

# Normandy Wreck Week

**13th September 2014**

Lovely night on the ferry floor. Occasional hour on the non-reclining recliners with a minor neck contortion onto the window ledge, just to make sure those impending visits to the physio on my return crack the £100 mark. Job done. Thank god the boat sold small bottles of Mouton Cadet to soften the pain, chocolate bar for pudding.

Arrive in Le Havre, 3 car rendezvous confusion, then the convoy began. Martin and Ali with Jim and Doug in the lead, Dawn, myself, Roger and Derek behind, and Mark and Brendan with Rob, Jenny and Tom making a fabulous rear end to the convoy between them. We never thought the convoy would last together longer than 15 mins, but what's this.....has Martin developed an empathetic streak? Stayed with us? Personally I am suspicious and believe that Ali may have been the source of such thoughtfulness, but who knows!

So we make it all the way to the gite. Beautiful, classic French farmhouse with converted barns for accommodation, old wooden doors, beautiful old wooden worn steps, wooden ceilings in the bedrooms, large rustic (very squeaky) heavy furniture, mixed with clean bathrooms with working showers. A big plus. The owner ran off to milk the cow and tea, coffee, bread and jam was had.

Our van always planned to head for the beaches, not to waste the day, sun shining, got to go! Whole group decided the same so off we all went. Less successful convoy, but we got there. Headed west to Omaha beach. Personally I was stunned! A large modern sculpture stood in the waves with a shore-based stone built structure that had a resemblance to a conning tower of a submarine just in front of it. Boards placed a little further inland showed pictures of some of the soldiers that had fought in the wars, with some of their thoughts and reflections. You see images like this in the papers and on various media, but the terrible sadness of what we are and do only really hits you when you move that extra step closer to the setting of terrible events like this. The sea was rough, strong wind from the NE, straight into the bay, adding to the powerful impact of the moment.



We all moved on to the nearby American cemetery. Huge sweeping grounds, beautiful sculptures and statues, a large shallow pool, and then the endless fields of white crosses. Felt so incredibly thankful that out of an endless series of tragedies, there was the will, drive and determination to make sure that this loss of life was surrounded by as much of a tribute as could be provided, however small it all seemed in the face of such loss



We accidentally drove west from Omaha beach (apparently my fault), and were half way to Utah beach before we realised. But along the way we did see the massive sculpture for World Peace Day in shining chrome, of a woman, bare breasted and appearing to run forward, not unlike a ships figurehead. Derek started to shout World Peace at everyone after that, hoping it might bring a mad flurry of breast exposures from all directions. We turned round and headed for Gold Beach to the east of Omaha.



Amazing sight at Arromanche. As the book says, 146 concrete caissons had been towed from England, to create a harbour for troop movements and supplies. Lots of the wreckage of these structures still sits there, proud of the waves, in their curved harbour formation. The logistics of moving them here really hits home when you see them, abandoned as a memorial in the waves. The ingenuity, audacity, determination and sheer effort that this must have taken is phenomenal to contemplate