

American Battle Monuments Commission

Suresnes American Cemetery and Memorial

LOCATION

The Suresnes American Cemetery and Memorial is situated on the wooded east slope of Mont Valerien, 4 miles west of the center of Paris, in the city of Suresnes. The cemetery can be reached by taxi or automobile via the Bois de Bougne and the Suresnes Bridge over the Seine River. On leaving the bridge, visitors should bear right and follow the traffic signs indicating Mont Valerien. From the Gare St. Lazare train station in Paris, suburban electric trains are available every 15 minutes to the Suresnes station. On arrival at the Suresnes station, visitors should take the Hospital Foch exit turning right, go up the slope to Boulevard Washington, turn right on the boulevard and proceed approximately 200 yards to the cemetery entrance.

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.

THE SITE

The cemetery site covers 7 ½ acres. Perpetual use of this land free of charge or taxation was granted to the United States by the French Government.

The hill on which the cemetery is located is rich in history. Now called Mont Valerien, it was known as Mont Calvaire in earlier times and was the site of a hermitage, which was itself the goal of many religious pilgrimages. The hermits maintained gardens and vineyards, as well as a guesthouse. Thomas Jefferson often visited the guesthouse while he was Ambassador to France, 1784-1789.

In 1811, Emperor Napoleon I confiscated Mont Valerien with the intention of building a home for the orphans of the Legion of Honor. During a subsequent visit to the site, he changed his mind and decided to build a fort. Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo in 1815 stopped the work and Mont Valerien was built and is presently in use by the French Signal Corps.

During World War II, German troops occupied the fort where they executed over 4,500 political prisoners and members of the Resistance Movement. The French people have erected an impressive monument along the south wall of the fort to commemorate this sacrifice. Thus, the hill in Suresnes has become a symbol to the French of democracy's struggle in the cause of freedom. Mont Valerien is a site of pilgrimage for both the French and the American peoples.

HISTORY OF THE CEMETERY

The American military cemetery at Suresnes was established in 1917 by the Graves Registration Service of the Army Quartermaster Corps. A majority of the World War I Dead buried there died of wounds or sickness in hospitals located in Paris or at other places in the Services of Supply. Many were victims of the influenza epidemic of 1918-1919.

The cemetery was dedicated by President Woodrow Wilson during Memorial Day ceremonies of 1919.

Administration of the cemetery passed to the American Battle Monuments Commission in 1934, the duties and functions of which are described in the final pages of this booklet. The Commission was responsible for construction of the chapel and landscaping of the grounds, which were completed in 1932.

At the end of World War II, it was decided that this particular cemetery should serve to commemorate the Dead of both World Wars, and an additional grave plot was created as an eternal resting place for the unidentified remains of 24 World War II Unknowns. Commemorative loggias were also added to the original chapel.

The World War II section was dedicated in 1952 with an impressive ceremony presided over by General George C. Marshall, then Chairman of the Commission, and attended by distinguished representatives of the American and French governments.

ARCHITECTS

The original chapel was designed by architect Charles A. Platt of New York. His sons, William and Geoffrey Platt, designed the loggias and memorial rooms which comprise the loggias added to the chapel after World War II.

GENERAL LAYOUT

The Suresnes American Cemetery is entered from Boulevard Washington at the East End of the cemetery.

From the gilded, wrought iron entrance gates, an avenue of clipped lindens leads upward to the chapel framing its classical facade. Groups of rhododendrons flank the chapel while red polyantha roses form a border of color along its base.

The impeccable headstones and lawns of the graves area extend in gentle arcs on both sides of the central avenue.

The initial horticultural development has now matured and contributes greatly to the tranquil beauty of the grounds. Planted among the grave plots are beech, weeping willow, mountain ash, horse chestnut and paulownia. The latter is an exceptional sight in the spring, when it is covered with mauve flowers. The hillside, which rises steeply behind the graves area and chapel, is planted with pines, yews, acacia, and hornbeam to form a discreet background.

THE CHAPEL

The exterior walls of the chapel are of Val d'Arion, a creamy French limestone. The four columns supporting the peristyle are interesting monoliths. Above these columns is inscribed in large letters:

PEACEFUL IS THEIR SLEEP IN GLORY

To the left of the bronze entrance doors, there is inscribed the text:

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

The same text in French appears to the right of the entrance.

The interior walls and columns of the chapel are of Rocheret, a compact limestone quarried in central France. The ceiling is paneled in native oak. The principal decorative feature inside the chapel is the mosaic mural behind the altar, created by Barry Faulkner, also of New York, New York, which depicts the Angel of Victory bearing a palm branch to the graves of the Fallen. Four large bronze plaques, each one cast as a single unit, bear the names of 974 men who were buried or lost at sea during World War I. The altar is of Italian Levanto marble and is inscribed:

I GIVE UNTO THEM ETERNAL LIFE
AND THEY SHALL NEVER PERISH.

