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A silver day of remembrance

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WASHINGTON — Twenty-five years ago, Chas Ricci was a 10-year-old boy standing by his father's side on a chilly hill in Arlington National Cemetery, watching as the body of John F. Kennedy disappeared into the earth.

"Angry at the world" is how Ricci remembers his father after the Kennedy assassination. Ricci's father ordered him to put on a suit, then bundled him into the car and drove from northern New Jersey to Washington on

Nov. 24, 1963, to pay homage to the fallen president.

That night they stood outside the Capitol until two in the morning, hoping to get in to file past the body, but the crowd was too big. They slept in the car, and early in the morning of the 25th they drove across the Potomac River to the cemetery to witness the pain of the day.

"I remember them presenting the flag to Mrs. Kennedy," Ricci said yesterday. "I remember the planes flying overhead. The cannon salute and the soldier playing taps."

Ricci, now 35 years old and an accountant in Morris Plains, N.J., returned yesterday to

that scene of his youth with the thousands of others who came to the constant, eternal flame that now marks the Kennedy grave.

Around the country, as those memories were rekindled on the 25th anniversary of the assassination, the Kennedy family stayed away from the public ceremonies and asked others not to emphasize Nov. 22 as the day to remember Kennedy.

"The family prefers to refocus the commemoration of President Kennedy's life on his birthday [May 29, 1917] rather than on the date of his assassination," said Melody Miller, a spokeswoman for Sen. Edward M. Kennedy

(See JFK on 4-A)

JFK, from 1-A

(D., Mass.) who also speaks for the Kennedy family.

Miller said the family "will have a low-keyed, private day."

Sen. Kennedy has usually visited the grave on Nov. 22, but yesterday he was in Britain to lay a white rose at a memorial to his brother in Runnymede, where King John signed the Magna Carta in 1215.

"We think it's extremely important to celebrate the life of President Kennedy rather than the tragedy," the senator said.

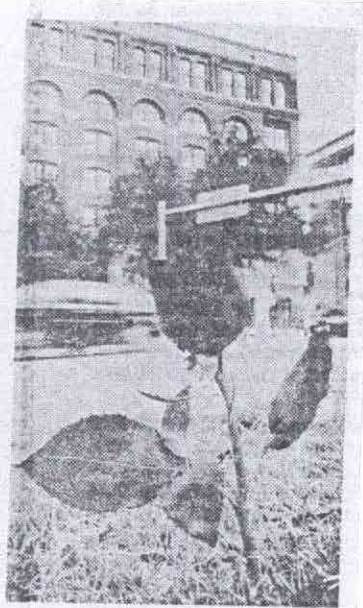
Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and her two children, Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg, 30, and John Jr., 27, attended a private Mass at St. Thomas More's Roman Catholic Church in New York City.

Shortly after 8 a.m. yesterday, Ethel Kennedy, the widow of Robert F. Kennedy, arrived alone at the grave of the president, knelt and placed a bouquet of flowers on the slabs of Massachusetts marble that form the grave marker.

