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Kennedy Remembered — With Flowers, Reflections

By SARA FRITZ, Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON—There were no official government ceremonies, no speeches by the President and no proclamations from Congress marking the 25th anniversary of President John F. Kennedy's death Tuesday, but that did not discourage thousands of American citizens and foreign visitors from visiting his grave or reflecting on the way his life had touched theirs.

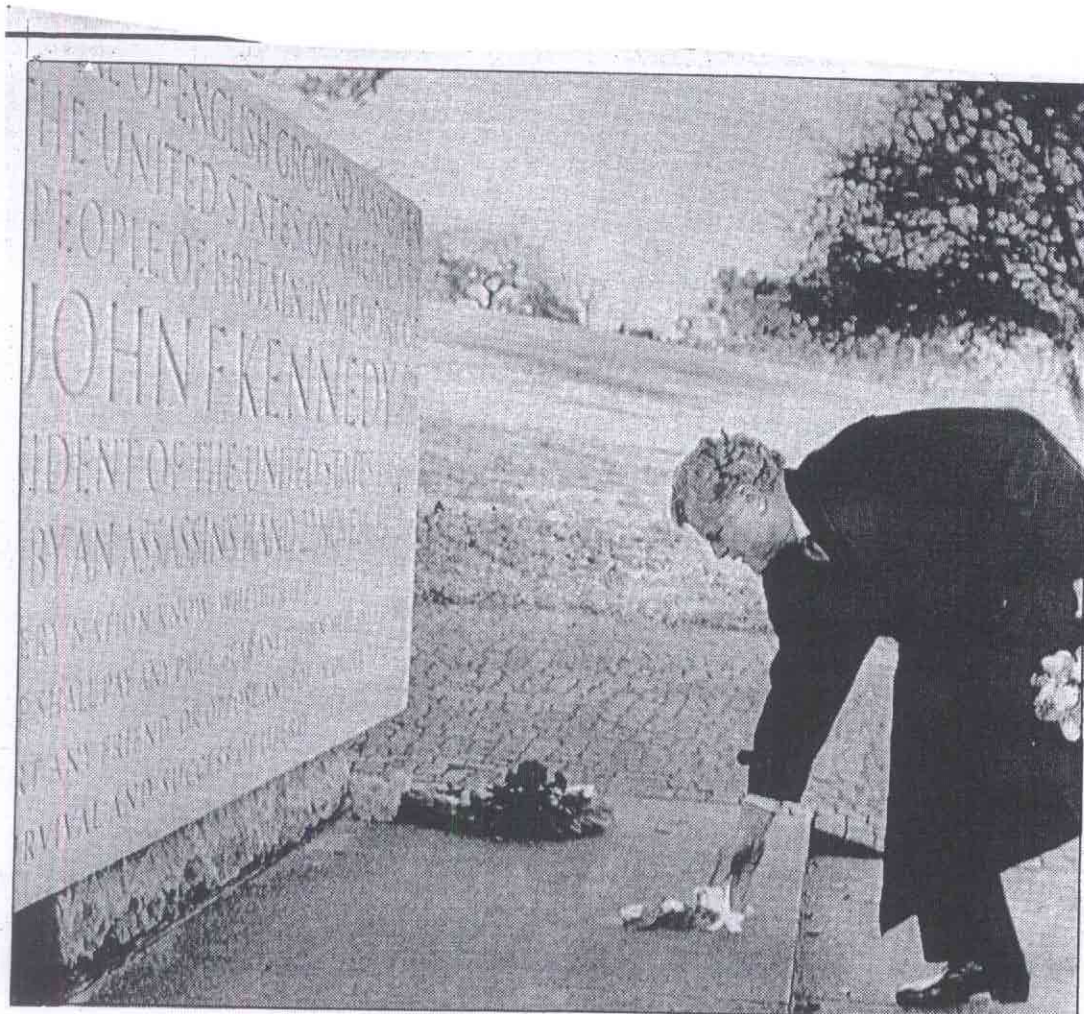
Only two members of Kennedy's family, his sister Eunice Kennedy Shriver and his sister-in-law Ethel, joined the long stream of visitors who bowed their heads or laid flowers at Kennedy's grave site at Arlington National Cemetery. Most of the Kennedys now prefer to honor him instead on his birthday,

May 29.

"We think it's extremely important to celebrate the life of President Kennedy rather than the tragedy," explained Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.), the late President's only surviving brother. The senator nevertheless took a few minutes away from a visit to London to offer up a prayer and a single white rose at the British memorial to Kennedy in Runnymede, England.

