Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery and Memorial

The American Battle Monuments Commission

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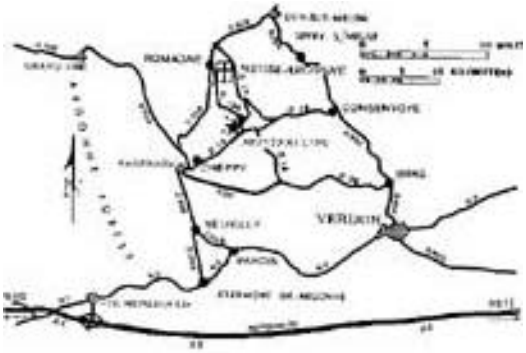


LOCATION

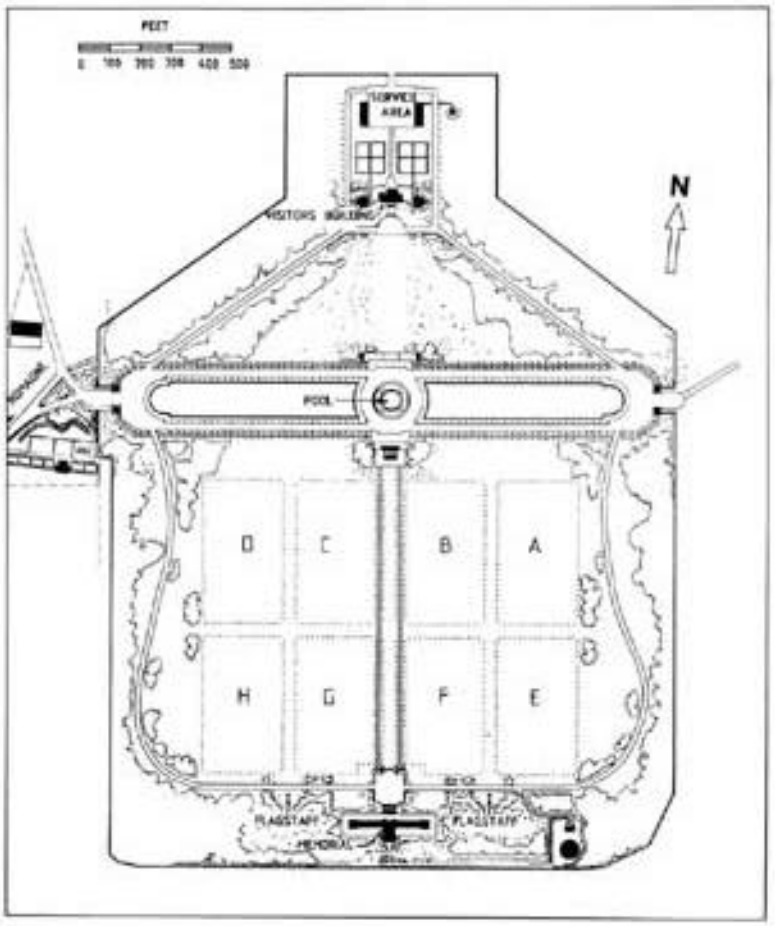
The Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery is the largest American military cemetery in Europe. It is located just east of the village of Romagne-Gesnes, Meuse, France, approximately 26 miles/42 kilometers northwest of Verdun.

Verdun can be reached by train from the Gare de I'Est in Paris in approximately 3 ½hours. Taxicab service is available at the station to complete the trip to the cemetery. Romagne-Gesnes can be reached by automobile from Paris (152 miles/245 kilometers) via toll Autoroute A-4 or highway N-3 Ste-Menehould, continuing on N-3 to Clermont-en Argonne which is 19 miles/31 kilometers south of the cemetery, and continuing via Varennes. Hotel accommodations are available in Verdun and Dun-sur-Meuse.

The cemetery and the American monument at Montfaucon, Meuse, France, about seven miles/11 kilometers south of the cemetery, are included in most battlefield tours commencing in Verdun. Thirty-eight miles/61 kilometers to the west of the Meuse-

Cemetery Entrance

Argonne American Cemetery is the Sommepy Monument located on Blanc Mont; this monument commemorates the actions of American and French troops in the Champagne region preceding and during the period of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive.



Location of Cemetery Features

HOURS

The cemetery is open daily to the public from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm except December 25 and January 1. It is open on host country holidays. When the cemetery is open to the public, a staff member is on duty in the Visitors' Building to answer questions and escort relatives to grave and memorial sites.

Aerial View of Cemetery

HISTORY

The Meuse-Argonne Offensive was the climax toward which the efforts of American Expeditionary Forces were directed since arrival of U.S. troops in France. It would be the largest battle ever fought by U.S. troops up to that time in U.S. history.

