

OUR D-DAY TRIP TO FRANCE

17 – 25 May 2013



Omaha Beach

Doctor Gary, Lisa and Michael Johnson with George and Donna Stephenson

Shakespeare penned a play titled *All's Well That Ends Well* meaning there is a good ending to an event even though there may have been troubles. Oddly enough Paris is central in the play. This is a good lead into our trip to France.

Our first attempt to travel to France was in March 2013, but bad weather conditions in France thwarted this trip. The Ides of March was not kind to us. We departed Orlando International Airport and arrived Dulles International Airport, Washington DC early a.m., Sunday, 10 March 2013. We met our daughter (Lisa) from Houston, her husband and their son at Dulles Airport. They flew into Dulles the day before and did an RON (Remain Over Night) at an airport hotel. We hired a limo and did a windshield tour of Washington DC. Our limo

driver was from India. He accommodated the points of interests we wanted to see. The highlight of that tour to me was visiting the WWII Memorial, Korean War Memorial and the Vietnam Wall Memorial. The name of Donna's uncle is etched on the Vietnam Wall Memorial. Coincidentally it is an uncle who was in the D-day glider landings. There is also the name of a good friend etched on the Wall. We got out of the limo at the war memorials to see them up-close. When we returned to Dulles we met another couple in our travel group from Montgomery, Texas (Retired Continental Airline Captain and his wife) at the United Airline Paris boarding gate. While our aircraft was boarding Lisa received e-traffic from the proprietor of the Bed and Breakfast (B&B) where we were to stay in La Fiere, France (the B&B a La Bataille de La Fiere). The proprietor encouraged us not to come because they were expecting a blizzard. The B&B (Picture Page 29) is owned by an American who is married to a Frenchman. It is a lone structure at the La Fiere Bridge battle site. On D-day the structure was a barn used by the 82d Airborne Division for a command post. We hurriedly caucused to determine if we wanted to fly to Paris and then to another European destination. Turkey, Ireland and Germany were considered. We decided to return home but could not get a flight to Orlando because those flights were sold out (Spring Break). We flew to Houston with Lisa and her family for two days and visited the birth place of Roxie (our miniature dachshund). It turned out our decision, not to proceed with the Paris leg of the trip, was a good decision. There was indeed a blizzard that crippled the area in Normandy we were to visit. Over 100 people were stranded in their cars in snow drifts. The area was also without power. Another couple in our group (Retired Continental Airline Captain and his wife also a retired Continental Airline Captain)

who were traveling a different route went to Paris and onto the B&B. They met severe blizzard effects. The B&B owner was rude to them for coming after the warning she sent to Lisa not to come. They were not given safe haven from the blizzard. She was later rude to Lisa concerning our second D-day trip attempt. I told Donna I would not stay at that property. Hence we changed our reservations to a property in Sainte-Mere-Eglise.

Our second trip, although successful, also met with problems. We extended the length of our second trip an additional two days beyond what our first trip would have been. These additional two days required us to make day care arrangements for Roxie. Our granddaughter was available to stay with Roxie each day. Our son (John) was with Roxie at night. Our other daughter (Lynn) flew to Houston two days prior to us leaving to stay with Lisa's hounds. Lisa and her family departed two days prior to us in order to do a day trip in London and Paris. In Paris they did a Segway tour and visited the Henri Selmer Musical Instrument Company and Museum. The Selmer Company is a renowned manufacturer of concert saxophones. Our grandson is a music education major at Stephan F. Austin College, Nacogdoches, Texas and is an accomplished saxophonist. He completed his freshman year in May 2013. Our first failed France trip was planned around his college Spring Break and the second trip at the end of his school year. Thus explains his interest in visiting the Selmer Company.

Day number 1, Friday (17 May 2013):



Departing home during the dark hours to begin the first leg of our trip

John and Roxie took us to Orlando International Airport. Donna and I departed Orlando and flew to Dulles Airport, Washington D.C., to connect with a Paris flight. We did not meet Lisa and her family at Dulles this trip. While in the boarding area I was approached by a man who recognized the Bronze Star lapel pin on my sports coat. He was the Director for the Advanced Strategic Art Program at the United States (US) Army War College. He was there with some associates who were taking a small group of college students to study D-day Order of

Battle (OB) tactics. He volunteered that he does this every year with a group of college students. We had a nice chat and exchanged professional cards in order to contact each other later. I also met his associates and some of the students.

The good news is our Paris flight took an on time push off from the gate. The bad news is we rolled back to another gate and took a five hour delay. We were third in line for takeoff on the runway approach when the pilot turned the plane around and proceeded to another gate. A hydraulic pump warning light had activated on the flight deck. Thankfully we were allowed to deplane at the new gate to wait for a decision to be made whether to replace the problem hydraulic pump or get another aircraft. The good news is we were told we would get another aircraft. The bad news is the replacement aircraft that arrived was a smaller plane and 25 passengers had to be removed from the flight. Donna and I got seats on the side of the plane that had just two seats. This allowed us to lean on each other during the flight. Once in the air we had a good overnight flight to Paris and landed at Charles de Gaulle Airport on the following morning. We were met by an escort when deplaning. The escort expedited our move through immigration and customs to get our passports stamped. He then took us to an inter-terminal tram to take us to the hotel shuttle bus area. Another thing that helped our smooth move through arriving activities is that we don't travel with checked baggage. We have learned how to live out of our hand carried luggage.

