

Standing the Watch Alone

Return Home of the Unknown Soldiers in 1958

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“When most people think about the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, they think of the United States Army. Most are unaware that every time the Unknown Soldier was brought home to the United States mainland it was aboard a Navy warship.”

*Gavin McIlvenna, President
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The Pacific – Part I



The Punchbowl – National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific May 1958

Fluffy white clouds drifted on the azure blue sky as an orange sun sparkled over the rim of the bowl shaped mountain and onto a vast expanse of open emerald green grass. A slight breeze gently moved the leaves on the two rows of monkey pod trees that lined the road through the 112 acres of green. Even the wind barely whispered in this sacred place where the silence of “au-makua” or the spirit of the dead reaches back to ancient times.¹

The metallic sounds of long handled shovels striking lava rock and dry, packed, soil in two different grave sites were followed by the ‘krump-krump’ of a half dozen military staff car doors opening and closing. For the first time since January 1949 the remains of America’s war dead were being dug up for removal from Puowaina, the dormant volcanic crater known as the “Punchbowl” or the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific high above the city of Honolulu.

By the morning of Tuesday, April 15, 1958 the Punchbowl held the remains of 16,000 service members from World War II and Korea. Each grave was marked with an inscribed flat stone barely visible in the expansive grass. The Punchbowl is one of only a few national cemeteries that does not mark the graves with white crosses or the Star of David. In 1954 the original white wooden crosses were infested with termites and replaced with flat stones. At the end of World War II the U.S. government initiated a plan called “The Return of the World War II Dead Program.” The Army responded by employing the American Graves Registration Service (AGRS)² to remove the approximately 11,000 remains of American servicemen and women from battlefields of the Pacific and move them to a permanent burial site. Many of these remains bore the title “Unknown”. For example, the 388 unaccounted-for Sailors and Marines who died on December 7, 1941, in the sinking of the USS *Oklahoma* are buried in 61 caskets at 45 separate grave sites.

¹ ETIN Honolulu, TH, November 29, 1958 pg. 17

² The Quartermaster General created the AGRS in August 1917

The bodies of these fallen Sailors, Soldiers, Airmen and Marines had been carried by ship and plane to the Punchbowl from distant beaches and jungles across the Pacific. From the black sands of Iwo Jima, from the jungles of Guadalcanal, from the last battle of the war in the Pacific – Okinawa where America lost 26,000 killed, missing and wounded and from seldom mentioned sites like Finschhafen, New Guinea³ the remains of fallen Americans were respectfully disinterred from temporary battlefield graves and their caskets covered in the red, white and blue stars and stripes and moved to a final resting place under the soft green grass of The National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific or the Manila American Cemetery (formerly Ft. McKinley National Cemetery in the Philippines).

The average age of service members during World War II was 26, with an average overseas duration during the war of 33 months – almost three years. Three years away from family and friends in America. Three years of Christmas and Thanksgiving away from mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters laughing and enjoying the holidays together. Total American military killed or missing in the Pacific theater of operations was 111,606 American service members. The Army Air Corps suffered 24,230 casualties; the Navy lost 31,157 in naval engagements; the Army, in ground operations suffered dead and missing of 41,952; and the Marine Corps lost 23,160 killed or missing⁴. These are numbers on a paper – cold statistics that might raise the eyebrows of the reader today. But each one of these dead and missing brought grief and suffering to family and friends waiting in the America of the 1940s. Their heart ache, tears and lost futures cannot adequately be described on paper.

³ Private Junior N. Van Noy received the Congressional Medal of Honor posthumously for his bravery on October 17, 1943 defending beach positions against a Japanese landing during the Finschhafen campaign.

⁴ The Pacific War On Line Encyclopedia

Probably the most feared person during World War II was the Western Union telegraph messenger. Any mother, father or wife who has a son or husband serving during a war will tell you the fear of hearing a car door slam in the middle of the night – this sound is the one that runs an electric shock up your spine, causes a throat to instantly turn dry and pushes tears to the edge of your eyes. One such Western Union messenger was Dewey Alley who rode his bicycle delivering the yellow envelopes in Greensboro, North Carolina during World War II⁵. He never had to explain himself at the doorstep. Often, mothers started screaming when they saw him coming up the driveway in his telltale leggings and brimmed cap. The first telegram Alley delivered, *“when she opened the door and saw me, she went into almost hysterics.”*⁶

The grim notice of death came at all times of the day during World War II. There was no preparation for the acceptance of the reality a loved one’s life was gone –no home coming with open arms on the front porch. The next reality would be the military funeral with a flag draped coffin and an escort of polished Soldiers, Sailors or Marines in their dress uniforms. But not even this painful closure came to many families – their loved one’s bodies were never found – blown to pieces – lost at sea in a sunken ship, smashed into the ground in a downed aircraft or buried in a grave with the simple title of – *“Unknown”*.



⁵ The News and Observer Raleigh North Carolina November 10, 2017 He Carried News of Every Soldier’s Death

⁶ Ibid

On June 24, 1946 Congress passed a bill, (H.R.3959) sponsored by Congressman Charles M. Price of Illinois, a veteran, to return an Unknown Soldier of World War II to Arlington National Cemetery. During 1948 the United States Army developed plans for the selection and burial in Arlington National Cemetery of an Unknown Soldier of World War II. Before the plans could be set in motion the North Koreans, with the backing of China and the Soviet Union, invaded South Korea in June 1950 and the Army put the plans on hold.

President Truman and the American press referred to the war in Korea as a "Police Action". When hostilities were suspended in 1953 over 36,516 Americans had died in this "Police Action" with 4,759 listed as missing in action. After the Korean Armistice was signed in 1954, the remains of more than 3,000 Americans were returned to American custody by North Korea through a plan called Operation Glory. In addition, the U.S. Graves Registration teams identified thousands of remains buried in South Korea. In 1956, 848 sets of remains that could not be identified were buried in the Punchbowl Cemetery Hawaii. Korean War veterans refer to the conflict in Korea as "The Forgotten War". But not forgotten to the families of the dead and missing were the memories of those who never returned.

The selection of the World War II Unknown candidates from the National Cemetery of the Pacific followed a plan developed by three organizations: Headquarters Pacific Air Forces, the 6486 Air Base Wing at Hickam Air Force Base (AFB) and Headquarters Army Pacific Base Command.⁷ Lieutenant Colonel (Lt. Col.) John H. Klaas, Headquarter Pacific Air Forces was named Project Officer. At the direction of Lt. Col. Klaas the records for six unknown graves were randomly selected and recorded on plain white cards. On April 15, 1958 the cards were placed in unmarked white envelopes and

dropped in a round container. Lt. Col. Clarence E. Hobgood, Chief Chaplain Hickam (AFB) then picked two envelopes from the bowl and handed them to Joseph V. Darby, Superintendent of the National Cemetery of the Pacific. The two unknown graves selected were then opened and the caskets removed for examination by a team led by Major David H. Beter at the Army mortuary at Kapalama Basin. Lt. Col. Klaas then destroyed all records used to choose the two candidates. These steps were similar to procedures followed in 1921 with the selection of the World War One Unknown Soldier in France.



