

**INDEPENDENCE SEAPORT MUSEUM TO COMMEMORATE THE CENTENNIAL
ANNIVERSARY OF THE RETURN OF THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER**

PHILADELPHIA, PA, October 15, 2021 – On Monday, October 25, [Independence Seaport Museum](#) (ISM) will honor and commemorate the [Centennial Anniversary of the Return of the Unknown Soldier](#) on [Cruiser *Olympia*](#). A National Historic Landmark, the U.S. Navy chose Cruiser *Olympia* to return an unknown American soldier's remains to the United States following World War I. The ceremony will mark 100 years since *Olympia* departed from Le Havre, France, in 1921, beginning its journey to bring the Unknown to the Washington Navy Yard. This event is the culmination of a yearlong effort by ISM to commemorate this major milestone through a series of programming and events.

Launched in 1892, the United States protected Cruiser *Olympia* represented the best of American ingenuity and naval strategy for her generation. She rose to fame as Commodore (later Admiral) George Dewey's flagship during the Spanish-American War in 1898 and patrolled the American coast after the U.S. entered World War I. She also played a crucial role in the 1919 Allied intervention in the Russian Civil War and promoted peace in the unstable Balkan countries. Fittingly, her final act of service was the transportation of the remains of the American Unknown Soldier from World War I from Le Havre, France, on October 25, 1921, to the Washington Navy Yard on November 9, 1921.

Given her status as the era's most famous vessel, *Olympia's* selection to bring home the remains of the Unknown Soldier served to commemorate both the ship's and the soldier's service. However, the journey home proved difficult as *Olympia* and the Unknown Soldier's Marine Detachment Unit encountered tropical storm-force winds and 20- to 30-foot waves for most of the 16-day voyage. Thanks to the crew's bravery, *Olympia* weathered the storm and safely delivered its precious cargo to the Washington Navy Yard on November 9, 1921. The Unknown Soldier's remains were laid to rest in the newly established Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery. Cruiser *Olympia* was officially decommissioned in 1922, ending 27 years of service that saw two wars and thousands of American commissioned officers and enlisted sailors. She was officially granted National Landmark status in 1966 and is currently the oldest steel warship still afloat.

Throughout 2021, ISM highlighted *Olympia's* journey and the sacrifice made by members of our armed forces with special programming and exhibitions. In addition to installing the permanent [historical marker](#), ISM debuted a special exhibit on the Cruiser that tells the story of the ship's transportation of the Unknown Soldier across the Atlantic Ocean. Titled [Difficult Journey Home](#), the exhibit features an 11-panel installation that examines the 16-day treacherous voyage home that Cruiser *Olympia* faced after departing from Le Havre France in 1921. The exhibit also includes animations highlighting the tropical force winds and 20-to-30-foot waves Cruiser *Olympia* encountered during its journey. Animations in the exhibit were made possible by contributing partner [Drexel University Westphal College of Media Arts & Design](#) and Assistant Teaching Professor Dan Rose. *Difficult Journey Home* will be on display aboard Cruiser *Olympia* until Thanksgiving weekend.

The Museum's stewardship of *Olympia* began in 1996 and has since overseen further restorations to make the historic Cruiser open for touring visitors. Earlier this summer, Cruiser *Olympia* reopened the [Quarterdeck](#) on the ship's main deck, which hadn't been open to the public in over two decades. After fundraising over \$11,000 since October 2020, ISM was able to add the necessary security repairs and

upgrades to make the deck safe for visitors. Starting Saturday, October 23, ISM will also bring back guided tours of *Olympia's* engine room, which will be available on weekends. ISM's long-term goal is to raise funds to eventually dry-dock *Olympia* to ensure her preservation for years to come.

ISM's private ceremony honoring the Centennial Anniversary will be streamed live via the museum's [Facebook page](#). The event will include remarks from museum staff and notable guest speakers, including Philadelphia Mayor James Kenney; ISM President & CEO Peter S. Seibert; President of the Marine Corps University, Brigadier General Walker M. Field; and a representative from the French Embassy.

Guests and speakers will be welcomed aboard *Olympia* starting at 1:30 p.m. and led to seating on the Cruiser's top deck. At 2:30 p.m., *Olympia's* bell will be rung to mark the exact moment the Unknown Soldier was brought aboard 100 years ago. Following the speaking portion of the ceremony, attendees will then have the opportunity to place white roses on the permanent [historical marker](#) as tribute. ISM installed the bronze marker on the area of the deck where the Unknown Soldier was placed during the voyage last summer to memorialize his story for future visitors. To mark the moment *Olympia* departed from Le Havre, *Olympia* and its neighbor *Battleship New Jersey* will conduct a gun volley at 3:28 p.m.

ISM requires all visitors entering the building or boarding Cruiser *Olympia* to wear a face mask and utilize sanitization stations installed in high traffic areas. Visitors are encouraged to visit [ISM's website](#) to learn more about the safety procedures.

Photos: **Live [HERE](#).**

About the Independence Seaport Museum

Independence Seaport Museum increases the awareness, knowledge, and experience of our waterways by highlighting the important role of the Delaware River through direct contact with our collections, exhibits, and the water. Our boating programs provide direct access to recreation and the scientific study of the water from the standpoints of biology and physics, while art is used to represent the importance of competing uses of the river. Through our historic ships, Cruiser *Olympia* and Submarine *Becuna*, we provide the ideal platform for examining the interaction of society and water over our nation's history. Our educational student outreach programs ensure generational awareness of the museum's mission. October 25, 2021, marks the Centennial Anniversary of Cruiser *Olympia's* 16-day journey to bring the American Unknown Soldier from World War I from France to the Washington Navy Yard. We will be honoring this significant milestone throughout the year by sharing stories, presenting programming, hosting discussions, and premiering digital content. Learn more about the Independence Seaport Museum at phillyseaport.org.

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