Rhône American Cemetery
and Memorial
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LOCATION

Rhône American Cemetery and Memorial are 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. Raphaël-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 as shown on the map insert.

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. Raphaël, Cannes and other towns along the Riviera.

HOURS

The cemetery is open daily to the public between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. (The cemetery is closed on January 1 and December 25. It is open on all 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 Rhône 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 3d, 36th, and 45th Divisions of the U.S. VI Corps stormed ashore from St. Tropaz to St. Raphaël. 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 3d Division on the left flank drove directly up the Rhône 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 3d Divi-
sion 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 Besançon. On 11 September at Somberon 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.

THE 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. Rhône 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 landings on the southern coast on 15 August 1944 and the advance northward. The official name of the cemetery is derived from the Rhône 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 area, is the memorial. In the northeast corner are the superintendent's quarters as well as the utilities area and 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.

MEMORIAL

To the right and left of the memorial are the two flagstaffs 66½ 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 Rhône.

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 RHÔNE 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. 3D, 36TH AND 45TH DIVISIONS PUSHED RAPIDLY INLAND.


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 façade 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-Saône.

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):

THI motion 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
3D INFANTRY DIVISION, 36TH INFANTRY DIVISION, 45TH INFANTRY DIVISION, 1ST AIRBORNE TASK FORCE, 1ST SPECIAL SERVICE FORCE
TWELFTH AIR FORCE, FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE, XII TACTICAL AIR COMMAND,

PROVISIONAL TROOP CARRIER AIR DIVISION

ARMEE FRANCAISE
ARME B. 1RE, 2E CORPS D’ARMEE
1RE DIVISION FRANCAISE LIBRE, 2E DIVISION D’INF MAROCaine, 3E DIVISION D’INF ALGERIENNE, 9E DIVISION D’INF COLONIALE, 1ER DIVISION BLINDEE, 1RE BRIGADE DE SPAHIS, 1RE, 2E, 3E GROUPEMENTS DE TALONS MAROCCAINS, 1ER, 2E, 3E GROUPEMENTS DE CHOC

UNITES AERIENNES
FORCES FRANCAISES DE L’INTERIEUR

BRITISH ARMY
2 INDEPENDENT PARACHUTE BRIGADE
ROYAL AIR FORCE
202 GROUP (FIGHTER)

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 Clarté) 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 Army Air Forces
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 over 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 olean- der 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

1 It will be recalled that during World War II the Air Forces still formed part of the United States Army.
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.

SERVICES TO THE PUBLIC

Upon request, and without cost, the following information and services are provided to family members and friends of those interred or commemorated at ABMC's cemeteries and memorials:

- name, location and general information about the cemetery, monument or memorial;
- plot, row and grave number and, if applicable, memorialization site;
- authorization for issuance of fee-free passports for members of the immediate family traveling overseas specifically to visit an ABMC grave or memorialization site;
- a photograph of grave and/or memorialization sites affixed to a large color lithograph of the appropriate cemetery and memorial;
- best route and modes of travel in-country to cemetery or memorial site;
- general information about accommodations in the vicinity of the cemetery or memorial;
- arrangement for floral decoration of a grave or memorialization site. (Weather permitting, a color photograph of the floral decoration in place is provided to the donor).

Corozal American Cemetery, Corozal, Republic of Panama
HERE RESTS IN HONORED GLORY
A COMRADE IN ARMS
KNOWN BUT TO GOD

THE AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION
ESTABLISHED BY CONGRESS MARCH 1923

UNITED STATES OFFICE
American Battle Monuments Commission
Court House Plaza II
Suite 500
2300 Clarendon Boulevard
Arlington, VA 22201
Telephone: (703) 696-6897
(703) 696-6896
FAX: (703) 696-6666
Website: www.abmc.gov

MEDITERRANEAN OFFICE
Street Address:
American Battle Monuments Commission
c/o U.S. Embassy
Via Sallustiana 49
00187 Rome, Italy
Mailing Address:
American Battle Monuments Commission
Unit 9500, Box 11
APO AE 09033
Telephone: (011-39) 06-4674-3084
Fax: (011-39) 06-487-1624

EUROPEAN OFFICE
Street Address:
68, rue du 19 Janvier
92380 - Garches, France
Mailing Address:
American Battle Monuments Commission
PSC 116
APO AE 09077
Telephone: (011-33) 1-4701-1976
(from U.S. & other countries)
33-01-4701-1976
(within France)
Fax: (011-33) 1-4714-1979

PHILIPPINE OFFICE
Street Address:
Manila American Cemetery
and Memorial
McKinley Road, Global City
Taguig, Philippines
Mailing Address:
Manila American Cemetery
PSC 513, Box 5
APO AP 96515-1800
Telephone: (011-632) 844-0212
Fax: (011-632) 812-4717

Decorated Gravesite of a World War II "Unknown"
Suresnes American Cemetery and Memorial, Seine, France