

The Memorial of Verdun - Education and History

The Battle Field of Verdun bears the scars of the First World War. Forever marked by the terrible battles of 1914-18 (craters left by mines and shells, destroyed villages, fortifications), the site is a veritable material lesson in history.



Why do people visit Verdun? Its name is attached to the battle of 1916, although in fact fighting went on in and around Verdun throughout the whole of the First World War. Why is there a focus on the Battle of Verdun, to the point of eclipsing the Battle of the Somme, which took place in the same year and is comparable in scale?

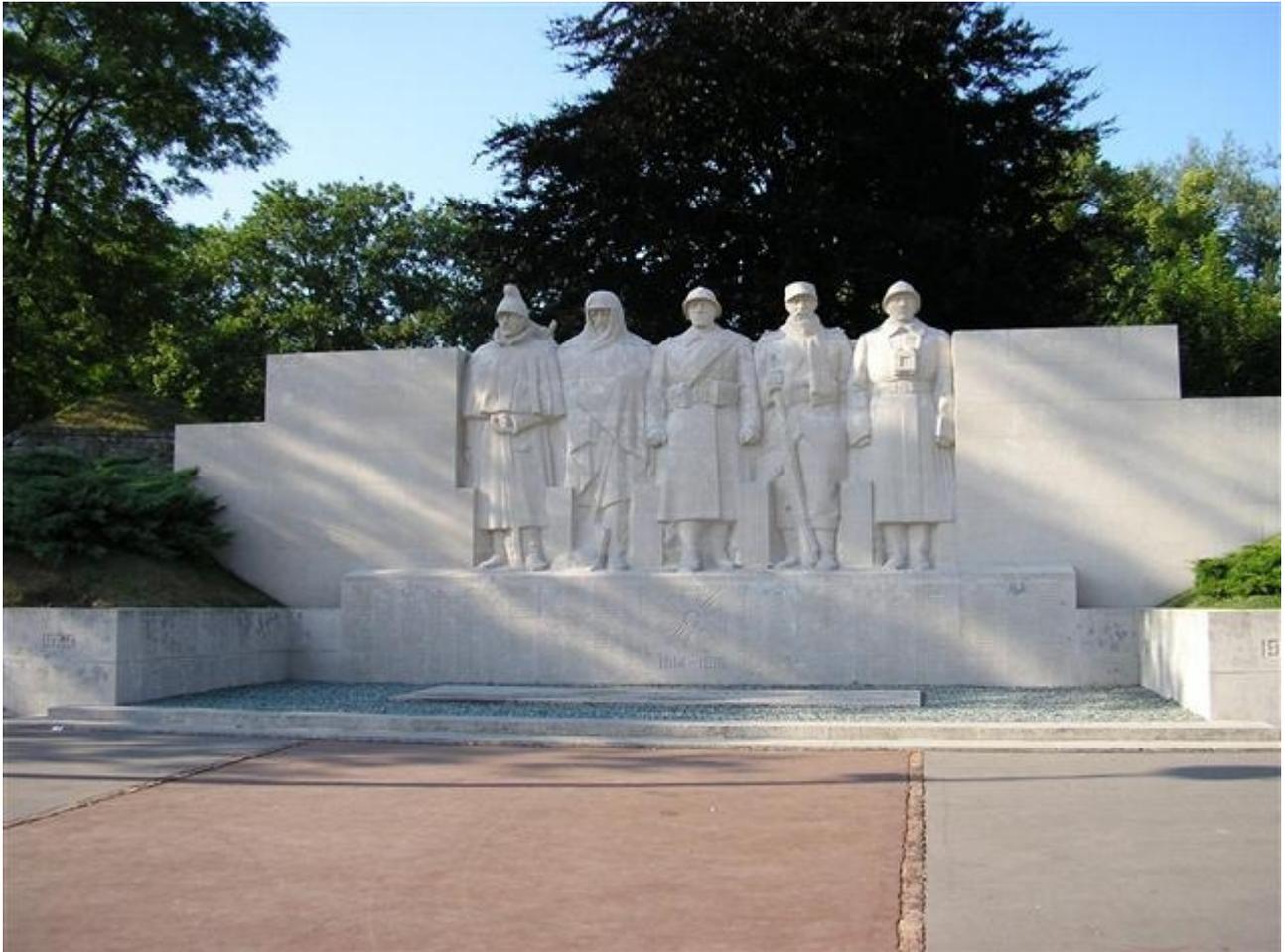
It is because the Battle seems a fitting summary of the 1914-18 war: the memory of this immense superhuman and inhumane sacrifice makes Verdun one of the most important sites in the National and European collective memory. People come, first and foremost, to learn: the Memorial's principal objective is to teach about the battles that went on around Verdun and those of 1916 in particular, in which two out of three Poilus (French First World War soldiers) participated.

The 'Battle of France' affected most French families. The Memorial also strives to balance French and German points of view: suffering, death and despair have neither a nationality nor a religion...



Provoking reflection on the First World War, and thus on the more general history/memory question, the Verdun Memorial is above all, as the former soldiers who founded it wished, an educational tool that serves historical truth.

Situated in Fleury-devant-Douaumont, the Memorial is a symbol of the process of historical remembrance, which has taken over from patriotic remembrance. As Antoine Prost highlights in the second part of "Places of Memory", published by Gallimard in 1986, it is necessary to provide explanations to those who come to the site knowing only that an important battle took place there, but with no knowledge of its progression or chronology. The tourist has taken over from the pilgrim; for the tourist, history takes over from religious fervor.



For someone who wishes to understand what really happened at Verdun during the First World War and who wishes to find an itinerary that allows them to discover the battlefield, the Memorial of Verdun serves as a wonderful introduction.

Since its inauguration on 17th September 1967 by André Duvillard, Minister for Former Soldiers, the Verdun Memorial has increasingly become more of an educational museum than a commemorative monument. Serge Barcellini stressed this point thus: “more than just a museum vaunting the glory of the French soldier, [the Memorial] bears witness to the engagement of all the troops, French and German alike.”

Practical Information

The Verdun Memorial is situated at the heart of the Battlefield, approximately four kilometers from Verdun. The road signs indicate the route from Verdun city center – follow up the direction longwy and ‘Champs de bataille 14-18’ or ‘Ossuaire de Douaumont’.

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