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NEW FRONTIERLAND

Caroline's father has to grapple with problems that threaten all the world's children

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LOOK WASHINGTON BUREAU

ONE BRIGHT morning recently, nine automobiles stood bumper to bumper on the curving asphalt driveway of the White House. Five of the cars were black Government limousines, and their chauffeurs lounged beside them in the sunshine. The other vehicles belonged to young mothers who had brought their three- and four-year-old tots to attend Caroline Kennedy's nursery school. (Caroline herself was away on Cape Cod, but her school was in progress anyway.)

Outwardly, this was the face of peace, but inside the White House, in President John F. Kennedy's second-floor oval study, seven men gathered to wrestle once again with the issue of Berlin. They did so under the invisible but always hovering shadow of the "great insupportable"—the hydrogen bomb.

What these American leaders decided, and how they executed their decisions, could mean the difference between extinction or survival for little Caroline's nursery class, as well as for thousands of nursery and kindergarten classes the world over.

The men, unlike the children, met in secret. Their conference was not listed on the schedule posted for newsmen in the White House press room. In fact, there were four such unannounced conferences at the White House that day—two on Berlin, one on broad military policy and one on Vietnam. On the President's private schedule, circulated to certain members of the White House staff, these sessions were listed in the margin of the typewritten copies as "off the record."

On this particular day, the Berlin conference participants included President Kennedy; Secretary of State Dean Rusk; Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara; Gen. Lyman L. Lemnitzer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Paul H. Nitze, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs; Foy D. Kohler, Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs and also chief of the special Berlin task force, and McGeorge Bundy, Special Assistant to the President.

Such groups meet in secret in the White House day after day. For every "crisis" conference publicly announced, three or four are held in private. Participants enter and leave by side doors or drive up in Government cars at the back of the Executive Mansion. They are seldom seen or questioned by newspapermen.

These meetings forge foreign and defense

policy under an almost intolerable burden, unknown before the days of Kennedy and his immediate predecessor, Dwight D. Eisenhower. Now, for the first time in history, decisions made in this house—and in the gloomy Kremlin in Moscow—can influence the survival of civilization itself.

A new element of terror in the practice of statecraft became apparent last summer, when the Soviet Union cynically shattered the moratorium on nuclear testing. Now, the 50- and 100-megaton bombs hang over all mankind like a guillotine blade suspended by a thread. As never before, the horror of the "great insupportable" casts its ugly shadow over every issue, from Cuba to Laos, from Berlin to Vietnam. Now, the two great powers can obliterate each other, and much of the world with them, within half an hour.

This dread possibility dogs President Kennedy literally every minute of the day and night. The complicated codes by which the President of the United States can touch off our missiles—through a complex but almost instantaneous communications network—are carried by five Army warrant officers. The codes rest in a slim black case inside a portfolio. Twenty-four hours a day, every day, the warrant officers alternate the duty. One of them, with the case always at hand, stays constantly but unobtrusively near the President.

When John Kennedy sleeps in the White House, the codes are brought up to the great hall outside his room, and the Army guard stands by. While the President works, the warrant officer has his post close by. When the President travels, the code men travel with him in civilian clothes. When the President sails on the family yacht, the *Marlin*, off Cape Cod, a warrant officer, wearing a deckhand's garb, is aboard with his box of codes. Even Government officials have been known to confuse them with Secret Service agents.

Because the warning time for a nuclear assault has been reduced to 15 minutes, and because the President alone is authorized to touch off America's atomic warheads, Kennedy can never be out of touch with his communications. For that reason, the Army installed new generators on the *Marlin*, powerful enough to handle transmission and receipt of coded messages when the yacht is far from shore.

The new generators got their first action test one day last summer, when Washington flashed word to Cape Cod that Communist fight-



While a carefree Caroline plays at Hyannis Port, care-

FACE OF CRISIS

ers had buzzed an American civilian transport in the air corridor to Berlin over East Germany. The harassment posed the threat of shooting because President Kennedy and Allied leaders stood firm on the right of Western access to Berlin without Communist interference.

