

## THE AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION

### NORMANDY AMERICAN CEMETERY AND MEMORIAL

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The Normandy American Cemetery site was chosen because of its historical location on top of a cliff overlooking famous Omaha Beach which was the scene of the greatest amphibious troop landing in history. The official name "Normandy" is derived from the name of the province in which the cemetery is located.

The cemetery site covers 172 acres. Use of the site, granted in perpetuity by the French Government in gratitude of their liberation in WW II, includes a right-of-way 1/2 mile long, leading from highway N-814 to the cemetery entrance.

The maintenance of the cemetery and memorial is the responsibility of the American Battle Monuments Commission. This Commission was created by an Act of Congress in March 1923 for the purpose of construction and permanent maintenance of the cemeteries and memorials on foreign soil.

Construction of this cemetery and memorial was completed in 1956 and dedicated on 19 July of that year.

The approach road to the cemetery starts at the large stone directional arrow on highway N-814 and runs between characteristic Normandy hedgerows to the main gate in the southeast corner of the cemetery. To the west of the gate is the utilities area; in this area are the deep wells which supply the cemetery water; here, too, are the reservoirs and pumping station. Beyond the Visitors' Building are the graves area, the memorial, the chapel, and the sea.

There are 9,386 American War Dead buried here. 307 of the headstones mark the graves of "Unknowns". The remains of approximately 14,000 others originally buried in this region were returned home at the request of their next of kin. There are also buried here, side by side, a father and his son, and in 33 instances two brothers rest side by side. Most of the dead who are buried here gave their lives in the landing operations and in the establishment of the beachhead. The headstones are of white Italian marble; a Star of David for those of Jewish faith and a Latin Cross for all others.

The architects for the cemetery and memorial were Harbeson, Hough, Livingston & Larson of Philadelphia, Pa. The landscape architect was Markley Stevenson, also of Philadelphia.

The Memorial consists of a semi-circular colonnade with a loggia at each end. On the platform immediately west of the colonnade is a 22-foot bronze statue, "The Spirit of American Youth" rising from the waves, a tribute to those who gave their lives in these operations. Around its base is the inscription "MINE EYES HAVE SEEN THE GLORY OF THE COMING OF THE LORD". The sculptor was Donald De Lue of New York City; the bronze was cast in Milan by the Battaglia Foundry.

On the walls within the south loggia are three maps engraved in the stone and embellished with colored enamels. The largest, oriented with south at the top, portrays landings on 6 June 1944, the establishment of the firm beachhead, the liberation of Cherbourg and St.Lô, and the subsequent attack by which our forces broke out of the beachhead.

The map on the west wall vividly depicts the air operations prior to the landings, including the isolation of the beachhead area by the destruction of all routes of access from the interior of France; the map also records the major air operations in the beachhead after the landings.

The map on the east wall shows the Naval plan for the landings and the manner in which it was executed.

These maps were designed by Robert Foster of New York City from data furnished by the American Battle Monuments Commission. They were executed by Maurice Schmit of Paris. The panels in the ceilings of the loggias are of blue ceramic by Gentil & Bourdet of Paris.

The west face of the loggias bears the dedicatory inscription, together with a French translation.

At the entrance to each loggia are two large bronze urns, also designed and sculptured in high relief by Donald De Lue and cast by Marinelli foundry of Florence, Italy. There are two identical pairs. On the face of one urn a dying warrior holding the sword with which he has fought the good fight is astride a charging horse which symbolizes War. The Angel of the Lord supports him and receives his spirit. On the reverse side of this urn a woman kneels, holding her child, beside the wreath-decorated grave of a soldier. About them shines the Star of Eternal Life. This composition is dedicated to the sacrifices and hardships of the women and children bereaved by war. The laurel leaf design around the top is symbolic of Victory and Honor.

On one side of the other urn, a figure represents the Lord as related in Genesis, Chapter I: "The spirit of the Lord moved on the face of the waters". The spray of laurel, on the representation of the waters, recalls to memory those who lost their lives at sea. The rainbow is the symbol of hope and peace. The reverse side of

this urn shows a figure of an angel pushing away the stone-symbolic of resurrection and eternal life.

From the platform and facing west, is the reflecting pool; beyond it are the two flagstaffs, and the graves area, with the chapel set at the intersection of the main avenue, which are laid out as the arms of the Cross. To the north is the beach and English Channel. As late as 1956 it was still possible to see remnants of the so-called "Mulberry" the artificial port created by sinking ships and concrete caissons to facilitate the landing of our men and supplies. The Mulberry was installed a few days after the first assault, but was wrecked by a storm two weeks later. Nevertheless, hundreds of thousands of troops, and millions of tons of equipment and supplies were landed over this and neighboring beaches. Soon it became possible to draw gasoline through pipe-lines laid across the English Channel.

