“FOR US THE LIVING”: HOW AMERICA BURIED ITS WORLD WAR I OVERSEAS DEAD

by

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A Dissertation
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Abstract

“FOR US THE LIVING”: HOW AMERICA BURIED ITS WORLD WAR I OVERSEAS DEAD

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After the World War ended in 1918, a national political debate arose in the United States over where to bury the American war dead. Some Americans believed the country’s war dead should be left overseas in permanent cemeteries to create an enduring tie between the United States and Europe, while many others wanted the dead returned to the United States for burial. As months passed without a final decision on where and how the dead would be buried, the families of the war dead increasingly became forceful advocates for their own views and choices, both in public and in their individual correspondence with the War Department. This dissertation makes extensive use of the correspondence between the families of the dead and the War Department, including thousands of personal letters from families and replies from the Department directed to individual concerns. These letters demonstrate that as families wrote to the War Department to explain their views, make demands, provide instructions, or ask for help,
their efforts substantially affected both the way that War Department policies about the war dead evolved and the amount of time and resources that the War Department dedicated to dealing with requests from families. This dissertation looks briefly at the public debate before focusing in detail on the issues raised by families as they decided where they wanted their dead buried. This dissertation is meant to recover the impassioned voices of Americans from all over the country and from all levels of society who lost a family member in the war and to trace the origins of America’s continuing policy of allowing families to determine where the war dead will be buried.
Introduction

Even before the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) crossed the Atlantic in 1917, Americans understood that men would die in the World War, though no one knew just how many. Some Americans were old enough to remember the deaths of hundreds of thousands in the Civil War, and many knew that several thousand Americans had died in the Spanish-American and Philippine wars less than two decades before. Americans also understood that the federal government would play a major role in determining what became of the bodies of the war dead. After the Civil War, the government had funded efforts to consolidate the Union dead in central cemeteries and had cared for their graves ever since. More recently, the government had paid to exhume all the war dead in places like Cuba and the Philippines and, for the first time, had returned some of the dead to

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1 The title of this dissertation comes from a speech that General John Pershing made at the United States cemetery at Romagne in the fall of 1919: “It is not for us to proclaim what they did, their silence speaks more eloquently than words, but it is for us to uphold the conception of duty, honor and country for which they fought and for which they died. It is for us the living to carry forward their purpose and make fruitful their sacrifice. And now, Dear Comrades, Farewell. Here, under the clear skies, on the green hillside and amid the flowering fields of France, in the quiet hush of peace, we leave you forever in God’s keeping.” Donald Smythe, *Pershing: General of the Armies* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 259.

their families for burial. Shortly after America declared war in April of 1917, Secretary of War Newton Baker stated that the government would again return the bodies of those who died in Europe to the United States.

A number of prominent Americans hoped to persuade the nation, and the families of those who died, to make a different choice about where to bury the war dead. General John Pershing, commander of the AEF, believed that the United States should leave the dead permanently overseas in battlefield cemeteries. He hoped the cemeteries would demonstrate America’s commitment to European security, serve as a permanent link between the United States and Europe, and perhaps keep America from returning to isolationism after the war. Other prominent Americans agreed with Pershing’s “internationalist” views, including former president Theodore Roosevelt, who argued for the dead to be left in Europe even after his youngest son, Quentin, was killed in the war.

Initially, the families of the Americans who died in the war just wanted to know how their family members had died and whether their bodies had been found, identified, and buried. If families could not undertake the traditional rituals surrounding a death, at least for the immediate future, they wanted assurances that the government was tending

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to those tasks. As Drew Gilpin Faust argues in *This Republic of Suffering*, families of war dead often want to know whether the dying knew of their impending deaths and whether the dead were buried with appropriate rituals—the kind of details that families would know for themselves if a family member died at home—so that they could begin to accept and grieve the death.\(^7\) The War Department and the AEF, however, largely failed to provide families with the information they sought during the war. Families received cursory telegrams from the Army Adjutant General that stated little more than the fact of a death.\(^8\) Both families and the Adjutant General’s office assumed that not long after the telegram arrived, families would receive a letter from an AEF official—a commanding officer, chaplain, doctor, or nurse—that would provide additional details about how men had died and been buried. Once American forces entered heavy fighting late in the war, however, the United States took casualties quickly, leaving those responsible for contacting families with little time to write letters.\(^9\) Many families would become increasingly frustrated and upset as time passed with little or no additional information about their family member, and some would begin to wonder if the AEF was failing in its obligations to them and to those that had died.

About 80,000 Americans died overseas of wounds or illness in the war—almost all from the Army but several thousand from the Marine Corps—and were buried in

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\(^8\) Adler, George C, March 10, 1919, telegram from Adjutant General to father (reporting death from influenza and bronchial pneumonia); Alewin, Lowrey, November 7, 1918 telegram from Adjutant General to father (reporting death from bronchial pneumonia); Bugold, Edmond, December 2, 1918 telegram from Adjutant General to mother (reporting soldier wounded in action).

hundreds of temporary cemeteries in Europe. The AEF and the War Department made it clear that families would have no choice but to leave the responsibility for returning the dead in the hands of the federal government and that no families would be allowed to arrange for the return of the dead privately. Most families understood that it would take time for the government to return the dead, but many pushed the AEF and the War Department to complete the task quickly, so that families could view the dead, arrange for funerals and burials, and undertake other traditional mourning rituals. When the AEF


With respect to the return of the dead, the Army and the Navy each had some responsibility. Some Navy personnel were buried in France, especially at Brest, if they died on board ships, and the Navy handled the disinterment and return of these bodies after the war. Congress, House, Subcommittee No. 3 (Foreign Expenditures) of the Select Committee on Expenditures in the War Department, War Expenditures, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., 2 March 1920, 3460-61; United States Graves Registration Service, History of the American Graves Registration Service: QMC in Europe (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1920) (hereafter GRS History), Vol. I, 97-103. With respect to United States Marines, the Navy had to work with the Army’s GRS because the GRS had taken responsibility for Marine Corps dead in Europe. GRS History, Vol. 1, 97-98; O’Neill, Arthur, January 14, 1919 memo from Office of Chief Paymaster, US Marines, France to Army Graves Registration Service; Frazier, Walter, February 3, 1920 memo from Major General Commandant, Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps to Chief, Graves Registration Service (Cemeterial Division). As the process of returning the dead began, the Navy agreed not to disinter its dead without notifying the Army but also informed the Army that a Navy team had begun work to return the Navy and Marine Corps dead from the Zone of the Interior in France. GRS History, Vol. 1, 97-98. As the official history of the GRS in WWI noted, “[t]here seems . . . to have been some difficulty in Washington in co-ordinating disinterment activities of the Navy Department and the Army Authorities . . . . The chief misunderstanding arose over the handling of the Marine Corps dead.” GRS History, Vol. 1, 98-99. The official history noted that the confusion meant that some “Marine and Navy bodies were already in their relatives’ hands and interred at the time the Army was asking for disposition advice.” GRS History, Vol. 1, 99-100. In June of 1920, a conference between the Army and Navy, attended by representatives from the Marine Corps, agreed that the Cemeterial Division would thereafter treat the Marine Corps Headquarters as next of kin for all Marines and that the Marine Corps would contact families and provide disposition instructions back to the Army. GRS History, Vol. 1, 101-03; Flynn, Francis, June 7, 1923 memo from Army Quartermaster General to Major General Commandant, Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps; Michael Sledge, Soldier Dead: How We Recover, Identify, Bury, and Honor Our Military Fallen (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2005), 154; Budreau, Bodies of War, 68.
and the War Department provided a series of reasons why the return of the dead would be delayed, some families became suspicious that Pershing and his political allies were trying to undermine what they saw as Baker’s “promise” to return the dead. In response, grieving families who wanted the dead returned fought to ensure that their wishes would be honored. Some families lobbied the government by testifying before Congress or writing to Congress or the Wilson Administration, while other families wrote the War Department to explain their views about what should become of the dead or to rebut the views of public figures like Pershing and Roosevelt. Some fought the Department over who would be allowed to choose for the family whether the dead would be permanently buried in the United States or in Europe. Other families pushed the government to explain how it could be sure that the dead were being properly identified in Europe and why the process was taking so long.

AEF and War Department officials, who initially viewed the process of returning the dead as just another logistical challenge to be handled, quickly learned that the forms and form letters they were sending to families to explain the process of returning the dead were not enough to reassure families that the government was committed to carrying out their wishes. These officials began to realize that they needed to find ways to provide the information that families were requesting and to address their questions and concerns, if for no other reason than to avoid negative attention from families, the press, and Congress. As a result, responsibility for corresponding with families about the dead was given to the Army Graves Registration Service (GRS), an AEF unit, and the Cemeterial Division, which supported the GRS from Washington, D.C.
The GRS had been created to follow closely behind the front lines during the war, to find, identify, and bury those killed in battle in temporary graves; to erect basic grave markers; and to record the location of graves so that the bodies of the dead could be recovered after the war. The GRS identified the dead through a variety of means. Enlisted soldiers had been issued aluminum identification tags, though tags were not unimpeachable evidence of identity, as men sometimes ended up with someone else’s tag and at other times tags were lost or destroyed.\(^{11}\) As a result, the GRS also looked for identifying information on uniforms and in items found on remains, such as Bibles, letters, watches, or rings.\(^{12}\) GRS staff filled out forms summarizing information about bodies, including the condition of bones and teeth, and about uniforms and personal belongings found with the remains as part of the identification process.\(^{13}\) After the war, the GRS worked to find and identify the missing and to consolidate the dead who had


\(^{12}\) Clayton, James, June 15(?), 1922 memo on investigation; Frank, Chauncey, December 13, 1924 letter from Army Quartermaster General to mother; Harris, Jerry, September 28, 1921 letter from Wymne of Cemeterial Division to Elgin Watch Company; McKinnon, John, December 12, 1921 letter from Wymne of Cemeterial Division to mother; McKinnon, John, December 21, 1921 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Michael, Austin, October 2, 1924 memo from Army Quartermaster General to Army Adjutant General; Ooster, Ben, June 26, 1928 letter from Army Quartermaster General to father; Robey, Hartley, May 13, 1921 letter from Wymne of Cemeterial Division to father; Rosen, Benjamin, February 2, 1921 letter from Greeley of Cemeterial Division to high school; Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 105-106.

earlier been buried into fewer cemeteries and install more-permanent grave markers. Given that the GRS was the only organization with detailed information about deaths and the location of graves, the GRS was the logical choice to take responsibility for answering questions from families about the identity of the dead, burials, and the location of graves, though it took the War Department some time to reach that conclusion.

The decision to assign the duty of dealing with the families of the dead to the GRS and the Cemeterial Division was a fortunate one for the War Department and for families. Under the leadership of Charles Pierce, who commanded the GRS in Europe from its creation in 1917 until mid-1919 and then returned to the United States to lead the Cemeterial Division until his death in 1921, the GRS and the Division worked hard to comb through War Department records to find as many answers for families as possible, to address families’ concerns, and to send timely and sympathetic replies to the many thousands of letters the Department received from families and their allies such as members of Congress. Many grieving families were comforted by the information that the GRS and the Division provided, and the efforts of the GRS and the Division gave families reason to believe that the government cared about their sacrifice and would help them bury the dead as they wished. The efforts of the GRS and the Division would even give some families confidence that the government would always care for the graves of the dead, and those families would allow their dead to stay buried in one of what would become eight permanent American World War cemeteries in Europe.

This dissertation argues that after the World War, the activism of the families of the dead forced the federal government to sharply increase the amount of time, resources,
and attention paid to responding to the needs of families and to ensuring that the dead were exhumed, transported, and buried as families wished. In the course of the several years that it took to arrange for the dead to be returned to families or buried permanently in overseas American cemeteries in Europe, the families of the dead, and many other Americans, would come to believe that the government owed it to families to answer their questions and address their concerns with respect and kindness, to resolve problems, to be fair and honest with families, and to enable families to bury the dead where and how they wished. The War Department would decide not just that meeting those obligations was the right thing to do but that not meeting them could lead to harsh questions from the American public, the press, and Congress about why the government was failing families. The efforts of the government to respond to the needs and concerns of families after the World War set a new pattern for the relationship between the military and families, and the legacy of those efforts impacts much of what the military, families, and the public expect to happen today when Americans die in the service of their country.

* * * * *

Today, we take for granted that as a rule, the government will return the remains of our military dead to their families for burial. We have seen pictures of flag-draped coffins at Dover Air Force Base as the dead make their final trip home. Some of us have traveled on airplanes with military escorts who are accompanying the dead back to families in cities and towns, or at posts and bases, across the United States. Few would question the need for—or the cost of—these efforts, even if some might question the justification for the wars in which these young men and women gave their lives. Nor
would most question other efforts made by the military to help the families of the dead. Today, when a military family loses a serving soldier, sailor, airman, or marine, the family is assigned a casualty assistance officer who informs the family of the death personally, gives the family the first financial death benefits, arranges for the return of personal effects, and explains how and when the body will be returned for burial. This investment of time and resources reflects not just the military’s view of what it owes to the men and women who serve and their families but also the military’s understanding of what Americans expect of the military when deaths occur, especially in war. The high standards that Americans have when it comes to the military’s actions with respect to the dead were made even more clear recently when press reports suggested that serious mistakes had been made in the information provided to families about the circumstances surrounding deaths, in the way remains were handled, and in how the dead were buried in national cemeteries. The strong reaction of Americans to these events demonstrated that most believed that the military has an obligation to care for the bodies of the dead and to quickly and accurately return the dead to their families.

It wasn’t always so. Prior to the twentieth century, the United States military almost always decided whether and where anyone who died in military service was

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buried. At least until the American Civil War, a lack of embalming or other preservation
techniques as well as limited transportation infrastructure made it challenging and
expensive to transport the dead.\textsuperscript{16} The remains of a senior or important figure might be
returned to the United States by the government, or a wealthy family might pay to have
the dead returned at their own expense, but most families would have little say in what
became of the dead.\textsuperscript{17} About 20,000 Americans died in war from the American
Revolution through the Mexican-American War of 1846-1848, most of them Army
soldiers serving in North America, and more of them dying from illness or disease than
from combat wounds.\textsuperscript{18} These dead were usually buried near where they fell, and their
graves often went unmarked.\textsuperscript{19} Not until the Mexican War in 1850 did the United States
Congress authorize the purchase of land near Mexico City for a cemetery for American
war dead, and about 750 soldiers, or about 6\% of the dead, all unidentified, were
eventually gathered together in a mass grave.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{16} Kristin Ann Hass, Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial
(Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 49-50; Sledge, Soldier Dead, 32.
\textsuperscript{17} Dickon, The Foreign Burial of American War Dead, 24.
\textsuperscript{18} Amy S. Greenberg, A Wicked War: Polk, Clay, Lincoln, and the 1846 U.S. Invasion of Mexico (New
York, NY: Vintage Books, 2012), 130; Hass, Carried to the Wall, 49-50; Dickon, The Foreign Burial of
American War Dead, 24.
\textsuperscript{19} Thomas W. Laqueur, “Memory and Naming in the Great War,” Com memorations: The Politics of
White, “Our Soldier Dead,” The Quartermaster Review, May-June 1930, available from
<http://www.qmfound.com/soldier_dead.htm>; Internet; accessed 31 December 2015; Yochi J. Dreazen
and Gary Fields, “How We Bury the War Dead,” Wall Street Journal, May 29, 2010, W3; Erna Risch,
Quartermaster Support of the Army: A History of the Corps, 1775-1939 (Washington, DC: Center of
\textsuperscript{20} Laderman, The Sacred Remains, 118; Ron Robin, “‘A Foothold in Europe,’: The Aesthetics and Politics
American Battlefield Monuments Commission, “Mexico City National Cemetery,” available from
<http://www.abmc.gov/cemeteries-memorials/americas/mexico-city-national-cemetery>; Internet; accessed
31 December 2015; Piehler, Remembering War the American Way, 41; Steere, The Graves Registration
Service in World War II, 3; Ron Robin, Enclaves of America: The Rhetoric of American Political
About 600,000 Americans died in the American Civil War, and the death of so many people, most of them young men, so far from home profoundly changed American ideas about death and about the duties owed to the war dead by the living, as Drew Gilpin Faust has shown.\textsuperscript{21} During the war, the governments of the North and South were slow to take responsibility for systemically recording information about deaths or conducting burials. Neither side officially notified the families of the dead, assuming that a man’s officers, comrades, or chaplain would write families about a death on the battlefield or that doctors or nurses would write from hospitals.\textsuperscript{22} Men who died from wounds or disease were sometimes buried by comrades or hospital staffs; in the South they were sometimes buried by slaves, while in the North they were buried by black soldiers or “contrabands,” by voluntary associations like the Sanitary Commission, or by contracted undertakers.\textsuperscript{23} In time, the Union issued orders establishing the military’s first official procedures for the recording of information about the dead, the requisition of land for

\textsuperscript{21} Faust, \textit{This Republic of Suffering}, 9; Martha Hodes, \textit{Mourning Lincoln} (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 197.

\textsuperscript{22} Casey, \textit{When Soldiers Fall}, 10; Michael C.C. Adams, \textit{Living Hell: The Dark Side of the Civil War} (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 99, 152; Faust, \textit{This Republic of Suffering}, 14-15, 17; Sledge, \textit{Soldier Dead}, 33.

burials, and the marking of graves. For some men, of course, there would be no graves: Civil War soldiers were among the first exposed to “modern” weapons, which created destruction so complete that men sometimes disappeared, vaporized or “blown to pieces.” A few determined families arranged for the return of the Civil War dead at their own expense, some using the new embalming techniques that would also preserve President Lincoln’s body, at least to some extent, on its trip back to Illinois in 1865.

After the war, the Union consolidated those of its dead that could be found in central cemeteries. Consolidation of graves had a number of practical advantages: farm


25 Congress, House, Subcommittee 7 of the Committee on Military Affairs, Miscellaneous Military Bills, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., 5 April 1920, 73; Capdevila and Voldman, War Dead, 22; K.S. Inglis, “Entombing Unknown Soldiers: From London and Paris to Baghdad,” History and Memory 5 (Fall-Winter 1993): 7-31, 8; Adams, Living Hell, 66; Faust, This Republic of Suffering, 128.

26 National Cemetery Administration, “History and Development of the National Cemetery Administration,” available from <http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/docs/factsheets/history.pdf>, 2; Internet; accessed 31 December 2015; Laderman, The Sacred Remains, 109-116; Dickon, The Foreign Burial of American War Dead, 27, 31-32; Adams, Living Hell, 101; Fabian, The Skull Collectors, 167; Faust, This Republic of Suffering, 89, 102, 157; Hass, Carried to the Wall, 72-75; Hodes, Mourning Lincoln, 144, 156; Laderman, Rest in Peace, 6; Groeling, The Aftermath of Battle, xvi, 4, 63, 66. Embalming was thought to preserve the body so that it could be viewed by mourners and to ensure that bodies did not transmit disease. James F. Farrell, Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830-1920 (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1980), 158-64; Laderman, Rest in Peace, 6.

27 Steere, The Graves Registration Service in World War II, 7; Poole, On Hallowed Ground, 71; Laderman, The Sacred Remains, 118-22; Pichler, Remembering War the American Way, 50-51; Faust, This Republic of Suffering, 236-37. In the South, women’s memorial associations tried to find the Confederate dead buried in the North, but their efforts were limited by a lack of resources, as only in the late 1890s did the federal government take responsibility for Confederate cemeteries to commemorate the cooperation between North and South in the Spanish-American War. Poole, On Hallowed Ground, 79-80, 112-15; Neff, Honoring the Civil War Dead, 146, 221; Pichler, Remembering War the American Way, 61; Faust, This Republic of Suffering, 237-47; William Blair, Cities of the Dead: Contesting the Memory of the Civil War in the South, 1865-1914 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 179, 193; Philip Longworth, The Unending Vigil: The History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (London, UK: Constable, 1967; revised ed., Barnsley, South Yorkshire, UK: Pen and Sword Books, 2010), 92-93; Groeling, The Aftermath of Battle, 132; Michelle A. Krowl, “‘In the Spirit of Fraternity’: The United States Government and the Burial of Confederate Dead at Arlington National Cemetery, 1864-1914,” Virginia Magazine of
land and other private property was returned to its owners for productive use; additional bodies were identified during the process of consolidation; maintenance of a smaller number of cemeteries was less costly; and centralized cemeteries created a site for memorials and commemorations, like President Lincoln’s address at the Gettysburg cemetery in 1863. More than 300,000 of the roughly 350,000 Union fatalities were found and buried, though almost half the recovered dead were never identified. Consistent with emerging standards of cemetery design, the Union’s cemeteries would be well-tended, orderly spaces replete with trees and greenery, including the Union cemetery established at Confederate General Robert E. Lee’s former home in Arlington near the nation’s capital. The Union Civil War cemeteries reflected what was then the novel idea that soldiers, whatever their rank, were entitled to individual graves.

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cemeteries like the one at Gettysburg were the first to have a grave and a headstone for each body that could be found, rather than burying enlisted forces or the unidentified dead in mass graves.\textsuperscript{32} The changing nature of citizenship after the French and American revolutions had affected the popular perception of soldiers: they were no longer seen merely as subjects (or mercenaries) following the orders of kings but as citizens who willingly gave their lives for their nations, and the United States was the first to honor those sacrifices with individual graves.\textsuperscript{33} For each grave, the government provided slab headstones, originally made of wood and later of marble.\textsuperscript{34} These headstones made the graves of the dead appear as if they were forever in formation and created a sense that all

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the dead were entitled to equal honor, regardless of military rank or social standing, although national cemeteries, including Arlington, would remain segregated by race until 1948.\textsuperscript{35} Civil War cemeteries became the core of the modern national cemetery system.\textsuperscript{36}

In the years after the Civil War, the military would continue to collect and bury its war dead where possible, with those who died in the Indian wars on the frontier buried in fort or post cemeteries.\textsuperscript{37} In the late 1800s, however, the United States became involved for the first time in conflicts outside North America. In the Spanish-American War of 1898, several hundred thousand American volunteers fought in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Guam, with about 2,500 dying from combat or disease; in the Philippines, between 1899 and 1902, tens of thousands of volunteers fought and about 4,000 died.\textsuperscript{38} The dead of these wars were originally buried where they fell, but many Americans opposed having soldiers buried permanently overseas, leading Congress to fund efforts to have the dead recovered and returned to the United States.\textsuperscript{39} At the War Department’s instruction, the

\textsuperscript{36} National Cemetery Administration, “History and Development of the National Cemetery Administration,” 1; Poole, On Hallowed Ground, 71; MacCloskey, Hallowed Ground, 23-24, 42-45; Holt, American Military Cemeteries, 2; Dickon, The Foreign Burial of American War Dead, 33.
\textsuperscript{37} MacCloskey, Hallowed Ground, 17-18, 40-45.
Quartermaster Department—at the time a civilian organization—sent D.H. Rhodes, an official from the national cemetery system who was essentially the superintendent of Arlington National Cemetery, to Cuba and Puerto Rico. Rhodes then led another Quartermaster expedition to retrieve the dead in the Philippines, only to find that the local military commander had already ordered a military team led by Charles Pierce, an Army chaplain, to collect the American dead. As a result of the efforts of Rhodes and Pierce, about 6,000 American dead, including unidentified remains, were returned to the United


40 “American Dead Reclaimed,” Washington Post, July 23, 1900, 1; “America’s Dead to Rest at Home,” Atlanta Constitution, September 19, 1900, 4; “To Bring Dead Home,” New York Times, September 19, 1900, 8; “Dead Heroes,” Boston Daily Globe, September 25, 1900, 12; “Dead to Rest at Home,” Washington Post, September 18, 1902, 3; War Department, Annual Report [to Congress], 1899, Report of the Quartermaster-General, 183-88; War Department, Annual Report [to Congress], 1900, Report of the Quartermaster-General, 301-03, 344-46; War Department, Annual Report [to Congress], 1901, Report of the Quartermaster-General, 276-77; Steere, The Graves Registration Service in World War II, 10-12; Poole, On Hallowed Ground, 110; MacCloskey, Hallowed Ground, 46; Holt, American Military Cemeteries, 2-3; Sledge, Soldier Dead, 34-36; Budreau, Bodies of War, 30; Leo G. Hirrel, “The Beginnings of the Quartermaster Graves Registration Service,” Army Sustainment, July-August 2014; available from <http://www.army.mil/article/128693>; Internet; accessed 31 December 2015. Budreau argues that Rhodes’s team was unable to reach some of the dead and that the team deliberately left two American bodies in their original graves because the two men had been deserters. Budreau, Bodies of War, 30. The Quartermaster Department was reconstituted as a military organization, the Quartermaster Corps, in 1912. Steven E. Anders, “With All Due Honors: A History of the Quartermaster Graves Registration Mission,” Quartermaster Professional Bulletin, September 1988, available from <http://www.qmfound.com/grave.htm>; Internet; accessed December 31, 2015; Hirrel, “The Beginnings of the Quartermaster Graves Registration Service”; Steere, “National Cemeteries and Memorials in Global Conflict.”

41 Pierce would later be credited with the idea of issuing “dog” tags to American forces based on his experiences in the Philippines. Steere, The Graves Registration Service in World War II, 10-11; Poole, On Hallowed Ground, 110-11; MacCloskey, Hallowed Ground, 47; Sledge, Soldier Dead, 35-36; Steere, “National Cemeteries and Memorials in Global Conflict”; Wooley, “A Short History of Identification Tags”; Anders, “With All Due Honors”; National Cemetery Administration, “History and Development of the National Cemetery Administration.” 5; Hirrel, “The Beginnings of the Quartermaster Graves Registration Service”; Budreau, Bodies of War, 32.
States at government expense. The families of the dead were contacted and asked to state whether they wanted the dead buried in national cemeteries or returned for private burial, and most families requested that the dead be returned to them. The dead whose families could not be located were buried in national cemeteries in San Francisco and Arlington alongside the unidentified dead. Most of the small number of American dead from the Boxer Rebellion and the “Punitive Expedition” into Mexico in the years before American’s entry into World War I would also be returned to the United States and to families by the government.

America’s efforts to bring its war dead home distinguished the United States from European powers like Britain and France, who only rarely returned the bodies of.

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43 MacCloskey, *Hallowed Ground*, 47.  
44 “Dead to Rest at Home,” *Washington Post*, September 18, 1902, 3; “America’s Dead to Rest at Home,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 19, 1900, 4; “To Be Brought Home for Burial,” *Washington Post*, September 19, 1900, 7; “To Bring Dead Home,” *New York Times*, September 19, 1900, 8; “Dead Heroes,” *Boston Daily Globe*, September 25, 1900, 12; Robin, *Enclaves of America*, 35; Dickon, *The Foreign Burial of American War Dead*, 35; Inglis, *Sacred Places*, 76-78. Almost 2,000 of the dead were buried in San Francisco and another 1,350 were buried at Arlington. MacCloskey, *Hallowed Ground*, 47; Steere, “National Cemeteries and Memorials in Global Conflict.” A cemetery for the burial of the American dead, some of them members of the military, who participated in the building of the Panama Canal would eventually become a permanent American cemetery. There does not seem to have been any effort to return any of the Panama Canal dead to the United States, likely because they were not seen as part of a war and because Americans viewed the Panama Canal more as American territory than other contested areas, though the number of deaths that occurred in Panama as a result of highly contagious diseases like yellow fever may also have worked against any thoughts of returning the dead.  
members of the military who died overseas.46 Those who died serving their empires were buried in colonial cemeteries reserved for their nation’s dead, while those who died in wars were buried near where they fell, with the “officers and those of high rank . . . buried with due and proper ceremony” while “[o]rdinary troops who died, if they were not abandoned or left to local inhabitants to deal with, were hastily buried at the scene of the battle.”47 America, in contrast, had no established colonial tradition prior to the turn of the twentieth century. Many Americans “isolationists” resisted the idea of the United States becoming a colonial power and supported a long-standing American tradition against “entangling alliances” with European powers.48 The isolationists were opposed in American political discourse by “internationalists” who thought America should work to spread democracy and end centuries of European conflict.49

The war we now call World War I, which was known by Americans at the time as the “World War” and later as the “Great War,” began in 1914, but political opposition from isolationists delayed America’s intervention in the war until April of 1917, when a divided Congress authorized President Wilson to send American troops to aid the Allied

46 Colley, **Safely Rest**, 223; Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead*, 452-55. The most famous return is probably that of Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson, whose body was returned after the battle of Trafalgar, supposedly in a keg of rum. Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 144.
powers, including Britain, France, and Belgium.\textsuperscript{50} America’s small standing or “regular” army of less than one million men was reinforced with four million draftees; more than one million Americans would serve overseas, including 200,000 Black Americans and a small contingent of women serving without official rank as Army nurses.\textsuperscript{51}

The World War was different from prior American wars for those who served and for the families they left behind. Before the World War, America’s military was often made up of units raised from local communities and led by local leaders who kept families informed about major developments. In the World War, however, while men were drafted by local draft boards, they generally served in geographically diverse units.\textsuperscript{52} This would have a major impact on the relationship between the military and families when men got sick, injured, or killed, because families had to seek information from the federal government and the military rather than from men they knew.

Neither the government nor families initially understood how radical this change would be. Despite the changes in how units were raised and the large number of men who joined the military, General Pershing made little effort to prepare the AEF to handle

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the deaths or burials of Americans serving overseas. Pershing initially left in place regulations from 1913 that made unit commanders and chaplains responsible for burying the dead and marking graves, because he hoped to avoid dedicating specialized forces to these tasks. Pershing assumed that AEF unit commanders and chaplains in the World War would continue to write families when members of their unit fell ill or were wounded or killed in combat, though the Army Adjutant General also attempted to notify families by telegram when men were reported dead. Pershing also asked for and received permission from the Wilson Administration to keep all the American dead in Europe until the war was over. Pershing likely hoped that delays in the return of the dead would encourage families to leave the dead overseas, but he was also influenced by America’s European allies, who planned to bury their own war dead permanently in battlefield cemeteries and wanted the United States to do the same. America’s allies worried that efforts to return the America dead would take resources away from the war and recovery efforts and that well-off American families traveling to Europe to find their dead would further tax roads and infrastructure. Just as importantly, the Allies worried that any effort to return the American dead would encourage European families to

54 Adler, George C, March 10, 1919, telegram from Adjutant General to father (reporting death from influenza and bronchial pneumonia); Alewin, Lowrey, November 7, 1918 telegram from Adjutant General to father (reporting death from bronchial pneumonia); Bugold, Edmond, December 2, 1918 telegram from Adjutant General to mother (reporting soldier wounded in action).
demand that their own dead be returned. Britain and France, in particular, wanted to avoid a massive and expensive effort to return almost a million British imperial forces and more than a million French dead.\textsuperscript{56} As a result, Pershing signed agreements with the French and British governments to establish temporary American cemeteries for the duration of the war, and all involved in the negotiations hoped that these cemeteries would eventually become permanent.\textsuperscript{57}

To the disappointment of both Pershing and the Allies, the wartime burial of tens of thousands of Americans in Europe would not be the end of the story. But those war dead are the beginning of this story. After the war ended and the peace treaty was signed, the United States government would confirm its commitment to returning the dead if families requested but would insist that government officials, and not individual families, take responsibility for the effort to exhume and move the American dead. American families would be allowed to decide where the dead should be permanently buried, but they would have to rely on their government to execute their instructions. The result was an unprecedented and interdependent relationship between the federal government and families. Families pressured the government to do more than it had planned when for the dead, and the government responded by dedicating additional resources to providing the information that families sought and addressing their concerns.

Few historical works, even scholarly works, discuss in detail how men die and are buried in war. Even in academic histories of war, the dead are seldom discussed, and a

\textsuperscript{56} Capdevila and Voldman, \textit{War Dead}, 47-51.
reader could sometimes be forgiven for wondering if anyone actually died during or as a result of the various attacks and counter-attacks. Monographs may contain a reference to the total number of “casualties,” an ambiguous term that may mean anything from minor wounds to fatalities, or to the total number “killed in action,” a narrow group that may not include those who died later of wounds or those who died of disease. Even less have historians focused on the families of the dead. The few exceptions to this have generally focused on the dead in the context of considering how the war they fought was later remembered. The most notable such work is Drew Gilpin Faust’s *This Republic of Suffering*, in which Faust argues that the Civil War caused significant changes to American ideas about death, burial, and grief after thousands of soldiers were buried far from their homes.\(^5^8\) Faust argues that during the Civil War,

> Americans . . . sought to manage battlefield deaths in a way that mitigate separation from kin and offered a substitute for the traditional stylized deathbed performance. Soldiers, chaplains, military nurses, and doctors conspired to provide the dying man and his family with as many of the elements of the conventional Good Death as possible, struggling even in the chaos of war to make it possible for men—and their loved ones—to believe they had died well.\(^5^9\)

Faust also argues that the government’s role in the burial of the war dead reflected changing ideas about the duties owed to those who served the nation and an emerging view that “[c]itizenship represented a contract in which the state and the individual both assumed certain rights and duties, for which either could be called to account.”\(^6^0\) Lisa Budreau’s *Bodies of War: World War I and the Politics of Commemoration in America*,

\(^5^8\) Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 3, 9, 86-98.  
\(^5^9\) Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 11.  
\(^6^0\) Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 229.
1919-1933 discusses the decision to return the World War dead as part of American commemoration of the war and argues that “the democratic burial options offered to families, initially proposed to assuage their grief, also contributed to a massive diffusion of memory. Since most of America’s war dead lay buried in scattered graves throughout the United States, interest in overseas commemoration was undeniably diluted.”

G. Kurt Piehler’s Remembering War the American Way surveys American commemorative practices related to war generally, including the process of returning the WWI dead. Michael Sledge’s Soldier Dead: How We Recover, Identify, Bury, and Honor Our Military Fallen reviews the evolution of the recovery, identification, and burial of American war dead, including after World War I.

Even these works do not generally detail how the government and families worked together to decide how and where the American war dead should be buried and to arrange for burials. In contrast to much of what has been written about America’s wars, this dissertation puts the dead and their families front and center. After men—and a much smaller number of women—died in the World War, families were usually notified of the death. But families wanted much more from the government than a brief telegram. They wanted to understand how men had died and how they were buried in order to process their loss and so they could be sure that the government was fulfilling the duties owed to the dead when they could not. Many families also wanted to know if the dead

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61 Budreau, Bodies of War, 5, 13-81. Steven Trout’s On the Battlefield of Memory looked at different aspects of World War I commemoration, including the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and the burial of Quentin Roosevelt. Steven Trout, On the Battlefield of Memory: The First World War and American Remembrance, 1919-1941 (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2010).
62 Piehler, Remembering War the American Way, 93-125.
would be returned to them at government expense as Secretary of War Baker had said, how long the process would take, and whether it would be possible to view and identify bodies when they were returned. This dissertation will demonstrate that the interaction between the families of the World War dead and the government about what was to become of the dead would change forever the way that Americans and the military viewed the government’s obligations to the families of those who died in the service of the nation. For the first time, the War Department would have to dedicate extensive resources to the logistical challenge of arranging for the permanent burial of large numbers of the dead and to responding to families on an individual basis. The War Department’s Cemeterial Division and GRS staffs consolidated available information about the dead, sought more information where possible, and sent personalized correspondence to tens of thousands of families. These organizations did this in part to avoid negative attention from families, Congress, and the press, but the government was also coming to understand that Americans increasingly believed the military had a duty to respect the grief of families, to acknowledge their sacrifices, and to provide what solace was possible. In the end, the federal government would learn that families expected a significant effort from the military to account for the dead, and the lessons the Department learned would establish traditions for all of America’s subsequent wars.

This dissertation will look at the interaction between the federal government and families from a number of perspectives. The dissertation will examine the correspondence that families sent to the government about the dead as well as the letters and other materials that the GRS and the Cemeterial Division sent to families to respond
to their concerns and questions. Much of this correspondence was retained after the war and is now held by the United States National Archives, which has “293 Files” or “Cemeterial Files” organized by name for each American who died in service in Europe during and just after the war.64 Though the level of interaction between the GRS and the Division and families varied widely, these Burial Files generally include correspondence between the government and families, such as original letters families sent to the government and carbon copies of the replies sent by the GRS and the Division. Many Burial Files also include internal War Department memos about the investigations conducted to try to get more information for families or analyzing the legal or policy issues raised by families. This dissertation will use the materials in the Burial Files to demonstrate how families expressed their expectations about the government’s duty to them and how the military’s understanding of that duty evolved over time.65 The dissertation will use a combination of excerpts from letters and full-text letters. While the temptation might be great for the eyes of the reader to skip over a full-length letter, as

64 The files are in the National Archives and Records Administration files in St. Louis, Missouri, Record Group 92, having recently been moved from National Archives II in College Park, Maryland. The National Archives electronic record for these files notes that the files are also sometimes called “Burial Case Files.” National Archives and Records Administration, “Correspondence, Reports, Telegrams, Applications, and Other Papers Relating to Burials of Service Personnel, 1/1/1915-12/31/1939,” available from <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/595318?q=burial%20files%20293>; Internet; accessed 31 December 2015.

65 The National Archives files include 5,416 legal-sized boxes of files. The boxes contain the records of the World War overseas dead, but the boxes also include requests for new or replacement government-provided headstones from the families of veterans who died between 1915 and 1939. I reviewed half of the boxes, focusing my efforts within those boxes on the files with the greatest amount of substantial correspondence. These files have been used by other researchers, including Michael Sledge and Erika Kuhlman. Michael Sledge, Soldier Dead: How We Recover, Identify, Bury, and Honor Our Military Fallen (Columbia University Press, 2005); Erika Kuhlman, Of Little Comfort: War Widows, Fallen Soldiers, and the Remaking of the Nation after the Great War (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2012). To my knowledge, however, the only detailed analysis of these files to date was done by David William Seitz in his chapter “‘Let Him Remain Until the Judgment in France’: Family Letters and the Overseas Burying of U.S. World War I Soldiers.” for Udo J. Hebel’s Transnational American Memories.
one might skim over a block quote, these full-length letters are an important illustration of the sophisticated and focused arguments that families from all social strata made to their government to advocate for their interests. Families, no matter their level of education or their comfort with the English language, were willing to express their views, ask questions, or complain about delays or other problems, and many wrote detailed letters to the government that provide insight into their views.

The Burial Files demonstrate a number of themes that will be the subject of this dissertation. First, the Burial Files show that political considerations were important to families. While many families based their final decision primarily on what they thought would relieve their grief or on their need to fulfill the duties they believed they owed to the dead, politics and grief intertwined for many families. Families understood that they were essentially being asked to decide whether the dead would continue to serve the nation, because if families asked that the dead be buried in permanent overseas cemeteries, their graves would forever represent the United States. Some families agreed with Pershing and Roosevelt that it was best to leave the dead buried together overseas to represent the efforts the United States had made during the war and to maintain a symbolic tie to Europe. Others families rejected that view and demanded that the government surrender the dead to families so that they could decide how to bury the dead and venerate graves. Families of all viewpoints read about the debate surrounding the return of the dead in newspapers and wrote the government to respond to issues raised in the dialogue. Some families lobbied for their views with Congress or the Wilson Administration or wrote letters to newspapers. Others wrote the War Department to
express their agreement or disagreement with the statements that government officials made or with the actions of the Allied governments with respect to the American dead. The efforts of families encouraged many public officials, even those who preferred to see the dead left overseas, to decide that it would be better to defer to families. Chapter 1 will demonstrate that families participated directly in the political debates about whether to return the dead, some in the national dialogue and many others in debates in their communities or within their own families, and that the views of families and other Americans evolved as a result of the involvement of families.

Second, the Burial Files show that families not only felt the need to express their confusion and grief to the government but expected that the government would respond to these emotions. A process that the War Department intended to be entirely bureaucratic—with the Department sending form letters to families and asking them to pick from a list of options—quickly turned into a series of conversations between the Army’s Graves Registration Service and Cemeterial Division staff and the families of the dead. Chapter 2 will demonstrate that the relationship between the Department and families changed after the GRS and Cemeterial Division took responsibility for communicating with families, with the tone of official communications becoming more compassionate and more focused on the concerns of individual families.

Third, the Burial Files show that families often challenged the War Department’s decisions about who should make final choices about where to bury the dead. The Department expected families to use written protocols to identify the single individual authorized to direct disposition of the dead, known as the “next of kin,” but families
challenged the Cemeterial Division to reconcile the legalistic rules identifying the next of kin with practical realities, such as if a man’s widow had remarried or his parents had divorced. Chapter 3 will demonstrate that family members forcefully contested both the Department’s rules and other family members in their efforts to be named next of kin, with some family members seeking to control the final decision about where the dead were buried because they thought they knew what was best and other family members clearly hoping to get a measure of revenge in preexisting disputes. These disputes put the Cemeterial Division in the unexpected and difficult position of arbitrating family relationships and negotiating with families.

Fourth, the Burial Files show that while the War Department had agreed to maintain control over the dead to appease the Allies and prevent favoritism, families went to significant lengths to challenge the War Department’s handling of the dead. Even while Department form letters suggested that “heroic patience” was the appropriate response to the long delays in the return of the dead, angry or frustrated families were working to circumvent the Department’s efforts by traveling to visit the graves of the dead overseas, ensuring that grave markers were correct, arranging for private coffins, attending exhumations, and questioning the government’s identification of the dead. A few families even engaged in what amounted to covert raids to bring bodies back from overseas for themselves. Chapter 4 will demonstrate that many families sought ways to exert control over the process of the return of the dead because they questioned either the willingness of the Department to return the dead or the accuracy of the Department’s process. In response to these challenges from families, the Cemeterial Division tried to
accommodate family requests where possible while still attempting to retain control over the process of disinterring and moving the dead.

Fifth, the Burial Files show how families struggled to choose where and how the dead should be buried. In the end, families had to decide whether to have the dead returned to them for burial or to ask the government to bury the dead in national cemeteries in the United States, to leave the dead in their original graves, or to move the dead to permanent American cemeteries in Europe. Even after families made their decision, they still had to wait months or years for the government to complete the tasks necessary so that families could have the dead buried as they wished. This extended period gave families time to reflect, and many changed their minds, sometimes several times, about what they wanted done. While the majority of families asked that the dead be returned to them so they could conduct traditional funeral and burial rituals and later visit graves, many families were willing to trust the government to bury the dead in national cemeteries in the United States or in Europe and to care for the graves long after those most closely connected to the dead were gone. A significant minority of families was willing to have the dead left in the overseas cemeteries that Pershing had envisioned, whether because they agreed with Pershing and other political leaders about the need for stronger ties with Europe or for their own reasons. Chapter 5 will demonstrate that families negotiated with the War Department to ensure that the government would either return the dead to families or bury the dead elsewhere as families wished. If the government was going to assume responsibilities that would have otherwise been the
duties of the family, families insisted on making sure the government also answered their questions about the process and complied with their decisions.

When it came time to decide where to bury the World War dead, more than two-thirds of the American families who lost a loved one in the war would request that the dead be returned to them. Most of these families would bury their dead in private cemeteries across the country. As Budreau argues, the choices these families made significantly affected how the World War has been remembered in the United States, because there would be no central cemeteries like the one at Gettysburg for the World War dead.66 The only concentrated gathering of World War graves in the United States is at Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C., where several thousand men who lost their lives overseas are buried near other veterans of the war who died later, including Pershing.67 Their graves are not far from the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, a memorial initially created to honor the World War dead who had no known graves. Overseas, Pershing would get his permanent cemeteries, which contain the graves of about 30,000 American dead, though the World War cemeteries are much less well known than the World War II American cemeteries, like the one above the Normandy beaches featured in films like Saving Private Ryan.68

66 Budreau, Bodies of War, 5, 13-81.
68 There are six American World War I cemeteries in France: St. Mhiel (originally known as Thiacourt), Somme (originally Bony), Suresnes, Oise-Aisne (originally Seringes-et-Nesles), Meuse-Argonne (originally Romagne-sous-Montfaucon), and Aisne-Marne (originally Belleau Wood). American Battle
While the World War and the graves of its American dead may have largely been forgotten, the process by which the dead were buried changed forever the obligations that the federal government and the military would have to those who died in their service and to those the dead left behind. Over the course of returning the World War dead or arranging for their permanent burial in Europe, the government would come to understand that a new and higher standard had been set for how the families of the war dead should be treated. Bureaucracy, forms, and form letters were not enough. Families—supported by the moral weight of the sacrifices they had made for the nation and by political allies in Congress and elsewhere who wrote the War Department on their behalf—wanted and believed they deserved focused attention from individual members of the military who understood their needs, could obtain the information or answers they sought, and were sympathetic to their grief. After an extended period of trial and many errors, the Graves Registration Service and the Cemeterial Division would eventually find ways to meet those obligations to the satisfaction of most families. That so many families would eventually be content with the results of the process can be attributed to the hard work of the GRS and the Division, but even more, it can be attributed to the efforts of the many families who demanded attention to their needs in ways that left the military with no choice but to dedicate resources to ensure that the dead were buried as families wanted. The legacies of this negotiation are still with us today every time the

Monuments Commission, “Cemeteries and Memorials,” available at <https://www.abmc.gov/cemeteries-memorials#.Vf81SX2guM8>; Internet; accessed 31 December 2015; Sarran, Edmund, War Department memo (with list of old and new cemetery names). Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery would be the largest, with more than 14,000 graves, while the cemetery established in Belgium at Flanders Field would be the smallest, with less than 400 graves. American Battle Monuments Commission, “Cemeteries and Memorials.” The eighth American World War cemetery is at Brookwood near London, England. Ibid.
military tries—and occasionally fails—to live up to the expectations that Americans have for how the dead, and their families, are treated when men and women die for the nation.

Notes on Sources:

Correspondence Files: This dissertation uses letters, many of them hand-written, from families or from the GRS and the Cemeterial Division staffs that are found in the Burial Files. In transcribing letters, I have attempted to reproduce them as precisely as possible, including variations in spelling and grammar and missing words, because I believe the letters demonstrate a great deal about the families who wrote and their determination to be heard despite their confusion and grief and despite their lack of education or their discomfort in confronting a distant bureaucracy. I think it is important to see some of the letters that families sent in their entirety to understand how much time, effort, and emotion families put in to their correspondence with the Department. I have used “sic” very rarely, but I have used question marks to indicate where I could not decipher a word or where a date was unclear. I have attempted to identify the particular organizations to which family wrote, but where it was not possible to identify the recipient of a letter, such as where the letter is addressed only “Dear Sir” and there is no other address information, I have indicated that the letter went generally to the “War Department,” though some families also actually addressed their letters to the War Department. I have made some minor edits: I corrected a few instances of what are by today’s standards unnecessary capitalization and punctuation that made letters less clear,
corrected a few obvious typos in typed letters, and standardized paragraph formats. I have images of all the letters, all of which can also be found in the National Archives.

_Casualty Numbers:_ Even in government and academic sources, the estimated number of deaths in America’s wars vary widely. I have attempted to use what I think are reasonable figures. With respect to the World War, for example, about 115,000 Americans died while serving in the military during World War I, including 80,000 who died in Europe, about 50,000 of those the result of combat.69 One number is relatively clear: the American Battle Monuments Commission, which is responsible for the permanent overseas cemeteries, states that 30,922 Americans who died in the World War have graves in its care, while another 4,452 are commemorated on the “Tablets of the Missing” in the cemeteries as “missing in action, lost or buried at sea.”70


70 American Battle Monuments Commission, “History,” available from <https://www.abmc.gov/about-us/history>; Internet; accessed 31 December 2015. This number includes the grave of Quentin Roosevelt, who is buried in the World War II cemetery at Normandy, and whose death and burial will be discussed more below. American Battle Monuments Commission, “World War I Burials and Memorializations,” available from <https://www.abmc.gov/node/1273>; Internet; accessed 31 December 2015. Congress established the ABMC, an independent government agency separate from the War Department, to oversee the overseas cemeteries in 1923; Pershing would chair the ABMC until his death in 1948. Risch, _Quartermaster Support of the Army_, 695 (citing 42 Stat. 1509 (Act of Mar. 4 1923)); Dickon, _The Foreign Burial of American War Dead_, 64. Plans were formulated to terminate the work of the Commission and hand the cemeteries back to the Army Quartermaster Corps in 1932, but two 1934 Executive Orders gave the ABMC continued responsibility for the overseas cemeteries. Risch, _Quartermaster Support of the Army_, 695 (citing Executive Order 6614 (Feb. 26, 1934), as amended by Executive Order 6690 (Apr. 25, 1934). Lisa Budreau argues that the decision to hand the cemeteries back to the Army Quartermaster Corps was “mysteriously reversed” in 1934. Budreau, _Bodies of War_, 161.
Chapter 1

“He is mine now and no longer belongs to the Government”: The Families of the Overseas War Dead Join the Debate on where the Dead should be Buried

After the World War ended, many prominent Americans expressed their opinions about what should become of the dead. As the press reported, General John Pershing of the American Expeditionary Forces wanted the dead left in Europe; former President Roosevelt wanted his own son’s body left buried in its original grave in France; and other political figures, including members of Congress, argued for or against the return of the dead. The families who had lost someone in the war, however, believed that their sacrifices had given them the right to decide where the dead should be buried, and they generally refused to allow anyone to presume to speak for them. To defend their interests, many families became directly involved in the public debate, testifying before Congress or writing federal officials to lobby for particular legislation, while many others wrote the government to argue for their views. Families who wanted the dead returned were particularly vocal: many believed the government had made a promise to the men who joined the military and to their families that the dead would be returned for burial, while others argued that, regardless of any stated policy, the government had a duty to return what it had taken.

Families from across the country wrote the federal government to explain how the arguments being made in the political debate influenced their decisions about where the dead should be buried. The letters that families sent to the government show that families
clearly understood that, in telling the government where they wanted the dead buried, they were also deciding what political message the graves of the war dead would send. Some families wrote the government that they wanted the dead returned to them so they could decide where the dead would be buried and how graves would be venerated. Other families wrote that they agreed with leaders like Pershing and felt it would be best to leave the dead buried in permanent overseas cemeteries as a symbol of the sacrifices that America had made to defend its European allies. This chapter will argue that, rather than being rendered mute by their grief or by their physical or social distance from the federal government, many families of the war dead took an active role in the national debate over where the dead should be buried and viewed the debate in part as a referendum on the government’s responsibilities to them and to the dead. The efforts of families to urge the government to meet what they saw as its obligations to them not only changed the dialogue about whether the dead should be returned but changed the way Americans thought about the duties the government owed to the families of those who had given their lives for the nation.

The chapter will begin by discussing the official policies regarding the overseas dead, because to appreciate the level of involvement by families in the debate, it is important to understand how the government’s policies on the dead evolved during and after the war and how families viewed the government’s attitude toward the dead over time. The chapter will then discuss the ways that families communicated their views and concerns to the federal government, quoting letters that demonstrate how much individual families wrestled with the issues raised in the debate as they were making their decisions.
Chapter 2 will then focus on how the War Department organized itself to respond to these communications from families.

**Part I: Pershing’s Decisions about Burying the War Dead Frame the Post-War Debate**

Between the time the United States declared war in April of 1917 and the end of the war in November of 1918, the War Department and General Pershing would make a number of decisions that would affect what would become of the overseas war dead in the short term and that would significantly impact how families viewed the government’s actions with respect to the dead in the long term. The War Department’s position on what should become of the World War dead evolved over time, but the first step in developing that position was a perhaps offhanded comment from Secretary of War Newton Baker. After the United States declared war but before American forces had entered the fighting in Europe, Baker stated publicly that the bodies of Americans who died in Europe during the war would be returned to the United States.71 Baker, a former

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mayor of Cleveland with no prior experience with the military, was likely recalling the return of the dead from the Spanish-American and Philippine wars and assuming that Americans in general and the families of the dead in particular would expect to have American war dead returned to the United States after the war.72

Hammond’s Body Returned Here,” *Boston Daily Globe*, October 25, 1917, 6. This may have been the context for a speech by Baker in Boston that Representative Porter claimed in a committee hearing included a promise from Baker that the dead would be returned. Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Removal of Remains of U.S. Troops from France (unpublished) [Part 1]*, 66th Cong., 1st sess., 29 July 1919, 5, 41. Families believed that the government’s promise had been made before Americans entered the fighting. Axe, Reuben, January 8, 1920 letter from mother to GRS (Cemeterial Division) (“want return as our government promised to do both to me and Our Dear Boys when they took them over”); Brown, Martin, January 1, 1920 letter from mother to GRS (Cemeterial Division) (“want my Boys Body Returned to his home as was Promised when this government of ours took them from their homes at that time and sent them to fight in a Foureign Land”); Bunting, Chambers, February 6, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (“we not only desire but insist that the War Department should carry out its promise to us when our Boys entered, that their bodies should be returned to this Country for final Rest after the War was over”); Charles, Frank, September 21, 1921 letter from sister to Cemeterial Division (“you took him away from us with the promise that he would be brought back to this country to lie on the soil for which he sacrificed his life”); Cregan, George, January 11, 1919 letter from mother (on Bring Home the Soldier-Dead League letterhead) to Baker (“our dear boys cross the sea thinking dead or alive they were to come back”); Ellig, Victor, January 12, 1920 letter from parents to Secretary of War Baker (“insist that our dear boys be brought back to their homes for burial and thereby make good the promises of the U.S. Government at the time they were sent over”); Ellis, Roy, October 22, 1919 letter from mother to War Department (“the war dep promised from the very beginning to bring back all dead on request”); McKenzie, Alexander, January 11, 1919 letter from parents to Secretary of State (“when our dear boys marched away to France in response to the call of our Government, we were promised to have returned the bodies of all our heroes who laid down their lives ‘over there’”); Stevenson, William, January 11, 1920 letter from parents, sister, and widow to Secretary of War Baker (“it was a sacred promise made to our honored dead, before they entered the war, and before they made the supreme sacrifice that in the event of being killed, that their bodies would be returned to their loved ones at home. This promise was repeated time and again during the progress of the war.”); Van Cleave, Chester, December 13, 1919 letter from parents to Secretary of War Baker (“fulfill the promises the boys were given in case anything happened to them while in a foreign country”); Young, Edwin, October 6, 1919 letter from stepfather to Army Adjutant General (“the promise made by the Government at the time of taking part in the conflict”). There were press reports about the return of the dead in the fall of 1918, after the War Department sent instructions to Europe that chaplains should keep records with the expectation that the dead would be returned to families, though several articles also noted that, even before the orders to chaplains, the “grave registration bureau has been working with this in view.” “Will Bring Bodies of the Soldier Dead Home,” *Boston Daily Globe*, August 17, 1918, 3; “Army to Send All Dead Home,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 23, 1918, 15; “To Bring War Dead Home,” *Baltimore Sun*, October 23, 1918, 1.

While they did not often say so publicly, the senior military officials in Baker’s War Department, including Pershing, opposed the return of the war dead. Officials like Pershing believed that America needed stronger ties with Europe to improve the nation’s growing international position, and they hoped that leaving the war dead in Europe might make Americans feel more connected to the Western European countries.73 These military officials also had practical concerns. They were focused on winning the war as quickly as possible and did not want resources diverted to administer the dead. Military officials also realized that the return of the dead would be a complicated, expensive, and lengthy logistical challenge and that delays in the return of the dead would likely frustrate and upset families. Officials worried that families who sought return would be disappointed and upset or even horrified if they opened coffins, because of the impact of decay and modern weapons on bodies.74 These officials also must have feared that the government’s inability to return bodies intact and recognizable would make families question how well the military had cared for men who had been drafted and perhaps cause Americans to question the government’s right to draft young men for future wars.


Pershing Determines How the AEF Dead Will Be Buried

General Pershing was given wide discretion in his command of the AEF by the Wilson Administration, and he established a number of policies with respect to the dead that he must have known would greatly impact any effort to return the dead to the United States. When the War Department and the AEF began planning how the American Army would fight in the World War, Pershing left standing existing 1913 regulations that gave unit commanders and chaplains responsibility for burying the dead and marking graves.75

In August of 1917 the War Department created the Army Graves Registration Service, or GRS, to follow behind the AEF lines to find, identify, and bury the dead and record the location of graves; these Army units were modeled on the graves registration units created by the French and British armies shortly after the start of the war to find, identify, and bury their dead after battles.76


As part of their responsibilities, GRS teams marked graves, first with a wooden peg and either a metal identification plate or a metal “dog” tag and later with a wooden cross and an aluminum strip containing the soldier’s name and other identifying information. The GRS was commanded during the war by Charles Pierce, the chaplain who had earlier worked to recover the bodies of the American dead in the Philippines and who was called out of retirement to oversee the training of GRS units in the United States and to command them in Europe. The first GRS units arrived in Europe in October of 1917, and over time the GRS staff would grow from two officers and fifty enlisted men to 150 officers and about 7,000 enlisted men. As part of caring for graves, the GRS

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also conducted commemorative events at temporary American cemeteries, putting wreaths, flags, and other decorations on graves, as was done in national cemeteries in the United States.  

In May of 1918, the GRS introduced America’s allies to the concept of Memorial Day, still known then to many Americans as Decoration Day. American newspapers reported to their readers that French representatives, from ordinary citizens to the Archbishop of Paris, had laid wreaths on American graves. In Washington, D.C., a unit known as the Cemeterial Division supported the GRS. (Going forward, the term “GRS” will generally be used when referring to the European organization, and “Cemeterial Division” will be used to refer to the unit in Washington, although at times the Washington unit and the ports at Hoboken, New Jersey and Brooklyn, New York where cargo ships delivered the dead from Europe were also sometimes identified as the GRS in memos and correspondence.)

Despite having agreed with the creation of the GRS, Pershing still expected that much of the responsibility for burials would remain in the hands of unit commanders and chaplains, and he resisted expanding the size of the GRS, which meant there were not


“‘Our Soldier Dead Honored in France,’” New York Times, May 31, 1919, 3; Covey, William, June 17, 1919 letter from Pierce to mother (“On Memorial Day, 1919, the graves of all American dead in France were decorated and flowers placed on all graves, while appropriate Memorial Day services were held in all American Cemeteries in France.”)


enough GRS units to attend to the dead during the fierce combat of the last months of the war.84 Men killed in combat were often buried hastily by comrades, and temporary grave markers were sometimes lost, leaving no way to locate graves.85 Some of the dead went unburied entirely, when men could not face burying their friends or when fighting moved on too quickly.86 In the Aisne-Marne counter-offensive of July 1918, for example, “very little attention was paid to the dead. Many lay for days without being interred; others were improperly buried or only partially buried in shell holes.”87 When soldiers and marines could not bury the dead, or to mark the location of the badly wounded, survivors might “stick the fallen man’s rifle in the ground, bayonet first, and hang his helmet on its butt, so it would be noticed by a medical corpsman when he passed by.”88 As the front lines on which American forces fought moved back and forth across Western Europe, the bodies of the dead began to impact the morale of the living.89 Field commanders reported

84 Congress, House, Subcommittee 7 of the Committee on Military Affairs, Miscellaneous Military Bills, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., 5 April 1920, 73; United States Army Quartermaster Corps, Operations of the Quartermaster Corps, U.S. Army During the World War, Monograph No. 2, 94; GRS History, Vol. 1, 19; Budreau, Bodies of War, 22, 34.
87 Smythe, Pershing, 159.
88 Smythe, Pershing, 155; Congress, House, Subcommittee 7 of the Committee on Military Affairs, Miscellaneous Military Bills, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., 5 April 1920, 77.
that men were distressed to encounter unburied bodies. The GRS would continue its efforts to find and identify the dead after the fighting finished.

Pershing made several other decisions that would have the effect of delaying the return of the dead and reducing any possibility that bodies could later be recognized by families. First, Pershing countermanded a GRS request that coffins be sent to Europe, based on what he saw as the “difficulties in the practical use of them.” Pershing was likely worried about husbanding available shipping capacity and the impracticalities of using coffins on the battlefield, but his decision meant that coffins were scarce even behind the front lines. In hospitals, the dead were sometimes buried in coffins constructed locally, but casualties from battles and diseases like influenza often overwhelmed hospitals, leading to simpler burial practices. On the front lines, the dead were often buried in blankets, in uniforms, or in nothing at all.

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92 Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Removal of Remains of U.S. Troops from France (unpublished) [Part 2]*, 66th Cong., 1st sess., 30 July 1919, 30; Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Authorizing the Appointment of a Commission to Remove the Bodies of Deceased Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines, from Foreign Countries to the United States, and Defining its Duties and Powers [Part 2]*, 66th Cong., 1st sess., 28, 30 October 1919, 40-43; Marchant, William, April 12, 1919 GRS memo (“due to the great numbers of deaths it was necessary on account of the public health that the bodies be buried . . . bodies were carefully wrapped and sewed in sheets and buried”). A chaplain who had been at Brest during the influenza epidemic in March of 1919 acknowledged that the dead had been transported by truck to a site away from Brest and buried without coffins but argued that the dead were buried with reverence. “Terrible Days Spent at Brest,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 3, 1919, 3.
93 Congress, House, Subcommittee 7 of the Committee on Military Affairs, *Miscellaneous Military Bills*, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., 5 April 1920, 75. Questioned by a member of the House of Representatives about burial practices, the commanding general of the Quartermaster Corps stated that, contrary to reports, soldiers killed in France were buried in their uniforms. Congress, Senate, Committee on Military Affairs,
Second, Pershing rejected a proposal from a non-governmental organization to embalm the American battlefield dead. Soon after the United States entered the war, a group of undertakers calling itself the “American Purple Cross Association” offered to send undertakers to Europe at their own expense to embalm the dead. Purple Cross representatives argued to a congressional committee that the government’s failure to embalm the dead of the Spanish-American War, the Philippine War, and the Mexican Punitive Expedition meant that disappointed families had been unable to recognize the bodies of the dead when they were returned to the United States. Pershing, however, deemed embalming under battlefield conditions impossible and rejected the proposal; Secretary of War Baker accepted his decision, and Congress did not press the issue.

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96 Congress, House, Subcommittee of House Committee on Appropriations, Deficiency Appropriations for the Fiscal Year 1919 and Prior Fiscal Years, 65th Cong., 3rd sess., 10 January 1919, 803; Congress, House, Hampton Moore of Pennsylvania, 65th Cong., 2nd sess., Congressional Record 56 (28 May 1918): 7176-79 (reporting that Pershing had cabled the War Department that “[d]ue to conditions beyond our control, it is ordinarily impracticable to embalm bodies anywhere in the theater of operations. It would be wise for us here to conform to the customs of our allies in this respect. The additional noncombatant personnel and additional supplies necessary to put into effect [the] proposed legislation are factors to be considered”); Congress, House, Hampton Moore of Pennsylvania, 65th Cong., 2nd sess., Congressional Record 56 (10 June 1918): 7588 (reporting “from the War Department the final conclusion that it has reached upon this question” and entering letter from office of Secretary of War into record); “Loving Hands in France Tend Graves of America’s Heroes,” Washington Post, May 25, 1919, S15; “American War Victims to be Buried Abroad,” Boston Daily Globe, May 28, 1918, 9; “Our Dead Must Lie in France,”
Finally, and most significantly for the families of the dead, Pershing decided that the American war dead in Europe would not be returned while the war continued.\textsuperscript{97} Quartermaster General Henry Sharpe recommended as early as May of 1917 that the bodies of American forces who died in Europe be left buried there until after the war.\textsuperscript{98} When Pershing requested permission to order the dead held in Europe for the duration of the war, Secretary of War Baker again concurred.\textsuperscript{99} In his decision, Pershing was guided not just by concerns about the efficient use of resources and his own political views but by the views of America’s allies. France, Britain, and Belgium wanted the American war dead left in Europe at least for the duration of the war. Like Pershing, the Allies did not want American resources diverted from the war effort, but of almost equal importance to the Allied governments was the example that the actions of the United States might set. France, Britain, and Belgium each lost hundreds of thousands of men in the war, and none of the Allied governments wanted to return their own war dead to families, particularly at government expense.\textsuperscript{100} The French government was particularly

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\item Congress, House, Hampton Moore of Pennsylvania, 65th Cong., 2nd sess., \textit{Congressional Record} 56 (28 May 1918): 7176-79 (discussing with John McKenzie of Illinois whether the War Department would return the dead to families during or after the war); Laderman, \textit{Rest in Peace}, 48.
\item Risch, \textit{Quartermaster Support of the Army}, 691; Budreau, \textit{Bodies of War}, 24-25.
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concerned about the possibility of having to return more than a million French dead—or having other governments try to remove the three million other war dead buried in France—and hoped that time would reconcile French families to leaving their dead in battlefield cemeteries.\textsuperscript{101} In Britain, the efforts of a few British families to retrieve the dead privately and the beginnings of a lobbying campaign supporting the return of the dead at government expense led the British government to affirm that it would continue to follow its traditional policy of leaving the British imperial dead buried near where they fell.\textsuperscript{102} Pershing, whom Army Chief of Staff Peyton March later described as having


“about as few qualifications for diplomacy as any man I knew,” attempted to handle the concern of the Allies diplomatically, by agreeing in early 1918 that the American dead would be left in Europe at least until the war was over. The French government had earlier ceded French land to the British and other Allied governments for use as cemeteries, and Pershing agreed to similar terms. The agreement also called for a French-American commission to address the disposition of the American dead after the war.

The death of one famous American soldier, Quentin Roosevelt, in the war led the War Department to revise the policy established by Baker’s statement that all the dead would be returned to the United States. In 1917, Americans read in newspapers that Quentin, youngest son of former President Theodore Roosevelt, had joined the newly established Army Air Service, predecessor to the Army Air Corps. Quentin was

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104 Hayes, Report to the Secretary of War on American Military Dead Overseas, 19; “Bodies of U.S. Soldiers Brought Home After War,” Official Bulletin, June 12, 1918, 2; Congress, House, Hampton Moore of Pennsylvania, 65th Cong., 2nd sess., Congressional Record 56 (10 June 1918): 7588 (entering into record letter from office of Secretary of War stating that Pershing has “arranged with the French Government for sections of the country to be used as military cemeteries”).
reported missing in action after his plane went down behind enemy lines on Bastille Day, July 14 of 1918. A short time later, the German Red Cross reported that Quentin had died and been buried by German forces with full military honors at the site of the crash. When American forces took the area where Quentin was buried a few days later, Quentin’s grave quickly became a shrine and tourist attraction. The Army offered to make an exception to policy and return Quentin’s body to the United States immediately, but Roosevelt wrote to Army Chief of Staff Peyton March to ask that Quentin’s body instead be left permanently where it had initially been buried. When he wrote General March, Roosevelt also enclosed a newspaper clipping reporting that the War Department intended to the return the war dead from Europe and protested against this policy on behalf of himself and his wife, quoting from Ecclesiastes 11:3: “We have

Roosevelt, 485, 491. As these sources note, before the United States entered the war, Quentin Roosevelt had been planning to join the Canadian aviation corps so that he could fly in the war.


always believed that: ‘Where the tree falls/There let it lie.’”\textsuperscript{112} General March replied to Roosevelt’s letter that he was “entirely in sympathy” with Roosevelt.\textsuperscript{113} Roosevelt’s letter and March’s reply were published in the \textit{New York Times} a week after the armistice.\textsuperscript{114} Roosevelt died in January of 1919—probably of an embolism, though the press reported that grief contributed to his death—and a month later, Roosevelt’s widow Edith travelled to France to visit Quentin’s grave and arrange for a permanent grave marker.\textsuperscript{115}

As Secretary of War John Weeks of the Harding Administration later explained, after Roosevelt’s decision to leave Quentin buried in France, the “original policy [to return all the dead] was then modified, under date of Oct. 20, 1918, to the effect that should the nearest relative so request, the remains of the deceased soldier would not be brought home but remain interred in France.”\textsuperscript{116} Weeks also explained that later, “because of the magnitude of the task, it was determined that only those remains should

\textsuperscript{112} “Roosevelt Objects to Removal of Son,” \textit{New York Times}, November 18, 1918, 11; “Roosevelt Will Visit Son’s Grave,” \textit{Boston Daily Globe}, November 18, 1918, 4. Newspapers had reported that Army chaplains in Europe had been told that the American dead in France would be returned to the United States after the war. “All American Dead to be Sent Home after War,” \textit{Washington Post}, October 23, 1918, 1.


\textsuperscript{114} “Roosevelt Objects to Removal of Son,” \textit{New York Times}, November 18, 1918, 11; “Roosevelt Will Visit Son’s Grave,” \textit{Boston Daily Globe}, November 18, 1918, 4; Crawford, Conrad, December 13, 1918 letter from brother serving with the AEF in Europe to Secretary of War Baker (“in compliance with authority given relatives of deceased soldier by the Chief of Staff, Gen. P.C. March, as indicated in a public letter to Mr. Roosevelt dated 29th October, 1918, I request on behalf of my mother (my only living parent) that the body of my brother be not disturbed but rest where it is now buried”); Ely, William, November 19, 1918 letter from father to Chief of Staff March; Trout, \textit{On the Battlefield of Memory}, 227-28.


be returned from France as were requested by the nearest relative and those remaining
gathered into permanent American cemeteries to be perpetually cared for by our
Government.” These changes meant that the dead would only be returned if families
requested; where the families of the dead did not request return or could not be found to
give instructions, the dead would be left in Europe. These changes would have the effect
of increasing the number of American dead left in Europe in the permanent cemeteries
Pershing and other War Department officials envisioned.

There is no indication that any of Pershing’s decisions were questioned at the time
either in the press or by Congress. Most Americans apparently accepted these
decisions in the context of other sacrifices they were being asked to make for the war
effort. Pershing did face some opposition from the Navy Department—at the time
separate from the War Department—which wanted to maintain its pre-war practice of
embalming the bodies of men who died at sea and returning them to families when ships
returned to the United States. The influenza epidemic, which killed many from both

117 Enright, Thomas, July 16(?), 1921 letter from Secretary of War Weeks to editor of Davenport Democrat and Leader. Weeks’s letter also suggests that the Harding Administration also understand the very political nature of the debate surrounding the return of the dead. In his letter, Weeks managed to assure the public that the dead would continue to be returned where families requested, while at the same time implying that he personally opposed returning the dead: Weeks wrote of the original policy that “[r]elatives have held and still hold this to be a solemn contract with them and their dead, which the Government cannot honorably refuse to fulfill.” Enright, Thomas, July 16(?), 1921 letter from Secretary of War Weeks to editor of Davenport Democrat and Leader.


119 As will be discussed in Chapter 4, at least a few families of the dead did write the War Department to ask why the bodies of their family members could not be returned immediately.

120 Navy Department, Annual Report [to Congress], 1919. Report of the Surgeon General, 2164-67 (arguing that the Navy’s practice of returning the dead had “afforded to the bereaved relatives and friends a measure
the Navy and the Army on ships to Europe, taxed the Navy’s ability to embalm and store
the shipboard dead, resulting in some being buried at sea, but the Navy refused to halt a
practice it saw as good for the morale of the Navy, its sailors, and their families.121 The
War Department, no doubt concerned that the Navy’s actions might make the War
Department policies seem harsh, pushed for an agreement with the Navy Department, and
in March of 1918, the Army and Navy agreed that if a body in the custody of the Navy
was taken onto European soil or if a member of the Navy died in Europe, the Navy
Department would leave the body in Europe until after the war.122 The resulting
agreement, published as War Department Bulletin No. 44 and Navy Department General
Order 392, appears to have been the first official written statement of government policy
on the return of the dead.123 The agreement received some press during the war, but no
opposition to the agreement appears to have been raised.124

Soon after the Army-Navy agreement was signed, the War Department
discovered that a senior Army official had violated the new policy. After Lieutenant

122 War Department, Bulletin No. 44, Washington DC, July 26, 1918; Navy Department, General Order
392, Washington DC, May 13, 1918 (stating that “remains of all officers, enlisted men, and civilian
employees who have died or will hereafter die in France shall be buried in France until the end of the war,
when the remains shall be brought back to the United States for final interment” and “[s]uch cemeterial
facilities as the army may have acquired in France shall be available to the navy,” while “remains of all
officers, enlisted men, and civilian employees who die on ships en route to or from the United States shall
be embalmed and returned to the United States on the ship on which the death occurred”); Congress,
House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, [Removal of Remains of U.S. Troops from France (unpublished)
[Part 2]], 66th Cong., 1st sess., 30 July 1919, 5-8; Enright, Thomas, July 16(?), 1921 letter from Secretary
of War Weeks to editor of Davenport Democrat and Leader.
123 War Department, Bulletin No. 44; Navy Department, General Order 392.
124 “Home Burial: Bodies of War Heroes to be Brought Back Here for Interment After the War,” Chicago
Daily Tribune, September 5, 1918, 4; “Graves Here for U.S. Dead,” Washington Post, September 5, 1918,
6; “Final Interment of Slain Soldiers in United States,” Atlanta Constitution, September 5, 1918, 1; “Bodies
to be Brought Home,” American Lutheran Survey, October 9, 1918, 788.
Warren Harries, the son of Brigadier General George Harries, was killed in an auto accident at Brest, France in July of 1918, General Harries ordered his son’s body sent back on a Navy ship for burial at Arlington National Cemetery. The investigation into the incident reached the desk of the Army Chief of Staff, who determined that no disciplinary action would be taken but affirmed that it was “essential that [the] policy that no bodies be returned to [the] United States during [the] war should not be violated in a single instance.” The Army clearly feared that families would be angry if those of particular wealth or status were allowed to have the dead returned quickly while the government was asking ordinary families to wait months or years for their dead.

The Public Debate about Where to Bury the American War Dead Begins

The war ended in November of 1918, and in early 1919, the Army Adjutant General affirmed to the press and the American public that the War Department still generally intended to bring the American dead back to the United States. In May of 1919, Secretary of War Baker, testifying before the United States House of Representatives on an appropriations bill, referred to his earlier statements about the return of the dead, noting that “[a]t the outset, based upon the analogy of the Spanish War experience, the War Department announced that it would bring back the bodies of the

126 Harries, Warren, August 23, 1918 Army Adjutant General memo to Army Chief of Staff; Harries, Warren, January 15, 1920 Army Adjutant General memo to Hayes (assistant to Secretary of War Baker).
soldiers who had died in France.” In his testimony, however, Baker indicated that he personally opposed the return of the dead. When Representative Frank Greene (R-VT) asked Baker whether “it [might] be wiser if the public could, by some definite propaganda be brought to the point where they would ask us to have no bodies brought back at all,” Baker noted that the Department was “advising, as sympathetically and reverently as it can, that course.” The Department also made it clear that the return of the dead would take a long time. After the armistice was declared, the Department began informing the press and families that any efforts to address the status of the dead would have to wait at least until the peace treaty was signed, which suggested that the dead would not be returned for several months. Department officials also cautioned families that living troops would have first priority for shipping capacity.

129 Congress, House, Committee on Military Affairs, _Army Appropriation Bill_, 66th Cong., 1st sess., 29 May 1919, 17-20; “Wanted Dead Left in France: War Department and House Military Committee Start Propaganda,” _Washington Post_, 6. The term “propaganda” did not immediately take on the solely negative connotation that it generally developed but was used to describe all efforts of persuasion, not just attempts to mislead, during and after World War I. Stanley B. Cunningham, _The Idea of Propaganda: A Reconstruction_ (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 2, 3, 79-80. Baker’s opposition to the return of the dead was reported in the press over time, leading families to write Baker or the Cemeterial Division to disagree with Baker’s views. Barber, Archibald, July 28, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (“see in the newspapers of July 20th that Secretary Baker is not in favor of return because some of the bodies were so nearly obliterated by high explosives as to make their identification impossible”); Busey, Charles, October 21, 1919 letter from family to Secretary of War Baker (“won't you please tell me why you are so opposed to bringing back home the bodies of our dear dead boys?”); Cartan, Richard, September 19, 1919 letter from mother to Wilson (“what has Mr. Baker or Mr. Pershing got to say about it”); Jonker, Alvin, June 3, 1919 letter from father to Secretary of War Baker.
130 Allen, Frank, April 6, 1919 letter from Quartermaster Corps to father; Bellman, Jeanette, January 30, 1919 letter from Quartermaster Corps to brother; Daly, Edwin, December 30, 1918 letter from Cemeterial Division to member of United States House of Representatives; Kinsella, Raymond, December 3, 1918 letter from Quartermaster Corps to member of United States Senate; Long, George, February 14, 1919 letter from Cemeterial Division to father.
131 Behn, Edward, June 26, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother (“date for return depends on result of deliberations of a commission now sitting in France to consider questions pertaining to exhumation, transportation and reburial, the transportation of troops now in France to this country and the
The Allies continued their efforts to discourage the return of the American dead. The French legislature introduced a bill in February of 1919 that would have prohibited moving any war dead for a period of three years; the American State Department intervened diplomatically at the request of the War Department and succeeded in getting the French legislation tabled.\textsuperscript{132} In December of 1919, the French government agreed to allow the United States to begin returning its dead from the “Zone of the Interior,” or the non-combat areas of France, but continued to forbid disinterment of the dead in the “Zone of the Armies,” or the combat areas, other than for the purpose of concentrating the dead into fewer cemeteries.\textsuperscript{133} The conference to which Pershing had agreed was


The United States had about 53,000 men buried in the Zone of the Armies and another 18,000 buried in the Zone of the Interior.
held in March of 1920 to address the dead in the Zone of the Armies. The United States delegation specifically agreed that (1) the American government would oversee the process of returning the dead rather than allowing individual families to retrieve their dead, (2) the unidentified American dead would be left in France, and (3) the American dead would only be returned if the next of kin requested, while the French agreed that the American dead could be moved from the Zone of the Armies beginning on September 15, 1920, almost two years after the end of the war. By the time the agreement was signed, the French government had agreed to return its own dead to families in France. The British and Belgian governments agreed to let the American government remove the dead buried in their countries but insisted that their own dead would remain permanently in battlefield cemeteries.

Committee on Expenditures in the War Department, War Expenditures, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., 2 March 1920, 3442; Tragerman, Charles, December 8, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother. The Tragerman letter also noted that the “zone of the army includes Aisne, Ardennes, Somme, Marne, Meurthe-et-Moselle, Vosges, Meuse, Nord, Oise, Territory Belfort, Pas de Calais, Seine at Marne-Arrondisements of Meaux, Coulommiers, [and] Provins.” Tragerman, Charles, December 8, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother.

134 Hayes, Report to the Secretary of War on American Military Dead Overseas, 25-30.
137 WWI GRS History, Vol. 1, 96, 122; Clair, Frederick, November 13, 1920 letter from Pierce to House member (“Belgium has been the last country to give consent to the removal of our dead”); Howard, George, August 7, 1920 letter from Pierce to Red Cross Headquarters (“operations for the removal of our dead from Belgium will not begin, under recent agreement with the Belgian Government, until after October 1st, 1920”); Budreau, Bodies of War, 42. Almost 2,500 Americans were buried in Great Britain,
The negotiations between the United States and the Allies were reported in newspapers and drew particular attention from members of the United States Congress, with many members suspicious that the French were either ungrateful for America’s efforts during the war or motivated by the potential of American tourism to France. Representative William Wood (R-IN) noted that the French “were very anxious to have our boys come over when they were standing with their backs to their wall, gasping for

primarily due to deaths from influenza and the sinking of two American troop ships, the Tuscania and the Otranto. GRS History, Vol. 1, 152-53; “Otranto Sunk in Collision,” New York Times, October 12, 1918, 1; “Tuscania Loss is 101; Troops 59; Civilians 14,” Chicago Daily Tribune, February 8, 1918, 1; “Torpedo Sinks Tuscania, Bearing U.S. Troops, in War Zone; Many Survivors Land in Ireland,” Official Bulletin, February 7, 1918, 1, 5; “Official List of the Tuscania’s Known Dead or Missing,” Official Bulletin, March 19, 1918, 10-12; Sledge, Soldier Dead, 159. The troop transport Tuscania was torpedoed in February of 1918, near the Island of Islay to the west of Scotland and north of Ireland, and while the majority of the men on board were saved by other ships, about two hundred died in the water and were washed ashore. GRS History, Vol. 1, 161-62; R. Neil Scott, Many Were Held by the Sea: The Tragic Sinking of HMS Otranto (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012), xx-xxi, 111. The Otranto, another troop transport, collided with another ship in her convoy and sank in October of 1918. GRS History, Vol. 1, 165-66; R. Scott, Many Were Held by the Sea, xx-xxi.

