



Entombed in a marble sarcophagus at Arlington National Cemetery is the body of a soldier who died during World War I. One of 1,543 unidentified dead of that conflict, it is not known whether he came from Idaho, Kentucky, or Manhattan, whether he fell in the Argonne Forest, on the banks of the Marne, or in the bloody valley of the Somme.

1879

Thomas Edison invents the incandescent lightbulb

1880

Britain adopts Greenwich Mean Time as its standard



Tomb of the Unknowns

LOCATION	DEDICATION	DESIGNER	COMMEMORATION
<i>Arlington National Cemetery, Virginia</i>	<i>1932</i>	<i>Lorimer Rich, Thomas H. Jones</i>	<i>Unidentified American soldiers who died in World War I, World War II, and the Korean War</i>

The power of the Tomb of the Unknowns (also known as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier) is found in its anonymity. It is not the first such tomb at Arlington—an unknown soldier from the Civil War was buried here on May 15, 1864—nor the only such tomb in the United States or abroad, but the one that holds a special place of honor.

Following the example of France and Britain, General John J. “Black Jack” Pershing, commander of the U.S. Army during the Great War, recommended that Americans show their appreciation of the two million doughboys who fought for their liberties. On October 24, 1921, four earth-stained caskets that had been exhumed from each of the American military cemeteries at Belleau, Bony, Thiaucourt, and Romagne were assembled in the city hall in Châlons-sur-Marne, France. Corporal Edward Younger of the 59th Infantry, recognized for his outstanding service, walked back and forth in front of the coffins before placing a bouquet of white roses on the one that henceforth would garner the honors for all unidentified soldiers.

The three remaining coffins were reinterred at Romagne, while the selected casket traveled on the ship *Olympia* across the Atlantic and up the Potomac, along with a box of earth from the American cemetery at Suresnes, with which it would be buried at Arlington. After arriving in

Washington on November 9, the body lay in state in the Rotunda of the Capitol on the catafalque that once bore the body of Abraham Lincoln. The bier was covered with flowers by national and international delegations of dignitaries and tens of thousands of private citizens. On Armistice Day 1921, with somber pomp, the remains were interred under a simple marble slab. The elaborate tomb that stands today would not be constructed for another eleven years.

Architect Lorimer Rich (1891–1978) and sculptor Thomas Hudson Jones (1892–1969) designed the tomb as well as its siting and approaches. The pair also reconfigured the site and various roadways so that the adjacent Memorial Amphitheater of 1920 was brought into relationship with the rest of the cemetery. Completed in 1932, the tomb rests on top of the original marble base of 1921. It sits on a stepped plaza that overlooks Washington and is situated before the colonnaded amphitheater, itself a general memorial to the soldiers and sailors of all American wars, and the site of annual Memorial Day and Veterans Day services.

Historian James M. Goode, in his classic guide, *The Outdoor Sculpture of Washington, D.C.*, describes the three stylized and classically draped figures that adorn the tomb’s east face as symbols of “Allied spirit” during the First World War.

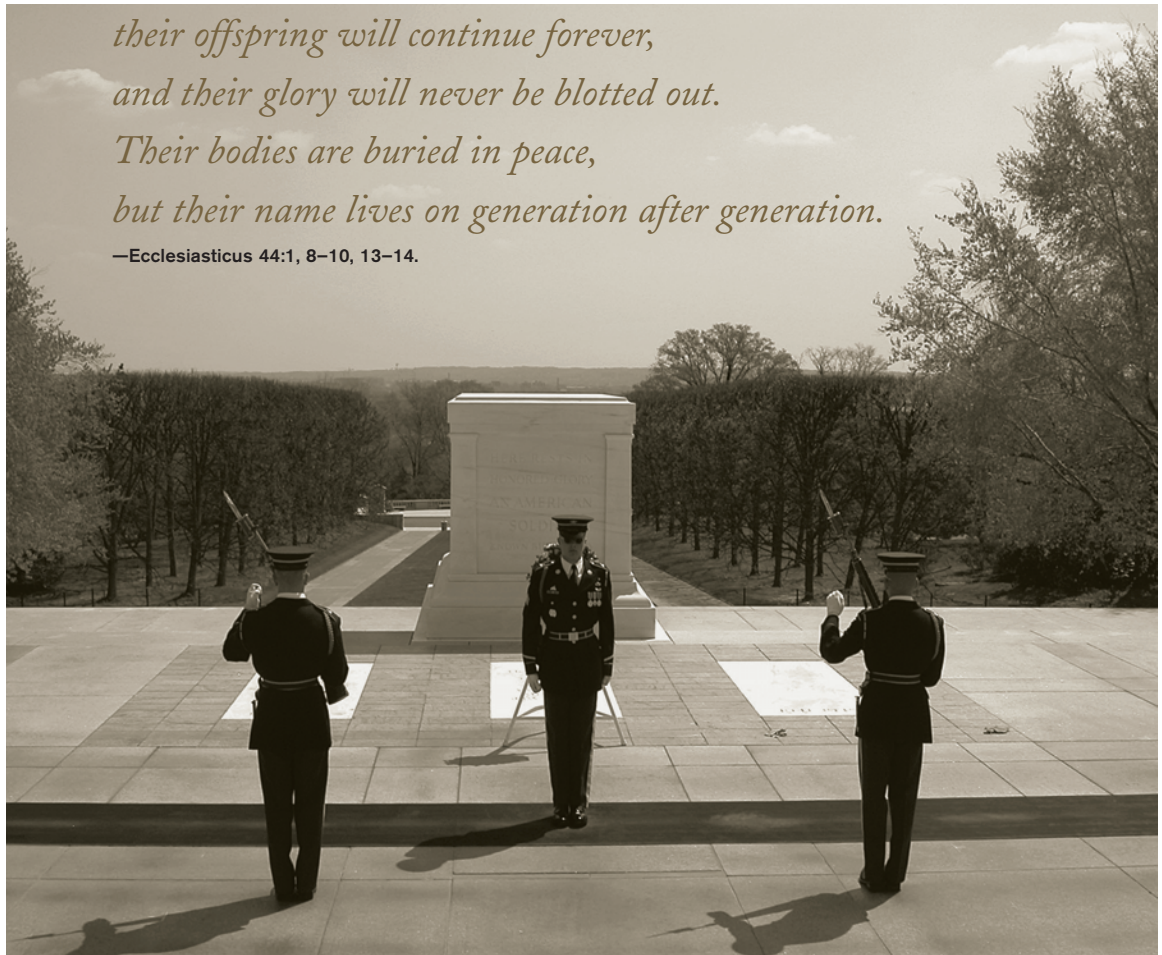
The tomb was cut from white marble from the Yule Marble Quarry in Marble, Colorado, where the marble used in the Lincoln Memorial was also quarried. On Memorial Day 1958, the bodies of unknown combatants who perished in World War II and the Korean War were interred in crypts on the plaza in front of the tomb.

