

THE NEW PRESIDENT—III

Nobody Had to Brief LBJ on the Presidency

By HARRY FERGUSON

Last in a Series

Washington, D. C. — UPI — There was a time when the top secrets of the government never were revealed to the vice-president of the United States. Harry S. Truman had no inkling about the attempt to build an atomic bomb until the day Franklin D. Roosevelt died and the man from Missouri was sworn in as president.

Things were different when Lyndon B. Johnson took the oath of office last week. Nobody had to brief the new president because he had been living at the very heart of governmental secrecy for three years. As vice-president he attended almost every meeting of the national security council. He not only knew the secrets; his voice and his opinions had helped shape them into policy.

Mr. Johnson took command of the federal government immediately. He did not have to fumble and search for guidance and information. He began calling his key men into conferences, issuing orders and proclaiming policy, such as announcing that the Kennedy program in South Vietnam would remain unchanged.

View of Dirksen

His intimate knowledge of the mechanics of government is one of the two sets of circumstances that should make Mr. Johnson's life easier as president. The other one is the great surge of sympathy in congress caused by the assassination of John F. Kennedy. At the moment the new president is in the middle of a sort of honeymoon with congressmen who have been fighting such key Kennedy bills as tax reduction and civil rights. It won't last long and, in fact, Senate Republican Leader Dirksen already has put Mr. Johnson on notice to that effect:

"The work of the nation has to go forward. Once the shock of the tragedy has been ab-

sorbed, a country, like a family, is quickly faced with the reality of daily problems."

Mr. Johnson's problem with congress is to devise some means to strike quickly and decisively in behalf of the Kennedy legislative program. It is

almost an impossible task. Senator Byrd, the conservative Democrat from Virginia, is all-powerful on tax matters. Doubtless he mourns Mr. Kennedy as deeply and sincerely as any man, but that is unlikely to budge him from the position that there cannot be a tax cut without reduction in federal expenditures. The voice of Senator Thurmond of South Carolina is muted at the moment, but he will recover his power of speech instantly when and if the time comes to lead a filibuster against the civil rights bill.

Powers to Be Tested

All of Mr. Johnson's formidable powers of compromise and conciliation will be tested in the coming months. He knows all these men personally. He respects them and they respect him, but many senators and congressmen have lifetime allegiances that run much deeper than their personal liking for Mr. Johnson.

Mr. Johnson almost but not quite fits the classic pattern of the presidency. He was born, not in a log cabin, but a small frame house near Johnson City, Tex., on Aug. 27, 1908. But his parents were poor. His father was a schoolteacher and there was no money to send Lyndon to college when he was graduated from high school in 1924. He worked in a road gang for \$1 a day, then traveled to California picking up any job he could on the way.

Three years of this convinced him he wanted an education and he returned to Texas and

enrolled in Southwest State Teachers' college. It was a hard life. He tried to earn his way by selling books door to door and working as a janitor.

He Teaches School

There wasn't enough money coming in and in 1928 he dropped out of college and took a job teaching school. But he accumulated enough money to go back to teachers' college and was graduated in 1930. For two years he taught school in Houston and then was offered a job as secretary to Representative Kleberg (Dem., Tex.). From that moment politics was in his blood and in 1937 he won his own way into congress by winning the seat in

the 10th congressional district of Texas.

On Nov. 17, 1934, Mr. Johnson married a pretty Texas heiress named Claudia Taylor. They have two daughters, one attending the University of Texas and the other a private school here in Washington.

When Mrs. Johnson was a baby, a nurse remarked, "Why, she's pretty as a lady bird," and at that moment the name Claudia ceased to exist except when Mrs. Johnson signs legal documents. A few weeks ago Mrs. Johnson was interviewed on a local television station and was asked how she would change her husband if she had the power to do so. She thought about that one a long time and then said:

"Well, I would make him tell me every afternoon whether he was coming home for dinner, and, if so, what time."