From left to right: Lt. Col. John H. Klaas, Project Officer, Capt. Walter Nachway, Assistant Project Officer, Mr. Joseph V. Darby, Supt. Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, Lt. Col. Clarence E. Hobgood, Chief Chaplain Hickam AFB, and Major David H. Beter.

As the sun rose on Tuesday afternoon, April 15th, 1958 the temperature in Honolulu moved into the mid-70s. Inside the Army's mortuary building at Kapalama Basin, a World War II warehouse designated Building 914, air conditioners and fans kept temperatures in a cool range as the two exhumed caskets of World War II Unknown candidates taken from the Punchbowl earlier in the day were placed on biers for examination to ensure no evidence of identification existed. The remains stayed

⁷ Selection of the World War II Candidate-Unknown, Pacific Area, SUPP DOCU No. 1

here under constant guard until the selection ceremony on May 16th at the Punchbowl.

In the Philippines, the Headquarters of the 13th Air Force located at Clark (AFB), issued Secret Letter, PFFMS-S, on March 17, 1958 to give direction for the selection, examination and transfer of the remains of Trans-Pacific candidates from Ft. McKinley National Cemetery near Manila, Philippine Islands. The letter named Charles A. Gould, a GS-12 federal employee, to serve as project manager for the selection process. At the request of Mr. Gould the secret letter directed the 13th Air Force historian, William T. T. Ward to document all events related to the disinterment of unknown candidates from Ft. McKinley National Cemetery.⁸ Mr. Owen A. Brook with the Air Force mortuary office was designated to lead the examination of the remains to ensure that no identification could be associated with those disinterred. The letter from Headquarters 13th Air Force also closely followed procedures established for the selection of the World War I Unknown Soldier from France in 1921.

The Manila American Cemetery and Memorial, formerly the Fort McKinley National Cemetery, holds 17,184 graves, the largest number of American war dead from World War II. The cemetery occupies 152 acres located on a plateau inside the boundaries of Ft. McKinley and not far from the center of Manila. For 30 days in 1945, from February 3rd until March 4th, a fierce street to street battle took place to free Manila from the Japanese. An estimated 100,000 civilians died in the fighting along with approximately 17,000 Japanese soldiers and sailors. American liberation forces lost 1,010 dead and 5,565 wounded.

On Monday April 21, 1958 the number one song in America was "Twilight Time" by the Platters. At 9:35 that morning the initial selection of burial records was held at the main office of the

⁸ Ft. McKinley National Cemetery later renamed Manila American Cemetery

Ft. McKinley National Cemetery. Mr. Gould and his team randomly chose 32 locations where unknown soldiers were buried. Each location was recorded on a blank 3x5 index card and placed in an unmarked white envelope. The unmarked envelopes were then placed in a container. Standing on a red tile floor polished to mirror perfection, Lieutenant Colonel T. B. Jack Donalson, Commander of the 26 Fighter Interceptor Squadron at Clark AFB, reached into the box holding the envelopes and picked four envelopes one at a time from the 32 in the container.



Lt. Col. Donalson giving selected envelope to Mr. Gould.

Lt. Col. Donalson was no stranger to Clark Field. Sixteen years earlier on December 8, 1941 as a Second Lieutenant, he flew his P-40 above the field engaging attacking Japanese aircraft. He was one of only a few pilots to get airborne during the attack and destroyed two enemy aircraft while protecting the field. Later when it was apparent the Japanese would capture the Philippines, Lieutenant Donalson was ordered to fly his plane from Luzon to Australia. During

the war in the Pacific Donaldson became an ace and was the recipient of the Distinguished Service Cross, two Silver Stars, two Distinguished Flying Crosses and three Air Medals.

Mr. Gould gave the four selected locations to workers of the American Battlefield Monuments Commission (ABMC) on April 22, 1958 with instructions to disinter the remains of each grave.



ABMC workers removing selected unknown candidate.

During the day on April 23rd the four caskets of the selected candidates were taken by closed truck under escort to the Air Force mortuary on Clark AFB. While under guard at the mortuary, Mr. William T.T. Ward led a team that examined the remains of each candidate to verify nothing existed to later provide an identity. At the end of this process, each of the remains was wrapped in an olive drab army blanket and then placed in separate Air Force transfer cases.

Four days later, on Sunday April 27, shortly after the sun had set at 6:12 p.m. brief services were held at Clark AFB Terminal by Protestant Chaplin Major Russel C. Naggard and Catholic Chaplin, First Lieutenant Mercellus C. Aser as a Military Airlift Transportation Service (MATS)

four engine C-124, tail number 0125, waited to receive the flag draped caskets of the four unknown candidates. At 6:45 p.m. the caskets were loaded aboard MATS flight 656/27 for transport to Hickam AFB Hawaii. Sergeant Robert A. Pitcher USAF boarded the plane as escort to the unknown candidates and to stand watch over them alone during their journey to Hawaii.



World War II Unknown candidates being placed aboard C-124 at Clark AFB.

Air distance between Clark AFB in the Philippines, and Hickam AFB in Hawaii is 5,302 miles. Known as "Old Shaky", the C-124's cruising speed was 230 miles per hour. At that speed it would have taken 24 hours for the big plane to reach its destination at Hickam AFB. A fuel stop was necessary along the route plus the weather in the Pacific was turbulent. The departure on Sunday, April 27th was made a day before tropical storm number two approached the coast striking the Philippines on April 29th with winds of 70 miles per hour.

On Tuesday, April 29th, the silver four engine C-124 Air Force cargo plane of the 1502nd Air Transport Wing, MATS landed at Hickam AFB and taxied to Butler Hanger at 12:30 p.m. with the remains of four World War II Unknown

candidates from Fort McKinley American Cemetery Manila.



World War II unknown candidate arriving Hickam AFB.

After moving the remains by four hearses to the Army Mortuary building, all six remains were placed in special caskets as a prelude for the selection ceremony scheduled for May 16, 1958 at Hickam AFB to designate the Trans-Pacific World War II candidate. A twenty-four hour guard was posted inside the mortuary building at Kapalama Basin.



Hearses moving the unknown candidates from Hickam AFB.

In parallel with the selection process of the World War II Trans-Pacific candidate, the National Cemetery of the Pacific held the remains of the unknown Korean War dead, one of which would be selected for interment in Arlington National Cemetery as the Korean War Unknown Soldier. In early May 1958 four unknown Korean War graves were randomly chosen and the bodies removed to the Army Mortuary at Kapalama Basin where each of the remains was inspected to insure nothing existed to identify the bodies. The remains of the

candidates were carefully wrapped in fresh burial sheets and blankets and placed in identical caskets in a guarded, separate room inside the mortuary.

