

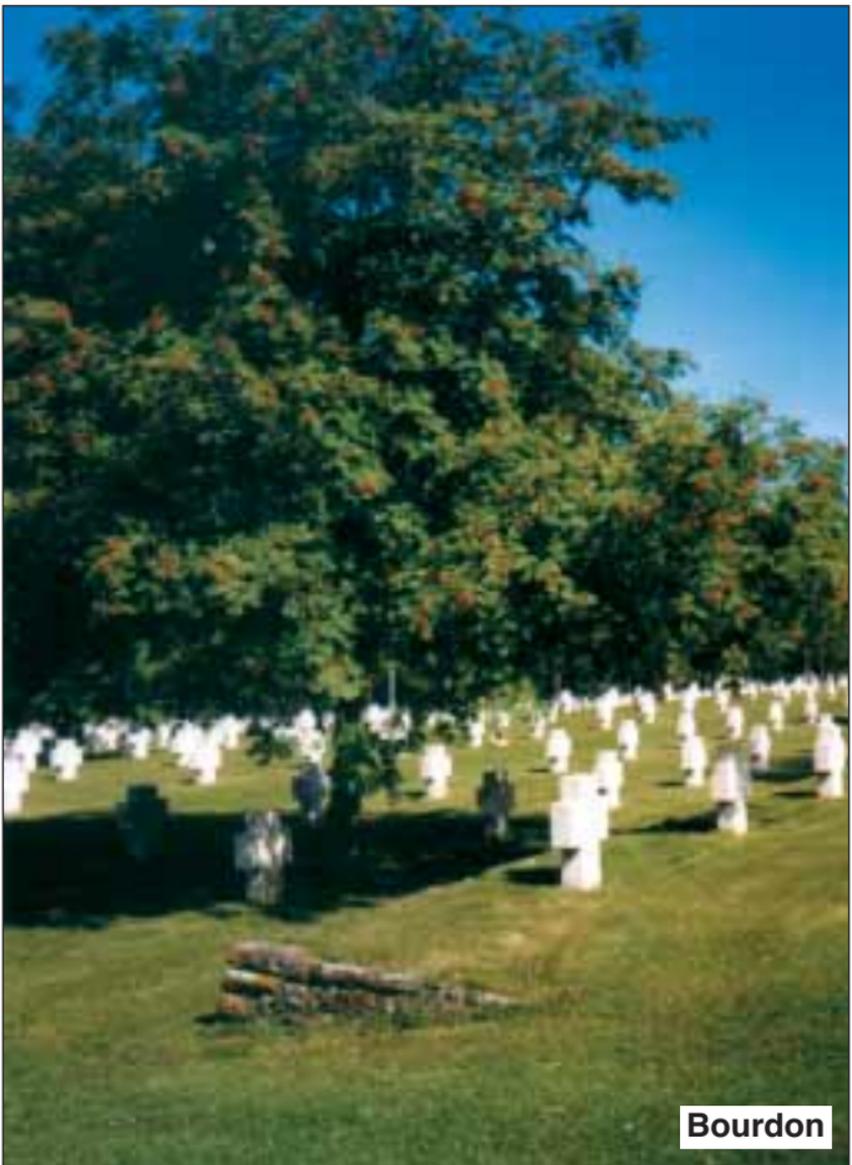
Northern France

Volksbund Deutsche
Kriegsgräberfürsorge e. V.



Reconciliation above the graves
Work for peace

German Military Cemeteries



Bourdon

In France, the German War Graves Commission (Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V.) looks after 192 German war cemeteries from the First World War, containing more than 769,000 dead, and 23 war cemeteries from the Second World War, containing 228,000 dead. The Commission performs this work on the basis of a War Graves Agreement, concluded between the Federal Republic of Germany and France.



The cemeteries are specifically highlighted and named on the maps. The detailed map sections show you the way.