Day number 2, Saturday (18 May 2013):

Our first day in France started at Charles de Gaulle Airport. We took a shuttle from the airport to our hotel (Airport Radisson Blu) and met Lisa and her family who were also staying at the same hotel. We had the hotel concierge book a cab for us with a driver who was fluent in English for a private evening tour of the night lights of Paris. You would think we would have gotten a Frenchman to tour us, but no the cab driver was from Cambodia. He was fluent in English and responded to all our requests. Donna and I had done a similar tour on a previous trip to Paris and thoroughly enjoyed our Paris night tour. Our Paris windshield night tour was absolutely breathtaking. We didn't go into any attractions or stop at souvenir stands, but had our driver stop for us to pose for pictures at certain venues. Seeing Paris landmarks illuminated at night is awesome. Our tour included but was not limited to the Musee du Louvre & Monument, Avenue des Champs-Elysees & the Arc de Triomphe de l'Etoile, Quartier Pigalle & Moulin Rouge, Dome des Invalides, Notre Dame de Paris, La Basilique du Sacre-Coeur, Palais Garnier and most majestic of all was the Eiffel Tower ablaze in night lighting. On the hour all the lights on the Eiffel Tower twinkle. I believe a night windshield tour of Paris offers a perspective most often overlooked. My first trip to Paris and the Palace of Versailles was in 1959 and I have since been to Paris no less than fifteen times. Donna and I have had the opportunity on previous Paris trips to visit Paris landmarks, tourist attractions and Versailles. In the past we have toured Paris on tours, using the Metro and driving. The latter was a hoot trying to exit the Arc de Triomphe traffic circle from the inside lane during peak hour traffic. There are seven lanes of traffic. Needless to say we looped the traffic circle several times before getting off.

Day number 3, Sunday (19 May 2013):

We departed the hotel early a.m. by hotel shuttle to AVIS car rental at Charles de Gaulle Airport. Possibly one of the most important decisions of this trip was made at the AVIS car rental counter....a GPS device. This was certainly better than depending on a gazetteer. Our first Stop was Monet Gardens and Estate in the small village of Giverny. We traveled on rural roads. The country agrarian landscape was beautiful. We did a self-tour of Monet's house and gardens. The gardens occupy two sides of the highway. Monet's home and flower gardens are on one side of the highway and the famous lily pond is on the other side. Donna and I had our picture taken at spots that were subjects of Monet's paintings, especially the lily pond and arched garden bridge. The flower gardens were well manicured and the flowers were beautiful (Pictures Pages 26-27). Before departing Giverny we ate at a quaint village hotel restaurant. The food was excellent. On this trip I learned that in France if a place is called a restaurant it has to use table cloths and cloth napkins. We left Monet Gardens and drove to Mont Saint-Michel to RON. Mont Saint-Michel is a famous French landmark in Normandy (Pictures Page 28). It is a rocky tidal island with a monastery about a mile off the coast of France. The hotel area is a gated commune on the mainland. An access code is needed to open the gate barrier arm. Once at the hotel your vehicle remains parked, you then use shuttle buses to take you to the monastery. We stayed at the Hotel Mercure. Tourists not staying at a hotel must take a bus into the commune or walk in. We spent the evening walking around the commune looking into shops in the area. We ended our stroll with a stop in a café and had a coke/coffee and French pastry. It was very good.

