

# **DUTY STATIONS**

**JOHN F. KENNEDY AND THE  
WEST POINT CLASS OF 1962**

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USMA 1962

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## REMINISCENSES

The Class of 1962 was unusually acquainted with President Kennedy for a number of reasons. Our first exposure came on a miserably cold day in January 1961 as we marched in Washington DC for his inauguration as the 35th President of the United States.

*"Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we will pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and the success of liberty."*

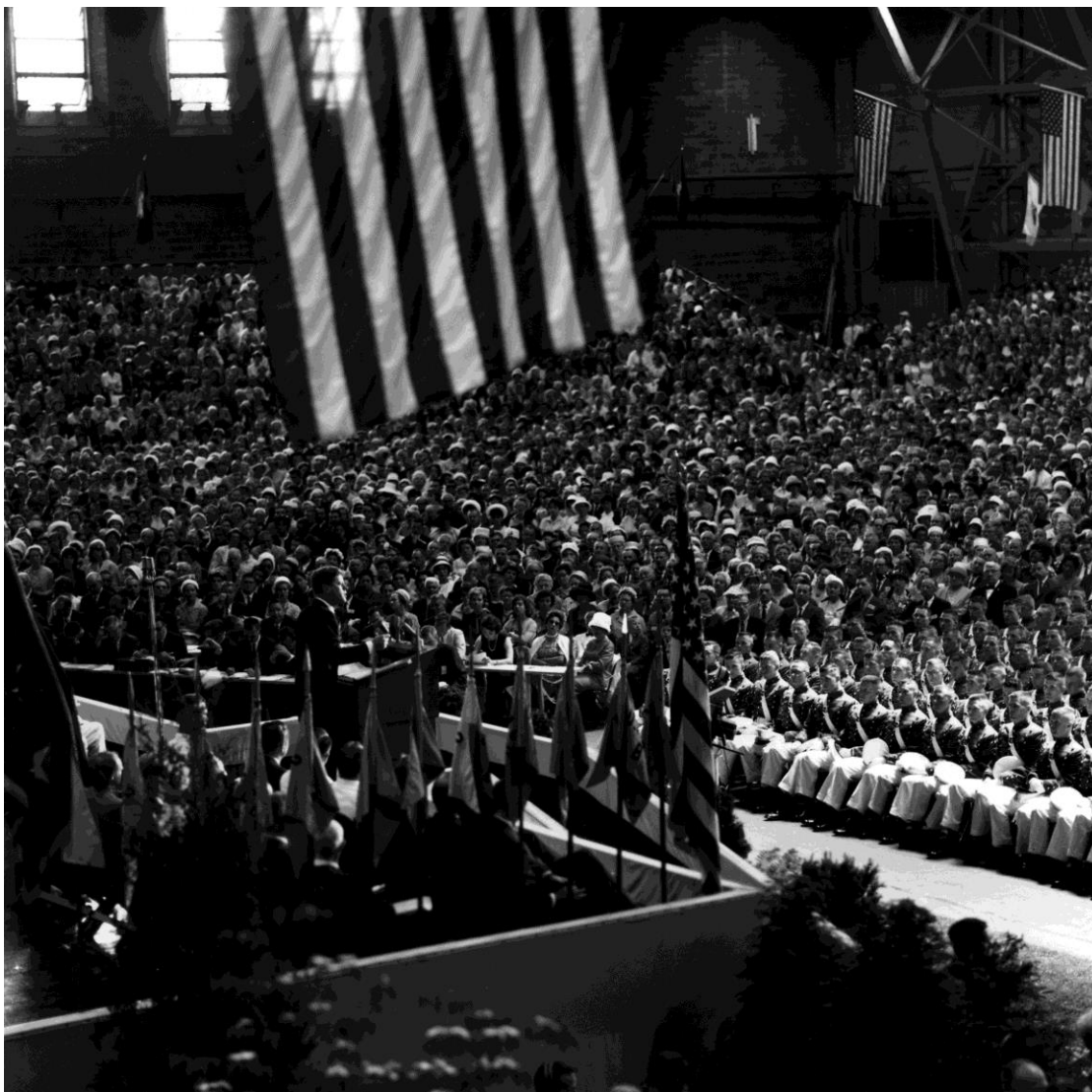


We saw JFK again when he attended the Army-Navy game in December 1961 at the Municipal Stadium in Philadelphia. As could be expected of a Navy veteran, the President presided over a Navy win after spending the first half on our side.



Finally, we had the honor to welcome JFK to West Point for our graduation ceremony on the 6th day of June, 1962. He was made an honorary member of the class and presented with a 1962 Class Ring which, thanks to the determination of several classmates, today resides in a display case in the Jefferson Hall library. JFK delivered a speech that day which was remarkable not only for its eloquence but because he spoke to our hearts and our sense of duty, as we looked forward to taking our place in the Long Gray Line.

*"You and I leave here today to meet our separate responsibilities, to protect our Nation's vital interests by peaceful means if possible, by resolute action if necessary. And we go forth confident of support and success because we know that we are working and fighting for each other and for all those men and women all over the globe who are determined to be free."*



On a tragic and momentous day in American history, approximately 18 months after our graduation, the life of the President John Fitzgerald Kennedy was brutally ended.

This document is intended to be a snapshot of the service of the members of the Class of 1962 at that iconic moment 50 years ago. It was a unique time when our entire class was on duty at the outposts of our national influence and many other challenging military assignments. Once upon a time we were all Lieutenants and leaders of men.

The Class of 1962 was engaged in a wide range of responsibilities across the three principal military theaters of Asia, Europe and the Homeland. Each area was characterised by a distinct mix of Cold War threats and domestic political tensions. Looking back at the short JFK Presidency, one is struck by the number of significant events which occurred and the magnitude of the stakes in each theater.

Our individual remembrances of the assassination have been placed within the appropriate theater of assignment in order to provide context and the opportunity to remember shared experiences. Those classmates present in Hawaii have been included in Asia rather than Homeland because their units essentially functioned as a part of US contingency planning for the Pacific area and they were looking westward.

The fallibility of anecdotal information is the bane of historians, as many of our memories are becoming faint and some are vivid beyond reason. However stories carry the thread of life unlike recitation of simple facts. The sum of these reminiscences testifies to the fulfilment of our Duty as charged above in the last sentences of JFK's graduation speech more than half a century ago.

We dedicate this collection of individual recollections to the memory of those members of our class who are no longer here to regale us and their loved ones with their own stories.

# **THE ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY**

**1230 CST, Dallas - 22nd November 1963**

The citizens of Dallas woke on the 22nd of November 1963 to a bright and promising day, charged with expectations of pageantry and hyperbole associated with the visit of President John F. Kennedy, accompanied by his wife and two of Texas' favorite sons, Vice President Lyndon Johnson and Governor John Connolly.

At approximately 1230 CST, two shots fired from a bolt-action rifle by Lee Harvey Oswald fatally struck the President, impacting the hearts and minds of millions of Americans and yet many millions more around the globe.

While the world recoiled in shock, there was a strategic process launched within minutes with the intent to protect Americans and the fragile Cold-War peace from as yet unknown consequences of that tragedy. The men and women of our armed forces, in countless locations at home and abroad, prepared for war.



## **ASIAN MEMORIES**

The Cold War in Asia was in a period of rapid transition as the strategic confrontation with China and communism moved from the relatively conventional, but still dangerous, stand-off on the Korean peninsula to an emerging unconventional threat in Indochina. Projection of the American peace in the Pacific required a vast network of military bases and trained manpower.

The US was confronted by the 'domino' theory. President Kennedy was reluctant to act but determined that SE Asia should not be lost. The number of US troops in Vietnam began its climb from 500 to 16,000 during his presidency. President Diem of South Vietnam was overthrown, with reported White House support, and unexpectedly executed three weeks prior to JFK's assassination.

The sequence of Asian stories is SE Asia, Korea, Hawaii, Pacific Islands.

### **Trevor DuPuy: D-1**

When the President was assassinated, I was on a special assignment in Laos that was highly classified at that time - no uniform or ID. I was paid very well and I understood my primary mission was being funded directly by the White House. After learning of JFK's assassination, I made my way back to the capitol city of Vientiane for further instructions. No one was sure what to do with me so I crossed the Mekong River into Thailand and then flew to Saigon where I was assured my project would continue to be funded for the foreseeable future.

After returning to Laos a few days later, I was asked to transfer to a permanent position in Laos. When I inquired about how I would continue to be able to work in my current capacity and if I would continue under the same financial arrangement, I was assured it could be done and the details could be worked out later. I declined on the basis I was engaged to be married in February, upon which I was then told my fiancée could be flown to Laos at no cost to me and that we could be married there. Like much of my work in Laos, it was a very "seat of the pants" plan which didn't engender a whole lot of confidence in me, so I thanked them for their generous offer but decided not to take it. I remained in Laos until completion of my TDY assignment in February 1964 and returned to the 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii. I was married the day after Valentine's Day (February 15th) in Newton, Massachusetts. Later, after telling my wife of the options I was offered, she said her parents would have committed her before allowing her to go to Laos to get married.

### **Jim Gorman: C-1**

I can't forget that day. It was just goofy.



Although I had never met him, I always had a thing for John Kennedy. I was from Massachusetts and had received a Qualified Alternate appointment in 1958 from him in his capacity as a Senator. You may recall that, after he moved into the White House in 1960, a number of Kennedy impersonators became prominent in the entertainment world. People rarely asked, but I personally felt that I could do a rather passable imitation of his speaking style as well, especially after I had a beer or six.

In November 1963, I was the commander of a USMC infantry platoon attached to a 1st Marine Air Wing helicopter squadron stationed on the other side of the world at the airbase in what was then the relatively quiet and quaint city of Da Nang, still known then by some as Tourane. But on November 2, you may recall, there was a military coup, and the President of the Republic of Viet Nam, Ngo Dinh Diem, was executed. A group of us actually crowded around a radio and listened as someone on the rooftop of a Saigon hotel attempted to relate what was happening as the fighting in the streets below progressed. Then came the announcement of President Diem's death.

The powers that be had no idea how Da Nang would react and the base went on full alert for several days, but then things gradually returned to normal. In fact, I dimly recall that some of us even over-celebrated the Marine Corps birthday one week later on November 10. We continued on our daily routine until November 22 or, for those in that part of the world, November 23.

Viet Nam was some twelve or thirteen hours ahead of Dallas, so I was actually asleep when that bullet struck the President and changed our lives forever. So it was not until I got up and went to the head in the dark Viet Nam morning that someone - - I have no idea who - - simply told me, calmly: "The President's dead." To this day, I cannot forget my sleepy, cynical, unthinking, unknowing, callous response as I relieved myself: "Yeah, so's Napoleon."

Why, I asked myself later, did I answer in that fashion? Why did I refer to "Napoleon" of all people? I was never able to answer those questions. Not then, not now. Fifty years later, I still have no clue.

I also cannot forget that, later that day, after learning the available details of the assassination, I was going about my work. At one point, I was talking about the assassination with a Vietnamese national who was serving as an interpreter at the base. In an ostensibly honest and straightforward pigeon-English question, he looked at me and asked: "Kennedy and Diem - - same-same, ne?"

At the time, I recall, I huffed and protested mightily that, in effect, there were absolutely no similarities between the two events. Now, after fifty years, I sense that perhaps I really have no clue as to the answer to that question, either.

## **Pat Hueman: I-1**

In November 1963, I was serving in Korea, assigned to the 13th Engineer Battalion, in the 7th Infantry Division, stationed about 50 miles north of Seoul. I had arrived in Korea on Saint Patrick's Day, 17 March 1963, and had served as a Platoon Leader in Company A of the 13th Engineers at Camp Kaiser for several months, then was assigned as the Adjutant (S1) on the battalion staff at Camp Casey, near Tongduchon. I assumed command of Company B in Camp Beavers about November 1, 1963, and was getting to know my soldiers and our mission.

The 7th Infantry Division's mission was to serve, along with the 2nd Infantry Division, as a "tripwire," should the North Korean Army invade South Korea again. In 1963, only 10 years had elapsed since the armistice was signed in 1953 that ended the fighting of the Korean War. The mission of the 13th Engineer Battalion in the division was to impede enemy movement in the event of hostilities, and to facilitate movement of friendly forces. Although the 13th Engineer Battalion had the wartime mission of employing ADMs (Atomic Demolition Munitions), the peacetime mission was much more prosaic -- maintaining dozens of miles of MSR in the 7th Infantry Division area, and of course training to perform our wartime missions.

Other classmates serving with me in the 13th Engineer Battalion included Bill Diehl, Ted Stroup, Dick Wylie, Todd Stong, Dave Spangler, Bob DeVries, Tom Ostenberg and Rusty Broshous -- about one quarter of the battalion's 30-odd officers were classmates. The Class of 1962 was well represented in Korea.

On Friday, 22 November 1963, I woke to my alarm clock at 4:30 a.m. and, as usual, turned on the radio to listen to the AFN news. At first I was puzzled by the lack of the normal news segment, but clearly some major event had occurred and was being reported. Then I heard Walter Cronkite voice the terrible truth -- that President Kennedy had been shot and was dead. His assassination shocked the entire world. When I entered the company area an hour later, all conversation centered on the assassination. Soldiers' reactions were shock and disbelief. We all wondered who the assassin was, what were his motives, whether he was a member of a conspiracy, or if he acted alone. Normal work and training were cancelled for the day. Midday, I held a company formation to read a proclamation that had been passed down through battalion headquarters.

President Kennedy's assassination particularly affected the Class of 1962, as our class had special connections to President Kennedy -- we marched in his Inaugural Parade on 20 January 1961, and well remember the frigid temperature and the deep snow that had been only partially cleared from the streets we marched on. And, of course, President Kennedy addressed our graduating class on 6 June 1962. I was fortunate to be among the few to whom President Kennedy gave their diplomas. I will never forget the six words he addressed to me: "Congratulations and good luck, Mister Hueman."

In late October 1962, while attending the Engineer Officers' Basic Course at Fort Belvoir, my engineer classmates and I huddled around a TV set in the evening, and

listened intently as President Kennedy told the nation about the Soviet missiles in Cuba, and wondered if we would then be called to serve in a major war. Fortunately for the nation (and for us), President Kennedy exhibited great courage and purpose and forced the Soviets to withdraw their missiles from Cuba. With those actions, President Kennedy made the world a safer place. However, later President Kennedy made an initial commitment to help the South Vietnamese to defend their nation against the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese -- a commitment that would later be greatly expanded by his successor, President Johnson, and would directly involve the US Army and the USMA Class of 1962 for a decade-long war -- a war in which virtually all of the Class of 1962 would serve, and for some, result in the ultimate sacrifice.

### **Roger Brown: C-2**

I was at a hillside I Corps artillery battalion camp in Korea when the alert (DEFCON 3) came. We quickly mustered, gathered our weapons and gear, and motor marched to our battery fighting positions just south of the DMZ with no knowledge as to the event that triggered the "call out". As I recall, it was several hours later we learned the tragic news of the president's assassination and the reason for our alert.

