

"Time will not dim the glory of their deeds." - General of the Armies John J. Pershing



Belleau Wood Trail Map



Aisne-Marne American Cemetery and Memorial



The 42.5 acre Aisne-Marne Cemetery Memorial sits below Belleau Wood where many of those buried in the cemetery lost their lives. During World War I, it was one of the temporary wartime cemeteries established by the Army's Graves Registration Service, and was known as the American Expeditionary Forces' (AEF) Cemetery

No. 1764-Belleau Wood. Photographs of the temporary cemetery hang in the visitor's room in the Visitor Building. In 1921, Congress authorized retention of the cemetery as one of eight permanent World War I military cemeteries on foreign soil. The following year, an agreement was signed with the government of France granting its use as a military cemetery in perpetuity, free of charge or taxation. The permanent cemetery is named for the World War I campaign area in which it is located.

The memorial chapel, the Visitor Building, the superintendent's quarters, and the service area facilities were constructed by the American Battle Monuments Commission as part of its program of commemorating the achievements of U.S. Armed Forces in World War I. The Commission also landscaped the grounds. In 1934, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued an Executive Order giving the Commission the added responsibility of operating and maintaining this and other permanent military cemeteries overseas.

The cemetery was dedicated on May 30, 1937.

Belleau Wood adjoins the Aisne-Marne American Cemetery behind the memorial chapel. It is maintained by the American Battle Monuments Commission as a memorial to the American men who fought in the AEF during World War I.

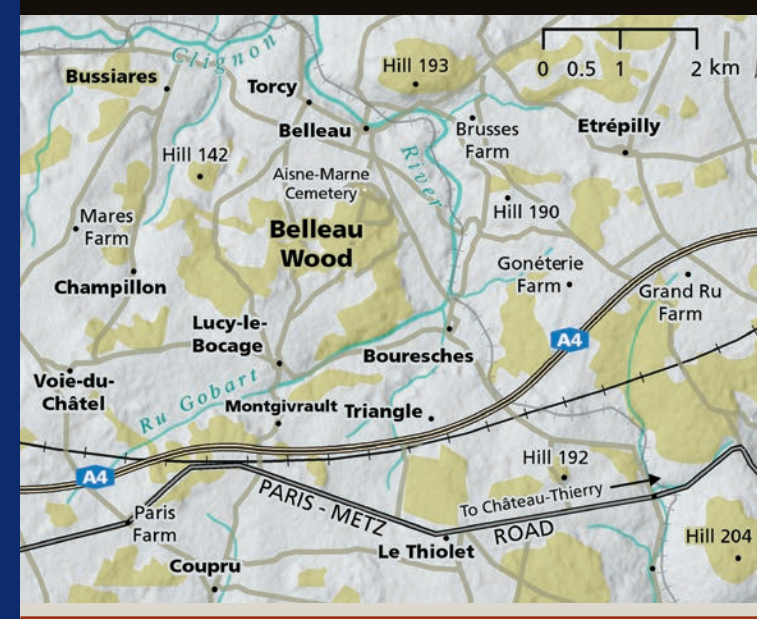
Visitor Information

LOCATION: The site is located 6.5 miles/10.5 kilometers northwest of Château-Thierry, just southwest of the village of Belleau, Aisne, France. Travel by train from Gare de l'Est station in Paris to Château-Thierry takes about one hour. Taxi service to the site is available at the Château-Thierry railroad station. You may also reach Belleau Wood by automobile from Paris via toll auto-route A-4 east by taking the Montreuil-aux-Lions exit and following the cemetery signs to Lucy-le-Bocage. The distance from Paris to the site is approximately 50 miles/80 kilometers. Hotel accommodations are available in the cities of Château-Thierry, Meaux, Soissons and Reims.

HOURS: The cemetery and trail are open daily to the public between the hours of 9:00 A.M. and 5:00 P.M.

