

This Day in History... November 11, 1921

Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

On November 11, 1921, President Warren G. Harding dedicated the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery. Now the final resting place for three unknown soldiers, it is guarded 24 hours a day by members of the Army's 3rd Infantry Regiment.

After World War I ended, the US and other Allied nations had a number of deceased soldiers that couldn't be identified. To honor their great sacrifices, each country created memorials to their unknown soldiers.

On March 4, 1921, the US Congress approved a resolution to create a memorial and inter an unknown American soldier from World War I at the Arlington National Cemetery Memorial Amphitheater that Armistice Day. World War I veteran Edward Younger was then selected to travel to France to choose the unknown soldier to be interred. Fallen soldiers were selected from four different cemeteries – Aisne-Marne, Meuse-Argonne, Somme, and St. Mihiel. Younger selected one of these soldiers to be interred at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.



Issued on the first anniversary of the interment of the Unknown Soldier.



From the popular Series of 1926-31.

That Unknown Soldier then lay in state for several hours as French and American soldiers came and paid their respects. The soldier was then transported to the USS *Olympia*, received honors along the way, and then began his journey home. The soldier returned to America on November 9, and lay in state in the US Capitol, where he was again visited by thousands of patriotic Americans.

Then on Armistice Day (now Veterans Day), November 11, 1921, the soldier was removed from the Capitol at 8:30 am and taken to the Memorial Amphitheater at Arlington National Cemetery with a military escort. He was followed by a long and seldom-seen procession for a fallen soldier – President Harding, the chief and associate justices of the Supreme Court, members of the Diplomatic Corps, Congressional Medal of Honor recipients, senators, congressmen, military generals and officers, state officials, and more.

Upon arriving at the tomb, the soldier received a simple but moving funeral. President Harding gave a speech and conferred upon the soldier the Medal of Honor and Distinguished Service Cross. Then members of other Allied governments from the war gave their highest military decorations. This was followed by three salvos of artillery and the playing of taps, bringing the ceremony to an end.



This stamp image was based on a drawing of US troops at the Second Battle of the Marne.



This stamp image was based on a 1950 photo of US troops retreating from Chosin Reservoir.

There was always a plan to place a structure on the site, but funding wasn't secured until 1926. The tomb was placed there without a formal ceremony on April 9, 1932. The simple structure has the Greek figures of Peace, Victory, and Valor, and the phrase, "Here rests in honored glory an American soldier known but to God."

Since July 2, 1937, a perpetual guard and the United States flag have stood sentinel over the Tomb of the Unknown. Selected from the Army's 3rd Infantry Regiment, the tomb guards are an elite group who stand sentinel around the clock, regardless of weather conditions. The guards are changed every 30-120 minutes, depending on the season and time of day, and the schedule does not change due to inclement weather. This dedication is incorporated into the Sentinel's Creed: "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." During blizzards, hurricanes, and the quiet of a summer's night, the guards and the US flag remain with the unknown soldiers, promising their sacrifices will never be forgotten by a grateful nation.

In 1956, President Dwight Eisenhower signed legislation to honor the unknown of World War II and the Korean War. Those soldiers were selected in similar ceremonies and awarded the Medal of Honor before being interred beside the World War I unknown.

In 1984, a Vietnam soldier was interred at the Tomb of the Unknowns. However, 10 years later a POW/MIA activist figured out who the soldier was. His DNA was tested and confirmed and he was reinterred at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery. The Vietnam Unknown tomb was changed to say "Honoring and Keeping Faith with America's Missing Servicemen."



This Vietnam Veterans stamp was issued on this day in 1979.

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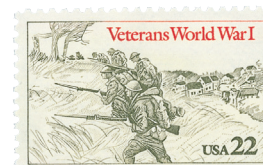


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