



ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

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FACT SHEET

NOVEMBER 2021

The 1921 Procession for the World War I Unknown Soldier

On November 11, 1921, ceremonies for the World War I Unknown Soldier's funeral began with a large procession from the U.S. Capitol (where the Unknown had lain in state since the afternoon of November 9) to Memorial Amphitheater at Arlington National Cemetery. This November 11, the centennial commemoration of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier features a [joint full honors procession](#) that will evoke elements of the 1921 event. The 2021 procession will take place entirely within Arlington National Cemetery. Like the procession of a century ago, it will include representatives from all military service branches, as well as military attachés from nine nations that took part in the 1921 ceremony. Also like the 1921 procession, it will be [open to the public](#).

At 8:00 a.m. on November 11, 1921, the procession began to form on the east steps of the Capitol. Around 8:30, the Unknown's casket was placed on a horse-drawn caisson, which would be escorted west through the streets of Washington, D.C. to Arlington National Cemetery. Thousands of spectators lined the streets to watch the grand military procession, and American flags adorned streetlights and storefronts. Though the event was clearly patriotic, its tone was somber and respectful rather than celebratory. The 1921 ceremonies for the Unknown represented a national moment of mourning—for those in attendance along the procession route and at Arlington, along with millions of others who listened to broadcasts or subsequently watched newsreel coverage of the events.

The route of the procession proceeded west from the Capitol along Pennsylvania Avenue. When it passed the White House, President Warren Harding, Vice President Calvin Coolidge and other dignitaries broke off and traveled the rest of the way by car. Those on foot then continued down Pennsylvania Avenue to M Street, crossing the Aqueduct Bridge (near today's Key Bridge) into Arlington. After passing through Fort Myer, the procession entered Arlington National Cemetery on the northwest side, culminating at Memorial Amphitheater around 11:40 a.m.

Procession participants included members of all military service branches, political dignitaries, veterans from every U.S. conflict since the Civil War (including representatives of the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and groups of Jewish and African American veterans), Medal of Honor recipients, and civilian organizations that represented a wide swath of American society. Army General H.H. Bandholtz, commanding general of the Military District of Washington, had overseen the procession's planning and execution, and he marched at its head as escort commander. The U.S. Army band marched behind him, followed by an Army battalion from Fort Washington, Maryland; a combined Navy and Marine battalion from the Washington Navy Yard; an engineer battalion from the D.C. National Guard; and artillery and cavalry battalions from Fort Myer.



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Next came the four military chaplains who would participate in the funeral service: Right Reverend Charles H. Brent, the Army's senior chaplain during the war; Chaplain Morris S. Lazaron, a Jewish rabbi; Navy Chaplain John B. Frasier; and Army Chief of Chaplains John T. Axton.

The Unknown's caisson followed the chaplains, escorted by eight body-bearers and twelve honorary pallbearers. Immediately behind the caisson marched General John J. Pershing (commander of the American Expeditionary Forces during World War I), President Harding, Vice President Coolidge, Chief Justice William Howard Taft and associate justices of the Supreme Court, members of the Cabinet, and members of the Senate and the House of Representatives. Distinguished military officers escorted these dignitaries; Pershing served as President Harding's military escort. Former President Woodrow Wilson, ailing at the time, arrived late and joined the procession after the contingent of Medal of Honor recipients.

Importantly, the procession also included a large, diverse civilian contingent. More than 40 civic groups participated: patriotic and hereditary societies, community service organizations, and women's groups such as the American War Mothers. Indeed, women were especially prominent, reflecting their leadership role in commemorative activities. Nurses who had served in or with the U.S. military during World War I also marched in the procession.

From its origins, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier has served as a people's memorial. In 1921, the ceremonies for the World War I Unknown's burial unified the country in a national moment of mourning. These democratic, participatory events created an enduring set of traditions at the new Tomb. By evoking elements of the 1921 procession, this year's centennial joint full honors procession will once again allow the American public to come together to honor and remember all who have served and sacrificed, whether known or unknown.

For more information on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier Centennial Commemoration, please visit arlingtoncemetery.mil/Tomb100 and follow our social media @ArlingtonNatl.