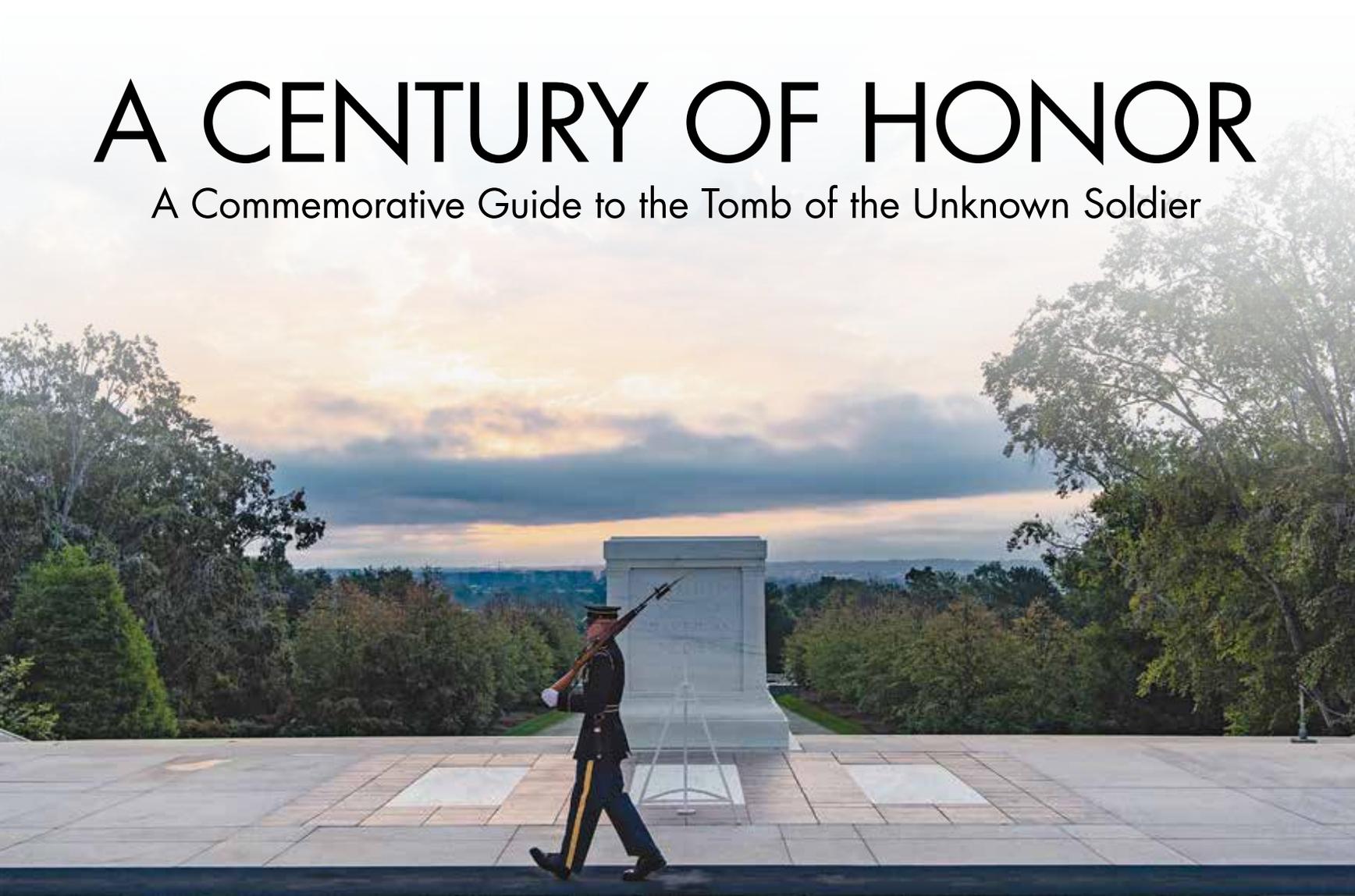


# A CENTURY OF HONOR

A Commemorative Guide to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier





# A CENTURY OF HONOR

A Commemorative Guide to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

Arlington National Cemetery History Office



# Contents

Foreword . . . . .	v
Introduction . . . . .	1
Arlington National Cemetery: A National Shrine . . . . .	3
From Plantation to National Cemetery . . . . .	19
Commemorating Civil War Unknowns. . . . .	33
Crucible of Carnage: The First World War . . . . .	47
Allied Inspiration: The British and French Tombs . . . . .	63
America Selects Its Unknown . . . . .	79
A Nation Mourns: The Burial of the World War I Unknown. . . . .	95
Unfinished and Unguarded: The Early Years of the Tomb . . . . .	115
Guarding the Tomb: From Civilians to Sentinels . . . . .	131
Designing a National Shrine . . . . .	145
The Tradition Continues: The World War II and Korean War Unknowns . . . . .	161
Unknown No More: The Vietnam War Unknown. . . . .	175
Rendering Honor to a Lost Soldier: Gifts Presented to the Unknowns . . . . .	191
Mourning, Memory, and Ritual: The Evolution of the Tomb. . . . .	203
Conclusion: Commemorating a Century of Honor . . . . .	219
Credits and Acknowledgements . . . . .	221



# Foreword

At Arlington National Cemetery, we conduct more than 6,000 interments/inurnments, organize 3,000 ceremonies, and host between 3 and 4 million visitors every year. Approximately 400,000 individuals are buried in these hallowed grounds, including service members from all of the United States' conflicts, from the American Revolution through today. Each one has a story to tell.

One hundred years ago, on November 11, 1921, the United States laid to rest an unidentified American who died in World War I. He has been in our charge ever since. Serving as the stewards of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is a duty and an honor that we humbly undertake on behalf of a grateful nation. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier stands,

physically and symbolically, at the heart of the cemetery and the heart of the nation. Every day at Arlington National Cemetery, we take seriously the special place that we hold in the national conscience.

On behalf of Arlington National Cemetery, I welcome the public to join us in commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. This commemorative guide, prepared by our History Office, allows visitors and readers to learn about the Tomb's history as a way to participate in the centennial events of November 2021. Whether you are physically present at Arlington or reading from afar, we invite you to honor, remember, and explore the history and meanings of this hallowed sanctuary.

Karen Durham-Aguilera  
Executive Director, Office of Army Cemeteries  
Army National Military Cemeteries  
Arlington National Cemetery  
November 1, 2021



# Introduction

Since November 11, 1921, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier has served as the heart of Arlington National Cemetery. As a sacred memorial site and the grave of three unknown American service members, the Tomb connects visitors with the legacy of the United States armed forces throughout the nation's history. It functions as a people's memorial that inspires reflection on service, valor, sacrifice, and mourning.

Throughout 2021, Arlington National Cemetery held a series of events culminating in special centennial ceremonies in conjunction with the National Veterans Day Observance on November 11, 2021. The public could experience and participate in a variety of commemorative events, both at the cemetery and virtually. Videos of monthly public programs developed by ANC, sometimes in partnership with external stakeholders such as museums and other government agencies, are available on YouTube. Please go to <https://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/Tomb100> for more information and links.

As part of the cemetery's new education program, an instructional module about the history and significance of the Tomb is available at <https://education.arlingtoncemetery.mil/>. The module is a resource for teachers, students, families, and adult lifelong learners. It includes lesson plans, assignments,

and primary source readings for elementary, middle, and high school students. The module also includes self-guided walking tours that individuals and families of all ages can use to explore the cemetery either virtually or in person.

In addition, Arlington National Cemetery historians have researched and written a forthcoming comprehensive history of the Tomb's creation. When released, this book will be available to download for free from the cemetery's Tomb100 webpage: <https://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/Tomb100> and for purchase in print through the Government Publishing Office: <https://bookstore.gpo.gov>.

Finally, Arlington National Cemetery created two new exhibits in its Welcome Center and Memorial Amphitheater Display Room, both of which focus on the centennial of the Tomb. This commemorative guide, based on those exhibits, tells the story of the Tomb's creation, history, and significance.

The entire team at Arlington National Cemetery welcomes you to join in the commemoration of the centennial of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. For more information, go to <https://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/Tomb100> and follow us on social media @ArlingtonNatl.



# Arlington National Cemetery: A National Shrine

Arlington National Cemetery is the nation's premier active military cemetery. Connected to every part of American history, this memorial landscape embodies the diversity of the United States. The heart of Arlington National Cemetery is the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, which turned 100 years old in 2021. Just as the cemetery chronicles the nation's history, the Tomb reveals the cemetery's changing meanings.

Established during the Civil War, the cemetery contains the graves of service members from the American Revolution through today. Its uniform rows of headstones represent a microcosm of the nation and those who have defended it. From the first Decoration Day observed here in 1868 to today's annual observances of Memorial Day and Veterans Day, Arlington National Cemetery remains the honored host of America's major commemorative events.

The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the historic Memorial Amphitheater offers a unique way to examine Arlington National Cemetery's history and development. As the Tomb enters its second century, it continues to belong to all Americans as an enduring symbol of sacrifice, honor, and mourning.

---

A horse-drawn caisson leads a funeral procession through McClellan Gate,  
the southeast entrance to the original 200-acre cemetery.  
*(Arlington National Cemetery)*

---

McCLELLAN

ON FAMES ETERNAL DAMPING COORDIN THEIR SILENT TROTT AND SPEAK  
AND GLORY CHARGES WITH SOLEMN DIGNITY THE HIGHWAY OF THE DEAD

MEIC



---

A Marine officer presents the flag that covered a service member's casket to a grieving family. (*Arlington National Cemetery*)

---



---

Visitors attend the 2019 National Veterans Day Observance at  
Memorial Amphitheater. (*Arlington National Cemetery*)

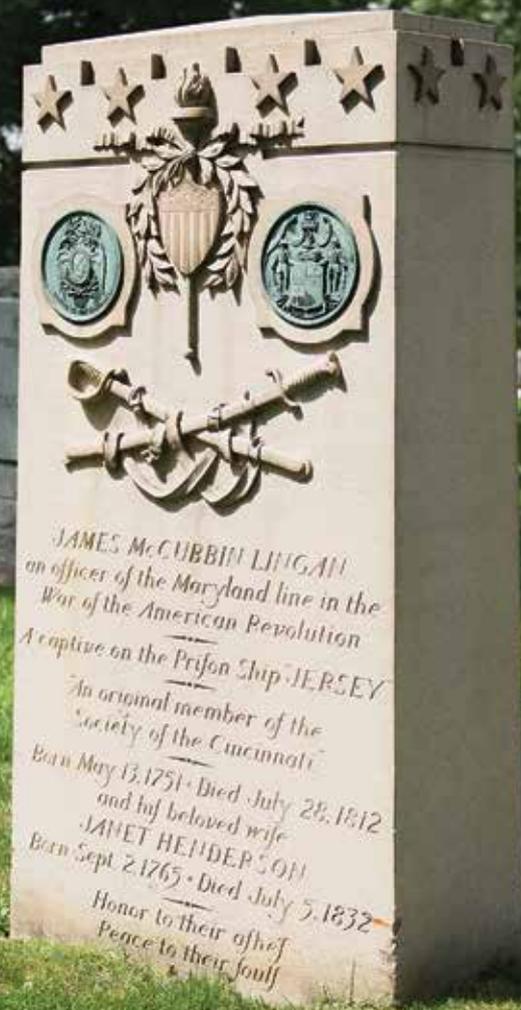
---



---

Brig. Gen. James M. Langan, a Revolutionary War veteran, was moved from his burial spot in Georgetown to Arlington in the early 1900s. Langan is one of eleven Revolutionary War veterans buried at the cemetery. (*Arlington National Cemetery*)

---



*JAMES McCUBBIN LUGAN*  
*an officer of the Maryland line in the*  
*War of the American Revolution*  
*A captive on the Prison Ship JERSEY*  
*An original member of the*  
*Society of the Cincinnati*  
*Born May 13, 1751 • Died July 28, 1812*  
*and his beloved wife*  
*JANET HENDERSON*  
*Born Sept. 2, 1765 • Died July 5, 1832*  
*Honor to their ashes*  
*Peace to their souls*



**NOBLE**  
 JOSEPH NOBLE  
 1788 — 1846  
 ELIZABETH NOBLE  
 1788 — 1846

---

Finland's President Sauli V. Niinistö participates in an armed forces full honors wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, October 1, 2019. (*Arlington National Cemetery*)

---



Sailors from the U.S. Navy Ceremonial Guard conduct military funeral honors in Section 60 on June 3, 2019.  
*(Arlington National Cemetery)*

Around 400,000 military members, veterans, and their family members are buried in Arlington National Cemetery. Founded in 1864, the cemetery performs more than 150 funerals per week. Today, Arlington National Cemetery continues to represent the American people for past, present, and future generations.



