

“‘On the Sacred Soil’: Remembering June 1918 and the U.S. Marines who fought in France”

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## **Introduction**

On November 18, 1955, General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., the 20<sup>th</sup> Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps, unveiled the Belleau Wood Memorial Monument in the French forest where he had fought as a young Marine in 1918. Shepherd, who was wounded three times in the First World War, had also fought in the Second World War and the Korean War. He understood the cost of war intimately. Shepherd observed on that November day,

It is with mixed emotion that I return today to this historic landmark, to join with all of you in paying tribute to the Marines who fought so successfully in the crucial battle that made the name Belleau Wood famous the world over. . . . Names and faces of many of my friends remain clear in my mind. I would like to feel that they are with us in spirit today as we dedicate this Memorial which will stand as a lasting reminder of their sacred memory.<sup>1</sup>

Shepherd’s concern for remembering and memorializing the marines who fought and died at Belleau Wood was rooted in his own pilgrimage experience. Two years prior he had visited the famed battlefield and, as he recalled, “was distressed to note that no marker existed to tell to future generations of French and American visitors the story of this battle.”<sup>2</sup> The battle of Belleau Wood was the first great trial of American Expeditionary Forces (A.E.F.) in the First World War and forced Americans to find new language, concepts, and symbols from which to

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The author would like to thank the staff and archivists at the Command Museum Archives, Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego, CA, and the History Division and Marine Corps Archives, Quantico, VA, for their assistance. Furthermore, the author is deeply appreciative of a research grant awarded by the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation, which funded part of this project.

<sup>1</sup> “Remarks By General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., USMC, at Unveiling of Belleau Wood Memorial Plaque 18 November, 1955,” Marine Corps Archive, Quantico, VA, 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

understand themselves.<sup>3</sup> Ideas for remembering this battle were profoundly shaped by French adulation that legitimized a new collective memory for Americans and the Marine Corps. Even today, if there is one single collective memory that survives from the First World War in American culture, it is most likely the Battle of Belleau Wood.<sup>4</sup> This paper will explore how French and Americans came to remember and continue to memorialize the sacred sacrifice associated with Belleau Wood.

### **I. “Undying Fame”**

The battle for Belleau Wood began at 1700 on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June as the 5th and 6th Marine regiments along with the 6th Marine Machine Gun Battalion, who collectively made up the 4th Marine Brigade (part of the U.S. Army’s 2d Division), spent most of the rest of the month in ferocious, hand-to-hand fighting to clear the wood of Germans and advance Allied lines. Through their sacrifice to liberate Belleau Wood they “won undying fame,” as one of the 2d Division histories published soon after the armistice would claim.<sup>5</sup> Marine Brigadier General Edwin Simmons described Belleau Wood “as one of the greatest battles of the twentieth century for the U.S. Marines, a touchstone that compares with Iwo Jima in 1945 and the Chosin Reservoir in 1950.”<sup>6</sup> Historian Michael Miller offers a similar interpretation when he writes, “the battle of Belleau Wood remains a central icon of the U.S. Marine Corps and represents the finest

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<sup>3</sup> Lisa M. Budreau, *Bodies of War: World War I and the Politics of Commemoration in America, 1919-1933* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Miller, “Bayonets, Blood, and Beyond: A Single Day of Combat for a Marine Corps Rifle Company,” in *Unknown Soldiers: The American Expeditionary Forces in Memory and Remembrance*, edited by Mark A. Snell (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 2008), 83.

<sup>5</sup> *The Second Division: American Expeditionary Forces, 1917-1919* (Newied am Rhein, Germany: n.p., 1919), 7.

<sup>6</sup> Edwin Howard Simmons and Joseph H. Alexander, *Through the Wheat: The U.S. Marines in World War I* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 100.

traditions of one of the world's elite combat forces.”<sup>7</sup> Simply put, the Marines who fought and died to take the wood became part of one of the most powerful collective memories of the First World War.