In 1918, the last year of the war, the armies of Germany launched a series of powerful attacks on the Western Front in an attempt to win a decisive victory before large numbers of American troops could be brought into action. The anemy assaults initially were highly successful and taxed Allied resources to the limit. Nevertheless, when the last great German offensive began on 15 July, Allied troops in heavy fighting quickly repulsed it. Three days later on 18 July, a U.S.-French counteroffensive was launched at Soissons. It was completely successful and marked the turning point of the war.

Determined to keep the Germans on the defensive and to maintain the initiative in battle, a series of strong offensive operations were planned by the Allies. The U.S. First Army was organized and given the mission of attacking in the St. Mihiel sector. The purpose of the St. Mihiel Offensive was to keep the enemy off balance, allowing him no

opportunity to reorganize. Its plan required an assault on 12 September to reduce the German salient at St. Mihiel, followed two weeks later by a great offensive in a different

Overall View of the Cemetery

area 40 miles away. Never before on the Western Front had a single army attempted such a colossal task. Four days after the St. Mihiel Offensive began, the German salient was eliminated.

The area between the Meuse River and the Argonne Forest was chosen for the U.S. First Army's greatest offensive of the war because it was the portion of the German front which the enemy could least afford to lose. The lateral communications between German forces east and west of the Meuse were in that area and they were heavily dependent upon two rail lines that converged in the vicinity of Sedan and lay within 35 miles of the battle line.

The nature of the Meuse-Argonne terrain made it ideal for defense. On the left, the heavily wooded and tangled Argonne Forest and the Aire River presented natural obstacles. On the right, the Meuse River and the Heights of the Meuse River to the east formed not only natural barriers but also gave the enemy commanding ground from which it could observe the battlefield and cover it with artillery fire.

In between the Aire and the Meuse Rivers were a series of broken, wooded ridges that provided excellent observation. The first was the dominating hill of Montfaucon. Behind it were the Height of Romagne and Cunel; beyond them was Barricourt Heights. To protect this vitally important area, the enemy had established almost continuous defensive positions for a depth of 10 to 12 miles to the rear of the front lines.

The movement of American troops and materiel into position for the Meuse-Argonne attack was attack was made entirely under the cover of darkness. On most of the front, French soldiers remained in the outpost positions until the very last moment in

order to keep the enemy from learning of the large American concentration. Altogether, about 220,000 Allied soldiers were withdrawn from the area and 600,000 American soldiers brought into position without the knowledge of the enemy, a striking tribute to the skill and abilities of the U.S. First Army.

Memorial Chapel

Following a three-hour bombardment with 2,700 field pieces, the U.S. First Army jumped off at 0530 hours on 26 September. On the left, I Corps penetrated the Argonne Forest and advanced along the valley of the Aire River. In the center, V Corps advanced to the west of Montfaucon but was held up temporarily in front of the hill. On the right, III Corps drove forward to the east of Montfaucon and a mile beyond. About noon the following day, Montfaucon was captured as the advance continued. Although complete surprise had been achieved, the enemy soon was stubbornly contesting every foot of terrain. Profiting from the temporary holdup in front of Montfaucon, the Germans pured reinforcements into the area. Even so, by 30 September, the U.S. First Army had driven the enemy back as far as six miles in some places.

The assault of the U.S. First Army was renewed on 4 October. Enemy forces continued its stubborn resistance, as additional German divisions arrived from other battle fronts. Though the U.S. First Army was subjected to furious counterattacks, its advance proceeded relentlessly. On 7 October, a strong flanking attack by I Corps on the left in the Aire Valley made capture of the Argonne Forest possible. The next day on the right, U.S. troops crossed the Meuse River, where severe fighting was encountered for

possession of the heights beyond. On 9 October, V Corps began an attack in the center aided by III Corps on its right; both Corps then penetrated the Hindenburg Line.

It seemed on 14 October that the Allied assault would develop into another prolonged struggle, as the enemy continued to resist stubbornly. The III and V Corps, however, provided relief when they broke through the German main line of defense and seized the Heights of Cunel and Romagne. On the left, I Corps captured St. Juvin and Grand-Pre, enabling the French Fourth Army, which was positioned to the left of the U.S. First Army, to advance its attack.

Chapel Entrance

The final chapter of the great offensive by the U.S. First Army began at daybreak on 1 November after a two-hour concentrated artillery preparation. Its progress exceeded all expectations. By early afternoon, the formidable position on Barricourt Heights had been captured, ensuring success of the whole operation. That night the enemy issued orders to withdraw west of the Meuse. By 4 November, after an additional crossing of the Meuse by the U.S. First Army, the enemy was in full retreat on both sides of the river. Three days later, when the heights overlooking the city of Sedan were taken, the U.S. First Army gained domination over the German railroad communications there, ensuring early termination of the war.

