



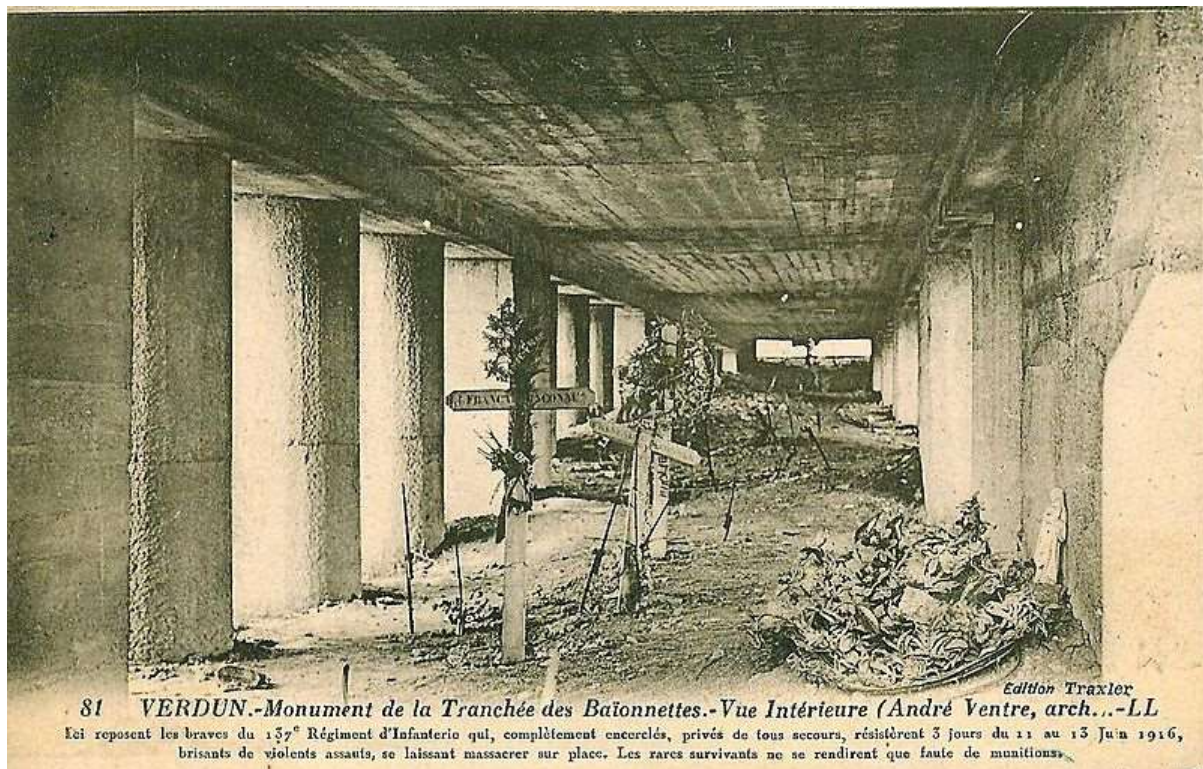
The Trench of the Bayonets Monument



The Germans were planning a huge offensive on the French-held position of Fort Douaumont on 23rd June 1916 during the Battle of Verdun. On 10th June two groups of soldiers from the 137th French infantry Regiment were sent to the trenches of the front line. The Germans shelled these trenches very heavily and the troops in them were cut off from their own side. By the night of 11th June the third company of the regiment had lost 94 out of 164 men. Those soldiers still alive were left in a row of trenches which could be directly seen by German artillery (heavy guns). In the early hours of the morning of 12th June German artillery fire on the trench increased and the rest of the 137th Regiment were killed almost to the last man.



After the war it was found that the trench had been completely filled in with earth. However poking out of the soil at regular intervals were bayonets still attached to the rusty muzzles of rifles. When the rifles were dug up it was found that there was a soldier's body by each one, 40 in all. It was decided that the soldiers must have placed their rifles along the parapet of the trench and stayed at their posts ready to repel any enemy attack despite the heavy bombardment. However they had all been buried alive because the sides of the trench had collapsed (a French pilot claimed to have seen an earth movement in the area from his plane above the battlefield at the time).



A rich American banker, GF Rand visited Verdun in December 1919. He was moved by the story of the trench of the bayonets but was already worried that the battlefield was being looted and vandalised by souvenir hunters. After a visit to the French Prime Minister, Clemanceau, Rand donated 500,000 francs to the government to build a monument to protect the trench of the bayonets. The architect of the steel and concrete monument over the trench of the bayonets boasted "I guarantee the monument to last for at least 500 years". It was opened in 1920 by the French President and leading French generals of the First World War.



Additional information about the Trench of the bayonets

It is possible that German soldiers simply buried dead French soldiers in the trench and used rifles with their bayonets attached as markers for the graves. **The story of the brave defenders of the trench of the bayonets may not be true at all.**

The original site of the trench of the bayonets was 30m away among shell craters. The men and the bayonets were reburied so that the monument could be built on flat ground nearby. The wording on the monument does not explain this.