## **II. American Memory and the “Devil Dogs”**

*Bois de Belleau*, roughly a mile in length, was a snarl of tangled underbrush, boulder strewn, and thick with trees that took away any advantage of the long-distance shooting skills that the marines prided themselves on possessing. Inside this old hunting preserve, fighting would be conducted over short distances, sometimes down to a few yards, using artillery bombardment, mortars, gas, machine guns, rifles, grenades, pistols, bayonets, and even rifle butts, knives, and fists were weapons of last resort. The marines were on the offensive and the Germans entrenched themselves in a rugged landscape that gave the defenders a significant tactical advantage where they could set up interlocking fields of fire for their machine guns. What the Germans did not count on was the fury marines brought to the fight. German Lieutenant von Buy, an intelligence officer tasked with reporting on the capabilities of the 2d Division, noted “the various attacks by both of the Marine regiments were carried out with vigor and regardless of losses. The moral effect of our firearms did not materially check the advance of the infantry. The nerves of the Americans are still unshaken. . . . The personnel may be considered excellent.”<sup>8</sup>

As the fighting in the Chateau-Thierry sector was beginning in early June, Floyd Gibbons, a war correspondent with the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, was approved to go to the front

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<sup>7</sup> Miller, “Bayonets, Blood, and Beyond,” 83.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Edward G. Lengel, *Thunder and Flames: Americans in the Crucible of Combat, 1917-1918* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 2015), 176.

so he could write first-hand combat accounts for readers back home. Gibbons, who favored the dramatic over the factual in his reporting style, was embedded with the marines, as they tried to advance into Belleau Wood under savage machine gun fire. It was Gibbons who reported that Gunnery Sergeant Dan Daly, a two-time Medal of Honor recipient, got the Marines from the 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment<sup>9</sup> moving again across the machine gun swept wheat field toward Belleau Wood shouting, “Come on you poor [sons of bitches]! Do you want to live forever?”<sup>10</sup> Gibbons, who was horribly wounded in the melee, had his dispatch from the previous day approved by the A.E.F. censor in Paris because the censor believed that this report was the correspondent’s dying message from the front. The censor failed to redact that Gibbons was with the U.S. Marines, something that normally would not have been made public. This simple oversight, combined with the lack of information about any other American military units involved in the fight, provided desperate readers on the home front unusual information that led to an avalanche of publicity for the Marine Corps.

Back in the United States, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* published the headline, “U.S. Marines Smash Huns” on June 6 and *The Boston Evening Globe* headlined the June 7 newspaper with, “U.S. Marines Whip Germans.” From there, newspapers around the country recounted the exploits of the U.S. Marines as if the U.S. Army was not even involved in the fight at Belleau Wood, much less the broader Chateau-Thierry sector. By the second half of June, American newspapers were publishing articles with titles like “Yankee ‘Devil Dogs’ Give Huns Taste of

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<sup>9</sup> J. Wayne Hill, “A Regiment Like No Other: The 6th Marine Regiment at Belleau Wood” (M.A. thesis, U.S. Army Command and Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, 2012), 57-58.

<sup>10</sup> Floyd Gibbons, “Devil Dogs,” *Country Life* 35 (December 1918), 29. Some question Gibbons’ assertion that it was Daly who shouted these famous words as Gibbons was already severely wounded (shot through the body and the left eye) when this call to move forward to escape the murderous German fire was made. Simmons, *Through the Wheat*, 107.

What's Coming to 'Em."<sup>11</sup> Many in the U.S. Army would never forgive this slight and blamed the Marine Corps for not setting the record straight.<sup>12</sup>

As news of the marines success began to dominate news coverage in June 1918 another misconception began that forever added to the lore of the Marine Corps. The marines fighting in June received their fabled nickname, "Devil Dogs," from the German term, "Teufel Hunden," which was supposedly what German soldiers called the marines during the battle of Belleau Wood. The only problem for this claim was that the term "Devil Dog" appeared in American newspapers in April 1918, well before the battle for Belleau Wood even commenced.<sup>13</sup> It appears that the new nickname was not widely known or used by American newspapers before June and became wrongly associated with the battle of Belleau Wood. Regardless of the mix-up,

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<sup>11</sup> "Yankee 'Devil Dogs' Give Huns Taste of What's Coming to 'Em," *The Charlotte Observer* (Charlotte, NC), June 23, 1918, 9.