### **Dick Wylie: L-1**

It was middle of the night in Korea and I was out checking guard posts when one of my guards said "sir did you hear that someone shot the president it just came across AFKN" I rushed back to the CP to find out what was going on and all hell broke loose as Korea went on full alert status. Later it hit me that I hadn't done a very good job checking my guards as what was he doing listening to a radio in the guard tower???

I was a brand new 2/LT company commander of Delta Co 13th Engineer Bn 7th Inf Div. Delta Co was a bridge company augmented with a combat engineer Plt and an Engineer tank Plt. The bridge Co was the only Co in the 13th Engr Bn authorized armor mechanics to support the AVLB plt so they drew in all the combat engineer tanks in the Bn and formed a Plt of tanks. We were augmented with a combat engineer Plt and 1/3 of the TO&E of a Combat Engineer Co so we could provide general engineer support for 7th Div HQ in addition to our Bridge mission and the unique tank Plt.

I had my own compound which was located adjacent to Div HQ about a mile away while all the other 13th Engr Bn combat engineer Cos were scattered all over hells half acre in central Korea. Delta Co was an awesome unit-probably the biggest Engineer Co in the Army by body count and number of vehicles. I was thrilled to be the Commander-although it offered some real challenges as I was given command by default as the Cpt who had commanded the Co was relieved of duty as we had just flunked a CMI and I had been the Combat Engineer Plt Leader providing support to Div HQ. A 2/LT commanding a stand alone company with 4 other 2/LT's--how cool can it get!!! Experienced leadership--not exactly! At the time the 13th Engr Bn was awash

with "62" Engineer 2Lts on their initial assignment -Pat Hueman, Dave Spangler, Todd Stong, Rusty Broshous, Ted Stroup and me. We had one hell of a promotion party a month later when we all were promoted to 1LT!

As to my reaction to that horrible event--initial disbelief and I felt sick to my stomach. How could this happen? After all JFK was the first president I had been old enough to vote for--we marched in his inauguration parade and he was our Grad speaker. First and only president I have ever felt a personal connection to. Probably the most horrific event of my life. Way off in Korea I think everyone felt about the same but frankly we didn't have time to grieve as if I remember we went on full alert and I had my hands full. Had just been given command--had fired the 1st Sgt was in the midst of a total reorganization and absolutely wasn't prepared to go in full alert mode!

### **Bob DeVries: K-2**

At the time of JFK's death I was in Korea. As a lieutenant in my company I took the 6am morning report. I stood in front of the company and the 1st Sgt. reported---"sir, they got the commander in chief". That is how I learned. A couple of days later the entire brigade held a solemn and moving ceremony.

### **Bob Krause: A-1**

I was a Platoon leader in the 25<sup>th</sup> Inf Div, Hawaii. I had returned to my quarters late the night before the assassination as we had been on a 5 day FTX. I slept in the next morning and when I woke up, I eventually turned on the radio. Of course in Hawaii, Dallas was some 5 or 6 hours ahead of us. I immediately heard that the President was dead. And of course our class's relationship with JFK flashed through my mind. I was stunned. How could this happen. I was heavy hearted for the rest of the day, and then we got on with our busy and demanding lives as young infantry officers.

I was a company commander in the Old Guard at the time JFK was transferred from his temporary grave site to his current one in ANC. My company was charged with securing the perimeter of the two grave sites (actually one large perimeter) while the transfer was made. This was at night, and the family wanted no news agencies involved. When hoisting the lead vault out of the temporary grave site, it cracked. Now, ANC had to come up with a replacement vault and re-seal the casket, which took most of the night.

At some point during the long wait for this to happen, Bobby Kennedy motioned me over, handed me a note card with a phone number on it and asked me to call Ethel and inform her that he (Bobby) was delayed and would not be home until the next morning. I dutifully turned the Company over to my XO and went to the ANC offices to place the call. I remember Ethel Kennedy being very polite and appreciative of my call, and asked me for a rundown of what was going on. I then reported back to Bobby "mission accomplished".

As I recall, the actual transfer and closing of the permanent grave was not completed until after daylight – well off plan. Also, and unbelievably, the secret of the transfer had been mostly kept, and as I recall, we only had one or two incidents of persons trying to bust our perimeter. Of course, they were turned away (politely) by our good Old Guard Infantrymen.

### **Gene Baxter: A-1**

I was a forward observer with A Battery 8th Artillery, 25th Infantry Division headquartered at Schofield Barracks Hawaii. I was in CBR school that afternoon when we were notified. Most of us initially did not believe the news. Shock is probably the most descriptive term. I played the CD of his graduation speech to our class, and watched it with my 16 year old grandson. He now wants to join the Long Gray Line. What a contrast to our current leadership.

### **Walt Menning: C-2**

It was a bright, clear November morning as the convoy made its way through Kole Kole Pass. The pass was a large ‘notch’ in the Waianae Mountains that opened to a breath-taking view of the Pacific below. In another twenty minutes the convoy would reach the platoon’s training site at Makua Valley. The jungle growth in the valley would provide a good setting to conduct aerial observation exercises and to rappel through the canopy to the jungle floor below. Only two weeks of training remained before the platoon deployed to Vietnam. The training had been intense. Everyone in the platoon had gained confidence and readiness for the mission ahead.

As the lead truck pulled into the assembly area, radio silence was broken: “Attention: Bravo Deuce; attention: Bravo Deuce. All training for today is suspended. I say again, all training for today is suspended. All personnel return to barracks now. Signal your unit status at Check point #2 and Check Point #1. DEFCON is now DEFCON 3.” As the last truck pulled into the assembly area, the platoon leader and non-coms gathered briefly to discuss the change in orders. While they were all puzzled, it was clear that something very significant had happened.

The return trip progressed quite rapidly. Reports were rendered by radio at each check-point. As the convoy entered the barracks area, the flag was at half-mast. The MP on duty reported, “ The President is dead!”

The platoon returned to Quad I of Schofield Barracks where it remained on alert with all units of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division for the next several days. On the next Monday when the fallen President was interred at Arlington National Cemetery, a full division review was held to honor the memory of President Kennedy. The next day training resumed for Operation Shotgun.

**Rich Foss: I-2**

When John F. Kennedy was assassinated I was stationed in Hawaii with the 27th Infantry Wolfhounds of the 25th Inf Div.. We were crowded around the radio in the day room to hear about the shooting. Television did not reach Schofield Barracks at that time. One of the lieutenants in our company was from Dallas and he said in his Texas drawl, "Ah dohn know, but ah dohn feel too see cure with LBJ in dah saddle". He was later killed in South Vietnam.

**Bill Ross: L-2**

On November 22, 1963, I was serving as a launcher platoon leader in the Little John battery supporting the 25th Infantry Division. While normally based at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, at that time we were on a field exercise at the Pohakaloa Training Center located on the Big Island of Hawaii. On that particular day we happened to be in from the field and at the cantonment area of Pohakaloa which consists of a dusty collection of Quonset huts at an altitude of over 5,000 feet.

I was in one of those huts working on supply matters with one of my section chiefs, SSG "Doc" Holliday, when a messenger brought the news of the death of the President to us. SSG Holliday was a 35-year-old African American of a dark hue. He was a man of few words, and on receiving the news, he merely shook his head and sat down. It was then that I noticed that his face had turned from black to grey. I think he knew better than I at the time what the nation had lost.

Later that day it was announced that there would be a memorial service that evening at the camp chapel. At an informal officers' call proceeding that service, our battery commander who was from Texas saw fit to opine, "I think that Lyndon Johnson will be a better president anyway." My reaction was strong and immediate, but I managed to suppress my career-ending impulse though I have never forgotten those thoughtless words. Since the post chapel was in another small Quonset hut and the voluntary turnout was great, the candlelight service was held outside.

The next day life went on, field training resumed, and only over the years have I learned to fully appreciate what might have been.

**Bill Christopher: B-1**

I was a 2nd Lt in the 65<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, stationed at Schofield Barracks, HA. I believe I was Battalion S-2. I was designated to go on TDY to South Korea to participate in some sort of Command Exercises of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army. The 25<sup>th</sup> Division was a strategic reserve, and each battalion had to be represented.

There were not any volunteers to go to Korea in late November, so I was sent. I went through Tachikawa (sp?) Air Base outside of Tokyo both ways. On the way back, I was sleeping in the BOQ at Tachikawa (an open barracks-type facility), when an incoming crew member shook me awake and said that the President had been killed, or words to that effect. I got up, got dressed, and took my gear down to the flight center for my flight, and to confirm what he had told me. I returned to Hawaii.

### **Fred Sheaffer: M-2**

On the night of 21 November 1963, I had been in the field with my 3rd Platoon, A Co., 1/35th Infantry Regiment (Cacti), 3rd Brigade of the 25th Infantry Div. on Oahu, Hawaii. Early in the morning of 22 November, we completed our night training exercise and were released for the day.

I drove back to the Waikiki apartment that I shared with Mack Howard (M-2), had breakfast, and was trying to decide whether to hit the rack or go to the Waikiki Beach at Fort DeRussey (my usual hangout) when I heard on the radio that President Kennedy has been assassinated. I was stunned. It was a very personal loss. I do not remember anything of that day after that. It was like being in a daze.

I felt the same way that I later felt in July-August 1965 when I was TDY in Vietnam and first heard that Ed Krukowski (M-2) and then my very close friend and roommate for two years in M-2, Bob Fuelhart, had been KIA.

### **Mike McDonnell: E-1**

I was officer of the day in our quadrangle at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. I can't recall now whether we had made the switch from pentomic organization to President Kennedy's flexible response. (ROCID TO ROAD) But I was performing the assignment as a member of the 2/35 Cacti Blue. It would be a year before I was on my way to my first mission in Vietnam as a door gunner platoon leader, and two years until I deployed back to Vietnam with the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.

As officer of the day, part of my duties required me to inspect the guard details for our battalion on post. As the reader of this will recall, that meant little, if any sleep and the quiet, dark traverse of the various post locations. "Halt, who is there!" I would hear as I approached each sentry. I would identify myself, check the soldier, and then give him a pat on the shoulder for doing a good but thankless job. I recall nothing out of the ordinary that night until the word came that the President had been shot.

The time difference between Texas and Hawaii in November is 4 hours. Kennedy was shot at 0830 hrs Hawaii time. Daylight savings time was not in effect in Texas, and Hawaii did not observe that convention. It was 0900 hrs in Hawaii when JFK was

pronounced dead. It was Friday morning, the final training day for the week, and the battalion was awake, fed, and ready to go to work.

I was just about ready to clear the battalion headquarters and resume my regular platoon leader's duties when the tragic news came down. I recall receiving a call with orders for the unit to alert and I got the word out quickly, but it seemed like the news was everywhere at once.

The deuce-and-a-halves and other battalion vehicles were brought to the quad and the units loaded on for a trip to Hickam field in the event of air deployment. The atmosphere was grim. No joking, no horsing around. As we waited I felt a sense of unreality spiked with an incredible rush of adrenaline. I had no idea what was to come, but I was ready to kick some serious ass. We waited as the man who would soon send so many of our numbers to their death was sworn into office. As I look back I see that we still have not learned our lesson.

### **Windsor Ward: H-1**

I was the executive officer of a tank company in the 69th Armor, the tank battalion in the 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii. I was in the field with the company in the Pohokuloa training area on the Island of Hawaii.

My recollection is that the company commander, Captain Medley, came out from the base camp to tell me that the president had been assassinated. I was stunned that a president of the United States could be assassinated. My immediate thought was that assassination of a president only happened in the past. After informing the troops, the company commander and I discussed what it might mean. The company commander indicated that we had already been placed on alert for a possible attack. We discussed what we would do to prepare for an attack.

After the initial shock I do not remember anything. We had no TV and were not exposed to the media coverage after the assassination.

### **Roger Havercroft: A-2**

I, and 5 other classmates: (alphabetically) Dan Buttolph, Dick Chegar, Wayne Downing, Erik Johnsson, Bill Pfeifer, and Don Snider) were on Okinawa, assigned to the newly activated 173d Airborne Brigade. It was Saturday, 23 November; I was wakened early by a phone call from the duty officer of the 1st Spl Forces Gp to notify my hootchmate, a captain, A Team Ldr, of the JFK assassination.

I regained my composure, and with some dread, knocked on the captain's door (he was grumpy gus, and I figured he would make it my fault). He actually was fairly decent, called his HQ to confirm, and suggested we go to work (he showered first).



My battalion was a bit of a drive, most everyone was there when I arrived, and whatever was planned (Quonset Hut Inspection, maybe?) was scratched. All the talk was sad; those of us who had voted for Nixon felt even worse. Several troopers ask if we would deploy; where would we drop into, etc.

Later, that afternoon, I returned to BOQ, talked to my neighbors in the parking lot (mostly psy ops and intel types) and we decided to get a burger and beer in the "ville." After we ordered, the restaurant manager assembled his staff and talked to them at some length in Japanese, we watched quietly, and they bowed silently for several seconds. When the waitress returned, we ask what was said. She answered, "We were honoring your fallen President. That was very touching.

Two and 1/2 years later in Vietnam, I was having a beer with an Australian officer from the 1st Bn, Royal Australian Regiment (which was attached to the 173d), who related that he had been in the UK that day, and was watching the film, "PT 109" when the projection was interrupted and the assassination was announced. That was ironic. I thanked him for sharing that story.

### **Dan Buttolph: L-2**

I was stationed on Okinawa with the 2nd Bn (Abn), 173rd Airborne Brigade when my clock radio went off at 0445 hrs for I was going out on an early morning parachute jump. Before I could get out of bed, an emergency announcement came on the Armed Forces Radio Network which was very unusual for the network. The announcer who sounded very distraught announced that President Kennedy had been shot and killed. That was all the information he had and it took the rest of the day to piece together the information on the assassination.

Since Okinawa is on the other side of the International Date Line, his assassination actually occurred at 0430 hrs on the 23rd Okinawan time. The 173rd Airborne Brigade conducted an all-brigade memorial parade about a week later which was one of the best parades I ever marched in—except at West Point of course. And the weather was certainly better than the freezing cold Inaugural Parade we marched in for his 1961 inauguration.

### **Dick Chegar: B-1**

On November 22, 1963, I was in the field in Okinawa on a training exercise. At the time, I was serving as the Platoon Leader of the Davy Crockett Platoon in Headquarters Company, 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade. The Davy Crockett was a man-transported or vehicle-transported nuclear weapons system deployed in Infantry Units. Years ago, one of the man-transported weapons was on display in the West Point museum.

We received news of the President's assassination in the field. Because President Kennedy was our graduation speaker a mere year and a half earlier, it was shocking news. Our other contact with the President had been at his inauguration when we marched in the Inauguration Parade; though the only cadet interest as we passed in review was getting a glimpse of Mrs. Kennedy.

