

The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier Centennial – Connecting All of America to its Past, Present and Future Through the Language of Flowers

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Society of the Honor Guard, Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (TUS) Never Forget Garden and its Garden Marker was inspired by 244 years of America's unshakeable commitment to its sacred duty to never forget or forsake those who have served and sacrificed on behalf of America in times of war or armed conflict.

Eight years ago Colonel Neale Cosby, U.S. Army (retired), assembled the co-founders of the Society of the Honor Guard, Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (Society) to announce that: "We need to prepare for the Centennial of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier." As with all of Neale's initiatives we commenced preparations to reach out to America. Our concepts and policies were driven by the mission that we were privileged to serve; our discipline; and the sacred trust the American people placed in our hands. Our Society and its mission reflect our lifelong commitment to serve as America's representative in honoring its sacred duty. As one sentinel put it, "there is no such thing as a former sentinel, there are only sentinels that no longer walk". So, with the grey hair and the old bones that betray many of us, the fire within us was rekindled and once again returned us to actively serve the American people. Our mission now was to find meaningful ways to reunite America with the millions that have fought and died so that America would endure.

The singular importance of this Centennial issues from what the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier means to the American people and all freedom loving people of the world:

*"[It] has, over the years, become an immortal shrine, representing American ideals of valor, service, duty, and patriotism. It is symbolic of the spirit of freedom, democracy, and unity which are the cornerstones of our Republic in peace and war."*²

The knowledge, skills and abilities acquired from our training and experience while serving at the TUS, and the diverse professional lives we led afterwards, provided a rich body of principles and historical data: These shaped the content and contours of our initiatives, and we easily erected guiding principles and requirements.

- The TUS is not about WWI, but rather about America's sacred duty to never forget those who served and sacrificed on behalf of America in times of war or armed conflict.
- The TUS is sacred to the people of the United States.
- Through educational programs, ceremonies, and other suitable activities we could reunite the people of the United States with all those who have served and sacrificed on behalf of America in times of war or armed conflict.

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² Hamilton Fish: Memoir of American Patriot, Regenery Gateway, 1991.

- The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier has become, as intended, to be a place where all of America could come together.
- The TUS has become a place where America is united: It is a place that fosters our unifying national identity that transcends our political, religious, racial and sectional differences.

“[The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier] more than anything else, manifests our nation’s deepest hopes and,....some of our deepest fears when we call young men and women to serve this country.”

“The Tomb is that one place where we say to those Americans who have died, and to those who serve today and who will serve in the future, ‘We will not ever forsake you. ‘We will never forget you’.”

“It isn’t necessarily what we say, it’s that the Tomb is there, and that you Sentinels are there. Isn’t that what those words mean that are carved in the marble? Keeping faith of the nation’. Keeping faith, that why I think the Tomb is so unique. That’s why I think it’s one of four or five places in America that captures the very heart of America and will always be there no matter who is entombed in the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.”³

- This Centennial provides us an opportunity to extend that unifying experience to those who cannot come to Arlington National Cemetery.
- Explaining the appropriate role of the Honor Guard would place in the forefront a clearer and accurate understanding of the profound meaning of the TUS:

*“.... Your mission, Sentinels, is so crucial. It’s why you are so indispensable for this country. **We have placed in your hands the very sacred duty of the entire nation. Everyone in the country is looking at you and counting on you.** (emphasis added) No soldier, sailor, Marine, airman or civilian in the entire Department of Defense has a more important job than you do.”⁴*

- Our purpose, work, and proposals must be all inclusive. We needed to reach out to and involve every individual, village, hamlet, town and city, and all branches of the uniformed services and civilian government.
- The Society’s suggestions should reflect the diverse ways Americans and freedom loving people have expressed their profound love of Country: We need to do our work and open the lines of

³ Society of the Honor Guard, Tomb of the Unknown Soldier: Remarks as Delivered by Deputy Secretary of Defense John J. Hamre, Fort Myer, Virginia, Saturday, November 13, 1999.

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communication through the several languages of ceremonies, literature,⁵ poetry, music⁶ and flowers.

- We needed to explore the several languages of ceremony, literature, poetry, music, and flowers to provide alternative paths for individuals and our governmental institutions to demonstrate America's unshakable commitment to the principles for which millions of Americans have fought and died.
- We could unite the American people around love of Country, and the principles that define us as Americans. The Centennial could become a springboard for discussions about service and sacrifice on behalf of America. Our rich history of service and sacrifice would provide local, state, regional and national examples that once again inspire.⁷
- The activities and planning **must not be** Washington, D.C. or Arlington National Cemetery centric.
- Our work should emphasize the future as we contemplate the past.
- We of the Honor Guard are living memorials. We have witnessed the profound grief, love, respect, and pride as generations of Americans fulfilled their sacred duty. We would not be faithful to the millions who have told us their stories if we did not memorialize what we heard, what we saw, and what we felt. What we have physically seen, felt and heard; what we felt emotionally changed our lives forever. That is why our work would not be complete and our service unfinished if we did not speak to why these millions of Americans answered their Country's call in times of need. Abraham Lincoln said it best, "It is the electric cord that connects us to every patriot grave and all freedom loving people".

