



SMU | CENTER FOR  
PRESIDENTIAL HISTORY

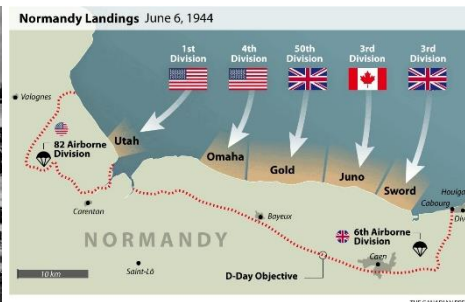


## D-Day: Operation OVERLORD & Europe's Liberation An Expedition for Students, Alumni & Friends of SMU

**May 19-27, 2025**

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, 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 students, 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. Departing London, 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. Next, is a visit to the grounds of Bletchley Park where, secret for decades, the ULTRA codebreakers worked tirelessly for allied victory. Our evening will be in the royal town of Windsor, next to its iconic castle. After a morning on your own in Windsor, we are 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. We will then follow this advance to its conclusion at the Falaise-Argentan Gap in mid-August. 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 conclude our expedition with a farewell dinner after you have had a chance to see one or more of the iconic sites and to sample the treasures of several millennia of Western culture, from 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, Monday, May 19<sup>th</sup>: Introduction to London in WWII

- We will meet at noon at the Conrad London St James for a welcome **lunch** in the lovely Orchard Room, located on the main restaurant level of the hotel. We will engage in introductions and an overview of the expedition. SMU's Director of Presidential History Dr Jeffrey Engel and Essential History Expeditions' Dr. Brian DeToy will provide an opening **lecture** and remarks.
- 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, including Parliament and 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.
- Group visit to the 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.
- Enjoy an evening in London on your own, including dinner.
- London hotel: Conrad London St James



## Day 2, Tuesday, May 20<sup>th</sup>: Airpower in Europe – RAF Duxford & Cambridge, the ULTRA Secret at Bletchley Park and evening in Windsor

- 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.
- 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."
- Drive to Windsor, home of the Royal Family's famed castle home, for dinner and an evening on your own.
- Windsor hotel: Sir Christopher Wren Hotel





### Day 3, Wednesday, May 21<sup>st</sup>: Southwick House & Seaborne Preparations for OVERLORD, and Cross-Channel Ferry to Normandy

- Breakfast
- Load luggage and depart hotel.
- First, we drive south to the coast to visit 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 lunch (initial Mentor) 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.
- We’ll board the *MV Normandie* for the Channel Crossing from Portsmouth to Caen-Ouistreham, 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.
- Dinner on your own on the ship.
- Arriving in the port of Ouistreham, we will drive to our lodgings in Bayeux.
- Normandy hotel: Villa Lara (adults) and Hotel Churchill (students)



## Day 4, Thursday, May 22<sup>nd</sup>: British Airborne, Beaches & Bayeux

- Breakfast
- First, 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. (We will also visit cemeteries of the Germans and Americans to see how each remembers their fallen.)
- We will enjoy a box **lunch (Mentor)** in Ranville.
- 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.
- Arromanches 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.
- Social hour with **lecture** from the CPH post-doc, followed by a group **dinner** in one of the many great restaurants in old Bayeux.
- Normandy hotel: Villa Lara (adults) and Hotel Churchill (students)





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

- Breakfast
- At the UTAH Beach Memorial with 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, we will see where General Teddy Roosevelt Jr led the first Americans ashore on June 6<sup>th</sup>.
- 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.
- 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. Lunch on your own in St Mere Eglise.
- 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.
- Our final stop of the day is 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.
- On return to Bayeux, dinner on your own in the Old Town.
- Normandy hotel: Villa Lara (adults) and Hotel Churchill (students)



## Day 6, Saturday, May 24<sup>th</sup>: Pointe du Hoc & OMAHA Beach

- Breakfast
- Our first 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 (Mentor)** at a restaurant overlooking OMAHA Beach.
- 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.
- Social hour with **Reflections**
- Dinner on your own in Bayeux.
- Normandy hotel: Villa Lara (adults) and Hotel Churchill (students)



### Day 7, Sunday, May 25<sup>th</sup>: Mont St Michel

- Breakfast
- Visit the enchanting island of Mont St Michel – explore the ancient monastery and narrow streets and alleys of this amazing village perched on a rock in the bay. Lunch on your own along the ramparts on Mont St Michel.
- Return to Bayeux and dinner on your own.
- Hotel: Villa Lara (adults) and Hotel Churchill (students)



