

American Newspaper

By LEONARD HOLDS

That Book Revisited

Year ago at this time, the Krupps were warming up in the wings for that seriocomic affair of the Kennedys versus Sam Manchester over the book "The Death of a President." After one of the greatest public rows in the immediate history of letters, the book was published last April. Now, just seven months later, you were near of it. The anticlimax is almost deafening.

How well has the book sold? This depends a bit on where you sit. Mr. Manchester and Harper & Row, the publisher, say that about 1,200,000 copies are in the hands of readers, about half this figure being copies distributed by the Book-of-the-Month Club. This is indeed a lot of readers for a book with a price tag of \$10. But cynics note that most of the retail sales were at the outset, bookstores reporting not much of a demand for it now.

Mr. Manchester, for one, is content with his 1,200,000 current readers. At the moment in his Middletown, Conn., office, he is revising his book on the Krupp armament family, on a history he interrupted in order to write "The Death of a President." He and the Kennedys do not yet invite one another to dinner, although "Bobby [Senator Robert] and I spoke and shook hands at a Gridiron dinner in Washington."

Behind him as he works on the four generations of Krupps are some tangible evidences of the dispute. On a shelf beside his own book and earlier Manchester writings are three paperbacks based on the row. They are "Why the Kennedys Lost the Book Battle," by Lawrence Van Gelder; "The Manchester Affair," by John Corey; "Jackie, Bobby and Manchester," by Arnold Bennett. He has leafed through them all, but hasn't read every word of any.

Bookstores across the land aren't as content with the 1,200,000 copies as is Mr. Manchester. They had counted on the book as a gravy train, but immediately on publication it became a plaything of the discount houses, which sold it for as little as \$5.99. Since discount houses buy books through wholesalers, it is impossible to say how many copies were sold at discount, but an educated guess puts it at 25 per cent of the copies distributed by Harper. Seeing

the gravy train vanish to the discounters, some bookstores said the devil with the whole thing and failed to press the book.

Rights to publish the book have been sold to publishers in 14 countries, and, according to Don Congdon, Mr. Manchester's agent, who handles the rights, the book is doing fine everywhere save, for some unknown reason, Greece.

In London, the British publisher, Michael Joseph, has had two printings and calls the book its biggest nonfiction work of the year. In Paris, Les Editions' Robert Laffont has sold over 80,000 copies. But there's a suggestion that the behavior in Paris is much as it was here. Brentano's reported the demand for the book much greater before it appeared, and so did La Hune, bookshop of the Left Bank intelligentsia. The book sold well there, but less well than had been hoped.

A final word or two about Mr. Manchester. Last summer, a New England radio chain announced breathlessly that he was building a \$75,000 house on the strength of "The Death of a President." At his office the other day, he said the house had been in the works all along, and consisted mostly of a real-estate swap with Wesleyan University.

Since "The Death of a President" came out, he has received some 6,000 letters about it and about the row, and he answers those he can. Several letters to Mrs. Kennedy have come in his care, and these he puts in envelopes and forwards.

Lecture circuits have beckoned—he's rated as a \$2,000 per lecture attraction—but he has declined on the ground that appearances would be undignified, and besides "books are important, authors aren't."

He continues to be recognized as he goes about. Not long back, he went to a store—it was a discount house—to pick up a copy of "Jackie, Bobby and Manchester." Other customers spotted him, started forward, and "it looked like a scene from Shirley Jackson's 'The Lottery.'"

Although he is working on the Krupps, his next book will be out later this month from Little, Brown. This will be a reissue of "City of Anger," a novel first published in 1953. For the book following the Krupps, he has one or two ideas, nothing definitely planned. And the paperback version of "The Death of a President" will be published by Harper & Row April 15.

Publisher

Scattered about the country, often in unlikely places, are numerous small-book publishers. The individual output runs to perhaps a dozen titles, on a sunny year, as against Doubleday's 600 or so, but many do extraordinarily fine work. They also have a ball. With fewer books to worry over, each takes on a personality of its own and when the visiting author comes to lunch, his martini costs 65 cents instead of the \$1.25 you can fork out urbanwise.

One of these, in business just over a decade, is Barre Publishers, with a slogan "Barre Books Are Worth Looking At." They are, and so is it. The firm's location is in Barre, Mass., a town of 4,000 population, 20 or so miles northwest of Worcester. The town's major industries are a machine tool and a wool company, Barre Publishers cheerfully regarding itself as the third largest business there. It has 10 employees, this year will offer 11 titles.

President of Barre Publishers is Alden P. Johnson, trained as an engineer and a machine-tool representative, who decided in 1947 to be a publisher. He bought The Barre Gazette, a weekly ("4,000 people, 4,000 readers") and ran that until a few weeks ago when the pressures of book publishing caused him to sell out. The first book came out in 1956, and by 1963 the yearly list had risen to 7 titles.

Not all of Barre's books will be everywhere familiar, for thus far Barre lacks a Leon Uris or James A. Michener on its roll of authors. But "New

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