

A STATE FUNERAL



Monday November 25, 1963

The **state funeral of John F. Kennedy** took place in Washington, D.C. During the three days that followed his assassination on Friday, November 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas.

The body of Kennedy was brought to Washington and placed in the East Room of the White House for 24



President Kennedy was brought back to Washington and placed in the East Room of the White House for 24 hours.

On the Sunday after the assassination, his flag-draped coffin was carried on a horse-drawn caisson to the U.S. Capitol to lie in state. Throughout the day and night, hundreds of thousands lined up to view the guarded casket.



Representatives from over 90 countries attended the state funeral on Monday, November 25.¹ After the Requiem Mass at St. Matthew's Cathedral, the late president was buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia. Kennedy is the most recent president to have died in office.

A Mass was said in the East Room at 10:30 a.m. on Saturday, November 23. After that, other family members, friends, and other government officials came at specified times to pay their respects, including former U.S. Presidents Truman and Eisenhower (The other surviving former U.S. president at the time, Herbert Hoover, was too ill to attend, and was represented by his sons. Herbert Hoover Jr. attended the funeral, while Allan Hoover went to the services in the rotunda; Hoover died 11 months afterward,¹ and too, lay in state.

Kennedy lay where; nearly one hundred years earlier, Lincoln had lain. An honor guard and two priests stood vigil over his remains. The honor guard included troops from the 3rd Infantry and

from the Army's Special Forces (Green Berets) The Special Forces troops had been brought hurriedly from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, at the request of Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, who was aware of his brother's particular interest in them.



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The catafalque upon which the remains rested was the same one used in 1958 during the funerals of the Unknown Soldiers from the Korean War and World War II at Arlington.

Outside the White House and in Lafayette Park, across the street from the White House, crowds stood in the rain, keeping a vigil and paying quiet respects. It rained all day in Washington, befitting the mood of the nation.

NBC broadcast uninterrupted coverage of the people passing through the Capitol rotunda during the overnight hours. While anchoring the *Today* show from an NBC Washington studio the next day, Hugh Downs said that the mass numbers made it "the greatest and most solemn wake in history. CBS Washington correspondent Roger Mudd said of the mass numbers: "This outpouring of affection and sympathy for the late president is probably the most majestic and stately ceremony the American people can perform." Jersey Joe Walcott, a former heavyweight boxing champion, passed by the bier at 2:30 a.m., and agreed with Mudd, saying of Kennedy, "He was a great man."

On Sunday afternoon about 300,000 people watched a horse-drawn caisson, which had borne the body of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Unknown Soldier, carry Kennedy's flag-covered casket down the White House drive, past parallel rows of soldiers bearing the flags of the 50 states of the Union, then along Pennsylvania Avenue to the Capitol Rotunda to lie in state. The only sounds on Pennsylvania Avenue as the cortège made its way to the Capitol were the sounds of the muffled drums and the clacking of horses' hooves, including the riderless horse Black Jack

In the only public viewing, hundreds of thousands lined up in near-freezing temperatures to view the casket. Over the span of 18 hours, 250,000 people, some waiting for as long as 10 hours in a line that stretched 40 blocks up to 10 persons wide over nearly 10 miles personally paid their respects as Kennedy's body lay in state. Capitol police officers politely reminded mourners to keep moving along in two lines that passed on either side of the casket and exited the building on the west side facing the National Mall.

The original plan was for the rotunda to close at 9:00 p.m. and reopen for an hour at 9:00 the next morning. Because of long lines however, police and military authorities decided to keep the doors open. At 9:00 p.m., when the rotunda was supposed to close, both Jacqueline Kennedy and Robert F. Kennedy returned to the rotunda again. More than half the mourners came to the rotunda after 2:45 a.m., by which time 115,000 had already visited.

Approximately one million people lined the route of the funeral procession, from the Capitol back to the White House, then to St. Matthew's Cathedral, and finally to Arlington National Cemetery. Millions more—almost the entire population of America—followed the funeral on television. Those who watched the funeral on

television were the only ones who saw the ceremonies in its entirety. The three networks, [ABC](#), CBS, and NBC, used at least 50 cameras for the joint coverage in order to allow viewers to follow the proceedings in their entirety from the Capitol to Arlington. In addition, the networks' Washington bureau chiefs (Bob Fleming at ABC, [Bill Monroe](#) at NBC, and Bill Small at CBS) moved correspondents and cameras to keep them ahead of the cortège.

NBC transmitted coverage of the procession from the White House to the cathedral by satellite to twenty-three countries, including Japan and the Soviet Union,^[92] allowing hundreds of millions on both sides of the [Iron Curtain](#) in [Europe](#) to watch the funeral. However, satellite coverage ended when the coffin went into the cathedral. In the Soviet Union, their commentators said that "the grief of the Soviet people mingles with the grief of the American people."^[116] However, there was no coverage in East Germany, where television audiences had only a soccer match to watch.^[116]







JFK ETERNAL FLAME

