

“I have to announce to the house that during the night and the early hours of this morning the first of a series of landings in force upon the European continent has taken place...

An immense armada of upwards of 4000 ships, together with several thousand smaller craft, crossed the Channel. Massed airborne landings have been successfully effected behind the enemy lines and landings on the beaches are proceeding at various points.. everything is proceeding according to plan”

PART OF A SPEECH BY
WINSTON CHURCHILL
TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS
6 JUNE 1944

THE ROAD TO VICTORY

70TH ANNIVERSARY OF
OPERATION OVERLORD (D DAY)
& THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE

PART II
CHERBOURG TO BRUSSELS

FRANCE & BELGIUM

8TH – 18TH SEPTEMBER 2014



ITINERARY

MONDAY 8 SEPTEMBER

Overnight flight from the USA to London

TUESDAY 9 SEPTEMBER

On arrival in London make your own way by train to Portsmouth. Our hotel is the Holiday Inn at Portsmouth Dockyard. This evening there will be a welcome introduction and tour briefing.

WEDNESDAY 10 SEPTEMBER

“OK, we go!” With those fateful words, General Dwight Eisenhower committed his command to the most storied and famous amphibious operation of all times.

Today we will visit Southwick House and see where Gen Eisenhower made the decision to commence Operation Overlord. Returning to Portsmouth we visit the D Day Museum.

After lunch, you will have the opportunity to visit Portsmouth Historic Dockyard with the Royal Naval Museum - there is Nelson's flagship from Trafalgar—HMS Victory; Henry VIII's flagship the Mary Rose and the mightiest warship of the nineteenth century—HMS Warrior. As our hotel is within 10 minutes walking distance, we will plan to walk to and from the Dockyard.

THURSDAY 11 SEPTEMBER

An early start this morning as we will be on the 09.00 (3 hour ferry crossing) to Cherbourg. Like George Patton, 70 years earlier we will arrive on the continent at Cherbourg. The town was a tough nut to crack and the allies had to have a secure dock with wharves after the US “Mulberry” artificial harbour were destroyed by a channel storm a few days after the June 6th landing. Bradley assigned the task to his US 1st Army which was spearheaded by the 9th Infantry Division. They cut off the peninsula and laid siege capturing (27th June) Cherbourg prior to the activation of 3rd Army.

Leaving Cherbourg we will drive to Nehou which was Patton's initial HQ in France. We will stop at St Mere Eglise to visit the fine Airborne Museum, then on to Brecourt Manor - made famous by E Company Band of Brothers, 506 Regiment, 101st Airborne Division.

Overnight Bayeux

FRIDAY 12 SEPTEMBER

We commence today in the British zone of operation at Pegasus Bridge where just after midnight on the 6th June, three gliders landed, quickly taking the bridge they held it until later that day when they were relieved.

We will then drive west along Sword Beach (British) then to Juno Beach (Canadian) to Gold Beach (British) where we stop at Arromanches to look at the remains of the Mulberry Harbour. This ‘harbour’ had been constructed in the UK and involved over four hundred towed components weighing 1/1 /2 million tons. Late on the afternoon of D Day the first ‘Phoenix’ (concrete hollow boxes) left the UK arriving on the morning of the 9th. By the 18th 115 had been sunk in a 5 mile long arc. On the 19th a severe storm destroyed the Omaha Mulberry, but even though this one was badly damaged by the end of 1944, 39,000 vehicles and 220,000 soldiers had made dry landings.

After lunch we move on to Omaha Beach (where the heaviest casualties on D Day occurred). The initial objective for the 1st & 29th US Divisions, many of the men from these Divisions who died on 6 June and subsequent days until the end of the Normandy Campaign will be found in the US cemetery at St Laurent-sur-Mer. Sited above Omaha Beach and looking down to where some of the bloodiest actions took place, the cemetery contains 9,286 personnel, including the Roosevelt brothers, Theodore & Quentin.

We end today at Pointe du Hoc, US intelligence had highlighted this battery (155mm) as the most formidable along the American beaches located so that it could not only engage surface vessels but fire onto both Omaha & Utah Beaches. The operation to take the battery was given to the 2nd US Rangers commanded by Lt Col James Rudder. Suffering many casualties Rudder's men eventually captured the battery only to find that the guns had been removed.

Overnight Bayeux

SATURDAY 13 SEPTEMBER

We will start today in St. Lo where bombers were used in a strategic tactical role. In addition to the aerial bombardment the town was shelled constantly. The town was eventually captured by the US 29th Division on the 18th July. Then to Coutances, where the 4th and 6th Armored Divisions broke through the German lines. (Operation Cobra)

As Patton looked to secure the Brittany Peninsula we will move on to Avranches which would be the key crossroads for Patton's “Breakout.” If Patton's 4th Armored Division could break through Avranches they would unhinge the German's left flank. The Germans understood this and fighting for this mountaintop town was fierce. While in town we will see a memorial to Patton. We will then pay tribute to the soldiers buried at St James's the Brittany American Cemetery.

Patton's relentless and aggressive offensive efforts paid dividends as the Germans were being pressed on numerous fronts simultaneously. Patton would be rewarded and his breakthroughs led to an opportunity for a real breakout and he capitalized on it. Success at Avranches allowed elements of 3rd Army to spread across the French countryside.

