

THE  
UNKNOWN  
SERVICEMAN  
OF THE  
VIETNAM  
ERA

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THE UNKNOWN  
SERVICEMAN  
OF THE  
VIETNAM ERA

by  
William M. Hammond



Center of Military History  
United States Army  
Washington, D.C., 1985



*On Memorial Day, 28 May 1984, the remains of the Vietnam Unknown were laid to rest beside the Unknowns of World War I and II and Korea at the Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington National Cemetery.*

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
WASHINGTON

## Foreword

On Memorial Day 1984, the Unknown American who lost his life in the service of his country during the war in Vietnam joined the Unknowns from World War I, World War II, and the Korean War in Arlington National Cemetery. Representing the more than 57,000 servicemen and women who died or are still unaccounted for in Southeast Asia, the hero was accorded a state funeral befitting the Nation's Great and presented the Medal of Honor by the President of the United States.

The following word-and-picture history depicts the planning and execution of the Vietnam Unknown's final journey. All branches of the military cooperated in the preparations with the Department of the Army as the executive agent for the Department of Defense. The arrangements for the interment ceremonies at Arlington were handled by the Military District of Washington.

It is my hope that these honors have brought solace to all those Americans who have lost loved ones, killed or missing, in Vietnam, and that these honors will renew the spirit of dedication that has always been a mark of the American character.

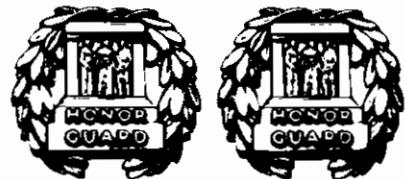
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Caspar W. Weinberger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'C' at the beginning.

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SECTION I



HISTORICAL  
REVIEW



## Precedents

On 28 May 1984, the remains of an unknown American serviceman of the Vietnam War were laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery. Entombed beside the Unknowns of World Wars I and II and the Korean War, the serviceman became the representative of all who had died or were still unaccounted for in Southeast Asia and a symbol of his nation's sorrow and gratitude.

The practice of honoring the dead and missing in battle goes back to ancient times. The Greek historian Thucydides relates that during the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta the people of Athens honored their dead, as had their ancestors, with a great funeral procession at which they reserved one empty bier to symbolize those of the fallen who were missing. The custom revived in Europe at the end of World War I. On the second anniversary of the armistice ending that conflict, 11 November 1920, England and France dedicated tombs to the memory of their missing and unidentified dead. Although other Allied nations followed with similar ceremonies, the United States held back until the U.S. Army's Graves Registration Service identified most of the American dead. On 4 March 1921 Congress approved the construction of a simple tomb in Arlington Cemetery and the return for suitable honors of an unknown American serviceman killed in France. The ceremonies consecrating the memorial took place on 11 November of that year. President Warren G. Harding presented the Medal of Honor to the Unknown and delivered a eulogy.

Congress approved the designation of an Unknown Soldier for World War II on 24 June 1946. Leaving five years for the Graves Registration Service to do its work thoroughly, the lawmakers prescribed 30 May 1951 as the date for the burial. Planning began immediately for an expansion of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, but when the Korean War broke out in November 1950, President Harry S. Truman postponed the interment. The project lay dormant

until 1955, when Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson, at the urging of the American Veterans of World War II, directed the Army to proceed. As planning for the project progressed, Congress passed a bill on 3 August 1956 providing for the selection and simultaneous burial of an Unknown Soldier for the Korean War.

The ceremony marking the interment of the two Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery occurred on Memorial Day, 30 May 1958. Both had lain in state since 28 May in the Rotunda of the Capitol at Washington before traveling by caisson to Arlington Cemetery, where President Dwight D. Eisenhower awarded each the Medal of Honor. After a solemn military service both were laid to rest beside the Unknown Soldier of World War I.



## The Directive

On 18 June 1973, shortly after the last American troops withdrew from South Vietnam, Congress directed the Secretary of Defense to select the remains of an unidentified American serviceman killed in the war for burial in the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington. It seemed reasonable that among all the casualties of the war the military services would find an Unknown, but scientists at the U.S. Army's Central Identification Laboratory at Honolulu had managed to name all but a few of the American dead and remained confident that they would ultimately identify the rest.