Walking through the orderly rows of graves provides an opportunity to read the names of the Americans honored in these hallowed grounds.  
*(Arlington National Cemetery)*

Arlington National Cemetery is a Level III Accredited Arboretum, a living tribute to those who have honorably served their nation. Rolling green hills, majestic trees, and a diverse collection of ornamental plants create a rich natural tapestry on these hallowed grounds. Visitors can stroll throughout the cemetery's 639 acres, which blend formal and informal landscapes and feature more than 9,600 native and exotic trees.





# From Plantation to National Cemetery

Arlington National Cemetery originated from the mass carnage of the Civil War. The war transformed this land from a plantation into hallowed ground. After the war, the cemetery came to occupy a sacred place in American culture, especially after the first Decoration Day (now Memorial Day) ceremony held here in 1868.

The cemetery's property was previously a plantation owned by George Washington Parke Custis, who dedicated his mansion on the plantation, called Arlington House, as a memorial to his step-grandfather, George Washington. The estate, completed in 1818, consisted of land worked by enslaved African Americans. The property eventually passed to Custis's daughter, Mary Anna Randolph Custis Lee, the wife of U.S. Army officer Robert E. Lee.

After the Civil War began in 1861 and Lee resigned his commission in the U.S. Army to fight with the Confederacy, his family fled south. The U.S. Army then seized the estate because its high ground offered protection for Washington, D.C., and built three forts on the property. In 1863, it established Freedman's Village—a refugee camp for formerly enslaved people—on the former plantation. As wartime fatalities mounted and military cemeteries in the D.C. area ran out of space, the U.S. Army also began to bury the dead here. Arlington officially became a national cemetery on June 15, 1864.

---

As deaths mounted during the Civil War, the U.S. Army repurposed parts of Arlington Estate as a military burial ground. This 1864 photograph of the cemetery shows the original wooden headboards and several African American workers. (*Chrysler Museum of Art: Andrew Joseph Russell Collection*)

---

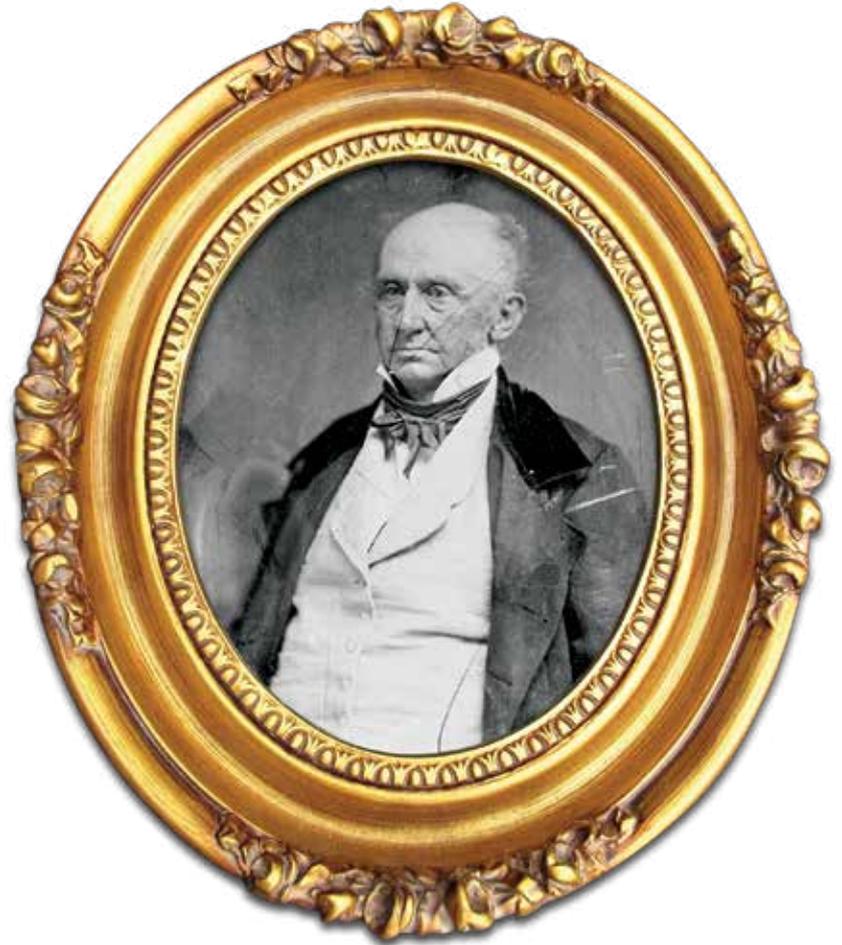


Cemetery  
grounds  
of  
Arlington  
June 29, 1864

---

George Washington Parke Custis, the step-grandson of President George Washington, established Arlington Estate in 1802. The 1,100-acre property was a working plantation run on enslaved labor, with a Greek Revival-style mansion (completed in 1818) that showcased Custis's large collection of George Washington heirlooms and memorabilia. (*Library of Congress*)

---



---

Maria Carter Syphax was likely the daughter of George Washington Parke Custis and his enslaved maid, Arianna Carter. As many as sixty-three enslaved African Americans lived and worked at Arlington. Maria Carter married Charles Syphax, an enslaved man who managed the Arlington House dining room. After the birth of their second child, Custis gave Maria seventeen acres of his Arlington property. The descendants of Charles and Maria Syphax have been leaders in Arlington County for many generations. (*National Park Service, George Washington Parkway, ARHO 6480*)

---



---

President Ulysses S. Grant and Senator John A. Logan attend the first Decoration Day ceremony held at Arlington's original amphitheater, near Arlington House, on May 30, 1873. Today, the structure is named the James Tanner Amphitheater. (*Library of Congress*)

---

IN MEMORIAM.



---

To provide formerly enslaved people with housing, social services, and skills training, the U.S. government established a Freedman's Village at Arlington in 1863, on the southern portion of today's cemetery. The village survived until 1900 and evolved into a unique and thriving community with a legacy that continues in Arlington County today. (*Library of Congress*)

---

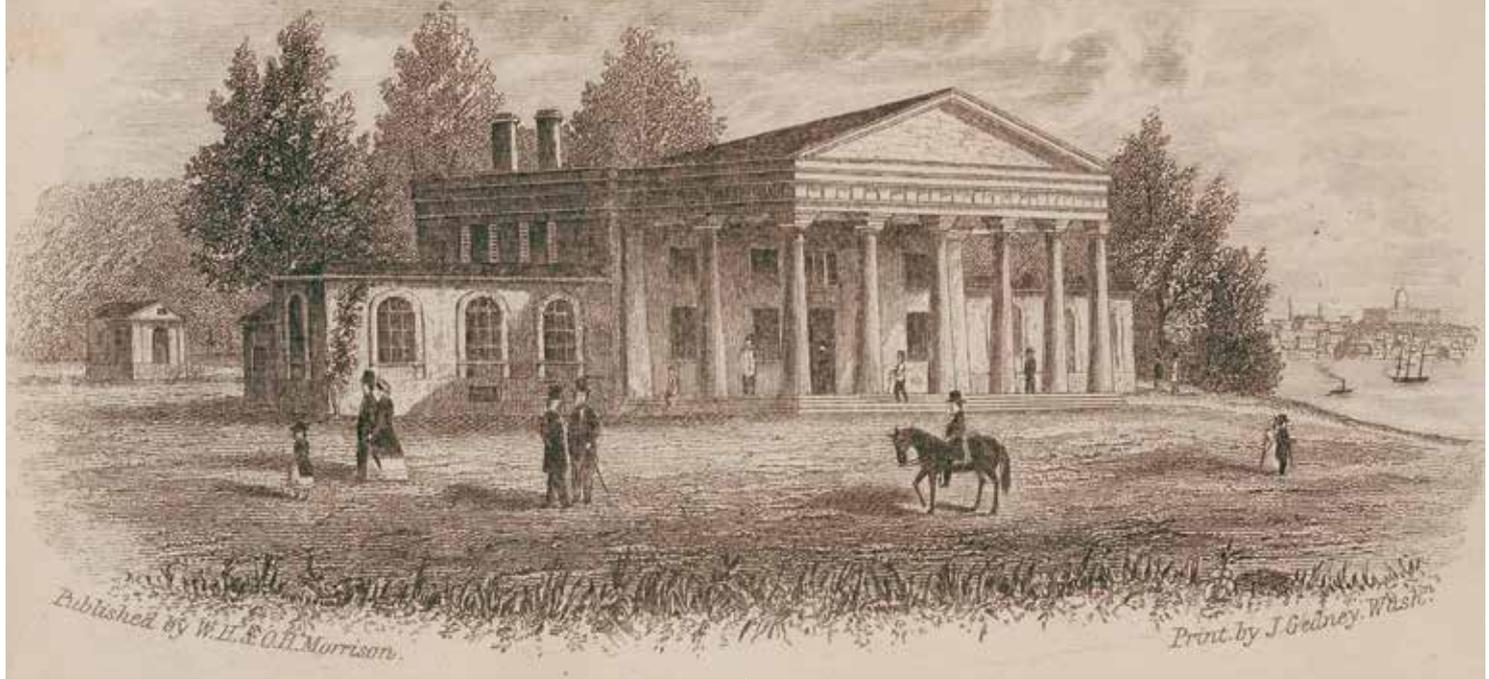


---

Created during the Civil War as one of the numerous forts ringing Washington, D.C., Fort Whipple, now Fort Myer, once marked the boundary of Arlington Estate. (*Library of Congress*)

---





Print of Arlington House, circa 1868. (*Library of Congress*)

Arlington House, maintained by the National Park Service, is open to the public for tours of the historic mansion, slave quarters, and museum exhibits. This site and its exhibits explore the history of the plantation, the family who owned it, and the enslaved people who toiled there. The stories told at Arlington House are the first chapter in the history of Arlington National Cemetery. Read more about Arlington House at <https://www.nps.gov/arho/index.htm>.

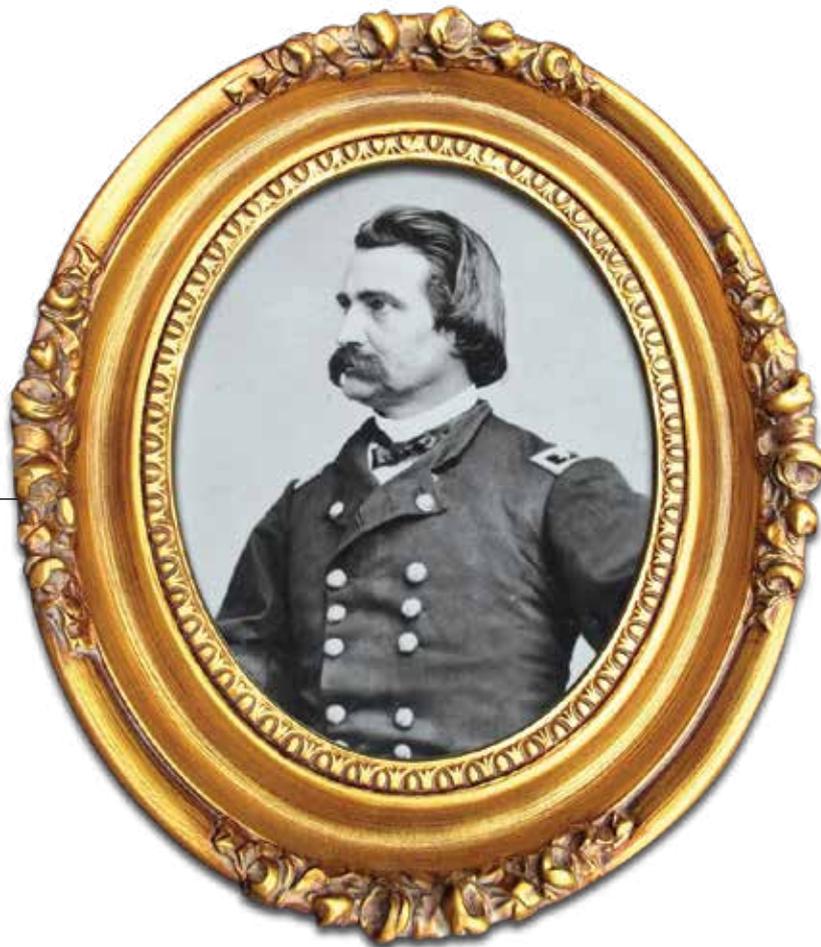


The federal government established Alexandria National Cemetery in 1862. By 1864, it started to run out of burial space, leading in part to the establishment of Arlington National Cemetery. (*Library of Congress*)

The extraordinary death rate during the Civil War forced the U.S. government and military to take responsibility for the burial of the war dead. A succession of Army general orders and congressional legislation led to the creation of national cemeteries such as Arlington. Located throughout the United States, often at battlefields, they can still be visited today.

