

UNITED STATES WAR DEAD REACH FRANCE FROM CHANNEL ISLANDS



HEADQUARTERS  
AMERICAN GRAVES REGISTRATION COMMAND  
Public Relations Office

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CHERBOURG, FRANCE, 15 June 1946 -- To the accompaniment of impressive ceremonies held on the British Channel Island of Jersey and at the French Naval Arsenal of Cherbourg, where they were received, the remains of 17 U.S. servicemen who lost their lives in World War II were removed from the English Islands of Guernsey, Jersey, and Alderney in the English Channel to France for reburial in the United States Military Cemetery of Blosville, located 20 miles north of St. Lo, France, on the Cotentin Peninsula.

Thirteen of the men had washed ashore after their deaths upon the Island of Jersey, three upon the Island of Guernsey, and one upon the Island of Alderney in the English Channel. All had been buried, their graves carefully marked and cared for, by the Islanders. Evacuation and disinterment to a U.S. Military Cemetery upon the mainland of France was a part of the program, responsibility for which is charged to the American Graves Registration Command, by which the remains of all United States War dead of World War II who lost their lives in the European Theater are being collected into established temporary military cemeteries.

The ceremonies at the Island of Jersey in which His Excellency, the British Lieutenant Governor of the Channel Islands turned over the American dead to Colonel George W. Power, Commanding the 531st Quartermaster Group of the American Graves Registration



Command, and the ceremonies at Cherbourg, held by the French Navy, in which the casketed remains were received from the decks of the French Destroyer "Alycon" were perhaps the first ceremonies of their kind held in the aftermath of World War II. The French Navy not only provided valuable assistance to the American Graves Registration Command throughout the operation but, of itself, arranged and held the ceremonies in which the bodies of the men were received at the Cherbourg Naval Arsenal.

The French Navy furnished motor torpedo boats for transportation of officers, enlisted men, and equipment of the American Graves Registration Command to the Islands, and the submarine chaser Chasseur 125 upon which the wooden United Kingdom type caskets were removed from the shallow-watered Jersey Island port for sea transfer to the decks of the 110 metre 1500-ton French Destroyer "Alycon".

Ceremonies at Cherbourg were held in a steady misting rain which, together with numerous postponements of the time of arrival of the "Alycon", forced abandonment of the ceremonies originally planned and confined them to the military ceremonies felt by the few who braved the day-long drenching rain to be more impressive, more simply befitting the occasion. Hundreds of civilians who had gathered at the Arsenal earlier in the day were driven away by the steady rain.

As the last and final radioed time of arrival from the "Alycon" drew near, three companies of French marines, one each from the battleship "Richelieu" and the light cruisers Le Malin



and Marceau, together with a 30-man firing squad and a 6-man detachment of buglers, formed three sides of a long, rectangular cordon about and facing the Quai Sane at which the Alycon was to dock. The official party formed in the center of the cordon of Marines.

Promptly at 1730 hours, the dim gray hulk of the destroyer became visible through the heavy gray-green mist, ghosting between the breakwaters into the slip, the flag of France at half-mast a fluttering wraith above her decks.

Seamen of the French cargo ship "Pomerol of Le Havre", docked in the same slip, spontaneously leaped to run the Pomerol's flag to half mast and uncovered as they stood at the stern rails of the cargo vessel to watch the destroyer dock.

The Alycon swung sharply sidewise to the quai, and the red, white and blue of the flag-draped caskets lined upon her decks became visible. Instantly, the detachment of French buglers sounded the French call to attention, "Garde a vous", and the ranks of the marine cordon stiffened. French commands cut through the rainsoaked air and the long ranks of marines came to the French Present Arms -- a more formal version of the United States Army's rifle salute -- the swords of the marine officers flashing to the Present.

On board the Alycon, the French Marine Guard of Honor were at The Present, and the Guard of Honor of American GI's -- men who had dug in the sands and clay of the Channel Islands to disinter these comrades of theirs -- stood at the salute.



The rigid salute was held until the destroyer was alongside the wharf itself and its hawsers had been cast ashore.

A small knot of miscellaneous American GI's from the American Graves Registration Command and Western Base Section's Cherbourg's contingent, who had stayed throughout the hours of rain and the repeated postponements of the destroyer's arrival, drew together of themselves into an unconscious formation of their own.

