

Normandy Wreck Week

20th September

We also have 2 accounts of the last day and the trip home. The first is by the ever-reliable Ali Bessel, who travelled home on the evening of 20 Sep in Dawn's van with Dawn, Roger and Derek who thus missed the end-of-exped party given by Catherine; the second account, by Jenny Watkins, covers the trip home by the remainder of the expedition on 21st September

Ali Bessel: Our last day, heading back to the ferry later, but before we left, we visited the Bayeux Commonwealth Cemetery. It was largely filled with British soldiers, nearly 4000, the remaining made of a variety of nationalities, over 400 of them German, the total stated as 4648. A beautiful place. A photo had been placed by one of the gravestones, which made you stop in your tracks, perception of what you are seeing shifting again, another slight variation in the sense of sadness that these various memorials can leave you with.



There was an opinion voiced that it seemed somehow disrespectful that a road had been carved through the site, separating the cemetery from the Bayeux War Memorial, on which are written 1800 names of the soldiers who died in the early stages of the war and don't have any known grave. I did not feel like this at all. It seemed almost fitting that this entire site and its memories are woven into the



activities of everyday life, the way the road was constructed, forcing you to slow down, which in itself, draws your eyes to the scene around you. Another day filled with contemplation of a momentous period in history. An amazing trip. One of the best diving experiences I have ever had. I would come back, any day, both to dive and pay my respects to those that have died here.



Others also visited the cemetery and museum in Bayeux; here is Jenny Watkin's account:

Jenny Watkins: After a leisurely breakfast we started to dry out our kit and Françoise, our hostess, found more space for us and provided fencing on which to place our heavy kit. Once this was spread around the Gite in the sunshine we returned to the dive centre to pay for our week of diving. We followed our leader back to the dive centre and then travelled to on to the Bayeux museum and British Military cemetery. We travelled in front of the leader and realised we had missed the entrance when from the rear view we saw our leader turning right. With artistic impression scoring 9/10 we executed a U turn much to the surprise and amazement of other road users. Once safely in the car park we decided to visit the museum first.

This museum is free of charge and contains an enormous amount of uniforms, equipment and large exhibits of tanks, guns and pistols from many nations. There were examples showing the conditions of the troupes from their cigarettes, rations and first aid kits to a hospital ward. The exhibits follow a chronological progression of the events from 6th June to the end of August 1944. There is also an archive film of the period.

We then crossed the road to view the British Military Cemetery which holds the graves of 4144 Commonwealth soldiers who died during World War II. Whilst there are over 3000 British graves there are graves of those unidentified and also those of German soldiers. A memorial has been erected to those who fought to liberate Europe.

Once again we headed back to the Gite to prepare for a last night party at the home of Catherine who had started this wreck week project. We enjoyed a wonderful evening in her fantastic home.

In the evening, the remainder of the party, including the non-SSAC participants, gathered at Catherine's beautiful and historic house, deep in the French countryside. There we were welcomed with an excellent barbecue and buffet accompanied by considerable quantities of local

cider and other beverages. The SSAC members eventually made their way back to the Gite in the early hours of 21 Sep, through the now deserted French backroads.

21st September

Jenny Watkins: We enjoyed our final breakfast and loaded our vehicles ready for our return home. Our leader had an alternative route planned as our ferry did not leave until later in the day and we hoped to see more of the French countryside. Having learned from yesterday's experience we decided to let our leader drive at the front. We had lunch at the Michelin starred McDonalds, the only place we could find open and passing up the delights of a McFlurry we decided that could find our own way to Le Havre. This worked well until the back seat passenger with the Sat Nav decided to get involved and we saw a little more of the countryside than originally planned. When we finally arrived at the port it was to discover our leader in front of us in the queue.

Once on board the ferry there was a requirement to recharge our various electronic equipment but sadly no WIFI on board. We recharged on pasties and drinks, watched a wonderful sunset and finally returned to Portsmouth later that evening having enjoyed new experiences and met and made new friends. A wonderful and challenging week for all involved.

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