



ABMC and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

1921-2021



Top Image: Wall of the Missing at Cambridge American Cemetery

Bottom Image: General Pershing saluting the Unknown Soldier in the U.S. Capitol



ABMC REMEMBERS THE UNKNOWN AMONG OUR FALLEN

ABMC SITES AROUND THE WORLD

For a hundred years, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier has represented America's eternal dedication to honoring not just the unknowns buried there, but all unknown dead of America's wars. The American Battle Monuments Commission shares in that mission, with over 7,500 unknown burials of World War I and World War II honored in our cemeteries and over 90,000 missing from the World Wars, Korea, and Vietnam memorialized by name on the walls of the missing at our cemeteries and monuments.



"It would be a very fitting tribute for the nation to pay not only to the unknown dead but to all who gave their lives and those who risked their lives for their country... we can not do too much to honor those who lie in France."

- General Pershing, General Pershing AEF Commander and first ABMC Chairman



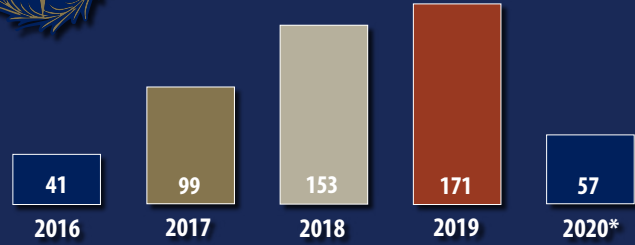
UNKNOWN AT ABMC SITES

WWI : OVER 1,600
WWII : ALMOST 6,000

Today, more than 82,000 Service Members remain unaccounted for after these conflicts.

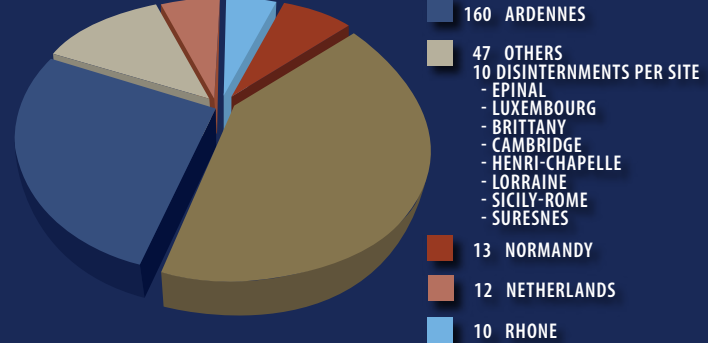
IDENTIFYING THE UNKNOWN

DISINTERMENTS AT ABMC CEMETERIES



* fewer disinterments due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

DISTRIBUTION OF DISINTERMENTS 2016 - 2020



CIVIL WAR

60% OF THE UNION SOLDIERS WHO DIED WERE IDENTIFIED. (AS OF AUGUST 2021)

364,511 TOTAL DEAD

WORLD WAR II

82% IDENTIFIED (AS OF AUGUST 2021)

405,399 TOTAL DEAD

SPANISH AMERICAN WAR

87% IDENTIFIED (AS OF AUGUST 2021)

2,446 TOTAL DEAD

KOREAN WAR

79% IDENTIFIED (AS OF AUGUST 2021)

36,574 TOTAL DEAD

WORLD WAR I

97% IDENTIFIED (AS OF AUGUST 2021)

116,516 TOTAL DEAD

VIETNAM WAR

97% IDENTIFIED (AS OF AUGUST 2021)

