

Mrs. Johnson Tells of Anxiety Of Husband on Vietnam in '65

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Exactly one month after ordering the bombing of North Vietnam in February, 1965—a date marking a significant escalation of the war—President Johnson told his wife that he saw no way out of American involvement.

"I can't get out," Lady Bird Johnson quotes him as saying on March 7, 1965. "I can't finish it with what I have got. So what the hell can I do?"

This is one of many often mournful insights from Mrs. Johnson's "A White House Diary," some of it published today in the first of two long installments in McCall's magazine. The 783-page book will be brought out by Holt, Rinehart & Winston on Nov. 2, culled from almost two million words of tape-recorded memories during five years in the White House.

Mrs. Johnson is the first President's wife since Abigail Adams to keep such a journal during her husband's term of office. The diary begins on Nov. 22, 1963, the day John F. Kennedy was mortally wounded in Dallas in a motorcade two cars ahead of the Johnsons, and ends on the day Richard M. Nixon was inaugurated, Jan. 20, 1969.

Elation to Gloom

Mrs. Johnson's feelings fluctuate from elation to gloom to pity in this intensely personal memoir. It is crammed with quotations and impressions of her own family, the Kennedy family, Mr. Nixon, Hubert H. Humphrey and hundreds of others.

In May, 1964, she was urging her husband to run for his first term as President in his own right, believing he would let himself and his country down if he did not.

Yet an entry in March, 1965, notes that Mrs. Johnson was "counting the months until March, 1968 [when her husband announced he would not run again for President], when it will be possible to say, as Truman did, 'I don't want this office, this responsibility, any longer, even if you want me. Find the strongest and most able man, and God bless you. Good-by!'"

On March 13, 1966, she recorded: "One thing about our life, you never can tell whom you'll find in Lyndon's bedroom. I walked in this morning for coffee, and who should be sitting there but Richard Nixon!"

'Relaxed and Affable'

She described Mr. Nixon as "relaxed and affable and well tailored" as he told Mr. Johnson, garbed in pajamas and sipping tea, that he strongly supported the President's Vietnam policies and would never attack him personally while cam-

paigning for Republican candidates. The diary indicates that President Johnson considerably respected Mr. Nixon, then in private life with a New York law firm.

The former First Lady writes of the Johnson's fondness for Hubert Humphrey and "our belief in him." But she puckishly cannot forget the "hilarious remark that Lyndon made" about the talkative Mr. Humphrey: "If I could just breed him to Calvin Coolidge"—famed as the most laconic President on record.

There is not one unkind word in this first installment about Mrs. Johnson's predecessor, Mrs. John F. Kennedy. She speaks of her as "gentle," a woman of "dignity."

Four days after the assassination, the two met in the White House, where Mrs. Kennedy was still living.

"Mrs. Kennedy was composed and radiating her particular sort of aliveness and charm and warmth," Mrs. Johnson wrote. "She is like an indescribably fresh flower and yet there

is an element of steel and stamina within her to keep her going on as she has."

There is a revealing conversation with then Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy on April 8, 1964, at the state funeral of General of the Army Douglas MacArthur. Mrs. Johnson related: "At one point Bobby Kennedy said, 'You're doing a wonderful job. Everybody says so.' And then, after a pause, he added, 'And so is your husband.'"

"I appreciated that very much," Mrs. Johnson remarked.

The former First Lady's perception that the Kennedy family did not like or rust Mr. Johnson permeates the memoir delicately. She describes a big Democratic party dinner in 1964 on the day Pierre Salinger announced he would quit as White House press secretary. It coincided with Lyndon's 20th birthday, and the party featured a big cake for her.

The evening, Mrs. Johnson said, was "a tremendous success."

Finding Equal Time

"But over all there was that peculiar pall—the departure of Salinger, the Irish decorations, the absence of any member of the Kennedy family. All helped to evoke a curious mood," she said.

She describes the "crux of my dilemma" with her daughters, with talks and time with them having to be "sandwiched in."

"If I'm going to win the battle to keep us all close together, I must find a way to apply equal time to the girls, to Lyndon, to my public duties and to my own pursuits," she writes.

There are pictures of her eating late dinners alone and "rather forlornly" from a tray after hours of waiting for her husband to come upstairs at the White House. And of how, during her first weeks in the mansion, of being "cold all the time: I wanted a sweater when nobody else wanted a sweater. I didn't have any appetite, and I lost about five pounds. I found myself walking on tiptoe and talking in whispers."

But there are moments of joy: Her daughter Luci's wedding in August, 1966, family birthdays and anniversaries and reunions. However, Mrs. Johnson expresses resignation and some sadness at her younger daughter Luci's conversion to Roman Catholicism. There was boisterous merriment too at Luci's flamboyance.

On one occasion, Mrs. Johnson was gently but firmly rebuffed by Mrs. John F. Kennedy about five months after the assassination. Visiting Mrs. Kennedy at her Georgetown home, Mrs. Johnson begged her to come to the White House for a meeting of the Committee for the Preservation of the White House.

"Lady Bird, I cannot return to the White House," Mrs. Kennedy replied. "You know, every place I go reminds me of all the places we lived."