<sup>12</sup> In the months and years that followed, several Army generals tried to undo the naming of Belleau Wood after the Marines and believed the Marines should never have been given credit for their exploits in the war. This resentment never quite faded and the by late-1920s Major Dwight D. Eisenhower, who was responsible for the organization and writing of the American Battle Monuments Commission's *A Guide to the American Battle Fields in Europe* made the almost complete absence of the Marine Brigade obvious by including few references to the U.S. Marines and instead preferring the nomenclature "the 2d Division" to avoid drawing more attention to their feats. Even the dead marines buried at the foot of Belleau Wood in the Aisne-Marne American Cemetery were not singled out but were referenced simply as "the majority of those who died in battle and are buried here are from units that fought in the immediate vicinity and along the Marne River." For some in the U.S. Army, the recognition of the Marines was too much, even if their dead filled the cemetery and legitimized the sacrifices that brought them acclaim. Robert B. Asprey, *At Belleau Wood* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 1996), 345. Steven Trout, *On the Battlefield of Memory: The First World War and American Remembrance, 1919-1941* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), xv-xix. American Battle Monuments Commission, *A Guide to the American Battle Fields in Europe* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1927), 22, 35, 38, 251. Even the commander of the A.E.F., General John Pershing, in his published memoirs of the war stated that the only "brilliantly executed operation" during the period from June 6 to July 8 was the capture of the village of Vaux by the Army's 3d Infantry Brigade, the other half of the 2d Division. John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the First World War*, new foreword by Frank E. Vandiver (1931; New York: Da Capo, 1995), 90. For further evidence of tensions see, Letter from Elizabeth V. R. Frazer to Captain Charles Dunbeck, July 20, 1927, Marine Corps Archives, Quantico, VA.

<sup>13</sup> "Marines Get New Nickname, The Boches Call Them the 'Devil Dogs,'" *Manhattan Mercury* (KS), April 16, 1918, 2; also see "Huns Call Marines Teufel Hunden or Better, 'Devil Dogs,'" *Newark Advocate* (OH), April 27, 1918.

Americans were now convinced that the Marine Corps and the battle for this significance piece of French territory were crucial for understanding America's role in the war and the world.

### **III. "French Honor Marines"**

In August of 1918, the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, arrived in Europe to evaluate the American war effort. Roosevelt, who was desperate to serve in the military during the war,<sup>14</sup> seized the opportunity to visit the frontlines as the Assistant Secretary and knew exactly what he wanted to see and who he wanted to meet. He traversed the battlefields at Chateau-Thierry, Belleau Wood, and Verdun.<sup>15</sup> Roosevelt also sent a cable back to the United States that was published under the title, "French Honor Marines," in which he wrote,

Have returned to Paris from a visit to the Marine Brigade. American and French commanders are equally enthusiastic over their magnificent showing. Have also visited Belleau Wood, a most difficult position which the Marines held against picked German troops, and finally cleared. The wood has been renamed Bois de la Brigade de Marines on French maps.<sup>16</sup>

Roosevelt's desire to see firsthand the most famous battlefield for Americans in the First World War revealed how deeply the newspaper coverage from June had affected the nation and illustrates the power of print to create a collective memory associated with troops in combat. This new American memory, for Roosevelt and the American public, was further legitimized by

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<sup>14</sup> Roosevelt never gave up on his desire to be recognized for serving during the First World War. In 1921, when a war memorial was being planned for Groton, he argued "though I did not serve in uniform, I believe that my name should go in the first division of those who were 'in the service,' especially as I saw service on the other side, was missed by torpedoes and shell, and had actual command over 'material' navy matters in Europe while I was there." Quoted in Graham Cross, *The Diplomatic Education of Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1882-1933* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: A Political Life* (New York: Viking, 2017), 68.

<sup>16</sup> "French Honor Marines: Belleau Wood Renamed for Devil Dogs, Cables Roosevelt," *The Washington Herald* (D.C), August 11, 1918, 1.

the French who not only praised the marines but renamed the very ground on which the marines fought against the Germans in honor of their fortitude and bravery.<sup>17</sup>

Because the vicious fight for Belleau Wood continued for weeks, the 4th Marine Brigade was awarded a series of unit and individual awards from the French that distinguished them from their Army counterparts.<sup>18</sup> Between June and November 1918, the 4th Marine Brigade had the distinction of receiving three French regimental awards of the *Croix de Guerre*, the only A.E.F. unit to receive such recognition from the French during the war.<sup>19</sup> French military commanders, French politicians, French artists, and French writers also recognized the significance of what occurred at Belleau Wood and the marines garnered accolades as elite troops who stunned and then beat back the German army. In the French weekly, *L'Illustrated* an article explained who the U.S. Marines were and noted that, "If you see on the collar of an American soldier . . . the insignia of the globe and anchor, surmounted by a spread eagle, you may give that soldier a particularly deferential and feeling glance. He belongs to a heroic brigade: he is a 'Marine.'"<sup>20</sup> Accompanying the article was an illustration by French artist Georges Scott who attempted to capture the valor of the marines in the wood for French readers. The artwork subsequently appeared in *The Illustrated London News* where the caption highlighted the superiority of the Americans to the Germans in combat and reminded readers that the U.S. Marines had "fought side by side with British Marines, under an American officer, at the defence of Peking."<sup>21</sup> Soon