On Thursday morning May 15, 1958, a warm spring day, a military police escort of motorcycles accompanied four hearses carrying the remains of the Korean War candidates, from the Army mortuary building to the entrance at the National Cemetery of the Pacific. At exactly 9 a.m. the procession arrived

at the entrance to the cemetery where pallbearers waited on both sides of the road. They solemnly marched beside the hearses to the oval area where the ceremony was scheduled to take place at 11 a.m. An Army band played patriotic music during the placement of the four identical flag covered caskets near the waist high hedge that formed a screen around the flag pole. After an invocation by Army Chaplin, Colonel F. B. Henry, General



General Cannon introducing Master Sergeant Ned Lyle.

Robert M. Cannon spoke a few words and introduced Master Sergeant Ned Lyle, a Distinguished Service Cross recipient, for the selection of the Korean War Unknown Soldier. Ned Lyle was born on September 5, 1925 in Unicoi County Tennessee. Master Sergeant Lyle, serving with Company F, 2nd Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, received the Distinguished Service Cross for his heroism and leadership repelling a numerically superior attack by enemy forces at Mundung-Ni Korea on October 21, 1951 where he charged an enemy machine gun position with only a bayonet. When the enemy ran from their position, he turned the machine gun on them killing many of the fleeing attackers and allowing his unit to retake the ground from where they had withdrawn.

Master Sergeant Lyle also distinguished himself fighting on the front lines in the European

⁹ Phil Hudson October 9, 2015 Face Book post to Ron Howard

Theater of Operations as a 17 year old soldier where he earned the Bronze Star, Combat Infantry Badge and was awarded the Purple Heart. He was captured by the Germans and threatened with a pistol to his head to disclose the location of his unit. He responded with a two word answer and spat on the ground. After serving in Korea he returned to duty as a First Sergeant. A former recruit in basic infantry training at Fort Jackson, SC in 1959 described him: *"First Sergeant Lyle was a wiry redhead with freckles all over him...and those people will kick your ass."*⁹ He retired from the military, but left retirement to serve in Vietnam as a special volunteer.

With 1,200 visitors and military members watching, Master Sergeant Lyle took a wreath of blue and white carnations representing the Korean Service Ribbon and stood for approximately one minute facing the four caskets. He then moved to the end casket at his left and placed the wreath. After taking one step back, he rendered the hand salute.



Master Sergeant Ned Lyle selecting the Unknown Soldier.

Then the military formation was brought to "Present Arms" and the band played the National Anthem. Following the selection, General Cannon gave custody of the Korean Unknown Soldier to Admiral Hopwood for transportation by the Navy to the United States.¹⁰ A Navy ambulance then carried the Korean

¹⁰ U.S. Army Quartermaster Foundation – *Tomb of the Unknown Soldier* January-February 1964

War Unknown Soldier to the Army mortuary building where the casket would be guarded during preparation for air transportation to the USS *Boston* (CAG-1) on May 17th. The unselected Korean War candidates were reburied at the Punch Bowl.

1942, graduating at Luke Field in September as a Second Lieutenant and was known as a "fighter pilot's fighter pilot."



Six caskets rest on piers at Hickam Field.

On Friday May 16, 1958 four weeks after the two World War II Unknown candidates were removed from their graves in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii and two weeks after four World War II Unknown candidates arrived at Hickam AFB from Fort McKinley in the Philippines, the selection ceremony at Hickam AFB on the island of Oahu began under grayish white clouds with a temperature in the mid-seventies. The 501st Air Force band played funeral music for the assembled visitors and escorts before Air Force General Lawrence S. Kuter, Commander in Chief Pacific Air Forces stepped to the podium to begin the ceremony.

Colonel Glenn T. Eagleston of the 313th Air Division, a combat pilot with an impressive record in both World War II and the Korean War, received the designation by General Kuter to select the World War II Trans-Pacific Unknown candidate. Colonel Eagleston was born in Farmington, Utah on March 12, 1921, and joined the US Army Air Corps as an enlisted man in 1940. He became an aviation cadet in

He flew almost 100 combat missions in P-51 Mustangs and P-47 Thunderbolts in Europe, some as a 22-year-old Squadron Commander. Eagleston was the leading ace of the Ninth Air Force in Europe in World War II. During the air campaign over Europe the Army Air Force lost more than 26,000 men shot from the skies – some crash sites would never reveal the bodies of the airmen lost. In Korea he flew 84 combat missions in the F-86 Saber jet where he served as Squadron and Group Commander.

All personnel came to attention. There was an empty bier in the center of the lawn where a white carnation lei rested. The empty bier was placed to accept the selected candidate. The audience rose as Colonel Eagleston lifted the lei from the empty bier. He approached the six caskets under the canopy, and, after a few seconds hesitation, placed the lei on the third casket from the left. Accompanied by a muted roll of drums, military pallbearers then carried the selected Trans-Pacific candidate to the empty bier. Pacific Air Force Staff Chaplain, Colonel Howell G. Gum delivered a prayer at

the conclusion followed immediately by the National Anthem.



Colonel Eagleston Selects the Trans-Pacific WWII Candidate.

Major General Matthew K. Deichelmann, representing the Commander in Chief, Pacific Air Forces, gave a brief address. Like the Korean War Unknown Soldier, the Air Force gave over custody of the Trans-Pacific Candidate to Navy Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet, Admiral Herbert G. Hopwood.

Admiral Hopwood spoke a few simple words of acceptance: "*On behalf of the Department of the Navy, I accept custody of this honored Unknown of World War II in the Pacific for transportation to the final ceremony at sea on the USS Canberra off the Virginia Capes.*" The Navy accepted responsibility for the transportation of both caskets and for the final selection of the World War II Unknown Soldier at sea onboard the USS Canberra (CAG-2). A Navy honor guard then carried the Trans-Pacific candidate to a waiting vehicle that drove to the Army mortuary for transportation preparation to the Navy base at Guantanamo, Cuba. The candidate remains that were not selected were buried in the Punch Bowl.