58,220 TOTAL DEAD



World War I

In addition to our shared mission, ABMC is connected to the Tomb through our role in the selection of the unknowns of World War I and World War II interred there. On March 4, 1921 the U.S. Congress passed a joint resolution allowing for the selection of an unknown soldier from the American Expeditionary Forces to be entombed at Arlington National Cemetery. The process of the selection and entombment of this unknown soldier was extremely elaborate. One set of unidentified remains were exhumed from four of the overseas WWI cemeteries. These cemeteries were selected as they represent the four major fronts or campaigns that Americans fought on during the Great War: Aisne-Marne American Cemetery for the early fighting at Belleau Wood and Chateau Thierry, Somme American Cemetery, St. Mihiel American Cemetery for the first major American-led offensive, and Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery for the offensive that ended the war. An officer was assigned to each cemetery, where he opened sealed orders specifying which grave to exhume, as well as an alternate should the first remains be found to have some sort of identifying feature or other issue. The exhumations occurred simultaneously at all four cemeteries on Oct. 22, 1921. All paperwork associated with each set of remains was subsequently destroyed to ensure the unknowns could never be identified. The next day the four caskets were transported to Châlons-sur-Marne, where they were guarded overnight by an honor guard from the French and U.S. Armies. Early in the morning on Oct. 24, the caskets were removed from their shipping containers and shifted at random, ensuring that the bodies were completely anonymous. Later that same day, Sgt. Edward F. Younger, a decorated veteran of the war, selected one of the caskets by placing a spray of white roses on it. The remaining three caskets were then resealed and reburied at Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery.

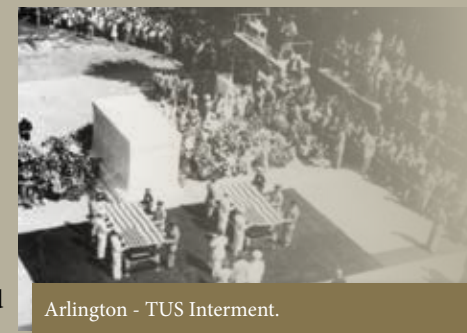


Carrying the unknown soldier to the train.

The selected casket was then transported across the Atlantic aboard the USS *Olympia*. On its arrival in Washington, D.C., Nov. 9, 1921, the casket was laid in state in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda until Armistice Day, when a procession carried it from the Capitol to the Arlington National Cemetery, where it was entombed on the eastern plaza of the Memorial Amphitheater. The casket was covered with a layer of French soil brought from Suresnes American Cemetery.

World War II

America's entry into another global war in 1941, this one costing the lives of over 400,000 Americans, soon raised calls for an addition to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The selection of remains was delayed by the Korean War until 1958, when remains from both wars were selected and transported to Arlington with ceremonies modeled after the post-World War I process.



Arlington - TUS Interment.

In the Pacific, remains from four unknown graves selected randomly at ABMC's Manila American Cemetery were disinterred on April 22, 1958. The remains were then transported to Hickham Air Force Base in Hawaii where they joined two unknowns from the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (the Punchbowl). A twenty-four hour honor guard watched the caskets until the selection ceremony, May 16, 1958. The selection was made by Col. Glenn T. Eagleston, the top WWII ace of the Ninth Air Force. The five unselected remains were reinterred at the 'Punchbowl' along with the unselected remains from the Korean war selection held the preceding day.

For the European theater, 13 sets of remains were disinterred between Dec. 19, 1957, and Apr. 9, 1958, representing every ABMC cemetery in Europe and Africa other than Cambridge and Epinal. One set of remains was rejected due to possible identifying information, and an alternate was disinterred and substituted. The remains were transported to Frankfurt, Germany, where a rearrangement ceremony was held during which three separate teams of soldiers rearranged the caskets to ensure there was no way to identify which remains came from which cemetery. The remains were then brought to Epinal American Cemetery, where they laid in state at the cemetery chapel. On May 12, 1958, a solemn selection ceremony was held, during which Maj. Gen. Edward J. O'Neill selected one casket to represent the European theater. The unselected remains were returned to ABMC cemeteries where they were reburied after simple ceremonies performed by Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish chaplains.

May 26, 1958, off the Virginia Capes, the Pacific and European WWII unknown candidates, as well as the Korean War unknown, were united aboard the USS *Canberra*. The WWII unknowns were moved to a separate room on board and once again rearranged by a team of sailors to eliminate any connection to their theater of origin before they were moved back above deck. Navy Hospital Corpsman 1st Class William R. Charette, who had earned the Medal of Honor in Korea, made the final selection. The selected remains, along with the Korean War unknown, were transferred to the USS *Blandy* for transport to Washington, while the USS *Canberra* moved to deeper waters and conducted a burial at sea for the unselected WWII unknown, once again following an ecumenical service.

The WWII and Korean War unknowns lay in state in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda until their funeral and interment at Arlington National Cemetery, Memorial Day 1958.

