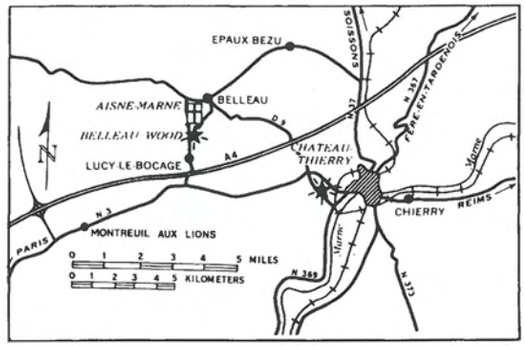
Aisne-Marne American Cemetery and Memorial

The American Battle Monuments Commission

Apse in Chapel

Aisne-Marne American Cemetery and Memorial



LOCATION

The Aisne-Marne American Cemetery and Memorial is located 6.5 miles/10.5 kilometers northwest of Chateau-Thierry, just southwest of the village of Belleau, Aisne, France. Travel by train from the Gare de l'Est station in Paris to Chateau-Thierry takes about one hour. Taxi service to the cemetery is available at the Chateau-Thierry railroad station. The cemetery may also be reached by automobile from Paris via toll autoroute A-3 east by taking the Montreuil-aux-Lyons exit and following the cemetery signs to Lucy-le-Bocage and proceeding through Belleau Woods to the entrance to the cemetery. The distance from Paris to the cemetery by automobile is approximately 50 miles/80 kilometers. Hotel accommodations are available in the cities of Chateau-Thierry, Meaux, Soissons and Reims.

HOURS

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

Entrance to the Cemetary

(The cemetery is closed on January 1 and December 25. It is open on all other U.S. and 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 to escort relatives to grave and memorial sites.

HISTORY

On the morning of 27 May 1918, the Germans attacked in force on the Aisne front between Berry-au-Bac and Anizy-le-Chateau. Reserves were rushed there by the Allies from every quarter. The French were able to stem the onslaught with the help of American troops, but only after a large salient had been driven into Allied lines roughly defined by the triangle of Reims, Chateau-Thierry and Soissons. On 9 June, two German armies attacked from the salient toward Compiegne in an attempt to widen it and secure use of the railroad from Compiegne to Soissons; the attack was unsuccessful.

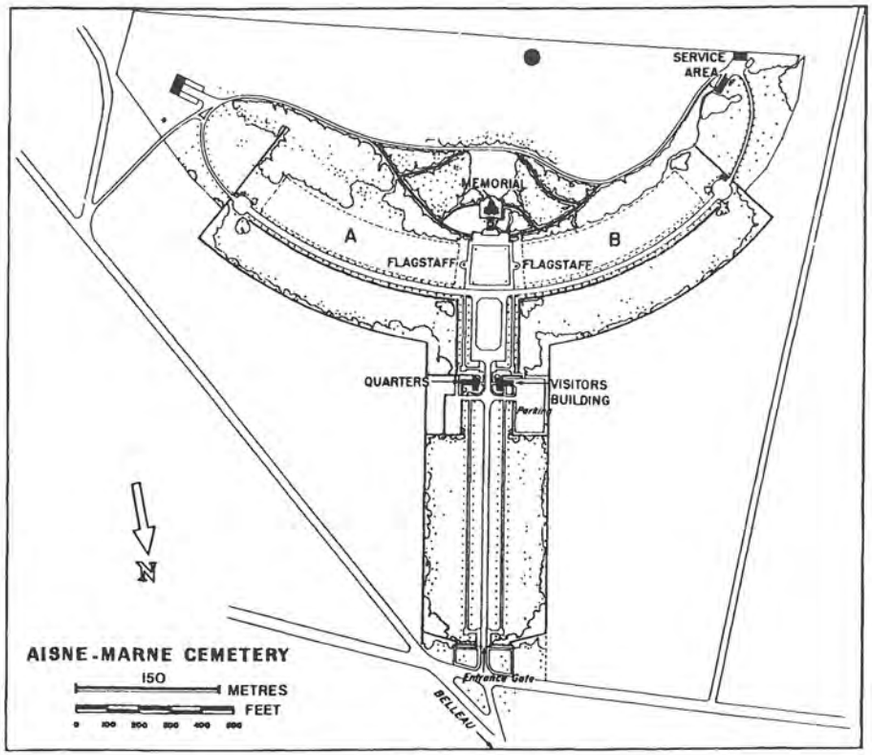
The Germans then began preparations for a major offensive on either side of Reims in the general direction of Epernay and Chalons-sur-Marne. Its objective was the capture of Reims and the high ground south of it to obtain use of an additional trunk line railroad. Three German armies totaling 47 divisions and a large quantity of artillery were assembled for the offensive. Meanwhile, the Allies were doing everything they could to discover when and where the next offensive would take place. They were completely successful in their efforts, as they not only learned the line of attack, but the exact day and hour that the German offensive was scheduled to commence.

