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ACM

THE JOINT CASNET BEARER TEAM

The Joint Casnet Team consisted of one officer, one NCO and seven enlisted men (from each branch of the Armed Forces). The casnet team was trained to carry the casnet to and from the ceremony sites and to fold the flag which draped the casnet following the interment service. They moved in cadence as a single unit, keeping the casnet level and at waist height, maintaining dignity and solemnity.

The casnet team transferred the remains from the Air Force Aircraft #1 to an ambulance at 1310 hours, 22 November 1963. They moved the remains as follows:

1. From the ambulance to the morgue (Bethesda) 2000 hours, 22 Nov 63.
2. Morgue to Hearse (Bethesda) 0350 hours, 23 Nov 63.
3. Hearse to White House 0430 hours, 23 Nov 63.
4. White House to Caisson 1100 hours, 24 Nov 63.
5. Caisson to Capitol 1200 hours, 24 Nov 63.
6. Capitol to Caisson 1035 hours, 25 Nov 63.
7. Caisson to St. Matthew's Cathedral 1200 hours, 25 Nov 63.
8. St. Matthew's Cathedral to Caisson 1317 hours 25 Nov 63.
9. Caisson to Grave site 1447 hours, 25 Nov 63.

Estimated weight of casnet without the President's body was 800 lbs.

Recommendation -- Army Commendation Medal

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MD 163

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COMPANY E (HONOR GUARD)
1ST BATTALION (REINF) 3D INFANTRY (THE OLD GUARD)
Fort Myer, Virginia 22211

10 December 1963

SUBJECT: After action report, joint casket team-state funeral,
President John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

THRU: Commanding Officer
Honor Guard Company
1st Battalion (Reinf) 3d Infantry
Fort Myer, Virginia 22211

TO: Commanding Officer
1st Battalion (Reinf) 3d Infantry
Fort Myer, Virginia 22211

1. Phase one (1)--Andrews Air Force Base, Maryland

5-30
A. At approximately 1700 hours, 22 November 1963, I boarded an H-21 helicopter at Fort Myer with an eight (8) man Army casket team. Upon landing at Andrews Air Force Base at approximately 1730 hours, I reported to Captain Patton, special events officer, Military District of Washington, while Sgt. Felder, NCOIC, marched the team to an area just outside the Air Force cordon.

B. Captain Patton instructed me to be prepared to take three courses of action. First, that the all Army casket team would remove the remains from the presidential aircraft. Second, that a joint armed forces casket team would be formed if personnel from the other services arrived prior to the arrival of the aircraft. Third, that the presidential aircraft had radioed that Secret Service agents aboard the aircraft would remove the President's casket.

C. The second plan was placed in action as representatives from each service arrived prior to the aircraft landing. I formed two (2) joint service teams of six (6) men each. One would accompany me on a bed lift truck and secure the remains from the aircraft and place it on the truck. The bed would be lowered and the second team would remove the remains from the truck and place it in either an ambulance or helicopter.

D. Immediately after the aircraft landed and the truck moved up to the aircraft, I reported to Brigadier General McLaugh, President Kennedy's Air Force aide. He then ordered me to have my men clear the area and also informed me that the Secret Service would

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move the casket from the aircraft. I was assisted by men who descended from the truck by a ladder on the side. Seeing that the casket was being poorly handled, I had two (2) men remain with me in place on the truck. We assisted General McHugh and the agents until they had the casket out of the aircraft.

E. The casket was made of solid bronze and was extremely heavy. Mrs. Kennedy, Mr. Robert Kennedy, and their party moved onto the bed of the truck which then descended to the bottom level.

F. The Second casket team was positioned at the left side of the truck and as it moved forward to secure the casket was disrupted by a host of agents moving forward pushing the team out of the way. The agents then placed the casket in an awaiting Navy ambulance.

G. I also placed a joint eight (8) man Army, Air Force cordon leading to the entrance of President Johnson's helicopter. These men were troops left over after the two (2) joint teams were formed.