Overnight Pontorson

SUNDAY 14 SEPTEMBER

We start today with the battle of Mortain where the German Counter Attack (Operation Luttich) attempted to stop Patton's drive across France by cutting across his rear and restoring control of Avranches. The defense of Mortain by the 30th Division frustrated the Germans' intentions, with the main defences being on Hill 314 providing both a strategic and tactical overview.

The Falaise Pocket: the American breakthrough finally flanked the German forces that had bottled up the Allies following D-Day. With 3rd Army on the loose, German forces on the coast risked encirclement and destruction if they did not abandon their advanced positions. The allies recognized the opportunity to encircle the Germans in an area known as the Falaise Pocket. Allied forces moved to seam up the routes of egress as the Germans attempted to escape through “the gap” that remained. We are going to examine the 3rd Army's role in this effort to trap the Germans.

We will then leave Mortain for Argentan where Patton attempted to close “the gap.” While en route we will talk about the plan—a variation of a double envelopment or “pincer” movement. Sadly, for Patton, this is the spot where Bradley ordered him to halt to accommodate higher priorities for logistical support. This afternoon we will head to Chambois where the Falaise Pocket was closed by elements of the 90th Division and the Polish Armored Division. The collapse of the Falaise pocket ended the Normandy Campaign.

Overnight Chartres

MONDAY 15 SEPTEMBER

The advance of Patton's army brought them to the ancient city of Chartres, site of one of the most beautiful cathedrals in Europe. We will have an opportunity to visit the Cathedral Notre-Dame de Chartres (In July 1944 an order was made to destroy the cathedral but it was spared by the intervention of US Army Col Welborn Griffith who challenged this order). Before leaving the city we will stop at the city's outer gate which the Germans attempted to destroy to delay the 7th Armored Division from entering the city. There are many myths surrounding the capture of the town and we will discuss them along with a short exposition on the importance of the city to both the Germans and Allies.

The destruction of German forces along the Normandy front set up a race for the German border and Patton intended to win. The pace of his advance strained his POL (petroleum, oil and lubricants) supply. Today we will follow Patton's Army moving along an axis framed by Nancy to the south and Metz to the north he found a mix of German units thrown in his way. Patton relished the destruction of enemy forces and his diary reflects a distinct pleasure in precisely documenting the amount of enemy casualties. As Patton moved further east the nature of the terrain in the Lorraine region slowed but failed to stop him. The 4th Armored Division served as his spearhead and they pushed past Nancy in September. That cluster of engagements is known today as the battle of Arracourt.

This battle ended the 4th Armored Division's drive east—they were next seen spearheading the drive on Bastogne during the battle of the Bulge.

Patton's 3rd Army had a decisive impact on the war in France and his move across France is a case study in mechanized warfare.

Overnight Luxembourg City

TUESDAY 16 SEPTEMBER

We will begin this day en route to Bastogne by first stopping at Patton's grave in Hamm at the US Military Luxembourg Cemetery.

Patton's many achievements have been overshadowed in history by his miraculous response to the surprise German counter-offensive known as the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944. As we move towards Bastogne we will describe the German offensive from the Ardennes. In doing this we will set up Patton's actions to relieve Bastogne. Patton had anticipated the possible need to respond to the crisis and had begun planning a relief expedition. That sense of the moment made possible his timely response and earned his men fame in the annals of US military history.

We will return to December of 1944 and follow the route of the 4th Armored into Bastogne. A tank battalion under Lt. Col. Creighton Abrams (of Vietnam fame) was ordered to defend the 4th's left flank but he demonstrated his leadership potential by exceeded his orders when he pushed ahead to link up with the besieged 101st Airborne on December 26th.

Arriving in Bastogne we will study the siege of the town, visit the museum and impressive American Memorial and finally visit the Band of Brothers action at Foy & Nuts' Corner.

Overnight Bastogne

WEDNESDAY 17 SEPTEMBER

Today we follow the attack made by the 6th Panzer Army and in particular 1st SS Panzer & Kampfgruppe Peiper'.

Here at Loshem the first action took place when the Peiper's leading infantry the 9th Airborne Regiment came up against Lt Bouck's recon platoon of the 394th Regiment, 99th US Division. His thirty-five men will hold up the paratroopers for 20 hours, to continue his attack Peiper is forced to take another longer route.

On the 17th December as the German spearhead approached Baugnez and the crossroads, the US 285th Field Artillery Observation Battalion was also approaching. With only small arms to defend themselves they were quickly overpowered. Pieper continued towards Ligneuville. About 120 prisoners were taken to a field nearby, for reasons that remain unclear the Germans suddenly commenced firing. 88 bodies were recovered a month later.

It is here at Stavelot that Peiper's spearhead (now seeking fuel supplies) meets serious resistance. On the 18th December he attacked and is held up by units from the 291st Engineer battalion and a company from the 526th Armored Infantry Battalion under Major Paul Solis with three 57mm antitank guns put a solid defense allowing time for other US units to withdraw from the town. On the road to Francochamps, Solis and his men destroyed a major fuel depot before they withdrew.

At La Gleize there is a museum worth visiting & outside there is a Tiger tank left behind during the German retreat

Overnight Brussels

THURSDAY 18 SEPTEMBER

Return flight to the USA or return to London by bus or Eurostar train (your choice).

For a registration form please contact;

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Forms are also available on line at;
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