On 15 July, the date of the German offensive, there were 26 American divisions in France under the command of General John J. Pershing, of which 12 were available for combat. Because of their large size, 12 American divisions were equivalent in fire power to 24 French, British or German divisions. With so many fresh American troops available and knowing that soon there would be more, Marshal Ferdinand Foch, Allied Commander-in-Chief, incorporated an attack by U.S. troops on the western face of the Aisne-Marne salient in his counterattack plans as it was considered the most vulnerable part of the German lines. Shortly before the German attack was scheduled to begin, the Allies reduced the manning of their front lines to weak detachments with orders for them to retire under heavy bombardment. This tactic proved exceptionally successful as the Germans wasted much of their preparatory fire on newly abandoned positions.

To capitalize further on knowing the exact hour that the Germans were to attack, the Allies began bombarding the German assembly areas for the planned offensive 30 minutes before the preparatory fire by the Germans was scheduled to begin. This caused much confusion in the assault forces, and they took many casualties. Two days later, after sustaining heavy losses, the Germans halted their offensive without attaining the important results they had expected to achieve.

The following day, 18 July, the Allies launched their counterattack against the western face of the Aisne-Marne salient. Although the Germans resisted stubbornly, they quickly realized that their position was untenable and began a gradual withdrawal from the salient. Reduction of the Aisne-Marne salient became a fact on 4 August, when Allied troops reached the south bank of the Vesle. On 6 August, the counterattack was officially terminated. Not only had a serious threat to Paris been removed, but important railroads were freed once again for

Graves Area from Chapel Terrace



Location of Cemetery Features

Allied use. Marshal Henri Petain, Commander-in-Chief of the French armies, who drew up the Allied plans for meeting the German offensive, said that the counterattack could not have succeeded without American troops.

During the fighting, the church in the village of Belleau was destroyed by American artillery fire. It was restored after the war by a veterans' association of the 26th Division. Located opposite the entrance of the Aisne-Marne American Cemetery, it is still known as the 26th Division Memorial Church of Belleau.

SITE

The Aisne-Marne Cemetery Memorial, 42.5 acres in extent, is situated at the foot of the hill on which stands 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' Cemetery No. 1764-Belleau Wood. A photograph of the temporary cemetery hangs in the superintendent's office in the Visitors' 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

Superintendent's Quarters and Visitors' Building on Entrance Road

is named for the World War I campaign area in which it is located.

The memorial chapel, the Visitors' 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 the Great War. The Commission also landscaped the grounds. In 1934, The President by Executive Order, gave the Commission the added responsibility of operating and maintaining this and other permanent military cemeteries overseas.

The cemetery was dedicated on 30 May 1937.

ARCHITECTS

Cram and Ferguson of Boston, Massachusetts were the architects of the cemetery's memorial features.

GENERAL LAYOUT

The cemetery is laid out generally in the form of a "T." A long avenue leads from the entrance gate past the Visitors' Building and parking area on the right (west) and the superintendents quarters opposite on the left to the mall and the memorial chapel beyond. The chapel which crowns the "T" sits on high ground to the south. The cross bar of the "T" is formed by the cemetery's two grave plots, each projecting in a slightly convex arc from opposite sides of the mall. A flag pole is centered on each side of the mall overlooking each grave plot.

