



## THE PRESIDENCY/HUGH SIDNEY

# The Man in the Plaid Coat

**C**ECIL STOUGHTON keeps colliding with Presidents, camera firmly in his grip. He did the picture of John Kennedy on Inaugural Day of 1961, waving to the crew of PT-109 on the parade float. It was his picture of Jackie Kennedy in the little sleigh on the snow-covered south lawn that became the President's Christmas card in 1962. Cecil was out at Atoka, Va., the Kennedy country place, on the weekend before Nov. 22, 1963. He took the pictures of John-John marching with a toy gun and helmet and saluting—a salute that the three-year-old repeated a few days later as his slain father's body passed by him. Cecil also caught the marvelous sequence that weekend of President Kennedy sitting in the sun reading the paper as Caroline's inquisitive pony Macaroni began to nibble on the presidential shoulder and head until a laughing Kennedy had to roll over and crawl away, shouting, "Keep shooting, you are about to see a President eaten by a horse."

At Dallas, Cecil Stoughton was the only photographer on Air Force One when they brought Kennedy's body back and Lyndon Johnson took the oath of office. Heart pounding, he squeezed off the 19 frames that showed Johnson repeating the oath as the stunned, blood-spattered Jackie stood beside him.

After 26½ years of military service, most of them as a photographer and five of them in the White House for two Presidents, he moved over to the National Park Service as chief still cameraman to serve out his time for full retirement. However, it turned out that he wasn't done with Presidents.

Cecil decided that he would shoot a few frames of the Inauguration from the stands behind the President, where he had recorded other Inaugurations. He dug out his big plaid coat, called a Wooldea, purchased for \$19.95 the previous fall in Canada. Its bright blue and brown would liven a dull day.

He picked up a huge red pass from his boss at the Park Service that said "Total Access to All Areas" and hung it around his neck and set off toward immortality of sorts. He slipped through the crowd filing up the Inaugural stands, found his way to his old spot behind one of the fake pillars. Everything went

fine until it was time for Nixon to take the oath. Suddenly, a Secret Service agent said Stoughton couldn't stand there. Get out. Stoughton, for a second, was panicky. The oath of office was about to be administered. Where to go?

His natural instincts as a photographer took over, and since the Secret Service man who had dislodged him now ignored him, Cecil stopped a few feet behind the President, took off his beaver hat, dropped down on his knees, hoisted his Nikon and began to shoot. Nixon's arm was up. Pat held the Bibles. The oath rang out. Nixon was in.

Nixon had fooled everybody and stood on the opposite side from where the photographers thought he would. Stoughton had beautiful frames of his back. Then he was shooed out and it was all over. Nobody bothered with him any more—until the next week.

One day that week came a summons to go to the office of Ron Walker, director of the National Park Service. The meeting exploded. Walker turned over color pictures showing that Cecil and his \$19.95 coat were in the background for the official photos of Richard Nixon's swearing in (*see cut*). How could he? stormed Walker. The White House was raging. Nixon's moment in history had been desecrated. These were the pictures that would go into the books. These were the photos that Nixon's children would have to look at. And there was Stoughton and his plaid coat.

Walker cooled down. Stoughton went home and pondered it all. He decided he had been an intruder. So he returned to his office near midnight and typed out a profound apology to Nixon. He laid it on Walker's desk.

There was silence for a few weeks. Then Stoughton was caught up in Nixon's bureaucratic housecleaning. It had been determined that his \$25,000 a year was far too much for his responsibilities. His job was abolished. So after 31½ years of Government service, with commendations for quality work and with a portfolio of some of the most historic pictures ever taken, Cecil Stoughton, who began his remarkable journey in Oskaloosa, Iowa, 53 years ago, was on the move again. But, suggested one colleague, shouldn't he burn that coat?