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<sup>17</sup> General Jean-Marie Degoutte, commander of the French Sixth Army, sent down a special order on June 30 that renamed Belleau Wood the *Bois de la Brigade de Marine* in tribute to the courage and tenacity of the Marines. George B. Clark, *Devil Dogs: Fighting Marines of World War I* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1999), 205.

<sup>18</sup> The March 1919 issue of *Everybody's Magazine* has published on the back page a full-color illustrated copy of one of the French *Croix de Guerre*'s awarded to the entire Fourth Brigade.

<sup>19</sup> To this day 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiments wear the *fourragère* in recognition of this honor.

<sup>20</sup> "La Brigade Marine Americaine au Bois de Belleau," *L'Illustration*, August 31, 1918.

<sup>21</sup> "American Cold Steel for Germans in France: United States Marines Rout the Enemy with the Bayonet," *The Illustrated London News*, September 28, 1918, 368-369.

the illustration was appearing in newspapers across America where captions proclaimed, “French Artist Depicts Victory of American Marines in Belleau Wood.”<sup>22</sup>

The gratefulness of the French for America’s marines was most obvious on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July in 1918. The day was celebrated as a French holiday and the French President, Raymond Poincarè, exchanged telegrams with President Wilson affirming their common fidelity to the cause of liberty. In French countryside, American military leaders and French leaders celebrated their relationship at the grave of Count de Rochambeau, the commander who led French soldiers in the American War of Independence. In Paris, French adoration for what the marines (and soldiers) in the Chateau-Thierry sector had done was unusual even for the French. Marines who had been pulled from the frontlines were paraded through the streets of Paris,<sup>23</sup> and *The Washington Post* reported, “flags hung from every window in honor of the Fourth of July, something which the city has not done in honor of any victory of the war, not even for that of the Marne.”<sup>24</sup> Throughout the rest of the war and into the 1920s Americans were regularly reminded by a stream of publications and public events that the French were as impressed with their marines as they were. French recognition of America’s military successes became crucial for establishing a new collective memory among ordinary Americans about the ability of their men to fight against overwhelming odds for the cause of liberty and, of course, to save Paris.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> “French Artist Depicts Victory of American Marines in Belleau Wood,” *The Lake County Times* (Hammond, IN), September 30, 1918, 7; “French Artist Depicts Victory of American Marines in Belleau Wood,” *Montgomery Times* (AL), October 10, 1918, 5; “French Artist Depicts Victory of American Marines in Belleau Wood,” *The Topeka State Journal* (KS), October 19, 1918, 13; “Marine Heroism that Turned Foe Told by Secretary,” *The Chicago Sunday Tribune*, December 15, 1918, 8.

<sup>23</sup> Simmons, *Through the Wheat*, 123-124.

<sup>24</sup> “July 4 French Holiday,” *The Washington Post* (D.C.), July 4, 1918, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Elements of the Army’s 3d Division and the rest of the 2d Division, which comprised the 3d Infantry Brigade and the 2d Army Engineer Battalion, also fought in and around Belleau Wood and helped subdue French fears that Paris would soon be captured by the Germans. “Americans Help to Stem German Drive on Paris,” *The Stars and Stripes*, June 7, 1918, 1; also see, *Diary of Fourth Brigade, Marine Corps, AM. E. F., May 30, 1918 to June 30, 1918*, Marine Corps Archives, Quantico, VA.

#### **IV. “On the Sacred Soil”**

In the March 8, 1919, issue of *Leslie’s Weekly*, a popular periodical of the time, Leila Montague Barnett, wife of Major-General George Barnett, Commandant of the Marine Corps, wrote an article entitled, “Over Our Hallowed Battlefields in France.” In the article she described her journey to France in November 1918 to visit her husband sick from influenza and pneumonia in a hospital in Paris.<sup>26</sup> By the time she arrived, the general was well on his way to full recovery and her services as his nurse and doting wife were not needed. At that point she was afforded the privilege that only the Commandant’s wife could have had, a personal tour of the battlefields where the 4th Marine Brigade had distinguished itself.