In the early morning hours of May 17, 1958 a four engine C-54 Skymaster, referred to by the

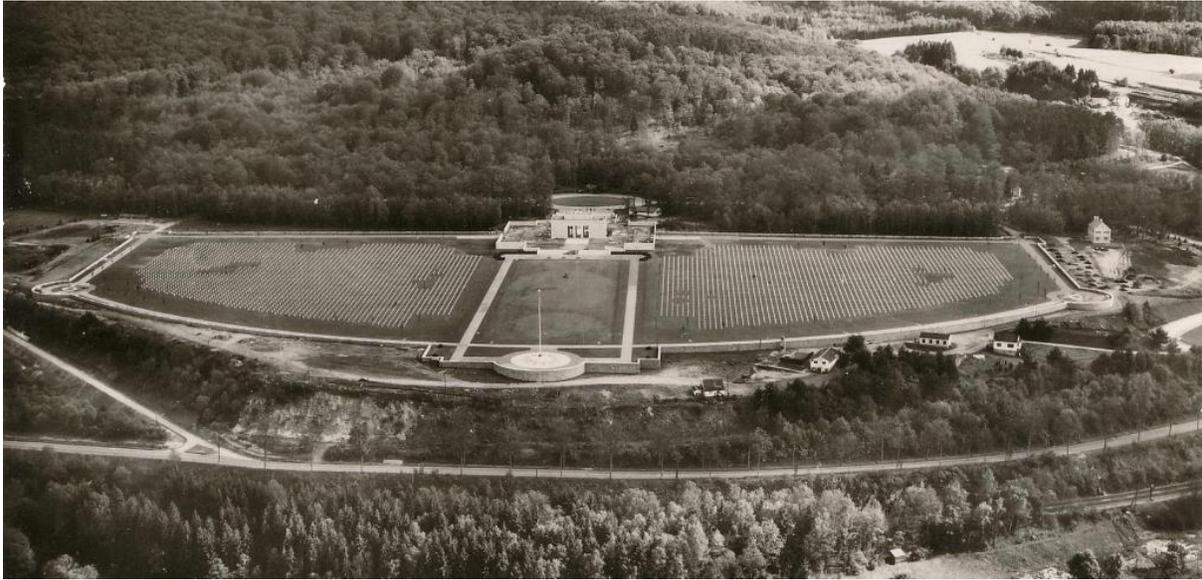
Navy as an R5D, of the Fleet Tactical Support Squadron VR-21 received the Korean War Unknown Soldier and the Trans-Pacific candidate and lumbered down runway two-four at Barbers Point Naval Air Station (NAS) heading for the Naval Base at Guantanamo, Cuba. The big silver cargo plane became airborne and rose into a cloudy Pacific sky climbing above the Air Station's neatly kept green ball fields and the cinder block base school house. Robert Whalen was an eleven year old dependent attending school that day, his father John Michael Whalen was a First Class Petty Officer working in the maintenance division at the airfield. VR-21 flew 16 aircraft – two R5Ds¹¹ were for special hauls one of these was now on the way to Guantanamo Bay where the *Boston* was anchored in the harbor waiting to accept the caskets. Arriving at Mc Calla Field NAS Guantanamo, twelve Sailors accepted the caskets with reverence and respect and transported them to the Naval Hospital where a twenty-four hour guard was posted.



Sailors at NAS Guantanamo carry one of the two Unknown Soldiers.

¹¹ Information on VR-21 provided by Robert Whalen and Brad Hayes author of the history of Barber's Point

Epinal – Part II



Epinal American Cemetery and Memorial in France – Photo by J. Chaumont

The Trans-Atlantic Unknown candidate's journey to Naples, Italy and the USS *Blandy* (DD 943) began on May 12, 1958 with a selection ceremony in the foothills of the Vosges Mountains near the Mosel River at the Epinal American Cemetery and Memorial in France. Located on a 48 acre plateau above the river is the resting place for 5, 255 American war dead from World War II.¹² At the center of the cemetery is a chapel and museum that is surrounded by the Court of Honor that contains the names of 425 Americans missing in action with the inscription:

"Here are recorded the names of American who gave their lives in the service of their country and who sleep in unknown graves. This is their memorial-the whole earth their sepulcher."

The selection process for the Trans-Atlantic candidate first began when the bodies of thirteen unknown American servicemen who died in the Trans-Atlantic phase of World War II were exhumed from eleven cemeteries in Europe and North Africa.

Ardennes American Cemetery (3)
Brittany American Cemetery (1)
Florence American Cemetery (1)
Lorraine American Cemetery (1)
Luxembourg American Cemetery (1)
Netherlands American Cemetery (1)
Normandy American Cemetery (1)
North Africa American Cemetery (1)
Rhone American Cemetery (1)
Sicily-Rome American Cemetery (1)
Rhone American Cemetery (1)

From the eleven cemeteries, examiners selected only one from each cemetery except Ardennes, where three unknown were chosen and then moved to Frankfurt Germany where the remains were rearranged by military personnel to ensure there was no connection to any American cemetery. The thirteen remains were then delivered in identical caskets to the American cemetery at Epinal, France. There the selection ceremony began on May 12th at 11 a.m. with the 33rd Army Band playing hymns prior to the introduction of Major General Edward J. O'Neill who was chosen to pick the casket representing the Trans-Atlantic Unknown

¹² Quartermaster Foundation – Tomb of the Unknown Part II

candidate. The Army chaplain spoke to the assembled guests and military personnel about the purpose of the ceremony; gave an invocation and introduced Major General O'Neill.

Major General O'Neill served with the Fifth Army's VI Corps as the G-4 (chief of supplies) during the North Africa campaign and at Anzio during Operation SHINGLE in 1944. Using a red and white carnation floral arrangement in the form of a white star on a crimson field with an evergreen background, he placed the wreath in front of the fifth casket from the left. The ceremony concluded eight minutes after eleven with "Taps" followed by the National anthem. The twelve World War II unknown candidates not chosen were returned and reburied at the eleven cemeteries¹³



Major General O'Neill placing the wreath at Epinal France.

From Epinal the Trans-Atlantic candidate was escorted by the Army in a hearse seventy miles to the Toul-Rosiere Airbase in France. In the early afternoon the hearse and escorts arrived at the base in a driving rain. With ceremonial salutes, the Air Force took custody of the remains¹⁴ from the Army. A four engine C-130 of the 322 Air Division, stationed at Évreux Air

Base just north of Paris, received the remains onboard and within an hour of the arrival became airborne on a course for the Naval Air Station at Capodichino outside Naples, Italy. When the plane touched down three hours later in Italy it was late in the day, so the pilots were directed to taxi the plane to a parking area near the control tower. United States Marines marched onto the parking pad and stood watch inside the plane all night with the plane's access ramp closed and locked.

At 8:30 in the morning on May 13th the engines of the C-130 were fired up and the big plane taxied to the Air Facility's loading ramp, where pallbearers and a joint service honor guard representing all the services proceeded to the rear of the aircraft. There the Commander, Fleet Air, Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean, accepted custody of the Trans-Atlantic candidate from the Air Force.¹⁵ A Navy ambulance carrying the casket along with a column of six military vehicles was escorted by Italian motorcycle police, to the Naples Harbor where the newly commissioned destroyer, the USS *Blandy*, waited to receive the remains at berth 70. The USS *Blandy* (DD 943), a Sherman Forest class destroyer was commissioned in November 1957 and on her first cruise when the ship received communications to proceed to Italy to take aboard the Trans-Atlantic Unknown candidate. Nothing would be left for chance during this special assignment. Lieutenant Junior Grade Ted Buckenmaier was ordered to leave the ship at Casablanca and fly to Naples to coordinate berthing assignments, scheduling and logistics for the reception and placement of the coffin onboard the *Blandy*.¹⁶