Neither Kennedy's widow, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, nor either of her two children, John and Caroline, made any public appearances. According to a spokesman, however, all three attended a pri-

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Associated Press

Memories—Sen. Edward M. Kennedy places a rose at the memorial to his brother in Runnymede, England. There were no official

ceremonies on the 25th anniversary of John F. Kennedy's death, but thousands of people honored his memory. (Story on Page 1)

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Associated Press

Ethel Kennedy kneels at the grave of President Kennedy in Arlington National Cemetery.

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ate Mass at St. Thomas More's Roman Catholic Church in New York City.

By the end of the day, Kennedy's grave at Arlington was smothered with flowers—huge funeral bouquets as well as single stems. Kennedy's secretary, Evelyn Lincoln, came as she does every year with three roses to place on the marker, and members of Kennedy's White House staff brought a bouquet of 46 roses, one for each year of his life.

The Kennedy staff as well as former members of the Peace Corps and the Green Berets—two groups that were created during the Kennedy era and still identify with the slain President—were responsible for the only religious observances in Washington on Tuesday. At noon, former Peace Corps members also completed a 24-hour vigil at the Capitol Rotunda.

All of these events were unusual for their simplicity and the absence of political speech-making. Unlike most such historic occasions in the nation's capital, no top officials of the current Administration spoke at any of these events. In fact, President Reagan, President-elect George Bush and most members of Congress were out of town.

Dallas Remembers

In Dallas, as well, the day was remembered by many people in a quiet, personal way. Kennedy admirers of all ages swarmed Dealey Plaza, where the President was shot as he waved to the crowds from an open limousine. Twenty people clasped hands along the motorcade route and others left flowers on the street.

Particularly for the Green Berets, and perhaps for many others as well, the 25th anniversary was viewed as the last time they would return to the grave site annually to mark Kennedy's death. The Green Berets have been asked by members of the Kennedy family to change their annual observance to his birthday.

Dennis O'Connell, a Treasury official and former Army intelligence officer who attended the Green Beret service, said that in the minds of many Americans the 25th anniversary is a time to commit Kennedy's death to histo-

ry, instead of reliving it every year. "For many people, it brings a kind of closure," he said. "It seems like a long time ago."

Indeed, many mourners marveled at how much time had passed since Nov. 22, 1963—a day that is still so vivid in their memories. Although Kennedy is remembered as a young, vibrant leader, the former Green Berets who laid their wreath at the grave—many of them Kennedy's contemporaries—were paunchy men with thinning hair.

Father Theodore O. Hesburgh, president emeritus of the University of Notre Dame, who is 71, noted in his homily during the Peace Corps service at St. Matthew's Cathedral that the young President Kennedy was born just four days after his own birthday and would probably have white hair if he were still alive.

Heartbeat of Nation

When Kennedy died, Hesburgh recalled, "the heartbeat of a nation stood still." If Kennedy had lived, Hesburgh speculated, he would have told the Peace Corps audience: "You are the people who delivered the message I gave to the world . . . you are the people who carried the Kennedy Camelot across the years."

In their remarks, those delivering Kennedy's eulogy openly scoffed at the notion held by many historians that he was actually an overrated President whose untimely death generated a myth that far exceeded the record of his Administration.

Former Gen. Michael Healy, who spoke at the Green Beret service at Arlington, dismissed these historians as "pseudo-intellectuals who would gain fame by depreciating his legacy." He added: "When they try to make idealism an unsophisticated thing, they fall so short of the mark."

But the most poignant recollections came from those who never knew Kennedy, or perhaps met him only once—people whose lives were affected by joining the Peace Corps, by serving in the Green Berets or simply by the news that Kennedy was dead.

John Coyne, a former Peace Corps volunteer, was one such man who recalled shaking hands with Kennedy during a White House

ceremony he attended before taking up his duties in Ethiopia more than 25 years ago.

He said that when he later told an elderly Ethiopian man about his encounter with the President, the man instantly grabbed him and insisted upon "shaking the hand that shook the hand of John F. Kennedy."

In fact, some of those who mourned Kennedy on Tuesday—men and women like retired Army Col. William Grieves and Jean Hill—knew him only in death. Grieves, who attended the Green Beret memorial service, had commanded the honor guard at Kennedy's funeral and recalled that he had too few men under his command for such an important task. Hill, who witnessed the slaying, took her 50 students to the assassination site in Dallas.

Another picture on Page 2.