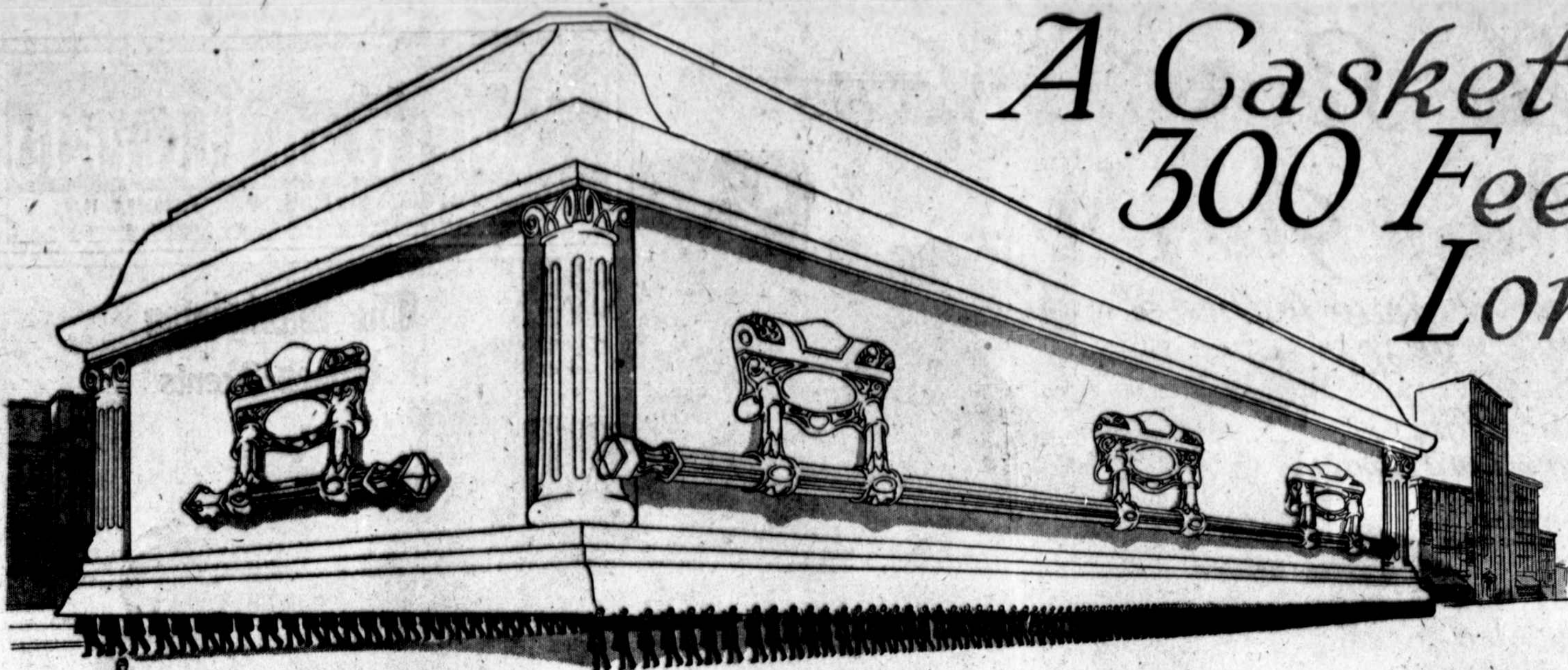


# A Casket 300 Feet Long



To Bring Back the 77,000 American Dead Would Require a Gigantic Coffin That Would Reach a Block and a Half Along Fifth Avenue and Fill the Street from Sidewalk to Sidewalk.

## The Distressing Truth Revealed Why It Is Not Possible to Properly Bring Back Our Soldier Dead from the Torn Battlefields and How the Undertakers Are Pressing the Scheme for Business Reasons

By Rene Bache.

ANY American mother whose soldier boy lost his life in France, or any wife whose husband died in the war "over there," has a right to demand that the body be brought back and given to her for burial in this country. The Government promised as much, and the War Department will do its best to make the promise good.

But there are difficulties which by most people are not understood at all.

The principal agent of destruction used in the great conflict was high explosives, in shells, in bombs, and in other instruments for killing. It is estimated that 3 per cent of the 77,000 American dead were literally blown to pieces. How in such cases could the fragments be collected and identified?

In numerous instances where our fighting men were killed by high-explosive shells their fate was shared by French comrades-in-arms. Burying parties picked up such remains as they could find and interred them, marking part of the ground as the grave of an American soldier and another part as the grave of a French soldier. There were many cases where bodies of horses or other animals killed at the same time were buried with the bodies of men.

There are 18,000 Americans who died in hospitals, of wounds or disease, outside the war zone. Eleven thousand of these are to be brought back immediately; the rest will remain, by the expressed wish of their families, where they are.

