

US NAVY NORMANDY MONUMENT DEDICATION TOUR  
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SOUVENIR TOUR DIARY

SEPTEMBER

24: Tour members arrived independently in Paris and gathered at the Novotel Convention and Wellness Center in Roissy-en-France, near Charles de Gaulle International Airport. Our Tour Directors Cristy and Ray Pfeiffer greeted our tour members and many chose to join them and our driver Alain Schneider as Ray directed a bus tour of Paris. Traffic was light and we entered the city from the west. Ray described the Battle of Paris in August 1944 and pointed out a monument to the Free French Army forces that had entered the city at this point. We drove around the Arc d'Triomphe and saw its Eternal Flame, and then drove down Avenue des Champs Elysees – Europe's most well known boulevard. Ray described how the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division paraded down the avenue on August 26, 1944 in a show of support for the French government. We continued to Europe's most magnificent square – the Place de la Concorde and viewed the Eiffel Tower and Seine River for the first time.

We toured the Right Bank of Paris, viewed the Louvre Museum and then turned down the Rue de Rivoli where Ray pointed out the Hotel Meurice which had been the German commander's HQ during the Battle of Paris. He described the fighting that went on there. We continued on to some of the most prestigious shopping areas of Paris and viewed the Ritz Hotel on the Place Vendome. This is where Hemingway came to liberate the bar in 1944 and from where Lady Di began her fateful last ride. We continued on to the beautiful Opera House and then got a better view of the Louvre.

We crossed over to the Left Bank and had a wonderful view of Notre Dame de Paris Cathedral. Ray described the two islands in the Seine - L' ile de la Cite and ile St. Louis which lie at the heart of the city. The building that Thomas Jefferson used to plan Monticello was pointed out as well as the new monument to Jefferson. We toured the Latin Quarter and saw the Luxembourg Gardens. The August 1944 fighting was described and buildings that still bear the damage from WWII were pointed out. We stopped in front of the building where John Paul Jones died. He had been taken in by the French people and given a state funeral. His body was preserved in alcohol for over 100 years until President Theodore Roosevelt requested its return to the US. We continued on to the Eiffel Tower and toured the fashionable St. Germain-des-Pres area. Areas where heavy fighting took place in WWII were pointed out. We crossed back to the

Right Bank and statues of George Washington and Benjamin Franklin were noted. We were able to complete our tour of the city without any problems considering that there was a partial transit strike!

This evening we gathered in our hotel for our Welcome Dinner. Ken Johnson and Greg Streeter of NOUS introduced themselves, but we had decided to hold the formal introductions of our tour members until the next night.

25: Under sunny skies we departed for Normandy. We ran into some traffic going around the city but then were able to get on the wonderful Autoroutes 14 and 13, and soon we were in the beautiful French countryside. We stopped for lunch on the highway and then continued on to Normandy. Ray described The Battle of the Atlantic and the buildup to the D-Day invasion. He also gave information on modern French history as well as the European Union.

We entered the invasion area near Caen but continued on to our home for the next four nights, the Novotel Centre in Bayeux. We stopped to drop off bags and then continued to our first special event. We drove to the coast along the road that divided the American and British sectors of the invasion in 1944. Historic Tours had worked closely with the American and French authorities to have the US Navy Band playing for our arrival at the beautiful and historic harbor town of Port-en-Bessin. Much credit for these arrangements needs to go our old friend Eric Beatty of the American Consul's office in Rennes. Eric did the translating as well. It was a glorious day with the sun shining and we got our first look at the English Channel. The tide was out and Ray described the actions of the US Navy and the 47<sup>th</sup> Royal Marine Commandos to liberate this small but vital town. US Navy destroyers of DESRON 18 supported the Royal Marines in their two-day bloody struggle to take the town.

The Allies knew that it would take time to construct the "Artificial Harbors" and so Port-en-Bessin was chosen to be developed by the US Navy into a much needed port and more importantly as a PLUTO Port. PLUTO stood for Pipeline Under The Ocean.

In addition to the Navy Band, we were greeted by French locals and the school children, who were let out of their classes. After the band played, our group was invited into the town reception hall for drinks and snacks with the kids and teachers. Veterans were asked by the students for their autographs.

Cristy and Ray also invited all the tour members over to the *Bar de la Maree* where we hosted to a drink and snacks. We had time to visit this beautiful town before departing for the nearby *Undersea Wrecks of D-Day Museum*.