WORLD WARI LOGGIA

A portal in the left wall of the chapel leads to the World War I loggia, a covered passage with one side open to give a view of the graves area below and of Paris in the distance. The opposite or rear side is paneled in limestone. One panel of this wall bears the inscription:

TO THE ETERNAL MEMORY OF THOSE AMERICANS
WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES IN THE SERVICE OF THEIR COUNTRY
DURING WORLD WAR I

INTO THY HANDS O LORD

Midway along the loggia, a relief portrays a group of soldiers carrying an empty bier. Beneath the frieze is the inscription:

SOME THERE BE WHICH HAVE NO SEPULCHRE.
THEIR NAME LIVETH FOR EVERMORE.

An engraved list of other World War I military cemeteries in Europe completes the texts appearing on the wall of this loggia.

WORLD WAR I MEMORIAL ROOM

At the end of the loggia, one enters the World War I memorial room and faces a pure white statue entitled “Remembrance.” This graceful figure was created in Carrara marble by the American sculptor John Gregory, of New York, New York. The walls and floors of the memorial room are of Italian marbles of varying shades and give a rich subdued effect to highlight the statue.

On one wall panel is inscribed the text:

THIS MEMORIAL HAS BEEN ERECTED BY
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
IN PROUD AND GRATEFUL MEMORY OF HER
SOLDIERS, SAILORS, AND MARINES
WHO FAR FROM THEIR HOMES
LAID DOWN THEIR LIVES THAT THE WORLD MIGHT
LIVE IN FREEDOM AND INHERIT PEACE

FROM THESE HONORED DEAD
MAY WE TAKE INCREASED DEVOTION
TO THAT CAUSE FOR WHICH THEY
GAVE THE LAST FULL MEASURE.

WORLD WAR II LOGGIA

A portal in the right wall of the chapel leads to the World War II loggia, which is very similar in appearance to the loggia previously described, except for the inscriptions on the wall. The dedicatory panel reads:

TO THE ETERNAL MEMORY OF THOSE AMERICANS
WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES IN THE SERVICE OF THEIR COUNTRY
DURING WORLD WAR II

INTO THY HANDS O LORD

Beneath the frieze depicting a group of soldiers carrying the shrouded remains of an Unknown comrade, there is inscribed:

GRANT UNTO THEM O LORD ETERNAL REST
WHO SLEEP IN UNKNOWN GRAVES

Two other wall panels bear the following text:

THE EAST COAST MEMORIAL
AT NEW YORK HARBOR
BEARS THE NAMES OF 4596 OF
OUR HEROIC DEAD WHO REST
BENEATH AMERICAN COASTAL WATERS
OF THE ATLANTIC OCEAN

THE WEST COAST MEMORIAL
AT SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA
BEARS THE NAMES OF 412 OF OUR
HEROIC DEAD WHO REST BENEATH
THE AMERICAN COASTAL WATERS
OF THE PACIFIC OCEAN

The loggia inscriptions are completed with a tabulation of other overseas World War II military cemeteries. In addition to Puerto Rico, the list includes Hawaii and Alaska as these two territories had not attained statehood at the time.

WORLD WAR II MEMORIAL ROOM

The walls and floors in this room are finished in Italian marble corresponding to that in the World War I Memorial room. A different statue is presented here, however, entitled "Memory." It is the work of another American sculptor, Lewis Iselin, also of New York, New York.

The wall panel bears the text:

THIS MEMORIAL HAS BEEN ERECTED BY
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
IN PROUD AND GRATEFUL MEMORY
OF HER SOLDIERS, SAILORS, MARINES, AND AIRMEN
WHO LAID DOWN THEIR LIVES
IN ALL QUARTERS OF THE EARTH
THAT OTHER PEOPLES MIGHT BE
FREED FROM OPPRESSION

LET US HERE HIGHLY RESOLVE
THAT THESE HONORED DEAD
SHALL NOT HAVE DIED IN VAIN.

THE GRAVES AREA

The graves area consists of four burial plots; three of World War I, with a total of 1,541 graves, and one of World War II, containing the graves of 24 unknown soldiers, sailors or airmen. Each grave is marked with a headstone of white Italian marble, the Star of David for those of Jewish faith, a Latin cross for all others.

The precise alignment of white marble headstones on well-kept lawns assures the visitor that no feature of the cemetery receives greater care than does the graves area.

The deceased are interred side by side without distinction as to rank, race or creed, so that all repose equally in everlasting dignity.

To view the graves area is poignant, and the presence of a pair of brothers, a pair of sisters, and seven nurses is particularly touching.