

2019 Normandy 75th Anniversary

June 9-16, 2019

The purpose of this trip was to visit Normandy as part of the 75th anniversary of D-Day. All of our fellow passengers were associated with MOAA (Military Officers of America Association).

We left home about 1 PM for our drive up to Dulles and our flight to Paris via Reykjavik, Iceland. We had no real traffic to speak of and arrived at our Hilton hotel parking area by 4 pm and shuttled over to Dulles. Our plane left at 8:30 PM and we arrived in Reykjavik at 6:30 am on Sunday morning. We went thru customs here, however, we didn't realize Iceland is part of the EU. Our next flight left on time and headed to Paris where we arrived at Terminal 1 on schedule at 1 PM. We were looking for customs and didn't find any. Since we were doing carry on (to check a bag was \$150 round trip!!!), we emerged from the baggage area meeting our MOAA guide who got us to the boat via limo. When we met the guide, there was another couple on board all the way from



Dulles, Jim and Joan. In 45 minutes, we arrived at the Uniworld *SS Joie de Vivre* cruise ship and got unpacked and toured our home for a week. We were in the [classic stateroom](#). Up on deck and in the lounge, we met fellow passengers as the boat left the pier at 6 PM. We had the normal safety meeting in the lounge after which we had our first French dinner. Early to bed tonight, so we can catch up on our sleep and be ready to go on Monday.

On Monday morning June 10, we docked at La Roche Guyon to visit the [Chateau de La Roche Guyon](#). The present building was built in the 12th century, controlling a river crossing of the Seine, itself one of the routes to and from Normandy; The Abbé Suger described its grim aspect: "At the summit of a steep promontory, dominating the bank of the great river Seine, rises a frightful castle without title to nobility, called La Roche. The Chateau is hollowed out of a high cliff. The able hand of the builder has established in the mountainside, digging into the rock, an ample dwelling provided with a few miserable openings". In the mid-13th century, a fortified manor house (the château-bas) was added below.

Guy de La Roche fell at the Battle of Agincourt, and his widow was ousted from the Roche, after six months of siege, in 1419; she preferred to depart rather than accept Henry Plantagenet as her overlord. The Chateau came to the Liancourt family with the marriage of Roger de Plessis-Liancourt to the heiress Marie de La Roche; he was a childhood companion of Louis XIII, first gentleman of the Chambre du Roi, and was made a duke in 1643. He and his



wife made great changes to the château-bas, opening windows in its structure and laying out the terrace to the east, partly cut into the mountain's steep slope.

The domain of La Roche-Guyon came to the La Rochefoucauld family in 1669, with the marriage of Jeanne-Charlotte de Plessis-Liancourt with François VII de La Rochefoucauld. The Château

retained its medieval aspect of a fortress, with its moat and towers and cramped, dark living apartments. The Château was largely extended in the 18th century. When Turgot, the minister of Louis XVI, failed in his schemes for fundamental reforms in 1776, he retired to the Château briefly, as the guest of Louise Elisabeth Nicole de La Rochefoucauld, Duchesse d'Enville.

La Roche Guyon was the birthplace of François Alexandre Frédéric, duc de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt (1747–1827). The castle was used as a setting for the medieval segment of a famous Franco-Belgian graphic novel on time travel: *Le Piège diabolique* (The Diabolical Trap) of the Blake and Mortimer series by Edgar Pierre Jacobs.

For each of the daily tours we used a personal communication system so everyone could hear the guide no matter where they were within 100 yards. This is an excellent system that we used for all tours. The Chateau was built in the 12 Century controlling a river crossing of the Seine. The Chateau became the headquarters of Field Marshal Rommel for the time before the Normandy invasion. Rommel thought that the invasion would not be on June 4-6 for the weather was bad and this really wasn't the place where the invasion would occur. So, on June 5th he left La Roche Guyon for Berlin to celebrate his wife's 50th birthday on June 6th. He had bought her a pair of red shoes for her birthday. History has recorded that all of the top Field Marshalls were not around the Normandy area and the lower level commanders were in charge when the invasion occurred.

We walked through the manicured gardens up to the gated Chateau which is built against a hillside of solid rock. There were extensive caves cut into the hill to store the ammunition. A large watch tower with anti-aircraft guns were on top of the hill. We walked through the caves, that were dug by prisoners, where the temperature was cool, and then into the main part of the Chateau. The billiard room story was interesting. The game evolved from a lawn game similar to the croquet played some-time during the 15th century in Northern Europe and probably in France. Supposedly, Louis XI was the main impetus for the indoor game played on a wooden table with green cloth to simulate grass. A simple border was placed around the edges. The balls were shoved, rather than struck, with wooden sticks

called "maces." The term "billiard" is derived from French, either from the word "billart", one of the wooden sticks, or "bille", a ball. The Chateau is sparsely furnished with sample furniture and there are some paintings on the walls. The gardens had both fruits and veggies growing including artichokes. The garden was a communal garden for the towns people.



