



SOCIETY OF THE HONOR GUARD, TOMB OF THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER

P.O. Box 1111, Hermitage, PA 16148

www.tombguard.org

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The Centennial of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier -- Circular Letter #2

At the close of the American Revolution, General George Washington issued his Circular Letter to the States. This device allowed him to express his heart felt gratitude for the trust placed in him, the unwavering support that met him everywhere and to share his thoughts on matters that would advance the noble purpose for which they had pledged, *"their lives, their property and their sacred honor"*.

In that spirit of gratitude for the trust placed in us to fulfill America's sacred duty to never, ever forget those who have or will serve in our military in times of war or armed conflict, we now share our thoughts and invite all of America to join us as we prepare for appropriate observance of the Centennial of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, in Arlington National Cemetery.

Background

At 11:00 A.M. on November 11, 2021 the people of the United States will mark the passage of 100 years since the interment of an unidentifiable member of the American Expeditionary Forces of World War I in Arlington National Cemetery. The place of interment has come to be known as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (TUS) and regarded as America's most sacred shrine. As intended, it is dedicated to all that have served and sacrificed for America in times of war or armed conflict from the American Revolution to the present and to those yet to come.

Congressman Hamilton Fish, Jr. hoped that: "the grave of this unidentified warrior will become a shrine of patriotism for all ages to come, which will be a source of inspiration, reverence, and love of country for future generations." Millions of Americans have embraced that vision by their pilgrimage to the TUS and continued reverence over the generations, eloquently expressed their profound gratitude and commitment to America. While we have witnessed the passing of generations, and with them the challenges of their times, we have also witnessed the profound respect, love and pride in the eyes and faces of our fellow Americans. Our service as Honor Guard, has enabled us to have a profound understanding that the TUS fosters a unifying national identity that transcends our differences of race, religion or politics.

(1)

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

The Society has applied our best efforts to plan, develop and initiate several activities suitable for this solemn occasion of National importance.

Each has been developed to reflect our research and, perhaps more important, the knowledge gained from what we heard and saw expressed by the American people, and the life transforming lessons as we kept the watch 24 hours a day, 365 days a year when surrounded by well-meaning crowds by day, or alone in the thoughtful peace of night.

Here is what we learned after nearly 93 years of duty at the TUS:

- The TUS is not about World War I. It is about every individual who has ever served – or will ever serve—and America’s promise to them that they will never forget them.
- The TUS is also that sacred place we Americans remember why millions of our countrymen have fought and died for our liberty and our freedom.
- The TUS fosters a unifying National identity that transcends our differences of politics, race or religion.
- The United State Government (through the Department of Defense) is responsible for implementing the federal law recognizing the Centennial of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.
- The dedicated federal resources and level of leadership must be commensurate with the National importance of this sacred national shrine, and capable to include interaction with our Allies and those countries where our honored war dead remain.
- All ceremonies and actions should be all-inclusive - to recognize in explicit terms, the diversity of the American people and how they have served together to preserve our Country
- Our combined efforts should reach out to individual Americans and communities, however defined
- Our efforts need to be pro-active, recognizing that not everyone can leave their communities, to avoid defaulting to Washington DC or Arlington National Cemetery centric
- Recruit all branches of the federal government to participate. i.e. Congress, Judiciary and the Executive
- Recruit all non-federal organizations
- Emphasize education component about service and sacrifice for our Country

Here are example of ceremonies and activities initiated or proposed by the Society¹

- The National Salute throughout the Unites States and in those foreign lands where our military war dead remain (see attachment for full description of the National Salute)
- Encourage Allies participation in lands where our honored war dead remain, like France, England, Holland and the Pacific theatre.
- Supporting the American Battlefields Monument Commission
- Supporting the several programs by Arlington National Cemetery
- Enlist Military assets (e.g. the USS Constitution) for the National Salute
- Immigration and Naturalization educational packages for new citizens