Complicating the process of selection was the fact that the government of Vietnam had failed to render a full accounting of the hundreds of American servicemen who were known to have fallen into its hands during the war. Over the years, the families of those servicemen had pressed for some official word of their relatives' fate, and they objected to the declaration of an Unknown for the Vietnam War on the grounds that the act would almost certainly diminish

official efforts to recover the missing — in effect, symbolizing to all concerned that the war was over and that the issue was no longer important. In addition, they understandably sought assurances that the individual to be interred was truly unidentifiable. In 1982, those families convinced the administration of President Ronald Reagan to postpone selection of an Unknown on grounds that the few bodies that remained unnamed might still be identified. By 1984, however, with all possibilities exhausted, the Central Identification Laboratory concluded that one of the two sets of remains still in its possession would never be identified. After close consultation with the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia, President Reagan decided to go ahead with the designation and interment of an Unknown. He assured the families that the ceremony would not close the book on the POW/MIA issue.

On 13 April 1984, Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger announced the decision to proceed, stressing that the Reagan administration would continue its efforts to gain the fullest possible accounting for those still missing to end the uncertainty for their families. Although the occasion would be of great significance to Americans, especially to those who had served in Vietnam, he said, "We must remember, there are almost 2,500 Americans still missing in Southeast Asia. For their families, the uncertainty and the pain continues. Our duty to them should be strengthened by this ceremony. The resolution of the fate of those gallant men still missing is, as the President has stated, a matter of highest national priority."



## Resumption of the Project

In announcing resumption of the project, Secretary Weinberger set Memorial Day, 28 May 1984, as the date of interment for the Unknown and desig-

nated the Department of the Army as his executive agent. The Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, William R. Gianelli, provided oversight for the Secretary of the Army, John O. Marsh, Jr., while the Commanding General of the Military District of Washington, Maj. Gen. John L. Ballantyne, made the necessary arrangements. Serving as point of contact for all the agencies involved in the funeral, Ballantyne's Director of Ceremonies, Paul C. Miller, assisted by Lt. Col. Thomas L. Groppel and James L. Albright, prepared the plans and supervised the conduct of the services.

Beginning in Hawaii, proceeding to California, and culminating in Washington, D.C., the funeral was to draw upon the resources of each of the United States' military services. After formal designation in Hawaii on 17 May, the Unknown would travel from Honolulu to San Francisco aboard the U.S. Navy frigate U.S.S. *Brewton*, which had been named for a hero of the Vietnam War, Lt. (jg.) John C. Brewton. The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter *Storis* would serve as escort during the first fifty miles of the journey; the cutter *Midget* would take up position beside the *Brewton* fifty miles off the coast of California. Arriving at Alameda Naval Air Station in Alameda, California on 24 May, the *Brewton* would transfer the remains to shore units, which would convey them by cor-tege to the chapel at Travis Air Force Base. After a brief period of public viewing, they would travel by air to Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland. The Unknown would then lie in state for three days in the Capitol at Washington before interment at the Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington National Cemetery.

Unparalleled since the funeral of President John F. Kennedy in 1963, the observances required extensive preparations. Before the formal announcement, the Military District of Washington received advance word that the Department of Defense might shortly designate an Unknown for the Vietnam War. Preparations began immediately, especially within the command's Directorate of Ceremonies and Special Events, where James Albright drafted a plan for the interment, and its office of communications, which had responsibility for providing radio and telephone circuits to support the operation. In January 1984, the command's Office of Resources Management set aside \$30,000 as a contingency fund to cover initial expenses.

Shortly after Secretary Weinberger announced plans for the funeral, the Defense Department decided to give the national commanders of the major American veterans organizations the opportunity to take the place of the fam-

ily of the deceased in the services, a very great honor. The Veterans Administration received the task of assuring that veterans organizations were properly represented. It delegated the effort to the President's Veterans Day National Committee, a group composed of the national commanders of all the major veterans organizations in the United States. The committee decided to invite the members of its executive board to participate. They represented the Veterans of Foreign Wars, AMVETS, the Blinded Veterans Association, the American Legion, the Military Order of the Purple Heart, the Veterans of World War I of the USA, the Marine Corps League, the Paralyzed Veterans of America, the Legion of Valor, the Congressional Medal of Honor Society, the Disabled American Veterans, and the American Ex-Prisoners of War. In addition, representatives from five national organizations whose membership had been intimately involved in the Vietnam War were invited. They were the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia, the American Gold Star Mothers, Gold Star Wives of America, Vietnam Veterans of America, and the United Vietnam Veterans Organization. The National League of Families declined to participate officially but allowed its members to join in the observances if they wished. Many did attend.

