



## History 3385 D-Day: Operation OVERLORD & Europe's Liberation A Travel Course for Students, Alumni & Friends of SMU

May 19-29, 2020

Southern Methodist University's (SMU's) Center for Presidential History's Jeffrey A. Engel and Essential History Expeditions' Brian DeToy are pleased to partner for an on-site exploration of London, Shrivenham, Portsmouth, Normandy and Paris, walking the cities and beaches where Churchill schemed, Ike commanded, and soldiers fought for Europe's liberation. This intergenerational tour offers three credits for students, and for alumni and friends the opportunity to see the places history took place — and to relive a bit of college life.

This fully guided and immersive tour will explore the people and places of Operation OVERLORD, the June 1944 invasion of Normandy that began Europe's liberation from Nazi rule. We will walk the beaches and cliffs, learn from local experts and guest lecturers, and be assigned a renowned (or reviled) figure from history to investigate and role-play. Plus, we'll have plenty of time to explore these iconic sites on your own and to reconnect with SMU friends and students in some of Europe's most scenic sites. This trip will also provide opportunities to connect with current SMU students through meaningful discussions and mentorship.



Long before they launched across the Channel, the Allies transformed Great Britain into a vast armed camp, with millions of soldiers, sailors and airmen poised to assault Hitler's Fortress Europa. We begin in London, examining the War Rooms of Winston Churchill's Cabinet along with centuries of history and culture in the capital of the British Empire, including a tour of Westminster Abbey and an optional night of London theater. We will visit the Imperial War Museum at the WWII airbase, RAF Duxford, as well as the university town of Cambridge and the nearby Cambridge American Cemetery. Departing London, we will visit the grounds of Bletchley Park where, secret for decades, the ULTRA codebreakers worked tirelessly for allied victory. Then, it's off to Portsmouth, on the Channel coast, where we will discuss seaborne preparations, and visit the invasion headquarters of Dwight Eisenhower at Southwick House. From there we board the large, modern *MV Normandie* for the crossing to the beaches of France!

The events of June 6, 1944, continue to inspire long after the guns have fallen silent. The largest invasion in history, on the isolated Normandy coast, drastically altered the conduct of the war and demonstrated the unflinching resolve of freedom-loving peoples. This D-Day tour will bring guests to the beaches, cliffs and fields; and villages, towns and cities where the Greatest Generation made their most indelible mark. From British glidermen at Pegasus Bridge, to the American infantrymen assaulting the beaches at Bloody Omaha; from American paratroopers jumping behind enemy lines at Ste Mere Eglise and Brecourt Manor to the Rangers climbing the cliffs at Pointe du Hoc to the building of the artificial harbors at Arromanches. And so many other iconic sites.

After six weeks in the bocage hedgerows, the allied armies broke out in Operation COBRA in late July and swept south and west around the German army before turning east to encircle them and move on to Paris. We will follow this advance from St Lo through Avranches (where Patton's Third Army merged) and to the border of Brittany. There, we will explore the mystical isle of Mont St Michel, a World Heritage Site of renowned beauty and history. After the crowds depart, we will spend the night on this enchanted island.

The culmination of the Operation COBRA breakout was the capture of Paris in late August 1944. We will trace the route of allied soldiers from Normandy across the plains to the French capital. In the City of Light, we will visit numerous sites connected with the war, along with time to sample the treasures of several millennia of Western culture. From Ernest Hemingway's bar in the Ritz Hotel to the Holocaust Memorial to the chance to visit the Louvre, the Arc de Triomphe, the Eiffel Tower and so much more; or simply stroll the Right or Left banks of the Seine as you wander from one amazing location to another.



## Day 1, Tuesday, May 19<sup>th</sup>: Arrival

- Arrival and check in to London lodgings.
- Enjoy London on your own. RECOMMEND: seeing sites we will not be visiting such as Covent Garden, Hyde Park, St Paul's Cathedral, Buckingham Palace, etc.
- Lunch and dinner on your own.
- Alumni/friends: Optional evening of London theater, likely a show at Shakespeare's Globe Theater.
- Students: London theater, likely a show at Shakespeare's Globe Theater.
- London hotel: Doubletree Westminster