The British agreed in early 1919 that the Americans could disinter and remove their dead. GRS History, Vol. 1, 155. The overall work of returning the American dead in Europe began in Britain in February of 1920. GRS History, Vol. 1, 159-60. In 1919, the British required the return of relatives who died while serving with the British Imperial forces to submit proof of the soldier’s American citizenship if they wanted the dead transferred to the United States and the GRS. “British Hold Soldier Dead,” Washington Post, January 8, 1921, 2; Fast, Joseph, November 10, 1919 letter from Pierce of GRS to member of United States House of Representatives; Fast, Joseph, December 13, 1919 letter from British office of Graves Registration & Enquiries to Chief of GRS (Cemeterial Division); Sledge, Soldier Dead, 145. By 1922, the British were refusing to allow members of their military, whatever their citizenship, to be exhumed. Farrant, Ethebert, March 22, 1922 letter from Imperial War Graves Commission to father; Finlay, George, March 22, 1922 letter from Imperial War Graves Commission to brother; Nelson, Howard, March 22, 1922 letter from Imperial War Graves Commission to father.

breath. They were perfectly willing to acknowledge the service then, though they are now denying it.” Representative Clement Dickinson (D-MO), who had lost a son in the war, argued that because “[b]illions of [American] dollars were given that France might not be wholly destroyed,” the French should permit the return of the dead. Representative Edward King (R-IL) testified on the floor of the House that “the French people expect that every American family who can raise the money, who have relatives buried in France, will come over and visit the graves of their dead.”

While some members of Congress were frustrated by actions of the Allies, most members were aware that there was a significant domestic debate over whether or not to return of dead and were unwilling to take a firm position on whether the dead should be returned. After the war, more than a dozen resolutions were introduced in Congress on the topic of the return of the dead, some of which led to hearings, but none of which were brought to a final vote. As they debated the issue, some members of Congress argued that only families could decide where the dead should be buried, whether because this

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139 Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, [Removal of Remains of U.S. Troops from France (unpublished) [Part 1]], 66th Cong., 1st sess., 29 July 1919, 16. Representative Huddleston made similar comments, noting that the French people “feel not the slightest obligation to the United States for our intervention” because they “feel that we ought to have come in from the beginning, that it was our war from the beginning.” Ibid., 33.

140 Congress, Senate, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., Congressional Record 59 (27 January 1920), 2132-2134.

141 Congress, House, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., Congressional Record 59 (14 January 1920), 1538-1540.

142 Laderman, Rest in Peace, 53; Sledge, Soldier Dead, 135.

reflected their personal views or because deferring to families would take the decision out of Congress’s hands. Representative William Mason (R-IL) said simply, “Let the parent decide.” Representative William Wood (R-IN) noted that “[p]erhaps if I had a son buried over there, I might [say]: ‘Let him lie where he fell.’ But there are thousands and thousands of American fathers and mothers who do not feel that way; it is a matter of personal sentiment.” Other members thought that the government had a duty to return to families the bodies of men who had died serving their country. Representative Oscar Bland (R-IN) argued that the choice should lie with families specifically because “a parent who gave his or her boy to this cause should have the right to have the body of that boy, that was given to the country, returned for interment in the country that they fought for and loved.” Representative Wells Goodykoontz (R-WV) stated on the House floor that the “government at its own expense and under compulsion of military necessity, having taken the soldier far from home and subjected him to service which cost him his life, upon request of the family, is honorably bound at its own expense promptly to return all that is mortal of the soldier to the tender care of the ones who loved him and who mourn his tragic fate.” Members of Congress recognized that many families felt they

144 Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Authorizing the Appointment of a Commission to Remove the Bodies of Deceased Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines, from Foreign Countries to the United States, and Defining its Duties and Powers [Part 1], 66th Cong., 1st sess., 23 October 1919, 12.
146 Congress, House, Select Committee on Expenditures in the War Department, War Expenditures, 66th Cong., 1st sess., 19, 20 June, 8, 11, 15, 18, 23, 29, 30 July, 5, 28, 30 August, 2, 4-6, 8-11, 16 September, 29 October, 12, 13 November, 15 December 1919, 819.
147 Congress, House, 66th Cong., 2nd sess, Congressional Record 59 (3 December 1919), 87.
had been “promised” that the dead would be returned and debated whether Congress was bound by the statements of War Department officials like Baker.148

Members of Congress debated the War Department’s intent with respect to the return of the dead. Some members believed that the War Department was trying to subvert the will of families by discouraging return.149 Representative Oscar Bland (R-IN) argued that “Army authorities are trying to cultivate a sentiment in favor of leaving bodies in France.”150 Representative Stephen Porter (R-PA), and chair of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, felt that the Department was not “doing its part. They are blocking [the return of the dead].”151 Other members agreed with the Department view that families might be upset and disappointed if they tried to view bodies or worried that


149 Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Authorizing the Appointment of a Commission to Remove the Bodies of Deceased Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines, from Foreign Countries to the United States, and Defining its Duties and Powers [Part 1], 66th Cong., 1st sess., 23 October 1919, 8-11, 13; Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Authorizing the Appointment of a Commission to Remove the Bodies of Deceased Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines, from Foreign Countries to the United States, and Defining its Duties and Powers [Part 3], 66th Cong., 1st sess., 13 November 1919, 78; Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, [Removal of Remains of U.S. Troops from France (unpublished) [Part 2]], 66th Cong., 2nd sess., 14 January 1920, 19; Congress, House, Select Committee on Expenditures in the War Department, War Expenditures, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., 5-7, 9-11, 17-19, 24-26 February, 1, 2, 5, 15, 16, 18 March, 3, 6, 10, 12, 14, 15 April, 28 May 1920, 3463, 3496.

150 Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Authorizing the Appointment of a Commission to Remove the Bodies of Deceased Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines, from Foreign Countries to the United States, and Defining its Duties and Powers [Part 1], 66th Cong., 1st sess., 23 October 1919, 8.

families might receive the wrong remains or believe they had. Congressman Alanson Houghton (R-NY) asked at a congressional hearing whether Congress should “try to discourage bringing [the war dead] back” because “if in any town these bodies were brought back in the condition that they might be brought back in, you might have a very serious situation.” Representative Thomas Connally (D-TX) stated that “[i]f I had a boy who was killed, I would rather have him in one of those national cemeteries than to bring back a little pile of bones that might be his or someone else’s.” Representative James Mann (R-IL) challenged the assertion of another member of the House that the Department was keeping careful records of where men were buried; Mann noted that he raised flowers and that, despite his efforts to label them, it was “the hardest thing in the world not to get them mixed up at times.”

Members of Congress also worried about how much the program to return the dead would cost. The budget was one place where Congress had no choice but to take a position on the return of the dead, because Congress would have to appropriate funds to return the dead and to create and maintain permanent overseas cemeteries. Some

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members, especially members of the House responsible for appropriations, gave close scrutiny to War Department funding requests, in part because the Republican committee leadership feared that the Wilson Administration and the Department would use the war as an excuse to justify expanding the post-war defense budget. Representative James Good (R-IA), chairing a subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee, challenged what he saw as excessive Department budget estimates and stated, “I think Congress would be willing to appropriate any amount of money that is reasonably required to bring back these remains,” indicating that he thought a smaller appropriation would be sufficient. Some members worried that expressions of concern from Congress about the cost of returning the dead might alienate voters, especially the families of the dead. Representative Oscar Bland (R-IN) noted that “Congress can not afford to take the position that would keep these mothers from getting [the dead] back.” Department officials defended the requested funding as necessary to return the dead to families correctly. Charles Pierce testified that the Department intended to “get these bodies back at the earliest possible moment, or as fast as we can consistently with safety and accuracy. . . . People will forgive you for losing $1,000,000 or for squandering $1,000,000, or for anything of that sort, but they will not forgive you for

156 Congress, House, Committee on Appropriations, Sundry Civil Appropriation Bill, 1921, Part 2, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., 7, 8 January, 5, 10 February, 12, 13, 15-20, 29-31 March, 1-3, 10 April 1920, 2639. Congressman Clement Dickinson (D-MO), who had lost a son in the war, also questioned the War Department’s budget for returning the dead on the floor of the House. Congress, House, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., Congressional Record 59 (1 May 1920), 6436.
haste whereby a body’s identity may be lost.”  
Congress passed legislation authorizing funds for permanent overseas cemeteries in early 1921.  
When they testified before Congress, War Department officials argued against the return of the dead and emphasized that it would likely be impossible for families to recognize remains if bodies were returned after so much time had passed.  
Army Chief of Staff March testified in front of a House committee in July of 1919 that “it must be recognized that the bodies of those men who fell on the battle field could not be brought back in a condition where their remains could be recognized.”  
General March noted that bodies were “practically in an unrecognizable condition” by the time the Graves Registration Service began to consolidate the dead and that if “friends or relatives expect to recognize the remains, it will be quite a shock to them to see what they are like.”  
A few War Department officials argued against the return of the dead in the press and to the public.  
Most notably, in August of 1919, when General Pershing was preparing to leave France for the last time, he told reporters that he opposed the return of

158 Congress, House, Committee on Appropriations, First Deficiency Appropriation Bill, 1921, 66th Cong., 3rd sess., January 5, 7, 8, 10-13, 17-21, 24, 1921, 308.
160 Congress, House, Subcommittee 7 of the Committee on Military Affairs, Miscellaneous Military Bills, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., 5 April 1920, 78.
161 Congress, House, Subcommittee No. 3 (Foreign Expenditures) of the Select Committee on Expenditures in the War Department, War Expenditures, 66th Cong., 1st and 2nd sess., 23 July 1919, 199.
Pershing argued that the dead would have wanted to be buried with their comrades and that leaving the dead in Europe would remind the Allies, particularly France, of their ongoing ties to the United States. Pershing was conscious, however, that many families had already stated their intent to have the dead returned and that many Americans were suspicious about the Department’s motives. As a result, Pershing was careful to say that he thought that families should be allowed to choose, as long as they had a “full understanding of all the sentimental reasons against such removal.”


166 The initial figures were based on the Army Adjutant Reply Cards that families returned. As of July 1919, the War Department had received replies to about three quarters of the communications sent out by the Army Adjutant General, which indicated that well over half of families were requesting the return of the dead to the United States. Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *[Removal of Remains of U.S. Troops from France (unpublished) [Part 2]]*, 66th Cong., 1st sess., 30 July 1919, 33; Colvin, Clarence, August 5, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother (“over seventy per cent of the parents have requested the return of the bodies to this country”); Lukish, Michael, October 25, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother (“approximately fifty-eight per cent of the relatives of our deceased soldiers have indicated the desire to have the bodies returned, approximately twenty-three perfect indicated a desire that the bodies not be returned, and approximately nineteen per cent of the next of kin were unheard from”).

General John O’Ryan, who had commanded the 27th Division in Europe during the war, similarly argued to reporters in early 1920 that families should gain a better understanding of battlefield conditions before asking for the return of the dead.\(^{168}\) O’Ryan told the press that there was “‘no civilization on Europe’s battlefields. The entire place was hell’” and that “‘many of the men who were killed on the field of battle were afterward struck by shell fire,’” suggesting that bodies were destroyed or maimed.\(^{169}\) Ultimately, however, O’Ryan said, speaking directly to families, “‘If you know the facts and then decide to have them brought back here, do so.’”\(^{170}\) Some representatives of the War Department made similar statements to Congress. In February of 1919, an Army representative testifying before Congress told a House Committee that he thought it was “a great mistake to bring them back, but you can not satisfy the families of these men in any other way, especially the mothers.”\(^{171}\)

Newspapers published articles about the statements made before Congress and by officials like Pershing and O’Ryan and also published editorials on the issue of whether the dead should be returned.\(^{172}\) A number of major newspapers, including the *New York Times*, published articles and editorials on this issue. For example, the *New York Times* and *New York Times* published articles on the topic of returning the dead on February 23, 1920, in articles titled “France Pays Tribute to America’s Dead,” and “France Pays Tribute to America’s Dead.” These articles highlighted the challenges of returning the dead and the emotional impact on families.

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The *New York Times*, the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, the *Boston Globe*, and the *Washington Post*, argued against the return of the dead.\(^\text{173}\) The *Washington Post*, for example, assured its readers that American graves in Europe were being well tended by the GRS and that the War Department wanted the dead left in France for “perfectly sound reasons,” including the time and expense required to return the dead, the reservations of the French government, the possible recurrence of diseases like influenza as a result of exhuming the dead, and concerns that returning the dead to families would “open up old wounds, which would bring about unhappiness and a lowering of morale.”\(^\text{174}\)

A number of advocacy organizations also attempted to discourage families from asking that the dead be returned. The national headquarters of two newly formed World War veterans groups, the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), generally supported leaving the dead in Europe, though some local chapters dissented.\(^\text{175}\) At least in part, these groups probably hoped that, like Civil War battlefields and cemeteries, centralized European war cemeteries would foster commemoration of particular units and the sites of individual battles. Another advocacy group, the “American Field of Honor Association,” was organized by Bishop Charles Brent, the


former senior chaplain of the AEF, to lobby against return. The leaders of the
Association included a number of public figures—though apparently none who had lost a
family member in service during the war—including former president William Howard
Taft; Evangeline Booth of the Salvation Army; Samuel Gompers of the American
Federation of Labor; Henry Morgenthau; and Owen Wister, author of the *The
Virginian*. In early 1920, Brent sent a letter on behalf of the Association to Secretary
of War Baker arguing against return and released the letter to newspapers. Brent’s
letter agreed that families should be allowed to choose but argued that if families knew
more about the plans for permanent overseas cemeteries, to be known as “fields of
honor,” they might be more content to leave the dead overseas. The Association also
published a booklet containing articles by Brent and others advocating for the dead to be
left overseas and quotes from Baker on the plans for permanent cemeteries in Europe.

One member of the Field of Honor Association received significant publicity for
his advocacy against return. In April of 1921, author Owen Wister sent a letter to the
Paris bureau of the *New York Times* that painted a disturbing picture of both the

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176 Piehler, “The War Dead and the Gold Star,” 95-96; Carol R. Byerly, *Fever of War: The Influenza
Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way*, 95. Like Pershing, Brent believed that American overseas
cemeteries would cement the bonds between America and her allies. “Brent Wants Dead to Stay in

177 Hayes, *A Report to the Secretary of War on American Military Dead Overseas*, 15, 36; “Returning our
Soldier Dead,” *Literary Digest*, February 7, 1920, 20-21; Depkat, “Remembering War the Transnational
Way,” 189; Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way*, 95; Piehler, “The War Dead and the Gold Star,”
172.


180 American Field of Honor Association, “American Fields of Honor for Our Glorious Dead who Remain
Forever Overseas,” Washington D.C.
deteriorating condition of bodies and the way they were being handled. Wister alleged that hundreds of unclaimed remains were “piled” up at the port of Hoboken, New Jersey, where ships docked to offload the dead. The same day, the *Times* also published a letter from a former American ambassador to Italy, Thomas Nelson Page, arguing that it “seemed desecration to dig [the war dead] up.” The *Times* then published responses to the two letters for several days. When reporters asked about the letter, Secretary of War Weeks expressed sympathy with Wister and Page’s views but reaffirmed that the dead would be returned if families requested. Other War Department officials rebutted Wister’s claims and noted that while 500 bodies were in Hoboken awaiting shipment to families, only two sets of remains had gone unclaimed, because families who had requested return could not later be found to give final delivery instructions. Others denounced Wister. In the Senate, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge (R-MA) asked that the

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183 “Plead for Our Dead in France,” *New York Times*, April 15, 1921, 1.
186 “Government is Bound by Wish of Families,” *New York Times*, April 16, 1921, 5; Ludwig, Charles (clipping on GRS efforts in which War Department’s Shannon states that only two bodies were unclaimed of 14,832 returned to date, one of which was buried at Arlington National Cemetery with the 1,626 other dead whose families had requested that the dead be buried at Arlington).
Wister and Page letters and the War Department response be printed in the Congressional Record, while other senators introduced materials rebutting the letters.188

Part II: Families Join the Debate

Prominent Americans may have thought they knew what was best for the United States or for the families of the dead, but families were more than willing to speak for themselves, even if that meant explaining their views directly to the federal government. Until the decades before the war, Americans had traditionally been more connected to their local or state governments, but they quickly learned to address the federal government directly.189 As Christopher Cappazolla notes, the federal government became the “Government” in the years surrounding the World War, a new use of capitalization that reflected the increasing role of the federal government in the lives of Americans.190 In the early 1900s, the federal government had become more involved in the lives, and wallets, of its citizens, while citizens were given a more direct say in the


way their country was run. As part of the war effort, the federal government took control over large portions of the national economy, essentially nationalized the railroads, and instituted programs designed to ensure efficient production and allocation of essential resources and materials. For many Americans, however, the biggest impact the growing federal government would have on their lives in the context of the World War would be the institution of America’s first national draft, which would register about fifteen million men and put about four million into the military between mid-1917 and late 1918. (The size of the resulting organization was so great that enlisted men would, for the first time, be issued identification or serial numbers by the military.) As the federal government called men to serve, it also assumed new responsibilities. As Carol Byerly writes, “Government control and expansion was not a unidirectional process of

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191 Two constitutional amendments, both ratified in 1913, authorized federal income taxes and the direct election of United States senators. Chambers, The Tyranny of Change, 193. The temperance movement and the women’s suffrage movements had begun years before and, aided by the effects of the war on American society, would lead to the 18th Amendment, which created Prohibition, and the 19th Amendment, which granted the vote to women, both of which would be ratified in 1920. Kimberly Jensen, Mobilizing Minerva: American Women in the First World War (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 13; Susan Zeiger, In Uncle Sam’s Service: Women Workers with the American Expeditionary Force, 1917-1919 (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 138.


the government acquiring power, but a dynamic of growing power with an evolving ‘social contract’ and increasing social expectations about the government’s responsibility to its citizens.”195 To aid the families left behind, for example, the federal government set up a major financial program in the Department of the Treasury when private insurance companies declined to insure the men who would go to war.196 As Byerly notes, “The Military and Naval Insurance Act of 1917 signaled the Wilson administration’s grasp of the fact that as soldiers lost many of their freedoms and rights, the government acquired new responsibilities not only for the soldiers, but for their families.”197 The “War Risk Insurance” program was the first major national benefits program since pensions for Civil War soldiers.198 Because families had already dealt with the federal government over a number of such issues before and during the war, they were able to conceive of “the Government” not as a distant or foreboding monolith, but as just another bureaucracy with which they had to interact to get the information or benefits to which they thought they were entitled.

195 Byerly, Fever of War, 43.
196 Craig, Progressives at War, 177.
197 Byerly, Fever of War, 44.
198 “Proposed System of Government Insurance, and Family Allowances for U.S. Soldiers and Sailors, as Outlined by Mr. M’Adoo, Approved by President; Could Compel Men to Save Pay,” Official Bulletin, August 10, 1917, 1; “How War-Risk Insurance Acts as Supplementary Benefit to Family Allowances for Dependents of Soldiers or Sailors,” Official Bulletin, January 16, 1918, 11; “Million Checks a Month Required to Pay Soldier-Sailor Allotments under War-Risk Insurance Plan,” January 18, 1918, 7; Dorothy A. Pettit and Janice Bailie, A Cruel Wind: Pandemic Flu in America, 1918-1920 (Murfreesboro, TN: Timberlane Books, 2008), 127; Neil A. Wynn, From Progressivism to Prosperity: World War I and American Society (New York, NY: Holmes & Meier, 1986), 123. Members of the military could buy policies worth $1,000 to $10,000, and four million men took out policies that averaged almost $9,000. Craig, Progressives at War, 177. More than two million Americans signed up for the program, including, as one federal publication cheerfully noted, more than one hundred thousand named Smith. “100,000 ‘Smiths’ Listed in Allotment Files in Bureau of War-Risk Insurance,” Official Bulletin, April 1, 1918, 2.
The families of the war dead would make extensive demands of the government and the military in particular. Families believed that the sacrifices they had made entitled them to expect that the government would listen to their views, answer their questions, and give them due respect for having sacrificed so much for the nation. Faced with the need to interact with a distant and unfamiliar bureaucracy, many families expected the military to meet what they saw as the obligations due to families and to the dead, while other families had no qualms about bringing, or threatening to bring, political pressure to bear on the military to obtain the results they desired. The efforts of families and their political allies to force the military to address issues relating to the permanent burial of the war dead would result in more time and attention being given to the individual needs of families than the military had anticipated.

**Families Testify and Lobby in Support of Their Views**

As the public debate over whether to return the dead continued, some of the families of the dead became directly involved in the debate, testifying before and lobbying Congress, joining organizations that advocated for their views, and writing the War Department to lobby for legislation. These families were unwilling to let others decide whether the dead would be returned and insisted on expressing their own views to their government. Many families thought that only they had the right to decide where the dead should be buried and that they had a duty to ensure that the dead were buried well, even as they began to understand that they would not be able to fulfill that duty for some time.
A number of parents who had lost sons in the war testified before Congress in favor of the return of the war dead, and their testimony was reported in newspapers. A.B. Pouch, the father of a soldier who died in Europe, testified before Congress in favor of legislation to return the dead. Walter McCoy, chief justice of the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia and a former member of the United States House of Representatives, also lost his son in the war. McCoy testified that he believed the War Department was attempting to deter families from having the dead returned. Concerned about the accuracy of battlefield identifications and about whether graves had been properly marked, McCoy also challenged the Department’s ability to correctly return the dead to their families. Another bereaved father, George Anderson, the


201 McCoy, George; Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Authorizing the Appointment of a Commission to Remove the Bodies of Deceased Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines, from Foreign Countries to the United States, and Defining its Duties and Powers [Part 2], 66th Cong., 1st sess., 28, 30 October 1919, 27-34; Congress, House, Committee on Appropriations, First Deficiency Appropriation Bill, 1921, 66th Cong., 3rd sess., January 5, 7, 8, 10-13, 17-21, 24, 1921, 311.


203 Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Authorizing the Appointment of a Commission to Remove the Bodies of Deceased Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines, from Foreign Countries to the United States, and Defining its Duties and Powers [Part 1], 66th Cong., 1st sess., 23 October 1919, 22; Congress, House, Subcommittee 7 of the Committee on Military Affairs, Miscellaneous Military Bills, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., 5 April 1920, 70; Congress, House, Committee on Appropriations, First Deficiency
assistant city attorney of Richmond, Virginia, assured members of a congressional committee that Secretary of War Baker had told him personally that while Baker and other Department officials thought “the parents ought to consent to a still greater sacrifice and leave those bodies forever in France,” Baker felt the government was bound by its promise to return the dead.204 Fathers were not the only family members to argue their views to Congress.205 The mother of a dead soldier, listed in the congressional records as Mrs. Oscar Jones Vogl, testified in favor of the return of the dead even though, she said, she had “no boy to bring back. Mine was blown to pieces.”206 Vogl argued that she represented many mothers who had lost sons and asked that the government “fulfill its pledge that it made” to return the dead.207 Parents who testified wanted to be sure that Congress understood that they wanted the dead returned to them, and they expected Congress to credit their views, because of the sacrifices they and their family members had made during the war. These parents saw themselves as defending not just their own interests but also those of other families of the dead.

_Appropriation Bill, 1921, 66th Cong., 3rd sess., January 5, 7, 8, 10-13, 17-21, 24, 1921, 311; “M’Coy Describes Neglected Graves,” Washington Post, October 24, 1919, 8._

204 Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, _Authorizing the Appointment of a Commission to Remove the Bodies of Deceased Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines, from Foreign Countries to the United States, and Defining its Duties and Powers [Part 3],_ 66th Cong., 1st sess., 13 November 1919, 70; Dickon, _The Foreign Burial of American War Dead_, 60.


Families also wrote their federal senators and representatives. Some wrote to advocate for the views or in support of pending legislation.\textsuperscript{208} Oscar Wurzbach’s mother wrote her representative in Congress that “I favor the passage of the Bland Bill H.R. 9927, which if passed will enable us poor mothers to have the bodies of our loved ones brought back, which the Government promised to do.”\textsuperscript{209} Others wrote seeking assistance from members of Congress, particularly with respect to getting the War Department to answer their questions or address their requests or concerns.\textsuperscript{210} William Davitt’s mother wrote her federal representative that “I do not like to bother you again but I am not leaving any stone unturned to have my son’s body brought home from

\textsuperscript{208} Busey, Charles, September 1, 1919 letter from mother to member of United States Senate (“as a member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, I am appealing to you to . . . take a personal interest in having the bodies of our fallen soldiers whose friends desire it returned at once not awaiting three years to have it done”); Cleary, James, November 20, 1919 letter from parent to member of United States Senate (“I therefore respectfully request that you use your influence to have such legislation passed as will result in the bringing home of the bodies this winter”); Dobbs, David, January 18, 1920 letter to member of United States Senate from parents (“I hereby sincerely and cordily ask you to give your support in urging Congress to pass the necessary laws to bring home the remains of our ‘Brave Heroes’ from France at once”); May, Roy, February 1, 1920 letter from father to member of United States House of Representatives (“you can do me a great favor by supporting the Bland Bill”).

\textsuperscript{209} Wurzbach, Oscar, March 17, 1920 letter from mother to member of United States House of Representatives.

\textsuperscript{210} Brandt, Henry, November 25, 1919 letter from father to Pierce of Cemeterial Division (“while it looks as if the War Dept does not intend to return the bodies to their friends I shall with thousands of others who have boys buried in France continue to fight until Congress passes a law compelling the War Dept to redeem its promise to the people who have given their boys as a sacrifice in this great war”); Daly, Edwin, February 9, 1920 letter from father to member of United States House of Representatives (“kindly help me to get [the body] at once”); Edwards, Horace, April 5, 1922 letter from father to member of United States Senate (“please you’re your influence in getting our boy sent home”); Middaugh, Charles, June 3, 1920 letter from widow to member of United States Senate (“for some time I have been trying to get information from the Graves Registration Service Dept” but “can get no reply”); Scarborough, Clarence, March 4, 1920 letter from mother to member of United States Senate (“having noticed in the enclosed newspaper clipping that the bodies of soldiers buried in the War Zone will not be returned unless the parents demand it, I am writing you in regard to the return of the body of my son” and “I ask that you please use my letter, if possible, should the Congressional Investigation be made, as I am very anxious that the bodies of the soldiers buried in the War Zone shall be returned where the parents request it”); Sexton, Ernest, January 15, 1920 letter from father to member of United States House of Representatives (“do what you can to have my son’s remains returned to me at once”).
France.” Some families clearly hoped that the Department would answer their questions more quickly and accurately if they involved their senators or representatives. Chapin Barr’s father wrote the Cemeterial Division that his senator was “a personal friend of mine.” These families wanted to bring whatever leverage they had to bear on the Department to get the answers or results that they sought.

Some families also created or participated in organizations that advocated for the return of the dead. The largest single advocacy group for the return of the dead was the “Bring Home the Soldier-Dead League,” formed in 1919 by the same A.B. Pouch who testified before Congress. In his role as head of the League, Pouch wrote to families to keep them informed about developments and wrote the War Department to lobby for

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211 Davitt, William, May 19, 1920 letter from mother to member of United States House of Representatives.
212 Cohen, Haskell, October 20, 1919 letter from mother to Secretary of War Baker (“sending a copy of this letter to Sec War Baker and our Senators”); Corbin, Harlan, October 17, 1919 letter from member of United States House of Representatives to Army Adjutant General (“father is a good friend of mine”); Davidson, Joseph, December 16, 1920 letter from father to Shannon of Army Quartermaster Corps (GRS at Hoboken) (“your kind interest would be appreciated by Senator Underwood”); Horn, Thomas, January 10, 1920 letter from member of United States House of Representatives to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division) (father is a “personal friend of mine”); Nelson, Howard, May 17, 1922 letter from father to Army Quartermaster General (“I am writing this letter at the suggestion of [Representative] Rainey who is also writing to you”); Strassburger, Julien, June 24, 1921 letter from member of United States Senate to Shannon of GRS at Hoboken (father is a “good friend of mine”); Woodul, Charles, September 4, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (copied to Senator Knox).
213 Barr, Chapin, January 6, 1922 letter from father to Penrose of Cemeterial Division.
214 Allen, Joseph, January 11, 1920 letter from mother to Secretary of War Baker (“I just got a letter from the League to bring home the dead soldier so I am writing to you to ask you to have my son’s body brought home as soon as possible”); Druding, George, October 26, 1921 letter from National American War Mothers to War Department; Gallagher, Edward, May 31, 1929 letter from mother to GRS at Hoboken (“I am the founder and first president of the Gold Star Mothers of the World War. I also organized almost 10 years ago the Philadelphia Chapter of War Mothers”); May, Will, April 2, 1931 letter from Army Quartermaster General to mother (advising mother who had inquired about receiving Gold Star to contact President of American War Mothers); Napp, Jack, July 27, 1922 letter from Philadelphia War Mothers to Army Quartermaster General; “War Mothers Ask Return of Bodies of Heroic Sons,” Atlanta Constitution, October 3, 1919, 20; GRS History, Vol. I, 10; “Returning our Soldier Dead,” Literary Digest, February 7, 1920, 20-21; Byerly, Fever of War, 130; Erika Kuhlman, Of Little Comfort: War Widows, Fallen Soldiers, and the Remaking of the Nation after the Great War (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2012), 71; Huelfer, The “Casualty Issue” in American Military Practice, 41; Piehler, “The War Dead and the Gold Star,” 173-77; Laderman, Rest in Peace, 51.
families who wanted the dead returned. Advocacy organizations like these also coordinated widespread efforts to lobby Congress and the Wilson Administration. Pro-return groups were supported in their efforts by undertakers, who had recently begun to

215 Dickinson, Clement, June 4, 1921 letter from father to Davis of Cemeterial Division (“I get no news about what is being done at [the American cemetery at] Romagne except as a few lines appears in New York Times or from letters that come to me from Pouch”); Gillett, Tod, April 27, 1920 letter from brother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division (“Pouch of Bring Home the Soldier Dead League sent my father a copy of your letter”; Ludwig, Charles, December 11, 1920 letter from parents to Pierce of Cemeterial Division (“I was so informed by Mr. Pouch who visited several soldiers cemeteries in France last summer and he told us they usually finish with the interrements of one cemetery before starting another one”); Sherrard, Edward, June 29, 1921 letter from Pouch to Davis of Cemeterial Division (asking about the status of the return of soldier’s remains).

216 Alexander, John, January 12, 1920 letter from mother to Secretary of War Baker (asking for support for legislation); Horn, Frank, June 1, 1920 letter from mother to GRS (Cemeterial Division) (“I wish to state in this letter of the Bring Home the Soldier Dead League. My son was killed on the battle field in France and I wish to state that I want my son brought home to his country”); McKenzie, Alexander, January 11, 1919 letter from parents to Secretary of War Baker (“I am writing this letter at the request of the ‘Bring Home the Soldier-dead League’ asking our American to keep her sacred promise to our dead in France and to us . . . and ask you to support our committee that will wait on you in Washington this week”). At least two pieces of legislation were the topic of sustained advocacy. Representative Thomas Crago (R-PA) introduced H.R. 10045 in the 66th Congress’s first session. Cottingham, Charles, January 10, 1920 letter from mother to Secretary of War Baker (“I want to urge all our representatives and congressman at Washington to support Bill 10045 for the benefit of those who are in deep sorrow unable to visit France and therefore desire their boys buried at home”); Cottingham, Charles, January 11, 1920 letter from mother to Adjutant General Harris (“I trust you will urge our Representatives at Washington to support Bill 10045 for the benefit of those who are in deep sorrow, unable to visit France and therefore desire our boys buried at home”); Howard, Fred, January 5, 1920 letter from parents to Army Adjutant General Harris (“we plead with you to do all in your power to help bring about the passing of the bill introduced by Mr. Crago”); Howard, Fred, January 5, 1920 letter from parents to Pierce (“we plead with you to do all in your power to help bring about the passing of the bill introduced by Mr. Crago”). Representative Oscar Bland (R-IN) introduced legislation. Dowell, Julian, December 2, 1919 letter from father to Pierce of Cemeterial Division (“can you tell me the present status of the bill introduced by Representative Bland to create a Commission to bring back the bodies of our dead at the earliest time practicable”); May, Roy, February 1, 1920 letter from parent to member of United States House of Representatives (“you can do me a great favor by supporting the Bland Bill”); Wurzbach, Oscar, March 17, 1920 letter from parent to member of United States House of Representatives (“I favor the passage of the Bland Bill H.R. 9927, which if passed will enable us poor mothers to have the bodies of our loved ones brought back, which the Government promised to do”). Congressmen William Wood (R-IN) introduced a resolution in June of 1919 to “provide for the removal of the remains of our deceased soldiers, sailors, and marines who fell in battle or who died in the prosecution of this World War, from France to the United States for final disposition.” Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, [Removal of Remains of U.S. Troops from France (unpublished) [Part 1]], 66th Cong., 1st sess., 29 July 1919, 2.
call their work a profession and to organize their political efforts. Undertakers hoped to benefit from the money that families would spend on funerals, especially after the Department announced that families would be reimbursed up to $100 for costs associated with private burials.

A smaller number of family members lobbied against the return of the dead. The Chicago Daily Tribune published a letter written by a local father, himself a military veteran, to the War Department opposing the return of the dead; in his letter Elliott Durand worried that the return of large numbers of dead “might breed a pestilence” and “create a gruesome and most depressing effect, unnecessary, and to be avoided. Their shipment would mean an expense of many millions.” Mabel Fonda Gareissen, whose son Lieutenant Scott McCormick was killed in combat in France in January of 1918, strongly opposed the return of the dead and made undermining undertakers a focus of her efforts. Gareissen had gone overseas after her son’s death to work at a YMCA canteen attached to her son’s unit and believed that her first-hand experience of war gave her

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218 Campbell, William, March 21, 1922 bill from undertaker to Penrose of Cemeterial Division (for exactly $100.00); Cappola, Antonio, September 16, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to widow ($100 meant for expense such as “burial site, hire of hearse, flowers, music, etc.”); Jones, Otis, September 20, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to mother; King, Perry, October 28, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to widow; Kinsley, Thomas, July 20, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to mother; Obermeyer, Henry, May 23, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to father; Venneman, Harry, September 14, 1921 letter from Pallas for Shannon of GRS at Hoboken to sister; Piehler, “The War Dead and the Gold Star,” 174.

219 “Let Heroic Dead Sleep in France, Father Argues,” Chicago Daily Tribune, April 7, 1919, 12; Durand, Elliott, April 9, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General.
views additional weight. Gareissen received publicity for the letter she sent to President Wilson and every member of the United States Senate and House in early 1920 to report on a conversation she claimed to have had with an undertaker who told her that his allies in Washington would ensure that undertakers profited from the return of the dead. The press reported the subsequent congressional investigation and noted that some members of Congress supported Gareissen while others defended undertakers.

### Families Write the Federal Government to Defend Their Choices

Many other families knew about the debate and wrote the War Department to agree with or rebut points raised in the debate as they expressed their own views or sought assurances that the Department was going to bury the dead as they wished. The

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223 Acevedo, Edelmiro, February 3, 1920 letter from widow to Army Quartermaster General (asking for information about letter from Bring Home the Soldier-Dead League); Colvin, Clarence, 1919 letter from
letters that families wrote the Department demonstrate how much families tracked the public debate in newspapers, how much information was circulating through the mail, and how extensively the topic was being discussed in communities. Roy Ellis’s mother sent the Department a newspaper clipping of a letter to the editor by George Anderson and later sent the Department a clipping about Anderson’s testimony before Congress. Some families wrote the Department that they had received information advocating for or against the return of the dead that influenced their thinking. Frank Allan’s mother wrote the Department that she had changed her mind about having her son’s body returned to her after reading a “book” she had received, which may have been a pamphlet written by Mabel Fonda Gareissen. William Better’s mother wrote the Department that she was a member of the Bring Home the Soldier-Dead League and that the League had sent her a letter “explaining the propaganda that is going around of non-

224 Bolin, James, August 6, 1919 letter from widow to War Department (“I have read an article from a paper edited in Washington DC the Stars and Stripes by the staff of former soldiers. They say in there article that it is uncertain whether those buried beneath white crosses in memorial cemeteries whether they will be returned or not”); Gallagher, Joseph, May 5, 1921 letter from mother to War Department (“at one time there was some talk about not bringing the bodies of our dead from a certain zone in France”); Hackenberg, William, March, 24, 1919 letter from brother to member of United States Senate (“it was at one time reported that the Government would bring all the dead to this country and i am writing you at this time to inquire whether this report can be relied upon”); Posey, Otho, August 1, 1919 letter from father to Army Chief of Staff (“any information as to whether they are going to bring any of the dead soldiers back from France”).

225 Ellis, Roy, September 3, 1919 letter from mother to War Department; Ellis, Roy, November 18, 1919 letter from mother to War Department.

226 Baker, Joseph, November 18, 1919 letter from sister to War Department (“my mother has received a letter about passing this bill HR 10045 to bring war dead soldiers sailors and Marines to the US”).

227 Allan, Frank, February 17, 1920 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General. The title of the “book” suggests that what she received was Gareissen’s pamphlet. Kuhlman, Of Little Comfort, 181 (fn. 61). Mervin Bennett’s mother had likely read the same pamphlet before she wrote the War Department that “I thought I wanted return but after reading this book I do not want him brought at all. Leave him with his comrades over there because I think this book tells the truth more than every thing else”). Bennett, Mervin, March 10, 1920 letter from mother to War Department.
mourners who are against bringing home the soldier dead.”

Families also noted that they were talking with others in their community. John Adams’s parents wrote that they had changed their minds about having their son’s body returned to them because “we’ve talked with others who said they wanted their boy sleeping in the soil they so bravely fought for.”

The letters that families wrote the Department demonstrates that many considered the larger issues raised in the public debate even as they made personal and emotional decisions about where the dead should be buried.

When they wrote the War Department to argue for their views, families sometimes reminded the Department that the government had promised men and their families that the dead would be returned or argued that the government had a clear duty to return the dead. The family of William Stevenson wrote Secretary of War Baker using language that had likely been suggested to them by an advocacy group:

228 Better, William, May 1921 letter from mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division.
229 Bell, Augustus, April 22, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (“others I have talked to feel the same”); Calvert, Harry, April 13, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“have talked with others and have decided that it would be better to let his bones rest in France where he gave his life”); Carpenter, Oates, January 1, 1920 letter from mother to Shannon of Army Quartermaster General (GRS at Hoboken) (“having talked with some Red Cross Men who were in France”); French, James, February 17, 1919 letter from mother to Cemeterial Division (“I have talked with a good many of our families and returned soldiers about the disposition of the bodies overseas and the soldiers say they would want to be buried in France”).
230 Adams, John R., February 20, 1920 letter from parents to Pierce of Cemeterial Division.
231 Andrews, Herman, December 14, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“the boys were promised that if any thing should happen when there remains would be sent back”); Cain, Joseph, July 22, 1919 letter from mother to Secretary of War Baker (“you and the rest of the War Dep promise the peoples of US that the boys who died in France would be brought home”); Dockendorf, Frederick, September 17, 1919 letter from widow to Army Adjutant General (“Uncle Sam promised that he would bring every body back”); Durham, Alford, August 26, 1919 letter from father to War Department (“I only say the government agreed with all soldiers to return their bodys if they were killed if I am not mistaken”); Ellig, Victor, January 12, 1920 letter from parents to Secretary of War Baker (“make good the promises of the U.S. Government at the time they were sent over”); Jonker, Alvin, June 3, 1919 letter from parent to Secretary of War Baker (“we want him brought home as we was promised”); McKenzie, Alexander, January 11, 1919 letter from parents to Secretary of State (“when our dear boys marched away to France in
Mt. Pleasant, Pa., January 11, 1920

Hon. Newton Baker,
Secretary of War,
Washington, D.C.

Hon. Sir:-

It is just fourteen months to-day since the ending of hostilities in the great World’s War, and the bodies of our heroic dead still lie buried in the soil of France, with little or no effect on the part of the government to bring home the bodies of our loved ones. It was a sacred promise made to our honored dead, before they entered the war, and before they made the supreme sacrifice that in the event of being killed, that their bodies would be returned to their loved ones at home. This promise was repeated time and again during the progress of the war. But since the close of the war, this sacred promise made, seems to be forgotten for some reason, which we can not understand. If there is one obligation more sacred than any other, it is to our soldier-dead, and we can not think that our government would repudiate so sacred a promise.

We, the undersigned, widow, mother, father and sister of Lieut. William C. Stevenson, late of Co. E., 110 Inft. who was killed in action at the battle of the Marne, demand that the United States keep her sacred promise made to him, and that the body of our loved one be returned to his own country and entombed where we can honor his memory, and where coming generations may venerate the resting-place of an American soldier who died on foreign soil.

This soldier held high the Torch of Liberty, and before God, we must not forsake him.

We ask that you as the head of the War Department, give your influence and power to bring about the return of our honored-dead, and we will ever feel grateful for your effort.

Very Sincerely Yours,

Mrs. William C. Stevenson
Mrs. S.C. Stevenson, mother
S.C. Stevenson father
Viola Stevenson, sister

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response to the call of our Government, we were promised to have returned the bodies of all our heroes who laid down their lives ‘over there’”); Seitz, “‘Let Him Remain Until the Judgment in France,’” 226. Stevenson, William, January 11, 1920 letter from family to Secretary of War Baker. Similar language was used in other letters. Cox, Ralph, January 10, 1920 from father to Secretary of War Baker (“we want our loved one entombed where we can honor his memory and where coming generations may venerate the last resting place of an american soldier who did on foreign soil”); English, George, January 12, 1920 letter from mother to Secretary of War Baker (“being one who has sent her boy and whose body I am anxious to have returned to his native land for entombment where I can honor his memory and where future generations may venerate the resting place of an American Soldier who did on foreign soil”); Finley, Ray, January 10, 1920 letter from parent to Secretary of War Baker (“we want our loved ones entombed when we can honor his memory and where coming generations may venerate the resting place of an American Soldier who died on foreign soil”); Gates, Thurman, January 16, 1920 letter from parents to Secretary of War (“we unite with the kith and kin of the soldier-dead in demanding that America keep her sacred promise to our dead heroes in France in other countries of Europe and to us, to return at once the bodies of
Stevenson’s family wanted the government to “keep her sacred promise made to” Stevenson and asked that “the body of our loved one be returned to his own country and entombed where we can honor his memory.” Stevenson’s family members believed that Baker and the Department had a duty to listen and respond to their concerns.

Other families, rather than using model language provided by advocacy groups, expressed the same ideas in their own words, arguing that the government owed it to them to return the dead. Frank Charles’s sister wrote soon after the war ended:

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January 27th, 1919
Mr. J.C. Ashburn, Adjutant General
War Department, Washington, D.C.

Dear Sir:

Your letter of the 25th inst. regarding my brother, Private Frank M. Charles, Company “B”, 307th Infantry, received, and in reply wish to state that we WANT his body home as soon as you can send it.

We had nothing to say when you took him away from us, and he died for his country, and I think the least you can do is to bring his body back to us.

Could you tell me where he is buried?

Thanking you in advance, I remain
Yours very truly,

Anna Charles

410 West 18th Street,
New York City
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233 Charles, Frank, January 27, 1919 letter from sister to Adjutant General.
Charles’s sister argued that the government had a duty to her family because the family “had nothing to see when you took him away from us,” likely referring to the draft, so “the least you can do is to bring his body back to us.”

Other families of the dead thought that the bodies of the dead belonged to families. These families thought that they had a “right” to the bodies of the dead because the government had “taken” young men and should “give them back.” Author Mary Clark has argued that a family’s “right” to the remains of a dead soldier has evolved over time, so that while families might have felt that they had no choice but to leave the war dead in the custody of the government after the Civil War, families have increasingly seen themselves as entitled to have war dead returned to them for private burial.

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234 Allen, Clarence, October 11, 1919 telegram from mother to Mrs. Wilson (“by the inviolable right of motherhood the body of a son belongs to his mother”); Ayres, Joseph, April 28, 1921 letter from father (“boddy is mine”); Barnes, Austin, December 26, 1919 letter from mother to Secretary of War Baker (“we have the right to the bodys of our loved ones”); Boss, Lewis, August 15, 1919 letter from mother (“he gave all that he had to his Country and France and now again belongs to me his mother”); Cosby, Sidney, January 28, 1920 letter from parent to GRS (Cemeterial Division) (“he no longer belongs to the Government[,] his body is mine and I want it and must have it”); Cox, Percy, March 20, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“since his life is gone his body belongs to me”); Hornstein, David, February 18, 1919 letter from family to Army Adjutant General (“the body does not belong to the government but to his parents”).

235 Burns, Charles, January 11, 1920 letter from mother to Baker (“this sacrifice we made for his country and the Government should do no less than keep their promise not only to parents but our heroes as well of returning their beloved remains to the loved ones at home”); Busey, Charles, October 21, 1919 letter from family to Baker (returning Busey’s body “is such a little thing our government can do in return for all we have given to our country”); Cohen, Haskell, October 20, 1919 letter from parents to Army Adjutant General (“it is the duty of this Government not to fail the soldiers who willingly gave their lives that not only this country but other countries might live”); Decker, Herbert, September 23, 1919(?) letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“the least the Government can do is to bring back our boys and burry them here where they belong”); Painter, Fred, October 27, 1919 letter from parents to Army Adjutant General (“we believe that our Country owes at least this much to those of us who gave our sons for the defence of Our Glorious Flag and for World Democracy”).

would persuade the government to meet what they saw as its obligations. Stanley Carpenter’s mother wrote the Department that “what remains of him belongs to me, his mother, and to me alone, and I cannot understand why you or any other one person, or persons, or Governments, or Organizations, be they what they may, should decide what should be done with my beloved dead.”

John F. Gallagher’s mother wrote the Department that she had the right to her son’s body:

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751 W. 77th St.
Chicago, Ill., 8/26/19

Gentlemen:

I have read General Pershing’s message of August 20th in the Chicago Examiner with reference to letting the heroes lie in France, and I again go on record as saying I positively will not permit the body of my son to stay in France. I want him here with me as early as possible. He is mine now and no longer belongs to the Government.

It is nearly a year since he died and it is about time the Government would make some decision.

You have written me several times in this matter, but give me absolutely no definite information. In your next letter, I hope you can tell me something encouraging.

My boy’s name is Private John J. Gallagher, Co. C, 123rd Machine Gun Bn., Serial 1385619.

Yours truly,
Mrs. M Gallagher
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Gallagher’s mother understood that Pershing thought the dead should stay buried in France, but she rejected this view because she felt that now that her son was dead, “he is mine now and no longer belongs to the Government.” Eugene Smith’s brother likewise argued to the GRS that the government had a duty to return Smith’s remains:

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237 Carpenter, Stanley, January 28, 1920 letter from mother to Secretary of War Baker.
238 Gallagher, John, August 26, 1919 letter from mother to War Department.
March 22 - 19

Mr. Chas. G. Pierce

Dear Sir:

A printed form letter rec’d telling us that Corp. Eugene A. Smith, killed Sept. 5 - 18 has been buried in Commune of Baslieux Le [Fismus?] France.

Now why in God’s name can’t you send this body home, the government took him away to fight and die among strangers, now we the family want him home, his remains. You don’t imagine what sorrow my dear old mother, his mother has gone thru, and her only request is when will this government bring home his dead body. What can we do or who should we write to for this information. When will his remains be shipped home.

Very Truly
Robert J. Smith
5731 Market St.

In re
Corp. Eugene A Smith - died
Co K 110th Inf.239

Smith’s brother felt that the government owed it to the family to return Smith’s remains because the government “took him away to fight and die among strangers,” also likely a reference to the draft. Families like these saw the bodies of the dead as a kind of property, temporarily transferred into the hands of the government out of necessity but “owned” by the families, and thus the government had a duty to return what it had taken “dead or alive.”240 William Better’s mother identified herself as a “member of the Bring Home the Soldier-Dead League of U.S.” when she wrote to remind the Department that the “Government promised to bring them back dead or alive.”241 These families must

239 Smith, Eugene, March 22, 1919 letter from brother to Pierce.
240 Bauer, Frederick, January 19, 1920 letter from mother to Pierce (“Uncle Sam promised to bring the boy's home dead or alive”); Cregan, George, January 11, 1919 letter from mother (on Bring Home the Soldier-Dead League letterhead) to Baker (“our dear boys cross the sea thinking dead or alive they were to come back”); Dahlin, Clarence, November 21, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (“our Government as promised us our body back to us dead or alive”).
241 Better, William, August 14, 1919 letter from letter from mother to Pierce.
have hoped that a practical argument would carry weight with the government, though some may also have been implying legal action if the government did not return the dead.

Some families wrote the War Department to challenge statements that had been made by those advocating against the return of the dead. Families feared that the Department would take the views of prominent Americans who opposed return as representing those of families and wrote to ensure that the Department knew they felt otherwise. Ted Opdyke’s father wrote the Army Adjutant General in early 1920:

Ridgeway, Nj. Jan. 27 - 1920  
P.O. Harris Adj’t Gen’l of the Army  
Washington D.C.  

Kind Sir.  

I see in the papers there is an organization terming themselves “Veterans of Foreign Wars” who are opposing the removal of the American dead in France and favor establishing a National Cemetery in France. I want to state that I am opposed to any such a proposition. I have a boy’s remains over there and the Government promised to return his body to me and I expect them to do so.

This so called organization surely had no one murdered in this war as I have done.

Resp.  
S.S. Opdyke

Opdyke’s father felt the need to say that he disagreed with the VFW, “who are opposing the removal of the American dead in France,” and to challenge the authority of the VFW to speak for families. Opdyke’s father argued that the government had made a promise to

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242 Minor, Victor, January 19, 1920 letter from father to Secretary of War Baker (“noting a news item going the rounds of the papers telling of Senior Chaplain Bishop Chas. H. Brent’s attitude toward the bodies of our soldier dead in France as expressed in an open letter to you and the ‘next of kin’ I desire, as the Father of one who made the supreme sacrifice, to registrar as strong a protest against that view as it is in my power to make”).

243 Opdyke, Ted, January 27, 1920 letter from father to Army Adjutant General Harris.
return the body of his son, that he “expect[ed] them to do so,” and that only he should be allowed to decide where to bury his son.

A number of families wrote to disagree specifically with Pershing’s views or to express suspicion about his motives. Cecil Sprong’s family wrote the War Department that “we see by the papers that Gen Pershing the man with out a heart doesnt want the bodies of the American Soldiers brought home. He isn’t the government. They promised to send all bodies home that wished them.” Ervin Robinson’s family, noting that Pershing was said to be making arrangements to bury some of the American war dead permanently in Europe, asked dryly, “Does Mr. Pershing intend to stay in France or come back to USA?” George Burgin’s father thought that Pershing was trying to force families to leave the dead overseas with help from the French government:

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244 Allen, Charles, September 19, 1919 letter from mother to United States Senator (“Pershing will do all with Congress he can to keep the Government from sending home the bodies”); Behn, Edward, August 22, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“in reference to General Pershing’s statement . . . when he says Our Dead Soldiers would wish to be undisturbed and buried in France . . . I wish to say that the General’s belief is not right in our case”); Brux, Cecil, August 23, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (“I am certainly of different opinion than Genl Pershing”); Bunting, Chambers, September 4, 1919 letter from family to Adjutant General Harris (“I note with very deep regret General Pershing’s position in this matter”); Cartan, Richard, September 19, 1919 letter from mother to Wilson (“what has Mr. Baker or Mr. Pershing got to say about it”); Crowley, George, August 28, 1919 letter from grandmother to Army Adjutant General (“I seen in today’s paper where general pershing says to leave our dead in france . . . that if they could speak they would say so . . . [but] I know for one my boy would say he wanted to lay in the land that gave him birth”); Foster, David, October 6, 1919 letter from father to Secretary of War Baker (“my duty to my son must not be determined by my regard for the French restrictions nor for General Pershing’s recommendation”); Gallagher, John, August 26, 1919 letter from mother to War Department (“I have read General Pershing’s message of August 20th . . . and I again go on record as saying I positively will not permit the body of my son to stay in France”); O’Brien, Clifford, August 24, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“I see by the paper where Pershing states that he believes if the boys could speak for themselves they would want to be left undisturbed ‘over there.’ However I feel as tho if my son could speak he would want to be brought back to dear old USA the one and only country for him”).

245 Sprong, Cecil H, August 9, 1919 letter from parents to Army Adjutant General.

246 Robinson, Ervin, August 7, 1919 letter from family to Secretary of War Baker.
Hubbard Springs, Virginia  
Sept 2 - 1919

War Department, Adjutant General’s Office. Washington.

Dear Sirs, I read General Pershing’s letter in regard to Our Ded in France about leaving them over there. I won’t my son Private George Burgin, who died at Base Hospital No 117 in France on October 9th 1918. He was buried in cemetery attached to said hospital. His grave is no. 2 if he hasn't been removed. I won’t him brought home just as soon as it can be done[,] his request was if he died over there was to be brought home. I filled out a blank to have him brought home and I will never give up for nothing else. I won’t him shipped to Joel G. Burgin, Hubbard Springs, Lee County Va. and I will get him.

I do think it would be one of the low downest things that ever a Government could guilty of after America sent her sons over there to save their nation for them to offer to forbid their dead from being brought home.

Joel G. Burgin  
Hubbard Springs, Lee County, Virginia

Burgin’s father rejected Pershing’s views, because Burgin’s request “was if he died over there [he wanted] to be brought home,” which was Burgin’s father’s wish as well.

Other families wrote the War Department to disagree with the Roosevelt family or to argue that the dead should be returned because they could not visit graves in Europe as Mrs. Roosevelt had done. Henry Clay’s mother, for example, wrote the Department

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247 Burgin, George, September 2, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General.
248 Ahring, Harry, November 3, 1921 letter from mother to Secretary of War Baker ("not everyone is like Mrs. Roosevelt and can go to France"); Barnes, Austin, December 26, 1919 letter from mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division ("most of us will never had the opportunity to visit the grave over there"); Clemons, David, June 27, 1920 letter from parent to Pierce of Cemeterial Division ("we cannot go to France like Roosevelts could for we are poor"); Cross, Paul, February 21, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General ("we could never hope to visit his grave in France, as other parents may do"); Daubert, Samuel, December 13, 1919 letter from widow to GRS (Cemeterial Division) ("Col Roosevelt wished his son to lie in France. That is alright but everyone in the USA hasn’t the money the Roosevelts has to travel back and forth to France to visit the grave of their loved one"); Deakyn, Irving, August 19(?), 1919 letter from father to President Wilson ("I was not in sympathy with Pres Roosevelt idea at all. He said let his son stay there but he was a rich man could afford to go over there and back any time"); Fouts, Loyd, March 16, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General ("Mrs. Roosevelt can visit her sons grave but thousands of us can not do so"); Jonker, Alvin, June 3, 1919 letter from father to Secretary of War Baker ("now Secretary Baker we are not all Col Theodore Roosevelt"); Simpson, Stuart, February 12, 1921 letter from father to GRS at Hoboken ("the government has established a precedent in favor of this request [to leave the body in its original grave] by permitting the body of Col and Mrs Roosevelts son to rest where it fell").
that she was not like “Mrs. Roosevelt [who] can go to France every year or as often as she likes, she has lots of money, she has already been over and seen where he boy lies, it makes a great difference who you are in the world . . .”\textsuperscript{249} In a letter that was passed on to the Department, Edwin Daly’s father wrote Roosevelt’s widow Edith directly to argue that she was “as unfair as Baker, Pershing and the rest that have tried to create a feeling to leave the bodies in France.”\textsuperscript{250} Alvin Jonker’s family wrote Secretary of War Baker that the government should fulfill its promise regardless of what others thought:

\textsuperscript{249} Clay, Henry, August 1, 1919 letter from mother to Pierce of Cemetery Division.
\textsuperscript{250} Daly, Edwin, January 25, 1920 letter from father to Mrs. Edith Kermit Roosevelt.
Secretary Baker

Dear Sir as I have seen in the Milwaukee Paper Sunday that you urged immediate passage of a bill providing for a great national cemetery in France. Now France may be happy and proud to retain the bodies of the American boy who had fallen on her soil. But there is no one more intitle to the bodies then the mothers who gave all and also as my son said to us the last words dead or live I want to be brought back to my home and as the Government has asked us to fill out the Blanks and as we want him brought home as we was promised and also as I have look up the other boys mothers in regards to there boys and they all agree with me and my wife that the boys must be brought home as they have promised and also the desires of the boys themself in close read the First Gold Star Mother Pleads for body just that way is the desires of my wife and our whole family my younger son who is back hear with Co. L 126th Infantry 32nd Division told us by all means have his body brought home he done his duty and done it right now let them for fill there promise to bring them home. Now Secretary Baker we are not all Col Theodore Roosevelt and we all don’t think alike but our Son was dear to us and we could not hold him back and if they all would have been as brave as he was you would not have needed any draft boards then you would have had more men then you needed. Now dear Secretary Baker do as they agreed to do bring them back to us and read this little clipping over of this dear mother and do the right thing with these mother you took the boys there now do as you agreed the boys and mothers and fathers did and we will be very glad please do all you can for us all the mother hear want there boy brought home.

Yours Truly,
Mr. and Mrs. Fred Jonker
and Family
513 Columbus at
Grand Haven Mich

My son name and company. Division Sergt. Alvin Jonker – Co. L. 126 Infantry – 32nd Division. Killed in action Oct. 9 – 1918 and his last wish was when he left was he wanted to be brought back dead or live and he would not go as a draftee so he got into Co. L. 251

Jonker’s family seemed to fear that the Department would assume Roosevelt’s views represented those of other families of the dead and wanted to make sure that the Department understood that “we are not all Col Theodore Roosevelt and we don’t all think alike.” 252 These families wanted to distinguish themselves from officials like Pershing and Roosevelt and make it clear that these men did not speak for them.

251 Jonker, Alvin, June 3, 1919 letter from father to Secretary of War Baker. Jonker’s body was returned to his family in September of 1921. Jonker, Alvin, September 2, 1921 receipt for remains.
252 Some families, usually in the context of asking that their dead be left overseas, referred to Roosevelt’s statements favorably, while others used the Biblical “where a tree falls” language that had become associated with Roosevelt’s views, though these families may have just found the same Biblical inspiration.
Some families wrote the War Department that they were suspicious that the Department was trying to delay the return of the dead so families would have no choice but to leave the dead overseas. John Lingle’s father wrote the Army Adjutant General in late 1919 to ask why delays continued:

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that the Roosevelts had. Cleary, James, November 20, 1919 letter from parent to United States Senator (“I have no quarrel with those who say ‘Let the tree lie where it falls’”); Clover, Greayer, November 19, 1918 letter from parent to Army Chief of Staff (“may I ask for a like consideration accorded Colonel Roosevelt in the protest against removal of my son’s body from where he lies interred in the soil of France”); Jones, Rogers, April 9, 1919 letter from family to Army Adjutant General (“where the tree falls”); Winsor, Philip, January 8, 1919 letter from father to GRS (“where the tree falls”); Trout, On the Battlefield of Memory, 227-28.

253 Aten, Albert, September 29 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“France refuses to let them come for 3 years more for mercenary reasons I think more than anything else as you will see from the enclosed [newspaper] clipping”); Cairns, William, February 2, 1920 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (“the heartlessly mercenary attitude of the French government in this matter is one of the strong reasons for my desire that my son shall not lie longer than is necessary in French soil”); Crawn, John, March 3, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“it looked as though they keep them over there so that when they were sent home they wouldn't be in the condition to look at them”); Satchell, Oscar, October 6, 1919 letter from family to Secretary of War Baker (“I believe the French people like us OK but it will mean a big thing for France if our dead are left in France and that they know as they will get a big some of money from the visitors that will go to see the graves of love ones”).
Adjutant General, U.S.A.,
Washington, D.C.,

Dear Sir:-

This is indeed a sad day for my wife and me, for it is the first anniversary of the death of only son, Capt. John A. Lingle, Jr., who died in an army hospital, Liverpool, Eng., just one year ago today, Oct. 21, 1918, having voluntarily and freely offered his young life as a sacrifice for the benefit of his country. Before he went across he had been informed, as had we, that in case of his death his body would be returned by the government for which he went to fight, that it might be buried at home where members of his family might visit his last resting place. I now have in my possession a letter sent me by a government official last July in which it was stated that the bodies of the dead soldiers would be returned to the United States “in due time”, except in cases where a specific request to the contrary is made. Along about the same time I received a letter from Washington, asking my preference in the matter of having the remains of our son brought here. I answered that such was our desire. The information I received from time to time was that this could not be done for the reason that the government was taxed to its ability in returning those soldiers who survived. But the War Department announced a few weeks ago that demobilization of the soldiers was then complete, and I am at a loss to understand why the removal of the dead heroes is not undertaken without further delay, if such is to be done. But what has distressed me most of all in this matter is the intimation I have received from Washington, and of which I have also read in the newspapers, that the bodies of the soldier dead are to be permitted to remain on foreign soil. This is a direct violation of the implied contract to those who went over never more to return as before, but is also a violation of the promise made by the government to some of us who are parents of those boys, and who have, since the close of the war, been promised the return of the bodies of their sons. I am writing for myself alone, but I know of other parents who feel just as I do about this matter. In the case of our son there can be no difficulty in locating his grave, as might be the case of those who died on the field and were buried there. My son, and several hundred others, died in hospitals in England and Ireland and are buried in cemeteries in these countries, their graves so marked as to make it easy to identify them, and it seems to me that if the government is going to bring those bodies home it is time it were being accomplished.

I am, therefore, writing you to ascertain just what the government is going to do in the premises, and when.

Will you please advise me.

Very Respectfully yours,
John A. Lingle

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254 Lingle, John, October 21, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General.
More than a year after his son’s death, Lingle’s father challenged the Department to fulfill more quickly the “promise made by the government to some of us who are parents of those boys, and who have, since the closer of the war, been promised the return of the bodies of their sons.” Lingle’s father referenced the concerns of other families and sent his letter to the Department on letterhead that indicated he was the editor of a local newspaper, perhaps implying a threat to use his position to raise public questions about the Department’s efforts. Frank Horn’s mother offered a less sophisticated but no less heartfelt argument to the Department expressing her disappointment with the delays in the return of the dead:

Pgh., Pa.
Jan. 11, 1920

Dear Sir:

I am a mother of an American hero who sacrificed his life in France Sept. 27, 1918. I wish to state that I would like my sons body sent to America at once. We want our loved one entombed where we can honor his memory. Before our American boys went over the big sea they were told that if they would fall in the fields of war they would be brought to their country were they belong and should be. I don't see why we have to fight to have them brought over to their own country and where their is a will there is a way.

Name of deceased
Pvt. Frank H. Horn
319 Inf.
Machine Gun Co.
A.E.F.

Sincerely Yours,
Mrs. W. Horn
6810 Baker St.
Morningside
Pgh., Pa.255

When Horn’s mother wrote the Department that “I don’t see why we have to fight to have them brought over to their own country,” it is not clear if she is referring to the actions of

255 Horn, Frank, January 11, 1920 letter from mother to War Department.
her own government or of the French government, but either way she believed that her
government owed it to her to return the dead “at once,” because before men left for war,
they had been told that if they died “they would be brought to their country were they
belong and should be.” Families like these had read about and understood the views of
the Department and its senior leaders and knew that there were political forces both in the
United States and in Europe working against return. These families sought to ensure that
the Department knew that they, and families like theirs, insisted on return and would not
stand by if the Department attempted to halt its efforts. They expected the Department
and the government to take whatever steps were necessary to fulfill what they understood
to be a promise made to the men who went to war and to their families.

Other families clearly focused their frustration on the French government, arguing
that the French should not be allowed to prevent or delay the return of the war dead and
insisting that the United States government pressure the French to allow return.256
Samuel Kinsey’s mother wrote the GRS to object to the delays she thought the French
government was creating:

256 Barksdale, Edward, December 3, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (“our Government
should make a strong demand on the French Government that we will not consent to any further delay”);
Borski, John, February 4, 1920 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division) (“the Michigan
senate will vote to petition the French government to return the bodies of all Americans buried on French
soil”); Hornstein, David, November 14, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (“since our
Government permitted him to go we must use all our powers for the return to his home of the body”);
Pouch, Harold, July 16, 1919 letter from father to Wilson (“should not efforts be made to cut the red tape
without further delay?”).
January 14th 1920

GRAVES REGISTRATION SERVICE
WASHINGTON D.C.

My Dear Sirs:- I note with much satisfaction that the United States Government have decided to redeem their promise to bring “Back the soldier dead.” And I am fully aware that no date can be set for the removal. But France can be shown that the people of the United States are in earnest in insisting that the bodies of the men who so valiently went to their rescue shall be exhumed and returned to be lain along-side their friends and relatives in their own native land.

My son Sgt.[.] Maurice Kinsey was probably killed August the first 1918
But reported August 8th,
Was buried at Fere-en-Tardenois in Grave #192.
And then removed to his present resting place at Seringes-et-Nesles,
And re-burried June 6th 1919, without consulting me[,] his Father.
He gave his life for his Country[.] His Body belongs to me, and I have frequently written to a number of people who are interested in the Idea of bringing back our soldier dead.

They think, and I think with good reason that we who want our Dead should not be delayed, and forced to wait until we go to that “Bourne from which no traveller returns,” just because an ungrateful Country insists on ignoring the affections of a people who willingly sent their sons to protect them from the aggressions of a ruthless enemy. Trusting this matter will be forced to a speedy conclusion I am with others very

Faithfully Yours
Samuel Kinsey
Box 1 Mt. Oliver, Pittsburgh Pa.257

Like other families, Kinsey’s mother argued that the government had promised to return the dead and that her son’s body “belongs to me,” but she was also frustrated with the French, who she thought were “ungrateful” for delaying the return of the dead after Americans had “willingly sent their sons to protect them from the aggressions of a ruthless enemy.” She expected the United States government to explain to the French that families like hers were “in earnest” in wanting the dead returned, and she believed that her government would be able to force the French to permit the return of the dead.

257 Kinsey, Maurice, January 14, 1920 letter from father to GRS (Cemeterial Division).
While many families wrote to the War Department to advocate for the return of the dead, some wrote to say that they had been sufficiently persuaded by what they heard or read to ask that the dead be left overseas.\footnote{Ely, William, November 19, 1918 letter from father to Army Chief of Staff (“seeing your correspondence with Mr. Roosevelt on this subject in yesterday's papers, I take the liberty of making my request to you”); Horn, Harold, August 14, 1920 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“I had written to have my son’s body returned from France [but] after hearing Gen ORyan’s views I think with him it is the best thing to let the boys stay side by side as they died”); Minor, Victor, January 19, 1920 letter from father to Secretary of War Baker (“noting a news item going the round of the papers telling of Senior Chaplain Bishop Chas. H. Brent’s attitude toward the bodies of our soldier dead in France . . . I desire, as the father of one who made the supreme sacrifice, to register as strong a protest against that view as it is in my power to make”); Von Krebs, Paul, July 6, 1919 letter from stepmother to Army Adjutant General (“the only reason why I do not wish too have my sons body brought to my home is I read in the NY papers that ‘General Pershing is going to have a soldiers buring ground in France for all the dead soldiers with appropriate tombstones’”).} James Anderson’s father wrote the Army Adjutant General to ask that his son’s body be left in France in part because “Pershing says it is a difficult job” to return the dead.\footnote{Anderson’s father also noted that his son would “have as good Resurrection from their as here.” Anderson, James, March 3, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General.} Curtis Bender’s mother wrote the Adjutant General that while the family had initially asked that Bender’s body be returned to the family, “since we have heard of General Pershing’s request that the boys be permitted to remain in France, we have decide that the remains of our son also remain in their present resting place.”\footnote{Bender, Curtis, August 16, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General.} John Clark’s widow likewise wrote the Adjutant General that she had changed her mind about having her son’s body returned to her since she had read “General Pershings Cablegram about the removal of bodies from France.”\footnote{Clark, John, August 26, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General. Clark’s body remains buried in Aisne-Marne American Cemetery. American Battle Monuments Commission, available from <https://www.abmc.gov/>; Internet; accessed 31 December 2015.} Two of these three families, however, later changed their minds and asked that the dead be
returned, suggesting how families continued to be affected by the ongoing public debate as well as by their own views and emotions about where the dead should be buried. 262

At least a few families were sufficiently distressed by the public debate that they wrote the War Department simply to ask for advice. 263 Albert Fortune’s parents reflected the confusion that other families must also have experienced when trying to do the “right” thing. Fortune’s parents wrote the Adjutant General that “[w]e would like to ask you for an advise. What would you do if you were in our place[?] Some tell us that Gen. Pershing is not in favor of sending these bodies home. Of course they say it costs a lot to have them sent home . . . but we would like to have him in our home lot.” 264 The Adjutant General’s office replied to Fortune’s parents with information about the process of returning the dead but declined to give the family any advice about where the Fortunes should bury their son. 265 The efforts of the Department to respond to questions like these, and to other issues raised by the families of the dead, will be discussed in Chapter 2.

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262 From the records, it appears that Anderson’s siblings later convinced their father to have Anderson’s remains returned to the family. Anderson, James, February 3, 1922 letter from Army Quartermaster General to sister. The records of the overseas cemeteries do not suggest that Curtis Bender is buried overseas, and there is some information to indicate that he is buried in Ohio. American Battle Monuments Commission, available from <http://www.abmc.gov>; Internet; accessed 31 December 2015; “Mt. Calvary Catholic Cemetery,” available at <http://www.genealogybug.net/Franklin_Cemeteries/mtcalvary/mtcalvary.htm>; Internet; accessed 31 December 2015 (listing grave of “Sergeant, Curtis G., MG CO 166th INF, born Jan 20, 1896, killed in the Battle of Chateau Thierry, France, July 28, 1918”).

263 Baker, Freda, September 1, 1919 letter from parents to Army Adjutant General (“General Pershing has advised leaving the bodies of our boys in France); Birchall, Thomas, undated letter from family to War Department (“I have always understood that the bodies of the deceased soldiers were to be returned to this country but lately have heard many arguments pro and con and am somewhat in the dark about it”); Gustus, Vanner, September 1, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“we read so much in regards to bringing our boys home that we don’t know what would be best”).

264 Fortune, Albert, August 30, 1919 letter from parents to Army Adjutant General.

265 Fortune, Albert, October 17, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to father.
Looking back from early in the twenty-first century, it is hard to imagine that the return of America’s war dead could ever be the subject of a public debate that included senior military officials urging that the dead be left overseas or that any member of Congress would ever publicly question how much should be spent to return the dead to families. In the period just after World War I, however, the idea that the government was responsible for returning the dead was a relatively new idea. Americans were still attempting to decide what duties the nation owed to those who died in its service and to the families of the dead. The effort to return the dead of the Spanish-American and Philippine wars had suggested to many Americans that the United States and its military had the capability and the resources to find, identify, and return the bodies of those who died overseas, but that was only part of the question for some. For men like Pershing and Roosevelt, the American war dead had the potential to continue to serve their country by being buried in large American cemeteries in Europe. They hoped these cemeteries would cement ties with the Western European powers and send a message that America was itself a world power capable of defending its interests thousands of miles from its shores if events required. Other government officials, including members of Congress, wanted the dead returned to families or at least wanted families to have the option to decide for themselves where the dead would be buried.

Families may have appreciated the support they received from the political figures who shared their views, but families proved themselves fully capable of looking after their own interests. It is clear from the letters sent to the federal government that families gave significant thought to the arguments being made by all sides in the debate as they
struggled to decide what to do, that they participated directly in the debate in large and small ways, and that they helped to shape the discourse about what would become of the dead. Many families expected that their voices would carry special weight because of the sacrifices they had made, and they expected the federal government and the War Department to listen to their questions, concerns, and views and to respond. As the rest of this dissertation will demonstrate, the Department would be surprised and somewhat overwhelmed by the demands that families made of the government and would struggle to meet those demands.
Chapter 2

“My boy who died was a farmer”: The Army Graves Registration Service and the Cemeterial Division Correspond with Families

Senior War Department officials knew that returning the American war dead from Europe was likely to be an expensive logistical challenge that would require them to exhume tens of thousands of bodies for transport to the final locations chosen by the families, but these officials initially failed to understand that a significant effort would also be required to handle the demands and concerns of the families of the dead. During the war, most Americans had been willing to be patient and make sacrifices, and the Department initially assumed that families would be willing to give the Department time to arrange for the permanent burial of the dead. In the spring of 1919, several months after the war ended, the Army Adjutant General’s office, which had notified families of deaths overseas, sent several forms to the emergency addresses that the Department had on file for the dead. The Adjutant General’s office must have hoped that families would simply fill out and return the forms, allowing the Department to identify which bodies should be returned the United States and which were to be left permanently in Europe and enabling the Graves Registration Service in Europe to get on with its tasks.

The families of the dead, however, strongly resisted the implication that the final burial of the dead could be a routine matter of paperwork and forms. During the war, families received few details about how wartime deaths had occurred, which made it even harder for them to understand and accept what had happened. Families wanted and needed to know more. As Drew Gilpin Faust has demonstrated about families who lost
someone fighting in the Civil War, the families struggling to come to terms with the death of a loved one in the World War wanted details about how men had died, including whether they had known of their impending death, whether they had received religious rites, where were they buried, and whether their graves been properly marked.\textsuperscript{266}

Families expected the government to have answers to these questions, and many families wrote the government even as the war continued to ask for more details than they had received in the Adjutant General’s cursory telegrams during the war. The government, however, could provide little of the information that families sought. The War Department and the American Expeditionary Forces documented little beyond the fact of a death, assuming that commanding officers, chaplains, or comrades would write to provide more details to families, as had happened in earlier wars. During the last months of the World War, however, the pace of fighting was so quick and the casualty rates so high that surviving troops were often sent back from Europe to civilian life before they could complete their letters. Many families were greatly upset by the failure of anyone associated with the military to provide any details about overseas deaths and burials, and some also became suspicious that the Department was trying to confuse or delay the process of returning the dead so that families would give up and agree to leave the dead in Europe. In their effort to get the information they sought, families wrote letters to the government forcefully requesting the details they thought they wanted about how men

had died and been buried. And if their initial efforts failed, some families sought assistance from the press or appealed to their representatives in Congress or to other government officials who they hoped could push the Department to fulfilling what families thought was a duty owed to them to provide information about how men had died and been buried while serving their country.

The War Department responded to this increased attention by delegating to the Cemeterial Division in Washington—aided by the Graves Registration Service (GRS) forces in Europe—responsibility for gathering information to send to families. Charles Pierce, who headed the GRS in Europe during the war and commanded the Cemeterial Division from the time he returned to the United States in mid-1919 until his death in 1921, would become the primary government official responsible for dealing with the questions and concerns of the families of the dead. Pierce, who had earlier retired after a career as an Army chaplain before being called back to duty for the World War, set high standards for the Department’s interactions with families. Pierce believed that he had a duty not just to avoid negative publicity but to treat families with kindness, sympathy, and respect as they grieved those who had died in the service of their country.

The assignment of Pierce to oversee the War Department’s interactions with families would ease at least some of the tension between the Department and families. Pierce and his Cemeterial Division staff could do little to hasten the return of the dead, but their efforts clearly gave comfort to families and likely reduced the number of public relations challenges associated with the final burial of the dead. In their letters to the government, many families expressed gratitude for the personal attention that Pierce’s
Division gave them, even when the Division could not get the information they sought. The personal and sympathetic style that the Division used in replying to individual families to answer their questions, address their concerns, or just express sympathy made families feel that someone in the government cared about them as they mourned their loss. This chapter will argue that after the Division assumed responsibility for the Department’s communications with families about how men had died and the conditions under which they had been buried, the correspondence became more responsive and more compassionate; the new tone that the Division took not only comforted families but also lessened the amount of negative media attention that the Department received about the return of the dead. In the end, many families, including some who had initially been very critical of the Department’s handling of the dead, would agree that Pierce and his group had acted well and fairly in their treatment of all involved.

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During the war, the AEF collected basic information about the status of men who were wounded or fell ill or were otherwise not available for duty with their units. The AEF also sent cablegrams to the Army Adjutant General listing men who were known to be dead, missing, or wounded, and the Adjutant General then sent affected families a brief telegram.267 The AEF also collected short reports about deaths that indicated what

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was known about the circumstances. Customary military practice provided that telegrams should be followed by letters from commanding officers or other comrades that would provide more information. The detail in some of the death reports suggest that those who wrote them expected that the reports would form the basis for letters that would eventually be sent to grieving families. Oscar Price’s death report, for example, stated that Price was a “good and courageous soldier” of “excellent” character. The reports also sometimes told of the last moments of the dead, suggesting that those who wrote the reports understood that families would want more details about how deaths had occurred. Nathan Korngold’s death report stated that Korngold had been conscious for about thirty seconds after being wounded and that his last words were “O Mother.”

268 Brown, Walter, death report (“was a gallant soldier and his cheerfulness won the admiration and love of his comrades”); Bullitt, Richard, July 9, 1918 death report (“was a mighty fine fellow and we all thought the world and all of him”); Chamberlain, Guy, March 23, 1919 death report (“the fellows all thought the world of him”); Maxey, Richard, 1918 death report (“a shell hit him, tearing his body all to pieces and killing him instantly”); Venneman, Harry, 1918 death report (“last words are unknown as he was killed instantaneous”).


270 Price, Oscar, undated death report.

271 Collins, Thomas, death report (“no words were uttered”); Eastlick, Fred, death report (“I was next to him when he was struck. He said, ‘I’ve got hit’. He did not die for some time. He asked me to write his home and tell how he died.”); Evatt, Carl, February 25, 1919 death report (“He didn't say anything after he was hit”); Kirby, George, 1918 death report (“died as they were loading him in the ambulance for the base hospital. His last words were of his father.”); Webster, Francis, 1918 death report (“he raised up and said ‘I am hit’ and then lost consciousness. When he came to he asked me to hold his hand and loosen his clothes, that he could not breathe”).

272 Korngold, Nathan, undated death report.
Death reports also seemed designed to reassure families that the dead had not suffered, with many reports referring to a quick and painless death.\(^{273}\)

Some families received letters from commanders, chaplains, or comrades, though sometimes only months after telegram reports of a death.\(^{274}\) Those who wrote families knew that sending such letters was an important duty, even if it was painful and even if they actually knew little about what had happened.\(^{275}\) Austin Kinney’s mother received a letter from her son’s commanding officer in May of 1919, almost a year after Kinney’s death, only after she wrote for more details:


\(^{274}\) Arthur, Romeo, September 29, 1919 letter from comrade to father; DeHart, Bayard, June 9, 1919 letter from comrade to brother (“I am very sorry to have to write you that there is no doubt concerning the death of your brother on June 6th, 1918”); Dunning, Clarence, December 18, 1919 letter from comrade to brother; Frank, Chauncey, October 25, 1919 letter from comrade to mother (“The writer feels very guilty and begs your pardon for not having written you earlier.”); Sweetnam, John, January 27, 1919 letter from comrade to mother (“our Company Commander has only recently joined us after our last action in which we were unfortunate enough to lose all our officers”).

\(^{275}\) Bailey, Oliver, June 29, 1919(?) letter from comrade (“I should have answered your splendid letters some weeks ago, but for the strenuous work I have been doing to help the commandant here restore order and discipline. Then too, I am saving my eyes as much as possible. They were burned with mustard gas on the third day of the Meuse-Argonne offensive and though I returned to duty after a month in hospital, I have not entirely recovered so far as my eyes are concerned, and hence amusing them as little as possible. . . . We have lost severely, but no loss was so personal to me as that of your son, with whom I worked so intimately from the time I joined the battalion at Camp Greene, until we lost him in our first real battle.”); Bair, Harold, October 20, 1918 letter to mother from comrade (“I am not writing to sadden you, but to tell you all I know about the circumstances of his death on the field of battle, and to tell the love and esteem all of his comrades bore toward him”); Frank, Chauncey, October 25, 1919 letter from comrade to mother (“The writer feels very guilty and begs your pardon for not having written you earlier.”); Jackson, Harry, February 25, 1919 letter to father from comrade (“I sympathize with you for your son's supreme sacrifice and grieve the loss of a dear friend.”); Pierson, Walter, September 10, 1918 letter from comrade to parents (“I cannot say enough good things about Walter. He was like an older brother to me, always giving me good advice, and even wanting to fight my little battles for me. If I come out of the prey, I shall do my best to look you up, and I am sure I can explain everything much better than I can write it. Dear friends, I surely trust that this letter may be of some slight consolation to you in your bereavement.”).
“D” Company, 9th Infantry  
10 May 1919  

Mrs. Melvin H. Kinney  
St. George, Maine  

My Dear Mrs. Kinney,  

Your letter to The Adjutant General, of March 19th, relative to your son August, who was a member of this company.  

Your son was killed in action on the morning of July 18th, during the battle of Soissons. We had been over the top about one hour and were fighting our way across a main highway when your son was hit by shell fire and was instantly killed.  

A great many brave boys gave of their lives on that morning. It must be a source of consolation for you to know that your boy died a real hero’s death, for it was this the battle of Soissons, that was the turning point of the war, for it was here we broke the German line.  

Your son was in the Second Division, the Division that stopt the Germans at Chateau Thierry and broke the line at Soissons.  

We have on the press a history of the Division and when it is ready it will be pleasure to mail you a number.  

I deeply regret I cannot tell you the location of your sons burial place, but if you write the Graves Registration Service at Washington, they can give you the desired information.  

I do not know just what the Government intends doing with her dead hero’s but The War Department at Washington will gladly give you all information.  

