Dear Jim, 1/16/84

How glad I am to have Salinger's 20th anniversary piece! It will go into my Tiger file, for the book I hope yet to be able to do. I make these few comments on it for you, Dave and that file.

Some, to the best of my knowledge, is not previously reported and is entirely consistent with the record the revisionists have been attacking for some years.

Salinger's testimate of the post-missle crisis period is correct, but I believe from what I have read that JFK was uncertain, as of the time of the limited test ban agreement, that he had this majority. However, he ran that risk.

Where Salinger says that JFK announced that we would be withdrawing 2500 advisers from VN in 1964, I believe there was no such specific announcement and I believe the number was a third lower, about 1700. Salinger is correct on JFK's intentions and confused on the announcement. I recall only a short Pentagon statement that we could begin the withdrawal because a re-evaluations showed it was safe. What JFK did do is call his generals in and try to persuade them that VN was a political, not a military problems and that political problems are not susceptible of military solutions. My source, General Gavin, in my interview of him about 6/67. About three days after the assassination the Pentagon re-evaluated and the rest is history.

I have no idea where Salinger got the notion that the USSR has a current nuclear advantage or that there are those who say they seek this because of what happened to them in 10/62. I do not believe either part of this.

I find Salinger's claim to ignorance about JFK's "Womanizing" particularly interesting because he may not know that they shared one particular ~~xx~~ woman, who is my source. She is not dead. There was a time when I was trying to (and ultimately did) end one of Garrison's wildest kicks, of a sado-masochist ring involvement and Salinger as part of it. It was in this connection that I spoke to her about S. She claimed opposite personal knowledge and experience.

There was some joking about S. when he became JFK's press secretary, and although he often joked, I believe he was one of the best of them.

While he has written little about the assassination, Charles Roberts appears to have talked him into part of his belief and to have persuaded him to write an introduction into Roberts' finky book, "The Truth About the Assassination." S. would have died if he'd heard some of what Roberts said when I confronted him once. He was silent thereafter, I add.

My hearing problem is not serious. Some nerve deafness that eliminates the higher registers. Those new aids can amplify part of the spectrum. Your friend shares what I've learned is a common problem, amplification of background.

On the weather, we've had rather continuous subfreezing weather, close to zero fairly often at night and often with strong winds. If it stays this way it will not have to go below zero to make many problems because the ground will freeze lower and raise paving and break pipes. It did in 1977. The building code has an 18" frost line and it can get below that by prolonged freezing weather. But we are making out OK and it looks like my wood will be sufficient for the heating season.

By coincidence I heard the other day from another of the KGO talk-show people, the all-night guy whose name, as best I recall, is Noah Griffin or Griffith. He wants me to do an early Sunday a.m. (here) segment. He told me that Spann is now network and soon will be moving to do his show out of New York. I'd almost assumed what you say about Eason from his long silence. When I last heard from him he was into the nutty stuff. Noah was going to speak to him. I've not heard from him

since. No big deal. I had a notion that it might be worth trying to reach the guy who phoned me about 12/15/66 on the Joe Dolan show and gave me accurate info on the LHO he knew in the Marines. I think if that guy wants to he can provide more.

If I didn't tell you, I heard from Hal Verb for the first time in years after he heard about Jean Davison's book, of which he sent me a silly review. I asked him for the talk-show rundown and I've heard nothing since.

Howard was here two weeks ago. He had business in the east and came down from Boston on his way back. He is now general counsel for Lucas films and is enjoying it very much. He is also dabbling at making shorts and enjoying that. With the 12 hours a day he spends at work he has little time. He looked and sounded well.

Glad your back is letting you make out. Remember how important it is to use the knees instead when possible. We are both OK, considering. Lil is making out remarkably well with a broken metatarsal bone and having relatibely little pain. She gets around with a walker that I think she'll soon discard. I had a little scare a week ago when it appeared that I was passing blood in the stools. The local emergency room said no but my doctor is not completely satisfied. This was my second experience with paramedics, both excellent. Had to use an ambulance because it was snowing then and the doctor ordered it. The did the preliminary workup in the ambulance before it left here, checking all the time with a doctor, by radio.

