

Film on RFK Memoir *Post 11-4-68*

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, which for \$350,000 purchased the screen rights to the late Sen. Robert F. Kennedy's memoir on the Cuban missile crisis, hopes to make it into a dramatic movie.

The Kennedy family, when it sold the rights, was convinced the only film value in the material was as a documentary. But M-G-M has earmarked almost \$250,000 to get a dramatic script written based on Kennedy's recollections of the 13-day crisis. Excerpts of the memoir are currently being published in *The Washington Post*.

The 13 Days of Crisis—II

Post 11-4-68

JFK Gave Khrushchev Time to Think

Second of three installments from the late Sen. Kennedy's personal memoir of the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. The first installment told of the Soviet missile buildup in Cuba, of the imposition of a quarantine and of the 20 Russian ships nearest the U.S. naval barrier stopping or turning around on the tense Wednesday night of Oct. 24, 1962.

By Robert F. Kennedy

Despite what had happened, the danger was anything but over. We learned later in the day that 14 of the ships had stopped or had turned back to Russia. Most of those continuing were tankers.

The ship that became the matter of greatest concern was a Russian tanker called the Bucharest. During the day, it had reached the barrier, identified itself to one of our naval ships and, because it was a tanker, been allowed to pass.

There was little likelihood that the Bucharest carried any missiles or any of the kinds of armament covered by the quarantine. Nevertheless, there were those in the Executive Committee who felt strongly that the

Bucharest should be stopped and boarded so that Khrushchev would make no mistake of our will or intent.

The President himself emphasized that eventually we would have to stop and board one of the ships approaching Cuba. Those who favored letting the Bucharest pass argued that it probably carried no contraband and that Khrushchev needed more time to consider what he should do.

The President postponed a decision and ordered the Bucharest shadowed by American warships. At that time, it was proceeding toward Cuba at 17 knots and a decision had to be made before nightfall.

That evening, the President, after further heated discussion, made the final decision permitting the Bucharest to go through to Cuba. Against the advice of many of his advisers and of the military, he decided to give Khrushchev more time.

"We don't want to push him to a precipitous action—

See **KENNEDY, A18, Col. 1**

KENNEDY, From A1

give him time to consider. I don't want to put him in a corner from which he cannot escape."

In the meantime, however, he increased the pressure in other ways. Low-flying flights of eight planes apiece flew over Cuba morning and afternoon, supplementing the photography of the U-2s. All six Russian submarines then in the area or moving toward Cuba from the Atlantic were followed and harassed and, at one time or another, forced to surface in the presence of U.S. military ships.

By now, in the Caribbean surrounding Cuba, we had 25 destroyers, two cruisers, several submarines, several carriers and a large number of support ships.

A Passenger Ship Cleared

On the night of Thursday, Oct. 25, our aerial photography revealed that work on the missile sites was proceeding at an extraordinarily rapid pace. By the following evening, Oct. 26, it was clear that the IL-28 bombers were also being rapidly uncrated and assembled.

By this time, an East German passenger ship carrying some 1500 people had reached the barrier. Another decision had to be made. Again, there were strong arguments within our group as to what should be done. The President ultimately decided that the risk of life was so great—with so many people aboard the ship, and so high a possibility of something going seriously wrong—that he would let the vessel through.

There were almost daily communications with Khrushchev. On Monday, Oct. 22, the day of his speech to the Nation, President Kennedy sent a long letter and a copy of his statement directly to the Soviet Chairman. In the course of the letter he said:

"In our discussions and exchanges on Berlin and other international questions, the one thing that has most concerned me has been the possibility that your government would not correctly understand the will and determination of the United States in any given situation, since I have not assumed that you or any other sane man would, in this nuclear age, deliberately plunge the world into war which it is crystal clear no country could win and which could only result in catastrophic consequences to the whole world, including the aggressor."

Khrushchev, in a letter received Oct. 23, had accused the President of threatening him and the Soviet Union with the blockade and asserted that it was not going to be observed by the Soviet Union. "The actions of the USA with regard to Cuba are outright banditry or, if you like, the folly of degenerate imperialism."

If any effort to interfere with Soviet ships were to be made, "we would then be forced for our part to take the measures which we deem necessary and adequate in order to protect our rights. For this we have all that is necessary."

The President replied on Thursday, Oct. 25, restating

again what had occurred and stressing that—despite private and public assurances that missiles would not be placed in Cuba—that very step had been taken by the Soviet Union. And then he added, very simply: "I hope that your government will take the necessary action to permit a restoration of the earlier situation."

First Vessel Boarded

All our efforts and letters, however, seemed to be having little effect. On the contrary, as we waited for the reply to President Kennedy's latest communication with Khrushchev, reports came in that a greater number of Russian personnel were working to expedite the construction of the missile sites and to assemble the IL-28s.

