

With the Hand of God He Will Be Delivered Home



By

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Pictured: "White Niphetos roses by Williams Anderson on Artnet".

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The words of George M. Cohan's popular song were being repeated by Americans in cinemas, corner bars and even churches. People decorated their streets, buildings and homes with red, white and blue flags and bunting. A war had been raging in Europe for more than three years, and Americans were ready to come to the rescue. Hanging over the rails of converted passenger ships on their way to the Great War soldiers, sailors and Marines enthusiastically sang:

*Over there, over there
Send the word, send the word over there
That the Yanks are coming
The Yanks are coming
The drums rum-tumming
Everywhere
So prepare, say a prayer
Send the word, send the word to beware
We'll be over, we're coming over
And we won't come back till it's over
Over there*

There was a burning spirit that ran through the blood of these young Americans on their way to battle. It was the same spirit of love of country that ran deep through the veins of Americans at Lexington, Gettysburg and San Juan Hill. It was a forever spirit of brotherhood that they carried in their hearts when they "went over the top" and into the face of German machine guns. After 53,402 American combat deaths, it was over – over there at 11 am on November 11, 1918. But sadly some would not come home from "over there". American military cemeteries in Europe listed 1,697 remains as "unknown". The story of America's Unknown Soldier is a message of love, respect and devotion by a grateful nation. It is also a story of America's military and their love for the people of America and their brothers in arms. A love that has not wavered since the first American died in Boston on March 5, 1770 and continues today.

On December 21, 1920, Congressman Hamilton Fish, III, of New York, a decorated officer in the 369th Regiment, the "Harlem Hellfighters"¹ introduced a resolution calling for the return to the United States of the body of an American, a member of the overseas forces of the United States, killed on the battlefields of France and whose identity cannot be established. His burial would be conducted with appropriate ceremonies and laid to rest in a tomb to be constructed at the Memorial Amphitheater in Arlington National Cemetery. The measure was approved on 4 March 1921, as Public Resolution 67 of the 66th Congress.

At Norfolk Navy Yard Virginia on Sunday September 25, 1921 the smell of creosote drifted on a light breeze with partly cloudy skies and temperatures in the mid- 70s . An

¹ The regiment, composed of men of color, lost no ground, had no POWs taken and was the first to reach the Rhine, while spending more time on the front lines than any other American regiment.

occasional distant toot from a ship's horn was a reminder the busy base was waking up. The third anniversary of the end of the Great War was 47 days away. Marine Corps Captain Graves B. Erskine was with his rifle company in Haiti when he received orders to lead the detachment responsible for the protection and return of America's Unknown Soldier. His orders required him to report to the commanding officer, Colonel "Wild Bill" McKelvey, Marine Barracks Navy Yard Norfolk. In their meeting that Sunday, Erskine thought Colonel McKelvey seemed to be very excited, and remembered him saying, "how are we going to do this overnight?"² The colonel was referring to putting together a detachment of 38 Marines before the USS *Olympia* sailed for France in a few days. The meeting ended with Colonel McKelvey promising to do everything he could to help Captain Erskine. The one thing they both knew, Marines had not served onboard *Olympia* for years and their quarters would need to be restored.³ Erskine's mission was now set—escort the body of the Unknown Soldier back to America by November 11th. Erskine was instructed to gather his detachment quickly and report to the skipper of the cruiser *USS Olympia* anchored off Hampton Roads.



Captain Graves B. Erskine

Graves B. Erskine grew up in Columbia, Louisiana. He spoke French with some difficulty and graduated from high school at fifteen. He went on to college at Louisiana State University (LSU), where he received excellent grades. While attending LSU he served with a National Guard unit on the Mexican border. When the United States entered the World War he had difficulty enlisting in the Army because he was 19 years old. A number of his friends had joined the Marine Corps, and after some difficulty proving that he had the necessary credits to graduate from LSU, he was accepted into the Marine Corps officer program. After training at Quantico, Virginia, he shipped off to France. Lieutenant Erskine was wounded three times leading Marines of the 2nd Battalion 6th Regiment at Belleau Wood, Soissons and St. Mihiel. For his gallantry under enemy fire at Belleau Wood he received the Silver Star.