DJ still does not dare charge me with contempt. Or even try to collect what the judge awarded them from me. Instead they've told Lesar they will seek s judgement from him. He says he is finally angry. I hope his anger lasts a little. He told me Saturday and was to have spoken to the ACLU today. Which is only what I tried hard to get him to do beginning about a year ago when what they were up to was obvious. Because what they have done is a threat to all lawyers the ACLU has a safe enough issue. Meanwhile, I am and will be technically in contempt. As I am in fact.

best wishes,

13 January 1984

Dear Harold:

Dont' return the enclosed copy of Pierre Salinger's retrospective after 20 years. I've sent the original to Dave for the file and have retained a copy here. As I recall it, Pierre has written very little about the assassination, and I find it interesting that after 20 years he remembers those things which coverup critics used to list as JFK's [redacted] policies in 1963 which were regarded as crimes by the right wingers and which probably led to his assassination. Note the last paragraph, however, in which Pierre reverts to the Gospel according to St. Edgar.

I know there was a certain amount of joking about Pierre when he turned up as JFK's press secretary. However, he was a good newsman when he worked for the Chronicle here and I don't think the Kennedy's took him on as court jester.

(Both [redacted] Owen Spann and Jim Eason still are with KGO Radio, Spann from 9a to noon and Eason from 1p to 4p. Spann is smooth and highly expert in skirting around controversy without actually dealing with its gut issues. Eason has grown very establishment if not actually conservative while pretending to be his old gabby self. I can hardly stand to listen to him. Spann is only cosmetically better. There are no good talk shows in this area now.

I'm very sorry to hear about your hearing problem and hope the new miniaturized equipment really is an improvement. I've been assigned to a patient who is supposed to have the latest, but his problem is that it works fine when talking with one or two people but in a crowd picks up everything, a story with which you no doubt are familiar.

For some reason my hearing seems to be holding up fairly well. I had expected to have it fade on me much more than it has. My back is behaving rather well, and while I can't do heavy work [redacted] and have to avoid too much torso twisting I can manage nearby everything else that I need to do.

Sounds like you've had some very cold weather but not much worse than usual. Here it has been mostly very wet for three months, with heavy fog if not rain.

Best to you both,

jdw

If John F. Kennedy Had Lived

By Pierre Salinger
Special to The Chronicle

In his commencement address at American University in June of 1963, President John Kennedy signaled the first major turnaround in U.S.-Soviet relations after nearly a quarter century of bitter invective.

Kennedy told his audience:

"Some say that it is useless to speak of world peace or world law or world disarmament — and that it will be useless until the leaders of the Soviet Union adopt a more enlightened attitude. I hope they do. I believe we can help them do it.

"But I also believe that we must re-examine our own attitude — as individuals and as a nation — for our attitude is as essential as theirs. ... World peace, like community peace, does not require that each man love his neighbor — it requires only that they live together in mutual tolerance, submitting their disputes to a just and peaceful settlement.

"And history teaches us that enmities between nations, as between individuals, do not last forever. However fixed our likes and dislikes may seem, the tide of time and events will often bring surprising changes in the relations between neighbors."

Kennedy bemoaned the "wholly baseless and incredible claims" made against the United States by Soviet propagandists. Nonetheless, he urged his countrymen to re-examine their attitude toward the Soviet Union, to hail the Soviet people for their achievements. He reminded his countrymen of the Russians' unparalleled suffering during World War II, and of what would happen should a major conflict erupt again.

"It is an ironic but accurate fact that the two strongest powers are the two in the most danger of devastation. All we have built, all we have worked for, would be destroyed in the first 24 hours. ... So let us not be blind to our differences — but let us also direct attention to our common interests and to the means by which those differences can be resolved.

"And if we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity. For, in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future. And we are all mortal."

What had given Kennedy the confidence to think such thoughts, let alone utter them in public, had been an earlier private exchange of letters between him and Chairman Nikita Khrushchev. It was that confidence-building exchange, I am certain, that played a part in the test ban treaty of 1963, a treaty that remains unbroken and unchallenged to this day, surely a record for U.S.-Soviet relations.

One can only wonder where U.S.-Soviet relations would be today if such a frank exchange were taking place between Ronald Reagan and Yuri Andropov.

One can also wonder what might have happened to U.S.-Soviet relations if Kennedy had lived.

What follows is sheer conjecture, but I do not believe that America's relations with the Soviet Union would be nearly as bad as today. They might possibly have been good.

My reasoning begins with the fate of Khrushchev, who was ousted from power in 1964. Would he have been ousted if Kennedy had lived? Many Kremlinologists believe that if a Soviet leader has a good relationship with the president of the United States, he is maintained in office regardless of how he is otherwise assessed.