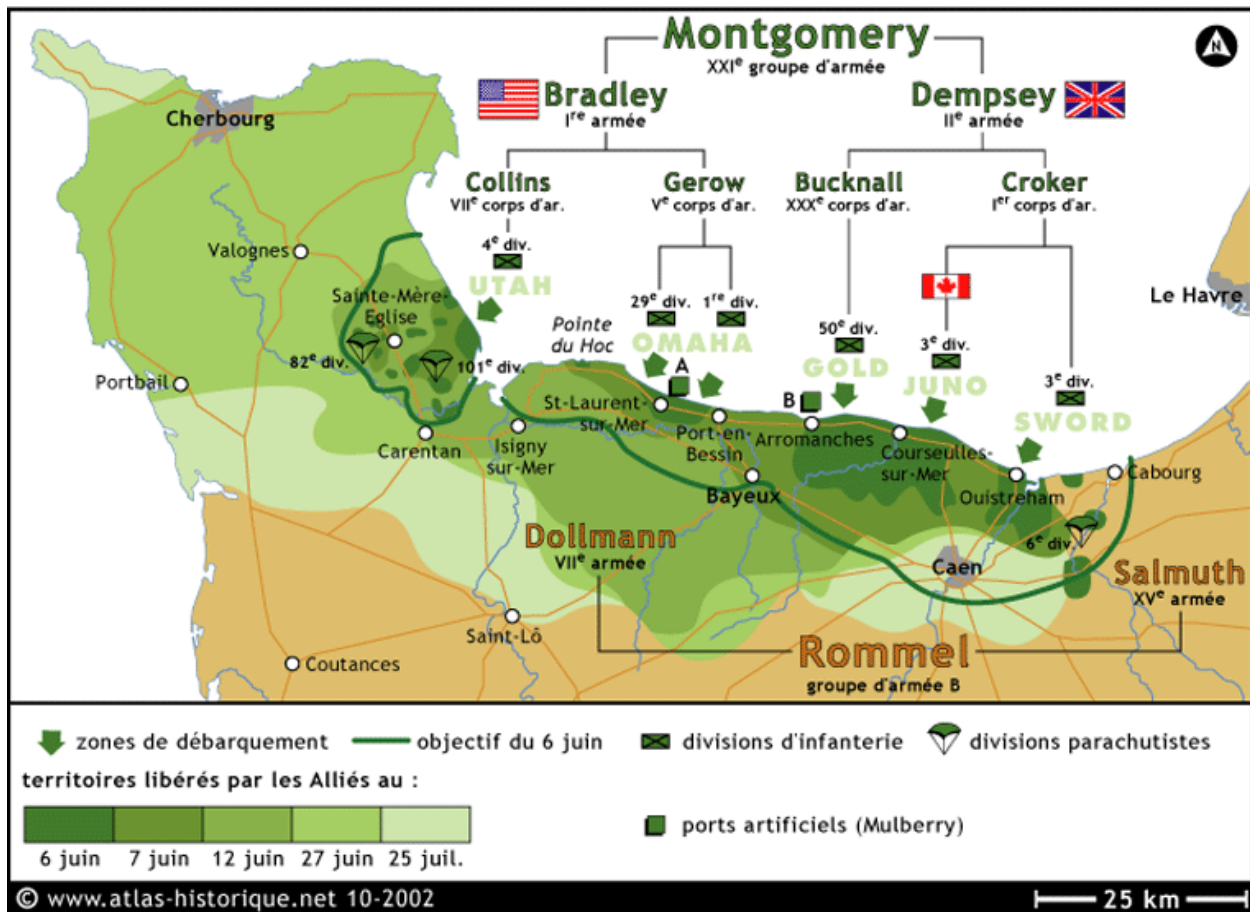
Day number 4, Monday (20 May 2013):

We checked out of our hotel early a.m. and repaired across the road to a small café and had a breakfast croissant and other French breakfast pastries with breakfast drinks. It was good. We then caught a special handicap small shuttle that takes passengers up to the front entrance of the island monastery. I had my blue handicap hangtag with me and used it at various sites to facilitate parking and transportation needs. The island has three levels with the monastery and abbey on the top level. Donna and I walked up two levels on the steep cobblestone pedestrian way. We did not continue to the third level to see the abbey like Lisa and her family. We went back down to a first level open air café and had a coke and cup of espresso coffee. When Lisa and her family returned we caught the shuttle back to the commune and stopped at the same café we had breakfast that morning for a baguette sandwich and departed Mont Saint-Michel for Sainte-Mere-Eglise. We stopped in Bayeux at the Musee de la Tapisserie de Bayeux to see the Bayeux Tapestry. It is a 230 foot long embroidered cloth from the 11th Century showing the Norman Conquest of England. It was enclosed in a glass covered illuminated case spread out for a full view. During World War II (WWII) a message was intercepted by Bletchley Park (English code breakers) from Himmler to the Wehrmacht to move the Tapestry to the Musee du Louver in Paris for safe keeping. The Tapestry was returned to Bayeux in 1945. We arrived in Sainte-Mere-Eglise late afternoon and checked into our hotel, the Logis Le Sainte-Mere-Eglise. We ate at the hotel that evening, but ate at a downtown restaurant our remaining time in Sainte-Mere-Eglise. The food was good and the proprietor visited at our table each meal. He was a most friendly and cordial individual.

Day number 5, Tuesday (21 May 2013)

Day number 6, Wednesday (22 May 2013)

D-day Landings (Operation Neptune) Tour



This war torn area is now a peaceful and tranquil place

Our breakfast the first morning of the tour was croissants we had purchased at a bakery. We were met in the hotel lobby at 9:00 a.m. by our tour guide, Trevor Standefer, American D-day Tours. Trevor was born in the Carentan area. He is tenacious and passionate when explaining D-day events. He has both French and American citizenship and speaks both languages fluently without an accent. His Father is an

American and his Mother is French. His Mother's family is indigenous to the region and this family lineage has given Trevor a vast knowledge about living in Normandy during the German occupation and events of D-day. In July 1944, his pregnant grandmother, in labor, was transported by American soldiers in a jeep to Carentan for medical attention. She delivered a baby girl....Trevor's Mother.

Meeting Trevor in the hotel lobby was the beginning of two fantastic 10 hour days of immersing ourselves in the D-day Invasion (Operation Neptune) and the Battle of Normandy (Operation Overlord) OB. We also followed invasion advancements inland. The order in which events are presented in this article is not a reflection of the order of travel of our D-day tour. We literally went each day until dusk and experienced varied weather conditions. We had a mix of windy, sunny and cold cloudy weather on our two day D-day tour. When we departed Sainte-Mere-Eglise to return to Paris we had rain and hail. We saw a vast area where the D-day invasion and subsequent Battle of Normandy played out. The OB events on the beaches, small villages and the Carentan Peninsula are indelibly imprinted in our mind. However, names pertaining to some sites are not recalled because of the French verbiage. The area of our two day whirlwind D-day tour would have best been suited for a week. I do not believe there was a town or village associated with the American invading forces that we did not see.

