

# Battlefield Tour '04

by Capt G. FORMIGNANI, SO3 ENGR PLANS

## NRDC-IT celebrates the 60th anniversary of D-DAY



*The Staff study the invasion plan*

EAGLE TOUR 04 was the exercise name given to NRDC-IT 2004 Battlefield Tour (BT). The exercise took place in the French region of Normandy (NW of France, facing the Atlantic Ocean), during the period 11-16 May 04. The BT was the only one planned by HQ NRDC-IT for 2004, planned and organised by the Engineer Division. The exercise was aimed at both senior and junior staff officers of the HQ (80 total) and, for the first time, 5 spouses came along.

The focus for the BT was to allow attendees the opportunity to analyse the Invasion through the battles fought between the Allies and the Germans in the Normandy Campaign, over the period June-August 1944.

To achieve the exercise training objectives, the BT had been designed to demonstrate some of the enduring characteristics of conflict, particularly at the operational level. Specific objectives were:

- To consider the military strategic and operational levels of command, decision making and resource allocation.

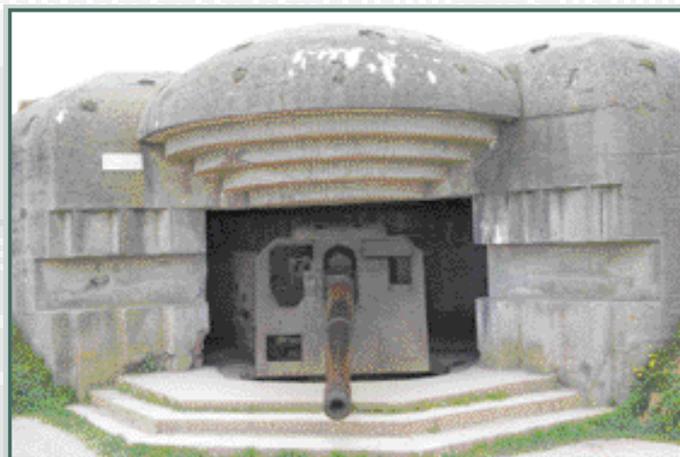


*The dark crosses of the German War Cemetery*

- To highlight the application of the principles of war and practice of operational art during the campaign through the battles analysed.
- To illustrate the significance of environmental and component factors in the planning and conduct of major operations and battles.
- To stimulate discussion, expanding knowledge of military history at the strategic, operational and higher tactical levels of conflict.
- To consider the relevance and lessons of military history for operations today.
- Throughout, to take into account the impact of technology on the conduct of military operations.



*DCOM gets into the detail*



*Fortress Europe; German fortifications on the Atlantic Wall*



# Battlefield Tour '04

D-Day, 6 June 1944, saw the largest amphibious landing operation in history. From ports and harbours on the southern coast of England, an armada of troopships and landing craft launched the Allied return to mainland Europe. This was the crucial campaign of the Western theatre.

The Exercise started prior to arrival in France with an introductory briefing in 'Ugo Mara' Barracks by Engineer Division, aimed to provide an overview. The exercise continued over 11 to 16 May with the tour of the battlefields, including evening back-briefs with informal discussions allowing comments and understanding of key elements of the battles analysed day by day. Two guest historians, Dr. David Hall and Dr. Niall Barr, among the most prepared and experienced on the subject matters of the Campaign, guided us through the battlefields, providing detailed pictures of the events and thorough analysis of the battles and the campaign. Of note was the ability of the historians to always offer varying perspectives and points of view, thus provoking considerable thought to exercise attendees of all ranks.