Meanwhile in mid-October, the U.S. Second Army was formed to take command of the St. Mihiel sector on the right of the U.S. First Army. In response to a directive that offensives be initiated and sustained all along the entire Allied front, the U.S. First and Second Armies both launched attacks on 10 November and made substantial gains. So

perilous was the enemy position that it was compelled to seek an immediate armistice, which became effective on 11 November 1918.

To echo some of the words of General John J. Pershing, Commander-in-Chief of the American Expeditionary Forces, inscribed on the Montfaucon Monument:

THE MEUSE-ARGONNE OFFENSIVE (IN WHICH OVER 1,000,000 AMERICAN SOLDIERS FOUGHT) WAS SUDDENLY CONCEIVED, HURRIED IN PLAN AND PREPARATION, COMPLICATED BY CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH A PRECEDING MAJOR OPERATION YET BRILLIANTLY EXECUTED AND PROSECUTED WITH AN UNSELFISH AND HEROIC SPIRIT OF COURAGE AND FORTITUDE THAT DE MANDED EVENTUAL ICTORY. IT STANDSOUT AS ONE OF THE VERY GREAT ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN ARMS.

SITE

The cemetery, 130 ½acres in extent, was established 14 October 1918 by the American Graves Registration Service on terrain captured by the 32nd Infantry Division. The use of the land on which it rests has been granted by the French government free of charge or taxation in perpetuity, as an expression of its gratitude to the United States. In 1943, administration of the cemetery passed to the American Battle Monuments Commission. The Commission, whose functions are described in the latter pages of this booklet, landscaped the cemetery grounds and erected the memorial chapel and other structures.

ARCHITECTS

The architects for the cemetery and memorial were York and Sawyer of New York, New York.

GENERAL LAYOUT

The cemetery is generally rectangular in shape with three-quarters of its area devoted to the grave plots and memorial chapel.

The memorial chapel is located on the high ground to the south. A grassy east-west entrance mall 600 yards long runs through the small valley across which the cemetery is located separating the graves and memorial area from the Visitors' Building and service area. There is an impressive entrance portal to the cemetery at each end of the east-west mall and a circular pool with a fountain at the center. This attractive pool with its goldfish and flowering lilies is a constant source of interest to visitors. A road bordered by a double avenue of beech trees runs from each portal and encircles the mall. A perimeter road encircles the graves area and the service area. Four rectangular grave plots are located on each side of the mall leading from the pool to the memorial chapel. The grave plots are framed by squaretrimmed linden trees. These trees are especially beautiful in the fall when their leaves are changing color. Over 65 varieties of evergreen

shrubs and trees plus many varieties of flowers complete the tranquil beauty of this cemetery. A stone wall more than 1 ½miles long encircles the cemetery.

THE MEMORIAL

The memorial, a fine example of Romanesque architecture, faces north on the crest of a gently sloping hillside overlooking the graves area. It consists of a memorial chapel and two flanking loggias, on whose walls are engraved the names of those servicemen and women missing in the area and also those missing in northern Russia. The memorial's exterior walls and columns are of Euville Coquiller stone; its interior walls are of Salamandre travertine.

High above the main entrance to the chapel, on the exterior wall, is carved the following:

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF THOSE WHO DIED FOR THEIR COUNTRY.

On the lintel directly over the chapel entrance is inscribed: IN SACRED SLEEP THEY REST. A sculpture bas-relief by L. Bottiau, Paris, France, with figures representing Grief and Remembrance appears above it in the tympanum. The beautiful bronze filigreed screen of the imposing entrance doors was cast by Henry Hope and Sons, Birmingham, England. Alongside the door, carved heads of American soldiers are included in the design of the column capitals. Across the ends and front of the loggias above the arches are names of places famous in the history of the American fighting in the region:

PONT-MAUGIS – BOIS-DE-CUNEL – MEUSE – CIERGES – BOIS-DES-REPPES – CONSENVOYE – EXERMONT – GRAND-PRE – MEUSE HEIGHTS – BARRICOURT-HEIGHTS – GESNES – MONTFAUCON – CORNAY – BOIS-DE-FORET – STENAY – ARGONNE – CHEPPY – COTE-DE-CHATILLON.

Inside the chapel on the wall above the right entryway is the inscription:

THIS CHAPEL IS ERECTED BY THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AS A SACRED RENDEZVOUS OF A GRATEFUL PEOPLE WITH ITS IMMORTAL DEAD.

The same text appears in French on the wall above the left entrance.