Ceremonial areas had been set aside on the pier and amidships of the *Blandy*. When the ambulance approached the pier the ship's crew

¹³Headquarters United States Army Quartermaster Mortuary System, Europe [Historical Report World War II Candidate Selection Program](#)

¹⁴ TOMB OF THE UNKNOWN SOLDIERS The Quartermaster Review January-February 1964

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ The [Sentinel](#) Issue 15, volume 2 *Transfer at Sea* by Larry Seaton

manned the rails in their dress white uniforms. Near the gangway the Operations Officer of the *Blandy* accepted custody of the Trans-Atlantic candidate on behalf of the ship's Captain, Commander William F. Cafferata. Pallbearers from each branch of service then passed the casket to eight of the destroyer's crewmen, who carried the remains aboard the ship and placed it on the "01 deck" (first deck above the main deck) along with the wreath used in selection at Epinal. Four armed crewmen immediately took positions around the casket. At 11:33 a.m. the *Blandy* cast off mooring lines and departed from Naples to rendezvous with the missile cruisers *Boston* and *Canberra* off the Virginia Capes. The *Blandy's* Captain, Commander Cafferata ordered a continuous guard of honor to be maintained with a one-hour duty rotation while the ship was underway.

Petty Officer Third Class Thomas De Michele was an 18-year-old fireman working in the ship's repair section and a "plank owner"

onboard the *Blandy*. He remembered his duty during the ship's mission:

"When we as a crew found out we would be carrying the body of the Unknown Soldier, the ship's crew took on a response that was unbelievable. The sensitivity, pride, the "what will my role be" shared by all was just beautiful. Our role, not all, but many crew members, was to take turns standing guard, one hour at a time over the casket of the Unknown Soldier. "

Another shipmate, Petty Officer Third Class Frank Ostland was also 18 and another "plank owner", who remembered standing watch guarding the Unknown candidate and thinking as he stood with his rifle at parade rest, alone beside the casket, it was "one of the proudest moments of my life".



Petty Officer Third Class Tom De Michele

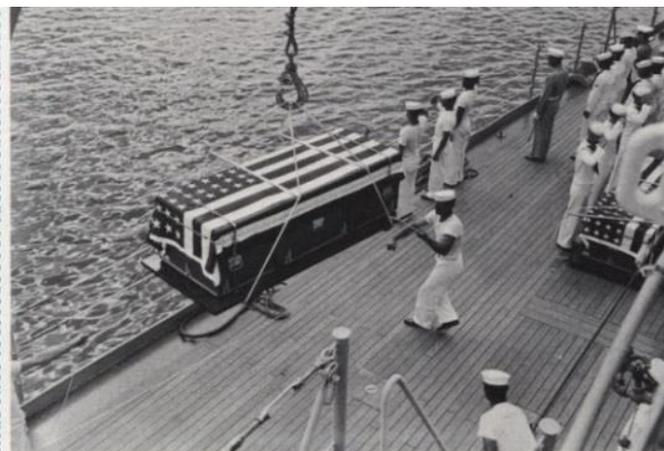


Petty Officer Third Class Frank Ostland standing watch alone aboard the USS Blandy.

The Rendezvous – Part III

The USS *Boston* (CA-69) was launched in August 1942 as a heavy cruiser of the Baltimore class. In January 1952 the *Boston* was reconfigured and reclassified as a guided missile cruiser and recommissioned on November 1, 1955 as CAG-1, the lead ship in her class. *Boston* carried a crew of 1,142 enlisted and officers.

While at Guantanamo the caskets of the Korean War Unknown Soldier and the Trans-Pacific candidate remained under guard at the Navy mortuary from May 17 until May 23, 1958 when they were transported to the dock and carried by motor launch at 8:35 a.m. to the starboard side of the *Boston*. The *Boston* was 673' long, 70' wide, and drew 27' of water. The channel and dock space could not accommodate ships of that size. The ship carried four liberty motor launches, each 44' long and about 12' wide, diesel-powered and seaworthy. The launches were normally used when the ship was at anchor to move personnel back and forth to shore especially for liberty calls while in port.¹⁷



The Korean War Unknown Soldier Coming Onboard from Motor Launch.

One of the Sailors standing on the “02” deck (two levels above the main deck) when the caskets were brought aboard was Petty Officer Third Class Michael J. Brady. Mr. Brady was a twenty year old sailor in the *Boston’s* Fox

Division – Fire Control. He remembers talking with his junior division officer, Lieutenant Junior Grade Jack Levitan, as the flag draped remains were carried past the two. “A chill went up my back when Jack said to me ‘you and I will remember this day for the rest of our lives.’”



Petty Officer Third Class Mike Brady

Two teams of pallbearers, each composed of six Navy enlisted men and one Marine non-commissioned officer, escorted the caskets to the missile handling area, on the *Boston’s* stern,



The Trans-Atlantic Candidate Being Moved Onboard Boston

where a continuous honor guard of one Marine and one Naval sentry maintained a round-the-clock vigil at the direction of the *Boston’s* skipper, Captain Robert L. Taylor. At 11:10 a.m. on Friday May 23rd the *Boston* left her anchorage at Guantanamo for the North Atlantic.

¹⁷ Information on the *Boston* related by Art Hebert, Secretary USS *Boston* Organization



Trans-Pacific Unknown candidate and the Korean War Unknown Soldier in the USS Boston missile handling area.

Meanwhile by May 17th the *Blandy*, was well into the Atlantic Ocean from the Mediterranean Sea with the World War II Trans-Atlantic Unknown candidate securely resting astern of the stack on the "01 deck". The *Blandy* had left Naples, Italy on May 13h with orders to steam toward a rendezvous with the missile cruisers *Boston* and *Canberra* off the Virginia Capes.



US Coast Guard Cutter (USCGC) Samuel D. Ingham (WPG-35)

As both the *Boston* and *Blandy* steamed to their rendezvous point in the North Atlantic the third ship, the *Canberra* where the final selection would be made, sailed from Norfolk Naval Base Virginia on May 26, 1958 at 8 a.m. escorted by

the US Coast Guard Cutter *Samuel D. Ingham* (WPG-35).¹⁸

The *Ingham*, launched in 1935, is one of the most decorated ships in Coast Guard history with Two Presidential Unit Citations and credited with sinking a German submarine during World War II. When the two vessels departed Norfolk for the open Atlantic the *Ingham* took up station 1,000 yards astern of *Canberra*. The two ships glided through calm deep purple seas to the rendezvous off the Virginia Capes for an 11 a.m. meeting with *Blandy* and *Boston*. The *Ingham* would act as a life guard station for the operation. USCG Captain C. R. Courser commanded the 120 man crew of the *Ingham* whose motto was "Never Too Old To Serve."



