

ESTABLISHING THE AMERICAN WAY OF DEATH: WORLD WAR I AND THE
FOUNDATION OF THE UNITED STATES' POLICY TOWARD THE
REPATRIATION AND BURIAL OF ITS BATTLEFIELD DEAD

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This thesis examines the policies and procedures created during and after the First World War that provided the foundation for how the United States commemorated its war dead for the next century. Many of the techniques used in modern times date back to the Great War. However, one hundred years earlier, America possessed very few methods or even ideas about how to locate, identify, repatriate, and honor its military personnel that died during foreign conflicts. These ideas were not conceived in the halls of government buildings. On the contrary, concerned citizens originated many of the concepts later codified by the American government. This paper draws extensively upon archival documents, newspapers, and published primary sources to trace the history of America's burial and repatriation policies, the Army Graves Registration Services, and how American dead came to permanently rest in military cemeteries on the continent of Europe. The unprecedented dilemma of over 80,000 American soldiers buried in France and surrounding countries at the conclusion of the First World War in 1918 propelled the United States to solve many social, political, and military problems that arose over the final disposition of those remains. The solutions to those problems became the foundation for how America would repatriate, honor, and mourn its military dead for the next century. Some of these battles persist even today as the nation tries to grapple with the proper way to commemorate the nation's participation in the First World War on the eve of the conflict's centennial.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The ramp of the *C-17 Globemaster* cracked open on the runway of Dover Air Force Base, Delaware. The creaking of the hydraulics was the only noise to break the stark silence surrounding the aircraft. The ramp hit the runway with a thud, and immediately six soldiers in Army combat uniforms with white gloves entered. After a few moments, they exited carrying a flag-draped gray steel transfer case; another fallen American soldier was being welcomed back to the United States. Captain Miles Hidalgo watched as the six-soldier honor guard carried the flag-draped transfer case containing the remains of his brother, Lieutenant Daren Hidalgo – killed two days prior in Afghanistan – past a pair of saluting general officers to a waiting van that would deliver the remains to the Dover Air Force Base mortuary for processing.

The Army treated Daren Hidalgo's remains with a mix of military efficiency and reverence. Once at the mortuary, the body was removed from the transfer case, embalmed, dressed in a Class A uniform, and casketed. The flag that adorned Hidalgo's transfer case since his remains left Afghanistan now draped his casket. Older brother Miles was brought back from his duties in Afghanistan and escorted the casket from Dover as it traveled by airplane first to Wisconsin for a family funeral, then to the national cemetery at West Point, New York, for interment. Before he was buried, a military honor guard removed the flag from Daren's casket, and then ceremoniously folded and presented it to his parents. Every aspect of the honors that Daren Hidalgo received from the time of his death on 20 February 2011 until his interment on 4 March were flawlessly executed, the result of established practices perfected by the military over years of unfortunate necessity. An outside observer might be impressed with the nationalistic

honor that the battlefield dead are given by the military and, by extension, American society. Few could imagine honors for the dead any differently than the procedures performed today.

One hundred years earlier, America possessed very few methods or even ideas about how to locate, identify, repatriate, and honor its military personnel that died during foreign conflicts. America solved its problem of burying the war dead in the aftermath of its 1861-1865 Civil War. However, the massive number of dead resulting from a year of fighting in Europe during the First World War presented a new challenge for the burgeoning nation. The unprecedented dilemma of over 80,000 American soldiers buried in France and surrounding countries at the conclusion of the First World War in 1918 propelled the United States to solve many social, political, and military problems that arose over the final disposition of those remains. The solutions to those problems became the foundation for how America would repatriate, honor, and mourn its military dead for the next century.

Historians have scrutinized the various aspects of America's return of its First World War dead. The largest group of these historians examine the dead's repatriation within the context of national commemoration. Kurt Piehler notes that the burial efforts after World War I "Marked a watershed in attempts by the federal government to encourage a national pattern of remembrance that minimized or ignored the ties of class, ethnicity, region, or race."¹ Lisa Budreau wrote that the repatriation of the dead provided the spark that drove efforts to commemorate the war within the United States. She contends, however, that the dispersal of the dead between Europe and hundreds of cemeteries throughout the United States diffused the memory of the country's sacrifice.² Budreau suggests a political undertone existed to the nation's commemoration efforts. She argues that the agendas of various political factions influenced the nation's tributes to the

¹ Kurt Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 4.

² Lisa Budreau, *Bodies of War* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 242.

men who fought in France.³ Budreau's argument about the influence of politics on commemoration is shared by other authors as well.

John R. Gillis edited a series of essays for his book, *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*. Gillis writes that traditionally, national commemoration usually favors the dead over the living.⁴ Beyond that, the care of the dead became the responsibility of the nation, rather than left to the financial abilities of the deceased's family. This is a fundamental change that occurred after the First World War: the dead became the responsibility of the United States to properly bury. One British field marshal agreed with Gillis, stating that the "care, registration, etc. of graves now assumes a national character."⁵ While the United States' treatment of the war dead was a uniquely American way of war, compared the European practices prior the twentieth century, America still found it necessary to compare its burial practices to its European allies and integrate some European methods into its own procedures.⁶

The United States aimed to make its cemeteries in Europe representative of its perceived national identity: one without bias toward color, creed, or rank. These cemeteries would not only memorialize the young men who died for their country in an idealistic struggle for democracy, but also reflect the growing prestige of the United States.⁷ The headstones would be uniform in nature, the only departure being a Christian Cross or a Star of David depending on the deceased's religion. Additionally, the cemeteries would reflect former President Theodore Roosevelt's notion that military service minimized class and ethnic differences.⁸ Even for those

³ Ibid., 241.

⁴ John R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 11.

⁵ Ibid., 153.

⁶ David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), v.

⁷ Gillis, *Commemorations*, 169; Mark Snell, ed., *Unknown Soldiers: The American Expeditionary Forces in Memory and Remembrance* (Kent, OH: Kent State University, 2008), 29.

⁸ Snell, *Unknown Soldiers*, 33.

that could not be identified or found at all, the allied nations constructed national memorials to represent all of the unknown dead. As is demonstrated in this thesis, the First World War marked a moment when there was a concerted effort by the United States to record – if not identify – the name of every fallen soldier. America already learned valuable lessons from dealing with the dead from the Mexican War and its own Civil War. While many of these lessons, particularly those involving identification, came too late to help the dead of those wars that experience would prove to be a valuable starting point in the aftermath of the First World War

Jay Winter dedicated his book, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century*, to explain the linkage between the First World War and its impact on how Americans commemorate events of the past, and how those events stay within the public's conscience. Winter argues that a “memory boom” occurred in the twentieth century. This boom was a result of various attempts and methods to capture the events of World War I for posterity. This occurred, according to Winter, because of a desire within the United States to ensure that the country remembered the victims and destruction caused by the war.⁹

No matter how strong public sentiment seems to be towards remembrance, Winter cites that fading memory is inevitable. All memorials have a “shelf life,” when their meaning is held in highest regard, usually by those people with a close connection to the commemorated event.¹⁰ As that generation dies out, the connection weakens, and resultantly so does the meaning of the memorial. Winter's assertion holds true in the case of the World War I dead. Ninety-seven years removed from the Armistice in November 1918, no American veteran of the war is alive,

⁹ Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 140.

and the children of these veterans are rapidly dying as well. The historical memory of many Americans is questionable. Those that do usually concentrate on the monumental struggle of World War II, not realizing the linkage between the two world wars. An additional area of emphasis for American historical knowledge is the Civil War, the battlefields of which may be easily visited by tourists as opposed to those in France.¹¹ The struggle within the United States over the proper methods to commemorate its World War dead is now largely unknown, even though those battles laid the foundation for how the nation would honor its dead following multiple wars over the next century. Paul Fussell, a veteran of the World War II Battle of the Bulge, once recalled his disdain for cocktail parties during the Vietnam War. He hated them because he frequently overheard people speaking about body counts, without any idea of the meaning behind them.¹² The meaning that is lost is that behind the numbers of deaths are individuals with families that were likely heartbroken upon receiving word of their loved ones' death.

Very few in the modern military, if any, probably realize that the solemn tributes paid to its dead did not exist one hundred years ago and only came about through ad hoc decisions in response to inquiries on the subject. A search of Record Group 92, which contains the files of the Office of the Quartermaster General in the National Archives, confirmed the lack of set procedures that are present today.¹³ The reactionary nature in which Army policy formed to honor its dead has not been discussed in any book published to date. These are important details of history that should not be forgotten, especially since those guidelines form the foundation for the solemn tributes that the Army still utilizes to honor its war dead.

¹¹ Snell, *Unknown Soldiers*, 23.

¹² Jay Winter, *The Legacy of the Great War, Ninety Years On* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2009), 162.

¹³ National Archives Record Group 92 is titled "The Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General."

The presence of political influence undeniably contributed to laying the foundation for national mourning after the First World War. Its presence was manifested in the bungled negotiations with France before the end of the war, which led to significant national discourse over the disposition of the dead, as well as the trustworthiness of France. However, this thesis argues that much of the political contests resulted from social forces across the country, rather than the political winds within the District of Columbia. Concerned citizens wanted their opinion considered as the nation wrestled with many significant aspects of war commemoration. They wrote their congressman, the Secretary of War, or their newspaper expressing their ideas, questions, or concerns. This thesis illustrates that the War Department had not considered some of these concepts, and quickly adopted them as policy. Other citizens formed special interest groups that tried to affect policy controlling how the dead were honored. This came in the form of groups that lobbied both for and against repatriation, as well as the American Legion, formed by veterans of the World War.

In addition, this thesis examines an oft-forgotten aspect of the American way of war: how the nation cares for its dead resulting from overseas combat. The American experience after the First World War was far from perfect, as the government and the Army often found that no precedent existed for situations that arose, and often needed to make choices and execute with only the best of intentions as their guide. Many of the decisions, particularly those regarding the return of the dead, were driven by public opinion rather than the whim of politicians. The influence of American citizens on civilian and military leadership ultimately led to major policy pronouncements regarding the burial and commemoration of the war dead. Many of these procedures ultimately solidified into the reverent ceremonies and honors that the public sees bestowed on its current military dead.

CHAPTER 2

THE AMERICAN WAY OF DEATH: UNITED STATES AND EUROPEAN MILITARY BURIAL PRACTICES PRIOR TO THE FIRST WORLD WAR

On the eve of the First World War, the concept of formally burying the war dead was mostly an American model. The warring armies in Europe of the nineteenth century usually left the dead where they fell. Grave markers were generally reserved for rulers or officers, while masses of common soldiers were buried by locals in unmarked fields.¹ After the 1813 Battle of Leipzig, a German doctor witnessed the dead splayed across the battlefield, ravaged by the effects of the weather, dogs, and birds. The first European military cemetery materialized by accident, as the dead from a minor skirmish during the Franco-Prussian war were collected and buried where they fell. The dead from subsequent battles were eventually brought to the same cemetery.² Aside from that outlier, the concept of burying a body was not the means with which Europeans honored their war dead.

The British also rarely marked the graves of the common soldier. One cannot find the name of any of 20,000 men lost by the duke of Marlborough at the 1709 Battle of Malplaquet memorialized anywhere near the battlefield. At Waterloo, the only grave markers for the British dead were pieces of equipment not policed from the battlefield. While the British government finally did allow the marking of its dead by small iron crosses during the Boer War, it prohibited the consolidation of the dead into private cemeteries. The decision resulted in over 170 different burial places constructed with no government organization to maintain the sites. The living watched as the shallow graves were disturbed by burrowing animals and the few identified

¹ Kurt Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way* (Washington: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1995), 6.

² George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 45.

graves markers consumed by the elements.³ While European governments could arguably maintain lax burial standards at the dawn of the World War, the unprecedented number of dead that would soon litter the battlefields could not be ignored; especially as the initially mobile war stagnated into trench warfare.

In contrast to its European counterparts, the American Army set many important methodological precedents during the nineteenth century for handling its dead. The 1846-1848 Mexican War began the Army's history of systematically caring for its dead. The majority of the 13,000 Americans killed during the Mexican War were simply buried where they fell.⁴ The state of Kentucky's authorization to fund the return of all of its dead to a state cemetery dedicated to that war stand as the only organized repatriations of the time.⁵ Most of the burial and return activities after the war were conducted by private groups outside of the Army, with procedures undeveloped at best and certainly not uniform. Significantly, there were very few identifications of the dead made during or after the war.⁶ This was partly due to the fact that burial procedures could be described as rudimentary, and that no organization existed within the Army dedicated to handling the dead. Unfortunately, the need for such an organization would not be realized until after another war.

Before the First World War, only one United States cemetery, established after the Mexican War, existed outside of the country's continental boundaries. The first official United States cemetery was created outside of Mexico City by a 28 September 1850 act of Congress for "[T]he internment therein of the remains of the American officers and soldiers who fell in battle

³ John R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 150-152.

⁴ Michael Sledge, *Soldier Dead: How We Recover, Identify, Bury, and Honor Our Military Fallen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 32.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁶ Edward Steere, "Genesis of American Graves Registration: 1861-1870," *Military Affairs* 12, no. 3 (Autumn 1948), 150.

or otherwise died in or near the city of Mexico.”⁷ By 1853, 750 Americans were buried there, but none were identified.⁸ In essence, the Mexico City cemetery represents more of a monument to the unknown soldiers of the Mexican War than an actual military cemetery. Nevertheless, the Congressional appropriations for the establishment and permanent care for a cemetery outside the borders of the United States is a significant moment in American military history.

For the many revolutionary advances made in tactics, weapons, and medicine during the American Civil War, it is often forgotten that the aftermath of the war became a watershed moment for the handling and care of the battlefield dead. The American Civil War’s death toll in excess of 600,000 compelled the United States Army to develop procedures to deal with burial and identification on a massive scale. Just after the war began, the War Department directed that all post hospitals maintain a supply of forms and headboards in order to preserve post-mortem details. This directive was supplemented with an additional order stating that the deceased soldiers’ commander was responsible for ensuring a soldier’s remains were identified and properly buried.⁹ Since the war was fought on American soil and advances were made in preserving remains through embalming, returning bodies to their families emerged as a distinct possibility.¹⁰ This possibility, however, was through private enterprise and therefore largely limited to those who could afford the price of embalming, a coffin, and transport. In addition, as the scale of battles increased, the ability of military commanders to heed the Quartermaster’s directive for burying the dead became virtually impossible.

⁷ Chris Dickon, *The Foreign Burial of American War Dead: A History* (London: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2011), 25.

⁸ Edward Steere, *The Graves Registration Service in World War II* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1951), 3. Edward Steere authored numerous books and articles chronicling the Army Graves Registration Service. His lineage always follows the Federal Army during the Civil War.

⁹ Steere, "Genesis," 151.

¹⁰ Dickon, *Foreign Burial*, 27.

In response to the Army's inability to handle its dead, local cemeteries began setting aside special plots for soldiers that died during the war. Congress realized the problem and on 17 July 1862 authorized President Abraham Lincoln "to purchase cemetery grounds, and cause them to be securely enclosed, to be used as a national cemetery for the soldiers who shall have died in the service of the country."¹¹ Under this legislation, Congress authorized the creation of special cemeteries, called "national cemeteries," to serve as burial grounds for American soldiers. Some of the designated national cemeteries were old post grave yards that were renamed, such as at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, or the plot adjacent to the Soldiers' Home in Washington, D.C. The Army founded others, beginning with Antietam in 1862 and Gettysburg in 1863, on former battle sites. Union officers founded three others after the battles of Chattanooga, Stones River, and Knoxville. One of the founding trustees of the Antietam National Cemetery proclaimed, "One of the striking indications of civilization and refinement among a people is the tenderness and care manifested by them towards their dead."¹² These burial sites adjacent to the combat areas lessened the distance that the bodies needed to be moved, and allowed (in theory) for swifter collection and identification.¹³

The lack of planning or a dedication organization to manage the number of dead manifested itself in the general orders issued by the War Department. Within these orders, commanders were directed, "as far as possible," to properly bury all of their dead in organized plots selected by the commander as "soon as it may be in their power." Additionally, each body should have a headboard, and "when practicable" the name of the deceased on the headboard.¹⁴

¹¹ Steere, "Genesis," 151.

¹² Drew G. Faust, *Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 61.

¹³ Steere, "Genesis," 151.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 153.

The mandate makes clear that the Army expected its commanders to do better by their dead than General Winfield Scott during the Mexican War. However, the quoted phrases from the general order essentially freed the commanders from any responsibility by acknowledging that concerns for the dead did not supersede the military operations of the living. While the Army took a big step in ensuring that a military commander was just as responsible to his dead as his living soldiers, the Army had not yet provided the commander the means with which to carry out his duty. That would not occur until after the Civil War was over.

In 1864, a small Confederate force advanced into Maryland with the intent of attacking the fortresses surrounding Washington, D.C. Union forces halted the Confederate advance. After the battle, Union Captain James M. Moore's improvised graves registration unit began identifying and burying the dead. This act marked the first time in American Army history that a dedicated unit performed identification and interment tasks. While the skirmish outside Washington produced few casualties relative to other battles in Virginia during 1864, Moore's ad hoc unit identified every set of Union remains.¹⁵ This success underscored the need for men dedicated to the grim work of identification and burial as well as the success attained when the dead were registered soon after the battle subsided.

As the war dragged on, the number of soldiers whose fate was unknown steadily increased. The continuous movement and battles of the Army in conjunction with poor record keeping and communication technology kept many families in limbo with respect to their soldier's fate. In 1865, Quartermaster General Montgomery Meigs directed all commanders to submit their wartime reports of registered graves, recalling his 1862 order deeming commanders responsible for their dead. The records submitted by these commanders accounted for a pitiful

¹⁵ Ibid., 156.

101,736 graves, less than one third of the estimated number of Federals killed.¹⁶ Clearly, the Army needed a better system to account for its dead.

The enormous number of dead changed the relationship between the dead and American society. Drew Gilpin Faust argues that during the Civil War, “Sacrifice and the state became inextricably intertwined.”¹⁷ Private enterprise attempted to supplement the Army’s lack of accountability. The Sanitary Commission, which billed itself as the “great medium of communication between the people and the army,” established a hospital directory in 1863. The hospital directory’s mission was to take inquiries about missing soldiers, conduct an investigation, and report the findings to the family. During the directory’s first year, it received over 13,000 inquiries. By the end of the war, over one million names had been sent to the directory to investigate.¹⁸ Clara Barton formed another private organization: the Friends of the Missing Men of the United States Army, to try to recover details about missing men from those who may have witnessed their death. Her efforts alone brought information about 22,000 soldiers to their waiting families. The actions and relative success of these private organizations revealed the public’s thirst for information, and the preference for news of death rather than ignorance.

With the retrieval of more than 90% of the Federals who died in the conflict, the Civil War illustrated that families were deeply interested in the proper burial of their loved ones and neither they nor the Army would tolerate the ineffective methods of the past.¹⁹ Through the work of Meigs, over 310,000 war dead were buried in over seventy newly-created national

¹⁶ Faust, *Republic of Suffering*, 213.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, xiii.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 111-112.

¹⁹ Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 34.

cemeteries throughout the United States.²⁰ About this same time, social forces began advocating policies be cemented to care for the fallen. The feeling was that since the 1863 draft, mandating the citizen's obligation to fight for his country, the government now bore an obligation to ensure those that died were properly honored.²¹ This socio-political contract would be revised by many relatives of the dead fifty years later in the aftermath of the World War.

In a bit of foreshadowing increased public concern for the dead, one general noted that "Public opinion seems to be turning to a more permanent mode of marking the graves... I would respectfully give it as my opinion that the sentiment of the nation will not only sustain the expense of marble or other permanent memorial, but, moreover, that it will be likely to demand it in a few years, if not now established."²² By the end of the five-year operation in 1870, the Quartermaster Department (later renamed the Quartermaster Corps) registered the graves of an estimated 315,555 Union soldiers. The identification rate was fifty-eight percent; a marked improvement from the Mexican War but significantly lower than what would be tolerated by the American public in the future.²³ Meigs remarked about the influence of public opinion on government policy with respect to the dead: "I do not believe that those who visit the graves of their relatives would have any satisfaction in finding them ticketed and numbered... Every civilized man desires to have his friend's name marked on his monument."²⁴ From now on, the government's responsibility was to remember and identify every individual that fought for the country's preservation.

²⁰ Steere, *Graves Registration in WWII*, 9.

²¹ Faust, *Republic of Suffering*, 229.

²² Steere, "Genesis," 160-161.

²³ *Ibid.*, 161.

²⁴ Faust, *Republic of Suffering*, 235.

As the United States, and by extension the United States Army, began to participate with regularity in foreign affairs in the late nineteenth century, the challenge of handling the dead on foreign shores arose. On 6 July 1898, Congress appropriated \$200,000 to “Cause to be transported to their homes the remains of officers and soldiers who die in military camps or who are killed in action or who die in the field at places outside the limits of the United States.”²⁵ This became the first preemptive allocation of resources by the United States to return its military dead from foreign countries. More importantly, President William F. McKinley directed that all graves, permanent or otherwise, be marked.²⁶ Using this allocation, Quartermaster Corps soldiers repatriated a total of 1,889 dead from the Philippine Islands, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Hawaiian Islands.²⁷ The only soldiers not immediately moved were those that died of small pox due to a potential danger to public health.

As a precursor to the arguments that would be seen after the World War, some in the United States felt that all of the dead should have remained overseas, “as silent emissaries to our allies.”²⁸ In 1899, the Quartermaster Corps began to disinter and return 1,222 sets of remains from Cuba and Puerto Rico.²⁹ The Quartermaster Corps’ history recorded that the Spanish American War was the first deliberate attempt by the United States Army to “disinter the remains of all its soldiers who, in the defense of their country, had given up their lives on a foreign shore, and bring them... to their native land for return to their relatives or their interment on the beautiful cemeteries which have been provided by our Government.”³⁰

²⁵ Digest of Appropriations – 1899 “Bringing Home the Remains of Officers and Soldiers Who Die Abroad,” National Archives (Hereafter NA), Record Group (Hereafter RG) 92, Entry 1890, Box 63.

²⁶ Steere, “Genesis,” 149.

²⁷ Report of the Quartermaster General, 1900, page 84, NA, RG 92, Entry 1890, Box 63.

²⁸ Dickon, *Foreign Burial*, 202.

²⁹ Steere, *Graves Registration in WWII*, 10.

³⁰ Edward Steere and Thayer Boardman, *The Final Disposition of World War II Dead 1945-1951* (Washington D.C.: Historical Branch Office of the Quartermaster General, 1957), 10.

One of the men primarily responsible for the successful mortuary work in the Philippines was Chaplain (Major) Charles Pierce. Pierce gained an excellent reputation for his care of the dead and staunch preservation of their identification. One officer noted that the gruesome nature of Pierce's work "Demands heroism in its prosecution."³¹ The following year, soldiers under Pierce's command in China assisted in returning 138 sets of remains of soldiers who died during the Boxer Rebellion.³² Thought of as the 'Army's Chief Specialist in mortuary affairs,' Pierce retired from the Army soon after the Spanish-American War concluded, but he would be recalled at the outset of the World War to organize America's fledgling Graves Registration Service (GRS). Pierce's abilities and knowledge gained him much respect within the Army as well as the political leadership in Washington. Soon, both would come calling for advice and recommendations in solving the many issues that arose with the disposition of the First World War dead.

As the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) began operations in France, the American Army's plans for the care of its dead were more detailed than at the outset of any previous war. Major Pierce immediately recognized that, if the experiences of the French and British were any indication, the AEF would have many of its men killed. Pierce recognized that the logistical needs for the dead alone could easily overwhelm the American transportation system. On 8 December 1917, Pierce recommended to General John Pershing that embalming not be practiced within the AEF, and that bodies not be returned to the United States until after the cessation of hostilities.³³ These approved recommendations relieved the AEF of needing to transport the

³¹ Graves Registration Service History (Draft), NA, RG 92, Entry 1890, Box 63. It appears that this draft was incorporated into the Quartermaster Corps three volume history, *History of the Army Graves Registration Service: QMC in Europe*.

³² Report of the Quartermaster General, 1900, page 111, NA, RG 92, Entry 1890, Box 63.

³³ Charles Pierce, Letter to the Chief Quartermaster, AEF, 12 August 1917, NA, RG 92, Entry 1894-B, Box 1.

supplies for embalming, the shipment of caskets, and the technical expertise in the form of embalmers to Europe in lieu of supplies necessary to help win the war. Despite the preparedness of the Army and its relatively inexperienced Quartermaster Corps to process its battlefield dead, the United States would soon find that it was totally unprepared for the political and social battles yet to be fought over how to best honor its dead.

CHAPTER 3

TO WHOM DO THE DEAD BELONG: AMERICAN SOCIAL UPHEAVAL RESULTING FROM POLITICAL STRIFE BETWEEN FRANCE AND THE UNITED STATES

The seeds of future diplomatic conflict between France and the United States over the disposition of the latter's battlefield dead were sown before the First World War ended. After hostilities ended, the two countries sparred over the American remains and the ability of the United States to immediately repatriate those dead. Army records in the National Archives portray the French government as stonewalling the United States' efforts to repatriate its dead, an opinion reiterated by major American newspapers at the time. Modern scholars also place the blame on the French for delaying repatriation efforts, citing various 'excuses' that France claimed to be the reasons for the almost two-year delay between the end of the war and when the first remains returned to the United States. An examination of the 1915 French proclamation regarding burial of Allied dead in France, and the 1918 Franco-American agreement to examine the logistical possibility of repatriation after the war ended, reveals that in fact the United States misinterpreted both the 1915 French law and the language of the latter pact. As a result, America promised its bereaved families the immediate return of the dead when it could not immediately guarantee such action. The result of this error brought diplomatic tension between France and the United States, social upheaval within the United States over the delay, and ultimately a fundamental change in the Army's policy for the return of the dead.

The War Department followed strict procedures to notify the families of each soldier of the AEF killed during the First World War. The AEF in turn based these policies on General John Pershing's observations of French procedures. General Pershing noted that the French Army's method was to distribute casualty information to local mayors, who were ultimately

responsible for notification¹. Pershing thought this technique to be much more dignified than American suggestions to distribute casualty lists to local papers as in previous wars. Pershing disliked this method for two reasons: first, publishing casualty lists immediately following a battle would provide intelligence to the enemy, and second, Pershing thought that a personal notification was much more gracious than column after column of names that “people would eagerly scan day after day.”² The AEF adopted a hybrid of the French method and sent delayed casualty lists to the War Department, which then notified the decedent’s family via telegram.

The Adjutant General immediately followed the War Department’s telegram with a detailed letter. In addition to confirming the soldier’s death, the Adjutant General explained that the soldier’s unit would provide a burial location in future correspondence. The third paragraph became the catalyst for much of the political and social strife that followed:

It is not the intention of the War Department to return the bodies of our dead to the United States before the end of the war and such removal by individuals is not practicable during the emergency. It is expected, however, that the remains of *all* American soldiers dying abroad will ultimately be returned to the United States for burial at their former residences at public expense.³

Attention must be paid to the phrase “remains of all American soldiers dying abroad will ultimately be returned to the United States for burial...” United States authorities believed, based on prior experiences with returning war dead from foreign countries, that its dead would be removed from France after the war without serious difficulty. However, America’s previous experience involved Cuba and the Philippines after the Spanish-American War, countries that the

¹ John Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1931), 341.

² *Ibid.*

³ The Adjutant General of the Army, Letter to Mr. B. F. Kendall, 15 August 1918, Edward Jones Research Center, Kansas City, Mo., 2000.30, Estella Kendall Collection (emphasis added).

United States controlled after hostilities ended. Due to that fact, America acted unilaterally with respect to removing its dead at will during the months following each expedition.

After World War I, France remained a sovereign country, and the United States needed to secure French permission before exhuming and moving the American war dead. Beforehand, France enacted legislation in 1915 that offered land – at French government expense – to all Allied nations for the burial of that nation’s dead.⁴ The only requirement was that each Allied country with graves in France create an organization to maintain the graves and the cemeteries. The British completed such an agreement with France in 1919, and created the Imperial War Graves Commission to oversee its cemeteries. Similar to its methods from past expeditions, Britain opted to bury its dead near where they fell, rather than consolidate its dead into larger cemeteries. For its World War I dead alone, Great Britain ultimately maintained over 3,000 separate burial places that contained the remains of forty or more British soldiers.⁵ After America entered the war in 1917, it learned about the 1915 French burial plans for the Allied dead.

In early 1918, the United States approached France about securing authorization to repatriate all of its dead following the end of the war. France announced that it “would examine conjointly with the American Government the methods to be taken to insure, in conformity with the French laws and police regulations regarding hygiene, the transport, and return to the United States the bodies of American soldiers and sailors interred in France.”⁶ The American government seemed to believe that as soon as a peace was settled, France would immediately

⁴ Ralph Hayes, *A Report to the Secretary of War on American Military Dead Overseas* (Washington: GPO, 1920), 19.

⁵ Michael Sledge, *Soldier Dead: How We Recover, Identify, Bury, and Honor Our Military Fallen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 204.

⁶ S. Pichon, Letter to Mr. Bliss, 25 August 1918, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

survey the situation with respect to the dead, and American bodies would be disinterred and repatriated soon thereafter. Thus, after the Armistice was signed on 11 November 1918, American officials made repeated requests to the French in hopes of beginning the removal of bodies, but reported the French as ‘disinclined’ to permit the Americans to begin their work.⁷ There appears to be no consideration given by the American government to the possibility of other priorities the French government needed to address within its country immediately after the war. As 1918 gave way to 1919, the United States government found itself without any official permission from France to begin repatriating its dead.

Meanwhile, Marshal Philippe Petain offered Pershing land on behalf of France to be set aside for use as permanent American cemeteries in accordance with the 1915 French decree. Petain told Pershing, “France would be happy and proud to retain the bodies of American victims who have fallen on her soil,”⁸ Pershing cabled Petain’s sentiments to the War Department, informing his superiors that he told Petain about the United States’ repatriation plan. Pershing also suggested that if a good number of bodies were to stay in France at the behest of their family, the War Department ought to take advantage of Petain’s offer.⁹

On 1 March 1919, General Pershing sent a confidential cable containing a political bombshell to the Secretary of War, Newton Baker. Pershing wrote that a political faction within France submitted a law that, if passed, would prohibit any dis-interments in France for three years. Subsequently, all American dead buried within the battlegrounds of France would be subject to the law. Pershing believed that the French could be influenced to modify this law, but urged Washington to use diplomatic negotiations rather than rely on military channels.¹⁰

⁷ Hayes, *Report to the Secretary of War*, 22.

⁸ John Pershing, Cable to the Chief of Staff, 13 December 1918, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 22.