At 7 o'clock Friday morning, Oct. 26, the first vessel was stopped and boarded. She was surely an international ship. It was the Marucla, an American-built Liberty ship, Panamanian owned, registered from Lebanon and bound for Cuba under a Soviet charter from the Baltic port of Riga.

The Marucla had been carefully and personally selected by President Kennedy to be the first ship stopped and boarded. He was demonstrating to Khrushchev that we were going to enforce the quarantine and yet, because it was not a Soviet-owned vessel, it did not represent a direct affront to the Soviets requiring a response from them. It gave them more time, but simultaneously demonstrated that the U.S. meant business.

At 7:24 a.m., an armed boarding party from two destroyers went alongside the Marucla and by 8 was aboard and had started the inspection. There were no incidents. The vessel was found to contain no weapons and was allowed to sail on.

The fact that this inspection had been successfully accomplished, however, did not lift the feeling of gloom that was settling over our committee and its deliberations. The Soviet Union had been adamant in its refusal to recognize the quarantine. At the same time, it was obviously preparing its missiles in Cuba for possible use.

The President in response ordered a gradual increase in pressure, still attempting to avoid the alternative of direct military action. He increased the number of low-level flights over Cuba from twice a day to once every two hours. Preparations went ahead for night flights, which would take pictures of the missile sites with bright flares that would bedropped across the island. The State Department and the Defense Department were asked to prepare to add petroleum oil and lubricants to the embargo list.

But privately the President was not sanguine about the results of even these efforts. The feeling grew that this cup was not going to pass and that a direct military confrontation between the two great nuclear powers was inevitable. If the Russians continued to build up their missile strength, military force would be the only alternative.

Recognizing this, Friday morning, President Kennedy ordered the State Department to proceed with preparations for a crash program on civil government in Cuba to be established after the invasion and occupation of that country. Secretary McNamara reported the conclusion of the military that we should expect very heavy casualties in an invasion.

The President turned to us all: "We are going to have to face the fact that, if we do invade, by the time we get to these sites, after a very bloody fight, they will be pointed at us. And we must further accept the possibility that when military hostilities first begin, those missiles will be fired."

John McCone said everyone should understand that an invasion was going to be a much more serious undertaking than most people had previously realized. "They have a hell of a lot of equipment," he said. "And it will be damn tough to shoot them out of those hills, as we learned so clearly in Korea."

An Emotional Response

In the meantime, we awaited Khrushchev's answer. At 6 o'clock that night, the message came.

A great deal has been written about this message, including the allegation that at the time Khrushchev wrote it, he must have been so unstable or emotional that he had become incoherent. There was no question that the letter had been written by him personally.

It was very long and emotional. But it was not incoherent, and the emotion was directed at the death, destruction and anarchy that nuclear war would bring to his people and all mankind. That, he said again and again, and in many different ways, must be avoided.

The United States, he wrote, should not be concerned about the missiles in Cuba; they would never be used to attack the United States and were there for defensive purposes only. "You can be calm in this regard, that we are of sound mind and understand perfectly well that if we attack you, you will respond the same way. But you too will receive the same that you hurl against us. And I think that you also understand this . . ."

"This indicates that we are normal people, that we correctly understand and correctly evaluate the situation. Consequently, how can we permit the incorrect

actions which you ascribe to us? Only lunatics or suicides, who themselves want to perish and to destroy the whole world before they die, could do this."

There was no purpose, he said, for us to interfere with any of his ships now bound for Cuba, for they contained no weapons. He then explained why they carried no missiles: all the shipments of weapons were already within Cuba. This was the first time he had acknowledged the presence of missiles in Cuba.

The reason he had sent these weapons to Cuba was because the U.S. was interested in overthrowing the Cuban government, as the U.S. had actively attempted to overthrow the Communist government in the Soviet Union after the revolution. Khrushchev and the Soviet people wished to help Cuba protect herself.

But then he went on: "If assurances were given that the President of the United States would not participate in an attack on Cuba and the blockade lifted, then the question of the removal or the destruction of the missile sites in Cuba would then be an entirely different question.

This is my proposal, he said. No more weapons to Cuba and those within Cuba withdrawn or destroyed, and you reciprocate by withdrawing your blockade and also agree not to invade Cuba. Don't interfere, he said, in a piratical way with Russian ships.

"If you have not lost your self-control and sensibly conceive what this might lead to, then, Mr. President, we and you ought not to pull on the ends of the rope in which you have tied the knot of war, because the more the two of us pull, the tighter that knot will be tied. And a moment may come when that knot will be tied so tight that even he who tied it will not have the strength to untie it, and then it will be necessary to cut that knot, and what that would mean is not for me to explain to you, because you yourself understand perfectly of what terrible forces our countries dispose.

"Consequently, if there is no intention to tighten that knot, and thereby to doom the world to the catastrophe of thermonuclear war, then let us not only relax the forces pulling on the ends of the rope, let us take measures to untie that knot. We are ready for this."