At the time of Kennedy's death, the two world leaders had a remarkable rapport based on mutual respect as well as an understanding of one another's strengths and weaknesses. Khrushchev, himself, pointed out this fact in a previously published letter written to Robert Kennedy for inclusion in the oral history section of the John F. Kennedy Library.

"I keep in memory my personal meetings with John F. Kennedy in the course of which we frankly exchanged opinions on questions of interest to both sides," Khrushchev wrote.

"It is appropriate to note here that although the main problems dividing the world today remained unsettled, nonetheless with President Kennedy we succeeded by joint effort in bringing about a certain change for the better in the international situation and in relations between our great powers."

Kennedy's American University speech had enormously impressed the Soviet chairman. "That statement can be called courageous and more realistic than what the Soviet Union and other countries of the socialist world often heard from America's shores," he said.

Although he had not liked everything about the speech, Khrushchev went on, "As a whole, however, it proceeded from acknowledgement of the inevitability and necessity of coexistence of states with different social systems. ... In that statement the president said, 'let us examine our attitude toward the Soviet Union'; he said that 'peace need not be impracticable and war need not be inevitable.' "

What might the world be like today if the Americans and the Russians had, little by little, learned to accustom themselves to the idea of peace between the countries? No one knows, because there is no way of knowing how long coexistence might have lasted even if Kennedy had lived. But I will make one other conjecture — that the United States and Cuba would have normal relations today.

In Cuba on Nov. 22, 1963, Fidel Castro had just finished a long evaluation of U.S.-Latin American relations for Jean Daniel, the respected correspondent for L'Express. For the sake of hemispheric peace, Castro had said, the United States must have a leader capable of understanding Latin America's explosive reality and adapting himself to it.

"That man may yet be Kennedy," Castro told Daniel. "He has all the possibilities of becoming, in the eyes of history, the greatest president of the United States — the one who might at last understand that there can be coexistence among capitalists and socialists even in the American zone. He would then be a president superior to Lincoln."

At that, the Cuban leader quipped, "If you see Kennedy again, you can tell him that if it will assure his re-election I am ready to declare that Goldwater (Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona, who became the Republican candidate for president in 1964) is my friend." A few minutes later, as Castro and Daniel began lunch, the telephone rang in his stark country home. It was Cuba's President Dorticos, reporting Kennedy's assassination.

My further conviction that relations between Cuba and the United States would have been normalized — with all the consequences such an action would have had on the situation in Central America today — is based on a private, two-hour discussion I had with Castro in August of 1975. (The only other person present at this discussion was James Reston of the New York Times, who at the time was wearing two hats, one that of a journalist, the other that of a secret emissary of then-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.) I have never previously written about these conversations, and I am doing so now only because of their special pertinence to Kennedy, and what might have been had he lived.

Castro was very forgiving about the Bay of Pigs. "We have to say that Kennedy's problem was complicated. He had just come into the presidency. And he found in the case of Cuba that all the plans of the Pentagon and the CIA were on the go. Way down deep, he was not in agreement," Castro said. "But he didn't feel strong enough, he didn't feel he had sufficient authority because of the narrow margin of his victory. After the Bay of Pigs, he had a reaction of another nature. He felt somewhat humiliated by this."

Castro was right. Kennedy *had* been humiliated. I was with him on the night we knew that the invasion had failed. He suddenly broke off our conversation and went outside and walked alone for nearly an hour on the vast south lawn of the White House. He had undertaken an enterprise and lost — and the Kennedys do not like to lose.

Castro was very upbeat about Kennedy. "I have always thought that Kennedy was a man of personal courage and political worth. I think that Kennedy, if he had not been killed, was the only American president who would have dared to reconsider and deal with the problem of Cuba."

Castro had interpreted the visit of Jean Daniel in that light — he had been to the White House first and brought a message from the president — as a probe toward an opening. More than that, Castro believed that Kennedy had become the political master of the United States at the time and was therefore capable of dealing with the most controversial subjects, including Cuba.

As to the plots to assassinate him, Castro was firm. The CIA had launched a number of efforts to kill him, the Cuban leader assured me, but he said he did not believe that Kennedy personally had anything to do with those plots.

