

The last report from E.T.O.

- Or the 65 th Anniversary of the landings in Normandy. June 2009

**Base of Operations** : La Cambe at “Our House in Normandy”with Pierre et Silvia

**Deployment** : From Miami International Airport, Florida to Zurich and to Paris:

a pleasant and uneventful trip, crossing the Atlantic at night on Swiss

Easy clearance of Customs/ Immigration in Zurich , and a simple walk out of the Charles

de Gaulle (CDG) airport in Paris , to our rental car. Exiting the airport on Sunday mid

day ,Once we became oriented to direction, was a pleasant four hour ride north west on

motorways (suggestion: use your credit card for tolls- the transactions are fast and easy)

By the way no trucks on the roads in France on Saturdays and Sundays..very convenient

It was easy to find La Cambe on RN 13, the famous Red Ball Express

road – and right into the center of the village- and then just on the edge we recognized

“Our House” and our congenial hosts met us in the courtyard

**Encampment:** What a place! Even after spending four days in Paris at the end of

our trip, we would rather have stayed in Normandy! Pierre and Silvia

have a comfortable (and beautiful) home with stone walls, of course “French” doors, slate

roof! It was so much fun to meet other MVPA members and enthusiasts from all over the

planet (almost) Our House saw constant stream of visitors and many military vehicles,

WWII only, stopping by- no only guests but visitors from every where dropping in to say

hello, have cup of tea/coffee or wine or cider in the pleasant courtyard, while military

vehicles rumble by on the former Red Ball Express route- ahh... the sounds of a CCKW

or Jeep or M8 – what a backdrop! We shared meals,told stories, traded tips about places

we’d been . The Florida Teepee –FFC was erected and flags flutterd in the breeze.

We could stroll out the gate of the estate and walk but a few steps to the butcher, the

baker, the locals stores –how pleasant! The villagers were kind and helpful, and

seemed very happy to see us there (even though we spoke no French- we tried, and were rewarded with smiles and laughter, and surprisingly, on occasion, English!)

Now, to the quarters. The labors of Pierre and Silvia were evident- first, this is their home, and they made it ours! The large comfortable living room on the ground floor boasted TV's, all sorts of military books, DVD's and maps. Countless times maps were spread out there, or in Pierre's workshop, where they were perused, -plans plotted,(almost a second invasion, I think!).

I drove our rental car (diesel – stick) all over greater Normandy, back and forth, on two lane cart paths and motorways,and thanks to Pierre knowledge and input, we never got lost.He knew just where we should go,and when,and what we would see.What a resource

A busy and bustling kitchen was a stopping place for a conversation, or a meal shared with new friends, and a catch up of who had seen what and gone where.

Above, on second floor four bedrooms (twin beds) and bathroom.

At the end of ground floor, open to the courtyard, was a room which Pierre now has made into a lounge for visitors. Adjacent to that is a guest kitchenette w/sink, microwave, coffee maker, fridge, just off water closet(toilet) and separate shower(all brand new)

Across the courtyard was a covered set up (the military way) for shaving and dish washing,( for the soldiers) and a soon to- be- completed additional shower area.(2)

Ample seating abounded in the courtyard to enjoy a glass of wine (or two) and fromage (cheese) after a day of immersing oneself into the abundant flow of history.

**The batchelor quarters** Rising to the second floor “barracks” a staircase in the guest kitchenette emerged into the center of a huge room, divided into four quad rooms (or chambrées) by good smelling canvas. Four beds in each “chambrée” It was like being in a renovated barn and a tent at the same time, with huge skylights,

military posters and lithos on the walls . Screwed on the timber dozens of dash plates, reward and commemorative plaques etc. I lay in bed the first night listening for an air siren and had my gear ready at the foot of the bed!!!!

A very comfortable place to use as HQ, with knowledgeable and helpful hosts whose invaluable input into our excursions into Normandy made our trip most enjoyable. In fact, without that input, even the best guidebook would have fallen far short !

**Location:** 2 1/2 hour from Paris La Cambe is right off the motorway which will take you everywhere that is anywhere in Normandy. An easy ride down to the sea and the beaches on wonderful narrow curvy roads through quaint villages with wonderful buildings (fortified farms- remains of the 100 Years War ) rounding corners to be confronted by convoys and lone military vehicles- it was close to be imbedded in the actual invasion as someone born in 1954 could be!

We stopped countless times at small museums- we enjoyed local food and friendly restaurants in seaside towns, we wandered through huge flea markets with more WWII military memorabilia than I have ever seen- and of course a lot more German items than we ever see here stateside. The weather was absolutely gorgeous, as though on cue for our visit alone! We visited the cemeteries (including as special invited guests all arranged on D-Day in St Laurent US cemetery by Pierre) we NEVER would have been able to pull that off without his organization and determination, the landings, the museums –it was almost overwhelming, which made each day's return to "Our House" a welcome haven. In fact one evening a group took off to see fireworks all up and down the coast ( in fact 80 km of fireworks)and I sat alone at a table in the courtyard as the sun set, smelling the Channel on a freshening eastern breeze, enjoying a glass of local cider- and allowed my thoughts to wander over what happened here – right here – sixty five years ago. How grateful I felt to men like my father, who was with the 15 Army Air

Corp in Italy, and to our honored guests at Our House, Bill Tritt who, as just a kid jumped with the 82<sup>nd</sup> Air Borne into the dark night and hit Sainte Mere Eglise in “less than five seconds” and spent the next thirty days fighting through Normandy – and this, is first return in sixty- five years.

La Cambe is situated in the very center of the American Sector of the beaches 5mn to the north Grandcamp and Pointe du Hoc- to the west Isigny- 10 mn Carentan 15mn St Mere 20 mn- to the east Omaha 15mn, Bayeux 15 mn, Arromanches 25 mn

**Conclusion** : If you consider a trip to Normandy, there is so much to see and do not just at the annual D- Day celebrations but throughout the year.

So many interesting and diverse people to meet,so much wonderful food and camaraderie and all of it made that much more special and efficient through the efforts of Pierre and Silvia. It is an opportunity that I encourage you all to take advantage of – it truly

made my trip to Normandy special.For those of us who honor the efforts of the Landings it is indescribable to be in the place where it all happened – the before and after pictures if you will, of such a price paid for freedom, by both sides. When we visited the

German cemetery (in La Cambe), the remains of a recently located German soldier,(of Course, unknown) was being laid to rest. A group of British re – enactors, in full dress, with bagpipes, stood at attention and honored that fallen soldier – it was as moving a tribute there, as the huge celebration at the American cemetery on D- Day. It reminded me that it was not the grand gesture, but the individual sacrifice, that mattered.

Plan your trip, (my first ever to Europe)without fear – Pierre and Silvia will be more than a resource, they will be a treasure !

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