

ARLINGTON CEMETERY

Thousands of headstones mark the graves of American soldiers who have died in battles from the American Revolutionary war to the present time.

Many famous persons are also buried here including John F and Robert Kennedy, Oliver Wendel Holmes and Joe Louis.

There is only one South African buried here – see under.

The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier has been patrolled continuously since 1930. Guards change every thirty minutes, twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year.

The Guard takes 21 steps as he marches the path before the Tomb, and at the end of the path, he hesitates for 21 seconds before about-turning. The 21 count alludes to the “twenty-one gun salute”, the highest honour that can be given to any military or foreign dignitary.

The Guard’s gloves are moistened to prevent his losing his grip on the rifle. He carries his rifle on the shoulder away from the tomb. After his march across the path, he executes an about-face, and moves the rifle to the outside shoulder.

For a person to apply for guard duty at the tomb, he must be between 5ft 10in and 6ft 2' tall and his waist size may not exceed 30in.

Guards commit to two years of guarding the tomb. They accommodate in barracks under the tomb, and they may not, in any way, disgrace the uniform or the tomb.

After two years, the Guard is given a wreath pin that is worn on his lapel signifying they served as guard of the tomb. There are only 400 presently worn. The Guard must obey the above rules for the rest of his life, or give up the wreath pin.

The Guard’s shoes are specially made with very thick soles to keep the heat and cold from his feet. There are metal heel plates that extend to the top of the shoe in order to make the loud click as they come to a halt.

There are no wrinkles, folds or lint on the uniform. Guards dress for duty in front of a full-length mirror.

Among the non-military notables buried at Arlington, are Joe Louis (the boxer), and Medal of Honour winner Audie Murphy, the most decorated soldier of WWII and of Hollywood fame.

DESIGNER TOURS

In 2003 as Hurricane Isabelle was approaching Washington DC, the US Senate and House took two days off in anticipation of the storm. It was reported that because of the dangers from the hurricane, the guards of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier were given permission to suspend the assignment. They respectfully declined the offer with a "No way, Sir"!

They stated that guarding the Tomb was not just an assignment; it was the "highest honour that can be afforded to a serviceperson".

South African Soldier honoured at Arlington Cemetery

For nearly 50 years World War II soldier Lieutenant Victor Potgieter lay unacknowledged in a common grave in the USA, until his family learned of his whereabouts in 1981.

The fate of Lieutenant Potgieter, who grew up in Carolina, Mpumalanga, and attended Wits before volunteering for active service in 1940, remained a mystery for half a century. He went missing in 1944 and his family in South Africa did not know his fate until 1981 when they read a newspaper article about an unknown soldier named Potgieter who lay unaccounted for in the United States, in the most revered military cemetery - Arlington, Virginia.

The lieutenant's brother, Ben Potgieter of Arcadia, told the Pretoria News in 1993 that he believed his brother was involved in a clandestine operation when his plane was shot down.

"Victor was home on leave from Egypt two months before his death," Ben Potgieter was quoted as saying. "He told me he had volunteered for a mission and he would be photographing bridges to be bombed."

When Potgieter was first brought to the USA, all the authorities knew was his name. He was not registered as being on a mission in the area with any army. With no other leads, his headstone was marked as a British soldier.

POTGIETER, V - LT ALLIED BRITISH VETERAN - SERVICE DATES Unknown
DATE OF DEATH: 09/10/1944 - DATE OF INTERMENT: 05/22/1951
BURIED AT: SECTION 2 SITE 3434-F - ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY