

**MILITARY**

**CEMETERIES FROM THE GREAT WAR 1914 TO 1918**



These remembrances were written for....

my son, whose imagination, energies, and perseverance made it all possible....

my wife, who did well in "holding down the fort" without a mishap in my absence....

my daughter-in-law, who supported that late night planning session with coffee and pastry, but more significantly, made a decision influencing remark to me....

my daughter, who had no part in the planning nor the trek but who will tell me how much she enjoyed reading about it....

my son-in-law, who was a silent bystander through it all, but can take heart in the tennis comments....

the grandchildren, who someday may find a bit of reading adventure within the pages.... and,

myself, that I may be able to keep the memory of the odyssey alive and ever before me.

robert maxham

## PREFACE

Webster defines *odyssey* as a wandering or quest. The enjoyable personal feelings, adventurous days, and unforgettable visual experiences that filled my life in the time frame 30 May - 8 June 1994 were just that - an odyssey. Those ten days were but a brief segment of the year, but in their span they tallied up a lifetime of memorable moments. Purposeful wanderings gave chance to a father and son to rekindle old memories at the ruins of a chateau, in a roadside restaurant, along sandy beaches, and with a walk in the rain at a seaside abbey. What follows is the story, my story, of how I saw those days unfold, and how they provided the opportunity to create new memories at the battlefields, burial grounds, and memorial parcs, that were the somber aftermath of the Great War 1914-1918.

Steve went to great lengths during our telephone conversations over a period of several months to convince me that we could share a journey of a lifetime - a trip to Europe in June. I presented several negative arguments but obviously they were not very convincing. I finally overcame the inertia of wanting to stay home and agreed to go to Europe. We could be there for the 50th anniversary of D-Day, June 6, 1944. We selected what we thought to be appropriate dates for the trip and plans were begun in earnest with maps, brochures, and reference materials.

I have always had a keen interest in World War I military history. The British call it the Great War, and the French refer to it as le Grande Guerre. I have read many books on the subject, particularly those concerning the British Commonwealth participation. We decided that if we departed early from the US in relation to the D-Day activities then the trip would provide us with the opportunity to visit some of the World War I battlefields. Heretofore they had been only words and pictures on the pages of my history books. To refresh my memory, particularly about the Somme and Ypres areas, I did research in several books and then I wrote out a brief scenario to help guide us in the areas that we decided to visit. Martin Middlebrooks' book First Day on the Somme was the primary source of information for a portion of our trip scenario.

The days passed quickly. I prepared a detailed packing list, and procurement of those items deemed as necessary for the trip became a priority. I applied for and received my passport. I selected comfortable walking shoes - in fact, the shoes were a pair which had been stored in the

garage in a foot locker since my Fort Knox days some 15 years ago. I had worn them while shoveling snow, as they were thick leather hightops with crepe rubber soles. With a bit of leather dye and some wax, they were ready for adventurous walking. A sleeping bag was also packed in case the 'no vacancy' signs were as prevalent in Normandy on 5/6 June as everyone in the news media contended they would be. I packed binoculars, camera (it malfunctioned on the second day, so Steve had to do all the photography), flashlight, alarm clock, sun glasses, note books, pens, vitamin pills, and toilette articles [I would discover much to my chagrin and discomfort that I had packed a container of razor blades that were not compatible with my Gillette Sensor razor. At first I tried holding the blades cartridges with my fingers and shaving. I had a miserable time of it and purchased a package of disposable razors at the first opportunity.], a pocket knife, candy-like food bars (as back-up rations), toilet paper, and some comfortable clothes, based on the weather being cool to warm, were also packed. A carry-on bag and my trusty ol' B-4 bag handled it all quite nicely. The sleeping bag was packed separately in a nylon duffle. One other act was to get some French and Belgique francs at Barnett Bank for immediate use when we arrived. I could have and should have waited since there was a convenient money exchange facility at the Brussels airport, and the exchange rate was much better there. Final telephone coordination was made with Steve. We were to meet in Atlanta at the airport.

## DAY 1 - MONDAY, 30 MAY 1994

I spent the morning checking over my 'take with me' list and making a few last minute packing changes. I put a couple of long sleeve turtleneck shirts and a pair of my favorite corduroy pants in my B-4 bag. That proved to be a smart move as a couple of the mornings were a bit on the cool side. After a light lunch I loaded my bags into the car, patted my dogs and scratched their ears. Somehow Honey and Sassy always know when I am leaving them, and they stare with pitiful looks in their eyes trying to put me on a guilt trip. With effort, I avoided their eyes, got into the car, and Lynda drove me to the airport. I checked the B-4 bag and the duffle and we walked through security to the passenger waiting area. Our timing was good and we had a minimum of stand-around time (I always disliked the drawn out, pressured good-byes on departing home. In all my military career travels I tried to avoid them). My flight was announced as ready for boarding, so I bid Lynda a 'goodbye and take care' as I got in line, showed my pass, walked through the boarding tunnel and into the plane.

Once aboard, I put my carry-on bag under the seat, fastened my seat belt, leaned back and relaxed and looked out the window. We taxied out to the runway and took off. I watched Pensacola and the Florida panhandle slip away under the wings. It was 2:20 pm on Delta flight 1149, I was airborne and headed for Atlanta.

I arrived in Atlanta about an hour later and joined up with Steve. We only had a short jaunt to the International Concourse from where I had arrived and a short wait before we departed at 5:40 pm on Delta flight 124 for Brussels, Belgium. I was excited. We were on our way. There was the usual routine of activity by the flight attendants - a smile here, an answer to a question there, checking the overhead compartments, passing out pillows and blankets, and of course the quick briefing on the emergency exits and the use of the oxygen mask in case of disaster. Funny how most people seem to ignore their spiel. I guess that always comes from the mindset that says 'it always happens to the other guy', which is odd when you consider-- what, if in a plane crash, you are sitting next to that 'other guy'.

All around there were people squirming in their seats as they checked the reading material in the pouch in front of them, fiddling with the armrest controls for the stereo, letting down the trays in

anticipation of early-on snacks and drinks, and there are always those people who head for the toilets which usually means scrambling over those seated next to them.

We sat in the middle section of seats xx xXXxx xx of the wide body about three rows back from first class, and after about eight hours in those narrow seats, the ol' rear end got a bit weary. There was an obese female who kept struggling up and down the aisles all during the flight. I wondered why, but came to the conclusion that she just couldn't tolerate her seat except for short periods of time. I sat next to a young Belgique female who was living in New Orleans and employed as a high school French teacher. She was going home to Waterloo, Belgium, for summer vacation. I must say that she was helpful to a point in that when I queried her on purchasing foodstuffs (exclusive of pastries) she gave me the names of several supermarkets... none of which I remembered, but Steve did. At a later time, when we discussed the 'whats and whatnots' of our flight, Steve and I gave her the sobriquet of 'Ears' since hers did protrude well beyond the line of her thin brown/blond hair. Steve sat next to an American male who was going to the south of France to take a live-on-a-barge canal trip. He slept with eye-shades on (as did others) and he didn't eat the evening meal. He told Steve that it would mess up his biological schedule - give me a break! I noticed when he deplaned in Brussels that he was carrying a tennis racquet, (sans cover) so he couldn't have been all bad. The in-flight movie was Beethoven (I didn't watch it, sorry Suzanne). When meal time came, the service was good and the food was tasty. I had chicken for the entree. 'Ears' requested an Indian tonic water with her dietary meal. Hardly necessary, as she was skinny and in her white stretch pants and bulky over-blouse sweater, she looked like a plucked sparrow in a blanket.

The flight as scheduled would go from daylight to dark to daylight. I recall that initially everyone was chatty, getting acquainted with their neighbors with the usual polite question and answer repartee. However, after the meal was consumed and the trays were collected, and as the flight progressed, the pillows and blankets began to appear, and all around people began contortive movements trying to assume a comfortable sleeping position. Neither Steve nor I slept, but we did not suffer from jet lag after we arrived and began our travel. I guess the excitement of being on the trip took care of that potential problem. There was an on-screen animated scenario all during the flight which kept the passengers apprised of their in-the-air

location in relation to the ground destination. Time passed. There was an almost total absence of people moving in the aisles. My conversations with Steve and the school teacher had fallen into an intermittent pattern and soon stopped altogether when the cabin lights were dimmed. I rested my head on the small Delta 'issue' pillow. I closed my eyes but it was a fitful relaxation at best. Sleep could wait..... Morpheus would not entertain my subconscious this night. My thoughts raced ahead to visions of the adventure that awaited us. The monotonous drone of the engines masked most all other sounds. There was just the low murmurs of sleepy sounding voices nearby, or the soft whisper-like voice tones of the flight attendants answering a passenger's inquiry. Finally the blackness of the night began to fade to pale grey and shortly, rays of a rising sun streaked across the sky. People all around were stirring to life, shedding blankets, yawning, rubbing sleepy eyes, straightening rumpled clothes, and craning their necks to get a peek out the windows. We were in a steady, steep descent, and the pitch of the engine noise changed; ears popped and there was the thump of the landing gear dropping into place. Our flight was ending. We were over Brussels. It was 7:15 am.

The pilot was doing a bit of chit-chat over the intercom - the usual, giving the local temperature and time, welcoming everyone to Brussels on behalf of the crew, saying how they enjoyed being of service to the passengers and inviting everyone to fly Delta again, etc. etc. The attendants scurried about getting everyone and everything ready. Out the windows I could see blue skies and sunshine. We had flown right into the second day of our trip. The pilot put the big bird on the ground smoothly. It felt good when that landing gear touched down and we taxied to the terminal. We quickly gathered up our few carry-ons and deplaned. It was 7:25 am.

#### DAY 2 - TUESDAY, 31 MAY 1994

Of course, the day had actually begun after midnight while we were some 30,000 feet up over the Atlantic Ocean, however, I like to think it started when we walked into the terminal. It was not an overly large terminal, though it seemed typical with 'moving sidewalks' down the main corridor, loud speaker announcements on flight information (I seldom understood what was being said due to the accent, static, etc.), coffee shops, lounges, and we even saw people lying

curled up along the corridor walls, asleep. We mixed and moved with the crowd all the while looking for directional signs to guide us to the baggage claim area. We found it, waited for a few minutes for the arrival of the bags, spotted them, picked them off the moving belt (they were in good shape), and headed for customs. We got our passports stamped without a question and hardly a glance from the young uniformed man in the glassed-in booth. Steve exchanged some US money for francs, checked in at the car rental window (EuropCar), and then we hurried down hallways and stairways trying to find the underground parking lot. The bags got heavy, I knew that I should have left that roll of Charmin at home! We were getting frustrated after a lot of walking and wrong turns. We stopped, gathered our wits about us, made an inquiry and, armed with the correct directions, we located the garage. After an almost equally exasperating search along rows and rows of parked cars, we made one more inquiry and then 'voila!' we located the car. It was a silver grey Renault, 4-door diesel, and over the trip it performed beautifully. We threw our gear into the trunk and the back seat, Steve checked out the myriad of instrumentation, cranked that diesel, and we headed out through the maze of dimly lighted aisles which were lined with rental cars. We wound our way around and around and although we had walked over a lot of the area hunting the car, we still couldn't locate the vehicle SORTIE (exit). It was almost comical (but Steve was not laughing), and I imagine that Algernon could have beaten us through that maze and to the outside. But at last, with Steve's frustration level reaching the face reddening point, we saw daylight and the elusive 'SORTIE' none too soon. We were now, truly, off and running. It was 8:45 am. As we pulled into the stream of traffic I noted that the sky was blue, the sun was bright, the temperature around 41 degrees f. (so the pilot had said as we landed). It was a beautiful day and it felt good to be in Belgium.....after all, it *was* Tuesday!

Steve pulled into a service area not far from the airport complex as we decided to get our directions and map oriented before we hit the autoroute. He drove the entire trip and I navigated. He had a good sense of direction during all the times that we zipped along back roads and through towns and villages. Although a bit prone at times to 'lead-foot syndrome', he did an excellent job behind the wheel. We melded into the flow of heavy morning traffic on the autoroute (comparable to a US interstate highway) that skirted the northern periphery of

Brussels. The road was a good one, and the traffic flowed fast. The countryside was green and fresh looking. Traveling this route through the open country was like being on a US interstate in that we could see built-up areas off in the distance and to either side at turn-offs (exits), but we seemed to by-pass everything. That of course made for rapid travel, which was our goal at the time. We needed to traverse Belgium to reach our start-point.

We reached our autoroute exit at Aalter in about an hour, and turned south out through the 'boonies' on a two-lane road. Our destination was Ypres. It didn't take but one good look at my maps, the scenario I had written up, and the signs designating road numbers to realize that something was amiss. The road network was basically the same, but the numbers were different from my 1963 Michelen maps (the only ones I had) which in turn negated the value of the scenario to some degree. But the town and village names were the same, so we keyed on those names as we drove along and did just fine. So much for that bit of prior planning. I was however, a bit chagrined because Lynda kept telling me as I was doing all the notes and scenario that there would be changes since my maps had been printed. I thought there might be also, but I guess I wouldn't admit it to myself. Isn't it the pits when women are right and men are in error, particularly where maps are concerned.

Traffic was no problem on the road or when we went through the small towns and villages which were picturesque - even quaint. Most were neat and clean, and well maintained. The names of some of the Belgique towns along our planned route were real tongue twisters - e.g. Ruiselade, Tielt, Koolscamp (I liked that one), Ypres, Lichtervelde, Poelcappelle, Wyschaete, Ploegsteert and Westrozebike just to name a few. I'm sure that the local folks would have had a good laugh at our pronunciation efforts. And as can be expected, we anglicized wherever necessary.

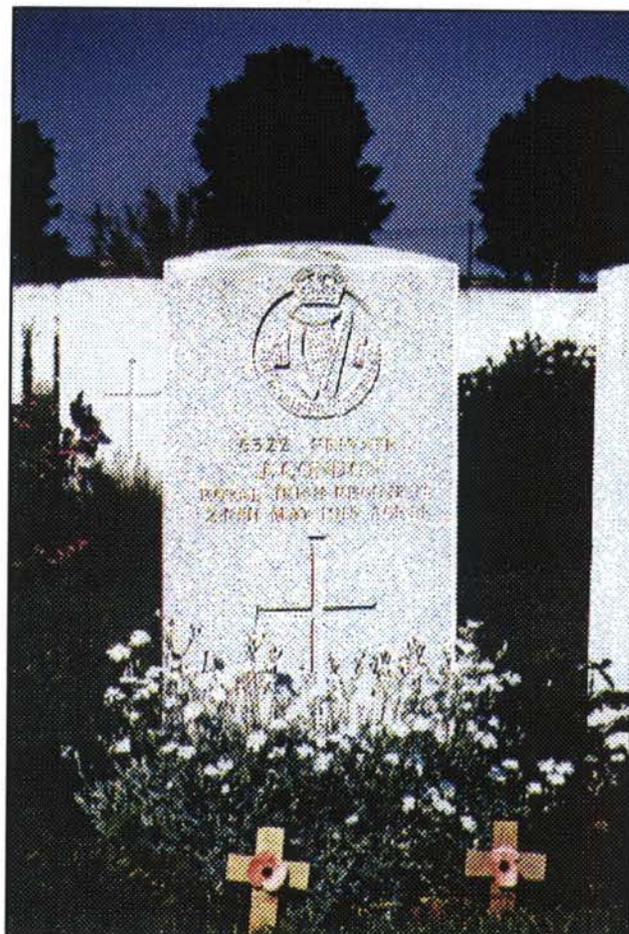
Passing through the small town of Hooglede, I spotted a 'mom & pop' fruit market, and Steve pulled over to the curb. I went into the small store. It was sparsely stocked with shelf goods, but there was fruit in bins along the side walls. The lady inside was all smiles and talkative when I said "Good morning!" but I didn't know from beans what she was saying. I just smiled back and pointed at the apples and bananas. She weighed up what I laid on the counter and I paid her (I could read and understand the posted prices). I said "Merci" and bid her adieu in my

best Pensacolian French .... maybe it sounded like Belgique- - right. The fruit was to be our munchies along the way. Already this was fun.

A short time later we came to the town of Poelcappelle. The first of the British cemeteries that we visited, and we would visit *many*, was located on the outskirts. It was at the Poelcappelle cemetery that Private J. Condon, 2d Royal Irish Regiment, was buried. He was killed in action on 24 May 1915. He was fourteen years of age and the youngest British soldier to be killed in action in the Great War. When the war began in 1914, the official age for enlistment was nineteen, however, as the drain on the manpower resources became heavy the age was lowered to eighteen. Rifleman Valentine Joe Strudwick, 8th Bn, The Rifle Brigade, KIA 14 January 1916, was buried nearby in the Essex Farm Cemetery. He was 15 years of age. Many adventurous, patriotic, and underage youth eager to serve their king and country tried to and did enlist in the Army, particularly during the first couple of years of the war. Obviously many succeeded somehow, as in the case of Condon and Strudwick. In the following days we would see many gravestones with the age inscribed as 17 or 18 years.

Poelcappelle was the third largest Commonwealth war cemetery in Belgium. There were 7,478 burials. 6,231 of the dead, many of whom were killed in early 1917, could not be identified by name as the remains were not recovered until after the Armistice on 11 November 1918. Where an unidentified soldier was buried the gravestone would have inscribed on it the words "Known But to God" or "Unknown" or "A Soldier of the Great War". I saw examples of all three.

At this point I will relate some of my observations, and some general information about the British



Gravesite of Private J. Condon

cemeteries and monuments we visited. There existed a commonality throughout the sites, a shared aesthetic and a consistency, and at the same time each possessed a unique atmosphere, or personality, if you will. At any rate, I would like to establish some points of reference for what we saw as recurring features at most every cemetery.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) is responsible for maintaining cemeteries and memorials for one and three-quarter million war dead in 23,097 burial sites located in 140 countries and territories. Of that number, 7,865 cemeteries contain only war graves from the 1914-1918 Great War. The Victorian-era expression 'the sun never sets on the Union Jack' is still a viable one if you take into consideration the British military cemeteries and singular burial sites located in such remote places as Togo, Canary Islands, Madiera, and Nepal for example. The CWGC organization obviously handles the Herculean task of administering and maintaining the sites with great efficiency. I say obviously because the cemeteries we saw (and I doubt that the ones we didn't see were less so) were absolutely beautiful. They were architecturally attractive and diverse, what with the use of red brick, field stone, granite, limestone, and Portland stone in the walls, entranceway structures, and memorials. The grounds of the cemeteries were horticulturally superb - impeccably and meticulously maintained, and beautiful, particularly so in the spring and summer months, what with the planting of myriads of small perennials of every type and color. These were in beds that extended continuously in front of the rows of gravestones. The iris lilies and the dwarf tea roses were standouts for their beauty. Trees, both leafy and evergreen, and shrubs were planted in places to act as dividers, and to frame and highlight the cemeteries and memorials as a whole. Manicured grassy aisles (pathways), looking as if each blade of grass had received the attention of the gardener, allowed one to walk along between the rows of gravestones.

As for size, there were large cemeteries with thousands of graves, and there were some with less than one hundred. The latter were usually associated with a single unit, such as a regiment or battalion. Some were located at the edge of a town or a village, others were in lonely fields along a woodline, and others were sited right along the side of a narrow country road or a lane that wound through cultivated fields. I recall one that was located along a street in a small town where nearby buildings were abutted against the cemetery walls and the entrance gate opened

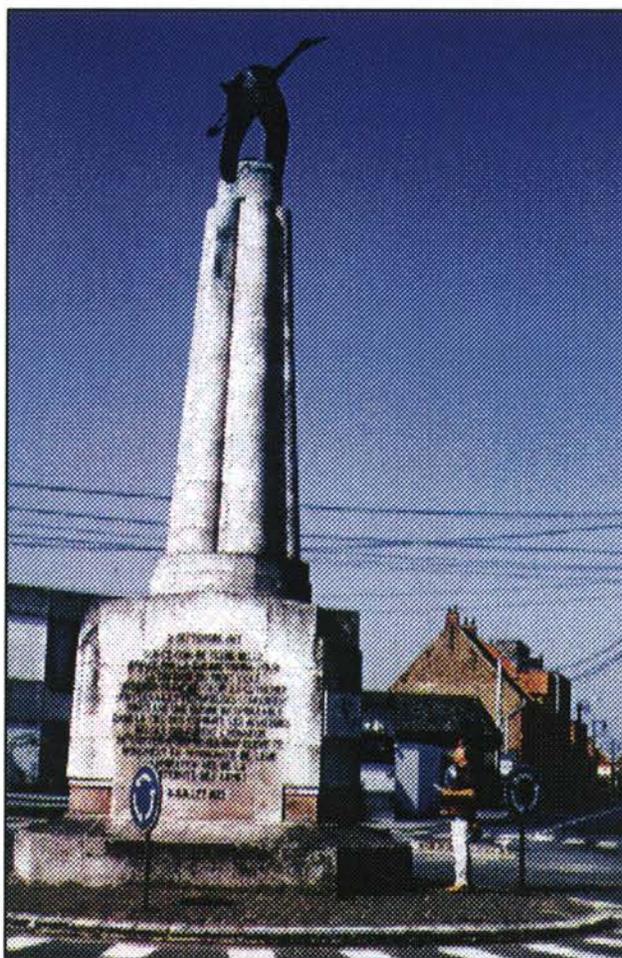
out onto the sidewalk. Yet, no matter where they were situated, no matter whether they were large or small, the same expert care for each was obvious.

There were two other stone pieces besides the gravestones that were consistently placed in the cemeteries - The Cross of Sacrifice and the Stone of Remembrance. I'll elaborate on these in detail later.

We browsed among the gravesites for awhile, snapped a few pictures of Condon's gravestone, and departed, driving south into Poelcappelle. In the center of the village was a towering obelisk (spire) shaped memorial/monument of grey granite on a tiered base. It was located in the middle of a traffic circle that served as a 'roundabout'.

Shops lined the streets along the circle. Atop the obelisk was a large bronze statue of a stork as if in flight, with it's neck stretched forward and wings swept downward and the legs trailing straight back. This was the squadron symbol for the French Escadrille des Colognes which was emblazoned on the fuselage of all the squadron's aircraft during the Great War - in the air. Captain George Guynemer, famous French ace, was a member of that squadron, and the monument

was dedicated to him. He was killed in aerial combat, which came to be known as a 'dogfight', over Poelcappelle on 11 September 1917. His body was never found. The Germans claimed that his plane and body were destroyed by British artillery fire later that day. Four years of intense fighting took place in the area. A disabled British tank was still lying on it's side in the mud in the ruins of the village when the Guynemer memorial was dedicated in 1923 - six years



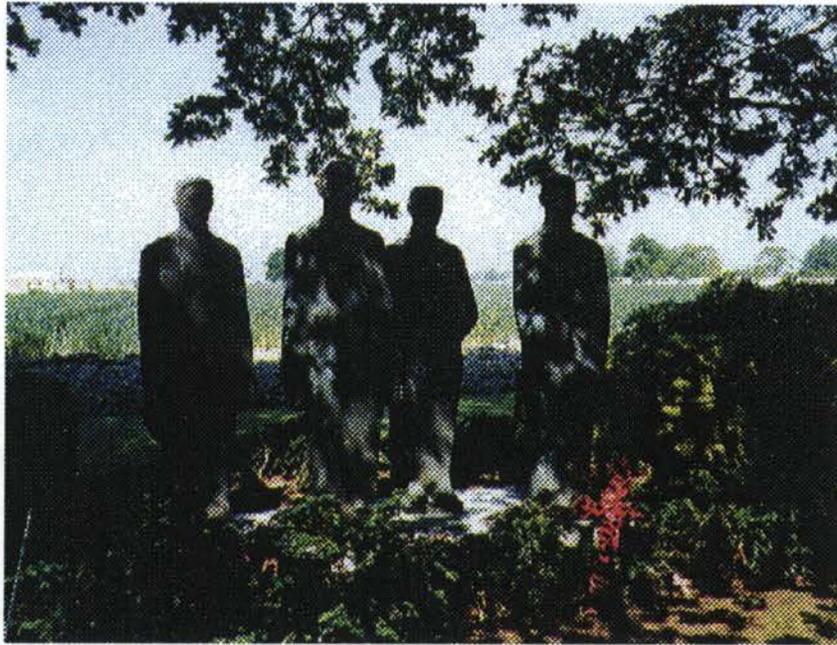
Monument to Captain Guynemer

after the Battle of Poelcappelle!

We drove south through the village of Langemarck and stopped at a German military cemetery on the other side. Steve parked the car alongside the red-brown stone wall of the entranceway. Tall leafy trees liberally shaded most of the cemetery grounds. The cemetery was neat, orderly, clean and well-cared-for, but lacked the floral arrays and the flower garden effect of the British cemeteries. The German War Graves Service (the name was changed to Volksbund in 1954) provides much the same service in administering and maintaining their cemeteries as does the CWGC. A small chapel was located at the entrance gate. The interior of the chapel was paneled with light brown wood planks, nearly two inches thick, which had been brought from Germany. The panels contained the names of the German missing from the battles in that area from 1914-1917. The names were inscribed in vertical columns from ceiling to floor, and there were thousands of names. Immediately behind the chapel entranceway in a stone surfaced plaza enclosed on three sides by small hedges was a mass grave, the Kameradengrab. It contained the remains of 24,917 Allmande soldats. A very large circular bronze plaque was mounted over it. A series of bronze plaques were placed atop rectangular stones bearing the names of 16,940 soldiers known to be buried in the grave. These were in a circle on the periphery of the huge center plaque. The cemetery proper is divided into two sections with a total of 19,618 burials. All of these graves were multiple burial sites marked by dark red-brown gravestones. Of interest here is that on 23 October 1914, hundreds of students from Hiedelberg and Munich Universities (75% of whom were under military age and led by cadet officers) linked arms, and in waves charged the British defensive positions while singing martial songs... a poor substitute for weapons and ammunition. Many of them were buried there in Langemarck.

Several tour buses and cars were parked in front of the cemetery entrance. They were being used by British visitors touring that area. There were about 25 school children (12-14 age group I guess, though some seemed a bit younger) were scattered about in small groups, throughout the cemetery. They were doing rubbings with art paper of the names and any insignia which were inscribed on the recumbently emplaced gravestones. Although they were chattering away, they did seem engrossed in their activity. Several adults were accompanying them, acting as chaperones or tutors, or both. When we first entered the cemetery, we noticed that under some

thick shade trees, there were four erect, stone, featureless male figures in a grouping. They stood along the low fieldstone wall, at the back of the cemetery, facing inward toward the gravesites. At first glance, I had thought them to be live persons, visitors maybe, because the shadows, dappled sunlight, and distance made it difficult to distinguish features. Close examination however confirmed the statue status. We did not determine the 'why' of their being there, a mourning memorial of sorts, I should think.



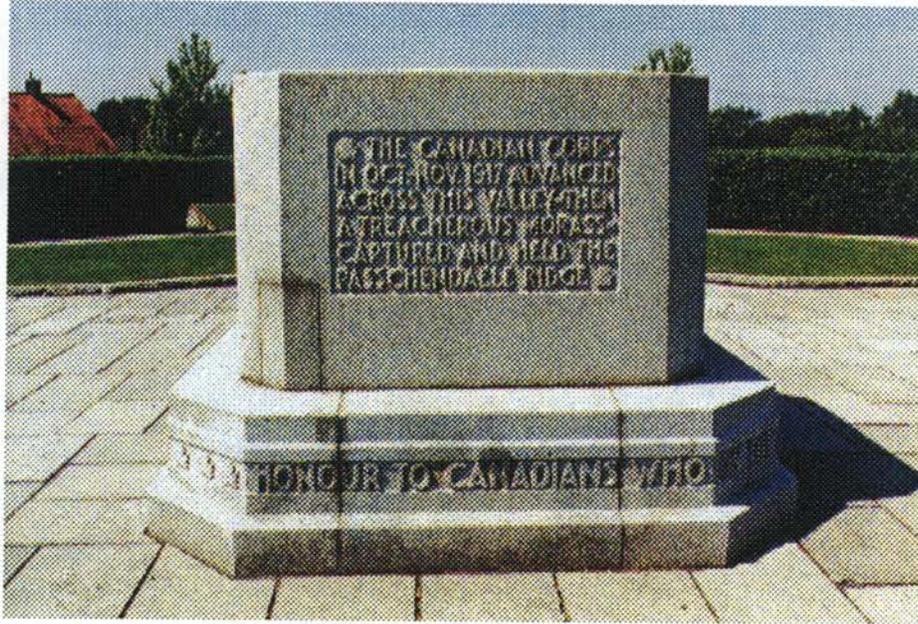
Mourning statues at Langemarck

We walked to the car and departed the area, however, before we cleared the town, I had Steve stop at a patisserie. It was time for goodies! I got out of the car and walked to the shop entrance all the while looking through a large window at the displayed baked goods. Before I realized that the glass entrance door opened to the inside, I pulled versus pushed rather hard on it, and since it was slightly ajar, it clanged loudly, and then I stepped inside. The three customers and the person behind a counter all had this quizzical - maybe mixed with a bit of shock and annoyance - look on their faces as I stood there. I felt a bit embarrassed, but I walked over to the glass enclosed display counter, smiled, said "Bonjour" and pointed to my choices of pastries and bread when the clerk came over. I showed a handful of francs (money sure seems to solve

problems and soothe feelings), paid for my purchases, bid them adieu and walked out with a bag of goodies and a couple of baguettes (a long, slender loaf of bread) under my arm. Steve and I dug into the bread by the chunks. I can't describe the delicious taste of those baked goods. My taste buds had flash backs to our tour in France in the early 60's.

We were enjoying the ride and since it was early in the day we decided to make further excursions in the immediate area and along our planned route before continuing on to Ypres. One of the most totally devastated sites in the Great War was the village of Passchendaele and the surrounding countryside. It became a wasteland. The village was pulverized into nothingness by artillery fire as the war dragged on year after year. Between October 1914 and September 1918 the village changed hands four times, as three major campaigns, each lasting months, were fought in the area. Of course, as we traveled it, the countryside showed few if any scars (except for preserved battlefield parcs) as the land is farmed or reforested, and the villages have long since been rebuilt, most looked prosperous. We saw the countless cemeteries that dotted the landscape and memorials in villages and along country roads that stood as mute testimony to the death and destruction that took place in the Great War, the extent of which is now almost inconceivable - almost. In World War II little if any damage was done to the villages and towns since the German blitzkrieg swept through the country almost unopposed. We drove through Passchendaele with it's small neat shops and houses aligned on, and separated from the streets by narrow sidewalks.

I recall seeing a young woman wearing an apron as she sat on the open door threshold of a street-side house where she was obviously enjoying the early afternoon sun and relaxing, maybe before preparing the evening meal. We stopped at a large, square, granite monument that was located in a circular parc-like area, surrounded by a dark green hedge. There was a small plaza-like area that faced a parking lot where Steve parked. This was all located adjacent to a street that led through a modern looking residential area. The monument, about five feet high, was dedicated to the Canadian forces who fought in the Passchendaele area in 1917 (it was so inscribed). There was a man and his young son at the site. They were speaking German. Seems as though they, too, have memories of their grandfather's generation, and conduct pilgrimages to honor the dead and pay their respects.



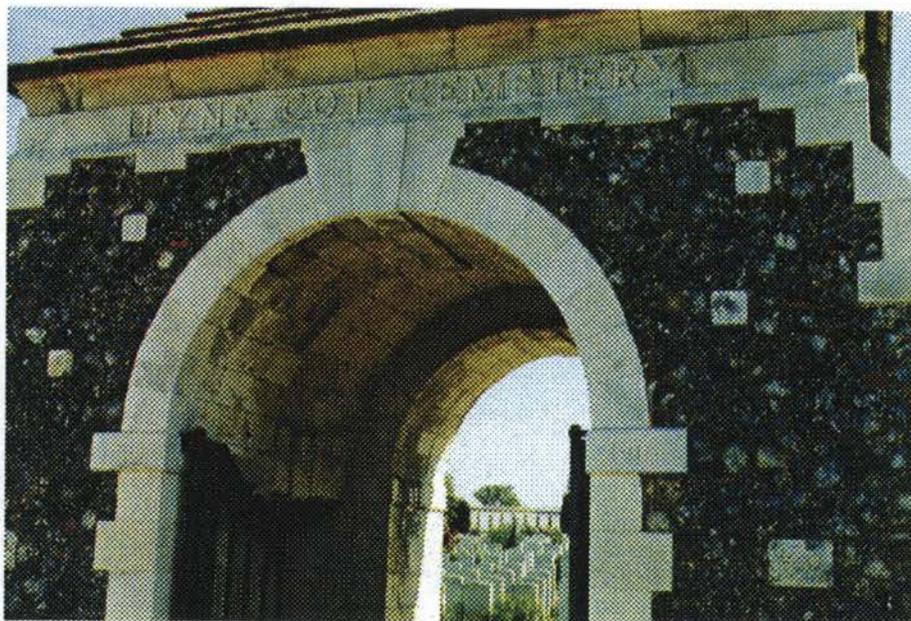
Canadian Monument in Passchendaele

On the outskirts of the village we came to the Passchendaele British military cemetery, containing over two thousand grave sites - 2,100 according to the cemetery data book. The cemetery was established after the Armistice. Those buried, almost all of whom died or were killed in the autumn of 1917, coming from the battlefields of Passchendaele and Langemarck. More than three-quarters (1,062) were not identified by name at the time of burial.



Passchendaele New British Cemetery

Situated on a sloping hillside, there were tall trees on the outer edge of the red brick wall that defined the cemetery boundary. The rows of gravestones were graced with the ever beautiful flowers which filled the beds. The entranceway was a massive Portland stone structure (reminded me of a fortress or prison entrance) and a tall fence with iron lattice-work placed in the openings along the wall which stretched across the front of the cemetery. At every cemetery, located somewhere right at the entranceway, set in a niche in a wall or gatepost, and protected by a small (12"x10") bronze door was a register book and a booklet that gave the soldier's name and location of his burial plot by section and row. The booklet also contained a burial plot diagram and background information of the cemetery and battles fought in that area. Visitors could sign in their name, date, address, and use a space designated for comments in the register. I usually took the time to read the remarks made by the visitors when I signed it. Some of the comments were simplistic, e.g. "RIP" or "Go With God" while some were anti-war, such as "Never Again" and others were personal and loving, as from a dear friend or a caring family member. We departed the area and drove to another cemetery near Zonnebeke. It was the Tyne Cot cemetery - the largest British military cemetery in the world. There were 11,957 grave sites. The British military cemetery at Etaples, France, has 11,446 burials. A German POW camp was located there and 655 of the burials are Allmande soldats. A red brick wall, three to four feet tall, was



Entrance archway to the Tyne Cot Cemetery

on three sides (including the front) and large leafy trees grew at random in the front portion of the cemetery and outside the wall. The rear wall was tall and constructed of brick and Portland stone. It was elongated, shallow, semi-circular shaped on which was inscribed 33,888 names of the men of the Commonwealth who were missing in action in that area from August 1917 to November 1918, and for whom there was no known grave.... a sobering thought, not to put to fine a point on it. The wall was actually the Tyne Cot Memorial which was dedicated in June of 1927. The Lancashire Fusiliers, with 1,304 names on the wall, was the most represented unit. There were large, open-sided, domed gazebo-like structures at both corners of the rear wall. Small evergreen type trees grew within the confines of the wall and, as was to be the rule, every row of gravestones was splashed with beds of colorful flowers, and all the open areas were carpeted in manicured grass. The entranceway structure had a single Portland Stone trimmed archway with a flat, slightly pyramided (stairstepped) roof. The walls were dark rough surfaced stones imbedded in a mortar.



The Tyne Cot Cemetery

There were the remains of three weather-eroded and battle scarred bunkers in the cemetery that had been built as German fortifications. They were captured during the battle by troops of the 3rd Australian Division in 1917. They were later used as an Advanced Dressing Station by

medical personnel and stretcher bearers of the 11th Canadian Field Ambulance Unit. The Cross of Sacrifice (I'll explain this later) was built atop one of the bunkers back near the Memorial wall. A small portion of the bunker was visible in a circular opening outlined by a bronze wreath on the base of the Cross.

King George V took a personal interest in the cemetery's construction and it was on his orders that the Cross was erected atop the German blockhouse, or bunker. Captain Clarence Smith-Jefferies, aged 23, led the attack on this particular bunker, capturing four machine guns and thirty-five German soldiers. He then continued the attack on another bunker. He was killed as a result of his actions, and was buried beside the bunker. The gravesite remains located there today. He was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross.

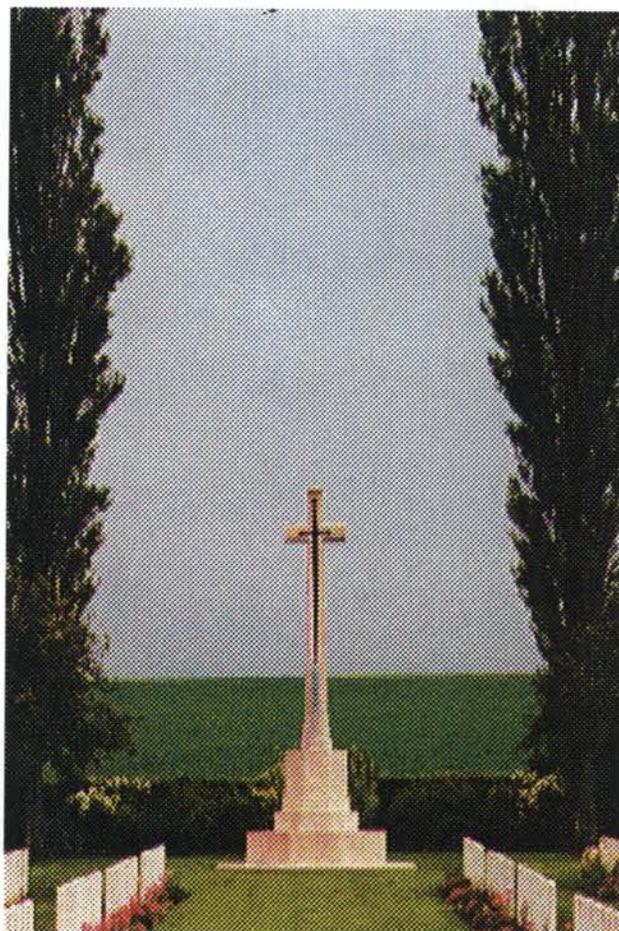
When we drove up the narrow road to the cemetery and parked along the front wall, we noticed a couple of tour buses, belonging to... oddly, the school children that we had seen at Langemarck. We were browsing among the rows of gravestones when we noticed them in a group by one of the bunkers. We approached them, stood on the edge of their grouping and listened to a gentleman (probably a tutor) explaining about the fighting that had taken place there. He was interesting, and without question, well-versed in the history of the battlefield, and the children appeared to be quite attentive and genuinely interested. Steve and I discussed later how it was obvious that the British did not intend to let subsequent generations forget the deeds and sacrifices of their forefathers. Since my return from the trip, I have had conversations via telephone with Anne Powell in Wales, a bookshop owner whose grandfather was killed on the Somme, about this observation.

In her delightful - to me, charming - 'veddy veddy' British accent, she stated, "Oh yes, quite so" and went on to explain about the tours taken by the school children in conjunction with history and art. Her remark was reinforced by one entry that I saw in one of the cemetery registers that read "Grandfather, we never knew you, but we'll never forget you." This certainly would seem to be a testimonial to the pride in and love for the honored dead by the living kindred.

A final comment: Cot is the abbreviated word for cottage. Soldiers of the Northumbrian Division remarked how the weathered concrete bunkers, from a distance, looked like the village cottages back in Tyneside. Hence the name of the cemetery - Tyne Cot.

Before describing other cemeteries that we visited, some facts about and description of the Cross of Sacrifice and the Stone of Remembrance should be given as I promised earlier to avoid repetition. Also, it should help 'paint the picture' when cemeteries are described.

The Cross of Sacrifice (during early construction of the Great War cemeteries it was known as the War Cross) is a tall cross shaped structure of granite or Portland stone. A large bronze broadsword is mounted on the face of the cross, with the blade pointing down the vertical shaft, and the hilt at the horizontal portion. They are erected on an octagonal base (usually of the same material as the cross) which in most cases was several tiers high. There are four sizes of crosses, from just under 15 feet to 30 feet. The size is predicated on the dimensions of the cemetery and the number of burials. The minimum number of burials to qualify a cemetery for emplacing a Cross is forty, but exceptions do exist. For example, in Zillebeke, Belgium near Ypres, a Cross was emplaced for twelve men of the 177th Tunneling Company of the Royal Engineers who were entombed deep underground when a tunnel they were digging collapsed.



Cross of Sacrifice

As a matter of interest, there is a Cross of Sacrifice in Arlington National Cemetery (USofA). It was placed there by the Canadian government to honor those Americans who died in the Great War while serving with Canadian Forces. In addition to the Cross, larger cemeteries (those with 400 or more burials) had a memorial monument called the Stone of Remembrance. It is a 12 foot long, rectangular, monolithic configuration about fourteen inches thick, lying up right on one of the long sides and set on a three tiered base. Inscribed on both sides are the words "Their Names Liveth For Evermore." Rudyard Kipling chose the inscription from the Bible, in the book of Ecclesiastes, verse 44:14.

The Stone is a memorial to the missing, and serves as a focal point for ceremonies, e.g. wreath laying on anniversary dates. To give a perspective of quantity - in Belgium and France, nearly 1,000 architecturally constructed cemeteries exist, almost all with a Cross, surrounded by 50 miles of stone or brick walls, 560 Stones of Remembrance, 600,000 gravestones set in 250 miles of beams (tracks), plus eighteen large edifices that serve as memorials to the missing. The effort that was put forth to establish and now continuously maintain this endeavor is well and truly mind-boggling.



Stone of Remembrance

One last comment before we 'hit the road' again. The Portland Stone mentioned as used in construction was formed millions of years ago under the sea bed. It is now mined in quarries near Weymouth, in southern England. It contains many fossils, especially seashells, the outline of which can be seen in the gravestones and other structures. I am sorry to say that I did not recognize any specific creatures, but I did notice patterns in the stone that looked like swirls, similar to the marbling in beef.

As Willie Nelson sings 'On The Road Again' - so were we. The sky was blue, the sun was warm, and a gentle breeze felt good as we drove away. We munched on bread and fruit and after a short drive arrived in Ypres about midafternoon. This town suffered severe damage to most of its buildings and portions of it were destroyed by German artillery, but it was never

taken from Belgian and British forces. Post-war restoration and subsequent building projects created a somewhat modern periphery encompassing the old section at the center of town with its cobblestone streets, quaint hotels, and cafes. Dwarfing all the surrounding buildings and dominating the architectural scene in the center of town was the Cloth Hall. A massive, beautiful, and elaborate structure that housed the town's government offices, tourist bureau, and a museum dedicated to the Great War 1914-1918. We drove around a bit, but quickly decided that we could best be a part of this by walking. Steve parked the car in a cobblestone market square (Grote Markt) that was surrounded by shops, cafes, hotels, and overshadowed by the Cloth Hall. I felt like a neophyte visitor from another world when I considered that Ypres had its beginning in 926 A.D. and the United States became a nation with a constitution some 850 years later! Ypres was the leading textile center in Europe during the Middle Ages. But history aside, we enjoyed mingling with the after-lunch shoppers. We entered a small bake shop and bought some pastries... those chocolate chip croissants were yummy. We ate them as we strolled along window shopping and people watching. What struck me (not as a surprise, though, since I had been in France on a military tour for over 2 years) was there were no large stores to be found, only small shops, boutiques, 'mom & pop' businesses which gave the impression of being a nice, friendly place to spend your money. There was one shop in particular that caught our eyes during our walk. It was small, sort of stuck back in the corner, so to speak, and we could see through the display window that all sorts of military artifacts were stacked on the floor, on shelves, and hanging on the walls. Unfortunately it was not open. A note on the door read that the shop would open in an hour, however, we returned not once but twice, and each time it was closed. We gave up on it.

We returned to the Cloth Hall (originally built over a 45 year period 1260-1304, destroyed in the war by German artillery fire, and restored in the 1920's) to visit the museum located in an upstairs gallery. It was not large, and one of the main displays was somewhat amateur in construction I thought, but the weapons, uniforms, photographs, etc. were great to look at and study. Steve, in all of our museum visits, had the critical eye for restoration and preservation of the artifacts, and a wishful look at times. Me? I 'pressed my nose' against the glass display cases and wished that some good fairy would bestow on me such a collection of weapons. Little did I

know at the time that there would be even better ones to come in later museum visits. We went back to the car and decided to cruise around some more. The town was clean, with its mix of the old and the new. A bit away from the center of town we came across a very nice, small, modern hotel (Hotel Ariane) located alongside a narrow canal and a residential area. Steve got the room, we tossed our gear down, refreshed, and headed back to town - it was getting time for food. We parked in the square again, walked around for a short while and selected a small sidewalk cafe, sat down and ordered a beer. I believe Steve had a Stella Artois, and I had a Heineken. Sitting there on the market square, the people-watching was great. From the young to the old and all ages in between, they strolled by the cafe. Some stopped, took a table and ordered refreshments. Everyone seemed talkative (my kind of place) and unhurried. School age children, laughing and calling out to one another, rode bicycles along makeshift paths in the street where cobblestones had been removed. It seemed late for children to be returning from school, until you take into account the fact that they are given a longer lunch period, more like a break in the middle of the day to return home for their meal and report back for the afternoon session. That was the case for most businesses as well. They simply closed-up shop for a couple of hours and came back after lunch! There was an extensive construction and street repair project there in the Grote Markt, and the removal of the cobblestones (to be replaced in like-kind I'm sure) restricted almost all vehicular traffic. That, of course, eliminated a lot of the noise and fumes which in turn made it all the more enjoyable to sit at our table and relax. (I kept thinking - we *really* are in Belgium).

The beer was cold, the late afternoon sun still warm, and we decided to order food from the cafe menu. The lady (waitress) didn't offer to speak English, so we just pointed to our choices and in a few minutes we had chow. Steve had ham, and I had baked chicken and a salad, and we shared some fried potatoes plus the good bread. I can't remember the cost, but it seemed reasonable at the time.

We left the cafe and walked to a nearby wooded parc where we strolled along a path that was atop a steep embankment bordered on one side by a canal and on the other by some nice large houses. It was very peaceful and quiet, with only a few other people walking about, so we decided to sit on the canal bank and talk over the day. The tall earthen embankment was part of

the old city's defensive ramparts. The road to Menin passed through the embankment. At that point, prior to the war, the roadway was flanked by two huge stone lions mounted in a sitting position atop two pedestals. They were destroyed by artillery fire, and the Menin Gate Memorial was constructed on the site of their shattered 'remains' after the war.

We left the parc area, and walked a short distance to the Menin Gate Memorial. It is a massive, towering red brick and Portland Stone structure that sits astride the road leading out of Ypres to Menin. Vehicular traffic and pedestrians pass through (under) the 120 foot long archway that spans the roadway and sidewalks. On the stone facings (panels) of the support pillars, on the walls, stairways, and upper loggias were inscribed the names and units of some 56,000 men missing in action, and for whom there was no known grave. These men were casualties in the period from October 1914 to August 1917 in the Ypres area. From 17 August 1917 to November 1918, the names of the missing in action were inscribed on the Memorial Wall in the Tyne Cot Cemetery. We stayed there for awhile reading the names as people and cars passed through the archway. You had to exercise a bit of caution while standing alongside the roadway if you tried to read off the names on some of the upper panels. There was a tendency to step back and look up, and the cars going through the gate had a *tendency* not to slow down. We walked back towards the market place along a sidewalk lined with shops. Although it was early evening, they were open for business. I bought a couple of postcard pictures of the Gate. We got to the car and left for the hotel - (the thought had crossed my mind - Could we find it again? We did). The room was clean, nicely furnished with comfortable beds, and there was plenty of hot water.

The only down side of the whole day had been our unsuccessful efforts to find the grave site of 2d Lt Lord Charles Worsley of the Household Brigade (Cavalry). He was killed in October 1914 near Zonnebeke, Belgium. His body was not recovered from a temporary (battlefield) grave until after the war. His gravesite location was recorded by a German officer and sent to his family in England through diplomatic channels. He was subsequently reburied in a civilian cemetery in Ypres. So you ask yourself, how many cemeteries can there be in a small town like Ypres? But, even after a trip back to, and an inquiry of, the tourist bureau (not much help) we were unable to find the cemetery. Our city map was not overly detailed and not very easy to

decipher. I had read about Lord Worsley and his family and had a passing interest in visiting his grave site.