The memorial is built of Vaurion, a French limestone from the Côte d'Or region; the plinths and steps are of Ploumanach granite from Brittany. The pavement on the platform between the loggias is faced with pebbles taken from the invasion beach below the cliff.

On the east side of the memorial is the semi-circular Garden of the Missing. Inscribed on its walls are the name, rank, organization and State of 1,557 of our Missing.

These gave their lives in the service of their country but their remains have not been identified, or they were buried at sea in this region. These men came from every State in the Union as well as from the District of Columbia and Guam.

At the center of the west side of the garden and below the colonnade is inscribed the extract from the dedication by General Eisenhower of the "Golden Book" now enshrined in St. Paul's Cathedral, London.

The garden has beds of Polyantha roses "Joseph Guy"; European Ash trees - *Fraxinus excelsior* - grow in the lawn areas; the beds at the foot of the walls of the Missing are planted with heather - *Erica cinerea* - and boxwood - *Boxus sempervirens*.

In the graves area the 9,386 headstones are set in 10 plots. Their precise alignment upon the smooth green lawn conveys an unforgettable impression of dignity and beauty.

These Dead, who gave their lives in our Country's service, came from every State in the Union and the District of Columbia. A few of them came from England, Scotland and Canada.

Informal groups of Shrub rose (*Rosa rugosa*) and Sea Buckthorn are planted in the grave plots.

The circular chapel, also built of Vaurion stone on Ploumanach granite steps, is surmounted by a bronze finial with an armillary sphere.

In the frieze, and vertically above the door, is a replica of the Congressional Medal of Honor, our Country's highest and rarest award for valor beyond the call of duty.

The chapel altar is of black and gold "Grand Antique" marble from the Pyrénées. Above it a cross is silhouetted against the crystal window. The altar is flanked by the flags of the United States, France, Great Britain, and Canada.

The mosaic ceiling, designed and executed by Leon Kroll of New York City, symbolizes America who gives her farewell blessing to her sons as they depart by sea and air to fight for her principles of freedom. Over the altar, a grateful France bestows a laurel wreath upon our Dead who gave their lives to liberate Europe's oppressed peoples. The return of Peace is recalled by the angel, the dove, and the homeward-bound ship.

At the western end of the main axis of the cemetery are two Italian granite (Baveno) figures by Donald De Lue representing the United States and France.

At the memorial one can descend a flight of granite steps to a parapet. From here can be seen the vertical stone cliffs approximately 1,200 yards to the right. To the left, about 2,500 yards, one can see the Pointe de la Percée. Between these two points lies Omaha Beach one of the three beaches where, in the darkness of the early morning hours on 6 June 1944, three Airborne Divisions, the British 6th, the U.S. 82nd and 101st, dropped behind the beaches to destroy enemy forces and to cover the deployment of the seaborne assault troops.

Simultaneously the Allied Naval forces moved in with battleships, heavy cruisers, destroyers and transports, and began laying down a barrage of gunfire along the cliffs and inland on enemy bivouac areas and supply depots, as well as centering their fire on all roads leading to the beaches.

At 0630 hours, under cover of this naval gunfire as well as air bombardment, six U.S., British and Canadian Divisions landed in the greatest amphibious assault recorded in history.

The tidal flats all along the beach for about 250 yards out from the high-water line were studded with obstacles made of rails or heavy angle iron and logs driven in the sand. Most of the obstacles were mined with Teller mines and set in such a manner that they would blow or stave in the bottoms of landing craft.

The enemy had been, for several months, working intensively on fortifying this area. At the entrance of the draws, the enemy constructed concrete blockhouses and pill-boxes. Many of these fortifications were connected by underground tunnels. Along the brow of the cliffs were trenches with dug-in machine gun and mortar emplacements. The flat area between the high-water line and the base of the cliffs was heavily mined with anti-personnel and tank mines and protected with barbed wire entanglement. The first wave of troops had to disembark from their boats in water up to their waists, and in some instances deeper, and wade ashore through these obstacles.

The engineers in the first wave had lost a lot of their equipment due to the high seas which capsized the boats causing some of them to hit the mined obstacles established by the enemy. Continuing on, the engineers began to open gaps through the shingles piled against the sea wall with whatever equipment they were able to retain. Other engineers, aided by the Infantry, were opening gaps through the minefields and wire entanglement.

This work was made extremely difficult by the enemy firing from their fortified positions along the cliffs directly down on the beach into the troops and supplies coming in from the boats. By 0800 hours the troops had worked their way up the face of the cliffs and were beginning to neutralize the enemy positions from behind. By 1400 hours the enemy fortifications along the cliffs were destroyed or reduced to a point that they were of little value.

The engineers opened roads up to draws; and tanks, heavy artillery and supply trucks were moving inland to support the troops that had advanced to the highway that enters the cemetery.

