

DEMOCRACY OF DEATH: US ARMY GRAVES REGISTRATION AND
ITS BURIAL OF THE WORLD WAR I DEAD

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The United States entered World War I without a policy governing the burial of its overseas dead. Armed only with institutional knowledge from the Spanish-American War twenty years prior, the Army struggled to create a policy amidst social turmoil in the United States and political tension between France and the United States.

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INTRODUCTION

Rows upon rows of polished white marble crosses meet visitors to the American military cemeteries now sprinkled around the world. Whether that traveler is in France, Belgium, or Great Britain and regardless if the cemetery contains dead from the First or Second World War, the marble headstones are distributed across well-manicured grass with such precision as to appear perfectly straight no matter the viewing angle. Rarely does an American guest leave one of the cemeteries without feeling pride in the undertaking of the United States to care for its gallant dead for the past century. Many likely believe that the observed graves – particularly those at the massive Meuse-Argonne Military Cemetery – represent the totality of American losses in that sector. The individual may also assume that creating such cemeteries was the predestined result of American participation in European conflict. The reality is that the gravestones in the overseas cemeteries represent less than one half of the total number lost during America's eighteen-month involvement in the First World War. Answering the second assumption requires a more thorough study that will reveal the controversies and political battles that ultimately established US military standards and procedures for the burial and memorialization of American wartime dead. Addressing and resolving these two assumptions is the two-pronged purpose of this dissertation.

After the guns fell silent on 11 November 1918, the United States entered a new struggle as the nation and its citizens attempted to comprehend and subsequently commemorate the military fallen. While the question of a national memorial is only just now being settled with the groundbreaking for a national World War One Memorial, the issue of the battlefield dead was one that necessitated immediate attention.¹ By war's end, some American dead already lay

¹ The groundbreaking for the National World War One Memorial occurred on 11 November 2017. The Memorial

buried in over 2000 cemeteries in Europe. However, the majority of the dead were strewn across the fields of France and would require a lengthy and expensive process to bury or repatriate those bodies to a final place of interment. The difficulty was that the American people, members of their government, and their military possessed widely differing ideas and expectations for how best to solve the problem of the dead.

By 1918, American citizens generally possessed expectations of governmental obligations to bury the war dead. Precedent going back to the Mexican War and reinforced during the American Civil War and Spanish-American War demonstrated that the government maintained a responsibility to take care of its citizen soldiers both in life and death. In the aftermath of the Mexican War, the Army established of the first American cemetery on foreign soil as a place for the country to bury its war dead together and ensure protection and memorialization for those bodies, albeit all remained unidentified. During and after the Civil War, American citizens witnessed or personally participated in the construction of national cemeteries – burial grounds in the United States exclusively for military members. Two generations later following the Spanish-American War, Americans observed the United States undertake military operations oceans away from its shores. More importantly, the American government funded a repatriation effort to return the bodies of the dead to the United States for permanent burial in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War.

The United States government gradually assumed responsibility for the dead incurred from military operations. Instituting conscription during the American Civil War thrust the government into accepting a larger role to care for dead soldiers as well as the living because America now possessed a national army rather than one comprised of volunteers. By the end of

site is in Pershing Park, southeast of the White House in Washington D.C.

the Spanish-American War, the government shouldered responsibility for not just the burial of its dead, but also transporting the bodies of those dead from faraway lands back to the United States. This largely self-imposed obligation became one that the government never abdicated.

The United States Army was the vehicle through which the wishes of the American people and their government were conducted. The Quartermaster Department constructed and maintained the American cemetery outside of Mexico City, and conducted similar burial responsibilities during and after the Civil War. Notably, Quartermaster General Montgomery Meigs established Arlington National Cemetery near the former home of Confederate General Robert E. Lee in 1864. During the Spanish-American War, the Army pieced together temporary cemeteries in overseas locations including Cuba and the Philippines. Later, the Quartermaster Department organized the repatriation back to the United States and the permanent burial of these American war dead.

The 1917 entrance of the United States into World War I, with its massive and unprecedented casualties derived from a citizen army, led to a vastly different public attitude toward the war dead. The United States Army had gained limited repatriation experience from the Spanish-American War two decades earlier. A more demanding public sentiment for the proper treatment of the war dead, arising from the American Civil War, required action from both the American government and, by extension, its army.

As noted, the United States government adopted a policy of repatriating the entirety of its war dead following the end of the Spanish-American War. The Army continued this policy during and after World War I. During the course of World War I, Colonel Charles Pierce, Chief of the Graves Registration Service – the arm of the Army's Quartermaster Corps responsible for locating, identifying, and burying the dead – wrote to families of those dying overseas stating

that all remains would be returned to the United States following the cessation of hostilities. One family that received such a letter was that of former President Theodore Roosevelt. Following the death of his son, Quentin, President Roosevelt expressed his desire that Quentin's body stay in France where he fell, rather than return to the United States. Roosevelt's personal stance proved the catalyst for a fiery official debate over the proper disposition for America's First World War dead as well as a modification in the Army's repatriation policy.

Americans voiced their desires through multiple means. Many expressed their views through letters to various officials in the government and military, while others attempted to persuade by publishing op-eds in widely circulated newspapers. Two major lobbies formed: The Bring Home the Soldier Dead League that wanted all American dead returned to American soil, and the American Field of Honor Association that advocated for bodies to remain buried in France. Caught amidst the public struggle were the families of the war dead, each with its own reasons to bring their relative home or not. Eventually, the United States government determined that families of the deceased could decide the final disposition of their soldier dead from four options: leave the body overseas, return it to the United States for burial in either a local or national cemetery, or repatriate the remains to the soldier's country of ancestral origin.

However, French law complicated American plans. Of the three major Allies on the Western Front – the British Empire, France, and the United States – only America repatriated most of its war dead away from the battlefield cemeteries. A 1915 French law guaranteed land within the country to each of the Allies to construct cemeteries as necessary. After the war, France leveled an additional regulation prohibiting the United States from disinterring any remains indefinitely. This policy, discussed below, was adopted in the hope American and British war cemeteries inside France would tie the United States and Britain to France in eternity.

This French policy was naturally controversial. For a time, the American government found itself attempting to assuage the rage of its people over perceived French interference and stonewalling while simultaneously trying to persuade France to modify the law. In 1920, the United States Army finally received clearance to begin disinterring its dead for either consolidation into permanent overseas cemeteries or repatriation to American soil, albeit under a different set of regulations than initially desired. Those instructions, codified by Franco-American agreement, were executed faithfully by the Army's Quartermaster Corps' Graves Registration Service (GRS) on behalf of the American people.

As the United States government, through the voice of its citizens, established national policy toward the disposition of its war dead, the Army's GRS implemented those orders. Not formally established until 7 August 1917 as the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) embarked overseas, the GRS's story represents both the ill-preparedness of the United States to care for its dead at the outbreak of war and the country's ability to create and modify repatriation and burial policies that reflected public desire.² The GRS's efforts during and after the war also represents how, in a few short years, the nation established the policy treating its war dead for the next century. The frequent intersection of military, political, and social stakeholders over the burial of the war dead necessitates that this history include elements of American socio-political events that influenced military action. While the final disposition of the war dead was governed by a national policy, it was the United States Army that ultimately carried out those instructions to fulfill the wishes of the people it served.

This dissertation argues that the First World War set multi-faceted precedents for

² Office of the Quartermaster General, *Report of the Quartermaster General to the Secretary of War: 1919*, (Washington: GPO, 1920), 37.

America's treatment of its war dead over the next century. The frequent battles of military, political, and social forces propelled conversation that eventually established policies and procedures for the military fallen. Prior to 1917, the American people had not been forced to consider the disposition of the war dead following an overseas war that affected much of the population. The Federal government entered the war without any plan for the disposition of the dead and relatively little precedent from which to work. Likewise, the 1917 American Army possessed no organization or methodology to attend to tens of thousands of battlefield dead. By the mid-1920s, the United States not only overcame its initial deficiencies regarding the war dead but developed a framework for overcoming similar situations in the wake of future conflicts. This change occurred through trial and error as well as the result of suggestions and desires from the American people. Many of these ideas and practices were later codified by the government and the Army during the twenty years between the World Wars. Elements of current military procedures involving the battlefield dead trace their origins to World War I.

* * * * *

A mournful visitor to Dover Air Force Base who witnesses the dignified transfer of bodies of American war dead from the aircraft that returned those remains from overseas to a United States mortuary may receive comfort through the honors bestowed upon the dead. The current conflicts demonstrate to the public a mix of military reverence and bureaucracy in Army's care for the dead. The public deserves the dignified transfer of the flag-draped caskets carried by honor guards in crisp uniforms. It sees the reverence surrounding a military funeral: the three volleys of rifle fire, signifying a twenty-one-gun salute, the playing of taps, and finally the folding of the American flag followed by its presentation to the deceased soldier's family. A later burial at a national cemetery such as Arlington, Virginia cements such feelings of

reverence. To those Americans who witness such events, those images remain burned into their conscience. Amidst these ceremonies, one would be challenged to find an American citizen questioning the cost or the attention paid toward the war dead whether from current wars or from decades prior. Today, no Americans openly demand accountability on the cost in time or treasure to repatriate our battlefield dead.

One hundred years prior to current operations at Dover Air Force Base, an intense public debate occurred as the nation grappled first with the sensibility of honoring the war dead followed by the question of how to execute such a challenging logistical effort. In the century prior to the First World War, American attitudes toward its war dead evolved as participation in the military grew, forcing the government to react sensibly. As a result, the American people, through their elected officials, demanded greater attention toward the war dead. This ultimately pressured the Army to solve problems related to identification of the dead, their burial, and subsequent maintenance of cemeteries for the war dead following the American Civil War. With the coming of the Spanish-American War, the United States faced a new challenge of putting the practices learned burying the Civil War dead in the decades prior to interments conducted in overseas locations. With a relatively small number of dead, the United States eventually repatriated most of its dead back to America for permanent burial. However, after the AEF sailed for France in 1917, the casualty rolls from the previous three years of the war signaled that the United States would confront a much larger problem regarding its dead following the end of this war. During and after the war, the Graves Registration Service (GRS) conducted an unprecedented operation to locate, identify, and bury the AEF's dead with few established policies amidst turbulence both at home and abroad over the proper disposition of the war dead.

Thirty years ago, one would have been hard-pressed to locate secondary sources that

discuss the World War I dead. While the AEF's division and regimental unit histories were often dedicated to the fallen, and contemporary memoirs readily discussed the war dead in the decade following the Armistice, from World War II until last century's twilight, the subject of the Great War dead remained largely neglected save for Quartermaster histories and studies. Within the field of military history, the study of memory has emerged over the past two decades as scholars attempt to dissect how conflicts are remembered by individuals and nations. Still, the field is not comparable to the number of historians who have written about the events of 1914, Verdun, the Somme, or even American participation in the war. Very few works concerning that time period devote significant attention to the war dead; a fascinating point given that two of the most iconic memorials to America's effort in the First World War – the overseas military cemeteries and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier – focus on the dead. Those historians who have written about death in World War I examine the dead's burial largely within the context of national commemoration rather than concentrating on the military operation required to locate, identify, and bury the fallen.

One of the first books not written by a non-participant of the Great War to directly address the World War I dead was Kurt Piehler's *Remembering War the American Way*. Published in 1995, Piehler correctly argues that "The First World War 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, and race."³ Tracing America's methods of remembering its participation in war from its Revolution to Vietnam, Piehler illustrates the difficulties with which America struggled to properly memorialize its war experiences. His chapter on World War I offers an excellent overview of the themes encountered when studying

³ Kurt Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way*, (Washington: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1995), 4.

the war dead from that period. Piehler addresses the myriad of political and social issues that arose as the United States grappled with the unprecedented situation of tens of thousands of its soldiers buried in foreign fields. *Remembering War the American Way* provides an excellent survey into the problems confronting the United States regarding its war dead. Yet, the themes discussed in Piehler's World War I chapter need further context while the intersecting roles of the Army, the government, and the people requires more explanation outside the focus of his book.

Michael Sledge's *Soldier Dead: How We Recover, Identify, Bury, and Honor Our Military Fallen* largely examines the military's role in caring for the war dead.⁴ Sledge chronicles how the United States has dealt with its war dead from the Mexican War through the war in Iraq. Sledge highlights the trials and successes over that period, as well as the effect of technological innovations that improved identification methods. Sledge endeavors to answer the question of what happens to military personnel after they die by using archival material backed by interviews and even his personal experience as a journalist embedded with a mortuary affairs company in Iraq.

Sledge discusses many important topics confronting the commemoration of the nation's war dead. His chapters are arranged topically, with each covering an aspect of the military's approach to those challenges and their importance to American society. Specifically, his chapters titled "Why it Matters" and "Open Wounds" tie in the military aspects of finding, identifying, and burying the dead to the families that sent sons to war, and depend on a body for some sense of closure. Sledge demonstrates the reasons the military expends so much time,

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

energy, and money to locate and return the bodies of the dead, sometimes decades after their death. The major drawback to *Soldier Dead* is its lack of attention to the First World War. World War II receives much of the book's focus, as do modern examples of identifying the dead such as the remains of the victims of the World Trade Center following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attack. As *Soldier Dead* is an overview of the evolution of identifying, burying, and honoring the war dead, it is understandable that each war did not receive detailed coverage.

Chris Dickon's *The Foreign Burial of American War Dead* examines the history of overseas interments of United States military personnel. Dickon's work centers on isolated burials not currently administered by the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC), which administers the overseas military cemeteries of the World Wars.⁵ Dickon begins with the 1792 death and burial of John Paul Jones in France and continues to those soldiers who remain unaccounted for in the Middle East. Regarding World War I, Dickon explores the controversies that arose over where the United States should bury its dead, the decisions made to create overseas cemeteries, and the ABMC to oversee those cemeteries. Dickon notes that plenty of American soldiers lie buried in British cemeteries or isolated graves throughout the world in addition to the ABMC cemeteries, and those soldiers are often excluded from narratives regarding the war dead.⁶

The Foreign Burial of American War Dead is an excellent account of the large number of Americans buried abroad but fails to address those soldiers returned to the United States following the war. The return of these soldiers – *roughly sixty percent of the total number of dead from the war* – needs to be discussed in concert with those soldiers buried overseas. This is

⁵ Chris Dickon, *The Foreign Burial of American War Dead*, (Jefferson NC: McFarland and Co., Inc., 2011).

⁶ See Appendices 9-11 in Dickon, *The Foreign Burial of American War Dead*, 226-262.

not a criticism of Dickon, as he stated his objective in the title of his book, but this dissertation will demonstrate the linkage between the overseas and repatriated dead, and that the two groups must be discussed simultaneously while deliberating the Army's World War I burial efforts.

The story of the overseas burial of America's World War I dead is not complete without discussion of the Gold Star Mothers and their government-sponsored trips to the cemeteries during the early 1930s. John W. Graham's *The Gold Star Mother's Pilgrimages of the 1930s* provide significant detail into the politics behind the creation and execution of these journeys. Holly Fenelon's *That Knock at the Door: The History of the Gold Star Mothers in America* and Lisa Budreau's *Bodies of War* provides additional insights into the topic. While these books offer insight into the Gold Star Mothers and their 1930s pilgrimages to the overseas cemeteries, they too fail to not link the work of the GRS to set the conditions for the pilgrimages to take place a decade after the war, nor do they discuss at length the significance of the Army's role in execution of both efforts.

Fenelon's book offers a glimpse into the group that arguably suffered the most from the war: the mothers of the dead, and their efforts to commemorate the sacrifice of their sons.⁷ Fenelon concentrates on the creation, establishment, and legacy of the Gold Star Mothers, Inc., which began during World War I. While only three chapters of her book specifically discuss the Gold Star Mothers during World War I, these chapters prove an important examination into the organization's founding as well as its role as both a social and political organization. The social aspect was the congregation of mothers with a shared experience: the loss of a son during war, and this organization's attempts to help them find both peace and a renewed sense of purpose as

⁷ Holly Fenelon, *That Knock at the Door: The History of the Gold Star Mothers in America*, (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, Inc., 2012).

they commemorated the war dead. The organization's political drive was characterized primarily by its campaign for the Gold Star Mothers' Pilgrimage. The Gold Star Mothers, Inc.'s role cannot be understated, and Fenelon's book is an excellent scholarly treatment of the group that pairs well with her study of the larger Gold Star Mothers organization.

Fenelon's book was no doubt difficult to research and compile. Her bibliography boasts contributions from archives and collections all over the United States, as well as personal interviews, and the use of private papers. The presence of such materials warrants the inclusion of Fenelon's book to this work. In addition to her sources, Fenelon's book offers an excellent timeline regarding the Gold Star Mothers, Inc.'s founding and subsequently rise as a national organization of mothers and eventually wives of fallen soldiers. Fenelon details the organization's drive to gain membership in order to enhance the likelihood that its voice would be heard in Washington. She also lists the numerous causes that the Gold Star Mothers championed to ensure that the dead of the First World War were properly honored.

Fenelon's book is also useful to this dissertation by supporting an additional social angle for the commemoration of the dead. The members of the Gold Star Mothers Inc., while united as an organization, did not all possess the same views on the repatriation of the dead or the proper methods to memorialize their sacrifice. The story of the Gold Star mothers is especially important because the government and American citizens came to respect the wishes and opinions of the Gold Star mothers. Some came to view those women as the individuals who sacrificed most in the war. As the organization did not always speak with a unified voice on the issue of repatriation or memorialization, it further divided national opinion over the same matters. Fenelon's important book is not without its share of challenges in terms of its usefulness as a source for this dissertation. As noted, it examines the Gold Star Mothers in a

vacuum that does not attempt to provide deep context to the issues facing Gold Star Mothers during and after the war.

The Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages of the 1930s by John Graham represents the most detailed examination to date about the Gold Star Mothers pilgrimages.⁸ While only briefly touching on the Gold Star Mothers as an organization, Graham devotes his book to United States' commitment to send mothers and widows of the dead to the overseas cemeteries. Graham devotes a chapter of his book to the Graves Registration Service (GRS), which serves to provide context to the organization that served as escorts to the women. However, he does not thoroughly discuss its role in building the cemeteries or identifying the bodies. To do so would have taken Graham well outside the focus of his book but further demonstrates the need for this dissertation to fill that historiographical gap.

A newly published addition to the historiography is Patrick O'Donnell's *The Unknowns: The Untold Story of America's Unknown Soldier and WWI's Most Decorated Heroes Who Brought Him Home*. Against the backdrop of the Unknown Soldier's selection and burial, O'Donnell seeks to shine light on those who participated in the Unknown Soldier's funeral procession.⁹ While largely focusing on the biographies of the eight men chosen as the Unknown Soldier's body bearers, *The Unknowns* contains good coverage of the Unknown Soldier's selection, processional, and burial in 1921. *The Unknowns* ties in well to the Army's efforts to bury its dead, but largely ignores the larger effort put forth by the GRS during and after the war.

The sections of Lisa Budreau's *Bodies of War: World War I and the Politics of Commemoration in America, 1919-1933* examines the repatriation of the dead (Repatriation), the

⁸ John W. Graham, *The Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages of the 1930s*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., Inc., 2005).

⁹ Patrick K. O'Donnell, *The Unknowns: The Untold Story of America's Unknown Soldier and WWI's Most Decorated Heroes Who Brought Him Home*, (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2018), xviii.

establishment of the ABMC as the vehicle to properly oversee the overseas cemeteries (Remembrance), and the Gold Star Mothers' pilgrimages (Return).¹⁰ The common thread through these themes is the intersection of the dead with the social and political culture of the time. Specifically, how citizens and politicians influenced the disposition of the war dead and how that ultimately affected America's commemoration efforts. Budreau explains "why the United States commemorated the war as it did and emphasizes the degree to which that course was so remarkable."¹¹ Building upon the major themes presented in Piehler's *Remembering War the American Way*, Budreau correctly asserts that the dead drove most war commemorations and explores how in her monograph.¹² *Bodies of War* offers the best understanding to date of how America attempted to remember the war through its treatment of the dead. This dissertation addresses similar subjects to *Bodies of War*, but it approaches those topics from a different lens. While Budreau examines the dead through a socio-political lens, this dissertation will primarily concentrate on the military's interaction with the dead, while addressing the influence provided by the government and the American people.

Each of the above-mentioned books is excellent in its own right, delving deeply into topics of which much of the American public possesses little to no knowledge. Lacking in the historiography is a militarily focused narrative that traces the origins of the Army's burial repatriation policies as they collide with the social and political desires that emerged following the Armistice. To understand the politicization the dead and their elevated social status, one must understand previous military policies as well as evolving civilian attitudes toward the

¹⁰ Lisa Budreau, *Bodies of War: World War I and the Politics of Commemoration in America, 1919-1933*, (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

¹¹ Budreau, *Bodies of War*, 1.

¹² *Ibid.*, 5.

military dead. In order to appreciate the overseas cemeteries, the Gold Star Mothers' Pilgrimages, and the saga of the Unknown Soldier, the story of the Graves Registration Service and its achievements during and after the war, are essential to achieving such gratitude. This dissertation seeks to tie these elements together into a cohesive narrative that brings appreciation of America's burial efforts during and after World War I and understand from where current military policies of repatriation and burial originated.

The preceding books largely fit into the historiography of memory. More specifically, the idea of collective memory which, according to author Jay Winter, "[T]he process in which groups engage in remembrance."¹³ Under that definition, the war dead should certainly fall under the subject of memory to discover the reasons the United States chose to memorialize its dead as in the manner it did. This dissertation, however, seeks to chronicle the U.S. Army's experience to create the process of caring for the nation's war dead that remains largely in place to this day. Preeminent memory scholar Paul Fussell noted his displeasure during the Vietnam War of people discussing body counts without proper context.¹⁴ By this dissertation describing how the Army arrived at its processes, future historians will be better armed to argue why the development occurred as it did.

This dissertation draws upon attitudes toward death to offer reasoning behind some of the opinions or decisions made during and after World War I. The preeminent work on this topic is Jessica Mitford's *The American Way of Death*.¹⁵ In her book, Mitford explores American attitudes toward death through interviews with private citizens and funeral directors from

¹³ Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 4.

¹⁴ Jay Winter, *The Legacy of the Great War, Ninety Years On* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2009), 162.

¹⁵ Jessica Mitford, *The American Way of Death*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963).

primarily the United States but also offers anecdotes from Great Britain as a comparison in different attitudes. This evidence is potentially useful in exploring the diverging methodology between the ABMC and Great Britain's Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) during and after the war because their citizenry held different feelings regarding the proper way to remember the dead. While *The American Way of Death* never directly addresses the World War I era, Mitford nevertheless provides some interesting evidence to aid in the understanding of American and British decision-making regarding the military fallen during and after the war.

In addition to Mitford, James Farrell's *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830-1920*, offers more direct evidence into American cultural attitudes toward death and dying circa the First World War. According to Farrell, "Death is a cultural event and societies as well as individuals reveal themselves in their treatment of death."¹⁶ This statement offers some allusion as to why the United States opted to expend such an immense amount of human and monetary capital in order to return its military fallen. Farrell's discussion of the time period complements Mitford's earlier book and offers additional insight into American thoughts toward death during the World War I-era.

In addition to the secondary works listed above, a short historiography exists of military publications examining its role during and after the war. The GRS published a three-volume history of its activities in Europe during and after World War I. *History of the American Graves Registration Service: QMC in Europe* remains the principal book detailing the breadth and depth of GRS operations during the war. The weakness of the volumes is that they study the GRS in a vacuum largely devoid of connection to the political or social forces that propelled the

¹⁶ James Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830-1920*, (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1980), 3.

organization's work in Europe during and after the war. In his preface, then-GRS Chief, Colonel H. F. Rethers wrote of the volumes that "The following account... makes no attempt to 'place' the operation in any kind of historical perspective or political milieu. It is merely as if the locomotive were describing itself."¹⁷ Indeed, as one reads through the monograph, the authors narrate the Quartermaster Corps and Graves Registration Service's activities akin to a unit history or war diary. The complexity of the story that led to the creation of the overseas cemeteries simultaneous to the repatriation of bodies to the United States demands that the military, political, and social aspects of the World War I fallen be told together. This dissertation seeks to fill that void in the historiography.

After World War II, the Quartermaster Corps (QMC), through author Edward Steere, published two books and an article about Quartermaster Operations. While all three focused on World War II, the introductions inevitably harkened back to the First World War to provide context for the QMC's organizational history prior to the Second World War. The last book published by the government that examined Quartermaster activities was Erna Risch's 1962 work, *Quartermaster Support for the Army: A History of the Corps, 1775-1939*.¹⁸ Risch's monograph is certainly the most comprehensive history of the QMC, but it, along with Steere's publications, contains omissions regarding the Graves Registration Service's contributions, particularly during the Spanish-American War. In fact, Risch's almost 750-page tome devotes only forty pages to the Spanish-American War – none of which specifically discuss the burial or repatriation of the war dead. This dissertation will seek to fill that historical gap to explain the importance of the Spanish-American War experience, the genesis of the GRS under the QMC,

¹⁷ United States Army Graves Registration Service, *History of the American Graves Registration Service: QMC in Europe*, Vol. 1, (Washington, Government Printing Office (GPO), 1920), 2.

¹⁸ Erna Risch, *Quartermaster Support for the Army: A History of the Corps, 1775-1939*, (Washington, GPO, 1962).

and the impact of the overseas dead in Cuba and the Philippines to the Army's procedures for its dead during and after World War I.

The reader familiar with the above titles will see themes present in those monographs throughout this dissertation. Indeed, this dissertation seeks to tie the stories together into a cohesive narrative using the Quartermaster Corps' Graves Registration Service as the central entity. The reader will find that no decision made by political or military figures nor the desires of the American people regarding the war dead could have been realized without the efforts of the GRS. While this is not new in the sense that an army carries out the political will of a nation, the GRS's story has thus-far been relegated further into the shadows than it ought to be.

While the secondary historiography for this topic is relatively thin, a wide variety of primary sources allow the complete narrative to come together to reveal the linkage between the will of the American people to the policy decisions regarding the World War I dead that were ultimately executed by the GRS. Numerous archives in the United States house a plethora of documents that provide insight into the circumstances surrounding the US government's decisions on the war dead the communication of those decisions to the Army. Much of the Army policy adopted as a result of lessons learned during and after the war is held in these repositories.

Information will be drawn partially from archival sources to discuss then-Chaplain Charles Pierce's actions in the Philippines and the influence of this experience on Pierce upon assuming command of the nascent Graves Registration Service (GRS) in 1917. In addition to Pierce, the work of other relatively unknown individuals in both the Caribbean and the Philippines provided lessons learned in mortuary affairs. To present the reader with actions from Cuba that proved influential to Quartermaster methodology during World War I, this dissertation will reference a previously unused resource in the field of the war dead, *The Martial Graves of*

our Fallen in Santiago de Cuba, written by Henry C. McCook. A chaplain in the 2nd Pennsylvania Volunteers, McCook witnessed the dilapidated, disorganized methods of burial conducted in Cuba, reported his concerns to President William McKinley, volunteered to return to Cuba, and began documenting and ensuring the durable marking of soldiers' graves there.¹⁹

The organization then known as the Quartermaster Department, McCook notes, was responsible for interments overseas similar to the duties it fulfilled at stateside military posts. However, the plan used by the Army at garrisons in the United States did not translate to Cuba. Likewise, the Army did not construct a structure of responsibility to undertake the burial and identification mission in Cuba. As a result, "This important duty was left to the voluntary impulses of the burial party, or of the hospital workers, or to the good will of comrades personally interested in the dead, who chanced to learn where the dead were buried before it was too late to identify the grave. As a result, a large number of our dead...were laid in unmarked graves and are classed among the unknown."²⁰ McCook's experiences in addition to those of three other men associated with the Quartermaster Department ultimately provided many lessons that the reader will see carried forward to GRS regulations during World War I.

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) II in College Park, Maryland is the primary repository of records belonging to both the Quartermaster Corps (QMC) and the ABMC. Letters, bulletins, meeting minutes, and notes provide excellent linkages between the will of the American people, the orders provided by the government of the United States, and the actions executed by the Quartermaster Corps as a result of the previous two entities. The Army Heritage and Education Center (AHEC) at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania

¹⁹ Henry McCook, *The Martial Graves of our Fallen in Santiago de Cuba*, (Philadelphia, George W. Jacobs & Co., 1899), 11-13.

²⁰ McCook, *Martial Graves*, 307-308.

also holds many periodicals pertaining to the era as well as all the QMC regulations published as a result of its experiences in World War I. Similarly, valuable documents came from the Army Quartermaster Museum at Fort Lee, Virginia.

To gauge the impact of organizational decisions, it was necessary to ascertain records that could demonstrate the effect on families and their soldier dead, be it positively or negatively. Consultation with records from the National World War I Museum's Edward Jones Research Center and the National Personnel Records Center proved vital. The Edward Jones Research Center offered intimate letters between next of kin and the government or the Army, as well as documentation of the Gold Star Pilgrimages of the early 1930s. The National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) houses the burial files of every soldier who died during World War I. Contained in the burial files are letters, memorandums, official forms documenting the deceased, any disinterment, transportation, identification, and final disposition for that particular soldier. More than any other record, the burial files offer intimate glimpses into the actions of the GRS and the impact of government decisions on the families of the dead.

In addition to the above noted files, a good selection of memoirs written by American participants in the war provide the point of view and opinion of the surviving soldiers who witnessed death, buried the dead, and were among the first visitors to the temporary cemeteries during and immediately following the conclusion of the war. Some of these works were based on diaries kept during the war while others were written later from memory. Other survivors' accounts appear in newspaper articles and post-war correspondence with the Quartermaster Corps. Notably, an interview with Edward Younger, the sergeant who selected the Unknown Soldier, will be presented in this dissertation. Select regimental and divisional histories that discuss burial methods or memorialization of the dead are included.

Another primary source used in this paper is periodicals from the time. Many articles from various newspapers were found in the National Archives, but one, the *New York Times*, published many commentaries discussing the questions of burial and memorialization that this dissertation covers. The *New York Times'* newspaper archives combined with repositories of other periodicals around the country represent a glimpse into the social pulse of America. The various other newspapers and periodicals kept readers up to date on the hot button issues of the time. One of these issues was the argument over whether the remains of American servicemen should be repatriated from France. Newspapers ran numerous articles documenting public sentiment as it ebbed and surged. These were written by concerned citizens, military personnel, and members of special interest groups. The articles capture the interest that this topic garnered across the nation and illustrate the divisive nature of the topic. The newspapers largely maintain a balanced view of the argument, publishing equal number of editorials from both sides of a particular issue, written by people of various backgrounds. Similarly, *The Times* of London, provided an equivalent service for the British. Newspapers also published excerpts of government letters and War Department orders that were not otherwise located in archival holdings.

To provide context and comparison to the American decisions regarding the war dead, some examination of British approaches is included. As Britain had been at war for almost three years prior to America's entry, its burial organizations already experienced many growing pains and operated much more smoothly by 1917 than its American counterparts, however, Britain viewed the ownership of the war dead differently than the American government. Sources into British methodology were primarily drawn from the former Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC), now called the Commonwealth Graves Commission (CWGC), archives as well as the

newspaper, *The Times*. The IWGC documents provide useful comparisons between the United States and Great Britain with respect to practices, attitudes, and decisions regarding the war dead. *The Times* will offer insight into the response of the British people to the decisions regarding their war dead. Similar to the United States, the British were not unified regarding the proper disposition of their dead. This is demonstrated both in the stories published by *The Times* as well as the editorials written by members of the public expressing their thoughts on the best methods to remember the war dead or reacting to published policies. Providing a comparison of the two countries' efforts helps us better understand the United States' actions during the time.

While various archives have collected a considerable amount of material saved by government and military organizations, artifacts kept by individual soldiers have passed down to their heirs and found their way into forgotten boxes in attics or garbage heaps. Some such pieces have been saved by historically minded collectors for posterity. One such collection is that of Scott Kraska who, possessing material related to soldiers killed in action, the Graves Registration Service, and a Gold Star Mothers, opened his holdings to the author for research and incorporation into this project. Through his kindness, these previously unknown stories will appear for the first time. While these accounts alone are not enough to base any arguments around, they serve to add to our body of knowledge regarding the World War I dead and their bereaved families. The state of the historiography regarding America's burial of its war dead remains in its infancy and requires much more study and discovery from which to base arguments. The importance of preserving surviving documents and artifacts only serves to broaden our understanding of a time in which there are no living witnesses.

Much of this dissertation hinges on understanding the wishes, commands, and reactions of diverse groups of people. Liberal use of direct quotes throughout the essay attempt to

resurrect those voices from a century past so readers might immerse themselves in the thoughts and feelings of those charged with deciding the final disposition of the war dead and similarly gain empathy for those suffering the loss of loved ones overseas and vying for a voice in the decision-making process. This dissertation's narrative follows a general chronological path. Chapter 1 begins by examining American burial methods during and after the Mexican War, continuing with discussion about the Civil War and Spanish-American War before leading into the beginning of World War I, the creation of the Graves Registration Service (GRS), and America's entry into the conflict in 1917. Chapter 2 discusses various situations encountered by the Army in 1918 that led to policy decisions regarding the war dead and continues through 1919 with the French prohibition of disinterments and initial American reactions to this policy. Chapter 3 discusses the Franco-American Commission that broke the diplomatic gridlock and allowed repatriations to begin in 1920 and discusses the repatriation and overseas burial processes in detail during 1921, ending with the return and burial of the Unknown Soldier to the United States. Chapter 4 chronicles the completion of repatriation activities in the 1920s as well as the work of the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) to finish the overseas cemeteries before transitioning to the Gold Star Pilgrimages that occurred in the early 1930s. Chapter 5 provides a short examination of the burials and repatriations for eleven soldiers executed for war crimes during World War I, the so-called 'dishonored dead.' The dissertation's conclusion discusses significant events involving the World War I dead after the completion of the Gold Star Pilgrimages. A sequential narrative was chosen rather than dividing the chapters topically so that the reader may better see the intersection of the American people's desires, the government directives, and the Army's execution of those requests and subsequent orders. Occasional exceptions are made, particularly when discussing the activities of the French or

British burials of their dead rather than scattering examples throughout the narrative. These appear as separate sections within chapters 1, 3, and 4 along with a brief discussion of British executions in chapter 5.

The astute reader of World War I literature may note a distinct difference in the number of American dead mentioned in other books than is depicted here. Some works report a death toll in excess of 110,000 soldiers.²¹ This dissertation frequently references the GRS total of just over 70,000 dead in Europe. The difference is that the former total accounts for soldiers dying in the United States or enroute to France, whereas the latter derives from deaths occurring in Europe during or immediately following the war. Indeed, a 22 February 1920 newspaper article acknowledges 118,409 American dead from the war but does not explicitly describe where those deaths occurred.²² A different newspaper declared in 1919 that 107,444 American soldiers died during the war, specifically citing that 72,951 of those dead belonging to the AEF.²³ That total no doubt contains soldiers who perished as a result of the flu pandemic. Modern estimates acknowledge that approximately 45,000 American soldiers in the United States, enroute to France, or within the AEF's ranks died from the flu.²⁴ Some were buried in America, others at sea, and the balance in the GRS cemeteries. As this work focuses on the burial of the overseas war dead, the GRS numbers recording the total number of dead in its cemeteries will appear throughout the narrative because those dead were the subject of the national and international discussions.

²¹ Such works include David Reynolds, *The Long Shadow: The Legacies of the Great War in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014), 35; and Geoffrey Wawro, *Sons of Freedom: The Forgotten American Soldiers who Defeated Germany in World War I*, (New York: Basic Books, 2018), xxiii.

²² "Meetings Today Honor War Dead," *Indianapolis Star*, 22 February 1920.

²³ "Deaths During War in Nation on Fields of Battle are 107,444," *Harrisburg Telegraph* (Pa.), 24 February 1919.

²⁴ Harry Thetford, "Flu Killed More World War I Troops than Any Battle," *Greensboro News and Record* (NC), 21 January 2018.

As a military history, this work will focus on the Graves Registration Service. The military acts at the behest of its civilian leadership that represents the American people. Therefore, their actions weave together throughout the narrative. This dissertation will seek to clarify the record of the United States' policy to repatriate its dead created during the Spanish American War, demonstrate that the Army, not the government, decided against repatriating bodies until the end of World War I, and reveal how a letter written by former President Theodore Roosevelt fundamentally changed the military's policy on repatriation. Instances of the Army's success and failures will be highlighted over the course of the story. This is not to cause embarrassment to the United States or its Army. The United States' accomplishment with respect to its war dead during and after World War I was impressive and unprecedented. To think that such an operation could be conducted – all while establishing policies and procedures on the fly – without problems is unrealistic. When challenges occurred, the Army proved transparent in identifying and correcting its shortcomings. While this dissertation emphasizes the military history aspects of the topic, it cannot ignore the influence of the American people or their elected leaders on military operations. By focusing on the military aspect, it is hoped this study will enrich understanding of how the Army interacted and worked with the government and the American people to not only bury and honor our First World War dead, but ultimately lay the foundations for how the United States honored its dead for the remainder of the twentieth century.

Graves Registration Chief Brigadier General H. F. Rethers, the Chief of the American Graves Registration Service, wrote the official history of the service and concluded on an appropriately contingent note: “What will be thought of the great adventure of the War Department in returning thousands of dead to the United States fifty years or a century from

now, it is impossible to say.”²⁵ The unasked questions within this statement are how the “great adventure” was conducted and administered, and how Americans might view the work done by his organization both in the context of the post-World War I world but also in how it affected American attitudes toward its military fallen. This dissertation seeks to answer those two questions.

²⁵ American Graves Registration Service, *QMC in Europe*, Vol. 1, 2.

CHAPTER 1

TRIAL AND ERROR: ARMY BURIALS THROUGH THE BEGINNING OF WORLD WAR I

To understand the success achieved by the United States Army in the care of its war dead during and immediately after the First World War, one must first appreciate the tribulations experienced during the first 150 years of the Army's history. Very little data remains available regarding the Quartermaster Department and any responsibilities it assumed regarding the dead prior to 1845. Consequently, the Mexican War has traditionally been the historiographical starting point for researchers to chronicle the Army's odyssey to discover the proper honors for its dead. This chapter follows the Army through the mid- to late-19th century as it grappled with increased responsibility for its battlefield dead resulting from public and governmental pressure. By the end of the Spanish-American War, the United States possessed the beginnings of a formula for identification and repatriation of its dead that became the Army's policy when it sailed for France in 1917.

Burials from the Seminole War through the Civil War

The American Army established many significant methodological precedents for handling its war dead during the 19th century. As far back as the Seminole Wars beginning in 1817, the Army's Quartermaster Department aided certain families in caring for remains of soldiers. During that time, families could apply for the Quartermaster Department to retrieve their soldier's body without charge. Two major caveats existed: first, the deceased must be an officer, and second, the family was responsible for purchasing the coffin and shipping it to a Quartermaster unit operating near the location of the officer's remains. The Quartermaster Department then disinterred, casketed, and shipped the remains back to the family for burial in a local plot. The implication of this policy was that the officer's family must possess the necessary

funds to procure the Quartermaster Department's services or his body remained at its original burial site. Although then-Quartermaster General Thomas Jessup petitioned Congress to authorize funding for burials, his efforts proved unsuccessful, keeping the applications for repatriation to a minimum. The remainder of officers and all enlisted soldiers remained buried where they fell during this period in American history. Most interment sites went unmarked with the only record of the soldier's death being mention in official casualty reports or confirmed via letter from a soldier's surviving friend.¹

While the Quartermaster Department had conducted burials in the past for the Army, its responsibilities and therefore its experience was limited to soldiers who died on military posts. Those soldiers were quickly buried by the Quartermaster Department at the post cemetery or at a nearby church cemetery in the event no burial ground existed at that base. Interestingly, the federal government annually appropriated money for such burials of enlisted soldiers only, assuming that deceased officers' estates would pay for funeral expenses. Only if that assumption proved incorrect would the War Department release funds for officer burial expenses. If federal funds were not available, the expectation existed that fellow officers would furnish the money.²

The 1846-1848 Mexican War began the Army's history of systematically caring for all of its dead. Over the course of the war, the Army buried the majority of its 13,000 dead near where they fell.³ One Mexican War history notes that the day following the battle of Resaca de la Palma was "devoted to the burial of the slain.... Their honored remains were laid at length in their resting-places, beneath the turf on which they fought and fell." Nevertheless, the account

¹ Erna Risch, *Quartermaster Support for the Army: A History of the Corps, 1775-1939*, (Washington, GPO, 1962), 463-464.

² *Ibid.*, 462-463.

³ Michael Sledge, *Soldier Dead: How We Recover, Identify, Bury, and Honor Our Military Fallen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 32.

did not describe methods for identification of the bodies or markings for the graves.⁴ The state of Kentucky's post-war authorization to fund the return of all of its dead to a state cemetery dedicated to that war stands as the only organized repatriations of the time.⁵ By contrast, most of the burial and return activities conducted after the war actually occurred through the efforts of private groups outside of the Army using procedures that were undeveloped at best and certainly not uniform. Very few identifications of the dead occurred either during or after the Mexican War.⁶ This happened partly because the burial procedures could be best described as rudimentary and no organization existed within the Army to handle the dead and capture or preserve identity over time.

Burial accounts from the Mexican War demonstrate a preference to bury officers over enlisted men. One deceased colonel received a funeral escort consisting of a squadron of dragoons, eight companies of infantry, a caisson bearing the body, and a contingent of officers. The officer was buried under a flag flying at half-staff. After reading the burial service, three volleys were fired over the grave before the flag rose to full staff.⁷ The funeral procession closely followed the instructions prescribed in the *General Regulations for the Army* published in 1821.⁸

On 28 March 1850, Congress approved \$10,000 for the purchase of land to construct a cemetery "for such of the Officers and Soldiers of our Army, in the late war with Mexico, as fell

⁴ Nathaniel Brooks, *A Complete History of the Mexican War: Its Causes, Conduct, and Consequences*, (Philadelphia: Grigg, Elliot & Co., 1851), 150.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

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

⁷ Brooks, *Complete History of the Mexican War*, 97.

⁸ *General Regulations for the Army; or, Military Institutes*, (Philadelphia: M. Carey and Sons, 1821), 27-29, AHEC.

in battle, or died in and around said City....”⁹ Two acres contained the graves of approximately 475 soldiers. The cemetery was viewed as a major step for the treatment of American dead; by contrast, one official noted that in another part of Mexico, the remains of almost 2,000 American soldiers lie buried no more than two feet underground. Heavy rains brought the remains to the surface where the bones comingled with each other as well as with animal remains.¹⁰ This would seem hardly an appropriate manner to treat the war dead.

By 1853, 750 Americans – all unidentified – were buried in the Mexico City cemetery.¹¹ While the portion of the cemetery containing the Mexican War dead represents more of a monument to the missing in action, the Congressional appropriations for the establishment and permanent care for a military cemetery outside the borders of the United States symbolized a significant moment in American military history. For the first time, the United States government funded the creation of a cemetery specifically for its war dead outside its borders. The Army’s collection and burial of these dead represented the first time that organization devoted significant organizational energy to such an undertaking.

The American Civil War drastically altered the public’s attitudes toward the treatment of war dead. This change prompted the government and the Army to do more to preserve identity and ensure proper burials for soldier dead. In September 1861, Secretary of War Joseph Holt issued instructions to Army hospitals outlining expectations for record keeping and burial of the

⁹ Extract from Act of Congress approved 28 September 1850, NARA, RG 117, Entry A1-22, Box 178; Chris Dickon, *The Foreign Burial of American War Dead: A History* (London: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2011), 25.

¹⁰ R.P. Letcher, letter to Hon. Daniel Webster, 10 January 1852, NARA, RG 117, Entry A1-22, Box 178. The letter indicates that only 450 bodies were buried at the cemetery, but the ABMC lists 750 total unknowns from the Mexican War at the cemetery.

¹¹ 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.

dead. Holt decreed that all hospitals in the Army maintain a supply of blank books and forms to record names of the dead and subsequent burial locations. Additionally, hospitals were to keep a stock of headboards for use as grave markers. Department commanders were responsible for their hospitals using these tools properly and routinely.¹²

By April 1862, the War Department expanded its instructions to include both the eastern and western theatres of war. Under this order, commanding generals became responsible for ensuring that the War Department's directives were properly executed. General Order 33 issued on 3 April 1862 directed commanding generals to provide decent burials to all soldiers wherever possible by selecting land for burial plots and ensuring each grave was marked with a number and, ideally, the name of the soldier buried. The command retained a register containing burial information from the cemetery.¹³ While the order demonstrated excellent intent by the War Department to ensure that burials were conducted properly and identities retained by the Army, its vague language combined with realities of combat to greatly hinder the Army's ability to remain faithful to these orders.

New embalming technology, which involved injecting chemicals into a corpse to slow the process of decomposition, coupled with the relative proximity of the battlefields to the homes of the soldiers to create the possibility of returning preserved bodies to their families for funerals and interment. While the War Department assumed the responsibility of identifying and burying the dead, its instructions effectively absolved the government of any responsibility toward returning its dead to their families. Wealthy families benefitted from the opportunity to bring their soldier's remains home for burial while most next of kin hoped the government would take

¹² Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 65.

¹³ Risch, *History of the Corps*, 464 and Steere, "Genesis," 151.

care of their loved ones. Undertakers understood the desires of some families to retrieve their dead relative and bring the remains back home for burial, and strategically placed themselves near the warring armies in order to render their services following a battle. Some undertakers saw this as a sacred duty within their profession while others viewed the war as a potential financial windfall. Unscrupulous business practices quickly gained the attention 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 as an unmitigated nuisance... the whole system as practiced here is one of pretension, swindling, and extortion.”¹⁴ Embalmers countered that their fees reflected the danger undertaken to recover the dead during and after battles. Complaints against embalmers peaked in 1864, prompting General Ulysses S. Grant to revoke all permits and prohibit private undertakers from working anywhere except to the rear of his army.¹⁵

The number of battlefield dead during the Civil War dwarfed anything seen on the North American continent to that point, taxing the abilities of the Army to execute War Department instructions properly, even when private undertakers were involved. In addition, the generic language of General Order 33 all but freed commanding generals to devote most if not all of their attention and organizational energy towards the living rather than the dead.¹⁶ The problem of the dead quickly overwhelmed both hospital and operational commanders.

Another new technology thrust the battlefield dead into the public consciousness: photography. Matthew Brady’s October 1862 photographic exhibition in New York City of the images he captured following the September 1862 Battle of Antietam was a watershed moment

¹⁴ Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 96-97.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁶ Risch, *History of the Corps*, 464 and Steere, “Genesis,” 153.

for the American public to become visually connected to the battlefield dead. Among Brady's photographs were images of dead Union and Confederate soldiers laying unburied across various parts of the battlefield. These dead soldiers – contorted and beginning to bloat – not only brought the American public closer to the war than ever before, but also galvanized some to do more for those soldiers who died for America. The *New York Times* opined that the mothers of serving soldiers, but particularly those who died at Antietam or on other battlefields, would be hardest hit by these images: “[H]ow can this mother bear to know that in a shallow trench, hastily dug, rude hands have thrown him. She would have handled the poor corpse so tenderly... yet even the imperative office of hiding the dead from sight has been done by those who thought it trouble, and were only glad when their work ended.”¹⁷ This article highlighted changing attitudes toward America's treatment of its soldier dead and its increasing empathy toward families ravaged by war. The American public would no longer tolerate cemeteries universally bearing unidentified bodies scattered throughout the battlefields of the Civil War.

In response to a quickly-expanding list of dead, Congress authorized on 17 July 1862 the “purchase [of] 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.”¹⁸ The War Department never codified the Congressional authorization into an order, so military commanders continued to largely overlook the care of the dead. In the war's Eastern Theater, cemeteries were created following the battles at Antietam in 1862 and Gettysburg in 1863, but these came about through the efforts of local citizens rather than the military. One of the founding members of the Antietam cemetery offered his opinion on the importance of

¹⁷ “Brady's Photographs: Pictures of the Dead at Antietam,” *New York Times*, 20 October 1862.

¹⁸ Steere, “Genesis,” 151.

establishing the battlefield cemetery: “One of the striking indications of civilization and refinement among a people is the tenderness and care manifested by them towards their dead.”¹⁹ In the West, General George H. Thomas established military cemeteries near the battlefields of Chattanooga and Stones River, ordering his chaplains to supervise their construction. General Ambrose Burnside later created one additional plot outside of Knoxville, Tennessee.²⁰ Together, these five cemeteries represent the only examples that follow the 1862 Congressional Authorization. Theoretically, cemeteries established near the battle sites would aid in preserving the identities of the fallen, however, visitors to these cemeteries will notice a large percentage of the interments are marked “Unknown.” For example, of the 5,350 dead recovered around the battlefield at Spotsylvania, only 1,500 were identified.²¹ This low identification rate can be attributed to a variety of factors including a long time between death and burial and the absence of any identification tags issued by the Army.

One campaign illustrated the potential that existed for facilitating identification if the military commander devoted the time and effort to the process. In 1864, a Confederate force moved against Washington, D.C. but was ultimately stopped in battles northwest of the city. One commander, Army Captain James M. Moore, created an ad-hoc graves registration unit that collected, identified, and buried the dead. While the number of dead in Moore’s area was small relative to most Civil War battles, Moore’s unit identified every set of Union Army remains.²² This action marked the first time the Army formed an organization dedicated solely to the disposition of the dead and the unit’s success underscored possibilities for the Army if it devoted

¹⁹ Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 61.

²⁰ Risch, *History of the Corps*, 465-466.

²¹ Robert M. Poole, *On Hallowed Ground: The Story of Arlington National Cemetery*, (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 70.

²² Steere, “Genesis,” 156.

the resources for identifying and burying its battlefield dead. In the short term, the Army was necessarily focused on winning a war and preserving the Union. After the war was over, however, the Army realized just how poorly it performed in taking care of its war dead.

Following General Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox, Virginia on 9 April 1865, Quartermaster General Montgomery Meigs ordered Federal Army commanding generals to take count of the number of registered graves within their command or district. Union commanders reported a total of 101,736 known graves scattered throughout the Eastern and Western theatres of war, representing less than one-third of known Federal deaths.²³ The Union Army's inability to account for the whereabouts of over 250,000 of its soldiers by war's end gives reason to so many citizens turning to private enterprise for assistance during the war. One such organization was the Sanitary Commission, which established a directory of hospital patients in 1863. In just two years, citizens submitted over one million names for the organization to investigate.²⁴ Red Cross founder Clara Barton formed the Friends of the Missing Men of the United States Army to help citizens ascertain information on missing soldiers. Through her organization's efforts, 22,000 families received information on their relative.

One cemetery that grew to fame as a result of the Civil War was Arlington National Cemetery. Constructed on the grounds of Confederate General Robert E. Lee's estate, Arlington's commanding views across the Potomac to Washington D.C. necessitated its seizure by Federal forces early in the war and contained a sizeable Union garrison by 1864. Arlington's first burial occurred on 13 May 1864 with the interment of Private William Christman.²⁵ The next month, Quartermaster General Montgomery Meigs wrote to Secretary of War Edwin

²³ Faust, *Republic of Suffering*, 213 and Risch, *History of the Corps*, 466.

²⁴ Faust, *Republic of Suffering*, 111-112.

²⁵ Poole, *Hallowed Ground*, 58.

Stanton recommending Arlington become a national military cemetery.²⁶ Despite earning such status, Arlington would not rise to prominence until fifty years later when one unidentified soldier from another war found repose within its grounds.

The military cemeteries fell under the Quartermaster Department of the Army, which became responsible for the care of the grounds. While the Mexico City Cemetery existed since its purchase on 28 September 1850, the United States did not formally codify it as a national military cemetery until 3 March 1873.²⁷ Following the act of Congress, the Quartermaster Department began regular inspections and generating reports of the cemetery and its grounds.

By 1870, the Army located and buried 299,696, or 85 percent of the Union dead in 73 national cemeteries.²⁸ Approximately 58 percent of those bodies were identified; a marked improvement from the Mexican War, but far below the nation's tolerance in the future.²⁹

Quartermaster General Meigs noted the importance of marking the graves, stating, "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."³⁰ Meigs' statement articulated the new responsibility of the government to take care of its citizen soldiers *in death as well as in life*. From this point forward, the government, through the Army, owed its citizens every effort to identify as many graves as possible. To be fair, the Army recognized that its previous methods would no longer be tolerated

²⁶ Ibid., 61.

²⁷ Act of Congress Approved 3 March 1873, NARA, RG 92, Entry 576, Box 46.

²⁸ The current accepted total number of Federal dead stands at 360,222, Risch, *History of the Corps*, 466; Steere, *Graves Registration in WWII*, 9; Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 34, and Faust, *Republic of Suffering*, 255. The current accepted total number of Federal dead stands at 360,222,

²⁹ Steere, "Genesis," 161.

³⁰ Faust, *Republic of Suffering*, 235.

by the American public, or its civilian masters. One general expressed his observation 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.”³¹

Twenty years after the 1861 First Battle of Bull Run, *Philadelphia Times* correspondent George Morgan traversed the great battlefields of Virginia from Manassas, Virginia south to Appomattox. The purpose of his series, which ran weekly from July until September of 1881, was to illustrate to participants as well as a new generation the condition of the war’s great battlefields after two decades of peace.³² Morgan also illustrated the numbers of dead not located and properly buried after these horrific battles. At the national cemetery near Seven Pines, Morgan noted that of the 1,857 Union soldiers buried only 150 possessed identifications. Down the road, Morgan tripped over a skeletonized hand emerging from a briar patch. Through further investigation among the locals, Morgan estimated that 200 remains were in that field. Local farmers reported frequent encounters with human bones during plowing season.³³

The following week Morgan visited Gaines’ Mill, not far from the 1862 Seven Pines fields. There, he reported the story of an incident not one week old where a farmer digging post-holes “...felt his spade grate against something hard and a moment later he cast up a skull,” which after a few more minutes work “disclosed a complete skeleton, which, from bits of blue and brass buttons about it, was pronounced to be that of a Federal Soldier. The farmer... took it to the Cold Harbor Cemetery, where the forgotten brave was given decent though not ‘Christian

³¹ Steere, "Genesis," 160-161.

³² “Announcement,” *Philadelphia Times*, 11 July 1881.

³³ George Morgan, “Virginia Battle-fields: A Day at Fair Oaks and Seven Pines,” *Philadelphia Times*, 18 July 1881.

burial' among his unknown fellows."³⁴ A week later at the Fredericksburg Cemetery, Morgan walked with the cemetery's superintendent who shared the burial register that contained 12,770 unknowns out of 15,257 burials.³⁵ These incidents reported by Morgan serve to highlight not just the lack of systemic identification methods used by the Union Army during the war, but also for collecting and burying the war dead after the cessation of hostilities.

In addition to creating the national cemetery system, the American military experience during and after the Civil War created other precedents that would affect military thinking through the Spanish American War and World War I. Notably, the creation of a large citizen army put the onus on the government to care for those soldiers, both living and dead, who fought for the government when it called.³⁶ This duty had been entirely neglected when armies had filled their ranks with rootless misfits and desperados, but could no longer be neglected when the great powers instituted conscription in the 19th century that pulled all classes of society into military service. At this juncture, historian Drew Gilpin Faust argues, "Sacrifice and the state became inextricably intertwined."³⁷ Fifty years later, this socio-political contract would force the Army to be much better in its efforts. In the interim, a new conflict, this time away from America's shores, would cause the United States to create new policies and procedures to care for its war dead.

The Spanish-American War

The 1898 Spanish-American War and subsequent Philippine Insurrection is usually

³⁴ George Morgan, "Virginia Battle-Fields: The Line of the Seven Days' Retreat," *Philadelphia Times*, 25 July 1881.

³⁵ George Morgan, "How Fredericksburg Now Appears," *Philadelphia Times*, 1 August 1881.

³⁶ Faust, *Republic of Suffering*, 229.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, xiii.

overlooked by historians who discuss the transformation of the Army's attitudes toward burying its dead. The Quartermaster Corps' World War II history notes that the Spanish-American War represents the first thoughtful 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 re-interment in the beautiful cemeteries which have been provided by our Government."³⁸ The numbers of dead did not come close to those of the Civil War, nor would they represent the toll of World War I, but many precedents evolved from the lessons of finding, identifying, burying, and repatriating bodies following overseas conflict. Names such as McCook, Croggon, Pierce, and Rhodes should be synonymous with the American war dead and the Philippines, but the latter two receive most of the current historiographical attention.

With the war occurring overseas, confusion abounded over the government's responsibilities regarding the war dead. Never before in American history had the Army conducted sustained campaigns overseas that resulted in hundreds of dead. Before the 1898 fighting on Cuba ended, relatives of known dead sent inquiries to ascertain whether the War Department intended to return bodies, explore the possibility of receiving permission to return bodies at private expense, or send "earnest prayers to the Secretary of War to undertake the work in its entirety."³⁹ Secretary of War Russell Alger indicated his desire to do so in the fall after the rainy season passed. If they did not desire to wait that long, relatives of the dead could repatriate their soldier dead at private expense. The *New York Times* quoted Alger as stating, "It is as little as the Government can do to restore the dust of the country's heroes to their native soil where it

³⁸ 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.

³⁹ "Home Burials for Heroes," *New York Times*, 31 July 1898.

is possible.”⁴⁰ In many ways, the genesis of the United States’ repatriation policies can be traced to Secretary Alger’s statement.

On 26 August 1898, two weeks after hostilities ended, Secretary Alger formally announced “...the intention of the government to bring to the United States and ship to their former homes the bodies of all soldiers who died in Cuba. Their graves have been carefully marked.”⁴¹ Secretary Alger’s statement marked the first official commitment by the United States to repatriate its dead from overseas – a watershed moment in American history. In February 1899, the United States Congress appropriated funding to make repatriation of “the dead bodies of officers, soldiers, and sailors who died away from home while members of the Army or Navy of the United States since Jan. 1, 1898” a reality.⁴²

The last sentence of the War Department’s 26 August message bears further discussion. The War Department assured the American public that the graves of its soldier dead were properly marked, insinuating that repatriation would be relatively easy because identifications of the dead were preserved. Henry C. McCook, chaplain of the 2nd Pennsylvania Volunteers, reported quite the opposite situation to President William McKinley in the summer of 1898 and volunteered to return to Cuba to begin documenting and ensuring the durable marking of soldiers’ graves on the island.⁴³ McCook’s testimony prompted President McKinley to issue an order on 6 August 1898 stating “[T]hat the graves of our soldiers at Santiago should be permanently marked. The present marking will last but a short time, and before its effacement occurs, suitable and permanent markers should be put up. The Secretary of War is charged with

⁴⁰ “Home Burials for Heroes,” *New York Times*, 31 July 1898.

⁴¹ “Dead to be Brought Back,” *New York Times*, 27 August 1898.

⁴² “Burial of Soldiers and Sailors,” *New York Times*, 12 February 1899.

⁴³ Henry C. McCook, *The Martial Graves of our Fallen Heroes in Santiago de Cuba*, (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs & Co., 1899), 11-13.

this order.”⁴⁴ Brigadier General Marshall Ludington became the Quartermaster officer ultimately responsible for this effort. Ludington cited McKinley’s policy as “probably the first attempt in history where a country at war with a foreign power has undertaken to disinter the remains of its soldiers... and bring them by a long sea voyage to their native land for return to their relatives and friends, or their reinternment in the beautiful cemeteries which have been provided by our government.”⁴⁵ McCook volunteered for this mission thinking that if he did not complete this mission, “strangers indifferent or hostile to our cause and name, would occupy the fields honored by the valor and consecrated by the death and burial of our heroes. Thus, it seemed inevitable that the perishable records left by the comrades of the dead would soon be destroyed.”⁴⁶ McCook’s commitment to the dead eventually ensured preservation of identifications and repatriation of many identified American remains to their families.

Aside from McCook’s task, the War Department dispatched Mr. David H. (D. H.) Rhodes to Santiago, Cuba in August for the same purpose of locating and marking graves of the soldier dead.⁴⁷ Rhodes, who served as the landscape gardener for the national cemeteries for over fifty years, was originally hired by the War Department in 1873 to oversee horticulture improvements to Arlington National Cemetery. Now, in 1898, he was named the Superintendent of the new U.S. Army Burial Corps.⁴⁸ While more a civilian organization, the Burial Corps worked on behalf of the Quartermaster Department to identify and register overseas graves as

⁴⁴ Executive Order, 6 August 1898, NARA, RG 92, OQMG Document File, Box 1770; McCook, *Martial Graves*, 12.

⁴⁵ Poole, *On Hallowed Ground*, 110.

⁴⁶ McCook, *Martial Graves*, 10-11.

⁴⁷ D. H. Rhodes, Report to the Quartermaster General, 14 November 1898, NARA, RG 92, OQMG Document File, Box 1771.

⁴⁸ Information derived from St. George’s Official Register, Arlington National Cemetery.

well as repatriate the dead. Its first test would be on the island of Cuba.

McCook's arrival in Cuba was marked with frustration as he revisited some of the poor burial sites that spurred his original conversation with President McKinley. McCook encountered the graves of three soldiers that "were hastily dug...and were only three feet deep, as it was impossible, under the circumstances, to dig them deeper."⁴⁹ In another area, McCook encountered a war correspondent, who told of a burial conducted by Cuban soldiers. The correspondent noted that the burial was done quickly, but as decently as circumstances would allow, ultimately burying the soldier in a hastily dug grave. McCook surmised that the grave, if found, was unfortunately probably marked 'Unknown.'⁵⁰

McCook also encountered problematic burial methods. One such instance included a large mound containing several bodies but lacking any notes to identify the remains. McCook estimated the identities could be narrowed down once he accounted for the other dead from that particular unit. McCook argued that "the existence of some system of marking, and perhaps a little more pains and intelligence and less haste on the part of the hospital corps or burial party, would have enabled us to distinguish every person and restore the remains to friends in America."⁵¹ He frequently encountered an explicit lack of burial procedures but sought any clues that could aid identification. McCook later came across the grave of an A. H. Newman, listed as a member of the infantry, but could not find his name among official War Department rosters.⁵² Likely, this was a case of failing to document the grave rather than mis-identification of the deceased, but McCook did not elaborate. Elsewhere, one man discovered a bleached

⁴⁹ McCook, *Martial Graves*, 56.

⁵⁰ John C. Hemmett, *Cannon and Camera: Sea and Land Battles of the Spanish-American War in Cuba Camp Life, and the Return of the Soldiers*, (New York: D Appleton and Company, 1898), 191.

⁵¹ McCook, *Martial Graves*, 205-207.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 89.

skeleton with assorted military items and uniform remains including a hat. On the hat was a crossed swords pin with a '1' above the cross, indicating the deceased probably belonged to the 1st Regular Cavalry.⁵³ This constituted a partial identification, which could potentially be confirmed once after examining all the dead from that regiment in the area. McCook found another cemetery containing forty-three burials – only two of which were identified – with numerals placed on the headboards. McCook noted that this information offered potential to eventually identify the unknowns.⁵⁴

Rhodes encountered problems like those of McCook. In his report, Rhodes thought his biggest obstacle in locating graves was that the Army units “who were supposed to be familiar with the entire ground and location of many graves, had departed for home before my arrival on Cuban soil.”⁵⁵ Deprived of first-hand knowledge, the success or failure of Rhodes’ mission rested entirely on his investigative efforts. He discovered 654 graves, identified 121 previously-unknown bodies, and erected headboards for previously unmarked graves but noted that many of the temporary burial sites “had become covered with vines, weeds, grass, etc., rendering the grave difficult to be found, even when only a few feet distant.”⁵⁶ Upon completion, Rhodes sailed to Puerto Rico where he worked on graves while awaiting his next assignment.

Meanwhile, in the United States, newspapers published General Order 141 around mid-September 1898. General Order 141, the first official sanctioning of overseas repatriation of war dead, alerted next of kin that their soldier dead would soon return from Cuba to the United States

⁵³ Henry Harrison Lewis, “The Santiago Battlefield as it is Today,” *Munsey’s Magazine*, Volume XX (March 1899), 857-858.

⁵⁴ McCook, *Martial Graves*, 183

⁵⁵ D. H. Rhodes, Report to the Quartermaster General, 14 November 1898, NARA, OQMG Document File, Box 1771.

⁵⁶ Poole, *On Hallowed Ground*, 110.

at government expense.⁵⁷ A July 1898 Congressional appropriation of \$200,000 to “enable the Secretary of War... to cause to be transported to their homes the remains of officers and soldiers... who are killed in action or who die in the field at places outside the United States” backed this order.⁵⁸ Affected families began writing letters and dispatching telegrams to the War Department expressing their wishes for repatriation.⁵⁹ Despite the deluge of letters, the bodies that returned largely depended on the burial and marking methods conducted by units overseas. Some of the graves McCook encountered were completed in a hasty or incomplete manner that prevented positive identification.

However, McCook did not solely encounter negative examples of burials in Cuba. McCook found that the San Juan Soldiers’ Cemetery, containing twenty graves, “approaches more nearly the ideal of a field cemetery than assemblage of graves on Cuban battlefields. The fence is strong and secure; the graves are all marked but one. Some of them... have been decorated with a loving sentiment which shows how strong is the bond of soldierly comradeship. Whoever was the inspiring spirit in the preparation of this cemetery, deserve high credit.”⁶⁰ In another area, McCook found the well-marked, well preserved grave of Private A. H. Missal of the 3rd Infantry who was buried under a stone-braced headboard, with an additional foot boulder. A cross of white shells was laid in the center of his burial site. Missal’s brother removed his remains in November of 1898 for burial in the United States. In another case, McCook wrote about the mother of a soldier killed in Cuba who asked about “the location of her son’s grave. The fact that it had been found and marked, and that in due time the remains of her son would be

⁵⁷ “Will Send Home Bodies of the Dead,” *Des Moines Register*, 16 September 1898.

⁵⁸ 3rd Indorsement, Act of Congress Approved 8 July 1898, NARA, RG 92, OQMG Document File, Box 1770.

⁵⁹ A sampling of such letters and telegrams is contained in NARA, RG 92, Entry 89, Document File 114311, Box 1770.

⁶⁰ McCook, *Martial Graves*, 154-55.

restored to her, was a great comfort to this afflicted mother.”⁶¹ Lieutenant Dennis M. Michie, founder of the West Point football program, was found buried under a marble headstone. Such a heavy, near-permanent method of marking ensured Michie’s gravesite was preserved before his repatriation to the West Point Cemetery.

Soon after repatriation plans were announced, the Army, and by extension the government, received bad press regarding its treatment of the dead. *Leslie’s Weekly*, a New York-based subscription newspaper, ran an exposé titled, “How We Bury Our Soldier Dead.”⁶² In four-page article, author Cleveland Moffett offered a startling macabre description of the poor handling of dead at Camp Wikoff, New York.⁶³ Moffett’s exposé highlighted how the dead and their perceived treatment can quickly become an inflammatory issue. Moreover, it demonstrated that the government must take all precautions to ensure that trust was not lost by the American people sending their sons to war because of how the war dead were treated.

Moffett’s story was published eight days later by the *New York Times*.⁶⁴ Foreshadowing events two decades later, negative press, whether true or not, spread quickly and could easily damage the Army’s reputation or erase established credibility with respect to handling of the dead. Other foreshadowing events occurred in Cuba, where McCook interrogated an officer regarding his organization’s burial methods. When asked if he thought the site was irreverent, the local commander replied, “We buried the dead under fire, and of necessity just near here where we could do so safely.”⁶⁵ The intensity of combat, McCook learned, proved to be a

⁶¹ McCook, *Martial Graves*, 84, 94.

⁶² *Leslie’s Weekly* was an illustrated news magazine that ran from 1855 to 1922. By 1897, the publication’s circulation exceeded 65,000.

⁶³ Cleveland Moffett, “How We Bury Our Soldier Dead,” *Leslie’s Weekly*, 22 September 1898.

⁶⁴ “The Burials at Montauk,” *New York Times*, 30 September 1898.

⁶⁵ McCook, *Martial Graves*, 47.

considerable factor in the quality of battlefield interments.

D. H. Rhodes' final report contained a series of seventeen sketches in conjunction with an overview map that provided the approximate location of all discovered gravesites. Identifying information for the body buried in each grave accompanied the record. In the event the temporary marker was unmarked or illegible, it was replaced with a new headboard with 'Unknown U.S. Soldier' inscribed along with a grave number for reference. When Rhodes returned to the United States in October, military authorities took his sketches and information and eventually identified at least twelve of the previously unknown burials.⁶⁶

In Cuba, McCook found more situations similar to those described by Rhodes. The poorly marked graves in battle areas were understandable to a degree, but McCook soon learned that even hospitals located away from the fighting possessed disorganized interments and associated record keeping. McCook encountered many marker-less graves at the First Division Cemetery. Four plots were actually larger graves containing an unknown number of bodies. The division's commanding general, Leonard Wood, replied that the hospital had become so overwhelmed with wounded as to preclude proper care for the dead. McCook lamented that not one officer was detailed to record names of the dead, secure identification for bodies, or create a simple marker to ensure identity remained for the dead. "Here again we see," McCook wrote while overlooking a cemetery containing over sixty burials but only eight bore identification, "how needful it is that some system should be adopted in the Medical Department, in conjunction with the Quartermaster Department, by which this duty shall not be neglected even under the most trying and confused conditions."⁶⁷ McCook summarized that "in some of the

⁶⁶ D. H. Rhodes, Report to the Quartermaster General, 14 November 1898, NARA, OQMG Document File, Box 1771.

⁶⁷ McCook, *Martial Graves*, 251-252, 254.

hospital cemeteries every grave is neatly marked with the name of its inmate. In others, burials were made in an extremely careless way, and little or no attention paid to the condition of the graves or securing identification of the bodies within.”⁶⁸ Similar to McCook, Rhodes’ report characterized those who exhibited “gross carelessness and laxity of system in failing to mark the graves of many soldiers who were buried from the hospitals” as men who demonstrated “a lack of proper respect for those who have given up their lives in defense of their Country.”⁶⁹ The hospital commander and time available largely determined the level of attention the cemeteries received.

The tropical illnesses that ravaged army ranks in Cuba and the Philippines necessitated special attention to the dead as well as the living. These ailments were responsible for more deaths than combat. Many in the United States worried that repatriated bodies bearing communicable tropical diseases might infect the living who come into proximity of the body while in transit or at funeral services. The Quartermaster Department was initially caught off guard, but preliminary plans soon called for infected dead to be brought back later.⁷⁰ The Surgeon General of the U.S. Marine Hospital Service protested to the Quartermaster General, who ultimately forbade transportation within the southern United States for the remains of any soldiers who died of disease. Instead, he ordered those bodies to Arlington National Cemetery for burial.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Ibid., 24.

⁶⁹ D. H. Rhodes, Report to the Quartermaster General, 14 November 1898, NARA, OQMG Document File, Box 1771.

⁷⁰ Quartermaster General, letter to the Asst. Secretary of War, 3 September 1898, NARA, RG 92, Entry 89, Document File 114311, Box 1770.

⁷¹ Charles Bird, letter to NYC Depot Quartermaster, 13 July 1900, NARA, RG 92, Entry 576, Box 7. An undated deceased passenger list reflects the high ratio of dead from disease versus combat-related causes, NARA, RG 92, Entry 576, Box 8.

As McCook completed his mission in Cuba, he reflected on his experiences and offered suggestions to conduct this process better in the future. McCook addressed the possibility of either the Medical Department or chaplains being assigned the duty to supervise identifications and burials. He expressed belief that chaplains would execute this task honorably, but organizational changes to insert chaplains at the regimental or battalion level would become necessary. Importantly, McCook also examined methods for marking graves in a way to better preserve identities. McCook noted that ad hoc methods, while poignant and personal, were not reliable. Rather, McCook proposed a metallic marker bearing a paper card that could be affixed both to the remains and the grave. This method, he opined, could prove much more reliable than techniques witnessed in Cuba.⁷² In some form, the Army would later adopt both methods outlined by McCook in his report.

While most of their work was not in strict coordination with the other, McCook and Rhodes held each other in high esteem. Before departing Cuba, Rhodes met McCook while the men traversed some of the same battle areas. Rhodes wrote that McCook was “entitled to the highest commendation for the self-sacrificing spirit and sentiment that prompted him to undertake the perils and hardships of such a task, and for the heroic and noble efforts which he made to carry out an object of vital importance to so many of the friends of deceased soldiers.”⁷³ Rhodes departed Cuba in October, while McCook continued for a couple more weeks before illness forced his return to the United States.

McCook completed his book stating, “One is impressed with the lack of system and absence of definite responsibility in the United States Army for preserving the identity of the

⁷² McCook, *Martial Graves*, 308-310.

⁷³ D. H. Rhodes, Report to the Quartermaster General, 14 November 1898, NARA, OQMG Document File, Box 1771.

dead.”⁷⁴ In an attempt to propose a solution, he referenced the burial policies under which European countries operated. The British did not possess any formal rules. Instead, they left burials to the individual regiments. The Germans marked each grave with the phrase “Here rests a brave warrior,” but without names except those inscribed privately. While McCook noted that the American army was on par or ahead of these European nations, he asserted this “should not encourage content with our unorganized condition, but rather should incite us at once to take the lead of sister nations in abandoning hap-hazard ways and in adopting regulated methods.”⁷⁵

Despite the hardships encountered during his expedition, McCook remained confident that the effort devoted to locating, identifying, and repatriating the war dead was a noble endeavor. McCook cited the story related to him during his expedition about an officer about to lead an attack. Before the attack began, the man handed a slip of paper to a fellow officer expressing the man’s desire to have a plainly marked grave in the event he was buried in Cuba. “Such an utterance as this,” McCook stated, “is sufficient justification for the interest which our Government has taken in designating the graves of our fallen heroes and restoring them, when possible, to their native country for burial among friends and kindred.”⁷⁶ The interest of soldiers and American citizens to ensure their soldier dead were identified and properly buried compelled the Army to act. The work of McCook and Rhodes proved essential to the efforts proceeding.

Through the tireless efforts of McCook and Rhodes, the American people witnessed the first mass-repatriation of American war dead in its history from the islands of Cuba and Puerto Rico. On 28 March 1899, the USAT *Crook* docked in New York harbor bearing 670 sets of remains: 550 from Cuba, and 120 from Puerto Rico, including 110 unidentified bodies.

⁷⁴ McCook, *Martial Graves*, 305.

⁷⁵ McCook, *Martial Graves*, 306, 307.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

Relatives of the deceased passengers claimed approximately one-half of the bodies, leaving 336 destined for Arlington National Cemetery. A dozen more bodies would be claimed by kin before final interment.⁷⁷ The remains bound for Arlington went by float from Brooklyn's Pier 22 to railroad cars. A detachment from the 13th Regular Infantry comprised the honor guard.⁷⁸ The *New York Times* noted that "the bringing home of the dead to the land of their birth or adoption is regarded as an innovation in the world's history of warfare."⁷⁹

The Arlington funeral was scheduled for the 6th of April 1899 and was replicated when the second shipment of bodies arrived a couple of weeks later. The *Crook* returned to New York on 26 April with another 356 bodies, of which 267 were eventually interred at Arlington.⁸⁰ The dead originating in Cuba could not be immediately released to their families due to the possibility the bodies contained Yellow Fever. The government was unable to gain assurance that the caskets would not be opened by grieving relatives. It is unknown when the Quartermaster Department allowed families possession of their soldier dead.⁸¹

On 3 April 1899, President McKinley issued an executive order regarding the return and impending Arlington burials of the first repatriated dead from Cuba and Puerto Rico. He directed the lowering of the American flag to half-staff and the closure of governmental departments. McKinley made special mention of the dead, writing:

Those who died in another land left in many homes the undying memories that attend the heroic dead of all ages. It was fitting that with the advent of peace, won by their sacrifice, their bodies should be gathered with tender care and restored to home and kindred. This has been done with the dead of Cuba and Puerto Rico. Those of the

⁷⁷ John B. Osborne, *The Story of Arlington*, (Washington: John B. Osborne, 1899), 70; "686 Dead Heroes Arrive," *New York Times*, 30 March 1899.

⁷⁸ "Soldier Dead Are Here," *New York Times*, 29 March 1899.

⁷⁹ "686 Dead Heroes Arrive," *New York Times*, 30 March 1899.

⁸⁰ Osborne, *The Story of Arlington*, 72.

⁸¹ "The Dead on the Crook," *New York Times*, 28 April 1899.

Philippines still rest where they fell, watched over by their surviving comrades and crowned with the love of a grateful nation.

The remains of many brought to our shores have been delivered to their families for private burial, but for others of the brave officers and men who perished there has been reserved interment in ground sacred to the soldiers and sailors amid the tributes of military honor and national mourning they have so well deserved.⁸²

In September 1900, the Quartermaster Department completed arrangements to repatriate bodies from both the Philippines and China. The Secretary of the Navy requested that the Quartermaster Department also return any Navy or Marine Corps personnel – thirty-six in all – with the 1,237 soldiers.⁸³ Mr. D. H. Rhodes, who proved his mettle working in Cuba and Puerto Rico in 1899, was dispatched to the Philippine Islands in 1900 with a larger team to supervise disinterments and prepare remains for shipment to the United States. Rhodes' team exhumed and prepared over 1,300 bodies – no small feat given that these remains were scattered over more than 125,000 square miles.⁸⁴

Rhodes submitted a final report of his expedition across the Philippine Islands. A list describing each site visited and the number of disinterments associated with that location accompanied his account.⁸⁵ While much of Rhodes' Philippine report detailed his travel to different locations and honors rendered during disinterment and embarkation of caskets to ships, Rhodes offered recommendations for the Army and Quartermaster Department from his experiences on the archipelago. Regarding burials, Rhodes thought an officer must oversee all interments and be likewise held responsible for that cemetery's condition. Burials should occur in such a manner with graves evenly spaced eight to ten feet apart, in parallel lines and

⁸² Osborne, *The Story of Arlington*, 70-71.

⁸³ "Bodies to be Returned," *New York Times*, 19 September 1900.

⁸⁴ OQMG, *Report of the Quartermaster General*, 9 October 1901, Quartermaster Museum.

⁸⁵ Exhibit C to Report of D. H. Rhodes, 30 September 1901, NARA, RG 92, Entry 677, Box 1.

formation, and be in numerical order roughly according to date of death. As soon as a burial took place, workers immediately erected a headboard, whether permanent or temporary, containing the decedent's name, rank, and date of death at a minimum; no other types of headboards should be allowed. Each cemetery or small burial plot should possess plans that detail the location of each grave with a corresponding grave number that matched the actual headstone for cross-referencing. Rhodes also argued that each site ought to hold a roster of all decedents that lists identifying information and a grave number that cross-references to the cemetery plan.⁸⁶ The Graves Registration Service resurrected many of Rhodes' recommendations in France a generation later.

The Quartermaster General's 1901 report provided interesting facts regarding its efforts in the Philippines. First, it highlighted that only nine bodies returned from the archipelago designated as 'unknown,' demonstrating the Burial Corps' care in establishing and preserving identification. Second, the report described the burial team's disregard for personal safety and personal comfort to overcome hardships caused by weather and distances to recover remains. Third, the Quartermaster Department learned many valuable lessons both in the field as well as from corresponding with relatives of the dead who expressed criticism due to delays.⁸⁷

Largely responsible for the mortuary success in the Philippines was the team led by a chaplain named Charles C. Pierce. Chaplain (Major) Charles Pierce, by order of the Philippine Department commander, was already conducting mortuary work in the Philippines. His innovative methods to preserve identifications of the deceased quickly earned Pierce an excellent reputation. First appointed to the Army in 1882 as chaplain of the 8th Cavalry, Pierce soon made

⁸⁶ Report of D. H. Rhodes, 30 September 1901, NARA, RG 92, Entry 677, Box 1, 9.

⁸⁷ OQMG, *Report of the Quartermaster General*, 9 October 1901, Quartermaster Museum.

a name for himself during the nearly two years that he spent in the Pacific solving problems related to the battlefield dead.⁸⁸ Through his diligent efforts in the Philippines, Pierce became a living legend within the Quartermaster Corps for undertaking a task most would decline if given the option. One officer serving in the Philippines wrote that Pierce's efforts "demand heroism in its prosecution."⁸⁹

Examination of Charles Pierce's efforts in the Philippines yields many of the tenets that Pierce carried forward into the Army Graves Registration Service during World War I. In March 1899, the Military Governor of the Philippines, Major General Elwell Otis, tasked Pierce to "take charge of the Morgue and ensure the perfect identification of the dead, seeing that all bodies were suitably clothed and that all funerals were properly conducted" and "guard the interests of the bereaved families at home and to show every mark of respect for the dead which the disturbed conditions would allow."⁹⁰ Numerous unidentified remains – buried and unburied – immediately confronted Pierce upon his arrival. Pierce's team, consisting of one private, immediately began creating a system of identification and record keeping as to prevent the disorganized situation that Pierce assumed from continuing. Next, the two-man team needed to figure out the identifications of the dead.

Over the course of three months, Pierce obtained complete rosters of all dead from every military unit on the Philippines. He repeatedly visited all burial sites to check and recheck marked graves, logging that information for cross-reference to his list of the dead. Eventually,

⁸⁸ "Colonel Charles C. Pierce," *Quartermaster Review*, November/December 1921, 41.

⁸⁹ Graves Registration Service History (Draft), NARA, RG 92, Entry 1890, Box 63. It appears that part of this draft was incorporated into the Quartermaster Corps three volume history, *History of the Army Graves Registration Service: QMC in Europe*.

⁹⁰ Charles Pierce, "Report on the Identification of the Dead in the Philippines," 19 February 1901, NARA, OQMG Document File, Box 3250.

after many late nights, Pierce achieved a list of dead that matched the number of unknown burials. Pierce took this list and reengaged the dead soldiers' organizations for additional information such as the nature of wound(s), clothing worn, and additional facts that were unique to the individual in question. Pierce then ordered each unknown burial disinterred, after which he personally inspected the remains, checking them against the fact sheet he compiled on each soldier. Through Pierce's efforts, every soldier who died on the Philippines was identified and returned home to his family for final interment.

Before burying new dead, or while preparing disinterred remains for repatriation, Pierce's team dressed the body in a new uniform and placed it into a coffin. Inside the coffin was a sealed bottle containing the decedent's name, rank, and unit, with a similar tag affixed to the outside of the coffin. Reflecting on the "inexpressibly repulsive work" he undertook to achieve a heretofore unobtainable feat of complete identification of all war dead, Pierce remarked: "no amount of remuneration could tempt me to repeat the process, unless, as in this case, the gruesome work would save some heartbroken mother or wife from mourning over the fact that the graves of her dead could never be located..."⁹¹ Pierce recognized that his efforts on behalf of the Army worked to assure American citizens that the Army took its charge to locate, identify, and bury its dead seriously and would exhaust every avenue to complete that task.

The value contained in Pierce's report largely centered on the various problems he confronted, and the techniques used to overcome them. Pierce insisted religious services were conducted at each funeral regardless of a chaplain's presence and sought the correct information on each decedent despite units frequently providing incorrect information in their haste of

⁹¹ Charles Pierce, "Report on the Identification of the Dead in the Philippines," 19 February 1901, pages 2-3, NARA, OQMG Document File, Box 3250.

reporting. Pierce's dogged efforts earned him wide praise from those who witnessed or benefitted from his work. Brigadier General Thomas H. Barry remarked, "The conscientious discharge of [your] duty, in every aspect of it, brought about a result unparalleled in the history of warfare, i.e. no unidentified dead."⁹²

Pierce built a new morgue to process, identify, and keep records on the dead before they shipped back to the United States. The harsh tropical climate of the Philippines forced him to embalm the dead lest they be subject to decay during the voyage to the United States. However, ordinary embalming fluid was too weak for tropical climates. Pierce began experimenting with different combinations of fluids until he found a satisfactory combination. Pierce reported no embalming failures using the new formula, even on bodies suffering from delays in shipment to America.⁹³

In conjunction with embalming methods, Pierce developed an organizational system that helped consolidate and retain all pertinent information for each set of remains from the time of death, through processing at the morgue, and burial location. Pierce devised a series of forms to be completed for each individual that removed any guesswork for the units in determining what information on their dead was important. This simplified record keeping at the morgue and ensured a paper trail for each deceased soldier.⁹⁴ The thoroughness of his work compelled the Army to send soldiers of his command to China in 1902 to assist in repatriating 138 soldier dead

⁹² Thomas H. Barry, letter to Charles Pierce, 15 December 1900, in Charles Pierce, "Report on the Identification of the Dead in the Philippines," 19 February 1901, NARA, OQMG Document File, Box 3250.

⁹³ Thomas H. Barry, letter to Charles Pierce, 15 December 1900, in Charles Pierce, "Report on the Identification of the Dead in the Philippines," 19 February 1901, NARA, OQMG Document File, Box 3250.

⁹⁴ Pierce's complete report, held in the National Archives I, offers a more thorough explanation with examples. The report was not stored properly, making reproduction of example forms impossible. NARA, OQMG Document File, Box 3250.

from the Boxer Rebellion.⁹⁵ Pierce's physical work on the Philippines proved worthy of acknowledgement.

For Pierce, his eighteen months in the Philippines yielded many valuable lessons that could benefit the Army in future conflicts around the world. Based on the tenuous situation that greeted him when he arrived a year and one-half prior, Pierce recommended the issuance to all officers and soldiers "a small tag of aluminum, bearing the name, rank, and regiment, to be worn constantly around the neck."⁹⁶ Citing the problems associated with using physical characteristics of a person when the body is subject to a tropical climate or is not found due to the exigencies of war, Pierce likened an identification tag to an insurance policy for the government and soldiers' families: "the wearing of a tag would be a souvenir of service, ordinarily, but, in the unhappy event of death, would insure against error in the shipment of remains."⁹⁷ This marked another example of innovation in Graves Registration techniques that would later appear in Europe.

Pierce next suggested that the Army create a central office to collect reports of death from various organizations and keep all records pertaining to the dead and their subsequent burial. Given the variety of name spellings due to the diverse backgrounds of American soldiers, combined with the dispersed nature of modern combat, an office to focus on the dead and their affairs would, Pierce concluded, "be of vital consequence to the Government and other interested parties." Despite his superhuman efforts in the Philippines, Pierce's time in the tropical environment deteriorated his health, forcing retirement from the Army in 1908. Pierce returned to the United States and served as a rector for St. Matthew's Protestant Episcopal Church in

⁹⁵ Report of the Quartermaster General, 1900, page 111, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1890, Box 63.

⁹⁶ Charles Pierce, "Report on the Identification of the Dead in the Philippines," 19 February 1901, page 13, NARA, OQMG Document File, Box 3250.

⁹⁷ Charles Pierce, "Report on the Identification of the Dead in the Philippines," 19 February 1901, page 13, NARA, OQMG Document File, Box 3250.

Philadelphia.⁹⁸ Nine years later, he would be recalled to federal service to create and lead such an organization within the largest army ever assembled by the United States.

Pierce's efforts earned high praise from many within and associated with the Army. Future president and proponent of the overseas American cemeteries following World War I, William Howard Taft wrote, "I regard Chaplain Pierce as one of the most self-sacrificing and hardworking men in the Army, and that he has always honored the cloth he wears and has done all the good he could."⁹⁹ General Arthur MacArthur added, "[I]t will be difficult to get a substitute to perform the important duties heretofore entrusted to you."¹⁰⁰ Even then-President William McKinley heard of Pierce's "rare and noble service for Christ and his country...."¹⁰¹

Despite Pierce's retirement, his idea regarding identification tags included in his report to the Adjutant General was heeded and in 1906, five years after Pierce's initial recommendation, the Army codified identification tags as part of individual soldier equipment. War Department General Orders 204, dated 20 December 1906, authorized each enlisted man and officer one aluminum tag "the size of a silver half dollar and of suitable thickness, stamped with the name, rank, and company, regiment, or corps of the wearer," to be "habitually in the possession of the owner."¹⁰² One year later, the War Department prescribed linen tape with which to suspend the tag from the wearer's neck.¹⁰³ When the spearhead of the AEF sailed to France in 1917, each

⁹⁸ "Colonel Charles C. Pierce," *Quartermaster Review*, November/December 1921, 41.

⁹⁹ William H. Taft, letter to Charles Pierce, 14 December 1900, Charles Pierce, "Report on the Identification of the Dead in the Philippines," 19 February 1901, NARA, OQMG Document File, Box 3250.

¹⁰⁰ Arthur MacArthur, letter to Charles Pierce, 31 December 1900, Charles Pierce, "Report on the Identification of the Dead in the Philippines," 19 February 1901, NARA, OQMG Document File, Box 3250.

¹⁰¹ William McKinley, letter to Charles Pierce, 7 March 1901, in Charles Pierce, "Report on the Identification of the Dead in the Philippines," 19 February 1901, NARA, OQMG Document File, Box 3250.

¹⁰² "The Development of U.S. Army Identification Tags," (no date), 3, US Army Quartermaster Museum.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

soldier possessed – for the first time – identification tags as part of his issued uniform [see page 393].¹⁰⁴

After the departure of Rhodes and Pierce from the Philippines, work remained across the archipelago to recover soldiers not located during Rhodes' expedition as well as repatriate American soldiers who died during the occupation and insurgency. A relatively unknown figure named F. S. Croggon oversaw some of the final efforts to identify and return the American war dead. Not much is currently known about Croggon. His name appears in the 1907 *Official Register of Persons in the Civil, Military and Naval Service of the United States*, working at large for the Quartermaster Department in Manila as a "War Embalmer" for \$150 per month.¹⁰⁵ Croggon's team consisting of ten undertakers accompanied by forty native laborers departed Manila on 13 November 1902 for the Philippines' southern islands.¹⁰⁶ Like his predecessors, Croggon recorded many recommendations to improve the systemic treatment of the battlefield dead that provided a foundation for the future Graves Registration Service in 1917.

