

# **St. Mihiel American Cemetery and Memorial**

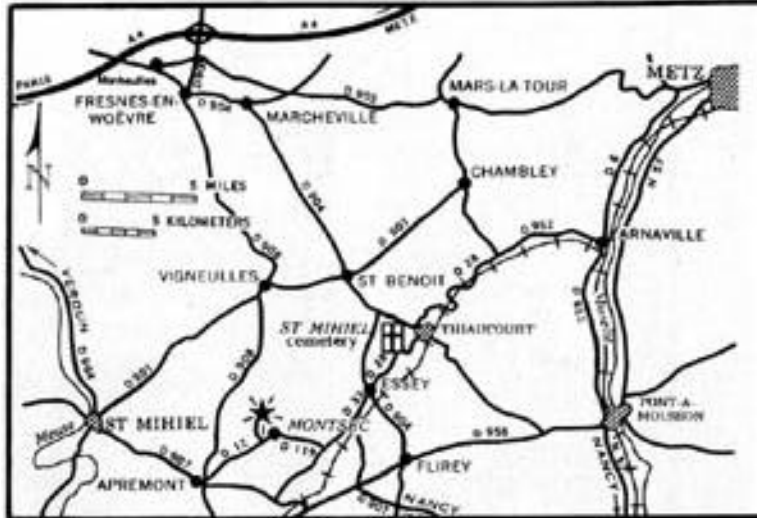


**American Battle Monuments Commission**



*Chapel Interior*

# St. Mihiel American Cemetery and Memorial



## LOCATION

The St. Mihiel American Cemetery and Memorial is located at the west edge of Thiaucourt, Meurthe-et-Moselle, France. The road from Verdun (29 miles/47 km), through Fresnes-en-Woevre, passes the entrance to the cemetery and continues on to Pont-a-Mousson and Nancy (29 miles/47 km). The cemetery may be reached from Paris by automobile (188 miles/300 km) via toll Autoroute A-3, from the Porte de Bercy, to the Fresnes-en-Woevre exit. From the village of Fresnes-en-Woevre, follow directions to Pont-a-Mousson (14-miles/22 km) to the cemetery. The cemetery may also be reached by train (Gare de l'Est) to Toul where taxi services are available. Hotels are available at Pont-a-Mousson, Metz, Nancy and Verdun. By calling the Superintendent or a member of his staff at 83-81-90-06, assistance will be provided to obtain hotel reservations or taxi service.

