Belleau Wood Trail Map

Headquarters
American Battle Monuments Commission
2100 Clarendon Boulevard, Suite 500
Arlington, VA 22201
Tel 703-696-6900

Aisne-Marne American Cemetery
04400 Belleau, France
Tel +33 (0) 3 25 70 70 99

Connect with us on Facebook www.facebook.com/abmcpage
Instagram Instagram.com/usabmc
YouTube www.youtube.com/user/abmcvideos

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

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 by taxi from Gare du 1er Traination 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 via Route 321 which runs from Paris via the auto-route A-3 east by taking the Montréal-aux-Lions exit and following the cemetery signs to Lucy-le-Grand. The distance from Paris to the site is approximately 35 miles/56 kilometers. Hotel accommodations are available in the cities of Château-Thierry, Maclas, Soissons and Namps.

HOURS: The cemetery and trail are open daily to the public between the hours of 9:00 AM and 5:00 PM. The cemetery and trail are closed on January 1st 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 escort relatives to grave and memorial sites.

The Aisne-Marne American Cemetery and 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 American Expeditionary Forces' (AEF) Cemetery Construction Corps as a memorial to the American men who fought in the AEF during World War I. The cemetery was dedicated on May 30, 1937. Congress authorized the site to be operated by the ABMC so 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.

No. 1764–Belleau Wood. A photograph of the temporary cemetery hangs in the superintendent’s office 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, and 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 testament to the American men who fought in the AEF during World War I.

On the Cover
The Marine Monument, created by sculptor Felix de Weldon, is a life-size bronze box relief of a Marine attacking with rifle and bayonet. The United States Marine Corps created 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 Bouscues that day. The 5th and 6th Marine Regiments fought in Belleau Wood throughout most of June 1918. Their gallant actions resulted in an Allied victory at Belleau Wood on June 26.

The 42.5 acre Aisne-Marne American Cemetery and 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 Construction Corps. Aisne-Marne American Cemetery and Memorial is a life-size bronze bas relief of a Marine attacking with rifle and still remain.

Becoming a “veteran” because they witnessed the battle and still remain. They predate the war. These are the veterans because they witnessed the battle and still remain.

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 were hunting preserves 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. París 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 battle and test their weapon training. They predate the war. These are the veterans because they witnessed the battle and still remain.

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 aid station for the wounded. 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 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 shells, high explosive, and poison gas shells at the men of both sides fighting here.
On this site in June 1918, American and French troops stopped the advance of German forces toward Paris.

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 shift 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 thrust of these offensives on May 27, in a previously quiet sector between Soisson and Reims. Taken by surprise, the French army fell back to the Marne River line, 25 miles from Paris.

France appealed to the United States for assistance, and the Americans rushed two divisions, untrained in major combat, forward to the front. The U.S. Army’s 2nd Division took up a position on the Marne River at Châlons-sur-Marne. On June 1, the 2nd Division, with its Marine brigade (5th and 6th Regiments and 5th Machine Gun Battalion), relieved French troops along the Paris-Metz line. On June 2, 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 on a front from northwest of Hill 142, overlooking Belleau Wood, through the Marine 5th Regiment’s positions. At midnight, the division was ordered by the French corps commander to hold their line at all costs.

#### June 3-5

As French troops withdrew through the Marine Corps’ 5th Regiment’s positions, a French officer suggested to Captain Lloyd Williams that the Marines should also retreat. Williams replied, “Belleau lies just here and we intend to keep it.” The German troops of the 461st Infantry Regiment strengthened their positions from Torcy north of Hill 142 through Belleau Wood. The Marines had 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 Belleau Wood, but were repulsed with heavy losses. On the 5th, both sides improved their positions and harassed each other with artillery fire.

#### June 6-9

The 2nd Division, with the French 157th Division on its left, attacked from a front on northwest of Hill 142 to Bouresches, to the south of Belleau Wood. The Marines suffered heavy casualties as they advanced across a mineswept field and field strewn with red poppies. During the fighting for Hill 142, Gunner 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 bitch! 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 1,072 killed and wounded, with more men killed in action in one day than the Marines had lost in their previous 145-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 9, the Marines withdrew to the edge of the wood, preparing for a renewed assault.

#### June 10-17

The American forces suffered 7,777 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 Germans were stunned by the sheer weight of American firepower and numbers of American troops, but now they had seen American soldiers, Americans and Marines in particular, display a relentless courage and dogged persistence under the most taxing battle conditions.

On June 10, the Marines’ 5th Regiment attacked the southern half of Belleau Wood, taking back the trenches evacuated early while the 6th Division attacked the northern half of the wood. On June 13, the Germans attacked the east side of Belleau Wood and Bouresches, but were blown back. During this fighting, Gunner 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, 3rd Division. Throughout this period both sides shifted 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 Marine’s 5th and 6th Regiments, and the 6th Machine Gun Battalion returned to Belleau Wood. After a day-long artillery barrage on June 22, the Marines and Army machine gunners attacked. Fighting well into the evening, they took the northern end of the wood and captured Hill 140. German counterattacks on the 26th were repulsed and Belleau Wood was firmly in Allied hands.