The cemetery and trail are closed on January 1 and December 25. They are both open on all other U.S. and French holidays. When the trail is open to the public, a staff member is on duty in the Cemetery's Visitor Building to answer questions and to escort relatives to grave and memorial sites.

Vicinity of Belleau Wood



CAUTION, WARNING & DANGER NOTICES!

It is unsafe to pick up any "souvenirs" in the form of bullets, shells, grenades or barbed wire that may be found throughout the woods. Unexploded WWI ordnance is extremely unstable and dangerous to handle. Unexploded gas shells are still being found, often leaking remnants of gas. Cuts from sharp rusting fragments can cause blood poisoning or tetanus. If you see any such ordnance, make a note of the location and report it immediately to the superintendent or staff at the Aisne-Marne American Cemetery. In accordance with French law, metal detectors are not allowed



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Aisne-Marne American Cemetery and Memorial
AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION

ENGLISH

American Battle Monuments Commission

This agency of the United States government operates and maintains 26 American cemeteries and 30 memorials, monuments and markers in 17 countries. The Commission works to fulfill the vision of its first chairman, General of the Armies John J. Pershing, Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Forces during World War I, promised that "time will not dim the glory of their deeds."

On the Cover

The Marine Monument, created by sculptor Felix de Weldon, is a life-size bronze bas relief of a Marine advancing with rifle and bayonet. The United States Marine Corps erected this monument to commemorate the actions of the 4th Marine Brigade of the U.S. Army's 2nd Division. The 2nd Division attacked German positions beginning on June 6, 1918. The 4th Marine Brigade liberated Boursches that day. The 5th and 6th Marine Regiments, and the Army's 2nd Engineer regiment along with the Army's 3rd Division, 7th Infantry Regiment and 7th Machine Gun Battalion fought in Belleau Wood through most of June 1918. Their gallant actions resulted in an Allied victory at the Battle of Belleau Wood on June 26.

HEADQUARTERS
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For more information on this site and other ABMC commemorative sites, please visit www.abmc.gov

Trail Stops

1 In this clearing, you will see the "Marine Monument," a sculpture by Felix de Weldon, who also created the Iwo Jima Memorial in Arlington, Virginia. The oak trees here are called "the veterans" because they witnessed the battle and still remain.

2 As you walk, notice the artillery craters, foxholes, and trench lines parallel to the trail.

3 Numbered stones are found throughout Belleau Wood. They predate the war, marking a surveyor's grid system. Belleau Wood was a hunting preserve before the war.

4 This clearing was a German artillery position. The land here was flattened and surrounded by a six-foot earthen wall. Close by are the remains of foxholes where artillerymen sheltered from enemy fire.

5 As you walk downhill, notice the wheat field. The Marines attacked the Germans across this field through waist-high wheat at great cost on June 6, 1918.

6 The open field to your right is the southern approach to Belleau Wood. Paris is only 35 miles away. This was as close as the Imperial German Army came to Paris in 1918.

7 In front of you are remains of two German infantry positions where machine gunners, officers, and many others observed the open fields.

8 Along the side of the trail you can still see signs of the heavy fighting throughout Belleau Wood. The remains of numerous shell craters among the fighting positions are a testament to the ferocity of the battle.

9 After the battle of Belleau Wood, between June 26 and July 18, 1918, American forces used these foxholes to observe the German-held Les Brusses Farm across the valley.

10 The Count and Countess of Belleau maintained a private hunting preserve here before the war. These are the remains of their hunting lodge before it became an icon of the battle. The lodge can be seen in many depictions of the end of the battle. It was used as a command and observation post by both adversaries in 1918.

11 This is one of the three isolated German artillery pieces placed in Belleau Wood after World War I to commemorate the battle. The Model 1896 77mm *Feldkanone* (Field Cannon) reminds us that German and Allied artillery fired thousands of shrapnel, high explosive, and poison gas shells at these woods and the men of both sides fighting here.