However, it had been a beautiful day with so much adventure and so many sights to digest that I could not let such a minor set-back cast a shadow on my excitement and enjoyment. I fell asleep with that thought. So ended the first day of our journey in-country.

### DAY 3 - WEDNESDAY, 1 JUNE 1994

Maybe it was a bit of the ol' 'jet lag' or perhaps the previous 36-hour day I had just experienced, but I slept so soundly that when I awoke, around 5:30am, I had that funny 'where am I?' feeling. My recovery was instantaneous however, and in one leap I was out of bed and pushing open the window of our 2d floor room. I looked out and down at ducks swimming and feeding in the narrow canal that was across the street. I breathed in cool crisp air and enjoyed the sight of the day's dawning with a great sunrise. Steve's head was buried in his pillow, but not for long. I was to be his constant alarm clock, ringing in the day with orange juice, bananas, and assorted local pastries.

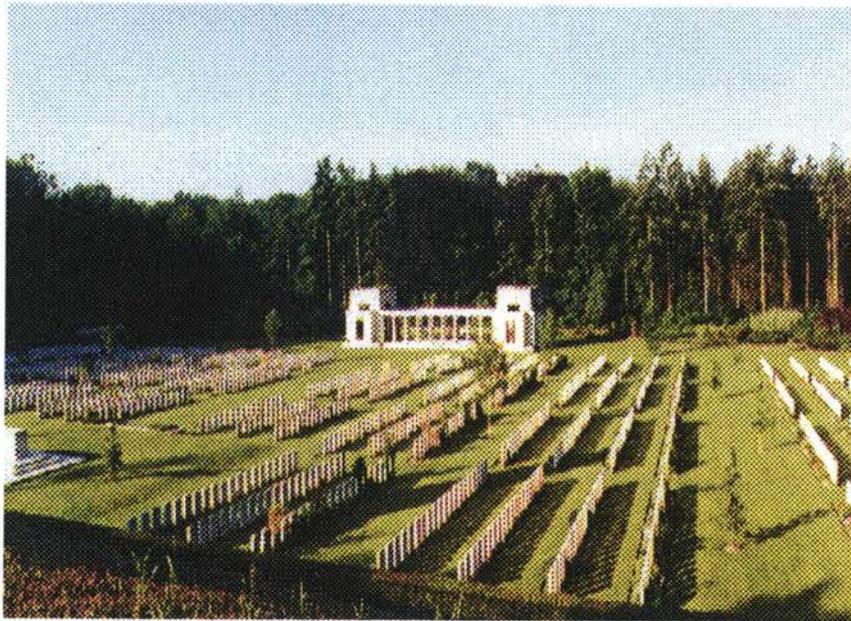


The Hotel Ariane in Ypres, Belgium

Standing at the window having my 'petit dejeuner' of chocolate chip croissant and banana, I sensed a very pleasant quietness. This feeling was pervasive during the early morning hours in virtually every small town and village where we stayed, and savoring that, along with the pastries, was to become a welcome morning ritual. Just as I turned from the window, I saw an old man wearing a beret, baggy black trousers, and a faded blue jacket with the collar turned up against the morning chill. He was slowly peddling a dilapidated-looking bicycle along the otherwise deserted street. The distinctive and familiar shape of a baguette was tied down on a carrier behind the seat. I wondered how many mornings, and over how many years, had that been his routine, or *his* morning ritual. Steve was up groaning about having to eat his daily ration of bananas. I kept telling him that it was for the potassium. I could not tell what his reply of a muffled grunt meant, probably a muted verbal rebellion. He ate it anyway. We showered, shaved, packed the overnight gear, dressed, went down the stairs, across the lobby, out the door, across the cobblestone parking lot, loaded the bags in the car, took a couple of snapshots, piled into the car, warmed up the diesel, checked our maps and drove out of town. It was 6:30am and we were wide awake and excited about what our itinerary held for us.

We departed the built-up area of Ypres and were on open countryside roads almost immediately. The sky was blue, sun bright, air crisp, and armed with our maps, notebook, and noting the roadside signs, we were 'on the hunt'. We were keying on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission signs to guide us. They were wooden, green with white block lettering, rectangular, not too large, and placed at intersections pointing in the direction of a site or turn-off. At times they were not too easy to pick-up, especially so if you were moving rapidly down the road or through a village, a tendency exhibited by the designated driver from time to time. However, with both of us searching, we didn't miss but a couple of them the whole trip. Our first stop was at a site where three 'attractions' were co-located: The Polygon Wood Cemetery, the Buttes New British Cemetery, and the Memorial to the 5th Australian Division. Steve parked the car in the small parking area just off the road in front of the entrance to the Polygon Wood Cemetery. As we got out of the car, our attention was focused away from the Polygon Wood enclosure towards a wide, long, grassy, stone-walled avenue leading through a densely wooded area. Very tall, leafy dark green trees formed a border and a natural overhead

archway for this grassy boulevard. We walked down this shaded lane, and at the far end, one could see standing in the bright sunlight, the memorial monument. It was sitting atop a large elongated butte (I wanted to say it was a mound) which was blanketed with a ground cover of an evergreen type foliage. A flight of stone steps led up to the tiered base of the tall granite obelisk. Bronze plaques emplaced on the sides of the obelisk, near the base, dedicated the memorial to the Australian forces who fought in the battle for Polygon Wood. Located just east of the village of Westboek was the large wooded area which the British soldiers called Polygon Wood. That descriptive name was coined because of the well-defined geometric shape (polygon) of the wood. The actual name was Dien Doel. During the intense combat that took place there, the woods were totally destroyed by shell fire. Now, of course, the beauty of a green forest can be seen once more. From atop the butte we looked down on a panorama of hundreds (official records indicated 2,093) of white gravestones standing in orderly rows which were adorned with splashes of colorful flowers. The cemetery was the Buttes New British Cemetery. It was not established until after the Armistice, and was used for the concentration of graves from the battlefields of Zonnebeke and Polygon Wood. The name came from the 25 foot high mound of grass covered earth that was used as a small arms impact berm for rifle marksmanship training.



Buttes New British Cemetery

Prior to the war, the cemetery site was the location of a riding school and a race course. Dense woods surrounded the rectangular shaped cemetery on three sides. The butte made up the fourth side. Opposite the butte, across the cemetery, was a large white stone, columned structure. The names of the men missing in action from the fighting in that area were inscribed on the walls. A New Zealand memorial in one corner honored 383 men killed in action who have no known grave. The Cross of Sacrifice and the Stone of Remembrance stood as gleaming white sentinels in an expanse of grassy carpet which sparkled with dew in the bright early morning sun.

We walked back to where the car was parked and turned our attention to the Polygon Wood Cemetery. It was small, with 103 British and New Zealand soldiers and one German buried there. It was not uncommon for German soldiers to be buried in British cemeteries.

In fact, there were over 13,000 German burials from the Great War in British cemeteries. There was a low fieldstone wall that enclosed the plot, and a wrought iron 'picket fence' gate was at the front entrance. Odd, but there was also the same type gate at the rear side of the cemetery that led into a pasture. I did a double-take of that back gate, and sure enough there was a large grey/white milk cow standing and staring at us through the gate. She did not make a sound, just calmly stared at us, while behind her the remains of a small herd grazed on tall, green forage grass. The Cross of Sacrifice, manicured grass, and pretty flowers in the beds along the front of the gravestones completed the scene. Another thing we noticed was the random location (lack of a pattern) of several of the gravestones. This puzzled us at the time, and continued to do so all

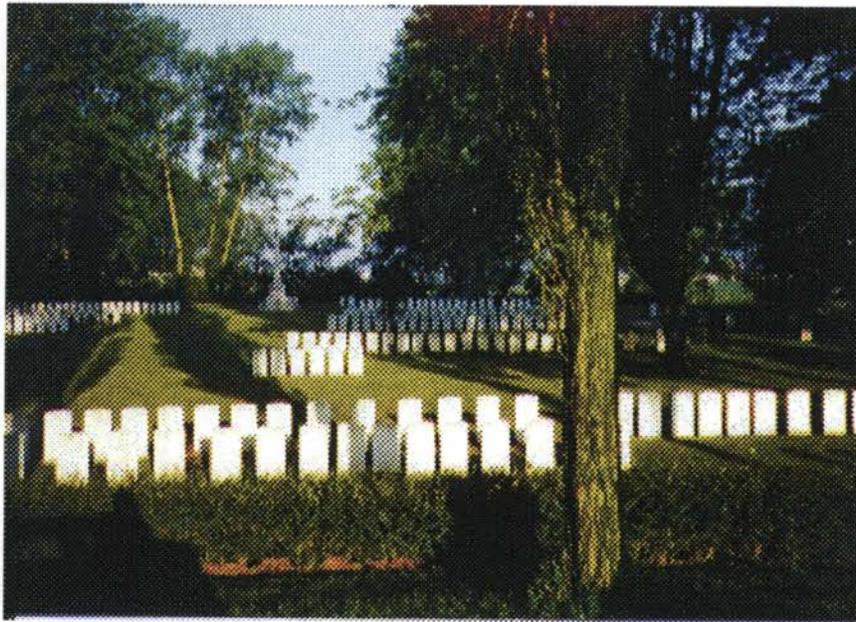


Random burials in Polygon Wood Cemetery, near Westhoek, Belgium

during the trip since we saw it in other cemeteries.

I was to learn later during research reading that when a cemetery was established on a previous 'hasty' battlefield burial site where only a few graves were located, usually, but not always, there was no attempt to 'tidy up' the graves into new plots or rows. The dead lay where they were buried on the battlefield, and the subsequent cemetery was organized 'around' them, as it were. We departed the area, driving through green fields of wheat and past farm complexes on narrow winding roads. Before we could make it to a major road, we met a passenger bus, of all things, on a very narrow (like one lane) farm road. We stopped. The bus stopped. The female bus driver just sat there at the steering wheel and did not budge that bus one inch to the back or side. We lost the 'stare-down' and Steve jockeyed the car, in reverse, back to a place where the bus could squeeze around us. I'm still not sure whether that was a smirk or a smile that she gave us when the bus went by. So much for the bus. While our Renault was clinging to a wet grassy strip of a soft shoulder, bordering an overgrown ditch of water, three feet down, I looked out of my window and down into the ditch. I could just see us bogged to the axle or worse, lying on our side in the ditch, at any moment. Steve, acting with what I perceived to be false bravado, did get us back onto the road. Isn't luck a grand thing when it is on your side! I've seen wider bike trails than some of those farm roads on which we traveled before our trek was over. We came to a better road, turned onto it, and moved out. Shortly, we spotted a CWGC sign that indicated the direction to another military cemetery. A quick glance at the map showed that it was down one of those farm roads. We made the turn, and the map didn't lie. We were on a narrow, winding road lined on one side by tall, slender leafy trees. Around a turn and we were at the Maple Copse Cemetery, near Zillebeke. A large, flat-topped multi-hued field stone structure with a white stone trim entrance archway was situated right on the edge of the road. Steve parked the car in front of it on the shoulder of the road. We got out of the car and had just snapped a couple of pictures when a very large blue farm tractor came rumbling past us at a rapid pace. For a moment I thought the Renault was going to become a hood ornament on the tractor. If 'Jean-Claude' was the least surprised to find tourists poking about this early in the morning in the middle of nowhere he didn't show it, and with a quick glance our way merely steered around the car without slowing down.

The cemetery was associated with an Advanced Casualty Clearing Station located in the copse close to nearby Sanctuary Wood. Most of the graves initially established in 1916 were destroyed by artillery fire in the subsequent fighting in that area. Of the 256 men known to have been buried there initially, only 26 could be located and identified at the end of the war. Gravestones identified as Special Memorials were placed in orderly rows for the other 230 men originally buried there. These gravestones were not placed 'over' the remains, of course, since they were never recovered.



Maple Copse Cemetery

It was easy to see how the cemetery name came about, as the trees which grew throughout the cemetery were leafy dark green and beautiful. The rays of the bright morning sun streamed through the trees, highlighting the gravestones. The grass was wet with dew, and the earth seemed soft and sponge-like beneath our feet. We walked among the graves, noting the names and unit crests inscribed on them. There were mostly soldiers of the Canadian army buried there, and the maple leaf crest inscribed on the stones was most prevalent. Despite the shade from the trees, the flower beds were filled with colorful perennials.

The Cross of Sacrifice was placed along the rear wall and shaded by trees. Beyond the low brick walls of the cemetery, it was bordered on three full sides by a semi-dry moat, stretched green cultivated fields, and in the distance, the red tile roof of a farm complex was visible against the

blue sky. A bit of the morning chill still lingered. All of this peaceful solitude was shattered however by a huge (enormous) greyish white bull. He was standing at the corner of a fenced pasture which was adjacent to the cemetery. He was the largest farm animal that I have ever seen. He stared at us and he stared at the car. He pawed the ground, sending large divots of mud and grass flying out behind him. But worst of all, he bellowed like a bass foghorn - a loud, long roar. Needless to say he was agitated by our intrusion into his domain. The incessant bellowing, once he began, was most annoying, so after taking a few more snapshots we departed that idyllic, almost mystical spot. (God, he was a massive beast).

Along a main thoroughfare south of Ypres near St. Elois, we stopped at the St. Charles de Potyze French military cemetery. It was neat, clean, and very tailored looking. There were some small shrubs and trees on the periphery of the cemetery boundary, but there was no color - no flowers. There was a sculpture of a Crucifix and a mourning mother in the cemetery. The rows of crosses stretched out on either side of a central stone pathway from the entrance to a Memorial to a French infantry regiment on the back side of the plot. The national flags of France and Belgium flew near the entrance (there was no gate per se and no entrance structure). 3,5447 French and Belgique soldiers were buried there in 2,983 individual graves; the remainder of the Poilus are unidentified and buried in a mass grave. Somehow there was no compassion generated in me for those buried there. I felt detached. Maybe I'm just biased towards the Brits in my emotions and sentiments. We left the cemetery and moved on. The weather was perfect - sunny and cool.

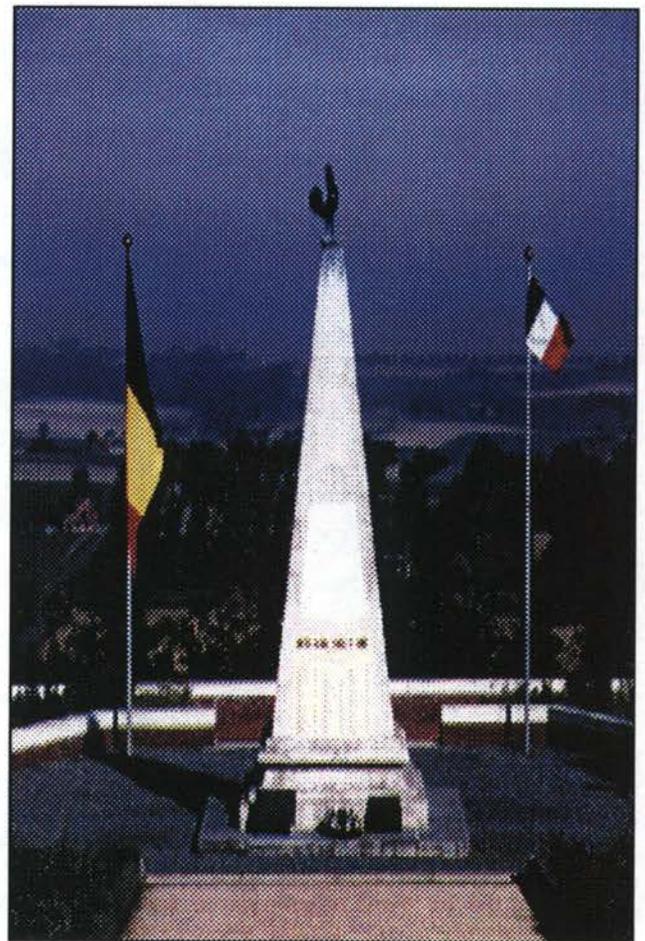
Our next target was the French ossuary on Mount Kemmel. Our search to find it and see it was influenced by our recollection of the French ossuary that we had seen near Verdun, France (actually at Fort Douaumont) in 1963. The one there was a huge quonset hut-shaped building with a massive spire-like tower at its center, and a small museum was in the top of the tower. Some 170,000 skeletal remains policed from the battlefields around Verdun after the war were buried there, or entombed under the building.

They could be seen, stacked in a somewhat orderly disarray, through small rectangular windows along the base of the building, just above ground level. I recall that the day we were there I saw an old and frail looking lady clothed in a long black dress and black shawl - her face thinly

veiled, placing a single red rose on one of the window ledges. Husband? Son? Obviously her love and memories continued to exist some 46 years later.

Despite our map references, whipping along narrow roads through woods and fields, and over, down, and around choppy hills, we were rewarded only with exasperation and frustration. As we passed through the village of Kemmel (it seemed we had been through it a couple of times already) we swallowed our pride (as you know, real men don't ask directions) and asked a gentleman for directions. In looks he reminded me of the actor who played the French detective in "Day of the Jackal", and he was puttering around the tables at a sidewalk cafe as we pulled up alongside the curb. The map seemed to mean nothing to him, and our limited command of a native tongue, French not Belgique, didn't do much either until at last he picked up on 'ossuaire' and then set us on the right track with words and arms and hands waving... at least Steve seemed to have picked up on his efforts. We thanked him and roared off. Going over the same roads, but making a few different, and correct, turns (plus following a mailman in his tiny French car - don't ask me to elaborate) we came to the Mount Kemmel Ossuary.

By definition, ossuary means a depository for bones of the dead. We had a sweeping view from the wooded hillside out over the wide valley and across the nearby border into France. There was a neat and attractive parc-like area with flags, plaques, and a not-too-tall granite obelisk which commemorated the area. It served as a memorial and marked the location of a mass grave for 5,000 French, 'poilus, connu seulement de Dieu' (soldiers, known but to God) who were killed in 1914 in the Mount Kemmel area. On top of the



The Ossuary

obelisk was a large bronze rooster, or cock. Chanticleer? Roosters seem to have a part in French history. They were pictured on several French postage stamps in the early 1900's. It is their national emblem, as the eagle is to the USofA. We snapped a few pictures, climbed into the Renault and drove through the wooded hillsides past several quaint and interesting looking inns (hotel/cafes) tucked away by the roadside. On top of Mount Kemmel, not far from where the ossuary site was located was a large, tall granite obelisk which was a memorial to the French soldiers who died in Belgium during the Great War, especially those who died defending Mount Kemmel. It was dedicated in 1932 by Marshal Petain. Inscribed on one side was "Monument Aux Soldats Francais 1914-1918" plus a bronze dedication plaque was mounted on the base and written in French. The monument stood at a "T" in the road, surrounded by an area of red clay and in a not too well kept area. We continued on and when we broke out of the woods, there we were back in Kemmel, driving along its cobblestone streets.

Steve parked at a tiny tree-lined parc, almost directly across from the cafe where we had stopped for directions. It was pick-me-up time... Steve's nerves were craving 'une cafe-grande au lait avec sucre' and a good jolt of espressed caffeine as it was getting close to mid-morning. We crossed the shady cobblestone street and sat down in front of the cafe at one of the small round tables. We said good-morning for the second time to the gentleman (he gave no sign of recognition from our earlier meeting at curbside) and ordered our cafe au lait. We were served with a demitasse cup of coffee, and on the saucer was a small paper wrapped cookie and a couple of sugar cubes along with the cream. After the ritual of dropping in the sugar cubes and stirring in the cream, we sat back and enjoyed our first sip yet of 'continental coffee'. First impression? Delicious, and strong enough to snap your eyelids open for sure. We relaxed and enjoyed the coffee and the buttery tasting shortbread cookie.

Very few people were stirring, but we were treated to the sight of a man putt-putting along on his motorcycle which had a sidecar attached - not a typical configuration, at least in the States. Also, a group of school children came down the street with a couple of adults 'herding' them along. They did not seem to be from Kemmel, since one of the adults had a map and kept consulting it as they came near us. Maybe a field trip from a school in another village... maybe in search of the hard-to-find ossuary, though I doubt it. Despite this small amount of activity it

was quiet, peaceful, and cool, with a beautiful morning sun shining against the shop fronts across the way and through the trees in the tiny parc across from the cafe. This was contentment. But we had more sights to see and more roads to travel, so we paid the tab inside (the bar room was full of antiques, stained glass, wood paneling, and it all added up to a cozy feeling).

In the typical and busy American way, we returned to the car and departed.

Out a short distance from Kemmel, on a secondary road, we were prompted by a CWGC sign towards the Irish House Cemetery. It was off of a road that wound through cultivated fields, and was located behind an old red brick farm house and barn complex. Renovations on the front of the house were in evidence. The roof of the barn was definitely in a state of disrepair and quite weathered... a green mossy fungus was covering a lot of the tile. Steve parked alongside the road near the house, and we walked on a narrow, grassy path stretching a hundred feet or so from the road to the cemetery. The entrance way pillars supported a 'picket fence' wrought iron gate set into a low fieldstone wall that bordered the cemetery.



Author surveying the gravestones in the Irish House Cemetery, near Ypres, Belgium.

It was not large, with 121 burials. There was one common grave which held 33 officers and NCO's of the 1st Gordon Highlanders who were killed in that area in 1914. They were buried

by units of the 16th (Irish) Division when it was a battlefield burial site.

In 1917 the remains were reburied by troops of the 11th Royal Irish Rifles at the time when more bodies were brought in from outlying areas and buried there, and a permanent status was given to the cemetery. That reburial was contrary to the practice of not disturbing battlefield burials when establishing a permanent cemetery.

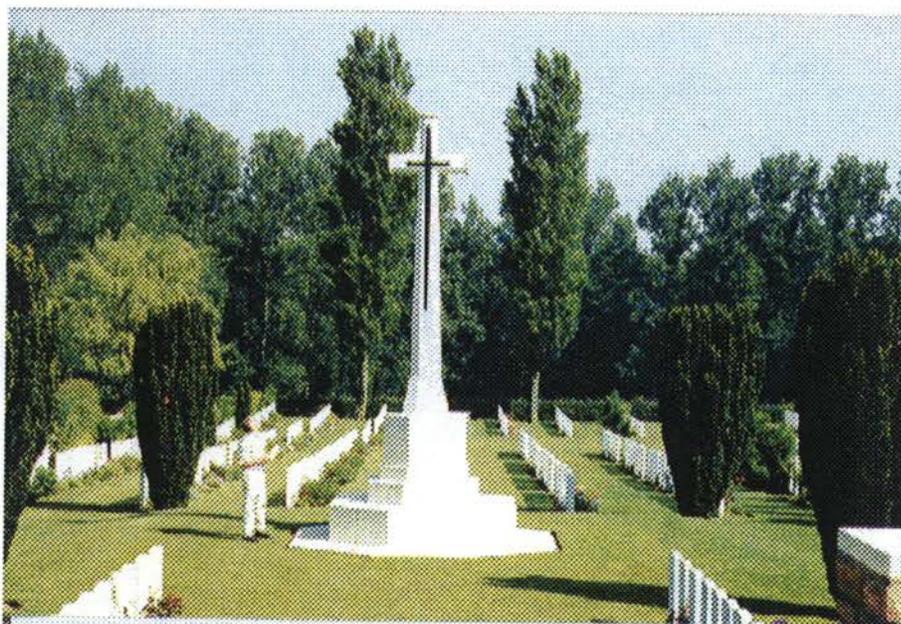
A gentle breeze was blowing from across the surrounding fields, rustling the leaves of several small trees growing in the cemetery, but the sun was warming us as we stood amid the gravestones. It was quiet and we saw no one, however, over in the barnyard there was a small colorful rooster perched on a rusty piece of farm equipment and he was crowing. Surely he crowed at dawn, so this must have been his second wake-up call. The cemetery got the 'Irish House' name from soldiers of the Irish units who had buried their comrades there. That farm house, which probably provided shelter and comfort to troops, still stands as a sentinel and landmark to that lovely and lonely plot of land. We walked back to the car and drove away with the thought that if it were eternity you were spending, you could find a lot worse place.



The farmhouse located nearby the Irish House Cemetery

On the main road again, and traveling south from Ypres, we passed through Wytchaete, a neat, clean little town with shops lining the streets. On the outskirts, located immediately adjacent to

the road was the Wytschaete British Cemetery. There were 1,002 burials, to include 423 'unknowns', arranged in four sections. The Cross of Sacrifice stood on a four tiered base at the junction of pathways separating the plots. Tall leafy and slender sycamore trees grew inside the cemetery along the back wall. Willow trees, and a dark green, tall flowering shrub was located on each of the corners of the intersecting pathways - the Cross was in the center. Flowers and small shrubs were in profusion. The Stone of Remembrance was on the right side (as you entered the cemetery) at the end of the pathway between two plots. A heavily wooded area was beyond the back wall, but adjacent to it. This was truly a 'garden spot'.

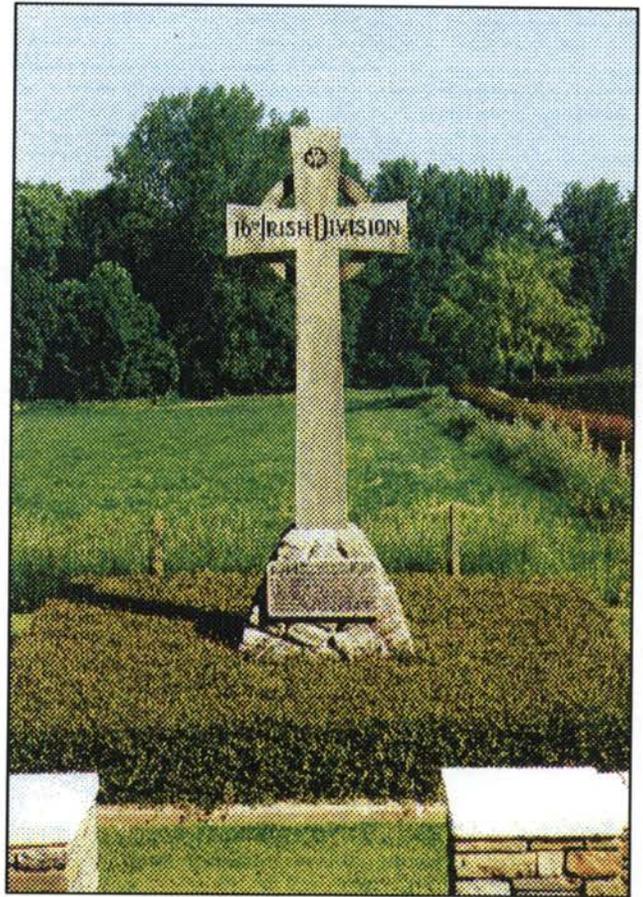


Taking notes in the Wytschaete Cemetery

The registry book was in its bronze doored niche in one of the entrance way fieldstone pillars (there was no structure at the entrance). I retrieved it and thumbed through the pages of past entries, most of which were made by visitors from other countries to include Germany. In all those registers that I looked in during the trip, entries by visitors from the USofA were scarce. By the time Steve and I departed, that statistic had changed a bit. As a note, the CWGC collects these registry books when they are filled, and they are sent to the home office in England where they are read, or analyzed, if you will, and filed away. One entry that caught my eye there at Wytschaete read: "I couldn't pass by without stopping to say 'Thanks'". As we walked out of the cemetery Steve noticed next to the side wall, close to the roadway, was a tall granite memorial

cross (a Celtic high cross) that stood on a fieldstone cairn. The horizontal cross bar had "16TH IRISH DIVISION" inscribed on it, and there was a shamrock inscribed in the upper part of the vertical portion of the cross. At the base was a plaque that commemorated those Irish soldiers who fell in the fighting for and subsequent capture of Wytshaete on 7 June 1917.

Departing the area, we traveled south towards Messines, munching on our apples, yesterday's baguette (a little tough and chewy, but still delicious) and fruit pastries, and washing it all down with Evian. The road we were on ran long a wide ridge that offered good observation into the wide shallow valley to the west. In their initial attack on the Messines ridge in June 1917, the British forces exploded nineteen (19) mines under the German trenches. This caused tremendous devastation, but over the years nature eroded and farmers cultivated the craters and we did not depart the main road to seek out a couple of shallow depressions that remain visible. As a note of interest, 21 mines were implanted, and only 19 exploded. In 1957, the 20th mine exploded killing several local farmers. The location of the 21st mine is unknown. We passed through the village of Messines. It was small clean, and had a look we'd seen before, what with small shops and houses along the narrow streets. However, we saw several new and attractive houses beside the road as we left the built-up area. Many of the small towns and villages had distinct outlines, or limits, when you departed from one of them, the transition to the countryside was usually sudden and complete - no suburbs. Shortly we came to the village of Ploegsteert (I could never master the Belgian names - and the British soldiers during the war called it Plug Street). This area was wooded and hilly, like the terrain around Kemmel... in fact we weren't too far southeast of



Monument to the 16th Irish Division

Kemmel. The village was small and looked entirely deserted as we passed through headed for the border.

As we approached the border we came to the Berks (abbreviated from the Royal County of Berkshire - in England) Cemetery Extension and the Ploegsteert Memorial. The Hyde Park Corner Cemetery - Royal Berkshire Regiment was located across the road, to which the Berks was the extension. This just seemed odd to me since the Berks was much larger than the Hyde Park Corner Cemetery. Who was I to second guess the Brits... or as Hawkeye said "Do not try to understand them - they are a breed apart". I was to learn later that size was not a factor... it was which cemetery was established initially and then the second one collocated would be the extension. Simple enough. Steve parked the car in a graveled area between the Hyde Park Cemetery and an attractive cafe located there by the road. It was painted white with green trim, awnings, and shutters, and set among large trees. It was a pleasant looking place though there were no other cars there, and it did not appear, at the time, to be open for business. As I got out of the car I saw in a fenced yard behind the cafe, a beautiful, light-colored golden retriever looking at us. It did not bark. I did so want to pet it, but since I saw no one around, I refrained from doing so. If someone had been in back of the building and saw a stranger around their dog, they may have caused some embarrassment by calling out. We opted to look at the Berks cemetery first and crossed over the road. The first thing to catch one's eye was the memorial. The steps leading up to the pavilion in front of the memorial was guarded by two large stone lions (one snarling - one benign) that were reclining (lying prone, with heads raised in a Sphinx type pose) on square pillars facing each other. The memorial edifice was impressive. It was a very large, open topped rotunda - a covered circular colonnade of white stone on whose walls were inscribed the names of 22,500 British soldiers who died near the Franco-Belgian border and have no known grave. It was dedicated by the Duke of Brabant, a Belgian province, in 1931. It abutted the Berks cemetery which had 394 burial sites set in the usual manicured grassy plots with the ever-colorful flowerbeds along the rows of gravestones. A very low red brick wall defined the cemetery. No trees or shrubs grew inside the walls, but a dense forested area, the Ploegsteert Wood, was immediately behind the site and provided a dark green background for the white stone of the memorial and gravestones. The Cross of Sacrifice appeared to be one

AN ODYSSEY AS I LIVED IT

10: Burt  
an Army buddy and my  
Fifth Avenue pal -  
May our friendship  
endure always -  
Bob M  
Nov '95

AN  
ODYSSEY  
AS I LIVED IT

by

ROBERT L MAXHAM

COL RET U S ARMY ARMOR

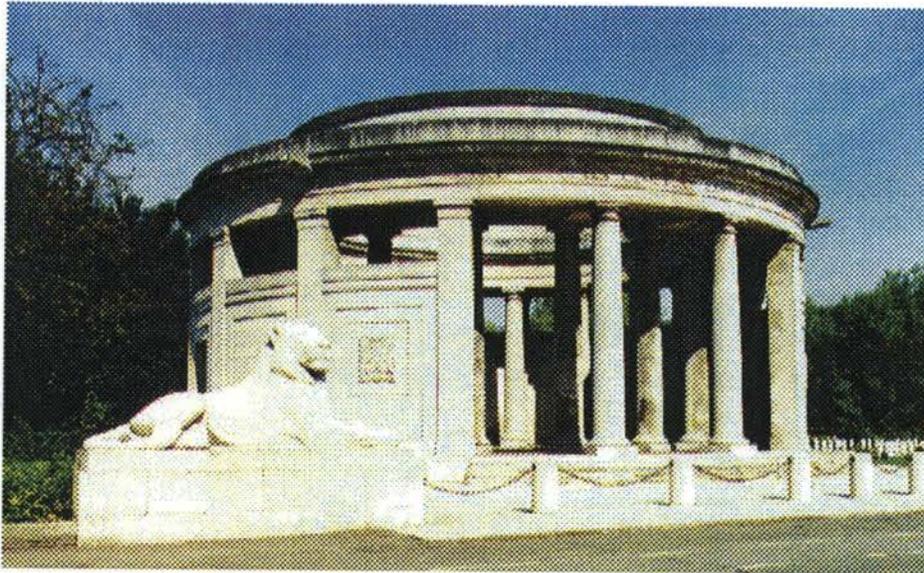
11802 CHANTICLEAR DRIVE

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prepared by Robert S. Maxham

of the smaller ones on a low base, and it stood in the center of the rectangular plot. The sun was bright and warm as we walked back across the road to the Hyde Park Corner Cemetery. It was small, with only 87 burials, but the flowers and grass exhibited the usual "English gardener's" tender loving care. As we walked out of the low red brick entrance gate and back to the car, I noticed that the golden retriever was no longer at the fence.



The Ploegsteert Memorial at the Berks Cemetery Extension

A note of interest: Post trip research (which has become a never-ending endeavor) revealed that one of the soldiers buried in Hyde Park Corner Cemetery suffered a less than honorable death. Rifleman Samuel McBride, 2d Royal Irish Rifles, was executed for desertion on 7 December 1916. He was one of 346 officers and men serving with the British army in the Great War who were executed, shot at dawn, after being condemned to death by a military courts-martial. Those soldiers are buried in military cemeteries throughout the Western Front, and their gravestones bear no incriminating remarks. Had I seen McBride's gravestone (and I *may have* looked at it) and not known this story, I would not have known the cause of his death. I am quite sure that therein lies the intent of no remarks on the gravestone. In the inevitable 'exception to the rule' category, two notable exceptions exist here as well. Upon learning of their son's execution for cowardice, one family felt so disgraced that the father requested permission to have the words

'Shot at Dawn' inscribed on the gravestone.

Such was the loyalty and love of a father for King and Country. On the flip-side of that thought, one family, whose 17 year-old (below minimum recruiting age) son had been executed for desertion, had inscribed on his gravestone 'Shot at Dawn, One of the first to enlist, A worthy son of his father.' Such was the loyalty and love of a father for a son.

In the context that maybe the truth would hurt, the government in the cases of execution, notified the families that their kin had been killed in action. But 'last' letters from the soldiers or their friends usually let the truth be known. One more note: Field Marshall Haig, commander of all Commonwealth troops on the Western Front, was on record as saying that an occasional execution was good for discipline.

The Australian Prime Minister, on hearing this, related to Haig that if just one ANZAC (Australian and New Zealand) soldier was executed, the ANZAC force would be withdrawn from his command. (Attaboy!) A shame he hadn't been present for the courts-martial of Morant and Handcock - scapegoats for the Empire during the Boer War.

Driving south, we crossed the border into France a mile down the road. We were surprised that there were no customs or border guards to check passports, etc. I recalled what a real hassle that border crossing could be from our days in 1962-1963. At times it was frustrating, aggravating, and usually time consuming... particularly upon entering France from Germany. I guess our thinking and expectations were dated from the 60's and we had no update nor did we account for everything in the national post-cold-war situation. As Steve said in Bush-speak, it appears to be a kinder, gentler Europe. Our next targeted area was south and southwest of Cambrai, France. I was doing some map shuffling and picking out a 'route of least resistance'. We traveled through Baillieul, Estares, across the Lys River, past Bethune and on toward Arras. It was not our plan to visit these towns, but from my pre-trip reading I was quite aware of the role they played for the British army in the way of replacement centers, training areas, base hospitals, transportation and communications centers, logistics depots, and rest areas for troops out of the front lines. We avoided the built-up areas where possible. I realize this probably caused us to miss some sights, but we didn't want the city traffic, and besides, the countryside was green and pretty, and we enjoyed seeing the villages scattered along our route.

Just north of the town of Souchez we were prompted by a sign that read Notre Dame de Lorette, and our map indicated there was a French military cemetery located there.

We left the main highway and drove up about three kilometers of narrow winding road to the top of a plateau. The sky was blue - not a cloud to be seen - the sun was bright and a breeze was blowing. Steve pulled off the road into a large graveled parking lot and parked up against a

dense, dark hedge. We walked through an open, wide gateway formed by two stone pillars onto the grounds of a huge cemetery. Some 20,000 crosses stretched row on row into the distance towards a thick forested area and in the back of and along the sides of a Basilica. A large section of the gravestones to the rear of the Basilica appeared Arabic in form, as opposed to Christian crosses in that they were domed and pointed as a mosque.

Indeed, they marked the graves of the Spahis, Algerian native cavalrymen who served and died in the French Army during le Grande Guerre. There were eight ossuaries which contained the remains of 22,000 'inconnus' (unknown) poilus.

There was a very tall, large memorial-like building which appeared to be a carillon tower that was located across a graveled area from the Basilica. In fact it was a memorial to the French poilus who died in France's wars.

It was called the Lanterne Tower. A crypt in the Tower contained the remains of 32 'inconnus' from 1914-1918, 1939-1945, d'Indochine, and d'AFN (Algeria). Between these two structures, a French Tri-color snapped in a steady breeze that crossed the plateau. Reading material on site called the Basilica (my word) a chapel, but it seemed too large and ornate with an elaborate

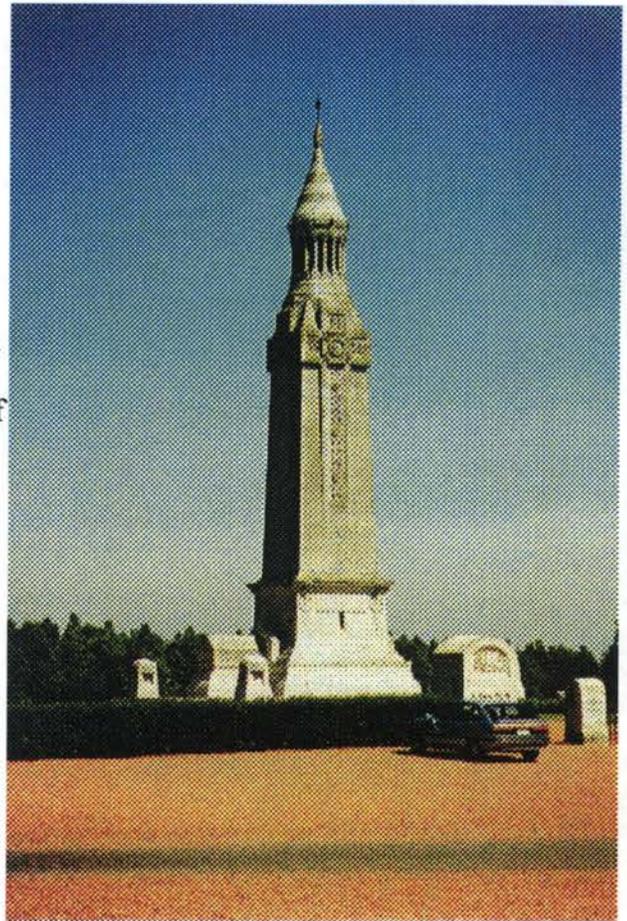


The Notre Dame de Lorette

exterior to fit into my description (and Webster's definition) of a chapel. The interior was very ornate, and colored tile mosaics covered the ceiling and lined the walls in the apse (alter area). Names of honored French soldiers were inscribed on large panels on the walls. We walked back to the car, and noticed from a prominent point, one could look out across a wide valley and down at the red tiled roofs of houses in the village of Albain Ste Nazaire. When Steve drove around the outer edge of the cemetery we came to a wooded area where a restaurant and a museum were located. We parked the car again, and walked over to the museum. We had decided that we were not ready for food so we ignored the restaurant, although it was near the noon hour.

As we would discover, we were most fortunate to have made this unscheduled stop. The museum was one of the highlights of our trip. It was a real treat. We were spell-bound by the displays of weapons, equipment, and

uniforms. Some of the uniforms were in pristine condition while others were crusted with dried mud - looking as they did when dredged up from the battlefield. In one display room there were viewing boxes on shelves which were operated by turning a knob at the side as you peered into eyepieces on the front of the box. They contained sepia-toned glass negative slides/plates, most depicting extremely gruesome scenes of the horrors of trench warfare, burned out tanks with dead crews, crashed airplanes with dead airmen, and the general miserable conditions on the front lines of fighting. Both men and horses were shown in hideous postures of death. I've looked at many Great War pictorial books and other illustrations, but I've never seen such gut-wrenching photographs as the ones in those boxes... definitely not for the squeamish. The piece de resistance of the 'Musee Vivant 1914-1918 abri souterrain' was a walkthrough of a realistic, life-size diorama. When you passed through the entrance door you felt as if you had descended



The Lanterne Tower

into an underground tunnel and dugout complex. It was complete with 'piped-in' battle noises, dim lights, dirt walkways, narrow passageways constructed of timber, uniformed mannequins speaking 'lines' (through a recorded speaker system) in keeping with the activities in which they were engaged. Example: One dugout had a French officer interrogating a German prisoner, another had aidmen tending to a wounded soldier, and a third dugout had several soldiers lounging about playing cards and cleaning equipment. The realism, right down to the glowing tip of a cigarette was to the extent that you could easily feel as though you were there, and a part of the activities. The lady attendant at the 'lobby' desk told us of another Great War (le Grande Guerre) museum south of Souchez in the village of Neuville St Vaast. One note: The theme - uniforms, equipments, etc. in the museum we had just visited was from the French perspective. We gave the lady our best "Merci, madam" and headed off the plateau in search of the Museum le Targette. We passed through the small town of Souchez, which was completely destroyed in 1915 and rebuilt in the 20's. Beyond the town, alongside the road, and sited on a sloping hillside was the British cemetery, Caberet Rouge. It was located (when it was established in March 1916 by the 47th Division) near a place where a small cafe (red brick with a red tile roof) called the Caberet Rouge was sited. It was also destroyed in the fighting, but its name lived on... as a cemetery. After the armistice (1918), some 7,657 dead were brought there from individual graves and small unit cemeteries to be reburied. Over 5,000 of these were unidentified remains. An interesting feature of the cemetery was that the Stone of Remembrance was centrally located and sat in a large low walled circle which was elevated about two feet above the surrounding ground level. There were shrubs around the periphery of the circle, but no flowers. Since the cemetery was on a hillside, the red brick wall that defined it was stair-stepped. The entranceway was a white stone, flat-topped building with columns and arches at the gate. The Cross was at the backside, overlooking the plot.

We pressed on and came to the little village of Neuville St Vaast. I do not know where the name of the museum originated, but from its location, I can imagine that area was just that - a target, during the war. The sought after museum was easily located. It was right on a corner on the main road through the village. It was an upstairs/downstairs arrangement, and was an absolutely great attraction. The manner of displaying the war relics, artifacts, weapons, uniforms, etc. was

more conventional than at Our Lady of Lorette, but the quality and comprehensiveness of the inventory was superb. We slowly moved down the narrow aisles, stopping, backtracking to pick out yet another minute detail of a uniform, weapon, or accoutrement. I all but salivated just pressing my nose against the glass and staring at the weapons. I could have stood there for a day studying every detail of those displays, but after about an hour or so, we departed and drove south on a good road.

We passed through the town of Neuville St Vaast and on the outskirts there was a German cemetery. We pulled into a gray gravel parking lot, got out and walked around for a bit. A large red brick building (in fact, there were two buildings there, one looked like an administrative/office building) stood at the entranceway. The door was locked, but we could still enter the cemetery to the side of the building. It was very large, with some 44,000 Allemande soldats buried there. It had neat and tailored grounds, with dark reddish brown stone markers as gravestones. These were atop multiple burials, and were set at ground level. There were no flowers, but the grass was well tended and several small trees grew at random. There was no wall or fence and overall I would say it looked austere when compared to the flower garden look of the British cemeteries. We pulled out and continued traveling south as we lunched on chunks of baguettes and chocolate filled croissants... a bit stale, but still delicious! A bit of map study, a road sign, and a CWGC 'green arrow' and we were headed through the village of Vimy, and on to the Vimy Ridge Parc. We drove up into a sloping wooded area, and eventually into a parking lot. There were several other cars, and people were walking about, while others were having what I guessed to be a picnic lunch.

We started wandering around through the trees and were immediately taken aback by the pock marked grounds. It was a preserved battlefield with large mine craters, trench outlines, and artillery shell holes. Trees, grass, and erosion over the years have softened the features of the churned up earth somewhat, but it required little imagination to mentally recreate the battle scene. Several areas were cordoned off to prevent visitors from walking among some of the craters because of the existence, still, of live shells, grenades, etc. that are buried in the soil, and having risen like a rock will in an empty field, remain hidden in the now thick grass. It was here in the Parc area, and on the ridge overlooking it, that in April 1917, four divisions of Canadian

troops had their moment of glory (it did take longer than Andy Warhol's 15 minutes, however). The Battle of Vimy Ridge has been called the pinnacle of Canadian military achievement in the Great War. Through a late spring snow and sleet storm the Canadians assaulted the German fortifications on the ridge, and captured the vital piece of terrain at the cost of 3,600 dead. The artillery bombardment that supported the infantry attack began in March - almost a month before the attack began - with some 1,079 heavy guns and field pieces. Over one million artillery shells were fired in that time... small wonder the Parc looked like a grassy moonscape and that unexploded shells still presented a hazard. One feature of the Parc was a trench system, complete with dugouts and saps, that had been recreated on the site in a permanent concrete fashion and offered the visitors a 'hands-on' look. I was not too impressed with that particular spin, or interpretation. There was an artificiality to the neat and orderly cement sandbags and the crenelated concrete duckboards. I'm sure it wasn't meant to represent a battlefield per se, just the manner a trench system might have looked - sans fighting. We stopped by the visitors information building and chatted with the attendants there. One was a young Canadian female who was doing summer work there. They served as tour guides that guided visitors through a tunnel complex under the ridge. We passed on that and opted to go up on the crest of the ridge and see the memorial. From photographs it appeared that this tunnel scene was somewhat sanitized and the tour did not fit into our time frame. We returned to the car and drove around the edge of the Parc, and up on top of the ridge. There stood the Canadian National Vimy Memorial. Steve parked the car, and we joined quite a few visitors walking around at the site. In one word - Wow!

It was definitely one of those things that "seeing is believing". Absolutely magnificent, massive, awesome, beautiful, overpowering - all of the above and more. The Memorial consisted of two towering pylons, over 200 feet tall... sort of like splitting the Washington Monument into two parts and separating the halves by some twenty feet. One of the pylons bears the crown and maple leaf, the other the fleur-de-lis and the laurel - representing the governments of Canada and France, respectively. It rests on a bed of 11,000 tons of concrete and masonry, reinforced by hundreds of tons of steel. The cost in 1920 and 1930 dollars was 1.5 million, and took 11 years to complete (in 1936). It stood in a vast grassy area on the forward slope of the crest of Vimy

Ridge, overlooking the Douai Plains in the Pas de Calais region of France. When we stood on the pavilion and looked north towards Loos we could see the slag heaps around the Union Chimeque et Miniere in the distance. Dominating the huge black piles of stone waste from the coal mines stood the 'Double Crassier' - a twin peaked mountainous slag heap. These slag heaps were the scene of bitter struggles in 1915. A wide walkway led from the parking area to the base of the monument. The base was rectangular in shape and some six feet high.



