

American Battle Monuments Commission

Rhone American Cemetery and Memorial

LOCATION

Rhone American Cemetery and Memorial is situated in the city of Draguignan (Var), France, 28 miles in an air line west of Cannes and 16 miles inland from the seacoast. Draguignan may be reached from Paris-Marseille-St. Raphael-Nice by Autoroute A6/A7/A8 (toll highway) by taking the Le Muy exit onto highway N-555 to Draguignan. From Cannes the cemetery may be reached via Grasse on highway N-85 (Cannes to Grasse) and then highway N-562 to the cemetery or highway N-7 via Frejus and Le Muy or Les Arcs to the city of Draguignan.

Draguignan may also be reached by the rail line from Cannes-Nice exiting the train at Les Arcs, a stop on the main rail line from Paris to Nice. There is bus service from Les Arcs to Draguignan or taxi cabs may be hired to reach the cemetery.

Hotel accommodations are available in Draguignan and at St. Raphael, Cannes and other towns along the Riviera.

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 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 escort relatives to grave and memorial sites.

HISTORY

As early as August 1943, when the campaign to seize the island of Sicily was coming to a victorious close, a landing in southern France was under active consideration by Allied war planners. They believed an amphibious assault in southern France essential, not only to relieve some of the pressure on the troops making the principal amphibious assault at Normandy, but to seize the major port of Marseille.

As planning for Normandy progressed, the desirability of launching both attacks simultaneously became apparent. When it was determined that despite the best efforts of American industry enough landing craft could not be produced to make both amphibious landings at the same time, the decision was made to undertake the southern France landings as soon as possible after the Normandy landings, utilizing many of the same ships and craft. Meanwhile, the threat of such landings immobilized substantial enemy forces in the south of France for over two months, preventing their deployment against Allied troops in Normandy.

Beginning in mid-June 1944, U.S. and French divisions were successively pulled from the lines in Italy, in preparation for the southern France landings. Air bombardment aimed at disrupting vital communications and installations in southern France commenced in July and increased in intensity. As the convoys assembled to bring the preponderance of the assault troops from Italy, and others from as far away as Algiers, the Twelfth and Fifteenth Air Forces struck at enemy beach defenses, and the bridges across the Rhone River in an effort to isolate the battle area.

During the night of 14 August, specially trained assault units landed to protect the flanks of the invasion areas. Then, shortly before dawn, U.S. and British troops of the 1st Airborne Task Force dropped near Le Muy to seize vital highway junctions.

At 0800 hours on 15 August 1944, under the cover of heavy naval bombardment by the Western Naval Task Force, the 3rd, 36th and 45th Divisions of the U.S. VI Corps stormed ashore from St. Tropez to St. Raphael. Breaking through the steel and concrete fortifications, they advanced inland so rapidly that they were able to establish contact with the airborne units by nightfall. On the following day, as the U.S. troops pursued the retreating enemy, French divisions landed and began moving westward toward the ports of Toulon and Marseille.

The 3rd Division on the left flank drove directly up the Rhone Valley, as the other VI Corps units of the U.S. Seventh Army advanced northward. Within ten days, Grenoble was liberated and a U.S. task force was moving westward to meet the 3rd Division attacking up the valley. By 28 August, the defile at Montelimar had been seized, cutting off large numbers of the retreating enemy, and Toulon and Marseille had been liberated by French troops.

The advance of the U.S. VI Corps continued without pause, while the U.S. Twelfth Air Force harassed the retreating enemy from the air. Lyon was liberated on 3 September and by 7 September, U.S. troops had reached Besancon. On 11 September at Sombernon west of Dijon, U.S. Seventh Army units met patrols from the U.S. Third Army advancing from Normandy. In less than one month U.S. forces had advanced 400 miles from the beaches of southern France, isolating all remaining units in southwestern France. Ten days later the U.S. Seventh and Third Armies joined in strength near Epinal and established a solid line extending to the Swiss frontier.

SITE

The site covers 12 acres near the eastern edge of the city of Draguignan, at the foot of a hill clad with the characteristic cypresses, olive trees and oleanders of southern France. Across the Street opposite the cemetery are schools and playgrounds. Just west of the cemetery is the civilian cemetery of the city of Draguignan.