If I can be of any service to you “over here”, please do not hesitate in writing me, I am  

Sincerely yours,  
Thos. W. Downes  
1st. Lieut. 9th Inf.²⁷⁶  

Kinney’s lieutenant expected that Kinney’s mother would be comforted by his statements that “your boy died a real hero’s death” in an important battle and that her son had died “instantly” and thus had not suffered. The letter from Kinney’s lieutenant provides little information about Kinney’s actual death other than that he was “hit by shell fire” and says nothing about how or where Kinney was buried, suggesting that the lieutenant may  

²⁷⁶ Kinney, Austin, May 10, 1919 letter from comrade to mother.
have been basing his information on the official report of Kinney’s death and not on personal knowledge. Many officials who wrote to families simply assured them that a man had died quickly, had not suffered, had been buried well, and had been a good soldier liked by other members of the unit.277 A comrade assured Russell Riggs’s mother that Riggs was “instantly killed by the fragments of a high explosive shell.”278 Walter Pierson’s fellow marine wrote his family that Pierson had “died instantly” and that he hoped his letter “may be of some consolation to you in your bereavement.”279 These correspondents doubtless had a variety of motives for the limited information they provided: some probably did not have any more details, while others perhaps did not want to relive painful events, did not believe that families could understand how deaths happened in war, or did not want to cause families additional grief by explaining just how men had actually died.280 War veterans often feel that civilians cannot understand what war is like and cannot comprehend the fear or chaos of battle, and World War soldiers were no different.281 As Carol Byerly has noted, those who wrote to families about deaths in the World War “invoked images of heroism and the purpose of the war to

277 Jay Winter notes that the European experience was similar. J.M Winter, “Communities in Mourning,” in Authority, Identity, and the Social History of the Great War, ed. Frans Coetzee and Marilyn Shevin-Coetzee (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1995), 332-33. K.S. Inglis identified the same element in Australia. Inglis, Sacred Places, 94, 99. Winter also argues, however, that comrades were more likely than commanding officers to tell families hard truths in the western European nations. Jay Winter, Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 36.
278 Riggs, Russell, January 9, 1919 letter from captain to mother.
279 Pierson, Walter, September 10, 1918 letter from corporal to family.
280 Capdevila and Voldman, War Dead, 12; Roper, The Secret Battle, 214.
justify a soldier’s sacrifice and to ease his family’s pain. Officers also at times sought to
hide the chaos of a fighting army that may have lost track of its men, or the fact that an
artillery shell had left no trace of a man’s body, or that a wounded soldier had been left in
the field for hours or days.” 282 Some correspondents, however, were brutally honest. 283
A comrade of Bayard DeHart wrote DeHart’s brother to reassure the family that while
DeHart’s body had initially been lost, it had later been recovered and identified by the
metal identification tags that “we all carry around our necks.” 284 DeHart’s comrade
wrote, “It is not very pleasant to write a letter of this kind but I believe it is better to know
the truth than be uncertain.” 285

Many other military officials had no time to write even short letters. 286 The first
American forces arrived in France in July of 1917, and before the war ended in
November of 1918, about 50,000 Americans died overseas as a result of combat, most of
them in the last three months of the war, while another 30,000 died of diseases like

282 Carol R. Byerly, Fever of War: The Influenza Epidemic in the U.S. Army during World War I (New
283 Eckman, John, November 13, 1925 letter from comrade (“he was hit (his comrades, and I’ve forgotten
just who they were, said) by a direct hit of a shell, which took his head from off his shoulders, and I
presume, must also have left very little of his body which was recognizable.”).
284 DeHart, Bayard, June 9, 1919 letter from comrade to brother.
285 DeHart, Bayard, June 9, 1919 letter from comrade to brother.
286 Bennett, Eugene, April 21, 1919 letter from aunt/godmother to GRS in Europe (“wish the Catholic
chaplain would write”); Cronin, Raymond, November 12, 1918 letter from sibling to Pierce of GRS
(Cemeterial Division) (“we do not understand why someone, friend, commanding officer, or Chaplain
hasn’t written to us”); Hanscom, Wilmer, April 26, 1919 letter from sister to officer with AEF in Europe
(seeking addresses of “three or four of his comrades in that Battalion who knew him intimately” and “their
home addresses so we can communicate with them after the army comes home”); May, Clyde, February 20,
1919 letter from parent to Army Adjutant General (“we understood the chaplain, Capt. or some one would
write us but alas no word has come”); Mueller, John, September 4, 1919 letter from father to Pierce (“we
would like to get into communication with the Chaplain who was stationed in that particular hospital”);
O’Neill, Arthur, November 17, 1918 letter from father to Commanding Officer, Fifth Marine Corps (“will
you write to me or ask the regimental chaplain to do so”); Raisor, Franklin, April 23, 1919 letter from
mother to Army Adjutant General (“I have never heard from a chaplain or any one”). Byron Farwell, Over
influenza or in accidents. Commanding officers in fighting units struggled to keep up with the administrative requirements of their jobs, especially late in the war when units were involved in heavy fighting, suffered high numbers of casualties, and were augmented with replacement troops about whom commanding officers sometimes knew little. Unit chaplains were supposed to write families but had other responsibilities. Medical personnel were equally overworked during the relatively brief period in which American forces fought, as men who were wounded or who fell ill were sent to field hospitals. Because all that hospitals could offer in many cases, including to the many influenza victims, was palliative care, nurses were often the medical staff that patients saw most. The Army and Navy had each developed nursing corps staffed by women serving without official rank in the years before the war. By the end of the World War, more than 21,000 women were serving in the Army Nurse Corps, over 10,000 of them with the AEF overseas.

288 Price, James, January 23, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (“we recd a nice letter from his Chaplain telling of his death and burial”); Thurston, James, March 13, 1919 letter from chaplain to brother; Valentine, Russell, December 24, 1918 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS (“received a letter from . . . the chaplain of base hospital 34”).
men suffering from disease and wounds, but hospitals were often overwhelmed, leaving medical personnel with little time to attend to the dying and no time to write to their families.  

Some nurses also felt that the pain of writing to families was more than they could bear or that letters made them feel too close to their patients.  

After the war, commanders, chaplains, comrades, and medical personnel generally returned to civilian life quickly, often without attending to the duty of writing to families.  

In the absence of letters, the only information many families received was a telegram from the Army Adjutant General’s office. These telegrams provided no contact information that would allow families to respond or to ask questions, and families often did not know where to write to get more information. Families sometimes sent reply letters or telegrams directly to the Adjutant General, but families who did not know where to turn wrote to a variety of civilian and military officials, from President Wilson and Secretary of War Baker to Army Chief of Staff Peyton March and General

Christopher Capozzola, Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 87. About 80 nurses died of disease, primarily influenza, in Europe during the war; nurses were buried with other American forces and given military burial honors where circumstances permitted. Byerly, Fever of War, 139; Lisa M. Budreau and Richard M. Prior, eds., Answering the Call: The U.S. Army Nurse Corps, 1917-1919 (Falls Church, VA: Office of the Surgeon General, 2008), 186.

Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, [Removal of Remains of U.S. Troops from France (unpublished) [Part 2]], 66th Cong., 1st sess., 30 July 1919, 30. A chaplain who had been at Brest during the influenza epidemic in March of 1919 acknowledged that that the dead had been transported by truck to a site away from Brest and buried without coffins but argued that the dead were buried with reverence. “Terrible Days Spent at Brest,” Atlanta Constitution, March 3, 1919, 3.

Byerly, Fever of War, 139; Budreau and Prior, Answering the Call, 186.

Henshaw, Willis, April 7, 1919 letter from mother to Graves Registration Service (“I have never received any particulars”); King, Sidney, December 5, 1919 letter from widow to Army Adjutant General (“never heard the details of death or place of burial of my husband”); Kinney, Austin, March 19, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“have never heard any more about it”); Ray, Hobert, January 15, 1919 letter from father to “oficer in charge of graves” (“we never have bin in formed by his comanding oficer concerning his death and buriel”); Riggs, Russell, January 4, 1919 letter from father to Pierce to GRS (“now more than two months since I received that notice and three months since he fell, yet that telegram is all the word I have had concerning the boy”).
John Armstrong’s father wrote General Pershing, “If he is killed will you please write us a line telling us as much as you can in regard to how he was killed. I think he is in your company[.]” Families also wrote to members of Congress, the Red Cross, and other third parties asking how they could get more information.

When they wrote, families often asked for specific details about how their family members had died and been buried. Michael Lukish’s mother wrote the War Department in February of 1919 to ask a number of questions about her son’s death:

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294 Anslow, George, February 2, 1919 letter from brother to Pershing; Galbraith, John, December 29, 1919 letter from mother to Wilson; Smith, Gilbert L., March 22, 1920 letter from sister to Baker; Woodbury, Robert, November 27, 1918 letter from father to Chief of Staff March (noting that Woodbury’s grandfather was a friend of March’s father).
295 Armstrong, John W., September 10, 1919 letter from brother to Pershing.
296 Atwood, Pierce, May 11, 1920 letter from father to member of United States House of Representative; Bishop, Orland, March 30, 1920 letter from parent to United States Senator; Brenner, Louis, August 31, 1921 letter from third party to Jewish Welfare Board; McCready, James, December 30, 1918 letter from mother to Stars and Stripes; White, Wilbert, December 26, 1918 letter from father to YMCA; Winter, Phillip, March 17, 1921 letter from mother to Red Cross.
297 Adams, David, April 28, 1919 letter from sister to GRS in Europe (asking whether son was buried with Catholic rites); Arant, Benjamin, February 14, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“want to know his last words”); Bennett, Eugene, April 21, 1919 letter from aunt/godmother to GRS in Europe (“want to know if he received last Rites . . . . Our sorrow would be less if we were sure that the last Rites of our Holy Religion were given to our boy”); Branson, Ray, January 11, 1919 letter from aunt (“what were his last words?”); Clark, David, March 20, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (“as a father I want to know the particulars of his death. Where was he hit, did he die instantly, how long he laid after being shot, and all about his burial and his last words if any” and “Only a father can feel as sad as I do.”); Dyrlend, Walter, February 3, 1919 letter from father to GRS in Europe (“did he realize he was going to die?”); Houlihan, Robert, December 6, 1918 letter from father to GRS in Europe (“let me know whether or not he has received the last rites of his church and what priest, if any, officiated”); Lukish, Michael, February 28, 1919 letter from parent to GRS in Europe (“what was his last words please”); Ray, Hobert, March 4, 1919 letter from father to GRS in Europe (“whether we was prepared to meet death or not”); Schryer, Earl, March 25, 1919 letter from mother to GRS in Europe (“could you give us any particulars as to the funeral rites held for him”); Byerly, Fever of War, 135. Jay Winter noted a similar phenomenon when writing about the European experience. Winter, “Communities in Mourning,” 332-33; Winter, Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning, 35. Joy Damousi found the Australian experience similar as well. Joy Damousi, The Labour of Loss: Mourning, Memory and Wartime Bereavement in Australia (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
Did my dear son have a priest buring him and did he have any funereal at all. Could you tell me how my son was wounded. Can you please tell me if my son had any thing to say when he was dying. What was his last words please and if you can’t tell me any thing about him when he was dying then please give me the address of the hospital he died at or if you could find out for me I would be very much thankful to you.  

Lukish’s mother wanted to be able to imagine how her son had died and obtain information that she would have known if he had died at home, such as whether he had been attended by a priest or “had any thing to say while he was dying.” Willie Jones’s mother asked whether her son, who died in a motorcycle accident days after the armistice, “was instantly killed or how long did he linger.” Letters like these were an attempt by families to understand in concrete terms how a death had occurred. As Faust argues, the families of men who died in the Civil War sought information about the lives and deaths of their family members because they were trying to recreate traditional rituals surrounding the acknowledgement and recognition of a death. The families of the World War dead reacted similarly to their inability to engage in traditional rituals like funerals by seeking information that would help them the deaths and begin to grieve.

With no process in place to respond to families, many letters were held for some time without any answer. The War Department organizations that did respond to

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298 Lukish, Michael, February 28, 1919 letter from mother to War Department.
299 Jones, Willie, December 20, 1918 letter from mother to War Department.
300 Faust, This Republic of Suffering, 10-11, 15-24, 106-107.
301 Blair, Tracy, October 27, 1919 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to mother; Davitt, William, September 18, 1919 letter from mother to Secretary of War Baker (“I made application to the War Department but have not received a satisfactory reply”); Gaither, Wilson, September 23, 1919 letter from father to “Graves Registration Commission” (“I have received no reply”); Kane, William, September 9, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to father (“delay in answering this letter is regretted, but most of the time has been consumed in obtaining information relative to the grave location”); Wirkus, Daniel, March 17, 1919 letter from parent to GRS in Europe (“have written you before” but “have received no
letters during and just after the war sent families formulaic language suggesting that families should continue to display the “patriotic patience,” “loyal patience,” “patriotic restraint,” or “patriotic resignation” that they had shown during the war while the Department obtained more information about the dead and when bodies might be returned.302 During the war, the federal government had used terms like “duty” and “sacrifice” to describe the obligations of ordinary Americans with respect to the war, and the Department initially used this language with grieving families.303 As Evan Andrew Huelfer argues, “[t]o wage a war without enmity toward the Germans, Wilson’s policy makers consciously employed euphemistic terms like ‘sacred’ and ‘sacrifices’ to allude to the shattered bodies heaped on the battlefield.”304 The Department’s early correspondence with the families of the dead also emphasized the patriotism and heroism of soldiers who had died.305 In February of 1919, the GRS wrote Earl Williams’s mother reply”); Lisa Budreau, Bodies of War: World War I and the Politics of Commemoration in America, 1919-1933 (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2010), 23.

302 Bailey, Howard, December 28, 1918 letter from Quartermaster Corps to United States Senator (“hope that the families will continue to exercise the patriotic patience they have so notably displayed during the prosecution of the war”); Busey, Charles, February 1, 1919 letter from Secretary of War Baker’s private secretary to third party acting on behalf of family (“can only enjoin upon the bereaved families of our dead heroes the same loyal patience which characterized them during the continuance of hostilities”); Carkener, Stuart, March 12, 1919 letter from Third Assistant Secretary of War to father (“hoped that bereaved families will continue to exhibit the same patriotic resignation which so notably characterized them during the prevalence of hostilities”); Galbraith, John, January 9, 1919 letter from Quartermaster Corps to father (“exercise the patriotic restraint that characterized them during the continuance of hostilities”); Wynne, James, December 4, 1918 letter from Quartermaster Corps to sister (“hope that the patience which has hitherto characterized all patriotic families having some in the war may continue”); Budreau, Bodies of War, 13-14.

303 Capozzola, Uncle Sam Wants You, 6.


305 Barrett, Judson, October 10, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother (“commend you for the contribution you have made to the cause for which your son gave his life”); Fowler, John, September 12, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother (“contributed to success of the French in outflanking the German line on the Chemin-des-Dames”).
and referred to “your brave son who was killed.” The Army Adjutant General assured Albert Emerson’s father in March of 1919 that the “bodies of our dead heroes” would be returned to families in due course. This language sought to encourage families to see their loss as a service to the nation, but it failed to acknowledge the grief and frustration that families were feeling when they could not get details about the deaths and burials of their family members.

In their letters to the government seeking more information, many families reflected this language of sacrifice back to the government, with some reminding officials that their family members had died for their country. Emery Frame’s mother wrote that Frame had given his life “to save the nation.” Families frequently referred to the “supreme sacrifice” that the dead had made, suggesting that this phase was in common use. Robert Shields’s mother wrote Charles Pierce that wartime censorship had prevented her from finding out exactly where her son had died and so she could “only

306 Williams, Earl, February 11, 1919 letter from AEF GRS to mother.
307 Emerson, Albert, March 25, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to father.
308 Adkins, Walter, January 11, 1920 letter from mother to Secretary of War Baker (“want his body to be laid in the country for which he gave his life”); Frank, Chauncey, January 31, 1925 letter from mother to Army Quartermaster General (“he sacrificed his life in the one great effort to save our beloved Republic”); Fuller, John, March 18(?), 1919 letter from widow to Army Adjutant General (“the dear one who gave his life in behalf of his country”); Jones, Samuel J., October 12, 1919 letter from sister to Secretary of War Baker (“gave his life for Democracy”); Ludwig, Leo, January 4, 1921 letter from parents to Army Adjutant General (“died for his Country”).
309 Frame, Emery, undated letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“he gave his life to save the nation”).
310 Baird, Verner, March 4(?), 1919 letter from mother to Chief, Graves Registration Service; Cannarozzi, John, November 17, 1919 letter from father to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division); Ciszek, Francis, April 10, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Emery, Joseph, August 27, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; Mueller, John, May 3, 1920 letter from father to Army Quartermaster General; Oberto, Dominic, August 4, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Shields, Robert, September 3, 1918 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS; Van Cleave, Chester, December 13, 1919 letter from parents to Baker; Weber, George, November 17, 1919 letter from sister to Pierce of Cemeterial Division.
know by the newspapers that the US Marines were doing such wonderful fighting at that
time around Chateau Thierry and suppose that is where he made the supreme
sacrifice.”311 As time passed without the return of the dead, some families began to argue
that they had sacrificed too and thus that the government had a duty directly to them.312
Byrd Fox’s widow referred to herself rather than to her husband when she wrote to object
to delays in the return of the dead, arguing that “we who have made the supreme sacrifice
cannot even call the dead bodies of our loved ones our own.”313 Likewise, Benjamin
Eyler’s mother wrote that she was “sorry to here” that her son had died in France but
“glad that I was able to furnish the U.S. Government with the help I did to win the great
war.”314 Razzie Absher’s parents wrote to request the return of their son’s body, because
“[w]e gave our all to the Call of our Country and to our Country’s defense, and now we
want his body sent back here to us.”315 Some families specifically wrote that, while they
had been patient during the war, they now expected the government to provide answers
and to return the dead quickly.316 These families wanted the Department to recognize

311 Shields, Robert, September 3, 1918 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS. As discussed in more detail
below, during the war, War Department censorship prevented the GRS from giving families the specific
locations of cemeteries during the war, and cemeteries were merely identified with numbers. Buell,
Charles, August 1, 1918 letter from Pierce of GRS in Europe to father; Dunlap, Clarence, September 17,
1918 letter from Pierce of GRS in Europe to father; Kirby, George, October 28, 1918 AEF memo to Chief
of French Military Mission (asking that French government not provide cemetery locations as this would
“open the way for an evasion of the prescribed rules of censorship”).
312 Adkins, George, April 7, 1918 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“I willing gave my son for
the cause of liberty”); Gailbraith, John, August 9, 1920 letter from mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division
(“us nearest relatives deserve some consideration for the extraordinary sacrifice”).
313 Fox, Byrd, May 20, 1919 letter from widow to Army Adjutant General.
314 Eyler, Benjamin, June 13, 1920 letter from mother to Cemeterial Division.
315 Absher, Razzie, February 12, 1920, letter from parents to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division).
316 Brown, Lloyd, December 31, 1919 letter from parent to Army Adjutant General (“believe I’ve been
patient about this”); Busey, Charles, August 12, 1919 letter from mother to member of United States Senate
(“I believed they meant what they said and have been patient as I thought that the right thing to do”); Ray,
Hobert, August 2, 1920 letter from father to Quartermaster General (“ive bin patient and waited so long”).
that while others talked about the “supreme sacrifice” made by the war dead, they too had made sacrifices. Department officials struggled to respond to these written challenges from families, which contested the narrative that the government and the military had attempted to establish to justify the war.

Until mid-1919, no single War Department organization was responsible for consolidating information about the dead from the variety of headquarters and AEF organizations. As a result, the Department was initially largely unable to provide the level of detail that families were requesting about how men had died and been buried. The military organizations that initially received and responded to correspondence from families were not particularly well suited to dealing with families. For example, the mother of Hobart Emerson wrote Secretary of War Baker in February of 1919 to challenge the elevated language that the government was using to justify the war and to ask for more details about her son’s death. She wrote that “I have ask som what we have gained[.] They can’t say. Som say freedom. I thought we was all ready free. I wish this could be made plain to me[.]”  

The military organizations that initially received and responded to correspondence from families were not particularly well suited to dealing with families. For example, the mother of Hobart Emerson wrote Secretary of War Baker in February of 1919 to challenge the elevated language that the government was using to justify the war and to ask for more details about her son’s death. She wrote that “I have ask som what we have gained[.] They can’t say. Som say freedom. I thought we was all ready free. I wish this could be made plain to me[.]”  

The letter sent back to Emerson’s mother a week later by the Adjutant General’s office was a short standard letter with basic information about Emerson’s death.

The War Department initially hoped to keep all its correspondence with families focused on the question of where the dead were to be buried. In early 1919, the Army Adjutant General’s office sent three items to the current addresses it had for the

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317 Emerson, Hobart, February 26, 1919 letter from parent to Army Adjutant General.
318 Emerson, Hobart, March 4, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother.
emergency contacts of the dead: a short memorandum from the Adjutant General, a form letter from the Adjutant General, and a reply card that contained the soldier’s name, unit, and rank.\textsuperscript{319} The memo tried to provide answers to questions that families were likely to have. The memo stated that families would not be allowed “to go to France to superintend the preparation and shipment of, or to accompany bodies back to the United States”; explained that Graves Registration Units would care for cemeteries and preserve identification records; noted that “[d]etails concerning the death of our soldiers are not ordinarily received by the War Department” and that “as a rule it will not be possible to furnish details” because “[m]any men were killed during darkness; or on a smoky, dusty battlefield, and no witnesses are available”; and gave addresses for where to write for more information about the location of graves, personal effects, back pay, allotments, and insurance.\textsuperscript{320} The form letter explained to families that the War Department “desires to ascertain the wishes of the families of officers, enlisted men, and civilian employees regarding the permanent disposition of those who have died overseas.”\textsuperscript{321} Like the


\textsuperscript{321} Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, \textit{[Removal of Remains of U.S. Troops from France (unpublished) [Part 2]]}, 66th Cong., 1st sess., 30 July 1919, 34; Angigliore, Mike, Adjutant General form letter to next of kin (marked “returned unclaimed”); Benboe, Herman, April 1, 1919 Army Adjutant
memo, the form letter stated that the Department would return the dead to families for private burial or to national cemeteries in the United States if families requested but noted that it was unclear when the return of the dead would be completed. The form letter also noted that “a desire has been expressed . . . in numerous instances to have the body remain abroad,” that General Pershing was negotiating to establish permanent American cemeteries in Europe, and that a bill was pending before Congress for the establishment of “Fields of Honor” in Europe that would be maintained like existing national cemeteries in the United States. The reply cards were designed to track where families wanted the dead buried. The Adjutant General’s office hoped that families would return the cards, and many did so, but many families also sent letters asking questions or raising concerns.

The Graves Registration Service took primary responsibility for corresponding with the families of the dead after mid-1919. During and after the war, the GRS’s mission in Europe had been to arrange for the burial of the dead. Since the GRS was consolidating information about where graves and bodies might be found as part of the

General Memorandum of Information (dated March 11, 1919); Aaby, Lewis, Army Adjutant General Reply Card; Yowell, Jess, Army Adjutant General Reply Card.


324 Evans, Richard, July 29, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to member of United States House of Representatives (“cards are made out in duplicate and name, rank, serial number and organization of the soldier is typed on each card. One copy is sent to the emergency address and the other retained in our files.”); Field, Charles, November 21, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to member of United States Senate; Seitz, “Let Him Remain Until the Judgment in France,” 220.

325 Congress, House, Subcommittee No. 3 (Foreign Expenditures) of the Select Committee on Expenditures in the War Department, War Expenditures, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., 2 March 1920, 3456-57.
effort to find the unburied dead and to concentrate the dead into central cemeteries in Europe, it made sense for the GRS in Europe and its headquarters organization in Washington, the Cemeterial Division, to assume responsibility for answering letters from families. Letters from families written to the Wilson Administration, Congress, or the various organizations within the War Department were forwarded to the Cemeterial Division and the GRS for responses. Families understood that the person or organization to which they wrote might not be the correct one and asked that the recipient either provide information about where they should write or forward their letters to the correct organization. Families also began to write the Cemeterial Division and the GRS directly after receiving letters or forms about overseas burials from the War Department or reading articles about the GRS’s overseas efforts.

326 Burns, Charles, January 15, 1920 letter from Hayes (assistant to Secretary of War Baker) to mother; Cahoon, Lonnie, February 10, 1919 letter from Lemly for Wood of Army Quartermaster General to mother; Detchon, Benjamin, August 5, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to father; Emerson, Hobart, January 8, 1920 letter from Hayes (assistant to Secretary of War Baker) to father; Fisher, John, January 8, 1920 letter from Secretary of War Baker to father; Hanscom, Wilmer, October 2, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to father; Koplovitz, Samuel, May 24, 1921 letter from Hanson of Cemeterial Division to family; Painter, Fred, March 25, 1921 letter from Penrose of Cemeterial Division to father; Spitz, Melvin, March 29, 1920 letter to father from Office of Secretary of War.

327 DeGraffenreid, Robert, March 2, 1920 letter from widow to War Department (“if you are not the wright one to resieve this letter plese sin it to the one that shood get it for me”); Denekee, Edgar, February 23, 1921 letter from brother to War Department (“if this letter an't at the right place ... see that it go to the place that dose the shipping of the bodies”); Hacker, Truman, February 13, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“if not your jurisdiction, kindly advise me whom to write to”); Koontz, Floyd, August 27, 1920 letter from widow to Army Adjutant General (“if this should go to some other department, will you please forward to proper place”); Smith, Eugene, May 20, 1920 letter from mother to GRS (Cemeterial Division) (“kindly see that properley people get this letter”); Smith, Leander, December 16, 1918 letter from father to Secretary of War (“if I haven’t addressed the right party please hand this letter to the right department”); Traue, George, July 3, 1921 letter from widow to Army Adjutant General (“ask that you have this letter turned over to the correct section, as I did not know to whom to write”); Yount, Roscoe, February 13, 1919 letter from parent to GRS in Europe (“if you can’t supply me with all the information I want to know, please forward this letter to where you think I can learn the full particulars of his death”).

328 Bacon, Charles, March 24, 1919 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS (“have seen in the papers where you told some people about their sons”); Bailey, Frank, February 23, 1920 letter from mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division (“another mother gave me your address”); Danker, Walton, July 18, 1918 letter from
In response to letters from families, the Cemeterial Division and the GRS forces in Europe undertook a significant effort to find and send families whatever information the military had about how men had died and where and how they had been buried, a task that was complicated by the quick demobilization of much of the AEF after the war ended. Some of the GRS’s own staff, including Pierce, were sent back to the United States in July of 1919, while other GRS personnel remained in Europe to oversee the work of finding and concentrating the American war dead from thousands of locations into centralized cemeteries. Many of the AEF and GRS records were transferred back to the United States at the same time, limiting access to the files while they were in transit and preventing the GRS and the Division from responding to families just as the patience

brother (serving with YMCA in Europe) to Pierce; Ellis, Roy, July 20, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (enclosing clipping from AP newspaper referring to Pierce); Forsgren, Faunt, February 3, 1920 letter from parents to War Department (enclosing clipping reporting that Bring Home the Soldier-Dead League had lobbied in Washington and had found Pierce trustworthy). A number of families mentioned having read an article about the work in the GRS in the January 1919 issue of the Saturday Evening Post. Isaac F. Marcosson, “Marvels of Army Organization,” Saturday Evening Post, January 4, 1919, 41-42 (calling Pierce a “big-souled, kindly man” who sends letters “to the next of kin as soon as the location of the [grave] is definitely known”); Englehardt, Oswald, January 19, 1919 letter from father to Pierce of GRS; Keel, Frank, January 8, 1919 letter from father to Pierce of GRS; Fishon, Sturgis, January 14, 1919 letter from father to Pierce of GRS; Riggs, Russell, January 4, 1919 letter from father to Pierce of GRS; Travis, Frank, January 1919 letter from mother-in-law to Pierce of GRS.

of many was beginning to wear thin.\textsuperscript{330} The lack of information families received during this period would add to their grief, distrust, and in many cases anger, particularly where they were already suspicious that the Department was trying to manipulate families into leaving the dead overseas. After Pierce and the Division were in a position to begin replying to letters from families, however, the Division began sending correspondence that was both more detailed and more sympathetic than earlier Department letters had been. Rather than simply requesting continued patience, the Division began to explain some of the reasons that it could not provide as much information as families sought and some of the reason for the delays in the return of the dead. The Division was doubtless reacting to several developments. By mid-1919, military officials and families were beginning to understand how long the process of returning the dead might take, and Division staff likely thought that families were owed at least some explanation. The GRS personnel who were transferred back from Europe also may simply have given the Division sufficient staff to attend to detailed correspondence. But the most likely explanation for the change in the Department’s tone around this time was Charles Pierce’s return to Washington. Pierce would draft or review much of the correspondence

\textsuperscript{330} Bullitt, Richard, October 11, 1919 letter from Pierce of Cemeterial Division to relative (“we recently transmitted to this city from my office in France a carload of papers and records”); Chapman, Victor, September 8, 1919 letter from Pierce of Cemeterial Division to father (“records are being transferred”); Fiske, Newell, December 5, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to member of United States Senate (“The main records of the Graves Registration Service have recently been moved to this city from France . . . .”); Foster, Louie, October 20, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother (“all the records of the AEF have not yet been received in this office”); O’Neal, Homer, July 15, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to member of United States House of Representative (“records are in transport”).
to families, aided by a small Division staff that included a handful of junior officers and several female clerks.331

“Thanking you for kind remembrance of me in my sorrow”: The Cemeterial Division Assumes Responsibility for Communicating with the Families of the Dead

The picture of Charles Pierce that emerges from the Cemeterial Division correspondence with families is one of an aging and overworked but deeply compassionate individual.332 Pierce was born in 1858 and joined the military in 1882, making him almost sixty years old when he was called back to lead the GRS in Europe during the World War.333 Pierce, who had led one of the efforts to recover the Army dead in the Philippines, had initially retired from the military in 1908 due to a “physical disability.”334 A letter to Pierce from Stanley Carpenter’s grieving mother, who knew Pierce personally, indicates that he suffered from malaria.335 Despite his age and health, Pierce led the GRS in Europe and later in Washington from 1917 until his death in 1921.

While commanding the GRS in Europe, Pierce exhausted himself trying to ensure that the GRS did as much as it could for the dead and for families. In late 1918, when

331 Baldwin, Edwin, May 13, 1921 War Department routing slip listing nine female staff members out of a staff of fourteen, including “Miss Boland”; Smith, Lonnie L., undated memo to Wynne of Cemeterial Division noting four different female staff members involved with mistake (three with title of “Miss” and one with title of “Mrs.”); Charles, Chester, November 19, 1921, memo from “F.E. Boland” to Wynne of Cemeterial Division and reply from Wynne to “Miss Boland.”
332 Seitz, “‘Let Him Remain Until the Judgment in France,’” 235.
333 Congress, House, Subcommittee 7 of the Committee on Military Affairs, Miscellaneous Military Bills, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., 5 April 1920, 66.
335 Carpenter, Stanley, August 4, 1920 letter from mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division (“I heard you hadn’t been very well this spring and hope you are back to good health by this time. That malaria seems to stick closer than a brother when it once gets a person”).
Pierce answered a letter from Representative George Edmonds (R-PA) asking for information about a death in the war on behalf of a constituent, Pierce wrote that he “was almost distracted with the mass of work which has fallen to the care of the Service of which I am Chief.”336 About the same time, Pierce explained to his friend Franklin Edmonds, a senior YMCA official based in Paris, that he worried that Americans would find the GRS’s efforts in the temporary overseas cemeteries to be insufficient:

The G.R.S. is not responsible for the selection of these places in the first place, nor for the manner in which the burial of the dead has been conducted; but we are trying in every conceivable way to remedy the unpleasant conditions, and are doing the best we can. We shall undoubtedly become the victims of the wrath of the American people, aroused by reports of the uninformed or the malicious, and it may be that “your humble servant” will prove to be the “Goat” and compelled to bear on his part the sins of the world. If so, let it be . . . . I shall have done the best that was possible, under very adverse conditions, and will be compelled to wait for the vindication of a Judge who really understands.337

In Pierce’s letter, it is possible to find pride, faith, exhaustion, and perhaps some self-pity as he writes that he feared that he and his staff “shall undoubtedly become the victims of the wrath of the American people” if press reports indicated that the GRS was failing in any way, but it also clear that Piece saw his demanding task as a calling.338

Pierce’s struggles, bureaucratic and physical, are also reflected in a March 1919 internal War Department memo that also suggests the loyalty that Pierce inspired in his staff. In the memo, Pierce’s deputy defended the GRS, and Pierce himself, to the Army Adjutant General after a father questioned the GRS’s failure to find his son’s body after

336 Bedingfield, John, December 28, 1918 letter from Pierce of GRS to Representative George Edmonds of United States House.
337 Woodward, Houston, February 28, 1919 letter to Edmonds of YMCA from Pierce of GRS; Woodbury, Robert, November 14, 1918 letter to YMCA overseas headquarters in Paris from Pierce of GRS.
338 Woodward, Houston, March 5, 1919 letter to Pierce of GRS from Edmonds of YMCA.
the grave marker was lost. Pierce’s deputy, Major Edgar Davis, wrote the Adjutant General to explain the challenges that the GRS faced, but he closed out the memo with a strongly worded paragraph that seems out of place in an official report:

This report is written and signed by the Assistant-Chief, G.R.S. because the Chief, one of the noblest and most sympathetic of men, retired once for physical disability and entitled to remain tranquilly at home, but preferring to again hazard his body [toward?] relieving the anguish of those whose loved ones had made that greatest of sacrifices for country and humanity, is ill in quarters – sick in body from overwork and struggle against the difficulties but meagerly outlined above, and sick in soul from the sting and burn of such unjust condemnations as this one, which pour upon his devoted head a galling flood of that anguish he came over to ward away in so far as possible, from the bereaved over there. There has been commendation and gratitude far in excess of censure, but, even so, such as these wound him deeply.\textsuperscript{339}

Davis was defending his own reputation as well as that of Pierce, but the fact that Davis felt the need to tell his superiors that Pierce was “sick in body from overwork” and “sick in soul from such unjust condemnations as this one” in an official memo suggests the depths of loyalty within the GRS to Pierce, the strain that GRS work put on the men in the organization, and the toll that the GRS work was taking on Pierce personally.

Pierce continued to work hard after he returned to the United States from Europe in mid-1919, and his task was made more difficult as families and their allies increasingly began to question whether the War Department really intended to return the dead to families and whether it would be possible to do so accurately. Pierce wrote Secretary of War Baker in June of 1919 in part to

\textsuperscript{339} George, Calvin, March 30, 1919 memo from Edgar (E.E.) Davis of Graves Registration Service in Europe to Army Adjutant General.
express to you my sense of gratitude for the privilege of having served in France as Chief of the Graves Registration Service for the past twenty months. It has been a service involved in the greatest difficulty and it has caused the expenditure of every atom of vital energy of which we have been possessed. We shall probably never be able to satisfy everybody concerned, but I regard it as the crowning privilege of a long army career to have been permitted to give myself so absolutely to this double ministry to our noble dead and to their sorrowing friends.  

Pierce no doubt had little choice but to tell the Secretary of War how pleased he was with his job, but his reference to a “double ministry” suggests that Pierce viewed himself not just as a bureaucrat but as a minister who had duties to the dead and their families. This note from Pierce also shows that he was well aware that part of his job was to “satisfy” the demands of families and to prevent adverse publicity where possible and that he knew that doing so would be a major challenge.

After his return to the United States, Pierce became the War Department’s public face on the return of the dead, and his responsibilities included defending the work of the GRS to Congress. Testifying before a House committee in late 1919, Pierce explained that too-hasty action in the return of the dead might result in inaccurate identifications. Pierce argued that “all the relatives of the dead ought to be urged not to allow the consideration of speed to operate as against the condition of safety. We want, when we come to you to say, ‘This is the body of your boy.’” At an appropriations hearing in late 1920, Pierce again justified the time it took to return the war dead: “‘safety first’ must be our motto, and in the battle areas, particularly, we have got to work with extreme

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340 Dickinson, Clement, June 8, 1919 letter from Pierce of GRS to Secretary of War Baker.
341 Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Authorizing the Appointment of a Commission to Remove the Bodies of Deceased Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines, from Foreign Countries to the United States, and Defining its Duties and Powers [Part 3], 66th Cong., 1st sess., 13 November 1919, 89.
care, where bodies were buried hastily and where there are still some unidentified dead. We have got to guard the identity of these bodies that are returned, as well as those that are to be kept over there. . . ."342

As he represented the War Department, Pierce walked a fine line on the question of the return of the dead. Like more senior War Department officials, Pierce and others in the Cemeterial Division and GRS staffs thought that the dead should be left in Europe, in part because they worried about the impact of extended grieving on families and in part because they were concerned about potential adverse publicity for the Department.343 Like other War Department officials, however, Pierce’s group knew that it could only go so far in advocating against return without risking the ire of pro-return families and their allies, especially when Congress and the press were expressing skepticism about whether the War Department really intended to return the dead. The Division did sometimes provide information that might have suggested to families that the dead were best left in Europe. In writing Arthur O’Neill’s mother to provide information about the location of

343 Congress, House, Subcommittee of House Committee on Appropriations, Second Deficiency Appropriation Bill, 1919, 65th Cong., 3rd sess., 10 January 1919, 803 (Lemly of Cemeterial Division: “There is no use to embalm a man and stick him in the ground unless you put him in a casket. They have only the bones or putrid mass to bring back. They will be unrecognizable.”); Congress, House, Committee on Appropriations, Miscellaneous Military Bills, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., 22, 29, 30 March and 2, 5 April 1920, 78 (Noetzel of GRS: “I do not believe all of [the families] appreciate the conditions under which the burials were made, and I realize that some of them will open the caskets in order to see the remains when they get back, and perhaps they will raise some question about it. [The resulting distress] is one of the greatest arguments for leaving the bodies over there.”); “America’s War Dead Only Skeleton Now,” Los Angeles Times, February 8, 1920, I9 (quoting unidentified GRS representative in France who thought that families should know that “[p]ractically every American who fell in action is only a skeleton” and that “[n]ot 1 per cent. of the men killed in action were buried in coffins, and less than 10 per cent. of the men dead of wounds in the advanced hospitals had coffins” and thought “[a] warning should be issued that the coffins containing these relics should not be opened when they arrive in America.”); Sledge, Soldier Dead, 174.
O’Neill’s grave, the Division used language about the location of the grave that was repeated in a number of letters to families:

October 16, 1919
(O’Neill - Arthur C. Pvt.)
Chief, Graves Registration Service, Washington, D.C.

Mrs. A. S. O’Neill, 5951 Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois

Location of Grave

1. Replying to your letter, mailed August 26th, and referred to this office from France, I beg to say that the body of Private Arthur C. O’Neill, U.S.M.C., has recently been transferred from its isolated position at Exermont, Department of Ardennes to the great concentration cemetery known as the Argonne American Cemetery at Romagne-Sous-Montfaucon, Department of the Meuse: Grave 67, Section 47, Plot 2.

2. This cemetery is located on a beautiful slope, almost exactly on the famous Hindenburg line. It was dedicated by General Pershing on Memorial Day, and now contains the bodies of about 26,000 of our men whose sacrifice made the Argonne campaign historic.

3. One identification tag was found upon the body.

4. Your address has not heretofore been on the files of this office, but will now be entered.

By authority of the Quartermaster General.
Charles C. Pierce,
Colonel, Q.M.C.,
Chief, Graves Registration Service.344

By reporting that the cemetery was buried on a “beautiful slope” near the “famous Hindenburg line” and “contains the bodies of about 26,000 of our men whose sacrifice made the Argonne campaign historic,” the Division must have hoped to persuade at least some families to leave the dead in place next to the bodies of their comrades as an

344 O’Neill Arthur, October 16, 1919 letter from Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division) to mother. Other letters mentioned the Hindenburg line. Bardelli, Roy, September 20, 1919 letter from Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division) to father; Chapman, Victor, September 8, 1919 letter from Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division) to father; Dixon, Arthur, September 18, 1919 letter from Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division) to third party; Gibson, Burgess, August 27, 1919 letter from Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division) to father’s secretary.
example of America’s important contribution to the war effort. Just as Pierce thought of his task as a double ministry, however, this description may have served another, kinder purpose as well, helping even families who wanted the dead returned to envision where graves were located, assure them that graves were well tended, and allow them to connect the deaths of family members to the larger achievements of the war.

Some families were persuaded to leave the dead permanently overseas by the efforts of the Cemeterial Division or by information they received about the GRS’s care for graves. Tracy Blair’s mother decided to leave her son’s body buried in Europe:

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Cotter, Iowa  
Feb. 6th 1919

Lt. Col. Chas. C. Pierce  
Q.MC. A.E.Forces

Dear Sir:-

I am in receipt of your letter in regard to the location of my son’s grave, I do not suppose it is necessary or customary to acknowledge these official letters. But the comfort that the receipt of the news gave me made me feel as if I wanted to thank you personally. So if it is out of the ordinary for me to do this, I want you to understand that it is out of the fullness of a Mothers heart. We Gold Star Mother’s of America fully appreciate what you are doing for us and humanity. And we like the Spartan Mothers of olden times are meeting the situation and our sorrow in the same spirit that our boys made the supreme sacrifice. And in no discretion to our late Ex. Pres. Theodore Roosevelt, “It is hard to give you up, son but I am proud of you. Corp’l Tracy S. Blair, Co. E., 353th Inf. 89th.”

My son wrote me how proud he was of his Company and Officers and said it was a find outfit (the 89th Division). Mother, he said, it means a heap to the soldier how he is officered. Now when the time comes when the ban is lifted on the photographic situation, I would like to make application through your office for views of my son’s grave and the cemetry. I have looked the war map of France over for the Lucy Sector, there is where they say my son fell and have unable to locate it. Is the name (Chappy-sur Meuse) the name of the cemetry or a small village near to Meuse. I understand that these cemeatries will be well kept as our national cemeteries in the States are. I do not believe I care to bring his body back if it has the care “Over There” that we could give it here at home for he died for the civilization of the world, just as much for the glory of France as for the U.S.A. and he wrote me from “Over There” in one letter, Mother there isn’t a Soldier “Over Here” that isn’t willing to make the supreme sacrifice for the good old U.S.A. for she is worth it. Again thanking you for your time and efforts. I have had no further word from anyone in regard to my son’s death only your official form letter. I had expected to hear from his chaplain or his Cap’t but up to date have had no intelligence from them.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Mary C. Blair  
Cotter, Iowa

Blair’s mother had confidence that the permanent overseas cemeteries would be as “well kept as our national cemeteries in the States are” and did not care to have Blair’s body returned if it was going to receive the “care ‘Over There’ that we could give it here at home for he died for the civilization of the world, just as much for the glory of France as for the U.S.A.” Blair’s mother made her decision in February of 1919, just as the [346 Blair, Tracy, February 6, 1919 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS.]
government was beginning to develop plans for the overseas cemeteries, but it is clear from her letter that she knew about the work of the GRS and trusted that her son’s grave would be perpetually tended. The Division thanked her for her letter and wrote that “we do all we possibly can for our comrades who were killed or died in this war.”

Blair remains buried in the Meuse-Argonne cemetery in France.

Many families who wanted the dead returned came to trust that Pierce and his group would do their best to arrange things however families wanted. Pierce’s hard work even made an impression on some of the War Department’s toughest critics. Chief Justice Walter McCoy of the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia had been publicly critical of the War Department’s efforts after he lost his son, George Baldwin McCoy, in the war. Justice McCoy wrote a letter to the Washington Star newspaper, accusing the GRS of failing to properly mark the graves of the dead in Europe, which prompted Pierce to invite McCoy to visit the Cemeterial Division offices. After his visit to the Cemeterial Division and a meeting with Pierce, McCoy wrote to one of Pierce’s staff that he was “satisfied that Colonel Pierce has a heart and that he is not merely a part of a machine.”

McCoy later wrote the Senate Appropriations Committee that he was fully satisfied with the procedures in place for the return of the war dead and

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347 Blair, Tracy, October 27, 1919 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to mother.
349 Congress, House, Committee on Appropriations, First Deficiency Appropriation Bill, 1921, 66th Cong., 3rd sess., January 5, 7, 8, 10-13, 17-21, 24, 1921, 311; McCoy, George, February 22, 1919 memo from Pierce of GRS to Lemly of Army Quartermaster General; McCoy, George, March 1, 1919 memo from Pierce of GRS to Lemly of Army Quartermaster General.
350 McCoy, George, undated newspaper clipping; Congress, House, Committee on Appropriations, First Deficiency Appropriation Bill, 1921, 66th Cong., 3rd sess., January 5, 7, 8, 10-13, 17-21, 24, 1921, 311.
351 McCoy, George, May 19, 1919 letter from father to Lemly of Army Quartermaster General. McCoy also wrote Pierce directly. McCoy, George, May 20, 1919 letter from father to Pierce of GRS.
that “Col. Pierce, at the head of the Cemeterial Division, and those associated with him have their hearts in the work.” The Bring Home the Soldier-Dead League also expressed trust in Pierce. A.B. Pouch, the head of the League, visited Pierce in person to discuss the return of his own son’s body and the broader question of the return of the dead. Pouch must have been satisfied, because when Walter Hunter’s widow wrote the League for assistance, the League wrote back that her letter had been forwarded to Pierce, who “has a sympathy for all of us who are desolate because of our loss.”

At times, there was little that Pierce and his organization could do for families. The GRS and the Cemeterial Division, for example, were not responsible for the process of returning a man’s personal property or “effects” to his family, whether the trunks and books of an officer behind the lines or the Bible and personal letters found in the pocket of an enlisted man. The Effects Bureau sent some men’s effects home to families, and a man’s property might arrive home well before his body did, but the process was still slow: the Department was still returning effects from men who died during the war by the

352 Congress, House, Committee on Appropriations, First Deficiency Appropriation Bill, 1921, 66th Cong., 3rd sess., January 5, 7, 8, 10-13, 17-21, 24, 1921, 311. When the House considered special legislation to promote Pierce in April of 1920, McCoy was among those who wrote in support of Pierce’s promotion. Congress, House, Subcommittee 7 of the Committee on Military Affairs, Miscellaneous Military Bills, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., 5 April 1920, 70. A.B. Pouch, head of the Bring Home the Soldier-Dead League, also wrote to commend Pierce’s work. Congress, House, Subcommittee 7 of the Committee on Military Affairs, Miscellaneous Military Bills, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., 5 April 1920, 70.

353 Pouch, Harold, December 16, 1919 letter from father to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division).

354 Hunter, Walter, February 24, 1921 letter from Bring Home the Soldier-Dead League to widow.

middle of 1919. Some families would never receive effects, if things were lost or stolen or if comrades made use of what a man no longer needed. Families were upset not to receive personal effects and wrote the Division to ask for help, often because they wanted items that a soldier or marine would not have been without if he were still alive, which would further confirm his death. Fay Fessenden’s brother stated that the family had never been able to get a record of Fessenden’s grave location nor his personal effects, “which leads us to believe that he is not dead but may have been wounded so badly that he does not know his name.” Effects also proved that a man’s body had been found and presumably buried where it could be located when the time came to return the dead. When confusion arose about the location of Fabian Doscher’s grave, his mother

356 Buzacott, George, September 8, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“I have just received his effects from the Effects Bureau”); Gilmore, Albert, July 30, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (“we have just received the personal effects of Albert who died in France Oct 3d last”); Weaver, Rosser, May 26, 1920 letter from sister to member of United States House of Representatives (“some are still receiving the effects of their loved ones in France”); “Returning Slain Soldiers’ Effects,” New York Times, March 9, 1919, 52 (noting that effects being sent in March of 1919 were from men who had died in May of 1918).

357 Frank, Chauncey, April 14, 1927 Quartermaster Corps memo to Government Accounting Office, Claims Division (“It is reasonable to assume . . . that in cases where no effects have been received they were either lost by the soldier in camp, on the march or in battle, or disposed of by him before death.”); Sweetnam, John, May 25, 1922 letter from father (“effects were turned over to the company Chaplain . . . not been received by effects Department”); American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, “Annual Report of the Society for the Preservation of Scenic and Historic Places and Objects to the Legislature of the State of New York,” 325.

358 Dumbolton, Ervin, November 14, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Henz, Harry, March 8, 1919 letter from mother to War Department; O’Neal, Homer, March 8, 1919 letter from father to member of United States House of Representatives; Smithwick, Floyd, January 16, 1919 letter from mother to GRS in Europe; Swanson, Charles, February 17, 1919 letter from parent to Army Adjutant General; Sledge, Soldier Dead, 225.

359 Fessenden, Fay, December 24, 1919 letter from brother to Army Adjutant General.

360 Ackerman, Russell, June 18, 1920, letter from mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division (“I received his personal effects & recognized them”); Buzacott, George, September 8, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“I have just received his effects from the Effects Bureau and now am satisfied he is dead”) Thomsen, Gustav, February 27, 1919 letter from father to GRS in Europe (“what I would like to know [is] have you any of his personal property that would assure both his mother and myself that our boy lies buried where you mention in letter”).
wrote the GRS that the “letters etc. which he carried on his person were returned me, which must prove that there was a body to bury.” Some families hoped that a man’s effects might yield one last communication from their family member. After Julian Dahlen died in an infirmary of rheumatism, his father wanted his son’s effects because “there may be things we would appreciate very much. There might be a letter to his mother that he did not have a chance to send.” Other families just wanted the things that their family members had carried for mementos. Louie Foster’s brother asked for Foster’s effects “so I would know he was in the war and to remember him by.” While the Division understood the importance of effects to families, it could do little other than sympathize with their loss and refer them to the Effects Bureau.

Pierce’s kindness to families reflected his personal views about what duties were owed to the military dead and their families, but the compassion with which the GRS and Cemeterial Division staff corresponded with families was also a natural response to the

361 Doscher, Fabian, October 1, 1921 letter from mother written by friend to GRS in Europe.
362 Dahlen, Julian, February 24, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General.
363 Ackerman, Russell, January 29, 1919 letter from mother (“I do not know if he had any personal effects which I might have as keepsakes”); Byrd, George, November 29, 1918 letter from parents to GRS in France (“you will understand why we want such things, not for their intrinsic value but for keepsakes”); Campbell, Raymond, undated letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“I do so hope I can have his things sent home as treasured keepsakes”); Henz, Harry, March 14, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother; Smith, Lloyd, December 8, 1918 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS (“he had a watch, Odd Fellows pin, knife and a few other things we would like to keep would? they be sent home”); Spoelstra, Harry, February 25, 1919 letter from parent to Pierce of GRS (“he also had a few little things with him, that I would like to have, will I get them yet, I do hope so, as that will be the last remembrance I can have of him”); Valiani, Albert, 1919(?) letter from mother to AEF (“would like to have pictures and valuables he had as a keepsake”).
364 Foster, Louie, February 23, 1921 letter from brother to War Department.
365 Boomgarden, Kelly, November 1, 1920 letter from Greeley of Cemeterial Division to father; Bray, Frank, November 6, 1919 letter from Cemeterial Division to mother; Canada, Thomas, February 4, 1921 letter from Cemeterial Division to sister; Carter, Dennie, May 9, 1919 letter from Cemeterial Division to mother; Downs, William, January 10, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to father; Jones, Willie, March 3, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother.
emotional letters that families sent. Families sought recognition of their sacrifice or tried to explain their loss to people they must have hoped would understand.366 Drew Gilpin Faust notes with respect to the Civil War that the death of young men in war upset “prevailing assumptions about life’s proper end—about who should die, when and where, and under what circumstances.”367 The World War had similarly taken the lives of young men who had been healthy before they left for war. The overall death rate in the United States of infants and children was declining in the early twentieth century, while at the same time rising incomes and new methods of birth control led to a decline in birthrates.368 As a result, families were smaller, parents had reason to expect that children would outlive them, and the report of a death in war was a shock. The news also often came without warning, because while some families were notified if their family members were sick or wounded, a telegram from the Army Adjutant General reporting a

366 Baldwin, Benjamin, July 12(?), 1922 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“my heart is sore and I cannot help expressing my feelings to the government”); Cassady, Charles, November 11, 1918 letter from sister to War Department (“no more we will see his smiling face until the final day”); Dunaway, Louis, February 14, 1919 letter from mother to War Department (“I am so sad and sorry that god taken as smart a boy as he was”); Eyler, Benjamin, June 13, 1920 letter from mother to Cemeterial Division; Fohrman, Walter, April 22, 1920 letter from mother to War Department; Hensley, John, December 4, 1919 letter from father to GRS in Europe (“me and wife is left a lone by the death of my son”); Snively, Harry, January 15, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (having the body brought back “would ease some of the pain during life” as “he was our baby”).

367 Faust, This Republic of Suffering, xii.

death in war was often the first information that families had that their loved one had been in danger or mortally ill. Families often went from thinking of their family members as alive and well to learning of their deaths with no time to prepare. Families struggled to understand what had happened and to grieve, and they wrote to the government expecting recognition of their loss from the leaders who had drafted their family members and demanded the ultimate sacrifice.

A number of families asked the War Department to return the dead quickly because their acute grief was made worse by the absence of a body to bury. Frank Donatelle’s father wrote the GRS to ask that his son’s body be returned because his wife was grieving and burying his body might make her feel better:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cumberland, Wis., Jan. 29, 1919</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dear Chief, Graves Registration Ser., Headquarters Service of Supply, A.F.O. 717, American E.F., France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dear Sirs:-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please send a picture of my darling son. Please write and let me know if you can get his body here. As my wife cries all the time, as he is so far away from home. I think it would be a relief to her to have him here in our cemetery. Now don’t you think so? Please answer this letter as soon as you can.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I remain yours truly,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Samuel Donatelle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Donatelle’s father sought to make the GRS recognize the grief of his wife, who “cries all the time,” perhaps because he thought that explaining his wife’s sadness would make his claim more persuasive or perhaps just because he felt the need to share his pain and

370 Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, 14-18, 215; Colley, Safely Rest, 247.
371 Donatelle, Frank, January 29, 1919 letter from father to Graves Registration Service.
frustration. Donatelle’s father’s question about whether the GRS agreed that “it would be a relief to her to have him here in our cemetery” was something more than rhetorical, and it seems clear that Donatelle’s father expected the GRS to respond to him, though it is not clear from Donatelle’s file whether he received a response. Oscar Satchell’s brother likewise wrote Secretary of War Baker soon after the war that he thought that the immediate return of Satchell’s body would comfort his mother:

Newport News, Va., Jan. 27 - 19

Hon Sec Baker
Washington D.C.

Dear Sir

I am writing you on behalf of my dear old mother Missouri A. Satchell whos address is Makomie Park, Accomac Co., Va. She lost a son Oscar C. Satchell on the battlefield of France Oct 3rd 18. She also lost another son at home Nov 10th 18 and she is a broken harted wreck of dear old mother. We cant do any thing with her she is nearly crazy the trouble is too grate for her but she has promist me that if I can get Oscars remains from France for her and if our Government will alow her to have him to put to rest in her little plot in the cemetary at Temperanceville Va that she will try to do better, the most of her worry is to get his boddy. Can you tell me to what steps I can take to have him brought to Makomie Park Va at once. This boy Oscar was dear to his mother he was 24 years of age and never in all his life stay away from his mother one single night untill he was called to Camp Lee the 27 day of last May she never saw him any more now don't you think that is hard on her. He also was her soport now she hasent got his co or his sopart, but that is OK she says that she wont complain at that if you people will let her have his body. The Red Cross of Accomac Co wants to erect a monument for him. Please advise me what to do as to getting his body and if the Government brings his body home will mother get any notice in advance. Please pardon me for anoying you with this letter, I will thank you in advance for a reply.

Yours Resp’t, G.L. Satchell
P.O. Box 887. Newport News Va.372

Satchell’s brother must have been frustrated by his inability to make his mother feel better, and he turned to the Department for help because his mother “has promist me” that “she will try to do better” if Satchell’s body was returned for burial. Satchell’s brother argued to Baker that the government should return Satchell’s body, or allow the family to

372 Satchell, Oscar, January 27, 1919 letter from brother to Secretary of War Baker.
have the body returned, so that his mother could begin to recover from her loss. (When
the Army Adjutant General replied to Satchell’s brother, it simply sent him the form
letter and other materials about the return of the dead.\footnote{When the Army Adjutant General replied to Satchell’s brother, it simply sent him the form letter and other materials about the return of the dead.}) Both Donatelle’s father and
Satchell’s brother clearly assumed that the government had a special duty to relieve the
grief of mothers, perhaps because the government had emphasized the role of the mothers
in producing soldiers to serve the nation.\footnote{Both Donatelle’s father and Satchell’s brother clearly assumed that the government had a special duty to relieve the grief of mothers, perhaps because the government had emphasized the role of the mothers in producing soldiers to serve the nation.}

The GRS and the Cemeterial Division received letters from some families who
were intensely angry at the government for political reasons or because they felt that their
family members had been mistreated by the military.\footnote{The GRS and the Cemeterial Division received letters from some families who were intensely angry at the government for political reasons or because they felt that their family members had been mistreated by the military.} Ross Carnes’s brother was an
opponent of the war who felt that American involvement was inconsistent with American
values and driven by profiteers. In one of many long letters expressing his frustration
with America’s role in the war, Carnes’s brother wanted to know the details of the
“murder” of his brother, who was killed in action in France.\footnote{Ross Carnes’s brother was an opponent of the war who felt that American involvement was inconsistent with American values and driven by profiteers. In one of many long letters expressing his frustration with America’s role in the war, Carnes’s brother wanted to know the details of the “murder” of his brother, who was killed in action in France.}

Floyd Deshon’s father

\footnote{The role of mothers will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.}
\footnote{Satchell, Oscar, January 29, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to brother.}
\footnote{Some families expressed anger about political issues. Cull, Andrew, August 28, 1921 letter from father to War Department (“the government took my boy over there and got him slaughtered and now they don’t want to bring him back”); Deshon, Floyd, October 14, 1919 letter from father to Secretary of War Baker; Deshon, Floyd, May 19, 1920 letter from father to War Department; Sahm, Albert, March 30, 1919 letter from sister to War Department (“Taking a man over three thousand miles of sea the eleventh hour an taking his life looks to me like a crooked scheme framed by his superior officers”). Some families argued that soldiers were mistreated. Barnes, William, January 14, 1919 letter from sister to War Department; Black, John, May 2, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Carr, Owren, September 14, 1919 letter from parent to War Department; Cooper, John, January 11, 1920 letter from mother to President Wilson; Crawn, John, March 3, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Emerson, Albert, January 23, 1919 letter from parent to GRS; McKenna, Charles, February 25, 1920 letter from sister to War Department; Meyerhoff, Roy, January 17, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Williams, Earl, December 20, 1918 letter from mother to “Postmaster General of Paris France.”}
\footnote{Some families argued that soldiers were mistreated. Barnes, William, January 14, 1919 letter from sister to War Department; Black, John, May 2, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Carr, Owren, September 14, 1919 letter from parent to War Department; Cooper, John, January 11, 1920 letter from mother to President Wilson; Crawn, John, March 3, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Emerson, Albert, January 23, 1919 letter from parent to GRS; McKenna, Charles, February 25, 1920 letter from sister to War Department; Meyerhoff, Roy, January 17, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Williams, Earl, December 20, 1918 letter from mother to “Postmaster General of Paris France.”}
\footnote{Ross Carnes’s brother was an opponent of the war who felt that American involvement was inconsistent with American values and driven by profiteers. In one of many long letters expressing his frustration with America’s role in the war, Carnes’s brother wanted to know the details of the “murder” of his brother, who was killed in action in France.}
\footnote{Ross Carnes’s brother was an opponent of the war who felt that American involvement was inconsistent with American values and driven by profiteers. In one of many long letters expressing his frustration with America’s role in the war, Carnes’s brother wanted to know the details of the “murder” of his brother, who was killed in action in France.}
accused the government of “butchery” and referred to the “Argonne massacre.” The Cemeterial Division replied to these families simply that it would return the bodies of the dead to the family when circumstances permitted.

Other families raised issues related to what they saw as government obstruction or incompetence. To families like these, the Cemeterial Division provided more detailed answers to attempt to resolve concerns and in an attempt to deflect negative public relations that might arise if families took their concerns to the press. Edwin Daly’s father thought that War Department officials were attempting to discourage families from having the war dead returned and wrote the Army Adjutant General in September of 1919 that he wanted “you and Kaiser Pershing to stand aside and dont try to influence public opinion to allow the dead to remain in rotten France. . . . Give [the body] to me at once and cut your dam red tape.” The Division wrote to assure Daly’s father that his son’s body would be returned to him. Harold Berger’s mother wrote the Cemeterial Division in September of 1921 that she had heard that there were delays in shipping the dead from Hoboken and that she was “truly fed up on Government red tape.” The Division likely assumed that Berger’s mother’s concerns were based on the allegations that Owen Wister had raised earlier in the year about coffins being “piled” up at Hoboken, as discussed in Chapter 1, and sought to address not just Berger’s mother’s concerns but the public

377 Deshon, Floyd, October 14, 1919 letter from father to Secretary of War; Deshon, Floyd, May 19, 1920 letter from father to War Department.
378 Carnes, Ross, September 13, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to brother; Opdyke, Ted, June 30, 1921 letter from Elder for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to mother; Deshon, Floyd, January 19, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to father.
379 Daly, Edwin, September 29, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General.
380 Daly, Edwin, October 3, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to father.
381 Berger, Harold, September 26, 1921 letter from mother to Cemeterial Division.
relations issue when replying to Berger’s mother three days later to assure her that “we need to correct the reports that you have heard or read in newspapers. There is no truth in those reports.” 382 The Division and the GRS certainly wanted to avoid negative publicity, but Pierce’s organization went out of its way to comfort grieving families, even taking time to assure them that their questions and concerns were understandable. After Stanley Carpenter’s mother apologized for sending a lengthy letter about her son’s grave, she received a letter from Pierce that assured her that she “need not apologize” and “[w]e are glad at all times to give you all the information in our power and only wish we could do more.” 383 When John Fulwiler’s mother asked for clarification on the date of her son’s death, she wrote, “This may seem like a small thing to you, who have so many names and graves to record, but it means much to me his mother.” 384 When her letter reached the GRS in France, Pierce’s deputy, Edgar Davis, drafted a letter for Pierce’s signature that answered her questions and assured her that her questions were understandable and that the GRS was glad to help:

382 Berger, Harold, September 29, 1921 letter from “Miss Donna Shaw, Ohio Representative, GRS, Hoboken, N.J.” to mother.
383 Carpenter, Stanley, February 4, 1920 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division); Carpenter, Stanley, February 9, 1920 letter from Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division) to mother.
384 Fulwiler, John, March 2, 1919 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS.
April 24th, 1919

Mrs. Fannie L. Fulwiler, 1807 W Dean Ave., Spokane, Washington.
Private John L. Fulwiler - place of burial, and date of death.

1. I regret that confusion should have arisen in your mind as to the company to which you son belonged, as stated in your letter of March 9th, 1919. When the Marine Corps was incorporated in the Army, the Companies were no longer designated by numbers but by letters. According to the records, your son belonged to the 6th Marines, Company “L”.

2. Chaplain William C. Hicks, American Red Cross chaplain, reported burial of your son, and a request has this day been sent to him asking him to communicate with you, as per copy of same inclosed. This Service has no record of place of death, but this information can be probably given you by the chaplain.

3. Your request for a photograph of the grave of your son has been made of record, and you will receive one just as soon as it is practicable to get out the many thousands of photographs taken for the benefit of the relatives of our dead.

4. Your son is buried in grave # 54, cemetery #540, as per previous advice sent from this office. The grave is also marked with a cross and one identification tag is buried with the body and the other is attached to the grave marker. The date of burial is given as October 7th, 1918.

5. I can assure you that your remark as to it being a small matter to trouble this Service above, is not necessary. Anything that the Graves Registration Service can do to comfort and relieve the minds of the mothers and relatives of the men who have given their lives for their country and for Humanity, is gladly done. No matter is too trivial, if the information given can help the bereaved at home, and every effort is made to care for the interests of the relatives of the dead.

6. You have every reason to be proud of your gallant son, and I hope you will accept my sincere sympathy in the loss you have sustained.

Incl. Charles C. Pierce
ED. Lieut. Colonel, Q.M.C., U.S.A.

Pierce and his staff need not have addressed Fulwiler’s mother’s polite apology at all: a bureaucratic response would simply have provided the requested information and made no reference to Fulwiler’s mother’s apology. The time that Pierce and his staff took to reassure Fulwiler’s mother that “no matter is too trivial if the information given can help the bereaved at home” shows that Pierce had communicated to his staff his view that the they had an obligation to do everything they could to aid grieving families.

385 Fulwiler, John, April 24, 1919 letter from Pierce of GRS to mother.
Many families thanked Pierce’s group for its expressions of sympathy and its efforts on their behalf, suggesting that the efforts of the Cemeterial Division and the GRS were well received but also that families increasingly began to see themselves as in a personal relationship with Pierce’s group. Roscoe Bishop’s mother wrote to Pierce directly:

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386 Adkins, Frank, May 20, 1918 letter from father to Pierce of GRS in Europe (“thank you for the kind words you sent me”); Bailey, Kenneth, March 5, 1919 letter from father to Pierce of GRS in Europe (“congratulate your department upon the systematic and humane manner in which you are giving the desired information”); Blankinship, Dan, August 6, 1918 letter from parents to Pierce of GRS; Bockelman, Harold, January 28, 1919 letter from father to Pierce of GRS (“will treasure your letter”); Byxbe, Fred, March 20, 1920 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS (“thank you for your sympathy”); Gagnon, Armand, January 17, 1921 letter from mother to GRS (Cemeterial Division) (“thank you and everybody for their kind word of sympathy”); Gallagher, Edward, April 6, 1919 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS in Europe (War Department “letter was very touching”); Gallagher, Joseph, August 17, 1920 letter from mother to War Department (“so far the Government has certainly been as kind as could be”); Kingsland, Edwin, April 30, 1919 letter from third party to GRS (”the only pleasant thing about all this business [has been] the unfailing courtesy and sympathy and kindness in communications from your various departments”); Potter, Edward, February 1, 1921 letter from family to Army Quartermaster General (”appreciate all the sympathy, kindness, and courtesy shown us by those in charge of our beloved one’s remains”); Ragan, James, March 4, 1919 letter from mother to GRS (“I want to express my gratitude to you and your service in giving me the information in your formal letter and your kind words of sympathy in regard to the death of my son”); Venneman, Harry, January 24, 1919 letter from sister to Pierce of GRS in Europe (“thank you for your kind letter of sympathy”).
Martinsville Ill Sept. 28, '18

To Charles C. Pierce:
Chief Graves Registration Service
American E.F.:-

Kind Friend:

With gratitude in my heart I write to tell you I received the nice letter from you in regard to a very dear spot on earth to me where lies the body of my dear son Roscoe W. Bishop. The thought of his body having to be buried so far away from me and where I never can see the place is so hard to endure. But after all it is a comfort to us all who mourn the loss of our dear ones to know that kind hands are taking such good care of their graves. I wish that I could have a picture of his grave but perhaps that would not be possible.

Thanking you for kind remembrance of me in my sorrow and hoping you may have health and strength to continue in your good work, asking you to please tenderly care for the sacred places where lie the bodies of our loved ones, I will close hoping I may hear from you again if you have the time and opportunity to write.

Most truly yours
Mrs. Lucinda Bishop
Martinsville, Ill.
U.S.A. 387

Bishop’s mother wanted to thank Pierce for the “nice letter” she had received giving the location of her son’s grave, but she also wanted Pierce to know that she felt better for knowing more about the “kind hands” of the GRS staff overseas who were “taking such good care” of graves. Robert Woodbury’s father visited Pierce in Washington before traveling to visit his son’s grave in France; after he returned to the United States, he wrote to Pierce to say that he appreciated the care and attention that the GRS was giving to the graves in France. 388 Pierce wrote back immediately to thank Woodbury for his letter, noting that “people are not always so careful to let us have kind words. Perhaps they imagine that we do not need them.” 389

387 Bishop, Roscoe, September 27, 1918 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS.
388 Woodbury, Robert, September 28, 1920 letter from father to Pierce of Cemeterial Division.
389 Woodbury, Robert, September 29, 1920 letter from Pierce of Cemeterial Division to father.
Other families sought to develop a personal connection to Pierce or other staff members. Families must have hoped that forming a connection might mean more attention would be paid to their situation, but they were also put in an unusual situation of having to rely on strangers that most would never meet to stand in their stead with respect to the burial of the dead and the care of graves. Families wanted to feel that they knew those strangers in some way. To senior government officials, families often took the time to be polite. Families asked after the well-being of government officials when they wrote, including asking after Wilson’s health after he began to experience problems in September of 1919. James McConnell’s sister wrote Wilson, “I am pleased to learn of your health improving so fast, and do earnestly hope it will continue to so until you have completely recovered so you can remain with us for many years to come and enjoy the benefits you have bestowed on this great US.” Families who wrote to Army Chief of Staff Peyton March and Army Adjutant General P.C. Harris expressed sympathy after both men lost sons in the war. Homer Dahringer’s father wrote to Army Chief of Staff March in January of 1919 asking about the return of the dead and wrote that “we understand that you also have lost a boy and you have our heartfelt sympathy and it is oh so hard for us all but after all we are proud of the lads who have ‘Gone West’ doing their

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390 Fields, William, September 29, 1919 letter from father to Wilson; Funkhouser, Paul, August 1, 1919 letter from father to Wilson; McConnell, James, December 16, 1920 letter from sister to Wilson; McCormick, Scott, January 12, 1920 letter from mother (Mabel Fonda Gareissen) to Wilson.
391 McConnell, James, December 16, 1920 letter from sister to Wilson and American Red Cross.
392 Emerson, Hobart, July 11, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, [Removal of Remains of U.S. Troops from France (unpublished) [Part 2]], 66th Cong., 1st sess., 30 July 1919, 41; “Son of Gen. March Killed While Flying,” Atlanta Constitution, February 14, 1918, 2; Harris, Charles, February 4, 1919 letter from uncle with Red Cross in France to Pierce of GRS; March, Peyton, February 18, 1918 memo from Lemly of Quartermaster Corps to Depo Quartermaster for Washington, D.C.
duty bravely and unselfishly.” Hobart Emerson’s father wrote to Harris in July of 1919 wrote that “we was so sorrow to hear that u had lost your son captain harris who
lost his life in France and we sure can sympathize with u.” Some families knew that
their letters to senior government officials would be read by their staffs and sometimes
asked that their letters be shown to the men of power whose assistance they sought.
When families wrote the Cemeterial Division or the GRS, however, they had higher
expectations and sometimes expressed disappointment when Pierce’s group failed to
abide by normal social conventions after receiving a letter. After George Howard’s
widow had written several letters to the War Department, she wrote again that “so far, [I]
have not received a courteous acknowledgement of any of my letters.” In its reply, the
Division noted that it had sent her a letter only a few days before, suggesting that the

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393 Dahringer, Homer, January 15, 1919 letter from father to Army Chief of Staff. The terms “go west” or
“gone west” were a euphemism troops used for being killed in the war that was adopted by some in civilian
society. Farwell, Over There, 302; Inglis, Sacred Places, 222; Leroy Bowman, The American Funeral: A
394 Emerson, Hobart, July 11, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General.
395 Busey, Charles, October 21, 1919 letter from mother to Secretary of War Baker (“Won’t you please
show the enclosed letter to Sec. Baker. I know how busy a man he is, but I do want so much that he should
read my letter. I will thank you so much if you will do this.”); Cobb, Oakley, March 24, 1919 letter from
father to third party (“I wish the President (?) this letter or one similar, but I know it would be folly for me
to write him as it would never get to him. The private secretary would think I was just a crazy fanatic and
then Mr. Wilson has more weighty matters to attend to at least at present, but this subject might be handled
through some other branch of the war department.”).
396 Anderton, George, January 19, 1920 letter from father to Pierce of “Graves Registry Service”; Browne,
Allsay, July 20, 1920 letter from parents to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division) (“we have not so much as
had a reply”); Davitt, William, September 18, 1919 letter from mother to Secretary of War (“I made
application to the War Department but have not received a satisfactory reply”); Echeverria, Charles, May
24, 1920(?) letter from mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division (“I requested a list of national cemeteries”
but “I have not received a reply”); Gaither, Wilson, September 23, 1919 letter from father to “Graves
Registration Commission” (“I have received no reply”); Kinsey, Maurice, April 30, 1920 letter from father
to Army Quartermaster General; Michael, Austin, January 22, 1920 letter from mother to GRS (Cemeterial
Division) (“have written several months ago but received no reply”); Templeton, Preston, April 7, 1920
letter from family to War Department (“I never received any reply”); Wirkus, Daniel, March 17, 1919 letter
from parent to GRS in Europe (“have written you before” but “have received no reply”).
397 Howard, George, September 13, 1920 letter from widow to Pierce of Cemeterial Division.
Division felt the need to answer her accusation that it had failed to respond to correspondence in a timely fashion, likely both to be polite and because the Division thought Howard’s widow might complain to others about a perceived lack of efficiency.

A number of families found ways to make direct personal connections with Pierce and his staff. Some families spoke with Pierce or Cemeterial Division staff in person or called the Division. Several families referred to having seen Pierce speak in public, suggesting that the War Department arranged for Pierce to hold at least one open meeting to discuss the program for returning the dead. Myles McPartland’s mother, who saw Pierce speak at Stuyvesant High School in New York, wrote Pierce that she now

398 Dowell, Julian, August 15, 1919 letter from Pierce of Cemeterial Division to father (“stop by the office any time you find it convenient to favor me with a call”); Ewell, James, June 3, 1920 letter from father to Wynne of Cemeterial Division (father had “been in the private office of Col. Charles Pierce”); Fiske, Newell, March 2, 1921 memo from Butler to Shannon of Cemeterial Division (father called, saw in the newspapers that Pierce was leaving for Europe, wanted to talk to Pierce before he left); Winslow, Kenelm, November 21, 1919 letter from widow to GRS (Cemeterial Division); Woodbury, Robert, September 28, 1920 letter from father to Pierce of Cemeterial Division (“I was greatly impressed with your attitude in this whole matter when I met you in your office in Washington last winter”); Wupperman, Carlos, August 6, 1920 letter from mother to Army Quartermaster General (“I personally met Summer and Quartermaster General Pierce relative to the return of my son”). Some families visited the port facilities at Hoboken where military personnel handled the transports of the dead back from Europe. Babcock, Lester, April 15, 1921 letter from father to Shannon of Army Quartermaster General (GRS at Hoboken) (note on letter says father “called personally at” Hoboken); Connelly, William, July 14, 1921 memo from Shannon of Army Quartermaster General to Cemeterial Division (mother “called at this office twice”); Gaither, Wilson, June 13, 1921 letter from father to Army Quartermaster General at Hoboken (“you may recall that I was in your office when the Wheaton was at the dock”); Venable, Paul, April 11, 1921 memo from Davis of Cemeterial Division to Files (“Mr Venable called in person”); Webster, Willard, March 21, 1921 memo from Butler (GRS at Hoboken?) (mother “called at the office” in Hoboken); GRS History, Vol. II, 54-55.

399 De Bella, Vincent, September 17, 1921 letter from sister to Pierce of Cemeterial Division; Blue, Kenneth, February 2, 1921 letter from parents to Pierce of Cemeterial Division; Dryson, Walter, January 11, 1920 letter from widow to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division); Friedman, Morris, February 7, 1921 letter from father to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division); Jackson, Winfield, January 19, 1921 letter from mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division; Kinsey, Maurice, October 4, 1920 letter from father to Cemeterial Division; McPartland, Myles, February 3, 1921 letter from mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division (“gave me great pleasure to see and hear you speak at the Stuyvesant High School on Saturday night last”); Budreau, Bodies of War, 79.
understood the government was doing its best and that “as you said in your speech there is no special graves granted[,] rich and poor the same.”

Some families reached out to Pierce personally because they knew him or knew someone who did. Pierce had been in the military community for many years and had friends both in the military and in private organizations that supported the military, like the Red Cross and the YMCA. Other people knew Pierce from his work during his time before the World War, when Pierce was a pastor at St. Matthews in Philadelphia. A friend of Frederick Edwards’s family, writing for information about Edwards’s grave, knew Pierce from Philadelphia and wrote to Pierce that he had heard that Pierce would not be returning to his parish and that “I am sure St. Matthews will greatly miss you especially now that it is decided you will not go back but I am sure it is a wise decision. You will want complete rest after so strenuous a campaign.” Pierce responded personally to some of the letters he received. After Wilmarth Brown’s mother reminded Pierce that she knew him from having played the organ in a church where Pierce had preached, Pierce replied that “I am more sorry than I can tell you that there is any necessity for correspondence between you and me relative to so distressing a subject, but

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400 McPartland, Myles, February 3, 1921 letter from mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division.
401 Blodgett, Richard, June 1, 1918 letter from General Lockridge to Pierce of GRS; Chamberlain, Guy, January 10, 1919 letter from YMCA staff in Paris to Pierce of GRS; Winslow, Kenelm, December 3, 1918 memo from Army Quartermaster General to Pierce of GRS (passing along letter requesting information on grave location).
402 Brown, Wilmarth, January 10, 1919 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS; Foster, Louie, December 18, 1919 letter from Pierce of Cemeterial Division to brother-in-law/soldier (“look forward with pleasure to seeing you at St. Matthews on Sunday next”); Thorn, Raymond, May 9, 1919 letter from third party to Pierce of GRS (“as yet there is no sign of any successor to you at St. Matthew’s”).
403 Edwards, Frederick, February 12, 1919 letter from friend of Edwards family to Pierce of GRS.
as this work must be attended to by somebody, I am glad that it falls to my lot to be some small service to a friend in sorrow.  

Pierce also wrote personal letters to families when problems arose. Pierce got directly involved when Frank Duffy’s widow became frustrated by the confusion around whether her husband’s body could be left permanently where it had been originally buried. Pierce wrote to address her concerns and asked that she send any future questions directly to him and that she mark her reply “as personal and give me the privilege of answering any further inquiry.” Perhaps Clifford Henry’s father had received the same invitation from Pierce, because he wrote Pierce a letter marked “personal” to ask about being present when his son’s body was exhumed in Europe. Pierce gave Henry’s father the necessary information and assured him that it was “not at all necessary for you to apologize for your insistence on knowing as much as can be communicated.” (Before his death, Clifford Henry had courted a young writer from his native Georgia named Margaret Mitchell.)

Some families began to feel that they knew Pierce from their interactions with him. James Linton’s mother wrote to assure Pierce that he was in her prayers:

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404 Brown, Wilmarth, January 10, 1919 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS; Brown, Wilmarth, January 28, 1919 letter from Pierce of GRS to mother.
405 Houston, Henry, June 26, 1919 letter from father to Pierce of GRS (marked personal).
406 Duffy, Frank, January(?) 1920 letter from widow to Pierce of Cemeterial Division. “Do not disturb” burials will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.
407 Duffy, Frank, May 25, 1920 letter from Pierce of Cemeterial Division to widow.
408 Henry, Clifford, January 8, 1920 letter from father to Pierce of Cemeterial Division. Efforts by families to attend exhumations will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.
409 Henry, Clifford, January 10, 1920 letter from Pierce of Cemeterial Division to father.
To Charles C. Pierce A.Q.M.  

First all, I want say God bless you, Major Pierce for the letter you sent telling me about my dead sons burial place 247 of the cemetery at Mandres.  If you only knew how much you helped me bear this heavy load of sorrow.  How I miss him and shall more so as the days go by.  He was my baby boy.  But I must not burden you with my grief.  God knows best, and his ways are not ours.  How I would love to tell you about Russell, but your time is too valuable for me to encroach upon it now.  I trust sometime I may meet you, but I shall pray daily for you and may the dear Lord protect you and bless you and make you a blessing to others.  Thank you a thousand times for the letter and right here I will say the Lord is helping me to be brave and I am going to work harder for our boys over there and our countrys cause.  

Gratefully yours,  
Mary A. Linton, Mrs. James Linton

Linton’s mother knew that Pierce was busy with his duties and that his time was “too valuable for me to encroach upon it now,” but this did not stop her from writing a letter just to thank him for the information that the GRS had provided and to tell Pierce how much she missed her son and how much she hoped that “sometime I may meet you.”  

