



# Centennial Flag Project

## Stage 10

Leading up to the national commemoration of the Centennial of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier the Society of the Honor Guard, Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (SHGTUS) proposed that a special flag be flown at key locations surrounding the World War I Unknown Soldier selection and journey home from France to the United States in 1921. The idea was that this special “Centennial Flag” would be flown at key locations in the history of the World War I Unknown Soldier as part of the historic pilgrimage that was planned for October 2021.

**November 9, 2021** – The flag was last used during 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the departure of the Unknown Soldier from the port city of Le Havre, France on October 25, 2021.

After the departure of the Unknown Soldier aboard the USS *Olympia* from the French port city of Le Havre on October 25, 1921, the Unknown Soldier journey home became a challenge. Immediately the Captain of the *Olympia* and the commander of the special US Marine Corps detachment determined that the exposed position of the casket on the fantail was untenable. Due to the hatches on the *Olympia* being too small to move the casket through, and the command decision that the casket would not be placed inside a cargo hold, they then moved the casket to the highest “ground” possible on the ship.

Resting between two large funnel stacks, the casket was lashed to a vent that led down into Admiral/Captains quarters. A special wooden case was constructed to cover the casket, along with the flowers used by Sergeant Younger to select the Unknown Soldier, it this was also lashed to the deck.

The US Marine Corps detail began a death watch that would not end until the ships arrival in Washington DC. This included the Marines lashing themselves to the deck in case the ship went down, as the Marine on duty would remain with the Unknown Soldier.

In the early morning hours of November 9, 1921, the *Olympia* arrived at the Navy Yard in Washington DC. Here the US Navy transferred responsibility back to the US Army and troopers with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Squadron, 3<sup>d</sup> Cavalry Regiment assumed the watch. The Unknown Soldier arrived home on American soil at 4pm.

To read more about this historical event, please visit the Naval History and Heritage Command website:



<https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/wars-conflicts-and-operations/world-war-i/history/unknown-soldier/final-voyage-home.html>

In 2021 the Department of Defense, along with the Society of the Honor Guard, Tomb of the Unknown Soldier honored those events in a special ceremony at the Navy Yard.

After speeches by dignitaries from the US Navy, US Army, and the Society President in a makeshift tent near the site, the official party moved to the spot where the Unknown Soldier was carried off the USS *Olympia* and onto his native soil.

A special historical plaque was donated by the Society to the US Navy, providing information on this difficult journey home. Prior to the laying of the official wreath, the Centennial flag was brought forward by former Tomb Guard James Livingston (1999-01) and a member of the US Navy Honor Guard. Once in front of the spot where the Unknown Soldier arrived in the United States the flag was unfolded and presented to those in attendance.



The dignitaries then each placed a single white rose on the wreath, followed by the playing of Taps.



*Navy Lieutenant Rebecca Brock, the great granddaughter of Congressman Hamilton Fish III, leads the dignitaries to the plaque.*



*Former Tomb Guard James Livingston (1999-01) hands off the Centennial Flag to Society President Gavin McIlvenna (1997-98)*

The Centennial flag was refolded and given to Society President Gavin McIlvenna before the dignitaries returned to the tent concluding the ceremony.

*“(The Society) fabulously shepherded the effort to commemorate the centennial and put in this special place of fitting reminder of the historic event we are celebrating today. (We) are inspired by your dedication, your loyal to the memory and legacy of those who made the ultimate sacrifice. It’s been a pleasure to work with you in the Society of the Honor Guard Tomb of the Unknown soldier. “*

*- Rear Admiral Michael Stephan  
92nd Commandant of Naval District Washington.*

*“... their final acts of service took place far away from their home and their loved ones with stories to go untold. We will remember them. We must remember them, but we must also do more. We must honor their life by living ours committed to the freedom for which they served.”*

*- Lieutenant General Walter Piatt  
United States Army Director of the Army Staff*

*“It is fitting that on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean there are plaques honoring the service and sacrifice of this unknown American who fell in the defense of others.”*

*- Gavin McIlvenna, Society President*

**The next stop** for the Centennial Flag is US Capitol on November 10<sup>th</sup> to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the day when the public was able to pay their respects to the Unknown Soldier in 1921.

For more information on the selection of the World War I Unknown Soldier visit:

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[www.tombguard.org/tomb-of-the-unknown-soldier/world-war-i](http://www.tombguard.org/tomb-of-the-unknown-soldier/world-war-i)

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