

2LT Gibson Bell Kennedy 1920 – 1971



Gibson Bell Kennedy, a World War II prisoner of war and later a successful businessman, was born in the Chestnut Hill section of Philadelphia September 1, 1920.

The second of three boys, he was the son of Elizabeth Wheeler Kennedy and Albert Edward Kennedy, Jr., both of Philadelphia. By agreement, when the three boys were still young, their parents left them in the care of their maternal grandmother, widow Laetitia Wheeler Bell, and her second husband, The Rev. Dr. Gibson Bell, after whom Mr. Kennedy was named.

Dr. Bell was founder and headmaster of the Montgomery School, a private preparatory boy's school, at the time located in Wynnewood, PA. Mr. Kennedy attended the school, graduating in 1938 and joined Harvard College's Class of 1942.

He left Harvard midway through his sophomore year and joined the First Troop Philadelphia City Cavalry, a National Guard unit tracing its history back to 1774 and the American Revolution.

Mr. Kennedy entered active service in February, 1941, serving both domestically and abroad. He was a Second Lieutenant assigned to the 326th Engineer Battalion of the 101st Army Airborne Division when he parachuted into Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944, and was captured by German troops.



Gibson Bell (center) with his brothers and their wives

He was sent to Oflag 64, a German prisoner-of-war camp for American officers located in Szubin, Poland. In 1945, he escaped either from the camp itself or during the forced march to German soil, resulting from German fears the camp would be liberated by advancing Russian troops.

He made his way to safety and returned to American soil September 4, 1945 and was honorably discharged the following December 8.

During those three months of domestic duty Mr. Kennedy promoted War Bonds and made condolence calls to the families of servicemen killed in action.

One of those was Marine Sergeant William Henry Palmer Townsend, of Philadelphia, an acquaintance of Mr. Kennedy's, who was killed during the

assault on Iwo Jima February 19, 1945. During his call on Sergeant Townsend's family, Mr. Kennedy met the elder of his two sisters, Mona Townsend. The two were married November 15, 1946 in Philadelphia.

After the war, Mr. Kennedy was employed by the Philco Corporation, at the time a leading manufacturer of consumer electronics. He worked in sales for the company in Philadelphia, Dallas, Boston, and Philadelphia again, returning there in 1957.

He rose to become Vice President in charge of Sales and Marketing for the company until it was acquired by the Ford Motor Company in 1961.

He subsequently worked as a consultant for TRW, an Ohio-based automotive and aerospace engineering concern and in 1963 moved with his family to England for an executive role with Standard Electric Corp., a UK-based consumer product company owned by ITT.

In 1964, Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy's marriage ended in divorce. He subsequently married Kay Doherty, of London.

He died May 12, 1971 in a swimming accident off the coast of Majorca, a Spanish island in the Mediterranean, and was buried in a London England cemetery.

At the time of his death, Mr. Kennedy was survived by his wife, Kay, and four children: William Townsend Kennedy; Gibson Bell Kennedy, Jr.; Laetitia Elizabeth Kennedy and Katherine Culzean Kennedy.



Biography written by his children: Katie Hines, Billy Kennedy, Mike Kennedy and Laetitia Hoskins