Colonel McKelvey did his part and soon orders were issued assigning 38 Marines from Sea School at Norfolk to *Olympia's* Marine Detachment. At the top of the list of these Marines was First Sergeant Edward A. Mullen, Sr. Any officer who has served in command knows the importance of a strong First Sergeant. Captain Erskine probably understood immediately that

² Oral History Transcript – General Graves B. Erskine pg.69

³ Ibid

having a senior non-commissioned officer from Sea School was exactly who he needed for his mission. First Sergeant Edward A. Mullen, Sr. was born in Limerick Ireland in 1895. He had recently re-enlisted after a six months absence from the Corps. He knew the requirements of life aboard a naval vessel and more importantly he taught this knowledge at the Marine Corps East Coast Sea School Norfolk.

At the time it was said that “you are not a Marine until you spend time at sea”. Marines assigned to Sea School were selected from the most promising graduates of recruit training. During three intense weeks of instructions seven days a week, young Marines learned the basics of life onboard a ship. They were taught communications with naval signal flags, lights and semaphores. They learned compass navigation and duties serving as an orderly to the ship’s captain. In addition, seagoing Marines were proficient with loading and firing 3 and 5 inch naval guns⁴. First Sergeant Mullen and his freshly trained “Seagoing Marines” received their orders by “radio” communication on September 26, 1921 for their assignment to escort the remains of the Unknown Soldier home.⁵

It was a short ride by olive drab military trucks from Norfolk to Hampton Roads. During the ride in the cab of the truck Erskine probably thought about his new detachment’s First Sergeant, Ed Mullen. Erskine had served with plenty of Irish Marines. In fact, laying in defilade behind a tree on the battlefield, he had been shot through the leg and pinned to the earth by a German machine gun. For hours he lay there unable to move when he heard the sounds of Marines coming up the hill through the brush. To warn the approaching Marines of the enemy machine gun, he held up his helmet on a stick. The Germans fired revealing their position to the lead Marine who was a big tall Irish fellow. He pulled the young Lieutenant to safety and carried him to the rear. Erskine remembered the incident telling his rescuer – “you saved my life – what can I do for you?” With a grin on his face the Marine looked at the Lieutenant and said “Sir, I have always wanted me a .45”. Erskine pulled his .45 pistol from his holster and gave it to him.

On September 27th the minesweeper USS *Quail* transferred the Marines to the *Olympia* while anchored at Hampton Roads. Based on the enlistment dates on Marine Corps muster rolls⁶ Mullen’s Marines did not have the combat experience of their captain. But they were Marines - dedication to their country and their mission was their foundation. These Marines would passionately guard the Unknown Soldier for the American people until he was returned home. The Marines understood the importance of this Unknown Soldier’s remains to mothers, wives, fathers, brothers, sons, daughters, sisters and dear friends who suffered the loss of a loved one who did not return from “Over There”. For many Americans there would never be a marked

⁴ *The Leatherneck* June 1926 “The Broadcast”

⁵ Muster Roll of Officers and Enlisted Men U.S. Marine Corps Marine Detachment USS Olympia Sept 1- 30, 1921

⁶ Muster Roll of Officers and Enlisted Men U.S. Marine Corps Marine Detachment USS Olympia Oct 1- 31, 1921

grave to visit. The nameless soldier in the specially designated unknown grave at Arlington would be theirs.

In the early morning darkness of September 28th the tug *Massasoit* came alongside the anchored *Olympia* and delivered 38 mattresses and 10 cots for the Marine detachment. *Olympia*'s boilers were being fired for departure as the Marines prepared their quarters and were able to take a few hours of sleep. Their mission had begun.