⁹ John Pershing, Cable to the Chief of Staff, 12 December 1918, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

¹⁰ John Pershing, Cable to the Adjutant General, 1 March 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

The United States Army, and by extension the American government, should have been prepared for the possibility of prohibitive French laws. A year before the United States entered the First World War, a soldier in Panama was struck and killed by a train.¹¹ Because the Army did not possess the capabilities to immediately ship the soldier's remains back to the United States, the soldier was initially buried in Panama. The soldier's congressman wrote the War Department at the behest of the soldier's father regarding shipment of the body back to Tennessee for burial. The War Department informed the congressman that the Panama Canal Zone's health laws prohibited the exhumation of any buried body until after eighteen months. Even though the United States controlled the Panama Canal Zone, it was still subject to local sanitary laws, much like the Army found itself with France in 1919. Scenarios such as those in Panama probably did not cause much concern in the War Department or State Department, since one soldier's remains constituted merely an isolated incident. In France, however, approximately 80,000 American soldiers awaited the government's intervention. Also waiting were the families of those men interred in France, all of whom received a promise from the Adjutant General that their soldier's remains would come back to America.

Unfortunately for the United States, France passed the law in April, stating that,

“The authorities of France have given due consideration to each practical and gruesome aspect of the horrors involved in the passing of the millions of bodies of military dead over its national railways or highways, the insuperable difficulties of transportation, sanitary regulations, the public health, effective registration, problems of construction and reconstructions, etc., and have therefore promulgated the existing decree of prohibition concerning such removals... Should an exception be made in the case of American dead, it would at once involve each of the other nations in clamorous agitation for like action... France particularly, whose territory would become a veritable charnel house if such extensive exhumations should take place, entertains strong hope of deliverance from such an event.¹²

¹¹ Edwards, Telegram to the Quartermaster General, 16 December 1916, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 13.

¹² Hayes, *Report to the Secretary of War*, 22.

This declaration effectively destroyed any chance that the United States might have possessed to repatriate its dead in the near future. Now the United States government needed to scramble and begin a dialogue with the French government to work towards a mutual diplomatic solution. More importantly, the United States government now needed to explain to its citizens why their "Soldier Dead" could not immediately return to American soil.¹³

The language of the French proclamation is worthy of further analysis. It certainly sends two messages to the United States government. First, the proclamation notes that if any exception was made for the United States to do dis-interments, other countries will want to follow suit, or at least object to any perception of favoritism granted by France. American losses during its one year at the front paled in comparison to the millions of French and British soldiers buried in French fields, and there was no reason that the United States should take precedent over any other Allied country. Second, France desired to spare its war-weary citizens from further reminders of the terrible years they just experienced. If French citizens continued to see coffins transported via every means of transportation available, morale would plummet as the reminders of Europe's lost generation passed by on public display. The last sentence of the decree may be interpreted as a plea by France to the United States to leave the remains of its dead in France, a prospect that the country soon tried to sell to the United States government.

British and French citizens largely found the United States proposal of reparation reprehensible. Many French believed the best way to honor the fallen was to leave them in their original resting place. One French writer recorded his conviction that, "...the dispersal of the bodies of the fallen heroes would forever destroy the actual reminder of their magnificent feat of

¹³ The term "Soldier Dead" was used throughout the post-war period by newspapers and government officials to describe the American dead from the First World War.

arms.”¹⁴ The Assistant Secretary of War, Ralph Hayes, captured similar sentiments during his trip to Europe in early 1920. The Assistant Secretary noted that some opposed the immediate return of the Soldier Dead due to the strain it would place on a French transportation system that was already taxed trying to deliver food and materiel across the country. Additionally, Europeans felt that no preference should be given to the American dead over the other Allied nations; almost all of which suffered more losses than the United States during the war.¹⁵ Hayes defended the European attitudes, writing, “It ought to be said in justice to the French that their attitude toward our dead is not different than with respect to their own.”¹⁶

While the diplomatic effort with France floundered throughout 1919, the American public’s angst over a perceived lack of French sympathy for the American sacrifice in Europe grew. Out of the argument, two primary special interest groups formed to lobby the government for their respective beliefs regarding the disposition of the American war dead. The first was the “Bring Home the Soldier Dead League,” which was formed 25 October 1919.¹⁷ Its membership largely consisted of frustrated parents and relatives of the overseas dead. The goal of the organization was ultimately to provide a grave in the United States for every soldier killed in Europe. League president A. B. Pouch stated that, “this organization was formed to appeal to our own Government to take such drastic action as may be needed to have France accept the wishes and heart and principles of American Motherhood in this matter rather than unjustly impose any national or individual thoughts of her own.”¹⁸ The League’s most pressing issue was to lobby the United States government to break the political stalemate with France in order to

¹⁴ Stephen Graham, *The Challenge of the Dead* (London: Cassell and Co. LTD, 1921), 37.

¹⁵ Hayes, *Report to the Secretary of War*, 13-14.

¹⁶ Ralph Hayes, Letter to J. D. Foster, 3 December 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 25.

¹⁷ “Kin of American Dead Form League to Demand Bodies,” *Pittsburgh Gazette Times*, 26 October 1919, First Section, Page 5.

¹⁸ A. B. Pouch, Letter to H. F. Rethers, 15 September 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 26.

repatriate the remains of the Soldier Dead without delay. The group recruited members across the country as it petitioned for the removal of all the bodies of America's fallen soldiers. In less than one year's time, the organization boasted committees in New York, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Missouri, Virginia, the District of Columbia, Indiana, Florida, and Maryland.¹⁹

In November of 1919, the Bring Home the Soldier Dead League issued an appeal for government action against France to the Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, on behalf of its national membership. The words of the proclamation not only highlight social angst over the delay in repatriation, but also a general misunderstanding by Americans toward the French decree of 1918:

After one whole year of patient waiting, affording ample time for government action... we here appeal to you for the solace which is our right; bring home our soldier dead, NOW. Early in 1917, many of our American boys were in France... Soon the question arose, 'Will the bodies of the dead be brought home?' It was discussed everywhere and became so insistent, that the Secretary of War took notice, and as a result doubts were banished, and hearts satisfied and Morale established upon your public announcement that positively the bodies would be brought home. That declaration at that time surely was a binding agreement (at least with those on this side) and one which this country dare not delay in carrying out. Such an agreement between individuals would surely be a binding obligation, and we as citizens protest that this government shall not have a different standard of ethics and duty that the highest standard observed by individuals, i.e. to keep the faith, and we respectfully submit that such an agreement with the government is enforceable in the court of right and duty... That situation, the action of the Congress in providing money; the fact that start (of exhumations) was actually made; the fact that excuses had to be offered by France to secure delay; the enlisting General Pershing while he was yet in France, to favor the delay, and finally the Secretary of War adopting and giving out the very excuses advanced by France, all give conclusive construction and proof that the agreement and intention was that the bodies would be brought home within a reasonable time, and we submit that the reasonable time was when France gave out her excuses. It is the belief in this League that should France further interfere to cause delay, that this Country should use whatever means possible; diplomatic, financial, commercial and industrial; even severing business relations, to enforce the rights represented in this matter, and thereby determine if France now had or has given real reasons for delay.²⁰

¹⁹ A. B. Pouch, Letter to Newton Baker, 20 August 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 26.

²⁰ Bring Home the Soldier Dead League, Proclamation to Robert Lansing, 3 December 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 26.

The League's negative sentiment towards France would be understandable if the facts presented in its proclamation were all correct. Congress did not even secure appropriations for repatriation of the war dead until mid-1919.²¹ A degree of ignorance toward French concerns regarding lack of available transportation and civilian morale also seems to confirm French citizen's suspicions that Americans felt their dead were more important than the French living.

A significant change in American sentiment occurred immediately after the war towards the possibility of leaving some, if not all of the dead buried in France rather than repatriate all of the bodies back to the United States. This transpired when newspapers across America printed an article about former President Theodore Roosevelt's son, Quentin, who was killed in France in 1918. In the commentary, Roosevelt expressed a desire for his son's body to remain where it was originally buried, stating "We believe that where the tree falls, let it lie."²² The Adjutant General eventually approved Roosevelt's request, and in a letter to General Pershing stated that "general authority is given for similar action in cases of the bodies of any officers or men of the AEF whose relatives... request such action."²³ This statement, influenced by the single request of a distinguished American, officially changed United States policy toward its war dead. Dutifully, the War Department sent the family of each dead soldier a poll letter to gauge their desires with respect to the final disposition of their son's remains. The option for families to leave United States servicemen in the country where they fell remained American policy until the Korean War.

²¹ William Scully, Memorandum to Mr. Ruddock, Subject: Disinterment of the Remains of American Soldiers in France, 17 February 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14.

²² *Letter from Emily Selinger to Theodore and Edith Roosevelt*. [1918?] Sagamore Hill National Historic Site. Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library. Dickinson State University, accessed 1 November 2013.

²³ Roy Harper, Memorandum to John Pershing, Subject: Interment of Quentin Roosevelt, 20 October 1918, NA, RG 117, Records Relating to Interment, Box 180.

The War Department's announcement unleashed a rapid series of events in support of former President Roosevelt's sentiments. By December 1918, families inundated the War Department with requests to leave their soldier's remains in France.²⁴ By January 1919, the Secretary of War reported that 19,499 bodies (roughly thirty one percent of all dead) were requested to permanently remain in France.²⁵ Congress introduced a bill to establish a cemetery in France, called the American Field of Honor, to inter all of the remains that would not be returned to America.²⁶ The War Department made an alternative proposal to disperse the remains among multiple cemeteries that followed the general line of the AEF's advance.²⁷ The latter idea would allow the AEF doughboys to be buried closer to where they were originally killed, similar to the British method. Initially, the Quartermaster General was in favor of concentrating the American dead into a Field of Honor overlooking the town of Suresnes, with a highway connecting the cemetery to Paris.²⁸ Eventually, the latter plan for multiple cemeteries would become reality.

With growing numbers of Soldier Dead possibly remaining in France, some American citizens felt that all of the dead should remain buried together, and began to lobby for such an occurrence. Opposing the Bring Home the Soldier Dead League was the American Field of Honor Association. The organization, founded by former president William H. Taft, American Federation of Labor president Samuel Gompers, and Charles H. Brent, a former AEF chaplain, favored the consolidation of all American graves overseas into a 'field of honor'.²⁹ The vision

²⁴ The Adjutant General, Memorandum for the Quartermaster General, Subject: Request that Remains of Soldiers Not be Returned to America, 9 December 1918, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14.

²⁵ Newton Baker, War Department Press Release, 17 January 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 8.

²⁶ Newton Baker, Letter to the Secretary of the Interior, 12 February 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

²⁷ Webb Hayes, Memorandum to the Quartermaster General, Subject: Organization of an American Battlefield Commission to Mark the Places Where the American Soldiers Fell..., NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 19.

²⁸ The Quartermaster General, Letter to the Adjutant General, 1 March 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 19.

²⁹ Kurt Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way* (Washington: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1995), 95.

was that this cemetery would be recognized as “America’s great monument to our dead.”³⁰ This group rallied around the sentiments of former president Roosevelt, whose son Quentin was killed during the war. The Field of Honor Association opined that “the ‘sacred dust’ of American soldiers had made the soil of cemeteries in France forever American, a place where the Stars and Stripes would always fly.”³¹ Like the Bring Home the Soldier Dead League, the Field of Honor Association’s intentions were backed by sentiment.

Others saw a more practical reason why the dead should not be brought back. One congressman suggested that leaving the dead in France would produce multiple benefits. He stated that it would settle the debate over the best course of action for the dead that was beginning to simmer within the country, ease the mind of every soldier concerning the disposition of his own body, and allow Americans visiting Europe on business to pay their respects to the dead.³² One citizen wrote the Secretary of War stating that “Having the dead bodies brought home for burial can be of no possible good; and the excitement which it entails is conducive of much sorrow, and also bitterness.” The man closed his letter foreshadowing the difficulties ahead for the United States government. “My sympathies are with the men in power.”³³

The American Field of Honor Association made a very detailed appeal titled “The Half That Hasn’t Been Told,” which documented the group’s reasons for leaving the dead in France. The paper noted the disarticulated nature of the remains due to the advanced modern weapons, as well as how the remains would further decompose after being buried in the French soil for over a

³⁰ William E. Bailey, Letter to Hon. F. F. Kepple, 14 May 1919, NA, RG 92.

³¹ Piehler, *Remembering War*, 95

³² Unknown, Memorandum for the Adjutant General, Subject: Burial of Soldiers in France, 9 August 1918, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 3.

³³ H. H. Hewlingo, Letter to the Secretary of War, 8 October 1918, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 3.

year and a half. The group then cited historical examples of the gruesome nature of repatriation as well as a plea from a Gold Star mother who presumed to speak for all bereaved mothers.³⁴ Both sides utilized this tactic of the Gold Star Mother in an effort to sway public opinion on the matter.

The American Field of Honor Association received a boost from a new organization: the American Legion. The American Legion, founded by and comprised of veterans of the First World War, passed a resolution at its founding convention in Minneapolis, stating its belief that no American dead should be removed from France unless a family specifically requested the return of their soldier. The Legion declared that the dead should be collected in permanent cemeteries “as a fitting memorial of America’s unselfish service to humanity.”³⁵ While the American Legion’s charter decreed that the organization would remain apolitical, it certainly did not hesitate to opine on significant social debates occurring within the country.

As the special interest groups grew in membership, they attempted to reach larger audiences, sway public opinion and rally support on the matter by making appeals through print media. The *New York Times* published at least five articles in 1920 and 1921 that were both for and against repatriating remains. In addition, many citizens wrote editorials expressing their own personal views on the issue, usually in response to the writings of nationally recognized personalities such as A. B. Pouch of the Bring Home the Soldier Dead League. Interestingly, most people that submitted publications were against repatriating the dead. One citizen said that “the statement that 40 per cent of the bodies in the beautiful American Cemetery at Romagne will be dragged up next month is horrifying.” Another asked “What right had anyone to violate

³⁴ “The Half That Hasn’t Been Told,” an undated, anti-repatriation flier meant to convey a sort of silent majority that is against returning the dead to America despite the strong pro-repatriation sentiment that appeared in public. NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

³⁵ Hayes, *Report to the Secretary of War*, 23.

[a Gold Star Mother's] wishes and desecrate that grave?"³⁶ Clearly, many citizens, both for and against repatriation, were interested in vocalizing their opinions for the disposition of the war dead, and even continued to do so long after the issue was decided by the War Department.

Members of the United States government and military, despite being in the position to carry out the will of the American people, held their own beliefs as to the disposition of the dead in France. General Pershing, for his part, made a bold statement that held a lot of weight in the court of public opinion. In an article published by the *New York Times* on 1 July 1919, he was quoted as saying that he supported leaving all of the dead buried together in France. He believed that "as the men had fought and died in France they should lie in France... and that the presence of American dead [in France] would be a reminder how the two nations had fought together."³⁷ Pershing followed this statement with another cable, also published by the *New York Times*. In that, Pershing stated, "I believe that, could these soldiers speak for themselves, they would wish to be left undisturbed where, with their comrades, they fought the last fight... I recommend that none of our dead be removed from Europe... [and] that immediate steps be taken for permanently improving and beautifying our cemeteries."³⁸

While Pershing may have presumed to speak for the deceased men of the AEF, some citizens saw him as using his prestige to sway public opinion and influence official policy. Pershing's statement drew the ire of at least one citizen, who wrote Secretary of War Newton Baker requesting that Pershing stay silent on the issue. "...For the following reasons: first, because [he] did not get close enough to the firing line to smell powder and know[s] nothing of real war; and second, because such cruel and brutal sentiments can only add to the grief and

³⁶ Letters to the Editor "Writers Disagree on Soldier Dead," *New York Times*, 17 April 1921.

³⁷ "Pershing Opposes Bringing Dead Back Home," *New York Times*, 1 August 1919.

³⁸ "Leave our Dead in France, Advises General Pershing," *New York Times*, 21 August 1919.

sorrow of the relatives of the dead.”³⁹ Such a harsh backlash against the man who led the United States forces in France during the war further underscores the division occurring within the country over the final disposition of the dead. The letter also highlights the fear that resided with some citizens that the United States may renege its promise to repatriate the dead as a result of the delayed agreement with the French government.

Pershing’s words persuaded his boss, Secretary of War Newton Baker, who indicated to one citizen that if the United States was not bound to returning the requested bodies, the federal government would opt to leave all of the dead in France.⁴⁰ In September, Baker was approached by a newspaper columnist who wanted to confirm a rumor that the government was no longer attempting to return any of the dead from France.⁴¹ Baker’s lengthy reply noted that while the War Department would repatriate the bodies that were desired by families, a growing number of families share the sentiments of Roosevelt and Pershing to leave the dead in France. Baker explained the reasons behind France’s reluctance to allow exhumations to commence: effect on French morale, sanitary and transportation issues. He closed his letter by stating that the United States Quartermaster Corps was currently concentrating the dead into centralized cemeteries that would eventually become fitting tributes to America’s sacrifice.⁴² Baker stated two months later that while the War Department recognized the rights of the next of kin to decide for themselves, it was sympathetic with any movement trying to retain the dead in France. “No more appropriate or more beautiful bond between the two Republics can be conceived, in my judgment, than for the American people to entrust the bodies of these young men to France, where they now lie and

³⁹ A. Corrigan, Letter to Newton Baker, 17 January 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁴⁰ Newton Baker, Letter to S. R. Bertron, 25 August 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁴¹ Edgar Forbes, Letter to Newton Baker, 24 September 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 27.

⁴² Newton Baker, Letter to Edgar Forbes, 27 September 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 27.

where their graves would become a shrine to be visited in the years to come by thousands upon thousands of our people.”⁴³

Some Americans denounced Baker’s tendency to favor leaving the dead in France. “You are also given credit for trying to induce parents to leave their dead son in France,” wrote one. Another citizen furiously wrote, “You, Mr. Baker, will be held to an accountability if the bodies are permitted to remain in France. The parents of the fallen heroes believe you are the person who has thus far been instrumental in permitting them to remain overseas.”⁴⁴ Baker made no apologies for his personal view. In a letter to a congressman, however, he acknowledged that he did not consider his duty complete until all of the requested remains were returned to the United States. At the same time, Baker wanted to be sure the congressman understood, “That there may be no uncertainty...I have the greatest sympathy and admiration for the attitude of those thousands of parents who have notified the War Department that they wish their loved ones to rest in the centralized plots which the nation will have abroad. I have no hesitancy in voicing this sentiment...”⁴⁵

Baker as an individual may have thought that the American dead should remain overseas, and as demonstrated above he occasionally allowed his personal feelings to creep into official correspondence. Nevertheless, in his capacity as Secretary of War, he dutifully pressed the Department of State for continuous updates, citing the volume of correspondence he received from relatives demanding a break to the stalemated negotiations. In October, Secretary of State Robert Lansing sent Baker a letter stating that his office was diligently keeping pressure on

⁴³ Newton Baker, Letter to William Bailey, 28 November 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

⁴⁴ H. F. Richards, Letter to Newton Baker, 9 December 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 26.

⁴⁵ Newton Baker, Letter to John Wilson, 13 January 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 27.

France and monitoring French legislative actions. Lansing also promised to keep the War Department abreast of any changes, but at the present time he had nothing significant to report.⁴⁶

Despite the difficulties presented to the Army by both the Bring Home the Soldier Dead League and the American Field of Honor Association, the Army did not shy away from corresponding with these societies. Colonel Pierce was particularly savvy at communicating with both organizations in such a manner that prevented undue criticisms of the government from being published in national newspapers. The League wrote Pierce and the War Department often in attempts to influence official policy. Pouch, the president of the League, wrote to the Secretary of War following Pouch's voyage to France to visit the grave of his son. Pouch noted that there were very few American visitors to the cemeteries that he visited. "It was gratifying, comforting and consoling to see practically all the American cemeteries in such good condition and well cared for," he said, "but if the parents are physically or financially unable to visit these cemeteries the work cannot be appreciated."⁴⁷

The members of the Bring Home the Soldier Dead League unanimously invited Pierce to attend their monthly meeting. Part of Pierce's invitation from the League remarked that by his presence, "there is no other method by which the parents all over the country could be reached and satisfied as to the avowed intention of the War Department that will be as comforting."⁴⁸

Author Lisa Budreau alleges that Pierce maintained an inappropriate relationship with the League by agreeing to appear at one of their meetings to speak and answer questions.⁴⁹ On the contrary, Pierce seemed to recognize that by freely liaising and building rapport with each of these groups' leadership, he could not only refute rumors before they spread, but also inject the

⁴⁶ Assistant Secretary of State, Letter to Newton Baker, 9 October 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁴⁷ A. B. Pouch, Letter to Newton Baker, 20 August 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 26.

⁴⁸ J. D. Foster, Letter to Charles Pierce, 28 August 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 26.

⁴⁹ Lisa Budreau, *Bodies of War* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 79.

Army and government's policies directly to each organization, thereby keeping gossip to a minimum.

The Field of Honor Association also tried to gain the attention of individuals with influence. Evidence suggests that some within the government and military privately and sometimes publically supported the retention of all of the war dead in France. In a letter to William Baily, chairman of the Association, Secretary of War Baker's third assistant secretary wrote, "in the absence of action by Congress there is nothing more that the War Department can do in the matter. Any movement which may be started toward retaining the bodies of our soldiers in France will be personally acceptable to Mr. Baker, and any appropriate steps which your organization may take in this movement will, I am sure, be agreeable to him."⁵⁰ The Field of Honor Association, like its adversary the Bring Home the Soldier Dead League, worked tirelessly to build public momentum toward its cause with hopes that its civic efforts would spur policy changes.⁵¹

The last civilian group formed after the war arguably possessed the greatest desire to see the dead be properly honored by the nation. This group consisted of the families, particularly the mothers, of the fallen. During the war, these mothers became known as "Gold Star Mothers" due to the gold star that adorned their window, signifying that their boy had been killed overseas. President Woodrow Wilson conceived the idea of a gold star rather than women wearing formal mourning attire, which could be detrimental to civilian morale.⁵² Additionally, many families patriotically hung red, white, and blue banners adorned with one or more blue stars to signify the

⁵⁰ F. P. Keppel, Letter to William Bailey, 1 April 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁵¹ William Bailey, Letter to F. P. Keppel, 14 May 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁵² Holly S. Fenelon, *That Knock at the Door: The History of the Gold Star Mothers in America* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, Inc., 2012), 29.

number of people in that house serving overseas. In the event a member of that family died overseas, a gold star covered that blue star.

Gold Star Mothers populated both sides of the social argument, with each mother having her own reasons to want her son buried overseas or in the United States. They banded together, usually without partisan motivations, to honor the war dead wherever possible. In 1928, a collection of Gold Star mothers formed the American Gold Star Mothers, Inc., in Washington, D.C., formally uniting mothers and wives across the country in their grief.⁵³ Despite not having a strong political lobby, most Americans looked upon the Gold Star mothers with great reverence over the loss they suffered. Ultimately, the War Department would dispose of the dead in accordance with their wishes over those of any other individual or group.

In addition to families of those killed and other interested citizens calling for the return of the Soldier Dead, another group of Americans was very concerned whether or not tens of thousands of bodies would be returning from overseas. Funeral directors across the United States understood that their services would be needed if the government decided to repatriate either some or all of the remains from France. The potential financial windfall from government contracts or fulfilling private funeral wishes of families was too great to ignore as undertakers across the country queried the Army to keep abreast of the ongoing negotiations with France. While funeral directors were not more vocal than the families of the dead, they certainly added a unique vote for repatriation, even if that opinion had economic rather than sentimental motivations.

As the rumor circulated amongst funeral directors that the government might start shipping the remains of the Soldier Dead back to the United States, many began to demand that

⁵³ Ibid., 62.

the Quartermaster Corps confirm this rumor. The sooner this was established, the sooner funeral directors could start advertising their services to the bereaved, and to the government. At least one undertaker recognized money could still be made on the overseas dead, and he wrote to the Quartermaster General proposing his patented concrete grave mound for use on the graves in all of the cemeteries overseas.⁵⁴ Another inquired into current regulations for the building of monuments within national cemeteries to memorialize the war dead.⁵⁵ Small funeral parlors queried the War Department directly to inquire whether or not special authorization was needed for a funeral home to oversee the remains of a returned soldier.⁵⁶

The service-based inquiries of the aforementioned funeral directors pales in comparison to others, however. A group of more devious undertakers formed the American Purple Cross, which became a lobby that represented some American funeral directors. The purpose of this lobby was to ensure that American undertakers would not be denied large potential profits by leaving all of the war dead in France.⁵⁷ Once established, the Purple Cross claimed that it received the official endorsement of the War Department, although no such recognition was ever made.⁵⁸ The lobby even volunteered to send embalmers to France with the (probably false) promise that every dead soldier would be returned in “a sanitary and recognizable condition a number of years after death.”⁵⁹ The National Funeral Directors’ Association refused to endorse the Purple Cross and wrote to the War Department expressing their dismay over the notoriety

⁵⁴ Memorandum for Files, “Concrete Mounds for Graves,” 11 June 1925, NA, RG 117, Box 181.

⁵⁵ Coggins Marble Company, Letter to the Office of the Quartermaster General, 21 September 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 24.

⁵⁶ The Quartermaster General, memorandum for the Adjutant General of the Army, “Organization of Graves Registration Units No. 302, 303, and 304”, 29 September 1917, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 40.

⁵⁷ Neil Hanson, *Unknown Soldiers: The Story of the Missing of the First World War* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 241.

⁵⁸ F. P. Keppel, Letter to Major Lemly, 28 May 1919. NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁵⁹ Piehler, *Remembering War*, 94.

that the Purple Cross brought to their profession.⁶⁰ For some, the fact that 80,000 American men died during the war was lost amid their lust for money.

The activities of the undertakers attempting to profit from mourning families was not without precedent. Like they would after the First World War, undertakers during the American Civil War attempted to aid bereaved families in recovering the body of their dead relative and delivering it back home for burial. While some operated with the best of intentions, the unscrupulous business practices of others drew the ire of the War Department. One Union officer wrote, “Scarcely a week passes that I do not receive complaints against one or another of these embalmers... [They] are regarded by the medical department of the army generally as an unmitigated nuisance... the whole system as practiced here is one of pretension, swindling, and extortion.”⁶¹ The embalmers contested that they had to charge high fees because they were risking their own lives to recover the dead. General Ulysses S. Grant eventually pulled all of the permits for the embalmers and ordered them to operate only behind the Army’s front lines.⁶²

There was enough suspicion of some undertakers’ activities after the First World War that the Senate convened a hearing regarding charges brought by a Gold Star mother against funeral directors of indecency. Remarked one Senator, “I don’t know if the charge is true, but it is in line with a number of circumstances that developed since the close of the war, showing there is some sort of an organization that is designed to derive profit from the plan of returning bodies.”⁶³ While there were, undoubtedly, some unscrupulous undertakers that tried to profit

⁶⁰ Chicago Undertakers’ Association, Letter to Newton Baker, 27 January 1920, and enclosed resolutions, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

⁶¹ Drew G. Faust, *Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 96-97.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 98.

⁶³ “Charges in Senate on Moving Our Dead,” *New York Times*, 14 January 1920.

from grieving families, many outside of the Purple Cross seemed professional in their pursuit of trying to provide a needed service for the country.

With no break to the diplomatic gridlock anticipated, anxious relatives of the dead sought alternative methods to try and bring their soldier back to the United States for burial. Parents wrote to the War Department imploring of its help in obtaining the body of their son.⁶⁴ One family even solicited the help of a French Army officer, who requested permission to exhume and escort the body of a soldier back to the United States on behalf of the deceased's family.⁶⁵ Colonel Pierce denied this and all other requests on the grounds that the GRS could not begin its operations in France until the United States arrived at a diplomatic solution with France over the American war dead.⁶⁶ One officer offered two reasons that such removals could not occur: "First that the French Government has not changed its regulations against the disinterment of these bodies and the second [is] that no appropriation has yet been made by Congress to cover the expenses incident thereto."⁶⁷

Organizations representing families of the dead also contacted the Quartermaster Corps in an attempt to glean answers as to when the repatriation of the dead would occur and if private funds could be used to transport remains back to the United States. Large organizations such as the Jewish Welfare Board down to local undertakers tried, but all received the same negative response.⁶⁸ The Quartermaster General concluded, "Nothing can be done individually to facilitate the matter. The final disposition of bodies will be considered and executed as an entire

⁶⁴ W. N. Haskell, Memorandum for the Graves Registration Service, 24 March 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁶⁵ E. Kuhlmann, Letter to the Commanding Officer, Graves Registration Office, Tours, 22 May 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁶⁶ Charles Pierce, Letter to Elmer Siple, 16 June 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁶⁷ J.I.B. Reiley, Memorandum for Mr. Koppel, 19 April 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁶⁸ George Cohen, Letter to H. L. Lemly, 29 May 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28; Callahan Brothers Undertakers, Letter to the Quartermaster General, 11 June 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 13.

project...”⁶⁹ To the average American, however, continued reports of diplomatic gridlock combined with frequent news articles blaming France for stymying American repatriation efforts only served to elevate a personal distaste for France.

To add additional fuel to Americans’ growing frustration, rumors circulated that remains were being brought back early. One man blasted the War Department for favoritism because he understood that the remains were in fact “the body of the son of a major general.”⁷⁰ The War Department confirmed that a body was removed from France. However, this was accomplished “not through the aid of but in spite of the War Department.”⁷¹ Secretary of War Baker acknowledged in late 1919 that this episode was one of two instances where individuals removed bodies from France without the knowledge or approval of the GRS.⁷² The other body was a Lieutenant Edward Hines of Chicago. There was evidence that French municipal authorities, aided by bribe, assisted in Hines’ exhumation and transportation back to the United States.⁷³

As Franco-American negotiations dithered throughout 1919, the United States focused its exhumation efforts on the other European countries that contained its war dead. Belgium had no objections to the United States exhuming bodies and allowed work to begin immediately.⁷⁴ Italy’s laws contained similar language to those of France, but the Italian government signaled its willingness to grant special consideration for the American war dead.⁷⁵ Britain outlined procedures for America to secure exhumation rights as well, although Britain later suspended

⁶⁹ H. L. Rogers, Letter to Callahan Brothers Undertakers, 14 June 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 13.

⁷⁰ H. F. Richards, Letter to Newton Baker, 16 December 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁷¹ Ralph Hayes, Letter to H. F. Richards, 4 December 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁷² “Soldier Dead Due Sunday,” *New York Times*, 8 November 1919.

⁷³ Charles Pierce, Memorandum for Mr. Durbin (Office of the Secretary of War), 20 April 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 26.

⁷⁴ E. de Cartier, Letter to C. Cordier, 28 February 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14.

⁷⁵ Italian Decree Permitting the Exhumation and Transportation of Bodies, 25 February 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14.

exhumations until the United States settled its dispute with France.⁷⁶ Additionally, the War Department finalized plans to exhume its dead from Germany as well as the bodies of men that died during the Russian expeditions.

In May 1919, the French reiterated that in lieu of a different agreement with the United States, the country would follow its 29 December 1915 decree, providing burial sites in France for Allied war dead.⁷⁷ The French also confirmed their adherence to their earlier announcement forbidding the exhumation of bodies for a period of three years. On 20 June 1919, France issued a provisional law that ceased the exhumation, transportation, and even the importation of bodies into France.⁷⁸ General Pershing cabled the State Department declaring that the French intimated a desire to amend the policy once the country's transportation restrictions were lifted. In the meantime, Pershing recommended that the United States ship the bodies from North Russia and Germany directly back to the United States, rather than temporarily burying them in France.⁷⁹ In July, France relented and allowed temporary burials near the port of embarkation used for the Russian dead while the GRS finalized shipping arrangements.⁸⁰

The Bring Home the Soldier Dead League blasted the continuous requests by France to delay repatriations. Pouch wrote of the disbelief members of his organization felt regarding the perceived French excuses.