MEMORIAL CHAPEL

The memorial chapel was erected

Memorial Chapel

South Face of Memorial Chapel

over front line trenches dug by the 2nd Division as part of the defense of Belleau Wood, following capture of Belleau Wood by the division on 25 June 1918. Rising more than 80 feet above the hillside overlooking the cemetery, the chapel is a striking example of French Romanesque architecture. Its exterior walls, steps and terrace are of native St. Maximin, Savonnieres and Massangis limestone.

The decorative embellishments on the outside of the chapel were designed by William F. Ross and Company, East Cambridge, Massachusetts and were executed by Alfred Bottiau, Paris, France. The carvings on the capitals of the three columns which flank each side of the chapel entrance depict scenes from the trenches of World War I. Carved on the columns on the right side are soldiers preparing for a bayonet charge, automatic riflemen and riflemen; carved on the columns on the left are artillery observers, a machine gun crew and soldiers launching grenades. In the tympanum over the entrance is carved the figure of a crusader in armor, defender of right, flanked by the shields of the United States and France intertwined with branches of oak to symbolize the traditional unity of the two countries. Around the top of the chapel on stone shields are carved the insignia of American corps and divisions which fought in the area and the U.S. coat of arms. On the north face are the insignia of I Corps, the U.S. coat of arms and III Corps; on the west face are the insignia of the 1st, 2d and 3d Divisions; on the south face those of the 4th, 26th and 28th Divisions; and on the east face those of the 32d, 42d and 77th Divisions. Decorative embellishments are also carved on the capitals of the belfry columns. The following eleven carvings appear: bayonets for the Infantry, cannon for the Artillery, tanks for the Tank Corps, crossed heavy machine guns for Machine Gun units, propellers for Aviation units, artillery rounds for both the Artillery and Ordnance, a plane-table for the Engineers, the Greek cross and caduceus for Medical units, airplane engines for Aviation repair units, a mule's head over which is engraved "8 Chev" for the French boxcar used to transport 40 men or 8 horses, and oak leaves for the Judge Advocate General Corps. Seven of these carvings appear on each side of the chapel. On the north face are a mule's head, bayonets, plane-table, crossed machine guns, Greek cross and caduceus, airplane engines and cannon; on the east face are artillery rounds, mule's head, bayonets, oak leaves, Greek cross and caduceus, cannon, propellers and tanks; on the south face are a plane table, crossed machine guns, oak leaves, Greek cross and caduceus, cannon, propellers and tanks; on the west face are artillery rounds, bayonets, plane-table, airplane engines, cannon, propellers and tanks. The arches of the belfry openings are embellished with carvings of small arms ammunition, the front view of a machine gun and projectile, field packs with entrenching tools attached, and selected officer and enlisted insignia. Engraved on the sills are orientation arrows with distances to points of historic interest. Below the belfry openings, are sculptured heads representing. the men and women of the Allied armed forces in World War I as follows: a French soldier, a French nurse, and American aviator, a Scottish soldier, a Russian soldier, a Portuguese soldier, a Canadian aviator, and a British Women's Army Corps driver. The same figures appear on each side of the chapel but in different order.

To the right of the chapel entrance is a hole in the stonework made in 1940 by a German anti-tank gun which

Inside of Chapel Entrance

was firing at French tanks passing in the vicinity of the cemetery. Other minor damage to the stonework occured but was repaired. This particular shell hole was left untouched as evidence of combat action in the region during World War II.

In honor of the 80th anniversary of the ending of World War I (11:00 am, 11 Nov. 1918), a carillon was presented to the cemetery by the American Veterans of World War II, Korea and Vietnam (AMVETS) and the Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation as a living memorial to those U.S. War Dead who made the supreme sacrifice in the cause of freedom.

CHAPEL INTERIOR

The chapel is entered through a large double door of oak, ornamented with wrought iron, which opens onto the vestibule. Above the inside of the entrance is inscribed:

THE NAMES RECORDED ON THESE WALLS ARE THOSE OF AMERICAN SOLDIERS WHO FOUGHT IN THIS REGION AND WHO SLEEP IN UNKNOWN GRAVES.

