

JFK 'Kicked LBJ Upstairs

NEW YORK (AP) — Former presidential aide Kenneth O'Donnell says John F. Kennedy chose Lyndon B. Johnson as his running mate in 1960 because he felt that if elected he would be unable to "live with" Johnson as Senate majority leader.

O'Donnell, who served in both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, said that four years later Johnson wanted Sen. Mike Mansfield of Montana as his vice president for the same reason—to remove him from the key Senate leadership post.

O'Donnell's observations in the Aug. 7 issue of Life magazine are from a book he is writing. In addition to domestic politics, the account offers new background on early decisions on America's involvement in Vietnam.

O'Donnell said Kennedy, after consulting with Gen. Douglas MacArthur and Mansfield in 1961 and 1962, agreed with both on "the need for a complete military withdrawal from Vietnam" but planned to withhold announcement until after the 1964 election.

Mansfield confirmed yesterday that Kennedy had "definitely and unequivocally" made the withdrawal decision in the spring of 1963, the Washington Post reported in today's editions.

On the selection of Johnson for the vice presidency, O'Donnell quoted Kennedy as offering this explanation at the 1960 Democratic convention:

"I'm 43 years old, and I'm the healthiest candidate for President in the United States. You've traveled with me enough to know that. I'm not going to die in office. So the vice presidency doesn't mean anything.

"I'm thinking of something else, the leadership of the Senate. If we win, it will be by a small margin and I won't be able to live with Lyndon Johnson as the leader of a small Senate majority. Did it occur to you that if Lyndon becomes the vice president, I'll have Mike Mansfield as the Senate leader, somebody I can trust and depend on?"

On the Vietnam involvement, O'Donnell wrote:

"President Kennedy first began to have doubts about our military effort in Vietnam in 1961, when both Gen. Douglas MacArthur and Gen. Charles de Gaulle warned him that the Asian mainland was no place to be fighting a non-nuclear land war."

"MacArthur was extremely critical of the military advice the President had been getting from the Pentagon," he wrote. "MacArthur went on to point out that there were domestic problems . . . the urban crisis, the ghettos, the

economy . . . that should have far more priority than Vietnam.

"Kennedy came out of the meeting somewhat stunned. That a man like MacArthur should give him such unmilitary advice impressed him enormously."

The following year, O'Donnell says, Mansfield returned from a visit to Southeast Asia and "emphatically advised, first, a curb on sending more military reinforcements to South Vietnam and, then, a withdrawal of U.S. forces from that country's civil war."

After criticism from Mans-

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field in 1963 for his support of the Diem regime in Saigon, O'Donnell says, Kennedy told him he agreed the United States should withdraw but told him that "if he announced a total withdrawal . . . before the 1964 election, there would be a wild conservative outcry against returning him to the presidency for a second term."

O'Donnell was White House appointments secretary under Kennedy and after Kennedy's assassination Nov. 22, 1963, remained under President Johnson as a special aide until after the 1964 campaign.

He also says that Johnson

was clearly opposed to Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey as a running mate and "frequently ridiculed the garrulous Minnesota senator in private."

As vice president, Johnson had felt sidetracked and ignored and blamed his lowered prestige on the then attorney general, Robert F. Kennedy, according to O'Donnell.

As president, Johnson was "obsessed" with the idea that Robert Kennedy would try to force himself into the vice presidency in 1964, says O'Donnell, although Kennedy had privately rejected that possibility and laid plans to run for the Senate in New York.