General John A. Logan was a decorated Civil War veteran, a leading veterans' advocate, and a politician who represented Illinois in both houses of Congress. His mausoleum is at the United States Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemetery in Washington, D.C. (*Library of Congress*)

After the Civil War, Americans in both the North and the South began decorating the graves of their war dead with flowers in the springtime. Former U.S. Army General John A. Logan, leader of a U.S. veterans' organization called the Grand Army of the Republic, formalized this tradition in 1868 with the first national observance of Decoration Day at Arlington National Cemetery. Every May, crowds overwhelmed the cemetery's first amphitheater and prompted the creation of the larger Memorial Amphitheater, dedicated in 1920. Decoration Day later became Memorial Day.



# Commemorating Civil War Unknowns

Since its establishment during the Civil War, Arlington National Cemetery has included graves of unknown soldiers. The tradition of burying unknowns at Arlington set the stage for the creation of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in 1921.

Unknown wartime fatalities have long been a heartbreaking yet common consequence of armed conflict. Even ancient battlefields had mass burial pits with unknown remains. Unburied bodies brought disease, and armies did not widely issue identification tags until World War I. Without the tools and time to record, properly bury, and transport the dead, soldiers' remains often became lost and unidentifiable.

The scale of the Civil War, and its powerful weaponry, resulted in staggering numbers of unknown dead on both sides. Cultural attitudes toward death also changed during the mid-nineteenth century. Americans felt great distress over the many missing and unknown soldiers who could not be properly buried or mourned. As a result, the U.S. government adopted new policies to care for the unidentifiable war dead. Whenever possible, these men received graves labeled as "unknown," and they began to occupy an honored place in military memory.

---

The Tomb of the Civil War Unknowns, created in 1866, contains the remains of 2,111 soldiers. The since-removed Temple of Fame, a monument to George Washington and other distinguished U.S. military leaders, stands in the background. (*Library of Congress*)

---

BENEATH THIS STONE  
REPOSE THE BONES OF TWO THOUSAND ONE HUNDRED AND ELEVEN UNKNOWN SOLDIERS  
GATHERED AFTER THE WAR  
FROM THE FIELDS OF BULL RUN, AND THE ROUTE TO THE RAPPAHANNOCK.  
THEIR REMAINS COULD NOT BE IDENTIFIED, BUT THEIR NAMES AND DEATHS ARE  
RECORDED IN THE ARCHIVES OF THEIR COUNTRY; AND ITS GRATEFUL CITIZENS  
HONOR THEM AS OF THEIR NOBLE ARMY OF MARTYRS. MAY THEY REST IN PEACE!  
SEPTEMBER, A. D. 1866.

---

The headstone of an unknown Civil War soldier in  
Section 13, one of many unknown gravesites in older  
sections of the cemetery. (*Arlington National Cemetery*)

---



UNKNOWN

U.S.

SOLDIER

---

Wooden headboards originally marked the graves at national military cemeteries, as seen here at Alexandria National Cemetery in the late 1860s. Eventually, they were replaced with white marble markers. (*Library of Congress*)

---



---

The industrialized nature of the Civil War led to the widespread destruction of both human bodies and the landscape—as shown in this photograph of ruined houses in Fredericksburg, Virginia. (*Library of Congress*)

---



---

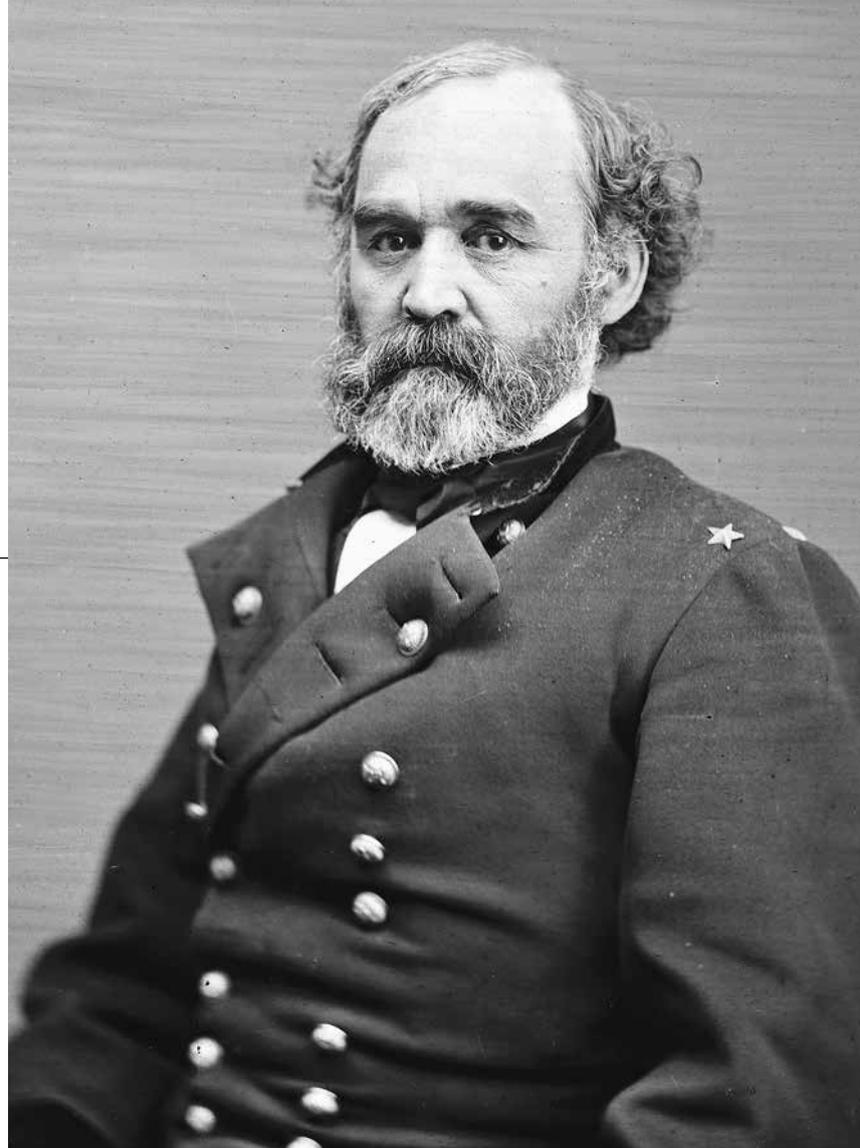
A military burial party prepares to inter U.S. dead near Fredericksburg, Virginia, after the Battle of the Wilderness, May 1864. (*Library of Congress*)

---



U.S. Army Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs, a renowned military engineer, oversaw the creation and initial design of Arlington National Cemetery, the Tomb of the Civil War Unknowns, and the cemetery's original amphitheater, now named the James Tanner Amphitheater.  
*(Library of Congress)*

In 1866, U.S. Army Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs authorized the creation of the Tomb of the Civil War Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery. Located near Arlington House, it contains the remains of 2,111 soldiers, probably from both sides of the Civil War, gathered from battlefields in Virginia.



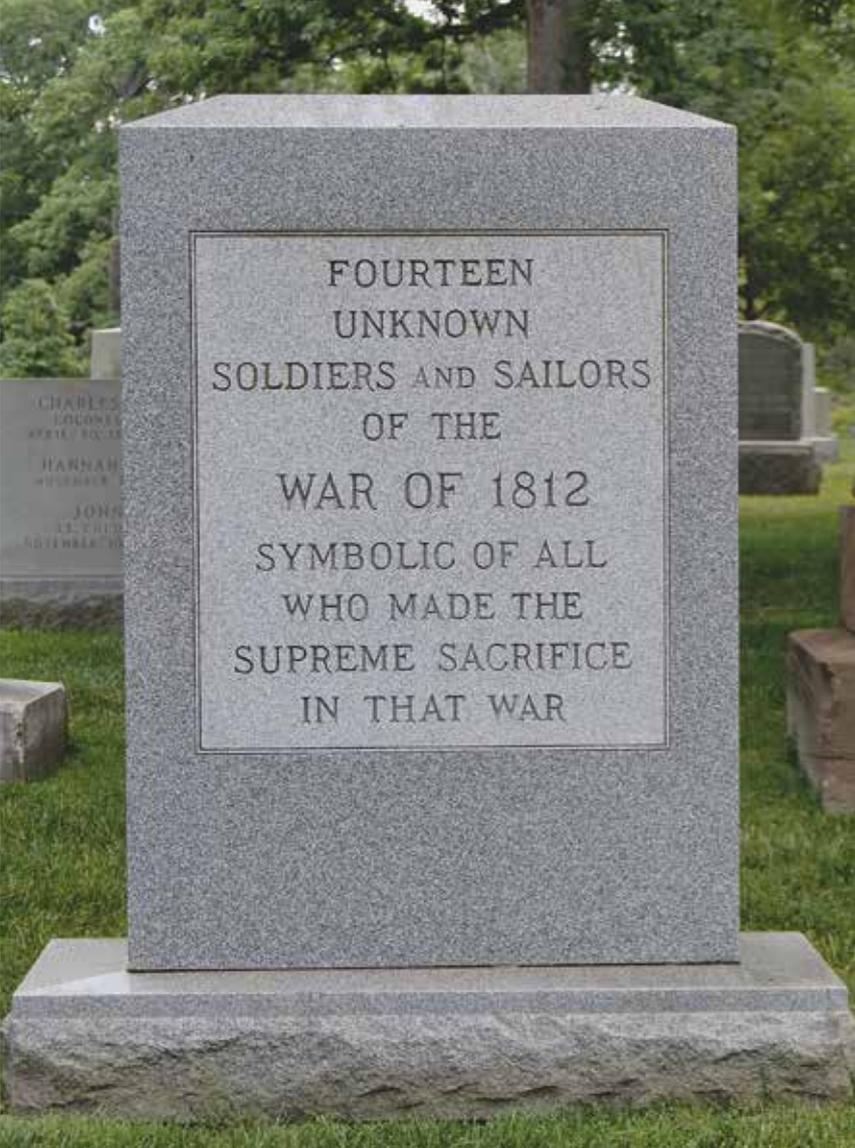


African American Civil War graves in Section 27 include some unknown soldiers. (*Arlington National Cemetery*)

Civil War–era unknown burials at Arlington include those of unidentified African American soldiers and civilians, who were buried in segregated sections of the cemetery. Sections 23 and 27 contain the graves of African American soldiers who served in the United States Colored Troops (the official name that the U.S. Army gave to these segregated units during the Civil War). Section 27 also includes the graves of formerly enslaved African American civilians, who lived elsewhere in the D.C. area.

In 1905, construction at the Washington Barracks (present-day Fort McNair) unearthed the remains of fourteen soldiers and sailors from the War of 1812. The Army reinterred them at Arlington National Cemetery with a group burial marker. (*Arlington National Cemetery*)

Visitors can find the graves of unknown soldiers from the Civil War and other conflicts throughout Arlington National Cemetery. The Army reinterred unknown soldiers from the War of 1812 at Arlington in 1905, and unknowns from the Spanish-American War (1898) also received burials here.



