



The President, Mrs. Kennedy and Gov. Connally leave on fatal Dallas journey.

A NOTED AUTHOR'S NEW FINDINGS

Johnson's Dilemma When JFK Was Shot

BY JACK ANDERSON

That awful day in Dallas when President Kennedy was killed has been relived many times over. Investigators have pieced together every detail of the crime; researchers have re-created every minute of Nov. 22, 1963. Yet out of the ant bed of details, some startling findings have been uncovered by still another chronicler, Jim Bishop, whose *The Day Kennedy Was Shot* will be published on the anniversary of the assassination.

This is a book that the Kennedy family tried to keep out of print. When Bishop sought information from Jacqueline Kennedy in 1964, the still distraught widow wrote to him: "The idea of it is so distressing to me. I cannot bear to think

of seeing—or seeing advertised—a book with that name and subject..." She added: "I hired William Manchester to protect President Kennedy and the truth. He was to interrogate everyone who had any connection with those days—and if I decide the book should not be published, then Mr. Manchester will be reimbursed for his time..."

But Bishop believed that no one, not even the tragic widow, should be permitted to censor history. He went ahead with his manuscript, and PARADE has now been given an advance peek at it. Here are some of his findings that should produce headlines:

- President Johnson was just about persuaded by his bodyguards that the

Kennedy assassination was part of a worldwide conspiracy. Yet he didn't know how to use the secret codes that would have been necessary to unleash nuclear retaliation against an attacking enemy. For hours, he was actually out of communication with the warrant officer who carried the secret codes in a locked, 30-pound metal suitcase and who was supposed to be within calling distance of the President at all times.

Johnson's story

- In reverse of Mrs. Kennedy's stand, Johnson refused to talk to Manchester but gave an exclusive account of his actions on Nov. 22 to Bishop. Manchester had reported, for instance, that the Kennedy aides resented Johnson's takeover of the presidential aircraft for the return flight from Dallas. Bishop claims that Kennedy's confidant, Kenneth O'Donnell, made the decision for LBJ to board Air Force One. The compelling reason was that it contained security equipment not available in the back-up plane.

- The new President, anxious to calm public fears over the assassination, wanted to demonstrate a continuity of leadership. With this in mind, he asked Mrs. Kennedy to disembark with him

and got back an acceptance from her. Instead, Kennedy aides physically blocked him from joining her as she prepared to leave the presidential plane with her martyred husband from the rear ramp.

- Bishop concludes from his 4½ years of painstaking research that Lee Harvey Oswald, alone and unaided, gunned down President Kennedy. Bishop also points out that Oswald made no real attempt to escape, therefore suggests that he wanted to be captured. A human cipher, he yearned for his place in the world spotlight.

The most startling fact that emerges from Bishop's vast accumulation of material, of course, is that the survival of the United States could have been in grave danger in the hours that followed Oswald's senseless act. The metal suitcase, containing the secret codes needed to order nuclear retaliation, was carried by a warrant officer named Ira Gearhart. In the Bishop book, the movements of Gearhart become crucial—and chilling.

After Oswald's shots crashed into their mark, Secret Service agents suspected there might be a plot by a foreign power to destroy the leaders of the United States. They hustled Johnson into a remote corner of the Parkland Hospital

emergency room, and their warnings finally filled him with silent dread. As he sat on an ambulance cart, legs dangling, eyes focused moodily upon the floor, he told an aide: "We don't know whether this is a worldwide conspiracy, whether they are after me as they were after President Kennedy, or whether they are after Speaker McCormack or Senator Hayden [next in line for the presidency]. We just don't know."

Yet if this had been the beginning of an assault against the U.S., with armed missiles coming over the polar icecap, America's ability to strike back was dependent on a warrant officer who couldn't be found. Bishop relates how Secret Service agent Lem Johns made his way down the antiseptic-smelling corridors, inquiring for the "bag man" as the custodian of the suitcase was called.

Where's the 'bag man'?

"It was ironic," Bishop writes, "that, in the past eight minutes no one knew where the bag man was or who he was; and the bag man didn't know where the President was, or who he was. If there was a time when the United States could not react instantaneously to a nuclear attack, these were the minutes."

Bishop tells how Gearhart was kept in another part of the emergency room. Indeed, the new President didn't even know the secrets of the sinister suitcase. Drawing on his wide knowledge of the Civil War, Bishop states: "As the radicals of the Republican Party had kept Abraham Lincoln from briefing his Vice President, Andrew Johnson, on matters of war and peace, so too the men around Kennedy had kept the doctrines of power from Lyndon Johnson. He knew there was a bag. He knew there was a man several booths away, standing with a bag. But, if this shooting was a particle of a larger threat to the security of the United States, Mr. Johnson had neither the combination to the bag, nor the exact knowledge of what to do with it."

Yet Ira Gearhart remained the forgotten man. When the Johnson motorcade began its rush from the hospital to the airport, Gearhart was left behind along with Kennedy's military aide, Maj. Gen. Chester V. Clifton—the man who understood the codes and how to use them.

This is the sort of detail that characterizes Bishop's book. In its own way, *The Day Kennedy Was Shot* will become part of the monument that America is still erecting to its greatest modern folk hero, John F. Kennedy.



Johnson is sworn as President on Air Force One shortly after the assassination.