David Clemons’s mother also wrote Pierce that she knew he was busy but took the time to explain not just how much she missed her son but about the bad weather on her farm and about her concern both for the men who had served with her son and for those who were now taking care of his grave.  Clemon’s mother wrote from Kansas,

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411 Linton, James, May 29, 1918 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS.
I expect you are awfully busy. But if you have any way of finding out the Hospital the boys who were buried in [the town where Clemon was killed] Limey were taken to, please take time to let me know. We are getting a fierce blizzard today. The apricot trees are in bloom and alfalfa and wheat fields were green yesterday. The snow is drifting and will make farming late. My boy who died was a farmer. Was only 22 Mar. 1918. Was born on this farm and it is just covered with his work. I am proud he was so brave but you know I want him so and need him so. I hope there will be no more war and you’ll all get home to the USA.412

Clemon’s mother knew that Pierce was “awfully busy,” but she wanted Pierce to know more about her son, writing that he “was a farmer,” that he was “born on this farm,” and that he was “only 22.” As she thought about her loss and how her life would be affected by her son’s death, she also wrote Pierce about the weather and the local crop conditions, central issues to a family who made its living from the land and who would have to face coming seasons without a son who had been important to the farm’s operations. Both Linton’s mother and Clemon’s mother wanted more information about the death and burial of a family member who died overseas in the war, but they were also grieving. Writing letters with a personal tone to Pierce must have made them feel better about the deaths they were mourning while they waited for the government to decide whether and when they would get a body back to bury.

Pierce’s staff also sometimes took a personal interest in the needs of a particular family, especially when they saw a connection between themselves and the family. After Raymond Campbell’s mother wrote to ask whether the family would be in the way if she attended Campbell’s burial at Arlington National Cemetery, Captain Butler of the

412 Clemons, David, April 9, 1919 letter from mother to GRS. The War Department burial files do not contain a reply to either Linton’s or Clemons’s mother, which is not surprising given that she wrote in the late spring of 1919 and the GRS would have been in the process of transitioning some of its staff back to the United States from Europe.
Cemeterial Division staff replied “in a personal tone” because he had been stationed in El Paso, Texas, where she lived, and had “most pleasant recollections of the time spent there and of the great friendliness and courtesy of the inhabitants of your city.”\textsuperscript{413} Butler promised to keep Campbell’s mother informed and assured her that “it will not cause the Government the slightest inconvenience or trouble to comply with your wishes.”\textsuperscript{414} To John Cooper’s mother, Pierce’s deputy, Edgar Davis, wrote that he was “going to depart from the ordinary lines of official correspondence and write you in a rather personal way,” because “[m]y home is at Villisca [a town in Iowa near where Cooper’s mother lived], and I feel that, being in a way neighbours, the things I say may have an additional value to you.”\textsuperscript{415} Davis tried to reassure Cooper’s mother, who had lost two sons in the war, that press reports of unmarked graves were exaggerated and that graves such as those of her sons’ could be “as easily found as you can find a man’s farm in Iowa if you were furnished the proper directions.”\textsuperscript{416} Other Division staff communicated directly with families as well, and this occasionally included the Division’s female clerks. Richard Conover’s mother wrote directly to one of the female staff working with the Division in Washington and, reminding her that a third party representing Conover’s mother had visited the Division offices and spoken to her, asked for an update from her directly.\textsuperscript{417} (Edgar Davis replied to Conover’s mother on behalf of the Division.\textsuperscript{418})

\textsuperscript{413} Campbell, Raymond, April 30, 1921 letter from mother to GRS at Hoboken; Campbell, Raymond, May 18, 1921 letter to mother from Butler of Cemeterial Division.
\textsuperscript{414} Campbell, Raymond, May 18, 1921 letter to mother from Butler of Cemeterial Division.
\textsuperscript{415} Cooper, John, March 21, 1919 letter from Davis of GRS in Europe to mother.
\textsuperscript{416} Cooper, John, March 21, 1919 letter from Davis of GRS in Europe to mother.
\textsuperscript{417} Conover, Richard, September 19, 1922 letter from mother to Miss Connor of Cemeterial Division staff.
\textsuperscript{418} Conover, Richard, November 1, 1922 letter from Davis of Cemeterial Division to mother.
Walter Enneberg’s aunt wrote directly to another of the female staff working with the
Division, indicating that she had corresponded with her before:

| Walker Iowa  
| Jan 13 - 1921  
| Miss Swenson:-  
| Dear Friend  
| Your very kind letter rec'd - a long time ago. I should have answered sooner but I have had so much sickness my husband passed away Oct 1 also my only Aunt Oct 6 Mother is quite poorley.  I also rec'd the large foto of our loved boys graves. We shoreley have a whole city of dead isent it terable. Now could you tell me if they have moved my nephews body yet. Walter T. Enneberg Grave 25 Sec 8 Lot 1. We often see in our papers ware some boy returns home that was Killed in Action and dont you think their might be a mistake and our boy might be alive wouldent we be happy if so. Is there any of our boys in hospitals over there. I havent been able to find out how he came to his death only Killed in Action Sept 26th 1918 Co 364 Inf 91 Div. I feel free in writing to you as you are a Skand Naving like my self. I am a Dain and you must be a Sweed or Norwegian. Would like very much and see you and have a face to face talk. We have had a lovely winter here so far. I have run my car all winter so you see the roads are good but to day we are having lots of snow. Now when you have time I would like very much to here from you again and thanking you for the postal and the information.  
| Resp yours  
| Mrs. Jennie McAllen  
| Walker Iowa  
| Box 185419  

Enneberg’s aunt was expressing her grief and seeking a personal response from a women she assumed was a “Skand Naving like my self.” She was looking for information and understanding, and perhaps some personal attention to her needs, from someone she felt she knew because of their similar cultural backgrounds. (One of Pierce’s military staff replied to Enneberg’s aunt on behalf of the Division.\(^{420}\))

One extended correspondence shows the extent to which Pierce and his Cemeterial Division staff sometimes sympathized with families. Roy Adams’s widow,

\(^{419}\) Enneberg, Walter, January 13, 1921 letter from aunt to Miss Swenson of Cemeterial Division staff.  
\(^{420}\) Enneberg, Walter, January 26, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to aunt.
who had married Adams three days before he left for the war, requested that the Division return her former husband’s body to Arlington National Cemetery for burial. Adams’s mother wrote to Pierce to ask that Adams’s body instead be returned to her in New York:

May 1, 1920

dear sir

Wen you sent me papers to fill out i had them sent back to you an did not hear nothing untill last Saturday the Red Cross notfide me it was [?] to Hoboken an that it wold be shiped to me on Monday so i got every thing ready even the grave and waited for it it did not come[.] so i sent a telgram for it it did not come thay telgram back that wife did not wante it she had the say[.] i will admint that wife had wright to say if she was a wife that she out to be but she is not she is wife in name only[.] she knows that it was Roy wish that his body be sent to me if aney thing shold happen to them we cold have it ware we cold go to it wen we wanted to as he knew that if it was not sent to us we cold not[.] our undertaker went to see her about it an asked her why she did not want it brought her as it was near home an we wanted it so bad an it was his wish to be brought home[.] she sed she did not give a d what his wish was or how bad we wanted it she was going to be as mean as she cold to us[.] she was not interested in ded men it was live one that she wanted she had al out of him she cold that is all she wanted an as she wanted it sent to Arlington to be mean to us she sed we cold go to H for the government gives her say an we cant help our selves about it[.] Please please do send it to us as we cant stand it if you send it to Arlington after it was so near home so please[.] if she had been a wife in any thing but name only she sed she did not want it to be带到 us as it was his wish to be sent home if aney thing shold happen to him an as she was wife by name only please please dont let us suffer that much moor please please dont if you dont believe what she sed about it you write our undertaker he will tell you about her an what she sed about it this is his address:

E.A. Bartle
948 Main St.
Peekskill
N.Y

[unsigned]

Adams’s mother argued that she should be allowed to decide where her son’s body was buried because his widow was only sending Adams’s body to Arlington “to be mean to

421 Adams, Roy, April 11, 1920 letter from widow to Pierce of Cemeterial Division. The rights of widows like Adams’s to be named the officially recognized “next of kin” and thus to direct where the dead would be buried will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

422 Adams, Roy, May 1, 1920 letter from mother to Cemeterial Division.
us.” Adams’s mother also claimed that Adams’s widow had told the family’s undertaker that the widow “did not give a d what [Adams’s] wish was” and “we cold go to H for the government gives her say an we cant help our selves about it.” Pierce’s deputy, Edgar Davis, replied for Pierce that the Department had to abide by the wishes of Adams’s widow as Adams’s closest relative under the Department guidelines:

May 4, 1920

File No: 293.3 Reg. Sec., Cem. Div.

Mrs. Ezra Adams,
R.F.D. #2
Peekskill, N.Y.

Madam:

Your communication stating that you prefer the body of your son, Private Roy E. Adams, be shipped to you for burial and giving the name of his widow, has been received.

Mrs. Blanche S. Adams has requested that the body be reinterred in Arlington, and in view of the fact that the desires of the widow are given preference over that of any other relative, it is impossible to comply with your request.

In this connection you may be interested to know that the Arlington National Cemetery is near Washington, D.C., and overlooks the city, and that all graves therein are given constant care by our Government.

By authority of the Quartermaster General:
Charles C. Pierce,
Colonel, U.S. Army,
Chief, Cemeterial Division.

By:
E.E. Davis,
Executive Assistant.423

Davis’s description of Arlington National Cemetery as a place where all graves “are given constant care by our Government” was clearly intended to make Adams’s mother feel better about where her son would be permanently buried. Adams’s mother then sent

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423 Adams, Roy, May 4, 1920 letter from Davis for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to mother.
the War Department a copy of forms that indicated that his widow had had a child out of wedlock more than a year after her husband’s death, which Adams’s mother hoped would prove that his widow should not be entitled to direct where he was buried. 424 Pierce sent a memo to Secretary of War Baker, seeking permission to deviate from policy:

424 Adams, Roy, June 30, 1920 letter from mother to Cemeterial Division.
War Department  
Office of the Quartermaster General of the Army  
Washington  

July 13, 1920  

From: The Quartermaster General, U.S. Army (Cemeterial Division)  
To: The Secretary of War.  
Subject: Delivery of remains to parents in case of alleged unchastity of soldier’s widow.  

1. The late Pvt. Roy E. Adams, Med. Repl., Unit #24, died October 1, 1918, and was buried in Kerfautras Cemetery at Lambezellec, (Finistere).  

2. Under date of April 11, 1920, the widow, being the next of kin of the deceased soldier, requested that his remains be returned to the United States and buried in the National Cemetery at Arlington, Va. Pursuant to the established policy with respect to the disposition of the remains of our soldier dead, this body was, therefore, returned to the United States and buried June 18, 1920, in Arlington, Virginia.  

3. Previous to interment at Arlington, the parents protested against the Government's granting the wishes of the wife, alleging misconduct on her part. They also requested that the body of their son be returned to the United States, but to their home for final interment. The protests were by ordinary letters unsupported by affidavits or copies of public records.  

4. Under date of June 30, 1918, the parents again, in a communication to this office, protested against the final interment at Arlington, and requested disinterment and shipment to them in New York. Enclosed with this communication was a certificate of birth, signed by attending physician and certified by Registrar of Vital Statistics in and for the village of Peekskill, New York, which showed the wife of this soldier to have become a mother of an illegitimate child, born January 11, 1920, one year, three months and ten days after the husband's death. This certificate substantiated the charge of unchastity set up by the parents of the deceased.  

5. In view of the evidence of unchastity of the widow, it is recommended that the request of the parents be granted and the remains of Pvt. Roy E. Adams be disinterred and shipped to them at Peekskill, New York.  

By authority of the Quartermaster General:  
[signed]  
Charles C Pierce  
Major, U.S. Army  

Pierce argued that the information that Adams’s mother had sent “substantiated the charge of unchastity set up by the parents of the deceased” and asked for authority to send Adams’s remains to his parents. Baker turned down Pierce’s request. In a memo signed by Baker and dated the day after Pierce’s memo to him, Baker wrote that “[t]he

425 Adams, Roy, July 13, 1920 memo from Pierce of Cemeterial Division to Secretary of War.
legal situation is that the wife is the next of kin” and that “[t]he War Department has no right to try such a question as to her fidelity, and has no facilities for a judicial determination of so delicate a question.”[426] One of Pierce’s staff then wrote on behalf of Pierce to tell Adams’s parents that their request had been denied:

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War Department  
Office of the Director of Purchase and Storage  
Washington  

July 21st, 1920  

293.8 Cem. #17381 (Adams, Roy E., Private)  
The Quartermaster General, U.S. Army, (Cemeterial Division)  
Mr. & Mrs. Ezra Adams, Peekskill, New York. R.F.D. #2  
Private Roy E. Adams.  

1. The request contained in your letter of June 30th, has been taken up with higher authority with a view to determine whether it is possible to grant your wishes in the matter. It has been decided that the War Department has no jurisdiction over the question of the fidelity of the widow of a deceased soldier and the determination of the rights of final dispositions of the remains of deceased soldiers. The War Department is compelled to follow the following order of relationship, namely, widow, father, mother, brothers and sisters, only in the case of remarriage of the widow has the War Department the right to comply with the wishes of the next of kin.  

2. We deeply regret that you have been compelled to suffer this additional hardship but we feel that you will understand that it is not possible for us to grant exemptions except those dictated by law. As this is a legal matter it should be taken up through the courts and if a decision is obtained in your favor we would then be able to comply with your wishes.  

By authority of the Quartermaster General:  

Charles C. Pierce,  
Major, U.S. Army,  
Chief, Cemeterial Division.  

By:  
Charles J. Wynne,  
Captain, Q.M.C.  

The letter on behalf of Pierce states that the request for an exception to policy had been denied by “higher authority,” but the letter also sympathetically expresses the view that

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[426] Adams, Roy, July 14, 1920 memo from Secretary of War Baker to Pierce of Cemeterial Division.  
this final decision was no doubt an “additional hardship” to Adams’s parents. Something about the case of Roy Adams must have touched Pierce, but there is nothing in the file to indicate why the question of where to bury Roy Adams’s body came to Pierce’s particular attention, including nothing to suggest that Adams’s family was politically connected, had connections to the military, or was threatening to make the dispute about Adams’s body public, any of which might have led to an extended review of the situation. It seems that Pierce and his staff were touched by the request of Adams’s parents and perhaps distressed by the reported actions of Adams’s widow and that as a result Pierce was willing to advocate for Adams’s parents within the Department.428

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When families pressed the War Department to provide answers about how men who had died and been buried in Europe during the war, the GRS and the Cemeterial Division stepped in to fill a bureaucratic vacuum. The GRS and the Division paired the bureaucratic efforts necessary to collect and disseminate the information that families wanted with kindness and sympathy towards families. The Division and GRS staffs saw that families needed more from their government and from the military than form letters or forms. Largely because Charles Pierce was a chaplain who understood his duties as caring for the living as well as the dead, his group treated grieving families with respect and understood how important that was.

428 In the end, Adams’s parents apparently got their wish: they sought and received permission from Adams’s widow to pay to have Adams’s body moved to Peekskill. Adams, Roy, December 17, 1920 letter from War Department to lawyer on behalf of parents; Westchester County Archives Digital Collections, Veterans WPA Cemetery Records, Burial Card for Adams, Roy E., available from <http://collections.westchestergov.com/cdm/singleitem/collection/vetcards/id/44/rec/44>; Internet; accessed 31 December 2015.
The lessons that the War Department would learn about how to handle the dead would leave an impression. A post-war report on the work of the GRS during and after the World War found that one of the reasons that families had responded well to the efforts of the GRS with respect to the return of the dead, despite the long delays and other challenges, was that the GRS had treated families with patience and sympathy.\textsuperscript{429} The GRS was created to care for the bodies of the dead and for their graves, but the perspective that the GRS also had a responsibility to the families of the dead arose over time, after the war ended, as the GRS and the Cemeterial Division assumed responsibility for corresponding with families. These interactions would begin to set new, higher standards for the duties that the military owed families after their loved ones died in war.

A final note: Pierce’s own body would eventually be among those returned to the United States from France for permanent burial. Accompanied by his wife and daughter, Pierce traveled back to France in March of 1921 with a delegation of the Fine Arts Commission to consider how the permanent American overseas cemeteries should be arranged.\textsuperscript{430} Pierce’s wife died in Paris on April 23, 1921, probably of influenza, and Pierce himself died at Tours, France on May 16, 1921, also likely of influenza.\textsuperscript{431} Since the Army returned to the United States the bodies of all Americans who died after the war while serving in Europe, there was probably no question of Pierce being buried in one of

\textsuperscript{429} GRS History, Vol. I, 4-5, 137; Congress, House, Subcommittee 7 of the Committee on Military Affairs, \textit{Miscellaneous Military Bills}, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., 5 April 1920, 71.
\textsuperscript{430} Gaither, Wilson, February 19, 1921 draft of cablegram from Cemeterial Division to Colonel Rethers, head of GRS in Paris; Hirrel, “The Beginnings of the Quartermaster Graves Registration Service.”
\textsuperscript{431} Pierce, Charles, June 6, 1921 memo from Army Quartermaster General (discussing preparations for funeral).
the permanent overseas cemeteries without an exception being made, and certainly Pierce’s wife could not have been buried with him overseas, as the GRS, at the request of the French, had taken a firm stand against any Americans other than the war dead being buried in the American cemeteries. Pierce’s daughter and her husband, an Army officer, asked that the bodies of Pierce and his wife be returned to Arlington National Cemetery. Pierce would eventually have a Burial File of his own that would make its way to the National Archives, mixed in with the files of the roughly 80,000 American war dead for whose final burial he had been ultimately responsible. As one final demonstration of the impact of Pierce’s efforts on families, Walter McCoy and A.B. Pouch sought to erect a monument to Pierce at his grave after his death.

432 Beal, Howard, June 26, 1922 letter from Penrose of GRS (Cemeterial Division) to widow (no widows in overseas cemeteries); Douglass, George, February 7, 1925 letter from mayor in France to United States ambassador to France (War Department translation) (questioning burial of children in overseas cemeteries); Douglass, George, February 24, 1925 memo from Army Quartermaster General staff in Europe to Army Quartermaster General (asking for instructions about question of children being buried in overseas cemeteries).

433 Pierce, Charles, August 9, 1921 Memo from Dye, Office of Superintendent, Arlington National Cemetery, to Quartermaster Supply Officer, Washington General Intermediate Depot, Washington, D.C. Pierce and his wife are buried in the Fort Myer section of Arlington National Cemetery along with two of their children who died in infancy. The War Department files indicate that the children were buried at an earlier date, perhaps after having been moved from another national cemetery. Pierce, Charles, March 10, 1920 memo to Pierce of Cemeterial Division from Dye, Superintendent of Arlington National Cemetery.

434 Pierce, Charles.

435 Pierce, Charles, July 15, 1921 letter from Walter McCoy to Penrose, Chief of Cemeterial Division; Pierce, Charles, August 5, 1921 letter from A.B. Pouch to Davis of GRS (Cemeterial Division).
Chapter 3

“He belonged to me when he was killed”: Families Challenge War Department Guidelines on who may Decide Where the Dead are Buried

Some families of the overseas war dead had bitter disputes within the family over who should be named “next of kin” under the War Department guidelines and thus be allowed to choose where the dead should be permanently buried. Under the Department guidelines, if a man was survived by a widow who had not remarried, she was the next of kin and could choose where he was to be buried. If a man was single, his father could choose, and if his father was dead but his mother was alive, she could choose. In many cases, this process worked as intended. Where soldiers had been older married men, widows directed disposition without challenge, and where the dead had been younger and unmarried, fathers spoke for the family to the satisfaction of all involved. A significant number of family members, however, disputed the guidelines, asking the War

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Department to name them next of kin instead of the individual who would otherwise qualify. Family members who would not ordinarily have been named next of kin argued that the Department policies wrongfully gave the authority to make decisions about the dead to another family member who they deemed unworthy on some grounds. Sometimes family members felt that the guidelines did not properly address their situation. Some parents, for example, were frustrated when a widow who had been married only a short time was named next of kin. Mothers were upset to find that fathers were next of kin even when these men no longer lived with or supported their wives or children. Sometimes family members who challenged the designation of the next of kin thought that they knew best where and how the dead should be buried, but at other times, challenges to the guidelines were the result of long-standing family feuds or grievances.

When the Cemeterial Division and the Graves Registration Service took responsibility for corresponding with the families of the overseas war dead, one of the first challenges was determining exactly who should be allowed to decide where the dead would be permanently buried. Family members wrote long and often emotional letters to explain complicated family situations and to argue for deviations from the guidelines. Some individuals provided documentation to support their claims, including copies of legal documents and other official records that were difficult and expensive to obtain. In a number of cases, would-be next of kin sent information about matters that they likely would have preferred to keep private, demonstrating how important it was to them that
they be allowed to determine how and where the dead would be buried.\footnote{Kuhlman, \textit{Of Little Comfort}, 76-79.} As it responded to these appeals, the Cemeterial Division became involved in a lengthy process that required the Division, with the assistance of other War Department organizations like the Army Judge Advocate General, to arbitrate among competing claims from potential next of kin so that the Division could identify the next of kin and get instructions on where to bury the dead.\footnote{Allen, Walter, March 26, 1919 Army Judge Advocate memo to Adjutant General; Congress, House, Subcommittee No. 3 (Foreign Expenditures) of the Select Committee on Expenditures in the War Department, \textit{War Expenditures}, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., 2 March 1920, 3454-58.} Division staff reviewed a myriad of individual letters and other materials, including legal documents and testimonials from family members and third parties, and decided in individual cases how the Department guidelines should be interpreted. This chapter will argue that families challenged the Cemeterial Division to rethink the War Department guidelines about who should be named next of kin and forced the Division to give extensive attention to negotiating with a variety of family members over who should get the right to decide where the dead were to be buried. Where families made reasonable claims for variances to the guidelines and backed up their arguments with detailed testimony and evidence, the Division often interpreted the guidelines liberally in order to reach the fairest result for those who cared most about the dead.

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When the Army Adjutant General’s office reached out to families in the spring of 1919, letters were sent to the address that the soldier had provided when asked to name “such relative or interested friend he desires to have notified” in the event of his illness or
Rather than assume that this individual should be entitled to make decisions on behalf of the dead, however, the War Department developed guidelines for identifying a single official “next of kin,” who would be allowed to direct disposition of the dead, and the Adjutant General’s office included these guidelines in the materials it sent to families in early 1919. First priority was given to a widow who had not remarried. A widow who had remarried lost her rights unless she was the guardian of the minor children of the soldier or marine. A man’s father was next in priority, and if a man’s father was dead, his mother could choose. If a man had no surviving widow or parents, brothers had priority over sisters. The Department guidelines implicitly viewed families as nuclear and patriarchal and accepted no variations from this model. Family members who sought to be named the next of kin over someone else with a stronger claim under the War Department guidelines challenged both the guidelines and the assumptions behind them in a variety of ways, and the Cemeterial Division had to decide who should be named next of kin. A number of disputes were common, such as between parents and widows.

“Eighteen days after the official news came telling of his sacrifice she remarried”: Parents v. “War Brides”

The War Department guidelines held that a man’s widow was his next of kin no matter how long the couple had been married before the war, and parents were sometimes

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440 Enright, Thomas, July 16(?), 1921 letter to editor of Davenport Democrat and Leader from Secretary of War Weeks; Seitz, “‘Let Him Remain Until the Judgment in France,’” 222-23.
dismayed to find that a “war bride” to whom their son had been married only briefly was entitled to choose where her former husband would be buried, instead of leaving that decision to his parents.\textsuperscript{442} These parents felt that they should be allowed to choose where to bury the dead because their emotional connection to their sons was stronger than the bond between young husbands and wives.\textsuperscript{443} Benjamin Baldwin’s mother wanted herself and not her son’s widow named next of kin:

\textsuperscript{442} Adams, Roy, March 25, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“he was only married three days before he went”); Brebner, Charles, July 15, 1920 letter from father to Army Quartermaster General (“they were married but a short time before his death”); Cate, Thomas, August 19, 1919 letter from member of United States House of Representatives on behalf of family to Army Adjutant General (“married shortly before he sailed for France”); Forbes, William, February 12, 1919 letter from father to GRS (“he married a young wife about six months before being called to the war”); Giambruno, Isidore, February 4, 1920 letter from mother to War Department (“he was in Camp Louis 3 months when he returned on a weeks furlow and married after 24 hours”); McConnell, James, January 9, 1920 to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division) (“he married just before sailing for France”); Schultz, Herman, April 17, 1919 letter from sister to “people of the white house” (“married to his wife one months before he left for camp”); Ragsdale, Irving, April 10, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (soldier’s wife “is apt to forget in the course of time while a mother never will”).

\textsuperscript{443} Armstrong, Henry, October 9, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (cemeteries in France “will more delicately meet the practical as well as the sentimental requirements of the case than to disinter the bodies of our soldier dead and return them to the various homes, scattered all over the nation” and widow “has a right to disagree” but “she will marry again” and “my boy will be mine forever”); Cain, Arthur, January 27, 1921 note from mother to GRS at Hoboken; Langrehr, William, February 21, 1922 letter from father to Army Quartermaster General (“I think I have as much right as anyone to say where his remains are to be laid”).
Montezuma, N.Y.
July 30th/20

To the Adjutant
War Dep’t - Wash, D.C.

Seeing boys are being sent home (our recently in my neighboring town, Port Byron) has led me to wondering if my son, Mec. Benj. Earl Baldwin, 325 Inf. M-G. Co., 82 Div., killed Aug. 8th, 1918, was coming home too.

It would be a great consolation to have him near so I could visit his grave. I personally have never asked for his body, as I supposed his wife would look after such things. But a mothers’ love is stronger by far than a young widow, there is always some one to take the place of a husbands’ love. But a mothers’ love never dies.

My son’s wife is well provided for by the Government. But his remembrance is worth more to me. What a shame poor boys’ lives blood should be spilled to furnish insurance for another worthless fellow to help sport on.

Please let me know if it is a possible thing that I may expect the body of my son, that I may lay him by the side of his deceased father of Dec. 15th 1919.

If my wish could be granted I shall be very thankful. Oblige his mother.

Mrs. Dorothy S. Baldwin
Montezuma, N.Y.

My son is buried at Menil-la-Tour
No. 1897176

Baldwin’s mother argued that “a mothers’ love is stronger by far than [that of] a young widow,” because she thought the grief of her son’s widow would pass while she would be left to mourn his death for the rest of her life. Baldwin’s mother may also have thought that his widow was moving on to a new relationship too quickly, since she referred to “another worthless fellow” who might benefit from the death benefits paid to her son’s widow. The Cemeterial Division, however, abided by the wishes of Baldwin’s widow.

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444 Baldwin, Benjamin, July 30, 1920 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General.
and sent Baldwin’s remains to Arlington National Cemetery. Calvin George’s father asked the Division to tell him if George’s widow did not request his son’s body returned:

Madison, Ga., Aug. 18/19

The Adj-General,
Washington, D.C.

Dear Sir:

Your letter of the 23 ult., desiring to know my preference as to the disposal of the remains of my son, Lt. Calvin George, Co. E, 28th Inft., killed in action in France was received.

My reply has been unavoidably delayed. My son left a widow, whose preference takes precedence of mine, Mrs. Marie Cobb George, 19 Fairview Road, Atlanta, Ga. I wrote her some weeks ago, to ascertain if she had any preference in the matter, and to request, if she had none, that she write me authorizing the exercise of my preference. I have had no reply. Since my letter was mailed in an envelope with return address thereon, I assume that she received it, and is indifferent, particularly since their courtship and married life were both so short as to constitute probably but an episode in her life. She is very young.

If she has expressed to the Department no preference, I hope you will notify me of the fact and give me authority to direct the matter. If she has expressed a preference, I will appreciate it, if the Department will notify me of it, if that can be done without impropriety.

Respectfully yours,
Emerson H. George

George’s father feared his son’s widow might not care where her former husband was buried, “since their courtship and married life were both so short as to constitute probably but an episode in her life. She is very young.” He wanted the Division to return George’s body to him because he felt that his son’s marriage created less of a bond than the one that existed between George and his father. In the end, George’s father agreed with his widow that he would decide, but George’s body was never identified.

445 Baldwin, Benjamin, July 12(?), 1922 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General.
446 George, Calvin, August 18, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General.
447 George, Calvin, September 6, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; George, Calvin, November 19, 1931 letter from Army Quartermaster General to father.
Some parents asked the Cemeterial Division to disregard the wishes of a young widow or help them persuade the widow to abide by their views. William Barlow’s parents were so anxious to have Barlow’s body returned to them against the wishes of his widow that they asked the Division to disregard the widow’s request without telling her:

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**Ashford Ala.**
April 7th 1921

To the Chief of the Cemeterial Div(?)
War Department
Washington D.C.

Dear Sir:

We write you in regard to the dead body of our son, William C. Barlow, Company F. 105 Engineer 30th Division, who was gassed and died Aug. 27, 1918, at Brandholk Bel. near Ypres. We want his body returned to us and be buried here. We have been advised that his widow who is rated as next of kin does not care to have his body brought over and the only reason she assigns is that it will renew her trouble. If she sets forth any other reason we are unable to ascertain it. Now she was wife only about thirty days before he went away to war. He was our child all his life and it does seem to us that our wishes concerning his last resting place should be due some consideration.

His widow lives in another state and we are perfectly willing not to disturb her happiness in the least. There is no need whatever for her to know that the body comes here, provided it does come. So far as we are concerned the body’s coming here will not renew our trouble since it is as fresh with us now as it has ever been, and we do feel like it would be some comfort in our declining years to know that we could be laid down to rest by the side of our darling son, who was so ruthlessly taken from us to die for his country’s honor, in the days of his early manhood.

If you will exert your influence to have our child’s body sent to us, we will assume all responsibility of having it laid away and the widow need not to bothered about that part of it. We have every reason to believe it is pure disinterestness on her part that she does not want the body brought home, while we know that it is the dearest wish of our lives that it should be brought.

Thanking you in advance for any kindness you may render in the matter, we are the broken hearted parents of William C. Barlow.

Mr. and Mrs. T. Barlow

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Barlow’s parents argued that their wishes should be respected over those of the widow because their son had been married only briefly but he “was our child all his life.”

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448 Barlow, William, April 7, 1921 letter from parents to Cemeterial Division.
Barlow’s parents thought that the Division might be willing to have Barlow’s body returned to them without notifying the widow, as “[t]here is no need whatever for her to know that the body comes here.” The Division replied that it bound by the decision of Barlow’s widow but that it had written Barlow’s widow to tell her of Barlow’s parents’ wish to have the body returned to them.\textsuperscript{449} The widow refused to agree, and Barlow was buried permanently in Belgium.\textsuperscript{450} Jack Settle’s parents asked the Division to attempt to persuade his widow to leave his body in France. Settle’s widow had written the Division that she wanted her husband’s body returned to her because she wanted to tend his grave and in time be buried next to him.\textsuperscript{451} Likely in part because they thought that the War Department would agree that his body should be left in France, Settle’s parents wrote the Division that if Settle’s widow requested the return of Settle’s body, “we should esteem it a great favor if you would discourage it all you can as it was his wish and ours also that should he die he was to be allowed to remain over there.”\textsuperscript{452} The Division returned Settle’s body to his widow.\textsuperscript{453}

Sometimes in disputes between parents and widows, compromises were possible, which relieved the Cemeterial Division of the need to make difficult decisions.\textsuperscript{454} A

\textsuperscript{449} Barlow, William, April 14, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to parents.
\textsuperscript{450} Barlow, William, April 7, 1921 letter from parents to Cemeterial Divisions; Barlow, William, August 31, 1921 letter from Cemeterial Division to member of United States House of Representatives. Barlow remains buried at the Flanders Field American Cemetery. American Battle Monuments Commission, available from <https://www.abmc.gov/>; Internet; accessed 31 December 2015.
\textsuperscript{451} Settle, Jack, 1919(?) letter from widow to Pierce.
\textsuperscript{452} Settle, Jack, December(?) 1919 letter note from mother to Army Adjutant General.
\textsuperscript{453} Settle, Jack, January 20, 1920 memo from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to Army Adjutant General; Settle, Jack, May 26, 1921 receipt for remains.
\textsuperscript{454} Foley, William, January 26, 1921 note from widow to GRS at Hoboken (“you may send remains to mother in compliance with her request”); Delke, Allen, November 25, 1921 memo; DePrill, Frank, August 29, 1921 affidavit from widow; Stephenson, William, November 1, 1920 letter from Shannon of
man’s parents and widow might agree about where he should be buried. 455 Bertrand Adoue’s mother, for example, wrote that “[m]y husband, self, and his young wife have decided to let him rest where he is.” 456 A widow might agree to let a man’s parents direct disposition. 457 Henry McKeithen’s widow agreed to allow McKeithen’s body to be sent to his father, who had written the Army Adjutant General that “me the father of the boy and the mother of the dear boy wants the body sent home.” 458 When the Division asked Luther Fields’s widow whether she concurred with Fields’s mother’s request that his body be left in France, Fields’s widow replied that she had faith that she would see her husband again and was willing to grant the request of her former mother-in-law: “You all doe just what his mother ses I wont contray her if she ses barry him over ther hit all rite withe me hit dont mater wher the boddy lies when recious day we all rice and i will see him a gane.” 459 Sometimes, remarried widows conceded that they had lost their rights because of subsequent remarriages. 460 Edgar Young’s admitted that she had remarried

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Quartermaster Corps to family; Johnson, Albert, January 22, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to guardian of children (“your request and that of the mother of this soldier agree”).
455 Bird, John, March 17, 1921 letter from widow to Wynne of Cemeterial Division (agreeing with request to return body to mother); Coleman, Matthew, June 18, 1920 letter from widow to Army Adjutant General; Cramer, Murray, September 17, 1920 letter from widow to GRS (Cemeterial Division); Crosley, Ernest, June 6, 1921 letter from widow to GRS for Shannon of GRS at Hoboken; O’Brien, Charles, August 15, 1920 letter from widow to Cemeterial Division; Wadsworth, Lawrence, November 12, 1920 letter from widow to GRS (Cemeterial Division) (if mother “wishes his body brought back and placed in Arlington I shall be very glad to consent to that”).
456 Adoue, Bertrand, April 18, 1919 letter from mother to Colonel House (“My husband, self, and his young wife have decided to let him rest where he is”).
457 Agnew, Edward, October 5, 1920 letter from widow to Cemeterial Division; Bolton, John, October 27, 1921 letter from Shannon of Army Quartermaster General to mother; Bothwell, Harold, March 25, 1919 affidavit from widow.
458 McKeithen, Henry, June 2, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; McKeithen, Henry, June 27, 1919 letter from widow to Army Adjutant General.
459 Fields, Luther, March 17(?), 1921 letter from widow to War Department.
460 Abramowitz, Harry, January 6, 1921 letter from widow to GRS at Hoboken (“I have remarried and no longer want his remains. Ask his parents what they want. I want to forget the past entirely”); Abrams,
and that Young’s father should be next of kin. Some “compromises” must have been the result of significant pressure on widows. Edgar Emmert’s widow first requested that Emmert’s body be left in France and then requested it be returned to a national cemetery in the United States. She next asked that Emmert’s body be returned to her because “my mother in law desires his remains brought to the home cemetery for burial and I am willing to try and satisfy her.” She noted that her former mother-in-law had “insisted that I write the Department to this effect.”

When families could not agree on compromises, however, they asked the Cemeterial Division to arbitrate their disputes. Henry Abbott’s parents asked the Division to reject the request of Abbott’s widow that his body be returned to her:

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Clarence, February 7, 1921 letter from widow to Army Quartermaster General; Dean, Jesse, June 9, 1921 letter from father to Army Quartermaster General (“enclosed you will find a statement of his widow that she has remarried”); Dean, John, April 7, 1921 letter from widow to War Department (“I have remarried therefore I am returning the papers as I have no minor children and therefore cannot make any claim which I deeply regret”); Smith, Gilbert W., September 31, 1920 letter from widow to Army Quartermaster General (“I understand I haven’t got no right to look after it”); Strickland, John, May 13, 1921 affidavit from widow; Gayle, Frederick, May 6, 1921 letter from widow to GRS at Hoboken; Traue, George, July 3, 1921 letter from widow to Army Adjutant General.

Young, Edgar, August 31, 1920 letter from widow to Pierce of Cemeterial Division.

DePrill, Frank, August 28, 1921 affidavit from widow; Emmert, Edgar, August 25, 1919 letter from widow to War Department.

Emmert, Edgar, June 3, 1919 letter from widow to War Department; Emmert, Edgar, August 25, 1919 letter from widow to War Department.

Emmert, Edgar, August 25, 1919 letter from widow to War Department.

Emmert’s widow may have had another reason for ceding to her mother-in-law’s wishes: the correspondence indicates that by November of 1920, the widow’s name had changed, suggesting that she remarried. Emmert, Edgar, November 24, 1920 letter from widow to War Department.
Van Vleet, Miss.  
Aug. 26, 1920

Charles J. Wynne,  
Capt. Q.M.C.

Dear Sir

I have your letter of July 31st stating that on receipt of a letter from Mrs. Henry G. Abbott requesting her husband's body sent to Egypt Miss.  As we are the parents of Pvt. Henry G. Abbott - No. 1591678 we think we have the legal right to have his body sent to Van Vleet Miss as our family burying ground is there.  Mrs. Henry G. Abbott has no family burying place and as she is to be married soon we think we have the first claim for his body.

Hoping you will comply with our request,

We are yours very truly,

Mr. and Mrs. L.L. Abbott  
Van Vleet Miss.

Abbott’s parents were judging Abbott’s widow for at least two reasons: that she was “to be married soon” and that she had no “family burying place,” the latter suggesting a lack of social standing or permanence that was important to Abbott’s parents. In the end, Abbott’s widow not only retained the right to direct disposition of his body but asked that Abbott’s body be left in France rather than returned.

Parents already upset that the wishes of a widow had priority over their own were sometimes more frustrated to find that the widow continued to receive benefits, including War Risk Insurance from the United States Treasury Department, regardless of her current behavior or marital status. The War Risk Insurance program was designed to ensure that those a soldier left behind did not suffer for his being sent to Europe and

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466 Abbott, Henry, August 26, 1920 letter from parents to Wynne of Cemeterial Division.  
467 Abbott, Henry, August 26, 1920 letter from parents to Wynne of Cemeterial Division.  
468 Abbott, Henry, September 11, 1920 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to parents; Abbott, Henry, June 2, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to widow.
perhaps killed. Married soldiers who signed up for insurance were no doubt encouraged to name their wives as their beneficiaries, since the military would have assumed that parents and siblings had other means of support, while a wife likely depended on her husband for financial security. The officials who created the program did not foresee the possibility that women who had, for example, been married only briefly to men who died in the war would continue to collect insurance even if they quickly remarried. While other death benefits ceased when a widow remarried, War Risk Insurance payments continued. Parents sometimes wrote the War Department to challenge those continuing benefits, which they felt were unfair or gave their son’s wives perverse incentives. Joseph Collins’s mother wrote that “[i]t seems wrong that these War Brides of a few months can claim all War Souviners while the Mothers who raised and dearly loved their boys can have nothing. Mother never forgets her boys.” Clifton Luckett’s father worried that his son’s widow was more concerned about the death benefits she received than about where his son would be buried:

470 Lulay, Frank, April 16, 1921 letter from Treasury Department to sister (“on remarriage of the widow to your brother, compensation which she was drawing was terminated . . . remarriage does not affect her right to receive insurance”).
471 Ball, Basil, August 25, 1919 letter from mother to War Department; Baumann, George, November 9, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Craig, Harry Lee, March 5, 1920(?) letter from father to Army Adjutant General; Donatelle, Frank, February 9, 1921 letter from postmaster (“parents are aged, in debt and striving hard to make a living and the issuance of $4,000 of the dead son's insurance to his widow, who is young and in good health has not family, and recently married . . . seems to them and other a bit unfair”); Howard, Frank, October 3, 1920 letter from family (“the only thought she had for him was to get his insurance money”); Lulay, Frank, April 7, 1921 letter from sister to GRS at Hoboken; McCormick, George, July 6, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; McQuiston, John H, August 3, 1921 letter from mother (widow “has been married since last November and I think that his mother ought to get the body as she is now out of the family and also I would like to know if the insurance could be cut off her”); Smith, Gilbert W., undated letter from mother to War Department.
472 Collins, Joseph, January 20, 1921 letter from mother to GRS at Hoboken.
American Expeditionary Forces  
Headquarters Services of Supply Office of the Chief Quartermaster, A.E.F.  
Graves Registration Service  

My dear friend -

I take pleasure in writing you as a real true friend concerning of the letter which you wrote to my daughter in law Mrs. Georgia Luckett the wife of Cpl. Clifton Luckett, Co. B. 326th Labor Battalion who died December 8, 1918 whom I am glad you think enough for to write her but I feel as I am near to him than she have been as I am his father John C. Luckett who have been his mother and father every since he was three years old until he was 25 yrs for his mother died and left him when he was 3 yrs. old and I have been his mother and father and he married this woman who was Georgia Adams, she married him after he had registered and not before, only stayed 7 months with him. I [am] satisfied she care more for the checks from his death than the letters you are writing her, concerning of him now. So as I am his father one who love him dear than any one on earth and would rather have his dead body than to being drawling checks from him when you feel like writing concerning of Cpl. Clifton Luckett the son of Jos. C. Luckett I will gladly appreciate your letters if you will only drop them to Jos. C. Luckett Sharon, Miss. R.R. 1 - Box 42a who wants his body if you ever can see fit for me to get it. Please let me know. For Mrs. Georgia Adams Luckett is not so intresting about nothing but those long checks.

I am truly cencirely your friend, John C. Luckett

address Sharon Miss. R-1 - Box 42a

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Luckett’s father was concerned that his son’s widow “care more for the checks from his death than the letters you are writing her.” Like other parents, Luckett’s father argued that he had a better claim for his son’s body than did Luckett’s widow because of his long-standing relationship with his son, but Luckett’s father also argued that his claim to his son’s body was purer for not being driven by financial reward. In the end, it appears that Luckett’s widow and father reached a compromise, as the Cemeterial Division agreed to return Luckett’s body to his wife, but Luckett’s father co-signed the government receipt for Luckett’s remains.  

David Davis’s mother, herself a widow,

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473 Luckett, Clifton, March 31, 1919 letter from father to GRS in Europe.  
474 Luckett, Clifton, January 26, 1921 letter from Shannon of Army Quartermaster General to widow; Luckett, Clifton, July 2, 1921 receipt for remains.
was glad to hear that she could select her son’s burial location because his widow had remarried but questioned why his benefits did not also revert to her:

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Longmont Colo, July 3rd 1920
War Department Office of the Quartermaster General Washington D.C.

Gentlemen

I am writing to know about Pvt David Horace Davis 3915049 Co. H., 11th Inf. I received a letter from his wife Mildred David telling she was remarried to Grant Von Duzee of Jackson Minnesota on June the 17, 1920, now about the insurance he left is it right that she should have his insurance. She has given up his name, and she has a husband now to protect her. I think that a mother has the right of the insurance after the wife marries again. The law sure was slack when they made the law that the wife should have it all, and the government gave her $25.00 a month allotment while she was his wife. Now what has the government given his mother. Nothing. I was left with five small children, the oldest 12 years old and this dear boy was 10 when his father died. I had to work hard to bring them up and school them, now this man has his insurance to make it easy for him. This hurts and hurts bad. I am very grateful to the government that I was the one that had the saying what to do with his body. If it had been his wife, she said she would let the body lay where he fell. This has nearly broken my heart, as his body is very dear to me and it is so far away to let him in that far away land France. I want him in the United State and I have him laid by his father in Winfred South Dakota. I am pleased to have such thorough information of the grave and that it has been registered and the body has been reburied in the Argonne American Cemetery. I am thankful to all that has been so careful about the body these are the things that helps to know that our dear boys are not forgotten. I been watching the papers very close and have read that the bodies that are in France will not be returned until after the 15 of Sept. When the body comes you will find me at 643 Terry St. Longmont Colo. I will be in Winfred South Dakota when the body gets there.

Sincerely
Mrs Anna Davis
648 Terry St.
Longmont, Colo.

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Davis’s mother could not understand why his widow should be allowed to keep financial benefits after she remarried and argued that the “law sure was slack when they made the law that the wife should have it all.” The word “slack” was used during the war as a

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475 Davis, David, July 7, 1920(?) letter from mother to Army Quartermaster.
negative term for men who refused to enlist, suggesting that Davis’s mother was making
a stronger objection to the legislation than the same language might imply today.476

Some parents argued to the War Department that widows were making choices
about where to bury the dead based on non-monetary benefits, such as the social status
that came with being the widow of a soldier or marine who had died for his country in the
war, rather than on what the dead would have wanted.477 Will Tredways’s mother asked
that her son’s body be left in France because she believed that Tredway’s widow had
been unfaithful, and she did not “like the idea of [Tredway’s widow] making a great
parade and pow-wow over my boy’s body.”478 Tredway’s widow eventually agreed with
his mother that Tredway’s body should be buried permanently in France.479

Other parents thought that widows’ decisions were being made not based on
benefits but on preexisting disputes between the two sides. Some widows clearly used
the process to retaliate against in-laws who they perceived had been less than kind.480
Charles Dew’s cousin wrote on behalf of Dew’s mother to explain that Dew’s remarried
widow did not want his body returned and “has circulated stories to the effect that the

476 “Slackers” were men who failed to register for the draft. Byron Farwell, Over There: The United States
in the Great War, 1917-1918 (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999), 52-53; David M. Kennedy,
Anniversary ed., New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 150-51; Christopher Capozzola, Uncle
University Press, 2008), 30-33.
477 Martin, John, May 2, 1921 letter from uncle to GRS at Hoboken (“she only wants the body for a show”).
478 Tredway, Will, May 26, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General.
479 Tredway, Will, May 12, 1920 letter from widow to Army Adjutant General.
480 Baumann, George, November 9, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Buster, Elmer,
November 19, 1919 letter from local Red Cross chapter on behalf of mother to Army Adjutant General.
body has been lost and that it is useless for the mother to try to have it returned.”481 The Cemeterial Division wrote the widow that she had lost the right to direct disposition of Dew’s remains based on her remarriage and returned his body to his mother.482 Parents were often particularly upset when widows who had originally requested that the dead be returned changed their minds and asked that their former husband’s body be buried in Europe or in a national cemetery far from the community in which the widow and her former husband’s family lived.483 The Division eventually realized that some widows

481 Dew, Charles, November 14, 1921 letter from third party on behalf of mother to Penrose of Cemeterial Division.
482 Dew, Charles, May 9, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to widow; Dew, Charles, December 20, 1921 receipt for remains.
483 Adams, Roy, April 11, 1920 letter from widow to Pierce of Cemeterial Division; Alexander, William, April 7, 1921 letter from widow to Army Quartermaster General; Allen, Jesse, October 19, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to mother; Baldwin, Benjamin, July 25, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to mother; Barlow, William, April 30, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to parents; Cade, Walter, April 7, 1920 letter from widow to War Department; Daniels, Edward, February 11, 1921 letter from widow to Shannon of Army Quartermaster General; Brebner, Charles, September 3, 1920 letter from Gwynn for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to father; Broughton, Ben, April 28, 1921 telegram from widow to GRS at Hoboken; Chapman, Clyde, August 9, 1919 letter from widow to War Department; Davis, Claude, July 26, 1920 letter from widow to Army Adjutant General (“could you advise me at once wheater I could have it changed about my husbands body being sent home for the second buriel or not if I could have it changed I rather have it put in the National cemetery at Virginia”); Delius, Clinton, May 6, 1921 letter from widow to Cemeterial Division (“unless the body has already been removed and on its way I think it best to remain where it is”); Fletcher, Earnest, May 1921 letter from widow to Army Adjutant General (“since having some time to think it over, I desire that he be left where burried”); Forbes, William, November 18, 1919 letter from widow to Army Adjutant General (“we have all decided that it would be much better to let him rest where he is”); Foster, Clayton, December 8, 1919 letter from widow to Army Quartermaster General (requesting that return of body be cancelled); Fraser, Edward, August 26, 1921 letter from widow to Army Quartermaster General (“have considered the matter over and if it is not too late now, would rather him remain where he fell”); Gayle, Frederick, June 16, 1920 letter from widow to Army Adjutant General (“I have changed my mind and do not want his body returned now”); Johnston, Frank, November 9, 1919 letter from widow to Army Adjutant General; Lulay, Frank, June 11, 1920 letter from widow to Army Quartermaster General; McQuiston, John, October 10, 1920 letter from widow to Pierce of Cemeterial Division (“I want carefully understood that I do not want any other relative to be ask about his body coming home. We have all decided it is but for it him to remain over there now as it is past 2 years”); Moore, John F., April 24, 1920 letter from widow to Army Quartermaster General; Teator, Elwood, May 11, 1919 letter from widow to Army Adjutant General; O’Neal, Homer, December 9, 1920 letter from widow to member of United States House of Representatives; Ratledge, William, November 20, 1920 letter from widow to Cemeterial Division; Smith, Mayberry, March 16, 1920 letter from widow to GRS in Europe; Trapp, Charles, May 7, 1919 letter from widow to Army Adjutant General; Young, Edgar, August(?) 1920 letter from widow to Pierce of Cemeterial Division.
were having the dead left in Europe or sent to cemeteries distant from parents and other family members out of spite or to “avoid having the body received and gratify the desires” of parents or other family members.  

Having the dead buried overseas or in a national cemetery would have had two practical advantages for a widow. First, when a man was buried in Europe or at a national cemetery, the government handled all the details and paid all the costs of the burial. Second, a widow could hope that a distant grave would put her former relationship out of sight and mind for those in her community who might judge any perceived lack of faithfulness to her former husband or the speed with which she remarried. Young women who had begun to consider remarriage might also have preferred not to engage in the social rituals of burial and widowhood if their new partners might be jealous of their prior relationship or of the attention that a funeral would receive in the community.

John Carney’s widow wrote in February of 1919 that she would “never be satisfied until my husband is buried near me in American soil.”

By June of 1921, however, when asked to confirm where she wanted the remains shipped, Carney’s widow wrote that she now wanted her husband to remain “in his resting place where he now lays some where in France which was his request if he should never return.” While it is possible that Carney’s widow had heard from one of her

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484 Barazotto, John, July 29, 1921 memo from Shannon of Army Quartermaster General to Cemeterial Division.
485 Allison, Roy, May 19, 1919 letter from widow to Army Adjutant General; Koontz, Floyd, August 27, 1920 letter from widow to Army Adjutant General; McCormick, George, July 28, 1921 letter from mother to War Department.
486 Carney, John, February 2, 1919 letter from widow to War Department.
487 Carney, John, June 14, 1921 letter from widow to War Department. Told it was too late to stop the remains from being returned from France, Carney’s widow requested that the remains be shipped to her. Carney, John, August 25, 1921 telegram from widow to GRS (Cemeterial Division).
former husband’s comrades that Carney had expressed a preference for being buried in France, this was more likely a convenient explanation for her change of mind. Although the correspondence does not reflect that Carney’s widow was in a new relationship, it had been more than two years since her husband’s death.

Since widows lost their right to direct disposition if they remarried, unless they were the custodians of the soldier’s minor children, some parents went to significant effort to demonstrate that their son’s widow was now someone else’s wife. Frank Howard’s mother wrote to contest her son’s widow’s request that Howard’s body be left in Europe. Howard’s mother wrote that the widow must be acting “only to hurt me” because “eighteen days after the official news came telling of his sacrifice she remarried.” After Howard’s mother provided proof of the widow’s remarriage, the Cemeterial Division agreed to return his body to his mother. Webster Albertson’s parents also proved that their son’s widow had remarried. They noted dryly that they

488 Bain, Joseph, November 12, 1920 letter from parents to Army Quartermaster General; Broughton, Ben, May 19, 1921 letter from member of United States House of Representatives on behalf of family to GRS (Cemeterial Division); Brown, Gilbert, May 3, 1921 affidavit from father; Burrows, Robert, February 1, 1921 letter from mother to member of United States House of Representatives; Cagle, Thomas, August 6, 1921 letter from American Legion post acting on behalf of family to GRS at Hoboken; Chapman, Clyde, October 16, 1920 letter from sister to Army Quartermaster General; Cross, Waite, July 28, 1921 letter from third party on behalf of parents to GRS at Hoboken; Dew, Charles, May 9, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to remarried widow; Donatelle, Frank, June 15, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to American Legion post acting on behalf of widow; Dussinger, James, June 7, 1921 affidavit from parents; Fitzpatrick, John E., December 29, 1920 letter from sister to Army Quartermaster General; Fultz, Olen, August 9, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to mother; Howard, Frank, October 3, 1920 letter from parents to Cemeterial Division; Langrehr, William, February 21, 1922 letter from father to Army Quartermaster General; Rauch, Lester, June 30, 1921 letter from mother to Cemeterial Division; Ross, Charlie, January 16, 1920 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Williams, Hiram, May 3, 1920 letter from parents to Cemeterial Division (enclosing copy of marriage certificate).

489 Howard, Frank, October 3, 1920 letter from mother to Cemeterial Division.

490 Howard, Frank, October 3, 1920 letter from mother to Cemeterial Division.

491 Howard, Frank, November 16, 1920 letter from Cemeterial Division to parents.
were surprised that the Division did not know of the widow’s remarriage, “but we are obliged to confess that we ourselves knew nothing of it for many months.” Albertson’s parents were allowed to decide where his body was buried.  

Parents sometimes contested the authority given to widows by arguing that the relationship between the soldier and his widow had broken down before the soldier’s death. Even if divorce carried some social stigma, parents were willing to send affidavits, legal documents, and other proof of a son’s marital difficulties to the Cemeterial Division if it meant that they could decide where their son’s body was buried. Richard Maxey’s parents sent the Division some particularly persuasive evidence that their son had divorced his wife before he joined the military: a letter written years earlier by Maxey’s ex-wife’s second husband, asking that Maxey stop writing to his ex-wife. The Division agreed to return Maxey’s body to his parents.  

Where a soldier and his wife had been having problems but had not legally divorced prior to his departure for Europe, the Cemeterial Division treated the question as a legal problem and sought a written record of problems within the marriage. William Lindsay’s mother wrote the Division that her son had been in the process of divorcing his

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492 Albertson, Webster, April 4, 1921 letter from father to GRS at Hoboken.  
493 Albertson, Webster, May 9, 1921 letter from Butler for Shannon of GRS at Hoboken to father.  
494 Dragoo, John, May 14, 1921 letter from Butler for Shannon of GRS at Hoboken to mother.  
495 Maxey, Richard, July 16, 1921 letter from mother to Shannon of GRS at Hoboken.  
496 Maxey, Richard, August 9, 1921 letter from Butler for Shannon of GRS at Hoboken to mother.  
497 Allen, Walter, April 1, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to father; Coleman, Joseph, July 24, 1920 letter from member of United States House to Army Quartermaster General (soldier “was living apart from the wife under a legal agreement”); Douglas, Otis, September 10, 1921 memo from Pallas for Shannon of GRS at Hoboken to Cemeterial Division; Fine, Abraham, April 28, 1921 letter from Red Cross on behalf of parents to GRS at Hoboken (soldier had “started divorce proceedings against his wife”); Walker, Roy, May 17, 1921 letter from mother to GRS at Hoboken (“if it had not been for his lawyers illness the divorce would have been granted before he left”).
wife of six months at the time he was called up, having discovered his wife “with many male friends and always under the influence of whiskey.” Fortunately for Lindsay’s mother, Lindsay had filed for a legal separation with a court before he left home. The Division accepted the evidence provided by Lindsay’s mother, and Lindsay’s body was returned to her. Parents and other family members were not above repeating gossip about a widow if it might help the Division decide to grant them the right to direct disposition. The Division sought guidance from the Army Judge Advocate General (JAG), which sought to avoid giving credence to rumors and hearsay. After Claude Baker’s father wrote that Baker’s widow “spent time visiting notorious characters in the home-town here,” the Army JAG memo on the dispute argued that

[i]n their letter Mr. and Mrs. Baker cast aspersions upon the character of the woman whom their son married and complain of the fact that although they were married but a short time, she as his beneficiary will now be in receipt of a large amount of money from the Government. These, of course, are matters with which the War Department cannot concern itself. It is recommended that they be advised that the War Department will recognize the right of the wife in this case to direct the disposition of the remains of her husband.

The JAG noted that Baker’s parents had “cast aspersions upon the character of the woman whom their son married” but concluded that these were “matters with which the

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498 Lindsay, William, August 27, 1921 letter from mother to Wynne of Cemeterial Division.
499 Lindsay, William, August 27, 1921 letter from mother to Wynne of Cemeterial Division.
500 Lindsay, William, September 13, 1921 letter to mother to Wynne of Cemeterial Division.
501 Barazotto, John, July 28, 1921 affidavit from family member (about behavior of widow); Benson, Harold, July 9, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; Buxton, James, August 16, 1921 letter from brother to Army Adjutant General; Craig, Harry Lee, March 5, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; Lindsay, William, September 1, 1921 letter from mother to Wynne of Cemeterial Division.
502 Baker, Claude, June 10, 1919 memo Army Judge Advocate General to Army Adjutant General.
War Department cannot concern itself.” Baker’s parents were apparently able to agree with Baker’s widow to have Baker’s body left in England.503

Sometimes parents argued that the dead should be returned to them because the widow was in a new relationship but not yet remarried. Some parents saw their grief as life-long and felt that their son’s former wife was not giving the marriage or their son the respect they felt was deserved.504 Edward Fraser’s mother asked that her son’s body be returned to her and noted that his widow had begun seeing a married man after Fraser left for Europe.505 Fraser’s mother wrote that she “would rather leave his body on the other side” than allow her son’s widow to claim his remains.506 Fraser’s widow asserted her right to direct disposition but asked that Fraser’s remains be left in France, and the Division complied, no doubt relieved that both sides agreed.507

Sometimes even a remarriage or legal separation did not give parents the authority they sought over their son’s body, because widows who had remarried were still entitled to direct disposition if they were the legal guardians of a man’s child.508 Allen McDonald’s sister wrote the Cemeterial Division that her brother’s widow had remarried
and questioned how the widow could have the “honor” to be named next of kin over McDonald’s mother.\textsuperscript{509} The Division replied that it had not been aware of the widow’s remarriage but “inasmuch as she has the custody of the minor children of the deceased soldier she still retains the right” to direct disposition.\textsuperscript{510} In other cases, however, the Division found that a man’s widow had not legally been appointed the guardian of his child, suggesting that legal guardianship at this time was not automatically extended to a child’s mother even after the child’s father’s death. This subtle point occasionally gave the Division a procedural loophole that justified sending a man’s body to his parents rather than to his remarried widow.\textsuperscript{511}

At other times, parents argued that the whereabouts of their son’s widow were unknown because the younger women had literally moved on. Where the Cemeterial Division had the address of a parent but was not able to reach a widow by mail, the Division sometimes asked parents to try to find widows and send affidavits summarizing their efforts, putting parents in a difficult position of looking for someone who might contest their decision.\textsuperscript{512} Ernest Dyar’s mother wrote that her son’s widow had left her son in 1916 and that all Dyar’s mother knew was that the widow now lived somewhere in

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\textsuperscript{509} McDonald, Allen, January 10, 1922 letter from sister to Shannon of GRS at Hoboken.
\textsuperscript{510} McDonald, Allen, January 17, 1922 letter from Taylor for Shannon of GRS at Hoboken to sister.
\textsuperscript{511} Barazotto, John, July 29, 1921 memo from Shannon of Army Quartermaster General to Cemeterial Division; Coleman, Joseph, July 24, 1920 letter from member of United States House of Representatives to Army Quartermaster General; Smith, Mayberry, June 2, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to attorney for Smith’s parents.
\textsuperscript{512} Beck, Oscar, August 18, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to American Legion Post on behalf of father; Deketlaer, Edmond, July 21, 1920 letter from sister to Pierce of Cemeterial Division; Deketlaer, Edmond, June 1921 letter note from sister on form returned to GRS (Cemeterial Division); Alexander, Doster, August 24, 1921 letter from Butler for Shannon of GRS at Hoboken to father; Blake, Andrew, February 4, 1921 letter from Pallas for Shannon of GRS at Hoboken to mother; Cashman, William, August 5, 1920 affidavit from mother; Wadsworth, Lawrence, October 9, 1920 letter from mother to Cemeterial Division (enclosing affidavit from mother).
\end{flushleft}
Oklahoma. The Division requested that the mother send an affidavit summarizing her “reasonable” efforts to locate the widow. Dyar’s mother must have had some success, or more information that she had initially shared with the Division, since an attorney sent a letter to the Division two months later reporting that the widow consented to Dyar’s remains being sent to his mother. Similarly, Elmer Dehart’s father wrote that he did not know where his son’s widow was but that the widow had told him to do what he thought best. Dehart submitted two affidavits confirming that the location of the widow was not known to those in his community, and the Division agreed to send Dehart’s body to his father. Harley Robinson’s parents took a different approach, sending an affidavit that stated that their son had been married in 1917 but had soon separated from his wife, claiming she was unfaithful; Robinson’s parents stated that they had “made no effort to locate his widow, knowing that she was unworthy of him.” The Division agreed to return Robinson’s body to his parents.

Some widows challenged the decision to disregard their wishes because of their remarriages as unfair, arguing that their feelings for their former husbands had not changed. George Traue’s widow assured the Cemeterial Division that it had been “no little thing to me” to concede that Traue’s parents now had the right to decide where

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513 Dyar, Ernest, March 23, 1921 letter from mother to GRS at Hoboken.
514 Dyar, Ernest, April 6, 1921 letter from Butler for Shannon of GRS at Hoboken to mother.
515 Dyar, Ernest, June 6, 1921 letter from attorney on behalf of widow to GRS at Hoboken.
516 Dehart, Elmer, March 30, 1921 letter from father to War Department.
517 Dehart, Elmer, April 14, 1921 letter from father to GRS at Hoboken (enclosing affidavits about widow).
518 Robinson, Harley, June 15, 1921 affidavit from parents.
519 Robinson, Harley, July 7, 1921 letter from Elder for Shannon of GRS at Hoboken to parents.
520 Bragg, Thomas, September 16, 1920 letter from widow to Cemeterial Division; Burrows, Robert, April 9, 1921 letter from widow to GRS (Cemeterial Division); Lulay, Frank, February 11, 1921 letter from widow to War Department.
Traue would be buried, and she assured the Division “that I have not forgotten his sacrifice.” Ellwood Paul’s widow likewise provided a lengthy explanation of her circumstances and an argument for why she should have been able to have her former husband’s body buried as she wished:

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Monday Nov 29th

Dear Sirs,

In reply to your letter of the 12th I wish to say it was quite a shock to me to learn that I could not have the honor of burying my former husband as I had never been informed that by re-marrying I would forfeit that privilege. I do not think it right especially in my particular case, but of course I know I cannot change a law. He belonged to me when he was killed and I cannot see why I cannot have the privilege of burying him just because the Gov has been so slow in their return of the bodies. My husbands wife died the same time as my husband was killed, she died with the flu and he has her buried just where he wanted her and I gave mine up for the country, and suffered untold agony during the war and for months after, in fact I will never be the same cheerful person that I once was and the Gov. Deprives me of that last honor.

I know I cannot be made an exception of but I wonder how the Judge Advocate General of the Army would like to be in my place as I believe it was his opinion.

I have no children so I suppose my former husbands father is the one to have the doings of the disposition of the remains.

Please write them and ask if they will have his body brought home as I have heard them say they would be satisfied to leave him in France.

Write to George W. Paul 3050 Aramingo Ave. Phila.

Yours Respectfully,
    Mrs. Jennie G. Paul Pusey
    2944 Aramingo Ave

The name of the deceased soldier was Ellwood G. Paul Co. A 315th Infantry

Paul’s widow suggested that it was “just because the [Government] has been so slow in their return of the bodies” that she had been prevented from attending to a responsibility
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521 Traue, George, August 23, 1921 letter from widow to Wynne of Cemeterial Division.
522 Paul, Ellwood, November 29, 1920 letter from widow to War Department. Paul’s widow also apparently had no relationship with her former husband’s parents after her remarriage, since she asked the Cemeterial Division to write her former in-laws, who lived a block away from her.
that she felt was hers; she compared herself to her second husband, who had lost his wife in the influenza epidemic and had buried his first wife as he wished soon after her death.

“Now I will tell you and then you will understand”: Mothers v. Fathers

When a soldier had not been married, parents sometimes fought with each other over who should be allowed to decide where the dead were buried.523 The War Department guidelines named as next of kin the fathers of men who had been single, but mothers sometimes challenged the view that fathers should be allowed to direct disposition. Fathers may have been viewed as the heads of households, but women often saw themselves as responsible for the family’s emotional life, which included overseeing important life events like deaths, funerals, and burials.524 Mothers found their efforts to make arrangements undercut by the Department guidelines, which required a mother to

523 Clark, Carl, October 4, 1920 letter from mother to President Wilson (“now why is it the War Dept I understand is going to send him to his father, which I have made arrangements for him”); Moore, William, June 24, 1920 letter from Wynne for Piece of Cemeterial Division to mother (requesting mother send divorce record); Newsom, Millard, January 12, 1921 letter from lawyers on behalf of mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division (“his father and mother were divorced and court gave the mother custody”); Ringer, Ira, March 19, 1921 letter from mother to GRS (Cemeterial Division) (“why have I never been informed or ask if I wish to have my son body brought back from France the father left home and left the boy in my care in the year 1905 has he the say to have him left in France if I wish to have him brought back”).
524 Burrows, Robert, February 1, 1921 letter from mother to member of United States House of Representatives; Carr, Owren, July 29, 1918 letter from mother to War Department; Cerv, Lewis, May 23, 1920 (?) letter from mother (in Czech with War Department translation) to War Department; Crowell, Eclemmial, 1921 (?) letter from mother to GRS (Cemeterial Division) (“I have the right as the mother of him to the frist decision but father and three sisters and friends all say to let the boddy be taken to Arlington Virginia”); DiAngelo, James, August 21, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Robert M. Poole, On Hallowed Ground: The Story of Arlington National Cemetery (New York, NY: Walker & Co., 2009), 145; Michael Roper, The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War (New York, NY: Manchester University Press, 2009), 218-19; Pat Jalland, Death in the Victorian Family (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1996), 211.
obtain the consent of her son’s father to any decision. When Verner Dahlin’s mother wrote the Army Adjutant General to request that her son’s body be returned to her, Dahlin’s father had to write to state that he agreed with her request.

Mothers who argued that they should be allowed to make decisions for the dead and for the family based their claims in part on the privileged social status that mothers of soldiers had, even over wives or fathers. As Kathleen Kennedy has written about World War I, “[t]he draft and . . . concerns over the nation’s ability to produce an efficient and effective fighting force dictated that the most important wartime roles of women would be the production of soldiers.”

During the World War, mothers were encouraged to see their losses as a necessary sacrifice made in the name of patriotism, service, and duty. One tradition that developed during the World War was designed to recognize the contribution of mothers and identify them as a unique and privileged group. The “Gold Star” tradition—initially a private effort that was later recognized by the federal government—was intended to identify publicly families who had made

525 Barry, William, June 28, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to mother; Hilton, Watson, April 8, 1921 letter from Butler for Shannon of GRS at Hoboken to mother; Jackson, Fred, February 26, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to mother; McDade, Furman, May 5, 1921 letter from Butler for Shannon of GRS at Hoboken to mother; Oates, Morley, March 17, 1921 letter from Pallas for Shannon of GRS at Hoboken to mother; Williams, Hiram, March 1, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to mother.

526 Dahlin, Verner, February 8, 1921 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Dahlin, Verner, March 5, 1921 letter from father to Wynne of Quartermaster Corps.


528 Kathleen Kennedy, Disloyal Mothers and Scurrilous Citizens: Women and Subversion During World War I (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), xvi.

529 Kimberly Jensen, Mobilizing Minerva: American Women in the First World War (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 19; Susan R. Grayzel, Women’s Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France During the First World War (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 2; Zieger, America’s Great War, 141-42.
sacrifices for their country by sending family members to military service. Families
displayed flags in windows or on houses that had blue stars for those who were serving
and gold stars for those who had died. The Gold Star became an alternative to more
traditional demonstrations of grief, like mourning dress, that some feared might adversely
affect morale during the war.

Mothers were at the core of the Gold Star tradition. “Gold Star Mothers” were
recognized as having made particular sacrifices, and women formed a variety of “Gold

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530 Kuhlman, *Of Little Comfort*, 57, 62-75; Kristin Ann Hass, *Sacrificing Soldiers on the National Mall*
(Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 184; Suzanne Evans, *Mothers of Heroes, Mothers of
110; G. Kurt Piehler, “The War Dead and the Gold Star: American Commemoration of the First World

531 May, Will, April 2, 1931 letter from Shannon to Quartermaster General to mother (“Receipt is
acknowledged of your letter of March 26, 1931, requesting information as to how you can obtain a Gold
Star. It is regretted to advise that no such emblem has been issued by the War Department. However, it is
suggested that you communicate with Mrs. Virgil McClure, National President, American War Mothers,
133 Forest Avenue, Lexington, Ky., who may be able to advise you relative to this matter.”); “President
Flags,” *Boston Daily Globe*, June 8, 1918, 6; “Stars of Gold,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 26, 1918, 3;
“Women Urged to Wear Arm Bands for Soldier Dead,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 26, 1918, 1; “Insignia
26, 1817, E4; Myrta Lockett Avary, “Roosevelt’s Gold Star,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 23, 1918, 6; “Gold
Star on Service Flag,” March 22, 1918, 4; “A Gold Star Instead of Mourning,” *New York Times*, August 20,
1918, 8; “Gold Star as Mourning,” *New York Times*, November 13, 1917, 7; “The Origin, Design and
Proper Display of Service Flag; Persons Entitled to Representation and Meaning of Stars,” *Official
War I and the Politics of Commemoration in America, 1919-1933* (New York, NY: New York University
Press, 2010), 96.

York Times*, November 18, 1917, E2; Peter N. Stearns, *Revolutions in Sorrow: The American Experience of
Comfort*, 57; Angus Calder, *Disasters and Heroes: On War, Memory and Representation* (Cardiff, Wales,
UK: University of Wales Press, 2004), 19; Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day, 1919-
Patricia Jalland, *Changing Ways of Death in Twentieth Century Australia* (Sydney, Australia: University of
Women identified themselves as Gold Star Mothers when they wrote to the government about their sons. At least one wartime organization used the term “Gold Star Fathers,” and a few fathers identified themselves to the War Department as Gold Star Fathers, but fathers were not generally granted the same status. The sacrifice of widows was also recognized to some extent, but there do not appear to have been any organizations just for widows, nor did widows generally identify themselves as Gold Star Widows when writing to the government. In giving fathers primacy over mothers as the official next of kin, the Department was denying mothers a status that they were granted in other contexts. The Department guidelines seem to have been based partly on traditional views of the family and partly on the hope that fathers would be less emotional about the dead and thus more willing to leave bodies overseas. From the

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534 Brophy, James, February 5, 1920 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Campbell, Raymond, May 6, 1922 letter from mother to Secretary of War (“I am one of those Golden Star mothers”); Cartan, Richard, August 6, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; DeMuth, Frank, March 24, 1920 letter from mother to Secretary of War (“I am a gold star mother and have lost a boy”); Druding, George, June 10, 1921 letter from mother to Cemeterial Division; Eagle, Clarence, July 31, 1920 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Everson, Ludwig, October 25(?), 1920 letter from mother to War Department; Hopper, Henry, March 27, 1920 letter from mother to Cemeterial Division; Oberto, Dominick, June 18, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“I know you will do what you can for a gold star mother”); O’Neill, Arthur, October 30, 1919 letter from mother to War Department; Scanlan, Horace, May 7, 1922 letter from mother of comrade to GRS in Europe (requesting son’s body be buried near Scanlan); Winter, Snedden, January 11, 1920 letter from mother to Secretary of War.

535 Beck, William, March 5, 1920 letter from father to Secretary of War; Bentley, Paul, July 27, 1921 letter from father (of Gold Star Fathers’ Association of Illinois) to Army Quartermaster General.

536 The primacy of mothers over widows and fathers would continue after the war. When the government paid for some family members to go overseas to visit the graves of men permanently buried in Europe in the late 1920s and early 1930s, mothers would be invited on the trips, and widows who had not remarried would later be added to the legislation, but fathers would not be allowed to participate. Piehler, “The War Dead and the Gold Star,” 177-78.
beginning of the process, the Department appeared to view mothers as the family members who would be most inclined to request that the dead be returned, because mothers were thought to want to participate in traditional mourning rituals, including viewing the dead, overseeing funerals, and later visiting graves. The Department emphasized in its early communications to families that the return of the dead could take a long time, generally leaving implied that delays would both preclude visual identification of the dead and defer any emotional comfort that might be gained from a funeral, thus suggesting that it would be pointless to request return. Hobart Baker’s father had the kind of dispassionate and unemotional views about his son’s body that the Department must have hoped other men would share, as he explained to his son’s mother, his ex-wife, in a letter that she forwarded to the Cemeterial Division:

537 Burrows, Robert, February 1, 1921 letter from mother to member of United States House; Cameron, Gilbert, October 27, 1920 letter from mother to War Department; Dunn, Tony, October 9, 1921 letter from father to Cemeterial Division; Ringer, Ira, March 19, 1921 letter from mother to GRS at Hoboken; Shilliday, Rexford, June 10, 1920 letter from father to War Department; Shipley, George, May 27, 1921 letter from family to GRS (Cemeterial Division); David P. Colley, Safely Rest (New York, NY: Berkeley Publishing, 2004), 218.

538 Benson, Wyllys, September 3, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to father; Korsmo, Arthur, August 13, 1919 from Army Adjutant General letter to mother; Mims, John, August 13, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to family; Moore, Lem, June 10, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to father. The letter that the Army Adjutant General sent to families in early 1919 stated, “It cannot be stated now just when the work of the transfer of the bodies to this country will begin, as it must be deferred until the conditions, including that of transportation, warrant the undertaking.” Angigliore, Mike, Adjutant General form letter to next of kin (marked “returned unclaimed”).
Dear Mary:-

I hope you did not think that I was rude or short to you yesterday over the phone, but I know you will understand when I tell you that I always have to have some one hold the receiver to my ear, bringing in a third person, which makes anything like a personal or private conversation out of the question. I am no good on a phone, and it is only a waste of time and money to call me. I have thought a great deal over your letter. We hold such very different ideas in regard to Hobart’s body that I am afraid it will be hard for me to explain, but Hobart's body really means nothing to me, any more than an old suit of his means. I never think of him as there, his real self is much nearer to me. In other words his grave means nothing to me, for to me he is not there. You I know from your letter feel very differently, and because you do feel this way, and his body or what remains of it are so precious to you, I am not going to interfere with your desire to have his body brought over by the Government and buried as you suggest in the Pemberton lot where you can look after the grave, keeping it green, and where you will be able to go to it every day which seems to be your great wish. I will therefore turn the matter over to you, and you can take it up with the Government yourself, as you suggested.

Sincerely yours,
Alfred T. Baker

Baker’s father was willing to admit that his son’s “body really means nothing to me,” but he refused to stop his ex-wife from having their son’s body returned to her, as he had the power to do. Baker’s father did not care about his son’s body or its grave, but he recognized that his ex-wife did and agreed that Baker’s body should be returned to her.

A number of fathers seemed to understand the implication that they should try to persuade their wives to leave the dead overseas, because they wrote that while they were personally disinclined to request return, they were doing so for the sake of their wives.

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539 Baker, Hobart, March 19, 1920 letter from father to mother (sent to Cemeterial Division by mother).
540 Bell, Augustus, August 16, 1920 letter from father to Wynne of Cemeterial Division (“mother has decided she wants return”); Berens, Romulus, November 14, 1921 letter from father to Cemeterial Division (mother had wanted return but “since a friend has been overseas and visited the grave and now she wants leave in France”); Cochran, Lloyd, November 16, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (“on his mothers account I want his remains sent home”); Elworthy, Henry, February 9, 1919 letter from father to War Department (“you can probably enter into a Mother's feelings”); Hertz, Edwin, January 26, 1921 letter from father to GRS at Hoboken; Roper, The Secret Battle, 219.
Wiley Burford’s father wrote that he understood that his family might suffer an extended
period of grieving or be unable to view the body, but he still wanted the body returned:

R.A. Burford  
Attorney and Counselor at Law  
Rooms 15-16-17 Holder Block  
Ocala, Florida March 31, 1919

The Adjutant General,  
War Department,  
Washington, D.C.

Wiley Haralson Burford, Second Lieutenant,  
Battery A, 7th Field Artillery, A.E.F. (Deceased).

Dear Sir:

I am in receipt of your circular letter of March 14th regarding desire for permanent disposition of
bodies of those who have died overseas, and I exceedingly regret that I, as father of the deceased,
am unable at present to give a definite and final expression as to our preference in this matter, and
I bet to inquire as to whether or not a final expression at a later date will be in all respects
satisfactory.

Personally, I am inclined to think it would be best for his body to remain in the National Cemetery
in France, and his two brothers and two sisters are inclined to the same view, but his mother, who
has grieved so intensely over the loss of our dear boy, cannot at present give her consent, and her
preference is that the body be returned to Ocala for burial in the cemetery here. Her great
motherly love and most poignant grief and sorrow incapacitates her to exercise judgment as to
conditions as they may exist in the far future, and she looks alone to the present.

While it seems to me that my directions as father of the deceased will control in this matter, I, of
course, feel disinclined to exercise my discretion if it should not be in full harmony with my dear
wife's desires, for after all, it is the tender cords of the mother's heart which throb incessantly and
most intensely over the sad loss of beloved ones.

At a later date time may, with its healing influences, somewhat temper the afflicted feelings and
enable my wife to take a more comprehensive view of the entire situation. Would appreciate it
very much if you will kindly advise me if it would create any embarrassment if I should delay
giving definite instructions until it is definitely known what action Congress may take regarding
the creation of National cemeteries in France for permanent disposition of bodies of our heroic
dead.

Yours very truly,

R.A. Burford
Father of deceased

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541 Burford, Wiley, March 31, March 31, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General.
Burford’s father seemed to understand that War Department officials would have preferred that Burford’s body be left in Europe, as he wrote that he was “inclined to think it would be best for his body to remain in the National Cemetery in France, and his two brothers and two sisters are inclined to the same view.” Burford’s father, however, wrote that as long as his wife was grieving deeply, because “after all, it is the tender cords of the mother’s heart which throb incessantly and most intensely over the sad loss of beloved ones,” he was unwilling to take away her hope that Burford’s body would be returned. James Young’s father similarly wrote to say that while he was not inclined to have the body returned, he would not veto his wife’s choice. Young’s father had originally requested that the body be left in France, but he wrote to ask that it instead be returned, because his wife had joined “the League to bring the bodies home from France.”

Young’s father wrote that he did not “want to appear as opposed to the objects of that League or to the Motherly desire and feelings of my wife who has a prior claim for the return of the body of her loved one.” Both these men were apologetic and seemed to feel that they were in some sense letting the government down, but they were unwilling to overrule the preferences of their wives.

Fathers were sometimes pressured by others in their communities to leave the dead overseas, and mothers sometimes appealed to the Cemeterial Division to ignore the

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542 Young, James H., March 3, 1920 letter from father to Pierce of Cemeterial Division. His wife would later confirm that she belonged to the “Bring Home the Soldier Dead League.” Young, James H., April 4, 1920 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division).
543 Young, James H., March 3, 1920 letter from father to Pierce of Cemeterial Division.
resulting requests. William Davis’s mother wrote to say that her husband had been manipulated by others in the community:

Rushville, Nebr  
Box #64  
July 6, 1921  

Graves Registration Service  
Hoboken NJ

Dear Sir

I have just learned that my husband wired you to leave the remains of our son Pvt William H Davis, Co B 355 Inf in France. This was a mistake we all want his remains sent back home[.] Mr Davis is 66 years old, some of his friends persuaded him to do this by saying that all he would get was his bones and he couldnt see them and some other things about what was done to the dead soldier[.] Please hear a mothers prayir and have his remains sent back home to us. Hoping that you will kindly do this for us, I remain

Respectfully yours Mrs. W. J. Davis

Davis’ mother wrote of her husband that “some of his friends persuaded him” to ask that Davis’s body be left overseas, and she asked that the Division to disregard his request. The Division asked Davis’s mother to have his father confirm the request, and Davis’s father wrote immediately to do so, though he attributed his change of heart to the fact that he had not been “fully aware of the wishes of [Davis’s] mother and the rest of the family.” Davis’s mother thought that she knew what was best for the family, and, if her husband could be convinced by others in their community to make what she viewed as a bad choice, that did not mean that she had to accept the result. Davis’s mother must have been frustrated that the Department guidelines allowed her husband to disrupt a process that had been proceeding as she wished, but she negotiated with the Division and

544 Adams, Walter, 1919(?) letter from mother to Pierce of GRS.  
545 Davis, William, July 6, 1921 letter from mother to GRS at Hoboken.  
546 Davis, William, July 26, 1921 letter from father to War Department.
her husband to obtain the outcome she wanted. At other times, mothers were persuaded by other family members to go against their instincts and agree that the dead should be left overseas, at least initially. Alfred Dent’s mother wanted her son’s body returned to her but was persuaded by “all of the children (his bro. and sister)” to leave Dent’s body in France, “as they think there could be nothing more fitting than let him sleep where he gave his life.” Sometimes these requests were later regretted. Harry Dorsey’s mother asked the American Legion to write on her behalf to ask if she could have her son’s body returned to her because, the Legion reported, she had been “persuaded against her wishes to have her sons body remain in France.”

