



Lost Destiny: Joe Kennedy Jr. and the Doomed WWII Mission to Save London

Alan Axelrod

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On August 12, 1944, Lieutenant Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr., heir to one of America's most glamorous fortunes, son of the disgraced former ambassador to Great Britain, and big brother to freshly minted PT-109 hero JFK, hoisted himself up into a highly modified B-24 Liberator bomber. The munitions he was carrying that day were fifty percent more powerful than TNT.

Kennedy's mission was part of Operation Aphrodite/Project Anvil, a desperate American effort to rescue London from a rain of German V-1 and V-2 missiles. The decision to use these bold but crude precursors to modern-day drones against German V-weapon launch sites came from Air Corps high command. Lieutenant General Jimmy Doolittle, daring leader of the spectacular 1942 Tokyo Raid, and others concocted a plan to install radio control equipment in "war-weary" bombers, pack them with a dozen tons of high explosives, and fly them by remote control directly into the concrete German launch sites—targets too hard to be destroyed by conventional bombs. The catch was that live pilots were needed to get these flying bombs off the ground and headed toward their targets. Joe Jr. was the first naval aviator to fly such a mission. And—in the biggest manmade explosion before Hiroshima—it killed him.

Alan Axelrod's *Lost Destiny* is a rare exploration of the origin of today's controversial military drones as well as a searing and unforgettable story of heroism, WWII, and the Kennedy dynasty that might have been.

Lost Destiny: Joe Kennedy Jr. and the Doomed WWII Mission to Save London Details

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From Reader Review Lost Destiny: Joe Kennedy Jr. and the Doomed WWII Mission to Save London for online ebook

Steve says

Alan Axelrod could've called this retrospective on the late Joe Kennedy, Junior's life, "What Might Have Been." That's the whole point behind the actual title of this 2015 biography. Had Kennedy not been assigned to America's early attempt at drone warfare, he might well have been running for President ahead of his younger brother Jack in the 1960 election. As most of us already know, the elder brother did lose his life in an effort to save London during World War II. In these 269 pages, Axelrod gives us the details behind Kennedy's ill-fated mission; that lost destiny.

Sadly, however, Joe Kennedy, Junior sort of takes a back seat in this war journal. Axelrod spends an entire opening prologue on what lead up to World War II and Kennedy's father, Joe, Senior's role in that history. We see Joe Junior in his role as the politically chosen son in the first chapter. Kennedy's naval aviation career takes off in the next chapter. Then the star of this literary show, Kennedy, all but disappears for the next, (are you ready for this?), six chapters. His name is rarely mentioned. Axelrod focuses here exclusively on the highly-detailed history of the USAAF's Operation Aphrodite and the US Navy's Project Anvil experiments.

It appears here in total that Axelrod is far more fascinated by the life and times of Joe Kennedy Senior as well as America's attempts to protect London from Germany's long range missiles. He seems less interested in detailing Joe Kennedy Junior's lost political destiny. Bottom line, this is more an exposé of a highly secretive but fatally flawed and disastrously-run military exercise. If we want to know more about Joe Kennedy, Junior, the man, apparently we'll have to look elsewhere. In this case, the younger Kennedy seems to be just an afterthought.

Pierre Lauzon says

Lost Destiny is a book I found more interesting for the aviation information than the short biography of Joe Kennedy, Jr. intermingled with the aviation information.

The book details the story of the United States' early efforts at using bombers as explosive-laden drones to be flown against hardened German V-2 and V-1 sites on the coast of France that were perceived to be an existential threat to London and the British Isles.

The United States and Britain were woefully behind Germany in drone and ballistic missile technology. This resulted in efforts by the United States Army Air Force and the U. S. Navy to develop weapons beyond the target drones then in use.

An interesting aside in the book is how the name "drone" came about. The term was coined in 1937 by the Naval Aircraft Factory in Philadelphia in homage to the Royal Navy's Queen Bee, pilotless target planes developed in the early 1930s.

None of the remotely piloted bombers ever reached their targets and the whole program was a failure, due

mainly to primitive technology. One of the pilots lost was Joe Kennedy, Jr., son of Ambassador Joe Kennedy and brother of President John Kennedy.

Jim Blessing says

This book was of interest, but my view of Joe Jr was that he was less intelligent than JFK and resentful of his war exploits (if you want to call them that), which led him to continue to volunteer for extremely dangerous flights which led to his death.

He wasn't a natural pilot, which raises the question of why JFK Jr flew an airplane.

Kate says

More a history of the British American and German efforts to create large bombs guided by a pilot in an accompanying plane (drones of a sort) from WWI through WWII. Joe Kennedy Jr lost his life in one of the attempts at this.