By the fall of 1921 the steel hulled cruiser *Olympia*, a veteran of two wars, was reaching the end of her service life. When she began her illustrious career, nearly thirty years earlier, *Olympia* was a proud addition to the United States' ambitious new "steel Navy". She was a carefully balanced design that was sometimes referred to as "the cruiser with battleship guns." Launched in 1892 *Olympia* was a marvel of modern marine engineering. She was equipped with electrical illumination, artificial refrigeration, rotating gun turrets and heating for crew spaces.⁷ Her first moment of glory occurred under the command of Commodore Dewey. *Olympia* led the Asiatic Squadron into Manila Bay as they destroyed the Spanish fleet. After that momentous victory, *Olympia* became the most famous vessel in the American Navy. It was fitting then that *Olympia* in her twilight years was assigned the noblest mission of her career – return the remains of the Unknown Soldier to the American people.

The *Olympia* with her new detachment of Marines onboard hauled anchor at 9:33 AM on September 28th for Melville, Rhode Island to refuel with additional coal before transiting the North Atlantic for Plymouth, England. After briefly steaming through fog, the *Olympia* dropped anchor off Montauk Point at 1:10 PM on the 29th. Rear Admiral Lloyd H. Chandler and naval musicians from Naval Training Station Newport came aboard at Melville⁸ to participate in first anniversary ceremonies for the British Unknown Warrior of the World War. Sometime during transit, Captain Wyman USN brought Captain Erskine to his quarters and instructed him to drill his sailors on deck for participation in a ceremonial parade in London. Captain Wyman made it clear he wanted his sailors to look smart and be the best unit in the parade. When *Olympia*'s sailors fell out on deck for marching instructions, Erskine and his sergeants were shocked to see the sailors were not wearing shoes. However, once the drilling began he quickly understood the shoeless wisdom on the slick wooden decks. After a few days of heavy seas, *Olympia* anchored at Plymouth, England on October 14th.

Upon arrival in Plymouth, Marines and sailors quickly prepared to honor the British Unknown Warrior in London. On October 17th Rear Admiral Lloyd H. Chandler represented the Navy at the ceremonies at Westminster Abby where U.S. Army General John Pershing presented the Medal of Honor to the British Unknown Warrior. After nine days in England, *Olympia* left port on October 23rd for Le Havre, France and arrived the next day.

⁷ Historic American Engineering Record USS *Olympia* – HAER Pa-428

⁸ USS *Olympia* Log Book 29 September 1921

Selection of the Unknown Soldier was carefully planned and executed to ensure that the unknown would be a member of the American expeditionary force killed in combat that could not be identified. The bodies of four unknown American soldiers were removed from four separate battlefield cemeteries and taken to Romagne, France on October 22nd for medical examination to ensure: all the bodies could not be identified, were combat casualties and were American. French military trucks then moved the four caskets to the Hotel de Ville (city hall) in Châlons-sur-Marne on the morning of October 24. U. S. Army Sergeant Edward F. Younger, a wounded and decorated soldier, was assigned to select one coffin as the American Unknown Soldier of the Great War. As Sergeant Younger entered the building he was presented a spray of white roses with instructions to place them on the coffin he picked. The roses were donated by a member of the Châlons-sur-Marne city council. Sergeant Younger entered the hall and faced the four coffins resting on their transfer cases. He deliberately walked around the four coffins three times; and then made his selection by placing the spray of white roses on the third coffin from the left.⁹ After the selection, the remains were removed to a separate room and transferred to a coffin built to detailed specifications in America.

The white roses were most likely grown by the florist Joseph Pernet-Ducher, who lost two sons in the war¹⁰. The Greek word associated with this rose is Niphetos (neef-tos) which translates: falling snow and is also known as the Bridal Rose. Poetically, this French white rose has been deemed or regarded as “the few, the immortal few that were not born to die”¹¹.

