

The Crisis in America

Washington

PIERRE Salinger was back in town the other day, exuding charm and theories with equal facility.

The reporter broke every story in town. Kennedy has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and was here to do a one-man show "America's Choice."

Swimming in the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban revolutionaries started taking on the subject of Watergate, the investigation of the vice president to the JFK administration, and the Kennedy-Chicago deal.

"The Russians were a major force in the Bay of Pigs," he said, referring to the CIA's role in the invasion.

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"They're going to give us our freedom back," he said, referring to the CIA's role in the invasion.

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phone taps on private citizens, including me, in Paris. It's a perfectly open thing. In fact, one of the French ministers recently dedicated a phone tapping center in Paris on the ribbon and all.

"Just the French business, they are concerned. They are Watergate undermining the confidence in the dollar and the world monetary situation becoming increasingly precarious.

"But my cab driver in Paris the other day praised Nixon for his detente with the Soviet Union and China and declared Watergate to be a vindication of the American system. And my own magazine has been hitting the French government for breaking its scandals under the table instead of opening 'The America'."

Salinger's own feelings on Watergate and Nixon are perfectly clear.

"What disturbs me most is how it betrays the mentality of these men and of Nixon himself. I've been saying for 20 years that Nixon is a hunted, paranoid man who thinks everyone is out to get him.

"He was traumatized in '47 during the Hiss case. He said the liberals were out to get him. In '52, he was traumatized when his slush fund was discovered. In '60, he was traumatized because he thought the election was stolen. (I'm not commenting if it's true or not.)"

"Then he got to the point where he was traumatized by an demonstrator outside the White House fence.

"I think all the Watergate activities—the domestic intelligence plans, the bugging, the bugging, are just a reflection of those fears. And I think the whole scandal would have passed over if he had had the good judgment to separate himself from his political friends like John Wallachman and

(Bob) Haldeman right away."

Salinger bristles at the suggestion that similar tactics, such as harassment of

reporters, might have been used by JFK. For example, didn't Kennedy try to have David Halberstam fired by the New York Times for writing a favorable Vietnam column?

"I don't know," says Salinger. "I tried to stop him, I told myself it was a mistake, but he fired the Times himself and insisted they fire Halberstam. He said later he realized it was a mistake."

And didn't Kennedy tape conversations in his office without the participants' knowledge?

"Yes, he taped conversations concerning the Bay of Pigs because of the historical significance. He probably didn't tell the people in the room."

And what about certain coverage? Did Kennedy ask the Times to suppress information about the Bay of Pigs invasion?

"I don't know about the Bay of Pigs, except that the Times had been printing long stories about covert operations that were being made in Cuba, like training insurgents, and Kennedy asked them not to print any more."

"But I do know firsthand of two other cases when the White House asked the media not to print.

"One concerned the release of two American pilots who had been shot down when their plane strayed over Soviet territory. The New York Herald Tribune had the information that they were about to be released.

"When Kennedy learned of it, he called Jock Whitney and asked him not to print it or Khrushchev might call off the dog."

"Kennedy scooped the Trib himself. He announced the release at a press conference the next day."

The second case concerned the Cuban missile crisis.

"The New York Times and Washington Post both

were aware that Russians had placed missiles in Cuba and were planning the story for their morning edition. The president's personal aide called and asked Kennedy to hold off on the story for a few days so that the press would not jeopardize national security.

"They did because they knew Kennedy had national security. I think it's interesting that the same two papers were asked by Nixon to print the Pentagon Papers. They refused because the 'leak' was a breach of national security."

Salinger says they're much more ready to state in the air, something he felt will help Senator Edward Kennedy in 1976.

"I think he'll run," says Salinger.

What about Chappaquiddick and the appearance of such bumper stickers as "Nobody Drowned at Watergate?"

Chappaquiddick was a personal tragedy. It happened when a senator drove his car into the water and involved a constituent of the United States. It's a matter of carrying out his constitutional responsibility.

Salinger says he knows the names of the pilots who had been shot down when their plane strayed over Soviet territory. The New York Herald Tribune had the information that they were about to be released.

"They may be taking Chappaquiddick in Washington, but just go outside the city's capital. They're taking Kennedy for president any day. He's the last living heir. He's got the name. He's been a good senator."

With the tenth anniversary of John Kennedy's death coming up in November, there are lots of Kennedy books and TV documentaries.

"John Kennedy opened the latter half of the century and set the example for

... who is not excluded from top... that might be unpleasant... "The country needs someone gifted with tender... and a few last words... in the country now Congress...