Like Rhodes, Croggon proposed prompt, accurate markings of headboards. He recommended inspecting the bottles buried with the body to ensure a good seal to prevent moisture damage, and that a pencil be used rather than ink to record the decedent's information on the paper to go inside the bottle. Regarding graveyards, Croggon stated that "too much cannot be said of each post having its own cemetery." While the use of native cemeteries frequently proved problematic for preserving identification, Croggon suggested placing the American plot close by in order to ease the logistical burden of moving bodies too far from their

¹⁰⁴ See Appendix A: World War I Identification Tags, US Army Quartermaster Museum.

¹⁰⁵ Director of the Census, *Official Register of Persons in the Civil, Military and Naval Service of the United States, and List of Vessels*, 1907, Volume I: Directory, (Washington: GPO, 1907), 226.

¹⁰⁶ F. S. Croggon, Report to the Chief Quartermaster, Division of the Philippines, 1 April 1903, NARA, RG 92, Entry 677, Box 1, 1.

original burial sites.¹⁰⁷ One of the most impressive documents accompanying Croggon's report was a roster that included both a list of disinterments conducted by his team along with a report detailing why remains of certain soldiers could not be recovered. The remains of John Smalls from the 9th Cavalry were not located in a Catholic cemetery. Croggon's team recovered nine of the ten bodies known to have been buried there, but could not locate Smalls, who was buried there after taking his own life in 1902. In talking with officers and men from the regiment, Croggon surmised that Smalls' body was "disinterred by natives and re-buried elsewhere, owing to the prejudice among them of burying suicides in consecrated soil."¹⁰⁸ Other similar instances of the number of bodies recovered not matching rosters of burials were noted as well as the inability to locate the gravesite. Bennett Blakely's body could not be recovered because Croggon's team was unable to locate the town listed as his burial site. Nevertheless, his remains were recovered two years later.¹⁰⁹ In addition to his reports and lessons learned, Croggon's efforts in the Philippines yielded 475 more remains for transport and burial in the United States; the USAT *Kilpatrick* arrived in September of 1903 bearing 302 bodies followed by the USAT *Sumner* in November with the final 173 remains.¹¹⁰

The combined efforts of McCook, Rhodes, Pierce, and Croggon yielded excellent results for the United States. For example, in fiscal year 1901 (1 July 1900 – 30 June 1901) alone, 1,825 remains returned to the United States. Of that number, 822 were buried in national

¹⁰⁷ F. S. Croggon, Report to the Chief Quartermaster, Division of the Philippines, 1 April 1903, NARA, RG 92, Entry 677, Box 1, 2-3.

¹⁰⁸ F. S. Croggon, Report to the Chief Quartermaster, Division of the Philippines, 31 August 1903, NARA, RG 92, Entry 677, Box 1.

¹⁰⁹ F. S. Croggon, Report to the Chief Quartermaster, Division of the Philippines, 1 April 1903, NARA, RG 92, Entry 677, Box 1.

¹¹⁰ "Brings 302 Soldier Dead," *New York Times*, 13 September 1903; "Brings 302 Soldier Dead," the *New York Times*, 22 November 1903.

cemeteries along with fifty-two interred in private cemeteries. The Army buried over 700 at the Presidio National Cemetery in California because no relative claimed the body, while another 172 sets of remains were still awaiting claims at the time of publication. These results cost the American taxpayers over \$250,000, a sum that was never questioned as worthwhile.¹¹¹ The monetary cost was measurable while the benefit of providing the mortal remains of the soldier dead was incalculable. Most of the remains arrived via the USAT *Hancock*, which collected war dead from Hawaii, Guam, and China before arriving in San Francisco on 10 December 1900 carrying the mortal remains of almost 1,500 soldiers and sailors – the largest single repatriation of the Spanish-American War.¹¹²

The Quartermaster General's 1901 report noted one obstacle in returning the dead. In Puerto Rico, "the department was unable to remove the remains of the soldier dead buried therein owing to the civil law of the island prohibiting the disinterment of any bodies until three years have elapsed.... Until the expiration of this limit, therefore, the department can take no steps toward bringing to the United States the 28 remains which are buried in that island."¹¹³ This seemingly small impediment in the form of a law imposed by a country to America's larger, worldwide effort foreshadowed a significant problem for the United States with regard to France following World War I.¹¹⁴

John Chadwick, who presided over the burial of dead from the USS *Maine* in Arlington National Cemetery, opined about the meaning of the dead in his eulogy, stating, "About the

¹¹¹ OQMG, *Report of the Quartermaster General*, 9 October 1901, Quartermaster Museum.

¹¹² "Hancock's Cargo of Corpses," *New York Times*, 11 December 1900.

¹¹³ OQMG, *Report of the Quartermaster General*, 9 October 1901, Quartermaster Museum.

¹¹⁴ The lack of public discussion in the wake of the Spanish-American War suggests that the number of affected dead was small enough that no powerful lobby could push for change whereas the problems to occur with France in 1919 affected all of the dead in France.

graves of our dead we shall lift our hearts to God in thanksgiving for all that God has done for our country.... Let us renew our patriotism in peace as we excite it to sacrifice in war.... Over the graves, let us recall and pledge ourselves to our ideals... that we may be gathered as brothers about the throne in the land beyond the blue.”¹¹⁵ Author James Farrell noted in *Reinventing the American Way of Death* that between 1830 and 1920, American attitudes changed toward death and burial as a reflection of changing American culture during a time when the country was slowly ascending on the world stage. “Common People,” Farrell argues, “wanted to make death the inspirer rather than the destroyer of progress.”¹¹⁶ American ideals regarding its war dead would soon be tested.

As a precursor to the arguments that would be seen after the World War, some U.S. citizens felt that all Spanish-American War dead should have remained overseas, “as silent emissaries to our allies.”¹¹⁷ No significant editorials or political conversations were located that would suggest a strong sentiment opposing the repatriation of the Spanish-American War dead. Such silence would not be the case following the next overseas war, yet, at the turn of the century, the American public made no concerted push to leave its war dead buried in either the Caribbean or Filipino battlefields. The American experience in Cuba and the Philippines offered many lessons regarding the dead that would be applied twenty years later on distant fields in Europe.

Europe at War: 1914-1917

While America’s participation in World War I and its subsequent burial activities are the

¹¹⁵ Kurt Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way*, (Washington: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1995), 89-90.

¹¹⁶ James Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830-1920*, (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1980), 99, 144.

¹¹⁷ Chris Dickon, *The Foreign Burial of American War Dead*, (Jefferson NC: McFarland and Co., Inc., 2011), 202.

focus of this dissertation, it is important not to forget that the war raged for almost three years prior to the United States' 6 April 1917 war declaration. Most of the historiography on this subject agrees that Europeans were offended by American efforts to repatriate their war dead. However, vigorous debates ensued in France and Britain over the burial of the war dead. Many French and British families wished to receive their soldier's mortal remains and bury them in a family plot. In France, local ceremonies honored the dead returned from the early 1914 battles until 19 November 1914 legislation barred exhumation and transportation of soldiers killed at the front. Given the mounting casualties and the decentralized nature of the fighting, this order made sense at the time. In order to ease logistical constraints during and immediately following the war, France attempted to keep this ban in place until the concentration and verification of graves was complete.¹¹⁸ The French government eventually acquiesced to its citizens after the war but held fast until late in 1920.

The facts regarding French 1914 repatriations would not be brought up by the French government in 1919, nor did it seem to be known by American officials or citizens during the tense period of negotiations regarding the American dead from 1919-1920. At least one 1914 report of a French family finding and moving the body of their relative home for burial appeared in American newspapers:

The son-in-law of the president of the upper Rhine provinces was killed at Liege [*sic*]. A notice of his death was sent to his relatives, and they went at once in an effort to recover the body, which had been buried in a trench. I saw the widow when she returned from this sad errand. Her eyes were red and swollen from weeping and her father and mother were trying to console her.

They had found the body in a grave, lying at the bottom of a pile of six other soldiers, officers and privates, and the father had identified the face of his son-in-law.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Luc Capdevila and Danièle Voldman, *War Dead: Western Societies and the Casualties of War*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 47, 51.

¹¹⁹ John McCutcheon, "Pitiful Havoc is Left in War's Wake," *Oregonian*, 2 October 1914.

The contents of McCutcheon's report probably did not reappear as evidence in 1919 for a number of reasons: American readers forgot about the story by the time the 1919 Franco-American tension arose; it was not widely distributed when originally published in 1914; or many readers dismissed the account because it was a case of a privileged family using their prominence to achieve a desired end.

While the opening stages of the World War occurred far from American shores, early reports from the front demonstrated to American newspaper readers the destructiveness of modern conflict. Reports arriving to the United States following the Battle of the Frontier described the macabre scenes: "Terrible stories are reaching the French capital of the piles of dead and wounded which incumber the battlefields along the Marne. At one place the Germans built a barrier 6 feet high of dead, behind which to resist the French charges. This barrier finally was carried, after a bloody struggle... and a horrible litter of 7,000 bodies now marks this spot."

¹²⁰ The subsequent French retreat again confirmed that the demands of the dead quickly became subordinate to those of the living. A Georgia newspaper elaborated on a ghoulish scene: "The French dead, in all sorts of conveyances, were a common sight and squares and cemeteries with unfinished graves, mute evidence of a hurried French retreat." Another story further described the condition of the battlefield dead left unburied:

The stench is pestilential. It is ghastly beyond imagination. Words cannot portray to the mind that picture by day and night—white eyes staring out of faces burned coal black by the sun. There are places where there are veritable piles of bodies. As the days and weeks go by they shrivel and shrink together until they look like little heaps of old clothes. These silent heaps are more weird by moonlight than by day.¹²¹

Amidst the disaster of 1914 emerged the work of Fabian Ware whose Red Cross unit

¹²⁰ Philip Gibbs, "Vivid Narrative of Great Retreat," *New York Times*, 31 August 1914.

¹²¹ "Object Lessons for Jingo," *Boston Globe*, 28 June 1915.

began collecting information about British deaths and burial locations, rudimentary though the latter were at the time. At least one British official noticed the utility of Ware's organization and sought its incorporation into the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). Established as the Graves Registration Commission in early 1915, the BEF formally absorbed the unit in October of that year.¹²² Creating the organization did not immediately solve the challenges of modern war, however.

The new year did little to assuage the wholesale slaughter on the Western Front or elsewhere. Journalists' prose painted ghastly images for American readers. In an aptly titled account "Terrible Battle Still Raging in France," readers learned that the number of dead soldiers continued to accumulate without solutions for burials by the Allied armies. French units near St. Mihiel found themselves immobilized because the area was "so choked with... huge stacks of dead soldiers.... The battles are of so furious a character that neither army is able to aid its wounded, much less bury the dead."¹²³ One 'solution' to bury the hundreds of dead nearby was the by-product of artillery. One soldier recalled, "We have fought over and over the same old ground until now there are about ten miles of dead bodies. We go on fighting over corpses of friends and enemies until the road becomes impassible... [because of] the dead bodies. The artillery is driven right over them, time and again, until a hundred have been crushed right into the ground. We never need to bury them."¹²⁴ Similar accounts emanated out of the 1916 Battle of Verdun, where an English observer remembered,

I thought the battle ended, but in a short time another line in solid formation was sent steadily forward and as they started to pass over the piled-up heaps of their dead and dying comrades, the French cannon again blazed and the pile of dead and wounded

¹²² Peter E. Hodgkinson, "Clearing the Dead," *Centre for First World War Studies*, Vol 3, no 1 (September 2007).

¹²³ "Terrible Battle Still Raging in France," *Aberdeen Daily News*, 9 April 1915.

¹²⁴ Quoted in David A. Copeland ed., *The Greenwood Library of American War Reporting, Vol 5: World War I and World War II, The European Theater* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2005), 46.

looked a solid wall. I have never dreamed of such slaughter: but the sight that followed I think no man ever before saw. High explosive shells began blowing into pieces the masses of dead and dying.¹²⁵

Artillery was not the only vehicle to mangle and intermingle the dead. One observer watched as “[r]iderless horses, some of them wild from the pain of wounds, dashed across the ground, trampling the dead.”¹²⁶ Little was left to the reader’s imagination regarding the destruction of modern war and its effects on the battlefield dead.

Human and animal remains littered the battlefields of Europe, and war correspondents constantly subjected American readers to accounts of individual encounters with dead and decaying bodies. A French soldier described entering “German trenches, walking and running over dead bodies. Some were old men, some looked not more than 16 years, some in such curious positions they looked alive.”¹²⁷ Machine gunner George Coppard noted how the sunken road in which he was walking “was full of British and German dead. In the darkness we kept stumbling over the bodies; when I fell heavily on one it gave out a deep grunt. The sudden weight of my body had compressed the corpse, forcing gases through the throat.”¹²⁸ Absent organizations dedicated to their burial, the dead were simply left to rot.

An English reporter accompanying the Australian-New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) into Gallipoli in 1915 recalled, “While acres of ground were covered up with dead and dying, the dried-up water courses were piled high with mounds of corpses.... Our advance was marked by a trail of dead and dying. Those in the rear had to clamber over the piles of corpses as they moved forward.” After being wounded, the journalist was told to move rearwards to seek

¹²⁵ “Frightful Cost of the War in Humanity,” *Wall Street Journal*, 24 April 1916.

¹²⁶ “Belgians Retire from Louvain Toward Antwerp,” *Wall Street Journal*, 21 August 1914.

¹²⁷ “Smoking Out Germans,” *Washington Post*, 27 June 1915

¹²⁸ George Coppard, *With a Machine Gun to Cambrai: A Tale of a Young Tommy in Kitchener’s Army 1914-1918* (London: Imperial War Museum, 1980), 97.

medical aid. “My trip to the rear was an experience of such frightfulness that I yet shudder to recall. Suffering the most intense pain and in absolute darkness I had to crawl on my hands and knees over the corpses of brave fellows who had been killed the day and night before.”¹²⁹ An American journalist recounted his horrid experience exploring the aftermath of a battle:

Going through an abandoned trench I stumbled over a mass of rags and they dropped apart to disclose the headless, armless, legless torso of a man. I kicked a hobnailed German boot out of my path, and from it fell a rotting foot. A hand with awful, outspread fingers, thrust itself from the earth as though appealing for help for its dead owner. I peered inquisitively into a dugout, only to be driven back by an overpowering stench.¹³⁰

By the middle of 1915, an American correspondent wearily stated, “Europe is daily becoming a vast cemetery of unmarked graves [and soldiers] are buried in trenches like dumb brutes merely to get rid of the odors arising from the decaying bodies. Their relatives and friends could not identify their burial places if they wanted to.”¹³¹ The dead were not only numerous, but also largely unidentified. The aftermath of battle on the Western Front witnessed both the Germans and the Allies struggling to identify to which nation a particular mass of corpses belonged. One reporter noted, “The only distinction [between German and French battlefield graves] is in the color of the crosses. The French are white, and the Germans are black. And on each is printed a number, the number of the regiment to which the dead belonged. There is seldom anything else.”¹³²

The astute observer who pieced together the above articles along with others that may have appeared in American newspapers throughout the first years of the war might have quickly realized the implications of industrial war not only with respect to the number of dead soldiers

¹²⁹ “Acres of Dead and Dying in Front of Trenches Along Dardanelles,” *Washington Post*, 17 October 1915.

¹³⁰ “Cosmic Bestiality of War, a Phantasmagoria of Sin,” *Los Angeles Times*, 22 October 1915.

¹³¹ “Europe’s Unmarked Graves,” *Macon Daily Telegraph*, 6 September 1914.

¹³² “Flags Fly in All Fields,” *Washington Post*, 9 August 1915.

generated, but also the problem caused by the volume of bodies produced by modern weapons in short periods of time. Disease and sinking morale at the front immediately come to mind, but the confidence of those on the home front that war was going well may have suffered, too. Men about to join the Army would almost certainly have second thoughts if they suspected that their bodies might be mislaid on a chaotic battlefield or pulverized beyond recognition by modern firepower. The man's mother or wife may add their strong opinions against their loved one joining as well. A system of burial and registration was needed to address the problem of the dead and present the second and third order effects of a country's ignorance toward those who fall in battle.

Because most of the Western Front fell within French borders, the war dead largely slept in French soil. Recognizing the sacrifice born by its allies, France made provisions for those dead to remain buried within the country and honored in perpetuity. On 29 December 1915, France passed a law from which it eventually governed its view on cemeteries within its borders both during and after the war. The law noted "in view of the establishment of perpetual sepulcher which ought to be assured to the troops of the French and Allied Armies, deceased during the duration of the war as the result of wounds or maladies contracted in the armies, it will be necessary to acquire lands *outside of the existing cemeteries*, the acquisition will be made in the name of the state by the Ministry of War." The law further specified that the "expense of acquisition, occupation, of enclosure and maintenance of the lands necessary for the sepulchers presented by the present law are at the expense of the State."¹³³ The law did allow for the Entente nations to receive responsibility for their cemeteries from France if desired but did not discuss the possibility of repatriation.

¹³³ French Law of the 29th December 1915, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 27.

The above-mentioned French law first directly affected British forces which entered the conflict in 1914 to aid invaded Belgium. Like its French allies, the British suffered mightily during the first few months of the war. An editor at the *Daily Mail*'s diary entry for 26 August read, "Published the first British casualties. Over 2,000. How enormous they seem, and the war is only beginning."¹³⁴ Burials by the BEF during those troubled days of 1914 represented the last vestiges of England's society where officers were considered of a different status than the men they commanded. After a German shell scored a direct hit on a British position, killing fifty nine officers and men, the soldiers were buried in mass graves dug near the road, while the officers enjoyed individual, marked graves in the town churchyard.¹³⁵ Within the first six months of the war, the British sought to create an organization dedicated to its war dead. This grew out of national sentiments as well as "to discourage the disconnected and spasmodic efforts of private individuals, which were threatening to create friction and confusion."¹³⁶ Such distinction between officers and men would evaporate as the war progressed [see page 395].¹³⁷

By 1915, the BEF held a mere sliver of Belgian soil around Ypres, while Englishmen, accompanied by soldiers from throughout the British Empire, occupied trenches from northern France south to where the French-occupied lines began near the Somme River. Throughout 1915, articles periodically appeared in *The Times* describing the war graves in France. Under the Red Cross, graves were located, registered, and the markers labeled with pencil or ink temporarily until the crosses could be properly painted and varnished.¹³⁸ The families of the

¹³⁴ Max Hastings, *Catastrophe, 1914: Europe Goes to War*, (New York: Random House, 2013), 295.

¹³⁵ Hastings, *Catastrophe*, 350.

¹³⁶ British Royal Government, *The Care of the Dead*, (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, Ltd, 1916), 9.

¹³⁷ A 1916 press photo of a crater burial depicts individual crosses for each soldier buried in the hole. See Appendix: B: British Temporary Grave Markers, Scott Kraska Collection.

¹³⁸ "Soldiers' Graves Abroad," *The Times*, 8 February 1915.

dead may have found comfort that the care of their beloved's resting place received consideration from the army in which the deceased fought and that the media devoted space to report that attention. One cynical soldier disputed these types of reports, writing "... The newspaper doesn't give any description either of how the 'heroes' are laid to rest... it is pitiful the way one throws the dead bodies out of the trench and lets them lie there, or scatters dirt over the remains of those which have been torn to pieces by shells."¹³⁹ The BEF's graves registration organizations eventually had to confront the realities of World War I combat and its effects on bodies along with the hasty burials that characterized the early months of the war. A BEF soldier, working by the dead near Artois recalled the flies but also the putrid smell of corpses. Maggot-filled bodies made "a noise like rustling silk as they gnawed their way through some dead man's guts. We worked with sandbags in our hands, stopping every now and then to puke."¹⁴⁰

In May 1915, British Red Cross member Fabian Ware created a photography section with "three competent photographers... employed solely for the purpose of taking photographs" to satisfy public demand for information regarding the war dead.¹⁴¹ These photographs would offer proof to a bereaved family that a body had been located and buried and comfort that the grave was marked and maintained. On 21 August 1915, Ware mentioned the work of his photographic section in a report to GHQ, stating of the "Three first class photographers [who] have been employed and have been at work daily.... They have never hesitated to take photographs as far up towards the firing line as they were permitted to go.... In all, nearly 2,000 negatives, showing

¹³⁹ Neil Hanson, *Unknown Soldiers: The Story of the Missing of the First World War*, (New York: Knopf, 2006), 14.

¹⁴⁰ Hanson, *Unknown Soldiers*, 55.

¹⁴¹ Jeremy Gordon-Smith, *Photographing the Fallen: A War Graves Photographer on the Western Front, 1915-1919*, (South Yorkshire: Pen and Sword Books, Ltd., 2017), 14.

8,000 graves have been taken.... Over 200 photographs have been dispatched and requests have been received for 200 others.”¹⁴² Such action provided proof to families across the Empire that at least some of the dead received proper burial but the reality persisted that, until a dedicated organization began caring for the dead, the British army and government would continue receiving complaints from distressed citizens.

Readers of *The Times* also discovered the manner in which their dead were treated by their allies when twenty-two British soldiers were buried with a combined British, French, and Belgian honor guard at the Hazebrouck Cemetery.¹⁴³ Additional space was devoted to stories about French civilians beginning to mark and otherwise care for graves, even going so far as to erect headboards over otherwise-unmarked graves. One commentator remarked, “When it is remembered what ruin and misery have been caused to the countryfolk in the track of the invaders, the fact that they should have the time and energy to rise above their own suffering in order to bestow this attention upon our dead is all the more remarkable.”¹⁴⁴ Adjutant-General Sir Nevil Macready noticed the BEF was already over-taxed trying to prosecute the war and could not perform the systematic attention necessary to the mounting numbers of dead. He proposed to Sir John French that a graves registration unit be created and integrated into the BEF to concentrate solely on this effort. In 1916, the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries (DGR&E) was formed.¹⁴⁵

On 19 April 1916, readers of *The Times* may have noticed an announcement creating a Graves Registration Commission (the DGR&E), whose task would be to care for “the graves of

¹⁴² Ibid., 37-38.

¹⁴³ “Honouring the Graves of British Soldiers,” *The Times*, 6 April 1915.

¹⁴⁴ “British Soldiers’ Graves,” *The Times*, 1 February 1915.

¹⁴⁵ Fabian Ware, *The Immortal Heritage: An Account of the Work and Policy of the Imperial War Graves Commission During Twenty Years*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 24.

British officers and men in France and Belgium.”¹⁴⁶ The Commission first assumed responsibility for the 49,413 graves the Red Cross identified across 33 cemeteries to date.¹⁴⁷ Citing the previous year’s French law, the announcement described vaguely that British cemeteries in France would eventually be gifted to Britain. Following precedent and common sense, the Commission announced that nothing permanent would be erected in or near the cemeteries until the cessation of hostilities. Meanwhile, British cemeteries large and small began cropping up everywhere British soldiers appeared on the Western Front. Some cemeteries became extensions of existing churchyards, while others were made by units wanting to bury their dead together, or because of proximity to hospitals or advance dressing stations. Some graveyards contained special plots for the Empire’s colonial soldiers who fell nearby.¹⁴⁸

A couple of weeks prior, the British public first became aware of the national effort underway to bury and commemorate its war dead when on 30 March 1916 King George V appointed his son, the Prince of Wales, to head a committee charged with “making permanent provision for the care of the graves of British officers and men in France and Belgium.”¹⁴⁹ Additionally, the public became aware of the 1916 French law granting land at cost to the French government for cemeteries as well as the decision not to erect any permanent memorials overseas until the completion of the war. A little over a year later, Great Britain created the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) to plan, construct, and oversee its First World War cemeteries. This act put the British Empire behind the effort to commemorate its war dead underway across the World War I battlefields. The IWGC’s success would largely rest upon the DGR&E’s work

¹⁴⁶ “British Graves in France and Belgium,” *The Times*, 30 March 1916.

¹⁴⁷ Michael Scott, *The Ypres Salient: A Guide to the Cemeteries and Memorials of the Salient*, (Uckfield, England: Naval & Military Press, 2002), 145.

¹⁴⁸ British Royal Government, *The Care of the Dead*, 12.

¹⁴⁹ “British Graves in France and Belgium: Prince of Wales’s Committee,” *The Times*, 30 March 1916.

in the fields of France and Belgium.

By the end of 1916, the DGR&E possessed four Graves Registration Units (GRUs), of which three were dispersed throughout the British sector while the fourth dealt with matters behind the front or elsewhere. The expansion of the DGR&E largely stemmed from experiences in the Somme Campaign. Despite days of work by members of the DGR&E following the battle, around 25,000 bodies remained unburied or only partially buried.¹⁵⁰ Fabian Ware recalled the lack of organization within the BEF at that time

At the beginning of the Somme offensive last year I called at the Fourth Army HQ and saw Gen Hutton with regard to this question of burials. There was no organisation for the purpose of the time and I was satisfied after having discussed the matter with them that it was impossible to establish any proper organisation at that time in the middle of severe fighting. Subsequently the organisation of Corps Burial Officers was established.¹⁵¹

Each death was reported to the director of the DGR&E, while another member of the DGR&E verified and registered the grave as reported by the unit chaplain or officer who oversaw the burial. British soldiers were directed to mark graves with a rifle or a helmet and attempt to preserve the man's identity as best possible with the idea that the GRU would come along and erect 'official' temporary crosses bearing the soldier's information.¹⁵² In addition to burial,

Orders had been given that we were to take from their pockets pay books and personal effects, such as money, watches, rings, photos, letters and so on, one identification disk had also to be removed, the other being left on the body. Boots were supposed to be removed, if possible, as salvage was the order of the day. A small white bag was provided for each man's effects, the neck of which was to be securely tied and his identity disc attached thereto. It was a gruesome job!¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Charles Pierce, letter to CoS, GHQ, AEF, 19 August 1918, NARA, RG 120, Box 159.

¹⁵¹ Peter E. Hodgkinson, "Clearing the Dead," *Centre for First World War Studies*, Vol 3, no 1 (September 2007).

¹⁵² Hanson, *Unknown Soldiers*, 45.

¹⁵³ Peter E. Hodgkinson, "Clearing the Dead."

Despite the gruesome nature of the task, the collection of personal effects was a critical aspect of bringing closure to a deceased soldier's next of kin.

The British were confronted with the problem of large numbers of unknown or simply missing bodies. "Many bodies are found but cannot be identified; many are never found at all; many are buried in graves which have subsequently been destroyed in the course of fighting. Therefore, whatever may be done in the way of placing individual monuments over the dead, in very many cases no such monument is possible. Yet, those must not be neglected, and some memorial there must be to the lost, the unknown but not forgotten dead."¹⁵⁴ In addition to neglect, the morale of the living was a concern. Ware noted that "We are on the verge over here of serious trouble about the number of bodies lying out still unburied on the Somme battlefields. The soldiers returning wounded or in leave to England are complaining bitterly about it and the War Office has already received letters on the matter."¹⁵⁵

British soldiers possessed leather identification tags up until May of 1916, when the DGR&E replaced them with two made of metal.¹⁵⁶ By 1917, the British decided that each man should "carry a double identity disc. These discs are different colours... The lower disc is for removal with a view to identification of death, so that, in case where burial is impracticable at the time when the body is first found, there may still be a second means of identification at the time of burial."¹⁵⁷

Because the dead were often a second thought compared to the living, bodies suffered from the elements which made the grim task of identification and burial that much harder. One

¹⁵⁴ "War Graves," *Daily Mail* (Paris Edition), 29 November 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 27.

¹⁵⁵ Peter E. Hodgkinson, "Clearing the Dead."

¹⁵⁶ Scott, *The Ypres Salient*, 145.

¹⁵⁷ "The Registration and Care of Military Graves," *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, Volume LXII, (February to November 1917), 300, AHEC.

member of a GRU working in the Somme area remarked,

Often have I picked up the remains of a fine, brave man on a shovel, just a heap of bones and maggots to be carried to the common burial place. In other cases where remains were found in water-filled holes, bodies that seemed quite whole, but which became like huge masses of white, slimy chalk when we handled them. [To find the identity disc] I shuddered as my hands, covered in soft flesh and slime, moved about in search of the disc and I have had to pull bodies to pieces in order that they should not be buried unknown. And yet, what a large number did pass through my hands unknown, not a clue of any kind to reveal the name by which the awful remains were known in this life.... For months after I relinquished this job, the smell of the dead was in my nostrils.¹⁵⁸

British notification of death still reflected the class differences of officers and soldiers.

An officer's death prompted a telegram that provided fairly quick notice of a man's death to his family. Families of common soldiers received a letter. The number of deaths prompted the letter to be an Army Form (104-82) stating that the soldier had been "killed in action in the field... I am to add that any information that may be received as to the soldier's burial will be communicated to you in due course." Also enclosed with the letter was another form letter from the Secretary of State of War stating "The King commands me to assure you of the true sympathy of His Majesty and The Queen in your sorrow. He whose loss you mourn died in the noblest of causes. His Country will be ever grateful to him for the sacrifice he has made for Freedom and Justice."¹⁵⁹

Two years into the war, the British realized that burying men at or near where they fell increased the likelihood of the grave being disturbed. Rather, cemeteries established behind the lines became the preferred place of initial interment.¹⁶⁰ This action not only consolidated British graves to ease the burden of care but helped erase stark reminders of futile efforts. Commission

¹⁵⁸ Peter E. Hodgkinson, "Clearing the Dead"; Hanson, *Unknown Soldiers*, 123.

¹⁵⁹ Hanson, *Unknown Soldiers*, 227.

¹⁶⁰ "Permanent Memorials in France: The Work of the Graves Commission," *The Times*, 28 October 1916; British Royal Government, *The Care of the Dead*, 10-11.

members clearing graves around La Boisselle would have disinterred the body of one lieutenant who perished there on 1 July 1916. The young man was buried where he fell, not more than ten feet from the trench from which he rose to begin the costly British attack on the first day of the Somme.¹⁶¹ Parallel to this effort, the Photographic Section continued its work to record those new temporary graves. The proximity of the interments to the front created peril for gravediggers and photographers alike. Photographer Ivan Bawtree recorded in his diary how the trio of photographers travelled by car when possible but sometimes had to pack their equipment on their backs to reach the more remote cemeteries. “Quite an adventure,” he wrote, “and a certain amount of shelling as we worked close by some of our batteries. It was not always funny.”¹⁶² By 1917, the Photographic Section dispatched over 17,000 photographs to grateful relatives. The backlog of requests compelled the addition of one new photographer to help ease the burden.¹⁶³

Many similarities exist between the described British methods and those used later by the American Graves Registration Service. In 1916, the British graveyards began assuming the feel of gardens. *The Times* reported the extent the Graves Registration units decorated the graves: “they sow grass and plant flowers and shrubs.” Such décor remains a staple of the British cemeteries that dot the French and Belgian countryside. The Graves Registration Commission’s work caught the attention of Sir Douglas Haig. A little over a month before the catastrophic Battle of the Somme, Haig penned heaping praise upon the Commission:

The Commission of Graves Registration and Enquiries has, since it first undertook this work eighteen months ago, registered and marked over 50,000 graves. Without its labors many would have remained unidentified. It has answered several thousand inquiries from relatives and supplied them with photographs. Flowers and shrubs have been

¹⁶¹ British Royal Government, *The Care of the Dead*, 7.

¹⁶² Gordon-Smith, *Photographing the Fallen*, 16.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 53.

planted in most of the cemeteries which are sufficiently far removed from the firing line, and all cemeteries which it is possible to work in during the daytime are now being looked after by non-commissioned officers and men of this unit.¹⁶⁴

While Haig's military decisions would soon provide much more work for the Commission, his commendation for the extensive undertaking so far completed proved very similar to the sentiment expressed by General John J. Pershing toward his Graves Registration Service once the American Expeditionary Force began operations in France beginning in the fall of 1917.

The Birth of the Graves Registration Service and its Arrival in France

America's entrance into World War I on 6 April 1917 committed the nation to a war approaching three years old that already consumed the lives of tens of thousands of Entente soldiers. Despite knowing the United States Army would likely suffer casualties on a similar scale, the nascent American Expeditionary Force (AEF) under the command of General John J. Pershing did not possess any organization dedicated to handling the unforeseen numbers of dead. Fortunately, the Army wisely tapped someone possessing institutional knowledge who could create an organization from the ground up to perform a duty that ultimately set precedent for how the nation would perform similar tasks for the next century. That someone was Charles C. Pierce.

Pierce's reputation from the Philippines preceded him and was a significant reason for his recall to the service. An observer remarked, "The direction of such a task demands not only real organizing genius but sympathy and understanding as well. All these qualities are happily embodied by... Charles C. Pierce. This big-souled, kindly man has cheered the aching hearts of bereaved American wives mothers, and sweethearts ever since the first Philippines campaign

¹⁶⁴ Sir Douglas Haig, Dispatch to King George V, 19 May 1916, in Sir Douglas Haig, *Sir Douglas Haig's Dispatches*, (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, LTD, 1919), 12-13.

took toll of our troops.”¹⁶⁵ The *Richmond Times* (Indiana) assured its readers that “U.S. Soldier Dead Will Not Sleep in Unmarked Graves Somewhere in France” because when Pierce was in the Philippines “he had charge of this work and as a result there were no unidentified dead in the Philippine campaigns and all bodies were returned to the relatives of the slain, or buried in national cemeteries in marked graves.”¹⁶⁶ While Pierce proved competent in the Philippines a generation before, the scale of the current war was such that Pierce needed a much larger organization to properly execute his duties.

On 31 May 1917, the War Department recalled Charles Pierce from retirement to organize a Graves Registration Service and subsequently supervise its actions in Europe [see page 397].¹⁶⁷ A Philadelphia newspaper noted Pierce’s promotion from rector at St. Matthew’s to major in the army destined to France.¹⁶⁸ Tasks with respect to the dead required assignment as the AEF organized its systems prior to sailing for France. AEF General Orders 2 dated 26 June 1917 instructed subordinate commands to submit “Reports of killed, wounded, and missing... to these headquarters where they will be consolidated.”¹⁶⁹

War Department General Order 104 dated 7 August 1917 provided for the creation of the Graves Registration Service consisting of 200 soldiers and 8 officers. They would be strengthened by those recovering from wounds or illnesses. In a subsequent cable, Pershing reminded his subordinate commanders that while this organization existed, “dead at the front are

¹⁶⁵ Isaac F. Marcossou, *SOS: America’s Miracle in France*, (New York: John Lane Co., 1919), 297.

¹⁶⁶ “U.S. Soldier Dead Will Not Sleep in Unmarked Graves Somewhere in France,” *Richmond Times* (In.), 29 September 1917.

¹⁶⁷ GRS Lecture, “Transportation of the Graves Registration Service,” 1922, 2. AHEC, UB 396.3 T72, See Appendix C: Charles Pierce, Chief of the GRS, US Army Quartermaster Museum.

¹⁶⁸ “Philadelphia Pastor now a Major,” *Evening Public Ledger* (Philadelphia, Pa.), 24 August 1917.

¹⁶⁹ Historical Division, United States Army, *United States Army in the World War, 1917-1919: Bulletins, GHQ, AEF*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1948), 3.

necessarily buried by the units themselves. These units perform this duty as a tribute to their dead.”¹⁷⁰ The first of these units was established in Philadelphia, where Pierce began recruiting from his home.¹⁷¹ War Department General Orders 80, dated 27 September 1917, designated Charles Pierce as commanding officer of the Graves Registration Service and superintendent of cemeteries in France.¹⁷² The first four Graves Registration units departed the Casualty Camp on Governor’s Island, New York, enroute to France. Each of these units, consisting of two officers and fifty enlisted soldiers, were prepared by Charles Pierce along with QMC Major H.R. Lemly. Their purpose was to ensure accurate record of deaths and interment locations for the AEF. Unit 301 was the first GRS unit organized in Philadelphia consisting of fifty men and two officers when it arrived in France on 31 October 1917.¹⁷³

Initially, the American Red Cross positioned itself to bring embalmers to France to ensure all bodies were preserved ahead of repatriation but the War Department denied this in favor of its nascent Graves Registration Service (GRS).¹⁷⁴ Shortly after the first four GRS units sailed for France, General Pershing requested eleven additional units. Eleven months later, the GRS would blossom with the arrival of nine more similarly sized units and five provisional units. By 11 November, eighteen units were assigned to the GRS.¹⁷⁵ By 1919, the GRS would employ 350 officers and 18,000 soldiers in the task of burying the dead.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁰ “Soldiers Killed in Action Buried in Their Uniforms,” *Army and Navy Register*, 13 April 1918, 460, AHEC.

¹⁷¹ GRS Lecture, “Transportation of the Graves Registration Service,” 1922, 2. AHEC, UB 396.3 T72.

¹⁷² Graves Registration Service, Technical Instructions: GRS, Quartermaster Corps, AEF, 11 November 1918. NA RG 92, HL Rogers’ Private File, Box 26.

¹⁷³ US Quartermaster School, *Operations of the Quartermaster Corps, US Army During the World War*, (Washington: GPO, 1929), 95.

¹⁷⁴ Capdevila and Voldman, *War Dead*, 56.

¹⁷⁵ US Quartermaster School, *Operations of the Quartermaster Corps*, 95.

¹⁷⁶ QMC, *The Work of the American Graves Registration Service: 1917-1936*, (Washington: GPO, 1943), 2.

AEF General Order 27 created a Burial Department to acquire land for cemeteries, maintenance of said cemeteries, notification of families with respect to a soldier's grave location, and creation of any necessary regulations regarding burials and graves registration. The latter charge allowed for promulgation of directives for chaplains and others who assisted in burials as well as for identification tags because they aided in the Burial Department's work.¹⁷⁷ The Burial Department's name was officially changed to the Graves Registration Service on 25 February 1918.¹⁷⁸ Charles Pierce, although retired, received appointment as the Chief of the Burial Department operating under the Chief Quartermaster of the AEF.¹⁷⁹

Two months later, a directive was issued to fill the officer ranks of the GRS. The Adjutant General sent a request to the commander of the AEF's rear areas for "assignment of approximately ten officers.... Believe that you have in your Corps certain officers with necessary qualifications for this purpose but who lack ability as leaders and not therefore needed in combat units."¹⁸⁰ The otherwise 'undesirables' from combat outfits comprised the initial core of GRS personnel responsible for the AEF's dead and the construction of the first American cemeteries in Europe. A later QMC history noted the problem with the GRS was that it was "unpopular with commissioned officers, and the civilian personnel that could be obtained for the type of work was not always of the best quality. After a certain stage of the operations had been completed, the chance of a mistake being detected, and the responsible persons punished was

¹⁷⁷ AEF General Order 27, 29 August 1917, Army Historical Division, *Bulletins, GHQ, AEF*, (Washington: GPO, 1948), 62.

¹⁷⁸ AEF General Order 30, 15 February 1918, Army Historical Division, *Bulletins, GHQ, AEF*, (Washington: GPO, 1948), 210.

¹⁷⁹ J.A. Logan, Memorandum for the Chief Quartermaster, Subject: Organization Graves Registration Service, AEF, 27 December 1917, NARA, RG 120, AG File, Box 158.

¹⁸⁰ The Adjutant General, telegram to Commanding General Service of Read, 29 February 1918, NARA, RG 120, AG File, Box 158.

remote.... Two commissioned officers (were) disciplined for gross carelessness in matters relating to the identification of bodies. In at least two cases, errors were discovered after bodies had been delivered to relatives.”¹⁸¹

The GRS originally established its headquarters at Chaumont, where Pershing was headquartered, but moved to Tours in March of 1918 where it remained until it relocated again to Paris in 1919. From the GRS’s arrival in France in October 1917 until September 1918, Pierce exercised complete control over all GRS operations from this headquarters. He dispatched his working units across the front wherever they were most needed. In September, he established three area headquarters at Neufchâteau, Soissons, and Amiens under subordinate commanders.¹⁸² This decentralization reflected the division of US combat troops on the Western Front: those fighting with the French at Soissons, with the British at Amiens, and those in the so-called quiet sector in the Vosges mountains at Neufchâteau. A GRS officer recalled “the main principle to be considered was the creating of an efficient organization handling the maximum number of casualties in the forward area, with a Central Bureau so arranged that efficiency in the field would be revealed in the records maintained.”¹⁸³ Upon establishment of its headquarters at Tours, the GRS established its foundational card record system which would be used to track all deaths in France as well as registered graves. Next, the GRS headquarters distributed forms for field units to complete reports of death and burial and published technical instructions for GRS personnel.¹⁸⁴

Through the Quartermaster General, Pierce communicated frequently with the Secretary

¹⁸¹ QMC, *The Work of the American Graves Registration Service: 1917-1936*, (Washington: GPO, 1943), 61.

¹⁸² GRS Lecture, “Transportation of the Graves Registration Service,” 1922, 3. AHEC, UB 396.3 T72.

¹⁸³ Lecture on the Transportation of the Graves Registration Service, 1925, 2, AHEC

¹⁸⁴ US Quartermaster School, *Operations of the Quartermaster Corps, US Army During the World War*, (Washington: GPO, 1929), 95.

of War, Newton Baker. President Woodrow Wilson had asked Baker to be his Secretary of War in 1916. Possessing no previous military experience, Baker travelled to Washington, met with Wilson, and proceeded to list the many reasons why, in Baker's mind, he should not be the Secretary of War. Wilson listened patiently to Baker's soliloquy, and then asked Baker if he was ready to be sworn in. Baker recalled later, "I then learned my first lesson in a soldier's duty and said I would do whatever I was bid to do."¹⁸⁵ Baker would wade deeply into the arguments that would soon engulf the country, and while possessing no military experience, he remained acutely aware of the dead's importance within the military as well as to the nation. The French took a much more pessimistic view of the secretary, asking "Can *he* possibly be the man to rescue *this* situation?"¹⁸⁶

The lead elements of the 1st Division, nicknamed the "Big Red One," arrived in France via Saint-Nazaire on 28 June 1917.¹⁸⁷ Right around this time, as the first AEF units arrived in France, the *Washington Times* published a current tally of the war's toll in lives: almost ten million dead.¹⁸⁸ On 3 November 1917, the 1st Division suffered a "first" in its own history as well as that for the United States. A War Department message received from General Pershing stated that "Before daylight, Nov. 3, a salient occupied by a company of American infantry was raided by the Germans. The enemy put down a heavy barrage of fire, cutting off the salient from the rest of the men. Our losses were three killed, five wounded, and 12 captured or missing...."¹⁸⁹ Privates Thomas Enright and Merle Hay along with Corporal James Gresham of

¹⁸⁵ Clarence H. Cramer, *Newton Baker: A Biography*, (New York: The World Publishing Company), 78.

¹⁸⁶ Wawro, *Sons of Freedom*, 71.

¹⁸⁷ Laurence Stallings, *The Doughboys: The Story of the AEF, 1917-1918*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 13.

¹⁸⁸ Steven Casey, *When Soldiers Fall: How Americans Have Confronted Combat Losses from World War I to Afghanistan*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 17.

¹⁸⁹ "Sammies Die When Caught by Barrage," *Evansville Press* (In.), 5 November 1917.

Company F, 16th Infantry were killed during a German trench raid near Bathelmont, France, becoming the first Americans combat deaths at the front.¹⁹⁰ A postwar account written of the raid by a corporal in Enright and Hay's squad provided gruesome details regarding how each man met death:

Corporal Gresham was standing in a dugout entrance when a man in an American uniform came running by and said to him, 'Who are you?' to which Gresham replied, 'An American, don't shoot.' The man replied, 'You are the one I'm looking for,' and immediately shot him [Gresham] through the eye. Private Hay was also shot through the head by a man in a dark uniform whom he thought was one of his own comrades. The body of Private Enright was found next morning on top of the parapet. He had evidently been captured and, refusing to accompany his captors, put up a hard fight before he was killed.... His throat had been cut from ear to ear and his chest ripped open. The medical officer also reported finding twelve bayonet wounds in his body.¹⁹¹

Newspaper headlines on the 5th of November relayed the news of the German raid and resulting deaths to readers through the country.

As Enright's death was among the first American casualties, his father received notification swiftly. On 5 November, he dispatched a letter to Secretary of War Newton Baker asking for his son's remains to immediately be returned to the United States for burial.¹⁹² The Quartermaster General dutifully responded that no bodies would be returned to the United States during the war.¹⁹³ These three deaths struck a chord among Americans, who sought to repatriate and honor these first soldier dead as soon as possible. Allegheny County Pennsylvania swiftly passed a resolution calling for the immediate return of Enright's remains while Enright's congressional representative wrote Secretary Baker seeking repatriation, stating that "[I]t would be a fitting and just tribute to the first of the fallen to return their bodies to their friends, for

¹⁹⁰ Andrea Neal, "Hoosier First to Die in WWI," *Indiana Policy Review*, last modified 16 May 2016, <http://inpolicy.org/2016/05/indiana-at-200-77-hoosier-1st-to-die-in-wwii/>.

¹⁹¹ Frank Coffman, "And Then the War Began," *American Legion Weekly*, 13 January 1922.

¹⁹² Frank Irwin, letter to Newton Baker, 5 November 1917, NPRC, OMPF of Thomas Enright.

¹⁹³ Henry Sharpe, letter to Frank Irwin, 8 November 1917, NPRC, OMPF of Thomas Enright.

burial at home.”¹⁹⁴

Not all Americans – or constituents – agreed with this sentiment. One lodged a protest with Baker, stating “[A] dear old mother in the West is broken hearted because she has learned that this government is going to discriminate between its soldiers [and] shower honors upon one and ignore others.”¹⁹⁵ The Quartermaster Corps, and by extension the War Department, reiterated its stance that no remains would be repatriated for any reason until the end of the war but stated that all bodies would return to the United States. This same incident regarding the bodies of Enright, Gresham, and Hay would similarly steel France toward retaining the remains of all Americans who died in France during the war.

Enright, Gresham, and Hay’s temporary burial in France foreshadowed the difficulties that would arise between the United States and France after the war when compared to the sentiment expressed by some in the United States for repatriating the first American dead. A French general named Bordeaux addressed his men during the funeral ceremony and revealed the intentions of the French to keep the American dead buried in French soil. George Marshall, G-3 (Operations Officer) for the 1st Division, the only American officer to attend the otherwise French ceremony, requested and secured a copy of General Bordeaux’s eulogy.¹⁹⁶ Through Marshall’s efforts, Bordeaux’s words are preserved:

Men! These graves, the first to be dug in our national soil... are as a mark of the mighty hand of our allies, firmly clinging to the common task, confirming the will of the people and Army of the United States to fight with us to the finish.... We will, therefore, ask that the mortal remains of these young men be left here, be left to us forever. We will inscribe on their tombs: ‘Here lie the first soldiers of the famous United States republic to fall on the soil of France, for justice and liberty.’ The passerby will stop and uncover his

¹⁹⁴ W.S. McClatchey, letter to Newton Baker, 21 November 1917, and Hon. Guy Campbell, letter to Newton Baker, 21 November 1917, NPRC, OMPF of Thomas Enright.

¹⁹⁵ James Crammer, letter to Newton Baker, 21 November 1917, NPRC, OMPF of Thomas Enright.

¹⁹⁶ Evan Huelfer, *The ‘Casualty Issue’ in American Military Practice: The Impact of World War I*, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 21.

head. The travelers of France, of the Allied countries, of America, the men of heart, who will come to these graves the tribute of their respect and of their gratefulness.¹⁹⁷

As 1917 drew to a close, a lobbying force emerged in the form of the American Purple Cross. The organization sought to receive Congressional recognition and subsequent assignment to France along with undertakers and supplies to embalm all American dead. Pierce noted the anxiety brought upon families of soldiers serving overseas and attempted to rationalize the argument using recent history: “If 25,000 bodies were unburied or only partially buried after days of work following the battle of the Somme, our force would require thousands of technical men in addition to the divisional units not planned by the War Department for the Graves Registration Service, in order to do embalming in the face of like casualties.”¹⁹⁸

The Purple Cross did get the ears of some in Congress. A Pennsylvania congressman introduced a bill to accept the Purple Cross’s services as a means to ensure experts in mortuary activities provide the best possible care for American soldier dead. The *Army-Navy Register* dismissed this proposition as “one of the boldest bids for recognition, with rank and pay attached, that has been directed against the War Department since the war was first thought of.”¹⁹⁹

Such rationale did not stop the Purple Cross in its efforts. The Purple Cross petitioned General Pershing in an effort to gain entry to Europe and work for the AEF under the directive Pershing previously issued in General Orders 104 from 5 August 1917:

Every unembalmed dead body is a menace to the living. This association offers, without rank or pay, to raise, equip, and maintain a force of expert, professional, licensed embalmers of the highest type in order that when the bodies of our soldier dead eventually are disinterred, for removal to their own church, they may be in an identifiable

¹⁹⁷ Address of General Bordeaux at the Funeral of the First American Soldiers to Fall on the French Front, 4 November 1917, NPRC, OMPF of James Gresham.

¹⁹⁸ Charles Pierce, letter to the Quartermaster General, 6 December 1917, NARA, RG 120, AG File, Box 158.

¹⁹⁹ War Department, *Army-Navy Register*, Washington, DC, (volume LXII, no. 1929, 1917), AHEC.

condition... The Military Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives agrees with us that this service should be attached to the Medical Department exactly as is the Red Cross.... We might point out, however, that the number of men required will be infinitely less than are required by the Red Cross or the Graves Registration Service... we believe we are backed by the sentiments of a majority of the members of Congress and of the Senate and in the overwhelming proportion of the mothers, fathers, families, and friends of the men in the service as is evidenced by the hundreds of columns of favorable newspaper comments on the subject, the many thousands of letters which have been addressed to members of Congress, the scores of pledges to favorable action received in reply, and the hundreds of thousands of signatures which have been attached to petitions praying for the passage of the Purple Cross bill... We believe that the acceptance of our service will do as much to promote morale at home in a sentimental way... Preserving the recoverable bodies in an identifiable condition is doubly important in an army raised as our presence force has been... we are offering skilled, professional embalmers whose services will be rendered... so that it may be possible in instances where the return of the body is sought by the family that it may reach them in a recognizable and sanitary condition.²⁰⁰

While the Purple Cross's suggested course of action might have briefed well, within the military, the feeling was that "there is no reason to change the policy which was determined upon the latter part of last year and the reasons which dictated this policy are much stronger at the present time.... However desirable it may be from a sentimental point of view, practical objectives far outweigh any matter of sentiment and must govern absolutely."²⁰¹ In other words, military necessity deemed the impracticality of embalming and nothing in the military situation had changed to necessitate a change in policy. This did not stop others in the funeral industry from trying to cash in on a potential windfall. Before many American soldiers even sailed for France, reports surfaced of funeral parlor proprietors trying to obtain permission to oversee the return of soldier dead.²⁰² While the funeral industry was initially blocked from partnership with the government regarding the dead, it would continue its attempts to become involved.

²⁰⁰ H.S. Eckels, letter to John Pershing, 7 March 1919, NARA, RG 120, AG File, Box 158.

²⁰¹ T.A. Roberts, Memorandum to Commanding General, Service of Supply, 8 April 1918. NARA, RG 120, General Correspondence, Box 3786.

²⁰² The Quartermaster General, Memorandum for the Adjutant General of the Army, "Organization of Graves Registration Units No. 302, 303, and 304", 29 September 1917, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 40.

In response to private and public lobby efforts to begin returning bodies, Pierce reiterated his recommendation to Secretary of War Newton Baker that the United States not repatriate any remains until the war ended. Baker approved Pierce's recommendation in December of 1917, and it held through the duration of the war.²⁰³ News of the War Department's position on the subject did not stop Wells Fargo from writing the Quartermaster Corps. Its purpose was to suggest soldiers be buried in zinc caskets to facilitate quick transfer to the United States following the war.²⁰⁴ Naturally, Wells Fargo probably had an idea from what company those caskets could be supplied.

Pierce's recommendation against repatriation of remains headed off an early clash with French authorities. As more Doughboys entered the trenches at the end of 1917, Pershing received notice regarding a prohibition against moving bodies located in the Zone of the Armies, defined as "roughly speaking, the area within 50 to 75 miles of the trenches".²⁰⁵ The order explained, "The French families have bowed before this rule, severe but necessitated by the actual circumstances, the British and Belgian authorities have conformed to it.... Therefore, it follows that American soldiers dying, be as their comrades of the Allied Armies, [be] buried in the cemetery nearest where they fell."²⁰⁶ Regardless of public or bureaucratic desires, bodies would remain where they were for the foreseeable future.

As American doughboys arrived in France, they not only began to learn from their British and French allies about survival in the trenches, they also witnessed their allies' treatment of the war dead. Army Field Clerk Will Judy from the Illinois National Guard's 33rd Division recalled

²⁰³ H. L. Rogers, letter to Charles Pierce, 7 December 1917, NARA, RG 120, AG File, Box 158.

²⁰⁴ Cross Reference Sheet, ASGS to CQM, 24 January 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 140.

²⁰⁵ Office of the Judge Advocate, letter to Mr. Harrie Rogers, 31 January 1920, NARA, RG 120, Entry 594, Box 22.

²⁰⁶ "DeBenney," letter to John Pershing, 26 November 1917, NARA, RG 120, Entry 594, Box 48.

the difference between the nascent American effort in contrast to that of the French and British for three years prior: “We stood at the cemetery at Contay and looked upon the long straight rows of wooden crosses.... Thirty American graves are here – of fresh wooden crosses during the last fortnight. A thousand English and Canadian graves show mostly black markers. When as many hillsides of France have as many American graves weatherworn, we too shall wear weary faces.”²⁰⁷ Judy also noticed something peculiar when comparing the American graves to their English counterparts, writing “the thirty American crosses, twenty-eight men and two officers, were exactly alike. But the English and Canadians mocked the democracy of death, giving larger crosses, some painted, to their officers. The grave marker for an aviator was the propeller of the plane in which he was killed.”²⁰⁸

In addition to witnessing British burial methods, Judy also recorded orders regarding interment procedures for the myriad of soldiers serving the British Empire. “The dead of each nation must be buried in separate groups. The soldiers of India must not be buried in a Christian cemetery. Non-Christian Egyptians also must not be laid in a Christian cemetery unless Egyptians dig the grave. Jews must lie under a double triangle or six-pointed star.”²⁰⁹ Despite witnessing burial markers based upon rank and status, Judy noted, “A grave is dug five feet deep, two feet wide, and six- and one-half feet long. When men are buried in a trench in one large hole, they are wrapped in blankets, if blankets can be had. Officers to and including colonels, are buried with the men in the trench and the same dirt is thrown upon all.”²¹⁰ In order to preserve identification, the British decreed that ““For indicating identity, crosses made from

²⁰⁷ William Judy, *A Soldier's Diary: A Day to Day Record of the World War*, (Chicago: Judy Publishing Company, 1930), 122.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 122.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

biscuit tins may be used.' Later, the Grave Service may erect a wooden cross three- and one-half feet high and one foot nine inches across the arm. They sleep in their glory."²¹¹

Despite its presence on the Western Front for only the closing months of 1917, the GRS, and the War Department as a whole, received immediate indications regarding the difficulty of the military task to bury ever-increasing number the war dead and the amount of public interest in the disposition of those dead. The quick organization and deployment of Pierce's GRS would establish processes to prevent the AEF from becoming overwhelmed in trying to simultaneously conduct operations and care for its dead. The GRS would not be without its share of challenges created by the events of 1918, however.

²¹¹ Judy, *A Soldier's Diary*, 93.

CHAPTER 2

THE GRAVES REGISTRATION SERVICE IN FRANCE, 1918-1919

Combat during the First World War proved more violent than previous conflicts with technology's destructive effects on the human body. Artillery, machine guns, and gas caused millions of deaths, but also created problems concerning locating, identification, and burial of the dead. One corporal revealed the brutal picture of modern combat: "A large shell made a direct hit upon four boys. All were dead. Limbs were mangled, bodies were torn. It was a sight revolting beyond description. Of one of my comrades I could find only small fragments of his poor body. None were larger than my hand... with the exception... there lay his head, jerked completely from his body..."¹ Doughboy Norman Summers remembered, "German shells, high explosives were bursting all around us.... Some of our men were blown to pieces.... Dead Americans, French, and Germans were lying everywhere."² One witness remarked, "The ground is so full of bodies.... In the earth here there are several layers of dead bodies and in places the pounding of the shells has brought up the oldest and placed them or scattered them across the newer ones."³ Such refrains of gruesome death scenes were continuous. A doughboy recalled the macabre picture upon entering a wooded area that had been subjected to heavy shelling: "It was full of dead men in all conceivable contortions. Some had been blown to pieces two or three times; others lay as if asleep; some were just torsos. There was a head with glasses still on. The gas masks added the last devilish effect."⁴

¹ James Hallas, *Doughboy War: The American Expeditionary Force in World War I*, (Boulder, Co.: Lynne Rienner, 2000), 233.

² George Browne, *An American Soldier in World War I*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 102.

³ Michael Stephenson, *The Last Full Measure: How Soldiers Die in Battle*, (New York: Crown Publishers, 2012), 239.

⁴ Geoffrey Wawro, *Sons of Freedom: The Forgotten American Soldiers who Defeated Germany in World War I*, (New York: Basic Books, 2018), 193.

Burials Amidst Combat

The first major attack by American forces occurred at Cantigny, France in late May of 1918. There, American doughboys from the 1st Division's 28th Infantry Regiment not only proved their mettle in combat but became familiarized with death and the difficulties associated with battlefield burials. Without much training in battlefield burial techniques, Sergeant John Licklider of the 28th Infantry wrote that "all the soldiers that were killed at Cantigny were rolled into the nearest shell hole and covered up to keep down the odor from their bodies.... Later there was an order from the War Department against this, and they were left where they fell." Fellow 28th Infantry soldier Charles Senay added that those hasty American graves were identified "with a bayonet often bearing their dog tags."⁵

The soldiers from the 16th Infantry assigned to bury the 28th Infantry's dead following the latter regiment's assault on Cantigny held the same inadequate training to bury the dead as their counterparts in sister regiments. Stuart Wilder of the 16th Regiment wrote about burying some of the fallen in the American trenches. He recalled burying "a number of bodies there that 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."⁶ Such ad hoc methods of burial would later come back to haunt the GRS as it attempted to locate and register graves that were never recorded if they existed at all.

Stories abound of human bodies devastated due to the advances of modern combat. First

⁵ James Nelson, *Remains of Company D*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2009), 120 (both quotes).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 131.

Division doughboy Willard Storms recalled being told the account of his entire squad taking refuge in a shell crater when a shell landed “directly in the crater or so near that the entire squad was either buried or blown to bits. Some of my men were on burying detail there and reported that none of that squad could be found although there were any number of torn and mangled bodies that could not be recognized that were buried in a shell crater.”⁷ One of Storms’ company mates recalled a similar, horrifying experience when a shell blast amidst four soldiers produced a terrible result: “the two in the middle had been cut down to a pile of horrid red guts and meat, while the two men on the outside had been cut up somewhat less badly, but no less fatally.”⁸

AEF General Order 27 dated 29 August 1917 followed previous precedent by assigning military commanders as responsible for the burial of their dead.⁹ As in previous wars, however, commanders often prioritized the living over the dead due to both military necessity and ignorance. The result of the former produced adverse effects on the living. The stench of death could quickly break morale in the trenches. One sergeant noted, “The odor [from the dead] was something fierce. We had to put on our gas masks to keep from getting sick.”¹⁰ Another soldier added, “The most sickening [smell] of all was the odor of putrid corpses in the hot sun.”¹¹ Again, battlefield conditions sometimes precluded proper care of the dead, but 165th Infantry Regiment Chaplain Father Francis Duffy captured the effects on soldiers upon returning from an attack and seeing their dead friends.

Back came our decimated battalions along the way they had already travelled. They marched in weary silence... Then from end to end of the line came the sound of dry,

⁷ Nelson, *Remains of Company D*, 104.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 264.

⁹ General Orders Number 27, American Expeditionary Force dated 29 August 1917, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 40.

¹⁰ Browne, *An American Soldier*, 98-99.

¹¹ Byron Farwell, *Over There: The United States in the Great War, 1917-1918*, (New York: Norton, 1999), 111.

suppressed sobs. They were marching among the bodies of their unburied dead. In the stress of battle there had been but little time to think of them – all minds had been turned to victory. But the men who lay there were dearer to them than kindred, dearer than life; and these strong warriors paid their bashful involuntary tribute to the ties of love and long regret that bind brave men to the memory of their departed comrades.¹²

AEF General Orders 30 published on 15 February 1918 produced many of the guidelines under which the GRS operated during the war. It directed commanders to “set apart a suitable spot near every battlefield and cause the remains of the killed to be interred therein.”¹³ Chaplains received instructions to become familiar with all military cemeteries within their unit’s area and report to the GRS any with inadequate standards. Chaplains were further directed to use those military cemeteries for burials whenever possible to help keep AEF burials concentrated. The General Order also designated all chaplains as inspectors of the cemeteries to make note of any errors in marker inscriptions or cemeterial appearance and report discrepancies to the GRS headquarters. General Order 30 further described burial procedures for chaplains or whoever presided over burials. Single interments were to be “6 feet six inches long, 2 feet wide, 5 feet deep, and no more than 12 inches apart, leaving not more than 3 feet wide between rows of graves.”¹⁴ Part of the chaplain’s responsibility was ensuring a soldier’s vital information was properly inscribed on burial pegs using only lead pencils and affixing the pegs at a forty-five-degree angle ensuring the inscribed label was oriented on the bottom protected from the elements. The burial pegs acted as the soldier’s first grave marker until a temporary cross or double triangle was erected. The attending chaplain also completed the Graves Registration

¹² Francis Duffy, *Father Duffy’s Story: A Tale of Humor and Heroism, of Life and Death with the Fighting Sixty-Ninth*, (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1920), 206. The 165th Infantry was nicknamed ‘The Fighting Sixty-Ninth.’

¹³ AEF General Order 30, 15 February 1918, Army Historical Division, *Bulletins, GHQ, AEF*, (Washington: GPO, 1948), 211.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 211-212.

Blank that provided record of each burial. Reports of burials on Grave Location Blanks were made in triplicate and distributed to the GRS headquarters, AEF headquarters, and the Effects Station along with any personal effects found on the body.¹⁵

As more American units began arriving at the front, Pierce issued additional instructions to his GRS units in the field. Pierce flatly stated that burial of the dead was not a function of the GRS. Rather, the Service was charged with “maintaining accurate and complete records with regard to the location and identification of the dead, registration of all graves, and acquisition of land for cemeteries....”¹⁶ Pershing had already followed the tradition of his predecessors by directing “the dead must necessarily be buried by the units themselves. These units perform this duty as tribute to their dead.”¹⁷ Pierce’s instructions intended to prevent his GRS units being pulled from their primary mission. Although the GRS was not directly responsible for burials, they were nevertheless instructed to maintain close contact with forward units to ensure commanders buried their dead, maintained adequate supplies, and concentrated burials as best possible in established cemeteries.¹⁸

As burying the dead was not a directed function of the GRS, units in the field worked to complete identification and initial burial of all officers and men. Graves Registration Blanks became the method to report a burial to GRS headquarters [see page 399].¹⁹ Following an engagement, a detailed work party under the supervision of the chaplain or an assigned burial

¹⁵ AEF General Order 30, 15 February 1918, Army Historical Division, *Bulletins, GHQ, AEF*, (Washington: GPO, 1948), 212.

¹⁶ HQ, SOS, “Memorandum of Preliminary Instructions,” 2 May 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 27.

¹⁷ John J. Pershing, Cable, 30 December 1917, text in HQ, SOS, “Memorandum of Preliminary Instructions,” 2 May 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 27.

¹⁸ HQ, SOS, “Memorandum of Preliminary Instructions,” 2 May 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 27.

¹⁹ See Appendix: D, GRS Blank, Scott Kraska Collection.

officer attempted to locate, identify, and bury its dead. As these parties worked near the front under combat conditions, burials were far from perfect.

Many individual burials... were made hastily.... They were often accomplished under shell fire; sometimes at night; often in isolated and not easily accessible places. Temporary burials were sometimes marked by a rifle, a helmet on stick or any convenient object which would attract the eye of a searcher. The grave might vary in depth from six feet to six inches, and many were the cases in which bodies were hardly buried at all. There were also the trench burials of many bodies together, and such if not soon exhumed and separated became like charnel houses.²⁰

Americans arriving in France immediately noticed the beauty inherent in the temporary American cemeteries. One observer recorded his emotions upon seeing the first burials of American soldiers:

We rounded a turn in the winding road and there before us, stretched the graves of our dead boys, soldiers and sailors, marines and members of labor battalions; whites and blacks and yellow men, Jews and Gentiles, Catholics, Protestants and Mohammedans – for there were four followers of the faith of Islam taking their last sleep here in this consecrated ground – row upon row of them, each, except in the case of the Mohammedans, by a plain white cross bearing the black letters the name, the age, the rank, and the date of death of him who slept there at the foot of the cross... these three-hundred odd men of ours who had made the greatest of all human sacrifices.²¹

While field commanders at all levels bore responsibilities for initial burials, their organizations did not contain personnel dedicated to such tasks within their formations. Therefore, commanders found officers to supervise and conduct burials wherever they could. These unit burial officers led small teams of men to perform initial interments of the battlefield dead. Infantry Lieutenant Marvin Taylor from the 2nd “Indianhead” Division recalled, “The Major decided that as my duties were not onerous I might act as battalion burial officer.”²²

²⁰ GRS Lecture, “Transportation of the Graves Registration Service,” 1922, 3-4. AHEC, UB 396.3 T72.

²¹ The mention of dead from the Islamic faith in American cemeteries is peculiar. No record of such soldiers was located in official documents nor do the overseas cemeteries knowingly possess such burials. Irvin S. Cobb, *The Glory of the Coming: What Mine Eyes Have Seen of Americans in Action in this Year of Grace and Allied Endeavor*, (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1918), 441.

²² Lieutenant Marvin H. Taylor, Diary Entry of 28 June 1918 in Historical Committee, Second Infantry Division Association, *The Second Division, American Expeditionary Force in France: 1917-1919*, (New York: The Hillman

Sometimes commanders did not properly coordinate the units conducting burials. Father Duffy witnessed an American platoon helping to bury the dead almost immediately upon relief from fighting.²³ One doughboy noted that in his outfit the engineers buried the dead. This task proved a very difficult chore because the engineers not only needed to bury the dead of their own division, but usually other American or German soldiers left unburied from previous fighting as well.²⁴

The chaplain or burial officer then completed and dispatched his reports and forms. Each form was to be prepared in duplicate – one copy dispatched to GRS headquarters, the other to the Adjutant General’s office. Map references or sketches with landmarks needed to accompany the reports to aid GRS personnel to later locate the grave. According to GRS personnel, “The report was expected to state how the grave was marked, [whether] by name-peg, cross, identification tag, record in bottle, or some other manner. It was further enjoined that graves should be marked in some way at time of burial to insure identification.”²⁵

After the GRS received burial reports, it immediately sent units working in the area from which the report originated. GRS personnel attempted to locate the grave based on the received reports from the decedent’s organization. If the grave location could not be ascertained, an attempt was made to locate witnesses to or participants in the burial. Upon locating the grave, GRS personnel exhumed the body to confirm identification. When satisfied, GRS soldiers reburied the body in a nearby local cemetery or in an American concentration cemetery. “No grave was considered fully reported until the GRS officer, or a responsible non-commissioned

Press, Inc., 1937), 253.

²³ Duffy, *Father Duffy’s Story*, 200.

²⁴ Browne, *American Soldier*, 134.

²⁵ GRS Lecture, “Transportation of the Graves Registration Service,” 1922, 3. AHEC, UB 396.3 T72.

officer acting under his orders had visited the grave, was reasonably satisfied of its identity, and had affixed a plate bearing the letters ‘GRS’ to the cross, thereby indicating acceptance.”²⁶

The burial of the dead mixed military expediency and efficiency with reverence.

Lieutenant Marvin Taylor, burial officer from the Second Division, recorded his memories of battlefield burials:

We established a little cemetery in the edge of the wood and made some crude railings about the graves and placed a large rustic cross in the center. A tiny cross on each grave bearing the identification disc of the soldier sleeping beneath completed the arrangement. The pioneers assigned to the battalion would dig the graves during the day, and as soon as darkness would fall we would hasten across the open area, get our burden, and hurry back to the shelter of our woods. After lowering the body into the grave, word would be sent to the Chaplain who would be waiting in the dugout and he would come and repeat the simple service; then the grave would be filled, the cross placed, and another patriot had paid the price.... It was most impressive – those burial services in the forest – the somber depths of which would be revealed only by the flash of the guns. The open grave, the group of soldiers standing bareheaded, their helmets under their arms; the figure of the Chaplain at the foot of the grave, his voice scarcely audible; the solemn ‘Amen’; the quick return of activity to the motionless group as the earth was returned. Of such are the scenes that dull the pomp and circumstance of war.²⁷

Taylor’s account illustrates the lengths to which American doughboys went to properly bury and honor their battlefield dead. One may also infer how the labors of men like Taylor ultimately aided the GRS’s efforts to locate and identify the dead. Because of the violent, industrial nature of the war, not all burials could be conducted in a traditional sense.

Burial officers like Lieutenant Taylor faced a unique task. In addition to facilitating burials within their formations, they also became responsible for preserving the memory of each soldier through various means. As the 27th Division’s burial officer confirmed the identity of Private Irwin L. Martin, he discovered a poignant message in one of Martin’s jacket pockets.

²⁶ Ibid., 4.

²⁷ Lieutenant Marvin H. Taylor, Diary Entry of 28 June 1918 in Historical Committee, Second Infantry Division Association, *The Second Division, American Expeditionary Force in France: 1917-1919*, (New York: The Hillman Press, Inc., 1937), 253-254.

Evidently possessing a premonition of death, Martin scribbled three letters to his mother, his sweetheart, and another individual on captured German postcards. On the front he asked the finder of the postcards to mail them to the address listed [see page 401].²⁸ Each card was dated 16 October 1918; Martin perished in the attack against Saint-Souplet on 17 October.

The letters, having been on Martin's person at death, were heavily stained with blood. The burial officer forwarded the postcards to Martin's regimental chaplain stating, "As they are much the worse for being on his person at time of death and as they have the specific request that they be forwarded, I did not send them to the Effects Q.M. but ask that you see they are sent to their respective destinations without fail. They have been cleaned as much as possible."²⁹ Taking the time to ensure families received such deeply personal messages demonstrates the GRS's deep commitment to both the soldiers the organization buried and the families of those deceased.

On 7 March 1918, a 42nd Division battalion suffered an event that forced those involved to utilize ad hoc burial methods. A German shell penetrated the earth above a dugout before exploding causing a cave-in that trapped twenty-five soldiers. While a couple soldiers were rescued, many bodies remained trapped below. Realizing the enormous effort required to retrieve the dead, battalion commander Lieutenant Colonel William Donovan heeded the advice of poet Joyce Kilmer, who suggested leaving the dead where they fell. The battalion erected a marble tablet stating, "Here on the field of honor rest" followed by the names for the fifteen men whose bodies remained buried underneath.³⁰ Kilmer, who would himself shortly be killed by a

²⁸ See Appendix E: Postcards found on Body of Private Irvin L. Martin, Scott Kraska Collection

²⁹ S.S. Curtiss, Memo to Chaplain Bass, 108th Infantry, 12 December 1918, Scott Kraska Collection. The letters were found in the effects of the chaplain decades later. While he never forwarded the letters, he must have felt Martin's last words too important to discard.

³⁰ Duffy, *Father Duffy's Story*, 61-64. Joyce Kilmer's poem, "Rouge Bouquet," is named after this incident.

German sniper, wrote the poem, “Rouge Bouquet,” in memory of the Rainbow Division men who died in that collapse.³¹ This incident was immortalized in the 1940 movie *The Fighting 69th*. Of the poor men buried alive buried “In a wood they call the Rouge Bouquet,” Kilmer wrote, “There is a new-made grave to-day / Built by never a spade nor pick / Yet covered with earth ten meters thick. / There lie many fighting men / Dead in their youthful prime / Never to laugh nor love again / Nor taste the Summertime.”³²

The trench collapse memorialized by Kilmer highlighted an important point about the nascent AEF: it was a learning organization as it entered the trenches. This included the GRS as well. A March 1918 GRS information sheet implored its members to search for solutions to problems. “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.”³³ The unprecedented yet important nature of the GRS’s role necessitated that the organization always search for improvement.

Some of the early-arriving AEF divisions had already suffered heavy casualties by Memorial Day of 1918. Father Duffy recalled that “The uniforms we wear and the losses we have already sustained make us appreciate the significance of Memorial Day... the dead of our division... are buried in a military cemetery; and our first duty was to pay them solemn honors.... Children of the town were selected to place the wreaths upon the graves of our dead, and the last resting place of our French companions was not neglected.”³⁴ Duffy recalled how

³¹ The 42nd Division earned the nickname of the “Rainbow” Division because its soldiers hailed from across the United States.

³² Joyce Kilmer, “Rouge Bouquet,” *Stars and Stripes*, 16 August 1918, Lines 1-8.

³³ Duffy, *Father Duffy’s Story*, 61-64.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 102.

the men of the “Fighting 69th” paid homage to their dead where “Colonel McCoy saw to it that the grave of every one of our dead was properly honored on this day... During the afternoon he and I went to Croixmare [*sic*].... We found that the Curé and his parishioners, as also the French soldiers, had kept the graves there in beautiful condition – a tribute to our dead which warms our heart to the people of France.”³⁵

Other soldiers made visits to allied cemeteries along with those of American dead. Army Field Clerk Will Judy recorded details of a visit to a French Cemetery:

The cross on another grave says that its dweller won the Legion of Honor and the Cross of War. Just six graves away, are two graves that, tho [*sic*] having the cross of death, do not carry the tricolor and epitaph. Of these two neighbors, one bears a name, the other, war’s cruelest word ‘Unknown’.... In a corner next the stone wall a grave bore the tri-color and the epitaph and also another flag, our own; it is that of Edward Joseph Kelly of Philadelphia, a volunteer in 1916.³⁶

Concurrent to GRS efforts in Europe, the War Department owed families of those dead a notification of their loss. General John J. Pershing observed that the French distributed casualty lists to local officials who then notified families within their jurisdiction.³⁷ Unbeknownst to Pershing, death notifications – particularly during the dark months of 1914 – proved so overwhelming that many officials eventually delegated their responsibilities to others. One local teacher assumed duties after the postman was called to war. She was chosen not because of her position in town, but rather that her personality was one that could deliver devastating news. She later remarked, “People reacted differently, of course. Some received the news hysterically, but most reacted with a kind of numbed shock, as if they had expected it in some way.”³⁸ And of

³⁵ Duffy, *Father Duffy’s Story*, 103.

³⁶ Judy, *A Soldier’s Diary*, 130-131.

³⁷ John Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1931), 341.

³⁸ Max Hastings, *Catastrophe, 1914: Europe Goes to War*, (New York: Random House, 2013), 559-560; P.J. Flood, *France 1914-18: Public Opinion and the War Effort*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), 91.

course they did expect it. France, after all, had the highest per capita casualties in the war. An average of 3,638 French soldiers were killed or wounded every day during the war.³⁹

While many in the United States preferred casualty lists published in the newspapers, Pershing lobbied for something closer to the French method. He cited the French system as one that might avoid providing intelligence to the enemy as opposed to newspaper publication of casualties immediately following a battle. Second, Pershing thought personal notification by a trusted official more intimate than columns of names that “people would eagerly scan day after day.”⁴⁰ Some of Pershing’s contemporaries would have agreed. One writer declared that “when a death occurs in a family, the sanctity of the home should be respected. The privacy of the family should not be intruded upon by the public.”⁴¹

The United States eventually adopted a hybrid approach, dispatching delayed casualty lists to the War Department which then sent a telegram to the soldier’s family. By the spring of 1918, American newspapers regularly displayed rolls of the dead, wounded, and missing with the sole caveat to postpone publication for twenty-four hours after next of kin notification.⁴² One aspect eliminated from newspapers was the next of kin address of soldier’s whose names were printed in newspaper casualty lists. At Pershing’s urging, the War Department added this step to block a potential source, however small, of information from reaching the enemy.⁴³ Even then, Pershing remained cautious, insisting that casualty cablegrams be sent in cipher code, lest the enemy obtain numbers of losses by units engaged at the front. Pershing constantly remained

³⁹ Wawro, *Sons of Freedom*, 11.

⁴⁰ Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, 341.

⁴¹ Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death*, 133.

⁴² Casey, *When Soldiers Fall*, 27.

⁴³ “To Give No Addresses on the Casualty Lists,” the Indianapolis News, 9 March 1918.

concerned that the code could be deciphered if enemy agents compared it to the published casualty lists in newspapers, and eventually ordered a new code developed.⁴⁴

Casualty cablegrams conveyed a strict minimum of information to the Adjutant General. A 26 May 1918 message from AEF headquarters reported deaths divided into several categories. Those killed in action or who died of wounds made up most of the names. A multitude of other causes also added a soldier's name to the list: diseases including scarlet fever, cerebrospinal meningitis, pneumonia, rheumatism, choroiditis, and appendicitis in addition to bomb wounds, aeroplane accidents, accidental gunshot wounds, and a fall. One soldier was listed as succumbing to anthrax.⁴⁵ The scant information provided the basis for the equally brief telegrams sent to those soldiers' families across the United States. When E Company, 165th Infantry Private George Adkins died during the trench cave in that inspired the poem *Rouge Boquet*, his mother, Anna, received a Western Union telegram bearing the stark message: "DEEPLY REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT PRIVATE GEORGE ADKINS INFANTRY IS OFFICIALLY REPORTED AS KILLED IN ACTION MARCH SEVENTH."⁴⁶

The telegram did not soften the blow to devastated American families. Mrs. Ida Hanks from Montana corresponded regularly with her son, Peter. Peter wrote his mother from the front, stating he expected to be home by Christmas if not Thanksgiving. Ida recalled, "I went to the post office hoping to find he was in New York, [instead] I got the telegram from the Government... and I knew he'd never have Thanksgiving with us again."⁴⁷ Another soldier, Paul Hanks, had died 4 October during the Meuse-Argonne campaign. The stark notification

⁴⁴ Palmer, *Newton Baker*, 352-353.

⁴⁵ HAEF, Casualty Cablegram to the Adjutant General, 26 May 1918, in Burial File of Joseph Guyton, NPRC.

⁴⁶ The Adjutant General, Western Union Telegram to Anna Adkins, 11 March 1918, Courtesy of Ryan Liebhaber

⁴⁷ "Oldest Gold Star Mother Arrives," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 31 May 1930. NARA, RG 92, Entry 1908-1911, Box 1.

telegrams and the pain brought to his family was described by Lamoine Boyle, who recalled the moment when her father “who always looked so young and full of life,” received the War

Department envelope:

[H]e opened the envelope and read the telegram inside. Then he straightened like a ramrod and stared hard at the gate.... His eyes were dead... the brightness had gone out of them. He didn't shed any tears... he just stood there, dying in the warm sunlight. I could see him die.... Then he sank down on the grass and drew my head against his cheek. 'Paul,' he said, and he wasn't talking to me. He was just saying words. 'He won't come back. He....'⁴⁸

The United States Army would continue using telegrams to notify relatives of its war dead for the next fifty years, only ceasing during the Vietnam War, when a system of personal notifications by an officer and a chaplain was implemented.

The casualty surge brought on by the fall 1918 Meuse-Argonne offensive seriously strained the War Department's casualty reporting system. That battle alone killed and wounded approximately 150,000 Americans.⁴⁹ By the time of the Armistice, casualty notification times averaged one month, with many death notices arriving from theater but not even being decoded for up to two weeks. War Secretary Newton Baker estimated that it would not be until January or February of 1919 before the system caught up.⁵⁰ Indeed, Pierce received a scathing letter from a War Department official that said “The delay in receiving information in regard to the death of our men in France has been a source of great anxiety to the people here, and,” he continued, “while we undertook a big job and there were serious and many difficult problems to be worked out, the delay in receiving information as to the death our boys has been inexcusable. I desire to congratulate your department upon the systemic and humane manor in which you are

⁴⁸ Henrietta L. Haug, *Gold Star Mothers: A Collection of Notes Recording the Personal Histories of the Gold Star Mothers of Illinois*, (Brussels, IL: No Publisher, 1941), 22.

⁴⁹ Wawro, *Sons of Freedom*, 455.

⁵⁰ “List Not in Before February,” *The Times* (Munster, In.), 10 December 1918.

giving the desired information.”⁵¹

This was not completely a War Department or GRS shortcoming; rather, it was due to poor record keeping by units in the field. For example, the 77th “Statue of Liberty” Division’s 305th Infantry Regiment noted that its casualty reports frequently contained errors and sought to correct those deficiencies. Additionally, it directed reporting officers and sergeants to provide personal information regarding the soldier’s job and reference any heroism or devotion in order to “make available as promptly as possible to his family that personal information which every family wants and is entitled to receive.”⁵² Surviving records of the regiment include notebooks containing the names of dead soldiers with map coordinates for their interment sites and chaplain reports of burials [see pages 403-404].⁵³ Such self-policing by field units ultimately began the process of ensuring next of kin received accurate and timely information.

As members of Congress and the American public waited anxiously for the publication of casualty lists, Newton Baker remained a stickler for accuracy in these reports to prevent unnecessary anguish. Nevertheless, mistakes occurred. The father of a boy killed in France was himself also overseas working for the AEF. Thinking that the official cable already reached her, the man cabled his wife with the eulogy, “In life and death we rejoice him,” – however this message was the first notification his wife received.⁵⁴

The losses incurred by federalized National Guard units hit small towns with devastating effects. One week before the Armistice, Chandler, Oklahoma’s population of 2,500 was rocked by the simultaneous delivery of telegrams announcing the deaths in action of six Chandler

⁵¹ C.W. Bailey, letter to Charles Pierce, 5 March 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 1.

⁵² James D. Williams, Memorandum to C.C. #2, 21 January 1919, Scott Kraska Collection.

⁵³ See Appendix F: Notebook excerpt and Chaplain Notice of burial, Scott Kraska Collection.

⁵⁴ Palmer, *Newton Baker*, 354.

natives: Arthur Matheney, Charlie Bouse, Forest Cox, Ulus Dunn, Samuel Pidcock, and Cleason Dale. Each man served in B Company of the 36th “Texas” Division’s 142nd Infantry Regiment. The six perished in an attack on Saint-Étienne-à-Arnes, France on 8 October 1918.⁵⁵ While the industrial-age casualty reporting process dispatched letters, it is doubtful anyone realized the pain that those six letters would bring to one small town.⁵⁶

The Adjutant General followed each War Department telegram with a confirmation letter. This letter not only served to – for better or worse – reassure next of kin that the telegram received the day prior was not in error and inform that the soldier’s unit would be writing with additional details as time allowed. By August of 1918, the War Department letter’s third paragraph stated:

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.⁵⁷

The language of this note proved significant. First, it reflected the attitude of both the United States Government and its army toward the final disposition of its dead. Effectively, both parties still operated under the original orders given by President McKinley’s administration in 1898. Second, it placed responsibility for repatriation on a specific timeline relative to the end of the war on the United States.

The nation officially obliged itself to repatriate the military fallen with the publication of

⁵⁵ Tim Stanley, “A Century Ago in World War I, Six Soldiers from Chandler were Killed on the Same Day. A Retired Judge Has Decided it’s Time to Tell the Story,” *Tulsa World*, 12 August 2019.

⁵⁶ Geoffrey Moorhouse’s brilliant book, *Hell’s Foundations: A Town, Its Myths, and Gallipoli*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2011) offers a social history on the impact of the 1915 Gallipoli campaign on the town of Bury, in Lancashire and the impact of almost 2,000 deaths in that battle had on a small British town.

⁵⁷ 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).

War Department Bulletin 44 on 26 July 1918 that decreed, “The remains of all officers, enlisted men, and civilian employees of the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps who have died or who may hereafter die in France shall be buried in France until the end of the war, when the remains shall be brought back to the United States for final interment.”⁵⁸ By 4 September 1918 agreement, the Army also assumed care for the Navy’s dead in France. The details of the agreement read in part:

The remains of all officers, enlisted men, and civilian employees who have died or will hereafter die in France shall be buried in France until the end of the war, when the remains shall be brought back to the United States for final interment. Such cemeterial facilities as the army may have acquired in France shall be available to the navy. The remains of all officers, enlisted men, and civilian employees who die on ships en route to or from the United States shall be embalmed and returned to the United States on the ship on which death occurred.⁵⁹

The correspondence between the War Department and families of soldier dead promising repatriation may have been the result of a Franco-American resolution that stated: “As soon as hostilities have ceased, the Government of the French Republic will examine conjointly with the American Republic the measures to be taken to insure, in conformity with the French law and police regulations regarding hygiene, the transport and return to the United States the bodies of American soldiers or sailors interred in France.”⁶⁰ The War Department further reaffirmed its commitment to total repatriation when it published an agreement between the army and navy regarding the disposition of the dead, of which one section read:

The remains of all officers, enlisted men, and civilian employees who have died or hereafter die in France shall be buried in France until the end of the war, when the remains shall be brought back to the United States for final interment. The remains of all

⁵⁸ Judge Advocate’s Office, Memorandum for the Chief of Staff, 10 March 1919, NARA, RG 120, Entry 594, Box 22.

⁵⁹ State of New York, *New York Legislative Documents, 1919*, (Albany: J.B. Lyon Co., 1919), 326; F.J. Kernan, memorandum to John Pershing, 1 July 1918, NARA, RG 120, AG File, Box 159.

⁶⁰ Ralph Hayes, Memorandum for the Quartermaster General, 13 February 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 25.

officers, enlisted men, and civilian employees who die on ships enroute to or from the United States shall be embalmed and returned to the United States on the ship on which the death occurred.⁶¹

Colonel Charles Pierce habitually wrote families of the dead to offer his personal sympathy for their loss. This seemingly small act connected the American people to the Army for which their sons gave their lives. Pierce purposely waited, however, until he received a confirmed location of the decedent's grave that he could pass along in his letter. In correspondence with Sergeant Paul Ludwig's family, Pierce wrote: "My heart always bleeds in sympathy for sorrowing friends at home when I am writing such a letter as that which I am sending now to you. And yet, you will want to know what I have to tell you.... The service of which I am in command will guard this spot of his sepulcher, and we shall try to care for it as you would wish. This will be our sacred trust."⁶²

An observer to the Quartermaster Corps (QMC) noted that Pierce's efforts elicited hundreds of return letters from families expressing their thanks. One respondent expressed that Pierce's letter, "[I]s a great support to me and it is good to note the absence of caste in our American Army. Your letter gives the tone of a true comrade, soldier, and American. I am enclosing a check... and ask you to place such flowers on his grave.... Will you please put a card on the flowers for Memorial Day, saying they are from Dad and Mother."⁶³ Another mother wrote,

At least I know where he is buried and the number of his grave thanks to the Graves Registration Service. Now all that is left to me is to wait for the time when I can cross the ocean and visit the place where he fell. At first, I thought I should go mad at the meagre information in that bare, bald telegram from the War Department announcing Howard's death. And nobody will ever understand what a relief it was to me, and what sublime consolation, to receive that sympathetic note from the Graves Registration

⁶¹ "Home Burial," *Chicago Tribune*, 5 September 1918.

⁶² "Ludwig's Burial Place Revealed to His Mother, *Reading Times* (PA), 29 April 1919.

⁶³ Marcossou, *SOS*, 303.

Service conveying the very information I desired. It gave me something more to live for.⁶⁴

According to a QMC history, a family's knowledge that the dead received proper care was the next best thing to immediate repatriation and burial in the United States.⁶⁵

Other officers also took time to write condolence letters. Will Judy, Army Field Clerk for the 33rd Division's commander, wrote in his diary that "the General is sending a letter of sympathy to the mother of every soldier of our division killed in action."⁶⁶ While Judy's entry is dated April 1919, it demonstrates the obligation felt by some to both the dead and the families of those lost, while simultaneously not allowing oneself to become overwhelmed by the losses sustained. Father Duffy noted the importance of maintaining this balance: "It is only spirit for warriors with battles yet to fight. We can pay tribute to our dead, but we must not lament for them overmuch."⁶⁷

The stream of post-mortem communication between the Army and a soldier's next of kin possessed meaning to the latter. Following Ralph Flora's death in France on 8 March 1918, his parents received a letter from their son's regimental commander as well as Charles Pierce. The local newspaper published both letters in full describing how:

the soldier's regimental commander, who in spite of press of other duties tried to assuage the anguish of the first grief which has overwhelmed the father's heart. If nothing else was emphasized, the kindness and tenderness, the solicitude for even the lowliest of our nation's heroes in the ranks points to a striking lesson of the democracy with which America is striving to safeguard the liberties of the world against the most brutal attack in history.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ US Quartermaster School, *Operations of the Quartermaster Corps, US Army During the World War*, (Washington: GPO, 1929), 93.

⁶⁵ US Quartermaster School, *Operations of the Quartermaster Corps, US Army During the World War*, (Washington: GPO, 1929), 91.

⁶⁶ Judy, *A Soldiers' Diary*, 197.

⁶⁷ Duffy, *Father Duffy's Story*, 69.

⁶⁸ "Pay Tribute to Hoosier Heroism," *Ft. Wayne Gazette*, 21 April 1918.