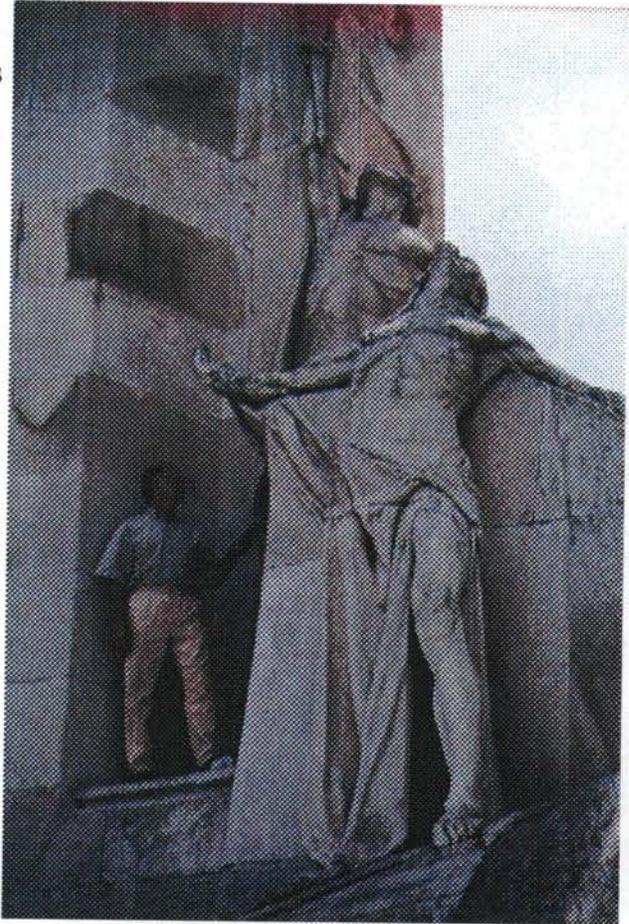
The Vimy Memorial

Two reclining stone sculptured figures flanked the wide steps that led up to the pavilion around the base, and more steps led up to the twin pylons of the monument. Some twenty symbolic, more than twice life-size, sculptured figures stood between and in front of the pylons - they symbolize Canada, her soldiers and ideals. They were carved where they stood from almost 6,000 tons of limestone from a quarry located in what was formally Yugoslavia. The task took place over a ten year span. A lone, shrouded female figure stood in a 'pose of mourning' on the forward edge of the pavilion. I was dwarfed by the figure as I stood beside it. Many of the figures had a look of anguish, and some lay prostrate, in poses of death. Panels on the facings of the walls and along the wide steps on the valley side of the monument had 11,285 names inscribed on them. These were Canadian soldiers missing in action in the Great War who had no known grave. The Canadian government sponsored the planting of 11,285 trees and shrubs in the 240 acres of the parc to match the number of missing soldiers. When the Memorial was

dedicated in 1936 by King Edward VIII, some 50,000 French and Canadian veterans and families were there. One of those in attendance was a Mrs. C.S. Woods of Winnipeg, Canada. She lost eight (8) sons in the war. She wore all of their medals that day. The Vimy Memorial is a Canadian government project, and not a War Graves Commission memorial, therefore the French Tricolor and the Canadian maple leaf national colors are flown from the flagstaffs on the grassy mall in front of the Memorial.

Displaying British national colors at cemeteries and memorials is contrary to the Commission's policy, except at the Thiepval Memorial in the Somme... which <sup>was</sup> still to come.

We had spent a couple of hours visiting the site, and we walked back to the car. I turned for a last



Detail of the Vimy Memorial statuary

look - truly an impressive sight. When we drove down off the ridge top we passed through an area where a small flock of sheep were grazing and napping. They stared at us as we slowed to a stop long enough for Steve to snap a couple of pictures of them. They looked contented, clean and 'full coated'.

We moved out onto the main road but had not gone too far when we were prompted by a CWGC sign. Steve turned off the main road and we drove along a one lane farm road through a bare muddy field. Shortly we saw and drove up close to a large copse of small trees and bushes which surrounded the Litchfield Crater. Not having prior knowledge of the place, we did not know what to expect as we walked over to the site.

There in an opening in the brush-line was a gate leading onto the lip of a large, deep (about 15 feet) saucer shaped depression in the center of the overgrown area. The crater was grassed over. It was now a cemetery, but had not been identified as such on the CWGC sign. There were no

gravestones, however, on one side of the embankment was a stone wall on which was inscribed the names of 41 known British soldiers (11 Known but to God), and 1 Russian - all buried in a common grave in the 'floor' of the crater. The Russian remains a mystery. Although the area was well maintained, there were no flowers, nor was there a Cross of Sacrifice. As we were walking back across the crater to depart, I noticed a solitary gravestone almost hidden back under the branches of a small shrub-like tree. It seemed almost forgotten, like an afterthought. The name of A. Stubbs was inscribed on the gravestone, and as we walked back to the car I pondered as to why a solitary gravestone... possibly a late burial of a body found in the area. As we drove away I realized that I had not taken note of the date of death or unit, which may have helped shed some light on that particular anomaly. Research reading since I returned revealed that a common grave, one that contains more than one set of remains & at least one of which is a war fatality, is not owned by the Commission. Therefore it is not marked nor designated a cemetery by the Commission, as they are often found on public and private property. The Litchfield Crater must have been owned by the person who owned the farm field where it was located, explaining why it was not a designated cemetery.

About 10 miles southeast of Arras we passed through the small town of Vis-en-Artois, on the outskirts of which was located a British cemetery of the same name. Steve parked the car on the shoulder of the road as the cemetery was immediately adjacent to the road. We walked to the entrance gate, located and signed the register, and began our walk-through of the rows of gravestones. There was a low red brick wall on two sides and the front of the cemetery. A wide grassy path led from the entrance to the back wall, which was a tall, semi-circular Portland stone structure with columns and a covered passageway along the base of the wall. This served as a memorial to the 9,903 soldiers whose names were inscribed on the wall, and for whom there is no known grave.

A touching sight that greeted us there was a small, framed photo of a soldier holding his rifle at the ready. The frame was weathered and the photograph faded. It was propped up against the base of the wall under a column of names, obviously a memento of love left by someone who cared and visited there. On the back of the photograph was written the name - Hughes - and a little searching found the name inscribed in the wall above where it was propped. There is no

way of knowing how long that photograph had been resting there in his memory.

The sun was shining and it was warm, giving a brightness to the color of the flowers along the rows of gravestones. Small trees grew at random within the confines of the brick wall, but as I walked back to the car, I noticed that the shrubs appeared to have been planted in a different manner than I had seen before. At the end of each long row of gravestones was a dwarf variegated evergreen (arborvitae, perhaps) and these seemed to form a border for the main aisle through the cemetery. While adding color to the overall beauty of the floral vegetation, it was a noticeable use of a regimented or purposeful planting in a cemetery, other than the orderly rows of flower trenches cut in front of the gravestones.

We continued along our planned route through the village of Harcourt, past Villers-les-Cagnicourt and Barelle, across the Canal du Nord (a big dry ditch - the canal was to connect the Canal de Sensee with the Somme River near Peronne, but was never completed) and past the town of Marquion, the last one before we turned off the main road again, about five miles north of Cambrai. We were on a secondary road, and shortly came to the village of Bourlon. The village was rebuilt in the 1920's after being totally destroyed by artillery fire in 1917. It was the first one that we had seen that seemed less than well kept, perhaps not fully inhabited. The road was narrow and wound between dark and dingy red brick buildings with predominantly black slate/tile roofing, shuttered windows and cobblestone side streets, often with sections of cobblestone missing. At one turn in the road, children - not very well dressed - were playing with a ball in front of an old building. We saw no one else in the village. It all suddenly seemed depressing under a sky that was beginning to cloud over. The village was not our objective,



Photograph of Rifleman Hughes

however, it was the Bourlon Wood, which we knew to be at the edge of town, but we found no prompt signs to direct us to the Wood nor the cemetery located there. Steve began to traverse up and down the narrow steep cobblestone streets, between rows of walled-in yards and the Renault responded to every demand. Since the village was quite small, this only took a few minutes, when at last we went up a short steep hill and came into a small dirt and gravel parking area. A brick wall, covered with a thick growth of vines, stretched away from a gateway formed by two square, weathered brick pillars.

Lounging about in front of the gateway was a half a dozen or so male and female teenagers, talking and smoking cigarettes. I figured that it must be the local 'hangout' and we were undoubtedly the object of their remarks and giggles as we walked past them. Beyond the gate stood huge, tall leafy trees, the trunks and limbs of which had been deeply scarred and deformed. From their apparent age, these trees had to have been present during the fierce fighting for the Wood, and their current condition a result of being subjected to gunfire. Later reading confirmed this suspicion. The trees lined a stair-stepped pathway up from the gate to a small clearing some 50 feet away. There stood a grey, square granite monument, no more than three feet tall and about six feet square. The inscription told that it was dedicated to the Canadian troops who captured the Bourlon Wood in September 1918. There was a register there, and after signing, we noticed that a US Army Lt. Colonel stationed in Germany had visited the site in 1993. The monument stood on a stone base surrounded by grass, but all around the immediate area was heavy underbrush, and beyond that, a thick forest. Two of the young girls (age 15 or so) had followed us up to the monument, and as we stood there signing the register, one of them (she had short dark hair, a nice fair complexion and even teeth... the other one was skinny, wore a goofy-looking hat and was on the homely side) asked with a heavy accent "Are you Anglais?" to which we replied "No, American" which elicited more giggles. I thought they were going to hit us up for cigarettes, and when they began to converse with each other (in French naturally) we ignored them and walked back past the gnarled trees to the car. We wanted to locate the cemetery which our map indicated was in the area. A somewhat suspect dirt road led off from the parking area up into the Wood. We got into the car and drove slowly along the road a very short distance, but it quickly turned into a pair of muddy ruts that looked to invite a problem so

we decided it was a no-go. Steve backed the car to the parking area. About this time, another car drove up, parked, and a man and a woman got out, walked a short distance down the road and turned up through the trees in a direction that was behind the monument clearing. We figured that must be the way, and set out to follow them on foot. We had gone only a few yards up the hill when we decided they were, in all likelihood, not going sightseeing. Once more back to the car in the parking area. By now we probably looked like and acted like we deserved those teenage giggles. Out of desperation we asked for directions from the teenagers gathered there, directing our question to no one in particular. The girl who had followed and spoke to us, and one of the boys stepped over to us and began a torrent of babble which got us nowhere fast. I walked away from this group toward a man whom I had noticed as we drove up who had been cutting vines from the wall in the opposite direction from the dirt road. I asked him directions, and got a quizzical look for my efforts when the 'monument girl' called out to him with a couple of short sentences. He seemed to comprehend, nodded and smiled, and pointed up the muddy, rutted little road. This was getting to be too much, but also a challenge, so we started down the road on foot. We had tip-toed along trying to dodge the worst of the muddy spots when we heard, approaching from behind, a rattling vehicle with a grinding engine. It was a beat-up panel truck with a man and one of the teenage boys in it. The truck stopped, the man got out, opened the rear door, and motioned for us to get inside. It was comforting to note that he was unarmed and this probably was not a kidnap caper. There were all sorts of garden tools, rakes, lawnmower, buckets, etc. piled on the floorbed of the truck. Steve and I looked at each other and I was having doubts about this offer - could there be a French Dahmer? Oh well, I thought, why not - or why ask why, as they say. We climbed in.

The man shut the door, got behind the wheel, crunched the gears and drove off lurching and jolting along the muddy ruts beneath overhanging tree branches. We were standing stooped over and hanging on to whatever we could reach, all the while trying not to get smacked by a rake handle or a rolling bucket. We could see very little of the area where we were going since the two small back windows were dirty and a thick dust was stirred up inside the truck where we stood. After maybe five minutes (it seemed much longer) the truck stopped, the man opened the door, and we got out, straightened up, and looking around found we were at the cemetery. We

said our thanks and he drove away toward some barn-like buildings in the distance. We dusted ourselves off and walked over to the cemetery. For some reason I was a bit surprised as I had expected to see a larger plot. This one was nestled up on a slight slope and it had a sunken appearance. There were 249 burials, and the majority were Canadians, but one odd sight caught our attention - there were also three Chinese laborers buried there (more about this situation later). As we had seen at others, there was a low red brick wall around it. The Cross of Sacrifice was located at one end of the rectangular shaped plot, and very pretty flowers were in abundance gracing the gravestones. We browsed for awhile reading names and dates and units. It was mid-afternoon under a partly cloudy sky, though sort of warm. We felt the humidity as we worked up a mild sweat walking back to the car under the canopy of trees. The teens were still there and so was the man cutting vines. We climbed into the car and headed out of Bourlon towards an intersection with the main road south out of Cambrai. We had not reached the intersection when a red convertible sports car zipped past us... driving it was the man (not a young dude) who had been cutting the vines away from the wall, which must pay well. When I had first seen the car at the monument parking area, I thought it probably belonged to one of the young boys. One of them, with blond hair and a little better dressed than the others, had seemed a likely candidate for ownership.

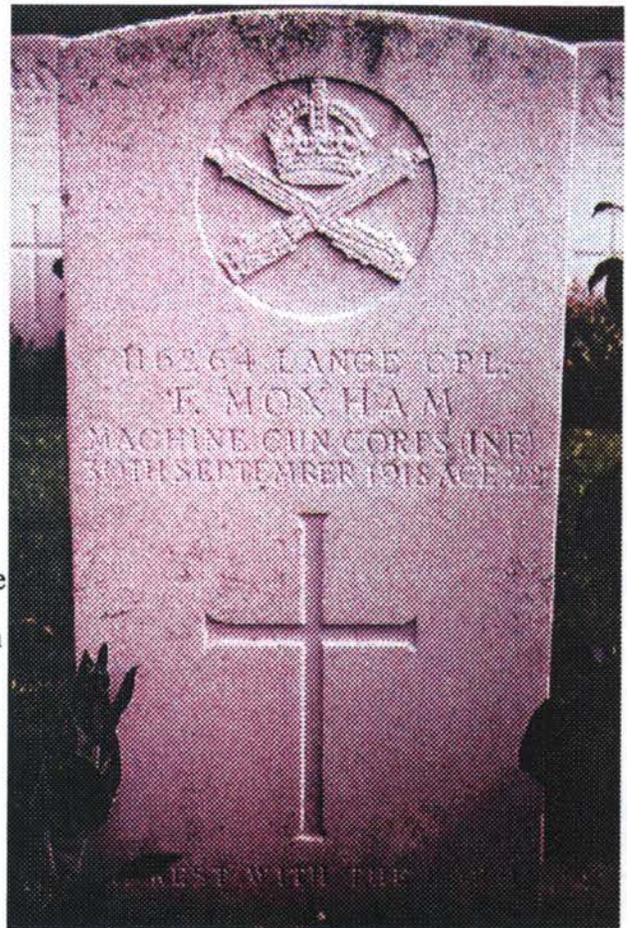
The small village of Anneux sat at the junction of the secondary road and the main road that we were headed for. As we turned onto the main road headed for Cambrai, there on the right was the Anneux British Cemetery, located right beside the road. Houses and a roadside store/cafe/gas station faced the cemetery from across the road, and cultivated fields stretched out to a distant tree line on the cemetery's rear side. There were 1,013 burials, mostly British, but there was also one Australian. A flat-topped, three arched red brick entranceway structure led through the low red brick wall into the plot, which was again, rectangular in shape. There was a Cross of Sacrifice and a Stone of Remembrance.

We signed the register and browsed along the aisles on the thick and evenly trimmed carpet of grass between the gravestones - row after row. It was at this cemetery that we noticed the first Royal Navy insignia we had seen on a gravestone, that bearing the rank of 'Able Seaman'. Then just as we were about to depart, we were standing near the entrance gate for a last look, I made

(whether by cosmic coincidence or mere serendipity) a rather surprising and somewhat emotional 'find'. There, quite literally at our feet, was a gravestone inscribed with Lance Corporal F. MOXHAM, Machine Gun Corps. That was one of the ways that our family name was spelled in genealogical material I had seen. Our family came from Britain in the early 1700's to settle in Vermont, originally. This was an interesting find, and oddly enough, a subject area which I had not considered when planning the trip. Steve took some pictures of the gravestone and we headed north with the idea of getting lodging, as it was getting to be late afternoon.

We passed through the small town of Fontaine-Notre Dame and got a room in the Hotel Ibis in the village of Petit Fontaine. The hotel was located right alongside the road, and was small and modern

(versus quaint), very clean, and had comfortable beds as well as a nice bath and a television. The clouds had become darker and a spattering of rain fell as we unloaded our 'spend the night' gear and took it upstairs. It had been a long and thoroughly enjoyable day by any standard, but now we were hungry, and what sustenance there had been from the remnants of baguettes and fruit had long since been exhausted. The dining room was not large, but it was neat and tastefully decorated. As we entered and were seated, we noticed several other diners were already eating. The menu was not totally mind-boggling, and I recognized the words for fish, chicken, pork, beef, and each meal was listed by price which was relative to the number of courses. However, I saw a party of four diners at a nearby table and one man was having a dish of pasta that looked good. When our waiter arrived I pointed to the man's plate, and in my best 'Harry Met Sally' form told him that we'd have what *he* was eating. We were served a thick,



A kinsman

tasty soup du jour (yellow in color, but tasted a bit like split pea), a salad, and the dish of pasta, which had minced clams in it. The pasta was good and filling, the beer was cold and added just the right touch to the meal. I should not forget the bread, as we had a second helping of that. It was twilight now and despite a fine intermittent drizzle, we walked a short distance along the road before going up to the room. Before leaving the lobby to go upstairs, I asked the desk clerk if he had postage stamps, and told him that they were for a letter going to the U. S. of A., and he replied that, yes, they had stamps and then proceeded to count out stamp after stamp after stamp from a small box. He had not mentioned the cost of the postage, but from the number of stamps he was counting, I thought 'Good Grief!', though as it turned out, they did not have a large denomination stamp (and probably did not need them for local business) so he had counted out 4 francs 30 centimes (about one dollar) in small denominations. Back in the room, Steve watched some European CNN on TV, called home, and read. I wrote a letter to Lynda, and except for the address, the envelope was literally covered, front and back, with stamps... 26 of them to be exact. We relaxed, got ready for bed, and talked about the next day. So ended our second day on the continent, the third day of our trip.

#### DAY 4 - THURSDAY, 2 JUNE 1994

I awoke around 6am, stretched, rubbed my sleepy eyes, and went to the window of our second floor room. It was no Ypres morning. I looked out at a lead colored sky and a light rain being whipped around by a strong wind. Dark clouds off to the west threatened a heavier rain for the day. I awakened Steve and told him we had less than perfect weather to start our day. We had our fruit juice, pastry, and bananas for breakfast, did the toiletry routine, packed the carry-in bags, caught a quick look at CNN for news and weather, and headed for the car. There was a brief moment of 'oops, where is my billfold!' - but it was back in the room, and all was okay. I gave the desk clerk my stamp-plastered letter, and he gave me a "good grief" look... my very sentiments when he counted out all those stamps. And, yes, the letter did make it to Pensacola. The rain had slacked off to a light spatter as we loaded our bags and climbed into the car. What with our eating the crusty baguettes and croissants, the interior of the car began to look like we

had spread crumbs for birds in the park... and it would get worse. We were determined not to be dismayed by the weather change, and figured it to be good 'mood' weather for touring battlefields and cemeteries. A quick check of the map and we were out of the parking lot and headed south. Our plan was to meander over the back roads, through villages, visit battle sites and cemeteries within a triangle formed by the towns of St. Quentin, Cambrai, and Peronne. It was in this area to the south and west of Cambrai (Bourlon Wood, Fontaine-Notre Dame, Cantaing-sur-Escant, Graincourt, Flesquires, Ribecourt, and Marcoing) that at dawn on 20 November 1917, some 378 British tanks went into action 'en masse' against the German defenses of the Hindenburg Line. Another 98 tanks were used for supply tanks, wire carrying tanks, and communication (wireless radio) tanks. In all, 476 tanks were to usher in a 'new cycle of warfare.' True, tanks had been used a year earlier in the Somme, but in piece-meal fashion and without any long range results. By mid-afternoon on the 20th, a wedge over eight miles wide and five miles deep had been driven into the German defensive lines. This was a tremendous achievement when you consider the three previous years of fighting had been static, stagnated trench warfare where gains, if any, were measured in yards and at a terrible cost of human life. But despite the success, the Germans recovered the ground, stabilized their lines, and it was back to trench warfare. Another agonizing year would pass before the Great War ground to a halt with the signing of the Armistice on 11 November 1918 in a railway car located in Compiegne Forest near Compiegne, France. Rain fell most of the day, usually light, but sometimes heavy with a blowing wind. Thank goodness it was more like a warm spring shower than a cold winter drenching. It did make for some muddy walks along paths and roads, but inside the cemeteries the wetness seemed only to enhance the green of the grass, shrubs, and trees. Though the rain and grey skies were cause for a somber mood, the beauty (color) of the flowers dispelled any gloomy feelings.

Our itinerary led us through the countryside and small villages on narrow farm roads. We visited the following cemeteries (in order):

Flesquires Hill Cemetery The 51st Highland Division and the 1st Tank Brigade engaged in severe fighting in this area and suffered heavy losses. The brigade lost 39 tanks to direct (over the sights) artillery fire, while mud, and mechanical problems also took a toll. The village of

Flesquires was destroyed. There were 921 burials here, and it was initially used as a burial ground in the fall of 1918. After the armistice it was enlarged with more burials as small cemeteries were consolidated and individual graves were located. The Cross and the Stone were placed at opposite ends of the rectangular shaped plot. There were no trees, but the flowers were much in evidence.

Ribecourt British Cemetery Sited on a hillside, well above the level of the road, it was located between Ribecourt and Villers-Plouich. After Steve parked the car beside the road, we had to walk up a wide fieldstone stairway (actually there were two sets of steps - facing each other in a 'V') to reach the cemetery level. There were 289 Commonwealth burials plus six Germans. The Cross of Sacrifice was positioned right at the entrance on a shelf like platform between the opposing stairways. There was no wall around the cemetery, and the periphery of the plot was defined by a thick line of small trees. First established in 1917 after the first battle of Cambrai, it was enlarged a year later. The 42d East Lancshires were well represented among the gravestones.

Ribecourt Road Cemetery Located outside the village of Trescault, it was sited alongside the road. Again, a rectangular plot with 261 burials, it also contained six New Zealanders. There was a low red brick wall, an entrance gate of red brick pillars, and small evergreen trees randomly placed along the side walks. The Cross was placed against the back wall, and was a short one with a three-step base. There was a purple flower, similar to a pansy, that was in great abundance here.

Gouzeaucourt New British Cemetery This cemetery was located on the road to Hendicourt. The 8th Division, Irish Guards and the 21st Division were heavily engaged in this area in 1917 and 1918. There were 1,296 burials here, which included one Newfoundlander, and two Russians. For the first time we saw where Royal Marines were buried in an Army cemetery. We also saw more gravestones of the Royal Naval Division. At the outbreak of the war in 1914, the British fleet was already mobilized and at sea. There was a surplus of naval reservists, and in 1916 when the call was made for volunteers for "Kitchner's Army" these reservists and many of the volunteers were formed into Royal Naval Divisions. The battalions were named (not numbered) after famous British admirals, e.g. Hood, Nelson, etc. and naval ranks, customs, etc. were used

and observed. The troops wore khaki, and naval badges were worn on their caps. The divisions had a distinguished record in the war on the Western Front and in the Dardanelles campaign. A low red brick wall surrounded the site. The entrance way was a limestone structure, square in form, with a domed roof (almost mosque-like) and was not a large edifice, with but a single doorway. The Cross was against the back wall across from the entrance. The Stone was on a line between the entrance and the Cross about midway of the plot. Leafy trees grew on the outside of the side walls, but none grew on the inside.

Fins New British Cemetery In this cemetery there were 1,521 burials, to include one from the Guernsey Islands and 234 German soldiers. The 6th Kings Own Scottish Borderers (KOSB) took part in heavy fighting in this area, and they were well represented throughout the rows of gravestones. The entrance way was a red brick rectangular structure with a flat roof of white stone. Four large columns stood in the breezeway and the register was located there in a side wall. The Stone was to the left of the center aisle and near the side wall, and the Cross was opposite the entranceway near the back wall. Flowers filled the beds in front of the gravestones, but there were only a few small trees scattered about.

Epehy Wood Farm Cemetery This was located at the edge of the village of Epehy alongside a narrow secondary road leading to Saulcourt. There were 996 burials here to include one from the island of Malta. The cemetery was above road level, with fieldstone steps leading up to the entranceway, which had a heavy wooden gate (a first for us to see). The structure forming the entrance to the cemetery was an oddity. It was made of fieldstone with a limestone facia trim, the roof was tiled, and from a center ridge, it sloped down on either side of the entrance doorway almost to ground level (sort of tent-like). Dark green hedges formed the wall around the plot. When we arrived at the cemetery, the rain was really pelting down and the wind was gusting. I made a dash from the car, up the steps, and into the entrance way structure. I signed the register, but got quite wet before I had taken a dozen steps into the cemetery. I'm sorry to say that I got no further, and returned to the car, post haste. Steve had stayed in the car and had done some jockeying around to get it aimed back in the direction from which we had come... through the village.

Unicorn Cemetery This was situated right beside the road near the tiny village of Lempire.

There were 1,008 burials here that included four Indian soldiers and 218 soldiers known but to God. A large number of the 20th Hussars and the 5th Lancers were buried there, however the name of the cemetery is taken from the divisional badge of the 50th Division whose men initially established the plot. A fieldstone wall topped with limestone slabs for trim defined the cemetery boundary. Tall slender evergreen trees grew along the back wall of the rectangular shaped plot, framing the Cross of Sacrifice. The Stone of Remembrance was off to the right near the side wall. The grass and flowers there were trimmed and pretty as always. Two U.S. divisions fought with the British forces in the area in September 1918, but there were no American burials.

The rain had slacked off to a light, sporadic drizzle.

At this point we took a slight detour from the British battlefields and cemeteries. It was time to retrace some familiar ground, simply because we were too close not to. We drove through the small town of Vendhuile. It was not an overly attractive place, and the dark clouds and drizzle did not help matters. We moved down a road generally parallel to the St. Quentin canal, through the village of Macquincourt, and into the village of Bony. All of these places showed a minimum of activity, as the shops and houses seemed deserted - shutters closed, and only a few lights shining against what must have been dark interiors. We almost felt lonely as we traveled in this area.

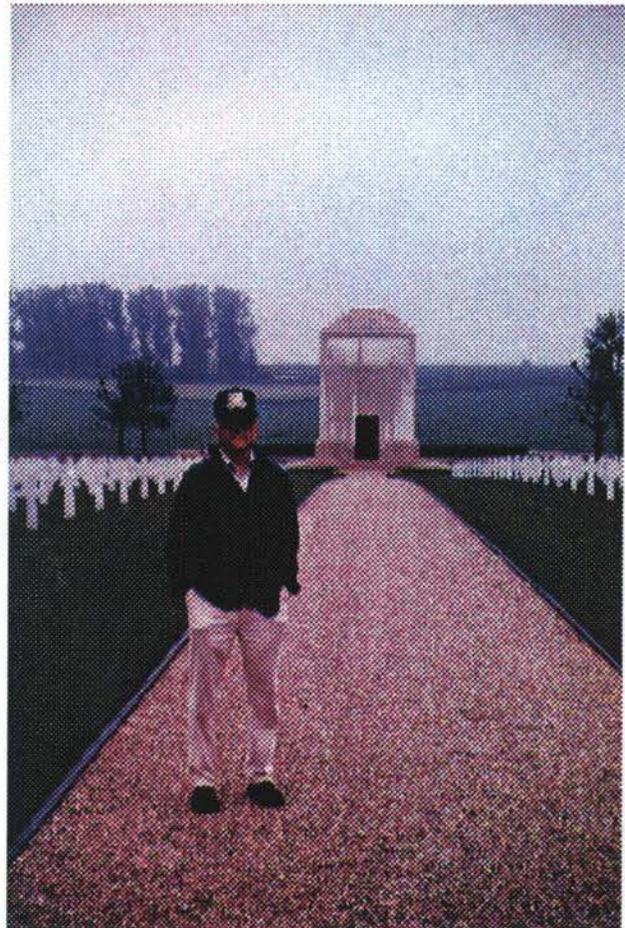
A short distance away from Bony was the Somme American Military Cemetery. It was our reason for this detour. This was a 'return' trip for us - a trip down memory lane, if you will. In 1962-64 I was assigned to the 66th TAC RCN (Tactical Reconnaissance) Wing of the U.S. Air Force at Laon Air Force Base, Laon, France (about 50 kilometers southeast of Bony). I was an Air Recon Liaison Officer (ARLO) detached from the Seventh Army Headquarters. My parent unit was the 2d Military Intelligence Battalion, at Kaiserslautern, Germany. On November 11, 1963, several car loads of Cub Scouts from the Air Base were driven by some parents to the cemetery at Bony for a flag ceremony to commemorate and observe Armistice Day, which ended the Great War - or, since we are at a U.S. military cemetery, World War I. Steve was nine years young and one of the Cub Scouts. His mother and I were along for the drive and to help out with the brown bag picnic that had been planned. David Bolling, a friend

of Steve, had no sooner got out of the car and hit the ground running when he began to take up the plea "Let's eat our lunches" - It was only 10am. I seem to recall he *was* a bit on the pudgy side. That has stuck with us as a joke for all these years. But the picnic was a bust; it rained on us all morning, to include the flag ceremony and the return trip. Yes, it had rained 11 November 1963 and we got wet; and, it was gently raining 31 years later as we walked the gravel paths through the cemetery, and we got wet. Steve parked the car and we went into the visitor center where we both signed the guest register and chatted with the receptionist, a French lady who said that she had been employed there for 11 years. Despite the rain, we walked over into the cemetery. It was as I remembered, quite beautiful.

The British are not without peers in the maintenance and care exercised in cemeteries that hold and honor the war dead. Tall oaks and evergreen trees grew about on the grounds, but not in the cemetery. Some small trees near the chapel had not leafed-out as yet. There were beds of roses and manicured grassy areas about. White marble crosses and markers in the shape of the Star of David stretched out in long uniform rows. The names of 333 missing 'doughboys' were inscribed on the walls of the cemetery chapel. The chapel, a monolithic

styled white stone structure with a stair-stepped pyramidal roof stood against a side wall at the end of a wide graveled path. The doorway was huge, ornate, and bronze.

U. S. military cemeteries do not have flowers immediately around the gravestone. The cemetery has 114 acres on a gentle slope of the Picardy countryside. There were 1844 burials, mostly men of the 27th and 30th Divisions who fought in the area while attached to the British forces in



A return visit to Bony.....31 years later

1918. Five American Army nurses were buried there, as well as a couple of civilians who were working with the military at the time of their deaths.

It was good to have gone back - father and son; Army captain and Cub Scout; retired Army colonel and director of an Army museum. Father and son - yes, it was good to have gone back. Even, perhaps especially, in the rain.

We walked back to the car and drove away in a light misting rain, each for a moment lost in our own thoughts. We moved along south until we were about a mile north of the village of Bellicourt. The Bellicourt Monument was located right beside the road. We had been traveling the main road, and it was lined with large leafy trees, some kind of sycamore or poplar. They were nice, and made the drive pleasant despite the lead grey sky that plagued us all morning. Steve pulled off the road and parked in a large graveled parking area. The monument is impressive in size, a very wide and tall granite structure embossed with flags and sculptured larger-than-life figures. A shrouded female figure (angel?) comforting a wounded soldier lying across her lap comprised one set of figures. A set of stone steps almost the width of the monument (which I judged to be about 50 feet wide) led up to the base of the memorial. The entire complex was flanked by shrubs and trees, which at the time were being whipped around a bit by the wind. The monument was constructed above the St. Quentin canal tunnel and along the site of the Hindenburg Line (a German defensive position). It commemorates the achievements and sacrifices of the 90,000 American troops who served with the British forces in France, 1917-1918.

We traveled south and stopped at the Bellicourt British Cemetery. There were 1204 burials there, to include 304 Australians. It was located on the site of part of the Hindenburg Line, on a sloping hillside overlooking a shallow valley. We did not browse this cemetery at length as we had done some of them. I did note the ubiquitous red brick wall with an unimposing pillared entranceway. The Cross was to the right and the Stone was to the left of the center aisle at the mid-point of the plot. Flowers were in abundance but only a few trees, set randomly about. The 'wet' was beginning to be uncomfortable and the shelter of the car was welcome.

We continued to travel south along a main road when we stopped in the village of Riqueval where there was a newly constructed building housing the tourist information office. Adjacent

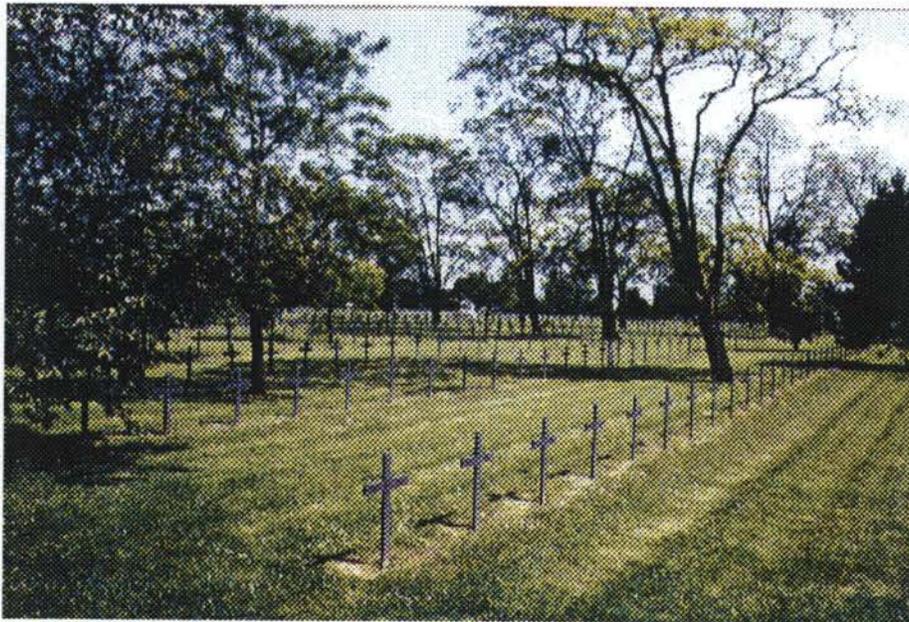
to the place where Steve parked, just off the road and not too far from the office, there was a small, upright, rectangular granite monument. It was dedicated to the men of the 30th Division who fought in the area with the British in 1918, some of whose burials we had seen at Bony. I'm sorry to say that the monument was not in an attractive area, almost on the edge of the road, and was quite mud splattered around the base. Worst of all, the upright portion of the monument had separated from the footer/base and sat slightly off-center, precarious enough to look as though it would topple over with only the slightest provocation. Steve made a token effort to push against the upright, testing in hopes of being able to straighten it out, but it was a hefty chunk of granite and was not about to budge. It would have been our luck for him to have shoved it over and the gendarmes (French national police) arrest us for destroying a monument (no one ever believes that you are really putting the hubcaps back on!).

We had stopped to inquire about the St. Quentin canal tunnel, which we knew was in the immediate area. We entered the lobby of the building to ask a few questions of the two ladies behind the counter. Neither of them spoke a word of English, and we were not getting any answers fast when one of them left the room quickly and went up the stairs, returning with another female who had short dark hair, wore glasses and had a pleasant smile. This one said she had not used her English in five years, but she did well enough with our questions, all the while consulting with one of the others in French. I guess she was making sure she said the correct thing. We did learn about the canal and tunnel, that is runs underground for about five miles between the villages of Macquincourt and Riqueval. The canal, built during the reign of Napoleon I, has two-way traffic, but the tunnel has only one way traffic which is regulated by a time schedule. Barge rides were available to tourists, but they lasted about an hour, and the departure times did not fit into our itinerary timing (loose though it was)...the next departure from Riqueval was several hours later that day. We thanked the ladies for their time and help, bid them adieu, and left the building. We could see off to one side of the building that there was a pathway down through the woods that appeared to lead to the Riqueval end of the tunnel. The rain had made the trails through the woods quite slippery with mud, and the path leading down to the canal descended a very, very steep and tree covered embankment - almost a gorge. We decided against trying to go down for a look-see. Through an opening in the tree branches we

did see a barge tied up along the canal bank not far from the mouth of the tunnel. It looked about an inch long because of the distance down to the canal from where we stood. The canal tunnel seemed a unique oddity, but actually the St. Quentin canal goes underground a second time about 12 kilometers south of Riqueval near the village of le Harcourt, but only for a distance of less than a mile. Post trip reading revealed that German soldiers hid in the tunnel (actually lived in it on barges) and exited it to counterattack British and American troops who were assaulting the Hindenburg Line in September 1918. We sort of slipped and slid back to the car and departed from the canal attraction.

We had driven about three miles when we came to a fork in the road. The main road continued south to St. Quentin, and the road to the right, to Bellenglise - the road less traveled, so we took it... it was our planned route anyway. Located just east of the fork was the British cemetery, La Baraque. I am not sure of the origin of that name. There were a couple of farm complexes (houses and barns) near the road, and I suppose it could have been called a tiny ville, and then again maybe the fork in the road was named La Baraque. At any rate, Steve pulled off the road and parked by the entrance. It was a small cemetery, only 62 burials. Most of them were from the 17th Lancers, who were killed on 3 October 1918. Their gravestones were inscribed with the skull and crossed bones of the regimental crest. The plot was on a gently sloping hillside. A fieldstone wall extended left and right from the entrance for a short distance before meeting the side walls which stair-stepped up the slope to form a rectangular plot with the back wall. Trees grew in close on the exterior of the side walls. The Cross was sited at the entrance on a limestone-like pillar, steps were on either side of the Cross base and led up and into the cemetery. I noted a profusion of small yellow flowers there - somewhat like a black-eyed susan. We departed La Baraque and drove through Bellenglise over a short bridge that spanned the St. Quentin canal. On the outskirts of the village we spotted a CWGC sign that identified an Australian memorial monument in the area. Our map indicated it was off the secondary road and could be reached by traveling up an 'unimproved roadway' to the hilltop where it was located. I can't be sure, however Steve was, that we were in the edge of a barnyard in a farm complex when we came up on a muddy, rutted trail barely suitable for a tractor that led off up the hill towards the monument. It must have been huge, because it looked massive even at a

distance. The misting rain didn't help our getting a good look - even with binoculars, the haze was too thick. Steve was about to try to negotiate the muddy trail, and had already downshifted and was looking for a suitable approach when I opted for a No-Go, conservative person that I am. I could just see us bogged to the axle in that soft brown mud. I suppose we could have asked 'Jean-Claude' for a tow with his farm tractor had we gotten stuck, but Steve reluctantly agreed to desist. Being identified as an Australian memorial it did have a mystique and an appeal about it, but there were no friendly maintenance workers to offer the back of their truck today, and we settled for the speculations that were raised from what view we did have. It was in this area that we saw the first red poppies that we were to see growing in the fields, prompting a recall of John McCrae's verse, *In Flanders Fields*. A short time after leaving Bellenglise and the non-viewing of the Aussie monument, we came across a German cemetery just north of the village of Pontu. There were 30,478 burials, and the reddish-brown stone grave markers stretched across acres of manicured grassy grounds. Trees were growing, but with no pattern or placement, and there were no flowers. German cemeteries were not as numerous as the British, but they had, as a rule, multiple burials per grave site and the total number of burials within any German cemetery exceeded by far those in a British cemetery.



Allemande Soldats gravesites at Pontu

Except at Langemarck, Belgium, we did not see any memorials which contained the names of German soldiers 'missing, with no known grave' and without a doubt there were many thousands in that category, as with the British. We browsed briefly, noting that there was a not too large building and a short wall on either side of it that formed the entranceway. As with the previous German cemetery, the small building was locked, but you could enter the grounds by walking around the end of the wall. Trees and dark green evergreen type shrubs grew along the wall area. Again, no flowers.

We drove away, through the small villages of Vermand, Poevilly, Doingt, and traveled east of Peronne. We did not enter Peronne, and stayed east of the Somme River. I found out later that there was a large museum located there that would have been of major interest to us. We did not see a prompt sign. It was a municipal project and relatively new which could explain the lack of signage. A short time later we pulled into a 'truck stop' where there was a cafe and a small supermarket located behind a battery of fuel points. The signs said 'gazoil', and logic plus an inquiry of the attendant at the pumps confirmed Steve's suspicion that it was, indeed, diesel. After refueling (our first such stop since leaving the Brussels airport) we went over to the cafe. The price of fuel had been something like 3 francs 90 centimes (less than a US dollar) per liter, which Steve thought was just great, until I reminded him to multiply by four!

We were sure glad that the Renault was a jewel on mileage. We went into the cafe, and it was busy with a lunch crowd of travelers and people whom I judged to be laborers. We ordered. The cafe au lait was good, and the jambon (ham) sandwich on a baguette loaf with a good stout mustard was tasty as well. I couldn't help but people watch a bit. A couple of guys at a nearby table knocked off a bottle of wine with their food. I used the stop to pay a visit to the latrine. No surprises here, but it seemed odd to step into a small closet-like room, put your feet up on the slightly above floor level 'footprints' and take aim at a hole in the tile floor. Since it was a uni-sex facility... well, ladies, you can figure it out. There was a nice food market, though small, next to the cafe where we resupplied our pastry ration, and boxes of fruit juice (orange), the ever-present bananas, more pastries (several plastic boxes of them) and three more baguettes (our crumb collection would grow by leaps and bounds in very short order). Steve bought some more film (the exposed rolls were to eventually number 15 in all) and we loaded our purchases

into the car, climbed in and headed out, traveling northwest. Just a light intermittent drizzle was in the air as we came into the outskirts on Mont St. Quentin, which was a small community strung out alongside the roads. We noticed the houses that were located beside the road were very attractive, somewhat modern (versus quaint or old) and had nice yards. The usual housing configuration was a village with houses facing the street or in a grouping, which seemed to emphasize the difference of this 'by-the-road' look. We came upon a small parc which was sited in a space between two houses. Located there was a memorial monument dedicated to the 2d Australian Division. It was a large granite pedestal, steeply pyramided sides, truncated top, some eight to ten feet high and on top of which stood a much larger-than-life bronze sculpture of an Australian soldier. His hat, the 'outback' style (tho' Army issue), had the brim ~~was~~ fastened up on one side and he was attired in full battle dress gear, his Enfield #1 Mk III cal.303 at sling arms, bayonet not affixed. There was excellent detail in the features of the face and the accoutrements. Tall trees were in the small parc which faced out onto an open area and overlooked the Somme River in the valley below. Just as we were walking from the car to the monument site, a tour bus pulled up and parked beside the road. As it turned out, it was a bus load of Aussies who were touring some of the battlefields of the Great War. Listening to them and talking with the tour guide was a real 'G'day mate' treat for sure. One of their group was badly crippled and walking seemed a real chore for him, but he was undaunted nonetheless. When the guide mentioned visiting the Australian monument near Bellenglise, we mentioned that we had come from there earlier, and that we didn't think the bus could negotiate the muddy trail. I'm sure that walking would be out of the question for many of that group, even Steve and I had quickly nixed the idea of walking -



2nd Division Monument

too far and too muddy. The guide kept talking about going to "Weeps" Belgium. I can't say that his pronunciation was wrong, but it sure sounded odd (we had been pronouncing Ypres as E-pray, and according to the receptionist at the Hotel Ariane in Ypres on our first night, it was E-pair). A plaque on the monument related that the 2d Division had taken part in actions in that area and had distinguished themselves. Had the for-real Aussie troops in 1917 looked anything like the rough and ready bloke in the bronze suit, it would be easy to believe.

We left the Aussies there and headed out, north by northwest. About six miles later, near Bouchavesnes Bergen we passed another German cemetery, however, we did not stop. We did stop a short time later just north of Rancourt at a small village on the road near the Bois de St. Pierre Vaast. Located there was a French cemetery with some 4000 burials. The crosses, made of a yellowish brown colored stone with a brass plate stating the name, unit, and date of death affixed to them, stretched row upon row into the distance up and over a low ridge. The sky was dark with rolling clouds and a wind was whipping in the trees which grew along the outer edges of the vast plot. Grassy pathways were between the rows of crosses, but no flowers. The French national Tri-color flew from a staff near a small chapel which was located on the edge of the cemetery and beside the road. We walked over and entered the chapel. It was dimly lit by the outside light coming through dusty stained glass windows. The entire interior seemed dusty and almost neglected. Soldier's names and death dates were inscribed on panels placed on the walls. Adjacent to the chapel was a small memorial room. We could see into it through a barred window. It appeared to be a sort of storage room for memorial artifacts. There were paintings (portraits and battle scenes), floral pieces, plaques, framed campaign and award ribbons, medals, photographs, and an odd saber or two. We felt that these items were probably associated with the soldiers and families of soldiers buried there.

Not long after passing the turn off to Saily-Saillisel we were prompted off the main road by a sign indicating that a memorial was located down a narrow paved secondary road that wound through farm fields. Steve drove down the road until we came to a not very large fenced in area on the edge of a cultivated field. A grain crop was growing there. Inside the fenced area there were a few coniferous trees and evergreen shrubs, and an irregular shaped pile of large stones (a cairn) about eight to ten feet tall. Atop the stones stood a large bronze sculptured stag, with it's

neck and head stretched upwards, and its mouth appeared to be bellowing a defiant challenge to an enemy. It was a Newfoundland battlefield memorial, however, no plaque nor signage was located there to tell of its dedication or significance.

The grounds within the fence appeared to have been left untouched save for natural erosion, and a partial trench section could be discerned beneath the now thick grass. Steve snapped a couple of pictures and then we back tracked to the main road and continued toward Bapaume. We passed through le Transloy and Beaulencourt and reached Bapaume under cloudy skies - no rain, but a stiff breeze. It was not a large place, but we skirted the center of it and saw mostly non-descript buildings and houses scattered about at the intersections where we turned south. It was not our intention to stop there. We were headed to Albert, some 10 miles away. We had reached the region where the July-November 1916 British offensive took place.

This was our ultimate target area; the Bapaume-Albert road ran on sort of a northeast-southwest center line thru the battlefield.

Albert has been referred to as the "gateway to the Somme" by British authors, some of whom have called what most authors refer to as the Battle of the Somme - the Battle of Albert (those are in the extreme minority, however). Actually, Somme is the name of the river that meanders along the southwest flank of the battlefields we were to visit. It played no major role in any of the battles. The name of the geographical region containing the battlefields is Picardy. Why the Battle of the Somme? Even after research I had to file that question under 'I wonder why?'

We were approaching Albert from the north, but it was our intention to use it as a start point, with a bit of backtracking, for our touring over the next day or so. Bapaume had been a British objective when they launched their 1 July 1916 offensive. They never did reach it, but they did hold Albert throughout 1914-1917, but lost it in the great German offensive in the spring of 1918. Albert was retaken and Bapaume finally secured by the British in a major counter-offensive in the summer and fall of 1918.

Our first stop after passing through Bapaume was the Walencourt British Cemetery located near Walencourt-Eaucourt. It sat back off of the road, the red brick wall defining the now familiar boundary for this collection of honored souls. Large trees were growing both inside and outside the walls, and the ever-present colorful flowers in varieties too numerous to mention were

blooming in the deeply cut trenched beds in front of the gravestones. The entrance way was a square shaped brick with white stone trim building, and an archway led from the roadway area into the cemetery. The register was located here and we signed it before browsing the rows of gravestones. There were 3,508 burials, to include 461 Australians, 126 South Africans, and 2 French soldiers. The Cross stood at the end of a wide, long grassy aisle opposite the entranceway. The Stone was placed near the left side wall. Leafy trees formed the backdrop, wide fields stretched beyond the walls.

Fierce fighting took place in this area in 1916. The Walencourt area was the high water mark of the British advance when the offensive ended in November of 1916. The area was again the scene of heavy fighting in 1918 when the area changed hands in March and again in September. We saw our first gravestone that reflected a 1 July 1916 date of death.

It was on this date that the British (and the French - on the extreme right of the line towards Rancourt) began the Somme Offensive. The attack was launched across an 18 mile front meandering through the countryside from Foncquevillers on the left flank to near Maricourt on the right flank. Thirteen infantry divisions on line, with five in reserve, were in the initial assault at 0730 hours on the first day of July, 1916. It was a hot, dry, and bright day when the first wave of Commonwealth soldiers climbed out of their trenches to go 'over the top'. Burdened with some 60 odd pounds of pioneer tools and material, ammunition, weapons, and personal gear, the riflemen scrambled up scaling ladders and fire steps, over sand bagged



1 July - One of too many

parapets and walked with rifles at 'high port', in the steady and disciplined manner of countless British soldiers before them, into a living hell-fire of machineguns, artillery, and rifles. The

German defenders had only to wait in their trenches, protected by belts of barbed wire before they began the slaughter.