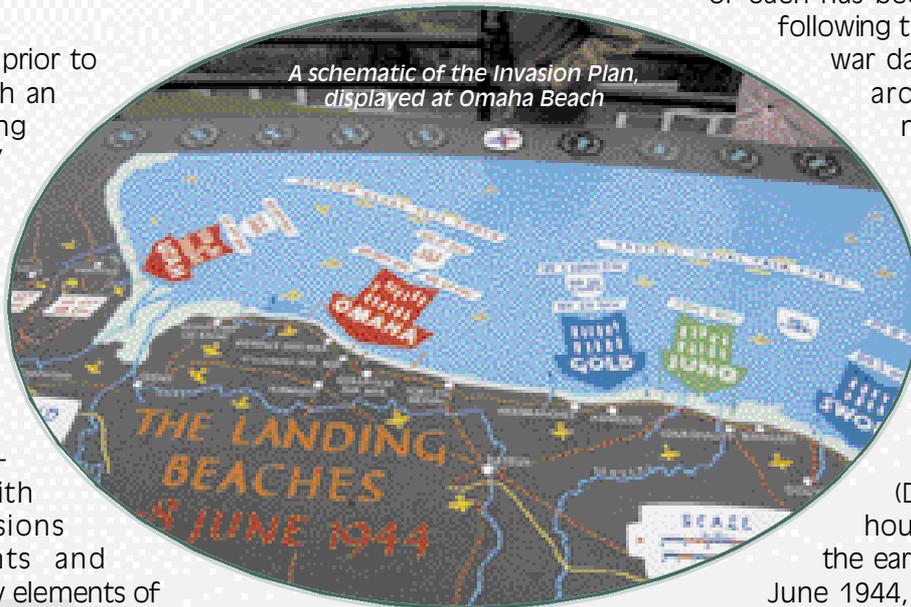
The 'battlefield' today remains largely similar to 60 years ago, with new roads replacing some of the old railways. As a result the countryside of Normandy has hardly changed since the battle. The area remains an attractive

tourist and farming area, visited regularly by the few remaining veterans of the battle and military students, either alone or in organized tours. The tour party moved by plane to Paris, and then by coaches, to the exercise base of Benouville-Ouistreham. The city of Caen has been extensively rebuilt following the Allied bombing and war damage. Today the city architecture combines modern and Middle

Age infrastructure, such as the Norman castle and the Gothic Abbeys. Northeast of Caen, Pegasus Bridge is still standing, clearly marked and fully operational (Day 1). Nearby, the first house to be liberated in the early hours of the 6th of June 1944, is now a well known

café, still owned by M.me Arlette

Gondrée, who clearly enjoyed relaying stories and her impressions of the Normandy Landings. The remains of the Mulberry harbour, unofficially named Port Winston, are still in Arromanches, where the Landing Museum shows a diorama of the 1944 landing seen from the sea. The viewpoint offers a wonderful outlook over the ocean (Day 2). A sobering view is offered by the German cemetery at La Cambe, with its dark and heavy colours, contrasting with the American cemetery beside Omaha Beach, which its Philadelphian architects designed with light colours and a wide, grassy mall extending westward from the reflecting pool, bisecting the grave area, where the memorial chapel is located (Day 2). The view from Pointe du Hoc, which was



A briefing on the German fortifications



The Staff at the Polish memorial

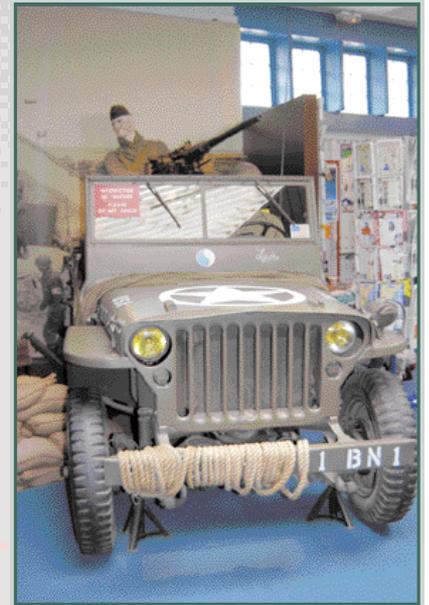


The white crosses of the US War Cemetery

# Battlefield Tour '04



*60 years of living history; Mme Arlette Gondrée in her house, the first freed by the allies*



*A "Willy" Jeep in the US Memorial Museum*

climbed by the American Rangers, is impressive and the landscape helped to recall the atmosphere of 60 years ago (Day 2). Chambois and Montormel Memorial view points offered a clear picture of the battlefield, as it could be observed during the encirclement, closing the Falaise pocket (Day 3).

In conclusion, in a modern era, where operations are often joint, Exercise EAGLE TOUR 2004 highlighted the growing synergy between sea, land and air power. HQ NRDC-IT had a unique chance to review the setting of the last great set-piece battle of the western world; a large scale landing operation which offers many lessons to all the functional branches.



*Explaining Glider landings by the 6<sup>th</sup> British Airborne Div*



*Pegasus Bridge, with the Gondrée family house on the far bank*



*The end of a fascinating Tour*