The importance of a mother’s views within families was clearest where family members reversed their request to have the dead returned after mothers passed away, suggesting that mothers had been the primary force behind the family’s original

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547 Aarvig, Truman, undated note on back of Army Adjutant General Reply Card from family (“family divided in opinion about what to do”); Abe, Edward, March 7, 1921 letter from father to GRS at Hoboken (“asked all the children and we want return”); Briscoe, Richard, August 9, 1920 letter from father to Army Quartermaster General; Cameron, Gilbert, October 27, 1920 letter from mother to War Department; Campo, Fred, April 20, 1919 letter from parents to Army Adjutant General; Castle, Herbert, December 9, 1919 letter from mother to War Department (“I would liked to have him brought home but the rest of his brothers and sisters said where he died and was burried let him rest in peace”); Cohen, Benjamin, March 14, 1921 letter from family to Shannon of Army Quartermaster General (GRS); Dixon, Ben, September 14, 1920 letter from brother to GRS (Cemeterial Division) (“I have persuaded my mother to let his body remain over there”); Himmel, Edward, May 15, 1922 letter from father to GRS at Brooklyn (“I requested return but most of my children are oppst to same so leave the body where it is at”); McDevitt, Earl, March 5, 1920 letter from mother to War Department (veteran son wants the body left in Europe “but the rest of the family wants his remains brought home and so do I”).

548 Dent, Alfred, March 8, 1921 letter from mother to Army Quartermaster General.

549 Brotherton, Ernest, August 10, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Buell, Charles, March 7, 1921 letter from father to GRS at Hoboken (“I said leave in France because I was fearful that mother would be unable to withstand return” but “I feel now that was a mistake and an injustice to her”); McDade, Furman, May 5, 1921 letter from father to Wynne of GRS at Hoboken (“I regret very much that I ever consented for him to be left over there”).

550 Dorsey, Harry, September 16, 1921 letter from American Legion post on behalf of mother to Army Quartermaster General.
request. Some surviving family members likely had different views about where the dead should be buried, while others were probably unwilling to compound their grief by having another funeral. A bank cashier wrote on behalf of William Schultz’s father to state that Schultz’s parents had requested his body be returned, but Mrs. Schultz had “died recently and the Widower does not care to have the body of his son removed and disturbed.” Similarly, when George Shipley’s mother died in May of 1921, his surviving siblings wrote to request that Shipley be buried permanently in Europe instead of returned to the family as their mother had requested. In other cases, families who might have changed their minds decided to have the dead returned because they knew that was what their subsequently deceased mother had wanted. When the GRS found the remains of John Eaton, a marine, in 1926, the War Department wrote the Commandant of the Marine Corps to ask the Marines to obtain instructions from the family about where Eaton’s body should be buried. Eaton’s sister assured the Marine Corps that, despite her mother’s death, she wanted to fulfill her mother’s wish that

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551 Babin, Allen, March 3, 1921 letter from third party to GRS at Hoboken; Bidwell, Frank, June 19, 1920 letter from (remarried?) widow to Cemeterial Division (“it was only on her account that I requested the body be brought home”); Edman, Roy, April 5, 1921 letter from brother to Shannon of GRS at Hoboken; Tucker, Raenzy, January 17, 1921 letter from third party to Army Quartermaster General.

552 Schultz, William, March 9, 1920 letter from third party (bank cashier) on behalf of father to War Department.

553 Shipley, George, May 27, 1921 letter from family to GRS (Cemeterial Division).

554 Derouen, Elea, March 5, 1920 letter from brother-in-law to War Department; Derouen, Elea, April 29, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to sister; Hora, Joseph, September 11, 1920 letter from brother to War Department (mother has since died but “I do the best I can as I do not care to go against her wish”); Jones, Samuel J., October 12, 1919 letter from sister to Secretary of War (“I am a mother myself and know just how my mother would feel if she were alive today”); Mezritch, Morris, September 20, 1919 from sister to Army Adjutant General (“it was the wish of my mother that the remains of her son be brought to this country”); Stephenson, MacCrea, June 14, 1920 letter from United States Senator to Baker (“father is very anxious to comply with his wife’s last request”).

555 Eaton, John, March 13, 1926 memo from Army Quartermaster General to Marine Corps Commandant.
Eaton’s body be returned. The Marine Corps passed Eaton’s sister’s request back to the Department, who returned Eaton’s body to the family. Roy Edman’s brother also asked that Edman’s body be returned after his mother’s death, although he had initially opposed having the body returned, because he wanted to fulfill his mother’s wishes.

The War Department guidelines allowed mothers to make decisions if fathers had died, but the guidelines left no path for mothers who were divorced or separated to be named next of kin, even where fathers had abandoned the family. Department guidelines provided that fathers who had neglected their responsibilities to their children and their former wives were still entitled to direct disposition of their son’s remains. Sometimes a father could be persuaded to cede his authority to his son’s mother. If

556 Eaton, John, March 21, 1926 letter from sister to United States Marine Corps.
557 Eaton, John, June 19, 1926 receipt for remains.
558 Edman, Roy, March 26, 1921 letter from brother to War Department.
559 Baldwin, Lester, October 15, 1920 letter from mother to War Department (cannot provide father’s address because “he is dead to me” and “we suffered the tortures of hell from that man”); Cannell, Arthur, July 6, 1920 letter from mother to Army Quartermaster General (father “never supported this boy since he was 19 months old as him and I were divorced 20 years ago”); Deford, Fletcher, December 14, 1920 letter from mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division (“since the death of my son I have secured a court decree providing for my separate maintenance”); Fitchett, Howard, May 28, 1920 letter from mother to Cemetery Division; Henshaw, Willis, June 22, 1921 letter from mother to GRS at Hoboken (“eleven years since [father] turned his family”); McCray, Samuel, April 19, 1921 letter from mother to Shannon of GRS at Hoboken; Ringer, Ira, March 19, 1921 letter from mother to GRS (“father left home and left the boy in my care in the year 1905”).
560 Elaine Tyler May, Great Expectations: Marriage & Divorce in Post-Victorian America (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 2-9; Chambers, The Tyranny of Change, 91. More rarely, fathers had to explain that mothers had abandoned the family. Crouch, Barney, May 31, 1919 letter from father to War Department.
561 Blair, William J., November 5, 1920 telegram from father to GRS at Hoboken; Blantin, Ernest, June 16, 1920 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Bradford, William, December 23, 1920 letter from father to War Department (“please send to mother but notify me”); Blackwell, Willie, October 4(?), 1920 letter from father to War Department (“I am perfectly happy for her to have her wish about it”); Bradford, William, January 7, 1919 letter from father to Secretary of War Baker (“I expect to claim his body if his mother Mrs. Carrier Morrow does not of course I will give her first prefference”); Combs, Ocey, February 5, 1921 telegram from father to GRS at Hoboken (“its all right with me”); Tucker, Charles, August 22, 1920 letter from father to War Department ( “although I might feal otherwise but will concur in her request and ask that the body be sent to her as she was his mother”).

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not, mothers who felt that they had acted as the sole parent to their sons appealed to the Department to reexamine the guidelines. In the process, mothers sometimes provided intimate details about their marital status or their families. In their correspondence, mothers expressed embarrassment, indignation, and perhaps sometimes even pride when asked about their relationship to men who had proved unreliable. Clifford O’Brien’s mother sent an affidavit declaring that her husband had left in 1895, and she had “neither seen nor heard from him since.” John Dolan’s mother wrote that she had separated from her husband twelve years earlier “because of his intoxicating habits” and did not know where he was. The Cemeterial Division reviewed letters decided whether to accept the request of a man’s mother or look for his father. The Division sent the bodies of O’Brien and Dolan to their mothers.

Sometimes the Cemeterial Division got more information than it probably needed or wanted about the marriages of soldiers’ parents. The Division wrote on more than

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562 Blair, William J., October 16, 1920 letter from Greeley of Cemeterial Division to mother; Cain, Arthur, January 27, 1921 note from mother to GRS at Hoboken; Ciccone, Daniel, February 28, 1922 letter from mother to War Department; Ringer, Ira, April 2, 1921, letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to mother (asking for information about legal separation and child custody).

563 Eyler, Benjamin, June 23, 1920 letter from mother to Cemeterial Division; Fitchett, Howard, May 28, 1920 letter from mother to Cemeterial Division; Palmer, Keene, August 2, 1921 letter from mother to Shannon of GRS at Hoboken (father’s address “is unknown to us at present” because parents separated twenty-two years before); Ringer, Ira, March 19, 1921 letter from mother to GRS at Hoboken; Webster, Willard, March 18, 1921 telegram from family to GRS at Hoboken.

564 Bellhouse, Brigid, June 17, 1920 letter from mother to Army Quartermaster General; Buck, Stanley, April 12, 1921 note from mother to War Department; Cain, Arthur, January 27, 1921 note from mother to Cemeterial Division.

565 O’Brien, Clifford, June 11, 1920 affidavit from mother.

566 Dolan, John, March 7, 1921 letter from mother to GRS at Hoboken.

567 O’Brien, Clifford, September 5, 1921 receipt for remains; Dolan, John, July 15, 1921 receipt for remains.

568 Bittner, Leo, January 28, 1931 letter from aunt to Army Quartermaster General (soldier was “illegitimate son”); Johns, Harrison, January 14, 1920 letter from third party on behalf of grandmother to
one occasion that “contentions between relatives regarding disposition of the remains of our soldier dead are very embarrassing to all those required to review and pass upon them.”

Samuel McCray’s mother wrote that McCray’s father had been abusive and had left her “with all of his back debts to pay” but that “we were better off without him”:

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Prv. 1 cl Samuel W. McCray  
Serial No. 59337  
Battery F. 44th C.A.C.  
Thomsonville Conn.  
April 19, 1921  
Mr. R. E. Shannon  
My dear Sir:  
I’m very sorry that I neglected to write down the boys father’s name, but didn’t see how it could be necessary as the body was to be sent to me and I was to care for it. I could have explained why but I hated to tell things as they were so just sent the letter along without the name. Now I will tell you and then you will understand. It is three years ago now that the father left me with all of his back debts to pay and three children to care for taking two with him. For months and months before, this boy I lost in the war was our main support. The father was working and earning money but would not spend it on the children and I and the home. That was what caused my son to leave home and enlist with the Rhode Island Coast Artillery then stationed at the Armory in Springfield, Mass. He felt that was the best thing to do at that time as he was eighteen and could do as he liked. He wanted to help his country and also to make his father support his family, but that he didn’t intend to do so left home very soon after the boy enlisted. He was cruel to the children and I in many ways so of course we were better off without him. I know it would be against the boys wishes to have his father have anything whatsoever to do about this were he here to speak for himself. I feel now that I have told you enough for you to understand. His fathers name is Theodore H. McCray of South Windsor, Conn.  

Very sincerely yours,  
Ella S. McCray

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McCray’s mother was forced by the Department rules to explain things that she “hated to tell,” but she was willing to do so to prevent her son’s father from interfering with her

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GRS at Hoboken (Johns was illegitimate son and was left with grandmother to raise); Von Krebs, Paul, April 8, 1919 letter from foster sister to Army Adjutant General (soldier was born illegitimate).  
Dozer, Lawrence, July 6, 1921 letter from Army Quartermaster General to member of United States Senate; Forsgren, Faunt, August 6, 1921 letter from Penrose of Cemeterial Division to sister.  
McCray, Samuel, April 19, 1921 letter from mother to Shannon of GRS at Hoboken.
plans for burying McCray’s body. The Division agreed to return McCray’s body to her.\textsuperscript{571} John Duvall’s mother wrote the Department with quiet dignity that Duvall “was an illegitimate son of whom I am the mother and whose father has never at any time been recognized. Under these circumstances I do not feel that you will require a statement concurring in my request.”\textsuperscript{572} The Division again simply replied that they would return Duvall’s remains to her.\textsuperscript{573} These women were willing to provide what must have been painful or shameful details to persuade the Division that they, and not their son’s fathers, should be given authority to arrange for the burial of the sons they had raised.

While Cemeterial Division questions must have been frustrating to women who had long acted for themselves, the questions likely also added to the grief of mothers who were themselves widows and who had to bear the loss of their son alone. Mothers sometimes wrote in response to questions that their husbands had passed away, whether years before or recently.\textsuperscript{574} Thomas Whitesides’s mother wrote that she was next of kin because her son had not been married, his father had died when Whiteside was eight, and “he is survived by myself alone.”\textsuperscript{575}

Eventually the Cemeterial Division realized that letters to mothers asking questions about fathers were inefficient and potentially painful. In May of 1921, an

\textsuperscript{571} McCray, Samuel, May 2, 1921 letter from Butler for Shannon of GRS at Hoboken to mother.
\textsuperscript{572} Duvall, John, October 21, 1920 letter from mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division.
\textsuperscript{573} Duvall, John, November 1, 1920 letter from GRS of New York to mother.
\textsuperscript{574} Buhl, William, July 15, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“I am a widower father dead 13 years”); Choate, James, June 22, 1920 letter from mother to Treasury Department (“husband has been dead about nineteen years”); Hilton, Watson, April 22, 1921 letter from mother to Shannon of GRS at Hoboken (“I am a widow my husband having died in the year of 1906”); Reuter, Bernard, December 16, 1920 letter from mother to GRS at Hoboken (“his father having died in 1896”); Sagers, Robert, December 20, 1921 letter from mother to Cemeterial Division (“his father has been dead for years”).
\textsuperscript{575} Whitesides, Thomas, July 19, 1921 letter from mother to GRS at Hoboken.
internal Division memo addressed two cases involving a lack of information on file about fathers who were the potential next of kin. The Division noted that in both cases, the mother was listed as the emergency address for the soldier and that

in similar cases it invariably occurs that in insisting upon the concurrence of the father or a signed statement of his wishes a contest is initiated or a reply is received that the father is deceased or has abandoned his family. In other cases the father writes a rather impatient note to the effect that the mother has very clearly indicated the wishes of the family and cannot understand why we insist upon referring to him in the matter. It is recommended as being most considerate of the relatives and in the interests of the expeditious and proper handling of these cases that the wishes of the mother be complied with without further follow-up correspondence.576

The author of the memo recognized that it was both “most considerate of the relatives” and more efficient to allow mothers to make decisions about where the dead should be buried where mothers were listed as emergency contacts and had taken responsibility for corresponding about the dead.

“I cannot bear to quarrel over the body but neither can I have it mistreated”: Fathers v. Siblings

Mothers were not the only family members who contested the decision to grant authority to fathers: where a soldier’s mother had died, his siblings sometimes had to provide information about an absent father to ensure that the Cemeterial Division abided by their wishes and not those of fathers who were no longer with the family.577 These

576 Barefoot, Rowan, May 5, 1921 memo from Shannon of Quartermaster Corps to Chief of Cemeterial Division (referring to cases of Barefoot and John E. Hunter).
577 Dickerson, Isaac, January 1, 1919 letter from sister to Army Adjutant General; Caveny, Michael, April 25, 1919 letter from sister to War Department (“my father was the cruelest man who ever walked on God’s earth”); Mezritch, Morris, August 17, 1921 letter from sister to Butler of GRS at Hoboken; Tucker, Raenzy,
siblings explained what they had learned about their parents’ marital status or about the identity of men they had seen as their fathers. John Ferguson’s sister submitted an affidavit from herself and her siblings to explain that her mother had died before the war, and she and her siblings had sought out their father, from whom their mother had been separated for thirty years. He had informed them that he had never been married to their mother, that all the siblings had been born “out of wedlock,” and that the woman with whom he was currently living was his wife. Ferguson’s sister asked that the Division return his body to her and her siblings, and the Division replied simply that “[i]nstructions have been issued” that the siblings’ wishes would be followed. Siblings sometimes accused fathers of exercising their rights to retaliate for perceived offenses when fathers asked that a soldier’s body be left in Europe or sent to a distant location while other family members wanted the body returned to them. Thomas Buchan’s sister argued that she should be next of kin because her parents had been separated for “20 or 25 years,” and she and her brother had lived with their mother until her mother’s death. Her father, she wrote, “is taking [Buchan’s] body just because he can,” and she believed that he would not care for Buchan’s grave. The Division denied Buchan’s sister’s request and returned Buchan’s remains to the location requested by his father.

February 4, 1921 letter from sister to GRS at Hoboken (“I can not get my father to sign card if there is any way I can get the body sent home why let me know at once and if not why I will be compel to let it remain where it is”).

578 Ferguson, John, December 4, 1920 affidavit from siblings.
579 Ferguson, John, January 7, 1921 letter from Pallas for Shannon of GRS at Hoboken to sister.
580 Tucker, Raenzy, May 3, 1921 letter from Pallas for Shannon of GRS at Hoboken to sister.
581 Buchan, Thomas, May 21(?), 1921 letter from sister to GRS at Hoboken.
582 Buchan, Thomas, May 21(?), 1921 letter from sister to GRS at Hoboken.
583 Buchan, Thomas, June 17, 1921 receipt for delivery of remains.
In some cases, siblings argued that they, and not their fathers, had acted as parents.\footnote{Bisky, Joseph, July 15(?), 1919 letter from sister to Army Adjutant General; Boshier, Charles, March 26, 1919 letter from sister to Army Adjutant General; Branam, Barney, March 28, 1919 letter from sister to War Department; Dickerson, Isaac, January 1, 1919 letter from sister (brother “has made his home with me since I was married six yrs ago and he had not seen father for five yrs”); Enright, Thomas, March 17, 1921 letter from sister (“he maid his home with me since mother died”); Everett, Thomas, January 8(?), 1922 letter from sister (“my dear bro. made his home with me since the death of our dear mother”); Kinsey, Maurice, November 1, 1919 letter from sister (Treharne) (“my brother made his home with me”).} Maurice Kinsey’s sister had raised him and thought she should be next of kin:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Charles C. Pierce, Colonel, U.S. Army,</th>
<th>Martins Ferry, O July 21 - 1920</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dear Sir -</td>
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<td>Some time ago I requested the return of my brother’s body (15547 Inquiry Kinsey, Maurice, Sgt.) to me to be placed by the side of his mother in Pittsburg, Pa. My father also requested the return of the body to him which leaves your position a hard one. However the rest of the family decided not to have him brought back and asked me to write to you about it. This is a peculiar case - my brother’s mother died when he was about 9 years old and I practically raised him - he lived with me up to the time of his enlistment - his war insurance also what he carried in another company was made to me - after his death my father tried to get it but certain papers which I had stopped him; after a complete investigation by the officials in Washington he could not get anything of my brothers - I also rec’d his back pay and his personal effects from France. His effects and insurance have been divided between his two minor sisters and myself equally and I was appointed administratrix of his estate. I cannot bear to quarrel over the body but neither can I have it mistreated. You see it is being brot back as spite work as he says I couldn’t stop him. I wouldn’t try to if he didn’t advertise it to his friends for truly my brother disliked publicity and did not approve of my father’s doings. There should be records in Washington. Would you please investigate this case and you see even in the letter I am inclosing and which I just rec’d that he cared nothing for the boy, while that boy’s body is as dear to me as my own sons would be and I can’t have it desecrated. I wondered if there is any way to get around it that the body could be left to rest - if we could see him I’d bring him in a minute but knowing the circumstances surrounding my brother while living my father ought to be ashamed to ask for the body and since he is dead he wanted the money when he couldn’t get that he would hurt us in the only way he could - he knows we know he never gave my brother a home when he was a child. You can see by the inclosed letter from my sister to the world he is a broken hearted father to his family he is his true self. I hope something can be done. I am still administratrix of the estate. Can I do anything in this case.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yours Sincerely,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs. Mary E. Treharne</td>
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<td>216 Sth 7th St. Martins Ferry, O\footnote{Kinsey, Maurice, July 21, 1920 letter from sister to Pierce of Cemeterial Division.}</td>
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Kinsey’s sister hoped to persuade the Division that Kinsey’s body was “being brot back as spite work as [her father] says I couldn’t stop him.” Kinsey’s sister’s concern was less where her brother was ultimately buried—she wanted his body returned, while other siblings thought the body should be left in Europe—than in ensuring that her father not be allowed to decide where her brother would be buried. In the end, Kinsey’s father also requested that his son’s body be left in France, and the Division complied with the request.\(^{586}\) Kinsey’s sister was likely satisfied with this result, since her brother’s grave was out of her father’s hands.

“My brother not being the father of a child could hardly be expected to realize what it must to give up one so dear”: Siblings v. Siblings

Sometimes where a soldier had neither a widow nor surviving parents, siblings found themselves in conflict about what to do with their brother’s body.\(^{587}\) Albert Sahm’s sister was angered by the Cemeterial Division’s failure to recognize her as next of kin over a surviving brother, who had requested that Sahm’s body be buried in a permanent cemetery in France. Sahm’s sister wrote angrily that “if you will not bring the body of my brother,” “you . . . can take my brother and his decision and go to the hot place.”\(^{588}\) The Division replied that it had no choice but to follow her brother’s

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\(^{586}\) Kinsey, Maurice, November 10, 1925 letter to sister from Army Quartermaster General.

\(^{587}\) Blackburn, Edward, May 13, 1920 letter from Davis for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to sister; Bullard, Francis, October 18, 1920 letter from brother to War Department; Ford, Henry, January 9, 1921 letter from sister to War Department (“I fill the blanks out and send it on. Now they sent my brother a letter.”); Radl, Andy, February 8, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to sister (asking that younger brother write to confirm request to return Radl’s body).

\(^{588}\) Sahm, Albert, December 23, 1921 letter from sister to War Department.
instructions as it was “governed solely by the requests of the legal next of kin and the wishes of a brother have precedence over those of a sister.”

Other brothers quickly conceded the role of dealing with death to their sisters. Dee Palmer’s brother was surprised that the Cemeterial Division would seek his views:

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Nov 16 - 20

Graves Registration Service:--

Received your letter of the Nov 12 today and must say once more and as I stated before in my other letter that if my brothers body Daniel D. Palmer late of Co G. 119 Inf 30 Div whose Serial no was 215-8215 is now in United States do not send it back to France or bury it in the Nat. cemetery at Arlington Virginia, but send it to Manilla Iowa and notify me at Sioux City Ia. But on the other hand if his body is still in France have it buried in an American Cemetery there. Now I give you my permission and agree to and with my sister Mrs Pearl Wilson of Gillette Wyo. to abide with any thing she does, only if his body is here now ship it to me do not send it back to France. For my part, my sister says she wants it left in France that is all right with me. I will agree with any thing she does, only if the body is here now I dont think it would be right to send it back. Another little matter I must call your attention to is this. My correct name is Alvin U. Palmer and not Wood Palmer as you addressed my letter Wood Palmer the last time. Where you got the Wood I cannot say. If this letter does not make things clear don't pay any more attention to nothing anyone says but Pearl Wilson Gillette Wyo. She is the deceased boys sister and I am only a brother of his.

From
Alvin U Palmer
R.F.D No 3 Box 148
Sioux City Iowa
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Palmer’s brother assumed that his sister would get to choose because “she is the deceased boys sister and I am only a brother of his.” He did not want his brother’s body shipped back to Europe if it had arrived in the United States, but otherwise he ceded decisions about the body to his sister. John Fitzpatrick’s brother also expected that his sister would decide where their brother was buried. When Fitzpatrick’s sister requested that her brother’s remains be returned to her, the Division asked that she seek the approval of her

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589 Sahm, Albert, December 30, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to sister.
590 Palmer, Dee, November 16, 1920 letter from brother to Cemeterial Division.
brother. “Had I known that I was the one entitled to make the request,” he wrote, “I would have done so in the first instance; but we felt, that my sister, being older than I, was the proper one to make the request to have my brother’s remains sent home.”

Sisters sometimes argued that they had acted as parents to soldiers or marines. Frederick Gayle’s sister was frustrated that her oldest brother was to decide where Gayle’s body was buried, because her brother had not stayed in contact with the family:

591 Fitzpatrick, John E., December 21, 1920 letter from Army Quartermaster General (Cemeterial Division) to sister.
592 Fitzpatrick, John E., December 29, 1920 letter from brother to Army Quartermaster General.
593 Cudmore, John, November 12, 1920 letter from Greeley of Cemeterial Division to sister; Tuiet, Robert, undated letter from half-brother to War Department.
Roswell N.M.  
June 24 - 1921

Dear Sir

I am writing to if you can have the remains of my brother Frederick P. Gayle brought back to the States. His wife Mrs. Winnie Eula Gayle Minor has remarried since Fred’s death, by doing so she forfeited her right as to saying what should be done with his remains even though she wishes to have him brought back. She told me she sent the papers to our older brother John M. Gayle of El Paso. I have learned through friends that he signed up to have him left over there. He did this without consulting any one of us and I dont think he had any right to do so.

There are four of we sisters and one brother who are anxiously waiting to hear if we can have him brought back. Fred was very dear to me as I helped to raise him. He was away from me very little in his life here, and when he was in the army I made it my business to keep up close correspondence with him as our mother and father had passed on, and I felt it my duty.

Now this brother who signed up these papers has been away from home, and in fact away from all of us for over twenty years and Fred was very little mind to him than a stranger would have been. I am the mother of three sons the older being eighteen but also in the army when the armistice was signed.

My brother not being the father of a child could hardly be expected to realize what it must to give up one so dear.

If it be necessary (in order to get our brother brought back) I can send you the signatures of each of my sisters and the other brother who played with Fred and thought him greater than a king. He too was in the army.

Now I will give you the numbers leading to the whereabouts of his grave. Sgt. Frederick P. Gayle (No. 2220934 Co. G. 358th Infantry) who was killed in action in France Sept 12 1918 and has been disinterred and reburied in grave 55 Section 3 Plot 2 St. Mihiel American Cemetery #1233 Thiaucourt Meurthe et Moselle 19686-1233-1319. Hoping to get an early favorable reply. Yours very truly.

Mrs. G. B. Armstrong

If my brother be sent, send him to this address. Mrs. G.B. Armstrong P.O. Box 806, Street 207 W. 7th Roswell N.M.594

Gayle’s sister felt that she knew better than her long-absent brother what was best for her family and noted that her other sisters and brother, as well as Gayle’s since-remarried widow, agreed with her views. In addition to arguing that she had “helped to raise” Gayle, suggesting that she should be viewed more as Gayle’s mother than as his sister by

594 Gayle, Frederick, June 24, 1921 letter from sister to War Department.
the Cemeterial Division, Gayle’s sister invoked both her own status as a mother and her brother’s childlessness, suggesting that her brother “could hardly be expected to realize what it must to give up one so dear.” She must have believed that the Division would be more likely to agree to her claim if she based it in motherhood, and she was perhaps correct, as the Division agreed to return Gayle’s body to her.595

She “is glad he got killed”: Non-traditional Families

Other individuals, including formal and informal foster parents of a soldier or marine, sometimes sought the right to decide where the bodies of men that they had seen as their children should be buried. The Cemeterial Division based its decisions in these cases on a number of factors including whether the relationship had been recognized by the courts and who the soldier had listed as his emergency address and insurance beneficiary.596 Warner Johnson’s grandmother challenged the Division’s determination that Johnson’s half-brother was the next of kin and argued that she should be viewed as Johnson’s mother; Johnson’s half-brother had requested that his body be left buried in

595 Gayle, Frederick, July 5, 1921 letter memo from Davis of Cemeterial Division to Penrose of Cemeterial Division.
596 Dickerson, Isaac, January 1, 1919 letter from sister to Army Adjutant General; Henshaw, Willis, July 22, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to mother (soldier listed father as emergency contract, will return to father despite mother’s objections); Moore, William, August 30, 1920 letter from Gwynn for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to mother (will return body to grandmother listed as emergency address despite mother’s objections); Ragsdale, Irving, April 9, 1921 letter from Army Quartermaster General to member of United States House of Representatives; Von Krebs, Paul, September 27, 1921 Cemeterial Division memo (return to foster sister despite stepmother’s objections because foster sister is listed as emergency address and is beneficiary of War Risk insurance); GRS History, Vol. II, 47-48; Seitz, “‘Let Him Remain Until the Judgment in France,’” 224; Michael Sledge, Soldier Dead: How We Recover, Identify, Bury and Honor Our Military Fallen (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2005), 141.
France, while his grandmother sought the return of the body to her. Attorneys acting on her behalf wrote to argue that Johnson had been put out of his house after his father remarried and had gone to live permanently with his grandmother, who was Johnson’s court-appointed legal guardian. The Division’s review of the case determined that Johnson had also named his grandmother as the beneficiary of his insurance. Johnson’s body was returned to his grandmother.

Other family members were not as fortunate, generally because they did not have legal support for their claim. Odus Everhart’s grandmother challenged the designation of Everhart’s mother as his next of kin, arguing that she, and not his mother, had raised him. Everhart’s mother conceded that Everhart had been born out of wedlock when she was sixteen and that she had left the child with her mother, but she requested that Everhart’s body be left in France. A friend of Everhart’s grandmother wrote that Everhart’s mother “wants to be mean and rule over her mother because she could not get the money” and “is glad he got killed. We know by her actions and after his death dressed in the gayest colors she could get to show people she was not mourning but

597 Johnson, Warner, August 4, 1921 memo from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to Davis of Cemeterial Division.
598 Johnson, Warner, August 4, 1921 memo from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to Davis of Cemeterial Division.
599 Johnson, Warner, August 4, 1921 memo from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to Davis of Cemeterial Division.
600 Johnson, Warner, November 5, 1921 receipt for remains.
601 Everhart, Odus, August 30, 1920 affidavit from grandmother.
602 Everhart, Odus, October 6, 1920 memo from War Risk Insurance Bureau to Cemeterial Division. Everhart’s grandmother confirmed his illegitimate status. Everhart, Odus, October 12, 1920 letter from grandmother to War Department.
rejoicing at his death. Everhart had given his mother’s name as his emergency address but named his grandmother as the beneficiary of his insurance. The Division found that Everhart’s mother was his next of kin, and Everhart was buried in France.

While the Cemeterial Division tried to keep the process of determining who was next of kin based on legal grounds where possible, the Division also listened to individual claims about who the soldier or marine would have wanted named next of kin. Lawrence Dozer’s body was returned to his cousin, rather than his mother, after the Division considered the evidence that the cousin submitted that Dozer was estranged from his mother. The Division wrote Dozer’s mother that “in this instance the desire of the soldier seems . . . clearly expressed in his will and letters.”

In at least a few cases, the Cemeterial Division informed prospective next of kin with disputed claims that the dead would be left in France if no agreement could be reached among them as to what was to be done. Leo Donnelly’s foster brother asked the Red Cross to write on his behalf and request that Donnelly’s body be returned to him, though he feared that Donnelly’s other brothers, who disagreed with his choice, might

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603 Everhart, Odus, August 10, 1920 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General.; Everhart, Odus, December 2, 1920 letter from third party (family member?) on behalf of grandmother to Army Quartermaster General.
604 Everhart, Odus, October 6, 1920 memo from War Risk Insurance Bureau to Cemeterial Division.
605 Everhart, Odus, December 18, 1920 letter from Army Quartermaster General to member of United States Senate.
606 Gallion, Fines, April 8, 1921 Cemeterial Division memo; Shilliday, Rexford, March 23, 1920 letter from mother to GRS (Cemeterial Division).
607 Dozer, Lawrence, July 1, 1921 memo from Davis of Cemeterial Division to Army Quartermaster General.
608 Dozer, Lawrence, July 1, 1921 letter from Davis of Cemeterial Division to Army Quartermaster General.
cause a scene at the funeral. The Division wrote back that if the two sides could not reach an amicable agreement, Donnelly’s body would be left overseas, and his body was eventually permanently buried in the Somme American Cemetery in France. The Division also ended some correspondence with some family members who contested final decisions about who was next of kin by telling family members that their recourse was either to persuade the family member who had been named next of kin to agree to change his or her mind or to appeal to the local courts.

“My brother was American”: Immigrants v. Family in the Home Country

In a number of cases, the Cemeterial Division’s efforts to identify and locate the next of kin were difficult because the individual who qualified under the War Department’s guidelines lived outside the United States. The American military that fought the World War included many first- and second-generation immigrants, and the Department guidelines compelled the Division to go to significant time and expense to seek out potential next of kin in foreign countries. Just the correspondence was a

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609 Donnelly, Leo, October 4, 1921 letter from Red Cross on behalf of foster brother to Shannon of GRS at Hoboken.
610 Donnelly, Leo, March 8, 1922 memo from Davis of Cemeterial Division to Wynne of Cemeterial Division.
611 Adams, Roy, April 8, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother; Boshier, Charles, April 1, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to sister; Daniels, Edward, September 24, 1921 letter from Connor of Army Quartermaster General to third party representing mother; Donnelly, Leo, March 8, 1922 memo from Davis of Cemeterial Division to Wynne of Cemeterial Division; Forsgren, Faunt, August 6, 1921 letter from Penrose of Cemeterial Division to sister.
612 Dekker, John, September 7, 1920 letter from brother in Holland to Pierce of Cemeterial Division; Doolan, Patrick, April 1, 1921 letter from sister to GRS at Hoboken (parents in England); Gullickson, Nelson, April 21, 1921 letter from third party on behalf of mother to GRS (Cemeterial Division); Nancy Gentile Ford, Americans All!: Foreign-Born Soldiers in World War I (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2001), 45-67; David Reynolds, The Long Shadow: The Legacies of the Great War in the
challenge: the Translation Section of the Military Intelligence Division handled the translation of letters received from overseas and translated letters into foreign languages to be sent to families in countries like Poland, Italy, and Sweden. Frank Adragna’s father wrote from Sicily to thank the Division for writing in Italian, since no one he knew spoke English; Arghirios Contos’s father in Greece wrote in Greek.

Siblings who had immigrated to the United States before, after, or with the soldier were sometimes frustrated when the War Department insisted on writing to parents in Europe. Cherobino Fortunato’s sister objected when the Cemeterial Division informed her that it would send Fortunato’s body to her father in Italy:

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613 Anderson, John R., August 2, 1923 letter from family in Sweden (in Swedish) to War Department; Biedzycki, Adolph, July 5, 1921 letter from Army Quartermaster General to family in Poland (translated into Polish); Bonasorte, Delphino, 1924 (?) memo from Army Quartermaster General to GRS (to be translated into Italian); Cerv, Lewis, May 23, 1920 (?) letter from mother (in Czech with War Department translation) to War Department; Crismeni, Rocco, January 16, 1921 translation of letter from mother in Italy to GRS at Hoboken; Loicca, Joseph, March 18, 1921 letter from mother in Italy (in Italian) to brother (and War Department translation); Rywick, Wadau, September (?) 1921 translation of letter from Army Quartermaster General to mother in Poland; Swanson, Oscar, December 31, 1921 memo from Wynne for Krauthoff of Army Quartermaster General (Cemeterial Division) to Military Intelligence Division, Translation Section.

614 Adragna, Frank, February 22, 1920 letter from father to War Department; Contos, Arghirios, January 7, 1919 letter from father (in Greece) to War Department.
Yonkers, N.Y. August 5, 1920

No: 293.8 Cem. #96617 (Fortunato, Cherobino, Pvt.)
From: Antoinette Fortunato, 6 Ritters Lane, Yonkers, N.Y.
To: The Quartermaster General, U.S. Army (Cemeterial Division)
Subject: Disposition of Remains.

1. It is my sad duty to protest most vehemently against the summary action of the Cemeterial Division in deciding to remove the body of my brother from his interment place in the American cemetery at Coblenz and forwarding it for final burial to his legal next of kin, his father, at Stete, Salerno, Italy.

2. I base my protest on various grounds. First, your division has, in many communications during the last twelve months, asked me again and again my intentions as the legal next of kin, having been so designated by Pvt. Fortunato on his entrance into the service. I lost no time in informing you of my wishes but none of them has been heeded. I preferred his body to remain where he had fallen. But failing this I told you it was preferable to return his body to his home here.

Furthermore, nothing was said about returning the body to his father, either by your division or by myself. I have insisted all along that the body should be returned here, in view of the fact that I believed I was the only one consulted on the subject.

3. I must confess I cannot see the necessity of sending my brother’s body to his father’s home. I have had no intimation from my father that he desired the body and I am afraid that if the body is shipped to him without other notice the shock may result fatally for he is ill and old.

4. But, perhaps, the most important objection is to be found in the fact that it is only just on the part of the United States to return the body to the place from where the soldier enlisted. My brother was American and it is my desire that his last resting place be the country of his adoption. My father I know agrees with me in this. If any papers have been signed by him to the contrary I know they have been signed under a misapprehension.

5. You have no right to willy-nilly send the body to Italy after having led me to believe that I had the right to designate his last resting place unless you first produce the evidence that his father has stated otherwise. I believe that I am entitled to some consideration along these lines as a matter of right and justice as well as humanity.

Antoinette Fortunato

Fortunato’s sister wrote the Cemeterial Division that she wanted her brother buried near her because “brother was American and it is my desire that his last resting place be the country of his adoption.” Fortunato’s sister’s seemed to feel that the Division was judging the family because they were immigrants. After the war, with many Americans increasingly suspicious of immigration and immigrants and some proposing to limit

615 Fortunato, Cherobino, August 5, 1920 letter from sister to Cemeterial Division.
immigration, immigrants like Fortunato’s sister wanted recognition that they were what others would call “100 percent American.”616 Fortunato’s sister was defending not only her right to decide where her brother’s body was buried, but the ties of both siblings to their adopted homeland. When no response was received from Italy, the Department agreed to return Fortunato’s body to her.617

In some cases involving overseas next of kin, the Cemeterial Division conceded the difficulty in reaching parents and granted family members in the United States the right to direct disposition of the remains.618 Where it seemed reasonable to do so, the Division sometimes took advantage of War Department guidance that if “all efforts to locate relatives have proven fruitless, the person so designated in the registered emergency address has the right to direct disposition.”619 Joseph Jacob’s body was sent to his siblings in the United States in 1921 after the Department concluded that it was

616 Daniels, John, May 4, 1921 letter from mother to Secretary of War Weeks (“I came to this country 16 years ago and I can prove I have always loved America and helped to keep it beautiful, I have also taught my children the same and always be 100 per cent American”); Davis, Roscoe, June 15, 1920 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (“it would give me relief to know that his request was so fulfilled as he gave his Dear sweet life for his country and friends that were 100% American”); Kennedy, Over Here, 63-69; Chambers, The Tyranny of Change, 11-17, 295.

617 Fortunato, Cherobino, September 4, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to sister; Fortunato, Cherobino, November 22, 1921 memo from Rethers of Army Quartermaster General (GRS in Europe) to Army Quartermaster; Fortunato, Cherobino, May 5, 1922 receipt for remains.

618 Pessin, Kolman, July 30, 1921 memo from Butler for Shannon of GRS at Hoboken to Chief of Cemeterial Division; Benda, Frank, October 6, 1921 memo from Pallas for Shannon of GRS at Hoboken to Chief of Cemeterial Division; Brown, Frank, June 7, 1921 memo from Butler for Shannon of GRS at Hoboken to Chief of Cemeterial Division.

619 Pessin, Kolman, August 9, 1921 memo from Davis of Cemeterial Division to Wynne of Cemeterial Division (“Paragraph 14: After all efforts to locate relatives have proven fruitless, the person so designated in the registered emergency address has the right to direct disposition of remains. Paragraph 12: Where it is impossible to secure information from the next of kin in a foreign country within a period of four months, it is considered that the wishes of the next of kin are that the remains be permanently concentrated in France.”)
“impracticable” to communicate with Joseph’s mother in Serbia.\textsuperscript{620} At other times, the Division held to the official policy that the dead would be returned only if the next of kin requested and that if next of kin in a foreign country could not be reached within four months, “it is considered that the wishes of the next of kin are that the remains be permanently concentrated in France.”\textsuperscript{621} Gregory Sawcheck’s remains, for example, were buried permanently in France after attempts to reach his parents in Russia, Lithuania, and Poland failed.\textsuperscript{622}

Some families who were reached asked that the dead be returned to them in foreign countries. The War Department determined that it was permitted under the congressional appropriation to pay to return the dead to next of kin in other countries as long as the deceased had lived in the overseas location at some point before joining the military, and the laws of the foreign country permitted return.\textsuperscript{623} The State Department

\textsuperscript{620} Jacob, Joseph, July 20, 1921 memo from Pallas for Shannon of GRS at Hoboken to Chief of Cemeterial Division.
\textsuperscript{621} Bukata, Ignac, November 7, 1921 memo from Rethers of GRS in Europe to Cemeterial Division; Hadjimchel, Pelopidas, April 26, 1922 letter to brother to Wynne of Army Quartermaster General (Cemeterial Division); Horenstein, Joseph, March 28, 1922 memo from GRS in Europe to Army Quartermaster General; Pavelonis, Paul, April 25, 1922 letter from Wynne of Army Quartermaster General (Cemeterial Division) to sister; Tucker, Leo, May 1, 1922 letter from Wynne of Army Quartermaster General (Cemeterial Division) to brother in United States; GRS History, Vol. II, 57-58; Ron Robin, \textit{Enclaves of America: The Rhetoric of American Political Architecture Abroad, 1900-1965} (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 37.
\textsuperscript{622} Sawcheck, Gregory, August 16, 1919 letter from brother-in-law to General Pershing of AEF; Sawcheck, Gregory, May 18, 1922 memo from Rethers of GRS in Europe to Cemeterial Division; Sawcheck, Gregory, May 6, 1924 letter from Army Quartermaster General to family in Poland.
\textsuperscript{623} Bond, Herbert, January 14, 1920 letter to attorney on behalf of family (in Canada) (“disposition and shipment of remains of deceased soldiers in the United States Army to points outside of the territory of the limits of the United States is taken care of by a ruling of the Comptroller of the Treasury of May 21, 1912, which briefly summed states that the appropriation for the ‘disposition of remains of officers, soldiers, and civil employees’ was available for the transfer to the bona fide home of the remains of a soldier. The entire expense incurred in the preparation and shipment of the remains of American soldiers to foreign points may properly be borne by the United States Government provided that in each case the soldier’s home is in the town, city or neighborhood where he resided or lived for an extended period prior to his enlistment”); Lindsey, Stanley, November 14, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to third party on behalf of family;
worked with foreign governments to obtain authority to send the American dead to other countries. The government evaluated the possibility of sending the dead to a variety of countries, including Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Britain and Ireland, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Sweden, Switzerland, and Turkey.\footnote{GRS History, Vol. I, 94-97; GRS History, Vol. II, 55-72.} About 750 members of the American military were eventually returned to family in countries other than the United States, the greatest number to Italy and the next largest number to Ireland.\footnote{GRS History, Vol. III, 15-23, 101; Budreau, \textit{Bodies of War}, 80; Swanson, Oscar, November 16, 1921 letter from family to Cemeterial Division (thanking United States government for shipping body to Sweden).} Efforts to return the dead to Russia failed as a result of the

\footnotetext[624]{Mallon, William, November 16, 1921 letter from Penrose of Cemeterial Division to mother in Ireland (“authoritative decision has just been received authorizing compliance with your request”); GRS History, Vol. I, 94-97; GRS History, Vol. II, 55-72.}
political turmoil that occurred during and after the Russian Revolution and Civil War.\textsuperscript{626} Returns to other nations also proved a challenge for political reasons: Pelopidas Hadjimchel’s brother, who lived in the United States, wanted his brother’s body returned to his parents in Turkey, but an April 1921 War Department memo determined that “until diplomatic relations are resumed between the United States and the Ottoman Empire,” it would be impossible to negotiate the return of the body to Turkey.\textsuperscript{627} At other times the difficulties in returning the dead to family overseas were logistical. One family wrote the Army Adjutant General in September 1920 that they would like the body of their son returned to them in Finland, but “the harbours shortly will be froze” and that the body could be returned no sooner than May of 1921.\textsuperscript{628} The War Department persevered, and the body was returned to the family in April of 1922.\textsuperscript{629}

In the end, some soldiers would have no official next of kin. Some had family members in the United States who had moved and could not be located. John Jonas’s family had contacted the Cemeterial Division in early 1920, but by the time Jonas’s body was returned to the United States in August of 1920, Jonas’s family could not be found, and the body was sent for burial at Arlington National Cemetery, where the unclaimed dead were buried.\textsuperscript{630} Others had no one to request that they be buried anywhere other

\begin{footnotes}
\item[626] GRS History, Vol. II, 68-69. There were enough bodies sent to Italy that the War Department developed forms in both English and Italian. Settevendemmie, Dominick, September 27, 1922 receipt for remains.
\item[627] Hadjimchel, Pelopidas, March 18, 1921 letter from brother to Cemeterial Division; Hadjimchel, Pelopidas, April 10, 1921 memo from military attaché in Turkey to GRS in Europe.
\item[628] Swenn, William, September 9, 1920 letter from father in Finland to Army Adjutant General.
\item[629] Swenn, William, April 16, 1922 receipt for remains to family (in Finland).
\item[630] Jonas, John, March 24, 1920 letter from mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division; Jonas, John, August 14, 1920 consignment form for Arlington National Cemetery. (All dead returned to the United States at the request of families whose bodies then went unclaimed because families could not be found to give final
\end{footnotes}
than in the permanent American overseas cemeteries. Ernest Denicola’s body was left in France because the Division determined that he was not survived by any relatives and that the fiancée who wanted to claim his remains had returned to Germany. But there were exceptions, as when the Division sent George Springstine’s body to his fiancée after she informed the Division that he was not survived by any relative.

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The War Department guidelines for identifying the next of kin of the war dead essentially asked families to follow a formula to identify the single person who would be allowed to decide where the dead would be permanently buried. Many families challenged the Department guidelines, and the underlying assumptions that the guidelines expressed, when they argued that someone other than the guidelines-mandated next of kin should choose the final resting place of the dead. A number of these families did not follow a traditional, patriarchal model in which young men left their parents’ homes to establish their own families. Would-be next of kin in families that did not follow the model sometimes argued that the Department should apply what they saw as a fairer standard. Parents, for example, questioned the rights of women who had been married to their sons only briefly before the war. Mothers—who had been lauded during the war for instructions were sent to Arlington. Hines, Edward, February 24, 1920 letter from Pierce of Cemeterial Division to Walter McCoy).


632 Denicola, Ernest, June 28, 1921 Pallas for Shannon of GRS at Hoboken to Chief of Cemeterial Division.

633 Springstine, George, June 13, 1921 memo from Pallas for Shannon of GRS at Hoboken to Chief of Cemeterial Division.
their contributions, who would be granted universal federal suffrage before most of the war dead were permanently buried, and who would normally have taken control of the process surrounding deaths within the family under more ordinary circumstances—were frustrated to find that their choices about where the dead should be buried could be trumped by their son’s father. When mothers were gone, sisters of the dead found themselves equally frustrated by the Department’s insistence on giving male relatives authority over the choice about where to bury the dead. Families made legal, factual, logical, and persuasive challenges to the guidelines in their effort to gain control over the decisions that were made about how to bury their family members.

In the end, however, families who challenged the War Department guidelines were dependent on the Department to entertain their arguments and to agree to their requests. When families challenged the guidelines and the assumptions that drove them, the Cemeterial Division could have chosen to follow Department policies about identifying the next of kin and allow those policies to control what became of the dead. The Division staff certainly preferred—and knew that the War Department leadership preferred—that the dead be left overseas for a variety of reasons. Even in cases where the Division would have been justified in ordering the dead left overseas, however, the Division was often persuaded by families that returning the dead to the United States was justified. The arguments made by families that the Department guidelines were rigid or unfair encouraged Division staff to undertake extensive and detailed reviews of individual cases, consider the overall circumstances, and try to decide how to serve families and the dead well.
Chapter 4

“There was only the skeleton remained”: Families Challenge War Department Control over the Bodies of the Overseas War Dead

Because Americans had largely been patient with the challenges that the war effort had imposed on them, War Department officials expected the families of the war dead to cooperate in identifying the next of kin, to have that person give the Department instructions, and then to wait patiently for the government to return the dead. Once the war ended, however, families argued to the Department that the government should expedite the final burial of the dead. When the Department informed families that the status of the dead might not be resolved for months or longer, many families grew concerned that the Department was failing to meet what they saw as the government’s obligations to them and to the dead. As a result, many families pushed the Department to explain itself, while others tried to take control of aspects of the process for themselves.

Families had at least two major concerns. First, some families feared that War Department officials were stonewalling the process because officials wanted the dead left overseas and hoped that delays would cause more families to give up and leave the dead in Europe. These families challenged the Department to move faster or sought to bring pressure on the Department, including by appealing to members of Congress or the press. Second, some families—encouraged by recent events, news reports, and rumors—believed that there was a chance that the Department would not be able to correctly identify the dead and that families might receive anything from the wrong body to an empty coffin. Before they were willing to decide where they wanted the dead buried,
families wanted to know whether they could be confident about receiving the correct remains. A significant number of families stated that they did not want to have the dead returned to them for burial if there was any question that the body they received might not be that of their family member. Many of these families challenged the Department to explain how they could be sure of receiving the right remains, questioned how the Department had identified the dead, or sought to view bodies and decide for themselves. A number of families went much further to verify identifications, traveling to Europe to gather information or attend exhumations so that they could view the dead. A few determined families even evaded Department control entirely and smuggled the bodies of their dead family members back to the United States themselves.

The War Department quickly discovered that the process of getting instructions from the next of kin was going to involve unexpected detailed and lengthy negotiations with families, who challenged the Department to prove that the process of arranging for the permanent burial of the dead was being given the attention and effort that families felt it deserved. Charged with corresponding with families, the Cemeterial Division and the Army Graves Registration Service exchanged letters with thousands of families that explained what the Department was doing and tried to assure families that they could trust the Department to care for the dead and carry out the family’s instructions with respect to permanent burial. The Division and the GRS had two goals. They did not want grieved families to worry about whether the Department was making mistakes, and they wanted to avoid negative publicity that would reflect badly on the Department and give families who had not already been anxious a reason to worry. As a result, in its
correspondence with families, the Cemeterial Division generally claimed that the procedures that the GRS had put in place in Europe made mistakes impossible. In one of the most unfortunate errors made by the Division and the GRS with respect to the return of the World War dead, however, these organizations continued to offer assurances to families long after it was clear that serious errors had been made in the return of the dead, up to and including a number of cases of returning misidentified bodies. At the same time, when mistakes were uncovered, the Division and the GRS were generally honest with families when it might have been easier to say nothing. This chapter will argue that many families, rather than simply accept that the Department was caring for the dead as it had promised, challenged the Department to prove that it could correctly identify the dead and arrange for the dead to be buried as families wished. Families expected the Department to demonstrate that the government was meeting its obligations to those who had served, and to their families, to bury the dead well. When questions arose about the Department’s intentions or actions, families also used the tools available to them, including appealing to members of Congress and the press, to defend their interests.

“The u boat menace, sir, is a thing of the past”: Families Push the War Department to Return the Dead Quickly so They Can View the Dead

The first military dead to be returned to the United States after the World War ended came not from Western Europe but from the undeclared war in Russia.634 Despite significant domestic opposition, President Wilson had authorized an intervention by the

United States military into the Russian Civil War in early 1918. The Polar Bear Expedition, a force of more than 5,500 Americans including the 339th Infantry Regiment (“Detroit’s Own”), was sent to Archangel in North Russia, while another 8,300 Americans were sent to Vladivostok in Siberia, where both groups met determined “Red” Russian resistance. About 400 Americans died from combat or disease before United States forces withdrew from North Russia in 1919 and from Siberia in 1920, leaving behind some of the American dead in their haste to evacuate. The first American dead from Russia arrived at the port of Hoboken in New Jersey in late 1919, and newspapers printed photographs of coffins covered with American flags and decorated with memorial wreaths. Press reports about the dead from Russia confused some families of the World War dead, who thought the reports referred to bodies from the war in Europe.


637 “Our Russian Losses,” New York Times, October 17, 1919, 3; “American Casualties in Russian Hostilities Reached Total of 553,” Atlanta Constitution, October 18, 1919, 6; Peyton C. March, The Nation at War (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1932), 132, 150; Foglesong, America’s Secret War Against Bolshevism, 188-89; Jennifer D. Keene, World War I (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 156-60; Boot, The Savage Wars of Peace, 225, 228; Carl J. Richard, When the United States Invaded Russia: Woodrow Wilson’s Siberian Disaster (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), 171. The missing were declared dead despite reports of Americans being taken prisoner; American authorities were surprised to accept more than 100 living prisoners from the Soviets in 1921 rather than the 20 they were expecting. Mead, The Doughboys, 393; Keene, World War I, 160; Michael Sledge, Soldier Dead: How We Recover, Identify, Bury and Honor Our Military Fallen (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2005), 275.

638 “First American Soldier Dead Brought Back to United States,” Boston Daily Globe, November 15, 1919, 11; Chris Dickon, The Foreign Burial of American War Dead: A History (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2011), 57. While some families who lost men in Russia would be among the first to have their dead returned, others would be among the last: diplomatic wrangling between the United States government and new Soviet regime delayed the recovery of the American dead for years. The Acting
The first of the World War dead, however, would not arrive for another year, and the long delays before the World War dead were returned or buried permanently in Europe upset and frustrated families.\textsuperscript{640} During the war, at least a few families who wanted the dead returned wrote the War Department to ask why the dead could not be returned immediately. James Eadie’s mother was glad to receive her son’s effects but argued that “it would have been as easy right after his death to send his body as to send his trunk and belongings.”\textsuperscript{641} John Eaton’s mother thought the Marine Corps should send her son’s body back immediately after his death because “he would not take up much space.”\textsuperscript{642} Most families understood delays during the war but expected the dead to be returned soon after the war ended.\textsuperscript{643} Just after the war, the Army Quartermaster Corps

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\textsuperscript{639} Behn, Edward, January 1, 1920 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Gallagher, John, June 10, 1919 letter from sister to Army Adjutant General; Hornstein, David, November 6, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; Myus, Ray, November 26, 1919 letter from mother to War Department; Settle, Jack, October 28, 1920 letter from widow to Army Adjutant General.

\textsuperscript{640} The bodies of 353 soldiers, including almost 300 representing the first war dead to be returned from the Zone of the Interior in France, were returned to the piers at Hoboken aboard the Army transport \textit{Mercury} in late April of 1920. “353 Soldier Dead Here,” \textit{New York Times}, April 29, 1920, 9; “Bodies of 353 U.S. Dead Brought Home,” \textit{Atlanta Constitution}, April 29, 1920, 1.

\textsuperscript{641} Eadie, James, December 6, 1919 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division).

\textsuperscript{642} Eaton, John, May 22, 1919 letter from mother to United States Marine Corps.

\textsuperscript{643} Autry, John, October 31, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (“want return at once”); Bierhorst, William, January 14, 1919 telegram from father to Army Adjutant General (“ship body home immediately without fail”); Bute, Lloyd, January 11, 1920 letter from mother to War Department (“I demand that my dead boy shall be returned to me at once”); Collier, Leslie, February 15, 1919 letter from father to War Department (“request that he be sent home at the most possible earliest convenience or at best
wrote families that while the Department had initially said that the dead would be returned when the war was over, nothing could be done about moving the war dead until after the peace treaty was signed and the troops in Europe returned to the United States:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>December 4, 1918</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Acting Quartermaster General of the Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs. Harold Bennett, Quaker City, Ohio</td>
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<tr>
<td>Return of remains of Corporal Harold E. Bennett, Co. C, 334th Regt., 84th Division</td>
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</table>

1. Replying to your letter of the 29th ultimo, I beg to state that Bulletin #44, current series, War Department, directs the return of the bodies of all American soldiers buried in France after termination of the war, which is understood to mean after the definitive signing of the Treaty of Peace.

2. This is, however, a huge undertaking and much time will be required for the formulation of plans and for their execution. Caskets must be procured and shipped abroad and the vessels now engaged in repatriating the living soldiers must be freed before the transportation of the dead can be attempted. It is hoped that the patriotic patience, which characterized our people during the prosecution of the war, will not fail the families of those who fell at this necessary delay in the restoration of their remains.

3. Our latest reports from the Graves Registration Service are for the month of September, 1918. Therefore it is not yet possible to answer your inquiries with respect to the location of your husband’s grave. Later this information will be furnished you.

By authority of the Acting Quartermaster General.

H.R. Lemly
Major, Q.M. Corps

The Quartermaster’s office admitted that the task of returning the dead to families was “a huge undertaking” but expected families to wait patiently while the GRS located graves, identified bodies, and developed plans for the return of the dead. The Department tried to

among the first of the dead that is sent home”); Horn, Frank, January 11, 1920 letter from mother to War Department (“I would like my sons body sent to America at once”).

644 Bennett, Harold, December 24, 1918 letter from Army Quartermaster General to widow. The same language is found in other letters. Bellman, Jeanette, January 30, 1919 letter from Army Quartermaster General to brother; Covey, William, January 14, 1919 letter from Army Quartermaster General to mother; Daly, Edwin, December 20, 1918 letter from Army Quartermaster General to father; Healy, Joseph, February 18, 1919 letter from Army Quartermaster General to father; Long, George, February 14, 1919 letter from Army Quartermaster General to father.
explain to families how much work would have to be done to return the dead, including
the need for an agreement with the French government that would permit moving the
American dead, so that families could begin to understand that the dead might not be
returned for months or even years.\textsuperscript{645} William Field’s father wrote General Pershing in
September of 1919, “I see in San Antonio Express that the bodys of the american dead
will be left in france for a period of three years,” no doubt referring to press reports about
the pending French legislation to prevent the return of the dead discussed in Chapter 1.\textsuperscript{646}
Families were increasingly unsympathetic to the Department’s explanations as time
passed, and some thought that the Department was deliberately delaying the return of the
dead so that families would agree to let the dead be buried permanently in Europe.\textsuperscript{647}
Owren Carr’s mother wrote the War Department in September of 1919 to ask when her

\textsuperscript{645} Arnold, Frank, December 30, 1918 letter from cousin to Army Adjutant General; Brogan, Joseph,
September 7, 1919 letter from brother to War Department (newspaper reports indicate “that the bodies of
our boys will not be brought home, at least for years”); Busey, Charles, August 12, 1919 letter from mother
to member of United States Senate; Cameron, Gilbert, November 3, 1919 letter from mother to War
Department; Cooper, Lawrence, March 4, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Strassburger,
Julien, November 6, 1920 letter from father to United States Senator.
\textsuperscript{646} Fields, William, September 13(?), 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General.
\textsuperscript{647} Barnes, Austin, December 26, 1919 letter from mother to Secretary of War; Busey, Charles, September
1, 1919 letter from mother to member of United States House of Representatives; Carpenter, Stanley,
January 28, 1920 letter from mother to Secretary of War (“from the information I have received it does
seem that someone has been ‘sleeping at the switch’ and that there has been unnecessary delay in starting
this work”); Chaille, Lambert, August 15, 1921 letter from father to Army Quartermaster General (“we
are certainly at a loss to understand the action of your Department or rather I should say inaction”); Cleary,
James, November 20, 1919 letter from father to member of United States Senate (“the war has been ended
over a year and they now offer as an excuse (which no one believes) that the laws of France will not permit
it to be done”); Finley, Ray, January 1, 1920 letter from parents to Army Adjutant General; Fry, Clarence,
June 7, 1919 letter from father to Secretary of War (“we who have lost our boys cannot understand the
delay”); Lingle, John, October 21, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; Pouch, Harold,
September 16, 1919 letter from father to member of United States House of Representatives.
son’s remains would be returned to her because “the war has been over now almost a year and yet no return. The u boat menace, sir, is a thing of the past.”

Families pushed the War Department either to move quickly to return the dead or to allow them to pay to have the dead returned privately. Some families wanted to have funerals and final burials sooner than the Department’s process appeared likely to permit. Delays in the return of the dead interrupted traditional mourning timelines and extended the period of sharpest grief. As one author has noted of death, “At the center of the death ritual is the presence of the corpse[,] which also assists in the grief process ‘to the extent that it is easier to grieve the loss that we see, than the one we imagine.’”

Michael Sledge argues about deaths in war that “[i]t is difficult for families to cope with the death of a loved one in any circumstance; it is more difficult when the death is premature and violent, and it is most difficult if they have no body to mourn and bury.”

Some families needed a body to believe the reports of a death, while others were anxious

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648 Carr, Owren, September 14, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General.
649 Andrews, Herman, February 10, 1919 letter from mother to Army Quartermaster General (“I am willing to pay the expense if he can only be brought home sooner than 1920”); Bates, Harold, September 2, 1919 letter from mother to War Department (“you know it would not be any consolation to let him lay there till there was nothing to send home” and would pay “any expense it would be”); Long, Courtney, January 15, 1919 letter from mother to “Cemeterial Board” (want to know “just when we would be permitted to go ourselves for the body if we would pay all the expense” as “it has been such a long sad wait for us already” and “it would seem so terrible to wait until 1920”); Sprong, Cecil, January 23, 1919 letter from mother to General Pershing (“I desire his body shipped to me as soon as it is convenient. I want to bury him here so I can visit his grave in my last few years. If there is any extra expense I will attend to it”); David P. Colley, Safely Rest (New York, NY: Berkeley Publishing, 2004), 218.
651 Sledge, Soldier Dead, 21.
to complete the obligations they felt they owed the dead.⁶⁵² On a practical level, families were also prevented from moving or taking trips because the dead might be returned at any time.⁶⁵³ By attempting to circumvent the Department’s control over the process of returning the dead, families sought to avoid these delays.

Other families hoped to have the dead returned quickly so that they could view the dead before remains decayed beyond recognition.⁶⁵⁴ For some, viewing the dead was part of a ritual meant to help survivors begin to accept a death. Frederick Gayle’s widow

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⁶⁵² Balcom, Fred, April(?!) 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“feel its my duty to bring him home”); Barnes, William, June 14, 1919 letter from sister to War Department (“it seems almost impossible to believe him dead”); Brazaitys, Anthony, August 15, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“I don’t believe my son is dead”); Brittle, Leonard, December 8, 1921 letter from family to Cemeterial Division (“I hope to live long enough to know his remains are in the United States in the National Cemetery”); Carr, Owren, July 24, 1918 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“I want to live long enough to see that my boys body is buried here so when I die I can be buried by his side”); Ciurca, Sebastian, August 20, 1919 letter from brother to War Department (“don't believe that my brother is dead”); Deller, John, April 2, 1919 letter from sister to Army Adjutant General (“my mother can’t believe he is dead”); Guth, Carl, June 11, 1921 letter from father to Cemeterial Division (“my only hope is now to live long enough to see them buried on our burial plot here aside their loving mother”); Raisor, Franklin, December 7, 1918 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“I yet can not convince myself to believe him dead”).

⁶⁵³ Aasgaard, Almer, January 13, 1920 letter from mother to War Department (“I’m thinking of going away but can’t go as long as I’m expecting his remains to come”); Abney, George, July 13(?) 1921 letter from father to War Department (“need to make a trip”); Anderton, George, December 30, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; Beebe, William, May 2, 1920 letter from widow to GRS (Cemeterial Division) (moving for job); Deardorff, William, February 24, 1921 letter from mother to Cemeterial Division (moving three hundred miles away); Healey, Harry, December 23, 1920 letter from Red Cross on behalf of mother to Cemeterial Division; Koons, Dallas, February 5, 1920 letter from family to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division) (wintering in Florida); Smith, Reginald, August 28, 1920 letter from mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division (moving for a change of scenery and climate while recovering from influenza); Smith, Leander, March 8, 1920 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (moving); Gallagher, John, May 26, 1920 letter from mother to “U.S Government, Washington, D.C.” (taking a trip for health reasons); Jobe, Lawrence, June 27, 1921 letter from parent to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division); Jones, Samuel J., April 21, 1920 letter from sister to member of United States House of Representatives (asking about timing of return because her house had sold); Young, Edwin, August 6, 1921 letter from mother to Pallas of GRS at Hoboken.

⁶⁵⁴ Barker, Alvis, June 25(?) 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“can we look upon thir faces and can we keep the body over night at home”); Jonas, Adolph, February 27, 1919 letter from parents to Cemeterial Division; McKenna, Charles, June 30, 1919 letter from mother to War Department; Opalka, Joseph, March 6, 1920 letter from mother to War Department; Williams, Earl, February 3, 1919 letter from mother to War Department (“if [the body] is sent to me I must see him if it kills me”).
wrote the War Department that “I can never be convinced that he is really dead unless I see his remains.”

William Blair’s mother wanted to see her son’s body:

Mrs. Michael Doyle  
Home Garden  
RFD #4  
Muskegon, Mich  
P.C. Harris, Adjt. General

Dear Sir

Would it be possible to have my boy’s body sent home soon. He only died 31st of Oct and if he was home soon perhaps it would be possible to see him once again. Or just touch his hair. His brother we lost in the woods when he was five years old and he was all I had left. Will you please try and have him sent home soon.

Yours Truly  
Mrs. Michael Doyle

[P.S.] He was at or near Romorantin in aero supply base.

Blair’s mother wanted her son’s body returned to her “soon” because “if he was home soon perhaps it would be possible to see him once again.” She believed doing so would give her comfort and allow her to accept his death, and she knew that time would decrease the likelihood that she would be able to recognize her son’s body.

Many families, however, wanted to view the dead because they believed that the War Department would make mistakes in the return of the dead. Clarence

655 Gayle, Frederick, February 25, 1919 letter from widow to GRS in Europe.  
656 Blair, William C., April 24, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General.  
657 Bahr, Edward, November 26, 1919 letter from mother to War Department (“do you think I will get the right body”); Bargerstock, Clea, May 8, 1922 letter from mother to War Department (“be sure and don’t ship any other body but the body of my son”); Barrett, John, December 9, 1918 letter from parent to Army Chief of Staff (“is there any way to prevent mistakes about the wrong bodies being sent? Would we know for certain it was our loved one”); Becker, Harry, December 17, 1918 letter from attorney on behalf of father to Army Adjutant General (father “is anxious to know whether there is a fair certainty that the right body will be sent or whether owing to the unavoidable exigencies of war it might be impossible to distinguish one corpse from another”); Blackwell, Willie, October 4(?), 1920 letter from father to War Department (“if you send him I would like for it to be his body and no other”); Bredlow, Emil, April 8, 1920 letter from mother to Army Quartermaster General (“if you can guarantee me the right body, I wish
Scarborough’s mother wrote, “I am very desirous that there shall be no mistake made in the disinterring of my son’s body and that the number of the grave in which he is buried may be made correct so that when these bodies are disinterred, I shall not receive the body of some other boy instead of my son’s body.”

Dudley Cason’s father asked the Department to send his son’s body, but “for God sake don’t make a mistake and send me some other soldiers remains in place of my Dear Son’s, maybe a negro’s. I would love to have any reason to know the remains are my boys.”

This mistrust of the government was the result of a number of general factors, including a lack of interaction between families and the federal government prior to the war that made the government an unknown quantity to many families, but families could also look to more concrete evidence that would justify concerns about mistakes in the identification of remains.

During and after the war, newspapers reported that mistakes had been made in death

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658 Scarborough, Clarence, December 5, 1919 letter from mother to Wynne of Cemeterial Division (letter addressed to GRS in Washington, D.C.).

659 Cason, Dudley, November 10, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General.
notifications, and families who read these reports found reason to hope that they would find their family members were actually still alive.\textsuperscript{660} In early 1919, the \textit{Atlanta Constitution} reported that Herman Scott Maynard was “[a]mong the number of those who are coming home to disprove the report that they are dead.”\textsuperscript{661} In 1920, the \textit{Constitution} reported that Nathan Cooperman, said by the Department to have been killed in action, was alive, although his mother had been sent a photograph of his grave.\textsuperscript{662} In 1921, the \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune} noted that Roy Compton, whose family had just been notified that he had been killed in action, had returned to the United States in April of 1919 and was “alive and kicking at the idea that he’s dead.”\textsuperscript{663} Families thought that if these reports


\textsuperscript{662} “Dead and Not Dead and Pressing Claim, Soldier Finds Self,” \textit{Atlanta Constitution}, June 18, 1920, 1.

\textsuperscript{663} “Soldier Home Two Years, War Office Says He’s Dead,” \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}, June 3, 1921, 1.
were true, other mistakes were possible.\textsuperscript{664} Lewis Elliott’s mother wrote in December of 1918 to ask whether it was possible her son was still alive:

\begin{quote}
\begin{verbatim}
Wickliffe Kentucky
Route 2 Box 43
Dec 14, 1918

Gen John J. Pershing

Dear Sir:

I am writing you in regard to my son, Private Lewis B. Elliott. I had a telegram the 26 of Nov. stating my son died from wounds received in action on 26 of Oct. I would like to know if you could give me any further information in regard to his death. I thought maybe there had been a mistake, as the war department has made 3 mistakes in regards to deaths right here in my own neighborhood. 3 of our young men that were reported dead some time ago have seance been found to be living but wounded and in hospitals. How can I find out for sure my son is dead and if dead how can I get his body and have it brought home and can I be sure I have my sons body and not some one else. I will now give you my sons address in full. Private Lewis B. Elliott. Co. G. 38 Inf. A.E.F. Any further information will be thankfully read by his mother. Thanking you in advance for any favor, I remain resp.

Ann E. Elliott
Wickliffe Kentucky
Route 2 Box 43
\end{verbatim}
\end{quote}

Elliott’s mother wanted information about her son’s death because she believed that the Department had “made 3 mistakes in regards to deaths right here in my own neighborhood.”

\textsuperscript{664} Brazaitys, Anthony, August 15, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“he must have been wounded or shell shocked and is in some hospital”); Cowart, William, November 7, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“will you please tell me if there are at any places any of our young men who went overseas who are suffering from shell shock or injury or so mentally unbalanced that they do not know who they are and whose records are not definitely known”); Crossley, Harry, May 21(?) 1919 letter from mother to Pierce (“I dont believe my boy is dead” and “I think he is in some hospital and hasnt his right mind”); Dick, Alvin, April(?!) 1921 letter from widow to Cemeterial Division (“I at once want a searched made for him in government hospitals”); May, William, May 22, 1919 letter from sister to GRS (“we have heard of so many boys whose death was reported and some whose pictures just recently were printed with the casualties and yet were seen and talked with the day our boys passed in parade”); Peterka, Joseph, January 11, 1919 letter from brother to Graves Registration Bureau in Washington, DC (“possibly he was not killed, but was picked up on the battlefield very seriously wounded and may at this moment be lying in some hospital in either France or England or in the States”); Raisor, Franklin, April 23, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“as I have never heard from a chaplain or any one, I sometimes feel as if he might be in some hospital wounded”); Tucker, Charles, March 2, 1920 letter from sister to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division) (“it looks to us as if there has been a mistake some where and we all feel that it is such and that he is not dead” “but probably in a camp for Demented Soldiers”).

\textsuperscript{665} Elliott, Lewis, December 14, 1918 letter from mother to General Pershing.
neighborhood,” which gave her hope her son might be alive and made her question the Department’s ability to return her son’s remains to her accurately.

Families who were suspicious of the government’s willingness or ability to return the dead accurately had sometimes read or heard that mistakes were also being made in the return of the dead. Reports that the war dead were being sent to the wrong families began at least as early as November of 1919, when the father of Edmund Collins, a soldier who had died in Russia, told the press that he had opened the coffin supposedly containing his son’s body and found the body of another soldier. Collins’s father told reporters that he had asked the War Department to disinter all 111 bodies that had been returned from Russia at the same time as his son’s to verify their identities. A friend of Collins’s told reporters that “[i]t looks very much as if they placed the bodies in coffins

666 Autry, John, September 4, 1920 letter from parents to GRS (Cemeterial Division) (“there have been some mistakes made in some of the bodies that have been sent home they have been sent to the wrong parties”); Baker, Carlos, February 24, 1920 letter from parents to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division) (“owing to the fact that mistakes are so often made in removing the bodies, we wants remains to stay where they are”); Betts, Harry, April 13, 1919 letter from mother to GRS (writing “I’ve read in the papers that sometimes they make mistakes” and enclosing a clipping on a soldier reported dead who was found alive); Buckley, John, November 1, 1918 letter from mother to Secretary of War (“I am afraid that in the confusion of moving so many bodies after the war is over, I might not get the right one”); Bull, William, October 19, 1920 letter from widow to Cemeterial Division (family had been “receiving news of many relatives finding the wrong body upon attempt of identification”); Connelly, William, February 13, 1919 letter from mother to GRS (“it was heartbreaking to know that my son is really dead. I was in hopes there was some mistake as there are so many mistakes made”); Covey, William, February 19, 1920 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division) (“there has been so much in the papers of the mistakes made in shipping the bodies that one has a great anxiety in regard to them”).


and then sent one indiscriminately to each of the 111 addresses.\textsuperscript{669} Collins’s father also wrote to other families who had received bodies from Russia to warn them.\textsuperscript{670}

While the issues involving Edmund Collins’s body had actually occurred, other concerns were prompted by rumors, such as those circulating that coffins were being returned to families empty or filled with rocks.\textsuperscript{671} When Almer Aasgaard’s mother asked how the War Department proposed to return the dead after so much time had passed, she also asked if she might receive the wrong body or no body at all:

\textsuperscript{669} “Bodies of Soldiers from Siberia Mixed,” Los Angeles Times, November 24, 1919, I3.

\textsuperscript{670} Collins, Edmund, November 25, 1919 telegram from Army Adjutant General to father (“not necessary for you to request bodies of other soldiers to be exhumed and earnestly requested that you take no further action towards that end as War Department is taking prompt measures to correct any errors”); Gasper, Leo, November 23, 1919 letter from widow to Army Adjutant General.

\textsuperscript{671} Bradley, Samuel, June 25, 1921 letter from mother to War Department; Foster, Louie, September 18, 1919 letter from mother to War Department (translated); Srong, Cecil, October 1, 1920 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General.
Aasgaard’s mother wanted her son’s body returned to her, but she had heard that “people receive empty caskets or a slab in a casket,” and she wanted the Department to explain its procedures so she could be sure that she would receive her son’s remains.

Families who worried that they might receive the body may also have believed that there had been widespread mistakes with respect to the identification of the victims of the influenza epidemic that began during the war. Known as the “Spanish flu” because Spain did not censor its press accounts of the epidemic, this particularly lethal strain of influenza killed about half a million Americans and tens of millions of people

672 Aasgaard, Almer, January 13, 1920 letter from mother to War Department.
Alfred Crosby, John Barry, and others have demonstrated the wide-ranging impact of this influenza epidemic on American society and on the World War. The Spanish flu and the World War were connected in many ways in the minds of many Americans at the time, since in both situations, substantial numbers of unexpected deaths compromised the ability of communities to provide traditional death rituals; bodies were buried quickly, raising concerns about the proper identification of the dead; caretakers sent letters describing the illness, death, and burial of those who died away from home; and undertakers were accused of profiteering. Families had heard that mistakes had been made in the handling of the influenza dead and feared similar mistakes with respect

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to the war dead. James Ewell’s cousin wanted to bring his body back privately because of “the horrible mistakes that occurred even here in this country during the flu epidemic in the fall of 1918.” Bascom Field’s father referred to the military training camps when he likewise requested to be allowed to bring Field’s body home privately, because he was “anxious to avoid the mix-ups that so frequently happened in bringing the bodies home from the Camps when the Flu was raging.”

“The cerial No. given in your communication is ALL WRONG”: Families Challenge the Identification of the Dead

Concerned for these or other reasons about the possibility of errors in the return of the dead, suspicious family members struggled to decide whether they wanted the dead returned to them if they could not be sure that the body received would be that of their family member. Some families questioned whether the War Department would even be able to produce a body. Francis Barnes’s mother wrote the Army Adjutant General to

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677 Field, Bascom, June 5, 1920 letter from father to member of United States Senate (“especially anxious to avoid the mix-ups that so frequently happened in bringing the bodies home from the Camps when the Flu was raging”); Lingle, John, March 27, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (“there have been so many mistakes in shipping remains of soldiers home who died in camps in this country that my wife fears that some similar mistake might be made in this case”); “Wrong Man Buried so Dolan is Back,” Los Angeles Times, August 27, 1919, I4.

678 Ewell, James, February 27, 1920 letter from cousin to member of United States House of Representatives (“remembering the horrible mistakes that occurred even here in this country during the flu epidemic in the fall of 1918”).

679 Field, Bascom, June 5, 1920 letter from father to member of United States Senate.

680 Armstrong, John W., February 10, 1919 letter from family to GRS (asking if “body was badly mutilated or tore up beyond recognition”); Atha, Thomas, November 5, 1919 letter from mother to Cemeterial Division (asking if body was “mutilated much at death”); Colister, Frank, March 27, 1919 letter from father to GRS (“I would like to know if his body was recovered and buried so that it could be returned to me or if he was blown to pieces so there is no grave”); Conley, William, September 21, 1925 letter from mother to Army Quartermaster General (“I have been told by his Buddies who were with him and saw his body shattered. Some of the boys who saw him blown to pieces were strangers to me and their people came and told me what their sons had seen of him so there must be some mistake on your part”); Costello, Thomas,
ask how it was possible that her son had been buried because “the latest report [was] that he was blown to pieces and all they could find was one arm.” 681 The Adjutant General replied that it had no specific information about Barnes’s death but assured Barnes’s mother that “if you have been advised as to the location of the grave, the body was intact enough to permit of burial.” 682 Thomas Costello’s sister had heard that her brother’s body was “blown to atoms,” though she also asked where her brother’s body was buried, suggesting she was not sure if the report was accurate. 683 At least a few families who believed the testimony of comrades about the circumstances of a death rejected the remains offered to them by the Department because they thought it was impossible that a body could be found. 684 John Sanger’s family declined to have his body returned to them after they were told by comrades who claimed to be eyewitnesses that Sanger had been “blown to atoms,” and the family therefore thought it “impossible that his body could be returned to the United States.” 685 Some families were later persuaded that reports of a

August 1919 letter from sister to Army Adjutant General; Palmer, Dee, Army Adjutant General reply card with note (“this soldier supposed to be blown to pieces and not found”); Peterka, Joseph, February 22, 1919 letter from brother to GRS in Europe (“One lad writes that he was snipped by a German sniper. Another party writes that he was killed by shrapnel and identified by his gas-mask. And another writes that he was killed by a high explosive shell. My, the poor boy must have been blown to pieces. If this is the case, how could he be buried in one place?”); Sanger, John, Army Adjutant General reply card with note (“I dont know about filling out this card as for the information I got that he was blown to pieces”).

681 Barnes, Francis, February 24, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General.

682 Barnes, Francis, March 8, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother. The GRS may have buried partial remains, or Barnes’s comrades may have been mistaken.

683 Costello, Thomas, August 1919 letter from sister to Army Adjutant General.

684 Acree, Arthur, September 24, 1920 letter from mother to War Risk Insurance Bureau (“they tell me that he was blown to pieces with a bomb”); Barber, Frank, January 14, 1921 letter from brother to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division) (“we think he was killed by a high explosive shell”); Blase, Louise, February 5, 1920 letter from parent to GRS (“so many boys told me that his body was blown to pieces”); Bragvatne, Ole, June 30, 1919 letter from third party (bank cashier) on behalf of father to Army Adjutant General (father does not want the body returned “unless identification is reasonably certain and entire body is in the casket”).

685 Sanger, John, September 6, 1920 letter from family to GRS (Cemeterial Division).
body’s destruction were mistaken. Robert Ryans’s brother questioned the identification of the body that the Cemeterial Division proposed to bury as Ryans at Arlington because one of Ryans’s comrades had reported seeing “my brother’s body blown to bits by a shell.” The Division replied that Ryans had been hit by a trench mortar shell, “which would not necessarily mean that the body was blown to pieces.” Ryans’s brother accepted the explanation, and Ryans was buried at Arlington.

Families also questioned the War Department about more mundane inconsistencies, including when information on official forms related to the dead—such as names, serial numbers, units, or ranks—did not match what they thought was true. Some families simply wanted records to be correct and argued that the Department had a duty to fix errors. James McConnell’s widow wrote the Department that “it seems to

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686 Peterka, Joseph, February 22, 1919 letter from brother to GRS. When a friend wrote on behalf of Hilary Rex’s mother to question if it was possible that the reports of Rex’s death were mistaken, Pierce replied, “I beg to say that it is a curious freak of memory in relation to exciting times that every instance in which returning soldiers have given verbal testimony concerning burials, in so far as these cases have been brought to our notice, has proven to be incorrect.” Rex, Hilary, January 7, 1920 letter to from Pierce of Cemeterial Division to third party on behalf of mother. The friend wrote back to thank Pierce for the information he had provided. Rex, Hilary, January 9, 1920 letter from third party on behalf of mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division.

687 Ryans, Robert, September 22, 1921 letter from brother to Wynne of Cemeterial Division (letter addressed to GRS in Washington, D.C.).

688 Ryans, Robert, September 26, 1921 memo from Davis of Cemeterial Division to Saxton of Cemeterial Branch; Ryans, Robert, October 6, 1921 letter from Penrose, Chief of Cemeterial Division to brother. Colonel Penrose commanded the Cemeterial Division after Pierce’s death in May of 1921.