A special train of the French government idled at the train station in Châlons-sur Marne to take the Unknown American Soldier to Le Havre France where the *Olympia* was docked at Pier d’Escale. When the train stopped overnight at the Batignolles station outside of Paris, the coffin was guarded by three American soldiers and a uniformed member of the American Legion until the train left in the morning. At 1 PM on October 25th the funeral train arrived in Le Havre. Church bells tolled as French and American troops along with members of the American Legion slowly escorted the flag draped coffin through subdued crowds to the dock via city hall. Women and men wore formal black mourning suits and followed alongside the caisson to the dock. Speeches were given by French and American officials. Monsieur Andre Maginot pinned the highest French medal, the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor, to the Stars and Stripes that covered the coffin. As the casket was solemnly carried from the pier to the ship, *Olympia*’s band played both the French and American national anthems.

During the final ceremonies on the stern of the ship young children laid bouquets of flowers on the coffin. Many of the little girls, wearing long white skirts left the ship with streaks of tears on their faces. They slowly walked home from the dock through a light rain to row houses, or chalets. The bronze floral displays from the French government were carefully

⁹ *Fortitudine*, Vol. 36 #2 Kara Newcomer

¹⁰ *Rose of the Unknown Soldier* by Robert B. Martin President of the American Rose Society 2019-2021

¹¹ *Everblooming Roses for the Outdoor Garden of the Amateur: the Culture, Description and Care of Roses* by Georgia T. Drennan

carried below deck along with the bouquets brought by the children and dignitaries. A chest of French soil from the cemetery at Suresnes was also placed below deck. The military march, Aux Champs¹² drummed continually by the French band, rang over and over in Captain Erskine's mind, but the ache in his leg told him the weather was changing. Wounded in the leg by machine gun fire it was only through the intercession of a young operating room nurse that he kept his leg. He fully recovered the use of his leg, but occasionally a tiny piece of bone fragment would force through his skin.

Captain Graves B. Erskine stood in the dew like mist on the after deck of the cruiser beside the coffin of the Unknown Soldier. He could feel the storm coming. He understood the gravity of his mission. He and his thirty-eight Marines were entrusted by the people of the United States to protect the remains of this fallen soldier of the War to End All Wars. Their orders were simple; bring him home before Armistice Day on November 11th. It was 3:28 PM on October 25th 1921 at the harbor of Le Havre. The French cruiser, Admiral Sénès was the first ship to begin the procession. *Olympia* pulled away from the dock with a 17 gun salute from the French warship, Verdun and farewell salvos from shore batteries. The USS *Reuben James* and two columns of six French destroyers, escorted the *Olympia* to the mouth of the harbor where the crews waved a final farewell. He was on his way home.

Meanwhile, in the southwestern Caribbean Sea swirling winds and rain had grown into a tropical depression on October 20th. The storm intensified quickly moving northwestward. By the 22nd it developed into a major hurricane – the sixth hurricane of the year. By the next day maximum sustained winds of 140 miles per hour on the Saffir-Simpson scale were recorded – a Category 4 storm that curved to the northeast and the Florida coast. As the *Olympia* was leaving France hurricane number six struck the Florida coast at Tarpon Springs as a Category 3 with sustained winds of 120 mile per hour. When hurricane six moved across central Florida it weakened into a Category 1 becoming known as the Tarpon Springs Hurricane of 1921¹³. Reaching the Atlantic with winds of 80 mph, the hurricane briefly re-strengthened to winds of 90 mph early on October 27th. Late on October 29th, the system accelerated northeastward and weakened to a tropical storm, before being absorbed by a large extratropical cyclone possibly the remnants of hurricane number five that had circled near the Azores and itself also degraded into an extra tropical depression on October 25th. The *Olympia* was about to traverse an ocean tormented by cyclone winds, mountainous waves and driving rain from two intense storms.

Captain Henry Lake Wyman, the *Olympia*'s skipper, instructed the Marine guard not to slant or tip the coffin. Therefore, the coffin of the Unknown Soldier could not be moved to the interior of the ship through bulk head hatches. Everyone onboard understood the dignity and respect deserving this fallen hero of America. The coffin would not be placed in a cargo hold.