The sons of America now buried over there died to save France; the same France of which so very recently it was thought no harsh feelings could ever arise among American people. Two suggestions were made by France to justify the delay of three years: economic conditions [and] sanitary conditions. The economic conditions were never apparent to Americans, whatever the term was intended to cover; but how can it be pretended that American mothers are interested in such matters, except, possibly

⁷⁶ Robert Lansing, Letter to Newton Baker, 28 July 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁷⁷ French Ministry of War, Letter to the American Attaché, 9 May 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14.

⁷⁸ Decree of the President of the Republic of France, 20 June 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 27.

⁷⁹ John Pershing, Cable to the War Department, 30 June 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁸⁰ John Pershing, Cable to the Chief of Staff, 8 July 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 3.

shipping, and at this time there are abundant ships for the purpose. The sanitary question seems idle indeed when we think of what was accomplished during the war.⁸¹

Pouch's diatribe again highlights the American ignorance towards the post-war priorities of France. Such statements could only be made by the citizens of a country that was not directly affected by the war.

On 9 November 1919, a ship bearing the bodies of 111 Americans who died in Russia docked at Hoboken, New Jersey.⁸² These were the first remains of World War I dead returned to the United States. Despite the progress the United States enjoyed exhuming bodies from European countries exclusive of France, its success was relatively insignificant without French support. Over ninety five percent of the World War dead were killed and subsequently buried in France.⁸³ Thus, the American public would not be satisfied until the transport ships began returning the dead from the temporary cemeteries in France.

The War Department issued its strongest plea on behalf of the people of the United States in late October 1919. This appeal contained both practical and sentimental statements in hopes of persuading France to grant an exception to its exhumation policy for the American dead. In the letter, the War Department listed five reasons why an exception ought to be considered. First, the distance from the United States to France meant that few relatives of the dead would be able to finance a trip to visit their soldier's grave. Second, the number of American dead to be returned was estimated to be no more than 40,000. Third, the location of the American dead was such that they could be transported to French ports with minimal traffic interference, decreasing the possible impact to civilian morale. Fourth, the United States already secured the return of

⁸¹ Bring Home the Soldier Dead League, Proclamation to Robert Lansing, 3 December 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 26.

⁸² "Soldier Dead Due Sunday," *New York Times*, 8 November 1919.

⁸³ Registration of Graves and Distribution of Bodies of Soldiers Who Died Overseas, 10 February 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

approximately 4,600 bodies from other countries. If France continued its repeated refusal to allow similar action, it may cause Americans to view France unfavorably. Finally, the War Department admitted that, based on the 1918 agreement, it promised the families of its dead that the dead would be returned if desired. In addition, the War Department had since ascertained the wishes of those wanting their soldier repatriated.⁸⁴ This statement is unprecedented on two accounts: first, it marks the first time that the War Department explained in detail why France should allow the United States to exhume its dead ahead of any other country. Second, the War Department admitted that part of the reason for the constant political pressure by the United States was the fact that the American people were previously promised a repatriation policy, and they were therefore anxious to see progress.

Baker's plea returned modest success. On 12 November 1919, the War Department issued a press release stating that the French government authorized the removal of American dead outside of the Zone of the Armies without delay.⁸⁵ The Zone of the Armies contained the battle front, and former Allied interior lines, where the majority of the Allied dead currently rested. While the number of dead in the area outside of this zone (called the Zone of the Interior) was small relative to those within the Zone of the Armies, the partial approval by France to allow exhumations signaled diplomatic progress for the United States. Paris reiterated its stance that the movement of thousands of caskets from the Zone of the Armies would place great strain on French transportation. Additionally, the French government expressed an unwillingness to allow the Americans to return their dead at a time when France could not do the same for its citizens.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Robert Lansing, Letter to the American Ambassador to France, 26 October 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁸⁵ War Department Press Release, 12 November 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28. See Appendix A: French Zone of the Armies and Zone of the Interior Designation (Newton Baker, Memorandum for the Secretary of the Navy, Subject: Return of Army Dead Buried in Europe, January, 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29).

⁸⁶ American Ambassador to France, Letter to the Secretary of State, 29 November 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

Inter-State Department messages acknowledged that if France did not expand its policy, it would have a negative social effect within the United States. “This is already being foreshadowed by the forming of societies, nation-wide in their scope, for the purposes of expediting the return of the American dead...” mentioned one such note.⁸⁷

France issued its formal proclamation authorizing exhumation outside of the Zone of the Armies on 10 December 1919. The decree noted that the exhumed bodies were to proceed only to assigned ports of embarkation. The announcement also reminded the Americans once again that France forbade any removals within the Zone of the Armies, and such prohibition would continue until the time specified by the parliament.⁸⁸ Meanwhile, Americans implored the War Department to continue pressing France by any means necessary. A December report estimated that the War Department received over 100,000 letters daily, and the Adjutant General over 87,000.⁸⁹ “But oh do what you can to bring back their remains to us,” pleaded one woman’s letter to the Adjutant General.⁹⁰

The year 1920 opened with an urgent message from a former AEF captain in Washington, D.C.’s *Sunday Star*. The captain’s article, taking over one half of a newspaper page, attempted to persuade the public to leave the dead in France. The author cited the fact that the return of so many dead would cause Americans to endure a terrible ordeal of national mourning during the endless parade of caskets.⁹¹ To such statements, the Bring Back the Soldier Dead League retorted to its membership, “do not be disheartened or discouraged by the

⁸⁷ Robert Lansing, Letter to the American Ambassador in France, 3 December 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁸⁸ French Minister of the Interior, Memorandum to the French Minister of War, Subject: Removal of Bodies of the Dead American Soldiers, 10 December 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁸⁹ H. F. Richards, Letter to Newton Baker, 9 December 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 26.

⁹⁰ Mrs. Jake Chase, Letter to P. C. Harris, 12 December 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁹¹ “Urges Relatives of Soldier Dead to Let Their Bodies Lie in France,” *Sunday Star*, 4 January 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14.

newspaper propaganda being printed in an effort to persuade you to change your intention to have the body of your loved one brought home. Pay no attention to it and do not be influenced by it...⁹²” The League did not suffer the opinions of those who were not the direct family of a dead soldier lightly. Calling such individuals “disinterested non-mourners,” the League felt that their sentiments did not, and should not, hold the weight afforded the mothers of the dead.⁹³

Nine days later, a forty-six-person delegation of men and women from eleven cities – all relatives of dead soldiers – met with the Secretary of War to press for a change to the current repatriation policy.⁹⁴ Accusations flew that France wanted to retain the bodies to make money from future American tourism to see the cemeteries. Others blamed the War Department for deliberately avoiding the subject because it was a difficult task.⁹⁵ The Bring Back the Soldier Dead League drafted additional resolutions regarding France, stating that “our confidence in their friendship and our belief that they will not approve any action that will cause unnecessary grief to thousands of their recent allies.”⁹⁶

The delegation’s visit with Secretary of War Baker did compel him to write the French Foreign Office a lengthy letter advocating for American permission to exhume and repatriate its dead. “But after fifteen months delay the American Government feels that the time has come when its own people on their side must receive the same measure of sympathetic consideration it has been its pleasure already to accord to the French Government and that it considers against the action of the French Government in refusing to permit removal of the American Dead as being

⁹² J. D. Foster, Statement to the Members of the Pittsburgh Branch, Bring Home the Soldier Dead League, 12 March 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 25.

⁹³ A. B. Pouch, Letter to Charles Pierce, 5 October 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 26.

⁹⁴ War Department Press Release: Statement of the Secretary of War on Return of Soldier Dead, 13 January 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 27.

⁹⁵ Newton Baker, Letter to G. H. Brent, 14 January 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁹⁶ Resolutions of the Bring Home the Soldier Dead League, 14 January 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

inconsistent with the terms of the agreement.”⁹⁷ The delivery of Baker’s message brought a surprising reaction from the Foreign Office. At the time, new leaders who did not know about the political impasse over the American dead had taken over certain ministries. Upon receiving Baker’s message, one of the new representatives at the Foreign Office stated his desire to permit the Americans to begin exhumation work, but if he did so his office would have to do the same for the French dead. Relatives of the latter were inundating his office with requests similar to those received by the War Department. This representative did appreciate the matter’s political importance and vowed to speak with the French Ministers of War and Public Health and insist that they give approval to the United States’ wishes. The American Ambassador to France, Hugh Wallace, who delivered the message wrote, “I consider that acquiescence in principle will be an important step gained in view of the unstable political situation here at the present moment.”⁹⁸

In another breakthrough, the French Foreign Office requested through Ambassador Wallace to create a Franco-American commission to “draw up at the earliest possible date a plan for the exhumation of remains of American dead and their transportation to the ports designated.”⁹⁹ Additionally, on 30 January 1920, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced its intention to immediately examine the American exhumation plan and ensure it conformed to French hygienic laws and regulations. While the French did not contest the importance of the 1918 Franco-American agreement, the proposed joint commission needed to build a plan to ensure that the American proposal was executed to the satisfaction of both sides.¹⁰⁰ The United States sent Colonel Henry Reuthers, chief of the GRS, and Colonel Bentley

⁹⁷ Newton Baker, Letter to the Secretary of State, 19 January 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁹⁸ American Ambassador to France, Letter to Robert Lansing, 24 January 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁹⁹ American Ambassador to France, Letter to Robert Lansing, 31 January 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

¹⁰⁰ French Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Letter to Hugh Wallace, 30 January 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

Mott, the American Military Attaché in Paris, to act as the American representatives to the joint commission.¹⁰¹ Secretary of War Baker wrote to a senator that the two officers, in addition to Ralph Hayes, will “represent me in a confidential and intimate way in working out all the details of this movement, so that we can be assured that every safeguard will be thrown around its accuracy and every tenderness and consideration accompany its execution.”¹⁰²

The commission hit an early bump when it was found that one of the French representatives was away in Switzerland, and the French did not desire to hold the meeting until his return.¹⁰³ Finally, on 20 March 1920, the International Commission of the Return of American Military Dead held its first meeting in Paris. The American delegates stated their case and what they expected of the French government. The obvious request was for permission to exhume the requested bodies from the Zone of the Armies. The United States delegation also explained the steps to be taken in order to conform to sanitary concerns, such as body wraps, disinfectants, use of metallic caskets and shipping cases. A French delegate expressed concern over whether the American remains could be sorted from those of other nationalities, to which the Americans replied that most AEF bodies were already identified. Transportation and sanitary issues were also addressed and concerns alleviated.

Colonel Reuthers stressed the need to satisfy public opinion. He noted that if even a few bodies from the old Zone of the Armies could be shipped back “this would go a long way towards appeasing the present feeling of disquietude and give extreme satisfaction to the government at Washington.”¹⁰⁴ The president of the commission stated that France would raise

¹⁰¹ Ralph Hayes, Memorandum for the Cable Section, General Staff, 13 February 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 25.

¹⁰² Newton Baker, Letter to Frank Kellogg, 20 February 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 25.

¹⁰³ American Attaché in Paris, Cable to the Adjutant General, 12 March 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

¹⁰⁴ Minutes of the First Meeting of the International Commission on the Return of the American Military Dead to the United States, 20 March 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 25.

no objection in principle to the removal of bodies from the Zone of the Armies. He added his wish for the American operations not to begin until October, the same month that the French government planned to begin exhuming its own dead. The joint commission adopted the following resolution for publication: “The Conference unanimously agreed in its first session to recommend to the French Government that the bodies of all the American dead, wherever buried in France... be eligible for return to the United States and this at such time as the regions where they lie are reached by the American Graves Registration Service in the course of its operations.”¹⁰⁵ The commission’s resolution was subsequently referred for ratification to the French Council of Ministers. Ambassador Wallace immediately telegraphed Secretary of State Lansing announcing the successful outcome of the Joint Commission’s session.¹⁰⁶

On 20 March 1920, the United States and France finally reached an agreement in principle to permit the repatriation of the American Soldier Dead. The *New York Times* reported a congressman as stating, “This practically ends the controversy between the United States and France over the return of our soldier dead.”¹⁰⁷ These comments again frame the French as relenting to United States pressure, more so than the logistical details – the particulars that France needed planned before the dead could be moved – being completed to the agreement of both countries. The political situation was still relatively fragile, and Secretary of War Baker noted to the Under Secretary of State the government’s lack of unity in the statements that it issued to the public, and the need for such statements to continuously come from a single source. He explained, “These differences in statement are never serious but the inflamed and delicate

¹⁰⁵ Minutes of the First Meeting of the International Commission on the Return of the American Military Dead to the United States, 20 March 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 25.

¹⁰⁶ Hugh Wallace, Cable to Robert Lansing, 20 March 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

¹⁰⁷ “May Return All War Dead,” *New York Times*, 24 March 1920.

state of feeling on the part of parents in this country magnifies them into misrepresentations on the part of the War Department or the State Department.”¹⁰⁸

On 28 June 1920, the War Department forwarded a letter from the French Foreign Office to the Secretary of State confirming that exhumation operations within the Zone of Armies in France could begin on 15 September 1920.¹⁰⁹ This did not mean the War Department’s work was complete, however. Its original policy was to repatriate all American remains unless relatives specifically requested that their soldier remain in France. In August, 1920, the War Department released a statement announcing a reversal of that plan. Now, only those bodies specifically requested by relatives to be returned to the United States would be repatriated. Additionally, the War Department warned that once operations at a certain cemetery were complete, no further requests for remains from that cemetery would be accepted.¹¹⁰ Families were welcome to request a different disposition than in previous correspondence. However, if the change was not received by the War Department in a timely manner, the original request would stand.

A former AEF artillery captain writing for the *New York Times* observed the operations at Pier 4 of Hoboken Harbor, New Jersey, where bodies from Europe were unloaded from ships before being distributed across the United States for burial. By the end of September, Hoboken processed a little over 6,000 bodies, mostly from countries outside of France. Another 43,000 bodies were estimated to soon arrive at the rate of 2,000 per week.¹¹¹ After two years of delay, the United States had finally secured France’s permission to repatriate its war dead. Americans thought the impasse was the result of French stonewalling, when in reality diplomatic troubles

¹⁰⁸ Newton Baker, Letter to Frank Polk, 23 March 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

¹⁰⁹ Ralph Hayes, Letter to the Secretary of State, 29 June 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 25.

¹¹⁰ “Warn Kin of War Dead,” *New York Times*, 24 August 1920.

¹¹¹ “The Soldier Dead Come Home,” *New York Times*, 3 October 1920.

began because the United States made promises to its people that were not supported by finalized agreements with France.

The repatriation of the American dead from France came to fruition through the actions of the Franco-American Commission. The Commission speedily completed what over a year of diplomatic letter exchange could not. The minutes of the 20 March 1920 meeting reveal that France was generally receptive to American needs so long as the Americans were willing to make concessions as well. The United States' willingness to assuage French concerns at the Commission was a trait not evident in its letters throughout 1919. Societal impact on the United States' diplomatic course with France cannot be denied. The formation of special interest groups, particularly the Bring Home the Soldier Dead League and the American Field of Honor Association, impacted the government to the point that officials cited these organizations when discussing growing public discourse in their correspondence to France. Given Secretary of War Baker's and General Pershing's personal feelings that the dead ought to remain buried together in France, it is possible that the United States may have kept the dead overseas if American citizens remained apathetic and did not demand that their government keep its promise to repatriate the bodies. Vocal people not only ensured that the government delivered on its original indenture to repatriate the dead, but also persuaded the War Department to modify its original policy and allow some bodies to remain overseas. The conclusion of the Franco-American negotiations over the final disposition of the war dead did not end the social influence on military procedures. Some of the special interest organizations that formed, notably the Bring Back the Soldier Dead League and the American Gold Star Mothers turned their efforts toward new projects involving the dead. As the GRS buried the remains staying in France, and returned and conducted funerals

for those soldiers whose family requested their bodies, societal forces continued to shape and check military policy.

CHAPTER 4

DO NOT DISTURB: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PERMANENT OVERSEAS MILITARY CEMETERIES

While the diplomatic process churned between the United States and France from late 1918 through March 1920, and American public frustration swelled, the Graves Registration Service (GRS) in France quietly executed its solemn obligation to the American war dead. The Quartermaster Corps, through the GRS, located, identified, buried, and registered the AEF's dead throughout Europe. The work of the GRS to consolidate the temporary American burial sites, select and construct permanent cemeteries in France, and segregate the remains selected for repatriation represents another unprecedented accomplishment of the United States to honor its war dead. Until the Korean War, following the example of the GRS, the United States continued to temporarily bury its dead near where they fell and constructed permanent cemeteries for its dead in many of those countries after hostilities ended.

Since the Spanish-American War, Army burial regulations called for soldiers who died in the service to be immediately returned to the United States at government expense for burial. In the event that prevailing conditions prevented an immediate shipment of the soldier's remains, the body would be temporarily buried until circumstances allowed repatriation to occur.¹ Colonel Pierce acted upon these regulations when he advised General Pershing that the remains of the AEF dead in France should not be shipped home until hostilities end due to the shortage of shipping space.² The Quartermaster Corps officially established the GRS on 7 August 1917 to oversee the burials of the AEF dead in Europe.³

¹ T.A. Baldwin, letter to Callahan Brothers Undertakers, 29 Jun 1916, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 13.

² Charles Pierce, Communication to the Chief Quartermaster, AEF, 8 December 1917, NA, RG 92, Entry 1894-B, Box 1.

³ H. R. Lemly, Memorandum for the Quartermaster General, 18 September 1917, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14.

When GRS units arrived in France, they queried the British regarding their methods of handling the battlefield dead. A British officer stressed many important points, notably the impracticality of embalming and of using caskets. Additionally, the officer recommended burying the dead at or close to the location where they died, and to take no unnecessary risks to retrieve a body for burial.⁴ The last point conflicted with GRS ideals, but by choosing to work so close to the front, GRS personnel were exposed to many of the harsh combat conditions as the men occupying the trenches. Beyond expectation, these men even braved enemy fire in pursuit of recovering remains. General John Pershing cited their heroism, writing,

I have heard with great pleasure of the excellent work and fine conduct of the members of the Advance Group #1, Graves Registration Service, who are mentioned herein. The work performed by these men under heavy shellfire and gas on April 20, 1918, and the days immediately succeeding at Mandres, and vicinity, is best described herein:

On April 20, Lieut. McCormick and his group arrived at Mandres and began their work under heavy shell-fire and gas, and although troops were in dug-outs, these men immediately went to the cemetery and in order to preserve records and locations, repaired and erected new crosses as fast as the old ones were blown down. They also completed an expansion of the cemetery, this work occupying a period of one and a half hours, during which time shells were falling continually and they were subject to mustard gas. They gathered many bodies which had first been in the hands of the Germans, and were later retaken by American counter-attacks. Identification was especially difficult, all papers and tags having been removed and most of the bodies being in terrible condition and past recognition. Command particularly mentioned Sergeant Keating and Private(s) Larue and Murphy as having been responsible for the most gruesome part of the work of identification, regardless of the danger attendant upon their work. This group of men was in charge of everything at Mandres from the time the bodies were brought in, until they were interred and marked with crosses and proper name plates were attached.⁵

General Orders Twenty Seven of the American Expeditionary Force dated 29 August 1917 contained the Graves Registration Service's operating instructions. Under the 29 December 1915 French decree, the GRS became responsible to acquire the necessary land for the

⁴ Michael Sledge, *Soldier Dead: How We Recover, Identify, Bury, and Honor Our Military Fallen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 183.

⁵ Office of the Quartermaster General (OQMG), *History of the American Graves Registration Service: QMG in Europe*, Volume 1 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920), 14-15.

temporary cemeteries, and to act as the intermediary between the United States and any French military or civil authorities during negotiations for land. The GRS was also responsible for maintaining the cemeteries, marking and preserving all of the graves. GRS personnel needed to submit monthly reports of all burial locations to the Chief Quartermaster. The order made clear, however, that field commanders were not relieved from their Civil War-era responsibility to properly bury their own dead whenever possible.⁶

AEF Bulletin Forty One spelled out the process of land acquisition for cemeteries. In what the AEF termed as ordinary acquisitions, the GRS had to pursue all of the requisite legal formalities France required in order to acquire a proper deed. This occurred when the land in question was far from the battle area. In cases where land for a cemetery was needed close to the battle front, military commanders (who were ultimately responsible for burying their dead), were instructed to use their best judgment for a suitable plot. The French requested that cemeteries not be within 100 meters of a dwelling, in a location where drainage could contaminate the water supply, not obstruct existing roadways, and be of the least fertile ground in the area. Colonel Pierce added that initial cemetery plots should be laid out in squares of 200 graves. In the event that the cemetery outgrew the initial dimension, additional squares of 200 graves could be added to meet demand.⁷

The order also called for heavy involvement by Army chaplains during burials. Chaplains were to take charge of burial parties, ensuring that interments took place in assigned cemeteries, that the graves met Quartermaster specifications, and that each cemetery maintained adequate provisions such as grave markers. Chaplains also maintained records of burials, and

⁶ General Orders Number 27, American Expeditionary Force dated 29 August 1917, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 40.

⁷ American Expeditionary Forces, General Headquarters Bulletin Number 41 dated 24 June 1918, NA, RG 92, Entry 1894-B, Box 1.

they were ordered to periodically reconcile their reports with those of the field units to ensure accuracy. Most importantly, Army chaplains needed to refer all inquiries about graves or the cemeteries to the Quartermaster General. The last point ensured all correspondence received equal attention.⁸ All of this was in addition to a chaplain's regular duty of seeing to the spiritual needs of the living.

Jewish Chaplains were not present in large numbers within the AEF. In fact, only twelve rabbis served in the AEF, compared to approximately 50,000 Jewish soldiers serving overseas. This created problems when a Jewish soldier died and no rabbi was present to conduct services. One soldier related how some of his friends held a makeshift memorial service for the soldier. "Two of the boys said Kadish," wrote the soldier to his congressman, "and I can truthfully admit that I saw more than one tear in that crowd."⁹ The Army would be challenged twice more to properly recognize the sacrifices of men outside of the Christian faith.

The senior chaplain in the AEF was responsible for the addition of a religious preference to soldier's identification tags. He wrote, "Experience has taught us that the burial of the dead would be greatly facilitated if the identification tags were stamped with the letter "P", "C", or "H", indicating that the wearer is a Protestant, Catholic, or Hebrew."¹⁰ Colonel Pierce had first recommended the identification tag in 1899 when he worked in the Philippines, and by 1913 it was mandatory issue throughout the Army.¹¹ All soldiers were required to wear at least two identification tags at all times. In the event of death, one tag was to remain on the body, while the other initially was sent with the burial report to GRS headquarters. The Quartermaster Corps

⁸ General Orders Number 27, American Expeditionary Force dated 29 August 1917, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 40.

⁹ Samuel Rudak, Letter to Nathan Barnert, 23 May 1918, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 20.

¹⁰ Lisa Budreau, *Bodies of War* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 120.

¹¹ Richard Wooley, "A Short History of Identification Tags," *Quartermaster Professional Bulletin* (December 1988).

later revised the regulations and ordered the second tag be fastened to the burial peg or stake.¹² The identification tags of the First World War were made of aluminum, and the GRS reported that some of the tags buried with direct contact to remains were later found unreadable due to a chemical reaction. This compelled the GRS to instruct that the tag buried with the body be worn outside of a shirt, if possible.¹³

The identification tag's importance for identification purposes was not lost on a member of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) working with the AEF near Chateau Thierry. He wrote the War Department about how he and some soldiers happened upon a group of remains in some woods on Hill 204 that were missed by the GRS team. He and these soldiers buried the bodies using a machine gun as a grave marker and affixing the identification tags of the interred remains to the gun. The YMCA representative mailed the second tags to the War Department upon his arrival to the United States.¹⁴ The War Department took possession of the tags, and reminded the YMCA employee that under GRS regulations, he should have left one tag on the body, and used the other as part of the grave marker.¹⁵ Despite the ad hoc burial method, the remains of the five soldiers were located, identified, and returned to the United States. The Germans on at least one occasion sent the dog tags of American soldiers buried in their sector. In a letter accompanying one message, the Germans noted the date of burial, place, and that some bodies lay in single graves while others in collective graves. The Germans closed by lamenting their inability to enclose a sketch of the grave locations "due to the tactical

¹² J. A. Logan, Letter to AEF division commanders, 13 January 1918, NA, RG 92, Entry 1894-B, Box 1; Revision: 9751

¹³ American Expeditionary Force Graves Registration Service Bulletin Number Eight dated 5 August 1918, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941 Box 3.

¹⁴ Deacon Hoagland, Letter to the U.S. Army Department of Records, 11 September 1918, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14.

¹⁵ R. R. Wood, Letter to Deacon Hoagland, 27 December 1918, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14.

situation.”¹⁶ Thanks to the German diligence in notifying American authorities about the graves, only one of the eleven bodies was not found or identified.

As noted, the GRS’s job was not to perform burials. Rather, the service was responsible to find graves, register their location, and ensure they were properly marked and maintained.¹⁷ This allowed the GRS to expend its organizational energy planning future cemetery locations, ensure the existing cemeteries maintained adequate supplies, and meeting with their French and British counterparts to acquire lessons of success and failure. The last part was particularly important for the Americans. As a GRS info sheet noted, “Everybody in the AEF is busily engaged in learning how to perform the functions of his office and none of us must be too proud to list ourselves among the learners. We are all working in a great cause and the particular mission of this Service is one which appeals very largely to the hearts of people at home.”¹⁸ The GRS understood its role in the unprecedented undertaking it was assigned, as well as its importance to both the soldiers and their families back in the United States.

Military unit commanders were responsible for burying their dead, an obligation held since the Civil War. Like in the Civil War, battlefield conditions often made this order difficult to execute. After the AEF’s first major battle at Cantigny, some American soldiers of the 1st Infantry Division did bury their dead, but it was for reasons other than honor. “All of the soldiers that were killed at Cantigny were rolled in the nearest shell hole and covered up to keep down the odor from their bodies.” Later there was an order issued by the War Department

¹⁶ German Regiment 111, Transmission of 17 Dog Tags, 20 October 1918, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 39.

¹⁷ Sample GRS Welcome Letter to France, 2 March 1918, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941 Box 40.

¹⁸ Ibid.

against this, and they were left where they fell.”¹⁹ Another soldier in the 1st Division noted that “we... marked their graves with a bayonet often bearing their dog tags.”²⁰

Additionally, the new technology of war such as high velocity artillery and machine guns wreaked havoc on the human body. As the men of the 1st Infantry Division saw the aftermath of modern warfare, one man recalled seeing, “a number of bodies there were in such condition as to make it impossible to identify them. We buried bodies in a shell hole, say one night, and the next night we would bury another bunch in the same hole. There are shell holes near Cantigny that I know had four layers of bodies buried in them and no markers were put up to show who or how many were buried there.”²¹ These situations, multiplied scores of times over throughout the AEF’s sector, begin to describe the challenge awaiting the GRS at the conclusion of the war. By February 1919, the Army Chief of Staff held records of 72,951 dead, and 7,738 missing; the GRS staff knew the locations of approximately 40,000 graves.²²

Since the GRS followed the AEF’s line of advance, temporary cemeteries roughly charted the Allied advance in France. The GRS left at least one man at each temporary cemetery to act as a caretaker for the graves. In addition to the simple maintenance of the cemetery, the caretaker ensured that the grave markers remained readable as the effects of weather and time occurred.²³ These men acquitted their duty meticulously, as one GRS private reported to his headquarters that the cemetery wall built by the Army engineers was incorrectly aligned. The private’s commanding officer wrote the engineers about the problem, asking how they planned to rectify the error.²⁴ Colonel Pierce noted the importance of maintaining the temporary cemeteries

¹⁹ James C. Nelson, *The Remains of Company D* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2009), 120.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 120.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 131.

²² William Scully, Memorandum for Mr. Ruddock, Subject: Disinterment of the Remains of American Soldiers in France, 17 February 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14.

²³ Charles Pierce, Press Guidance Re: “Forgotten Graves” article, NA, RG 92, Entry 1894-B, Box 1.

²⁴ S. R. Dishman, Letter to Camp Engineer, APO 711, 3 July 1918, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

in proving the United States' commitment to its war dead by stating "It is necessary that every American grave in the A.E.F. be put in the best possible condition, so that those who come to view them in the future will find no cause for criticism."²⁵

The individual burials of soldiers required meticulous attention to detail, especially with regard to identification and properly marking the grave to preserve that identification. Before temporary wood crosses were erected, small pegs with labels containing identifying information marked the graves. Regulations required that hard, black lead pencils be used to write on the peg's label to prevent the lead from washing off. Further, the peg should be driven into the ground at a forty five degree angle, with the label underneath to further protect the writing from the elements.²⁶ By late 1920, The Quartermaster General promised disciplinary action and relief from service for any officer who did not follow prescribed regulations regarding the exhumation, and identification of the dead or taking the appropriate measures to preserve identification during transport.²⁷

After a soldier was buried, copies of a form entitled "Burial in Permanent Cemeteries," containing all of the necessary data about the interred soldier was sent to GRS headquarters for future reference. Information included name and place of cemetery, disposition of identification tags, name, rank, and unit of the deceased, a description of the grave marker, and the location of the dead's personal effects. The form ordered a special annotation for Jewish dead.²⁸ These forms were collected not only to account for the dead, but also referenced as the GRS exhumed the dead in preparation to consolidate the temporary cemeteries.

²⁵ Charles Pierce, Letter to Commanding Officer, Garden Service, Selles-sur-Cher, NA, RG 92, Entry 1894-B, Box 1.

²⁶ Graves Registration Service Bulletin number 8, 5 August 1918, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 3.

²⁷ General Orders Number 36, HQ, American Graves Registration Service, QMC in Europe, 16 September 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

²⁸ See Appendix B: Example Burial Reports (NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14).

There were two types of headstones within the overseas military cemeteries: the cross and the Star of David. The default marking was originally the cross, until a successful lobbying effort by Jewish soldiers and the Jewish Welfare Board brought about a policy change. In May 1918, a Jewish soldier, Private Samuel Rudak, wrote to his congressman to express his dismay over an absence of rabbis compared to the multitude of Christian chaplains. While the purpose of his letter was to address the lack of rabbis to serve the spiritual needs of Jewish soldier, Rudak also mentioned visiting a cemetery where “there were our Jewish boys, the sons of Moses and Jacob with a cross at the head of their graves.”²⁹ The Jewish Welfare Board forwarded a request to the Army requesting a plain board or something similar be used as a marker in lieu of a cross.