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Back on board for lunch and off to Giverny which is the home of [Monet](#). This garden was crowded as we walked through it, but we got to see and walk over the famous bridge by the water-lily pond. There was a dirt road besides the lily pond and dust would settle on the lilies. Monet had the water-lilies washed every day so he could paint them looking fresh. Impressionists paint the scenes in different lighting. There might be 200 paintings of water lilies from the same perspective. [Monet's home](#) was open for touring. This was a small home that housed his family of 8. In the kitchen there was a big stove and many copper pots hanging from the walls. Lovely excursion. We also visited

the museum there to see more of Monet's paintings along with another fellow painter. Unfortunately, there were only about a dozen of Monet's paintings compared to the other painter, so our 5 Euros each wasn't well spent.

Monet's Water Lily Pond



Monet's Garden



Famous Bridge



On June 11th we were docked down river at Rouen on the Seine. We arose and the weather was 55 degrees. We went up to the top deck and the temperature seemed much warmer, so we shed our down vest and were ready to go on our guided walking tour of Rouen. Rouen is the historic capital city of Normandy and was one of the most prosperous cities of medieval Europe. The town was important in the Roman era and Middle Ages, The city has Gothic churches, such as Saint-Maclou and Saint-Ouen, and a cobblestoned pedestrian center with medieval half-timbered houses. The skyline is dominated by the spires of the Cathedral Notre-Dame, much-painted by Impressionist Claude Monet. Rouen beautifully mixes dazzling Gothic architecture and contemporary bustle. It's a thriving port with a pedestrian-friendly old town and a grand cathedral standing as a reminder of the town's historic importance. Boat shaped Joan O'arc monument. 500-foot tower.

We left the boat at 9:30 and walked to the Cathedral of Notre Dame which is in gothic style and dates back to the 11th century. The Cathedral houses the tomb of Richard the Lionheart, which contains his heart. Other parts of his body are elsewhere. This city was heavily bombed in WWII mostly because the allies were trying to bomb the bridges. Our bombing wasn't very accurate and thus the surrounding community was quite devastated. The Cathedral has a number of stain glass windows, mostly from the 16th century for they were small glass pieces with only blue and red colors. Thus, the windows really could not be seen in detail. In the 19th century they had the technology for doing bigger pieces of glass and more colors. The Cathedral is made up of early gothic and medieval gothic. Inside all of the side chapels were destroyed in the bombing, but are now restored. The Cathedral is the subject of a series of paintings by Claude Monet. We continued our walk and went over to the L'Eglise Jeanne d'Arc which is in the center of Place du Vieux Marche. This large modern structure dominates the square and is famed for its beautiful stained-glass windows. The Church of St Joan of Arc is located where she was burnt at the stake. The location of the cross is exactly where she was burnt. The story of Joan of Arc is that she was always dressed as a man so she was accused of being a heretic. They condemned her and offered her a choice of



being burned or repenting. She repented. But the next time they saw her in man's clothing, she was condemned and was burned at the stake. Well, years later, the French decided they made a mistake and that Joan really wasn't a heretic, so they absolved her....**Too Late!!** The church is a couple blocks from Notre Dame of Rouen, but this is a modern type church next to a market.



The walking tour went through the marketplace that sold fresh fish, beautiful veggies and fruits and cheeses. The cheese store gave us samples of 3 different cheeses. Our walking tour ended, we were shown where the toilets were, and we were off on our own. We left the group and headed to the waterfront area to see the 46 tall ships that where berthed there for the [2019 Armada](#). Tall ships from around the world including the Le Hermione, Lafayette's ship that brought him for the second time to the American coast in the 1770's. The ship was reconstructed in 2015

in the same French shipyard as the original vessel and sailed across the ocean to stop in our east coast ports – Yorktown, Alexandria, Annapolis, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, Boston and Halifax. We were aboard her in Alexandria. The Coast Guard ship, The Eagle, was supposed to be here at berth #3, but she wasn't. We found out, that there were rough seas and she was late to the party, but hoped to be there on Wednesday or Thursday. One of our newfound friends aboard told us her granddaughter is aboard the Eagle and they were hoping to see her. All told, we walked 8.75 miles today!!