Battlefield burials improved both sanitary conditions and morale, but cemeteries constructed close to the front became subject to wartime conditions. Father Duffy witnessed one of his fresh burial sites targeted by a German aviator who, evidently thinking the freshly-turned dirt was a gun emplacement, dropped three bombs near the temporary cemetery.⁶⁹ Another observer witnessed how the buried dead were not always allowed to sleep in peace:

[W]herein for sheer, degenerate malignity the Germans targeted their heavy guns until they had broached nearly every grave, heaving up the dead to sprawl upon displaced clods. One becomes, in time, accustomed to the sight of dead soldiers lying where they have fallen, because a soldier accepts the chances of being killed and of being left untoned after he is killed. The dread spectacle he is presented is part and parcel of the picture of war.⁷⁰

Such instances as witnessed above illustrate the difficulties presented to the GRS as it attempted to register graves and preserve identifications during a fluid military situation in mid-1918. Early in May, an artillery barrage hit a GRS cemetery at Domjevin. Pierce noted that the cemetery “was partially destroyed by heavy shell fire, and in some cases bodies were blown from their graves.” Nevertheless, Pierce assured the Chief Quartermaster that “all the American bodies are safe and graves have been remarked and put in good condition by GRS men.”⁷¹ As American participation in Western Front operations expanded, so did to the need for cemeteries. Pierce published his guidelines for a standard cemetery constructed in the battle area. The order outlined the type of marker used, site selection, cemetery layout, and upkeep. Pierce stressed that the plan “must be strictly adhered to.”⁷²

Conditions on the front in 1918 made it imperative for the GRS to check and recheck its

⁶⁹ Duffy, *Father Duffy's Story*, 222.

⁷⁰ Cobb, *The Glory of the Coming*, 399.

⁷¹ Charles Pierce, letter to Chief Quartermaster, AEF, 4 May 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 1.

⁷² Charles Pierce, “The American Standard Cemetery for Battle Areas, 21 June 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 2.

charges. Thus, regular inspections of cemeteries and battle areas comprised an essential portion of GRS activities. Such a methodical, self-policing system ensured the GRS did not falter from its solemn yet complex mission. Sometimes, the scrutiny yielded unforeseen results: during an inspection of various cemetery areas following artillery barrages, the inspecting officer found four bodies which otherwise might never have been located.⁷³ These situations occurred in combat as well. Father Duffy recalled a situation where a young soldier who was wounded and attempted to make his way back to be examined. On the way back, that soldier was struck by artillery fire and killed. No one knew of this soldier's death until much later when another member of the deceased's company happened upon his body.⁷⁴ Such instances illustrate why the GRS's job was never truly complete and fraught with difficulties.

Burying the dead quickly prevented health hazards, but also prevented the deceased's comrades from seeing death outside of a combat situation. Then-Brigadier General Douglas MacArthur remembered the reaction of his 84th Brigade from the 42nd Division when they took Sergy, France on 29 July, after the village exchanged hands eleven times. MacArthur recalled his men "sobbed when they came out of the line and found their dead lying like cordwood." He remembered so many dead in the area that "we stumbled over them. There must have been at least 2,000 of those sprawled bodies.... The stench was suffocating."⁷⁵

While battlefield burials under Pershing's directive aided morale, the units under fire could not complete them in an organized manner. While somewhat understandable given the chaotic nature of combat, this resulted in great difficulties later. One GRS unit of ten men plus

⁷³ Chief, AGRS, weekly report to Chief Quartermaster, AEF, 20 April 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 1.

⁷⁴ Duffy, *Father Duffy's Story*, 270.

⁷⁵ Evan Huelfer, *The 'Casualty Issue' in American Military Practice: The Impact of World War I*, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 9.

an augmentation of labor personnel patiently “disinterred 893 scattered bodies and placed them in new cemeteries.... Of this number only 16 were finally unidentified.”⁷⁶ By June 1918, Pierce noted that continued reporting of isolated graves could easily overwhelm the GRS, and, without organization, those interments might not be found during concentration efforts following the war. The GRS initially defined isolated graves as any grave not within the confines of a cemetery, or a group of interments not large enough to warrant construction of a cemetery. Later, Pierce would specify that “twelve or more isolated graves, group together, or in such close proximity as would justify their designation as a ‘cemetery,’ will be listed and classified as an American Battlefield Cemetery.”⁷⁷ Pierce issued detail instructions to all units within the GRS regarding how to record isolated graves and report them to GRS Headquarters. Pierce went so far as to procure and distribute maps to ensure all entities worked off the same records.⁷⁸ His tireless efforts brought order to the chaos of AEF burials in France.

The thoroughness of the GRS shone in its dealings with the isolated graves cases, however. The men sketching and recording these locations were, according to one observer, “so minute and accurate that a child could find the grave by having the diagram in its hand.”⁷⁹ The observer explained that such sketches included not only the territory immediately adjacent to the grave, but included numerous other landmarks such as “a group of firs six feet away,” or other permanent landmarks to guide future recovery efforts. The observer summed up the GRS’s devotion to its work and the AEF’s commitment to the dead as well as the living by stating,

⁷⁶ Charles Pierce, letter to H. L. Rogers, 6 October 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 1.

⁷⁷ GRS Bulletin no. 16, “Changes in Use of GRS Forms no. 1 and Sketches,” 16 November 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 27.

⁷⁸ GRS Bulletin no. 3 “Instructions for Map Reference Work,” 19 June 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 27.

⁷⁹ Marcossou, *SOS*, 304.

“Greater love than this hath no army.”⁸⁰

The GRS quickly proved its usefulness to the AEF through both its innate attention to detail in addition to the lengths with which it went to recover the dead. By May 1918, General Pershing echoed the sentiments of his British counterpart, General Haig, regarding the AEF’s Graves Registration Service:

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.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Ibid., 305.

⁸¹ CinC, AEF, Memorandum to Chief Quartermaster, AEF, Subject: Commendation, 15 May 1918, NARA, RG 92,

Pershing's commendation was indeed earned by the GRS, but that is not to say the organization operated without flaw or above reproach. Until July 1918, all GRS burials occurred under a cross. This practice quickly changed when Samuel Rudak wrote his Congressman and described visiting a cemetery to find "our Jewish boys, the sons of Moses and Jacob with a *cross* at the head of their graves."⁸² The Jewish Welfare Board's executive director subsequently requested that the GRS erect a plain board as a grave marker in lieu of a cross.⁸³ Meanwhile, the Assistant Secretary of War found a solution to the problem at hand. The British Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries (DGR&E) from 1917 called for Jewish graves to be marked with a double triangle.⁸⁴ Pierce codified this in GRS Bulletin number 6, stating that plain headboards should be used for Jewish dead. In the event that only crosses were available, Pierce directed that the horizontal piece should be removed and used as a temporary headboard until the prescribed one could be obtained. Noting the visibility of this, Pierce added, "The War Department enjoins special watchfulness in order to guard this point."⁸⁵ Pershing strengthened Pierce's directive the following day, dictating the use of headboards or double triangles for Jewish grave markings.⁸⁶

After Pershing's order trickled across the AEF, the use of a cross as a marker for Jewish dead ceased. Regulations prescribed a square headboard, a material already found in Quartermaster supply. If only crosses were available, GRS personnel removed the horizontal

Entry 1915, Box 27.

⁸² Samuel Rudak, Letter to Hon. Nathan Barnert, 23 May 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 20. Cross is underlined in Rudak's letter.

⁸³ Chester J. Teller, Letter to Harry Cutler, 18 June 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 20.

⁸⁴ Benjamin Jacobson, memorandum for the Third Assistant Secretary of War, 29 June 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 11.

⁸⁵ GRS Bulletin no. 6, 25 July 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 27.

⁸⁶ AEF, General Orders 122, 26 July 1918, NARA, RG 120, Box 159.

piece and attached the soldier's information directly to the vertical marker. Meanwhile, units promptly requisitioned headboards to accommodate their Jewish burials.⁸⁷ Upon seeing the lengths to which the Army adjusted and went to accommodate its Jewish dead, one observer remarked, "you feel certain that if any Mahometan [*sic*] should die in the service of the AEF, he would be laid away with his head towards his beloved East!"⁸⁸ Properly burying Jewish soldiers in accordance with instructions proved problematic. Jewish Chaplain Lee Levinger noted: "Most units had no religious census, certainly none was up to date including the replacements.... Often a man would carry a prayer book in his pocket, but if the bodies were searched by one detail and buried by another that did not help. I know that it took me three months to verify my list of Jewish dead in the 27th Division, so that one can imagine the task for the entire A. E. F."⁸⁹ Fortunately, a modification to a significant piece of a soldier's equipment offered a potential solution to Levinger's problems and his peers across the AEF.

Members of the AEF who first went to France in 1917 did so with the single identification tag as prescribed in the 1906 General Order 204.⁹⁰ AEF General Order 21 dated 13 August 1917 added a second tag to the soldier's uniform. Due to a lack of materiel to produce the discs, square tags were cut from aluminum sheets, stamped, and issued [see page 406].⁹¹ March 1918 regulations prescribed "Two aluminum identification tags, each the size of a silver half dollar and of suitable thickness, be stamped with the name, rank, regiment, corps, or

⁸⁷ APO 739 Unit 301, Advance Group 2, Requisition for Headboards, 15 July 1918, NARA, RG 120, Box 159.

⁸⁸ Marcossou, *SOS*, 304.

⁸⁹ Lee Levinger, *A Jewish Chaplain in France*, (New York, Macmillan, 1921), 110-111.

⁹⁰ Paul F. Braddock, "Armed Forces Identification Tags," *Military Collector and Historian*, (Washington, Company of Military Historians, 1972), 112, US Army Quartermaster Museum.

⁹¹ "AEF Square Tags," *GI Journal*, March/ April 1998, 19, US Army Quartermaster Museum. See Appendix G: Round and Square Identification Tags, Author Photo.

department of the wearer in the case of officer and with the name and Army serial number in the case of enlisted men.... These tags are prescribed as part of the uniform and... will be habitually kept in the possession of the owner.”⁹² The regulations only called for name, branch, and service number to be etched on the tags. With the two tags, one was supposed to remain with the body, while the other sent to GRS headquarters accompanied by the report of burial.

Senior AEF Chaplain Charles Brent was the first to suggest adding religious preference to 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.”⁹³ The 26 July 1918 AEF General Order 122, which ordered the use of headboards or double triangles for marking of Jewish graves, also prescribed units to mark all dog tags with religious designations.⁹⁴ This suggestion carried forward to modern times, but did not immediately solve the religious identifications within the AEF. Chaplain Lee Levinger from the 27th Division wrote: “The order for marking the identification tag with an additional letter—“P” for Protestant, “C” for Catholic, and “H” for Hebrew—was issued after most of us were overseas, and hardly any of the tags had it; I know I never had the “H” put on mine.”⁹⁵ Combat conditions once again proved an adversary to the implementation of critical regulations.

Identification tags undoubtedly helped the GRS ascertain identities much easier than had they not been issued. Unfortunately, identification tags caused some problems of their own. Complicating the identification tag issue was that the tags only helped identification if soldiers

⁹² War Department, *Army Regulations*, March 1918, US Army Quartermaster Museum.

⁹³ Lisa Budreau, *Bodies of War* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 120.

⁹⁴ AEF, General Orders 122, 26 July 1918, NARA, RG 120, Box 159.

⁹⁵ Levinger, *Jewish Chaplain in France*, 110-111.

wore them. Lack of adherence to the order prompted the AEF to demand compliance to its General Order 158 which directed that all soldiers and civilians in the AEF wear two aluminum identity tags at all times.⁹⁶ Pierce issued instructions regarding illegible and detached tags in order to provide guidance when such instances inevitably occurred. Pierce wanted GRS members to ascertain to which set of remains the detached tags belonged. If they could not be matched to a body, the unit marked on the tag should be contacted to verify whether the owner was deceased or merely lost the tags. If no owner was found, the tag was forwarded to GRS Headquarters. Similarly, any illegible tags were to be sent as well, accompanied by as much circumstantial information as possible.⁹⁷

Unreadable tags stemmed from a problem in design. The tags, made of aluminum, produced a chemical reaction when against human skin for prolonged periods, especially when attached to buried, decaying bodies. This information compelled the GRS to issue instructions for soldiers to wear their tags outside of their shirts whenever possible.⁹⁸ AEF General Order 30 ordered all officers and soldiers as well as civilians assigned to the AEF to wear the two identification tags furnished by the QMC. The order also cautioned men against wearing the tags against their skin to avoid “defacement of inscription” and likewise recommended tags be placed on the undershirt to avoid direct contact with the remains.⁹⁹

Evidence of the corrosive nature of the aluminum-based tags came to light in research of AEF burial files. GRS personnel discovered James Gresham’s dog tag after three and a half

⁹⁶ GRS Bulletin no. 12, 10 October 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 27.

⁹⁷ GRS Bulletin no. 11, “Instructions Regarding Disposition of Illegible Identification Tags and Tags Detached from Bodies,” 24 September 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 27.

⁹⁸ American Expeditionary Force Graves Registration Service Bulletin Number Eight dated 5 August 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941 Box 3.

⁹⁹ AEF General Order 30, 15 February 1918, Army Historical Division, *Bulletins, GHQ, AEF*, (Washington: GPO, 1948), 213.

years interred in French soil. They noted that the “Body tag [was] corroded, reads A.--B.-- Resham.¹⁰⁰ Thomas Enright, buried alongside Gresham, did not possess identification discs and his identification was instead verified by the cross over the grave along with a brass plate and railing around the site.¹⁰¹ The AEF’s final death, Henry Gunther, was buried with one of his identification tags, but that item was never retrieved to verify his identity during disinterment almost three years later.¹⁰² A QMC history succinctly states the value of the identification tag” If on the body of every soldier an identification tag had been found hanging around his neck, the work of identification would have been exceedingly simple and entirely certain.”¹⁰³ While one identification tag was to be buried with the body, and another sent to GRS Headquarters, Pierce directed field units to use the latter tag or make duplicate tags to fasten on grave markers in hopes to add “to the permanency of grave markings.”¹⁰⁴

Experience proved much different than the ideal. Many men neglected to keep their identification tags anywhere on their body while others stowed them in pockets or fashioned bracelets out of them like their French counterparts. Regardless, GRS personnel witnessed firsthand that the tags did not hold up well against high explosive shells, regardless of how they were worn. Nevertheless, GRS personnel went to extraordinary lengths to try and secure identification tags. If no tags rested around the neck or wrists, the decedent’s pockets and clothing was searched as well as the ground around the body since the shoelace from which the

¹⁰⁰ Report of Disinterment and Reburial, 9 March 1921, in Burial File of James Gresham, NPRC.

¹⁰¹ GRS#106, 16 January 1920, in Burial File of Thomas Enright, NPRC.

¹⁰² Report of Disinterment and Reburial, 5 August 1921, in Burial File of Henry Gunther, NPRC.

¹⁰³ Quartermaster Corps, *The Work of the American Graves Registration Service: 1917-1936*, (Washington: GPO, 1943), 104.

¹⁰⁴ GRS Bulletin no. 6, 25 July 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 27; J. A. Logan, Letter to AEF division commanders, 13 January 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1894-B, Box 1; Revision: 9751

tags were suspended easily rotted away. One particularly persistent GRS man with experience as an embalmer searched the interior of a corpse to find the tags had been carried into the man's intestines by a shell fragment.¹⁰⁵

Integral to identification, burial, and proper honors for the AEF were the chaplains scattered amongst its ranks. In addition to providing much needed spiritual comfort to the living, these men provided invaluable assistance to the GRS and by extension the soldier dead's next of kin as part of their divine duties. Pierce codified the chaplains' vital role in a July 1918 GRS bulletin: "Chaplains are responsible for seeing that every grave is immediately marked after each burial... and that sunken graves, unkempt cemeteries, and unaligned grave markers are promptly placed in proper condition."¹⁰⁶ This provided a purpose and direction for chaplains to execute their duties, the problem for the GRS became ensuring enough chaplains were overseas.

By May 1918, the AEF sought to possess one chaplain for every 1,800 men.¹⁰⁷ Despite this desire, chaplains seemed constantly in short supply. Units of smaller size, or geographically separated often went without religious services. Some detached organizations attempted in vain to secure the services of chaplains, but without luck.¹⁰⁸ Base hospitals also suffered due to the shortage of chaplains. One commander wrote a chaplain request because "As the only chaplains available for funerals and other religious services are those of transient organizations, it is easily possible that a situation may arise in which there would be no chaplain available at a time when the services of one were urgently required."¹⁰⁹ By the end of the month, forty-two clergymen

¹⁰⁵ US Quartermaster School, *Operations of the Quartermaster Corps, US Army During the World War*, (Washington: GPO, 1929), 104-105.

¹⁰⁶ GRS Bulletin no. 5, "Chaplains in the GRS," 6 July 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 27.

¹⁰⁷ Paul Moody, Memorandum for the Adjutant General, 9 May 1918, NARA, RG 120, AG File, Box 554.

¹⁰⁸ H.D. Cutting, letter to the CiC, AEF, 23 May 1918, NARA, RG 120, AG File, Box 554.

¹⁰⁹ D. H. Biddle, letter to Commanding General, Base Section #1, 12 May 1918, NARA, RG 120, AG File, Box 554.

sailed to France to bolster the AEF's chaplain ranks. The manifest accompanying the group noted each man's religion and, in the case of three, that they were 'colored.'¹¹⁰

Finding chaplains to administer to the needs of certain faiths also proved problematic. Lee Levinger, chaplain in the 27th Division, noted that only twelve Jewish chaplains stood among the ranks of the AEF's clergy.¹¹¹ While chaplains generally administered to the spiritual needs of soldiers following any faiths, some religions held special requirements at death or during interment that required knowledgeable clergymen to perform. In the absence of such men, soldiers took matters into their own hands. Private Samuel Rudak recalled participating in a Jewish burial where no Jewish chaplain was present. "Two of the boys said the Kaddish [and] I can truthfully admit that I saw more than one tear in that crowd."¹¹² Chaplains provided multifaceted means of comfort and assistance to both the living and the dead which manifested itself in many ways over the course of the war.

One of the GRS's strengths was its ability to learn from mistakes and self-correct before small problems spiraled out of control. This success was largely due to the diligence of Charles Pierce. A shining example of this was his July and August investigations in conjunction with the AEF Inspector General. Pierce's purpose was to survey the condition of the battlefields over which the AEF had fought over the previous months and assess the GRS's sufficiency and efficiency in its work thus far in the campaign. Pershing issued guidance to all AEF division commanders on 31 August reaffirming their responsibility to search the battlefields for the dead, bury their fallen, carefully mark the graves, and properly dispose of identity tags and personal

¹¹⁰ The Adjutant General of the Army, Memorandum to CG, AEF, Subject: Assignment of Chaplains, 29 May 1918, NARA, RG 120, AG File, Box 554.

¹¹¹ Levinger, *Jewish Chaplain in France*, 8.

¹¹² Samuel Rudak, Letter to Nathan Barnert, 23 May 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 20.

effects. Pershing reminded his division commanders of the importance of chaplains and appointed burial officers to properly burying the dead.¹¹³

The GRS received help from the YMCA, the Knights of Columbus, and various relief groups. The most systematic aid – and that which brought direct comfort to families of the dead – was from the American Red Cross.¹¹⁴ Additional to the service’s detailed burial work, the GRS established a photography section through the American Red Cross to provide another measure of comfort to families of the fallen. The American Red Cross assigned Captain Maurice B. Dix as the Director of Photography under Charles Pierce. Dix’s photographers operated in France, Belgium, Great Britain, Ireland, and Italy.

This group, consisting of twenty-five persons some of them expert photographers, and operating in all the countries of Europe where American troops had been stationed, functioned as a Department of the Graves Registration Service, under the immediate direction of the Chief. Its work consisted of photographing individual graves and of replying to correspondence with stricken homes regarding requests for photographs and other favors.¹¹⁵

Over the course of several months, these men methodically photographed every registered grave in the above-mentioned countries. Echoing Pierce’s consistent theme, no special consideration was granted to any requestor with regards to “priority, precedence, or favoritism,” even processing all film and dispatching it from the Bureau of Communications at the Red Cross’s Washington, D. C. headquarters rather than sending photos directly from Europe to the decedent’s family.¹¹⁶ Charles Pierce composed a form letter to acknowledge receipt of such requests, but also to set expectations for families that they would receive their photo in due

¹¹³ Chief of Staff, Memorandum to CGs, AEF divisions, 31 August 1918, NARA, RG 120, AG File, Box 159.

¹¹⁴ GRS Lecture, “Transportation of the Graves Registration Service,” 1922, 4. AHEC, UB 396.3 T72.

¹¹⁵ QMC, *The Work of the American Graves Registration Service: 1917-1936*, (Washington: GPO, 1943), 4.

¹¹⁶ Maurice Dix, “GRS .004.5: Photography of Graves, American Expeditionary Force, Scott Kraska Collection.

time.¹¹⁷

An early 1919 newspaper article explained the Red Cross photography effort and the photographs “beautifully mounted in a cardboard folding frame with the seal of the United States in gold and containing data concerning the dead hero” being dispatched by the Red Cross to bereaved homes through the United States [see page 408].¹¹⁸ The article further intimated that “These little tokens will probably be the last and only mementos of near and dear who died.... For a feeling is growing that instead of attempting to return the bodies of soldiers as the army officials promised... they who died and were buried in foreign lands should be allowed to rest there...”¹¹⁹

As the campaign in France continued through the summer and into early fall of 1918, more families in the United States received casualty telegrams and subsequent letters from Charles Pierce. Relatives asked many questions of the GRS regarding identification, burial, and memorialization of the dead. In an effort to stem the tide of information requests from the United States deluging the GRS Headquarters, Pierce wrote an information paper titled “Information for the Friends of Our Dead” in late 1918 aimed to answer the most frequently asked questions of his command. The paper addressed why flowers should not be sent, that no permanent monuments will be erected until after the war, and disinterment operations will occur at that time as well. Pierce acknowledged photographs would eventually be taken of all graves as time and battle conditions permitted. Perhaps most important to those friends and relatives of the dead, Pierce addressed why communication from the GRS was sometimes slow due to

¹¹⁷ Charles Pierce, “GRS Form 3: Photographs, Scott Kraska Collection.

¹¹⁸ See Appendix H: Red Cross Photo Example, Scott Kraska Collection.

¹¹⁹ “Photo of Soldiers’ Grave Sent to Next of Kin,” *Tulare Advance-Register* (Ca.), 19 March 1919.

wartime exigencies.¹²⁰

The fluidity of the final weeks of the war necessitated that the needs of the living outpace those of the dead in the eyes of military commanders. During the great Meuse-Argonne Offensive in the fall of 1918, Graves Registration units followed the fighting to collect, identify, rebury, and mark graves, but could not keep up with the staggering casualty rate.¹²¹ The results would manifest themselves in November and December as GRS units returned to the areas covered by the great offensive. One GRS member noted that in some places, “most of the burials were made in shell holes and trenches, and, in some cases, not more than 12 inches of dirt placed over the bodies.”¹²² A grim report from a GRS unit working to locate members of the 370th Infantry in an area where the regiment fought with a French division illustrated the difficulties modern war imposed upon those tasked with finding the dead. After finding twenty three of the forty bodies believed to be buried in the area, a GRS officer noted that “it is extremely doubtful whether all will be located, as the country is in such an impossible condition that a man buried without a marker, as many are found to be, makes it almost necessary to investigate by digging acres of shell-torn ground.”¹²³

Elsewhere, one GRS unit uncovered ten Americans buried in a machine gun emplacement trench, with the identification tags fastened to one stake at the end of the trench.

¹²⁰ Charles Pierce, “Information for the Friends of Our Dead,” 1 November 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 27. The undated form does not provide any clues as to its original publication. A copy was donated to the Edward Jones Research Center in Kansas City, MO along with a letter from the GRS to the family of a soldier who died in October of 1918. (Edward Jones Research Center documents 2006.144.3 and 2006.144.4).

¹²¹ Report of Activities through 12 October 1918, Army Service of Supply, 15 October 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 1.

¹²² Report of Activities for the period ending 10 December 1918, Army Service of Supply, 10 December 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 1.

¹²³ Report of Activities for the period ending 20 December 1918, Army Service of Supply, 21 December 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 1.

Amazingly, the GRS disinterred and identified each body before properly burying the group in individually marked graves.¹²⁴ Such hasty burials resulted from the fierce, fluid fighting during the closing months of the war on the Western Front. Pierce understood the nature of war and knew that hasty burials or unburied dead awaited his men as they scoured the countryside. One thing Pierce would not tolerate was dereliction of duty. He issued instructions to “guard against the possibility of leaving any unburied dead upon the field,” writing, “while the GRS is not responsible for the burial of the dead, it is incomprehensible that GRS personnel should leave unburied and unregistered bodies which may be discovered in the progress of their search of battlefields.”¹²⁵

The AEF divisions cannot be faulted for poor burial efforts without context. Twenty-Seventh Division Commanding General John F. O’Ryan reflected in his division’s history that “The saddest and most difficult work following a battle is the burial of the dead. This disagreeable duty comes at a time when officers and men are exhausted by nervous strain and lack of sleep.” Because most of the dead lie in areas still in range of enemy fire, O’Ryan noted that,

... the burial parties worked in great danger as well as under extreme difficulties. The Divisional Burial Officer was 2d Lieutenant Summerfield S. Curtis. He was supplied with details of men from each regiment for the conduct of his work. The chaplains were also pressed into service not only for the purpose of conducting appropriate religious ceremonies, but also to aid in the work of identification of bodies and making authentic record of their interment. Search of the fields, dugouts, and trenches was systematically made by squads assigned to particular areas. The contents of the clothing were secured, placed in sacks, sealed and properly tagged for shipment to the Effects Bureau in the Service of Supply. The bodies were then carried on litters to the nearest road, where they were laid along the edge of the road awaiting removal by limbers and wagons to cemeteries which had been established at St. Emilie, Ronssoy, Bony, and other points in

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ GRS Bulletin no. 18, “GRS and the Care of Unburied Dead,” 18 November 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 27.

the vicinity.¹²⁶

Simultaneous to the Meuse-Argonne Offensive in October of 1918, another historic occurrence stressed the GRS to the limit. The influenza epidemic caused a spike in non-combat deaths, particularly on the cramped troop ships crossing the Atlantic. One coastal cemetery buried 1,566 soldiers in the month of October – over 1,200 in a fifteen-day span. One transport arrived and subsequently disembarked 400 dead bodies in addition to its live cargo. The rash of bodies compelled the GRS to hastily dig burial trenches instead of individual graves. After the coffin supply became exhausted around field hospitals, the GRS buried 465 sets of remains in shrouds while 240 bodies were buried in the remaining caskets.¹²⁷

In November 1917, 1st Division men Enright, Hay, and Gresham became the first American soldiers to die at the front. As the war neared its end some doughboy was destined to become the last. That unfortunate honor fell to Henry N. Gunther from A Company of the 313th Infantry near Chaumont, France. Shortly before 1100 hours on 11 November, Gunther inexplicably rose from the safety of his trench to charge the German line. As Gunther began his lone assault, the Germans did not fire upon him. Rather, they attempted to wave him back and yelled in broken English that war was almost over. Gunther disregarded their advice and continued his advance, shooting his Browning Automatic Rifle at the Germans.¹²⁸ Gunther's continued actions compelled the Germans to fire upon Gunther, striking him about the head and heart.¹²⁹ Gunther fell in no-man's land at 1059 hours.

Seconds later the very Germans who fired on Gunther rushed out with a stretcher and

¹²⁶ John F. O'Ryan, *The Story of the 27th Division*, (New York: Wynkoop Hallenbeck Crawford Co., 1921), 334.

¹²⁷ US Quartermaster School, *Operations of the Quartermaster Corps, US Army During the World War*, (Washington: GPO, 1929), 107.

¹²⁸ James M. Cain, "Died to Prove Loyalty," *Baltimore Sun*, 16 March 1919.

¹²⁹ Grave Location Blank of Henry Gunther, 11 November 1918, in Burial File of Henry Gunther, NPRC.

hustled his body toward the American lines. The Germans explained that Gunther's actions left them little choice but to shoot lest they themselves be killed. The Germans and Americans shook hands before the former returned to their lines, having left Gunther's remains with his comrades.¹³⁰ Gunther was buried near Chaumont before the sun set on the 11th of November.¹³¹ Pershing's subsequent "Order of the Day" cited Gunther as the last AEF man to fall in combat.¹³²

The culmination of American efforts in France occurred on 11 November 1918 with the signing of the Armistice. The world celebrated the end of the four-year struggle, but some soldiers were not in the mood for celebration. The number of deaths incurred by the AEF's divisions hung like a cloud over the Doughboys who survived 1918. Father Duffy wrote, "I had always believed that the news of victory and peace would fill me with surging feelings of delight. But it was just the contrary," he continued, "... I knew that in New York and in every city at home and throughout the world, men were jubilant at the prospects of peace. But I could think of nothing except the fine lads who are not alive to enjoy the triumph. All day I had a lonely and aching heart. It would be a lesser thing to have been killed myself than to go back to the mothers of the dead who would never more return."¹³³ The nation would eventually turn its attention to these men, their families, and determining the final resting place for the military fallen.

While some members of the AEF remained behind as members of the Army of Occupation, most of the AEF returned to the United States. Father Duffy returned to the United States in early 1919 with the 42nd Division. Before departing France, Duffy recorded the last

¹³⁰ James M. Cain, "Died to Prove Loyalty," *Baltimore Sun*, 16 March 1919.

¹³¹ Grave Location Blank of Henry Gunther, 11 November 1918, in Burial File of Henry Gunther, NPRC.

¹³² Joseph E. Persico, *Eleventh Month, Eleventh Day, Eleventh Hour: Armistice Day, 1918: World War I and its Violent Climax*, (New York: Random House, 2004), 351.

¹³³ Duffy, *Father Duffy's Story*, 304.

task he performed: “My duties, like my feelings, still lay in the past. With men from all the companies I went round the battlefield to pay as far as I could my last duties to the dead, to record and in a rough way beautify their lonely graves, for I knew that soon we would leave this place that their presence hallows, and never look upon it again.”¹³⁴ While many soldiers probably felt the same sentiment as Father Duffy toward leaving their buddies buried overseas as they returned home, the GRS remained in France to care for them until their final burial whether that was at home in America or abroad. However, the question of the dead’s final disposition was not to be resolved quickly.

Almost immediately following the Armistice, the GRS poised itself to undertake its most immense operation since its inception: “to recheck graves registration throughout the theater of operations.”¹³⁵ To accomplish this work thoroughly, the GRS could not operate in a vacuum. One organization it cooperated with was the Quartermaster Salvage Service, which sought to repurpose discarded equipment. Pierce issued instructions to GRS units ordering them to turn any Army property found during the course of operations over to the Salvage Service for disposal. An agreement allowed for “bayonets, rifles, helmets, etc. used as temporary grave markers to remain until replaced by regular GRS grave markers.... [see page 410]”¹³⁶ Indeed, the ubiquitous nature of rifles and helmets made them likely tools for makeshift grave markers. Their distinctive shapes particularly helped lead GRS personnel to isolated graves during their sweeps [see page 412].¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Duffy, *Father Duffy's Story*, 305.

¹³⁵ Report of Activities from 11 November to 20 November 1918, Army Service of Supply, 22 November 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 1.

¹³⁶ GRS Bulletin no. 14, “Cooperation with Salvage Service,” 11 November 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 27. See Appendix I: Ad Hoc Grave Marker, Scott Kraska Collection.

¹³⁷ See Appendix J: Temporary Grave Markers, Scott Kraska Collection. Note both markers have an identification tag affixed.

Rechecks and the concentration of the temporary cemeteries proved essential to establishing identifications and correcting work done in the haste in combat. According to a QMC history, numerous examples emerged of problems that required attention:

When it came to disinterring the bodies from these graves to bring them to the cemeteries it was often found that a grave marked with the name of John Jones contained the body of James Brown and vice versa. In one plot marked on the diagram as containing 'three bodies, one identified and two not identified,' eleven bodies were found, and every man of them was identified. In another supposed to contain two unidentified bodies, both were readily identified by tags still around their neck.¹³⁸

The fate and subsequent burial of downed aviators proved particularly difficult to ascertain because the crash usually occurred behind enemy lines. After Lieutenant Jay Carpenter's aircraft went down on 11 June 1918, his commanding officer advised his family that unless they received word that Jay was a prisoner, not much hope existed that he was alive. In November, word finally arrived through the Red Cross that a French soldier found Carpenter's body on 12 June. Finding his identification tag and a card directing notification to his mother allowed the French to dispatch word of Carpenter's fate to his family.¹³⁹

Change of Repatriation Policy, Change in Repatriation Plans

In early December 1918, columnist Frederic Haskins wrote about the planned return of all soldier dead, "This order suggests in itself that it must have been issued without a careful preliminary consideration of what it might involve. It is known to have been issued in response to a popular demand for the return of the remains of the slain to this country." Haskins argued against repatriation: "there are great practical difficulties in the way of bringing back the remains of the slain. For another, they are not buried here and there in France in scattered and untended

¹³⁸ US Quartermaster School, *Operations of the Quartermaster Corps, US Army During the World War*, (Washington: GPO, 1929), 104.

¹³⁹ Haug, *Gold Star Mothers*, 35.

graves.” Haskins described the organization of the GRS and its work in France to locate, identify, and bury the dead in France and referred to the circulating photos of the well-tended temporary cemeteries in Europe. Haskins detailed the GRS’s addition of identification and religious preferences to the graves but noted that wartime necessity prohibited the organization’s ability to embalm the dead or use caskets for burials. Haskins cited these reasons and projected cost to advocate for the burial of the dead in Europe.¹⁴⁰ Unbeknownst to Haskins, his article was syndicated in newspapers across the United States just days before the War Department announced a significant shift to its policies regarding the AEF dead.

On 17 December 1918, newspapers around the country alerted the war dead’s next of kin that the War Department would soon solicit their input as to the final disposition of the soldier dead. Relatives now possessed three options: the body would remain buried in its current location in Europe, be returned to the United States for burial in a national cemetery, or be repatriated and interred in a local cemetery. Families were warned that if no reply was received, their soldier’s remains would automatically be returned to the United States and buried in the most convenient national cemetery.¹⁴¹ Unknown at the time was if the family selected burial in a national cemetery, was whether they chose the national cemetery or it that was left to the War Department.¹⁴² One article noted that if relatives desired the first option, they should notify the War Department in “the example of Col. And Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt.”¹⁴³ This line was not an accident, but rather a signal that the War Department’s policy had significantly changed.

The death of one American flyer in the summer of 1918 succeeded in altering America’s

¹⁴⁰ Frederic J. Haskin, “The American Dead,” *Butte Miner* (Mt.), 13 December 1918 (All quotes).

¹⁴¹ “Bodies of Ohio Heroes May be Sent Home,” *Dayton Daily News* (Oh.), 17 December 1918.

¹⁴² “The Bodies,” the *Lancaster Eagle-Gazette* (Oh.), 12 December 1918.

¹⁴³ “Parents May Choose Heroes’ Burial Place,” *South Bend Tribune* (In.), 5 December 1918.

repatriation policy. Lieutenant Quentin Roosevelt was shot down on 14 July 1918 behind German lines.¹⁴⁴ His death probably would not have gained national prominence had Roosevelt not been the son of former President Theodore Roosevelt. Because the downed airman possessed the name Roosevelt, much became known of the aerial encounter that caused his death.

On 14 July 1918, twelve American planes fought seven German planes above the Marne. Quentin Roosevelt and a German non-commissioned officer named Greper engaged in an extended dogfight.¹⁴⁵ Greper eventually bested his adversary and brought him down somewhere near the town of Chamery.¹⁴⁶ Germans later approached the wreckage with the pilot lying nearby. The American airman died from two bullet wounds to the head. Upon searching his body, the Germans learned their victim was Lieutenant Quentin Roosevelt, son of the former American president. The Germans, out of respect for President Roosevelt and their Kaiser's admiration for the same, buried Quentin in a field outside of Chamery [see pages 414-416].¹⁴⁷ Using pieces of his plane's wreckage, the German soldiers created a makeshift memorial around the gravesite. They erected a cross bearing the inscription, "First Lieutenant Quentin Roosevelt, buried by the Germans, July the Fourteenth, 1918."¹⁴⁸ Pershing sent details of Quentin's gravesite along with some photographs directly to President Roosevelt.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ Certificate of Memory for Quentin Roosevelt. Roosevelt Library, Oyster Bay, NY.

¹⁴⁵ Information Sheet 10 (translated German report), 24 July 1918, Roosevelt Library, Oyster Bay, NY.

¹⁴⁶ George Gibbs, Memorandum to the Secretary, General Staff, 19 August 1918, Roosevelt Library, Oyster Bay, NY.

¹⁴⁷ Lawrence Stallings, *The Doughboys: The Story of the AEF, 1917-1918*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 117-118; See Appendix K: Quentin Roosevelt Crash Site and Temporary Grave Marker, National Air and Space Museum (NASM-9A13640, NASM-9A13631, NASM 82-5763) and Roosevelt Library, Oyster Bay, NY.

¹⁴⁸ Herbert Bailey, "Lt. Q. Roosevelt's Grave," *Daily Mail*, 8 August 1918, Roosevelt Library, Oyster Bay, NY.

¹⁴⁹ John Pershing, letter to President Theodore Roosevelt, 23 August 1918, Roosevelt Library, Oyster Bay, NY.

Quentin Roosevelt's death, and his connection to Theodore Roosevelt, inspired many soldiers to stop and pay respects at his grave. Father Francis Duffy recalled the sentiment of being nearby following the regiment's assault on the Croix-Rouge Farm near Seringes-et-Nesles, France:

We knew that Lieutenant Roosevelt had met his death in this sector, and our colonel had instituted inquiries to find if any person had discovered his grave. Word was brought to him that the grave had been found in the sector to our right, which was occupied by the 32nd Division, and Colonel McCoy determined to have it suitably marked. I had a cross made and inscribed... [and] went by automobile to the place to erect it over the grave. We found the roughly made cross formed from pieces of his broken plane that the Germans had set to mark the place where they buried him. The plot had already been ornamented with a rustic fence by the soldiers of the 32nd Division. We erected our own little monument without molesting the one that had been left by the Germans. It is fitting that friend and enemy alike should pay tribute to heroism.¹⁵⁰

Similar to other grieving parents, the Roosevelts received assurance that Quentin's remains would be returned to the United States following the end of the war. However, the Roosevelt's did not wish for Quentin's remains to leave their original burial spot. In a letter to General Peyton March, President Roosevelt wrote,

Mrs. Roosevelt and I wish to enter a most respectful but emphatic protest against the proposed course as far as our son Quentin is concerned. We have always believed that 'Wherever the tree falls there let it lie.' We know that many good persons feel entirely different, but to us it is painful and harrowingly long after death to move the poor body from which the soul fled. We greatly prefer that Quentin shall continue to lie on the spot where he fell in battle and where the foe buried him. After the war Mrs. Roosevelt and I intend to visit the grave and erect a small stone saying that it has been erected by us but we shall not disturb the stone already erected by his friends and comrades in arms.¹⁵¹

Roosevelt's plea put the GRS, and by extension the Army along with the Wilson administration in a difficult position. The precedent for the United States to repatriate all of its

¹⁵⁰ Duffy, *Father Duffy's Story*, 223.

¹⁵¹ "Colonel Roosevelt Coming to Visit Quentin's Grave," undated newspaper clipping in Burial File of Quentin Roosevelt, NPRC; State of New York, *New York Legislative Documents, 1919*, (Albany: J.B. Lyon Co., 1919), 329; "Where a Tree Falls," *Eureka Herald*, 5 December 1918, 2.

dead had been in place for twenty years, and the GRS steadily notified the next of kin of its soldier dead that all bodies would be repatriated following the end of the war. Conversely, the GRS refused any exceptions to the repatriation policy going back to the requests made following Thomas Enright's death, indicating an unwillingness to break from policy. If it accepted President Roosevelt's wishes, not only would the GRS demonstrate favoritism to the wishes of politically connected individuals, but subsequently could face a deluge of families wishing to emulate the Roosevelt's request. Should such a scenario unfold, the GRS would need to quickly design a plan to bury and care for the dead remaining in France. Likewise, the American government would have a diplomatic tight rope to walk in explaining to the French why only some American soldier dead remained in France while the rest returned to the United States.

Perhaps prompted by his correspondence with President Roosevelt, Pierce formulated a memorandum for the Chief Quartermaster to reconsider its total repatriation policy. In his memorandum, Pierce acknowledged that present policy called for all bodies to return to the United States following the war and recognized many people within the United States wanted such action to occur. Pierce also noted a strong desire by many Americans both in the United States and soldiers serving in France for permanent burials in France. Pierce therefore recommended the GRS retain the American cemetery located outside of Suresnes, Paris, as the interment site for all unclaimed bodies as well as those whose relatives desired to leave them in France. Pierce envisioned that "this spot may soon become a shrine for those crowds of appreciative Americans who are eager to visit France for nearer view of battlefields where ideals were made real, and on which men, whose crosses mark this modern Calvary, became new Saviors of the world."¹⁵² Army Chief of Staff General Peyton March replied to Roosevelt's

¹⁵² "Our Heroic Dead in France," *Army and Navy Register*, 11 January 1919, 38.

request, “In view of your desire; with which I am in sympathy, I am sending an order to General Pershing to carry out your wishes and *giving him authority to take the same action regarding the body of any other soldier whose relatives desire the same course to be followed.*”¹⁵³ March’s order effectively cleared the way for the eventual creation of permanent American cemeteries overseas.

Before the public and international outcry regarding the disposition of the war dead, the Army viewed the question of repatriation as a legal issue. The AEF’s Judge Advocate General (JAG)’s office produced a two-page document detailing some of the legal problems pertaining to the burial of the soldier dead. The JAG noted that while the government effectively promised the repatriation of the dead after the war, that assurance was made to the families of the dead. Resultantly, if families followed the potential precedent set by President Roosevelt and wished their decedent’s body would remain in France, no legal objection would arise from the United States. The War Department officially changed its policy on 20 October 1918 to leave soldiers buried in France if specifically requested by their next of kin. The policy was later modified to return to the United States only those remains requested by a soldier’s family. The War Department later acknowledged in communications, that the genesis for this policy change being the case of Quentin Roosevelt.¹⁵⁴

The War Department’s unilateral decision to allow soldier dead to remain buried overseas would ultimately cause several headaches for itself, the American government at large, and the GRS left to execute the directions of its civilian authorities. By January 1919 nearly 20,000 families had followed Roosevelt’s example and asked that their soldier dead be buried

¹⁵³ “Colonel Roosevelt Coming to Visit Quentin’s Grave,” undated newspaper clipping in Burial File of Quentin Roosevelt, NPRC.

¹⁵⁴ Sec. of War John W. Weeks, letter to Ralph W. Cram, 19 July 1921, in Burial File of Merle Hay, NPRC.

overseas.¹⁵⁵ By creating options for families, the revised policy caused internal struggles between those who had strong opinions for or against repatriation. One man wrote the Secretary of War expressing his belief 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.... My sympathies are with the men in power.”¹⁵⁶ This man’s foreboding statement would prove true over the next eighteen months.

Indeed, the War Department faced many difficult decisions; one immediate example in 1918 being what to do with remains for which no relatives could be found or if the Army received no communication regarding final disposition. The Judge Advocate General opined that while the government could legally either retain those bodies in France or return them to the United States, it should, in accordance with the promises noted, execute the latter. Regarding American cemeteries in France, the JAG outlined three courses of action: first, the United States could acquire under the 1915 French law appropriate tracts of land similar to the cemetery established in Mexico City in 1845. Second, the United States could acquire the necessary land, but leave it under the supervision of French authorities, or third, let the French acquire the appropriate land and maintain the cemeteries in perpetuity. The JAG acknowledged that the ultimate decision for the appropriate course of action would be “one of policy and sentiment.”¹⁵⁷

On 17 November 1918, a War Department circular stated that “all of America’s soldier and sailor dead will be returned from the battlefields and hospital cemeteries of France at the expense of the Federal Government in 1920. This is concretely the plan of the War and Navy

¹⁵⁵ Harris, Cable to General Pershing, 21 December 1918, NARA, RG 200 (Pershing File), Entry 19, Box 5; Newton Baker, War Department Press Release, 17 January 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 8.

¹⁵⁶ H. H. Hewlingo, Letter to the Secretary of War, 8 October 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 3. Underline exists in original letter.

¹⁵⁷ W.A. Bethel, letter to the Army G-2, NARA, RG 120, Entry 594, Box 22.

departments, which will act in concert.”¹⁵⁸ The Armistice afforded GRS units to move relatively uninhibited throughout the countryside to begin locating and registering gravesites.

Concurrently, American field units used the time to bury their dead resulting from the final offensives. One GRS lieutenant happened upon ongoing burials from the 81st “Wildcat”

Division and was aghast at the lackluster practices of the burial teams:

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.¹⁵⁹

Throughout the course of a week, this unlucky lieutenant moved on to other areas of the battlefield, and continually encountered problematic burials. His report cited the disinterment of nine graves because the burial party neglected to place markers over the sites. Elsewhere, he and his work party labored to rectify the disorganized burials of approximately 175 soldiers interred in shell holes and trenches with no more than twelve inches of dirt covering the remains. The lieutenant found another site with graves spaced “two feet apart while others do not have enough space to erect crosses.”¹⁶⁰ Assuming that this lieutenant’s experience was not the sole exception to otherwise perfect burial practices by the AEF, his report demonstrated how much toil awaited the GRS as it moved into the battle area to find and consolidate the war dead across the American sector.

Less than one month following the Armistice, Marshal Philippe Pétain, Commander in

¹⁵⁸ State of New York, *New York Legislative Documents, 1919*, (Albany: J.B. Lyon Co., 1919), 326.

¹⁵⁹ C.J. Lennox, Extract of Report to 1st Army GRS Officer, 22 November 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14.

¹⁶⁰ C.J. Lennox, Extract of Report to 1st Army GRS Officer, 22 November 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14.

Chief of the French Army, wrote General Pershing regarding the permanency of American graves on French soil:

In order to make live forever the union of two peoples, who, for the second time, have just fought together for liberty, it is necessary to perpetuate the veneration of those who have died for this noble cause. France would be happy and proud to retain the bodies of the noble American victims who have fallen upon her soil. She will take the same care of their tombs as of those of her own children. Thus I have the honor to request whether you are willing to ask your government to leave in France the bodies of the American soldiers killed by the enemy or who have died in the hospitals, count being taken, naturally of the wishes expressed by their families. Provided this proposal conform with your intentions, I should request you to inform me of the localities which should be suitable for installation of American cemeteries, where you could group scattered tombs. These places might preferably be chosen near the localities where your soldiers especially distinguished themselves, as for example: Cantigny, le Bois Belleau, Château-Thierry, St. Mihiel, Varennes, Buzancy, and others still, which you might judge proper to indicate to me. If you will give me your opinion, I shall willingly become your interpreter to the French Government in order that you may obtain the necessary ground.¹⁶¹

Concurrent to Pétain's letter, some in the United States began questioning the efficacy of repatriation. The noted op-ed by Frederic J. Haskin had appeared in newspaper syndication in December 1918. Haskin acknowledged that the idea of repatriation was supposedly settled with the War Department's July circular, but argued that the sentiment surrounding Roosevelt's letter to the Secretary of War was more widely spread than realized. Haskin believed, and so described in his piece, that the costs of repatriating the war dead, estimated at over \$50 million for approximately 75,000 bodies, far outweighed the sentimental benefits. In addition, he cited the immense task already undertaken by the GRS to identify, mark according to religious preference, and consolidate the dead into picturesque cemeteries. Haskin cautioned that if the dead were brought back, the condition of the bodies would not meet the expectation of a 1920 funeral. Haskin summarized his anti-repatriation stance by stating that "all of these facts have been advanced as reasons why the relatives of American soldiers who fell in France should be

¹⁶¹ Phillipe Pétain, Letter to John Pershing, 5 December 1918, NARA, RG 120, Entry 594, Box 22.

content to allow their remains to stay in the soil of the country for which, as well as for their own, they died.”¹⁶² Haskin’s words comprised the opening salvo in a year-long public battle over the war dead.

Regardless of the emerging conversation on the final disposition of the war dead, a considerable job remained in Europe. As the GRS moved into Germany with the Army of Occupation, it found necessary the establishment of additional temporary cemeteries even though the war was over. These arrangements enabled the concentration, marking, and care for graves of soldiers who died while in German captivity during the war as well as those who died from other causes during the opening weeks of occupation.¹⁶³ As the occupation continued, GRS officials discovered additional isolated American graves and concentrated those to the established temporary cemeteries.¹⁶⁴

As 1918 turned to 1919, the GRS continued its efforts to locate previously unmarked bodies and concentrate its vast number of cemeteries. The primary purpose was to find and exhume isolated graves to decrease the possibility of a location becoming forgotten as well as to make maintenance and accountability simpler. The isolated graves in greatest danger were those established in low ground where flooding was likely to destroy identification or graves located in dense forests that easily swallowed up gravesites and yielded little clues to casual searchers.¹⁶⁵ In January 1919, the GRS focused the entirety of its personnel to registering and re-checking graves for accuracy. As the GRS received its units from the 1st and 2nd Armies, it reassigned those personnel back to the areas where they previously served and possessed the best

¹⁶² Frederic Haskin, “The American Dead,” *Butte Miner* (Mt.), 13 December 1918.

¹⁶³ Report of Activities from 20 December 1918 to 31 December 1918, Army Service of Supply, 3 January 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 1.

¹⁶⁴ Chief, GRS, letter to Chief Quartermaster, AEF, 10 May 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 1.

¹⁶⁵ GRS Lecture, “Transportation of the Graves Registration Service,” 1922, 4-5. AHEC, UB 396.3 T72.

knowledge. Each GRS unit received 100 labor troops to cover 64 square kilometers where fighting previously took place. Orders called for the units to put twenty men in skirmish lines with 50-meter intervals over a 1-kilometer front. Each section contained enough personnel to cover an 8-kilometer front, which allowed for all 64 kilometers to be completely covered in a single day.¹⁶⁶

As the GRS registered more graves and continued to comb the battlefields, Pershing remained frustrated with one statistic: the number of missing. War Department records listed 72,951 dead and 7,738 as missing in action while GRS records contained only 40,000 located gravesites. While Pershing realized the GRS was constantly endeavoring to reduce the number of unaccounted bodies, he surmised the AEF divisions certainly could assist in communication. In January 1919, he wrote:

I find constant complaints about the missing. This... shows possible defect in the system in vogue in the Medical Corps. In this connection, representatives from each Division should continue to search for the missing, even to going over the battlefields again with necessary assistants from the Burial Corps; and there should be an exchange of information among these various units. For instance, if the 42d Division detail should find some men of the 37th Division, a report should be made to the 37th Division to that effect. Please do whatever is necessary to carry this out.¹⁶⁷

Pershing's directive nested with his original general order assigning commanders the responsibility for initial burials of their war dead.

Concurrent to GRS efforts overseas in early 1919, a new organization formed in the United States seeking to raise fifteen million dollars for the construction of a national cemetery called the 'American Field of Honor' in France. The founders of the American Field of Honor Association (AFHA), which included former president William H. Taft, American Federation of

¹⁶⁶ Report of Activities for the period ending 10 January 1919, Army Service of Supply, 11 January 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 1.

¹⁶⁷ John Pershing, Memorandum to the Chief of Staff, 27 January 1919, NARA, RG 120, AG File, Box 651.

Labor president Samuel Gompers, and former senior most AEF chaplain Charles H. Brent, argued for the consolidation of all American dead into a single cemetery spread over 500 acres.¹⁶⁸ Ultimately, the AFHA envisioned this cemetery becoming “America’s great monument to our dead,” because “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.”¹⁶⁹ This proposed cemetery would hold the remains of every Great War American soldier dead and be permanently garrisoned by a company or more of American soldiers.

The AFHA’s proposal declared “it will be the one hallowed ground in all Europe to the people of America, because it will hold the bodies of the republic’s heroic sons who gave their all in defense of the nation’s honor and life and for the liberties of the world.” The proposal continued, “No father or mother who knows his boy sleeps in a place of beauty under the care of his government, which will never neglect the cause for which he died nor the grave in which he lies, will regret the inability of the government to bring back the body. For this Field of Honor will be a perpetual reminder to all the world of the debt it owes to the service of the men who made the supreme sacrifice.”¹⁷⁰ The incorporators of the organization envisioned “to remove all semblance of the cemetery idea. There would not be the usual tombstones and no rivalry between states or divisions. Burial plots would be arranged by states marked by appropriate arches. Each grave would be marked by a simple marker with the initials of the sleeping hero.”¹⁷¹ The AFHA envisioned that the cemetery selected “should be for its natural beauty, away from the battle area and near enough to Paris to be accessible... large enough to permit the

¹⁶⁸ Kurt Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way* (Washington: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1995), 95.

¹⁶⁹ William E. Bailey, Letter to Hon. F. F. Kepple, 14 May 1919, NARA, RG 92; Piehler, *Remembering War*, 95

¹⁷⁰ “Shrine in France for American Dead,” *Evening Sun* (Baltimore), 24 January 1919.

¹⁷¹ “American Field of Honor Association Memorial in France,” *Times Dispatch* (Richmond, VA), 24 January 1919.

bodies of all the fallen heroes to be buried there by divisions and without the crowing effect of the usual military cemetery... and where every 11th of November... memorial services could be held.”¹⁷²

The catalyst for the AFHA’s efforts is unknown, but the idea of a consolidated American cemetery resonated with some. Even the Army’s Quartermaster General favored concentrating the American dead at Suresnes outside of Paris with a highway connecting the cemetery to the French capital.¹⁷³ Early proposals also included the Belleau Wood area to become the location for a national cemetery due to the heavy 1918 fighting in its vicinity and its proximity to Quentin Roosevelt’s gravesite.¹⁷⁴ The American Legion also supported the Field of Honor concept. During its founding convention in Minneapolis, the Legion passed a resolution stating the organization’s belief that the dead should remain buried overseas unless specifically requested by the soldier’s family. The Legion further stated that it viewed any future burial grounds in Europe “as a fitting memorial of America’s unselfish service to humanity.”¹⁷⁵

One columnist opined in early 1919 that “...a feeling is growing that instead of attempting to return the bodies of soldiers as the army officials promised at first, that they who died in foreign lands should be allowed to rest there as a tremendous and lasting symbol this union of blood and soil of the great alliance that fought to victory.”¹⁷⁶ Congress, while generally supporting repatriation but acknowledging the surge in desire to leave bodies overseas following Quentin Roosevelt’s example, introduced a bill to create a Field of Honor for all remains that

¹⁷² “Field of Honor for Iowa Heroes,” *Evening Times-Republican* (Marshalltown, IA), 6 February 1919.

¹⁷³ The Quartermaster General, Letter to the Adjutant General, 1 March 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 19.

¹⁷⁴ “Belleau Wood a Roosevelt Memorial,” *Burlington Daily News* (Vt.), 1 March 1919.

¹⁷⁵ Ralph Hayes, *A Report to the Secretary of War on American Military Dead Overseas*, (Washington: GPO, 1920), 23.

¹⁷⁶ Carolyn Vance, Bell, “Graves of US Soldiers are Photographed,” *Bismarck Tribune* (ND), 14 March 1919.

would stay in Europe.¹⁷⁷ The War Department countered the proposal for a single Field of Honor with one that envisioned dispersed cemeteries generally following the AEF's trek across Europe which allowed the soldier dead to be interred closer to where they originally fell. With the War Department possessing requests for only thirty-one percent (19,499) of bodies to remain buried overseas as of January 1919, however, a fight was sure to erupt if the government opted against its promise of repatriation or if other diplomatic forces sought to disrupt such efforts to return the dead.¹⁷⁸

This fight would occur because Americans did not agree on the war dead's ultimate disposition. While Roosevelt's quote stirred sentiment for leaving all bodies in France, many wanted the government to uphold its promise to repatriate. Lena Gunther, mother of Henry Gunther, wrote: "As the Government has taken our boys what have died in France, it should see to it that their remains are brought back. We mothers did not give them to France or England. *Their bodies belong to us* and should be buried in the United States where they belong. This is the wish of mothers who have lost their loved ones. There is not one in fifty whose health would permit her to go over to visit the grave of her dear boy."¹⁷⁹ While the pro-repatriation camp did not yet possess a lobby equivalent to the AFHA, it would by year's end.

The same day the Quartermaster General laid out his plan for the Suresnes Cemetery Field of Honor, General Pershing sent a confidential cable warning that "Paris Temps publishes text of proposed law submitted to Chamber which if passed would prohibit for a period of three years the disinterment and transportation of bodies of officers and soldiers buried in France," and

¹⁷⁷ Newton Baker, Letter to the Secretary of the Interior, 12 February 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

¹⁷⁸ Webb Hayes, Memorandum to the Quartermaster General, Subject: Organization of an American Battlefield Commission to Mark the Places Where the American Soldiers Fell..., NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 19.

¹⁷⁹ "Letter to the Editor," *Baltimore Sun*, 17 February 1919.

cautioning:

proposed law also provides that disinterments necessitated by remaking cemeteries and assembling isolated graves will be made exclusively by French civil administration which it is feared will increase difficulties of preserving identification. It is believed that if any representations are to be made to the French Government they should be made now and through diplomatic rather than military channels.¹⁸⁰

Indeed, French law going back to 2 October 1917 forbade removal of bodies from the Zone of the Armies without permission granted by the French Minister of the Interior. This law's original intent was to prevent transportation space from being used to transport the dead rather than moving military equipment and troops. The United States government expressed its wishes to repatriate the American dead following the end of the war, early in 1918. The French responded that it soon "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."¹⁸¹ The United States renewed its request following the Armistice in hopes of starting the repatriation process immediately, but reports characterized the French as 'disinclined' to permit such action.¹⁸² America now possessed an answer from their French ally regarding the removal of the war dead, but it was hardly the one anticipated, much less desired.

While Pershing's 1 March 1919 memorandum startled many, this news should not have come as a big surprise to American officials. At least one week earlier, Pershing's chief of staff received a memorandum from the AEF's Judge Advocate regarding the possible passage of this law with the note, "the passage of this law by the French Chamber is fraught with so many

¹⁸⁰ John Pershing, Cable to the Chief of Staff and Secretary of War, 1 March 1919, NARA, RG 120, General Correspondence, Box 3692.

¹⁸¹ S. Pichon, Letter to Mr. Bliss, 25 August 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

¹⁸² Hayes, *Report to the Secretary of War*, 22.

possibilities of entanglement with American public opinion that I believe this matter should be referred to our civil authorities at once, with a view of their having a full understanding of the matter before it becomes law.”¹⁸³ Pershing’s Judge Advocate opined that “the question is a diplomatic one and not a military one. I am of the opinion, however, that we should invite the attention of the Washington authorities to the situation so that they may determine upon a course of action with knowledge of the impending legislation, which, if it becomes law, much increase the difficulty in obtaining... desired concessions from the French government.”¹⁸⁴

The Judge Advocate became very busy in early March 1919 not only examining the new French law prohibiting burials, but also the rights of the communes in which the GRS established new cemeteries throughout the country under the 1915 provisions. The JAG noted that “the law does not provide for the payment by the State of the legal communal charges for funerals and burials nor does it deprive the communes of the right to exact those charges in the case of every soldier within their respective jurisdiction.”¹⁸⁵ By 7 March, the JAG acknowledged that, “Under existing French law the right to disinter the bodies of our soldiers could be secured only by a modification of those laws, and attention is invited to proposed legislation published by Paris Temps about 1 March 1919, which would effectively close the door against any dispensation which our government must ask...”¹⁸⁶ Lawmakers and members of the public might have expressed surprise at this but to the men of the GRS, however, this law was just another example of working in France. Pétain had seemed to pledge after the Armistice that the French

¹⁸³ Deputy Chief of Staff, memorandum to the Chief of Staff, AEF, 24 February 1919, NARA, RG 120, Entry 594, Box 22.

¹⁸⁴ W.A. Bethel, Memorandum for the Chief of Staff, Subject: Disinterment of Soldiers, 24 February 1919, NARA, RG 120, Entry 594, Box 22.

¹⁸⁵ Judge Advocate’s Office, Memorandum for the Judge Advocate, 2 March 1918, NARA, RG 120, Entry 594, Box 22.

¹⁸⁶ Joseph Swan, Letter to W.A. Bethel, 7 March 1919, NARA, RG 120, Entry 594, Box 22.

government would see to the creation of war cemeteries for the American dead. But Pétain's energy and idealism was vitiated by the torpor of the French bureaucracy. A member of the Service of Supply (SOS) remarked, "If you have ever tried to do anything 'official' in France you can at once appreciate the tangle of red tape and the maze of complications into which we were plunged."¹⁸⁷ French bureaucracy would add another burden to the already burdensome work of the GRS in Europe.

The JAG's notes demonstrate the principal departure in the American experience with France in 1919 from that of Cuba and the Philippines a generation prior. Whereas the United States repatriated its war dead without challenge from a host-nation government after the Spanish-American War, it found itself having to negotiate with a sovereign nation in France in 1919. Precedent existed in War Department files that demonstrated the difficulty in navigating local laws pertaining to the dead going back to the bodies not released by Guam following the Spanish-American War. In 1917, a soldier stationed in Panama was struck by a passing train and was buried in that country. Later attempts to repatriate the body were stymied by the Panamanian government, which cited its local sanitary laws prohibiting disinterments for eighteen months following burial.¹⁸⁸ While this case was an isolated incident in 1917, a similar situation was developing in 1919 which potentially held hostage the remains of approximately 75,000 American boys from returning to their families. Further, if the GRS became forced to track interments by these year intervals, it would face a gargantuan task.

Around the same time France barred disinterment of American soldiers from its soil, the AEF concluded a study regarding the disposition of the war dead and the study's purpose was to

¹⁸⁷ Marcossou, *SOS*, 26-27.

¹⁸⁸ War Department Telegram, 16 December 1916, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 13.

research the interest of American citizens on the subject and conclude whether current government policy would be feasible and acceptable to its people. The study offered a remarkably accurate forecast of where the remains of the soldier dead would ultimately rest:

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.¹⁸⁹

While this estimate would ultimately prove accurate, the United States faced significant roadblocks to make it a reality. Soon after the French decree preventing the disinterment of American dead, former Attorney General Thomas W. Gregory, already performing duties as an advisor for President Wilson in France, acted as a special envoy to break the diplomatic deadlock over the war dead.¹⁹⁰ He failed. So began an almost year-long struggle over the disposition of the American war dead in France.

Regardless of diplomatic turbulence, the GRS possessed a full slate of tasks in France. From 1 to 10 March 1919, over 200 men worked to clear the cemetery at Fléville. Period documents demonstrate a GRS solely focused on the task of locating, identifying, and burying the war dead and do not reflect the socio-political occurrences unless they have direct correlation to the task or a change of orders. A major problem facing the group was that the cemetery, created under combat conditions, was established in low ground. Upon GRS personnel arriving

¹⁸⁹ H. B. Fiske, Memorandum for the Chief of Staff, AEF, Subject: Summary of a Study of Disposition of the AEF Dead, 6 March 1919, NARA, RG 120, General Headquarters AG File, Box 159.

¹⁹⁰ “Gregory Returns, Believes Treaty Will be Satisfactory,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 20 April 1919.

at the cemetery, they found the graves under four feet of water, necessitating construction of a five-foot dam around the plot to pump the water out. Despite the poor condition of the Fléville cemetery, the GRS ultimately identified thirty of the unknown remains buried during the concentration work.¹⁹¹ From 21 March to 31 March, Graves Registration soldiers recorded 564 new burials and identified 80 previously unknown sets of remains while clearing 6 cemeteries for return of the land to the French.¹⁹²

In March 1919, the GRS created initial plans for permanent cemeteries in France. The GRS worked from the French law of December 1915 that pledged to make land available in France for British war cemeteries but was extended to the Americans when they entered the war in 1917. The French land would be given to the United States once it designated its preferred burial sites. The GRS initially designated Romagne, which had been the epicenter of the bloody battle of the Meuse-Argonne, as a 26,000 grave American war cemetery. The GRS estimated it would fill half of those graves by the end of May. The GRS also developed initial plans for cemeteries at Beaumont and Thiaucourt that would also reach capacity by the end of May.

To assist the GRS in creating these burial sites, the Service received 4,000 men from labor battalions to conduct the concentration and burial efforts.¹⁹³ This released assigned GRS personnel to concentrate on their principal task of locating and identifying bodies, along registering graves. Concurrent to the tireless work of its field units, the GRS office in Paris answered 1113 requests for information regarding graves during the last week of March alone.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Report of Activities from 1 March to 10 March 1919, Army Service of Supply, 12 March 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 1.

¹⁹² Report of Activities from 21 March to 31 March 1919, Army Service of Supply, 2 April 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 1.

¹⁹³ Report of Activities for the period ending 10 March 1919, Army Service of Supply, 11 March 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 1.

¹⁹⁴ Report of Activities for the period ending 31 March 1919, Army Service of Supply, 1 April 1919, NARA, RG 92,

These figures provide insight into the simultaneous physical and administrative work conducted by the GRS.

While the French law of March 1919 prohibited disinterments of war dead for at least three years stopped the return of American soldier dead to the United States, the GRS was able to repatriate the personal effects of the fallen. Prior to World War I, the Army did not possess a system to collect, catalog, and return the personal effects of soldiers perishing on the battlefield. In conflicts past, return of these items to a soldier's next of kin was largely left to chance, meaning that it usually only occurred if a soldier's friend survived and was able to recover the deceased possessions and forward them. The Quartermaster Corps (QMC) established the Effects Bureau in 1917 to bring bureaucratic structure to a previously overlooked yet important part of the grieving process. Unlike with the disposition of his body, however, the soldier could select who would receive his personal effects upon death. Once recovered from the deceased soldier's person on the battlefield or from a rear area, the effects were inventoried, packaged, and forwarded to Base Section Number 1 if the death occurred on the Continent or Base Section Number 3 if in England. The QMC established an effects depot at St. Nazaire on 9 April 1918. Eleven months later the depot had received 40,000 packages bearing effects from AEF dead, deposited over \$520,000 in cash prior to disbursing checks to next of kin, and processed approximately 1,100 letters daily during that time in correspondence with families of the deceased.¹⁹⁵

From one of those points, the effects crossed the Atlantic to Hoboken, from where the QMC office distributed to the designees. The Bureau possessed six branches: Newport News,

Entry 1915, Box 1.

¹⁹⁵ Army Historical Division, *Reports of Commander in Chief, AEF*, (Washington: GPO, 1948), 100.

Va., Baltimore, Philadelphia, Hoboken, Boston, and Halifax to assist in distribution of the effects throughout the United States.¹⁹⁶ To provide an idea of the scale of the Effects Bureau's efforts: during the first week of March 1919, over twenty tons of material comprising the effects of untold thousands of soldiers had arrived in the United States for processing and disbursement.¹⁹⁷ Immeasurable was the comfort the personal items brought to the bereaved families of the soldier dead.

The GRS was not without its problems, or its troublemakers. A report from the 303rd Graves Registration Company noted a trend in its sector of having to rebury German dead who had been dug up, presumably to be looted. The 303rd's company commander ordered any man found committing such acts placed under arrest and brought to his headquarters; the officer wrote, "enlisted personnel are not the only malefactors in this dastardly practice. Efforts will be made to deliver for punishment the first persons apprehended."¹⁹⁸ A sergeant in the 303rd Graves Registration Company confirmed his commander's suspicion, mentioning that in a conversation with some sailors near Château-Thierry, two men confessed to digging up German remains in a search for souvenirs.¹⁹⁹ These obscure vignettes demonstrate a GRS that sought to preserve the sanctity of all dead, Allied or otherwise.

The continuing French prohibition of disinterments likewise did not deter U.S. officials from polling families of the dead to ascertain wishes in the event of a diplomatic breakthrough. During the month of March 1919, Adjutant General P. C. Harris dispatched letters to families of the American dead soliciting their desire with respect to the final disposition of their soldier

¹⁹⁶ State of New York, *New York Legislative Documents, 1919*, (Albany: J.B. Lyon Co., 1919), 325.

¹⁹⁷ "Slain Soldiers' Effects," *Burlington Free Press* (Vt.), 14 March 1919.

¹⁹⁸ I.G. Myers, Report to HQ, 304 Graves Registration, 29 March 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 1.

¹⁹⁹ Statement of QM Sr. Gr. Sgt. Harry H. Foster, 12 March 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 1.

dead. Harris's letter defined next of kin as "Father, mother if father is dead, brother if both parents are dead, sister, if both parents are dead and there are no brothers. In the case of a married man – Wife, parents or children and other relatives in order set forth...."²⁰⁰ Harris described the current situation pertaining to the dead, illustrating the new possibility of bodies being buried in France, or brought back to the United States for burial in a local or national cemetery. While Harris emphasized that "the Department is unable to state when it will be possible to begin removal of the remains of the soldiers," he asked they return the enclosed card promptly, so that their wishes could be executed as soon as possible.²⁰¹ Part of the early misunderstanding between the War Department and next of kin was where the soldier dead would actually be buried. Pershing sent word back to the Chief of Staff that "Popular belief [is that] soldiers' bodies will rest in exact spots originally buried, unless removed to States. Isolated graves or many burial places not desired by French. Recommend no set time for return of bodies be set & that public be informed of grouping in larger cemeteries, pending French legislation on the subject."²⁰²

In April 1919, France officially published the law prohibiting disinterments that it had been debating in February and March. It stated:

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

²⁰⁰ P. C. Harris, letter to Mrs. Anna MacDonald, 29 March 1919, Scott Kraska Collection.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² John Pershing, Cable to Chief of Staff and QMG, 7 March 1919, NARA, RG 120, Entry 594, Box 3786.

deliverance from such an event.²⁰³

France's law demonstrates its reluctance to engage in mass-repatriation immediately following the war. Its 1914 experience of sending large quantities of dead soldiers across the country following the disastrous Battles of the Frontier may have influenced this decision, especially if the French genuinely felt that allowing the United States to bring home its dead would make the French people inclined to do the same immediately. If such an occurrence came to fruition, the scenario outlined in the law's text could very well become a reality. One might also interpret the last sentence as a plea to the United States to acquiesce and leave its dead in France – something that the French would repeatedly attempt to do in earnest over the next year.

Despite conducting repatriations during the early months of war in 1914, many vocal French and later Britons found such American actions and intents with regards to its war dead distasteful. “the dispersal of the bodies of the fallen heroes would forever destroy the actual reminder of their magnificent feat of arms,” one French writer remarked.²⁰⁴ Assistant Secretary of War Ralph Hayes later defended French sentiments, stating, “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.”²⁰⁵ Hayes further noted in his 1920 report to the president that many French citizens were against repatriation not for sentimental reasons, but that by executing its plan, the United States would further tax the French transportation system that already could not meet demand for food distribution. Moreover, such preference should not be given to a country that arguably suffered the least of all the principal allied nations.²⁰⁶

²⁰³ Hayes, *Report to the Secretary of War*, 22.

²⁰⁴ Stephen Graham, *The Challenge of the Dead* (London: Cassell and Co. LTD, 1921), 37.

²⁰⁵ Ralph Hayes, Letter to J. D. Foster, 3 December 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 25.

²⁰⁶ Hayes, *Report to the Secretary of War*, 13-14.

The French and British attempted to influence key leaders in the military to argue against repatriation of the American dead. In April 1919, Pershing's deputy chief of staff wrote him a note recalling an instance where a French staff captain inquired for Pershing to "undertake propaganda work in the United States to change the sentiment of the people, so that it would be practicable to secure an agreement to have the bodies of American dead stay in Europe; or at least allay any discontent, should the French pass their law prohibiting the moving of bodies for three years."²⁰⁷ Members of the Army did not require much convincing from their Entente counterparts. Major General J.G. Harbord, Chief of the AEF's Service of Supply, wrote to General Pershing that April recommending "an effort be made at this time to create a sentiment against the return of any bodies of Americans interred in France to the United States." Harbord listed his reasons which noted that French sentiment was against this policy. That if the United States executed its plan other Allied nations might be forced to do the same. In France alone this would mean moving millions of bodies at great expense. Harbord noted that many remains were mutilated, decomposed, or a combination of the two. Shipping such pieces of bodies to the United States would cause great distress upon families of the dead. Some bodies might never be located, and Harbord argued that retaining all dead in Europe would lessen the blow of this fact upon next of kin.²⁰⁸ Dissent amongst members of the Army would continue to grow and begin to reach the public by summer's end.

By April 1919, the GRS directed the efforts of its personnel to the concentration of isolated burials concurrent with evacuating dead from hasty battlefield cemeteries. In their place, GRS personnel constructed new concentration cemeteries. AEF divisions aided the GRS

²⁰⁷ DCoS, AEF, memorandum for General Pershing, 9 April 1919, NARA, RG 120, AG File, Box 159.

²⁰⁸ J.G. Harbord, letter to John Pershing, 28 April 1919, NAEA, RG 120, AG File, Box 159.

by attempting to locate their missing from the previous year's battles. In the 33rd Division "Questionnaires were sent to units of this division and a mass of evidence was collected bearing on the death and burial of men, whose graves had not been located, either by my searching party or the GRS units. Several graves were thus located... We were also able to establish... the identity of several soldiers buried as unidentified."²⁰⁹ Such actions proved critical to finding isolated graves and resolving identification challenges.

Meanwhile, the GRS endeavored to construct the temporary cemeteries for interment of all remains until the diplomatic gridlock with France was broken. This was executed with bureaucratic reverence. During the construction of the Romagne temporary cemetery, New York *Evening Post* correspondent William Shepard received access from the GRS to the site. Shepard noted the difficulty of receiving admittance and described how normal battlefield passes prohibited visitors into the town of Romagne, much less near the cemetery. Nevertheless, Shepard arrived in time to witness the extraordinary amount of work that went into organizing 26,000 plots into a temporary cemetery, consolidating bodies from nearby areas, and burying them with reverence.²¹⁰

For a period after the cessation of hostilities, very few kin of the war dead had been able to visit either the temporary or permanent grave of their soldier. Many of the graves receiving visitors did so only through personal connections. One such grave was that of Lieutenant Thomas Kern of the 26th Infantry whose father was connected to Secretary of War Newton Baker. On an overseas trip, Baker took a 100-mile detour and visited Kern's grave. Baker wrote to Kern's father on the condition of his son's plot, noting, "On his grave there lay the remains of

²⁰⁹ V.C. Nickerson, letter to CG, 33rd Division, 9 April 1919, NARA, RG 120, AG File, Box 160.

²¹⁰ "The Great American Cemetery in the Argonne," *Literary Digest*, 21 June 1919.

a beautiful floral tribute tied with the associated ribbons of America and France, and... the following words appeared, '*Les officiers Français a leur camarade Américain.*' The floral tribute had... been presented by French officers to their American comrade."²¹¹

The GRS received a letter from Sergeant William H. Meagher following his visit to Bony Military Cemetery and the grave of his brother.

[The cemetery] is appropriately located and its layout well planned.... I can give nothing but praise to the work of your service which is of course anything but agreeable. Efficiency and the natural camaraderie necessary for a proper recognition of our fallen boys is quite evident in the work accomplished to date. It seems only right that the bodies of our heroes should remain in the vicinity of the place where their lives were sacrificed for the United States, and particularly France and her womanhood. In the years to come the towns, villages and cities will realize their indebtedness to these men and give them the honor due them. We cannot bring them back to life and many a mother will never recover from her loss, but when the fact is brought home to the folks 'over there' that their boys' graves are given the proper care and honored by both France and our government, then and then alone will they realize that the supreme sacrifice was not in vain, but was the instrument that won the battle for a better world. It is not necessary to bring the remains to the States; rather, let France draw them to her bosom, and uphold the dignity of their abiding place.²¹²

The Red Cross simultaneously worked to photograph every grave for dispatch to the decedent's family in the United States. On average, the Red Cross photographed around 400 graves daily and amassed a collection of 15,000 photos by the middle of the month.²¹³ Unfortunately, the GRS also possessed approximately 1,800 unidentified burials. As re-check and concentration efforts continued, GRS units in the field and at the Paris headquarters labored constantly to discover clues that revealed identities for the unknown remains.²¹⁴ Photographing the graves allowed the workers opportunities to appreciate the efforts conducted by the GRS. A Red Cross

²¹¹ Palmer, *Newton D. Baker*, 351.

²¹² Chief, GRS, letter to Chief Quartermaster, AEF, 11 April 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 1.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ Chief, GRS, letter to Chief Quartermaster, AEF, 21 April 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 1.

worker in France noted of the American cemeteries, “If the home folks could see how well their fallen ones are being taken care of it would relieve a great portion of the grief they suffer.”²¹⁵ While providing a service to the GRS, comments such as this were helpful to shape a positive narrative to the overall effort in France.

At first tally, unidentified remains comprised a little over eight percent of the total dead. Within three months, GRS personnel whittled that number down to less than one- and one-half percent. As the GRS rechecked graves, it discovered that almost 200 graves marked ‘Unknown American Dead’ were actually those of German soldiers, while nine others contained horses, one was an ox, two graves held dog remains, and another was filled with amputated limbs. On 1 July 1919, only 557 bodies remained unidentified out of approximately 40,000 burials, a theretofore unequalled identification rate of 95 percent.²¹⁶

As the American Expeditionary Force prepared to dissolve in the summer of 1919, the GRS was alerted to complete its activities by 1 July. Pierce returned to the United States on 9 July 1919 but continued to direct GRS operations from Washington. While the GRS’s primary function was the care and maintenance of cemeteries, 8,500 graves had yet to be located.²¹⁷ Returning to Washington in July of 1919 with some of his GRS men, Pierce, acknowledging the “taxing and irksome duty with which you have ministered to the bodies of our fallen comrades and the anguish of their sorrowing kinfolk,” noted their accomplishments in a circular that read in part “God alone knows how deeply you have gone into the very heart of splendid service, and how much your heroic efforts will count in coming years for the comfort of your countryman.”²¹⁸

²¹⁵ E.A., letter to Charles Pierce, 24 March 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 1.

²¹⁶ US Quartermaster School, *Operations of the Quartermaster Corps, US Army During the World War*, (Washington: GPO, 1929), 102.

²¹⁷ QMC, *The Work of the American Graves Registration Service: 1917-1936*, (Washington: GPO, 1943), 11.

²¹⁸ Special GRS Circular “To All Members of the GRS, Regular and Attached, 13 July 1919, Mortimer De Groot

Colonel Pierce's return to Washington coincided with the dissolution of the AEF, but much more went into Pierce's recall. According to a QMC history written in 1943, Pierce was not "a top-flight administrator. His background was that of a popular chaplain and... he had little administrative experience" which stifled the GRS's ability to complete its tasks on schedule. Some officers recommended Pierce's removal. While this did not occur, Pierce's responsibilities in Europe transferred to Colonel H. F. Rethers, while Pierce retained control of the Cemeterial Division from Washington.²¹⁹ Pierce's position seemed to be more of a figurehead, while many decisions for concentration, construction of cemeteries, and repatriation occurred through Rethers' office in France.

Taking Sides at Home and Abroad

Opinions regarding the dead's disposition were constantly aired by the American public and their elected leaders. For the most part, military personnel kept their opinions out of the papers. The press hounded the AEF's commander for his position, but Pershing largely maintained a stiff upper lip. In private, however, his opinion was formed. In a confidential cable to the Secretary of War regarding repatriating bodies from England amidst the diplomatic troubles with France, Pershing took the opportunity to air his opinion regarding the war dead's final disposition.

Have given the entire question of our dead much thought and my opinion is that we should leave our dead near where they fell. Am sure that this course would be fully appreciated by the Allies and that our Government will be given every facility in beautifying and caring for the cemeteries already established on the fields won by our Heroic Dead. Believe that could these Soldiers speak for themselves they would wish to be left undisturbed in the places, where, with their comrades, they fought the last night. Those who rest in England gave their lives in the same cause and their remains represent the same sacrifice as those who lie on the battlefields. The graves of our soldiers

folder, AHEC,

²¹⁹ QMC, *Work of the American Graves Registration Service*, 58.

constitute, if they are allowed to remain, a perpetual reminder to our Allies of the liberty and ideals upon which the greatness of America rests. Think the sentiments above outlined are held by many who have given this subject thought. These sentiments should appeal to the relatives and friends. Recommend that none of our dead be removed from Europe unless their nearest relatives so demand after a full understanding of all the sentimental reasons against such removal, and further recommend that immediate steps be taken for permanently improving and beautifying our cemeteries.²²⁰

Former AEF Chief of Staff Peyton March agreed with Pershing, stating that, “steps be taken to give publicity to the difficulties attendant on the return of bodies, with a view to creating a sentiment in favor of leaving all America’s dead left abroad.”²²¹ General John F. O’Ryan added to the chorus of Army leaders wanting the dead to remain in Europe, arguing that “their occupants would continue in no small measure to do what they were doing – what they gladly, proudly, and gloriously did-when they gave their lives: they would still be serving their country.”²²²

H. R. Lemly, the officer in charge of Arlington National Cemetery, opined that for the estimated \$30 million bill to repatriate a fraction of the dead to the United States, the money could instead be invested to construct “the finest military cemeteries in the world” overseas as “a perpetual reminder to the nation of the American soldier and the decisive part taken by the United States in the World War.”²²³ Even the former Chief of the Graves Registration Service seemed to prefer constructing permanent cemeteries overseas over repatriating the dead. Pierce described the beauty that could become the permanent overseas cemeteries in Europe. He wrote:

No more beautiful site in all the world could possibly be found for the permanent repose of our nation’s heroic dead. It lies on the splendid slope of Mont Valérien, overlooked and sentineled by a historic fortress which is memorable in the mind of the French

²²⁰ John Pershing, Cable to Newton Baker, 18 August 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 139.

²²¹ Robert M. Poole, *On Hallowed Ground: The Story of Arlington National Cemetery*, (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 144.

²²² Thomas J. Conner, *War and Remembrance: The Story of the American Battle Monuments Commission*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2018), 19.

²²³ Conner, *War and Remembrance*, 19.

population. Bordering the curved frontage of its 1,300 square meters runs a shady roadway which the municipality, with kindly sentiment, has recently christened 'Boulevard Washington.' From this spot of sepulcher one overlooks the city of Suresnes, with the Seine winding a sinuous way past its shore, and the Bois de Boulogne, now in the great gorgeousness of autumnal forestry, lying yet further on down the gentle declivity towards the French capital; and one feels that both the fortress at the summit and the sleeping soldiers entombed nearby have, in their respective times, meant enough to Paris to have a place in its history and a home in its environs. It is imaginable that this spot may soon become a shrine for those crowds of appreciative Americans who are eager to visit France for nearer view of the battlefields...²²⁴

Privately, these men understood that the final decision was up to their civilian leadership although they well understood why men who fought and died together ought to be permanently interred together. The War Department began attempting to persuade the American public not to repatriate the fallen. A July 1919 War Department announcement demonstrated the military's preference to leave all bodies in France, citing the effects repatriation would have on the devastated French, that the nation's allies were leaving their dead in France, and highlighted the cemeteries constructed by the GRS.²²⁵ Even Secretary of War Baker admitted in a private letter that if the United States had not previously committed itself to repatriating requested remains, the government would probably leave all of the dead buried overseas.²²⁶

Baker, while recognizing the rights next of kin possessed to choose the final burial location for the soldier dead, nevertheless stated his belief that, "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 where their graves would become a shrine to be visited in the years to come by thousands upon

²²⁴ "Our Heroic Dead in France," *Army and Navy Register*, 11 January 1919, 38.

²²⁵ War Department Press Release, 29 July 1919, NARA, RG 120, AG File, Box 160.

²²⁶ Newton Baker, Letter to S. R. Bertron, 25 August 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

thousands of our people.”²²⁷ Many disagreed with Baker’s view. One man accused Baker of “trying to induce parents to leave their dead son in France,” and said that “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.”²²⁸ Baker, confided to a congressman, “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...” but also stated that his charge was to return all requested bodies to the United States.²²⁹

Despite the strenuous efforts of the GRS, many families agonizingly waited for news regarding their missing soldier. When answers did not arrive from the War Department, some turned elsewhere. May 1919 found Sam Stainton searching Hill 263 in the Argonne Forest for his brother, Marvin, missing in action from the 28th Infantry Regiment. Armed with maps drawn by members of his brother’s company, Stainton tried in vain to locate his brother’s remains on the hill. Writing to his mother, Stainton expressed his frustration, “I did everything that was in my power to do Mamma and I don’t know what I would go thru to know his body is not lost to us forever.”²³⁰ Stainton’s search was not completely in vain because he uncovered the body belonging to a previously-missing American soldier. That soldier proved to be another member of the company whose family subsequently received precious personal effects belonging to their

²²⁷ Newton Baker, Letter to William Bailey, 28 November 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

²²⁸ H. F. Richards, Letter to Newton Baker, 9 December 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 26.

²²⁹ Newton Baker, Letter to John Wilson, 13 January 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 27.

²³⁰ Nelson, *Remains of Company D*, 297.

soldier while electing for him to remain buried overseas.²³¹ Miraculously, the GRS later located Stainton's remains on Hill 263 near the village of Boureuilles in an isolated grave just eighteen inches deep. On 23 July 1924, Marvin Stainton was buried in Laurel, Mississippi.²³²

Identifying and registering the graves of downed aviators proved a difficult task for the GRS because in many incidents the Germans stripped the bodies of all identifying information. The GRS, working in concert with officers from the Air Service, found those teams useful in sharing information and expertise to determine the identities of fallen aviators. German reports received after the Armistice also provided important clues to confirm identification work.²³³ Air Service Captain E. W. Zinn assumed the task to locate downed aviators. With detective-like stamina and patience, Zinn scoured across France looking for isolated or unknown graves to match with Air Service records. By May of 1919, Zinn had located and identified 75 of the 150 missing aviators.²³⁴

By 15 May 1919, the GRS had recorded the graves of 76,076 men buried in Europe, with records of another 4,102 missing in action.²³⁵ Of the dead, approximately 2,000 were estimated to be of the Jewish faith.²³⁶ Jewish leaders were confident that now all graves had been properly marked despite Pershing's order from almost one year prior. Jewish Chaplain Lee Levinger recalled that,

In May of 1919, the J. W. B. [Jewish Welfare Board] undertook this duty of identifying the Jewish graves, so that the War Department could mark them all properly. They have thus identified 1,500 altogether and where a cross had already been put up the headboard was changed. In this connection, a peculiar situation arose through the efforts of the Red

²³¹ Ibid., 301, 303-304.

²³² Ibid., 311.

²³³ J. F. Gallagher, letter to Chief, AGRS, 13 March 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 1.

²³⁴ "Captain Zinn Finds the Graves of Lost American Aviators," *Literary Digest*, 17 May 1919.

²³⁵ H. R. Lemly, Memorandum for Colonel Chambers, ND, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 26.

²³⁶ "200,000 Jews in Army and Navy, Records Show," *New York Tribune*, 24 February 1919.

Cross to photograph all graves in France for the benefit of the families at home. Such graves as had not been identified as Jewish still had the cross, and some families had their religious sensibilities shocked by the photographs. Hence the photographs in all such cases were detained until the changes had been carried out, and the Jewish Welfare Board had the graves photographed for the benefit of the families²³⁷

Memorial Day, 1919 was the first following the Armistice. President Woodrow Wilson was scheduled to speak at Suresnes Cemetery outside of Paris. Before his Memorial Day speech at Suresnes, Wilson had not visited a battle site or cemetery despite having been on the continent for over five months and the constant insistence by military and political leaders at home and abroad.²³⁸ His address attempted to assuage those in the United States eager for their soldier dead to be buried in the United States: “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.”²³⁹ Pershing, speaking at another future permanent American cemetery, followed a similar theme as his commander in chief. During his 1919 Memorial Day address at Romagne, he thanked those French civilians on hand “for their sympathy and their offer to do all in their power to care for the graves of our American soldiers. “Here under the clear skies, on the green hillsides and amid the flowering fields of France, in the quiet hush of peace, we leave you forever in God’s keeping.”²⁴⁰ If not completely overt, Pershing provided a glimpse into his feelings on the matter of repatriation. No matter, back in the United States, the War Department prepared to execute repatriation of the AEF dead as soon as the government finalized a diplomatic agreement.

²³⁷ Levinger, *Jewish Chaplain in France*, 111; “Letters from People,” *American Israelite* (Cincinnati, Oh.), 24 June 1920.

²³⁸ Conner, *War and Remembrance*, 30.

²³⁹ 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.

²⁴⁰ Conner, *War and Remembrance*, 8, 32.

To grasp the scale of possible repatriations, the War Department dispatched 74,770 letters to next of kin to again poll their desires for the final disposition of their soldier dead.²⁴¹ The Adjutant General explained within the letter that a family could decide to leave their soldier dead's body where it was currently buried or return it to the United States for interment in a local or national cemetery. If no instructions were received for final disposition, the War Department would ship the body to a national cemetery.²⁴² The mid-1919 poll contained no changes in instructions or options from the 1918 poll.²⁴³ By November 1919, the War Department received over 40,000 repatriation requests from families across the United States. One congressman said that the high number of appeals necessitated a "turn-about in the policy of the War Department."²⁴⁴ This is not exactly true because War Department policy always accounted for repatriation but rather demonstrated that some sentiment existed in the United States to retain war dead overseas. Nevertheless, the high number of requests may have persuaded military and government officials that the majority of the AEF dead's families would not be in favor of all bodies remaining overseas.