Our tour included all museum fees and lunch each day. The first day Trevor invited us into his home for a lovely meal prepared by his wife. It was delicious baguette sandwiches with local chesses, ham and other sandwich meats. The meal included chips and cokes. The crème de la crème came when his wife served a sumptuous apple tatin she had

prepared. Possibly the apples were from apple orchards in the area, maybe orchids D-day soldiers ate apples from. Our meal on the 2nd tour day was at a café on Omaha Beach. We had grilled chicken shish kabob with sides. Our meal option was called in by Trevor and was ready upon our arrival. It was a good meal. This was certainly a time saving action that allowed us to have more time for the tour.

The Battle of Normandy, D-day Beaches to Bastogne, lasted 80 days. We started our D-day tour at the La Fiere Bridge over the Merderet River. The bridge is five miles inland from Utah Beach. At the La Fiere Bridge we saw a tranquil open green landscape (Picture Page 29) not the flooded marsh land it would have been on D-day. The Germans had flooded the area to retard the movement of allied forces. The La Fiere Bridge was assigned to the 82d Airborne to take five hours prior to the D-day amphibious landing to block a possible German counterattack against our forces landing on Utah Beach. PFC Charles DeGlopper from the 325th Glider Infantry Regiment (GIR), 82nd Airborne Division was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor (MOH) for his actions at the La Fiere Bridge on 9 June 1944. The foxhole of Brigadier General (BG) Gavin can still be seen at La Fiere. Donna had an uncle who was in a glider of the 325th GIR on a D-day +1 re-supply mission. There is a memorial on a knoll at the bridge flying a French and American flag. There is also a metal diorama and an Iron Mike Statue at that site. A twin Iron Mike Statue is located at Fort Benning, Georgia, home of the Infantry (“Queen of the Battle”, “Follow Me”). Donna and I had two tours of duty at Fort Benning.

During our two day D-day tour we visited several museums. The two that stand out in my mind are the Musee Airborne, Sainte-Mere-Eglise and the Utah Beach Museum at Sainte-Marie-du-Mont. The former is

located on Rue Eisenhower in Sainte-Mere-Eglise and the latter is on Utah Beach. The Airborne Museum had a US Army Air Force Waco glider on display. It was a glider like the one Donna's uncle would have flown in during D-day actions. Guests were permitted to enter the aircraft. It was a monumental moment for us to stand inside this aircraft from D-day missions.

We saw and entered numerous churches that had D-day significance. The 11th century Church of Saint Mary located on Rue Eisenhower, Sainte-Mere-Eglise across from the Airborne Museum is one. It is the church that Private John Steele of the 82d Airborne, 505th Regiment Combat Team (RCT) got his parachute caught on the church steeple. An effigy of Private Steele in his parachute uniform and parachute hangs from the church steeple today as a memorial (Picture Page 30). We went inside the church and saw the two D-day memorial stained glass windows and other D-day artifacts. The most noticeable memorial is the paratrooper memorial of a John Steele hanging by his parachute from the church steeple. While inside the church Trevor pointed out the location of the hidden stairwell located in an interstitial area between walls that gave access to the church steeple.

We visited the Angoville-au-Plain Church. Angoville-au-Plain was in a 101st Airborne Division D-day DZ (drop zone). Their mission was to secure the bridge over the Douve River and hold it for ground troops in the D-day amphibious landings. Airborne medics used the church as a first aid infirmary. Blood stains are still visible on some of the pews. The church was marked with a red cross flag denoting it as a non-combat area. PFC Robert Wright and PFC Ken Moore 101st Airborne Division, 2d Battalion 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) medics treated approximately 80 battle casualties (American and German)

there. The church changed hands several times during the course of battle. On one occasion a German officer came in the church and saw that the German soldiers were receiving the same care as the American soldiers. PFC Wright had the German officer remove his sidearm before entering the church to visit his soldiers. PFC Wright did not allow armed soldiers in the church. There are two stained glass windows in the church that are a tribute to the 101st airborne action there. A monument is located in the church courtyard in tribute to PFC Wright and PFC Moore. There is also a marble monument with a set of airborne wings with the words Toccoa, Angoville-au-Plain. This is a tribute to the 101st Airborne Division that formed at Camp Toccoa, Georgia. When we were in the church we noted a donation collection box to help preserve the D-day tributes there. We left a contribution.



We visited the ruins of the 12th Century Roman Catholic Church in the village of Graignes destroyed in the Battle of Graignes. This was the site of the Graignes massacre. The church tower had provided a panoramic view of the agrarian area surrounding the village and served as a First Aid Station for the 82d Airborne Division, 3d Battalion, 507th PIR. This 182 member airborne unit was mis-dropped on D-day 18 miles off course landing in Graignes. This unit held off the German 17th SS Panzergrenadier Division inflicting 500 KIA (Killed in Action) and 700 wounded on the enemy. The action of the 507th PIR nearly annihilated the German unit and prevented it from reinforcing German forces in Carentan. They inflicted a devastating blow on the German SS unit.