WELCOME TO BELLEAU WOOD (BOIS DE BELLEAU)



Sending over gas shells. (French 75) Battery B, 12th Field Artillery Regiment, Bois de Boileau, France, 1918.

In a month of heavy fighting, the U.S. Army's 2nd Division, whose 4th Infantry Brigade, composed of U.S. Marines and commanded by Army Brigadier General James G. Harbord, prevailed against veteran opponents under punishing conditions. After the Americans held the line at Belleau Wood and Château-Thierry, the tide of the war turned, leading to the Armistice five months later.

The battlefield has been largely untouched since the war and is the final resting place of more than 1,000 American, French, and German soldiers whose remains were never recovered. Because these grounds are sacred, visitors should not disturb the soil or other historical remains they encounter.

Historical Background

By June 1914, Europe was divided into rival alliances. The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary led to mobilizations by Russia and Germany; when Germany invaded neutral Belgium to attack Russia's ally France, Great Britain joined the fray, and by August Europe was at war.

Within months, the war in Belgium and France had become a stalemate, with the opposing forces entrenched along the 400-mile Western Front. Two events in 1917, however, promised to alter this balance. In March 1917, Tsar Nicholas II of Russia was overthrown, and within a year the new Soviet government would sign a peace treaty with Germany, freeing German troops to redeploy from Eastern Europe to the Western Front.

In April 1917, the United States entered the war on the side of France and Britain. Although it would take the United States a year to muster, train, and supply an army, the millions of American troops expected to eventually arrive in France would tilt the balance of power.

Desperate to defeat the Allies before America arrived in force, Germany launched a series of offensives in spring of 1918. Germany launched the third of these offensives on May 27, 1918, in a previously quiet sector between Soissons and Reims. Taken by surprise, the French army fell back to the Marne River line, 35 miles from Paris.

France appealed to the United States for assistance, and the Americans rushed two divisions, untried in major combat, forward to the front. The U.S. Army's 3rd Division took position on the Marne River at Château-Thierry. On June 1, the 2nd Division, with its Marine Brigade (5th and 6th Regiments and 6th Machine Gun Battalion), relieved French troops along the Paris-Metz Road. On that line stood the Bois de Belleau, a dense forest a mile and a half long and held by the Germans. Control of these woods was essential to stopping the German advance.

The Battle of Belleau Wood

June 2, 1918

The 2nd Division troops arrived to cover a front from northwest of Hill 142, overlooking Belleau Wood, through the Marine 5th Regiment's positions. At midnight, the division was ordered by their French corps commander to hold their line at all costs.

June 3-5

As French troops withdrew through the Marine 5th Regiment's positions, a French officer suggested to Captain Lloyd Williams that the Marines should also retreat. Williams replied, "Retreat, hell! We just got here!" The German troops of the 461st Infantry Regiment strengthened their positions from Torcy north of Hill 142 through Belleau Wood and Bouresches with mortars, light artillery, and machine guns, and bombarded the Marine lines with high explosives, shrapnel, and poison gas. On June 4, the Germans attacked the Marine and Army units around Lucy-le-Bocage and Les Mares Farm, but were repulsed with heavy losses. On the 5th, both sides improved their positions and harassed each other with artillery fire.



26th Division Memorial Church (Église Saint-Étienne de Belleau). Parts of the initial church within the village of Belleau dated from the 13th century. It was destroyed on July 18, 1918 as the 26th (Yankee) Division took the town. After the war, the veterans of the 26th Division raised money and rebuilt the church for the town. The newly restored church was inaugurated on October 10, 1929, which is reflected in this image.