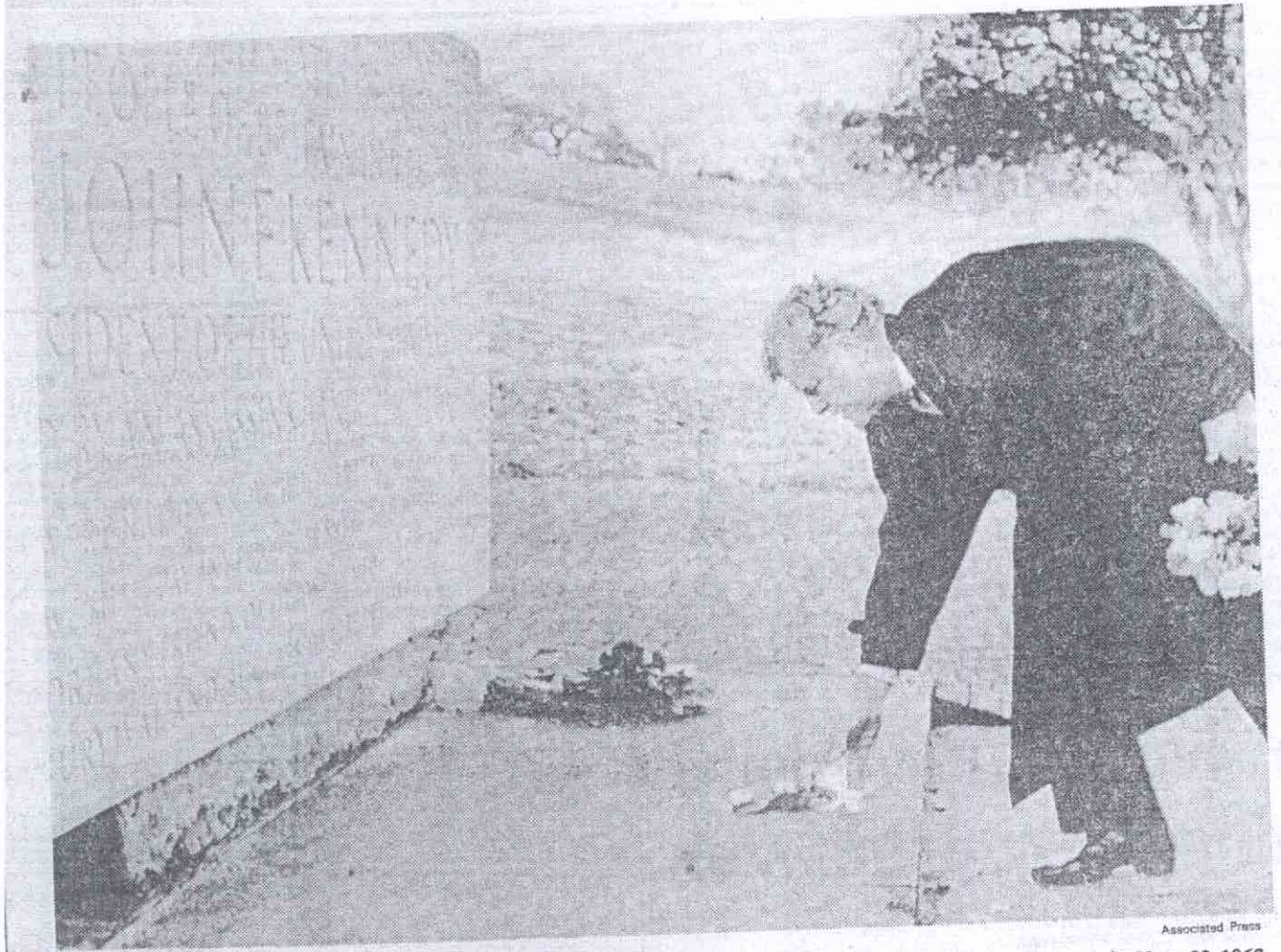
She then took a single rose from the bouquet and walked over the hill to the grave of her husband — assassinated in June 1968 — where she knelt and left the flower.

"I think for the family it's a private moment," she said. "It's a wonderful outpouring of love."

Eunice Kennedy Shriver, the presi-



A rose placed beside JFK's route
Book depository is in background



Associated Press

At Runnymede, England, Sen. Edward M. Kennedy places a white rose at memorial to his brother, slain Nov. 22, 1963.

dent's sister, and her husband, Sargent Shriver, also made an early morning visit to Arlington.

Throughout the day, thousands of visitors came to the grave and many left flowers.

One group that left flowers was a contingent from the Special Forces Association, which has visited Kennedy's grave on every anniversary of his death to remember the president who empowered the force, commonly known as the Green Berets. But one member of the group said that — at the request of the Kennedy family — the association would no longer officially mark Nov. 22.

The only Kennedy family member to attend an official event was Sargent Shriver, who served in the Kennedy administration as the first director of the Peace Corps.