The SS retaliated rounding up the civilians, ransacking, pillaging and burning the church and village. Civilians found to have supported the 507th PIR were massacred along with the two Priests of the church. Thirteen wounded paratroopers with their combat physician (Captain Bud Sophian) who stayed back with them when the village was captured by the German unit were executed. Five were bayoneted to death and thrown into a shallow pond. The other nine were required to dig a hole and each were shot in the head and pushed into the hole



on top of each other. There was an observation platform outside the cemetery for tourist to get a sense of the lush green landscape that would have been marshes due to the Germans flooding the area.

We stopped at the Church of Notre-Dame in Colleville-sur-Mer for pictures only. The church was the scene of heavy fighting as the 1st Infantry struggled on shore D-day. It was mostly destroyed in battle actions. The USS Harding used the church as an aiming point to lob over 100 shells on Omaha Beach. There is a large memorial picture



billboard in front of the restored church showing 1st Infantry Division soldiers at the bombed out old church (see me with sign).

While on tour Trevor called the mayor of Pointe du Hoc on his cell phone and asked that the town church be opened to allow us to go in. Trevor wanted us to see a D-day memorial inside

the church honoring a favorite son of Texas; Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) James Rudder, Commander 2d Ranger Battalion and his unit's feat of derring-do in scaling the cliffs of Pointe du Hoc to neutralize 155 mm canons that posed a threat to the D-day invading forces. One wall has an engraved image of LTC Rudder and a tribute to his men. The French, American and Texas flags hang on the wall side by side behind the altar (Picture Page 33). Trevor wanted us to see this because Lisa and her family are from Texas. The French, American and Texas flags fly on separate flag poles in front of the Pointe du Hoc City Hall. I guess it can be said The Eyes of Texas are upon Pointe du Hoc. LTC Rudder went on to become a Major General and a president of Texas A&M University.

Pointe du Hoc is centrally located between Utah and Omaha Beaches. When standing on the Pointe du Hoc bluff looking toward the English Channel Utah Beach is located on the left and Omaha Beach on the right. Trevor gave us an interesting walking lecture on the Pointe du Hoc bluff using visual aids. We were able to go into bunkers and Widerstandsneests (concrete caves and defensive positions) on Pointe du Hoc and peripheral Omaha Beach hillside fortification positions. Impressive was a thick (perhaps 10 feet thick) reinforced concrete roof with iron bars that was an ammunition bunker blown up by combat engineers after Pointe du Hoc was secured. The top was blown at least 100 feet from the ammunition bunker. We had our picture taken at the granite pylon monument dedicated to the 2d Ranger Battalion. It is on the edge of the cliff on top of a bunker facing Omaha Beach. President Reagan gave his 1984, speech at the D-day 40th reunion at this location. We viewed



numerous battle monuments on top of the cliff, gun emplacements and



Widerstandsneests. Earlier in the day we walked in the hedgerows where five Pointe du Hoc cannons (replica pictured on page 15) were secreted and subsequently destroyed by the Rangers. The cannons were captured WWI 155mm GPF (Grande Puissance Filloux)

Cannons. The hedgerows were dense and covered with a natural canopy.

We walked on Utah Beach the first day and the second day we walked on Omaha Beach. Trevor gave an OB lecture at each beach using placard visual aids and drawing D-day OB diagrams in the sand at each beach. We visited only the beaches in the American Sector....Utah and Omaha. We did not go onto Gold, Juno or Sword Beaches in the British Sector. A particularly interesting commemoration to the liberation of occupied areas is the Memorial to the Liberation (Voie de la Liberte). It commemorates the route taken by allied forces from the breakout at Utah Beach to Bastogne, Belgium, 1146 kilometers. There is a Liberty Stone marker ('Borne') placed every kilometer along the route from Utah Beach to Bastogne. The first Borne on Utah Beach is KM 00 (Picture Page 31).

The 1st Infantry Division and 29th Infantry Division stormed Omaha Beach at 6:30 a.m., Tuesday, 6 June 1944 and the last bunker was neutralized at 3:30 p.m. that day. It was quicker than I had originally believed. Roughly 2000 American soldiers were killed on the flat exposed killing zone of Omaha Beach. There were 3700 obstacles on the beach (one every 2 yards) and 1700 land mines. On Omaha Beach

the rate of German fire power was estimated to be 900 artillery rounds, 450 mortar rounds and 36,000 rounds of machine gun fire that occurred per hour. A big moment for me was standing next to the 1st Infantry Division Monument on Omaha Beach shoreline (Picture Page 32). It is a monument bearing the names of 1st Infantry Division soldiers killed on D-day. It is built on the roof of a shoreline bunker. Another Omaha Beach monument is the Les Braves Monument (Picture Page 32). It is a stainless steel sculpture built on the Beach commemorating the soldiers who fell on the beach. During high tide the base of the monument is in the water. It is also believed that approximately 3000 French citizen casualties occurred on D-day. We walked between the thick hedgerows that were part of the battle scenario. Having read about the hedgerows and now seeing them was surprising. We followed the corridor the 1st Infantry Division took off Omaha Beach. Going up the corridor we stopped at a 1st Infantry Division patch (Picture Page 32) that was constructed of stones into the road embankment. It was approximately 15 feet tall. I had my picture taken standing in front of the Division patch.