June 6-9

The 2nd Division, with the French 167th Division on its left, attacked on a front from Hill 142 to Bouresches to the south of Belleau Wood. The Marines suffered heavy casualties as they advanced across a waist-high wheat field strewn with red poppies. During the fighting for Hill 142, Gunnery Sergeant Ernest Janson became the first Marine of the war to earn the Medal of Honor, and Sergeant Major Dan Daly led his men forward with the legendary cry, "Come on, you sons of bitches! Do you want to live forever?" Marines also attacked Bouresches and the south corner of Belleau Wood, again suffering heavy casualties. The Marine brigade suffered 1,087 killed and wounded, with more men killed in action in one day than the Marines had lost in their previous 143-year history. The Germans reported their enemy to be "Stubborn and not afraid of his losses..." Patrols and probing attacks continued through the night. On June 7-9, the Marines withdrew to the edge of the wood, preparing for a renewed assault.

June 10-17

On June 10, the Marines' 6th Regiment attacked the southern half of Belleau Wood, taking back the area evacuated earlier, while the 5th Regiment attacked the north half from Lucy-le-Bocage. In the broken terrain and confusion of battle, bypassed German units and infiltrators attacked from behind. By June 11, after much close quarter fighting, the Germans retained control of the northern half of the wood. On June 13, the Germans attacked the east side of Belleau Wood and Bouresches, but were thrown back. During this fighting, Gunnery Sergeant Fred Stockham put his gas mask on a wounded man and later died from the effects of gas himself; he posthumously received the Medal of Honor.

On June 16 and 17, exhausted companies of Marines were rotated out of the line and replaced with Army troops from the 7th Infantry Regiment and 7th Machine Gun Battalion, 3rd Division. Throughout this period both sides shelled their enemies with explosives and gas, including attacks of mustard gas that inflicted chemical burns as it clung to the men's skin and clothing.

June 22-26

Between June 22 and 24, U.S. Army machine gun battalions, units of the Marines' 5th and 6th Regiments, and the 6th Machine Gun Battalion returned to Belleau Wood. After a day-long artillery barrage on June 25th, the Army and Marine machine gunners attacked. Fighting well into the evening, they took the northern end of the woods and captured over 500 Germans. German counterattacks on the 26th were repulsed and Belleau Wood was firmly in Allied hands.

Aftermath

The United States suffered 9,777 casualties in the fighting at Belleau Wood. Two Marines and two Navy officers were awarded the Medal of Honor, and another 152 Marines were awarded the Navy Cross. The German military had previously doubted the qualities of the American Expeditionary Forces, but now they had seen American soldiers, and Marines in particular, display a relentless courage and dogged persistence under the most taxing battle conditions. It was here, Marine Corps lore has it, that the Marines earned the nickname Teufel Hunden (Devil Dogs), however, the correct German is Teufelshunde, and the first claim of the nickname was actually published in American newspapers in May 1918, two months before the battle, at a point when the Germans had not yet faced any Marines. Along with other American units that had preceded them in combat, the Marines and soldiers of the 2nd Division inspired the French and American public during an anxious time for the Allies. In gratitude, the French renamed Belleau Wood the "Bois de la Brigade de Marine."

Belleau Wood Valor Awards



The European custom of one nation decorating heroes of another nation was a new experience for American Commanders. The United States, with the Medal of Honor as its sole decoration, was unprepared for this custom. The U.S. had no appropriate award to recognize heroism of a level



less than that which would merit the Medal of Honor and no decoration to reward the myriad acts of meritorious noncombat service that the war spurred. The U.S. Army shared this dilemma and, with the aid of President Woodrow Wilson and the U.S. Congress in 1918, instituted its Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) and Distinguished Service Medal (DSM) with clear guidelines for the award of the DSC for combat heroism and the DSM for distinguished noncombat duty in a position of great responsibility. These were available in time for award during World War I.

Parallel awards were created a year later for the Navy and Marine Corps, months after the Armistice and amid the massive demobilization of

American forces. For valorous actions during the Battle of Belleau Wood, two Marines were awarded the Medal of Honor—Gunnery Sergeant Ernest A. Janson (as Charles F. Hoffman) and Gunnery Sergeant Fred W. Stockham. Two Navy officers serving with the Marines were also awarded the Medal of Honor—Lieutenant (junior grade) Weedon E. Osborne and Reserve Lieutenant Orlando H. Petty, as well as Army Private First Class George Dilbooy. For their actions in battle, 152 Marines were awarded the Navy Cross and 16 were awarded the Army's Distinguished Service Cross.