Does give background on Joe Jr and his father Joe Kennedy, the defeatist American Ambassador to London, but to me, there were two books here, with only a minor connection.

The 4* is based on the military history.

Primarily secondary sources.

Pat Lampe says

This book was ostensibly about Joseph Kennedy, Jr.'s death in WWII. But it was about more, I thought. Kennedy seemed to be striving for his dad's approval and competing with JFK for success in the war. Sad that he was killed while still feeling he needed to accomplish something outstanding in order to count in his family. Or at least that is how I felt after reading the book. The book was like two different stories, (1) The Kennedys and (2) defeat of the V1 and V2 rockets in agonizing detail (6 chapters dedicated to development of plans).

Erin says

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I'm not gonna beat around the bush here and I'm not going to apologize for my bluntness either. I was hugely disappointed with Alan Axelrod's *Lost Destiny: Joe Kennedy Jr. and the Doomed WWII Mission to Save London* and feel the eleven and half hours I spent listening to the audio largely wasted.

Axelrod did a marvelous job chronicling Operations Anvil and Aphrodite, but his coverage of the famous face that graces the jacket is nothing short of laughable. The mission, its purpose and development are illustrated in minute detail, but the man himself features in less than 30% of the text. Looking back, I wish the author had written solely about the operations and listed Kennedy as little more than a tragic pilot, but it's also occurred to me that Joe Jr. was tacked on to this manuscript to capitalize on name recognition and artificially inflate sale numbers.

I'll grant the book has merit for those interested in exhaustive detail regarding WWII aviation, developing technologies, weaponry, and bomb testing, but those looking for information on Kennedy's war experience best look elsewhere.

Roger Smitter says

Axelrod brings to life the son of Joe Kennedy, Sr. But first, we learn about Joe Kennedy, Sr. and all his plans to make his first-born son the first Catholic president. The first half of the book is more about the Kennedy family -- and especially the ambitions of the dad for his sons. It is not a pretty family picture but an engaging one.

The second is about Joe, Jr.'s decision to join the Army Air Corps and his volunteering to take on an especially dangerous mission.

The connection of these two themes is held back until the final pages of the book.

Readers who want to learn more about the Kennedy we never knew will like this book. Axelrod also provides us with the decisions generals make that change history for the young men who they lead.

It's a bio and an informative read about WWII.

Tom Donaghey says

LOST DESTINY is a very fine book about the doomed flight of Joe Kennedy, Jr. towards the end of WWII. Or, to be precise, it is the mash up of two very fine books, one about Kennedy and one covering a doomed project that was proposed to save London.

Alan Axelrod has done his homework in both cases. Operation Aphrodite/ Project Anvil was a joint operation designed to destroy the extremely hardened bunkers the Germans were suspected of using to build and launch the V-1 and V-2 bombs that were harassing London and the south of England. Regular bombing was having little or no effect upon the sites and so a more desperate plan was hatched. Father by the famous General Jimmy Doolittle and using the best brains the Army Air Corps had available, the plan was to remotely fly old B-24 Liberator Bombers, drastically stripped of everything besides rudimentary flight controls and a pilot's seat, directing these gigantic bombs onto precise locations at the missile sites.

Packed with high explosives, the pilot made the takeoff, then, at a set point, both he and the electronics man set the explosive charges and bailed out letting a mother ship take command of the "Bomb" and guiding it to the target.

Young Joe Kennedy was the final pilot of the mission and long before reaching their assigned jump point, the plane, acting erratically under the remote control, exploded, killing both pilot and lone crewman.

The first section of the book relates the story of the Kennedy family and the rivalry between Joe and his younger brother John F. This is the more fascinating of the two intertwined parts, telling of the rise of Joe Sr., his time as Ambassador to the Court of St. James, his feud with Roosevelt, and his views on the war. It also depicts his drive for the presidency and, when that route in politics was deigned him, how he groomed his sons for the job.

This is a fascinating and thought provoking look into another corner of the Kennedy legacy. The biographic sketches are well drawn while the military details are both accurate and eye opening. This is one book to have on your selves, but what category to place it in eludes me at the moment.

This is yet another example of the uselessness and waste of war.

I won this book through Goodreads

Jim McIntosh says

To write about the death of Joe Kennedy, Jr., in WWII, the author had to take us back to walk through the father's story and then through the son's. To understand the death itself in, basicly, a prototype of unmanned aircraft, the author walks us through the history of unmanned aircraft in the US, England, and -- to some extent -- Germany. In short, quite an interesting book.

