

The Washington Merry-Go-Round

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Kennedy Has Become Tougher

By Drew Pearson

(The brass ring good for one free ride on the Washington Merry-Go-Round today goes to President John F. Kennedy.)

Some remarkable changes have taken place in John F. Kennedy during his first year as President. No President during my experience in Washington has grown up so much.

The surface changes are easy to diagnose; the less perceptible, behind-the-scenes changes are more important.

On the surface, Mr. Kennedy has settled down.

When he first became President he was restless, hated to be confined, couldn't get used to Secret Service guards and the protocol that necessarily ties up a President. He was accustomed to driving his own car to work, he couldn't get used to going to his office merely by going downstairs in the White House.

When he was first elected, Mr. Kennedy would sometimes grab the wheel of his car, tell the Secret Service man to move over, and race down the highway. He doesn't do that any more.



Pearson

His restlessness at first took the form of examining every room in the White House. He turned up in places no President had even seen before. One secretary in a top, back room, was so flabbergasted she almost fainted when the President appeared in the doorway. She had served under two previous Presidents, but never saw them.

Still Restless

Mr. Kennedy, after a year as President, is still active, still restless. He will drift into his secretary's room to dictate, drop in on aides, shuffle through their papers ask them about problems they have forgotten but he hasn't. Perhaps no other President—certainly not in recent years—has shown such an amazing faculty for keeping all sorts of diverse problems in his head.

But the most notable change in John F. Kennedy is that he is no longer overconfident. When first elected, he was cocky, sure of himself, certain that no problem was too complex for him to solve. He had won every battle he ever tackled. The Irish four-leaf clover seemed securely in his pocket.

But there is also a cautious streak in the President. It is not to be confused with cowardice, which is not in him. He has great courage, but it's mixed with caution. And this

caution hit him a jolt never to be forgotten, with the Cuban fiasco.

All his advisers, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told him the Cuban invasion would succeed. Eisenhower advisers, from whom he inherited the plan, told him the same thing. Only Sen. William Fulbright of Arkansas disagreed. It proved a tragic failure.

With this, the luck of the Irish vanished. Mr. Kennedy retreated to a policy of extreme caution, retreated also from his new advisers, fell back on his old. His brother was given the job of reorganizing CIA, his close friend Ted Sorenson was told to review European policy, a youngster, Dick Goodwin, became chief adviser on Latin America.

Deadlock at Vienna

On top of this came another tragedy—the deadlock with Khrushchev at Vienna. Flying home from Vienna, Mr. Kennedy was more depressed than at any time in his life. He talked about the probability that his children might live under war. The first thing he did on arriving home was to get a military appraisal on the number of lives that would be lost in an atomic war.

Immediately after Vienna came the return of his back injury. Thus three failures hit him almost simultaneously.

Gradually came the long,

slow climb back from the depths of the Cuban crisis and the Vienna tragedy. During this Mr. Kennedy has regained confidence in himself, and Europe has regained confidence in him.

The old cocky Kennedy is gone now. The "luck of the Irish" has been relegated to the background. The President still relies on his remarkable memory, still reads the papers with amazing rapidity, still uses the telephones. But he has gone back to his old advisers, realizes that his Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, knows more than Dick Goodwin, and that he has some able, loyal men in his cabinet.

He still has not learned what President Truman and Roosevelt learned, that it's next to impossible to get along with Congress, and that soft-soaping will get him nowhere.

The President has become tougher in the past year, steeled in the most difficult school of the cold war and congressional forensics. And he has become a vastly better President. But if there's one thing he still must learn, it's that high Gallup polls don't solve problems nor can you solve them by being too nice.

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Drew Pearson will predict what will happen to General Walker at the Senate hearings next week—over WTOP-radio at 6:45 tonight.

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