As families received solicitation from the War Department regarding the final disposition of their soldier dead, the finality of the decision forced deliberation over the same social issues the gripped the country since the war's end. Joyce Kilmer's widow received word that if she elected to leave her husband's body in France, it would lay in the military cemetery near Fère-en-Tardenois. Kilmer's son remembered the discussion he had with his mother regarding this significant family decision. They agreed that Kilmer's battlefield death should be handled in the

²⁴¹ Ibid., 17.

²⁴² "Preparing to Bring Home Bodies of American Boys," *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, 15 July 1919.

²⁴³ "Will Not Disturb American Dead in France," the *Lancaster Eagle-Gazette* (Oh.), 15 July 1919.

²⁴⁴ "Bodies of Soldier Dead to be Returned from France in Near Future," *Pittsburgh Daily Post*, 14 November 1919.

same way as the men who were the subject of his poem, "Rouge Bouquet." That is, they should all be left where they fell. "There is on earth no worthier grave / To hold the bodies of the brave / Than this place of pain and pride / Where they nobly fought and nobly died."²⁴⁵ By March 1920, Secretary of War Baker reported that he expected almost 50,000 bodies to return to the United States for burial, while 20,000 to 25,000 would remain buried in the permanent overseas cemeteries.²⁴⁶ By August of that same year, War Department files contained over 45,000 requests for repatriation of soldier dead.²⁴⁷ However, those wishes could not be acted upon due to diplomatic reasons.

One widow, upon consultation with her husband's comrades, summed up her torturous decision: "This matter has caused me a great deal of agonized thought, but as my thought clears there seems a great comfort in thinking of my dear one as over there still 'with the rest of them' with whom he endured the hardships and sacrifice."²⁴⁸ Mrs. Laura Evelyn, upon initially relenting to leave her husband's remains in France, ended her letter on the matter with a statement that accurately captured the feelings of some wives and mothers making the same weighty decision: "So we complete our sacrifice."²⁴⁹

In July 1920, Secretary of War Baker inquired as to the possibility of repatriating the remains of American soldiers who fought with the British or Canadian armies.²⁵⁰ This request

²⁴⁵ Kenton Kilmer, *Memories of My Father, Joyce Kilmer*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Joyce Kilmer Centennial Commission, 1993), 119. The 'lines' referred to are from Joyce Kilmer's poem, "Rouge Bouquet," written for the memorial service of 42nd Division men killed in a March 1918 trench collapse.

²⁴⁶ Newton Baker, letter to Hon. J. J. Wadsworth, 11 March 1920, Scott Kraska Collection.

²⁴⁷ War Department Press Release, "The Return Home of the Nation's Soldier Dead," 7 August 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 69.

²⁴⁸ Nelson, *Remains of Company D*, 309.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ Secretary of State's office, letter to Newton Baker, 6 July 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 139.

manifested from reports from the GRS regarding requests received to exhume the bodies of Ethelbert Farrant, killed serving with the Canadians at Cambrai, and Howard Nelson, who died while serving with a Canadian Railway unit.²⁵¹ Initial inquiries by the GRS to the IWGC were returned with regrets that the requests would not be fulfilled because “the demand of the next of kin in such cases is based on a promise made by the United States Government to return bodies of American soldiers to the United States, but I do not think that the promise committed the United States Government to return the bodies of American citizens, no matter with whom they served.”²⁵² The divergent thinking between American’s belief that the dead belong to their families, and Britain’s argument that they belong to the state, never became a significant source of friction between the two countries after the war. The United States did not press the issue further.

Despite the diplomatic problems caused by American desire to disinter and repatriate its war dead, the United States achieved agreements with other countries where its war dead lay. Belgium allowed disinterments to begin in February 1919 without condition.²⁵³ Around the same time, Italy provided the United States special dispensation to begin operations despite possessing similar laws as France.²⁵⁴ Britain and the United States came close to securing an agreement but the former suspended such talks in July until the latter country settled its dispute with France.²⁵⁵ Meanwhile, the War Department outlined procedures to retrieve its dead from

²⁵¹ H. F. Rethers, letter to the Quartermaster General of the Army, 10 June 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 139.

²⁵² Arthur Browne, letter to H. F. Rethers, 29 May 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 139.

²⁵³ E. de Cartier, Letter to C. Cordier, 28 February 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14.

²⁵⁴ Italian Decree Permitting the Exhumation and Transportation of Bodies, 25 February 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14.

²⁵⁵ Robert Lansing, Letter to Newton Baker, 28 July 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

Germany as well as Russia.

By August 1919, as the GRS completed concentrating graves in Italy, it requested 300 soldiers to care for the various temporary cemeteries, and dispatched a team to Archangel, Russia to begin the process of recovering remains and evacuating them to the United States.²⁵⁶ In fact, Lieutenant V. M. Conway departed Neufchâteau on 20 June 1919 with a team of ten soldiers to retrace the route of the North Russian Expeditionary Force.²⁵⁷ GRS activities in areas such as Italy and Russia where few AEF soldiers fought demonstrate the span of responsibility for the relatively small organization. Nevertheless, the GRS remained determined to register graves for all known dead.

Public patience over delays in the final burial of the military fallen showed signs of wearing thin by the summer of 1919. Indeed, a Quartermaster officer noted 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 particular will be rightly criticized.”²⁵⁸ The War Department had already weathered editorials in the *Literary Digest* and the *New York Tribune* regarding what was perceived as poor conditions at the temporary overseas cemeteries.²⁵⁹ The QMC went so far as to create a board of advisors consisting of one Catholic Priest, one Protestant minister, and one Jewish Rabbi to instruct its personnel on the appropriate religious customs of each denomination.²⁶⁰ Such efforts demonstrate the desire of the War

²⁵⁶ Chief, GRS, letter to Chief Quartermaster, AEF, 10 August 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 1.

²⁵⁷ Chief, GRS, letter to Chief Quartermaster, AEF, 20 June 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 1.

²⁵⁸ M. J. Henry, Memorandum for the Chief Quartermaster, 19 August 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

²⁵⁹ James H. Scarr, Letter to the Adjutant General, 19 September 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1894-B, Box 1; “Neglected Graves in France,” *Literary Digest* 18 October 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 27; “Forgotten Graves,” *New York Tribune*, 19 September 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1894-B, Box 1.

²⁶⁰ M. J. Henry, Memorandum for the Chief Quartermaster, 19 August 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

Department and subordinate organizations to constantly seek improvement under the watchful eyes of American citizens.

By the fall of 1919, public impatience reached swelled regarding perceived government inaction to repatriate the soldier dead to the United States. For many, French stonewalling, combined with perceived American bureaucratic indifference, forced action. On 26 October 1919, the newspapers of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania reported a relatively obscure event that occurred the previous afternoon in small articles hidden within their respective periodicals. The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* reported the gathering of widows, parents, and other relatives of Pittsburgh-area soldiers who fell in France to form an organization and advocate for the immediate return of all overseas soldier dead. The group modestly named itself the “Bring Home the Soldier Dead League.”²⁶¹ The body’s motto was “An American tomb in America for every American hero who died on foreign soil.”²⁶² The *Pittsburgh Dispatch* printed the League’s purpose, which was to

[A]id in the formation of similar organizations throughout the United States, and enroll every person and widow and other relations of deceased soldiers now interred in France... To... secure the aid of every sympathizing person in the country... Petition Congress to require the secretary of war ... on or before February 1, 1920, to begin ‘bringing home the soldier dead,’ and to have the work completed within six months... to demand that action for the ‘bringing home the soldier dead,’ shall be taken... without regard to the wishes, objections, or suggestions of France, or of any individuals... demand that the wishes and hopes of the parents, widows and other relatives be respected above all else in this tragic matter... (and) to demand that the contract made with our boys before they all had ‘gone across,’ when they were solemnly promised and the parents were assured the dead would be brought back, be now faithfully kept by bringing back our dead now.²⁶³

Before year’s end, the League issued a proclamation to Secretary of State Robert Lansing

²⁶¹ “Kin of American Dead Form League to Demand Bodies,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 26 October 1919.

²⁶² “Plan to Bring Back Hero Dead,” *The Tribune* (Coshocton, OH), 15 November 1919.

²⁶³ “Bring Home Soldier Dead, League Elects,” *Pittsburgh Daily Post*, 26 October 1919.

demanding action against France to break the diplomatic gridlock:

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 than 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.²⁶⁴

The creation of the Bring Home the Soldier Dead League represented the frustration felt by many within the United States regarding the perceived French obstruction of efforts to return the war dead. It also embodied the weariness of American citizens regarding perceived inaction by their government to do anything that might bring an end to the stalemate. Many in the League took offense to those supporting France or the concept of leaving bodies buried overseas because they did not possess the same stake as others in the process. J. D. Foster, founder of the League's St. Louis chapter, stated: "That crowd has no loved ones sleeping over there and is backing France in its purpose to commercialize our soldier-dead. We cannot allow their

²⁶⁴ Bring Home the Soldier Dead League, Proclamation to Robert Lansing, 3 December 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 26.

rapacious work to proceed.”²⁶⁵

Some families requested exceptions to GRS policy and offered to arrange and pay for the repatriation of their soldier dead at the soonest possible time. The War Department refused these requests to avoid possible charges of favoritism toward those with monetary means. Even in the cases of isolated burials, the United States did not relinquish control of the plot until the completion of repatriation and concentration operations.²⁶⁶ Some citizens began feeling as if they possessed no recourse to retrieve their soldier dead through the government. These families eventually resorted to avenues that offered hope – whether they were legal or not.

A small ceremony in Chicago, Illinois on 20 September 1919 witnessed the burial of Lieutenant Edward Hines, Jr. who had died in France over a year prior. Astute readers of the *Chicago Tribune* might have found the occurrence curious given that the Graves Registration Service was not yet allowed to begin repatriation operations from France. Hines died of pneumonia on the 9 June 1918 in a French hospital near Chaumont.²⁶⁷ Following his death, Hines’ mother received the usual correspondence from the War Department and GRS. The *Chicago Tribune* interviewed Mrs. Hines the day after receiving news of her son’s death regarding the war dead needing to remain buried in Europe until cessation of hostilities per War Department policy. Mrs. Hines declared, “We want our son to have a soldier’s grave in France, just like the other American boys who give their lives for their country. At first, we thought we would like to have the body brought home.... There are thousands of boys like Edward over there and we want him to be one of them in death as he was in life.”²⁶⁸ Mrs. Hines subsequently

²⁶⁵ “Branch of Bring Home Soldier-Dead League to be Formed Here,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 25 November 1919.

²⁶⁶ QMC, *The Work of the American Graves Registration Service: 1917-1936*, (Washington: GPO, 1943), 32.

²⁶⁷ “Pneumonia Kills Lieut. Hines in Base Hospital,” *Chicago Tribune*, 10 June 1918.

²⁶⁸ “Lieut. Hines to be Buried with Friends in Arms,” *Chicago Tribune*, 11 June 1918.

joined the nascent Gold Star Mothers organization; her Chicago branch was one of the earliest mentioned in newspapers as a formal organization of Gold Star Mothers in the United States.²⁶⁹

By 1919, Mrs. Hines' viewpoint had changed. "Bodies of the American soldiers who died in France should be brought back by all means," she declared in a May 1919 interview with the *Chicago Tribune*. "If their mothers gave them (alive they should at least) be given the consolation of knowing that their bodies are near the places they loved in life." The interviewer then asked Mrs. Hines to discuss a report that she and her husband had successfully removed their son's body from France. Mrs. Hines declined to address the report directly, but said that "we have tried hard, but met only with opposition and refusals."²⁷⁰ She left interpretation of that statement to the reader.

On 20 September 1919, the Hines family buried their son in Chicago. Following a short service at the Hines home, the funeral cortege moved to St. Mary's Catholic Church in Evanston for the funeral mass before burial at Calvary Cemetery. A chaplain from nearby Fort Sheridan presided over the mass, and a company from the Illinois National Guard performed the rifle salute and played "Taps."²⁷¹ The incorporation of these servicemen constituted the only military contribution to the return and final interment of Lieutenant Edward Hines, Jr. in the United States.

Hines' repatriation and burial in the United States was not conducted or sanctioned by the GRS. The Hines family did attempt to return their son's body through military channels but were denied because France was not permitting such removals. Exhausting this option, the Hines enlisted the help of the YMCA, the American Red Cross, and a couple sympathetic French

²⁶⁹ "The Gold Star Mothers," *Chicago Tribune*, 24 August 1918.

²⁷⁰ "Bring Bodies of U.S. Heroes Home Says Mrs. Hines," *Chicago Tribune*, 23 May 1919.

²⁷¹ "Military Burial Services Held for Lieut. Hines," *Chicago Tribune*, 21 September 1919.

officials. After French assistants disinterred Hines' body, they secretly transported it to Le Havre for embarkation to an awaiting ship. That ship brought Hines' remains to New York, where the casket was loaded onto a train bound for Chicago.²⁷² Undoubtedly, the success of the Hines' enterprise came in large part due to their financial means. Hines' father was the president of a large Chicago lumber company which put him at a distinct advantage compared to most families of soldier dead.

Another wealthy Chicagoan named Francis Houlihan also succeeded in recovering his son's remains from France. The *Chicago Tribune*, evidently sympathizing more with the Houlihan family than the War Department, hailed Houlihan's efforts in "smashing every military and civil rule of this country and France..." to retrieve his son's body. Houlihan subsequently arranged to have his son's body stored in a vault for a couple of months until his son's comrades returned to the United States and could participate in the funeral.²⁷³ Coincidentally, both Houlihan and Hines are buried in the same Calvary Cemetery in Chicago. The War Department later acknowledged that the return of Houlihan and Hines comprised the only two cases where relatives removed bodies without the GRS's knowledge, and occurred "not through the aid of but in spite of the War Department."²⁷⁴ Nevertheless, rumors of other secret disinterments and returns continued. Situations like this kept those in the funeral industry focused on getting government allowance to begin repatriation operations lest families continue to find other methods to bring the fallen home.

Those proposing the field of honor concept kept insisting that the funeral director lobby's

²⁷² "Last Tribute to Lieut. Hines," *Lumber World Review*, 25 September 1919, 40.

²⁷³ "Soldier's Pals Bury 'Boy King'; Died in France," *Chicago Tribune*, 19 June 1919

²⁷⁴ Ralph Hayes, Letter to H. F. Richards, 4 December 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28; Soldier Dead Due Sunday," *New York Times*, 8 November 1919.

desire for financial gain outweighed real concern for the fallen. One newspaper reported how the 1 September 1919 issue of *The Casket* urged funeral directors throughout the United States to back potential legislation to return all dead to the United States. The paper ran this story under a sub-headline titled “Truth About Agitation in This Country Shows That Undertakers Hoped to Increase Business.”²⁷⁵ The charge against *The Casket* stemmed from an advertisement which appeared in a New York-published trade magazine asking funeral directors what they would do if the prospect of 50,000 additional funerals could become a reality? “Between you and me,” the ad expressed, “this is plain business talk, a matter of dollars and sense, plus sentiment.”²⁷⁶

On 13 November 1919, the first repatriated remains of American soldiers arrived in Hoboken, NJ. Eighteen rows of flag draped caskets on the pier displayed the first 113 soldiers and sailors brought back from foreign soil.²⁷⁷ These soldier dead perished in the north Russia fighting. Although their retrieval was arguably the most difficult, the ongoing challenge with France allowed their immediate homecoming. In June 1919, Pershing had recommended that the War Department focus on repatriating the dead in north Russia and Germany in lieu of a 20 June 1919 French law that prohibited movement of bodies in or out of France until the country’s transportation crisis eased.²⁷⁸ While symbolic, with over ninety-five percent of the dead lying in French cemeteries, the American public’s angst would continue until ships arrived in the United States bearing dead from French cemeteries.

Concurrent to the return of the first American overseas dead, France authorized removal of American war dead outside the Zone of the Armies, which was formally signed on 10

²⁷⁵ “Sentiment Favors Our Dead Remaining in France,” *New York Herald*, 15 February 1920.

²⁷⁶ “Undertakers Want Dead Brought Home,” *Evening Sun* (Baltimore), 14 January 1920.

²⁷⁷ “Dead Honored,” *Pittsburgh Daily Post*, 14 November 1919.

²⁷⁸ Decree of the President of the Republic of France, 20 June 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 27; John Pershing, Cable to the War Department, 30 June 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

December 1919 [see page 418].²⁷⁹ The proclamation reiterated that no soldiers buried inside the Zone of the Armies were to be removed until allowed by parliament.²⁸⁰ Officials within the United States acknowledged that while this signaled progress but would ultimately not satisfy the American people. A State Department message acknowledged "...the forming of societies, nation-wide in their scope, for the purposes of expediting the return of the American dead..."²⁸¹

The creation and lobby activities of the American Field of Honor Association and the Bring Home the Soldier Dead League embodied the divide growing in the United States over the disposition of the war dead. This schism exacerbated by the public defiance of former-President Roosevelt to War Department policy only grew as 1919 wore on. The War Department changed its return policy in a matter of months from total repatriation to allowing all families requesting return of their soldier dead to do so, without any significant preparation to execute such an undertaking. Once the War Department allowed such action to occur, the execution of those desires fell to the GRS. The year 1920 would bring about resolution between the United States and France on the disposition of the war dead, again providing the GRS instructions from which to ensure the soldier dead reached their final resting place in the United States or Europe.

²⁷⁹ War Department Press Release, 12 November 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28. See Appendix L: 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, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29). The Zone of the Armies contained the battle area and interior lines, the location of the majority of American war dead.

²⁸⁰ French Minister of the Interior, Memorandum to the French Minister of War, Subject: Removal of Bodies of the Dead American Soldiers, 10 December 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

²⁸¹ Robert Lansing, Letter to the American Ambassador in France, 3 December 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

CHAPTER 3

REPATRIATION AND CONSTRUCTING THE OVERSEAS CEMETERIES

During the last year of the war through the year following the Armistice, the British equivalent to the Graves Registration Service (GRS), the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries (DGR&E), went about similar tasks to locate, identify, and bury the British war dead. The Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) worked like the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) after its 1923 establishment. Thus, the opportunity existed for the DGR&E and IWGC to make great headway toward burying the British dead if the two organizations could work toward a common goal. This section is a description of the British efforts during those two years and how similar social and governmental forces interacted with IWGC and DGR&E work in France and Belgium. The reader will notice some similarities as well as marked differences between the two countries' experiences trying to find, bury, and properly honor their respective dead during and after the war.

British Burial Efforts in France and Belgium

While American doughboys entered the trenches in late 1917, Great Britain was already working a plan to bury and memorialize its ever-lengthening list of battlefield dead. Initial work by the British Red Cross and DGR&E had brought some order, but no dedicated organization existed to see the necessary work to completion because the DGR&E's purpose did not include creation of permanent cemeteries. A summer 1917 visit to various parts of the front by a group of architects offered initial opinions on the layouts for future permanent cemeteries. Among their early ideas were that the cross should be the dominant feature of the cemeteries, every grave ought to be marked, efforts to preserve temporary graves should be made, and solicitations

for headstone designs should occur.¹ Many of the architects' ideas became the foundation for the IWGC's policies. At the 1917 Imperial War Conference, the IWGC was formed as a permanent body to carry on the work began in France and elsewhere to permanently bury Britain's war dead.²

The IWGC was established in November 1917 with the charge to "acquire and hold land in this country [England] and abroad, to control, maintain, and adorn the cemeteries, to erect permanent memorials, to make arrangements with regard to scattered graves, and to receive and administer funds provided by the State and funds bequeathed by regiments or private individuals for special purpose."³ One of the Commission's most esteemed members was poet Rudyard Kipling. Kipling's son, Jack, was reported missing following the fighting around Loos in 1915. At the IWGC's first meeting in November 1917, the Commission established a very important precedent: "That no distinction between officers and men should be made in the nature of memorials."⁴ This was a significant change from documented burials earlier in which that distinction existed. An adviser to the Commission, Sir Frederic Kenyon, surveyed members of the British army in France and Belgium for their opinions on the matter of memorialization for their dead comrades. Hanging over the commission were the battlefield cemeteries, and what they would look like once the war was over. Sir Fabian Ware, founder of the IWGC, received numerous suggestions and opinions for those sites, but he and IWGC resolved to prevent what ought to be a national-unifying project from becoming one shrouded in controversy.

Accordingly, Ware appointed Sir Frederic Kenyon, director of the British Museum, as a special

¹ Report of 1917 Working Party to France, 9-18 July 1917, CWGC Archives.

² Fabian Ware, *The Immortal Heritage: An Account of the Work and Policy of the Imperial War Graves Commission During Twenty Years*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 25.

³ "Care of Soldiers' Graves," *The Times*, 7 November 1917.

⁴ "Graves of British Soldiers: Equality for Officers and Men," *The Times*, 24 November 1917.

advisor to the IWGC. Kenyon received orders to conduct an investigation and create a report “reconciling the various opinions on this subject among the Armies at the front and the general public at home, and particularly in artistic circles.”⁵

Kenyon’s investigation lasted just a few months, after which he brought forth a series of recommendations regarding the equality of burial, headstones, as well as the design and content within individual cemeteries. Whether or not families would be able to erect their own headstones, had long been a source of contention amongst Britons. Some wanted to put an individual, familial memorial over their soldier’s remains, while the IWGC feared that only those soldiers from well-off families would be afforded such. Ultimately, Kenyon agreed with the IWGC’s original position that “where the sacrifice had been common, the memorial should be common also... the cemeteries should be the symbol of a great Army and a united Europe.”⁶ Kenyon reported to the IWGC during its second meeting in February, 1918, his recommendations that the Commission should carry out their plan for equal-sized grave stones for officers and men, but allow for distinctive designs that denoted the soldier’s regiment or parent unit. In addition to recommending architects to oversee the work of these future cemeteries, Kenyon also suggested the placement of central memorials in each cemetery accompanied by a fitting phrase.⁷

Given that the headstones would all be the same size regardless of rank or social status, Kenyon then discussed the markers’ appearance. He stressed the desire of many in England that the cemeteries possess individual headstones as opposed to a single monument bearing the

⁵ Sir Frederic Kenyon, *Report to the Imperial War Graves Commission*, (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1918), 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷ “Soldiers’ Graves: Headstones and Central Memorials,” *The Times*, 22 February 1918.

names of all buried in the field. Kenyon wrote: “The existence of individual headstones will go far to meet the wishes of relatives, who above all things are interested in a single grave. Many of them... will be disappointed that they are not allowed to erect their own monument... but they will be more disappointed if no monument... marks that grave at all. The individual headstone... will... focus the emotions of the relatives who visit it.”⁸

But what should be on those headstones? Kenyon thought regimental symbols were appropriate owing to “the regimental feeling which is so strong a characteristic of the British army.”⁹ In addition to rank, name, unit, and date of death, Kenyon argued the usefulness of suggestions to allow for personal epitaphs, citing that it would again appease those who sought individuality within the graves. Kenyon recommended that the epitaphs’ expense be borne by the requestors and that the IWGC retain the ability to veto ones deemed inappropriate.¹⁰ Kenyon also approved the inclusion of what would become the Stone of Remembrance and Cross of Sacrifice. Citing that the Empire was predominately Christian, Kenyon thought it appropriate to include the latter monument in all cemeteries. Despite Jewish soldiers being buried amongst those of the Christian faith, Kenyon surmised that no offense would be taken by Jewish families whose relative would possess a Star of David engraved on their headstone. Regarding soldiers of other faiths, Kenyon stated: “no less honour should be paid to the last resting-places of Indian and other non-Christian members of the Empire than those of our British Soldiers.”¹¹ Kenyon closed his report addressing the need to consolidate isolated burials in an effort to moderate costs and return some land to the French.

⁸ Kenyon, *Report to the IWGC*, 8.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

The IWGC approved, or approved with modifications, many of Kenyon's recommendations. Ultimately, headstones would be uniform in shape, but bear differences in regimental badge, religious symbol, and epitaph at cost to the decedent's family. The IWGC announced the adoption of most of Kenyon's recommendation from February 1918. Burial would occur, regardless of rank or civilian status, under gravestones bearing the decedent's name, rank, regiment, date of death and regimental insignia. Additionally, each cemetery was to have a central cross (Cross of Sacrifice) and memorial stone (Stone of Remembrance) with an inscription selected by Rudyard Kipling.¹² Kipling chose a quotation from the Book of Ecclesiasticus, verse 14, "Their Name Liveth for Evermore."¹³ Kipling's proposal included his opinion on why this phrase would be perfectly appropriate:

It was necessary to find words of praise and honour which should be both simple and well known, comprehensible, and of the same value in all tongues, and standing, as far as might be, outside the flux of men and things. After search and consultation with all ranks and many races in our armies and navies, as well as those who had given their sons, it seemed to me that no single phrase could better that which closes the tribute to 'famous men' in Ecclesiasticus: 'Their name liveth for evermore.'¹⁴

In addition to approving Kenyon's recommendations, the IWGC also finalized a general scheme for the British cemeteries. The Commission envisioned the cemetery plots to consist of uniform gravestones, ideally facing east. The Stone of Remembrance would lie at the easternmost edge of the cemetery. Lastly, a large cross would be placed to symbolize the Christian faith and the sacrifice of those interred within the grounds. The Commission also intended for the planting of numerous trees and shrubbery, and for the graves to essentially rest in beds of flowers. The intent was to "strike the note of dignity and solemnity suitable to a cemetery,

¹² "War Graves: Uniform Pattern Memorial Decided On," *The Times*, 25 November 1918.

¹³ Imperial War Graves Commission, *The Graves of the Fallen*, (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1919), 11.

¹⁴ "'Their Name Liveth For Evermore'" *The Times*, 28 November 1918.

accompanied by the spirit of hopefulness and pride proper to the resting places of those who have died with glory and not in vain.¹⁵ The Commission also noted the needs of “Mohamedan, Hindu, and other non-Christian soldiers” who served the empire and were buried throughout the war zone. The IWGC directed a sub-committee to ensure soldiers of all faiths were treated according to their religious beliefs and to investigate the proper marking of their graves.¹⁶ By war’s end, an estimated 150,000 isolated graves dotted the British sector in France and Belgium.¹⁷ A large task awaited the subcommittee called for in Kenyon’s report.

Another matter before the IWGC was whether or not the relatives of the dead should be allowed to add an inscription to the grave. While Kenyon noted the risk involved by allowing “the effusions of the mortuary masons, the sentimental versifier, or the crank,” he recommended the Commission allow the engravings because, “...it would give satisfaction in many instances to be allowed to add an appropriate text or prayer or words of dedication....”¹⁸ Kenyon recommended the inscription lengths be limited and the cost, since it would be optional, borne by the relatives of the deceased. Kenyon’s proposals helped bridge the IWGC’s want for uniformity and the understanding that while these British cemeteries were military in nature, each consisted of individuals with families possessing a strong desire to individually commemorate their loved one in addition to any national remembrance.

By the time the war ended in France on 11 November 1918, the British public was ready to memorialize the sacrifice of the Empire and some, similar to American citizens, offered their opinion regarding the Commission’s proposals. One woman wrote in November 1918 regarding

¹⁵ “Soldiers’ Graves: Plans for Cemeteries in War Areas,” *The Times*, 27 November 1918.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ “Our Gallant Dead,” *The Age* (Melbourne, Australia), 30 November 1918.

¹⁸ “Soldiers’ Graves: Plans for Cemeteries in War Areas,” *The Times*, 27 November 1918.

the IWGC's plan to adorn graves with regimental insignia, declaring, "The result, I say, will be terrible. It will convert what should be beautiful resting-places for loved and honored dead into dreary expanses of unlovely headstones and will make these military burial places a blot on the countryside. To inflict cemeteries of this kind on our French and Belgian friends would be an offence against taste and courtesy."¹⁹ Other citizens wrote editorials expressing their opinions regarding the Commission's desire regarding uniformity of headstones. One man accused the IWGC of a "'camouflaged' effort to do things 'on the cheap,'" by proposing headstones that could be mass-produced and proposed the Commission allow relatives to choose between the standard stone and a cross.²⁰ Another Briton, whose son was killed in France, disagreed with that sentiment, however, stating, "I am sure the last thing my own son, who lies in France, would wish would be that, as an officer, his grave should be different from those of his men for whom he had such unbounded admiration."²¹ Permanent memorials with uniform headstones that gave no deference to military or civil prestige were approved at the 1918 Imperial Conference.²²

Following the Armistice, the British army identified three principal tasks: Locate isolated graves and bury the bodies in established cemeteries, consolidate small cemeteries into larger ones to return land back to the French, and locate and identify the missing.²³ The latter task proved most challenging as many of those missing were generated from the 1914-early 1915 battles. On 26 November 1918 a Franco-British agreement was signed formally recognizing the IWGC as the sole British organization charged with caring for the Empire's graves. France

¹⁹ Ethel McKenna, "The Graves Commission: To the Editor of *The Times*," *The Times*, 13 November 1918.

²⁰ T.C. Fry, "The War Graves: Letter to the Editor," *The Times*, 4 December 1918.

²¹ G.S. Layard, "The War Graves: Letter to the Editor," *The Times*, 5 December 1918.

²² Fabian Ware, *The Immortal Heritage: An Account of the Work and Policy of the Imperial War Graves Commission During Twenty Years*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 30.

²³ Peter E. Hodgkinson, "Clearing the Dead," *Centre for First World War Studies*, Vol 3, no 1 (September 2007).

agreed to provide land for British cemeteries and allowed the design of those cemeteries to be at the discretion of the IWGC. French authorities did request that the IWGC concentrate its cemeteries as much possible so that more land may returned to French farmers for use.²⁴ This desire was something Kenyon noted in his report and the DGR&E began working towards immediately after the war.

In adjourning a December 1918 meeting, the IWGC affirmed its commitment to all bodies staying overseas, stating that,

...a higher level than that of private burial at home is embodied in these war cemeteries in foreign lands, where those who fought and fell together, officers and men, lie together in their last resting place, facing the line they gave their lives to maintain... These British cemeteries in foreign lands would be the symbol for future generations of the common purpose, the common devotion, the common sacrifice of all ranks in a united Empire.... The Commission was strongly of opinion that it would commend itself to the majority of the British people as the higher and nobler course.²⁵

This quote showed a belief among some influential Britons that the war dead belonged to the state. Not everyone agreed with this premise, however.

The IWGC received enough dissent from various concerned citizens and groups to undertake a public relations offensive in the closing weeks of 1918 and throughout the first couple of months in 1919. The Commission's perceived intent was to explain the rationale behind certain decisions and assure all Britons that the IWGC acted in good faith. First, the Commission published an article in *The Times* explaining its position on a couple of issues. One topic being the ability for families to choose a Star of David in lieu of a cross on the headstone. The Commission explained the reason for this option was, "recognition of the fact that the Jews are now not a sect but a nationality, though one based upon religion.... The separate symbol,

²⁴ "British War Graves: An Agreement with France," *The Times*, 24 March 1919.

²⁵ Report of IWGC Meeting, December 1918, 1/1/7/B/43, CWGC Archives.

too, is a recognition of the fact that for the Jews this war has been a worse tragedy than for other peoples.... We have had the consolations of nationality to sustain us, for them it has been a civil war....”²⁶ The article further elaborated on the allowance of epitaphs at private expense and clarified an earlier statement as to the composition of such inscriptions, noting, “... the rule that these inscriptions should be in the nature of a text or prayer was not, of course, meant to discriminate between sects, but only to restrain the expressions of grief and affection for the dead within the limits of what is permissible in a public memorial.”²⁷

On 17 February 1919, Rudyard Kipling published an article in *The Times* detailing the Commission’s vision for British cemeteries and memorials for the war dead. Kipling used his article to describe the origins of the IWGC and to note that its funding came from contributions throughout the Empire. Specifically, “the cost of carrying out the decisions of the Commission being borne by the respective Governments in proportion to the number of the graves of their dead.”²⁸ Kipling also explained why the IWGC recommend that crosses not be used as headstones along with the initial cemetery plans. Kipling summarized that each cemetery would include a Cross of Sacrifice as well as a Stone of Remembrance. Each gravestone would have engraved the deceased’s name, rank, and whatever inscription requested by his relatives in addition to his regimental badge and religious symbol; a cemetery building would house a register with each burial’s name, age, birthplace, and familial lineage. Kipling added that the IWGC was examining appropriate markings for Indian graves as well as exploring the possibility of constructing both a mosque and temple in France in remembrance of men from those religions

²⁶ “The Brave that are No More,” *The Times*, 6 December 1918.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Rudyard Kipling, “War Graves: Work of Imperial Commission: Mr. Kipling’s Survey,” *The Times*, 17 February 1919.

who died serving the Empire.²⁹

Kipling's wide-ranging article also broached the subject of isolated graves and the missing. Upon noting the impossibility of bringing bodies back to England if public sentiment wished for it to occur, Kipling promised that all remains lying in single, isolated graves would be disinterred to the nearest IWGC cemetery to prevent encroachment or obliteration of the gravesite. Kipling closed stating much more work still remained, particularly in the ordering of headstones of which, "More than a half million of these will be required... While they are being made the wooden crosses will stand, and, where necessary, will be renewed; the registers will be filled and filed, and the cemeteries will be faithfully and reverently tendered."³⁰

To ensure widest dissemination, the IWGC republished Kipling's article as a booklet entitled, *The Graves of the Fallen*, intended for public distribution.³¹ The booklet intended to address concerns and queries made by the public regarding the cemetery layout, commemoration of the dead, and the design of tombstones. In addition to the descriptions, the publication of the booklet allowed for the public to view artistic renderings of the various aspects of the planned cemeteries. *The Graves of the Fallen* gave Britons their first opportunity to view the IWGC's concepts for the British overseas cemeteries.

Regarding headstones, the IWGC outlined its plan for a plain headstone, citing the fragility of stone crosses in addition to the size restriction due to the close proximity of burials. Instead, headstones two- and one-half feet high with a width of just over one foot allowed it to display, in addition to the decedent's name, rank, and date of death, a religious symbol as well as

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Rudyard Kipling, "War Graves: Work of Imperial Commission: Mr. Kipling's Survey," *The Times*, 17 February 1919.

³¹ Imperial War Graves Commission, *The Graves of the Fallen*, (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1919).

the soldier's regimental badge. The British placed special emphasis on including the regimental badges, citing that, "In due time, then, wherever a man may be buried, from East Africa to North Russia, his headstone will carry his regimental badge, identifiable the world over."³² *The Graves of the Fallen* provided detailed artist renderings of the possibilities for the public to better visualize the IWGC's ideas.

In addition to the aforementioned engravings, the IWGC permitted next of kin to add a short inscription to their loved ones' graves. The purpose allowed for individual expressions of affection, and to humanize the otherwise uniform gravestones. For space reasons, the inscriptions were capped at sixty-six letters, spaces and punctuation included.³³ The IWGC dispatched forms to the identified next of kin of every British soldier informing them of their right to submit an inscription. Once the IWGC received the engraving request, the text was added to the Headstone Schedule for the decedent's cemetery. The parents of Private J. Sadler of the 87th Battalion, Canadian Infantry, killed on 9 April 1917, selected the fifty-nine character inscription, "A Silent Thought, A Secret Tear, Keep His Memory Ever Dear, From All at Home," to adorn his headstone at the Neuville-St. Vaast number Two Canadian Cemetery near Pas-de-Calais, France.³⁴ Perhaps the most well-known inscription may be found on Lieutenant Arthur C. Young's grave in Tyne Cot Cemetery, Belgium, whose family inscribed, "Sacrificed to the fallacy that war can end war."³⁵

³² IWGC, *The Graves of the Fallen*, 6.

³³ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁴ Imperial War Graves Commission, Comprehensive Report (B) Headstone Personal Inscriptions, Canadian Cemetery number two, Neuville-St. Vaast. CWGC Archives, accessed 2 December 2016, <https://doingourbit.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/doc2084158.jpg>.

³⁵ Robert Fiske, "In Ypres, I Suddenly Realised What This War has been About," *Independent*, last modified 25 December 2009, <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/fisk/robert-fisksquos-world-in-ypres-i-suddenly-realised-what-this-war-has-been-about-1850442.html>.

Originally, the British government charged relatives of the dead three- and one-half pence per letter, with a maximum fee of one Pound. While the intent was to provide ownership to the grave, relatives argued that the deceased already paid for this inscription with their sacrifice. While payment was somewhat voluntary, as no money was required prior to engraving, the fee did discourage poorer British families, causing some graves to not bear inscriptions. By contrast, the Canadian and Australian governments bore all costs associated with private epitaphs. New Zealand authorities, upon deciding that the fee deprived all families of equal opportunity, did not allow any personal engravings on the graves of its dead.³⁶ The one exception is the headstone of an unknown soldier, whose remains were disinterred from Plot 14, Row A, Grave 27 of Caterpillar Valley Cemetery in Longueval, France. The new headstone notes that the remains of the New Zealand soldier buried there were removed in 2004 and reinterred in the National War Memorial in Wellington, New Zealand.

Despite the IWGC's allowing relatives to submit a unique epitaph, its decision on headstones in lieu of crosses left some bereaved families very dismayed. One, after starting a petition of protest against the decisions of the IWGC on which she claimed to have collected over 800 signatures, wrote to *The Times* expressing her displeasure: 'Many say they have been waiting eagerly... to erect their crosses... and the announcement that may do nothing personally, not even choose the design or retain the crosses now standing which were put up by their comrades comes as a heavy blow to them.'³⁷ She continued, "We are grateful to the [IWGC] for their good intentions, but we do earnestly wish to be allowed some power of choice; the matter

³⁶ The discussion regarding payment for the personal epitaphs comes from the following website: David Avery, "Epitaphs of the Great War, last updated 2012, accessed 23 October 2016, <https://ww1epitaphs.wordpress.com/about/>. The author has original primary documents shown, but I have not heard back from my inquiry to him.

³⁷ Florence Cecil, "Letter to the Editor: War Graves," *The Times*, 3 April 1919.

lies too near the hearts of the bereaved to be lightly dismissed by official decisions. One mother writes, ‘We are suffering under a deep rooted sense of injury... we protest against making the cemeteries merely regiments of stone as perpetuating the military ideal which our sons sacrificed themselves to crush.’³⁸ With over a half-million dead, the feelings of 800 bereaved families was relatively small, but their sentiments are worth noting as the British struggled to mesh obligations of national memory with the personal desires of individual Britons to erect or maintain individual memorials. *The Times* ran letters to the editor that bore desires from families of the dead coming down on both sides of the issue.³⁹

Winston Churchill perhaps summed up the disparity between the two viewpoints in noting that, “[T]he practical difficulties involved... are not fully realized by those who have not seen the cemeteries....”⁴⁰ Nevertheless, Britons became increasingly more vocal following the publication and distribution of the *Graves of the Fallen* booklet and continued to voice their displeasure over not getting a say in the IWGC’s activities. The father of a British officer casually wrote to the IWGC expressing his wish to return his son’s body and requested “the necessary steps to be taken to get permission of the French authorities for the removal.”⁴¹ A similar request was made by the New South Wales government to repatriate the body of Major General William Holmes to Australia, a request which Ware also denied.⁴² Holmes remained buried at the Trois Arbres Cemetery near Steenweck amongst 1275 other dead. Such stories give

³⁸ Florence Cecil, “Letter to the Editor: War Graves,” *The Times*, 3 April 1919.

³⁹ “War Graves,” *The Times*, 5 June 1919. Similar letters were published on 6 and 7 June under a “War Graves” section of the paper.

⁴⁰ “War Graves: The Question of Individual Headstones,” *The Times*, 29 May 1919.

⁴¹ W.G. Thompson, letter to Director, IWGC, 25 October 1919, 1/1/7/B/43, CWGC Archives.

⁴² Commonwealth of Australia, letter to Fabian Ware, 12 December 1919, 1/1/7/B/43, CWGC Archives. Burial location confirmed on CWGC website.

credence to the argument that the British people did not universally agree with their government's policy to leave the war dead buried overseas.

It would be a mistake to think that the IWGC's decisions met with universal embrace by the British people. While the Commission did due diligence in soliciting the opinions of all concerned as to the design of the overseas cemeteries, indications abound in Kenyon's report that demonstrate it would have been impossible to appease everyone. As noted, the design of the grave marker caused consternation amongst some British subjects. Soon after, the Prince of Wales, in his capacity as president of the IWGC, received a petition requesting relatives who so desired be able to purchase a cross for their soldier's permanent headstone. The Prince of Wales received a petition backed by seventy pages of signatures pleading:

In the name of thousands of your heartbroken subjects, we, the undersigned, appeal earnestly to Your Royal Highness... to help us in altering the regulations of the Commission, in regard to their decision in prohibiting the removal of the remains of the fallen to this country.

It has always been the view of every English family that their beloved dead belong to them alone. Yet we are not permitted to have the remains brought over, nor even to erect a Cross, or other emblem, over their graves.

Where possible, and where the relatives desire it, is it too much to ask that the bodies may be brought across, at our own expense, if necessary?

We pray your Royal Highness will grant that the right which has ever been the privilege of the bereaved, may not be denied to us.⁴³

The first few pages of the petition contained columns of signatures, but a few pages in, signatories added short narratives alongside their names. Among them, Mrs. W. Stretton wrote that "Four dear sons (out of five) have given their lives for their King and Country; Florence Johnson noted she was the "Mother of three sons killed (1 in 1916 2 in 1917);" the roster of

⁴³ Petition to His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales Re: Return of bodies to England, CWGC/1/1/5/21 (WG 783 PT.1).

sorrow went on for over 120 pages.⁴⁴ While the thick petition carried a certain amount of emotional charge, the reality was that the petition represented a very small fraction of the bereaved British subjects. A staffer scrutinized the petition and attributed the signatures to approximately 1,400 families, noting that almost 200 signatures appeared more than once.⁴⁵ Given the hundreds of thousands of dead from the war, this petition was not enough to persuade the IWGC to consider altering its policy.

The Prince of Wales nevertheless directed the IWGC to consider the petition at its next meeting. The Commission elected not to change the policy of leaving all bodies buried overseas. In its response to the petition's originator, the IWGC also noted that "the French Government have lately issued a Decree strictly forbidding the removal of bodies from France until further notice."⁴⁶ Further complicating the British request was the scale of bodies lying in Europe that could potentially bankrupt the nation if Britain attempted mass repatriation. After the subject was brought up in the House of Commons, one member noted that "if permission to exhume bodies for subsequent reinterment in all parts of the Empire is given to some, it must be given to all, and I am sure it will be realized that such a proposal is quite impracticable."⁴⁷

While the British public wrestled with the decisions made by the government on their behalf, the DGR&E continued to struggle in its process to locate the immense number of missing bodies. Body density maps provided an idea of where bodies were located, but the challenge was knowing how many actually lie underneath the soil. An officer noted that "in one area, information reported 11 isolated graves, careful search reveals 67. In another area in one

⁴⁴ Petition to HRH, The Prince of Wales, CWGC Archives, 1/1/5/14 (ADD 4/2/7).

⁴⁵ Note of "M. Talbot," CWGC/1/1/5/21 (WG 783 PT.1).

⁴⁶ IWGC, letter to Mrs. S.A. Smith, 30 July 1919, CWGC/1/1/5/21 (WG 783 PT.1).

⁴⁷ Principal Assistant Secretary, letter to Mrs. S.A. Smith, 8 December 1919, CWGC/1/1/5/21 (WG 783 PT.1).

fortnight no remains found under 4% of crosses erected.”⁴⁸ The IWGC watched over this work and did not approve of the DGR&E’s conduct throughout 1919. The IWGC cited “exhumation Companies, obsessed with the idea that their reputation depended on their concentrating the highest possible number of bodies in the shortest possible time have often paid little or no heed to the essential matter of identification” as a problem requiring immediate attention.⁴⁹ At least one inquiry was made into an Exhumation Company in which its workers were accused of bisecting bodies in order to double the count of remains concentrated in the area.⁵⁰

The breakdown of the DGR&E significantly hindered British burial operations and probably significantly contributed to the high numbers of missing or unidentified soldiers. The IWGC did not possess the organizational energy to establish the immense number of cemeteries required under the British plan, wrestle with an anxious public regarding commemoration of their war dead, and conduct sweeps to recover unlocated remains. The relative ineffectiveness of the DGR&E helps illuminate the contributions made by Pierce and the GRS. That is not to say the latter organization did not undergo strain or make mistakes. As the new decade arrived, the GRS stood poised to undertake operations never before seen in United States history on behalf of the American people.

Diplomatic Breakthrough with France

The 1920s proved a significant decade for America’s experiences with its World War I dead. In the first half of the decade, Washington brokered a diplomatic agreement to bury its

⁴⁸ Memo Major-General J. Burnett Stuart to Secretary, War Office 14/3/1919. CWGC WG 1294/3 Pt. 1 Cat. No. 268 Box 1082 in Peter E. Hodgkinson, “Clearing the Dead,” *Centre for First World War Studies*, Vol 3, no 1 (September 2007).

⁴⁹ Revised Instructions - Records Branch (Undated), CWGC WG 1294/3 Pt. 1 Cat. No. 268 Box 1082 in Peter E. Hodgkinson, “Clearing the Dead,” *Centre for First World War Studies*, Vol 3, no 1 (September 2007).

⁵⁰ Peter E. Hodgkinson, “Clearing the Dead,” *Centre for First World War Studies*, Vol 3, no 1 (September 2007).

dead at home and abroad, executed that program to include repatriation of over half its dead, and began construction of the overseas cemeteries. It also conceived and implemented the selection and burial of a representative unknown soldier in the United States. The second half of the decade saw a completion of the overseas cemeteries and continued searches to account for those dead still not buried in a marked grave. Through all these activities, the GRS was the action arm for the Army in carrying out the orders of the government acting on the will of the American people.

The American people did not all enter 1920 confident that the dead would soon be repatriated to the United States and began to think that this task required an organization other than the GRS or even the Army to accomplish. One senator suggested organizing a group of war mothers to supervise the exhumation and reburial of the war dead. The senator believed that this group would ensure the task was completed quickly. Secretary Baker responded that it was not efficient to divide responsibilities amongst military and civilian organizations. Further, he argued, the GRS brought expertise to the task combined with a similar level of reverence since they were burying their fellow soldiers.⁵¹ Another senator advocated for French undertakers to quickly complete the job, to which Baker responded that it would probably lead to “untold confusion, expense, and sorrow if the return of these bodies were left to the individuals concerned rather than the government.”⁵²

The GRS, Baker argued, would not gouge bereaved families nor would it show preference to families with financial means. Baker pressed the GRS to draft a cemetery disinterment schedule because “the Department will be in receipt of many requests for the

⁵¹ Newton Baker, Letter to Joseph France, 2 February 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 27.

⁵² Newton Baker, Letter to James Reed, 2 February 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 27.

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.”⁵³ Baker’s defense of the GRS and continued advocacy for equal treatment of all military fallen became the standard for the Army’s treatment of its war dead for the next century.

By January 1920, ads for Bring Home the Soldier Dead League meetings appeared in newspapers of major cities requesting attendance “If you are one of the 42,000 relatives who have requested the Government to bring back our soldier dead from France,” but the advert generously mentioned that “If you are one of the 19,000 who prefer to leave your dear ones remain in France, kindly disregard this notice, as there is no desire to influence your judgment.”⁵⁴ At a New York City meeting, over 400 gold star mothers and fathers appeared to join ranks with the League. League President A. B. Pouch informed the crowd that a delegation would travel to Washington for meetings with Secretary Baker and the Congressional Foreign Relations Committee to continue pressing for their cause.⁵⁵

The League was not the only organization pressing promotion of its cause to the American people and their government. Senior AEF Chaplain Charles Brent continued advocacy for the Field of Honor in an open letter to Secretary Baker and the soldier dead’s next of kin, writing that:

America has left the decision of the nearest of kin in each case what the final resting place of our dead is to be – whether in France or in this country. No one will dispute the right of parent or wife to claim the fulfilment of the promise made by the American government to return to America the bodies of our dead soldiers. But it is conceivable that there are those who, after learning the plans to establish and maintain in France an American field of honor for those who are ‘forever overseas,’ may consider this the more

⁵³ Newton Baker, Memorandum for the Quartermaster General, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 27.

⁵⁴ “In Memory of Our Dead,” *Evening World* (NY), 8 January 1920.

⁵⁵ “Gold Star Parents Join League to Bring Back Soldier Dead,” *New York Daily Herald*, 10 January 1920.

excellent way.... It is the work of love carried through by a sense of reverence for that sacred dust which, though mingled with the soil of France, is forever America. It aims to pay high honor to those to whom high honor is due. It would preserve as far as may be the comradeship of the war among those who met a common fate. It would express to all who are bereaved the undying value of the sacrifice made. It would perpetuate in death that work begun in life to bind together nations of like ideals.⁵⁶

January 1920 also brought renewed hope to the stalemate preventing the United States from continuing its work of consolidating and repatriating the war dead. The breakthrough was not caused by anything accomplished by the Army or the GRS. Rather, political negotiation succeeded in securing American desires to repatriate its dead back to the families who so desired. Toward the end of January, Secretary of State Robert Lansing received a letter from the French Foreign Office expressing its desire to create a Franco-American Commission to examine the topic of World War I dead. The office stated its intention to examine the proposed exhumation plan for adherence to French sanitation laws and expressed its desire that the combined commission would “draw up at the earliest possible date a plan for the exhumation of remains of American dead and their transportation to the ports designated.”⁵⁷

The importance of France’s willingness to create a joint commission and the United States’ success in securing the timely repatriation of the war dead from the Zone of the Armies cannot be understated. While the historiography cites a 1920 acquiescence by France to allowing the disinterment and return of American dead, the details of reaching an agreement, and the necessary American acquiescence, is generally airbrushed out of the story. The details of the agreement, however, are critical to understanding the change in American repatriation policy from the 1918 concept to the guidelines under which the GRS operated from 1920-1923. This

⁵⁶ “Bishop Brent, Senior Chaplain with AEF, Urges Against Return of Soldier Bodies,” *Gastonia Gazette* (NC), 15 January 1920.

⁵⁷ American Ambassador to France, Letter to Robert Lansing, 31 January 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

story and the Army's prominent role in securing the agreement will be discussed in detail for the first time.

In February 1920, the War Department completed the purchase of 17,000 coffins to have on hand in the event France consented and repatriation activities could begin immediately thereafter. Oddly, for as much as funeral directors pushed for the return of bodies from an economic point of view, a casket manufacturers' association condemned the War Department plan to return bodies as "impractical, expensive, and unsatisfactory."⁵⁸ Concurrently, a periodical called *The Casket* ran an article urging members of the public to throw their support behind a bill to repatriate all the soldier dead. This article demonstrated the continual split the disposition of the soldier dead created.

Citizens who favored the creation of overseas cemeteries for the war dead complained about such tactics. To Secretary of War Baker's dismay, his department could do little to combat such advocacy. "What the War Department wants," he said in a press release, "is the decision of the next of kin of the soldiers buried in France on the question of returning their bodies to the United States. No commercial motive or any other act to disturb the free election of those next of kin of the deceased soldiers, except that which results from sentiment and personal desire will be approved by the department."⁵⁹ Baker stuck to the principles promised to the American people by its government.

Baker selected Colonel Harry F. Rethers, Chief of the GRS, and the American attaché in Paris, Colonel Bentley Mott, to represent the United States at the Commission along with Assistant Secretary of War Ralph Hayes, writing that "these men would represent me in a

⁵⁸ "Buy 17,000 Coffins," *Lancaster Eagle-Gazette* (Oh.), 9 February 1920.

⁵⁹ "Baker Cannot Curb Soldier Funeral Drive," *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis, Mn.), 15 January 1920.

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.”⁶⁰ With this, Baker placed the outcome of the Joint Commission and therefore the repatriation issue principally into the hands of his GRS chief. This was an excellent choice by Baker, as Rethers, having replaced Pierce as Chief of the GRS in mid-1919, was intimately familiar with GRS activities and could speak authoritatively about processes. Rethers would not fail Baker in this mission.

By the eve of the Franco-American Commission, the War Department possessed over 63,000 replies to its 1919 polling. Of those received, 59 percent requested repatriation, 26 percent decided to leave their relative’s body in Europe and 15 percent were yet undecided.⁶¹ In real numbers, this equated to 63,708 responses to the 74,770 disposition requests dispatched by the War Department. Of those, 43,909 requested repatriation, 19,499 desired burial in France, and 300 wanted their soldier dead buried in a different country. The War Department planned a “follow up” with each family approximately one month before the GRS’s planned evacuation of their soldier dead’s cemetery.⁶² Those numbers placed significant pressure upon the American delegation to broker a satisfactory agreement with France. While the War Department and the United States government continually cautioned that bodies would not be returned until an allowance was made by France, many Americans would have viewed failure of this delegation as a broken promise between the government and the people. A Franco-American deal had to be finalized so that the War Department would not lose the confidence of the American people.

⁶⁰ Newton Baker, Letter to Frank Kellogg, 20 February 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 25.

⁶¹ “US Soldier Dead Soon to be Taken Back to America,” *Oregon Daily Journal*, 14 March 1920.

⁶² “Will Bring Bodies Home, the *McIntosh County* (OK) *Democrat*, 12 February 1920; Lelia M. Barnett, “American Military Cemeteries in France,” *Daughters of the American Revolution Magazine*, May 1920, 284.

The International Commission of the Return of American Military Dead met in Paris on 20 March 1920. In addition to the three American delegates, the military attaché for the French ambassador to the United States acted as president of the Commission along with twelve representatives of seven French ministries.⁶³ Colonel Mott stated that the prevailing feeling in America was that no distinction should be made between the Zone of the Interior, where disinterment operations would begin by the end of March, and the Zone of the Armies. Mott presented a proposed statement on behalf of the United States which read in part: “the bodies of American soldiers, sailors, marines, and associated personnel, now buried in France – within or without the Zone of Operations (Armies) – be now eligible for return to the United States as soon as the regions where they lie are reached by the... American Graves Registration Service.”⁶⁴

Commission President André Maginot responded that the French people had not yet received permission to return their own dead despite some 500,000 such requests received by the French government. French repatriation was tentatively set to begin in October 1920 when the French government predicted the present transportation crisis in that country might alleviate. In response to this concern, Colonel Rethers proposed waiting to concentrate the dead remaining in France until the transportation crisis eased. Maginot argued that with disinterment operations within the Zone of the Interior slated to take over a year, that work alone could be interpreted as both governments upholding their promise to remove the dead. Rethers countered that current American public opinion would not be assuaged until no distinction existed between the two zones – even suggesting that the return of a few bodies from the Zone of the Armies would go a

⁶³ Minutes of the First Meeting of the International Commission on the Return of the American Military Dead to the United States Page 1, 20 March 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 25.

⁶⁴ Minutes of the First Meeting of the International Commission on the Return of the American Military Dead to the United States Page 2, 20 March 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 25.

long way.

Maginot stated that the French government would accept the American request but warned that similar permission must be given to the French people lest they perceive preference toward the American dead over their own. Additionally, the American representatives needed a more agreeable timetable; while operations could not be postponed another year, the proposed four months was entirely too short. Representatives from the Ministry of Sanitation especially argued against commencing operations in the summer, when the risk of infection was highest. While Rethers thought the likelihood of disease spreading was small, the French sanitation representatives remained adamant.⁶⁵ The meeting minutes display back and forth conversation between the two sides. The tone of discussion was not contentious but rather a healthy dialogue by two sides eager to find common ground.

Maginot, echoing the thoughts of the other French representatives, thought it reasonable that the American government could wait to commence operations until October when the French government likewise began. By day's end, the joint commission issued the following statement: "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."⁶⁶ With that, the Franco-American Commission adjourned to meet again on 24 March. After ratification by the French Council of Ministers, Ambassador Wallace dispatched a telegraph to Secretary Lansing

⁶⁵ Minutes of the First Meeting of the International Commission on the Return of the American Military Dead to the United States Page 2-3, 20 March 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 25.

⁶⁶ Minutes of the First Meeting of the International Commission on the Return of the American Military Dead to the United States Page 4, 20 March 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 25.

informing him of the successful outcome.⁶⁷

The Commission met again on 24 March 1920 to continue closing the gap between the United States and France regarding the timing for disinterring and repatriating the American war dead. The French insisted that operations in the Zone of the Armies not begin before 1 November but the American delegates reiterated that such a date would be viewed unfavorably by the American people. The American position was to open the Zone of the Armies and allow disinterments to begin when the GRS reached the area, rather than be bound to a specific date. Maginot suggested the 1 November date remain a verbal agreement even if no specifics were published in the press.⁶⁸

Following another morning session on 25 March, Hayes, Rethers, and Motts excused themselves from the large group to privately examine the concerns and proposals presented by the French both in group sessions and in writing since the 20th as well as to reexamine the proposed American disinterment operations in the Zone of the Armies. The three Americans understood that their demands needed modification to affect a breakthrough, so they prioritized the non-negotiable points and offered concessions where possible. The United States' delegation presented its modifications to the original American proposals to Maginot:

1. The Federal Government will transport to America only those bodies whose next of kin demand their return. It will leave in France not only those whose next of kin signify a willingness to have the remains retained here, but it will leave also those whose next of kin make no request concerning the disposition of remains, and those remains which cannot be identified.

2. [T]he Graves Registration Service... will be willing for the time being to request transportation only for those bodies which are to return to America, leaving all others undisturbed until such later time as transport facilities can be provided more readily...⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Hugh Wallace, Cable to Robert Lansing, 20 March 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

⁶⁸ Notes of the Second Meeting of the International Commission on the Return of the American Military Dead to the United States, 24 March 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 25.

⁶⁹ The American Commission, letter to Monsieur Maginot, 25 March 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 25.

Important to this presentation was the modification in part one that allowed for additional bodies to remain in France, and a compromise in movement of remains to ease transportation requirements in the short term. The American delegation requested to start operations in the Zone of the Armies on 15 July 1920, a compromise between the two countries' proposals. In the four-page letter, the American delegates noted the considerable effort done by the War Department since the French law prohibiting disinterments passed in 1919 to educate the American people and prevent public or political debates from occurring. The delegation also noted that with increased attempts by well-off families to conduct private repatriations as well as amplified Congressional interest the War Department would not be able to placate the American people indefinitely.⁷⁰

The Commission held an informal session on 1 April 1920 largely to address the subject of hygiene. The Americans received and promised to adopt French exhumation directives to prevent the spreading of disease during their work. The resulting two pages of instructions would later be implemented throughout GRS disinterment operations in France.⁷¹ These instructions proved important because with over 2,300 cemetery sites across France, the safeguards used by the GRS gave credence that the land would be usable upon transfer back to France.⁷²

On 2 April, the French Ministry of Pensions prepared a proposal for ratification by the French government to allow transfer of American dead from the Zone of the Armies. On 16 April, less than one month after the first Franco-American Commission session, Colonel Mott

⁷⁰ The American Commission, letter to Monsieur Maginot, 25 March 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 25.

⁷¹ Notes Taken at an Informal Conference, 1 April 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 25.

⁷² H. R. Lemly, Letter to the Adjutant General, 16 May 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14. This figure is 500 more than published in Michael Sledge's *Soldier Dead*, 193.

dispatched a cablegram to the Adjutant General that formally announced French agreement to the American proposals. The cablegram confirmed exhumation operations could begin no earlier than 15 September 1920.⁷³ The Franco-American Commission's outcome provided the bedrock guidance from which the United States executed its repatriation and burial operations for the next few years. Further, it became the starting point from which future repatriations would begin.

A 5 April 1920 War Department announcement confirmed the tenets of the Franco-American Commission's deal. The GRS would grant the wishes of all relatives desiring repatriation or burial in one of the overseas cemeteries. Suresnes remained the only named option but the War Department noted that others would be identified in the future. Any bodies for which the GRS received no disposition instructions would remain buried overseas along with unidentified remains. The War Department allowed next of kin to leave their soldier dead buried in the original location, but warned that the decedent's family bore all future maintenance costs for the gravesite.⁷⁴

As the War Department continued to receive responses from next of kin containing burial instructions for their soldier dead, the QMC began planning to determine the number of cemeteries to make permanent and their location. The QMC planned for approximately 40% of the war dead to remain in Europe.⁷⁵ Complicating its efforts was the fickleness of some families regarding the disposition of their loved ones. By the end of May 1920, the GRS reported 73 requests for bodies to remain overseas after initial requests to bring them home. Conversely, 142 families requested bodies return to the United States after initially wanting them to stay in

⁷³ Colonel Mott, Cablegram to the Adjutant General, 16 April 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 25.

⁷⁴ "Return of Bodies at Request of Kin," *Hartford Republican* (Ky.), 16 April 1920.

⁷⁵ H. F. Rethers, Memorandum for Ralph Hayes, 8 March 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14.

France.⁷⁶ At least one family was persuaded to leave their soldier buried overseas simply because they obtained a photo of his overseas grave. Upon receiving a letter from Charles Pierce regarding her son's burial location, Mrs. Charles Kreps replied,

Some time ago I received a letter signed by Charles C. Pierce in regards to location of graves and in the letter was a paragraph reading that inquiries regarding photographs and etc. Does that mean that it would be possible for me to get a photo of my son's grave? If so I would be more than pleased as you can know it is very hard to have and see nothing he being buried so far away. I would be very thankful for same if it would be possible to get it thanking you most graciously.⁷⁷

Mrs. Kreps ultimately elected to leave her son buried in France, and he rests in the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery in Plot A, Row 25, Grave 6.

A bulletin published through the QMC in early 1920 informed interested families of the updated permanent cemetery plan. So far, burial grounds at Suresnes, the Argonne, and Belleau Wood were selected as permanent cemeteries with the possibility that more be designated later depending on future requirements.⁷⁸ These sites were chosen because they were the places of the heaviest American combat and casualties. This bulletin also confirmed Secretary Baker's earlier instructions that no permanent cemeteries would exist in Germany, Luxembourg, or north Russia.⁷⁹ The United States government could not guarantee future peace with those states and subsequently did not want to risk American war graves in those countries.

The announcement's section about the rationale for selecting the three permanent cemeteries and the possibility of future cemeteries being designated opened the door for another organization to lobby the GRS; this time, it was the US Army. Major General John F. O'Ryan,

⁷⁶ War Department Press Release, "Decoration Day Exercises Abroad," 28 May 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 69.

⁷⁷ Michael G. Knapp and Constance Potter, "Here Rests in Honored Glory: World War I Graves Registration," *Genealogy Notes*, Summer 1991, 192.

⁷⁸ Charles Pierce, Cemeterial Division Bulletin No. 10-F-W, (Washington: GPO, 1920), 4. NARA, RG 92,

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

commanding officer of the 27th Division during the war was intensely dedicated to preserving the history of his division.⁸⁰ Charismatic and politically-connected, O’Ryan was venerated by his men who called themselves “O’Ryan’s Roughnecks.” O’Ryan’s 27th Division (nicknamed the Orions) had fought shoulder to shoulder with the British on the breakthrough of the Hindenburg Line from 29 September to 1 October 1918. O’Ryan was determined that the sacrifices of his division, which suffered over 3,000 casualties breaching the Hindenburg Line, would be memorialized near the site of their battle.⁸¹ Upon seeing the Quartermaster Bulletin, he embarked on a campaign to get one of the temporary cemeteries from his old division’s sector added to the roster of permanent burial sites in France.

Beginning in April 1920, O’Ryan pressed for the addition of the temporary cemetery at Bony, which lay near the Hindenburg Line forts where the 27th Division had lost so many casualties. Understanding that many within the War Department in and out of uniform at least privately preferred for all remains to be left overseas and that some families opted to bring bodies home upon learning they would be moved from their original burial sites, O’Ryan crafted his letter in an attempt to appeal to those sentiments. He expressed his belief that more families would leave their soldier dead in France if they were left buried near their friends with whom they had fought and died: “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.”⁸² O’Ryan may have been influenced by a letter he received from

⁸⁰ O’Ryan’s 27th Division captured its war record in a two-volume division history plus separate histories for its infantry regiments.

⁸¹ Geoffrey Wawro, *Sons of Freedom: The Forgotten American Soldiers who Defeated Germany in World War I*, (New York: Basic Books, 2018), 352-353.

⁸² John F. O’Ryan, Letter to General March, 8 April 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

the mayor of Bony who told the former 27th Division commander how the townspeople frequented the cemetery to pay tribute to his fallen soldiers. O’Ryan predicted that “a strong sentiment will develop among the families of the dead protecting against what seems to be almost a sacrilege – the removal of the bodies of our gallant men from these sacred sites in France where they died together, and which will become places of pilgrimage for the honoring of their memory.”⁸³

While some War Department officials may have agreed with part of O’Ryan’s letter, they did not concur with O’Ryan’s assertion that the historical significance of his battlefields around Bony was equal to that of other areas such as Château-Thierry or Soissons, which at the time still did not have cemeteries planned in their immediate vicinity. Additionally, the Quartermaster General did not think that merely burying the dead of a given unit together would significantly alter the number of soldier dead remaining in France.⁸⁴ Given that the Quartermaster General was privy to the letters received by the GRS from bereaved families, he no doubt possessed a better feel for the reasons families opted to repatriate their loved ones.

O’Ryan continued to press the QMC following his visit to the overseas cemeteries that summer. After heaping praise on the QMC’s efforts in France and the appearance of the temporary cemeteries, O’Ryan predictably mentioned that the most impressive cemetery he visited was at Bony and expressed his belief that its picturesque terrain made it particularly worthy of being a permanent cemetery.⁸⁵ The gently rolling hills outside of the cemetery’s stone wall certainly gave credence to O’Ryan’s assertion. O’Ryan followed this letter with another

⁸³ John Graham, *The Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages of the 1930s: Overseas Grave Visitations by Mothers and Widows of Fallen U.S. World War I Soldiers*, (London: McFarland and Co., Inc., 2005), 37.

⁸⁴ H. L. Rogers, Memorandum for the Assistant Chief of Staff, “Removal of Dead (Bony Cemetery)”, 17 April 1920, NARA, RG 92.

⁸⁵ John F. O’Ryan, Letter to Charles Pierce, 25 August 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

one to the Army Chief of Staff in which he discussed a conversation he had with the family of a soldier from his 27th Division who died during the war. He relayed that his family wanted to bury their son at Bony permanently but since it was not retained as a permanent cemetery, they were repatriating his remains. O’Ryan hinted that other families held very similar views as he reiterated his desire for Bony’s permanency but offered no supporting evidence to his claim.⁸⁶

O’Ryan sent a second letter to the GRS to reinforce his earlier points and added that many families of soldiers from his division as well as many survivors desired for the 27th Division dead to rest together at Bony.⁸⁷ This second letter prompted a blistering response from Quartermaster General H. L. Rogers who wrote directly to O’Ryan stating that “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.”⁸⁸ The letter also reinforced earlier decisions to ensure that the cemeteries selected were accessible by travelers and in a centralized location to receive bodies as the GRS consolidated the temporary cemeteries.⁸⁹ The Quartermaster General added 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 established at Bellicourt. All replies to these representatives have been similar to that given you here...”⁹⁰ The 30th “Old Hickory” Division, drawn from North Carolina, South

⁸⁶ John F. O’Ryan, Letter to the Chief of Staff of the Army, 29 September 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁸⁷ John F. O’Ryan, Letter to Charles Pierce, 11 December 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁸⁸ H. L. Rogers, Letter to John F. O’Ryan, 22 December 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

⁸⁹ H. L. Rogers, Letter to the Adjutant General of the Army, 8 December 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 27.

⁹⁰ H. L. Rogers, Letter to John F. O’Ryan, 22 December 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee, had fought alongside the 27th Division in the breaching of the Hindenburg Line and had suffered even heavier casualties.

The Quartermaster General's letter was important for a couple of reasons. It revealed that at least one other division was lobbying the War Department to specifically memorialize its organization through the creation of a permanent cemetery. Second, the letter demonstrates that the War Department attempted to keep the process fair by not showing favoritism toward rank, social prestige, or specific organizations.⁹¹ It is unknown if more organizations attempted similar petitioning with other cemeteries, but the ABMC eventually undertook a similar task to adjudicate the placement of battle monuments in France.⁹²

Memorial Day, 1920, was much different from that of 1919. The temporary cemeteries were more polished than the year prior and the tension between France and the United States over the dead's disposition had evaporated. This Memorial Day was particularly poignant because it marked the last such Memorial Day that all the American war dead would lie together in Europe. An estimated 497 separate ceremonies took place in honor of 1920's Memorial Day. In his speech at the American war cemetery of Suresnes, Marshal Pétain, now Vice-Chairman of the French Supreme War Council, remarked that "those families who weep for their dead will find consolation," that the soldier dead buried in France "are not resting as strangers in a strange land, these soldiers of liberty.... These tombs will be forever watched over with the pious care as that which our country gives her own children."⁹³ Pétain clearly was underscoring the

⁹¹ While Bony was later added as a permanent cemetery, no evidence can be found to suggest it was the direct result of O'Ryan's lobbying efforts.

⁹² See Connor, *War and Remembrance* for a thorough discussion of all ABMC activities including the overseas cemeteries and AEF memorials.

⁹³ Conner, *War and Remembrance*, 32.

promise he had made just after the Armistice to bury and care for the American war dead in France.

Concurrent to burial operations performed by the GRS under the QMC, the Adjutant General's Office processed decorations earned by men during the war, including those killed in action performing deeds for which the award was given or those who survived performing an act of valor but died in a subsequent action. In the event a soldier did not survive to receive their decoration, the Adjutant General notified the soldier's next of kin. Captain Joseph C. Davis's mother received word in August 1920 that her son earned a posthumous Distinguished Service Cross "for extraordinary heroism in action near Beaumont, France, April 22, 1918."⁹⁴ The letter further informed Mrs. Davis that the award was being forwarded to a local military officer who would present the decoration.⁹⁵ A photograph exists of Mrs. Davis receiving the award amongst a group of officers, but it is unknown whether the photographer was there as part of an official ceremony or at the request of Mrs. Davis [see page 420].⁹⁶ The Adjutant General's letter did not provide Mrs. Davis the option for a private ceremony.

Evidence exists that some awards occurred amidst special public ceremonies. Upon the Fighting 69th's return to New York City in 1919, a celebration was held in the unit's honor. At some point following the parade down 5th Avenue, Joyce Kilmer's family was presented his posthumous Croix de Guerre from the French government. Officials pinned the award to Kilmer's son, Kenton, who caused a scene when he backed away from the French representative's customary kiss. No spectator understood that the nine year old boy was heeding

⁹⁴ Citation for the Distinguished Service Cross awarded to Captain Joseph C. Davis, 2 August 1920, Scott Kraska Collection.

⁹⁵ P. C. Harris, letter to Mrs. Clara Davis, 2 August 1920, Scott Kraska Collection.

⁹⁶ See Appendix M: Mrs. Davis Receives Son's posthumous DSC, Scott Kraska Collection.

the final words said by his father after kissing him goodbye before departing overseas: “Don’t let any other man kiss you until I come home and kiss you, Joyce had said to Kenton.”⁹⁷

A theme that would be repeated in successive wars of the twentieth century was the issue of deference toward wives and mothers. In the case of decorations, if a soldier was married, the award went to the wife, leaving some mothers feeling disregarded. Joyce Kilmer’s mother secured from the French embassy an additional award of her son’s Croix de Guerre, which she wore on occasion along with her son in service pin “whose blue star miraculously turned to gold two days after I received the news of my son’s glorious death.”⁹⁸

In 1920, the War Department announced the pending issuance of memorial certificates to next of kin of all war dead in alphabetical order by state. No discrimination was made if the soldier was killed in combat action or perished from other causes.⁹⁹ The War Department issued the certificates to the next of kin. Some families received certificates facsimile signed by General Pershing which read in part “He bravely laid down his life for the cause of his country. His name will forever remain fresh in the hearts of his friends and comrades.”¹⁰⁰

Also in 1920, the French government issued memorial certificates to all men and women who died in the service to the United States during World War I, giving same priority to wives as previously mentioned.¹⁰¹ Part of the inscription of the French certificate came from a Victor Hugo poem: “For those who devotedly died for their country/ It is right that the people come and

⁹⁷ Kilmer, *Memories of My Father*, 118. Kilmer writes that he lost the medal later that day while walking through the City back to the place his family stayed during the celebration. Father Duffy secured a replacement, presented later in a smaller ceremony.

⁹⁸ Anne Kilburn Kilmer, *Memories of My Son, Sergeant Joyce Kilmer*, (New York: Brentano’s, 1920), 12.

⁹⁹ “To Issue Certificates to Dead Soldiers’ Relatives,” *Buffalo Enquirer*, 8 July 1920.

¹⁰⁰ Heiman Blatt, *Sons of Men: Evansville’s War Record*, (Abe P. Madison, 1920), 38.

¹⁰¹ “Meetings Today Honor War Dead,” *Indianapolis Star*, 22 February 1920.

pray at their tombs.”¹⁰² While this small token possessed little intrinsic value, it represented an acknowledgement by the French state of the American soldiers’ sacrifice.

Ahead of the major disinterment, repatriation, and reburial operation set to commence in the fall, the War Department issued new guidelines to prevent “instances where near relatives asserted rival claims for possession of the body and its disposition,” and to alleviate concerns with the mechanics repatriating bodies to the United States. First, the department defined the legal next of kin for the soldier dead and established the order of precedence for who would be allowed to give disposition instructions. Following a widow or children (of a certain age) was the soldier’s father, mother, brother(s), and sister(s) in that order. The Judge Advocate General ruled that a widow who remarried forfeited her standing as a legal next of kin. The press release further stated that bodies would be returned or reburied as the GRS evacuated the current cemetery in which it was interred – not before or after. The War Department emphasized that no requests for priority would be honored and again clarified that no bodies were to remain in Germany, Luxembourg, or North Russia.¹⁰³ From these guidelines the War Department and GRS worked for the remainder of the operations in Europe.

As the date grew nearer to begin repatriations from the old Zone of the Armies, the GRS worked to complete operations in the old Zone of the Interior. By August of 1920, 4,229 soldiers from the Zone of the Interior had been returned to the United States for permanent burial.¹⁰⁴ This number grew to 6,000 by September with an additional 2,000 enroute to America. Subsequently, the GRS concentrated the bodies to remain in Europe allowing the organization to

¹⁰² Haug, *Gold Star Mothers*, 31.

¹⁰³ “Government Issues Rules for Relatives of Dead,” *Fort Wayne Sentinel* (In.), 27 July 1920.

¹⁰⁴ “Relatives Delay Soldiers’ Burials,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 25 August 1920.

clear over 90 cemeteries in France and Germany.¹⁰⁵ Repatriation activities allowed the United States to demonstrate the reverent care it offered the dead to the citizens of the countries in which the dead were buried. In England, the press commented on the “labor of love” executed by the United States as GRS units disinterred and repatriated seven American soldiers from a cemetery in Stamford, England.¹⁰⁶

The problem of relatives changing their minds on the final disposition of their soldier dead emerged as a problem before the Zone of the Armies disinterments began. While relatives had previously changed their mind from earlier polling, now that the GRS was moving bodies, such indecisiveness cost the government money and increased the chances of mistakes. In August of 1920 the War Department issued a statement lamenting that “relatives of our soldier dead, in many instances and sometimes repeatedly, change their requests, vacillating between shipment to this country and permanent burial abroad.”¹⁰⁷ Pierce testified before Congress as to the necessity of multiple polling inquiries:

We found as we were reconciling these requests – those that have come in from different sources – that there are conflicts of all sorts and changes back and forth, sometimes as many as five alterations that have been made in a requisition. Now, we have got to list every one of those, every piece of paper has got to be gone over... What the request is, the date it was made, the name of the person making it, and the relationship of that person to the deceased, on order that we may know first of all what is the final request. Then, in the second place, we discovered that here are family difficulties; a wife wants one thing, a mother wants another thing. We have had to put the matter up to judicial authorities of the Army to determine what a woman’s rights are; she has married again, she loses her right. Then a conflict is settled, this case can be cleared up and the body disposed of. And now, each one of those cases has got to be worked out on that basis and finally passed upon by somebody who is competent to settle that one case.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ “Bodies of 6,288 US Dead Already Returned, *Baltimore Sun*, 9 September 1920.

¹⁰⁶ War Department Press Release, “The Return Home of the Nation’s Soldier Dead,” 7 August 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 69.

¹⁰⁷ “Relatives Delay Soldiers’ Burials,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 25 August 1920.

¹⁰⁸ Testimony of Colonel Charles C. Pierce, *Hearings before Foreign Expenditures Subcommittee on War Expenditures*, (Washington: GPO, 1920), 3454

Sarah Mosher was one such mother whose indecision necessitated flexibility from the GRS. She initially requested her son Thomas Morrissey be returned for burial at Arlington National Cemetery. Soon after sending that directive to the QMC, she quickly dispatched another letter changing her request to leave her son buried in France. She added a note explaining that “unless the body of Thomas F. Morrissey has not yet been shipped that I would prefer that his remains be buried in Europe...”¹⁰⁹

Another problem confronting Pierce and the GRS was the establishment of next of kin. In some of the more difficult situations, “the soldier did not give the right address when he registered his emergency address. That has been the case with hundreds of thousands; the man gave the name of some friend, yet he might have had a wife or mother living, and in other cases maybe he wanted to get away from his wife or he wanted to keep his mother from finding out if any casualty occurred.”¹¹⁰ Unfortunately, these problems persisted through the end of repatriation activities.

Repatriation Operations

Repatriation activities in the Zone of the Armies began in July 1920 as agreed upon by the Franco-American Commission. The GRS acknowledgement regarding the frequency at which families changed their mind regarding their soldier’s final disposition brought the final numbers of dead that would be buried both in Europe and the United States into question. In perhaps a last pitch to those families still undecided, Bring Home the Soldier Dead League president A. B. Pouch described the American overseas cemeteries as “isolated and God-

¹⁰⁹ Disposition Instructions for Thomas Morrissey, 16 September 1920, in Burial File of Thomas Morrissey, NPRC.

¹¹⁰ Testimony of Colonel Charles C. Pierce, *Hearings before Foreign Expenditures Subcommittee on War Expenditures*, (Washington: GPO, 1920), 3458

forsaken territory... which blots out individuality and gives one the feeling that our dead are almost forsaken in a foreign wilderness, away from civilization and beyond the reach of the dear ones who long for the privilege of visiting the resting place of their dead.”¹¹¹ One of the League’s members was Johanna Trunzer. Trunzer’s brother was Thomas Enright, one of the first three soldiers killed in the trenches in 1917. Since their death, France had erected a memorial to the three men and petitioned the United States for those men to remain buried in France. Trunzer declared, “Why should we want to allow Thomas’ body to remain in France? He was a soldier in the American Army for nine years and fought for his native land and no other.”¹¹²

The League not only lobbied the government on behalf of its members, it also protected them against unscrupulous “individuals and associations that are attempting to collect money in connection with the care and disposition of American dead in France....”¹¹³ Those families whose soldier’s remains had not been located found themselves under additional stress of not knowing, which sometimes prompted them to use any means available to retrieve answers. One particularly reprehensible occurrence was announced by the War Department in 1920. A man approached a Gold Star Mother whose son’s body had not yet been located; he promised that for a sum of money he, as a former doughboy and member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, would assist the mother in finding her son’s grave. He reported that he located the grave and that the mother would soon receive her son’s body from France. The decedent’s brother travelled to Washington and discovered that no inquiry was ever made and that his brother’s body had not been located.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ “Says War Heroes Lie in God-Forsaken French Wilderness,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*,” 3 September 1920.

¹¹² “Sister Asks Return of Body of Enright, First to Fall in War,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 22 September 1920.

¹¹³ “Warning Sent out by Soldier-Dead League,” *Washington Times*, 21 September 1920.

¹¹⁴ War Department Press Release, “A Despicable Swindle,” 9 August 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1915, Box 69.

The American Legion began publishing a syndicated column entitled “Missing Men” with the purpose of sharing short stories surrounding a soldier’s disappearance on the battlefield with contact information for next of kin who sought information. By September of 1920, the Legion claimed that an untold number of stories “have been solved through the medium of ‘Missing Men,’ and many letters have come into the office of the *Legion Magazine* containing the information sought in a published query.”¹¹⁵ The article’s popularity highlighted a connection by the American people to the missing, amplified by emerging sentiment at the time toward burying an Unknown Soldier in the United States.

Indeed, the burying of unknown soldiers in France and Great Britain compelled Americans to ask why their government had not yet done the same. Anna Charles, whose brother was still listed as missing in France, wrote “It was the Government’s pledge to the boys before they left the country that... each and every one would be brought back to lie in the soil of the country for which they fought, so why don’t the Government live up to its pledge and bring back all the unknown dead instead of conferring the honor upon one, and bury them in Arlington?”¹¹⁶ 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...”¹¹⁷ Pierce assumed that Americans would want to emulate the honors paid to unknown soldiers in France and Great Britain. Pierce ordered that

¹¹⁵ The American Legion, “Make Most Tragic Column,” *Pretty Prairie Times* (Ks.), 23 September 1920.

¹¹⁶ Anna Charles, letter to Newton Baker, 3 February 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 140.

¹¹⁷ “The Unknown Soldier,” *New York Times*, 9 December 1920.

no action be taken until Congress adopted something similar to that of France and Great Britain.¹¹⁸

By the end of 1920, the War Department had selected five burial sites including Paris (Suresnes), the Meuse-Argonne Sector (Romagne), Belleau Wood, the Somme (Bony), and London (Brookwood).¹¹⁹ These locations were sited around the principal American battlefields in France and the cemetery near London was chosen because so many Americans had been buried there after falling ill either in transit to the United Kingdom or after arrival there. The GRS anticipated unidentified bodies being buried amongst the known dead at each cemetery in accordance with the Franco-American agreement. Amidst the growing sentiment in the United States to follow precedent set by France and Great Britain to repatriate and honor a symbolic unknown soldier, the GRS would be called upon again to execute the wishes of the American people.

The year 1921 became significant as it ushered in a unique precedent for the way the United States honored its war dead: how to symbolically honor those whose remains were unidentified or never located. America became the third country to select and honor a representative 'Unknown Soldier' following similar acts by France and Great Britain during the previous year. Like the burial of all soldier dead from World War I, the selection and burial of America's Unknown Soldier was not without controversy. Similar to the disposition of the war dead, the will of the people, authorized by the Congress, paved the way for the Army to bring the Unknown Soldier back to the United States for interment.

By March 1921, 14,849 bodies had been returned, 500 waited at Hoboken ready for

¹¹⁸ Charles Pierce, memorandum for GRS Executive Officer, 11 November 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 140.

¹¹⁹ Conner, *War and Remembrance*, 23.

shipment to points in the United States, 3,293 caskets sat at the French ports awaiting embarkation, and 3,577 more resided at GRS concentration points waiting shipment to the ports of embarkation.¹²⁰ The managerial system that routed bodies from the interment site to a permanent overseas cemetery or back to the United States was captured on motion picture film and in still photograph. It is unclear whether the undated silent film was produced for documentary purposes, as a training aid, or a combination of the two. The two reels containing fourteen total minutes of film and housed at the National Archives displays in sometimes graphic detail the sequence of events that transpired as the GRS sought to evacuate temporary cemeteries and prepare bodies for concentration in the permanent overseas cemeteries or return to the United States for burial.¹²¹ Discussing the film in detail is necessary to understand the process undertaken by the GRS to systematically concentrate the permanent overseas cemeteries and repatriate the requested dead with reverence and efficiency.

The film begins by panning across an unnamed and unidentified temporary cemetery, presumably located in France. Across half the cemetery workers feverishly dig into gravesites to begin disinterring bodies. Tents are sporadically erected in various places to support the process. The GRS erected tents and screens to prevent onlookers from potentially grisly sights. Guards were posted to prevent unauthorized entry into the area.¹²² The other half of the cemetery denoted by a flagpole with the colors at half-staff, is peaceful since work has not yet begun on that side and the GRS prohibited visitors during exhumations. Looking closely, one can see shipping crates and trucks waiting to move the dead to a concentration point.

¹²⁰ Neil Hanson, *Unknown Soldiers: The Story of the Missing of the First World War*, (New York: Knopf, 2006), 243.

¹²¹ Activities of the Graves Registration Service, France, 1919-1920, NARA, 111.H.1208 Reels 1 and 2.

¹²² Office of the Quartermaster General, *History of the American Graves Registration Service: QMC in Europe*, Volume 3 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922), 32.

The next scene brings the viewer six feet down inside a mostly evacuated row of graves. The temporary white crosses remain leaned against the earth as reference if a recheck becomes necessary. The temporary cross stayed with the body until it was sealed in the casket.¹²³ A pair of men prepare a set of remains to be lifted out of the trench to begin the task of confirming (or establishing) the body's identity before it's prepared for onward movement. The men in this scene appear to be lifting chunks of dirt onto the stretcher as opposed to a recognizable body form – a testament both to the long intervals between initial burial and disinterment and the violence brought upon the human body by modern war. Despite the gruesomeness of their work, the men are careful if not reverent as they place the remains on the stretcher and fold the blanket around them. One gets a better glimpse into the challenges presented to GRS personnel as the team moves the stretcher to a tent in the next scene and rolls the decomposed remains onto the table as a waiting GRS officer prepares to sift through them and begin his identification work.

Following this, the viewer watches a group of workers hoist a casket from a gravesite under the supervision of a GRS officer who double checks the temporary grave marker before they begin. After the team of six lifts the casket, they set it near a tent and begin disassembling the casket. Upon opening the coffin, a disinfectant is sprayed before workers begin removing extraneous items to get to the body. In this case, an intact, recognizable body emerges from the mud, which is then placed on a blanket for further examination. A quick shot depicts the GRS officer and another worker examining something – probably an identification disc – found within the casket. The next opened casket appears to only hold parts of a body. Workers are shown putting all the casket's contents into a sifter in hopes of separating out the soldier's remains from

¹²³ H. F. Rethers, Letter to the Adjutant General, 18 September 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

extraneous materiel.¹²⁴ After removing the coffin from a temporary gravesite, the GRS aimed to disinfect, confirm identification, wrap, and casket the remains in approximately five minutes.¹²⁵ To prevent confusion and ease the burden on GRS officers, regulations allowed for only one body out of a casket at a time unless identification needed to be established on a set of remains.¹²⁶ This guidance necessitated the teams work briskly yet carefully at their task.

Following a brief shot of a worker examining a set of remains, the viewer watches a team working to lay out a set of remains on a table before spraying disinfectant on the body. The next scene shows the first intact body pulled from a casket. The GRS officer, presumably having confirmed the identity of that soldier, now supervises the preparation of the remains. He watches as the workers wrap the body in a standard wool army blanket. The men take great care in ensuring the blanket is wrapped and secured in a crisp, military manner. As they complete it, the GRS officer appears to pin either the Identification disc or a slip of paper to the blanket at the head.

The shipping case containing the casket is set next to the table and the body placed inside as the GRS officer watches. Simultaneously, a worker paints identifying information for the soldier on the wood shipping case before the casket is sealed. After the remains are placed inside the casket, workers place pillows around the body to prevent it from shifting in transit. The hygienic-law compliant metallic caskets inside the shipping crates were delivered from the United States since comparable models did not exist in Europe.¹²⁷ Upon securing the casket lid, a wood frame is placed inside the shipping crate to prevent damage to the casket during its

¹²⁴ Activities of the Graves Registration Service, France, 1919-1920, NARA, 111.H.1208 Reels 1 and 2.

¹²⁵ OQMG, *QMC in Europe*, Vol. 1, 139.

¹²⁶ H. F. Rethers, Letter to the Quartermaster General, 18 September 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

¹²⁷ OQMG, *QMC in Europe*, Vol. 1, 143.

journey. Finally, the shipping crate top is nailed in and loaded onto a truck – the GRS officer watches the remains until they are loaded onto the truck bound for a concentration point. After a body was enroute to a concentration point, GRS workers collected the old coffin, temporary cross, and other items extracted from a gravesite and destroyed them. Finally, they spread lime, which neutralized harmful bacteria, in the old gravesite before refilling it, thus meeting French hygienic specifications.¹²⁸

Larger cemeteries disallowed the above sequences from occurring as easily as in the smaller cemeteries. Notably, exhumation and examination could not occur adjacent to the gravesite since multiple teams worked nearby, creating mounds of excavated dirt prohibiting such activity. This situation compelled the GRS to establish examination stations using privacy screens set up in nearby fields, which solved the problem but lengthened the time needed to process bodies. If casketed remains did not depart the cemetery by nightfall, GRS personnel guarded the bodies against thieves and the elements.¹²⁹ This process eventually cleared over 2,000 temporary cemeteries, allowing the United States to return that land back to the French people.

Original GRS plans called for a cemetery to be evacuated in sequence, meaning the bodies requested to return to the United States were removed first, then later the GRS would return to that cemetery and concentrate the remaining bodies into the permanent cemeteries. In actuality, the GRS executed concentration efforts concurrent to repatriation operations. Despite accomplishing both operations simultaneously, the GRS did not finish concentration to the permanent cemeteries until the end of October 1922.¹³⁰ Surprisingly, neither exhumation,

¹²⁸ Minutes of the Franco-American Commission, 1 April 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 25.

¹²⁹ H. F. Rethers, Letter to the Adjutant General, 18 September 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

¹³⁰ QMC, *The Work of the American Graves Registration Service: 1917-1936*, (Washington: GPO, 1943), 36.

identification, nor transportation proved the principal cause for delay. One primary cause for the delay stemmed from the inability to finalize land acquisition from the French and complete preparatory work on the ground to receive the remains. As a result, bodies arrived from the temporary cemeteries at a faster rate than GRS personnel could inter them at the concentration cemeteries.