The Assistant Secretary of War found a British solution to the problem at hand. The British “Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries” from 1917 called for Jewish graves to be marked with a double triangle. The Quartermaster Corps recommended the AEF follow the British practice. Rudak wrote his letter on 23 May, and by the end of July General Pershing issued orders to substitute a different marker for any crosses over Jewish graves.³⁰ Another cablegram specified that the marker be a plain board, or double triangles on a stake (representing the Star of David).³¹ Due to the lobbying of the Jewish Welfare Board, Jews became the only religion represented by a specific headstone within the overseas cemeteries (Protestants and Catholics alike were represented by the Cross). The successful effort to ensure proper recognition for the dead of the Jewish faith was another lesson that would be remembered in future commemoration efforts.

²⁹ Samuel Rudak, Letter to Hon. Nathan Barnert, 23 May 1918, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 20.

³⁰ John J. Pershing, Cablegram to the Adjutant General, 14 August 1918, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 20.

³¹ Lt. Riley, “Extract from Adjutant General Cablegram No. 1734”, 18 July 1918, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 20.

An additional aspect of the grave markers for the First World War dead that departed from previous conflicts was their size. The government headstones used in the United States as well as in the future cemeteries in France were planned to be of uniform size for both officers and enlisted men. Whereas before, a man's rank could afford him a larger, more ornate gravestone or even an individual memorial, the government now took steps to ensure that each man's sacrifice was held with equal reverence. "Any other course would savor of discrimination," wrote the Quartermaster General.³²

Retaining permanent cemeteries in France was not part of the American government's pre-war plan. As stated, the original intention of the United States was to repatriate all of its war dead following the end of hostilities. As the public fight over the dead's disposition swelled, some families followed President Theodore Roosevelt's sentiment to leave their dead relative in France. The de facto result was the need for a place to bury these dead. As one Quartermaster officer wrote to the Adjutant General in May of 1919, "It is expected that some of the American cemeteries in France will be made permanent, because many requests have been made not to return the bodies of our deceased interred there..."³³

Decoration Day, 30 May 1919, was the first major holiday celebrated by the United States after the end of the First World War. Newspapers in America and Europe hailed the ceremonies' homage to the war dead. One English newspaper noted the "token of love on every American soldier's grave," while another wrote how the living "celebrated [the dead's] memory with prayerful lips and sacrificial flowers."³⁴ The *Brooklyn Standard Union's* piece, entitled "Government Has Not Neglected Soldier Dead," not only told the story of Decoration Day

³²H. L. Rogers, Letter to Montague Castle-London Company, 3 May 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 24.

³³H. R. Lemly, Letter to the Adjutant General, 16 May 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14.

³⁴"Rest in Peace," *Southampton Times*, 31 May 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14.

activities but also tried “to make the public appreciate the excellent work... [the] men of the Graves Registration Services have done...”³⁵ The article itself detailed the history of the GRS, and attempted to portray the difficulty of the task facing the organization to locate, identify, bury, and honor each fallen soldier. Additionally, the piece detailed the agony experienced by relatives of the dead in their search for information surrounding their relative’s death, and promised the work of the GRS would ultimately ease their suffering.³⁶

President Wilson delivered the keynote address at the commemoration ceremonies at Suresnes Temporary Military Cemetery on 30 May 1919. With the French refusal to release the remains of the dead for reburial or repatriation, there were undoubtedly questions as to how Wilson would navigate the lingering diplomatic tensions as well as the socio-political discourse within the United States regarding whether or not the remains of the dead were better off in France or the United States. Remarking at the condition of the cemetery, Wilson noted, “We know that these men are not buried in alien soil... the mothers at home should know that there were mothers here who remembered and honored their dead.”³⁷ Beyond that statement, Wilson’s remarks navigated the swirling controversies regarding the dead at home or abroad by simply concentrating on the day’s intent to pay homage to the fallen.

By July 1919, the GRS reported the status of its initial concentration work in Europe. In France there were 230 military cemeteries containing 47,236 graves. An additional 6,779 graves lay in 558 local French cemeteries. Italy held 76 graves in 12 cemeteries, while 403 dead were interred in two cemeteries in Belgium. Great Britain held 93 cemeteries with a total of 2,073

³⁵ R. K. Weller, Letter to H. R. Lemly, 1 June 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 10.

³⁶ “Government Has Not Neglected Soldier Dead,” *Brooklyn Standard*, 1 June 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 10.

³⁷ Woodrow Wilson, *Text of Address Delivered at the Memorial Exercises Held at Suresnes Cemetery Near Paris, France, on May 30, 1919* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1919), 2.

dead. Luxembourg contained 8 cemeteries containing a total of 110 dead, and the GRS registered 1,053 graves in Germany across 31 cemeteries. Finally, 189 dead lay in Russia; 94 in the cemetery at Archangel and the rest along the line of communication anywhere from 90-200 miles from Archangel. While the diplomatic gridlock between the United States and France prevented the GRS from completing the majority of the concentration work in France, it was allowed to remove bodies from Russia, Luxembourg, and Germany and bury them in France while the bodies awaited final disposition.³⁸

The GRS did receive its share of criticism. A letter to the editor of the *New York Tribune* by the mother of a dead soldier entitled “Forgotten Graves” provided ghastly descriptions of two American cemeteries in France. In addition to the woman not finding the wreath she ordered for her son’s grave, she saw misspelled grave markers and generally untidy cemetery grounds, and she left the cemeteries with the feeling that the United States was neglecting its war dead.³⁹ The article prompted one government official, also the parent of a dead soldier in France, to write to the Adjutant General, “I am sure I speak with the voice of the American Nation in demanding that those charged with the duty of properly guarding and caring for these graves, even temporarily, execute that trust fully and efficiently, in spite of difficulties, as among the first and highest duties, not only to these poor remains, but to the relatives of these men, to the American Nation, and to the French People...”⁴⁰ Her editorial was syndicated in other publications such as the *Literary Digest*, with the potential to quickly and overwhelmingly turn public opinion against the work of the GRS in France.⁴¹

³⁸ John Pershing, Letter to the Adjutant General, 10 July 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 3.

³⁹ “Forgotten Graves,” *New York Tribune*, 19 September 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1894-B, Box 1.

⁴⁰ James H. Scarr, Letter to the Adjutant General, 19 September 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1894-B, Box 1.

⁴¹ “Neglected Graves in France,” *Literary Digest* 18 October 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 27.

The Quartermaster General responded with a series of letters to the Adjutant General. He admitted that the criticism regarding incorrect grave marker inscriptions was accurate, but he noted that correcting inscriptions was a continual process. In fact, older permanent headstones from Civil War and Spanish American War veterans were still being modified as additional information came to light.⁴² With regards to the disheveled appearance of the cemeteries visited, the Quartermaster Corps noted that the cemeteries were recently completed during a very dry season, and as a result the grass and flowers planted had not grown and the ground had not yet settled.⁴³ The War Department followed with a press release addressing the criticisms brought forth in the *New York Tribune* article, clarifying some of its existing policies and explaining how it would fix the identified shortcomings.⁴⁴ The candor displayed by the War Department seemed to assuage any discontent brought on by the negative press.

The GRS's preparation for the simultaneous concentration and repatriation operations should not be underestimated. The men of the GRS understood the importance of their work not only to commemorate the AEF's dead, but also their responsibility to the people of the United States. Accordingly, the GRS went to great lengths to acquire and preserve identification, and ensure the utmost care was given when bodies were transported. The GRS even went so far as to send the identifying information for each coffin in triplicate, via three different transportation methods to its destination in order to prevent loss. GRS administrators also, whenever possible, handpicked the largest men to move the caskets to prevent mishandling. A Quartermaster Corps major pointed out that "the smallest mistakes would be greatly exaggerated in newspapers and in the minds of the people of the United States. The Army and the Quartermaster Corps in

⁴² H. L. Rogers, Letter to Fred Feigl, 26 September 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1894-B, Box 1.

⁴³ Connor, Letter to the Adjutant General, 3 October 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1894-B, Box 1.

⁴⁴ War Department Press Release, 9 October 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1894-B, Box 1.

particular will be rightly criticized.”⁴⁵ To handle any religious matters, this same major recommended creating a board of advisors to instruct Quartermaster personnel as to the appropriate religious customs depending on the soldier’s denomination. The board would comprise of a Catholic priest, a Jewish rabbi, and a Protestant minister.⁴⁶

Despite the GRS’s preparations, it still faced much adversity in executing its duties to the high standards owed to their dead comrades. Some of the difficulties arose as the result of poor burial practices by AEF field units. The weekly reports of one Quartermaster lieutenant from November, 1919 highlights some of these situations encountered by GRS units.

Week of 21 November: Considerable trouble has been experienced... on the account of the burial officers of the 81st Division making interments according to their own ideas. I...explained the correct method of making plots, etc. but they refused to comply... I also noticed that one of the burial officers had a handful of identification tags and the only record of the grave on which they belonged was a pencil copy on a piece of scratch paper. I explained the necessity of placing the tag and some mark at the head of each grave, but was informed that they were doing the burying not me.⁴⁷

This poor lieutenant encountered many more troubles that week, including the need to disinter nine graves on the account of the burial detail not placing identification on the graves.⁴⁸ In another area, his work party had to spend considerable time reorganizing approximately 175 graves where the bodies were buried in shell holes or trenches with as little as twelve inches of dirt covering them.⁴⁹ Elsewhere, he found unevenly spaced graves, some “two feet apart while others do not have enough space to erect crosses.”⁵⁰ Given that all of these instances occurred in one week, it is easy to imagine the arduous task that the GRS units endeavored to complete across Europe.

⁴⁵ M. J. Henry, Memorandum for the Chief Quartermaster, 19 August 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁴⁶ M. J. Henry, Memorandum for the Chief Quartermaster, 19 August 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁴⁷ C. J. Lennox, Extract of Report to 1st Army GRS Officer, 22 November 1918, NA RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14.

⁴⁸ C. J. Lennox, Extract of Report to 1st Army GRS Officer, 22 November 1918, NA RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14.

⁴⁹ C. J. Lennox, Extract of Report to 1st Army GRS Officer, 22 November 1918, NA RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14.

⁵⁰ C. J. Lennox, Extract of Report to 1st Army GRS Officer, 22 November 1918, NA RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14.

An example of difficult circumstances for the GRS caused by combat was found in the Forest of Parroi. In March 1918, a German aero bomb scored a direct hit on an AEF dugout approximately sixty feet underground, killing a total of thirty one Americans. The unit recovered fifteen bodies, but could not reach the remainder. On 5 November 1919, the GRS began excavating the site to recover the remaining fifteen bodies. After ten hours of digging, the GRS located the original entrances to the dugout. Due to constant flooding, and repeated cave-ins, another three weeks elapsed before the main chamber was uncovered and the remains located. Fortunately, the GRS located and positively identified each set of remains.⁵¹

Following France's allowance to remove bodies outside the Zone of the Armies on 12 November 1919, the Adjutant General corresponded with the Quartermaster General to plan exhumation and repatriation operations within the Zone of the Interior. The Adjutant General recommended that when the GRS removed the bodies from a temporary cemetery to return them to the United States, the service would also disinter the bodies that would remain in France and transport them to the designated permanent cemeteries. These concurrent actions would prevent the GRS from having to survey the same cemetery more than once, and thus it would accelerate concentration efforts. If this procedure was to be adapted, permanent cemetery sites needed to be designated and a decision was also needed as to the disposition of the Soldier Dead currently interred outside of France.⁵² By this point, the GRS registered 73,591 graves of the 80,322 deaths held in the War Department records.⁵³

The Quartermaster General responded that the Adjutant General's single sweep recommendation for the temporary cemeteries was vital to evacuating the cemeteries in an

⁵¹ Charles B. Keating, Letter to Commanding Officer, GRS, 12 January 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁵² The Adjutant General, Memorandum for the Quartermaster General, Subject: Return of Bodies of Deceased Soldiers from France, 26 November 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 27.

⁵³ "80,322 American Dead in Europe," Unknown Newspaper Clipping, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14.

orderly yet expeditious manner. With regard to the permanent cemeteries locations, the Quartermaster General asked if the intent was to place the cemeteries near the old battle sites – some quite inaccessible – or closer to Paris in a newly constructed cemetery. If the former plan was preferred, Suresnes Cemetery near Paris should be retained. Finally, the Quartermaster General opined that, for simplicity, all bodies interred in any country exclusive of France should be returned to the United States.⁵⁴

Given the vocal nature of American civilians concerning the ultimate disposition of the Soldier Dead, the War Department understood that once the cemetery exhumations began, the department would again be inundated with letters seeking information. Thus, the department queried the Quartermaster General about where exhumations would begin, and the order in which other cemeteries would follow. Secretary of War Newton Baker wanted this schedule in anticipation of receiving “many requests for the preferred treatment of one body over another and I wish to be in a position to state the general schemes of the Graves Registration Service with respect to the orderly evacuation of our dead from France and to ensure the petitioners that in the absence of circumstances now wholly unforeseen, variations will not be sanctioned by the War Department.”⁵⁵ As with the grave markers, no preferential treatment would be given any of the dead regardless of their social status or military rank, or their location; all of the dead were equally important in the eyes of the War Department.

The Franco-American Joint Commission’s 20 March 1920 meeting and subsequent diplomatic agreement deeply affected GRS operations in France. First and foremost, the GRS could perform exhumation, identification, and burial duties anywhere in France beginning after 15 September 1920. Second, it received instructions, through diplomatic arrangement, as to

⁵⁴ H. L. Rogers, Letter to the Adjutant General, 8 December 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 27.

⁵⁵ Newton Baker, Memorandum for the Quartermaster General, 3 February 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

which bodies it needed to prepare for repatriation to the United States, and which bodies would remain in France. Only those remains demanded by next of kin would be returned to America. Bodies that were requested to stay in France would do so, along with any remains for which a request was not received by the War Department and those bodies that could not be identified.⁵⁶

Additional French concerns regarding hygiene during exhumations arose during the Joint Commission. The GRS addressed four primary concerns during exhumation and concentration activities: establishment and preservation of identity; hygiene; safe transportation of remains; and respectful treatment of the dead.⁵⁷ The American delegation to the Joint Commission provided the GRS's exhumation procedures for soldiers being repatriated to the United States that also detailed the sanitary safeguards in place during such work. This submission greatly aided America's diplomatic agreement with France.

The GPS procedures were usually the same for each grave. After assembling the appropriate tools and labor, GRS workers closed the work area with canvas screens and posted guards to prevent illicit entry. No unauthorized persons were allowed near the cemeteries during times when graves were being exhumed, and worksites were enclosed by privacy tents whenever possible.⁵⁸ To prevent potential confusion, each exhumation team could only have one body out on the ground, except in cases where identity could not be established.⁵⁹ Officers and soldiers who worked these details were cautioned against making any statements outside of official channels.⁶⁰ Above all, the utmost attention to detail needed to be exercised. Any mistake such

⁵⁶ The American Commission, Letter to Monsieur Maginot, 25 March 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 25.

⁵⁷ Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 193.

⁵⁸ Office of the Quartermaster General, *History of the American Graves Registration Service: QMC in Europe*, Volume 3 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922), 32.

⁵⁹ H. F. Rethers, Letter to the Quartermaster General, 18 September 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

⁶⁰ Office of the Quartermaster General, *History of the American Graves Registration Service: QMC in Europe*, Volume 2 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1921), 26.

as a misidentification, or should the wrong personal effects much less the wrong body be delivered to next of kin, could significantly discredit the GRS's efforts.

Workers laid earth-covered canvas on the ground next to the exhumation site and then dug to within six inches of the body. The next steps of treating the body were completed with the goal of exposing the body to air for as little time as necessary. Once the coffin was exhumed, the body was removed and placed on the canvas, where it was saturated with disinfectant and deodorant before being wrapped in a blanket. The remains were then placed in a metal casket, encased in pillows to prevent movement, covered with a white sheet, and the casket sealed before being placed in a wooden shipping case. The entire process took less than five minutes. When gravesites were exhumed, GRS regulations specifically stated that an officer had to be present. If the casket was broken or collapsed, that officer would stay with that particular set of remains until identity was confirmed or established.⁶¹ Once identity was established, the remains were placed in metallic caskets so to be in compliance with the hygienic procedures approved by the French government. Since no satisfactory metal caskets were available in Europe or England, they were shipped from the United States.⁶²

The exhumed coffin, temporary cross, and any other miscellaneous pieces of clothing or other items from the gravesite were destroyed by fire and lime was sifted into the former grave.⁶³ Through this process, over two thousand temporary cemetery sites were returned to France for private use. The above sequence worked well for individual plots, or in small cemeteries. However, the GRS found that in larger cemeteries, where multiple exhumations were occurring simultaneously, teams could not casket the remains next to the gravesites due to the many

⁶¹ OQMG, *QMC in Europe*, Vol. 1, 139.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 143.

⁶³ Minutes of the Franco-American Commission, 1 April 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 25.

mounds of dirt from grave excavations. The GRS set up its screens in open fields close by to perform the exhumation work. The temporary grave marker accompanied the coffin in order to prevent any confusion as to the identification of the body. In the event that exhumed, casketed remains needed to be left in the cemetery overnight, GRS guards protected the caskets from the elements and any potential thieves.⁶⁴

The Army selected permanent overseas cemeteries from the 2,342 temporary sites established during the war.⁶⁵ The general idea was for the permanent cemeteries to roughly follow the trek of the American Expeditionary Force across France. The Quartermaster Corps studied its existing temporary cemeteries, their current capacity, and projected capacity if expansions were possible. Since the War Department did not yet have the disposition wishes of all next of kin, the Quartermaster Corps estimated that 40% of all dead would remain in France for planning purposes.⁶⁶ An early 1920 Quartermaster Corps bulletin to the families of the dead stated that cemeteries in Suresnes, Argonne, and Belleau Wood had been selected to be permanent, and that more may be designated if the need existed.⁶⁷ This same bulletin also noted that the GRS would not establish permanent cemeteries in Luxembourg, North Russia, or Germany.⁶⁸ The announcements in the document about selecting permanent cemeteries as well as the open-ended possibility of others being selected became the catalyst for an unexpected conflict within the military over the memorialization of its dead.

Major General John F. O’Ryan commanded the 27th Infantry Division during the war. Upon seeing the 1920 Quartermaster bulletin that alluded to the possible establishment of

⁶⁴ H. F. Rethers, Letter to the Adjutant General, 18 September 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

⁶⁵ H. R. Lemly, Letter to the Adjutant General, 16 May 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14. This figure from archival documents is 500 more than claimed in Michael Sledge’s *Soldier Dead* (page 193).

⁶⁶ H. F. Rethers, Memorandum for Ralph Hayes, 8 March 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14.

⁶⁷ Charles Pierce, Cemeterial Division Bulletin No. 10-F-W, (Washington: GPO, 1920), 4. NA, RG 92,

⁶⁸ Ibid.

additional permanent cemeteries, O’Ryan seized upon an opportunity to memorialize the men of his division. O’Ryan began a writing campaign to the War Department and Quartermaster Corps in April, 1920 to lobby for the cemetery at Bony, which held the remains of many men from his division, to be included as a permanent cemetery. Trying to appeal to the sentiment of some in the War Department that believed the dead should lie together, O’Ryan noted that there were many families who may opt to leave their soldier in France if they could be buried with their friends, stating “The point in this whole problem is largely sentimental and if the sentiment of the families are met in relation to some features of the problem a large percentage of the families will accept the point of view of our officers and men which is... in favor of leaving the bodies in Europe.”⁶⁹

O’Ryan’s letter was well-received by the War Department, but the department did not necessarily agree with O’Ryan that Bony’s significance was commensurate with that of other areas in the vicinity such as Belleau Wood, Soissons, or Chateau Thierry. Beyond that, the decisions from the families of the dead were still being received at the War Department, and the question was raised if there would be enough bodies left in France to warrant more than one American cemetery. The final opinion was that the promise of burying the dead from the same outfit together would not significantly alter the number of dead that would remain in France.⁷⁰

Undeterred, O’Ryan wrote to the Quartermaster Corps after his return from visiting the American cemeteries in France in August 1920. He lavishly praised the beauty of all of the cemeteries and the efforts of the Quartermaster Corps to maintain them. Naturally, O’Ryan mentioned that he was most impressed with the cemetery at Bony and thought it occupied a

⁶⁹ John F. O’Ryan, Letter to General March, 8 April 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁷⁰ H. L. Rogers, Memorandum for the Assistant Chief of Staff, “Removal of Dead (Bony Cemetery)”, 17 April 1920, NA, RG 92.

picturesque scene worthy of being a permanent cemetery.⁷¹ O’Ryan then wrote to the Army Chief of Staff; in this letter, he specifically recalled the family of a soldier who died under his command. They wanted to bury their boy at Bony, but since it was not an option they were going to repatriate his remains. O’Ryan reiterated that there were many other families with similar sentiments and renewed his push to establish Bony as a permanent cemetery.⁷² He expressed this same sentiment in another letter to the Quartermaster Corps, stating that he wrote on behalf of the many families of dead as well as survivors of his command who wished for the division’s war dead to be concentrated in one cemetery.⁷³

O’Ryan’s insinuation that the dead of his division deserved to be concentrated in one cemetery rankled the Quartermaster Corps. The Quartermaster General intervened and sent a blistering letter to O’Ryan that flatly stated, “You, in common with some others, seem to be under the misunderstanding as to the reasons which governed the selection of the permanent American cemeteries in France. None of these cemeteries were selected with the idea of commemorating the achievements of any division or organizations.”⁷⁴ The letter noted that cemetery selection was based upon the locations that were accessible, in a central location to consolidate isolated remains, and could be properly decorated. This had been the policy of the Quartermaster General since as early as December 1919.⁷⁵

The Quartermaster General further noted that “a number of very vigorous protests against the selection of Bony have been received from representatives of the 30th Division who have insisted, that if divisional features were to be accentuated, a cemetery for that division must be

⁷¹ John F. O’Ryan, Letter to Charles Pierce, 25 August 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁷² John F. O’Ryan, Letter to the Chief of Staff of the Army, 29 September 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁷³ John F. O’Ryan, Letter to Charles Pierce, 11 December 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁷⁴ H. L. Rogers, Letter to John F. O’Ryan, 22 December 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁷⁵ H. L. Rogers, Letter to the Adjutant General of the Army, 8 December 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 27.

established at Bellicourt. All replies to these representatives have been similar to that given you here...⁷⁶ It is clear from this letter that there were individuals and groups other than O’Ryan and the men of the 27th Infantry Division who tried to influence the cemetery selection process for somewhat personal reasons. While the desire to keep the men who fought and died together buried at the same cemetery is understandable, the magnitude of the operation just to concentrate and repatriate did not leave the time or labor to insure unit cohesion at each cemetery. The Quartermaster Corps never bowed to political pressure or, as shown here, from both overt and covert coercion within the Army’s ranks.⁷⁷

Another cemetery issue soon arose, but this occurred in Great Britain. In 1920, the Quartermaster General made no provision for a permanent cemetery in England and instead recommended that all remains in Britain be returned to the United States. However, relatives of some of the American dead in Great Britain asked that their soldier remain overseas.⁷⁸ The War Department decided to leave those bodies in England for the time being until an accurate total of dead left in the country could be ascertained. The War Department doubted its ability to properly maintain more than a few overseas cemeteries “in view of the difficulties which seem to be perpetually present in connection with the suitable maintenance of 83 National cemeteries in the United States.”⁷⁹

In November 1920, the War Department issued a press release stating the establishment of four permanent overseas cemeteries in France: Suresnes, near Paris, Romange in the Argonne area, Belleau Wood, and Bony in the Aisne region, which would be renamed "Flanders' Field."

⁷⁶ H. L. Rogers, Letter to John F. O’Ryan, 22 December 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁷⁷ Bony did become a permanent cemetery, however there is no evidence to support its selection because of the campaigning of General O’Ryan and the men of the 27th Infantry Division.

⁷⁸ Ralph Hayes, Memorandum for the Quartermaster General, 28 June 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

⁷⁹ Charles Pierce, Letter to J.M. Wainwright, 27 September 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

A fifth cemetery was planned near London for those soldiers who died enroute to France. The release reiterated that the dead would not be grouped by rank, and all headstones, either Christian crosses or Stars of David, would be of uniform construction.⁸⁰ Many objected to renaming Bony as Flanders' Field because American soldiers did not fight at Flanders. Instead, the fighting in the area by the AEF fell under the Somme Offensive, and thus it was recommended to change the cemetery's name a third time to "The American Cemetery of the Somme".⁸¹ This recommendation was not acted upon, but a different cemetery would eventually use the title of Flanders' Field.

Next of kin had two additional options besides repatriation and burial in France. Situations entitled "Do Not Disturb" allowed families to leave their soldier buried in his original location. For families such as the Roosevelt's, who wished for their son be buried in the exact spot he was killed, the War Department had to work with the British and French governments. Known as "Isolated Graves", these plots were scattered across the areas where Americans fought during the last year of the war. The French government wanted to reclaim as much territory as possible as temporary burial sites were exhumed and therefore was reluctant to keep these isolated gravesites.⁸²

An agreement was reached with the French for relatives of the deceased to purchase the land containing the gravesite, and thus be solely responsible for the maintenance of the land and monument. 161 families opted to keep their Soldier Dead in his original burial location.⁸³ Once purchased, the relatives were responsible for the grave's perpetual care.⁸⁴ A congressman wrote

⁸⁰ War Department Press Release, "Plans for National Cemeteries," 12 November 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 22.

⁸¹ George H. Penrose, Memorandum for Record, 20 May 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14.

⁸² OQMG, *QMC in Europe*, Vol 2, 40.

⁸³ OQMG, *QMC in Europe*, Vol 3, 102.

⁸⁴ Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 194.

Secretary of War Baker questioning one family's ability to assume the expenses to maintain a gravesite. Baker simply responded, "Should this decision not be acceptable to them the remedy would appear to be for them to consent to the placing of bodies in our own cemeteries where they will be perpetually under government control... I believe that you will agree that this is not an unreasonable demand for the department to make."⁸⁵ In contrast to the French position, the British volunteered to maintain the graves of any American servicemen left in his original burial location.⁸⁶

The other option for families created by a 26 January 1920 War Department ruling was to bury their soldier in the country of his ancestral heritage.⁸⁷ The remains that were returned to their family's country of origin received treatment similar to those who returned to the United States. In Greece, United States Army escorts received a resolution from the town where Sergeant J. G. Bordelis was buried. It declared that the people were "Much touched by the noble act of the Government of the American Republic, in having repatriated the remains of the soldier who died for Liberty under the flag of the United States..."⁸⁸ In Ireland, the mayor of Dublin offered the city's morgue to store remains that were being buried in the country. Italy conducted elaborate ceremonies in receiving the remains of Italian men who fought for America and were being brought back to Italy for burial.⁸⁹ The reverence given to the dead by other countries was not forgotten by the men who witnessed such displays.

GRS soldiers frequently worked alongside American and European citizens during the execution of their duties. On at least two occasions, civilians were accused of stealing valuables

⁸⁵ Newton Baker, Letter to A. S. Burlison, 1 April 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 26.

⁸⁶ OQMG, *QMC in Europe*, Vol. 2, 41.

⁸⁷ American Graves Registration Service in France, Disposition of European Burials, 18 November 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

⁸⁸ OQMG, *QMC in Europe*, Vol. 3, 18.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

from corpses during exhumation work.⁹⁰ The GRS presented their cases in front of a board of officers, who determined the accused's guilt or innocence.⁹¹ One was cleared of the charges. The outcome of the second offender's case was not located, but the officer in charge of the board recommended the accused be sent back to the United States "to offset the trouble and notoriety that has been brought on the Service through this man's actions..."⁹²

Inevitably, irregularities arose causing identifications of some service members to be called into question. It is important to remember that the Quartermaster Corps did not have a trained graves registration unit with standard operating procedures prior to the war. Additionally, some burials were made under fire, and cemeteries subjected to subsequent artillery fire after completion of burials. When graves were exhumed, and identification could not readily be confirmed, the case was referred to a board of review.⁹³ Such cases could include bodies without a grave marker, more than one body in a grave, or no means of identification found on a body.⁹⁴ One documented case involved a body that was dug up under the grave marker of one name, but the identification tags belonged to a different name.⁹⁵ The review board, made up of three officers, received all doubtful cases and subsequently reviewed the burial files in Paris. Combining the burial records with evidence submitted from the field, the board determined where the burial irregularity occurred and tried to resolve the case.

⁹⁰ Edgar Fry, Memorandum to Chief, AGRS, Subject: Report on Theft from Bodies of Deceased American Soldiers at Cemetery in Coblenz, Germany, 16 July 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

⁹¹ CO, AGRS Memorandum to Chief, AGRS in Europe, Subject: Proceedings of Board of Officers in the Case of Frederick Jorgenson, 11 August 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29; CO, AGRS Memorandum to Chief, AGRS in Europe, Subject: Proceedings of Board of Officers in the Case of Max Kaplan, 11 August 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

⁹² CO, AGRS Memorandum to Chief, AGRS in Europe, Subject: Proceedings of Board of Officers in the Case of Max Kaplan, 11 August 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

⁹³ H. F. Rethers, Letter to the Quartermaster General, 25 January 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 41.

⁹⁴ OQMG, *QMC in Europe*, Vol. 3, 83.

⁹⁵ American Military Attaché in Paris, Telegram to the Quartermaster General, 31 October 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 22.

Each cemetery was to report the number of questionable identity cases to the board upon completion of all exhumations or concentration activities.⁹⁶ Eighty one cemeteries reported 1,746 irregularities, of which the board of review successfully identified 1,061 of the cases.⁹⁷ Most of the identifications came through reconciling all available evidence, as well as examining maps and charts of grave locations to solve mysteries.⁹⁸ In one case where the GRS could not locate a soldier supposedly buried in Cemetery 608 (Aisne), the board of review found that the entire row of graves possessed anomalies. The board systematically rechecked the identities of every set of remains in the row to ensure other errors did not exist.⁹⁹ The creation of the board of review proved to be very successful in resolving cases of identity in which otherwise might have remained a mystery. Convening the boards in Paris to reconcile evidence with burial files, and consisting of officers not otherwise connected with exhumation and identification, allowed the board members to solely look at facts without being swayed by emotion.

By February of 1921, the GRS registered 76,173 graves in Europe. The coming year there would be an acceleration of repatriated bodies and concentration activities at the four permanent cemeteries in France. On Colonel Pierce's recommendation, next of kin opting to leave their Soldier Dead in France were prohibited from choosing in which cemetery the GRS buried their relative.¹⁰⁰ Rather, the GRS selected the cemetery based on the geographic location of the soldier's death. Suresnes would receive bodies from the old Zone of the Interior until it reached capacity. Excess bodies from the Zone of the Interior would then be interred at Belleau Wood, as well as men killed in the vicinities of Soissons and Chateau Thierry. Bony received

⁹⁶ Graves Registration Service Bulletin number 7, 21 January 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 41.

⁹⁷ OQMG, *QMC in Europe*, Vol. 3, 85.

⁹⁸ H. F. Rethers, Letter to the Quartermaster General, 24 May 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 41.

⁹⁹ Proceedings of the Board of Review in Case of Millard Moore, 22 August 1921, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 41.

