2016 D-Day Tour Preview

Slide 1: "Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force! You are about to embark upon a great crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of liberty loving people everywhere march with you."

With these words, Gen. Dwight Eisenhower, Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force, launched the Normandy Invasion on June 6, 1944, D-Day. Over 152,000 American, British, Canadian, and French soldiers landed in Normandy from an armada of over 6,900 ships and 4,500 aircraft.

Welcome to Bob and Mike’s Excellent European Battlefield Adventure! We hope you’ll be joining us for an eleven-day tour of London, Normandy, and Paris to commemorate the 72nd Anniversary of D-Day. Here’s a preview of what you’ll see.

Slide 2: D-Day pitted the Allies against the Axis Powers.

Allies:
- United States and President Franklin Roosevelt
- Great Britain and Prime Minister Winston Churchill
- Soviet Union and Premier Josef Stalin

Axis Powers
- Germany and Fuhrer Adolf Hitler
- Italy and Il Duce Benito Mussolini
- Japan and Prime Minister Hideki Tojo

Slide 3: D-Day created a long-awaited second front in Northwestern Europe. The Allies’ National Strategy focused on defeating Germany first followed by the defeat of Japan. The Combined Chiefs of Staff directive to the newly appointed Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force, US General Dwight Eisenhower clearly outlined their military strategy:

“You will enter the continent of Europe and, in conjunction with the other United Nations, undertake operations aimed at the heart of Germany and the destruction of her armed forces.”

Operationally, this translated into the Normandy Campaign:

- Invade Northwest Europe at a time and place of the Allies choosing
• Establish a beachhead and capture a major port
• Breakout, drive for the heart of Germany, and defeat her armed forces

Slide 4: During the Casablanca Conference in November 1942, the Allies set Spring 1944 as the date for the invasion of France and established a Combined Staff to plan the invasion. British Major General Frederick E. Morgan was appointed as the Chief of Staff to the Supreme Allied Commander (COSSAC), even though the Supreme Commander would not be appointed until the end of the year. The Tehran Conference in November 1943 set the Invasion date as May 1, 1944.

This Chain of Command Chart accompanied the Directive the Combined Chiefs of Staff sent to General Eisenhower in February 1944. Although Field Marshal Montgomery and General Bradley are shown as equals on this diagram, Montgomery commanded all Allied ground forces on D-Day. Once the numbers of Allied Forces ashore increased to the point two Army Groups were justified, both Bradley and Montgomery commanded Army Groups.

The SHAEF Command Team is shown in the left hand picture taken in the Southwick House near Portsmouth, Eisenhower’s forward headquarters. From left to right:

• Lieutenant General Omar Bradley
• Admiral Sir Bertram H Ramsay
• Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur W Tedder
• General Dwight D Eisenhower
• General Sir Bernard Montgomery
• Air Chief Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory
• Lieutenant General Walter Bedell Smith

Slide 5: Churchill led the war from an underground bunker complex buried under the Treasury Building in Whitehall near 10 Downing Street. Closed immediately after the surrender of Japan, the bunker remained undisturbed until the early 1980s when the Imperial War Museum took over management of the museum. Many of the furnishings and equipment and most the maps are original.

Slide 6: This map, courtesy of “Times Magazine” shows the five Landing Beaches and three airborne Drop Zones in the D-Day invasion plan. The unit patches shown represent the participating Allied Infantry and Airborne Divisions. You’ll see these patches throughout Normandy.
Slide 7: Even today, Normandy contains numerous reminders of D-Day. The Comité du Débarquement Normandy (Normandy Landings Committee) erected 10 of the “Signal” Monuments pictured on this slide throughout Normandy to commemorate significant events. The Kilometer Markers in the lower right photo mark the 1,100+ kilometer Liberty Road beginning at both Utah Beach and Ste. Mère Église and continuing on to Bastogne. Numerous other vehicles and signposts highlight the numerous smaller monuments and memorials in Normandy.

Slide 8: Shortly after midnight on June 6, 1944, ninety soldiers of Company B, 2 Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry (the Ox and Bucks), 6th (British) Airborne Division, landed in three gliders to capture this bridge over the Orne Canal north of Caen. The soldiers, commanded by MAJ John Howard, also liberated the Café Gondree on the far side of the bridge. The Gondree’s youngest daughter Arlette was six years old on D-Day and still runs the Café. We’ll have lunch there as part of our tour.

Slide 9: In an amazing feat of airmanship the three Horsa gliders, cut loose from their tow planes 6,000 feet in the air 10 miles away, all landed within meters of the bridge.

