Belleau Wood Trail Map

**On the Cover**
The Marine Monument, created by sculptor Felix de Weldon, is a life-size bronze bas relief of a Marine advancing with rifle and bayonet. The United States Marine Corps erected 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 Marine Monument, created by sculptor Felix de Weldon, who also created the Iwo Jima Memorial in Arlington, Virginia. The oak trees here were flattened and surrounded by a six-foot earthen wall. Close by are the remains of foxholes where artillerymen behind the memorial chapel. 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.

**CAUTION, WARNING & DANGER NOTICES!**
To avoid injury or possible “souvenirs” to the German battle, shells, grenades or barbed wire that may be found throughout the woods. Unexploded WWI ordnance is extremely unstable and dangerous to handle. Unexploded gas shells are still flowering, often leaving remnants of gas. Cans from sharp cutting fragments can cause blood poisoning or tetanus. If you see any such ordnance, make a note of the location and report it immediately to the superintendent or staff at the Aisne-Marne American Cemetery. In accordance with French law, metal detectors are not allowed.

**LOCATION:**
The site is located 6.5 miles/10.5 kilometers northwest of Château-Thierry, just southwest of the village of Belleau, Aisne, France. Travel by train from Gare de l’Est station 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 Wood by automobile from Paris via 41 auto-route A-4 east by taking the Montréal-aux-Allions exit and following the cemetery signs to Lucy-le-Bocage. The distance from Paris to the site is approximately 45 miles/75 kilometers. Hotel accommodations are available in the cities of Château-Thierry, Mâcon, Soissons and Valence.

**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 1 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 Visitor Building to answer questions and to escort relatives to grave and memorial sites.

**Vicinity of Belleau Wood**
- Vicinity of Belleau Wood
- 42.5 acre Aisne-Marne American Cemetery
- Memorial sits below Belleau Wood where many of those buried in the cemetery lost their lives. During Wood 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
- The cemetery was dedicated on May 30, 1937.
- 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
- No. 1764-Belleau Wood. Photographs of the temporary cemetery hang in the visitor’s room 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, 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.
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**Trail Stops**
1. In this clearing you will see the “Marine Monument,” a sculpture by Felix de Weldon, who also created the Iwo Jima Memorial in Arlington, Virginia. The oak trees here are called “the veteins” because they witnessed the battle and still remain.
2. As you walk, notice the artillery craters, foxholes, and trench lines parallel to the trail.
3. Numbered stones are found throughout Belleau Wood. The Marine Monument, created by sculptor Felix de Weldon, who also created the Iwo Jima Memorial in Arlington, Virginia. The oak trees here were flattened and surrounded by a six-foot earthen wall. Close by are the remains of foxholes where artillerymen behind the memorial chapel. 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.
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 behind the memorial chapel. 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.
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. Parris 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 German-held Les Brusses Farm across the valley.
10. The Cour and Countess of Belleau maintained a private hunting preserve here before the war. There are the remains of their hunting lodge before it became an icon of the battle. 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 three isolated German artillery pieces placed in Belleau Wood after World War I to commemorate the battle. The Model 1939 77mm Feldkanone (Field Cannon) reminds us that German and Allied artillery fired thousands of shrapnel, high explosive, and poison gas shells at these woods and the man of both sides fighting here.
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 mobilize, train, and supply an army, the millions of American troops expected to eventually arrive in France would tilt the balance of power.

Despite to defeat the Allies before America arrived in force, Germany launched a series of offensives in spring of 1918. Germany launched the third of these offensives on May 27, 1918, a previously quiet sector between Soisson and Reims. Taken by surprise, the French army fell back to the Marne River line, 35 miles from Paris.

French 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 position on the Marne River near Château Thierry. On June 1, the 2nd Division, with its Marine Brigade (5th and 6th Regiments and 6th Machine Gun Battalion), relieved French troops along the Paris-Metz Road. On that line stood 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 to cover a front from northwest of Hill 142, overlooking Belleau Wood, through the Marine 5th Regiment's positions. At midnight, the division was ordered by their French corps commander to hold their line at all costs.

June 3-5

As French troops withdrew through the Marine 5th Regiment's positions, a French officer suggested to Captain Lloyd Williams that the Marines should also retreat. Williams recalled, "We heard, hell, we just got here!" The German troops of the 461st Infantry Regiment strengthened their positions from Tury north of Hill 142 through Belleau Wood and Boursches with machine guns, bombs, and mortars. The Marines and French lost their previous 143-day history. The Germans reported their enemy to be "stubborn and not afraid of its losses." Patrols and probing attacks continued through the night. On June 7-9, the Marines withdrew to the edge of Belleau Wood, preparing for a renewed assault.

June 6-9

The 2nd Division, with the French 167th Division on its left, attacked on a front from Hill 142 to Boursches to the south of Belleau Wood. The Marines suffered heavy casualties as they advanced across a vast high wheat field strewed with red poppies. During the fighting for Hill 142, German General Ernst Janson, the head of the German troops, again suffered heavy casualties. The Marine brigade suffered 5,848 killed and wounded, with more men killed in action than any other unit in the Marine Corps' history. The Germans reported their enemy to be "stubborn and not afraid of its losses." Patrols and probing attacks continued through the night. On June 7-9, the Marines withdrew to the edge of Belleau Wood, preparing for a renewed assault.

June 10-17

On June 10, the Marines' 6th Regiment attacked the southern half of Belleau Wood, taking back the area evacuated earlier, while the 7th and 8th Regiments took the north. The Marines were heavily engaged in the broken terrain and confusion of battle, bypassed German units and infiltration attacked from behind. By June 11, after much closer quarter fighting, the Germans retreated north of the forest to the woods. On June 13, the Germans attacked the east side of Belleau Wood and Boursches, but were thrown back. During the fighting, Gunner Sergeant Fred Stockham put his gun on a wounded man and later died from the effects of gas; he posthumously received the Medal of Honor.

On June 16 and 17, exhausted companies of Marines were relived out of the line and replaced with Army troops from the 7th Infantry Regiment and 7th Machine Gun Battalion, 3rd Division. Throughout this period both sides revealed their resilience and capacity for endurance with gas and shell numbers of the gas attacks fatal. For two days, the tide of the war turned, leading to the Armistice five months later.

The battlefield has been largely untouched since the war and is the final resting place of more than 1,000 American, French, and German soldiers whose remains were never recovered. Because these grounds are hallowed, visitors should not disturb the soil or other historical remains they encounter.

Historical Background

By June 1914, Europe was divided into rival alliances. The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary led to mobilizations by Russia and Germany; when Germany invaded neutral Belgium to attack Russia’s ally France, Great Britain joined. When Germany invaded France, the United States offered its moral support but was not yet ready to enter the war. After the United States entered the war on April 6, 1917, the United States was able to provide the Allies with much-needed industrial support such as arms and supplies. After waging a war of attrition, the United States, with the aid of the Allies, began to turn the tide of the war with its massive infantry divisions and artillery.

Battle of Belleau Wood

June 2-25, 1918

In a month of heavy fighting, the U.S. Army's 2nd Division, whose 4th Infantry Brigade, composed of U.S. Marines and Canadian and Army brigade General James G. Harbord, provided with veteran opponents under punishing conditions. After the Americans held the line at Belleau Wood and Château-Thierry, the tide of the war turned, leading to the Armistice five months later.

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