As French sailors hauled on the heavy hawsers of the destroyer two huge mobile cranes clanked about on heavy tractor treads seeking proper position for the lifting of the caskets. French sailors of the Alycon sprang to the row of simple wooden caskets with the rain-drenched American flags covering them, a wreath of flowers, gift to these dead of the organizations and people of the Island of Jersey upon each casket, and began swiftly to rope each casket with double loops about each end, the rope itself making the sling into which the hook of the crane would reach.

One of the big mobile cranes swung its housing in a half-circle so that the arms of the two cranes reached in toward each other.

Two olive green 2.1/2 Ton American trucks rolled quietly into position upon the quai. The French sailors of the Alycon secured the ropes of two caskets to the cables of the cranes. The steel cables of one of the cranes tightened. The first casket, still bearing its wreath of flowers and the American flag, swung into the air, and-- high, mysterious, echoing as it rose and fell, swelled and diminished, -- there rose into the water-soaked air the shrill piercing, gurgling, wailing notes of the bosun's whistle



as the French Navy piped over the rails of its warship the military dead of the United States. As the sound of the bosun's whistle, the detachment of French marines aboard the Alycon came to an instant and rigid Present Arms, and the small body of American G.I.'s from the 6823rd Composite Graves Registration Company aboard the Alycon snapped into a salute that could come only from the hearts of soldiers whose hands had encradled soldier dead.

Over and over, each time the casket of an American leaped upward in the hoists and swung in the air, the shrill call of the bosun's whistle wailed through the air; each time the squad of marines and the group of American GIs aboard the Alycon came to The Present and held it until the casket was over the rails. As each pair of trucks was loaded -- three caskets to a truck in order that no casket should rest upon another -- the trucks moved forward and two more trucks moved into position.

At the far end of the Quai Sane the 2/1/2 ton trucks halted in formation of two's. Chaplain (Lieutenant) Charles Williams, of the American Graves Registration Command's Sector V, read a Prayer for the Dead. As the Prayer ended, the sharp ringing tones of the French Bugle Call that is to France as Taps is to the United States -- Sonnerie Aux Morts (Call to the Dead) -- rang across the wharves.

Captain de Corvette Vigneau, Commanding the troops, brought his marines again to the present arms they were to hold until the last of three volleys from the 30-man firing squad -- smacking



into the heavy air -- rolled over the wharves and marines, and the trucks where the flag-draped caskets waited.

With the precision of regular troops, as the trucks formed in single file, French marines moved to place a complete cordon about the trucks as an escort of honor to accompany them through the gates of the Arsenal.

The French bugle detachment moved to the head of the procession to be followed by an advance guard of marines with carbine at shoulder arms. Along each side of the line of trucks, marines formed in file, carbines at armes a bas, muzzles to the ground, butt between shoulder and arm, bolts down. To the rear of the trucks a third detachment of Marines formed. The Official Party moved into place behind the rear guard of Marines.

Slowly the cortege moved to the high heavy inner gates of the arsenal and through them into the large square beyond. In the square the trucks halted as the buglers and the advance and rear guard fell out to right and left to form again the respective companies from the warships of France. The Official Party marched into position to one side but near the head of the column.

The jeep of Lt. Harcourt Newman, in charge of the convoy, very small and lonely in the huge square, moved to the head of the procession of trucks, and slowly headed toward the outer exit of the square. The bugles of France slashed through the air in the call to Attention, Captain Corvette Vigneau's voice cut through the square, the carbines and swords of the Marines leaped to Present Arms, and the Official Party came to the salute.



Slowly the leading 2.1/2 ton truck moved off behind the Lieutenant's jeep, each truck in its turn waiting to gain its convoy distance.

The little islands of Guernsey, Jersey and Alderney, in the English Channel, had given up their sea-bourne dead of America for a long sporadic trip by truck, by train, by ship, to the States from which they had come.

Included in the Official Party at Cherbourg Arsenal were Capitaine de Vaisseau Emmanuelle, Prefet Maritime of Cherbourg, Capitaine de Vaisseau Mando, Major General of the Cherbourg Arsenal, Capitaine de Vaisseau Arden, Che d'Etat Major of the Cherbourg Arsenal and Capitaine de Gendarmerie, Monsieur Daniel, a representative of the Sous-Prefet of the Department of Manche, and of the United States Army, Colonel George S. Weare, Commanding Officer of the American Graves Registration Command's 2nd Field Command, and Lt. Col. Daniel A. Ramney, Commanding Officer of the American Graves Registration Command, Sector V. Aboard the Alycon the ranking United States Officer was Lt. Colonel George W. Power, Commanding Officer of the 531st Quartermaster Group in charge of the Islands operation.