The Allied air forces had been over this area before the landing started, searching out targets for the Naval Forces to fire on, and bombarding the access roads as well as any enemy troops and equipment moving toward the landing areas. The air forces dropped more than 37,000 tons of bombs during the month of May just prior to the invasion. This air preparation was successful in destroying all rail and highway bridges. The bombardment also reduced all rail centers to or about 40% of their effectiveness. This systematic bombing by Allied air forces was far reaching as it disrupted all forms of transportation between the Seine and the Loire.

Eight road miles west of here is Pointe du Hoc which the U.S. 2d Ranger Battalion stormed in the same manner as the old medieval castles were attacked, by grappling hooks and ladders.

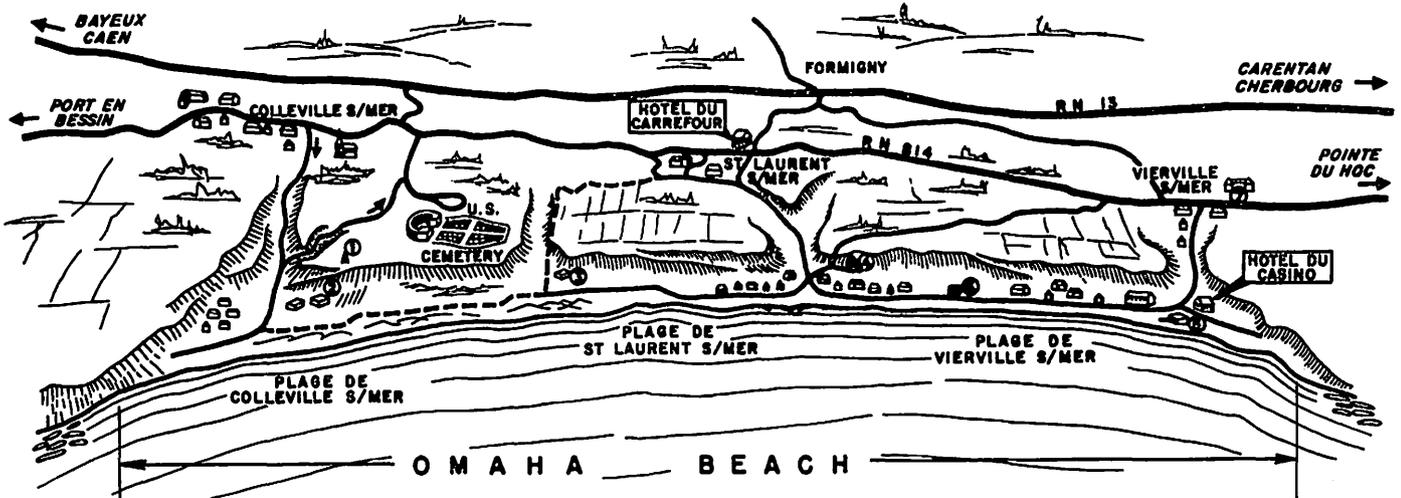
Thirty-three road miles to the west is Utah Beach where in the same morning, 6 June, American troops made another amphibious assault as well as an airborne landing.

The principal units that made the assault landings here at Omaha Beach were the U.S. 1st and 29th Divisions.

The Allied armies grew rapidly in strength. Driving northward, American forces, aided by strong naval and air bombardment, freed Cherbourg on 26 June. On 9 July, the British and Canadians fought their way into Caen; nine days later U.S. units took St. Lô. The Allies could now unleash their planned attack to break out of the beachhead. While British forces heavily engaged the enemy on the Allied left flank, American troops west of St. Lô undertook the major effort to drive through the enemy defenses. On 25 July, following a paralyzing bombardment by the U.S. Eighth and Ninth Air Forces and the Royal Air Force, the U.S. 4th, 9th and 30th Divisions opened a gap in the enemy line which was promptly exploited by the 1st Infantry and 2nd and 3rd Armored Divisions. Other American forces progressively added their efforts, liberating Coutances on 28 July. In a week the drive had cleared Avranches.

After nearly two months confinement to the beachhead area, the Allied armies had finally broken into the open and were moving forward on a broad front.

An orientation table at the overlook indicates the various landing beaches. From the overlook one may descend to the beach where another orientation table is located showing the Mulberry in some detail. Down on the beach a visitor can get a better idea of the perils of those who stormed ashore on that June morning.



- LEGEND:**
- ① 1ST DIVISION MONUMENT
  - ② 5TH BRIGADE MONUMENT
  - ③ PROVISIONAL ENG. BRIGADE
  - ④ 6TH ENG. SPECIAL BRIGADE
  - ⑤ FIRST TEMPORARY CEMETERY
  - ⑥ NATIONAL GUARD MONUMENT
  - ⑦ PLAQUE 11TH PORT