The GRS constructed mortuaries outside each of the permanent overseas cemeteries in which to store caskets awaiting burial.¹³¹ The mortuary's purpose was to act as a holding site for bodies disinterred from that cemetery as they awaited disposition instructions or onward movement. Likewise, bodies arriving for burial at the permanent cemetery from outlying areas were retained in the mortuary until a burial spot was readied to receive the remains. The GRS organized a force of guards to protect the buildings from fire or vandalism. Guards circulated the building to ensure any fire hazards were cleared from the areas around the caskets. Two feet of sand comprised the floor of each mortuary. Following their fire hazard inspections, the guards carefully raked the passageways smooth. This action allowed the guard mount to easily ascertain if intruders gained access to the mortuary's flag-draped confines.¹³²

The final interment location for a body remaining in Europe was determined by geographic location. The GRS assigned the bodies lying in each temporary cemetery to one of the seven continental permanent cemeteries based on the shortest distance for transportation and economy of manpower. Bodies in England remained there; those bodies already located at a permanent cemetery stayed at that cemetery. Relatives attempted to influence the cemetery in which their son was to be buried, but the War Department denied all such challenges. Within the

¹³¹ Ibid., 36-37.

¹³² AGRS, *QMC in Europe*, Vol. 3, 10-11.

cemeteries, no effort or preference was given to group officers together, or group dead of the same organization. Only the unidentified bodies were initially grouped together in order to facilitate future identification attempts.¹³³

The QMC film reel then shows a concentration point located near railroad tracks. Tents have been set up and stacks of shipping crates are visible waiting movement to their destination. A subsequent clip demonstrates how boats were used where canals allowed for an alternative mode of transportation to move bodies to concentration points. At the concentration point, workers are seen placing American flags over the shipping crates which will remain in place until the remains reach their destination. After the casket is removed from the shipping case, the flag draped the casket until its final interment. A breathtaking shot follows showing the inside of a concentration point's storage facility filled with flag-draped shipping containers beautifully decorated with flags and bunting.¹³⁴ Mass storage of the wood coffins was tenuous because of the fire risk. Guards kept strict vigilance on the morgues and ensured the availability of plentiful fire suppression options [see page 422].¹³⁵

Adorning caskets of the soldier dead with American flags was a practice largely codified during World War I. Previously flag-draped caskets appeared, notably during the burial of sailors killed in the USS *Maine* explosion two decades prior [see page 424].¹³⁶ No regulation existed, however, mandating the type of flag or authorizing its procurement at government expense. This changed in June 1918 when purchase of the American flag became part of the

¹³³ QMC, *The Work of the American Graves Registration Service: 1917-1936*, (Washington: GPO, 1943), 37; GRS History, Vol 2, 32-33, 35.

¹³⁴ Activities of the Graves Registration Service, France, 1919-1920, NARA, 111.H.1208 Reels 1 and 2.

¹³⁵ See Appendix N: Photo of Mortuary Fire Guard, Scott Kraska Collection.

¹³⁶ See Appendix O: Flag-draped caskets of USS *Maine* victims awaiting burial at Arlington National Cemetery, Library of Congress.

expenses borne by the government for the burial of deceased soldiers. Further investigation by QMC officers revealed that “there are no regulations relative to the manner in which this flag shall be placed on the casket.”¹³⁷ The QMC was charged with determining the appropriate size for such a flag, understanding that the size would not only need to drape a casket but a shipping case as well. One official recommended that a "storm flag" be used for such purposes.¹³⁸ By contrast, the QMC had previously proposed a flag bearing a thirteen-foot, three-inch fly with a seven foot hoist.¹³⁹ No evidence exists giving the exact dimension for these flags. As the United States waited for permission to begin repatriation operations in France, the Chief Quartermaster directed the procurement of flags so that one covered the casket of each body returning to the United States.¹⁴⁰

The next scene in the Graves Registration movie reel depicts a flag-adorned train evidently preparing to depart with remains bound for the United States. French locals turned out in droves to honor the fallen and a clergyman is seen speaking to the masses followed by a choir likely singing either, Le Marseilles, the Star-Spangled Banner or both national anthems. A priest blesses the train cars with holy water before the train departs the area. The locals watch silently as the honored dead roll by. The reel cuts to a view of a French port where the flag-adorned shipping cases are arranged on the pier alongside the ship that will transport them across the Atlantic. Dock workers rig the shipping cases to cranes which hoist caskets from the pier and

¹³⁷ Benjamin Jacobson, Letter to the Quartermaster General, 9 July 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 11.

¹³⁸ M. J. Henry, Memorandum for the Chief Quartermaster, 19 August 1919, NARA, 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’.

¹³⁹ Proposed Change to Army Regulations, 1918, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 11.

¹⁴⁰ M. J. Henry, Memorandum for the Chief Quartermaster, 19 August 1919, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 27.

lower them into the cargo hold of the ship. The American flag is shown flying over this area.¹⁴¹ Remains returned to the United States through various European ports. The majority of bodies (30,260) embarked through Antwerp, Belgium in addition to nine other ports throughout France and England.¹⁴²

After the United States gained approval from France to repatriate the requested bodies, the War Department quickly seized the initiative to begin operations. The QMC dispatched the USAT (US Army Transport) *Mercury* to Brest, France where the Paris military attaché directed the embarkation of all available bodies onto the ship. As caskets were loaded onto the ship, an officer recorded the name, rank, and service number of each soldier like any ship's manifest. The difference was that at the top of the register the words 'military deceased' noted the status of the *Mercury*'s silent passengers.¹⁴³

Ahead of what would soon be a deluge of ships bearing coffins from France, the War Department needed to select a suitable disembarkation point. The QMC scoured potential sites along the east coast of the United States searching for a suitable port that met all requirements pertaining to offloading and temporarily storing the dead in addition to transporting them efficiently anywhere in the country to their final resting place. Pier 4 at Hoboken, New Jersey, one of the ports from which the Doughboys left the United States bound for France years prior, was selected because it met all the QMC's requirements. In addition to possessing adequate storage space as remains awaited ground transport, areas existed nearby in which to make minor repairs to caskets or shipping cases "away from the prying eyes of reporters and others morbidly

¹⁴¹ Activities of the Graves Registration Service, France, 1919-1920, NARA, 111.H.1208 Reels 1 and 2.

¹⁴² OQMG, *QMC in Europe*, Vol. 3, 15.

¹⁴³ Deceased Passenger List for USAT *Antigone*, 7 August 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 30. The format was similar as it would be for the *Mercury*.

inclined” in order to preserve the sanctity of the remains at all times.¹⁴⁴

This last point was of concern to the QMC since military officials at Hoboken already experienced controversy back in November 1919 as they tried to walk the thin line between privacy and ceremony. As the first shipments of dead from North Russia returned to the United States through Hoboken, the local commander prohibited newspaper reporters from the pier in an effort to prevent their printing of potentially-gruesome details revealed by QMC soldiers removing the dead from the ship onto the pier. His decision was blasted by local journalists; one correspondent promptly cabled Secretary of War Baker expressing his opinion 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.”¹⁴⁵ This episode demonstrated how closely the public still watched the actions of the GRS despite the passage of almost two years’ time.

The first ship bearing remains from the Zone of the Armies arrived at Hoboken bearing over 7,000 coffins on 10 July 1921. Three caskets on the transport bore the remains of Enright, Hay, and Gresham: the first AEF soldiers killed in the trenches. After delivering a speech, General John Pershing laid wreaths on each of the three caskets.¹⁴⁶ This ceremony marked the beginning of repatriation activities conducted by the GRS for the next two years. On 12 July 1921, the bodies of Gresham, Enright, and Hay went to Evansville, Indiana, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Glidden, Iowa, respectively, for interment.¹⁴⁷ Pershing’s wreath accompanied

¹⁴⁴ F. P. Jackson, Memorandum for the Commanding General, Hoboken POE, 9 January 1920, NARA, RG, 92, Entry 1984-B, Box 1.

¹⁴⁵ M. Abbott, Telegram to Newton Baker, 18 November 1919, NARA, RG 92,

¹⁴⁶ “Enright, Hay, and Gresham Among 7,000 Dead Honored,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 11 July 1921.

¹⁴⁷ J. McClintock, letter to Willard Wright, 4 January 1929, in Burial File of James Gresham, NPRC.

at least Hay's casket all the way to Glidden to his final burial site.¹⁴⁸ Not all Americans were pleased to see Gresham, Enright, and Hay return to the United States. One editorial opined,

We cannot be enthusiastic over his return from French to Iowa soil.... Sleeping together in the soil of France, the graves of Enright, Gresham, and Hay would have been a shrine not only for Americans but for lovers of liberty from all parts of the world. Scattered in their homeland, they cannot speak the message for freedom that they spoke from that resting place where France so frankly hoped that they might remain.¹⁴⁹

Another newspaper article reported Merle Hay's mother as asking, "Why couldn't they have left him?" though the newspaper was not sure what compelled her to say this since she probably made the decision to repatriate Hay's remains.¹⁵⁰ Her equivocation reflected the tremendous, disorienting grief felt by the families of the dead. Hay's father had signed the War Department poll from 1921 but recorded that he lived with his wife in Iowa.¹⁵¹

Hoboken's Pier Four became an unofficial mourning site during the two years it welcomed home the repatriated dead of the AEF. A 17 March 1921 crowd of over 2,000 greeted 1,609 caskets arriving on the SS *Somme* from the Zone of the Interior. Christian and Hebrew prayers along with the "Star Spangled Banner" and "Taps" accompanied the formal speeches.¹⁵² A little over two months later, a reporter for the *New York Times* watched as 6,000 caskets arrived on the SS *Wheaton*. The reporter recorded "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

¹⁴⁸ "Pershing's Wreath Decorates Grave," Newspaper clipping in Burial File of Merle Hay, NPRC.

¹⁴⁹ "The World Loses a Shrine of Freedom," Newspaper clipping in Burial File of Merle Hay, NPRC.

¹⁵⁰ "Why Couldn't They Have Let Him?" Newspaper clipping in Burial File of Merle Hay, NPRC.

¹⁵¹ Remains Disposition Form for Merle Hay, 4 January 1921, in Burial File of Merle Hay, NPRC.

¹⁵² "Thousands at Pier Honor Soldier Dead," *New York Times*, 17 March 1921.

whose eyes tears glistened.” Following the formal portion of the ceremony, the same correspondent witnessed 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.”¹⁵³

The crowds receiving the silent passengers arriving from France were a far cry from the experiences of one reporter who witnessed the second ship from Cuba bearing bodies of the dead in April 1898. He wrote that “there was nothing of sentiment in the lifting of the pine boxes, one by one, over the side of the vessel, and the only persons to greet them were a corps of clerks from the Army Quartermaster’s office, who called out the name of each hero as the pine box was swung over the ship’s side. It was the last muster. There were no crowds on the pier.”¹⁵⁴ This reflected the difference between the Army of 1918 and the Army of the 19th century. The former was a true citizen’s army, the latter mostly a collection of mainly poor and destitute men, many without known family connections. If citizens of the United States typically “looked down on soldiers as shiftless individuals... because they could not or would not engage in the industrious pursuits of normal society” during the 19th century, those same Americans would not expend emotional energy to ensure their government honorably buried the war dead.¹⁵⁵ When the World War I caused the deaths of men from all walks of life, attitudes changed.

In more intimate ceremonies, Gold Star mothers gathered, presumably to privately mourn

¹⁵³ “Tribute on Pier to 6,000 Soldier Dead,” *New York Times*, 29 August 1921.

¹⁵⁴ “The Dead on the Crook,” *New York Times*, 28 April 1899.

¹⁵⁵ Clayton R. Newell, *The Regular Army Before the Civil War: 1845 - 1860*, (Washington: Center of Military History, 2014), 8.

the returning dead on behalf of their Gold Star companions who could not make the trip to Pier Four to welcome their son's home.¹⁵⁶ The various ceremonies at Hoboken's Pier Four, whether large or small, provided a public platform for the American public to mourn its war dead. This arguably would not have been possible without the GRS selecting a suitable debarkation site and executing a well-planned sequence to move the dead in a deliberate, organized fashion.

After the disembarkation ceremonies concluded, GRS personnel placed the caskets into storage areas where the coffins were organized by destination to allow for easy loading as rail transportation became available. Plans called for the War Department to coordinate between Hoboken and actions at the European ports to ensure GRS personnel at the former possessed notice of inbound ships. A deceased passenger list and ideally the final destinations for each body greatly assisted the newly-established GRS office at Hoboken to quickly receive and process remains, check paperwork for accuracy, and ensure all sanitary requirements were up to regulation prior to dispatching the caskets from Hoboken to their final interment sites across the United States.¹⁵⁷

With hundreds to sometimes thousands of caskets coming into Hoboken on one ship, the GRS inevitably experienced backlogs of caskets while coordinating rail transportation. This was usually not a problem except on the night of 24 August 1921 when a fire at Hoboken's Pier Five nearly caused a national disaster. The fire began adjacent to Pier Four and quickly threatened the warehouses that served as holding areas for over 1,500 caskets awaiting rail transport. A GRS captain and a handful of soldiers moved over 400 bodies to safety and made plans to push a

¹⁵⁶ Holly S. Fenelon, *That Knock at the Door: The History of the Gold Star Mothers in America* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, Inc., 2012), 47.

¹⁵⁷ H. L. Rogers, Memorandum to Chief, Transportation Service, Subject: Disposition of the Dead – Coordination of Service, 10 January 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1894-B, Box 1.

recently arrived ship containing more coffins back into the river less it too be overtaken by the encroaching flames. Fortunately, winds shifted the fire away from the warehouses that still contained over 1,000 bodies.¹⁵⁸ The fire raged for over three hours before it was finally contained by local fire departments. The damage assessment confirmed much structural damage to Hoboken but no damage or loss to any soldier dead caskets. The *New York Times* heaped praise upon the GRS men whose bravery on behalf of the dead and the families of the dead demonstrated the GRS's unyielding commitment to its mission.¹⁵⁹

Upon a transport's arrival at Hoboken, the QMC organized shipments of caskets bound for certain geographic areas within the United States as well as the national cemeteries. Pierce issued instructions in March 1920 to guide both officials at Hoboken and cemetery superintendents in completing all actions leading up to final interment. Pierce's guidance instructed Hoboken to notify the appropriate cemetery officials in a timely manner so graves might be prepared and ready for use upon arrival of the remains. Additionally, cemeteries were to record and maintain on file specific information regarding each burial.¹⁶⁰ Hoboken dutifully provided this information, but requests for additional information began to arrive at the Adjutant General's office.

Memorandums from the QMC's Cemeterial Branch dispatched lists of dead whose remains were bound for a national cemetery asking "that this office be advised if any of the following named enlisted men and officer(s) whose remains are to be reinterred in Arlington and other National Cemeteries at an early date, are colored:..."¹⁶¹ Black soldiers mostly worked at

¹⁵⁸ "Leviathan Singed, Army Piers Burned, Soldier Dead Saved," *New York Times*, 25 August 1921.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Charles Pierce, memorandum to Zone Supply Officer, Subject: Burials, 15 March 1920, NARA, RG 92 Entry 1941, Box 19.

¹⁶¹ H.D. Saxton, Memorandum for the Adjutant General's Office, 27 May 1921, 15 March 1920, NARA, RG 92

the front in labor battalions or in rear-echelon jobs with the Service of Supply. Only very late in the war were two black combat divisions created. Given the range of Great War artillery, African Americans in non-combat roles were often as vulnerable as white soldiers on the front line. And yet, inequality in death, as in life, persisted in the United States for these men. Several such requests reside within the QMC files in the National Archives and certainly provide evidence that institutional racism penetrated the GRS no less than the Army. Indeed, a visitor to the Antietam National Cemetery today will find rows of World War I dead grouped together. But well apart from those graves are two graves belonging to black soldiers, who died during the war and in death remain segregated from their comrades. The National Park Service declared the cemetery 'closed' for future burials guaranteeing the blemish upon the record of the American Graves Registration Service by leaving those two soldiers forever segregated in death due to the color of their skin.

At Arlington National Cemetery, the deceased soldiers identified as 'colored' were buried in segregated plots – a final injustice by the nation for which those men died, but which certainly reflected the segregation and racism that had increased under the Progressive administration of President Woodrow Wilson, a native of Virginia. These plots were initially separated by narrow walking paths from their white equivalents. Following the Army's desegregation in 1947, the paths that separated the white and black plots were filled in with new burials. A visitor to that area today would only notice where the segregated plots existed through a careful examination of the graves and the dates of death for those buried in them.¹⁶²

For soldier dead being returned to their hometowns for burial in a private cemetery, the

Entry 1941, Box 19.

¹⁶² Arlington National Cemetery Historian Tim Frank pointed out the demarcation lines during a 2017 visit to the cemetery.

GRS communicated directly with the soldier's family and the funeral home responsible for the burial. Initially, the GRS notified the family once their soldier's remains arrived at Hoboken to allow ample time for funeral arrangements to occur.¹⁶³ Unfortunately, the distance some bodies needed to travel compared to when the telegram was dispatched created plenty of opportunities for delays to occur. In one instance, an entire Kentucky town turned out for the arrival of a soldier in order to honor him and his grieving family. The train arrived at the time stated by the GRS in its telegram to the family, but no casket was on board. The soldier dead's absence compelled the undertaker to write the GRS stating, "We never faced such a disappointed crowd."¹⁶⁴ This occurrence and others like it did not occur due to negligence but demonstrated to the GRS that even small delays and let-downs could produce adverse feelings toward the service and the Army writ-large. The GRS needed to eliminate avoidable mishaps wherever possible and quickly devised a plan to ensure better accuracy.

Understanding that the volume of remains inbound from France would only increase with time, the GRS established twelve distribution centers at key stations across the United States including Washington, D.C., Chicago, Louisville, Kentucky; Atlanta, St. Paul, Minnesota; Omaha, Nebraska; Little Rock, San Antonio, Cheyenne, Wyoming; El Paso, Portland, and San Francisco.¹⁶⁵ The distribution centers communicated and coordinated directly with Hoboken and grouped remains destined for their respective geographical areas. Once the caskets arrived, the distribution center then communicated with the soldier's next of kin via telegram. This system allowed greater control for the GRS and enabled the service to offer families a more precise

¹⁶³ H. C. Whitehead, Letter to the Quartermaster General, 3 March 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 3.

¹⁶⁴ Maury Undertaking Company, Letter to Mr. Bradley, 24 August 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 13.

¹⁶⁵ The Quartermaster General, Memorandum for Depot Officer, San Francisco, Subject: Establishment of Distribution Centers, 16 June 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 3.

timeline as to the arrival of their soldier dead. Doing so allowed the bereaved families adequate lead time to prepare final goodbyes to their loved ones.

The American Legion offered its services to the families of those soldiers repatriated from France. Readers of select newspapers might have seen articles summarizing the plans outlined by the Legion for participation in any funeral where its presence was desired by the soldier's next of kin. The veterans' organization forwarded copies of its organizational bulletin that provided details of what honors the Legion could participate in and subsequently instructed its local posts to contact bereaved families through local mortuaries to offer its assistance rather than wait to be asked. Within its instructions, the Legion was adamant that members do not attempt to influence families' decisions to repatriate or leave their soldier dead in France.¹⁶⁶

Regrettably, the GRS received returned telegrams marked 'undeliverable,' meaning the next of kin had moved and did not update their address with the War Department or perished and no succeeding next of kin contacted the GRS or War Department. Such occurrences were an unfortunate result of the delay between the War Department's initial polling of next of kin wishes and the final confirmation sought for the final disposition of their soldier dead, French acquiescence to repatriation, cemetery evacuation, and finally arrival of caskets to America. The Quartermaster General, upon the recommendation of Charles Pierce, ordered that unclaimed bodies be redirected for permanent burial in Arlington National Cemetery.¹⁶⁷

After the bodies arrived at Hoboken, the GRS assigned escorts to accompany the remains to their destination whether that was a national cemetery or a local funeral home ahead of a private interment. A military commander near Chicago conceived the idea of government

¹⁶⁶ "Plans Made to Honor Dead on Arrival Here," *Tampa Bay Times*, 28 July 1920.

¹⁶⁷ H. L. Rogers, Memorandum for the Secretary of War, 9 February 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 17.

funded escorts early in 1918 when he noted that his office was regularly asked to supply men as escorts. The commander explained that no authority existed to fund the escorts, so the bereaved family was forced to pay, lest their soldier dead travel without an escort. “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, adding, “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.”¹⁶⁸ The War Department approved the commander’s request and corresponding funding in March, 1918. This act provided the foundation for escorts to accompany the repatriated military dead across the United States. It is a practice that continues today.

Fort Hamilton, New York supplied the escorts accompanying repatriated remains. The Quartermaster General ordered “A force of *competent* enlisted men for this purpose [escort duty]” understanding that these men would be the ‘face’ of the Army to thousands of bereaved families across the United States.¹⁶⁹ Sometimes, the personal interaction of the families with their escort comprised their first and only personal interaction with the Army, making it more imperative for a positive outcome. Despite the importance of the duty, the War Department did not publish a manual or instructions regarding the prosecution of this vital responsibility.

The military escorts performed a duty for the Army as much as for the family of the

¹⁶⁸ William H. Carter, Memorandum for the Adjutant General, “Funeral Escorts and Pallbearers”, 26 February 1918, NARA, RG 92 (both quotes).

¹⁶⁹ Frank T. Hines, Letter to the Commanding General, Hoboken POE, 23 January 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1894-B, Box 1 (emphasis to ‘competent’ added).

soldier they brought home. Caskets shipped via rail possessed a bill of lading similar to any piece of cargo. The escort assisted train engineers, funeral directors, and others to navigate military paperwork and ensured the casket arrived without significant damage. If this did occur, the escort could arrange for repairs or replacements as required. Escorts also assisted funeral directors with moving the casket wherever requested by the family up to its interment.¹⁷⁰ For the War Department, the escort needed a signed receipt from the decedent's family or the national cemetery superintendent accepting responsibility of the remains from the escort.¹⁷¹ The escorts' utilitarian duties eased much burden on all involved with the transportation and interment of the soldier dead.

While the soldier dead's escorts were almost exclusively military personnel, a provision existed for a substitute escort who was a friend or relative of the deceased. The War Department provided for the person's transportation from Hoboken to the place of interment, but the individual was responsible for getting to Hoboken to assume their duty.¹⁷² After Frank Leslie's body arrived at Hoboken, it was met and claimed by his father who had travelled from Rockford, Illinois to bring his son home.¹⁷³ This flexibility from a usually rigid organization signaled a willingness by the Army to allow families opportunities to participate in the repatriation process if it assisted their receiving closure.

Jessica Mitford noted the importance of viewing the deceased to achieving closure in her 1963 book, *The American Way of Death*. She explains that "grief therapy is...the mental and

¹⁷⁰ 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, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

¹⁷¹ P. W. Davison, Memorandum for the Commanding General, Hoboken POE, "Dead Bodies from Overseas", 9 January 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1894-B, Box 1.

¹⁷² "Removal of Soldier Dead from France," *Richwood Gazette* (Oh.), 22 July 1920.

¹⁷³ Haug, *Gold Star Mothers*, 20.

emotional solace...achieved for the bereaved family as a result of being able to ‘view’ the embalmed and restored deceased.” The ability to present a body resembling its living form “will largely determine the degree of permanent mental trauma to be suffered by all those closely associated with the deceased.”¹⁷⁴ Another doctor added that “we know that viewing (the deceased) in most instances – is valuable.”¹⁷⁵ Mitford cautioned that “an exhumed, embalmed body is a repugnant, moldy, foul-looking object. It’s not the image of one who has been loved.”¹⁷⁶ Assuming that is true – what does an exhumed, un-embalmed body look like, and what image does it present? In the case of the World War I dead, bodies had been buried for at least two or three years prior to their return. Those burials were executed without embalming and oftentimes without caskets. Yet, some families wanted the opportunity to see their soldier dead before permanently committing his remains to his native soil.

That such a question would arise makes sense given the American social attitude toward death at the time the soldier dead returned from Europe. James Farrell wrote in *Inventing the American Way of Death* that “an American funeral in 1920 usually included a life-like body resting in a sightly and comfortable casket.”¹⁷⁷ By contrast, a surveyed English funeral director conducted but one embalming in his career. That one instance only occurred because the family was overseas, delaying the funeral. The general feeling in England seemed, to at least one researcher, that the dead should be buried without pomp.¹⁷⁸ Indeed, an English woman attended a funeral in San Francisco and wrote her reaction to the open-casket funeral. “It shook me rigid

¹⁷⁴ Jessica Mitford, *The American Way of Death*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), 90.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁷⁷ James Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830-1920*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 172.

¹⁷⁸ Mitford, *The American Way of Death*, 205-206.

to get there and find the casket open.... Then and there I decided that I could never face another American funeral – even dead.”¹⁷⁹ American dead by 1920 were almost exclusively embalmed, which might have created the expectation for families to receive their dead in a similar state in order to perform customary funeral rites.¹⁸⁰ Expectations of some families collided with the realities of modern war and the circumstances of wartime burials during this period.

The GRS did not possess a policy one way or another regarding viewing the remains. Texas representatives wrote the GRS seeking guidance with which to respond to the deluge of requests sent to funeral homes across the state to do so. A Missouri funeral home suggested the War Department follow their guidance:

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 every 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.¹⁸¹

The sometimes-unbecoming actions of undertakers reappeared during this time. One funeral director wrote the War Department regarding information he had that some unscrupulous peers were opening caskets under the guise of confirming whether the family received the correct body. They were then charging the family money to secure the casket or even an entirely new coffin before burial.¹⁸² While far from widespread, the actions of an unscrupulous few cast bad light on the funeral industry during and after World War I.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 75-76.

¹⁸⁰ Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death*, 158-159.

¹⁸¹ Walther-Wymore Furniture and Und. Co, Letter to the War Department, 6 October 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

¹⁸² J.A. Tufts, Letter to the Bureau of War Risk Insurance, 15 September 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

Aside from achieving closure, some families sought to view the remains to confirm that they received the correct body. One such family was convinced that since their boy shared names with another soldier in the company who also was killed, they received the latter body rather than that of their son.¹⁸³ Some in the War Department were inclined to prohibit opening caskets altogether, but a Quartermaster captain argued that such a decision could cause additional problems for the War Department. He noted 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 anybody 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.¹⁸⁴

The War Department proffered that it transferred legal control of the remains for all caskets dispatched to a next of kin or a funeral director for private burial in a local cemetery. Therefore, attempts by the soldier's family to view remains were subject to "the local health laws and sanitary regulations."¹⁸⁵ Despite releasing authority to afford families the opportunity to make their own decision, the War Department did warn that since the bodies were never embalmed the sight of decomposed remains could place additional stress on the grieving kin.¹⁸⁶ Farrell's *Inventing the American Way of Death* describes that "The expectation of preserving

¹⁸³ Gerald Murphy, Telegram to Charles Pierce, 8 July 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

¹⁸⁴ Charles J. Wynne, Memorandum for Major Davis, 26 July 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

¹⁸⁵ Charles J. Wynne, Letter to C. E. Juren, 7 July 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

¹⁸⁶ Charles J. Wynne, Letter to W. J. Schewe, 9 June 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

bodies to prevent decomposition... relieved intense emotions, not only of grief, but of horror and revulsion.”¹⁸⁷ Given that finding, the War Department’s warning was with good cause to prevent additional stress placed on families who might not be prepared for the sight that awaited them. The GRS movie reel described in the preceding pages gave glimpse to the differing stages of decomposition in exhumed bodies that the flag draped caskets contained.

Remains going to national cemeteries were another matter. Those bodies going to national cemeteries remained technically in government control through interment since the cemetery was federal property. Legal authority did not transfer to the next of kin, giving the War Department final say as to whether those remains could be viewed. Therefore, it elected to prohibit such action and directed subordinate organizations to deny any such requests from next of kin.¹⁸⁸

The questions from the public did not cease with the opening of caskets. The War Department was peppered with requests for information, clarification, and policy by families and funeral directors alike. Questions included whether or not a family could place their soldier’s remains upon the altar at their local church to lie in state.¹⁸⁹ Another wanted to know whether or not they could conduct their son’s funeral service in Czech since immediately following, the American Legion would be on hand to perform military honors.¹⁹⁰ Such questions arose because the public had not previously possessed the option to conduct a private funeral with military honors. It represented the early intersection of the Army with the American people.

A funeral director wrote to inquire if he could let friends or relatives retain the American

¹⁸⁷ Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death*, 162.

¹⁸⁸ H. J. Conner, Letter to Colonel Jones, 21 May 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

¹⁸⁹ Scott Wilson, Letter to the United States Department of Health, 26 May 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

¹⁹⁰ O. H. Juren, Letter to the Quartermaster Corps, 28 June 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

flag that draped the casket.¹⁹¹ Such an action is assumed today, but no policy existed a century prior. The American flag that draped the returned caskets emerged as a hole in the War Department's burial policy. As discussed, no policy existed with respect toward the flag's disposition following the end of the funeral mostly because flags had not previously draped the caskets of war dead as a matter of practice prior to the war. In December of 1920, the American Legion brought the issue to the Quartermaster General. The Legion understood the War Department's hesitancy to intervene in the private funerals in local cemeteries but asked for guidance governing the flag, which the government provided at its expense. The Legion had found itself embattled with cemetery officials over whether it was proper to bury the flag inside of the casket or on top of the casket but within the wood shipping crate.¹⁹² The Adjutant General found that no published instructions existed so offered general guidance that "the flag is fulfilling its best mission when it is being properly cared for and exposed to view."¹⁹³ Pierce researched the matter as well and concluded that while most within the War Department concurred that burial of the flag was improper, no regulations existed to prevent such occurrences.¹⁹⁴ Once again, a suggestion originating from within the Army's ranks brought about a change of policy.

A dissatisfied Quartermaster lieutenant wrote to the Quartermaster General in January 1921. He argued in his letter that "The flag should be turned over to the next of kin of the deceased soldier to be retained as a memorial," which became the genesis for one of the most solemn if not heart-wrenching aspects of a military funeral.¹⁹⁵ The Quartermaster General seized

¹⁹¹ W.H. Willberger, Letter to "U.S. Government." 14 June 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

¹⁹² Frederick Clouter, Letter to the Office of the Quartermaster General, 6 December 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 8.

¹⁹³ F. W. Lewis, Letter to the Quartermaster General, 6 January 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 8.

¹⁹⁴ Charles Pierce, Letter to Frederick Coulter, 20 December 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 8.

¹⁹⁵ H. J. Conner, Memorandum for the Quartermaster General of the Army, 8 January 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry

upon this suggestion and on the 16th of January 1921, issued the first instance of policy governing the disposition of the casket flag. On that day, the Quartermaster General ordered,

The flag which drapes the casket will be lowered in the grave on top of the shipping case, but will be removed immediately after the ceremonies and turned over to the nearest relative of the deceased if so desired. If not desired... it should be removed by the Superintendent and retained by him and report made to this office in each case, which instructions will be given as to the disposition of the flag.¹⁹⁶

Requests for exceptions to this policy eventually emerged. A patriotic organization known as the Loyal Legion expressed its desire to honor its members to bury them in their flag-draped coffin.¹⁹⁷ In 1921, the Loyal Legion received permission from the Quartermaster General to continue this practice, as could any other individuals or groups. The Quartermaster General added a caveat that at no time could the flag be placed atop the vault and no dirt was permitted to be thrown on the flag-draped casket inside the vault.¹⁹⁸ Such exceptions granted by the War Department demonstrate a commitment to allow Americans to honor their war dead in the most suitable way possible within the intent of very nascent guidelines. While department officials readily acknowledged the existence or absence of regulations, they proved amenable to requests that met the spirit of the nation's intent to properly honor its military fallen.

The spring of 1921 witnessed a surge of repatriation activities abroad which caused a similar reaction in the United States to receive and transport returning remains to their final burial site. Arlington National Cemetery, already holding twelve percent of all repatriated

1941, Box 8.

¹⁹⁶ H.J. Connor, Memorandum for the Depot Quartermaster, 25 January 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 8.

¹⁹⁷ H. L. Rogers, Memorandum for the Depot Quartermaster, "Burial of Flag with Casket in all Cases of Members of Loyal Legion," 14 May 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

¹⁹⁸ H. L. Rogers, Memorandum for the Adjutant General of the Army, "Disposition of Flag at Military Burials," 16 May 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 28.

remains, doubled this number. This increase allowed for up to 220 weekly burials.¹⁹⁹ As the Quartermaster Corps absorbed a surge of remains returning from France, capacity problems inevitably arose. One such difficulty was the ability to provide due honors to the deceased such as an escort for the remains and a firing squad accompanied by a bugler for the burial service. These oversights resulted in complaints from families and spectators to the ceremonies. By August 1921, the Quartermaster Corps estimated all requested bodies would be repatriated from Europe by the end of October. Acknowledging that “These complaints are hurting the standing, prestige, and honor of the Army,” the Adjutant General directed that “A liberal policy will be followed in furnishing these details even at the expense of training and other activities.”²⁰⁰ Such drastic actions by ranking War Department officials exemplified their commitment to carrying out the wishes of the American people through the orders of their civilian authorities.

Amidst the scrutiny, relatives of the soldier dead and interested parties contacted the War Department requesting assistance or guidance in properly commemorating the World War I dead. A stone company queried the QMC regarding the dimensions of the crosses currently used in the temporary overseas cemeteries. The company possessed numerous requests to replicate those grave markers for use in private cemeteries or as personal memorials.²⁰¹ The QMC forwarded the crosses’ specifications, including how much of the monument existed above and below ground.²⁰² The Quartermaster General personally approved the addition of two cubic feet of dirt into a shipping container so that a family could possess some of the soil that covered their

¹⁹⁹ H. J. Connor, Letter to Captain Shannon, 15 April 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 17.

²⁰⁰ The Adjutant General, Memorandum to all Commanding Officers in the 3rd Corps Area, Subject: Military Honors for Deceased Soldiers Returned from Abroad, 11 August 1921, NARA, RG 92, Decimal 293, Box 3990.

²⁰¹ The Presbrey-Leland Company, Inc. Letter to the U.S. Army Engineers Board, 10 August 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 24.

²⁰² H. J. Conner, Letter to The Presbrey-Leland Company, Inc., 26 August 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 24.

son's initial burial site in Europe.²⁰³ However minor these vignettes might seem, they nevertheless demonstrate a War Department empathetic to bereaved families that sought to help assuage their grief and assist in commemorating their soldier dead in any way possible.

While the problems arising during the repatriation and burial efforts of the GRS largely remained in its files, it is important to remember that in many cases the soldier's final burial occurred in the manner envisioned by his family. Air Service Lieutenant Jay Carpenter, shot down and listed missing until his remains were identified five months later, was returned to the United States because he had indicated his desire to be buried in America in numerous letters home. Arriving in the United States on 25 March 1921, Carpenter was buried in Rochelle, Illinois on his birthday, 1 April.²⁰⁴ Similarly, it was important for Alma Douglas to repatriate the remains of her son, Darrell, so that his remains might lie in the same cemetery with five generations of her family.²⁰⁵ She ultimately received her wish.

The final scenes of the Graves Registration reel from the National Archives shows panoramic shots of unidentified American cemeteries being beautified in France. Scenes of other highly decorated cemeteries along with the full trees give the impression that the dignitaries shown arriving are there to celebrate Memorial Day. Ceremonies abound with French and American officials participating are depicted in cemeteries and towns. The final three minutes of the film reel consist of slow camera pans, first of a smaller, unidentified American cemetery followed by an impressive sweep of the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery. Taken before the trees and shrubs blocked the view, the viewer gains an appreciation not only of the largest American overseas cemetery but also the scale of the American sacrifice in World War I.

²⁰³ H. L. Rogers, Telegram to H. F. Rethers, 19 September 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 24.

²⁰⁴ Haug, *Gold Star Mothers*, 35.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

This film was taken before the final reorganization of the cemetery, however. The last two graves shown side by side in the film belonged to Corporal Kenneth J. Summersby (Grave 200) and Private George E. Long (Grave 201).²⁰⁶ Examining current ABMC burial files reveals that Summersby is now buried in Plot H, Row 30, Grave 30 while Long rests in Plot D, Row 8, Grave 29.²⁰⁷

At the 1921 Suresnes Memorial Day program conducted as the repatriation program was in full swing, American Ambassador to France Hugh Wallace remarked, “Could I have my way, these graves would never be disturbed.”²⁰⁸ Marshal Pétain probably agreed, but sought to make those remaining dead in France, “the basis of an eternal friendship.”²⁰⁹ Aware of their declining power and importance after World War I, the French saw political opportunity in the cemeteries. They would bind the United States, the world’s strongest power, and France closer together. In August 1921, the GRS added three more permanent overseas cemeteries as the total number of bodies remaining in France became clearer: Oise-Aisne, Thiaucourt, and Waregem in Belgium.²¹⁰ These places corresponded to the battles of the 2nd Marne, St. Mihiel, and the Ypres-Lys Offensive, respectively. Each was specifically selected for its significance to the AEF’s seven-month fight rather than ease for travelers. The addition of the cemeteries meant more bodies remained in Europe than initially anticipated, but the total stayed below half.

Despite the best efforts of GRS personnel conducting exhumations and confirming identities of the remains before movement to a permanent cemetery, the circumstances of some

²⁰⁶ Activities of the Graves Registration Service, France, 1919-1920, NARA, 111.H.1208 Reels 1 and 2.

²⁰⁷ ABMC, Search ABMC Burials,” accessed 1 June 2019, <https://www.abmc.gov/database-search>.

²⁰⁸ Conner, *War and Remembrance*, 32-33.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

cases proved too difficult to resolve. The GRS established a board of review to reconcile such cases, including bodies without identification, multiple bodies in the same grave, or bodies without a grave marker.²¹¹ Consisting of three officers, the review board consolidated all irregular cases in Paris where the files could be reviewed and compared carefully in order to attempt identification.

Eighty-one cemeteries reported a total of 1,746 cases to the board of review, of which the board identified remains in 1,061 of the files.²¹² Critical to the board's success was its creation in Paris where the officers not otherwise connected with the exhumations in the field could pour over the evidence without becoming swayed by emotion or fatigue.²¹³ While the board enjoyed tremendous success, ultimately unknown American remains existed in the overseas cemeteries. While some possessed evidence that could aid in eventual identification, the GRS had to date exhausted all available means at its disposal. Resultantly, over 1,000 American families did not possess a body with which to decide where it should be buried.

Selection and Return of the Unknown Soldier

Modern scholars of death and mourning emphasize the importance of a body to the grieving process. On this subject, one funeral director remarked that "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."²¹⁴ In accordance with the 1920 Franco-American Commission agreement, all

²¹¹ H. F. Rethers, Letter to the Quartermaster General, 25 January 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 41; OQMG, *QMC in Europe*, Vol. 3, 83.

²¹² OQMG, *QMC in Europe*, Vol. 3, 85.

²¹³ H. F. Rethers, Letter to the Quartermaster General, 24 May 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 41.

²¹⁴ Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry, *Death and the Regeneration of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 96.

unidentified bodies were to be left in France.²¹⁵ For the families of those unknown dead, they received no options from the government regarding the final disposition of their soldier dead. Rather, they possessed no body to bury and no grave over which to grieve their loss. Without physical proof of their soldier's death, some families held onto an admittedly slim hope that their loved one was alive somewhere, somehow. The same funeral director, having witnessed countless families of deceased in his mortuary, wrote that he learned from them 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."²¹⁶ Those not knowing the location of their soldier dead became the subject of discussion late in 1920, culminating with the return of an Unknown Soldier in 1921.

The conversation regarding the possible repatriation and burial of an unidentified soldier began in the United States in 1920 amidst the efforts of France and Britain to bury an Unknown Soldier. The American Legion and the Bring Home the Soldier Dead League immediately threw the weight of their organizations behind such a possibility.²¹⁷ For its part, the Bring Home the Soldier Dead League viewed such an action as a possible catalyst to return all the unidentified dead, arguing that such a move "would keep sacred the Government's promise and pledge to those who cannot speak."²¹⁸ The War Department countered that "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."²¹⁹ It also stood to break the

²¹⁵ OQMG, *QMC in Europe*, Vol. 1, 122.

²¹⁶ Bloch and Parry, *Death and the Regeneration of Life*, 97.

²¹⁷ W. K. Hammond, Letter to Newton Baker, 4 February 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 26; "The Unknown Soldier," *New York Times*, 21 January 1921.

²¹⁸ A. B. Pouch, Letter to John Weeks, 25 July 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 26.

²¹⁹ J. W. Wainright, Letter to A. B. Pouch, 2 August 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 14.

agreement with France.

Army Chief of Staff Peyton March dissented to the burial of an unknown soldier. His cause was not of sentiment but of practicality. He argued that the British and French unknown soldiers represented a much larger number of unidentified bodies in those respective countries. By contrast, March stated, “[In] our case... the list of unidentified is very small and constantly growing smaller.... We entered the war with the advantage of having all the previous work of the Allied nations in.... and our system has been so complete that even now from day to day identifications of the few remaining are being made....”²²⁰ March had reason to be skeptical. By early 1921, only 1,717 unknown dead with 431 unidentified bodies remained.²²¹ By 1929, this number had dropped to 1,648.²²² Continued efforts eventually lowered the total unidentified to 1,250 by 1932.²²³

Still, with over 1,000 unknown soldiers, Congress felt compelled to act. In February 1921, the Congress published a joint resolution for “the bringing to the United States of the body of an unknown American, who was a member of the American Expeditionary Forces, who served in Europe and lost his life during the World War, and for the burial of the remains with appropriate ceremonies,” and authorized funding to the Secretary of War for such action.²²⁴ Of burying an unidentified soldier in the United States, General Pershing remarked, “When the Unknown Soldier is buried here, every activity throughout the United States, might pause for one

²²⁰ Peyton March, letter to Marie Maloney, 16 November 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 140.

²²¹ Hearings before the Committee on Military Affairs, 1 February 1921, NARA, RG 200 (Pershing File), Entry 19, Box 1.

²²² Newspaper Clipping, the *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 1 June 1919, NARA, RG92, GSM Pilgrimage, Box 345.

²²³ “Recovery of War’s Dead Goes on in No Man’s Land,” 1932 newspaper clipping, NARA, RG92, GSM Pilgrimage, Box 348.

²²⁴ Public Resolution 67, 66th Congress, 4 March 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 140.

half an hour and everyone pay silent tribute by prayer and meditation to the men who died and who offered to die in the World War.”²²⁵ After the government agreed on the concept, the next step was identifying a burial location

Initially, the War Department identified the Capitol Rotunda and Arlington National Cemetery as possible interment sites. Arlington’s association with the Civil War dissuaded some Americans who thought the Capitol a more suitable location.²²⁶ For his part, Newton Baker agreed, stating that Arlington would not become the “Westminster Abbey of the dead,” by which he meant a national shrine.²²⁷ To Baker and the War Department, Arlington National Cemetery was just another military cemetery, not a place of national or historical significance. Other ideas poured into the War Department regarding the appropriate interment site for the Unknown Soldier. A Philadelphia civic group advocated for Independence Hall citing, “There could be no more holy ground for the Nation’s unknown hero who gave his life for liberty; there is none more hallowed than where Independence Hall stands, for it belongs to the people of the United States, and in truth is a Nation’s shrine.”²²⁸ New York’s planned Victory Hall was also submitted as a possibility.²²⁹ A month later on 4 March 1921, Congress formally authorized the disinterment of one unidentified set of remains in France for return to the United States and burial in a special tomb located near Arlington National Cemetery’s Memorial Amphitheater.²³⁰ The managing editor of the *Philadelphia Record* opined of the selection that “Comparatively few

²²⁵ John Murray, letter to the Hon. Julius Kahn, 4 February 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 140.

²²⁶ Kurt Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way* (Washington: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1995), 118.

²²⁷ “The Unknown Soldier’s Tomb,” *New York Times*, 3 February 1921.

²²⁸ Philadelphia City Council Resolution, 11 February 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 140; Charles Gilland, letter to John Weeks, 22 March 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 140.

²²⁹ Newton Baker, letter to George Wingate, 24 November 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 140.

²³⁰ Text of HR 8032, 4 March 1921, NARA, RG 92, Records Regarding the Design and Construction of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Box 2.

people go to Arlington or ever will go there.”²³¹

After America’s intentions to bring home an unidentified body for burial came to light, many became anxious for those plans to become reality. The Quartermaster Corps needed to temper expectations, lest a body be declared unidentifiable in haste. Quartermaster General H. L. Rogers responded to a congressman asking such a question: “Inasmuch as... the Graves Registration Service is daily effecting identifications in cases which heretofore have been in doubt, it has been recommended that selection of the remains be deferred until the last possible moment.”²³² Still, some Americans asked why their government moved much slower than those of France and Great Britain in selecting and burying a representative Unknown Soldier.

Amidst the planning for the burial of an unknown soldier the GRS suffered a devastating loss. Colonel Charles Pierce, the man who twenty years prior innovated many of the techniques that helped ensure the success of the GRS during and after World War I, died of pneumonia in Tours, France, on 16 May 1921. He had travelled to France on an inspection tour accompanied by his wife. She fell ill while in Paris and died toward the end of April, and he followed three weeks later. Pierce’s replacement as Chief of the GRS, Colonel H. F. Rethers, fell ill with pneumonia a couple months later and for a while his condition was reported as grave. Ultimately, Rethers recovered.²³³ Ironically, if not fittingly, as a member of the Army dying overseas, Pierce’s remains became subject to the Army’s ongoing repatriation policy; the plan for which just a few short years before he helped create.

Perhaps fittingly, Colonel and Mrs. Pierce’s remains followed the path that over 45,000 soldiers of the AEF had traversed under Pierce’s charge. The Pierces’ remains arrived at

²³¹ Letter to Newton Baker, 30 November 1920, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 140.

²³² H. L. Rogers, letter to Hon. F.R. Gooding, 27 May 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 140.

²³³ War Department, *Army and Navy Journal*, Volume 58 6 August 1921, 1295.

Hoboken's Pier 2. Like many others before, their destination was Arlington National Cemetery, Virginia. Pierce had written instructions in March of 1921 placing his son in law in charge of his cemetery plot number seven in in the Fort Meyer section of Arlington National Cemetery, not far from where many of the repatriated members of the AEF were recently interred. Under Pierce's son in law's direction, cemetery workers prepared the gravesite and planned for Pierce and his wife to be side by side, with Mrs. Pierce closest to her children. A. B. Pouch, president of the Bring Home the Soldier Dead League who corresponded often with Pierce from the League's founding through 1920, inquired regarding the possibility of erecting a memorial to Pierce near his gravesite.²³⁴ This did not occur, but nevertheless represented a sign of respect toward the man who worked earnestly to ensure the nation's war dead received burial honors both in Europe and the United States.

After the United States government settled on repatriating an Unknown Soldier for burial, the task inevitably fell to the GRS to carry out this solemn task. In October, 1921, Colonel Harry Rethers, Chief of the GRS, then supervising repatriation activities for 46,000 soldier dead across France, while simultaneously concentrating 30,000 remaining bodies in the overseas cemeteries, received orders to disinter one unknown body for shipment back to America.²³⁵ Rethers' order specified that the selection of the Unknown Soldier come from a representation of the battlefields over which American soldiers fought during the war, including St. Quentin, the Château-Thierry area, the St. Mihiel sector, and the Argonne Forest.²³⁶ Selecting from four bodies precluded families from reasonably surmising from where exactly the Unknown Soldier originated, thus

²³⁴ A. B. Pouch, letter to E.E. Davis, 5 August 1921, in Burial File of Charles Pierce, NPRC.

²³⁵ General (ret.) Harry Rethers, *Selection of Unknown Soldier*, (San Francisco: The Recorder Printing and Publishing Co, 1931), 1.

²³⁶ Rethers, *Unknown Soldier*, 2.

maintaining the possibility for all families that the body of the Unknown Soldier may belong to them. Simultaneously, the QMC prepared for the service to be held at Arlington. This included tasks large and small, including printing 5040 tickets for attendees to the planned 11 November ceremony.²³⁷

At Rethers' central office in Paris, he and his staff poured over records pertaining to the 1,700 unidentified bodies. Each set of remains that carried no name was assigned a number bearing a U (Unknown) prefix allowing for easier reference until identity was established [see page 426].²³⁸ GRS personnel searched for remains whose records bore the least certainty regarding the location of the body prior to its concentration at the selected overseas cemeteries, and simultaneously bore no clues that could potentially lead to identification.²³⁹ Rethers dispatched disinterment orders to four officers at designated cemeteries, with subsequent orders to rendezvous at Châlons, France, on 21 October. Major George Waugh, Captain Arthur Dewey and Lieutenants John Powers and Hugh Harpole were the four officers charged with carrying out this solemn task at Belleau Wood, Bony, Romagne, and Thiaucourt Cemeteries, respectively.²⁴⁰

As the officers arrived at their respective cemeteries on 22 October, they found a steel gray casket prepared in a shipping case, completely devoid of markings that would identify the cemetery. Attendants at the cemetery handed the officer two sealed envelopes: one bearing the word 'Unknown,' the other 'Alternate.' The officer opened the 'Unknown' envelope, which contained a standard exhumation form bearing the U (Unknown) number along with designated plot and grave information from which to retrieve the selected body. After the body was

²³⁷ George Penrose, letter to Quartermaster Supply Officer, 6 October 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 140.

²³⁸ Arthur E. Dewey, *Selection of the Unknown Soldier*, (Army Heritage and Education Center: D675 A7D5, 1931), 2. See Appendix P: Temporary Grave of an Unidentified Soldier

²³⁹ Rethers, *Unknown Soldier*, 2.

²⁴⁰ Dewey, *Selection of the Unknown Soldier*, 2.

disinterred, the team thoroughly searched it for any means of identification. If the team found identification or evidence of possible future identification, orders directed the body to be promptly reburied and the alternate unknown disinterred and checked in the same manner. Fortunately, each cemetery required only the primary envelope. As the remains were casketed, the officer in charge collected all documentation pertaining to that body from the cemetery office and burned them.²⁴¹ Similarly, Colonel Rethers and his staff destroyed the records pertaining to these four bodies at the GRS central office in Paris.²⁴² These actions disallowed anyone from ever attempting to trace GRS records in an effort to identify the Unknown Soldier or the origin of any of the bodies. This cemented Rethers' desire for families to retain hope that the Unknown Soldier could be theirs.

Châlons, France was the central location chosen for the four unidentified bodies to concentrate. Rethers personally selected the city in which the Unknown Soldier would be chosen. Again, he did not want to give preference to any one location where American soldiers fought, so he selected a point roughly equidistant from the four cemeteries and along the rail line that could take the selected remains through Paris enroute to the port at Le Havre.²⁴³ As the solemn convoys travelled from their respective cemeteries, each stopped some distance outside Châlons to clean the vehicles and drape their respective shipping cases with American flags. GRS officials met each procession with more precise instructions on how and when the convoy was to enter the courtyard of the Hôtel de Ville. At 1450, the Unknowns from Romagne and Thiaucourt, representing the unknown dead of the Meuse-Argonne and St. Mihiel, arrived, with each body carried into the building by a French honor guard, through two lines of other French

²⁴¹ Dewey, *Selection of the Unknown Soldier*, 2-4.

²⁴² Rethers, *Unknown Soldier*, 3.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 2.

soldiers at present arms. At 1455, this process was repeated for the Unknown from Bony and finally for the Belleau Wood Unknown at 1500.

Inside the decorated Hôtel de Ville, a catafalque sat ready in the main hall to eventually receive the chosen set of remains. A side room was prepared to receive the four inbound caskets, while a third room across the corridor was readied for a transfer ceremony to a specially-designed casket for the selected remains.²⁴⁴ That casket, made of ebony and silver, arrived from the United States specifically to bear the Unknown Soldier.²⁴⁵ The honor guards removed the four caskets from the shipping cases and arranged them in the room immediately to the right of the entrance, and a new honor guard arrived to stand watch for the next two hours as the public streamed through to pay its respects.²⁴⁶ Colonel Rethers ensured that as the caskets were placed on the shipping cases-turned-pedestals that no coffin rested on the same case in which it was brought to Châlons.²⁴⁷ Late in the evening of the 23rd, a pair of embalmers previously unassociated with the four sets of remains entered the empty room. There, they opened all four caskets and shifted the remains randomly amongst the four caskets, further eliminating the possibility of identifying each decedent's point of origin.²⁴⁸ Between this action and the constant shifting of guards, no continuity existed to identify a body's cemetery or shipping case of origin.

Whilst the drama involving the concentration of the four unidentified bodies played out in Châlons, additional arrangements for the ultimate selection of the Unknown Soldier occurred. Originally, instructions called for a commissioned officer to select the Unknown Soldier. When

²⁴⁴ "America's Unknown Soldiers," *After the Battle*, no. 26, 1979.

²⁴⁵ Dewey, *Selection of the Unknown Soldier*, 7.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

²⁴⁷ Rethers, *Unknown Soldier*, 2.

²⁴⁸ Dewey, *Selection of the Unknown Soldier*, 6.

Quartermaster General H. L. Rogers arrived in Châlons, Colonel Rethers, Chief of the GRS, informed him that the French used an enlisted soldier to select their representative Unknown and recommended the American Army do the same. Rogers authorized Rethers, who delegated the authority to Major Harbold, to select an enlisted soldier.²⁴⁹

On 23 October, Sergeant Edward Younger received orders to report to his commanding officer who said, “You will go to Coblenz, sergeant, and there meet five other soldiers. You will then proceed to Châlons-sur-Marne and report to Major Robert Harbold for service as pallbearers for the Unknown Soldier.”²⁵⁰ Startled, Younger followed his orders, and arrived at Châlons with five fellow soldiers. Younger, a member of A Company, 9th Infantry, had enlisted in February of 1917, participated in four major operations and received wounds at Vaux and Mont Blanc. Promoted to sergeant two days before the Armistice, Younger remained with the Army of Occupation to fulfill his second enlistment.²⁵¹ Younger probably did not realize at the time was that he was about to intersect with history.

After the six soldiers arrived at Châlons, Major Harbold quizzed each man regarding his service in the AEF. Before departing, Harbold informed the six assembled men that one of them would choose the Unknown Soldier the following day, and that all of them would subsequently act as pallbearers to escort the Unknown Soldier from Châlons to Le Havre for embarkation back to the United States. Younger recalled, “There was little sleep among us that night as the full measure of our assignment bore in upon us. I felt a haunting restlessness that was different from

²⁴⁹ H. L. Rogers, letter to George Penrose, 31 October 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 140.

²⁵⁰ Edward Younger, “I Chose the Unknown Soldier,” *The American War Mother*, vol. 14, no.7 (September 1937), 2.

²⁵¹ Robert Harbold, Memorandum for Record: Sergeant Edward Younger, 26 October 1921. NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 140.

anything I had ever known before.”²⁵²

America’s Unknown Soldier was selected on Monday, 24 October 1921. Despite the selection of the Unknown Soldier not due to occur until 1100, Captain Dewey noted that “the public square in front of the City Hall teemed with citizens of Châlons and the surrounding countryside... it seemed as though everyone wanted to be there early to secure a position of advantage on such an occasion.”²⁵³ The six soldiers designated to be pallbearers assembled with Major Harbold, who stated that Sergeant Edward Younger was to place a bouquet of roses on one of the four caskets inside the Hôtel de Ville, thereby designating the Unknown Soldier. Younger recalled his feelings upon this assignment, writing, “I was overwhelmed. I had gone over the top many times, [and] had known the agony of waiting for the charge. But nothing paralyzed me as that simple announcement did.”²⁵⁴ The officer handed Younger a spray of white roses, and informed Younger to proceed into the chapel alone and place the flowers on his chosen casket.

The white roses, donated by Mr. Brasseur Brufler and called “The Roses of France,” added special significance to the day.²⁵⁵ Mr. Brufler, a former member of the Châlons city council, lost two sons during the war.²⁵⁶ Brufler expressed to Quartermaster General H. L. Rogers his regret that he could not do more for the Unknown Soldier because “... your unknown soldier... represented for me not only all the American fallen in France, but also all the Unknown Soldiers of whom my son is one, and that is why I unite them all in the same thought

²⁵² Younger, “I Chose the Unknown Soldier,” 2.

²⁵³ Dewey, *Selection of the Unknown Soldier*, 6.

²⁵⁴ Younger, “I Chose the Unknown Soldier,” 2.

²⁵⁵ H. L. Rogers, letter to Brasseur Brufler, 26 October 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 140.

²⁵⁶ H. L. Rogers, “Report of the Ceremony in Connection with the Selection of the Body of an Unknown Soldier,” 29 October 1921, page 2, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 140.

and in the same affection.”²⁵⁷ Bruffler’s act was another instance of admiration toward the efforts of the GRS to honor its war dead.

Over fifteen years after this momentous event, Edward Younger recounted his experience for *The American War Mother*. His words best describe the scene inside the Hôtel de Ville:

I took the flowers and advanced to the little temporary shrine through a line of French troops. I entered the door, and stood alone with the dead... For a moment I hesitated, and said a prayer, inaudible, inarticulate, yet real. Then I looked around me. That scene will remain with me forever. Each casket was draped with a beautiful American flag. Never before had the flag seemed to have such a sublime significance and beauty. About the walls were other flags, American and French; flower petals had been scattered over the floor, and outside I could hear the band playing a hymn. I began a slow march around the caskets. ‘Which should it be?’ thoughts poured through my mind. ‘Maybe these buddies had once been my pals? Perhaps one of them had fought with me, had possibly shielded me from a bullet that might have put me in his place, who would ever know?’ I was numb, I couldn’t choose.... Three times, I walked around the caskets; then something drew me to the coffin second to my right on entering. I couldn’t walk another step. It seemed as if God raised my hand and guided me as I placed the roses on that casket. This, then, was to be America’s Unknown Soldier.²⁵⁸

Younger saluted the casket, then reported his duty fulfilled. The six pallbearers removed the designated Unknown Soldier from the chapel to another room in the hotel, where the body was transferred to the special casket sent from the United States. A small plaque fastened to the casket read “Unknown but to God.”²⁵⁹ The old casket was returned to the chapel, where one of the unidentified bodies not selected was placed in that casket. The purpose, according to Colonel Rethers, was further means to prevent any future identification of the bodies.²⁶⁰ The GRS returned the three bodies not selected to Romagne Cemetery near the Argonne Forest. These soldiers rest side by side in Plot G, graves one, two, and three.²⁶¹ On Memorial Day, 1930,

²⁵⁷ Brasseur Brufler, letter to H. L. Rogers, (no date), NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 140.

²⁵⁸ Younger, “I Chose the Unknown Soldier,” 2.

²⁵⁹ Dewey, *Selection of the Unknown Soldier*, 8.

²⁶⁰ Rethers, *Unknown Soldier*, 3.

²⁶¹ OQMG, *QMC in Europe*, vol. 2, 120.

Edward Younger visited the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the remains of who he selected almost a decade prior. As he placed a bouquet of flowers upon the memorial, Younger recalled “Feelings surged through me that I cannot describe. Like many who were in the thick of the fighting, I helped bury the bodies of hundreds of my buddies under fire. Many of them could not be identified. Could the hero I chose have been one of those? I cannot know. But somehow, I hope he was.”²⁶²

The Unknown Soldier’s casket was sealed and placed in the Hôtel de Ville lobby. For the remainder of the afternoon flanked by honor guards from the French and American armies as military officials and members of the public paid their respects. At 1700, a caisson led by four black horses arrived in front of the hotel. The six American pallbearers carried the Unknown Soldier out of the hotel to begin his journey to the United States. The 6th French Division of the 6th Army Corps comprised the guard of honor. The division’s staff led the procession, followed by a band and a company of infantry. The Unknown Soldier’s caisson followed with his pallbearers, trailed by a twenty-four-member honor guard from the American Army of Occupation and a group of official mourners. The remainder of the French 6th Division ended the official cortege, but numerous French civilians followed behind and marched the two kilometers to the Châlons train station.²⁶³

Despite the bickering in the United States over the disposition over the war dead, the feelings between the armies of France and the United States remained strong. The commander of the French 6th Army Corps that comprised the honor guard for the Unknown Soldier as he departed Châlons, captured this sentiment in his speech before the four unidentified American

²⁶² Younger, “I Chose the Unknown Soldier,” 2.

²⁶³ Dewey, *Selection of the Unknown Soldier*, 8-9.

soldiers.

I wish, in the name of the 6th Army Corps, to bring a fraternal message of gratitude, admiration, and respect to those gallant soldiers who their blood on the French soil that they so valiantly defended. I hope you will see in that homage a deep and significant token of our faithful and unshakeable fraternity in arms with the Great Army of the United States of America, who, by the side of our soldiers, fought with such noble valor and such magnificent courage for the most righteous of all purposes, and has so brilliantly contributed to bring about common victory through which the world was saved.²⁶⁴

The mayor of Châlons expressed his impression upon the selection ceremony and its impact upon Franco-American relations, writing Quartermaster General H. L. Rogers,

On that day the heart of every citizen of Châlons went out to you. It was more than the accomplishment of a duty; it was a manifestation of deep affection, which I hope will have a far reaching echo in our Country where we so sincerely feel it, and in yours which we particularly desire to honor. Such manifestations weave the threads which so powerfully bind us together and which nothing will ever break. The grave of the French Unknown Soldier under the 'Arc de Triomphe' sends forth a ray of glory and love which meets, at Arlington, the tomb of the Unknown American soldier, and that ray will never fade.²⁶⁵

The remains travelled from Châlons to Paris and remained there under guard. Next day, the funeral cortege travelled to Le Havre where the 3rd French Army Corps commander assumed duties as an honorary escort. At Le Havre, the Quartermaster Corps history noted 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."²⁶⁶ Upon reaching the dock, French officials bestowed the Legion of Honor on the Unknown Soldier before the casket embarked on the USS *Olympia*. Once onboard, French school children strew flowers on and around the casket. As the *Olympia* withdrew from the harbor, the two French escort ships departed, one firing a seventeen-gun

²⁶⁴ General Duport, letter to H. L. Rogers, 24 October 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 140; Draft Report of Colonel Rethers, 29 October 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 140, 2.

²⁶⁵ Mayor of Châlons, letter to H. L. Rogers, (no date), NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 140.

²⁶⁶ OQMG, *QMC in Europe*, Vol. 2, 124.

salute which the *Olympia* returned in honor of the Unknown Soldier

The *Olympia* arrived at Hampton Roads, Virginia on the 8 November 1921. The Unknown Soldier disembarked the vessel and embarked on the USS *Mayflower*, which was the presidential yacht donated for this mission by President Harding. The *Mayflower* carried the body up the Potomac River toward Washington, D.C. and docked at the Washington Navy Yard with its sacred cargo on Wednesday, 9 November. A regiment of cavalry along with a contingent of military and government officials greeted the yacht.²⁶⁷ Also awaiting the Unknown Soldier's arrival on the pier was a group of eight men who would carry the Unknown Soldier for the next two days. The group was comprised of men from all the armed services who distinguished themselves during the war. Amidst planning for the Unknown Soldier's burial, the Secretary of War requested from each service recommendations for men who "must not vary by more than one inch from six feet in height... and must present the finest military appearance possible. Each and every one must have served in battle with a combat branch during the World War and have an exceptional record."²⁶⁸ General Pershing himself chose each man individually from the consolidated list. The eight men selected were Navy Chief Gunner's Mate James Delaney, Army Color Sergeant James Dell, Marine Gunnery Sergeant Ernest Janson, Navy Chief Water Tender Charles O'Connor, Army First Sergeant Louis Razga, Army First Sergeant Harry Taylor, Army Sergeant Samuel Woodfill, and Army Corporal Thomas Saunders.²⁶⁹

They escorted the Unknown Soldier to the US Capitol to lie in state. Beginning at 8:00

²⁶⁷ Department of Defense, Press Release, "Background Information Relating to Selection of Unknown Soldier of World War I," 5 April 1950, NARA, RG 117, Box 179.

²⁶⁸ Patrick K. O'Donnell's *The Unknowns: The Untold Story of America's Unknown Soldier and WWI's Most Decorated Soldiers Who Brought Him Home*, (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2018), 280.

²⁶⁹ For a history of the body bearers, please see Patrick K. O'Donnell's *The Unknowns: The Untold Story of America's Unknown Soldier and WWI's Most Decorated Soldiers Who Brought Him Home*, (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2018).

AM on the 10th until the staff ushered the last mourners from the great hall around midnight of the 11th, almost 100,000 people paid respects to the Unknown Soldier.²⁷⁰ As the Unknown Soldier lay in state, “on the same catafalque where only martyred presidents – Lincoln, Garfield, and McKinley – had rested before,” floral tributes from Americans and foreigners alike filled the room.²⁷¹

The next day, 11 November 1921, proved a solemn day in United States history. The Unknown Soldier’s funeral took on meaning as a national funeral for the World War I dead. Seventy-seven Medal of Honor recipients attended along with a group of 476 former doughboys; each one representing 10,000 of their comrades who served during the war. A group of Generals and Rear Admirals removed the Unknown Soldier from the catafalque and placed his casket on the caisson for the procession. General Pershing led the march followed by other flag officers, the Marine Corps Band, a cavalry squadron, a Regular Army infantry battalion, a National Guard infantry battalion, a battalion of sailors and Marines, a field artillery battalion, and the Washington Barracks Band.²⁷² The Unknown Soldier’s caisson followed, trailed by President Harding and his cabinet.

Harding directed that two minutes of national silence precede his speech at the Unknown Soldier’s gravesite ceremony on the east side of Arlington’s Memorial Amphitheater.²⁷³ Harding said of the Unknown Soldier, “We do not know the eminence of his birth, but we do know the

²⁷⁰ List of Body Bearers for Ceremony – Burial of Unknown Soldier: 11 November 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 140; O’Donnell, *The Unknowns*, xxi.

²⁷¹ Department of Defense, Press Release, “Background Information Relating to Selection of Unknown Soldier of World War I,” 5 April 1950, NARA, RG 117, Box 179.

²⁷² Adjutant General, Memorandum for the Commanding General, District of Washington Subject: Ceremonies for the Unknown Dead – November 11, 1921, 19 October 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

²⁷³ Warren G. Harding, Presidential Proclamation: Armistice Day, 11 November 1921, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 29.

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."²⁷⁴ Harding bestowed the Medal of Honor and Distinguished Service Cross upon the casket; an act repeated by representatives of foreign countries who awarded their nation's highest military decoration.²⁷⁵

Following the ceremony, somewhere between 500,000 and 1,000,000 visitors paid homage to the tomb.²⁷⁶ One family of a missing Doughboy offered their opinion on the possibility of their son being the Unknown Soldier, stating "There is a long shot possibility... and that is good enough for me."²⁷⁷ These mourners departed leaving over 100,000 wreaths at the tomb.²⁷⁸ The *New York Times* correctly summarized meaning of the previous day's pomp and circumstance to the 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 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.'²⁷⁹

²⁷⁴ "President Harding's Address at the Burial of an Unknown Soldier," *New York Times*, 12 November 1921.

²⁷⁵ Department of Defense, Press Release, "Background Information Relating to Selection of Unknown Soldier of World War I," 5 April 1950, NARA, RG 117, Box 179.

²⁷⁶ Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day, 1919-1946*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 24.

²⁷⁷ James C. Nelson, *The Remains of Company D*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2009), 312.

²⁷⁸ Gregory, *The Silence of Memory*, 27.

²⁷⁹ "The Unknown Soldier," *New York Times*, 11 November 1921.

While the Unknown Soldier's presence evoked a sense of hope for many families of the missing that their boy may be the one lying in Arlington's amphitheater, not knowing the identity of the soldier added to the heartache of others. One of the guests present at the Unknown Soldier's interment was Lieutenant Colonel Charles Whittlesey, commander of the famed 'Lost Battalion.' During the ceremony he sat rigidly, staring off in the distance. The only change to this routine was to turn to his executive officer and fellow Medal of Honor recipient, George McMurtry, to state, "I keep wondering if the Unknown Soldier is one of my men... I should not have come here."²⁸⁰ For some survivors, the dead, the images of the dead, and the ceremonies honoring the dead, ultimately became more than they could bear.

Two weeks later, on the afternoon of 26 November 1921, Whittlesey boarded the British steamship SS *Toloa* in New York bound for Havana, Cuba. That evening, Whittlesey dined with the ship's captain followed by two hours of discussing a myriad of subjects including the Army-Navy football game played earlier that day. Around 11:30 that evening Whittlesey announced he was retiring for the evening. Those present in the room during this evening were the last to see him alive and subsequently reported nothing out of the ordinary in Whittlesey's actions or general demeanor.²⁸¹

The next morning, ship's staff entered Whittlesey's stateroom and discovered a letter written to the *Toloa*'s captain which instructed the captain to dispatch letters to his immediate family informing them that Whittlesey "jumped overboard and was drowned yesterday...." Whittlesey closed the letter to the captain expressing his regret "to bother you with these

²⁸⁰ O'Donnell, *The Unknowns*, 307.

²⁸¹ American Consulate, letter to the Department of State, 30 November 1921, NARA, RG 59, Reports of Death of American Citizens who Die Abroad, file 337.113/415.

unpleasant details.”²⁸² The captain reported that none of Whittlesey’s letters to his family were written on ship’s stationery indicating that Whittlesey’s actions were probably pre-meditated before his embarkation.²⁸³

Whittlesey’s suicide, though directly connected to his service in World War I, was not handled by the GRS since he was long out of the service. His death served as a tragic reminder that commemorating the dead sometimes causes wounds to reopen in some while bringing healing in others. Indeed, during an 11 December 1921 memorial service attended by over 3,000 people in his hometown of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, friend Charles Hibbard noted in his eulogy that Whittlesey was never again able to be himself or escape the pressures put unto him by the public. “Try as he may, he cannot get away from it. Wherever he turns, he is Col. Whittlesey, not the Charlie Whittlesey of old days,” declared Hibbard to the crowd. “Then begins that never ceasing and most exhausting drain upon his sympathy. From every hand come appeals for help. There are funerals and hospital visits and the impact of all such experiences upon his sensitive nature are terrific. The mainspring of his life is wound ever tighter and tighter and then comes the burial of the unknown soldier.”

Massachusetts Secretary of State Frederick Cook surmised that the mournful tone of the ceremony for the Unknown Soldier served as the catalyst for Whittlesey’s actions. “He saw in him the face of all those boys of his command who had gone to death and that burden was rolled back on him with crushing weight.” This combined with recent rumors that the ordeal of the Lost Battalion was due to fault on the part of Whittlesey “darkened his last days.”²⁸⁴ The story

²⁸² Charles Whittlesey, letter to Captain, SS *Tolosa*, no date, NARA, RG 59, Reports of Death of American Citizens who Die Abroad, file 337.113/415.

²⁸³ American Consulate, letter to the Department of State, 30 November 1921, NARA, RG 59, Reports of Death of American Citizens who Die Abroad, file 337.113/415.

²⁸⁴ Larry Parnass, “Lost Again: Echoes of a WWI Hero’s Suicide,” *Berkshire Eagle* (Ma.), 26 May 2017 (All quotes

of Whittlesey's suicide resulting from the Unknown Soldier's burial contrasts sharply with the stories of comfort the return of the dead brought numerous families across the United States. It demonstrates the burden of command, the unique bond between soldiers, and helps provide insight as to why Americans possessed such wide-ranging preferences for the final disposition of the World War I dead.

attributed to Hibbard).

CHAPTER 4

COMPLETED OBJECTIVES AND THE GOLD STAR MOTHERS' PILGRIMAGES

The GRS estimated it possessed 10,000 bodies lying in their respective permanent cemeteries as of 1 January 1922. Future concentration plans and cemeterial designs necessitated each of those bodies be disinterred and reburied soon, but they were at least at their final geographic destination. The dead would soon be joined by an additional 4,512 bodies waiting to be brought in from outlying cemeteries. Approximately 2,100 bodies across 52 cemeteries still required exhumation and shipment to the United States along with another 429 more disinterments for reburial in a foreign country. Over 7,500 sets of remains sat in various GRS mortuaries awaiting final disposition instructions or movement to either a port for repatriation or a permanent overseas cemetery for reburial.¹ Much was accomplished, but significant work remained for the GRS.

Completion of Overseas Cemeteries and Repatriation Activities

The return of bodies to the United States continued into 1922. Repatriation did not occur for every family that desired it, however. As noted, next of kin for soldiers who served in foreign armies learned that those remains were subject to that country's repatriation policy. In April, 1922, six American families of soldiers who died serving in the British army requested through the State Department to the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) for their loved one's remains to be returned to the United States.² The IWGC replied "To allow the removal a few individuals would be contrary to the principle of equality of treatment...; on the other hand

¹ United States. Army Graves Registration Service, *History of the American Graves Registration Service: QMC in Europe*, Volume 3, (Washington, DC: Adjutant General Center, 1922), 4.

² Secretary of State, letter to the Secretary of War, 29 April 1922, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 139.

to arrange for the removal of all, as the United States has done, was unfortunately an impossible task in our case – how impossible you will appreciate when I remind you that great as were the American losses ours were ten times greater.”³ The families of American dead serving with foreign armies were some of the exceptions to the American policy because the bodies fell under the jurisdiction of a different organization operating under different guidelines. This demonstrates the differing British position of whom or what entity controls the bodies – the state – as opposed to the American view that it is the family.

Families changing their desires for final disposition continued all the way to the end of repatriation operations. On the 21 July 1921, the Secretary of War had directed that no additional requests for repatriations would be accepted after 15 August of that year. A deluge of requests numbering in the hundreds compelled the War Department to push the deadline back eight months to 1 April 1922.⁴ However, between 1 January and 31 August 1922 alone, 633 requests were made to change from overseas burial to repatriation and 164 from return to concentration in the overseas cemeteries. For other families, the options emerged for the first time. In a final surge during the first half of 1922, the GRS identified an additional ninety-six bodies, thereby providing more families the possibility of choosing the final disposition for their soldier dead.⁵

A 1922 Congressional appropriation of \$856,680 “for purchase of such real estate as is necessary to establish suitable burial places for American military dead...” ensured that all necessary tracts were in American possession by year’s end. Much land, including the 130 acres for Romagne, most of Suresnes, and Waregem was donated by France and Belgium, respectively

³ Arthur Ononne, letter to Mrs. L.B. Stout, 22 March 1922, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 139.

⁴ OQMG, *QMC in Europe*, Vol. 3, 315.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

but funding was required for landscaping and maintenance.⁶ A Franco-American agreement formalized on 27 July 1922 added four additional permanent cemeteries: American Cemetery of the Somme near Bony, the Oise-Aisne Cemetery near Fère-en-Tardenois, St. Mihiel Cemetery near Thiaucourt, and Aisne-Marne Cemetery near Belleau Wood.⁷ The contract for each cemetery, be it in France, Belgium, or England, granted complete control of the parcel to the United States as long as it contained the remains of American war dead.⁸ The GRS closed Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery to new burials on 29 August 1922, its plots ultimately containing 13,968 American war dead [see page 428].⁹ Romagne became the biggest American cemetery of war dead in Europe, a distinction that it retains to the present day.

A few days past the second anniversary of France's lifting of its repatriation moratorium, the USAT *Cambrai* docked at Brooklyn Pier on 29 March 1922. The *Cambrai*'s deceased passenger list of 1,200 bodies represented the final repatriation of remains from Europe. Of the group, one casket was selected as the representative 'final returned soldier' to receive special honors in New York City. Attendees included an array of government officials, members of patriotic organizations, and military representatives in addition to the public.¹⁰ The caisson bearing the 'final returned soldier' proceeded down Fort Hamilton Parkway until it reached the site of the funeral services at the Brooklyn Army Base. The pomp and circumstance surrounding

⁶ Thomas J. Conner, *War and Remembrance: The Story of the American Battle Monuments Commission*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2018), 28.

⁷ Undated Memorandum regarding establishment and controlling agreements re: cemeteries in Belgium, England, and France.

⁸ Conner, *War and Remembrance*, 28-29.

⁹ OQMG, *QMC in Europe*, Vol. 3, 30; W.H. Hart, Memorandum to H.W. Angus, Subject: American Cemeteries in Europe, 27 October 1922, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 22, See Appendix Q: Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery, US Army Photo, ABMC, *A Guide to the American Battle Fields in Europe*, (Washington: GPO, 1927), 246-247.

¹⁰ "Last Soldier Dead Due Today," *New York Times*, 29 March 1922.

this soldier were only eclipsed by those given to the Unknown Soldier in November of 1921.¹¹

The GRS History tallied 45,149 bodies repatriated to the United States during the eighteen-month operation.¹²

Numbers help put GRS operations into perspective. In the last months of 1920 following French permission to begin repatriation operations, the QMC dispatched 11,534 bodies to the United States. The following year saw 31,945 more return home, and the final 2,109 went in the first three months of 1921.¹³ Of the roughly 45,000 repatriated remains, most were scattered across the country in local cemeteries whereas 5,800 went to National Cemeteries. Of the latter number, 5,241 reside at Arlington National Cemetery.¹⁴ The GRS also dispatched 454 bodies to foreign countries at the request of next of kin. The AEF dead boasted a sect comprised of recent immigrants or the children of immigrants. These “hyphenated Americans” gave AEF censors mail containing forty-nine different languages to translate.¹⁵ After the war, the GRS discovered that some families’ ancestral ties were stronger than those to America, or the soldier’s next of kin resided in a foreign country. Recognizing this, the War Department authorized shipments of bodies to ancestral homelands.¹⁶

One such case was that of Adolph J. Vercruysse from the 318th Field Remount Squadron. His nearest relatives resided in Belgium; Vercruysse was a Belgian resident for a time prior to

¹¹ “Parade to Honor the Soldier Dead,” *New York Times*, 2 April 1922.

¹² OQMG, *QMC in Europe*, Vol. 3, 15.

¹³ Conner, *War and Remembrance*, 22.

¹⁴ Robert M. Poole, *On Hallowed Ground: The Story of Arlington National Cemetery*, (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 146.

¹⁵ Geoffrey Wawro, *Sons of Freedom: The Forgotten American Soldiers who Defeated Germany in World War I*, (New York: Basic Books, 2018), 20, 61.

¹⁶ QMC, *The Work of the American Graves Registration Service: 1917-1936*, (Washington: GPO, 1943), 32.

his enlistment.¹⁷ His burial file contains much back and forth along with acknowledgement by Vercruysse's family that they bore responsibility for the upkeep of the grave in Belgium.¹⁸

Ultimately Vercruysse was buried in Zarren, Belgium in January of 1922. His burial was one of many that demonstrated the War Department's willingness to accommodate wide-ranging wishes of next of kin and the GRS's ability to carry out those desires.

The War Department created the option for burial in country of ancestral heritage on 26 January 1920.¹⁹ Nine countries received remains of American war dead. The majority of those bodies (301) went to Italy followed by Ireland (64), Greece (25), England (19), Poland (17), Denmark (14), Sweden (5), Scotland (4), and Czechoslovakia (4). This disposition of the dead pointed to the fact that America was a nation of very recent immigrants, 20 million of whom had emigrated to the United States in the two decades prior to 1914.²⁰ The 19 bodies in England were buried in family plots rather than Brookwood American Military Cemetery. These burials proved memorable for both the country that received the American dead and the soldiers who escorted the remains. Escorts for Sergeant J.G. Bordelis received a resolution from the Greek town of Bordelis' burial that read in part, "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...."²¹ The mayor of Dublin, Ireland offered the city's morgue for use during the transportation of soldier dead through his town, while Italy conducted

¹⁷ H. F. Rethers, letter to OQMG, 5 April 1921, in Burial File of Adolph Vercruysse, NPRC.

¹⁸ Signed avadavat for disposition of the remains of Adolph Vercruysse, 25 March 1921, in Burial File of Adolph Vercruysse, NPRC.

¹⁹ American Graves Registration Service in France, Disposition of European Burials, 18 November 1920, NARA, RG

²⁰ Wawro, *Sons of Freedom*, 20.

²¹ OQMG, *QMC in Europe*, Vol. 3, 16, 18.

elaborate ceremonies for each of the 301 bodies returned to that country.²²

The GRS performed admirably in its efforts to locate, identify, and permanently inter the World War I dead. To say it was executed perfectly, however, would be far from the truth. In 1923, the GRS consolidated six cases in which the incorrect bodies were shipped to the United States and buried. In each case, the correct body was located and exchanged for the correct one. A GRS officer from the Cemeterial Branch personally visited the homes “to confer personally with the relatives in each case and to impart to them confidentially that the remains of a soldier, other than their own son or husband, had been delivered to them by the Government in error and that it was the desire of the War Department to correct such errors with the least possible anxiety and discomfort to the bereaved.”²³ Before going to the next of kin, the officer found the local undertaker who assisted with the funeral to explain the situation and receive background information on the family and their likely reactions to the news. The officer then brought the undertaker with him to the family’s home since he was a recognized figure and his presence would lend credence to the news. Of his experience, the officer noted that

...the duty I was called upon to perform was very exacting, very uncertain and there was no way of contemplating the supernumerary events and questions that may arise. I endeavored to handle each phase as it arose, sometimes without much time to give it proper consideration, and may possibly have deviated from what the Department would consider good policy. It was my firm intention in each instance to convince the relatives and to leave no doubt in their mind nor loophole in my argument.²⁴

Francis J. Flynn’s body was supposed to return to Binghamton, New York but instead David Robidoux’s body was buried there. As the officer visited Flynn’s family, he found Flynn’s mother in advanced age and her husband bearing power of attorney for her. The officer

²² Ibid., 22.

²³ Memorandum for Chief, Cemeterial Division, 8 September 1923, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 139.

²⁴ Ibid.

explained the situation to Flynn's father but determined that attempting to discuss the situation with the mother could be detrimental to her; the purpose of the visit was merely to ensure she had procured the proper headstone for her son. Of the six reported cases in the QMC files, all were rectified without incident and enjoyed basic understanding from the families regarding the accident and appreciation toward the War Department's correcting of the error.²⁵

While the GRS performed its tasks to locate, identify, and bury the dead, the organization was not suited to perpetually maintain the permanent overseas cemeteries or the monuments being erected on the old battlefields. The American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) was created through a 4 March 1923 act of Congress to "prepare plans and estimates for the erection of suitable memorials to mark and commemorate the services of American forces in Europe and erect memorials therein at such places as the commission shall determine, including works of architecture and art in the American cemeteries in Europe."²⁶ Upon incorporation, the ABMC immediately began site visits in Europe and laid out its objectives, which did not include language specific to the overseas cemeteries, rather focusing on monuments and memorials in addition to compiling a historical record in words and photographs.²⁷ The overseas military cemeteries required a great deal of beautification once the GRS completed burials. Part of that was the planting of trees, of which thousands were planted throughout the permanent cemeteries.²⁸

As the ABMC began to focus on the permanent overseas cemeteries, one of its first big decisions was the shape of the headstone. Like the British, American temporary grave markers

²⁵ Memorandum for Chief, Cemeterial Division, 8 September 1923, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 139.

²⁶ ABMC, Report of Fiscal Year 1926, (Washington: GPO, 1927), 1. AHEC, D 639.D4 U3.

²⁷ Conner, *War and Remembrance*, 53.

²⁸ X.H. Price, ABMC Memorandum, 8 October 1923, NARA, RG 117, Memoranda to the Commission, Box 4.

were largely crosses save the occasional Star of David. By 1923, many were eager to have the temporary markers replaced with permanent headstones. Charles Moore, Chairman of the Commission of Fine Arts envisioned the overseas cemeteries resembling Arlington National Cemetery by featuring the round-topped headstones ubiquitous throughout that cemetery. In fact, he granted initial approval for such headstones to be installed overseas. As Pershing approached Moore regarding the wooden crosses being replaced with permanent ones, Pershing initially lost that battle. Despite the stature of the ABMC chairman, Moore retorted, “the British wanted a cross too. Everybody wants the cross, but you can’t have the cross in marble. It breaks. It’s too fragile – that is all.”²⁹ The ABMC did not back down from its chairman’s position.

Before leaving for Europe, the ABMC affirmed its preference for headstones in the shape of a cross or Star of David. This decision went against the approved designs of two previous secretaries of state that dated back to 1920. Secretary of War Baker had approved the proposed Arlington-style rounded headstones in 1920 in conjunction with a committee comprised of War Department members as well as members of the Catholic community, American Legion, Marine Corps, Commission of Fine Arts, the Institute of Architects, and former AEF chaplains. The gravestones, made of American marble, had a circle etched near the top containing the decedent’s religion with their name, rank, organization, and date of death inscribed below. The War Department declared then that “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.”³⁰ An article in the

²⁹ Conner, *War and Remembrance*, 55.

³⁰ Lisa Budreau, *Bodies of War: World War I and the Politics of Commemoration in America, 1919-1933*, (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 122.

American Legion Weekly unveiled an artist's rendering of the Arlington-style headstones approved by the National Fine Arts Commission as the eventual replacement for the temporary wooden grave markers.³¹ In 1922, the proposed headstone was enlarged to stand twenty-four inches above the ground and widened in order to increase durability and allow more room for eventual inscriptions including a personal sixty-character epitaph for the rear of the stone. The design was approved by Secretary of War Weeks in April of that year.³²

The rounded headstone proposal seemed to have heavyweight figures backing it, among them Moore who envisioned the overseas cemeteries as a "little Arlington with gravestones to match" as well as the late Charles Pierce who, harkening back to the preference of the Jewish faith to have a Star of David, thought uniformed rounded headstones instead of crosses punctuated by the occasional Star of David to disrupt "the desirable harmony which should characterize national cemeteries."³³ The ABMC held firm to the cross design. One AMBC member who was especially enchanted with the thought of permanent crosses mocked this design asking his fellow ABMC members to "Imagine McCrae's poem rewritten like this: 'In Flanders Fields, the poppies grow, Between the – squat little headstones – row on row.'"³⁴

Pershing's view may have been influenced by correspondence with prominent individuals and relatives of the soldier dead who expressed their strong desires to see crosses over the graves of their loved ones. Pershing also received support from the Gold Star Fathers Association that passed a resolution in 1923 supporting the use of the cross that declared "This is a Christian Nation and the meaning of these fields of crosses, when properly understood, should be broad

³¹ J.W. Rixey Smith, "America's Holy Ground," *American Legion Weekly*, 28 May 1920.

³² Conner, *War and Remembrance*, 57.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ X.H. Price, letter to John Pershing, 1 February 1924, NARA, RG 117, Memoranda to the Commission, Box 7; Conner, *War and Remembrance*, 57-58.

and high enough for everyone and offensive to none.” The American Legion, one of the organizations that initially supported the rounded headstones in 1920, followed with a 1924 resolution in support of permanent crosses.³⁵ One ABMC member later recalled, “it was the sense of the commission that the form of the headstone used overseas should be that of a cross.”³⁶ For his part John Pershing supported the white cross, explaining that it “has become in my mind such an important feature in marking the graves of our Dead that I think it should be retained if at all possible, and stand ready to support the Commission in any endeavors it may make in this direction.”³⁷ Secretary of War Weeks eventually yielded to the preference of the ABMC for the headstone design and in 1925 the cross and Star of David designs were officially approved.³⁸

The ABMC’s tour of Europe generated many important insights to commission members. Notably that the American cemeteries were largely uninspiring to the eye. Before 1924 ended, the ABMC recommended adding nonsectarian chapels to each cemetery not only as a place for prayer or meditation but as a means of distracting visitors from the plain administrative buildings otherwise surrounding the grounds. The building should also describe generally the actions in which the men in the cemetery participated. Pershing recommended adding some sort of memorial to the missing in action from that cemetery’s region.³⁹ The commissioners also notified the secretary of war regarding their unanimous selection of white marble for the permanent headstones. After being shown an example and some subsequent discussion, the

³⁵ Gold Star Fathers Association, Resolution Adopted at Annual Armistice Meeting, 15 December 1923, NARA, RG 117, Memoranda to the Commission, Box 4.

³⁶ Budreau, *Bodies of War*, 123.

³⁷ John Pershing, letter to X.H. Price, 18 February 1924, NARA, RG 117, Memoranda to the Commission, Box 7.

³⁸ Conner, *War and Remembrance*, 59.

³⁹ ABMC Minutes, 21 November 1924, NARA, RG 117, Entry A12, Box 1A; Conner, *War and Remembrance*, 60.

Secretary concurred with the ABMC's recommendation.⁴⁰

Visits to British cemeteries in France also provided committee members with good ideas to take into the designs of their cemeteries. One was that the work of the cemeteries should be done with the "idea of permanence in mind" and "to make the graves themselves the most striking feature in the cemetery and the one to which the attention is irresistibly attracted."⁴¹

Bodies continued to return to the United States throughout the 1920s. These were bodies found during searches or by local citizens or previously unidentified remains that received confirmed identifications. Between February and July 1924, 147 additional bodies were found and subsequently repatriated to America.⁴² In 1923, the GRS had compiled a roster of all missing or unidentified dead in the event additional remains were located.⁴³ Very soon, the ABMC began striking names from that list as bodies continued to be found and subsequently identified.

An early 1925 visit by an ABMC member to Quentin Roosevelt's isolated gravesite illustrated the problematic nature of the isolated graves sporadically located throughout the European battle area. Senator Reed's visit to the gravesite found the grass uncut and an accumulation of garbage around the site, leaving an unsightly appearance. Despite Quentin's gravesite being just over three miles from Oise-Aisne Cemetery, it was a private plot. Reed reported the grave's condition to Mrs. Roosevelt and later to the ABMC at its 12 May meeting. He suggested the Commission purchase the land and give responsibility for the plot's upkeep to the GRS. The 12 May 1925 meeting also witnessed ABMC approval of Dr. Paul Crest's designs

⁴⁰ ABMC Minutes, 21 November 1924, NARA, RG 117, Entry A12, Box 1A.

⁴¹ Conner, *War and Remembrance*, 61.

⁴² QMC, *The Work of the American Graves Registration Service: 1917-1936*, (Washington: GPO, 1943), 34.