Slide 10: As part of Hitler’s Atlantic Wall, the German defenders constructed numerous fortified positions or “Widerstandsneuster” (Resistance Nests). The Hillman Bunker (Widerstandsneust 17) is located about 10 KM west of the Pegasus Bridge on a hill just south of the town of Colleville-Montgomery. In this picture, a Dutch volunteer explains the Bunker to our 2012 tour. We will also visit several other Widerstandsneuster including WN 60, 62, and 72 during our tour of Omaha Beach.

Slide 11: Landing on SWORD Beach on D-Day, the First Battalion, Suffolk Regiment, part of the British 3rd Infantry Division, attacked south toward the Hillman Bunker. Their difficulty in capturing the Hillman Bunker prevented the capture on Caen on D-Day as planned, lead to a prolonged struggle for the City, and ultimately led to the destruction of the City by Allied bombers.

Brigadier Lord Lovat’s 1st Special Services Brigade also landed on SWORD Beach at 0730 on D-Day. His Piper, Bill Millin, piped the troops ashore and accompanied the Brigade on its march to the Pegasus Bridge. The town, once known as Colleville-sur-Orne, changed its name to Colleville-Montgomery in 1946.

Slide 12: JUNO Beach, landing site of the Canadian 3rd Infantry Division, starts 6 kilometers west of SWORD Beach. The flags at this monument show the many nations involved in D-Day: Canada, Belgium, the US, Great Britain, Norway, France, Holland,
and Poland. The Queen’s Own Rifles House, named after the Canadian Regiment landing in this area, is featured in many D-Day photos.

Slide 13: GOLD Beach lies directly west of JUNO. Landing here early on D-Day, Company Sergeant Major Stanley Hollis of the Green Howards Regiment won the only Victoria Cross (the British equivalent of the Medal of Honor) awarded on D-Day. The concrete PHOENIX used to construct the artificial (MULBERRY) Harbor at Arromanches remain today. A second MULBERRY Harbor was constructed at OMAHA Beach.

Slide 14: Both of the MULBERRY Harbors were damaged by a severe storm on June 19-20, 1944. The serviceable parts of the OMAHA Beach MULBERRY were brought to Arromanches to create one operational harbor. Many are still clearly visible at low tide.

Slide 15: The four, 150mm guns of Longues Battery (Widerstandsnest 48) could fire on both GOLD and OMAHA Beaches. As a result it was heavily bombed in late May 1944, but without much damage. It is one of the best preserved batteries and the only one with its original guns still in place. Small fighting positions, or “Tobruks, surround the guns.

Slide 16: The Longues Battery presented a significant threat to both GOLD and OMAHA Beaches as well as Port-en-Bissin-Huppain, the terminus of PLUTO (Pipe Line Under The Ocean) an undersea pipeline pumping petroleum products from England over 100 miles under the English Channel.

Slide 17: The memorable event depicted in a scene from the movie “The Longest Day” where the MAJ Werner Pluskat suddenly sees the Allied Invasion Fleet appear out of the mist took place along the coast near the small town of Sainte Honerine des Pertes. An observation bunker is in the cliffs just to the right of the building in this photo.

Slide 18: OMAHA Beach, owing to the 100 foot high bluffs immediately behind the beach and the significantly stronger German defenses, was the scene of the bloodiest fighting on D-Day.

Slide 19: The 1st US Infantry Division (The Big Red One), the 29th Infantry Division (including the 116th Infantry Regiment that traces its roots back to Stonewall Jackson’s Civil War Brigade), the 5th Ranger Battalion and a portion of the 2nd Ranger Battalion all landed on OMAHA Beach, seen here from Widerstandsnest 60.
Slide 20: The St. Laurent Draw was one of the five draws the soldiers planned to use to get off the beach. The Normandy American Cemetery is on the plateau on the left of the draw. The first operational American airfield in Normandy was constructed on the plateau on the right side. We will have breakfast on D-Day at the hotel with the white flag in the photo.

Slide 21: The sand on OMAHA Beach was over one-half mile wide at 0630 on June 6, 2012. Tour members are standing on Widerstandsnest 72. Remnants of the OMAHA Beach MULLBERRY are in the upper left hand corner of the photo.

Slide 22: The view from a gun emplacement in Widerstandsnest 62 at the foot of the Normandy American Cemetery. The Higgins boat, developed by Andrew Higgins in the swamps around New Orleans, transported many of the soldiers over eleven miles of open ocean from their transports to the beach.

Slide 23: A moving sculpture frames the Signal Monument at the Les Moulins Draw. The location of the first American cemetery established in France after D-Day is nearby.

Lycoming alumni CAPT Jack Lea, retired after 28 years of service in the Navy on Omaha Beach in front of the sculpture on June 6, 2014.

Slide 24: The Normandy American Cemetery contains the graves of 9,387 Americans identified by Latin Crosses and Stars of David and a list 1,557 soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Coast Guardsman Missing in Action.