To the right and left of the vesibule are small alcoves with benches where many of the names of the 1,060 Missing in the region whose remains were never recovered or if recovered, never identified, are engraved on the walls. The remainder of the names are engraved on the walls of the vestibule and the apse. Each alcove has one of the chapel's five beautiful stained-glass windows by Reynolds, Francis and Rohnstock of Boston, Massachusetts. The window in the alcove on the left contains the coats of arms of some of the Allied nations of World War I: the United States, France, Great Britain, Italy, Belgium, Serbia and Romania. The window of the alcove on the right contains the coats of arms of the United States, the insignia of I and II Corps and the insignia of the 1st, 2d, 3d, 4th, 26th, 28th, 32d, 42d, and 77th Divisions; these are the same insignia which are engraved on the stone shields around the top of the tower.

On entering the chapel, one's eyes

Interior of Chapel

Stained Glass Window in Chapel Alcove

are drawn to the apse with its exquisitely carved and gilded altar of Italian marble, the color of peach blossoms. At the top of the altar back are carved, respectively, an owl for wisdom, a crusader whose shield bears a lion device for fortitude, and scales for justice. Below these figures the six virtues appear in two lines—WISDOM, FORTITUDE, JUSTICE and FAITH, HOPE, CHARITY. Lower on the altar back in five circles are carved respectively a Gallic rock, symbolic of France; a pommee cross on an apple blossom with a serpent representing the Garden of Eden; a fouled anchor and lily, symbolic of lasting peace; a poppy representing valor; and a passion flower, symbolic of the Crucifixion and Resurrection. Across the face of the altar is inscribed: PEACEFUL THEY REST IN GLORY EVERLASTING.

Sprigs of olive and oak are carved on the altar front, symbolizing peace and life. Carved in the center of the altar front is a bird feeding her young, symbolic of Christ feeding his flock.

Inscribed on the wall to the left of the altar are the words: IN GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE OF HER SONS WHO DIED IN THE WORLD WAR THIS CHAPEL IS ERECTED BY THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. A French translation of this text appears on the wall immediately to the right of the altar. The three remaining stained-glass windows are located above and to the left and right of the altar. The stained-glass window over the inscription on the wall to the left of the altar depicts St. Louis, one of the great Crusaders; the window over the altar depicts St. Michael triumphing over evil; and the window over the inscription on the wall to the right of the altar, St. Denis, patron saint of France.

GRAVES AREA

The graves area consists of two convex curved plots projecting from each side of the south end of the mall; Plot A is on the left (east) and Plot B is on the right (west). Each plot contains 13 rows of headstones. Stars of David mark the graves of those of the Jewish faith and latin crosses all others. Of the 2,289 burials in the cemetery, 250 are Unknowns. Those interred in the cemetery came from all of the then forty-eight states and the District of Columbia.

Graves Area

Interior of Visitors' Room

VISITORS' BUILDING

On the right of the entrance avenue are the Visitors' Building and parking area. Inside the building are the superintendent's office and a comfortably furnished room where visitors may rest and obtain information from the cemetery staff. The visitors' register is maintained there. Burial locations and sites of memorialization in each of the Commission's cemetery memorials, travel information, information on accommodations in the vicinity, local history and other information of interest are provided on request by the cemetery staff member on duty.

PLANTINGS

The long avenue leading from the entrance gate to the graves area is bordered by plane trees and polyantha roses. Massifs of multicolored shrubs such as forsythia, laurel, boxwood, Japanese plum, deutzia, mock orange, Oregon grape and others screen the graves area from the north. Beds of polyantha roses border the mall and extend to the chapel steps.

Visitors' Building and Ofice

Belleau Wood

Belleau Wood, 200 acres in extent, 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 fighting men who fought in the AEF during World War I. Vestiges of trenches, shell holes and relics of the war to include weapons found in the vicinity may be seen. A monument erected by the U.S. Marines and a flagpole are located on an island in the road passing through the clearing in the center of Belleau Wood. The monument is a black granite stele to which has been affixed a life-size bronze bas-relief by Felix de Weldon, of New York, NY, of a Marine attacking with rifle and bayonet. It commemorates the 4th Marine Brigade of the U.S. 2d Division which was primarily responsible for capture of the Wood. Below the bas-relief at the base of the stele is a bronze plaque on which is engraved in English and French: BOIS DE BELLEAU OFFICIALLY RENAMED BOIS DE LA BRIGADE DE MARINE BY THE COMMANDING GENERAL FRENCH SIXTH ARMY ON 30 JUNE 1918 IN RECOGNITION OF THE COURAGEOUS ACTION OF THE 4TH UNITED STATES MARINE BRIGADE IN THE SEIZURE OF THIS WOOD IN THE FACE OF DETERMINED GERMAN RESISTANCE. ON 27 MAY 1918, THE GERMANS LAUNCHED A MAJOR SURPRISE OFFENSIVE WHICH CROSSED THE CHEMIN DES DAMES AND CAPTURED SOISSONS. BY