On entering the chapel, one's attention is immediately drawn to the apse, in the center of which is the altar backed by a semi-circle of flags of the United States and the principal Allied nations.

The insignia of many of the American divisions and large units which served in the AEF are reproduced in its stained glass windows-which were executed by Heinigke and Smith, New York, New York. Shown in the window of the west wall are:

I CORPS, GENERAL HEADQUARTERS, III CORPS, 1ST DIVISION, ADVANCE SECTION S.OS., 30TH DIVISION 3RD DIVISION, 7TH DIVISION, 35TH DIVISION, 5TH DIVISION, 26TH DIVISION, 32ND DIVISION, 4TH DIVISION, 28TH DIVISION, 36TH DIVISION, 6TH DIVISION, 29TH DIVISION, 37TY DIVISION, 2ND DIVISION, 27TH DIVISION AND 33RD DIVISION.

The window of the east wall includes:

IV CORPS, FIRST ARMY, V CORPS, 41ST DIVISION, 80TH DIVISION, 88TH DIVISION, 77TH DIVISION, 84TH DIVISION, 91ST DIVISION, 78TH DIVISION, 83RD DIVISION, 90TH DIVISION, 89TH DIVISION, 85TH DIVISION, 92ND DIVISION, 42ND DIVISION, 81ST DIVISION, 76TH DIVISION, 79TH DIVISION, 82ND DIVISION AND 93RD DIVISION.

Through these windows a soft and subdued light is diffused throughout the chapel's interior and blends with the deep colors of the marble floor.

On the arches over the door, apse and windows are the following inscriptions:

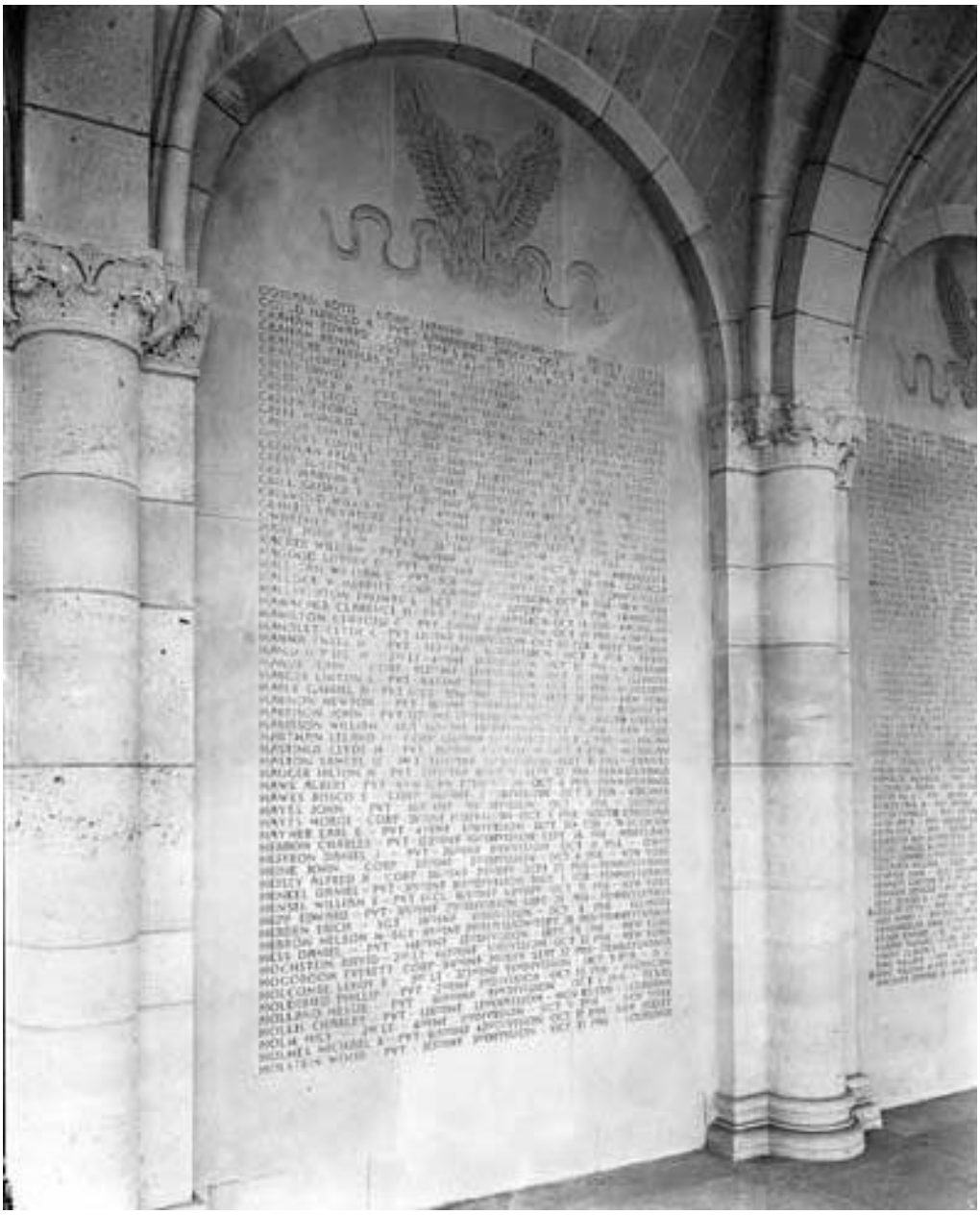
GOD HATH TAKEN THEM UNTO HIMSELF
THEIR NAMES WILL LIVE FOR EVERMORE
PEACEFUL IS THEIR SLEEP IN GOD
PERPETUAL LIGHT UPON THEM SHINES.

