

Kennedy Memoir Details 1962 Crisis

By **BERNARD GWERTZMAN**
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WASHINGTON, Oct. 20— "It looks really mean, doesn't it? But then, really there was no other choice. If they get this mean on this one in our part of the world, what will they do on the next?"

That was what Robert F. Kennedy remembered his brother, the President, as having said as they both waited, extremely tense, to see whether the Soviet Union would choose to pull its offensive missiles out of Cuba as President Kennedy had demanded or would risk a world war with the United States.

"I just don't think there was any choice, and not only that, if you hadn't acted, you would have been impeached," Mr. Kennedy—who was Attorney General at the time of the 1962 crisis—said he told the worried President.

President Kennedy thought for a moment, according to his brother, and said, "That's what I think—I would have been impeached."

The agony, the doubts and the quiet triumph of those critical days were told by Robert Kennedy in a lengthy article written last year and scheduled to be published posthumously tomorrow by McCall's magazine under the title "Thirteen Days."

The publication is taking place on the eve of the sixth anniversary of the speech in which President Kennedy informed the nation and the world that Soviet offensive missiles had been detected in Cuba and warned Moscow that the United States was prepared to go to war to make sure that the missiles were removed.

Robert Kennedy's account adds little to what already has been published by others about the details of the crisis, but it provides some intimate glimpses of his brother's Ad-

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ministration under the pressure of a possible world war.

The New York Senator wrote the article for publication in The New York Times Magazine to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the crisis last October. But he informed The Times last fall that he had decided against publication because he did not want it alleged that he was trying to use the article out of political motives.

Following the Senator's assassination last June, his estate decided to offer the 25,000-word manuscript for sale. It was purchased by the McCall Corporation for an advance of \$1-million, probably the most ever paid for a manuscript of that length.

W. W. Norton & Co. has purchased the book rights from the McCall Corporation for an amount in excess of \$250,000.

Mr. Kennedy gave details of the crisis from the time he was informed on Oct. 16, 1962, that missile sites had been discovered by a U-2 reconnaissance plane flying over Cuba until the denouement on Oct. 28, when the then Soviet Premier, Nikita S. Khrushchev, agreed to withdraw the missiles.

The confrontation between the two great powers, Mr. Kennedy wrote, "brought the world to the abyss of nuclear destruction and the end of mankind."

The crisis actually had two distinct phases. The first was from Oct. 16 to Oct. 21, when President Kennedy and his advisers worked in extreme secrecy to devise their course of action in light of the discovery of the missiles. The second was from Oct. 22 until Oct. 28, when the entire world wondered whether the crisis could be resolved short of war.

The President decided against an immediate military strike at the island's missile bases—an action, Robert Kennedy wrote, that was advocated by the military leaders including the then Chief of Staff of the Air Force, Gen. Curtis E. LeMay, now the American Independent party's candidate for Vice President.

Instead, the President adopted as a first step, a plan for a quarantine of Cuba that was supported by Secretary of State Dean Rusk and the Secretary of Defense, Robert S. McNamara, and by his brother.

U.S. Ready for War

The blockade of the island, aimed at giving Mr. Khrushchev time to withdraw the missiles without Soviet humiliation, was seen as a means of showing United States determination to force the missiles out, while stopping short of actually initiating military action. However, in the event, the Russians tried to run the blockade, the United States was prepared to go to war, Mr. Kennedy's article asserts.

The blockade was scheduled to go into effect on Wednesday morning, Oct. 24, and Senator Kennedy recalled that as the President and his advisers awaited news of whether the Russians would accept this measure, "the danger and concern that we all felt hung like a cloud over us all and particularly over the President."

A few minutes after 10 a.m. an intelligence report stated that two Soviet ships, the Gagarin and the Komiles, were accompanied by a Soviet submarine, as they neared the 500-mile blockade barrier. They were due to be intercepted in the next hour if they tried to enter the forbidden area. This raised the real possibility of a conflict, Senator Kennedy's article asserts.

The aircraft carrier Essex was to signal the submarine by sonar to surface and identify itself. If the Soviet craft refused, said Secretary McNamara, depth charges with small explosive would be used until it surfaced, the Senator's article says.

'Time of Gravest Concern'

"I think these few minutes were the time of gravest concern for the President," the Senator wrote. "Was the world on the brink of a holocaust? Was it our error? A mistake? Was there something further that should have been done? Or not done?"

"His hand went up to his face and covered his mouth. He opened and closed his fist. His face seemed drawn, his eyes pained, almost gray. We stared at each other across the table. For a few fleeting seconds, it was almost as though no one else was there and he was no longer the President."

"Inexplicably, I thought of when he was ill and almost died; when he lost his child; when we learned that our oldest brother had been killed; of personal times of strain and hurt," the article continues.

"The voices droned on but I

didn't seem to hear anything until I heard the President say: 'Isn't there some way we can avoid having our first exchange with a Russian submarine—almost anything but that.'"

Mr. McNamara's reply, Senator Kennedy wrote, was:

"No, there's too much danger to our ships. There is no alternative. Our commanders have been instructed to avoid hostilities if at all possible, but this is what we must be prepared for, and this is what we must expect."

