



# Centennial Flag Project

## Stage 6

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 23, 2021** – The flag was last flown at the Somme American Cemetery in Bony, France on the afternoon of October 22, 2021 where one of the candidates for the World War I Unknown Soldier was disinterred 100 years ago yesterday.



On the morning of October 23, 2021, the Centennial Flag was taken to the largest American cemetery in Europe located just east of Romange-sous-Montfaucon, France. The offensive starting in later September 1918 led to the enemy retreat and eventual armistice on November 11<sup>th</sup>.

This is the fourth and last cemetery that the pilgrimage group and flag will visit that 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 three candidates not selected during the 1921 ceremony were returned and buried here on October 24<sup>th</sup> in Plot G, Row 1, Graves 1-2-3.

The pilgrimage group gathered at the cemetery and the flag detail raised the flag at 9:00am. The detail consisted of Assistant Quartermaster David Hathaway, a first responder from Pennsylvania; former Tomb Guard David McCamis (1976-77); Army veteran and Society member Patrick Sutliff; and four members of the Robinson family including former Tomb Guard First Lieutenant Ruth Robinson (2015-17), Lieutenant Commander Brad Robinson, USN and his parents Michael and Nicole.



Upon conclusion of the ceremony the flag was carried a short distance away to the final resting place of the three candidates who were not chosen in 1921. Located in Section G, Row 1, Plots 1-3. Here together the three unknown candidates were joined by all who had attended the ceremony.





The Centennial Flag was unfolded once more and presented before the three in a sign of respect and honor. All those present stood in quite silence. The flag was then refolded with care and passed to Mrs. Elaine Brattain, the National Chaplain of the American Gold Star Mothers. Mrs. Brattain then touched the flag to the top of the first headstone for a brief moment, connecting the flag and its journey with the unknown American resting in the French soil he fought and died upon.



Mrs. Brattain then passed the flag to Mr. Mark Furlan, a Vietnam Veteran and minister, who also in turn touched the flag to the second headstone. Mr. Furlan then passed the flag to the Society Bereavement Director and retired Army Captain Amy McIlvenna.



Captain (Ret) McIlvenna touched the flag to the final headstone for a moment, and then passed it to former Sergeant of the Guard Paul Basso (2000-04, 2015-17) who accepted the flag and placed it in the special case.

The Society President then asked three Tomb Guards in attendance to come forward and place freshly minted 2021 coins upon the headstones: two dimes and one penny, equaling 21 on each.

Each of the pilgrimage members then placed a single white French rose on one of the three graves and then stepped back and paused to reflect, ending the very personal ceremony.



*“With a hand upon the stone ready to pay respect to a fall brother. A wave of emotion swept over me, and I was humbled. I thought about Audie Murphy's poem. Alone and removed from earthly care the noble ruins of men lay buried here, they were good men, strong men, endowed with youth and much to will to give I hear no protests from the mute lips of the death they rest there is nothing more to give.”*

- James Tate



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](http://www.tombguard.org/tomb-of-the-unknown-soldier/world-war-i)

---



*The next stop for the Centennial Flag is the city of Chalons-en-Champagne on the evening of October 23<sup>rd</sup>.*



*Society President Gavin McIlvenna (1997-98)*



*Specialist Sam King (2019-Current) presents the wreath on behalf of the Society*



*American Gold Star Mother Cinthia Kruger presents a wreath*