*Historic Tours* had been working with the museum since 1987 when it brought back the survivors of the 741<sup>st</sup> Tank Battalion. These were the men who brought in the DD Duplex Drive Sherman Tanks on Omaha Beach. 27 of 32 tanks were

lost during the run into the beach. The now deceased owner of the museum Jacques Lemonchois had welcomed the veterans. He was a deep-sea diver who personally salvaged the wrecks we now viewed. Tour members were amazed how well preserved the tanks and other vehicles were after 40 years in the sea. We were given a warm welcome by Madame Lemonchois.

We checked into our hotel and this evening we had formal introductions of all tour members. NOUS officers spoke and there many emotional stories related.

26: We headed directly for the Normandy American Cemetery on Omaha Beach. Our veterans helped to hoist the colors on the giant flagpoles that had been seen in *Saving Private Ryan*. It was quite emotional for all as Taps and the National Anthem were played.

Tour members then gathered at the giant battle map of the European Theater of Operations and Ray related the history of the theater of war concentrating on the American role. He then continued with an explanation of the war against Japan.

We proceeded to the *Garden of the Missing* where we learned about the 1,557 casualties commemorated on the Wall whose remains were never found. We were told about the SS Leopoldville and the men of the 66<sup>th</sup> ID and how over 500 of the names on the Wall were theirs. We continued on to the US Navy section and observed the names of the many Navy men whose bodies were never found.

Ray made his presentation on the Battle of Normandy using the second giant battle map. We proceeded to the Graves area and visited the Chapel where its beautiful ceiling was explained. We proceeded to the graves of the Niland brothers, about whom *Saving Private Ryan* was based. We continued on to the graves, including those of the two sons of President Theodore Roosevelt.

We drove down to the E3 Draw on Omaha Beach and Ray made his first presentation on the epic struggle to take the most difficult of the five invasion beaches. Once again the tide was out and we had a chance to walk on the beach and to observe the German positions on the heights from the same position the men had on June 6.

We had lunch at the *Omaha Beach Golf Club* and returned to the Cemetery for our official Wreath Laying Ceremony. We were joined by a Color Guard with the various Armed Forces represented. Greg Streeter led the ceremony, which was held under sunny skies. Our veterans laid the wreath at the foot of magnificent statue of *American Youth Rising From The Waves*. Taps and the Navy Hymn were played and there was barely a dry eye in the group.

We now proceeded back to Omaha Beach where our first stop was the E1 Draw at German Resistance Nest # 65, where Ray described the actions and Captain Zimmerman added his own personal memories of the day. E1 was the first draw

cleared on D-Day and DESRON 18 and Captain Zimmerman deserved much of the credit for the gunfire support the troops received from the destroyers that came in perilously close to shore.

We proceeded along Omaha to the D3 Draw and stopped to view the first temporary US cemetery site and the spot where the landings were supposed to take place in *Saving Private Ryan*.

We stopped at the infamous D1 or "Vierville Draw". The actions here were described in detail as well as those of the heroic Rangers in "Charlie Sector". We viewed German Resistance Nest # 72 and saw the 88mm gun. The American "Mulberry Harbor" was explained, as was its destruction in the great storm of June 19, 1944. When driving up the Draw to Vierville we learned how locals had found remnants of the Artificial Harbor in 2004 in central France and how they had brought them back and restored them for the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day. We also viewed the 6<sup>th</sup> Engineer Special Brigade Monument and the plaque to the 5<sup>th</sup> Ranger Battalion. Ray also described how this street was named after Bedford, Virginia in honor of the town that had lost so many men in Vierville on June 6.

We stopped in Vierville to allow Don Krebs to once again visit the church which had had its steeple shot off by his ship USS Harding. He and his wife and daughters were thrilled to find this church again, which they had visited on a prior tour.

We returned to the Novotel for our dinner.

27: The big day for the dedication of the Monument was finally here! Cloudless skies greeted us as we drove to the Cotentin Peninsula. Our first stop was Ste. Mere-Eglise. The town had been put on the map when *The Longest Day* was filmed here, featuring Red Buttons as Pvt. John Steele when he hung off the town church's steeple. We learned about the heroic efforts of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division to take and to hold this strategic town. We were shown the inside of the historic church including the two commemorative stained glass windows. We then had some free time to shop, visit the Airborne Troops Museum or to enjoy the classic car display in the town square.

We moved on then to Ste. Marie-du-Mont where we were greeted by hundreds of French people from the local area and by many Americans both military and civilian. Many of these folks had been coordinating the efforts to build the monument for many months and everyone enjoyed the chance to finally meet them.

Ambassador Stapleton, VADM Gallagher and Stephen Spears, the sculptor of the monument, were there to greet us. Cristy and Ray had invited their good friend Helen Patton – the granddaughter of the great WWII general. She and three artists from Bosnia accompanied her on the ride all the way from Germany.

