

Centennial Flag Project

Stage 3



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.

October 21, 2021 – The flag was last flown on the USS *Olympia* on September 27th, marking the 100th anniversary of the start of her journey to bring home the World War I Unknown Soldier. The flag was lowered from the fantail and placed into its special case, designed by Pelican Case Company. This was then carried by James Livingston (1999-01) to France on October 16th.

On October 21, 2021 the Centennial Flag was taken to the St. Mihiel American Cemetery in Thiaucourt, France where the majority of the fallen that are buried here came from the reduction of the St. Mihiel salient that threatened Paris in September of 1918.



This is the first cemetery that the pilgrimage group and flag will visit and has direct ties to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery. On October 22, 1921, the Army Quartermaster Corps came to the cemetery to remove one unidentified American who fell during the war. This unknown American would become one of four candidates that would be moved to the city of Chalons-en-Champagne (back in 1921 it was named Chalons-sur-Marne), where a final selection would be made to designate the World War I Unknown Soldier.



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

www.tombguard.org/tomb-of-the-unknown-soldier/world-war-i



The pilgrimage group gathered at the cemetery flagpoles, and under the watchful eye of Society's Assistant Quartermaster David Hathaway they raised the flag at 9:00am. The detail consisted of former Tomb Guard's George March (1963-65), Lonny Legrand (1981-83), Paul Basso (2000-04, 2015-17), Roy May (2002, 2004-05), and Army Veteran and Society member Patrick Sutliff.

The flag was then raised to full staff, before being lowered to half-staff in accordance with the President of the United States order for all government buildings and agencies to have flags lowered in to remember General (Retired) and former Secretary of State Colin Powell.



Upon conclusion of the small ceremony involving ABMC staff, local community leaders, and US and French veterans the flag was ceremonially lowered and returned to its travel case.

Speaking during the ceremony were Superintendent Joseph Alotto and host of the ceremony; Mr. Laurent Naves, Sous-Prefet of the arrondissement of Toul (Department of Meurthe-et-Moselle); and Society President Gavin McIlvenna (1997-98).

“The privilege of this day has claimed a place in my heart. It will forever remind me that the spirit of those 4135 American heroes who sleep here in the gentle lands of France, and the spirit of those 284 missing in the glorious action at St. Mihiel, are among those that bind the fabric of the stars and stripes of the flag flown here today.”

- Geroge March (1963-65)

“As a dependent of an Army NCO, and also an Army veteran, I remember a 8th grade high school history lesson regarding the battle of Verdun. 40 years later I’m able to reflect on that lesson and have no words to express my deep emotions of personally being part of a society to honor those men and women who fought and died defending the freedom for the French. Blessed are the peacemakers”

- Patrick Sutliff

“The care that has been and continues to be put forth by American Battle Monuments Commission and the French people to honor and remember the American soldiers that gave their lives in the name of freedom during World War I is awe inspiring.”

- David Hathaway

“I never imagined in my lifetime being a part of something like this. The road to get here started a long time ago, working, training and perfecting my job that would make me a Tomb Guard. A Tomb Guard, I choke up when I say that in this moment. The hallowed grounds that we were

standing and walking on, it's just awe inspiring. To know and embrace the magnitude of being a part of this historic event that took place today, raising, lowering and folding an American Flag at one of the American Cemeteries on foreign soil, one that these men laying before us, fought and died for, I am beyond honored and privileged to have been a part of this. This great memory will live with me forever. God Bless America."

- Lonny LeGrand (1981-83)



Prior to departing the cemetery Superintendent Alotto selected soil from the grave one of the 117 unknown Americans buried in the cemetery, for a special vial that will eventually collect soil from each of the cemeteries that an unknown candidate came from.



The next stop for the Centennial Flag is the Aisne-Marne American Cemetery on the morning of October 22nd, followed by the Somme American Cemetery that afternoon.