

# Literature

## RFK Gives Doves' Side in Cuban Missile Story

THIRTEEN DAYS: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis. By Robert F. Kennedy. Norton. \$5.50.

By JOHN W. WILDS

One comfortable session in an armchair is sufficient to dispose of the essential 123 pages of liberally-spaced-out type in which the late attorney general and United States senator gives his version of the Great Confrontation of 1962.

In view of the story that Robert Kennedy chose to tell, that's all of the demand that should have been made on the reader.

The book is fleshed out to respectable length with forewords by Robert S. McNamara and Harold Macmillan, and with photographs and texts of documents.

There are no surprises for those who remember news accounts of the suspenseful October days and who weeks ago read a magazine's condensation of the work. But Kennedy's laconic recollection does manage to convey the awesome urgency of the decisions which had to be made. Russia had a dagger pressed against the throat of the United States.

The middle Kennedy had a way with words which he used with skill to argue for his ideas. What he lacked, or at least does not show in his book, were a reporter's eye and ear. The human drama of men caught in a situation where their advice could result in a nuclear catastrophe never comes through in words. It does in two photographs—one on the jacket showing the backs of Kennedy and his brother-President as they were pacing a White House porch in anguished consultation and another on page 133 showing participants in a fateful meeting.

Kennedy from the outset divided the dozen, perhaps score, of those involved into Good Guys, the Doves who advocated a blockade to halt the movement of atomic missileery into Cuba, and Bad Guys, the Hawks, who wanted to wipe out the

ROBERT F. KENNEDY  
Names Good and Bad Guys.

missile bases with air strikes and invasion.

Among the Bad Guys were some congressional leaders and all of the military figures except Gen. Maxwell Taylor. They never (and this is a basic shortcoming of the narrative) are given a chance to explain their reasoning. The side of the Doves, for which President Kennedy opted, is better explained. But it is the dialogue which could have made this one of the more important books of the generation.

Not surprisingly, the President, to whom Robert Kennedy's fraternal loyalty always was fierce, emerges as the hero. And perhaps his handling of the showdown was the major accomplishment of his administration.

Implicit in the book is a reminder that man still is only a pawn in the game of international politics, just as he was in the days of Napoleon, Caesar and before. The millions of Americans who might have been wiped out in the event of a miscalculation had no voice in the decisions for peace or war.

And neither did millions of Russians.