The Wars in France

The 1870/71 Franco-Prussian War

The Franco-Prussian War of 1870/71 was the first of three wars in 75 years. Even today, graves and monuments still commemorate this war, a war which took the lives of 80,000 people from both nations.

The First World War in France

The First World War had a devastating effect in France. As well as a large number of British and American soldiers, 930,000 Germans and more than one million French soldiers also fell. At 192 sites, 461,000 German war dead lie in individual graves, with around 294,000 buried in communal graves. Following the Agreement on the Protection of War Graves, signed between Germany and France after the Second World War on 19th July 1966, the military cemeteries were restored and have been maintained and looked after by the Volksbund ever since. Work to restore the cemeteries of the First World War for more than 769,000 war dead lasted until the 1980s. Wooden crosses were replaced with crosses made of stone or metal, buildings at the sites were rebuilt, and the gardens landscaped.

The cemeteries lie along what were once the frontlines of areas of land that were once so heavily fought over. Marne, Maas, Somme, Verdun and Flanders: these theatres of war were the scenes of battles that claimed the lives of more than two million people on both sides.

As a result, the section of map shown on page 2/3 (northern France) shows a large number of German war cemeteries. By reading the dates of the dead on the gravestones, it is possible to get an idea of how the war took its course in this region.

The advance by the German troops through Belgium and on to France claimed many victims right at the start of the war in August/September 1914. In the years that ensued, dreadful fighting flared up over this poorly fortified border section.

The battle of the Somme, which began in June 1916, the battle for Verdun in 1916/17 and the battle at Flanders, the western offensive of 1917/18, are the tragic highpoints of the war in Western Europe.

The cemetery at Neuville-St.-Vaast/Pas-de-Calais has 44,888 dead and covers an area of some 10 hectares, making it the largest German military First World War

cemetery in France. It was laid out in 1919 by the French. Between 1975 and 1983, the war cemetery was redesigned, work which included the replacement of the wooden crosses with metal ones. The cemetery was overhauled with the construction of an entrance building and a warden's hut. The cemetery still looks the same today.

The name Verdun symbolises the inhumanity and the impotence of people in the face of the violence of the war machine deployed here during the First World War. Neither side wanted to give in. Accordingly, the number of people who died here was high. The fighting began on 21st February 1916 and lasted until August 1917. The struggle for Verdun saw almost 300,000 fall on both sides. Almost three quarters of all the places that lay within the battle zone were destroyed, with 200,000 hectares of land rendered uninhabitable.

Even today it is still possible to make out the scars of the war, such as in the region of von Vauquois and in the Butte de Montfaucon, as well as in the area around Douaumont. Even today, human skeletons are still being found during excavation and recultivation work within the former battle zones. The battle field had been churned up and littered with shells and ammunition.

The Volksbund suspects that, with the extensive clearance work that was carried out in this area right up to the 1930s, it subsequently proved impossible to recover the bodies of around 20,000 war dead on both sides. In the area of Verdun, 73,000 French and 85,000 German war dead lie in 64 war cemeteries. More imposing than all this, however, is the house of mortal remains (bones) in Douaumont, in the vaults of which 120,000 unknown soldiers have been given their final resting place and in whose tower a colossal bell tolls in memory of the dead.



Neuville-St.-Vaast

The Second World War in France

In France, the Second World War claimed the lives of 240,000 German and 255,000 French. Two war grave agreements signed between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Republic of France regulate the development and maintenance of the German war cemeteries. Under these agreements, work was assigned to the Volksbund. In 1975, 22 sites for the war dead of the Second World War were completed, with the Giffertswald (Spicherer Höhen) cemetery added to the list in 1998. Young people attend German and international youth camps to assist the Volksbund in maintaining and looking after the war cemeteries.

Between Verdun and Amiens, there is a large number of German, British and French War cemeteries. For this reason, you will appreciate that in this brochure we have placed the focus on providing an account of the German cemeteries at which the overwhelming majority of the war dead of the Second World War have their final resting place. These are the cemeteries at Beauvais, Bourdon, Fort-de-Malmaison, Noyers-Pont-Maugis, Solers and Versailles. You can find these on our main map on page 2/3. Detailed descriptions are also included in the books of names on display at the cemeteries.

