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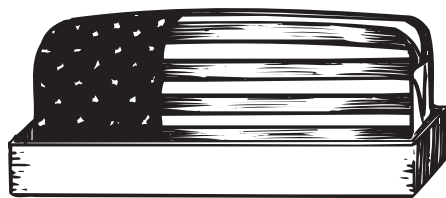
Tomb of the Unknowns

The Tomb of the Unknowns is also called the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.¹ The memorial was first meant to honor an unknown U.S. warrior after World War I. President Warren G. Harding attended the burial of the first Unknown on November 11, 1921, the second anniversary of Armistice Day (the day the fighting ended in World War I). The memorial is located in Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia and bears the inscription: “Here rests in honored glory an American soldier known but to God.”² After two more wars—World War II and the Korean War—the nation decided that this monument should honor unknown soldiers from all wars. Every year on Veterans Day, ceremonies are held to honor the Unknowns.

The memorial to the unknown soldiers was constructed of white marble from Marble, Colorado. It is called a sarcophagus, which is a stone coffin with ornamentation on it that is displayed in public as a memorial. The carving on the front of the Tomb of the Unknowns shows three Greek figures that stand for peace, victory and valor (or bravery). The white marble sarcophagus was placed directly on top of the grave of the Unknown from World War I. Successive graves of soldiers from World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War are to the west of the original monument. Each grave is covered with a white marble slab that is flush with the pavement of the plaza of the Memorial Amphitheater.

U.S. Army Sgt. Edward F. Younger, who had been awarded the Distinguished Service Medal in The Great War, chose the body of the first Unknown. (“The Great War” is what World War I was called before World War II occurred and the wars began to be numbered.) Four bodies from four U.S. cemeteries in France were dug up and laid in identical caskets in the city hall in Chalons-sur-Marne, France, on October 24, 1921. Sgt. Younger chose at random the third casket from the left and designated his choice by laying a spray of white roses on the coffin. The U.S.S. *Olympia* returned the casket to the United States, where the Unknown Soldier lay in state in the Capitol Rotunda until Armistice Day. President Harding presided over the reburial of the Unknown on November 11, 1921.

President Eisenhower signed a congressional bill on August 3, 1956, that provided for the selection and reburial of a soldier from World War II and one from the Korean War. For the choice of the World War II soldier, bodies were brought from burial sites in Europe, Africa, Hawaii and the Philippines. From among these soldiers, two were chosen: one from the European theater and one from the Pacific theater. The bodies were taken aboard the U.S.S. *Canberra* where Congressional Medal of Honor winner Navy Hospitalman 1st Class William R. Charette chose between the two bodies. The one not chosen was buried at sea with appropriate ceremonies.



¹“Tomb of the Unknown Soldier”: <http://www.mdw.army.mil/FS-A04.htm>

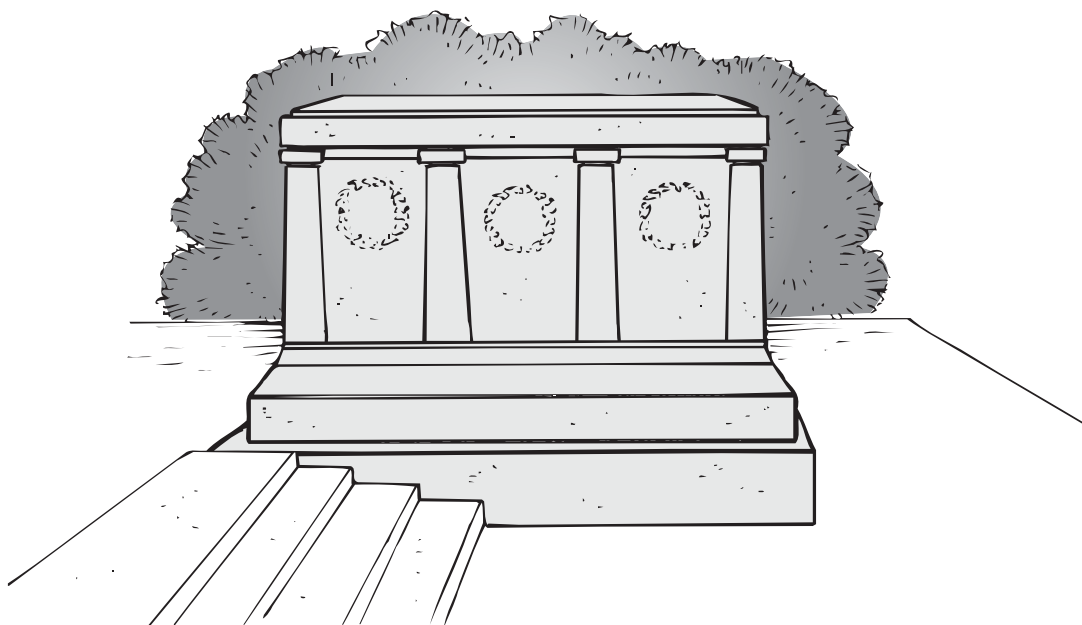
²*The Family Encyclopedia of American History*, Pleasantville, New York, The Reader’s Digest Association, Inc., 1975.

Tomb of the Unknowns

At the same time the Unknown Soldier was chosen for World War II, the same process was going on for a Korean War soldier. Four caskets containing unknown soldiers from that war were dug up from the National Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii. Army Master Sgt. Ned Lyle chose the casket to be reburied at the Tomb of the Unknowns. The bodies of the veterans of the two wars lay in state in the Capitol Rotunda from May 28 to May 30, 1958. On Memorial Day (May 30), President Eisenhower awarded both soldiers the Medal of Honor. The two were then reburied next to the marble memorial where the Unknown Soldier from World War I was honored.

Although U.S. troops officially left Vietnam in 1973 and the war ended in 1975, it wasn't until 1984 that an Unknown from that war was chosen. Medal of Honor winner U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Maj. Allan Jay Kellogg, Jr., selected the body in a ceremony at Pearl Harbor,

Hawaii, on May 17, 1984. The body of this Unknown also lay in state in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda. President Ronald Reagan officiated at the Memorial Day ceremonies at Arlington National Cemetery where reburial beside the Tomb of the Unknowns occurred. In 1998, the remains of the Vietnam Unknown were identified through DNA testing as Air Force 1st Lt. Michael Joseph Blassie. Blassie's family had pushed to have the remains tested, and when they were identified, they had their hero moved to Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery, near the family home in St. Louis, Missouri, July 11, 1998. The crypt has remained vacant, but was dedicated on POW/MIA Day in 1999 to the missing servicemembers of all wars, with the inscription: "Honoring and Keeping Faith with America's Missing Servicemen." POW-MIA Day is celebrated the third Friday of every September.



Name _____

Tomb of the Unknowns Questions

1. The memorial to an unknown soldier was originally built to honor a warrior from which war?

2. Write a general description of the way in which each Unknown Soldier was chosen for burial at the national monument. _____

3. Research Question: What title does the President of the U.S. hold relative to the military that makes it appropriate for him to preside over the burial services at the Tomb of the Unknowns? (Hint: Look in Article II of the Constitution.) _____

4. Why were two soldiers chosen for burial at the Tomb of the Unknowns in 1958? _____

5. Why is there no soldier from the Vietnam War buried at the Tomb of the Unknowns?

6. Thought Question: If we have been in a war against terrorism since 9/11/01, shouldn't an unknown victim of the collapse of the World Trade Towers be buried at the Tomb of the Unknowns? Support your answer with logical arguments. _____

