

Merry-Go-Round *SF Chronicle 11 Jan. 1967*

Another Side of the Kennedy Tragedy



Drew Pearson

I WAS in Dallas on the tragic day President Kennedy was assassinated. Since that time Jack Anderson and I have talked to members of the Kennedy and Johnson staffs in order to get the facts regarding the friction and bitterness which William Manchester reports developed between Mrs. Jackie Kennedy and President Johnson.

Unquestionably there was friction. Bitterness developed during the tense moments after the assassination. However, the Manchester book tells only one side of the story.

Here is part of the other side.

★ ★ ★

FIRST, friction occurred with the coroner in Dallas, Kenneth O'Donnell, secretary to President Kennedy, and Brigadier General Godfrey McHugh, his Air Force aide, had been entrusted with the job of getting the body back to Washington. But the coroner refused to release it until he held an inquest.

Finally O'Donnell and McHugh prevailed upon him. Then they had trouble with a Dallas City ordinance against carrying a casket in an ambulance. They had purchased a casket but found it was necessary to get a hearse.

It took about an hour to overcome local red tape and drive Mr. Kennedy's body to the waiting airplane.

Meanwhile, Air Force One, the presidential plane, had been waiting for Mr. Kennedy's body. This delay was on the personal order of the new President, and contrary to the wishes of the Secret Service.

Emery Roberts of the Secret Service

staff had ordered the plane to take off immediately. The Secret Service had no idea, in the confusion of President Kennedy's death, as to whether there was a widespread plot against both the President and the vice president and felt the new President would be safer in the air en route to Washington.

★ ★ ★

JACKIE KENNEDY expressed indignation in the original version of the Manchester book that Mr. Johnson used her husband's plane. However, the plane contained secret electronic communications equipment which only the President could use in case of emergency. Mr. Johnson had flown to Dallas in the vice presidential plane, but it did not carry this equipment. The Secret Service had decided that he must use Air Force One for the return journey in order to be able to use this equipment. Besides he was now President.

Stories have been circulated regarding the tragic flight back to Washington. Mrs. Kennedy is reported saying she objected to being called "Honey" and did not want Johnson near her; that she didn't want "that man to touch me." It was also reported that Mr. Johnson had come back to the rear of the plane and smiled on the casket.

According to Malcolm Kilduff, President Kennedy's press secretary, the new President acted with dignity and sympathy.

"My hero was Jack Kennedy," Kilduff told me, "but Johnson acted with nothing except sympathy for a bereaved widow. He took over the situation with precision and dignity."

(Copyright, 1967)

See also story by Pearson 12 Jan. 1967, filed Mrs. Kennedy.