Slaughter hardly describes it. At the day's end, with little or no gain of terrain to show for their sacrifice, the tally of casualties (in a war I would come to know some 50 years later, it would be called a 'body count') was 57,470. Of that number, 19,240 were killed; 35,493 were wounded; 2,152 were missing; and 585 had been taken prisoners of war.

It has been said, and rightly so, that this stands as the blackest day in the history of the British army. The magnitude of that horrific, tragic day can be placed in some modern context when one considers that in one approximately 12 hour period, the British army lost the equivalent of 33% of the total number of US military dead suffered in 10 *years* of conflict in the Republic of South Vietnam.

The offensive by the British ground on until mid-November when, in a wintry blizzard, it was finally called to a halt... but not before 419,654 (official count) Commonwealth soldiers had become casualties. It was not difficult to see why in the Somme area alone there were over 100 military cemeteries. During the period 1 July - 13 November (alpha to omega for the campaign) 51 Victoria Crosses, the equivalent of our Medal of Honor, were awarded - of that number, 27 were posthumous. Of note: 20 VC's were awarded to officers, 12 to NCO's, and 19 to 'other ranks'. In addition to their regimental crest (as on all gravestones) a likeness of the Victoria Cross was inscribed on the gravestones of those whose bodies were recovered and buried. The magnitude and tragedy of that military operation that was the magnet that drew me to the Somme battlefield.

We returned to the car and departed Walencourt, moving south towards Albert, but had not gone far before we left the main road and visited a small British cemetery in the village of Martinpuich. Steve parked by the entrance and we walked through the two pillars forming the entranceway onto the grassy aisles. There were 109 burials that included one Canadian. The 15th (Scottish) Division was heavily engaged in this area, and we noted some of their dead were buried here. There were no trees inside the plot's red brick wall, but flowers grew in abundance in the beds in front of the gravestones. I always associate flower gardens with rural areas and villages in Great Britain, and I believe that the 'flower will always be there' was the CWGC's

way of placing a bit of 'home' in the cemeteries. We signed the register and as we walked away, I noted the Cross was standing at one end of the narrow rectangular plot.

It was early afternoon and the rain had stopped, but these were heavy dark clouds, and the wind was blowing briskly. We drove towards the village of Longeval on a back road and came to the High Wood (Longeval) and London Cemetery and Extension. The 47th (London) Division buried 97 of their soldiers between 15-21 September 1916 in a large shell crater, and that was to be the London Cemetery. In 1934 the cemetery was extended to take in nearly 4,000 burials from surrounding battlefield areas. Most of these were unidentified by name.

Small cemeteries in most cases had been battlefield cemeteries, since units, when possible, buried their dead singularly or in common graves before leaving an area. Often the dead lay for weeks, months, even a year (or more, in some cases) before they could be recovered - one of the more gruesome side-effects of stagnant trench warfare - and in such cases, the usually unidentified remains were collected and buried in larger plots by burying details from whatever unit was in the area at the time. Perhaps a note concerning the Herculean efforts of the British government to account for the dead and missing both during and after the war would be in order. Indeed, the effort and methodology applied to the task are near to incomprehensible considering the task that was faced at the war's end was that of finding and concentrating into cemeteries the enormous number of bodies which were scattered about the battlefield in temporary graves and those which lay where they had died and had remained unfound. Immediately after the armistice the entire British front was divided into narrow sectors. Each sector was combed repeatedly by teams composed of 12 men of the ranks and a senior NCO that engaged in systematic searches for battlefield graves and, of course, for unburied bodies. In 34 months, between November 1918 and September 1921, over 200,000 bodies were recovered by the military and members of the War Graves Commission. These were to be buried in concentration cemeteries. The official search ended only after the battlefield sectors had been exhaustively searched, each no fewer than six times, and some as many as twenty times! Nonetheless, by 1937 almost 38,000 more bodies had been found, by accident, usually by local inhabitants. Early on, in those years immediately after the war, the British government gave five shillings to locals when they handed over a British soldier's body for burial. Even in the late 1980's some 20 to 30 bodies were

found annually. I feel most assured that some of those 'late found' bodies and their burial accounted for a large portion of the 'unknown' designation inscribed on the gravestones of the cemeteries that we visited. For example, in the Passchendaele Cemetery, 1,062 of the 2,100 burials (50%) were unidentified... and there were others with as high or even higher percentages of those 'Known but to God'.

Despite the dark and dreary sky, the beauty of the cemetery was evident. It was the third largest cemetery in the Somme area. Across the road from the cemetery was a densely forested area known locally as Bois des Fourcaux - the British soldiers simply called it High Wood. It was totally destroyed in the fighting, and the only wood left in High Wood was in the form of stumps and splinters, but nature has its strange and wonderful ways, and it had returned to a state of beauty as we viewed it. Steve parked the car alongside the road in a small parking area. There was a wrought iron, double 'picket fence' gate set between two L-shaped red brick pillars, topped with white stone. Thick green hedges extended laterally from the pillars to form the front wall. Set back across from the front wall hedge and gate, and across a grassy plot about 20 feet wide, was a large red brick, rectangular edifice with a red tile roof and three tall archways centered in front that led onto the Extension Cemetery grounds. Tall, dense, and dark green shrub-like hedges grew at each end of the building and extended outward towards the side walls of the cemetery.

The area between the front hedge wall and the entrance building and its hedge wall was the original London Cemetery. An inscription on a stone in that area stated that 78 of the soldiers whose names appear on nearby gravestones are "known to be buried in that area" but the exact grave location is not known. This had been the crater burial site in 1916. We had seen the same situation in the Maple Copse Cemetery in Belgium.

We browsed that area for a short time and then walked into the entranceway building, signed the register located there, and walked out into the cemetery. The Cross was located at the back wall down a wide and long grassy aisle between plots of gravestones. The Stone was not far from the entrance, and centered in a grassy aisle. Tall slender evergreen trees were growing throughout the cemetery in a random manner, and of course, the colorful flowers grew along the rows of gravestones. Inscriptions we observed on the gravestones indicated burials from many

units and 1916 death dates were in abundance. There were 160 British and 3 Canadian burials from World War II located in the rear of the cemetery, and that included soldiers of the 51st Highlanders, who were killed in June 1940, fighting at the Somme River crossing before the BEF was forced out of France at Dunkerque. An elderly couple was visiting at the same time we were there. Their auto license was from England. The lady sat in the car (not a bad idea considering the wind and the chill) while the gentleman checked the register, and then he moved in a rather direct line towards a section of gravestones. I was standing near the entrance and was able to observe this. Perhaps it caught my eye simply because we saw so very few other people at the majority of the sites we visited. As we moved to the car, the winds were really whipping the trees, and a light rain began to fall (you just had to know those dark clouds were not going to let us get away without some rain). Our jackets felt good. With a 'last look' we climbed in the car, checked our maps, and drove away.

A short drive along narrow roads that meandered through cultivated fields led us to the Caterpillar Valley Cemetery, which lay out below a low wooded ridge line. The name Caterpillar came from the British soldiers, and came about due to the similarity of the narrow, ribbon-like irregular shaped woods on the ridge which were like a bowed up caterpillar. Steve parked the car off the road in front of the entranceway, which was a large, rectangular red brick



Entrance structure to Caterpillar Valley Cemetery

flat topped building with white stone trim. It was basically open, with square columns on the corners and circular ones in the openings which formed archways leading into the cemetery. I signed the register and we browsed along the grassy aisles bordered with flowers blooming in front of the gravestones. There were 5,574 burials, to include 214 New Zealanders and 2 Newfoundlanders, as well as many Australian, South African, and Canadian soldiers. The majority of graves however, represented the British Isles. The area was the scene of very fierce fighting in July 1916 and many of the gravestones reflected that date. Tall slender leafy trees framed the Cross while the Stone was off to the left of the center aisle, near a side wall. The cemetery was sited on a sloping side of the shallow valley, and from there we could see the Thistle Dump Cemetery located in an open, cultivated field. It was small, no trees, and a low red brick wall defined the periphery. To get there, one had to walk a hundred yards or so along a path from the farm road. The Cross stood centered in the rectangular plot. The recent rains stymied us from undertaking the walk through the field. I learned later that two brothers (MacBeth) ages 26 and 34 were buried there side by side.

We departed the area and just beyond Longeval, about 2 miles north of Montauban, we came to the Delville Wood Cemetery and the South African Memorial Parc. We left the car in a cobblestone and grass parking lot next to a visitor information/bookstore/small art gallery type of business establishment - you could also get a cup of coffee (not espressed) there. The lady in charge sounded like a Brit, not French. We browsed a bit, looking at large photographs of battle scenes that took place in the immediate vicinity. I picked up a business card there which would later lead to an interesting, friendly telephone relationship with Jeremy and Anne Powell - owners of a bookshop in Wales. Since my return to the USof A, I have purchased books from them and chatted with them on several occasions.

Despite the misting rain, we walked over to the cemetery which was located a short distance away across the street. It was a large cemetery with 5,519 burials. The 2d, 14th, 17th, and 9th (Scottish) Divisions were heavily engaged in the Delville Wood area, but the unit to suffer the most was the South African Brigade.

There were 30 special memorials - I have not mentioned that category of burial to this point, but most all the cemeteries had them. The special memorials were the normal gravestones and had

the soldier's name, unit, etc. inscribed on it, however, his original grave was unaccounted for (lost, probably destroyed). Therefore, the 'memorial' gravestone was placed in the cemetery because the soldier was believed to be buried there, somewhere. The stone, though, was not placed over any known remains. The architectural theme of the fieldstone wall was used here, and the gateway was simply an opening in the wall, and there was no entrance building. The register was in a compartment in the gateway. The Stone of Remembrance was located about midway from the entrance to the back wall, centered in the wide grassy aisle that divided the cemetery into two plots. The Cross was located at the front end of the aisle at the entrance. Evergreen shrubs and slender trees were inside the walled area, and large leafy trees grew outside the walls. Two flat topped, open front, columned 'gazebo-type' structures were located against the back wall, about 20 feet apart. They could have provided me with a measure of shelter from the light rain that was falling, but I felt a strong urge to walk among the gravestones, searching the recesses of my mind for faces to associate with the names I read... trying to give some personality to those who lay beneath that soft earth and wet grass.

I was so engrossed in my wanderings and musings that I didn't realize that Steve had departed the cemetery. He had gone back to the visitor's center where he had surreptitiously purchased a British War Medal 1914-1918. It was the medal awarded to those who served during the Great War. Larger and thicker than a US silver dollar, it is cast in sterling silver, suspended on a ribbon which has a wide yellow vertical center stripe, bordered by a narrow white stripe on either side, which in turn is bordered by a narrow blue stripe. The profile of King George V is on the obverse side.

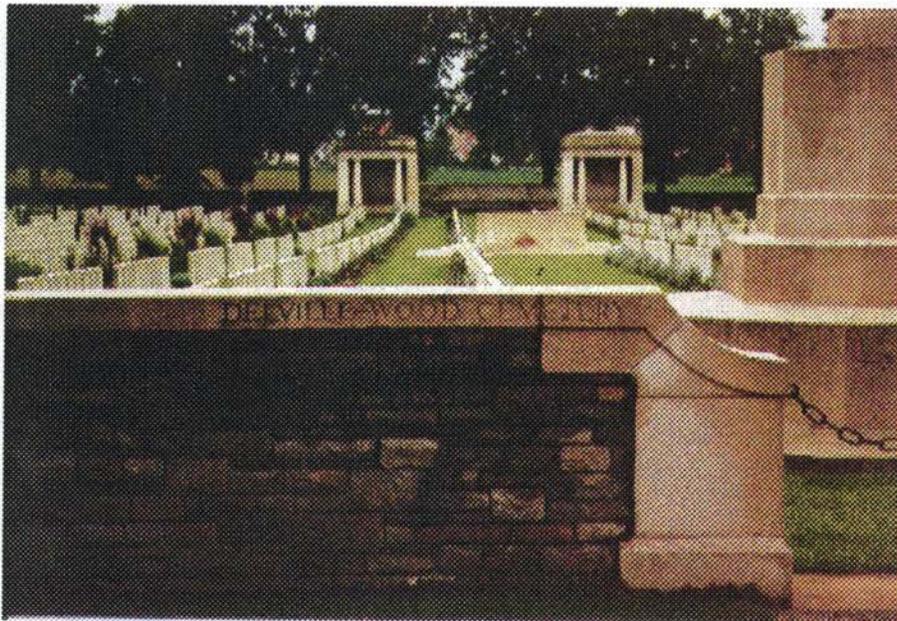
It was struck for and engraved with the name of Corporal H.N. Roscoe, RE (Royal Engineers), and as such, was an original and issued medal, not a replica. This was unexpected, and I appreciated his thoughtfulness when he said, "Happy Birthday" (only a few days early - and true to his nature, I knew he would not have been able to wait even that short a time). It now hangs in a frame on the wall over my desk.

Thanks, Steve. I do not have the vaguest idea of what may have ever become of Corporal Roscoe of the RE, but I do know what became of his War Medal.

We walked across the road and onto a long and wide grassy mall which extended through a

densely forested area - the Delville Wood. The South African National War Memorial stood at the end of the mall. There was no defined or paved walkways, we just strolled down the wet, carpet of grass and marveled at the dark, intense green color of the trees. These wood, like High Wood, had been reduced to stubble and splinters during the fighting for the area, but now some 78 years later, it was a beautiful forest again.

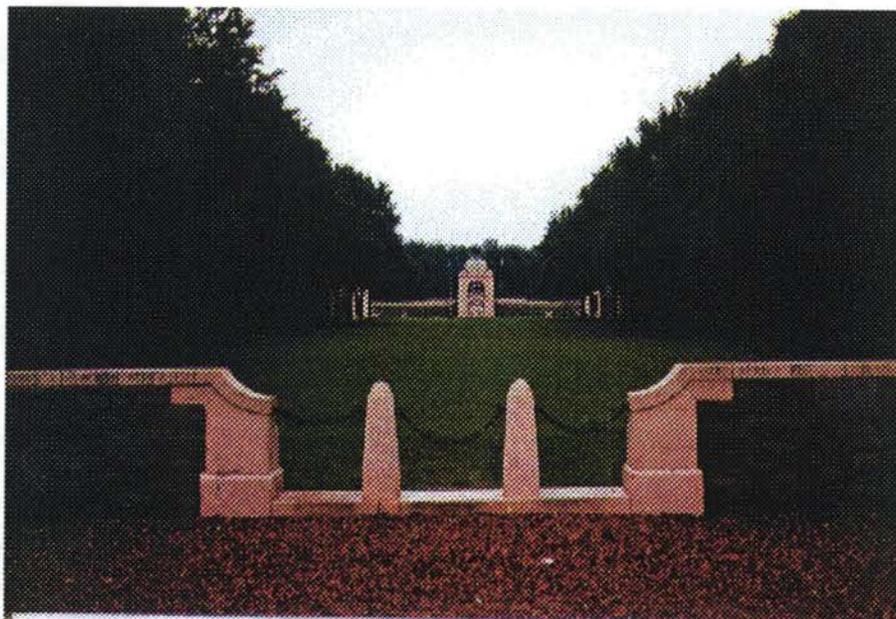
The South African Brigade attacked the German defenses in the Delville Wood on 1 July 1916 with a unit strength of 121 officers and 3,032 men. After six days of some of the most miserable and inhuman fighting imaginable, only 30 officers and 140 men answered the roll call muster. Hundreds of the dead were never recovered for burial, so intense and destructive was the artillery bombardments in the woods.



Entrance to Delville Wood Cemetery

The dead outnumbered the wounded 4 to 1, contrary to the law of averages for casualties on a battlefield, which is usually accepted as 3 to 1 wounded to dead. Source documents have presented no valid explanation for that statistic; however, one theory set forth is that some of those men who were just wounded initially, subsequently became KIA casualties when they could not leave the immediate battle site as 'walking wounded', nor could they be evacuated from a forward aid station due to the severity of the fighting, and the difficulty in negotiating a way through the mutilated and entangled forest by the stretcher bearers.

We approached the memorial structure. The Portland stone entranceway structure was large and flanked by two smaller structures on opposite ends of a semi-circular shaped wall which extended from the sides of the center edifice. It was sweeping and impressive and the greenery of the woods provided a good background. Beyond the entranceway and down a wide concrete walkway was the museum.

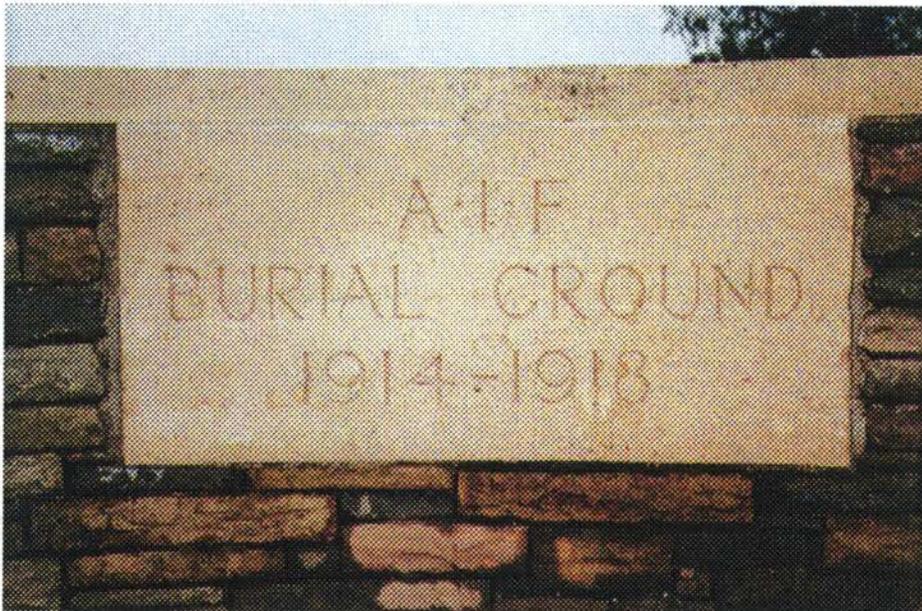


The mall leading to the South African Memorial

The design for the building was based on the Castle of Good Hope in Capetown, South Africa. The basic shape was that of a 'star fortification' (pentagonal with bastions at the apexes) similar to Fort Monroe, Virginia, and many of the coastal artillery forts. The bastions in this case served as the galleries that contained the museum exhibits. One of the most impressive features of the display was a long and larger-than-life floor to ceiling bronze bas-relief sculpture depicting battle scenes, and was located throughout along parts of the interior walls. In the center of the building there was an open courtyard, and the inward facing walls of the museum were all-glass panels that looked out onto the courtyard and a large Cross of Consecration stood there in the center. As we stood there looking at the Cross sculpture, a wind blown rain began to fall in torrents, lashing against the glass panels. We exchanged a look that said we sure were glad to be inside at the time. In all the hit and miss raining that we had seen, we had yet to get caught in a good 'soaker'. We wandered through all the galleries, viewing the photographs, uniforms and

weapons that illuminated some of the South African involvement. When the rain slacked off to a drizzle, we headed back to the car, back across the grassy mall, which had now become rather squishy in places.

We 'climbed aboard' and departed the area. In very short order we came upon a tall stone obelisk memorial dedicated to the New Zealand Forces that fought in the Great War. Tall, thick evergreen shrubs grew around three sides of the stone. It sat beside a farm road not far from Longeval, and could be seen across the fields for some distance, as it sat on a slight ridge line. The last cemetery we visited for the day was a bit unusual in name. It was the A.I.F. Burial Ground, which was inscribed into the panel affixed to stone wall near the entrance gate. It was the standard format we were used to seeing -- except for the term 'Burial Ground'.



The sky had ceased to leak, but the low clouds were swept over the lead colored panorama by a brisk wind. Steve parked the car off the narrow farm road on a small patch of grass and gravel, and we walked some 50 yards along a rutted, muddy lane (probably used only by farm tractors) leading to the cemetery. A field of some sort of forage grain surrounded the area, and the lane we were on traversed the field. We finally gave up on the rutted lane after a few yards, and wound up wading through the wet, knee-high crop. Steve's open-toed sandals served as good mud scoopers and were no doubt responsible for a brief slipping and sliding balancing act on his part that resulted in the dropping of a 10 franc coin and the lens cap to his camera into the

grass... both miraculously found after a brief search.

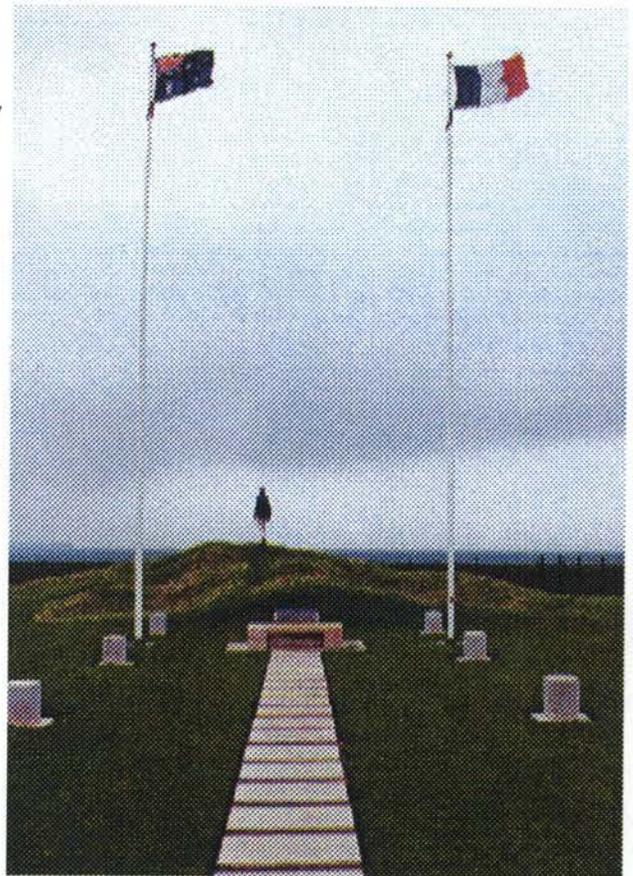
The gateway was a pair of square pillars topped with weathered stone and formed the entrance through the ever-present red brick wall. Trees grew around the periphery to the back and one side, and the gravestones stood in orderly rows behind their screen of flowers. The cemetery was all but square, and the Cross was placed at the back side opposite the entrance. The Stone was off to the right side, in one of the lateral aisles. There were 3,639 burials to include 163 French, 3 German, and 26 Special Memorials.

We learned from the register that A.I.F. stood for Australian Imperial Forces, however, there were only 402 Australians buried there. The initials had caused us some speculation prior to reading that. The cemetery was located about one mile northeast of Flers. Some of the gravestones marked the site of burial for soldiers of the Tank Corps. A rain shower swept across the open field and the cemetery. We were a bit uncomfortable and therefore decided to cut our visit short and head for the car. We slipped, slid, and slogged back to the car and tried to clean our shoes (and sandals) as best we could with handfuls of weeds. The car was a muddy mess, also, outside and now in... added to the crumbs and refuse of the road, the Renault had taken on a rather lived-in, gypsies-on-the-road look - and was only to get worse. We drove away as the rain slacked off, and headed for the main road going south toward Albert.

It was mid-afternoon as we came to the Bapaume-Albert road and turned south. We had a few chunks of baguette, some bottled water, and a Tootsie Pop for desert. Shortly after turning we came to one of the most interesting sites, and not to put too fine a point on it, sights, of our trip - The Windmill, or at least where a large windmill once stood. The site was immediately beside the road, just north of the village of Pozieres, on a ridgeline of the same name. Steve parked the car, and we walked into what could be called a small memorial parc, although there were no definitive boundaries to it. The Australian and French flags flew from very tall flagpoles, and the wind (especially 40 feet up) had the flags 'on the fly' as if they had been wired out straight, although the quite audible popping and snapping of fabric underscored the true cause. Square stepping stones led from the roadside up to a bronze plaque just above ground level and canted in a semi-recumbent position. The plaque depicted the action at the site and in the immediate area. A concrete bunker had been constructed under a large windmill located on this site. It was

one of the German defensive positions along the ridgeline, and a strongpoint, having been fortified with machineguns, offering an excellent field of view (and fire) for observation of the open battlefield over which the British forces had to attack. The 2d Australian Division eventually captured the area in August 1916, after much bitter and costly fighting. The windmill and its strong point and the immediate area was pulverized by artillery fire during the attack. Before us, as we stood there, were large irregular shaped mounds of ruins from the foundation of that windmill, now covered with earth and grassed over giving it a rounded lumpy appearance. We walked about, and climbed up and over the mounds. At one point as we stood near the base of a mound, we spotted a small patch of earth and exposed rock. I probed and dug by hand until I uncovered a tiny section of weathered concrete and stone aggregate (a part of the fortification). I pried loose an egg sized stone to keep as a treasured souvenir. I brought it back and put it under a glass dome, which rests on my desktop beneath the framed War Medal given to me on my birthday. If only it could speak! Hopefully it would not reprimand me for taking it away. If my act was offensive or thoughtless, I apologize to any and all, but I do so much appreciate having that fragment of history on my desk.

This was to be a 'double feature' site, as some had been, for directly across the road from The Windmill was the memorial monument to the British Tank Corps. On 15 September 1916, the first-ever combat action involving an armored tank took place near the village of Flers, some 4 kilometers from where we stood. Although the tanks gave the German defenders a real 'wake-up call', they achieved only limited and qualified success. Of the 42 tanks to start the action, only 25 reached the starting line, and 17 of that number were destroyed, damaged, broken down, or



The site of the windmill - Pozieres Ridge

ditched in the muddy water filled shell craters. Hardly a success, and as I mentioned earlier, it wasn't until 1917 at Cambrai that tanks were used successfully, and effectively, 'en masse' against the German forces.

The monument was a tall white stone obelisk atop a raised (about four feet high) base which was X-shaped. Bronze model tanks (Mark IV's, I think) about three feet in length and not to any apparent scale were mounted atop each of the legs of the X-base. The small parc area was defined by a large heavy linked chain, which looked like a huge bicycle chain, and was actually part of the tanks' drive system. Holding the chain up about three feet above the ground were cannon barrels which had been set, muzzle down, in a concrete base.

The barrels made appropriate posts, as they were the six-pounder guns mounted in the side turrets of the Mark IV - known as a 'male' tank, while the 'female' versions had machineguns mounted in the side turrets. Though interesting enough, it was not an overly impressive monument considering the eventual impact of the tank and Tank Corps in the

later stages (1917-1918) of the war. It was unfortunate, in my opinion, that an actual tank could not have been set aside after the war and placed there as a monument. What with the hatches sealed and preservation measures taken, the tank could have served to interpret the events with much more impact. But perhaps that is the bias of an ol' tanker coming through.

We left the area and drove south into Albert under a clearing sky, the brisk winds we had been experiencing also served to move the clouds right out of the way. Albert seemed to be a prosperous town, with many busy streets lined with shops. Steve parked the car along a street before we reached the center of town. We strolled around for a bit in the immediate area, then



Tank Corps Memorial

decided to get lodging for the night. Steve noticed that the car was parked across the street from a small and modest appearing hotel. It looked very much the 'mom & pop' business, not to be confused with the quaintness of a 'bed and breakfast' - although that did seem to be the fashion for business in that everywhere we stopped it was expected that the room you asked for would include the 'petit dejeuner' (for an additional fee) the next morning. Many an innkeeper seemed somewhat chagrined when informed that 'no thank you, we had our own... and, oh by the way, we'd like to be on the road 'a six heures et demi' (around 0630)! On several occasions, since we had paid in advance the evening before, we left the keys at the desk and let ourselves out, quite secure in the belief that we were the only souls awake. In this case, we looked across the street to a three and a half story flat fronted 'row house' separated from the street only by the narrow sidewalk. A part of the first floor was a big double wide barn door with a rounded top and hinged on one side. It opened inward and was standing open to reveal a small courtyard partially graveled, and having two other cars inside, with an additional one under a small carport belonging to the owners, I guess. We got a room and drove into the courtyard, as we had been told by the owner that the door would be closed for the evening and our car would be safe inside. We dragged our overnight gear from the car and ascended a narrow and winding staircase up to the third floor, actually the 3rd and a half floor, and our room. Although not spacious, and sparsely furnished, it seemed comfortable enough with twin beds, a nightstand between the headboards, a small desk and a free standing wardrobe (armoire). There was a small bathroom with a tub and shower, and the WC was down at the end of the hallway. Our lone semi-gabled window looked out onto the town side, and below to the street where we had been parked. We were not ready to settle down. We wanted to walk around the town a bit and have some supper. Unless you count the kitchen table of the owners who lived on the second floor, our hotel had no dining facility. It was late afternoon and the sun was not shining through, but a brisk wind belied its warmth. We walked downstairs, out onto the sidewalk, and headed for the general direction of 'thataway' - towards 'downtown'. People were hustling to and fro, doing their shopping, banking, and browsing. The street noise and the people noise were sort of welcome after a day of quiet cemeteries and monuments. Hunger was our motivation at this time and the destination was not Portland Stone, but something more appetizing. We perused

the menu board on the outside of a restaurant for an idea of the fare and fee. This was commonplace, and I think, required of an establishment. It was a good idea as it let you see what you could order and the prices without entering. In the smaller restaurants the menus were not all that given to variety. We made some tentative choices and entered the restaurant. It was about 6:30 pm. We were met by a lady who came from a side room that appeared to be a family dining room. When I glanced that way I could see a family, of young and old, sitting at a table and eating a meal.

The lady led us into a tastefully decorated and clean dining room that was not overly large, perhaps a dozen tables. She gave us a menu and departed. We were the only people present, and were a bit puzzled as it was some time before she returned. While it had given us time to retrace the days adventures and recall many of the particulars that piqued the gray matter, a beer would have been a nice counterpoint to the wait. We happen to take note of the fact that she entered the dining room again just as the wall clock chimed 7pm. She politely took our order, brought us a cold Stella Artois and in a very reasonable amount of time served us a delicious meal. After the salad, again with some very fresh and very tasty bread, our entree was broiled trout with some excellent vegetables. The fish, hopefully not named Wanda, still had its head intact, so I used my parsley sprig to cover the eye. I somehow found it rather difficult to enjoy my meal while it stared at me. As we were eating, a well dressed lady came into the dining room with a small dog on a leash. She was seated, then ordered, received her meal, and began to eat. The dog was small, tan and white, with long hair, and it lay there by her chair as still and quiet as a mouse. Only in France, I thought. We finished our meal, paid and left the restaurant. As we walked away we discussed events and decided that we had probably arrived prior to the accustomed dining hour, and rather than lose the business or appear to be rude, or both, the lady simply seated us. Though I didn't see it, the serving time was probably posted on the outside menu. Anyway, we made a point to go to dinner at a later time after that episode. We walked up the street. There were many early evening shoppers and strollers out and about and we mingled with them. Everyone seemed relaxed and enjoying their evening out. A large basilica stood in the center of a shopping area. It looked quite old, but in fact was restored during the years 1927-1929. It was all but destroyed by artillery fire during the fighting in 1916 and 1918. It was

incorrectly described by the British soldiers as a cathedral, or basilica, when in fact it was the Church of Notre Dame-de-Brehiere. I'm with the Brits... basilica was easier.

British forces used it as a dressing (aid) station during their Somme offensive in 1916. High atop the basilica's dome was a golden statue of the Virgin Mary holding the infant Jesus in her arms. It glistened in the setting sun. We could see it when we moved up the street and looked back. The statue is a replica of the original one and was placed on the dome in 1929. The original was destroyed by British artillery in their efforts to prevent the Germans from using the tall spires and tower beneath the dome for observation posts when they captured Albert in March of 1918.

It was around 8:30pm when we reached our hotel and made our way up to the room. We talked over the days activities and freshened up, despite the minuscule size of the bathtub, and turned in. We agreed that the beds felt good, and I was soon on my way to sleep, leaving Steve reading from our 'Somme textbook' we had brought along. All through the trip he claimed I snored, and said that he even resorted to putting tissue in his ears. Of course I denied the former and chose to dispute the latter. Then again, maybe he was correct, but believe me - trust me - *he* snored. So ended the fourth day of our travels.



Golden Virgin atop the Basilica

#### DAY 5 - FRIDAY, 3 JUNE 1994

I greeted this day rather early. About 4am to be exact. I awoke to a dark room, quietly got out of bed, fumbled with the door latch, and found my way down a narrow, very dark hallway to the WC. The beer that had tasted so good at supper was now demanding to be recycled. So be it.

Going back down the hall I used one hand brushing up against the wall as a guide and counted the number of doors until I reached our room. After that I always kept my megalite unpacked and handy beside my bed. I got into the room, over to the bed, and was feeling smug about negotiating my way around in the dark (and being quiet about it) when I rammed my right foot into a bed frame leg. The second toe cracked like a dry stick - it subsequently turned purple and hurt like the devil for the next several days, even forcing a pronounced limp. I stood there a moment in a real world of hurt, stifling the urge to yell an 'expletive deleted'.

About the time that I had come back under the red line of the pain threshold, I heard some muffled engine noises coming up from the street below our window. Curiosity overcame pain, so I hobbled over to the window (the hotel had a mansard style roof), opened it and leaned out onto the window ledge on my elbows and forearms to look down into the street. A very light rain, more like a mist, was falling and the narrow street wet below was dimly lit by a distant street light. I could see a convoy of WW II US Army vehicles (1/4 ton and 2 1/2 ton trucks, command cars) all fully restored and equipped, moving through the town at about 15 mph, headed south. Despite the drizzle, the vehicles had no side curtains in place and I could just make out the US uniforms of a few drivers. They were driving with their cat-eye (blackout) lights... I don't know why they were doing that. Knowing what events were to take place in just a few days, I figured that the men and vehicles were on their way to Normandy and the beaches for the re-enactment activities on the 50th anniversary of D-Day. I stood there thinking what a novel visual experience to be able to witness this almost dream-like (if not for the throbbing toe to remind me of how awake I really was) micro time warp.

Steve was still sleeping soundly and before I could decide to wake him to share the bizarre moment, the convoy of about 15 vehicles was gone from sight and the engine noises were fading away. As I was about to turn from the window I noticed in the distance (several blocks) over the roof tops, the Golden Virgin statue atop the basilica was bathed in a beam of light that was focused on it. There in the darkness, the golden statue reflected the light and radiated like a giant star, almost as if it were on fire. It was truly a magnificent sight.

I was so engrossed in all I had seen that I had not noticed that my pajama top was damp from the misting rain and also realized that my toe would be giving me some trouble after several more

cemeteries worth of walking.

I left the window slightly ajar to get the cool fresh air, slid under the covers, thought about how great all of this was, and fell back asleep thanking Stella Artois. But for the beer, I might have missed all of that early morning activity... though I could have done without the toe bashing. I popped wide awake at 6am, climbed out of bed and pushed open the window to look out at a beautiful blue sky and the rising sun. Standing there in the very cool morning air, I greeted day five again. I awakened Steve, but from the pillow-muffled grumble I heard, I think that he wanted more sleep, but he got up anyway. We dressed as we ate our usual juice/fruit/pastry breakfast. We always had hot water in our rooms and shaving, except for my hand-held razor blades, was not a problem. We grabbed our bags and headed downstairs. On the second level we passed a small kitchen and noticed through the open door, several people were sitting around a table. The room looked smoke-filled and I was glad not to be a part of that. One of the people was the manager (owner) who followed us downstairs where we chatted briefly as we paid the bill and looked at a few war artifacts and relics that he had in a small glass case in his 'office'. We went outside into the courtyard, loaded our gear and got out fresh bottles of water. Steve jockeyed the car around as the man opened the 'barn door' for us. We pulled out onto the street bidding him 'adieu' as we turned north towards Bapaume.

We did a bit of deliberate backtracking here, and a short time later we came to the Pozieres British Cemetery. Steve parked the car on a paved apron in front of the entranceway, and we climbed out of the car and into a stiff wind, and though the sun was shining bright, it was very cool - could even say cold- in the upper 30's.

We had on our jackets and caps, and they felt good, could even been heavier maybe.

Thankfully, it warmed up as the day went on. The cemetery was a large one with some 2,756 burials to include 690 Australians and one German. The Aussies engaged in heavy fighting in this area. The village of Pozieres, and The Windmill, were a short distance up the road.

The building at the entranceway was large, rectangular - elongated and parallel to the road. A tall archway led through the structure to the cemetery. There was an entrance gate of wrought iron bars and stone columns which stretched across the front of the building and down either side along the tall front wall. This was all constructed of a greying white stone. I believe

Steve signed the register and we walked onto the cemetery grounds. The entire plot was enclosed by a high wall which was made of the same masonry material as the entrance edifice, and the wall comprised a memorial to the missing.



Entrance gate to the Pozieres British Cemetery

To the inside of the wall there was a columned walkway all the way down the sides and back. On the wall were inscribed the names of the 14,690 men who were missing - with no known grave - who fell in the Battle of the Somme area in 1916 and 1918. Tall evergreen type trees bordered a center aisle leading from the entrance across the cemetery to the Cross. There were not many small shrubs present, but the flowers were there in profusion.

The early morning sunlight was just beginning to clear the east wall as we walked along the soft grassy pathways among the gravestones. We hugged our jackets closer and turned up the collars against the cold wind - this was June? Strange, but I always had this feeling as I stood and read the names and units on the gravestones that I should know these men lying beneath the grass and flowers... like I was a survivor returning to visit a comrade (No, I'm not Shirley McLaine - a day dreamer or romantic maybe). The horrors that put those men to rest in those cemeteries I would not want to share in nor experience, even in another life. Maybe I have read too many histories about the war. Maybe not.

We returned to the car and drove north, making a brief stop at the Tank Corps Memorial for a few snapshots, this time in the sunlight, and moved on. We passed through Bapaume without

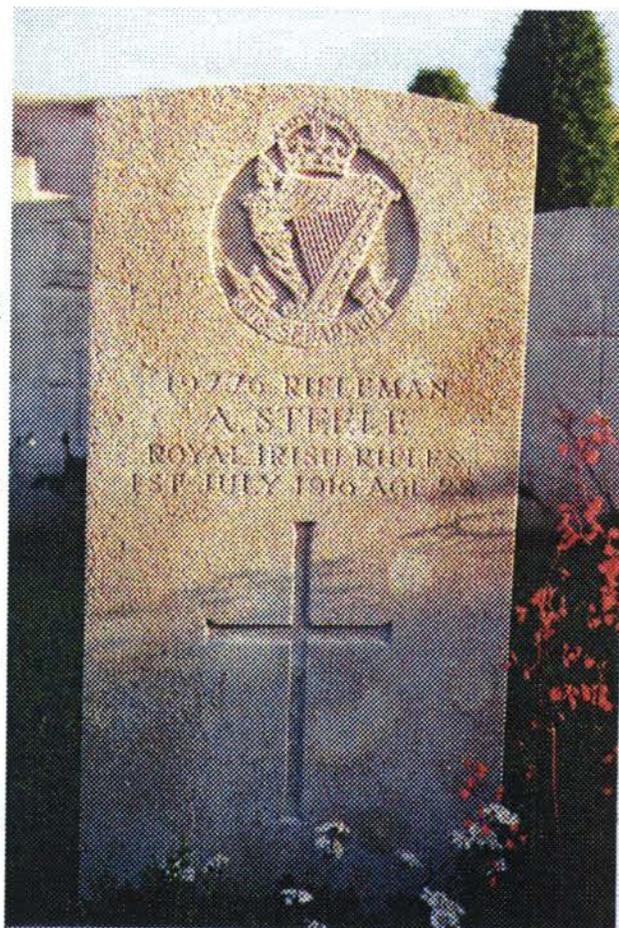
seeing a soul stirring about - just a few cars. Our plan (itinerary) was to start at the left flank, and generally traverse the length of the front lines of the battle as they were located on 1 July 1916 and the days that followed.

It seemed like a sound and logical plan, but the road systems and directions didn't exactly cooperate. We came up on several cemeteries located along the narrow farm road on which we were traveling, as we headed towards Foncquevillers - the village that marked the far left of the line. So rather than pass them by and then back track, we stopped as we came to them.

The first of a series of cemeteries we visited was Rossignol Wood Cemetery just north of Puisieux on the road to Gommecourt. It was located right

alongside the roadway. A low wall of fieldstone marked the boundaries. There were no large trees, but the ever-present flowers were bright with color in the sunlight. The Cross stood at one end of the small rectangular plot. There were only 41 British burials, but strangely enough, there were 70 German burials in a mass grave site.

We moved on and came to the Gommecourt Wood New Cemetery. This one was also located alongside the road which led into the village of Gommecourt. A wall constructed of multi-hued fieldstone with a white stone trim defined the periphery of the cemetery. The Cross of Sacrifice was sited at the front of the center aisle that was laid out from the entrance to the back wall. The Stone of Remembrance was located in the middle of the aisle, some 30 feet away from the Cross. This was the first time that I saw these two memorials in such close proximity to each other in a cemetery. There were small trees along the wall and the flower beds were ablaze with color in the bright sunlight. Two flat-topped square structures, about 30 feet apart, that were constructed of fieldstone to match the wall, flanked the Cross. One of these provided the



Gravesite of Rifleman Steele

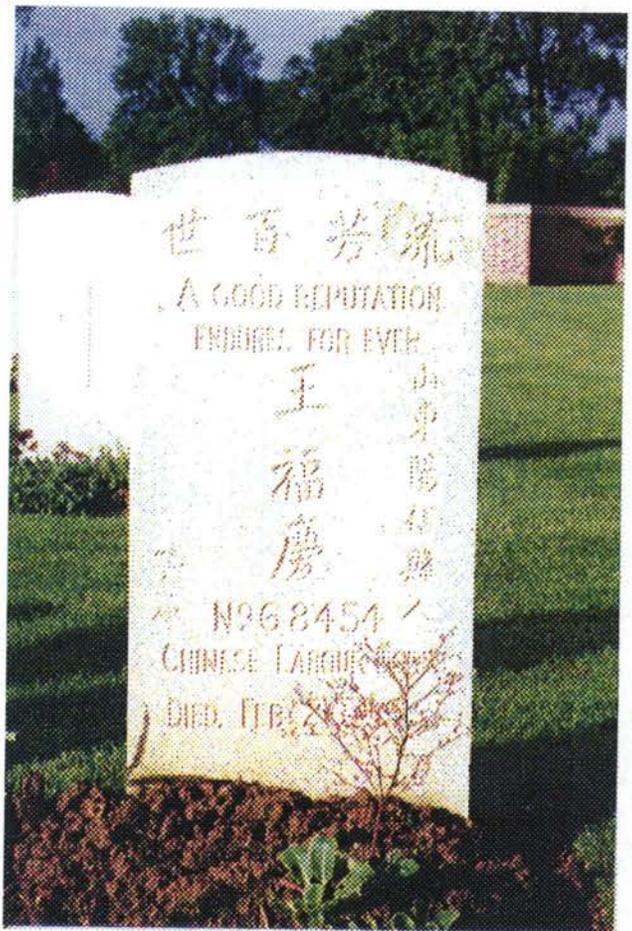
entranceway into the cemetery, the other contained stone benches, for rest and meditation I guess. There were 739 burials to include 1 Australian. The cemetery was established after the war from nine small battlefield cemeteries which were in the area. The cemetery was located on an old German trench line. As we walked to the car, a rooster could be heard crowing in the distance. The cemetery was in a cultivated field and farm houses were not too far away. We had heard a rooster crowing when we were at the Irish House Cemetery also... I guess we were in farm country for sure.

We left the cemetery, but had hardly settled into our seats before we came to the Gommecourt British Cemetery No.2 located south of the village of Gommecourt near the road to Bucouy. Steve parked just off the road and we walked to the entranceway which was two large square Portland stone blocks with the cemetery name inscribed on them. A wide grassy path led from the two 'uprights' down between two rows of dense dark green hedges to a second entranceway. This one had a wrought iron gate hung between two white square stone pillars, and beyond this gate was the cemetery. We signed the register. It was a large plot with 1,365 burials to include one lone French soldier. The entire cemetery was exceptionally well groomed, even by the standards we had seen. The flower beds here seemed to be pure masses of color. Large leafy trees were growing randomly along the walls. The Cross was at the end of the center aisle, and the Stone was located near the left wall on one of the lateral aisles. Gommecourt village and the surrounding wooded area were German strongholds and offered stiff resistance to the attacking British troops during the initial assault on 1 July. We noticed a great number of July 1916 dates on the gravestones. There were many with the date 1918 as well, and among these were numerous Australian and New Zealand burials. Despite the bright sun, the wind still had a chill to it as we drove into the small farm village of Foncquevillers. Keying on a CWGC green and white directional sign, we came to the cemetery at the edge of the village which was quite small. It was sited along a muddy shouldered, narrow road that spurred off from a road from the village, and led out into cultivated fields, and one had the impression that the pavement ended not too far over the small rise ahead. Steve usually parked right at the entrance ways and since there was seldom, if ever, anyone else visiting, it made it convenient. We got out of the car and immediately were struck by the 'difference' of this cemetery. For the first time we were looking

at a cemetery that had a somewhat, but definite substandard appearance. Not neglect, per se, but it seemed to lack having had the TLC that was quite evident in the cemeteries prior to this one. We found no register or burial plot locator at the entranceway - at one or two some of the pages may have been missing, and at one the entire contents, but at least the cover had been left. Several large trees at the very front of the cemetery had not leafed out and they looked barren and 'wintery'. The red brick wall was quite weathered and the stone trim at the gateway and top of the wall was discolored with a fungus, as were quite a few of the gravestones, stained and dark. The engraved stone plaque bearing the name of the cemetery (the same as of the village) had a deep crack traversing it. There did not seem to be an abundance of flowers or shrubs. The Cross was on the back side, but not down a center aisle. The Stone was off on a side aisle. This cemetery was begun by the French and taken over by the British in 1915, and in 1915-1916 it was just behind the British front line, thus being a battlefield cemetery with little chance for refinement. That particular spirit seemed to have lingered over into the present caretaking.

Located here was the grave of Captain J.L. Green, Medical Corps officer who was awarded the Victoria Cross for bravery on 1 July 1916. His grave was off to one side - as one of the random battlefield burials.

Many of the burials were men of the 46th Division who attacked in this area on 1 July. They were repulsed by the Germans with heavy losses, and their remains were not recovered from no man's land and the German barbed wire until almost a year later. Many of the graves were inscribed 'Unknown' obviously. Steve noted, with surprise and confusion, that there were two gravestones marked with Chinese characters, with sentiment inscriptions and "Chinese Laborers" in English. As we visited more cemeteries we found that it was not uncommon to see one or two of these graves.



After the trip, research reading revealed that these men were brought to France to serve as laborers, and were obtained on contract by the British government from Chinese war lords. They were used in the moving of supplies and rebuilding of roads, bridges, and railways. All of which subjected them to long range artillery fire. They were also used extensively to help clear the battlefield of war debris and to salvage equipment. A Chinese cemetery is located at Noyelles-sur-Mer, on the channel coast, that contains 838 burials from the Labor Corps. In the British military cemeteries the Chinese gravestones were not located in any alignment with the graves of soldiers.

After taking some pictures and browsing, we returned to the car and departed, driving southeast through the village of Hebuterne. It was like many of the other small rural French farm villages that we saw as we moved about the countryside. In the rain and under cloudy skies, the houses lining the narrow winding streets appeared drab. Most were a dingy and dull ocher color, shuttered usually, and few people were ever seen out and about. On sunny days it was not much different except that we would see a few people, mostly men, who were probably farmers tending to their chores, or on the way to their fields. Cars were seldom seen parked along the streets. If they existed they were parked in courtyards, as we had done at the hotel in Albert, or in barn complexes - where many buildings, a barn and often the house were connected by a tall brick wall. I remarked many times to Steve - "Where are the people?" and he would say "Who lives in these houses...and what do they do?" Deserted and lonely were the words that always came to my mind. I knew that behind those dull colored walls and shuttered windows people carried out their routines of living, and in the larger towns and cities there was more activity of traffic and people conducting business; but in rural France, generously dotted with small villages and burgs, it was easy to wonder if many were even populated.

