

Centennial Flag Project



April 15, 2021 - 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.

Key locations include:

- Arlington National Cemetery (VA) on Memorial Day 2021.
- USS *Olympia* (PA) on September 27, 2021 to commemorate the departure of the *Olympia* on its mission to bring home the World War I Unknown Soldier in 1921.
- World War I cemeteries in France that the four candidates came from October 21-23, 2021.
- City of Châlons-en-Champagne, France where the World War I Unknown Soldier was selected on October 24, 1921.
- City of Le Havre where the World War I Unknown Soldier was placed aboard the USS *Olympia* and transported to the United States on October 25, 1921.
- The historic Navy Yard (DC) where the World War I Unknown Soldier first returned to the United States on November 9, 1921.
- The US Capitol (DC) where the Unknown Soldier lay in state on November 9-10, 1921.
- The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery (VA) on November 11, 2021 for the national commemoration 100 years later.

The driving force behind the Centennial Flag project was David Hathaway, the Assistant Quartermaster for the Society and a full time First Responder with the Bucks County Firefighter and EMS Memorial Honor Guard in Pennsylvania. Outside of the responsibilities with SHGTUS, he has been a first responder for over 30 years as a volunteer firefighter and works as an emergency medical technician (EMT) in suburban Philadelphia. Additionally, he oversees a joint emergency services honor guard that provides funeral services and family support to first responders around the country. He also dedicates time to supporting the National Fallen Firefighter Foundation and National EMS Memorial Foundation.

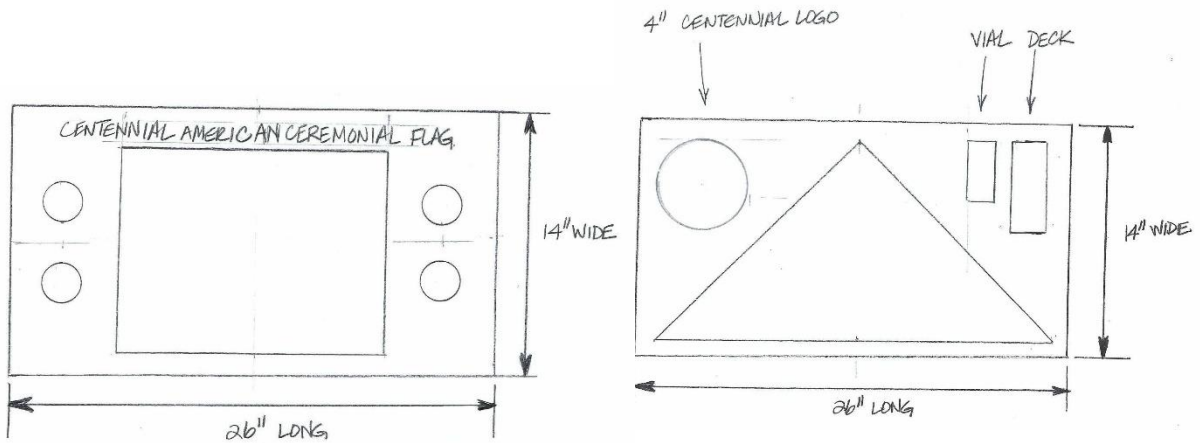


“The fire service created a ceremonial Flag that was flown over major memorials around the nation dedicated to firefighters that had died in the line-of-duty and is used by fire service honor guards during the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Weekend each year. This flag carries with it the essence of each surviving family member and that of every firefighter. It seemed like creating a similar Flag project to commemorate the centennial of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, would have an even more powerful emotional and symbolic impact on an entire nation.”

– David Hathaway

“Soldiers never die until they are forgotten, Tomb Guards never forget.”

