

## Information and Useful Links

Fifteen years of touring European battlefields has brought a deep appreciation of how a commander's use of local terrain can significantly influence the outcome of military engagements. Defensive positions are strengthened by placement on high ground with clear lines of observation and fields of fire. Routes of advance are hidden by terrain or deception while attackers search for an enemy's weaknesses. Battlefield exploration offers opportunities to understand the flow and counterflow of military actions, but the actions of troops in the field determine the victor.

The combat infantrymen's burden was indeed heavy. For example, by 1944, only 20 percent of American troops were in combat divisions and of those in combat divisions only 65 percent of the men were fighting soldiers. By war's end some rifle companies had suffered over 200 percent casualties; in other words, statistically, every man in the unit had become a casualty – and so had each of their replacements. Frequently a battalion's original combat soldiers that survived the entire war unscathed could be counted on one's fingers. With that in mind the Fields of War battlefield guidebooks are in tribute to the soldiers of all nations who, willingly or not, suffered the cold, hunger, fear, and hurt of battle.

### How to Use these Tours

The following brief excursions bring battlefield visitors to specific sites of important battlefield events, describe what happened there, and offer opportunities to view commemorations, visit museums, or inspect surviving relics of the battle. They are presented as supplement to the battlefield guides offered through French Battlefields described at: [http://www.frenchbattlefields.com/guide\\_books4.html](http://www.frenchbattlefields.com/guide_books4.html)

Generously illustrated with maps and photographs, each excursion begins with a summary of the precipitating military events. A 'fact box' summarizes key information. Detailed battlefield maps assist in following the action and locating selected sites. The 'Battle' section describes commander's objectives and troop movements. An 'Aftermath' section notes results of the fighting and significant events which occurred after the engagement. The major section of each battle is devoted to the 'Battlefield Tour'.

Each tour has a suggested tour route with clear driving instructions, highlighted in boxes for easy reading and designed to bring a visitor to various positions of importance on the battlefield. Geographic coordinates (latitude, longitude) are given for each location which can be entered into GPS locators allowing visitors to select only those sites of individual interest or to alter the order of visitation. The use of a global positioning system navigator is highly recommended even when utilizing the suggested tour route. Footnotes provide insights into mentioned soldiers' post-battle lives.

The tours have been written with the intent of touring battlefields by automobile. For those unable or unwilling to provide their own transportation, a few tour companies offer reasonable alternatives. Public transportation to battlefields is seldom a viable option.

The maps show modern roadways; but they should never be considered a substitute for current highway road maps. Farm or forest roads are generally not drivable without four-wheel drive vehicles. The indicated positions of military units on the battlefield maps are approximated for ease of viewing and do not necessarily indicate headquarters locations.

Appendices offer helpful comparisons of military ranks, unit sizes and their composition, German military terminology, and statistics on armored vehicles.

### General Tourist Information

Tourist offices can provide helpful information regarding accommodations, cultural and historic sites, walking or cycling routes, and hours of operation for museums. The offices are not included in the tours, but their addresses and contact information are provided at the beginning of each town's description. The Michelin Green Guides are highly recommended for presentation of general tourist information. They

make an excellent accompaniment to these excursions and offer general touring advice in addition to listing historic and cultural locations, market days, festivals, and public holidays.

Twenty-four hour military time is used in Europe; therefore operational hours are so presented. Those sites open on weekends are frequently closed on Mondays or Tuesdays. Some variations exist, especially later closing hours during the summer tourist season. Few museums are handicap accessible; those that so advertise are indicated. The information contained herein is believed to be accurate at the time of issue, but museum hours are notoriously subject to change. If access to a certain site is of paramount importance, it is best to contact it in advance.

American visitors must accommodate the use of the metric system as it is the measure used on local road signs and maps. Each year roadways are improved or re-routed and intersections reconstructed. Therefore, up-to-date road maps or GPS locators are a necessity. The 1:50,000 scale maps prepared by the Institut géographique national (IGN) are available at many bookstores, automobile service areas, or over the internet from <http://www.ngi.fr> for France or <http://www.ngi.be/> for Belgium

Local citizens are remarkably tolerant of battlefield visitors; however private property should be respected and never accessed without the owner's permission. Crops are the farmer's livelihood and trampling planted fields should be avoided, although a field boundary often provides a useful walkpath. Forests may be the scene of the autumn shooting season and care should be exercised. Finally, abandoned bunkers or off-trail battlefield terrain frequently retain dangerous spikes, barbed wire, or even unexploded ordnance. The utmost caution must be exercised and independent exploration is discouraged.

### **Military Units and Ranks**

The spelling of British unit names has been maintained; thus, for example, British 'Guards Armoured Division' appears in the text. Military ranks are displayed as appropriate to the country. The American rank of lieutenant colonel becomes the British lieutenant-colonel. German SS ranks are generally unfamiliar to English readers and literally awkward, therefore we have adopted the convention of noted authors by substituting their American / British equivalent for improved readability. See the appendix for a table of comparative ranks.

Commonly used foreign language military terms are not in italic font as is custom to aid readability. The more unusual terms are defined in footnotes at their first appearance. German military terms can be complex compound words; therefore, for brevity, their German abbreviations are frequently used. For example, Fallschirmjäger Regiment becomes FJR. A reference table of such terms is in the appendix.

Unit names are presented as they were used at the time. Thus, the second company in a battalion would appear as Company B in the American Army, B Company in the British Army, and #2 Kompanie or II Bataillon for 2nd Battalion in the German Wehrmacht.

### **Military Cemeteries**

Due to the contingencies of warfare, bodies were hastily buried in fields or local community cemeteries. After the war each participant country strove to locate and transfer battlefield remains to their respective military cemeteries, but additional remains are still occasionally discovered. Numerous community cemeteries still contain the graves of soldiers and airmen who, for a variety of reasons, have been left where originally buried. These graves are treated with great respect.

Access to military cemeteries is controlled by the respective country's regulations. Most are handicap accessible. British, Dutch, and German military cemeteries allow unrestricted access except for those located within military camps. American military cemeteries are open every day except Christmas and New Year from 09:00 to 17:00. An American representative is always on duty to assist relatives in locating graves of family members.

Major combatant countries provide websites to identify cemetery locations and at least a partial listing of identified burials within each cemetery. Those websites are:

American Battle Monuments Commission: <https://www.abmc.gov/>

Belgian War Dead Register (WW One only): <https://www.wardeadregister.be/en>

Commonwealth War Graves Commission: <https://www.cwgc.org/>

Sépultures de Guerre (French Ministry of Arms portal):

<https://www.memoiredeshommes.sga.defense.gouv.fr/fr/article.php?larub=44>

Slachtofferregister Oorlogsgravenstichting (Dutch Victims Register War Graves Foundation):

<https://oorlogsgravenstichting.nl/>

Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge (German War Graves Commission):

<https://www.volksbund.de/>

Slowly walking through these cemeteries presents the horrific cost of warfare. Commonwealth gravestones are noted for listing the ages at which these young men died robbing them of a full lifetime of experiences. German cemeteries are noted for the large percentage of grave markers inscribed ‘Unbekannt’ or unidentified detailing the forlorn and forgotten remains never reunited with loved ones. Reading the differing states of origin on the gravestones in American cemeteries demonstrates how men fought and died to liberate someone else’s country and gives proof to America’s motto ‘E Pluribus Unum’ — ‘Out of Many, One.’ No other evidence of the strength of the United States need be sought.