## Day 2, Wednesday, May 20<sup>th</sup>: Introduction to London in WWII

- We will gather at the Doubletree Westminster at 9am for a welcome and overview of the expedition.
- Walk past Parliament to visit Westminster Abbey, the World Heritage Site with more than a thousand years of history, including coronations, weddings and burials of kings, queens, poets, warriors and heroes.
- Walking tour of central London from Parliament Square along Whitehall, the center of British government, to Trafalgar Square and its iconic monuments, museums and public buildings.
- Lunch on your own vicinity Trafalgar Square, along with time to visit the nearby National Gallery to see some of the world's most iconic art works or the National Portrait Gallery or the famed St Martins-in-the-Fields Church.
- Walking tour of Horse Guards Road, along St James Park, with the headquarters of the Imperial War machinery of the 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- Group visit to Churchill Cabinet War Rooms — from this location, near both to Parliament and No. 10 Downing, the War Cabinet received information, held high-level meetings and conducted its world-wide imperial war effort in WWII.
- Group dinner and introductions at the prestigious Royal United Services Institute on Whitehall. SMU's Director of Presidential History Dr Jeffrey Engel and Essential History Expeditions' Dr. Brian DeToy will provide opening remarks.
- London hotel: Doubletree Westminster



### Day 3, Thursday, May 21<sup>st</sup>: Airpower in Europe – RAF Duxford and Cambridge

- Breakfast
- Bus drive to RAF Duxford, a WWII base for British and American air groups. Today it is an arm of the Imperial War Museum focused on airpower. We will explore and discuss various aspects of airpower in both WWII and the Normandy invasion, in particular. There will be plenty of aircraft, vehicles and other equipment to examine.
- On your own time to explore the gorgeous and historic university town of Cambridge. We will do a short introduction to the town at the famed pilot-pub, The Eagle, and then set you on your way! Lunch on your own in Cambridge.
- Visit the Cambridge American Cemetery, where 3,811 of our war dead lie in repose. An additional 5,127 names are recorded on the Walls of the Missing. Most here died in the Battle of the Atlantic or in the strategic air bombardment of Europe.
- Return to London for dinner and an evening on your own.
- London hotel: Doubletree Westminster



## Day 4, Friday, May 22<sup>nd</sup>: ULTRA at Bletchley Park, Southwick House & Seaborne Preparations for OVERLORD

- Breakfast
- Load luggage and depart hotel.
- At Bletchley Park, we'll visit the ULTRA Code Breakers compound — a vital component in Allied victory and real-life inspiration for the recent Oscar-winning film "The Imitation Game." Guided tour and lecture with Bletchley Park's Director, David Kenyon.
- Lunch on your own at Bletchley Park's Hut 4 cafe.
- Next, we'll join the director of Southwick House, the Headquarters of the Allied High Command in the days before the invasion, and the location where, in the dark hours of night with torrential rains beating against the windows, Ike made the decision — "Let's go!" Director COL (Ret) Jeremy Green will provide our lecture. For the visit to Southwick House, each person must have a photo ID available. The dress code also dictates nice attire with no torn jeans or sportswear.
- Group dinner in Southwick Village at the Golden Lion, a traditional British pub with a rich history of visits from legendary leaders such as Montgomery and Eisenhower.
- Check in to Portsmouth lodgings at the Portsmouth Marriott.



## Day 5, Saturday, May 23<sup>rd</sup>: American Airborne & UTAH Beach

- Breakfast
- Load luggage and depart hotel.
- On the Portsmouth harbor along the quays, we'll discuss D-Day shipping.
- We'll board the *MV Normandie Express* for the Channel Crossing from Portsmouth to Cherbourg, France. The Brittany Ferries fleet of ships are modern seagoing ships similar to a small cruise ship with restaurants, bars, and entertainment options. We will enjoy comfortable reserved lounge seating for our crossing.
- Lunch on your own on the ship.
- Arriving in the port of Cherbourg, we will discuss its importance in Allied planning as the first major seaport that must be taken, as well as its actual capture.
- At La Fiere Bridge we will observe the tough defense by the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division to hold the town of Ste Mere Eglise and secure the crossings over the Merderet River.
- In the quaint town of St Mere Eglise, we will discuss the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division in the first French village liberated by Americans. You will have the opportunity to visit the church, which beautifully commemorates the airborne paratroopers, and walk the town.

- Next is the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division landings near Ste Marie du Mont, and the Band of Brothers of Easy Company, including their leader Dick Winters, at Brecourt Manor. The monuments to these men are a perfect place to examine the minute tactical battle detail of Americans in combat.
- At the UTAH Beach Memorial with 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, we will see where Americans first came ashore on June 6<sup>th</sup>.
- When we arrive at our lodgings, we will discuss the June 6 capture of Crepon and the only Victoria Cross awarded on D-Day as well as La Ferme de la Ranconniere's use as logistics point and air field.
- Check in to lodgings at La Ferme de la Ranconniere.
- Four-course dinner at the Michelin-rated, charming La Ferme de la Ranconniere.