I believe Castro was sincere in what he told me, even though I fully recognize the brutal and authoritarian side of his regime, and that is why I further believe that Castro did not plot to kill Kennedy — one of the favorite theories of the modern-day conspiracy advocates.

I'm also convinced that if President Kennedy had lived, the worst chapter in American history — Vietnam — would never have been written.

During Kennedy's presidency, 50 Americans died in Vietnam. That's 50 too many, but it doesn't remotely compare to the number who died afterward. The small number of deaths during Kennedy's presidency reflected, I believe, his conviction that the role of the United States was to act as an adviser and not to wage the fight on behalf of the South Vietnamese.

"I don't think that unless a greater effort is made by the (Saigon) government to win popular support that war can be won out there," Kennedy told Walter Cronkite of CBS during a September 1963 broadcast. "In the final analysis it is their war. They are the ones who have to win it or lose it. We can help them, we can give them equipment, we can send our men out there as advisers, but they have to win it." It was clearly Kennedy's conviction at that time that the government of South Vietnam had lost the support of the people necessary for victory.

As if to underscore his belief in a detached U.S. commitment, Kennedy announced shortly thereafter that the United States would be withdrawing 2500 advisers from Vietnam in 1964.

But the principal reason for my conviction that Kennedy intended to disengage almost completely from Vietnam was a conversation I had with him on the morning of Nov. 19, 1963, a few hours before my departure for Hawaii and the Far East in company with six members of the president's cabinet. On our agenda in Hawaii was a review of how the situation in Vietnam was going.

Kennedy could not have been more explicit that day. What he had to do, he told me, was to figure out a way to reduce our commitment in Vietnam. The subject was now paramount in his thoughts.

Imagine the difference in our lives if Kennedy had lived to carry out his intent!

Hundreds of thousands of people — North and South Vietnamese as well as Americans — would be alive today who aren't.

On domestic issues, it was clear that by the end of his presidency, Kennedy was beginning to build the kind of congressional majority which would have assured him success on a number of issues in which he was vitally interested.

Many of these issues did not come before the Congress until after Kennedy died. They were adopted. People then said they were adopted because Lyndon Johnson was such a great legislative leader. Others said they were adopted out of memory for JFK. My own judgment is that they were adopted because of the process he had initiated during his presidency. By the time of his death, Kennedy had marshaled public opinion in such key issues as education and civil rights, and he had built the congressional majority to effect his legislative wishes.

Let us take a moment to deal with several specific criticisms of Kennedy.

One of the counter-theories that has developed is that the current Soviet nuclear advantage over the United States is all Kennedy's fault. It's argued that by using U.S. nuclear superiority to force Khrushchev to withdraw Soviet missiles from Cuba, he convinced the Russians that they should never again accept nuclear inferiority.

The argument is specious. Kennedy couldn't fold on Cuba. Perhaps the blame should fall on subsequent presidents who did not realize the extent to which the Russians were arming themselves.

(3)

What about the constant stream of information to the effect that Kennedy was a womanizer? This is a difficult problem for me to deal with, not because I was a friend of Kennedy's but because I have no direct evidence of such activity, in spite of the fact that for almost three years I was an insider at the White House. It is not my style to deal with rumors, and as a journalist I can't afford to.

It is undeniable that Kennedy admired beautiful women and that he liked the company of women. These are not terrible crimes, particularly in view of the fact that his primary concern was running the government of the United States. Whatever his outside activities might have been, they never prevented him from performing his duties to the very best of his ability.

Kennedy was a human being, not a myth. His tragic death undoubtedly contributed to the larger-than-life view that many people have of him. But I believe the realities, not the myths, were responsible for the image we have of him today.

Kennedy did bestir his countrymen. Twenty years after his assassination, a Harris Survey showed that he rates more highly among his fellow Americans than any of the eight preceeding presidents. Forty percent of those polled said that Kennedy most inspired confidence in the White House. The closest former president was Franklin D. Roosevelt, with 23 percent.

That regard, I believe, is reflected throughout the world as well. I have spent 15 of the 20 years since his death living and traveling abroad. Not a day in my life has passed since his death when someone hasn't mentioned him to me.

I still see his picture hung in the homes of both the mighty and the humble. I saw it once on the wall of a KGB agent's flat in Moscow.

It is clear to me that Lee Harvey Oswald did much, much more than kill a man. He killed a dream shared by all mankind.

HIS PRESS SECRETARY'S VIEW