While none of our class had been deployed to Vietnam in the Fall of 1962, all of us remember clearly the Cuban Missile Crisis that took place in October. Word of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division being airborne with members of the Class of 1961 aboard was most painful to us still in training at Fort Benning, itching to be part of an attacking force. That "itch" would be more than satisfied in the coming years!

My most memorable political lesson came from President Kennedy's successor, Lyndon Baines Johnson in his 1964 presidential campaign. One of his oft-repeated campaign slogans was "Why don't we let those Asian boys fight those Asian wars?" Now a First Lieutenant in 1964, that sounded like a promise I could live with, so I voted for Mr. Johnson! Six months later, I was in combat. Lesson learned!

### **Rog Luis: K-1** (Philippine Army in Manila)

November 23 1963 (22 November for USA) started out as an ordinary day for me. I was getting ready to go to the office when on the radio the news bulletin that President John F Kennedy, the president of the United States was shot and killed was announced! The first words that I uttered were "Oh Shit!" It represented my frustrations and utter feeling of helplessness and the question "Why?" What is happening in the United States? Suddenly I was afraid-Vietnam at that time was only spoken in hushed tones among us. What will happen to my classmates? They will be in the frontline as I would be being, lowly lieutenants in the infantry acting as platoon leaders or Executive Officers at the company level? What if USSR or PROC takes advantage of the situation and attack?

I did not go to the office that morning and kept tuned-in instead to the radio as more details started filtering in. Dallas Texas, where is that and what was he doing there in the first place? Why would any one shot a young dynamic president challenging the Americans with his "Ask nots!" What did he do to be so hated in a very short period of time? He was our graduation speaker and we have marched on a very cold day during his inauguration, our eyes straining to get a look at his beautiful First Lady. He definitely did not have the flowing, flowery oratory of a General Douglas McArthur but he did make sense and had that boyish captivating and endearing smile of a man so full of promises. I felt as if I had lost a personal friend!

If the United States goes to war with anybody wouldn't the Philippines then be also involved as it was in World War II? The Americans are our closest ally after all. At least I will be fighting side by side with my classmates but against whom? USSR? PROC? Both? Will the local communist party take advantage of the situation and intensify the

local armed conflict? There were so many questions in my mind that went round in circles. What was to come next?

## **EUROPEAN MEMORIES**

The European military theater was relatively familiar to Americans because the Cold War confrontation with the Soviet Union was still dictated by the geographical divisions imposed in WWII agreements. There was an understandable immediacy about the USSR of intercontinental ballistic missiles and European occupation.

The conventional 'front' was the East-West German border. All stories but two from classmates in Europe were located in West Germany, facing eastward. The border in West Germany dated from 1945 with subsequent enhancements, while the wall in Berlin was only closed on 13 August 1961. At the time of JFK's assassination, the residents of Berlin, West Germany and the rest of Western Europe were still basking in the reassurance of Kennedy's "Ich bin ein Berliner" speech of 26 June 1963. More than a million NATO and Warsaw Pact troops weighed the possible outbreak of war.

The sequence of stories is Berlin, Border, Northern Sector, Grafenwoehr, Southern Sector, Turkey.

### **Jim Worthington: H-2** (Posthumous memories from Kitty Sibold Worthington)

I can't write the story because I wasn't there and Jim is gone.

However, I do remember his saying that he was in Berlin at the time, I think at a bar at the base, when the announcement came in. He said the bar cleared out immediately and everyone went to their rooms to monitor tv or radio coverage.

On the day of the funeral, Jim was in charge of the battery salute, queuing up the firing of the cannons. Someone else had to count in case of misfires, of which there were one or more.

### **Charles Hertel: H-1**

Like most members of our generation, my memories of certain aspects of the day of Kennedy's assassination are crystal clear. I was then stationed in Bad Hersfeld, Germany, with the 3rd Reconnaissance Squadron, 14th Armored Cavalry Regiment. The Third Squadron was posted, along with an Engineer company, at a small caserne called McPheeters Barracks. The Third Squadron had the distinction not only of being positioned less than 15 miles from the interzonal border with East Germany but also of being the northernmost stationed combat unit of U.S. Army, Europe. I had been the Executive Officer of K Troop for less than two weeks on 22 November.

Duane Slater was the Executive Officer of the Howitzer Battery of the Third Squadron and, as classmates and friends, we were inseparable running mates, sometimes to our own

physical and professional detriment. November 22 was a Friday and, although we had duty the next day, it was only until noon, so we opted to go out to a German gasthaus that night and have dinner and a couple of beers. With beer at 40 pfennigs or 10 cents a glass and meals correspondingly cheap, a night out was something we could well afford even on our base salary of \$222 per month. We got to the gasthaus a bit after eight p.m. after we got off duty, cleaned up, and changed into a coat and tie. In those days, U.S. troops were not allowed off the caserne without a coat and tie. Duane and I were accompanied by one of the Howitzer Battery Forward Observers, Gene Hogan.

The three of us were sitting at a table in the gasthaus, having ordered a meal, and were obviously drinking beer a bit too fast and having good time. None of us noticed that the gasthaus seemed quieter than normal. We were animated to the point of being loud (and probably obnoxious), when the gasthaus proprietor came to our table and said, in quite good English, words to the effect that "Aren't you ashamed of yourselves acting like this after what has just happened?" We three looked at the man dumbly and asked what he was talking about. He explained that President Kennedy had just been assassinated in Dallas.

We were dumbfounded by the news and, since we could not understand the German news commentary on TV or radio, we left without eating and returned to the BOQ where we could get the news on AFN radio. As the time in Germany was seven hours ahead of Dallas time, the latest news kept coming in well into the next morning, and we stayed up quite late listening to the incoming reports and talking. As young men who felt we knew Kennedy, having marched in his inauguration parade and having heard him at our graduation, we were terribly affected by the situation.

Sometime in the early morning, the order came out that all activities were cancelled for Saturday and that the Squadron would assemble in Squadron mass on the parade field at 1000 hours in dress green uniforms for a memorial service. As dress greens were seldom worn, this announcement set off a frantic effort to make sure that all the troops (and officers) were properly uniformed. Fortunately, Saturday 23 November was a bitterly cold day in Bad Hersfeld, and the uniform order was soon amended to dress greens with overcoats, so that any missing or incorrect decorations or insignias would be covered up.

The memorial service went without a hitch. The mood was somber, and the attitude of most of the troops was one of stunned disbelief, but we did our duty and stood in a squadron formation in the bitter cold and honored our fallen Commander. In later years, I have often tried to fathom what we were mourning for that day and why we remember that time so vividly. Was it simply the loss of a young, inspiring President, or was it our own loss of innocence -- or something more -- the end of an era of certainty and the beginning of an era of doubt and mistrust. I don't know.

## **Roy Degenhardt: C-2**

I was a platoon leader in the 14th Armored Cavalry at Fulda in West Germany. Fulda is the principal town in an area called the Fulda Gap, an historic route for invading armies from the east and also the route Napoleon used in 1813 to escape westward after defeat at the Battle of Leipzig.

Our unit had two missions. First of all, we carried out constant patrolling of the East Germany border to show the flag. Secondly, should the Russians launch an attack, we were expected to try to delay their formations to allow the US main battle units of V Corps, garrisoned to our west, to deploy. Surely not good for your health. If the 8th Guards Army didn't kill us, our own Atomic Demolitions would have finished the job.

It was early evening and I had just returned to my bachelor's apartment to clean up after an uneventful 24-hour patrol of the Border. Time for a shower, a beer and some sack-time. I turned on my stereo and within a few minutes the Armed Forces Europe announcer interrupted with news that the wire services were reporting that President Kennedy had been shot in Dallas. A few minutes later, my telephone rang with our standard Alert message. I happened to have a blank recording tape on my stereo and so I hit 'Record' on my way out the door with my gear.

As a Border-Guard unit, we were subject to an Alert at random times every month to ensure that we could be relied upon. We would receive a call and/or hear the siren in town and would race to the Kaserne, grab our personal weapons, jump in our tank, truck or jeep and head for our assigned war positions on the border. Each vehicle would leave the Kaserne as soon as it had most of its crew and make its way (race) individually to its war position. Stragglers would hitch a ride and follow. The locals learned to vacate the roads during an alert as we did not bother with traffic rules.

I reached the motor pool in time to climb into my command tank where my crew was impatiently waiting. Our Exec confirmed that the President was reported dead. It is still difficult today to believe this had happened and, in a few moments, the world had changed. I felt a deep sense of personal involvement, even as a lowly Lieutenant, as I vividly remembered President Kennedy's inspiring speech at our Graduation and, of course, his Berlin speech in June was still ringing in our ears.

The platoon was soon dug-in near the border, with scout vehicles in a forward screen. My team of professionals were unusually quiet as they surveyed their target points in the dark and settled in for the wait. We all know how to wait. Radio silence was maintained, but we knew for sure that the Russians knew we were there and knew our positions. Three tanks, a mounted infantry squad, a mounted mortar squad and four scout vehicles. 36 enlisted men (when full), 1 officer, 10 vehicles. We were certainly not an insurmountable obstacle but of course there were eight other similar, combined-arms platoons from our squadron strung across the Gap. Yes!

A couple of days later, we pulled back into the Kaserne and resumed normal activities. The West German government showed great sensitivity by closing all bars and dance halls, as I recall, for a week! Can you imagine? The residents of Fulda reacted as if they had lost a family member and we all knew we had been witnesses to a seminal moment in history.

I recovered my tape reel which was a running record of the announcements, interspersed with requiem compositions. The tape was recently transferred to CD, which I hope will one day be a source of interest to my family. I am older now, less idealistic and perhaps a little embarrassed by recalling my emotions on that day. But it was a day to remember.

### **Chuck Dominy: K-2**

This personal JFK remembrance comes from Northern Bavaria Germany approximately 30 kilometers east of Bad Kissingen, Germany. I had arrived in Germany in May, 1963 as a second lieutenant on my first assignment after Airborne and Ranger training. With a brand new bride in tow I was assigned as a platoon leader in B Company, 10<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division.

The Cold War remained a fact of life and our focus on the East German Border dominated our training and how we were stationed. B company was a separate company about a two hour drive North of the Battalion Headquarters in Kitzingen. In the fall of 1963 I was given the mission to plan a 1 week Company Field Training Exercise (FTX) within a 3-hour convoy radius of home station. I spent several days on recon to find a suitable spot that would minimize maneuver damage yet provide a place for Engineers to do their thing. The final selection was a heavily wooded area in a rugged hilly, quite remote sector about 15 kilometers from the East German Border. The dates selected for the FTX were 19-26 November, 1963.

The initial convoy and establishment of a company bivouac were uneventful and training began in earnest. Each platoon had their own GP Medium tent for the troops-the four officers had a smaller tent with a pot-bellied stove for comfort. The "mess hall" was a field kitchen with two German Nationals augmenting the Mess Sergeant for food prep and clean-up.

On the evening of 22 November about 1900 hours dinner was over and the officers were in the tent discussing the next day's training plan. Suddenly-a German cook burst into our tent screaming-"Kennedy Mord!!!! Kennedy Mord!!!!" Our initial reaction was total shock-he had a small portable civilian radio in his hand and he kept pointing to it and screaming. President Kennedy was very popular in Germany and it really hit hard.

So many unanswered questions-do we go on full alert-is a military response in the making-do we terminate the FTX and return home-who was responsible??? Being so close to the East German Border in that day and time caused some very unsettling

thoughts. After about 24 hours of intense anxiety it appeared a Soviet march to the Rhine was not about to begin.

### **Tom Middaugh E-2**

Having just returned from a month's tour of duty along the Czechoslovakian border, I arrived at my Landshut Germany BOQ in time to scrub off the grime of rustic living in the field, suit up in formal blues and depart with my fellow officers of 2nd Squadron, 11th Armored Cav to attend what was a major German-American banquet hosted by our local civic leaders. We arrived and enjoyed cocktails with our gracious hosts who really seemed to appreciate our presence in town and our contributions to the community, perhaps motivated in part by President Kennedy's famous "*Tch bin ein Berliner*" speech several months earlier in June.

The social interchange lasted for about an hour before sitting down to dinner. It was interesting that the seating plan was truly integrated, almost no Americans sat side by side. After the salad course and just as the entrees arrived a senior officer in the squadron came up behind this lowly 2nd Lt and whispered in my ear that the President had been shot, not to say anything, but on the CO's signal, we were to immediately rise and depart as our unit had just been ordered to alert status. Several minutes later, and on cue, we all silently arose and made our way toward the banquet hall door. The silence was deafening! I could feel the pall set in on what had been a cheerful, good-natured evening. All I could hear was our footsteps on the hardwood floor. It took a good ten or fifteen seconds before our boss reached a microphone and announced that President Kennedy had been shot, and that we had been ordered back to our kaserne as our forces had been placed on the highest alert status.

This was a Friday evening I will never forget. I don't think we even knew yet whether or not Kennedy had died, being so far down the information chain. So it was back to combat gear waiting to hear if we were going to deploy, going to war, whatever. Alerts were serious business in those days. More than once we had been ordered to the field and remained in positions for days on end without knowing at platoon level what was going on, suggesting more than just another monthly alert or practice exercise.

However, my most prominent memory of the evening of 22 November 1963, was the awkwardness of the moment, the shocked looks on the faces of our German friends and allies and the unanswered hush and utter stillness that blanketed our departure. My mind had swirled with thoughts of we Americans affronting our German neighbors, and the embarrassment I was beginning to feel until my CO reached the microphone and said his piece. The significance of losing our president had yet to cross my mind.



### **Gus Fishburne: F-2**

I was assigned to C Troop, 1st Squadron, 11th ACR and stationed in Straubing Germany. It was approximately 1730 hours, Germany time, on the date JFK was shot and I was having dinner in the Officers Club with several other lieutenants. Our German waiter, Adolph, came running into the dining shouting "your president has been shot !! " We immediately ran to our BOQ and turned on the radio. The news, though sketchy, confirmed that JFK had died.

Almost immediately, the word came down to the BOQ that we were to go on Full Alert status. Our squadron assembled in the motor pool under full combat gear with the engines running on all vehicles. We remained in this status for approximately 12 hours until ordered to Stand Down. The reason the alert status was called was because of the possibility that Russia was behind the assassination and that this may have been the prelude to an invasion of West Germany.

As I remember, among my fellow officers and men the feeling was more of anger and revenge than sadness. Yes we were definitely sad but anger was the overriding emotion. It was the opposite with the locals that worked at our kaserne. They were truly saddened. I think they were identifying with JFK's Berlin speech and really looked upon him as a true friend of Germany. They would get tears in their eyes when the subject was brought up.