Preparations began in earnest shortly after Secretary Weinberger's formal announcement. During the first week of May, the House and Senate issued legislation authorizing the Military District of Washington to use the Capitol Rotunda for the lying in state. At the request of the secretaries of the military departments, they also approved the award of the Medal of Honor to the Unknown in honor of the unrecognized heroism of all the missing and dead. Workmen at Arlington Cemetery meanwhile refurbished the tombs of the earlier Unknowns and erected scaffolding at the Memorial Amphitheater for a press stand. Planting more than 5,000 bedding flowers around the amphitheater, the cemetery's gardeners manicured lawns, planted extra shrubs, and trimmed trees. Since space in the amphitheater was limited to invited guests and since no more than 3,000 persons could view the ceremony from the mall adjacent to the Tomb of the Unknowns, the cemetery's staff attempted to accommodate any overflow that occurred by awarding a contract for live video coverage of the event and for the erection of a twenty-by-thirty-foot viewing screen at the cemetery's visitors center. On 23 May, a stonemason inscribed the date 1958-1975 on a marble cover that had already been prepared to mark the grave of the Unknown.

The Military District of Washington's Public Affairs Office meanwhile reserved space at the cemetery's old administration building to serve as a temporary center for processing the credentials of the press. In the weeks that followed, command public affairs officers traveled to California and Hawaii to coordinate with their counterparts in those areas, provided for comprehensive photographic coverage, assembled a press kit for civilian newsmen containing extensive background information, designed and printed a program, disseminated twenty-two press releases, and answered more than a thousand queries from newsmen. As a result, on the day of the interment, 800 reporters and cameramen covered the event in all of its phases without complications.

With many members of the public interested in attending the ceremonies but with seating in the amphitheater limited to public officials, Medal of Honor winners, representatives of the Military services, and the families of those still missing in Vietnam, only seventy-seven tickets were available for general distribution. On 14 May, the Office of the Adjutant General of the Military District of Washington set up a clearinghouse to process requests for those seats. Over the next eleven days, the facility responded to 253 calls and letters, awarding tickets first to the families of the missing, then to widows with husbands buried in Arlington National Cemetery, and finally to Vietnam veterans.

By the third week in May, rehearsals had commenced and preparations for the ceremonies in Hawaii, California, and Washington were well advanced. Technicians had augmented telephone service wherever necessary within the Military District of Washington and they were prepared to put eighteen radio nets totaling 159 stations on the air in support of security operations, medical emergency teams, the funeral cortege, the ushers at the amphitheater, and the officials coordinating the services. The command's transportation unit had meanwhile leased fifty-three buses to shuttle visitors between the Pentagon parking lot and the Tomb of the Unknowns, nine vans to accommodate the handicapped, and eighty sedans for the funeral cortege. To meet possible medical emergencies, first aid teams manning twenty-five ambulances had meanwhile selected stations at the U.S. Capitol and along the line of procession. In all, the Military District of Washington spent \$85,000 on preparations, most of it for vehicle leases, supplies, construction, and travel. Much of the rest of the funding for the event came from the normal operating budgets of the military services.



## Designation Ceremonies

The ceremonies honoring the Vietnam Unknown began in Hawaii on 17 May 1984 with the arrival of the remains by hearse at Bravo Pier 25, Pearl Harbor Naval Base. One hundred and eighty members of the military services stood at attention to receive the casket, all in duty uniform except for a platoon of U.S. Army troops from Schofield Barracks in full combat gear. The vessels in the harbor nearby wore full dress ship, a rainbow of signal flags flying fore and aft the length of each. Several hundred visitors were in attendance.