With those who lost their lives in the war zone the situation is entirely different. Already they have been buried twice, the first interment being usually by the regimental chaplain, without a coffin—just a covering of the body with earth, to get it out of sight and for sanitation's sake.

This was always practicable when our troops were advancing. When they retreated, the American dead were often of necessity left unburied. The Germans interred them higgledy-piggledy in trenches dug for the purpose. Indeed, in many instances the Yanks were obliged to bury their own dead in this wretched fashion.

When the fighting lines were long stationary, bodies sometimes lay unburied for weeks before it was possible to reach them without undue risk.

Many small temporary cemeteries were established, in which thousands of uncoffined bodies were laid to rest. The sites chosen were usually on low ground, because in such places the burial parties were relatively safe from shell-fire. But there came four months of continuous rain, and the cemeteries were flooded. One there was which for a long time was under four feet of water, which washed some of the corpses out of the shallow graves, so that they floated to the surface.

This is distressing, but it is the truth. Everything was done that could be done in the circumstances. A concrete dam was built around this particular cemetery, and attempts were made to get the water out with gasoline pumps.

But the water seeped in beneath the concrete as fast as it could be pumped out; and finally, as a last resort, men equipped with long rubber boots and gas masks were sent in to grab literally for the bodies. It was a dreadful task, but they got them.

The possibilities of mistake in returning to American families the bodies of dead soldier boys are many and dreadful to contemplate. Recently 200 were brought back from Russia, and out of that small number no fewer than twelve were sent to the wrong homes.

After the Spanish war and subsequent fighting in the Philippines, the bodies of many dead American soldiers were brought back to the United States. Several of the coffins were found to contain the corpses of Chinese coolies.

Frequently it happened in France that American soldiers and German soldiers perished together and were buried together. Nothing is more certain than that

efforts to fetch our dead boys from the war zone will result in the incidental importation of German remains. One can easily see how many an American mother or widow might thus weep over German bones, or even put flowers on the grave of the very man who slew the mourned son or husband.

For it must be remembered that the bodies shipped to this country from the war zone will be impossible of identification after their arrival.

They will be saturated with disinfectants, and inclosed in metal-lined caskets, hermetically sealed. It will be clearly explained in every instance that they are on no account to be opened.

There are now in the war zone, in France, 52,200 American fighting men, interred in proper cemeteries. Much clamor has arisen for the return of their bodies to the United States. But the French Ambassador, M. Jusserand, says that it is "an artificially stimulated movement."

Cardinal Gibbons says: "The experiment of exhaling the bodies would be a useless one, to say nothing of the distress and pain caused to relatives."

The American Legion, at its recent convention in Minneapolis, passed a resolution to the effect that "the bodies of American dead be not returned from France, except in cases where parents or next of kin so desire."

The "movement" to which Mr. Jusserand refers, however, is to press for the immediate return, at Government expense, of all the American dead now in Europe. It is being very strongly pushed in Congress.

If it be "artificially stimulated," who is giving it stimulation?

The answer is that the real force behind the movement is the self-styled "Purple Cross," which is another word for the Undertakers' Trust. They see big money in it for them.

If proof of this be demanded, it is furnished by an editorial printed in *The Casket* (September 1, 1919), which is the official organ of the Funeral Directors' Association. It reads:

"Suppose, Mr. Funeral Director, that some one were to come into your office and tell you that he had a scheme for increasing the number of funerals this year by more than fifty thousand.

"What would you do?"

"Most likely you would rush out wildly into the street and shout.

"But, Mr. Funeral Director, with your newly appointed office and your not-for-profit motor equipment, this offer is being made to you in all seriousness.

"In alien soil there lie more than 50,000 American men who died in battle or of disease during their tour of duty abroad.

"For nearly every American soldier returned some funeral director will be called upon to perform the necessary duties of reception and burial.

"Extra business, gentlemen, legitimate, patriotic, kindly, sympathetic, remunerative extra business. No additional number of widows and orphans. Only the final laying away of America's sons in the bosom of their dear motherland."

With which whole-hearted exordium "The Casket" urges all undertakers to get busy and bring the requisite pressure on Congress to put through the scheme so promising of big profits for them.

The undertakers are pushing propa-

ganda designed to cause uneasiness among people whose boys died in the war and to persuade them to write to their Congressmen and bring other influence to bear.

Listen to the testimony of one bereaved mother, Mrs. Mabel Fonda Gareissen, of No. 610 West One Hundred and Fourteenth street, New York City. She writes:

"I am a Gold Star mother and vitally interested in what is to be done with the bodies of our soldiers who lie in France. Therefore I decided to discover for myself the truth of persistent rumors that the

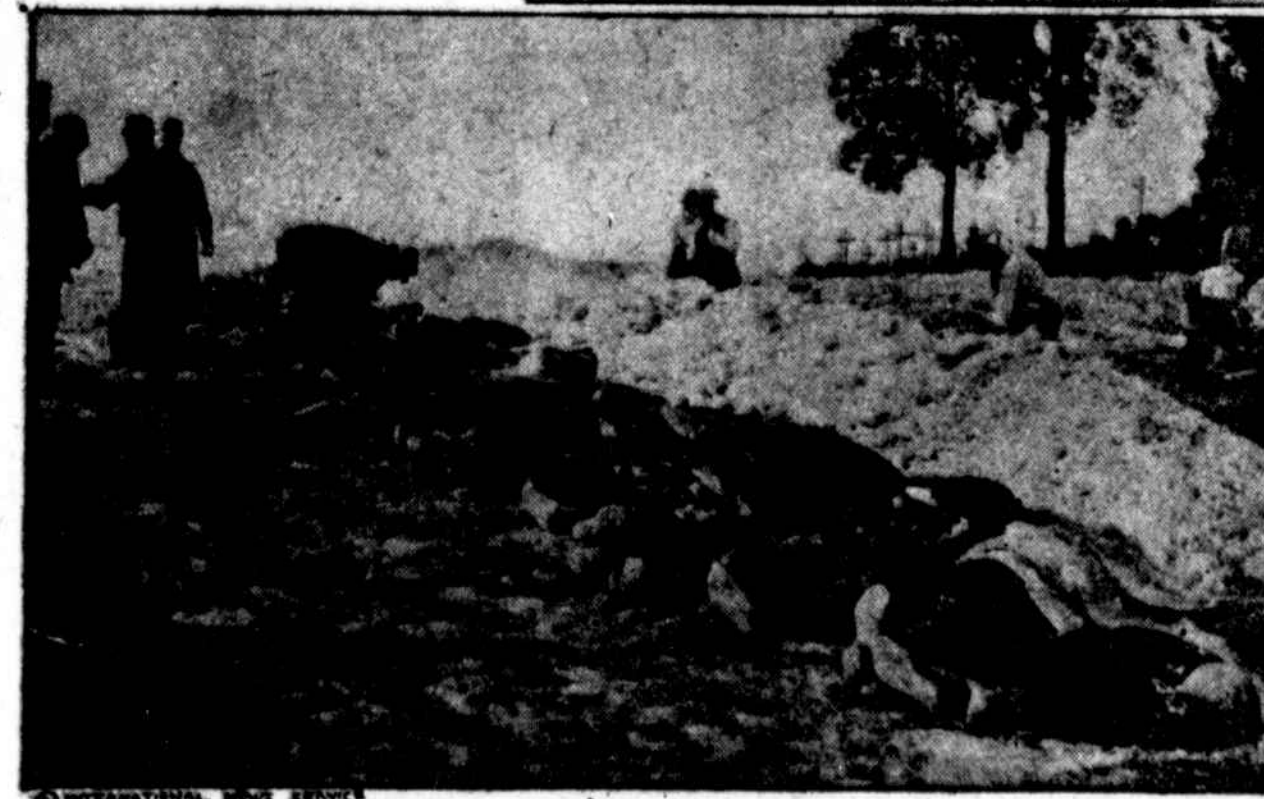
Purple Cross (American Undertakers' Association) is back of the movement to bring to America the bodies of our heroes.

"I asked Miss Jane O'Ryan, sister of General O'Ryan, to go with me to Mr. Blank, a leading undertaker. We saw there a tall, pale-faced man, with horn-rimmed glasses, who spoke with authority as one of the proprietors or managers.

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### and How the Undertakers Are Pressing the Scheme for Business Reasons



A French Burying Squad Assembling Heroes of the Battlefield for Burial.

"Yes," he said, "the dead in France are to be returned. Every pressure is being brought to bear. We have powerful representatives at Washington—not only our own, but Congressmen. We have been after the Congressmen for a long time."

"Are you sending embalmers over?"

"No, the dead are in no condition for embalming. We shall use strong disinfectants, place the bodies in hermetically sealed caskets, and they will not be reopened."

"Shall you ship all the caskets from America?"

"Yes, we shall use our own caskets, made in America."

"After our dead arrive, can we be certain they are our own?"

"He hesitated and cleared his throat. 'Well,' he said, 'with very evident doubt, we are going to be as careful as possible.'"

"As we left he gave each of us a beautiful pink rose. We dropped them on the sidewalk when out of sight.

"Is it possible that the undertakers of this country would profiteer and use to that end the bodies of our American boys, one of whom is my own son?"

An answer to Mrs. Gareissen's question is furnished by the editorial above quoted

from "The Casket." "Extra business, gentlemen—remunerative extra business."