¹⁰⁰ Charles Pierce, Approval of H.F. Rethers' Recommendation to the Quartermaster General, 21 October 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14.

the bodies of men who died in Belgium, Cantigny, and the British area. Finally, Argonne Cemetery held men who died in the Meuse-Argonne sector as well as the St. Mihiel region.¹⁰¹

On 15 August 1921 the War Department readjusted its plans for the permanent cemeteries. Since February, the Quartermaster Corps had added three additional cemeteries at St. Mihiel, in Belgium, and at Fere-en-Tardenois (now called Oise-Aisne).¹⁰² The estimated cost to make the necessary improvements to these cemeteries totaled close to three million dollars.¹⁰³ This estimate compelled the War Department to realize that its plans for the cemeteries were too elaborate, and that each location should be culled of excess land and that any unnecessary buildings should be dropped from architectural plans. The goal was that the overseas national cemeteries should be on par with, but no more elaborate than, the best national cemeteries in the United States.¹⁰⁴ All construction and improvements to the cemeteries was forecasted for completion by 30 June 1923. Any buildings deemed to be necessary were to have “simplicity, good proportions, and the absence of ornament for the sake of ornament. It also means appropriateness to the intended uses, a certain modesty, and the eschewing of anything approaching boastfulness.”¹⁰⁵ By August 1923, the War Department sent relatives of the dead their soldier’s permanent grave location at the new permanent cemeteries.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ W. D. Connor, Memorandum for the Chief of Staff, Subject: Permanent American Cemeteries in Europe, 10 September 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 22.

¹⁰² W. H. Hart, Memorandum to H. W. Angus, Subject: American Cemeteries in Europe, 27 October 1922, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 22.

¹⁰³ Summary of Estimated Cost of American Cemeteries in Europe, 24 August 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 22.

¹⁰⁴ W. D. Connor, Memorandum for the Chief of Staff, Subject: Permanent American Cemeteries in Europe, 10 September 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 22.

¹⁰⁵ W. H. Hart, Memorandum to H. W. Angus, Subject: American Cemeteries in Europe, 27 October 1922, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 22.

¹⁰⁶ H. J. Connor, Letter to Mrs. B. F. Kendall, 7 August 1925, Edward Jones Research Center, 2000.30, Estella Kendall Collection.

Two more controversies occurred before the cemeteries' completion. First was the issue of permanent grave markers. Initially, the War Department recommended headstones similar to those at Arlington National Cemetery, declaring "Nothing could be more impressive than the rank after rank of white stones, inconspicuous in themselves, covering the gentle wooded slopes of Arlington and producing the desired effect of a vast army in its last resting place."¹⁰⁷ Each gravestone was to be made of American white marble, with a circle etched at the top. In the circle would be either a Latin cross, or the Star of David. The inscription would include the soldier's name, rank, regiment, division, and date of death. This obviously came from the 1919 recommendation of Colonel Pierce, citing the Hebrew aversion to the cross, and that having two different styles of headstones would upset the harmony of the cemetery.¹⁰⁸

Despite pressure from veterans' organizations and religious groups, the matter seemed to be settled until a meeting of the newly formed American Battle Monuments Commission, created to oversee the permanent American cemeteries overseas.¹⁰⁹ During the meeting, one member stated that "it was the sense of the commission that the form of the headstone used overseas should be that of a cross."¹¹⁰ With that statement, the policy of the United States again changed to erect crosses and not? Stars of David over the graves of its soldier buried overseas. The British, by contrast, rejected the use of the cross on the grounds that the symbol was not suitable for inscriptions. The French used crosses, Stars of David, or a dome shaped stone for Christians, Jews, and Muslims, respectively.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Budreau, *Bodies of War*, 122.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Kurt Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way* (Washington: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1995), 100.

¹¹⁰ Budreau, *Bodies of War*, 123.

¹¹¹ John R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 161.

The second controversy erupted over the construction of the permanent cemetery chapels. The chapels' architecture was distinctly Christian. Kurt Piehler contends in *Remembering War the American Way* that the American Battle Monuments Commission and the Commission of Fine Arts tried to tie American nationalism with Christianity in the construction of these chapels. The president of the Jewish Welfare Board protested, stating that the chapels should be nonsectarian. The Suresnes chapel architect responded, "If the Jews are strong enough to prevent us from using any insignia of the Christian religion, I suppose I shall have to comply with their desire." The request by the Jewish Welfare Board was refused.¹¹²

Despite GRS's gallant efforts, there were still remains unaccounted for. The process used by the GRS to locate the missing remains was relatively simple. A team from the GRS and 100 laborers spread out across an area; as they walked, they inspected any shell hole or other abnormality in the ground that may contain a body.¹¹³ In the event remains were discovered, the team gathered any evidence found on or nearby the remains that might aid in identification. The GRS recorded in its history that personal effects, along with dog tags and eyewitnesses, were usually present and considered the most conclusive means of identification.¹¹⁴ Anthropological data was only inspected if no dog tags or personal effects were discovered with a set of remains. In other cases, especially those of aviators lost behind German lines, the GRS relied upon eyewitnesses and even enemy reports to discover the missing soldier. In the end, the GRS compiled rosters in 1923 listing the dead not located for future reference in the event additional remains were ever found.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Piehler, *Remembering War*, 100-101.

¹¹³ Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 67.

¹¹⁴ Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 111.

¹¹⁵ AGRS, QMC Europe Memorandum to the Quartermaster General, Subject: Unlocated Dead, 5 October 1923, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 3.

Remarkably, only 1,648 bodies remained unidentified, but their names were not forgotten by the Army.¹¹⁶ The unknown dead were buried in individual plots with gravestones among the identified dead. At each cemetery, the names of the unknown or missing from that area were inscribed on walls near at the cemetery's chapel.¹¹⁷ For the first time in America's short history, it memorialized every single soldier who was killed in action during a war.

Sir Douglas Haig remarked that the GRS's work, "Does not directly contribute to the successful termination of the War, (but will) have an extraordinary moral value to the troops in the field, as well as to the relatives and friends of the dead at home."¹¹⁸ The GRS's ability to execute the wishes of its civilian leadership and accomplish a mission on which the credibility of the United States government rested should be admired and studied. Independent of the political bickering between the people of the United States, their government, their military leadership, and France, the GRS faithfully stood by its commitment to the fallen men of the AEF, and ensured that they received their permanent place of honor, either in France or the United States. Perhaps no higher honor could be given to the men of the GRS than that given by their commanding officer, Colonel Charles Pierce, who wrote,

I wish you could see what our G.R.S. men are doing at the front. I have just returned from three weeks of extended inspection and have come back thrilled with pride because of the faithfulness and the splendid success of our men. The work they are doing is gruesome and onerous, but they are effecting identification in a marvelous way and correcting errors made in the heat of a hellish battle to an extent that entitles them not only to encouragement, but to the plaudits of an admiring and grateful nation. My own share in the work dwindles into insignificance, although I have given out almost all of the

¹¹⁶ Edward Steere, *The Graves Registration Service in World War II* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1951), 13.

¹¹⁷ ABMC Overseas Cemeteries, <http://www.abmc.gov/cemeteries/cemeteries.php>, accessed 21 November 2013. Clicking on the link for each of the World War I cemeteries will reveal the number of names inscribed on the walls of the missing.

¹¹⁸ American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, "American Soldiers Graves on Foreign Soil," *Annual Report of the Society for the Preservation of Scenic and Historic Places and Objects to the Legislature of the State of New York* (1918): 462.

strength I have, when I see what sacrifice and patient earnestness have accomplished for sorrowing people at home through the agony of these splendid men.¹¹⁹

Coming from the man who effectively created the GRS, no higher honor may be awarded to his men.

By the end of the GRS's endeavor in France in 1923, the United States maintained a total of eight permanent cemeteries: six in France, one in Belgium, and one in England. Meuse-Argonne (formerly named Romange) was the largest cemetery, covering 130 acres and holding 13,969 gravesites. Aisne-Marne (formerly named Belleau Wood) covered thirty four acres with 2,242 burials. Somme Cemetery (formerly Bony) had an area of 22 acres with 1,825 burials. Suresnes in the Paris suburbs had 1,497 graves spread over seven and one half acres. St. Mihiel (formerly Thiancourt) held 4,141 bodies in thirty acres. Oise-Aisne (formerly Fere-en-Tardenois) contained 6,028 dead in its forty eight acres. Brookwood in England had 435 burials in its four and one half acre. Finally, Flanders Field in Belgium held 362 American dead in its five acres.¹²⁰ Each cemetery adhered to strict standards of uniformity. Every plot measured two meters by three meters. The graves measured one meter wide, two meters, fifty centimeters in length, and one meter, fifty-five centimeters in depth.¹²¹ When a visitor stood among the graves, they could see that in any direction, the magnificent marble crosses mixed with the occasional Stars of David headstones were perfectly aligned.

Today, the United States maintains the sacred pledge it gave to its bereaved families to perpetually honor those men buried on foreign soil. Those crosses and Stars of David for the identified provide name, rank, regiment, division, home state, and date of death. All of the

¹¹⁹ "Government Has Not Neglected Soldier Dead," *Brooklyn Standard*, 1 June 1918, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 10.

¹²⁰ W.H. Hart, Memorandum to H.W. Angus, Subject: American Cemeteries in Europe, 27 October 1922, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 22.

¹²¹ OQMG, *QMC in Europe*, Vol. 3, 27.

unknown dead are buried under crosses. Their inscription reads “Here Rests in Honored Glory an American Soldier Known but to God.”¹²²

¹²² J. H. Laubach, Memorandum for the Quartermaster General, 22 March 1919, NA, RG 117, “Records Relating to Interment,” Box 181. See Appendix C, Photo of Meuse-Argonne American Military Cemetery, France Showing Grave Markers for Christian and Jewish Soldiers (NA, RG 117, Records Relating to Interment, Box 179).

CHAPTER 5

HOMECOMING: REPATRIATION AND BURIAL IN THE UNITED STATES

Repatriating the Soldier Dead of World War I involved many different functions for the Army. First, the remains needed to be identified before they were casketed and the coffin placed in a wood shipping crate. The remains travelled by truck, rail, or a combination of both to a port of embarkation on the French coast. The Army contracted ships to solely carry the dead back to the United States. Once docked, the remains needed to be off loaded and re-checked before being dispatched to the soldier's family for final burial. On the surface, the procedures seemed straight forward and could proceed with minimum difficulties, but this often proved to be incorrect, forcing rapid and lasting changes in Army policies.

As the Army proceeded with its sad task, first for the dead buried outside of France and then for the remainder buried in France, certain aspects came under scrutiny by both the public and within the Army. The United States had not experienced war dead on such a scale since its Civil War fifty years prior. As mentioned, that war significantly changed American attitudes toward death, as well as the commemoration of the war dead. The year-long civic discussion over the proper disposition of the war dead after the First World War heightened the communal perception of the dead, and as their remains began arriving in the United States, the public kept a watchful eye to ensure that the living discharged their duties faithfully.

While the political machinery in Washington and Paris endeavored to strike a deal with France to allow the shipment of remains back to the United States, Quartermaster Corps units both within the United States and in Europe prepared to undertake the unprecedented operation to repatriate the American war dead. Before the war was over, situations arose that would not

only determine how the First World War dead were honored, but ultimately serve as the foundation for how the United States commemorated its military fallen for the next century.

Some in the Quartermaster Corps possessed misgivings over repatriation, noting the logistical nightmare of potentially moving thousands of decomposed remains. When Secretary of War Newton Baker held firm the War Department's commitment to repatriate, the GRS executed his orders. Baker allowed each family to decide the final disposition of their soldier: remain buried in France, brought home and buried in a national cemetery, or returned and interred in a family plot.¹ Such was the policy that dictated the removal of over 60% of the First World War dead from Europe back to the United States.

As the War Department prepared for the massive undertaking of exhuming, preparing, and shipping approximately 40,000 sets of remains to the United States, very little could be found in the way of precedent for such a task. However, methods of honoring the dead, such as the escorting of caskets and the use of the American Flag to drape coffins, had been developed in the years prior to the Armistice. These practices were not captured in any manual, nor did they come about as the result of deliberate planning. Rather, they came about by suggestion and trial.

A sad reality of war is that some men die before they get a chance to fight. Numerous soldiers died at training camps throughout America before they shipped overseas. These deaths came in the way of training mishaps, accidents, and disease. Since the soldier died within the continental United States, the military shipped the soldier's remains to their families for burial. While tragic, these cases provided a basis for how the overseas dead would be transported and honored once they arrived in America. In February 1918, a military commander wrote the Adjutant General to describe his experiences with respect to military dead near his headquarters

¹ Kurt Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way* (Washington: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1995), 95.

in Chicago. He explained that his office received regular requests for soldiers to participate in funerals for men who died in the service. The commander noted that while he complied with most applications, no authority existed to pay for these soldiers' expenses, so the bereaved families had to bear the financial burden. "This practice operates unfavorably," he wrote, "in that families with insufficient means to meet the expense incident to the attendance of military escorts are deprived of the privilege, while those better endowed with the world's goods are enabled to have them." The commander foresaw an opportunity for the Army in the use of escorts, however. He argued, "The presence of escorts at funerals gives a very good impression in the community, in that the relatives and friends of the deceased feel that the government does not lose interest in the individual who has sacrificed his life in the service."² The commander's request and applicable funding was approved in March 1918, opening the way for escorts to accompany the military dead within the United States.

Funding escorts did not solve all of the Army's problems with respect to shipping remains. The next step was to determine what personnel would be used as escorts. Post commanders initially recommended that when the need arose a man should be selected as an escort who lived in a similar geographic location as the deceased. Under this method, the escort could then perform his duty before proceeding home on a furlough.³ Since situations would arise where no other serviceman lived in the same area, it was further proposed to use a close friend or a relative to act as the escort.⁴

The adornment of caskets of deceased soldiers with the United States flag began in a regular, official capacity during the First World War. Some military posts purchased a flag with

² William H. Carter, Memorandum for the Adjutant General, "Funeral Escorts and Pallbearers", 26 February 1918, NA, RG 92 (both quotes).

³ T. F. Powell, Memorandum for R. C. Kloeber, 1 November 1918, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 11.

⁴ H. R. Lemly, Memorandum for R. C. Kloeber, 6 November 1918, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 11.

private funds and affixed it to the deceased soldier's shipping case. A June 1918 change made the purchase of an American flag part of the government's funeral expenses for deceased soldiers, but it was discovered that "there are no regulations relative to the manner in which this flag shall be placed on the casket."⁵ Additionally, the Quartermaster Corps needed to determine a suitable size for the casket flags. The official requirements called for the flag's dimensions to appropriately cover the shipping container during transit. A proposed Army Regulations change mandated a flag with a thirteen foot, three inch fly, and a seven foot hoist.⁶ As the Quartermaster Corps finalized its repatriation plans pending a diplomatic settlement, one of the mandates directed the procurement of enough flags to cover each coffin returning to the United States.⁷

By mid-1919, many of the American dead had been interred for at least a year. During that time, GRS units buried the located remains in temporary cemeteries under wood markers. Other bodies lay in isolated graves, sometimes under a marker constructed by the deceased's comrades to commemorate his death as well as provide an indication of his remains. As relatives submitted their requests to bring their dead sons home, some inquired about the temporary monuments to their sacrifice. One man wrote to the Adjutant General asking if the government would ship the monument made by friends of his son, Harry Brenker, home with his body. The man noted that if this was not possible, he preferred that Brenker remain buried in France.⁸ The Quartermaster Corps replied that no appropriation existed to fund such a project. Additionally, if permission was granted to one family, the War Department stood to oblige all families with

⁵ Benjamin Jacobson, Letter to the Quartermaster General, 9 July 1918, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 11.

⁶ Proposed Change to Army Regulations, 1918, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 11.

⁷ M. J. Henry, Memorandum for the Chief Quartermaster, 19 August 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 27.

⁸ Henry Brenker, Letter to T. C. Harris, 12 April 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14.

similar requests.⁹ No documentation exists concerning the Adjutant General's reply to Brenker's father, but Private Harry Brenker remains buried in the St. Mihiel Military Cemetery in France.¹⁰

Another item requested by at least one family was the actual wood cross used by the GRS as temporary grave markers. A congressman wrote to the Secretary of War on behalf of a constituent inquiring as to the possibility of the marker, with the soldier's identification tag affixed, being shipped home with the soldier's body. The congressman suggested that, "If this matter has not already been considered, that it would be pleasing to the families of deceased soldiers..."¹¹ The Quartermaster Corps recommended this action, citing that the temporary cross could easily be enclosed with the casket in the shipping case. The Quartermaster warned that this action needed to occur as the GRS disinterred bodies in preparation to return them to America.¹² If not, the GRS would be forced to collect all of the temporary grave markers, ship them to the United States, and distribute the markers to the correct families.

In a sense, France's delay in allowing the United States to remove its dead bore some unexpected benefits. The GRS needed the year of 1919 to lay the foundation for the War Department's repatriation plan. One major decision finalized was assigning one organization to work with the dead of all the military services. Since Army, Navy, and Marine Corps personnel populated the cemeteries, each service would have been theoretically responsible for its own dead. This initially occurred in early 1919 during an attempt to coordinate the return Navy and Army dead from Archangel, in Russia. In this instance, the Navy used its own exhumation unit in cooperation with the GRS to retrieve its dead.¹³ Problems later arose when the Navy

⁹ H. R. Lemly, Letter to the Adjutant General, 22 April 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14.

¹⁰ Confirmation of this fact was obtained through a search of burials through the American Battle Monuments Commission's website, www.abmc.gov.

¹¹ John Rogers, Letter to the Secretary of War, 12 June 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 3.

¹² H. L. Rogers, Memorandum for R. E. Wyllie, 17 June 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 3. It is unknown if this action actually occurred.

¹³ E. P. Pierson, Letter to the Quartermaster General, 22 January 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

expressed a desire to return its dead directly to the United States, rather than temporarily bury the Archangel dead near a French port of embarkation like the Army dead from the same area until France allowed the movement of bodies out of the country. Eventually, an inter-service agreement was reached that gave the GRS authority over all of the American dead.

GRS work in France did not escape controversy. During concentration operations in 1919, the GRS used Army trucks to move the dead in lieu of the French rail system. French civilians complained about seeing the American dead transported through towns in open trucks. In fairness, the French government warned the United States that it did not want the Americans to repatriate their dead because such sights would be upsetting to the locals. Colonel Pierce immediately issued orders for GRS convoys to avoid populated areas whenever possible to avoid offending residents.¹⁴

By the time France approved the evacuation of all requested dead from the country in March 1920, some Americans mistook the reason for the delay as being due to an inept GRS organization. Accordingly, the War Department received suggestions for alternative individuals or organizations that could do a better job than the GRS. One senator suggested that the exhumation and transportation of the dead be supervised by an organization of war mothers.¹⁵ His belief was that the war mothers possessed a deep interest in ensuring the work proceeded quickly and without error. Secretary Baker, while appreciating the sentiment behind the letter, thought it unwise to divide responsibility between civilian organizations and the military. Furthermore, Baker assured the senator that the people directing the GRS operations mixed expertise with sympathy toward their task.¹⁶

¹⁴ Charles Pierce, Memorandum for All GRS Officers, Subject: Disinterring of Bodies, NA, RG 92, Entry 1894-B, Box 1.

¹⁵ Joseph France, Letter to Newton Baker, 13 January 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 27.

¹⁶ Newton Baker, Letter to Joseph France, 2 February 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 27.

Another senator implied that French undertakers could return the American dead more expeditiously than the GRS. Baker responded that such a method would only lead to “untold confusion, expense, and sorrow if the return of these bodies were left to the individuals concerned rather than the government.”¹⁷ Baker was correct. While the GRS may have operated slower than individual entities, it being the sole organization prevented private companies from gouging bereaved families by promising to return their son’s body before all others for a certain price. Most importantly, neither the GRS nor the War Department would show preference to one dead soldier or another. Baker even went so far as to have the GRS draft a tentative disinterment schedule by locations because “the Department will be in receipt of many requests for the preferred treatment of one body over another and I wish to be in a position to state the general scheme of the GRS with respect to the orderly evacuation of our dead from France and to assure the petitioners that... variations will not be sanctioned by the War Department.”¹⁸ Baker’s statement marks another departure from procedures of the past: no longer were dead officers, men of wealth, or men of influential families given special consideration. In death, they were all important, but none more so than another.

When France agreed to allow the United States to return its requested dead, the War Department moved immediately to begin operations. The Quartermaster Corps directed the transport ship USAT *Mercury* to dock at the port of Brest. The military attaché in Paris received orders to load all bodies available for shipment to the United States.¹⁹ The *Mercury*’s passenger list was similar to any ship’s manifest, with each passenger’s name, rank, and service number

¹⁷ Newton Baker, Letter to James Reed, 2 February 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 27.

¹⁸ Newton Baker, Memorandum for the Quartermaster General, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 27.

¹⁹ Frank Hines, Letter to the Quartermaster General, 26 March 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 27.

recorded. However, the top of the register noted that all of the passengers were ‘military deceased’.²⁰

Even with France’s diplomatic approval, a disconnect still existed between the people of the United States and France with regard to America repatriating its dead. Historian Kurt Piehler wrote that Americans viewed asking a mother to leave her son buried an ocean away as similar to asking her to make another sacrifice for her country, which some mothers refused to do. One mother told the Secretary of State, “You took my son from me and sent him to war... My son sacrificed his life to America’s call, and now you *must* as a duty of yours bring my son back to me.”²¹ Europeans took an entirely different view of this operation. British author Stephen Graham, who wrote *Challenge of the Dead* in 1921, recorded his observations of American war dead being prepared for shipment to the United States:

At great cost of time and labour the dead soldiers are being removed from the places where they fell and packed in crates for transport to America. In this way, America’s sacrifice is lessened. For while in America this is considered to be America’s own concern, it is certain that it is deplored in Europe. The taking away of the American dead has given the impression of a slur in the honor of lying in France. America removes her dead because of a sweet sentiment towards her own. She takes them from a more honourable resting place to a less honourable one. It said to be due in part to the commercial enterprise of the American undertakers, but it is more due to the sentiment of mothers and wives and provincial pastors in America. That the transference of the dead across the Atlantic is out of keeping with European sentiment she ignores, or fails to understand. America feels she is morally superior to Europe.²²

The Quartermaster Corps searched the eastern coast of the United States for a sufficient location to receive and offload the ships containing the dead when repatriation operations started. This area not only needed pier access from which to unload bodies from transport ships, but also

²⁰ Deceased Passenger List for USAT *Antigone*, 7 August 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 30.

²¹ Piehler, *Remembering War*, 96.

²² Stephen Graham, *The Challenge of the Dead* (London: Cassell and Co., Ltd., 1921), 124.

nearby rail access to distribute the remains to their final destinations across the country. The Quartermaster Corps selected Hoboken, New Jersey, primarily because the pier at that port met the transportation requirements. Additionally, the dock area possessed ample storage space for caskets as they awaited shipment, as well as private areas to make minor repairs to caskets or even shipping cases if necessary “away from the prying eyes of reporters and others morbidly inclined.”²³ This last point was particularly important to preserve the dignity of the remains from the curious or passersby.

The “prying eyes of reporters” had already been the subject of controversy at Hoboken before its official selection as the disembarking port for all Soldier Dead. In November 1919, the remains of soldiers who had died in Russia arrived at Hoboken on the SS *Darage*. The commander of Hoboken barred reporters from the pier to prevent newspapers from printing any gruesome details regarding the transfer of remains off the ship. One reporter angrily cabled the Secretary of War complaining that, “Left for his own sense of decency no reporter would detail the horrors of such a home coming. Hundreds of parents of the dead have come here from Detroit and all parts of Michigan are to be shocked tomorrow morning simply because Gen. Shanks is not able to see beyond his own nose.”²⁴ The media policy created at Hoboken in November 1919 highlighted a juxtaposition that has prevailed: maintain the dignity of the dead, yet still allow Americans, either personally or through the media, to see and understand the cost of war.

Hoboken, and by extension the GRS, did not escape controversy once the dead began arriving. A congressman wrote the War Department complaining that citizens witnessed bodies

²³ F. P. Jackson, Memorandum for the Commanding General, Hoboken POE, 9 January 1920, NA, RG, 92, Entry 1984-B, Box 1.

²⁴ M. Abbott, Telegram to Newton Baker, 18 November 1919, NA, RG 92,

being casually unloaded onto the docks and perceived that the remains were being handled in a disrespectful manner.²⁵ Secretary Baker expressed his appreciation that citizens were informing the War Department if they thought disrespectful acts or handling occurred. While Baker noted that the department received numerous letters commending the Quartermaster's work, he nevertheless promised a complete investigation into the matter.²⁶ In another instance, a body destined for South Carolina received paperwork for delivery to Ohio. The father's physician opened the casket and determined the remains were those of a black soldier. An investigation by the GRS revealed that the father's son's remains were still at Hoboken.²⁷ The problem was quickly rectified by the GRS.

Hoboken experienced a potential disaster on the night of 24 August 1921, when a large fire started in the Pier Five area, adjacent to Pier Four. Over 1,500 caskets awaiting shipment were threatened by the fire. A GRS captain with the aid of other soldiers hastily moved over 400 coffins to safety before a wind shift pushed the fire in the direction of Pier Six, saving more than 1,000 bodies that had not been moved. Before the wind shift occurred, the GRS men prepared to push a recently-docked ship containing more dead into the river before the fire overtook the ship.²⁸ Despite the ferocity of the three-hour blaze, no caskets were damaged or destroyed, and the *New York Times* fawned over the gallantry of the GRS men to preserve the dead for their waiting kin. In the end, the GRS averted a possible catastrophe and proved its willingness to go to great lengths to fulfill its mission to the dead and their families.

²⁵ Harry Lane, Letter to C. McGlennon, 16 August 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

²⁶ Newton Baker, Letter to C. McGlennon, 25 August 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

²⁷ E. G. Primont, Memorandum for Officer in Charge, Rail Branch, Subject: Report on Accompanying Remains, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

²⁸ "Leviathan Singed, Army Piers Burned, Soldier Dead Saved," *New York Times*, 25 August 1921.

Since Hoboken's Pier Four was the place that the war dead returned to the United States, it became the backdrop for numerous ceremonies that commemorated the dead. On 17 March 1921, more than 2,000 people turned out as a former division commander paid homage to 1,609 caskets that had recently arrived on the SS *Somme*. The formal ceremonies included Christian and Hebrew prayers and the playing of the "Star Spangled Banner" and "Taps," as well as speeches.²⁹ As the number of dead returning from France accelerated, the Hoboken ceremonies became even larger.

A couple of months later, on 28 August 1921, the *New York Times* recorded the solemn scene as tributes were paid to 6,000 caskets that arrived on the SS *Wheaton*. The reporter noted how "The middle of the long pier, laden with row after row of pine boxes, on each rested the flag, was filled with relatives and friends of the dead. Just before the platform from which services were read sat rows of women in black, their heads bowed, listening to the tall, grizzled veteran whose lot it had been to order men into battle and in whose eyes tears glistened." After the ceremony, the same reporter recorded how "A group of relatives and friends sought among the dead their own. Some mothers were accompanied by other tall sons whose strong arms supported them as they made their faltering way between the caskets. Others walked beside the father. The son that had once been their support was in one of those pine boxes on the pier, the flag above him."³⁰ While the services reported above were very large, others were much more intimate. Gold Star mothers frequently held solemn private ceremonies on Pier Four to honor the returning dead.³¹ Whether large or small, these ceremonies became part of the national healing process and would also be revived again in the future.

²⁹ "Thousands at Pier Honor Soldier Dead," *New York Times*, 17 March 1921.

³⁰ "Tribute on Pier to 6,000 Soldier Dead," *New York Times*, 29 August 1921.

³¹ Holly S. Fenelon, *That Knock at the Door: The History of the Gold Star Mothers in America* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, Inc., 2012), 47.

Once the remains arrived at Hoboken, the GRS needed to coordinate the shipment of the caskets to all parts of the United States as quickly as possible. The Quartermaster's plan called for the War Department to supply Hoboken with the name of the ship, its deceased passenger list and, if possible, the final destination of each body before the ship docked at the port.³² This allowed lead time to ensure adequate space at the pier and to arrange ground transportation to the remains' final destinations in the United States. The GRS established an office at Hoboken to receive the bodies, and ensured the relative paperwork and sanitary requirements were met before the body was shipped from the pier.³³ Initially, the GRS notified the next of kin when their son's remains were at Hoboken so the family could make funeral arrangements.³⁴ With the prospect of an increased volume of remains coming from France, the GRS established twelve distribution centers in Washington, D.C.; Chicago; Louisville, Kentucky; Atlanta; St. Paul, Minnesota; Omaha, Nebraska; Little Rock; San Antonio; Cheyenne, Wyoming; El Paso; Portland; and San Francisco.³⁵ The distribution centers would receive the remains from Hoboken, and at that instant send a telegram to the next of kin to advise them of their son's impending return.

The addition of the distribution centers allowed the GRS to better estimate when a casket would arrive at its destination and thus prevent unnecessary problems. In one case before the notification change, an entire town in Kentucky turned out to the local train station to pay tribute to a fallen soldier and his family, but the body did not arrive at the time stated on the telegram

³² P. W. Davidson, Memorandum for the Commanding General, Subject: Dead Bodies from Overseas, 9 January 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1894-B, Box 1.

³³ H. L. Rogers, Memorandum to Chief, Transportation Service, Subject: Disposition of the Dead – Coordination of Service, 10 January 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1894-B, Box 1.

³⁴ H. C. Whitehead, Letter to the Quartermaster General, 3 March 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 3.

³⁵ The Quartermaster General, Memorandum for Depot Officer, San Francisco, Subject: Establishment of Distribution Centers, 16 June 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 3.

from Hoboken. “We never faced such a disappointed crowd,” wrote the local undertaker.³⁶ Such instances, while not the result of negligence, nevertheless were events that made the bereaved family’s experience with the Army negative, something that needed to be avoided wherever possible.

Unfortunately some of the telegrams sent by the GRS to next of kin came back undeliverable, meaning that the family moved and did not update their address with the War Department. This was an unfortunate bi-product of the delay between the time that the War Department polled families to ascertain their burial preferences in 1919, to late 1920 and 1921 when the remains came to the United States. The Quartermaster General planned for this eventuality and ordered that rather than return the remains to France, the GRS should follow the recommendation of Colonel Pierce and bury the unclaimed dead in Arlington National Cemetery.³⁷

In addition, some relatives changed their mind, and requested their soldier’s remains to stay in France. A *New York Times* article chronicled the GRS’s response to such requests, noting that the War Department received approximately one dozen requests per week. The article explained that in some cases word reached the GRS in France as the body was being exhumed. In other situations, the body was already loaded aboard a ship for its voyage to America. In either case, the GRS carried out the ultimate wish of the family, and returned the remains to the appropriate French cemetery.³⁸

When the remains departed Hoboken, New Jersey, for their final destination, a military escort accompanied each casket. Nearby Fort Hamilton, New York, furnished the necessary

³⁶ Maury Undertaking Company, Letter to Mr. Bradley, 24 August 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 13.

³⁷ H. L. Rogers, Memorandum for the Secretary of War, 9 February 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 17.

