



An Unknown Soldier of the REVOLUTION

By JACK VOELPEL

IN A SILENT, sunny place in an old burial ground called God's Acre lies the Unknown Soldier of the Revolutionary War. His sleep is undisturbed, for prying eyes and plodding feet seldom make their way to his monument. There are some who find his resting place and pay him homage, but the people who visit his tomb are fewer in number than those who visit the tomb of his younger compatriot, the Unknown Soldier of World War I in National

Cemetery just outside of Washington.

The burial place of the Unknown Soldier of the Revolutionary War is in a silent cemetery behind the Old Presbyterian Meeting House in Alexandria, Virginia, about ten miles from Washington. The Meeting House, built in 1774 — the year that the First Continental Congress assembled — is a red-brick, vine-covered, steepled church in which George Washington worshipped many

times, along with many members of his Masonic lodge.

It was in this church, too, that the official memorial service was held upon the death of Washington in 1799, because the roads to Christ Church, also in Alexandria, were too muddy to travel. Upon receiving news of Washington's death, members of the Congregation of the Meeting House tolled the church bell — the only church bell then in Alexandria — continuously for three days until after the funeral at Mount Vernon. The same bell today calls people to worship at the Meeting House.

To the rear of the Meeting House is a walled enclosure called God's Acre and there, buried in the morning shadow of the church, lie the remains of a Revolutionary hero, Major John Carlyle. Beside him lie the bodies of six captains of the line in the war of the Revolution, other veterans of the Revolution, and members of the lodge of Masons over which Washington presided — Dr. James Craik and Colonel Dennis Ramsey. Two of Washington's pall bearers and the wife of another are buried there, as is the chaplain who preached the funeral sermon, and the captain of the last military organization which Washington reviewed.

There also lies the Unknown Soldier of the Revolutionary War and it is his burial that provides a dramatic episode of United States history.

In 1821, a short twenty-two years after Washington died, a group of workmen were digging an excavation for the rear wall of a Catholic chapel — now St. Mary's Church — and inadvertently crossed the surveying line. By accident, fate, or whatever it was, for some reason the workmen were guided to a little bit of Meeting House property and in the process of digging they uncovered an old ammunition box. Examination of the contents of the box disclosed the remains of a man and the remnants of a tattered Revolutionary uniform.



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A new grave was prepared and the remains re-interred in God's Acre. A single-line entry in the burial records of the Meeting House on January 19, 1821, indicate "An Old Revolutionary Soldier from Kentucky."

There are no records that indicate how it was determined that the soldier was from Kentucky, but it is probable that there were insignia on the remnants of the uniform which might have identified his regiment or battalion. It is also speculated that since the city of Alexandria served as a hospitalization center during the Revolution, and since it was important that burials be conducted expeditiously, this unknown man from Kentucky died alone, away from home, and then was buried unceremoniously in an ammunition box — the only coffin available — in a small, un-

marked plot of land behind the Meeting House. One witness was William Gregory.

AS IN MANY CASES, the grave lost interest for members of the Congregation who had many more pressing matters to attend to. Years passed. Then one Sunday, while tarrying in the churchyard after the morning service, William Gregory, now an elder of the church, and his daughter Mary were studying the tombstones. It was then that the memories returned to Mr. Gregory and he related the story to Mary and pointed out to her the spot where the soldier from Kentucky was buried. Impulsively, Mary plucked a branch of honeysuckle from a nearby vine and placed it on the grave.

Mr. Gregory died in 1875, but by that time the practice of placing flowers on the grave had become such a habit that even events in Mary Gregory's life did not interfere with it. She married and raised a family. Finally, in 1926, when she was assisting in the restoration of the Old Meeting House, she called attention to the spot where the unknown soldier lies and suggested that a memorial tablet be placed at the foot of the grave.