WW I Ruin in Belleau Wood

31 MAY, THEIR ARMIES WERE ADVANCING RAPIDLY DOWN THE MARNE VALLEY TOWARD PARIS. THE 2D UNITED STATES ARMY DIVISION OF WHICH THE 4TH MARINE BRIGADE FORMED A PART, WAS RUSHED INTO THE DEEPEST POINT OF THE PENETRATION TO ASSIST THE FRENCH FORCES IN STOPPING THE ADVANCE OF THE ENEMY. RAPIDLY OCCUPYING DEFENSIVE POSITIONS SOUTH AND WEST OF BELLEAU WOOD, THE 4TH MARINE BRIGADE, COMPOSED OF THE 5TH AND 6TH MARINE REGIMENTS AND THE 6TH MACHINE GUN BATTALION, STOOD FIRM UNDER UNREMITTING ENEMY ATTACKS FROM 1 TO 5 JUNE. ON 6 JUNE, THE MARINES BEGAN A SERIES OF ATTACKS WHICH CULMINATED ON 25 JUNE WITH THE CAPTURE OF THE ENTIRE BELLEAU WOOD AREA, AND THE DEFEAT OF THE GERMAN OFFENSIVE IN THIS SECTOR. MAY THE GALLANT MARINES WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES FOR CORPS AND COUNTRY REST IN PEACE.

Marine Monument at Belleau Wood

East Face

Château-Thierry Monument

The Chateau-Thierry Monument is situated on Hill 204, 2 miles/3 kilometers west of the town for which it is named. It is 54 miles/87 kilometers east of Paris and 4.5 miles/7 kilometers southeast of the Aisne-Marne Cemetery and Memorial. Two stone pylons inscribed AMERICAN AISNE-MARNE MEMORIAL mark the entrance to the monument from the Paris/Chateau-Thierry Highway (N-3). The site, 25 acres in extent, commands a wide view of the Marne River valley.

Designed by Paul P. Cret of Philadelphia, the Chateau-Thierry Monument was constructed by the American Battle Monuments Commission to commemorate the sacrifices and achievements of American and French fighting men in the region, and the friendship and cooperation of French and American forces during World War I.

The monument is a large and impressive double collonade set on a well landscaped terrace. It is ornamented on its west face by heroic size figures representative of France and the United States and the longstanding unity and friendship between the two nations. The figures were designed and executed by Alfred Bottiau of Paris, France. At either side of the figures on the base of the monument is engraved the dedicatory inscription: THIS MONUMENT HAS BEEN ERECTED BY THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO COMMEMORATE THE SERVICES OF HER TROOPS AND THOSE OF FRANCE WHO FOUGHT IN THIS REGION DURING THE WORLD WAR. IT STANDS AS A LASTING SYMBOL OF THE FRIENDSHIP AND COOPERATION BETWEEN THE FRENCH AND AMERICAN ARMIES. The text appears in English to the left (north) of the figures

Figures Depicting Unity of U.S. and France

and in French to the right.

The east face of the monument is ornamented with an eagle and shield also of heroic proportions. Inscribed on the base of the sculpture are the words: TIME WILL NOT DIM THE GLORY OF THEIR DEEDS. Below the inscription is a large ornamental map of the region designed by Paul P. Cret showing the ground gained by U.S. Forces on 18 July 1918 and thereafter. In front of the map is an orientation table giving distances and directions to points of historical interest. From there and elsewhere on the terrace, an excellent view of the Marne River valley may be had. Along the base of the monument on either side of the map are carved the numerical designations and insignia of the U.S. corps and divisions commemorated there. These are from left (north) to right: the 1st, 2d and 3d Divisions, I and III Corps, and the 28th, 32d, 42d, 77th and 83d Divisions.