### **Tom Walker: L-1**

The things that come to my mind were the connections that the Class of '62 had with JFK. Our class marched in his inauguration parade in January of 1961. I clearly remember seeing Jackie Kennedy looking at the cadets as we passed in review. She had this look of wonder in her eyes. She seemed to be fascinated by the ranks of cadets smartly passing by in review. I also remember that we did an unusual thing as we passed the reviewing stand. We did an "Eyes left" as opposed to the normal "Eyes right." I held that "Eyes left" as long as I could to keep that historical moment in my mind. I was only 15-20 feet away from both the president and first lady.

Then in June of 1962, Jack Kennedy was our graduation speaker. A lucky few actually had their diploma given to them by Pres. Kennedy. That did not include me.

Fast forward to November 1963. I was assigned as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant to the Artillery Battery, 3<sup>rd</sup> Squadron, 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Cav stationed in Amberg, Germany. Our mission was patrol duty along the Czech border—the famed "Iron Curtain." We patrolled within the 5 Km zone that separated West Germany from communist Eastern Europe.

At 7:00 PM German time (2:00 PM Dallas time) my wife, Mary Jean, and I were returning from dinner in town. As we came up the hill to the "kaserne" where we were housed, someone came up to us shouting "The president has been shot, the president has

been shot!” We did not know at that time whether he was dead or alive. To say that we were stunned, would be an understatement. My reaction is still as clear to me today as it was that evening.

Fast forward again—Spring of 1981. I was driving my car from Orlando to Ft. Lauderdale on a sales call. On the radio an announcement was made saying, “The president (Reagan) has been shot.” My immediate reaction was, “Oh no, not again!”

### **Marshall Johnson D-2**

In 1963, George Kirschenbauer and I joined 2 Airborne Battle Groups in Mainz, Germany (George - 505<sup>th</sup> & me - 504<sup>th</sup>). We were joined there by Fred Hillyard, Ernie Webb and Pete Hameister (all went to the 505<sup>th</sup>). Not too long after we arrived in Germany, the 504<sup>th</sup> & 505<sup>th</sup> were reorganized into the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalions, 509<sup>th</sup> Airborne Infantry, 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Brigade, 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Much later we were again reorganized into an Airborne/Mechanized Brigade (probably the only such organization in Army history). This entire process is another interesting story in itself.

As with most tactical Army units in Germany at the time, we were subject to random alerts every month. Most of the time, if we were not in the field, we just moved to our initial alert positions near our kaserne. We were required to be in these positions within 2 hours of the alert being called. On occasion we would actually move to an airfield, load on C-130's and make a tactical airborne drop to test our ability to rapidly respond to any crises in our geographical area of responsibility (much later this resulted in near deployments to Lebanon and Cyprus to protect US civilians). During each alert, we were inspected to ensure that we had all of our weapons, equipment and ammunition to perform an actual mission.

At the time of the assassination, I was a rifle platoon leader in B Company, 1/509<sup>th</sup> Infantry. My unit was training in Baumholder when we were notified of the JFK assassination (don't recall if our sister unit was also there or in our home kaserne). Our units immediately deployed to our pre-assigned Emergency Deployment Positions (EDP's) near the Fulda Gap on the East German border where we remained for several days.

It was both a stimulating and rather anxious experience for new 2 LT's as we had no idea what was ahead. Hard to imagine at the time how light infantry was expected to stop Soviet tank columns blowing through the Fulda Gap – perhaps the “Airborne Multiplier”? In any event, there was no doubt in our minds we could handle the mission.

The autobahns were jammed with all sorts of US military vehicle convoys moving from locations throughout Germany to their EDP's – quite a mess. Not only were we constantly attempting to avoid running over local German vehicles, but we also had to be alert for and report sightings of Soviet Military Liaison vehicles. Needless to say, it was

a circus. The entire process was repeated several days later as all units repositioned back to their home kasernes.

Once back home, our first Happy Hour at the O Club was filled with “war” stories of our unit moves to and from our EDP’s. The majority of the stories recalled the road trips up and back and humorous encounters with the local population and Soviet Military Liaison vehicles.

Several days after our return to home station, the Bishop of Mainz arranged for a High Mass to be held in the 1000 year old Mainz Cathedral. The Cathedral was filled with both the local population and the US Military in Dress Blues, with many forced to remain outside as the Cathedral was filled to capacity. A very somber and yet beautiful scene greeted mourners entering the ancient Cathedral illuminated entirely by candles.

Footnote: Forty five years after I completed Infantry Basic, Airborne and Ranger schools and reported to my unit in Germany, my son, Marshall A ’07, repeated the process, reporting to the 2/503<sup>rd</sup> Infantry, 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade in Italy - actually the descendent of my original unit. I deployed to Vietnam after my initial assignment. My son beat my timeline by deploying to Afghanistan while assigned to the 173<sup>rd</sup>.

### **Craig Richardson: E-2**

On the day President JFK was assassinated I was stationed in Friedberg, Germany with the 1st Bn, 32 Armor.

There were three duties junior officers pulled, one of which was Courtesy Patrol. Many of you recall this consisted of visiting all the bars and nightspots to settle down or remove drunk or unruly soldiers. That was my duty that evening so at about 2000 hours local time I was heading out the front gate of the kaserne in a 3/4 ton truck and enlisted driver. He had a radio on the front seat tuned to AFN and as we were driving along he asked me if I'd heard that the president had been shot. I had not and this startled me and was stunned at how casually he mentioned it.

Shortly, a news bulletin interrupted the program on the radio with this news and soon the program turned to only reports of the assassination. I cannot remember how I received the word, but my mission was to go everywhere and tell soldiers to get to their units immediately. The MPs were out doing the same thing.

My most vivid and haunting memory of that evening was the stark contrast of emotions demonstrated by many soldiers, who grumbled and were upset that their evening on pass was cut short, and the many German citizens out on the streets, some in tears, who came up to me and expressed their sorrow.

## **Ed Rowe: D-2**

The West Point Class of 1962 had a special relationship with President Kennedy. He was our graduation speaker who charged our class with our duty as newly commissioned officers bound for assignments during the Cold War. We made him an honorary member of the class and presented him with a class ring, which now resides in the museum at the Academy. He was the first President for whom most of us voted. We also closely related to him as he was young and did things like we enjoyed doing, such as touch football, sailing, golfing, and going to the beach. He had a young family. In short, he seemed like one of us, not like other senior government officials, most often viewed by us as old, bureaucratic, and stuffy. Losing him was especially meaningful.

In 1963, the Nation was still free from large scale worldwide terrorism and random domestic shootings, which made no sense, by deranged individuals. An assassination of a President was most likely to be viewed as the action of a foreign power. Our Class was spread around the world and throughout the country on its first duty assignments. The threat was the Soviet Union which had demonstrated its aggressive tendencies since the end of World War II. The tension along the Iron Curtain and the Cuban Missile Crisis were concrete examples we witnessed. Thus, it was natural to believe that the Soviet Union could have been behind the assassination to create chaos as a prelude to military action against the United States and its allies.

I was a platoon leader in C Co, 3/68 Armor, Sullivan Barracks near Mannheim, Germany and single at the time. The Battalion wives were having some kind of function that evening at the Officers Club so my Company Commander was hosting his officers at his quarters. I stopped by Class VI on way to his quarters (to procure my contribution to the gathering) and first heard the news there over a radio; there was no American television in the area. Once at Company Commander's house, we checked in with battalion headquarters and settled in to listen to radio. While there was no official alert or recall, the troops all returned from being on pass (it was Friday evening in Germany), and we all just waited for the next shoe to fall.

In those days, there was an alert at least once a month. The tanks were fully uploaded with all ammunition and topped off with diesel. We were required to clear the Kaserne within 2 hours after the alert was called. I recall the somberness of that night as we waited for the alert which never came. Everyone was in disbelief that this could have happened to our Commander-in-Chief and wondered just what was coming next. The assassination was widely covered on German television and all Germans I knew expressed their sympathy to me in next few days. Everyone was surprised when hearing that Lee Harvey Oswald was the assassin. Despite all the reports and commissions, to this day I do not fully understand his motive and reasoning. All were saddened and shocked by his untimely and unjustified early death. However, we were all relieved to hear that the Soviet Union was not behind this as a first step toward a military confrontation and possible war. Now in hindsight, it appears that the assassination might have been the start of a changing world.

**James Peterson: K-2**

When President Kennedy was assassinated I was on my first assignment in Baumholder, Germany, as an artillery officer and Second Lieutenant in Howitzer Battery, 1st Squadron, 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment.

The day he was shot I was the Squadron duty officer, starting my tour at 5:00 PM with my Duty Sergeant and a duty driver. Most of the Squadron senior staff including the CO were out on Baumholder range for a night training session for the Squadron tank crews. Shortly after assuming my duties I had to send a sick soldier to the dispensary, which was separate from the main post. To get there and back the duty driver had to drive through downtown Baumholder. On his way back he called me to say there was suddenly pandemonium in the streets, with the Germans running about yelling that President Kennedy had been shot.

Assuming it was a hoax, I told him to get off the radio and back to Squadron HQ ASAP. However, moments later I got a phone call from Regimental headquarters telling me president Kennedy had indeed been shot. Very shortly thereafter a full alert was initiated throughout Seventh Army. At some point, word came that President Kennedy was dead.

**Phil Burns: L-1**

I was at the other end of the Class so I did not shake the President's hand at Graduation.

After the Basic Infantry Officers Course, Ranger and Airborne, Molly and I arrived in Germany, reporting in to the 2/48th Armored Rifle Battalion, Combat Command B ( Chuckle, Chuckle Banana ). We lived on the economy for several months. When President Kennedy came to Germany in June 1963, D Company Commanded by Big Ben Swinson, was responsible for erecting the tents for the soldiers who were to represent the 3d Armored Division. I was a 2d Lieutenant in charge of the tent detail.

When I returned from the Kaserne the evening of the President's visit to Berlin, I was greeted by our landlord over and over with "ish bin win Bearleener" (the way the President with his Boston accent had said it).

By the Fall the 2d /48th had been broken in two and we only had 3 Rifle Companies in what became the 2d Battalion 48th Infantry, (Armored Rifle Battalion had more class) I was XO of Company A sitting in the Company Commanders Office (Phil McDonald) when Sgt Mallory 4th Platoon Leader opened the door with out knocking and said "The President has been shot" I immediately said "That is not funny".

Word went out and in Gelnhausen the troops and Germans alike were in shock. The Officers Club was closed. Many went to the Chapel to pray. Walking back to my

quarters in the upper housing area I passed our soldiers on both sides of the road walking single file with their heads down back to the Kaserne.

There was no siren activating the unit for deployment to our defensive positions covering the Fulda Gap.

Later that night a large group of Germans carrying candles quietly, almost religiously, passed by the Kaserne. By the next morning it was nearly impossible to walk inside the chapel - as the Germans had filled it with flowers.

We were told to report to our units in Class A, Dress Green, low quarters and overcoats the next morning. The entire Brigade was to stand formation at 11:00 hours. The uniform was unusual as all formal formations included steel helmets, woolen OG pants and shirts, boots, and pistol belts and weapons. If it was cold, field jackets with liners would be included.

The Kaserne was small and the only open space large enough to hold the entire Brigade at one time was the tank park. That night and early morning, all the tracked vehicles were moved to the maintenance area where they were parked bumper to bumper. The tank park itself was nothing but dirt and rock, not exactly something to walk on let alone march on in low quarter shoes. The engineers used a road grader to smooth the surface and a steam roller to flatten things out.

At 10:45, the entire Brigade, consisting of two battalions of infantry, one tank battalion, one artillery battalion, an MP platoon, a medical platoon, a signal platoon and an ordinance company marched onto the tank park, some 3500 men. We stood there in greens and unarmed. Immediately behind us was the Kaserne fence which ran along Frankfurter Strasse, (Renamed Colin Powell Strasse many years later.) Outside the fence, hundreds of German nationals stood in tears carrying flowers and pictures of the late President. They were all very well dressed and very respectful.

As in any large formation, the Brigade Adjutant commanded that unit commanders bring the units to attention and to present arms. The adjutant then informed the Brigade Commander that the Brigade was formed. Col. Gilbert Woodward returned the salute, ordered the units to Order Arms and Parade Rest. He stepped forward and said "It is my duty as your commanding officer to inform you that our Commander-in-Chief has been assassinated. Our new Commander-in-Chief is Lyndon Baines Johnson." That is all he said. He ordered all units to stand down and return to their quarters. No band, no pass in review. We marched back up the hill.

At five PM, the colors were lowered at retreat, a ceremony faithfully performed every single day, seven days a week at every military installation in the world. A twenty one gun salute honoring the late president was to occur at that days retreat. There was a battery of howitzers (4) lined up in front of the flag pole. The call to colors sounded which was immediately followed by the artillery blasts, all four guns, firing in perfect

unison. A 21 gun salute. Mike Ashapa our 2/48 S-4, told me he was in his office just down the hill - everything shook and he was afraid the windows might shatter.

62' had been given General MacArthur's expectations in May and our President's in June. We understood what was expected of us.

### **John Regan: D-1**

President Kennedy stopped off in Hanau, Germany before he went to Berlin to give his "Ich bin ein Berliner" speech. My battalion along with hundreds of other American, British, French and German troops were sent to Hanau for the ceremony. We bivouacked the night before and were up at 3am the next day. We were on the parade ground at 7am for a 10 am arrival. President Kennedy arrived and the band played at least 4 National Anthems. After a short speech, JFK trooped the line, stopping to shake hands with every Bn CO. Our bn symbol was the bayonet. All our guidons had a chrome plated bayonet on the end. As JFK approached our bn one of the Secret Service called out, "Watch those bayonets." Needless to say, as soon as we returned to our kaserne, every unit in the bn had a streamer made up and added to our guidons that read, "Watch those bayonets."

My parents' 25th wedding anniversary was Nov 24, 1963. A friend of the family arranged for me to fly back and be the "surprise". I arrived in New York early on the 22d and checked into the Astor Hotel (naturally). I turned on the radio to listen to one of the good old rock n roll stations we used to listen to as cadets. I called the family friend to let him know that I had arrived and while I was talking to him on the phone, President Kennedy was shot. I swear the rest of that day was a blur. Fortunately, I had an uncle who lived in the city and I spent some time with him. I went by train up to Boston and my folks met me at South Station. The wedding anniversary party was delayed 10 days, and it was more somber than we would have wanted.

Also, I went to late Mass that Sunday. I walked in the house after Mass, and my father said, "You're not going to believe what just happened. Somebody just shot Oswald."

Very vivid memories of a Great American Tragedy.

### **Terry McCarthy: E-2**

My first duty station after Fort Sill and Fort Benning was in Kitzingen, West Germany. I was assigned to the 2/82 Artillery Battalion, which was a Corporal Missile Battalion. As you may remember, the Corporal was the US's first tactical nuclear missile system loosely copied from the German V2 (thank you Dr Von Braun). It was a liquid fuel guided missile, fueled with fuming red nitric acid and liquid oxygen. The Corporal was transported and accompanied by a set of highly complex equipment that was all classified

Top Secret, and was rarely functional. Because of the security restrictions and lack of mechanical reliability, field training was minimal.