McNamara Remains Firm

President Kennedy then said: "We must expect that they will close down Berlin—make the final preparations for that."

Senator Kennedy recalled that "I felt we were on the edge of a precipice with no way off."

The tension was broken, the Senator declared, when a messenger brought a note to John A. McCone, then director of the Central Intelligence, disclosing that some of the Soviet ships approaching the quarantine line had stopped dead in the water, an indication that Moscow did not want a confrontation.

Robert Kennedy recalled that his brother had recently read Barbara Tuchman's book, "The Guns of August," which told how the major powers of Europe were drawn into World War I largely out of miscalculation.

The President vowed, Senator Kennedy wrote, that if some future historian were to write a book on the critical events of that October, it would be understood that "we made every effort to find peace and every effort to give our adversary room to move."

Throughout the second week of the crisis, President Kennedy exchanged letters with Premier Khrushchev. The correspondence has not been published in full, but Senator Kennedy did excerpt some of the letters, including an emotional one sent by Mr. Khrushchev on the night of Friday, Oct. 26, that indicated to the Americans that he wanted to negotiate a solution.

Similar excerpts from Premier Khrushchev's letter were published by Elie Abel in his book "The Missile Crisis" (J. B. Lippincott, 1966), which covered the whole Cuban affair in detail.

Mr. Khrushchev called for a statesmanlike approach, and asserted that if the United States would give a pledge not to invade Cuba, the problem of the missiles would disappear.

The letter, as printed in Mr. Abel's book, concluded:

"If you have not lost your self-control, and sensibly conceive what this might lead to, then, Mr. President, we and you ought not now to pull on the ends of the rope in which you have tied the knot of war, because the more we pull, the tighter the knot will be tied. And a moment may come when the knot will be tied so

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tight that even he who tied it will not have the strength to untie it, and 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 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."

New Problems Seen

But on the next day, Saturday, Oct. 27, events took a gloomier turn, Senator Kennedy wrote. He received a memorandum from J. Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, telling of the receipt of information that Soviet "personnel" in New York had been told to prepare to destroy certain papers.

According to Senator Kennedy's account, Mr. Hoover said the Russians had been told that the United States would probably take military action against Cuba or against Soviet ships, and that this would mean war.

That same morning a new and much more formal letter was received from Mr. Khrushchev, saying that the missiles would be withdrawn if the United States withdrew American missiles from Turkey.

The proposals concerning the missiles in Turkey was a new factor and annoyed President Kennedy, his brother wrote, because "to reasonable people, a trade of this kind might look like a very fair suggestion."

The President was piqued, Senator Kennedy wrote, because he had earlier in the year asked the State Department to negotiate the withdrawal of the obsolete American missiles from Turkey. To take this action now would be to deflect world attention from the Cuban issue, the President decided.

Ironically, a similar proposal concerning removal of the missiles in Turkey had been made by Adlai E. Stevenson, the United States representative at the United Nations. Mr. Stevenson's proposal was almost unanimously rejected, Senator Kennedy's article said, but the Senator defended Mr. Stevenson against subsequent press criticism.

U.S. Plane Downed

On the Saturday a U-2 reconnaissance plane was shot down over Cuba—"and there was the feeling that the noose was tightening on all of us, on Americans, on mankind, and that the bridges to escape were crumbling," Senator Kennedy wrote.

He asserted that the President asked: "How can we send any more U-2 pilots into this area tomorrow unless we take out all

of the SAM [surface-to-air missile] sites? We are in an entirely new ball game."

There was almost unanimous agreement among the top officials that it would be necessary to attack the Cuban missile sites the next morning, Senator Kennedy wrote, but President Kennedy changed his mind and proposed that another letter be sent to Mr. Khrushchev. The final version was drafted by Robert Kennedy and Theodore Sorensen, the President's aide, the article says.

The new letter disregarded Mr. Khrushchev's "Turkey letter" of Saturday and replied, instead, to that of Friday. It proposed a withdrawal of the missiles under United Nations supervision, an ending of the quarantine and a no-invasion pledge.

Items Accepted by Soviet

On Sunday morning the Moscow radio broadcast Mr. Khrushchev's acceptance of the terms and the crisis came to an end. The terms were never completely fulfilled because Premier Fidel Castro of Cuba refused to permit United Nations supervision of the withdrawal

of the missiles. The United States has never given a no-invasion pledge.

Senator Kennedy said in his article that the President had given orders to all his officials never to claim a victory over the Soviet Union. "He respected Khrushchev for properly determining what was in his own country's interest and what was in the interest of mankind," the Senator declared. "If it was a triumph, it was a triumph for the next generation and not for any particular government or people."

The lessons from the crisis, the Senator wrote, were that it is vital that a variety of opinions be available to the President and that sufficient time be allotted for making critical decisions, if possible.

He also said that the missile crisis underlined the importance of understanding the adversary's point of view and not trying to humiliate him.

With Vietnam in mind, Senator Kennedy asserted that the missile crisis was proof of how vital it was to have allies and friends. Unlike the Vietnam situation, the missile crisis found the United States solidly supported by all its allies, he declared.