I recall one scene that I thought particularly novel, and seemed to underscore the theme of the small village life. We were rolling on a back road under sunny skies and approaching a few houses clustered by the road. There just in front of one of the houses was a small, grey Citroen panel truck, and a young man was standing at the open rear doors of the vehicle. He was cutting a large loaf of bread in half and handing one part to an elderly lady dressed in a black dress, apron, and sweater. I had only a quick glance into the rear of the vehicle, but I clearly saw more

loaves of bread. The lady was obviously getting her minimum daily requirement, you might say, from a sort of 'traveling boulangerie'. Sort of a throw back to the mobile hucksters in their dilapidated pick-up trucks who used to come by our house when I was a kid with their sales of fruit and fresh vegetables. There in the rural area, few if any shops existed in the very small villages, therefore one either went to a larger village to shop, into a nearby city, or as we saw in this case, the shop came to them.

Shortly we came to the Serre Road Cemetery No.1, located about one kilometer west of the village of Serre on the road to Mailly-Maillet. Steve parked and we entered the cemetery through a gate hung between squared red brick posts. It was a large one with 2,434 burials of British, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, and South African soldiers. It was sited on a gently sloping hillside, and there was a stair-stepped red brick wall on both flanks. The cross was located in the middle of the cemetery on the center aisle; the Stone was off to the left of the Cross on a side aisle. As was the pattern always, the grass, flowers, and the decorative shrubs presented a showplace. A large number of the burials were from the 16th and 18th Battalions of the Prince of Wales Own West Yorkshire Regiment. Their attack on Serre village on 1 July was a disaster. The men of three volunteer battalions were from the city of Bradford, and were known as the Bradford Pals, in keeping with the British army's allowing for unofficial designations, e.g. Leeds Pals, Grimsley Chums, Glasgow Boys, etc. Sounded like intra-city football, or soccer league teams. The 16th Bn suffered casualties of 22 officers and 493 NCO's and other ranks, which equated to about 70% of their effective present for duty strength, all within the first 20 minutes from the time that they went 'over the top'. Many of the dead and wounded fell immediately in front of, or back into, their trenches, as the German machinegunners swept the parapets with their Spandaus and Maxims as the 'Pals' were climbing out to begin the attack. We signed the register and walked to the car.

We drove only a short distance before we came to the Serre Road Cemetery No.2. The site of this cemetery was on an old German redoubt with initial burials made July - November 1916. After the armistice it was enlarged by concentrating isolated graves and relocating burials from small existing cemeteries. There were 3,365 burials, to include three German soldiers. The Cross was butted up to the front wall and was flanked by two small entranceway buildings. Both

buildings and the peripheral walls were red brick with white stone trim. The Stone was sort of centrally located inside the front wall right beside the road, and large leafy trees were growing close in all around the side and back walls. There were no large shrubs inside the walls, but as always, the flowers provided the color. We signed the register and departed.

The wind continued to blow, which made it seem colder than it was. The clouds were beginning to build up and sweep across the blue sky that we awoke to earlier. It was 8:30am.

Our next stop was the Newfoundland Memorial Parc, a bit northwest of the village of Beaumont-Hamel. The following brief description of a tragic event serves to relate the reason for the Parc being established. Beaumont Hamel was one of the initial objectives of the 29th Division on 1 July 1916. Within the general boundaries of the Parc as it is presently preserved, the 2/South Wales Borderers and the 1/Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers as units of the 87th Brigade, 29th Division, were the first wave of assault troops. The 1/Essex and the 1/Newfoundland were assigned to the 88th Brigade, 29th Division, and were in support trenches as a reserve to be committed to exploit the expected breakthrough and seize Beaumont Hamel. At 0730 hours, 1 July 1916 the Somme Offensive began. When the first waves of attacking troops went 'over the top' they were practically stopped in their tracks. Many were killed as they made their way through the gaps in their own barbed wire. The German machine guns cut them down and drove the survivors back into the front line trench. Almost two hours later, and seemingly out of touch with the tragic reality, the Brigadier at brigade HQ ordered the 1/Newfoundland and the 1/Essex into the attack... to reenforce a failure, if you will, which is an absolute no-no in military tactics. With the mind set of 'ours not to reason why...' the Newfoundlanders climbed out of the support trenches, ignored the congested communication trenches, and charged over open ground, then scrambled over the front line trench which was filled with the dead, dying, and survivors of the initial assault battalions, and pressed their attack into No-Man's Land. Their elan and bravery were rewarded with death. The German machine gunners were waiting and once more took a deadly toll. The earlier slaughter had an even more disastrous encore. Unbelievable determination carried a pitiful few all the way to the German barbed wire (about 400 meters) before they too were shot down. The Newfoundland Battalion ceased to exist as a fighting unit in less than 40 minutes after leaving their trenches. Ironically, maybe divinely, the attack by the

1/Essex was called off. They had been unable to extract themselves from the confusion and congestion in the communication trenches and could not reach the front line (assault) trench. Beaumont Hamel would not fall that day... nor the next, nor the next. It was finally taken on 13 November by units of the 51st (Gordon Highlanders) Division. That action has been called the last battle of the Somme Offensive. In the final analysis, 710 of 790 of the attacking Newfoundlanders became casualties (272 killed); every officer in the assault was killed or wounded except the commander and the adjutant. July 1st remains a day of commemoration and mourning in Newfoundland.

The Newfoundland government purchased some 40 acres of ground from the French government and established the parc as a memorial to the Newfoundlanders who were killed there in that absolute slaughter on 1 July 1916. As a note, the land in France on which other countries have established cemeteries and memorials was donated to that country by the French government as a gesture of good will and to honor the dead.

This was an extremely interesting site that covered acres of open ground and woodlands. Steve parked at the entrance area and we walked along a tree lined path past an obelisk shaped stone memorial to the 29th Division, and out into a very large open field bordered in the distance by trees. Like Vimy Ridge Parc, the ground looked like a pock-marked, grassed over moonscape.

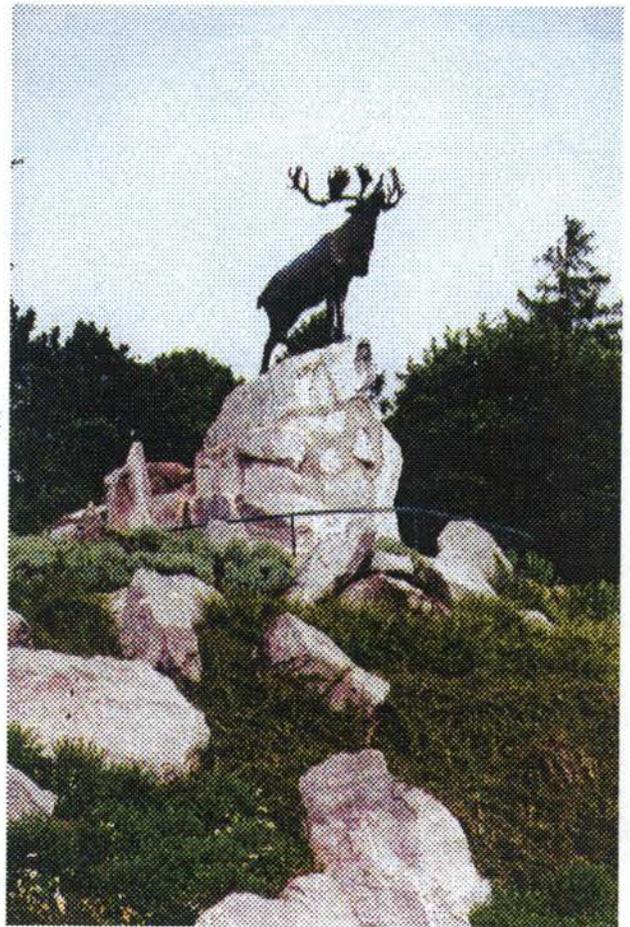


The battlefield landscape and the caretaker's residence

The trench lines, remnants of both German and Commonwealth, and hundreds of shell holes and craters, though more shallow from erosion over the years than their original forms, were preserved and offered an interesting visual spectacle.

It had retained enough of the 'lay of the land' to offer some interesting mental gymnastics as well, just in trying to visualize the pure hell of that environment at the time those craters were being formed. A great number of them overlapped, indicating the density of the artillery shells impacting in the area. For many, many years, the original barbed wire was left strung on the pickets along the trench lines, but sheep, allowed to graze the area from nearby farms (I'm sure it was easier than trying to mow that terrain) would entangle themselves in the wire. The rusted wire and pickets were finally removed to preclude endangering the animals, and tourists too, perhaps. Since there were no defined pathways, one could wander at will through the battlefield, which we did, and though somewhat damp and muddy in places, we sampled ground zero at the bottom of St. John's Road Trench, trying to peer up over the crest, wondering what the scene would be like complete with duckboard and wattle, firesteps and dugouts.

A focal point of the parc was a large bronze statue of a caribou stag, standing in a defiant pose atop a tall earth and stone cairn. The caribou was the cap badge of the Newfoundland Regiment. The caribou statue (the work of the English sculptor Basil Gotto) located here commemorates the 1st Newfoundland Battalion, and is one of five placed in various locations on the "western front" where the Newfoundland Regiment fought in major actions. The site we had briefly visited the previous day near Gaudecourt was one of these. A profusion of large evergreen shrubs grew on the sides and between the stones of the cairn and along the spiraling walkway that wound up from ground level to



The defiant caribou

the base of the stag. Standing on top of the cairn one can get a panoramic view of the churned up battlefield. Bronze panels on the base of the cairn contained the names of 800 Newfoundlanders who died in the Great War but who have no known grave.

We left the statue area and walked along the narrow unmarked pathways around the edge of craters, stopping at times to look more closely at something that caught our eye. Steve spied a partially buried rusted steel spiral rod about two feet long used to hold strings of barbed wire, a bit muddy, but he took it along as we continued our tour of the Parc. There were no other visitors, and the only people we saw were a couple of Frenchmen cutting some high grass off in the distance. I doubt that they would have cared about his 'treasure', but I could see Steve puzzling out how to spirit it away, down the pants leg maybe - and then having to worry later about packing it for the plane!

We entered into a wooded area that contained the Hawthorne Ridge Cemetery No.2 - still within the boundaries of the parc. There were 214 burials, and it was established by the British V Corps after the Somme offensive. The shape of the cemetery was an elongated rectangle with a low fieldstone wall on three sides and a red brick border about 12 inches high ran along the front of the cemetery. Tall trees surrounded the entire area, and although the ground was shaded, it was carpeted with grass. The Cross was abutted against the back wall and centered. The flowers and trimmed grass within the cemetery were exemplary. We noticed a different look to this cemetery in that the gravestones were all touching, side-to-side, in two long rows. The cemetery was established to bury a large number of dead at one time and it consisted of two long trenches, and the dead were placed, or packed, in as closely as possible for burial. This accounted for the gravestone configuration. When more than one name appeared on the same gravestone, and the men were from different units, both their regiment's crests were inscribed on the gravestone. A good golf wedge-shot away was another cemetery that was also quite unique in form and configuration from the standard look we had come to recognize. It was the Hunter Cemetery, with 46 grave sites for men of the 51st Highland Division. There was a circular fieldstone wall surrounding the small plot. The gate was an opening between two large square, not tall, limestone-like pillars. The Cross was emplaced on a tiered base in the center of the circular enclosure, which was itself a raised circle of earth. The gravestones were abutted side-to-side,

facing outward, and the backside flush against that base on which the Cross stood. The flowers grew in a continuous curving circular bed in front of the gravestones. The initial grave for the 46 men had been in a very large artillery shell crater, accounting for the circular configuration.



The Hunter Cemetery

We walked away from the cemetery along a wide grassy mall that led under a canopy of tall leafy trees and up to a large monument. On the edge of the tree line stood a truncated pyramid shaped pedestal constructed of rough-cut, textured granite building-block type stones. It stood about 20 feet high. Atop the pedestal was a larger-than-life bronze statue of a Scottish soldier attired in battle dress kit (kilts, battle jacket, balmoral, heavy calf-length socks, and brogan style shoes). He stood posed roughly at-ease, holding his SMLE No1 Mk III, cal .303 rifle in front of him, butt-stock down, at 'ground arms'. The 10 foot tall bronze figure was modeled after CSM Bob Rowen, DCM, MBE, CofG (Belgium), who was the Glasgow Highlander 'B' Company Command Sergeant-Major at the battle for High Wood in July 1916. The detail of the figure was excellent, quite like the Aussie memorial statue that we saw at Mont St Quentin.

A bronze plaque mounted on the massive base was cast with a raised inscription, in 'auld' Gaelic - "La a Bhlair's math na Cairdean" - which translates to "Friends are good on the day of battle". The statue memorialized the 51st (Highland) Division that captured nearby Beaumont-Hamel, November 1916. We moved away from the monument and walked along pathways on the crater

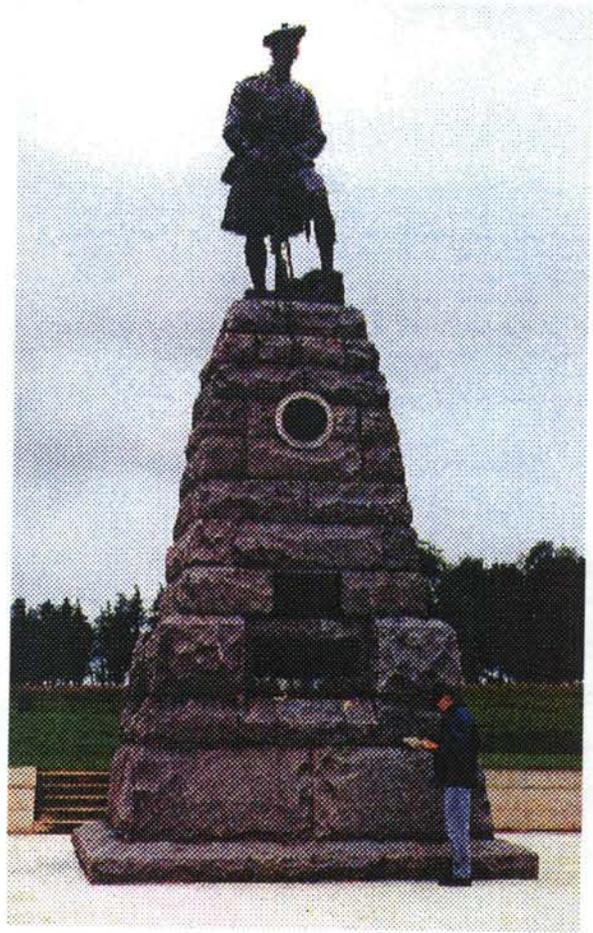
rims towards another cemetery. A small flock of sheep was grazing among the grassed over craters, but I saw no shepherd nor dog herding them.

We passed by a crater that was not completely grassed over and had bare earth showing, with what looked like debris piled in the bottom and partially buried. It looked interesting, so we scrambled down into the crater and began to poke and dig around.

Our reward was several strands of barbed wire - old, rusty, and a bit fragile, but collectible nonetheless.

We broke off several short pieces and pocketed them for mementos from the Parc. Steve was still carrying the picket, but tossed it down in lieu of the wire, which was a more than adequate substitute, not to mention much less heavy! Limited in what we could take with us, we walked away from the crater with our wire. The sky was turning leaden again, and there was a strong breeze, though no rain, and it seemed that it was beginning to warm up just a bit.

At the bottom of a rather steeply sloping hillside, along a woodline, was the Y - Ravine Cemetery, named after the topography of that area. The ravine, y-shaped, was the scene of bitter fighting by units of the 29th Division. A memorial to their men was near the entranceway to the Parc. There were 316 burials plus 61 Special Memorials. Approximately 50 per cent of the burials were unknowns/unidentified. One of the known burials there was CSM J. Fairbrass, 2d South Wales Borderers, killed in action on 1 July 1916. He was one of six brothers who served in the army, three of whom were killed in action. A low fieldstone wall topped with white stone trim defined the cemetery. The Cross stood at one end of the rectangular plot facing across the rows of gravestones, and there was no entrance structure, just a gateway. Trees grew all around the area and they were being whipped about by



51st Highland Division Memorial

the wind as we walked among the gravestones. The flowers were in colorful bloom, although I did notice that they were not as thickly planted there as they had been in other cemeteries. We left the Y- ravine area, walked past a flock of sheep, across the cratered field, past the caribou monument, through the evergreen trees at the entrance, and arrived back at the car. We drove away under a grey sky, and a light rain began to fall.

The next site on our itinerary was the Ulster Tower. We drove through the villages of Auchonvillers and Hamel, and the terrain here was hilly. Wooded areas, copses, covered large portions of the landscape. We crossed the Ancre River, not very wide, at the village of St Pierre Divion and drove up out of a narrow valley on a winding road. Near the village of Thiepval atop a hill along the Thiepval Ridge we came to the Ulster Tower. Steve parked the car by a fieldstone entrance gate. The Tower was located at the end of a graveled walkway, about a hundred yards from the gate. It was a great grey stone structure, and had the appearance of a small castle. Actually it was an exact replica of Helen's Tower at Clondeboyne, near Belfast, Ireland. It was built by the people of Belfast on land donated by the French, as a memorial to the men of the 36th (Ulster) Division who were killed on 1 July and subsequent days. The Thiepval village, ridge, plateau, and chateau, were all German fortified strongholds, and none of these fell to the attacking Ulsters on that day. Weeks passed before the Thiepval village and surrounding area was captured on 27 September, 1916 by troops of the 18th Division, 89 days after the initial assault.

We contacted the caretaker, whose office and living quarters were there in the tower, and requested permission, which he gave, to go up into the tower. I can remember seeing a large shepherd dog through his opened office door. We climbed up a long flight of steep, narrow winding stairs to the top of the tower and walked outside. There was a great view of the countryside, the hilltop location gave a commanding view of the surrounding area. The German forces had used the high ground to good advantage for observation, and were able to direct artillery and long range machinegun fire onto the attacking Ulsters.

From atop the Tower we could see a cemetery located out in a huge cultivated field south of the Tower. It was the Mill Road Cemetery. It was large, with 1,298 burials, almost square in shape. There was a red brick wall and an entrance structure of red brick and white stone. A single

archway in the structure led into the cemetery.

There were no trees within the walls and the Cross was at the far end of a central pathway, opposite the entrance. The Stone was located in that aisle also.

The cemetery could be reached by walking through a field on a long pathway which was muddy from the recent rains, so we didn't even try it. The wind was whipping around us as we stood there at the parapets, and a rain shower swept across the area so we sought shelter inside the Tower. We went down the stairs and started outside when we caught sight of a room by the staircase. It had escaped notice when we entered in our eagerness to get to the top of the Tower, I guess. It was small and contained several oil paintings depicting battle scenes of the fighting for Thiepval ridge. There were also framed



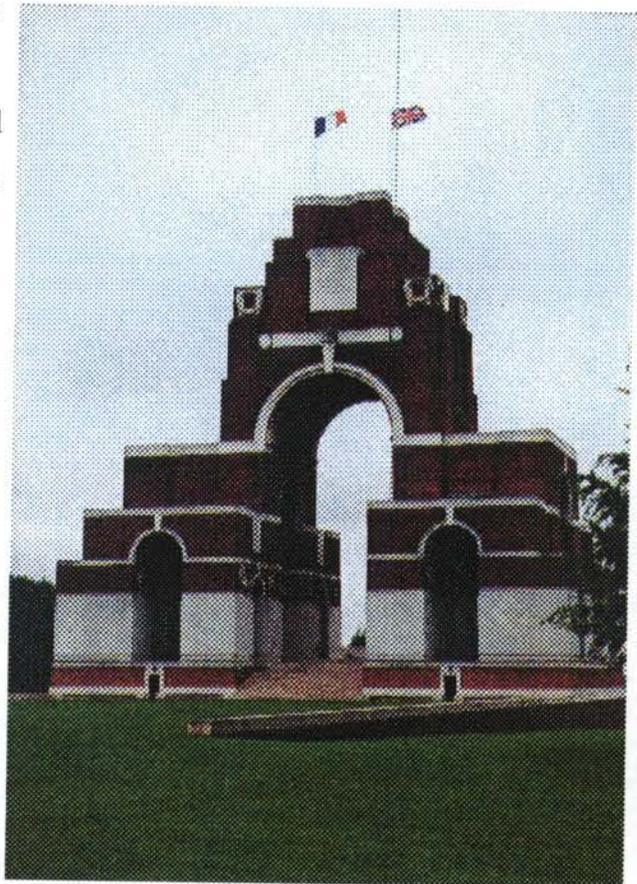
The Ulster Tower

plaques on the walls dedicated to the Ulsters. We walked back to the car and drove away. There had been no other visitors at the Tower while we were there.

On the road leading to Authvillers, located right adjacent to the road, we came to the Connaught Cemetery. If you looked back you could see the Tower across the treeline. It was an elongated rectangle with a low red brick wall surrounding it. No trees were within the walls, but a large wooded area was immediately behind the plot. The area was not level, and the cemetery sloped away from the road. This site was a no-man's-land in front of the Ulster trenches. There were 1,278 burials with a large number being Ulster troops. The Cross was centrally located along the back wall, facing the roadway, and the Stone was off to the right side at the end of an aisle. There were no shrubs but flowers bloomed in front of the gravestones per usual. Strange maybe, but I did not have a warm or comfortable feeling about the cemetery. In the jargon of a realtor, it did not have much in the way of 'curb appeal'. This is not meant to take anything away from

the honor and deeds of the men who were buried there, it seemed a shame for them, to be in a so seemingly desolate place. The rational mind won't entertain the aspect of some metaphysical connection to the ground itself, and the desolation of the "land between the wires".

We continued on the road to Authvillers, and shortly could see in the distance on the horizon above the tree tops, the upper portion of the Thiepval Memorial. After winding around hills on a narrow road, we arrived at the memorial site. Steve parked the car in the area by the entrance which was a low curving red brick wall with a wide open entranceway that led onto a huge grassy area. The area around the entrance had many large leafy trees. We got out of the car, moved through the gate and walked to the memorial over the expansive and manicured lawn, and such a memorial deserved such a lawn. The structure was massive. Like the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, you can't believe it's as big as it is until you are standing there in front of it. The Thiepval Memorial was the largest memorial structure built by the War Graves Commission. Overall it was 150 feet high and the entire structure sat on a concrete base of almost 17,000 square feet. Originally, the surface of the white stone panels appeared the names and units of over 73,077 soldiers who died in the Battle of the Somme, 1916, and had no known grave. Since the Memorial was erected in 1932, 1,002 bodies or graves have been found, but unless the remains were identified, no names were removed from the panels. There were also names of soldiers inscribed here who were missing in action in 1915 when the British took over the Somme area from the French, plus there were names from the actions during the German 1918 spring offensive, and the British counter-offensive. The Northumberland Fusiliers with 2,391 names and the

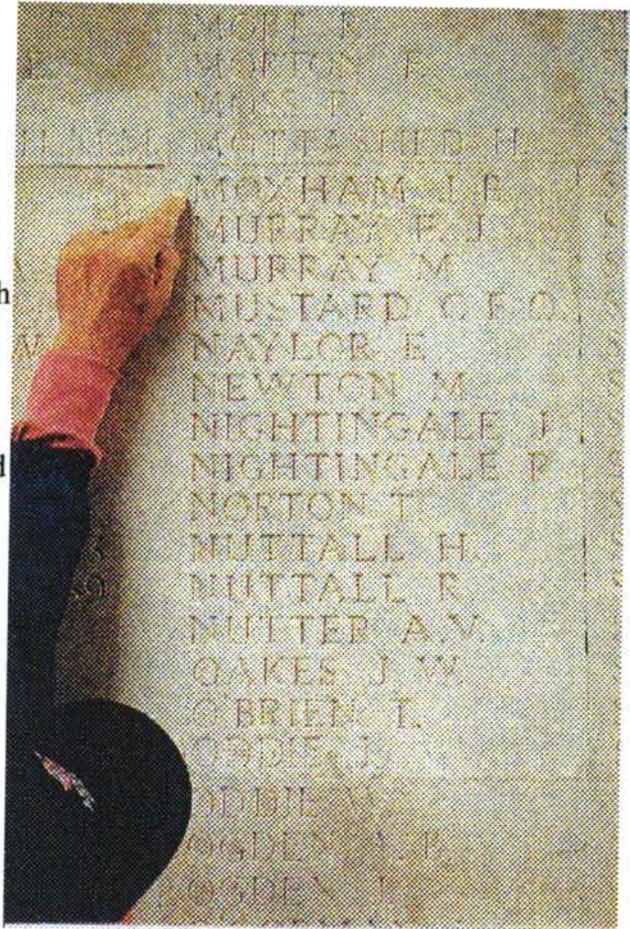


The Thiepval Memorial

Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment) with 2,502 names were the most represented units. The Memorial was situated on high ground that was the site of the ruins of the Thiepval Chateau before its destruction by artillery fire. Close by was the village of Thiepval, which was also totally obliterated during the months of fighting. After the war the French government considered erasing it from its list of municipalities, much the same as was done with several small villages around Verdun, which were so pulverized that there was absolutely no trace of them as villages. However, with financial aid of

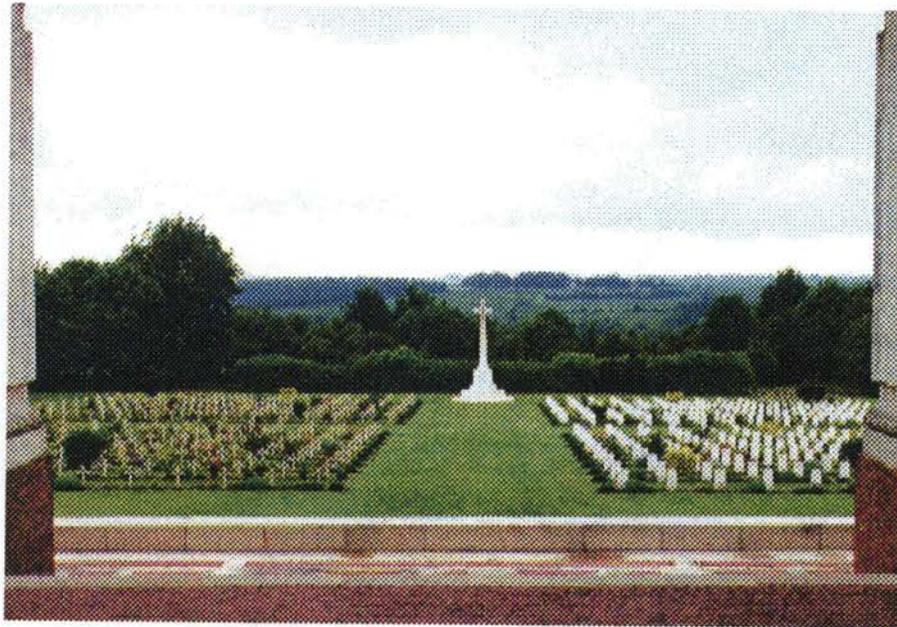
'sister' cities in Great Britain, the surviving populous returned and rebuilt their village.

As Steve and I stood there before that massive edifice, it looked almost foreboding under a misty, rainy lead grey sky, and a cold wind whipped through the cavernous archways. There was a Stone of Remembrance located in the spacious center area under the huge center arch and it was centrally placed between the inner piers. We walked around every one of the 16 piers looking at and reading many of the thousands upon thousands of names inscribed there. The panels were so tall that even by standing back and craning our necks to the point of discomfort, we couldn't read the uppermost names. There were over 1,100 names on each of the 64 paneled areas. What we did find were the following



names which have the same genealogical interest we discovered at Anneux : J.B. Moxham, Loyal Northumberland Lancers; G. Moxon, 2d Royal Fusiliers; and G.F. Moxon, Rifle Brigade. In front, or rear - I did not determine which - of the Memorial was a cemetery sited in a grassy plot, enclosed on three sides by leafy trees and a thick, tall hedge. It was below the level of the memorial structure, and as I stood in the center archway, I could look down to the cemetery. It was an Anglo-French military cemetery, probably as a gesture of unity of effort in the war.

There were 300 French soldiers, their graves marked with crosses, and 300 British soldiers, their graves marked with gravestones. They were buried in four sections - two French plots on the left and two British plots on the right. Actually there were 285 Brits, 10 Aussies, 4 Canadians, and 1 New Zealander to form a Commonwealth representation. Flowers and small shrubs grew along the Commonwealth gravestones, and at the insistence of the CWGC probably, flowers grew uncharacteristically among the crosses of the French graves. Most of the soldiers buried



The Thiepval Memorial Cemetery

there were unidentified, the majority were found and taken from the Somme battlefields between December 1931 and March 1932.

The Memorial was dedicated by the Prince of Wales on 1 August 1932. We were there for some time, but we had been the only visitors. We walked back across the rain soaked grassy lawn and sat in the car for a moment to have a drink of Evian. I looked back at that giant of a structure. It was extremely impressive.

Then I noticed for the first time, or gave it notice now, that the French and British national flags were flying from separate staffs atop the highest part of the Memorial. The oddity here being that the CWGC's policy is that national flags are not displayed at their cemeteries or memorials. Protocol, politics, diplomatic relations, etc. being areas which could cause a problem if flags were flown. Also the caring for, raising and lowering, and the replacement costs, considering

the number that would be required alone, all serve to reinforce the policy not to fly flags.

Having said all that, the exception to the policy is the Thiepval Memorial, where the Tri-color and Union Jack display their colors to the honor of the missing and dead. In my opinion, a very fitting and very appropriate exception to the rule. Not that any thing can achieve a balance for the ultimate cost and waste of life, nor any memorial tribute fully interpret the event, but this seemed a place befitting for such a sacrifice.

We fastened our seatbelts (we always did), checked our maps, brushed away the crumbs from having eaten the last few bites of a baguette leftover, and departed.

As we rode through the countryside on narrow paved back roads, I couldn't help but think about those thousands of names we had seen at the Memorial. Each one represented a human being, some mother's son, who vanished in a blinding flash of an exploding artillery shell or blown to nothingness when a mine exploded; maybe he was wounded and sank into the mud and slime of an old crater, possibly buried in a collapsed trench or dugout, never to be seen again - only grief for the family left behind with no remains to bury, no grave site to visit - unknown but to God. A light rain fell as we rode in search of the Lonsdale Cemetery, and find it we did, sited along a winding hilly farm road just off the main road between Authvillers and Ovillers. Steve pulled off the road as best he could onto a narrow muddy shoulder, and we walked through a muddy field on a narrow grassy path that led to the cemetery. There was the ubiquitous red brick wall with the white stone blocks for trim. The entrance gate was at the top of a short flight of steps. The cemetery plot was on uneven ground and it sloped down towards a large stand of trees outside the wall. What appeared to be one of the tallest Crosses we had seen was located along the back wall of a rectangular plot. The Stone was opposite the Cross near the front wall. I noticed that the dates on the stone plaque at the entranceway which gave the name of the cemetery were in Roman numerals - that was a 'first' for us. A large number of the 1,543 graves were those of the 1st Dorsets and the 11th Lonsdale Battalion of the Border Regiment. Those units suffered heavily as they advanced from the Authville Wood (near the present cemetery site) on 1 July 1916. The grave of Sgt J.Y. Turnbull, Highland Light Infantry was located there. He was awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions on that day. He was killed later that same day by a sniper at the Leipzig Salient.

The rain slackened up after a bit, and the sky lightened some as the wind pushed the low squall clouds on, and we made a dash for the car. I should mention that when we walked to the cemetery, the path was through clusters of red poppies growing in the surrounding field. We each picked one and they have been pressed in a book about the Somme which currently is placed on a bookshelf beside my desk.

When we drove away, our route took us through the small village of Ovillers. East of the village and within sight of the Bapaume-Albert road was the Ovillers Military Cemetery. It was located on a sloping hillside alongside a narrow paved road. There were 3,327 burials with many 1 July dates. There were also 121 French soldiers buried in the plot, along with 60 Special Memorials. The rain stopped and fleeting broken clouds were letting the sun shine through. French maintenance personnel were doing some repair and restoration work on several gravestones and steps at the entranceway. We took the time to observe their work techniques. They certainly seemed skilled with their tools and in what they were doing. They ignored us. The cemetery overlooked Mash Valley, another British soldier nick-name for a geographical feature, a shallow long valley which the 2d Middlesex Battalion had to cross (some 750 yards) to reach the German trenches that were their objective in the assault. The battalion suffered 540 casualties, many of whom lie in peace in the Ovillers Cemetery. It was not until the 7th of July that the area was taken by units of the 48th Division. Since my return from the trip, I have been in contact with Ray Westlake, a book shop owner in Wales, U.K. During one of our discussions he told me that one of his grandfathers (2d Middlesex Battalion) was killed in Mash Valley and was buried there at Ovillers. His other grandfather was subjected to a gas attack at Ypres in 1915. He eventually



Gravesite of Sergeant Turnbull, VC

died of respiratory complications after the war.

The cemetery was a large rectangle with a red brick wall. There were no trees inside the walls, but the flowers were there and colorful as usual. The Cross of Sacrifice was near the front entrance, and a domed gazebo-like structure, red brick and pillared, trimmed with white stone, stood on each corner of the front wall, flanking the Cross. The Stone was at the back of the plot close to the wall. We browsed along the rows of gravestones. The sun was breaking out from behind cloud masses that were more white than grey and the warmth was welcome. I noted quite a few Australian and Canadian burials here. Pozieres and the Windmill were just short distances away and both were scenes of bitter struggles involving Australian troops.

We departed the Ovillers area and crossed over the Bapaume-Albert road, passed through the village of la Boiselle - sort of a wide place in the road. It was near this point on 1 July 1916 that four pipers of the Tyneside Scottish Battalion 'piped' the men of that battalion into battle. I can well imagine that the skirls of the pipes were encouraging to the troops, but the rhythmic chattering and popping of the Spandaus and Maxims were up to the task of 'discouraging' and the battalion suffered heavy losses, and the fighting was fierce.

On 1 July, the 34th Division, which included the Tyneside Scottish Brigade, was the assaulting division in the sector where la Boiselle was located. The village was a heavily fortified German strongpoint and in attacking it, the 34th suffered more casualties than any other front line division on 1 July. The division was withdrawn from action. On 4 July la Boiselle was finally taken by troops of the 18th Division.

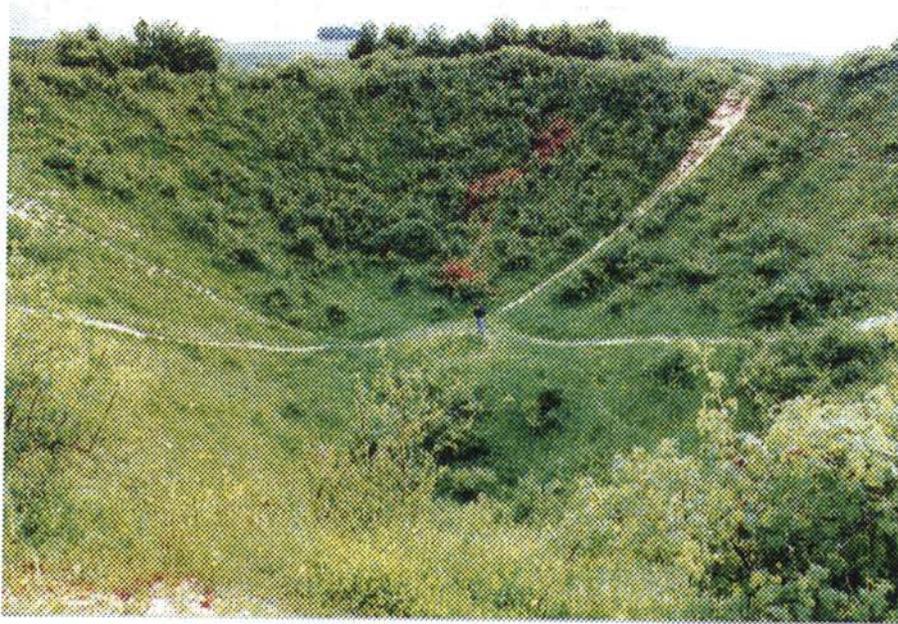
It was time for our coffee break. Steve pulled into a 'truck stop' roadside cafe located along the road at the edge of la Boiselle. We walked in and took seats at one of the tables. It was sort of austere furnished, with a few tables and a bar where several men had 'bellied-up' for a mid-morning bracer. A lady took our order, and served us our demi-tasse of cafe au lait. In one word - Whoa! - it was strong, and black as shoe polish. Not even the lait and sucre brought it into my "I can drink this" taste range. Steve wound up having both cups, and he survived. As he was finishing up my cup, I walked over to the end of the bar where the cash register was located. The patrons and the bar lady were having a fast paced conversation. I noticed a large photograph on the wall behind the bar and motioned for Steve to come over for a look at it. The

lady finally came over and took pay for the coffee, and in answer to our inquiry (not much better than "Ou et le hole in the ground?") she told us that the photo was of a mine crater not far from the cafe. From the photo it looked huge, and certainly aroused our interest.

We walked from the cafe, hopped into the car, checked the directions and pulled away in search of the crater. A narrow paved road circled behind the cafe and over a low hill mass. We had not gone far when we spotted what looked like (from a distance) a mound, which turned out to be the lip, or rim, of the crater. Steve pulled over and parked in an unimproved (dirt) parking area. We left the car and climbed up a steep but short hill, past a sign that identified this as the Lochnager Crater. It is on private property, having been purchased by an individual residing in London, however, it is open to public visitors. It has nothing to do with the CWGC monuments or memorials. The crater was located in an expanse of cultivated fields. There was a fence which surrounded it and defined what might be considered an unrefined parc. Scrub trees grew within the fenced area, and also down the steep sides and on the bottom of the crater. Several paths led from the rim down to the bottom. Before erosion could cause the crater dimensions to change, it was measured after the war ended. It had a 450 foot diameter at the rim. It was the largest mine (and subsequent crater) exploded during the course of the war. Twenty-four tons of ammonal had been tamped into the head of the mine. Perhaps the most unique perspective offered on the explosion of this mine would have to be that of 2d Lt C.A. Lewis, 3 Squadron, Royal Flying Corps. He was flying his observation aircraft over la Boisselle at the moment of the explosion, and tells of his aircraft being tossed sideways from the repercussing air rising upward, and that a column of earth and debris rose to almost 4,000 feet, hung there, and fell away! Doubtless the young 'leftenant' was due for a uniform change. Steve made his way along a path down to the bottom and stood at the center. I held my hand at arms length and he measured only as tall as the length of the first joint of my index finger.

This crater was the result of a mine being exploded directly under the German trenches at 7:30am on 1 July. After the explosion, the men of the 10th Lincolnshires (the Grimsby Chums - the Brits did have a way with their unit names) crossed the no-man's-land and established defensive positions on the crater's edge. As the battle progressed, soldiers from other units became lost, confused, and/or wounded, and sought refuge there. But as the day wore on, the

crater became a death-trap as German artillery took its toll. In Lyn MacDonald's book, *Somme*, an incident is related concerning the Lochnager Crater. Oddly enough, genealogy and history mingled with our visitations once again. It describes actions at the crater on the 1st of July involving two brothers named Moxham (6th Bn, Wiltshire Regiment). One brother was killed by machinegun fire as he stood at the rim of the crater. His death was witnessed by his brother who was taking refuge in the crater at that time. Steve climbed up one of the side paths back to where I had remained to take pictures. We walked back to the car.



Steve standing in the bottom of the crater

We moved down the road munching on chunks of stale baguette washed down with tepid Evian. I had a bag of chewy Starburst candy, so we had several pieces for desert - so much for lunch. Our next planned stop was the Norfolk Cemetery, just north of the small village of Becordel-Becourt. Shortly we came to the cemetery which was sited close by the road. It was an elongated rectangle shape. It seemed to be out of the mold of so many others - red brick with white stone trim. Leafy trees stood on either side of the Cross which was centered along the back wall. The Stone of Remembrance was opposite the Cross against (close to) the front wall. The entrance gate was a simple wrought iron picket-fence gate. It was placed in the wall, without a structure and located towards one end of the front wall. The cemetery was established in August 1915 by the 1st Norfolks (hence the name) and was used by other units until August

of 1916. There were 549 burials to include 126 unknowns and 1 Indian, Noor Muhamad of the 9th Hodson Horse. Also buried there was Maj S.W. Loudon-Shand of the 10th Green Howards. He was awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions while leading his men in the 1 July attack.

We browsed a bit, snapped some pictures, signed the register, and drove away.

The sun was bright, but a good breeze was stirring, and some 'thunder bumpers' as I call them, were building up in the south. The road was indeed narrow and winding and the area was hilly. About a mile west of the village of Fricourt on the Becourt road we came to the Dartmoor Cemetery, so named at the request of the Devonshire Regiment. It was tucked in the base of a thickly wooded hillside. Steve parked on the shoulder of the road at the entrance. We had no more gotten out of the car, signed the register, and walked into the cemetery when we saw several flashes of lightning followed by booms of thunder. We glanced around, hesitated, and then dashed for the car as a wind swept rain squall hit us, actually just the harbinger drops - you could see the sheets of rain across the fields - and we escaped with just a bit of wetting down.



Gravesite of Major Loudon-Shand

There were several interesting things of note about this cemetery, so we decided to wait out the rain. If any of the previous showers could be the basis for guessing, it would pass quickly, and it did. Our wait was brief as the wind cleared the clouds out. I noticed as I walked back into the cemetery there was a farm complex not far away. This time, however, I heard no rooster. Yes, a red brick wall defined the cemetery, but I noted a difference in floral color. Yellow tree roses and an abundance of purple iris lilies dominated the color scheme. Several tall evergreen trees grew within the walls and flanked the Cross. The Stone was at one end of the rectangular plot.

There were 768 burials to include 71 Australians and 1 unknown.

There were several burials that were of some historical note:

Lt Henry Webber, 68 years of age, the oldest British soldier killed in action in the Great War.

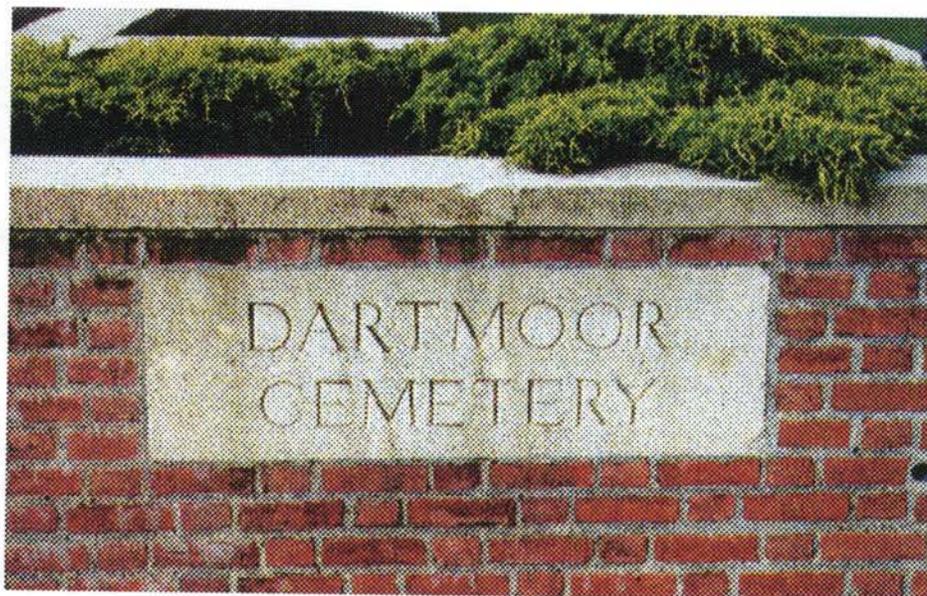
Pvt J. Miller, 7th King's Own Light Infantry, awarded the Victoria Cross and killed in action in September of 1916.

Sgt George Lee, 46 years of age, and Cpl Robert F. Lee, 19 years of age, both of A Battery 156th Royal Field Artillery, father and son killed in action the same day, 5 September 1916, and buried side-by-side in graves Nos. 35 and 36.

Imagine yourself in Mrs. Lee's shoes when the King's telegram was delivered to her door.

LtCol H. Allardice, an Indian Army officer who commanded the 13th Northumberland Fusiliers, and was killed in action 1 July 1916. Curiously, his gravestone is inscribed with his regiment of affiliation in the Indian Army, the 9th Jacob's Horse.

Steve snapped some pictures and I browsed among the rows of gravestones in the wet grass. I was not able to shake the feeling of pity and even anger over the waste of youthful lives as I saw many gravestones that reflected ages of 18, 19, and even 17. We walked back to the car.



We drove away and traveled through the small villages of Fricourt and Mametz, both being the scene of severe fighting. About a mile east of Mametz on the road to Montauban was the Dantzig Alley British Cemetery. It was sited on a low hilltop which overlooked the Mametz Wood, and was on an old German trench line. Dantzig Alley was the name given to a major German trench that ran through the village of Mametz.

Steve parked, and we moved through the entranceway which was a simple walk-through with a wrought iron gate. A walkway led from the gate to a red brick gazebo-type building about 12 feet square, with white stone trimmed archways and a red tiled roof. We walked through the gazebo and into the cemetery. There were 2,053 burials to include 500 unknowns and 87 Special Memorials. Green cultivated fields and stands of small trees surrounded the cemetery. Flowers and shrubs (some were a bit large) grew throughout the plot in a well planned horticultural design. The Stone and the Cross were placed somewhat opposite each other on the long side walls of the rectangular plot. Near the Stone was a memorial to the 14th Battalion, Royal Welch Fusiliers.

There were many gravesites of the men of the 7th, 8th, and 30th Divisions who fought in that area during July 1916. As I stood and signed the register I noticed that the red bricks and white stone looked weathered and aged. We drove away, headed for the Carnoy Military Cemetery.

On our way to Carnoy, on the road to Maricourt, we saw a tall, roadside directional marker which read SUZANNE - pointing in a southerly direction. We opted not to follow it to the village, but Steve took my picture standing under it and pointing up to it. How touristy can you get? Just for you, Suzanne. We topped a hill and there down at the base, situated



'Wish you were...'

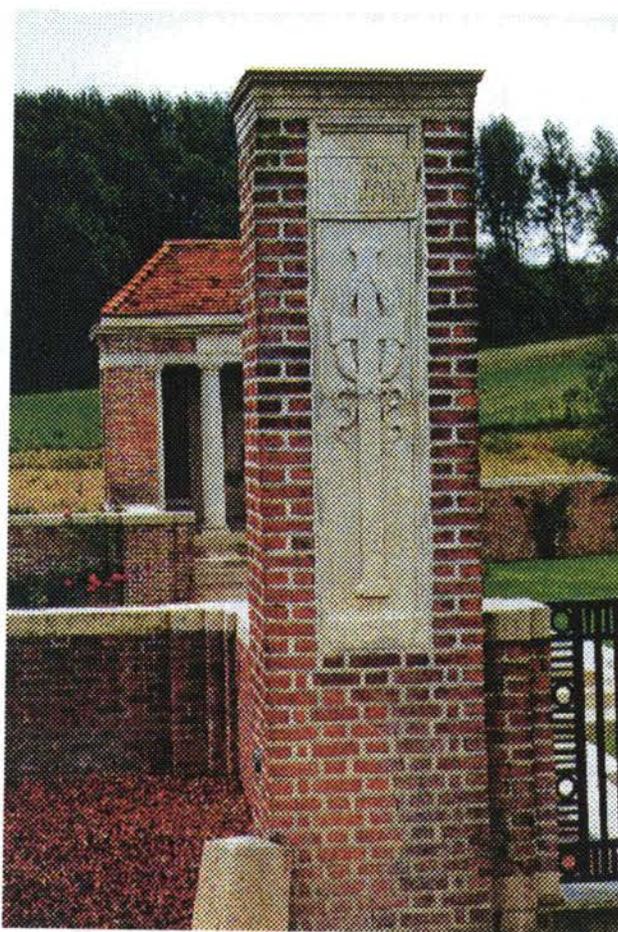
right alongside the road was the entrance to the Carnoy Military Cemetery just south of the village of Carnoy.

