

This week is largely going to be dedicated to **PRESIDENT JOHN F KENNEDY**, who was the 35th President of the United States, and was killed in the third year of his Presidency 57 years ago yesterday, on 22 November 1963. On Monday and Wednesday, I will talk about his life, and on Friday, I will talk about his death.



John F Kennedy was often referred to by his initials, JFK, and to save a bit of time and words, that's how I will refer to him this week. JFK was born in 1917, into a very rich American family with a long history of being involved in politics. His father was **JOSEPH KENNEDY**, who made a fortune on the American stock market (where people buy shares in companies, hoping to get paid a share of the company's profits if it does well, and also hoping that the shares will go up in value so that they can sell the shares and make money that way) and was one of the few people who wasn't affected by the 1929 **WALL STREET CRASH**, when the value of shares in American companies collapsed. Joseph Kennedy had already sold all his shares - at the top of the market, when they were worth the most that you could get for them - because he was worried about getting tips for what shares to buy from the guy who shined his shoes. Kennedy thought, 'If the guy who shines my shoes is getting involved with the stock market, things are going crazy - I should sell all my shares before things get really crazy and there is a huge crash.' So Joseph Kennedy's children - especially JFK's older brother, also called Joseph, and his younger brothers, **ROBERT** and **EDWARD** - lived a very comfortable, privileged life, going to the best schools and universities.



By the time **WORLD WAR II** broke out, Joseph Kennedy was in London - he had been appointed the American Ambassador to Great Britain. He didn't think that the British had any chance against Adolf Hitler, and should have surrendered to Germany. By the end of World War II, when it was clear just how evil the Nazi rulers of Germany were, anyone who had suggested giving up fighting against Hitler was not very popular - and Kennedy had to abandon any dreams he had that he might become President of the United States himself. But

he was determined that one of his sons would become President. But JFK's older brother, Joseph, had died in the war - he was a pilot and the bombs he was carrying on board his plane blew up before he had chance to release them. So Joseph's dream that one of his sons would become President turned into a dream that JFK would become President. And JFK certainly had everything needed to become the President of America - he was handsome, charming, funny, very intelligent, very knowledgeable about history and politics, and he was also a war hero. Unlike his brother Joseph, who died fighting against Nazi Germany, JFK spent World War II in the Pacific, captaining a small patrol boat that could launch torpedoes (pronounced 'tor - pee - doh - zz') and sink Japanese ships. But JFK's boat was sunk instead by a Japanese ship ramming it, and he had to rescue his crew and get them to safety, swimming to a nearby island, and then swimming to other islands for food and to get help.