Inscribed above the columns on all four sides of the monument are the names of places in the region where important battles were fought by American troops: GRIMPETTES WOOD VAUX FISMES MISSY-AUX-BOIS BELLEAU WOOD JUVIGNY MEZY NOROY-SUR-OURCQ — SERGY SERINGES-ET-NESLES VIERZY LE CHARMEL BAZOCHES FISMETTE BERZY-LE-SEC TRUGNY LA CROIX ROUGE FARM TORCY.

A brief resume of American fighting in the general vicinity is engraved on the north and south interior walls at the center of the colonnade: IN LATE MAY 1918 THE GERMAN ARMY MADE A SURPRISE ATTACK ALONG THE AISNE RIVER AND ADVANCED RAPIDLY TOWARD THE MARNE. ALLIED REINFORCEMENTS WERE HURRIEDLY BROUGHT UP, INCLUDING THE 2D AND 3D AMERICAN DIVISIONS WHICH WENT INTO POSITION DIRECTLY ACROSS THE GERMAN LINE OF ADVANCE TOWARD PARIS. AFTER SEVERE FIGHTING THESE DIVISIONS DEFINITELY STOPPED THE PROGRESS OF THE ATTACK ON THEIR FRONT AND THE LINES STABILIZED, THE GERMAN FORCES HAVING DRIVEN A DEEP SALIENT ROUGHLY DEFINED BY REIMS, CHATEAU-THIERRY AND SOISSONS INTO ALLIED TERRITORY.

THE LAST GERMAN OFFENSIVE OF THE WAR, ON 15 JULY, INCLUDED AN ATTACK IN THE EASTERN PART OF THIS SALIENT AND THERE THE 3D AMERICAN DIVISION AND ELEMENTS OF THE 28TH WERE IMPORTANT FACTORS IN THE SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE OF THE ALLIED POSITIONS.

ON JULY 18 THE ALLIED TROOPS BEGAN A GENERAL COUNTEROFFENSIVE AGAINST THE WHOLE SALIENT IN WHICH THE 1ST, 2D, 3D, 4TH, 26TH, 28TH, 32D AND 42D AMERICAN DIVISIONS, MOST OF WHICH SERVED UNDER THE I AND III CORPS, TOOK A BRILLIANT PART. THIS OFFENSIVE WAS A COMPLETE SUCCESS AND BY AUGUST 6 THE ENEMY HAD BEEN DRIVEN BEYOND THE VESLE RIVER. LATER THE 4TH, 28TH, 32D AND 77TH AMERICAN DIVISIONS AND ELEMENTS OF THE 3D AND 93D PLAYED A PROMINENT ROLE IN THE DESPERATE FIGHTING ON THE NORTH OF THE VESLE.

OF THE 310,000 AMERICAN SOLDIERS WHO FOUGHT IN THESE OPERATIONS, 67,000 WERE CASUALTIES. The resume is in French on the north interior wall and in English on the south interior wall.

SERVICES TO THE PUBLIC

Upon request, and without cost, the following information and services are provided to family members and friends of those interred or commemorated at ABMC's cemeteries and memorials:

- name, location and general information about the cemetery, monument or memorial;
- plot, row and grave number and, if applicable, memorialization site;
- authorization for issuance of fee-free passports for members of the immediate family traveling overseas specifically to visit an ABMC grave or memorialization site;
- a photograph of grave and/or memorialization sites affixed to a large color lithograph of the appropriate cemetery and memorial;
- best route and modes of travel in-country to cemetery or memorial site;
- general information about accommodations in the vicinity of the cemetery or memorial;
- arrangement for floral decoration of a grave or memorialization site. (Weather permitting, a color photograph of the floral decoration in place is provided to the donor).

Corozal American Cemetery, Corozal, Republic of Panama

Decorated Gravesite of a World War II "Unknown"

THE AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION

ESTABLISHED BY CONGRESS MARCH 1923

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Suresnes American Cemetery and Memorial, Seine, France