Beauvais

The German War cemetery at Beauvais was laid out in the summer of 1942 by the burial service of the German Wehrmacht, which transferred the war dead who fell in the French campaign of 1940 in the areas of Oise, Somme and the lower Seine and buried them at a single site. The French burial service completed further reburial work in 1946 and 1947. After the conclusion of the Franco-German war graves agreement (1954), the Volksbund began to develop the site in July 1961. From the centre of Beauvais, west of the Calais road, there runs a side street that leads to the war cemetery situated on the southern tip of Bois brûlé.

Visitors reach the narrow gate of the entrance building via stone steps. It is made of reddish Main sandstone, and is covered in sheet copper. On the wall of the commemorative hall it says in large letters:

„Remember the dead! – Change yourself!”

Down two sides, the war cemetery is surrounded by woodland, whilst on the entrance side and in the south east it is bordered by a sandstone wall. The burial ground has been grassed over, with shrubs and small groups of trees

planted along the edges. In the rear third of the elongated stretch of land a 3.50 metre high stone cross rises up. Most of the graves have been identified with small stone plaques, each bearing the names and dates of two war dead. Towards the wooded side of the cemetery, 80 cm high pillars (stele) have been erected, each one bearing the names of four war dead. On 4th July 1964, the war cemetery, where 1,597 war dead from the Second World War now lie, was opened to the public.



Bourdon

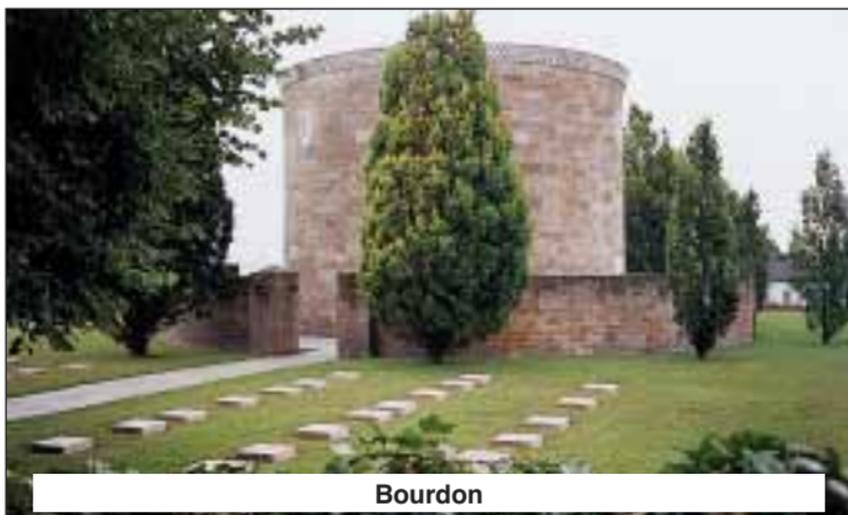
The German war cemetery at Bourdon lies south of the Amiens to Abbéville road, in the Somme valley. On the southern side, it is bordered by the Somme sand flats. The small village of Bourdon lies in the immediate vicinity. The Somme, a previously little known river in northern France, later became synonymous with the First World War. The valley of the Somme became the flashpoint for years of the most violent battles. Place names such as Arras, St. Quentin, Cambrai and Bapaume are sad reminders of this war.

The German campaign on the western front lasted from 10th May to 22nd June 1940, during the course of which the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg and parts of France were occupied. As part of the Franco-German War Graves Agreement, a military cemetery was laid out for all the German war dead lying in temporary graves in the three French Départements of Nord, Pas-de-Calais and Somme.