Steve parked the Renault over on the shoulder and we approached the plot. A small gazebo-like structure of red brick and tile roof, with columns formed the entranceway. Here the red brick wall was four to five feet high, topped with a white stone trim, the standard. A dense wood was beyond the back wall, and weeping willow trees grew randomly along the walls, and even along the pathways. The mainstay of the flowers there at Carnoy seemed to be roses - red, yellow, pink - they grew all along the wall and were in full bloom. My favorite flower. Dwarf-like roses were also in the beds in front of the

gravestones. Steve took an excellent shot of a yellow rose in one of the beds. The cemetery was not rectangular, but rather a fat U-shaped plot with the open end (actually it was closed with a wall) facing the road. The Cross and the Stone were at the open end and in close proximity to each other, and I recalled that I had seen this configuration (close together) at the Gommecourt Wood New Cemetery. We signed the register and browsed.

There were 855 burials. It was started in August of 1915 by the King's Own Scottish Borderers and the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, behind what was then the British front lines. One of the graves was that of Captain Wilfred Percy Nevill, known to all as Billie. It was his story that drew me to Carnoy. He commanded a company of the 8th East Surreys on 1 July 1916. Nevill was not a timid

person. He had been known to stand on the fire-steps of his unit's trench and shout insults at the Germans across the way. In many places the distance across no-man's-land between opposing trenches was measured in yards, and well within shouting distance. The troops in his company



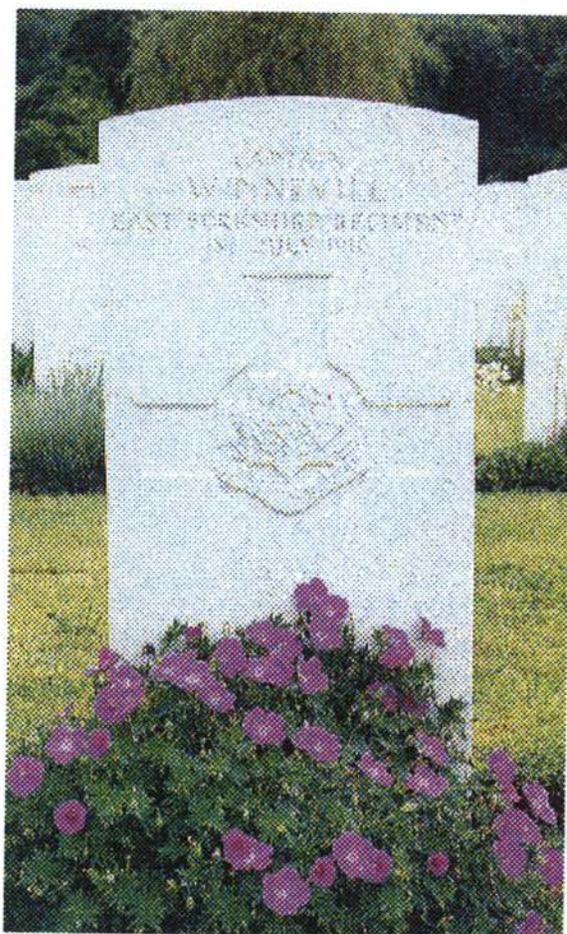
Entranceway to Carnoy Cemetery

had never been in an initial assault before, and in an effort to 'ease tensions' about going over-the-top, Nevill purchased two soccer balls (the books telling the story always said 'footballs') while at home on leave. He gave the balls to his platoons with the challenge to kick them across no-man's-land as they attacked on the morning of 1 July. There is a story that Nevill offered a sum of five pounds as a prize to the man who kicked one of the balls into the German trenches. A book I've read since the trip, by R. Edwin Harris, does not give credence to the story about the wager. Witnesses have said that Nevill and another officer, Bobby Saome, were the ones who made the initial kicks. Both men were killed in action that day. The balls were recovered on 2 July from the barbed wire in front of the German trenches. One is now in the Queen's Regiment Museum in Dover Castle, and the other is in the 8th East Surrey Regimental Museum at Clendon Park.

We lingered at his gravestone, where a large but not tall cluster of beautiful fuschia colored pansy-like flowers grew. We were puzzled about the unit designation and unit crest inscribed on his gravestone. Nevill was leading a company of the 8th East Surreys in the attack - but the East Yorkshire Regiment and crest were inscribed on his gravestone.

The answer was that he was in fact assigned to the East Yorkshires but since his records were not changed prior to his death to reflect that he had indeed transferred to the East Surreys, his gravestone reflected his previous unit. We walked back to the entranceway, signed the register, and went out to the car.

As we stood by the Renault a moment before climbing in, Steve, and then I, saw at the edge of the road across from where the car was parked, two



Gravesite of Captain Nevill

artillery shells lying in some weeds, with their fuses still intact. They were rusty, and caked with mud. I judged them to be a 75mm and a 105mm - but I did not get close enough to know for sure. Every year farmers plow up live ordnance in their fields, even now, and if they are lucky the shells do not explode (but some do, killing or maiming). They can place them beside the road for pick-up and disposal by qualified persons. Steve had brought along a fairly recent Smithsonian magazine that had an article on the now-generations of people who have made a living locating and disposing of WWI ordnance that yearly makes its way to the surface. This is a mind-boggling perspective on the degree to which the earth was churned over and over... and let us not forget that another war has even been contested over some of the same ground.

Though Steve was incautious enough to hazard a much closer - though brief - inspection, we left them alone as not-so-desirable souvenirs.

We got into the car and drove away. We soon passed through the village of Mametz. On the edge of the village we came to the Mansel Copse where the Devonshire Regiment Cemetery is located. A sharp turn off the main road, up a short steep incline and we were at the cemetery. It was located in a large stand (copse) of tall leafy trees, below the crest of a hillside, and overlooking a valley of farmland, wooded areas, and low rolling hills. Steve parked the car and we got out of the Renault and started walking through a short tunnel of trees leading to the entranceway of the cemetery. It was small, with 163 burials of the 8th and 9th Devonshires all of whom were killed on 1 July 1916. There were more than a few gravestones with age 18 inscribed on them. The Cross stood at one end of the narrow rectangular plot. It was one of the smaller sized Crosses and was sitting on a built up pedestal abutted against the wall. The entrance was a wrought iron gate swung between square red brick pillars topped with white stone. I saw for only the second time, Roman numerals designating the year on the entrance gate. The surrounding brick wall was about 3 to 4 feet high, and there were only two rows of gravestones. The flowers seemed to have a yellow and red theme, and for the first time I saw carnations (red) growing in the beds before the gravestones. As we walked about on the manicured grass, the sun broke out all bright and warm, and a brisk wind was rapidly clearing the clouds away again - the blue sky was welcome. We sat on the wall sort of meditating, I guess... it was as quiet as a thought, with only the wind rustling the leaves of the trees. I can't

say enough about how beautiful the trees were that grew around the walls' periphery.

One of the main reasons for visiting this cemetery was the story I had read about Captain D.A. Martin who commanded a company of the 9th Devons.

It was over the ridge, down the hillside (where the cemetery was later established) and past the area where the copse of trees stand, that Martin was to lead his men in the attack against German defenses near Mametz on 1 July 1916. Before the attack, he had a plastique model made to duplicate the area that his company was to attack. After studying his model, the topography of the actual ground, and the known German trenches and strong points, Martin made the morbid, philosophical prediction that his company would be slaughtered, and he even indicated the area where it would happen. Unfortunately, and as fate would have it, he was proven correct. The Devons climbed out of their trenches and moved forward at 7:30am on 1 July. German machineguns, dug in under the base of a wayside shrine on the road at the edge of Mametz, cut down the advancing Devons.

Ironically, the killing was where Martin had predicted. He was one of the many to fall that morning. Captain D.A. Martin was buried in a single grave with two of his men: Pvts Oxford and Williams, both age 22. This was the only single grave, triple burial in the cemetery. I have not read of an explanation for it. We moved to the entrance gate, signed the register, and paused at a stone plaque to the left of the gate. It was unveiled by the Duke of Kent in 1986 and dedicated the cemetery to the Devons. The inscription read "The Devonshires held this trench, the Devonshires hold it still" - a poignant and emotional statement. We walked away in silence to the car. Mansel Copse was peaceful.



Gravesite of Captain Martin

We drove off down the hill, but had gone only a short distance when we stopped to visit the Gordon Cemetery. It was located some 50 feet off the main road.

Steve parked the car on the shoulder, and I walked on an ill-defined pathway to the entrance gateway. There was no gate per se, only an opening between a pair of red brick pillars trimmed on top with white stone, on which the name of the cemetery was inscribed. It was sited on an old British support trench which the 2d Gordon Highlanders, 7th Division, used to bury some of their dead from the 1 July attack. There was a very low red brick wall, to the inside of which grew a thick green hedge. Two medium sized leafy trees grew at the corners of the back wall. The Cross was centrally located in the rectangular plot and stood on a three-tiered base. There were 102 burials to include six 2d Lieutenants buried side-by-side along the front wall/hedge. The other gravestones were arranged in two concentric semi-circles facing the front, or gateway. The Cross was in front of the two arcs of gravestones.



The Gordon Cemetery

As I browsed the pathway between the two rows, I noted one gravestone in particular, it was the burial site of a Pvt Wright, age 17. I signed the register booklet, took a last look at the splash of color that the flowers added under the bright sun, and walked back to the car. We rode away towards Albert, which would be our point of departure from our Somme battlefields visit.

As Steve drove, I sat back and thought about how he and I, during our visit to the Somme, had walked beneath blue sunny skies, slopped along muddy pathways, stood in the rain to look at silent stone memorials that glorified heroic deeds or remembered tens of thousands of the missing with the words 'No Known Grave'. We had read countless inscriptions on gravestones of names that belonged to faces that we had never seen, and shared a few quiet moments at the gravesite of someone who just may have been a kinsman. I thought about how the gravestones, monuments, and memorials stood as reminders of the pain, bravery, loyalty, and for so many, the ultimate sacrifice. Furthermore, how could one ignore the sorrow, grief, anxiety, and tears suffered by the families of the missing and dead throughout the Commonwealth. These gravestones and memorials also belonged to them.



Harvest of the Great War 1914-1918

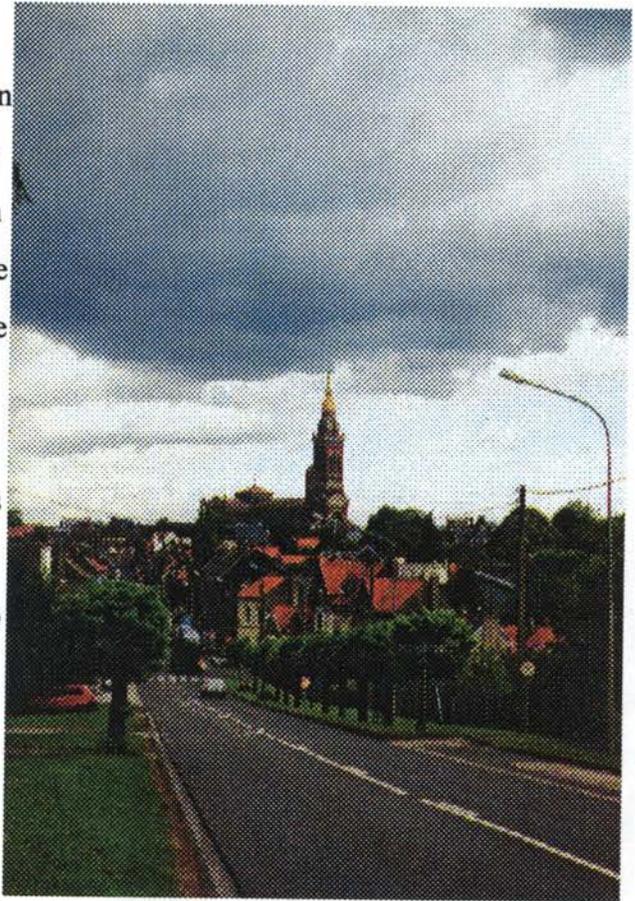
'For King and Country' was indeed a noble motivator, but was the waste of all that manhood in vain? How many budding scholars, statesmen, scientists, were lost before they were found. So much has been written about the men, and by the men, who fought in the Great War. I couldn't help but think about all the eager young patriotic "Willie McBride's". When they answered the call and took the 'King's shilling', it would seem that they knew little about the hell that was waiting just across the Channel to snuff out their lives. And it happened to 947,000 of them.

The British poet and Army officer, Wilfred Owen, would deride as "the old lie" that it was "dulce et decorum pro patria mori" (sweet and fitting to die for one's country). The war fought to end all wars did not. It all happened again a generation later.

Traffic noises snapped me back from those melancholy and somber thoughts as we drove into Albert. It was 3:30pm. On the approach to the town Steve got a good photo angle of the Golden Virgin atop the Church of Notre Dame-de-Brehiere. He snapped a photo, and we pulled out of Albert heading southwest towards Normandy.

Phase II of the trip was about to begin. We cleared the environs of Albert and were making good time on the auto-route. I think Steve was glad to 'let it out' a bit after so much start-stop driving in villages and on back roads. We were south of Rouen along the Seine River. The road was new to us, but not the area as we had been along this route in 1963. We spotted directional signs that we were looking for which indicated the exit off the auto-route to reach the ruins of the Chateau of Robert de Diablo. We turned off and wound around a secondary road until we came to a wooded hilltop overlooking the Seine River in the distance. There was located the ruins, which had changed little if any since our visit in 1963, and why should they? There probably hasn't been much to change about the place over hundreds of years. Even the obvious commercialization at the parking area -

i.e. a restaurant and, of all things (to Steve's great dismay) a carpet golf game - did not totally distract from the mystique of the vine-covered grey stone walls, the draw bridge's weathered and worn timbers, and the crumbling parapets of the towers. The Viking ship hull (a replica) still stood under an open-sided shed in the central courtyard. We climbed up and down the winding stone stairways in the towers and along the narrow passageways inside the walls. Steve dashed



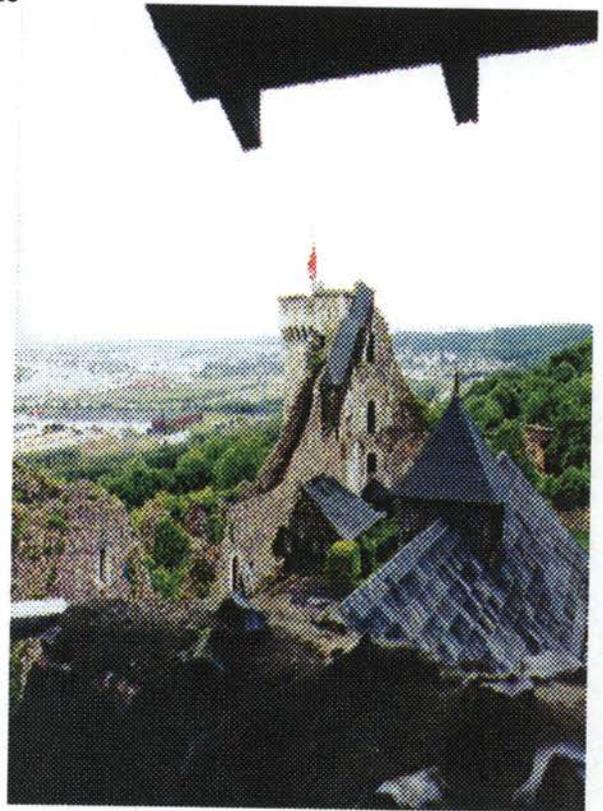
Au revoir, Somme

about inside every nook and corner, seemingly as excited as he was in 1963 at age 9. As he did his exploring, I stood on a walkway between two towers, leaned back against the parapet and reminisced about our first visit there. I recalled an underground dungeon-like passageway leading through a hand-hewn earthen tunnel and footpaths that smelled of wet clay and were damp and cold. There were dimly lighted niches in the walls that held a gallery of wax figures which were frighteningly realistic. They were presented as parts of scenes depicting early feudal life (circa XII century) in that area, and were a real treat to view. I remember carrying Suzanne, and we exited the 'tunnel' in a wooded area outside the chateau walls, and had to take a path back up to the parking area. The underground displays were no longer there, nor was the area accessible, but some of the figures had been moved to one of the towers for display.

A light spattering of rain began to fall as I stood there and I sought out a corner next to a tower to avoid the rain. I could see the Seine River in the distant valley as it looped south of Rouen and continued on its meandering path to the English Channel at LeHarve. Only the muffled traffic noises from the auto-route disturbed the quiet of the moment. Previously, the view from the ramparts, facing away from the valley, was lushly forested, and still was, except for the six lane auto-route that was, literally, a stones throw away.

I saw Steve emerge from a doorway in one of the towers and I walked down a stairway and joined him in the courtyard. We crossed over the dry moat on the drawbridge, and walked to the restaurant. It was getting on towards mealtime and we perused the menu board but we opted not to eat there. Instead we purchased a few postal cards at a vendor's booth, got into the car and headed on our way. Memories had been served.

It was still raining lightly as we picked up speed on the well-trafficked auto-route. Our trip now took on a 'different feel' as we had departed the area of the



View from the chateau tower

battlefields of the Great War, and entered a new area of interests and sights. Steve had mentioned in our planning of the trip that it would be nice to re-visit Mont St Michel, since it was not all that far from the Normandy coast, probably no more than 100 miles. With the auto-routes available (which were not present for our travels in 1963) it didn't seem at all 'out of the way' to take that side trip. So we did, and the cities and towns rapidly fell behind us (emphasis placed on the *rapidly*) - Brionne, Lisieux, Caen, Villers-Bocage. Steve had an interesting WW II story to tell about that latter town as we drove along, but as Hawkeye said "I'm not remembering" enough of the details to relate it here.

It was about 6pm when we pulled into a roadside service area for fuel, a new map, and some food. The place was bustling with activity at the fuel pumps and inside at the concession counters. There seemed to be an exodus towards Normandy. I rummaged through the 'fridge' counter and came up with some canned iced tea with lemon juice, which wasn't bad, and a couple of sandwiches, jambon avec fromage. I had promised my tennis partner and ol' Army pal, Len Bockman, that I would have a jambon sandwich for him. He was stationed in Paris as a lieutenant. That repast was not exactly gourmet fare, but was filling and as it turned out, we were too late for the evening meal at the hotel where we finally stopped.

The sky was partly cloudy, and the rain had stopped. The sun was setting and it was cool. We were fading a bit, and although Steve demonstrated excellent stamina behind the wheel, I knew that he was tired, but wouldn't admit it. I must have been getting a sample of his acting from his 'little theater' experiences. Notwithstanding the loss of an Oscar, we decided to stop at the next exit and get overnight accommodations. We were nearing the area that would lead us up and into the coastal region, and Mont St Michel. We were close enough to get an early start in the morning.

We came to the little town of Vire, and we ran through the forest to grab a tree. We drove into the center of what turned out to be a pretty decent sized town. There was a hotel in the junction of a Y-shaped intersection, older looking, but renovated, about four or five stories tall. The center of town seemed to be very active in the early evening. As an obvious bit of 'culture shock', we were confronted by the sight of the downtown area strung with flags, ribbons, and bunting in the French Tri-color and the American Stars and Stripes. We were indeed nearing the

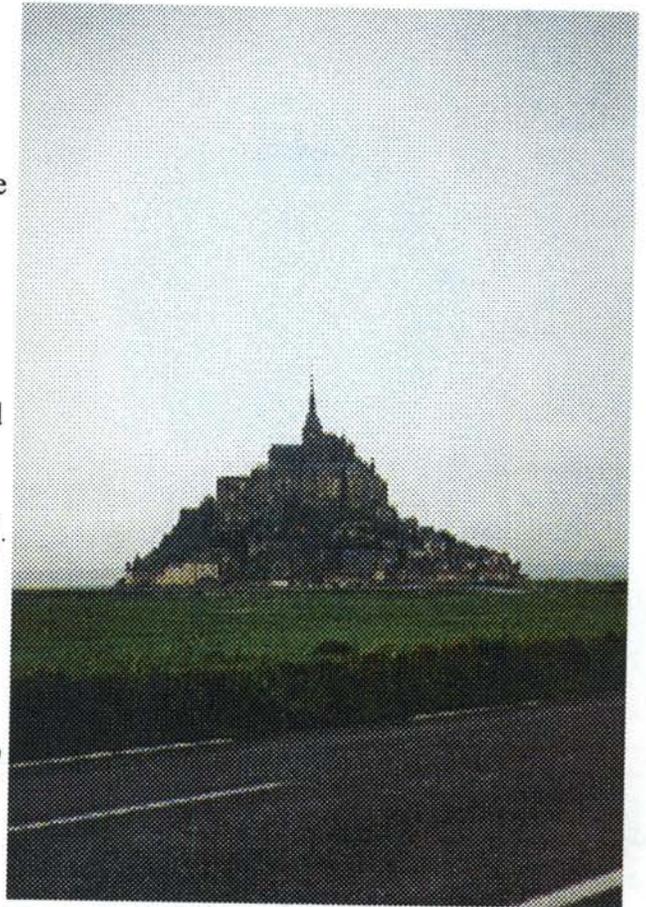
Normandy sphere of influence, and the grand celebrations for those whose memories are rooted in the second World War. Apparently there were many of them. Steve returned after a brief inquiry at the desk only to be told that there was 'no room at the inn'. We headed back the way we came, to the edge of town. There we had passed a small inn on the side of the road. It looked clean, modest in size, sort of quaint (with a name like Hotel Roger, it had to be), and we got a room on the third floor - where else! It was at the top of a narrow winding, carpeted staircase. At least the hallway was lighted, albeit dimly. The beds here were terrible, obviously they needed more straw filler, but the bath felt *oh so good!* The room's furnishings appeared to be early period Waterfront Mission, but a roof over our heads, a bath, and a good bed were all that we wanted... well, two out of three was not too bad.

It was around 8:30pm, but there was still some daylight left, maybe twilight, so we went down to the bar for a bit of elixir. The downstairs was quiet, and the bar was closed, or at least deserted, but I guess that the owner heard us and came from somewhere in back and welcomed us to the bar. We ordered and were served a beer. We turned down the chairs at a small table, and sat down to relax and enjoy the cold beer - it was a European, French probably, beer with a number (1903, I think) for a name. As I sat there looking at the bar's decor and chatting with Steve about yet another grand day of touring, the man departed the room, but a lady came in and busied herself behind the bar. I suddenly found a large, fawn colored, gentle acting Boxer dog by my side. He was shoving his big black muzzled face into my lap. I had no idea where he came from, but our host seemed comfortable with him being in the bar, and so was I.

I patted his flanks, rubbed his head and scratched behind his ears. He was as content as I was to be there, which made me feel at home, as I had been missing my yellow labrador and golden retriever. When I was a teenager, my family owned a Boxer named Pat. I was reminded of him. The beer and relaxation had served us well, and we bid our canine friend and barkeep a 'bon nuit' and climbed the stairs to our room. Steve phoned home briefly, and watched a bit of the Euro-version of CNN. As I said, the beds were not really that comfy, but it did not seem to interfere with our falling to sleep. So ended day five of our trip.

DAY 6 - SATURDAY, 4 JUNE 1994

The day dawned early, with dark clouds, cool wind, and a light steady rain falling. We didn't exactly sleep in, but getting up somehow seemed more difficult that morning. But get up we did, packed our overnight bags, and had our fruit, pastry, and juice. We made our way down the stairs, along a wooden floored hallway that squeaked loudly in the early morning quiet, and on to the exit door. I didn't see my canine friend. I guess he was sacked out somewhere dreaming of chasing a 'lievre' across green fields. We walked to the car, quickly tossed our gear in the back seat and climbed in. A quick check of the map and we drove away under a dreary weeping sky. It was shortly before 7am, and very few people were up and about in the town, just a couple of sleepy eyed Americans in a grey Renault looking for traffic directional signs out of town. We passed Avranches and went through the village of Pontabault, and were not far from the road leading up onto the causeway to Mont St Michel. Looking out over an open area we could see that most photographed landmark, subject of so many coffee table pictorial volumes, as it loomed in the grey distance, rising above the tidal flats and looking almost foreboding in the misty rain with its shadowy complex massiveness. We came to a small shopping area, passed through it and drove onto the built-up causeway (about one half mile of elevated paved road over the tidal flats). Steve drove off the causeway on a ramp and parked in the designated area, and though we had made an early start, other people were arriving also. The rain was pelting down hard, and we made a 'head-down collar-up' dash for the entrance gate leading through a wall and into the commercial village which was located at the base of the abbey. Others were doing the same.



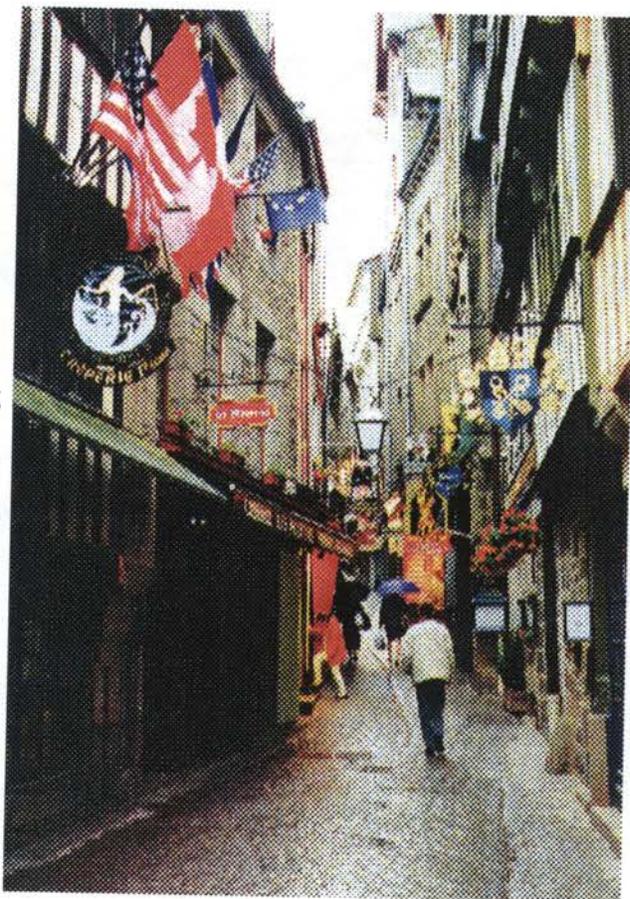
Mont St. Michel

The village consisted of specialty shops, boutiques, cafes, restaurants, and hotels, all of which were quite small in size and faced inward onto a narrow, winding cobblestone street (for pedestrians only, no vehicles - except for a massive forklift which nearly ran us down) . Every foot of that street is uphill - all the way to the abbey. With my rubber crepe soled shoes on those wet, slick cobblestones, I felt like Scott Hamilton about to do a triple toe loop.

Most of the shops were just beginning to open when we walked up to the abbey, but as for the tour of the abbey, we were too early (and got no worm for our efforts) so we made our way back down toward the shops, jousting with the other rain soaked tourist for walking space on the slick cobblestones, hopefully under the eaves of the shopfronts. We browsed a few shops with nothing particular in mind. Steve had mentioned wanting to look for a ring, not expensive, but souvenir-ish, that was similar to one that I had purchased for him in 1963 during our first visit here. I confess to 'not remembering' again, but obviously it had made an impression on him, since he related having kept that ring until he was in college, only to have it pilfered. I bought him a key chain medallion with a relief of the 'mont', but it hardly compared to his gift of the War Medal. He said,

however, that it was the 'perfect thing', that the value intrinsic in both gave him a sense of closure. I'm not sure I know what he meant by that, but he was well pleased. It was time for our morning jolt of caffeine in the form of 'une cafe au lait' - great stuff to open one's eyes, or anything else that happens to be clogged, including the sink drain.

We walked into a small cafe that was neat and clean, and had a pastel peach colored decor with an 'ice-cream parlor' like theme. We sat down at a small round table with our cafe au lait.



Main street leading to the Abbey

Almost immediately we looked at each other and agreed that this was the same place, but different, where we had refreshments (Cokes) 31 years earlier. We both remembered (this time I did.. sorry, Hawkeye) about the pigeon that had flown into the open-fronted cafe that day, and sat on a rafter as we sipped our Cokes. Odd, but neither Steve nor I had tried to find that particular cafe, and there were many others, and no such thought had come to me of finding it. It just seemed that subconsciously we were drawn there. Once more Steve helped me finish off my order of that witches brew. It sure was wicked tasting stuff... shades of la Boisselle.

Again we made our way back up to the abbey, still early, but quite a few people were trudging up the cobblestones to wait for the tour hour, so we stood around dodging the steady light rain as best as we could. From the walkway where we were standing - sort of on the backside of the abbey and several hundred feet in elevation - we could look out towards the sea. The view we enjoyed was one of beauty, even under dark clouds. It was low tide, and we could see vast expanses of tidal flats criss-crossed with riverlets of sea water that snaked along in shallow channels across the sandy mud, into the tall thick marsh grass growing on the rim of the huge basin. At high tide, Mont St Michel would be an island except for the causeway.

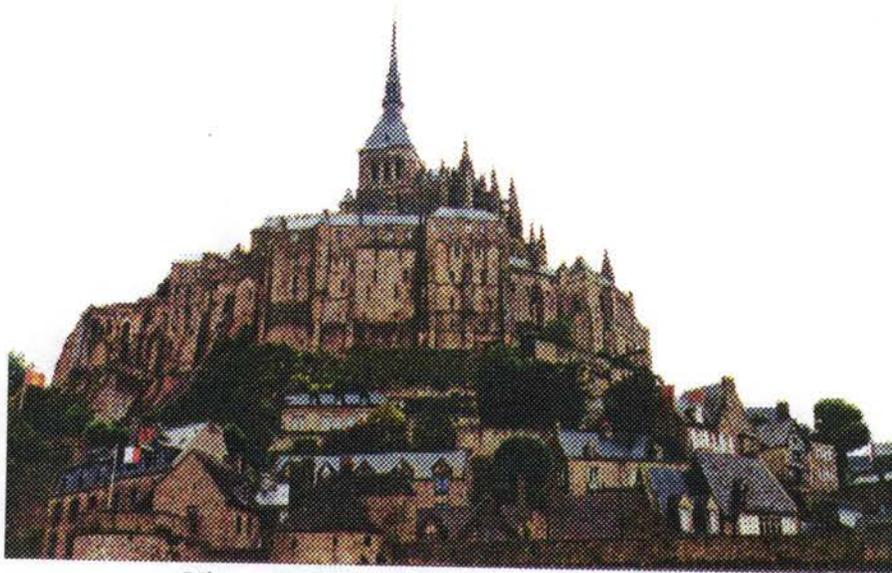
Precisely at 9:30am, the large wooden doors at the entrance were opened and the tour could begin. We joined a host of other 'soggy' tourists as we climbed up the worn stone steps through the doorway, paid our admission fee, and began to walk through unguided. There were small, red, but faded and almost indiscernible, directional arrows placed sparingly over doorways or along walls that steered the group in the proper direction (most of the time). It all seemed about the same as it did in '63, although I believe some areas were closed off this time that we toured previously, i.e. the dungeon-like prison cell. It was vertically positioned (the entrance to the cell was a hole in the floor) and prisoners were lowered into it. The abbey was the site for incarcerating political prisoners in the 17th century. We moved along passageways, through empty, cold, stone-floored and walled rooms, and briefly, out onto a patio-like area where a flower garden complete with decorative shrubs and stone benches was located. A cloistered walkway wrapped three sides of the garden. I don't know how we were so lucky, but we wound up 'in line' behind two broad beamed Brit women who chattered like mag-pies, and they behind a gentleman who was crippled and walked with a decided limp. One might ask "So What?" and

it would have been no problem, except that at the time we were climbing up a very narrow steep and spiraling stone stairway that was dimly lit at best. There was not much overhead space either, and I wondered about a claustrophobic person being there. About the time one of the women mentioned turning back (there would have been *no way* ) we came to an exit. I could hear sighs of relief, and one of them was mine.

We came to a large room with a high ceiling, heavy rafters and thick, worn floor planking. The object of attention was a huge (at least 12' in diameter and 5' wide) circular, open-sided wooden squirrel-cage, much like a waterwheel without the paddles. It was anchored and balanced with its axle mounted in massive timbers. It rotated about this axle. Inside the wide wheel rim, wooden strips, or cleats, ran side-to-side and were spaced at about 30 inches or so intervals, providing foot holds as in a treadmill. Monks or political prisoners living in the abbey centuries ago provided the manpower to move the wheel by walking inside of it. A steep stone incline was built onto the exterior of the abbey wall, like a tall thin buttress, with its base on the ground and the top ending at a large doorway, actually an opening in the stone wall, on the same level as the cage. The incline had a raised center spine with flat ledges on either side. The runners of heavy wooden sleds would ride on these, with the center guide making sure the load stayed on track. The sled would be attached to the cage, or windlass, with a heavy rope. Material and supplies would be loaded and lashed down on the sled, then men would walk inside the cage, the rope would wind around the outer surface of the cage, and the sled would be drawn up the incline to the unloading area at the doorway in the wall. The whole rig was quite simplistic in design, but was very intriguing. I doubt that anyone looked forward to their turn walking in the cage, regardless of the load.

We moved through the abbey and departed the hilltop. As we walked back down past the shops, we were stopped by an American couple. The man was a retired Air Force officer. He and his wife were Mormon missionaries from a small French town nearby. She said "I could tell that you were American by the way you look and walk." I said to myself -- Right. We chatted briefly standing in front of a shop in the rain. Bidding them farewell, Steve and I moved down to an entrance courtyard, out the gate to the parking lot, into the car, and drove away. We were wet, but the trip was a good memory jogger.

Any way you look at it (literally, from a distance or up close and personal) Mont St Michel is one more impressive sight.



View of 'the Mont' from the parking area

Over the causeway and back onto the main road, we stopped in the small village of Pontaubault at a food and notions store. It was time to restock our 'pantry' with the major food groups - bread, pastries, water, fruit juice (a twelve-box case of liter sized cartons), and boxed cookies... we still had some obligatory potassium injectors (Steve's descriptor of the bananas, not mine... someday he will thank me). I also bought a couple of cans of sardines and a pack of disposable razors. We loaded the purchases into the car, climbed in, buckled up, checked the map, and pulled out under cloudy skies and in a light rain.

Our plan was to go north, visit Utah Beach, St Mere Eglise, and then move over "somewhere" behind the Omaha Beach area for the night. This we did, plus we added Pointe d'Hoc to our list of stops. Driving the back roads slowed us down quite a bit, however, we made it to St Mere Eglise around one o'clock in the afternoon. It was the first town to be liberated by US Forces on D-Day. The paratroopers of the 82d Airborne Division were the liberators.

The rain had stopped, but the skies were still cloudy and a wind was blowing as we reached the edge of town. An unbelievable madhouse of activity greeted us. It was a small town built on

the town-square layout, and from one end of the town to the other, there were hundreds of people jamming the sidewalks and streets. There were countless re-enactors in their WW II uniforms, and WW II vehicles were parked everywhere... who knows, maybe I had seen some of these men and vehicles while leaning out of my window in Albert. Cookers (grills) were set up all along the sidewalks, and the air was filled with the smoke billowing up from the fat dripping from the sausages onto the charcoal. Everyone seemed to have a large paper cup, or stein, or both of beer and they all appeared to be having a great time, visitors and locals alike, and I would be willing to bet a fair sum that everyone of them had 'crickets' (the spring metal tab that sounded with a 'tick-tok' click when pressed) and sooner or later would be clicking away in such profusion that it would sound like a hail storm in a used car lot.

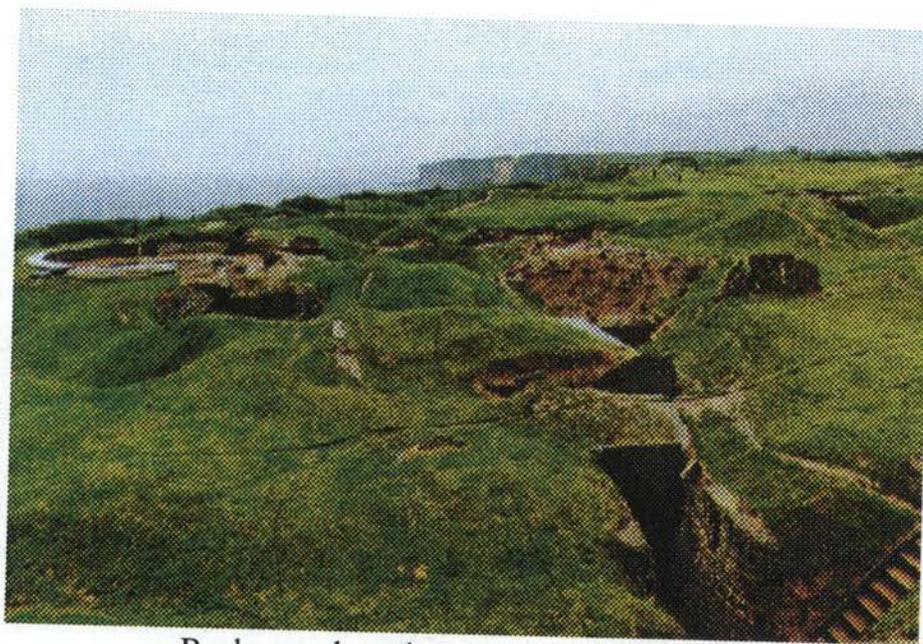
We inched our way along the congested main street and through the square, but parking was out of the question. When we did find a place, we were all the way on the far side of the town. One battalion of the 82d Airborne Division (current) was to stage a jump (parachute drop) the next day and 'liberate' St. Mere Eglise (again). We had not planned to see that exercise... a similar one, though far more impressive (we assumed) awaited us not too much farther up the coast. We did see the church where the trooper hung from the roof by his snagged 'chute, and feigned death to avoid being shot by the defending German troops. Red Buttons played the trooper in the movie The Longest Day. It was tempting to stay awhile, but the surging, loud, jostling, carnival-mind-set crowd was too much for us. It was almost obscene contrasted to the solemn air and solitude of our previous days adventures. We headed for Utah Beach, a short drive away. Before we could reach Utah Beach, the sky darkened, the wind started to whip through the area, and the rain really began to fall hard and steady. As we came into the beach area, French gendarmes directed us into a parking area (a big sandy lot) about 200 yards from the waterfront. Yuck... but carloads of people were arriving, parking, and walking down the road towards the beach. Who's to say that they were dumber than us, so we got out of the car and 'fell in' with the crowd. Yes, we got wet. Yes, we had rainsuits. No, we did not wear them... too much trouble to unpack, I guess. We made the walk to the beach in a blowing rain.

There was a large, newly constructed museum located right on the beach and we could see people entering it. But when we arrived at the door, we found that the museum was closed from

1 to 4pm to everyone but a private party for a civic organization - The International Rotary Club. As I stood there soaking wet, I made a mental note to never join that civic group, or contribute to their efforts. Since we were certainly not on the guest list, all we could do was peer into the lobby area at the guests and their wine glasses. The galleries were out of our line of sight for the most part, despite the glass front, so we couldn't peek at the exhibits. Discouraged? Not a whet. We walked down onto the sand dunes behind the museum. Now that we were out in the open beach area, the wind was becoming a real nuisance to our comfort. There on the dunes area was a rusty, wheel-less, breech-less, German anti-tank gun (about a 50mm), and outside the museum were two American 'alligator' type landing craft, painted a shade of bright blue. They were falling apart, with broken tracks, large holes in the bulkheads and engine compartment, the front end was gone from one of them, and I could not think of them as battle relics as much as just being junk. I believe vehicles in better condition would have provided more enjoyable viewing. True, this beach's history pales in comparison to the bloody affair at Omaha, but that pitiful display, in my opinion, was a disgrace to the honor of the men who fought and died there on 6 June, 1944. We were wet, disappointed, and saw no reason to stay any longer. We returned to the car. At least the rain began to slack off, but the wind continued to blow. The rain had prevented us from taking the camera, though in truth there was not much to photograph. We left the beach and drove to Pointe d'Hoc, all the while bad-mouthing the whole affair that we had just left. Steve seemed particularly incensed as a museum professional that anyone would have the arrogance to restrict visitation to such a facility, at such a time, to such a group. So it goes. The rain was only a drizzle by the time we closed on the Pointe d'Hoc site. The sky was overcast still, and it was late afternoon when we pulled into the parking area under the direction of the gendarmes. Huge white fibrous sheets (fiberglass matting) somewhat like burlap had been spread out on the ground in this large grassy field adjacent to the road. This was the impromptu parking lot. It worked very well to prevent bogging down in the rain soaked field. Although after a bit of traffic, muddy water and silt oozed up and splashed through the porous sheets. The weight of the cars, however, was supported, and the cars moved about, albeit slowly, without becoming stuck. Very clever of the French. I had never seen that done before. I guess they can do more than bake baguettes and make good frommage.

We walked across the fiber parking lot to the cliff area, where some activities were in progress. The speech making and hand shaking events were over, but there was a contingent of US Rangers still involved in a cliff scaling exercise. Quite a few people were milling about in the area. TV cameramen and journalists were moving around interviewing and filming Army personnel, and visitors also, as they walked around the area of German bunkers and fortifications.

Several of the bunkers were basically intact, and people were crowding around them in order to get down inside and get a German 'birds eye view' of the channel waters. I lined up, as did Steve, and we got our look-see through the vision slits. Lots of visitors were wandering around over the bomb and naval gunfire-created craters which pock-marked the area just like we had seen at the Vimy Ridge and Newfoundland Parcs. These, too, were grassed over and eroded.

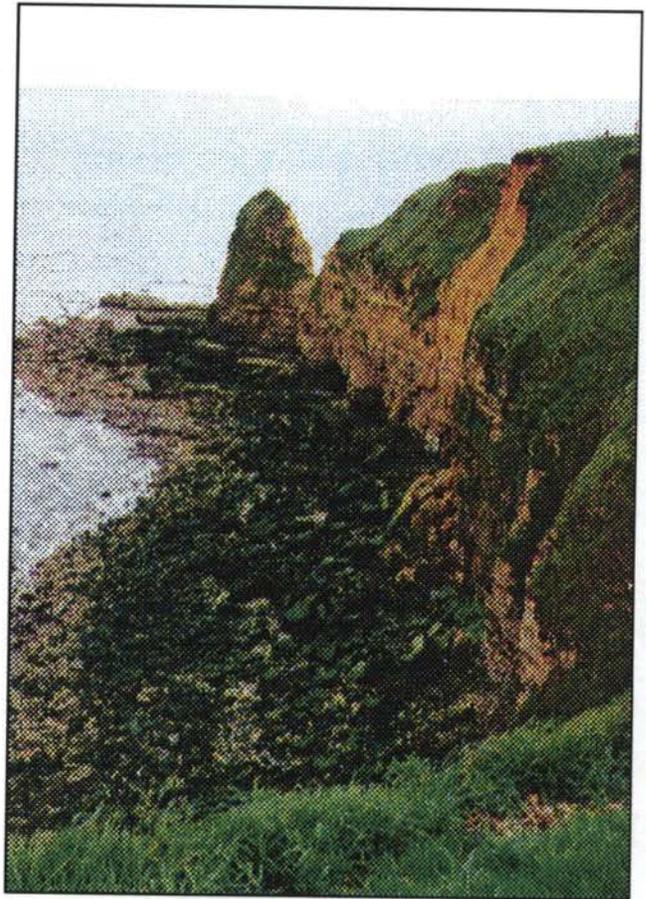


Bunkers and emplacements above the cliffs

Time and nature will have their way. When you stood and looked down at the surf and rocky shoreline a hundred feet or so below, you wonder how could those US Rangers have gained a foothold on top of that fortified area - enough to mount a fight from that would eventually secure the entire area. But they did, and it was done in the early morning darkness of 6 June, with grenades being thrown down on them. With grappling hooks and ropes, they climbed

through small arms and automatic weapons fire to close with the defending German troops. From their rubber landing craft, 225 Rangers assaulted those cliffs and bunkers, and after two and one half days of intense fighting, only 90 men survived to claim the high ground. The irony of it all was that Allied intelligence failed to discover that the battery of coastal artillery pieces, their capture or destruction being the Rangers objective, had been moved from their emplacements to positions inland, to protect them from bombing raids. All the sacrifice for naught? I would have to say yes.

I noticed quite a few male spectators were of the age to have been D-Day veterans. Many of them wore various items of clothing, pins, patches, etc. that identified them as such. Some just stood and stared out at the dark choppy waters of the channel, maybe mesmerized by a memory of those early morning hours in June or the days that followed when they laid it all on the line and survived, and by what miracle them. I can well imagine there were moments while standing there, maybe thinking of buddies who didn't make it, that the moisture on their cheeks wasn't all just from the misty rain in the air. Overall though, I think the mood of the crowd was one of relaxed enjoyment over just being there and in the company of friends. Steve was off snapping pictures somewhere and I found myself behind a



Looking down on the assault cliffs

wooden fence or barrier looking down and across the face of the steep cliff where a group of Rangers were busy rappelling and scaling to the delight and interest of quite a few spectators. A civilian couple walked up and stood beside me at the barrier. I looked over and said "Hello". They both smiled and returned my greeting in French. They looked to be in their mid-to-late forties. I had on a black baseball style cap with an embroidered D-Day anniversary logo on the

front of it (both Steve and I were wearing one - I purchased them at the Navy Exchange for our trip). It did not cover my grey sideburns, to say nothing of the wrinkles, and the man asked me in accented English if I was a veteran. I told him not of WW II, but that I had been in service in Korea and in Vietnam. He turned and spoke to his female companion in French, and I heard the word "Indochine"; she looked over at me and smiled. All of that exchange seemed innocent enough, however, a lady that I really had not noticed before, stepped over past the couple and faced me. In an unmistakable British accent, she 'blasted me with both barrels' about the US policy and presence in Vietnam. Mind you, it was more than 20 years ago that we pulled out of Vietnam. She made it sound as if I had been personally responsible for the whole mess. I was taken by surprise, and at first slightly amused by her vehemence, then a bit annoyed. She was not looking for an argument or debate or opinion. She was both lecturing and admonishing me in no uncertain terms. I guess I was too taken aback by the moment to remember what she said exactly. I had no time or chance to offer a rebuttal. I think I got out a 'now wait a minute' before she wheeled around and strode off. The couple looked embarrassed by the tirade, and as they turned to leave, the lady leaned over, smiled, touched my arm briefly, and said "God bless you for being here" in a heavy accent. They walked away. I just stood there in a mental quandary for a moment, then looked around for Steve. He came up, and I related the incident to him. He was more emotionally incensed about it than I. It was nothing personal probably, though her remarks were pointed, and I resolved it in my mind as someone who had an axe to grind, and I happened to be the nearest available American whetstone.

The crowd seemed to be thinning, and we had seen our share here. Steve had his photos, and it was getting late under grey skies and a brisk wind. We moved along the road with the other departing visitors and back to the fiber mat parking lot, but all the traffic had caused so much seepage and rut like impressions that we were slopping in muddy water to the car. We climbed into the car and squished our way out to the road and drove away.

We were wet, chilled, hungry and ready for a meal. It was well beyond baguette and Evian time. It was time to find a 'roost' for the night.

Steve drove into the outskirts of Bayeaux, which is a large city, but with a good traffic pattern around it. We stopped by a fairly large, modern (Holiday Inn-ish) hotel located on an autoroute

cloverleaf, and inquired about lodging. The parking lot was crowded and the lobby was a beehive of activity. So, it was no real surprise when we got the "No Vacancy" heave-ho real quick-like. It almost seemed the clerk took some perverse pleasure in telling us that the hotel was full, had been full (reservations) for a year or more, and that we probably wouldn't find a room anywhere within 70 miles inland of the beach area. We had both read where there would be difficulty in securing lodging in the Normandy coast area, and inland as well. That is precisely why we had packed and lugged around a tent and sleeping bags - like good Boy Scouts, we were prepared. And at this point we decided to take advantage of the preparations we had made, and the next step was to locate a campground.

The rain had stopped, but the wind was really whipping up on the trees as we moved east inland on a road leading out from the city. Steve spotted a campground sign and pulled into the site which was located just off the road. It looked nice as we drove through the gate, lots of grassy areas, some eateries nearby, bathing and laundry facilities, and tall leafy trees throughout the grounds. We drove around briefly to give it the once over, and then parked near the office. This looked like the place for a new adventure on the trip... a little impromptu 'roughing it'. Steve went into the office to request a camping space as we had seen what appeared to be several vacant numbered spaces on our quick drive through. He returned shortly, all red in the face (a sure sign he was upset). The fat, red-haired female in charge had told him that there were no spaces available. That sure didn't seem to be the case however. Though lots of people were in the area, we had seen some vacant sites. To rub salt in the wound, Steve said a back-packer (French speaking) had come in just before him, asked for a space for a tent, and was accommodated. I don't know why, but I 'picked up the gauntlet' and walked over to the office building. I asked for a site and was told emphatically there were no vacancies. She had probably seen us together and meant for us to understand - *no vacancies*.