H. After the ambulance bearing the President's body left the airfield, I took one (1) of the joint casket teams and boarded Major General Wehle's H-21 helicopter. The remainder of the Army troops boarded another H-21 helicopter also standing by. Both helicopters then flew to Bethesda Naval Hospital, Maryland.

2. Phase two (2)—Bethesda Naval Hospital, Maryland

A. At approximately 1845 hours, the aircraft landed at the Naval Hospital heliport. Within a few minutes the ambulance bearing the president's body arrived at the hospital. An attempt was made to place a six (6) man Army cordon at the front entrance of the hospital for Mrs. Kennedy. Due to a tremendous crowd which impeded the placement of the cordon this was not able to be accomplished. After considerable confusion as to where the President's body would be taken the joint casket team removed the casket from the ambulance at the rear entrance in the rear of the hospital.

B. While the casket was being moved inside the hospital, Brigadier General McHugh relieved YN/2 Barnum, USCG, from the casket team and awardly took his place. After the President's body had been removed from the casket, a mahogany casket was exchanged for the original bronze one. This was necessary because the bronze casket had been scratched and marred from its being poorly handled. A handle on the side was also broken.

C. As soon as the body was taken into the mortuary the casket team acted as guards immediately outside the two entrances to the room in which the autopsy was being performed. A detachment of Marines were also sent to the area as a security detail and aided the casket team with its security responsibilities. By direction of Major General Wehle, Commanding General of Military District of Washington, Sergeant Felder, Sp/4 Mayfield, or the undersigned was to be at the main entrance to the room during the entire period the president's body was inside. Throughout the night I kept in contact with Captain Gray, Battalion S-2, and relayed all information available from the hospital.

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D. It approximately 0400 hours, 23 November 1963, I conducted a ceremony which placed the United States flag over the casket. The casket was then placed in a Navy ambulance. The casket team was included in the official cortège which escorted the remains to the White House.

3. Phase three (3)—The White House

A. At 0428 hours, the cortège entered the northwest drive at the White House. The team then removed the casket from the ambulance and laid it to rest in the east room. Following a short service and Mrs. Kennedy's exit from the room, the death watch was posted and we returned to Fort Myer.

B. Throughout the day the team trained, rehearsed, and practiced for the sad duties we were to perform the following two days. Two additional men were added to the team due to the tremendous weight of the casket. It was reported by the press to have weighed in excess of 1,300 pounds.

C. At 1300 hours, 24 November 1963, I directed the team to remove the casket from the east room and place it on the horse-drawn caisson for the march to the Capitol. The team marched behind the caisson during the procession to the Capitol.

4. Phase four (4)—Movement to U.S. Capitol and following rehearsals.

A. After honors were rendered at the base of the Capitol steps, we carried the casket up the center of the steps, through the bronze doors and to the catafalque under the rotunda. Being relieved by the death watch we returned to Fort Myer for further rehearsal.

B. That evening we went to St. Matthew's Cathedral for a briefing by Captain McManera, site control officer. I was instructed that on the following day we would be propositioned at the cathedral prior to the arrival of the funeral procession. On Captain McManera's command we were to remove the casket from the caisson, hold it in place while Cardinal Cushing gave it his blessings. Then move it forward into the cathedral and place it on a catafalque before the altar. Following the service we were to remove the casket from the catafalque and carry it to the door, holding it in place while honors were rendered to it. Next descend down the stairs and stop to again receive the Cardinal's blessings. Finally, lift it up and place it on the caisson.

C. It appeared to me that very little consideration had been given to the tremendous weight of the casket during the planning stages of the funeral. A good indication of this were those plans we received at the cathedral. During the movement of the casket it required every ounce of strength that all nine of us could muster to move the casket in an appropriate and respectful manner.

D. I recommended that a "church truck" replace the catafalque for three reasons. First, the distance from the street to the resting place before the altar was great and the physical burden of the heavy casket could be reduced by the casket being rolled instead of carried. Second, there was not sufficient room near the altar to reverse the direction of the casket to allow the body to be removed feet first. A

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"church truck" could be pivoted in place eliminating this problem. Third, the casket could remain on the church truck while honors were being rendered immediately prior to removing the casket from the cathedral. This would greatly assist us by eliminating the burden of weight for the period honors were being rendered.