## Day 8, Monday, May 26<sup>th</sup>: COBRA, Mont Ormel & On to Paris

- Breakfast and load luggage/checkout.
- In late July, the Americans broke out in the west in Operation COBRA, and soon the allies had nearly surrounded the two German armies in Normandy. Only a small gap remained open and a battle to close it was fierce and unrelenting.
- We will visit the awe-inspiring heights of Mont Ormel, where the Polish 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Division fought heroically against five German divisions.
- Then, it's off to Paris!
- Check in to Paris lodgings near the gare St Lazare.
- Afternoon on your own.
- We will enjoy a farewell dinner and **lecture** with SMU's Dr. Jeffrey Engel.
- Hotel: Hilton Paris Opera



## Day 9, Tuesday, May 27<sup>th</sup>: Departures and Onward Journeys

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





## Important Information for Your Upcoming Trip to England & France

### Initial Contact Information

- Sheryl Shafer: phone 303.517.9676; email [sheryl@historyexp.com](mailto:sheryl@historyexp.com)
- Dr. Brian DeToy: phone 253.468.7374; email [brian@historyexp.com](mailto:brian@historyexp.com)

### Leadership Team

#### SMU

**Dr. Jeffrey A. Engel** is founding director of the Center for Presidential History at Southern Methodist University and Professor in the Clements Department of History. A Senior Fellow of the Norwegian Nobel Institute and of the John Goodwin Tower Center for Political Studies, he graduated magna cum laude from Cornell University. He additionally studied at St. Catherine's College, Oxford University, and received his M.A. and Ph.D. in American history from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, before holding a John M. Olin Postdoctoral Fellow in International Security Studies at Yale University.

#### **Dr. Crystal L. Clayton, Senior Executive Director, Hegi Family Career Development Center**

Crystal Clayton, a career-management professional with more than 20 years of experience working with graduate and undergraduate students, began her work as the executive director of the Hegi Family Career Development Center at Southern Methodist University in August 2017.

As the executive director for the Hegi Family Career Development Center, Dr. Clayton provides leadership and oversight to the Offices of Career Development and Employer Relations in the Hegi Family Career Development Center. The Hegi Center includes nine professional staff, two graduate assistants, five student career consultants, three student assistants, a Career Development Ambassadors group, Board Fellows Organization, Student Advisory Board, and the Hegi Career Leaders premier professional development program. Since 2017, Dr. Clayton created the Hegi Career

Leaders Professional Development Program which prepares student talent for full-time work and career leadership, developed the Board Fellows Program allowing SMU students to serve as nonprofit board members in the DFW metropolitan area, and launched the Hegi Student Advisory Board.

Clayton currently serves on the Board of Directors for the Plano Chamber of Commerce and is involved with the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE). She is the past chair for the executive committee of the University of Missouri Alumni Association's Griffiths Leadership Society. From 2009 to 2012, she served as a board member of the American College Personnel Association's Commission for Career Development. A native of St. Louis, MO, Clayton received her B.A. degree in English from Truman State University. She earned an M.A. in educational leadership and policy analysis from the University of Missouri-Columbia, and an Ed.D. degree in educational leadership and higher education from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

#### **Jade Weaver, M.Ed., Associate Director for the Hunt Leadership Scholars Program**

Jade Weaver is responsible for managing the Hunt Leadership Scholars Program. This includes oversight for 60+ students, logistics and recruitment for potential and incoming Scholars, career advising and developing, event programming, and mentorship, both direct and indirect.

Jade Weaver is a student affairs practitioner, with nearly a decade of experience in supporting student growth and leadership development. Jade began her journey on the Hilltop in 2020, as a graduate student in the Simmons School of Education. She worked as the Student Involvement Graduate Assistant, supporting student organizations, fraternities, and sororities. During her tenure as a graduate student, Jade was offered a full-time staff position as Assistant Director for Fraternity & Sorority Life. In this role, she oversaw two of the four Greek councils on Southern Methodist University's campus. She developed deep and meaningful relationships with students, campus partners, and alumni advisors.

Jade is a member of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA). She earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Biology from Baylor University. She holds Master's degrees in Physician Assistant Studies and Higher Education from the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center and Southern Methodist University, respectively.

**Dr. TBD** is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Center for Presidential History at Southern Methodist University.