Oh well. I had told Steve earlier that we could always find us a farmers barn. We stood around for awhile as the wind snapped the trees around, and after Steve calmed down a bit, we hit the road. It was still light, but getting late in the day. We had no definite direction in mind, but we didn't want to go too far inland away from the Omaha Beach area, as that was our target for the next day. Steve was half inclined to drive back to Vire and the Hotel Roger. That would have

been a long shot, and at the very outer fringes of an acceptable distance away. I don't think it would have worked out anyway. I feel sure that the hotel proprietor had, by then, fed our mattresses to some farm animals.

About seven miles southeast of Bayeaux, we came upon the small town of Tilly-sur-Seulles. It was sort of closed up looking as it was around 7pm under a dark sky with a threat of more rain. I glanced down the street at a pretty parc-like area as we approached a traffic circle in the center of town, and as I did, my eye caught sight of a small nice looking hotel on the corner across from the parc, and facing the traffic circle. I told Steve to stop and check there for a room. I could sense some bit of reluctance on his part, but good son that he is, he parked, went across the street and entered the hotel while I sat in the car. He came out shortly with a slightly smug, slightly embarrassed, slightly you were right and slightly we *lucked out* look on his face. Bingo, I knew we had a room at the Hotel Jean d'Arc... and it was on the second floor this time. Steve moved the car to the other side of the street (in front of or to the side of the hotel, I couldn't tell which). We unloaded our overnight gear and our 'breakfast bag' and headed for the room.



The Hotel Jean d'Arc in Tilly-sur-Seulles

Up one flight of nice wide stairs, down the carpeted hallway and we had done something neither one of us secretly thought possible... we had come to France to spend the night in Normandy two days before the 50th anniversary of D-Day without reservations, figuring to have to pitch a tent in a field, and after having been told repeatedly not to expect a room within a 70 mile radius of the beaches, we wound up in a convenient location, in a quaint little excellent four-star establishment, not 15 miles from the coast. We must have been living right or something!

It was a nicely furnished room, clean, with comfortable beds (funny how it is like kicking the tires in a used car lot, you always go over to the bed in a rented room and punch on the mattress to see if it seems comfortable). There was a bath with a shower stall and a large bathtub. It was also our first experience with a 'waterless electric toilet'. Some of the tubs at our overnight stops had been the chin-to-your-knees type, with a contoured depression shaped to fit your butt for a seat, and a flexible hose with a spray head for a shower. I always appreciated the bath, regardless of furnishings, but the thought did cross my mind as to how the tub manufacturer's came up with the dimensions for the butt contour. The night before in Vire as I sat all drawn up in a ball (the sides of the tub were shoulder high, though) I can tell you that the 'fat lady' would not have sung sitting in that tub... it would have been a groan. We had a large window with a view out onto the traffic circle and the parc that I had seen earlier, and the shops (now closed) along the main street off the traffic circle.

We freshened up a bit and headed for the dining room, as it was high time for some good solid food. Just before I departed from the room, I walked over and looked out at a darkening sky. Rain had begun to fall very hard and the wind was lashing the trees in the parc. But, in spite of the days' adventures, we were dry, warm, and comfortable... and I kept thinking about how the people at the campground were faring. Thank you! fat, obnoxious red-haired lady... you made our night.

The dining room was spacious and well designed, with mirrored walls and a large picture window facing out to the park and had a wrap-around, veranda-feel to it. There were potted floor palms placed about and floral arrangements (fresh) on the tables, table linens, silver, and neatly dressed young waitresses and waiters. There was a subdued elegance about the room. The food was outstanding from the salad to the entree to the desert and frommage. My baked

trout was cooked to perfection... (I covered this one's eye also, with my parsley sprig). We passed on the vin maison, though, and had good cold beer. We leisurely dined and thoroughly enjoyed every minute and bite of it. The French serve a dinner which allows conversation; they don't hurry when they dine, so neither did we.

The room was almost full. There was a long table not far from us where some Americans and French, dressed in their business suits, sat discussing - loudly at times, as if their remarks were meant for others to hear - their plans for the ceremonies, speeches, protocol, etc. for the part of the D-Day commemorations in which they were involved. We weren't impressed even before we gathered from certain remarks that their part in the overall scheme of things was pretty low in the 'pecking order'. One American in particular seemed to be trying a bit too hard to be the Mr. Vice, and run the show. But these people and their 'world' were not of our concern and we turned our attention to more amusing fare. About that time, we had noticed a large bird hopping about the grass just outside the window. He went about systematically probing and then latching onto a worm, began the inevitable tugging match, of which he would be the inevitable winner, and then hopped on to the next promising spot. We were seated by the window, and a young British couple came in and sat down at a table next to ours. They were to be our next conversational 'worm' it seemed, as they provided us with a good bit of listening and visual amusement as the dinner progressed. He wore heavy khaki twill trousers with a plaid shirt and a V-neck pullover sweater. She had on a white nylon long-sleeve blouse and a beige jumper dress. They appeared to be quite reserved as they were seated and when ordering, and during their initial conversation as well. As the time passed, and the wine bottle emptied, those 'stiff upper lips' became rather loose, and they talked loud enough for any and all to hear. 'I am not remembering' what all they did and said during the course of the meal, but at the time I thoroughly enjoyed those 'quite right' and 'bloody well' remarks. I mentioned earlier that we went to the dining room dry, warm, and comfortable; well, now we could add stuffed to that physical description. Conversations were still going strong all over the room, but I had decided that enough was enough when the 'ugly American' at the long table offered a toast.

We paid up and departed. Back in the room Steve was not yet ready to call it an evening, so he went back to the bar and rubbed elbows with some of the dining room crowd who had moved to

the bar (including the Brits, who according to Steve were into another bottle of wine). I relaxed in the room and mulled over our plans for the next day. It was our intention - from the very initial planning - to visit Omaha Beach on 5 June, not 6 June. Yes, we would miss the 'hoop-la', speeches, Clinton, massive traffic gridlock (which was to be the bane of many ceremonies on the 6th). Apparently the advance teams chose to make light of the absence of any *real* roads at, near, and just inland of the beach areas. What roads there were, were narrow winding back roads, not made for the copious amounts of cars at one time, to say nothing of the *huge* tour buses... which carried most of the veterans. Excuse me, did I say miss? Better, we would avoid all of the above. All of that was surely reason enough to go one day early. It allowed us to experience some quiet time on the beach, and at the cemetery at St Laurent-sur-Mer which was located on the top of the cliffs above Omaha Beach. We thought of all that extraneous activity as a major distraction, not a major attraction in our observance of the D-Day commemoration and remembrance.

With those thoughts, I fell asleep. Sometime later I was awakened by the Brit couple who were fumbling, laughing, stumbling, giggling, and loudly talking as they came down the hallway. They finally made it through the door to their room (the lock and the key gave them some trouble). Sorry Steve, but I can not recall whether or not I looked over to check on you. I knew you had a key, and even so, I had not set a curfew on you in the past 25 years. The noise from the Brit's room finally faded out and so did I again, but I was awake long enough to hear wind driven rain pecking at the window panes. The bed felt so good! Now this was my idea of camping. So ended my day, the sixth day of our wanderings.

#### DAY 7 - SUNDAY, 5 JUNE 1994

When I awoke, bright light was coming into the room through the opening in the window drapes. I glanced at my watch. It was 6am and time to 'rise and shine'. I got out of bed, opened the drapes and voila! a blue sky and an early morning sun. I pushed open the window and was greeted with a very cool wind. It was good to be alive and well in Normandy, France. I woke

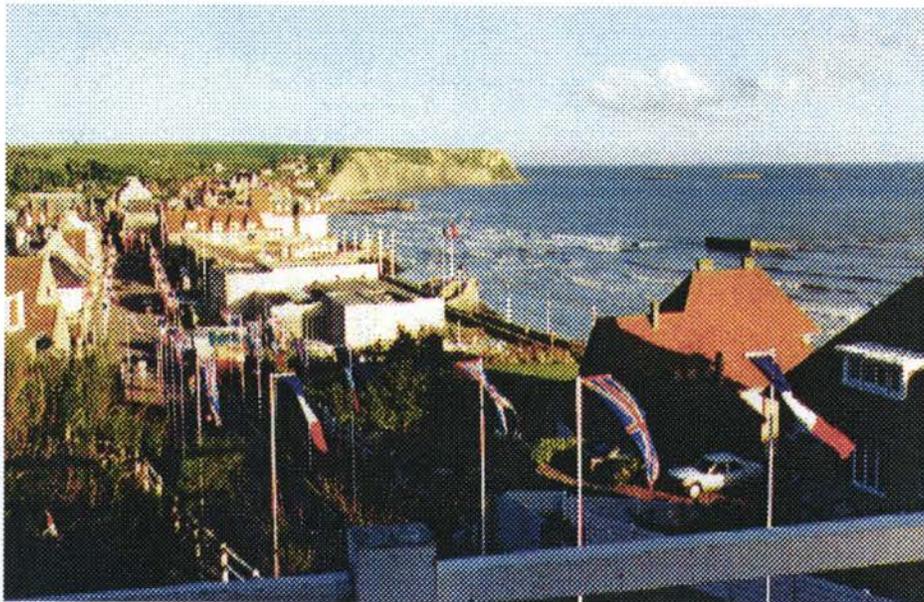
Steve, which wasn't easy to do that morning, and he came back into the 'now' time from the twilight zone and we began our usual routine. Shaved, dressed and packed (I had brought plastic bags for wet clothes, and we used them), we sat in our room and munched on bananas and pastries, washed it down with orange juice, and headed for the car. Down the hallway, down a short set of steps, out onto the sidewalk and over to the car, which was at curbside. The proprietor of the hotel, who was a Mr. Pierre Belfy according to his business card, was already out in the street, about a half a block away talking jovially with someone, and carrying a large basket of breads - no doubt fresh - that would surely become part of the 'petit dejeuner' of the other guests a little later in the morning. It was our job to be the early birds. The early morning sun, while bright, was not giving out much warmth yet, and the wind was really cool... I'd say cold. We loaded our gear into the car and dug out heavier jackets at the same time (Steve loaned me one).

We were off and rolling northwest around Bayeaux. It sure looked like it had rained in the area the night before. (I can only imagine how inhospitable the campground would have been compared to Monsieur Belfy's establishment). We headed onto the channel coast and the Plateau of Calvados - more specifically, the small coastal town of Arromanches. Steve made good time driving, and we arrived at our destination around 7:15am, parked on a side street just off the 'main drag' which ran parallel to the waterfront.

There were not many people out and about as we left the car and walked to the seawall area. It was a small picturesque town built into the hillside right at the water's edge. It was protected from extreme tides by a high (steep) stone seawall. The tides rise and ebb there to such an extent that at the time of the invasion in June 1944, in order to use Arromanches as a logistical harbor, the Allies had to create an artificial barrier, or breakwater. Huge concrete caissons were constructed in England, towed across the channel and scuttled in a long curved line some distance offshore. They were called (code name) Mulberries. Several can be seen close in to shore at low tide, lying askew and partially buried in the sand. Farther out, the tops of several more can be seen thrusting up out of the water. Over the years, the force of tides have shifted them about somewhat.

Our family was there in June of 1963. I recall that Steve, age 9, and Suzanne, just a grunt under

age 3, rode in a two wheeled cart drawn by a pony across the tidal flats along the shoreline. We stayed in a small hotel across the street from the waterfront. I saw it again as we walked along the seawall - the Hotel Arromanches. There was a cafe right on the seawall pavilion, and it was caffeine time. We stepped inside and could see that about half the tables were occupied. A waiter approached and asked in French if we wanted to order breakfast. When he was told no, that we only wanted cafe au lait, he gave us a down the nose look and a curt answer that left no room for doubt: no eat, no coffee. Probably nothing personal, just a money thing. So we did an about face and departed the premises. We had our 'petit dejeuner' some time ago and were not ready for breakfast. We wanted to visit the museum located there. It was housed in a large new building since our visit in 1963. But we were too early, and the 10am opening was too late to fit into our time table for the day. I noticed a large section of temporary bleachers had been erected on the quay for ceremonies by the British the next day. We walked up a steep road onto a hilltop that overlooked the town and the channel waters.



Overlooking Arromanches

There was a US M-4 Sherman tank emplaced on a concrete slab as a sort of memorial to some French armored units. The US forces did not land nor fight in this area on D-Day. It was a Brit show, but it was not an assault beach. Standing by the tank, looking down at the town which was coming to life now.

Thinking back, somehow it seemed only yesterday that Steve and I had stood on this same spot - but it had been 31 years ago. Oddly enough, I think that we had changed more in that time than that sleepy coastal town.

We walked back down the road, immersed in a bit of nostalgia. People were out and about by the time we reached the car. It was a beautiful morning, just a few puffy white clouds drifting towards the east. We checked our maps, picked our route, and headed for Omaha Beach.

We passed through Colleville-sur-Mer, which was the first town to be liberated by US forces who made the over-the-beach assault, and we arrived at the American military cemetery near St Laurent-sur-Mer. Most of the roads leading into the site were less than two full lanes, it seemed. There was no center line markings on any of the farm roads, and the shoulders, if they existed, were narrow, and often were bordered by a water-filled, weed-clogged ditch. At times it appeared as though we were driving through 'Jean-Claude's' barnyard, and I'm not sure that we weren't. Meeting a fast moving car was an uncomfortable experience but meeting a bus was a lesson in panic driving. It was one of the very reasons that we didn't want to be in that area on June 6th, and it proved to be a valid one. As events, to include the weather, would have it, there was an absolute nightmare of traffic gridlock on that day, and the rain and the mud added to the misery. We later spoke to a veteran who was there and he talked about all of that.

But not to worry, today was the 5th of June, and the sky was all but cloudless and blue, the sun was warming up and the wind was calm... in a word the weather was perfect. Steve parked in the designated parking area for the cemetery; quite a few cars were there already and more arrived during the entire time we were at the site. Obviously we were not the only ones who wanted an early, quiet visit. We walked from the car along shrub and tree lined paths onto the cemetery proper. It is a beautiful place, located on a plateau atop steep cliffs which overlook the beach that lives in American history by the code name of Omaha. The cemetery contains some 9,000 (plus) US dead who were killed in the Normandy area during the fighting across the French coastal region. It is a showplace, immaculately and beautifully landscaped with shrubs, trees, and flower beds. White marble crosses and Stars of David stretch row on row endlessly into the distance in perfect symmetry. A chapel, a round shaped white stone structure with columns all around, stands at the end of a centrally located wide grassy mall that separates

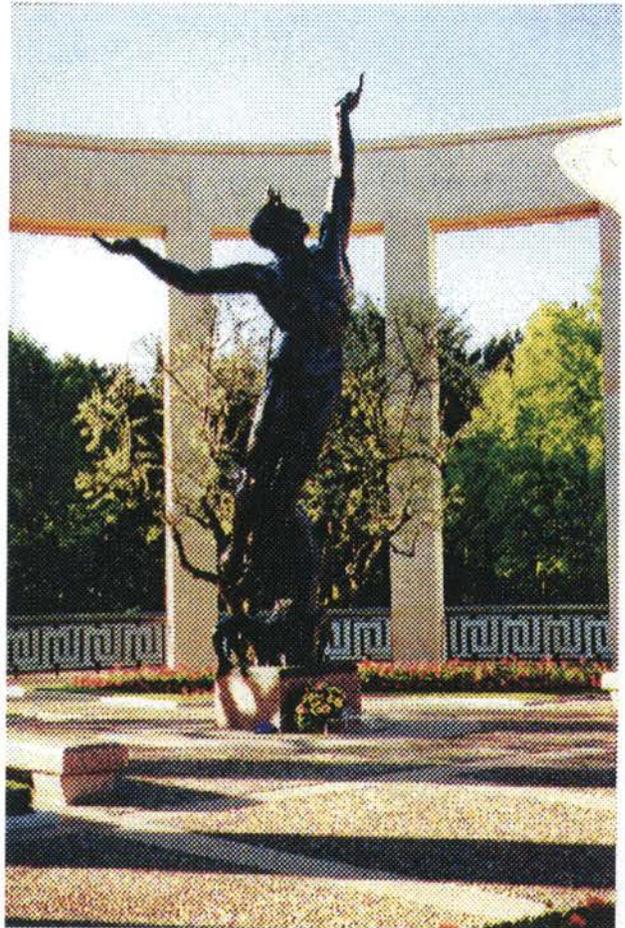
sections of gravesite plots. A reflecting pool was situated at the end of the mall which was flanked by gravel walkways.

It was almost obscene the way that the large bleacher sections, hundreds of folding chairs, the speaker platform, the TV platform, and seemingly miles and miles of heavy black cables were strung along the ground, all placed there for the use of the dignitaries as they made their speeches, and for the thousands of 'listeners' as they trampled down the beauty of the cemetery. I wanted no part of that.

Steve left me with my thoughts for a few minutes to snap some pictures of the tall bronze, masculine statue that stood in a semi-circle of stone columns in a pavillion just behind where the speechifying would take place. It was located near the entranceway and overlooked the cemetery. I stood near the tall flag pole and looked out over the cemetery, away from all the distractions, and though I had seen it all before, in 1963, I was no less emotionally impressed the second time.

The British have their Commonwealth War Graves Commission, and the USofA has the American Battle Monuments Commission, which is an independent agency of the Executive Branch of the US government. They both have basically the same mission, and both agencies do an absolutely magnificent job.

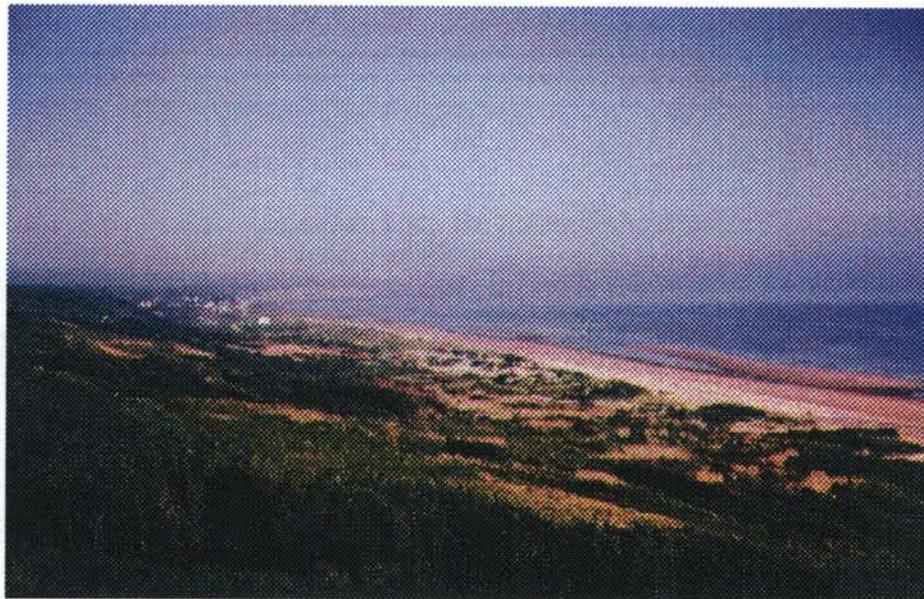
I met up with Steve and we walked along a paved path for a short distance as it wound along the edge of the cliffs. There was a stone wall alongside the path, on the channel side. We soon turned down onto a wide well-constructed path that led in a zig-zag, stair-stepped terrace fashion down from the top of the cliffs to the beach. Nondescript vegetation, to include small trees, grew alongside the path and all along the face of the cliff. Reaching the bottom of the path, we



Memorial at St Laurent-sur-Mer

walked through some patches of weeds and across a few yards of sand and shale, then out onto the water's edge. The tide was out. There was only a gentle swishing of small rippling waves skimming across the wet sand flats. We walked slowly across the wet, yellow-reddish colored sand, and water oozed up to fill the footprints we left behind. The sun was still not up very high, and we cast long shadows onto the beach as we walked. We could feel a bit of it's warmth, but the air was cool and our jackets were welcome. We snapped a couple of pictures of each other for a remembrance of this occasion.

A morning mist hung in the air along the beach. It was like a thin veil as we looked off in the distance back toward Arromanches. There were only a few other people walking on the beach, as most of the visitors to the cemetery just stood at the low stone wall at the cliff's edge and looked down at the beach and channel. It was not a short walk down that path, but it was worth every step, just to be there at the water's edge. My thoughts were - what a hell this place was 50 years ago, to be such a blissful scene as we were witness to on this fine morning.



The Normandy beach known as "Omaha"

We had gone down the beach a few hundred yards when we turned back and retraced our steps to an area where we could climb up to the cliff top without using the pathway... there were several unimproved trails that were available. Just back from the 'wet-sand' there was a band of

water smoothed, rocky shale and stones of various hues that covered a strip of the beach. I collected a few of the stones as mementos. I had thought about an ol' Army buddy of mine, Burt Boudinot, as I walked along the beach, and I remarked to Steve that Burt might appreciate having one of the stones. I recalled Burt saying that his father had crossed these beaches. I mailed him one on my return.

Using one of the trails, we scrambled back up to the top of the cliffs at a point where a tall stone obelisk, dedicated to the 5th Engineer Brigade was located. Engineer units did a tremendous job on D-Day in clearing obstacles while under fire. Their accomplishments facilitated the egress from the beach by the assault troops.

Several concrete bunkers and open gun emplacements were near the monument, but there was obviously no effort to preserve or restore them. They were partially filled in and grassed over. It was possible to enter them by stooping down or crawling, but we made no attempt.

We walked away from that area and went back to the parking lot which was rapidly filling up with cars and tour buses. People were streaming towards the cemetery. I noticed that US Army MP's were present and directing traffic. There were quite a few US military personnel in the area to support the activities which were scheduled for 6 June. We saw a heliport and communications 'rig' outside the cemetery over near the cliffs. Surprisingly enough, and to me it was noticeable, despite there being several hundred visitors by the time we departed, there was still a quietness about the area.

We climbed in the Renault, checked our maps for a route exiting the area and headed out towards the British D-Day beaches. We wound our way through the 'bocage' country on narrow farm roads and through several tiny villages, all the time saying what a traffic nightmare it would be in that area in less than 24 hours. We were on the coastal road, passing through Courselles-sur-Mer, St Aubin-s-Mer, Luc-s-Mer, Lion-s-Mer (the latter three being the areas of Gold, Juno, and Sword beaches for the British and Canadian forces during the invasion). It seemed odd, but the British D-Day landing sites included small coastal villages, whereas the American forces landed on beaches that were basically uninhabited. These small built-up areas were very beachy and touristy little seaside towns with boardwalks and pavilions. Cafes with colorful umbrellas and tables were located right on the waterfront. The villages were clean and

neat, and very attractive. Some of the houses were very charming and some were quaint. Overall they appeared to be great places for seaside vacations. Preparations were in full swing - bunting, banners, placards - all for the next days activities. The Queen was to be there, so we read. There was a good breeze that stirred the flags and banners along our route. It was all very colorful and festive, and already a large number of visitors were there strolling the sidewalks and boardwalks. It struck me as we rode along that at St Mere Eglise there was a carnival like ambiance and the people boisterous; Omaha Beach with the beauty of the cemetery seemed quiet and subdued; and the coastal villages where the British would observe D-Day commemorations were decorated, colorful, and the people appeared dignified and acting as if they were casually enjoying a spring holiday at the beach. Most assuredly, there is such a thing as a national personality, and we saw some evidence of it here.

We passed through Riva-Belle, a larger coastal town with a casino-resort look about it. There were lots of people strolling the boardwalks enjoying the warm, early afternoon sun. We turned southeast along the Orne River and canal, through Ouistreham to the small town of Benonville where we stopped at a service station to fuel up with 'gazoil' (man that stuff stunk). While standing at the fuel pumps we could see a couple of large excursion type boats moving on the canal. We 'topped off', paid up and pulled away from the station into a stream of traffic which was queued up to cross the Pegasus Bridge. The bridge was a drawbridge, and was in the raised position to allow the boats we had seen to pass through - hence the traffic tie-up.

The bridge was renamed Pegasus after WW II ended. The name was taken from the British 6th Airborne Division shoulder patch, which was the winged horse Pegasus. The troops of that division fought for and captured the bridge in the early morning darkness of 6 June 1944. Our destination was the outskirts of the village of Ranville, beyond the bridge. We were going there to observe a British airborne assault re-enactment. It was to be a parachute drop of over 1,000 troops. The bridge lowered, and traffic began to move, albeit slowly, since people were everywhere, walking on the road and beside it without much thought, it seemed, to the cars creeping past them. Everyone seemed to have the attitude of 'who cares, we are here for a holiday!' We nudged our way through the masses of Brits at and around the bridge - it was not a large bridge - and looked for a place to park.

Luck was with us and we found a place beside the road, beyond the bridge (not far away) and in line with scores of other cars. We just sat in the car relaxed, and watched the 'Easter parade' of people passing by us. The sun was cozy warm and a gentle breeze stirred through the trees that shaded the area where we had parked.

After a while, we decided to mingle with the mob, so we walked the short distance back to the bridge. There were several establishments located adjacent to the road which approached the bridge, and one of them was the Gondree Cafe (named after the owners), and it sits right alongside the canal at one end of the bridge. It was a two-story, red brick and white shuttered structure. The family lived upstairs. In the early morning hours of 6th June 1944, the cafe and the Gondree family (George, his wife, and daughter) were liberated by British paratroopers. This action was depicted in the movie *The Longest Day*. The daughter now manages the cafe, and on this day it was a virtual beehive of activity. Colorful umbrellas were outside on the sidewalk 'plaza' in front of the cafe.

It was strictly 'standing-room-only' inside and outside, and the cold beer was being consumed in large quantities. Who said the Brits drink only warm beer? Not true. Neither Steve nor I had an inclination to shoulder through the masses inside the cafe bar in an attempt to get one of those beers. Steve did manage to snake his way inside for a brief moment and a quick look around. The noise level of laughing, talking, calling to old friends and such was just under a mild roar. Looking across the sea of people, it was almost as if there were a uniform of dress among the veterans. Colorful embroidered crests on dark blue blazers, maroon berets (paras) and some black berets (tankers) were worn at jaunty angles on heads where silver hair was the rule. Steve and I had a marvelous time of it as we edged along the periphery of groups of veterans, catching parts of their conversations without being obvious that we were listening.

We did single out a couple of veterans who seemed to be in a jovial mood and were engaged in lively story-telling. One was tall, slender, with a trim mustache; and the other was stocky, round-faced with blue eyes (he was the story teller). Both wore the dark blue (could have been black) crested blazer and the black berets with the 'Fear Naught' armored (or as the Brits spell it armoured) corps badge. Their spouses, dressed in cotton floral print dresses, thick heels (good for walking), stood dutifully holding their handbags, smiled, nodded, and were in general being

good 'listeners'. I was amused by their manner, because I could just imagine their real thoughts were along the lines of "Here we go again, I've heard that blooming war story a hundred times!". Steve and I stood looking the other way, but leaning-in to listen to the tale unfold. It was funny to me, even though I could not hear every word. It concerned "mooshroom soup in a 'jerrycan' and the bloody RE's". I won't even attempt to relate any of the details of the story, but the accents, voice inflections, and word pronunciations made the effort to listen-in worthwhile. I wish we had been able to tape it all.

There is a story, the details of which I *can* relate, that happened in 1963 when we (Betts, Suzanne, Steve, and I ) stopped at the Pegasus Bridge because a heavy downpour of rain made it impossible to see to drive. As we sat in our '58 Chevy Impala convertible with the rain pounding us like a drum, Betts had a sudden thirst for a Coke. I declined the obvious 'why don't you run in and get us one' invitation. The Gondree Cafe was about 50 feet away or so, but in that deluge it might as well have been 50 miles. Betts sat there for a minute or so, then got out and went into the Cafe (she didn't even run), and returned with three Pepsi's. Needless to say, none of the three was for me. She was 'mad as a wet hen' (no pun intended). I wanted to laugh at the situation, but thought better of it. A long time passed before my being 'inconsiderate' was ever forgotten. The Gondree Cafe lives in my memory.

We left the milling mob at the cafe and strolled back towards the car, stopping along the way to shop around at some of the tailgate souvenir stands set up in and around the cars parked by the road. The French were out to make a franc off the Brits. Steve succumbed to the temptation and they made a franc off of him also when he bought a couple of the 'cricket clickers'.

We crossed the bridge on the pedestrian walkway and stopped at a fruit stand set up on the side of the road, not far from our car. I purchased a couple of kilos of fresh bing cherries which turned out to be a delicious afternoon snack.

Steve confronted the sack of cherries with an "Uh-Oh" look. He recalled, and reminded me, though he didn't need to, of the time at Laon AFB when I bought the same type cherries from a vendor. The whole family was eating them and commenting on how good they were when I just happened to break one open before I ate it. Next to the pit was a little grub (brown head, white body). Betts and the kids went 'green' and gagged as I tore open the remaining few cherries left

in the carton, and yes, they all had an occupant. I wasn't too comfortable with that find considering the number that I had eaten. Needless to say, cherries were not on our shopping list for a long time. We arrived at the car, climbed in, sat back and did some serious people watching while the cherry pits piled up beside the car. They were very tasty, sweet, and no, I didn't break any open. We also munched on chunks of baguette washed down with Evian. It was time for relaxing with the warm sun and a cool breeze.

As we sat in the car with people walking past, talking and laughing, and with cars slowly passing, we discussed what we would probably see during the para-drop. Then Steve came up with the idea - and after some thought, I agreed - that the drop would not take place at our present location. Because of the proximity to the canal, some power lines, a large wooded area, and the general congestion of the people and traffic, it would be too dangerous. His idea proved valid. When in doubt, ask a gendarme, which we did, and were told that the drop would take place a kilometer or so over the hill towards Ranville, just as the brochure had indicated it would. Sometimes you have to believe what you read, even in a tourist brochure.

We had already left our parking spot by the road to go in search of the gendarme. We drove up to a cut in the crest of the hill that the gendarme had pointed out, and Steve pulled off onto the grassy, flat shoulder that butted into the base of the cut and parked in line behind several other cars. Obviously some other people had thought of this before we had, or maybe had read (and believed) the brochure which said that the drop would be near Ranville. From where we parked you could see the village of Ranville in the distance. We got out of the car and scrambled up a steep grassy embankment (about 20 feet high) and sat down on deep soft green grass, which bordered a plowed field that stretched toward a shallow valley.

We had our binoculars, and the view of the surrounding area was perfect from our elevated position. From our vantage point we looked out over a very wide, saucer shaped valley of green wheat fields (or some type of forage crop). There were several orange panel markers and small triangular flags in the field. That had to be the drop zone. A few white puffy clouds were drifting overhead, a breeze was stirring and on this hilltop it was a bit cool even in the sunshine. The brochure we read indicated the drop was scheduled for 5pm, when some 1,100 British paratroopers were to jump. As it was about 3pm, we had a couple of hours to pass, so we spent

the time watching people moving along the road, we relaxed a bit - even dozed I believe, just lying back in the grass and wondering what to expect.

Our quiet reverie was not long in duration. A mass exodus of people from the bridge area began to arrive at the hilltop, and indeed began to converge on the area of the field from several small secondary and farm roads that seemed to feed onto the main one we were on, this side of Ranville. The crowd noise level began to rise and we sat up to take it all in. It was like a swarm of army ants in a rain forest. Hundreds of people in cars, vans, buses, on motorcycles, and on foot and bicycles were coming up the long sloping hill. Evidently the word was passed out that the jump wasn't to be at the bridge site. Many of the new arrivals scrambled up the embankment where we sat... literally *where we sat*... and we soon had to stand up to avoid being trampled, but it all seemed in good fun, and quite truly, everyone was well-behaved. Others moved past us and down the road into nearby fields, and in a short space of time we found ourselves in the middle of a very large crowd, easily in the tens of thousands.

The road became jammed with traffic. Both shoulders were full at two deep which encroached on the pavement, and then one other lane was blocked, and soon there was room (but barely) for only one lane of traffic.



Looking up the road to Ranville

No one, to include the gendarmes who were walking around in their usual aloof manner, seemed to care about the traffic jam or parking, in fact it just seemed the natural thing to do. No one got excited, frustrated, or angry. Everyone seemed to be 'a happy camper' and tail gate parties were going full tilt. The crowds were festive with lots of laughter and friends meeting and talking. People sort of ebbed and flowed along the road and across the fields, filling in the blanks in the landscape. In the distance, across the shallow valley, we could see thousands of spectators on the hillside ringing the drop zone.

Americans were in the minority, and I don't recall seeing but a couple of other guys that I would have pegged as American. But we were right where we had planned to be. I had thoroughly enjoyed my time there with the Brits so far, and as events would have it, the enjoyment continued. Immediately in front of our car was a station wagon and the four Brit occupants were having a picnic, tail gate style (I never did figure out what they were eating). Steve went down to the car, to check his camera I believe (he did have a knack for ending a roll at the most inopportune time) and talked with them for awhile when I was on top of the embankment. We learned that it was a father, mother, and daughter with a son-in-law. As we had been observing them since our arrival (they had been parked and settled when we arrived), and before we even knew the 'relationship matrix' we already had our private amusement about the daughter's husband. He was a scruffy looking guy - tall and rangy - with a shock of unruly, wiry greying hair and several prominent missing teeth. He was wearing an ill-fitting T-shirt, cotton twill khaki shorts and sandals, no socks. At one point he proceeded to 'roll his own' from a pouch of Drum tobacco and lit the misshapen cigarette with a match. When he finished rolling it, it hardly looked like a Woodbine or a Ruby Red, but I'll bet he probably could do that with one hand in a wind. Come to think of it, I believe he did! He stuck the cigarette in a gap in his teeth and puffed away. We had given him the name of 'Sar' Major'. The others in the family seemed much more conventional in dress and looks. As it was, it was the father that had been with the 'paras', and in WW II. The 'Sar Major'? Who knows what he did.

The time had passed quickly and as we stood on top of the embankment just a few minutes before 5pm, the droning noise of an approaching aircraft sent everyone, including us, grabbing for their binoculars and cameras.

Into view came a rare and thrilling sight - a C-47, WW II cargo, twin-engine aircraft. It was fully restored and painted in the invasion markings appropriate to the event. It passed slowly over the drop zone and over tens of thousands of up-turned faces. From the side of the plane's fuselage, a 'stick' of paras 'hit the silk' (about 15 of them I believe). That was a commemorative jump, made as a salute and tribute to those men who made the combat jump on 6 June 1944. That was well-received and everyone responded with a hearty applause, cheers, whistles, and the proverbial 'oohs and ahhs'.

Very shortly, in the distance, could be seen a fleet of 17 British and Canadian C-130 cargo aircraft heading for the drop zone. We watched the long string of planes lumber in and maneuver into a long line with plenty of interval. The roiling turbulence from the prop wash could be seen spinning off from the aircraft engines, made visible by the exhaust of the preceding planes. The sight really stirred up the excitement in the crowd as the first of the planes roared over the drop zone with the paratroopers rapidly launching themselves out the door in perfect order. The blue sky was filled with olive drab chutes floating down to the green field. No sooner had the first wave passed, with the paratroopers all rapidly rolling their silks and exiting the field 'by the stick', than a second pass was made by the same aircraft, and again, hundreds of airborne soldiers were floating down to join their mates on the ground.



Units of the 6th ABN Div (Red Devils) over the drop zone

From our altogether perfect location and with our binoculars, we could clearly see the faces of the men as they stepped into the doorway, steadied themselves against the 'propwash' and then leaped from the aircraft. It all happened so quickly that it seemed all one motion.

It was a precision exercise, professionally executed, and not to mention a great crowd pleasing spectacle, and everyone expressed their appreciation with rousing, genuine applause and excited comments. Since we didn't see any medical vehicles cruising around in the landing area, it seemed that all went well, and with no injuries. The paratroopers were all streaming across the green field carrying their rolled chutes and battle gear. They were moving into assembly areas in the distant hillside. It seemed to end all too soon. Instant replay on TV has spoiled us, for here there was none.

As the planes disappeared into the late afternoon sky, the mass of people began to move back down the hill toward the bridge. Others moved in the opposite direction, along the road we planned to travel. Almost immediately the pedestrian and bicycle traffic melted away. People were getting into their cars and vans, hoping to get a jump on the traffic and be first out into the line, however, the vehicular traffic was stymied initially. There was no horn blowing, or anxious nellys trying to break out of the pack and be the first to leave the area... for one thing *no one* was going *anywhere*! But it was truly amazing, as we sat there on the grassy embankment and watched the gendarmes in a calm manner of professionalism sort out the Rubics cube of traffic with hand and arm signals and a no nonsense attitude. They deserved a true salute, as did the motorists who were extraordinarily patient and well-behaved.

Steve and I had decided to be spectators until the crowd thinned and the road cleared up a bit. Slowly at first, but surely, the reluctant vehicular traffic began to move. The wind was brisk and there was a cloud cover moving into the area. The weather at jump time had been great. We slid down the embankment - the tall grass was pretty well beaten down - to the car, and while sitting there out of the wind, we decided to have our version of a tail gate party. With the last of our day old baguette, we made sardine (in tomato sauce) sandwiches which Steve managed to eat with negative comments and reservations, however, I thought they were tasty. We finished up our meal with bananas, bottled water, and a Tootsie Pop for dessert. Imagination and 'hunger sauce' can do wonders for a menu like that. Oh well, it was economical. Notice I did not say

filling. After waiting for a little more than an hour, we pulled out into a still slow moving line of cars headed east and north along a coastal route. We passed through some very pretty towns - Houlgate, Cabourg, Villers to name some. I can't recall the name of the town, but we stopped at a do-it-yourself car wash. I provided the francs and Steve provided the labor, and the trusty Renault received a much needed cleaning, inside and out. Mud from the Somme, Flanders, and Normandy were caked on, in, and under the car. The interior was also covered with bread and pastry crumbs. Twenty minutes and ten francs later, we were on our way in a clean car. After all, we didn't want to look like a pair of Gascon bumpkins heading into the big city!?

We turned southeast past Lisieux and then headed east on an auto-route towards Paris. It was early evening, but still daylight, and the Sunday traffic was heavy and fast - emphasize fast. Motorcycles in particular seemed to be flying down the roadway. I had noticed even before today, that in rain or sunshine, the cyclist would weave through traffic and roar down the center line between cars. Dressed in their bulky leathers and dark visored helmets, they surely must have a death wish. I think Steve felt challenged by the French drivers and had us clipping along about 160kph (100 miles an hour). We were still being passed, however I objected to that speed. I wanted both of us to see the USofA again. He reluctantly slowed down at my insistence to a snail's paced 85mph.

Looking at the map, the time, and the darkening sky, we started thinking about our stop-over for the night. Several choices of towns - Thibouville, le Neubourg, Evreux - were discussed, and we were trying to eke out as many extra miles as possible before dark, and get close to, but not into, the Paris area. We finally agreed on a town with what seemed to us a most un-French sounding name - Vernon.

We departed from the auto-route and drove about 10 miles (on a good road) to the town, which was about 35 miles west of Paris. It was a pretty place, with tree lined streets, a modern business section, and was sited on the Seine River. We drove around a bit and selected a modest, but modern looking hotel - the Hotel du Haut Marais - in a quiet area not far from the river. Very few people were out and about, and everything seemed closed down as it was late Sunday evening. Steve got the room, we unloaded our gear plus a change of lighter clothing, as it seemed to have warmed up some, and headed for our room on the second floor. I saw or

heard no one else on the premises, and we may well have been the only guests. The room was sparsely furnished but it was clean, had comfortable beds, and a TV. Later we lay in bed and watched The Longest Day, dubbed in French no less, and thought 'how appropriate' on the eve of D-Day to be seeing this film, here. We were more amused by the voice-overs for John Wayne and Robert Mitchum than we were awed by the well-known story line. John Wayne sounded as if his fatigue pants were too tight.

One thing about the accommodations which struck me as odd, was the size of the bathroom. It was huge. It was easily as large, if not larger, than our sleeping room. There was a king-sized bath-tub elevated some 3 feet above the floor level on a ledge against one wall. On the opposite wall was the lavatory all by itself. The WC was just that, a closet in one corner of the room. The room and all the plumbing furnishings were stark white, but the water was hot, and it felt great as I sat in it and soaked. It had been a long, enjoyable, memorable, and perfect day, and I'll wager that the Gondree Cafe and the bridge were still the scene of warm comradeship and toasts to those long ago days of hardship and glory. We turned out our bed lights, and were probably asleep before we even stretched out. So ended the seventh day of our trek.

#### DAY 8 - MONDAY, 6 JUNE 1994

Usually we were on the road by 6:30am, but we slept-in a little later that morning. Since I was the alarm clock I guess I fell down on the job, but the bed was so comfortable even I didn't want to get up. However, adventure called. I flipped back the covers and put my bare feet down on the cold tile floor - that was a wake-up call! I woke Steve from somewhere 'out there' and we dressed, had our fruit, juice, and pastry, and talked over the day's plan as we packed our gear and then headed down the stairs. We didn't see or hear anyone stirring in the hotel. We got to the car, threw our bags in, got a fresh bottle of water for the day, and drove through Vernon to get back to the auto-route. It was 7am but there wasn't much traffic or many pedestrians to be seen. The sky had a heavy grey overcast, and it was humid, but not windy.

Steve had predicted dense traffic for a Monday morning and he proved to be an accurate prophet on that count. The road out to the auto-route was okay, however, once we pulled onto the auto-

route, the traffic, to include large trucks, was bumper to bumper. We moved along, although slowly at times, until we were about 15 miles outside of Paris, then everything stopped and it was a miserable stop/start/creep pattern of movement. Oddly, no one seemed to get anxious about the slow pace. We saw people reading newspapers, novels, and talking on the phone. A light mist of rain fell intermittently, wetting the roadway, but the slow pace negated any skidding. I wondered how it was possible for these people to be going to work and not be late. Surely some of them were going to work, since most of the cars had only a single occupant and most looked well-dressed, and at the same time had that Monday morning 'I would rather be doing something else' look on their faces. It was 8:30am and we had been on the road for an hour. We had covered less than 30 miles.

Per usual I did the map work and Steve drove. I had my fling at Paris traffic in 1963 when the family spent a 3 day weekend there... and by the end of the second day, I had parked the car at the hotel and we rode in taxi cabs (but that is another story, another time, and another life). I had not said anything, but I was waiting to see Steve's reactions behind the wheel while jousting with the Parisians around the Place Charles de Gaulle, and the Arc d'Triomphe - my favorite Paris landmark (In retrospect, he did well, and we emerged unscathed at the day's end).

At last the auto-route emptied onto the 'beltway' around Paris, the Peripherique, with all of it's 'ports of entry' into the city proper. Some of that road network was tunnel-like underpasses which were several lanes wide and filled with fast and frenetic traffic. I looked any minute to see, or be involved in a pile up, but I heard not one horn blow, nor a tire screech in earnest. Good fortune was with us and we spotted our exit sign in time to move into the proper lane and swing up the ramp and onto the city streets.

We moved down the Avenue du Armee, around the Arc and down the Champs Elysee, and it was truly a grand sight. Paris has to be one of the most beautiful and exciting cities in the world. We turned off the Champs, passed the Grande and Petit Palais, crossed the Pont Alexander III (a magnificent but not overly large bridge over the Seine), and parked the car on a side street just across from the Musee de l'Armee and Hotel National des Invalides - our destination, the French national military museum.

A light drizzle was falling and reaching for my cap as I got out of the car, and not finding it, I

realized that I had left my D-Day commemorative cap at the hotel in Vernon. I remembered taking it off and laying it on a table in the small lobby where we sat our bags down right before we went up to the room. I wasn't too happy about my negligence at losing the cap, as I had intended to keep it as a memento, but I thought Steve had gone 'bonkers' when he suggested we go back for it... and he was serious.

We left the car and entered the grounds through a large ornate gate after crossing a dry moat, and walked along a very wide cobblestone path/street up to the building's front entrance.

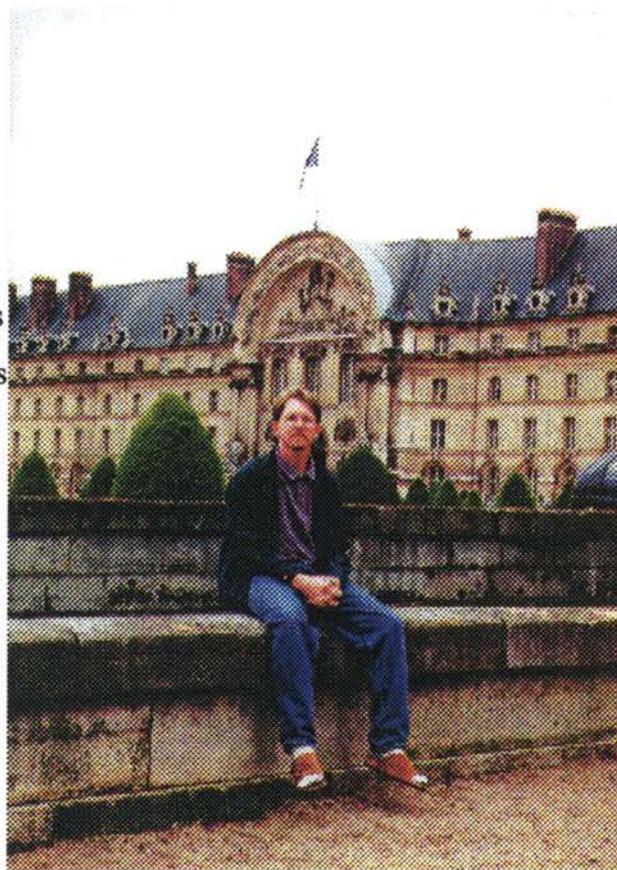
We had visited this museum complex in 1963, but with Suzanne along it was not easy to linger in the galleries and leisurely examine the exhibits. Her interest level was not too great, but then she was only 3 years old. Her mother was much older and her interest span wasn't too great either.

This was truly a fantastic museum, with multi-storied galleries filled with a rich collection of artifacts from time periods as early as the Roman Empire's ventures into Europe.

There were uniforms and weapons displays from wars down through the ages, rows and rows of glass encased suits of armor worn by knights and warriors from 'days of yore'.

There was a huge, expansive courtyard, cobblestoned, that was surrounded by walkways lined with ornately cast bronze cannon from past centuries.

It simply is not possible nor will I attempt in this writing to describe the magnificent inventory and the scope of exhibits that we saw, as there were literally thousands of items, all expertly displayed. We browsed for a long time.



Steve in front of the Musee de l'Armee



Several of the many suits of armor exhibited

It was really fascinating to see 'history' preserved in such a manner for everyone to view. The weapons displays, and in particular the ones from the Great War 1914-1918, were focal points of my interest. It was late morning when we finished our walkthrough of all the galleries, and decided it was time for a pick-me-up. We stopped by the in-house cafeteria for a cup of cafe au lait and a large pastry. This time I finished my coffee without Steve's help. If we had stayed in-country for another week, I might have even developed a taste for it, at least for the good cups.