Big money in the scheme from beginning to end if it goes through. Fifty thousand caskets to start with!

If all the American dead were put in one casket it would require a coffin 300 feet long, about sixty feet high and would cover a block and a half of Fifth Avenue and stretch from sidewalk to sidewalk.

There is no article of merchandise on which the profit is larger than on coffins. Each coffin must be inclosed in a box. It is an ordinary wooden box, costing perhaps \$2.50, but the price the undertaker usually asks for it is \$50. Then the funerals on arrival at destination, with carriages, incidentals and "service." Did you ever see an undertaker's bill, and note the way in which it was "built up" out of a variety of items? Only a plumber's bill can compare with it in this respect.

And then there are the tombstones, to wind up. The tombstone makers usually stand in with the "funeral directors," and tombstones, like everything else, have gone up in price. The cost of them has doubled and trebled recently. When a monument is in question, you cannot buy the smallest and simplest pattern for less than \$500.

H. S. Eckels, Director General of the



Where Quentin Roosevelt Is Buried. President Roosevelt and the Family Requested That His Remains Be Not Removed to America.

### An American Cemetery in France. Often the Tide of Battle Swept Over These Graves Obliterating All Marks of Identification or Hopelessly Mixing Them Up.

Purple Cross (No. 1922 Arch street, Philadelphia) offers the following estimate for bringing a soldier's body from France—a private job:

Average cost of disinterment and transportation to New York	\$120.00
The above total itemized as follows:	
Zinc-lined oak coffin and outside box (cheapest)	\$115.00
Labor, legal fees, etc.	48.00
Own transportation and expense of journey	112.00
Transport from French port to New York	160.00
Transport of body in France	48.00
Personal supervision and service	50.00

It will be noted that this fetches the body only as far as New York. One may safely surmise that "extras" would double the bill. And, of course, the undertaker would not be making such an expedition for the bringing back of one body. There would be many, and for each one the charges for "personal services" and "own transportation," etc., would be duplicated. Never was there such a chance for ghoulish graft.

Lieutenant Quentin Roosevelt's father and mother asked the War Department to permit his body to remain in France. They felt that the American soldiers who fell there should lie in the soil they died defending.

A great many parents and widows have been led by the Roosevelts' example to relinquish their desire that the bodies of their soldier sons and husbands be brought back. Already letters to this effect have been received by the War Department from 19,000 families. In two recent weeks 500 such letters came from families who wished to reverse a previous request that their dead be returned.

Congressmen have made excited speeches to the effect that the French were anxious to prevent the removal of our dead, in order that money-spending Americans might come over in flocks. But, as a matter of fact, the French, in relation to all this sad business, have conducted themselves in the most sympathetic way imaginable. Their women, peasant and cultured alike, have tended with loving care the graves of the khaki-clad American dead. They are doing it to-day, esteeming it an honor and a privilege. They plant flowers on the graves, one or more being assigned to each volunteer for the purpose.

At the close of hostilities, with the ready cooperation of the French, convenient sites for burying grounds were chosen as centers into which the American dead were gathered from the temporary war cemeteries. There they now rest, awaiting the decision as to their final disposition.

Meanwhile there has been organized in this country an American Field of Honor Association, which, when sentiment on this subject has crystallized, expects to send to France a commission for the purpose of choosing a site for a great central soldiers' cemetery. It is thought that France will give the site. There will be erected a magnificent memorial—possibly a duplicate of the Washington Monument. Also there is in contemplation a memorial hall, to be there located, with a room for each State of the Union, on the walls of which will be placed bronze tablets bearing the names of the gallant dead.

According to present plans, the cemetery is to be made as much unlike a typical burying ground as possible. There will be no dismal rows of tombstones, but a grouping of graves about rocks and under trees. And always will be maintained there a guard of honor, composed of honor men of the army, who, with fine quarters and extra pay, will serve for one year, being thus rewarded for distinguished and meritorious services.

The great memorial cemetery will enjoy the special and extraordinary right of extra-territoriality. In other words, though in France, it will be a part of the United States—as much so as the Island of Manhattan. And above its sacred precincts will forever float the sheltering folds of the Stars and Stripes.

France has pledged herself to care for the American dead. In the belief of the Field of Honor Association, it is a mistaken scheme to attempt to disinter the bodies in the war zone, to haul them hundreds of miles to a seaport, to load them on ships, to bring them to this country, and to forward them by railroad and truck to all parts of the United States.

It would take years to complete the job. During that time homes that have endured the first pangs of sorrow and have become in a measure reconciled would be plunged into renewed grief.

"Extra business, gentlemen! This is a matter of dollars." So says their official organ, "The Casket."

It was the voice of France that spoke when Clemenceau said: "We look upon the Americans who died for France as sons of France!"

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