**Ronna Spitz** joined the Center for Presidential History as Coordinator in the Fall of 2012. Her professional background includes university, government, and large corporate marketing, event planning, and project management. She has worked in multiple fields, including the petroleum industry; electricity generation, distribution and government regulation; and business intelligence software. Ronna holds a BS in finance and a MBA in marketing from Oklahoma City University. Ronna has done a tremendous job of coordinating our trip from the SMU campus. However, she will not join us in Europe.

#### **Essential History Expeditions**

Expert historian and guide, LTC **Dr. Brian DeToy** (Ret.) served as Director of the Defense & Strategic Studies program at the United States Military Academy, West Point from 2007-13. His previous assignments include Assistant Professor in the Academy's History Department, Chief of Research and Publications in the Combat Studies Institute at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and Professor of Military

Science at the University of Kansas. An Airborne Ranger, DeToy also possesses the Expert Infantryman and Air Assault badges. DeToy graduated from the University of Notre Dame with a BA in History and earned a PhD from Florida State University in European History. He has presented papers, and chaired and commented on sessions at numerous conferences both in the United States and Europe. In 2009-10 he served as the Command Historian in theater for the Multi-National Corps-Iraq out of Baghdad.

**Sheryl Shafer** serves as full-time expedition director, committed to meeting the unique needs of each group. She has leadership experience in the start-up phase of multiple corporate and nonprofit businesses, including roles as president, consultant and board of directors member. She is passionate about exploring worldwide cultures through travel. She holds a BA in English from Texas A&M, an MA in Education Leadership, Policy and Politics from Columbia University's Teachers College and a Master of Nonprofit Management from Regis University.



**Lodging:** Our lodging and channel crossing is as follows:

Alumni/Friend	Student
London	
Conrad London St James	
Windsor	
Sir Christopher Wren Hotel	
Normandy	
Villa Lara	Churchill Hotel
Paris	
Hilton Paris Opera	

**Tour Dates:** May 19<sup>th</sup> through May 27<sup>th</sup>. Arrival in London and departure from Paris.

**Meeting Location on May 19<sup>th</sup> at 12pm:** We will meet for an opening lunch in the Orchard Room at the Conrad London St James. The room is on the main restaurant level at the hotel.

**Passport:** Please send me your passport information – either a copy of the photo page or just the full name, birth date, passport number, expiration date and nationality. I will need this information for the Brittany Ferries manifest. Students: this information will be provided through the Hunt Scholar office.

**Accommodations:** Please let us know if you have any medical, dietary or mobility limitations or issues so we can make every effort to accommodate you and provide the best experience. If you have dietary restrictions, I can ensure restaurants can accommodate you if I know in advance. Please also let me know if you require a walk-in shower rather than a tub/shower.

**Mentoring Component:** We have established a mentoring component for the students to learn from the alumni/friends. On previous SMU CPH trips, this has proven to be a wonderful success from both the alumni/friend as well as student perspective. While most of alumni/friends chose to participate, the few who did not later expressed regret for missing the engaging experience. In fact, several of our mentor/mentee relationships have continued well past the trip!

Please respond with two pieces of information: 1. Are you willing to talk with students who may be interested in your professional or life experiences at some point during the trip? 2. If so, please send me a short bio, including information you'd be willing to share with students, so that we can match up interests. If you'd prefer not to take on a mentoring role, that's absolutely fine, too. Thank you!

**Additional Hotel Nights:** If you would like to extend your stay in London before the tour or in Paris after the tour, I would be happy to make hotel reservations at the same hotels listed above at the pass-through rate from the hotel (no mark up). **The rate for the Conrad is £478, double occupancy, which is currently about \$600 at the current conversion rate. In Paris, the rate at the Paris Hilton Opera is €394, or currently about \$425, double occupancy. Unfortunately, I will not be able to extend this offer to students.**

**Dinner on your own in Bayeux:** There are many wonderful restaurants in Bayeux, and we will have two on-your-own dinners in Bayeux. A couple of these venues require advanced

reservations, including [L'Angle Saint Laurent](#), [La Rapiere](#), and L'Alchimie (apparently, no website but you can look them up on other review sites). Of course, there are also wonderful pubs and casual restaurants as well. One interesting note about restaurants in France: France has interesting rules regulating its restaurants. Legally, a true restaurant cannot open before 7pm, and that applies to the restaurants I suggested above. Other dining establishments, such as brasseries, cafes and pubs can open earlier and they are often very good – just not in the category of “restaurant.” There are plenty of non-restaurants in Bayeux and they generally do not require reservations.