¹² Aux Champs originally played to warn French soldiers it was time to leave and was among many martial songs played during the ceremony

¹³ American Meteorological Society 2012 A Reanalysis of the 1920 – 30 Atlantic Hurricane Data Base

Under the direct supervision of Captain Erskine, Marines carried the Unknown Soldier to the signal bridge, the highest point on the ship that could accommodate the coffin aft of the ship's conning (bridge). *Olympia's* carpenters had constructed a wooden outer protective shell for the casket. Marines and sailors lovingly wrapped the wood in waterproof tarps then lashed it down with ropes and lines that a Marine private described as "enough line to secure the battleship Wyoming fore and aft with brest and spring lines to boot."¹⁴



The coffin of the Unknown Soldier secured on the signal bridge

Captain Erskine sensed an intense storm was looming ahead of *Olympia*. During his trip across the Atlantic to Portsmouth, England he had experienced how the *Olympia* rolled and heaved in angry seas. The ship's draft was 29 feet of water but as Captain Erskine later described – "she seemed too short for the long waves and too long for the short ones."¹⁵ Captain Erskine was quoted as saying in an interview: "The agonizing thought came to me: what if the Unknown Soldier – the hero America waits to honor – is washed overboard? I knew if such a thing happened I might as well jump over with him."¹⁶

After passing the Azores on October 31, *Olympia* began encountering large waves and rain. The deck crew quickly moved to secure forecastle gear and place buckler plates over the chain locker to keep water out. Near gale force winds ripped into *Olympia* around 10 AM making steering difficult. Green water smashed into the bow of the ship and washed down her wooden decks like a mountain stream in spring. Life lines were quickly tied to stanchions by the

¹⁴ Marine Corps Gazette Nov. 1964 Vol. 48 #11 *In Good Hands* Lt.Col. Dennis D. Nicholson pg. 57 Lt. Col. Nicholson was the first to write in detail about *Olympia's* Marine Detachment and their heroic service. A great deal of credit is due Lt.Col Nicholson for his research

¹⁵ Oral History Transcript – General Graves B. Erskine 1975 pg. 71

¹⁶ Marine Corps Gazette Nov – 1964 Vol. 48 #11 *In Good Hands* Lt. Col Dennis D Nicholson pg. 57

ship's crew for traversing slippery open areas. When the bow rose on a growing wave the fan tail dipped low with green water gushing across the place where the Unknown Soldier previously rested. Captain Erskine's natural senses that served him so well on the battlefields of France allowed him to stay one step beyond a disaster. Before the *Olympia* departed France, Captain Wyman ordered a Marine guard to stand with the Unknown Soldier around the clock. Captain Erskine established a four hour duty watch for his Marines. They now stood their watches on the open signal bridge beside the coffin in winds that ripped and tore at their oil skin jackets. Even facing away from the cold, pelting rain it found ways to trickle down their necks.

As the storm roared, the *Olympia* rolled dangerously close to her limit for broaching. Her white bow sank deeply into green water – decks were more awash in foaming green sea water than clear. When the watch changed Captain Erskine realized his sentry on the signal bridge was in danger of being swept overboard. The Marine guards suggested that they be lashed to the ship's rail. Captain Erskine then ordered detachment First Sergeant Mullen to tie each relief to a stanchion and place two Marines inside the helmsman station in case the ropes loosened holding the canvas, or the wooden enclosure failed. Marine Private Frederick A. Landry was quoted as saying: "I began feeling sorry for myself standing there in a small area with wind and rain pelting me in the face, but my self sorrow didn't last long. I soon realized that what I was doing was little enough compared to what the Unknown Soldier had done – given his life."¹⁷ Captain Erskine observed a Marine on ship's watch caught by a wave and washed down the deck. His black rubber boots instantly filled with sea water and were carried overboard as he held tightly to the safety line.