At the end of the Armada was a replica of the Statue of Liberty along with posters about its construction. Edouard De Laboulaye was a fervent admirer of the American Constitution. In 1865 he had the idea of offering a monumental gift from the French people to the United States to celebrate the 100th anniversary of our independence. Laboulaye chose Bartholdi as the artist to create the sculpture. The project took him 20 years and was his masterpiece that ensured his fame as an artist. Sarah Coblenzer was the wife of the American Adolphe Salmon. She accompanied him to Bartholdi's sculpture workshop in 1875 and Bartholdi's reaction was immediate. This is the neo-classical features he imagined for the statue. She accepted his request to pose for the project, on the condition their arrangement would remain a secret!!

We turned around and walked back to the ship, another 2.5 miles. All told, we walked 8.75 miles today!! See the layout of the 2019 Armada on page 10.

On Wednesday, June 12, after going passed the Armada the night before, we arrived down river in Caudebec-en-Caux. This is our furthest down river western point. The town is located 27 miles (43 km) W.N.W. of Rouen, on the right bank of the River Seine. The tidal bore in the estuary of the Seine which is known as the mascaret in French, but locally as the barre, used to be well seen at this point. The development of the industrial area towards Honfleur has changed the geometry

of the estuary so that mascaret now seems to be a phenomenon of the past. Since 1977 Caudebec has been served by the Pont de Brotonne, one of three bridges built across the Seine, downstream from Rouen since 1960, to replace the many ferries so making vehicular access between the Pays de Caux and the Autoroute A13 easier.

The ship had buses for the one-hour ride to Honfleur. The town is on the estuary where the Seine river meets the English Channel. The Vieux-Bassin (old harbor), lined with 16th- to 18th-century townhouses, has been a subject for artists including Claude Monet and native son Eugène Boudin. Nearby is 15th-century St. Catherine's Church, a vaulted timber structure erected by shipbuilders. This very lovely town was founded by the Vikings at the mouth of the Seine. Honfleur looks so utterly enchanting. However, the town was built essentially for commerce. The harbor sits in a great location, tucked away on the southern side of the Seine's estuary. During the Hundred Years War, the French king had this strategic spot fortified, but that didn't stop the English taking over for several decades.



We had a walking tour and were able to stay for lunch if we desired. Along the way in the bus, we passed by houses with the famous thatched roofs. The roofs are very, very thick with Irises growing on the peak. Apparently, the Irises keep the roof solid as their roots bind together the thatch. The thatch is carved around the windows and you can see the roof is about a foot thick. We arrived in Honfleur about 10 am and were on a walking tour for an hour after which we were on our own. We



visited an old wooden church (Saint Catherine's) that was originally built by boat builders, this church has been restored and is the oldest wooden church in France. There is an old colorful carousel at the mouth of the yacht harbor. Among the famous people from Honfleur is Samuel de Champlain who left to establish Quebec. For several hundred years, the town was occupied by English. Fortunes were made in the town by shipping magnates in the cod-fishing and the triangular slave trade. The yacht harbor is lovely with all the little restaurants facing the water. We had a great stroll around the harbor looking at the colorful awnings and narrow buildings. The buildings around the harbor are very narrow and are seven stories tall. The bottom floor has shops and restaurants. The next 3 stories are for one family and the entrance is on the harbor side. Floors 4-7 has their entrance around the back from another street. There is a medieval stone building that once housed 10,000 tons of salt. Salt was a big thing during the 1400-1700s for that is how cod was preserved and of course everyone was fishing off the coast of Newfoundland and Iceland.

We walked around the harbor, we sat on a wall and people watched for a while and then chose a restaurant for lunch. We had a fixed price 3 course lunch for 15 Euro or \$16.80. John had oysters

while I had shrimp. Then, I had salmon, mashed potatoes, mashed carrots while John had escaloped veal, and French fries. Our dessert was fresh strawberries and cheeses. Most of the MOAA people returned to the ship for lunch while only 4 of us stayed in town. They sent a bus back to pick us up, no problem! We arrived back at the ship to rest until dinner. We went back in the stern of the ship to the spa area where there are some tables, a small swimming pool, and a bar for cold drinks. There also was a foot diameter bottle filled with gummy bears. Carolyn typed her travel notes. John ate gummy bears! The weather was too chilly to sit on the top deck. Great blue-sky weather today. We just needed a light jacket. We walked 2.7 miles today and during the night the ship went upriver and back to Rouen. We passed the 2019 Armada and the Eagle was still not at her berth. She arrived later that night.