**Arrival and Departure:** We do not coordinate transport service to/from the airport and hotel in London and Paris. However, if you prefer to have a car hire service rather than take public transportation or a taxi, we highly recommend Blacklane (<https://www.blacklane.com/en>). We have worked with them in multiple cities in England and France in the past and the service has always been reliable and highly professional. When organizing transportation, you have the option to select the type of car you prefer, such as Mercedes, BMW, Tesla, Audi or similar.

**Earbuds:** We will use audio units to ensure everyone can hear Drs Engel and DeToy clearly. We will have earbuds available but if you have pair you prefer, please be sure to bring them.

**Power Converter:** You will need power converters for both England and France (two different types). You can purchase these at a travel store or on Amazon. If you will have multiple devices to charge each evening, we also recommend bringing a splitter (like a mini extension cord without the cord) so that you can plug in more items into one outlet.

**Transportation During Tour:** We will have a bus for the transportation during the tour. The bus will include one bottle of water per person per day, but it likely will not have wifi service.

**Packing:** Bring layered clothing for warmth, a rain jacket, an umbrella and good walking shoes. The weather in our locations in late May can run the gamut from postcard-perfect to overcast with wind and rain. It's springtime in northwest Europe! (Note: Layering is key and we can always remove layers as necessary. If you have a small duffel bag, you can roll/fold it up empty in your suitcase and then bring it with extra clothing items in the bus each day of the touring). Remember, good walking shoes are important!

**Luggage:** There are no hard limits on luggage. The bus stowage should be sufficient for the size of bus as compared to our group size. For the ferry, the luggage can remain on the bus as we will be taking a day crossing.

**Family Connection:** As we prepare for this trip, could you let us know if you had any relatives with ties to Normandy and the D-Day invasion? Perhaps a parent or grandparent who served at that time? Brian had three uncles serve in Europe and one in the first USAAF unit (a P-47 squadron) onto the continent on an airstrip carved right near Pointe du Hoc days after the landing. If you can give us the name and unit or organization, we will identify a time/place we can include that story in the touring.

**Participation:** Under the auspices of the CPH, Director Professor Jeff Engel's students will be portraying historical characters while we are in Europe.

Dr DeToy has developed a list of roles for people to portray. For the students, this is a mandatory exercise; for the remainder of you, this is entirely voluntary and optional but highly encouraged! For those who would like to do this, it will make the trip even more worthwhile as

you dig into understanding a person who was critical to the history. Here's how it works: Brian will let you know at what location(s) he will ask you to speak to the group and for how long. He will give you a short list of possible talking points and questions you may want to address. No worries, at all – Brian is prepared to speak and lead the entire thing. But we are confident it will be more enjoyable if we hear some other voices. For some others of you, he will provide a short reading that he will call on you to read at a specific point. There's no preparation required at all for those. Here is an initial list of possible characters and topics; if you have another that you would like to add, do not hesitate to suggest them:

- Winston Churchill
- GEN Dwight Eisenhower
- Professor Alan Turing at Bletchley with ULTRA
- Mavis Batey at Bletchley with ULTRA
- ADM Bertram Ramsay and Seapower in the Invasion
- Field Marshal Erwin Rommel
- GEN Bernard Montgomery
- LTG Omar Bradley
- MAJ John Howard and British airborne at Pegasus Bridge
- LTC Terence Otway at Merville Battery
- LTC James Rudder and Rangers at Pointe Du Hoc
- CPT Joe Dawson and Infantry at Omaha Beach
- BG Teddy Roosevelt Jr at Utah beach
- COL Hans von Luck at Caen
- CPL Helen Denton – Ike's WAC secretary
- Nancy Wake and The French Resistance
- MG Elwood "Pete" Quesada and Airpower in the invasion
- LTG JCH Lee and Logistics in the invasion
- Medical care
- BG James Gavin and US airborne at La Fiere Bridge
- LT Dick Winters and Easy Company at Brecourt Manor
- CPT Michael Wittman – German Tiger ace
- LTG George Patton
- MG Phillipe LeClerc in Paris
- GEN Dietrich von Choltitz in Paris
- Ernest Hemingway and Reporters in War

If you would like to participate, please respond to this email with your character/topic choice.