USS Canberra CAG-2

Like her sister ship, the *Boston*, the *Canberra* (CAG-2) was also a Baltimore class heavy cruiser that had been converted to a missile ship after the Korean War. The big, fast cruiser was commanded by Captain F. H. Brumby. On May 26 the *Canberra* carried a ship's complement of 1,142 officers and enlisted, but also onboard during the three-hour trip to the rendezvous point were 36 news reporters, camera crews and television media, the U.S. Navy Band Sea Chanter coral group, Navy officials and Congressional Medal of Honor recipient, Hospital Corpsman First Class (E-6 rank) William R. Charette, who had been chosen to select the World War II Unknown Soldier from the Trans-Pacific and Trans-Atlantic candidates.

¹⁸ Operation Order COMCURLANT No. 2-58 April 9, 1958



*Navy Hospital
Corpsman William R.
Charette*

On March 27, 1953 Hospital Corpsman Charette was attached to Fox Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment in the Panmonjom Corridor of Korea. On the night of March 26, 1953 Chinese infantry attacked three mountain outposts named Vegas, Carson and Reno that were defended by the Marines. By dawn the larger Chinese force had overrun Vegas and Reno. On the morning of the 27th Marine infantry, along with Charette attacked up the hill named Vegas to drive out the enemy.

As casualties mounted with the Marines, Hospital Corpsman Charette rushed to the aid of a wounded Marine, bleeding near his position. While Charette was treating the wounds an enemy hand grenade hit the ground close to the two of them. Without hesitation Charette covered the wounded Marine with his body absorbing the blast that ripped his helmet, medical pack and clothing from his body. Initially knocked out and dazed by the shock and bleeding from his face, he continued to treat the fallen Marine who had not received any of the shrapnel from the grenade.

As the battle raged with heavy machine gun fire, falling mortars and hand grenades landing along the Marine positions Corpsman Charette moved among the downed Marines treating each man with urgency and care. At one point in the battle he saved a Marine's life in the line of fire of an enemy machine gun. Charette stood up in the murderous fire with total disregard to his own safety to pull the wounded Marine to a safer location. During this fierce battle Corpsman Charette gave his flak jacket to a wounded Marine and used torn pieces of his uniform to cover wounds and stop bleeding. He was credited with saving the lives of many Marines in Fox Company as well as Marines in an adjacent unit.

The Navy designated Hospital Corpsman First Class Charette to make the final selection of the World War II Unknown Soldier during final ceremonies onboard the *Canberra*. But first, three ships had to meet at sea from three different directions on the compass and perform delicate maneuvers that demanded the precise execution of large moving vessels on an ocean that could roll a ship in an unplanned direction without warning – the method employed to transfer the caskets from one ship to another is called “high lining”.



Boston on the left of picture Canberra on right with first casket on the high line.

On Monday May 26, 1958 at 6:10 a.m. in the morning the *Boston* was sighted by lookouts on the *Blandy* 10 miles west of the *Blandy's* location. The *Boston* carried the caskets of the Trans-Pacific candidate and the Korean War Unknown Soldier from Guantanamo Bay, Cuba to the rendezvous point. Matching speed the two ships merged at the rendezvous and at 7:47 a.m. began to commence preparations for the “high line” transfer of the Trans-Atlantic candidate to the *Boston*. The suction produced from the two vessels cutting through the water in close proximity attempts to pull the ships together. This complicated operation requires the ships to travel in the same direction, at the same speed, while moving the casket between the ships by rope and cables.

The *Blandy* approached *Boston* on her starboard side and transfer lines were secured to *Blandy's* port side. As the Trans-Atlantic Unknown candidate reached the midpoint in the highline, Sailors on both ships came to attention and rendered a hand salute. The high line operation took 23 minutes to complete. The *Blandy* secured the highline and fell back to a position directly astern of the *Canberra* following a base course of 90 degrees with a speed of 10 knots. The *Ingham* took position behind the *Canberra* on her starboard side.



Casket being transferred from Boston to Canberra.

With all three caskets onboard the *Boston*, the ship's crew maned the rails in preparation for the transfer of the caskets to the *Canberra*. At 10:50 a.m. a second high line operation was prepared from the starboard side of *Boston* to the port side of *Canberra*.

As the two cruisers maintained course and speed in a sea, with slight one-two foot swells, the first casket was transferred via high line at 10:58 a.m. At the midpoint of the transfer the crew of the *Boston* in their dress white uniforms snapped to attention and rendered a hand salute.

Onboard the *Canberra* sailors also lined the rails to honor the remains. Eighteen-year-old, Tony Appel, an E-3 meteorologist "striker"¹⁹ who reported to the *Canberra* at midnight the day before was suffering from mild seasickness, but stood his duty on the rail with tears running down his cheeks. He remembered crying then and feeling the ship sway as it dipped in the seas during the transfer.

Also, standing on the rail that day was Yeoman Third Class Robert Randolph. He remembered watching the high line operation and feeling "goose bumps" run across his body. Years later he was reassigned to duty in Washington, D. C. and would take friends and family who visited him to three graves at Arlington National Cemetery: Joe Lewis, Audie Murphy and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

By 11:05 a.m. all caskets had been passed to the *Canberra*. Each casket was covered in a secured American flag and carried by six sailors with black arm bands down the port side of the *Canberra* to the missile handling room. Once the two World War II candidates had been carried to a separate room inside the missile handling space, the pallbearers left the room and a second team of twelve Sailors entered the room and removed the steel caskets from their shipping cases. This team then relocated the two caskets to a different position so that no one would know which casket came from Europe or the Pacific. These twelve Sailors left the room and three morticians entered – Mr. Richard L. Trask, a member of the Naval Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, Mr. Hugh. C. Munro United States Air Force Mortuary Branch and Mr. William N. Annettire, United States Army, Memorial Division, Office of Quartermaster General. The three men removed the remains from the steel caskets and placed them in special bronze caskets. The previously selected Korean War Unknown Soldier was also placed in

¹⁹ If a sailor has qualified for a rate, but has not yet become a petty officer, he is called a designated striker, and is identified by

a striker's badge that displays the sailor's rating, along with his group rate marks.

a special bronze casket with a small identification plaque.

After each of the remains had been placed in bronze caskets, Navy pallbearers carried them out of the missile handling area to the starboard side of the ship and up to the '01' deck via a ramp on the port side. The three caskets were placed on support biers and the guests were asked to assemble for the ceremony. The casket of the Korean War Unknown Soldier was placed in the center with the two World War II candidates on either side. Standing in his dress white uniform on the '01' deck was 26 year-old First Class Petty Officer



Pallbearers move the caskets into position for the final selection ceremony..