D-Day

We were up at 6 AM to have breakfast and hop on our bus. We were moored next to another cruise line, so we had to cross over her. Today was our trip to the beaches of Normandy. There is a three-hour drive from Rouen to Utah Beach. An interesting story about the names of the beaches. The English choose fish names...Goldfish, Swordfish and Jelly fish. The Canadians were to land at Jellyfish, and they refused that name. Someone in charge said "what about Juno", for the is my wife's name. So, Juno was selected. The Americans had Utah and Omaha and were the western most. British troops had sword and gold and were the eastern most along with the Canadians.

We arrived at Utah Beach with our guide. We walked on the bluff above the beach where the German machine gun nests were prolific. We walked and heard the highlights of the battle. We initially had 30 minutes thereon the bluff and beach before we went to Sainte-Mere-Eglise where the paratroopers landed. The paratroopers behind Utah and Omaha didn't do well because Rommel had flooded the swampy fields. Many of our paratroopers died in the flooded fields and others landed in trees and were shot or captured by the



Germans. Remember, the young guy whose parachute got caught by the church steeple? Well John Steele was his name. He tried to use his knife to cut the chute, but instead dropped the knife at the feet of a German soldier who looked up and shot him. John Steel was only shot in the foot and faked being dead for 3 hours. He did survive, was captured, and eventually escaped. He lived to see himself in the movie *The Longest Day*.

Here in Sainte-Mere-Eglise, we had time to go thru the very good airborne museum and grab a bite of lunch. Our next stop was the walking tour of Pont du Hoc on the plateau at the top of Utah Beach. The Rangers were supposed to capture the bunkers at the top and also secure bridges in the area. We walked around the cliff with our guide to see the huge bunkers and the cliffs that our boys had to climb to knock out the bunkers. This is a very spread out area with huge bomb holes. When the Rangers landed, they found the huge guns had been moved inland about a mile and the Germans were nearby. They soon found the real guns and destroyed them.

Our next stop was the American Cemetery. We walked around the Cemetery to see the memorial and the chapel. There are 9,378 soldiers buried here. The cemetery is a very emotional place. We could see Omaha Beach from the cemetery which is on the plains above the beach.



Our last stop was Omaha Beach itself where we walked out on the beach. We had a wreath laying ceremony. A beautiful wreath with the words “**Military Officers of America Association**” was laid by Lt Gen Dana Atkins, President of MOAA and leader of our trip. Our National Anthem was played by a trumpeter, followed with Taps and a minute of silence. Very moving ceremony. We left Omaha beach at 5:30 and got back to the ship at 8 PM.



We had a lot of traffic going back from Normandy mainly caused by the influx of people to the Seine wharf area to see the 2019 Armada. We were 30 minutes late and 8 PM, so most of us went directly to dinner. The chaplain decided to do the memorial service the next morning. The memorial service included reading a letter that a WWII

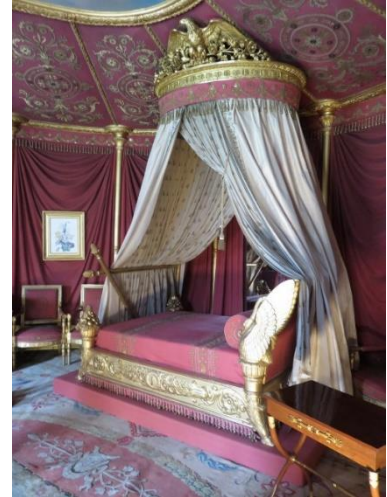
vet had written to his grandson about the sacrifice of these men, the average age of these men, who stormed the beaches, was 24.

We could sleep in in the morning, but if you wanted breakfast you need to be there by 8:45 because the buffet closed at 9. The memorial service and a brief talk of what we would do today and tomorrow is at 9:30. The ship didn't dock until 11 am this morning. There were 2 trips to Versailles and one to [Chateau de Malmaison](#). We chose Malmaison as we have been to Versailles several times. Malmaison is



the home of Napoleon and Josephine. Josephine purchased the Chateau in 1799 and, together with the Tuileries, was the French government's headquarters from 1800 to 1802. Josephine died at the Chateau on May 29, 1814. This is the story of Napoleon Bonaparte and Josephine, the fascinating (and notorious) widow he married in 1796 and divorced 14 years later in order to marry Marie-Louise of Austria (who gave him the son Josephine could not bear him). Despite the divorce, Napoleon remained devoted to Josephine: Malmaison is a testament to that devotion. The jewel-box palace was redesigned under Josephine's direction in the 1790s, with every facet intended to reflect both the “Little Corporal's” glory and Josephine's own exquisite tastes. Though the palace fell on hard times in the 19th century, the building has been beautifully restored. The Consulate Chamber, where Napoleon met with his staff, resembles a military tent; the library is furnished with the emperor's desk from his apartments in the Tuileries. Amongst the Empresses' rooms,

there is her extraordinary red and gilt room in the shape of a tent with the bed (designed by Jacob Desmalter) in which she died. Among the many gems on display here are David's original Napoleon Crossing the Alps and the Austerlitz table inlaid with Sèvres plaques commemorating Napoleon's victory at Austerlitz. The Chateau has many pieces of Sevres porcelain and the brothers Jacob Desmalter furniture...no furniture by the German Jean-Henri Riesener. The Chateau was tastefully furnished, not opulent like Versailles. Originally there were over 700 hectares of land, but now there are just 6.



