

The 2007 CSUN History Department Staff Ride to Normandy, France

by Katy Flaherty and Richard Harding

This past June the History Department sent sixteen students and faculty to Northern France to walk the battlefields of the Second World War. The Staff Ride was led by CSUN alumnus Dave Livingstone (now a professor at Moorpark College), and former CSUN adjunct Stephen Bourque (now a professor at the Army Command and General Staff College), both of whom generously volunteered their services in exchange for expenses only. Professor Tom Devine also accompanied the group. The students were mostly graduate and undergraduate students from the History Department.

The first days of the trip consisted of an afternoon and evening (and for some, early morning) in Paris. The next morning we embarked on our journey to Caen, which would be our home for the next 12 days. After our arrival there, we explored the castle of William the Conqueror (remember the Battle of Hastings, 1066 and all that?) and the rest of downtown Caen. One PhD who shall remain nameless discovered to his horror that the culinary specialty in Normandy—tripe—was not what he had imagined it to be (*Local fish? Au contraire*).

For the next several days we walked along each of the five major beaches of the D-Day landings. The strong winds and cold driving rain provided an all too authentic setting. At various spots along the way, students gave research presentations on a variety of aspects of the Normandy campaign, and Professors Bourque and Livingstone situated locales and battles in a broader historical context. Major highlights included our visit to the Pegasus Bridge Museum, (site of the first Allied landings on D-Day), museums at each beach, and the Ranville Commonwealth Military cemetery where several thousand British, Australian, New Zealand, and German soldiers lie. The group also spoke briefly with two British World War II veterans, now in their 80s, who participated in the D-Day invasion.

Each of the five cemeteries that our group visited was unique and powerful. Built to honor those who died during the Normandy campaign, they now remind our generation of the cost of war. The sight of thousands of immaculate headstones in neat rows has ensured that none who participated in the Staff Ride will soon forget the tragedy that is inex-

tricably linked to war.

A trip to the Caen Memorial and Peace Museum rounded out our study of the Normandy Invasion. The museum, designed to remind visitors of the cost of war, genocide, and human rights violations, presented a comprehensive overview of 20th Century history, with a focus on international conflicts and World War II in particular.

Shifting its historical focus to the Middle Ages, the group spent an afternoon in Bayeux where the famous Bayeux Tapestry is on display. The 230-foot tapestry recounts another invasion, this one, however, launched from the beaches of Normandy to the shores of England where William the Conqueror triumphed over Harold Godwinson on the field of battle at Hastings. The next day we set off for the thousand-year-old pilgrimage destination of Mont Saint Michel, still home to a handful of monks and numerous well-stocked souvenir shops.

During the final two days, we drove the entire circumference of the "Falaise Pocket," the area where Allied forces almost encircled and captured the majority of the German Army in France at the end of the Normandy campaign. The trip ended on a solemn note as Professors Bourque and Livingstone had arranged for us to help raise the U.S. flag over the American Military Cemetery at Couleville, just above Omaha Beach. □□□



General Bourque instructs the troops shortly before they commenced eating their box lunches.

Berlin-Prague Trip –
June 5-18

Instructors

Professor Donal O'Sullivan

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Cost

- \$350 at time of application
- \$1500 by March 1
- \$1649 by May 5
- \$ 3,499 Total

Includes

- Hotel accommodations
- All breakfasts, 2 dinners
- Flight and bus transportation
- Public transportation passes for Berlin and Prague
- Entrance fees for museums, concerts, and other sites
- English speaking guides for city tours

Highlights

- Visits to the Reichstag, the Olympic Stadium, the remains of the Berlin Wall, Checkpoint Charlie, and the Palaces at Potsdam
- Meetings with University of Potsdam students
- Tours of former Gestapo headquarters, the new Holocaust memorial and the historic Jewish quarter

Information

- Call Kristina Choura at Witte Travel, 1-800-469-4883