This Day in History… November 22, 1963

President Kennedy Killed



For many Americans, John F. Kennedy's administration gave hope for a better future.

On November 22, 1963, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated during a motorcade through Dallas, Texas. The visit was part of a two-day trip through five Texas cities, planned to build support for his 1964 campaign and bring rival Democrats together.

Kennedy's Texas trip began on November 21, with stops in San Antonio and Houston. The next morning, he spoke at a breakfast in Fort Worth before flying to Dallas. An Austin stop was planned for later that day. Kennedy's campaign team hoped the trip would strengthen his support in Texas, an important state in the coming election. It also offered a chance to ease divisions among Texas Democrats.

Kennedy and First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy arrived at Dallas Love Field shortly before noon. Their open-top Lincoln limousine joined a motorcade traveling about 10 miles through downtown toward the Dallas Trade Mart, where the president was scheduled to speak at a luncheon. At about 12:30 p.m., as the car passed through Dealey Plaza, shots were fired. Kennedy was taken to Parkland Memorial Hospital, where he was pronounced dead at 1 p.m. Texas Governor John Connally, who was riding in the car, was also seriously wounded.

Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson was at the airport when Kennedy was shot. He took the presidential oath aboard Air Force One before it left Dallas, with Jacqueline Kennedy beside him. Television and radio networks interrupted regular programming to report the assassination and provide updates. The public followed events over the next several days.



Stamp pictures Kennedy and the eternal flame at Arlington.

Dallas police arrested Lee Harvey Oswald that afternoon. He was charged with Kennedy's murder but never went to trial. On November 24, while police were transferring Oswald from the Dallas police station to the county jail, nightclub owner Jack Ruby shot and killed him in the station basement. The shooting was broadcast live on television.

Kennedy's funeral took place on November 25. His body was brought to Arlington National Cemetery, across the Potomac River from Washington, DC. Many people had expected him to be buried in Brookline, Massachusetts, where he was born and where his parents were buried. Jacqueline Kennedy wanted a gravesite accessible to the public. She discussed the location with Robert F. Kennedy and Defense Secretary Robert McNamara. They selected a hillside overlooking Washington, between Arlington House and the Lincoln Memorial.



Johnson was sworn in as President immediately following Kennedy's death. He later passed the 1964 Civil Rights Act in Kennedy's honor.

The first gravesite was a temporary plot measuring 20 by 30 feet, enclosed by a white picket fence. At Mrs. Kennedy's request, Army Corps of Engineers workers created a temporary eternal flame in time for the funeral. On November 25, she lit it with a candle. The flame was later moved to a permanent burner.

Crowds soon made the small site difficult to manage. During the first year, as many as 3,000 people per hour visited, with an estimated 50,000 visitors on some weekends. A permanent design was commissioned from architect John Carl Warnecke. It made room for visitors while keeping the burial area simple. Kennedy's grave is marked by a low stone set into the ground. A circular granite stone at its head supports the eternal flame, and fieldstones surround the grave area.



Stamp issued for JFK's 100th birthday in 2017.

Kennedy and the remains of two of his children were quietly moved to the permanent gravesite on March 14, 1967. Cardinal Richard Cushing blessed the site the next morning. Construction was completed on July 20, 1967. Arlington National Cemetery reports that more than 16 million people had visited Kennedy's original grave by the time it was moved. His gravesite remains a prominent stop for visitors to the cemetery.

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