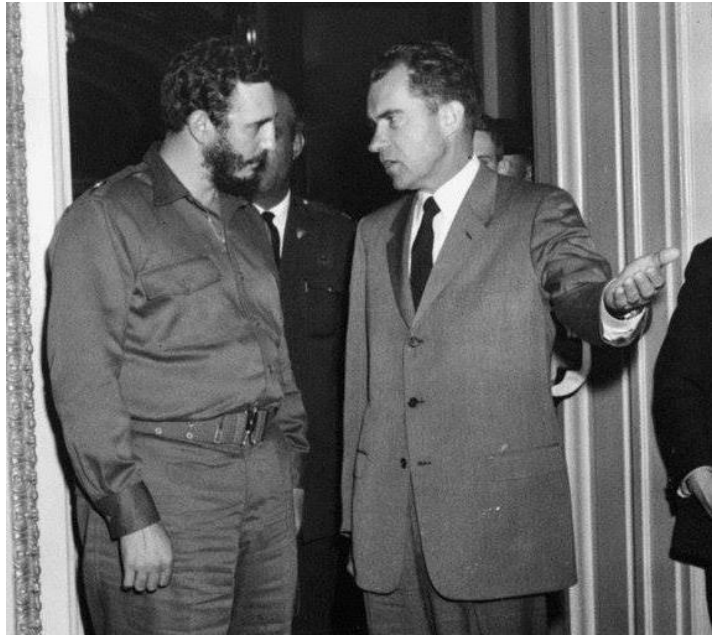


So once the war was over, JFK went into politics. He became a Congressman (the equivalent of a Member of Parliament in the UK) for his home state of Massachusetts in 1947 - his dad Joseph joked that he had spent so much money on getting JFK elected, that he could have got his driver to win the election. JFK then moved up and became a Senator (much more powerful than a Congressman - there are hundreds of Congressmen and women, but only 100 Senators, two for each state in the United States) in 1953, and attempted to get the DEMOCRAT nomination for the Vice-Presidency in 1956, when ADLAI (pronounced 'Ad - lie') STEVENSON ran against the REPUBLICAN President, DWIGHT EISENHOWER (pronounced 'Dwyte Eye - zen - how - uh'). JFK missed out narrowly on being nominated for the Vice-Presidency, but became very well known nationally - and probably didn't mind that he didn't get to run for Vice-President as Eisenhower beat Stevenson quite easily.

Instead, JFK's mind turned to the 1960 election when Eisenhower wouldn't be running for President because the American Constitution had been changed to stop Presidents serving more than two terms in office. (This was in response to FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT, who served three terms in office from 1933 to 1944, and then died in office in 1945, having won a fourth term as President while concealing just how sick he was. After that, people thought - two terms is enough for anyone, and the Constitution was changed to stop a President serving more than two terms in office.) Eisenhower's Vice-President RICHARD NIXON would probably get the Republican nomination for President - and would get all the blame for anything that went wrong from 1956 to 1960, while Eisenhower was President and Nixon was Vice-President.

Those years would turn out to be very stormy both in America and in the world. Leaders like MARTIN LUTHER KING (who I told you about on July 15) were emerging, demanding that black Americans be treated just as well as white Americans, especially in the American south. In CUBA, which was only a few miles away from Florida, one of the American states, there was a revolution in 1959, and the pro-American dictator FULGENCIO BATISTA

(pronounced 'Fool - gen - see - oh Bat - ee - stah') was overthrown by FIDEL CASTRO, who soon claimed he was a communist and that he would take over American companies and property in Cuba and run them for the benefit of the people of Cuba. And the SOVIET UNION was making moves against America, sending in tanks to crush anti-Soviet demonstrations in HUNGARY in 1956, and starting to help the communist NORTH VIETNAM (pronounced 'Vee - et - nam') in South East Asia try to take over the pro-American SOUTH VIETNAM by giving rebels in South Vietnam (called the 'VIETCONG' (pronounced 'Vee - et - kong')) gun and bullets to make trouble.



JFK got the Democratic nomination for President in 1960, and Richard Nixon got the Republican nomination. So it was JFK vs 'Tricky Dick' Nixon for the American Presidency. For the first time, the candidates' debates were televised, and it was thought JFK came across better on TV than Nixon did - Nixon did better with radio listeners who couldn't see him getting sweaty and looking shifty. JFK slammed Nixon for being soft on communism - of allowing the Soviet Union to get its own way too easily, and allowing a 'missile gap' to develop, where the Soviets had more nuclear missiles than the Americans did. Nixon slammed JFK for being inexperienced. The election was really close. In fact, it was so close that JFK's dad tried to guarantee his son would win by paying Italian gangsters - part of a criminal organisation known as THE MAFIA (pronounced 'Ma - fee - ah') - to use their influence to make sure that JFK 'won' the state of Illinois (pronounced 'Ill - uh - noy'). Nixon knew he had been cheated, but refused to make a fuss - it would be better for America if they did not think their new handsome President had resorted to rigging an election to become President. So Nixon conceded the election, and JFK achieved his dad's dream of becoming President.