The first U.S. troops to enter Draguignan were elements of the 1st Airborne Task Force, on the night of 16 August 1944. They were joined by units of the U.S. 36th Division on the next day. Rhone American Cemetery was first established on 19 August 1944. Here are buried 861 of our military Dead representing 39 per cent of the burials which were originally made in this region; most of these men died during the operations incident to the landing on the southern coast on 15 August 1944 and the advance northward. The official name of the cemetery is derived from the Rhone River whose

watershed was the scene of these operations. Construction of the cemetery and memorial was completed in 1956.

ARCHITECTS

Architect for the cemetery and memorial was Henry J. Toombs of Atlanta, Georgia. The Landscape Architect was A. F. Brinckerhoff of New York.

GENERAL LAYOUT

The main entrance to the cemetery is on the north side of Boulevard Kennedy. Immediately to the right of the entrance gate is the Visitors' Building – to the east (right) of it is the parking area. Beyond the gate is the graves area within an oval wall built of local limestone with a coping of Ampilly limestone from central France. To the north, beyond the graves, is the memorial. In the northeast corner are the superintendent's quarters as well as the utilities area, the reservoirs and water purification system. In the southeast corner of the reservation is the deep well to an underground stream from which water is pumped to the reservoirs.

Outside the oval wall, masses of shrubs backed by trees enclose the cemetery.

THE MEMORIAL

To the right and left of the memorial are the two flagstaffs 66 ½ feet high. Between them is the bronze relief map on which are portrayed the military operations in the area beginning with the landings on the beaches south of Draguignan on 15 August 1944 followed by the advance up the valley of the Rhone.

The bronze relief map was fabricated by Bruno Bearzi of Florence, Italy, from data furnished by the American Battle Monuments Commission. At the near end of the map is a brief description in English and French of the military operations; the English version follows:

ON 15 AUGUST 1944 THE ALLIED FORCES LAUNCHED THEIR CAMPAIGN TO ASSIST THE NORMANDY OPERATION AND LIBERATE SOUTHERN FRANCE. THE PREPARATORY AIR BOMBARDMENT HAD BEGUN IN JULY AND HAD GROWN STEADILY IN INTENSITY. AS THE ASSAULT CONVOYS ASSEMBLED, THE U.S. TWELFTH AND FIFTEENTH AIR FORCES STRUCK AT THE BEACH DEFENSES, AS WELL AS AT THE BRIDGES ASTRIDE THE RHONE TO ISOLATE THE BATTLE AREA.

ON THE EVE OF THE ATTACK SPECIALLY TRAINED ASSAULT UNITS LANDED TO PROTECT THE FLANKS OF THE INVASION BEACHES. BEFORE DAWN AIRBORNE TROOPS DROPPED NEAR LE MUY TO SEIZE HIGHWAY JUNCTIONS NECESSARY TO ASSURE THE ALLIED ADVANCE. AT 0800 THE U.S. VI CORPS MOVED ASHORE UNDER COVER OF BOMBARDMENT BY THE WESTERN NAVAL TASK FORCE. BREAKING THROUGH STEEL AND CONCRETE FORTIFICATIONS THE U.S. 3RD, 36TH AND 45TH DIVISIONS PUSHED RAPIDLY INLAND.

IN A TWO-PRONGED ADVANCE THE U.S. SEVENTH ARMY LIBERATED GRENOBLE AND WITHIN TEN DAYS WAS ENVELOPING MONTE LIMAR TO TRAP THE ENEMY. MEANWHILE FRENCH UNITS HAD LANDED AND THRUST WESTWARD TO TOULON AND MARSEILLE. BY THE END OF THE MONTH THE ALLIED GROUND TROOPS WERE APPROACHING LYON PRECEDED BY THE U.S. TWELFTH AIR FORCE WHOSE ATTACKS DISORGANIZED THE FLEEING ENEMY. BY 7 SEPTEMBER U.S. FORCES HAD REACHED BESANCON AND WERE MOVING ON BELFORT AND EPINAL. FOUR DAYS LATER THE ALLIED FORCES FROM NORMANDY AND SOUTHERN FRANCE JOINED HANDS AT SOMBERNON, THUS ISOLATING ALL GERMAN UNITS REMAINING IN SOUTHWEST FRANCE. THE ALLIES COULD NOW DEVOTE THEIR EFFORTS TO THE DEFEAT OF THE NAZIS IN GERMANY ITSELF.

