

Centennial Flag Project

Stage 4



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 22, 2021 – The flag was last flown at the St. Mihiel American Cemetery in Thiaucourt, France on October 21, 2021 where one of the candidates for the World War I Unknown Soldier was disinterred 100 years ago today.

On October 22, 2021 the Centennial Flag was taken to the Aisne-Marne American Cemetery in Belleau, France where the majority of the fallen that are buried here fought in the vicinity and in the Marne Valley in the summer of 1918. Belleau Wood xx adjoins the cemetery which commemorates the valor of the US Marines who captured much of this ground in 1918.

This is the second cemetery that the pilgrimage group and flag will visit and has direct ties to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery. On October 22, 1921, the Army Quartermaster Corps came to the cemetery to remove one unidentified American who fell during the war. This unknown American would become one of four candidates that would be moved to the city of Chalons-en-Champagne (back in 1921 it was named



Chalons-sur-Marne), where a final selection would be made to designate the World War I Unknown Soldier.

The pilgrimage group gathered at the cemetery 9:00am and the detail raised the flag at 9:15am. The detail consisted of Assistant Quartermaster David Hathaway, a first responder from Pennsylvania; former Tomb Guards James Livingston (1999-01) and the Society President and former Tomb Guard Gavin McIlvenna (1997-98); retired Oregon State Police Captain and former US Marine Eric Judah; and Army Veteran and Society Member Patrick Sutliff.

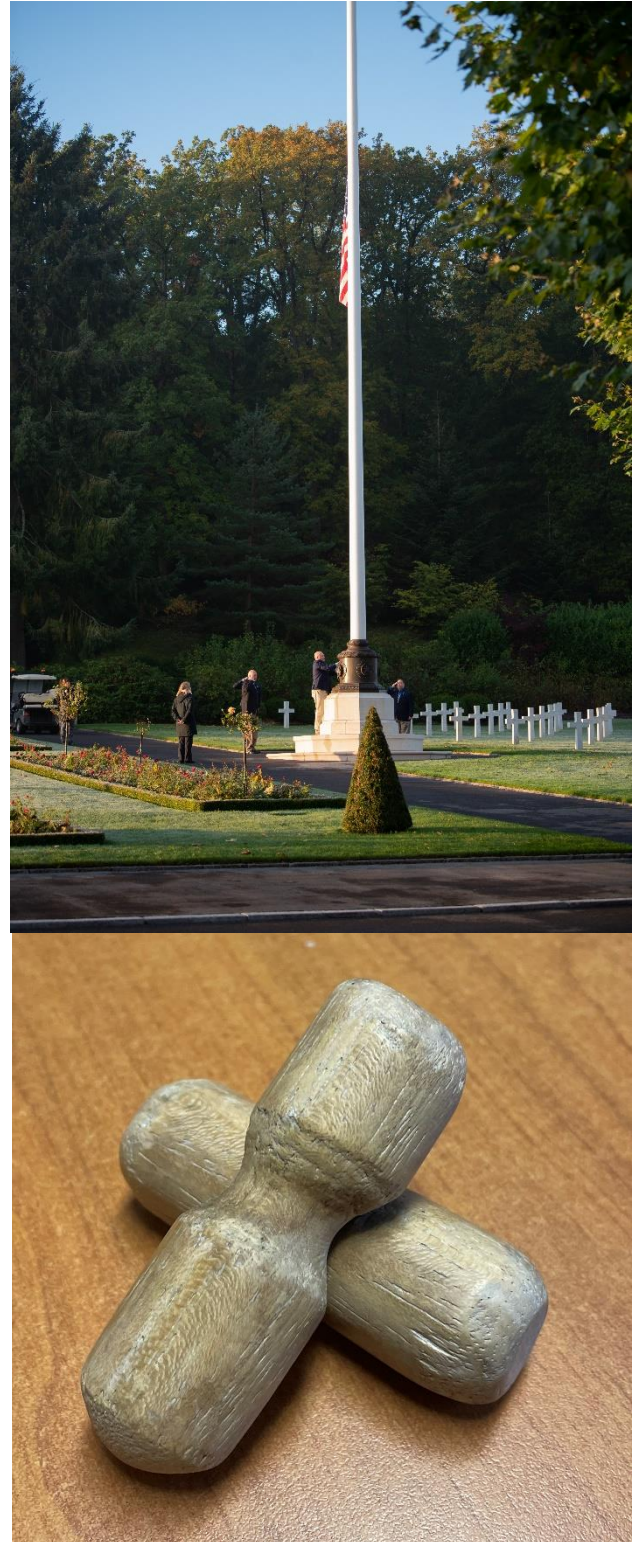
The flagpole has a unique toggle system to attach flags to and the staff at St. Mihiel were on hand to ensure that the Centennial Flag was attached correctly. Consisting of a small section of twine attached to the grommets of the flag, that is then looped through the main line of the flagpole and connected with a wooden dowel.

“Our flag posting teams assigned to each cemetery were challenged in several ways including high winds. We were also challenged by learning how to use a very different way of attaching the Flag to the halyard using a system consisting of pieces of pre-cut cord and Wooden pegs. This system was used for three out of the four flag poles at the cemeteries we visited.”

- David Hathaway

Upon conclusion of the small ceremony involving ABMC staff, local community leaders, and US and French veterans the flag was ceremonially lowered and returned to its travel case.

Speaking during the ceremony was the President General of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), Denise VanBuren and Superintendent Kelly Craig.





“For generations, Americans have fought and died at places like Belleau Wood in order that we might enjoy the rights and responsibilities of U.S. citizenship. As a people, we share a solemn obligation to honor the memory of those who made the ultimate sacrifice on the battlefields of WWI — especially those who even gave their identities in doing so. It has been the privilege of my lifetime to carry in my heart not only the members of the DAR but also our Patriot ancestors on this journey. We will never forget.”

- Denise VanBuren, President General DAR

“As the early morning frost and fog slowly burned off with the rising of the sun, the cemetery grounds and flowers were frozen in a moment I will soon not forget. Being able to walk amongst the final resting place of so many of my countrymen, lovingly watched over by the French community, brought the fast pace of the outside world to a slow remorseful pace. Finding a young man who fell 103 years ago on that very date made me pause and reflect on the service and sacrifice of so many in the pursuit of freedom.”

- Gavin McIlvenna (1997-98), Society President





Veterans from France move their Flag Bearers into position



Two members of the Aisne-Marne staff hold the Centennial Flag case upon the conclusion of the ceremonies



Members of the delegation gather at the chapel with the flag bearers

The next stop for the Centennial Flag is the Aisne-Marne American Cemetery on the afternoon of October 22nd.



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