The memorial loggias flank the chapel. Engraved on a panel of the west loggia is an ornamental map, showing in color the operations of American divisions during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. A similar map appears in the Montfaucon Monument; see page 19 of this booklet.

THE * NAMES * RECORDED
ON * THIS * PANEL * ARE * THOSE
OF * AMERICAN * SOLDIERS *
WHO * LOST THEIR * LIVES * IN * NORTHERN * RUSSIA
DURING * THE * WORLD * WAR
AND * HAVE * NO * KNOWN * GRAVES

Stained Glass Window in Chapel

The names of 954 of the Missing who gave their lives in the service of their country, but whose remains were never recovered or identified are engraved on the remaining panels of the two loggias. Above the names high on the center panel of each loggia is inscribed:



Section of the Tablets of the Missing

THE NAMES HERE RECORDED ARE THOSE OF AMERICAN SOLDIERS WHO FOUGHT IN THE REGION AND WHOSE EARTHLY RESTING PLACE IS KNOWN ONLY TO GOD.

The Chapel Alter

Included among them, but inscribed on a separate panel in the east loggia are the names of the Missing of the Service of Supply. At the top of the panel is the inscription:

THE NAMES RECORDED ON THIS PANEL ARE THOSE OF AMERICAN SOLDIERS WHO DIED IN THE SERVICES OF SUPPLY DURING THE WORLD WAR AND HAVE NO KNOWN GRAVES.

Similarly, in the west loggia a separate panel carries the names of the Missing from the American expedition to Northern Russia under the inscription:

THE NAMES RECORDED ON THIS PANEL ARE THOSE OF AMERICAN SOLDIERS WHO LOST THEIR LIVES IN NORTHERN RUSSIA DURING THE WORLD WAR AND HAVE NO KNOWN GRAVES.

On the floors of the pavilions at the ends of the loggias are directional arrows pointing to prominent terrain features relating to the operations which took place in the area. Also, from the ends of the loggias one can see, in the distance to the southeast, the dominating hill of Montfaucon with its imposing monument.

Graves Area

GRAVES AREA

The graves area lies on the southern slope of the valley and is divided into eight rectangular plots lettered from A to H. Each plot is surrounded by square-trimmed linden

trees. Plots A,B,E and F are located on the east side of the grassy mall extending from the chapel to the circular pool and fountain below and C,D,G and H are on the west. The carefully clipped grass of the mall and graves area gives the impression of a vast green velvet carpet.

14,246 War Dead are interred within the cemetery, 486 of whom are Unknowns. The cemetery contains no multiple burials. Each of the Dead has his own headstone of white marble, a Star of David for those of the Jewish faith and a Latin cross for all others. The immense array of headstones is arranged in long parallel rows beginning at the east-west mall and extends row-on-row to the chapel crowning the ridge overlooking the graves area.

Exterior of the Visitors Building

VISITORS' BUILDING

The Visitors' Building is located to the north of the cemetery is located to the north of the cemetery. Here visitors may obtain information, sign the register and pause to refresh themselves. During visiting hours a member of the cemetery staff is available in the building to answer questions and provide information on burials and memorializations in the Commission's cemeteries, accommodations in the vicinity, travel, local history and other items of interest.

The Montfaucon Monument

The imposing shaft of the Montfaucon Monument rises 200 feet above the ruing of the former hilltop village of Montfaucon and dominates the surrounding countryside. Before its capture by the American 37th and 79th Division on 27 September 1918, the site provided the German forces with excellent observation.

The monument commemorates the victory of the U.S. First Army in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, 26 September-11 November 1918, and pays tribute to the heroic services of the French Armies before that time on that battlefront.