Members of the Alexandria Post of the American Legion immediately prepared a temporary marker, which Mary — now Mrs. Mary Gregory Powell — dedicated. As a result of publicity about the grave, the National Society of the Chil-

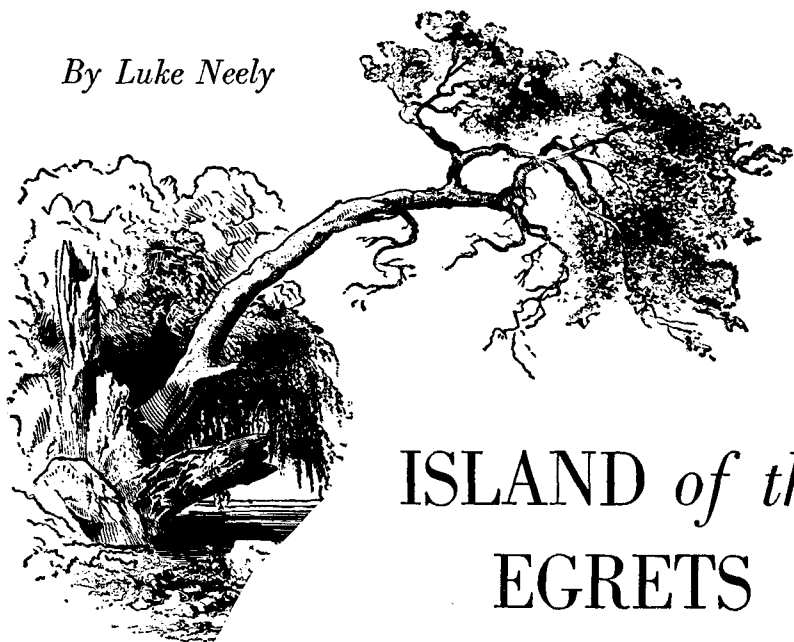
dren of the American Revolution asked to be allowed the honor of supplying the monument. Finally, on April 19, 1929, bearing an inscription by William Tyler Page, the monument to the Unknown Soldier of the Revolutionary War was unveiled. Mrs. Mary Gregory Powell stood proudly beside the familiar grave and listened as the Secretary of War, James C. Good, gave the principal address.

"We know not this soldier hero's racial origin, his religious creed, his family relations, or the extent of his accomplishments. Was he of the rank or of the file? Was he a youth with a bright and promising world before him? Or had he reached maturity with parental duties and family ties? We do not know. An inscrutable past holds the answer . . ."

Overhead, the April sun shone brightly as the Secretary spoke, and the words of the epitaph stared up at the cloudless sky.

Here lies a soldier of the Revolution whose identity is known but to God. His was an idealism that recognized a Supreme Being, that planted religious liberty on our shores, that overthrew despotism, that established a people's government, that wrote a Constitution, setting metes and bounds of delegated authority, that fixed a standard of value upon men above gold and lifted high the torch of civil liberty along the pathway of mankind. In ourselves, his soul exists as part of ours, his memory's mansion.

By Luke Neely



ISLAND *of the* EGRETS

ONE DAY last January some friends and I drove to West Bay in the Everglades National Park and became passengers on one of the most interesting boat rides available anywhere — a cruise to Cuthbert Rookery, a mangrove island where the snow-white egret, considered by many people the most beautiful of water birds, breeds each winter.

We boarded an open, spun-glass boat. The shallow waters of the salt lake we were to navigate were strewn with large and disorderly squadrons of coots, and as we pushed away from the dock, the nearest assembly of coots took off with a great thrashing of wings and water.

We skimmed along at a good clip, cutting directly across a wide open expanse of water toward an opening in the mangroves. We entered a narrow, winding passage beneath thick arches of growth.

Near the end of the tunnel the mangroves thinned out a bit and revealed on one side a small island of earth. Here, the guide told us, had been located the camp of a group of the plume-hunters who, in the 1890's when the egret plume was in great demand for women's hats, almost succeeded in eliminating the bird entirely.

We were in the open again, and heading once more toward a far-off,