• Special to the Leader &Times

Jim Little, former instrumental music coordinator, director of “That” Liberal Band, and retired principal of Liberal High School, will have a second chance to participate in an “opportunity of a lifetime” when he joins more than one hundred buglers from across America on Nov. 16 to take part in one of the ceremonies surrounding the 50th anniversary of the assassination and burial of President John F. Kennedy.

In May, 2012, Little joined 200 buglers at Arlington National Cemetery to participate in the 150th anniversary of the creation of Taps, the somber 24-note bugle call used since the Civil War to signal the end the day for military personnel and later dedicated to honor military veterans and active duty military members at funerals.

“For all of us at the time, it was a once in a lifetime experience. Civilian buglers, even though they may have served in the military as musicians and buglers, very rarely get the opportunity to sound Taps at Arlington. It was only through the hard work of the Taps 150 organization, headed by retired USAF Band bugler Jari Villanueva, and Bugles Across America, along with the assistance of the folks at Arlington National Cemetery, that we were able to join together for that great celebration.”

Taps for Veterans, headed by Sgt. Villanueva, and Bugles Across America are again working with the leadership of Arlington National Cemetery to organize the event for November 16, “A Bugle Call Remembered: Taps at the Funeral of President John F. Kennedy.”

Little said that while remembering President Kennedy, the buglers will also honor the soldier who sounded Taps on that cold, grey day at the revered Arlington National Cemetery. “Sgt. Keith Clark, a member of Pershing’s Own, The United States Army Band, was chosen to sound Taps that day, as he had a number of times when President Kennedy was present for special ceremonies. Because the military honors were for an assassinated president, nearly everyone involved received unprecedented media coverage, and Sgt. Clark’s rendition of Taps was no exception. In fact, Clark has become known over the years as The JFK Bugler.

While the program for the Nov. 16 event is still being coordinated, arrangements have been made for participation by The United States Army Band, the Joint Services Color Guard, and members of the United States Air Force Pipe Band who participated in the 1963 funeral. Colonel Michael Colburn, Commander and Conductor of the United States Marine Band, will conduct the massed buglers in both unison and harmonized versions of Taps as part of the official ceremonies.

Speakers for the occasion will include Mr. Jack Lechner, Deputy Superintendent of Arlington National Cemetery, James Swanson, historian and author of “End of Days: The Assassination of President John F. Kennedy,” and Nancy Joy McColley, daughter of Sgt. Keith Clark.

Little stated that following the formal program at the Old Amphitheater, buglers will disperse throughout the cemetery to sound Taps after the sounding of Noon Chimes at sites of their choosing. They will then regroup at the Amphitheater where Mrs. Keith Clark will lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier on behalf of her husband and in honor of all military buglers and Taps for Veterans.

After graduating from Artesia High School and Eastern New Mexico University, Mr. Little joined the United States Air Force, serving as a trumpeter and bugler with the 589th USAF Band at Amarillo Air Force Base, Texas and MacDill AFB, Fla. He then entered a 36-year in public education as a band director in North Carolina, Texas, and Colorado before coming to Liberal to head the USD 480 instrumental music program from 1989 – 1998. Little was tapped to become an assistant principal at LHS in 1998 and then was appointed principal in 2003, serving in that position until his retirement in June, 2006.

Little currently resides in Mineola, Texas, with his wife, Barbara, a former teacher at West Middle School and also retired from USD 480. He is a member of the Lake Country Symphonic Band, serves as a bugler with the East Texas Patriot Guard Riders, and performs on trumpet with the Praise Band at Yantis First Baptist Church.