

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.” - Helen Keller<sup>1</sup>

The alliance between France and the U.S. played a critical role in both countries' successes, as they fought together for the greater good throughout history. A strong alliance provides security, allows us to amalgamate our military forces, and lends resources and support. France and the United States' alliance is exemplary and a necessary reminder of how important it is to work together; when one of us falls, there will be another to lift us up. It took a considerable amount of work and sacrifice to make this country ours, and we could not have done it on our own. France played a significant role in achieving that.

The alliance between the United States of America and France began during 1775 - 1776, when France secretly provided the U.S. Colonies with financial aid and supplies to help fight Great Britain during the Revolutionary War. France did not contribute official support until early 1778 after the victory at Saratoga. On February 6th, 1778, France and the U.S. signed the Amity and Treaty of Commerce, recognizing the United States' independence. The second treaty signed was the Treaty of Alliance, which was a military alliance and France's entrance into the Revolutionary War. An interesting declaration in the Alliance treaty prefaced that if either country were to go to war against their common enemy, Great Britain, the latter would support the fight.

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<sup>1</sup> Keller, Helen. p. 1. <https://helenkellerarchive.afb.org/> . Accessed 1 May 2026.

An interesting declaration in the Alliance treaty prefaced that if either country were to go to war against their common enemy, Great Britain, the latter would support the fight. It also mentioned that neither country would be allowed to side with Great Britain without consulting the other. Great Britain and the U.S. would sign the Treaty of Paris on September 3rd, 1783, officially making the United States of America an independent country.

To fully understand France and the U.S.'s involvement in WWI, we need to understand the events leading up to the Meuse-Argonne Offensive and the reasons why this war transpired in the first place. The War began with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to Austria's empire. He was killed by Gavrilo Princip in 1914, a South Slav nationalist who wanted to free Bosnia and Herzegovina of Austro-Hungarian rule.<sup>2</sup> The Austro-Hungarian Empire consisted of many regions in central and Eastern Europe. The assassination of Franz understandably enraged Austria-Hungary, resulting in a war declaration on July 28th against Serbia. As Russia and Serbia were close allies, Russia mobilized four military districts facing the Galician front. In the days following, Germany declared war on Russia and France. This would be the beginning of the first long, bloody world war.

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<sup>2</sup>History.com Editors. "World War I: Summary, Causes & Facts | HISTORY, *History.com*, 29 October 2009,

<https://www.history.com/articles/world-war-i-history> Accessed 3 March 2026.

The United States stayed neutral until April 6th, 1917. Two and a half years after the war began, the US reevaluated its position when Germany sank American merchant ships and when the Zimmermann telegram was intercepted from Germany to Mexico offering an alliance against the U.S.. President Woodrow Wilson came before Congress requesting permission to declare war on Germany. The U.S. Congress voted yes and declared war on the German Empire on April 6, 1917.

The first American troops landed in Saint Nazaire, France. They were untrained and inexperienced when it came to fighting on the Western Front. General John J. Pershing's first assignment as the commander for the soon-to-be over 2 million American Expeditionary Force was to build a training camp and create a communication and supply network in France<sup>3</sup>. American troops first saw combat in late 1917 near Nancy, France. They began in the trenches learning alongside the French before their first major combat, the Battle of Cantigny, in May of 1918. In July of 1918, Marshal Ferdinand Foch, the Supreme Allied Commander on the Western Front, was in charge of organizing the French, Italian, British, and American forces. He led the allies in the Second Battle of Marne, a successful counterattack that halted the Germans' progression into French territory. Around 270,000 American soldiers ( about 8-9 divisions) were involved in this battle.

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<sup>3</sup>History.com. "First U.S. troops arrive in France | June 26, 1917 | HISTORY." *History.com*,

<https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/june-26/first-u-s-troops-arrive-in-france> Accessed 6 April 2026.

American troops assisted in stopping the Germans on the Marne River and in Champagne. This marked the beginning of many successful attacks on the Germans, which resulted in the Hundred Days Offensive, a series of attacks by the Allies, also led by Foch.

