

Guide to

Arlington National Cemetery

About

[Arlington National Cemetery](#) is the final resting place of more than 400,000 fallen heroes from the fronts of Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the veterans of World Wars I and II, the Korean conflict, Vietnam, the Cold War and America's Civil War. Established in 1864, the cemetery is still fully operational today, conducting an average of 27 funerals each day throughout its 624 developed acres.

History

The land which makes up Arlington National Cemetery was, in fact, never intended to be used as a national cemetery at all. Instead, it was the grounds of Arlington House, a 19th-century mansion on a Virginia hillside overlooking Washington, DC. The mansion was constructed in 1802 to be a living memorial to America's first president George Washington. It was the home of George Washington's adopted grandson George Washington Parke Custis and his wife Mary Lee Fitzhugh until their deaths in 1857 and 1853 respectively.

The estate was passed along to Custis' only child Mary Anna Randolph Custis. She had married Robert E. Lee and the two lived in the house until 1861. At that time, Civil War had broken out in the country and the state of Virginia had seceded from the Union. Lee became major general for the Virginia military forces. As federal troops moved in to occupy the land, Lee wrote to Mary Anna to urge her to flee for safety. She did and the federal government eventually confiscated the property for unpaid property taxes.

Due to the ever-increasing number of Civil War casualties, burial land was scarce. In 1864, the grounds were appropriated for use as a military cemetery. Since that time, nearly 150 years later, the cemetery has grown to become the final resting place of more than 400,000 soldiers from every major American war and their immediate family members.

What to See

Tomb of the Unknowns: The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is a white sarcophagus in the plaza of the Memorial Amphitheatre which pays tribute to an unidentified American soldier from World War I. On Memorial Day in 1921, four unknowns were exhumed from four American cemeteries in France. One soldier was chosen at random to be interred at Arlington National Cemetery. In front of the sarcophagus are also crypts for unknown soldiers from World War II, Korea and Vietnam. The Vietnam soldier has since been identified through DNA testing and was returned to his family for proper burial. The Vietnam unknown grave now remains vacant.

Changing of the Guard Ritual: The Tomb of the Unknowns is guarded 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and in any weather by Tomb Guard sentinels. Sentinels, all volunteers, are considered to be the best of the elite 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment headquartered at Fort Myer, Virginia. This is the oldest active-duty infantry unit in the Army, since 1784. The guard is changed every hour on the hour from Oct. 1 to March 31 in an elaborate ritual. From April 1 to September 30, the guard is changed every half hour.

Source #1

President John Fitzgerald Kennedy Gravesite: After the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on Nov. 22, 1963, he became only the second U.S. president to be buried at Arlington National Cemetery. The other was William Howard Taft in 1930. Arlington was chosen at the request of his wife Jacqueline who stated simply, "He belongs to the people." The funeral took place on Nov. 25, 1963 in which Jacqueline and Robert Kennedy lit the eternal flame, the centerpiece of his resting place. Two deceased Kennedy children are buried alongside the President, as well as Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis who was laid to rest on May 23, 1994.

Arlington House: Tour the former residence of Robert E. Lee and his family before the Civil War. Over the last 200 years, the house and its grounds have served many purposes including a family home for the Lees and Custises, a plantation estate and home to 63 slaves, a monument honoring George Washington, a military headquarters, a community for emancipated slaves and a national cemetery. Self-guided tours of the house, garden, slave quarters and the Robert E. Lee Museum are available.

Historical Figures Buried at Arlington: Among the thousands of white headstones are the graves of such notable figures as President John F. Kennedy, Senator Robert F. Kennedy, Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, world champion boxer Joe Louis, the seven Space Shuttle Challenger astronauts, and the Tuskegee Airmen.