Battle of Belleau Wood, June 2–June 25, 1918 Aisne-Marne Counteroffensive, June–July, 1918



Surrounding Sites Related to the Battle



▲ The war-torn village of Belleau, 1918 The shattered town of Belleau after the war. Belleau Wood, south of the village, was a focal point of the fighting here. Other nearby areas also witnessed heavy fighting, like the town of Bouresches and its surrounding fields and woods. Gas poisoned and bleached the plants and trees. Shrapnel and explosions stripped the trees, made roofs shed their tiles, and shattered doors and windows. In the village, a fountain mounted with a sculpted mastiff head has come to be known as the "Bulldog Fountain," in honor of the Marines, although no Marines entered the village which was held by the Germans throughout the battle. It was liberated after fierce fighting by the Army's 26th Division after the 2nd Division and the Marine Brigade had left the sector.

▼ The Belleau Wood hunting lodge, 1918 The two-story stone hunting lodge of the Count of Belleau's game preserve. Its stout walls provided cover and an elevated observation post. Over the course of the battle, both sides used this building as an observation or forward command post. Germans and Americans sheltered here at different times, taking cover from the intense volume of fire during the battle.



▼ Marines with a captured mortar Marines with a 170mm German *Minenwerfer* (mine launcher). These rifled mortars fired 113 pound explosive or gas shells more than a half mile. Their destructive power was respected by Allied infantry. Smaller than field guns, they were often brought forward behind assault troops. They could be drawn through trenches or rough terrain by teams of soldiers. In forward positions, they were often captured in the seesaw fighting at Belleau Wood.



Hill 142 One and one half miles west of the village of Belleau is Hill 142. The 5th Marines attacked this position at 3:45 a.m. on June 6. They seized the hill by 8:00 a.m. but took heavy casualties while advancing swiftly in compact formation. The Marines dug in on the north side of Hill 142 and held off repeated German counter attacks. Reinforced by the Army's 2nd Engineer Regiment acting as infantry troops and Army machine gunners, they consolidated the Hill 142 position, securing the left flank of the Belleau Wood fighting.

Les Mares Farm Les Mares Farm is southwest of Hill 142. On June 2, the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines established an extended position here, facing north with advanced guard posts. They were shelled through the next day. For the next two nights, German infantry probed their position. Lightly armed Marine marksmen held their position with long range fire. On June 4, the Fifth Marines successfully defended Les Mares Farm from repeated German attacks.

Lucy-le-Bocage Two miles south-southwest of Belleau is the crossroad village of Lucy-le-Bocage. From there, lanes radiate toward Hill 142, Bouresches, Belleau Wood, and Belleau. Before the 2nd Division attacked Belleau Wood, it defended Lucy-le-Bocage from German attacks on June 4. The Marines attacking Belleau Wood started from Lucy-le-Bocage. It was their brigade reserve position, supply source, and evacuation route for casualties. Lucy-le-Bocage was shelled with gas and high explosives daily by the Germans.

▼ Marine Officers who led and fought at Belleau Wood Veteran officers of the 2nd Battalion of the 6th Marines on June 18, 1918. They had been rotated to the rear but would return in a few days to finish clearing Belleau Wood by the morning of June 26.



Village of Bouresches The Village of Bouresches on the eastern side of Belleau Wood was attacked from the southwest on June 6 by the 3rd Battalion of the 6th Marines. They were pinned down by machine guns. A platoon of the Marines under Lt. Clifton Cates skirted along Belleau Wood and rushed Bouresches, silencing the machine guns. Cates' platoon led the way until they were stopped by Germans in the train station.