**Movies:** Some D-Day films to watch:

- *The Longest Day*
- *Saving Private Ryan*
- There are many others, of course, but the first gives a very good overview and the second (especially in its initial 25 and final 25 minutes) provides a superb view of the chaos, madness, and simplicities and complexities of infantry warfare at the tip of the spear.
- Although not concerning the Normandy invasion, per se, these two recent films give a great view of the British psyche in 1940 as they prepared to stand-alone against the Axis – *Dunkirk* and *Darkest Hour*. While Brian, as a former Army infantryman, found issues with the portrayal of ground side in *Dunkirk*, he thought the air and, especially, the sea portions were exceedingly well done and the director's story-telling and bringing all three strands together at a single point to be superb. We found *Darkest Hour* to be quite informative, entertaining and a very good examination of the British will in the darkest days of May 1940. The movie provides an excellent view of the Cabinet War Rooms – better known as the Churchill War Rooms – which we will visit on our first day in London. Gary Oldman's portrayal of Winston Churchill is magnificent – and the Oscars rewarded him for his performance!
- *Band of Brothers*, episodes 1-3, for an examination of the training and preparation of a small unit for combat, followed by its initial forays at Brecourt Manor and Carentan.

**Reading:** If you want to do some reading beforehand, we recommend:

- Max Hastings *Overlord* for the larger view
- Stephen Ambrose's *D-Day* for an incredible selection of telling vignettes
- *The Longest Day* by Cornelius Ryan
- *Six Armies in Normandy* by John Keegan
- *Decision in Normandy: The Unwritten Story of Montgomery and the Allied Campaign* by Carlo D'Este
- *D-Day: The Battle for Normandy* by Anthony Beevor
- *Omaha Beach: D-Day, June 6, 1944* by Joseph Balkoski
- *Double Cross: The True Story of the D-Day Spies* by Ben MacIntyre
- *The Guns at Last Light: The War in Western Europe, 1944-1945* by Rick Atkinson (portions on D-Day, but the entire Liberation Trilogy is magnificent)

The required student reading for the course includes the following; this reading list is subject to change and will be updated if necessary in January:

- Douglas Brinkley, *The Boys of Pointe du Hoc: Ronald Reagan, D-Day, and the US Army 2<sup>nd</sup> Ranger Battalion* (New York: Harper, 2006).
- Frank Costigliola, *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances: How Personal Politics Helped Start the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012)
- Max Hastings, *Overlord: D-Day and the Battle for Normandy* (New York: Vintage, 2006).
- Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997)
- Norman Rich, *Hitler's War Aims: Ideology, The Nazi State, and the Course of Expansion* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992)

### *On-Line Texts: Canvas*

- Andrew Preston, “Monsters Everywhere: A Genealogy of National Security,” *Diplomatic History*, 38:3 (June 2014).
- Mark Stoler, “George C. Marshall and the ‘Europe-First Strategy, 1939-1951: A Study in Diplomatic as well as Military History,” *The Journal of Military History*, 79:2 (April 2015).

**Monthly Historical Update:** Here is the timeline of World War II events leading to D-Day, showing the context of what was going on in the war at-large and also the background leading to Operation OVERLORD. **This update takes us up through the end of December 1943.**

Items in **Bold** are directly related to the Normandy operations.

### **1941**

**June:** Germany invades her former ally the Soviet Union (which consequently becomes Britain’s ally). This begins the bloody struggle on the Eastern Front, which continues until the end of the war in 1945.

**December:** Japan attacks the US fleet at Pearl Harbor, inflicting serious damage and involving the US directly in the Second World War. Germany declares war on the USA, bringing American into the war in Europe. At the Washington Conference, Britain and the US agree a strategy of “Europe first” – in other words, that they will concentrate on the defeat of Germany before turning to deal with Japan. This begins the train of events that would lead to D-Day.

### **1942**

**April:** The build-up of US forces in Britain (**Operation BOLERO**) begins, in preparation for D-Day.

**August:** The Allied raid on the French coastal town of Dieppe (using mainly Canadian troops) is repulsed with heavy casualties. The raid graphically illustrates how difficult the Allied invasion of Europe would be.

**October – December:** The critical Allied victories that will lead to the defeat of Axis (German and Italian) forces in North Africa – The Battle of El Alamein is won by the British Eighth Army under General Montgomery; American/British forces land in Morocco and Algeria, commanded by General Eisenhower.

### **1943**

**January:** At the Casablanca Conference, the Allies agree that the conditions are not right for D-Day to take place in 1943. Instead, the Allies will capture Sicily. They decide to form an Anglo-American staff to begin the detailed planning for D-Day.

**March:** The Anglo-American staff is formed under the command of British Lieutenant General Morgan. He is given the title of COSSAC (Chief of Staff, Supreme Allied Commander). The Supreme Allied Commander has not yet been appointed.

