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Of The Bulletin Staff

A top aide to the late President John F. Kennedy has charged that District Attorney Arlen Specter tried to get him to change sworn testimony he had given to the Warren Commission investigating the President's assassination.

At the time of the incident, in July 1964, Specter was a staff attorney with the Warren Commission.

Specter today vehemently denied the charge. He threatened to sue for libel.

Kenneth J. O'Donnell, who was Mr. Kennedy's appointments secretary and personal confidante, first made the charge in a book about the President, "Johnny, We Hardly Knew Ye."

He and David E. Powers, another close friend of Mr. Kennedy's, wrote the book with Joe McCarthy.

Identifies by Name

In the first printing of the book, O'Donnell identified Specter by name and said that Specter wanted him to change his testimony because it conflicted with a statement made by the late President Lyndon B. Johnson.

Specter protested to the publisher, Little, Brown and

Co. of Boston. In subsequent printings, the description of the incident remained the same but Specter's name was deleted.

"We didn't think it was that important," O'Donnell told The Bulletin. "I believe he

protested to the publisher, and the publisher felt it was not important enough to get into a fight over it."

'Not Important'

Was Specter's name deleted because the reference to him
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was inaccurate or because it was not important? O'Donnell was asked.

"It was deleted because it's not important," O'Donnell said.

Does that mean he is standing by the charge? O'Donnell was asked.

"I'll stand by what I've said," he replied. "It's a controversy we don't need. The book is selling very well. It's a book about the President, and in that context, Specter is just not very important."

Testimony Concerns

The testimony O'Donnell referred to concerned Mr. Johnson's use of Air Force One to fly back to Washington from Dallas after the assassination. This became a sore point with some Kennedy loyalists who thought Mr. Johnson should have traveled on Air Force Two while Mrs. Kennedy used the presidential aircraft to bring her husband's body home.

Subsequently, Mr. Johnson told the Warren Commission that O'Donnell told him to use Air Force One. O'Donnell testified he had never discussed the matter with Mr. Johnson.

In the initial version of the book, O'Donnell described the situation this way:

"I distinctly remember that when Johnson and I talked at the hospital there was no mention of which of the two planes he should use. Nor was there any mention that he was considering waiting for Jackie and the President's casket to be on the same plane with him before he left Dallas. Later a lawyer for the Warren Commission, Arlen Specter,

pointed out to me that Johnson's testimony that I had told him to board Air Force One disagreed with my own testimony before the commission about our conversation at the hospital.

"Specter asked me, to my amazement, if I would change my testimony so that it would agree with the President's 'Was I under oath?' I asked Specter, as of course, I was. 'Certainly I wouldn't change anything I said under oath.'"

Second Version

The second version of the book says:

"Later a lawyer for the Warren Commission pointed out to me that Johnson's testimony that I had told him to board Air Force One disagreed with my own testimony about our conversation at the hospital.

"He asked me, to my amazement, if I would change my testimony so that it would agree with the President's 'Was I under oath?' I asked him, as of course, I was. 'Certainly I wouldn't change anything I said under oath.'"

Specter's Letter

Last Dec. 18, Specter wrote to Little, Brown & Co., saying of O'Donnell's assertions:

"I never asked him to do such a thing. I have discussed this matter with Mr. (Norman) Redlich, who was with me during the entire session with Mr. O'Donnell. Mr. Redlich has confirmed the fact that I made no request of Mr. O'Donnell to change his testimony."

Redlich was an assistant counsel with the Warren Commission and is now corpora-

tion counsel for the City of New York.

Publisher's Reply

On Dec. 26, Little, Brown's vice president and treasurer, George Hall, replied to Specter saying:

"We have checked again with Mr. O'Donnell and have been assured that he considers these passages to be accurate. However, in consideration of your wishes, we have deleted your name from these passages from the new printing, which goes on press this week."

In an interview, Specter said it was impossible for O'Donnell's charge to be true. He said he examined O'Donnell May 13, 1964, two months before Mr. Johnson gave his statement. Specter said that was the only occasion on which he has ever seen O'Donnell.

Specter also said he was not satisfied by simply having his name deleted from the book since the description of the incident remains.

"I will not let the matter rest at this point," Specter said. "Little, Brown & Co. has not honored its commitment to delete the incident from the book."