¹ For updated detailed information about the National Salute and other Society initiatives, please see our website at <https://tombguard.org/centennial/>

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- The Society's Educational Tool kit²
- Society has requested a series of United States Postage Stamps that depict the many ways in which our fellow countrymen have served to keep America free.³
- Memorial Ceremonies, such as the ones conducted at Chief Plenty Coups Memorial in Montana or for George Washington's Immortal 400 at the gravesite of Colonel Gassaway Watkins (American Revolution and the War of 1812, Clarksville Maryland)
- Recruiting the support of National Guard for each State
- Recruiting the United States Congressional Medal of Honor Society
- Encouraging programs by military units identified with regions. E.G. The Code Talkers of the South West, the Harlem Hell Fighters, the Japanese-American units
- Supporting organizations such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, the Gold Star Mothers, the Society of the Cincinnati, the Society of the Sons of the American Revolution, the Boy Scouts of America, the Girl Scouts of America
- Support the United States Army Old Guard traveling show
- Air shows led by the U.S. and joined by the various civilian organizations that put up period aircraft and educational shows.
- Full national support for programs like that of the American Legion's outreach for educating and sale of the American Flag or the Independence Seaport Museum and the preservation of the USS Olympia
- The Society has developed a Centennial pin.
- The Society seeks the military to develop a musical score to recognize this moment in this history of our Country

Status of Initiative and Current Planning for the Centennial

Under the singular leadership of Senators John McCain and Tom Cotton, the National Defense Authorization Act of 2017 directed the Secretary of Defense to take appropriate action to observe this Centennial as a historical event. The legislation recognizes the truly national scope of this Centennial and the overarching meaning of the TUS. The legislation contemplates, that it must be inclusive; that it not be Washington DC centric, and that like our enduring freedoms, it should contemplate long lasting programs to discuss and encourage public service for our Country; and that it create ways in which our citizenry (individually and collectively) might express our profound sorrow, gratitude, respect, and pride in those who have answered the call; their sacrifice and those yet to come.

This legislation empowers the Secretary of Defense to develop a national mobilization of public (federal and state) and private resources; individual and group actions; and expressions of remembrance to promote discussions of service and expressions of patriotism.

This legislation is the full-throated voice of the American peoples' sacred promise to never forget and provides the National authority and power to assemble and orchestrate federal, state, regional, local and individual resources. It is the single most effective engine to connect all of America, both here and in those foreign lands where our war dead remain.

² See the Society's description and pictures at our website at <https://tombguard.org/centennial/#toolbox>

³ See Society's letter to the U.S. Postal Commission

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We have witnessed how many communities, organizations, and individuals have developed activities and ceremonies that recognize their contribution to the national defense. And this is as it should be. This Centennial legislation renews the promise of the American people and provides the national authority and power to assemble and orchestrate federal, state, regional, local and individual resources to connect all of America both here and in those lands where our fellow citizens fell in defense of our freedoms.

With appropriate leadership and staffing, the Centennial observance can become this and future generations “Electric Cord” that connects us to every patriot – living and dead.

Our invitation

We write you now because we believe that as you have honored us with your trust to fulfill America’s sacred duty to never forget, you also expect us to share our thoughts regarding the Centennial. As Congressman Fish Jr. was greatly assisted by his fellow Americans in advancing the legislation that created the TUS, we believe that the Secretary of Defense will be well served by your expressing your thoughts and encouragement to dedicate the resources necessary to advance this National initiative and to make public his planning and how each of us can fully and meaningfully participate.

Accordingly, we encourage your contacting the Secretary of Defense and expressing your support and specific suggestions. We also invite your recognition of the leadership and continued support by Senators McCain and Cotton.

We invite you to share this letter and suggest how we can better communicate with our fellow Americans. The Society maintains a website and presence on social media. We will continue to update and make announcements on those sites. We welcome your inquiries about our initiatives and want to hear about your initiatives.

Thank you in advance,

Gavin McIlvenna

Sergeant Major (Retired) Gavin McIlvenna

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