

MEDITERRANEAN

SIGGY AND HEATHER | TRIP AROUND THE MEDITERRANEAN | SATURDAY, 22 JUNE 2013

D(reary) Day

Fortune favoured us yesterday. We were very glad we stopped in Arramanches for the night. Had we not camped here, we would have quickly driven by this little seaside village without giving it much thought and would have missed one of most historically significant locations in D Day annals. We now know that Arramanches happened to be the major staging point for the allies in their thrust into Germany.

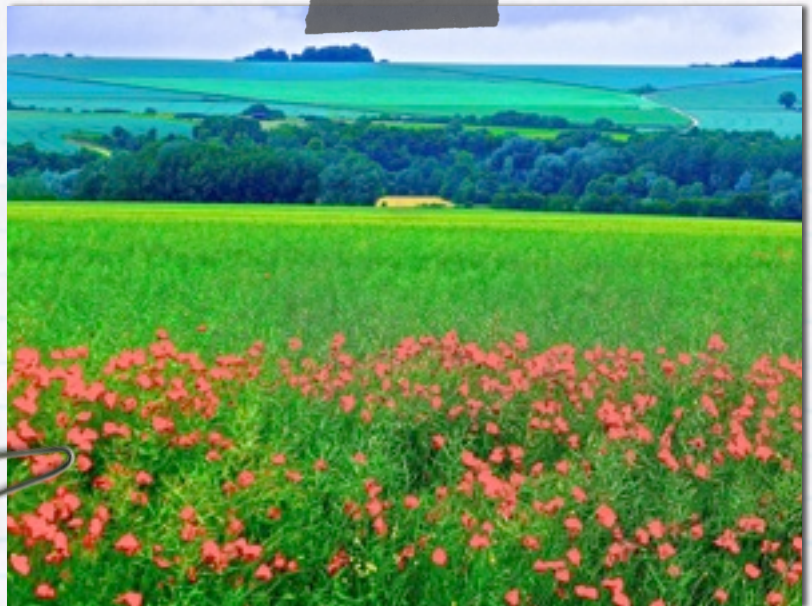
Yesterday we saw the remnants of 24 caissons or huge concrete blocks that were off the coast of Arramanches. We now know that 115 were constructed and once the Normandy beachheads were secured, they were sunk into place to form a breakwater. They had been constructed in England over an 18 month period and sunk in the Thames to keep them secret! Seaward of the caissons, 15 old ships were also sunk. On the landward side of the caissons, floating bridges and pontoons were used to make "roadways". They were called "Mulberry Harbours".

We spent over two hours in the waterfront war museum dedicated to the building of this war port.

It was an exceptional exhibit.



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Top Secret?

The document on the right is a Top Secret beach defence map. Heather noted that it was COPY number 205!

A gold plated letter opener? With protective sheath? For goodness sake!! How sharp do you need your letter opener? I checked for dried blood but could not find any. I suspect this knife was never used in anger or the enemy never got within stabbing distance.



PORT WINSTON

It is said that Winston Churchill came up with the idea of building these "portable" ports to be made from concrete caissons (called Phoenix boxes).

I wonder whether Winston also took credit for creating the artificial fog at night to hide the harbour lights so that it could remain in operation day and night?

SNAPS



WREATHS LAID EVERYWHERE



NO AUSTRALIAN FLAG



STEEL GIRDER BRIDGE



FLIER HEAD GEAR



HALF TIMBERED HOUSE
ON OUR WAY TO SOMME

The place was packed with tourists. On show were large models, some of which are the original ones used to show Winston Churchill the features and engineering of the design.

There was also a large screen with film showing original footage and rooms full of war paraphernalia and memorabilia.

What impressed me was the clever design that enabled the caissons to float on a tidal range that was as high as 8 meters. The caissons moved up and down on large poles that were buried in the sand. These poles also acted as anchors for the floating harbour.

Outside the museum were original guns, tanks, trucks and the last remaining steel girder bridge used to ferry materials and soldiers from the ships. Not much is left today because much of the metal in war embattlements and left over armaments was melted down after the war.

To top it all off, the museum was designed so that large windows gave great views of the sea and the remaining caissons - a very appropriate backdrop.

The weather started to close in again, probably in sympathy with the sadness of the history of this area, so we moved on. On the way out of town we caught sight of two very old WWI era motor cycles. They looked great.

This sort of overcast, rainy weather does not encourage you to go out and walk or ride. It is funny how a dreary, drizzly day can get to you and dampen your spirits a little. Inside our van we were warm and isolated from the rain.

On our trek out of Normandy we drove through many villages and over countryside that was really pretty. There were a number of beautifully restored half timbered houses in one particular area and also a number of churches, but none with outstanding spires.

Interestingly the sun only shone for less than a minute today - when we drove into the Somme district.

No sooner had we crossed over into the Somme and it started to rain again. We had thought that the weather in northern Europe would be progressively warmer as our trip progressed but this has not been the case. The last week, in particular, has been quite unpleasant. We have even turned on the heater tonight.

Our destination for the evening was the Somme district - the town of Villers Bretonneux in particular.

There are supposedly lots of Australian related memorials here and in neighbouring towns.

So, more war history to come tomorrow - this time about Australians in WWI.