We visited the beautiful, and ornately decorated, domed chapel which contained the Tombeau de Napoleon I. It actually looked more like a mini-cathedral, both from the inside and outside. When you enter the very large main room you notice a huge 'hole' in the floor in the center of the room, surrounded by a marble balustrade. Marble



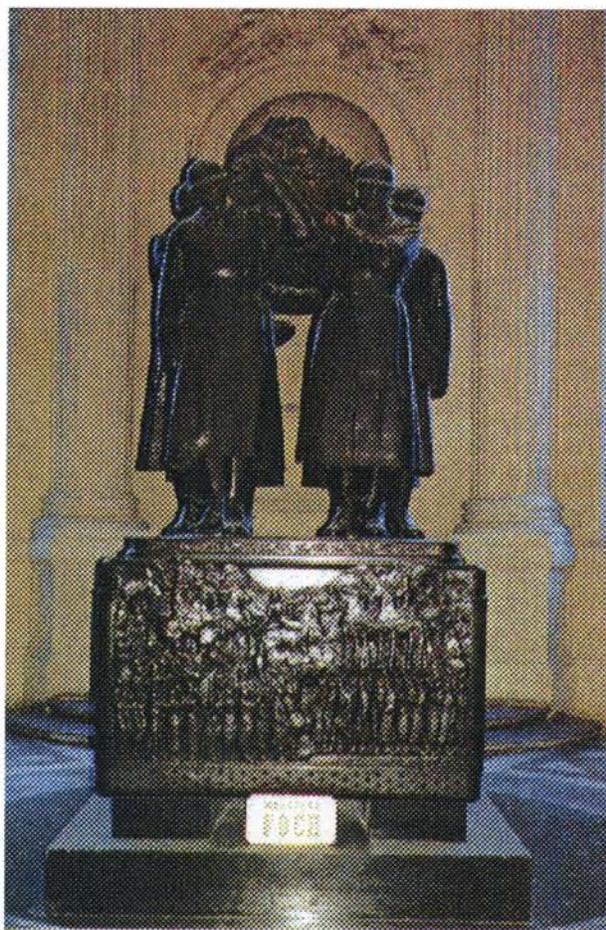
Knight and horse in shining armor

was everywhere in the construction, to include the floor. There, maybe 30 feet or more, below the floor level was a massive, carved red marble (ironically, from Russia) vault in which Napoleon I is buried. The vault sat on a dias at the center of the circular, columned 'pit' and it was possible to go down a set of stairs and view the vault at eye-level from a peripheral walkway. It was an impressive sight, though I had see it before.

At the entrance floor level, and spaced evenly around but well back from the ballustrade, were large separate chambers where Vauban, Foch, Lyantez, and Josephine Bonaparte were all entombed. Field Marshall Foch's large bronze vault was borne on the shoulders of six larger-than-life le Grande Guerre 'poilus', all uniformed and helmeted, cast in bronze as well. Entry into those side chambers was not possible, but as I viewed Foch's chamber, I appreciated it most of all. An alter area located at the end of the main room, opposite the entrance, was extremely ornate with stained glass, marble statuary, and gilded surfaces everywhere.

We departed the museum after several hours there of great browsing, and we drove back down to the Champs Elysee. It was our

intention to do a bit of strolling and people watching on the Champs followed by a late lunch and libation. Steve parked the car in what appeared to be a legitimate parking place... appeared to be. We walked a short distance and entered a money exchange facility, since we needed some francs. I had left my passport in the car (which I needed for the transaction) so I went back, and there under the windshield wiper was a traffic citation for 240 francs (not quite \$50). Unawares, we had parked in a bus stop lane. Neither of us had seen any signs, but I noted as I looked about



Tomb of Field Marshall Foch

that there was a blue painted line on the pavement which I guess defined the 'stop area'. At any rate, I returned post haste to the exchange facility and showed the ticket to Steve. Welcome to Paris. Merde! We envisioned a visit to the bastille, and with that in mind, we hopped in the car and moved out of the area. Steve had a traffic citation for a memento, and we were hoping that Interpol would not track him down in Enterprise, Alabama.

Fighting through traffic circles, dodging a Peugeot here and there, cutting in front of and being cut in front of, getting and giving dirty looks but stopping just short of the 'bird', and with frustration at having been denied a short visit on the Champs, we made it past the Arc and down the Avenue de Armee, and eventually onto the Peripherique, finally clearing the environs of Paris. The traffic had been nightmarish and we were disappointed... I suppose that was our wrist slap for deviating from the plan of avoiding large cities.

The open road had a good feeling as we headed for Pierrefonds, some 85 kilometers away. The drive was a pleasant one as we moved through the countryside and the forests near Compiegne.

As I mentioned before, this was the location where the Armistice Agreement was signed that ended the Great War 1914-1918. The signing took place in a railway car.

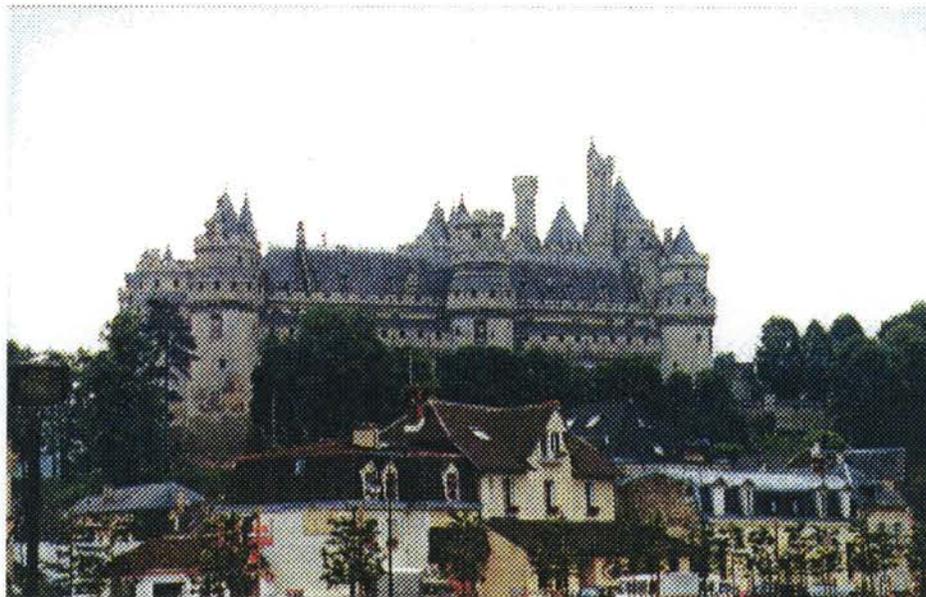
To satisfy a revengeful ego, Hitler made the French government representatives sign their surrender documents in 1940 in the same area and same railcar. The car was taken to Berlin where it was subsequently destroyed in an Allied bombing raid. The railway car and all of the documents on display at the site today are exact replicas of the originals.

The sky was overcast and it was warm, but rain didn't seem a threat. It was late afternoon when we stopped for some 'gazoil' and then continued on our way. We finally rolled down into the



Au revoir, Parea

wooded valley where the small village of Pierrefonds was located. This was another 'revisitation' for us. We had visited the chateau (I called it a Walt Disney castle) in October 1963. We both recalled the reds and yellows of the autumn foliage, and acorns covering the pathways and ground alongside the outer walls of the chateau. Steve related how he had pocketed some of the acorns and later dropped them from a passageway window to watch them fall to the ground below, some of them ricocheting off the slope of the buttressed walls. After driving around a bit, to include a quick run up to the chateau to check on the hours open for visitation, we selected a quaint little hotel, the Hotel des Etrangers, for our night's stay. The hotel was located amidst shops on a street which bordered a modest sized lake that seemed to serve as the western boundary of the village. A flock of ducks were quacking and swimming around on the lake as we stood outside the hotel unloading our gear. We took our bags up to our 3d floor room, negotiating narrow, steep stairs. From our window we could look out and up at the massive grey stone walls and the numerous turrets and crenellations of the chateau. We could not have asked for a better view. Rising up from the hillside, towering above the trees, it dominated the houses and shops below.



The Chateau Pierrefonds

We had some time before the dinner hour, and decided to visit the chateau for a tour rather than wait until the next morning. We rode up to the chateau, parked, and walked over the drawbridge

that spanned a dry moat. We passed the guard tower and went into the cobblestoned courtyard. No real surprises, it was as we had remembered. There was a small shop just off the courtyard where we paid our admission, and later bought some glossy photos of the chateau. After snapping a couple of photos in the courtyard, where a life-size bronze statue of a horse-mounted knight in armor carrying a lance, is located, we entered the main part of the chateau and walked along dimly lighted, cold stone hallways, and through unfurnished rooms with their scuffed stone floors and bare walls.

I wondered about the comfort level back in the days when it was lived in. Each of the rooms had a small fireplace. Except for the huge banquet hall (it must have been 75 to 100 feet long), the other rooms were rather small and most were windowless. That feature would be a boon of course when the cold wet winter winds blew. The banquet hall had a wooden parquet-like floor, and the walls were covered with a rich green/blue covering (like wallpaper). At the far end of the room were two side-by-side, massive fireplaces, literally tall enough to walk into. Above the fireplaces and the ornate mantel, were nine life sized carved female statues painted in colorful robes and dresses, standing in shallow alcoves. It was an impressive room. We completed our tour and departed the chateau since it was nearing time for them to close. It had been a quick but pleasant return to an interesting historic site.

As we drove back to the hotel, I had Steve drop me off at a patisserie to purchase a supply of goodies for the next day's breakfast and travel. It was a small shop right on the corner of the street leading out of the village. Inside it was clean and the display cases were filled with baked goods. It was about 6pm when I entered the shop. There was a customer there at the time, being waited on, and a steady flow of people came in to purchase bread for their evening meal. As I stood looking into the glass fronted cases, several teenagers came in, bought their pastries and went out the door eating them. One lady came in, approached the counter and placed on it a one-half dozen egg carton, which the lady behind the counter filled with loose, unpackaged eggs from a small basket in a refrigerator behind the counter. I thought that was novel... for that matter, so was shopping for fresh bread every evening! The clerk, a pretty young dark-haired woman (dressed in pink with a white apron) asked me several times in French, between waiting on others, what I wanted to purchase, but I couldn't make up my mind, and she seemed amused

by my hesitation and indecision. Everything looked absolutely delicious, and without a doubt, the best selection of pastries I had seen on the trip. I used to think it was funny the way my yellow labrador retriever, Honey, would sit by the chopping block in the kitchen and salivate as food was being prepared. As I stood there before those trays of sumptuous pastries, I came to fully understand the extent of her gastronomical and olfactory sensations. Finally, after seeing the supply of one particularly mouth watering pastry that I had eyeballed being depleted by other customers, I decided to make my purchases. I kept pointing, the clerk kept sacking. Quite satisfied with my purchases, I gave my best 'au revoir et merci' and departed with a large bag of goodies. I walked back to the hotel, and showing great restraint, I held off of the pastries to save my appetite for the evening meal. It was not easy. Just as I arrived in front of the hotel, three teenagers (*deux garçons et une fille*) came riding by on bicycles. Tennis racquets were slung across their backs. Their happy voices could have been recounting good play and games won. Who knows, someday maybe... center court at Roland Garros Stade.

Back in the room, I stashed the pastries, freshened up, and then we went down for our meal in the hotel dining room. The dining area was quite attractive, with draped windows, plants and flowers about the tables and room, and antique artifacts on the walls. There was an antique trammel - a metal fireplace cooking device for hanging pots above the fire (Steve has one that came from a home in Laon, France, where our friends Bill and Pat Campbell lived in the '60's). The tables were set with silver and fine glassware. The young man who waited on us spoke no English, but did a good job of interpreting our menu requests. There were several other diners, but the one most noticeable to us was a well-dressed gentleman who sat at the table next to us. He had deliberately 'scoped out' the dining room to select a seat, seemingly taking a long time. I believe that as he overheard our conversation, his decision was made (as he seemed to be, while trying not to be obvious, hanging on our every word throughout his meal). Maybe Americans were not a common sight in the hotel or the town, at least at meal time.

Our meal was very tasty, with quiche for an appetizer, a salad, and an entree of baked chicken in a wonderful sauce, flan for dessert, and a selection of frommage to top it off. We thoroughly and leisurely enjoyed the meal. Steve noted that the only thing that was incongruous to our other dining experiences was that in this case, the piped-in music was playing a modern rock

album he recognized. It seemed slightly out of place in this quaint establishment under the shadow of a centuries old chateau.

Afterwards we walked across the street to a small parc at the lake's edge, and in front of the hotel. We stood and tossed chunks from our day old baguette (we had retrieved from the car) to the ducks as they quacked and waddled about the water's edge. We lit up and puffed on "D-Day commemorative cigars" (actually two Cuban churchills) that Steve had brought along for the right moment. This seemed to be it. With the bread gone, the cigars finished, and twilight setting in, we went back inside the hotel. The stairwell was narrow and carpeted, as was the hallway to our room. The room was small, clean, sparsely furnished and had comfortable beds... but no TV for Steve.

I wrote a letter to Suzanne. I wanted to mail it from Pierrefonds because she had been there as a 3 year old. Steve had already sacked out and was asleep after spending some time at the window watching the darkness enfold the chateau and engaging in some quiet musings of his own. I soon followed him. As I lay in bed, the thought came to me that except for the commemorative stamp that I put on the letter, I could not recall a single event or sighting - not even in Paris - that brought to my mind that the date was June 6, the D-Day anniversary date. I had no regrets about our decision not to hassle with the crowds and traffic in Normandy that day. Our bout with the traffic at Ranville confirmed that (and as it was, to top it all off, it had rained). I fell asleep with those thoughts and slept soundly, ending day eight of our trip.

#### DAY 9 - TUESDAY, 7 JUNE 1994

I awoke around 6:30am and through a gap in the curtain I could see the golden glow of early morning sunshine in a bright blue sky. I yawned, stretched, and climbed out of bed, making my way around Steve's bed to the window. He had opted for that side of the room the night before. I opened the window to a cool breath of fresh air. It was another one of those "it's good to be alive" mornings, this one in Pierrefonds, France. I was treated to the soft whispering sound of a passing bicycle on the street below... it's rider no doubt headed for the patisserie for some

morning croissants! Through the trees covering the hillsides I could see quite a few tile roofed houses overlooking the narrow valley to the east, and whereas last evening the chateau had looked almost foreboding, with the dark sky and light misty fog, its massiveness was beautiful and altogether different bathed in the morning sunlight.

I gathered up some munchies along with my fruit juice and stood there in my pajamas, leaning out of the third floor window watching the small village slowly coming to life. The chocolate filled croissant certainly added to the enjoyment of my time at the window. Between bites I gave Steve his first call, then watched the ducks swimming in the lake, leaving an ever-widening trail of ripples in their wake. I dressed, gave Steve his final wake-up call, and watched as a couple of autos passed beneath the window. Several people walked along the sidewalk, some with briefcases and another with a half a loaf of bread tucked under his arm.

Steve was up, dressing, and grumbling about having to drink two glasses of orange juice. I think he did renege on eating his daily ration of bananas, saying he would eat it later. I don't recall whether he did or not. We packed our bags and left the hotel. I had enjoyed my stay very much. After we loaded the car and got our daily bottle of fresh water, I posted Suzanne's letter in the mail drop at the small post office. This one was not covered with stamps, and she received it. Steve drove up the winding hillside road out of the valley and headed northeast.

We had decided to use the day as a wind-down day and sort of 'wing it' for an itinerary. As I mentioned before, we were on somewhat familiar ground, though our sense of direction had been dulled by a 31 year absence. However, with map, memory, and road signs, we were confident in our ability to find the desired sites. The morning hours were spent locating and visiting an American military cemetery and monuments.

Over hills, through valleys, and across the Marne river, we went until we came to the absolutely gigantic monument near the town of Chateau-Thierry. Located in a beautiful hilltop park of some 25 acres of woodlands and overlooking the Marne river valley, the monument was a massive, rectangular colonnaded edifice. On the eastern face (valley side) of the monument, along the base, there was a huge eagle and shield of 'heroic' proportions and below that was inscribed "Time will not dim the glory of their deeds". The monument was dedicated to the American military forces that took part in the fighting in that area in July 1918. The park, most

of which is forested, and the monument area were well maintained, and sort of picture book pretty. The sun was warming away the morning chill. We departed, feeling proud that the US government also honors the achievements and sacrifices of its men-at-arms.



The monument at Chateau-Thierry

About six miles of back roads took us to the edge of Belleau Wood, between the villages of Belleau and Lucy le Bocage where the American military Aisne-Marne Cemetery was located. Steve parked in the designated area and we walked through the entrance gate. We saw no one the entire time we visited there. It was early, and even the visitor's house was closed. It was a beautiful setting. A long wide walkway bordered by small leafy trees and masses of rose bushes led from the entrance gate up through the grave plots to a chapel of white stone which was sited at the base of a hillside overlooking the cemetery.

The two sections of grave plots, one on each side of the pathway, extended in a convex curve along the base of the hill. Each section contained 13 rows of Italian marble headstones placed over the graves of 2,289 US WW I dead. Every state of the union, 48 of them at the time, was represented. The names of 1060 missing or unidentified (and buried there) were inscribed on the chapel walls.

The back side of the cemetery was defined by large islands of shrubs such as mock orange, boxwood, and forsythia. The beauty of the cemetery easily rivaled most of those we had seen in

the Somme area. After browsing some of the rows of stones, we walked back to the car and drove on our way.

We went around the boundary of the cemetery and drove up into Belleau Wood, which joins the cemetery on the north side. Some 200 acres of the wooded area are maintained by the American Battle Monuments Commission, and serve as a memorial to the American Expeditionary Force in WW I. The principal US force involved in the battle for Belleau Wood was the 2d Infantry Division, which had a brigade of Marines attached to it. I had served with the 72d Tank Bn as a tank unit leader in the 2d ID in Korea.

On the entrance road into the park, standing on an island in the road, was a life size bronze plaque that had a large bas-relief sculpture of a marine holding a rifle in a combat posture in the center. Trench

mortars and French 75mm artillery pieces were placed as displays along the sides of the road in a small area just in the edge of the woods. Off the roadway in the wooded area, trench outlines and shell craters were much in evidence. The ground was covered in ferns and soggy with moss and fallen leaves that smelled of decay. The sunlight hardly penetrated the dense overhead tree foliage, and despite the openness of the ground and the lack of any real undergrowth or 'young' trees, it was dreary and depressing in the dampness and mud under that canopy. It did not seem inviting even on a peaceful morning.

Steve poked around a bit in the cratered area, and although it was not posted as a danger, I cautioned him against such impromptu exploring. I'm not exactly a 'cautious clyde', but I wanted us both to continue enjoying life. Actually, I was thinking that if he gets blown away, I'll have to drive the Renault back into that stupid underground parking lot in Brussels! Not!



The chapel at the Aisne-Marne Cemetery

Just a bit of comic relief. Our visit over, we drove away.

We headed north past Soissons. It was on the outskirts of this town that there were caves used as mushroom farms where one could go and purchase fresh mushrooms, which we often did back in 1963. In fact, you could harvest your own, which we also did. We were driving through open country. It was all farmland, with sugar beets and forage crops being abundant. Most of the roads were vastly improved since I had driven over them on our family Sunday forays 31 years earlier. But landmarks were the same, as was the case with the mushroom caves.

The German World War II cemetery Kriegsgraberstatte at Fort-de-Malmaison was one of those landmarks that told us where to turn onto the Chemin des Dames. It was a roadway used by the ladies of the court to travel between Reims and Compiègne in the 'days of yore'. It ran basically east-west atop a broad, well-defined ridge, and was the scene of fierce fighting in WW I, particularly with the involvement of French forces.

Our destination on this road was the Cavern of Dragoons, where in 1914 an intense, nightmarish struggle took place in the dark, in an underground cavern, between German and French Algerian troops. From our previous visit in the 60's, we recalled seeing sealed rooms or passageways that had crudely scratched lettering that read e.g. 100 Allemande soldats. Those were their tombs, buried where they fell. On that visit, an old man, bent with years of age, dressed in baggy black pants, faded blue coat, and a dark, worn beret, carried a sputtering, smoking lantern and guided us around in the damp and soft chalky clay of the underground rooms and passageways. Muddy, rusty battlefield artifacts and weapons were lying about 'on display' as it were. It was a smelly gloomy place that seemed almost malevolent. Before you climbed up the narrow steep dirt steps to the above ground level, you were expected to place a franc or so in the old man's gnarled outstretched hand as he stood by the exit bidding you adieu. That was my memory, Steve's also, perhaps. And we looked forward to seeing all of that again with its mystique intact (you would think that the visit to Robert Diablo's digs would have prepared us for some changes). But it was not to be. The visit on June 7, 1994 proved to be a real disappointment. We arrived at an unkept, somewhat commercialized touristy area adjacent to the road. We got out of the car and walked around, sort of disbelieving what we saw. We noted the entrance to the cavern (cave) had been dressed up with field stones, labeled with an inscribed sign in the cement, and several

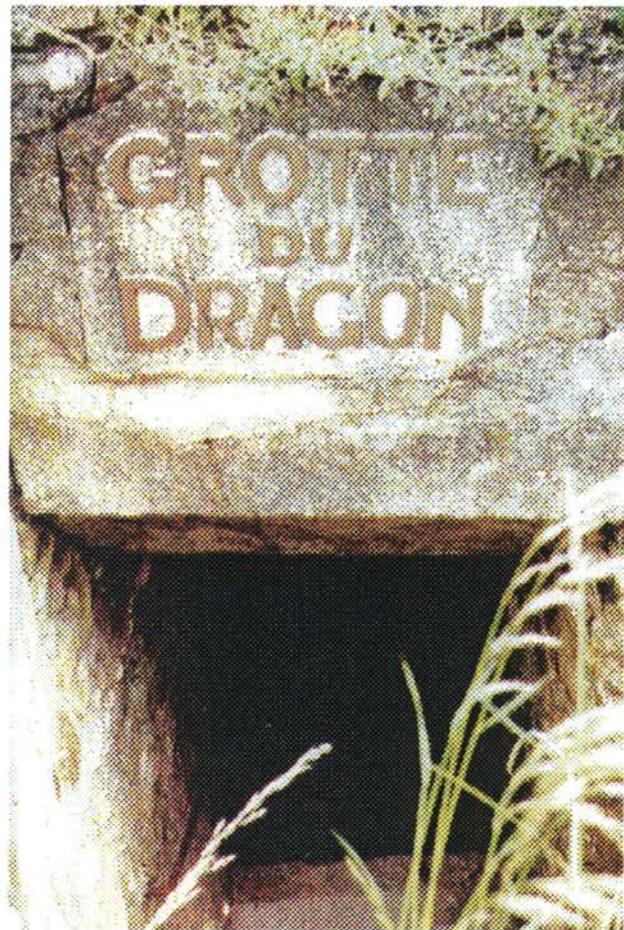
stone steps led down to a steel door with a padlock on it. In the 60's the entrance was an unimproved hole in the ground on the backside of the ridge, and a small weathered monument had marked and dedicated the site. What confronted us now was a small, ill-constructed trench with a few strands of barbed wire (rusty, but it looked commercial), a rusty French artillery piece, and a pitiful looking junky wreck of a WW II tank hull, partially buried. All placed by the path leading down from the road. This all served merely to distract not enhance the site. None of that hodge-podge of junk even remotely played a part in the battle there in the cavern. It was an abomination of the truth. We were shocked....it was enough to make you cry.

What really rubbed salt in the wound, however, was the notice posted on the door of a very small structure. To our chagrin, frustration, and ultimate disgust, Tuesday was the only day of the week that the site was closed to visitors. Yes, it was Tuesday, and no it wasn't Belgium, but Steve did experience his Lord Worsley. Maybe we were lucky. The inside of the cavern was probably not the same as we remembered either. I noticed that even the name inscribed over the entrance read 'Grotte du Dragon', and not the more glamorous, Cavern of Dragoons.

We turned and left with a bad taste for it all. Thank goodness for memories. The day was not lost. We moved on.

We back-tracked to the Soissons-Laon road and turned north towards Laon, and the site of the former Laon Air Force Base that had been my assignment from 1962-1964. The air base had an interesting history of occupancy. When the Great

War broke out in 1914, it was a French aerodrome, then it was alternately held by German (1914-1918), French (1918-1940), German (1940-1945), and US (1945-1967) occupants, and



Entrance to the 'grotte'

then the US forces in France departed, courtesy of President de Gaulle, and the French once again regained possession of the air base. In some of his pre-trip research, Steve had spoken with the French liaison officer to the US Army Aviation Center at Fort Rucker, Alabama (Steve is the director of the US Army Aviation Museum). He learned from this particular French colonel that Laon was now used as an artillery base, and we did not intend to visit.

South of Laon, some 15 miles or so, was the small village of Urcel, located astride the main road. There in the village was the Hostellerie de France, a 3-star restaurant in the Michelin guide book. Steve pulled into the parking area, and for auld lang syne, and since it was late morning, we decided to have a cafe au lait. We entered the bar area, sat at a table and ordered 'deux cafe'. Two well-dressed older ladies were at a nearby table having some type of refreshment, and we could hear diners in another room, having an early lunch, I suppose.

The place was as I had remembered it, although there had been some cosmetic remodeling in the dining room, which I could see through an open door.

The restaurant had quite a reputation for dining excellence. People from the Paris area would come up for evening meals. Couples from the air base often dined there, and on one occasion some folks we knew saw Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor having dinner. We sat and sipped our coffee. Although Steve had no point of reference and seemed quite content with his 'cafe', memories were all around me... Pat and Bill Campbell, paying more for two Coca Colas (6 oz) than I did for a pitcher of vin d'maison (the waiter seemed more than perplexed when Bill ordered the colas to accompany one of the chef's meals). We also dined there when my aunt Lois and cousin Martha visited us while they were vacationing in Paris. During that meal we polished off a bottle of Rose Anjou Cabernet and ordered another. The food ran out before the wine and I wound up finishing off about half of that second one without help (waste not, want not... it was expensive). Driving back to the air base that night with those dim yellow headlights, required by law in France at that time, along those narrow tree lined roads was a real adventure, trust me. So much for jogging down memory lane. We finished up our coffee, paid the tab, and walked out to the car. I turned for a last look. It was a pretty place; not modern but sort of quaint - a Tudor style. I used Steve's camera and took what turned out to be a wonderful picture of the place.



The Hostellerie de France

It was only a short time after we left Urcel that we were driving on the outskirts of Laon, and looking at what had been the results of an obvious growth period since our last days in this area. Modern high rise apartment complexes, industrial sites, and a new, much expanded road network to support it all. Even so, in the distance high up on the plateau that rose up out of the surrounding sugar beet farmlands, we could see the old walled city and the Laon Cathedral.



Distant view of the Laon Cathedral

It was built in the 12th Century during the Crusades, and has survived time and wars very well.

A memorial mass was held there in November of 1963 for President John Kennedy.

Steve drove steadily on the auto-route past small villages and cultivated fields, past Maubage and then we crossed the border into Belgium. As before, there was no hassle at the crossing point. Buildings that at one time had housed the customs operations were closed and deserted. We did stop however, not far into Belgium, at a money exchange facility. We unloaded our French francs for Belgian francs, and then continued our journey northward under a blue sky, bright sun, and a cool wind. We passed through Mons, where the British Expeditionary Force, a small but highly trained and professional army (given the nickname of 'the Contemptibles' by Kaiser Wilhelm) met the Germans and fought some of their first engagements in 1914. The next stop was also our destination for the remainder of the day and the evening. Waterloo.

We were in pretty country, with nice houses and neat little villages that had been along our route ever since we pulled off the auto-route, which we had been on since departing the Laon area. On the southern outskirts of the town of Waterloo was the site of the Battle of Waterloo, 1815, and the location of the Butte of the Lion. As we were nearing the area of Waterloo, I had been looking at the map symbols, getting oriented as to just where the Butte was situated. We were stopped at a traffic light when it seemed all of a sudden we were staring out over a tree line at a lion statue on top of a huge hill mass. How we could have not seen it earlier, I can't imagine. Steve did a right turn when the light changed and we drove a very short distance to a tourist-like complex. Shops, hotels, and restaurants were all about, but the main, 'center stage' attraction was the massive, grass covered, truncated conical



The Butte of the Lion

mound, on top of which stood a very large bronze statue of a male lion on an enormous pedestal. After parking the car, we went over to a large building which housed a gift shop and movie theater (a multimedia presentation on the Battle of Waterloo was shown there on a repetitious schedule). Access to the mound was through that building after paying the admission price, which we did. You reach the top of the mound by climbing 226 steps, which we did. They seemed to go up and up forever.

A steady stream of visitors huffed and puffed their way up and down those steps. So did we, and thank goodness for the hand rail on the ascent.

The climb was worth every huff and puff. The view from the platform on top was magnificent. The entire terrain of the battlefield stretched out in front of you like an open book. A large semi-recumbent bronze plaque was just in front of the railed platform, and it graphically depicted with color coded symbols, the disposition and direction of movement of the armies of Wellington (British) and Napoleon (French) plus the forces of Prussia and the Netherlands (both allied to the British) as they were all engaged in the Battle of Waterloo. You could look at the graphics on the plaque, then look out in the distance at the actual terrain. It was an interesting and impressive site, notwithstanding that the topography most surely has undergone changes in the 179 years since the armies clashed near that small village in Belgium. As we stood there on the platform we could look up at the much larger-than-life sized bronze lion. He stood on all fours facing out towards the battlefield.

The top of the rectangular granite pedestal was at least 10 feet or more above the level of the platform. We were in a group of about a dozen or so people standing around on the pedestal, looking, talking and gesturing, when up walked three US Air Force officers, and the oddity here, to me, was that they were in flight suits. We did not engage them in conversation, so the 'I wonder why' was not answered.

The sun was shining, but the sky was a bit hazy and across the area a good stiff breeze was blowing. Before we descended the steps we were treated to the sight of a Belgian Air Force jet, probably a trainer, coming in on a low pass (we were about eye level) across the area from behind us. He then tracked out over the area of the battlefield.

After descending the steps, which was far easier than ascending them, we went over to one of

the shops at the base of the mound and browsed a book\gift section. We both scan read pamphlets and books about the Butte and gleaned the following data: The mound was 1,700 feet in circumference at it's base, and 140 feet vertical (high). It was constructed of 10.5 million cubic feet of earth, which was carried to the site in wicker baskets on the backs of women who worked for the Cockerill Foundry, makers of the bronze lion, in Leige, Belgium. It took two years to construct and was completed in the mid-1800's. The bronze 'simba' was 15 feet in length (not counting the tail, which was in a 'hanging downward' attitude), 14 feet tall at the head, and weighed 28 tons. He was a big one. We did a good number on browsing the book shelves, bought some picture post cards to supplement Steve's photos (he was afraid he would not get a very good shot of it because of the size), and I bought a black baseball style cap with the word Belgium in block letters across the front in the national flag colors of red, yellow, and black. I have not worn it though, as I figured the local bubbas would want to know was that a new brand of beer. There were quite a few people visiting the site, business was good for them. We went to the car and drove away.



Le Bivouac de L'Empereur near the Butte

The town of Waterloo was just down the road, and we arrived there and drove around looking at some of the sights. There was plenty of late afternoon traffic and people scurrying around shopping. It all looked clean, modern or modernized, and prosperous. We decided to get our

lodging in the town, as opposed to heading back out to the outskirts where we had seen a couple of hotels. We got a room in a not too large, modern hotel, the Primevera Hotel, just off the main street through town. The room, can you believe it was on the ground floor, was clean, well furnished, good beds, tile bath and shower, and a color TV - a Waterloo Holiday Inn.

It was much too early to turn-in, and we had not eaten our supper, so we walked along shop lined streets, window shopping, and browsed a very large and well-stocked toy store that caught our eye. Finally, the hour and our stomachs said it was 'food time'. We decided to pass on the hotel dining room. It looked so formal, and we were not in the mood for a full blown, sit down dinner. When we walked back to the hotel we saw a large supermarket type store located practically next door. We went there and shopped up and down the aisles. It was a super nice place and I enjoyed pricing items, looking at the variety of products offered, and watching the people as they did their shopping. Maybe the tourist bureau would be interested in placing that activity in their travel brochures. I purchased cookies, candy (Belgian chocolates - what else would a chocoholic buy?), and from the bakery section I got a passion fruit torte. Steve kept saying that it was too large, that we wouldn't be able to eat it all. Wrong. Later, in our room when we got around to eating it for desert, I noticed that he had no trouble with his half. It was delicious, and had the store still been open at that hour, I would have gone back for another one. We brought our sack of goodies back to the room. It was about 8pm, and as we sat watching the European edition of CNN news on the 'telly', we discussed what we should do about our last evening meal on 'the continent'. I think Steve may have seen it first, as he was sitting by the window, but there across the street from the hotel was, of all things, a pizza parlor, and that idea sounded like a winner for some reason. We went over and ordered a large vegetarian pizza, walked around a bit looking in the window of a sporting goods store at golf clubs, then went back and picked up the pizza, returned to the room, and devoured every morsel. It tasted very good, even washed down with room-temperature Evian. We were saving our last box of fruit juice for our now-traditional petit dejeuner. Then came torte time, and as I said earlier, we had no trouble finishing it off, as it was truly a treat.

This was our last night. We had a departure time from Brussels the next afternoon, and we had a lot of repacking and 'cargo shifting' to do before bedtime. It took about an hour of decision-

making and shuffling baggage loads, and in the middle of the operation, the room looked as if a tornado had struck. I packed wet and/or dirty clothes in plastic bags, left my roll of Charmin in the bathroom, packed my candy and cookies in the carry-on bag, put my mud stained shoes in a bag (they had served me well as I walked in Somme mud and Omaha Beach sand), hung up my next day's travel clothes, checked to make sure that my passport and tickets were stashed safely and where I could get to them easily, and feeling satisfied with my efforts, I stacked the sleeping bag duffle, the B-4 bag and carry-on bag at the foot of the bed. Steve, of course, had been doing the same thing, and the room was large enough that we didn't interfere with each other's work. It was getting late, but we watched a bit of TV, and then called it a day. It had been a good one that evoked memories of times long passed and also created new moments that would become good memories. I stretched out, told Steve good-night, and was soon sound asleep. And so ended our ninth day in-country.

#### DAY 10 - WEDNESDAY, 8 JUNE 1994

I awoke to a beautiful sunny and cool morning, feeling fresh and good. As I lay there letting the world slowly return to my mind's consciousness, I thought about what a fantastic adventure Steve and I had shared. I felt eager to read new, and re-read my presently owned, military history books about the Great War as the British knew it and fought it. My thoughts were of the exciting and satisfying feelings that would enhance the readings of the names of villages, forests, and battlefields, knowing that Steve and I had walked many of the sites, and visited the final resting place of the men of the units engaged in the battles. I was grateful for the opportunity we had to share a common interest in military history in such a tangible way. It has always occupied the majority of my leisure reading.

My emotions were mixed about our departure. Economy-wise, it was time to leave, but interest-wise, I could have stayed much longer. You might say at this time it was matter (money) over mind (heart). It was getting late in the morning, and we had an afternoon departure time, and I knew we had to get on with it. I got out of bed, crawled over the piled up baggage and called to

Steve to get a move on or 'all the worms would be gone'.

Routines were hard to give up, so we had our juice (grape for a change), bananas, and pastries as usual. We had somewhat overstocked on the bottled water - I guess we overestimated how much it would take to wash down a chunk of baguette. We left some bottles in the room and several in the car trunk later. Don't ask why, but we each put a bottle in our carry-ons as well. We gathered our gear together, lugged it out to the car, packed it in place, and drove towards Brussels.

We were back on the auto-route and traffic was moderate to heavy as we closed in on Brussels. The road network was a bit confusing, our map was not very helpful, plus we didn't recognize the word used for the airport exit when we first saw it, so we missed the turn off to the airport. Our approach route was from the southeast and a different one than we had departed on some eight days earlier. We didn't realize our error initially and had driven into a rather extensive residential area. Steve figured out the 'error of our ways', reacted quickly, and our back-tracking turned out to be minimal. We soon were on the correct road, turned off at the correct exit, and shortly arrived at the airport area. After topping off (refueling) the Renault, we drove into the underground car rental return area. Once again, we found ourselves squeezing down narrow aisles, between rows of parked cars. We were right at the place we needed to be to turn in the car, but other cars were jamming around us, blocking us off from the central check out station, or running up behind us expecting to continue moving. Steve was reaching his 'flash point' even sooner than when we tried to depart the place. But with the grace of good fortune, a precarious parking slot, and my pouring oil on Steve's water, he parked and cleared the car through the checkout station.

We unloaded our gear, then shouldered the bags and climbed the stairs to the main terminal area. I stood guard over the pile of bags as Steve finished up the paperwork at the Europcar rental office. He shortly returned, so I assume that the APB put out on the Paris traffic citation hadn't reached Brussels yet. As I was standing there people watching, along came a man with a large, pretty golden retriever that was carrying its own leash looped up in its mouth. I had to laugh to myself. My retriever, Ginger, used to do that when I walked her to and from the lagoon beach for her swim... funny how one can never get away from having their emotional strings played.

We were early for our flight check-in, so we stood around in the vicinity of the Delta check-in counter waiting and people watching. I must say it, and here seems a good place, but I had been in Europe for 8 days and I had not seen one female that I could call real attractive or in possession of that 'euro-chic something'. I guess they do not frequent cemeteries, monuments, or battlefields, nor do they stay in 'Mom and Pop' hotels.

When the attendants arrived and began the check-in activities, we got rid of our baggage, except for the carry-on. Clearing customs was sort of a farcical formality, with the passports getting stamped by a uniformed clerk who displayed all the emotion of a robot. Then again, how exciting can it be, sitting there all day banging down on a piece of paper with a rubber stamp? With our bags x-rayed, we left customs and entered the main terminal area and the 'business strip' with all the shops and duty-free stores.

Our energy level was flagging a bit, so we stopped in one of the bars for our last experience with that toxic substance known as cafe au lait. We ordered and sat there sipping that elixir of caffeine. It was really quite good, and except for that 'battery acid' that I had in Pozieres and Mont St Michel, it had all been delicious. Steve seemed to thrive on it. My paternal grandfather used to say "If coffee ain't strong enough to float a nail, it ain't fit to drink", and I always thought that was clever, but after my experience with that brew at Pozieres, I take some exception to that bit of colloquialism.

We finished off the coffee and walked around in the duty free shops. No bargains there that I could see, but some very nice articles were available for purchase. There were leather goods, watches, and other jewelry, clothes, perfumes, tobacco, liquor, etc. all fancy pieces with brand names likely to be found in shops along Rodeo Drive. I was able to pass on all of the above, but I did fall victim to my chocolate habit. In one gourmet shop, I could hardly refrain from drooling on the display cases as I stood there breathing in those scrumptious odors. Will power just melted away. I had to have some of that chocolate to take home. Belgian chocolates are delicious with a capital D. My circulatory system was saying "watch out for the cocoa butter", but my taste buds were ignoring the plea. I bought several boxes.

It was just past mid-day when we went into the passenger waiting lounge and sat down in some comfy chairs facing out over the tarmac area and waited for our flight boarding call. I could

look out and see that the sky had a covering of high cirrus clouds, but the sun had burned off that bit of early morning fog that we had driven through near Waterloo. People were moving about, and the public address system kept up a chatter laced with static that mixed with the crowd noises, and I seldom understood what was announced. Together with the muted plane noises, it all blended into a reminder that we would soon be airborne and homeward bound.

We talked to an older guy who was from Louisiana, a WW II veteran of the 4th Infantry Division who piloted a light observation plane on D-Day at Utah Beach. He had taken some of his training at Fort Rucker back in the '40's, so he and Steve had an interesting conversation. He was still upset though, because the bus in which he and other vets were riding was denied entrance to the Omaha Beach area where the speeches and ceremonies took place. The MP's stopped them, and others, due to the traffic congestion on those narrow roads and in the parking areas. Imagine, there were men who fought on those beaches on 6 June 1944, but couldn't attend the ceremonies on 6 June 1994 due to traffic. Our visit on 5 June had been a real coup. I was getting a little drowsy when our flight number was announced to begin boarding. I shouldered my carry-on bag and followed Steve. We lined up with the milling masses, showed our boarding passes and filed aboard the aircraft.

We had the two seats on the outside aisle XX xxxxx xx, and I had the window seat. We were much more comfortable than on our trip over. Carry-on bags were placed under the seats, seat belts were fastened, and trays were 'in their upright position and locked' as we taxied out towards the runway. At 2:25pm that Delta wide-body, Flight 125, climbed up into a blue Belgique sky and headed west. Au revoir, Belgium.

The flight attendants were scurrying to and fro. The fasten seat belt sign was off. People were chattering away - excited or nervous (or both). The safety pitch had been dutifully given and summarily ignored by most. The plane's engine noises settled to a monotone droning the nearer to cruising altitude we got, and we settled back for some eight hours of 'sit time'. The main meal was served and the food was surprisingly good, if not overly plentiful. The movie was *Intersection*, ala Richard Gere and Sharon Stone (it was so-so).

The flight was an all daylight flight, so sleeping was not easy, and neither of us did, nor did I see any of those eye shades on anyone. Somehow, and I can't give words to it, the homeward flight

had a different emotional characteristic to it than the outbound flight, more subdued I guess, less anticipation of an exciting and challenging adventure, maybe more reflective at having had the remarkable good fortune of having just completed one with, in all respects, 'nary a hitch'.

The trip so far had been without a serious glitch, maybe it was time for one. As we were filling out our customs declaration papers we noticed upon reviewing our tickets that our arrival time in Atlanta gave us only 20 minutes to get our baggage, move through customs, and make the connecting flights at our respective departure gates. All the time (since making the reservations) I had thought we had *an hour* and 20 minutes... just missed the fine print, I guess. By our discovering the time gaff on the flight home, at least we were spared being concerned about it during our in-country stay.

There are electric trams that move underground from terminal to terminal in the Atlanta airport and escalators to take you to the concourse levels, so, don't worry, be happy, right? Not exactly. On further looking at our ticket folders we found that our baggage tags had our names and destinations switched. The clerk at the counter in Brussels obviously got confused over the Robert L. and Robert S. and it meant that we would also have to take the time (some of that generous 20 minute window) to re-route our baggage at a Delta counter - like the first available one. Steve was on a commuter type flight, but affiliated with Delta. A check of connecting flights out of Atlanta revealed that we could both catch later flights if we ran out of time, so we had a plan B. However, that would cause problems with Kate and Lynda meeting our respective flights. There was nothing to do but sit, wait, and hope that we could overcome whatever obstacles were waiting in Atlanta as we came to them. We sat there with our eyes glued to the screen showing the time-distance flight data in relation to our position and Atlanta. Steve kept a positive attitude, invoking some baloney about a charmed life...he even cheered on the increases in tailwind, however slight. I leaned more towards Murphy's law. Time passed.

We had settled back into our thoughts, but were given little time to be concerned, because the pilot, or captain, spoke on the address system giving his welcome pitch, weather, time of arrival, etc. and the attendants were busy securing equipment and checking passenger areas. The 'fasten your seatbelt' sign lit up. Everyone came to life and made themselves ready for landing. The descent began and we landed a few minutes ahead of schedule, but we seemed to taxi forever to

get to the unloading dock at the International concourse. At last the plane was ground-guided into the proper parking place. It had hardly stopped forward motion before Steve and I grabbed our carry-ons and bolted from our seats. We quickly but not too rudely, I hope, shouldered our way down the aisle to the exit door.

We had 25 minutes to work with as we cleared the door into the passenger waiting area. We started looking for baggage claim signs. My carry-on bag was heavy - those chocolates, not to mention a quart of Lambs Navy Rum I was carrying for Steve (you were only allowed one, and he had one already) - but at least I had left that bottle of water at my seat. Steve still had his in it's nylon shoulder carrier. We all but ran to the baggage claim area, where we anxiously awaited for the carousel to start (like the ol' Army game, hurry up and wait). Finally pieces started coming into the area by conveyor and falling onto the endless looping belt of the carousel. First one piece and then another showed up until everything was accounted for except the duffle containing my unused (thankfully) sleeping bag. I didn't have a second thought about leaving it if catching my flight was in jeopardy, so we turned and jogged as best we could with the heavy bags towards the customs check counter. So far we were ahead of the crowd and holding our own with the clock.

The uniformed customs clerk standing at the baggage counter with a very bored look gave one of Steve's bags a casual check and waved him through. He just nodded for me to move on, so I pulled my B-4 bag off the inspection counter, and away I trudged towards the Delta ticket counter following Steve. We were lucky as there was no line at the counter where two Delta 'angels' listened to our rapidly related tale of woe. They put on new tags and had the bags re-routed and on a moving belt in about thirty seconds, and smiled all the while. We gave them our sincere thanks, no time for hugs, and dashed away. The passageways were crowded, but we side stepped and dodged and shouldered our way to, and then through, the electronic security gate leading into the domestic terminal area and ran towards the tram station to catch a ride... me to the B concourse, and Steve to D, unluckily, all the way at the end of the line. OJ couldn't have done any better in his Hertz days.

We had about ten minutes or less as we boarded the tram. It was a short ride for me to the B concourse. We had a brief hug and a goodbye wave as I got off and Steve disappeared into the

tunnel. I climbed the stairs to the passenger lounge and gate level.

I literally ran down the wide passageway in the concourse past gate after gate until I came to B-10. Thank goodness for the tennis legs. After those cool Belgian and French days and nights, the Atlanta airport was hot and humid, and I had to bring myself to remember that it was June. I was sweating through my shirt, but I made it to the passenger waiting area just as the boarding was about half completed. I showed my boarding pass, filed aboard, found my seat (by the window, lucky me), pushed my carry-on under the seat, leaned back, buckled the seatbelt, breathed a sigh of relief, and waited for Delta flight 1121 to depart for Pensacola.

I had no idea of Steve's good or bad fortune in catching his flight. As we sat on the taxiway waiting our turn to take off, I saw a couple of planes from the airline (I am not remembering the name) on which he was flying, taxi out onto the runway, but of course I could not tell if he was on one of them. His call to me later that evening brought the good news that he made his flight - by seconds. I had left my bottle of water on the plane in Atlanta on purpose. Steve had left his on the plane in Dothan by accident (and Kate lost her nylon water bottle carrier). Not a drop of French Evian made it to our home pantry shelves.

The flying time to Pensacola was about an hour. An ex-Army aviator, now a business man, sat next to me and we had about an hour's worth of interesting talk. It was a coke and smoked almonds flight, no problems, and the pilot made a smooth landing about 7pm and taxied to the terminal. Everyone was busying themselves with debarking chores. I pulled the old green nylon carry-on bag from under the seat, stood up and waited my turn to walk down the aisle to the exit door. As usual there were a couple of smiling attendants at the door wishing everyone a pleasant stay. I walked through the boarding tunnel and out into the terminal.

Lynda was there waiting. She had on a new outfit for the occasion and she looked great. She later said that she was on the verge of tears when I landed as she just knew that I'd never make it back home... talk about a worry-wart. I retrieved my baggage, sans the untimely sleeping bag duffle, and we drove home.

The dogs were sitting in the garage looking out from behind the wire mesh barrier that keeps them enclosed when we are gone from the house. The head lights shone on them when we pulled into the driveway, and as soon as I stepped out of the car they went 'ballistic'. I slid the

barrier away and Honey, the yellow lab 'ox', all 90 (plus) pounds nearly decked me when we collided, and Sassy, the sneaky, sweet one was running around dodging Honey and trying for her chance to leap on me. Bootsie, Lynda's mongrel, just stood and added to the melee and confusion by yelping. I was definitely back home.

It was getting late and I had been talking almost nonstop to Lynda trying to let her share some of my experiences. But how could she... how could anyone? As I stretched out in the comfort of my own bed I fell asleep with the answer. I would write about it!

So ended my tenth day. My wandering, my quest... with all of the emotional and physical reality... my odyssey as I lived it was over.



And write about it I did...

## EPILOGUE

There were sights that I had seen and places that I had visited that were filled with history and ghosts. I needed more insight into them.... I had questions that needed answers. In order to enhance the subject area in my personal military history library, I began to acquire more books about the British army in the Great War 1914-1918. An invaluable source for this was the two bookshop owners in Wales. I thoroughly enjoyed our trans-Atlantic telephone conversations. For several months I did research reading and I reviewed the pages of notes that I had jotted down as we trekked about the countryside. Satisfied at last, I took up pen and paper and began to write. And as I sat at my antique roll-top desk and wrote these remembrances, often late at night with a cup of coffee, Honey and Sassy would lie across my feet or stretch out asleep on the rug around my chair... models of canine loyalty. As words flowed from my pen and the pages fell away, I realized that this would be the medium whereby I would always experience again and again the emotions of 'being there'. I could walk the battlefields of Ypres, the Somme, Flanders, Belleau Wood, and Waterloo. I could feel the nostalgia of Urcel, Pierrefonds, Bony, and look back on those quiet moments that Steve and I shared one fine morning over our first cup of cafe au lait at a small sidewalk cafe in the village of Kemmel, Belgium.... that will always be a special moment in my memories.....

FINIS

Postscript: Yes, the duffle with the sleeping bag in it finally caught up to me. The loop was closed.

rlm

Pensacola, Florida

November 1994