

Above and Beyond: John F. Kennedy and America's Most Dangerous Cold War Spy Mission

Casey Sherman and Michael J. Tougias (PublicAffairs, 2018), 329 pp., bibliography, index.

Reviewed by David A. Foy

Capt. Jerry McIlmoyle, a U-2 pilot, was near the end of his 25 October 1962 reconnaissance mission over Cuba and was turning for home—McCoy Air Force Base, near Orlando, Florida—when two nearby explosions rocked his aircraft. An experienced flier, McIlmoyle realized he had experienced a near-miss from Soviet surface-to-air missiles (SAM) recently installed in Fidel Castro's Cuba. As expected, he reported being fired on as soon as he landed, only to be informed by a gruff Air Force lieutenant general freshly flown in from Washington, DC, that he most assuredly had not been fired on and that was to be his story, period. McIlmoyle, who later became a brigadier himself and carried the nuclear launch codes for President Reagan, asked imagery analysts at CIA's National Photographic Interpretation Center (NPIC) to confirm that he had been targeted by SAMs—which they did.

Thus begins the recent book by prolific authors Casey Sherman and Michael Tougias that intertwines the U-2 program, the Cuban missile crisis and, especially, the president and man John F. Kennedy. Early on, the authors introduce readers to McIlmoyle and two other U-2 pilots who play key roles in the story, Chuck Maulsby and Rudy Anderson. They also introduce the famous commander of PT-109 and review its 1943 encounter with a Japanese destroyer that resulted in the deaths of two crewmen, which powerfully affected John F. Kennedy, both at the time and during the Cuban Missile Crisis. In the course of discussing the familiar background of the U-2 program, the authors provide good biographic details on Lockheed Martin engineer Kelley Johnson—not often a part of the Cuban missile crisis story.

After discussing the well-known shootdown of the U-2 piloted by Francis Gary Powers, the authors shift their focus to President Eisenhower's \$13M plan to oust Castro, approved in August 1960, which CIA Deputy Director for Plans Richard Bissell was to accomplish by planning a "low-key" invasion. They chronicle the "immediate and spectacular failure" that was the 17 August 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, the dangerous and nerve-rack-

ing U-2 overflights of Cuba, and the unwelcome news that the Soviets had installed medium-range ballistic missiles on the island. On 16 October 1962, National Security Advisor "Mac" Bundy showed President Kennedy photos of the missiles in Cuba, a secret he initially shared only with members of the ExComm. All were agreed that the missiles had to go and all options were on the table for their removal.

As many readers will already know, an intense days-long debate followed about how the United States should respond to this Soviet challenge. After briefing Congress, President Kennedy delivered a somber 17-minute speech to the American people on the night of Monday, 22 October, informing them that a blockade 500 miles from Cuba would go into effect at 10:00 a.m. on Wednesday, 24 October. The nation's military forces were at DEFCON 3 and by 24 October would be at DEFCON 2, only one level short of war.

After chronicling the high-stakes tension of that critical period in October 1962, including the blockade and encounters both actual and anticipated, the authors highlight the glimmer of hope resulting from a backchannel meeting a few blocks from the White House between ABC News reporter John Scali and KGB officer Alexander Fomin, who stunned Scali when he told him that Khrushchev was ready to make a deal and was writing a letter to Kennedy to propose terms to head off World War III. But two disparate events revived the spectre of nuclear war, both involving U-2 flights, one piloted by Chuck Maulsby, who became disoriented and was barely able to land in Alaska before being shot down and, more tragically, Rudy Anderson, whose U-2 was downed by a SAM, killing him instantly. As the authors point out, it was just such "miscalculations, incorrect interpretations, and breakdowns in command and control that could lead to war." (260)

They discuss the two letters Khrushchev sent to Kennedy to stave off nuclear war and the latter's strate-

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gic decision to accept the terms of the first letter, which offered to remove all the nuclear missiles and return them to the USSR in return for a promise of no US invasion. If the blockade failed and there was no or a negative response to Kennedy's counteroffer, the invasion would proceed. As the authors note, with the appropriate level of drama, "The Russians' response on Sunday would determine whether war began on Monday." (271) At 10:00 Sunday morning, Secretary of State Dean Rusk told Bobby Kennedy that the Soviets had "blinked" first and had agreed to remove all the nuclear missiles from Cuba.

The authors thankfully provide readers with "the rest of the story," at least concerning some of the primary actors. On 5 Nov 1962, the Cubans released the body of Rudy Anderson, who was thereafter buried in his South Carolina hometown. His wife Jane never forgave Kennedy for getting her husband killed, as she expressed it, and died in 1981, at the young age of 46. Chuck Maultsby retired from the Air Force in 1977 and died of lung cancer in 1998, at age 72. In terms of "how do we avoid this situation in the future," the authors note that the crisis prompted the immediate installation, on the US side, of a Moscow-Washington "hot line," both in the White House and at the Kennedy family compound on Cape Cod.

In *Above and Beyond*, Sherman and Tougias provide a number of interesting tidbits, likely unknown to many readers, in what is otherwise a familiar tale. For example, they talk of President Kennedy's suffering with Addison's disease and the side effects of the cortisone shots and other drugs he was taking when he first met Nikita Khrushchev at the 1961 Vienna summit meeting, where the Soviet leader dismissed "Jack" as "inexperienced and weak." (112) They also deserve credit for documenting how close the two superpowers came to a nuclear exchange underwater—unknown to most was the fact that among the Soviet vessels wending their way toward the

blockade line were four nuclear submarines, each carrying a nuclear warhead-equipped torpedo. It was not until 2002 that Secretary of Defense McNamara learned about this near-nuclear exchange of 40 years before. The short chapters in the book make for easily-digested chunks of reading and the volume is well-written and engaging, as one would expect from a pair who have written 40 books between them. They also excel at capturing and relaying to readers the inherent tension of the ExComm meetings, the intense debates that occurred there, and the colorful and conflicting personalities and interests of those in the room.

In at least two instances, the authors reveal their lack of familiarity with DoD jargon, which has the potential to either confuse or irritate readers. In one instance they refer to "intercontinental-range ballistic missiles" (IRBM) (153), when the context makes clear that what the authors are referring to is "intercontinental ballistic missiles," for which the standard acronym is "ICBM"—"IRBM" is generally understood as "intermediate-range" vice "intercontinental-range" ballistic missiles, which differ markedly in range and lethality. Although a minor criticism, it is an error that would not be made by the most junior intelligence analyst. A similar order-of-battle gaffe is a reference to imagery shot by Navy F8U Crusader low-level recon flights over Cuba, which the authors state revealed "nuclear-tipped SAMs, or FROGs" (203); again, an OB analyst worth his or her salt knows that the two are very different weapon systems rather than synonyms, the latter being a "free rocket over ground"—an unguided artillery asset.

While the amount of new information in this book is limited, *Above and Beyond* is nevertheless a very satisfying read overall and is a worthwhile addition to the more scholarly literature on an event that brought the United States and the Soviet Union to the brink of nuclear war.



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