FOURTEEN  
UNKNOWN  
SOLDIERS AND SAILORS  
OF THE  
WAR OF 1812  
SYMBOLIC OF ALL  
WHO MADE THE  
SUPREME SACRIFICE  
IN THAT WAR

# Crucible of Carnage: The First World War

The technological advances of World War I resulted in the destruction of human remains on an unprecedented scale. Around the globe, the war created a new generation of unknown soldiers, leaving many families without closure.

Technological and industrial progress, along with the global influenza pandemic of 1918, made World War I one of the deadliest wars in history. Artillery and machine guns became increasingly accurate and lethal. Trench warfare led to stalemate, with enormous casualties and few clear victories. The warring nations utilized deadly new weapons and tactics, including poison gas, tanks, flamethrowers, aircraft, and unrestricted submarine warfare. Globally, these methods of slaughter rendered the remains of millions of combatants unidentifiable or missing.

When the war ended, nations created cemeteries and memorials to honor their dead, known and unknown. Americans looked to Arlington as the nation faced another reckoning with massive wartime fatalities.

---

During World War I, mechanized warfare increased the scope and scale of mass destruction. This 1918 photograph of a ruined church in Montfaucon, France, reveals the war's devastating impact. Today, the Montfaucon American Monument marks this important American site of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. *(National Archives and Records Administration)*

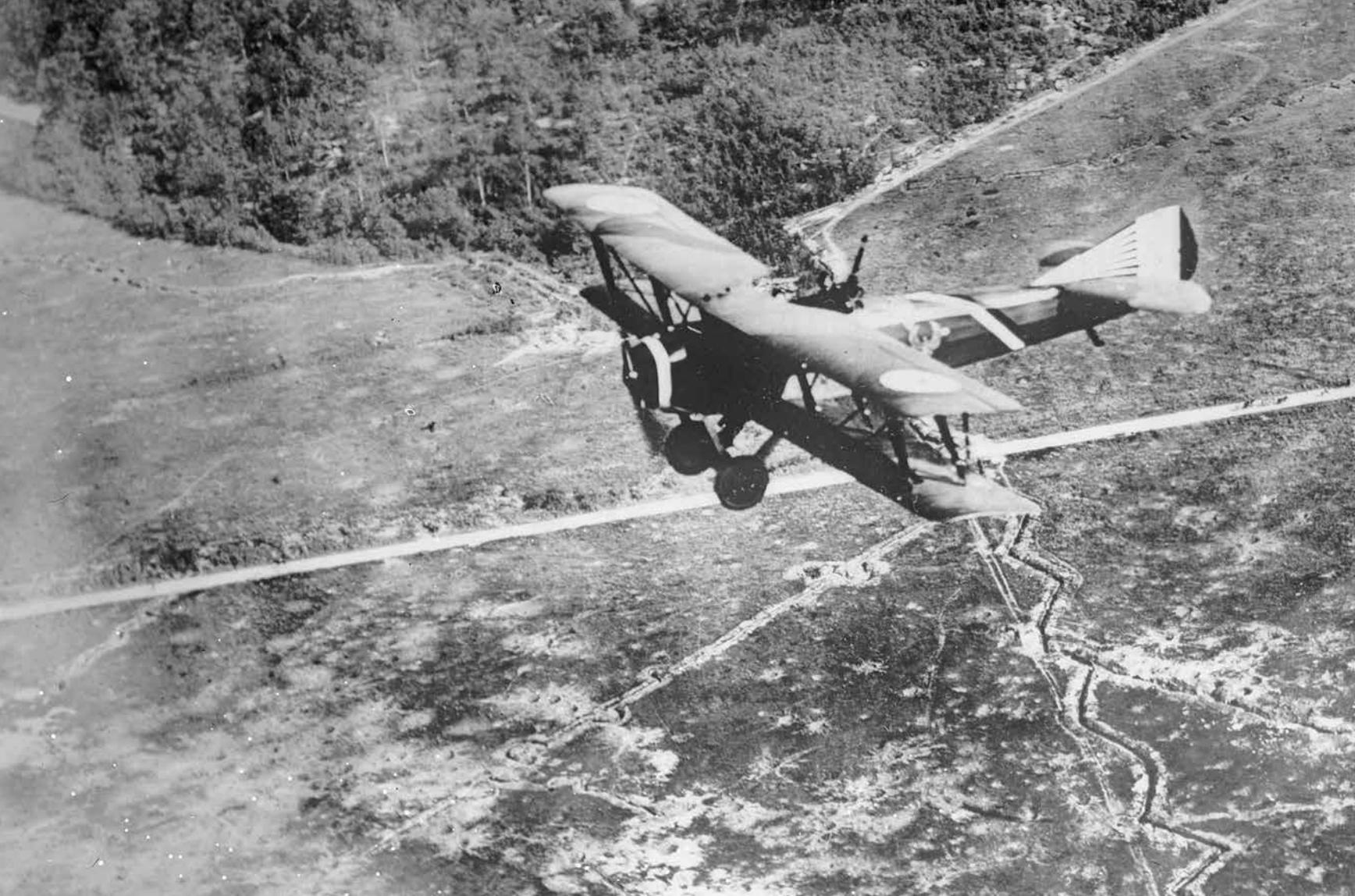
---



---

Airplanes soared above the trenches where millions of soldiers fought and died during World War I. Aerial bombardment increased the likelihood of unidentifiable remains. (*San Diego Air and Space Museum Archive*)

---



---

An American crew fires a 37-mm. gun during an advance on German positions in 1918. Weapons like this made combat deadlier and more destructive to the human body.  
*(National Archives and Records Administration)*

---



---

During the 1918 influenza pandemic, soldiers await treatment at an emergency hospital at Camp Funston, Kansas. The influenza pandemic may have originated at Camp Funston or another location in Kansas. (*National Museum of Health and Medicine*)

---



---

Frontline Allied artillery guns fire on German positions along the Western Front. Like airplanes, these powerful mechanized guns contributed to high numbers of unidentified fatalities.  
*(National Archives and Records Administration)*

---



African American soldiers assigned to the Army Quartermaster Corps place a U.S. service member's remains into a casket. In the segregated military, African American soldiers often performed the physically and emotionally difficult labor of burying the war dead.  
*(National Archives and Records Administration)*

The Army's Graves Registration Service (GRS) led the effort to locate and identify the World War I dead. Under the GRS, commanded by Maj. (later Lt. Col.) Charles C. Pierce, African American soldiers in segregated units did much of this difficult labor. Pierce is buried in Arlington National Cemetery's Section 15A, and several African American GRS soldiers rest in the segregated World War I sections.



The American Battle Monuments Commission administers the Somme American Cemetery and Memorial, located in northern France. It is the final resting place of nearly 2,000 Americans who died in World War I.  
*(American Battle Monuments Commission)*

After World War I, the U.S. government allowed families to choose whether to bring home their war dead, leave them buried where they fell, or inter them at American military cemeteries in Europe. In 1923, Congress established the American Battle Monuments Commission to create these permanent cemeteries in Europe. Inspired by Arlington, they contain numerous unknown graves, and each has memorial walls or “Walls of the Missing” that name those Americans without known graves.



General John J. Pershing, the  
commander of the American  
Expeditionary Forces during World

War I,

is buried under a standard headstone  
in Section 34 alongside his soldiers.

*(Arlington National Cemetery)*

General John J. Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Forces during World War I, lies buried atop a knoll in Section 34. Pershing is the only American to be promoted during his own lifetime to the highest rank in the U.S. Army—General of the Armies of the United States. Pershing played a major role in the ceremonies for the burial of the Unknown Soldier. In 1948, the government honored him with a funeral at Memorial Amphitheater. At his request, his grave rests under a standard government-issued headstone like those of the soldiers who lie near him, many of whom served in World War I.



# Allied Inspiration: The British and French Tombs

Faced with unimaginable numbers of unknown World War I dead, Great Britain and France each dedicated a tomb in their memory in 1920. This began a tradition that inspired other nations to do the same, including the United States.

On November 11, 1920, the second anniversary of Armistice Day, Great Britain and France both interred an unknown service member from World War I. The French laid theirs to rest under the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, and the British buried theirs at Westminster Abbey in London. These unidentified remains represented all unknowns, and their tombs became shrines where citizens could mourn the war's human cost.

The United States, inspired by its allies, decided to create a similar tomb for an American unknown. Congressman and World War I veteran Hamilton Fish led the effort in Congress, which passed legislation to approve the creation of a Tomb of the Unknown Soldier on March 4, 1921. Although other locations were considered, Congress ultimately located the Tomb at Arlington National Cemetery, near the new Memorial Amphitheater.

---

France's Unknown Soldier lies beneath the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. The French and British Tombs inspired the United States to create its own Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. (*Arlington National Cemetery [ANC] Historical Research Collection*)

---



ICI  
REPOSE  
UN SOLDAT  
FRANÇAIS  
MORT  
POUR LA PATRIE

---

Britain's Unknown Warrior lies buried in Westminster Abbey  
in London. (*ANC Historical Research Collection*)

---

BENEATH THIS STONE RESTS THE BODY  
OF A BRITISH WARRIOR  
UNKNOWN BY NAME OR RANK  
BROUGHT FROM FRANCE TO LIE AMONG  
THE MOST ILLUSTRIOUS OF THE LAND  
AND BURIED HERE ON ARMISTICE DAY  
11 NOV: 1920. IN THE PRESENCE OF  
HIS MAJESTY KING GEORGE V  
HIS MINISTERS OF STATE  
THE CHIEFS OF HIS FORCES  
AND A VAST CONCOURSE OF THE NATION  
THUS ARE COMMEMORATED THE MANY  
MULTITUDES WHO DURING THE GREAT  
WAR OF 1914-1918 GAVE THE MOST THAT  
MAN CAN GIVE LIFE ITSELF  
FOR GOD  
FOR KING AND COUNTRY  
FOR LOVED ONES HOME AND EMPIRE  
FOR THE SACRED CAUSE OF JUSTICE AND  
THE FREEDOM OF THE WORLD  
THEY BURIED HIM AMONG THE KINGS BECAUSE HE  
HAD DONE GOOD TOWARD GOD AND TOWARD  
HIS HOUSE  
IN CHRIST SHALL ALL BE MADE ALIVE

THIS  
THAN  
MAN  
NO  
HATH  
LOVE  
MINDS

DYING AND BEING THE LIFE  
UNKNOWN AND YET WELL KNOWN

---

Hamilton Fish in March 1921, the month that his bill to create the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier finally became law. Fish served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1920 to 1944. (*Library of Congress*)

---



---

Belgium's Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, located in Brussels, was dedicated in 1922. (*National Archives and Records Administration*)

---



---

Italy's Victor Emmanuel II National Monument in Rome honors both the nation's first king and an unknown soldier from World War I. In 1921, three of the World War I Allies—Italy, Portugal, and the United States—followed Britain and France in creating tombs to honor unknown soldiers. (*Library of Congress*)

---



In France, the Thiepval Memorial honors the 1916 joint British and French offensive in the Somme region. Engraved on the memorial's walls are the names of more than 72,000 missing British and South African soldiers who have no known grave. (*Commonwealth War Graves Commission*)

In Europe, numerous monuments commemorate the unknown dead. The Douaumont Ossuary at Verdun, France, contains the skeletal remains of 130,000 unidentified French and German soldiers. Great Britain's Thiepval Memorial in France commemorates more than 72,000 unknown British and South African soldiers from the Somme sector. The Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial in Belgium honors more than 54,000 unknown soldiers from the British Commonwealth. Engraved on both British memorials are the names of the missing.



At the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, General John J. Pershing lays a wreath at France's Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in 1925. (*National Archives and Records Administration*)

The French buried their Unknown Soldier beneath the Arc de Triomphe, a memorial in the center of Paris that commemorates the dead from the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. The tomb's eternal flame later inspired Jacqueline Kennedy to include an eternal flame at the grave of her husband, President John F. Kennedy, at Arlington National Cemetery.



An unknown British headstone, perhaps similar to this one, inspired British Army Chaplain David Railton to propose that the British honor an unknown service member in a tomb in Westminster Abbey. (*National Archives and Records Administration*)

David Railton, a British Army chaplain and World War I veteran, is credited with the idea of honoring a single unknown British service member to represent all war dead and to provide a place for the British people to grieve. The Unknown Warrior was buried in London's Westminster Abbey on November 11, 1920, Armistice Day.