Admiral Jordan, in command of the Arsenal of Cherbourg was ill and unable to attend.

The destroyer Alycon carries a complement of 100 men and was named for a famous French writer of sea stories. The light cruiser Marceau, which furnished one of the companies of marines was a former German warship, completed so late in the War that it had only a number and not a name.



The bodies of the 17 men left by truck for a processing point of the 2nd Field Command at La Ferte Mase, France, near Alencon. From the processing point the bodies will go to the United States Military Cemetery at Bloisville, one of the nine United States Military Cemeteries scattered throughout Normandy in charge of American Graves Registration Command's Sector V. In the earlier ceremony, held at the Victorial Pier on the Island of Jersey, on the morning of 14 June, a British Guard of Honor from A Battery 614th Regiment of the Royal Artillery and a detachment of United States Marines from the United States cruiser "Houston", on a goodwill tour of the Islands, participated. Among the dignitaries present at the Island ceremony in which the remains of the United States servicemen were formally handed over to Colonel George Power, of the American Graves Registration Command, were His Excellency the Lieut-Governor, Lieut-General Sir Edward Crasett, K.B.E. C.B., D.S.O., M.C., the Bailiff of Jersey, Sir Alexander Coutanche, Colonel Power, United States Army, Capt. Niel K. Dietrich, U.S.N., commanding the U.S.S. Houston, Brigadier R.M.H. Lewis, C.B.E., M.C., Government Secretary, Lieut-Col. A. B. Rogers, M.C. and bar, Officer Commanding Troops, Jersey, M. Raymond Deflin, Consul de France, and Lieut. M. Wheatley, A.D.C. The handing over ceremony took the form of a Guard-Mount. Brief but moving religious ceremonies were conducted by Dean of Jersey, the Rev. W.C.H. Fell, President, Free Church Council, the Rev. Father Zollo, representing the Roman Catholic Church, and Chaplain W. Ivan Hoy, U.S.S. Houston.



Wreaths of flowers were laid upon the 17 American flag-draped caskets resting on trestles on the quayside by: the States of Jersey, by the Bailiff; the British Red Cross and Order of St. John, laid by Sergeant Burt, St. John Ambulance Brigade; the British Red Cross and Order of St. John War Organization, laid by Dr. J. R. Hanna, County Commissioner, Order of St. John; the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Association, laid by Major T. F. Vernon Cooke, D.S.O., Royal Marines; The French Colony in Jersey, laid by the Consul de France; and the Vicar and Wardens, St. Luke's Church.

Among those present at the ceremony were Jurats P.N. Gallichan, S. Hocquard, W.J.J. Collas, D.S.O., N.G. Hind, C.S.I., M.C., the Attorney-General, the Constables of St. Helier, St. Saviour, St. John, St. Martin, Deputies C.H.B. Avarne, C.P. Rumfitt (also representing the British Legion), W.H. Kricheski, the Deputies of St. Saviour, St. Martin, St. Brelade, St. John, St. Lawrence, M<sup>r</sup>. H. Le Riche Edwards (Greffier of the States), Capt. H. W. Richmond (Harbour Master), M<sup>r</sup>. W. Furzer (Assistant Harbour Master), Mr. C. J. Cumng, O.B.E., Ambulance Officer W.A. Bartlett and a detachment of the St. John Ambulance Brigade, representative of the men of the Brigade who guarded the bodies as and when they were recovered from the sea until their interment, Dr. J. R. Hanna, representing British Red Cross and Order of St. John Ambulance Association, Capt. E. A. Mossop, representing Royal Air Force Association, Major T. Vernon Cooke, D.S.O., representing R.N. and Royal Marines Association, Centenier, R. F. Potier, and others.



The following are the names of the United States Service men who were buried here. In most cases their rank and service is not known:--

Alfred E. Poitras  
Darrel Archie Bricker  
Richard Ellsworth Horsfield  
Rudolph William Schaffroth  
William H. Parker  
Junius Job Stout  
Woodrow Wilson Anderson  
T. J. Manning  
W. H. Kearns  
Edward John Pycz  
Armene G. J. Pallatine  
William H. Westensier

Arrangements with the French Navy were in charge of Capitaine E. A. Roger Samson, Chief Liaison Officer with the American Graves Registration 2nd Field command.

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