Walt Welsh – a designated pallbearer. Above him on the '02' deck he could hear the continuous clicking of camera shutters as the press recorded every movement below them. He felt the breeze flipping the ends of his black, silk neckerchief tied in a square knot precisely at the "V" of his Navy jumper. Petty Officer Welsh at first thought the clicking of the

cameras would interfere with the ceremony but in fact it proved helpful to him. The constant shutter clicking "*...was a reminder for my shipmates and I that we might be the subject of one of the many pictures taken that day. So that sound meant stay alert, stand at attention and don't do anything which would distract from the solemnity of the moment.*"



The ceremony began with the ship's band playing Chopin's "Funeral March" as the Navy pallbearers moved the casket up the ladder and onto the missile deck. First Class Petty Officer Welsh, carrying one of the unknown the caskets with his shipmates felt a strong sense of respect and reverence for the remains along with a deep sense of pride and patriotism. Wearing the powder blue and silver Congressional Medal of Honor around his neck, Navy Hospital Corpsman First Class Charette sat directly in front of the Korean War Unknown Soldier's

Rear Admiral Lewis S. Parks began the ceremony with introductory remarks followed by an invocation of Lieutenant Commander Ross H. Trower, a Lutheran Navy chaplain and former chaplain to the 1st Marine Division in

Korea.²⁰ Immediately after the completion of the invocation, Rear Admiral Parks introduced Hospital Corpsman First Class Charette who took a wreath from a floral stand in front of the speaker's podium, walked around the flag covered caskets and placed it on the casket on the far-right casket.



Corporal Bill Desmond with the national colors.



Corporal Tim McKenna, USMC

²⁰ The chaplains of four faiths were onboard for the burial at sea of the candidate for World War II who was not chosen

The joint service color guard near the aft of the ship fought to hold their colors in a stiff wind that blew across the gray steel deck. Proudly holding the Marine Corps Flag to the left of the podium was Corporal Tim McKenna. His good friend, Corporal Bill Desmond stood in the same formation fighting to hold the American Flag straight in the cross wind. The June issue of Readers Digest reported that Corporal Desmond held the Stars and Stripes “like the rock of Gibraltar.”

Both Marines felt the solemnity of the moment and sixty years later still talk to each other once a month about their time aboard the Canberra and that special memory they shared holding the flags against a nagging wind.

After Corpsman Charette made the selection, he stepped back and smartly saluted the coffin. He later reflected on the ceremony:

“It was a very formal occasion. Yes, lots of brass there. It was windy and you could hear the flags covering the caskets flapping, “I will tell you I chose the one on the right. I just went to it, no sign, no system. I just picked the one on the right,” Charette said²¹

The ceremony concluded with the “Sea Chanters” choral group of Sailors in their dress white uniforms forming behind the caskets to sing the Navy Hymn that began with this verse:

*“Eternal Father, strong to save,
Whose arm hath bound the restless wave,
Who bidd’st the mighty ocean deep
Its own appointed limits keep,
O hear us when we cry to thee
For those in peril on the sea!”*

Petty Officer First Class Karl Bach was one of the initial members of the Navy Band Sea Chanters. He is the fourth Sailor from the left, second row standing in front of Corporal Tim McKenna proudly holding the Marine Corps flag in the picture above. The “Sea Chanters”



US Navy Sea Chanters choral group aboard the USS Canberra.

practiced with the Navy Band in the Sail Loft of Building 105 at the Washington Navy Yard, the final destination for the *Blandy*. Petty Officer First Class Bach remembers flying from Anacostia NAS, Washington, D.C. to Norfolk Naval Base and boarding the *Canberra* before the ship sailed on May 26, 1958. For Petty Officer First Class Bach singing before dignitaries and

special events became a routine occurrence for the Sea Chanters, but on the aft of the *Canberra* he understood the deep, soul touching meaning of the Navy Hymn as he sang the words into a salty damp breeze to close the ceremonies. It was a moment in time he has never forgotten.



Senior Chief Musician Karl Bach

²¹ The Ledger Newspaper by Bill Ruffy November 10, 2011

When the last notes had been sung and only the sound of the flags snapping in the wind and the waves lapping hurriedly against the steel hull of the ship, the honor guard in their dress Navy white and the Marines in their deep blue uniforms gave one final salute and moved to the front of the ship behind the admirals, captains and military officers of all the branches. The ceremony had concluded.

The *Blandy* at three hundred yards to the stern of the *Canberra* and traveling at 5 knots began to steam forward toward a parallel heading on the port side of *Canberra*. After all dignitaries and participants moved forward on the ship, Marine Corps and Navy pallbearers returned the selected Unknown Soldiers from World War II and Korea to the preparation room.

Turning Home – Part IV



World War II Unknown Soldier Being Carried to Main Deck with the Blandy in the background.



Blandy approaches to conduct high line operations.

With the ceremony complete on the *Canberra*, the *Boston* turned north-west and set a course for the Norfolk Naval Base. The *Blandy* pulled along the port side of *Canberra* and began high line operations at 1:00 p.m. to transfer the World War II and Korean War Unknown Soldiers for the final leg of their journey home at the Naval Gun Factory on the Potomac River.

When the *Blandy* and *Ingham* left the formation for Washington, the *Canberra* turned east for deeper water thirty-three miles off shore and set a burial detail with an eight man rifle team of Marines and six Navy pallbearers to carry the World War II unknown candidate not selected to the starboard, after quarter of the ship. Here a brief ceremony was conducted according Navy regulations.

Once the high line operation from *Canberra* to *Blandy* had been completed at 1:17 p.m., the *Blandy* turned away from *Canberra*, maneuvered with *Ingham* and set a course of 270 degrees and speed of 15 knots toward the Chesapeake Bay and the final destination at the Washington Naval Yard on the Potomac River.

At 1:57 p.m. all of the *Canberra's* engines were stopped. The body bearers brought the remains on a wooden pallet, covered with the American flag to the burial location on the ship where the *Canberra's* Executive Officer and four chaplains were waiting: Protestant Chaplain Joseph F. Dreith, Senior Chaplain Atlantic Fleet gave an invocation along with prayers by Jewish

Chaplain Lieutenant Nathan M. Landman, USAF, Roman Catholic Chaplain Major Henry L. Durand, USA and Eastern Orthodox Chaplain Lieutenant Boris Geeza, USN.



Pallbearer Walter Welsh facing camera.

The six pallbearers raised the pallet and the remains, in a canvas wire reinforced shroud weighted with 200 pounds of lead and sand, solemnly slid from the ship 113 feet into the rolling waves of the Atlantic.



Burial at Sea Ceremonies on the aft quarter of the USS Canberra.



Three rapid rifle volleys were then fired by the Marines. The body bearers folded the flag that had covered the unknown candidate and Petty Officer First Class Welsh presented it to the Executive Officer, Commander Thomas R. Weschler.

With the wind snapping the service flags near him, Corporal Len Kucharski, Marine Corps Detachment, watched the ceremony with an 18-year old heart thinking *"Is this the end we all face? Is this the way it ends – alone? - buried without family or friends."*

At 2:18 p.m. the burial at sea ceremony ended with Seaman James W. Howard performing the solitary and mournful sound of taps on his bugle. While his mortal remains were given to the ocean, his memory and sacrifice would live on forever in the polished marble of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery.