# America Selects Its Unknown

In the fall of 1921, the U.S. Army selected one unknown American service member to inter in the planned Tomb. The Army took detailed precautions to ensure the anonymity of this honored American and cooperated with the French to commemorate him on his journey home.

The Army's Quartermaster Corps disinterred one set of remains each from four American cemeteries in France: the Meuse-Argonne, St. Mihiel, Somme, and Aisne-Marne cemeteries. They transported the four caskets of remains to the town of Châlons-sur-Marne, where a formal selection ceremony took place at the city hall on October 24, 1921.

In the presence of French and American dignitaries, U.S. Army Sgt. Edward F. Younger, a decorated World War I veteran, selected the Unknown by laying a spray of white roses upon one of the four caskets. After a ceremonial procession, a special train transported the casket to the port of Le Havre. Along the way, the French people honored the Unknown and expressed their gratitude for America's role in the Allied victory. These events strengthened ties between the United States and France. After an elaborate send-off at Le Havre on October 25, 1921, the casket departed on the USS *Olympia* for the journey home.

---

French soldiers escort one of the four American unknown candidates into the Châlons-sur-Marne city hall on October 23, 1921. The next day, a U.S. World War I veteran would select one as the Unknown Soldier to be interred at Arlington. (*National Archives and Records Administration*)

---



---

Sgt. Edward F. Younger was serving with the American Forces in Germany when he received orders to report to France for duty as part of the Guard of Honor for the selection ceremonies. He was chosen to select the Unknown. (*ANC Historical Research Collection*)

---



---

A joint American and French honor guard stand at attention before  
the selected American Unknown Soldier in Châlons-sur-Marne,  
France, October 24, 1921. (*Bibliothèque nationale de France*)

---



---

Crowds watch as a military procession escorts the Unknown's caisson through the streets of Châlons-sur-Marne, France, on October 24, 1921. (*National Archives and Records Administration*)

---



GLOIRE AU HÉROS AMÉRICAIN INCONNU

PHARMACIE

---

American soldiers carry the Unknown Soldier from the  
train to a caisson in Le Havre, France, on October 25, 1921.  
*(National Archives and Records Administration)*

---



André Maginot, the French Minister of Pensions and a World War I veteran, presents the *Croix de chevalier de la Légion d'honneur* to the Unknown Soldier in Le Havre on October 25, 1921. (*Bibliothèque nationale de France*)

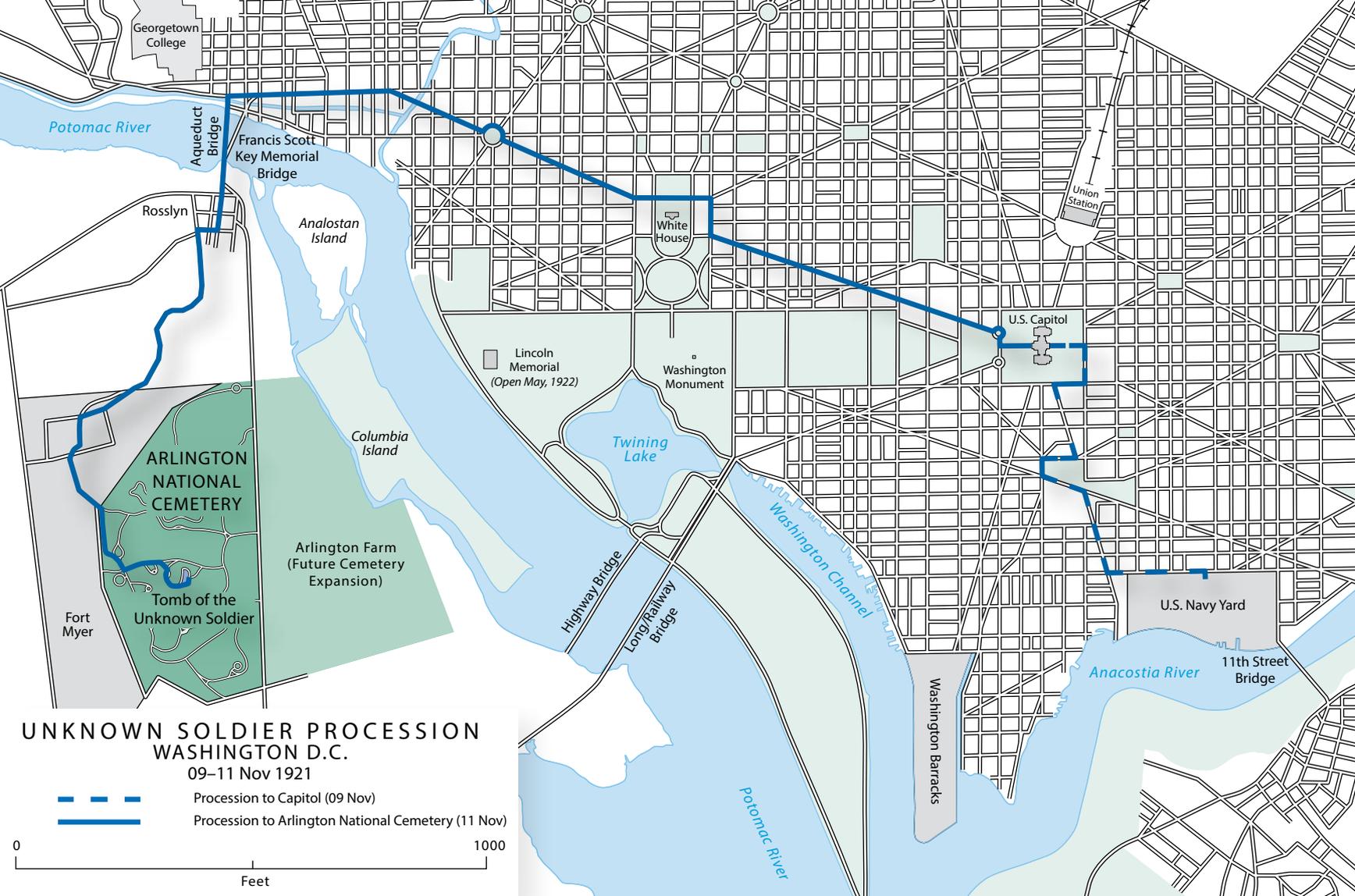
France's government, military, veterans, and citizens all honored the American Unknown through various ceremonies and processions. In Le Havre, children showered the casket with flowers, and André Maginot, the Minister of Pensions, presented the Unknown with the *Croix de chevalier de la Légion d'honneur*, France's highest military honor. This medal remains on exhibit in Arlington National Cemetery's Memorial Amphitheater Display Room.



The USS *Olympia* departs from the port of Le Havre, France, to transport the Unknown to the United States, October 25, 1921. (*Bibliothèque nationale de France*)

The U.S. Navy selected the cruiser USS *Olympia* to bring home the Unknown Soldier, in honor of the ship's celebrated service history. Commissioned in 1892, the *Olympia* served as Admiral George Dewey's flagship during the Spanish-American War, most famously in the Battle of Manila Bay (1898). The ship also protected the U.S. coast from German U-boats during World War I.





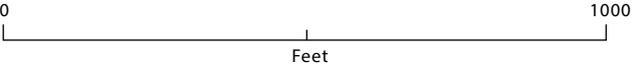
# UNKNOWN SOLDIER PROCESSION WASHINGTON D.C.

09–11 Nov 1921



Procession to Capitol (09 Nov)

Procession to Arlington National Cemetery (11 Nov)



## A Nation Mourns: The Burial of the World War I Unknown

In the United States, ceremonies for the burial of the Unknown unified the country in a national moment of mourning. These democratic, participatory events created a set of traditions at the new Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Ceremonies surrounded the Unknown Soldier's return home, starting with the USS *Olympia*'s arrival at the Washington Navy Yard on November 9, 1921. Each event was open to the American public. On November 10, as the casket lay in state in the Capitol Rotunda, more than 90,000 mourners came to pay their respects. The Unknown's funeral took place on November 11, the anniversary of Armistice Day. Throngs of spectators lined Washington's streets as a grand military procession escorted the Unknown from the Capitol to Memorial Amphitheater at Arlington National Cemetery.

At the still-incomplete Tomb, the Unknown Soldier was laid to rest with an elaborate funeral. Thousands attended the funeral. AT&T even used telephone lines to transmit

President Warren G. Harding's speech to audiences at venues in New York City and San Francisco. To create a shared sense of nationwide participation, President Harding formally declared a national holiday and encouraged all Americans to observe two minutes of silence and to toll their bells during the funeral. In his speech, Harding honored the Unknown Soldier as a representative of the United States who connected the diverse American people to the world. International participation lent diplomatic significance to the burial. Dignitaries from France, Belgium, Great Britain, Italy, Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Poland presented the Unknown with medals to demonstrate their governments' gratitude to the United States. Thus, from the start, the Tomb became a people's memorial, a collective grave representative of all Americans who fought and died in World War I. Simultaneously, it demonstrated the United States' wartime contributions to the world.

---

Sailors and Marines bring the Unknown Soldier's  
casket ashore at the Washington Navy Yard, November  
9, 1921. (*ANC Historical Research Collection*)

---



---

Military officers salute the Unknown Soldier as the casket is carried to the caisson that will transport it from the Navy Yard to the U.S. Capitol. (*Library of Congress*)

---



---

President Warren G. Harding and former President William  
Howard Taft pay tribute to the Unknown Soldier inside the  
U.S. Capitol, November 9, 1921. (*Library of Congress*)

---



---

On November 11, 1921, crowds assemble outside Arlington National Cemetery's Memorial Amphitheater to witness the funeral of the Unknown Soldier. (*Library of Congress*)

---



---

General John J. Pershing scatters soil from France into the  
Unknown Soldier's crypt during the burial ceremony at Arlington  
National Cemetery, November 11, 1921. (*Library of Congress*)

---



---

President Warren G. Harding addresses the nation during the funeral service for the Unknown Soldier at Memorial Amphitheater on November 11, 1921. (*Library of Congress*)

---



During the Unknown Soldier's funeral ceremony, Chief Plenty Coups lays his coup stick and headdress on the Tomb. These and other ceremonial gifts are on exhibit in Memorial Amphitheater. (*Library of Congress*)

Chief Plenty Coups of the Crow Nation (Apsáalooke) represented American Indians at the funeral ceremony. During the burial service, Plenty Coups removed his feathered war bonnet and coup stick and placed them on the crypt, in tribute to the Unknown and the many American Indians who served and died during the war. Chief Plenty Coups's war bonnet and coup stick are on display in the exhibit at Memorial Amphitheater.



