



## Inauguration Parade Memories 1961

Our Naval Academy Class of 1963 was linked with John F. Kennedy in several ways. Perhaps the first was marching in his Inauguration Parade on that cold January 20, 1961. Nearly one million people in the nation's capital braved the subfreezing temperatures to catch a glimpse of the new President – we had a close-up look. Here are a few of our classmate's memories remaining 64 years later, January 20, 2025<sup>1</sup>.



**Mike Shelley (4<sup>th</sup> Co):** Looking to confirm the temperature on the day we marched in JFK's inaugural parade, I found this web site:

[https://www.weather.gov/lwx/events\\_Inauguration](https://www.weather.gov/lwx/events_Inauguration)

**Worst Traffic Jam - 1961:** On the eve of the inauguration, 8 inches of snow fell and caused the most crippling traffic jam (for its time). Hundreds of cars were marooned and thousands of cars were abandoned. The president-elect had to cancel dinner

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<sup>1</sup> Graduation companies are shown after the name, not our plebe/youngster year company of 1959-1961.

plans and, in a struggle to keep other commitments, is reported to have had only 4 hours of sleep. Former President Herbert Hoover was unable to fly into Washington National Airport due to the weather and he had to miss the swearing-in ceremony. By sunrise, the snow had ended and the skies were clearing, but the day remained bitter cold. An army of men worked all night to clear Pennsylvania Avenue and despite the cold, a large crowd turned out for the swearing-in ceremony and inaugural parade. At noon, the temperature was only 22°F and the wind was blowing from the northwest at 19 mph making it feel like the temperature was 7°F above zero.

**John Kelly (1<sup>st</sup> Co):** The only inauguration I was invited to (actually, commanded to) was the 1961 Kennedy event. The entire brigade of USNA midshipmen were to march in the parade and we actually rehearsed once or twice in advance, as if we hadn't been marching in formal parades before. It didn't help.

There was a big storm on the east coast the night before. To get us from Annapolis to D.C. buses had been chartered from all over the east coast. Because of the storm, only about half the buses made it to Annapolis. So the decision was made to send half the brigade, one regiment. I was in the unlucky regiment chosen to go. It was a Friday and Monday was the start of exam week and I wasn't feeling particularly strong in all subjects.

We got to D.C. early and stood on solid ice waiting for the parade to begin. I couldn't feel too sorry for myself because I could see girls nearby wearing very skimpy baton twirling outfits. We all wore rubber overshoes. As we marched the slush tended to pull off the overshoes and we left a lot in our wake.

I think the West Point cadets made it to the parade but they must have had a much harder time than we did, but maybe they came the day before. Being a WP cadet was a much harder life than that of a midshipman, I'm sure. (I just checked the reference in Wikipedia's article and according to a hick newspaper in Terre Haute, 1700 WP cadets marched and 3800 midshipmen, but 3800 was our population and only half marched. I think a lot of the guys who stayed home would have been willing to put up with the cold and ice in order to get four or five hours of liberty in D.C.)

At the end of the parade route there were trucks from USNA to receive our M1 rifles, and buses to take anyone back to USNA. I think I had a bit of a cold but had nobody to see in D.C. and I chose to go back home on the first bus. I was the only one from my company of 200 to go home right away.

*from Wikipedia:*

"A major winter storm occurred the day before the inauguration, with temperatures at 20 °F (−7 °C) and snowfall at 1–2 inches (2.5–5.1 cm) per hour<sup>[6]</sup> and a total of 8 inches (20 cm) during the night,<sup>[7]</sup> causing transportation and logistical problems in Washington and serious concern for the inauguration.<sup>[6][7][8][9]</sup>

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On inauguration day, January 20, 1961, the skies began to clear but the snow created chaos in Washington, almost canceling the inaugural parade.<sup>[6]</sup> The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was put in charge of clearing the streets during the evening and morning before the inauguration, and were assisted by more than 1,000 District of Columbia employees and 1,700 Boy Scouts.<sup>[6]</sup> This task force employed hundreds of dump trucks, front-end loaders, sanders, plows, rotaries, and flamethrowers to clear the route.<sup>[6]</sup> Over 1,400 cars which had been stranded due to the conditions and lack of fuel had to be removed from the parade route along Pennsylvania Avenue.<sup>[6]</sup>

The snowstorm dropped visibility at Washington National Airport to less than half a mile,<sup>[6]</sup> preventing former president Herbert Hoover from flying into Washington and attending the inauguration.<sup>[10]</sup> "

I had voted for Nixon over Kennedy because Nixon was clearly supporting Taiwan, which was an issue then. In Hawaii you could vote at my age, which was then 19, I think. That doesn't sound right but I know for sure I voted for Nixon.

**Mike Blackledge (4<sup>th</sup> Co):** My only memory is that when we went by the Reviewing Stand, we were ordered "Eyes Right!" and I actually saw Jacqueline Kennedy. A thrill for me! And I do remember the rubbers.

