

Charles McCabe

Himself

'The Search for JFK'

JOHN KENNEDY was the first man to be selected by what we now call the media — that combination of print and electronic information that is the greatest educational force ever known. Just how much a creation of the media JFK was, and the media conspired in some very fancy cover ups indeed, is a major theme of a fine new book called "The Search for JFK." (Putnam, \$12.95) The book was written by Clay Blair, former editor-in-chief of the Saturday Evening Post and his wife, Joan.

The most remarkable revelation of the book is that JFK was a semi-invalid almost from birth. He was born with "an unstable back." This fact was concealed from the press by members of the Kennedy family, led by the redoubtable Joe, Senior, the patriarch.



Sometimes it was suggested that his bad back came from playing football at Harvard. Later, his aides leaked the story that his back had been injured when his torpedo boat, the PT-109, was sunk in the Solomon Islands in 1943.

Say the Blairs: "It is a distortion — or a downright lie — to attribute his bad back to either a Harvard football injury or the PT-109. Even if he had not engaged in these strenuous exercises, his back would have failed."

Throughout the period the Blairs researched, the years 1935-47, Kennedy "was tormented by an almost continual series of illnesses, most of which we are unable to identify because the medical records are still closed."

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THE YOUNG Kennedy got into the Navy without passing any physical, thanks to the clout of old Joe. After a mere six months of active duty, he had to request six months inactive duty for health reasons.

He arrived in the Solomons in poor health, according to one of his shipmates quoted by the Blairs. Seven or eight months later he was relieved of command of the PT-109 on orders of a doctor, and wound up in a hospital in the Solomons. He spent most of his last year in the Navy — 1944 — in and out of hospitals, and, finally, was surveyed out of the Navy because of his health.

More important, even, is the Blair's story that the former President was kept alive for the final 15 years of his life by drugs because he suffered from Addison's disease, a failure of the adrenal glands. He collapsed in London, in 1947, from Addison's disease.

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THE BLAIRS say he took orally a daily dose of 25 milligrams of the hormone cortisone. Pellets of the drug desoxycorticosterone acetate (DOCA) were embedded in his thigh for his system to draw on, and changed every three months.

According to evidence given the Blairs by one of Kennedy's doctors, the Kennedy family kept supplies of cortisone and DOCA in safe-deposit boxes around the U.S. so that he would never run out.

When Kennedy was running for President in 1959 and 1960, the question of his health was raised. They always responded by saying the candidate did have, or had in the past, an adrenal gland problem — the result of malaria contracted in the South Pacific. Shortly after his election, on Nov. 10, 1960, Kennedy himself baldly lied: "I have never had Addison's disease."

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THE BOOK cites a November issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association, which reported surgery carried on in a New York hospital on "a man 37 years of age" who "had had Addison's disease for seven years." Because of the Addison's disease the operations on his back were thought to be dangerous.

However, to quote the journal, "since this young man would become incapacitated without surgical intervention it was decided, reluctantly, to perform the operation." The young man was in fact John Kennedy, according to the Blairs, who are responsible and convincing reporters who found much to like and admire in the life and works of JFK.