The new team that swept into Washington under JFK's leadership was young, vibrant, and intelligent - 'THE BEST AND THE BRIGHTEST' that America had to offer. JFK's team included his younger - and just as handsome and charming - brother, ROBERT KENNEDY, who JFK made Attorney General (which means that Robert Kennedy was in charge of the American justice system.) JFK's wife JACQUELINE BOUVIER (pronounced 'Boo - vee - ay') KENNEDY - known as 'Jackie' for short, and whom JFK had married in 1954 - was the



most beautiful First Lady anyone had ever known. JFK had big support from the film and entertainment industry, including the singer FRANK SINATRA and the actress MARILYN MONROE. Everything about JFK's administration screamed - youth, beauty, class, intelligence. Jackie Kennedy would later say that it was as if a 'new Camelot' (pronounced 'Cam - uh - lot') had been created in the American capital thanks to JFK, referring to the legend of KING ARTHUR and his KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE (which I might tell you about sometime). JFK's inaugural speech in January 1961, when he was made President, was brilliant and made everyone think he was the right man for the job as President:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mx4HDgfWFs>

Only two things seemed to spoil the atmosphere of hope and optimism around JFK. The first was JFK's Vice-President, LYNDON (pronounced 'Lin - don') JOHNSON. Lyndon Johnson was not young and vibrant and beautiful - he was old and ugly and grouchy (you can see him on the video above, just to the right of JFK). He had been around Washington since before World War II started, and he felt he should have been President, not JFK. It was his turn to be President in 1960, and he'd been passed over in favour of the younger JFK - and had to be content with being Vice-President instead.

The second spoiler was DWIGHT EISENHOWER'S Farewell Address (I told you on October 22 how the very first President, GEORGE WASHINGTON, had started a tradition of giving a Farewell Address when giving up the Presidency), where Eisenhower warned that a 'MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX' was gaining power in Washington, where the military were addicted to starting wars to justify their continued existence, and industry was only too happy to help the military with starting those wars, as the American government would have to pay industry millions and billions of dollars to make the equipment needed to fight those wars:

<https://youtu.be/Gg-jvHynP9Y?t=30>

JFK was soon to get a taste of the 'military industrial complex' in action. Soon after JFK took office in January 1961, he was approached by ALLEN DULLES (pronounced 'Dull - ess'). Dulles was the head of the American spy organisation - the CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY (or 'CIA' for short - pronounced 'See Eye A') - and he told Kennedy that the CIA had come up with a plan to get rid of Fidel Castro, and get a pro-American government reinstalled in Cuba. What the CIA proposed to do was take a lot of anti-Castro Cubans who were gathered in Florida, arm them, train them, and ship them over to Cuba, and they would start a revolution against



Castro and get Castro overthrown. The Cuban rebels would land at the BAY OF PIGS in Cuba, and make their way from there to the Cuban capital, HAVANA, and overthrow Castro.

JFK approved the plan - he had promised in his campaign not to be soft on communism, and he had promised in his inaugural address to do whatever it took to uphold freedom, so trying to overthrow Castro seemed the right thing to do, to him. The Bay of Pigs invasion went ahead on April 17 1961. It was an utter disaster. The Cuban rebels could not get off the beaches at the Bay of Pigs and were pinned down by the Cuban army. The American generals and the CIA went to JFK and said, 'You have to help them. You have to send in American planes to bomb the Cuban army and allow the rebels to get off the beaches and into Cuba.' But JFK refused - the invasion had not gone the way he had been promised, and he was not going to get sucked into a shooting war with the Cubans as goodness knows how Castro's supporters in the Soviet Union would react to that. So the rebels were left to fend for themselves. A lot of them managed to get back to the United States, with the help of the CIA, and would never forgive JFK for what they saw as a betrayal in failing to help them when their initial invasion failed.

JFK, on the other hand, felt betrayed by the CIA. He sacked Allen Dulles as head of the CIA and promised a friend that he would scatter the CIA into a thousand pieces. In the meantime, he had to go on TV to take the blame for the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion. His Presidency had gotten off to the worst possible start. He looked weak and incompetent, and the watching Soviets were fully ready to take advantage. How he would react would define his Presidency and whether he would go down in history as a great President, or a failure.

More on Wednesday to find out what happened!