An officer at the summer White House radio at Hyannis Port raised the *Marlin* at sea. The yacht turned at once and headed for land. During the 14 minutes of cruising time on the return trip, the ship-to-shore radio stayed open and ready for use. When he came ashore, Kennedy received a full briefing. As it turned out, no action was required. The episode became just another incident in the Cold War's grueling test of nerves. But aboard the *Marlin*, only a few steps from Kennedy, the warrant officer had been standing by with his little black case.

The Presidency today is the nerve center of an intricate, worldwide network of wires, radio and closed-circuit TV that spreads through a complex of top officials and war rooms down to the tandem officers in block houses who would push the buttons to release the rockets of atomic war.

All of the President's top advisers are linked by a system of "hot" phones for instant consultation in an emergency. In addition, many of them, like Kennedy, have radiotelephones in their official automobiles. At all times, even when the President is on vacation, the White House switchboard must know the whereabouts of these officials.

The nation has hundreds of watch-and-listen posts tied into the command network, but a select few are most important to Kennedy, faced as he is with the ever-present possibility of immediate decision. These posts are:

National Indications Center. This is located behind an always-locked green door in the basement of the Pentagon. Here, men of all the governmental intelligence units, supervised by the Central Intelligence Agency, chart movements within the Soviet Union. Dispatch of Soviet Army divisions, whereabouts of important Soviet officials and scientists, operation of missile assembly plants, shipments of rocket parts and other strategic materials—all these and more are watched for indications of Russian military intentions. Should the Soviet Union be planning a surprise attack, certain necessary preparations might tip off the National Indications Center hours or days in advance. This center works around the clock to distill data from the worldwide reports of

some 100,000 U.S. intelligence workers.

Operations Center. This is the State Department's new alert post, established after the Cuban debacle. Seven foreign-service officers man it on a 24-hour schedule. Previously, a whole night might pass before Secretary of State Rusk became aware of a critical diplomatic or military development. Now, every major dispatch from embassies around the world goes to the Operations Center as soon as it is decoded. The duty officer is linked with the White House, the CIA and the Pentagon.

The War Room. This is the alert post of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, located in a restricted section of the Pentagon, where an electronic eye scrutinizes visitors and sounds an alarm bell to alert the guard. The Army and Air Force each has its command post, and the Navy maintains its flag plot, but the Joint Chiefs' war room serves as the Pentagon's nerve center in case of emergency. Direct phones to the Chiefs and to attack operations posts are open at all hours.

SAC Command Post. A maze of wires, including a direct command line from Washington, leads to this huge underground room near Omaha, Nebr. The concrete bastion is reinforced against blast and protected against fire. Guards line the corridor ramps descending to the room, located 45 feet below the earth's surface. The room contains huge maps and a two-story, glass-enclosed observation post. Direct lines link it with air bases around the world. Key "gold" and "red" phones are at hand—one for receipt of an emergency war message and the other for transmittal of orders. The Strategic Air Command is the nation's chief atomic striking force, and its headquarters near Omaha houses the country's most important command post outside the White House itself.

Combat Operations Center. This three-level room is located in a windowless concrete-block building at Ent Air Force Base in Colorado Springs and serves as the command post for the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD). From here would go the directions to defend the continent by fighter plane and Nike missile in case of an attack on the United States. With 35 officers and men usually in attendance, a 24-hour watch is kept over the battery of teletypewriters and phones and the "Iconorama" screen on which electronic projectors flash the minute-by-minute picture of defense and attack. The complexity of this

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system extending down from President Kennedy, buttressed by duplicate lines, codes and automatic authenticators, provokes fear that the machines may outsmart the men and set off an atomic war by accident. It is "only God's miracle," in the words of a Presidential adviser, that a frightening accident has not occurred in the United States or the Soviet Union.

Also involved are very human equations that no machine can solve. Suppose, for instance, that the Soviet Union launched a lone missile. Would we retaliate at once? How could Kennedy find out instantly from Moscow whether or not the launching was an accident? And if he did receive an answer from the Russians, could he believe it? Or suppose a President or a SAC commander became mentally unbalanced and ordered an attack without provocation? Or suppose all officers of a missile-launching site misinterpreted a signal?

