

**Tomb of the Unknowns**

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- A. Brigadier General William D. Connor
- B. Public Resolution 67

II. The task

- A. Lorimer Rich
- B. Construction cost

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### The Tomb of the Unknowns

The United States Army has been the only military service since 25 March 1926 to guard the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Brigadier General William D. Connor suggested the concept of honoring our unknown war dead and Congressman Hamilton Fish, Jr., of New York introduced Public Resolution 67 of the 66<sup>th</sup> Congress on 21 December 1920. On 4 March 1921, Congress approved the resolution and declared 11 November 1921 a legal holiday to honor all those who participated in World War I (“Where did the Idea”).

The task to design and sculpt the Tomb belonged to Lorimer Rich and Thomas H. Jones. The construction cost for the sarcophagus, made entirely out of White Yule Marble, was \$48,000. The symbolism on the final design is truly amazing. On opposite ends of the Tomb, both north and south, you can find 6 inverted wreaths, representing both mourning and the six main battle campaigns of the First World War: Somme, Oisiu-Eiseu, Ardenne, Chateau-Terrie, Belleauwood, and Meusse-Argonne. On the East side of the Tomb, which is off limits to visitors, are three figures representing Peace, Victory and Valor. Peace, the first figure on the far left, has a dove in her left hand. Valor, the third figure on the far right, has a broken sword in his hands and is facing Victory. In the middle is Victory, holding the hand of Peace and extending an olive branch towards Valor. This signifies the sacrifice, loyalty, and courage to make the grounds of righteousness triumphant. On the Tombs West end, there is an inscription: *Here Rests In Honored Glory an American Soldier Known but To God* (“Where did the Idea”).

The mission of the Tomb Guard is to maintain the highest of military standards while preserving the traditions of the United States Army and the Nation. The Tomb Guard must keep a constant vigil at the national shrine and prevent any desecration or disrespect directed toward the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (“Who are the”).

Standing watch over the Tomb of the Unknowns is one of the premier honors for a Soldier in the United States Army. The Tomb of the Unknowns is run strictly by Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs). Only enlisted Soldiers in the ranks of Private through Sergeant First Class are eligible to participate in the rigorous Tomb Guard selection process. A Soldier wishing to serve as a sentinel must possess exemplary qualities and a spotless record. Soldiers must possess impeccable military bearing and present a Soldierly appearance in the Army Blue Uniform. All Soldiers must be 5’11 – 6’4 in height and have a 30 inch waist. Once selected, each Tomb Guard is responsible for memorizing vast amounts of knowledge about the Regiment, the Army, and the Tomb of the Unknowns. All Soldiers must retain detailed information on over 150 different grave sites, 12 poems, and the complete history of Arlington National Cemetery (“Specialty Platoons”).

The Guard of Honor, Tomb of the Unknowns has six levels of responsibility: the Sentinel, the Assistant Relief Commander, Relief Commander, Assistant Sergeant of the Guard, Sergeant of the Guard, and Platoon Leader. The Tomb Guard Platoon is made up like a Light Infantry Squad. The Platoon has nine enlisted Soldiers which make up three Relief’s or teams all commanded by a Staff Sergeant. Soldiers are assigned to the Relief based on their height, with the tallest Soldiers being assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Relief. Each Relief has an Assistant Relief Commander and four Sentinels. The Sergeant of the

Guard, Assistant of the Sergeant of the Guard, Primary Trainer, and a Driver are all assigned to the Headquarter Relief for the ease of mission coordination (“Who are the”).

The Tomb Guards are assigned to Fort Myer, Virginia in the legendary 3d U.S. Infantry (The Old Guard). The nickname “The Old Guard” originates from General Winfield Scott who gave 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 3d U.S. Infantry the name during a bayonet charge on the Mexican citadel in 1847. The Old Guard dates back to 1784 and is the oldest Infantry unit in the Army. The Old Guard is known for their tough standards which are set for the entire Regiment. Each Soldier must serve six months within the Old Guard prior to entering the rigorous Tomb Guard selection process (“The Unknown”).

Duty as Tomb Guard is both meaningful and symbolic. Each Sentinel executes movements with precision and meticulous attention to detail. In front of the Tomb of the Unknowns is a 63-foot rubber walkway that each Sentinel crosses in exactly 21 steps. The Sentinel executes facing movements in a timed pattern. Each time the Sentinel crosses the walkway they sharply face the Tomb and pause for 21 seconds. They then execute another sharp facing movement, pause for an additional 21 seconds and finally retrace their steps across the walkway (“Frequently Asked”).

“The 21 is symbolic of the highest salute according to dignitaries in military and state ceremonies. As a gesture against intrusion on their post, the sentinel always bears his weapon away from the Tomb. Only under exceptional circumstances may the guard speak or alter his silent, measured tour of duty. If anyone attempts to enter the restricted area around the Tomb the Guard will halt and bring his rifle to port arms and issue a warning (Statue’s)”.

The Army Dress Blue Uniform is the duty uniform for the Tomb Guard. The distinguished colors of the dress uniform are symbolic to the uniforms worn in the late 1800's. Each member of the Honor Guard, Tomb of the Unknowns proudly displays their Tomb Identification Badge on the right breast pocket of their uniform. The badge is designed with an inverted open laurel wreath. The wreath is surrounding a representation of the front side of the Tomb with the base of the badge displaying the words "Honor Guard". Currently, there have only been 500 badges issued since the establishment of the organization in 1950. The badge becomes a permanent part of the uniform if a Tomb Guard serves at least nine months within the organization. Soldiers who earn the privilege of wearing the badge must maintain the utmost conduct both on and off duty. Any situation which brings discredit to the Tomb of the Unknowns is cause for badge revocation by the Regimental Commander ("Specialty Platoons").

In summary, the Tomb of the Unknowns is a place where America has buried it's brave but unidentified war dead. The Soldiers who are buried in the Tomb represent the missing and unknowns from at least four different wars. The Plaza at the Arlington National Cemetery gives the families a place to grieve and pray for the Soldiers who have lost their life in the defense of the nation. The Tomb Guard stands on diligent watch over the gravesite in humble reverence. The mission of the Sentient is to pull security so that the Unknowns can rest in peace. The Tomb is a representation of how committed American Soldiers truly are in fulfillment of their mission. The Soldiers resting in the Tomb have given their lives and their identities for our freedom and way of life while the Tomb Guard dedicates their lives to be identified with the Tomb.

## Works Cited

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