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LBJ's Aim Like JFK's To Salinger

Associated Press

Former White House Press Secretary Pierre Salinger said yesterday that, had President Kennedy lived, he probably would be running the war in Vietnam much as President Johnson does, despite the fact that, in 1963, Mr. Kennedy was opposed to a major land war in Asia.

"The preponderance of advice to President Kennedy during his Administration was against a major land war in Asia," Salinger said on the CBS television program "Face the Nation" (WTOP).

But escalation of the conflict by North Vietnam came in 1964, the year after Mr. Kennedy's assassination, he said.

"What he would have done in the face of such escalation by North Vietnam, we cannot project for him," Salinger said. "But we must consider it in the light of his commitment to an American presence there. That commitment was clear."

When Mr. Kennedy took office there were 600 Americans in the Southeast Asian country, but by the end of 1963, that number had grown to 22,000, Salinger said.

Salinger also said the Kennedy Administration made "serious public information errors . . . in not being more candid about our involvement in that war. And I think those errors paid off poorly for us in the years that followed."

Salinger said there is still a "great misunderstanding" about the war and urged that President Johnson "give the American people the fullest possible information."

Salinger was asked about the controversy that arose over a statement by former Kennedy aide Arthur Schlesinger Jr. that the late President had considered firing Secretary of State Dean Rusk.

"On any given day he might have been upset with the performance of anyone of his Administration," Salinger said. "But it would be a mistake to try to project this to an overall attitude."