Epinal Ceremony.

Walls of the Missing

The elaborate rituals used to ensure that the unknowns entombed at Arlington National Cemetery would forever be unidentified served an important symbolic function. By removing the possibility of identification, these remains stand in for every Soldier, Sailor, Marine, or Coast Guardsmen who was never identified. While the next of kin of a missing soldier could stand in front of the ‘Tomb’ and imagine that it is their son buried there, the anonymity of the ‘Tomb’ extends even further, representing the honor and sacrifice of all those who paid the last full measure of devotion.

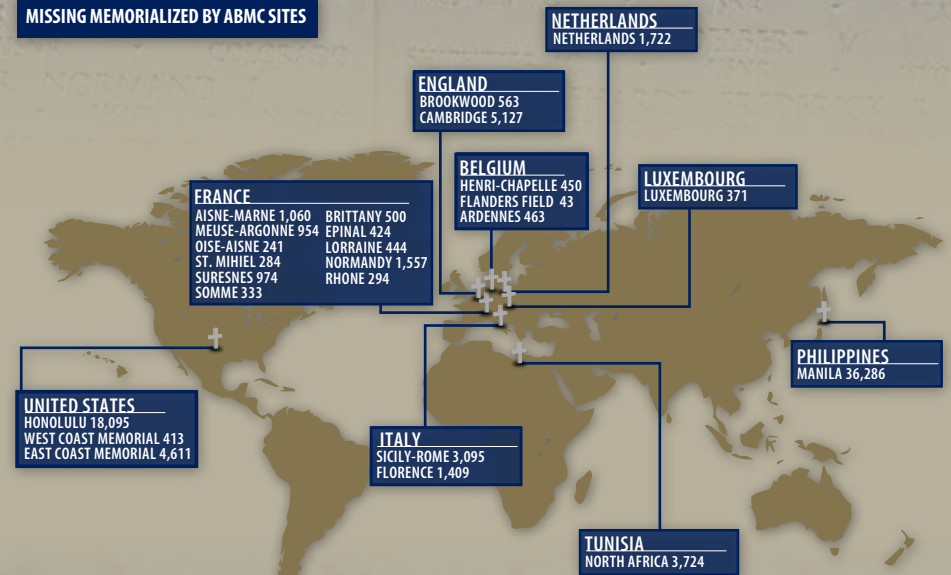
This universality at Arlington National Cemetery has its counterpart in the American Battle Monuments Commission’s Walls of the Missing. If the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier symbolically represents all missing, ABMC’s cemeteries and memorials literally represent them. Each American servicemember missing, lost, or buried at sea from World War I, World War II, Korea, and Vietnam is represented by name on the Walls of the Missing at one of our sites. In total, the various Walls of the Missing honor the memory of 4,456 missing from World War I and 78,985 from World War II. For World War II, this includes the names of the missing memorialized on the Honolulu, East Coast, and West Coast memorials. The 8,201 missing of the Korean War and the 2,504 of the Vietnam War are honored, alongside their comrades from World War II at the Commission’s Honolulu Memorial. When a servicemember is identified by the Department of Defense, a rosette is added to the individual’s name on the Walls of the Missing to denote that their remains have been recovered and identified.

Such identified remains are the only authorized new burials in ABMC’s World War I and World War II cemeteries.

In addition to the names inscribed on the Walls of the Missing, over 1,600 unknowns of World War I and almost 6,000 of World War II are buried in ABMC cemeteries. Their graves are marked, like the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, with the inscription of “HERE LIES IN HONORED GLORY AN AMERICAN SOLDIER KNOWN BUT TO GOD.” For World War II, the phrase “A COMRADE IN ARMS” replaced “AMERICAN SOLDIER” to better include the fallen of the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard. These headstones, along with the names engraved on the Walls of the Missing, represent ABMC’s essential mission of remembering and honoring the service and sacrifice of those Americans who rest in unknown graves.

Oise-Aisne American Cemetery

MISSING MEMORIALIZED BY ABMC SITES



Ardennes American Cemetery



AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION

“Time will not dim the glory of their deeds.”

GENERAL OF THE ARMIES JOHN J. PERSHING

Washington, D.C.

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