



# News From France

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## D-Day Special Edition: 70 Years Later, Honoring Those Who Were There



French citizens form a slogan of solidarity in commemoration of D-Day, the landings by Allied forces on the beaches of Normandy. Part of Operation Overlord, the campaign began on June 6, 1944, and would mark the beginning of the end of World War II in Europe. France will never forget those who fought and died.

## From the Ambassador's Desk: A Monthly Message From François Delattre

▲ I'm delighted to be addressing you a special word following a month of exceptional significance in French-American relations: the 70th anniversary of D-Day. To all American and Allied soldiers who fought and died to liberate France from occupation and end World War II, let me say, on behalf of France and from the bottom of my heart: France will never forget.

On June 6, French President François Hollande welcomed U.S. President Barack Obama and 18 other Heads of State and Government to Normandy. An elaborate ceremony took place involving some 7,000 dignitaries, veterans, and spectators on the beaches of Ouistreham, better known for the nearby Sword Beach. President Hollande, who spoke at length during the event, paid tribute to those men and the solidarity that exists between our two countries seven decades later. Presidents Hollande and Obama also took part in a bilateral ceremony held the same day at the American Cemetery in Colleville-sur-Mer. I was extremely honored to be a part of these great events and I must tell you, there was not one dry eye on the beaches.



France's diplomatic network demonstrated similar commitment to honoring D-Day through events in the United States. Each of France's 10 Consulates, from Miami to Los Angeles, organized events, medal ceremonies,

and speeches to remember the conflict with respect for those who served and gratitude for the peace we enjoy today. The French Will Never Forget, a New York-based civic association that promotes French-U.S. ties, arranged to have one million rose petals showered over the Statue of Liberty in New York, delivered via helicopter above a group of French and American observers where the structure stands on Liberty Island. Partnering with private U.S. organizations—including the National D-Day Memorial in Bedford, Va., and the World War II museums in Boston and New Orleans—French and Americans joined together in commemorating a watershed moment in the history of France and the United States.

As part of Operation Overlord, some 156,000 Allied troops landed on Normandy's shores. Of those, 73,000 were American, with over 6,600 casualties. Nearly 2,500 U.S. military personnel would be killed on June 6 alone. It is with these numbers, each one signifying a terrible cost to family and country, that freedom was recovered in France and the rest of Europe.

Therefore, with due respect for D-Day's history, France is both grateful and proud to celebrate the 70th anniversary of victory by American and Allied fighters. It all began on D-Day. Let me say again, since it truly bears repeating—France will never forget. 🇫🇷

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## Looking Back at D-Day: A History of Courage

On June 6, 1944, some 156,000 Allied troops stormed the beaches at Normandy, on France's northern coast. The country had suffered occupation by Nazi Germany for the previous four years.

Nations united under the banner of freedom had resolved to bring about the end of the Western Theater of World War II, a conflict of extraordinary scale that had taken the lives of millions. While much of D-Day did not go according to plan, the troops' sacrifices allowed the Allies to secure a presence in mainland Europe. France was liberated in events following the D-Day landings. By May 1945, all fighting on the Continent had stopped. Here is a history of that day's historic events.

### Immense Preparation

By the spring of 1944, France, along with many other European nations, had been under enemy control for four years. Allied forces had planned an operation to enter occupied Europe since early 1942, but depleted resources made any major advance impossible at the time.

Resistance movements working with the Free French Forces, active in London and North Africa, had created an intelligence network to provide vital information to the Allies, who sought the most strategic way to carry out their objective. By early 1944, the Allies had sufficient air, naval, and land power to coordinate a massive offensive.

The Allied Expeditionary Force, a coalition of American, British, Canadian, and other Allied nations, examined landing points on the coast of northern France. Possible locations included Brittany, the Contentin Peninsula, Normandy, and Pas-de-Calais. Despite the inevitable loss of life, the landings, codenamed Operation Overlord, would pave the way for an all-out push to free subjugated Europe.

By the beginning of 1944, the Allies selected a 60-mile stretch of beaches in Normandy as the best site for the landings. Initially scheduled for late May, D-Day required careful preparation in order to maintain the plan's secrecy. Allied leadership planned a combined aerial and naval assault taking place over 24 hours in order to propel their forces inland.