Accompanied by those who participated in the fighting firsthand, including a Marine Captain who was a veteran of Belleau Wood, she walked the scarred landscape and provided a female witness to the bravery and sacrifice of the marines and soldiers for their wives, their sisters and, most importantly, their mothers back home. She recounted stories of her interactions with French women who wished the marines had joined the war sooner so that they could have saved their homes from destruction by the Germans. She also reminded readers of the horribly wounded men she visited in the hospitals. Yet, her most moving words detailed her visit to Belleau Wood where she recovered a couple of items from a hasty battlefield grave that had recently had its occupant exhumed for proper burial. She explained for readers, “I looked down into it and saw a letter and a Bible, the last earthly remains of the brave lad who had died for Liberty, and I thought of the mother somewhere overseas who so proudly gave her boy up for the glory of humanity.”<sup>27</sup> Moved by the “battered” condition of the items, she contemplated the

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<sup>26</sup> Leila Montague Barnett, “Over Our Hallowed Battlefields in France,” *Leslie’s Weekly* (March 8, 1919), 336.

<sup>27</sup> Barnett, “Over Our Hallowed Battlefields in France,” 336.

grave of an American fighting man who bled, died, and was buried in Belleau Wood. The Bible and letter as objects of love and devotion helped her explain the selfless sacrifice of a son for something greater than the bonds of a mother's love.<sup>28</sup>

Leila Barnett's pilgrimage tapped into a deep desire for what Americans longed to do. Although Americans had an immense literature they could read regarding the triumph of the marines and the moral superiority of the American troops over the defeated Germans, many wished to visit the battlefields and the graves of loved ones in France.<sup>29</sup> In 1921, American members of the Rotary Club gathered for their international convention in Edinburgh, Scotland, and then proceeded across the English Channel to France as part of a larger pilgrimage to visit the place where the Americans fought at Belleau Wood.<sup>30</sup> The American Rotarians, accompanied by a caravan of Rotarians from Paris, arrived at the small village of Belleau on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Belleau, Belleau Wood, and Aisne-Marne Cemetery had already become pilgrimage sites for dignitaries, veterans, and kin who hoped to see where loved ones were buried. As the townsfolk greeted them, the mayor of the small village thanked them in a language few could understand. The American guests soon stood in awe of Belleau Wood, and they were sobered by their memory of what had happened there.<sup>31</sup> When the president of the Paris Rotary Club, M. Gabriel Gorce, spoke he moved the Americans with the depth of his short speech. "You are on the sacred

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> The following is a small sample of the vast literature that soon appeared detailing the exploits of the marines in the First World War: John W. Thomason, Jr. *Fix Bayonets!* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926); Ray P. Antrim, *Where the Marines Fought in France* (Chicago: Park and Antrim, n.d.); Otto H. Kahn, "When the Tide Turned: The American Attack at Chateau Thierry and Belleau Wood in the First Week of June, 1918" (Boston: Boston Athletic Association, 1918); Edwin N. McClellan, *The United States Marines Corps in the World War* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1920).

<sup>30</sup> Roger H. Motten, "Impressions of the Convention," *The Rotarian* XIX, no. 3 (September 1921): 152-155, 199.

<sup>31</sup> Taylor Erin Gauthier, "The Pilgrimage to Belleau," *The Rotarian* XIX, no. 4 (October 1921): 219-220.

soil where, close to the battlefields where they fell, the children of America sleep their last sleep,” he affirmed. He went on to explain, “No country practices to such an extent as France the cult of remembrance. We cannot think that nothing remains of those who sacrificed themselves for us. They are no longer in the flesh, but by our decimated hearths they live yet, they are ever present to our eyes. They live at our side.” Gorce went on to proclaim that they “have given their lives for the ideals of Justice and Liberty. When we think of them, we understand better the meaning of the celebrated words: ‘Humanity is composed more of the dead than the living.’”<sup>32</sup> It should come as no surprise that a Frenchman could illuminate the civil religious foundation on which the Americans visitors could reconcile Liberty, death, and the bodies of American troops buried on foreign soil.<sup>33</sup> In a nation defined by the cult of memorialization, Americans were indeed worthy recipients of France’s deepest thanks for this tangible sacrifice. In the years that followed, American Legion members,<sup>34</sup> Gold Star mothers, and ordinary Americans drawn to the historic battle came to remember, commemorate, and mourn what had happened at Belleau Wood.<sup>35</sup> In April of 1922 a fundraising drive was held to raise \$300,000 for an “all-American shrine” in France, which simply meant rebuilding the village of Belleau and restoring some of the brokenness caused by war.<sup>36</sup> The following year Belleau Wood was purchased by the Belleau Wood Memorial Association to ensure that the battlefield was maintained as a permanent memorial to the marines and soldiers who fought and died there.

