

How President Kennedy Planned to Quit Vietnam

By John Averill
Times-Post Service

Washington

John F. Kennedy decided in 1963 that he would pull all U.S. forces out of Vietnam after his anticipated re-election in 1964, according to Kenneth P. O'Donnell, one of the late President's most trusted associates.

This was confirmed by Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, who said in an interview that he was convinced Kennedy would have carried out the withdrawal if he had lived. The Montana Democrat emphasized:

"That's what he indicated to me that he would do."

PLANS

Mansfield's comments came in reaction to O'Donnell's disclosure of a White House meeting in the spring of 1963 when, O'Donnell said, Mr. Kennedy told Mansfield

military withdrawal from Vietnam."

"The quotation is correct," Mansfield said.

The Senator was asked why he had never spoken of the incident before in view of speculation over what President Kennedy would have done in Vietnam had he lived. Mansfield gave this reply:

"I never keep notes on executive meetings with a President. I consider it a trust and I would not break a confidence. It was up to him (President Kennedy) to break it if he wished but he is dead and I would not consider that it was up to me to do so, and I wouldn't now except that it is in print."

TURNABOUT

O'Donnell's account of Mr. Kennedy's hitherto untold turnabout on Vietnam appears in this week's issue of Life magazine. The article was excerpted from an in-

complete book manuscript.

O'Donnell, now a candidate for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination in Massachusetts, also said in the Life article:

- That the "real" reason Mr. Kennedy chose Lyndon B. Johnson as his vice presidential running mate in 1960 was because he wanted Mr. Johnson out of the Senate so that Mansfield, "somebody I can trust and depend on," could become Senate leader.

- That President Johnson, whom O'Donnell served for a year after the Kennedy assassination, wanted Mansfield rather than Hubert H. Humphrey as his running mate in 1964. O'Donnell suggests that it was the concerted effort of the Kennedy forces that finally persuaded Mr. Johnson to take Humphrey on his ticket.

- That President Kennedy, much to his surprise, developed a warm admiration for General of the Army Douglas MacArthur. O'Donnell said the old General, during a private three-hour lunch at the White House in 1961, implored the President to avoid a military buildup in Vietnam or any part of the Asia mainland because he felt the "domino theory was ridiculous in a nuclear age.

MISTAKE

However, it was Mansfield who was most responsible for persuading Mr. Kennedy that U.S. involvement in Vietnam was a mistake, according to O'Donnell.

Mansfield corroborated O'Donnell's report that Mr. Kennedy had told him in the spring of 1963 that he planned a complete with-

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Opera House Scare

There was an added attraction at the War Memorial Opera House yesterday during the performance of Russia's Moiseyev Dance Company — but it wasn't presented by S. Hurok.

Shortly after 3 p.m., an anonymous male caller telephoned the box office and snarled: "You Russian-catering bastards — there's a bomb in the Opera House."

Tem policemen from Northern Station and a company of firemen reacted to the scene and, after evacuating hundreds of persons in what was termed an "unscheduled intermission," made a thorough search of the lobby and all the seats.

Nothing resembling a bomb was found and the afternoon performance continued to its end with the dancers big applauded back on stage for several curtain calls.

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drawal from Vietnam in 1965.

Mansfield said he had no idea whether President Johnson, who started the massive U.S. buildup in Vietnam in 1965, had known of Mr. Kennedy's reported pullout plans.

The report of Mr. Kennedy's contemplated Vietnam withdrawal — backed up by Mansfield's confirmation of it — seems certain to provoke controversy. The timing alone is ironic: With the political and military situation in South Vietnam having deteriorated greatly during 1963 and 1964, President Johnson, in early 1965, after weighing whether to withdraw American forces, ordered a massive buildup of U.S. ground forces and the bombing of North Vietnam.

DISCLOSURE

O'Donnell's disclosure undercuts Mr. Johnson's repeated assertions that he was continuing in Vietnam the policies inherited from his immediate predecessors, Mr. Kennedy and General Eisenhower.

President Nixon has said much the same thing in defense of his Vietnam policies.

Mansfield first communicated his misgivings about Vietnam to Mr. Kennedy in a still-secret report following a global trip he made at the President's request late in 1962. Mansfield personally delivered the report to the President as they were cruising in a presidential yacht on the choppy waters off Palm Beach, Fla., on December 26 of that year. According to O'Donnell, the report angered Mr. Kennedy.

Yet in the following spring, O'Donnell said the President had him call Mansfield into his office following a breakfast meeting of Congressional leaders.

DISCUSSION

"I sat in on part of their discussion," O'Donnell wrote. "The President told Mansfield that he had been having serious second thoughts about Mansfield's argument and that he now agreed with the Senator's thinking on the need for a complete military withdrawal from Vietnam."