⁴³ AGRS, QMC Europe Memorandum to the Quartermaster General, Subject: Unlocated Dead, 5 October 1923, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 3.

for the crosses and Stars of David which would soon become the permanent headstones at the cemeteries, The ABMC also unanimously approved the wording to adorn graves of unidentified soldiers as “Here rests in honored glory an American soldier known but to God.” Secretary of War Dwight Davis approved this phrase as well as the use of the cross and Star of David for the permanent headstones. Criticism over the use of ‘but’ as opposed to ‘only’ occurred, but after six months of work on the inscription the ABMC felt the message conveyed the appropriate meaning as it was.⁴⁴

In 1926, the ABMC took up the question of what type of stone to use for the headstones and, from where the stone would originate. In March, the American Granite Association, the Gold Star Fathers Association, and the Service Star Legion all wrote the ABMC to urge its consideration for granite headstones. The Commission submitted a request to the War Department to offer granite companies a chance to bid on a modified headstone.⁴⁵ Three months later the bids arrived to the ABMC for granite and marble headstones. Despite the American Granite Association lobby for the use of its product, but the ABMC eventually settled on Italian marble citing its cost, availability (including ease of shipment) and beauty.⁴⁶ Additionally, the striking white of the Italian marble best replicated the white wooden crosses used in the temporary cemeteries. A member of the Gold Star Fathers’ Association made one last-ditch effort to persuade the ABMC in a one-hour diatribe only to be told the matter was closed.⁴⁷

With the headstone materiel settled, the ABMC returned its attention to the chapels it approved the previous year. The chapel’s construction varied with the size of the cemetery as

⁴⁴ ABMC Minutes, 12 May 1925, NARA, RG 117, Entry A12, Box 1A; Conner, *War and Remembrance*, 66.

⁴⁵ ABMC Minutes, 29 March 1926, NARA, RG 117, Entry A12, Box 1A.

⁴⁶ ABMC Minutes, 3 June 1926, NARA, RG 117, Entry A12, Box 1A.

⁴⁷ ABMC Minutes, 7 October 1926, NARA, RG 117, Entry A12, Box 1A; Conner, *War and Remembrance*, 67-70.

well as the importance of the actions which took place in the vicinity. While non-denominational, the chapel's purpose was to provide visitors a place for reflection and prayer if desired. A significant decision by the ABMC occurred in June of 1926 related to these places of worship. At this meeting, "it was decided that the chapels in the American cemeteries in Europe shall contain tablets upon which will be recorded the names of those missing in action in the vicinity during the World War. These tablets will serve as a record in the cemeteries of those men who, because their bodies have not been found, have no headstones [see page 430]."⁴⁸ This action proved significant not only for the ABMC's memorialization of the war dead, but also a significant moment in America's continued efforts to honor its war dead. For the first time in American history, every soldier who died during the war would have his name carved in stone somewhere. It would either be on a gravestone in the United States or Europe or on one of the planned Tablets of the Missing in an overseas cemetery chapel.

The original plan called for the American cemetery plots to be laid out perfectly aligned in every direction as a result of each grave being equidistant from those around it. Charles Pierce directed this for all temporary cemeteries and carried it through during concentration efforts. In some cases, this necessitated multiple disinterments and reburials as the consolidation of the permanent cemeteries occurred simultaneous to the repatriation program. During that time, members of "O'Ryan's Roughnecks" from the 27th Division blocked attempts to align gravesites at Bony and Oise-Aisne on the grounds that their dead friends should not be disturbed for the sake of aesthetics. Pershing sided with these men, ordering the GRS to stop to all alignment efforts at those two cemeteries. The ABMC did not agree with this decision. Commissioner

⁴⁸ ABMC Minutes, 3 June 1926, NARA, RG 117, Entry A12, Box 1A; ABMC, Report of Fiscal Year 1926, (Washington: GPO, 1927), 11. AHEC, D 639.D4 U3. See Appendix R: Tablet of the Missing at Aisne-Marne American Cemetery, Author Photo.

Price stated in the 1925 annual report that “the graves in all cemeteries, with the exception of certain sections in the Oise-Aisne and Somme, have been arranged so that the markers are equidistant apart.... This regularity is very effective and adds greatly to the appearance of the cemetery. Where not regularly arranged, the effect is disturbing.”⁴⁹

However, as more people visited the cemetery, the ABMC received increasing criticism regarding the irregular plots. One former 27th Division officer broke ranks with his former comrades, insisting that he thought the cemetery “presents an uneven appearance because... there are gaps in the various lines of wooden crosses and to a casual visitor who does not inquire into the reason the impression would be given that the cemetery is carelessly kept.”⁵⁰ By 1926, the commission recommended the Secretary of War direct the GRS to realign the graves at Oise-Aisne and Somme similar to those at the other permanent cemeteries. Fortuitously, the order coincided with the delivery of the permanent headstones, meaning that once the permanent graves were installed the cemeteries largely took on the appearance that they keep today.⁵¹

While the chapels were originally conceived to be nonsectarian in nature, by 1927 the ABMC had changed its mind, stating, “As the United States is a Christian nation the interiors of these chapels should be Christian in character.”⁵² The commission later ordered the Star of David to be adorned within the walls of the chapels as well. Interestingly, Pershing refused requests by local French churches to hold services within the chapels. Citing such use would be

⁴⁹ Secretary of War, letter to Douglas Despard, 25 June 1926, NARA, RG 117, Memoranda to the Commission, Box 4; Conner, *War and Remembrance*, 98.

⁵⁰ Douglas Despard, letter to Hanford MacNider, 11 June 1926, NARA, RG 117, Memoranda to the Commission, Box 4.

⁵¹ ABMC Minutes, 7 October 1926, NARA, RG 117, Entry A12; Conner, *War and Remembrance*, 98-99.

⁵² ABMC Minutes, 8 February 1927, NARA, RG 117, Entry A12.

“inappropriate,” Pershing ordered future requests be denied; a policy still in place today.⁵³

Perhaps the most poignant items within the chapels are the tablets of the missing bearing the same information for each man as if he rested under a headstone. The number of names in each chapel depended on the number of missing from that region, thus varying greatly from each cemetery” Brookwood (563), Aisne-Marne (1,060), Bony (333), Oise-Aisne (241), Waregem (41), Suresnes (974), St. Mihiel (284) and Romagne (954) plus an additional panel for those missing in North Russia.⁵⁴ Speaking at Suresnes Cemetery in 1927, Pershing remarked, “No soldier could ask for a sweeter resting place than the one on the field of glory where he fell... The land he died to save vies with the one which gave him birth in paying tribute to his memory, and the kindly hands which so often come to spread flowers upon his earthly coverlet express in their gentle task a personal affection.”⁵⁵ Pershing’s preference toward the dead remaining near the fields where they fell again shines through in his public remarks.

The ABMC first published its *Guide to the American Battlefields in Europe* in 1927. This guide provided European visitors maps, descriptions, and history of the AEF’s operations from 1917 to 1918. The book’s second to last chapter discusses the overseas cemeteries and describes how they came into existence.⁵⁶ Brookwood Cemetery became the concentration site for all soldiers who died in or near England. Located 28 miles southwest of London adjacent to a British military cemetery, Brookwood contains 437 American graves. The sole American Cemetery in Belgium was constructed near Waregem but took the official name of Flanders Field American Cemetery. Located roughly half-way between Ypres and Brussels, the 365 dead

⁵³ Conner, *War and Remembrance*, 86-87

⁵⁴ Conner, *War and Remembrance*, 93.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁶ ABMC, *A Guide to the American Battle Fields in Europe*, (Washington: GPO, 1927), 245-256.

buried there hailed primarily from the 91st, 37th, 27th, and 30th Divisions.⁵⁷

Somme American Cemetery near Bony, France contains the graves of 1,826 soldiers. Those buried there are from the early 1st Division battles near Cantigny as well as men from the 27th, 30th, and 33rd Divisions. Suresnes Cemetery outside of Paris contains the graves of 1,506 American soldiers, most of whom perished in surrounding hospitals during the war. Oise-Aisne American Cemetery outside Fère-en-Tardenois holds 5,946 graves of soldiers mostly from the 3rd, 4th, 28th, 32nd, 42nd, and 77th Divisions. One of its most famous burials is that of Joyce Kilmer. Aisne-Marne Cemetery located near Belleau, France and adjacent to the Belleau Wood battlefield, contains 2,212 graves. The Army dead mainly comprise of 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 26th, 28th, 32nd, and 42nd Divisions along with 320 Marines from the brigade assigned to the 2nd Division. St. Mihiel Cemetery near Thiaucourt, France contains the graves of men who fell during the offensive which reduced the salient of the same name. The cemetery's population came from the 1st, 2nd, 4th, 5th, 7th, 26th, 37th, 42nd, 78th, 82nd, 89th, 90th, and 92nd Divisions.⁵⁸ When the United States instituted the draft in 1917, Regular Army divisions were numbered 1 through 10, while National Guard divisions numbered 24 through 42. New formations, the National Army divisions, held numbers 11 through 23 and 43 through 102. The National Army divisions were part of the Army's great expansion to meet the demands of war.⁵⁹ Just as all of the divisions were treated equally in combat, they were treated equally in death.

The largest American Cemetery in France lies near Romagne, northwest of Verdun. It was (and remains) the largest military cemetery in Europe, with 14,107 graves. Almost every combat division that fought in France is represented by a burial at this cemetery. The cemetery's

⁵⁷ ABMC, Report of Fiscal Year 1926, (Washington: GPO, 1927), 3. AHEC, D 639.D4 U3.

⁵⁸ ABMC, Report of Fiscal Year 1926, (Washington: GPO, 1927), 3. AHEC, D 639.D4 U3.

⁵⁹ Wawro, *Sons of Freedom*, 73.

name as well as its deceased population was the result of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive.⁶⁰

Romagne Cemetery, now named the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery, deserves special mention for its enormity in comparison to the other American cemeteries. Originally planned to accommodate 30,000 burials, the cemetery held the remains of more than 21,000 men before repatriation operations began. At its peak, the site occupied 89,053,178,380 square feet of French soil.⁶¹

By 1928 only a few more matters remained to be resolved regarding the permanent headstones. During the 4 January 1928 meeting, the ABMC approved the option for next of kin to add a personal message of not more than sixty characters that would be inscribed on the back of the headstone.⁶² Commission member Thomas North noted that this idea came from the British practice that was found on most headstones. This offer was supposedly extended to all families soon thereafter but only nineteen headstones across the eight cemeteries bear such an inscription. The latest ABMC history declares that “It is almost certain that the average visitor to our country’s World War I cemeteries in Europe will never notice any of these rare inscriptions.”⁶³ The author’s 2016 visit to the former Bony Cemetery yielded a chance encounter with one such inscription. The grave of 27th Division Private Thomas F. Morrisey bears the inscription “Dear Son – Brother – Think of clasping a loving hand and finding it God’s hand [see pages 432-433].”⁶⁴ Since Morrisey’s family was one of few that took advantage of this opportunity, an examination of his burial file was made in hopes to discover source

⁶⁰ ABMC, Report of Fiscal Year 1926, (Washington: GPO, 1927), 7. AHEC, D 639.D4 U3.

⁶¹ US Quartermaster School, *Operations of the Quartermaster Corps, US Army During the World War*, (Washington: GPO, 1929), 100.

⁶² ABMC Minutes, 4 January 1928, NARA, RG 117, Entry A12.

⁶³ Conner, *War and Remembrance*, 71.

⁶⁴ See Appendix S: Photo of T.F. Morrisey’s grave at Somme American Cemetery, Author Photo.

documentation that illustrated the method in which the War Department notified the families of its soldier dead that they could write epitaphs. Unfortunately, the only document contained in the file is a 1929 letter from the QMC confirming the epitaph request.⁶⁵ No other documentation regarding the inscriptions has been located, lending to the theory that the option was not well-advertised by the ABMC.

Aside from the optional inscription on the headstone's reverse, the standard information that appeared on the temporary headstones – name, rank, unit, date of death, and home state – was likewise inscribed on the permanent headstone. The commission further recommended noting whether the soldier was killed in action or died of wounds and listing any decorations earned. Noting the soldier's cause of death never occurred, which was probably a good decision since soldiers perished by several reasons besides the two initially brought forward in the commission's meeting. The headstones do list some decorations earned, the most conspicuous being those inlaid in gold for Medal of Honor recipients [see page 435].⁶⁶ Those headstones which stand over an unidentified body bear the words, "Here rests in honored glory an American soldier, known but to God."⁶⁷ An astute observer will note a mix of Stars of David and crosses bearing the 'Unknown' inscription. Either the QMC or ABMC determined that the markings for the unknowns would be proportional to the known Jewish and Christian dead [see page 437-438].⁶⁸ The rationale for the decision possesses merit but left the possibility a Jewish soldier was buried under a cross, and a Christian under a Star of David, however.

⁶⁵ John Harris, letter to Sarah Masher, 8 November 1929, in Burial File of Thomas Morrissey, NPRC.

⁶⁶ Conner, *War and Remembrance*, 70. See Appendix T: Photos of Gravestone with Decorations, David Siry Photo.

⁶⁷ X.H. Price, Memorandum for: Colonel Markey, 4 February 1926, NARA, RG 117, Memoranda to the Commission, Box 4.

⁶⁸ ABMC Minutes, 24 May 1948, NARA, RG 117, Entry A12. See Appendix U: Jewish and Christian Markers for Unidentified Soldiers.

The so-called “isolated graves” or “do not disturb cases” continued to be a concern to the GRS, especially in France. Whereas the British government retained responsibility for the care of such graves in England, France only cared for American graves left in existing French military cemeteries, otherwise the decedent’s family bore responsibility for upkeep. This was acceptable for a family such as the Roosevelts but could be problematic for families of lesser means. Additionally, as the generations who knew the deceased died out, the graves stood to be forgotten over time. The QMC tried to dissuade families from selecting this option during concentration operations and renewed its plea in 1928. By promising to arrange the transportation and burial in a permanent overseas cemetery, the QMC eventually reduced the total number of isolated burials in France to approximately seventy.⁶⁹

Despite successes yielded across France, the GRS realized its 1919 mission to Russia did not secure all of the dead accumulated during the North Russian Expedition. No diplomatic agreement was possible because the United States did not have any relations with the new Soviet government and attempts by France and Great Britain to intervene proved unsuccessful. In 1929, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, accompanied by GRS personnel masquerading as members of the veterans’ organization, went to the old battle areas with permission from Soviet officials. The VFW’s then-National Legislative Committee Chair, Edwin Bettelheim, Jr., recalled “ In some instances we had to make two or three separate expeditions to the same locales, offering rewards to peasants before we could get any information as to where American soldiers might be lying.”⁷⁰ Through their efforts, eighty-six more soldier dead returned to the United States for burial.⁷¹ Into the 1930s, the QMC still endeavored to ascertain identities for unknown burials. A

⁶⁹ QMC, *The Work of the American Graves Registration Service: 1917-1936*, (Washington: GPO, 1943), 38.

⁷⁰ “The Polar Bears are Finally Home,” *VFW Magazine*, 27 November 2019.

⁷¹ QMC, *The Work of the American Graves Registration Service: 1917-1936*, (Washington: GPO, 1943), 35.

QMC officer wrote a fraternal organization regarding a missing soldier from Russia who was found bearing an emblem for that fraternal order. The QMC officer sought whether the organization possessed any members killed in Russia that might provide a lead for the QMC to investigate.⁷²

As time wore on, and evidence buried with bodies became lost, investigators used anything available to try and save identification. The Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) found a set of remains that possessed a pen belonging to the International Correspondence Schools from Scranton, Pennsylvania. Additionally, the remains were found in an area of the 1st Division, leading the IWGC to surmise the remains were those of an American soldier.⁷³ The QMC wrote the school requesting any information which may help identify this unknown set of remains.⁷⁴ The National Archives did not possess documentation confirming whether the soldier was identified.

In addition to contacting corporations, the QMC found and contacted soldiers that could aid in identifying remains. Late into the 1920s, the Quartermaster Corps remained committed to locating the missing from a decade prior. The GRS continued updating its roster of unlocated dead and cross-checked data with the Quartermaster and Adjutant Generals to eliminate duplications and other errors.⁷⁵ In order to reconcile cases of missing and unidentified soldiers, the GRS used any means available. In one instance, it referred to a man's diary from which it located a body belonging to that unit. Unfortunately, the identification tags broke apart upon handling so the GRS wrote back to the diary's owner seeking additional information that could

⁷² John Harris, letter to George Ward, 15 April 1930, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 139.

⁷³ Guy Coleman, letter to Chief, AGRS, 15 February 1929, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 139.

⁷⁴ J. McClintock, letter to the International Correspondence Schools, 23 March 1929, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 139.

⁷⁵ Chief, GRS, letter to the Quartermaster General, 1 May 1928, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 139.

help identify the body and any other recollections of nearby burials.⁷⁶ The QMC found Former Chaplain Russell Nye in 1928 as a reverend in Moravia, Iowa. During the war, Nye presided over the group burial of soldiers in the Argonne Forest while part of the famed 'Lost Battalion.' The QMC desired information regarding the method and layout of the burial and information recorded regarding the unidentified burials.⁷⁷

By the end of the 1920s, the overseas cemeteries assumed the look that they hold to this day. Six permanent cemeteries existed in France along with one each in Belgium and England. The largest, Meuse-Argonne (formerly Romagne), contains 13,968 graves over 130 acres; it was and remains the largest ABMC cemetery in the Europe, and the second largest in the world after the Manila American Cemetery in the Philippines. Aisne-Marne (formerly Belleau-Wood) houses 2,242 burials over 34 acres. The American Cemetery of the Somme (formerly Bony) has 1,825 burials on 22 acres. Suresnes in the Paris suburbs contains 1,497 interments on its 7.5 acres. St. Mihiel (formerly Thiaucourt) holds 4,141 dead on 30 acres. Oise-Aisne (formerly Fère-en-Tardenois) possesses 48 acres in which the GRS buried 6,028 dead. Brookwood Cemetery in England contains 435 burials on its 4.5-acre plot and Flanders Field (formerly Waregem) in Belgium interred 362 Americans on 5 acres.⁷⁸ Crosses and Stars of David remain the only two types of headstones in the American overseas cemeteries. When a visitor stands anywhere in the cemetery the headstones appear in perfect alignment in every direction. This occurred because each plot was held to a standard measurement of two meters, fifty centimeters length, one-meter width, and one meter, fifty-five-centimeter depth.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ John T. Harris, letter to Artine Stiers, 17 December 1929, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 139.

⁷⁷ K.J. Hampton, letter to Russell Nye, 14 April 1928, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 139.

⁷⁸ W.H. Hart, Memorandum to H.W. Angus, Subject: American Cemeteries in Europe, 27 October 1922, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1941, Box 22.

⁷⁹ OQMG, *QMC in Europe*, Vol. 3, 27.

Of the ABMC, John Pershing wrote, “We are attempting fittingly to discharge the sacred duty entrusted to us as the American people and the veterans on the World War would have it done – with accuracy, with modesty, and with reverence.”⁸⁰ *The Literary Digest* wrote, “The American flag is still in Europe, even tho [*sic*] the last doughboy has left the Rhine. It floats over eight cemeteries... where 32,000 American soldiers are gathered in their last bivouac.”⁸¹

With regards to race, the dichotomy between the integrated overseas burials versus the segregated interments found at some national cemeteries within the United States should not be lost. Death found soldiers of all faiths, color, and background during the war. Yet, these United States soldiers were good enough to die for and be buried together for eternity in Europe. Only in their homeland their country deemed these men unworthy to rest together. It remains the blemish on an otherwise extraordinary effort by the United States.

Great Britain Completes its Cemeteries

While not experiencing the same social pressure regarding repatriation and burial operations as their American counterparts, the British government and the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) were not exempt from correspondence from citizens expressing certain desires or dissatisfaction with the work done regarding the British war dead. The British found themselves at a distinct disadvantage by the early 1920s because unlike the American GRS, the DGR&E was proving less and less effective, causing additional burden to fall upon the IWGC. This was due to shoddy work by some members within the organization followed by the DGR&E’s dissolution when the BEF returned the England. While the British repatriated an Unknown Warrior in 1920, the dissolution of a dedicated organization to locate and identify war

⁸⁰ John J. Pershing, “Forever America,” *American Legion Monthly*, May 1927.

⁸¹ “A Memorial for Some Americans Abroad,” *the Literary Digest*, 23 May 1923.

dead meant, that hundreds of thousands of British dead would remain unidentified or simply missing. Meanwhile, the British government continued on its path to bury its dead overseas and prevent repatriation for any person or entity in line with the decisions made by the IWGC to honor all British dead equally. That notion would be challenged in many ways including the creation of lobby groups. This section examines some of the problems brought forth to the British government and the IWGC for continued comparison to American burial efforts in France.

Some British subjects were not satisfied with the answers received from their government. Sarah Smith, whose son died of wounds in 1918 organized a petition to lobby the Prince of Wales and IWGC for repatriation of those dead specifically requested by their next of kin. The 2,500 signature-strong plea was delivered to the Prince of Wales in May of 1919 to “help us in altering the regulations of the Commission in regard to the decision in prohibiting the removal of the remains of the fallen to this country.”⁸² Ultimately, the Prince of Wales denied the petition’s requests.

Undeterred, Smith formed a more organized lobby called the British War Graves Association (BGWA), whose intent in part was “To claim equal rights with other nations... The BWGA insists upon the desires of the next of kin to be respected...”⁸³ Smith further explained her intent was “banding together the relations and friends of all those who fell in the Great War, and to protect their rights and interests; to claim the bodies of our fallen heroes, where this is desired, or by securing facilities for visiting the cemeteries.”⁸⁴ Simply, the association’s intent

⁸² Sarah Smith’s Petition, May 1919, CWGC_1_1_5_21 (WG 783 PT1), CWGC Archive.

⁸³ British War Graves Association Application, no date, CWGC Archive.

⁸⁴ “British War Graves,” *Yorkshire Evening News*, 26 April 1920, in CWGC/1/1/5/21 (WG 783 PT.1).

was to “obtain for British families the same privilege as granted to the Americans.”⁸⁵ By June of that year, the association boasted 2,000 members on its rolls, slightly more than the number who signed the original 1918 petition.⁸⁶

Unlike the Bring Home the Soldier Dead League, Smith understood that she could never affect the removal of every BEF soldier but advocated for those who desired repatriation to receive their soldier dead. By the mid-1920s, Smith continued to push for this end knowing that many Britons did not possess the financial means or physical health to visit their dead. Expressing this to the Prime Minister “on behalf of our members, mothers, wives, sisters who are heartbroken to whom life can never be the same again,” Smith expressed the War Graves Association’s willingness to defray the costs of removal.⁸⁷ In a separate letter, she argued that if repatriation was not an option than “at least facilities should be afforded for visiting, and this should not be given as Charity, it is our right and was promised by Lloyd George.”⁸⁸

The IWGC realized that its staff was not making any headway with Mrs. Smith. An internal note asked whether a note to her from Rudyard Kipling would produce a change in her viewpoint. The memo’s writer noted that perhaps “a little personal influence would probably check a movement like this more effectively than anything.”⁸⁹ While this episode between a private citizen and the IWGC ultimately did nothing to alter the organization’s cemetery plans it does demonstrate a level of dissatisfaction that runs counter to the narrative that Britons kept a stiff upper lip rather than openly question their country’s plan for the overseas cemeteries and

⁸⁵ “British Dead in France,” *Yorkshire Evening News*, 12 February 1920, in CWGC/1/1/5/21 (WG 783 PT.1).

⁸⁶ “War Graves Association,” *Yorkshire Evening News*, 8 June 1920, in CWGC/1/1/5/21 (WG 783 PT.1).

⁸⁷ Sarah Smith, letter to the Prime Minister, 7 March 1924, CWGC Archive.

⁸⁸ Sarah Smith, letter to the Prime Minister, 8 April 1924, CWGC Archive.

⁸⁹ Internal Memo Re: Mrs. S.A. Smith, no date, CWGC/1/1/5/21 (WG 783 PT.1).

had no commonality with American desires to repatriate the dead.

Britain possessed 767,978 graves containing bodies, of which 180,861 were interred as unknowns. Its cemeteries and memorials commemorated 517,773 missing soldiers. All told, Great Britain suffered 1,104,890 dead during World War I.⁹⁰ In a subsequent Armistice Day address, a British broadcaster told his listeners that if all the British war dead were assembled four-abreast, it would take eighty-four hours for the column to pass in review.⁹¹ Ironically, the last combat death in the British army, George L. Price, was buried in the same cemetery as first known British soldier to die in 1914, Private J. Parr.⁹²

Frustrating some grieving families were the activities of both the Americans and French. The 29 December 1915 French decree promised a grave for all French soldiers as well as those of its allies. Frustration grew when, after the war, the French government announced that it would be three years before permanent cemetery construction would begin, causing some to take matters into their own hands by disinterring and transporting a loved one's remains from temporary burial sites. Local gravediggers willingly helped these grieving families so long as a sufficient bribe was paid beforehand. Other more brash Frenchmen set up commercial enterprises that would dig up and transport a body, charging for the exhumation and mileage. These activities put the French government in a bind, ultimately forcing its submission to the people and allowing those who wished their soldier to be returned to do so at government expense.⁹³ On 28 September 1920, the French relented and began transferring bodies to those families who requested such. From 1921 to 1923, 240,000 bodies – thirty percent of all

⁹⁰ Fabian Ware, *The Immortal Heritage: An Account of the Work and Policy of the Imperial War Graves Commission During Twenty Years*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 26.

⁹¹ Ware, *Immortal Heritage*, 27.

⁹² Neil Hanson, *Unknown Soldiers: The Story of the Missing of the First World War*, (New York: Knopf, 2006), 222.

⁹³ Hanson, *Unknown Soldiers*, 230.

identified remains – were sent back to French families.⁹⁴

Britons also witnessed American repatriation operations that were ongoing both in France as well as in England. This combined with French repatriation activities amidst a British government that would not budge from its position became very frustrating for some. 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.⁹⁵

Some British families desiring repatriation resorted to nefarious activities equal to those of American families such as the Hines of Chicago discussed earlier. William Arthur Peel Durie was killed “while in command of his Company in the front line trenches, in the vicinity of St. Emile and during a heavy enemy bombardment, a large trench mortar struck the parados [*sic*] instantly killing him. This occurred at 10.15 a.m. on 29 December 1917.”⁹⁶ After previously being told her son's cemetery was to become permanent, Durie's mother, Anna, became furious upon learning that was not the case. She wrote a blistering letter to Fabian Ware stating, “It was only by falsehood and misrepresentation that you could have accomplished the removal of

⁹⁴ Capdevila and Voldman, *War Dead*, 51; “France's Soldier Dead,” the (London) *Times*, 22 June 1920, 1/1/7/B/43, CWGC Archives.

⁹⁵ Stephen Graham, *The Challenge of the Dead* (London: Cassell and Co., Ltd., 1921), 124.

⁹⁶ Circumstances of Death Register, W.A.P. Durie, Page 852, Microform 3189_B016739, Library and Archives of Canada.

remains of my beloved son, Captain W.A.P. Durie from Corkscrew Cemetery.”⁹⁷ Months after writing to Ware, the *Toronto Daily Star* published an article in which it mentioned that Anna “after eight years of effort, had succeeded in obtaining custody of his remains.”⁹⁸ The article further described the ceremonies and funeral for W.A.P. Durie in his native Canada.

Upon news of the public funeral that occurred in August, the IWGC officer dispatched an officer to the gravesite for an inspection. There he discovered “The coffin was found to have been forced open; the timbers had been broken and displaced; and the zinc shell had been cut upwards from the foot. The coffin was empty except for few small pieces of bone and some fragments of officer’s clothing. The coffin had not been opened up for its whole length but apparently the contents had been scraped out.” No evidence pointed to who conducted the raid, but IWGC officials probably knew the mastermind of the operation.

Anna never formally acknowledged her nefarious actions to the IWGC. She even went so far as to request a personal inscription for his grave marker. She cryptically wrote: “He took the only way/ And followed it/ Unto the glorious end.” It is unclear if she wrote that for her son or herself. W.A.P. Durie remains one of the few whose remains were repatriated from France and arguably the most well-known instance from the BEF. Like the incidents involving the Hines and Houlihan families years prior, Mrs. Durie demonstrated how far next of kin were willing to go to return loved ones from faraway graveyards to family cemeteries despite government regulations to the contrary.

Women’s rights activist Beatrix Maud Palmer, Countess of Selborne, added her voice to the growing chorus of dissent to the IWGC’s efforts. In a 1920 article published in the

⁹⁷ Anna Durie, letter to Fabian Ware, 2 March 1925, CWGC Archive.

⁹⁸ “Paying Tribute to Great War Hero,” *Toronto Daily Star*, 22 August 1925, CWGC Archive.

National Review, Selborne argued that by prohibiting repatriation of the dead and implementing a more or less uniform design of the cemeteries and grave stones, “The rights of the individual were swept away by the stroke of a pen,” and that the IWGC’s “conscriptio[n] of bodies is worthy of Lenin.”⁹⁹ She was one of many who viewed the British government’s control over the war dead as contrary to the values those men fought to uphold.

The IWGC offered next of kin the opportunity to receive the original wooden crosses from the temporary cemeteries but few families accepted the offer. Some unclaimed crosses ended hanging upon church walls if not buried in the churchyard. The IWGC burned the remaining crosses as they replaced them with permanent headstones. A British tabloid published a photograph of this action, sparking a small outrage.¹⁰⁰ The IWGC’s actions were no different than how the GRS disposed of its temporary crosses, but the IWGC learned that not all events warranted documentation for posterity.

Perhaps in acquiescence, the IWGC allowed personal inscriptions on the headstones, of which over 229,000 headstones bear. While the CWGC later claimed it engraved personal inscription regardless of executed payment, it admitted the requirement probably dissuaded many families from submitting the form.¹⁰¹ The IWGC rejected some inscriptions deemed controversial, but mysteriously allowed some that suggested the futility of war. Fabian Ware personally informed the father of one soldier that his proposed inscription “A noble son sacrificed for capitalism” was rejected. Ware also recommended the IWGC reject “Set out to save England/ Result: England permanently damned,” and “He left our home to fight the Hun/

⁹⁹ Maud Selborne, “National Socialism in War Cemeteries,” *National Review*, July 1920, copy in CWGC Archives.

¹⁰⁰ Hanson, *Unknown Soldiers*, 233.

¹⁰¹ CWGC, “Shaping Our Sorrow,” accessed 25 October 2019, <https://shapingoursorrow.cwgc.org/bargaining/families-make-their-mark/>.

Little did we think he would never return.” The Commission agreed to reject all three.¹⁰²

Britain lost 1,081,952 dead during the war – almost half of which – 499,000 – were listed as missing in action. British cemeteries contained 173,000 bodies that bore no identification.¹⁰³ The image of a grave only marked ‘Unknown’ continued to haunt British chaplain David Railton. “How that grave caused me to think...What can I do to ease the pain of father, mother, brother, sister, sweetheart, wife, and friend? Quietly and gradually there came... this answer... ‘Let this body – this symbol of him – be carried reverently over the sea to his native land.’ And I was happy for a few minutes.” Railton’s conception of a memorial to honor all the unknowns was heretofore inconceivable. His idea, however, stood to ease the long list of bereaved British families whose soldier possessed no known grave. While the DGR&E continued finding and identifying bodies in isolated graves, hundreds of thousands more remained without identity. Indeed, when a soldier’s body was found with personal effects, he stood a 75% chance of identification, without effects, the odds plummeted.¹⁰⁴

Railton was unsure how such an idea would be accepted two years after the war’s end. He mused at how to present his idea in order that it might take hold and subsequently appealed to the Dean of Westminster, who wrote King George V. The King’s office replied, “His Majesty is inclined to think that nearly two years after the last shot fired on the battlefields of France and Flanders is so long ago that a funeral now might be regarded as belated, and almost, as it were, reopen the war wound which time is gradually healing.”¹⁰⁵ Indeed, Railton’s idea was rejected, but would soon be resurrected.

¹⁰² Extracts from IWGC Meeting Minutes (no dates), CWGC Archives.

¹⁰³ Hanson, *Unknown Soldiers*, 224.

¹⁰⁴ Memo from DAAG in charge of effects, 1/4/1920. CWGCWG 1294/3 Pt. 1 Cat. No. 268 Box 1082, in Peter E. Hodgkinson, “Clearing the Dead.”

¹⁰⁵ Hanson, *Unknown Soldiers*, 260 (first quote), 263.

Renowned architect Sir Edwin Luytens, one of three principal designers appointed to the IWGC and designer of the Memorial to the Missing of the Somme in Thiepval, France, conceived the idea of a temporary cenotaph in which to allow Britons unable to travel to France a place to mourn their dead. The success of the temporary Cenotaph eventually led to a permanent memorial and, perhaps just as important, helped persuade the British Cabinet and the King that public reception would be favorable to burying an unknown body in London. On 15 October 1920, the idea was approved with Armistice Day the target for interment – three weeks away. In selecting the British unknown, authorities directed the retrieval of a body that had been buried since 1914 or 1915 to ensure advanced decomposition. The selected graves were opened, bodies examined to confirm British origin and that no identity existed. Four bodies originating from the Aisne, Somme, Arras, and Flanders were brought to a centralized location for selection.¹⁰⁶

On 7 November 1920 outside of his headquarters at St. Pol, France, General Louis John Wyatt selected the Unknown Warrior from the four unidentified bodies brought to his headquarters. In a 1939 letter Wyatt recalled,

The four bodies lay on stretchers, each covered by a union jack, in front of the altar was the shell of the coffin which had been sent from England to receive the remains. I selected one, and with the assistance of Colonel Gell, placed it in the shell; we screwed down the lid. The other bodies were removed and reburied in the military cemetery outside my headquarters at St Pol. I had no idea even of the area from which the body I selected had come; no one else can know it.¹⁰⁷

The procession of the British Unknown Warrior as he proceeded from the fields of Europe to his final resting place was marked by impressive ceremony that began in earnest from the train station. “The Padre’s flag” that David Railton, whose lonely thoughts years before became the

¹⁰⁶ Hanson, *Unknown Soldiers*, 278, 282-283.

¹⁰⁷ “The Story of the Unknown Warrior,” *The Guardian*, 13 October 2018.

genesis for this Unknown Warrior's burial, lay over the coffin, on top of which were placed a helmet, a sidearm, and a wreath presented by King George bearing the message, "In proud memory of those who died unknown in the Great War. Unknown, yet well-known; as dying, and behold they live."¹⁰⁸ Many Britons felt a similar connection to the Unknown Warrior. One Briton noted that the soldier's anonymity meant that "The mystery as to whose son he was makes him the son and brother of us all."¹⁰⁹ One man said, "I lost two sons out there, but the other –," he broke off, implying that his third boy might now rest beneath the Abbey.¹¹⁰

Before the Unknown Warrior was buried, a Canadian maple leaf sent by a Victoria Cross recipient was placed on his coffin. The casket was lowered, and the grave filled with soil from the great battlefields; 100 sandbags containing earth from France filled the Unknown Warrior's gravesite.¹¹¹ Britons passed by the grave at 70-80 per minute. The regular Abbey organist required the assistance of four others to provide continuous music during the public's continual visitation.¹¹² Nine months later, the tomb still received 300-400 wreaths weekly.

One year later, a black Tournai marble slab was laid over the Unknown Warrior's grave. The inscription, inlaid by melted battlefield brass, contained two distinctly Christian phrases which drew rebuke from a member of the Jewish faith. The Dean of Westminster replied that one should not be surprised to see Christian text in a church and noted that those lines were only a small part of the total inscription. When further pressed the Dean retorted: "We cannot hope to

¹⁰⁸ "The Warrior Lay to Rest, *The Times*, 12 November 1920.

¹⁰⁹ Richard Jenkyns, *Westminster Abbey: A Thousand Years of National Pageantry*, (London: Profile Books, 2011), 172; Hanson, *Unknown Soldiers*, 306.

¹¹⁰ "A Test of Endurance," *The Times*, 12 November 1920.

¹¹¹ "The Warrior Lay to Rest, *The Times*, 12 November 1920.

¹¹² "At the Abbey," *The Times*, 12 November 1920.

please everybody.”¹¹³

While the British Unknown Warrior travelled to Boulogne for embarkation back to England, a French Poilu named Auguste Thien selected his country’s Unknown in the Citadel of Verdun by placing wildflowers gathered from the nearby battle areas. Eight coffins were sent from nine different areas of the former French sector; one was not sent because the body bore evidence that could potentially lead to identification.¹¹⁴ Thien placed the flowers on the sixth coffin because “6” was the sum of the numbers in his 123rd Régiment d’Infanterie. The remaining bodies were removed for burial in a new war cemetery named Faubourg-Pavé.¹¹⁵ Meanwhile, André Maginot, the French war minister who would become notorious for his decision to build the Maginot Line, ordered, “In honour of the unknown soldier who died for France – sound the drums!”¹¹⁶ Other poilus removed the selected casket to a waiting carriage to begin France’s Unknown Soldier’s final journey to the Arc de Triomphe. Like the Americans a year later, the French tasked an enlisted soldier to select their unknown soldier whereas a British general officer chose his country’s representative unknown.

The same day Britain buried its unknown, the French Unknown Soldier was being led down the Champs Elysees by Maginot accompanied by five widows, five maimed soldiers, five members of the French Army, and five veterans from the Franco-Prussian War. The French Unknown remained lying in state in the Arc de Triomphe until January of 1921. Once buried, thousands poured into the gravesite, but the crowd was mostly silent. Some wept; soldiers who

¹¹³ Ronald Blythe, *The Age of Illusion: Glimpses of Britain Between the Wars, 1919-1940*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 12; Hanson, *Unknown Soldiers*, 313, 317.

¹¹⁴ “Foch’s Final Salute at Boulogne,” *The Guardian*, 11 November 1920.

¹¹⁵ “Did You Ever Wonder?” *Commemoration.Info*, accessed 21 January 2020, <http://www.commemoration.info/pages/entries/entries.php?post=n67>.

¹¹⁶ “Battlefield Flowers,” *The Guardian*, 11 November 1920.

served with the Unknown Soldier in France threw their decorations into the partially opened tomb.¹¹⁷

Despite the public success of returning an Unknown Warrior to England, by 1921 the IWGC found itself at a crossroads. The DGR&E reported it was now only conducting identification work “when it had time” and achieved identifications on 20% of the 600 bodies located weekly.¹¹⁸ By the end of 1921, the DGR&E claimed it had searched the battle area six times. Secretary of State for War Sir L. Worthington-Evans told the House of Commons that certain locations of particularly tense fighting were combed over upwards of twenty times. Nevertheless, “It was certain that bodies would be found in the course of reconstruction and drainage, and this process might continue for years.”¹¹⁹

That October, the military personnel of the DGR&E returned to England, leaving an IWGC member to opine that “if it was known to the public that bodies were being found at the rate of 200 a week at the time the search parties were disbanded, the public would want an explanation.”¹²⁰ The British people did want answers as much as they wanted results, but their Army did not meet expectations. Its burial units were fraught with indiscipline including the desecration of remains to enhance the reported total of bodies recovered and buried, thievery of exhumed bodies, or general indifference toward the task. When the DGR&E units disbanded, they left behind over 300,000 bodies of their countrymen abandoned in the soil of France and Belgium. This left all remaining mortuary work in the hands of the IWGC which did not possess the capacity to execute extensive search operations concurrent to its main charge of the

¹¹⁷ Hanson, *Unknown Soldiers*, 329.

¹¹⁸ Peter E. Hodgkinson, “Clearing the Dead,” *Centre for First World War Studies*, Vol 3, no 1 (September 2007).

¹¹⁹ “Battlefields Searched Six Times for Bodies,” the (Washington, DC) *Evening Star*, 11 November 1921.

¹²⁰ Peter E. Hodgkinson, “Clearing the Dead,” *Centre for First World War Studies*, Vol 3, no 1 (September 2007).

permanent cemeteries and memorials. Resultantly, the IWGC was forced to rely upon locals and other foreign labor to search for remains.¹²¹ This went on simultaneous to the IWGC's principal task of cemetery construction, organization, and maintenance.

Before his death, Rudyard Kipling characterized the IWGC's efforts as "The biggest single bit of work since any of the Pharaohs – and they only worked in their own country."¹²² In France alone, the IWGC constructed 970 cemeteries enclosed by 50 miles of brick or stone. Within those cemeteries are almost 1000 Crosses of Sacrifice, 560 Stones of Remembrance, and approximately 600,000 headstones standing on almost 250 miles of foundational concrete beams. At the conclusion of its effort, the IWGC installed almost 680,000 headstones across some 1,850 plots and cemeteries containing anywhere from 40 to 12,000 graves. On his pilgrimage to the British war graves in 1922, King George V remarked, "I have many times asked myself whether there can be more potent advocates of peace upon earth, through the years to come, than this massed multitude of silent witnesses to the desolation of war."¹²³ In each IWGC cemetery visitors will find a register of names. Each register bears an alphabetized roster of the dead and missing as well as any biographical details ascertained through communication with the decedent's family.

Beginning with the Armistice and ending in September of 1921, the British army had located 204,650 bodies and buried them in established cemeteries. When the IWGC assumed responsibility for this task it conducted no further organized searches. From 1922 until Fabian Ware published his reminisces in 1937, over 38,000 additional bodies were found. Over half

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Fabian Ware, *The Immortal Heritage: An Account of the Work and Policy of the Imperial War Graves Commission During Twenty Years*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 56.

¹²³ Fabian Ware, *The Immortal Heritage: An Account of the Work and Policy of the Imperial War Graves Commission During Twenty Years*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 23, 30, 56.

were turned up by metal searchers, another third by farmers, and the remainder by organized French search parties.¹²⁴ Ware noted that as of his book's first printing, the IWGC received word of newly-found bodies at a rate of twenty to thirty per week but he did not specify how many were ultimately identified.¹²⁵

The IWGC's commitment to equality for all received an early test when Prince Maurice of Battenberg, the youngest grandchild of Queen Victoria, died at Zonnebeke in October of 1914 and buried in the Ypres Town Cemetery. Battenberg's mother, Princess Beatrice, ordered an exceptionally large granite cross for her son's headstone which contravened all existing policy. Upon notification that she could not erect her cross, Princess Beatrice expressed her anxiety over the dilemma and requested that since "the grave is in the civilian cemetery that such a concession might be allowed her."¹²⁶ As the IWGC began replacing temporary gravestones with permanent versions, newspapers reported in July of 1925 that Battenberg's grave was due to receive a permanent Commission headstone. The newspaper article also mentioned Princess Beatrice's plea to the Prince of Wales for an exception to policy that was denied.¹²⁷

Ware wrote an impassioned letter to the Princess's household begging her consideration to the situation at hand.

Were I able to state that Prince Maurice's grave is marked in the same way it would create a wonderful impression and would create a wonderful impression and would receive a warm and affectionate response from the relatives of the other dead. Were, however, it once thought that it was intended to mark Prince Maurice's grave in a special way, I really tremble to think how pained Her Royal Highness would be with the comments which would be aroused. There has already been a good deal said about Prince Maurice's grave in the Press emphasizing the fact that it will be treated just like the others. Is it too much to say that we are looking to Princess Beatrice to place herself

¹²⁴ Peter E. Hodgkinson, "Clearing the Dead."

¹²⁵ Ware, *The Immortal Heritage*, 37.

¹²⁶ Reggie Seymour, letter to Creedy, 3 December 1918, CWGC Archive.

¹²⁷ "All Treated Alike," the (London) *News of the World*, 19 July 1925, CWGC Archive.

at the head of that movement of bereaved mothers who have agreed that they will meet one another on this equal footing of facing the sorrow which has fallen on almost every home in the Empire?¹²⁸

Further correspondence or discussion on the subject could not be located. Research of CWGC burials shows that Prince Maurice remains buried in the Ypres Town Cemetery amongst the men with whom he was originally buried. While his burial plot is lined with concrete décor, the Prince lies underneath the standard IWGC headstone in a cemetery containing the bodies of men who died with him during the war's early days.

Long after the war, British veteran George Coppard was speaking with another veteran who worked for the IWGC for over fifty years. The man was specifically tasked with going back over the old battle areas to find remains, determine their nationality, and rebury them in an appropriate cemetery. The man told Coppard that, lacking other physical evidence, the bones of German dead seemed to be of a grayish color while British bones were generally white. When Coppard inquired about the color of Belgian or French bones the man replied that the only places he went over his five decades seemed to be places only fought over between the British and Germans.¹²⁹ One British officer possessed an idea of how the dead could be used to demonstrate the cruelty of war: "I wish when peace comes, our Government might combine with the French government to make one long avenue [of graves] between the lines... Then I would like to send every man, woman, and child in Western Europe on pilgrimage... so that they might think and learn what war means from the silent witnesses on either side."¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Fabian Ware, letter to Victor Corkran, 27 November 1925, CWGC Archive.

¹²⁹ Coppard, *With a Machine Gun to Cambrai*, 153-154.

¹³⁰ Ware, *The Immortal Heritage*, 21.

The QMC's Gold Star Mothers Pilgrimages

The story of the Gold Star Mothers' Pilgrimages is arguably the most recognizable aspect of America's commemoration of its World War I dead. The Army's role in that tribute is less known. Indeed, relevant portions of the story appear in most books within the topic's historiography that discuss the various themes present within the pilgrimages. The Gold Star Mothers' Pilgrimage rightly deserves discussion because it is a unique feat of the United States government that occurred during a turbulent period in American history. The 1930-1933 Pilgrimages also effectively mark the end of the Quartermaster Corps (QMC) odyssey to conceptualizing the overseas cemeteries, making them a reality, then host mothers and widows of the dead to those cemeteries. This section is devoted to a discussion of the pilgrimages from their conception and fight for Congressional approval, to the expressions of thanks received by the Quartermaster Corps from grateful mothers. This discussion is necessary because the idea for the pilgrimages was an idea brought forth as a social issue to the Congress, which approved the voyages but tasked the Army to ensure the success of the journey. The pilgrimages would not have been possible if not for the combined GRS work to create the cemeteries and the QMC planning and conducting the trips over a four-year period.

America's 80,000 World War I combat casualties left behind approximately 33,000 widows.¹³¹ While girlfriends and fiancées undoubtedly existed for many, they were not 'officially' recognized by the War Department and, therefore, possessed no ability to influence the final disposition of their men.¹³² The earliest known account of a woman wearing a gold star to signify the loss of a loved one overseas occurred in Chicago in November of 1917 when it was

¹³¹ Erika Kuhlman, *Of Little Comfort: War Widows, Fallen Soldiers, and the Remaking of the Nation After the Great War*, (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 3.

¹³² Kuhlman, *Of Little Comfort*, 10-11.

a reported that “a movement was begun here today for the substitution for the black garb of mourning, such as a Gold Star in memory of American soldier dead. The glory of death should be emphasized rather than its sadness....”¹³³ On 28 May 1918, President Woodrow Wilson approved a Women’s Council on National Defense proposal for mothers and wives of soldier dead to display a gold star on their service flag and wear a black armband bearing a gold star.¹³⁴ The Gold Star Mothers, Inc. eventually received a federal charter on 4 June 1928.¹³⁵ While the gold star symbol provided some measure of public mourning for the bereaved, it did not and could not substitute for the opportunity to grieve at their soldier dead’s grave.

The United States referred to women who lost their husbands in France as ‘war widows,’ inexorably tying their status to the war and their soldier dead.¹³⁶ This section will consist of government and military documents that incorporate vignettes from various Gold Star Mothers who participated in some of the many pilgrimages conducted between 1930 and 1933. The chapter will also detail the trip made by Mrs. Anna Winberg of Minnesota. Anna’s son, Swen, died on the 20 October 1918, and Anna reached her son’s grave at Romagne Cemetery during the pilgrimage of June 1933. Composed of the letters, photographs, and personal items retained by Anna, her story provides an in-depth examination of the mother’s experience on the pilgrimage. Incorporation of then-Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, Sr.’s escort notes will provide unique insight into the responsibilities thrust upon many officers to ensure the pilgrimages met with success. Davis was presented the unique challenge of escorting the African American mothers very soon after the Army decided to segregate the pilgrimages.

¹³³ John Graham, *The Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages of the 1930s: Overseas Grave Visitations by Mothers and Widows of Fallen U.S. World War I Soldiers*, (London: McFarland and Co., Inc., 2005), 12.

¹³⁴ Hanson, *Unknown Soldiers*, 251.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 256.

¹³⁶ Kuhlman, *Of Little Comfort*, 11.

While the British Empire conducted no organized pilgrimages for its mothers or widows, an estimated 60,000 Britons travelled to France in mid-1919 following the cessation of travel restrictions to the battle area. Some searched in vain for unknown grave locations; others brought mementos to leave at their loved one's grave. Some brought souvenirs from the area, mostly flowers. One mother wrapped her boots in paper following her visit to the cemetery where her son was buried to preserve the mud that accumulated. She wore her slippers back to England. When suggested that she knock the muck off and wear her boots she replied that the mud "was too sacred to be removed."¹³⁷

Unofficial pilgrimages by American mothers and widows also took place within months of the war ending when the overseas cemeteries were anything but finished.¹³⁸ While the government did not fund the early pilgrimages to the overseas cemeteries, mothers could obtain a passport without charge by presenting proof that their son was buried overseas.¹³⁹ Mrs. A. G. Dorian visited her son's grave at the Meuse-Argonne Cemetery in France four separate times long before Congress conceived the Gold Star Mothers' Pilgrimages.¹⁴⁰ Some initial pilgrimages offered clarity to mothers and widows as to the final disposition of their soldier dead. Sarah Hathaway journeyed to France in 1921 to visit her son's grave and ultimately elected to repatriate his remains. Reflecting on her decision at the end of 1940 with Europe embroiled in another war, Sarah wrote that at the time "I was determined to have my son's body brought

¹³⁷ Caroline Scott, "After WWI, Women Began to Make Their Way to Europe's Graves. What They Found is Worth Remembering," *Time*, 5 November 2019.

¹³⁸ Graham, *GSM Pilgrimages*, 50.

¹³⁹ H. J. Connor, letter to Annie K. Kilmer, 13 April 1923, in Burial File of Joyce Kilmer, NPRC.

¹⁴⁰ Henrietta Haug, *Gold Star Mothers: A Collection of Notes Recording the Personal Histories of the Gold Star Mothers of Illinois*, (Brussels, IL: No Publisher, 1941), 42-43.

home, and from what has happened, I am thankful that I did.”¹⁴¹

The trips were largely conducted by those families possessing the financial means to do so, something that could not be replicated by most Americans. One of the more prominent women to make an unofficial pilgrimage was Annie Kilmer, mother of poet Joyce Kilmer. In 1919, Annie requested governmental permission to visit her son’s grave at Fère-en-Tardenois, France. Twice the War Department refused her request, stating that “no relatives of soldiers were allowed to cross.” Undeterred, Annie made a third request in 1920, but this time cited personal business in England and France. The War Department granted this request, providing Annie the opportunity for a May 1920 voyage to Europe.¹⁴² While travel restrictions existed immediately after the war, they were lifted by the time of Annie’s 1920 request.

Annie spent a few weeks in London, but then journeyed to France in September. She reached Fère-en-Tardenois on 9 September. Approaching the cemetery, Annie recalled her only thought being a pleasant one – that she might die at her son’s grave. Annie recalled:

We arrived at the grave about 3 p.m. At my desire I was left alone. He lies just a little way from the gate of the little cemetery, on the left side as you enter. I can see it as I write. The grave was covered with flowers, but I took those at the head, and placed them lower down, and put *my* flowers in their place. Then I knelt and said my Rosary, the one Joyce gave me... “telling my beads” soothed and quieted me that day as I knelt on his grave, more than anything else could have done. And I did not shed one tear.¹⁴³

After leaving the cemetery and arriving at the nearby guest house, Annie met with the people responsible for the cemetery’s upkeep. She secured soil sampled from Joyce’s grave and despite being assured Joyce’s grave “was never without flowers” arranged for special flowers to be placed on the grave for her son’s birthday and on Christmas. Annie left France on 12 September,

¹⁴¹ Haug, *Gold Star Mothers*, 93.

¹⁴² Annie Kilburn Kilmer, *Leaves of My Life*, (New York: Frye Publishing Co., 1925), 126-127.

¹⁴³ Kilmer, *Leaves of My Life*, 130-131.

writing later that it was then she “cried for the first time because I was leaving Joyce, but I don’t feel like that anymore, for he is with me always!”¹⁴⁴ Annie’s testimony alluded to the power of a mother visiting her son’s grave. Whether all women would enjoy a similar privilege, however, remained a mystery in 1920.

In 1919, then-Secretary of War Ralph Hayes predicted the difficulty most families of the dead would experience visiting the overseas military cemeteries. Hayes wrote in his 1920 report “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 who are of moderate means.”¹⁴⁵ Indeed, the early, self-funded pilgrimages sometimes drew the ire of the less fortunate. One woman who visited her husband’s grave at Romagne in 1918 was invited to speak before a group of war mothers to tell of the comfort received from visiting the well-kept cemetery. During her speech, one of the war mothers stood up and said, “I wish you would make that woman sit down.” When asked why since the speaker had not said anything offensive, the mother replied, “Yes; she said she had visited her husband’s grave; because she has money enough, she could go over there and visit her husband’s grave, and we don’t want her to come and tell us, when we have not the money to go...”¹⁴⁶ Visits to the war graves in France emerged as yet another political irritant in American society, already strained by battles between progressives and conservatives.

Realizing a swelling desire by next of kin to see their soldier dead’s gravesites, New

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 132-133.

¹⁴⁵ Ralph Hayes, *A Report to the Secretary of War on American Military Dead Overseas* (Washington: GPO, 1920), 14.

¹⁴⁶ Statement of Mrs. J.S. Bach, Hearings before the Committee on Military Affairs, House of Representatives, 19 February 1924, in NARA, RG 92, GSM Pilgrimages, Box 345.

York Congressman and World War I veteran Fiorello La Guardia first proposed a pilgrimage in a 1919 bill, but it met considerable dissent from the funeral lobby still trying to get all of the bodies returned to the United States. It was just as well, since early travelers to the European battlefields found human remains littering the landscape. This scene was hardly proper for grieving relatives.¹⁴⁷ La Guardia's 1919 bill was unique in that it included fathers as potential pilgrims in addition to mothers, but not widows.¹⁴⁸ Reflecting on his 1919 bill almost a decade later, La Guardia remarked: "It didn't take hold. It just didn't take hold. Everything was concentrated on getting those bodies back."¹⁴⁹ In fact, La Guardia faced vehement opposition from the funeral lobby which was against any action designed to leave bodies in Europe. The prevailing thought was that if mothers saw their sons' graves in Europe, they would become more inclined to leave them buried overseas. La Guardia remarked, "I was criticized very severely at the time and abused."¹⁵⁰

The next Congressional attempt to secure overseas trips for Gold Star Mothers occurred with a House Resolution 4109 on 23 December 1923. In that bill, Congress proposed to "designate such members of the military forces of the United States as may be necessary to conduct such tours."¹⁵¹ Support for war mothers to journey overseas had not gained significant traction throughout the early and mid-twenties. By 1928, Congressional support strengthened as lawmakers held numerous hearings to seriously consider appropriations for a pilgrimage. Pershing gave reserved support for the Gold Star Mothers' pilgrimage stating he was "interested

¹⁴⁷ Hanson, *Unknown Soldiers*, 252.

¹⁴⁸ Graham, *GSM Pilgrimages*, 17.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁵¹ H.R. 4109, 23 December 1923, NARA, RG 92, Gold Star Mothers Pilgrimage, Box 345.

in every movement in any way connected with our soldier dead, realizing as I do, the great sacrifice which they themselves made and the irreparable loss their families sustained.”¹⁵²

New York Democrat Royal S. Copeland, the senator who introduced the 1928 bill along with fellow New York Democrat Robert F. Wagner, 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.” He added “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.”¹⁵³ While understanding of the sentiment, the cost had to be considered. While the families who opted to leave their soldier dead buried in Europe saved the United States government about twenty-three million dollars earlier in the decade that was no guarantee that Congress would invest in a pilgrimage. The Gold Star Mothers, however, now formed a potent lobby, having received a federal charter on 4 June 1928.¹⁵⁴ These women now came to testify with the backing of a unified organization in their corner.

Congress patiently listened to countless testimonials from wives and mothers seeking to travel to France and see their husband or son’s grave. Some who spoke had already completed self-funded trips and gave glowing testimonials of what the visit did for their spirit. One mother testified:

The body of my only son lies in Romagne 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

¹⁵² Hanson, *Unknown Soldiers*, 255.

¹⁵³ Seventieth Congress, *Hearing Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Military Affairs of the United States on HR 5494* (Washington: GPO, 1928), 3.

¹⁵⁴ Hanson, *Unknown Soldiers*, 256.

United States has provided through the Quartermaster Corps of our Army for these silent 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.¹⁵⁵

The prospect of closure was certainly a valid argument for the Gold Star Mothers who never received a physical body with which to mourn and no grave to easily make pilgrimage. Jessica Mitford elaborated on the human desire for closure in *The American Way of Death*, detailing the stories of people facing similar circumstances. One funeral director related the story of a woman who required psychiatric treatment because her husband's funeral involved a closed casket, no service, and was ultimately buried in another state without her presence at the interment. Another case was a woman whose husband's body was donated for medical research. She planned a funeral and burial upon receiving the remains ten years later.¹⁵⁶

Despite the passing of over a decade, questions arose whether the cemeteries were of quality to receive mothers and widows of the dead. Assistant Secretary of War Patrick Hurley suggested deferring the pilgrimages longer until the ABMC completed enhancements of the overseas cemeteries. The Quartermaster General responded "I seriously doubt if the postponement of the pilgrimage would meet with the approval of members of Congress, the

¹⁵⁵ Seventieth Congress, *Hearing Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Military Affairs of the United States on HR 5494* (Washington: GPO, 1928), 6-7.

¹⁵⁶ Jessica Mitford, *The American Way of Death*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), 93.

patriotic organizations which worked for the passage of the bill authorizing the pilgrimage and of war mothers themselves.... Many of the mothers of the men who are buried in France are of advanced age....”¹⁵⁷ The Quartermaster General was correct in his point regarding the age of the mothers. The average age of the Pilgrims in the 1930s was over sixty-five years old.¹⁵⁸ The 1930 pilgrimages would carry the oldest Gold Star Mother to France. Mrs. Elizabeth Hutchins of California was 92 when she arrived at Aisne-Marne cemetery to see her son’s grave. Hurley had suggested that the overseas cemeteries would not be ready for the pilgrims until 30 May 1932; Elizabeth Hutchins would die on 30 June 1932.¹⁵⁹ Had the War Department succeeded in delaying the pilgrimages, Elizabeth might not have lived to see her son’s grave in France. It should be noted that the funding for this pilgrimage was never something that Congress debated – even after the 1929 stock market crash – no suggestion has been found to pull money from this event. On 7 February 1929, First Lady Lou Henry Hoover selected one of fifty-four envelopes from a silver bowl. Each envelope stood for a state and the territories of the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Canal Zone, the District of Columbia in addition to future states Alaska and Hawaii. Nebraska was the first state picked by Mrs. Hoover, meaning ladies from Nebraska would be the first offered the pilgrimages in 1930 with Colorado being last.¹⁶⁰

Before Secretary of War Hurley signed the 1930 Pilgrim Regulations, he charged the Quartermaster General with “the management of all pilgrimages.”¹⁶¹ The Red Cross was

¹⁵⁷ B.F. Cheatham, letter to the Assistant Secretary of War, 18 May 1929, NARA, RG 92, Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages, Box 378.

¹⁵⁸ Major General J.L. DeWitt Instructions for Officers Detailed to Duty with the Pilgrims, 10 April 1931, AHEC, Benjamin O. Davis Collection, Box 12.

¹⁵⁹ Patrick J. Hurley, letter to the Quartermaster General, 11 May 1929, NARA, RG 92, Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages, Box 378; California Death Index, 1905-1939 via ancestry.com.

¹⁶⁰ War Department Press Release, 11 July 1930, NARA, RG 92, Gold Star Mothers Pilgrimages, Box 348; Hanson, *Unknown Soldiers*, 257.

¹⁶¹ War Department, Pilgrimage Regulations, Washington, 18 January 1930, Scott Kraska Collection.

initially offered as lead agency, but some vocal mothers rejected this idea. They did not dislike the organization, but preferred the pilgrimages not be viewed as a mission of mercy for old women. One mother, Ethel Nock, argued for the Army to accompany the pilgrims feeling that it could best care for the women. Another mother agreed, stating that “I feel that this is something that should be done entirely under the Army. I cannot say enough in praise of the wonderful service we had in France. I have had experience with the Graves Registration Service in France for the last six years. I think at this time it would be unwise to not put this matter entirely into the hands of our Quartermaster Service.”¹⁶² Another mother added, “I fear [the pilgrimages] will be [a junket] if the Red Cross conducts it...My hope is that the mothers will [go] over as a sacred pilgrimage, and if our Quartermaster Department conducts it I am sure that that is the way the crusade will be accomplished.”¹⁶³ Shortly thereafter, responsibility fell to the War Department and the Quartermaster Corps to arrange the details for their journeys.¹⁶⁴

After Congress authorized a pilgrimage for Gold Star Mothers, a determination became necessary regarding who was authorized to participate in the trip. Congress ordered a compendium published listing every eligible woman, her address, and the burial location of her son or husband.¹⁶⁵ The War Department dispatched over 30,000 letters to the eligible next of kin who had a soldier buried overseas; forty percent of those letters eventually returned as undeliverable.¹⁶⁶ The message explained the intention of the pilgrimages and those eligible to

¹⁶² Graham, *GSM Pilgrimages*, 56-57.

¹⁶³ “Hearings to Authorize Mothers and Unmarried Widows of Deceased World War Veterans Buried in Europe to Visit Graves,” *Congressional Record*, 14 May 1928, 10.

¹⁶⁴ Kuhlman, *Of Little Comfort*, 16.

¹⁶⁵ United States Congress, *Congressional Record* (Washington: GPO, 1930), 171.

¹⁶⁶ David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 367.

partake in the voyages. It advised potential pilgrims to fill out whether or not they desired to go, and if they wanted to go during 1930, the first year of pilgrimages. Eligible mothers soon received information sheets on the upcoming pilgrimages which detailed costs, itineraries, and recommendations for the mothers. Formal invitations followed.¹⁶⁷

The War Department worked closely with the Judge Advocate General to determine eligibility requirements. Between 1929 and 1932, the Judge Advocate General issued thirty-two rulings declaring or clarifying eligibility for individual participation in the pilgrimages. The decision to prohibit remarried widows from partaking in the pilgrimages caused the founder of the Gold Star Mothers, Inc, to be excluded, and was eventually rescinded. These decisions were often bitter, as one mother, arguing against the inclusion of widows, said, “you must remember... that many of the widow are girls whom the boys would never have met had it not been for the contingency of camp life... I do fear that many of the widows are going over with the thought of Paris.”¹⁶⁸

Once the War Department in conjunction with the Army’s Judge Advocate General, 17,389 women were deemed eligible to travel, of which around 6,000 took advantage.¹⁶⁹ Although Joyce Kilmer’s mother, Annie, was initially not eligible for the pilgrimages, she received correspondence gauging her interest in attending. On the 1931 poll for the 1932 parties Annie wrote “No! Went in 1920 and 1929 at my own expense and for when I go again shall continue to do so.”¹⁷⁰ Unfortunately, Annie died before she could travel overseas again. The

¹⁶⁷ Example of Desired Stopover Request Sheet, NARA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows, Box 82.

¹⁶⁸ “Hearings to Authorize Mothers and Unmarried Widows of Deceased World War Veterans Buried in Europe to Visit Graves,” *Congressional Record*, 14 May 1928, 10.

¹⁶⁹ Hanson, *Unknown Soldiers*, 256.

¹⁷⁰ Annie K. Kilmer, 1932 Pilgrimage Letter, 3 October 1931, in Burial File of Joyce Kilmer, NPRC.

1933 poll was returned to the War Department with a note that “Mrs. Kilmer has passed away.”¹⁷¹ Quentin Roosevelt’s burial file contains letters from Mrs. Roosevelt declining participation in all four years of the Gold Star Pilgrimages.¹⁷²

The knowledge that visiting their son’s grave buoyed the spirits of some mothers. One described her feelings upon hearing about the opportunity afforded her: “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.”¹⁷³ Some mothers required or requested accompaniment by a friend or relative. The QMC allowed this but those persons became responsible for making arrangements out of pocket, though the QMC ensured the pairs were quartered together.¹⁷⁴

The QMC seized an early opportunity for public praise when Thora Holt was initially deemed ineligible to participate in the pilgrimages. Holt, a Norwegian immigrant, lost her citizenship papers in a housefire years prior to the pilgrimages’ announcement. Weeks before her scheduled departure, the *Boston Globe* announced that “The War Department today cut the red tape surrounding the case of Mrs. Thora Holt... in an attempt to make it possible for this gold star mother to visit her son’s grave in France.”¹⁷⁵ Such an occurrence making national headlines boded well for the War Department’s efforts and demonstrates its efforts to accommodating the needs of mothers wherever possible.

¹⁷¹ 1933 Pilgrimage Letter, 11 July 1932, in Burial File of Joyce Kilmer, NPRC.

¹⁷² Letters from Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt in Burial File of Quentin Roosevelt, NPRC.

¹⁷³ “War Mother, Ill 12 Years, Sails Recovered,” 25 July 1930, NARA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows, Entry 1904, Box 1.

¹⁷⁴ A.D. Hughes, “Pilgrims,” *Quartermaster Review*, May-June 1931, 35.

¹⁷⁵ “Red Tape Cut for Gold Star Mother,” *Boston Globe*, 20 May 1930.

As the Army planned and executed the pilgrimages, some widows noted the military veneer of the voyage. One mother wrote the Quartermaster General to clarify if kosher meals would be served during the journey to mothers of Jewish soldiers. She received a negative reply with the explanation that Jewish soldiers ate the same Army rations as their Gentile counterparts.¹⁷⁶ Indeed, the War Department viewed the pilgrimages as a military operation to ensure “lodging, food, transportation, entertainment, and medical care” for all of the Gold Star Mothers and widows both in the United States and in Europe.¹⁷⁷ Given the average age of the Pilgrims was between sixty-one and sixty-five years of age, with many venturing outside the United States for the first time, the War Department and QMC needed to make many special accommodations and considerations as they executed this operation. The 1930 report provides an excellent glimpse into how the War Department and QMC worked to make this such a memorable event for those involved.

As early as 1929, the War Department reached out to France, Belgium, and England through the State Department to inform the governments of the planned pilgrimages. This effort enlisted valuable assistance from the foreign governments. The French particularly prepared to open their country to the pilgrims. Museums were opened especially to the ladies, the police allowed their touring buses special parking and route access special trains were organized to move pilgrims from the port to Paris, and the French organized the ceremony at the French Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the first significant stop for each party. Meanwhile, the British coordinated for similar receptions and ceremonies as well as the entertainment for the pilgrims. The Women’s Section of the British Legion was specifically helpful in getting pilgrims to

¹⁷⁶ Kuhlman, *Of Little Comfort*, 71.

¹⁷⁷ Report on the activities in Europe of the American Pilgrimage Gold Star Mothers and Widows, 1930, NARA, RG 92, Gold Star Mothers Pilgrimages, Box 360.

isolated gravesites. While no formal receptions occurred in Belgium, coordination with the country assured ease of border crossings.¹⁷⁸

Party A departed the United States to much fanfare on 7 May 1930. The pilgrims boarded the SS *America* and embarked thirteen years to the day the first doughboys departed for France. Five thousand cheering spectators fell silent as they glanced upon the brooding faces of the pilgrims setting off on their solemn mission.¹⁷⁹ Forty-two Army planes appeared overhead and as the formation passed over the SS *America*'s deck, the planes released red poppies that showered the deck of the ship as it exited New York Harbor into the expansive Atlantic waters.¹⁸⁰

Two weeks at sea brought the first party to France's shore on 16 May 1930, perhaps with a feeling of uncertainty toward how the French would receive the pilgrims. The ladies disembarked the *America* to a warm welcome by French dignitaries. A French war widow presented the group with a bouquet of flowers on behalf of their grieving French counterparts. A witness noted that 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" as the women walked to their waiting train that would take them to Paris to begin their tour of France.¹⁸¹

Such kind receptions became commonplace throughout the pilgrimages. A former

¹⁷⁸ Report on the activities in Europe of the American Pilgrimage Gold Star Mothers and Widows, 1930, pages 2-6, NARA, RG 92, Gold Star Mothers Pilgrimages, Box 360.

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

¹⁸⁰ "Gold Star Mothers Weep on Departure for France as Planes Drop Poppies," *New York Evening World*, 7 May 1930, NARA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows, Box 1.

¹⁸¹ George Dailey, Summary of Report, 17 May 1930, NARA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows, Box 87.

soldier accompanying a later party approached a French woman waving a small American flag with tears streaming down her face. When asked if she had lost a son during the war the woman replied, “Yes, Yes, I too am a Gold Star Mother as you call them. Who here is not? I had three sons who went to war, they died. I had three sons-in-law, they died too.”¹⁸² Many Americans quickly forgot the animosity toward France built from the months of uneasiness over the disposition of the American dead from 1919 to early 1920. Once the pilgrims arrived in Paris, they were treated to tea at one of the finest restaurants in the city. The tea was attended by American and French governmental officials along with members of French patriotic organizations.¹⁸³ The event succeeded in cementing the bond between the two countries ahead of the four-year partnership in hosting the American Gold Star Mothers and Widows.

Each party stopped at the French tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Paris or the Westminster Abbey in London depending on its itinerary. The lead escort officer was directed to select a pilgrim from their party to place a ceremonial wreath on behalf of all present pilgrims.¹⁸⁴ Following ceremonies in Paris, the pilgrims usually next travelled to a hotel near the cemeteries they would visit. This ensured the ladies were well-rested prior to the first cemetery visit and allowed the maximum time at the location. Once again, the Quartermaster Corps stood ready with escort officers and nurses readily available in later pilgrimages. One pilgrim remembered that “We found our government had a fresh wreath of flowers for us to place on the graves” and also discovered “a camp chair at each grave and a flag on the grave of each mother’s son, who

¹⁸² Joseph J. Caro, *On Assignment: The Great War, American Gold Star Mothers*, (Self-published: no date), 21.

¹⁸³ Richard Ellis, Letter to John Burke, 24 April 1930, NARA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows, Box 81.

¹⁸⁴ Richard T. Ellis, letter to the Quartermaster General, 23 April 1930, In AHEC, BO Davis Collection, Series II, Box 11.

was in the group.”¹⁸⁵

The first parties received much fanfare both in the United States as well as Europe. Journalists on both sides of the Atlantic sharpened many pencils covering stories about the Gold Star Mothers and occurrences during the pilgrimages. One such article told of Mrs. Elizabeth Hutchins from Oakland, California. At 92, she was the oldest of any pilgrim to make the voyage and supposedly regaled the members of her 1930 Party ‘C’ with reminiscences of her childhood friend, Abraham Lincoln.¹⁸⁶ The older ladies seemed very popular across all parties. Edward Jackson remembered that the oldest pilgrim on his ship, seventy-six-year-old Lydia Lyndsey, “held their attention most all the way to France with her witty stories.”¹⁸⁷

Another article told the story of a widow who embarked upon the trip both to see her husband’s grave and perhaps find her a new suitor in Paris.¹⁸⁸ In addition to journalists, members of Congress began appearing in France during the summer of 1930. The lawmakers prodded cemetery superintendents to gauge the success of the pilgrimages to date.¹⁸⁹ The endlessly peering eyes of the media combined with the close oversight of Congress ensured the ABMC, QMC, and GRS worked interdependently to ensure the parties were executed without a hitch. One of the mothers participating in 1930’s Party A gave this message to other Gold Star Mothers:

I am glad I have come. Now I feel that my son rests at peace among his comrades, that he is a soldier. Without seeing that grave, with his name marked on the marble cross, I would never have felt satisfied that he had really died. The first moment I knelt at the

¹⁸⁵ Graham, *GSM Pilgrimages*, 21.

¹⁸⁶ “Oldest Gold Star Mother Arrives,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 31 May 1930. NARA, RG 92, Entry 1908-1911, Box 1.

¹⁸⁷ Caro, *On Assignment*, 20.

¹⁸⁸ “Gold Star Mother Who Speaks No English Hopes to Collect New Hubby from France,” *Chicago Tribune* (Paris Edition), 18 May 1930, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1908-1911, Box 1.

¹⁸⁹ James Duncan, Memorandum to Chief, AGRS Europe, Subject: Visit of Robert Wagner, 25 August 1930, NARA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows, Box 81.

grave was one of anguish. But now that is passed. I can only add that I am glad that I elected that my son should remain in France. I feel that in that quiet, beautiful spot, on one of the hillsides over which he fought, he will have a more fitting resting place than in America.¹⁹⁰

Despite best efforts, one party was decidedly a failure although it was not one of the regular War Department pilgrimages. In 1930, the 27th Division organized an exclusive group made up of 149 mothers and widows of soldiers solely from the 27th Division. This was the same division whose commander, John F. O’Ryan, earlier advocated for Bony cemetery to remain as a permanent cemetery largely to exclusively recognize the exploits of his 27th Division. Over a decade following the Armistice, O’Ryan sought to highlight the camaraderie of his old division as it executed its own Gold Star pilgrimage. The 27th Division Party was not officially sanctioned by the War Department and consequently devoid of intricate planning and first-class service. The War Department attempted to help Thos. Cook & Son, the organizer for the division reunion tour which featured the division’s Gold Star Mothers with creating a suitable itinerary for the pilgrims that included (in the War Department’s mind) a minimum of two days at each cemetery. Since the tour was organized by the division, the War Department noted that the itinerary ought to include stops at Meuse-Argonne, Oise-Aisne, Somme, Brookwood, Waregem, and Suresnes cemeteries for each mother to see her son’s grave.¹⁹¹ One unique aspect of the trip was that former members of the division accompanied the mothers on their voyage. One former Signal Corps photographer in that division turned photojournalist named Edward Jackson accompanied the 27th Division Party. As they left the United States he wrote,

As the ship pulled away from Pier No. 4 Hoboken, the same pier that during the war many thousands of soldiers sailed from, bands played and cheering crowds waved American flags... There was much contrast between the sailing of troop ships and the

¹⁹⁰ “This Must Never Happen Again!” the *Indianapolis Star*, 25 May 1930.

¹⁹¹ R.E. Shannon, letter to Thos. Cook & Son, 28 February 1930, NARA, RG 92, Gold Star Mothers Pilgrimage, Box 380.

Gold Star Mothers.... No bands played when the troop ships left in the dark of night, and no family members were... allowed to see their boys off. Submarines waited in the Atlantic, so the troop sailings were very much a secret. As the *America* sailed down the Hudson River, mothers were on deck as we passed the Statue of Liberty, just like their sons when they went to war... Many waved little American flags as they passed.¹⁹²

Jackson was one of a group of former 27th Division men who accompanied the Gold Star Mothers of the division back to France. According to Jackson, each Gold Star Mother in the 27th Division Party who visited a grave at the cemetery was accompanied by someone who knew their son. This small gesture by veterans of the division no doubt brought some measure of comfort to the mothers on the trip and perhaps closure for the veterans. However, facing the mother of a close friend who died sometimes proved taxing to the former doughboys. Edward Jackson noted the personal difficulty of seeing the mother of Clifford Howe, the soldier who despite his broken body smiled for Jackson's camera as he was being led back to an aid station where he succumbed to his wounds three weeks later.¹⁹³ O'Ryan later wrote that Howe's smile "indicates the spirit of the division."¹⁹⁴

Jackson recalled the moment instantly. As a captain, he witnessed a pair of soldiers coming toward him from the front. The leading man had been gassed but was in much better shape than the other man whose name Jackson would later learn was Clifford Howe. Howe "was terribly hurt with one shattered leg from knee to foot with two fingers blown off his hand. He too had been gassed." Jackson, a photojournalist by trade, sighted his camera on the pair and was shocked to see the men stop and Howe smile for the camera despite the personal agony he was experiencing.¹⁹⁵ Howe later died, but Jackson's photo [see page 440] was immortalized

¹⁹² Caro, *On Assignment*, 18-19.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 21, 24.

¹⁹⁴ John F. O'Ryan, *History of the 27th Division: New York's Own*, (New York: Bennett & Churchill, 1919), front page. Army Signal Corps Photo.

¹⁹⁵ Caro, *On Assignment*, 21.

when published as the first photo inside the cover of the 27th Division history's first volume.¹⁹⁶

The 27th Division Party sailed with War Department Party B, but then broke away to execute a more focused pilgrimage based on the division's exploits during the war. Since the division's dead were largely concentrated at Suresnes and Bony cemeteries, the party only stopped at those cemeteries while visiting other battle sites as far east as Verdun. At Bony, where the majority of the division's dead rested, the 200 pilgrims were greeted by "Poppies blowing red on every roadside and long wheat was waving over the endless plains of the Somme."¹⁹⁷ Jackson witnessed a poignant scene that he repeated for President Herbert Hoover's secretary in a glowing letter about the success of the pilgrimage written on the return voyage:

At the entrance to Bony cemetery the mothers, the veterans, and the villagers gathered in a semicircle... French and American buglers stood side by side and sounded taps as the American and French flags were raised to the top and lowered to half-staff. The little French school children sang the Star-Spangled Banner and the Marseillaise. General Pershing made a short informal speech of the heroism of the men who had died there and the greatness of their sacrifice.¹⁹⁸

In contrast to Jackson's letter, however, reports from the trip indicated that the 27th Division party was largely devoid of the care and personal touches experienced by the official parties. One officer wrote that the "Trip as a whole to the majority of Pilgrims [was] highly unsatisfactory... A comparison of their own trip and the trips made by other Pilgrims out of the Paris office caused great dissatisfaction."¹⁹⁹ Another officer reported "So many complaints were registered to me from the Mothers who accompanied the 27th Division that it would be absolutely

¹⁹⁶ See Appendix V: Edward Jackson photo of Clifford Howe, in John F. O'Ryan, *History of the 27th Division: New York's Own*, (New York: Bennett & Churchill, 1919), front page. Army Signal Corps Photo.

¹⁹⁷ Edward Jackson, "War Mothers Participate in Bony Ceremony," *Chicago Tribune* (France Edition), no date.

¹⁹⁸ Edward Jackson, letter to Mr. Lawrence Ritchie, 8 June 1930, in Caro, *On Assignment*, 9.

¹⁹⁹ Pierre Mallett, Memorandum to OIC, American Gold Star Mother Pilgrimage, 5 June 1930, NARA, RG 92, Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages, Box 361.

impossible to enumerate them....”²⁰⁰ One pilgrim simply stated that it “was a mistake to send Gold Star Mothers and Widows with Division groups.”²⁰¹ Colonel Ellis recommended that the 1930 27th Division Party be the first and last trip of Gold Star Mothers made away from the auspices of the War Department less the War Department receive blame for poor trips conducted by well-meaning but ill-equipped entities. His report detailed the problems presented by having a singular group of pilgrims led by different agencies – in this case the War Department with the official group, and 27th Division veterans with the other – and subsequently receiving different accommodations and experiences.²⁰² One officer went so far to say in his report that “The resentment against the indifference with which Thos. Cook & Sons handled this tour was pronounced and emphatic.”²⁰³ The War Department would not suffer another informal organized pilgrimage to occur during the remainder of its Gold Star Pilgrimages.

Despite success of ongoing voyages in the 1930s, the War Department’s treatment of African-American pilgrims reflected the continuing problem of segregation and Jim Crow within the United States. Pilgrimage director J. L. DeWitt carefully said that “the composition of groups [was] determined after the most careful consideration of the interests of the pilgrims themselves. No discrimination will be made as between the various groups.” Not until after Party A sailed for France did the War Department announce that “Groups of Colored mothers and widows will be formed.”²⁰⁴ Assistant Secretary of War P. H. Payne defended the decision

²⁰⁰ William Ochs, Informal Report to OIC, American Gold Star Mother Pilgrimage, 5 June 1930, NARA, RG 92, Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages, Box 361.

²⁰¹ W.F. Dalton, Memorandum to OIC, American Gold Star Mother Pilgrimage, 6 June 1930, NARA, RG 92, Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages, Box 361.

²⁰² Richard T. Ellis, Report to the OQMG, 23 June 1930, NARA, RG 92, Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages, Box 361.

²⁰³ George F. N. Dailey, letter to Richard Ellis, 4 June 1920. NARA, RG 92, Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages, Box 369.

²⁰⁴ Rebecca jo Plant and Frances M. Clarke, “‘The Crowning Insult’: Federal Segregation and the Gold Star Mother and Widow Pilgrimages of the Early 1930s,” *Journal of American History*, September 2015, 419-420 (both quotes).

stating that his department was “confronted with many perplexing problems” in conceiving the pilgrimages and ultimately concluded that “the formation of white and colored groups of mothers and widows would best assure the contentment and comfort of the pilgrims themselves. No discrimination as between the various groups is contemplated. All groups will receive like accommodations at hotels and on steamships. The War Department will... be as solicitous of the welfare of the colored mothers and widows as they will be... of those of the white race.”²⁰⁵

While Payne’s “separate but equal” logic may have appeared sound to many within the War Department and indeed across the United States, it was not well received by the African-American community.

The War Department’s decision left some in the African-American community asking “What shall we do about it?... [W]e believe that if no heed is given to this nationwide Negro protest, then the 216 Negro gold star mothers should draw up and sign a resolution condemning the proposed Jim Crow policy and refusing to be parties to it.”²⁰⁶ Indeed, many black Gold Star Mothers did appeal to President Hoover, stating that “Twelve Years after the armistice, the high principles of 1918 seem to have been forgotten. We who gave and who are colored are insulted by the implication that we are not fit persons to travel with other bereaved ones. Instead of making up parties of Gold Star mothers on the basis of geographical location, we are aside as a segregated group, Jim Crow-ed, segregated and insulted.”²⁰⁷ Neither this appeal nor those made by the media succeeded in changing the War Department’s position, so institutionalized was segregation in American society. The protests sparked by the NAACP compelled twenty-five women to cancel their reservations, but 279 women eventually made the trip on 6 segregated

²⁰⁵ P. H. Payne, letter to M.E. Mallette, (undated draft), NARA, RG 92 (GSM Pilgrimage), Box 345.

²⁰⁶ “The Last Straw,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 29 March 1930.

²⁰⁷ “Negro Gold Star Mothers Resent Segregation on Trip,” *South Bend Tribune*, 30 May 1930.

pilgrimages.²⁰⁸ One of the twenty-five women who cancelled said that despite “an intense desire to visit the grave of my beloved husband,” she would “not be a party to this conspiracy against the dead.”²⁰⁹

African-American Gold Star Mothers faced a predicament. They undoubtedly possessed strong desire to take advantage of perhaps their only opportunity to see the graves of their son or husband but at the same time did not want to accept segregation to take part. Lost in the fight seemed to be the feelings of the mothers. One such mother noted: “Ever since I lost my son in 1918, I have been wanting to come. I would have come over in a cattle boat. I would have swam [*sic*] over if possible. I love my race as strongly as any other but when I heard the United States was going to send us over, I could not refuse.” Another woman declared her stance not to participate by saying “I do not want to be a disgrace to my son and the race.” She did end up sailing on the last segregated party, which was the largest of the six parties.²¹⁰ Colonel William Gibson, officer in charge of the pilgrimages, stated that black mothers “will be given the same treatment as white mothers,” but what he and the War Department did not understand was that by separating the black mothers from their white peers, the message sent was interpreted as contradictory to his statement.²¹¹ Ironically, the dead whose graves these mothers were trying to visit had received better treatment in death than their surviving kin. As the GRS arranged the permanent cemeteries, no sort of physical separation existed within the plots between blacks, whites, Protestants, Jews, or any other group.

Payne further defended the War Department’s decision stating that “the War Department

²⁰⁸ Plant and Clarke, “The Crowning Insult,” 407.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 421.

²¹⁰ Plant and Clarke, “The Crowning Insult,” 420.

²¹¹ George S. Schuyler, “Black, White – and Gold,” *Daily News* (New York), 28 March 1930.

has been motivated by the desire to relieve this strain insofar as possible by not disturbing the normal contacts of individual pilgrims. It would seem natural to assume that these mothers and widows would prefer to seek solace in their grief from companions of their own race.”²¹² While this may have proved accurate, no option was presented to allow a mother to choose for herself. Further problems for the War Department stemmed from the refusal by multiple shipping lines to even transport the African-American mothers across the Atlantic. “Holland-America, North German Lloyd, Cunard and Anchor, the French Line, and the International Mercantile Marine company were all appealed to but offered nothing.”²¹³ Like their sons and husbands, the African American women stood to endure the overseas voyage to France in second-class accommodations compared to their white counterparts.²¹⁴ Aside from the vessels chosen to sail the segregated parties, the War Department received scrutiny as a result of the hotel accommodation differences noted both in New York and Paris for the white and black women.²¹⁵

Amidst the strife regarding the segregated pilgrimages emerged a letter that might have greatly assisted the War Department finding the best officer to assist with an already high-visibility party. R. R. Motts, principal at the Tuskegee Institute, wrote the War Department endorsing Colonel Benjamin O. Davis as an escort for the segregated party. Davis, a Professor of Military Science at Ohio’s Wilberforce University, already possessed knowledge of the World War I battlefields and could speak French. Motts wrote: “I know that such thoughtful consideration would please the colored people, and I am sure the Mothers would have the sort of

²¹² P. H. Payne, letter to M.E. Mallette, (undated draft), NARA, RG 92 (GSM Pilgrimage), Box 345.

²¹³ “Govt. Sends 58 Colored Gold Star Mothers to France on Big Sea Liner,” *The Tribune* (Coshocton, OH), 11 July 1930.

²¹⁴ Wawro, *Sons of Freedom*, 461.

²¹⁵ Plant and Clarke, “The Crowning Insult,” 422.

care at his hands that the department would want them to have.”²¹⁶ It’s unclear whether Motts’ recommendation is what compelled the War Department to select Davis, but Motts’ description of Davis being the best officer for the pilgrimage was correct, and the War Department agreed. Davis would be assigned to each segregated Party during the four-year operation.

Party L was to be the first segregated group of Gold Star mothers and widows to sail to France in 1930. As the day of Party L’s voyage approached, one news article noted that “[T]he “Jim Crow” arrangements for colored war mothers to visit the graves of their sons and husbands in France remains unchanged. Protests for organizations and individuals in all parts of the country have gone unnoticed. The voice of the Negro press, lifted in indignation, has been ignored.”²¹⁷ One correspondent noted on the eve of Party L’s departure that “a little contingent of 58 colored Gold Star mothers and widows will sail tomorrow for France and the graves of their sons and husbands, the only passengers on a whole big ship – because all the power of the government has not been able to break down age old prejudices of race.”²¹⁸ The *Pittsburgh Courier* alleged that “only 56 of the 430 originally booked sailed” on the SS *American Merchant* with Party L and that “Of the 158 mothers who came to New York to sail Saturday, 102 refused passage. The remainder of the 430 declined several weeks ago when they learned they would be Jim-Crowed.”²¹⁹

The War Department felt the public pressure regarding the upcoming segregated Party L and passed down that angst to the QMC. Quartermaster General John L. DeWitt wrote Colonel

²¹⁶ R. R. Motts, letter to Patrick Hurley, 28 March 1930, NARA, RG 92, Gold Star Mothers Pilgrimage, Box 379.

²¹⁷ “‘Jim Crow’ Gold Star Mothers; Pilgrimage Plans are Completed,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 19 April 1930.

²¹⁸ “Govt. Sends 58 Colored Gold Star Mothers to France on Big Sea Liner,” *The Tribune* (Coshocton, OH), 11 July 1930.

²¹⁹ “Only 56 Sail on Freighter,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 19 July 1930. Fifty-five is the number held in official records and is the number used in future references to the trip.

Ellis with instructions to “please treat this letter as confidential.” DeWitt praised Ellis’ efforts thus far, DeWitt expressed his desire that nothing occur to bring discredit to the service during Party L’s travels:

I want to inform you confidentially that there has been a good deal of agitation with reference to the pilgrimage of the colored mothers and widows, and, while our stand here with reference to the matter has been upheld by the Secretary of War and they will be sent in a separate group... it is extremely important that this group be handled with the utmost care and circumspection while in Europe so that nothing can possibly arise that will be cause for complaint. I wish you would bear this in mind. While I do not want to give you any instructions other than those you now have, I simply want to caution you in this personal way to be certain that no complaint can be made that we did not show the colored mothers and widows the same deferential treatment that has been show all the other groups. I know you will do this, but in view of the very delicate situation here I felt that I must bring the subject to your personal attention.²²⁰

Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Davis, Sr., then stationed in Ohio, was assigned the Liaison Officer for the first segregated group of pilgrims, Party L.²²¹ Colonel Davis conducted an inspection of the SS *American Merchant* on 10 July 1930 for the purpose of “determining the sufficiency of accommodations, and becoming familiar with the location of the decks, cabins, dining saloon, social rooms, hospital, etc.”²²² He did not rate the accommodations as sub-standard in his report. As the ladies of Party L embarked the *American Merchant*, Colonel Davis addressed the group but made no reference to the War Department’s segregation of the parties. Davis later expressed his belief to a reporter that Americans should “be permitted to travel and live as they can afford without any discrimination.”²²³ This largely comprised the extent of his comments on the issue. Travelling with Davis were his wife and seventeen-year-old son,

²²⁰ John L. DeWitt, letter to Richard Ellis, 16 June 1930, NARA, RG 92, Gold Star Mothers Pilgrimages, Box 379.