E. It was not until the following morning at Arlington National Cemetery that I was told by Lt. Colonel Cross, C.C. 3d Infantry, that my recommendations had been approved. From my conversation with Major General Wehle and Lt. Colonel Cross prior to the grave-site rehearsal I got the impression that my recommendations had been reviewed and approved the preceding evening. I felt that there had been a weakness in passing this information on down to the casket team.

F. After leaving the cathedral, we went to the steps leading to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery to rehearse moving the casket down the front steps of the Capitol. Also the following morning we rehearsed the grave-site service prior to being escorted to the Capitol.

5. Phase five (5)—Movement from the Capitol to the Cathedral and grave-site.

A. On command from Captain Smith, Capitol Site Control Officer, at 1027 hours, 25 November 1963, the casket team followed the death watch in the rotunda. Following a visit by the President's immediate family, we removed the casket from the catafalque. Honors were rendered while the casket was held in place at the top of the steps. During the rendering of honors, I had PMSG Sharp, NSCIC at the rotunda, assist us in holding the casket. When the honors were completed, we carried the casket down the steps and placed it on the caisson. Immediately following, we boarded an Army bus and were escorted to St. Matthew's Cathedral by elements of the armed forces police.

B. At the cathedral we executed the actions that Captain McManara briefed me on the previous evening with the exception of being modified by the recommendations that I had made and had been approved.

C. After we placed the casket on the caisson we positioned ourselves with four (4) men on each side of the caisson and myself in the rear, centered on the casket. We marched in this formation from the cathedral to the cemetery.

D. When the procession stopped at the grave site, I stepped to the side of the caisson to let Major Converse, OIC grave site, assume command of the casket team. I also informed him that the man would need his assistance in carrying the casket to the grave. He then instructed me to remain with the team. Following the playing of our National Anthem, we removed the casket from the caisson, carried it to the grave, and placed it on the lowering device. The top of the casket was then lowered approximately one (1) foot above ground level and the flag pulled tight above. Following the service the flag was folded and presented to Mr. John C. Motzler, superintendent of Arlington National Cemetery, by Sp/4 Magfield. Mr. Motzler in turn presented the flag in behalf of the nation to Mrs. Kennedy. The team remained in place until the family, the many visiting

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heads of state, and distinguished guests had departed. We then rendered final honors to the late President and returned to New York.

6.

Personnel

A. Members of the cadret team were selected from each branch of service and included the following personnel:

ARMY

1st Lt. Samuel R. Bird	OIC
Sgt. James L. Falder	NOIC
Sy/4 Douglas Mayfield	

USMC

I/Cpl. Timothy Cheek
PFC Jerry J. Diamond

Navy

SA Larry B. Smith -
SA Hubert Clark

USAF

S/Cgt. Richard W. Caudreau

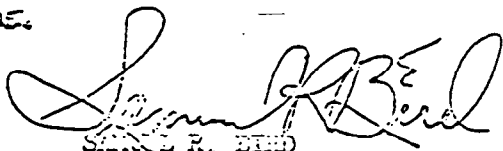
USMC

YN/2 George A. Parnun

NOTE: Pfc Diamond and SA Smith were added to the team prior to the movement of the remains from the White House to the Capitol on 21 November 1963.

B. All through my dealings with these men I found them to have a strong spirit of cooperation. They quickly formed into one close team without any selfishness of their own particular branch of service, but with the desire of giving their very best as a combined defense team. The superior manner in which they performed their duty reflected not only their individual respect for the man they honored, but also the respect of the millions of men and women in the armed forces they represented. I found they possessed a tremendous sense of pride and honor in having been selected for the assignment they so ably performed.

C. I strongly recommend that these men be highly commended for the superior manner they accomplished their mission. They won the respect and admiration of the entire nation in performing with flawless military precision, giving dignity and honor to our late Commander-in-Chief during a time of sorrow for all Americans.



SAMUEL R. BIRD

1st Lt. Infantry

OIC - Joint Service Cadret Team

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