Much effort had been put into coordinating the lunch, which was attended by about 200 persons. The lunch was wonderful and Eric Beatty once again did a great job of translating. With a police escort, we then made our way down to Utah Beach area of Ste. Marie-du-Mont. The best seats were reserved for our group with the veterans in the very front. A large French and American crowd was on hand for the dedication.

US Naval personnel from USS The Sullivans formed an honor guard and Greg Streeter represented NOUS during the dedication ceremony. Following the ceremony we moved up to the top of former Command Bunker of German Resistance Nest #5 to the site of the monument. For the unveiling ceremony, the monument was wrapped in a parachute.

Following a flyover of French jets, the moment finally arrived and the monument was unveiled. All tour members felt a great sense of pride that this beautiful monument would now finally commemorate the sacrifices made by so many of the US Navy in the world's greatest amphibious operation and its aftermath. There were many tears and also a sense of relief that all had gone well and even the infamous Normandy weather had cooperated!

The unveiling ceremony was followed with time for photos and a reception for all hosted by Ste. Marie-du-Mont. Cristy and Ray took the time to introduce Dr. Moon to Helen Patton – the daughter and granddaughter of two of America's great WWII leaders met for the time. Together we went inside the Command Bunker so that Dr. Moon could see the painting of her father, up close for the first time.

Following the reception, we stopped by the new Brecourt Manor Monument which commemorates the battle of Easy Company, 506<sup>th</sup> PIR, 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division made famous in *Band of Brothers*. Ray explained how this was Easy Company's first battle and how the mission was carried out. We then stopped at the town square in Ste. Marie-du-Mont to admire the war monument and to visit the church and to see the plaque to the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne.

We went back to our hotel where we were joined by the Belgian US Navy WWII Reenactors who had long been in e-mail contact with Cristy and Ray. They wore actual WWII uniforms and were enjoyed by all.

28: Our day began with a visit to Pointe du Hoc where the heroic US Rangers had scaled the 100-foot cliffs to knock out the German guns which were thought to have threatened both Omaha and Utah Beaches and the ships at sea. This was the only time during our tour that the weather was not clear and some fog hampered our view back to Utah Beach. Ray explained the battle and made various stops including at Col. Rudder's Command Post.

We continued on to the British sector and stopped at Arromanches. Ray related how "Port Winston" the Artificial Harbor was so vital to the success of the landings. We viewed the Mulberry Harbor and its remaining "Phoenix's" and had time to visit the museum, to shop and to have lunch.

We continued on to Gold Beach and stopped at Asnelles for a really fantastic view of the western end of the British sector and the Artificial Harbor. We moved on to the Juno Beach sector where the Canadian role was related.

Our final stop was Bayeux. Though we had been here for four days, the days had been full and many of us had not had a chance to see this delightful town. We were led on a brief walking tour passing the famed Bayeux Tapestry and viewing the 900 year old cathedral. The walk ended at the Tanner's District and we had free time to explore this charming town.

Dinner was at our hotel and we used this opportunity as a Farewell Dinner to thank all of those involved in the planning for the monument and its dedication.

29: We had an early departure from Bayeux and headed into Paris. During the ride the end of the Battle of Normandy was related as well as the "War Around The World" as well as the role of American women in WWII. Cristy took over the guiding as Ray drove some of the veterans into Paris in their car. She pointed out the sites and we were a little early, so Cristy and Alain took tour members near the Napoleon's Tomb to take photos. The bus returned to the boat and we had a delightful, deluxe lunch cruise on the Seine on the Bateux Parisien. We floated by sites like the Eiffel Tower, the Statue of Liberty (the smaller one of course), the Louvre, the Place de la Concorde and of course Notre Dame de Paris.

We said our goodbyes and Cristy and Alain dropped off tour members at different points in Paris or near Charles de Gaulle Airport. Ray drove back to Normandy.

A personal note from Ray:

I drove back to Normandy and spent the night in Bayeux. On September 30 I had to drive to Cherbourg to take the overnight ferry back to Ireland. I spent the afternoon at Utah Beach. Our friends there gave me the honor of signing the "Golden Book" of the town that they have had since the early 1950's. Though we had many veterans sign the book over the years, it was the first time Cristy or I had been given the honor.

By now the normal rain of Normandy had returned but I took quite a bit of time to go up to the monument and really let it all sink in. All the effort made by so many people over five years. I also actually looked at it up close for the first time and touched it. The attention to detail made by Stephen Spears was incredible. I must have spent 45 minutes there looking at it from every angle, trying to imagine

people looking at 50 or 100 years from now and knowing that NOUS had completed the mission of honoring these heroes who sacrificed everything they had so many years ago.