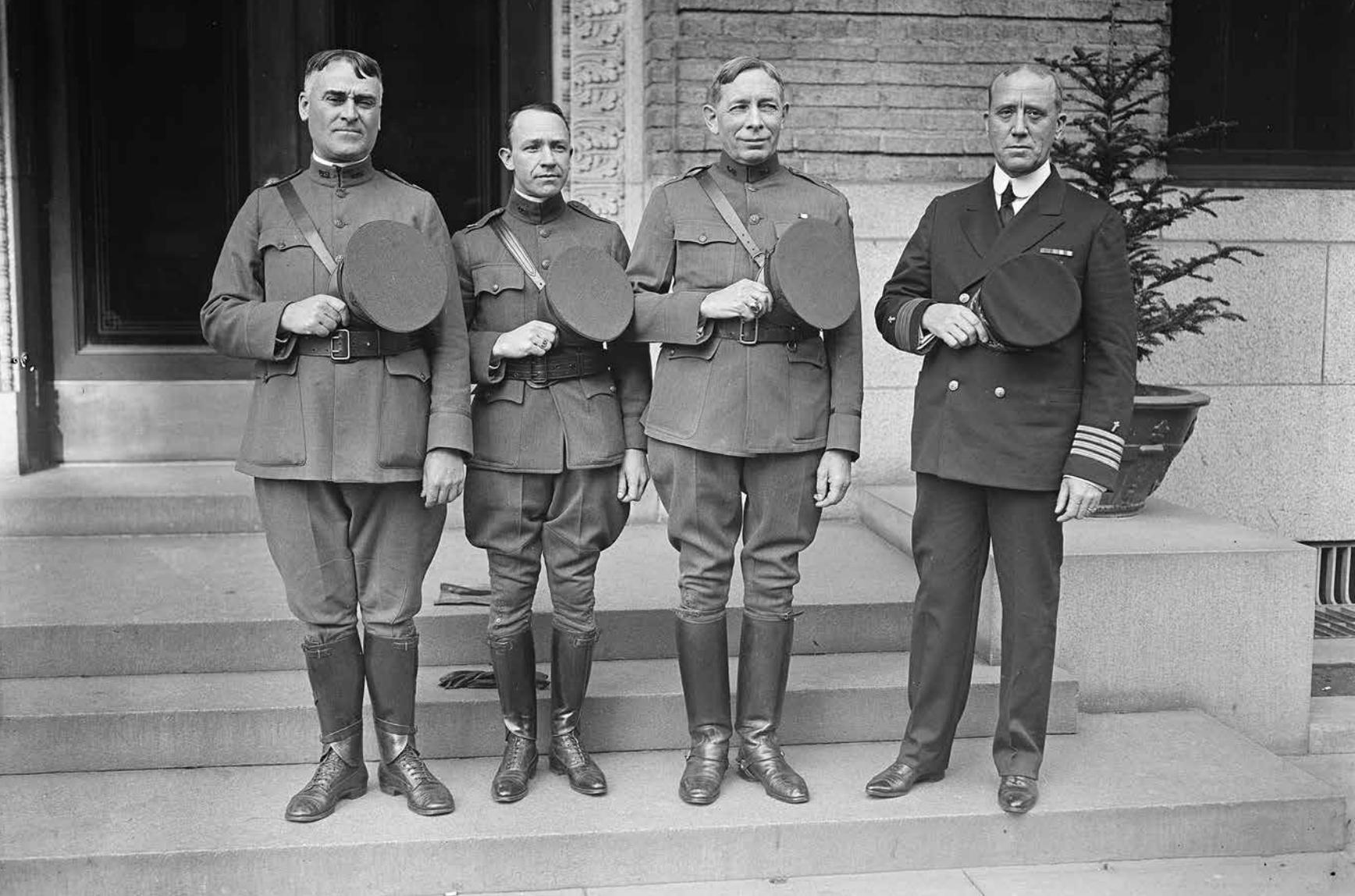
World War I nurses march in the Unknown Soldier's funeral procession from the Capitol to Arlington National Cemetery. (*National Archives and Records Administration*)

The procession that accompanied the Unknown Soldier from the Capitol to the cemetery represented a cross section of American society. Civilian organizations marched alongside veterans, military units, and government officials. Participants included veterans from every U.S. conflict since the Civil War, Medal of Honor recipients, groups of Jewish and African American veterans, the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, female nurses, and the American War Mothers organization.



The four military chaplains who participated in the Unknown Soldier's funeral (*left to right*): Chaplain John T. Axton, Rabbi Morris S. Lazaron, Rt. Rev. Charles H. Brent, and Chaplain John B. Frazier. (*Library of Congress*)

Four military chaplains from different denominations participated in the burial ceremony. The Right Reverend Charles H. Brent, the Army's senior chaplain during the war, led the service. Army Reserve Chaplain Rabbi Morris S. Lazaron, Navy Chaplain John B. Frazier, and Army Chief of Chaplains John T. Axton all delivered parts of the ceremony.





# Unfinished and Unguarded: The Early Years of the Tomb

During the early years of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the unfinished site served as a communal grave for grieving families. It also began to evolve into a symbolic stage for ceremonies and rituals: military, diplomatic, and personal.

There was not enough time to finish constructing the Tomb before the Unknown's 1921 burial ceremony, and the structure remained incomplete until 1932. Pressure to perfect the revered site slowed its completion. Still, mourners, veterans, and others made pilgrimages to ease their grief. Many had no other grave to visit.

Meanwhile, organizations and officials from around the globe participated in frequent ceremonies to honor the Unknown. Yet the Tomb remained one memorial among many at Arlington National Cemetery. The site initially did not have a guard, and visitors could walk up to and even touch the Tomb. During the 1920s and 1930s, the Tomb gradually became more renowned as a national site of commemoration, further elevating the cemetery's importance. As the Tomb rose in prominence, it forever changed Arlington National Cemetery itself.

---

A woman mourns at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in 1922. During World War I, thousands of American families lost loved ones, many of whom remained missing or unidentified. (*Library of Congress*)

---



---

Prince Andrew of Greece uses a movie camera at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in 1923. During these early years, the Tomb became a popular tourist attraction as well as a site of mourning. (*Library of Congress*)

---



---

To prevent visitors from disrespecting the Tomb, the Army enclosed it within a fence. A civilian guard was added in 1925 and a military guard in 1926. (*Library of Congress*)

---



---

French military aviators pay homage to the Unknown  
on February 9, 1928. (*Library of Congress*)

---





---

Gold Star mothers from Missouri lay a wreath at the Tomb on September 21, 1930. General John J. Pershing (*center left*) also attended this ceremony to honor these women's sacrifices. (*Library of Congress*)

---



GENERAL JOHN J. PERSHING AT THE TOP OF THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER -  
NATIONAL CEMETERY - SEPTEMBER 25, 1920 -

Gold Star mothers participate in a ceremony at the Tomb during Armistice Day, 1925. (*Library of Congress*)

Many women felt a strong connection to the Tomb. During World War I, American culture honored women as mothers of the fighting force. They formed advocacy organizations and pursued service projects. Mothers and widows of fallen service members, known as Gold Star mothers and widows, frequently took part in events at the Tomb, such as the American War Mothers' annual Mother's Day ceremony at the Tomb. For those whose loved ones remained unidentified, the Tomb stood in for an absent individual gravesite.



S. Sgt. Frank Witchey sounding "Taps" for the American War Mothers, a service organization formed during World War I to unite mothers of military members, during their annual Mother's Day ceremony at the Tomb in 1929.  
*(Library of Congress)*

Wreath-laying ceremonies, accompanied by the sounding of "Taps" on the bugle, quickly became a tradition at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. S. Sgt. Frank Witchey, who sounded "Taps" at the burial of the World War I Unknown, frequently played at these ceremonies during the Tomb's early years. These traditions continue today and remain an integral part of the ceremonial rituals at the Tomb.





# Guarding the Tomb: From Civilians to Sentinels

With their immaculate uniforms and precise rituals, the Tomb Guards are iconic figures at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. However, the Tomb did not always have guards. The story behind the guards' presence shows how this sacred space has evolved during the past 100 years.

Originally, the Tomb sat unguarded. Although most people visited the new Tomb to pay their respects, some early visitors treated it as a tourist attraction, with claims that some even used it as a picnic table or posed there for commercial photographers. As it became more popular with visitors, such instances of disrespectful public behavior led the Army to employ civilian guards at the site.

In 1926, the Army assigned soldiers as guards, and in 1937, they began to guard the Tomb twenty-four hours a day. In 1948, soldiers from the 3d U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard) assumed this prestigious duty, which they continue to hold today. Known as Sentinels, these soldiers provide security for the Tomb, lead ceremonies, and maintain the sanctity of the space. Most importantly, they honor the Unknowns through the precision and perfection of their rituals.

---

A changing of the guard ceremony on September 10, 1929.  
*(Courtesy of the Mary (Smith) Blood Family)*

---



---

A soldier guards the Tomb in 1931, before the completion of the sarcophagus in 1932. The Army assigned soldiers to guard the Tomb beginning in 1926. (*Library of Congress*)

---



---

S. Sgt. Kevin Calderon guards the Tomb in June 2018. (*U.S. Army*)

---



---

Soldiers from the 3d U.S. Infantry Regiment perform the Changing of the Guard in 1958 (*left*) and 2019 (*right*). Uniform styles may change, but the Tomb Guards' rituals remain the same. (*Left: Photo by Rose Klovdahl, ANC Historical Research Collection. Right: Arlington National Cemetery*)

---





Sentinels complete a changing of the guard ceremony during a heavy rainstorm. (*U.S. Army*)

Sentinels guard the Tomb 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, regardless of weather. The military's highest ceremonial honor—the twenty-one-gun salute—is the basis of the Sentinel's ritual walk. The Sentinel takes twenty-one steps, and pauses for twenty-one seconds between movements. After executing a facing movement and before walking to the next point, the Sentinel executes "shoulder-arms" to place the rifle on the shoulder farthest from the Tomb. This signifies that the Sentinel stands between the Tomb and any possible threat. The guard changes every hour or half-hour in a precise ceremony that honors the comrades they protect.



Army Sfc. Chelsea Porterfield, sergeant of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, renders honors during a wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb on Inauguration Day, January 20, 2021. (*U.S. Army*)

Tomb Sentinels are precise in all of their movements while guarding the Tomb and also in their uniform preparation. They wear the U.S. Army dress blue uniform and ensure the placement of all their medals and insignia are within a fraction of an inch of their specifications. Through these and other traditions, the Sentinels honor the Unknowns by upholding the highest standards in all they do.





# Designing a National Shrine

Drawn out over a decade, the process of completing the Tomb incited vigorous debates. After careful consideration, the final design created an enduring national symbol rife with meaning.

Originally, the U.S. government gave Thomas Hastings, the architect of the new Memorial Amphitheater, the responsibility for designing the Tomb. Hastings created the temporary tomb installed for the 1921 burial, and afterward, he worked tirelessly to complete the site. He viewed the Tomb as the final piece needed to complete Memorial Amphitheater, initially envisioning it as a tall, elaborately carved monument. Although the federal Commission of Fine Arts supported Hastings's vision, the War Department opposed his ornate design and decided to look for other options.

In 1926, Congress authorized an open design competition to complete the Tomb. After several phases of review, it awarded the design to World War I veterans Lorimer Rich and Thomas Hudson Jones. Simple and symbolic, their design featured a flat sarcophagus inscribed with neoclassical carvings that reflected the Tomb's rising importance in American commemorative culture. After more debates and delays, the completed Tomb finally opened in 1932, almost eleven years after its inception.

---

One of architect Thomas Hastings's early designs for the completed Tomb was erected as a model at the site around 1923. The War Department eventually rejected Hastings's designs and launched an open design competition instead. (*National Archives and Records Administration*)

---



WE DO NOT KNOW THE  
EMINENCE OF HIS BIRTH  
BUT WE DO KNOW THE  
GLORY OF HIS DEATH  
HE DIED FOR HIS  
COUNTRY  
AND GREATER DEVOTION  
HATH NO MAN THAN THIS  
HE DIED UNQUESTIONING  
UNCOMPLAINING WITH  
FAITH IN HIS HEART AND  
HOPE ON HIS LIPS  
FOR HIS COUNTRY  
HONOR TRIUMPH AND  
ITS CIVILIZATION  
SURVIVE

---

In 1928, Secretary of War Dwight Davis and Maj. Gen. Benjamin Cheatham, Quartermaster General of the U.S. Army, display a model and illustration of the winning design for the finished Tomb. (*Library of Congress*)

---



---

Workers who chiseled and cut the marble block that would rest atop the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier pose for a photograph before its transfer to Arlington National Cemetery, c. 1931. (*ANC Historical Research Collection*)

---



---

A crane lowers the marble sarcophagus over the original  
crypt of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, December 23,  
1931. (*National Archives and Records Administration*)

---



HEGEMAN-HARRIS CO.

BUILDING  
CONSTRUCTION

---

Marble carvers and sculptors complete work on the Tomb's sarcophagus, circa 1932. The sarcophagus is adorned with sculpted wreaths and figures representing Peace, Victory, and Valor. (*Library of Congress*)

---



The sarcophagus of the Tomb seen after its 1932 completion.  
*(National Archives and Records Administration)*

Rich and Jones designed the finalized sarcophagus for the Tomb to be rich in symbolism. One side features carved figures representing Peace, Victory, and Valor. The other side includes the inscription, "Here Rests In Honored Glory An American Soldier Known But To God." Rich sculpted many of the marble carvings himself, along with the Piccirilli Brothers, a renowned family of sculptors.



