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You don't catch Pierre Salinger in Washington much anymore. As one of the last surviving knights of Camelot, John F. Kennedy's press secretary and confidant prefers living most of the year in Paris, where the love for good food, fine wine and even better cigars suits this 73-year-old bon vivant just fine.

For France was where Salinger initially escaped to in 1968 after being hit hard by the assassinations of both John Kennedy and then just five years later, Robert Kennedy. "I really just had to get away from America - get out or just get under the bedsheets," admits Salinger, who was with Bobby Kennedy at the Ambassador Hotel the night he was gunned down.

Salinger's disillusionment with America has certainly been heightened the last few years, starting with the media scorning of his investigation into the crash of TWA Flight 800, alleged by Salinger to have been downed by a missile accidentally fired from a U.S. Naval ship. And the current Bill Clinton-Monica Lewinsky sex saga that threatens the presidency leaves Salinger seeing red. "In the Kennedy days, there was absolutely nobody looking into his private life, or mistresses," shrugs Salinger. "That is absolutely their private life. There are only two nations in the world where they're doing this now and that's the U.S. and the U.K... I mean, I've lived in France for 19 years and I've known every President since de Gaulle and I've known a lot of their mistresses, but none of the press in France ever looks into that, or even cares.

"See if I was press secretary now, it would be completely 100 per cent different than when I was with Kennedy," continues Salinger. "Our relations with the media then were entirely different, with totally different priorities. But after Watergate,

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where two journalists [Woodward and Bernstein] were able to get Nixon out of power, suddenly reporters changed their whole mentality and decided to go into scandals and investigating people's private lives ... it's all very sad."

Prodigy

Salinger's eclectic career as a press secretary to two Presidents, journalist for France's leading magazine L'Express, novelist and ABC News Paris bureau chief began in San Francisco at age eight, where as a child prodigy concert pianist he would often duet with Isaac Stern. At 19, he was made captain of a ship in the South Pacific during World War II and a decorated Naval hero at age 20 for saving the lives of 14 soldiers during an Okinawa typhoon. He became an award-winning journalist by the time he was 26 for his investigative reporting at the San Francisco Chronicle, and then went on to work as Adlai Stevenson's press director and speechwriter.

However, it was in 1956, while later investigating the Teamsters Union as a

SALINGER: ON the Record



contributing editor for Collier's Magazine, that Salinger first forged ties with the Kennedys. Robert Kennedy had been using Salinger's research material for his Senate probe of Jimmy Hoffa and the mob-corrupted Teamsters, and soon hired Salinger on as the first staff investigator for the newly-formed Senate Rackets Committee. It was there that Salinger was introduced to John Kennedy, then a Massachusetts Senator and one of the committee's leading members.

American royalty

When Kennedy decided to run for the presidency in 1959, Bobby recommended Salinger as campaign press director for his brother, and then on Nov. 10, 1960, President-elect Kennedy promoted Salinger to his White House press secretary. At 35, Salinger was the youngest press secretary in the history of the White House and revitalized Presidential press relations with an unprecedented openness. Salinger also extended first-time White House access to foreign journalists, "because I felt strongly that the image of the President of the United States abroad could have an impact on the image of the President at home."

And it worked. The Kennedy aura was almost - if not more - as brilliant overseas as it was in America. To this day, Salinger is still treated as American royalty whenever he travels in the world. He was admitted to the French Legion d'Honneur and has had the ear of every French politico, from Charles de Gaulle to Jacques Chirac.

But never the retiring kind, Salinger is now utilizing his twilight years to combat historical untruths and revisionism lobbed at the Kennedy presidency, most notoriously in Seymour Hersh's recent account *The Dark Side of Camelot*, which Salinger calls "nothing but lies." So, in an effort to battle the barrage of disinformation, Salinger has written *John F. Kennedy: Commander In Chief* (Penguin Studio), a fascinating first-person account of

After 35 years, JFK's press secretary Pierre Salinger is still asked about his former boss's rise and fall, his love affairs, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Mafia and much more. And Salinger, armed with a new book about the White House years, has more than ever to say

• By David Gianmarco

Kennedy's prudence that brought the world back from the brink of nuclear war in peacefully solving the Cuban Missile Crisis, says Salinger.

Negotiating a peaceful settlement left the military and CIA warmongers irate, who believed the presence of nuclear missiles justified a U.S. attack on Cuba. "We've been had," fumed Admiral George Anderson of the Joint Chiefs.

"The military's only position on solving the crisis was to go in and bomb," recounts Salinger with immense disgust. "But Kennedy's view was if you did that, a war would erupt, resulting in a nuclear

exchange. Eventually, it was Bobby who came up with the final solution of bringing in the Naval blockade around Cuba to make sure the Soviets couldn't get any ships in there with more information and more missiles."

Salinger writes in his book that Kennedy's "...planned withdrawal (from Vietnam), once announced, may have caused his death. We will never know..." But one thing is for certain, Salinger doesn't buy the Warren

Commission's "lone-gunner" conclusions. He was shocked by the lapse in security for the President's motorcade in Dallas, which normally would have had Secret Service agents in or around Kennedy's vehicle, not just in the follow-up car. "And he should never have been riding in an open car," affirms Salinger. "He never would've been killed if they had been doing their job."

Warning

Salinger also reveals that three days before the assassination, he received a personally addressed letter at the White House from a woman in Dallas, warning of an assassination attempt against Kennedy. "The letter said, 'Don't let him go to Dallas, because someone is going to try and kill him.' Salinger says he gave the warning letter to the Secret Service, but they never questioned her.

Salinger says he routinely receives letters and faxes concerning new information about the assassination, and keeps them all on file.

"I'm waiting for the government to come out with the truth," he says softly. "But I suppose it will be another century before we find out." In the meantime, he will continue to fight the good fight as a disenchanting American in Paris. □



Above: Salinger and Kennedy meet in the Oval Office in March of 1961.

Right: With his new book Pierre Salinger (today) hopes to correct some of the inaccuracies that are being promulgated in other books.

Kennedy as manager of the Cold War, shedding valuable new light on one of the most scrutinized and heavily debated periods in American history.

Enhanced with over 150 rare black and white photos from the Kennedy presidency, Salinger includes many Kennedy directives, memoranda and transcripts of secret meetings held during the spectre of World War III, including the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Bay of Pigs fiasco, when Kennedy had first discovered he was being grossly deceived by the "old guard" of the CIA and Pentagon. "Kennedy discussed with me at least three or four times about how the CIA was misleading him," states Salinger about the disastrous April 1961 invasion of CIA-controlled Cuban exiles, which was initiated a year earlier under Eisenhower and was designed to destroy Castro and regain control of Cuba.

Disillusioned with the CIA and the upper echelon of the military, Kennedy ultimately came to rely on his own wits and a small circle of trusted advisors, according to Salinger. During the 1960 campaign, Kennedy had accepted the Pentagon's "Missile Gap" theory, but the later disproof of the so-called "gap" by satellite photos raised serious doubts about all military assessments, as did the Joint Chief's endorsement of the Bay of Pigs invasion. By October '62, it was strictly