## 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.

## HISTORY

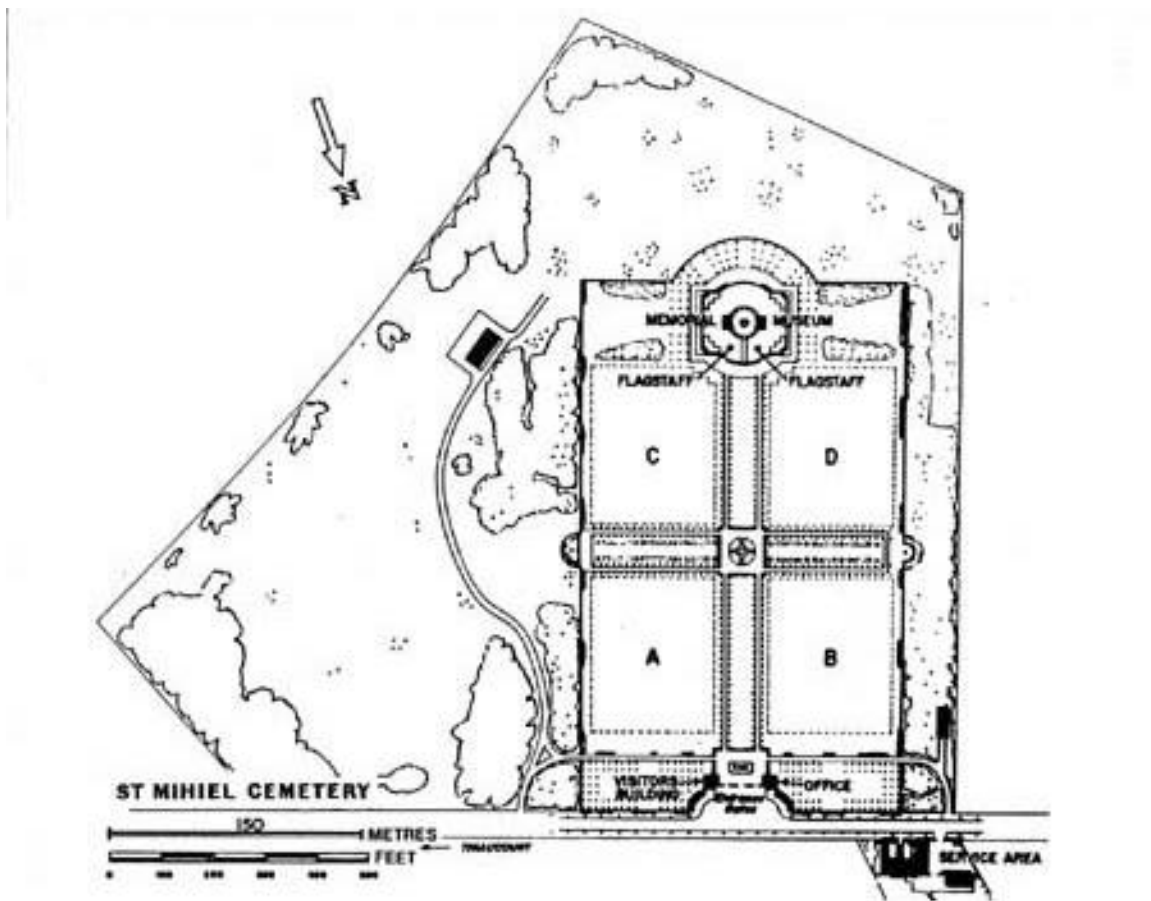
Toward the end of 1916, French and British commanders on the western front were optimistic concerning a successful conclusion of the war in 1917. Except for the loss of Rumania, events during 1916 had appeared to be working in favor of the Allies, who had numerical superiority on all fronts.



*Entrance Gate*

As if to reinforce Allied optimism, the Germans on the western front began withdrawing some of their forces north of Paris to prepared positions approximately 20 miles to the rear that could be held by fewer divisions. These defensive positions were later to be known as the Hindenburg Line. The Russian Revolution broke out while the German withdrawal north of Paris was still in progress. The revolution delivered a serious blow to Allied plans, as the Russian Army had been counted upon heavily to keep German troops occupied on the eastern front. Although the Russian Army did not collapse immediately, it was apparent that it soon would do so.

On 6 April 1917, the United States entered World War I with no modern equipment and less than 200,000 men under arms scattered from the Mexican border to China and the Philippines. It would take longer for the United States to mobilize, train, ship troops to France and equip and prepare them for combat than for the Russia Army to disintegrate. Despite this realization, the French and British Armies began the offensives that had been planned on the western front prior to the Russian Revolution in March. The initial British assault began on 9 April. It was followed by a French offensive on 16 April. Quickly, the French offensive turned into a disaster leaving the British Army to shoulder the main burden of the war on the western front, until French forces could reorganize and recuperate. On the eastern front, the Russian started to attack but were promptly driven back. Shortly thereafter, an assault by the Germans in the north caused the Russians to seek an armistice. Although the treaty between Germany and Russia was not signed until March 1918, the Germans began moving divisions from Russia to France as early as November 1917, in an attempt to end the war before sufficient American troops could be brought into action to affect the outcome of the war.



*Location of Cemetery Features*

As a consequence, the beginning of 1918 looked far worse for the Allies than the beginning of 1917. To take advantage of the troop that had been moved to France from the Eastern front, the Germans launched a series of five powerful offensives on 21 March 1918. The first two offensives caused considerable concern among the Allies who

vehemently contended that if American soldiers were not sent immediately as replacements to fill the depleted ranks of their units, the war would be lost. General John J. Pershing, Commander-in-Chief of the American Expeditionary Forces, refused to allow his men to be used piecemeal and in a surprisingly short time organized, trained and equipped them into effective fighting units. When the French Army found itself in desperate need of assistance during the third and fifth German drives, General Pershing quickly offered American troop units to halt the advancing enemy.