²²¹ H.D. Tarrell, letter to BO Davis, 19 May 1930, and S.O. 67, 10 July 1930, in AHEC, BO Davis Collection, Series II, Box 11.

²²² B.O. Davis, Report of Liaison Officer, Party L, 12 July 1930, in B.O. Davis Collection, Series II, Box 11, AHEC.

²²³ “Only 56 Sail on Freighter,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 19 July 1930.

Benjamin O. Davis, Jr.²²⁴ The latter would enter West Point in 1932 and graduate in 1936. Once commissioned, he and his father comprised the totality of black officers in the active Army. The younger Davis would go on to command the 332nd Fighter Group known as “The Red Tails” during World War II and accrue an impressive war record.

As the *American Merchant*, bearing fifty-five Pilgrims who elected to participate in the trip docked at Cherbourg, witnesses could hear the ladies singing “the haunting and poignant melody of ‘Swing Low Sweet Chariot,’” as the gangplank was lowered.²²⁵ Also accompanying the women of Party L was former Quartermaster General B. Frank Cheatham, Jr.. Cheatham, on special assignment from the War Department, undoubtedly appeared to ensure no corners were cut in the treatment of Party L.

Davis’ Party L travelled with fifty-five pilgrims. Of the group, thirty were to visit Meuse-Argonne, twenty to St. Mihiel, and five were going to graves at Suresnes.²²⁶ The passenger list reflected many cancellations, undoubtedly some due to the War Department’s unfortunate decision to segregate the parties.²²⁷ In fact, 158 mothers had arrived in New York City with the intent to sail for France; 102 allegedly declined before embarkation.²²⁸ The *Pittsburgh Courier* argued that the 56 women departing with Party L were disembarking via “a combination freight and passenger ship.”²²⁹ The United States Lines, owner of the *American*

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ “Negro War Mothers Arrive, Singing Spirituals for Dead,” *New York Herald* (Paris Edition), 22 July 1930, in BO Davis Collection, Series V, Box 33.

²²⁶ Passenger List: SS *American Merchant*, 12 July 1930, in BO Davis Collection, Series II, Box 11.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ The word ‘allegedly’ added because the number of cancellations written in the *American Merchant*’s passenger list do not add up to 102, which was expected given the proximity to embarkation the cancellations were to have occurred. “Only 56 Sail on Freighter,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 19 July 1930, in BO Davis Collection, Series V, Box 33.

²²⁹ “Only 56 Sail on Freighter,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 19 July 1930.

Merchant, maintained that “there was no truth that the mothers are being sent on cheaper boats. The *American Merchant* was picked because it is a small ship and it was felt that the women would mingle and have a better time on such a ship than on a bigger one.”²³⁰

The ladies of Party L were “unanimous in expressing delight over the wonderful trip they had enjoyed and were loud in praise of the splendid manner in which they had been treated by the government officials and ship’s crew. Every possible attention was shown them, and every care taken to see that the trip was devoid of any form of discomfort.”²³¹ In his report submitted at the conclusion of Party L, Davis declared that “The *American Merchant* was well-suited for this mission. The cabins were large and comfortable.... The entire ship was placed at the disposal of the Pilgrims and the entire crew left nothing undone or failed in any way whatsoever to make the voyage a pleasant one.” Davis continued, “The Pilgrims have been very profuse in their expressions of satisfaction, happiness, and appreciation as the way they have been handled on this trip. They are returning to their homes with a feeling of gratefulness to the government....”²³² This attitude was arguably not possible without the efforts of Benjamin O. Davis and the QMC officers who assisted him on the trip.

Later in the summer of 1930, Davis returned to France with the seventy-nine-member Party Q, which sailed in August.²³³ While in France, Davis received a glass mounted photo of John H. Bates’ grave at the Meuse-Argonne Cemetery. Bates’ mother was a member of Party O but died at Verdun before reaching the cemetery. Davis received the photo with instructions to

²³⁰ “Negro Mothers Charge ‘Jim Crow’ Tactics,” *Daily Courier* (Connellsville, Pa), 10 July 1930.

²³¹ “Gold Star Mothers are Recipients of Splendid Treatment at Hands of Government Officials and Ship Crew,” the *New York Age*, 23 August 1930.

²³² B.O. Davis, Report of Liaison Officer, Party L, 12 July 1930, in B.O. Davis Collection, Series II, Box 11, AHEC.

²³³ Passenger List: SS *American Merchant*, 7 September 1930, in BO Davis Collection, Series II, Box 11.

transmit it to the soldier's father.²³⁴ The seventy-nine ladies of Party Q arrived receiving the same warm greetings at their Party L companions. When asked about the issues of segregation they expressed their displeasure over the slight but "explained that official mistreatment could not destroy their desire to visit the graves of their lost sons."²³⁵ As the 1930 segregated parties arrived back in the United States, Army officials provided the pilgrims with the names and addresses of eligible mothers and widows as a new campaign was waged: this time to get as many of the mothers on the remaining pilgrimages as possible. The results of these efforts paid off. Women who sailed in 1931's Party E reported feeling "deterred" due to the negative stories found in newspapers but changed their mind upon hearing from women who actually participated in the trip.²³⁶ Former Quartermaster General Cheatham, son of Confederate Major General Benjamin F. Cheatham, defended his decision to segregate the pilgrimages, stating that "I am a Southerner, I knew the white people, I also know the colored people, and love them. I knew that those colored women were liable to meet with insults on a trip on which all went together and that the whole trip was going to be spoiled for some of them." He continued, "I had no thought of segregation. Now I see that I was right. Everything has moved smoothly. When these women return, each one is going to spread the news. I make this assertion and will back it up with a bet. No one, colored or white, will refuse to make the trip next year."²³⁷

Voyages continued throughout the summer and early fall of 1930. Unusual occurrences punctuated the various parties. The *Paris-Midi* published a remarkable story about a young French soldier who saved a Gold Star Mother's life. The lady had fallen on the voyage over,

²³⁴ Henry S. Evans, letter to B.O. Davis, 6 September 1930, in BO Davis Collection, Series II, Box 11.

²³⁵ "Second Group of Gold Star Mothers Reaches France," *Pittsburg Courier*, 6 September 1930, in BO Davis Collection, Series V, Box 33.

²³⁶ Plant and Clarke, "The Crowning Insult," 428.

²³⁷ "Cheatham Started Jim-Crow," undated newspaper clipping, NARA, RG92, GSM Pilgrimage, Box 348.

opening an old surgical wound which hemorrhaged, leaving the woman near death. Needing a blood transfusion, doctors found a type-match with a French soldier nearby. The soldier was dismissed by the medical team when they discovered the soldier had donated one quart of blood the previous week to another accident victim. The soldier declared, "I was too young to fight for France. It is my right to do what I can for this woman who has given her boy to the cause of my country."²³⁸ French doctors went ahead with the transfusion; both the soldier and the mother survived.

Another occurrence happened at the St. Mihiel Cemetery when a group of pilgrims entered the cemetery and found a group of men solemnly bowing in respect to the ladies as they passed. Suspecting the men were part of the cemetery's staff, the women politely greeted the group, but noticed that the men hurriedly departed the cemetery grounds after the pilgrims passed. It was later discovered that among the group of men was former German War Minister Otto Gessler. Gessler had been touring German cemeteries and brought his staff to St. Mihiel to gain ideas for how to design German war cemeteries when they happened upon the pilgrims.²³⁹ Upon hearing who composed the group of men who had earlier greeted them, some pilgrims became incensed at the idea of a former enemy visiting the graves of American boys and thought Germans should be prohibited from even entering the cemetery grounds. Another mother offered, "Well, many German mothers lost sons, too."²⁴⁰ It was a simple statement that demonstrated the bond of mothers to their sons, regardless of the side for which they fought.

It was not only German mothers who lost sons fighting for the Kaiser, but American

²³⁸ "A Young French Soldier Gives Blood to a Gold Star Mother," *Paris-Midi*, 26 June 1930.

²³⁹ "Germans Visiting Own Bleak Graves Salute American Gold Star Group," *Daily News*, 23 May 1920, NARA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows, Entry 1904, Box 1.

²⁴⁰ "Unexpected Drama Marks Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers to St. Mihiel," *Chicago Tribune* (Paris Edition), 23 May 1930, NARA, RG 92, Scrapbook of Col. Richard T. Ellis, Box 1.

mothers, too. A Quartermaster escort was asked by a pilgrim if he hated Germans. When the officer replied that he did not, the woman said, “Oh, I am glad to hear you say that. After I visit my boy’s grave in the American cemetery, I want to go at my own expense to Cologne. I had another boy in the Army. He died fighting for Germany and I want to visit his grave, too.”²⁴¹

The early parties received much fanfare from the press but proved to be a learning experience for the Army. One such matter was the availability of nurses to attend to the medical needs of the aging pilgrims. On early voyages, the nurses assigned to the ship worked in excess of twelve hours each day of the passage to treat the most seriously ill mothers, leaving those less sick to fend for themselves. A recommendation was made to have a nurse meet the pilgrims at their hotel in New York, become familiar with their medical needs, and accompany them on their journey. This would allow someone to serve as continuity between New York, the ship over, France, and the ship home.²⁴² Aside from medical duties, the nurses also helped break any tension amongst the group of strangers. One observer to a segregated 1931 party noted how the women arrived in New York somewhat timid. This gradually broke down as the nurses began to circulate and converse with the women. By the time the group sailed for Europe, the observer declared that this same group of women had morphed into “a jubilant group, apparently as much at home as at a local church meeting.”²⁴³ This policy was in place by 1931 and the Quartermaster Corps along with the assigned liaison officer for a particular trip hand selected the nurse who would fulfil this duty.²⁴⁴

Sometimes the presence of nurses offered comfort in immeasurable ways. During one

²⁴¹ Holly S. Fenelon, *That Knock at the Door: The History of the Gold Star Mothers in America* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, Inc., 2012), 99.

²⁴² W.R. Gibson, letter to Col. A.E. Williams, 17 June 1930, in BO Davis Collection, Series II, Box 11. AHEC

²⁴³ Plant and Clarke, “The Crowning Insult,” 424.

²⁴⁴ F.H. Pope, letter to B.O. Davis, 31 March 1930, in BO Davis Collection, Series II, Box 12. AHEC

voyage “One of the pilgrims addressed the nurse, asking her first name. On being informed it was Mary, she inquired if she had been at a certain hospital in France at a given time. The nurse replied that she had, and it developed that this was the identical nurse who had cared for the pilgrim’s son, whose grave she was now to visit.”²⁴⁵ This serendipitous moment proved one of the extraordinary stories to come out of the pilgrimages.

Another special occasion added in 1931 was the addition of mothers and widows of those lost at sea. To commemorate those dead, the group conducted a special ceremony at sea consisting partly of a wreath laying and casting off a drift bottle. Drift bottles contained a list of those present in the Party and the request to return the contents if discovered along with a note describing where the bottle was recovered. The War Department recorded receipt of five bottles found in Iceland, Ireland, France, Antigua, and off the coast of Cuba. The bottle recovered in Iceland occurred less than six months after it was cast off by the pilgrimage, while the bottle in Cuba was recovered in 1937 – six years after it was dropped into the ocean.²⁴⁶ The addition of the mothers and widows of the missing and the special ceremonies for their soldier dead demonstrate another length to which the War Department went to honor the fallen regardless of circumstance.

Mothers of soldiers buried in isolated graves also participated in the pilgrimages. These mothers set out from New York to Paris with a particular party. From Paris, the QMC arranged transportation to the isolated gravesite whether it was in France or another country. In 1930 alone, pilgrims went as far as Ireland and Romania to visit an isolated grave. “Each of these pilgrims was provided with a nurse who was qualified to act as an interpreter and who

²⁴⁵ Fenelon, *A Knock at the Door*, 99.

²⁴⁶ “Drift Bottles,” no date, NARA, RG 92, Gold Star Mothers Pilgrimage, Box 385.

accompanied the mother or widow to the grave of her loved one and remained with her until she rejoined her party in Paris.”²⁴⁷ This allowance marked another instance of the QMC going above and beyond to ensure it met the needs of the mothers entrusted to its care.

One unknown surrounding the pilgrimages was the attitude the pilgrims would maintain throughout the trip. Obviously, emotional moments would occur, but the War Department did not intend for this trip to produce additional anguish rather than help emotionally heal these ladies. For his part, Edward Jackson was a little dubious about accompanying the mothers of the 27th Division Party for fear that “women who had lost so much would have all their sorrow revived.... There would be crying... and heavy reminiscing from morning till night.”²⁴⁸ The language found within his book indicates he enjoyed his duty and experience with the pilgrims. He was not the only one with unfounded doubts.

Despite fears to the contrary, many observers found the mothers to be quite cheery throughout most of the trips. One lady in a 1931 party told a reporter that she “wished it were possible for her to see every mother and widow eligible to make the trip and personally urge them to do so,” citing that “the party was like one big family and received the best treatment, both on the boat and while abroad.”²⁴⁹ Edward Jackson recalled the 27th Division Party mothers’ “Faces were smiling as the mothers cordially embraced each other as ‘teammates’ keeping inside the grief they felt and the reason for their pilgrimage.”²⁵⁰ While the American women enjoyed their pilgrimage to the United States cemeteries, at least one mother noticed that their French counterparts did not possess the same resting places for their dead. “I am so sorry that the

²⁴⁷ A.D. Hughes, “Pilgrims,” *Quartermaster Review*, May-June 1931, 40.

²⁴⁸ Caro, *On Assignment*, 21.

²⁴⁹ “Second Group of Gold Star Mothers and Widows Return,” *New York Age*, 15 August 1931.

²⁵⁰ Caro, *On Assignment*, 21.

French have not been able to provide beautiful cemeteries for their dead,” one Party A mother expressed, “Those bleak wooden crosses make my heart bleed for the French Gold Star Mothers.”²⁵¹ This instance again reflects the connection between mothers.

An embarrassing situation for both the War Department and the GRS occurred during 1930’s Party K. A woman arrived bearing the card with her son’s name and grave information, only to be led to a location marked as an unidentified burial. The woman understandably became quite distraught, since she had received correspondence from the GRS in 1918 regarding her son’s death in a hospital during the war and subsequent confirmation of his burial in a marked grave. Worse, the mother received the Red Cross photographs of her son’s temporary grave, and never received anything from the War Department that suggested her son’s burial site could not be located.²⁵² Baffled, military and cemetery officials were at a loss to assuage the woman’s anguish over the administrative mistake. A report was filed with the Office of the Quartermaster General’s office, but no resolution was attached to the report. A postwar report by the QMC revealed that the “embarrassing incident resulted from the fact that the nearest of kin had not been informed that it was found upon exhumation of the remains that the grave shown in the photograph had been erroneously marked.”²⁵³

Throughout the 1930 pilgrimages, Quartermaster Lieutenant George F.R. Taylor collected lessons learned from the liaison officers accompanying the various parties. On 1 March 1931, the QMC published *Guide for Liaison Service*, meant to provide identical guidance and expectations of performance to all liaison officers for the remainder of the pilgrimages.²⁵⁴

²⁵¹ “This Must Never Happen Again!,” *Indianapolis Star*, 25 May 1930.

²⁵² Incident Reports for Party “K”, NARA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows, Box 83.

²⁵³ QMC, *The Work of the American Graves Registration Service: 1917-1936*, (Washington: GPO, 1943), 64.

²⁵⁴ QMC, *Guide for Liaison Service*, (New York: GPO, 1931), AHEC.

Indeed, the liaison reports allowed the QMC to continuously assess the performance of its officers against the requests made by the pilgrims and situations that arose over the course of the trip. The trip liaison report for Party C noted two incidents regarding Mrs. Sarah Mosher's luggage. On the way to Europe, she complained that her suitcase was damaged in transit from the hotel to the ship. Officials examined the luggage and repaired the damage. On the return trip Mosher again complained of damaged luggage. Closer inspection revealed that the bag was made of flimsy material and considerably over its intended capacity.²⁵⁵ This small vignette illustrates that no problem was beyond the scope of the QMC's duties during the pilgrimage.

In 1931, Colonel Davis was again summoned as liaison officer for Party E, which sailed on 29 May 1931 and Party K, which disembarked from New York 10 July the same year.²⁵⁶ A woman escorting her mother with one of the 1931 segregated parties expressed her regret that more black mothers and widows "did not take advantage of the opportunity and pointed out that a half dozen groups of white mothers and widows made the trip during the summer and that each of these groups averaged over 100."²⁵⁷ While the War Department verdict was and remains a stain on the Gold Star Pilgrimages, the decision of those brave mothers to participate in the pilgrimages and subsequently encourage others to participate should not be understated.

Anna Winberg carried the pain of her son's death for over a decade. Born in Minnesota, her son, Swen moved to California to continue trade as a printer. On 1 June 1917 Swen enlisted in the field artillery, fighting in France with the 83rd "Ohio" Division.²⁵⁸ A member of Swen's artillery battery wrote, "I remember quite well when your son left our battery to go up with the

²⁵⁵ Extract of Liaison Report, Party C, in Burial File of Thomas Morrissey, NPRC.

²⁵⁶ F.H. Pope, letter to B.O. Davis, 17 April 1930, in BO Davis Collection, Series II, Box 12.

²⁵⁷ "Second Group of Gold Star Mothers and Widows Return," *New York Age*, 15 August 1931.

²⁵⁸ "More Fall in France," *Little Falls Herald*, 29 November 1918.

infantry in the front lines on liaison duty... The liaison duty in which he was engaged was about the most dangerous work that an artilleryman had to perform, as it was only at that time that our men were ever called upon to be in the front lines with the infantry. Corporal Winberg went about this work quite cheerfully...²⁵⁹ On 19 October, Swen, acting as an artillery forward liaison was shot in the right side of his body.²⁶⁰ His wounds were serious enough to warrant prompt evacuation to a hospital behind the front lines. After his arrival to the evacuation hospital, Swen had the wherewithal to enlist a nurse to compose a telegram for his mother.

Anna received a relatively optimistic telegram from a helpful Red Cross worker sent on the 19th of October from AEF Evacuation Hospital #4. The Red Cross girl wrote, "Your son Swen asked me to write you that he has been wounded but that he is getting along as well as could be expected...."²⁶¹ Anna's world collapsed the following day when she received another telegram from the same Red Cross girl: "I wrote you that your son Swen had been wounded and I am very sorry to have to tell you that he died suddenly last night. He will be buried here by Americans."²⁶² Anna would later learn that Swen's own unit did not know of his passing. A soldier wrote "We carried him upon our roster as missing for many weeks – I think, in fact, until we returned to America when we learned officially that he had been killed in action."²⁶³ Swen was twenty-six.

After Swen's death, Anna received first the photograph of his grave compliments of the Red Cross. Years later, a member of her son's artillery battery visited the Meuse-Argonne

²⁵⁹ Ernest Dempsey, letter to Mrs. Anna Winberg, 20 November 1924, Scott Kraska Collection.

²⁶⁰ P. C. Harris, letter to Mr. M. Collins, 18 January 1922, Scott Kraska Collection.

²⁶¹ Constance Wheeler, ARC Telegram to Mrs. Anne Winberg, 19 October 1918, Scott Kraska Collection.

²⁶² Constance Wheeler, ARC Telegram to Mrs. Anne Winberg, 20 October 1918, Scott Kraska Collection.

²⁶³ Ernest Dempsey, letter to Mrs. Anna Winberg, 20 November 1924, Scott Kraska Collection.

Cemetery and sent her a similar photo but apologized for its poor quality because, “it was raining at the time and a drop of water on lens has rather spoilt it.”²⁶⁴ Nonetheless, Anna retained possession of both photos in lieu of being able to visit Swen’s grave.

In January 1921, the Winbergs received confirmation from the GRS of their desire to leave Swen’s body buried in France. The GRS assured the Winbergs that they would immediately move to inter Swen in his final resting place. That November, the War Department received a letter from the offices of Little Falls attorney E.P. Adams. The letter informed the GRS that his clients, Mr. and Mrs. Winberg, had since changed their minds and now desired their son’s remains return to the United States.²⁶⁵ The letter sought affirmation from the War Department that such action was possible. The War Department through the GRS replied: [Y]ou are advised that the progress of the work in France has rendered it necessary to establish a definite policy governing requests relative to the disposition of our soldier dead...” and stated that the Secretary of War established a cut-off date of 15 August 1921 after which no changes could be made to disposition.²⁶⁶ This occurred to avoid significant cost inflation beyond current Congressional appropriations in the event significant numbers of families switched their preferences.

Concurrent to the communication between the GRS and the Winberg’s attorney, Swen’s remains were enroute from the GRS concentration point near Verdun to the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery. GRS personnel interred Swen at that cemetery on 18 March 1922 in Plot A, Row 25, Grave 29.²⁶⁷ The Winbergs received confirmation of Swen’s burial in April of 1923,

²⁶⁴ Ernest Dempsey, letter to Mrs. Anna Winberg, 20 November 1924, Scott Kraska Collection.

²⁶⁵ E.P. Adams, letter to the War Department, 12 November 1921, in Burial File of Swen Winberg, NPRC.

²⁶⁶ Charles J. Wynne, letter to E.P. Adams, 26 November 1921, in Burial File of Swen Winberg, NPRC.

²⁶⁷ Report of Disinterment, Preparation, Shipment and Reburial of Body: Swen Winberg, in Burial File of Swen Winberg, NPRC.

after which communication between the Winbergs and the War Department ceased for six years until the War Department notified Anna Winberg about the impending Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages. Anna promptly confirmed her eligibility to partake in the pilgrimages upon receipt of her initial notification in 1929, but probably did not realize it would be four more years until it became a reality.²⁶⁸

For unknown reasons, Anna declined participation in the pilgrimages during 1930 or 1931. Anna again opted out of the 1932 pilgrimages, citing poor health.²⁶⁹ A QMC representative responded understandingly to Anna's physical condition, and expressed his wish for her improved health. He also mentioned that, "doctors and nurses are available to care for the comforts and needs of the mothers and widows making the pilgrimage," and assured her "that every consideration will be given your physical condition in the event you make the trip. During the summers of 1930 and 1931 many mothers of advanced age and in poor health made the pilgrimage and appear to have benefitted therefrom"²⁷⁰ As 1932 drew to a close, the War Department endeavored to complete its rosters of Gold Star Mothers participating in 1933's pilgrimages, which would be the last such journeys authorized by the United States government.

A strong desire existed to get as many Gold Star Mothers to France as possible less they experience regret later for not participating. Curiously, Anna had not responded to the 1932 questionnaire dispatched to her. Anna then received what amounted to a 'final notice' from the War Department to ascertain her wishes to participate in the last trips to France. The top and bottom of the letter noted in block letters that this was Anna's 'LAST CHANCE' to make the pilgrimage. Whatever ailments Anna battled were put aside. Anna stated her desire to make the

²⁶⁸ Anna Winberg, letter to John T. Harris, 5 July 1929, in Burial File of Swen Winberg, NPRC.

²⁶⁹ Anna Winberg, telegram to the War Department, 12 April 1932, in Burial File of Swen Winberg, NPRC.

²⁷⁰ A.D. Hughes, letter to Anna Winberg, 13 April 1932, in Burial File of Swen Winberg, NPRC.

pilgrimage, her current age, and confirmed she could speak English along with Swedish. She listed her health as 'fair' before signing and returning the form.²⁷¹ Anna would see her son's grave within the next year through the efforts of the War Department and QMC.

Fifty-one years old when her son died, Anna was sixty-five when she became eligible for her pilgrimage [see pages 442-446].²⁷² In preparation for her journey, Anna needed two obtain two documents: her passport, and the other an official certificate of identification for the pilgrimage. The maroon passport was labeled a 'Special Pilgrimage' passport that would be cancelled at the conclusion of her journey. The second document issued by the Secretary of War was an official certificate of identification. Given to each pilgrim, this document provided much of the same information as a passport but linked the bearer to the pilgrimage in a unique way. The first page of the book had space for a serial number; Anna's was stamped '6487.' Anna received a medal bearing her name and state on the brooch. On the reverse of Anna's medal, the same '6487' was stamped [see pages 448-449].²⁷³ These medals, made by the prestigious and expensive Philadelphia jeweler Bailey, Banks, and Biddle, were termed a 'badge' by the Army, and proved more than just a souvenir. Pilgrims received instructions to wear their badge for easy identification.²⁷⁴ Staff members at the hotels, trains, and other businesses knew to look for the badge and afford the wearer all accommodation necessary. The Army bought 5,000 such badges \$2 apiece in 1930, which amounts to \$30.89 today.²⁷⁵ Anna later received an additional medal

²⁷¹ Charles Dietz, Letter to Anna Winberg, 8 September 1932, in Burial File of Swen Winberg, NPRC.

²⁷² War Mothers and Widows Pilgrimage Official Certificate of Identification, Anna Winberg, Scott Kraska Collection. See Appendix W: Identification Cards and Passports

²⁷³ Anna's medal hangs in a distinct way, which is evident in photographs where she is wearing the medal. See Appendix X: Anna Winberg's Gold Star Mothers' Medal, Scott Kraska Collection.

²⁷⁴ Hotel McAlpin Welcome Card, Scott Kraska Collection.

²⁷⁵ Contract with Bailey, Banks, and Biddle, 27 March 1930, NARA, RG 92, Gold Star Mothers Pilgrimage, Box 345.

from the United States Lines, the company whose steamship carried her party across the Atlantic.

Anna departed Little Falls, Minnesota on the evening of 3 June 1933. Her three-day trek to New York took her through St. Paul and Chicago, arriving two days prior to her scheduled 7 June departure. Anna arrived in New York joining seventy-four other mothers for the journey as 1933's Party 'B'. Another woman from Minnesota arrived in New York harbor and, upon first glimpse of the endless Atlantic Ocean, decided to return home.²⁷⁶ For Anna, the sight of the Atlantic Ocean was nothing new despite her Midwest roots. She previously crossed the Atlantic to emigrate from Sweden as a young girl then twice more when she made a return trip to her homeland in 1897.²⁷⁷ The ladies of 1930's Party B departed from New York on the SS *Washington* on 7 June 1933. Billed the largest steamer built in the America to that time, the *Washington* carried Party B across the Atlantic in seven days.²⁷⁸ Anna described the steamship as "a veritable floating palace, and the Gold Star Mothers were afforded every comfort."²⁷⁹ One service offered was that of a photographer. Anna received a flyer for Mr. Simon Warolin, the official photographer of the Gold Star Mothers' Pilgrimages. He offered keepsake photographs of the numerous sites that the pilgrims would enjoy over the next few weeks. By coincidence, Mr. Warolin and Anna both hailed from Little Falls, Minnesota.²⁸⁰ Anna would depart her pilgrimage with many photos from Mr. Warolin, the first being a photograph of the entire party at sea aboard the *Washington* [see page 451].²⁸¹ The importance of the mementos obtained by

²⁷⁶ "Mrs. Winberg Tells of Trip," undated clipping, Scott Kraska Collection.

²⁷⁷ "Mother to Pay Visit to Grave of Soldier Son," *St. Cloud Times* (Mn.), 2 February 1933.

²⁷⁸ SS *Washington* Passenger List, 7 June 1933, Scott Kraska Collection.

²⁷⁹ Mrs. Winberg Tells of Trip," undated clipping, Scott Kraska Collection.

²⁸⁰ "Mrs. Winberg Tells of Trip," undated clipping, Scott Kraska Collection.

²⁸¹ See Appendix Y: Anna Winberg and Members of Party B Aboard SS *Washington*, Scott Kraska Collection.

Anna is demonstrated by the fact that they all remain together almost ninety years after her voyage.

Anna's party began in France with the customary ceremonies at the French Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. One newspaper writer witnessing the first 1930 party declared 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..."²⁸² The following day her party travelled to Verdun by way of Meaux and Châlons. The party used Verdun as a base from which they visited Meuse-Argonne battle sites, the Trench of the Bayonets, French cemetery at Verdun, the town of Varennes, and the Marine Corps battle site at Blanc Mont. The group first visited the St. Mihiel American Cemetery on the 21st of June. The following day, they arrived at Meuse-Argonne Cemetery.

Anna's journey in France traversed 640 miles and numerous sights of interest, but for her the most important sight was Plot A, Row 26, Grave 29 at the Meuse-Argonne Cemetery: the final resting place of her son, Corporal Swen Winberg. Anna's party arrived at the cemetery on the morning of the 22nd of June. Each pilgrim with a son or husband buried at the cemetery possessed a small card with locator information for their soldier's grave. They were led to that grave where each mother or widow was afforded time graveside. Cemetery officials acquired natural wreaths of flowers to provide each lady for placement on their son's or husband's grave. Photographers circulated the cemetery during each visit to capture the pilgrims by their loved one's grave then provided three photographs along with the negative to each pilgrim before their party departed the cemetery grounds.²⁸³ Nurses also circulated in the event mothers became

²⁸² Translation of article appearing in the *Journal des Mutilés et Combattants*, 25 May 1930, NARA, RG 92, Scrapbook of Col. Richard Ellis, Box 1.

²⁸³ James Duncan, Memorandum to Chief, AGRS Europe, Subject: Visit of Robert Wagner, 25 August 1930,

physically or emotionally overwhelmed at their son's grave. The process was strictly military but simultaneously conducted with reverence.

While most mothers were left to their silent mourning at their son's graves, Edward Jackson did observe one oddity. While most Pilgrims placed a flag, wreath, or other small decoration at their soldier's grave, Mrs. Alice Stern, following hours of silent prayer at her son's Suresnes Cemetery grave, would not permit any flower or flag to be placed upon her son's grave. No reason was given but her request was granted.²⁸⁴ No record exists of Anna's time at the cemetery save the pair of photos taken of her at Swen's grave [see page 453].²⁸⁵ Anna did not discuss that personal moment with her son in subsequent interviews. Following the visit, the group continued on to Reims where they stayed the night. The 23rd saw the party visit Oise-Aisne and Aisne-Marne cemeteries before returning to Paris. Five restful days in Paris ensued, broken by short excursions to sites near the city.²⁸⁶ During her time in Paris, Anna went to Notre-Dame Cathedral, paying the one-franc admission [see page 455].²⁸⁷ Unfortunately, Anna's time in Europe could only last so long.

On 29 June 1933 Anna's journey through France ended. The party departed Paris destined for Le Havre where they boarded the *SS President Harding*. Before heading up the gangplank, Anna received a letter accompanied by a small bag. The third paragraph of the letter read: "We are sure there is nothing that can give you more peace and joy to your children than to

NARA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows, Box 81.

²⁸⁴ Caro, *On Assignment*, 22.

²⁸⁵ See Appendix Z: Anna Winberg at Son's Grave, Scott Kraska Collection. Both photos present a nearly identical pose, but one exposure was much better than the other.

²⁸⁶ Party B, Meuse-Argonne Group Itinerary, in Burial File of Swen Winberg, NPRC.

²⁸⁷ Notre-Dame de Paris Entrée, Scott Kraska Collection. See Appendix AA: Anna Winberg Outside of Notre-Dame, Scott Kraska Collection.

know that both your country and ours are still closely united for the defense of the common ideal, for which they sacrificed their lives.” Whether Anna believed that is difficult to know, but she must have found solace with the letter and the small red, white, and blue package which, the letter explained, was a “little memorial present, from your pious pilgrimage to France. This little sack is made with our united flags, and it is filled with the earth of France, which is sacred to you, as it is to us, because of all the young heroes who rest in our soil.”²⁸⁸ Eighty five years later, the sack given to Anna remains close to the same condition it was when she received it in 1933, and the unopened bag still retains the sacred soil of France [see pages 457-458].²⁸⁹

Anna disembarked the *President Harding* on 8 July 1933 in New York City. After a brief sightseeing trip around New York City, Anna returned home by way of Chicago and St. Paul, her roundtrip train tickets costing the government less than thirty dollars.²⁹⁰ In an interview following her journey, Anna’s only complaints were “the poor coffee in France and the hard bread which the French serve for the noon and evening meals” but characterized the trip as “one which she herself would never forget.”²⁹¹

Anna’s sentiments were largely echoed by other pilgrims who wrote the Quartermaster Corps following their voyage. The Gold Star Pilgrimage files housed in the National Archives contain numerous such letters, a sample of which follow. One mother wrote: “I am happy to think that my son gave his life for this great country and feel very proud to be a Gold Star Mother. The journey will remain in my thoughts forever.”²⁹² Another added, “... May I say the

²⁸⁸ La Bienvenue Française, Summer, 1933, Scott Kraska Collection.

²⁸⁹ See Appendix BB: Bag of French Soil Presented to Anna Winberg

²⁹⁰ Request for Pullman Reservations, in Burial File of Swen Winberg, NPRC.

²⁹¹ “Mrs. Winberg Tells of Trip,” undated clipping, Scott Kraska Collection.

²⁹² Bianca Lewin, Letter to the Officer in Charge, War Mothers Pilgrimage, 19 June 1930, NARA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows New York 1930-1933, Box 4.

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.... Pardon my lengthy letter but [it] is just a letter from a Gold Star Mother with a heart full of gratitude....”²⁹³ One pilgrim declared that “The Government has done all in [its] power to ease the broken hearts of the War Mothers.”²⁹⁴ Gratitude to the United States government or its Army Quartermaster Corps did not solely come from participants. 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.”²⁹⁵

From 1930-1933, 6,674 women participated in the Gold Star Mothers Pilgrimages, 5,612 of those visiting a grave at one of the overseas military cemeteries. Of the remainder, 543 were mothers or widows of soldiers with no known grave while 519 others brooded over a son or husband who was buried at sea.²⁹⁶ The QMC escorted the pilgrims over 3,283,828 miles and handled thousands of pieces of luggage without loss. So accommodating and prepared was the QMC that one mother remarked, “My only chance to go astray was to try and think by myself.”²⁹⁷ The QMC’s record for this operation was exemplary.

Many women braved chronic ailments or put aside fears of travel, sickness, or death to make what for many was a once in a lifetime trip to see their son or husband’s grave. At least one doctor tried to dissuade a mother from partaking on the pilgrimage, warning that the

²⁹³ Laura Green, Letter to AE Williams, 11 August 1930, NARA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows New York 1930-1933, Box 4.

²⁹⁴ Elizabeth Windecker, Letter to the Officer in Charge, War Mothers Pilgrimage, 14 September 1930, NARA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows New York 1930-1933, Box 4.

²⁹⁵ “Gold Star Mothers in Europe,” *Altoona Tribune*, 28 March 1930, NARA, RG 92, Scrapbook of Col. Richard Ellis, Box 1.

²⁹⁶ War Department Press Release, 4 August 1933, NARA, RG 92, Gold Star Mothers Pilgrimages, Box 348.

²⁹⁷ Fenelon, *That Knock at the Door*, 89 (quote), 98.

woman's heart could give out. The woman replied, "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."²⁹⁸ Indeed, two women were not fortunate to complete that journey. One mother experienced a stroke next to her son's grave as she waited for the photographer to take her photo. Despite the escort officers transporting her to medical facilities, she died two days later.²⁹⁹ The second woman demonstrated no signs of ill-health but suffered a cerebral hemorrhage and died in her sleep days after arriving in France, but before visiting her son's grave.³⁰⁰

The experiences of the pilgrimages left an indelible mark on many of the participants. Margaret Morrison Cowgill's mother departed at the age of seventy-nine to visit her son's grave at the Oise-Aisne Cemetery in 1931. Margaret later described both the gratitude her mother held for the courtesy shown her by War Department and French officials as well as the memories of her visit. "She has talked by the hour," Margaret later wrote, "of the beautifully kept cemetery, where her boy rests, or the lovely wooded rolling land nearby, the blood-red poppies along the roadside... among her most treasured possessions, the small, weather-stained flag she brought back across the ocean from her son's grave."³⁰¹ Reflecting on her pilgrimage a decade prior, Gold Star Mother Mrs. John Evanko wrote "I am thankful that today, when there is so much unrest and war over Europe that I am an American citizen and that peace and harmony will forever reign on this continent, without the horrible destruction of war..."³⁰² Unfortunately, Mrs.

²⁹⁸ Grace Robinson, "'If I Died I will be with Him' She Tells Doctors," *Daily News*, 24 May 1930, NARA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows, Entry 1904, Box 1.

²⁹⁹ Richard Ellis, Memorandum to the Quartermaster General, Subject: Report on the Death of Mrs. Grace Kinsbury, 19 September 1930, NARA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows, Box 83.

³⁰⁰ Richard Ellis, Memorandum to the Quartermaster General, Subject: Report on the Death of Mrs. Harriet Bates, 22 August 1930, NARA, RG 92, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows, Box 83.

³⁰¹ Haug, *Gold Star Mothers*, 37.

³⁰² Haug, *Gold Star Mothers*, 57.

Evanko's wish would not come true.

The pilgrims not only got to see their son or husband's grave, they also witnessed the ravages of war mostly unknown to those who did not participate or otherwise travel to Europe. One mother noted that despite the passage of over ten years, "Standing yesterday in Belleau Wood, I realized a little of what my son went through. The scene of those trenches, the tangled wire and the rusty remains of German machine guns brought home to me more than anything else a feeling that this awful thing must never happen again. I have another son at home. He is only 15. He and other boys his age must never go through that."³⁰³ Other mothers came away with the same sentiment about war and their desire that the world should not experience war and that no other mothers should have to experience the pain of losing a child. While the 27th Division Party was at Verdun and watched a French regiment drilling nearby, a Gold Star Mother named Anna Carey turned to Edward Jackson and asked, "Captain, they tried to sooth us by saying that our boys had not died in vain, that the war they helped to win was a war to end war forever. Then what does this all mean?... all this military presence. Was it only empty talk? Are mothers to be robbed of their sons till the end of time?"³⁰⁴ Jackson wrote that he had no words for the poor widow and could only reach out and hold her hand. Jackson noted that the date was 30 May 1930 – Memorial Day – as the woman's question repeated in his head, "What does this all mean?" Jackson later wrote, "For some reason I thought of the last lines of 'In Flanders Fields' by John McRae; 'If ye break faith with us who die – we shall not sleep, though poppies grow in Flanders Fields.'"³⁰⁵

The conclusion of the Gold Star Mothers Pilgrimages largely represented the closing

³⁰³ "This Must Never Happen Again!" *Indianapolis Star*, 25 May 1930.

³⁰⁴ Caro, *On Assignment*, 25.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

chapter regarding the World War I dead, a story that began on 6 April 1917. After the last mother reached home, the United States could take stock of what it accomplished over the past fifteen years. As of 1 July 1933, the disposition of the American First World War dead was as follows: of 77,870 registered dead in Europe, 46,307 returned to the United States at the requests of their families. The cost to repatriate the bodies to the United States was \$14,936,735.³⁰⁶ In inflation-adjusted 2020 dollars, that amounts to \$230,733,201.48. Six hundred twenty-three remains were shipped to foreign countries, with 42 ‘Do Not Disturb’ cases remaining at their original burial sites. Eighteen men were buried at the Lafayette Escadrille Memorial in Paris. Of the 77,870 dead, 30,880 bodies remained in Europe, including 1,629 unknown burials. An additional 25 bodies were returned to the United States but reshipped to Europe.³⁰⁷ Of the European burials, 30,046 were in France, 468 in Great Britain, and 368 in Belgium.³⁰⁸ The United States also financed the pilgrimage of 6,674 widows and mothers to the overseas cemeteries of Europe. General Pershing said of the pilgrims, “I consider the pilgrimages... the most wonderful and inspiring occurrence since the World War.... As truly representative Americans as were our soldiers, in them is found the embodiment of the spirit which, transmitted to their sons, enabled the American Army to achieve its great victory.”³⁰⁹ While the people of the United States through their government largely influenced how and where the World War I dead were buried, their wishes were exclusively carried out by the United States Army through the Quartermaster Corps’ Graves Registration Service.

³⁰⁶ J.L. DeWitt, letter to the Hon. Ross Collins, 18 January 1933, Quarterly Statistical Report, 1 July 1933, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 139.

³⁰⁷ Quarterly Statistical Report, page 1, 1 July 1933, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 139.

³⁰⁸ Quarterly Statistical Report, page 2, 1 July 1933, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 139.

³⁰⁹ John Noll, “Crosses,” *American Legion Monthly*, September 1930, 53.

CHAPTER 5

THE AEF'S DISHONORED DEAD

The preceding chapters detail the events that led to the formation of the Graves Registration Service (GRS) by the United States Army and the Service's subsequent actions to execute the social and political desires for the First World War dead. As exhibited, America through the Army's GRS achieved feats of memorializing the dead never before attempted within the shores of the United States or abroad. The overseas military cemeteries in France, Belgium, and Great Britain became the gold standard to be repeated in France, Belgium, Great Britain, Holland, North Africa, Italy, and the Philippines during and following the Second World War a generation later. Likewise, the subsequent repatriation of desired bodies proved the foundation of a policy that by the twenty first century became expected by the American people. The Gold Star Mothers' Pilgrimages of the 1930s arguably fulfilled a debt owed by the country to its Gold Star women whose sons and husbands populated the overseas cemeteries.

The actions occurred because the United States sought to properly memorialize its 'honored dead.' Save precedents set by Charles Pierce and D. H. Rhodes in the Philippines twenty years prior, many of the GRS's actions were actually reactions to presented situations rather than following established procedures. In the absence of guidelines regarding the war dead, government and military decision-makers sought to do what they thought best at the time under the circumstances. History has generally favored the results brought by the GRS. Indeed, the continued reverence shown the overseas cemeteries and the war dead by Americans and Europeans alike today further demonstrate what the GRS's labor provided for America.

We would be remiss if we did not address the treatment of the bodies of those soldiers executed for crimes during World War I. The AEF executed eleven soldiers: Frank Cadue of

Company E, 26th Infantry, Charles E. Chambers of the Stevedore Regiment's Company G, Service Battalion Private Claude Wilson, Labor Battalion Privates William Buckner and James Favors, John W. Jones of Company D, 508th Engineers, Clair L. Blodgett of the 6th Air Park, Joe Cathey from Company A, 301st Labor Battalion, Henry Williams and Sercey Strong from the 808th Pioneer Infantry's Medical Detachment and Company H, respectively, and Charles F. Witham from Company D, 16th Infantry.¹ Among the historiography outlined in the introduction, decisions made (or not made) by the GRS regarding the final disposition of eleven select men of the AEF have yet to be addressed by scholars. These eleven men constitute a very small but unique category of the World War I dead that must be addressed yet ought to be discussed separate from the 'honored dead.'

These eleven men separated themselves from the honored dead due to the circumstances of their death, which for each was caused by the hangman's noose. Each of these dishonored dead were executed through General Courts Martial resulting from committing various war crimes including rape, murder, or a combination of the two. The majority of the eleven men were minorities – six African American, one Native American, two white, and two whose race could not be ascertained from available documents. Clearly, race played a role in the US Army's investigation and prosecution of dishonoring crimes like rape and murder. No overt conspiracy was located within the archives of the US government or the military, but the racial prejudice of the Army's white leadership certainly suggests that officers and JAGs were prejudiced and more inclined to take a hard line with minority soldiers than whites.

Treated more harshly than their white peers, these eleven men ultimately were treated by the GRS exactly the same as all of the other military fallen as corpses. While the cause of death

¹ Report of Executions in the American Expeditionary Force, 1 August 1919, NARA, RG 120, Entry 594, Box 13.

for the dishonored dead was markedly different from the honored dead, the GRS and the War Department faced a decision whether actions in life justified alternative treatment in death. Of the eleven men executed by General Courts Martial during and after World War I, the GRS buried six of those in the overseas cemeteries amongst those killed in action or died of wounds from 1917-1919.² The other five sets of remains went to the United States for burial in local cemeteries. The decisions about their final disposition were made not out of a deliberate decision to treat the remains of the dishonored dead no differently but rather the absence of policy present within the War Department or the GRS.

Executing soldiers for military crimes was not restricted to the AEF. The other Entente armies put hundreds of men to death. The French executed 918 men during the war. During the war's first two years, they used a method prescribed by a 1909 decree that dictated executions should occur "...with a revolver, the barrel of which shall be placed just above the ear and five centimeters away from the cranium."³ Similarly, the British army executed over 300 soldiers over the course of World War I. More than 3,000 death sentences were handed down by military courts, but 346 executions occurred.⁴ Desertion and cowardice offenses accounted for 262 executions while murder convictions sent 19 men to their death.⁵ British Army General Routine Order 585 dated 13 January 1915 directed a soldier guilty of a crime unless evidence proved his innocence.⁶ The controversy surrounding British executions stem from the combination of this

² ABMC, Record of Proceedings, Fifty-Seventh Meeting, 26 January 1949, NARA, RG 117, Proceedings of the Commission, Box 1A.

³ Oliver Favier, "A Remembrance They'd Rather Forget: WWI's Executed Soldiers," *Equal Times*, last updated 11 November 2014, <https://www.equaltimes.org/a-remembrance-some-would-rather>.

⁴ Chris Kempshall, "Shot at Dawn," East Sussex in WWI, accessed 13 November 2019, <http://www.eastsussexww1.org.uk/shot-dawn/index.html> The First World War East Sussex.

⁵ John Simkin, "Executions in the First World War," Spartacus Educational, accessed 13 November 2019, <https://spartacus-educational.com/FWWexecutions.htm>.

⁶ C.N. Trueman, "World War One Executions," The History Learning Site, last updated 31 Mar 2015,

regulation and a lack of understanding of shell shock, known now as post-traumatic stress.

Accounts of British executions have surfaced over the last 100 years to provide a grim depiction of these events. British soldier Victor Sylvester was detailed to participate in four firing squads. Of one he later wrote:

The tears were rolling down my cheeks as he went on attempting to free himself from the ropes attaching him to the chair. I aimed blindly and when the gunsmoke had cleared away we were further horrified to see that, although wounded, the intended victim was still alive. Still blindfolded, he was attempting to make a run for it still strapped to the chair. The blood was running freely from a chest wound. An officer in charge stepped forward to put the finishing touch with a revolver held to the poor man's temple. He had only once cried out and that was when he shouted the one word mother. He could not have been much older than me. We were told later that he had in fact been suffering from shell-shock, a condition not recognised by the army at the time. Later I took part in four more such executions.⁷

Sylvester later participated in another such event, recalling how "the victim was brought out from a shed and led struggling to a chair to which he was then bound, and a white handkerchief placed over his heart as our target area. He was said to have fled in the face of the enemy. Mortified by the sight of the poor wretch tugging at his bonds, twelve of us, on the order raised our rifles unsteadily." Sylvester described the disposition of the firing squad, adding "some of the men, unable to face the ordeal, had got themselves drunk overnight. They could not have aimed straight if they tried, and, contrary to popular belief, all twelve rifles were loaded. The condemned man had also been plied with whisky during the night, but he remained sober through fear."⁸

Army Field Clerk Will Judy recorded coming upon the grave of a man executed, noting

historylearningsite.co.uk.

⁷ David Johnson, *Executed at Dawn: British Firing Squads on the Western Front, 1914-1918*, (New York: History Press, 2015), 71.

⁸ "Victor Sylvester," Spartacus Educational, updated January 2020, <https://spartacus-educational.com/FWWsilvester.htm>.

that “the soldier sentenced to death has no epitaph mentioning the disgrace, but his end is proclaimed eloquently by the one simple word ‘Died.’”⁹ This language was codified in British burial instructions through a 1916 order. Specifically, “Any man who suffers the extreme penalty of the law may be buried in a cemetery the inscription being marked ‘Died’ instead of ‘Killed in Action’ or ‘Died of Wounds.’”¹⁰ This nuance allowed for a visual separation between those executed and those killed in battle while keeping all dead in the same cemetery.

While the British dishonored dead graves were marked differently, the men’s next of kin received all the privileges afforded the relatives of other BEF dead with respect to burial in the IWGC cemeteries next to other dead and the right to add an epitaph to the gravestone. William R. Burrell of the 2nd Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment was shot for desertion on 22 May 1916 in France.¹¹ Buried in the Mazingarbe Communal Cemetery Extension northwest of Lens, it seems Burrell’s grave is similar to the other 249 buried dead in the graveyard. His parents were offered the privilege of adding an epitaph, of which they put “The Will of the Lord Be Done (ACTS 21.14).”¹²

The British army eventually weathered backlash regarding the volume of death sentences ordered through courts martial. “As a result,” according to machine gunner George Coppard, “a man who would otherwise have been executed was instead compelled to take part in the forefront of the first available raid or assault on the enemy. He was purposely placed in the first wave to cross No Man’s Land and it was left to the Almighty to decide his fate. This was the situation

⁹ Will Judy, *A Soldier’s Diary: A Day-to-Day Record in the World War*, (Chicago: Judy Publishing Company, 1930), 93.

¹⁰ DGR&E, *Technical Instructions*, 1 February 1918, 6, 1/1/1/38/2, CWGC Archives.

¹¹ Chris Kempshall, “Shot at Dawn,” <http://www.eastsussexww1.org.uk/shot-dawn/index.html> East Sussex in WWI, accessed 13 November 2019, <http://www.eastsussexww1.org.uk/shot-dawn/index.html>.

¹² Schedule B, Mazingarbe Communal Cemetery Extension, CWGC Archives.

as we Tommies understood it, but nothing official reached our ears.”¹³

A dedicated scholar would be hard pressed to find similar information on the American World War I dishonored dead in current literature. Lawrence Stallings briefly mentions that the AEF executed ten soldiers following trials by General Courts Martial for offenses of rape and murder, or a combination thereof in *The Doughboys: The Story of the AEF 1917-1918*. While he correctly explains that all died on the gallows, he does not get the number of executions correct (ten instead of eleven) nor does he discuss the lack of uniformity in their final disposition.¹⁴ No other mention of the World War I dishonored dead exists. Of the three recent works that discuss the World War II executions in Europe, none draw comparison to those similar stories of the First World War.

The story of the dishonored dead of World War One is worthy of telling not just to enhance understanding of GRS activities following the end of hostilities. Indeed, if understanding many aspects of the First World War enhances one’s understanding of the Second World War, studying the dishonored dead proves no different. In the introduction to his book chronicling the life and death of Eddie Slovik, the only American soldier executed for desertion since the Civil War, William Huie alludes to the presence of a secret plot adjacent to the Oise-Aisne American Cemetery. Describing the plot as the resting place for soldiers who, like Slovik, met their fates through military justice, Huie’s description of the secret plot causes the reader to wonder why such a plot was originally constructed in the first place.¹⁵ The answers may lie in the GRS’s treatment of the eleven dishonored dead from the First World War

¹³ George Coppard, *With a Machine Gun to Cambrai: A Tale of a Young Tommy in Kitchener’s Army 1914-1918*, (London: Imperial War Museum, 1980), 76.

¹⁴ Lawrence Stallings, *The Doughboys: The Story of the AEF, 1917-1918*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 352.

¹⁵ William B. Huie, *The Execution of Private Slovik*, (New York: Delacorte Press, 1970), 2-4.

The obvious question is why any of the eleven men are buried amongst those who perished under ‘honorable’ conditions during the war. The Army’s reasoning was discussed during a 1947 meeting of the American Battle Monuments Commission. During that meeting, after nominating General of the Army George C. Marshall to succeed General John J. Pershing as chair, Commission members wrestled with the final disposition of general prisoners who were executed throughout the European theatre. During World War II, Commission Secretary Brigadier General Thomas North noted that six executed soldiers lay in the World War I cemeteries, receiving honors similar to others who died under honorable circumstances.¹⁶ Evidently the number of dishonorable dead was not adequate to categorize separately from the honored dead with regards to burial practices. The ABMC clearly did not want to replicate the actions of their predecessors and created a separate plot for the World War II dishonored dead. North’s statement represents the only known justification for why the GRS treated the eleven dishonored dead in the same manner as the honored dead during burial operations following World War I.

This chapter will chronicle the journeys of three of these eleven dishonored dead – two, Charles Chambers and William Buckner, remained buried in the overseas cemeteries and one, Frank Cadue, whose remains were repatriated to the United States. Following narratives of the crimes these men committed and their subsequent execution in chronological order during the first part of this chapter, their stories will weave together into a description of how they arrived at their final resting places and the options present for their families during the Gold Star Mothers’ Pilgrimages. Detailing the crimes committed in each case study is critical in understanding why

¹⁶ Records of Proceedings 57th Meeting of the American Battle Monuments Commission, 26 January 1947, NARA, RG 117, Entry 2, Box 1A.

these men must be discussed separately. The crimes they committed led to a cause of death unlike any other soldier in the AEF, but their burials were not unlike those experienced by those killed in combat. Their story, therefore, ultimately becomes part of the GRS's operations in France. While this chapter is notably shorter than its predecessors, this subsection risked getting fragmented and lost if incorporated into the general narrative of the dissertation.

Each man brought up on charges and specifications within the Uniformed Code of Military Justice that warranted a trial by General Courts Martial had their names and crimes recorded in General Pershing's ledger. The Judge Advocate General retained copies of all documents pertaining to a soldier's case in individual files. These General Courts Martial files survive in the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, Missouri. The General Courts Martial files for Frank Cadue, William Buckner, and Charles Chambers were used to formulate the story that composes the first part of this chapter. The men's burial files, also housed at the NPRC, contained information about their burial and possessed some surviving correspondence between the War Department and their next of kin to discuss burial options and even potential participation in the Gold Star Mother's pilgrimages. Similar to the final disposition of these men, their burial files are largely the same as any other burial file for soldier dead of World War I.

Three Crimes

Sergeant Frank Reiterman awaited retreat outside his billet late in the afternoon of 20 October 1917. His Company E, 26th Infantry of the 1st Division was located near the French town of Givrauval, France. As he waited the order to fall into retreat formation, Reiterman heard some commotion near one of the company billets. Amidst the excited tones he ascertained that 'the Chief' had been stabbed and was bleeding. 'Chief' was Private Frank Cadue, also a member

of the 26th Infantry's Company E. As Reitermann got closer, he noticed Cadue's clothes were dirty and bloody. He asked Cadue to let him see his injuries but was refused. Thinking Cadue looked ill, Reiterman told Private Arthur McGavery and another soldier to escort Cadue to the hospital.

During the walk to the hospital, Cadue's story already seemed inconsistent. Cadue first told McGavery he was hit by an American soldier, but shortly changed it to a French soldier. He told the other escorting soldier that "three or four men... almost threw him in the canal."¹⁷

Captain A. W. Kenner received Cadue at the battalion infirmary. Kenner immediately noticed the bare-headed Cadue's clothes were muddy and stained. As Cadue repeated his story of being assaulted and robbed, Kenner also noticed Cadue was intoxicated. This was not a new state of being for Cadue, whose personnel file already held two charge sheets for drunk and disorderly conduct in the short time since the regiment landed in France.¹⁸ Kenner's physical examination of Cadue yielded a saturation of blood on Cadue's breeches and drawers from his crotch to his waist. Kenner found no cut in the clothing, and subsequently no source of the blood on Cadue, though his genitals were bloody as well. Kenner asked Cadue when he last had sexual intercourse with a woman, to which Cadue replied that he had not since being overseas.

A little after 8 PM on the evening of the 20th, a woman arrived at the 2nd Battalion, 26th Infantry headquarters to report to Major G. K. Wilson that her seven-year-old granddaughter had been missing for the past three or four hours. The woman further stated that an intoxicated American soldier entered their house shortly before the granddaughter was last seen. Wilson dispatched his adjutant accompanied by an interpreter to the house to investigate the situation

¹⁷ Statement of Cortes Miranda, 21 October 1917, in General Courts Martial File of Frank Cadue, NPRC.

¹⁸ The Charge Sheets list the offense dates as 23 July and 20 August 1917, in General Courts Martial File of Frank Cadue, NPRC.

and report their findings. Also present during this exchange was Captain Kenner, who informed Wilson about his recent examination of a private named Cadue in E Company. Around 10 PM, Wilson received word that seven-year-old Raymonde Georgette Sirjean's body had been found.¹⁹ He, Kenner, and a couple aides travelled to 8 Rue de Longeaux where they encountered a scene that AEF Judge Advocate William A. Bethel later described as, "[P]robably the most atrocious case of murder and rape ever committed by an American soldier."²⁰

Captain Kenner arrived to examine the deceased girl. He arrived at a barn building behind the girl's home. He found her lying on top of a manure pile intermixed with garbage in the aftermath of a terrible death. Kenner testified, "She was upon her back, her head turned toward the left, her knees flexed and separated. Her clothes about her throat were torn open and her dress pulled up.... Her upper lip was severely lacerated, evidently from a blow, and there were finger bruises upon her upper left chest at the base of the throat." Kenner also noted the extent of trauma to the young girl's genitals, and that she had been dead several hours by that time.²¹ Under Raymonde's body the team found an American campaign hat with the numbers '1236' written inside the crown.

Shortly after arriving back at his headquarters, Wilson learned that Cadue had been located and subsequently confined. Wilson ordered Cadue to appear before him, at which point Wilson produced the campaign hat recovered at the scene. Cadue identified the hat as his own, citing the numbers written inside as being his identification number originally assigned to him back at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. After Cadue enlisted on 8 March 1917, his first

¹⁹ Statement of Major G. K. Wilson, 21 October 1917, in General Courts Martial File of Frank Cadue, NPRC.

²⁰ W.A. Bethel, Memorandum to Col. Boyd, 26 December 1917, in General Courts Martial File of Frank Cadue, NPRC.

²¹ Statement of Captain A. W. Kenner, 21 October 1917, in General Courts Martial File of Frank Cadue, NPRC.

assignment was to that post.²² Wilson interrogated Cadue and elicited a confession from Cadue that he did indeed rape Raymonde that afternoon. Wilson cautioned Cadue that any statement made would be used against him at trial and then asked why he committed the act. Cadue replied that he was drunk.²³ Wilson ordered Cadue stripped of his clothes as evidence and referred him to the 26th Infantry Regimental Commander, Colonel F. G. Lawton on the 21 October. After giving Cadue the same rights warning, Lawton recorded that Cadue voluntarily testified that he, Cadue, raped and murdered Raymonde Georgette Sirjean. This testimony was witnessed by three other officers in addition to Lawton; all four men signed the avadavat confirming the confession.²⁴

On 22 October, Cadue's General Court Martial convened at 1520 hours. The jury consisted of one general officer, three field grade officers, and six company grade officers with three other officers excused. After completing administrative procedures, the charges against Cadue in violation of the 92nd Article of War were read. The two specifications cited that Frank Cadue did "with malice aforethought, willfully, deliberately, feloniously, unlawfully, and with premeditation kill one Raymonde Georgette Sirjean, a human being, seven years old, by choking, beating and raping her." The second charge specified that Cadue had "forcibly and feloniously, against her will, have carnal knowledge of Raymonde Georgette Sirjean, a child seven years old."²⁵ Cadue pled not guilty to the charge and specifications.

The first witness was Sergeant Frank Reiterman, who first encountered Cadue near the

²² "An Indian Enlists," *Atchinson Champion* (Kansas), 9 Mach 1917.

²³ Statement by G. K. Wilson of Testimony in Case of Private Frank Cadue, no date, in General Courts Martial File of Frank Cadue, NPRC.

²⁴ Rights Warning and record of Confession, 21 October 1917 in General Courts Martial File of Frank Cadue, NPRC.

²⁵ General Court Martial Proceedings of Frank Cadue, 22 October 1917, in General Courts Martial File of Frank Cadue, NPRC.

company billets and ordered him to the infirmary. Following Reiterman, Monsieur Leon Dusséaux, Raymonde's step-grandfather, described his encounter with Cadue the day of Raymonde's murder. Following, Dusséaux, Major Wilson testified to his recollections of the events from the 21 October without cross-examination. Captain Kenner followed and under cross-examination established Raymonde's cause of death as "shock incident to the raping."²⁶ Colonel Lawton was the last prosecution witness and discussed his conversation with Cadue that produced a verbal confession to the events. Without cross-examination from the defense, the prosecution rested.

Cadue was then told his rights as a defendant by the President of the Court, and offered the opportunity to take the stand, to which Cadue accepted. His eleven-question testimony offered little in the way of detail. Cadue claimed he woke up drunk next to the girl but did not know if he indeed was responsible for her death. Cadue did state he had no prior thoughts of committing the rape or murder.²⁷ At the conclusion of his brief time as a witness, the defense rested.

The General Court Martial transcript does not provide an exact timeline of the proceedings but noted that by 1735 hours the court was adjourned. Cadue was found guilty of the charge and specifications and sentenced to "be hanged by the neck until dead."²⁸ Major General William L. Sibert, commander of the 1st Division, approved Cadue's sentence and forwarded his recommendation to General John J. Pershing. Pershing confirmed the sentence and ordered Cadue to be executed on 5 November 1917. In consultation with its mayor, the

²⁶ Testimony of Captain A. W. Kenner, in General Courts Martial File of Frank Cadue, NPRC.

²⁷ Testimony of Frank Cadue, in General Courts Martial File of Frank Cadue, NPRC.

²⁸ General Court Martial Proceedings of Frank Cadue, 22 October 1917, in General Courts Martial File of Frank Cadue, NPRC.

execution would take place at a public place in Grivaupal, the town near which Cadue committed his heinous act.

At 1415 hours on 5 November, Cadue arrived under guard to his execution site. After receiving the execution order the previous day, Cadue visited with two chaplains and secured permission to make a statement before his execution. After the wagon in which he was riding halted, Cadue stood up in the back, looked over the crowd, and in a feeble voice emitting much emotion that made it difficult to continue, said his final words: “Brothers, and Sisters, and Friends. A few days ago, I made a mistake – a very bad mistake, and I am very, very sorry that I did it. I thank you all for the kindness you have shown me in the past, and I hope that God will bless you all.”²⁹ Upon completion, Cadue hastily executed a final will benefitting his three brothers and sister with the attending chaplain.

Minutes later, Cadue was removed from the wagon and his hands bound before the guards tied his arms to his torso. After ascending the scaffold, the hangman tied Cadue’s ankles and knees and at one minute to three, the black cap was put over his head followed by the hangman’s noose. At 1500 hours, the executioner activated the trap “giving the prisoner a six feet drop, which broke his neck, and he died without pain. The attending medical officer took charge of Cadue’s body, and fourteen minutes later pronounced Cadue dead, though wrote in his certificate of death that the “cessation of all sensations was probably instantaneous.”³⁰ With that, the first soldier was executed by the AEF in France.

After the drama of the day’s events culminated, the scaffolding was removed while the

²⁹ Commanding Officer, 26th Infantry, Report on Execution of Private Frank Cadue, 7 November 1917, in General Courts Martial File of Frank Cadue, NPRC.

³⁰ T.W. Burnett, Surgeon’s Certificate of Death in the Case of Private Frank Cadue, 7 November 1917, in General Courts Martial File of Frank Cadue, NPRC.

crowd slowly dispersed. The execution's presiding officer opined that "the civilian population of the little town appeared to be satisfied with this proof by the military authorities of their determination to protect the home and families, which have – through the war – been so closely associated with our troops."³¹ While nothing in Cadue's file indicated the feelings of the French people toward the American force after the crime but prior to Cadue's trial and execution, his death seemed to have righted a wrong in the eyes of the French locals.

Meanwhile, the GRS took charge of Cadue's remains. After cutting the rope, they placed Cadue in a prepositioned coffin and fastened the casket cover. Like any other death, Cadue's body was to be buried in a temporary cemetery, and one of his dog tags sent to the GRS office for record.³² Unlike other deaths, Cadue's body was buried still wearing the hangman's noose in addition to his other identification tag.³³ Since current policy called for repatriation to occur after the war, Cadue's remains would stay at the Gondrecourt temporary cemetery, grave number seventeen for the time being.³⁴

News of Cadue's death soon reached his home state of Kansas, but the circumstances of his death were not clear. A 22 November 1917 newspaper article stated: "It is not known whether he died in action or not, but the message came directly from the adjutant general, instead of through the Red Cross." With his death occurring just a day after the AEF sustained its first combat deaths in the trenches, Americans were not yet accustomed to regularly seeing official War Department casualty notifications and thus not familiar with the notification process.

Indeed, the 22 November edition of the *Topeka Daily Capital* also reported the presumption that

³¹ Commanding Officer, 26th Infantry, Report on Execution of Private Frank Cadue, 7 November 1917, in General Courts Martial File of Frank Cadue, NPRC.

³² B.T. Scher, Letter to the Chief, Burial Department, AEF, 7 November 1917, NPRC, OMPF of Frank Cadue.

³³ Report of Disinterment for Frank Cadue, 27 October 1921, NPRC, OMPF of Frank Cadue.

³⁴ AGRC Alphabetical Reference Card, Cadue, Frank, NPRC, OMPF of Frank Cadue.

Cadue died in combat under the headline “Mayetta Indian Gives Life for His Country.”³⁵ By the first week of December, however, newspapers in major outlets ran articles about the execution of Frank Cadue, the first of its kind in the AEF. Many of those articles mentioned the age of Cadue’s victim as well.³⁶ While Cadue was the first, the AEF would execute ten others for war crimes over the next eighteen months.

Sixty-eight-year-old Marie Lapotre, a widow, her two sons serving with the French army, was a day laborer in the village of Circourt, France. On the afternoon of 27 April 1918, Marie emerged from the woods around Circourt when she noticed a man between her and the safety of her home. She tried to put distance between him and herself but was soon tackled from behind in a field with high brush that concealed his nefarious intentions. Though knocked to the ground from behind onto her chest and face, Marie quickly rolled over and began desperately fighting with her attacker, pushing and grabbing at whatever she could to get him away. Her shouts were heard by a nearby civilian, but he could not intervene due to a swollen river physically separating him from the scene. The man hit and choked Marie, eventually succeeding in removing her clothes and raping her. Going in and out of consciousness, Marie only remembered his big lips. Once she came to, the bloodied and battered Marie noticed she was grasping something in her hand – a small, circular disk that she pulled off the man’s wrist during her struggle. Clutching this pendant, she made her way back to Circourt. There, the woman who came to her noticed the bruises to Marie’s face as well as bleeding that originated from her womb. The woman quickly summoned a doctor look over Marie’s injuries.³⁷

The French doctor who examined Marie noticed blood along her inner thighs. Further

³⁵ “Mayetta Indian Gives Life for His Country,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, 23 November 1917.

³⁶ Articles appeared in the 3 December *Washington Evening Star* as well as the 4 December *New York Times*.

³⁷ Court Martial Transcript for Charles Chambers, in GCM file of Charles Chambers, NPRC.

examination yielded obvious signs of a violent rape.³⁸ Meanwhile, Marie's son-in-law took possession of the disk Marie brought back with her and turned it over to French authorities. Major J. G. Ord, 1st Corps Provost Marshal, received notice of an alleged rape within his jurisdiction along with a slip of paper bearing the words "Charles E. Chambers, Co. G, 303 S. R. and a number." Ord learned this was a transcript of an identity tag allegedly found at the scene of the crime. Upon ascertaining that "S. R." stood for Stevedore Regiment, Ord remembered that such a unit recently came to the area from Bazoilles a half mile away and immediately set out to investigate the alleged crime.³⁹

Meanwhile, the subject of Ord's investigation had returned to his barracks. Charles E. Chambers walked in and found two soldiers previously with him that day until they separated now playing cards. Chambers told the men they missed out by not going with him. When they asked why Chambers replied, "I got a piece."⁴⁰ The soldier then saw what looked like red mud on Chambers' trousers, which Chambers confirmed to be blood. After the exchange, Chambers retired to his bunk.

Ord travelled to Bazoilles and located Chambers' name on a muster roll. Ord then obtained permission from the commanding officer to interview Chambers to try and confirm or deny the rape allegation. Upon securing Chambers for an interview, Ord asked Chambers where his identity disc was. Chambers looked at each wrist before replying that he must have lost one, but had another in his pocket, which he produced. The tag read identical to the words inscribed on Ord's paper. Ord then asked Chambers where he lost the other disc. Chambers suggested it

³⁸ Upon cross-examination, the doctor was asked how he knew the woman was not willing in the intercourse, he described Marie's injuries as resulting from either violent rape or a piece of wood.

³⁹ Testimony of J.G. Ord, 6 May 1918, in General Courts Martial File of Charles Chambers, NPRC.

⁴⁰ Testimony of Clarence Cash, 6 May 1918, in General Courts Martial File of Charles Chambers, NPRC.

occurred in a scuffle with another soldier in the squad room. Upon hearing this excuse and subsequently receiving vague, evasive answers from Chamber as to his whereabouts the previous day, Ord ordered Chambers to remove his clothing. During this time, Ord noticed reddish splotches both on Chambers' shirt and trousers near his crotch. All the blood was on the outside of the clothing, away from Chambers' body. Ord asked from where the blood originated, and Chambers remarked that he cut himself with his knife, causing the bleeding. Examination of Chambers' genital area did not show any cuts, scabs, or scars. Convinced that Chambers may have been involved in the crime, Ord took Chambers into custody and had him confined while retaining possession of his clothing for evidence. A later interview of Chambers failed to satisfy Ord that Chambers was anywhere other than the crime scene or that his missing identity tag was lost due to a scuffle with a fellow soldier. Chambers remained confined while preparations began for his General Court Martial.⁴¹

Chambers' General Court Martial convened on 6 May 1918 amidst continuous injection of American soldiers into the front. Meanwhile, Chambers was potentially facing life in prison or death for violation of the 92nd Article of War in that he "on the 27th of April 1918, forcibly and feloniously against her will, have carnal knowledge of Marie Lapotre." Chambers pled not guilty to the charge and specification. Prosecutors pieced together the timeline of the alleged crime, though ultimately no one other than Marie and Chambers were immediate witnesses to the act. Chambers took the stand in his own defense, stating that he did happen upon a younger French woman in the field, and through broken communication he paid for consensual intercourse. Prosecutors, however, cited Chambers identification tag as damning evidence of Chambers' presence at the crime scene despite his denials. Ultimately, the panel found

⁴¹ Testimony of J.G. Ord, 6 May 1918, in General Courts Martial File of Charles Chambers, NPRC.

Chambers guilty of the charge and specification, recommending he be hanged as punishment.⁴²

The officer in charge of Chambers' confinement, Captain George Shorkley of the 161st Infantry, spoke with Chambers on 6 June 1918 and offered his time should Chambers want to discuss the incident further. Six days later, Chambers recalled Shorkley to his jail cell and confessed to the crime. Shorkley typed up the statement and, in the presence of a sergeant from F Company, Chambers signed the confession requesting Shorkley to "Ask for as light a sentence as possible."⁴³ In his statement, Chambers declared that "Freely and of my own will and without being forced in any way I confess that I am guilty of the charge and specification under which I was recently tried for a General Court-Martial at this post."⁴⁴ While Chambers confession was, as much as can be ascertained, made of his own free will, military authorities recommended that Chambers' statement not be considered in determining the appropriate punishment.⁴⁵ This may have been due to Shorkley's participation in the Court Martial proceedings as a panel member.⁴⁶

Chambers' court martial was subsequently reviewed because irregularities surfaced over the course of testimony. These anomalies were investigated and reviewed for two weeks following the trial's close. Ultimately, the investigating officer determined the problems identified were minor in nature and did not warrant a retrial.⁴⁷ General John Pershing's Staff Judge Advocate subsequently reviewed both the trial and the corrections and recommended to

⁴² Court Martial Transcript for Charles Chambers, in GCM file of Charles Chambers, NPRC.

⁴³ George Shorkley, "Confession of Private Charles E. Chambers," 12 June 1918, in General Courts Martial File of Charles Chambers, NPRC.

⁴⁴ Confession of Charles E. Chambers, 12 June 1918, in General Courts Martial File of Charles Chambers, NPRC.

⁴⁵ Maj. Gen. F.J. Kernan, letter to General John J. Pershing, 21 June 1918, in General Courts Martial File of Charles Chambers, NPRC.

⁴⁶ Special Orders 126, General Court Martial of Charles E. Chambers, 6 May 1918, in General Courts Martial File of Charles Chambers, NPRC.

⁴⁷ As previously mentioned, an in-depth review of these anomalies would be critical in determining if the minority soldiers executed during World War I received fair trials, but that is outside the scope of this dissertation.

the AEF commander that Chambers' be executed. Pershing confirmed Chambers' death sentence on 27 June 1918.⁴⁸

The 13th of July was the appointed date for Chambers' execution. Three days prior, an officer visited Chambers at his confinement site in Neufchâteau to read the formal sentence. Chambers appeared dazed and made no reply when asked if he understood the sentence. A chaplain spoke with Chambers afterwards and subsequently visited the jail each day until the 13th. That day, an escort brought Chambers from his jail cell to Bazoilles, the scene of his crime, and soon the place of his execution. As Chambers disembarked the ambulance, he was met by the execution scaffold looming over the crowd present to witness his death. In addition to French locals and two companies of guards from Ohio's 37th "Buckeye" Division, every soldier stationed in the town was ordered assembled. The motley formation included white engineer soldiers, black soldiers from labor battalions and Stevedore troops, Chinese and Portuguese laborers, and even patients convalescing at nearby hospitals.⁴⁹

After Chambers was situated in front of the scaffold, the presiding officers asked if he had any statement to make. Chambers replied in sentences broken by emotion: "I am sorry for the crime I have committed and for which I am going to pay the penalty. I hope that this is going to be an example to the rest of you." Chambers then ascended the scaffold, receiving words from the chaplain as his arms, knees, and ankles were bound with rope. The black cap was placed over his head, after which Chambers shouted, "I hope that you boys won't commit the crime that I have committed, for which I am very sorry that I have done. I hope that America

⁴⁸ John J. Pershing, Confirmation of Sentence for Charles E. Chambers, in General Courts Martial File of Charles Chambers, NPRC.

⁴⁹ Report of Execution of Private Charles E. Chambers, 17 July 1918, in General Courts Martial File of Charles Chambers, NPRC.

will win this war and that you will all return to the States.”⁵⁰ Those became his final words.

Chambers was placed on the trap door. After adjusting the noose, the hangman sprung the trap at 10:05 AM. Eighteen minutes later the presiding medical officer deemed that all life had exited Chambers’ body due to a “fracture of the cervical spine.”⁵¹ The rope was cut, and Chambers was placed in an awaiting casket under the charge of the GRS. By day’s end, Chambers was interred in the Bazoilles-sur-Meuse American Cemetery, grave number eight.⁵² Chambers became the second man executed by the AEF.⁵³

Just before 2200 on the evening of 2 July 1918, French Chasseurs Gaston Bouchigny and Ferdinand Martinot heard cries as they walked along the road toward Arrentieres from Bar-sur-Aube, France. Bouchigny thought the cries originated from an animal but Martinot, who grew up in the country, knew those cries were of a human rather than an animal. The pair continued in the direction they were already travelling trying to track from where the cries were originating. Once they were positive the cries were those of a human their pace quickened unsure of why such cries were continuing to carry across the countryside.

At once they saw a woman emerge from an oat field being held by a man who the Chasseurs immediately recognized as American by his uniform. Upon seeing her fellow countrymen, the woman cried out, “Kill him, he has just raped me.” Martinot seized the American by his uniform blouse while Bouchigny went to the woman’s aid as the foursome continued in the direction of Arrentieres. Believing she was severely injured, Bouchigny

⁵⁰ Report of Execution of Private Charles E. Chambers, 17 July 1918, in General Courts Martial File of Charles Chambers, NPRC.

⁵¹ Robert L. Benson, Certification of Death, 13 July 1918, in General Courts Martial File of Charles Chambers, NPRC.

⁵² Report of Execution of Private Charles E. Chambers, 17 July 1918, in General Courts Martial File of Charles Chambers, NPRC.

⁵³ Report of Executions in the AEF Up to August 1, 1919, NARA, RG 120, Entry 594, Box 13.

stopped to assist the distressed woman. Meanwhile, Martinot struggled to maintain a grip on his prisoner. Martinot struck the man in the right jaw in an unsuccessful attempt to subdue the alleged perpetrator. Martinot then saw the American withdraw something metallic from his pocket. Martinot “believed he was drawing a revolver. I was unarmed and thought that if I attempted to hold him longer, he would shoot me. I loosened my grip and he broke away and fled into the darkness.”⁵⁴

About the time of the commotion occurred on the road to Arrentieres, Private John C. Alred of Company B, 313th Labor Battalion was preparing to turn in for the evening. Taps for the outfit was at 2100 but he opted to stay awake for a bit longer before eventually going to bed. As he prepared to go to sleep, Alred noted that Private William Buckner, an A Company man who shared the tent had not yet returned. Alred and Buckner had gone into town on a couple of occasions but Alred had recently become wary of continued interactions with Buckner out of concern that Buckner’s desire to “Play MP” with a homemade brassard and baton would likely get the duo into trouble.⁵⁵ Alred did not know at the time that his decision to avoid Buckner that night may have saved his life.

The next morning William Johnson, a tentmate of Buckner and Alred ran into Buckner who chided Johnson for not coming out with him the previous evening. During the exchange, Buckner told Johnson about the girl he met in Arrentieres the previous evening and how he had to chase her down in order to “do business with him” and that he “slapped her after he got what he wanted.”⁵⁶ Johnson did not immediately do anything with this information until the 5th of July 1918 when his work party was lined up for inspection by some officers and a white woman.

⁵⁴ Sworn Statement of Ferdinand Martinot in GCM File of William Buckner, NPRC.

⁵⁵ Sworn Statement of John C. Alred in GCM File of William Buckner, NPRC.

⁵⁶ Sworn Statement of William E. Johnson in GCM File of William Buckner, NPRC.

Johnson learned that the reason for the lineup was to identify the man or men who caused trouble with this woman a couple days prior and surmised that it was probably the same instance that Buckner had described to him a couple days prior. Upon inspection, two noncommissioned officers took Private Mike Jackson into custody. Johnson said to the man next to him “That isn’t the man (they are looking for). William Buckner is the man.”⁵⁷

Johnson’s intuition was correct. The day prior to the inspection, local officers had become aware of an alleged rape perpetrated by an African American soldier. The only outfit nearby containing such soldiers was the 313th Labor Battalion. The officers learned that the perpetrator wore a watch with a chain on his uniform blouse. When the members were lined up on the 5th, William Buckner was not wearing a watch or chain but confirmed he possessed such items, so he was ordered back to his tent to receive them. Buckner returned with his watch but claimed that he lost the chain playing baseball over the last couple of days. Further investigation proved that Buckner had not lost the chain at the game and interviews with other men on that team brought into question whether Buckner even played baseball in the days since the crime and had lost the chain to his watch.

Investigating officers soon learned that the perpetrator had been previously seen in Arrentieres wearing a makeshift MP brassard and carrying a baton. Investigators went back to Buckner, who denied ever being in that town or impersonating an MP. However, both Alred and Johnson confirmed that Buckner had done both in their presence. The Judge Advocate subsequently ordered a search of Buckner’s belongings which yielded the phony MP brassards. Buckner was asked directly where he was on the night of 2 July 1918, to which he replied that he was in the tent playing cards with Alred. Alred’s statement contradicted Buckner’s statements in

⁵⁷ Sworn Statement of William E. Johnson, GCM File of William Buckner, NPRC.

all facets.⁵⁸

In order to confirm the identity of the attacker, Army investigators needed confirmation from the witnesses. While suspicions abounded that Buckner was probably the perpetrator, the case would be weak without a strong witness from the crime scene. Thus, the sixty-eight-man labor unit was lined up for the victim, Georgette Thieboux and the two French Chasseurs who happened upon her, to try and recognize the offender. Georgette selected two men from the group, one being Mike Jackson which caused William Johnson to express that was not the correct person to the man next to him. Georgette dismissed Jackson once she heard his voice. Investigators brought others in separately to see if Georgette would misidentify her attacker, but she did not. When Buckner was brought in, Georgette immediately recognized him and confirmed as much upon hearing his voice.⁵⁹

The two French soldiers were then provided an opportunity to confirm Georgette's identification of Buckner. Both soldiers declared that they were having difficulty identifying the assailant but said that Buckner looked more or less like the man they had seen committing the rape. Despite the seemingly late hour of the incident, enough light remained to give both men confidence in their own minds that Buckner was the correct man. Meanwhile, French authorities had accompanied Georgette back to the scene of the alleged crime and recovered evidence of the assault and wrote a statement describing the state of the general scene for American authorities. Additionally, they took possession of Georgette's clothing worn at the time of the assault and secured it as evidence for any upcoming trial.⁶⁰

Three weeks later Buckner stood trial in a General Court Martial in violation of the 92nd

⁵⁸ Sworn Statement of John C. Alred in GCM File of William Buckner, NPRC.

⁵⁹ Testimony of Georgette Thieboux, in GCM File of William Buckner, NPRC

⁶⁰ Trial Transcript for William Buckner, in GCM File of William Buckner, NPRC.

Article of War in that he “did, in a field near the town of Arrentieres... on or about the second day of July, 1918, forcibly and feloniously, and against her will, have carnal knowledge of one Georgette Thieboux, an adult female.”⁶¹ Following his arraignment and plea of ‘Not Guilty’ Buckner’s trial began, with Georgette Thieboux beginning the list of prosecution witnesses. Georgette recalled how on the evening of 2 July she was walking down the road between Arrentieres and Bar-sur-Aube when the accused grabbed her by the throat and dragged her to the side of the road. While the surprise and grasp prohibited her from screaming, Georgette yelled loudly when Buckner threw her to the ground. Buckner then grabbed her and carried or dragged her to a nearby oat field, Georgette intermittently screaming along the way.

Once into the field, Buckner attempted removing Georgette’s clothes while she kicked in vain to stop him. She eventually lost strength to resist and Buckner stuffed a handkerchief into her mouth. Buckner then proceeded to rape her over the course of approximately twenty minutes. Georgette was subsequently shown the dirty, bloody, and broken clothes she wore that night, confirming her possession and how they came to be in that condition.⁶² The back and forth between the prosecution and defense over the next day centered largely on circumstantial evidence of the watch chain, an alleged exchange of gifts between Georgette and Buckner, and whether the two had interactions prior to the alleged rape. In his testimony, Buckner alleged that he and Georgette had intercourse on multiple occasions in the days before 2 July.⁶³ Subsequent testimony from Georgette’s friends put her in different places than attested by Buckner.

In closing comments, the prosecution summarized the circumstantial evidence and noted that throughout the trial most of Buckner’s statements were proved to be false by the testimony

⁶¹ Review of Trial Record: United States v. William Buckner, 23 August 1918, in GCM File of William Buckner.

⁶² Testimony of Georgette Thieboux, in GCM File of William Buckner, NPRC.

⁶³ Trial Transcript for William Buckner, in GCM File of William Buckner, NPRC.

of his fellow soldiers as well as the victim. The credibility of the one soldier who spoke on Buckner's behalf was impeached through the statements of two officers. Even as simple a matter as his whereabouts on the evening of 2 July did not hold up: Buckner swore he was in his tent, but two fellow soldiers did not see him there. The prosecution closed its case by recounting the events Buckner allegedly lied about. "On these matters William Buckner did not tell the truth. Did he state the truth when he said Georgette Thieboux consented? This is a question for the court to decide."⁶⁴

Buckner's trial began on 27 July 1918 and adjourned twenty-eight hours later. Buckner was found guilty of the charge and specifications and sentenced "To be hanged by the neck until dead" with "Two thirds of the members of the court concurred in the sentence."⁶⁵ On 5 August the case documents were forwarded to the AEF's General Headquarters. General Pershing confirmed the sentence before dispatching the case file to his Staff Judge Advocate. The Judge Advocate upon review of the files opined "that the record of the case is legally sufficient to support the sentence of death adjudged, approved, and confirmed."⁶⁶

The 6th of September 1918 was selected as William Buckner's execution date. In a field outside Arrentieres a scaffold was erected under the direction of a QMC officer. At 1700 two evenings prior, an officer read Buckner the execution order. Buckner smiled and made no reply when asked if he understood the order. The officer departed and a chaplain arrived who assisted Buckner's creation of a will. A seven-soldier death watch assumed duty which would end with Buckner's execution. Next day, Buckner made a statement denying the rape charge and attesting

⁶⁴ Prosecution Closing Statement, Trial Transcript of William Buckner, page 157, in GCM File of William Buckner, NPRC.

⁶⁵ Trial Transcript of William Buckner, page 157, in GCM File of William Buckner, NPRC.

⁶⁶ E.A. Kreger, Memorandum to CiC, AEF, Subject: United States vs. William Buckner, 23 August 1918, in GCM File of William Buckner, NPRC.

that Georgette consented to the intercourse.⁶⁷

At 0550 on 6 September Buckner arrived at the gallows in a military ambulance. Two guards removed him from the ambulance and escorted him up the scaffold. Buckner declined the option to make a final statement. The chaplain recited consoling words as the guards bound Buckner's arms, knees, and ankles. The hangman placed a black hood over Buckner's head before placing Buckner over the trap door. After adjusting the noose, the hangman gave the signal, springing the trap, dropping Buckner six feet, six inches at precisely 0600. The presiding medical officer waited a couple minutes before beginning his examination of Buckner. At 0614 the officer pronounced that all signs of life had disappeared. The rope was cut, and Buckner placed in the awaiting casket. A QMC officer took charge of the remains and buried it "At the extreme end of aisle between Sections I and J in the Cemetery of Bar-sur-Aube..."⁶⁸

Three Burials

As the US Army, through the Graves Registration Service, began consolidating remains into larger cemeteries following the Armistice, no known discussion occurred regarding the final disposition of the eleven executed soldiers. Indeed, burial files for each of the eleven reveal that almost without exception the remains of the eleven were treated no differently than any other body in the American cemeteries. At least a couple disinterment teams opened graves to find a hangman's noose still around the neck of the decedent, but no evidence exists that those teams raised any questions with their superiors. Only the burial team responsible for exhuming James Favors, a 331st Labor Battalion soldier executed 8 November 1918, for dispatch to a nearby concentration cemetery seems to have raised any objection to a dishonored soldier dead's burial

⁶⁷ Sworn Statement of William Buckner, in GCM File of William Buckner, NPRC.

⁶⁸ Report of Execution of Private William Buckner, 6 September 1918, in GCM File of William Buckner, NPRC.

location. As the team cleared the French Military Cemetery near Belleville to concentrate the American dead to Romagne they somehow became aware of the reason Favors died and sent their objections that “this man executed as an OUTLAW – and for this reason it was deemed advisable not to exhume the remains and reinter same in the concentration cemetery out of respect to the heroic dead... this body will be left in its present resting place unless otherwise directed...”⁶⁹ While no response to this memorandum can be located, Favors was eventually permanently interred at the Meuse-Argonne American Military Cemetery in Plot H, Row 12, Grave 14.⁷⁰ Outside of that instance, the reader will notice, aside from a couple striking differences, these men found final interment locations in the same manner as most of the other World War I dead. The burial files for Cadue, Chambers, and Buckner, housed at the National Personnel Records Center, provide insight into the second part of their story – the journey to their final burial locations in Europe and the United States.

Frank Cadue’s remains stayed at Gondrecourt Civilian Cemetery for the next couple of years. Responding the GRS survey sent to relatives of all the war dead, Cadue’s sister indicated her desire to bring her brother’s body back to Kansas for burial.⁷¹ With Cadue’s parents deceased, his sister assumed the role of next of kin. She was also Cadue’s beneficiary for his war risk insurance. Documents exist within his burial file regarding his insurance, but no indication of the Army voiding that insurance considering the circumstances of Cadue’s death exists.⁷² Additionally, no documentation exists demonstrating any resistance at any level within the War Department to the repatriation of Cadue’s remains for permanent burial.

⁶⁹ E. Kensett Vail, Memorandum for Record, 25 June 1919, in Burial File of James Favors, NPRC.

⁷⁰ Report of Dis-interment and Reburial, James Favors, 7 November 1921, in Burial File of James Favors, NPRC.

⁷¹ Angelina Sullivan, Return of GRS Form 120, 27 December 1920, in Burial File of Frank Cadue, NPRC.

⁷² Illegible Form Title, 21 January 1921, in Burial File of Frank Cadue, NPRC. The form lists Angelina Sullivan as the War Risk beneficiary.

After the French allowed the United States to begin repatriation in March of 1920, cemetery consolidation began in earnest for the next eighteen months. GRS soldiers disinterred Charles Chambers from the American Cemetery near Bazoilles-sur-Meuse on 30 September 1921. His body was inspected for identification clues in the same manner conducted for every set of remains. The inspecting officer did not discover any personal effects, but did locate a copy of the execution order, hangman's noose, and execution cap on Chambers' body.⁷³ Executed soldier Charles Witham's remains were discovered in a similar state when GRS personnel opened his temporary gravesite on 31 October 1921.⁷⁴ Once GRS personnel prepared Chambers' remains for permanent burial, they dispatched his casket to a concentration point near Neufchâteau. The GRS did not possess instructions regarding final disposition of Chambers' remains, and therefore listed him as 'unclaimed.'⁷⁵ In accordance with the March 1920 agreement completed by the Franco-American Commission, Chambers' unclaimed body was destined to lie in one of the permanent overseas cemeteries. On 30 November 1921, Chambers was permanently interred in the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery in Plot E, Row 26, Grave 9.⁷⁶ Similarly, James Favors, another of the eleven executed AEF soldiers, was disinterred on 7 November 1921, three years following his hanging. Attempts to locate his mother to determine whether or not she desired his body to return initially proved fruitless, causing the GRS to label Favors' remains as unclaimed as well. In February of 1922, the GRS received instructions to

⁷³ Report of Disinterment, Preparation, Shipment and Reburial of Body, Charles Chambers, 30 September 1930, in Burial File of Charles Chambers, NPRC.

⁷⁴ Report of Burial and Disinterment, Charles Witham, 31 October 1921, in Burial File of Charles Witham, NPRC.