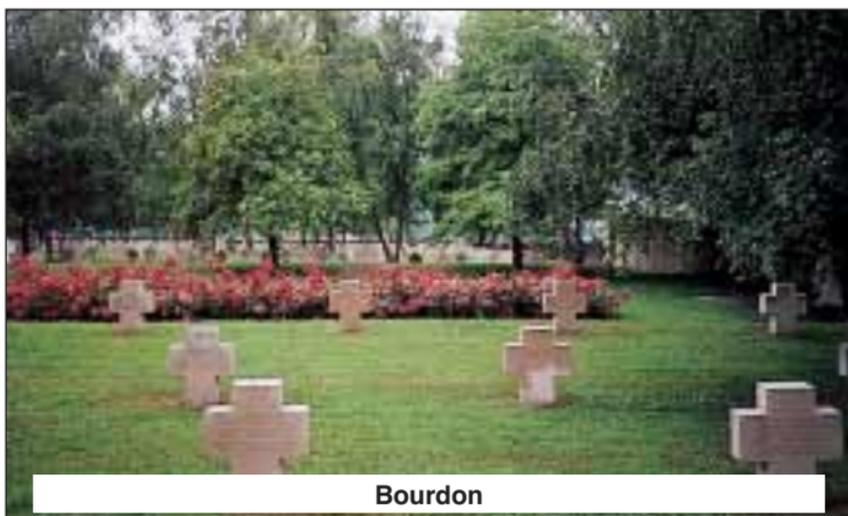
Visitors enter the cemetery grounds via an initial forecourt area, also connected to the car park. Situated in the wing of the entrance building on the left-hand side is the home of the administrator and, in the right-hand wing, the office and the visitors' room, complete with the books of the names of the dead who are buried here. The hall of honour, measuring 12 metres in diameter, is a 10 m high, round structure built from sandstone from the Palatinate region.

The room gets its light from a circular, 60 cm diameter opening in the ceiling of the hall and through six narrow openings in the brickwork. Prof. Gerhard Marcks created the larger-than-life marble sculpture, entitled "Mother". The shape of it reminds visitors of female sculptures made by the ancient Greeks.

The path to the graves leads through the hall's side doors, both of which have copper fittings. Eight communal graves are arranged around the hall. The other communal graves lie behind the hall of honour, in the next section of burial block G. Stone plaques bear the names of the dead who have been identified. A wide, lawned path leads to the 12-metre high wooden cross. The burial ground extends along both sides of the path. For every six graves there is one cross made of French sand-lime brick, each of which bears the name of three war dead on the front and back. Today, the cemetery is home to the graves of 22,216 war dead from the Second World War. On 16th September 1967, the war cemetery was inaugurated.



Bourdon



Fort-de-Malmaison

Right next to Fort-de-Malmaison lies one of the German war cemeteries laid out by the German Wehrmacht in 1941 and extended by the Volksbund. Under the Franco-German war graves agreement, the temporary burial site of Fort-de-Malmaison was designated as the final War cemetery for German war dead of 1939/ 1945. Over 6,800 German war dead from individual graves and smaller burial sites in the six French Departements of Aisne, Loiret, Seine-et-Marne, Oise, Yonne and Aube were transferred here by the Volksbund.

If you approach the war cemetery on the „B” road (Chemin-des-Dames), you will see – even from far away – the 15 m high cast iron cross that, together with the memorial hall, forms the centrepiece of the cemetery. The cemetery is 67,000 square metres in size and is enclosed by an earth wall, densely covered in vegetation, measuring roughly one and a half metres in width and one metre in height.

On the eastern flank, a side road leads to the entrance 200 metres away. From here, visitors go through a narrow gate to a small forecourt area bordering the entrance building. It contains a reception room for visitors, where the books containing the names of the war dead lying here are also located. The entrance building, forecourt area and administrative building are all uniform in their design. From the entrance building, the visitor can look across over the entire cemetery. The large cross and hall of honour dominate the entire cemetery and are situated in the middle of the burial site. The hall is built as a reinforced concrete structure, the corners of which have been finished with natural stone



Fort-de-Malmaison

brickwork. The sloping roof has been planted with grass. In the heart of the open hall lies the communal grave, complete with a bronze plaque. The individual graves are divided into eight plots. Rows of double graves each contain two war dead. Cast-iron crosses each bear the name and dates of two war dead.