In 2019, a cemetery employee applies zinc oxide to the Tomb sarcophagus to reduce biofilm—a complex colony of living microbes that, over time, discolors the marble.  
*(Arlington National Cemetery)*

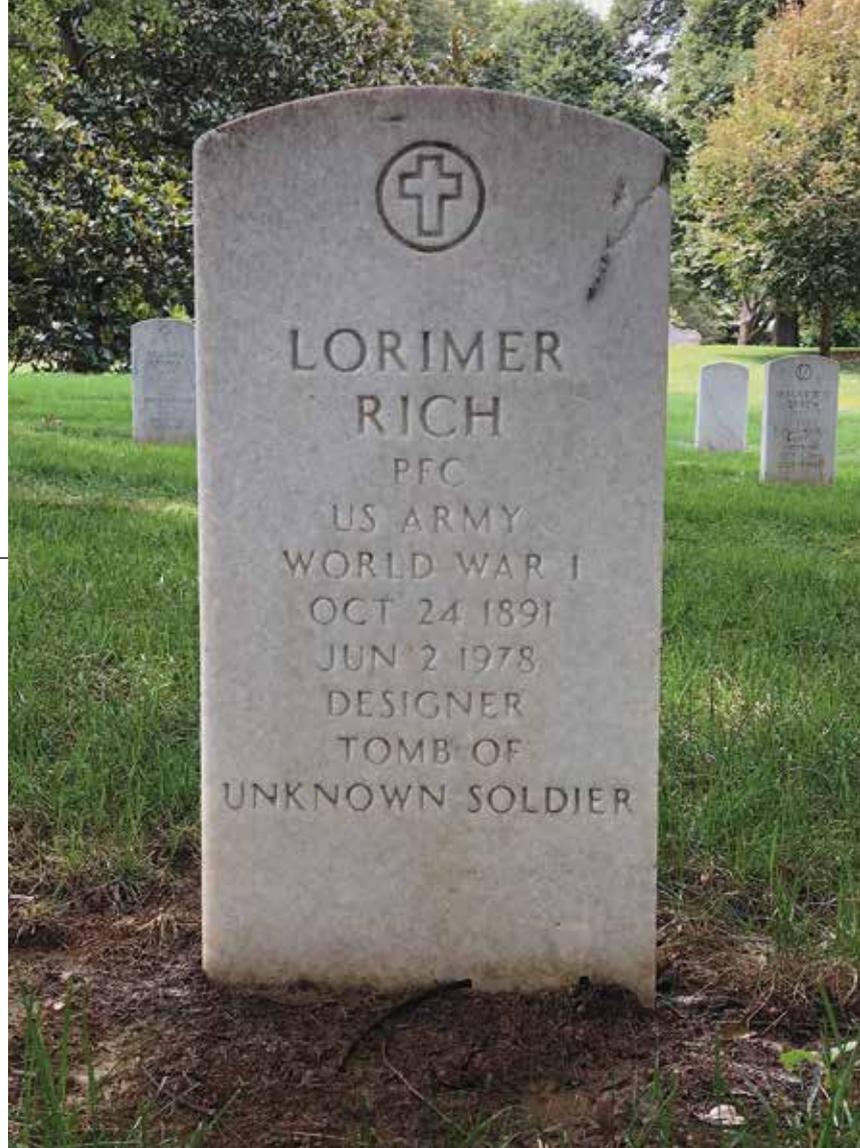
The preservation of the Tomb began during its first few decades and continues today. Major repair work began as early as 1933. In 1972, workers filled the Tomb's cracks for the first time. Between 1988 and 1990, a multidisciplinary team created three-dimensional, infrared, and radar images of the Tomb, followed by cleaning and repairs. The cemetery undertook extensive conservation of the Tomb, plaza, and Memorial Amphitheater before the Tomb centennial. Arlington National Cemetery continues to preserve the Tomb for future generations.



The grave of architect and World War I veteran Lorimer Rich is located in Section 48, a short distance from his best-known creation, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

*(Arlington National Cemetery)*

Two World War I Army veterans collaborated to create the permanent Tomb. Architect Lorimer Rich designed the marble sarcophagus to go atop the crypt, and sculptor Thomas Hudson Jones contributed the decorative carvings. Their design submission also reimagined the landscape around the Tomb as a more ceremonial space. Rich added a granite plaza in front of the Tomb and a monumental staircase that led from the Tomb to a tree-lined lawn. Rich's grave is in Section 48 of the cemetery.



# The Tradition Continues: The World War II and Korean War Unknowns

Although the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier originated with World War I, it eventually symbolized fallen service members from all American wars. After a succession of wars that resulted in more unidentified American service members, the United States continued the tradition of interring an Unknown at the Tomb. This decision distinguished the United States from other nations, most of which did not add more unknowns to their tombs.

In the aftermath of World War II, Americans wanted to add an unknown from that war to the Tomb. The United States' entrance into the Korean War in 1950 delayed the process, as the nation focused on fighting yet another conflict. When the Korean War concluded, plans resumed to add unknowns from both World War II and Korea. Suitable sets of remains from each of these wars needed to be selected. Because World War II had stretched across the globe, the Army exhumed unidentified bodies from every major combat region. It selected two to represent the European and Pacific Theaters. Aboard the USS *Canberra*, an enlisted U.S. Navy sailor and Medal of Honor recipient, Hospital Corpsman 1st Class William R. Charette, placed a wreath on one of the two identical caskets. The other received a burial at sea. The

Korean War selection proved more straightforward. Four unidentified bodies from the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific ("The Punchbowl") in Hawai'i were chosen as candidates, and Army M. Sgt. Ned Lyle selected one to be the Korean War Unknown.

On Memorial Day 1958, the nation paused for a dual funeral for the Unknowns from World War II and the Korean War. The ceremony re-created many of the 1921 events. After lying in state at the Capitol Rotunda, the Unknowns received a ceremonial procession to Arlington's Memorial Amphitheater. There, a crowd of thousands watched President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Vice President Richard M. Nixon receive folded flags from atop the two caskets. In the context of the Cold War, this dual funeral, with the chief executives in the spotlight, served as a public showcase of American military power and international influence. Meanwhile, the Tomb's meanings continued to change. Now a monument to multiple wars, it became a stronger symbol of nationalism as well as a place where foreign visitors could honor the American military. Ceremonies at the Tomb also increased in frequency, further transforming it from a site of individual mourning to one of collective patriotic ritual.

---

In May 1958, the World War II and Korean War Unknowns lie in state at the U.S. Capitol Rotunda, surrounded by a joint honor guard. (*National Archives and Records Administration*)

---



---

An overhead view of the World War II and Korean War  
Unknowns as they lay in state at the Capitol Rotunda from  
May 28 to May 30, 1958. (*Architect of the Capitol*)

---



U.S. Navy Hospital Corpsman 1st Class William R. Charette selects the World War II Unknown aboard the USS *Canberra*, May 26, 1958. The caskets of the two World War II candidates are on either side of the Korean War Unknown, in the center. (*Naval History and Heritage Command*)

In order to select an unknown from World War II, separate ceremonies were held for the European Theater of Operations and the Pacific Theater of Operations. U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Edward J. O'Neill selected the unknown candidate from Europe at Epinal American Cemetery and Memorial in France on May 12, 1958, and U.S. Air Force Col. Glenn T. Eagleston selected the Pacific Theater unknown candidate at Hickam Air Force Base, Hawai'i, on May 16, 1958. On May 26, 1958, on board the USS *Canberra* in the waters off the Virginia capes, Charette made the final selection from among the two candidates. The remains not chosen received a burial at sea.



---

Flanked by military members at Memorial Amphitheater, the flag-draped caskets of the World War II and Korean War Unknowns await burial on May 30, 1958. (*ANC Historical Research Collection*)

---



---

The World War II and Korean War Unknowns are placed side by side above their final resting places, May 30, 1958. (*ANC Historical Research Collection*)

---



---

On May 30, 1958, President Dwight D. Eisenhower receives the folded flag as the symbolic next of kin for the World War II Unknown. Vice President Richard M. Nixon awaits the flag from the casket of the Korean War Unknown. (*National Archives and Records Administration*)

---





# Unknown No More: The Vietnam War Unknown

The Vietnam War raised new questions about the Tomb's future. Technological and scientific advancements, along with improved recovery methods, opened the possibility that all unknowns from Vietnam could someday be identified. Public opinion remained divided over whether to inter an unknown service member from that conflict.

As an interim measure, on November 11, 1978, President Jimmy E. Carter dedicated a plaque at the Tomb to honor Vietnam veterans. Despite this gesture, some veterans and others still lobbied Congress to add an unknown Vietnam War service member to the Tomb. On Memorial Day in 1984, an Unknown from the Vietnam War, selected from a very limited group of candidates, received a state funeral and

joined his comrades at the Tomb, despite the possibility that all remains from that war might eventually be identifiable.

The high likelihood of positive identification and advances in DNA technology later led the Department of Defense to decide to disinter the Vietnam Unknown in 1998. Using DNA analysis, the Defense Department subsequently identified the Vietnam Unknown as U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Michael J. Blassie, whose family had urged the government to investigate this possibility. Blassie's family chose to rebury him at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in Missouri. His empty crypt now honors all missing and unknown Americans who served in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War. The era of the Unknown Soldier, it seemed, had come to a close.

---

The funeral procession for the Vietnam War Unknown enters  
Arlington National Cemetery en route to Memorial Amphitheater  
on May 28, 1984. (*National Archives and Records Administration*)

---



---

President Ronald W. Reagan presents the Medal of Honor to the  
Vietnam War Unknown during a ceremony at Memorial Amphitheater  
on May 28, 1984. (*ANC Historical Research Collection*)

---



At Memorial Amphitheater on Veterans Day 1978,  
President Jimmy E. Carter and J. Maxwell Cleland,  
Administrator of the United States Veterans  
Administration, dedicate the bronze plaque that honors  
Vietnam War service members.  
*(ANC Historical Research Collection)*

A bronze plaque honoring all service members who died in the Vietnam War hangs in Memorial Amphitheater's Display Room. On Veterans Day in 1978, President Jimmy E. Carter and Veterans Administration Administrator J. Maxwell Cleland, a decorated triple amputee of the Vietnam War, dedicated the plaque. Cleland often acknowledged the struggles faced by fellow veterans of this controversial war, as he did during his 1979 Memorial Day address when he told the audience, "All soldiers who fought in Vietnam are unknown."



THE PEOPLE  
OF THE  
UNITED STATES  
OF AMERICA  
PAY TRIBUTE  
TO THOSE  
MEMBERS  
OF ITS ARMED  
FORCES WHO  
SERVED HONORABLY  
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA  
DURING THE  
VIETNAM CONFLICT

---

President Ronald W. Reagan lays a wreath during the  
funeral for the Vietnam War Unknown on Memorial Day,  
May 28, 1984. (*ANC Historical Research Collection*)

---



---

The Vietnam War Unknown was interred on May 28, 1984. Despite ongoing progress in the identification of unknown Vietnam War fatalities, the burial of the Vietnam Unknown went forward. (*National Archives and Records Administration*)

---



---

In a ceremony on May 14, 1998, the Department of Defense disinterred the Vietnam War Unknown, after reexamining evidence related to his possible identity. He was positively identified as U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Michael J. Blassie. (*ANC Historical Research Collection*)

---



U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Michael J. Blassie died in combat when his plane was shot down on May 11, 1972. He had flown 138 combat missions and posthumously received the Silver Star for his service in the Vietnam War. (*National Museum of Health and Medicine*)

The identification of the Vietnam War Unknown as U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Michael J. Blassie ended the complicated saga that surrounded this interment at the Tomb. A 1970 graduate of the Air Force Academy, Blassie flew 138 combat missions with the 8th Special Operations Squadron in Vietnam. He died in combat when his plane was shot down near An Lộc on May 11, 1972. At his family's request, he was reburied with full military honors at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in his hometown of St. Louis, Missouri.



---

1st Lt. Michael J. Blassie's mother, Jean, and brother, George, embrace at his gravesite at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in 1998. (*National Archives and Records Administration*)

---





TO SOLDAT AMERICAN

THE GREAT WAR  
1914-1918  
A TERRIBLE WAR

TO SOLDAT AMERICAN

[Small plaque with illegible text]

# Rendering Honor to a Lost Soldier: Gifts Presented to the Unknowns

Over the past 100 years, visitors from around the world have left tributes at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in the form of ceremonial gifts.