The outstanding achievements of these U.S. troop units are recorded at the Aisne-Marne American Cemetery and Memorial and at the Chateau-Thierry Monument. When the last great German offensive commenced on 15 July east of Chateau-Thierry, it was promptly repulsed in a severe struggle in which American troop units played a leading part. Quickly, a U.S.-French counteroffensive was launched on 18 July at Soissons. The highly successful three-week battle that followed, known officially as the "Aisne-Marne Offensive" but called the "Second Battle of the Marne" by Marshal Ferdinand Foch, Allied Commander-in-Chief, marked the turning point of the war.

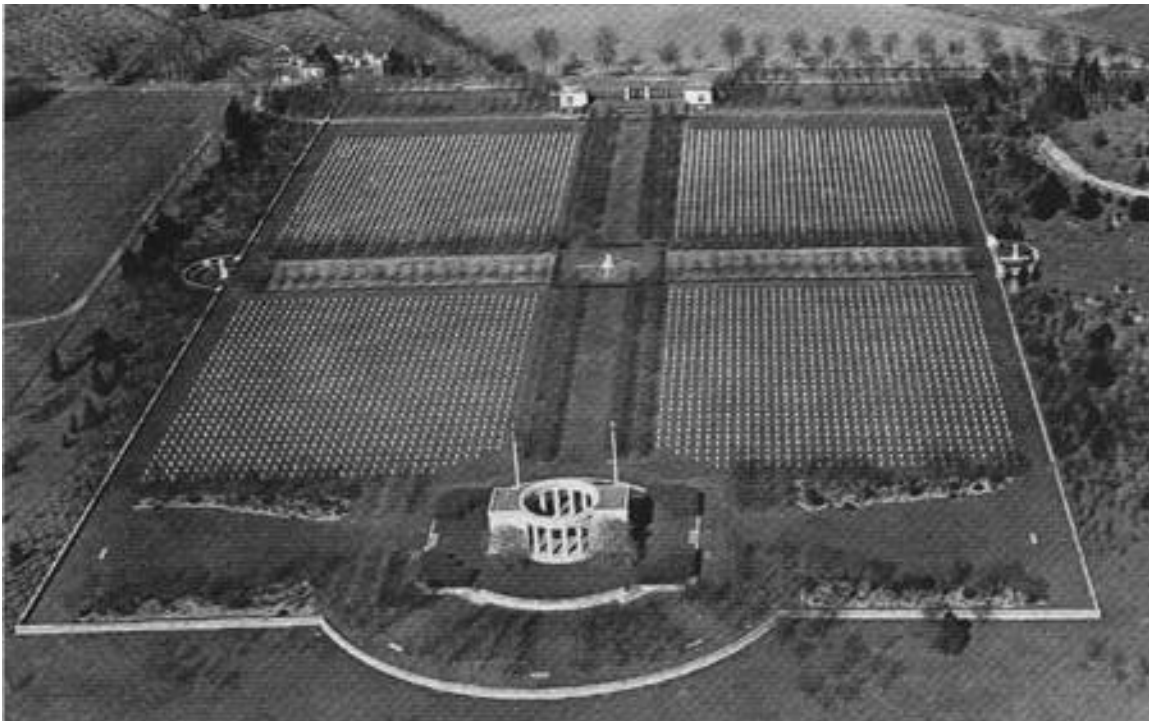
Determined to keep the enemy on the defensive, the Allied Commander-in-Chief, at a conference on 24 July, planned a series of strong offensive operations to maintain the initiative and give the enemy no respite or opportunity to reorganize. Following completion of the Aisne-Marne Offensive, the British, assisted by the French, were given the mission of conducting an offensive in the Amiens sector where the enemy had made such great gains in March and April.