On 21st August 1965, the war cemetery, at which 11,841 German war dead from the Second World War now rest, was inaugurated.

Noyers-Pont-Maugis

On the range of hills west of the Maas, the French authorities laid out a German war cemetery in 1922.

In the Second World War in 1940, with the breakthrough through the Ardennes and the Maginot line, violent fighting once more erupted around the Sedan area. The war dead, initially buried by troops at the edge of the road or in temporary cemeteries, were transferred between 1940 and 1942 by the burial service of the German Wehrmacht to a special piece of land next to the First World War cemetery. After the war had ended, a number of French soldiers were also buried here. By the time of the conclusion of the Franco-German war graves agreement in 1954, 4,880 war dead from the Second World War had already been given their final resting place here. Other burials were carried out by the Volksbund.

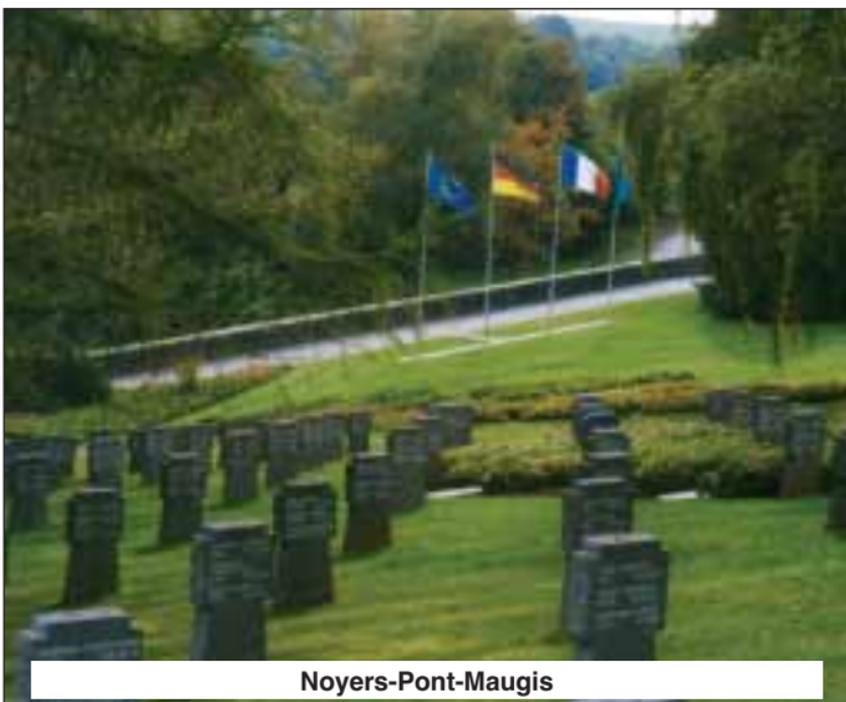
Visitors to the cemetery enter via a wroughtiron entrance gate. Covered steps lead to a lobby area, where the books of the names of the war dead can be found in the visitor section. A guide tells visitors how to find their way around the cemetery plots.

A path slopes up from the entrance building to the memorial hall, a small chapel lined with copper. The interior has been designed as a cross vault and is illuminated by three round windows made of coloured glass. The stature created by Prof. Dr. Kurt Schwippert of a female figure made of shell limestone personifies the mourning for the war dead of both world wars.

The Second World War burial site is divided into eight blocks. On account of the sloping position, the graves are identified in blocks 1 - 4 by grave plaques, laid flat on the ground and each for two war dead. Groups of crosses have been erected in this section. In blocks 5 - 8 and in the First World War burial site, crosses have been used, each bearing the names of four or six soldiers.

