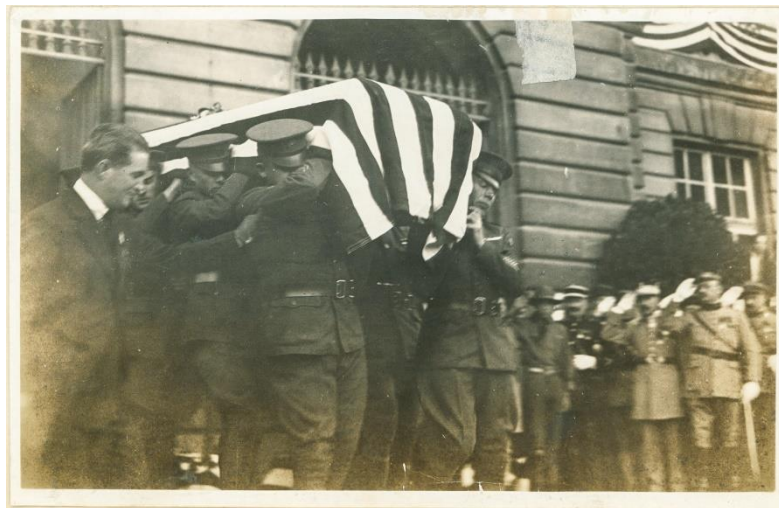


A Tomb of the Unknown Soldier Never Forget Garden for this Memorial Day, “the electric cord” that connects our generation to every patriot’s grave.

Recently a neighbor stopped by the house and commented on the roses I had planted on the walkway leading to the front door. While maintaining our distance he asked about the white garden marker installed in the middle of the newly planted roses. I told him that it was a Tomb of the Unknown Soldier Never Forget Garden marker, and that this was not just another garden. It is a special place and each rose bush represented someone close who had been killed in combat while my wife and I served in the Army.



As I explained to my neighbor, we chose to plant white and yellow roses, along with poppies and forget-me-nots. White roses offered a powerful connection to my duty at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Sergeant Edward F. Younger, on October 24, 1921, placed a “spray of white roses” upon one of four caskets containing the remains of unidentifiable Americans killed in combat in 1921 with this simple act he selected the World War I Unknown Soldier buried in the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National, Cemetery.



Since the end of the Civil War, Memorial Day has been a day set aside for remembering and honoring millions who have fallen while serving in the Armed Forces of the United States. Millions of American will gather as families, or individually, and visit cemeteries and memorials. While it may be a national holiday, every day is Memorial Day to these families. Unfortunately, this year COVID-19 presents challenges for us to remember and honor our dead. The National Cemetery Administration made a difficult decision to

suspend normal Memorial Day observances in their 142 cemeteries but open them to families so they may visit their veteran's final resting place. Many local communities have also suspended the practice of "flags in" at local cemeteries, ceremonies and parades citing social and physical distancing recommendations by health departments.

Memorial Day is a federal holiday. But it is not just another day off from work. For America it is the day set aside that we officially remember our war dead, and for many individuals it is that painful time to remember those veterans who "gave their tomorrows for our today". Most will decorate the graves of loved ones and comrades with flowers and mementos, wear a red poppy, or participate in a parade or ceremony. Many will just quietly visit a grave to remember and be close.

Yet there are millions of Americans who can never visit the grave of those who never came home from war. The oceans cradle many who have been lost at sea, while graves across this nation and in foreign lands have headstones that declare that an "Unknown" American rest here. Where do these families go?

The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery is that place where we as a nation remember all our fallen. Millions of visitors have made the pilgrimage over the past 100 years and witnessed our nation's commitment to account for and watch over those who sacrificed so that we may live free now and in the future. It took me more than 20 years to steel myself to visit a comrade's grave in Colorado, but while I was a Relief Commander at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in 1997-98, I was able to visit with him every night.

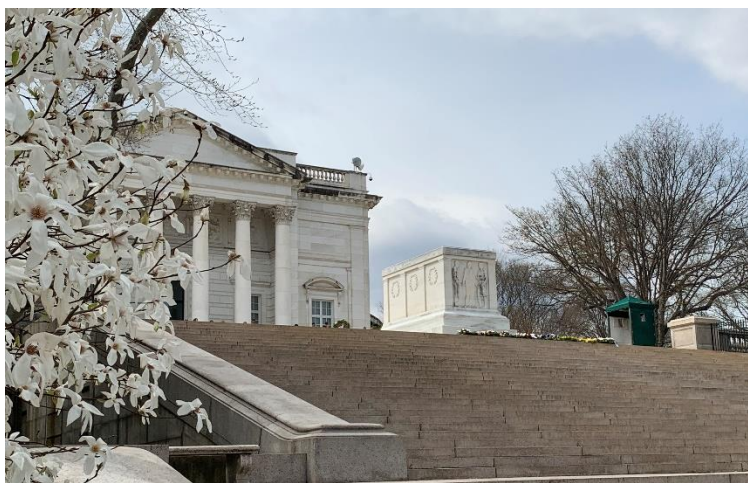
As Memorial Day 2020 approaches I encourage each of you to consider installing a Never Forget Garden to recognize and remember all those who have and will serve and sacrifice on behalf of America. It is the Society's intention that this living memorial serve as a kind of a proxy not only for the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, but for your loved ones final resting place that you may not be able to visit this year. In doing so, you will keep their memory alive and support the national commemoration for the 100th anniversary of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier on November 11, 2021.

The Society's envisions that through this garden we can express our feelings in ways that words sometimes cannot. A Never Forget Garden *"can and should evoke emotions in individuals but should also foster an occasion for shared emotions and especially learning why this Garden is here. There are stories to be told of our veterans from the past and our service men and women, current and future."* It will create opportunities for teaching and remembrance, just as when my neighbor asked, 'why is this garden special'?

There is a unifying effect the language that flowers offer in expressing the profound emotions of patriotism, remembrance, and love. The languages of music, prose and poetry offer unique ways to express and communicate love for America, patriotism and remembrance. So too with the language of flowers. For something that is often small, a flower has the ability to provoke intensely strong emotions. Flowers bring joy and give

comfort to those who grieve. We give flowers to the mother of a new-born child to welcome him or her to the world. We include flowers as we celebrate birthdays, weddings and other special occasions. We also place flowers on the coffins of our loved ones as part of our final farewell. Few things in this world have the power to express our emotions and matters of the heart.

Your Never Forget Garden can foster a unifying national identity that will transcend our political, social, religious or regional differences. Every flower, plant, or tree will be a symbol of love and act of unity and the growing such is a very personal experience in a very personal space. While we may be deprived of our customary paths of remembrance on Memorial Day this year, your personal Never Forget Garden will be a place that will allow you to be close all year round. It can be our generations “electric cord” that connects to us every patriot’s grave.



SGM Gavin McIlvenna, US Army Retired, is President of the Society of the Honor Guard, Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (SHGTUS) and is working with the government and various non-governmental organizations on the Centennial Commemoration of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (1921-2021).