Josephine loved roses and was a botanist. The side garden had lovely roses. We had a small group on the tour to Malmaison for most of the people went to Versailles. We had no crowds at Malmaison. Thus, we were not rushed through the house and had time to visit the garden. Today we walked 2.8 miles.

On Saturday, the 15th, we arrived back in Paris by 2 AM. Up at 7 to have breakfast and leave at 9 AM for a bus tour of the city. Our French friend, Brice, wasn't arriving until close to 4 PM, so we have time to do things in the morning. The bus trip took us by all the famous places that we had been in our many Paris trips. Twice we got off the bus for a photo opportunity and walk, once at the Eiffel tower and then through the Gardens of Tuileries. Next was a drive down the Champs-Élysées and twice around the Arch of Triumph, around the Invalides, down some of the famous



shopping streets, and to the Jardin de Tuileries where we had a bathroom stop and a walk around the gardens. We had been there 5 years ago and saw the kids sailing their boats in the pond, none were there today. Back past the Louvre and to the ship. This was a 3-hour tour and we walked about 2 miles. We are docked at a place in the Seine where Brice can park his car when he arrives and join us for dinner.

Food has been excellent aboard the ship with much too much to eat – French pastries, French bread. Wine for every meal, if you wish, open bar essentially. Entertainment has been excellent. On Friday night, we had a singer who had the place rocking. The night before there was a sax/keyboard duo. The first 2 nights we missed as we faded quickly after dinner.



Breakfast and lunch were buffets



Wonderful French bread!!

Several of us had asked for a listing of all the people on the tour. Uniworld personnel said this is a privacy issue with them and they wouldn't give us a listing. Finally, MOAA composed the listing with emails and we now have the list! Several things that could improve the trip is to give out nametags, for remembering the names from day to day is tough. We had our VIPMOAA nametags which we wore sometimes (John wore his every day). When people looked at our nametag they always said "VIP", are you important??? Never thought that the VIPMOAA would confuse people...VIP means Virginia Peninsula, not Very Important Person!! I found out that the derivation of the "VIP" is unknown, some of the chapter members would like VPC for Virginia Peninsula Chapter, but that won't happen! We instead have highlighted the chapter!

Another thing that Uniworld could do is provide history talks on the various places we would visit, especially on the Normandy beaches. Fortunately, one of the MOAA officers stepped up and gave us a 45-minute presentation. Another suggestion for the trip to the Normandy beaches, is the option of a box lunch. Since this was such a long day with 5 out of the 12 hours in the bus, many of us wanted to maximize the time at the sights. We were to have lunch at Sainte-Mere-Eglise and visit the Air Museum. We only had about 90 minutes. There was a food truck and some other places where you could pick up a sausage/hot dog/hamburger or sit down at a restaurant.

The MOAA leader for the cruise was Lt General Dana Atkins. The Membership VP, Kathy, interacted with the group and her husband was the "official" photographer!

All of the meals were open seating. Breakfast and lunch were buffets and dinner was served. As a result, we made many new friends. The crew was excellent.

On our last day on the ship, we were notified at 6 AM that Air France and Delta were flying us home. We flew Air France from Paris to Detroit, Michigan—yes Detroit!! Until we got to Detroit, the airlines had us booked to National Airport. When we got to Detroit, we got the last two seats to Dulles where our car was. The **neat thing** was that we flew on the great circle route and flew over Greenland. This was a **first for us** as the normal great circle routes that we have flown on for the past 60 years have been back to the East Coast from Europe and Iceland. We never heard why Icelandic changed our return trip via Iceland.

Great Trip!!

John & Carolyn McHale 6/22/2019

The 2019 Armada will be in Rouen from June 6-16, 2019 . Forty-four tall ships, including the US Coast Guard Eagle and the French L’Hermione.

<https://www.armada.org/docs/Armada INTERNET 2019 2.jpg>



Our ship the *SS Joie de Vivre* was docked here, with a 2.5 mile walk to the end of the wharf and berth #1.

This is the map of our river cruise