The relief map which is 20 feet long and 11 feet wide is at a horizontal scale of 1:100,000 (1.6 miles to the inch); the vertical scale has been exaggerated three times (2,750 feet to the inch). It is set on a base of Rocheret Clair limestone from the Jura region of eastern France.

On each side of this relief map, on Rocheret stone table tops between the benches, are the two sets of key maps: "The War Against Germany" and "The War Against Japan."

On the facade of the Memorial is the heroic-size sculpture, designed by Edmund Amateis of Brewster, New York, of the Angel of Peace nurturing the new generation. Beneath is the inscription:

WE WHO LIE HERE DIED THAT FUTURE
GENERATIONS MIGHT LIVE IN PEACE.

The actual carving of the sculpture was by Georges Granger of Chalon-sur-Saone.

THE CHAPEL

The chapel is entered from the terrace through handsome bronze grilles on the east or west sides. The memorial, like the Wall of the Missing, is also built of Rocheret limestone from the Jura region.

Much of the interior of the chapel is decorated with mosaics designed by, and fabricated and installed under the supervision of, Austin Purves of Litchfield, Connecticut. The mosaic mural in the apse was conceived by the artist to recall the eternal care of the Almighty, understanding and transcending the personal grief of bereavement, and encouraging new hope for this and for future generations. The grief stricken pair beneath the willow tree symbolize the mourning relatives of the dead, but apparently sleeping, youth held by the mystical figure of goodness and strength – the type of uniform, helmet and rifle characterize him as an American.

The figure of Saint Louis of France, on the right, standing on the walls of the city of Aigues-Mortes recalls an earlier crusader who set sail, as symbolized by the ship (now part of the arms of the City of Paris), from a port in this region. Behind him is the Sainte

Chapelle built in Paris to enshrine the relics of his crusade. The French inscription beneath is ascribed to Saint Louis – “My faithful friends,” he said – “we shall be unconquerable if we remain united in charity.” (The French text was found in an ancient record.)

It will be recalled that the American crusade was symbolized by the crusader’s sword which appeared in the emblem of Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force.

The bird in the shrub between the headstones and the central figure serves as a reminder that notwithstanding the tragic upheavals of war, nature continues its evolution unceasingly.

On the left of the apse is this extract from Cardinal Newman’s prayer:

O LORD SUPPORT US ALL THE DAY LONG UNTIL OUR WORK IS DONE
THEN IN THY MERCY GRANT US A HOLY REST AND PEACE AT THE LAST.

The ceiling is in blue mosaic with gold stars. The rear wall mosaic contains an adaptation of the Great seal of the United States and this inscription (with French translation):

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

The altar is of Vert des Alpes marble from the valley of Aoste (Val d’Aoste) in the Italian Alps. A Latin cross is engraved at one end; the Tablets of Moses at the other. The altar cloth is of Florentine leather, the cross and candlesticks of polished brass. The prie-dieu and the pew are of teakwood. An American flag hangs from the wall on either side of the altar.

Engraved in the walls flanking the apse is a list of the major units which participated in the military operations in this region:

On the left side (facing the altar):

SOUTHERN FRANCE

1944

MAJOR ARMY
AND
AIR FORCE UNITS ENGAGED

UNITED STATES ARMY

SEVENTH ARMY, VI CORPS

3RD INFANTRY DIVISION, 36TH INFANTRY DIVISION, 45TH INFANTRY DIVISION, 1ST AIRBORNE TASK FORCE, 1ST SPECIAL SERVICE FORCE

TWELTH AIR FORCE, FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE, XII TACTICAL AIR COMMAND, PROVISIONAL TROOP CARRIER AIR DIVISION

ARMEE FRANCAISE

ARMEE B, 1ST, 2ND CORPS D'ARMEE
1ST DIVISION FRANCAISE LIBRE, 2ND DIVISION D'INF MAROCAINE, 3 RD DIVISION D'INF ALGERIENNE, 9TH DIVISION D'INF COLONIALE, 1ST DIVISION BLINDEE, 1ST BRIGADE DE SPAHIS, 1ST, 2ND, 3RD GROUPEMENTS DE TABORS MAROCAINS, 1ST, 2ND, 3RD GROUPEMENTS DE CHOC