The old queen of the fleet moaned and groaned through each wave. Captain Erskine reported later that he thought he saw plates on the ship's hull moving. During the battle of Manila Bay the *Olympia* had been struck a number of times by Spanish cannon fire but only cosmetic damage had occurred. Below decks the *Olympia* rolled so far that sailors moved down passageways with one foot on the deck and the other on the bulkhead. The bridge became awash from monster waves and the ward room had water slushing across the deck. At 10:30 AM a strong wave broke lose the life raft in the port galley passage. As the ship pitched, a falling water bucket lacerated the scalp of Seaman Charles D. Bell. In the engine room Seaman R. M. Thistle fell through the catwalk bars and onto a cylinder head cutting his head. Captain Wyman grew concerned that one more roll might be the ship's last. A Navy chaplain, Lieutenant Edward A. Duff had boarded the ship at Portsmouth England to hitch a ride back to America. Lieutenant Duff was ordained a Catholic priest at St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore in June 1912. Captain Wyman, worried the ship might sink, suggested it would be a good idea for Lieutenant Duff to hold a prayer service for the crew.

Sailors and Marines not on duty gathered together in the galley where they held tightly to bulk heads, pipes and each other as the ship pitched violently. Father Duff began by reminding

¹⁷ *Last Voyage* by Dennis D. Nicholson, Jr. pg. 44

the crew of the importance of their mission. He told them that God was watching out for the *Olympia* and with the hand of God the Unknown Soldier would be returned home to the people of America. All bowed their heads as Father Duff said a prayer for the Unknown Soldier lying above them on the ocean swept signal bridge. He prayed that the Unknown Soldier would be returned to the land of the free and the home of the brave.¹⁸

On Sunday, November 6th the weather moderated. The deep green seas rolled gently under *Olympia* as the great white lady rose up the side of a wave giving a panoramic view of a powder blue sky. Then she would gracefully slide down the opposite side changing the powder blue horizon to deep green. Below decks the engine room was having problems. Not from the pounding seas, but from the large consumption of coal. The two huge engines were fed greater than normal quantities of coal by the engine room crew to maintain course and speed. As the fires in the boilers grew dim from a lack of fuel, Captain Wyman ordered all hands to move coal stores from a forward bunker. Marines and sailors formed a line to pass the black chunks of coal to the starving boilers before the fires flickered out. With the last obstacle removed, the *Olympia* proudly steamed for Cape Henry Light at the southern entrance to the Chesapeake Bay. It was time for the Marines to polish their brass and spit shine their dress shoes.

A light rain was falling when the *Olympia* eased alongside Pier Three at the Washington Navy Yard dock. There is an old saying, “when it rained at someone’s funeral, it was angel tears, as a good one left the earth for their eternal home.” Waiting on the wet cobblestone dock to take the Unknown Soldier home were mounted soldiers of the Army’s 3rd Calvary Regiment. The calvary squadron faced the ship in line formation. All eyes were on the flag draped coffin of the Unknown Soldier. The Marines and sailors on deck smartly saluted one last time. The ship’s bell sounded at 4 PM and the Army band began playing “Onward Christian Soldier” as the Unknown Soldier was gently carried down the sand dusted ramp from ship to shore and his waiting caisson with six black horses. Captain Erskine’s Marines stood at attention in formation on the dock. With the command “Present Arms” the Marines in their dress blues snapped their Springfield rifles into one last salute. Sabers flashed in the rain – a salute from the men of the 3rd. The Navy and Marines relinquished their responsibility to the Army. The Marines had accomplished their mission and lived up to their motto – Semper Fidelis – Always Faithful. The slow trip to the Capitol rotunda began and Captain Graves B. Erskine shouted the orders to his men “Order -- Arms -- At Ease”. With the skill of the officers and sailors of *Olympia*, the devotion of the United States Marine Detachment and with the hand of God – he was home to America.