The flag will be transported in a special case with items of significance to the World War I Unknown Soldier. David contacted the Society President, Gavin McIlvenna a former Tomb Guard who served from 1997-1998, to work on the interior design of the case and they came up with the following items:



- US Flag
- Wood decking from the USS *Olympia*
- Framed photo of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier as it appeared in its original design
- Special challenge coins commemorating the historic pilgrimage
- A vial of soil collected from the four battlefields where candidates were removed
- A vial of portions of the crushed unknown candidate headstones not selected
- A vial of shavings from the base of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier
- A vial of soil collected from under the red marble on the plaza of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

The Society intended that there be no cost associated with this project to the key owners of the locations that were planned, and reached out to the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC), Independence Seaport Museum (ISM), Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (TUS) Platoon, the cities of Châlons-en-Champagne and Le Havre in France, the US Capitol, and the Naval District Washington (NDW) to obtain their approval. By mid-May all agencies have granted approval for the project, except for the US Capitol, which is still under development.

With the basic design concept in hand, David's next step was to obtain a regulation sized interment flag. He reached out to the Bucks County Firefighter and EMS Memorial Honor Guard in Pennsylvania and they graciously donated a 5' by 9.6' casket flag, which is the same size used by the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier Platoon.

With the flag in hand David contacted the Independence Seaport Museum (ISM) in Philadelphia where the USS *Olympia* is located. After talking with ISM Chief Curator Craig Burns, a small section of wood decking from the *Olympia* was donated that was 4 1/4" long, 2 13/16" wide, and 1 1/4" thick. Craig described it as "The wood is clear Douglas fir and was removed from the ship sometime in the summer of 2016."

Next key element was to decide what picture to use and how it would fit into the design of the case. Keeping with the intent that it should focus on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and not a unit or individual, it was decided to capture the Tomb in its original design in 1921, prior to the modifications that are seen today when it was completed in 1931.

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Once that was done, David then went to the Pelican Case company to see what type of case could be used to fit the design. The Pelican 1605 Air Case, grey in color, was chosen and deemed the best to hold all the proposed items. Designers at Pelican were able to modify the interior foam to fit all items, engraving the TUS100 logo next to the flag location, and “Ceremonial Centennial Flag” across the inside of the upper lid.



David placed the empty vials, decking from the USS *Olympia*, two of the four special coins, and the flag into the case and transported it to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (TUS) Platoon of the 3d United States Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard) on Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall in Arlington, Virginia a few days before Memorial Day. This would be the first leg in the flag's journey.

The Sergeant of the Guard, SFC Chelsea Porterfield, accepted responsibility for the flag and directed the 1st Relief to ensure that it was raised on the flagpole outside of the Memorial Amphitheater on the morning of May 31, 2021, prior to the cemetery being open, and retired when the cemetery was closed later that day.

After refolding the flag, SSG Damien Fraser, the 1st Relief Commander in training, gathered his relief at the end of the day and posed for a picture with the flag, outside of the chains, before beginning their nightly training on the plaza of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.



David found that the original design of the interior was creating a potential problem and the case needed to be modified:

“A modification was made to the interior of the case in order to provide additional protection to the contents of the case. A 1/8” piece of black foam was cut to fit over the entire interior and placed between the cover and the bottom of the case. This provided a barrier that will prevent damage to both the contents and case itself while the case is being transported.”

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(L-R) SPC Sprosty, Spc Barber, SPC Vesely (Sentinel), SPC Williams (Sentinel), SSG Fraser (1st Relief Commander), SPC Fanning (Sentinel), PFC Paschall, SPC Pulte (Sentinel)

The flag and case remained with the platoon until July 15th, 2021, when it was transferred by Assistant Sergeant of the Guard Gabriel Silva to James Livingston, a former Tomb Guard who served from 1999-2001 as a Relief Commander. With this transfer, the first leg of the Centennial Flag’s journey was completed.



Next key date for the Centennial Flag: September 27, 2021 aboard the USS *Olympia*.



To learn more about the Centennial Flag Project and keep track of its progress on the historic pilgrimage in the century old footsteps of events surrounding the selection, transportation, and burial of the World War I Unknown Soldier in 1921 please visit <https://tombguard.org/centennial/projects#the-centennial-flag-project>

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