All of these contingencies and scores of others, equally remote but nevertheless real, have caused concern to the Kennedy Administration. At the outset, the President thought some of the command-control procedures "rather loose." Improvements were made, but Secretary of Defense McNamara still wasn't satisfied, and in late summer, he named a committee to study the system again.

In addition, some of Kennedy's advisers wish to initiate discussions with Russia on ways of preventing atomic holocaust by accident. The subject was mentioned to Nikita S. Khrushchev at Vienna. He brushed it off with a laugh and the remark that he had better control of his forces than Kennedy did. But some White House advisers believe this subject must be talked out with the Russians. The President himself believes that the existence of the engines of atomic destruction poses a continuing threat to the world and that the peril "will get worse" before it gets better.

The President walks a fine line. On the one hand, he tries to convince the world that the United States has the will to use atomic weapons, if necessary, to preserve its rights. On the other hand, the extent of nuclear devastation is always in his mind.

He believes he has succeeded in convincing a skeptical Khrushchev that America would go to atomic weapons as a last resort. For that reason, he is less fearful of war now than he was in May and June. But some allies of the U.S. wonder whether we would use the bomb unless we were attacked directly. President

Charles de Gaulle of France told Kennedy that he was not sure Kennedy really "would be willing to trade New York for Paris" in a showdown.

The President also was stung by a Senate speech delivered in late September by Margaret Chase Smith (Rep., Maine). She posed the question of whether the President dared to risk nuclear war over Berlin, and said, "God forbid that the pattern of brave words on Laos and Cuba, followed by no brave action, be repeated on Berlin."

Kennedy told friends that Senator Smith had implied he was a "coward," and that people who argued as she did were "ignorant." They ignored, he contended, the fact that the President had to weigh the consequences of "thirty or forty million Americans killed" in a nuclear war whenever he threatened to resort to such a course.

The machinery of crisis has changed substantially since the fiasco of the Cuban invasion in April. Now, there are more and longer meetings and efforts at more thorough preparation for contingencies. The Berlin task force meets every morning and tries to anticipate Communist moves and recommend appropriate American responses. Similar task forces for other areas and other problems channel recommendations to the President.

The men of crisis have changed somewhat too. The President's brother, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, is consulted regularly now on important foreign-policy decisions, as is Gen. Maxwell Taylor, retired Army chief of staff, who became Kennedy's special military

adviser in July. Vice-President Lyndon B. Johnson sits in on crucial meetings. Other key men this winter are Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, General Lemnitzer and John A. McCone, the new CIA director.

But the hard core is smaller. Often after a major meeting, Kennedy will confer further on the subject with only Rusk, McNamara and Taylor, sometimes with only Rusk and McNamara. The essence of the hard core is smaller still. It is President Kennedy alone. Finally and irrevocably, the decision is his.

Shifts in men and machinery bring no insurance against error. The men of crisis around Kennedy now concede frankly in private that they underestimated worldwide repercussions when they permitted the Communists to build first a fence and then a wall in East Berlin, sealing off the great escape hatch to the West. It had been anticipated that the Communists might build the wall, and the decision had been made not to knock it down. What was not foreseen was the clamor throughout the West, particularly in West Germany and the U.S., and the criticism of the White House for not acting promptly to destroy the barrier.

Facing a formidable enemy is nothing new for an American President. James Madison faced the British in the War of 1812, when the foe burned the White House. Woodrow Wilson faced the Germans in World War I; Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Axis in World War II; and Harry S. Truman, the Chinese Communists in Korea. What only Kennedy and Eisenhower have shared, however, is the decision for war or peace when not only the enemy, but the very existence of nuclear weapons themselves, poses the threat of global destruction.

This terrible burden of the hydrogen inferno can never be shrugged off by the President and his advisers. They must live with it night and day, at work and at play. "It is always there at the back of your mind, gnawing," says one Kennedy adviser. "You realize that a wrong decision could destroy the world," says another. And still another, "You get numb after a while. If you didn't, you'd go crazy."

The nuclear shadow is, indeed, the "great insupportable," and not until the bomb is dismantled and junked through a foolproof nuclear-disarmament treaty will man ever feel at ease again. Until that day, the men of crisis will continue to meet secretly in the same house where the mothers bring Caroline Kennedy's little friends to nursery school.

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