*“Post and Orders Remain as Directed”*¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid pg. 46

¹⁹ Command at changing of the guard Tomb of the Unknown Soldier- please see Epilogue for further explanation

EPILOGUE

The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier - in Arlington is an American symbol of remembrance that has a connection to an organization in France, Le Souvenir Francais. In 1887 this organization began in northern France in an area known as Alsace-Lorraine that was claimed by Prussia after the War of 1870. To remember French soldiers who had died fighting Prussian (German) soldiers, young French girls placed flowers and tri-color cockades of the French flag on the tombstones of these departed warriors despite the orders of Prussian officials who occupied Alsace-Lorraine not to decorate the graves. A professor from the area, Xavier Niessen organized the Le Souvenir Francais to honor these dead soldiers. As word spread throughout France, a swell of patriotism grew. On March 7, 1887 Professor Niessen petitioned the French government to join Le Souvenir Francais and they did. Up until 1914 and the start of Great War, Le Souvenir Francais created monuments and participated in ceremonies across France honoring war dead. In 1914 the organization began affixing tricolor cockades on tombstones of France's dead near hospitals and cemeteries.

Following the end of World War I, Le Souvenir Francais was unable to access the graves of the dead still on French battlefields. The government was concerned about the spread of disease, unexploded ordnance and other hazards. Around the 1st of November, All Saints Day, Ceremonies were organized away from the battlefields to place flowers on graves and help bereaved families. It was during one of these ceremonies that Francis Simon asked the French government to transfer the body of an Unknown French Soldier from the battlefield to Paris.

The commanding general of American forces in France, Brigadier General. William D. Connor, learned of the French project while it was still in the planning stage. Favorably impressed, he proposed a similar American project to the Army Chief of Staff, General Peyton C. March, on October 29, 1919.

General March ultimately did not approve General Connor's proposal. Mrs. M. M. Melony, editor of the *Delineator*, made a similar suggestion to General March. In his reply General March explained to Mrs. Melony that while the French and English had many unknown dead, it appeared possible that the Army Graves Registration Service eventually would identify all American dead. Furthermore, the United States had no burial place for a fallen hero similar to Westminster Abbey or the *Arc de Triumphe*. In any case, March pointed out, the matter was one for Congress to decide.

On December 21, 1920, Congressman Hamilton Fish, III of New York introduced a resolution calling for the return to the United States of an unknown American member of the overseas Expeditionary Force killed in combat in France and his burial with appropriate ceremonies in a tomb to be constructed at the recently built Memorial Amphitheater in Arlington National Cemetery. The measure was approved on March 4, 1921 as Public Resolution 67 of the 66th Congress. Fish had originally intended for the ceremony to take place on Memorial Day 1921 but

it was too late for that date. Then on October 20, 1921, Congress declared November 11, 1921 a legal holiday to honor all those who participated in World War I; an elaborate ceremony in Washington would pay tribute to the symbolic unknown soldier. On September 9, 1921 the Quartermaster General received orders from the War Department to select an unknown soldier from those buried in France. Following the selection ceremony, he was to deliver the body to Le Havre, where the Navy would receive it for transportation to the United States. The necessary arrangements were completed by the Quartermaster Corps in France in cooperation with French and U.S. Navy authorities. According to plans, the selection ceremony was to take place at Chalons-sur-Marne, ninety miles east of Paris, on October 24, 1921. ¹

Since April 6, 1948 the Army's 3rd United States Infantry Regiment (Old Guard) has guarded the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier with a sentry walking post twenty four hours a day, every day and in every weather – from rain to snow to hurricanes the guards walk their twenty one steps. Often soldiers walking their post cannot help but to listen to grieving mothers as they open their hearts at the Tomb. It takes a very special soldier to perform his duties under those emotions. These sentries are selected from the best in the United States Army – they are men King Leonidas would have been proud to lead. For more information on the history of the Tomb Guard see “Centennial of Honor: A Brief History of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier” by SGM Retired Gavin McIvenna, President Society of the Honor Guard, Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (SHGTUS).

The USS *Olympia* - was officially retired from naval service in December 1922 and placed in reserve. In 1957, the U.S. Navy ceded title to the **Cruiser *Olympia*** Association, which restored the ship to her 1898 configuration. Since then, *Olympia* has been a museum ship in Philadelphia where it is now part of the Independence Seaport Museum. *Olympia* was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1966. The ship is located in Philadelphia at Penn's Landing on the Delaware River.

