

Manchester Says Kennedy Aides Showed Hostility to Johnson on Flight From Dallas to the Capital

By RICHARD WITKIN

Aides of President Kennedy made clear their animosity toward President Johnson in incident after incident aboard the plane that returned them to Washington after the assassination in Dallas, according to William Manchester.

In the third installment of "The Death of a President" in Look magazine, Mr. Manchester says that the turnover of power "seemed needlessly cruel" to those close to Mr. Kennedy and that it was a mistake to put the Kennedy and Johnson groups aboard the same plane.

"Aspects of Johnson's behavior in a very understandable state of shock may have proven exacerbating," the author adds, "but the difficulty there was largely one of manners and mannerisms. Johnson was not himself that afternoon—no man was himself then."

The main incidents related to illustrate the resentment reported in the Kennedy entourage are these:

¶Except for Mrs. Kennedy, only one minor member of the Kennedy group joined in the knot of people around Mr. Johnson for the swearing-in ceremony before take-off. Mr. Manchester calls this "an affront to the Presidency."

But the author goes on to say that the throwing together of the two groups and their battle over the presidential nomination in 1960 guaranteed the high tension. He said there were no villains on either side.

¶Two close Kennedy aides, Kenneth P. O'Donnell and Lawrence F. O'Brien, twice refused requests sent by President Johnson to join him up forward during the flight. They insisted on remaining in the rear corridor with Mr. Kennedy's widow near his coffin. (Mr. O'Donnell left the Administration some months later but Mr. O'Brien was named Mr. Johnson's Postmaster General.)

¶A third Kennedy aide, Brig. Gen. Godfrey McHugh, strode forward to make sure the press knew that Messrs. O'Donnell, O'Brien, McHugh and a fourth aide, David Powers, "spent this flight in the tail compartment with the President — President Kennedy."

¶During the swearing-in, Mr. O'Donnell was "pacing the corridor outside the bedroom [of the plane] like a caged tiger, his hands clapped over his ears as though to block the oath."

His thoughts, according to Mr. Manchester, were that Mrs. Kennedy was "being used." He was referring to the fact that

she had been persuaded to stand beside Mr. Johnson during the swearing-in.

¶When the plane landed at Andrews Air Force Base, Mr. Manchester says, "it seems clear that everyone had priority over the new Chief Executive." The author quotes Mr. Johnson as having complained later to his secretary that the Kennedy family had departed with Mr. Kennedy's coffin "without any attention directed or any courtesy toward him."

The author says that Mrs. Kennedy agreed to stand beside Mr. Johnson because "she understood the symbols of authority, the need for some semblance of national majesty after the disaster."

Mr. Manchester says that Mrs. Kennedy also took pains to let the press know that, throughout the flight, she was remaining in the rear of the plane with her dead husband. The author says she told Malcolm M. Kilduff, an assistant press secretary, who was on board:

"You make sure, Mac—you go and tell them that I was not up front, but that I came back here and sat with Jack."

The incident is offered in quite a different context from the one in which General McHugh is reported to have told the press of the four aides who stayed back with the coffin.

The implication is that Mrs. Kennedy simply wanted to emphasize that she had remained almost uninterruptedly with her husband. The author says her "rapport" with Mr. Johnson "had been excellent."

How might Mr. Johnson's behavior have aggravated the feelings of resentment attributed to members of the Kennedy entourage?

Mr. Manchester's account contains several incidents that he may have had in mind. Mr. Johnson was reclining on the bed in the Presidential bedroom when Mrs. Kennedy, having just come aboard, opened the door without knocking and came in. Mr. Johnson on at least two occasions called Mrs. Kennedy "honey."

A good deal of the installment from the Manchester book is devoted to the chain of events that led up to Mr. Johnson's decision to be sworn in on the ground at Dallas rather than in

the air or back in Washington.

It also underscores an apparent disagreement. Mr. Manchester says that Mr. Johnson thought the dead President's brother, Robert F. Kennedy, had advised an immediate swearing-in, and Mr. Kennedy, who was then Attorney General, decided later that the President had misunderstood him.

The issue, according to the Look article, was discussed in phone conversations between the plane and Washington. The Attorney General apparently saw no urgency but Mr. Johnson thought he was agreeing

with Mr. Kennedy that the swearing-in should be accomplished as soon as possible.

The tension in the plane was aggravated by the humidity, the long delay in making arrangements, and the fear of some that the assassination might have been part of an international plot that was aimed also at Mr. Johnson.

The plane's co-pilot, Lieut. Col. Lewis Hanson, is reported to have been particularly anxious to take off because he expected that the craft might be riddled with gunfire at any moment.