



Arc de Triomphe

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The **Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile** (French pronunciation: [aʁk də tʁijɔ̃f də letwal], *Triumphal Arch of the Star*) is one of the most famous monuments in Paris. It stands in the centre of the Place Charles de Gaulle (originally named *Place de l'Étoile*), at the western end of the Champs-Élysées.^[3] It should not be confused with a smaller arch, the Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel, which stands west of the Louvre. The Arc de Triomphe honours those who fought and died for France in the French Revolutionary and the Napoleonic Wars, with the names of all French victories and generals inscribed on its inner and outer surfaces. Beneath its vault lies the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier from World War I.

The Arc de Triomphe is the linchpin of the *Axe historique* (historic axis) – a sequence of monuments and grand thoroughfares on a route which runs from the courtyard of the Louvre to the Grande Arche de la Défense. The monument was designed by Jean Chalgrin in 1806 and its iconographic program pits heroically nude French youths against bearded Germanic warriors in chain mail. It set the tone for public monuments with triumphant patriotic messages.

The monument stands 50 metres (164 ft) in height, 45 m (148 ft) wide and 22 m (72 ft) deep. The large vault is 29.19 m (95.8 ft) high and 14.62 m (48.0 ft) wide. The small vault is 18.68 m (61.3 ft) high and 8.44 m (27.7 ft) wide. Its design was inspired by the Roman Arch of Titus. The Arc de Triomphe is built on such a large scale that, three weeks after the Paris victory parade in 1919 (marking the end of hostilities in World War I), Charles Godefroy flew his Nieuport biplane through it, with the event captured on newsreel.^{[4][5][6]}

It was the tallest triumphal arch in existence until the completion of the Monumento a la Revolución in Mexico City in 1938, which is 67 metres (220 ft) high. The Arch of Triumph in Pyongyang, completed in 1982, is modelled on the Arc de Triomphe and is slightly taller at 60 m (197 ft).

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History

Arc de Triomphe



The Arc de Triomphe from the Champs-Élysées



Location within Paris

Alternative names	Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile
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General information

Type	Triumphal Arch
Architectural style	Neoclassicism
Location	Place Charles de Gaulle (formerly Place de l'Étoile)
Coordinates	48.8738°N 2.2950°E﻿ / ﻿48.8738°N 2.2950°E﻿ / 48.8738; 2.2950
Construction started	15 August 1806 ^[1]
Inaugurated	29 July 1836 ^[2]
Height	50 m (164 ft)
Dimensions	
Other dimensions	Wide: 45 m (148 ft) Deep: 22 m (72 ft)
Design and construction	
Architect	Jean Chalgrin, Louis-Étienne Héricart de Thury



A colourised aerial photograph of the southern side (published in 1921)



Free French forces on parade after the liberation of Paris (1944)

The Arc is located on the right bank of the Seine at the centre of a dodecagonal configuration of twelve radiating avenues. It was commissioned in 1806 after the victory at Austerlitz by Emperor Napoleon at the peak of his fortunes. Laying the foundations alone took two years and, in 1810, when Napoleon entered Paris from the west with his bride Archduchess Marie-Louise of Austria, he had a wooden mock-up of the completed arch constructed. The architect, Jean Chalgrin, died in 1811 and the work was taken over by Jean-Nicolas Huyot. During the Bourbon Restoration, construction was halted and it would not be completed until the reign of King Louis-Philippe, between 1833 and 1836, by the architects Goust, then Huyot, under the direction of Héricart de Thury. On 15 December 1840, brought back to France from Saint Helena, Napoleon's remains passed under it on their way to the Emperor's final resting place at the Invalides.^[7] Prior to burial in the Panthéon, the body of Victor Hugo was displayed under the Arc during the night of 22 May 1885.

The sword carried by the *Republic* in the *Marseillaise* relief broke off on the day, it is said, that the Battle of Verdun began in 1916. The relief was immediately hidden by tarpaulins to conceal the accident and avoid any undesired ominous interpretations.^[8] On 7 August 1919, Charles Godefroy successfully flew his biplane under the Arc.^[9] Jean Navarre was the pilot who was tasked to make the flight, but he died on 10 July 1919 when he crashed near Villacoublay while training for the flight.

Following its construction, the *Arc de Triomphe* became the rallying point of French troops parading after successful military campaigns and for the annual Bastille Day Military Parade. Famous victory marches around or under the Arc have included the Germans in 1871, the French in 1919, the Germans in 1940, and the French and Allies

in 1944^[10] and 1945. A United States postage stamp of 1945 shows the *Arc de Triomphe* in the background as victorious American troops march down the Champs-Élysées and U.S. airplanes fly overhead on 29 August 1944. After the interment of the Unknown Soldier, however, all military parades (including the aforementioned post-1919) have avoided marching through the actual arch. The route taken is up to the arch and then around its side, out of respect for the tomb and its symbolism. Both Hitler in 1940 and de Gaulle in 1944 observed this custom.

By the early 1960s, the monument had grown very blackened from coal soot and automobile exhaust, and during 1965–1966 it was cleaned through bleaching.