French Soil from the cemetery at Suresnes – covers the ground one inch deep below the coffin of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington

White spray of roses – was placed on the coffin of the Unknown Soldier in France and is buried with him. The Society of the Honor Guard, Tomb of the Unknown Soldier has made the white rose their official flower. As an homage to that moment that Sergeant Younger indicated his selection of America's Unknown Soldier, the Society has urged the exclusive use of white roses in floral arrangements in all ceremonies of remembrance at graveside or memorials for America's veterans. See The Society's Circular Letter # 4. It is also recognized as the principle planting in the Society's Centennial Never Forget Garden.

See www.TombGuard.org/centennial

¹ *Last Salute: Civil and Military Funerals – 1921 – 1969* Chapter 1

Bronze Florals and the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor – are on display at the Trophy Room Arlington National Cemetery.

First Sergeant A. Edward Mullen, Sr. – died in June 1945 on active duty at the Naval Hospital in San Diego with the rank of warrant officer. He is buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

Father Edward A. Duff – became the Chaplain of the United States Navy in 1935. He visited the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier every year until his death in February 1943.

Private Frederick A. Landry – served continuously in the Marine Corps at least until 1950 and achieved the rank of captain. He died in 1957.

Captain Graves B. Erskine – served a distinguished career with the United States Marine Corps. After many successful leadership roles during the early years of World War II, he was promoted to Major General to command the 3rd Marine Division during operations on Iwo Jima. Upon his retirement from active duty he was advanced to the rank of general (four stars). In 1953 he was appointed Director of Special Operations – Department of Defense where he served for eight years. He died on May 21, 1973 and is buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

Captain Henry Lake Wyman – received the Navy Cross for actions in Nicaragua in 1927. Captain Wyman died July 12, 1937 and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Congressman Hamilton Fish, III – introduced resolution 67 that established the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Fish was born in New York State in 1887. He attended Harvard University graduating in three years before the start of World War I. Fish was named a company commander with the 369th Regiment, a National Guard Unit that was known as the Harlem Hellfighters, a unit of mostly men of color. The Harlem Hellfighters were assigned to fight with the French despite General Pershing's pledge that no American units would serve under foreign command. The Hellfighters had an outstanding record of service in combat. Hamilton Fish was a past commander of the American Legion, involved with founding the Legion and assisted in writing the preamble to the Legion's constitution. He served in the House of Representatives until 1945 and died in 1991 at 102.

“Post and Orders Remain as Directed” -With these words the Sentinel at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Arlington National Cemetery, during the Change of the Guard, relinquishes the sacred trust placed in his hands to “Honor the Memory and Protect the remains of the Unknown Soldier”; the Tombs of the Unknown Servicemen of World War II and the Korean War and the Memorial to the Missing In Action. The “relieving” Sentinel, accepts this charge of responsibility with the words: “Orders Acknowledged”. These few words make timeless the spirit of these dedicated soldiers and the service and sacrifice of all those who brought America's Unknown Soldier home: Indeed it is this spirit that is the “Electric Cord” that links America's past, present and future. It is captured in the Sentinel's Creed:

The Sentinel's Creed

*My dedication to this sacred duty
is total and whole-hearted.*

*In the responsibility bestowed on me
never will I falter.*

*And with dignity and perseverance
my standard will remain perfection.*

*Through the years of diligence and praise
and the discomfort of the elements,
I will walk my tour in humble reverence
to the best of my ability.*

*It is he who commands the respect I protect,
his bravery that made us so proud.*

*Surrounded by well meaning crowds by day,
alone in the thoughtful peace of night,
this soldier will in honored glory rest
under my eternal vigilance.*

– Simon 1971

About the Author: Joseph Robert Neubeiser served in the United States Marine Corps from 1968 -1971. Enlisted in the Platoon Leaders Class in 1966 and was commissioned a second lieutenant upon graduation from Mt. St. Mary's College. Trained at Quantico as a communications officer and served with the 3rd Marine Division in Vietnam in 1969 as a platoon commander and company commander. He has published a number of human interest stories for various national and local newspapers. He retired from the Federal government after 34 years as a Senior Executive.

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