Construction of the monument was completed in 1933; it was dedicated in 1937 by the President of the French Republic, Albert Leburn.

Architect for the memorial was John Russell Pope of New York. The 180-foot massive shaft is of Baveno granite in the form of a Doric column and is surmounted by a figure symbolic of Liberty. It faces the U.S. First Army's line of departure of 26 September 1918. From the observation platform at the top, one can see most of the Meuse-Argonne battlefield.

The names of the four most important areas captured by American troops, MEU HEIGHTS, BARRICOURT HEIGHTS, ROMAGNE HEIGHTS AND ARGONNE FOREST, appear in large letters across the front of the monument.

On the wall surrounding the main terrace are listed the divisions which made up the U.S. First Army along with the names of three places now recorded in American military history, where each of the divisions encountered hard fighting.

1ST DIVISION, EXERMONT, COTE DE MALDAH, VILLEMONTRY; 2ND DIVISION, LANDRES-ST. GEORGES, BEAUMONT, BOIS DES FLAVIERS; 3RD DIVISION, BOIS DE CUNEL, CLAIRS CHENES, BOIS DE FORET; 4TH DIVISION,

Map of the Meuse-Argonne Region on the Northeast Wall of the Vestibule

SEPT SARGES, BOIS DE FAYS, BOIS DE FORET; 5TH DIVISION, CUNEL, DUN-SUR-MEUSE, FORET DE WOEVRE; 26TH DIVISION, LE HOUPPY BOIS, LA

WAVRILLE, BOIS DE VILLE, 28TH DIVISION, ARGONNE, VARENNES, APREMONT; 29TH DIVISION, BOIS DE CONSENVOYE, MOLLEVILLE FARM, BOIS DETRAYE; 32ND DIVISION, COTE DAME MARIE, ROMAGNE, PEUVILLERS; 33RD DIVISION, BOIS FORGES, CONSENBOYE, BOIS PLAT-CHENE; 35TH DIVISION, VAUQUOIS, BAULNY, MONTREBEAU; 37TH DIVISION, BOIS DE MONTFAUCON, IVOIRY, BOIS BE BEUGE; 42ND DIVISION, COTE-DE-CHATILLON, BOIS DU MONT DIEU, SEDAN HEIGHTS; 77TH DIVISION, ARGONNE, ST. JUVIN, REMILLY-SUR MEUSE; 78TH DIVISION, GRAND-PRE, BOIS DE LOGES, TANNAY; 79TH DIVISION, MONTFAUCON, NANTILLOIS, CHAUMONT; 80TH DIVISION, DANNEVOUS, BOIS DES OGONS, BUZANCY; 81ST DIVISION, MANHEULLES, ABAUCOURT, GRIMAUCOURT; 82ND DIVISION, CORNAY, MARGO, ST. JUVIN; 89TH DIVISION, BOIS DE BARRICOURT, POUILLY, STENAY; 90TH DIVISION, BANTHEVILLE, HILL 343, STENAY; 91ST DIVISION, BOIS DE CHEPPY, EPINONVILLE, BOIS GESNES; AND THE 92ND DIVISION, BOIS DE LA GRURIE, VALLEE MOREAU, BINARVILLE.

In addition, the five French units which fought with the First Army and the two American divisions which were in reserve are commemorated:

10E D.I.C.(FR) DAMLOUP, BOIS DE LA PLUME, NOBRAS; 15E D.I.C. (FR), SIVRYSURE-MEUSE, HARAUMONT, DAMVILLERS; 18E D.I. (FR), HAUMONT, BOIS DES CHENES, BOIS D'ORMONT; 26E D.I. (FR), BOIS DE CAURES, ANGLEMONT FERME, BEAUMONT; IN RESERVE, 6TH DIVISION, 36TH DIVISION, 5E D.C. (FR).

On the paving of the main terrace in front of the entrance door, the following text is engraved in English and French:

ERECTED BY THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO COMMEMORATE THE BRILLIANT VICTORY OF HER FIRST ARMY IN THE MEUSE-ARGONNE OFFENSIVE SEPTEMBER 26-NOVEMBER 11, 1918, AND TO HONOR THE HEROIC SERVICES OF THE ARMIES OF FRANCE ON THIS IMPORTANT BATTLEFRONT DURING THE WORLD WAR.

Inside the entranceway is a small vestibule decorated with the flags of the United States and France. On the northwest wall of the vestibule is a map of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, carved in polished marble and indicating in color the operations of the various divisions in the area. Inscribed on the southwest wall is a brief description in French and English of the American operations:

DURING SEPTEMBER 1918 THE ALLIED FORCES LAUNCHED A GENERAL OFFENSIVE AGAINST THE GERMAN ARMIES ON THE WESTERN FRONT. IN THIS OPERATION THE AMERICAN FIRST ARMY WAS ASSIGNED THE TASK OF BREAKING THROUGH THE EXTREMELY STRONG AND VITAL PORTION OF THE ENEMY DEFENSIVE SYSTEM LYING BETWEEN THE MEUSE RIVER AND THE ARGONNE FOREST.