³⁸ “Change Orders for Bodies,” *New York Times*, 17 May 1920.

soldiers for this detail. Escorting military remains was another practice born of the Great War that the military has continued to use. Evidence exists suggesting the Army's realization that the military escort accompanying remains to a funeral could be the only personal interaction some citizens had with the Army. Due to this fact, it became imperative that those singular experiences had a positive outcome. As the return of remains became imminent, along with the need to ship remains from New Jersey all over the United States, the Quartermaster General issued orders to dispatch "A force of *competent* enlisted men for this purpose [escort duty]."³⁹ Beyond mention of escort behavior and decorum in correspondence, no formal manual for escort duty seems to have been published for this period.

The idea of a military escort was also based in practicality as much as commemoration. When a casket was shipped via rail, it required a bill of lading, just like any other cargo. In addition, as the casket changed possession receipts were required to be obtained and forwarded to the Office of the Quartermaster General. Thus, the escort's utilitarian purpose became to help train station agents and funeral directors, particularly those of small towns, navigate unfamiliar government paperwork, ensure that the casket was delivered in good order, and obtain proof of receipt by the decedent's family or appointed representative.⁴⁰ The escorts also assisted the funeral director with moving the casket to and from the funeral home, into homes, churches, and ultimately the burial site.⁴¹ While perhaps not the escort's primary task, these additional duties became instrumental in preventing undue stress or burden upon the grieving families of the dead.

³⁹ Frank T. Hines, Letter to the Commanding General, Hoboken POE, 23 January 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1894-B, Box 1 (emphasis to 'competent' added).

⁴⁰ P. W. Davison, Memorandum for the Commanding General, Hoboken POE, "Dead Bodies from Overseas", 9 January 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1894-B, Box 1.

⁴¹ CG, New York General Intermediate Depot, Memorandum to CG, 2nd Corps Area, "Guards and Escorts for Overseas Dead at Army Supply Base, Brooklyn, NY," 2 November 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

For the families bringing their dead back to the United States, they faced many decisions, notably where to bury their loved one. Some families opted to keep their loved one buried close to home in a private cemetery in a family plot. For families who wanted their soldier buried with other service members, the national cemeteries stood as a particularly attractive option. The problem was that the national cemetery system, created in the aftermath of the Civil War, had languished during the fifty years following that war. The Andrew Johnson National Cemetery in Greenville, Tennessee was the latest established cemetery, dedicated in 1906. As of 1920, eighty-three national cemeteries existed in the United States but were dispersed throughout the country and did not correspond to the location of populous areas. Notably, only one such cemetery existed in New York, two in Pennsylvania, and one in Texas.⁴² Such a meager number of cemeteries did not increase the likelihood of their utilization, despite an act of Congress allowing the dead of the World War to be buried in any national cemetery at government expense.⁴³

Furthermore, some families had additional reasons to be cautious before confirming their choice to have their soldier buried in a national cemetery. First was the location and upkeep, since some cemeteries, such as Andersonville in Georgia, were far away from population centers and may not be as well kept as cemeteries such as Arlington, Virginia. The second concern was whether or not families could erect their own headstones within the national cemeteries. The Quartermaster Corps responded that the headstones for enlisted men had to be uniform in nature and were usually provided. Officer headstone sizes could vary, but they were to be purchased at

⁴² Quartermaster Corps, "List of United States National Cemeteries and Location of Each," NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 17.

⁴³ House Report to Accompany S. 4082, 66th Congress, 2nd Session, 6 APR 1920, via *ProQuest Congressional*, accessed 18 March 2015.

private cost and the size had to be commensurate with the deceased's rank.⁴⁴ Such questions understandably needed to be answered before a family would make their final decision to let their soldier permanently rest in a national cemetery.

The dispersal of the national cemeteries also led to questions of how military honors would be performed. Military honors at the time included the firing of a twenty-one gun salute and the playing of taps. In order to accomplish this, a military detail would need to perform at each funeral service. The Quartermaster General authorized national cemetery superintendents to call upon active or National Guard soldiers to accomplish these honors.⁴⁵ The problem was that not every state possessed a National Guard; of the fourteen states that did not, most had a national cemetery.⁴⁶

In addition, the Quartermaster Corps noted that many of the cemeteries were located far away from Army bases, precluding soldiers (either active or National Guard) from performing military honors at national cemetery funerals. Someone suggested asking American Legion members to perform funeral honors if the organization had the means to do so. A couple of months prior, the Legion had volunteered its membership to perform funeral honors at Arlington National Cemetery "as a mark of honor to our departed comrades."⁴⁷ The Legion's willingness to fulfill this duty ensured that every re-interment would be completed with full military honors due to those who died overseas.

Honors were not always performed without a hitch, however. The superintendent of Arlington Cemetery wrote in a letter that neither a chaplain nor a band appeared to perform at a

⁴⁴ H. L. Rogers – When the dead from World War II were repatriated, those buried in national cemeteries all had government-issued headstones of the same dimensions, regardless of rank.

⁴⁵ H. L. Rogers, Letter to the Chief of the Militia Bureau, 1 June 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 17.

⁴⁶ J. M. Carter, Letter to the Militia Bureau, 18 June 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 17.

⁴⁷ James A. Drain, Letter to Ralph Hayes, 29 May 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 17.

funeral on the grounds. The superintendent secured a chaplain from nearby Fort Meyer but noted, “The absence of the band made the military part of this ceremony appear unusually poor... the services were delayed fifteen minutes, which was a real hardship on the waiting relatives.”⁴⁸ Such incidents did occur, but seemed to be rare and quickly corrected by the Quartermaster Corps.

Other issues arose throughout 1920 and 1921 concerning the perceived treatment of the dead returning to the United States. The *Washington Times* published an article titled “AEF Graves Despoiled to Remove Dead,” alleging the desecration of the war dead by the GRS. The piece detailed hideous practices of exhumation supposedly witnessed by civilians traveling to the various cemeteries in France. One letter noted that “If Congress could see heads roll off and bodies lifted while the arms remain still, somebody and everybody who is responsible for this nefarious work would be made to suffer severely.”⁴⁹ A senator read these letters to Congress to instigate an official investigation into these claims.

Such articles infuriated relatives waiting for their deceased’s body to return home. The Bring Back the Soldier Dead League’s president, A. B. Pouch, wrote “We who mourn and wait, are much disturbed over this new public agitation...”⁵⁰ Pouch penned his own editorial to rebut what he viewed as “propaganda” designed to support the argument for leaving the Soldier Dead in France.⁵¹ “How much comfort do you think a poor and lonesome mother, crying and pining for the return of her dead hero, will get from reading the published opinions of disinterested non-mourners?” Pouch wrote. “What comfort is it to a broken heart to hear two or three generals and chaplains want our dead to remain in... France, where only a few fortunate rich sightseers can

⁴⁸ Robert Dye, Letter to the Quartermaster Supply Officer, 3 June 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 17.

⁴⁹ “AEF Graves Despoiled to Remove Dead,” *Washington Times*, 1 May 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

⁵⁰ A. B. Pouch, Letter to the Adjutant General, 6 May 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 26.

⁵¹ A. B. Pouch, Letter to the Adjutant General, 6 May 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 26.

visit the graves of these heroes? These generals and chaplains have no dead buried in foreign soil, therefore are not qualified to discuss this subject with those whose hearts are still aching...”⁵²

Special interest groups continued to be active during the repatriation process. As noted above, the Bring Home the Soldier Dead League kept pressure on the War Department to ensure that no delays occurred that stood to prevent waiting families from reuniting with their deceased soldier. When delays did occur, or were reported in the newspaper, the War Department could count on receiving numerous letters of inquiry from the organization until the matter was resolved. One such occurrence was the GRS’s inability to procure freight cars from the French, which drew a letter from League president A. B. Pouch. Pouch even wrote when members of the military spoke out against repatriation for fear that their words might influence the GRS’s work.⁵³ Meanwhile, Secretary of War Newton Baker reassured individuals aligned with the Field of Honor Association that the War Department did not return any remains that were not requested by next of kin.⁵⁴

Aside from the complaints of the Bring Home the Soldier Dead League, rumors did circulate and quickly gained traction in the newspaper. One such rumor in June 1920 was that the government had ceased all further shipments of remains to the United States. This naturally caused a dramatic surge in correspondence to the War Department, which quickly issued a press release to reestablish that the department would not deviate from its commitment to the American people.⁵⁵

⁵² “‘Bring Home Our Dead,’ Cry American Mothers,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 19 April 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 26.

⁵³ A. B. Pouch, Letter to H. F. Rethers, 18 August 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 26.

⁵⁴ Newton Baker, Letter to Dr. Carter, 21 January 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

⁵⁵ Charles C. Pierce, Recommended Press Release for the Quartermaster General, 15 June 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

As bodies arrived at funeral homes throughout the country, an additional question arose: were the relatives of the dead allowed to open the casket and view the remains? By the time bodies began arriving in the United States, they had been in the process of decay for a year and a half, since the GRS did not embalm any of the dead. Nevertheless, some families requested to view remains upon their arrival at the funeral home. One woman even volunteered to pay for a new casket if necessary in order to be fully satisfied that she was indeed burying her son.⁵⁶ The state government of Texas received so many requests that the state health officer contacted the War Department for advice.⁵⁷ One funeral home in Missouri wrote to the War Department that,

Several families of the dead boys have requested us to open the casket and we have never opened one for the following reasons: 1) We deemed it unwise to do so as a matter our own health as well as the family; 2) We have very reason to believe that identification is impossible; 3) If identification were possible and the family should decide in their own minds that the body sent them was not theirs, they would never be able to get the body of their own; and 4) We believe it against the laws of the United States. We have some folks who were more than persistent in their request that we open the casket and we have steadfastly refused for the reasons stated above.⁵⁸

The War Department responded by stating that once the casket was delivered to the next of kin or their designated agent (i.e. funeral director), the United States no longer had legal control of the remains. Any attempt for the family to open the casket would be governed by “the local health laws and sanitary regulations.”⁵⁹ The War Department did advise that the opening of caskets containing a decomposed body that was never embalmed could cause additional stress to bereaved families.⁶⁰ The Quartermaster Corps did decree that since the War Department

⁵⁶ Joseph Gorsage, Letter to Charles Curtis, 24 August 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 11.

⁵⁷ Manton M. Carrick, Letter to the Graves Registration Bureau, 2 June 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

⁵⁸ Walther-Wymore Furniture and Und. Co, Letter to the War Department, 6 October 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

⁵⁹ Charles J. Wynne, Letter to C. E. Juren, 7 July 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

⁶⁰ Charles J. Wynne, Letter to W. J. Schewe, 9 June 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

maintained custody of all remains to be buried at national cemeteries, that it would deny all requests to open caskets.⁶¹

The issue of opening soldier's caskets by the next of kin stood to become a contentious issue. One family wanted to open their son's casket because they simply did not believe it was him. Their son and another soldier in his company with the same name were both killed and the family was not satisfied that they received the body of their boy instead of the soldier with the same name.⁶² The War Department, and some undertakers, sought to maintain the sanctity of the dead and shield the families from potentially gruesome sights by advising against or preventing the opening of a casket. One Quartermaster captain pointed out, however, that such efforts could be misconstrued as nefarious by grieving families who doubted the identity of the remains in their possession. The captain astutely observed that,

It is an undisputed fact that certain parties antagonistic toward the War Department are waiting for an opportunity to criticize the War Department in this very important phase of returning remains of deceased soldiers to this country. If the War Department... acts upon the suggestion... in advising relatives not to open the caskets it is bound, in my opinion, to bring criticism to the effect that the War Department is endeavoring to deliver the bodies on which doubt may exist as to identification. It is not the desire of the War Department that relatives or their representatives open caskets upon receipt in this country. The reasons are obvious but it is not the desire of the War Department to create a doubt as to the identity of any body delivered by not allowing next of kin or representative to view the remains... The writer does not see why the War Department should lay itself open to criticism upon the failure of the Public Health Service to issue definite instructions to the State Boards governing this subject.⁶³

The War Department was further queried with more situational questions involving the memorialization of the dead. Questions were asked whether or not the casket could be removed from its shipping case, and if a soldier's remains could lie in state at the church of which he was a member.⁶⁴ Another asked if the family was allowed to conduct the funeral for their son in the

⁶¹ H. J. Conner, Letter to Colonel Jones, 21 May 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

⁶² Gerald Murphy, Telegram to Charles Pierce, 8 July 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

⁶³ Charles J. Wynne, Memorandum for Major Davis, 26 July 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

⁶⁴ Scott Wilson, Letter to the United States Department of Health, 26 May 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

Czech language if after the service the American Legion was to take charge of the final honors at the grave site.⁶⁵ Another asked if friends or relatives of the deceased could retain the flag that draped the soldier's casket. The War Department responded affirmatively to each query. While these questions might seem trivial, they highlight just how unprecedented it was in the American experience for relatives of Soldier Dead to hold private funerals for men who died an ocean away on such a mass scale. Even the idea to incorporate the American Flag to drape the caskets of the dead was born of the First World War.

Today, military caskets are always seen draped by the flag of the United States. This idea was born in the aftermath of World War I as Quartermaster Corps officials planned for the movement of remains from the temporary cemeteries to a permanent cemetery in the United States or Europe. One official recommended that as soon as the remains were disinterred and placed in a new coffin, that the coffin be wrapped in a "storm flag."⁶⁶ These instructions were carried out, but a new problem arose as caskets began arriving at the cemeteries: What to do with the flag as the casket went into the ground? Should the flag be placed inside of the casket before burial, or could it stay on the coffin as it was placed inside of the vault? Such questions arose because the situation was new, and no Army policy of decorum existed to reference.

The American Legion first brought the issue of flag decorum during funerals to the Quartermaster General in December 1920. The Legion noted that a dispute arose between the organization and cemetery officials over whether or not the flag may be buried either inside the casket, or on top of the casket but within the wood shipping crate. The Legion acknowledged the government's desire not to tamper with private funerals, but wanted to know the Army's customs

⁶⁵ O. H. Juren, Letter to the Quartermaster Corps, 28 June 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

⁶⁶ M. J. Henry, Memorandum for the Chief Quartermaster, 19 August 1919, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 27. A 'storm flag' is a 4'x8' flag that is flown on military posts during inclement weather in lieu of a larger flag. A special casket flag now exists, which is 5'x 9.5'.

in this situation.⁶⁷ The short answer from the Adjutant General was that there was no standing procedure for disposing of the flag after a military funeral. The only guidance provided by the Adjutant General was that “the flag is fulfilling its best mission when it is being properly cared for and exposed to view.”⁶⁸ Colonel Pierce added that while the majority opinion within the War Department was that burying the flag was improper, no regulation then existed that prevented such action.⁶⁹

In January 1921, a Quartermaster lieutenant wrote a letter to the Quartermaster General to opine on the flag controversy. He flatly stated that it was improper to bury the flag in any capacity, and that the War Department’s procedure was to remove the flag before lowering the casket into the ground. The lieutenant’s next sentence, based on the Adjutant General’s guidance on the best use of the American flag, would evolve into one of the most solemn aspects of a military funeral: “The flag should be turned over to the next of kin of the deceased soldier to be retained as a memorial.”⁷⁰ The Quartermaster Corps immediately issued instructions to all national cemetery superintendents of the new procedure. In the event a family refused to accept the flag, the Quartermaster Corps ordered the superintendent to take charge of the flag and await disposition instructions for the flag.⁷¹

The Loyal Legion, a patriotic organization, insisted that it was an honor to their members to leave the flag draped upon the deceased’s coffin during burial.⁷² The organization petitioned

⁶⁷ Frederick Clouter, Letter to the Office of the Quartermaster General, 6 December 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 8.

⁶⁸ F. W. Lewis, Letter to the Quartermaster General, 6 January 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 8.

⁶⁹ Charles Pierce, Letter to Frederick Coulter, 20 December 1920, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 8.

⁷⁰ H. J. Conner, Memorandum for the Quartermaster General of the Army, 8 January 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 8.

⁷¹ H. J. Conner, Memorandum for the Quartermaster General, Subject: Disposition of Flag Which Drapes a Soldier’s Casket, 19 January 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 8.

⁷² H. L. Rogers, Memorandum for the Depot Quartermaster, “Burial of Flag with Casket in all Cases of Members of Loyal Legion,” 14 May 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

the War Department to allow the practice to continue despite the new policy. In 1921, the Quartermaster General decreed that the flag could be buried with members of the Loyal Legion or any overseas dead if requested by their next of kin. The sole binding caveat was that under no circumstance could the flag rest on top of the vault, and dirt was not allowed to be thrown on top of the flag-draped coffin inside of the vault.⁷³ While a military funeral without a flag-draped coffin has become inconceivable for modern Americans, one hundred years ago it was an unprecedented concept.

Using the flag to honor the dead was heartily endorsed by many citizens, and some thought that the colors should adorn any space occupied by the dead, however temporary. One woman suggested putting flags on train cars transporting remains to their burial location. The War Department was pleased with the many suggestions it received from citizens, citing it as “an indication of a deep interest... that the greatest measure of respect should be accorded the remains of men who died for their country.”⁷⁴ Unfortunately, not all of these requests were grounded in practicality. With respect to hanging flags from train cars, the War Department noted that trains were generally not equipped for such ornamentation. Additionally, it was unlikely that the public would recognize the symbolism without an advance press release by the government.

The controversy regarding the disposition of the American flag following the funerals of the World War dead gave way to a new debate: should flags adorn the caskets of all ex-servicemen? It began with a congressman writing the Adjutant General, noting that the government provided a flag for the funerals of men who were killed in Europe, but did not

⁷³ H. L. Rogers, Memorandum for the Adjutant General of the Army, “Disposition of Flag at Military Burials,” 16 May 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁷⁴ John Weeks, Letter to James Reed, 22 April 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1894-B, Box 1.

provide the same for ex-servicemen who died after discharge from the military.⁷⁵ The Quartermaster General responded that the government did not furnish flags for ex-servicemen because the flag was considered a cost of burial, and the government did not pay the funeral expenses of ex-servicemen. The Quartermaster General also believed that such a measure would be difficult to execute and costly.⁷⁶ While the idea was dismissed in 1921, it did not die. On 6 July 1939, Congress approved the issuance of flags for the funerals of all honorably discharged servicemen and women.⁷⁷

By April 1921, the pace of repatriation continued to increase as the GRS exhumed more remains from France for shipment to the United States. Arlington National Cemetery, already the burial place of roughly 12% of all remains from Europe, found it necessary to double the weekly shipments to the cemetery, allowing for up to 220 burials to occur each week.⁷⁸ This began to strain the abilities of military units within the United States to render proper honors to the dead. The public noticed this decrease, and did not fail to voice their dissatisfaction. The Adjutant General stated that such complaints hurt “the standing, prestige, and honor of the Army.”⁷⁹ The Adjutant General further ordered “corps area commanders [to] take every possible means to furnish suitable escort at distributing points, and firing squads at funerals of deceased soldiers returned from abroad... A liberal policy will be followed in furnishing these details even at the expense of training and other activities.”⁸⁰

⁷⁵ John Cable, Letter to the Adjutant General, 12 July 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 8.

⁷⁶ H. L. Rogers, Letter to the Adjutant General, 19 July 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 8.

⁷⁷ Public Law number 156, 76th Congress, *The Congressional Record*, (Washington: GPO, 1940), 999.

⁷⁸ H. J. Connor, Letter to Captain Shannon, 15 April 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 17.

⁷⁹ The Adjutant General, Memorandum to All Corps Commanders, Subject: Military Honors for Deceased Soldiers Returned from Abroad, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 3.

⁸⁰ The Adjutant General, Memorandum to All Corps Commanders, Subject: Military Honors for Deceased Soldiers Returned from Abroad, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 3.

As the pace of repatriations intensified, the War Department also received more letters from relatives of the dead with requests for assistance honoring the dead. One stone company inquired for the dimensions of the crosses used for the overseas headstones. The firm wanted to fulfill the wishes of families that wanted the cross reproduced for their private memorial in the United States.⁸¹ The Quartermaster Corps not only obliged with the specifics of the crosses' construction, but even noted how far above the ground each cross stood.⁸² In another case, the Quartermaster General approved adding two cubic feet of soil in the shipping container of a body returning to the United States so that a family would have some of the earth from their soldier's original burial site.⁸³ Such instances, while minor, further demonstrated the Army's willingness to continually assist the families of its dead in remembering their soldier's sacrifice by whatever means they felt necessary.

On 29 March 1922, just over two years since France's approval for the United States to repatriate its dead, the USAT *Cambrai* arrived in the United States bearing the last 1,200 bodies returned from France. Instead of the pier at Hoboken, the *Cambrai* docked at the Brooklyn pier, allowing for the ceremonies to take place in New York City. Of the 1,200 sets of remains aboard, one soldier was selected as the symbolic 'final returned soldier' to receive special honors in a procession. Representatives of the Armed Services, government officials, and numerous patriotic organizations attended.⁸⁴ The symbolic last Soldier Dead's caisson proceeded down the Fort Hamilton Parkway to the Brooklyn Army Base, where funeral services were held.⁸⁵ The

⁸¹ The Presbrey-Leland Company, Inc. Letter to the U.S. Army Engineers Board, 10 August 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 24.

⁸² H. J. Conner, Letter to The Presbrey-Leland Company, Inc., 26 August 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 24.

⁸³ H. L. Rogers, Telegram to H. F. Rethers, 19 September 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 24.

⁸⁴ "Last Soldier Dead Due Today," *New York Times*, 29 March 1922.

⁸⁵ "Parade to Honor the Soldier Dead," *New York Times*, 2 April 1922.

honors rendered to the symbolic ‘final returned soldier’ and the dignitaries who attended the service was superseded only by the funeral for the Unknown Soldier the previous November.

The mass repatriation of the Soldier Dead from the First World War during the early 1920s required the Army to construct and solidify many procedures for commemorating the war dead. With minor changes, many of these techniques, some made in the haste of the moment, remained Army policy almost one hundred years later. The Army’s decisions and subsequent actions did not escape public scrutiny, but the service always acted in good faith and investigated any soldier or civilian accused of mishandling the dead. As the dead returned to the United States, Congress passed legislation to bring home one additional soldier – one without an identity. The repatriation of an unknown soldier and the construction of a tomb to honor this man and others lying in France without names would again set a precedent for future United States actions following overseas armed conflicts.

CHAPTER 6

THE AMERICAN WAY OF REMEMBRANCE: THE TOMB OF THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER, THE GOLD STAR MOTHERS' PILGRIMAGE, AND THE FIGHT FOR NATIONAL COMMEMORATION OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The burial of the Soldier Dead in France and the United States marked a major step in assisting the American public with its grief following the sacrifice of the First World War. Still, some wounds did not seem closed merely by the act of repatriation and burial of the dead. There were over one thousand families whose sons' bodies were either not identified or located by the GRS. The families of men buried in France possessed communication from the War Department stating the plot, row, and cemetery where their soldier was buried, but that plot was an ocean away. Many simply could not afford the voyage to France and were left with the inability to mourn over their boy's grave. Lastly, the nation was yet undecided as to the methods with which it would remember this Great War, and the sacrifice by millions of Americans both on the home front and overseas. The government's actions in the 1920s and 1930s would help heal the wounds of the families of the unknowns, and the Gold Star Mothers. By contrast, its relative inaction to create a national memorial for the next one hundred years allowed the First World War to fade in the national consciousness. A common theme during that decade was the rebuilding of the Franco-American alliance that was tested during the diplomatic tensions of 1918-1920 over the repatriation of the American war dead.

Modern scholars writing about death provide insight into the difficulties experienced by families of soldiers whose bodies were never found or identified. One funeral director wrote, "Seeing [the body] is the hardest and most helpful part. The truth, even when it hurts, has a healing in it. When someone dies, it is not them we fear seeing, it is them *dead*. It is the death.

We fear that seeing will be believing.”¹ Part of the Franco-American agreement included that all unknown dead were to remain buried in France.² As a result, the relatives who had no body to bury and no grave over which to mourn, by extension possessed no place to grieve their soldier’s death. Without a body to bury or a grave over which to mourn left open the possibility, however slim, that the missing or unidentified person might still be alive. Such dangerous hope can prevent a person from confronting their grief. The same funeral director wrote that seeing families of the dead taught him that, “seeing is believing, knowing is better than not knowing, to name the hurt returns a kind of comfort, the grief ignored will never go away.”³

By the end of the First World War, an estimated 517,000 bodies of Allied dead could not be identified.⁴ The burial of a representative unidentified American soldier was unique in that it would be the only anonymous set of remains repatriated for the United States to create a representative mourning site for all of the families whose loved ones’ bodies were never located. The idea for the selection and burial of a symbolic unknown soldier was conceived by a British soldier, David Railton, who became deeply moved by the grave of an unknown soldier that he encountered while fighting in the Somme.⁵ The British subsequently buried an unidentified body at Westminster Abbey, while France interred its unknown at the Arc de Triumph.

The United States government began discussing the idea to bury an unidentified soldier in 1920, and received immediate support from the Bring Home the Soldier Dead League as well

¹ Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry, *Death and the Regeneration of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 96.

² Office of the Quartermaster General, *History of the American Graves Registration Service: QMC in Europe*, Volume 1 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920), 122.

³ Bloch and Parry, *Death and the Regeneration of Life*, 97.

⁴ John R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 156.

⁵ Neil Hanson, *Unknown Soldiers: The Story of the Missing of the First World War* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 260.

as the American Legion.⁶ The League attempted to use the repatriation of one unknown to champion bringing home all of the unidentified dead, citing that such action “would keep sacred the Government’s promise and pledge to those who cannot speak.”⁷ The War Department replied that such action would probably complicate more than simplify matters: “To do so would probably provoke a renewal of the controversy between those who earnestly advocated a return of all our military dead and those who objected to the return of any.”⁸ After so much disagreement over the past three years, it is understandable that the government was not willing to reopen any debate on the subject.

The *New York Times* opined that “As in England and France, it is the nation that should do honor to the unidentified soldier, and his tomb should be a shrine for the Americans of all the States and all the lands under the flag. And that shrine should be in the National Cemetery at Arlington, where the bravest lie...”⁹ General John Pershing agreed that a Tomb of the Unknown Soldier would fill a void in the national attempts to commemorate the war. “There has been no national expression since the war ended to give the people an opportunity to show their appreciation” of the sacrifices made by its fighting men in the war.¹⁰ The Unknown Soldier’s anonymity would allow all Americans, especially those whose sons were missing in action, to identify with him.¹¹

While few argued about the reasons to repatriate one unidentified American, discussion ensued as to the proper location for the eventual tomb. The argument centered on the suitability of the Capitol Rotunda versus Arlington Cemetery as the location. Some Americans opposed

⁶ W. K. Hammond, Letter to Newton Baker, 4 February 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 26; “The Unknown Soldier,” *New York Times*, 21 January 1921.

⁷ A. B. Pouch, Letter to John Weeks, 25 July 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 26.

⁸ J. W. Wainright, Letter to A. B. Pouch, 2 August 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14.

⁹ “The Unknown Soldier,” *New York Times*, 9 December 1920.

¹⁰ “The Unknown Soldier’s Tomb,” *New York Times*, 3 February 1921.

¹¹ Gillis, *Commemorations*, 175.

Arlington Cemetery as the Unknown Soldier's tomb site, citing its association with the Civil War. Those opposing largely suggested the Capitol Rotunda as a better location.¹² Secretary of War Newton Baker agreed, stating that Arlington could not be the "Westminster Abbey of the dead" through its dedication as a military cemetery.¹³ A group of New York civic leaders petitioned Baker to entomb the Unknown Soldier in the city's planned Victory Hall.¹⁴ The codification of Public Law 397 on 4 March 1921, however, called for the construction of the Unknown Soldier's tomb in the grounds adjacent to the Arlington Memorial Amphitheater.¹⁵

The Unknown Soldier was selected on 24 October 1921 as a symbolic representation of the 77,000 Americans who perished in the war.¹⁶ To select the Unknown Soldier, the GRS dispatched three Quartermaster officers and one Infantry officer to four different cemeteries: Aisne-Marne, Meuse-Argonne, Somme, and St. Mihiel, under sealed orders. The orders instructed the teams to disinter a certain unknown from the cemetery, designated by a number chosen at random (unknown graves were marked with numbers for cemetery records). An alternate number was included in the event a team found any possible means of identification on the first body. The teams transported their selected unknowns to Chalons, France.¹⁷ To further safeguard against any possibility of identification, all records pertaining to the four unknowns were destroyed. After the caskets were brought to Chalons and placed in the Hotel de Ville, they were rearranged during the night to guarantee no one even knew from which cemetery the

¹² Kurt Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way* (Washington: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1995), 118.

¹³ "The Unknown Soldier's Tomb," *New York Times*, 3 February 1921.

¹⁴ Mark Snell, ed., *Unknown Soldiers: The American Expeditionary Forces in Memory and Remembrance* (Kent, OH: Kent State University, 2008), 49.

¹⁵ Text of HR 8032, 4 March 1921, NA, RG 92, Records Regarding the Design and Construction of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Box 2.

¹⁶ Office of the Quartermaster General, *History of the American Graves Registration Service: QMC in Europe*, Volume 3 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922), 117.

¹⁷ Department of Defense, Press Release, "Background Information Relating to Selection of Unknown Soldier of World War I," 5 April 1950, NA, RG 117, Box 179.

remains originated.¹⁸ The selection of the representative unknown was made by Sergeant Edward Younger, a decorated veteran of the war. Sgt. Younger entered the room where the caskets were displayed. He circled the four caskets three times, laid a spray of white roses on the third casket from the left, and saluted the casket. The coffin was inscribed, “An Unknown American Who Gave His Life in the World War,” sealed, and covered with an American flag.¹⁹ The GRS sent the three unidentified soldiers not selected to Romange Cemetery. They were buried in graves one, two and three of Plot G, Row 1.²⁰

The selection of the representative Unknown Soldier initiated a series of Franco-American ceremonies. The remains left Chalons escorted by a Franco-American honor guard and were guarded overnight in Paris. The next morning the remains were moved to Le Havre, obtaining the commander of the 3rd French Army Corps as its honorary escort.²¹ The Quartermaster Corps’ official history notes that, “[t]he entire population of [Le Havre] turned out to pay homage to America’s Unknown Soldier and to show deep appreciation and respect.”²² The funeral procession through the city culminated with the presentation of the Legion of Honor (Chevalier) to the casket in the name of France.²³ After loading the casket on the USS *Olympia*, school children from Le Havre decorated the casket with flowers. As the *Olympia* began to sail out of the bay, two French escort ships peeled away. One fired a seventeen gun salute in honor of the unknown dead, which the *Olympia* returned.²⁴ This beautiful ceremony symbolized not only the commitment of the United States to its war dead, but also France’s profound gratitude for the sacrifice made by the United States soldiers so far from home.

¹⁸ OQMG, *QMC in Europe*, Vol. 2, 118-119.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 121.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 120.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 123.

²² *Ibid.*, 124.

²³ *Ibid.*, 126.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 127.