A joint service team of pallbearers carried the flag-draped casket to its resting place at the head of the assembly. After an invocation by a Jewish chaplain and a rendition of the National Anthem by the Fleet Marine Force Pacific Band, the Commander in Chief of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, Admiral S. R. Foley, Jr., delivered a brief eulogy. "Our unknown hero . . . represents the finest of that generation who went to a far off land to fight for the ideals of freedom and human dignity," Foley said, "because it was not in their make up to say, 'No, we won't go.'" At the end of Foley's remarks, after a prayer by a Catholic chaplain, Vietnam Medal of Honor recipient, Sgt. Maj. Allan J. Kellogg, Jr., of Marine Barracks Hawaii, placed near the casket a white carnation wreath inset with yellow, red, and green flowers in the design of the Vietnam Campaign Ribbon. The Commander in Chief of the U.S. Pacific Air Forces, Gen. Jerome F. O'Malley, then placed the Purple Heart on a black pedestal near the coffin. Musical honors, a 21-gun salute and a flyover by Hawaii Air National Guard F-4C aircraft in "missing man formation" followed, along with a final benediction by a Protestant chaplain. At the conclusion of the prayer, as the assembled troops saluted and the band played Chopin's mournful "Funeral March," the

pallbearers carried the casket up a ramp to the *Brewton*. Six minutes later, while the band played "America the Beautiful" and all the ships in Pearl Harbor rendered passing honors — each crewman standing at attention and holding a hand salute — the *Brewton* cast off for San Francisco in the company of the Coast Guard cutter *Storis*.



## The Trip to Washington

Seven days later, at noon on 24 May, escorted by the Coast Guard cutter *Midget*, the *Brewton* docked at the Alameda Naval Air Station. While a military band played a hymn and a 21-gun salute fired, a joint service team of pallbearers, preceded by the American flag and members of the clergy, carried the casket to a waiting hearse for the trip to Travis Air Force Base outside Sacramento. At Travis, the pallbearers transferred the remains in solemn procession to the base chapel, where it lay in repose all night. Protestant, Jewish, and Catholic chaplains offered short prayers, with the Jewish chaplain, Navy Lt. Norman L. Auerback, observing in the place of the Unknown that, "My death is not mine, it is ours. It will mean what you make of it." A guard of honor then took up station around the casket, which remained on public view until the next morning, when, after a simple ceremony, it was transferred to a U.S. Air Force C-141B aircraft for the trip to Washington.

The body of the Unknown serviceman arrived at Andrews Air Force Base near Washington at 2 P.M. on 25 May, where it was greeted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the national commanders of various U.S. veterans organizations, and the former U.S. Commander in Vietnam, General William C. Westmoreland. To the accompaniment of four "Ruffles and Flourishes" and a hymn played by the U.S. Air Force Band, with a 21-gun salute in the background, pallbearers carried the casket to a hearse for the trip to Washington. Arriving at the Capitol

Plaza at 3 P.M., the party moved solemnly up the East Capitol steps into the Rotunda, where President Ronald Reagan waited along with members of the cabinet, Congress, and other dignitaries. A brief wreath-laying ceremony followed, during which the president delivered a eulogy. Observing that the Unknown symbolized "the heart, soul, and spirit of America," he said that, "We may not know of this man's life, but we know of his character. We may not know his name, but we know his courage. He accepted his mission and did his duty. And his honest patriotism overwhelms us." The body lay in state in the Rotunda for the next three days, to be viewed by tens of thousands of visitors.



## The Funeral

The vigil at the Rotunda lasted until noon on Memorial Day, Monday, 28 May. As the national commanders of the veterans organizations, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and other mourners waited in the East Capitol Plaza under cloudy skies, pallbearers carried the casket down the Capitol steps to a caisson drawn by six matched white horses. Troops at Fort McNair began firing a 21-gun salute at one minute intervals. The U.S. Coast Guard Band played four "Ruffles and Flourishes" and the hymns "Yigdahl Eloheem Chahi" (Great Is Our Living God) and "Ah-dohn Oh-lom" (Lord of the World).