I was delighted this morning [20 Jan 2025] to see the USNA Glee Club/chorus participate in today's Inauguration, warmly inside. I had to define for Bonnie the stripes/ranks/stars on the middle blue uniforms.

**Mike Shelley (4<sup>th</sup> Co.):** Blackie: I had forgotten that only the First Regiment marched in the parade. Lucky us.

A minor point: If you did Eyes Right at the reviewing stand you missed Jackie Kennedy. The rest of us did an Eyes Left. (Yes, I know that's what you meant but I thought I'd pull your chain a bit.)

I remember the cold and the overshoes more than anything else about that day.

**DBA Moore (18<sup>th</sup> Co):** A minor correction to John Kelly, we all did an "Eyes Left" at the Reviewing Stand. Probably the main reason we did practice marches for the inauguration is that we used a formation twice as wide as for Worden Field parades. After the inauguration I heard from my mother who watched the festivities on TV. As the Brigade approached the reviewing stand the TV channel she was watching cut to an orange juice commercial. They resumed the telecast just as the brigade marched away and the announcers were talking about all the overshoes on the street.

I remember during breakfast that morning they announced what the uniform would be

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concluding with “Wear Overshoes”. Immediately some table started pounding their fists on the tables and then yelling “NO RUBBERS”. And that went around all 150 tables.

I was always of the opinion losing overshoes was caused by the person behind stepping on the heel. We also encountered this phenomenon when we wore overshoes marching to classes. And, of course, doing Eyes Right or Left would skew peoples gait maximizing the loss of overshoes.

I was in the Fourth Company, First Battalion so we were not too far from the Capitol Building as we waited and waited in the snow. No one had made any provision for a rest room or porta-potty. Someone discovered there was a small store on the corner with a small rest room with one toilet and we individually broke ranks to go use the rest room. It was crowded beyond belief. I have no idea what the later battalions were doing.

It was many years later that I first heard from class mates that they did not attend the parade. From inquiries I made, I have the impression that it was only the Sixth Battalion that stayed back in Bancroft. A few additional buses showed up later and the Sixth Battalion had the option of going to Washington for liberty if they wanted to.

I can clearly remember trudging across an open field full of snow between Pennsylvania Ave and the trucks that collected our rifles. I spent my afternoon watching the movie “SPARTACUS” and then caught a bus back to USNA.

**John Kelly (1<sup>st</sup> Co.):** Mike, you do remember differently. I remembered that the reviewing stand was on the left. See [https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-1-d&q=inaural+parade+1961#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:4ce4a373,vid:h-\\_nGtG62P4,st:0](https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-1-d&q=inaural+parade+1961#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:4ce4a373,vid:h-_nGtG62P4,st:0) They might have reversed the image. I don't remember Mrs. Kennedy. My eyes were smarting from the cold, and I see in the movies that it was pretty windy too.

**Andrew Curtin (16<sup>th</sup> Co.):** I remember it well. It was colder than a witch's t\*\*\* and the plebe behind me couldn't stay in step and kept stepping on my rubbers!

**Ben Redd (5<sup>th</sup> Co.):** The Drum & Bugle Corps was also one of the outfits at Kennedy's Inaugural Parade ... and I can attest to the cold, as my bugle mouthpiece firmly froze to my lips !!!!

**Steve Coester (18<sup>th</sup> Co.):** It was eyes left and when we did it, Kennedy wasn't looking. Upset me. Somehow I was invited to one of the balls. Went with a beautiful young lady that I had met at the A-N game. She had the most beautiful Gone With The Wind gown I ever saw. I dated her at USNA a couple of times and found we had nothing in common. After the

parade my uniform was soaked to the knees and I felt like a drowned rat at the ball. I heard it was just the sixth batt that didn't march. I was in 4th and we sure did.

**Craig Barton (4<sup>th</sup> Co.):** I remember some of the parade. It was cold and wet and we had to wear our rubber overshoes. Marching with those things on was usually a disaster. Every couple of yards, the guy behind you would step on your heel, thereby giving you what we called a flat tire. You'd try to get it back on without stopping, usually to no avail. There must have been about a thousand of those overshoes, lying on the street behind us. I never did see my overshoes again.

Memory of liberty in DC is very vague. I do remember Pete Featherstone getting the news that his mother had unexpectedly passed away and he had to get home to New Jersey right away.

Seems like a lot of years ago.

**John Kelly (1<sup>st</sup> Co):** I was sort of wondering whether we paraded with bayonets and I think the newsreels showed that we did not. Our bayonet belts probably wouldn't have fit around the overcoats.