Trevor gave a presentation on Utah Beach using instructional posters and diagramming Utah Beach OB in the sand. The 4th Infantry Division stormed Utah Beach and lost approximately 200 KIA. They landed about one mile off their designated landing zone. This prompted Brigadier General (BG) Theodore Roosevelt Jr. (Deputy Commanding General, 4th Infantry Division) to utter his famous words, "*We Will Start The War From Here*". BG Roosevelt was the only General to come ashore with the initial D-day assault force (first wave) and oldest at 56. He landed on Utah Beach. He was also the only father/son to go on shore with the first wave on D-day. His son Captain Quentin Roosevelt

landed on Omaha Beach. BG Norman Cota (Deputy Commanding General, 29th Infantry Division) was in the second wave that landed on Omaha Beach. He made the famous statement "*Gentlemen we are being killed on the beaches. Let go inland and be killed*". He was played by Robert Mitchum in *The Longest Day*. We followed the D-day OB off the Beaches on the same corridors used by the D-day soldiers. The most somber venues we visited were the American War Cemetery at Colleville-sur-Mer and the German War Cemetery at La Cambe near Bayeux.

The German War Cemetery at La Cambe is a small cemetery. Unlike the American cemetery at Colleville-sur-Mer this cemetery is still French soil. There are in excess of 21,000 war dead buried here of which 207 are unknown soldiers. The cemetery is divided into 49 grave fields. Each field has five black crosses (Picture Page 36). After the war German soldiers buried by US forces were recovered to be reinterred in the German cemetery. One grave had five soldiers marked with five crosses. This became a symbol of unity for the German soldiers buried in the La Cambe Cemetery. Due to the small size of the cemetery up to three soldiers are buried in one grave and marked with a flat plaque with the names of the dead buried there. There is a tumulus in the center of the cemetery. It is a mass grave of 89 known soldiers, 207 unknown soldiers and over 2000 body parts.

The Colleville-sur-Mer Cemetery was the last site we visited on our two day D-day tour. It was a fitting end to our tour. The solemnity and grandeur of the cemetery brought out profound emotions looking at the field of crosses that represented our Normandy Invasion losses. Upon departing the cemetery Donna remarked about the dignity of these hallowed grounds and how well they were kept. Not a blade of

grass was out of place. The cemetery at Colleville-sur-Mer is a 172.5 acres site located on a bluff that overlooks Omaha beach and the English Channel. The land was granted to the United States by the French Government. This granted land is under the control of the United States Parks Service. The remains of 9,387 war dead (mostly D-day) are buried here and marked with a cross or Star of David with the name of the fallen. In this number are 307 unknown soldiers. Their crosses are marked with the words "*Here Rests in Honored Glory a Comrade in Arms Known But to God*". There is also a wall memorial in the cemetery that has the names of 1,557 soldiers missing In Action (MIA). Among those buried here are:

- Three MOH recipients. Their crosses have gold lettering and a gold star.
- Four women
- One Father and Son buried side by side.
- Thirty-three pair of brothers buried side by side
- The two brothers that inspired *Saving Private Ryan*
- One WWI Veteran buried next to his brother BG Roosevelt (MOH)

Our visit to the Colleville-sur-Mer Cemetery had an extraordinary conclusion. Trevor arranged with the cemetery staff for our grandson (Eagle Scout) and me to take part in lowering and folding the flag. Taps sounding, me rendering a hand salute and the wind blowing across the crosses made this a profound experience. Donna and I have in the past visited the American War Cemetery in Hamm, Luxembourg, where 5076 of our war dead are buried. The field of crosses there, like Colleville-sur-Mer give an image of the great sacrifice our Nation has paid for freedom. General Patton is buried at the Cemetery in Hamm.

Day Number 7, Thursday (23 May 2013):

A paradox penned by Shakespeare for a balcony scene from Romeo and Juliet comes to mind.....*Parting is such sweet sorrow*. We departed Normandy this day to return to Paris and fly home. We left behind the landscape of such monumental and memorable epic world shaping events that were so eloquently and professionally presented by our tour escort. Trevor brought out such detail with his knowledge of events and the use of visual aids.

Our drive back to Paris was eventless. We did not travel country roads as in our earlier travels. However, there were a few things that impressed me....the road discipline of drivers and refueling of vehicles at gas stations. The left lane of traffic was kept open for passing. There were no slow moving vehicles in the left lane impeding traffic. At a gas station you used a credit card at the pump or filled your gas tank without having to prepay. You gassed your vehicle without any hindrance and then went inside and paid for your gas.

When we arrived in Paris we went to Charles de Gaulle Airport and turned in our vehicle. Thankfully we had the GPS device to keep us on the correct path. We then caught our hotel shuttle to the Airport Radisson Blu Hotel. We stayed at the hotel the remainder of the day and did not go anywhere that night. We ate at the hotel that evening and bade adieu to Lisa and her family. Our great adventure had come to its end and it was time to say au revoir and return home. We had separate flights from Charles de Gaulle the next morning and would not see Lisa and her family.

