

His Finest Hour—Or a Botched-Up Period?

Each Presidential administration does its best to manage the news and the history of its deeds and misdeeds while in power. Since Dallas, hundreds of books and untold magazine articles about John F. Kennedy have poured off the presses with the result, observed Andy Logan recently in *American Heritage*, that the late President's "fine-liberal-fellow image had expanded uncountable times, been transformed and purified, burst all mortal bounds, and soared toward the realm of the supernatural."

Now we have the late Sen. Robert F. Kennedy's recollections of the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 in the November issue of *McCall's*. The recollections seek to perpetuate the thesis, already expressed by Sorensen, Schlesinger, and Salinger in their books and articles, that the crisis was, indeed, the late President's finest hour, more than making up for the disaster that was the Bay of Pigs.

From Robert Kennedy's article emerges the picture of a courageous President who moved swiftly and surely to deal with the mortal threat of nuclear-tipped Soviet missiles emplaced 90 miles off America's shores, thus saving the world from nuclear holocaust. The title of the article, which is scheduled to be published in January as a book by W. W. Norton of New York City, is "Thirteen Days: The Story About How the World Almost Ended."

Two Opposing Views

Two recently published books by respected authors cast grave doubts about this picture. They are *Memoirs* by Arthur Krock of the New York Times, and *Dagger in the Heart* by Mario Lazo, an international lawyer who once represented U.S. Government interests in Cuba. From passages in both works (and this is confirmed perhaps unwittingly by Robert Kennedy's recollections) there emerges the clear inference that the late President and his brother relied more upon the assurances of the Soviets that offensive missiles were not being put into Cuba than they did to the warnings of none other than John A. McCone, director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), that the missiles were being prepared. Both Mr. Krock and Mr. Lazo state that Mr. McCone first expressed his view to President Kennedy in August—10 weeks before the President, on Oct. 22, 1962, went on television to inform the world that many American cities now sat within the range of Soviet missiles off its shores.

During that 10-week period, it will be recalled, President Kennedy and the U.S. State Department denied time and time again that Soviet missiles were going into Cuba. Now hear what Robert Kennedy has to say in his article.

"On Tuesday morning, Oct. 16, 1962, shortly after 9 o'clock, President Kennedy called and asked me to the White House. He said only that we were facing great trouble. Shortly afterward, in his office, he told me that a U-2 had just finished a photographic mission and that the intelligence community had become convinced that Russia was placing missiles and atomic weapons in Cuba. . . . The dominant feeling at the meeting was stunned surprise. No one had expected or anticipated that the Russians would deploy surface-to-surface missiles in Cuba. . . ."

"No official within the Government had ever suggested to President Kennedy that the Russian build-up in Cuba would include missiles. . . ." (Italics added.)

Says Mr. Krock in his *Memoirs*:

"Aug. 10. After examining secret intelligence reports he had received, McCone dictated a memorandum for President Kennedy, expressing the belief that installations for the launching of offensive missiles were being constructed on the island. His subordinates who prepared the 'national estimates' papers of the [Central Intelligence] Agency recommended that he omit a statement of this belief until it was completely documented. He ordered that it remain in the paper."

Again on Aug. 17, says Mr. Krock, Mr. McCone stated his case in a high-level meeting attended by Secretary of State Rusk and Secretary of Defense McNamara, both of whom disagreed with him. Mr. McCone issued similar warnings on Aug. 22 and 23.

Mr. McCone's Daily Cables

Then, incredibly, in the midst of what he believed to be a gathering crisis, Mr. McCone departed a few days later for his wedding in Seattle, Wash., and on Aug. 30 for his honeymoon on the French Riviera. But he continued to receive intelligence reports, and on the basis of these he sent back almost daily cables to Washington recommending that the "national estimates staff" of CIA "make a firm statement of opinion that the SAM-sites [surface-to-air missiles] discovered in Cuba were being developed for emplacements of surface-to-surface missiles with a 1,200-mile range and more, and that these missile parts and IL-28s [Soviet

bombers] were already being assembled on the island by the Russian 'technicians.' He also told his staff to reiterate his recommendation, which McNamara had successfully opposed some weeks earlier, that low-level observation flights over Cuba be made to help verification of what the regular U-2 flights were photographing."

Mr. McCone's deputy, Lt. Gen. Marshall S. Carter, overruled him, and did not include his recommendations in the national estimates. "Carter's explanation is that, as *charge d'affaires*, and in possession of all the intelligence reports textually, which at that point McCone was not, it was his responsibility whether or not to include these statements," says Mr. Krock.

Mr. Lazo's account goes into much greater detail than does Mr. Krock's, noting that "in brushing aside the CIA warnings, the Kennedy Administration relied to some extent on assurances it was receiving from the Kremlin that the Russians meant no harm. On Sept. 4, the Soviet ambassador in Washington, Anatoly Dobrynin, had called on Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy with a message from Khrushchev. The chairman wanted the message passed along by his (the President's) brother and no one else. It was a promise that the Soviets would create no trouble for the United States during the election campaign. . . ."

Robert Kennedy discusses this and other meetings with the Soviets during this period, conceding: "We had been deceived by Khrushchev, but we had also fooled ourselves."

Mr. McCone returned from his honeymoon, says Mr. Lazo, flabbergasted to discover that "western Cuba had not been flown over for a full month, and he reacted immediately, recommending that the entire island be photographed at once, especially western Cuba. This recommendation was made on Oct. 4." Ten days were lost, however, before Mr. McCone's orders were carried out, the delay caused by disagreements in the top-secret "Committee on Overhead Reconnaissance," which determined the U-2 flight schedules, and by Mr. McNamara, who "insisted that the U-2 squadron be placed under the jurisdiction of the Air Force, under his control." This was done—over CIA's stern objections.

The U-2 flight of Oct. 14 confirmed that the Russians were preparing offensive missile sites. "McCone's warning could no longer be ignored," writes Mr. Lazo. ". . . The Kennedy Administration finally realized that the Kremlin had lied. The missile crisis was on."