So as a bachelor 2d Lieutenant, I didn't have much to do on weekends and in the evenings. I had taught myself to play the guitar during Firstie Year. In search of someone to point me to where I could purchase a cheap electric guitar, I was lead to Horst and Herbert, two German brothers, who with a third German, Peter, played in a band. Popular music in Germany then (and now) was American or English music, so a local band needed to know American music. I helped Horst and Herbert with some songs that I knew and in gratitude, they asked me to have dinner with them in the gasthaus where they were playing, if I would sing with them. We became friends and eventually they asked me to join the band.

My invitation to join the band was not because of my outstanding musicianship, but rather because, being an American, I could presumably get the band into American clubs which paid about twice as much as what German clubs paid. Since I had lots of time on my hands for practicing and playing on the weekends, with permission from my Battery Commander, I joined "Les Chevaliers". The band had all the guitars and amplifiers, etc. The only thing I had to buy was a microphone. We wore gray suits, white shirts with maroon ties.....and actually looked like gentlemen.

The Kitzingen Officers Club: In the Kitzingen area were stationed many units, including 3d Division units, 7<sup>th</sup> Army support units, and aviation units. It was a busy club. Lots of infantry, armor and artillery battalions. And they all had battalion parties at the Officers Club.

I soon learned that the Kitzingen Officer's Club was auditioning for a band to play at battalion parties. Les Chevaliers auditioned, was hired, and signed a six month contract to play on Friday and Saturday nights, from 7:00 pm to 11:00 pm, for about \$100 per month each (those were big bucks then). We played the music of the day: Kingston Trio, Brothers Four, Peter Paul and Mary (I was Mary), plus Everly Brothers, early Beatles, Ray Charles, and some jazz music.

There was a little bandstand in the corner of the Club, elevated about three or four feet from the floor where our piano, drums, microphones, guitars, speakers, and even a vibraphone, were crammed together. The bandstand was our territory, no visitors allowed. It was Friday night and we were scheduled for play for an infantry battalion party. We were on the bandstand getting ready to start our 7:00 dinner music, when out of nowhere the Battalion Commander strode up to bandstand, jumped up beside me, grasped my microphone, and asked "Is this thing on?" "Yessir", I responded, being irritated that he was encroaching on my territory.

After quieting the noisy crowd, his words were (to my best memory), " I have the very sad duty to announce that President Kennedy was shot today in Dallas, Texas, and died at 1:00 pm Central Time. This party is cancelled". I can clearly remember my own shock together with the silence in the Club, which must have lasted for several minutes. No one



moved. Then a woman began quietly sobbing, and then a second woman began to cry. Finally someone stood up and started for the exit, and in deathly quiet, the entire room slowly emptied....leaving Horst, Herbert, Peter and me on the bandstand.

I could tell that Horst and Herbert were affected the same way that I was. When Peter, our drummer, turned to me and asked "Does this mean we don't get paid tonight?" Horst and Herbert both said something sharply to him in German, which I did not understand, and Peter left the three of us on the bandstand to put away the instruments.

When Horst, Herbert and I left the Club, we went to my place to listen to AFN, our only communication link to the US, where we learned of some of the details. Horst and Herbert apologized for Peter's insensitive question, and I told them about how our Class felt so close to JFK because of his graduation address to our Class. Since JFK's famous "Ich bin ein Berliner" speech earlier in the year, most German's felt the same way as Americans did, attracted to his youth, intelligence and his courage for standing up to the Russians at the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Like most people of our age, November 22d remains vividly clear to me. My personal shock and grief, the Colonel's words into my microphone; the deathly silence that ensued, the sobbing of the women, and (unfortunately) Peter's untimely words, will forever be with me.

The Corporal Missile system was declared obsolete in 1964; I was transferred to the 3d Battalion, 21<sup>st</sup> Artillery, an Honest John missile system which was a much more practical system. It was a solid propellant rocket (no more fuming red nitric acid), fired from a modified five ton truck. I then began a more normal training regimen, going to Grafenwohr to fire them (with concrete warheads), and participated in many field problems and maneuvers. With that my music career came to an end. Les Chevaliers faded into history, Horst became a very successful architect, Herbert an attorney. I think Peter became a doctor. My friendship with Horst has survived the years; we see each other every other year or so, either in Nurnberg or in Seattle. I spent four days with him in March of this year.

We often talk of our memories of that terrible night in November, 1963.

And we did get paid.

### **Tom Faley: K-2**

I was an Infantry Platoon Leader, 3rd Infantry Division, 1/15th "CAN DO " drinking with my buddies in the Officers Club near Wurtzburg, Germany. The Officer of the Day strode into the bar wearing his hat "covered." He was therefore packing a loaded .45-caliber Colt automatic (wearing a hat in an officers club, unless armed, is such an etiquette breach that the offender must buy the bar a round).

He pointed at the bartender: "Close the bar." He turned to us: "Red Alert." This lieutenant was our drinking buddy, so we thought it was a joke and started laughing. He looked us dead on: "I'm not kidding..."

THE PRESIDENT HAS BEEN SHOT! THIS BAR IS CLOSED! RED ALERT!"

At the motor pool, my four APCs (Armored Personnel Carriers) already had "Live ammo on board, SIR!" and we roared into the forest to begin our advance to pre-selected defensive positions near the East German border.

We sweated 'till dawn awaiting the probable Russian attack; doubtful we could hold, even if we used our (then TOP SECRET) battlefield nuclear weapons...yeah, we were ready...you were safe.

### **Don DeSapri: C-2**

Like so many other classmates, in the Fall of 1963 we were experiencing the wonderful challenges of our first assignments. Mine was as a tank platoon leader in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 70<sup>th</sup> Armor, 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. That November, like so many other months, our unit was once again at the 7<sup>th</sup> Army Training Center in Grafenwohr Germany, engaged in tank gunnery training. That November 22 day began early with a tank convoy out to range 30, or 42, or perhaps some other number. I believe we were firing for qualification on table 6 or 7, leading to eventual qualification on Table 8, the annual required qualification for all tank crews.

At the end of each day on the range, most officers retired to the boisterous bar at the Graf officers club. Some of our battalion lieutenants were lined up at the bar next to some 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry guys. As usual they wanted to serenade us with unending stanzas of "Garry Owen." And, as was the custom of tankers, we responded with our rendition of "Herman Nelson." You remember, that was the heater used inside of tents. That always drew a heated response.

The music blaring from the juke box, or whatever other source of music was either the Four Seasons singing "Walk Like a Man," or maybe it was the Chiffons with "He's So Fine." Probably also heard that early evening was the Angels with "My Boyfriends Back," or, most likely, the Surfari's belting out "Wipe Out."

Whatever the song, suddenly the music stopped. And then someone on the public address system announced the news that the President had been shot and had been taken to a hospital in Dallas. He concluded by saying that the club would close in 15 minutes.

We emptied the club and silently walked back to our crude barracks. The next day as we were preparing to return to the range, we heard news of President Kennedy's death. Our Company Commander offered some remarks to all the men, and then we got back to the business of qualifying our tank crews, with a deeper purpose to our efforts.

**Don Chafetz: C-2**

My memory of the events has faded with time. I do remember we were at Grafenwohr, Germany for training. I was a member of the 24th Infantry Division stationed in Munich, Germany. It was in the evening and we were eating dinner with some friends in the officers club when we hear the announcement. It became very quite and seemed unreal.

I do not remember any special activities, assemblies or orders coming through. Again my memory is fading but I believe we remained at Grafenwohr and probably continued training.

**Dave Phillips: B-1**

The tragedy occurred while the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 35<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery was at the Grafenwohr training center. We were a 105 mm howitzer battalion, equipped with the self-propelled M52 tracked weapons, holdovers from, I believe, WWI. I further think it might have been that we received the new M109 self-propelled 155 mm guns upon our return from Graf. Not sure.

We held a formation, observed a moment of silence, and went on with our business. I do recall that the German people held JFK in extremely high regard and took the loss much more than the men and women I associated with. Odd.

Many years later, I incorporated into my riveting talk, "Things I Did Not Learn In School," two examples of the strength of the US Constitution and the transfer of power in the greatest country in the world. One example was the resignation of Richard Nixon: one and only one military person was present when the presidency was transferred to Gerald Ford, the US Marine standing at the foot of the stairway into the helicopter.

The other example was when the doctor at Parkland Memorial Hospital announced that President Kennedy had died. The Army warrant officer carrying the nuclear "football" who had been sitting just outside the doors to the operating room, as near to the President as he could get, simply got up and walked over to sit beside Lyndon Johnson.

**Brian McEnany: H-2**

Grafenwohr, Germany - November 1963. Eating dinner at the O-Club in the early evening hours - suddenly, the loudspeaker activates and "General ---- report to your HQ, immediately!" followed by Colonel ---, report to your headquarters immediately!" There were a number of these announcements and then it cut to a radio broadcast that told us that JFK had been assassinated.

We returned to our barracks, packed our go-to-war duffle bags and waited for the call to head for our alert positions - Graf was just 10K from the Czechoslovakian border. I even wrote out a will – left my only possessions, a Grundig stereo and records to my girlfriend – later my wife. Meanwhile, we waited and waited in the barracks, but no call came - finally turned in to await another day - uncertain of what actions would be required of us in the morning!

### **JJ Kelly: E-2**

Well, since Brian McEnany and I were together at the Graf O'Club, I'll corroborate his story. Just finished a rib-eye steak. German band playing. They just packed up, shed lots of tears and left.

### **Morris Brown: C-2**

My first unit assignment after graduation and follow-on training was B Battery, 2nd Battalion, 16<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery (Honest John). The battalion was located in Pinder Barracks in the village of Zirndorf, on the outskirts of Nurnberg-Furth, (West) Germany. The Iron Curtain stood only a few hours' drive to the east.

On the 22d of November, 1963 I was the battalion staff duty officer. After eating supper in the battalion consolidated mess per standing instructions, I returned to battery headquarters to work on some papers. My trusty Zenith Trans-Oceanic radio was tuned to the Armed Forces Network (AFN) and provided background music as I worked.

After about an hour there was a knock on the office door. One of the men stuck his head in and excitedly informed me that, although he didn't understand much German, he thought the local radio station had just announced that President Kennedy had been shot. Since nothing yet had been said on AFN I doubted this, and told him not to do anything out of the ordinary until this announcement had been verified through channels. After about twenty minutes or so, AFN did broadcast the news that President Kennedy had been shot in Dallas.

My initial thought was that this might be the precursor to a surprise assault by Warsaw Pact forces. Telephoning the division staff duty officer, I anxiously informed him of the AFN broadcast. He already was aware of it, but said that no direction yet had been received from VII Corps. After some discussion, he advised me just to pass the word throughout the battalion, and discretely to round up those individuals on pass in the village.

After briefing my battalion commander by telephone, I proceeded to the main gate guard shack, informed the Sergeant of the Guard of events, asked him to send a couple of men into the village to recall all US personnel there, and that all questions should be deflected gently without comment. I then proceeded to the small Officers' Club annex, where

several individuals were engaged in a card game, and informed them that the President had been shot. One of them replied, "That's a poor joke!" I angrily replied that it was not a joke and that it was being announced on the air. The card game ended abruptly as the participants headed for the nearest radio.

For the next several hours there was a steady stream of people in and out of the orderly room, asking for the latest news about the shooting, and near-constant discussion about it. I think the entire battalion spent the night anxiously waiting for the klaxons on the barracks walls to loudly signal an Alert, Loadout, and Displacement to tactical field positions in preparation for the start of WWII. Fortunately, that didn't happen.

The battalion commander called a formation the next morning and officially announced that President Kennedy had died. Everyone's mood for the rest of the week was somber. A number of individuals later remarked that, when they went off-installation, many of the villagers approached them with sincere expressions of sympathy and encouragement.

Regardless of nationality, it seemed to me that all were united in common grief at the assassination of a beloved President.

### **Phil Galanti: K-2**

I was in Germany, as ADM PLatoon Leader of the 3rd Engineer Battalion, 24th Infantry Division (Mech). There were a bunch of us sitting in the Officers' Club having a beer. It was about 2000 when the club manager made the announcement over the PA system. We looked at each other, put down our beer glasses and went home to await the call. We knew we were about to go to war. The story followed that Seventh Army had scheduled a Readiness Test that night, but had the good sense to cancel it, or who knows what might have happened.

I could not forget that he had given me my diploma on June 6, 1962. That fact made it very personal.

I had been ADM (Atomic Demolition Munitions) Platoon Leader for about a month, and it was the first time I had been faced with the possibility that I might have to actually fire those things off. It was a very sobering series of thoughts.

### **John King: C-2**

At the time, I was a platoon leader in the 237<sup>th</sup> Engineer Combat Battalion in Heilbronn, Germany, but on TDY to a German Engineer unit in Koblenz where I was demonstrating a new machine that automatically placed anti-tank mines in the ground. On November 22<sup>nd</sup>, we were bivouacked in the woods somewhere outside of town where the demonstration was taking place and were out of touch, so nobody heard anything about the President's assassination until we returned the next morning to the German kaserne

where the unit was stationed. We had no sooner arrived when I was informed by the first German officer who saw me what had happened the previous day. I was tremendously shocked and exploded with an expletive, which was sympathetically understood. I also remember receiving the condolences of the entire Pioneer (Engineer) Battalion at the barracks, something that made me appreciate the widespread upset caused by the assassination of our President.

Of course I was proud that President Kennedy had addressed our class's graduation and he was special to me for that. That specialness was somewhat undermined a bit later just after my arrival in Germany when my platoon was sent to a military base where the President was arriving for a visit, and our role (among other things) was to paint the dirt green around the landing place for his helicopter so it would look like grass. But in retrospect, that is more a reflection on some up-tight local commanders than on the President. The fact remains that his assassination marked a major and world-shaking event that shook our confidence and remained forever imbedded in our memories, all the more so for the special association our class had with him.

### **John Kirby: I-1**

I was stationed as a platoon leader in A Co, 67<sup>th</sup> Armor, at Monteith Barracks in Furth, Germany. As I recall, the reason we were there was to slow/stop a Russian attack designed to put all of Western Europe under Communist control. I felt that we were playing a deadly earnest role in the protection of Western Europe and our way of life. It was not a game but rather an assigned mission – to be executed with just cause and maximum speed.

We were constantly ready, kept ammunition for all weapons on the tanks at all times and had monthly alerts (normally in the middle of the night). We had a “chain” system for notifications, and when I got a call from my company commander – I would immediately call my tank commanders who then notified their crew members. We all at once went first to the arms room to draw weapons and the Orderly Room for radio frequency cards and then to our motor pool. Each of us kept a bag of alert gear (including clothes, hygiene kit [and cigarettes for those who smoked], as well as hot sauce to make C-rations edible!) on our tanks at all times.

