



UNITED STATES MISSION TO UNESCO

Paris, May 6, 2008

Dear Colleagues,

At 6:30 a.m. on June 6, 1944, at the height of World War II, six American, British, and Canadian divisions began a massive assault on five different beaches along an eighty kilometer stretch of the coast of Normandy. Operation Overlord, a bold initiative to regain a foothold in Western Europe in order to liberate France and then advance into Nazi Germany, was led by the Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force, General Dwight D. Eisenhower. Due to stormy weather and high seas, the invasion, originally scheduled for June 5, had to be delayed by twenty-four hours. Convoys that had already started across the English Channel had to reverse their courses. Allied troops waited in their ships and landing crafts, apprehensive and seasick.

When there was finally a break in the bad weather, 5000 vessels, the greatest amphibious force in history, headed for the coast of Normandy. After a heavy pre-dawn bombardment of the beaches by Allied ships, American troops, under the command of General Omar Bradley, landed on a stretch of beach at Sainte-Marie-du-Mont designated as Utah Beach. Additional American troops landed at the beaches of Vierville in an area designated as Omaha Beach, while still others climbed the sheer cliffs at Pointe du Hoc.

British troops landed at Le Hamel at Gold Beach, and at Sword Beach between Lion-sur-Mer and the mouth of the Orne River at Ouistreham, accompanied by a unit of the Free French Forces which consisted of 177 commandos led by Captain Philippe Kieffer. At the same time the Canadians landed at Juno Beach at Bernieres and Saint-Aubin.

Thousands of men were lost that day, including 2,500 Americans killed or wounded at Omaha Beach, which became known as "Bloody Omaha". However, thanks to extraordinary logistical preparation, skill, cooperation, and courage, 156,000 men and 20,000 vehicles were on shore by the evening of June 6th, and all five beaches were under Allied control. During the ten days following this audacious maritime assault, commonly known as D-Day, half a million men crossed the English Channel.

Subsequently troops from other nations joined the Allied forces, including those from Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Holland, Luxembourg, and Poland. A British

General, General Sir Bernard L. “Monty” Montgomery, served as the Commander-in-Chief of all British and American land forces during the Battle of Normandy, which continued for 75 days after D-Day. Finally, on August 24, General Leclerc’s forces entered Paris, and on August 25, Paris was liberated.

In order to maintain the crucial element of surprise, the D-Day assault took place along a section of the Normandy coast where there was no harbor, as all working ports on the French coast were heavily protected by Nazi forces. Since the Allies knew that they would need to resupply their forces, General Eisenhower decided to build two artificial harbors, code-named Mulberry, with prefabricated pieces that would be towed across the English Channel. Although another severe storm destroyed the one at Omaha Beach, an artificial harbor, known as Port Winston, was successfully constructed off Gold Beach at Arromanches.

Sixty years later, on June 6, 2004, a commemoration of that fateful day was held at Arromanches. Although similar ceremonies had been held for the fortieth and fiftieth anniversaries of the Normandy invasion, this was the first time that German officials were invited to attend a D-Day commemoration. It was a powerful and moving event, with many heads of states and veterans of the Allied forces in attendance. The commemoration reminded us all once again that at times the price of freedom can be very high, and that freedom must be constantly protected and defended by liberty-loving people everywhere.

On Friday, June 6, 2008, I invite you to join me on a trip to Normandy to commemorate the 64th anniversary of the D-Day landings. Our first stop will be at the beautiful American cemetery at Colleville-sur-Mer which overlooks Omaha Beach. We will begin our visit at the new Visitors Center, which celebrates the values of competence, courage, and sacrifice. The Center, which is located next to the cemetery, will enable us to better understand why there are 9,387 young Americans buried in the soil of France.

We will have lunch at Vierville-sur-Mer at the Hotel du Casino which is directly behind Omaha Beach at the site of the destroyed Mulberry, one of the artificial harbors. The grandparents of the current proprietor owned the hotel during the war, and it was visited by General Eisenhower. After lunch we will proceed to Pointe du Hoc, where 225 men of the 2nd Ranger Battalion, led by Lieutenant Commander James E. Rudder, climbed a 100-foot cliff to disable the massive German guns that threatened both the Utah and Omaha Beaches.

By the time reinforcements arrived two days later, 135 Rangers were dead, wounded, or missing. This 30-acre site was donated to the American government in 1979, and it remains in almost exactly the same condition that it was in June 8, 1944.

Both the American cemetery and site at Pointe du Hoc are maintained by the American Battle Monuments Commission. The ABMC is responsible for

memorial shrines established to commemorate the achievements of United States Armed Forces at the sites where those Forces have served since April 6, 1917, the date on which the U.S entered into World War I.

Finally we will visit Arromanches, where we will see the remains of the artificial harbor and visit the D-Day Museum which shows how the breakwaters, wharves, and floating causeways were assembled and constructed. It also describes how barrage balloons were floated above the port to prevent enemy planes from attacking, and how artificial fog was created each night to hide the lights of the port, which operated non-stop day and night. Since the Allies could not use the port of Cherbourg until early August, the artificial harbor at Arromanches played a critical role in enabling the invasion to succeed.

This will be a long day, starting at approximately 7:30 a.m. at Fontenoy, and ending at approximately 9:30 p.m. that evening. Transportation, lunch, and guided tours in French and English will be provided free of charge. Due to space limitations, we will need to limit this trip to 50 people. A formal invitation will be sent to you shortly, but in the meantime, I encourage those of you who are interested in joining us to contact my office either by phone or by email.

I am excited about sharing the amazing achievement of the Allied forces with you on June 6th. I also hope that this trip will help remind us why UNESCO was founded, and why it is so important for us to promote peace and mutual understanding among all nations through this organization. Never again should the world have to endure the tragedies and sacrifice that occurred during World War II. I look forward to hearing from you, and to participating with you in the remembrance of this historic event that has helped to make possible the lives we enjoy today.

With best wishes,

Sincerely,

Louise Oliver
Ambassador