### Aftermath

The United States suffered 7,777 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 Germans were stunned by the sheer weight of American firepower and numbers of American troops, but now they had seen American soldiers, Americans and Marines in particular, display a relentless courage and dogged persistence under the most taxing battle conditions.

On June 10, the Marines’ 5th Regiment attacked the southern half of Belleau Wood, taking back the trenches evacuated early while the 6th Division attacked the northern half of the wood. On June 13, the Germans attacked the east side of Belleau Wood and Bouresches, but were blown back. During this fighting, Gunner 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, 3rd Division. Throughout this period both sides shifted 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 Marine’s 5th and 6th Regiments, and the 6th Machine Gun Battalion returned to Belleau Wood. After a day-long artillery barrage on June 22, the Marines and Army machine gunners attacked. Fighting well into the evening, they took the northern end of the wood and captured Hill 140. German counterattacks on the 26th were repulsed and Belleau Wood was firmly in Allied hands.

### Beautiful 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, 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 required. The U.S. Army shared this dilemma, and, with the aid of President Woodrow Wilson and the U.S. Congress in 1918, initiated its Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) and Distinguished Service Medal (DSM) with guidelines for the award of the DSC for combat heroism and the DSM for distinguished noncombat duty in a position of great responsibility.

Parallel awards were created a year later for the Navy and Marine Corps, months after the Americans and Allies the massive dismantlement of German forces. For valorous actions during the Battle of Belleau Wood, two Marines were awarded the Navy Distinguished Service Medal (DSM). Gunner Sergeant Ernest Janson (as Captain, Janson is sometimes wrongly credited with the DSC) and John A. Thompson were awarded the DSM.

Fred W. Stockham, two Navy officers serving with the Marines were also awarded the Medal of Honor—Lieutenant (jg) Howard C. Weeden E. Osborne and Reserve Lieutenant Orlando R. Petty.

The U.S. Navy, which had no appropriate award to recognize heroism of a level less than that which would merit the Medal of Honor, was authorized in 1918 to present Distinguished Service Crosses (DSCs) to American military forces that had achieved a high level of valor in action and risk.

The U.S. Army’s first Distinguished Service Crosses were awarded to the Marines for valorous actions during the Battle of Belleau Wood. A year later, the U.S. Navy awarded four DSCs to the Marines.

### Surounding Sites Related to the Battle

- **Marines with a captured mortar**
  - Marines with a 170mm German Minenwerfer (mine launcher). These rifles mortared 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 driven through trenches or memorized or beams of soldiers. In forward positions, they were often captured in the worst fighting at Belleau Wood

- **Marines with a captured machine gun**
  - American units and Division
  - The war torn village of Belleau, 1918
  - The chattered town of Belleau, 1832
  - The village of Bouresches, 1918
  - The Bois de Belleau, 1918
  - The 26th Division Memorial Church (Eglise Saint-Édme-de-la-Bois), 1917
  - The Bois de Belleau, 1918
  - The 26th Division Memorial Church (Eglise Saint-Édme-de-la-Bois), 1917

- **Lucy-le-Boe France**
  - Two miles south-southwest of Belleau, the crossroad of village of Lucy-le-Boe France.

- **Village of Bouresches**
  - The Village of Bouresches on the eastern side of Belleau Wood was attacked from the southwest on June 6 by the British. They were stopped by a series of trenches dug by machine gun. A platoon of the Marines under Lt. Clifford Cates stalked along Belleau Wood and rushed Bouresches, silencing the machine guns. The rest of the Marines sneaked through the trench and closed on the village. Cates’ platoon led the way until they stopped Marines in the town and reached the rail northwest of the town. The Marines under Cates’ leadership then attacked Belleau Wood.

- **Belleville Wood**
  - The battlefield has been largely untouched since the war and is a mile Western Front. Two events in 1917, however, promised to alter this balance. In March 1917, Tsar Nicholas II of Russia was relieved French troops along the Paris-Metz Road. On that line stood the 5th and 6th Regiments and 6th Machine Gun Battalion, June 2, 1918

- **Château-Thierry**
  - On June 10, the Marines’ 6th Regiment attacked the southern half of Belleau Wood, taking back the trench evacuated early while the 6th Division attacked the northern half of the wood from Lucy-le-Boe France. In the broken terrain and confusion of battle, bypassed German units and artillery attacks were behind them. On June 11, after much fierce fighting, the Germans retained control of the northern half of the wood.

- **Les Mares Farm**
  - Les Mares Farm is southeast of Hill 142. On June 10, the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines established an extended position here, facing north with advanced guard posts. They were shielded through the next day. For the next two days, the German infantry probed their position. Lightly armed Marine marksmen held their position with long range fire. On June 4, the 5th Marines successfully defended Les Mares Farm from repeated German attacks.