The communal grave for the war dead of the Second World War is located beyond the paved walkway. It is home to seven known and 30 unknown dead and is identified by a commemorative stone plaque made of Belgian granite.

On 17th September 1966, the war cemetery was inaugurated. Today, this is where around 14,055 war dead from the First and 12,788 Second World War lie.



Noyers-Pont-Maugis

Solers

The war cemetery is about 20 miles south-east of Paris. The 1st American army laid out a temporary war cemetery here in 1944.

Whilst the American dead were transferred in 1948 to the military cemetery of Epinal, the German graves remained under French management. Reburials from the surrounding area, but also from Troyes and Chartres, were carried out. As a result, the German war dead from the fighting in June 1940 in the area of Marne were transferred to Solers.

A paved walkway takes visitors through a gate into the entrance hall. It is deliberately designed to be very simple – the walls in rough cut stone have no other signs of decoration on them. A special effect is created by the reinforced glass windows that take up the whole wall: a mosaic-like representation of the „Resurrection” made of thick, strong coloured and dark glass.

From here, the whole site of the cemetery opens up, complete with burial sites and the large cross. The graves have been identified by stele (pillars) made of shell limestone, on both sides of which the names of the war dead are inscribed. A wall made of rough, undressed stone surrounds the entire cemetery, apart from a 24-metre wide opening behind the group of tall crosses, through which it



Solers

is possible to look onto the surrounding countryside. The three tall crosses have each been worked from five basalt blocks. Behind the group of tall crosses, in the middle of a large lawned area, there lies the comrades' grave. Home to 53 war dead, 40 of whom are unknown. The war cemetery, inaugurated on 28th July 1962, is currently home to bodies of 2,228 German war dead from Second World War.

The German military cemetery in Versailles

The military cemetery for the German war dead in Versailles is situated in the municipal cemetery of „Les Gonards“. It is joined to a larger site for allied soldiers and French war dead from the First World War and the victims of wartime bombing in the Second World War.

Even during the First World War, 37 German soldiers were interred here, having died in French war prisons. In February 1942, the burial service of the German Wehrmacht added more bodies who had fallen around Paris during the campaign for France in 1940. A second German



Versailles

burial site from 1944 was closed by the French in 1946. The dead were also given new graves at this site. In total to date, 534 war dead have been laid to rest here. The section of the cemetery was overhauled in 1957 by the Volksbund. For every four war dead, a joint grave stone was erected, on the back and front of which the names of two war dead are listed.

At the old municipal cemeteries of Notre Dame and St. Louis in Versailles, closed to further burials, there are also German/French burial sites dating back to the 1870/71 Franco-Prussian War. Those who lie here died during the siege of Paris in the German military hospital, housed in a side wing of the palace.

War cemeteries of other nations

During the battles of the First and Second World War in France, soldiers from many nations lost their lives. As well as British and American war cemeteries there are cemeteries for Canadians, Australians, Poles, Russians, Czechs, Italians, Portuguese and Danes; two fine examples are worth a mention: the top picture shows the Vimy Memorial – a monument to 11,184 Canadians killed north of Arras, whilst the bottom picture shows the British cemetery at Villers-Bretoneux/Somme in Amiens, laid out for Australian war dead.



Villers-Bretoneux/Somme



Vimy Memorial

The German War Graves Commission ...

- ... cares for the German war graves here in France and nearly 100 countries all over the world.
- ... helps the next of kin in finding out about their relatives' fate and searches for their graves.
- ... works in the Eastern European countries since 1990 when the borders were opened.
- ... finds the war dead and brings them to central cemeteries.
- ... advocates through its work understanding and reconciliation with former enemies.
- ... leads young people to war graves in order to make them understand the terrible consequences of war such recognizing how important it is to work for peace.
- ... finances its work almost exclusively with contributions of its members and donors and would be very grateful for YOUR help.

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