In the prolongation of the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, a new arch, the Grande Arche de la Défense, was built in 1982, completing the line of monuments that forms Paris's *Axe historique*. After the *Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel* and the *Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile*, the *Grande Arche* is the third arch built on the same perspective.

In 1995, the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria placed a bomb near the Arc de Triomphe which wounded 17 people as part of a campaign of bombings.^[11]

Design

The astylar design is by Jean Chalgrin (1739–1811), in the Neoclassical version of ancient Roman architecture (see, for example, the triumphal Arch of Titus). Major academic sculptors of France are represented in the sculpture of the *Arc de Triomphe*: Jean-Pierre Cortot; François Rude; Antoine Étex; James Pradier and Philippe Joseph Henri Lemaire. The main sculptures are not integral friezes but are treated as independent trophies applied to the vast ashlar masonry masses, not unlike the gilt-bronze appliques on Empire furniture. The four sculptural groups at the base of the Arc are *The Triumph of 1810* (Cortot), *Resistance* and *Peace* (both by Antoine Étex) and the most renowned of them all, *Departure of the Volunteers of 1792* commonly called *La Marseillaise* (François Rude). The face of the allegorical representation of France calling forth her people on this last was used as the belt buckle for the honorary rank of Marshal of France. Since the fall of Napoleon (1815), the sculpture representing *Peace* is interpreted as commemorating the *Peace of 1815*.

In the attic above the richly sculptured frieze of soldiers are 30 shields engraved with the names of major French victories in the French Revolution and Napoleonic wars.^[12] The inside walls of the monument list the names of 660 people, among which are 558 French generals of the First French Empire;^[13] The names of those generals killed in battle are underlined. Also inscribed, on the shorter sides of the four supporting columns, are the names of the major French victories in the Napoleonic Wars. The battles that took place in the period between the departure of Napoleon from Elba to his final defeat at Waterloo are not included.

For four years from 1882 to 1886, a monumental sculpture by Alexandre Falguière topped the arch. Titled "Le triomphe de la Révolution" (the Triumph of the Revolution), it depicted a chariot drawn by horses preparing "to crush Anarchy and Despotism". It remained there only four years before falling in ruins.

Inside the monument, a permanent exhibition conceived by the artist Maurice Benayoun and the architect Christophe Girault opened in February 2007.^[14] The steel and new media installation interrogates the symbolism of the national monument, questioning the balance of its symbolic message during the last two centuries, oscillating between war and peace.

Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

Beneath the Arc is the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier from World War I. Interred on Armistice Day 1920,^[15] it has the first eternal flame lit in Western and Eastern Europe since the Vestal Virgins' fire was extinguished in the fourth century. It burns in memory of the dead who were never identified (now in both world wars).

A ceremony is held at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier every 11 November on the anniversary of the armistice signed by the Entente Powers and Germany in 1918. It was originally decided on 12 November 1919 to bury the unknown soldier's remains in the Panthéon, but a public letter-writing campaign led to the decision to bury him beneath the Arc de Triomphe. The coffin was put in the chapel on the first floor of the Arc on 10 November 1920, and put in its final resting place on 28 January 1921. The slab on top bears the inscription *ICI REPOSE UN SOLDAT FRANÇAIS MORT POUR LA PATRIE 1914–1918* ("Here lies a French soldier who died for the fatherland 1914–1918").

In 1961, American President John F. Kennedy and First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy paid their respects at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, accompanied by French President Charles de Gaulle. After the 1963 assassination of President Kennedy, Mrs Kennedy remembered the eternal flame at the Arc de Triomphe and requested that an eternal flame be placed next to her husband's grave at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia. President Charles de Gaulle went to Washington to attend the state funeral, and witnessed Jacqueline Kennedy lighting the eternal flame that had been inspired by her visit to France.

Details

- The four main sculptural groups on each of the Arc's pillars are:
 - *Le Départ de 1792* (or *La Marseillaise*), by François Rude. The sculptural group celebrates the cause of the French First Republic during the 10 August uprising. Above the volunteers is the winged personification of Liberty. This group served as a recruitment tool in the early months of World War I and encouraged the French to invest in war loans in 1915–16.^[16]
 - *Le Triomphe de 1810*, by Jean-Pierre Cortot celebrates the Treaty of Schönbrunn. This group features Napoleon, crowned by the goddess of Victory.
 - *La Résistance de 1814*, by Antoine Étex commemorates the French resistance to the Allied armies during the War of the Sixth Coalition.
 - *La Paix de 1815*, by Antoine Étex commemorates the Treaty of Paris, concluded in that year.



Avenues radiate from the Arc de Triomphe in Place Charles de Gaulle, the former Place de l'Étoile.



The Arc de Triomphe is located on Paris's Axe historique, a long perspective that runs from the Louvre to the Grande Arche de la Défense.