⁷⁵ Compilation of Disposition of Remains Data, Charles Chambers, in Burial File of Charles Chambers, NPRC.

⁷⁶ Report of Disinterment, Preparation, Shipment and Reburial of Body, Charles Chambers, 30 September 1930, in Burial File of Charles Chambers, NPRC.

bury Favors in France, and Favors was interred at Romagne 22 March 1922.⁷⁷ The letter describing Favors as an outlaw that kept him segregated from the Neufchâteau Temporary Cemetery was either forgotten or disregarded because Favors now rests amongst the heroic dead at the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery in Plot H, Row 12, Grave 14.

Of the eleven soldiers executed during World War I, six lay buried in the permanent overseas cemeteries: Joe Cathey and William Buckner at St. Mihiel, Charles Chambers and James Favors at Meuse-Argonne, Charles Witham and Sercey Strong at Oise-Aisne. Shortly following Chambers' interment at Meuse-Argonne, the GRS located his sister, Clara, in Philadelphia. A letter sent on behalf of the Quartermaster General informed Clara of her brother's burial site and described the upcoming installation of permanent marble crosses. The letter closed ensuring Clara – like it would for the five other families of the executed soldiers buried overseas – that “The grave of the deceased will be perpetually maintained by this government in a manner befitting the last resting place of our heroes.”⁷⁸

While Chambers' casket was awaiting transport from Neufchâteau to the Meuse-Argonne Cemetery, the GRS disinterred Frank Cadue's body in October of 1921 while clearing the Gondrecourt Civilian Cemetery. Bearing a metal nameplate, Cadue's casket arose from the earth. Once opened, Cadue's badly decomposed body rendered identification through visual recognition impossible. Perhaps puzzled as to what occurred, GRS officials noted the presence of a rope with a hangman's noose buried with a body; they did not specify whether or not the noose was still around Cadue's neck or if it was placed in the new casket for Cadue's eventual reburial.⁷⁹ Once the lid to Cadue's casket closed, however, his remains were placed with the

⁷⁷ Compilation of Disposition of Remains Data, James Favors, in Burial File of James Favors, NPRC.

⁷⁸ OQMG, letter to Clara Chambers, 4 December 1922, in Burial File of Charles Chambers, NPRC.

⁷⁹ Report of Disinterment for Frank Cadue, 27 October 1921, in Burial File of Frank Cadue, NPRC.

other dead, with no markings to segregate him from the others in the process of repatriation.

GRS personnel placed Cadue's remains in a new casket and shipped it to a concentration point near Antwerp, Belgium. Once enough caskets were collected, they went to the port of Antwerp for embarkation ahead of the cross-Atlantic voyage. Cadue's coffin, intermixed with coffins of others who died under wholly different circumstances, was given no different treatment. Ironically, Cadue's remains were transported by the USAT *Cantigny*, so named after the May 1918 battle in which Cadue would probably have participated if not for committing his heinous act the previous November. As Cadue's remains sailed across the Atlantic, the GRS alerted his sister of the movement with the promise to communicate again when the transport ship was approximately ten days from port in the United States.⁸⁰

On 1 December the *Cantigny* docked at Hoboken Pier. Cadue's family confirmed their desires to receive his remains in Nebraska. On 16 December, Private William Watters departed Brooklyn, New York bound for Omaha, Nebraska. Watters was escort for twenty-two sets of remains, one of which was Cadue's. At Omaha, Watters ensured Cadue's casket went to the appropriate train that would eventually arrive in Holton, Kansas. On 21 December, Cadue's remains arrived in Holton for eventual burial in the Shipsee Cemetery in the Potawatami Indian Reservation, Kansas. No fanfare – much less controversy – surrounded his interment.⁸¹ A 2015 internet photo of Cadue's grave shows it decorated with a flag-adorned marker indicating he gravesite of an honorably discharged veteran of World War I [see page 460].⁸²

In 2016, a newspaper local to Jackson County, Kansas ran a story about a local group

⁸⁰ R.E. Shannon, letter to Angeline Cadue Sullivan, 7 December 1921, in Burial File of Frank Cadue, NPRC.

⁸¹ Series of Transfer Documents in Burial File of Frank Cadue, NPRC.

⁸² "Frank Cadue," Find a Grave Frank Cadue, accessed 27 September 2016, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/63509068/frank-cadue>. See Appendix CC: Gravestone of Frank Cadue with Honorable Service Marker.

seeking to construct a monument dedicated to the area's Purple Heart recipients. A list of names that the group planned to engrave on the monument accompanied the article. Frank Cadue's name appeared in the World War I section with the listed cause of death 'DNB' (died, non-battle) – the only soldier on the memorial with such a title. A local researcher compiled short biographies of the men to be honored on the monument and mentioned Cadue's execution "for an unnamable offense."⁸³ The author alerted the group through the newspaper of Cadue's background, but the group replied that since Cadue earned the Purple Heart prior to his execution they were adding his name to the memorial. During World War I, the Purple Heart did not exist. The medal as it is known today was instituted in 1932, and WWI veterans had to apply for it themselves using documentation from their service records. It was not until 1942 that the Army began awarding the Purple Heart to the families of soldiers who were killed in action or died of wounds but set the retroactive date back only to 7 December 1941. Neither the Purple Heart nor its predecessor, the Wound Stripe, was awarded for 'non-combat' injuries or death not related to or resulting from combat actions. Cadue's surviving files make no mention of a wound prior to his execution making it unlikely he in anyway qualified for a wound stripe, much less a Purple Heart.

In May of 2017, Jackson County, Kansas proudly unveiled its monument to all Purple Heart recipients from it and adjacent Holton County.⁸⁴ Frank Cadue, the convicted child rapist who was executed by the United States Army and not a Purple Heart recipient, has his name inscribed amongst dozens of men who honorably earned their award through wounds or death caused by enemy action. This occurred as a result of the War Department's lack of policy

⁸³ Dan Fenton, *Some World War I Veterans Connected with Jackson County, Kansas: April 6, 1917 – November 11, 1918*, last updated 27 June 2017.

⁸⁴ "Purple Heart Monument Dedicated Saturday," *Holton Recorder*, 8 May 2017.

toward the disposition of those soldiers who died under less-than honorable circumstances 100 years prior thereby opening the door for undue recognition to be earned, brought about by good but ignorant intentions. Unlike other armies, the US allowed bureaucratic routines and rhythms to override real moral judgements in the interment of war dead. Perhaps the Army was trying to suppress news of the atrocities that would have alarmed politicians in Washington and depressed morale in American society. Whatever the reason, the sad fact is that one hundred years after the last shot was fired in the war a memorial was erected in Kansas that honors a child rapist alongside men who served honorably.

In addition to Cadue, three other executed soldiers' remains returned to the United States. William Henry's body returned to Flatonia, Texas for final burial, while Clair Blodgett's remains lie in Salem, Oregon.⁸⁵ Claude Wilson's mother directed, "I do not want my son Claude Wilson's body returned to the U.S.A. Let him remain where he was first buried."⁸⁶ While it is unknown whether she knew her son was buried in a German plot, Mrs. Wilson eventually changed her mind and requested Claude's body come back to St. Charles, South Carolina after learning that his remains had already been moved to a concentration cemetery.⁸⁷ Mrs. Wilson's wanting to repatriate her son's remains upon learning they had already been moved from their original burial location was not unlike decisions made by many other mothers at the time. Wilson's remains are buried in South Carolina today.

Subsequent to burial operations, the War Department extended the title of Gold Star Mother to the mothers of the dishonored dead. Following the Gold Star Mothers' Pilgrimage legislation, the War Department began contacting relatives of the dead buried overseas. Similar

⁸⁵ Information derived from the Burial Files of William Henry and Clair Blodgett, NPRC.

⁸⁶ GRS Form 120, Shipping Inquiry, Claude Wilson, August 1920, in Burial File of Claude Wilson, NPRC.

⁸⁷ Louisa Wilson, note to GRS, 24 June 1921, in Burial File of Claude Wilson, NPRC.

to other mothers, the War Department expended great organizational energy to track down every possible eligible mother. The Fayetteville, Tennessee postmaster was enlisted to try and locate Sercey Strong's mother so that she could be made aware of the Pilgrimage. The postmaster found that she and all other eligible members of Strong's family were deceased.⁸⁸ Clara Chambers received the Pilgrimage application in 1929 but did not return it, probably because she did not meet the criteria of mother or widow to her brother. In 1932, she received a different letter from the QMC requesting she provide the dates of death for her parents and identify a possible stepmother anyone who may have acted as loco parentis for Charles. Clara confirmed the deaths of Charles mother and father in 1917 and 1926, respectively, as well as the absence of a step-mother or loco parentis for Charles.⁸⁹ While no living person was eligible to represent Charles Chambers on the Gold Star Mothers' Pilgrimages, it was not due to them being barred from attending due to the cause of Chambers' death. The mother of one executed soldier buried in France, William Buckner, was still alive when War Department Pilgrimage surveys went out in 1929. Her story, however, was fraught with issues.

A 1929 inquiry made on behalf of Mrs. Buckner inquired into her receiving benefits and eligibility for the impending Gold Star Mothers Pilgrimages. Mrs. Buckner's representative also inquired if she could receive the \$840 cash in lieu of going abroad citing Mrs. Buckner's poor health.⁹⁰ This request stemmed from a proposal in which Senator David Walsh from Massachusetts argued that,

Each gold-star mother whose son is buried in France is entitled to have \$850 spent in her behalf by the government. If she cannot go, it is only fair and reasonable to pay her what the trip cost the government... Unless this is done the women who benefit from the legislation will be the ones whose circumstances give them the leisure, the money, and

⁸⁸ OQMG, Letter to Postmaster, Fayetteville, Tennessee, 13 December 1932, in Burial File of Sercey Strong, NPRC.

⁸⁹ Clara Chambers, letter to the OQMG, 22 March 1932 in Burial File of Charles Chambers, NPRC.

⁹⁰ James E. Watson, letter to Charles H. Bridges, 26 December 1929, in Burial File of William Buckner, NPRC.

the good health to make the pilgrimage, while the others, barred by extreme poverty, household cares, or poor health, will receive no consideration.⁹¹

This 1930 proposal failed, however, and Mrs. Buckner never received compensation or participated in a pilgrimage.

A response made in confidence to her representative explained that William Buckner was executed for war crimes and therefore made her ineligible to receive compensation or other benefits. Regarding the pilgrimage, however, the man conceded that “The terms of the act apparently give this woman the privilege of being included on this trip – although that surely was not the intention of Congress... The law was not intended to give such privilege to the mothers of soldiers who died under circumstances of dishonor.”⁹² A similar dispatch went to the Adjutant General, asking “First. Will the War Department permit this woman to make this trip in view of the fact that her son apparently died in dishonor by a court martial of American military authorities? Second. What rights, if any, has she to receive the expenditure of this ocean trip in lieu of making the trip?”⁹³ There was a curious lack of symmetry between the blasé indifference of the GRS in the matter of who was buried where and the fiery reaction of the War Department to the matter of Gold Star Mothers of the dishonored dead.

Army Quartermaster General Benjamin F. Cheatham, Jr. wrote to the Assistant Secretary of War offering his opinion regarding the rights of Mrs. Buckner to visit her son at St. Mihiel Military Cemetery with a 1930 Pilgrimage party.

...it does not seem proper to have her make the pilgrimage along with mothers whose sons met their death in defense of their country under honorable circumstances. It is realized that the provisions of the Act... are so broad that they can be construed to include Mrs. Buckner among those who are entitled to make the pilgrimage. Similarly,

⁹¹ John Graham, *The Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages of the 1930s: Overseas Grave Visitations by Mothers and Widows of Fallen U.S. World War I Soldiers*, (London: McFarland and Co., Inc., 2005), 55.

⁹² James E. Watson, letter to C.J. Prentiss, 26 December 1929, in Burial File of William Buckner, NPRC.

⁹³ James E. Watson, letter to Charles H. Bridges, 26 December 1929, in Burial File of William Buckner, NPRC.

the laws governing burial in a national cemetery are broad enough to permit the burial of a discharged soldier who has been executed for a crime against the laws of the land. In both instances, however, it is clearly not the intent of Congress to extend the privileges in such cases... It is my opinion that similar action should be taken in the case of Mrs. Buckner and that she should be denied the privilege of making a pilgrimage to the grave of her son.⁹⁴

Cheatham's letter cited the recent case of Philip Jackson, a recently discharged black soldier who was executed in June of 1927 for rape. In that case, the Assistant Secretary of War denied a request for his remains to be interred at Arlington National Cemetery.⁹⁵ None of the five dishonored dead returned to the United States were buried in a national cemetery but only because each family elected for interment in a local cemetery rather than requesting burial in a national cemetery.

Mrs. Buckner renewed her request for compensation in March of 1930 through a local attorney. The attorney's letter revealed that "Mrs. Buckner is an illiterate woman and did not keep the telegram that she received relative to his death, and knows but very little about dates, even the date of Mr. Buckner's birth."⁹⁶ The attorney's statement is very revealing. Mrs. Buckner's personal limitations aside, the notification and subsequent correspondence not only to Mrs. Buckner but the ten other families might have contributed to the memorialization provided the deceased. Indeed, in a short survey of newspapers announcing Buckner's death most list the cause as disease.⁹⁷ Neither this category, or a similar one titled 'accident and other causes' fit the reason Buckner or the other ten met death in Europe and might help explain why their families wanted to see them properly commemorated and themselves properly compensated.

⁹⁴ B.F. Cheatham, letter to the Assistant Secretary of War, 6 January 1930, in Burial File of William Buckner, NPRC.

⁹⁵ Ibid..

⁹⁶ Verne C. Chapmen, letter to the War Department, 12 March 1930, in Burial File of William Buckner, NPRC.

⁹⁷ Such Indiana newspapers include the *Republic*, *Daily Clarion*, and the *Republican*.

Buckner's file does not contain any response from the War Department regarding Cheatham's January letter, but the situation described by Cheatham did not come to pass. Mary Buckner declined the opportunity to travel in 1930 before accepting an invitation in 1931. Mary solicited information from another mother who went with a previous party regarding treatment and the amount of expenses that were covered.⁹⁸ Inexplicably, Mary changed her mind and declined the invitation to travel shortly thereafter and no evidence suggests that she travelled on a later party to the overseas cemeteries.

A recent occurrence involving two of the First World War's dishonored dead highlights that their presence is hidden in plain sight. Followers of the American Battle Monuments Commission's Facebook page see daily photographs of graves or inscriptions on the Walls of the Missing from various overseas cemeteries. Each photograph is followed by an appeal to the pages followers to remember that soldier. In June of 2018, the ABMC posted a photo of Charles F. Witham's grave at the Oise-Aisne American Cemetery. Like other postings on the ABMC page, users showed their appreciation for Witham's service in all the manners that social media provides. Within 48 hours of its original posting, the photo of Witham's grave received over 500 positive reactions from subscribers to the website, and 262 shares to audiences across the Facebook platform, potentially reaching untold thousands of households [see pages 462-464].⁹⁹

Beyond the simple icon clicks, Witham received additional messages of thanks and commendation for his service from ABMC page subscribers. Messages ranged from simple "thank you for your service" to pledges of respect and that his service is not forgotten. One observer completed cursory research about Witham and noted that Witham "died of accident or

⁹⁸ Mary Buckner, letter to Mrs. Elliott, 22 February 1931, in Burial File of William Buckner, NPRC.

⁹⁹ See Appendix DD: ABMC Memorial for Charles Witham.

other causes.” He and the balance of the viewers and commenters of Witham’s grave provided no indication that the ‘other causes’ of his death was by hanging for the murder of a fellow soldier. One could argue the disconnect was caused the century’s distance since World War I, a lack of knowledge about the eleven soldiers executed for war crimes, or a combination of the two.

Upon seeing this, the author dispatched an email to ABMC, informing them about Witham’s history. A representative replied stating that,

[T]his individual is not the person we should have been honoring. As you're probably aware, people that fit this category of dishonored burials within an ABMC cemetery are very few. It's not our regular practice to vet every individual we honor in our Daily Remembrance posting due to limited staffing and the very small number of dishonored burials. However, this example shows we need to reassess this for WWI burials. We do not currently have copies of the General Courts Martial Document in NARA II RG 200, Entry 23, Box 1. I will ask our historians to pull this documentation during a future trip to NARA. In the meantime, if you have any other digital copies you can easily send to us, we would certainly appreciate that so we can begin vetting names against this list.

The author sent files related to the General Courts Martial and execution of the eleven men to the ABMC to avoid future mistakes and risk public scrutiny if it was discovered the ABMC publicly honored such a soldier.¹⁰⁰ Neither the above vignette or this dissertation chapter are mentioned to pass judgment upon the Army, the GRS, or the ABMC of the past or present, but rather to bring understanding as to why and how the dishonored dead from World War I are buried indistinguishably among the honorable dead in our First World War cemeteries. Whether or not this new information will alter the way the ABMC commemorates those six burials is not known; it is not practicable to remove those bodies less the cemeteries lose the symmetry for which they are so well-known.

¹⁰⁰ The records were found in NARA, RG 200 (Papers of Gen. J.J. Pershing), List of Officers, Soldiers, and Others Convicted by General Court-Martial in the AEF Entry 23, Box 1.

The eleven men executed were not the only death sentences handed down by the AEF during the war. In fact, twenty-five other General Courts Martial delivered such verdicts. According to AEF Judge Advocate records, each of these cases was forwarded to the President for action. None of the twenty-five cases received by the President resulted in the service member being put to death. Actions ranged from pardons to life sentences.¹⁰¹ The irony of the dishonored dead's story regarding the treatment of African American soldiers must be highlighted. As mentioned, the remains of black soldiers returned to the United States found themselves segregated in death due to policies of certain cemeteries, including Arlington National Cemetery. This means the six dishonored dead buried in the overseas cemeteries received better treatment, more visitors, and perpetual commemoration when compared to those honored dead who were returned to the United States. While arguably not done purposely by the War Department, not producing a policy for the dishonored dead's burial stands out as one of the poorer decisions made by the War Department and GRS. The ABMC would seek to avoid making the same mistake after World War II during the consolidation of the overseas dead from that war.

This chapter's primary goal was to unveil a relatively unknown aspect of the GRS's activities following World War I. The reader may note an absence of discussion regarding the military justice system that brought death to the eleven men discussed herein. This was done purposely due to the current historiography which discusses the dishonored dead from World War II. The men comprising the World War II dishonored dead are mostly minorities. Two books on the subject, Alice Kaplan's *The Interpreter* and French MacLean's *The Fifth Field*, attempt to discuss the dishonored dead while simultaneously proving that military justice was

¹⁰¹ Death Sentences Forwarded to the President for Action, n.d., NARA, RG 120, Entry 594, Box 13.

especially heavy-handed toward minority soldiers.¹⁰² The number of men executed, and their corresponding crimes suggest that such leaning occurred. However, what the authors fail to do, especially in Kaplan's case, is compare cases from the General Courts Martial files that bear similarities. It was with this in mind that no attempt was made in this work to determine whether or not the punishment received by the accused was just, but rather concentrate on the effects their dishonored status carried into their memorialization by the Army.

Indeed, the racial makeup of the eleven World War One dishonored dead suggests that Jim Crow attitudes influenced the punishment. They almost certainly did. General Robert Lee Bullard, for example, who commanded the US 2nd Army in the war, was an Alabamian who made no secret of his racism or his conviction that black soldiers were more inclined than white soldiers to rape. Bullard actually said, "That the Negro is a more sensual man than the white man," and that blacks would be disposed to rape, as Bullard put it, "wherever they are in contact with whites."¹⁰³ The author was able to confirm each of the World War One dishonored dead's charge, trial, and punishment through the AEF's General Courts Martial ledger in the National Archives, but was struck by the lack of any overt evidence of racial bias, suggesting that the racist attitudes expressed in the actual convictions and sentences were left unspoken in all official correspondence. Two questions for future study obtrude from this inquiry. First, the degree to which African Americans and other minorities were discriminated against in military justice. Second, how the GRS could have been so shortsighted (or incompetent) as to place dishonored dead in ground consecrated for the burial of honored dead.

¹⁰² Alice Kaplan, *The Interpreter*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); French MacLean, *The Fifth Field: The Story of the 96 Americans The Interpreter Sentenced to Death and Executed in Europe and North Africa in World War II*, (Atglen, PA: Schiffer, 2013).

¹⁰³ Geoffrey Wawro, *Sons of Freedom: The Forgotten American Soldiers who Defeated Germany in World War I*, (New York: Basic Books, 2018), 461-463.

CONCLUSION AND AFTERWORD

Graves Registration Chief Colonel Harry Rethers could not predict history's judgement of his organization's efforts while writing the forward to the first volume of the Graves Registration Service (GRS) history. One hundred years after the GRS began operations in France to locate, identify, and bury the AEF's war dead we might now offer conclusions regarding the organization's efforts. In doing so, we must evaluate not only what the GRS accomplished during and immediately after World War I, but activities that occurred sometimes decades later that carried forth and completed work begun by the GRS during the war. This dissertation attempted to examine the GRS's activities to affect the final burials of the American war dead following the end of World War I. That narrative included discussion of the political and social forces that influenced GRS activities and policies.

Early attempts by the Army to properly bury and honor its war dead during the 19th century met with sub-standard results. The Mexico City Cemetery contained all unknown burials while the many of Civil War dead were not located and buried until well after the war with only about 40% identified. The Spanish-American War challenged the Army to perform systematic burial and identification operations outside of the United States for the first time. While not perfect, efforts by men in or associated with the Army, notably Charles Pierce, devised techniques and captured lessons learned that would serve the Army well in the next war.

Among the major legacies of the Spanish-American War was President William McKinley's decree to repatriate the bodies of all the American war dead. This declaration, made during America's first major overseas war, became the standard procedure from which the Army executed post-war operations in the Caribbean and Pacific. Once the United States declared war on Germany in April of 1917, the AEF departed for France with political and military officials

under the assumption that the dead would be repatriated in totality following the cessation of hostilities in Europe.

The US Army was woefully prepared for the sheer volume of deaths on the Western Front in 1917-18. Indeed, the Army was overwhelmed. The nation's record of success in identifying and burying its dead was mediocre and the United States possessed limited experience repatriating war dead from overseas, and only in countries it occupied, not those buried in the soil of a sovereign nation. The lack of experience in this area forced the Army to learn through trial and error which greatly lengthened the time to accomplish the final interments of the American dead in the United States and Europe. The Army wisely looked to the man possessing the most experience regarding the identification and burial of the dead, Charles Pierce. Pierce had efficiently and humanely organized the burial of war dead in the Spanish-American War and he returned to build a larger organization to cope with the flood of American war dead in World War I.

The creation of the Graves Registration Service ensured care for the military fallen that was far ahead of anything previously attempted. The GRS as an organization created policies and provided field teams to supplement the charge of unit commanders to bury their dead, and that ultimately prevented the large numbers of unidentifiable bodies or lost graves experienced in the Civil War and Spanish-American War. Much of the GRS's success during and immediately following World War I should be contributed to Colonel Charles Pierce. His knowledge, experience, and well-known compassion toward both the dead and their bereaved families made him the perfect choice to head the organization and influence its values from the beginning. The determination to locate, identify, and properly honor the war dead are traits still present in Mortuary Affairs teams to this day.

In France, Pierce brought organization to what otherwise could have become chaos. He pushed his GRS units to continuously scour the battlefields to locate American dead, ensure gravesites were marked, and report interment sites to the GRS office. While Pierce advised Pershing to lean on his division commanders to ensure their dead were buried, Pierce bore responsibility to locate, identify, and bury the AEF dead during and immediately following the war. Through Pierce, the GRS conducted battlefield sweeps to locate the missing, constructed, and later maintained thousands of temporary cemeteries across Europe that housed the battlefield dead until political decisions were finalized regarding the final disposition of those bodies. While Pierce was unceremoniously recalled due to complaints about his leadership and management, he must be credited historically with having provided the impetus for the Graves Registration Service's founding and operations in France. Many of America's policies toward its battlefield dead can be traced directly to his ideas.

The United States Army was extremely lucky that Charles Pierce lived to 1921. While Pierce enjoyed much success in the Philippines and spearheaded many initiatives that he would carry forward to France in 1917, he failed – and the Army failed to force him – to codify his lessons and techniques into any sort of manual or instructions upon his homecoming from the Philippines. Had Pierce died before 1917, it is difficult to know whether or not the Army possessed someone else to carry the torch or, in the absence of resident knowledge within his ranks, Pershing would have agreed to permit the services of the Red Cross or another private agency to conduct identification and burial work for the American Expeditionary Force.

Diplomatic tension loomed large over GRS operations in France. The 1919 French decision to temporarily prohibit the disinterment of the American dead for up to three years represented arguably the most significant political act that affected GRS activities. The French

policy, undertaken to reduce the strain on the French railroads and prevent the spread of disease, had harmful effects on the GRS. It delayed repatriation and reburial efforts, and marooned in France all unidentified and unclaimed bodies that had been slated for return to the United States. The GRS also found itself directly involved in the selection and burial of the Unknown Soldier in 1921 and the creation of the Gold Star Mothers and their logistically-challenging pilgrimages.

Trends in American society also impacted the choices ultimately made by the GRS. Perhaps the most important example was the letter from former President Theodore Roosevelt pleading for the body of his son, Quentin, to remain buried where he fell. This letter prompted the Army to unilaterally change its total repatriation policy to one that provided families of the dead an option to leave remains buried in Europe. This decision necessitated the construction and perpetual maintenance of overseas military cemeteries in England, France, and Belgium following World War I. Pressure groups, such as the American Field of Honor Association and the Bring Home the Soldier Dead League, fought hard to keep the subject of the war dead prominent within political circles and provided close scrutiny over military efforts to ensure the government fulfilled its promise to the dead and their families.

The profit-seeking of the funeral industry throughout this period was also a significant influence on the GRS. Indeed, author John Graham wrote, “the influence of the funeral industry cannot be understated in understanding why almost two-thirds of the dead returned to the United States.”¹ Undertakers regularly lobbied to persuade both the government and the American people to repatriate the war dead for the financial gain of the funeral homes. Their influence was so great that Congressman Fiorello La Guardia cited it as the main reason that his first push for a

¹ John W. Graham, *The Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages of the 1930s: Overseas Grave Visitations by Mothers and Widows of Fallen U.S. World War I Soldiers*, (London: McFarland and Co., Inc., 2005), 38.

Gold Star Mothers' Pilgrimage did not pass through Congress.

The decision by the American soldier dead's next of kin ultimately determined the size of the overseas cemeteries and the scale of repatriation efforts. Once the government announced its intention to honor the requests of families for their soldier's final disposition and codified agreements to begin operations, the GRS worked to bury bodies in the overseas cemeteries over return the dead for burial in local or national cemeteries in the United States. Some of these same families – namely the mothers of the dead – put pressure on Congress to finally approve pilgrimages to the overseas cemeteries for eligible Gold Star Mothers. This momentous decision only became a memorable experience for the pilgrims through the efforts of the Army to carry out the will of the government on behalf of its people.

Opportunities existed at multiple junctures for an organization other than the Army to carry out the tasks associated with the war dead discussed in this dissertation. Beginning with the AEF's deployment to France when it was suggested either private undertakers or Red Cross representatives be used to care for the dead – a proposal renewed during concentration and repatriation operations following the war. The American Red Cross was later offered as the lead agency for the Gold Star Pilgrimage. Even members of Congress suggested outside agencies handle the war dead in lieu of the GRS. In each instance, however, the Army was trusted to carry out the orders of the government. Any other entity might have been successful in this effort, but the Army balanced bureaucratic process, mostly equal treatment, and reverence to achieve the wishes of the soldier dead's families.

An examination of British burial practices throughout the same period found similarities and differences that existed between the United States and Great Britain. Glaringly obvious was the lack of repatriation done by the latter country as well as the disinterest of the government

toward the wishes of some Britons to return their soldier for burial. While those wanting repatriated remains were a minority, the government's decision demonstrates a major difference between Great Britain and the United States as to whom the dead belonged. Additionally, there was a stark difference in performance and arguably devotion to the task between the British DGR&E and the American GRS. While the British certainly possessed more dead and more missing scattered amongst a wider area, its Army did not demonstrate the intense commitment to locating those unaccounted for in a manner similar to the Americans. Similarly, it seemed to tolerate deficiencies in an organization entrusted with a very sacred duty.

Many similarities between the two countries existed as well. The creation of the IWGC and ABMC allowed both countries to maintain beautiful overseas cemeteries in perpetuity and many burial practices executed by the AEF and BEF bore many similar characteristics, notably that the dead, regardless of social class or military rank, largely received the same treatment. Families of the dead from both countries equally peppered their respective government officials and wrote editorials expressing their desires and opinions in attempt to influence political decisions; some were successful, others were not. Both countries also buried a representative Unknown Soldier in his home country while leaving the remainder buried overseas.

The challenges presented by a relatively small number of executed soldiers in the AEF caused the GRS to bury these soldiers both overseas and in the United States under the same circumstances as the remainder of the war dead. The result is eleven men who committed horrible crimes have received the same accolades as their comrades who conducted themselves honorably. In the case of those buried overseas, their graves are decorated, visited, and heralded without acknowledgement to their crimes. While mostly minorities, these men did not suffer the indignities that some of their contemporaries did who were segregated in their burial in national

cemeteries.

While the above concludes the main points discussed in this dissertation, it must be acknowledged that America's interactions with the war dead did not cease once the final Gold Star Mothers disembarked from their pilgrimage. Indeed, not only did another global war and other engagements require America to recommit itself to the location, identification, repatriation, and burial of its dead, but eventually redefine its policies. Additionally, the World War I dead continued to require attention both overseas and in the United States. Lastly, the Army needed to ensure it did not waste the priceless knowledge it acquired regarding the handling of the war dead.

Evidence exists that the Army did learn from some of its failures and setbacks during World War I. Three years following Pierce's death in France, the United States published the first Army Regulations (ARs) that became known as the "30- series." The first, AR 30-1810: *Burials on the Field of Battle*, resembled more of a pamphlet than a manual. Not quite three pages, it covered topics such as the establishment of cemeteries, searching the battlefield, supervision of burials, isolated burials, temporary grave markers, and the disposition of identification tags.² Much of the language reflects the lessons learned over the previous decade, including one passage that implored the reader to consider the "morale of the home population" when conducting burial operations.³ Accompanying AR-1810 was the one and a half page AR-1815: *Reports of Burials*. Published the same day, the pamphlet offered instructions for personnel responsible for submitting burial reports with or without the aid of graves registration personnel.⁴ Perhaps due to the beliefs and subsequent concerns expressed by Jewish soldiers and

² War Department, AR 30-1810: *Burials on the Field of Battle*, (Washington: GPO, 1 February 1924), AHEC.

³ War Department, AR 30-1810: *Burials on the Field of Battle*, (Washington: GPO, 1 February 1924), 2, AHEC.

⁴ War Department, AR 30-1810: *Reports of Burial*, (Washington: GPO, 1 February 1924), AHEC.

civilians during and after the war, AR-1810 described marking temporary graves with a headboard as opposed to a cross or Star of David.⁵

Regulations 30-1825: *Disinterment of Remains*, and 30-1830: *Preparation for Burial and Shipment* reflected the lessons learned by the GRS throughout the war, particularly with respect to the value of uniformity, attention to detail, and the use of identification tags postmortem as well as identifying parties responsible for remains on land and at sea. Perhaps the most interesting passage in the entire series was printed in AR-1820: *Disposition of Remains*. After discussing how officers and soldiers dying within the United States and its territories would be buried in the United States as soon as transportation could be ascertained, the regulation devoted just two sentences to wartime occurrences. In that event, “remains will be buried at or near the place of death, there to remain until final disposition becomes practicable.”⁶ The paragraph is noticeably devoid of language referring to whom or what entity would decide what that final disposition of the overseas dead would be. It would be a topic revisited a generation later, when the sons of the doughboys returned to France along with points all over the globe during World War II. The Army updated AR-1820 in 1927, 1931, 1932, 1937, but did not elaborate on the definition of final disposition with respect to burial location in the United States or abroad.

While Pierce ensured the GRS was successful in France, he could not control the political and diplomatic aspects regarding the burial of the dead. American officials neglected to anticipate the diplomatic problems with France that would arise over such an undertaking and were likewise blind to the negative attitude expressed by the British and French toward mass-repatriation before the war was over. Such failures forced the United States into acrimonious

⁵ War Department, AR 30-1810: *Burials on the Field of Battle*, (Washington: GPO, 1 February 1924), 3, AHEC.

⁶ War Department, AR 30-1820: *Disposition of Remains*, (Washington: GPO, 1 February 1924), 2, AHEC.

dialogues with its European allies concurrent to the difficult negotiations ongoing to finalize the Treaty of Versailles. Meanwhile, the families of the dead were sentenced to suffer an additional year or more until the final disposition of their soldier dead could be realized.

After the gridlock was broken, in part due to the efforts of GRS chief Harry Rethers, the United States followed the guidelines set forth by France to conduct exhumation, repatriation, and reburial operations within that country. Once allowed, the GRS completed the repatriations of roughly sixty percent of the American war dead to the United States in approximately three years. It buried the remainder in cemeteries constructed across France as well as in England and Belgium. Subsequent work by the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) memorialized in stone every single American soldier killed overseas during the war regardless if they possessed a known grave.

Despite the postwar efforts of the QMC, GRS, and ABMC, bodies remained unaccounted for everywhere American forces fought, including Russia. Congress authorized over \$80,000 in 1929 to recover and return those soldiers still buried in Russia. An expedition began in August of that year recovered eighty-six bodies before cold weather halted operations. Of those, seventy-six were repatriated to the United States while the other ten were added to the overseas cemeteries.⁷ The group of people comprising this expedition were members of Veterans of Foreign War members and a delegation from the state of Michigan (home state to many North Russia participants) along with GRS advisors. A later report mentioned that “the only part of the expedition which did any serious work toward recovery of bodies was composed of an Army officer and a group of civilian employees of the U.S. Army masquerading as representatives of

⁷ OQMG, letter to the Adjutant General, 21 May 1934, NARA, RG 117, Records Related to Interment, Box 181.

the Veterans of Foreign Wars.”⁸

As the 1929 expedition was unable to recover thirty-eight sets of remains in Russia a second expedition was planned for 1931, but Soviet authorities did not grant permission for such an undertaking. In 1934, the Army received permission to conduct the second expedition and appointed QMC Lieutenant Colonel Clifford Corbin to lead the effort beginning in June of that year.⁹ Corbin’s team departed Paris on 9 June, arriving in Moscow by the 14th. Corbin then contracted a labor force, interpreters, and transportation. A representative of the Soviet government accompanied the team throughout its work. Of the thirty-eight bodies Corbin’s team was seeking, Corbin knew immediately some would never be located. This group included four were buried in a British cemetery in which his team could not dig, two engineers who drowned in a river over a mile wide with a strong current, one soldier lost in a swamp located over 200 miles from where the other bodies were located, the remains of one private “blown to pieces by a high explosive shell at Vistavaka,” and a soldier taken prisoner to another part of Russia.¹⁰ This left thirty bodies which stood a chance of being found by Corbin’s team despite the passage of over fifteen years.

The lag between the actions in Russia and Corbin’s recovery notwithstanding, his team was able to contact and interview men who participated in burials of American soldiers following some of the fighting. This led to his team’s first discovery of three unidentified American soldiers on 2 July. Corbin’s work continued throughout the month of July yielding some good results while other leads failed to materialize. As his teams disinterred remains,

⁸ “Informal Report on the 1934 Expedition to Artic Russia to Recover the Bodies of American Soldiers Lost during the 1918-1919 Campaign in the Archangel Region,” RG 117, Records Related to Interment, Box 181.

⁹ OQMG, letter to the Adjutant General, 21 May 1934, NARA, RG 117, Records Related to Interment, Box 181.

¹⁰ “Informal Report on the 1934 Expedition to Artic Russia to Recover the Bodies of American Soldiers Lost during the 1918-1919 Campaign in the Archangel Region,” RG 117, Records Related to Interment, Box 181.

Corbin analyzed the physical evidence yielded by the bodies and compared it with the last known information of the men listed as missing. Corbin then made recommendations to the Quartermaster General to positively identify some of the bodies.

By 28 August, Corbin's expedition ended with the shipment of nineteen bodies back to the United States. The report for Corbin's mission concluded that "all bodies that it was possible to recover were found and there is no possibility of further recoveries. It would be a waste of time and money to send another expedition to North Russia," and gave credit to the Russian assistance received stating that "If it had not been for them not more than ten bodies would have been recovered."¹¹ The north Russian recovery operations further prove the extent to which the United States committed itself to locating the remains. Corbin's expedition was the third effort over a fifteen-year period to attempt recovering the remains of every soldier lost during the North Russia campaign. Had Corbin's report not declared that no more bodies could be located it is not a far stretch to think that the United States would have dispatched a fourth mission if the possibility arose of more bodies being recovered.

Remains continued to appear into the 1930s. In 1935, remains estimated to originate from up to nine different bodies were located less than two miles south of the Oise-Aisne Cemetery.¹² Investigators recorded each set of remains on separate forms, but no record exists of their final disposition. In other cases, the minute record keeping of the GRS ensured the wishes of families would be honored, even over a decade after the fact. Doughboy Jesse Butler's body was missing following the end of the war, but his family submitted a request to return his

¹¹ "Informal Report on the 1934 Expedition to Artic Russia to Recover the Bodies of American Soldiers Lost during the 1918-1919 Campaign in the Archangel Region," RG 117, Records Related to Interment, Box 181.

¹² ABMC Europe Officer, Memorandum to the Quartermaster General, Subject: Unidentified Parts, 26 April 1935, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 139.

remains in the event they were found. On 10 November 1931, Butler's remains were found, still bearing his identification tag. The QMC confirmed Butler's identity following an investigation and subsequently notified his next of kin. Following the Butler family's desires, the QMC shipped Butler's remains to Lewiston, Illinois for final interment on 30 March 1932.¹³

French citizens and their government continued to work closely with the QMC as the countryside continued to yield bodies throughout the decade. South of Soissons, two bodies were recovered from a trench running parallel to a road near Soissons. One body was unidentifiable, but the second was confirmed to be that of an H Company, 26th Infantry soldier. The former body possessed two badly-corroded identification tags that yielded enough partial information to match the name of another soldier from the same battalion and regiment who went missing during the same attack.¹⁴ Two months later In February of 1936, the QMC was made aware of a grave south of Soissons containing the remains of four soldiers. QMC investigators identified three as members of the 26th Infantry but the fourth's identity was not ascertained. The QMC report gave detailed information of the burial locations and notified the Quartermaster General of a possible lead to further investigate in the hopes of confirming the identity of the one unknown set of remains.¹⁵ Another body was found in 1938 by French locals in a shell hole which through erosion yielded its secret. QMC personnel found an identity disc that identified the body as that of Lonnie C. Blair.¹⁶ ABMC records as late as 1939 show more

¹³ J.L. Dewitt, letter to the Hon. David Reed, 3 February 1933. Quarterly Statistical Report, 1 July 1933, NARA, RG 92, Entry 1889, Box 139.

¹⁴ Mark M. Boatner, Jr., letter to the Quartermaster General, 22 November 1935, NARA, RG 117, Records Related to Interment, Box 181.

¹⁵ Mark M. Boatner, Jr., letter to the Quartermaster General, 7 January 1936, NARA, RG 117, Records Related to Interment, Box 181.

¹⁶ K.F. Herford, letter to the Quartermaster General, 26 July 1938, NARA, RG 117, Records Related to Interment, Box 181.

bodies emerging from their theretofore unknown gravesites. Two unidentified American bodies were discovered by members of the Imperial War Graves Commission conducting similar searches for British missing in a shell hole just over a half-mile from the Bellicourt Monument.¹⁷

In June 1934, an effort was made to disinter a body out of the Meuse-Argonne Cemetery for repatriation and burial in his hometown of Marion, Ohio. The ABMC rejected this request, having received letters protesting the removal of the body from notable groups such as the Gold Star Mothers and American Legion.¹⁸ The president of the Gold Star Mothers wrote: “If a poll of all Gold Star Mothers were taken I feel that they would emphatically protest the removal of a single body or the disturbance of the beauty and peace of any cemetery overseas.”¹⁹

The ABMC went further to adopt definitive policy that no burials, other than World War I dead would occur in the ABMC cemeteries; the present arrangement of graves would remain in perpetuity; and removal of a body from an ABMC cemetery was prohibited under any circumstance.²⁰ Pershing declared in May, 1935 that “no removal of any body from any of these cemeteries should be permitted under any conditions whatever.”²¹ Indeed, such policy had already been declared on 15 August 1921 prohibiting any disinterment from the permanent overseas cemeteries.²²

One of the most remarkable aspects of the Graves Registration Service’s efforts during

¹⁷ K.F. Herford, letter to the Quartermaster General, 13 March 1939, NARA, RG 117, Records Related to Interment, Box 181.

¹⁸ ABMC Minutes, 14 May 1935, NARA, RG 117, Entry A12.

¹⁹ Thomas J. Conner, *War and Remembrance: The Story of the American Battle Monuments Commission*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2018), 100.

²⁰ ABMC Minutes, 14 May 1935, NARA, RG 117, Entry A12.

²¹ Conner, *War and Remembrance*, 100.

²² James E. Mangum, letter to Captain Watson Miller, 8 March 1939, NARA, RG 117, Records Related to Interment, Box 181.

and subsequent to World War I was the factor of cost borne by the American people to achieve this unprecedented undertaking. Except for total expenditures documents produced by the GRS or War Department, no evidence was uncovered that showed any questioning of the financial burden necessary to return and bury the dead. Despite Congress drastically cutting the military budget, from \$19 billion to \$3 billion after the Armistice, the program remained fully funded.²³ The recovery and burial of the World War I dead cost the United States around \$30 million (\$463,420,958 in 2020), or \$658 (10,164 in 2020 dollars) for each body. This number almost quadrupled the initial 1920 estimate of \$8 million and did not include the additional \$2.4 million expenditure required to formalize the purchase of land to construct, landscape, and maintain the overseas cemeteries.²⁴

In 1940, Illinois Gold Star mother Henrietta Haug solicited fellow Illinois Gold Star mothers and widows to write about their soldier dead. The mothers responded in enough volume to generate a published book that reflected their thoughts on their soldier dead, loss, grief, patriotism, and the future. With many of the letters being written after the outbreak of war in Europe, the thought of other mothers experiencing the pain experienced by the World War mothers was evident in their writings. Writing six months after Germany's 1 September 1939 invasion of Poland, Gold Star Mother Elizabeth Donovan wrote, "Though William died fighting on foreign soil, I personally disapprove of our boys leaving our shores and have a deep aversion to war and its awful destruction. May peace soon reign throughout the world, is my prayer."²⁵ Mrs. William Gustafson, whose son was gassed at Cantigny and perished in June of 1918, wrote

²³ Geoffrey Wawro, *Sons of Freedom: The Forgotten American Soldiers who Defeated Germany in World War I*, (New York: Basic Books, 2018), 491.

²⁴ Lisa Budreau, *Bodies of War* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 128.

²⁵ Henrietta Haug, *Gold Star Mothers: A Collection of Notes Recording the Personal Histories of the Gold Star Mothers of Illinois*, (Brussels, IL: No Publisher, 1941), 51.

“As a Gold Star Mother, made so by the World War, I can only hope and pray that the mothers of this country will be spared by the tragedy of sending their sons off to another foreign war.”²⁶ Sarah Maxey, a 1931 pilgrim, wrote “I think most people are praying that the United States will never be involved in another war, as we all learned that war was uncalled for and I think each war mother knows the others’ grief.”²⁷ Gold Star Mother Jane Haden added to the sentiment, writing “I have sacrificed a beloved son in the great International Mistake of 1917 and 18; which sowed the seeds of the awful strife now raging in the world today... My heart goes out to the Mothers of America today, whose sons are being enlisted in the military service... and I pray to God that these dear boys may never be called upon to sacrifice their lives in useless warfare in foreign lands.”²⁸ Despite the longings of the Gold Star Mothers, war came to the United States and would produce a new generation of mothers and widows.

World War II also affected the cemeteries from the First World War. The 1940 German invasion of France caused damage to some grave markers that were subject to shell fire. While this action was not determined to be done deliberately, it nevertheless caused concern within the ABMC as to the well-being of the overseas cemeteries under German occupation. Aisne-Marne Cemetery suffered the worst harm: 171 headstones suffered damage, with 89 requiring replacement [see page 466]. A grenade explosion within the chapel damaged interior stonework and almost all the stained-glass windows.²⁹ Meuse-Argonne’s register bore the name of twenty-five German officers and soldiers who visited the cemetery but did not cause harm to any aspect

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 84.

²⁷ Haug, *Gold Star Mothers*, 136.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 105.

²⁹ ABMC, European Office, Report of War Damage to Chairman, ABMC, 11 October 1940, NARA, RG 117, Box 164. See Appendix EE: 1940 damage to Aisne-Marne Cemetery, NARA, RG 117, Commission Dedication File, Box 164.

of the cemetery.³⁰ The same ledgers bore inscriptions from American soldiers who visited the cemetery during the 1944-45 Allied offensives to liberate Europe. Army Technician 4th Grade Julian Lloyd wrote, “A beautiful spot – like being at home in the states again.” Army Nurse Ann Welsky recorded “A visit I shall never forget.” World War I retread Lieutenant Colonel Harvey Hopp noted that he “Looked again at some of my friends who stayed – 1918.” Major C.B. Maynard viewed the cemetery as “A beautiful memorial to those before us.”³¹

As the fighting moved out of the World War I cemeterial sites by late 1944, assessments could be done of the cemeteries. By and large, they fared well.³² Meuse-Argonne Cemetery sustained damage in the fall of 1944 when an American plane attempted to strafe German units stationed near the cemetery grounds. Otherwise, “either war damage dates back to 1940, or is of minor importance.”³³ The only deliberate vandalism discovered was the breaking of some Jewish headstones at St. Mihiel Cemetery before intervention by a local German commander.³⁴ The ABMC opted to leave some minor battle damage as evidence of World War II’s effect on the area.³⁵

After the United States and its allies secured victory in both theaters of war, the War Department moved to execute a new program to recover and bury the war dead, relegating the World War I cemeteries to the secondary effort for a generation. While the fundamental problem confronting the Army and the GRS following the end of World War II was the same, the scale and scope of the challenge was far greater. Records of ABMC meetings following World War II

³⁰ Conner, *War and Remembrance*, 153.

³¹ Extractions from Remarks Column – Visitor’s Book of Romagne Cemetery. US Army Quartermaster Museum.

³² Conner, *War and Remembrance*, 155.

³³ *Ibid.*, 172.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 175.

³⁵ ABMC Minutes, 5 April 1946, NARA, RG 117, Entry A12.

demonstrate a Commission that was cognizant of the hard lessons learned from 1917-1921 and sought to rectify them quickly. This included a policy of repatriation, agreements with foreign nations, and the selection and design of the cemeteries as well as the headstones. The ABMC solved most of these problems within a year or two of the war's end, allowing focus on the massive repatriation program necessary to locate, identify and bury bodies from places around the world.

Despite the Army's focus on the World War II dead, the ghosts of its World War I experience continued to appear. In 1949, the disposition of those soldiers executed through General Courts Martial during World War II came before the ABMC. The ABMC this time voted not to bury those men amongst the 'honored dead' but rather ordered a separate plot constructed near Oise-Aisne Cemetery. The ABMC recommended burying those dead in a World War I cemetery because its more mature plantings would screen the plot from casual visitors. The ABMC further noted that this course of action was possible because the executed soldiers' next of kin had not yet been notified to provide disposition instructions.³⁶ In 1948, the Quartermaster General (QMG) directed that no dishonored dead from World War II be repatriated to the United States. Initial plans called for the burial of those dead in a manner similar to that conducted by the GRS following World War I where they were interspersed throughout the overseas cemeteries. Thomas North, then-ABMC secretary noted that

...at Cambridge, with a total of 3,850 graves, there would be 18 dishonorable cases; and at St. James, with a total of about 4,445 graves, there would be 35 cases. I thereupon pointed out to the QMG that at St. James this would amount to almost one percent, a percentage so high that we could expect that relatives of those buried in nearby graves would become inquisitive as to the nature of these cases, and would object.³⁷

³⁶ ABMC Minutes, 26 January 1946, NARA, RG 117, Entry A12.

³⁷ Thomas North, Memorandum for the ABMC, 1 November 1948, NARA, RG 117, Memoranda to the Commission, Box 4.

Racial issues amongst the living continued to affect the World War I dead. On a 1946 visit to Arlington National Cemetery, a white family was aghast to see an African American family mourning a soldier buried in the same section. The family complained to cemetery officials and expressed a desire to move the deceased to another section or out of the cemetery altogether. The Arlington superintendent wrote the Quartermaster General stating that “Investigation proved that a 10-foot aisle separated the plots, but since no road, fence or other visible barrier separated the graves it was apparent that the graves were adjoining.”³⁸ At least one other similar incident at the Philadelphia national cemetery remains in the National Archives’ files.³⁹

Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. wrote the ABMC in 1954 on behalf of the Roosevelt family expressing that “our family has now come around to the suggestion that the grave of my brother-in-law Quentin should be moved and that it should be placed as close as possible to my husband in St. Laurent.”⁴⁰ Such conversation had been ongoing since the late 1940s when Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt, Jr.’s body was moved to St. Laurent Cemetery above the Normandy Beaches for final interment. Theodore Jr., Quentin’s brother, had died in 1944 of a heart attack in France following the Normandy invasion. The Roosevelt family indicated such a move might occur but never fully committed to the action. Officials expressed concern in 1948 that if the Roosevelt family did not soon decide it would “prevent the side by side arrangement once talked of...” and necessitate Quentin be buried in a World War I cemetery.⁴¹

³⁸ Robert A. Spence, letter to the Quartermaster General, 11 July 1946, NARA, RG 92, General Records Relating to National Cemeteries: 1920-1960, Box 14.

³⁹ H.M. Barrett, letter to Harry Painting, 4 June 1946, NARA, RG 92, General Records Relating to National Cemeteries: 1920-1960, Box 14.

⁴⁰ Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., letter to General North, 4 June 1954, NARA, RG 117, Records Relating to Interment, Box 180.

⁴¹ Jon Harbeson, letter to Thomas North, 16 August 1948, NARA, RG 117, Records Relating to Interment, Box 180.

While the ABMC felt it could comply with the family wishes and place Quentin's remains next to those of his brother's, the Army did not possess the legal authority to move Quentin's remains since the U.S. government was relieved of caring for the isolated grave, thus transferring ownership back to France.⁴² The ABMC sent a formal request to French authorities responsible for Quentin's gravesite and received permission to move Quentin's remains. On 22 September 1955 local French gravediggers exhumed Quentin's grave, transported the body to the St. Laurent American Cemetery and buried Quentin next to his brother Theodore Jr. on the 23rd of September.⁴³ Perhaps fittingly, the body of Quentin Roosevelt now lies within an overseas military cemetery, the creation of which his death was directly responsible. The burial also represents an appropriate bookend to the efforts of the GRS and ABMC to locate, identify, and bury the AEF's dead going back to 1917.

Was the American decision to separate the dead correct? It is a difficult question to answer. One might argue that it was correct to allow the families of the deceased the final decision for burial of their soldier dead not unlike the families of American war dead today. One could just as easily counter that had the United States government retained all bodies in France it would have ensured the proper care of the World War I dead in perpetuity. Instead, graves of some soldiers lie forgotten, lost, or segregated in death as they were in life such as demonstrated in this dissertation. An in-depth study and analysis of primary resources could produce an argument supporting or attacking the American efforts to bury its dead. When examining the background for the decision to offer families of the deceased a choice – the government made the correct decision according to the desire of its people at the time. The Army did an outstanding

⁴² Thomas North, letter to Jack Mage, 12 April 1955, NARA, RG 117, Records Relating to Interment, Box 180.

⁴³ Authorization to Transport of Quentin Roosevelt's Remains, 22 September 1955, NARA, RG 117, Records Relating to Interment, Box 180.

job carrying out those wishes.

Was an intangible effect of the dead remaining overseas lost, however? Did the decision to scatter the remains of the war dead potentially hamper a veteran's ability to grieve his departed comrades? Lisa Budreau argues that "the democratic burial options offered to families, initially proposed to assuage their grief, also contributed to a massive diffusion of memory."⁴⁴ Some veterans would agree with Budreau's assertion. Decades after the war, British veteran George Coppard embarked on a tour of his old battlefields in France and periodically stopped at the CWGC cemeteries containing the remains of his buddies. The epilogue of his autobiography, *With a Machine Gun to Cambrai*, captures the effect of visiting those graves: "Sitting here along with my thoughts I feel a deep sympathy for these dear departed men who died so young. I recall how often I myself might have been enrolled in their lifeless ranks and perhaps lie with them in these quiet and beautiful cemeteries." Before leaving Coppard thought, "I am glad I came here alone and not in a crowd. If I had, I should not feel as I do now. I would not have recaptured my spiritual link with them, the dead soldiers... Though late in life I've experience a glimmer of youth and heard the voices of my young companions again."⁴⁵ British veterans had to travel to overseas cemeteries to visit the graves of their fallen comrades. American veterans might have to go overseas to visit the graves of their fallen comrades or they might find them in a national cemetery or a family plot within the United States.

The above conundrum – whether it is better for a government to compel military burials in foreign lands or provide the option of repatriation to grieving families – is just another of the

⁴⁴ Lisa Budreau, *Bodies of War: World War I and the Politics of Commemoration in America, 1919-1933*, (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 5.

⁴⁵ George Coppard, *With a Machine Gun to Cambrai: A Tale of a Young Tommy in Kitchener's Army 1914-1918*, (London: Imperial War Museum, 1980), 173 (both quotes).

new questions arising from this dissertation upon which future historians may engage themselves. Future studies might also examine the Franco-American commission, the role of bodies as a tool of negotiation, or whether the concentration on memorializing the dead was done to cover up the mistakes made during the war by living. The eleven dishonored dead are certainly worthy of additional study from a legal standpoint as well as through the lens of memory. In the meantime, we should reflect on the hard and difficult work completed by the Graves Registration Service in France and the Army's Quartermaster Corps' efforts to locate, identify, bury, repatriate, and honor the World War I dead.

When considering the void of policy or procedure to govern the burial and repatriation of the American Expeditionary Force on 6 April 1917, the efforts of the GRS seem near miraculous. In a matter of months, Charles Pierce formed an organization specifically tailored to care for the dead. Continuously reacting to situations on the ground, Pierce tirelessly worked to ensure that his GRS soldiers located the graves of all AEF dead and set conditions to retain identifications for future permanent burials in the United States.

Charles Pierce once wrote of his Graves Registration Service: "But the work that has befallen my department is one of the unpublished chapters of history. Suffice it to say that my men have displayed a splendid sort of heroism – worthy of the reddest blood stock in the world – and that I have had occasion to recommend a number of them for promotion and a number of them for the bestowal of the Distinguished Service Cross."⁴⁶ No higher praise could come from the man that built and led the organization during and immediately following the war. AEF commander John J. Pershing agreed, characterizing the GRS's work in a 28 March 1919 letter to Colonel Charles Pierce. He closed the letter by writing that the efforts of the GRS ensured a

⁴⁶ "Marking Graves is Task for Heroes," *San Anselmo (CA) Herald*, 22 November 1918.

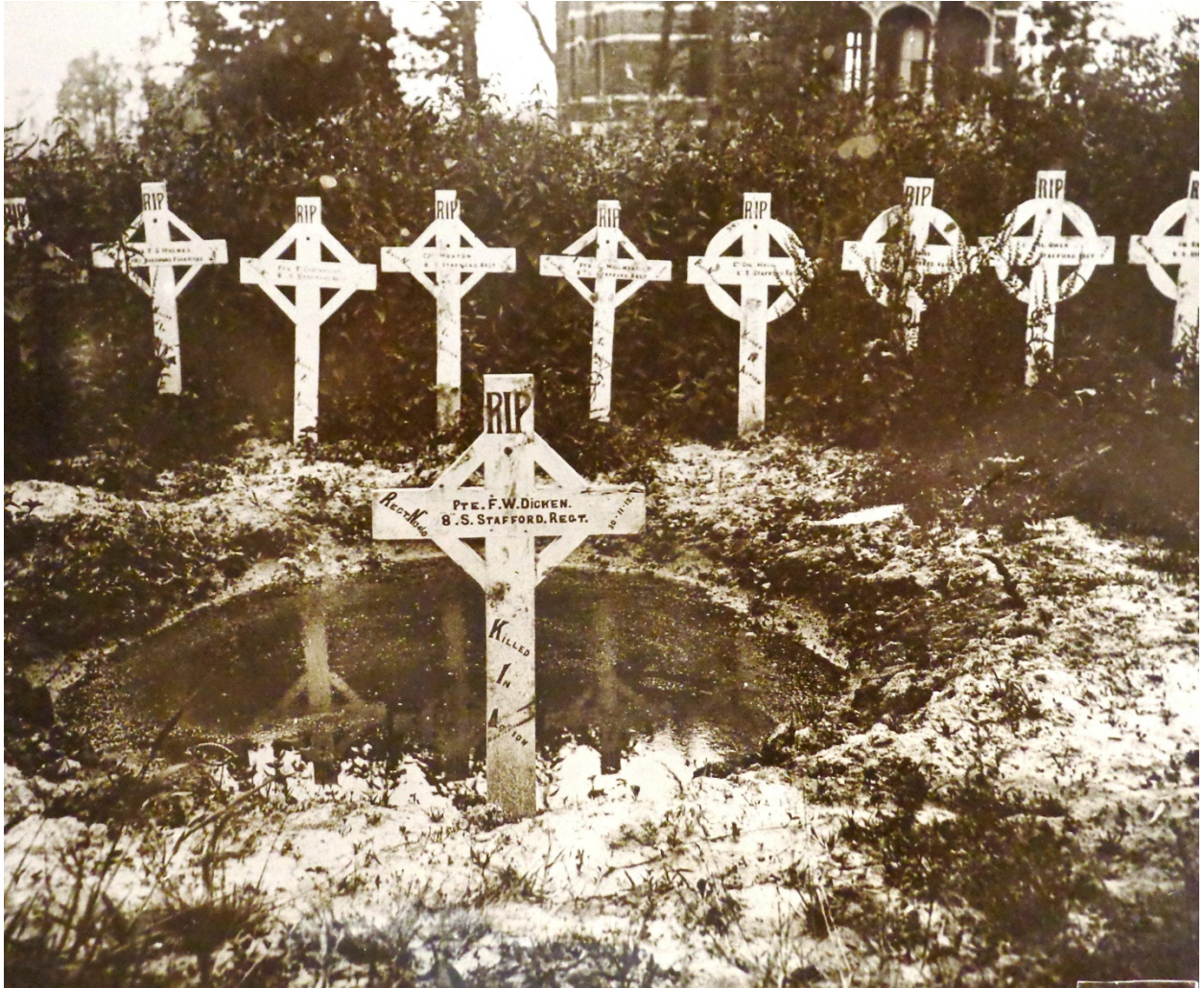
broad, sympathetic, and tireless “humanitarianism” that “will be a credit to our country forever.”⁴⁷

⁴⁷ John J. Pershing, letter to Charles Pierce, 28 March 1919, reproduced in the Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the First Session of the Sixty Sixth Congress, Part 7, 7159.

APPENDIX A
WWI IDENTIFICATION TAGS



APPENDIX B
BRITISH TEMPORARY GRAVE MARKERS



APPENDIX C

CHARLES PIERCE, CHIEF OF THE GRS



APPENDIX D

GRS BLANK

GRAVE LOCATION BLANK

LOCATION OF THE GRAVE OF

.....
(Surname.) (Number.) (First Name and Initials.)

.....
(Rank.) (Organization.)

DATE OF BURIAL.....

PLACE OF BURIAL.....

(Give Cemetery, Town and Department.) Map reference must specify clearly what map is used.

GRAVE NUMBER.....

HOW MARKED: Name Peg?..... Cross?.....

Headboard?..... Bottle?.....

IDENTIFICATION TAGS:

Was one buried with body?.....

Was one fastened to name peg or stake used as a grave marker?.....

If name unknown and tags missing, description and marks should be given here:

REPORTED BY:

.....
(Signature and Rank of Reporting Officer.)

This portion to be forwarded to Adj. Gen'l., G. H. Q., A. E. F.

APPENDIX E

POSTCARDS FOUND ON BODY OF PRIVATE IRVIN L. MARTIN

Feldpostkarte

No. (postnummer)

Please mail to
 Mrs L. P. Martin
 1890 Clifford Ave
 Rochester
 N.Y.

(Postnummer von Empfänger)

Abnehmer Name: _____
 (Nachschrift Spalte gratis nach Art vom Landwehr gesprochen
 Anmerkung beachten)

Sonstige Formationen:
 Bataillon, Abtheilung, Kompanie, Batterie, Eskadron

Regt. Nr. _____

Feldpostnummer auf der linken Seite von Armeekorps Divisionen und Brigaden und bei Kompanien, in deren Bezeichnung die Nummer eines Regiments vorkommt, nicht angegeben werden.

Deutsche Feldpost Nr. _____

Feldpostkarte

No. (postnummer)

Kinder Pleasemark
 To Mrs. Mansfield
 18 W. Maple St
 Newark
 N.J.

(Postnummer von Empfänger)

Abnehmer Name: _____
 (Nachschrift Spalte gratis nach Art vom Landwehr gesprochen
 Anmerkung beachten)

Sonstige Formationen:
 Bataillon, Abtheilung, Kompanie, Batterie, Eskadron

Regt. Nr. _____

Feldpostnummer auf der linken Seite von Armeekorps Divisionen und Brigaden und bei Kompanien, in deren Bezeichnung die Nummer eines Regiments vorkommt, nicht angegeben werden.

Deutsche Feldpost Nr. _____

Dear Alma: Oct. 16, '18
 This note in fond farewell
 should I fall on the field tomorrow
 please don't feel blue or sad
 as I go to a better home.
 Good by dear, Alma.
 Paul.

191

APPENDIX F

NOTEBOOK EXCERPT AND CHAPLAIN NOTICE OF BURIAL

Pfc. Turfitt, Charles H. 3134220 ✓
 Oct. 3/18 Buried Oct. 4/18 - 75.8 - 97.5
 Pl. Finnigan Cornelius J. 1698452 ✓
 Killed Oct. 3, 1918 Buried Oct. 4/18 - 75.8 - 97.5
 Pl. Hawkins, Joseph H. 1698471 ✓
 Killed Oct. 3/18 - Buried Oct. 3/18 - 97.95 - 75.5
 Pl. Anthoniah, Joseph 1677980 ✓
 Killed Oct. 1/18 - Buried Oct. 3/18 - 97.95 - 75.5
 Pl. Anderson, Richard O. 1681332 ✓
 Killed Oct. 3/18 Buried Oct. 5/18 - 98.00 - 75.5
 Paff, Herman L. 3703221 ✓
 Killed Oct. 3/18 Buried Oct. 4/18 - 98.00 - 75.5
 Pl. Daly, William L. 1681303 ?
 Killed Sept. 27/18 Buried ?
 Pl. Shanahan Michael 1698537 ✓
 Killed Oct. 3/18 75.8 - 97.5
 Pl. Callahan William E. 1698427
 Killed Oct. 3/18 Not Buried
 Pl. Hanson, Oscar M. 2786642
 Killed Oct. 3/18 Buried ?
 Pl. Brewbalt, Harry 1707037 ✓
 Killed Oct. 1/18 Buried ✓

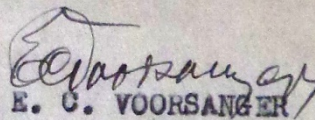
Headquarters, 77th Division
American E. F., Jan. 18 1919

Lieut. E. L. Beysen
305th Infantry
American E.F.

Dear Lieutenant Beysen:

Private David Danziger, No. 1 714 703,
Co. L., 305th Infantry, was buried by Chaplain Friedman, H. Q.,
77th Division, on November 10th 1918 at point 87.5 - 97.6
Buzancy Map No. 79.

Very sincerely yours


E. C. VOORSANGER
Senior Chaplain

ECV-jeer

APPENDIX G
ROUND AND SQUARE IDENTIFICATION TAGS



APPENDIX H
RED CROSS PHOTO EXAMPLE



NAME Ernest E. Marsh

RANK Private

SERVICE 95th Aero Squadron

Died in France ^{Dec 22,} ₁₉₁₇ ^λ

CEMETERY Issoudun



APPENDIX I
AD HOC GRAVE MARKER



APPENDIX J
TEMPORARY GRAVE MARKERS



APPENDIX K

QUENTIN ROOSEVELT CRASH SITE AND TEMPORARY GRAVE MARKER

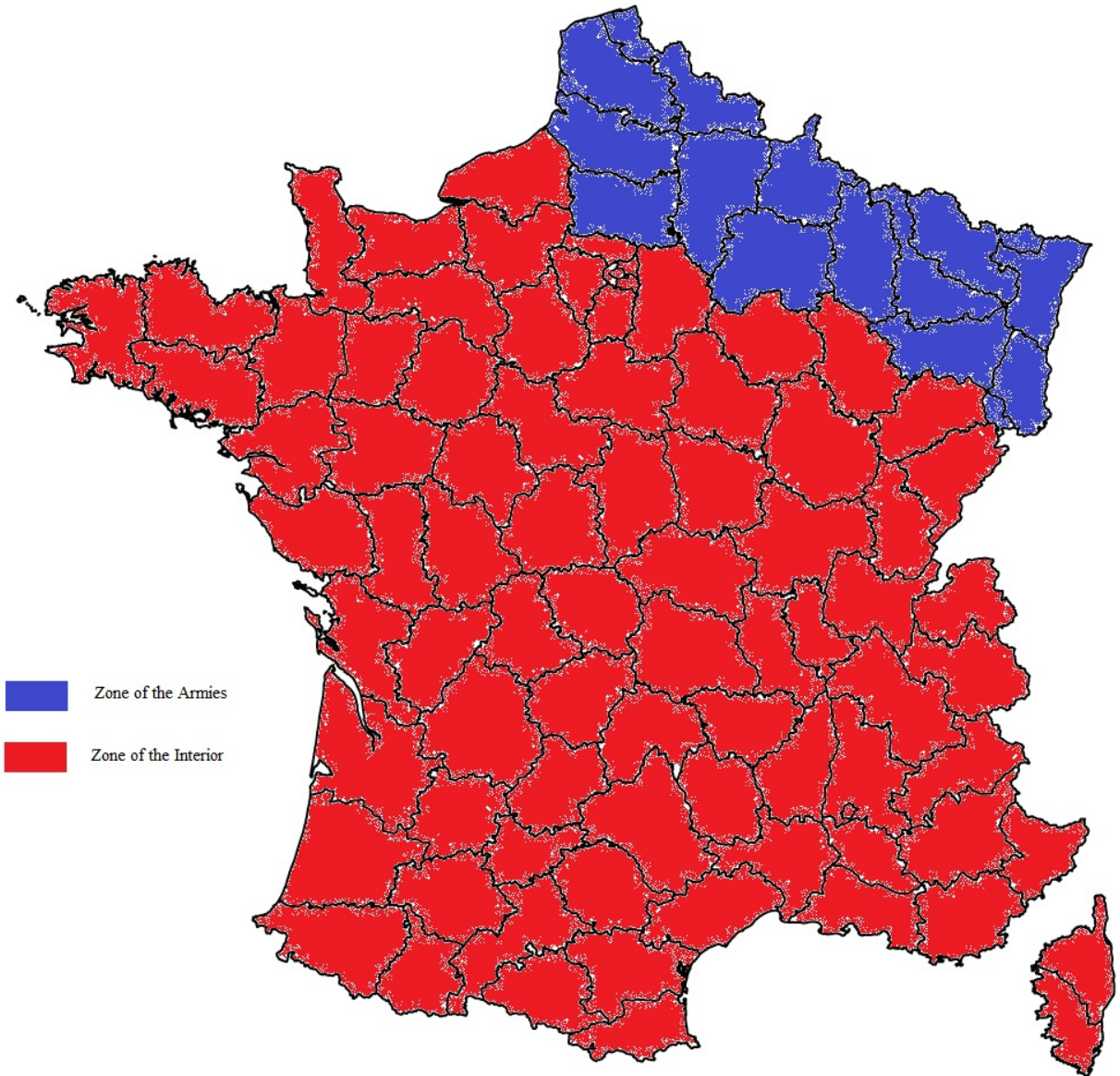






APPENDIX L

FRENCH ZONES OF THE ARMIES AND THE INTERIOR



APPENDIX M

MRS. DAVIS RECEIVES SON'S POSTHUMOUS DSC



APPENDIX N
MORTUARY FIRE GUARD



APPENDIX O

FLAG-DRAPED CASKETS OF USS *MAINE* VICTIMS AT ARLINGTON CEMETERY



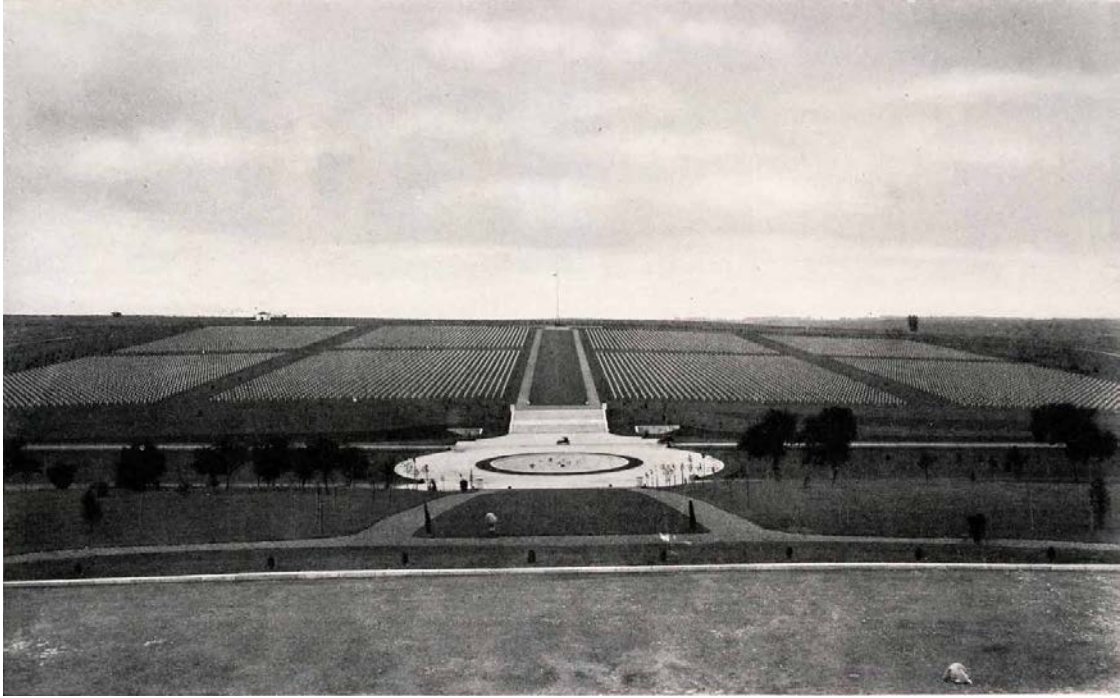
APPENDIX P

TEMPORARY GRAVE OF UNIDENTIFIED SOLDIER



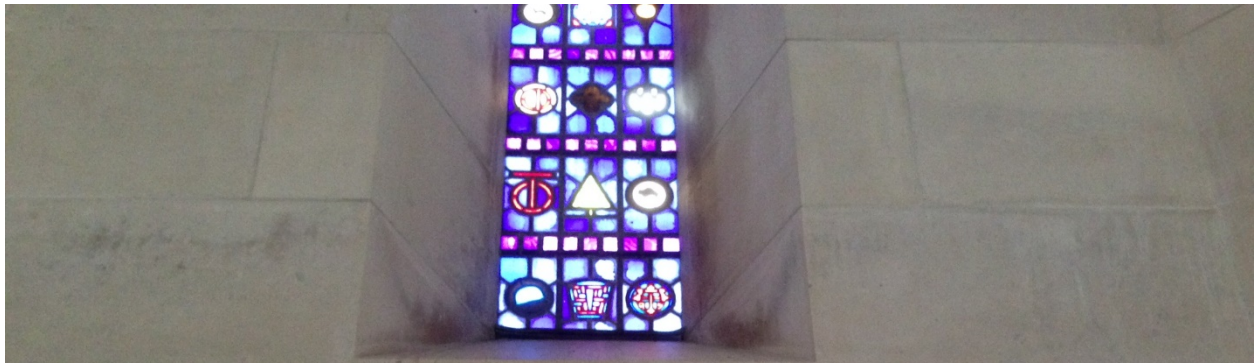
APPENDIX Q

MEUSE-ARGONNE AMERICAN CEMETERY



APPENDIX R

TABLET OF THE MISSING AT SOMME AMERICAN CEMETERY



HAPTEL HAS BEEN ERECTED BY THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA IN GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE OF HER SONS WHO DIED DURING THE WORLD WAR

ELD PAUL	2 ND LT	ATCHD	FR	AIR	SERVICE	AUG	15	1918	MICHIGAN
ER ALBERT E	SGT	301 ST	BN	TANK	CORPS	OCT	8	1918	PENNSYLVANIA
E JESSE	PVT	28 TH	INF		1 ST DIV	MAY	28	1918	WEST VIRGINIA
EDWARD H	1 ST LT	6 TH	ENGRS		3 RD DIV	MAR	30	1918	MASSACHUSETTS
CLAUD	PVT	106 TH	INF		27 TH DIV	SEPT	27	1918	NEBRASKA
EN LOUIS	1 ST LT	106 TH	INF		27 TH DIV	SEPT	26	1918	NEW YORK
ON FOLKE	COOK	6 TH	ENGRS		3 RD DIV	MAR	28	1918	MISSOURI
OD BIACCIO	PVT	107 TH	INF		27 TH DIV	SEPT	29	1918	NEW YORK
WILLIAM O	PVT	28 TH	INF		1 ST DIV	MAY	28	1918	WEST VIRGINIA
HENRY O	PVT	106 TH	INF		27 TH DIV	SEPT	27	1918	OHIO
NGELO	PVT	106 TH	INF		27 TH DIV	SEPT	27	1918	NEW YORK
ER GEORGE A	PVT	118 TH	INF		30 TH DIV	OCT	8	1918	TENNESSEE
JOHN R	SGT	28 TH	INF		1 ST DIV	MAY	28	1918	NEW YORK
ALTER	PVT	120 TH	INF		30 TH DIV	OCT	18	1918	NORTH CAROLINA
JOSEPH H	WAGONER	106 TH	INF		27 TH DIV	NOV	1	1918	NEW YORK
ILLIAM	PVT 1 ST CL	117 TH	INF		30 TH DIV	SEPT	29	1918	TENNESSEE
ALTER B	PVT	119 TH	INF		30 TH DIV	SEPT	29	1918	MINNESOTA
ETER	PVT	28 TH	INF		1 ST DIV	MAY	29	1918	WISCONSIN
LTON	PVT	11 TH	ENGINEERS			NOV	30	1917	NEW YORK
DWARD L	PVT 1 ST CL	108 TH	INF		27 TH DIV	NOV	4	1918	NEW YORK
RD	PVT	106 TH	INF		27 TH DIV	SEPT	28	1918	NEW YORK
RGE	PVT	120 TH	INF		30 TH DIV	OCT	18	1918	KENTUCKY
NDREW	PVT	117 TH	INF		30 TH DIV	OCT	8	1918	TENNESSEE
	PVT	28 TH	INF		1 ST DIV	MAY	29	1918	MICHIGAN
M	PVT	119 TH	INF		30 TH DIV	SEPT	29	1918	NORTH CAROLINA
L	PVT	6 TH	ENGRS		3 RD DIV	MAR	29	1918	INDIANA
HONY	PVT 1 ST CL	106 TH	INF		27 TH DIV	SEPT	27	1918	NEW YORK
ERICK W	2 ND LT	106 TH	INF		27 TH DIV	SEPT	27	1918	NEW YORK

APPENDIX S

PHOTO OF THOMAS F. MORRISEY'S GRAVE AT SOMME AMERICAN CEMETERY





APPENDIX T
GRAVESTONES OF DECORATED SOLDIERS



APPENDIX U

JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN GRAVES FOR UNIDENTIFIED SOLDIERS





APPENDIX V

JOSEPH CARO PHOTO OF CLIFFORD HOWE



APPENDIX W

ANNA WINBERG'S GSM ID AND PASSPORT



WAR MOTHERS
AND WIDOWS
OFFICIAL CERTIFICATE
OF IDENTIFICATION



PILGRIMAGE

No. 113

PASSPORT



UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

WAR MOTHERS AND WIDOWS
PILGRIMAGE

Official
Certificate of Identification

SERIAL No. 6487

ISSUED BY

THE SECRETARY OF WAR

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

WAR DEPARTMENT,
WASHINGTON, D. C.

This is the OFFICIAL CERTIFICATE OF IDENTIFICATION for the War Mothers and Widows Pilgrimage to Europe in 1931, issued by THE SECRETARY OF WAR.

Anna Winberg

has been granted Government Transportation to Europe and is entitled to this Certificate in accordance with special regulations issued by THE SECRETARY OF WAR.

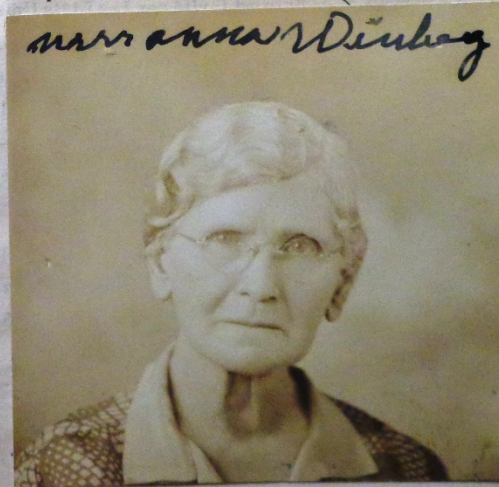
J. L. DEWITT,
The Quartermaster General.

R. E. Shannon
BY
Captain, Q. M. Corps.

DESCRIPTION OF BEARER

Minn.

Residence *716 First St. N. E., Little Falls*
Date of birth *Dec. 17, 1866*
Place of birth *Sweden*
Age _____ years; Sex **Female**
Height *5* ft *4* in.; Weight _____ lbs.
Hair *Gray* Eyes *Blue*
Complexion _____
Scars, etc. _____
Occupation _____



No. 148

Special Pilgrimage

Passport

(Act of March 2, 1929)



United States of America
Department of State



I, the undersigned, Secretary of State of the United States of America, hereby request all whom it may concern to permit safely and freely to pass, and in case of need to give all lawful aid and protection to

ANNA WINBERG

a citizen of the United States.

The bearer is accompanied by his Wife, XXX

Minor children, XXX

XXX



Given under my hand and the seal of the Department of State at Washington, MAR. 12TH 1933

Cancelled

Description of bearer

Height 5 feet 4 inches

Hair GRAY

Eyes BLUE

Distinguishing marks or features:

XXX

CANCELLED

Place of birth SWEDEN

XXX

Date of birth DEC. 17, 1866

Occupation XXX

XXX

XXX

XXX

Signature of bearer

Photograph of bearer



This passport is valid only for Special Pilgrimage authorized under the Act of March 1929.

1933



APPENDIX X

ANNA WINBERG'S GOLD STAR MOTHERS' MEDAL



*Official
Certificate of Identification*

SERIAL No. 6487



APPENDIX Y

ANNA WINBERG AND MEMBERS OF PARTY B ABOARD SS *WASHINGTON*



APPENDIX Z

ANNA WINBERG AT SON'S GRAVE



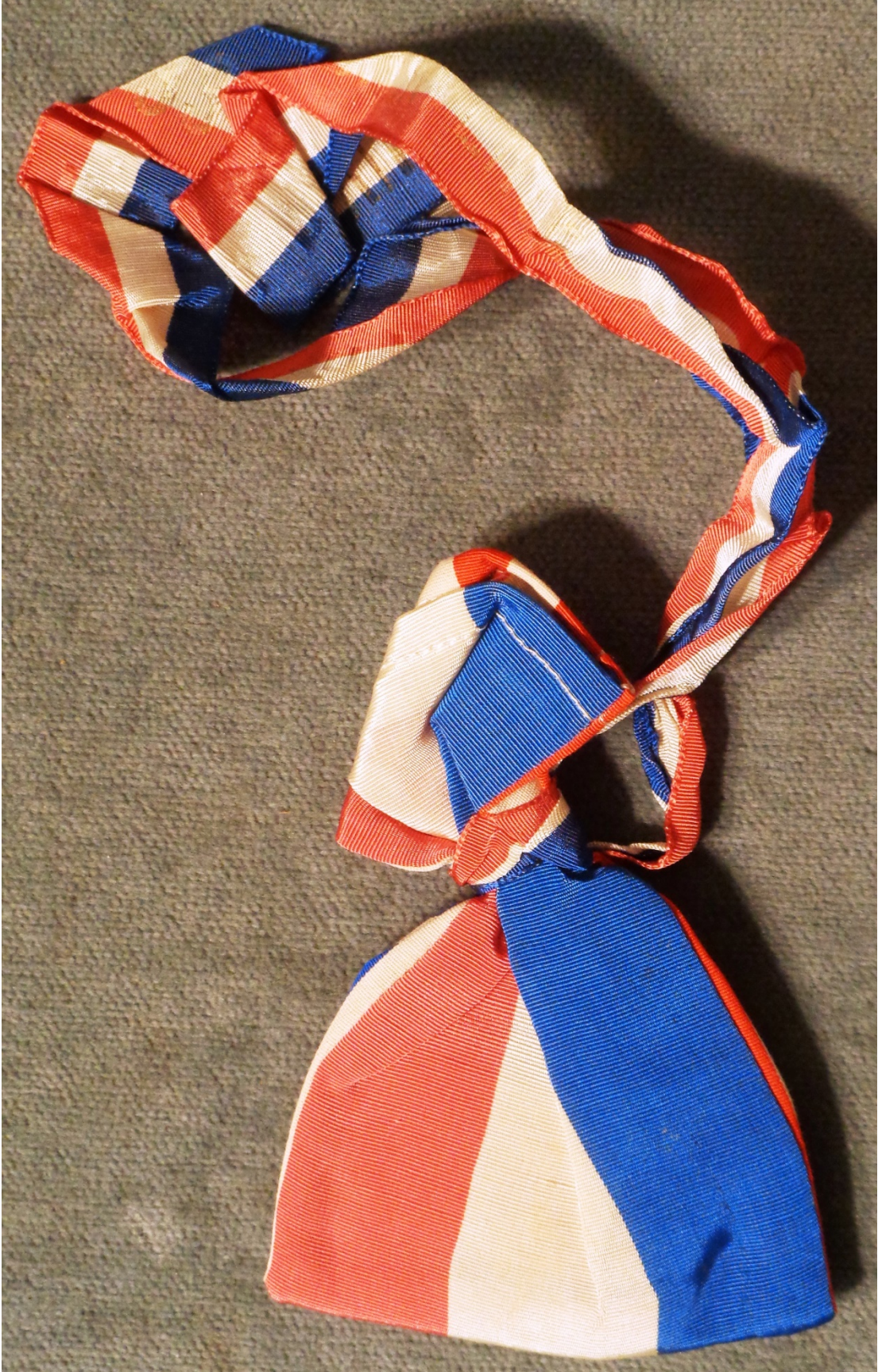
APPENDIX AA

ANNA WINBERG OUTSIDE OF NOTRE-DAME



APPENDIX BB

BAG OF FRENCH SOIL PRESENTED TO ANNA WINBERG





APPENDIX CC

GRAVESTONE OF FRANK CADUE WITH HONORABLE SERVICE MARKER



APPENDIX DD

ABMC ONLINE MEMORIAL FOR CHARLES WITHAM

 Liked ▾  Following ▾  Share  ...



 Like  Comment  Share 

   510

Oldest ▾

262 Shares



Tom Beatty RIP, you are not forgotten. (Prayer) 2

Like · Reply · 11h



Jos Castro Rip 1

Like · Reply · 11h



Elizabeth Powell R.I.P. 1

Like · Reply · 11h



Allen Vorhees THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE SIR R I P

Like · Reply · 11h



Monica Helen Nygård RIP 1

Like · Reply · 11h



Frankie Whitecloud MANY THANKS, RIP. SIR. HCN.

Like · Reply · 11h

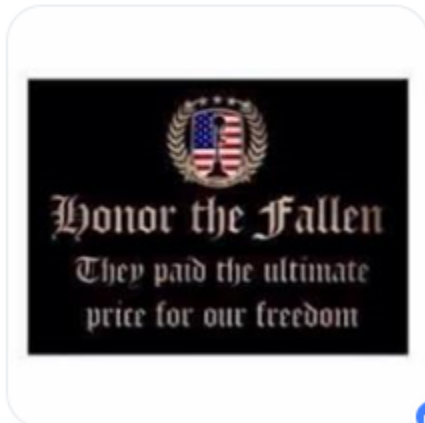


Michael Bone Salute 1

Like · Reply · 11h



Rajesh Barigat





Like · Reply · 11h



Michel Cantinaux RIP 1


 **Michel Cantinaux** RIP  1
Like · Reply · 11h

 **Marshall Williams** Respect  1
Like · Reply · 11h



 **Carlos Vulgamore** Thank you for your service. Prayers for your family. R. I. P.  2
Like · Reply · 10h



 **Shawn Musselman** Taps Slow Salute Sir.



 2
Like · Reply · 10h

 **Albert Miner** Rip  1
Like · Reply · 10h

 **Mary Jo Adams** Thank you for your service. Rest In Peace   1
Like · Reply · 10h

 **Eugene Nordt** Lex Ford thinking you might like this page if you are not familiar with it  2
Like · Reply · 10h

 **Corky Thatcher**

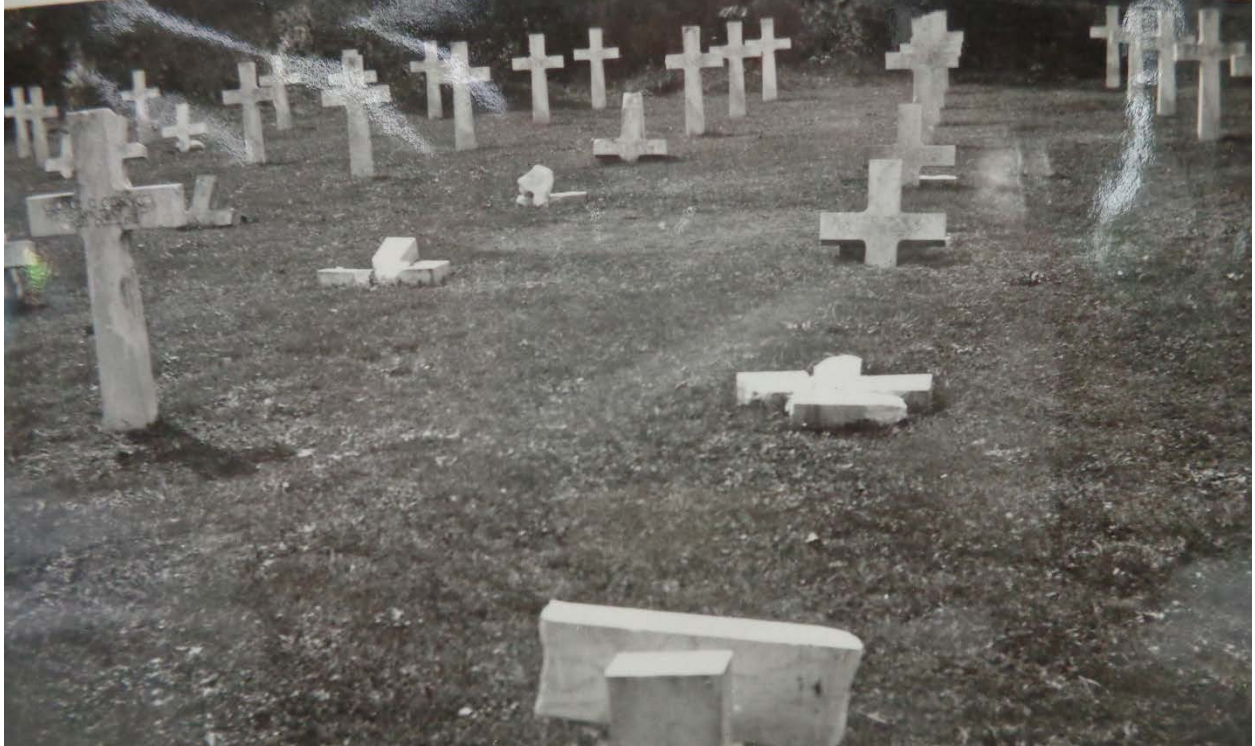


 1
Like · Reply · 10h

 **Patrick Connolly** God bless you sir  1

APPENDIX EE

1940 DAMAGE TO AISNE-MARNE CEMETERY



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Archival Sources

Army Heritage and Education Center: Carlisle, PA.

Edward C. Jones Research Center: Kansas City, MO.

40.4.11: Copies of KCPL Collection.

2000.30 Estella Kendall Collection.

2002.50: Francis X. Fraas Collection.

2013.135: Carl Fred Musbach Collection.

2012.94: Julia C. Underwood Collection.

Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archive

The Congressional Record

Liberty Memorial Association Records.

Library of Congress

National Air and Space Museum

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National Archives II: College Park, MD.

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