THE AMERICAN ATTACKS STARTED ON SEPTEMBER 26 AND AFTER TWO DAYS INTENSE FIGHTING MONTIFAUCON UPON WHICH THIS MONUMENT STANDS WAS CAPTURED. BY SEPTEMBER 30 TH ENEMY HAD BEEN DRIVEN BACK SIX MILES. THE GERMAN TROOPS DEFEN DED EACH POSITION TO THE UTMOST AND MANY DIVISIONS WERE RUSHED TO THEIR SUPPORT FROM OTHER BATTLEFRONTS.

THE BATTLE CONTINUED THROUGHOUT OCTOBER AGAINST DESPERATE RESISTANCE. A BRILLIANT ADVANCE DOWN THE AIRE VALLEY MADE POSIBLE TO OUTFLANK AND CAPTURE THE ARGONNE FOREST. THE ATTACK THEN SPREAD EAST OF THE MEUSE WHERE SEVERE FIGHTING OCCURRED. THE PROLOGNED STRUGGLES FOR THE STRONGLY FORTIFIED GERMAN MAIN LINE OF DEFENSE ON THE HEIGHTS NEAR BRIEULLES CUNEL AND ROMAGNE WERE UNSURPASSED IN FURY BUT BY OCTOBER 14 THIS LINE HAD BEEN BROKEN AND THE END OF THE MONTH FOUND IT AND THE VILLAGES OF ST. JUVIN AND GRAND-PRE SECURELY IN THE GRASP OF THE AMERICAN ARMY.

ON NOVEMBER 1 THE ARMY LAUNCHED ITS LAST GREAT ATTACK. HTE DOMINATING HEIGHTS NEAR BARRICOURT WERE CAPTURED AND THE ENEMY WAS DRIVEN BEYOND THE MEUSE RIVER. THESE SUCCESSES AND THOSE OF THE ALLIES ON OTHER BATTLEFIELDS COMPELLED THE GERMANS TO ASK FOR AN IMMEDIATE ARMISTICE WHICH BECAME EFFECTIVE ON NOVEMBER 11, 1918.

DURING FORTY-SEVEN DAYS OF CONTINUAL BATTLE ON THIS FRONT THE FIRST ARMY ADVANCED 35 MILES CAPTURED 26,000 MEN 874 CANNON AND 3,000 MACHINE GUNS ATTISMAXIMUM STRENGTH THE ARMY COMPRISED MORE THAN 1,000,000 SOLDIERS. THE AMERICAN BATTLE CASUALTIES WERE 122,000.

A tribute by General Pershing to his officers and men who served here appears on the southeast wall. The text of General Pershing's tribute reads:

THE MEUSE-ARGONNE BATTLE PRESENTED NUMBEROUS DIFFICULTIES SEEMINGLY INSURMOUNTABLE. THE SUCCESS STANDS OUT AS ONE OF THE GREAT ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN ARMS. SUDDENLY CONCEIVED AND HURRIED IN PLAN AND PREPARATION; COMPLICATED BY CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH A PRECEDING MAJOR OPERATION; DIRECTED AGAINST STUBBORN DEFENSE OF THE VITAL POINT OF THE WESTERN FRONT; AND ATTENDED BY COLD AND INCLEMENT WEATHER; THIS BATTLE WAS PROSECUTED WITH AN UNSELFISH AND HEROIC SPIRIT OF COURAGE AND FORTUTUDE WHICH DEMANDED EVENTUAL VICTORY. PHYSICALLY STRONG, VIRILE, AND AGGRESSIVE, THE MORALE OF THE AMERICAN SOLDIER DURING THIS MOST TRYING PERIOD WAS SUPERB. IN THEIR DEVOTION, THEIR VALOR, AND IN THE LOYAL FULFILLMENT OF THEIR OBLIGATIONS, THE OFFICERS AND MEN OF THE AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCES HAVE LEFT A HERITAGE OF WHICH THOSE WHO FOLLOW MAY EVER BE PROUD.

--*John J. Pershing*
General, Commander-in-Chief,
American Expeditionary Forces

A circular stairway of 234 steps leads from the base of the shaft to observation platforms from which large portions of the Meuse-Argonne battlefield may be seen. Eleven of the thirteen landings on the stairs are provided with benches where visitors may pause to rest. Use of the monument site was given to the United States by the French Government in perpetuity, free of charge or taxation.