Slide 25: The cemetery sits on a plateau along the Normandy coast between Vierville-sur-mer and Colleville-sur-mer.

Slide 26: This quote from General Mark Clark says it best.

Slide 27: Early on D-Day, Rangers under the command of Lieutenant Colonel James Rudder (later the President of Texas A&M University) scaled the cliffs at Pointe du Hoc to capture six guns thought to be in place and threatening both OMAHA and UTAH Beaches. The Anchor Memorial on the Point recognizes the Rangers bravery and achievement.

Slide 28: The guns were not emplaced on the Pointe but were discovered nearby and destroyed later on D-Day. Even after 70 years, the craters left by Allied bombs are clearly visible.

Slide 29: Soldiers from the 82nd US Airborne Division jumped into Normandy to secure the flanks of the beachhead from German counterattacks. A majority of the Division’s
troopers landed in and around Ste. Mère Église. One trooper, PVT John Steele, landed on the church steeple and dangled there for several hours. His “dummy” still hangs there. The stained glass windows in the church commemorate the liberation of the town.

Slide 30: Kilometer Zero of the Liberty Road stands in front of the Town Hall. Ste. Mère Église was also the site of two American cemeteries opened shortly after D-Day.

Slide 31: The La Fiere Bridge over the flooded Merderet River was the site of a three-day battle involving troopers from the 82nd Airborne Division. The memorial depicts “Iron Mike”, a WWII paratrooper ready for battle. A similar sculpture stands at Ft. Bragg, NC, the home of the US Army Airborne.

Slide 32: Numerous other well maintained memorials dot the landscape around Ste. Mère Église including a memorial to the 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment in Amfreville, another to PFC Charles DeGlopper of the 325th Glider Infantry Regiment who posthumously won the Medal of Honor, and a moving memorial to American Airmen in Picauville. The Supreme Allied Commander Europe, a USAF four-star general, led this ceremony involving active duty troopers from the 82nd Airborne Division on June 5, 2014.

Slide 33: The 4th US Infantry Division landed at UTAH Beach, the far right Allied landing beach. Pushed to the left by strong currents, the initial wave came ashore in front of a German position (WN5), now the home of the UTAH Beach museum. Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt Junior, son of the former President, led the assaulting forces and made the decision to start the war from there. Another bunker has been converted to a café and bears his name.

Slide 34: UTAH Beach’s low sand dunes contrast with the high bluffs on OMAHA Beach. The fortifications, while not as significant as those on OMAHA Beach, were imposing. The Commander of the 1st Special Engineer Brigade named the roads in and around UTAH Beach after Brigade soldiers killed during the landing.

Slide 35: Four Causeways lead from UTAH Beach inland through flooded fields. The 101st US Airborne Division was tasked with securing the inland ends of these causeways. One of these battles involving E Company, 505 Parachute Infantry Regiment commanded by Captain Dick Winters was shown in the min-series “Band of Brothers.”

Slide 36: The British Cemetery in Bayeux contains over 4,400 graves, including the graves of 400 German soldiers. Many village and town cemeteries in Normandy contain the
graves of British Commonwealth soldiers, as shown by small signs at the entrance to the cemeteries.

Slide 37: The monument to British soldiers, airmen and seamen missing in action contains some interesting language in Latin.

Slide 38: The German Cemetery at La Cambe contains over 21,000 graves and was once the site of an early American Cemetery.

Slide 39: No trip to Normandy is complete without a visit to the monastery at Mt. St. Michele. An island at high tide, the Monastery can only be reached on foot. The courtyard at the top is worth the climb.

Slide 40: We'll end our tour with a dinner cruise on the Seine River. We should arrive in Paris from Normandy early enough to enjoy dinner on the Left Bank and spectacular views of Notre Dame. The French Army Museum highlights centuries of French Military conflict, including their wars in Indo China and Algeria. Napoleon’s Tomb sits close by. The Eiffel Tower, built for the 1899 Paris Exposition, includes a massive underground bunker, water powered elevators, and a spectacular view of Paris.

Slide 41: A part of the Pre-Tour, Bletchley Park was the wartime home of the Government Code & Cypher School. Here, Alan Turing and Gordon Welchman (with a little help from the Poles) developed the “Bombe” to break the German Enigma Code. Nearly 10,000 people worked at Bletchley Park and amazingly kept their activities secret until the early 1970’s.

Slide 42: Also included in the Pre-Tour, a visit to the Cambridge American Cemetery, located near the historic university town of Cambridge. The cemetery contains the graves of 3,812 Americans and the Tablets of the Missing list the names of 5,127 Americans, including MAJ Alton G. Miller, USAF Band, and Navy Lt Joseph Kennedy Junior.

We are looking forward to our next European Battlefield Adventure May 30 to June 9, 2016. Please call if you have any comments, suggestions or questions.

See you in London!

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