UNITES AERIENNES

FORCES FRANCAISES DE L'INTERIEUE

BRITISH ARMY

2 INDEPENDENT PARACHUTE BRIGADE

ROYAL AIR FORCE

202 GROUP (FLIGHTER)

On the right side (facing the altar):

SOUTHERN FRANCE

1944

MAJOR NAVAL UNITS ENGAGED

WESTERN NAVAL TASK FORCE
UNITED STATES NAVY

515 SHIPS AND CRAFT
INCLUDING

BATTLESHIPS: ARKANSAS, NEVADA, TEXAS. HEAVY CRUISERS:
AUGUSTA, QUINCY, TUSCALOOSA. LIGHT CRUISERS: BROOKLYN,
CINCINNATI, MARBLEHEAD, OMAHA, PHILADELPHIA. ESCORT CARRIERS:
KASAAN BAY, TULAGI

ROYAL NAVY

283 SHIPS AND CRAFT
INCLUDING
1 BATTLESHIP, 10 LIGHT CRUISERS
AND
7 ESCORT CARRIERS

MARINE DE GUERRE FRANCAISE

12 SHIPS AND CRAFT
INCLUDING
1 BATTLESHIP AND 5 LIGHT CRUISERS

ROYAL HELLENIC NAVY

7 SHIPS AND CRAFT

ALLIED MERCHANT VESSELS

63 SHIPS AND CRAFT

At each end of the terrace outside the chapel is a fountain of red granite (Granit de la Clarte) from Brittany, and a pool. Behind the Memorial the hill rises steeply.

THE WALL OF THE MISSING

On the face of the retaining wall of the terrace of the Memorial are inscribed the names and particulars of 294 of our Missing:

United States Army and Airforce ¹	257
United States Navy	37

These men gave their lives in the service of their Country but their remains have not been identified. The lists include men from every State in the Union except Arizona, Delaware, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Rhode Island, and Wyoming. Heading these lists is the inscription:

** 1941 ** 1945 **
HERE ARE RECORDED THE NAMES OF AMERICANS
WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES IN THE SERVICE OF THEIR COUNTRY
AND WHO SLEEP IN UNKNOWN GRAVES.

Without confirmed information to the contrary, a War Department Administrative Review board established the official date of death of those commemorated on the Tablets of the Missing as one year and a day from the date on which the individual was placed in Missing in action status.

GRAVES AREA

The graves area is divided into four plots about the oval pool, which is set at the intersection of the axes of the cemetery. The 861 headstones are arranged in straight lines; planted among them are olive trees, which lend an unforgettable peacefulness to the scene.

The Dead who gave their lives in our Country's service came from every State in the Union except North Dakota; some came from the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Sixty-two of the headstones mark the graves of "Unknowns." Here, also, side by side in two instances, are the graves of two brothers.

THE GARDENS

Outside of the oval wall and on the transverse axis of the cemetery are the East and West Gardens. The East Garden is an intimate enclosure with a small circular pool, which has a background of tall Italian cypress. It is surrounded with beds of broad-leaved evergreens, including oleander and crepe myrtle, as well as seasonal plants to provide color in the summer.

The West Garden is somewhat smaller; its pool is octagonal in form, and is set in a brick pavement in contrast to the green lawn of the East Garden. It is enclosed by a high sheared hedge of Arizona cypress and planted with a few of the summer-flowering shrubs of the region.

PLANTINGS

The long terrace outside the Chapel is lined with a double row of closely planted Italian cypress, which forms a green curtain behind the Chapel and across the ends of the terrace. The areas at the two sides, enclosed with low formal hedges, are planted with redbud trees (*cercis canadensis*) and strawberry trees (*arbutus unedo*).

The entire grave plots area is framed by a row of hackberry (*Celtis Australis*) trees behind which plantings of oleander, crepe myrtle and various shrubs accentuate the inside oval perimeter wall, while a great variety of trees and shrubs soften the wall's exterior outline.

VISITORS' BUILDING

Immediately to the right of the entrance gate is the Visitors' Building. The parking area is adjacent to the building on the east (right) side.

It contains the Superintendent's office, toilet facilities, and a comfortably furnished room where 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.