Don says

Many people that are familiar with the Kennedy family history may already have read about the short life of Joseph Kennedy Jr. This book is a good substitute if you have not. It's best value is providing an excellent history of America's drone development and usage during WWII. Air Force leaders decided that especially hard targets used in the V1 and V2 launchings were too hard to be destroyed by regular bombing. Only flying an unmanned remote controlled bomber filled with explosives would destroy these targets.

The problem was that remote controls were to primitive to use during take-off so a real pilot was required to get the plan in the air after which he would bail out when a second plane assumed remote control.

Biblio Files (takingadayoff) says

It's hard to imagine a more screwed up, poorly thought out, incompetent plan as the one that killed four men and injured several more. The idea had been to blow up important Nazi targets, especially the plants where the dreaded V-2 and suspected V-3 rockets were being built. But the mission failed completely. No targets, let alone high value targets, were hit, and highly trained war pilots were killed, not by enemy fire, but because of malfunctioning parachutes and other avoidable problems.

Lost Destiny is about the Aphrodite Project and its successors, a plan to send unmanned bombers filled with napalm to destroy Nazi rocket factories. Since Joseph Kennedy, Jr. was one of the pilots who died during the mission, the story is also about him, but there isn't a lot to tell about a man who was still going to law school when he quit at age 26 and joined the Navy in 1941 to become a pilot. Author Alan Axelrod also tells the more interesting story of Joe's father, Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr., self-made businessman, U.S. Ambassador to Great Britain, father of Jack, Robert, Ted, and the rest.

But the bulk of the book is about the half-baked plan to take old Army Air Force B-17 and B-24 bombers and their Navy equivalents, strip them hollow, fill them with napalm, and remote control them from airborne "mother" planes, from bases in England to targets in France. The sticky wicket in the plan was that such heavy planes could not take off remotely, so a pilot and an engineer would take the fully loaded plane up, stabilize the flight, hand over remote control to the mother plane, then bail out before reaching the Channel. Piece of cake.

Of course the pilots and crew did have training in bailing out, but they were not expert paratroopers and even so, they would be bailing out at speeds of around 200 knots instead of the normal 100 knots. The other risk was that the plane, on being handed off to remote control, would fail to synchronize and might well crash in populated areas before they reached the Channel.

And if those risks were not enough, there was a childish rivalry between the U.S. Army and the U.S. Navy that kept the services from co-operating on the joint project. They were competing and kept some information from each other so that their service would be first to score a hit. This is possibly what led to Kennedy's death on board his flying firebomb, since it accidentally exploded before he had a chance to bail out.

The writing is crisp, the description of the missions was riveting. Never mind the Kennedys or "what could have been" -- the story of smart men doing stupid things is the story that resonates.

Rhonda says

The 20th century is not usually my area of history. I am interested in the Kennedy family, however, and when I saw this book on the giveaways I decided to enter. I was lucky enough to win and am glad I did. It's a very interesting book and offers a very different perspective both on WWII and on the Kennedys. I like how it is narrative rather than strictly factual, as this makes Joe Kennedy more human and accessible. I would definitely recommend this book for 20th century history buffs and neophytes like myself.

Fredrick Danysh says

Analysis of Joseph Kennedy, Jr., as well as the war time exploits of his father and brother John. The author also traces the development of explosive drone aircraft and explores the myths surrounding his death.

Dona says

lots of background and extra material that may or may not lend to story. Was very woody

Kges1901 says

Lost Destiny is a book about Joseph Kennedy, Jr. and his participation in Project Anvil, an attempt to destroy German wonder weapon launching sites. It describes the lives of both Kennedy Jr. and his father, the isolationist, pro-appeasement US ambassador in London. After the first several chapters, the book flips to describe the technology of the German wonder weapons, such as the V-1 rocket and V-2, the first ICBM. In this part of the narrative, it also describes Allied attempts to prevent these wonder weapons wreaking havoc. After these chapters, Axelrod then describes Operation Anvil and its predecessors. Operation Aphrodite was an American attempt to destroy the Wonder Weapons with explosive packed B-17 Flying Fortresses (designated CQ-17). Aphrodite is a US Army Air Force Operation which ends with no successes at all and the loss of several pilots. After this setback, the Navy takes over using two PB4Ys, Navy versions of the B-24 Liberator. Joe Kennedy Jr is the pilot of one of these and is killed when his PB4Y blows up. Axelrod primarily describes Project Anvil rather than the life of Joe Kennedy Jr. He also ruminates a little on what could have happened if Joe Kennedy Jr had lived, because allegedly Joe Kennedy Jr was smarter than JFK... These 'what ifs' are not provable. Thus, Axelrod's book is interesting reading but not at all a biography of Joe Kennedy Jr.