The *Olympia* reached Hampton Roads, Virginia, on 8 November 1921. The Unknown Soldier's casket was transferred to the yacht *Mayflower*, which carried the casket up the Potomac River to Washington, D.C. As the *Mayflower* docked at the Washington Navy Yard, a full regiment of cavalry saluted the casket. Government officials and military officers watched as the casket was placed on a black draped gun caisson led by six black horses. The cavalry then escorted the caisson to the Capitol Building.²⁵

On 10 November, 1921, the Unknown Soldier lay in state in the Capitol building, "on the same catafalque where only martyred presidents – Lincoln, Garfield, and McKinley – had rested before."²⁶ Thousands of people, led by President Warren G. Harding, filed past and paid homage to the Unknown Soldier. Floral tributes from foreign representatives and veterans' groups filled the room.²⁷ The honors bestowed the Unknown Soldier on 10 November were merely a prelude to the events of the following day. The pomp and circumstance involved in the ceremony was planned as the national funeral for the dead of the World War. Seventy-seven Medal of Honor recipients attended, as well as one representative for every 10,000 of the 4,764,071 men that served in the Army during the war. The Unknown Soldier's casket was carried by officers at the rank of Major General or Rear Admiral.²⁸ Guns from Fort Meyer began firing at 8:30 A.M., continuing until noon.²⁹ General Pershing led the funeral procession, accompanied by other generals and admirals. The funeral escort, comprised of the Marine Corps Band, one squadron of cavalry, one battalion of regular infantry, one battalion of National

²⁵ Department of Defense, Press Release, "Background Information Relating to Selection of Unknown Soldier of World War I," 5 April 1950, NA, RG 117, Box 179.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Adjutant General of the Army, Memorandum to the CG, District of Washington, "Ceremonies for the Unknown Dead – November 11, 1921," NA, RG 92, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

²⁹ Department of Defense, Press Release, "Background Information Relating to Selection of Unknown Soldier of World War I," 5 April 1950, NA, RG 117, Box 179.

Guardsmen, one battalion of sailors and Marines, one battalion of field artillery, and the Washington Barracks Band, followed.³⁰ Next came the caisson bearing the Unknown Soldier, with the President and his cabinet walking behind.

President Harding decreed two minutes of national silence in memory of the war dead to precede his speech to commemorate both the Unknown Soldier and all of the war dead.³¹ He remarked in his address about the Unknown Soldier, “We do not know the eminence of his birth, but we do know the glory of his death. He died for his country, and greater devotion hath no man than this. He died unquestioning, uncomplaining, with faith in his heart and hope on his lips, that this country should triumph and its civilization survive.”³² Following his oration, Harding bestowed the Medal of Honor and the Distinguished Service Cross upon the casket. Representatives of various Allied countries followed suit in awarding their nation’s highest honors to the Unknown Soldier.³³

The Unknown Soldier was buried in a sarcophagus on the East front of the Memorial Amphitheater at Arlington National Cemetery. The *New York Times* accurately captured the importance of the Unknown Soldier to the entire nation:

The Unknown American has come home – come home without a name or age, without birthplace... without vocation, except that of serving his country and the cause to which it asked him to offer his life... The greatest citizens of his time have stood with bare head in his presence, thought he was but a youth when his years ended. The greatest Generals of the world have saluted him, though he may have been but a private. The poets have sung his praise. Beyond all this tribute of presence and speech, a hundred million men, women, and children will pause today... and pay an homage of silence more eloquent than speech. But in winning all this honor, he has lost not only his life but also his identity... Yet by sacrificing his identity not only has he shared it with every American who lies in France, and indeed with every American who perished on land or sea in the

³⁰ Adjutant General, Memorandum for the Commanding General, District of Washington Subject: Ceremonies for the Unknown Dead – November 11, 1921, 19 October 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

³¹ Warren G. Harding, Presidential Proclamation: Armistice Day, 11 November 1921, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

³² “President Harding’s Address at the Burial of an Unknown Soldier,” *New York Times*, 12 November 1921.

³³ Department of Defense, Press Release, “Background Information Relating to Selection of Unknown Soldier of World War I,” 5 April 1950, NA, RG 117, Box 179.

Great War... Today the whole nation, mourning in solemn and united recognition of a sacrifice which it has shared with other nations... whence to catch a glimpse of America's duty to her dead, whose worth, having displayed itself in deeds, can be sufficiently rewarded only 'by honors also shown by deeds.'³⁴

Even the revered Tomb of the Unknown Soldier did not escape discourse over whether or not it was suitable to properly honor the sacred remains that it held. After the Unknown Soldier was buried, the casket was covered by a concrete block, but did not have the monument installed that visitors to the tomb see today.³⁵ Some visitors mistook the concrete for a bench, claiming that there was nothing to indicate where the Unknown Soldier was buried. The Quartermaster Corps installed a small sign in front of the concrete slab, but lamented that the tomb's condition made it susceptible to public criticism.³⁶ The disparagement heightened as the *Washington Star* ran an article entitled "Plea for Honoring Unknown Dead Hero," which detailed further denigration of the tomb's unfinished appearance.³⁷

The principle problem with completing the tomb in the eyes of the Quartermaster Corps was how to make the tomb inspiring, rather than sad. Discussion noted that Armistice Day ceremonies conducted since the Unknown Soldier's burial conveyed the attitude of mourning rather than patriotism, and the day tended to mirror Memorial Day's regret rather than recognizing achievement.³⁸ In 1923, the federal Commission of Fine Arts, which oversaw the completion of the tomb, proposed and installed a thirty five foot model shaft for consideration by

³⁴ "The Unknown Soldier," *New York Times*, 11 November 1921.

³⁵ See Appendix D: Tomb of the Unknown Soldier Before Monument Added to Sarcophagus (NA, RG 92, Records Regarding the Design and Construction of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, 1926-1933).

³⁶ H. C. Bonnycastle, Memorandum to the Quartermaster General, Subject: Tomb of the Unknown, 31 July 1923, NA, RG 92, Records Regarding the Design and Construction of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Box 2.

³⁷ "Plea for Honoring Unknown Dead Hero," *Washington Star*, 11 December 1923, NA, RG 92, Records Regarding the Design and Construction of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Box 2.

³⁸ W. K. Naylor, Memorandum for the Chief of Staff, 11 December 1923, NA, RG 92, Records Regarding the Design and Construction of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Box 2.

the Secretary of War.³⁹ The secretary rejected it, wanting “a smaller, less elaborate memorial.”⁴⁰ While the desire to be deliberate in selecting the final design was understandable since the tomb would represent so much to the nation, as the months turned to years with no progress, the American public grew impatient. Secretary of War Dwight Davis noted that “There has been considerable adverse newspaper criticism of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the Memorial Amphitheater, on account of its present unfinished condition. These criticisms have been widely disseminated throughout the country and as a result a number of letters have been received relative to this matter.”⁴¹

Even before the Tomb’s completion, it became the de facto site for any organization wishing to pay homage to America’s Soldier Dead, both identified and unknown. These organizations included the American Legion and delegations of war veterans from various Allied countries. One group wanted to present an inscribed bronze palm with the desire that it be permanently affixed to the tomb.⁴² While the tribute was generously received, the Quartermaster General stated that no permanent tributes would be attached to the monument.⁴³ Other patriotic organizations presented the Arlington National Cemetery’s superintendent with a plaque and other mementoes to commemorate their visits and gratitude for the sacrifice made during the First World War. The cemetery kept such items in a consolidated area for some time until too many were accumulated for a proper display.

³⁹ “Model of Column Placed for Study on Unknown Tomb,” 23 February 1924, NA, RG 92, Records Regarding the Design and Construction of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Box 2.

⁴⁰ “Weeks Rejects Unknown Soldiers Monument Design,” *Washington Evening Star*, February 1, 1924, NA, RG 92, Records Regarding Design and Construction of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Box 2.

⁴¹ Dwight F. Davis, Letter to President Calvin Coolidge, 12 November 1925, NA, RG 92, Records Regarding Design and Construction of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Box 1.

⁴² A. P. Andrew, Telegram to John Weeks, 1 October 1922, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 8.

⁴³ W. H. Hart, Memorandum to the Secretary of War, 29 September 1922, NA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 8.

By 1925, public opinion, fueled by many newspaper articles calling for an appropriate monument for the tomb, propelled the Secretary of War to recommend that Congress pass an appropriations bill for the design and installation of a monument over the sarcophagus.⁴⁴ On 3 July 1926, a Congressional Resolution appropriated \$50,000 to fund the completion of the tomb. The resolution also called for the final design to be selected as the result of a design competition beginning in 1927.⁴⁵ The first round of design selections were not undertaken until June 1928, when five designs were chosen from seventy-three submissions by a jury panel. One of the five was ultimately recommended as the best design to the Secretary of War.⁴⁶ The process used by the War Department in coordination with the Fine Arts Commission was intended to ensure that the recommended proposal would perfectly memorialize the unknown dead.

The War Department approved the final design on 10 December, 1928.⁴⁷ The Quartermaster General telegraphed Thomas Jones, the winning sculptor, to relay the good news, stating “It is a real triumph.”⁴⁸ Initial work started on the grounds surrounding the sarcophagus in January 1931.⁴⁹ Construction of the actual tomb began on 27 August 1931, with completion forecasted to be in time for Memorial Day, 1932.⁵⁰ On 16 February, the War Department

⁴⁴ Dwight Davis, Letter to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, 11 January 1926, NA, RG 92, Records Regarding Design and Construction of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Box 1.

⁴⁵ Text of Act of Congress, Approved 3 July 1926, NA, RG 92, Records Regarding Design and Construction of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Box 1.

⁴⁶ “Instructions for the Guidance of the Five Competitors in the Second State of the Competition for Completion of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery,” NA, RG 92, Records Regarding Design and Construction of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Box 1; Secretary of War, Letter to Fiorello La Guardia, 7 June 1928, NA, RG 92, Records Regarding Design and Construction of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Box 1.

⁴⁷ B. F. Cheatham, Letter to the Secretary of War, 6 December 1928, NA, RG 92, Records Regarding Design and Construction of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Box 1.

⁴⁸ B. F. Cheatham, Telegram to Thomas Jones, 10 December 1928, NA, RG 92, Records Regarding Design and Construction of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Box 1.

⁴⁹ Charles Mortimer, Memorandum for the Quartermaster General, Subject: Newspaper Release, 2 February 1931, NA, RG 92, Records Regarding Design and Construction of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Box 1.

⁵⁰ Hegeman-Harris Company, Inc., Letter to L. H. Bash, 27 August 1931, NA, RG 92, Records Regarding Design and Construction of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Box 1. The Quartermaster General, Letter to the Chief of Staff, 10 December 1931, NA, RG 92, Records Regarding Design and Construction of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Box 1.

unveiled the previously secret inscription for the tomb: “Here rests in honored glory an American soldier known but to God.”⁵¹ The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier quickly became the pilgrimage site for many patriotic and military organizations to honor the collective memory of the dead from the World War.

The American Legion called for a permanent sentry to guard the tomb to ensure proper reverence, noting that some visitors used the tomb as a bench or picnic table. In 1926, soldiers from nearby Fort Meyer began guarding the tomb.⁵² This did not prevent vandals from stealing most of the medals bestowed upon the Unknown Soldier by various patriotic organizations out of an amphitheater showcase on 24 March, 1934.⁵³ Nevertheless, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier accomplished two important tasks in helping the American public commemorate its war dead. It provided a sort of national memorial for citizens and patriotic organizations to come and pay homage to the collective sacrifice made during the war. Second, it provided a representative gravesite for families of the unidentified and never located men to mourn their personal loss.

During the construction of the tomb’s superstructure, the government was also trying to grant the wishes of those mothers that wanted to see the graves of their sons buried in France. In his 1920 report to the Secretary of War, Assistant Secretary of War Ralph Hayes foreshadowed the potential difficulty presented to the American families with a relative buried overseas. He explained that, “For Americans there is necessary a long trip to the seacoast, a trans-Atlantic voyage, and another journey by land across a country strange in its language and customs. The project is one of great difficulty at best... and it is wholly impossible for that majority of parents

⁵¹ L. H. Bash, Letter to Lorimer Rich, 18 February 1932, Charles Mortimer, Memorandum for the Quartermaster General, Subject: Newspaper Release, 2 February 1931, NA, RG 92, Records Regarding Design and Construction of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Box 1.

⁵² Piehler, *Remembering War*, 122.

⁵³ “Vandals Steal Unknown Soldier’s Medals,” *New York Times*, 25 March 1934.

who are of moderate means.”⁵⁴ Throughout the 1920s, various Gold Star Mothers’ organizations lobbied for a government-sponsored voyage to France, stating that their hearts were “just breaking for the sight of the grave of their boy.”⁵⁵

Some members of Congress rightly questioned the cost of such a pilgrimage. Congressmen advocating for the pilgrimage noted that these mothers saved the government an estimated twenty three million dollars by keeping their sons buried in France.⁵⁶ The senator who introduced legislation for the pilgrimages remarked, “I know that every mother must have that yearning to visit the place where her boy fell... Once in a while, as I view it, Congress should turn aside from its ordinary purposes to... do something that touches the heart of humanity.” Another senator remarked, “Their loyalty and devotion was such that they gave these sons, and now, let us Mr. Chairman, show our decent regard for their agonizing sufferings, pass this bill and permit these mothers to go and visit the graves.”⁵⁷

Congress held hearings in 1928 and 1929 to decide whether or not to enact legislation for the pilgrimages. Many women, along with members of military and patriotic organizations appeared before Congress during both hearings to plead for the statute’s passing. It was the testimony of the Gold Star mothers that made light of not only the need for such journeys, but the urgency. One woman testified about the positive effect on her life that resulted from seeing her son’s grave:

The body of my only son lies in Romange Cemetery, France, because I trusted the government to forever care for and guard the ground in which these heroes were placed... not until I saw for myself did I realize the wonderful preparation, care, and protection the United States has provided through the Quartermaster Corps of our Army for these silent

⁵⁴ Ralph Hayes, *A Report to the Secretary of War on American Military Dead Overseas* (Washington: GPO, 1920), 14.

⁵⁵ Piehler, *Remembering War*, 102.

⁵⁶ Gillis, *Commemorations*, 177.

⁵⁷ Seventieth Congress, *Hearing Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Military Affairs of the United States on HR 5494* (Washington: GPO, 1928), 3.

soldiers. I came home so grateful for what had been done that I have been anxious ever since that every mother whose son's body lies overseas should have this great boon granted her, so that she may be forever satisfied that her decision to allow the tree to lie where it had fallen was a wise one. During the nine years intervening between my son's death in 1918 and my pilgrimage to France in 1927 I was a broken, grief-stricken woman, avoiding all contacts outside my home... In the year and a half that has elapsed since I saw the white crosses overseas, I have devoted my life to service... It has been eleven years since our sons died, and those years have taken a greater physical toll from us that we would have paid to time had we not had this grief to bear. I hope you gentlemen will realize that when a man lays down his life he takes with him a part of his mother's heart as well – a mother never really gets over her son's death, but it will be sure to help in comforting her to make the pilgrimage to the spot where a part of her own body lies, and see for herself that she need not fear that any neglect can ever happen there.⁵⁸

Some citizens opposed the pilgrimages and lobbied their Congressional representatives to block the bill's passage. Others believed the government should invest the money on the living, rather than the dead. "What's the idea of giving the gold-star mothers a trip to Paris and doing absolutely nothing for the mothers of the disabled soldiers..." wrote one.⁵⁹ Various women's organizations also voiced opposition to the pilgrimage as well, although none gave specific reasoning for their protest. One organization did claim that the pilgrimage was merely a commercial opportunity for the government.⁶⁰ Fortunately for the Gold Star Mothers and their supporters, dissenters of the bill's passage were in the minority.

Congress authorized the Gold Star pilgrimages through Public Law 952 on 2 March 1929. The bill called for all qualifying Gold Star mothers and unmarried widows to be invited to participate in one pilgrimage between 1 May 1930 and 31 October 1933. The provisions of the bill allowed for mothers, stepmothers, mothers through adoption, or loco parentis. If a woman previously visited her son or husband's graves at her own expense, she was disqualified from taking part in the pilgrimage. Congress passed the bill on 2 March, 1929, and carried out the

⁵⁸ Ibid., 6-7.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 19.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 26.

requirements of the bill despite the stock market crash of October 1929 and the economic depression that followed. Interestingly, Congress did not allocate the \$5,386,367 for the pilgrimages until early 1930.⁶¹

The GRS had much to prepare ahead of these pilgrimages, namely ensuring that all of the headstones bore correct inscriptions. By February, the GRS's list held fifty cases of headstone errors for correction. Before each party began its voyage, the GRS sent each superintendent a list of burial cards from its files for the cemetery superintendents to check against the inscription of the soldier's tombstone as a final precaution.⁶² While the Gold Star Pilgrimages provide the government an opportunity to showcase its national cemeteries, it also carried risk that if a name was misspelled, or a grave in the wrong location, the government and the GRS would be subject to considerable embarrassment. Additionally, the press would probably carry multiple stories of any error, however small, which would likely overshadow any positives that came from the pilgrimages.

Meanwhile, Congress dictated the completion a compendium listing the name and address every eligible woman along with the name and unit of her son or husband, and his burial site.⁶³ The War Department sent information sheets detailing the pilgrimage and followed with formal invitations. The information sheet provided a brief overview of the pilgrimage including costs, transportation, recommended clothing, and a general itinerary. The packet also contained an emergency addressee sheet in case a crisis occurred during the voyage and a sheet to list any desired stopovers to visit upon completion of the pilgrimage.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Text of Public Resolution 38, 71st Congress, 7 February 1930, NA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows, Box 81.

⁶² Adolph Kaess, Memorandum to Chief, AGRS Europe, 3 March 1931, NA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows, Box 83.

⁶³ United States Congress, *Congressional Record* (Washington: GPO, 1930), 171.

⁶⁴ Example of Desired Stopover Request Sheet, NA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows, Box 82.

The War Department mailed over 30,000 letters to the qualified Gold Star Mothers whose soldiers remained buried overseas. Forty percent of those letters were returned as undeliverable. Approximately 6,000 mothers accepted the War Department's invitation.⁶⁵ Once a woman committed to a voyage date, she received a formal invitation stating the date their pilgrimage was scheduled to begin, and the name of the steamship that would carry her to Europe.⁶⁶ Even the mere possibility that a mother could visit her son's grave helped ease the anguish that some mothers experienced. One mother noted, "I became ill when I received the news of my boy's death, and since then I have spent most of my time in a wheelchair. Then came the cheering news that I could see my boy's grave. I began to get well, and my strength returned. Now I am practically cured, and I'll be aboard that boat when it sails from Hoboken."⁶⁷

As a lady's travel date neared, she received a comprehensive packet from the War Department regarding the pilgrimage. The contents included a roster of participants, consolidated and detailed itineraries, and Paris sightseeing information accompanied by marked maps with travel routes highlighted to places of interest. In addition, each mother received a brief history and current information on the permanent cemeteries in Europe.

The SS *America* departed New York on 7 May 1930, carrying the first group of 232 pilgrims bound for France, thirteen years to the day after the first ship carrying members of the AEF set sail for the same destination. Newspapers captured the drama of the day and America's mood toward these brave women finally travelling to mourn over their son's grave.⁶⁸ As they

⁶⁵ David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 367.

⁶⁶ Invitation for Estella Kendall to participate in Gold Star Mother Pilgrimage, Edward Jones Research Center, Kansas City, Mo., 2000.30, Estella Kendall Collection.

⁶⁷ "War Mother, Ill 12 Years, Sails Recovered," 25 July 1930, NA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows, Entry 1904, Box 1.

⁶⁸ See Appendix E: Press Coverage of First Voyage of Gold Star Mothers to France (RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows, Entry 1904, Box 1).

left New York, some of the women watched the cheering crowd of 5,000 fall silent as they looked upon the sullen faces of the pilgrims on the ship.⁶⁹ A flight of forty-two Army planes dropped red poppies on the deck of the ship as it pulled out of New York Harbor⁷⁰ Escort officers accompanied each travel party, along with one nurse for every twenty pilgrims. The officers received orders to maintain the strictest of bearing during their duties to the pilgrims. Any officer caught drinking alcohol would be immediately dismissed from the service; the Army was not risking the attitude of these ladies being compromised due to the actions of its officers.⁷¹

The first voyage docked at Cherbourg on 16 May 1930. As the ladies disembarked the ship, French authorities welcomed them to France, and a French war mother presented her American counterparts with a bouquet of flowers on behalf of all war mothers and widows. As the mothers walked to the train, French women “reached out to shake their hands and offer words of welcome that could only be understood by the expression on their faces and the tears in their eyes.”⁷²

An unlikely event occurred at St. Mihiel Cemetery as the first group of pilgrims entered the cemetery, they noticed a group of men saluting their caravan before reverently bowing to the pilgrims as well. The mothers, thinking the men were part of the welcoming party for the cemetery, returned a greeting to these men, who then hurriedly departed the cemetery grounds. Only later did the ladies find out that among the men who greeted them was former German War Minister Otto Gessler. He and his staff had toured German cemeteries in the region, and had just

⁶⁹ “232 Sad Women Sail for France to View Graves,” *New York Evening World*, 7 May 1930, NA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows, Entry 1904, Box 1.

⁷⁰ “Gold Star Mothers Weep on Departure for France as Planes Drop Poppies,” *New York Evening World*, 7 May 1930, NA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows, Box 1.

⁷¹ “Gold Star Escort Hears Ouster is Tippling Penalty,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 16 April 1930.

⁷² George Dailey, Summary of Report, 17 May 1930, NA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows, Box 87.

stopped at St. Mihiel to view the American cemetery.⁷³ While some mothers thought that the Germans should not be allowed in the cemetery, one mother said, “Well, many German mothers lost sons, too.”⁷⁴ For a brief moment, the bonds of motherhood transcended military rivalry.

Unfortunately, the pilgrimages did not go off without a hitch. In the three years that the United States sent mothers and widows to France, at least two women died during their respective journeys. One experienced a stroke moments before the cemetery photographer was to take her photo next to her son’s grave, and perished two days later.⁷⁵ The second woman suffered a cerebral hemorrhage a couple of days after landing in France.⁷⁶ Many women were nearing advanced age at the time, and combined with the stress of losing their son or husband over a decade prior, were in ill health. One woman, making the journey despite her doctor’s warning that her heart might fail on the journey, stated, “No matter what it costs me I must go once more to the grave of my boy and say farewell to him tomorrow. If I die I shall be with him.”⁷⁷

In a unique if not uncomfortable situation at Suresnes Cemetery, officials escorted a mother to a cross bearing the inscription for an unidentified soldier. The mother became distraught, stating that she received notification that her son died in a hospital and subsequently was buried in a marked grave. The mother had received photos of her son’s grave and never received notice that he was considered an unknown.⁷⁸ The American officers escorting the party

⁷³ “Germans Visiting Own Bleak Graves Salute American Gold Star Group,” *Daily News*, 23 May 1920, NA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows, Entry 1904, Box 1.

⁷⁴ “Unexpected Drama Marks Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers to St. Mihiel,” *Chicago Tribune* (Paris Edition), 23 May 1930, NA, RG 92, Scrapbook of Col. Richard T. Ellis, Box 1.

⁷⁵ Richard Ellis, Memorandum to the Quartermaster General, Subject: Report on the Death of Mrs. Grace Kinsbury, 19 September 1930, NA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows, Box 83.

⁷⁶ Richard Ellis, Memorandum to the Quartermaster General, Subject: Report on the Death of Mrs. Harriet Bates, 22 August 1930, NA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows, Box 83.

⁷⁷ Grace Robinson, “‘If I Died I will be with Him’ She Tells Doctors,” *Daily News*, 24 May 1930, NA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows, Entry 1904, Box 1.

⁷⁸ Incident Reports for Party “K”, NA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows, Box 83.

and cemetery officials were at a loss to explain the oversight. Unfortunately, the records do not detail any resolution to the instance.

The French press astutely covered the pilgrimage as well, churning out various articles during the numerous journeys from 1930-1933. One newspaper noted the pilgrims' "first act symbolic and especially touching was to kneel at the Tomb of the Unknown "Poilu" as though to affirm, immediately upon their arrival, their solidarity and their indissoluble union with the French mothers..."⁷⁹ Each mother received a natural wreath of flowers to place on their son's or husband's grave. Cemetery officials took photographs of the pilgrims by their loved one's grave, and subsequently gave each pilgrim three copies of the photograph and the negative before their departure.⁸⁰ Before the pilgrims embarked to return to the United States, French officials presented each a letter stating, "We are sure there is nothing that can give you more peace and joy to your children than to know that both your country and ours are still closely united for the defense of the common ideal, for which they sacrificed their lives. You have won the gratitude of the women of France, and their hearts feel and sympathize with yours during these days of emotion and souvenirs."⁸¹

Members of Congress who travelled to France during the pilgrimages eagerly solicited cemetery superintendents for their opinion on the success of the pilgrims' visits to cemeteries.⁸² The pilgrimages' success can be gauged by the letters of appreciation sent by the women upon their return home. "I am happy to think that my son gave his life for this great country and feel

⁷⁹ Translation of article appearing in the *Journal des Mutilés et Combattants*, 25 May 1930, NA, RG 92, Scrapbook of Col. Richard Ellis, Box 1.

⁸⁰ James Duncan, Memorandum to Chief, AGRS Europe, Subject: Visit of Robert Wagner, 25 August 1930, NA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows, Box 81; See Appendix F: Photo of Gold Star Mother next to Her Son's Grave During the Gold Star Mother's Pilgrimage (Photo of Estella Kendall, Edward Jones Research Center, 2000.30, Estella Kendall Collection).

⁸¹ "La Beinvenue Francaise," Summer, 1933, Edward Jones Research Center, 2000.30, Estella Kendall Collection.

⁸² James Duncan, Memorandum to Chief, AGRS Europe, Subject: Visit of Robert Wagner, 25 August 1930, NA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows, Box 81.

very proud to be a Gold Star Mother. The journey will remain in my thoughts forever,” wrote one.⁸³ Another wrote, “... May I say the USA has never done a more glorious thing than sending the mothers to visit the national cemeteries in France. Our cemeteries are the most beautiful places on earth and a fitting resting place for our dear boys... Pardo [sic] my lengthy letter but [it] is just a letter from a Gold Star Mother with a heart full of gratitude...”⁸⁴ One woman summed the experience by stating, “The Government has done all in [its] power to ease the broken hearts of the War Mothers.”⁸⁵ The *Altoona Tribune* succinctly stated the effect of the Gold Star Pilgrimages on the American psyche: “America honors its hero mothers just as forever it will its martyr sons.”⁸⁶

One of the preeminent results of the Gold Star Mothers’ pilgrimages was the strengthening of relations between the United States and France. While it would be an exaggeration to say that the relationship between the two nations frayed as a result of the diplomatic tensions over the disposition of the war dead, a slight level of animosity certainly developed by the citizens of each country toward the other. The arrival of the Gold Star Mothers in France helped to eradicate the feelings of animosity. At the pilgrims’ arrival in Paris, they were hosted to a tea at one of the better known restaurants in the city. Representatives of American and French government and patriotic organizations attended.⁸⁷ When each mother departed France, French officials presented each of them with a small sack made with the French

⁸³ Bianca Lewin, Letter to the Officer in Charge, War Mothers Pilgrimage, 19 June 1930, NA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows New York 1930-1933, Box 4.

⁸⁴ Laura Green, Letter to AE Williams, 11 August 1930, NA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows New York 1930-1933, Box 4.

⁸⁵ Elizabeth Windecker, Letter to the Officer in Charge, War Mothers Pilgrimage, 14 September 1930, NA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows New York 1930-1933, Box 4.

⁸⁶ “Gold Star Mothers in Europe,” *Altoona Tribune*, 28 March 1930, NA, RG 92, Scrapbook of Col. Richard Ellis, Box 1.

⁸⁷ Richard Ellis, Letter to John Burke, 24 April 1930, NA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows, Box 81.

and American flags. The sack contained French soil because “it is sacred to you, as it is to us, because of all the young heroes who rest in our soil.”⁸⁸

In the years after the Armistice, numerous cities and towns erected memorials commemorating the local sacrifices during the Great War. According to art historian Mark Levitch, there are an estimated 10,000 memorials in the United States that commemorate the Great War.⁸⁹ The president and other dignitaries honored the collective war effort at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier on Memorial Day and Armistice Day. With so much effort expended for its completion, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier became a sort of de facto national war memorial. By the end of the twentieth century, the United States began to reflect upon its war experience over the past one hundred years and erect memorials to pay tribute to those who fought in those battles.

One hundred years after the Treaty of Versailles, America has not yet settled on a national memorial to honor its Great War dead. With the completion of the National World War II Memorial in 2004, World War I became the only twentieth century conflict without a national memorial on the Mall in Washington, D.C. To be fair, the idea of “national memorials” in Washington, D.C. was only recently conceived. The Vietnam Wall, the first national memorial to a twentieth century war, was completed in 1982, followed by the Korean Memorial in 1995, and the aforementioned World War II Memorial. Unbeknownst to many Americans, the last battle of World War I has been brewing between representatives of two memorials built in the aftermath of the war for recognition as the nation’s monument to the First World War. Like the

⁸⁸ “La Beinvenue Francaise,” Summer, 1933, Edward Jones Research Center, 2000.30, Estella Kendall Collection.

⁸⁹ Michael E. Ruane, “A D.C. Historian is Hunting Down Forgotten Monuments in Memory of ‘the Great War,’” *Washington Post*, 7 February 2014.

battle over the disposition of the war dead, the fight over the location of the national memorial was covered by newspapers as lobby groups struggled to influence Congress of its position.

The city of Kansas City possesses a significant history for honoring its World War dead. As early as 1919, the secretary of the Kansas City area Gold Star League compiled a list of 328 area dead entitled, “We are the Dead” as part of a Victory Loan Drive. Later that year, the Kansas City Historical Society and the city’s Gold Star League began soliciting the names of all the men from the city who died during the war in an effort to complete the list. This effort was later expanded to include the men from the entire county as well as Kansas City, Kansas. The initial list ran in the Kansas City paper and generated significant public response.

The public, particularly the relatives of the dead, took this list very seriously. The printing of the list brought omissions to the attention of the historical society, but it also became clear that if Kansas City was going to honor its dead, the city would do so properly down to the last detail. The historical society received a handful of replies stating that names were misspelled, or other information was incorrect. One father enclosed the correction to his son’s military rank by stating “I feel certain your society desires to keep a correct record of those who fell.”⁹⁰ While these details may seem trivial to the outside observer, a mother whose son was listed as serving under the Army rather than the Navy reminded the society that “it makes a material difference to his family and friends.”⁹¹ To some, accuracy in remembering the dead was just as important as burying the remains.

Despite the list’s initial problems, the city continued to correct the list as necessary. Later in 1919, the Gold Star League and the Kansas City Historical Society began to work with

⁹⁰ (Illegible), Letter to R. A. Long, 4 May 1919, Edward Jones Research Library, Kansas City, Mo., Copies of KCPL Collection, 40.4.11.