As soon as I could, I turned on my tank radio and checked in to the company net. When the net was complete, we were notified to either stand down or move to our alert positions. Since movement included use of some German roads, before we could move, the German Police had to be present to stop civilian traffic. If we moved to these positions, we would normally stay there through at least one C-ration meal. Thank God we had heaters in our tanks so we could heat the C-rations. Occasionally either our Alert Positions or our Mission would change. When either of those occurred, during the winter when the ground was frozen, we would have practice maneuvers to either find our new alert positions or rehearse our new mission.

My wife and I were living in an Army apt bldg on Fronmueller Strasse in Nurnberg, Germany. It was supper-time and we were listening to AFN radio. The programming was interrupted by an announcement that JFK had been shot. I immediately called my friend, Walt Ligon (class of 1961) and told him what we had just heard. His response was: “Jay – Quit kidding — that’s not funny”. I told him that I was not kidding and suggested that he turn on the radio. I can’t remember whether he did or not!

### **Marlin Schmidt: C-2**

It was night on an Armored Infantry Battalion (1/41 Inf) FTX in a cold dark forest in Germany. I was asleep in my pup tent as a platoon leader, when a runner woke me to report to the Company CP. When I arrived with the other platoon leaders, the CO announced that President Kennedy had been shot. He ordered that all our men be told, while resuming our security for the night.

As I told my men the news, I cried as did a few others. I felt embarrassed by that as something a leader should not do. I no longer feel that way. At dawn his death was confirmed. We would prepare to road march back to our Kaserne in New Ulm; the FTX was over.

As we were awaiting the order to move out, black armbands & antenna pendants were somehow procured & distributed. When we thundered through the German villages, hundreds of people lined the road, crying in mourning. No one knew if the Russians were crossing the border & war was imminent. Memories of WWII were rekindled in their minds.

### **Dennis Bennett: M-1**

It was a typical evening as a diverse group of military and embassy personnel celebrated Happy Hour at the Officer’s Club in Ankara Turkey on 22 November 1963, when the news of JFK was announced by the Duty Officer as he rushed into the room. Happy was quickly replaced with Somber.

As the Commander of the Detachment at the International Airport, I was responsible for any evacuation contingency plan for all military and embassy personnel, so I quickly dispersed to my pre-assigned station and duties.

But what struck me more than anything was not the efficiency of all the US personnel. No, it was the quick and sad reaction of the Turkish people. Air Force One had recently been to Ankara and the Turkish people held President Kennedy in high regard. And over the next few weeks their outpouring of sympathy and grief were a real testimony to the reach of his charisma.

## **HOMELAND MEMORIES**

Classmates assigned within the continental United States were confronted with the most diverse challenges of all theaters. From the world of ICBM's and B-52's to rapid reaction deployment in hot spots in the Americas, to maintenance of domestic peace in the escalation of racial issues, to preparing units and training soldiers available for strategic deployment anywhere in the world; 62 was there.

Our missile development was accelerated to support McNamara's Mutual Assured Destruction principle. The Cuban missile crisis of October 1962 was probably the closest to nuclear war that we had ever experienced. Airborne units were rehearsing contingency drops into Latin locations. Medgar Evers of the NAACP was assassinated in June 1963, followed by Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech in August. And we should not forget the US-based combat divisions ensuring their readiness for strategic re-deployment to Europe.

The sequence of stories is Fort Campbell, Fort Bragg, Air Force, Fort Carson, Air Defense, Northwest US, Schools and other US Posts.

### **Barry Thomas: A-2**

The day started like so many others. Company formation at 0600 and then a PT run before breakfast. This week the 1<sup>st</sup> Battlegroup, 327<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne division was taking over the responsibility for providing the Immediate Ready Force (IRF) for the Division. We all reported to the parachute rigging line right after breakfast to rig out our jeeps, mules, and other equipment. Stu Sherard and Neil Hyde were in A Company, Ty Cobb in B, John Godwin in C, Norm Grahn in D, and I, Barry Thomas, in E Company. I can't remember which Company was designated for the two hour ready force but I know it was not E Company.

The rigging was going well and around noon we shut the line down and took a break for lunch. I went home and the troops went back to the Company area for chow. We were to get back to finish up at 1400. Pat and I were eating lunch when we saw the news on the TV. I was stunned, Pat was crying. I wolfed down what was left of my sandwich and headed back to the rigging line. Everyone was shocked and angry. The talk was all about who was behind this. Most people believed it was the Cubans. We expected to get the word to be ready to load out and go somewhere, maybe to Florida where some of the Division had been sent during the Bay of Pigs event.

The afternoon dragged on. We were done with the rigging by about 1600 and all went back to the Company area. I don't recall at what time we were released but it was late in the evening. The troops were all told to stay on base for the night. Officers were to



remain by the phone in case we got the call to action. The atmosphere was very tense for the first few days but no alerts materialized. And that's the way it was—Above the Rest!

**Ty Cobb: E-1**

I was assigned to Co B, 1/327 Infantry at Ft Campbell, KY. Got to Campbell in Mar '63 after Frostbite 6 Ranger School with a bunch of Can Doers (Godwin, Hyde and Sherard in same battalion). I was company XO and weapons platoon leader.

On the DAY, I was attending a one week NBC class for officers and NCOs. Had been home for lunch when first saw on TV that there was a shooting in Dallas. Then as I was returning to class we learned that the President had been shot. At class, we learned that he was dead. Little instruction occurred the rest of the afternoon, as we all just stared into space.

Back at home Bev and I were glued to TV for hours.

That weekend Bev, my new daughter (Christy) and I went to Missouri to visit my grandmother. While there, we noticed on the TV that there was a shooting in Dallas. At first, we thought it was only a "re-run" of the Kennedy shooting. Soon we realized that Jack Ruby had killed Oswald. We thought "what is happening to our country?"

**Ray Pendleton: E-2**

I remember November 22, 1963 quite clearly.

It was a chilly day at Fort Campbell, KY, but the temperature was not as brutal as a few weeks earlier when we froze in the bleachers of Soldiers Field while watching Army and the Air Force Academy battle it out on the gridiron. Except for cold blasts off of Lake Michigan, that was a good trip, thanks to the generosity of the USAFA Supe who sent a plane to take most of our West Point grads at Fort Campbell to Chicago for the event. On the bus ride in from the airfield, we were reminded that President and Mrs. Kennedy had visited Chicago only days before.

I was a member of E Company, 506th Airborne Infantry Battle Group of the 101st Airborne Division at the time. I had completed jump master training, and was tasked to help supervise and rig vehicles and equipment for a coming "heavy drop" exercise, which we were doing at the time. While lashing the quarter ton, three-quarter ton, and 105 mm light artillery loads to their cargo 'chutes, pallets and cardboard honeycomb cushioning, we were talking about that Army-Air Force game ... then one of the young troopers (who had been tuned into some great Blue Grass on his portable radio) rang out with, "Hey, sir, listen to this, they just shot the president!" Everyone went silent.

As best as possible we tried to hear the initial, sketchy and unconfirmed details coming from that small radio in an open area with wind gusting. Knowing more complete and reliable information would be available shortly thereafter, we hurried up to complete the rigging, then left to join others for more comprehensive news reports. In the wake of that shocking announcement, the remainder of the day seemed to turn eerie and somber. In light of the President's actions during the Cuban Missile Crisis a year earlier, we began to speculate about going to war with Cuba or Russia.

### **John Ulmer: I-2**

I was flat on my back in the Ft. Campbell hospital where I had been since 9/11 having sustained a broken back and internal injuries on my 13th parachute jump (now that's a good set of numbers!). I was in an open ward and the TV was on. For the next week I watched the entire set of events unfold. I watched Lee Harvey Oswald get shot live. My life had already changed substantially, but it was going to change even more.

### **John Winkler: L-1**

Where were we (June & John Winkler) the afternoon of 22 November? We were driving back to Fort Campbell after a weeklong leave at my home in Caney Kansas. This was the first time I had been home since just after graduation. I had a wonderful time quail hunting with Dad and his beautiful English setters. It was great seeing my Mom, brother and twin sisters. We had to get back that Friday because of the start of Thanksgiving week and, as one of the most junior officers in the 506<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, we were on lots of duty rosters for that upcoming week. The more senior officers/NCOs would be on leave that week.

We were on US 60 going across southern Missouri near Poplar Bluff when the announcement came over the radio. Not much was said between us as the same report was repeated over and over again.

June was devastated by the assassination. She had bought into "Camelot" big time. Me not so much. While I was impressed greatly by JFK's inauguration and graduation speeches, and his focus on Special Operations, that soured when I got to Campbell in March and saw the recon photos of the 506<sup>th</sup> drop zones in Cuba. The leadership of the Regiment felt that an inexperienced national politician had come within 12 hours of committing the unit to drop zones full of wire, obstacles and machinegun positions.

Many believe JFK was one of our greatest Presidents. I can't rank him anywhere near the top.

**Pat Canary: K-2**

I was a platoon leader in C Co, 325 Battle Group (before we converted to Bn's and Brigades) 82 Abn Div and the company was the immediate alert unit for the division with my platoon as the lead unit on a 10 minute alert standby in the company area----ie. sitting on the trucks or on the steps to the barracks waiting for nothing to happen----but we were ready to go to someplace in the Caribbean or wherever south.

We were alerted in late morning and loaded and departed the company area at Fort Bragg for Pope AFB assuming we were on a "Drill"/"Test"exercise because we were not given any info as to why we were moving. On the way to the Pope one of my troops had a little portable radio and heard an announcement that the President had been shot in Dallas Texas. Upon arrival at Pope we assembled behind a C-130 with props turning and tailgate down waiting to load. Parachutes and gear were prepositioned so we started gathering up our equipment when a jeep from the G-3 arrived and a Major and senior NCO showed me an ESSO map of Dallas Texas and the airfield where we would land --- Love field-----it was going to be a civil disturbance mission -----the other 4 platoons of the company were about 20 min behind and more C-130's were moving into position -----we had no need for parachutes, mosquito nets etc. so we stripped our troops of all the excess and began to load the first aircraft-----All went from we are ready to HOLD ---- we were listening to the news reports on portable radios -----

We did not deploy but stayed at the airfield until the next morning thankful that there was no civil disturbance-----Yes it was a memorable event that I reflect on every November and when JFK is mentioned in a conversation.

**Steve Warner: D-2**

I was at Ft Bragg: D Co, 187th Inf, 82d ABN DIV. I was inspecting my platoon's weapons in the company arms room, when news of the JFK assassination reached us. After work, I went home and cried.

**Larry Waters: F-2**

I was in the field in a commo trailer with the 504th ABN brigade, 82nd ABN. A ticker tape type message came thru while I was standing there that said "President Kennedy was shot" . A short time after it indicated he was dead. Not much we could do in the boonies. We always seemed to be on alert during the civil rights movement in Selma and other spots.

## **Greg Wilcox: E-2**

I was a platoon leader of a recon platoon in 1/17 Cavalry, 82d Airborne Division attending Heavy Drop school that day when the word came. It was a shock like I've never experienced. Kennedy was our President. We marched in his inauguration parade. He spoke at our graduation and handed out the first 50 diplomas (I was not one of the 50). But it was not just us West Point grads who felt the pain. My entire platoon was more motivated than any time I had ever witnessed. It was a mixture of pain, shock, denial, grief, and a desire for vengeance.

Thirty minutes after hearing about Kennedy's assassination, I was back at the barracks with my platoon, and we were ordered immediately to Pope AFB where we sat on our parachutes awaiting further orders. The rumor was that we were going into Cuba. I think we were there on the ramp about 12 hours before we were recalled to the barracks, but on a leash for further orders.

As I recall, we had no maps, no specific DZs, no intel. My memory is now foggy about all this, but none of us were clear of any plans other than we wanted revenge and we were going to unload on anyone who got in our way. A lot of our classmates were in the 82d at that time, and I'm sure we all wanted to jump into Cuba and take out the entire Cuban Army. Perhaps it was best that wiser heads prevailed.

## **Will Cannon: A-1**

On November 22, 1963, we were at the height of the Cold War. Having gone Air Force after graduation, I was stationed on a Strategic Air Command Base as an Intelligence Officer.

SAC's mission was, first, to survive an enemy attack on the Homeland, and this was accomplished by having intercontinental ballistic missiles buried underground in bomb-resistant silos and by having a fleet of bombers and an airborne command post already in the air at all times, 24/7.

Secondly, SAC's mission was to respond with devastating force to any attack on the Homeland within 30 minutes, which was the predicted window of time between the detection of incoming planes or missiles at the Defense Early Warning Line (DEW Line) in Canada and nuclear impact in the United States.

This was the "Mutually Assured Destruction" situation that preserved the peace for decades of the Cold War between the United States on the one hand and Russia and China on the other hand.

Each bomber crew and each missile crew carried the nuclear Go Codes on their person. Activation of the Go Codes required an order from the President of the United States confirmed by the two senior officers on the crew before responding.

In those days there was no exception for perfection in the Strategic Air Command. The SAC Inspector General and his staff would swoop down on a SAC base, and anyone --- ANYONE --- who didn't make 100 on their test was fired on the spot. If more than one person made less than 100 on their tests, the Colonel who commanded the Wing could expect to be told to get off the base and report to the Pentagon for reassignment.

On November 22, 1963, I was the Officer of the Day at McConnell Air Force Base in Wichita, Kansas. I was about 20 miles outside of Wichita on my way in a staff car to one of the 18 ICBM silos that ringed Wichita. I heard about President Kennedy's having been shot on the radio. I immediately thought: This is it! The President is disabled or dead, so he won't be able to initiate the Go Codes, and there will no doubt be so much confusion that no one else will be able to do it either. If this is a Russian plot, and planes or missiles were coming over the North Pole toward the DEW Line at that exact moment, there would be no way for SAC to respond in time.

I wheeled around and headed back to the base, top speed. I expected to see that the DEFCON level had skipped a couple of steps on its way to the top. I expected to see hyper-activity on the flight line. I expected to see people running, tires squealing, etc. But what did I find? Everyone was gathered around black and white televisions, dumfoundedly watching the drama unfold in Dallas.

As it turned out, there was apparently no Cold War threat that day. But, there could have been. Of course, it was easy for me to judge from the level of a Second Lieutenant, but I've never, before or since, been more disappointed in the Pentagon than I was that day.

### **Len Butler: K-2**

In November of 1963 I was a young pilot in the 305<sup>th</sup> Air Refueling Squadron at McGuire AFB, New Jersey. I was new to Strategic Air Command (SAC) and was preparing to be certified on the Strategic Integrated Operations Plan (SIOP) for my unit. As such, I was in the special plans office studying the SIOP for my certification which was coming up in a couple days. The Chief of Special Plans had the radio on listening to a NYC easy listening station. The music was interrupted by the announcement that the President had been shot. Inasmuch as there was no speculation as to who was responsible, my study of the SIOP gave me a chill as I thought of the possible ramifications.

About ten years later during one of our moves, I found a copy of the White House Press Release of our graduation address by JFK. To this day I have no idea how I came to have it. I distributed a copy to as many classmates as I could.