Day Number 8, Friday (24 May 2013)

Email received from Roxie



Subject: When Are You Coming Home Papa?

We were up at 4:00 a.m. and took a cab to the airport. Taking a cab we could be deposited at the airline counter. Coincidentally we again had a Cambodian cab driver. We flew back to the United States coach class on a United Airline Boeing 757 airplane to Newark Liberty International Airport, New Jersey. It was rather an uncomfortable flight. It was a full flight and Donna and I had a stranger between us. It was difficult for us to hold hands. We both agreed that on future trips it will be worth it to pay the extra fee and fly business or first class. Upon arriving at Newark International Airport we once again had an escort meet us as we deplaned and were escorted through immigrations and customs. This was a valuable service. We connected with our Orlando flight without incident. Newark International to Orlando International was a nonstop flight. We were met at the Orlando Airport by our son and Roxie. We had a wonderful trip but there's no place like home. Although, it was good to get back to the old homestead there was a feeling of pride leaving the great friendship of the French people of Normandy who so magnificently demonstrated their appreciation to the United States. We saw more American flags flying in the small villages than we see in municipalities locally.

Day number 9, Saturday (25 May 2013):

Donna, Roxie and I went to the Orlando Airport to get Lynn arriving from Houston and her hound tending chores.

EPILOGUE

During our two day D-day tour we saw sites depicted in *The Band of Brothers*, *Saving Private Ryan*, and *The Longest Day*. We went through numerous villages and small towns where the D-day OB played out. There were monuments and memorials in all the communities. What was significant about the monuments and community town halls was both the American and French flags were flying at each. It was difficult to go a great distance without seeing an American Flag and French flag flying next to each other marking a battle monument concerning a significant battle or a soldier's gallantry. There were areas we saw I know other tours probably don't get to see. You can read about D-day or see movies about it, but walking the terrain gives you a clearer picture of the history and sacrifice that was made there.

There was a particular site that interests me. It was the house shown in the opening scenes of the *Longest Day* where a Frenchman, on D-day morning, opened the shutter on his home and saw a rather slovenly looking German soldier on a mule going to Utah beach with food. The Frenchman exclaimed there goes Germany's finest. At that moment the ships offshore opened fire. I took a picture of that house on our tour (picture this Page).



On this trip we had international cell phone service and laptop computers. This allowed us to be informed of home and world circumstances

An unanticipated event on our last tour day came after leaving the Colleville-sur-Mer Cemetery. We retraced our tour route that day to search for a lost cell phone. We found it!

