

Centennial Flag Project

Stage 5



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 22, 2021 – The flag was last flown at the Aisne-Marne American Cemetery in Belleau, France on the morning of October 22, 2021, where one of the candidates for the World War I Unknown Soldier was disinterred 100 years ago today.

On the afternoon of October 22, 2021, the Centennial Flag was taken to rolling countryside where the Somme American Cemetery resides just outside of Bony, France. The fallen buried here in this small but very powerful cemetery, fell while serving in American units that were attached to British armies in the fall of 1917 when the first massed tank offensive in history was conducted, and the summer of 1918 as divisions from the American Expeditionary Forces came together to repel the emeries advances.



This is the third 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.

The pilgrimage group gathered at the cemetery in the early afternoon to partly cloudy skies with sun breaking through at key moments. The Centennial Flag raising detail consisted of Assistant Quartermaster David Hathaway, a first responder from Pennsylvania; former Tomb Guard and Society President Gavin McIlvenna (1997-98), retired Oregon State Police Captain and former US Marine Eric Judah, Army veteran and Society member Patrick Sutliff, and the American Legion Paris Post 1 Commander Bryan Schell.



The American Battle Monuments Commission Director of Cemetery Operations, Edmund Ryan, was present and walked the Society President through rubbing sand from the beaches of Normandy upon a headstone so that the name looks like it is painted with gold. Mr. Ryan was then asked to remove soil from one of the over 117 unknown American's graves and add it to the small vial containing soil from St. Mihiel and Aisne-Marne cemeteries.



Superintendent Eryth Zecher and American Gold Star Mothers INC President Jo Ann Maitland spoke during the ceremony, which was well attended by local veterans and community leaders.



American Gold Star Mother Jo Ann Maitland



Former Tomb Guard David McCamis (1976-77) presents a spray of roses

With the ceremonies concluded, the Centennial Flag was lowered by former Tomb Guards Lonny LeGrand (1981-83), Robert “Larry” Jewell (1974-75) and his wife Mary; retired Oregon State Police Captain and former US Marine Eric Judah and former Old Guardsman and Society Member Colonel (Ret) William King.

“We feel privileged to participate in the pilgrimage honoring the selection of the WWI Unknown Soldier. How incredible that 46 years ago I was guarding this Unknown and today I am retracing the events surrounding his selection in France 100 years ago!”

- Robert (Larry) Jewell (1974-75)



The next stop for the Centennial Flag is the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery on the morning of October 23rd.



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

