

**The Washington Times**  
**Op Ed Section**  
**The 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier**

This year, 2021, marks the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the establishment of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, located in Arlington National Cemetery, the nation's eternal resting place of thousands of men and women who gave their lives in service to our country.

House Joint Resolution 426 was brought before Congress on December 21, 1920, by New York Congressman Hamilton Fish, who served in the US House of Representatives from 1920 until 1945. The Resolution called for "Providing for the bringing to the United States of the body of an unknown American, who was a member of the American Expeditionary Forces, who served in Europe and lost his life during the World War, and for the burial of the remains with appropriate ceremonies."

In February, 1921, Congressman Fish stated that "He should not be taken from any particular battlefield, but should be chosen that nobody would know his identification or the battlefield he comes from. He should represent in himself the North, the South, the East and the West."

The legislation was signed into law by President Woodrow Wilson on March 4, 1921. On November 11, 1921 Congressman Fish laid the first wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier who had given his life for his country.

Congressman Fish, father, son and grandson of members of the US House of Representatives who all bore the same name, served in Congress from 1920 until 1945 from New York State. He had been a combat veteran during World War I and had been commissioned to serve as commanding American officer of the famed 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, the "Harlem Hellfighters." The 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry was a unit of African American enlisted men that served under the French Army during World War I. The 369<sup>th</sup> spent 191 days on the front lines, which was the longest period of any American regiment. Captain Fish saw firsthand the devastation "modern" warfare inflicted upon his soldiers in Europe. The remains of many of these soldiers who gave their lives were buried by the French, but with no identification to put upon the field cross except "unidentified American Soldier." This war time experience motivated Fish to propose the legislation to establish a Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in the United States.

Following the conclusion of World War I, which resulted in the staggering loss of over 9 million military and 10 million civilians, France and Great Britain began the process of selecting one of their fallen to represent all the dead in 1919.

On November 11, 1920, France laid to rest their "Soldat Inconnu" (Unknown Soldier) at the center of the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. On the same day, the British Unknown Warrior was laid to rest at Westminster Abbey, in London, England. King George V then scattered soil from France upon the casket and millions of mourners paid their respects. In 1920 and 1921, similar ceremonies were held in Portugal, Italy and Belgium.

The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier has grown in relevancy over the years since 1921 and is a powerful locus for millions of gold star families and for all Americans to pay their respects to those who sacrificed their very lives for this nation. The Tomb transcends race, religion, and politics, and stands as a beacon for unity and love of country, as seen by the presence of four Presidents standing together on the east plaza of the Memorial Amphitheater to re-commit this nation's pledge "to never forget."

This year the non-profit organization, Society of the Honor Guard, Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, is leading many events that local communities can get involved with around the United States and overseas to commemorate the Centennial of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (TUS100), including ceremonies in France in October during a historical pilgrimage to become reunited with the history of the Unknown Soldier and the unique ties with the French people. More information about these events can be found at [www.tombguard.org/centennial](http://www.tombguard.org/centennial).

We have seen our nation bitterly divided in recent years but it is propitious that we have this centenary to offer our heartfelt appreciation and commemorate those young Americans of various races, religions, and ethnicities who gave their lives more than a century ago.

This week is an opportune moment for our President and for Members of Congress to commemorate what was signed into law on March 4, 1921. All Americans should be encouraged to take a moment this week to reflect on the Unknown Soldier from World War I, a young person, no doubt, who surrendered his life and his future so that the American dream might live on. The race, religion, and ethnicity of the unknown soldier are not known by any of the living and yet, because of his sacrifice, he represents the "True American," a silent, unrecognized hero who could embrace the clarion call to service and make the ultimate sacrifice for God and Country.

*The only granddaughter of Hamilton Fish, Alexa Fish Ward has been active in the civil society sector for forty years. A graduate of Georgetown University, she has worked with the Women's Federation for World Peace for twenty-seven years, where she currently serves as Senior Advisor and Member of the Board of Directors. Alexa and her husband, Thomas, live in the Hudson Valley of New York, close to her family's roots.*