

Lodge 758 Plays Important Role at Arlington Veterans Day, 2006

Story and Photos by Muriel Sue Kerr, PR Chair

VETERANS DAY - November 11, is the anniversary of the Armistice which was signed in the Forest of Compiègne by the Allies and the Germans in 1918, ending World War I, after four years of conflict.

In 1921, the American Unknown Soldier, symbolizing all the unknown dead, was chosen in an unusual way. Six soldiers of the American Army of Occupation in Germany were selected from different sectors to act as pallbearers. They met at Chalons-sur-Marne, and were interviewed by Gen. Rogers. Next day, Sgt Edward F. Younger of the 59th Inf. was asked to make a choice among four caskets, with unidentified bodies disinterred from American cemeteries at Bony, Belleau Wood, Romagne, and Thiaucourt. When the Sergeant was ready to perform his solemn duty, he received a bouquet of white roses, with instructions to proceed into the City Hall at Chalons, where the four caskets stood. Younger after bowing his head, he walked around the coffins three times. On the fourth round, he seemed involuntarily drawn to the second one. Reverently, he laid the roses on it, saluted and reported to his commanding officer that he had accomplished his mission. The body of the Unknown Soldier was brought home on the cruiser, Olympia, reaching Washington, D.C., on November 9, 1921. For three days thousands of people passed by as the body lay in state in the rotunda of the Capitol. For this important Armistice Day in 1921, President Harding requested that flags be flown from sunrise to sunset at half mast, and that all Americans pay silent tribute as the casket was lowered into the tomb at 11 A. M. on November 11, 1921. On the plain recognizable white marble tomb, these words are carved: **Here rests in honored glory - An American Soldier Known but to God**

Being part of the more than five thousand in attendance during the traditional Arlington National Cemetery program outside Washington, DC, Lodge 758 ER, Kathryn Redman, along with Lodge Officers Tom Baker and Anke Baker found there way to their reserved box seats. Their box in the Amphitheater was just 4 boxes away from President Bush. For those attending the program for the first time, it is difficult not to be a little choked up when you see the Procession of Colors, hear the U.S. Marine Band perform, and stand tall as the 21-gun salute announces the arrival and the departure of the President.



Following the Veterans Day Program, members of our Lodge had accepted an invitation to attend the Fifty-Third Annual Veterans Day National Reception, hosted this year by the Military Order of the Purple Heart. Everyone was keeping a close eye on the time because our ER, Kathryn Redman, was to be a guest speaker at the General John J. Pershing Memorial Service.

The weather was extraordinary as Ms. Redman and the Lodge visitors arrived at Section 34 on Pershing Drive in Arlington National Cemetery. She was greeted by the LTC Shehab and Col. Rice, officers with the Military Order of the World Wars. The MOWW took over the Pershing Program more than ten years ago when the Veterans of World War One could no longer handle the preparation necessary each year.

Kathryn took her seat on the dais and was probably a little nervous as she re-read to herself, the speech so carefully prepared. The U.S. Army Band, Pershing's Own, played World War One music, as the visiting Embassy dignitaries made their way to their seats. It's not often you get the opportunity to address the Allied Nations of the First World War at the gravesite of the General of the Armies before several hundred guests.



The Armed Forces Color Guard advanced the colors and the program began sharply at 3 pm as it has for more than 40 years.

What made this year even more special to the ELKS Lodge 758, the National Commander of the Veterans of World War One, Frank Buckles, was in attendance. He is a young 106 year old who lied about his age to get in the service. And coming from West Virginia, just as our ER does, they struck a friendship up very quickly.

Roger:

This was published 4 years ago in the ECHO. It is the story of the WW I Veterans Association and the last living WW I Vet who was buried recently at Arlington Cemetery. I thought it might be newsworthy.

Jim Estep, PDDGER