

DISTINGUISHED MEMBER OF THE SPECIAL FORCES REGIMENT



**PRESIDENT
JOHN F. KENNEDY**
*President of the United States
Posthumous*

Inducted April 11, 2025



John Fitzgerald Kennedy was born in Brookfield, Massachusetts, on May 29, 1917, to a prominent family. After graduating from Harvard in 1940, he served in the U.S. Navy during World War II, famously captaining PT-109, which was sunk by a Japanese destroyer. Despite being injured, Kennedy was instrumental in saving his crew, for which he earned the Purple Heart and Navy and Marine Corps Medal (equivalent to the Army's Soldier's Medal). After World War II, Kennedy entered politics. He successfully ran for Congress (Massachusetts) in 1946. He served three terms in the House of Representatives before being elected to the U.S. Senate in 1952.

In 1960, Senator Kennedy ran for President, and defeated the Republican challenger, Vice President Richard M. Nixon. Kennedy was sworn in as the nation's 35th President on Jan. 20, 1961. Kennedy immediately faced dire challenges. During his presidency, he navigated the Berlin Crisis, the Bay of Pigs Invasion and subsequent Cuban Missile Crisis, and Communist-inspired 'wars of national liberation' in South America and Southeast Asia.

A veteran who had seen the destruction caused by a global war, President Kennedy's military strategy focused on a doctrine of "flexible response." This policy, which differed from the previous national strategy centered on massive nuclear retaliation, allowed for scalable options in the event of conflict. Flexible response was designed to prevent miscalculations that could lead to global nuclear war. Therefore, President Kennedy embraced the lower-risk options offered by special warfare.

President Kennedy was a proponent of Special Forces in particular. As a symbol for his support, he was instrumental in formalizing the official wear of the Green Beret. This monumental event with former Brig. Gen. William P. Yarborough has been commemorated with a bronze statue that resides outside Kennedy Hall at the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School located at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. It depicts the Oct. 12, 1961 review of Special Forces Soldiers by President Kennedy at McKellar's Pond.

President Kennedy's support for Special Forces endured throughout his administration. In April 1962, President Kennedy described the Green Beret as "a symbol of excellence, a badge of courage, a mark of distinction in the fight for freedom." In his commencement address at the United States Military Academy on June 6, 1962, he reinforced the importance of Special Forces and emphasized the Army's need to be prepared to conduct special warfare.

President Kennedy was assassinated on Nov. 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas. At the request of the Kennedy family, Special Forces Soldiers guarded the President's body as it lay in state and served in Kennedy's funeral procession on Nov. 25, 1963. Command Sergeant Major Francis J. Ruddy, notably placed a Green Beret, crest forward, at the foot of JFK's grave. Ruddy explained, "He gave the beret to us, and we considered it appropriate that it be given back to him."

In honor of the fallen President, in 1964, the U.S. Army Special Warfare Center was renamed the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Center for Special Warfare, additionally the 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) added a black border to their beret flash.