

JFK was a SWL! Our 35th President of the United States, John Fitzgerald “Jack” Kennedy serving from 1961 until his assassination in 1963 had the wandering ear that enjoyed hearing the shortwaves. Jim Riff K7SC wrote in Electric Radio about the fascinating instance where President Kennedy liked to tune his own receiver for his personal need for up to the minute public reaction and comments on his policies. Plus, Radio Havana was one of his regular programs he tuned the dial to.



Jim Riff wrote “In the early 60s during the height of the cold war, President John F. Kennedy was very concerned about world opinion and the foreign press coverage of his European and Cuban policies. One first hand source that was available to him was the worldwide international shortwave broadcasts, such as radio Moscow and the BBC.” Riff continued “On one of Kennedy’s flights to NYC, he ordered one of the secret service agents on board Air Force 1 to go into downtown Manhattan and purchase a good shortwave radio that he could use on his many trips. The flight engineer indicated that they had a backup receiver in the navigators area, a WW2 BC348 that could be piped back to his desk in the rear of the aircraft. Kennedy indicated that he would like to have a set near him that he could use at will. The secret service as instructed arrived in Manhattan and purchased the best radio available and returned to the aircraft for the return flight to DC. (Author says, I hope the agent had a good dolly to cart that beast) Urrrahh for Radio Row.

The service technicians at Andrews AFB were instructed to install the new Hallicrafters SX-62B directly into the presidents desk on Air Force 1. - A long wire antenna was fitted from the top of the vertical rudder angling down to just behind the cockpit and 110 V.AC was wired from the inverter bank back to the SX-62B. The speaker was built into the side panel of the desk and ear phones were sometimes used due to the high engine noise in the cabin.

The Icon of all band receivers Hallicrafters Corp., had a majestic design in the SX-62B and it even copies the FM bands. Riff said “The installation of the Hallicrafters set was on the port side of the aircraft and to the right center in the president’s desk. The metal case had been removed and the receiver dropped into a cut out on the desk. Riff continued, he was advised both Pres. Kennedy and Johnson used the receiver frequently during their cross country flights. The aircraft was retired and is property of U.S.A.F. Museum Wright Patterson, Dayton, Ohio.