**July and September:** The Allied landings in Sicily and mainland Italy respectively lead to the Italian surrender and open a new front in the war in Europe.

**August:** At the Quebec Conference, the Allies adopt COSSAC's outline plan for D-Day.

**October:** British Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay is appointed as the Allied naval commander for D-Day.

**November:** The British, American and Soviet leaders – Winston Churchill, Franklin Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin – meet together for the first time, at the Teheran Conference. **Stalin urgently wants to know when the Allies will land in France, to aid the Soviet armies fighting on the Eastern Front. Churchill and Roosevelt tell him that the planned date is May 1944.** Discussions are also held on related matters, such as the planned Allied landings in the south of France (in the event, these will take place in August 1944).

**December 1943:** Field Marshal Erwin Rommel is given responsibility for improving the German defenses on the French coast, which the Allies will have to overcome on D-Day (including minefields, obstacles to sink landing craft, and pillboxes). He is later appointed commander of the German Army Group B in France. Construction work also begins at various points along the English coasts, in this case however on the first sections of the Mulberry Harbors. These artificial harbors, made in huge sections from steel and concrete, will be towed over to Normandy after D-Day and assembled there. They will enable the Allies to land troops and equipment at a faster rate than is possible straight onto the beaches. Also, after months of indecision on the part of the Allied leaders, US General Dwight D. Eisenhower is finally appointed as Supreme Allied Commander, in overall charge of Operation Overlord (the D-Day landings and subsequent fighting in Normandy). General Bernard Montgomery ("Monty") is appointed to command 21st Army Group, with responsibility for the assault landings on D-Day and the following ground fighting. Earlier in the war, he had fought – and beaten – Rommel's forces in North Africa.

**January 1944:** With the new year, the planning for D-Day takes on greater urgency. The newly appointed Allied commanders begin revising the draft plans that had been drawn up by COSSAC. In particular, they decide that the number of troops to be landed in the first waves on D-Day needs to be considerably increased. Further naval forces and aircraft must therefore be found to support these additional troops. The target date for D-Day is moved from 1 May to 31 May, to allow time for these preparations. Midget submarines of the Combined Operations Pilotage Parties (COPP) secretly visit the Normandy beaches to take sand samples. These are needed to confirm that the sand on certain sections of the chosen landing beaches will support the weight of the tanks that the Allies plan to land on D-Day. Across many parts of Europe, including France, British and US aircraft begin to drop weapons and supplies to the Resistance. This will enable them to fight back against the occupying Germans. Back in the UK, the first amphibious exercise for American troops takes place at Slapton Sands, Devon. The exercise involves 16,000 assault troops and is a rehearsal of the techniques that will be used on D-Day itself.

#### **January 1944**

4: The 1st Ukrainian Front of the Red Army enters Poland in a winter offensive.

9: British forces take Maungdaw, Burma, a critical port for Allied supplies.



**12: The SS United Victory, the first Victory ship, is launched; this class of transport will prove to be crucial in hauling men and supplies across the oceans.**

: Count Ciano, the Italian Foreign Minister and Mussolini's son-in-law, is executed by Mussolini's revived Fascist government sympathizers.

17: The first Battle of Monte Cassino begins when the British X Corps attacks along the Garigliano river at the western end of the German Gustav Line.

19: Red Army troops push westward toward the Baltic countries in the great winter offensive.

20: The Royal Air Force drops 2,300 tons of bombs on Berlin.

: The US Army 36th Infantry Division attempts to cross Italy's Gari River but suffers heavy losses and is halted in a stiff fight.

22: Allies begin Operation SHINGLE, the landing at Anzio-Nettuno, Italy, commanded by American Major General John P. Lucas. The Allies hope to break the stalemate in south Italy, but they are unable to break out of the beachhead and the line holds until late May.

24: The Allied forces have a major setback on the Rapido River in Italy.

28: In the winter offensive, the Russian Army completes the encirclement of two German Army corps at the Korsun pocket, south of Kiev. Two-thirds of the Germans escape in the breakout next month with the loss of most heavy equipment.

31: The US Army's 7th Infantry Division invades Kwajalein in the Japanese-occupied Marshall Islands. On February 1, Kwajalein is the target of the most concentrated bombardment of the Pacific War. Thirty-six thousand shells from naval ships and ground artillery on a nearby islet strike Kwajalein. B-24 Liberator bombers also hit the island, adding to the destruction. Of the 8,782 Japanese soldiers deployed to the atoll, 7,870 are killed in the battle.