689 Ryans, Robert, October 17, 1921 letter from brother to Penrose, Chief of Cemeterial Division.

690 Baughman, Albert, August 24, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; Flegal, Russell, March 11, 1919 letter from family to GRS; McConnell, James, April 11, 1919 letter from widow to GRS; Stewart, Edmond, June 6, 1919 letter from parent to Army Adjutant General; Winslow, Kenelm, November 21, 1919 letter from widow to GRS (Cemeterial Division); Woodbury, Robert, April 24, 1920 letter from father to GRS (Cemeterial Division).

691 Evans, Robert, February 15, 1919 letter from sister to Pierce of GRS in Europe; Flegal, Russell, March 11, 1919 letter from family to GRS in Europe; Fulwiler, John, March 2, 1919 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS in Europe; Keep, Henry, October 29, 1920 letter from widow to Cemeterial Division; Stewart, Edmond, June 6, 1919 letter from parent to Army Adjutant General; Vedder, Harmon, December 31, 1918
me that when a man gives up his life to his country and has gone beyond the call of duty by extraordinary bravery, the least the War Department can do for him is to correct all the mistakes it has made on the records at Washington.”

Other families feared that discrepancies might lead to mistakes when the dead were returned. Ellis Tucker’s father found several items he thought were mistakes on the reply card he received:

October 13th 1919
P.C. Harris
Auditor War Department
Washington, D.C.

Dear Sir:

Your letter received with identification card enclosed, relating to having the remains of Ellis A Tucker being brought to the U.S. will [say] that if the errors are as numerous in identifying the body and shipping to this country, as they are in filling out these cards, we would not be very sure of receiving the [remains] of our son, as you have him listed as being a private and belonging to Co D 2nd Engrs, while he belonged to Co H 355th Inf, and was a Sgt. and until you can assure us of some system you will be able to make no mistakes in these matters and can turn the work over to some one that knows what they are doing as to locations and are interested in getting every thing straight instead of simply performing a duty just to fill a shipping contract I do not believe I will do any thing.

Yours Truly,
A.F. Tucker

letter from father to Pierce of GRS in Europe; Webster, Francis, August 18, 1920 letter from father to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division).

McConnell, James, January 27, 1921 letter from widow to Cemeterial Division.

Baughman, Albert, August 24, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (“Kindly straighten this out as we would be afraid to order his body sent home unless we have the number straighten out, for fear it would not be our son’s body when it arrived”); Brawley, John, April 30, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (“we are calling your attention to this number so we will be sure to get the proper body”); Cox, James, July 15, 1920 letter from father to War Department (“will you do me the great favor to look this up and give me the correct no. or would never feel that we had our boy home”); Gilkeson, Robert, June 18, 1919 letter from father to Army Chief of Staff (“I fear the confusion as to the number of grave will cause a mistake in the removal.”); Stevenson, Alfred, February 24, 1920 letter from father to GRS (Cemeterial Division) (“the fact of the name being spelled wrong may cause considerable confusion at some later date”); Winslow, Kenelm, November 21, 1919 letter from widow to GRS (“Kindly me know at once whether the letter which I have just received from you refers to my husband or to somebody else of the same name.”).

Tucker, Ellis, October 13, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General.
Tucker’s father believed that “if the errors are as numerous in identifying the body and shipping to this country, as they are in filling out these cards,” he could not be sure that the Department would send him the right body, and he therefore refused to state where he wanted his son buried. The Adjutant General’s office replied that Tucker’s father had received the card for another soldier of the same name and sent him a new card with information matching what Tucker’s father had provided.695 The Department sometimes admitted errors, and at other times discrepancies could be reconciled because a soldier had been promoted or transferred.696 The Army Adjutant General wrote one father, “You are informed that the records in this office show Sergeant Harold E. Bockleman, formerly of Company C, 106 Infantry was a member of Company C, 88th Infantry at the time of his death.”697

Families also questioned the information written or inscribed on grave markers, which most families saw only in the photographs they received from the Cemeterial Division or the Red Cross, who cooperated to send each family a photograph of overseas graves.698 While families argued that they wanted grave markers to be correct out of

695 Tucker, Ellis, November 14, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to father. This response may not have entirely comforted Tucker’s father’s concerns, because Tucker’s body was later buried permanently in Europe. Tucker, Ellis, March 13, 1924 letter from Army Quartermaster General to father.
696 Borden, Giles, October 3, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to father (soldier moved to a different unit); Bovino, Pietro, May 3, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to third party on behalf of mother; Conway, Charles, July 9, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother; Factor, Joseph, April 21, 1919 letter from Pierce of GRS to mother (“not unusual for a soldier to be transferred from one company to another”); Tucker, Arthur, March 22, 1920 letter from Wynne of behalf of Pierce of Cemeterial Division to family.
697 Bockelman, Harold, May 15, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to father.
698 Aarvig, Truman, May 1, 1920 letter from father to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division); Brandt, Henry, May 19, 1920 letter from father (father questioning whether the grave photos he received were of another man’s grave because of wrong middle initial on grave market); Bruch, Louis, November 21, 1919 letter from father to GRS (Cemeterial Division) (grave photo has wrong name); Hopper, Henry, March 27, 1920
respects for the dead, they also wanted to ensure that graves were properly marked while a body was still identifiable, so there would be no mistakes when the dead were returned to the United States. Edward Elsworth’s brother had both issues in mind when he wrote to request that his brother’s grave marker be changed to correct the spelling of his name because “it might lead to confusion should the body be returned to this country. Furthermore, it seems to me that a man’s name ought to be spelled correctly on his own grave-stone if anywhere.” George Johnston’s sister wrote that her brother’s name was misspelled, and she was “afraid some mistake would be made in the removal of the


Adler, George, April 2, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (“hope the body will be marked so we will receive the right person”); Alexander, John, October 16, 1918 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS in Europe (“make sure grave is marked distinctly”); Anton, George, February 24, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; Atkinson, Henry, November 27, 1918 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; Baker, William, 1919(? letter from third party (undertaker) to Army Adjutant General (parents “want me to go to France, take a photo, and put a marker up”); Carpenter, Oates, March 25, 1919 letter from mother to GRS in Europe; David, John, June 29, 1921 letter from father to Wynne of Army Quartermaster General (“I am pleased to note that you will have the inscription on the cross marking the grave changed to agree with the records of your office”); Davis, Robert, April 21, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; Henry, Clifford, December 20, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (“Only those who have given an only child to their country can appreciate the feelings of parents who’s son’s grave has been for over a year marked with a wrong name.”); Scarborough, Clarence, December 5, 1919 letter from mother to Wynne of GRS (Cemeterial Division); Stevenson, Alfred, February 24, 1920 letter from father to GRS (Cemeterial Division) (“fact of the name being spelling wrong may cause considerable confusion at some later date”); Watts, Nealy, April 9, 1921 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to widow; Wiseman, Charles, December 4, 1920 letter from mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division; Young, Chauncy, June 7, 1921 letter from mother to GRS (Cemeterial Division). Elsworth, Edward, April 8, 1920 letter from brother to Pierce of “Graves Resignation Service” (Cemeterial Division).
bodies if the name is not spelled right.”

James Bolin’s widow wanted his grave correctly marked so that there would be no mistake when the body was returned to her:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dec 5 1918</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General March:</td>
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</table>
| My kind sir as I've saw in the papers you are one of the honest hearted solders that are going to see that the dead soldiers are brought back to their homes for burial from over the sea. I am a heart broken widow of the last two months[.] My husband sailed for France the later part of Sept. and he died with Broncho Pnuomonia October the sixteenth 1918. He was stations in this Co. This is his name and address: Private James C. Bolin, Company K. 121 Infantry, 31 Division, American Expeditionary Forces. He was stationed at Camp Hills New York before he sailed. Will you please see that his body is sent home among the first of the dead if there is no other time to bring him home. Please see about his grave that it is marked safe enough to be no mistake when it gets home as my life is not long and I want him home. Oh honest dear General please be so kind as to let me hear from you soon as it is possible he’s been dead such a short time it may be possible to look on his face when he reaches the U.S.A. soil but I will trust in God and your kind heart to get him home sooner or later.

With respect to you I will close. I remain a true American mother and wife. Please answer. This is my address.

Mrs. Nellie Bolin
Long Point
Illinois

Even though Bolin’s widow hoped that his body would be returned to her while it was still recognizable, she wanted the grave “marked safe enough to be no mistake when it gets home,” suggesting that she thought that mistakes might be prevented if the grave was properly marked.

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701 Johnston, George, April 17, 1920 letter from sister to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division).
702 Bolin, James, December 5, 1918 letter from widow to Army Chief of Staff.
Families also worried when they received inconsistent information about grave numbers or grave locations. Receiving different grave numbers caused Joseph Healy’s to question whether the War Department actually knew where his son was buried:

Furnace, Mass, Nov. 15, 21  
Quartermaster General  
Washington, D.C.  

Dear Sir,  

Owing to a discrepancy in the number of the grave of my son, Pvt. Joseph Aloysius Healy, Ser. No. 366455, Co. C, 104th Field Signal Bn., 29th Div. A.E.F., (File No. 293.8 Cem. #29869 Cty. 1502 Sht. 6) buried in the French Civilian Cemetery at Brienne le Chateay, Aube, France, credited at the Washington office as occupying Grave #1 and at Paris as #93—I would like to inquire the name, nationality, organization, and home address of the occupant of Grave #93 (or vice versa) (if Priv. Healy occupies Grave #93) and, if disinterred, where said body was sent? Kindly advise me further as to the number of the section, plot, etc. of my son’s grave for future reference. I am willing to go France, before my son’s remains are forwarded to the United States to establish his identity that there may be no mistake in the shipment.

Thank you.  
Very respectfully yours,  
(Judge) Dennis Healy

After the Department sent him two different locations for his son’s grave, Healy’s father asked dryly for “the name, nationality, organization, and home address of the occupant of Grave #93 (or vice versa)” to emphasize that he could not be sure which grave his son’s body occupied and that he did not want the occupant of the other grave sent to him by mistake. Questions like these sometimes resulted from administrative mistakes such as typographical errors in correspondence, but confusion about grave numbers was also

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703 Bush, Harry, March 25, 1921 letter from mother to GRS at Hoboken; Clark, Carl, March 16, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to mother; Forrest, Harry, August 12, 1920 letter from brother to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division); Healy, Joseph, December 22, 1921 GRS in Europe memo Army Quartermaster General; McCarthy, Frank, June 7, 1920 memo from investigator; Muir, Russell, May 12, 1921 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to father; Scarborough, Clarence, December 5, 1919 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division); Taylor, William, May 7, 1920 letter from sister to Army Adjutant General; Weaver, Rosser, June 5, 1920 letter from sister to Army Quartermaster General.

704 Healy, Joseph, November 15, 1921 letter from father to Army Quartermaster General.
attributable to the GRS’s efforts to concentrate the dead. Bodies were sometimes transferred from isolated graves to temporary cemeteries and then often moved again, sometimes several times, before they were returned to the United States or buried in permanent overseas cemeteries. The press explained that the dead were being moved, but many families were still upset to find that bodies had been moved without them being informed.705 Newell Fiske’s father found out from a “French lady” who was caring for Fiske’s grave that his son’s body had been moved, and he wrote his senator to state his opinion that “our Government should keep the parents of those boys, who made the ‘supreme sacrifice,’ informed of the final resting place of their sons”; the senator forwarded the letter to the Army Adjutant General’s office, which replied that one reason that Fiske’s father had not been kept informed was that the records of the GRS had only recently arrived from France.706 Some families feared that moving the dead meant that their request to have a body returned had been overlooked.707 Other families were clearly

705 Adams, John E., January 11, 1920 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; Brandt, Henry, November 25, 1919 letter from father to Pierce of Cemeterial Division; Byrd, George, January 10, 1920 letter from father to GRS in Europe; Conk, Joseph, November 20, 1919 letter from mother to GRS (Cemeterial Division); Forbush, Robert, May 20, 1920 letter from father to Cemeterial Division (“very sorry to hear that the body of our son will have to be moved. It seems almost a sacrilege to do so, but I suppose there is nothing we can do in the matter”); George, Edwards, September 18, 1922 letter from third party to GRS in Europe; Hornsby, Luther, February 7, 1920 letter from father to Pierce of Cemeterial Division; Kinsella, Raymond, January 27, 1920 letter from father to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division); Long, George, March 15, 1920 letter from Wynne for Piece of Cemeterial Division to mother; O’Neill, Arthur, August 1919 letter from mother to GRS in Europe; Spoor, Millard, December 6, 1919 letter from father to Pierce of Cemeterial Division.

706 Fiske, Newell, November 28, 1919 letter from father to member of United States Senate; Fiske, Newell, December 5, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to member of United States Senate (answering letter from father that senator had forwarded for reply).

707 Ackley, George, February 11, 1922 letter from mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division; Conk, Joseph, November 20, 1919 letter from mother to GRS (Cemeterial Division); Hornsby, Luther, February 7, 1920 letter from father to Pierce of Cemeterial Division.
suspicious that the Department was trying to make it harder to return the dead. Edwin Bennett’s mother questioned why her son’s body had been repeatedly moved:

Sherwood, Michigan  
February 7th, 1920

Chief of Graves Registration Service, Quartermaster Corps, Washington, D.C.

In re File your number 13069 Musician 3rd Class Edwin R. Bennett No. 556034 HDQ Co. 39th Inf.

Dear Sir:

Your notice of re-burial of above soldier on Form No. 107 just received. This is the third time his remains have been disinterred and been re-buried.

We have requested that they be returned to this country and the frequent reburials there give a suspicion that it may not be intended that his remains be brought back.

Will you not see that the records show our desire properly and that his remains be returned?

Yours truly,

Mrs. Leslie Bennett

Edwin Bennett’s mother politely expressed her view that “the frequent reburials [overseas] give a suspicion that it may not be intended that his remains be brought back.” Henry Brandt’s father more forcefully stated his suspicions that the Department was moving the dead to avoid having to return them:

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708 Bolton, John, June 21, 1920 letter from mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division; Brandt, Henry, November 25, 1919 letter from father to Pierce of Cemeterial Division; Buchman, Stanley, February 16, 1920 letter from sister to GRS (Cemeterial Division); Cooper, George, February 6, 1920 letter from parent to War Department; Dashiell, Joseph, 1920(?) letter from father to GRS (Cemeterial Division); Duty, Dan, January 24, 1920 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; Eadie, James, December 6, 1919 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division); Edwards, Frederick, October 7, 1919 letter from father to War Department; Price, James, May 12, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Venters, Leslie, January 16, 1920 letter from mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division.

709 Bennett, Edwin, February 7, 1920 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division).
Altoona, Pa., November 25, 1919

Charles C. Pierce
Washington D.C.

My Dear Sir:

Your letter of November 17th came to hand and I was very much surprised and disappointed to learn that my son’s body, Corporal Henry U. Brandt, Co. G, 110th Infantry, has been moved from the cemetery at Courmont to the American Cemetery, Seringes-et-Nesles, Department of Aisne, Grave 10, Section D., Plot 1. When we were promised that the bodies of our boys were to be sent home I cannot understand why they should be disinterred and reburied in France. Does this mean that these bodies are never to be returned to America? If it is then the Government has simply broken faith with the parents of the boys who died in France.

Again I cannot understand why it is when my son’s body was moved that I was not notified to that effect. I was under the impression all along that his body was still buried at Courmont and had I not written to your Bureau a week or so ago I would still be under that impression. It seems to me it is as little as you could have done to notify me of the reburial of his body. I wish you would kindly write me the date on which his body was moved so that I may have a complete record of its disposition.

While it looks as if the War Department does not intend to return the bodies to their friends I shall with thousands of others who have boys buried in France continue to fight until Congress passes a law compelling the War Department to redeem its promises to the people who have given their boys as a sacrifice in this great war. I must say and I am expressing the opinion of a great many others that I do not feel that we are getting a square deal, at least, I shall feel that way until I have [a] more explicit explanation of the conduct of the War Department in the disposition of the bodies of our dead.

Hoping you will give me more information and also tell me when my son’s body was moved, I am

Yours sincerely,

C.H. Brandt

Brandt’s father was aware of Secretary of War Baker’s assurances that the dead would be returned, but he also knew that Department officials had expressed a preference for leaving the dead buried permanently in France, and he felt that the movement of his son’s body suggested that “the War Department does not intend to return the bodies.” Brandt’s father warned that he would address his concerns to Congress and ask for legislation to compel the Department to return the dead if necessary.

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710 Brandt, Henry, November 25, 1919 letter from father to Pierce of Cemeterial Division.
Some of the most frustrating problems for both families and the Cemeterial Division occurred when families believed they knew a soldier’s serial number, and the information they had did not match something sent to them by the government. Families were sometimes confused by the numerous identifying numbers that men had received in the process of being drafted, inducted, and insured. Kenneth Counter’s foster mother thought the government had her son’s serial number wrong:

711 Brewer, John, September 11, 1921 letter from mother to GRS at Hoboken; Brown, Vivus, April 9, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Browne, George, April 7, 1921 letter from brother to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division); Clark, Carl, March 2, 1920 letter from mother to War Department; Cox, James, July 15, 1920 letter from father to War Department (“to my horror I find you have the no. of his grave wrong”); Delaney, John, November 19, 1919 letter from mother to Wynne of GRS (Cemeterial Division); Duggar, John, January 5, 1922 letter from father to GRS at Brooklyn (expressing concern about serial number because father “would like very much to have the body of my son. But under no circumstances do I want the body of another there in lieu of my son”); Fodness, Theodore, April 23 1919 letter from brother to Army Adjutant General; Forrest, Harry, August 12, 1920 letter from brother to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division) (“mix-up in the bodies would be a most regrettable thing”); Horner, Howard, April 7, 1919 letter from family to Army Adjutant General; Jones, Richard, July 22, 1921 memo from Harbold of GRS in Europe to Army Quartermaster General; Squire, Yale, March 31, 1919 letter from Red Cross on behalf of mother to GRS in Europe; Tully, Daniel, July 24, 1921 letter from mother to Shannon of GRS at Hoboken.

712 Charles, Morris, February 8, 1921 letter from Butler for Shannon of GRS at Hoboken to father; Creekmur, Ira, December 23, 1919 letter from father to War Department; Delaney, John, November 25, 1919 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to mother; Healy, Joseph, December 22, 1921 memo from GRS in Europe to Army Quartermaster General; Ludwig, Charles, February 14, 1920 letter from parents to Pierce of Cemeterial Division; Malarkey, Gerald, July 14, 1921 letter from father to Shannon of GRS at Hoboken; Thurston, Edgar, August 23, 1921 telegram from father to GRS at Hoboken; Tully, Daniel, July 24, 1921 letter from mother to Shannon of GRS at Hoboken; Woodbury, Robert, April 24, 1920 letter from father to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division).
Alden Minn.
Oct. 15th 1920

R.E. Shannon
Capt. Q.M. Corps
Officer in charge

Dear Sir:-

In reply to your request that we state whether or not the late Kenneth E. Counter left a widow or children we will say that we have repeatedly filled out blanks to the contrary. Kenneth E. Counter was unmarried and leaves neither wife or child.

The serial No. given in your communication is ALL WRONG. You give the No. 274706 THAT IS NOT HIS NUMBER. Kenneth E. Counter was a member of CO. I. 127 Inf. with Cerial No. 18440.

Mrs. J.H. Powers
Alden, Minn 713

Counter’s foster mother was positive that her information was correct and emphatic that the number on the forms she had been sent was “NOT HIS NUMBER.” She was ultimately persuaded by the Cemeterial Division reply that “[t]he number 18440 is the serial number of a soldier in the regular army prior to the late war, and any person joining the temporary army would be given a serial number higher than 18440. No doubt you have confused the Claim insurance number of the late soldier with that of the serial number.” 714 Russell Bolley’s father questioned the serial number listed for his son and ultimately asked that his son’s body be returned to Arlington National Cemetery instead.

713 Counter, Kenneth, October 15, 1920 letter from foster mother to Shannon of Army Quartermaster Corps (Cemeterial Division).
714 Counter, Kenneth, November 8, 1920 letter from Shannon of Army Quartermaster Corps (Cemeterial Division) to foster mother; Counter, Kenneth, November 18, 1920 letter from foster mother to Shannon of GRS at Hoboken.
of to the family because “I do not think we would be satisfied as we would always doubt as to whether it really would be our sons remains or not.”

The Cemeterial Division and the GRS in Europe sometimes discovered omissions or errors on forms or grave markers, but the Division insisted that the GRS’s burial records were accurate even if other details were not. Charles Pierce of the Division reassured a member of the United States House of Representatives who wrote on behalf of a constituent that the government’s records of the dead were clear:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>October 17, 1919</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Hon. Champ Clark,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. House of Representatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My dear Mr. Clark:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replying to your letter of October 9th, which has been referred to this office by the Adjutant General, I beg to say, in relation to the case of Corporal Stuart Carkener, that the records of the Graves Registration Service agree perfectly with the spelling of the name as given in the letter of Colonel Buffum, which you have enclosed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are this date sending instructions to our office in France to investigate the matter, and make such corrections in the inscription on the grave marker as will conform to the records.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is much regretted that there should have been any difficulty in relation to this matter, but inasmuch as the Quartermaster General’s Office is still meeting with certain difficulties in relation to necessary corrections in inscriptions on the monuments of Veterans of the Civil War, who are buried in National Cemeteries in the United States, it is hardly surprising that we should not yet have worked out to perfection all the various notations that have to be made in connection with the death of a soldier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are hoping, however, to live long enough to make some appreciable approach towards perfect accuracy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A letter of notification concerning the original grave location of this young soldier was sent by my office in France to the father of the deceased under date of October 26th 1918.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very sincerely yours,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles C. Pierce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonel, Q.M.C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief, Graves Registration Service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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715 Bolley, Russell, June 2, 1921 letter from father to Cemeterial Division.
Pierce reminded the congressman that the process of correctly marking the graves of the dead was difficult, noting that “inasmuch as the Quartermaster General’s Office is still meeting with certain difficulties in relation to necessary corrections in inscriptions on the monuments of Veterans of the Civil War, who are buried in National Cemeteries in the United States, it is hardly surprising that we should not yet have worked out to perfection all the various notations that have to be made in connection with the death of a soldier.” Pierce’s point, however, was that the records of the GRS were clear even where, as in this case, the marker was incorrect, and thus errors in identification were unlikely.

Many families were sufficiently concerned about the possibility of mistakes that they asked whether they would be allowed to view bodies in order to decide whether they had received the correct body. To evaluate whether remains would be recognizable if they were returned, some families asked for additional details about how the dead had been buried. During the war, the government-published *Official Bulletin* had

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716 Carkener, Stuart, October 17, 1919 letter from Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division) to member of United States House of Representatives on behalf of family.
717 Bandel, Edgar, March 31, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (want to open casket because “I could not bear the thought of having some other body”); Brown, Francis, April 28(?), 1919 letter from mother to GRS in Europe (“if his body is sent home in a few months can his coffin be opened and his body viewed for identification”); Buckley, John, November 1, 1918 letter from mother to Secretary of War; Deller, John, April 2, 1919 letter from sister to Army Adjutant General; Delmonico, Antony, March 20, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; Johnston, Frank, March 27, 1919 letter from widow to Army Adjutant General; Michael, Austin, April 20, 1921 letter from mother to GRS (Cemeterial Division); Prins, Peter, May 7, 1920 GRS (Cemeterial Division) form (note from family says “we would like to view the remains when it arrives so no error creeps in if that is possible”); Williams, Frank, February 24, 1920 letter from mother to War Department.
718 Adams, David, August 23, 1919 letter from sister to General Pershing of AEF; Adkins, Frank, February 15(?), 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; Cameron, Gilbert, April 7, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother; Carr, Owren, February 27, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“I have been told that the soldiers boys are buried in rubber sacks”); Danielson, Melvin, February 18, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Elworthy, Henry, February 9, 1919 letter from father to War Department (“you can probably enter into a mother’s feelings particularly when she is aware of the form of burial of a soldier (that is to say no coffin or casket enclosing his remains)”); Gunger, Laurence, March 30,
reproduced a letter that the Army Quartermaster General had written to a member of the
House of Representatives to rebut reports that the war dead were stripped of their
uniforms before burial. After the war, the Cemeterial Division admitted to families
that some of the dead had initially been buried in blankets or sheets but assured families
that bodies were being put in coffins as the dead were recovered. Families were upset
to hear about informal burial practices. Lawrence Cooper’s mother wrote that “if I get

719 “Soldiers Buried in Action Buried in Their Uniforms,” Official Bulletin, April 9, 1918, 3. The Official Bulletin, later known as the Official U.S. Bulletin, was published from 1917 to 1919 by the Committee on Public Information (CPI). The CPI was created by Woodrow Wilson’s executive order soon after the United States entered the war and was led by George Creel, a supporter of the Wilson Administration. The Official Bulletin was intended to be the official source of information about the actions of the federal government. Unlike the modern Federal Register, however, the Official Bulletin acted as a source of general news and clearly reflected the editorial viewpoint of the Wilson Administration. The Official Bulletin was distributed to post offices for posting, to newspapers and magazines, to federal agencies, to United States diplomatic posts overseas, and to some private subscribers. At its height, the Official Bulletin published 118,000 copies per day. Robert A. Emery, “The Official Bulletin, 1917-1919: A Proto-Federal Register,” Law Library Journal, Vol. 102:3, 2010, 441-448; Brett Gary, The Nervous Liberals: Propaganda Anxieties from World War I to the Cold War (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1999), 18.

720 Allen, Charles, January 18, 1920 letter from mother to Secretary of War; Clifford, Leonard, June 7, 1919 letter from Pierce of GRS to mother; Horn, Sherman, March 26, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to mother; Nabb, Malvern, March 26, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother.

721 Aasgaard, Almer, January 13, 1920 letter from mother to War Department (“it don’t seem possible that you can take their bodies up again after being buried a couple of years wrapped only in a blanket and identify them so as to get the right body sent to each address”); Clark, Herbert, July 3, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (“we understand if the body was buried where or near where it fell and no other covering except a blanket or flag, no chance for any casket of any kind”); Crumley, Ulmont, February 27, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to third party (practice of embalming not yet initiated in the AEF when soldier died in street car accident in May of 1919).
things rite they are buried just about where they fall on the battle ground wrap in a piece of burlap then the dirt piled on them. O my dear friend that the way i burry my pet dogs and cats when they did. O this horable wicked war. Think how our brave boys gave their lives for you and me than to be dumped in a hole."722

Many families understood that the bodies of the dead would decay with time and challenged the War Department to ensure that the dead were in coffins they believed would retard deterioration or that could be marked in ways that families could later verify.723 William Fields’s father asked whether his son’s body could be put in a coffin after he read that the dead might not be returned for three years: “Now general you know and I know and the world knows that in three years time thire will be no bodys thire to bring home as my son was put in a blanket or something of the kind and put a way.”724

722 Cooper, Lawrence, March 4, 1919 letter from mother to War Department.  
723 Austin, Enoch, November 29, 1920 letter from mother to War Department (“I realized I cant see it in fact I would only receive a box of dust”); Bates, Harold, September 2, 1919, letter from mother to War Department (“it would not be any consolation to let him lay there till there was nothing to send home”); Berg, Robert, August 30, 1920 letter from sister to Cemeterial Division (“will it be possible to see the body upon its return for purpose of identification or is the body in such a condition that it is not recognizable”); Bourgue, Telesphore, April 15(?), 1920 letter from father to War Department (“if his body is not too decayed I will be able to recognize him”); Clifford, Leonard, January 2, 1919 letter from mother to GRS in Europe (“if my son is really dead I wish to get him back home before he is very bad decayed”); Ellis, Roy, November 18, 1919 letter from parent to War Department (“let us have them while there is something to bring home”); Fields, William, September 10, 1919 letter from father to General Pershing; Gallagher, John, January 21, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“I do not want to be stalled on this from time to time until my boy’s body is in such condition that it will be impossible to bring it back. I want it while it is fresh.”); Gullickson, Nelson, March 13, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Nabb, Malvern, November 25, 1918 letter from parent to War Department; Oberto, Dominick, December 2, 1920 letter from mother to War Department (“I realize in what conditions my son’s body is in after being buried for almost three years”); Weeks, Francis, July 20, 1921 letter from mother to Cemeterial Division.  
724 Fields, William, September 13(?), 1919 letter from father to Adjutant General.
Clarence Fry’s father wrote that “the proper place to guard against mistakes is in exhuming the body and properly marking the coffin.”

Other families questioned why the War Department could not arrange for bodies to be preserved through embalming. Eugene Kibbler’s mother asked whether she would be able to identify her son’s remains:

Jan the 21 1921

Dear Sir

We rec. a letter telling that we should fill out and then you would send our sons body home that served in war. He should of died of wounds in a hospital in 1918. Now can’t you fix some way so I can see him so I can look at him just enough so I can see if it is my boy they can tell and all of that. Their was so much mistakes made and I will be satisfied if you make a way so I can look at him I can indentify some thing so if possible do fix a way. Honor me that much. I know the bodies haint like they would be if they got sick and died here at home. Do what you can for me, please. I haint got no rest and if I knowed and seen for my self it is my boy I can feel satisfied. Now ans at once, my boys name was Eugene A. Kibbler, Pvt. 316 Inf. 79 Division. Tag No. was 1808872.

My address is Mary Kibbler, Noxen Pa., R.F.D. No. 1

Kibbler’s mother wanted the Department to “fix some way so I can see him so I can look at him just enough so I can see if it is my boy,” though she knew that “the bodies haint like they would be if they got sick and died here at home.” She thought seeing her son’s body would help her cope with her grief, but she was also concerned about receiving the wrong body. John Crawn’s asked if her son’s body could be returned to her quickly so that she could have it preserved, since she knew the war dead had not been embalmed:

725 Fry, Clarence, December 31, 1919 letter from father to United States Senator.
726 Barrett, John, November 29, 1920 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Galbraith, John, January 1, 1919 letter from mother to wife of Secretary of Treasury McAdoo; Posey, Otho, May 6, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; Walker, Lester, March 6, 1919 letter from attorney on behalf of mother to Army Adjutant General.
727 Kibbler, Eugene, January 21, 1921 letter from mother to War Department.
January 20, 1919
Towanda, PA

Dear Sir

Referring to your letter dated the 13th of Jan. why is it they dont embalm the body of the dead soldier there as well as in this country? [B]ecaus it dont give their parent any chance of seeing them for the last time. We never have seen him since he left for Camp Meade the 23 day of May 1918. And we would like to have the chance of seeing him for the last time. There would not be so much risk to run if he could be sent right away for we have him taken to some undertaker establishment where there would be poison fluid around so there would be no danger. If any danger we will run our own risk if we can only see him. We understand that they are buried in just a blanket. If that's so we will surely want him buried in a shroud. [W]ould like to be informed about 2 week before [the body will arrive] so I can prepare to meet the body at New York. The reason that we want to open the casket is this we dont want to go to any great expence and not know that its my boy. And the mistake can be easly made as the Gov. has made lots of mistakes in reporting the death of our soldiers. Hoping to have a quick reply from you.

Sincerely
Mrs. Louise Crawn
200 Lombard St.
Towanda Pa

Crawn’s mother knew that her son had died of disease and that there might be a risk of contagion if the coffin were opened, but she felt that “[t]here would not be so much risk to run if he could be sent right away for we have him taken to some undertaker establishment where there would be poison fluid around so there would be no danger,” and, in any event, the possibility of exposure to disease was a risk she was willing to take to look at the body she received and verify its identity. The Army Adjutant General replied to her that “[y]ou can readily understand that, during time of battle, it is absolutely impossible to embalm bodies, and it is not deemed advisable to disinter the bodies at this time for embalming purposes.”

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728 Crawn, John, January 20, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Crawn, John, March 3, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General.
729 Crawn, John, January 23, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother.
The War Department consistently tried to discourage families from viewing bodies. The Department first sought to persuade families that it was impossible for the dead to be misidentified, because the GRS was being careful to ensure that the bodies of the dead were properly identified and their grave locations correctly marked and recorded. In its first mailing to families in early 1919, the Army Adjutant General assured families that “[o]rganizations have been formed, known as Grave Registration Units, whose duty it is to look after burials, care of the Cemeteries, and the preservation of identification records, so that there will be no question as to identity.” Soon after, the Adjutant General assured James Price’s mother that careful records were being kept:

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730 Alexander, James, March 18, 1919 letter from Lemly for Army Quartermaster General to father; Bandel, Edgar, April 4, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to father (“taking care to safeguard identity”); DiAngelo, James, September 4, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother (“every precaution has been taken to safeguard the identity”); Foster, Louie, October 20, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother (“every precaution has been taken to safeguard identity”); Horton, Reuben, May 29, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to father (“every precaution has been taken to safeguard the identity of the deceased soldiers”); Swan, William, May 16, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother (“every precaution has been taken to safeguard the identity of the deceased soldiers”); Wurzbach, Oscar, October 14, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to sister (“every precaution has been taken to safeguard the identity”).

731 Benedetti, Nickolas, January 27, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother (enclosing January 24, 1919 Army Adjutant General Memorandum of Information for families); Frick, William, March 25, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to father.
May 20, 1919

Mrs. Fremont B. Price
Crown Point, Ind.

Dear Madam:

In response to your letter of May 12th, relative to the return of the body of your son, Pvt. James I. Price, Co. H, 307th Inf., I beg leave to advise you that it will be the policy of the Department to return the bodies of our deceased soldiers if so desired by the relatives. Your card, stating your wishes in the matter, has been filed in this office for reference when the time arrives for the transfer of the bodies. As it will no doubt be some time before the bodies can be removed to this country, owing to problems of transportation, etc., the American and French organizations abroad are taking good care of the graves and records of our dead heroes, to show our appreciation of their great sacrifice and also so that no mistake will be made when the bodies are transferred. The letter you enclosed is returned herewith.

I desire to take this opportunity to extend to you and your family the deep sympathy of the Department on account of the loss you have suffered, and to commend you for the sacrifice and contribution made to the cause for which your son so nobly gave his life.

Very sincerely,

The Adjutant General

The Adjutant General wrote that tending the graves of the dead was important “to show our appreciation of their great sacrifice and also so that no mistake will be made when the bodies are transferred,” indicating that the military understood how much families were already concerned about mistakes. The Adjutant General similarly wrote Frederick Bauer’s mother that she would not get the remains of anyone but her son:

732 Price, James, May 20, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother.
March 25th, 1919

Mrs. Sophia M. Bauer
3331 N. 19th St.

Dear Madam:

Referring to your letter of recent date, relative to the identification of the body of your son, I beg to advise you that every precaution has been taken that there may be no doubt in the identification of any soldier. One identification tag is buried with the body of the soldier, and the other is fastened to the marker on the grave. You may rest assured that the body returned to you will be that of your son.

Very respectfully,
The Adjutant General 733

Bauer’s mother would not have to decide whether she believed that there was “no doubt in the identification of any soldier,” because Bauer’s body was never identified.734

The Army Adjutant General and the Cemeterial Division vaguely suggested to families who inquired about viewing the dead that local health authorities would likely prevent families from opening coffins or that it would “not be permissible” to open coffins.735 In August of 1919, Harry Aldren’s father wrote the Adjutant General that he wanted his son’s body returned to him but warned that he expected “proof positive as to the identity of the remains will also be required by the survivors of the deceased, even to

733 Bauer, Frederick, March 25, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother.
734 Bauer, Frederick, January 19, 1920 letter from mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division; Bauer, Frederick, January 24, 1920 letter from Pierce of Cemeterial Division to mother; American Battle Monuments Commission, available from <https://www.abmc.gov/>; Internet; accessed 31 December 2015.
735 Bryce, John, September 12, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to sister; Cobb, Oakley, April 23, 1919 letter from Graves Registration Service to father; Dobbs, Edmond, August 3, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to mother; Dominy, Dan, October 9, 1919 letter Army Adjutant General to mother; Emmert, Edgar, June 13, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to widow; Foster, Louie, October 20, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother; Lukish, Michael, October 25, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother; Rains, John, April 29, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to family.
the opening of casket and viewing the remains.”736 The Adjutant General’s office replied that “[w]hile the Department is not advised as to individual cases, it is reasonable to assume, owing to the time that must necessarily elapse, and the circumstances connected with the whole situation, that it will not be permissible to open caskets after their arrival in this country.”737 After the Division assumed responsibility for communicating with families, Division staff admitted that nothing would legally prevent families from opening coffins but continued to try to convince families that it would be impossible to identify bodies and distressing to try.738 The Division was blunt with John Crawn’s family, writing that “it must be borne in mind that over twenty months have elapsed since the death of Private Crawn and the remains cannot now present other than a gruesome

736 Aldren, Harry, August 13, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General.
737 Aldren, Harry, August 25, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to father.
738 Barker, Alvis, April 29, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to mother (“since over a year has elapsed it will be impossible to in any way recognize the remains”); Barnes, John, January 21, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to father (“the remains of our soldier dead, in most cases, have been buried for over two years and recognition of their features would no doubt be impossible”); Barr, Chauncey, June 19, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to father (“during the year of 1918 it was impossible to embalm the bodies of our soldier dead and they were buried in their natural state,” so “it is, therefore, not believed that recognition would be possible”); Brindle, John, April 23, 1919 letter from GRS to mother (“as you know, it would not be possible to recognize the faces of bodies buried some time in the USA and conditions in this respect are the same over here”); De Bella, Vincent, September 20, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to sister (“the remains of your brother have been buried approximately three years and recognition of the features would no doubt be impossible”); Jonas, Adolph, March 4, 1919 letter from Army Quartermaster general to parents (“owing to the disintegrated state of the remains of our American soldiers it will be impracticable to view the remains upon their arrival in this country”); Michael, Austin, July 13, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to mother (“it must be remembered that the remains of our soldiers killed in the late war have now been buried nearly three years and recognition of the features would be practically impossible”). Even as the Adjutant General was telling families that local health authorities would prevent coffins from being opened, the Quartermaster Corps was assuring at least one parent early in the process that “no reason is known why the casket cannot be opened upon its arrival in the United States.” Better, William, February 17, 1919 letter from Lemly of Quartermaster Corps to mother.
sight.”739 The Division similarly wrote Thomas Backhouse’s mother in 1920 that his body would “be badly decomposed and beyond recognition” when it was returned.740

Decay was not the only issue that worried military officials when families asked about opening coffins. Officials feared that families would confront the damage done to human beings by mechanized warfare or be upset to discover that coffins sometimes included only partial remains. Officials likely feared a political backlash related to the military’s inability to return the bodies of the American war dead to their families intact.741 The Army Adjutant General replied to one member of Congress, who had written on behalf of a constituent, that “insistence by relatives upon opening the caskets and viewing the remains would result in most distressing scenes in view of the fact that the bodies will be in a badly decomposed state and in many cases badly mutilated.”742 The Adjutant General explained to Chambers Bunting’s family that “the engines of destruction in modern war are so powerful that mutilations and dismemberment were frequent.”743 (Perhaps the Adjutant General thought Bunting’s family would understand these concerns because the GRS had earlier informed them that its records showed that Bunting had been killed instantly “by shell fire, a large calibre shell making a direct hit on the ‘pill box’ occupied by him and a number of others,” that his remains had been found and buried, that his grave had then been hit by another shell, and that his body had

739 Crawn, John, June 11, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to mother.
740 Backhouse, Thomas, February 18, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to mother.
743 Bunting, Chambers, September 18, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to father.
been missing for several months until his second grave was discovered.744) Officials tried to be clear but circumspect about the condition of bodies, to avoid adding to a family’s grief and to deter them from viewing bodies that had been torn apart by war and perhaps questioning the government that had sent men into such harsh conditions.

Families negotiated for assurances that the War Department would remedy any mistakes that were made. Jabez Draper’s father wrote the Cemeterial Division to ask what would happen if he rejected the identification of the remains he received:

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Clearfield, Utah
April 17th, 1920

Quartermaster General
Attention Cemeterial Branch
War Department
Washington DC

Dear Sir:

I have read in the papers that the United States Government is beginning to return the bodies of those who died in the service, to their homes. About a year ago I, the father of Private Jabez M. Draper, Company D 26th Infantry 1st. division, officially reported killed in action July 21st., 1918, ordered your branch of the service to return the remains of said deceased soldier to his home.

In reconsidering the matter I have been wondering if there would be any positive way to identify the remains. Would we be allowed to open the casket? And in case we should satisfy ourselves that it was not his body, what could we then do with the corpse?

I would much rather my son rest up on the soil of France where he fell, or be brought to a Government Cemetery in the United States than to be sent by mistake to some other home and some other soldier’s body sent here.

Kindly answer the above questions and oblige an anxious father. Thanking you in advance I am Yours Truly,

George H. Draper
Clearfield, Utah745
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744 Bunting, Chambers, January 29, 1919 letter from Pierce of GRS in Europe to father.
745 Draper, Jabez, April 17, 1920 letter from father to Cemeterial Division.
Draper’s father wrote that he would rather leave the body identified as his son’s in France or have it returned to a national cemetery than for it “to be sent by mistake to some other home and some other soldier’s body sent here,” but he also wanted to know what the Division would do if his family “should satisfy ourselves that it was not his body.” In its reply, the Division agreed to retake custody of the body if he rejected the identification but cautioned him against opening his son’s coffin:

April 24, 1920

From: Quartermaster General, U.S. Army, Cemeterial Division
To: Mr. George H. Draper, Clearfield, Utah
Subject: Remains of Pvt. Jabez M. Draper

1. Referring to your inquiry of April 17, 1920, you are advised that the matter of opening caskets after delivery to relatives is one over which this office does not attempt to exercise supervision. If any attempt were to be made to give advice it would be to urge against the casket being opened in view of the condition of the remains after the length of time they have been buried and the resulting distress, not because of any question of identity.

2. Should you not be satisfied that the remains delivered to you are those of your son, this office would, at your request, resume charge of them and bury them in a national cemetery. There is, however, nothing in the report of the Graves Registration Service officer on file in this office to indicate any question of identity of the remains in this case.

By authority of the Quartermaster General:
 Charles C. Pierce
 Colonel, U.S. Army
 Chief, Cemeterial Division

By E.E. Davis
 Executive Assistant

Rather than suggesting that some local authority would bar families from opening coffins, the Division simply suggested that the process was likely to result in “distress.”

Draper, Jabez, April 24, 1920 letter from Davis for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to father.
“It was not my boy. It was only a few bones and dirt of some one that was killed on the battle field”: Some Families View the Returned Dead

Despite the advice of the Army Adjutant General and the Cemeterial Division, many skeptical families examined the bodies they received. In March of 1921, Willard Webster’s mother brought dental charts to the port at Hoboken where the ships offloaded the dead and asked that the coffin said to contain her son’s body be opened.747 After conducting an examination, she “expressed herself as being satisfied that the remains examined were those of her son.”748 Even Army Adjutant General P.C. Harris and his wife came to Hoboken in August of 1921 and reviewed the paperwork associated with the body said to be that of their son, Charles.749 General Harris “stated that he was not satisfied with the identification,” so the coffin was opened, and Harris and his wife examined the remains.750 Based on markings on clothing and items that had been left on the body, Harris and his wife accepted the identification.751

At least a few families who opened the coffins they received wrote the Department to express their satisfaction with the result. Edward Bowman’s father wrote to thank the Department for the care his son’s body had been given:

747 Webster, Willard, March 21, 1921 memo from Butler of Cemeterial Division.
748 Webster, Willard, March 21, 1921 memo from Butler of Cemeterial Division.
749 Harris, Charles, August 8, 1921 memo from Butler of Cemeterial Division to Penrose of Cemeterial Division.
750 Harris, Charles, August 8, 1921 memo from Butler of Cemeterial Division to Penrose of Cemeterial Division.
751 Harris, Charles, August 8, 1921 memo from Butler of Cemeterial Division to Penrose of Cemeterial Division.
Wheeling, West Virginia  
Aug. 3rd, 1921
War Department  
Office of the Quartermaster General of the Army  
Washington D.C.  
Cemeterial Division

Dear Sir

I feel that I must write to thank you for the very careful manner in which my sons body shipped from the battle fields of France. He was killed at the second battle of the Marne south of Souissons July 22nd, 1918 in the great drive that turned the tide of the germans to facing berlin instead of paris.

He was buried [by] the men of his squad that was left, they were being relieved by the brittish[.]
Was buried at the roots of a big tree one hundred yards to the right of where he fell.

He lay here until the beginning of the present year, his body arrived home july 23rd 1921, we had the casket opened after having lain where his buddies buried him for two years and nine months[.]

There was only the skeleton remained[.]
The official report said half of his head was shot away, which was undoubtedly was true for only a few pieces remained[.]

He was wrapped in a nice clean sheet and an army blanket and enclosed in a metal kasket and the outer wooden kasket[.]
More than two hundred persons saw the kasket opened[.]

It made a most profound impression on them in the way the body was cared for after what it had to endure.

Sir, would that I could write a letter to each and every person who helped to bring this about, the family and my self feel his loss very keenly but are proud [to] know he carried himself so gallantly on the field of honor[.]

Words are inadequite but the family and my self again thank you for the courtesy and great care taken in this matter of vital importance to us especialy to the mother[.]

With the greatest esteem we are
Very truly yours
S.A. Bowman  
Wheeling West Virginia  
1210 McColloch Street

Edward F. Bowman (56325) (Enlisted) M.G[,] Co. 28th Inf.  
First Division

Bowman’s father was comforted by the fact that the damage to the body was consistent with the reports of his son’s death because “the official report said half of his head was shot away, which was undoubtidly was true for only a few pieces remained,” so he had

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Bowman, Edward, August 3, 1921 letter from father to Army Quartermaster General.

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probably been concerned about whether the body of his son had been properly identified. That Bowman’s family allowed the body to be viewed by two hundred witnesses, however, suggests that the family’s primary concern was a traditional viewing of the dead. Another family invited a reporter from the local newspaper to their viewing. An article in the Watertown (New York) Daily Times reported that the family of Raymond Giles had had the coffin they received opened. Whether or not the Giles family wanted to reassure other families or just themselves about the accuracy of the Department’s efforts, their actions also created a detailed record of the care the GRS took in returning the dead. The newspaper reported that the “infinite care and pains shown in the preparation of the body and the casket which contained it made a distinct impression upon those who saw the casket opened” and that

[i]dentification was made beyond all doubt. The oak casket, lined with metal, was carefully opened. The body of the soldier was found to be wrapped in a new army blanket of regulation dimensions. The blanket was carefully pinned by large safety pins, and the manner in which it was folded and tucked in at the head and feet indicated extreme care and attention to detail which were given in the preparations for removal. The body lay upon a casket mattress, the head supposed by a silken pillow. Two mattresses or pads, extending the entire length of the casket had the double use of preventing the body from moving about in the casket during the jolting in transit, and also that of disinfectant for the pads had been saturated with disinfecting chemicals. Over all was a white silk spread, completely covering the body, blanket and mattresses. The remains were in perfect condition and relatives were impressed by the manner in which the government had provided for the return of the soldier dead in France. The excellent condition of the body and the identification tag which encircled his neck made it possible, beyond any doubt, to know that the body was that of Corporal Giles.

\[753\] Giles, Raymond, May 13, 1921 typed copy of newspaper article.
\[754\] Giles, Raymond, May 13, 1921 typed copy of newspaper article. The Cemeterial Division sent a copy of the article to the GRS Paris office to be published “for the information of all personnel on duty with this service,” presumably because the Division thought that the positive press would aid GRS morale.

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Other families wrote the War Department that they trusted the government and therefore had not opened the coffin they received. The way these families wrote the government about their decision suggests that they thought they were doing something patriotic in not viewing the dead. Arthur Allingham’s father wrote the Department official who had contacted him about where his son’s body was to be delivered to thank him and assured him that “I did not have the casket opened as I trusted that I was getting the correct remains.” Thomas Dunn’s mother similarly expressed her confidence in the government’s efforts:

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Mingo Jct Q
RD 1
Nov 2 1920

To: Quartermaster General US Army Cemeterial Division and to Bureau of War Risk Insurance

Dear Sirs

I wish to thank you and let you know I appreciate all you have done me in regards to my son Thomas C Dunn being brought home[.] Although not seeing his remains I am perfectly satisfied that I [know] I buried my son and that his remains are out in our own cemetery. Thanking you for all favor in the past

I remain your resp.

Mrs. Ella Dunn Burns
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Dunn’s mother wrote that “[a]lthough not seeing his remains I am perfectly satisfied” that she had received and buried the body of her son. Both these parents seemed to think that not viewing the body would meet with the Department’s approval.

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755 Allingham, Arthur, October 5, 1920 letter from father to Butsch of GRS at Hoboken.
756 Dunn, Thomas C., November 2, 1920 letter from mother to Cemeterial Division (and Bureau of War Risk Insurance).
Some families who did open coffins were bitterly disappointed. John Arnold’s father wrote the Cemeterial Division in December of 1920, more than two years after his son’s death, to say that he had received a set of remains but was unable to identify them:

Doniphan Mo
Dec. 6 1920

I am sending you a statement of what I was out for the burial of my boy. And it was not my boy at all[.] I didn’t open it till after I had received it. I would not have received it. It was not my boy. It was only a few bones and dirt of some one that was killed on the battle field. My boy died in the hospital with disease and was buried in the cemetery of Saint Aiguau France, and if he has ever been moved he was sent to some one else and I would like to have it looked up and see if he has ever been took up.

P.J. Arnold

Arnold’s father was submitting a request to be paid back for the expenses associated with the burial, but he did not believe that the “few bones and dirt” he had buried were those of his son. The Division did not contest Arnold’s father’s statement that the remains were in the condition he claimed but replied that the Division was willing to take the remains back and send them to a national cemetery for burial, while at the same time urging Arnold’s father to reconsider, because the records about the body were clear:

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757 Arnold, John, December 6, 1920 letter from father to Cemeterial Division.
December 21, 1920

From: The Quartermaster General, U.S. Army
To: Mr. P.J. Arnold, Doniphan, Missouri
Subject: John H. Arnold, 112124, Cook, Military Specialty Company

1. In reference to your letter of December 6, 1920, this office regrets to inform you that we cannot accept your decision that the remains delivered to you are not those of the above named soldier as final.

2. The records of this office show that [your] son died at Camp Hospital #26 at 7 p.m. on July 15, 1918 and was buried July 17, 1918, in grave #11, American Plot French Municipal Cemetery #76 B, St. Aignan. The records on this interment further show that this body was buried originally in a uniform and pine box and was so found upon disinterment. At this time identification tag was found with the body which read as follows: “John ---“Cook” 148 MG Bn. 41st Div. Rapid City, So. Dak. The records further show that your son was transferred to the Military Specialty Company as a cook from the 148th M.G. Bn. and that he enlisted at Rapid City, So. Dakota, as shown on the tag. At the time of exhumation for return there was absolutely no discrepancy between the burial as shown by the records of this office and the burial place form which this body was exhumed. It was an original burial, body never having been reburied, consequently there could be no error in location.

3. With reference to your statement that the remains delivered to you were those of ‘someone who was killed on the battle field’ you are advised that there were absolutely no burials in this cemetery of soldiers killed on the battle field, this being a cemetery where only men who died of disease were buried.

4. In view of the above facts it is requested that you reconsider your decision that this is not the body of your son. If, however, you still believe that this is the body of some other soldier, this office will exhume the remains and re-bury them in a National Cemetery upon receipt of request to that effected signed by you.

By authority of the Quartermaster General.
M.N. Greeley
Captain, Q.M Corps
Executive Office
Cemeterial Division

The Division assured Arnold’s father that, contrary to his view that the body he received must have been killed in combat, “there were absolutely no burials in [the] cemetery [where the remains were found] of soldiers killed on the battle field,” suggesting that the condition of the remains provided no grounds to suspect that the body had been

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Arnold, John, December 21, 1920 letter from Greeley of Cemeterial Division to father.
misidentified. Arnold’s father must have decided he had received all that remained of his son’s body, as there is no indication that Arnold’s body is buried in a national cemetery.

“It is not believed that mistakes can be made”: The War Department is Accused of Errors in the Return of the Dead

Some families believed that the War Department had made mistakes in its handling of their family members. Families thought that the Department had disregarded their instructions by having the dead returned to the United States after the family had requested that the body be left in Europe. Families blamed the Department for mistakes even when the family had sent conflicting instructions, but the assembled Burial Files often make it clear that families made one choice in response to the materials from the Army Adjutant General in mid-1919 but a different decision a year or two later. William Neubauer’s family initially filled out the Adjutant General’s reply card to request that his body be returned to a national cemetery in the United States. The family later requested that Neubauer’s body be left in Europe. Neubauer’s body was

759 Adams, Irving, June 29, 1921 letter from American Legion Post to Secretary of War Weeks; Foster, Clayton, October 7, 1921 letter from Penrose of Cemeterial Division to father. Edward Baker’s family wrote in 1919 that they wanted his body left in France unless it had to be moved, but by 1921, the family stated that they had never requested that the body be returned under any circumstances. Baker, Edward, October 24, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; Baker, Edward, May 10, 1921 letter from parents to GRS at Hoboken. After the Cemeterial Division explained the confusion, Baker’s father wrote that he understood how the confusion could have arisen and that since perhaps the family “should share a part” in creating confusion, “we will assume that in some way it is all for the best.” Baker, Edward, May 16, 1921 letter from Penrose of Cemeterial Division to father; Baker, Edward, May 17, 1921 letter from father to Penrose of Cemeterial Division.

760 Neubauer, William, Army Adjutant General reply card.

761 Neubauer, William, August 5, 1921 letter from Pallas for Shannon of GRS at Hoboken to father.
sent back to Arlington National Cemetery. Neubauer’s family told reporters that Neubauer’s body had been returned to the United States against their wishes. The situation received attention from members of Congress, who referred to the Neubauer situation when they wrote the Department on behalf of concerned constituents. The case became a watchword for the Cemeterial Division as it tried to ensure that the dead were only returned where families requested.

The opposite situation also occurred occasionally: families believed that bodies were left in France after they had requested that the dead be returned. Frank Bianco’s mother filled out an Adjutant General reply card asking that her son’s body be left in France but wrote again in 1921 to say that she had never requested that his body be left in France. No doubt because of the possibility of publicity associated with the situation, the Division asked that an officer and a translator go from the port at Hoboken to Brooklyn to speak to the family. The officer from Hoboken reported that Bianco’s

762 Neubauer, William, August 8, 1921 letter from father to Graves Registration Service (Cemeterial Division); Neubauer, William, August 22, 1921 form consigning remains to Arlington National Cemetery.
763 Cobbs, William, October 18, 1921 letter from Secretary of War Weeks to member of United State Senate.
764 Cobbs, William, October 18, 1921 letter from Secretary of War Weeks to member of United State Senate; Fleming, Saunders, October 12, 1921 letter from member of United State Senate to Secretary of War.
765 Adams, Henry, September 21, 1921 memo from “P.J. Rex” to “Miss Boland” of Cemeterial Division (“don’t want another Neubauer case”).
766 Bell, George, May 16, 1923 letter from Army Quartermaster General to father; Brodbeck, Ernst, October 12, 1921 letter from Army Quartermaster General to member of United States House of Representatives.
767 Bianco, Frank, Army Adjutant General reply card; Bianco, Frank, August 23, 1921 letter from mother to Army Quartermaster General.
768 Bianco, Frank, September 28, 1921 memo from Shannon of GRS at Hoboken to Cemeterial Division. The level of concern about this case may be because it occurred just after another situation that got significant attention in New York and that also involved a family living in New York who had roots in Europe. One incorrect story was even reported in the New York Times. In August 1921, the New York Times reported on its front page that the military escort accompanying the body of Silveno Bufanio to
father wanted his son’s body returned and that a “failure to return this body will result in criticism and a great deal of dissatisfaction in the Italian community of Brooklyn.”

While the concern in this case was about the impact of perceived mistakes on a particular constituency, the public relations problem was more general. The Department had told families that it would return the dead only where requested by the family, but questions about individual bodies being buried somewhere other than where the family requested caused even more families to fear that errors in the burial of the dead were common.

By far the most serious mistakes made by the War Department were ones that raised unquestionably legitimate questions about the procedures in place for identifying the dead. The bodies of Edmund Collins and the other American dead from Siberia were not the only dead that the War Department later determined had been sent to the wrong

Newark, New Jersey, had found no one home to receive the body. “Body of Newark Lad, Killed in the Argonne, Left by Soldiers on Porch of Father’s Home,” New York Times, August 3, 1921, 1. The Times reported that the escort had left the coffin on the porch and departed. The newspaper reported that that the grief-stricken father had required the assistance of neighbors to carry the coffin upstairs to the family apartment on the second floor. Ibid. The Times published a small article the next day farther back in the paper noting that further inquiry had revealed that the body had actually been returned several days before and that when the stairway was found to be too narrow, Bufanio’s father had told them to leave the coffin on the porch. “Funeral of War Veteran: Newark Father Explains Why Soldiers Left Coffin on Porch,” New York Times, August 4, 1921, 19. Several days later, the Times also published a rebuttal to the original story from the War Department, which stated that the shipping case, not the coffin, had been left on the front porch at the request of the family, that the coffin itself had been left inside the building on the first floor due to the narrow stairway, and that the family had expressed their satisfaction with the manner in which the body was returned. “Did Honor Dead Soldier: Official Statement by War Department Regarding a Newark Story,” New York Times, August 6, 1921, 6.

Bianco, Frank, September 28, 1921 memo from Shannon of GRS at Hoboken to Cemeterial Division. Bianco is not buried in a permanent American overseas cemetery according to the American Battlefield Memorials Commission website, so apparently Bianco’s remains were returned to his family.

Bodenhamer, Reed, 1921(?) letter from parents to Treasury Department; Caylor, James, September 19, 1921 letter from mother to War Department; Chiles, Marcellus, October 21, 1921 letter from father to GRS (Cemeterial Division); Clarke, Ralph, February 8, 1921 letter from father to War Department; Ragenoski, Frank, September 21, 1921 letter from Cemeterial Division to father.
Wilhelm Briel’s father was sufficiently concerned about the identification of his son’s body that he asked two dentists to examine the remains that were returned to him in mid-1921 and, on their recommendation, refused to accept the remains as those of his son. The War Department accepted the remains back and held them at Arlington even while continuing to try to persuade Briel’s father to change his mind, assuring him that an identification tag had been found on the body but that it would continue to investigate. The remains thought to be Briel’s were buried at Arlington in the fall of 1921. In early 1922, the War Department conceded that, based in part on the dental records that Briel’s father provided, the GRS had determined that the original remains had been sent in error, Briel’s identification tags having been switched with those of another soldier when the body was buried by German forces with other American dead. Perhaps not surprisingly, Briel’s father requested that the second set of remains

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771 Bell, Marshall O., December 31, 1921 letter from Army Quartermaster General to member of United States House of Representatives; Bell, Marshall, December 21, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to father; Berger, Carl, January 7, 1920 memo from Wynne for Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division) to Army Adjutant General; Chenoweth, Rufus, November 18, 1921 memo from GRS in Europe (summarizing investigation into confusion involving seven bodies, including one that had already been returned and buried at Chattanooga National Cemetery); Coleman, William, May 29, 1922 memo in file to Colonel Davis (same incident as Chenoweth); Cook, Aaron, November 27, 1922 memo from Army Quartermaster General to Quartermaster Supply Officer; Cook, Carl, November 29, 1922 note in file (body returned as Cook is actually that of O’Dell); Houseman, Howard, December 19, 1929 memo from Army Quartermaster General to GRS in Europe (seven graves involved in transposition, including those of Howard Houseman, Peretz Sherman, James Madden, Edwin Card, Peter Brown, Alfredo Ghitti, and Thomas Martin).

772 Briel, Wilhelm, July 19, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to father; Briel, Wilhelm, August 1, 1921 letter from father to Army Quartermaster General.

773 Briel, Wilhelm, July 19, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to father; Briel, Wilhelm, August 11, 1921 letter from Penrose of Cemeterial Division to mother.

774 Briel, Wilhelm, October 25, 1921 letter from Conner of Cemeterial Division to mother.

775 Briel, Wilhelm, January 31, 1922 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to father.
be buried in a national cemetery; the remains identified as Briel were buried at Arlington, near the original remains, which were identified as those of George Bonfield. 776

War Department officials informed families about mistakes when bodies were found to have been returned to families in error. 777 Families appear to have been surprisingly cordial to Division representatives who arrived to explain that a family had buried the wrong body, indicating that these representatives dealt with families with a high level of tact and respect. In one case, the bodies of John Gertje, Joseph Lucier, Oluf Finstad, Oscar Sorbye, Louis O’Dell, and perhaps others were transposed under grave markers, and several bodies were shipped to the wrong families. 778 The GRS used dental records and other identifiers to untangle the mess, but the Division had to send representatives to several families to deliver the right body and to arrange for the recovery of remains that had earlier been mistakenly delivered. 779 D.H. Rhodes, who was at the time effectively the superintendent of Arlington National Cemetery, traveled to Big

776 Briel, Wilhelm, April 28, 1922 memo from Conner of Cemeterial Division to Washington D.C. Quartermaster Supply Officer.
777 Cook, Aaron, November 27, 1922 memo from Army Quartermaster General to Quartermaster Supply Officer. A body returned as Cook was buried at Arlington at the request of Cook’s family; when another body was later identified as Cook’s, the Army Quartermaster ordered that Cook’s body be buried at Arlington without informing the family and that the body in the grave be examined for identifying information to determine if it could be the body of Willie Campbell. Ibid. The Burial File for Cook does not indicate the ultimate result of the review of the original body.

The Burial Files show that families were sometimes not told of mistakes if the mistakes could be remedied without involving or notifying families, such as when a misidentified body was buried in a national cemetery. Clayton, James, May 27, 1922 memo from “Clerk in Charge, Adjustment Branch” to Wynne of Cemeterial Division (“I do not consider it necessary or desirable to notify the relatives of Luy of this change or inform the parents of Clayton that there has been any question in the matter”); Robidoux, David, June 15, 1923 memo from Army Quartermaster General staff (?) to Davis of Cemeterial Division.
778 Gertje, John, April 11, 1922 memo in file; Gertje, John, April 20, 1922 memo from Penrose of Cemeterial Division to GRS at Hoboken; Gertje, John, May 27, 1922 memo from Conner of Army Quartermaster Corps to Quartermaster Supply Officer; Gertje, John, June 10, 1922 memo from Penrose of Cemeterial Division to GRS at Hoboken.
779 Gertje, John, February 2, 1922 memo from investigator in file; Gertje, John, April 11, 1922 memo in file.
Stone City, South Dakota—a town that Rhodes reported was “without a hotel or any place where a stranger might obtain a meal”—to explain things to John Gertlje’s family.  

Mrs Gertlje and her son Joe both showed a very fine spirit and a high degree of patriotism and sympathy with the Government and the Graves Registration Service in its tremendous task of bringing home the soldier dead from overseas and in doing it in such a conscientious manner as to assure the public of its trustworthiness and fidelity in each and every case. Needless to say, they heartily approved my plans for the removal of Private Lucier’s remains and also that I might wire Brooklyn, N.Y. for the remains of Private John F. Gertje that same evening, which I did.

Rhodes was also sent out by the Department when the bodies of two men named James Collins were misidentified, and one set of remains delivered to a family before the mistake was discovered. The discovery that mistakes had been made continued for years. The Department notified Willis Comfort’s family in 1928 that the body that they had buried as Comfort in 1921 was actually that of Thomas Watson; the Department sent the body now identified as Comfort to the family with an escort who arranged for Watson’s body to be exhumed for delivery to his family.

Another mistaken delivery involved not just the Army but the Marine Corps as well. A body identified as that of Francis Flynn was returned to Flynn’s family in 1921, but a body that the GRS determined was actually Flynn’s was later found under another

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780 Gertje, John, July 10, 1922 report from Rhodes to Army Quartermaster General. Rhodes stayed in a nearby town. Ibid.

781 Gertje, John, July 10, 1922 report from Rhodes to Army Quartermaster General.

782 Collins, James, March 15, 1921 memo from Conner of Army Quartermaster General to Rhodes; Collins, James, April 8, 1921 report from Rhodes to Army Quartermaster General.

783 Comfort, Willis, May 28, 1928 letter from Army Quartermaster General to mother; Comfort, Willis, August 2, 1928 memo from McClintock of Army Quartermaster General to Jeffersonville (IN) Quartermaster Depot.
The Department contacted the Marine Corps, since Flynn had been a marine. A Marine Corps representative accompanied the Division official who arranged for the exhumation of the body previously thought to be Flynn. The second body, identified as that of David Robidoux, was sent to Arlington, and Robidoux’s sister and next of kin, who had not made any request for burial with respect to Robidoux’s body, was notified. Flynn’s family wrote the Department to thank “the Service [for] the manner in which this matter was handled and the very creditable services rendered by [the escorts] who accompanied the remains . . . and so ably assisted in making arrangements, which without their assistance would have been more distressing.”

Mistakes were reported by the press. A newspaper reported that a body identified as that of Merville Brandt had been buried by his family but that the War

784 Flynn, Francis, March 10, 1923 memo in file; Flynn, Francis, June 30, 1923 letter from Conner of Army Quartermaster General to mother; Flynn, Francis, undated newspaper clipping (about mistake in delivery of Flynn’s remains, apparently from Binghamton Press and Leader. “Binghamton Press and Leader,” available from <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn90066575/>; Internet; accessed 31 December 2015); Robidoux, David, March 10, 1923 memo from investigator in file.

785 The situation was the first time the body of a marine had been involved in a mistaken delivery. Flynn, Francis, June 7, 1923 memo from Conner of Army Quartermaster General to United States Marine Corps Commandant.

786 Flynn, Francis, June 18, 1923 memo from United States Marine Corps Commandant to Army Quartermaster General.

787 Flynn, Francis, March 23, 1923 memo from Conner of Army Quartermaster General to United States Marine Corps Commandant; Robidoux, David, July 5, 1923 letter from Conner of Army Quartermaster General to sister.

788 Flynn, Francis, June 30, 1923 letter from Conner of Army Quartermaster General to mother; Flynn, Francis, July 13, 1923 letter from cousin on behalf of mother to Conner of Army Quartermaster General. The War Department escort’s trip report noted that Flynn’s mother was not fully competent and that the cousin and the escort had decided not to tell Flynn’s mother about the mistake. Flynn, Francis, 1923 report from escort in file.

Department had sent men to deliver another body and recover the first one. When the family of Lonnie L. Smith from Georgia received a body meant for the family of Lonnie L. Smith from North Carolina, Rhodes retrieved the remains in Georgia and delivered them to North Carolina, but not before the family in Georgia spoke to reporters.

The Cemeterial Division continued to insist that mistakes in the return of the dead were impossible long after it was obvious that the truth was to the contrary. The Division wrote to Port Bell’s father in March of 1920 that a “system is employed by the GRS to secure accuracy in all cases and where there is the slightest doubt as to the identification of the body, a thorough investigation is pursued until results prove the full identity.” In November of 1920, the Division reassured William Bull’s widow that “it

790 Brandt, Merville, June 9, 1925 memo from Army Quartermaster General to Quartermaster Supply Office at Brooklyn; Brandt, Merville, undated news clipping about mistake in return and burial.
791 Smith, Lonnie L., October 18, 1921 memo from Rhodes to Army Quartermaster General.
792 Cowgill, Roy, October 7, 1920 letter from Black for Shannon of Cemeterial Division to father (“you need be under no apprehension as to the care with which this body has been removed nor need you have any fear as to the accuracy of the identification” as “every precaution has been taken that any agent of yours could have observed”); Dawson, Dayton, April 20, 1921 letter from Butler for Shannon of GRS at Hoboken to father (“every precaution is taken to guard against mistaken identity”); Derrickson, Paul, February 15, 1921 letter from Pallas for Shannon of GRS at Hoboken to mother; McCormick, Daniel, August 1, 1921 letter from Butler for Shannon of GRS at Hoboken to father (“extreme care exercised in the work precludes an error”); Minish, Walter, March 25, 1921 letter from Pallas for Shannon of GRS at Hoboken to widow (“extreme care exercised in the work practically precludes an error”); Scarborough, Clarence, March 22, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to mother (“special study has been made as to the proper marking of the coffins in order to prevent all possibilities of any errors” and “every effort will be made to avoid mistakes”). The GRS in Europe had actually been more honest with families earlier in the process. Bryant, James, November 19, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to widow (quoting report from GRS in Europe that “mistakes in identity are possible but the utmost care is being taken to avoid them in all phases of the work of this Service”); Cooper, James, November 19, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother (quoting report from GRS in Europe that “mistakes in identity are possible, of course, but the utmost care is being taken to avoid them in all phases of the work of the GRS”).
793 Bell, Port, March 10, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to father. This language was used in other War Department memos. Brown, Grady, January 18, 1920 letter from GRS (Cemeterial Division) to mother (“the system employed by the GRS is such as to insure accuracy in all cases and where there is the slightest doubt as to the identification of a body a thorough investigation is pursued until results prove the full identity”); Clark, Carl, February 10, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial
is not believed that mistakes can be made.”\textsuperscript{794} In August of 1921, the Division assured Daniel Tully’s family that “no bodies will be returned to this country until absolute identification has been established.”\textsuperscript{795} The Division wrote Abram Corman’s family in October of 1921 that it was a “firm policy of the Department not to return a body where there is the slightest question of identity.”\textsuperscript{796} Perhaps concerns about negative publicity trumped any preference for honesty or perhaps the Division felt that families who had not heard otherwise would rather have the comfort of believing that the bodies they buried could not be those of anyone but their family members.

\textbf{“I desire to go overseas at once to identify the body personally”: Families Seek to Take Control over the Process of Arranging for the Final Burial of the Dead}

Some families so distrusted the government that they attempted to have the dead returned themselves. Before the War Department made clear that only the GRS would be permitted to move bodies, some families sought to make private arrangements.\textsuperscript{797} Families wrote to organizations within the American or French governments to seek information to ask if it would be possible to arrange for the return of the dead.\textsuperscript{798} Hilton

\textsuperscript{794} Bull, William, November 4, 1920 letter from Greenly of Cemeterial Division to widow.
\textsuperscript{795} Tully, Daniel, August 31, 1921 letter from Cemeterial Division to mother.
\textsuperscript{796} Corman, Abram, October 15, 1921 letter from Penrose, Chief of Cemeterial Division to sister.
\textsuperscript{797} Dahlin, Clarence, March 12, 1919 letter from third party on behalf of parents to Army Quartermaster General; Davis, Murray, April 4, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; Fisher, John, December 14, 1918 letter from father to War Department; Jackson, Harry, May 17, 1919 letter from parents to Army Adjutant General; Kinsella, Raymond, November 29, 1918 letter from United States Senator to Army Quartermaster General; Long, Courtney, January 5, 1919 letter from mother to GRS (Cemeterial Division); Wupperman, Carlos, October 29, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General.
\textsuperscript{798} Burk, Hobart, November 2, 1918 letter from father to United States ambassador to Britain;
Brown’s father wrote the American ambassador in France to ask how to arrange for the return of his son’s body, as if the matter were a diplomatic challenge to be resolved:

February 19, 1919

To the American Ambassador
Paris, France

Sir,

May I trouble you to advise me how to proceed in ascertaining the location and condition of the grave of my son, Hilton U. Brown Jr. He was a lieutenant in Battery D., 7th. F.A., First Division, American Expeditionary Forces and was killed in action November 3, 1918[.] I am advised in a general way that he was buried where he fell near the little town of Nouart in the Argonne region a short distance south of Fosse. One report said that the burial place was just outside of the village grave yard at Nouert.

To what official in the Argonne might I address a letter so that it would receive attention? I should be glad to be assured of course that the grave was marked and that the means of identification are preserved until permanent action can be taken. Any information that you can give will be appreciated.

Perhaps you may be able to pass this letter to some authorized agency or individual that will be good enough to make, or have made, an early inspection and report.

Very truly yours,
Hilton U. Brown

Brown’s father sought the kind of information about an ordinary death in Europe that any family would have needed to have the body returned privately, and he sought help from the State Department to ensure that his son’s grave was marked “until permanent action can be taken,” suggesting that he thought, or hoped, that he would be allowed to arrange for the return of his son’s body. Joseph Healy’s father wrote the Army Quartermaster General to ask similar questions, though Healy’s father recognized the possibility that the Department might not be allowing families to arrange for the return of the dead:

Dennis, Clarence, September 23, 1918 memo from French government (War Department translation); Hackenberg, William, April 28, 1919 letter from brother to mayor of Verdun; Kirby, George, September 19, 1918 letter from father to president of France.

Furnace P.O., Mass. Nov. 12, 1918

Quarter Master General of Army
Washington, D.C.

Dear Sir,

I wish to make application at once for the return of the body of my son, Private Joseph Aloysius Healy, No. 366,455, Co. C, 104th Field Signal Battalion, American Expeditionary Forces, France, whose death has been officially confirmed. Private Healy died from broncho pneumonia following influenza at 7:30 AM on October 5, 1918 at a French hospital, Brenne le Chateau, and was interred on the following afternoon, October 6, 1918, at Aube, France.

If permissible, I desire to go overseas at once to identify the body personally, bring it back with me, or at least mark the spot for future identification. If such is not allowed, please send the body at the earliest possible moment to the below address which is our railroad station and express office.

On accompanying sheet are questions on which I would be grateful for enlightenment. I thank you.

Very respectfully yours,
Dennis Healy

Questions
1. Is Pvt. Healy’s name and number on marker?
2. Where is grave located?
3. Is he embalmed?
4. What identification marks are on person or within container?
5. Can I go overseas to make personal identification? Bring body back with me? If not, when is the earliest time that I can go?
6. If yes (Ques 5), what papers and steps are necessary for same?
7. . . .
8. To whom shall I apply for his personal effects, which besides of pecuniary worth are of intrinsic value?
9. To whom shall I apply for information regarding my son’s illness prior to his demise?

Healy’s father wrote that he wanted to travel overseas immediately “to identify the body personally [and] bring it back with me, or at least mark the spot for future identification.” Whether or not Healy’s father knew about the Department’s promise to return the dead, he hoped he would be allowed to bring his son’s body back himself.

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800 Healy, Joseph, November 12, 1918 letter from father to Army Quartermaster General.
Families like these sought assistance from officials and individuals overseas because even those families who could afford to travel to Europe were initially prohibited from doing so: during the war and for several months after, the State Department, at least in part at the War Department’s request, declined to issue passports to Americans who wanted to travel to Europe in search of the missing or the dead. In time, families would be given permission to travel to Europe and even receive their passport without cost if they intended to visit an overseas grave. Once families were allowed to travel to Europe, a number of families did so or found representatives to do so.

801 Anderson, Winston, May 31, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother; Stewart, Edmond, July 8, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother; Davis, Murray, April 16, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; Davis, Robert, April 21, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; Duffy, Frank, May 12, 1919 memo from Army Adjutant General to Secretary of War; Fisher, John, May 27, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to father; Stewart, Edmond, July 8, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to family.

802 Gaillard, Oscar, December 7, 1923 letter from Army Quartermaster General to father; Ring, Frank, April 25, 1924 letter from Army Quartermaster General to brother; Townsend, Richard, April 5, 1927 letter from Army Quartermaster General to brother.

803 Armstrong, Edwin, February 27, 1921 letter from father to War Department (“I was in France this last summer and I went to see my son’s grave”); Bland, William, March 8, 1921 letter from father-in-law to member of United States Senate (widow has been “in France for 18 months waiting for permission to bring him back”); Catton, Richard, November 19, 1921 letter from sister to GRS in Europe (“I am leaving Paris with a much changed frame of mind”); Carlisle, Paris, May 17, 1921 letter from mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division (third party “has just returned from France and has visited his grave”); French, James, November 17, 1920 letter from mother to Cemeterial Division (“I have been in France this summer and visited my son’s grave at Rouen”); Gaither, Wilson, September 23, 1919 letter from father to GRS (Cemeterial Division) (“I visited his grave very recently”); Spitz, Melvin, March 25, 1920 letter from father to War Department (“while in France recently”); Traill, James, June 12, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (“I have visited the grave of my son”); Vedder, Harmon, January 28, 1922 letter from father to Secretary of War (“we went over to see his resting place”); Webster, Willard, January 23, 1920 letter from mother to War Adjutant General (“I have been ‘over here’ . . . but we have not been able to find his grave”); O’Neill, Arthur, August 1919 letter from mother to GRS in Europe (“a friend of mine went to France with the K of C club to do some work over there. I asked this young man to visit my sons grave”).
The War Department attempted to make it clear that no families would be permitted to bring the dead back themselves. The Department was bound by Pershing’s promises to the Allied governments but also feared negative publicity if rich or well-connected families got special treatment. The Army Adjutant General wrote Arthur Cannell’s mother shortly after the war ended that private returns “would not only be an unjust discrimination but would result in a flood of complaints from those families to whom this privilege has been denied heretofore.” The Cemeterial Division later wrote a member of the United States Congress, who had written on behalf of a family, that “it has been decided not to grant requests of the next of kin of our soldier dead to return the bodies of their relatives from France at their own expense. This is in order to avoid the appearance of discriminating in favor of those able to bear the cost involved and reduce the possibilities of confusion or loss of identities probable through miscellaneous and uncoordinated exhumations.”

The GRS permitted family members or their representatives to watch as the dead were exhumed to be put into coffins or searched for identification, but generally declined to give families more than an estimate of when a given grave might be reached, in part

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804 Angigliore, Mike, Adjutant General form letter to next of kin (marked “returned unclaimed”); Benboe, Herman, April 1, 1919 Army Adjutant General Memorandum of Information (dated March 11, 1919); Barrett, Thomas, December 14, 1918 letter from Army Quartermaster General to mother; Bowe, Joseph, May 16, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother; Cannell, Arthur, May 20, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother; Long, Courtney, January 20, 1919 letter from Army Quartermaster General to mother; Oberto, Dominick, April 8, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to mother; Robinson, Ervin, March 17, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to family; Simpson, Zeilin, September 4, 1919 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to parents; Wynne, James, May 26, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to sister; “To Refuse Requests for Removing Dead,” Atlanta Constitution, December 17, 1919, 11.
805 Cannell, Arthur, May 20, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother.
806 Ewell, James, March 22, 1920 letter from Cemeterial Division to member of United States House of Representatives.
because the timing of GRS efforts in any one cemetery was actually uncertain but no
doubt also because the GRS hoped that families would give up if they had to wait an
indeterminate amount of time. When Michael Amatrudi’s father requested that a
member of his family be allowed to witness the exhumation of Amatrudi’s body in late
1921, the GRS agreed but told Amatrudi’s father that the exhumation would happen
“between early November and early December some time.” The lack of specific
information about timing did not deter some families, who stayed in France for weeks or
longer or who had family or friends who resided in France who could travel to view an
exhumation. The GRS worried about families disrupting its efforts but also feared the
reaction of family members to bodies that were decayed or badly damaged by munitions.
Wilson Gaither’s father was convinced that the dental records he had for his son did not
match those of the body identified as Gaither’s and went to France to challenge the
identification that the Department had made. When the body was exhumed, Gaither’s
father agreed to the suggestion of the GRS staff that he not view the body, but he asked
the staff to remove a tooth with a distinctive crown and to compare the wounds on the

807 Bartels, George, April 2, 1920 memo from Pierce of Cemeterial Division to Assistant and Chief Clerk of
War Department; Bartels, George, April 7, 1920 letter from clerk to Secretary of War to attorney on behalf
of family; Fry, Clarence, November 26, 1919 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to
father; Stephenson, MacCrea, June 23, 1920 letter from Secretary of War Baker to member of United States
Senate.
808 Amatrudi, Michael, October 8, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to father.
809 Anderson, George Wayne, May 22, 1919 memo from Hayes, private secretary to Secretary of War, to
Army Adjutant General; Catton, Richard, November 19, 1921 letter from sister to GRS in Europe; Cowgill,
Roy, July 8, 1920 letter from father to Red Cross in Paris, France; Davis, Murray, August 18, 1921 letter
from father to Cemeterial Division; Budreau, Bodies of War, 79.
810 Gaither, Wilson, November 16, 1920 letter from father to Greeley of Cemeterial Division; Gaither,
Wilson, 1921 investigation memo; Gaither, Wilson, March 31, 1921 memo from Denny of GRS in Paris to
GRS in Europe.
body with the reports of Gaither’s death. The GRS staff gave Gaither’s father the tooth and described the wounds visible on the remains to his satisfaction.