The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier Never Forget Garden⁸

Our Proposal

To invite federal, state, regional, local governments, individuals, and private sector organizations, to recognize and remember all those who have and will serve and sacrifice on behalf of America and their families. We are exploring the languages of music⁹, prose and poetry to offer diverse ways to express and communicate love for America, patriotism, and remembrance. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier Never Forget Garden appeals to the language of flowers.

⁵ See e.g. The Unknowns: The Untold Story of America's Unknown Soldier and WWI's Most Decorated Heroes Who Brought Him Home, Patrick K. Odonnell, Atlantic Monthly Press 2018, and A Century of Honor: Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Philip Bigler, Appleridge Publishers 2019.

⁶ Inspired by the Centennial of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, The United States Army Band has completed an original music piece entitled "Journey Home". We anticipate that it will be premiered very soon and that it will enjoy its rightful place among America's patriotic music. The story it tells and its haunting melody will never be forgotten.

⁷ See e.g. George Washington's 1790 Letter To Touro Synagogue. During a visit to Newport, R.I., in 1790; General Douglas MacArthur speech acceptance of the Thayer Award at West Point.

⁸ For a full description of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier Never Forget Garden, see our website, WWW.TombGuard.org/Centennial.

⁹ See above reference to the brilliant work of Staff Sergeant Sarah Corry of the United States Army Band.

We recognize, and recommend, the unifying effect the language of flowers offer in expressing the profound emotions of patriotism, remembrance, love and mourning.

The Society views the Centennial of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier as an opportunity for individuals, communities, gardening clubs, garden architects, seed and plant vendors and government elements to express our profound love, sorrow, respect, and gratitude in those who have served and sacrificed on behalf of America: we pay special reverence to their families. Every flower, plant, or tree will be a symbol of love, their planting, an act of unity. In the timeless language of flowers, they will quietly trumpet the message that must never weaken: America's sacred commitment to never, ever, forget or forsake our veterans or the principles that define us as Americans. Any time that we pause to remember those who have served and sacrificed on behalf of America could not be more serious. On that day, in that place, will be the time to remember and reflect. A day when personal grief and love for country go hand in hand.

For something that is often exceedingly small, a flower has the ability to provoke intensely strong emotions. Flowers bring joy and give comfort to those who grieve. We give flowers to the mother of a new-born child to welcome him or her to the world. We include flowers as we celebrate birthdays, weddings, and other special occasions. We also place flowers on the coffins of our loved ones as part of our final farewell. Few things in this world have the power to express our emotions and matters of the heart.

The growing of flowers, plants, or trees is a very personal experience in a very personal space. Visiting a cemetery or memorial with flowers is a common and beautiful way to remember and express our love, respect and gratitude – but for those who want to express their love of Country in a more private space, to bring that beauty home, we invite the creation of a Tomb of the Unknown Soldier Never Forget Garden and placing a Never Forget Garden Marker. These special gardens will be a living tribute to be cherished throughout the year, 24 hours a day.

Our Goal

We seek to have a conversation with every individual and every community (however that is defined) to foster a national movement to create and promote “The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier Centennial Never Forget Garden”. Not unlike the popular support of the Victory Gardens of WWII.

We ask every American to help the Society bring this message and invitation to as many Americans as possible; help us by urging all to plant, and to encourage the planting and dedication of a Never Forget Garden; help the Society and our fellow Americans make the Never Forget Garden our generation's “electric cord” that connects us to each other and especially to those who “we owe a debt that can never be repaid.”

The Name Signals that this Garden is Different

While the gardens we invite America to plant or rededicate to the millions that serve and sacrifice today, those that have gone before and those that will come after, naturally tends to take on the character and

classification as a “remembrance garden”, we nevertheless chose the name “Tomb of the Unknown Soldier Centennial Never Forget Garden.