### Day 6, Sunday, May 24<sup>th</sup>: British Airborne, Beaches & Bayeux

- Breakfast
- Our first stop is the Caen Memorial Museum. There is a plethora of museums throughout the region, but none tell the story as well as this official site with its incredible collection that goes into both depth and breadth of the vast enterprise. Lunch on your own at the café.
- Next, we will visit Pegasus Bridge, where glidermen of the British 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division captured the key bridge over the Orne and liberated the first French house in the invasion – today's Café Gondree, where you can enjoy a coffee and may meet the owner, Madame Arlette Gondree, who saw the invasion as a little girl.
- The critical capture of the Merville Battery by British paratroopers is our next stop. An American C-17 that dropped 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne troopers on D-Day is a must-see part of this visit.
- Visit the nearby Ranville British Cemetery, where the first Allied killed in action are buried.
- Drive along SWORD Beach.
- We will visit Courselles, the heart of JUNO Beach, where we will discuss the Canadians, Free French and the French Resistance in the success of the invasion.
- Arramanches is next, the site of GOLD Beach, another British landing site for the 50<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and the location of the British Mulberry artificial harbor.
- At 5:45pm, in the old town of Bayeux, we will visit the famed Tapestry Museum, where the story of William's conquering of England has been portrayed for 1000 years!
- A walk through the ancient center of Bayeux will include the glorious Cathedral and medieval streets.
- Dinner on your own in one of the many great restaurants in old Bayeux.
- Normandy hotel: La Ferme de la Ranconniere in Crepon.



### Day 7, Monday, May 25<sup>th</sup>: Pointe du Hoc & OMAHA Beach

- Breakfast
- We will stop in La Cambe to visit the German Normandy Cemetery. The somber landscape stands in contrast to those of the Allies although the remembrance remains extremely moving. (We will also visit cemeteries of the British and Americans to see how each remembers their fallen.)
- Our next stop is one of the most dramatic landscapes of the entire region! Marvel at the climb of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ranger Battalion up the cliffs of Pointe du Hoc. The capture of the guns here was critical to invasion success.
- At the western end of OMAHA Beach, we will discuss the 29<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division at Vierville. This is the area where the fierce landing scenes in *Saving Private Ryan* took place. It is also the location of the remains of the American Mulberry artificial harbor. Group lunch.
- Moving to eastern OMAHA Beach, we will see the incredibly difficult high-ground facing the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division at Colleville and we will follow their climb to the top of the bluffs for success against great odds.
- Atop the bluffs we will visit one of the most memorable, beautiful and awe-inspiring sites in American military history – the incomparable Normandy American Cemetery. The bus is available to drive those who do not wish to hike up the ridge.
- Group dinner at Ferme de la Ranconniere.
- Hotel: Le Ferme de la Ranconniere in Crepon.



### Day 8, Tuesday, May 26<sup>th</sup>: COBRA and Mont St Michel

- Breakfast and load luggage/checkout
- Visit the key crossroads town of St Lo, the capture of which in July 1944 marked the end of the bocage fighting and set the stage for the allied breakout – COBRA
- Visit Avranches, a hilltop ancient town that overlooks the boundary between Normandy and Brittany and is where George Patton’s Third Army came into existence.
- Visit the island of Mont St Michel – check into lodgings and explore the ancient monastery and narrow streets and alleys of this enchanted village perched on a rock in the bay.
- Lunch on your own and group dinner
- Hotel: TBD on Mont St Michel



### Day 9, Wednesday, May 27<sup>th</sup>: Paris

- Breakfast and load luggage/checkout
- Depart for Paris
- Check in to Paris lodgings.
- Time to explore the wonders of Paris on your own, including any of the following:
  - Holocaust/Deportation Memorial near Notre Dame
  - Myriad museums, including the Louvre, Legion d’Honneur, Invalides/Army/Napoleon, Musee d’Orsay
  - Famed cemeteries

- The Americans in Paris — a walk along Montparnasse
- Shakespeare & Co. bookshop on the Left Bank
- The Latin Quarter
- Walk and shop along the Champs Elysees — Arc de Triomphe to the Tuileries
- Notre Dame and Ste Chapelle churches
- Market at Les Halles and St Eustache church
- Eiffel Tower
- Dinner on your own.
- Hotel: Paris Marriott Opera (alumni/friends) or Holiday Inn Paris Opera Grand Boulevards (students)



### Day 10, Thursday, May 28<sup>th</sup>: Paris in WWII and the City of Light

- Breakfast
- We'll start the morning with a walking tour of WWII Paris events and personalities, with numerous sites including Ritz Hotel and the Hemingway Bar, and German Military HQ near the Louvre and the Tuileries Gardens.
- Lunch on your own and additional time to explore Paris.
- We will enjoy a farewell dinner and lecture with SMU's own Dr. Jeffrey Engel.
- Hotel: Paris Marriott Opera (alumni/friends) or Holiday Inn Paris Opera Grand Boulevards (students)



### Day 11, Friday, May 29<sup>th</sup>: Departure and Onward Journeys

- Breakfast
- Check-out of lodgings and begin onward journeys