This tradition began with the burial of the World War I Unknown in 1921. Foreign leaders presented the Unknown with medals, such as the British Victoria Cross, and gifts like the “Victory” statue given by the Republic of China. Throughout the years, gifts and wreaths have been presented by American and foreign dignitaries, veterans, civic groups, schools, and individuals. Visitors often leave these gifts as part of wreath-laying ceremonies or other rituals at the Tomb. Ranging from simple wooden plaques to pieces of fine art, many of these items represent the rich cultures of various nations and showcase the Tomb’s role in diplomacy. These gifts demonstrate how the Tomb remains a meaningful place to honor sacrifice, both past and present.

---

The Republic of China presented this iconic statue prior to the funeral of the World War I Unknown. It was created using a smaller mold from a feature of Augustus Saint-Gaudens's William Tecumseh Sherman Monument in New York City. (*Arlington National Cemetery*)

---



---

The French *Croix de chevalier de la Légion d'honneur*, presented by French politician and World War I veteran André Maginot on October 25, 1921, accompanied the Unknown Soldier on his journey home aboard USS *Olympia*. Today, it is on permanent display in Memorial Amphitheater. (Arlington National Cemetery)

---



The French delegation to the World War I Unknown's interment presented this marble tablet at the ceremonies on November 11, 1921. (*Arlington National Cemetery*)

Presented by the Republic of France, this tribute plaque consists of a beveled white marble tablet with an attached spray of American Beauty roses and ribbon crafted in gilded silver. The marble is engraved with the inscription: *Hommage de la France, au Soldat Inconnu des Etats-Unis d'Amerique Mort pour le Droit et la Liberté* ("Tribute of France to the Unknown Soldier of the United States of America Who Died for Rights and Freedom"). Produced by Falize-Paris, an illustrious French jewelry firm, the plaque was given by the French delegation, led by Premier Aristide Briand, at the interment of the Unknown Soldier on November 11, 1921.

HOMMAGE  
DE LA FRANCE



AU

SOLDAT INCONNU

DES ETATS-UNIS

D'AMERIQUE

MORT

POUR LE DROIT ET LA LIBERTE

VERSAILLES 1783-1918

---

A gift presented to the Unknown from the League of American Pen Women, a professional organization of women in the arts, letters, and music. The owl and crossed writing instruments are part of the league's logo. (*Arlington National Cemetery*)

---



---

The Medal of Honor presented to the Korean War Unknown by  
President Dwight D. Eisenhower. (*Arlington National Cemetery*)

---



Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal, Princess Anne of the United Kingdom, lays a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, November 6, 2014. She then presented a bronze plaque that is on display in Memorial Amphitheater. *(U.S. Army)*

On November 6, 2014, Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal, Princess Anne of the United Kingdom, and her husband, V. Adm. Sir Timothy J. H. Laurence, visited the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery. After laying a wreath at the Tomb, the princess unveiled a bronze memorial plaque remembering American service members from World War I who had been awarded the Victoria Cross, Britain's highest military honor and the equivalent to the United States' Medal of Honor.





# Mourning, Memory, and Ritual: The Evolution of the Tomb

In its first century, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier has evolved into a national place of mourning connected to all of American history. What began as a single grave now symbolizes American wartime fatalities more universally.

The Tomb originated as a place for Americans to collectively honor and remember the unidentified and missing World War I dead. The first Unknown buried within the Tomb symbolized all lost service members from that war. Grieving families and veterans made pilgrimages to the Tomb, often the only grave they could visit.

Although it remains connected to World War I, the addition of Unknowns from World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War expanded the Tomb into a distinctive, multigenerational shrine. As direct mourners have decreased over the years, it has also become a site of memory and ritual. The Tomb now functions as a ceremonial space for the performance of American diplomacy and patriotism. Steeped in ritual, the Army's 3d U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard) perpetually guards the Tomb in the ultimate display of honor for America's Unknowns.

---

President John F. Kennedy places a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in honor of Veterans Day, November 11, 1963. Kennedy is one of only two U.S. presidents buried at Arlington National Cemetery. (*John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum*)

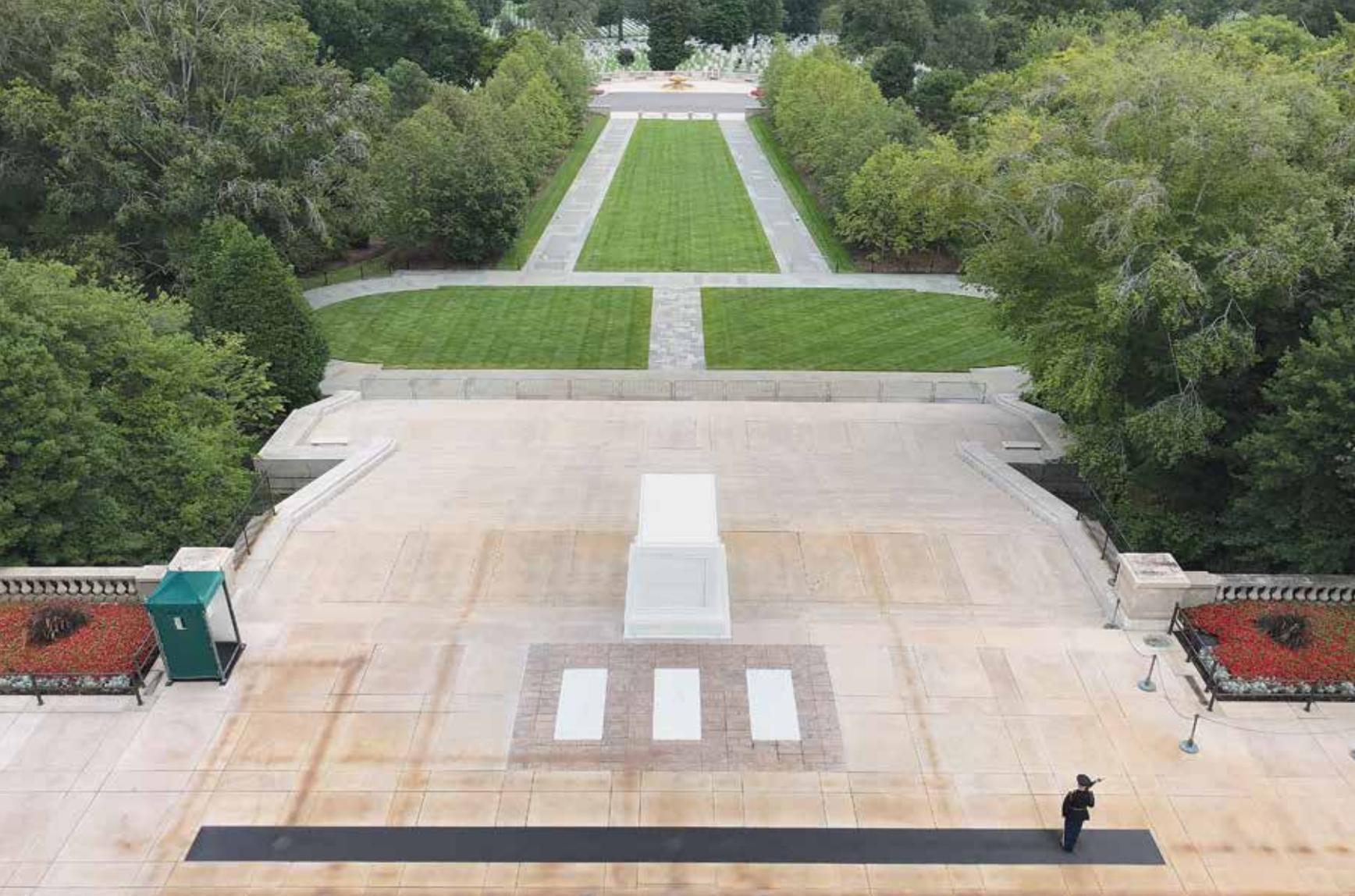
---



---

An aerial view of the Tomb of the Unknown  
Soldier. (*Arlington National Cemetery*)

---



---

Members of the first all-female honor flight lay a wreath at the Tomb on September 22, 2015. The ceremony included seventy-five female veterans from World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. (*Arlington National Cemetery*)

---



---

Ceremonial wreaths from civic and veterans' groups surround the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier on Veterans Day in 2015. Wreath ceremonies, held nearly every day, reflect the Tomb's enduring national and global significance. (*Arlington National Cemetery*)

---



---

High school students lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown  
Soldier on March 8, 2019. (*Arlington National Cemetery*)

---



---

Service members from every branch of the U.S. military march into position for an armed forces full honors wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier on Memorial Day, May 27, 2019. (*Arlington National Cemetery*)

---



DPAA personnel search for two Vietnam-era service members in Cambodia in early 2019. *(U.S. Army)*

The Defense POW/MIA [Prisoner of War/Missing in Action] Accounting Agency (DPAA) works to identify the military's unaccounted-for personnel. Using genetic testing and forensic, historical, and archaeological research, DPAA identifies remains of U.S. war dead around the world, from World War II through the present. Many families choose to bury their identified loved ones at Arlington National Cemetery.





## Conclusion: Commemorating a Century of Honor

For the past century, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier has served as the heart of Arlington National Cemetery. It is a people's memorial that inspires visitors to reflect on service, valor, and sacrifice. Although its meanings have shifted over time, this hilltop sanctuary remains a central site of American memory.

In many ways, the evolution of the Tomb mirrors that of Arlington National Cemetery. Established out of necessity during the Civil War, Arlington grew into the country's premier military cemetery and a national site of remembrance. Likewise, the Tomb began as a grave and memorial to the unknown dead of World War I, but with the inclusion of Unknowns from subsequent wars, it now commemorates all American wars and all unknowns. Visitors to the Tomb honor not just the three Unknowns interred here, but also all American unknowns and missing service members who rest in national cemeteries across the United States, in American military cemeteries around the world, and in unknown or unmarked graves. At the Tomb, they are never forgotten.



# Credits and Acknowledgements

## **Arlington National Cemetery Contributors**

### **Project Leads:**

Command Historian, Dr. Stephen Carney  
Senior Historian, Dr. Allison S. Finkelstein  
Contract Writer/Editor: Dr. Jenifer Van Vleck

### **Staff Writers and Researchers:**

Historian: Timothy Frank  
Curator: Roderick Gainer  
Contract Technical Writer: Kevin Hymel

### **Production:**

Historical Products Division,  
U.S. Army Center of Military History

### **Special thanks to:**

Karen Durham-Aguilera; Charles R. (Ray) Alexander; Robert Quackenbush; Elizabeth Fraser; Rebecca Stevens; Caitlin Smith; Gerald Lowe; Barbara Lewandrowski, Ashley Topolosky, Amber Vincent, and the Arlington National Cemetery Public Affairs Office; the entire staff of Arlington National Cemetery; Blake Learning Solutions, especially Sarah Blake, Alexandra Tanner, Emily Rheault, and Crystal

Monson; the staff of the National Park Service, George Washington Memorial Parkway, especially Kim Robinson and Brent O'Neill; Stephen Hammond; the National Cemetery Administration, especially Richard Hulver, Sara Leach, and Timothy Nosal; the staff of the American Battle Monuments Commission, especially Ben Brands, Mike Shipman, and Bruce Malone; the U.S. 3d Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard), especially SFC Chelsea Porterfield and 1st Lt. Andrew Katz; Senator Max Cleland and John Marshall; the staff of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency; Craig Bruns and the staff of the Independence Seaport Museum; Sheldon Hochheiser and the AT&T Archives and History Center; the Society of the Honor Guard, Tomb of the Unknown Soldier; Major Kyle Hatzinger; Aidan Carney; the National Archives and Records Administration; the Library of Congress; the Bibliothèque nationale de France; the Chrysler Museum of Art; the San Diego Air and Space Museum; the National Museum of Health and Medicine; the Mary (Smith) Blood Family; the Commonwealth War Graves Commission; Rose Klodahl and the Frank family; the Naval History and Heritage Command; and the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.