⁹¹ Mrs. Robert Kisting, Letter to R. A. Long, 12 March 1920, Edward Jones Research Library, Kansas City, Mo., Copies of KCPL Collection, 40.4.11.

the new Liberty Memorial Association by loaning their compiled list for use during its funding drive.⁹² The Liberty Memorial Association challenged Kansas City alone to raise the \$2.5 million necessary to complete the memorial. The fund drive occurred from October 27 to November 5, 1919.⁹³ Approximately 83,000 citizens (25% of Kansas City's population) contributed a total of \$2,517,000.⁹⁴ The city began searching for an architect and judged design submissions for the memorial. The panel selected Harold van Buren Magonigle's design, a combination of the Egyptian Revival style and what would soon be known as "Art Deco." His design envisioned a towering shaft with two urns atop a giant wall flanking the shaft. This would be framed by a reflecting pool and two sphinxes. The jury praised Magonigle's design as "an architectural masterpiece, a design of commanding dignity, power, and beauty."⁹⁵

The Liberty Memorial was dedicated on November 1, 1921. The Memorial Association set the date in conjunction with the third annual meeting of the American Legion, which was meeting in Kansas City that year. The Liberty Memorial Association invited the five principal Allied military commanders: General Pershing, Baron Jacques of Belgium, Armando Diaz of Italy, Ferdinand Foch of France, and Lord David Beatty of Great Britain, along with Vice President Calvin Coolidge.⁹⁶ After the elaborate ceremonies attended by over 100,000 people, work began on the actual memorial.

⁹² R. A. Long, Letter to Fred Sharon, 6 October 1919, Edward Jones Research Library, Kansas City, Mo., Copies of KCPL Collection, 40.4.11.

⁹³ Derek Donovan, *Lest the Ages Forget: Kansas City's Liberty Memorial* (Kansas City: Kansas City Star Books, 2001), 20.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁹⁶ Donovan, *Lest the Ages Forget*, 52.

The cornerstone was laid on 11 November 1924, around the monument's shaft which already rose to its full height.⁹⁷ The opening ceremony for the memorial finally occurred on Armistice Day of 1926, with ceremonies matching if not exceeding those of 1921. A secret service agent who accompanied now-President Coolidge estimated the crowd to be in excess of 150,000. This was the largest crowd that any president ever addressed to date.⁹⁸ With the opening of the National World War I Museum in Kansas City in 2006, some believe that by natural extension the Liberty Memorial should also be designated as the National World War I Memorial.

On Armistice Day of 1931, another local memorial was dedicated by President Herbert Hoover on the Mall in Washington D.C. This monument, conceived by architect Frederick Brooke, was built to honor the 26,000 men from the District of Columbia who served during the war. The names of 499 men who died overseas are etched on the monument itself, which was only meant to be a memorial honoring the local dead.⁹⁹ It remained that way for ninety years until the monument fell into neglect and was resurrected by interested individuals with the hopes of rebranding the District's memorial into something bigger than what it was. Because of its location on the Mall, some advocates believed it was a logical place to become the National World War I Memorial.

While some want the District of Columbia Memorial to become the de facto national memorial, others think that the memorial should remain solely as a tribute to the men for whom it was originally intended. One special interest group is the Association of the Oldest Inhabitants

⁹⁷ Minutes of Kansas City Gold Star League Meeting, 15 November 1924, Edward Jones Research Library, Kansas City, Mo., Copies of KCPL Collection, 40.4.11.

⁹⁸ Donovan, *Lest the Ages Forget*, 78.

⁹⁹ National Park Service, "DC War Memorial," last updated 24 November 2014, <http://www.nps.gov/nama/planyourvisit/dc-war-memorial.htm> (accessed 29 November 2014).

of the District of Columbia (AOIDC), a civic organization established in 1865 to preserve the District's history. The organization was vehemently against nationalizing the District memorial and strongly recommended using Pershing Park as the National Memorial.¹⁰⁰ Pershing Park is located on Pennsylvania Avenue between 14th Street Southwest and 15th Street Southwest, approximately one quarter mile southeast of the White House. The organization noted the location possessed many features necessary for a memorial and could easily be enhanced to pay homage to the nation's struggle during the First World War. The AOIDC also wrote editorials in the *Washington Post*, arguing that private funds could not be raised to build a new memorial, and that Congress must select an existing site for the memorial.¹⁰¹

The most vocal opponents of nationalizing the District memorial were the District government, who wanted the memorial to remain solely as a tribute to the men from the area that fought and died in the war. They desired to retain their local memorial in the way that many cities and states maintain their own tributes to local soldiers.¹⁰² Instead, the District officials back some members of Congress who want to rededicate Pershing Park as the National World War I Memorial. Since Congress effectively banned new construction on the Mall in 2003, the Pershing Park idea will draw new attention to an area that has been relatively forgotten. In addition to rehabilitating the park, the plan calls for raising \$10 million in private donations to build a memorial selected from a competition.¹⁰³

One detractor (and advocate for the national memorial to be combined with the District of Columbia Memorial) declared, "When you put World War I someplace else — whether in

¹⁰⁰ William Brown, Letter to Eleanor Holmes Norton, 23 May 2011 via aoidc.org, accessed 28 March 2015.

¹⁰¹ William Brown, "Memorializing the Great War," *Washington Post*, 4 December 2011.

¹⁰² Tom Howell Jr., "D.C. Fights Congress on National World War I Memorial," *Washington Times*, 23 January 2012.

¹⁰³ Tom Howell Jr., "Plan would dedicate federal park in D.C. as WWI Memorial," *Washington Times*, 29 April 2014.

Kansas City or Pershing Park — you are diminishing it somehow, saying it was not as profound an event.”¹⁰⁴ This began a battle between two cities and three locations over the proper location for a National World War I Memorial. What will be lost in this battle is the fact that no national memorial exists anywhere to the Great War. Also lost will be the last living American veteran of the war, who died fighting for the recognition long past due him and his comrades.

In 2008, the WWI Memorial Foundation was formed to provide a lobby for repairs to the District of Columbia memorial and ultimately rededicate it as the national memorial. Their spokesman was Frank Buckles, the last surviving American veteran of the war.¹⁰⁵ In a small victory, Congress did authorize funds to repair the memorial. Despite Buckles’ death in 2011, the foundation continued to campaign for the District monument to be named the nation’s World War I memorial. Like the perceived reverence of the Gold Star Mothers during the 1920s, Buckles’ status as the last living veteran of the war was used by proponents of the District memorial location to add legitimacy to their cause. David DeJonge, co-founder of the WWI Memorial Foundation, invoked Buckles’ name in opposing the Pershing Park location: “He [Buckles] and his family would be vehemently opposed to this... Put it at Pershing Park [and] this will contribute to a systematic extinction to the memory of World War I ... I think [this] is a grievous error... It’s an island surrounded by five lanes of traffic. It’s a 20 minute walk from the National Mall, from other monuments.”¹⁰⁶

With Congressional support largely favoring the Pershing Park site instead of the District of Columbia site, the proponents for the latter’s designation as the national memorial have all but

¹⁰⁴ John Kelly, “D.C.’s WWI Memorial Causes 21st-Century Battle,” *Washington Post*, 31 March 2011.

¹⁰⁵ Frank Buckles, the last surviving American World War I veteran, died in 2011. The National World War I Memorial Foundation, “The Quest,” last updated 2013, <http://wwimemorial.org/quest/> (accessed 27 September 2014).

¹⁰⁶ Nikki Schwab, “World War I Memorial Gets a Take Two,” *US News and World Report*, 13 August 2014.

capitulated.¹⁰⁷ In May 2014, a bill was submitted to Congress labeling the Liberty Memorial in Kansas City as “The National World War I Museum and Memorial”. Concurrently, Pershing Park in Washington, D.C. would be labeled “The National World War I Memorial” under the same bill.¹⁰⁸ President Barack Obama signed the legislation in December 2014 as part of the 2015 National Defense Authorization Act. Harkening back to the design of the Unknown Soldier’s tomb, the bill calls for a design competition for the memorial, with a planned dedication date of 11 November 2018.¹⁰⁹

The modern wrinkle to commemoration, as opposed to the events of the late 1910s and 1920s, is that Congress did not appropriate any money for the project or the design competition. Edwin Fountain of the US World War I Centennial Commission griped, “Congress, in its wisdom, formed our commission and gave us a charter, then gave us no resources because, apparently, that’s how this country establishes memorials and commemorates great events – by calling on private citizens to do it on their own dime.”¹¹⁰ This represents a compromise between the two cities with respect to the national memorial designation, and may ultimately clear the path for a World War I memorial in Washington, D.C., to finally reside next to its peer memorials to the other conflicts of the twentieth century.

For Kansas City, the designation of the Liberty Memorial as the National memorial and museum marked the culmination of the city’s efforts over the past ninety years to commemorate the First World War. The museum’s president remarked, “This recognition from Congress is a tribute to the foresight and dedication of the 80,000-plus Kansas City area residents who took the

¹⁰⁷ Andrea Stone, “DC World War I Memorial Now Slated for National Mall,” *Huffington Post*, 11 September 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/10/world-war-i-memorial_n_1871366.html (accessed 30 November 2014).

¹⁰⁸ Congressman Emanuel Cleaver, II Press Release, “Congressman Cleaver Passes Historic World War I Memorial Amendment,” Press Release, 21 May 2014.

¹⁰⁹ Ian Simpson, “Obama Approves US World War One Memorial in Washington,” *Reuters*, 20 December 2014.

¹¹⁰ Nikki Schwab, “World War I Memorial Gets a Take Two,” *US News and World Report*, 13 August 2014.

initiative to establish and build the Liberty Memorial and museum shortly after the end of World War I.”¹¹¹ While the re-designation may not guarantee federal funding or increased attendance, it will pay homage to the history of the Liberty Memorial and the intent of those who over ninety years ago labored to make the memorial a reality.

¹¹¹ Matt Campbell, “Liberty Memorial is Closer to National World War I Memorial Designation,” *Kansas City Star*, 13 December 2014.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

An American Expeditionary Force study completed on 6 March 1919 correctly forecast the manner in which America would honor and bury its war dead over the next decade:

The study resolves itself into an estimate of the sentiment of the people of the United States which will eventually affect the general policy of disposition of the dead of the AEF. It is believed that the pressure of public opinion and political interest will force the Government to adopt a dual policy with regard to the disposition of the dead of the AEF, i.e. the return to the United States at Government expense of the bodies of such of the fallen is demanded by their friends or relatives, or interment in national cemeteries maintained at Government expense in friendly European countries whose return to the United States is not demanded. These policies will be forced by varying sentiments – one to have the dead of the family or community honored by burial in the home plot; the other to have them buried in national cemeteries maintained by the United States near the field where they have fallen.¹

While politicians issued the final decrees detailing America's methods to bury and honor its war dead, their decisions were largely driven by the will and desires of the American people. This pattern harkened back to the Civil War, when citizens showed through the actions of private repatriation and continuous search and identification of battlefield dead that they would no longer suffer their soldiers left on the battlefield to rot or military cemeteries bearing only the markers of unknown dead. The soldiers of American citizen armies would forevermore demand treatment in death as citizens and not cannon fodder.

The desire for the dead of a citizen army to return to their families propelled the government to establish a repatriation policy, thereby ensuring the return of all war dead to the United States. Twenty years later the America learned that this plan needed approval when executed on the shores of a sovereign country such as France. This grievous oversight strained relations between the United States government and both its people and ally, France. For over a

¹ H. B. Fiske, Memorandum for the Chief of Staff, AEF, Subject: Summary of a Study of Disposition of the AEF Dead, 6 March 1919, NA, RG 120, General Headquarters AG File, Box 159.

year, American officials found themselves struggling to reach a diplomatic settlement with France to repatriate the war dead while being bombarded with letters from relatives of the dead, concerned citizens, and eventually lobby groups. Most wrote with the motive of persuading the government to modify or completely alter its return policies. Simultaneously, these individuals and groups published editorials in local and national newspapers in an attempt to bolster support for its cause.

The sentiments of one American, Theodore Roosevelt, did cause an unprecedented revision of the policy to repatriate all bodies. His wish to leave his dead son buried in France became the catalyst for the War Department's allowing next of kin to decide between burial in the United States and Europe. This policy modification also paved the way for the construction of permanent military cemeteries in Europe, which stand symbolic of the American sacrifice in France. It should be noted that while Roosevelt was a former president, his letter that spurred the change was not written as a politician, but as one of the thousands of mourning families of Soldier Dead who wanted their son or husband properly honored.

How the American dead would ultimately be decided through frustratingly slow diplomatic negotiations between the United States and France. Discussions began after Armistice Day, 1918, and dragged on until the two countries brokered an agreement in March, 1920. During the intervening time negotiations could be consisted of letter writing between representatives of the two countries' governments. At no time until March 1920 did agents of each nation come together in the same room to discuss the operational plans of the American Graves Registration Service (GRS) and balance them against the concerns of the French government. After over one year of letter writing, the first face-to-face summit yielded an agreement at the end of the first day's meeting.

Despite the completion of negotiations between the United States and France, the story of the repatriation of the dead was integral to the completion of the United States' obligation to the decedents' families. The unprecedented creation of an organization, the GRS, that was specifically tasked to care for the dead, ensured a soldier's remains no longer remained secondary to military operations. Rather, the GRS buried bodies concurrent to actions at the front. Once the war was over, the GRS, working within the constraints set by the political deadlock undertook simultaneous operations to exhume and identify remains, repatriate requested bodies to the United States, and concentrate the remaining dead into eight permanent cemeteries. Such a task had never previously been conceived on such a grand level, let alone executed.

The work of the Quartermaster Corps and the GRS established three major precedents. First, the service continually operated very close to the front lines conducting identification and burial tasks. On 1 February 1924, the Quartermaster Corps issued the first in a series of field manuals based on its experiences in the World War.² These manuals would serve as the basis for burial and repatriation operations after the Second World War. The War Department further revised these manuals to reflect new lessons and practices during and after World War II.

The second precedent was the close contact with the next of kin to ensure their desires were properly executed. Congress resurrected many of the policies and procedures established by the Army during the First World War for use in the aftermath of World War II. During Policy Study 34, published 14 August 1943, an initial War Department recommendation suggested only returning the dead from overseas cemetery locations if seventy percent or more next of kin requested their decedent's return. Fortunately, Congress realized the potential fallout from such

² Michael Sledge, *Soldier Dead: How We Recover, Identify, Bury, and Honor Our Military Fallen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 183.

a policy and codified that the each family would get to decide their decedent's final disposition in Public Law 383, passed on 16 May 1946.³ While the Quartermaster Corps realized that the scale of their recovery operations would be much greater than after the First World War, the core mission was essentially the same. The most important lesson learned and put into policy immediately was to not begin reparations of remains until after hostilities were over. Once reparations commenced, the War Department would again poll the next of kin and act on their wishes.

The third and most prophetic of the precedents was that the United States would spare no expense in identifying and handling remains of military fallen in accordance with the wishes of their family. The final cost for the World War I program was \$30 million, about \$658 per body. This was more than triple the 1920 estimate of \$8 million. In addition, the United States spent over \$2.4 million by 1930 in creating the overseas cemeteries, including the purchase of land.⁴ The War Department never ceased operations until it completed the task, and the American public never questioned the expenditure.

In subsequent conflicts, costs would increase if not due to the scale of operations, then because of the sheer determination of the United States to honor its commitment to bringing its fallen home. It is estimated that the United States spends on average \$1.2 million to find and identify each set of remains missing from the Vietnam War.⁵ Even the Army's current manual for the disposition of remains, AR 638-2, states that: "No specific limitations exist on the amount that can be spent to search for, recover, and identify eligible deceased personnel."⁶ The First

³ Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 140.

⁴ Lisa Budreau, *Bodies of War* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 128.

⁵ Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 93.

⁶ Department of the Army, AR 638-2 *Care and Disposition of Remains and Disposition of Personal Effects*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, December 2000), 43.

World War set the precedent for the United States to go to whatever length necessary to locate, identify, and bury its battlefield dead. On 14 April 2015, the Department of Defense announced its intention to exhume 388 sets of the commingled remains of sailors killed at Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 aboard the USS *Oklahoma*. Many newspapers around the country hailed the government's decision to identify and properly bury these dead almost seventy five years post-mortem; none of these periodicals mentioned, much less questioned, the cost for such an undertaking.⁷

During these operations America's government learned that the acts by the War Department to bury and honor the dead, while appreciated by the public, did not constitute the entirety of how the nation would grieve for its Soldier Dead. The ideas of low ranking military members, private citizens, and special interest groups expressed through letters eventually became part of national policy. Such concepts included next of kin keeping the flag that draped their soldier's casket, allowing next of kin to open the casket to view remains if desired, and the use of military escorts to accompany bodies as they returned to their families. Each one of these concepts have since been codified and remain integral to current procedures.

Perhaps the most profound idea that carried the most symbolism was that to send the Gold Star mothers and wives on a pilgrimage to France to visit their son or husband's grave. This concept provided many mothers a chance for closure and also further demonstrated the United States' commitment to the dead and their families. Many eligible Gold Star mothers and wives made the voyage to Europe and were able to view firsthand the overseas American Military Cemeteries and kneel at their soldier's grave. These visits not only allowed for

⁷ The Associated Press story, with varying editorials, was referenced in the following newspapers: *Tulsa World*, *Boston Globe*, *Washington Post*, *Stars and Stripes*, *USA Today*, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *New York Daily News*, and the *Washington Times*.

bereaved mothers from the United States meet their French counterparts, but demonstrated the reverence and consideration given by the American government towards the families of its war dead.

In addition, the selection and repatriation of an unknown American soldier also aided national mourning, as well as set precedent for the United States. For families of soldiers who were not located or identified, the tomb held special significance. At the Unknown Soldier's grave, these families could mourn their soldier, with the thought and hope that the boy lying in the tomb was their son. The creation of a memorial for the Unknown Soldier also produced a site for all Americans to remember the national sacrifice made during the First World War. This became evident after the tomb's completion as multiple patriotic groups and foreign delegations visited the tomb to pay homage not only to the Unknown Soldier, but to all American dead from the war.

While the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier provided a de facto mourning site to honor the First World War dead, it was not designated to be any sort of national memorial to that war. This was demonstrated by the inclusion of unidentified Americans who died during the Second World War and the Korean Conflict. Meanwhile, many cities across the country began erecting memorials to the dead from their locality. In Kansas City, Missouri, local officials, backed by the generosity of their citizens, created a memorial that commemorated national sacrifice. The attendees to Kansas City's Liberty Memorial dedication reflected this, with appearances by the top military commanders of the Allied belligerents as well as many government dignitaries.

The public and celebrity turnout of for the dedication of the Liberty Memorial owed to the possibility that the memorial was the national monument to commemorate America's effort in the First World War. Tragically, most veterans of this war died before any sort of national

recognition project was conceived, and none will be alive when a monument is ultimately dedicated. Almost one hundred years since the intervention of America in the First World War, plans are only now being finalized for a national memorial to those who served in Europe. As Jay Winter warned, the urgency to complete any memorial could not be higher. All American veterans of the First World War are dead, and many children of those veterans are passing on as well. Soon, very few living Americans will be able to say that they personally met a veteran of the Great War, and the personal linkage to that event will be lost.

From 1861-1915, the United States government made but two policy decisions regarding the burial of its battlefield dead: national cemeteries would be made available to bury soldier's remains, and the nation would repatriate bodies of those killed overseas. By contrast, between 1918 and 1923, the War Department established the entire framework for America's repatriation and burial procedures that would remain in place for the next century. While the government ultimately created or approved the military's policy changes, the influence of social forces on these decisions was constant and succeeded in shaping the majority of the published orders.

This thesis contributes to the historiography in two ways. First, it challenges the common argument that politics alone shaped how America honored its battlefield dead after the First World War, instead demonstrating the social pressure that influenced government policy. Second, it begins to unravel the complex civil, political, and military effort that led to the aforementioned creation of the United States' burial and repatriation policy framework. While this paper does not navigate all of the social, political, and military issues surrounding the commemoration of the First World War dead, it provides a solid basis for future researchers to begin to delve further into the story, judge the performance of certain government or military figures, or determine what lobby groups, if any, were the most successful influencing the

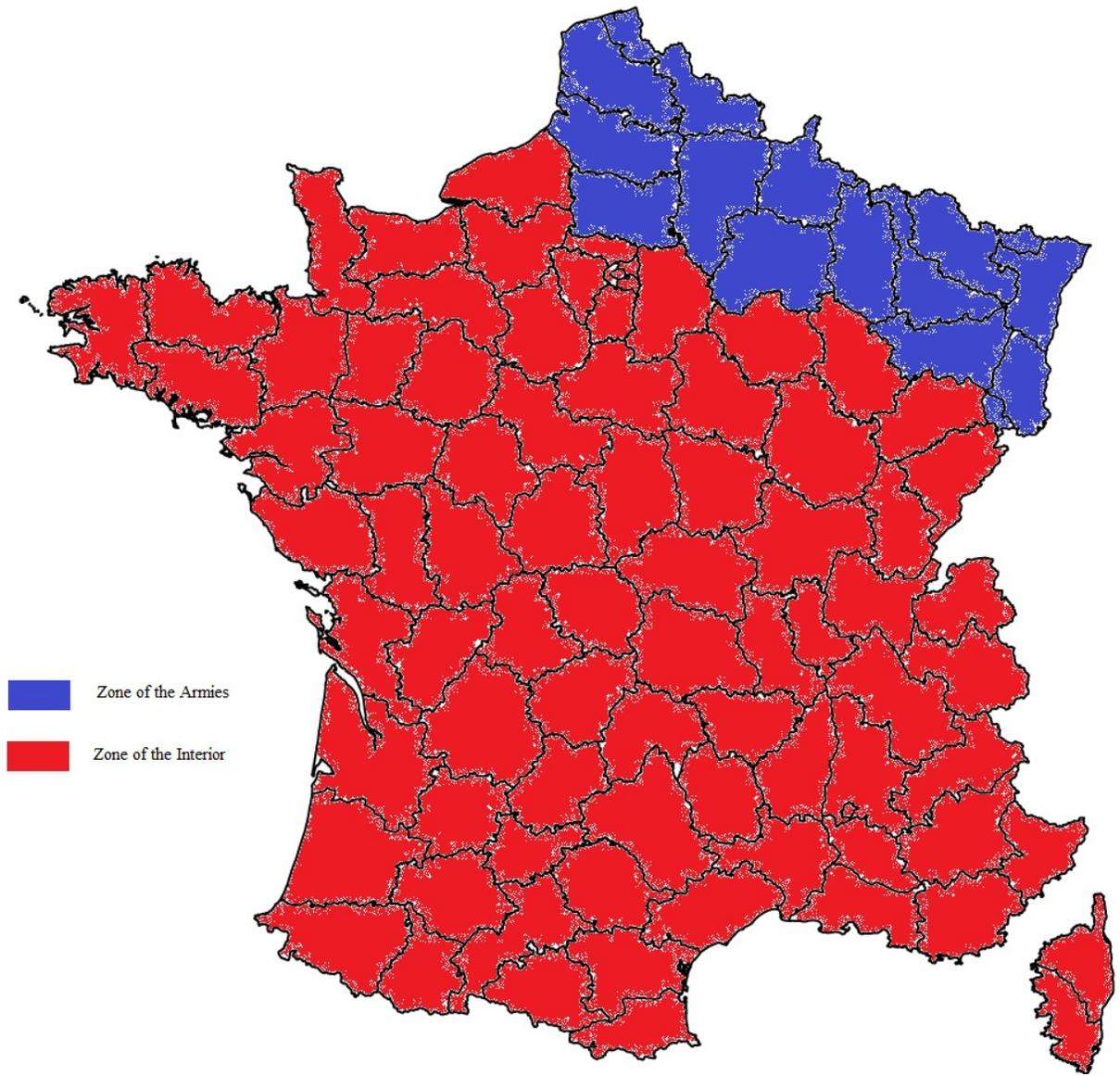
American people and the decision-makers in Washington, D.C. This topic remains very open to research and historical dialogue now as the nation approaches the centennial of its involvement in the First World War and as it repatriates its battlefield dead from current and future overseas locations.

Looking back at Lieutenant Daren Hidalgo's repatriation and funeral, one notices how many of the precedents begun during and after the First World War have been refined, combined with technological advances, and remained in use to demonstrate the United States' perpetual commitment to its battlefield dead. This commitment, while enforced through the federal government, has been given consistent oversight by both the relatives of the dead and concerned Americans for the last one hundred years. Through coincidence, the government-issued headstones for both Daren Hidalgo, killed in Afghanistan in 2011, and Frank Buckles, the last American veteran of the First World War who died in 2011, were cut from the same piece of granite, but this simple action provides a powerful symbol of the continuing influence of the debate over the Soldier Dead of the United States in World War I.⁸

⁸ Serena Altschul, "The Marble of Our Heroes' Headstones," CBS News, 29 May 2011, <http://www.cbsnews.com/videos/the-marble-of-our-heroes-headstones/>, accessed 7 April 2015.

APPENDIX A

FRENCH ZONE OF THE ARMIES AND ZONE OF THE INTERIOR DESIGNATION



APPENDIX B
EXAMPLES OF BURIAL REPORTS

BURLIAMS IN PERMANENT
CEMETERIES
AMERICAN EXPEDITION

Q.M. Form No. C.B.
Report No. 4
Sheet No. 1

No. of Cemetery Grave No. 1 - Amer. Cemetery DATE Feb. 23^d, 1918
 Place of Cemetery Meuill la Tour - Meurthe et Moselle, France
 Place of Death American Hospital, Meuill la Tour
 Disposal of Tags Bureau of Grave Registration, A.E.F. Hdqrs.
 Name James S. Dukes Rank Private
 Regiment and Company Battery D, 5th F.A.
 Nature of marking Cross with name - bottle with name on grave
 Disposal of personal effects Battery Commanding
 Signed Francis P. Joyce, Alston
 Chaplain officer in charge

Note:- Soldiers of Jewish faith to be checked in left hand margin.

MAR 14 1918

BURLIAMS IN PERMANENT
CEMETERIES

Q.M. Form No. _____
Report No. _____
Sheet No. _____

No. of Cemetery #21, Base Section #1, France Date March 2, 1918.
 Place of Cemetery St. Nazaire, France
 Place of death Base Hospital No. 101, Base Section No. 1, France.
 Disposal of Tags Par. 6, G. O. #21, AEF 1917, complied with.
 Name Cox, Samuel C. Rank Private
 Regiment and Company Co. 16, 1st Motor Mechanics Regiment, S.C.
 Nature of marking Official Head Board.
 Disposal of Personal Effects Par 482 M.C.M. complied with
 Signed: John M. Sutton, _____
 Chaplain. Officer in charge.
 Grave No. 152, Plot "F".

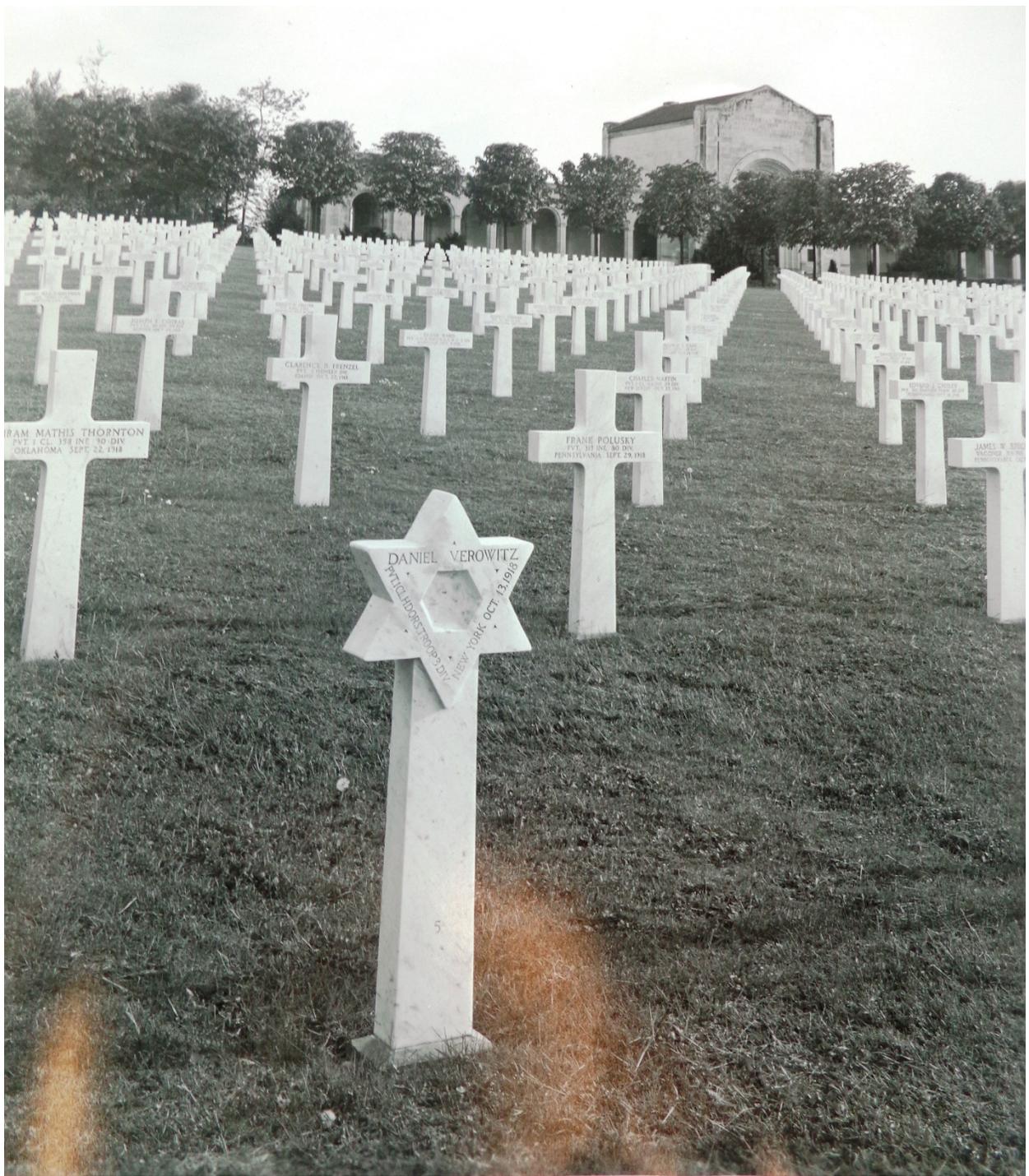
NOTE. - Soldiers of Jewish faith to be checked thus in left hand margin :

8K list

MAR 7 1918

APPENDIX C

PHOTO OF MEUSE-ARGONNE AMERICAN MILITARY CEMETERY IN FRANCE
SHOWING GRAVE MARKERS FOR CHRISTIAN AND JEWISH SOLDIERS



APPENDIX D

TOMB OF THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER BEFORE MONUUMENT ADDED



APPENDIX E

PRESS COVERAGE OF FIRST VOYAGE OF GOLD STAR MOTHERS TO FRANCE

FLEET STEAMS UP HUDSON IN

OUR LEGION OF HONOR

--

By Nelson
Harding



APPENDIX F

PHOTOGRAPH OF GOLD STAR MOTHER AT THE GRAVE OF HER SON DURING THE
GOLD STAR MOTHER PILGRIMAGE



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