- First, as originally intended and more perfectly consecrated by the millions that continue to make the pilgrimage to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (TUS) over these last 99 years, the TUS is about America’s sacred duty to never, ever, forget or forsake those who have served and sacrificed on behalf of America and those yet to come.
- Second, as we stood up the Society as a formal organization, we memorialized our mission and how we, as Honor Guard, related to that mission: Our service and our mission are hard linked and captured by the Society’s maxim, “Soldiers Never Die Until They Are Forgotten, Tomb Guards Never Forget”. Our rigorous discipline to maintain the watch and our gratitude for the trust America placed in our hands, have forged these two precepts into one inseparable statement by the American people –we will never forget you.
- Third, Congressman Dan Crenshaw provided electrifying leadership by precept and example as he constructed a teaching moment out of a popular TV program comic’s ill-conceived comedic ridicule about Congressman Crenshaw’s wound suffered in his service and sacrifice as a U.S. Navy Special Warfare Operator. When provided an opportunity to respond, this former U.S. Navy warrior gracefully accepted the apology that included a sincere “thank you for your service”. But he went further, and with purpose: he tendered a constructive path forward revealing his love for America’s sons and daughters that have answered our Country’s call. He said rather than saying “Thank you for your service”, we should consider saying “Never Forget,” explaining that it really says to the veteran, “I am in it with you”. The Society believes that “Never Forget” offers individuals and communities a path to express their full-throated support to our veterans and unwavering commitment to the principles that define us as Americans. It provokes the patriotic spirit residing deeply in the hearts of Americans. It reminds us of our duty.

Our Vision

Our vision was captured by Dr. James D. Schaub (President of the Society of the War of 1812, in Maryland:

“[T]he words ‘the language of flowers’ is an excellent context leading us to understand that the flowers express our deep respect and honor for our veterans that can speak for us when we struggle to express our feeling in words. [T]he uses of flowers as symbols of high regard and remembrance is longstanding historically and culturally. We humans across time and the globe embrace flowers as our physical expression supplemental to verbal expression.

[A] Never Forget Garden can and should evoke emotions in individuals but should also foster an occasion for shared emotions and especially learning why this Garden is here. There are stories to be told of our veterans from the past and our service men and women, current and future. Because gardens are scalable, a large professional Never Forget Garden and a household Never Forget Garden can be effective stimulators. [T]he Never Forget Garden will create opportunities for teaching and remembrance. I can imagine a child asking mommy and daddy ‘why is this garden special’? Or the parents

taking the initiative and saying, 'I want to tell you why this garden is special'. The Never Forget Garden will be, in a way, proxies for the Tomb."

THE TOMB OF THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER NEVER FORGET GARDEN MARKER

The language placed upon the Never Forget Garden Marker is set out below. It gives voice to what we learned from the living and the dead while serving as Honor Guard at the TUS and what we hope for America.



"This garden is a living tribute to all of America's veterans and their families. In silence and respect, this is a place to remember why millions of our countrymen have fought and died for our liberty and our freedom. Here we renew our promise to fulfill America's sacred duty to never forget: Here we renew our mutual pledge to support them with "our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor".

Its message beckons the visitor to pause in this special place, and with a quiet soul open their heart to allow these plantings to speak; to reflect upon the deeds of those who we owe a debt that can never be fully repaid; and to think about those immutable truths that define us as Americans, and the freedoms secured by their full measure of devotion. Occasioned by the Centennial of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Arlington National Cemetery, this Never Forget Garden and this marker are intended to be a place to remember, to honor, and to teach. It is a place of remembrance and renewal of our commitment to say to the living, the dead, and those yet to serve our Country, "Never Forget, I am in it with you."

Again, we turn the pen of Dr. Schaub for the analysis of the Garden Marker, its language, and its symbolism:

"With images and text, it moves the viewer to a reflective state. I have studied the image for several hours. From top to bottom, it speaks to the viewer and for our veterans. The allegorical figures of Peace, Victory, and Valor set the tone and can be contemplated many times. It is classical communication. Even if someone does not know the artist's intent nor immediately appreciates the concepts represented by the figures, it calls forth reflection on a generic story of humanity.

The words "TOMB OF THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER" will trigger thoughts of the hallowed site in Arlington and connect this tranquil garden and the viewer to America's symbol of gratitude and remembrance of our veterans.

The ribbon displaying "NEVER FORGET GARDEN" identifies this place is special and the subsequent text elaborates. The promise to Never Forget is promulgated by each garden.

The text speaks for itself. The second paragraph is a promise and a charge to those who read it to keep this promise. The closing words taken from the Declaration of Independence remind the viewer of so much-- the valor of the founding fathers, the fact that as Americans we are connected to the principles expressed in the Declaration of Independence and have our own obligation to preserve liberty and freedom."

In closing, The Society asks the reader to lock arms with us; together let us unite our Country around love of Country and those that have secured it for us. Let us work together to make the Never Forget Garden our generation's "electric cord" that connects to America's sons and daughters and their family's: past, present and future.



www.tombguard.org/centennial