Preparations for the Normandy landings set as a first priority the establishment a beachhead from which forces could resist an enemy counterattack. Cities like Caen and Carentan were also supposed to be taken on the first day to establish a secure presence inland. Plans specified further that the first soldiers to arrive would secure most of the Normandy coastline, where subsequent waves of Allied troops would land.

After D-Day, the Allies would take ports in Brittany to set up a base for the campaign to liberate Europe. Allied command believed it would take about three months to hold northern France before attempting to liberate parts of continental Europe further inland.

The Allies soon moved the operation to June 5. As the intended date drew closer, those in command worried that the operation wouldn't be able to take place. Inclement weather, including choppy

waters and limited visibility, forced them to delay.

Unexpected clear skies and calm seas on the night of June 5 prompted Allied leaders to approve the mission, beginning the next day. Paratroopers climbed into airplanes, infantrymen boarded boats, and every man prepared himself for duty.

### Soldiers' Sacrifice

The first forces involved included paratroopers, who landed in the early hours of June 6 with the goal of linking up with their amphibious counterparts. However, airborne operations did not go as planned and left many scattered far from their destinations. Despite the confusion, the paratroopers successfully carried out their mission of eliminating obstacles for Allied infantry, whose task was less dangerous as a result of their support.

At 6:30 a.m., the first Allied troops to land on the beaches encountered heavy gunfire and formidable enemy fortifications called the Atlantic Wall. The Americans were responsible for Omaha and Utah beaches, two of the five previously divided sectors, while British and Canadian soldiers fought to take Gold, Juno, and Sword beaches. Members of the French Resistance had provided crucial intelligence regarding enemy movements and locations that allowed the Allies to continue the operation as planned.

As more and more soldiers streamed out of their boats, the fighting raged on. Encounters were so costly at Omaha Beach, which claimed 3,000 casualties, that Allied leadership considered abandoning the landing point altogether. It was not until the evening of June 6 that the Allied forces broke through to hold all five beaches and began to set up command posts.

Though most of the Allied forces spent the day securing the coastline and preparing it for the arrival of reinforcements, some troops successfully advanced several miles into the French mainland. Some 156,000 soldiers made it onto the beaches the first day and were accompanied by thousands of ships and vehicles.

While the Allies did not accomplish all of D-Day's goals—such as securing certain Norman towns of strategic interest—their cumulative success was sufficient to impose a game-changing new order in the battle for Europe. The more than 4,000 soldiers who perished on June 6 gave their lives in a courageous endeavor that would ultimately return freedom to the Continent.

### The Campaign Continues

Allied forces sustained their push through northern France in the days that followed D-Day. They next set their sights on French towns such as Caen, Cherbourg, and Saint-Lô, in the hope of freeing more occupied territory.

In the first few weeks after the Normandy landings, the Allies met strong resistance and suffered over 100,000 casualties. Despite these losses, the enemy could not stop their advance through the country. They freed Cherbourg at the end of June,

and Caen and Saint-Lô followed about a month later. Securing the cities galvanized the French people and gave the Allied forces a clear path toward the rest of Europe.

Shortly thereafter, on France's Mediterranean coast, a lesser-known military maneuver named Operation Dragoon was deployed. It sought to take the key ports of Toulon and Marseille. Like the landings at Normandy, Dragoon was a joint aerial and amphibious assault, launched from Allied strongholds in North Africa and Italy. Over 100,000 Allied soldiers landed on France's southeastern coast during the operation, which lasted from August 15 to September 14 and allowed Allied troops to enter France from a new direction.

Back in northern France, the Allies pushed further southward in order to launch the successive phases of the Normandy campaign. They gradually gained advantages over the enemy in position, equipment, and manpower, which inspired optimism among the Allied command and buoyed morale among their soldiers.

By the middle of the August 1944, talk of a siege of Paris spread throughout the city. Civilians went on strike to protest the occupation, and the Resistance sabotaged enemy infrastructure by destroying communication lines, puncturing tires, and tearing down road signs.