Some families travelled to Europe for the purpose of having the dead reburied in coffins purchased privately by the family or sought to have identifying information stenciled on the outside of coffins so they would be able to check it when coffins were returned. The GRS initially rejected requests to have the dead reburied in coffins obtained by the family. In January of 1919, the GRS explained its view to a French undertaker acting on behalf of Herman Boldt’s family who had requested permission to bury Boldt’s body in a coffin he would provide:

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811 Gaither, Wilson, March 31, 1921 memo from Denny of GRS in Paris to GRS in Europe. Gaither had died of “pneumonia and edema of lungs (gas)” accord to his hospital record, but the record also indicated that he had suffered a head wound that fractured his skull and gas burns. Gaither, Wilson, hospital record.
812 Gaither, Wilson, March 31, 1921 memo from Denny of GRS in Paris to GRS in Europe.
813 Allen, Charles, October 28, 1920 letter from mother to United States Marine Corps Headquarters (“I sent a son to France” and “he found the grave and put body in copper lined casket”); Cooper, Charles, March 17, 1921 letter from brother to Shields of GRS in Europe; Culbertson, Tingle, April 25, 1920 letter from mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division; Davis, Murray, August 18, 1921 letter from father to Pierce of Cemeterial Division; Frick, William, April 17, 1920 letter from father to member of United States House of Representatives; Fry, Clarence, December 31, 1919 letter from father to member of United States Senate; Gaither, Wilson, May 17, 1921 letter from Penrose of Cemeterial Division to father; Hague, Jay, August 20, 1920 letter from mother to widow. In some cases, comrades or family members also serving in Europe had ensured that the dead were buried in privately procured coffins. Burstan, Robert, October 31, 1919 letter from brother to GRS (Cemeterial Division); Deckert, Dwight, January 10, 1920 letter from parents to Secretary of War; Dowell, Julian, May 3, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; Gillett, Tod, April 26, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; Johnston, Joseph, June 14, 1920 letter from brother to GRS (Cemeterial Division).
814 Atlas, Albert, January 21, 1919 letter from GRS in Europe to brother (in service in Europe); Strassburger, Julien, March 6, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to father.
[n]umerous requests of this nature are being received and it is believed to be advisable at this time to state frankly the facts concerning burials in metal or cement caskets. The idea seems to be somewhat generally entertained that if bodies are placed in such caskets they may later be exhumed and shipped without further treatment or being transferred to another casket. This is a mistaken belief. In every case the remains must be prepared for shipment and placed in a new container. The process of dissolution continues in a metal casket and the effects thereof, together with the action of the elements in soil surrounding, soon render the condition [of?] the casket unfit to risk shipping.815

The GRS argued that the belief of families that the dead would not have to be moved to a new coffin for transport was mistaken, because “[i]n every case the remains must be prepared for shipment and placed in a new container.” By mid-1919, however, the GRS began to allow families to transfer the dead to private coffins under GRS supervision.816

“I will personally disinter my son’s body regardless of consequences”: A Few Families Attempt to Evade War Department Authority over the Dead

A few determined families were so concerned about the possibility of delays and mistakes that they took matters into their own hands and recovered their dead without

815 Boldt, Herman, January 16, 1919 letter (misdated 1918) from Dix of Red Cross for Pierce of GRS in Europe to third party on behalf of family.
816 Althouse, George, July 9, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to member of United States House of Representatives; Arnold, Howard, February 27, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division) to father; Carrigan, Alfred, December 11, 1918 memo from Pierce of GRS in Europe to 36th Division chaplain on behalf of father; Cobb, Oakley, April 23, 1919 letter from GRS in Europe to father; Coleman, Warren, September 8, 1920 memo from Rethers of GRS in Europe to Army Quartermaster General; Cooper, Charles, September 11, 1919 memo from Pierce of Cemeterial Division to GRS in Europe (“permission is given for family for disinterment and emplacement of body in metallic casket for reinterment in custody of GRS” but “work [to be] done under the supervision of a representative of the GRS”); Davis, Murray, August 26, 1921 letter from Acting Secretary of War to Chief Justice Taft (“authority granted father to have remains exhumed, placed in a metallic lined casket and reinterred in the same grave”); Foster, David, July 25, 1921 letter from father to Rethers of GRS in Europe (“I visited France to place body in metallic casket”); Funkhouser, Paul, April 26, 1920 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (brother “caused his body to be reburied in the same cemetery in an oak, metal lined casket at his own expense”); Gaither, Wilson, May 17, 1921 letter from Penrose of Cemeterial Division to father (“information has been received from [GRS in Europe] that the remains of your son . . . were placed in a gray steel casket selected by you”).
permission. These private returns were a challenge to the War Department in several respects. They made the Department look slow or incompetent, and they challenged the Department’s emphasis on equal treatment. Stories and rumors about private returns were often quickly brought to the Department’s attention by angry families or newspapers.817 After Army Chief of Staff Peyton March was questioned about unauthorized returns by a committee of the United States House of Representatives in mid-1919, he subsequently submitted a list of nine cases of the bodies of dead Americans known to have been returned from Europe during or after the war; General March’s report stated that the only deceased member of the military who had been returned from France was Warren Harries, the son of General Harries, as discussed in Chapter 1.818

General March’s information was out of date by the time he provided it, because in May of 1919, the Chicago Daily Tribune had reported that Francis Houlihan had gone to France, found the body of his son Robert, and essentially smuggled it back to

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817 The War Department wrote a member of the United States Senate in July of 1919 that the only dead that had been returned to the United States up to that point were bodies from Siberia and “a few from England where removal was done without the knowledge of the government”). It is not clear to which cases involving Britain the War Department referred, as most of the contentious cases that were reported in the press involved bodies buried in France, where the War Department’s agreements with the Navy Department and the French government controlled. Barber, James, July 18, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to member of United States Senate.

818 Congress, House, Subcommittee No. 3 (Foreign Expenditures) of the Select Committee on Expenditures in the War Department, War Expenditures, 66th Cong., 1st and 2nd sess., 23 July 1919, 197-98; Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, [Removal of Remains of U.S. Troops from France (unpublished) [Part 2]], 66th Cong., 1st sess., 30 July 1919, 4; “Return of Soldier Dead is Explained,” Los Angeles Times, July 29, 1919, I6. The dead included a congressman who had died in Germany of pneumonia in February 1919; a member of the United States Labor Board who died in England of pneumonia in February 1919; three YMCA employees; a sailor killed when the Tuscania sank who was washed ashore in England and whose body had been returned to the United States by the Army after his father had agreed to pay the costs because the sailor was deemed to have died on a transport ship and not in England; the military attaché to Paris; and a man named Douglas Littleton that the War Department misidentified as an officer in the Army. Congress, House, Subcommittee No. 3 (Foreign Expenditures) of the Select Committee on Expenditures in the War Department, War Expenditures, 66th Cong., 1st and 2nd sess., 23 July 1919, 197-98; Hines, Edward, February 16, 1920 letter from Pierce to McCoy; Barry, The Great Influenza, 381.
Francis Houlihan reported that he had tried to negotiate a release from American authorities but then, “discouraged and fighting mad,” had the body put on a truck and “never stopped to ask questions on my way to the coast.” The GRS memo on the incident noted that Houlihan’s father had been given permission to disinter his son’s body, have it embalmed, put in a casket, and have it reburied in France but “instead took [the body] away in an auto-truck.” Another father would achieve much the same result a few months later. In September of 1919, the Chicago Daily Tribune reported the return of Edward Hines’s remains. Hines’s father had traveled to France and obtained permission to move his son’s body to Paris, where it was to remain in the custody of the GRS. Instead, according to the GRS memo, Hines’s father “surreptitiously” took the body to a French port and back to the United States.

In February 1920, newspapers reported on yet another parent who had not waited for the government to act. James De Vere had enlisted in the Marines three days after the United States entered the war, was wounded in the Argonne three days before the

821 Houlihan, Robert, April 23, 1919 memo from GRS in Europe staff at Blois to GRS in Europe; Houlihan, Robert, May 29, 1919 memo from GRS in Europe to AEF Quartermaster General.
823 Hines, Edward, March 2, 1919 Pierce memo to AEF Chief Quartermaster.
824 Hines, Edward, March 2, 1919 Pierce memo to AEF Chief Quartermaster; Sledge, Soldier Dead, 173.
armistice, and died a week later. Frustrated by delays in the return of her son’s body, De Vere’s mother went to France in late 1919. De Vere’s mother told the press upon her return that she had succeeded in her effort only by making liberal payments to employees of French bureaus, which she called “tipping.” Walter McCoy, who had lost a son in the war and was a public advocate for the return of the war dead, informed Charles Pierce of the Cemeterial Division about the De Vere case when he called Pierce and then sent him a newspaper clipping about the case. The situation was then brought to the attention of Secretary of War Baker, who sent newspaper clippings about the De Vere case to the Secretary of State, suggesting to him that perhaps the United States ambassador in Paris could work to deter future incidents.

One family’s efforts received less public attention but nonetheless illustrate both the grief that drove families and the lengths to which the GRS in Europe went to stop families from working outside the process, especially after the early successful attempts. The father of marine David Foster wrote the Cemeterial Division in early 1920 that he would be taking a casket to France and saw no reason why he should be prohibited from bringing his son’s remains back to the United States. “There shall be at least one marine,” wrote Foster’s father, “brought back by his dad.” The Division took Foster’s

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829 Devere, James, February 7, 1920 letter from Justice McCoy to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division).
830 Devere, James, February 12, 1920 letter from Secretary of War Baker to Secretary of State.
831 Foster, David, March 22, 1920 letter from father to Pierce of the Cemeterial Division.
832 Foster, David, March 22, 1920 letter from father to Pierce of the Cemeterial Division.
forceful language seriously, writing the GRS in France to “[p]lease instruct caretaker to lock gate at night and if need be place guard. . . . The caretaker should call upon the municipal authorities in the nearest locality having gendarmes in order that they may take steps to arrest if necessary any visiting American who attempts to disregard the agreement that has been entered into between the two governments.”833 Prevented from exhuming his son’s body, Foster’s father wrote the Secretary of War from France that the government does not have the slightest claim on the dead body of my son now lying in French soil. It is mine absolutely as his father and next of kin. My legal rights cannot be disputed. If necessary . . . I will personally disinter my son’s body regardless of consequences. Please understand that I am exercising my inalienable rights and have no desire to a conflict with my Country for which my son gallantly gave his life.834

Foster’s father warning that he would exhume his son’s body “regardless of consequences” led the Division to caution him that further efforts “would be at the same time unseemly and futile.”835 After the GRS permitted Foster’s father to have his son reburied in the casket, he gave up his quest to bring the body back himself. When Foster’s grave was later opened, however, with another member of Foster’s family in attendance, the remains could not be identified as Foster’s.836 Another set of remains buried nearby were identified as Foster’s, and the family’s casket, now containing those remains, was sent to Foster’s family.837

833 Foster, David, June 15, 1920 memo from GRS in Europe to “Commanding Officer, Zone of France.”
834 Foster, David, June 16, 1920 letter from father (in France) to Secretary of War.
835 Foster, David, July 16, 1921 memo from GRS in Europe to Army Quartermaster General; Foster, David, July 2, 1920 letter from Secretary of War Baker to father (in France).
836 Foster, David, July 16, 1921 memo from GRS in Europe to Army Quartermaster General.
837 Foster, David, July 16, 1921 memo from GRS in Europe to Army Quartermaster General.
As the War Department anticipated, families saw private returns as unfair.\textsuperscript{838}

Richard Cartan’s mother wrote the Department that “I know that I am poor but if the rich like Mr. Houlihan and Mr. Hines have there son’s body brought back to American, why cant the poor have there dear one’s to. My son is just as good as there is so I want his body.”\textsuperscript{839} Cartan’s mother wrote President Wilson in September of 1919 to say that she had read “about Mr. Hines and Mr. Hooligan [sic] also the adjutant general’s son being brought back.”\textsuperscript{840} The \textit{Chicago Herald}, in its self-styled advocacy role as the “Soldiers’ Friend,” wrote the Department after the Hines story became public to note that “a whale of a storm is arising out here over the fact that some 120 bodies had been returned from France, including that of the son of the Adjutant General and the son of Edward Hines, a millionaire lumberman here and of Robert Houlihan, who also has some means. Less fortunate parents are wondering why this preference is shown.”\textsuperscript{841} While Cartan’s

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\textsuperscript{838} Adoue, Bertrand, November 17, 1920 letter from mother to member of United States Senate; Beck, William, March 5, 1920 letter from father to Secretary of War; Busey, Charles, September 24, 1919 letter from member of United States Senate to Army Adjutant General (referring to Hines case); Cohen, Haskell, May 2, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Cudworth, Alonzo, April 28, 1920 letter from member of United States Senate to Secretary of War; Dahlin, Clarence, November 21, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; Devere, James, February 24, 1920 letter from third party to Army Adjutant General (referring to “Devera” case); Ewell, James, February 27, 1920 letter from cousin to member of United States Senate (referring to “Devera” case); Gallagh, John, September 25, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“if Hines and Houlihan can have their sons’ bodies why can I not have one”); Hines, Edward, October 9, 1919 memo from Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division) to Army Adjutant General; Hines, Edward, February 16, 1920 letter from Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division) to McCoy; Oberto, Dominick, February 23, 1920 letter from mother to War Department (referring to De Vere case); Oberto, Dominick, July 5, 1919 letter from attorney on behalf of mother to Army Adjutant General (“read in the paper that others have “gone to France in person and procured the return of the bodies of their deceased relatives”).

\textsuperscript{839} Cartan, Richard, August 6, 1919 letter from mother to Adjutant General.

\textsuperscript{840} Cartan, Richard, September 19, 1919 letter from mother to President Wilson.

\textsuperscript{841} Harris, Charles, September 19, 1919 letter from former Army major (Sexton) on Chicago \textit{Herald} (Soldiers’ Friend) letterhead to Major Swing at “Fort Meyer” in Washington (likely a reference to Fort Myer). Other letters came to the War Department from the \textit{Herald} as part of the Soldiers’ Friend effort. Ring, Louis, April 26, 1919 letter from Sexton on Chicago \textit{Herald} (Soldiers’ Friend) letterhead to Army Adjutant General. The reference to 120 bodies may suggest some confusion involving the return of the
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mother and the *Herald* were right about Hines and Houlihan, they were wrong about the body of Charles Harris, son of Army Adjutant General P.C. Harris; Charles was killed in action in October of 1918, but since his body was not returned to his family until August of 1921, the Department did not expedite its return.*

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Many of the families of the dead were not content to wait patiently or rely on the War Department’s intentions or ability to return the dead accurately. Families sought ways to satisfy what they saw as their obligations to the war dead. Some families probably wanted an outlet for their grief or to regain a measure of control over the situation. Many others, however, did not trust the government to return the dead as it had promised, whether because they feared that Department officials like Pershing were trying to manipulate families into agreeing to leave the dead in Europe or because they saw the Department as incompetent.

The War Department undertook a monumental effort to persuade families that it was fulfilling its duties to the dead. In the letters sent to families, the Cemeterial Division and the GRS worked to explain their efforts and to defend their actions against the challenges that families made. There is no question that the Division and the GRS made a number of mistakes. To be fair, the Division and the GRS accomplished a task of significant scope. Over about two years, the GRS and the Cemeterial Division returned American military dead from Russia.

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842 Harris, Charles, April 28, 1919 memo from Army Adjutant General Harris to GRS in Europe; Harris, Charles, August 6, 1921 receipt for remains; Harris, Charles, November 15, 1919 memo from Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division) to War Department Director of Purchase and Storage.
more than 45,000 bodies to families in the United States. It seems likely that most of those identifications were accurate and that, in any event, many families who requested that the dead be returned were relieved to have a body to bury and a grave at which to grieve, however long the process took and however stressful it was. That so many could undertake these rituals was a reflection of the hard, gruesome work that the Division and the GRS did to ensure that as many of the dead as possible could be returned to families. In a significant and unfortunate way, however, the Division failed by assuring families that mistakes were impossible long after major errors had been identified. While it is probably unfair to expect the Division to admit that mistakes might occur, it was a significant error for the Division to continue to deny even the possibility when the Division knew better. The confident statements made by the Division ultimately had the opposite effect from what the Division, and the Department, sought to accomplish, which was to reassure families and to reduce the likelihood of negative public relations. In the end, however, the Division does appear to have generally done the right thing in being honest with families when mistakes were identified, even when it might have been easier to pretend they had not occurred.

A final note: when the remains of a man who died in the World War in the service of the United States are found, as still happens occasionally, the Department of Defense

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asks any surviving family members it can find whether they want the remains returned to the United States. The remains of Thomas Costello, whose sister had been told he was “blown to atoms,” were recovered in 2006, identified in 2008, and buried at Arlington National Cemetery in 2010.844

Chapter 5

“I do my want my boy’s remains cared for”:
Final Burial of the American War Dead

The families of the World War dead expected the government to provide the dead with good temporary burials during the war—with bodies found and identified and graves properly marked—but they also wanted the government to help them ensure that the dead received a good final burial. Drew Gilpin Faust demonstrates in This Republic of Suffering that the families of the Civil War dead tried to recreate the kinds of rituals that would be associated with a “good death” by seeking information from comrades and commanders about how men had died, whether they had “last words,” and whether they were conscious of the approach of death. As Chapter 1 showed, the families of the World War dead wanted to know more about the deaths of their loved ones in the war, but they also wanted to know how men had been buried during the war. Families considered what they knew about wartime burials as they decided what instructions to give the government about where the dead should be permanently buried, and they also considered what they thought the dead would have wanted and what they thought would be of most comfort to family members.

Giving the dead a good final burial meant different things to different families. Families who wanted the dead returned to them wanted to conduct funeral and burial rituals, see for themselves that the dead had been buried well, and care for the grave. Families who asked that the dead be returned for burial in a national cemetery in the United States ceded responsibility for many of the details about final burials and for
tending graves as the years passed to the government, whether because they could not afford to bury the dead for themselves or because they wanted their family members buried in cemeteries they felt would be tended by the government after they, too, were gone. Some families, like the Roosevelts, insisted they wanted the dead left permanently in their original graves in Europe, because they did not want to disturb the dead or because they feared that mistakes of identification might occur when the dead were moved. And families who wanted the dead buried in permanent overseas cemeteries expected that the government would bury the dead with other soldiers, in graves that were properly marked and tended in cemeteries that memorialized the contribution of the United States to the war effort. This chapter will argue that families made the decision about where to have their dead buried for a variety of reasons, but that all families who were given a choice expected the government to comply with their decisions, make appropriate arrangements, and deal with families responsibly, kindly, and with respect. In the end, most families would get what they wanted, though sometimes only after a prolonged and sometimes contentious correspondence with the government. Based on the instructions provided by families, the government, particularly the Army Graves Registration Service would arrange for the final burial of about 80,000 war dead; about 45,000 bodies were returned to the United States, with more than 5,000 buried in national cemeteries, and most of the rest were moved to the permanent overseas cemeteries.845

The War Department Begins to Arrange for the Permanent Burial of the War Dead

When the war ended in November of 1918, about 55,000 American war dead were buried in more than two thousand military or civilian cemeteries in France; another 15,000 were buried in “isolated” graves in France; and smaller numbers of Americans were buried in dozens of other locations, including England, Scotland, Ireland, Belgium, Germany, and Italy. While the Army Adjutant General was sending families surveys to determine how many of the dead would be left permanently in Europe, the GRS was beginning the process of concentrating the dead. As the GRS moved the dead, GRS

American World War dead were buried states that “46,291 bodies had been returned to the United States; 30,797 bodies had been concentrated in the eight permanent American cemeteries in Europe; 605 bodies had been shipped, at the request of relatives, to foreign countries; 31 bodies removed to the Lafayette Escadrille Memorial; 28 bodies turned over to relatives for burial in private tombs, at private expense; and 70 bodies remaining where first buried. In addition, there are 3,173 who have been reported missing in action, and whose bodies have not yet been recovered.” William R. White, “Our Soldier Dead,” The Quartermaster Review, May-June 1930, available from <http://www.qmfound.com/soldier_dead.htm>; Internet; accessed 31 December 2015. While these numbers were incomplete because additional changes were made after 1930, they appear to be roughly accurate. Several hundred American aviators joined a unit known as the Lafayette Flying Corps or the Lafayette Escadrille before the United States entered the war. Some of the men transferred to the United States Army and were commissioned as Army officers, but others remains with the Escadrille. “Commissions Issued to Several Americans who have been with Lafayette Escadrille,” Official Bulletin, December 26, 1917, 4; Dickon, The Foreign Burial of American War Dead, 46. After the French created a memorial to the Lafayette Escadrille, the bodies of about fifty members of the unit would eventually be moved to the memorial. Campbell, Andrew, December 16, 1927 affidavit from father; Ely, Dinsmore, October 24, 1928 memo from Army Quartermaster General to GRS in Europe; Ely, Dinsmore, November 19, 1928 memo from GRS in Europe to Army Quartermaster Corps; Dickon, The Foreign Burial of American War Dead, 78-79.


847 Pouch, Harold, November 22, 1919 memo from Graves Registration Service (Cemeterial Division) to Army Adjutant General; Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, [Removal of Remains of U.S.
staff also worked to identify remains and put bodies into coffins and to locate bodies buried outside of cemeteries.\(^{848}\) The effort to identify the dead was laborious, involving research into records, the examination of bodies, and investigations of both the circumstances surrounding deaths in the area where the dead were found and of the potential owners of items found on the remains, such as letters, watches, or rings.\(^{849}\) Enlisted soldiers carried identification tags, or what today would be called “dog tags,” made of aluminum and slightly larger than a quarter that contained a man’s name, rank, and organization.\(^{850}\) Tags were not always available or accurate, since tags were

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}\(^{848}\) After determining that suitable coffins could not be acquired in Europe, the War Department arranged for metallic caskets to be sent from the United States. GRS History, Vol. I, 142-44. These caskets were hermetically sealed to prevent the release of germs or the fluids used in preparation of bodies for shipment. GRS History, Vol. I, 143.

\(^{849}\) Clayton, James, June 15(?), 1922 memo on investigation; Frank, Chauncey, December 13, 1924 letter from Army Quartermaster General to mother; Harris, Jerry, September 28, 1921 letter from Wymne of Cemeterial Division to Elgin Watch Company; McKinnon, John, December 12, 1921 letter from Wymne of Cemeterial Division to mother; McKinnon, John, December 21, 1921 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Michael, Austin, October 2, 1924 memo from Army Quartermaster General to Army Adjutant General; Ooster, Ben, June 26, 1928 letter from Army Quartermaster General to father; Robey, Hartley, May 13, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to father; Rosen, Benjamin, February 2, 1921 letter from Greeley of Cemeterial Division to high school; Sledge, Soldier Dead, 105-106.

\(^{850}\) Congress, Senate, Committee on Military Affairs, The Delay in the Publication of Casualty Lists of the American Expeditionary Forces of the Army, 65th Cong., 3rd sess., 3-9 December 1918, 63; Congress, House, Subcommittee of House Committee on Appropriations, Second Deficiency Appropriation Bill, 1919, 65th Cong., 3rd sess., 10 January 1919, 804; Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, [Removal of Remains of U.S. Troops from France (unpublished) [Part 2]], 66th Cong., 1st sess., 30 July 1919, 13; New York Historical Society, “Twenty-Fourth Annual Report of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society,” April 17, 1919, 323-24. Thomas Laqueur traces the term “dog tag” to the Franco-Prussian War, when “the German army became the first in Europe to introduce the ‘hundenmark’ in Germany, a reference to the dog tags that the dogs in Berlin were required to have at about the same time.” Thomas W. Laqueur, The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains (Princeton, NJ:
sometimes destroyed when men were killed and sometimes removed by souvenir hunters or civilians who did not understand the function the tags served; soldiers also sometimes exchanged tags during the course of the war, accidentally or to avoid discipline for not having tags when an inspection was called. To try to preserve as much about the identity of the dead as possible, GRS personnel filled out forms that noted all the information about the body, including the state of the teeth, and about uniforms and personal belongings found on the body. In any case where there were irregularities in the burial of the dead, the procedures of the GRS called for formal inquiries by review boards. Despite these efforts, about 1,600 American bodies, or less than 2% of the dead, were never identified, and the unidentified dead who were located were buried in the permanent American overseas cemeteries. Men whose bodies were either never

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Princeton University Press, 2015), 457. Laqueur also notes that British forces were only issued one tag, which was moved to a bag containing the effects of the dead, leaving many bodies without any other identification and increasing the number of unknown dead. Ibid., 465.

851 Cooperman, Nathan, April 20, 1920 letter from chaplain to Army Adjutant General; Schuler, Joseph, January 27, 1921 letter from comrade to mother; GRS History, Vol. 1, 25; Congress, House, Committee on Appropriations, First Deficiency Appropriation Bill, 1921, 66th Cong., 3rd sess., January 5, 7, 8, 10-13, 17-21, 24, 1921, 302-03; Sledge, Soldier Dead, 103.


853 GRS History, Vol. III, 82-85; Sledge, Soldier Dead, 126. More than 1,500 burials were considered by review boards. GRS History, Vol. III, 82-85.

found or never identified, including those who died at sea, would be memorialized in the overseas cemeteries on “Tablets of the Missing.”

As they had during the Civil War and would during World War II, units of Black Americans assigned to labor duties would be ordered to attend to the gruesome task of disinterring and reburying the American dead. A post-war history of the Quartermaster Corps described this work in stark terms:

Only the highest sense of devotion to duty and appreciation of the sacredness of their task and what it meant to the mothers, fathers, wives, and sisters of the men at home, sustained the personnel engaged in this task. Its gruesomeness was heightened by the fact that most of the bodies were in an advanced state of decay and decomposition, often frightfully mutilated by their death wounds and generally presented heart-rending spectacles.

About 10,000 Black American non-combat soldiers worked under GRS direction to disinter the dead, put bodies in coffins if needed, and transport coffins to new sites for

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burial. Other than the GRS staff, White Americans would not generally be asked to deal with the remains of the American dead: when the Black American troops were sent back to the United States as part of overall demobilization, their task was taken over by French civilians hired for the job. Albert Atlas’s brother, who was also a soldier in the American Expeditionary Forces, visited his brother’s grave before leaving Europe and wrote the GRS in Europe to commend the work being done by all the Americans working on the project of concentrating the dead:

859 GRS History, Vol. II, 10; GRS History, Vol. III, 3. Thomas Laqueur notes that the British used Chinese laborers to bury and rebury the dead, and that 1,500 of them died during the effort, many probably as a result of influenza. Laqueur, The Work of the Dead, 468.
United States Military Mission
Berlin, Germany
Russian Prisoner of War Camp
Brandenburg a/H, June 13, 1919.

United States Graves Registration Service,
American Expeditionary Forces,
Neufchateau (Vosges) France.

Gentlemen:

I have recently returned from leave to France for a visit to the grave of my brother, Private Albert Atlas, Company A, 132 Machine Gun Battalion, 36th Division, who was killed in action October 8, 1919, and is buried near the town of St. Etienne-a-Arnes (Ardennes). While in Paris I talked with your office over the telephone to get the most recent information before going to the site. You recalled a note which you had on file to inform me of any change in the status or location of the grave. As far as I could learn there seems to be a probability that this cemetery would be moved either to Romagne(?) or to another site a little near St. Etienne than the present location, but that there was no knowledge as to when any bodies might be sent home. I am taking this opportunity to inform you of my present address and to thank you for your courtesy and assistance.

I visited several of the cemeteries in the Champagne, Marne and Ourcq river districts with a friend who was also looking for the grave of a brother, and everywhere we went we were treated with the greatest kindness and given every assistance. The work that was being done, including the moving of the bodies, gave the appearance of real care and interest on the part of everybody, from the negro privates all the way up. This has been my own experience right from the time I learned of my brother’s death up to the present time. It has been a great comfort to my people and I know will be to others to learn that the remains of their boys are being so well cared for.

I shall be very grateful if you will advise me at the earliest possible date when anything definite is known regarding my brother’s cemetery or have the proper office do so.

Very sincerely yours,
Chas. E. Atlas, 2nd Lt. A.S.
c/o United States Military Mission,
BERLIN, Germany, Via Coblentz

While other family members and friends who were serving in the American Expeditionary Forces visited graves after the war ended and wrote to the AEF, Atlas’s brother was unusual in that he took notice of the efforts of “the negro privates.” Few if any other acknowledgements of this work can be found in the Burial Files, which may

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860 Atlas, Albert, June 13, 1919 letter from brother (in service with the AEF in Europe) to GRS in Europe.
suggest that the sight of Black Americans, even those wearing their country’s uniform, doing difficult and gruesome tasks was not particularly noteworthy.  

The care that Atlas’s brother noticed was part of the GRS’s efforts to ensure that, even as the dead were disinterred and moved, “nothing should occur which outsiders might see and report as being callous or disrespectful.” The AEF dedicated significant resources to ensuring that the dead were handled with respect and ceremony. Once returns began, the bodies were sent to morgues, where the walls were draped with American flags, and then transferred to ports like Cherbourg or Brest in France or Antwerp in Belgium via truck, barge, and rail. At the ports, warehouse walls were draped with flags, and shipping cases containing coffins were aligned and covered with flags. Protocols were established to ensure that American military personnel and local civilians who worked at the ports treated the coffins with respect. Officers and enlisted honor guards attended the transfer of the bodies to the docks and on to the ships. Flags were draped on each shipping case while it was loaded and removed after the cases were stored on the ship. Newspaper photographs showing the return of the dead resemble

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861 The work of the Black American troops was occasionally noted elsewhere. Asked about stories that men had been buried hastily, a chaplain who had been at Brest during the influenza epidemic acknowledged to the press that the dead had been transported by truck to a site away from Brest and buried without coffins but argued that the dead were treated with reverence by the “negroes” who had been detailed to dig graves and bury the dead. “Terrible Days Spent at Brest,” Atlanta Constitution, March 3, 1919, 3.


864 GRS History, Vol. 1, 149.


867 GRS History, Vol. II, 85. Once the dead arrived in the United States, GRS personnel stationed first at Hoboken and later at Brooklyn unloaded bodies from the transports into a warehouse decorated with American flags; flags were also put on the coffins. GRS History, Vol. 1, 53-54.
similar images from recent wars, indicating that the efforts surrounding the World War
dead established patterns that have been followed since that time.868

While the GRS was preparing some of the dead for return to the United States, the
War Department was also developing plans for the permanent overseas cemeteries, to be
known as “Fields of Honor.”869 In February 1920, Secretary of War Baker announced
that he was sending his aide, Ralph Hayes, to Europe to make recommendations for
establishing permanent American overseas cemeteries.870 Hayes recommended that the
American dead be concentrated into the fewest possible number of permanent cemeteries,
despite calls from veterans of individual Army units to maintain cemeteries where the
majority of the unit’s dead were buried; that the cemeteries have standardized headstones;
and that the Army continue the wartime practice of intermingling officers and enlisted
men and men from different units.871 The United States government would eventually
establish six permanent cemeteries in France: St. Mihiel (originally known as Thiacourt),
Somme (originally Bony), Suresnes, Oise-Aisne (originally Seringes-et-Nesles), Meuse-
Argonne (originally Romagne-sous-Montfaucon), and Aisne-Marne (originally Belleau
Wood).872 Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery would be the largest of the cemeteries,

869 Bennett, Robert, April 22, 1919 letter from mother to “Cemeterial Quartermaster”; Fiske, Newell, August 2, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to father; Gilkeson, Robert, May 5, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; Minor, Farrell, May 5, 1919 letter from Pierce of GRS to father; Kotlyn, Joseph, 1920-06-02 letter from mother (“There was a picture in the paper of the caskets when they landed in New York.”); Patton, Darrell, May 17, 1919 letter from parents to Army Adjutant General.
870 French, James, March 11, 1920 letter from Secretary of War Baker to General O’Ryan; Woodbury, Robert, April 26, 1920 letter from Pierce of Cemeterial Division to father.
872 Sarran, Edmund, undated typed list of old and new cemetery names; Sledge, Soldier Dead, 204.
with more than 14,000 graves, while the smallest cemetery, established in Belgium at Flanders Field, would have fewer than 400 graves.873 A small cemetery at Brookwood in England with 468 graves would bring the total number of cemeteries in Europe to eight.874

“I dont know what would be best”: Families Try to Decide Where to Bury the Dead

While the GRS worked to bury the dead, families sought more information from the War Department about the circumstances under which the dead had been buried. As discussed in Chapter 2, families wanted to ensure that, if the government was going to displace families in the role of burying the dead, even temporarily, the graves of the dead were receiving the same care that families would have provided.875 For some, the concern was primarily emotional, because learning more details about a grave helped to relieve grief, even as it made reports of a death seem more real. John Jonas’s mother wrote to ask for the location of her son’s grave:

875 Horowitz, Samuel, February 14, 1919 letter from mother to GRS in Europe; Kingdon, Leon, March 17, c1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Ross, Clifton, December 26, 1918 letter from mother to AEF (“please have his grave marked with his name on it so they can find it when i sent for him”); Smith, Lewis, March 2, 1920 letter from mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division; Young, James H., December 26, 1918 letter from widow to War Department.
Albany R #1 Minn
Mch. 24 - 1920

Col. Charles C. Pierce
Washington D.C.

My Dear Sir:-

I understand that you are in a position to give a person information as to the burial place of my son, who died in Germany as the result of wounds received in France. He was John P. Jonas, Private, Company I Reg. 357 Inf. We understand that he died in Coblentz or near by that city, but can not find out where, in what hospital he died and where about he is buried. If you could let me have the desired information I would be very thankful to you, as a mother always wishes to be satisfied that her son really died and also wishes to know where her son is at rest. Please do me the favor my dear sir and let me have all the information possible. Thanking you in advance I am

Very respectfully yours
Mrs. Barbara Jonas

Albany R #1 Minn

Jonas’s mother wanted more information about where her son was buried because “a mother always wishes to be satisfied that her son really died and also wishes to know where her son is at rest,” and she thought that more information about her son’s grave would help her to comprehend and begin to accept his death. Luther Fields’s mother similarly wrote that “knowing the place of his burial brought to me a great realization of his death.” But families were also comforted by information about graves because they believed that receiving the location of a grave meant that their family member’s body had been found and buried, was not missing or unidentified, and could later be buried as the family chose. Burett Wade’s widow wrote the Department that she wanted her husband’s body returned to her:

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876 Jonas, John, March 24, 1920 letter from mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division.
877 Fields, Luther, February 20, 1919 letter from mother to GRS in Europe.
878 Brightwell, William, January 9, 1919 letter from family to GRS in Europe; Castle, Herbert, December 9, 1919 letter from mother to War Department; Woodul, Charles, February 4, 1919 letter from father to Pierce
Wade’s widow was confident that her husband’s body could be returned because Wade’s body had had a “good burial,” by which she meant that his grave had been well marked, so his body could be found and returned to her. Robert McCune’s grandmother wrote to thank Charles Pierce of the Cemeterial Division for the information she had received about McCune’s grave:

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Wade, Burett, June 26, 1919 letter from widow to Bureau of War Risk Insurance.

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of GRS in Europe (“comfort to know where our loved heroes are buried and that their graves are marked for identification”).

879 Wade, Burett, June 26, 1919 letter from widow to Bureau of War Risk Insurance.
Paducah Ky  
Feb 3rd 1919

Lieut Col Charles C. Peirce of Graves Registration Service

Dear Sir

Your letter I received. I cant tell you how very gratified I am for your great kindness in so promptly answering my letter. [And] what a load you have taken off my mind [and] heart to know that my dear boy is resting in a cemetery [and] his grave is being taken care of.

I have thought so much about it that maybe his precious body was burried out most anywhere [and] maybe lost. I cant never thank you enough for what you have done for me but I want [?] tell you - I feel you will all ways have my best wishes for your future welfare [and] God will bless you for this good [and] noble work you are doing for I know that is in the heart of every mother as it is in mine. Good by

Mrs. Sarah McCune  
1015 Trimble Street  
Paducah Ky

Would love to have a photograph of Robert’s grave.

I have the promise of our Government that Robert’s body will be returned to me.

Your friend,

S. McCune

McCune’s grandmother knew that it was possible that McCune’s body might have been buried by his comrades on the battlefield and its location later forgotten, and she had been afraid that “maybe his precious body was burried out most anywhere [and] maybe lost.” She believed that the confirmation of the location of her grandson’s grave meant that McCune’s body had been located and that the grave was marked so that she could eventually receive McCune’s body for private burial as, she noted in her post script, the government had promised her. Arthur Malherbe’s parents likewise wrote to seek more information about the exact location of Malherbe’s grave:

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880 McCune, Robert, February 3, 1919 letter from grandmother to Pierce of GRS in Europe.
Chief, Graves Registration Service, American E.F.

Honorable Sir,

I beg to acknowledge receipt of your letter and information with reference to our son Pvt Arthur L Malherbe, Headquarters Co., 137 Inf., Died September 28th 1918 in the battle of the Argonne. In reply would advise that it is a great comfort to us, to know that his body lies buried in an American Cemetery, Chateau de Salvange, Dep of the Meuse, under your care and control, and that there will be no danger of its loss or neglect.

It would also be a great comfort to us if you possibly can forward to us the photography of his grave in due time according to the Regulation.

Further more if our Deceased Son had any personal effects of aney kind, I beg you to do what you possibly can to have it forward the same to us.

What is the nearest city or village in which our son is buried.

We are please of your earnest desire to guard our interest in evry possible way and our satisfaction is resting on your care.

With kind regards,
We remain, 
Very Sincerely Yours,
Mr. and Mrs. Geo Malherbe
Kaw City Okla USA

Malherbe’s parents were quoting a letter they had received from the War Department about there being “no danger” of the loss or neglect of their son’s grave, but like McCune’s grandmother, Malherbe’s parents were at the same time expressing gratitude and reminding the government of the obligations it had assumed, both to stand in the family’s stead with respect to caring for the dead and their graves and to return bodies to families who requested it.

Families sometimes asked for specific information about the location of graves. During the war, War Department censorship prevented the GRS from giving families the specific locations of cemeteries during the war, and cemeteries were merely identified

\[\text{881} \text{ Malherbe, Arthur, February 20, 1919 letter from mother to GRS in Europe.}\]
with numbers. Families wanted the comfort of knowing that their loved ones were buried in a particular town or village that they could see on a map, which also gave them a sense of the location and setting of the grave. Some families were comparing available maps of France with the information provided by the War Department, just as they had done during the war to understand where major battles were being fought and where Americans were dying. Paul Cross’s father wrote to ask for the name of the town nearest the cemetery where his son was buried:

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882 Buell, Charles, August 1, 1918 letter from Pierce of GRS in Europe to father; Clay, Henry, February 20, 1919 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS in Europe; Dunlap, Clarence, September 17, 1918 letter from Pierce of GRS in Europe to father; Frazier, Walter, September 24, 1918 letter from Pierce of GRS in Europe to third party (minister); Hopps, Martin, December 20, 1918 letter from local Red Cross chapter on behalf of family to GRS in Europe; Kirby, George, October 28, 1918 AEF memo to Chief of French Military Mission (asking that French government not provide cemetery locations as this would “open the way for an evasion of the prescribed rules of censorship”).

883 Barry, David, December 3, 1918 letter from father to Pierce of GRS in Europe; Brunig, Paul, March 1(?), 1919 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS in Europe; Buck, Stanley, November 22, 1918 letter from Pierce of GRS in Europe to father; Caton, Walter, February 26, 1920 letter from father to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division) (“what is the name of the Cemetery and near what Town?”); De Binder, Henry, December 16, 1918 letter from father to Adjutant General; Engles, Brooklyn, December 29, 1918 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS in Europe; Hopps, Martin, December 20, 1918 letter from local Red Cross on behalf of family to GRS in Europe; Rennard, Herbert, December 20, 1919 letter from father to GRS (Cemeterial Division) (“I might some day take a notion in my head to cross the lake and see his grave”); Stevenson, Alfred, June 1, 1919 letter from widow to Pierce of GRS in Europe; Thurston, Edgar, May 8, 1919 letter from father to Pierce of Cemeterial Division.

884 Crooks, Lloyd, March 24, 1919 letter from parents to War Department.
West Street Methodist Episcopal Church  
Shelbyville, Indiana

August 13, 1918

Major Charles C. Pierce,  
Am. Ex. Force

Dear Sir:-

Some weeks ago I received your official communication which brought the information as far as it was permissible for you to give it, of the location of the grave of our son, Pvt. Paul F. Cross, who was killed in action June 5th; the place of his burial you designated as Cemetery No. 112.

I want to thank you most kindly for the information, and for the interest you show, and for the service which your department renders. It is a source of satisfaction in the midst of our grief, to know that the grave of our hero son is not to be neglected - for that spot, wherever it may be, is most sacred to us.

Since receiving your letter, I have been informed in an indirect way, the name of the French village in whose cemetery our son was buried - Pexonne. Of course I have no way of knowing this to be correct. If true, and it is permissible, will you please verify the information? If it is not true, will you not at the earliest moment it is permissible, tell us where it is?

Not that the information will be any particular value to us; but there will be some comfort in the knowledge of the exact location of the grave where lies the body of our only son - and as fine and noble and brave as has died or will die in the defense of righteous principles.

We look hopefully toward the day when victory shall be won; and when we may have his body returned to us to lay it to rest here in his home land.

Yours truly  
(Rev.) S.J. Cross  
629 S. West St.

Cross’s father, a minister, sought information about the location of his son’s grave because it would be “some comfort” to himself and his family. He was willing to be patient if the GRS was not yet able to officially confirm the location of the cemetery that he had received from unofficial sources, but he expected the GRS to give him more precise information as soon as it was able to do so.

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885 Cross, Paul, August 13, 1918 letter from parent to Pierce of GRS.
While some families were looking at maps to try to understand where and how the dead were buried, many others were looking at grave photographs. The GRS, with extensive help from the Red Cross, attempted to send each family a photograph of the marked grave of his or her family member.\footnote{Cassady, Charles, February 25, 1920 letter from sister to War Department; Garvin, James, February 18, 1920 letter from father to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division); Scanlon, Daniel, October 21, 1921 letter from sister to American Red Cross National Headquarters; Weaver, Rosser, October 27, 1919 letter from Wynne for Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division) to sister (“you can readily understand that the taking of one photograph of the approximately 80,000 graves of our men buried in Europe is a gigantic task” and “the Photographic Section of the Red Cross is employed day and night in forwarding the individual photographs to the nearest relatives”); Whiteley, David, May 4, 1920 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division); “Red Cross Will Link Soldiers and Homes,” \textit{Boston Daily Globe}, March 18, 1918, 14; “Will Photograph Graves in France of U.S. Soldiers,” \textit{Atlanta Constitution}, February 22, 1919, 8; American Expeditionary Forces, General Headquarters, General Orders No. 30, February 15, 1918 (France); American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, “Annual Report of the Society for the Preservation of Scenic and Historic Places and Objects to the Legislature of the State of New York,” 325-26; Jennifer D. Keene, \textit{World War I} (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 86; American Expeditionary Forces, General Headquarters, General Orders No. 101, June 24, 1918 (France); “Photographs of Identified Graves of U.S. Soldiers in France will be Sent by Red Cross to Their Relatives,” \textit{Official Bulletin}, February 24, 1919, 4; War Department, \textit{Location of Graves and Disposition of Bodies of American Soldiers Who Died Overseas} (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1920), 3.} The GRS hoped that the photographs would help families accept the fact of the death, make them feel better that the dead were properly buried, and allow them to envision how a grave looked, but the GRS was also doubtless hoping that seeing graves, even if only in photographs, would encourage families to leave the dead permanently overseas. Bart Ziino notes that for the Australian families of the World War dead who had no hope of the dead being returned, grave photographs provided families with a “sense of place” that was “crucial to imagining the grave, and centering private memory of the dead.”\footnote{Bart Ziino, \textit{A Distant Grief: Australians, War Graves and the Great War} (Crawley, Western Australia: University of Western Australia Press, 2007), 21, 87, 140.} American families took the same comfort from Red Cross grave photographs. Keller Smith’s sister wrote to thank the War Department for the photographs she had received because “[i]ts consoling to the relatives
to know thier deads graves are cared for.” Charles Ludwig’s parents wrote to thank the War Department for the photos of their son’s grave, which they said had “consoled us greatly as we think the grave is in good care.” As the GRS hoped, some families decided to leave the dead in France because of the photographs. Frank Branigan’s mother wrote the Army Adjutant General after she received photographs of her son’s grave:

Brooklyn, N.Y., April 30, 1920.

The Adjutant General,
War Department,
Washington, D.C.

Dear Sir:

Referring to your letter of March 20, 1919, in regard to the permanent disposition of the bodies of those who died overseas, and my reply thereto that you bring my son’s body, Frank E. Branigan, to America, if not too late I wish now to advise you not to bring him home.

I have just received some pictures of my son’s grave from the American Red Cross, and feel now that he is resting well, and for that reason I would not care to disturb his body.

Respectfully yours,
Amm Branigan
16 Spencer Court,
Brooklyn, N.Y.

For Branigan’s mother, having her son’s body “resting well” was more important than the comfort she thought she might get from having his body returned to her, and she agreed to leave Branigan’s body buried overseas.

888 Smith, Keller, February 24, 1920 letter from sister to Pierce of Cemeterial Division.
889 Ludwig, Charles, July 17, 1919 letter from parents to War Department.
890 Acheson, William, May 1920 letter from father to GRS (Cemeterial Division); Barnes, John, May 1, 1920 letter from father to Army Quartermaster General (“rather the body not to be returned, since I have seen the picture of his grave in France”); Field, Pauline, July 16, 1921 letter from mother to Red Cross; Fleming, Joseph, May 24, 1921 letter from mother to Secretary of War (“I have the picture of his grave” and “I don’t want his body disinterred”); Kildee, Edward, February 11, 1920 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; Prince, John, May 6, 1920 letter from third party to GRS (Cemeterial Division) (“I received photos from the Red X and think it much better not to have his grave there disturbed”).
891 Branigan, Frank, April 30, 1920 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General.
Once families knew that the bodies of their family members had been found, identified, and buried in Europe, they had to decide where the dead should be permanently buried. Families were often uncertain about what should be done, and while they sometimes wrote the government to provide instructions or to ask what was permissible, they often also explained or defended their choices. In particular, families understood that the War Department and officials like Pershing were encouraging Americans to leave the war dead left overseas, and a number of families offered rationales that supported their decision to have the dead brought back. Some families argued, for example, that the dead would have wanted to be buried near family.893 James Burleson’s mother was sure her son would have wanted his body brought home:

893 Aldrich, Perry, September 22, 1921 letter from mother to Army Quartermaster General; Davis, Roscoe, April 18, 1921 letter from father to War Department (“his last word to me was Dady if I die return my boddy if possible”); Dreger, William, March 21, 1919 letter from family to Army Adjutant General (“his last wish before he left was that if he were killed he could be brought home so we won’t have any rest unless his last wish is fulfilled”); Estlick, Floyd, October (?) 1920 letter from father to Army Quartermaster General (“my son said before he left the United States that if anything happened to him he wanted to be brought home”); Everett, Thomas, March 9(?), 1919 letter from sister to Army Adjutant General (“was also his own wish if anything should happen that I would bring him home”); Fleming, Thomas, April 2, 1920 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“he wanted to be brought home”); Fouts, Loyd, March 3, 1919 letter from mother to War Department (“last request of his wife when he left for camp was if he never lived to return to be burried by his father”); Galbraith, John, December 29, 1919 letter from mother to President Wilson (“my son’s desire was to come home and that his body should return”); Jones, Samuel J., October 12, 1919 letter from sister to Secretary of War (“he wanted to be buried with his father and mother”); Kinnamon, Bert, May 1, 1921 letter from guardian of widow to War Department (“he told me so many times if he died over there he wanted to be brought back to the united states for burial”); Koons, Dallas, October 30, 1919 letter from family to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division) (“he said before leaving if any thing happened to him he should be saints back and buried with us here”); Shilliday, Rexford, March 23, 1920 letter from mother to GRS (Cemeterial Division) (soldier wrote “‘if I should be killed I’d like to be buried in the States where my mother could come to my grave”). A smaller number of families argued that they were sure the dead would have wanted to be buried in Europe. Sanwald, Louis, August 28, 1921 letter from mother to War Department (“I know his wishes was to rest in France”); Tredway, Will, May 26, 1919 letter from mother to War Department (“his personal wish was to have his body remain where he fell”).
Jan 10 1919

Mr. Some Body

Please ancer me in regard to this of Privt James Burleson Co G 120 inf American EF via NY[.]
He was kild in France Sept 29 1918[.] Will you please send his deare body to me when it is tuck up[.]
It will help me to liv in this life better and it will help us all[.]
It is so sad hear at home[.]
We all want to be in the same spot of ground[.]
Little James was my baby boy and i want to be lad by him[.]
Dont say he cant be sent it will kill me[.]
i no he wanted to tell me to hav it done if he cold speek he wold say so so i will look and wait for it.

Mrs. Matilda Burleson
Boonford Mitchell Co North894

Burleson’s mother thought she knew what her son would have told her “if he cold speek,”
and the idea of being buried near him someday also gave her comfort.

Families also argued to the War Department that their views were supported by
information from veterans to whom they had spoken. A few families wanted the dead
returned in part because veterans had told them that, contrary to statements made by
military leaders, the dead would have wanted to be brought home.895 Robert Thurman’s
father wrote that he had talked to a number of veterans and “most of those with whom I
have talked state that the great number of soldiers desired in the case of death that their
bodies be returned to America.”896 Other families wrote that they had been persuaded by
veterans to leave the dead overseas.897 Joseph Boyle’s father wrote that “a comrade of

894 Burleson, James, January 10, 1919 letter from mother to War Department.
895 Connors, Patrick, September 3, 1921 letter from sister to Cemeterial Division.
896 Thurman, Robert, March 29, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General.
897 Brogden, Joseph, September 7, 1919 note from mother to Army Quartermaster General (“I have talked
to men over that that was over in France where they were removeing the dead solgiers graves and they told
me that they get the markings mixed up and I would not now if I got my sons remains or some other
remains”); Brown, Grady, January 1, 1920 letter from widow to Army Adjutant General (“since the return
soldiers have told me how they were berried”); Condon, Thomas, August 2, 1919 letter from family to
Army Adjutant General; Conklin, Sherman, undated letter from parent to Army Adjutant General (other
two sons are in the Army, and “we all think Sherman’s body should rest in the country for which he gave
his life”); French, James, February 17, 1919 letter from mother to Cemeterial Division (“I have talked with
his told us how he died and advised us not to have the body brought home as he thinks we would not be able to bear it.\textsuperscript{898} A comrade of Joseph Shuler contacted his mother in early 1921 as part of an investigation into the location of Schuler’s grave and wrote that some people are having their boys brought home, which in my view is a great mistake. The place where your boy is resting is far more honorable than any place you could have him placed here in the states. . . . Then there is a chance of you being sent the body of some stranger in place of your dear boy. If Joe could speak to you, he would say, let me rest where I fell.\textsuperscript{899}

Other veterans told families that one reason not to have the dead returned was that the government’s identification of the dead could be inaccurate.\textsuperscript{900} Joseph Brogden’s mother was told by veterans to whom she spoke that “I would not [k]now if I got my sons remains or some other remains.”\textsuperscript{901} The voices of these veterans carried great weight.

\textsuperscript{898} Boyle, Joseph, January 17, 1921 letter from father to Cemeterial Division.
\textsuperscript{899} Schuler, Joseph, January 27, 1921 letter from comrade to mother.
\textsuperscript{900} Carter, John J., June 7, 1919 letter from sister to Army Adjutant General (“I have been told by both boys and nurses that although the graves are marked they could not swear as to whether it contained the body of John Smith or John Brown”); Chamberlain, Harry, May 2, 1920 letter from comrade to mother (suggesting that mother should have someone go to France “instead of accepting any body that the government might send to you as your son’s which a number of people will have to do”); Dragoo, John, September 22, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (two other sons “that was over there” and other family members “tell me I could not have the casket opened and could not be it was him after all”); Schuler, Joseph, January 27, 1921 letter from comrade to mother (“some people are having their boys brought home, which in my view is a great mistake”; “there is a chance of you being sent the body of some stranger in place of your dear boy”). This is a hint of profiteering in some of these letters: the comrade of Harry Chamberlain, for example, offered to go to France on behalf of the family if the family would make “some provision” for the comrade’s wife and children. Chamberlain, Harry, May 2, 1920 letter from comrade to mother.
\textsuperscript{901} Brogden, Joseph, September 7, 1920 note from mother to Army Quartermaster General. Not all veterans felt the same. Jonker, Alvin, June 03, 1919 letter from family to Secretary of War; Lindsay, William, May 24, 1920 letter from mother to War Risk Insurance Bureau. Clarence Allshouse’s sister wrote that she had talked to veterans who assured her that “I cant help but get the rite body[,] so if it aint to
with some families. Joseph Schuler’s body was eventually located, but his mother asked that the body be left in an overseas cemetery specifically because of the advice she had received from his comrades; Joseph Brodgen’s mother also asked that her son’s body be left in Europe. The views of family members who were veterans were understandably given special consideration. William Dalton’s father wrote that “I have decided not to move the remains of my son as his brother[,] who was with him in battle at the time of his death[,] has requested that his remains remain where they are buried.” Dalton’s brother may have known something about the condition of Dalton’s remains or may just have thought his brother’s body should be left in Europe with other soldiers. Brothers were not the only family members who had informed opinions about where the dead should be buried: a friend of Arthur Dixon’s family wrote that Dixon’s sister, who had

late and dont put you out any I would like very mutch to have it.” Allhouse, Clarence, May 22, 1919 letter from sister to War Department.

902 Brogden, Joseph, March 15, 1921 letter from mother to Army Quartermaster General; Schuler, Joseph, February 17, 1921 letter from mother to Pierce of Graves Registration.

903 Bagnell, Clifford, May 22, 1920 letter from father to GRS (Cemeterial Division) (had requested return “but in talking to his brother who was in the same Div I have changed my mind”); Barefoot, Rowan, May 16, 1921 letter from brother to GRS at Hoboken; Blosser, Emil, August 19, 1919 letter from brother to Army Adjutant General (“I wish to state that [mother's] decision has been arrived at through the stand taken by myself and another brother, both of us being ex-service men with Overseas service”); Jonker, Alvin, June 3, 1919 letter from family to Secretary of War Baker (younger son who served “told us by all means have his body brought home”); McDevitt, Earl, March 5, 1920 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (second son who served “said if he had died over thair his dying request would of abin to leve me thair”); McQuaid, Hugh, June 18, 1919 letter from brother to Army Adjutant General (“my other brother was in France” and “has formed the same desire as my self and that is to bring his body back to Chicago where we may place it with his father, mother, and his sisters and our other brother the entire family being dead” other than the two surviving brothers); Meyer, William, June 12, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“at one time we thought we would rather let the body remain in France but upon my son’s return from the service he was annoyed at our decision and wishes the same to be returned so that it can lie in our family plot”).

been an Army nurse in France during the war, wanted her brother’s body buried in an overseas cemetery.905

Some families had trouble deciding and changed their minds several times.906 Families worried what the government would think of their indecision and apologized for any inconvenience even as they defended their new choice.907 Joseph Davidson’s father changed his instructions at least twice:

905 Berryman, Roy, April 1, 1919 letter from uncle to Army Adjutant General; Dixon, Arthur, May 9, 1919 letter from third party on behalf of sister to Army Adjutant General.
906 Allan, Frank, February 17, 1920 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (read book about why the dead should be left in France); Collins, Alfred, June 3, 1920 letter from mother to War Department (want return because parents of son’s friends from same community are requesting return); Echeverria, Charles, June 3, 1920 letter from mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division (widowed mother permanently leaving the country); Ford, Henry, January 29, 1921 letter from sister to Cemeterial Division ("we received some time ago from the chaplain that was with him before he died that he was resting peacefully in the little Catholic cemetery in France"); Gallagher, Joseph, July 9, 1920 letter from mother to War Department ("I hear the French people have taken great interest in taking care of the graves"); Senstad, George, October 18, 1920 letter from parents to Cemeterial Division (family moving); Shipley, George, May 27, 1921 letter from family to GRS (Cemeterial Division) (mother requested return but is now dead); Strobel, Ezra, April 30, 1920 letter from father to War Department ("I hear so much about those dead bodies that are brought back that it is daftfoul wether I shoud get the wright body of my son back").
907 Allen, John S., August 20, 1921 letter from family to GRS at Hoboken ("please do not condemn us as people who do not know their own minds"); Birchall, Thomas, 1919(?) letter from mother to War Department; Blevins, Charles, November 9, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General ("this is a hard question for me to decide"); Clemons, David, June 5, 1921 letter from mother to Army Quartermaster General ("Oh! It has been so hard to decide. So don’t think me too changeable."); Cunningham, Edward, December 29, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (you perhaps will think I am changeable"); Heath, James, June 23, 1920 letter from sister-in-law to Army Adjutant General ("I know that these changes are confusing and cause a great deal of trouble to your Department"); McDade, Furman, May 5, 1921 letter from father to Wynne of GRS at Hoboken ("we are very sorry to have caused you any unnecessary trouble"); Williams, Frank, April 5, 1921 letter from mother to War Department ("pardon me for being so changeable regarding the disposition of my boys body who died in France").
Panola Co. Limited
Cotton and Timber Lands

St. Joseph, La. January 30th 1920

General P.C. Harris,
War Department,
Washington, D.C.

My dear General Harris:-

I am afraid you will think us a very uncertain and a very changeable family, for Mrs. Davidson-the rest of us concurring-have concluded to make Arlington the final resting place for the remains of our beloved boy, and I trust that in going back to the original plan, we have in no manner inconvenienced or annoyed you and we would thank you to so advise colonel Pierce.

You will of course duly advise us of the time of arrival of the remains of our precious dead, so that we may be at Washington in time to receive them, and to arrange for funeral services.

I see that a movement is on foot, headed by Mrs. Roosevelt, looking to the prevention of the return of the American dead, and just why she should interest herself outside of her own family, I am at a loss to understand.

As far as we are concerned, we are most anxious to have Jody’s body returned, and would be more than willing to go to any expense, if by so doing it would expedite the matter.

I trust therefore my dear General, that you will use your powerful influence in behalf of those who feel as we do. We have given our all to the cause of liberty, and all we ask now is that we be given the privilege of having our boy’s remains rest in his own country.

Thanking you for your kindness and the courtesies extended to me heretofore, and in anticipation for your further efforts in our behalf, I remain,

Very sincerely yours,
W. M. Davidson

Davidson’s father was “afraid” that the Army Adjutant General would think his family was “very uncertain” and “very changeable,” but that did not stop him from asking that his son’s body be returned. He also took the opportunity in writing to the Adjutant General—who, from the tone of letter, he may have known personally but who he also likely knew had lost a son in the war—to defend the right of families to decide where the

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908 Davidson, Joseph, January 30, 1920 letter from father to Army Adjutant General.
dead should be buried and to argue against those public figures, like the Roosevelts, who wanted the dead left in Europe.909 Other families wrote to defend both their current decision and their right to change their minds.910 William Lindsay’s mother insisted in May of 1920 that she wanted her son’s body left in France, writing that “I would always have a doubt if it was my son’s remains or some other poor mothers boy” and that “my minister (who was Chaplin in the 80th Div.) has said a number of times ‘let the boys sleep where they fell.’”911 By August of 1921, however, she wanted her son’s body returned:

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909 Davidson’s body was returned to Arlington National Cemetery. Davidson, Joseph, March 22, 1921 receipt for remains delivered to Arlington National Cemetery. Another letter in Joseph Davidson’s Burial File may support the idea that Davidson’s father knew the Army Adjutant General. Davidson’s father wrote the Cemeterial Division that his wife planned to travel through Washington, D.C., and wanted to visit the Cemeterial Division offices for more information about the timing of the return of her son’s body. Davidson’s father noted that she would be “accompanied by Senator Joseph E. Ransdell of this state, in whose office my son was employed for two years as assistant secretary, and from which position he resigned immediately upon the outbreak of the war, to enter the Officers Training Camp at Fort Myer.” Davidson, Joseph, December 16, 1920 letter from father to Shannon of Army Quartermaster Corps (Cemeterial Division).

910 Andelstedt, Raymond, October 20, 1921 letter from parents to War Department (“our Legion Representative has just returned from France and has informed us of the removal of thousands of bodies from the cemetery”); Carpenter, Frank, June 6, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“I have changed my mind as I could not see it I should always feel uneasy for it might not be the right one”); Dubravsky, Mike, September 3, 1920 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (change of mind because “if his mother or father cannot look at him and see who is may they would sooner leave him stay right where he is”).

911 Lindsay, William, May 24, 1920 letter from mother to War Risk Insurance Bureau.
Pitts. Pennsa  
Aug. 12 – 21

To Chas. C. Pierce Q.M.

Dear Sir:-

Rec’d a letter a letter from you on Mar. 30th 1920, saying my son and only child was buried in Romagne Cemetery, Grave #40, Section 94, lot #1, cty 1232. Wm. Howard Lindsay, Priv. Co. B, 320th Inf.

Now, Mr. Pierce it is my earnest prayer and desire to have my son’s body returned to his own native soil and buried in our family lot so I can lie beside him when I am deceased. I belong to the Chateau Aus. of V.F.W. and have attended 11 funerals the past three weeks, and oh, my heart is almost broken it looks to me that all are brought back here but my dear loved boy. I cannot stand it longer to have him there. I am haunted day and night, for I know he would want to be brought back to the ‘good old U.S.A.’ as he called it in every letter to me, so that is why I changed my mind. At first, some boys told me he was blown to pieces, his head was 3 or 4 feet from his body, also left arm and shoulder off and ‘dog tags’ missing, so I thought I would not get him, but I met his sergeant here at the 80th Div. Convention a Mr. Wallir and he has his death record he said he kept it because he was the only boy in his Co. B to fall on that one drive Sept. 26th 1918. He is going to send me the record and also the address of the boy who was with him when he fell, he said his head was not blown off.

So now I have told you the reason I want him back, so please see I get my only boy home to rest with me in the U.S.A.

Please give this your immediate attention and answer this and relieve a mother’s sad and breaking heart for her boy. Trusting to hear from you in a few days I am anxiously awaiting.

His mother,
Mrs. Annie Lindsay
1133 Rush St.
U.S. Pitts, Pa. 912

Lindsay’s mother felt the need to explain “the reason I want him back” to justify her change of mind. She explained that after attending funerals for other veterans and talking to someone who had actually served with her son, she had decided that she did want his body back.

Like Lindsay’s mother, other families were deeply affected by funerals for other soldiers or marines in their communities and defended their change of mind by referring

912 Lindsay, William, August 12, 1921 letter from mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division.
to their experiences. Some families who had initially requested that their war dead be left in France changed their minds after attending other funerals. These families presumably thought that participating in a funeral or having a grave to visit would help them come to terms with their grief, though they may also have been influenced by the support that communities gave to families during and after a funeral. Charley Youngs’s mother initially requested that her son’s body be sent to her but then changed her mind and asked that her son be left buried in Europe:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sep 26 1920</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dear Sir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As you will know that I filled out a card that were sent me in regards to having my sons body sent home for burial and i signed yes to sent him to me but as it has ben so long and there has ben some bodies sent here for burial and cannot open the casket to see them i do not wish to have him sent now because i do not know what i would do to see him come now as it has bin so long of corse if i could of had him sent before then i would not have taken it so hard but i do wish that you leave him lay with the rest of the boys that died for the same cause and please answer my letter and let me know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from Mrs. Eliza Youngs his mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>309 11 St. Bay City Mich.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His name Charles A. Youngs. Pvt 80th Co. Tank Corps R-148068</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Having learned that she could not open her son’s coffin, she asked that the government “leave him lay with the rest of the boys that died for the same cause.” Later, however, she changed her mind again:

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913 Beck, Oscar, June 21, 1921 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (had requested leave in France but “day before yesterday I was to a funeral where one of the boys was being interred and I was made to be sorry I said that”); Caffrey, Raymond, October 24, 1921 letter from mother to GRS (Cemeterial Division) (wanted body left in France but “since then nearly all the bodies of soldiers from this town and nearby have been returned and it has changed my feelings”); Clemons, David, June 5, 1921 letter from mother Army Quartermaster General (“I was at a military funeral Sat. It seemed so nice.”); Densmore, Fred, April 8, 1921(?) letter from mother to War Department (“they are bringing them back all around me”); Paulson, Thomas, June 10, 1919 letter from brother to War Department.

914 Youngs, Charley, September 26, 1920 letter from mother to War Risk Insurance Bureau.
Bay City    1921

In regard of the body of my son i hope it can be shipped home instead of being taken up and put in another cemetery. Of course when i sent word to let him lye where he was burried i thought it would be all wright but now i feel different. If he is sent home i will feel a lot better and please Wanswer and tell me just what you will do about it if you will please. If i understand wright all charges are paid by the government write me all about it as i will be glad to know.

from Mrs. Eliza Youngs
309 11 St.
Bay City Mich

Youngs’s mother decided that she would “feel a lot better” if his body were returned to her, despite the long delays since his death. The government agreed to return his body to her and did so in August of 1922, almost four years after Youngs died. Fred Densmore’s mother had similarly intended to leave her son’s body buried in Europe, but after witnessing funerals in her community, she wrote that she “thought I could leave him there but they are bringing them back all around me and I will louse my mind if he don’t come. . . . You cant imagne the heart ache of a mother when the other boys come back and mine is still over their.” Other families who witnessed funerals for the war dead changed their minds and asked that the bodies of the dead not be returned to them, believing that funerals and burials would only increase their grief. James Dobson’s father asked a friend to write for him to ask that Dobson’s body not be returned, because his wife, Dobson’s mother, did not think she could endure a funeral:

915 Youngs, Charley, April(?), 1921 letter from mother to War Risk Insurance Bureau.
916 Youngs, Charley, August 25, 1922 receipt for remains.
917 Densmore, Fred, April 8, 1921(?) letter from mother to War Department.
918 Boetger, William, March 19, 1920 letter from father to War Department; Dunn, Thomas F., August 8, 1920 letter from Red Cross on behalf of mother to Army Adjutant General; Eccles, Homer, May 13, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (“it will only make us feel worse than we did at first”).
Moscow, Tenn 4/28 1919,
Honorable Hubert F. Fisher,
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Fisher:

Mr. and Mrs. M. F. Dobson who at first wished the body of their son - who died in France - brought back - now desire that this be not done - or if on this side - that the body be buried in National Cemetery in the north. The reason for this is - a soldier boy arrived here a day or two ago with a body going to Slayden, Miss (near here) and it has torn her up the mother - pretty bad - and she does not want the body brought here or to Memphis as requested - she does not think she could stand it after hearing about the body which I mention above.

If possible please have her request complied with and let us know.

Gratefully,

W. L. Jewell

Dobson’s father changed his instructions because his wife did “not think she could stand” to have their son’s body returned for burial. From the timing of the letter about Dobson’s family, the military dead who the Dobsons had seen buried must have men who had died in the United States from disease or accident, not while serving overseas, but Dobson’s parents did not change their mind when the other overseas war dead were returned, and Dobson’s body was buried permanently in Europe.920

The decision about where to bury the dead was wrenching for many families, who wrote the government to express their distress. Even Mabel Fonda Gareissен, the staunch public advocate of leaving the dead in France discussed in Chapter 1, experienced indecision about the final disposition of her son’s body. Gareissен wrote that the letter she had received from the government asking her to state her preferences about where she wanted her son buried made her “fearfully upset and uncertain. In short my good sense

919 Dobson, James, April 28, 1919 letter from third party on behalf of father to member of United States House of Representatives.
920 Dobson, James, January 3, 1927 letter from Army Quartermaster General to father.
and judgment is wavering.”921 Gareissen’s moment of uncertainty passed, and she reaffirmed her commitment to leave her son’s body in France.922 Guy Johnston’s mother wrote the Army Adjutant General to change her initial instructions and ask that her son’s body be left overseas, but she wrote again the next day to renew her initial request that the body be returned to her.923 Johnston’s mother worried that the Adjutant General would find her “changeable and perhaps unpatriotic,” but she wrote, “Since mailing the letter to you yesterday, I have been living in a horrible nightmare. I feel that I must have back something of my dear loving son, though it be but a handful of dust.”924

As the War Department began to prepare to return the dead to families who had requested it, families continued to change their minds about where they wanted the dead buried. In February 1920, the War Department announced that the return of the war dead from France would begin in the spring of 1920 and that families would be polled again to confirm their wishes before the dead were returned or transferred to permanent cemeteries.925 The need to repeat instructions or information about the identity of the next of kin would upset or frustrate some families and anger others who saw the follow-up inquiries as an effort by the Department “to get people to change their minds.”926 In

921 McCormick, Scott, August(?) 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General.
922 McCormick, Scott, September 24, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General. For more information on Gareissen’s political efforts, see Chapter 1.
923 Johnston, Guy, April 29, 1920 letter from parents to GRS (Cemeterial Division).
924 Johnston, Guy, April 30, 1920 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General.
926 Anderton, George, July 12, 1920 letter from widow to Pierce of Cemeterial Division (“I’ve made two such requests very clearly in writing already”); Counter, Kenneth, October 15, 1920 letter from mother to Shannon of Army Quartermaster Corps (“in reply to your request that we state whether or not he left a widow or children we will say that we have repeatedly filled out blanks to the contrary”); Hines, Edward, February 18, 1920 letter from McCoy to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division); Strauss, Julius, April 29,
August of 1920, the Department warned families via the press that they needed to make final decisions about where they wanted the dead buried. In late July of 1921, the Department announced that no requests for the return of the dead to the United States would be entertained after August 15, 1921, because the GRS was preparing to complete the process of establishing final permanent cemeteries in Europe. The Department received several hundred requests for exceptions in the last months of 1921 and extended the deadline to April 1, 1922. The official World War history of the GRS noted over 600 new requests to have the dead returned and over 150 new requests to have the dead left in France were received in the first eight months of 1922.

1920 letter from mother to War Department (“on various occasions I have expressed my wish in this matter and that is to have my son brought home to us before we too finish our life duties”); Webster, Willard, November 16, 1920 letter from O’Ryan on behalf of mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division (mother “complains of the numbers of various papers she has had to make out from time to time most of them duplicates of other papers already completed by her”); Wishart, Raymond, January 4, 1920 letter from family to Army Adjutant General (“I have already filed a request for the return of his body to me”);

Budreau, Bodies of War, 44; Sledge, Soldier Dead, 151. Justice McCoy, the advocate for having the dead returned discussed in Chapter 1, assured Pierce that he knew that Pierce had not sent the new questionnaires for that purpose but that advocates for the return of the dead like himself were “still up against the agitation against bringing home the bodies of the soldiers” and that he still thought it was a “mistake to leave the bodies of their relatives in France.”

Hines, Edward, February 18, 1920 letter from McCoy to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division).

1920 letter from mother to War Department (“on various occasions I have expressed my wish in this matter and that is to have my son brought home to us before we too finish our life duties”); Webster, Willard, November 16, 1920 letter from O’Ryan on behalf of mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division (mother “complains of the numbers of various papers she has had to make out from time to time most of them duplicates of other papers already completed by her”); Wishart, Raymond, January 4, 1920 letter from family to Army Adjutant General (“I have already filed a request for the return of his body to me”);

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Hines, Edward, February 18, 1920 letter from McCoy to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division).


928 Ashe, Anthony, October 7, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to Red Cross on behalf of mother; Brechbill, Elmer, October 28, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to parents; Deiman, Harry, November 23, 1921 letter from Pallas for Shannon of GRS at Brooklyn to mother; Eichelsdorfer, Joseph, April 21, 1922 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to father; Jones, Otis, September 15, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to mother; Moore, Thomas, October 1, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to mother; Ragenoski, Frank, October 13, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to mother; GRS History, Vol. II, 54; Sledge, Soldier Dead, 151.

929 Christmas, Carl, March 14, 1922 memo from Army Quartermaster General to Secretary of War; Amey, Earle, March 1922 letter from mother to War Department; Haggerty, Michael, March 18, 1925 letter from third party on behalf of father to member of United States House of Representatives; Himmel, Edward, May 15, 1922 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to father; Sweetnam, John, April 24, 1922 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; GRS History, Vol. III, 15.

930 GRS History, Vol. III, 64.
Most families had to choose one of four options: have the dead returned to them for burial or request that the government either return the dead for burial in a national cemetery in the United States, leave the dead in their original grave, or move the dead to a permanent American cemetery in Europe.\footnote{Some of the dead would either never be found or never be identified, and other families would not have to choose where they wanted the dead permanently buried: the War Department announced in October of 1919 that it intended to return all the dead from Germany, Belgium, Italy, Great Britain, Luxemburg, and “Northern Russia.” “Soldier Dead will be Brought Home,” Los Angeles Times, October 2, 1919, 17; “Will Return Bodies from Six Countries,” Boston Daily Globe, October 4, 1919, 4; “To Bring Bodies Home,” New York Times, October 4, 1919, 3; “Some of U.S. Dead to be Returned,” Atlanta Constitution, October 4, 1919, 1; “Return of Soldier Dead,” Washington Post, October 4, 1919, 6; GRS History, Vol. 1, 93; Sledge, Soldier Dead, 146; Pehler, Remembering War the American Way, 97; Capdevila and Voldman, War Dead, 47. As discussed above, some of the American war dead would later be permanently buried in Britain and in Belgium, but there is some indication in the Burial Files that the dead were returned from Britain unless families requested otherwise, consistent with the original War Department policy with respect to the war dead in France but not the revised policy that followed Quentin Roosevelt’s death. Bragg, George, August 28, 1920 letter from Gwynn for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to mother (return of body “was in conformity with policy established at commencement of operations in the British Isles under which bodies of all American soldiers are to be removed unless a specific request to the contrary is received from the relatives prior to the exhumation of the bodies”).} In all cases, families were dependent on the government to fulfill their request, and only if the dead were returned did families regain control over the process of arranging for a final burial. Families who wanted the dead returned to them were significantly in the majority, with about two-thirds of families asking that the dead be returned to the family for burial.\footnote{The official Graves Registration Service history of its World War I efforts states that 43,909 families requested return to the United States. GRS History, Vol. III, 14.} The reasons that families requested the dead be returned to them have already been discussed, so after a brief summary of that perspective, this chapter will focus primarily on how some families chose other options.
As discussed above, families who wanted the dead returned often wanted to fit the death and burial of their family member into their traditional rituals for a family death, by arranging for funerals and burials, viewing the dead, and visiting and tending graves.\footnote{Ackerman, Harvey, February 22, 1920 letter from parents to War Department (“want our sons body here in the cemetery . . . where we will be buried and where other children are already buried”); Dougherty, George, February 2, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“it would be a great comfort for me to visit his grave”); Ellis, Roy, July 26, 1919 letter from family to Army Adjutant General (“I want my poor boy where I can plant one flower on his grave”); Fox, Byrd, May 20, 1919 letter from widow to Army Adjutant General (“the only consolation I have had was the hope of having his remains brought home and placed where I could go and tend the grave”); Gaynor, Robert, January 11, 1920 letter from mother to War Department (want to be able to “strew flowers” and “honor his last resting place”); Horton, Harding, March 12, 1922 letter from mother to GRS (Cemeterial Division) (“want his body brought home and buried besides his Father”); Jonas, Adolph, February 27, 1919 letter from parents to Cemeterial Division (“we lost another son here about the same time and would like very much to have them rest side by side”); Kotlyn, Joseph, February 13, 1919 letter from mother to War Department (“here I could go to see his grave and take care of it”); O’Brien, Charles, June 28, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“I can breathe easier to know I can lay beside him in a few years”); Rinck, Joseph, September 15, 1919 letter from mother to War Department (“so I can go to his grave when ever I want”); Spong, Cecil, January 23, 1919 letter from mother to “Mr. Pearshing” (“I want to bury him here so I can visit his grave in my last few years”).} Albert Fortune’s foster mother wrote simply that “if we only had him in our cemetery lot I think i would feel better.”\footnote{Fortune, Albert, April 24, 1919 letter from foster mother to War Department.} No doubt many families already made periodic pilgrimages to local grave sites to visit graves, and parents in particular likely took comfort from the idea of being buried in these locations at a future date. Many families referred to their family “burying ground” or “family plot,” suggesting that they had long-standing burial sites where several family generations were buried.\footnote{Abbott, Harry, June 2019 letter from father to GRS at Hoboken (“burying ground”); Callahan, Marcus, January 3, 1920 letter from father to GRS (Cemeterial Division) (“family lot”); Daniel, Peter, February 26, 1919 letter from widow to Army Adjutant General (“family burying ground”); Dodwell, William, April 8, 1919 letter from next of kin to Army Adjutant General (“family lot”); Evans, Richard, December 6, 1919 letter from father to Secretary of War (“family burying ground”); Gaffrei, George, July 27, 1921 letter from mother to War Department (“family lot”); Kotlyn, Joseph, January 23, 1919 letter from mother to War Department (“family lot”).} Other families
wanted to be able to ensure that the dead were properly memorialized. James DiAngelo’s mother wanted her son’s body returned to her for burial, though she also asked for reassurance that she would receive the correct body:

Balto Md
August 21, 1919,

Dear Sir -

Have answered the card you sent me asking if I wanted the body of my deceased son back home. I have answered that I want him taken directly to the cemetery. But people will talk, and most of them say that you would not possibly send the body of my own son here. So this is what I ask you, are you positive that you will send me the body of my son and no other? If so, please explain to me and tell me what I must do, if I must make any preparations as to what cemetery you will take him, or if there are any expenses that I must pay etc.

The deceased James J. DiAngelo was my first son and for two years I have been crying my life away for one more glimpse of his face. Therefore, now that he has given his life for his country, I would like to see him buried before my own eyes with all the honor that can be bestowed upon him.

Please send full details as to how I must proceed.

Yours truly,
Mrs. Teresa DiAngelo

DiAngelo’s mother wanted her son buried “with all the honor that can be bestowed upon him.” The Army Adjutant General reassured DiAngelo’s mother that she could be confident in the identification of her son’s body and agreed to return his body to her.

Families who requested return waited years to perform the duties they believed they owed to the dead. The bodies of the first Americans to be returned from the Zone of the Interior in France arrived at the piers at Hoboken aboard the Army transport Mercury.
in late April of 1920. While almost all the military war dead were men, the press reported in May of 1920 that the transport *Princess Matokia* had returned the body of ten female nurses who died at Army hospitals overseas as well as the remains of over 400 hundred soldiers. The French had agreed that American dead from the Zone of the Armies could be returned to the United States beginning in September of 1920. The last major shipment of American dead arrived in the United States in March of 1922.

Families who wanted the dead returned to them were taking the bodies of their family members back from government control and deciding for themselves how the dead would be buried, memorialized, and commemorated. Families who sought return did not want the dead to represent the United States or to symbolize America’s commitment to its European allies. Instead, these families wanted the dead given back to

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940 GRS History, Vol. I, 126; Risch, *Quartermaster Support of the Army*, 694; Engles, Brooklyn, April 27, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to mother; Hinkle, Jesse, July 12, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to widow; Hunt, Sterling, April 24, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to father; McKenzie, Jessie, May 7, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to mother.
941 “Last of U.S. Soldier Dead Due March 30,” *Boston Daily Globe*, March 20, 1922, 9; “Halts Return of War Dead,” *Washington Post*, March 22, 1922, 11; Risch, *Quartermaster Support of the Army*, 694; GRS History, Vol. III, 14-15. A small number of American dead were returned in the late 1920s as the United States continued to find and identify the bodies of Americans that were found in isolated graves. Risch, *Quartermaster Support of the Army*, 694. The remains of more than 80 Americans were recovered in Russia in 1929; eleven were buried in France and the rest returned to the United States, where most were sent to families in Michigan. “U.S. War Dead Paid Honors by France,” *Washington Post*, November 20, 1929; Dickon, *The Foreign Burial of American War Dead*, 57, 81; Capdevila and Voldman, *War Dead*, 153. 19 more sets of remains were turned over to American officials in 1934. Dickon, *The Foreign Burial of American War Dead*, 82.
them so that they could conduct ordinary rituals like viewing the dead, having the dead buried near other family members, and tending graves. When they asked that the dead be returned to them, these families were arguing that they, and not the government, knew best what should become of the dead. These families essentially ensured that the dead once again became civilians, with no outward ties to the government or to the war they had fought other than what the family chose to put on a headstone in a private cemetery.

“I have heard of this cemetery for Souldier Boys at Arlington Virginia”: Some Families Want the Dead Buried in National Cemeteries in the United States

Some families who wanted the dead returned to the United States asked the government to send the dead to a national cemetery in the United States for burial. In some cases, their decision was based on financial factors: the government paid all costs associated with burial in a national cemetery, and some families could not afford to pay burial costs even with the promise of reimbursement from the government. John Campbell’s mother wrote the War Department that “I certanilly wish it to be sent here but I havent the money to go to much expence,” and even after she was informed that the Department would reimburse for up to $100 of the expenses associated with the burial,

942 Smith, Mayberry, December 17, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to attorney on behalf of father. 943 Bacon, Lucian, May 25, 1920 letter from wife to Pierce of Cemeterial Division (requesting return to national cemetery because she “couldn’t afford to pay anything”); Barrett, Ben, November 2, 1920 letter from Greeley of Cemeterial Division to mother; Battista, Theodore, April 4, 1921 letter from brother to Shannon of GRS at Hoboken (“want Arlington as family is unable to bear the expense incident to a private burial”); Bradley, Albert, July 16, 1920 letter from widow to Cemeterial Division; Burns, William, November 15, 1920 letter from widow to Army Quartermaster General; Cook, Baxter, August 28, 1920 letter from father to War Department; Drnovec, Frank, August 19, 1921 letter from family to War Department; King, Perry, October 15, 1919 letter from widow to War Department (requesting return to national cemetery because “I am not able to give it a private funeral”).