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<sup>32</sup> Motten, “Impressions of the Convention,” 155.

<sup>33</sup> Repatriation of bodies of the American dead was a major issue in the post-war years, see Budreau, *Bodies of War*, 13-26.

<sup>34</sup> Letter from Captain Charles Dunbeck to Major J. C. Fegan, September 10, 1927, Belleau Wood File, Marine Corps Archives, Quantico, VA.

<sup>35</sup> Budreau, *Bodies of War*, 236-241.

<sup>36</sup> “School Children to Aid Shrine Fund, Penny Contributions on April 6 Will Help to Rebuild Belleau in France, *The Tennessean* (Nashville, TN), April 4, 1922, 4.

## Conclusion

One of the more curious letters housed in the Command Museum Archives at Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego, is a reflection on Chateau-Thierry sector written in the aftermath of the battle in late June or early July 1918 by an unnamed author. The letter states

On the road out of Chateau-Thierry . . . there's an acre of crude little crosses where we buried young Sgt. Monroe with a crowd of his "comrade crusaders" who's name we may never quite know. Someday that road will be teaming [*sic*] with pilgrims who venture to go to "humanity's holy of holies," on the road by the "Bois de Belleau." Some will be looking for Brothers, others for Fathers or Sons, many for husband or sweet-hearts, or comrades who stayed by the guns. God grant that they come in the sunshine while spring flowers boom on their graves, and may they be proud of our comrades and glad of the gift that they gave.<sup>37</sup>

This recognition of the battlefield as a future site of pilgrimage for loved ones and a grateful nation was prophetic. In this 100<sup>th</sup> year of remembering the end of the First World War many conferences, tours, and other events have been held to reflect on the causes and the effects of the war. War is, at best, coordinated chaos mired in incoherence. To make sense of the randomness of death, the living must make sacred the memory and places of those sacrificed in battle. This remembering is part the complicated nature of collective memory where the dead, the recollection of those who lived, and the desire to make both a permanent part of a national story are essential for making meaning. Out of a terrible reality that cannot simply be forgotten, battlefields become places of memory that are sacred for the nation and remain so for future generations that choose to remember.

This past year when the French president, Emmanuel Macron, visited President Trump he brought an oak sapling that he and the American president jointly planted in the White House

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<sup>37</sup> Letter about Chateau Thierry, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Marines, June 1<sup>st</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> 1918, Command Museum, MCRD San Diego, CA.

garden—the tree was from Belleau Wood.<sup>38</sup> To ensure no one missed the significance of the ceremony, President Macron Tweeted, “The tree from the Belleau Wood grew from the earth where the blood of your soldiers was spilled to defend France.”<sup>39</sup> Even today, Belleau Wood and Aisne-Marne Cemetery remain a crucial part of American civil religion, a site of memory and pilgrimage for the Marine Corps, and a sacred landscape purchased from the people of France in both blood and treasure for the people of the United States.<sup>40</sup> As sacred places, Belleau Wood and the cemetery that sits below the former battlefield enables the nation to remember the dead and to recognize the bravery of citizens, whether soldiers, sailors, or marines, who sacrificed their lives for “Liberty.” Such memory making was vital for Americans during the First World War and remains the only promise that can be made to those who give up their lives in service to the nation today.

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<sup>38</sup> Andrea Scott, “French President, Trump Plant Oak Sapling from Belleau Wood in White House Garden,” *Marine Corps Times* (April 24, 2018), <https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2018/04/24/french-president-trump-plant-oak-sapling-from-belleau-wood-in-white-house-garden/>

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> “Address of Major General James G. Harbord, U.S. Army, Dedication of ‘Belleau Wood,’ July 22, 1923,” Marine Corps Archives, Quantico, VA.