1880

For the first time, a photograph is reproduced in a newspaper, the *New York Daily Graphic* (Mar. 4)

*Let us now sing the praises of famous men,
 our ancestors in their generations . . .
 Some of them have left behind a name,
 so that others declare their praise.
 But of others there is no memory;
 they have perished as though they had never existed;
 they have become as though they had never been born,
 they and their children after them.
 But these also were godly men,
 whose righteous deeds have not been forgotten . . .
 their offspring will continue forever,
 and their glory will never be blotted out.
 Their bodies are buried in peace,
 but their name lives on generation after generation.*

—Ecclesiasticus 44:1, 8–10, 13–14.



1883

Benito Mussolini, Italian dictator, born (July 29; d. by firing squad Apr. 28, 1945)

1884

The World Time Conference establishes Greenwich Observatory in England as the prime meridian from which world time is calculated

A central female figure of Victory is flanked by and holds hands with two male figures representing Peace and Valor. The north and south faces are ornamented with Doric pilasters and inverted laurel wreaths. The tomb's west face is inscribed, "Here Rests In Honored Glory An American Soldier Known But To God" in lettering designed by August Reuling.

Tombs honoring unidentified warriors have been built throughout recorded history. Monuments, as *Washington Post* culture critic Philip Kennicott characterized them, are an "attempt to place some fact, or some understanding of history, beyond dispute: This man was heroic; this war was good; these people should be remembered. They demand our assent to some basic proposition, which we can give or we can withhold." One of the most famous Western war monuments, now lost, was erected to the memory of the three hundred Spartans who in 480 B.C. fought to the last defending the pass at Thermopylae against two hundred thousand invading Persians. Their dedication to duty was described with a starkly unequivocal inscription that read, according to Herodotus, "Go and tell the Spartans, stranger passing by, / That here, obedient to their laws, we lie."

The unknown military Everyman has lost not only his life but his identity as well, a transformative loss that bestows upon him immortality. His tomb embodies the hope that awful sacrifices of war have some redeeming value. This is not a new idea. Pericles, delivering in 431 B.C. what is considered the most influential funerary oration, said,

For this offering of their lives made in common by them all, they each of them individually received that renown which never grows old, and for a sepulcher, not so much that in

which their bones have been deposited, but that noblest of shrines wherein their glory is laid up to be eternally remembered. . . . For heroes have the whole earth for their tomb; and in lands far from their own, where the column with its epitaph declares it, there is enshrined in every breast a record unwritten with no tablet to preserve it, except that of the heart.

Lincoln echoed these sentiments at Gettysburg when he urged those assembled to be "dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced." More than simply a remembrance, the tomb asks us to preserve the ideals for which the unknowns have died. In other words, *Earn this*.

Science has rendered the Tomb of the Unknowns an anachronism. With the availability of DNA testing, it is possible to conclusively identify remains, something that was not possible before the end of the twentieth century. DNA testing revealed that the remains of the Vietnam War serviceman placed in the Tomb in 1984 were those of Air Force pilot 1st Lt. Michael J. Blassie, who was shot down over An Loc, South Vietnam, in May 1972; through the efforts of his family, Blassie was exhumed, identified, and reinterred in 1998 in his hometown of Saint Louis, Missouri. Even though advances in forensic genetics have diminished some of the mystery shrouding the Tomb of the Unknowns, the memorial remains a viable cultural entity. It joins together the population in contemplation of the contribution and sacrifice of those who fight for the larger citizenry. Although technically speaking there will be no more unknowns, the tomb that commemorates them will continue to make visible the noble sacrifice of a few for the many.

Since 1937, the tomb has been guarded by a hand-selected group of rigorously trained members of the 3rd Infantry Regiment. In a formal ceremony that is repeated on the half hour in summer and hourly during the rest of the year, twenty-four hours a day, the guards pace back and forth in front of the tomb, marching twenty-one steps, pausing for twenty-one seconds, and then making a crisp turn; twenty-one refers to the twenty-one-gun salute, the highest military honor.