The main funeral procession was composed of the U.S. Army, Navy, and Air Force Bands; units from all of the services and service academies; and elements from the National Guard and Reserves. A cordon of honor composed of 1,750 men and women representing, once again, all of the military services lined both sides of the route to Arlington National Cemetery. Its members came to "present arms" when the color guard bearing the American flag reached their positions, returning to "order arms" once the caisson bearing the Unknown had passed. When the cortege reached the Vietnam Veterans

Memorial on Bacon Drive, it stopped for an instant to receive the homage of fifty-six veterans of the war bearing the flags of all the states and territories of the United States. Rounding the Lincoln Memorial and crossing Memorial Bridge, the procession then entered Arlington Cemetery, where the president and other dignitaries waited at the Memorial Amphitheater. Although veterans of the war were represented in every aspect of the program — Medal of Honor recipients from the Vietnam War, for example, served as honorary pallbearers — a group of 300 veterans insisted on falling in behind the procession. Dressed in combat fatigues and marching to the accompaniment of a bagpiper playing the hymn "Amazing Grace," they became a reminder, however subdued, of the protests that had once seemed as much a part of the Vietnam War as the effort to defeat the enemy.

The cortege arrived at the west entrance of the Amphitheater at 2 P.M. After the funeral party had been seated, the Army Band played four "Ruffles and Flourishes," the signal for the pallbearers to carry the casket into the Apse of the building. The National Anthem followed, along with an invocation by the Chief of Chaplains of the U.S. Army, Maj. Gen. Patrick J. Hessian. A marine trumpeter then sounded the call "Attention." After a moment of silence and a rendition of "My Country 'Tis of Thee" sung by everyone in the Amphitheater, Secretary Weinberger introduced President Reagan.

Observing that the Unknown Soldier was a symbol of all the American servicemen still missing in Vietnam, President Reagan reminded his listeners in the Amphitheater, across the United States, and around the world that "We close no books. We put away no final memories. An end to America's involvement in Vietnam cannot come before we've achieved the fullest possible accounting of those missing in action." Turning to the Unknown, the president continued that the man\* had died fighting for human dignity and for free men everywhere and that "Today we embrace him and all who served us so well in a war whose end offered no parades, no flags, and so little thanks." President Reagan then presented the Unknown with the Medal of Honor "for service above and beyond the call of duty — in action with the enemy during the Vietnam era."

\*All the women who served in Vietnam were accounted for.

The funeral service continued with an a capella rendition of the hymn "On Bended Knee" by the U.S. Army Chorus; a reading of Psalm 91 — "O Thou that dwellest in the covert of the Most High . . ." — by the Director, Chaplains Service, Veterans Administration, Rabbi Simeon Kobunetz; and the singing of Randall Thompson's "The Last Words of David" by U.S. Army Chorus soloist M. Sgt. Michael Miller. The Chief of Chaplains, U.S. Navy, Rear Admiral Neil M. Stevenson, followed with a reading from the New Testament, John 14, "Let not your hearts be troubled . . ." The service ended with the singing of Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd . . ." by the U.S. Army Chorus and a brief blessing by Capt. Robert M. Radasky of the U.S. Navy Chaplain Corps.



## The Interment

At the conclusion of the blessing, the president, the honorary pallbearers, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and a number of dignitaries and guests proceeded into the Display Room until invited guests moved from the Amphitheater to the East Steps. The pallbearers then began moving the casket to the plaza east of the Amphitheater where the Tomb of the Unknowns is located. When the casket reached the second landing leading to the plaza, the pallbearers paused while Col. Robert G. Krause, the commander of the honor guard, brought his troops to "present arms" and the U.S. Army Band played four "Ruffles and Flourishes" and the hymn "Holy, Holy, Holy." Upon completion of the music, the procession moved forward into the plaza, where the pallbearers placed the casket on the lowering device above the crypt. After chaplains representing the Jewish, Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant religions read the graveside prayers customary to their faiths, the president placed a wreath at the head of the casket. A 21-gun salute followed, fired by the Saluting Battery of the 3d U.S. Infantry (The Old Guard).

The Chaplain, U.S. Coast Guard, Capt. Eddy B. Moran, gave the blessing. "Lord," he prayed, "we ask Your final benediction upon our comrade, known but to You. As we have honored him, we also honor all men and women who have served their country with loyalty and devotion." At the conclusion of the prayer, three rifle volleys and the bugle call "Taps" sounded. While the band played "America the Beautiful," the pallbearers folded the flag that had covered the casket from the beginning of its journey in Hawaii. The escort commander, Major General Ballantyne, then presented the flag to the president, who stood in the place of the Unknown's next of kin. He passed it to Raymond J. Costanzo, the superintendent of Arlington National Cemetery, for safekeeping.

