

Brief History of the Luxembourg American Cemetery

This cemetery was established on 29 December 1944 by the 609th Quartermaster Graves Registration Company of the U.S. Third Army under General George S. Patton, Jr., as a temporary burial ground for soldiers killed in the fighting in the Ardennes hills north of here. Ten days earlier, Third Army units rapidly swung north from positions in Germany's Saarland after Adolf Hitler launched his vast counter-offensive with half a million troops that broke through U.S. First Army lines in the Ardennes. Three of Patton's divisions attacked the southern flank of the German penetration on 22 December, a week before the first burials took place here. The fierce winter engagement came to be known as the Battle of the Bulge.

As the fighting raged 30 miles to the north, a service detachment of the Third Army prepared the grounds in this forest glade and built simple wooden structures and primitive dirt roads, while labor troops performed the burials. A staff of American and Luxembourg clerks were installed in the school building at nearby Hamm to handle records.

Gen. Patton himself was buried here on Christmas Eve 1945, three days after he died in Heidelberg, Germany, as a result of a neck fracture suffered in a car accident. His original grave was in an area now designated as Plot F.

During 1946, American labor troops aided by German prisoners of war built a chapel, an office building and other structures, and laid stone pathways among the 28 plots of graves then in existence, which contained the remains of 8,412 soldiers. That same year, the American Graves Registration Command (AGRC), which had taken over the task of developing and maintaining the U.S. military burial grounds in Europe after the war, appointed Mr. (Col.) R. Warren Davis as the first superintendent of the Luxembourg American Cemetery. Under Mr. Davis, a local labor crew came into being, which also maintained the nearby German military burial ground.

Over 200,000 people visited the American cemetery in 1946, and virtually all of them went to see Gen. Patton's grave. It was then decided to move his remains to a more convenient location at the top of the burial plots. The move was completed during March 1947, and the general's grave was not touched by the subsequent reconstruction of the cemetery according to a new design.

In March 1948, the cemetery was closed to visitors and screened with tarpaulins around its entire perimeter, and 250 local laborers were hired to perform the exhumations of all remains in preparation for casketing and the repatriation of those whose families had chosen to rebury them in the United States. Over the next year and a half the cemetery was completely rebuilt. All the remains were prepared by morticians after final positive identification and were laid in 500-pound, bronze-finished coffins. About 5,050 of the dead were then trucked to Antwerp for shipping to the United States. The others were buried in trenches shaped in concentric arcs according to the new design of the cemetery. An additional 1,700 American dead were brought here for reburial from the temporary cemeteries of Grand Faily near Longuyon in France and Foy near Bastogne in Belgium, bringing the total to 5,076. All but 101 of an original number of 267 unknown soldiers were positively identified at this time.

Among those buried here, there are 118 soldiers of the Jewish faith, whose headstones are in the shape of a Star of David, 22 pairs of brothers and one pair of close friends buried side by side at the request of their families, and one woman, an Army nurse.

The American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC), an agency of the Executive Branch of the U.S. Government founded by an Act of Congress in 1923, took over control of the Luxembourg American Cemetery from the AGRC in December 1949. The cemetery was reopened to visitors but development of the grounds continued and new plans were made for the construction of the present terrace area, chapel, visitors' building, entrance gates, and the asphalted pathways with the pools. General George C. Marshall was chairman of ABMC at the time. In Luxembourg, Mr. Davis continued as superintendent of the American cemetery under ABMC. A treaty was signed on 20

March 1951 by Madame Perle Mesta, U.S. Minister to Luxembourg, and Luxembourg Foreign Minister Joseph Bech, giving the United States Government the perpetual right to use the 50.5 acres of land taken up by the cemetery. The Luxembourg Government had offered outright title to the land but this would have raised a problem of extraterritoriality, which the United States considered undesirable.

All of the present structures of the cemetery were built during the 1950s based on plans prepared by architects Keally and Patterson of New York and several other American firms. During this time, the original wooden markers on the graves were replaced by new, white marble headstones from the Lasa quarry in the Dolomites Mountains of northeastern Italy. These headstones were cemented onto concrete beams that run for more than six miles under the manicured lawn of the grave plots. Two large pylons were erected on either side of the terrace, bearing battle maps on the inside faces and the names of 371 missing soldiers on the outside faces. Seven of those names have since been marked with asterisks to show that the remains of those soldiers were later found.

The completed grounds and Memorial were dedicated on 4 July 1960 in a ceremony attended by the late Grand-Duchess Charlotte and her consort, Prince Felix of Luxembourg. On this occasion, President Dwight D. Eisenhower issued a message stating in part: "On this anniversary of America's Independence Day, I join you in paying proud tribute to the men who sleep in the Luxembourg cemetery, our comrades-in-arms in the crusade against tyranny. These died that people might live in freedom and peace. Now they rest forever in the soil of the friendly country which so many of them helped to free from the invader."

In the decades since the dedication of the Luxembourg American Cemetery and Memorial many distinguished visitors have been received, including all members of the Luxembourg royal family, and two vice presidents of the United States who later became president: Lyndon B. Johnson in 1963 and George H.W. Bush in 1984.

More than 70,000 people visited the cemetery in 2007, including over 30,000 Americans.

At present, the permanent cemetery staff consists of two Americans and 10 local national employees.

Selected states of origin and number of soldiers buried or commemorated in the Luxembourg American Cemetery:

PA - 584	OH - 307	NJ - 227	TX - 153
NY - 579	MI - 271	CA - 211	MO - 144
IL - 380	MA - 240	IN - 159	WI - 143

Selected divisions and number of soldiers buried or commemorated in the Luxembourg American Cemetery:

80 th Infantry Div. - 504	26 th Infantry Div. - 319	28 th Infantry Div. - 163	4 th Armored - 165
5 th Infantry Div. - 418	90 th Infantry Div. - 292	4 th Infantry Div. - 159	6 th Armored - 160
94 th Infantry Div. - 410	76 th Infantry Div. - 272	10 th Armored - 186	101 st Airborne - 227

Opening hours: Every day except Christmas and New Year from 9:00 till 17:00.

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