On August 19, fighting broke out in the streets of the French capital. Guerilla warfare preceded the Allied advance, who entered the city to an ecstatic crowd five days after the skirmishes began. Paris came under complete Allied control on August 25. The next few days featured the triumphant return of Charles de Gaulle, President of the exiled French government, as well as victory parades down the Champs-Élysées. Spirits soared throughout France.

The liberation of Paris preceded further Allied gains in Europe. While the Allies encountered some setbacks in the winter, the following spring brought the much-awaited end of the war in Europe. Fighting stopped on May 7, 1945, less than a year after D-Day.

The freedom returned to France by the Normandy campaign came at a great cost. Of the more than two million soldiers that landed, over 220,000 were wounded. Peace would not have been possible without the sacrifices of those who fought for France, whether in Normandy, in the south of France, or thereafter.

An operation of a scale unprecedented in world history, D-Day required meticulous preparations to ensure the success of the landings. Even though much did not go according to plan, Allied soldiers fought sacrificially in carrying out their mission. The events of June 6 pushed the Allies forward in their efforts to liberate all of Europe, and the fact that the war ended less than a year later indicates how decisive D-Day was.

Seventy years after the Normandy landings, D-Day remains a towering symbol of the strong ties between France and the United States. For the sacrifices rendered by American and other Allied forces, France will never forget. 



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Top left: one of the famous white gravestones that marks the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial, where nearly 9,400 U.S. servicemen are laid to rest. Top right: U.S. troops ride aboard a Higgins boat during the long ferry to Normandy's shores. Bottom: A U.S. military medic reacts to the drama of the Allied Landings on June 6, 1944.

## French President, Citizens Invite World to Remember

In commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the June 6, 1944, landings, France organized several official ceremonies honoring the 156,000 Allied troops who risked or gave their lives to liberate Europe. In addition to the state-organized programs, civic organizations also paid tribute to the American liberators, with multiple events planned throughout the country — coordinated by museums, cities, veteran's associations, and more. The events highlight the close ties that France and America continue to share.

### French-American Ties

Prior to the official ceremonies, French President François Hollande welcomed U.S. President Barack Obama in Paris on June 5, where they dined at a Michelin-ranked restaurant on the Champs-Élysées. They were joined by John Kerry, U.S. Secretary of State, and Laurent Fabius, France's Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Development.

The two Presidents met the next morning at the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial, located in Colleville-sur-Mer near Omaha Beach. Waiting to listen to them was a crowd of nearly 15,000 people. As the Presidents took turns speaking, spectators contemplated the famous white crosses that dot the cemetery, marking the graves of the many that perished. They stand as a solemn reminder of the heavy losses that American troops suffered that day.

President Hollande began the ceremony with a tribute to the estimated 20,000 civilians who lost their lives during the landings. He also thanked the United States. "France will never forget what those soldiers did for our country," he said. "France will never forget the solidarity that exists between our two countries."

Mr. Hollande also reinforced France's commitment to join the United States "against other perils that we believed had disappeared for ever: fundamentalism, racism, extremism and terrorism. That's why today's ceremony has a special dimension," he said.

President Obama spoke next. "Here, we don't just commemorate victory, as proud of that victory as we are. We don't just honor sacrifice, as grateful as the world is. We come to remember why America and our allies gave so much for the survival of liberty at its moment of maximum peril. And we come to tell the story of the men and women who did it, so that it remains seared into the memory of the future world."

He thanked those who fought, citing stories that the veterans present had shared with him that morning. "They sacrificed so that we might be free," he said. "They fought in hopes of a day when we'd no longer need to fight. We are grateful to them." His praise of the veterans drew a standing ovation from the crowd.

Following the ceremony, the two Presidents greeted the assembled veterans from World War II as well as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, thanking them for their service. Both men then walked to an observation deck overlooking Omaha Beach, where they stood in silence for several moments.

### The World, in Normandy

With much fanfare, the international ceremony took place in the Norman town of Ouistreham—better known under its 1944 code name, Sword Beach. Nineteen Heads of State and Government attended the event hosted by President Hollande, as did more than 1,000 veterans who had been present during the D-Day landings 70 years prior.

As the ceremony began, guests watched military performances from under covered risers overlooking the beach. Mr. Hollande then personally greeted each of the foreign dignitaries, as well as several veterans who were seated in a position of honor.