Fini

George & Donna



Hedgerow

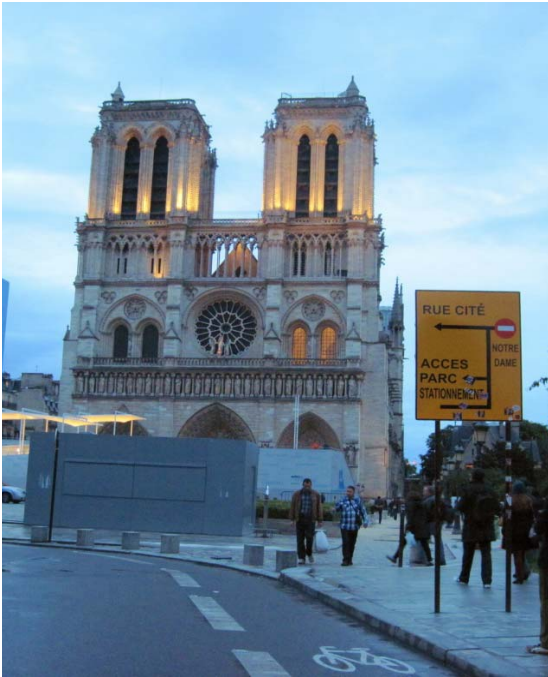


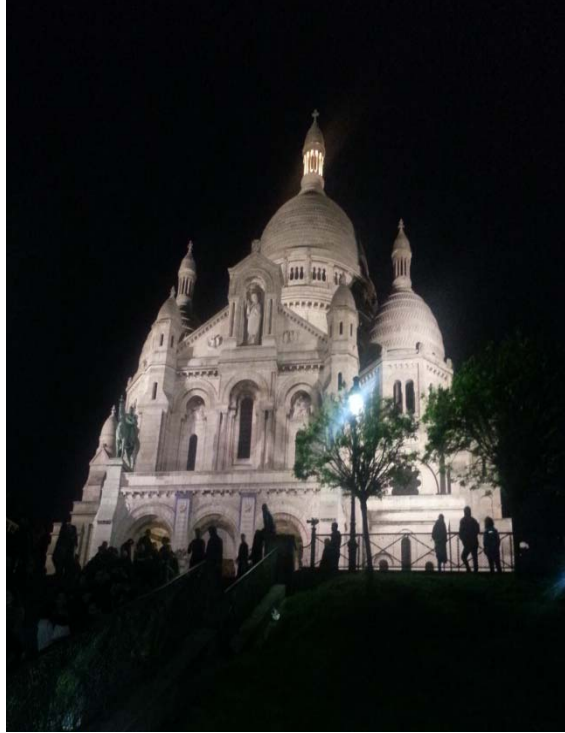
Mont Saint Michel

Washington War Memorials



Paris





Monet's Garden





Monet's Lily Pond





Mont Saint Michel



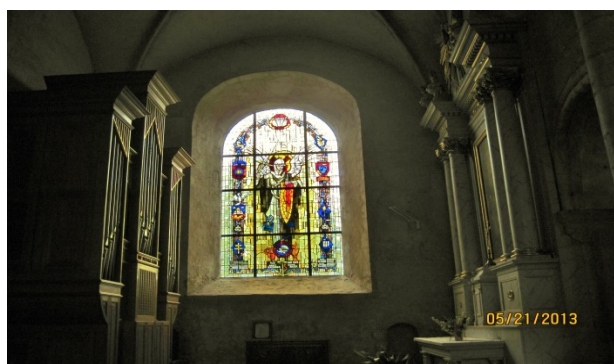
La Fiere Bridge

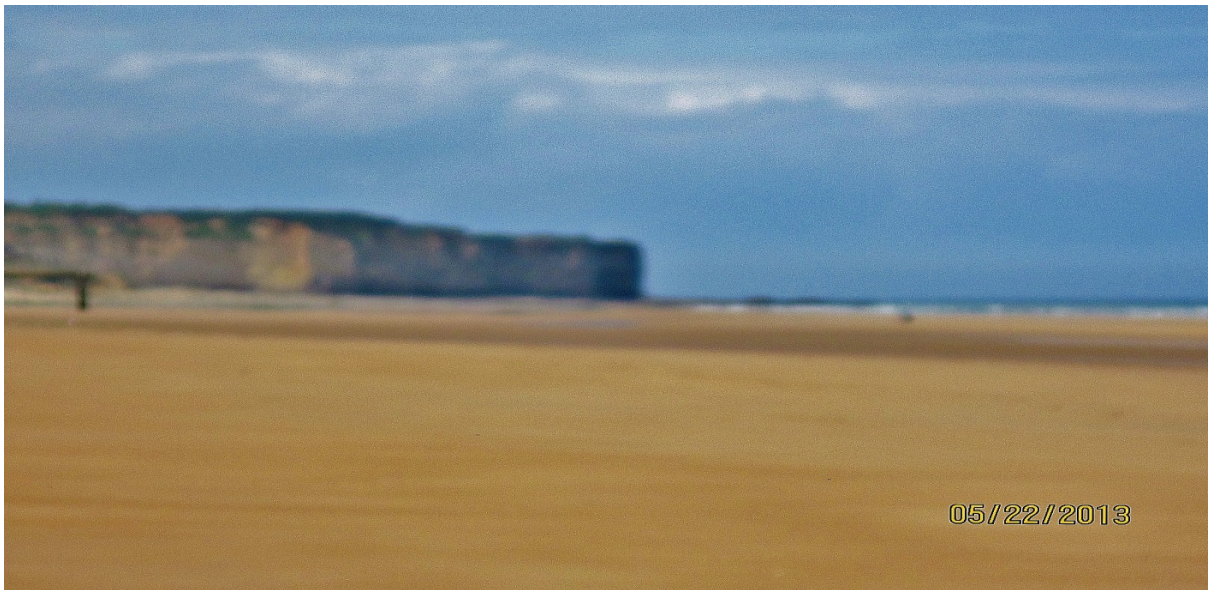


Sainte-Mere-Eglise



Utah





05/22/2013

Omaha Beach





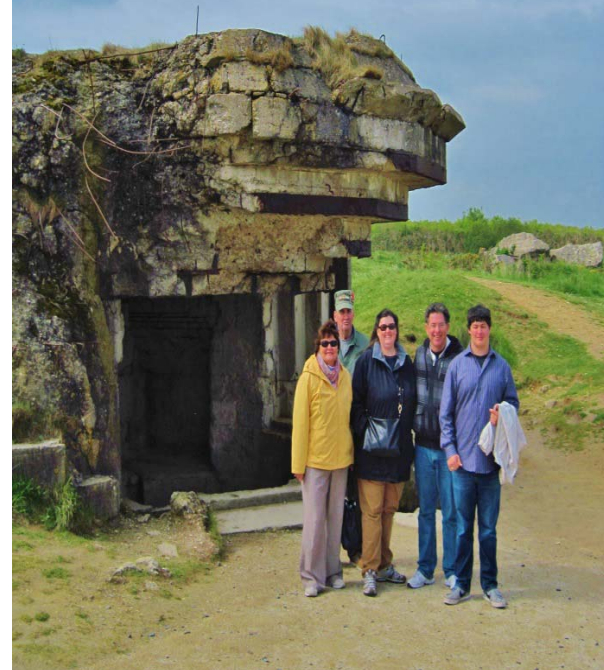
Pointe du Hoc



Widerstandsneests



Bunkers At Pointe du Hoc



La Cambe German Cemetary





Colleville-sur-Mer American Cemetery