The U.S.' involvement with WWI lasted for 19 months from April 6, 1917, to November 11, 1918. They fought in many military campaigns and battles alongside France on the Western Front until the Meuse-Argonne Offensive was one of the final, major Allied operations in the Hundred Days Offensive. This battle was the largest offensive during WWI; it involved over 1.2 million U.S. personnel and a few hundred thousand French.<sup>4</sup> It lasted 47 days and was the U.S.'s last major attack on Germany during WWI. This battle lasted from September 26th, 1918, to November 11th, 1918. Given that European soldiers had been fighting for years before the U.S. arrived, they were exhausted and depleted of necessary supplies. At the end of the Hundred Days' War, Foch made a plan to attack the Germans along the entire front to force them out of France and back into Germany. After four years of fighting, the Europeans were exhausted, and new U.S. troops had just arrived, which gave the allies an advantage. Although the U.S. provided essential military aid, the French disagreed on the military strategies and the speed of incoming American troops. Despite this, the French were grateful for the extra men, which boosted the morale of the exhausted French and British soldiers.

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<sup>4</sup> Wikipedia. "Meuse-Argonne offensive: Revision history." *Meuse-Argonne offensive*, Wikipedia, August 2003,

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meuse%E2%80%93Argonne\\_offensive](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meuse%E2%80%93Argonne_offensive). Accessed 6 February 2026.

This battle was brutal; the Allies faced difficult terrain, bad weather, and, not to mention, the pushback of the Germans. They had to be continuously aware of the enemy and be ready to fight at a moment's notice, but there was one other obstacle that hindered the Allies' advance into the German-infested French territory: barbed wire. This mangled beast was no easy obstacle to maneuver. Soldiers had to cut through the wire by hand and writhe through the mess, resulting in many cuts and gnarly wounds. The rain made the ground like muddy quicksand or what some people like to call gumbo. This made the heavy artillery sink and become immovable until the ground was dry or they had a way to extricate the vehicles. The setback allowed the Germans to bring in reinforcements. Their artillery showered over the 24-mile spread between the Argonne Forest and the Meuse River. It was a brutal and strenuous fight.

Although this was a successful battle, all great things come at a cost. In this case, the cost was nearly 26 thousand deaths and almost 100 thousand wounded. The Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery rests in France, spanning 130 miles and containing around 14,500 graves and about 1,000 names on the wall of the missing.<sup>5</sup> The alliance between France and the U.S. reminds us how important it is to have strong and healthy alliances. We can't expect to excel if we don't support one another. France took the first step in believing in the U.S. and siding with us as a new and upcoming country.

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<sup>5</sup> American Battle Monuments Commission. "Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery." *American Battle Monuments Commission*, [https://www.abmc.gov/video/meuse-argonne-american-cemetery/?utm\\_campaign=Website](https://www.abmc.gov/video/meuse-argonne-american-cemetery/?utm_campaign=Website). Accessed 2 May 2026.

France was America's first ever ally, a strong relationship that began during the Revolutionary War and continued 131 years later into WWI and eventually into WWII. France aided the U.S. to become a free country, and we helped them from the powerhouse that was Germany. No one quite knows how our world or our lives would be different if WWI had a different outcome, but I do know that our alliance with France allowed us to side with the Allies, creating a strong army that, in the end, won WWI.

France and Belgium were free of German power, and the German, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman empires fell. The Treaty of Versailles forced Germany to accept full responsibility for the war, and the U.S expanded its global influence, helping us to build strong connections that would later benefit us during WWII and beyond.

I am incredibly grateful for all the soldiers who have fought and continue to fight to keep our country free, including both of my grandfathers. Our country is a unique and beautiful place of freedom, hope, and connection. A place where women's rights, religious beliefs, and educational opportunities are only a few of the benefits of a safe and free country. The United States is a place where you can stand up for what you believe without fear of persecution. Our country's founding fathers' beliefs were rooted in freedom and the idea that all men are created equal. Without great alliances like France and the constant fight for the greater good, I would not have opportunities or freedom to fight for what is right and to pursue the dreams for my future. With that, I say thank you, France, for supporting and believing in America when it needed an

ally. Alliances are not always straightforward, especially now, but as we have seen with our alliance with France, they are not only beneficial, they are essential for building strong and successful nations. When we stand together, we are monumentally stronger than if we stand alone.

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