**"If we can live in peace today... it is thanks to these men who gave their lives. And I confirm, here on this beach, that the gratitude of France will never fade."**

— French President  
François Hollande

**"We come to remember why America and our allies gave so much for the survival of liberty... so that it remains seared into the memory of the future world."**

— U.S. President  
Barack Obama

Before a large audience, Mr. Hollande gave a moving speech. He began, "we are sending a message with today's ceremony, with those who are participating, a message of peace."

"I wish to express my gratitude to all the combatants who are no longer with us: Americans, British, Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, Polish, Belgians, and all the other Allied nationalities," President Hollande said. "All of them served humanity, and if we can live in peace today, if we can live in security, if we can live in sovereignty, protected by laws that we have created, it is thanks to these men who gave their lives. And I confirm, here on this beach, that the gratitude of France will never fade."

Following the French President's speech, a contemporary dance performance was given, representing the key events leading up to and during the D-Day battle while artistic video imaging played in the background. In a poignant conclusion to the ceremony, the veterans gath-

ered together on the beach in front of resounding applause, while fighter jets flew across the sky.

### Civic Groups Remember

In recognition of the 70th anniversary of D-Day, civic society organizations commemorated the occasion throughout France both before and after June 6, 2014.

Beginning in April and unfolding during a five-month period, a series of events, called "Normandy Celebrates Liberty," is devoted to international remembrance and union. The Normandy Tourism Board helped sponsor the events, which take place throughout the Normandy region, in collaboration with many American and other international civic groups, in a display of gratitude for the sacrifices made two generations ago.

Early ceremonies included a tribute by the Boy Scouts of America, where on April 26 they held an interfaith prayer for peace in the city of Caen, in the presence of numerous leaders representing various religions. The event later led to the unveiling of the Bell of Peace and Freedom by four Scouts — each representing their home countries of Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Later in June, as a special honor, the Tilly 44 Association, in collaboration with the Utah Beach and Tilly-sur-Seulles Museums, paid tribute to the 13 Native Americans who participated in the D-Day landings at Utah Beach. The soldiers, members of the Comanche Tribe, served as "code talkers," or servicemen who used their tribal language as the vocabulary for transmitting coded messages. Descendants of the 13 soldiers returned to the landing site, where they performed a traditional Comanche ceremony.

Other events took place elsewhere in France, including the French-American Global Forum, which hosted "Le D-Day Forum" in Paris. The three-day program focused on current transatlantic issues, as well as relations between France and the United States since 1944. The event, led by Romuald Sciora, the group's Founder and Director, brought together leading members of French and U.S. academia, journalism, and members of the French and U.S. governments.

Civic and state-run organizations in France celebrated the 70th anniversary of D-Day with a variety of ceremonies and services around June 6. President Barack Obama and President François Hollande reflected on the strong ties between the United States and France during the day prior to the services at Sword Beach. At the official ceremony in Ouistreham, President Hollande personally greeted the 19 Heads of State and Government in attendance as the international community paid respect to the more than 1,000 veterans present. Civic organizations throughout France also contributed to the anniversary through interfaith services, music concerts, and special commemorations of World War II veterans.

The solidarity shown by the French and American groups involved in honoring the Normandy landings reflects the bilateral commitment to foster the long-standing friendship between France and the United States. 



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Top: A U.S. veteran of D-Day enjoys a moment with French President François Hollande and U.S. President Barack Obama. Bottom, Heads of State and Government whose national histories are linked to the Normandy landings pose for a photo. The D-Day operation, though led by U.S. forces, involved some 20 countries in all.

## In U.S., France Commemorates its American Defenders

**F**rench and American civic organizations throughout the United States partnered for numerous tributes and ceremonies for the 70th anniversary of D-Day this month. Consulates General of France around the country, as well as museums, veterans foundations, and other French and American groups joined to observe the historic events of June 6, 1944, with due honor and respect. The commemorations took place all across the United States and included film screenings, memorials, and ceremonies decorating veterans of D-Day.

### Consulates Honor Vets

To honor the sacrifice of American soldiers who fought at Normandy, French Consulates General throughout the United States organized ceremonies with local organizations to bestow the French Legion of Honor to veterans. One of the first events took place in early May in Santa Barbara, Calif., where the Pierre Claeysens Veterans Foundation and the Channel City Club co-hosted an event titled "70 Years On: The Boys Who Stormed Normandy."

