

White House Aide Reveals:

'JFK Goal--Quit Vietnam'

Examiner News Services

NEW YORK — President Kennedy would have removed all American troops from South Vietnam in 1965 if he were re-elected.

Kennedy also put Lyndon Johnson on his presidential ticket in 1960 to get rid of Johnson as Senate majority leader and keep him "safely tucked away" as Vice President.

These were two of several disclosures made by Kenneth O'Donnell, a former presidential aide to Kennedy and Johnson in the current Life magazine.

In addition to giving an insight into Kennedy's thinking of the war in Vietnam and Johnson, the account also offered new background on many decisions on American involvement in Vietnam.

O'Donnell said Kennedy, after consulting with General of the Army Douglas MacArthur and Senator Mike Mansfield (D-Mont) in 1961 and 1962, agreed with both on "the need for a complete withdrawal from Vietnam" but planned to withhold announcement until after the 1964 election.

Unequivocally

Mansfield confirmed yesterday that Kennedy had "definitely and unequivocally" made the withdrawal decision in the spring of 1963.

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 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."

Views on LBJ

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?"

O'Donnell, now the Democratic candidate for governor of Massachusetts, also reported that:

• As Vice President, Johnson frequently complained to President Kennedy about Attorney General Robert Kennedy and that "part of the enmity between Johnson and Robert Kennedy stemmed from a dispute over the appointment of a federal judge in Texas."

• As President, Johnson wanted Senate majority leader Mike Mansfield as his vice presidential running mate for the same reason Kennedy selected Johnson: To deprive him of the Senate leadership in favor of a more sympathetic man. Mansfield flatly refused the offer, and Johnson wound up with Hubert Humphrey whom he tried to avoid.

The judgeship issue involved Sarah T. Hughes, a Texas attorney Johnson wanted on the federal bench. O'Donnell says Johnson went to Robert Kennedy and recommended Mrs. Hughes only to be told that she was too old, at 65, for the job.

O'Donnell reported that Robert Kennedy, then 35, subsequently encountered another prominent Texan, House Speaker Sam Rayburn, in quest of affirmative House action on two key Justice Department bills and that Rayburn mentioned Mrs. Hughes' judgeship.

Kennedy, according to O'Donnell, explained that Mrs. Hughes was 65 and too old.

"Son, everybody looks old to you," Rayburn reportedly

told Kennedy. "Do you want these bills passed, or don't you?"

Mrs. Hughes was appointed the next day, and Johnson felt he had been undercut. Mrs. Hughes was the judge who administered the oath of office to Johnson in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963, after John Kennedy was slain.

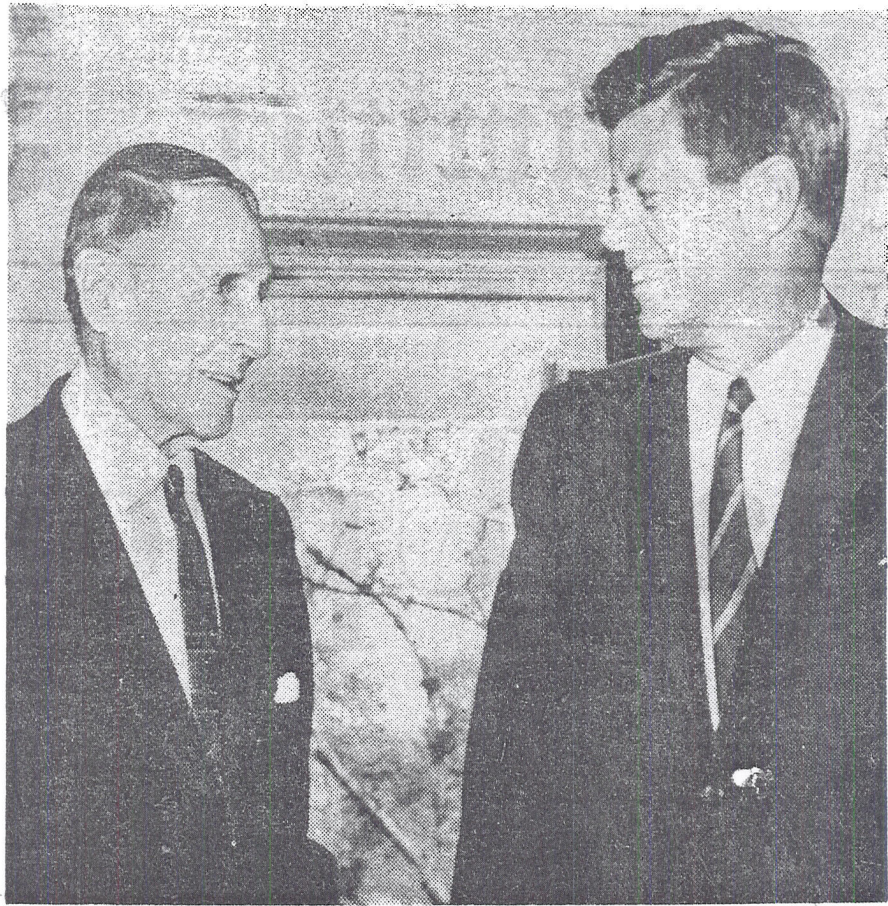
'Wild Outcry'

O'Donnell, who was White House appointments secretary under Kennedy and remained with Johnson as a special aide until after the 1964 campaign said Kennedy told him in 1963, after criticism from Mansfield, that he agreed the United States should withdraw from Vietnam.

"But if he announced a withdrawal before the 1964 election," O'Donnell quoted Kennedy as saying, "there would be a wild conservative outcry against returning him to the presidency for a second term."

Mansfield said Kennedy told him of his plans to withdraw from Vietnam after a White House meeting with congressional leaders.

President Kennedy didn't waste words," Mansfield recalled. "He was pretty sparse with his language. But it was not unusual for him to shift position. There is no doubt he had shifted definitely and unequivocally on Vietnam, but he never had the chance to put the plan into effect."



GENERAL MacARTHUR AND PRESIDENT KENNEDY IN AUGUST, 1962
Military leader agreed on withdrawal, former White House aide says