O'Donnell said the President felt and Mansfield agreed that to announce a total withdrawal before the 1964 elections could produce "a wild conservative outcry against returning him to the Presidency for a second term."

After Mansfield left, O'Donnell said the President told him:

"In 1965, I'll be damned everywhere as a Communist appeaser. But I don't care. If I tried to pull out completely now, we would have another Joe McCarthy red scare on our hands but I can do it after I'm re-elected. So we had better make damned sure that I am re-elected."

JOHNSON

O'Donnell wrote that "the real story has never come out" of why Mr. Kennedy picked Mr. Johnson as his 1960 running mate.

O'Donnell said he was furious at the decision and that Mr. Kennedy, to escape the

crowd milling around his Biltmore Hotel suite in Los Angeles, ushered him into a bathroom to explain. Before the President could speak, O'Donnell said he told him:

"This is the worst mistake you ever made. You came out here to this convention like a knight on a white charger, the clean-cut young Ivy League college guy who's promising to get rid of the old political ways. And now, in your first move, you go against all the people who supported you. Are we going to spend the whole campaign apologizing for Lyndon Johnson and trying to explain why he voted against everything you ever stood for?"

Mr. Kennedy, O'Donnell continued, "became pale, livid with anger, so upset and hurt that it took him a while before he was able to collect himself."

ACCOUNT

O'Donnell then proceeds, with Mr. Kennedy's purported words, to offer an account all other published explanations of why Mr. Johnson was offered the vice presidential nomination.

"I'm 43 years old and I'm the healthiest candidate for President in the United States," Mr. Kennedy was quoted as telling O'Donnell. "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 in 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 Johnson becomes Vice President, I'll have Mike Mansfield as the Senate leader, somebody I can trust and depend on?"

That thought, O'Donnell said, had never occurred to him or to anyone else around Mr. Kennedy. "Bobby had wanted Henry Jackson for Vice President; I had been for Stuart Symington. I had never heard anyone even mention Johnson's name. But Kennedy saw it differently and the way he explained it sounded like an elementary history lecture."

REMINDER

O'Donnell said Mr. Kennedy reminded him that Congress was still in session and that he had to go back and fight for the issues in his platform — housing, urban renewal, Medicare and relief for depressed areas. Mr. Kennedy said he couldn't afford to alienate Mr. Johnson and his fellow Texan, the late House Speaker Sam Rayburn.

"If Johnson and Rayburn leave here mad at me," Mr. Kennedy was quoted as saying, "they'll ruin me in Congress next month. Then I'll be the laughing stock of the country. Nixon will say I haven't any power in my own party and I'll lose the election before Labor Day."

O'Donnell said he and Robert Kennedy were assigned the task of persuading labor leaders, who did not like Mr. Johnson's Senate voting record, not to fight his nomination for Vice President.

"Bobby's own feeling about

Johnson at this point was neutral," O'Donnell said. "It has been widely reported, and accepted, that Bobby Kennedy tried to block Johnson from the ticket. This is simply not accurate."

It was not until after Mr. Johnson became Vice President and began missing the patronage and power he had as majority leader that bad feelings developed between him and Bob Kennedy, who was then Attorney General, O'Donnell said.

"He felt that Bobby had taken over his rightful position as the Number 2 man in the Government, which was true enough," O'Donnell said.

President Kennedy was

"uncomfortably aware of Johnson's unhappiness," O'Donnell said, and leaned over backwards to keep him involved in important affairs.

Only one month after President Kennedy's death, O'Donnell said, Mr. Johnson told him he did not want Robert Kennedy as his running mate in 1964.

"I don't want history to say I was elected to this office because I had Bobby Kennedy on the ticket with me," Mr. Johnson was quoted as telling O'Donnell.

THREAT

"The simple fact was that Johnson didn't want anybody to be his Vice President," O'Donnell said. "He felt threatened by anyone who had a constituency. That, in Johnson's eyes, would detract from his own victory."

O'Donnell, who was made executive director of Mr. Johnson's election campaign, said the President remarked on several occasions that he wanted a Catholic as his running mate.

Among others, O'Donnell said Mr. Johnson mentioned Sargent Shriver, a member of the Kennedy family by marriage, and Senator Eugene J. McCarthy (Dem-Minn.). O'Donnell said he asked how Mr. Johnson could "pick the Number 2 Senator from Minnesota over the Number 1 Senator from Minnesota, Hubert Humphrey, who is better qualified and more strongly backed, only because the second man is a Catholic? Catholics would resent that."

O'Donnell said by then it was clear to Mr. Johnson that the Kennedy camp wanted Humphrey to be the Vice President and "it was equally clear to us that Johnson was not eager to have Humphrey."

A few weeks before the convention, O'Donnell related, "Johnson made one last stab at dropping Humphrey and picking somebody else whom even Humphrey's supporters would have hesitated to oppose — Senator Mike Mansfield."