The area surrounding the monument is administered by the French Fine Arts Commission and is also of historical significance. The ruins upon which the monument is erected are believed to date back to the 6th century. Numberous battles have been fought in the vicinity. In one battle against the Normans about 888 A.D., 19,000 Dead are said to have been left on the battlefield. During the Hundred Years' War, the district was frequently ravaged by robbers; and during the 16th and 17th centuries, the town was twice destroyed. While making excavations for the foundations of the monument, an underground passage hollowed out of the soft rock was found running from the ruins behind the monument to the foot of the hill. To the left of the monument shaft, as seen from the parking plaza and about 12 feet underground, a cemetery was found which probably dates from the Middle Ages. Under the front of the wall on the right side of the terrace, three old cellars were found, one below the other, the lowest one showing evidence of having been used as a dungeon.

The Sommepy Monument

The Sommepy Monument stands on the crest of Blanc Mont ridge, three miles/5 kilometers north of Sommepy in the Department of Marne, 38 miles/61 kilometers from the Neuse-Argonne American Cemetery. The site on which the monument stands was captured on 3 October 1918 after heavy fighting by the American 2nd Division. The nearest cities are Reims – 22 miles/35 kilometers to the west and Chalons-sur-Marne – 23 miles/37 kilometers to the south.

The monument commemorates the achievements of the 70,000 American soldiers who fought in the Champagne region of France during the summer and fall of 1918 and those of the French soldiers who fought with them.

The monument is in the form of a tower, its sturdy though graceful shape harmonizing with the surrounding landscape. The golden brown stones of different shades on its exterior give it a very attractive appearance.

Architect for the monument was Arthur Loomis Harmon of New York, New York. Carved on the exterior walls are the dedicatory inscription and the insignia and names of the American Divisions which the monument commemorates with the inclusive dates that they served in this region and the names of four locations where each of the divisions participated in difficult fighting.

93RD DIVISION, SEPTEMBER 26-OCTOBER 6, 1918, RIPONT, SECHAULT, ARFEUIL, TRIERES FARM; 36TH DIVISION, OCTOBER 8-OCTOBER 27, 1918, MACHAULT, DRICOURT, ST. ETIENNE-A-ARNES, FOREST FARM: 2ND DIVISION, OCTOBER 2-OCTOBER 9, 1918, BLANC MONT, MEDEAH FARM, ST. ETIENNE-A-ARNES, ESSEN TRENCH; 42ND DIVISION, JULY 15-JULY 17, 1918,

AUBERIVE-SUR-SUPPLIES, ST. HILAIRE-LE-GRAND, SOUAIN, SPANDAU WOOD.

The dedicatory inscription is carved in both English and French below the eagle on the front face of the monument:

ERECTED BY THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO COMMEMORATE THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF HER SOLDIERS AND THOSE OF FRANCE WHO FOUGHT IN THIS REGION DURING THE WORLD WAR.

Inside the tower, on a stone panel visible through the bronze grille of the door, is a brief description of the American operations in this vicinity:

IN EARLY JULY 1918 THE 42ND AMERICAN DIVISION ENTERED THE BATTLE LINES WITH THE 13TH AND 170TH FRENCH DIVISIONS NEAR SOUAIN. THERE IT GALLANTLY ASSISTED IN REPELLING THE LAST GERMAN MAJOR OFFENSIVE OF THE WAR.

WHEN THE ALLIES BEGAN THEIR GREAT CONVERGENT OFFENSIVE IN LATE SEPTEMBER, THE 2ND AND 36TH AMERICAN DIVISIONS WERE ASSIGNED TO THE FRENCH FOURTH ARMY. ON OCTOBER 3 THE 2ND DIVISION, SUPPORTED ON THE LEFT BY THE 21ST FRENCH DIVISION AND ON THE RIGHT BY THE 167TH, IN A BRILLIANT OPERATION CAPTURED BLANC MONT RIDGE ON WHICH THIS MONUMENT STANDS. THE 36TH DIVISION RELIEVED THE 2BD ON OCTOBER 10 AND CONTINUED THE ADVANCE NORTHWARD AS FAR AS THE AISNE RIVER.

THREE INFANTRY REGIMENTS OF THE 93RD AMERICAN DIVISION, SERVING WITH THE 157TH AND 161ST FRENCH DIVISIONS, ENGAGED IN INTERMITTENT FIGHTING DURING DEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER TAKING PART IN THE CAPTURE OF RIPONT, SECHAULT AND TRIERES FARM.

A flight of steps leads to an observation platform at the top of the structure where a fine view of the surrounding countryside is available and where directional arrows point out prominent terrain features.