At this conference, General Pershing chose the St. Mihiel sector for an American offensive. The objective of the offensive was a salient projecting 16 miles into the Allied line. Roughly shaped like a triangle, the salient ran from Verdun on the north, south to St. Mihiel and then east to Pont-a-Mousson on the Moselle River. It was bordered by a line of hills known as the Heights of the Meuse and a succession of marshes and lakes situated across deep ravines and dense forests. In addition to its natural defensive advantages, the salient protected the strategic rail center of Metz and the Briey iron basin so vital to the Germans as a source of raw material for munitions. Offensively, it interrupted French rail communications and constituted a constant threat against Verdun and Nancy. Reduction of the salient was imperative before any large Allied offensive could be launched against Briey and Metz or northward between the Meuse River and Argonne Forest. At the conference, General Pershing insisted that the attack be a United States Army operation with its own sector, under the separate and independent control of the American Commander-in-Chief. When the decision was made, there were over 1,200,000 American soldiers in U.S. troop units widely scattered throughout France, either serving with French or British Armies or training in rear areas. In view of the splendid record that so many of the U.S. units had already achieved in combat, the Allies were forced to agree that a separate U.S. Army should be formed, although they requested that U.S. divisions continue to be permitted to fight with their armies.

The order creating the United States First Army became effective on 10 August 1918. On 30 August, the U.S. First Army took over the St. Mihiel sector. After a series of conferences, the Allies agreed that the St. Mihiel attack should be limited to a reduction of the salient, following which the U.S. First Army would undertake a larger scale offensive on the front between the Meuse River and the Argonne Forest. With the

attack at St. Mihiel scheduled for 12 September, this would require winning an extraordinarily swift victory there, then concentrating an enormous force to launch a still greater operation 40 miles away, within just two weeks. Never before on the western front had a single army attempted such a colossal task.

At 0500 hours, 12 September 1918, following a four-hour bombardment by heavy artillery, the U.S. I and IV Corps composed of nine U.S. divisions, began the main assault against the southern face of the salient, while the French II Colonial Corps made a holding attack to the south and around the tip of the salient. A secondary assault by the U.S. V Corps was made three hours later against the western face of the salient. Reports were soon received that the enemy was retreating. That evening, the order was issued for U.S. troops to press forward with all possible speed. By the dawn of 13 September, units of the U.S. IV and V Corps met in the center of the salient, cutting off the retreating enemy. By 16 September, the entire salient had been eliminated. Throughout these operations, the attacking forces were supported by the largest concentration of Allied aircraft ever assembled. The entire reduction of the salient was completed in just for days by which time some of the divisions involved had already been withdrawn to prepare for the Meuse-Argonne battle.



*Aerial View of Cemetery*

## **SITE**

The cemetery, 40 ½ acres in extent, is located almost at the center of the salient where the majority of the 4,153 military Dead buried there gave their lives. The cemetery was first established as a temporary cemetery by the American Graves Registration Service

following the offensive in 1918. After the war, the other temporary cemeteries in the area were discontinued and the military Dead of the region whose next-of-kin requested burial overseas were moved to the St. Mihiel cemetery for permanent interment. It is the third largest of the eight permanent World War I American military cemetery memorials in Europe. Post-war administration of the cemetery passed to the American Battle Monument Commission in 1934.

The Commission, whose functions are described in the latter pages of this booklet, landscaped the grounds and constructed the memorial chapel and other permanent buildings in the cemetery.

## **ARCHITECTS**

Architect for the memorial chapel and other architectural features was Thomas Harlan Ellett of New York City, New York.



*The Sundial and Surrounding Gardens at the center of the Cemetery*

## **GENERAL LAYOUT**



The formal entrance, with its ornamental grill gates and fencing and its gem-like buildings, is of striking beauty and offers an excellent view of the cemetery. To the right of the entrance is the Superintendent's Office; to the left is the Visitors' Building. Both are constructed of Euville limestone. Directly behind these buildings is the cemetery proper. Here, in a beautifully landscaped setting, are the graves area and the memorial. The pristine whiteness of the headstones is in striking contrast to the immaculately maintained emerald green lawn.