Tomb of the Unknown Soldier beneath the Arc de Triomphe, Paris



*Le Départ de
1792 (La
Marseillaise)*



*Le Triomphe de
1810*



*La Résistance de
1814*



La Paix de 1815

- Six reliefs sculpted on the façades of the Arch, representing important moments of the French Revolution and of the Napoleonic era include:

- *Les funérailles du général Marceau* (General Marceau's burial), by P. H. Lemaire (SOUTH façade, right),
- *La bataille d'Aboukir* (The Battle of Aboukir), by Bernard Seurre (SOUTH façade, left),
- *La bataille de Jemappes* (The Battle of Jemappes), by Carlo Marochetti (EAST façade),
- *Le passage du pont d'Arcole* (The Battle of Arcole), by J. J. Feuchère (NORTH façade, right),
- *La prise d'Alexandrie*, (The Fall of Alexandria), by J. E. Chaponnière (NORTH façade, left),
- *La bataille d'Austerlitz* (The Battle of Austerlitz), by J. F. T. Gechter (WEST façade),



*Les funérailles du général Marceau, 20
September 1796*



*La bataille d'Aboukir,
25 July 1799*



*La bataille de Jemappes,
6 November 1792*



*Le passage du pont d'Arcole,
15 November 1796*



*La prise d'Alexandrie,
3 July 1798*



*La bataille d'Austerlitz,
2 December 1805*

- The names of some great battles of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars are engraved on the attic, including



- A list of French victories is engraved under the great arches on the inside façades of the monument.



- On the inner façades of the small arches are engraved the names of the military leaders of the French Revolution and Empire. The names of those who died on the battlefield are underlined.



NORTH pillar



SOUTH pillar



EAST pillar



WEST pillar

- The great arcades are decorated with allegorical figures representing characters in Roman mythology (by J. Pradier).



- The ceiling with 21 sculpted roses



- Interior of the Arc de Triomphe



First World War
monument

Permanent exhibition about the
design of the Arch

Access

The *Arc de Triomphe* is accessible by the RER and Métro, with exit at the Charles de Gaulle—Étoile station. Because of heavy traffic on the roundabout of which the Arc is the centre, it is recommended that pedestrians use one of two underpasses located at the *Champs Élysées* and the *Avenue de la Grande Armée*. A lift will take visitors almost to the top – to the attic, where there is a small museum which contains large models of the Arc and tells its story from the time of its construction. Another 46 steps remain to climb in order to reach the top, the *terrasse*, from where one can enjoy a panoramic view of Paris.



Paris seen from the top of the Arc de triomphe

See also

- Bastille Day military parade
- Galerie des Batailles
- List of works by James Pradier
- Names inscribed under the Arc de Triomphe

References

1. Raymond, Gino (30 October 2008). *Historical dictionary of France*. Scarecrow Press. p. 9. ISBN 978-0-8108-5095-8. Retrieved 28 July 2011.
2. Fleischmann, Hector (1914). *An unknown son of Napoleon*. John Lane company. p. 204. Retrieved 28 July 2011.
3. The *étoile* ("star") is formed by twelve radiating avenues.
4. Melville Wallace, *La vie d'un pilote de chasse en 1914–1918*, Flammarion, Paris, 1978. The film clip is included in The History Channel's *Four Years of Thunder*.
5. This film is thought still to be subject to copyright.
6. Photograph of the first flight through the Arc
7. Hôtel des Invalides website (<http://www.paris.org/Musees/Invalides/>)
8. "History of the Arc de Triomphe in Paris". Places in France. Retrieved 28 December 2013.
9. "Les débuts de l'aviation : Charles Godefroy - L'Histoire par l'image". Histoire-image.org. Retrieved 13 August 2014.
10. Image of Liberation of Paris parade (http://pictopia.com/perl/get_image?size=457x275_mb&provider_id=38&ptp_photo_id=79689)
11. "Bomb Near Arc De Triomphe wounds 17". New York Times. Retrieved 8 January 2015.
12. The Battle of Fuentes de Oñoro is inscribed as a French victory, instead of the tactical draw that it actually was.
13. Among the generals are at least two foreign generals, Venezuelan Francisco de Miranda and German born Nicolas Luckner.
14. "Between War and Peace". Archived from the original on 16 December 2014. Retrieved 15 September 2014.
15. Naour, Jean-Yves Le; Allen, Penny (16 August 2005). *The Living Unknown Soldier: A Story of Grief and the Great War*. Macmillan. p. 74. ISBN 978-0-8050-7937-1. Retrieved 28 July 2011.
16. Forrest. *The Legacy of the French Revolutionary Wars*. Cambridge University Press. p. 38. ISBN 1139489240.

External links

- Inscriptions on the Arc de Triomphe (http://www.parisrama.com/thematiques/thematique_arcdetriomphe.htm)
- The names of 660 persons inscribed on the Arc de Triomphe (http://perso.wanadoo.fr/arnauld.divry/arc_de_triomphe.htm)
- Clarification of history of Arc de Triomphe (<http://arcdetriompheparis.com/history>)
- The permanent exhibition inside the Arc de Triomphe (<http://www.arc-de-triomphe.org/>)
- View from the Arc de Triomphe (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T_wyyfmCZuo)
- Arc de Triomphe (<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=73261227>) at *Find a Grave*



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