Whether or not I agreed with President Kennedy politically, I was honored to march in his inaugural parade and have him speak at our graduation. Several years ago, I tracked down Ted Sorenson, JFK's speechwriter. I wrote him to tell him how timeless I thought our graduation speech was. He didn't respond and has since passed away.

## **Ray LoPresto: I-2**

I tried but did not make the cut. I was in the middle of the middle third and so when they handed out other service commissions I did not get one. Since the Air Force would allow you to get a masters right away the powers that be were afraid that they would lose all of the star men to the Air Force, so they split the quota in thirds and counted back from the top of each third.

Ever since our cow summer at Eglin AFB when they had us lined up on the side of the runway and brought in the fighter series starting with the T-37 at very low altitude and ended with an F-104 going vertical, lighting the burner and very rapidly going out of sight headed for a contrail I knew what I wanted to do in the military. When I got to Ft Bliss for Nike missile training in El Paso I found the right Major who listened to my sad story, figured it was not some epiphany from a wild night in Jaurez and helped me write a request for transfer. I must have learned something after almost flunking out of plebe English writing themes. When I finished Nike missile school, jump school, got married and reported to my Nike battery in the L.A. area, I received a transfer in July 1963 to the U.S. Air Force and a pilot training class date of Sept, '63 at Moody AFB Valdosta, GA in the 3552<sup>nd</sup> Pilot training squadron.

I remember when I became aware of the JFK assassination very vividly. 22 November 1963 we had just finished briefing for my next training flight in the T-37 and were walking to the parachute room to don our chutes before going to our aircraft when it was announced over the loud speaker system. There was not a lot of time to contemplate the event for we were on a rather tight schedule to get airborne. I was still trying to keep up with fast moving events in the cockpit. When we got back to the flight room for the debriefing there certainly was a lot of speculation and discussion.

I graduated from pilot training in Sep. '64 and joined the 3660<sup>th</sup> pilot training squadron at Laredo AFB Laredo TX in Dec. '64 after instructor pilot training at Waco AFB Waco TX.

## **Roger McNamara: D-2**

I was assigned to the USAF Navigator Training Squadron in Waco, Texas at James Connelly Air Force Base. I was driving on a two lane road near the flight line; going back to my barracks from a flight training mission that I completed that morning. The radio was on; the music was interrupted by the broadcaster announcing that JFK had been assassinated.

Pulling off of that road, I stopped and put my head down on the steering wheel. I could not believe what I had just heard, yet the radio continued to broadcast news of the tragedy that had happened in Dallas. Dallas is about forty-five minutes North of Waco. I sat in my car with my eyes closed. I was in a state of disbelief and great sorrow. I felt totally

deflated. I just could not believe it. After a bit, I drove back to the barracks and spent time in the tv room with the other squadron fliers. Everyone was very quiet but we were glued to the television newscast.

All flags on James Connelly Air Force Base went to half- mast immediately. All flight operations were cancelled except for the alert aircraft which were on the runway. I spent the evening in my room quietly trying to grasp what was happening. I was simply stunned.

### **Jerry Janicke: K-2**

I was assigned to 570th SMS, part of the 390th SMW in Tucson, AZ, which had 18 Titan II silos strategically placed. I had just gotten off alert at a Titan II silo and I was on my way home (about 11:30 Tucson time) in my car when I heard of the shooting and since I needed some sleep---I was up 22 hours straight as part of our 24 hour duty at the missile site---I went to bed.

When I got up, about 3 pm, I learned that the president had died. I went on alert that Sunday and saw on TV Ruby shoot Oswald. I didn't know how to feel. I can assure you we paid attention to the message traffic from SAC HQ that Sunday while we were on alert. I thought we would go to a higher alert status, but as I recall we didn't.

I was not certain that this was a plot planned by many but I thought others were involved

### **Mike Schredl: A-1**

After finishing school at Keesler AFB, Mississippi in 1963, and being assigned to the 6594th Aerospace Test Wing in Sunnyvale California as a Satellite Control Integrations Officer, Judy and I lived with her parents while I went back to work as a sausage maker, having a month of leave.

I reported for duty as ordered and Judy and I then started looking for a place of our own. We would drive on days that I was not on duty down to Silicon Valley and look at apartments and duplexes. On one of these trips, on 22 November, Judy and I were driving south from San Francisco to San Jose, listening to the radio, when the program was interrupted telling us that President Kennedy was shot. My reaction was that shot meant maybe a minor wound. The announcer kept talking for a bit, and then updated that the President was shot in the head and the Governor was also wounded. After excessive incidental talk we were advised that the President was being rushed to the hospital. This was the first inkling that made me think this might be bad. Again after much analysis, the news was reported that the President was reportedly dead. Judy was impacted by the word dead and I think I was more focused on reportedly, therefore thinking probably not true.

On this particular trip, we were going down to San Jose to take possession of a duplex in

a complex on the border between San Jose and Santa Clara which we had just rented. When we arrived at the manager's office, she was crying with tears streaming down her face. She then told us that it was confirmed that the President was dead. It still didn't really hit me for a day or two of just how terrible this tragedy was. Of course those classmates who knew me, especially in A-1, should not be surprised. I always was a little slow on the draw. As General Franks would have said, I was not the sharpest knife in the drawer.

A few days later we launched a reconnaissance satellite and I was fully involved with long hours for the next week and although we didn't really have time to think of current events, our workplace was really subdued. After about a week and a half, when we had recovered the payload, done the preliminary analysis, and forwarded our report to the Secretary of Defense, we then started discussing the assassination. I remember that many of the old timers, both military and civilian, were especially shocked and saddened by the assassination. I think more so than us new shavetails, as they were very fond of the President, but also concerned about Johnson. These old timers included Dave Sykes '53 and Bob Conlan USNA '54, who was the son of my father-in-laws' boss Dr. Louis Conlan, President of the City College of San Francisco.

A short time later, Dick Randazzo and Jan Molvar were also assigned to the 6594th. Ultimately all three of us became Shift Leaders - **62 can do**. We did, as we flew 26 satellites together before I left active duty. Although much of our work is still classified, after almost 50 years, I think it is now a well known fact that we were photographing Russia, Vietnam and other areas. Our resolution was remarkable and some of our best pictures missed the target coordinates. We had a three dimensional error of a Russian farmer doing poo poo in his field, and of several air force officers giving us the bird as we flew over a tracking station. Needless to say we also obtained some very good, important, and timely sensitive material which I still feel after all these years more comfortable not mentioning.

Judy and I really didn't discuss the assassination too much; her hands were full with our four-month-old son and starting a household. I think both of us just tried to put it in the back of our minds, wishfully thinking that it really didn't happen.

### **Don Babb: C-2**

On 11/22/1963 I was at Fort Carson, CO, home of the 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (Mech) and assigned to C Btry, 5<sup>th</sup> Bn, 4<sup>th</sup> FA. The Bn had returned to post from the firing range where we spent 4 days running various scenarios with hip shoots, fixed firing positions, etc. I was supervising the Fire Direction Center (FDC) conducting training and cross training to improve proficiency and increase speed and accuracy to carry out fire missions.

The morning of Nov. 22<sup>nd</sup> I was with the FDC section in the motor pool conducting more training. We were contacted to return to the Btry area of barracks. We were redirected to



the Bn Hq area where the Bn CO was standing on one of the raised PT platforms. Once all personnel were assembled he told us the news from Dallas.

The entire post had been placed on alert status. We returned to our Btry area and remained there for 2 more days until the order came to stand down. We had access to a couple of radios for news updates. The TV in the Btry dayroom was out of order so I did not see any TV news until 3 days later. I recall feeling sort of numb and in disbelief.

### **Alan Biddison: L-2**

I was a platoon leader in E Company, 7th Engineer Bn, 5th Inf Div Mechanized. The unit was based at Ft. Carson which is close to Colorado Springs.

My wife and I lived in post housing a few miles from the company area. I was listening to the radio while driving home to have lunch. The program was interrupted with an announcement that President Kennedy had been shot. I turned on a radio as soon as I got home and told my wife the president had been shot. We focused our attention on the radio until we heard the President was dead. It was unbelievable.

Either that afternoon or the next morning the battalion had a dress rehearsal for a parade. We marched from the battalion area to the parade ground to keep tanks and other mechanized vehicles off of the post roads. The formal parade of the division was in the afternoon. The officer's club was located next to the parade ground. The battalion commander, as soon as the parade was over, turned the battalion over to the battalion's sergeant major and announced an officer's call at the officer's club. All officers left their units on the parade ground and walked to the club.

### **Art Lovgren: H-1**

On 22 November 1963 2LT Art Lovgren found himself as artillery forward observer in Charlie Battery, 1st Battalion 19th Field Artillery, in the 5th Mech Infantry Division, Fort Carson, Colorado. I had reported for duty in January 1963. Our division was one of those so-called STRAC divisions that had been alerted the previous October to convoy to Florida to take part in the planned invasion of Cuba to dump Fidel Castro.

As the "senior" 2LT of three in the battery I was assigned as Supply Officer as an extra duty. (The junior guy was traditionally assigned as Mess Officer----not very desirable duty to say the least because of all the inspections and opportunities to fail!) Much nicer back in the Supply Room where a 2LT could set up office! FO's didn't have offices! Since we depended on the draft to fill the ranks, my armorer was a PFC without a whole lot of education or technical/administrative skills. Physically he limped and was paralyzed on half his face. But he had his heart in the right place and was motivated to do well.

Thus, I was back in the arms room of that World War II vintage building, with a stove, fired.....yes, by draftees! I was helping my PFC inventory and properly document our weapons when we began to hear stirring and excited voices around the battery area.....something about the President being shot, down the highway in Dallas. We immediately sought out and found a radio in the XO's office where we started picking up the ongoing details of that terrible day. Later that evening when I returned to my rented apartment in Colorado Springs I turned on the TV just as Jack Ruby was shooting Lee Harvey Oswald on live news!

As I now reflect on that horrible day and all the sadness that followed for weeks afterward, I think we can marvel at the fact that the transition to Lyndon Johnson went down smoothly and without significant national disruption, thanks to our great constitution and political heritage! God bless America!!

### **John DeVore: F-2**

After Fort Benning, Georgia (IOOC, Airborne, Ranger, Jumpmaster, 4.2" Mortar & Davy Crockett School and Special Assignment as United Care Givers' Fund Project Officer), the first duty station was Fort Carson, Colorado, 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized), 3rd Brigade, 2nd Battalion, 10th Infantry. In April 1963 the initial assignment was Rifle Platoon Leader, 2nd Platoon, C Company. On November 22, 1963 the new assignment became Reconnaissance Platoon Leader.

On or about the hour of JFK's assassination, Recon Platoon Sergeant E-5 Michael J. Hughes and I were walking from the C Company Orderly Room around the Day Room of Headquarters Company to the Recon Platoon barracks for a first meeting with the assembled members of the Reconnaissance Platoon. As Sergeant Hughes and I neared the barracks, The Headquarters Company Clerk came bursting out of the Day Room to share that JFK had just been shot and was not expected to live. Sergeant Hughes and I stopped in our tracks, looked at one another, and were speechless.

The character of the introductory meeting with the Recon Platoon members was distracted and reflective. Aside from meeting each other, we just wanted to chat and to reflect. The only decision we made was to request permission to wear red berets during field exercises. This permission was granted and the red berets made us feel special.

### **Rusty Wilkerson: E-2**

My platoon was the aggressor in the Squad ATTs for the 1<sup>st</sup>Bn, 11<sup>th</sup> Infantry. Because I (and more importantly, my platoon Sgt) were the most experienced, our Co Cdr knew we would ace it. I distinctly remember sitting on a hill at Fort Carson when we got a radio call to cease operations and move to a rendezvous point. No reason was given even though we asked.

Once we got back in the cantonment area we learned that JFK had been shot. Shortly afterwards we were directed to change into Class A's for a Division (5<sup>th</sup> Mech) formation on the parade field. Before and after we stayed glued to the TV. A couple of days later and several others spend most of the day at our Battalion S-3's quarters watching the entire funeral.

**Will Miller: C-2**

I've hesitated to contribute since I have a lousy memory and am astounded at the clear remembrances of my classmates. The best I recall, I was just returning to Ft Carson, CO from leave [my oldest child had just been born in Tulsa, OK] and eating lunch alone at the O Club [an unusual place for me to eat to begin with since I was a married O-1] when the announcement was made over the PA system.

I suspect I went back to my unit 4/12 Cav where I was XO of the Hq troop--which is where I spent most of my waking hours. If I went further than that I would be making it up...not even sure about that last sentence since I had several assignments within the squadron and the dates of those assignments are lost in my memory bank.

Sadly, Kennedy didn't mean that much to me one way or the other at the time. Yes, he spoke at our graduation [but even that didn't mean that much to me since I was happy to have just gotten through those 4 years] and he was our Commander in Chief, [but there were a helluva lot of layers between him and me].

Now if LTC Chapin [my squadron CO] had gotten assassinated... I suspect that would have been another story. That said, I'm sure I was as stunned as everyone else that someone would assassinate the President of the United States. But, frankly, I've always had enough on my plate to be too concerned about things I could do little about--but that's just me.

**Dan Clark: F-2**

When President Kennedy was assassinated, I was serving as Executive Officer, C Battery, 2nd Battalion, 51st Artillery in San Rafael, California. Our Nike Hercules Missile Battalion was under the command of the 40th Brigade with Headquarters in San Francisco. Bill Byrd was also in C Battery. Ernie Zenker and one or two other classmates were assigned to the 40th Brigade.

Everyone was in shock and disbelief at the news. As I recall, there were several conspiracy theories. Cuba was suspected. So many units were moved to Florida that there was some concern that Florida would sink into the ocean. Some of us felt that we would be reassigned to Air Defense units in Florida. Because of the concerns and perceived air threat, all of our units were moved to the highest readiness status. I do not recall how long this lasted but it was more than just a few days. As many of us gathered

at various meetings and exercises, those of us in the '62 Can Do Class realized we had lost a great leader, one whom we felt had a special connection to our class.

### **Dale Smith: I-2**

I was on a Nike site in Calif, a mile up. I recall almost total silence from everyone in the Company and Fire Control area. Total disbelief was the first display of expression, followed by "Oh, My God" or something similar. The third phase was a dumb faced look on the face: shock. I still remember the "empty" feeling.

### **Larry Needs: K-1**

As I was coming down from "the hill" in the IFC area of D Btry, 3/1 ADA (a NIKE Hercules air defense battery) outside of Pittsburgh after Tac Eval training, and, as I entered the HQ building, my platoon Warrant, CW3 CW Porter, yelled, "Lt, you better come in here, Kennedy's been shot." My BC, XO, and 1SG and CW3 Porter gathered around the TV.

Since our mission was to defend the skies around Pittsburgh from a massive Soviet bomber attack and since no one had a clue as to why the President was shot, nor who did it, our alert status was raised from 2-hour standby to 30-minute alert to meet whatever the potential threat might be.