At the intersection of the central mall and transverse axis in the center of the cemetery is a large sundial of attractive design consisting of a carved stone eagle gnomon on a round base. The shadow cast by the eagle gnomon in relation to the lead Roman numerals set in the flat surface of the base indicates the time of day. Around the circular base of the sundial is carved the inscription:

TIME WILL NOT DIM THE GLORY OF THEIR DEEDS

From this point one can view the beautiful perspectives along the two axes of the cemetery. At the west end of the transverse axis is a sculptured stone figure of a youthful American officer, executed by Paul Manship of New York City, New York, standing in



*Sculpture of a Young American Officer in Field Uniform*

front of a stone cross in his field uniform, with trench helmet in hand and side arms and map case. Above his head is engraved.

IL DORT  
LOIN DES SIENS  
DANS LA DOUCE  
TERRE DE FRANCE

(Translation: He sleeps far from his family in the gentle land of France.) And on the pedestal below him:

BLESSED ARE THEY THAT  
HAVE THE HOME LONGING  
FOR THEY SHALL GO HOME

At the opposite end of the transverse axis is an ornamental urn on a semi-circular platform flanked by two beautiful yews. From this platform, facing the east, an excellent view of the surrounding rural countryside may be seen.

## THE MEMORIAL

At the north end of the cemetery stands the memorial, an open circular colonnade or peristyle flanked by a chapel room on the left and a museum room on the right. On the left front facade of the memorial is engraved a lamp representing an eternal flame and under it the inscription:

1914-1918  
TO THOSE WHO DIED  
FOR THEIR COUNTRY

On the opposite facade appears the same lamp symbol and the same inscription in French.

The memorial rests on a slightly raised circular terrace and is enclosed by a stone-faced wall. On the lawn in front of it are two large flagpoles with stone and bronze bases. Large chestnut trees frame it on the sides and rear and immediately behind the memorial are two large weeping willows.



*View of Memorial and Graves Area*

The memorial is constructed of Rocheret limestone. On the inside surface of the lintel is carved in the stone:

THIS CHAPEL HAS BEEN  
ERECTED BY THE UNITED  
STATES OF AMERICA IN  
GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE OF  
HER SONS WHO DIED IN  
THE WORLD WAR

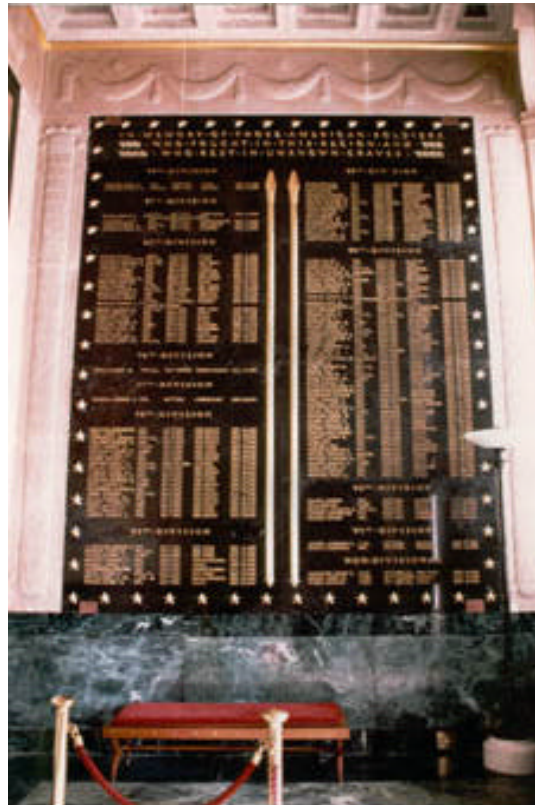
These words emphasize that the memorial and, indeed, the entire cemetery were erected not to commemorate the glory of battle won or the triumph of victory achieved, but to pay homage to those American servicemen who made the supreme sacrifice for their country.

The large rose-granite urn with its carved drapery at the center of the peristyle resembles an ancient funeral vase. One of its decorative features is a winged horse, Pegasus, symbolizing the flight of the immortal soul to its resting place in the life beyond.