The event honored four D-Day veterans from the area and featured a speech by Axel Cruau, Consul General of France in Los Angeles. Mr. Cruau attended a luncheon in Van Nuys, Calif., on June 6 co-hosted by the Heritage League of the Second Air Division and Bert Boeckmann, a prominent local businessman.

Continuing the commitment to foster the partnership between French and U.S. entities to commemorate D-Day, the Consul attended another ceremony the following day in San Pedro, Calif., where the U.S. Merchant Marine Veterans of World War II opened the S.S. *Lane Victory*, a retired American naval vessel, to the public. Memorabilia and displays of World War II-era vehicles, in addition to aircraft fly-bys, provided the crowd with entertainment and an educational experience.

At an event in San Diego, Mr. Cruau emphasized France's gratefulness to the United States. "The French people will never forget that you helped restore their freedom," he said. "They will never forget that without you, they wouldn't be here today. Without you, I wouldn't be here today. Your courage and dedication is an example for us all."

In a partnership between the Consulate General of France in Houston and the Battleship Texas Foundation, veterans and spectators gathered aboard the U.S.S. *Texas* to observe the anniversary. Sujiro Seam, Consul General of France in Houston, decorated 30 American veterans from Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas with the the Legion of Honor, France's highest award.

At the U.S. Freedom Pavilion in nearby New Orleans, the National World War II Museum and the Consulate General of France held a joint event where 14 World War II veterans received the Legion of Honor from Jean-Claude Brunet, Consul General of France in New Orleans. Ceremonies also took place in Naples, Fla., and Miami, where the latter city's Trinity Episcopal Church held a public service of remembrance. Meanwhile, the Friends of the Collier County Museum and the Museum of Military Memorabilia

at Naples Airport co-hosted the 70th Anniversary D-Day Commemoration at Naples Depot Museum, which featured 30 U.S. veterans, live music, and exhibits displaying World War II artifacts. Philippe Létriliart, the Consul General of France in Miami, attended both events.

On June 7, in Wheaton, Ill., another memorial service took place at the First Division Museum. Graham Paul, the Consul General of France in Chicago, spoke about France's appreciation of the United States and its veterans. "Let's never forget that the United States and France owe each other their very existence as free nations," he said. Mr. Paul then awarded the Legion of Honor to veterans of the D-Day landings.

Denis Barbet, the Consul General of France in Atlanta, honored seven American World War II veterans from South Carolina with the Legion of Honor during a D-Day ceremony on June 6 at the South Carolina State House in Columbia, S.C.

Likewise, Olivier Serot-Almérés, Consul General of France in Washington, D.C., traveled to Pittsburgh on June 3rd to decorate nine U.S. veterans for their service in World War II and D-Day.

Fabien Fieschi, Consul General of France in Boston, honored five U.S. veterans at an event in Hyannis Port, Mass. Mr. Fieschi also attended a ceremony hosted by the Museum of World War II in Natick, Mass., where he bestowed 10 World War II veterans with the Legion of Honor.

Romain Serman, Consul General of France in San Francisco, bestowed the Legion of Honor upon seven U.S. veterans of World War II during a ceremony at the Residence of the French Consul on May 26.

### Museums Reflect on D-Day

While several museums hosted Consuls General as part of remembering D-Day, many more museums arranged their own commemorations. Each organization sought to highlight the victory, and the terrible cost, of D-Day's events.

The Museum of Natural Science in Houston began film screenings of a D-Day documentary in their IMAX theater on May 23. The National World War II Museum in New Orleans, originally named the National D-Day Museum, organized a series of events on June 6 and 7 that included film screenings of D-Day documentaries, tours, musical performances, guest speakers, and other family activities.

In addition to the ceremony presided over by the French Consul General in Chicago, the First Division Museum in Cantigny, Ill., hosted a special ceremony where World War II veterans placed sand from Omaha Beach in the grounds of the museum, a symbol of the friendship between France and the United States. The museum featured a World War II exhibit and interactive activities for children in order to learn more about the war.