Short-Lived Optimism

I had a slight feeling of optimism as I drove home from the State Department that night. The letter, with all its rhetoric, had the beginnings perhaps of some accommodation, some agreement.

The feeling was strengthened by the fact that John Scali, a very able and experienced reporter for ABC, had been approached by an important official of the Soviet Embassy with a proposal that the Soviet Union would remove the missiles under United Nation supervision and inspection and the U.S. would lift the blockade and give a pledge not to invade Cuba as its part of the understanding.

On Saturday morning, Oct. 27, I received a memorandum from J. Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal

Bureau of Investigation, that gave me a feeling of considerable disquiet. He had received information the night before that certain Soviet personnel in New York were apparently preparing to destroy all sensitive documents on the basis that the U.S. would probably be taking military action against Cuba or Soviet ships, and this would mean war. I asked myself as I drove to the White House: If the Soviets were anxious to find an answer to the crisis, why this conduct on the part of Soviet personnel?

It was therefore with some sense of foreboding that I went to the meeting of our Ex-Comm committee. My concern was justified. A new, this time very formal, letter had arrived from Khrushchev to President Kennedy.

It was obviously no longer Mr. Khrushchev personally who was writing, but the Foreign Office of the Kremlin. The letter was quite different from the letter received 12 hours before. "We will remove our missiles from Cuba, you will remove yours from Turkey . . . The Soviet Union will pledge not to invade or interfere with the internal affairs of Turkey; the U.S. to make the same pledge regarding Cuba."

To add to the feeling of foreboding and gloom, Secretary McNamara reported increased evidence that the Russians in Cuba were now working day and night, intensifying their efforts on all the missile sites and on the IL-28s. Thus began the most difficult 24 hours of the missile crisis.

The fact was that the proposal the Russians made was not unreasonable and did not amount to a loss to the U.S. or to our NATO allies. On several occasions over the period of the past 18 months, the President had asked the State Department to reach an agreement with Turkey for the withdrawal of Jupiter missiles in that country. They were clearly obsolete, and our Polaris submarines in the Mediterranean would give Turkey far greater protection.

At the President's insistence, Secretary Rusk had raised the question with the representatives of Turkey following a NATO meeting in the spring of 1962. The Turks objected, and the matter was permitted to drop.

In the summer of 1962, when Rusk was in Europe, President Kennedy raised the question again. He was told by the State Department that they felt it unwise to press the matter with Turkey.

But the President disagreed. He wanted the missiles removed even if it would cause political problems for our Government. The State Department representatives discussed it again with the Turks and, finding they still objected, did not pursue the matter.

Vulnerability Our Own Fault

The President believed he was President and that, his wishes made clear, they would be followed and the missiles removed. He therefore dismissed the matter from his mind. Now he learned that the failure to follow up on this matter had permitted the same obsolete Turkish missiles to become hostages of the Soviet Union.

He was angry. He obviously did not wish to order the withdrawal of the missiles from Turkey under threat from the Soviet Union. On the other hand, he did not want to involve the U.S. and mankind in a catastrophic war over missile sites in Turkey that were antiquated and useless. He pointed out to the State Department and the others that, to reasonable people, a trade of this kind might look like a very fair suggestion, that our position had become extremely vulnerable, and that it was our own fault.

At that moment, not knowing exactly what to suggest, some recommended writing to Khrushchev and asking him to clarify his two letters. There was no clear course of action. Yet we realized that, as we sat there, the work was proceeding on the missile sites in Cuba, and we now had the additional consideration that if we destroyed these sites and began an invasion, the door was clearly open for the Soviet Union to take reciprocal action against Turkey.

If we carried out an air strike against Cuba and the Soviet answered by attacking Turkey, all NATO was going to be involved. Then, immediately, the President would have to decide whether he would use nuclear weapons against the Soviet Union, and all mankind would be threatened.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff joined the meeting and recommended their solution. It had the attraction of being a very simple next step—an air strike on Monday, followed shortly afterward by an invasion. They pointed out to the President that they had always felt the blockade to be far too weak a course and that military steps were the only ones the Soviet Union would understand.

In the midst of these deliberations, another message came, to change the whole course of events and alter history. Maj. Rudolf Anderson Jr., from South Carolina, one of the two Air Force pilots who had carried out the original U-2 reconnaissance that uncovered the presence of missiles in Cuba, had since flown several other photo-reconnaissance missions and was flying one that Saturday morning, Oct. 27. Our meeting was interrupted by the report that his plane had been hit by a SAM missile, that it had crashed in Cuba and that he had been killed.

There was sympathy for Maj. Anderson and his family. There was the knowledge that we had to take military action to protect our pilots.

"How can we send any more U-2 pilots into this area tomorrow unless we take out all of the SAM sites?" the President asked. "We are now in an entirely new ball game."