To the left of the peristyle, bronze doors, decorated with stars and two miniature soldier heads, lead to the impressive interior of the chapel room. The carved white Italian marble altar holds a lighted bronze lamp symbolic of an eternal flame. Above the altar is a richly-colored mosaic depicting the “Angel of Victory” sheathing a sword and “Doves



*Sculptor at the Center of the  
Peristyle Representing an  
Ancient Funeral Vase*



*Tablets of the Missing*

of Peace” bearing olive branches. At the top of the wall, carved in white marble with gold letters, is the inscription:

I GIVE UNTO THEM  
ETERNAL LIFE AND THEY  
SHALL NEVER PERISH

The mosaics on the end walls have as their main features large shields displaying the national colors of the United States and of France.

The coffered ceiling is decorated in gold and blue, while the floor and lower wall-paneling are of inlaid marble with light and dark green markings. Dispersed about the chapel in appropriate places are graceful candelabra, cushioned seats and kneeling benches.

Crossing to the right side of the memorial one enters the museum through a similar set of bronze doors. On the wall directly opposite the doorway is a beautiful map of the St. Mihiel region inlaid with various colored marbles. This map shows the boundaries of the salient, the German lines before the offensive, the Allied lines after the battle and the progress of the campaign. On the side walls of the museum are black marble panels, at the tops of which are engraved:



*The Memorial Peristyle*

IN MEMORY OF THOSE AMERICAN SOLDIERS  
WHO FOUGHT IN THIS REGION AND  
WHO SLEEP IN UNKNOWN GRAVES.

Listed below the inscription in gold letters are the names of the 284 American soldiers who gave their lives in this area, but whose remains were not recovered or identified.

## **THE GRAVES AREA**

The graves area consists of four burial plots, lettered from A to D, separated by the central mall and the transverse axes. The 4,153 headstones are arranged in parallel rows across the green lawns, which carpet the grave area. One hundred and seventeen of these headstones mark the graves of “Unknowns”. The cemetery contains no multiple burials. Each of the Dead has his own headstone of white marble, a Star of David for those of the Jewish faith and a Latin cross for all others. The precise alignment of clean, polished marble headstones on clipped green grass assures the visitor that no feature of the cemetery receives more respectful care than does the graves area.



*Plot D, Graves Area from Crosswalk*

## **PLANTINGS**

At the entrance gate to the cemetery is a large bed of flowering annuals. The main paths of the cemetery are bordered by square-trimmed European linden trees, their low overhanging boughs furnishing a canopy. Flower beds of polyantha roses are planted along the transverse axes. The base of the decorative sundial at the intersection of the

center mall and transverse axes in the center of the cemetery is surrounded by beds of flowering annuals and bordered with dwarf boxwood hedge.

## **VISITORS' BUILDING**

Located to the left of the entrance gate is the Visitors' Building. Here 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.



*Montsec Monument*

## **MONTSEC MONUMENT**

On a high isolated hill, 12-miles/19 km from the St. Mihiel American Cemetery, stands the Montsec Monument. It commemorates the capture of the St. Mihiel salient by the American First Army, the operations of the American Second Army on 9-11

November 1918, and other combat services of American divisions both in this region and in Alsace and Lorraine.

The monument consists of a large circular colonnade, at the center of which, on a raised platform, is a bronze relief map of the St. Mihiel salient. Its size, its commanding site, and the perfection of its proportions combine to make it one of the most impressive in Europe.

On the right side of a flight of steps leading to the monument is engraved:

THIS MONUMENT HAS BEEN ERECTED BY THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO COMMEMORATE THE CAPTURE OF THE ST. MIHIEL SALIENT BY THE TROOPS OF HER FIRST ARMY AND TO RECORD THE SERVICES OF THE AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCES ON THE BATTLEFRONT IN THIS REGION AND ELSEWHERE IN LORRAINE AND IN ALSACE. IT STANDS AS A LASTING SYMBOL OF THE FRIENDSHIP AND COOPERATION BETWEEN THE FRENCH AND AMERICAN ARMIES.

The same inscription is repeated in French on the left side of the flight of steps. Near the top of the monument on the outside lintel are engraved the names of villages and towns where battles were fought in this region:

THIAUCOURT – VIGNEULLES – FRESNES – VIEVILE – ST. BENOIT – NORROY  
– BENEY – JAULNY – FRAPELLE – HAUMONT – ST. HILAIRE – XAMMES –  
NONSARD – VILCEY – ST. BAUSSANT – VANDIERES.