The Naples Depot Museum in Naples, Fla., and the Museum of World War II in Natick, Mass., held special exhibits devoted to D-Day and World War II that displayed artifacts, tokens, and military vehicles of the era. The exhibition in Natick houses one of the most comprehensive collections of

D-Day artifacts and documents in the world. The museum raised a French flag during the week of the anniversary as a tribute to the French-American friendship.

### Civic Groups Pay Tribute

The D-Day Memorial Foundation in Bedford, Va., held a ceremony on June 6, attended by over 300 D-Day veterans and 8,000 guests, which included officials from Canada, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Guest speakers included Frédéric Doré, the Chargé d'Affaires at the Embassy of France in Washington, and Bruno Caïtucoli, the French Defense Attaché. A related parade took place in Bedford the next day.

In Roanoke, Va., a French citizen living in the city named Bernard Marie held a 30th annual honorary banquet for D-Day. Among the 400 guests were three dozen World War II veterans and their families, numerous U.S. and foreign military officials, and Olivier Serot-Almérés, Consul General of France in Washington. The event honored three veterans with the Legion of Honor.

In New York City, The French Will Never Forget, a French civic association, organized a symbolic gesture on June 6 when one million rose petals were transported via helicopter over the Statue of Liberty, then showered over the site and on Liberty Island, where the statue stands. Following the demonstration, Bertrand Lortholary, Consul General of France in New York, bestowed the Legion of Honor on Maurice Greensberg, a World War II veteran. "France is what it is today, a free and sovereign country," Mr. Lortholary said. "We will never forget that it is thanks to you."

French-language high schools based in the U.S. showed their solidarity as well. French schools in New York City attended the rose petal ceremony, while l'Ecole Française du Maine and the Lycée International de Los Angeles also organized meals themed in commemoration of the historic anniversary. Students of the Lycée Rochambeau in Washington gathered to form a message spelling out "Never Forget," reminding us to remember the sacrifices made by Allied soldiers to liberate Europe.

In sum, memorial services and tributes for the 70th anniversary of D-Day in the United States featured a wide range of partnerships between French and American civic organizations with the presence of French officials. French Consulates General throughout the country worked with civic organizations to host events commemorating the anniversary and honoring veterans with the Legion of Honor. Museums took the opportunity to schedule comprehensive services dedicated to educating citizens about the importance of D-Day and thanking its veterans. French and American civic organizations in the United States found creative, moving ways to honor the events of June 6, 1944.

The combined efforts of these institutions revealed the gratitude of France to its ally and made clear that the friendship between France and the United States remains strong. 



Clockwise from top left: a Legion of Honor medal awaits bestowal upon a veteran; spectators pay tribute aboard the USS *Texas*; Fabien Fieschi, Consul General of France in Boston, speaks at the Museum of World War II; the Statue of Liberty is showered with one million rose petals; and Washington's Lycée Rochambeau remembers.

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## Petition Seeks UNESCO Status for D-Day Beaches



Normandy's local government leaders have endeavored to secure World Heritage status from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which would add it to the list of 38 of its sites in France currently.

▲ France is looking to honor those who participated in the D-Day landings by campaigning for the D-Day beaches in Normandy to become recognized officially as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Local Normandy officials who launched the program in 2006 requested that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recognize the five beaches that played a vital role in the D-Day landings and in the Battle of Normandy—codenamed Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno, and Sword. The petition seeks to protect the area from development projects.

The effort has gained increasing international momentum, with several grassroots petitions currently in circulation. Local populations also welcome the designation.

French President François Hollande also mentioned

the idea during the 70th anniversary ceremony that took place at Sword Beach in the town of Ouistreham on June 6. "In the name of France, I wish for the beaches to be listed as World Heritage by UNESCO," he said.

Originally, the campaign focused on incorporating the beaches on the World Heritage list in time for the June 6 anniversary. Yet the deadline proved to be too short, given the number of submitted requests already placed on UNESCO's lengthy waiting list.

The site must also meet the 10 strict criteria necessary for admittance, notably that the area must be "directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs [...] of outstanding universal significance."

UNESCO World Heritage list includes more than 900 sites worldwide, 38 of which are in France, including the Palace of Versailles and the Chartres Cathedral. 

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