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she requested that her son’s remains be buried at Arlington National Cemetery. Other families wanted the dead buried with other soldiers or in a historic cemetery. Before changing his mind and asking that his son’s body be left overseas, John Comfort’s father requested that his son’s body be buried at Gettysburg National Cemetery because “I have a brother there that went to the war of the Rebellion and was left in Virginia shortly after the Battle of Pittsburg Landing, which I have always presumed to have been buried in this Cemetery.” Some families were comforted by the idea that federal cemeteries would always be maintained, whatever became of family members or local communities. Clarence Barr’s family wrote from Texas to ask that Barr’s body be

944 Campbell, John, June 1, 1920 letter from mother to Cemeterial Division; Campbell, John, July 23, 1920 letter from mother to Cemeterial Division.
945 Allen, John S., July 21, 1921 letter from aunt/adopted mother to Shannon of GRS at Hoboken (“his remains should rest with his comrades who gave their all, in a spot that will forever be sacred and cared for, as we are here for so short a time and cannot do this for him” so “send him to Arlington”); Cookman, Andrew, April 27, 1920 letter from widow to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division) (“will I be responsible for the body or will the Government honor our heroes by burying them in the historic grounds at Arlington”); Cowell, Jay, November 13, 1920 letter from mother to Army Quartermaster General (“considering all things as they were we thot it best to have him laid at rest in the Arlington National Cemetery where his grave would be always cared for and he would be where he would be remembered with all his other fellow men like on Decoration Day and other remembered days”); Wade, Burett, August 3, 1920 letter from widow to War Department.
946 Comfort, John, March 26, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General. Comfort’s father later changed his mind and asked that his son’s body be buried in France. Comfort, John, May 20, 1920 letter from father to Army Adjutant General.
947 Abbott, Harry, June 1921 letter from father to GRS at Hoboken (“I have no burying ground and I think it is the best thing to to is to bury him” at Arlington National Cemetery); Barrett, Ben, October 12(?), 1920 letter from parent to War Department (want body “buried in the national cemetery there in Washington” because “I’m not settled here”); Brackin, Roy, April 14, 1921 letter from parents to War Department (send to Arlington because “we are getting old and we feel that the graves there will be taken care of”); Chandler, Hugh, September 9, 1921 letter from sister to Butler of GRS at Hoboken (“better to place [the body] at Arlington where the graves will have permanent care”); Childress, Willie, February 4, 1921 letter from family to Cemeterial Division (“I have desided I would rather have buried in the world war section in arlington national cemetery Va where I know his grave will be cared for”); Cowell, Jay, November 13, 1920 letter from mother to Army Quartermaster General (“considering all things as they were we thot it best to have him laid at rest in the Arlington National Cemetery where his grave would be always cared for and he would be where he would be remembered with all his other fellow men like on Decoration Day and other remembered days”).
buried at Arlington because the family’s local cemetery was badly kept and “there is oil excitement here and if there is an oil region our home will not be here much longer.”

The War Department would have preferred that all families who requested that the dead be returned to the United States have the dead buried at a national cemetery and specifically at Arlington National Cemetery. The Department could control a great deal about the shipment and burial of bodies sent to national cemeteries, which meant that the process was both less expensive to the government and less likely to result in problems, mistakes, or other adverse publicity. Arlington, in particular, was relatively close to the New York and New Jersey ports where the dead arrived, near a major train station, accustomed to handling burials, and large enough to accommodate significant numbers of dead. The forms that the Department sent to families subtly encouraged them to consider having the dead buried in a national cemetery and emphasized Arlington. The reply card that the Army Adjutant General sent to families, for example, asked first if families wanted the dead brought back to the United States and then next asked if the family wanted the dead buried in a national cemetery. The shipping form that the next of kin filled out referred to Arlington as if it were the only national cemetery available.

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948 Barr, Clarence, June 27, 1920 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General. Barr’s family does not appear to have asked about national cemeteries closer to their home. The Arlington National Cemetery website indicates that Barr was buried at Arlington. Arlington National Cemetery, available from <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil>; Internet; accessed 31 December 2015.
949 King, Perry, June 7, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to widow (“War Department regulations forbid the opening of the casket of the remains of a deceased soldier, which are to be buried in a National Cemetery, for the purpose of viewing the remains”).
950 Aaby, Lewis, Army Adjutant General Reply Card.
951 Anthony, Everett, April 24, 1920 War Department/Army Quartermaster Corps/Graves Registration Service Shipping Form (“The nearest living relative may choose between (1) return of remains to homes for burial; (2) interment in Arlington, Va., National Cemetery; or (3) remain in Europe.”); Dietz, Phillip, January 25, 1921 letter from adoptive mother to GRS at Hoboken (“I had previously asked that his body
Cemeterial Division also wrote families describing Arlington in glowing terms, describing a cemetery “among the most beautiful of the National Cemeteries in this country, situated in the Virginia hills overlooking the city of Washington” and containing a “World War section” where the dead could be buried “without cost” to families.952

Some families were pleased to have their dead buried at Arlington because they knew of Arlington’s historical significance as a place of burial for America’s war dead.953 Albert Crane’s widow wrote the War Department, “I know that Arlington is especially

remain where his machine fell but so long as it must be moved from that place I prefer that it should it be shipped to this country and buried in Arlington Cemetery . . . probably I shall never get to Europe but I could visit Arlington occasionally”); Fitchett, Howard, August 3(?), 1920 letter from father to Pierce of Cemeterial Division (mother and father want “to have the body of our son . . . place in the National Cemetery, which we think the most honored place for his body”).

952 Barrett, Ben, November 2, 1920 letter from Greeley of Cemeterial Division to mother; Long, George, January 13, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to father. The GRS and the Cemeterial Division also suggested to families that those requesting burial in a national cemetery were asking that the dead be sent to Arlington. Ames, Elliott, January 31, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to father (“most remains returned to national cemeteries will go to Arlington”); Kirby, George, September 20, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to father (“majority of those being returned for burial in National Cemeteries are buried in this Cemetery,” meaning Arlington); Winslow, Charles, December 21, 1922 letter from Cemeterial Division to aunt (“The Department would be gratified should you desire to confide the mortal remains of this late soldier to his Country’s care. In beautiful Arlington, he would rest with thousands of his comrades, forever under the flag in defense of which he gave his young life.”).

953 Albertson, Webster, April 25, 1921 letter from father to GRS at Hoboken (Arlington National Cemetery a “more fitting permanent resting place after having for years served as a soldier, and given his life for his country”); Burns, Joseph, April 30, 1919 letter from sibling to War Department (“before sailing he told us if he died to try and have his body buried in Arlington Cemetery Washington DC”); Chileoat, Harry, March 8, 1921 letter from mother to GRS at Hoboken (“Please inter in a national cemetery. I would prefer Arlington yet any national cemetery would be acceptable just so I knew which one”); Cookman, Andrew, April 27, 1920 letter from widow to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division) (“will the Government honor our heroes by burying them in the historic grounds at Arlington”); Derrickson, Paul, June 22, 1921 letter from mother to Pallas of GRS (Cemeterial Division) (asking if cemeteries in France will be “on the order of Arlington in Washington”); Durham, Alford, July 23, 1921 telegram from father to GRS (declining offer to return remains to nearby national cemetery in favor of having body buried at Arlington); Ewell, James, February 25, 1920 letter from parents to Secretary of War (“he expressed a desire to be buried in Arlington Cemetery (near Washington)”); Gwynne, Harry, June 26, 1920 letter from father to GRS (Cemeterial Division) (declining offer to return remains to nearby national cemeteries in favor of having body buried at Arlington); Ryman, Herbert, January 21, 1921 letter from nephew to Cemeterial Division (widow “would not care for the body to be transferred to American unless it could be buried in Arlington”).
commemorative of the Civil War.”954 Raymond Campbell’s mother asked that her son be buried at “the National Cemetery at Arlington Va where the grave will be taken care of after we are all dead and gone.”955 Okey Chenoweth’s father also mentioned Arlington:

Oct 21 1920

(?)/ Grave Reg

Gentlemen,

As I have heard of this Cemetary for Souldier Boys at Arlington Virginia close to Mt Vernon or Washington D.C. who takes charge of the graves and does the Government keep it up good all the time[?] Does it furnish a monument or just a slab tomb[?] Is it a beutifull place an green grass on a high elevation[?] An will the Government allow the friends to put up any thing to there own Boys grave at their grave[?] And I will thank you for all information you can give me concerning this place of beriell. Our son belonged to the Baltimore Md Co G. 319 Rig an lost his life in France at (?) Sonely (?) Meuse. We are expecting to get a tellagram at any time now to claim his body. Wright to us as soon as you get this letter an let us hear from you.

The mother and father of Okey Ray Chenoweth, Mr. and Mrs. Job M. Chenoweth956

Chenoweth’s father wanted to be reassured that he was correct about Arlington being a place where the government kept the cemetery “up good all the time.” Based on what he had heard about Arlington and on the Cemeterial Division’s responses to his questions, Chenoweth’s father was sufficiently convinced to ask that his son’s body be buried at Arlington.957 For families who wanted the dead buried in the United States but who did not want, or could not afford, a funeral, burial of the dead at Arlington was a compromise that allowed families to contemplate family members visiting the grave someday.958

954 Crane, Albert, April 6(?), 1919 letter from widow to Army Adjutant General.
955 Campbell, Raymond, April 30, 1921 letter from mother to GRS at Hoboken.
956 Chenoweth, Okey, October 21, 1920 letter from parents to Graves Registration (Cemeterial Division).
957 Chenoweth, Okey, November 24, 1920 letter from father to Cemeterial Division.
958 Cowell, Jay, August 30, 1920 letter from mother to War Department (“I don’t think I am the only ones that feel this way as I know quite a few mothers that have the same opinion so I hope you wont think me heartless”); Hanson, Arthur, August 10, 1921 note from mother on government letter to Army Quartermaster General; Shipley, Edward, May 18, 1920 telegram from third party on behalf of parents to Pierce of Cemeterial Division.
James Castleberry’s brother wanted the government “to bring the remains of his brother James F. Castleberry and inter them in the National Cemetery at Arlington Va” so that “if in later day if any of the children ever wanted to visit the grave they could but dont want him sent home because they could not stand to look at him.”

And for at least a few families, Arlington was a local cemetery. Charles Chambers’s widow wrote the Department that “as I expect to live in Washington for the rest of my life, I would like him to be buried in Arlington.” About 5,200 of the 5,800 dead sent to national cemeteries were buried in the “World War” section of Arlington.

959 Castleberry, James, May 25, 1921 letter from uncle on behalf of brother to Butler of Cemeterial Division.
960 Alexander, Edgar, August 17, 1920 telegram from father to Army Quartermaster General (requesting burial at Arlington National Cemetery and notice so that family can travel from Petersburg, Virginia); Chambers, Charles, June 2, 1919 letter from widow to Army Adjutant General (“as I expect to live in Washington for the rest of my life, I would like him to be buried in Arlington”); Chenoweth, Okey, November 24, 1920 letter from father to Cemeterial Division; Johns, Harrison, June 14, 1921 letter from family in Richmond, Virginia to War Department (asking that the body be buried at “the National Cemetery at Arlington as it is in Virginia”); Walker, Lester, April 16, 1919 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS in Europe.
961 The information on Chambers’s grave does not suggest that his widow was buried with him. A wife could be buried in the same grave as an enlisted soldier, but there is nothing on Charles Chambers’s headstone to indicate that another person is buried in the same grave. Chambers, Charles, July 11, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to widow; Arlington National Cemetery, available from <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil>; Internet; accessed 31 December 2015.

Arlington was where the bodies of the war dead were sent if they were returned to the United States at the request of families who could then not be found to issue final instructions and or if families rejected remains. Abraham, Sam, August 11, 1920 letter from Annis for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to widow (body buried at Arlington after relatives could not be located); Bengston, Ben, July 22, 1920 letter from Annis for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to father (body removed from England buried at Arlington after relatives could not be located to give instructions); Charles, Chester, November 19, 1921 memo from Boland of Cemeterial Division to Wynne of Cemeterial Division (“Recommend burial in Arlington if
While the War Department forms may have suggested to some families that Arlington was their only choice if they sought burial in a national cemetery, the Department provided information about other national cemeteries when asked and accommodated requests to have the dead returned to any national cemetery that had space for additional graves. Information that the dead could be buried in national cemeteries relatives cannot be located before the body arrives in U.S."); Hines, Edward February 24, 1920 letter from Pierce of Cemeterial Division to Justice McCoy (father of another soldier) (“In the event of failure to designate a cemetery it has been arranged that the body shall be placed in a group in the Arlington National Cemetery.”); Jonas, John, October 28, 1932 letter from Army Quartermaster General to third party on behalf of family; Jonas, John, October 28, 1932 letter from Army Quartermaster General to third party on behalf of family; “Bodies of 10 Nurses Arrive on Transport,” Boston Daily Globe, May 24, 1920, 3; “Ship Brings Bodies of 10 War Nurses,” Washington Post, May 24, 1920, 2; “Army Transport Brings Both Joy and Sorrow Home,” Atlanta Constitution, May 24, 1920, 10.

The dead at Arlington included some of the Army and Red Cross nurses who died during the war. Forrest, Eileen, June 3, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother (noting daughter eligible to be buried at Arlington, though body was later returned to family); Thornton, Cornelia, June 18, 1920 letter from Conner for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to mother. These burials included that of Jane Delano, who had headed the American Red Cross Nurse Corps during the war and, while head of the Army Nurse Corps from 1909 until 1912, had been credited with successfully reorganizing the Army Nurse Corps. Delano died in France in 1919 of an infection while touring Red Cross facilities, and her body was returned to the United States by the Department and buried at Arlington with special permission from the Army. Delano, Jane, September 15, 1920 memo from Conner of Cemeterial Division to Dye, Superintendent of Arlington National Cemetery; Mary T. Sarnecky, A History of the U.S. Army Nurse Corps (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 69-79; John M. Barry, The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History (New York, NY: Viking, 2004; revised, New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2009), 142; Lisa M. Budreau and Richard M. Prior, eds., Answering the Call: The U.S. Army Nurse Corps, 1917-1919 (Falls Church, VA: Office of the Surgeon General, 2008), 3; Pielhér, Remembering War the American Way, 178.

963 Earle, Patrick, November 27, 1920 letter from parents to GRS at Hoboken; Ellington, Corbie, April 28, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to widow; Gwynne, Harry, August 1919 letter from father to War Department; Stevenson, Harry, November 5, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother; Wade, Burett, September 29, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to widow; Woodul, Charles, March 8, 1921 letter from Wynne of Cemeterial Division to father (“The majority of the remains of our soldier dead being returned to this country for interment in National Cemeteries will be interred in the National Cemetery at Arlington, Va. However, the legal next of kin may select any of the National Cemeteries in this country for interment provided there are available grave sites in the cemetery selected at the time the remains return from Europe.”) A number of families asked about a rumor that the War Department was going to great one or more new national cemeteries just for the World War dead; the Department told families that no additional national cemeteries were contemplated. Alexander, Edward, February(?) 1920 letter from widow to War Department; Bratton, Vawter, March 29, 1920 letter from mother to Secretary of War; Chapman, Bruce, February 3, 1920 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; Chapman, Bruce, February 25, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to father; Cole, Paul, May 6, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General. The national cemetery
that were closer to them than Arlington was a relief to some families. Irving Barton’s father wrote from northern New Jersey that he was out of work and could not afford to pay for his son’s burial, so he requested that his son’s body be buried at Arlington.964 The Department replied that it could send the body to Arlington or to Cypress Hills National Cemetery in Brooklyn, New York.965 Barton’s father immediately wrote back to request that his son’s body be buried at Cypress Hills, and the Department complied.966

Burial in a national cemetery was one of the few times that race overtly entered into the War Department’s efforts to bury or return the war dead, because while bodies were buried overseas without regard to race, national cemeteries were segregated.967 The forms consigning the bodies of Black Americans to national cemeteries were marked by hand with the term “colored.”968 Joseph Douglas’s mother requested that her son’s body

system was more limited in geographic scope at this time than it would later become, and many Americans lived in places that were distant from any national cemetery. MacCloskey, Hallowed Ground, 24. There were more than 80 national cemeteries at the time. Cleveland, Oliver, December 13, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother.  
964 Barton, Irving, March 2, 1922, note from father to Shannon of GRS at Brooklyn written on letter from Shannon dated March 1, 1922.  
965 Barton, Irving, March 3, 1922 letter from Shannon of GRS at Brooklyn to father.  
966 Barton, Irving, March 4, 1922, letter from father to Shannon of GRS at Brooklyn.  
968 Bracy, Roland, May 12, 1921 consignment form for national cemetery; Brinkley, John, December 5, 1921 consignment form for Arlington National Cemetery; Brooks, James, December 2(?), 1921 consignment form for Arlington National Cemetery; Cook, Aaron, undated consignment form for Arlington National Cemetery; Cooper, Will, December 10, 1921 consignment form for national cemetery; Johns, Harrison, January 6, 1922 consignment form for Arlington National Cemetery; Jones, Sedric, January 5, 1922 consignment form for Arlington National Cemetery; Jones, William A., February 10, 1922 consignment form for Arlington National Cemetery; King, Perry, October 4, 1921 consignment form for Arlington National Cemetery; Voorhees, Prime, November 12, 1920 consignment form for Arlington National Cemetery; Walker, Lester, September 16, 1920 consignment form for Arlington National Cemetery.

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be returned to the national cemetery at Chalmette, Louisiana, where Douglas’s father and brother were buried.\textsuperscript{969} The form consigning Douglas’s body to Chalmette has “colored” written on it by hand.\textsuperscript{970} Black families who had their dead buried at Arlington were told that the dead had been buried in Arlington’s World War “Colored Section.”\textsuperscript{971} Edward Brown’s widow was told that Brown had been buried at Arlington National Cemetery per her request and that his grave number was “335 (Colored).”\textsuperscript{972}

When they asked that the war dead be buried in national cemeteries in the United States, some families were thinking primarily about the cost of a funeral and burial, but other families saw national cemeteries as a way to ensure that the dead, their service, and their sacrifices were remembered forever. The dead who were returned for burial in national cemeteries continued to serve their country in one sense, since their graves became part of vast landscapes of military memorials at places like Arlington where war and military dead are commemorated. The families of these dead, however, were unwilling for a variety of reasons to have the dead left in Europe. Some hoped to travel to see a grave someday and thought that even a distant national cemetery was a more conceivable trip than a visit to Europe. Others wanted the dead buried in their native soil but with other soldiers or in locations that called to mind the heroism of men who had

\begin{footnotes}
\item[969] Douglas, Joseph, March 24, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General.
\item[970] Douglas, Joseph, October 26, 1920 consignment form for Chalmette National Cemetery.
\item[971] Brinkley, John, January 11, 1922 letter from Conner of Cemetery Division to widow; Cooper, Will, November 29, 1921 letter from Conner of Cemetery Division to Red Cross on behalf of widow; Johns, Harrison, February 3, 1922 letter from Army Quartermaster General (Cemetery Branch) to family.
\item[972] Brown, Edward, October 20, 1921 letter from Army Quartermaster General (Cemetery Branch) to widow.
\end{footnotes}
died in the Civil War or in other conflicts. And some just wanted to be sure that the graves of the dead would be tended long after widows, parents, or siblings were gone. By asking that the dead be buried in national cemeteries, families essentially stated that while they disagreed that the dead should be left overseas, they trusted the government to bury the dead and tend their graves as well as or better than families could.

“We have a prejudice against disturbing the dead”: Some Families Want the Dead Left Where They were Originally Buried

A small number of families asked that the dead be left permanently in their original graves. Some of these families agreed with the Roosevelts, whether because they had similar political views or the same interpretation of scripture. William Henry’s brother specifically referred to Roosevelt’s views:

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973 Agar, John, December 23, 1918 letter from father to Pierce of GRS in Europe; Blumberg, Harris, March 7, 1921 letter from guardian of soldier’s minor children to Shannon of GRS at Hoboken (“I was going to leave in France just as our late Colonel Roosevelt had quoted ‘let a man lie where he fell’”); Campbell, Peyton, October 5, 1921 letter from mother to Cemeterial Division; Harris, George, January 22, 1919 letter from mother to Pershing (“let him sleep where he fell”); Jones, Rogers, April 9, 1919 letter from family to Army Adjutant General (“where the tree falls let it lie”); McConnell, James, January 5, 1921 letter from widow to Army Quartermaster General; GRS History, Vol. III, 62; Sledge, Soldier Dead, 193.
1669 New Haven Ave.,
Dormont, Pittsburgh, Pa.,
March 22nd, 1919.

The Adjutant General’s Office
Washington, D.C.
Dear Sir:-

I am returning herewith the card giving the information requested regarding the disposition of the remains of my brother, Sergeant Wm. E. Henry, Co. F, 111th Infantry.

My opinion on this subject coincides with that of Colonel Roosevelt that “where the tree falls let it lie” and that there is no more sacred spot for the remains of our heroes to lie than the soil of France, enriched as it is by the blood of countless thousands who have given their lives for a great cause.

I am heartily in sympathy with the project to establish “Fields of Honor” in France and sincerely hope that this may be consummated.

I speak as the oldest brother and administrator of Sergeant Wm. E. Henry but I may also say that my views are those of my brother and sister, the sole remaining kin of the boy who gave his life.

Faithfully yours,
Ralph W. Henry974

Henry’s brother did not claim that he had been guided in his decision by President Roosevelt’s views but instead noted that his “opinion on this subject coincides with that of Colonel Roosevelt.” Other families, like Philip Winsor’s, argued their own case:

974 Henry, William, March 22, 1919 letter from brother to Army Adjutant General.
January 8, 1919.

The Graves Registration Bureau of the Army,  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Sirs:-

I have seen the statement made that the Government intended to bring back to this country the bodies of our soldiers who died in France.

My son, Philip Winsor, a private in Section 627 of the Ambulance Service, died at Bussang, in the Vosges, October 24, 1918, and was buried in that village. As I have received no official notice from Washington, it may be that they have no record of this fact.

We have always felt strongly that “where the tree falls, there let it lie,” and we shall be grateful if you will see that a record is made that we wish to have his body remain where it is buried, and not brought back to this country.

Very truly yours,
Robert Winsor 

Winsor’s father said that his family had “always felt strongly” that the dead should not be disturbed and quoted the same scripture that Roosevelt had invoked. Kenneth Carter’s father, a minister, referred neither to the Roosevelts nor to scripture but wrote to express his opposition to the dead being moved:

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975 Winsor, Philip, January 8, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General.
The Manse
First Presbyterian Church
Organized 1801
William S. Carter, Minister

		North East, PA, January 19" 1920

To the Secretary of War
Washington, D.C.
My dear Sir:-

Concerning my son, Kenneth Peirson Carter, First Class Private, Hdqt. Co. 180: Inf., who fell in action near Cambrai, September 29" 1918, and whose body is buried in the American Cemetery at Bony, Aisne, France.

I beg to protest that the body of my son should not be removed from the soil of France. My daughter and I much prefer that the body should remain where it was honorably buried. I cannot understand why any of the near kin should wish our heroic dead removed - a harrowing, restless procedure! So easily a mistake in identity - so painful the rewounding of the heart! Please don’t!!!!!

Very respectfully yours, honorable Sir,
W.S. Carter976

Carter’s father was troubled by the idea that his son’s body would be removed, which he thought a “harrowing, restless procedure,” but he also worried that “a mistake in identity” might be made when the body was moved. Other families similarly worried that positive identifications of the dead might be confused or lost if bodies were moved. Jane McConnell’s widow hoped that having her husband’s body left in its original grave would eliminate any risk that his remains would be confused with someone else’s:

976 Carter, Kenneth, January 19, 1920 letter from father to Secretary of War. In the end, Carter’s father was apparently persuaded to have his son’s body moved to a permanent American cemetery in France. American Battle Monuments Commission, available from <https://www.abmc.gov/>; Internet; accessed 31 December 2015. The effort to consolidate isolated graves will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.
Pontiac Hotel,  
St. Louis, Mo.  
Jan. 5th, 1921.

Quarter Master General,  
U.S. Army,  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Sir:-

In reply to your letter of recent date wherein it is requested that I advise my final decision in regard to the remains of my beloved husband the late Lieut. James McConnell, Co. B, 4th U.S. Infantry. Owing to restrictions by the Gov’t I am unable to fulfill my hearts desire to go my own self and bring his remains to this country for permanent interment. I could not entrust the transaction to probably disinterested work-men and be fully satisfied that no error had been made. Therefore I can not consent to let the gov’t proceed to send his remains back home.

My desire is to leave his remains rest in his original burial place without removal what-so-ever and I will always know for certain that is his grave. Kindly inform me if my request can be granted.

Respectfully yours,  
(Mrs.) Susan S. McConnell

McConnell’s widow thought that if her husband’s body was not moved from its original grave, she would “always know for certain that is his grave,” and she preferred the comfort of that thought to having her husband’s body either buried in a permanent American cemetery overseas or returned to her for burial.

Other families asked that the dead be left in their original graves because they were content that their family member had received a good burial based on having seen a photograph of the grave, visited it, or received reports about it from chaplains, comrades, friends, or family who had visited it. As discussed in Chapter 4, many families found

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977 McConnell, James, January 5, 1921 letter from widow to Army Quartermaster General.  
978 Allyn, Arthur, February 26(?), 1920 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division); Andelstedt, Raymond, November 26, 1920 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division); Berens, Romulus, January 14, 1921 letter from father to Cemeterial Division (mother had wanted return but “since a friend has been overseas and visited the grave and now she wants leave in France”); Borders, James, September 27, 1920 letter from parent to GRS (Cemeterial Division); Bowden, James, July 12, 1920
ways to go to Europe or asked friends or family to view the condition of graves or cemeteries, even before the Gold Star Mother pilgrimages of the late 1920s and early 1930s that have been discussed by G. Kurt Piehler, Lisa Budreau, and others. Americans already overseas with the military, including both soldiers and marines and representatives of private organizations like the Salvation Army and Red Cross, sought out the graves of family members or friends before going back to the United States after the war. Stuart Simpson’s father argued to the War Department that he wanted his son’s body left in place because another son serving in the war had visited the grave and reported that Simpson’s body was “in a beautiful cemetery and the government could not possibly better the conditions.” Simpson’s father also argued that “the government has

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980 Brown, Orley, February 16, 1919 letter from brother (in service in Europe) to GRS in Europe; McCarthy, Edgar, February 6, 1919 letter from GRS in Europe to friend (in service in Europe); Sexton, Ernest, December 21, 1918 letter from brother (in service in Europe) to GRS in Europe; Strickland, Charles, March 4, 1919 letter from brother (in service in Europe) to GRS in Europe; Traill, James, June 12, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; Van Cleave, Chester, February 16, 1919 letter from brother (in service in Europe) to GRS in Europe; Venable, Paul, January 13, 1919 letter from friend (in service in Europe) to GRS in Europe.

981 Simpson, Stuart, February 24, 1920 letter from father to Shannon of GRS at Hoboken.
established a precedent in favor of this request, by permitting the body of Col and Mrs Roosevelt’s son to rest where it fell.982 The French government discouraged the establishment of isolated graves, especially on land that could be returned to private owners, especially for agricultural purposes, and sometimes simply refused to permit the continued existence of isolated graves, leaving it to the Department to inform families that the dead would have to be moved.983 When families were told that their request to leave the dead in place could not be accommodated, some, like Simpson’s, questioned whether the Roosevelts were getting special treatment. Peyton Campbell’s mother wrote, “May I ask if the body of Colonel Roosevelt’s son had to be re-interred?”984 The Cemeterial Division replied that Campbell’s body was not in a location where it could be left undisturbed and noted that Quentin’s case was an exception:

982 Simpson, Stuart, February 12, 1921 letter from father to Shannon of GRS at Hoboken.
983 Beal, Howard, July 16, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to member of United States Senate; Fearon, Joseph, June 14, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to mother; Fletcher, Earnest, September 19, 1921 letter from French liaison officer to GRS in Europe; Johnson, Walter, January 31, 1920 memo from French government to GRS in Europe; Ford, Tirey, April 23, 1919 letter from GRS in Europe to brother-in-law (in service in Europe); Savage, Arthur, July 2, 1919 memo from AEF Services of Supply to AEF Commander in Chief.
984 Campbell, Peyton, October 5, 1921 letter from mother to Cemeterial Division.
October 18, 1921

Mrs. Rosalie H. Campbell,
89 Pinckney St.,
Boston, Mass.

Dear Madam:

Your letter of October 5th is received and noted. The American cemetery at Fismes is to be
 evacuation and the land surrendered to the French Government which will probably return it to the
 original owners although this office is not fully advised concerning the latter feature. If that is the
 case, however, it would undoubtedly be necessary, in order to obtain title to the burial place there
 of your son, that you purchase the land from the owners. In addition to the purchase there would
 have to be secured permission under the French law for the maintenance of the plot as a cemetery.

While this office is not able to advise you definitely of all the details connected with such
 transaction it is safe to say that the purchase of land in France is accompanied by the same
 conditions as prevail in the United States. It has not been the policy of the Department to
 endeavor to influence relatives as to the final disposition of the remains of their dead and this is
 not intended to be a departure from that policy. It is suggested, however, that if you will permit
 the remains of your son to be transferred to a permanent American cemetery they will be handled
 with all due reverence and reinterred with his comrades in a place that will have the perpetual care
 of his own government.

Plans are already drawn and being working out in detail which will place these permanent
 American burial places in Europe in the same class as our national cemeteries here in the United
 States and there can be no question of the jealous regard that will be given them for all time. The
 permanent cemetery to which the remains of your son would be removed should you decide to
 follow that course would be the Oise-Aisne American Cemetery near Seringes-et-Nesles.

The grave of Lt. Quentin Roosevelt was, at the request of the French Government and with the
 consent of the family, turned over entirely to the custody of the French Government. The body
 was not reinterred. So far as this office knows it is the only instance of the kind.

Very truly yours,
George H. Penrose,
Colonel, Q.M.C.,
Chief, Cemeterial Division.985

The Division attempted to explain that it was returning the cemetery in which Campbell
 was buried to the French, “which will probably return it to the original owners,” but that
 the French Government had agreed not only to leave Quentin Roosevelt’s grave in place
 but to take responsibility for it. Other families were better able to understand why the
 dead might need to be moved. The mother of Gertrude Valentine, a YMCA worker who

985 Campbell, Peyton, October 18, 1921 letter from Cemeterial Division to mother.
was killed in an automobile accident in France, was disappointed to hear that her daughter’s body could not stay in its original grave, but she acknowledged the necessity and could “see the wisdom of the Government in wanting a few large cemeteries instead of several small ones.\textsuperscript{986}

Some families requested that bodies be returned to the United States once it was clear that they would have to be moved in any event.\textsuperscript{987} Kirby Stewart’s mother wanted his body returned to her because it could not be left in its original grave:

\textsuperscript{986} Valentine, Gertrude, July 1, 1919 letter from YMCA (in Paris) to GRS in Europe; Valentine, Gertrude, September 13, 1920 letter from mother (YMCA worker) to War Department.

\textsuperscript{987} Agren, Peter, May 6, 1921 letter from Cemeterial Division to father; Armstrong, Edwin, February 7, 1921 letter from father to War Department; Blevins, Charles, November 9, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General; Chapman, Charles, May 17, 1921 letter from father to “General Charles Menoher, Director of Air Service”; French, James, February 22, 1921 letter from mother to GRS at Hoboken; Hines, Patrick, June 25, 1921 letter from mother to Army Quartermaster General; Johnson, Walter, August 30, 1921 letter from family to Cemeterial Division; McDonald, Allen, May 11, 1920 letter from mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division; Stephens, Ona, May 13, 1920 letter from father to Army Quartermaster General; Tragerman, Charles, June 3, 1920 letter from father to Cemeterial Division; Yowell, Jess, September 8, 1920 letter from mother to Cemeterial Division.
Bradentown, Fla.

May 24, 1920
Col. Charles C. Pierce,
Chief - Graves Registration Service.

Dear Sir:

Almost three months have passed since the notification was received of the disinterment and reburial of my son 2nd Lieut. Kirby P. Stewart, but I have not been able to compose myself sufficiently to write a coherent letter thanking you. Although I have a request to make that is of vital importance to me. The thought that my boy will be left in a foreign land is unbearable. We have a prejudice against disturbing the dead and about a year ago we filled out a paper to the effect that his body should remain in France thinking at the time his grave would not be disturbed; but since it has been found necessary to disinter him, we want him brought home and buried by his father in the cemetery at Bradentown, Florida. Any assistance you can give us in having this change made will be appreciated.

The notification is to
Mrs. J.M. Stewart
211 Court St.
Bradentown, Fla.

Case of 2nd Lieut. Kirby P. Stewart, Company G, 328th Infantry
Place of Burial: Disinterred and reburied in Grave #84, Section 45, Plot #2, Cty #1232, Argonne American Cemetery, Romagne-sous-Montfaucon, Meuse.

Thanking your for past favors,
I am
Respectfully,
Mrs. J.M. Stewart

Stewart’s mother had already been torn between leaving her son’s body in its initial grave and wanting to have her son buried next to his father, and once she understood that “it has been found necessary to disinter him,” she asked that his body be returned to her. The father of nurses Ruth and Viola Lundholm, who died in England within days of each other, felt the same way, asking that, “rather than have them disturbed by transferring them to another cemetery, we would rather desire them sent home.” These families

988 Stewart, Kirby, May 24, 1920 letter from mother to Graves Registration Service (Cemeterial Division).
989 Lundholm, Ruth, May 3, 1920 letter from father to War Department.
would have preferred that the dead be left in their original graves, but if bodies had to be moved then the families wanted the dead returned to them.

War Department officials clearly had sympathy with the French government’s preference to return as much land as possible to productive use after the war, but Department officials, and particularly the staff of the GRS in Europe, also feared that isolated graves would fall into disrepair and that the United States government would be blamed for failing to care for graves. In an attempt to clarify responsibility, and no doubt to discourage families from seeking to leave isolated graves in place, the Department insisted that families make any necessary arrangements to permit isolated graves for themselves and then accept full responsibility for the upkeep of graves. Families were required to submit forms stating that the government was no longer responsible for the grave or its upkeep.\footnote{Brewer, Merwin, July 10, 1921 release; Davis, Lee, May 15, 1922 letter from Penrose of Cemeterial Division to mother; Dixon, Walter, June 17, 1921 release for grave from mother; Malloch, Grace, September 8, 1921 release for grave from mother; McCarthy, Joseph, May 18, 1921 letter from Penrose of Cemeterial Division to father; Walker, John, June 24, 1920 release for grave from mother.} As the Department hoped, the requirement that families arrange for and then accept responsibility for isolated graves deterred some families, who had the dead returned to the United States or moved to permanent overseas cemeteries.\footnote{Bowie, George, June 26, 1921 letter from parent to Wynne of Cemeterial Division; Connelly, Edward, June 14, 1921 letter from parents to Cemeterial Division; Cunningham, Faires, February 2, 1921 letter from widow to Hanson of Cemeterial Division; Dixon, Levi, February 12, 1921 letter from mother to Hanson of Cemeterial Division; Kane, Bothwell, May 17, 1920 letter from mother to Clerk to the Secretary of War; Ludwig, Leo, April 5, 1921 letter from family to Army Quartermaster General; Obermeyer, Henry, June 20, 1921 letter from father to Army Quartermaster General.}

Later in the process, as the final efforts to complete the permanent overseas cemeteries began, the Department again urged families to move the dead in “do not disturb” graves to permanent cemeteries. After the Army Quartermaster Corps, the
parent organization of the Cemeterial Division, took direct responsibility for communicating with families in the late 1920s, the Quartermaster Corps strongly urged families to allow the government to move remains in isolated graves to one of the permanent American overseas cemeteries. The Quartermaster Corps sent one round of letters in the mid-1920s and a second round in the late 1920s, prior to the completion of the permanent American cemeteries, that painted a negative picture of the care that isolated graves were receiving.992 The Quartermaster Corps wrote one father that “it has been brought to the attention of this office, that in many cases these undisturbed isolated graves are not being properly cared for and that the crosses on same are either illegibly marked or in poor condition.”993 Another mother was told that “[e]xperience has shown that after the death of the parents of the deceased member of the military or naval forces or those vitally interested in the veteran, the grave is not properly cared for and becomes neglected, and this condition causes a reflection upon the United States in permitting the graves of her honored dead to be uncared for.”994 By the late 1920s, at least some graves were in fact falling into disrepair, and families who thought that French villages or kindly individuals had either granted land for graves in perpetuity or assumed perpetual care of American graves sometimes discovered that the arrangements had not been carried out or

992 Conrad, Robert, June 12, 1926 letter from widow to Assistant Secretary of War; Craig, Harry, March 28, 1929 letter from Army Quartermaster General to mother (“in many cases these undisturbed isolated graves are not being properly cared for”); Mahoney, William, October 18, 1926 letter from Army Quartermaster General to mother (“in many cases these undisturbed isolated graves are not being properly cared for”); Simpson, Stuart, October 4, 1928 letter from Army Quartermaster General to father (“in many cases these undisturbed isolated graves are not being properly cared for”).
993 Barbee, Eddie, October 5, 1928 letter from Army Quartermaster General to father.
994 Simpson, Stuart, March 18, 1931 letter from Army Quartermaster General to mother.
were not indefinite.\footnote{Elkanich, John, December 18, 1928 letter from father to Army Quartermaster General; Frank, William, January 24, 1929 letter from Army Quartermaster General to brother; McConnell, James, July 8, 1930 letter from widow to Army Quartermaster General; Simpson, Stuart, March 17, 1931 letter from father to Army Quartermaster General.} As a result, some families agreed to have the dead moved to permanent American cemeteries.\footnote{Frank, William, March 23, 1929 letter from brother to Army Quartermaster General; McConnell, James, July 23, 1930 letter from Army Quartermaster General to widow. James McConnell’s return to Arlington National Cemetery seems to be an exception, which may have resulted from McConnell’s status a recipient of the Medal of Honor from the American war in the Philippines at the turn of the twentieth century, since at least one other family that requested that the dead be returned rather than moved to a permanent overseas cemetery had their request denied. McConnell, James, October 18, 1930 letter from Assistant Secretary of War to widow; McCarthy, Joseph, October(?) 1928 note from father to Army Quartermaster General; Simpson, Stuart, October 4, 1928 letter from Army Quartermaster General to father.} Stuart Simpson’s father had asked that his son’s body be left in its original grave, but his mother would later agree to allow her son’s body to be moved to a permanent overseas American cemetery after having viewed his grave on a Gold Star Pilgrimage. She wrote the Department that “only lately have I been equal to look at the matter with less prejudice and bring myself to a more reasonable view of conditions than when I wrote you before.”\footnote{Simpson, Stuart, March 17, 1931 letter from mother to Army Quartermaster General.} John Walker’s mother also visited his grave for herself in 1927 and feared that the arrangements she had made for the care of her son’s grave were insufficient. She wrote that since her trip, “the thought, ‘Who will care for it after my death,’ has been constantly in my mind.” She continued, “I shall be only too glad to avail myself of the opportunity to have his body placed by his comrades, in a little bit of 'American in France,' where the flag he so loved flies.”\footnote{Walker, John, October 16, 1928 letter from mother to Army Quartermaster General.} She was conscious that no one else would ever be as interested as she was in the condition of the grave, and she was satisfied that she could have his remains removed to a location where, she believed, the United States government would maintain the grave in perpetuity.
Other families challenged the Army Quartermaster Corps’s assertions about the care that graves were receiving, assuring the Quartermaster Corps that the family had made satisfactory arrangements. Where families challenged the Quartermaster Corps to identify problems, the GRS reviewed the status of particular graves and sometimes concluded that graves were in fact receiving good care. 21 Americans had been buried on the Astor estate in Britain during the war, along with dozens of forces from Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The Astor family agreed to assume permanent responsibility for the graves. After 19 of the American dead were returned to the United States at the request of families, the GRS considered whether the final two American bodies should be transferred to the permanent American cemetery in England but concluded that the graves on the Astor estate were well kept, and the graves were left in place. Other families declined to have the dead moved despite the repeated urging

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999 Dubois, Norman, June 25, 1930 letter from mother to Army Quartermaster General; Frank, William, February 6, 1929 letter from brother to Army Quartermaster General; Malloch, Grace, March 27, 1931 letter from sister to Army Quartermaster General.


of the Army Quartermaster Corps, and isolated American graves—in the end, less than one hundred of them—remain part of the French landscape today.\footnote{Matt Grills, “At Rest Abroad: ‘The Glory of Their Deeds,’” \textit{American Legion Magazine}, May 1, 2012, 20. A 1930 article in a Quartermaster Corps journal puts the final number of “do not disturb” graves at 70, which is similar to the number identified by Chris Dickon in his project to find American war dead buried overseas outside ABMC cemeteries. White, “Our Soldier Dead”; Dickon, \textit{The Foreign Burial of American War Dead}, 260-62.}

One name that does not appear on any list of isolated American graves is that of Quentin Roosevelt. After years of difficulty ensuring that Quentin’s grave was properly tended, the Roosevelt family asked the United States government to assume responsibility for the grave.\footnote{Trout, \textit{On the Battlefield of Memory}, 229-38.} Rebuffed, in part for political reasons, the Roosevelts struggled to ensure that Quentin’s grave was maintained and that damage and acts of vandalism were repaired.\footnote{Trout, \textit{On the Battlefield of Memory}, 229-38.} When Quentin’s brother Theodore, another of President Roosevelt’s sons who had served in the World War, died of a heart attack shortly after leading troops on the D-Day invasion, his body was buried in the American World War II cemetery in Normandy.\footnote{Trout, \textit{On the Battlefield of Memory}, 229-38.} The Roosevelt family requested that Quentin’s remains be moved there as well.\footnote{Trout, \textit{On the Battlefield of Memory}, 229-38.} The government initially denied the request, but eventually Quentin’s remains were moved to the cemetery at Normandy, where they remain.\footnote{Trout, \textit{On the Battlefield of Memory}, 229-38; Sledge, \textit{Soldier Dead}, 203; Piehler, \textit{Remembering War the American Way}, 132.}

Some families who wanted the dead left in their original graves based their decision on scripture or the view that the dead should be allowed to rest in peace, while other families assumed that the dead had been correctly identified initially but that the identity of the dead might be confused if the dead were moved. These concerns
overcame what for most other families was a strong urge to ensure that the graves of the
dead were well tended, either by the family or by the federal government and either in the
United States or in Europe, since “do not disturb” graves were left in the care of French
communities or families. Families who wanted the dead left in their original graves
because of concerns about identification had less faith than any other families that the
government could be trusted to meet its obligations to the dead and to their families to
maintain the identity of the dead and care for graves.

“All we wish is that he has a good grave and that he lays by the side of all the United
States soldiers”: A Significant Number of Families Decide to Leave the Dead Buried
in Overseas Cemeteries

Some families would choose, for a variety of reasons, to ask the federal
government to leave their dead in a permanent American overseas cemetery. As
discussed in Chapter 1, some families put their decision in a political context. ¹⁰⁰⁹ Harold

¹⁰⁰⁹ Allain, Charles, October 23, 1920 letter from sister to American Red Cross National Headquarters
(“We understand this cemetery is to be a National burying ground, therefore, we are desirous of revoking
our previous instructions to the end that Lt. Allain’s remains will not be disturbed.”); Babcock, Lester,
November 16, 1920 letter from father to GRS (Cemeterial Division); French, James, February 20, 1920
letter from mother to O’Ryan; Von Krebs, Paul, July 6, 1919 letter from stepmother to Army Adjutant
General; Walker, John, March 23, 1921 letter from mother to Chief, GRS (Cemeterial Division) (“this is
my small way of making the bond closer between the two countries”); Woodbury, Robert, September 28,
1920 letter from father to Pierce (“These cemeteries are Fields of Honor and will do more to cement the
relationship between France and America than any written document. Think of the impression it would
leave on the French people if all these men should be brought back. Those graves are constantly and
eloquenty, though silently, expressing sentiments and strengthening ties necessary to the elevation and
development of the human race. It would be a kind of sacrilege to disturb so important a status. These men
have given their lives for freedom’s sake. They can best preserve the principles for which they fought by
being interred in American cemeteries in France, perpetually cared for by our Nation, and over which
sacred ground the American Flag will forever float. What a protection to France. If that northern section
of their country should ever be invaded, the American boy of the future could not be held back in the
preservation of the sacred ground over which his fathers and brothers fought and where they lie,”);
Woodul, Charles, September 4, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (“let our boy's body
remain in France where we are sure the memories of those that suffered and lived and of those that suffered
Horn’s mother wrote to say that while she had earlier requested that her son’s body be returned to her, “after hearing Gen ORyan’s views I think with him it is the best thing to let the boys stay side by side as they died.” Families like these either agreed with military officials that the war dead should remain overseas or accepted the recommendations of leaders they thought knew best.

Where families made decisions for reasons other than politics, they analyzed many of the same factors as families who wanted the dead returned but reached opposite conclusions. Families who wanted the dead left overseas were sometimes sure that they knew what the dead would have wanted. Stanley Beane’s mother asked that Beane’s body be left in an overseas American cemetery:

...and died will be honored and that the graves of those that died will receive the careful attention of a grateful people as long as it is possible for them to give that attention”).

1010 Horn, Harold, August 14, 1920 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General.
1011 Buckley, John, April 12, 1920 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“I am convinced that he would prefer to lie where he fell”); Crispens, Howard, January(?) 1927 letter from sister to War Department (“I have decided to let him remain in France for I know he would want too if he were alive”); French, James, February 17, 1919 letter from mother to Cemeterial Division (“I have talked with a good many of our families and returned soldiers about the disposition of the bodies overseas and the soldiers say they would want to be buried in France”); Minor, Farrell, March 30, 1922 letter from father to Army Quartermaster General (“we would want him to lie with his comrades in that ground”); Woodbury, Robert, September 28, 1920 letter from father to Pierce (“I have yet to find a soldier who does not say, if he had fallen in battle, he would want to lie near where he fought his last fight”).
August 13, 1919. Bingham, Me.

To the Adjutant General.

Your letter just received, will say in regard to my son's burial, I have been informed that my son, Corporal Stanley A. Beane, 103rd Infantry, has been moved from where he was first buried and that he is now in a cemetery where it is well guarded and kept in good condition and everything is kept up as it should be, flowers and marked and if that is the case his wishes would be to stay there. When he went away he said should he never come back, let me lay where all good soldiers lay. He was a noble son and I wont his wishes to be carried out. I have been told that I should receive pictures of his grave, have never received any of them. If he has not been buried in a cemetery please let me know as soon as you receive this as I want to know it will change everything.

Mrs. James L. Beane.

If buried in a good cemetery, let the body remain, if not send it to me.1012

The information that Beane’s mother had received about the care being given to her son’s grave and her belief that her son would have wanted to be buried “where all good soldiers lay” convinced her to ask that Beane’s body be left in Europe.

Some families felt ties to Europe or to France, whether as a result of the war or of their family’s history. Some families believed that the dead had died to defend France and should be buried there.1013 James Garvin’s father wrote that “I have notified the Government that it was not our desire that the remains of our son should be returned, but that they should stay in France in the grave in which he was buried; that they should remain in the land which he so cheerfully volunteered to defend.”1014 Some of the families of female Army nurses and Red Cross nurses and other aid workers likewise

1012 Beane, Stanley, August 13, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General.
1013 Ashby, John, September 9, 1921 letter from brother to Penrose of Cemeterial Division; Bayne, James, January 22, 1919 letter from father to Army Chief of Staff; Bybee, Homer, May 7, 1920 letter from father to War Department; Fearon, Joseph, April 21, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Fiske, Newell, March 2, 1921 letter from father to Pierce of Cemeterial Division; Garvin, James, December 5, 1918 letter from father to GRS in Europe; Johnston, Frank, February 28, 1919 letter from widow to Army Adjutant General.
1014 Garvin, James, February 18, 1920 letter from father to Pierce of Cemeterial Division.
wanted the dead buried where they had served. Katherine Dent’s brother asked that his sister be permanently buried in France because “we are of French descent and my sister loved France and its people, and I know it would be her wish to remain there.”

Other families were equally content to have the dead buried permanently in Europe because their family had come to the United States from Europe. Preston Templeton’s father was initially inclined to leave his son’s body in England because “our fore parents came from Old Britain and I have thought probably we would let him stay in the land of his fore fathers. The family came from England and Wales to South Carolina near or about 230 years ago.” For more recent immigrants who still had close relatives in Europe and for families where the next of kin resided in Europe, a grave in an overseas cemetery might allow relatives to visit it someday. Guerino Casellini’s sister

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1015 Breen, Anne, March 18, 1921 memo from Rethers of Cemeterial Division to Army Quartermaster General; Drisko, Alice, July 12, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to third party on behalf of mother; Field, Pauline, July 16, 1921 letter from mother to Red Cross; Malloch, Grace, February 2(?), 1919 letter from mother to Army Surgeon General; Raithel, Hattie, June 16, 1923 letter from Army Quartermaster General to family; Valentine, Gertrude, September 13, 1920 letter from family.

1016 Dent, Katherine, January 10, 1921 letter from brother to Shannon of GRS at Hoboken.

1017 DeSaussure, Edward, May 12, 1919 letter from father to Pierce of GRS; Fleming, Joseph, May 29, 1921(?) letter from mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division (“nearly all my relatives are over there and I dont want my boys body disturbed”); Palache, James, August 24, 1921 letter from father to Wynne of Cemeterial Division. As noted in Chapter 3, some families had little choice but to leave their dead overseas because of War Department regulations, which required that if next of kin overseas could not be located, the dead would be permanently buried in Europe.

1018 Templeton, Preston, March 31, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General.

1019 Ashby, John, September 9, 1921 letter from brother to Penrose of Cemeterial Division; Bulkley, Harold, July 28, 1920 letter from father’s personal secretary to Davis for Pierce of Cemeterial Division (“father and other family in Europe”); Drnovec, Frank, August 19, 1921 letter from uncle to War Department (“his folks live in Europe”); Fleming, Joseph, May 29, 1921(?) letter from mother to Pierce of Cemeterial Division; Sawcheck, Gregory, undated note from cousin on Army Adjutant General Reply Card.
wrote from Switzerland that she wanted her brother buried in France because that was “not far from my country and I shall be able to pay him a visit.”

A number of families chose to leave the dead buried overseas because they had faith that the government would continue to care for overseas graves as it cared for graves in national cemeteries in the United States. William Carstensen’s parents wanted their son’s body left in France:


War Department.
The Adjutant General of the Army.
Washington, D.C.

Dear Sir:--

We are very thankful to you that you give us the offer to have our son transferred from France over here. But we think it is best to leave him their by the side of his comrades. All we wish is that he has a good grave and that he lays by the side of all the United States soldiers. And then if you want to do us a favor to let us know how it happen that he got shot. And also I wish you would so kind and let us know where he is buried in France. Give us the full address from over there. So when every thing is over that we can go over their and see his grave once. We would be very thankfull to you.

This is from his Father and Mother.

Mr. H.F. Carstensen.
Denison, Iowa.

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1020 Casellini, Guerino, May 19, 1921 letter from sister to Army Adjutant General.
1021 Blair, Tracy, February 6, 1919 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS in Europe; Cain, John, May 14, 1921 letter from sister to Wynne of Army Quartermaster General (Cemeterial Division) (“I have an abiding faith in the Government that it will maintain the grave of my brother”); Callaway, Earl, February 4, 1919 letter from mother to AEF “Headquarters Service of Supply” (“I feel sure you will look after his grave and keep it up”); Field, Pauline, July 16, 1921 letter from mother to Red Cross; Fox, Clark, November 18, 1919 letter from mother to War Department (request that body be left in France “with the belief and understanding that the US Government will maintain military cemeteries in France and place him there in”); Valentine, Gertrude, July 22, 1920 letter from mother to Army Quartermaster General (“I know all the cemeteries will be well cared for”); Budreau, Bodies of War, 15.
1022 Carstensen, William, August 4, 1919 letter from parents to Army Adjutant General.
Carstensen’s parents wanted to be sure their son had “a good grave and that he lays by the side of all the United States soldiers,” but they trusted that the War Department would care for their son’s grave. Howard Braddock’s father decided to have his son’s body left in France “providing it is the intention of the United States Government care for said grave and Cemetery, as the cemeteries of Gettysburg, Arlington are cared for.” These families trusted that the federal government would follow through on its promise to ensure that the overseas cemeteries were maintained as well as national cemeteries in the United States.

To ensure that the overseas cemeteries would receive the same care as national cemeteries in the United States, some families wanted to know how many of the dead were likely to be buried overseas or in a particular location. Families clearly feared that graves might eventually be forgotten if there were only a few American graves in a particular location, and a number of families expressed concern that their soldier or marine family member would be left “alone,” which was perhaps an emotional consideration as much as a practical one. Charles Saxton’s mother requested that

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1023 Braddock, Howard, January 26, 1921 letter from father to Cemeterial Division.
1024 Aulick, Howard, November 28, 1920 letter from father to Pierce of Cemeterial Division; Ballard, Lawrence, October 6, 1920 letter from parent to Army Quartermaster General; Gustus, Vanner, September 1, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“if the majority are left there then let the remains lay in it last resting place”); Hensley, John, April 29, 1922 letter from parents to GRS (Cemeterial Division); Nabb, Malvern, April 20, 1920 letter from mother to Pierce of GRS (Cemeterial Division).
1025 Boehler, John, July 30, 1921 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Fredrichs, Ferdinand, March 26, 1918 letter from sibling to Army Adjutant General (“if his comrades are not coming back with him that if they remain buried in France he should also rest with them he should not be the only one to be brought home. But if more bodies are sent home then he should come also”); French, James, February 20, 1920 letter from mother to General O’Ryan; Houske, James, February 16, 1921 letter from father to War Department; McDade, Furman, April 22, 1921 letter from mother to Cemeterial Division (“I dont want him left over thare as all of his comrades are sent home”); Meyers, Vernard, September 12, 1920 letter from mother to Army Quartermaster General (“I don’t want my son’s remains left in a lonely deserted place I do
Saxton’s body be left in France “if my son’s grave where he now lies is tenderly cared for unless he is to lie alone. I do not want him left alone.” Frank Allridge’s mother preferred that his body be buried in Europe:

<table>
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<th>Feb 19th 1921</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dear Sir.</td>
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<td>I would like to inform you that if eney of the soildier is brough home please let me know as I would not like him out there all alone. It would look as though he had no friends. I do not see why we should put the Government to such expense as it doesnt do the soildier any good. Now if he was a cripple or sick I would say send him home as I can take care of him. Other wise I dont see any use of having him brought home. I just simply write you these few lines to let you see that I did love my son but I am geting old and i dont think it would be best as the war has broken me all up and I am simply a nervous wreck. But still dont leave him out there by himself. God knows I loved him as he was the youngest son out of eleven boys. So now you understand how I feel.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thanking you for your kindness</td>
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<td>I remain</td>
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<td>Mrs. Ruth Allridge</td>
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Allridge’s mother was not inclined to have her son’s body returned to her, either for his sake or for hers, but she did want the government to “understand how I feel,” and she wanted to be assured that her son’s body would be buried with other Americans and would not be “out there all alone.” When asked how many of the dead were going to remain in Europe, the Cemeterial Division provided the statistics it had at the time they sent a response, even though the Division must have realized that the high percentage of families who were requesting return might encourage other families to do likewise. In

want him left where he fell (or near there) if he can be with his comrades who fell with him even if it be in Europe”); Tanney, Levi, July 29, 1921 letter from father to Army Quartermaster General; Vedder, Harmon, April 17, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General.

1026 Saxton, Charles, undated note from mother on Army Adjutant General Reply Card.
1027 Allridge, Frank, February ?, 1921 letter from family to War Department.
1028 Allen, William Harold, March 6, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to mother (30,000 war dead to stay in France); Brown, Henry, September 3, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to father; Chandler, Hugh, October 2, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to sister; Deaver, James,
mid-1919, the Army Adjutant General wrote Clarence Colvin’s mother that “over seventy per cent of the parents have requested the return of the bodies to this country.”\textsuperscript{1029} As the figures evolved, the War Department was able to assure families that there would be substantial numbers of dead in the permanent overseas cemeteries. In April of 1921, the Army Quartermaster General wrote Bruce Clarke’s mother that while “relatives are constantly changing their requests,” “there are however approximately 25,000 to 35,000 of the remains of our soldier dead whose bodies are to be permanently interred” in the overseas cemeteries.\textsuperscript{1030}

Like Frank Allridge’s mother, some families saw no reason to have the dead returned, especially given the effort involved. A number of families wrote that it would do “no good” to bring back the remains, which may suggest that this phrasing was in common use.\textsuperscript{1031} Harry Calvert’s mother wrote the War Department that the family had

\begin{footnotes}
\item[1029] Colvin, Clarence, August 5, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother; Lukish, Michael, October 25, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to mother.\\
\item[1030] Clarke, Bruce, April 5, 1921 letter from Army Quartermaster General to mother.\\
\item[1031] Fountain, Virgil, April 9, 1920 letter from father to Pierce of Cemeterial Division (“it would do us no good nor him neither to bring him home”); Prince, John, October 26, 1920 affidavit on behalf of father and brother (“would serve no good purpose to have the said remains brought to his former home”). Other families used similar language. Bauer, William, July 22, 1919 letter from mother to War Department (“it would not do me any good if they would ship his body here”); Belknap, Clanie, March 27(?) , 1919 letter from parents to Army Adjutant General (“don’t think it is any use for [the body] to be shipped back here”); Bundy, Thomas, February 19, 1920 letter from family to War Department (“it would not do us or him any good to have his bones brought home”); Carter, Thomas, April 1920 note from mother (on GRS (Cemeterial Division) form) to Army Quartermaster General (“I do not see any real benefit it would be to disturb his grave”); Fletcher, Earnest, May 1921 letter from widow to Army Adjutant General (“no one
\end{footnotes}
“talked with others” and “decided that it would be better to let his bones rest in France where he gave his life. It can do no good to him or we now for the real Harry is with his maker and to move what is left would work hardship on an over worked government.”

Some families had begun to move on emotionally and were content to leave the dead buried overseas after the passage of so much time. Sterling Hunt’s father wrote in early 1921 that his family did not want “the body shipped back to America at this late date for several reasons. The most important one is that the mother has practically recovered and we don’t care to go through another trying circumstance.” Families like these believed that having a body returned for burial would not give them comfort and would only serve to revive their grief.

Families who wanted the dead buried permanently in Europe were content to have the government make the necessary arrangements and trusted the government to care for the graves in the overseas cemeteries. Some families likely hoped that the dead would represent the United States in Europe or that they would be buried with honor in a war

\[1032\] Calvert, Harry, April 13, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General.  
\[1033\] Aunchman, Arthur, April 14, 1921 letter from parents to War Department (“we’ve already had services performed”); Altman, Edward, undated note from mother on Army Adjutant General Reply Card (“we feel it would only open up a fresh fountain of grief to bring our dear ones remains back so if his grave will be cared for there we will not disturb his remains”); Bellomy, Alton, December 1921 letter from father to War Department (“I will request you to leave him buried over sea if he is not being shipped yet it will only renew the thoughts again”); Bodmer, Albert, May 3, 1921 letter from father to War Department (“now since he has been dead three years it would only make it worse to have him brought back now”); Elliott, Pearl, July 21, 1919 letter from father to War Department (“my wife is in such poor health I fear she would be overcome by grief”); Hines, Patrick, April 29, 1920 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General (“I would not be able to stand the sorrow [the return of the body] would cause me”); Kinnamon, Bert, May 1, 1921 letter from guardian of widow to War Department (“mother is getting old says she has gone through so much trouble she cant stand to have him brought her for burial”).

\[1034\] Hunt, Sterling, January 11, 1921 letter from father to Cemeterial Division.
cemetery that would resemble the cemeteries of the Civil War, while other families were simply satisfied that the cemeteries would be cared for like national cemeteries in the United States. Whether or not they agreed with public figures like Pershing or Roosevelt about where the dead should be buried, these families were at least willing to allow the dead to be included in the permanent overseas cemeteries that those public figures had envisioned and that would eventually contain the graves of 30,000 Americans who died serving their country in the World War.

The families who wanted the dead buried in Europe would wait even longer than other families to be notified that the dead were buried well. Because the final layout of the permanent overseas cemeteries could not be completed until the dead who were to be returned to the United States were exhumed and shipped, it took even longer for the government to inform families of the final location of the permanent overseas graves of their family members than to return the dead. Families received letters between early 1922 and 1929 that included a card that stated the final grave location of their family member, which meant that some families waited ten years or more after men died to know that they were buried under the government’s care in Europe.1035

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1035 Bishop, Remson, August 12, 1922 letter from Army Quartermaster General to mother; Cretton, Benjamin, March 15, 1927 letter from Army Quartermaster General to widow; Dalton, Ella, July 10, 1922 letter from Army Quartermaster General to father (in Canada); Davis, Lee, June 13, 1929 letter from Army Quartermaster General to mother; Deketlaer, Edmond, February 20(?), 1922 letter from Army Quartermaster General to sister; Johncox, Ralph, January 5, 1927 letter from Army Quartermaster General to next of kin; Killeen, Thomas, November 10, 1925 letter from Army Quartermaster General to family; Moore, John W., January 28, 1927 letter from Army Quartermaster General to father; Saxon, John, January 3, 1927 letter from Army Quartermaster General to father; Vergenz, Fred, February 1, 1927 letter from Army Quartermaster General to family.
After men died in the World War, their families were caught in a kind of limbo, wanting to make sure the dead were buried well so that surviving family members could grieve but unable to control the process. There were no precedents for what families went through after the war. A death in Europe was not like a death at home, where families would have been able to control everything about a burial. Nor was it like a death in earlier wars, when the dead were buried near where they fell, and most families had no option but to live with the choices that the government made about whether, where, and how the dead were buried. Even after the colonial wars at the turn of the twentieth century, families were simply told that the dead were being returned to the United States and asked if they wanted the dead returned to them for burial or sent to a national cemetery.

After the World War, in contrast, the families of the war dead were sometimes overwhelmed by their options and by the lengthy process of arranging for the final burial of the dead. Families had to decide whether to ask if the dead could be left in their original graves, moved to a national cemetery in Europe, returned to the United States for burial in a national cemetery, or returned to them for private burial, and they literally had years to decide what was best for the dead and their families. Families wanted the dead to be buried well and to rest in peace, but many also thought that conducting rituals like funerals and being able to visit a grave would comfort them and help them accept what had happened. Many changed their minds, sometimes several times, as time passed, reflecting how difficult the decision must have been and how the evolving nature of both their grief and their individual circumstances affected their views. In the end, however,
most families were able to negotiate with the government to arrange the good permanent burial they sought for the dead.

While for the majority of the dead a good burial would mean a grave near other family in a private cemetery in the United States, for about 30,000 Americans a good burial meant a grave in a permanent American cemetery in Europe. In some ways, even though those graves were far from home and loved ones, and even though family members might never visit a grave, those overseas burials were very good burials. The United States government continues to preserve and maintain the permanent overseas American cemeteries, and the graves of the dead have been tended with care long after parents, siblings, children, and grandchildren have died. If Lisa Budreau is right that the memory of the World War was lost in American history to some extent in part because the dead returned to the United States were scattered to many cities and towns for private burial, the permanent American overseas cemeteries are a small but important challenge to that diffusion of memory. The cemeteries, and the permanent symbols they provide of America’s sacrifices in the World War and the recurring, if sometimes intermittent, ties between the United States and Europe were made possible only because thousands of American families trusted the United States government to continue to meet forever the obligations that the government had initially assumed when Americans died overseas in the service of their country. And to a great extent, the United States government has met its obligations to ensure that the dead would be commemorated and that their graves would be marked and maintained in a setting befitting their sacrifice. While the American cemeteries of the World War have been somewhat cast in shadow by the
bigger and more numerous permanent American cemeteries of another, later world war, the American war dead buried in the World War overseas cemeteries are still buried together under individual headstones, under grass that is carefully tended, and under the flag they served.
Conclusion

Americans and Their War Dead

Beginning with the American war in Korea, the United States has returned its war
dead to families as quickly as possible and left no dead permanently buried overseas, a
policy now known as “concurrent return.”1036 Americans are now accustomed to the war
dead being returned within days. It is hard for us to imagine a world when senior military
officials suggested that the dead were better left buried overseas, when politicians
publically expressed concerns about the costs associated with returning the dead, or when
families who wanted the dead returned were told that it would be months or even years
before a coffin arrived. But the families of the World War dead lived in that world. The
World War Burial Files show that even as families grieved their losses, they had to make
difficult decisions about where the dead should be buried and do so in the midst of a
contentious political debate. As families tried to decide if they wanted the dead returned
or left overseas, they negotiated with the government to get more information about how
their family members had died and been buried. They fought within their families to
determine who would have the privilege of being allowed to choose what became of the
dead. They questioned whether the government had correctly identified the dead, and
they pushed to be part of the process so they could evaluate the government’s efforts for

1036 United States Army, Regulation 638-2, “Army Mortuary Affairs Program,” effective 23 July 2015,
December 2015; Arnd Frie and others, “Fallen Comrades: Mortuary Affairs in the US Army,”
Internet; accessed 31 December 2015; Michael Sledge, Soldier Dead: How We Recover, Identify, Bury, and
themselves. And when the return of the dead was delayed and delayed again, many had

time to make their decision, change their minds, and change their minds again,
demonstrating just how hard the decision was for many families. The families of the

World War I dead put significant pressure on the government to meet the obligations that
families felt they were owed, and the way the government responded to that pressure
would have a significant impact on how the government, the military, and all Americans
would view the question of what was to become of the dead in future wars. Beginning
with World War I, the needs and preferences of families would be the primary driver of
government policies on the disposition of the war dead.

We take the return of the war dead to their families for granted today, but things
could well have gone differently. For more than a hundred years, the United States has
been relatively fortunate that the number of its wartime deaths has made it practical to
return the dead to families and has made the cost of returning the dead an amount that it
was conceivable for the nation to pay. But if Congress and the President had at any point
simply refused to return the war dead or allow families to do so privately, there would
have been little that most families could have done. This was the essentially the
British policy for much of that nation’s history, where, as Lisa Budreau notes about the
World War, “the British state remained stronger than the individual, even after death.”

1037 Sledge, Soldier Dead, 135.
1038 Lisa Budreau, Bodies of War: World War I and the Politics of Commemoration in America, 1919-1933
(New York, NY: New York University Press, 2010), 99. The Australian government has returned its war
dead to families since Vietnam, and the British government has returned its war dead to families since the
1982 Falklands war. K.S. Inglis, Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape (Melbourne,
Victoria, Australia: Melbourne University Press, 1998, 2005), 351, 381-83; T.A. Edwin Gibson and G.
Kingsley Ward, Courage Remembered: The Story Behind the Construction and Maintenance of the
Instead of dictating what would become of the dead, however, the United States government responded to Americans, and families in particular, who wanted the government to take actions, and spend money, on things that were thought to comfort those who are seen as having sacrificed for the nation.1039 As this dissertation has shown, the World War Burial Files illustrate the extent to which families pushed the government to respond to their concerns and questions after the World War. Even before American troops were sent to Europe, Americans knew that Secretary of War Baker had stated that the dead would be returned to families after the war, as they had been after the recent Spanish-American and Philippine wars. But almost everything else about the process of permanently burying the American war dead was determined by the demands that families made in their correspondence and their other interactions with the government during and after the war. Families quickly made it clear that they were unwilling to fill out forms and wait patiently while the government provided assurances that the dead had been correctly identified and well buried and that their graves were properly marked and tended. Some families testified at congressional hearings while others wrote their federal representatives to lobby for their views or to request assistance. Families wrote the government to ask how their family members had died. They asked for photographs and maps of grave locations so they could imagine the site where their family member had been buried. And some families went further, traveling to France to evaluate the work

1039 Sledge, Soldier Dead, 26 (“efforts to recover and return soldiers who have died indicate that the nation’s leaders expend political capital on matters of significance to its people”).
being done and, occasionally, seeking to evade the authority that the government had asserted over the process of returning the dead.

As families demanded more of the government, the government had to dedicate additional resources to meeting those demands, turning an already major logistical challenge into a huge effort in which the government corresponded directly with thousands of individual families and addressed the detailed questions and concerns they raised. This dissertation has demonstrated that the War Department was surprised by the number of questions and issues raised by families but that the Department, and particularly the Graves Registration Service, felt both a duty to respond to families with individual attention and compassion and a concern that failing to do so would result in adverse publicity. Families certainly proved very capable of defending their interests. They formed political coalitions, argued on their own behalf to executive and legislative branch officials, threatened the War Department with political repercussions, and generally demanded that the government care as much about the dead and where and how they were buried as families did.

Families who advocated on behalf of the dead and of their own right to decide where the dead would be buried were not intimidated or deterred by their distance—physical or social—from the federal government. One of the primary contributions of this study has been to closely examine the Burial Files correspondence sent between families and the federal government over the issue of where to bury the war dead. By transcribing and analyzing those letters, this dissertation has demonstrated that families of all levels of education and literacy wrote—or found others to write on their behalf—to
senior government officials like President Wilson and their senators and congressmen to push the War Department to do what families wanted and to properly represent families when it came to caring for the dead and their graves. Nor were families defeated by the size and complicated nature of the federal bureaucracy. Families found ways to seek out information about where and who to write to get the answers they sought and to ensure that their voices were heard. Families learned to ask agencies to forward their questions to whoever could answer their questions and expected that government officials would help them or direct them to those who could.

In the years after the World War, the families of the dead were essentially being asked which American tradition they wanted to follow: one dating back to the Civil War, with national cemeteries established near battlefields, or a newer tradition dating back only to the recent colonial wars, with the dead returned to families. As this dissertation has shown, the Burial Files make it clear that families were conscious of the ramifications and political importance of the choice they were being asked to make. Families knew that leaders like Pershing were essentially asking them to give the dead into the government’s permanent keeping. To make their decisions, families asked for more information about how the dead had been buried and how the government would care for permanent overseas graves. They weighed arguments from political military leaders that the dead would have wanted to be buried in battlefield cemeteries with their comrades against their desire to have the dead returned so that they could bury and mourn the dead with traditional rituals. And in the end, thousands agreed to leave the dead overseas, which is perhaps the most surprising aspect of the effort to bury the American dead after
the World War. The Burial Files demonstrate that for some families, leaving the dead overseas was about practical considerations—some families had other family in Europe, for example, while others could not agree with other family members on a decision about where the dead should be buried—but many of the families who asked that the dead be left overseas agreed with public figures like Pershing and Roosevelt that burying the dead in Europe could contribute to a significant statement about United States leadership in the world.

In the World War Burial Files, this dissertation has uncovered the details of a time when many decisions about where and how America’s war dead would be buried were still undetermined. Few families initially had a clear position on the issues that were raised in the public debate over where to bury the dead or whether the debate should even inform their decisions. Many of the families of the dead engaged in a protracted and sometimes contentious correspondence with the government to get the information and answers they sought to inform their decision. The War Department found itself with no choice but to respond to these requests, which sometimes meant defending the decisions that had been made but at other times involved changing policies to respond to families’ legitimate questions and concerns. The Department may have responded in this way in part because of concerns about adverse publicity from families, their representatives, or Americans more broadly, but the Burial Files show that those who were responsible for caring for the dead sincerely felt that providing comfort to families was part of their duties.
The view that the government’s primary duty to the families of the war dead is to provide what comfort is possible is consistent with America’s broader political traditions. Americans see the United States as a nation without a standing army, and so we see armies as temporary, created for the needs of the moment and made up of citizen soldiers who drop their plowshares, pick up their rifles, and then return to their farms when the war is over. Americans thus tend to view those who die in war not as the property of the nation, but as belonging to families, who have merely loaned them to the government in time of great need.\textsuperscript{1040} From this perspective, it makes sense that we see the government’s main role with respect to the dead as returning them to families as quickly as possible. This view is so deeply embedded in our history and our view of who we are as a nation that it seems unlikely that any alternative to the current practices could gain sufficient political support to be implemented. We should at least acknowledge, however, that our current policy has several important consequences.

First, the policy of concurrent return will continue to make it hard for Americans to remember the wars in which the dead fought and the consequences of those wars for our nation. Lisa Budreau’s work has demonstrated how the return of the World War dead to their families diffused the memory of the war for Americans, despite the establishment of eight overseas American cemeteries and the burial of over 5,000 war dead in a World War section at Arlington National Cemetery. Without overseas cemeteries or other

\textsuperscript{1040} Nataliya Danilova argues that Britain began to return its war dead to families after the war in the Falklands in part because “in the Britain of the 1980s, the bodies of the British fallen came to be perceived not only as [ ] belonging to the nation-state and as the property of the military, but as individuals who had the right to an individual burial and private commemoration.” Danilova, \textit{The Politics of War Commemoration in the UK and Russia}, 25.
centralized burial locations, the problem of remembering wars, and their cost to our society, has only increased. With the possible exception of Arlington, where many dead from current and prior wars are buried each day, there is no equivalent to the cemetery at Gettysburg, where acres and acres of headstones testify to the cost of war and remind us that war is a terrible thing that should not be undertaken except for the most critical reasons. In addition, if we think it is important to commemorate that fact that Americans have died for their country in a particular war, we no longer have any expectation that such commemoration will be done at a cemetery. \(^{1041}\) Instead, today we build new memorials to the wars of the past, disregarding the choices of veterans and communities from those wars, who generally saw functional memorials like stadiums, libraries, and hospitals as more fitting tributes to those who fought and died. Depending on their design, the new memorials can, like many of the written histories of wars, all but overlook the fact that people die in war. While the Vietnam Veterans War Memorial gives names to those who died, and the Korean War Veterans Memorial puts faces on those who fought, the newer World War II Memorial represents every hundred American war dead with one gold star, a fact only apparent to those visitors to the memorial who realize that the stars are more than merely a design choice. \(^{1042}\) By shifting memorialization from cemeteries to memorials like these, we make it easier to avoid facing the huge costs that these wars imposed on individual Americans, including both

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\(^{1042}\) National Park Service, “World War II Memorial: History and Culture,” available from <http://www.nps.gov/wwii/learn/historyculture/index.htm>; Internet; accessed 31 December 2015 (“A wall of 4,048 Gold Stars silently pays solemn tribute to the sacrifice of more than 405,000 American lives.”)
the dead and their families, no matter what we think about whether the wars were justified.

Second, by focusing attention on the families of the war dead and their sacrifice, we are able to avoid hard questions about the realities of war.\textsuperscript{1043} Most of us do not actually want to know what really happens in war or accept that the military will never be able fully to prevent painful and arguably unnecessary deaths in war, even in what is perceived as an age of modern and technologically sophisticated warfare.\textsuperscript{1044} The military has often seemed to believe that civilians could never accept the way that wars were really fought and to fear that recruitment might be adversely impacted if the real truths of war were known. The mistakes that the military made during the wars of the early twenty-first century about the information provided to families with respect to the circumstances of deaths and how remains were handled suggest that the military does not trust that families, and other Americans, can handle the truth about what really happens in war. Just as they did during the World War, military officials continue to put providing comfort to families (and avoiding negative publicity) above being honest about the confusion, trauma, and damage that can result from modern warfare and the toll it takes both on those who live and those who die. The military has been slow to trust the public with harsh facts, and the result has been corresponding distrust from ordinary Americans and even some military families about the explanations proffered by the government and the military when those in the military die or disappear. But these scandals only arise

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\item \textsuperscript{1043} Danilova, \textit{The Politics of War Commemoration in the UK and Russia}, 32.
\item \textsuperscript{1044} Danilova, \textit{The Politics of War Commemoration in the UK and Russia}, 10, 38.
\end{itemize}
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when some fundamental issue is raised about the dead, often by an individual family or by the media. Returning the dead quickly to families for burial makes it easier for us not to question whether deaths were necessary or preventable.

Finally, returning the war dead quickly for burial makes it harder to appreciate their sacrifice and that of their families. We are generally spared the grief of families, who mourn and bury the dead with the support of only extended family and their local military communities. We have been frequently told that the all-volunteer military has to some extent put the military separate and apart from the rest of society, with fewer and fewer political leaders having served, and fewer and fewer Americans serving or knowing someone who serves in the military.\textsuperscript{1045} By allowing families to decide where and how to bury the dead, we continue this pattern of separation between those who serve and the rest of us. Most of us do not have to face directly the costs of serving to those in the military and their families, and when the worst happens, we also do not have to face directly the loss of those who die. When we do not have to consider the impact of individual deaths, we are able to avoid questions about the overall toll of the war on the nation. We are not pushed to ask whether these continued losses are worth the benefits that the war is achieving. We are not forced to ask whether the military can learn from deaths whether or how those who serve can be better protected from harm. The war becomes something that happens to other people, something that we can distance ourselves from emotionally just as we distance ourselves from the political and fiscal consequences of the war. As long as the nation suffers relatively few casualties and the

\textsuperscript{1045} Danilova, \textit{The Politics of War Commemoration in the UK and Russia}, 10.
military continues to return the dead to families one or a few at a time, quickly and quietly, the rest of us will continue to be at liberty to rally for patriotism and “supporting the troops,” for honoring those who served and died, rather than feeling compelled to confront the politicians and policies that put them in harm’s way and push officials to justify wars that continue to claim American lives.\textsuperscript{1046}

Just to consider the road not taken for a moment, let us return one last time to the Burial Files, which include letters from a number of the families of the World War dead who wrote the War Department to argue for a dedicated World War cemetery or to ask if the rumors that they had heard about the establishment of such a cemetery were true.\textsuperscript{1047} Bruce Chapman’s father wrote the War Department to ask whether the government intended to “establish a new cemetery in the U.S. for the burial of the soldiers who died over seas.”\textsuperscript{1048} The Department replied that since there were national cemeteries in about “half of the states in the Union,” no new national cemeteries were to be established because “the existing National Cemeteries are of sufficient number and size to take care

\textsuperscript{1046} Danilova, The Politics of War Commemoration in the UK and Russia, 13.
\textsuperscript{1047} Allen, Charles, September 19, 1919 letter from mother to member of United States Senate; Anderson, Richard, July 15, 1919 letter from mother to Army Adjutant General; Bross, William, March 31, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General (“I think it would be very much nicer to have a cemetery over there and put them all together”); Crane, Albert, April 9, 1919 letter from Army Adjutant General to widow; Gwynne, Harry, August 1919 letter from father to War Department; French, James, February 17, 1919 letter from mother to Army Quartermaster General; Lint, Arthur, January 18, 1920 letter to House member from parent to member of United States House of Representatives. The source of the rumors is unclear, but they may simply indicate that some families expected that the commemoration of the World War would resemble that of the Civil War. Budreau, Bodies of War, 6.
\textsuperscript{1048} Chapman, Bruce, February 3, 1920 letter from father to Army Adjutant General. Henry Armstrong’s father thought the cemeteries in Europe were a better solution that having the dead “scattered all over the nation. Armstrong, Henry, October 9, 1919 letter from father to Army Adjutant General. Lawrence Ballard’s mother likewise thought there should be a “national cemetery ‘over there’ where all the American brave boys who paid the supreme sacrifice should be together.” Ballard, Lawrence, April 7(?), 1921 letter from mother to Army Quartermaster General.
of the needs.”1049 But what if the United States had established a cemetery in the United States for the dead of the World War? Might the existence of a World War cemetery, similar in design to the Civil War battlefield cemeteries, have changed the way the United States remembered the World War? What if the government had decided to return the dead to that cemetery if families wanted the dead returned to the United States or agreed to return the dead to families but encouraged families to consider having the dead sent to the national World War cemetery instead? Perhaps the government, especially the military, was just as content to avoid the image of 45,000 American dead gathered together in a single place after a war that had not been widely popular and that had involved the first nationwide draft. But if we had a place to commemorate the World War and its dead, would we need a (new) World War memorial, as some have proposed? It is surely good and right to want to comfort families as much as we can after they sacrifice their loved ones for the nation. But we should recognize that when we do so, we deprive the nation of a place to gather, to erect memorials, to grieve, and to remember. War cemeteries are a stark reminder of the costs that wars impose on the societies that fight them, whether the wars are won or lost. Without such cemeteries, it is easier to forget that we can do no greater honor to the war dead than to ensure that as few men and women as possible join their ranks.

1049 Chapman, Bruce, February 25, 1920 letter from Wynne for Pierce of Cemeterial Division to father.
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