**Steve Coester (18<sup>th</sup> Co.):** Worth mentioning that we stood in the snow and ice for hours before marching, holding our rifles with the metal butt on the frozen ground. The powers that be had us wear our dress white cotton gloves instead of our winter weather leather ones and when we finally marched off, those frozen M-1s froze our hands. Our 18th Company started off at right shoulder arms and when the Company Commander ordered the switch to left shoulder arms, we smartly snapped the rifle out to the port arms and then left shoulder arms position.....except several rifles crashed to the deck because the owner's hand was frozen and numb and had no grip or feeling.

I had forgotten but noticed in the photo that we marched with fixed bayonets. That added weight and threw off the balance a bit. I didn't drop my rifle or lose my rubbers which was an accomplishment but my memory then was it was a miserable cold wet experience. All these years later it is a fond memory that we were among the few to be able to say we were there.



The three major service academies representatives were ordered by seniority. Here are a few similar, but quite different, memories from our contemporaries at the brand new academy, having graduated their first class in 1959:

## USAFA JFK memories

Here's the "warm" clothing we wore marching during the Kennedy Inauguration parade, our USAFA cadet blue overcoat designed by Cecil B. DeMille - we called them "horseblankets." Also, we marched with rifles, something they probably wouldn't let us do today and following the attached photo are some of my classmate comments about that day - ah youth and memories, 64 years ago – Shep



I was too cold to remember what happened to me. I guess that was a good thing. Thankfully - Sam Dehne

I was in one of the airplanes that did not land at Andrews. We were on final approach when the A/C was told not to land. The traffic was so snarled between Andrews and the parade site that there was no way we would get there in time to march. We executed a missed approach and flew directly back to Colorado. By that time, we'd spent over a dozen hours in a C-130A (heater vents in the ceiling). Cadets tried to weave themselves horizontally halfway above the floor in the nylon netting of the side-facing seats to try to put themselves at a comfortable temperature level between the floor and ceiling. The aircraft provided plenty of water but nowhere nearly enough latrine capacity, so during the last segment urine had flowed freely onto the floor of the aircraft. The only saving grace was that the floor temperature was well below freezing, so it was all frozen, which limited the smell and mess. A trip to remember! – Jack Swanson

So there we were, proud but freezing our butts off. I remember standing around two hours waiting for the parade to start. Those M-1s didn't put out much heat! We spent the previous night in a US Army facility WWII barracks with coal burning stoves. We had cots and one Army blanket. Cold, hungry, tired. But what an adventure! And all things considered, we looked good in the parade. We had to consolidate squadrons since many aircraft couldn't land because of the storm - Jerry Smith

Shep, marching in the slush on Pennsylvania Ave was a picnic compared to flying in the cargo hold of a C-130 with a defective heating system. We all buddied up beside one another and tried to pile overcoats over the top of the grouping to ward off the cold. The entire trip and review march was a miserable experience - Gary Baughman

As I recall, we waited in the snow for an extra ½ to one hour while the Famous Folks finished lunch. BTW, someone earlier decided that we should march in rubber overshoes, which we managed to leave strewn all over Pennsylvania Avenue. What a great day that was!!! - George Harrison (my roommate)

It was definitely cold. We followed Navy. They left their low quarters all over the place. My right hand and arm went numb. When we went to left shoulder, I couldn't move my rifle with right hand. Almost dropped it. Managed to catch it with my left hand and somehow it made it to my left shoulder. When we passed in review Bob Brickly (I think) had to use both hands to present the sword. My attention was focused on the First Lady - Jack Anderson

If memory serves, I had the honor of freezing my balls off - George Lyddane

On a plane that did not make it. Watched the parade from Duffy's in Denver - Huck Spory

Only made it to Ft. Cambell KY! Discovered that a C-130 can fly high and freeze meat and that the Army doesn't heat barracks. - Willie Gray

Willie, ditto! Empirical data derived from the meat lockers called barracks at Ft Campbell shows that memories don't always have to be joyous - Roger Rhodes



For fact checking, see the videos on YouTube.com

From JFK's speech that day:

"Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty."

In this Boston Latin School video, at 4 minutes it shows a full-scale model of PT-109 coming by the reviewing stand, to the delight of President Kennedy:

<https://www.bls.org/apps/video/watch.jsp?v=10029600>

### ***Late thoughts:***

**John Kelly (1<sup>st</sup> Co):** I've wondered about a couple of things. As I wrote, the Terre Haute newspaper says 1700 West Point cadets marched, and I suspect that's right. I wonder how they managed to get there. Maybe they came the day before. They should have had a terrible time coming from WP.

The other thing is how many midshipmen marched. It occurred to me that maybe the first call was "1st Regiment will go," and as more buses arrived, more battalions from 2d Regiment were added.

And about that "eyes left." I remember we had at least one and maybe two practices after class in January. This was very early in the winter striper set (2 1/2 weeks), so we had new stripers. And we had that "eyes left" curve ball added. Maybe that's why we needed the practice.