With that the ceremonies ended. Members of the public who wished to pay their respects to the Unknown filed past the crypt until evening, when the cemetery closed. At 8:30 P.M., the superintendent of Arlington National Cemetery, accompanied by the commanding general of the Military District of Washington, lowered the casket into the crypt. Shortly thereafter workmen set the vault cap and crypt cover in place. By 11:30 P.M. all work was done. The Unknown was at rest.

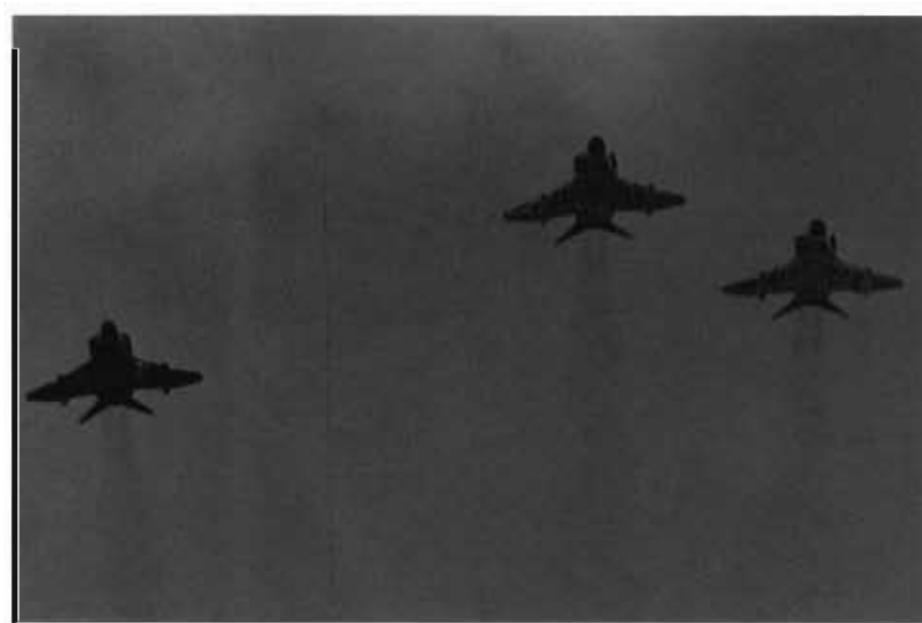
## **SECTION II**



**PICTORIAL  
REVIEW**



*On 17 May 1984 at Pearl Harbor Naval Base, Honolulu, Hawaii, Gen. Jerome F. O'Malley, commander in chief of the U.S. Pacific Air Forces, and Sgt. Maj. Allan J. Kellogg, Jr., of Marine Barracks Hawaii and a holder of the Medal of Honor, salute the casket of the Vietnam Unknown during designation ceremonies.*



*F-4C Aircraft from the 199th Tactical Fighter Squadron, Hawaii Air National Guard, pass in review in, "missing man formation", during designation ceremonies in Hawaii.*



*Joint Service Pallbearers carry the flag-draped casket aboard the frigate U.S.S. Brewton for the voyage to San Francisco. Crewmen stand at attention in salute*



*With the casket of the Unknown aboard and the frigate's crewmen lining its deck, the Brewton departs Hawaii for Alameda Naval Air Station in San Francisco, the first leg of its trip to Washington, D.C.*



*A crewman keeps watch beside the casket of the Unknown as the Brewton nears San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge.*



*Upon arrival at Alameda Naval Air Station on 24 May, the Unknown is borne from the Brewton to a funeral hearse for the trip to Travis Air Force Base, California.*



*Lying in repose and surrounded by a joint service guard of honor in the chapel at Travis, the Unknown remained on public view until the morning of 25 May, when the casket was flown to Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland*



*Aboard a C-141B at Travis, the casket is secured in the cargo bay for the flight to Andrews, the final transfer point on its trip to Washington.*