He took part yesterday in two events sponsored by the National Council of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers — a 24-hour vigil in the rotunda of the Capitol, where Kennedy's body had lain in state, and a 1 p.m. Mass at St. Matthew's Cathedral, where the funeral service for the president was held.

At both the Mass and the vigil, where former corps members read from journals they kept while serving around the world, the Peace Corps was described as the living embodiment of Kennedy's spirit.

"John Kennedy spoke to my generation of service and sharing," said Bill Moyers, who was Shriver's deputy during the Kennedy administration and is now a television correspondent and commentator.

"There is no man who does not have his time and no time that does not have a leader," Moyers said, paraphrasing the Talmud in his eulogy at the memorial service. "Sometimes the wait may seem eternal. But John Kennedy was right on time and we responded."

To the north, in Boston, on a cloudless, blue day, the flag flew at half-staff outside the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library. In the lobby, there was a simple arrangement of more than two dozen red roses. Those were the only signs that the day carried special meaning.

The library was expecting as many as 1,500 people to visit, double the usual number. The mood was subdued, reflective. Its director, Charles Daly, had barred the press from the grounds.

"Our purpose," he said in a statement, "will be to focus entirely on serving those who come here in a spirit of quiet remembrance and on ensuring that they encounter as little distraction as possible."

No special events or programs had been planned. Deputy Curator Frank Rigg said the library was supporting the Kennedy family's request that the president's birthdate — and not his assassination — be the focus of public attention.

"It's the library's judgment that this is not the day for a lot of activity," he explained.

In Kennedy's home town of Brookline, the anniversary was also being observed simply.

At the restored, yellow-shuttered house where the president was born, the National Park Service was giving free tours.

"With everything that's been on TV lately, it's been difficult," supervisor Leslie Obleschuk said. "I didn't want to emphasize the sad aspects."

A tape recording of Rose Kennedy speaking about memories of each room played as visitors entered the 2½-story green house. The 98-year-old matriarch spent the day at the family compound in Hyannisport.

More than the usual number of weekday visitors went to the historic site. Robert Habeeb and his son Scott were among those who stopped to pay their respects.

"I thought it would be a good day to come," said Scott, a Boston College student who turned 20 yesterday. Some left their thoughts in the guest book. Wrote Edward Carpenter of Needham, Mass.: "Our innocence ended 25 years ago today. We will never be the same."

In Dallas, hundreds of people gathered around the Dealey Plaza site where Kennedy was shot.

A line of two dozen people stood on a plaza curb across from the Texas School Book Depository Building, holding hands. They grew silent as their watches moved toward 12:30 p.m., the moment 25 years ago when the shots rang out.

"He'd be 71 now? Yeah," murmured Dennis Pfeifer, 25, as he hugged his wife Deborah Pfeifer, 24.

"Isn't that strange," she responded. "He seems frozen in time."

A few minutes past 12:30, Joann Moscatti of Buffalo, N.Y., darted from the crowd into heavily traveled Elm Street. She placed a borrowed bouquet at the spot where Kennedy was first hit.

Traffic stopped, and soon a knot of about 100 people pressed in a circle around a small section of Elm Street,

protected from passing cars by Dallas police on horseback.

Roses were tossed down next to Moscatti's bouquet, then two Kennedy half dollars and two commemorative newspaper sections.

Alvin Marin, 52, of Farmer's Branch, Texas, carefully laid down his sterling silver crucifix — the same one he had clutched impulsively 25 years ago when he heard the news of the assassination.

"I guess of all presidents, he did so much for the minorities, the underclass" Marin said. "That's the reason I come here every year."

Yesterday at Parkland Memorial Hospital, where Kennedy was taken and pronounced dead, Chaplain Ben Breitreuz read the closing paragraphs of the Thanksgiving 1963 proclamation that Kennedy never got to deliver.

In the text, Kennedy prayed for God "to sustain us in the great unfinished tasks of achieving peace, justice and understanding among all men and nations."

"It feels like a piece of all of us died when he died," Breitreuz said after the memorial. "He was a profound person."



Associated Press

Eunice Kennedy Shriver and Sargent Shriver pray at grave.