Although, politically, I was not on the same page as the President on a number of issues, I had great respect for him and all of us were shocked that anyone in our time would be of a mind to shoot the President of the United States, no matter who he was nor the nature of his politics.

### **Gus Zenker: E-2**

I, like Larry Needs, was in my Hercules battery area (San Francisco Defense). My first thought: Oh my gosh, Johnson is President! I was not a particularly big fan of JFK (or any Democrats)- still am not. I was one of the "lucky" ones to shake his hand at graduation, and the only thing I remember about that occasion was how blue his eyes were and that he was shorter than I. (I guess I, like many, thought of him as a giant.)

### **Sammy Steele: C-2**

In November of 1963, I was with the 2d Battalion 43d Artillery (Nike Hercules) at Turner AFB, near Albany Georgia. I was assigned to B Battery, near Sasser, GA while Ron Henderson and Jim Tumpane were with A Battery, near Sylvester, GA. I don't recall precisely where I was at my battery on 22 November, but I was on site, as was the norm.

One other lieutenant and I were working 33 hours on, and 15 hours off. At the time, that was normal working hours for a young lieutenant in Air Defense.

As the launcher platoon leader, I was most likely in the launcher building, when one of our crewmen came in and said that Kennedy had been shot. I thought he must have been talking about PFC Kennedy, one of our launcher crewmen. It took a few seconds for me to grasp the significance of what had happened that day. I only vaguely recall watching the news about the assassination on my small black and white television set over the next few days.

Then, there was the funeral procession itself with the horse, no rider, the caissons and most memorable, little John John's salute.

The 2/43 was a two battery Nike battalion, with 12 missiles in each battery. The battalion had the mission of protecting Turner AFB, an element of the Strategic Air Command. Due to the battalion's geographic location in southern Georgia, they were on highest alert during the time of the Cuban crisis. Today, there are no CONUS strategic Air Defense missile sites, and Turner AFB was closed during the late 60's.

### **Will Worthington: C-2**

On the morning of November 22, 1963, I was in the 559<sup>th</sup> Engineer Company headquarters at Ft Wainwright, Alaska, when someone said we should turn on the radio and we heard that President Kennedy had been shot. I think there were two small offices for four platoon leaders and we didn't normally spend much time there, but it was early morning in Alaska, and for whatever reason we were all in the headquarters that morning, along with the CO, First Sergeant and other NCO's. Our classmates Dick Irwin and Art Webb were in the same company and I suspect they were present.

A short time later, we heard the news that the President was dead. There was a feeling of incredulity among all of us there in the orderly room, wondering who might have done this and why, and could it be part of a larger plot? For the most part, the mood was very somber and we just listened quietly as the stunning news came in over the radio . . . there was no live television in Alaska at the time. As I recall, there was talk of establishing a higher DEFCON, and we may have been told to stand by for orders, but I do not recall that we actually did change our readiness status.

I've always been proud that the President was our graduation speaker, though my recollections of Kennedy's speech to us on June 6, 1962, are limited as I suspect our main concern was that it not be too long so we could get on with our day, but I do recall that part of the message was that we would be called on to fight our nations wars and defend our freedom. I remember thinking at the time that the possibility of war was pretty remote as nothing was on the horizon that I thought might result in war, and that his warning didn't get much traction with me. It was a bit ironic that on June 6, 1967,

exactly five years later, I stepped off the plane in Pleiku, Vietnam, to begin my first tour there.

### **Russ DeVries: I-1**

I was stationed at Fort Wainwright in Fairbanks, Alaska. We were out on a cold weather exercise for a few days. The announcement came over our military radio net. We all thought that it was part of the exercise. Ten minutes later we were informed that it was real and that the maneuver was ending. We were ordered back to Fort Wainwright to prepare for what could have been a national emergency. That is my story and I am sticking to it.

### **John Wagner: L-1**

We all remember where we were when we heard that JFK had been killed. Here is how I remember the occasion.

At the time, I was stationed at Ft. Lewis. I was Battery Commander of Battery B, 6th of the 32nd Field Artillery, Self Propelled 8" howitzers. On 22 November I was on leave in Louisiana and by the time I returned to my unit JFK had been buried and the immediate shock of the event had passed. At that time the officers and NCO's tried to focus the troops on the tasks at hand as we prepared for field training at Yakima Training Area in early January.

Peggy was expecting our first son, Bart, in early November and for several reasons, we decided that it would be best for her to travel back to our home town in Louisiana to deliver Bart. Just before she delivered, I took leave and came home to be with Peggy during the birth. Bart was born on November 14 after a difficult birth. Peggy and Bart stayed in the hospital for a week while she recovered. They came home to her Mother's home on November 20.

On November 22, we were in the bedroom playing with Bart and Peggy's Mother was across the hall in the kitchen preparing lunch. The TV in the kitchen was tuned to Kennedy's visit to Fort Worth and Dallas. All of the sudden, Peggy's Mother, Lulu, screamed, "they've shot the President, they've shot the President". We rushed into the kitchen and watched the news coverage the rest of the day and for the next few days until JFK was buried. We were shocked and saddened by the attack.

I was very familiar with the Dallas/Fort Worth area. I spent many family Christmases in Fort Worth with my Father's extended family. While growing up, I spent many summer vacations there with two Aunts. Many other relatives lived in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. I felt that I knew the kinds of people who lived in the area and was shocked that Kennedy would be killed there.

As a final note, our son, John H (Bart) Wagner III graduated USMA in the Class of 1986 and is now a practicing psychiatrist in Shreveport, LA...in the same hospital where he was born. He also practices in the local VA Hospital.

**Joe Petrolino: K-1**

I was in the Transportation Office at Ft Hood arranging travel back to my duty station at Ft Lewis. A group of us had been sent to Ft Hood to participate in Operation Big Lift and were now back from Germany and due to return to our home station.

A couple of day later we took the train to Dallas to connect to another to take us to Tacoma. We stopped off in Denver and watched all the TV news.

**Bob Phillips: K-1**

On that fateful day I was on base at the Army Language School (Monterey, California) clearing post and getting ready to sit for my final written examination in completion of the Language Course in Vietnamese. Bob Tarbet and I had both come from Armor assignments from Ft. Hood and took the three month course together. We were due to have a few days leave and report to VN in early December.

I turned on the radio in my car while driving to the location of the examination when I heard a halting, unsure voice inform me that the President has been shot with a few other speculations thrown in. My reaction was at once to think that "I thought all that kind of stuff was prohibited on the radio after the Orson Welles big scare of the Mars invaders," and immediately changed stations. Again, I heard a similar halting announcement of the President being shot. A third station had the same thing.

I was stunned, confused, and in a mild state of shock. All I could do is seek more information from yet more stations. After a while, I had to deal with where I was going in my car and what I needed to do next. I arrived at the test site and was informed that the exam had been cancelled but graduation would proceed the day after tomorrow as scheduled.

Of course there was a flood of thoughts about the entire situation of JFK, his unprecedented support for Army Forces in Counter-Insurgency situations, his emphasis on equipment improvement, and his support in general. In a speech he quoted Kipling,

For God and the soldier we adore, In time of danger, not before!  
The danger passed, and all things righted, God is forgotten and the  
soldier slighted.

He visited soldiers in the Big Red One. He was determined to enhance our military ability to respond to small wars and not depend only on Nuclear Weapons. Yet, he had recently

announced a cut in the strength of US Forces in VN by 1,000. Clearly he was looking for a détente with the Russians at the time. Personally, I was wondering if Tarbet and I would be sent home within a few weeks after arriving in VN. Yet, I had read everything I could find about insurgency situations including WWII campaigns and battles involving guerillas and insurgents. And, of course I read, as did we all, Bernard Fall's *Street Without Joy*, and the other three books he had out at that time. It was very exciting to be going to VN to try out our combat skills and our language training.

The enthusiasm of all of us at the Language School was very high even after JFK was killed. We felt we were continuing his work.

### **Walt Bryde: C-2**

In my case, I was on a firing point in north Ft Knox, Kentucky. Had taken half the firing battery (C of 3d Bn , 3d FA) to the field that AM to fire in support of an Armor School problem. The Bn CSM arrived in a jeep and passed us the news from Dallas. Shortly afterwards, range control closed us all down. We march ordered, returned to the post, washed up and put the guns to bed. Then spent the next several days glued to our little black and white portable TV! Terrible business.

### **David McLaughlin: K-2**

I was in the officer's club at the Ranger Mountain camp in Dahlonega Ga. on temporary duty from the 82nd Abn to act as a Blackjack agent for the class of '63 going through ranger training. I left the club to get word to the Commandant and on the way ran into a local and told him the President had been shot. His reaction shocked me as he replied, "Good I hope he is dead".

### **Rick Kelly: F-2**

On the day of the assassination, I was assigned on temporary duty from the 101st Abn Div as an instructor at the Mountain Ranger Camp in Dahlonega Ga. On that particular day I had made a trip to Gainesville, GA for the purpose of buying a used television for my hooch at the camp. I was in a pawn shop in Gainesville and asked the owner to plug in the TV to demo it for me.

Well I guess you know the rest, the station he tuned to had the headline of the shooting in Dallas. Needless to say, we were mesmerized for the next hour or two at which time I declined to purchase the set and headed back to camp.

The next day we held a small memorial service for the President and then went back to work. Not much to write about as we had class schedules to keep up with.



**Steve Sperman: F-1**

I had just been appointed both the S-2 and the S-3 of the 3/77th Armor at Fort Devens, Massachusetts. The S-3 had been reassigned due to the draw down, the S-3 also was the S-2. My S-2 SFC came running in to my office with a TWX which said JFK had been shot dead and we were to go on Alert, we were a STRAC unit.

Off I went to the CO LTC Wheeler, to hand him the TWX, he had just heard the news on the radio JFK been shot but they had not announced his death. Other than riot duty we could not figure out what to do but we canceled leaves and passes and waited for further instructions which never came. We later had a battalion formation where the news was read.

**Dick Steinke: E-2**

I was the battalion adjutant of a tank battalion at Fort Irwin California. The mail clerk had been listening to the radio and came in and told us that President Kennedy had been shot. A few days later we had an assembly of the entire battalion for the Colonel to read the official death notice.

We were all shocked at the news. It was unbelievable. As I look back this was a key event in the history of our country and things changed from this point on. The changes were not always for the good.

**George (Tank) Telenko: I-1**

Remembering what I was doing the day President Kennedy was shot in Dallas is easy for me. I was stationed at Ft Hood, Texas a short four hour drive south of Dallas when President Kennedy was shot. I was a young Tank Platoon leader in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 67<sup>th</sup> Armor of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division. We had been on standby alert for deployment to Florida for over six months in preparation for the possible invasion of Cuba during the Cuba missile crisis. That alert status had been canceled and we were just getting familiar with living at home with our families and going through a normal scheduled day. We at that time were also preparing for the visit of President Kennedy the following day Saturday Nov 23<sup>rd</sup>.

I can remember plain as day getting the call from my wife Dana when I was in the troop barracks preparing for the visit by President Kennedy. She said "Honey the President had been shot"! It was hard for me to grasp the seriousness in her voice I kept asking her questions about the shooting. Where did it happen, when did it happen and ultimately what was the condition of the President? The only thing she knew was what she was seeing on TV which was the President had been rushed to the hospital and nobody knew his condition. I immediately ran to our day room and turned on the TV to see what was

going on. The room I was in filled up quickly and we all sat with our hearts in our hands wondering why this had happened and who had done it. About 30 minutes after we started watching the situation in Dallas our company received an alert to go to full combat alert status similar to what we had been in for the Cuban deployment and to start drawing weapons. We all assumed that the shooting of President Kennedy was a prelude to a full scale military invasion of the USA. While preparing for the alert we received word that the president Kennedy had died in Dallas and that the Vice President had been sworn in as the new President.

We remained in alert status the rest of that day and by evening were released back to our quarters. When I got home my wife was in tears and glued to the TV set reliving all the events surrounding the shooting of President Kennedy. It was extremely hard for us to accept his death after seeing him at graduation a little over a year before. It felt like I had lost a classmate. Since he was given a class ring and made a member of our class at graduation, accordingly he was unofficially the first member of our class to be killed performing his duty for the United States. "Can Do" Mr. President, may you rest in peace!



### **20 January 1961**

"And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country."

### **6 June 1962**

"But you have one satisfaction, however difficult those days may be: when you are asked by a President of the United States or by any other American what you are doing for your country, no man's answer will be clearer than your own."

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

14 June 1962

Dear Lieutenant Kirschenbauer:

I am fully aware of the distinction accorded me when you and your classmates made me an honorary member of the Class of 1962. Your own presentation talk made me feel that I was once again in uniform and starting out along with your classmates on a lifetime of duty which holds many challenges, and certainly many rich rewards. Through you, I want to thank the members of the class and assure them that I will be especially watchful of their accomplishments and their careers in the years to come. The class ring, with the engraved seal of the President of the United States, is a most handsome one which I shall treasure, and the beautiful silver humidor has a place of honor in my office.

No one can visit the United States Military Academy at graduation time and not be impressed with the Academy and its fine young men. From the moment I met the Cadet Guard of Honor until I looked down on Constitution Island and The Plain from the helicopter as I headed back to Washington, I enjoyed every minute of it. I drew from my visit a feeling of confidence in the dedication of the Long Grey Line, the instructors and leaders at West Point, and the cadets themselves.

Since the members of the class are by this time scattered around the world on leave or heading for their new assignments, I have asked General Westmoreland to publish this letter in the Assembly Magazine so that all of the class can know of my deep appreciation.

Sincerely,



## **EDITORIAL POSTSCRIPT**

I would like to thank our class scribe, Dave Phillips, as well as Walt Menning, Fred Bothwell and Brian McEnany for their encouragement to undertake this project as well as their invaluable practical suggestions and publishing support to a novice editor. I doff my hat to our classmates who were willing to share their personal experiences and thoughts and I hope their stories will now also form a part of their family histories. Most of all, I thank my wife, Louise, surely bored with listening to recitation of my own story, for suggesting that it would be much more interesting to hear what my classmates were doing on that fateful day.

Naturally all errors and omissions in this document are my responsibility. I have tried to limit my intervention in the individual stories to matters of obvious typos. I have particularly avoided 'political cleansing' except in a very few cases where a comment may have strayed significantly from the purpose of the collection. So there are plenty of strong opinions expressed in the stories and which, of course, I and all other persons associated with the creation and distribution of this document do not endorse.

This document will be available to members and friends of the Class of 1962 as well as to open websites affiliated, officially or unofficially, with the US Military Academy, the Class of 1962 or the Kennedy Library. It is also anticipated that a bound version will be available for order on Amazon in the near future with copyright registered in the name of United States Military Academy Class of 1962. Questions or comments may be directed to LOG1962JFK@aol.com until 31 December 2014.

Roy Degenhardt  
London, England  
March 2014

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