"The other Unknown Soldier shares the deep and vast and silent tomb with a myriad, the sea dead of the ages; the dead remembered and unremembered of many lands. Under sod or sea, soldier, sailor, airman they will never be alone, they who rest in honored glory, known or known but to God."²²

The *Blandy* escorted by the Coast Guard Cutter *Ingham* passed the Chesapeake light ship at 3:07 p.m. and entered the greenish inland waters marked by a black and white buoy at 3:40 p.m. on course up the Bay to the Potomac River. Later at 8:42 p.m. the *Blandy* dropped anchor in eleven fathoms of the brownish green waters near Piney Point Light.

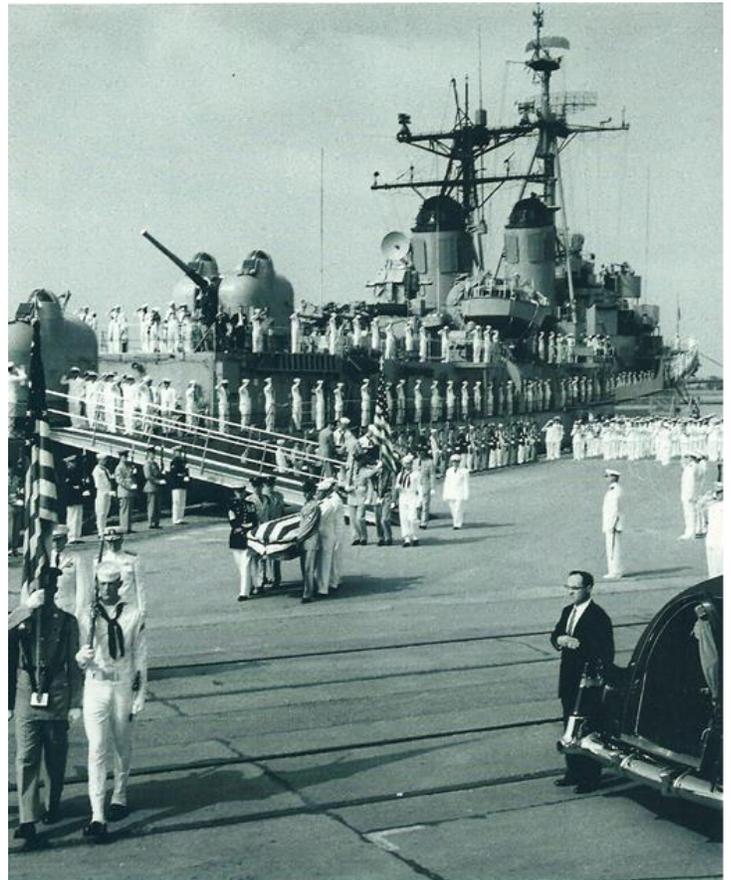
The next morning, Tuesday May 27th the two ships hauled in their anchors and steamed up the Potomac past Mount Vernon at 11:19 a.m., where they rendered appropriate honors to General Washington in accordance with Naval Regulations. At 12:35 p.m. the *Blandy* eased alongside Pier 1 of the Navy Yard and secured for the night. Ceremonies welcoming home the World War II and Korean War Unknown Soldiers were scheduled to commence the next day, On Wednesday May 28th at 9:30 a.m. the caskets of the World War II Unknown and the Korean War Unknown Soldiers with the World War II Unknown Soldier in the lead were carried down the gang plank to American soil once again. An honor guard of all the services waited on the dock to accept the remains and solemnly escort these unknown Americans to the Capital of their country.

The *Blandy* had completed her mission and brought America's sons home.

Petty Officer Third Class Tom Spivey, an 18-year-old fireman on the *Blandy* remembers that *"It was a humbling honor to escort the remains*

of the unknown service man in that flag draped casket" and considers it his most memorable moment in the service with the Navy. Mr. Spivey's friend and shipmate, Petty Officer Third Class Fireman Thomas DeMichele had similar feelings:

" I have an uncle who fought in World War II and came back alive and to think this soldier could be responsible for his safe return. It's sad they couldn't find a name or family connection to this soldier, but coming back as an unknown soldier means we all can claim him as part of our family and remember him with prayers on this 100th anniversary of his resting place. God bless all who served and gave their lives for the United States of America."



The Unknown Soldiers arriving at Naval Gun Factory Washington, D.C.

²² R. K. T. Larson Virginia Pilot Managing Editor

Respect, brotherhood, honor and devotion were given to each and every unknown. Unselected or selected the remains of each American were never left alone – there was always a Soldier, Sailor, Airman or Marine standing watch – sometimes standing alone – at a grave site, in a mortuary, on a ship or a plane an American stood guard. They may have died alone on the battlefield, but America would not forget their sacrifice and would remember them always. Corpsman Charette did not hesitate to put his life on the line for his fellow countrymen. The brotherhood in his heart exploded in spontaneous acts of courage. No one told Charette to cover the wounded man's body – he demonstrated without hesitation the thread that runs through men when bullets snap past their heads – this thread of loyalty and love of fellow Americans was there on that cold day in Korea as it was on that early spring day in 1775 on a town green in Lexington Massachusetts. Men rose for their fellow Americans in every war. For every Lexington there was a Concord bridge in American history. From that day on April 19, 1775 Americans have put on the uniform to ensure that *"all men are created equal"* and those inalienable rights shall not perish from this land. As President Lincoln said in his memorable "electric cord speech" on July 10, 1858 commemorating the 4th of July and the Declaration of Independence:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal," and then they feel that that moral sentiment taught in that day evidences their relation to those men, that it is the father of all moral principle in them, and that they have a right to claim it as though they were blood of the blood, and flesh of the flesh of the men who wrote that Declaration, and so they are. That is the electric cord in that Declaration that links the hearts of patriotic and liberty-loving men together, that will link those patriotic hearts as long as the love of freedom exists in the minds of men throughout the world."

They – the fallen, defending *"these truths"* are the form and face of America's hopes and dreams; the principles and values for which they gave their lives, is the electric cord that connects each American to each other and to every patriot grave. An article of faith, embraced by every Tomb Guard is that, *"A soldier never dies until he is forgotten, Tomb Guards never forget"*. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier represents these immutable truths. It has stood the test of time and the passing of generations. As long it stands, Americans all, will never forget, and America will endure. This story is a quintessential part of America's history issuing out of the very soul of America as it is embraced by succeeding generations. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier continues to remain a place to mourn, to express gratitude and pride in those that have sacrificed all; to reflect upon being an American; and it remains the one place where all of America comes together.



This continuity of devotion and duty is an unbroken chain demonstrating America's unshakeable commitment to never forget those who have and will answer our Country's call in time of need. That sacred duty and mutual commitment of every American is symbolically repeated day after day at Arlington at the changing of the guard when the Relief Commander orders the Sentinel to *"Pass on your orders"* to which the Sentinels complete the unbroken chain with: *"Post and orders remain as directed."*

"Orders acknowledged."