



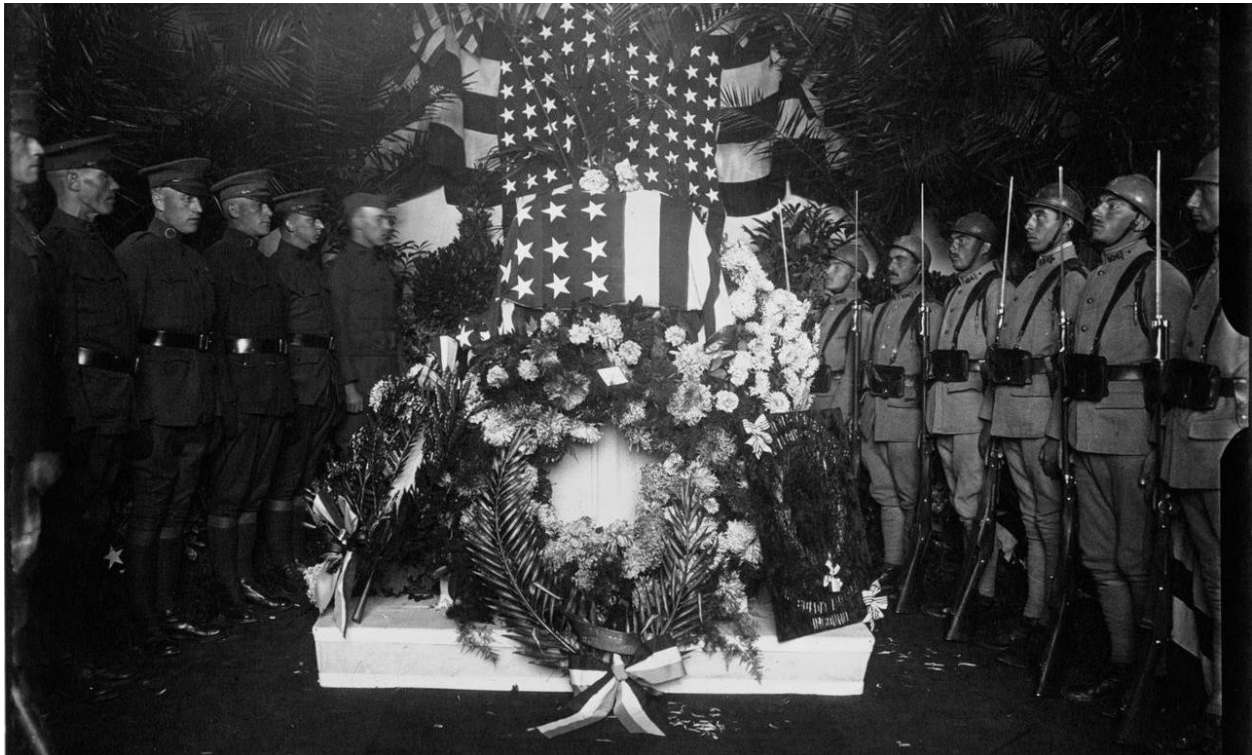
Centennial Flag Project

Stage 7

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 23, 2021 – The flag was last flown at the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery in Romange-sous-Montfaucon, France on the morning of October 23, 2021 where one of the candidates for the World War I Unknown Soldier was disinterred in 1921, and the three unknown candidates not chosen were returned 100 years ago.

On the evening of October 23, 2021, the Centennial Flag was taken to the city of Chalons-en-Champagne, France where it would be used by the city in the special vigil to honor the Centennial of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and the events that occurred in 1921.



On October 23, 1921, the Hotel de Ville was selected as the location for selection ceremony the next day. Promptly at 3:00pm the four unknown candidates converged upon the city from the American cemeteries they were disinterred from: St. Mihiel, Aisne-Marne, Somme, and Meuse-Argonne. The casket was draped with the United States flag and placed into the great hall of the Hotel de Ville.

French Soldier then assumed the 'death watch' over the four caskets. Periodically until 10:00pm a French officer would arrive and remove the Soldier so that he could rearranged the caskets, ensuring that nobody would know from which cemetery they had come from. The French Soldiers remained watching over our fallen warriors until 10:00pm, when six American Soldier joined them. For the remainder of the night both nations would jointly watch over these unknown Americans.

The planners for the Mayor's office wanted to capture that reverence by reenacting the vigil performed by the French and US militaries 100 years ago, and they placed an empty casket inside the same hall that was used in 1921.



The special Centennial Flag, that had first been flown at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier on Memorial Day and then that morning touched to the three unselected candidate's headstones, was unfolded and draped over the empty casket where it would remain until the morning of October 24th by former Tomb Guard Clifford Redden (1970-71) and American Gold Star Mother 2nd Vice President Pam Stemple.

Re-enactors from the Les Soldats de Plomb Association, wearing period correct French and American uniforms stood the watch as the public came into city hall to see the casket and exhibition area.

"Seeing the casket, draped in the flag carried from the United States, being guarded by period correct uniformed re-enactors of both the French and American military made the experience that more intense. I could see the historical pictures of 1921 in color in front of me in the

present, and I was moved to the point of not being able to adequately express my emotions. The Mayor and staff of the City of Chalons-en-Champagne were able to capture the moment 100 years ago and send chills down my spine.”

- Gavin McIlvenna (1997-98), Society President



The next stop for the Centennial Flag is the city of Chalons-en-Champagne on the morning of October 24th.



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

