

Site Visits

UK

Churchill Memorial Response

Today we visited the remains of the Allied bunker in London. Located in central London, this bunker was basically hidden in plain sight. The Germans just didn't expect the British to build their bunker in the middle of everything. The entrance to the bunker is unimpressive, just a sign leading to a door. However, once you get below the concrete and steel armor, the place is interesting. The first thing I noticed was that it was really dark. From what I was told, this was done to conserve electricity, as sometimes, the bunker was cut off from the main power grid. The bunker was recreated to look exactly as it did right before the Allies abandoned it after the war. There were also mannequins that showed the typical actions and positions of the Allied troops. Something I found weird about the bunker was the lack of internal security. There were few strong doors or even guns within the bunker. It was almost as if the Allies were gambling on the bunker not being found by land troops. Another thing in the bunker that was unusual was the size of the VIP rooms. The room for the PM was SMALL, It was smaller than the size of any normal bedroom today. The most interesting thing in the memorial was the museum dedicated to the life of Churchill. It was big for being just about 1 man. One unique thing I saw in the museum was a dynamic time line. It showed every event in Churchill's life and also major world events, such as Pearl Harbor and the surrender of the Japanese. The museum had a lot of state of the art technology, I found that slightly ironic as we remember someone from WWII. It almost seems that the presentation was stressed more than the facts of Churchill's life.

As I went in the bunker, I felt as if I was stepping back in time. The exhibit was very detailed and accurate. It gives off a feeling of power and awe when you see it. You also feel a sense of pity for those who had to work in the bunker, as some of them didn't see the light of day for several months at a time. The Churchill museum was nice, but I didn't feel anything, Perhaps it was from being a bit tired after going through the bunker exhibit. At any rate, both exhibits contained far too much information to be understood in one day. A return visit may prove more enlightening.

St. Paul and HMS Belfast.

Today we visited both St. Paul's Cathedral and the HMS Belfast. At St. Paul's we were not allowed to take pictures so that kind of sucked. St. Paul's was built to commemorate the dead military heroes of Britain. Some of there included Nelson, and Montgomery. The architecture within the church was impressive, but overall I left a little disappointed. I was expecting to see a lot more stained glass that I did. However the high dome was cool. Supposedly there is something like 500 stairs you have to climb to get to the top of the dome. You do get a feeling of awe as you first step into the Cathedral, it is just a little overwhelming to see something like that for the first time. Once inside, we see all the statues dedicated to the various military leaders who have passed. In the Cathedral there was also an Anne Frank exhibit. It was small but very informative. The best part of that was the life size mock up of Anne's bedroom. There was barely enough space for someone to lie down there. It felt interesting being in such a grand church like that for the first time. Personally, I didn't think this was relevant to the program. Although it is nice to know what happened to the great leaders of WWII, simply showing us their grave doesn't provide us with much of a memorial. There are far better memorials commemorating the accomplishments of the great leaders. The church was a nice place, it was something unique.

The HMS Belfast was a cruiser that saw action in WWII. It has since been converted into a museum commemorating the British Navy. Everything in the ship was basically left as it was during

the war. We got to see most of the rooms in original conditions. It was weird that there were no windows in the gun rooms. You had to aim based on what coordinates you were told. Another thing I noticed was that the ship was cramped. It seemed like there was barely any space to move around. Seeing the ship in an almost operating condition was really cool. There were also several exhibits documenting various aspects of Navy life and accomplishments. The ship was much bigger than it looked from shore. Another thing that I noticed was that there were basically no bunks. The crew slept mostly on hammock like things. The ship was a great example of how Navy life was like for the British. I was able to get a better sense of how things were back then from the ship than I was from the bunker. The ship just had more of a life like feeling to it.

Imperial War Museum

The Imperial War Museum was a great exhibit documenting all aspects of British Warfare. There were exhibits of WWI, WWII, other minor wars, and various weapons. There was also an exhibit for the Holocaust, and the art of the era. The most powerful exhibit there was the Holocaust exhibit. In comparison to the memorial in Farmington Hills. This memorial is much better. It captures the raw emotion of the Holocaust much more strongly. We see more graphic footage and some more videos. We also saw a scale model of a section of the camp and how the prisoners were led through it. The only negative I have to say about the memorial is that it didn't have a section dedicated to the aftermath of the Holocaust. It mostly dealt with the events leading to the Holocaust and the Holocaust itself. The experience in there was still extreme, it was hard to get through without shedding a tear. In comparison to that, the rest of the museum was much more upbeat. The presentation of the other exhibits was more flashy and less overt. The weapons exhibit was really cool. There were real WWII artifacts from there, including a V2 rocket, and several tanks. There was also a mock-up of Monty's tanks and many guns. Another couple of cool exhibits were the WWII house and the trench. The house was a to scale model of a house during the Battle of Britain. The house looked a lot like a current day house but a little smaller. The trench exhibit was also nice, it had all the features of a real trench, the smell, lighting and the feel. It was kinda nice experiencing that.

Personally I was intrigued by the museum. It was one of the best museums that I have been in. It combines hands on exhibits with some normal exhibits. It also had a very moving Holocaust exhibit. It was one of the most graphic exhibits that I have seen. They spared no qualms in making the exhibit. Every phase of the Holocaust was presented in great detail. This place was a good place to end our London exhibits with. It shows the complete picture of what the British Military has accomplished throughout history. We see all the action from WWI to the most recent conflict in Iraq.

France

D-Day Beaches: Gold, Utah and Omaha

All the beaches had basically the same feeling for me. Most of them had some kind of war relics left over from WWII. Mostly it was bunkers and non working guns. Some of the beaches had impressive cliff faces, while others had a relatively level landing zone. It was impressive seeing the stretches of beaches that the Allies landed on. You can read about the scope of D-Day but you can't truly appreciate it until you see how much of the beach was assaulted. It is also hard to understand how hard it was for some of the units to take some of the beaches without seeing the cliffs that they had to face. Also the damage to the German bunkers was staggering. The concrete there was several feet thick and yet some of the bunkers suffered immense damage. Also the tide makes a huge difference. I saw the beaches at both high tide and low tide and the differences was staggering. There was at least a couple hundred of yards of difference between low and high tide. Also seeing the Mulberries out in the distance gave me a much better idea of what they were and how they were used.

Another thing about the beaches was the presence of memorials. All of the beaches had a memorial dedicated to the country of the Allied troops that landed there. On most of the beaches the memorial was in the simple style that is dominate in France. They were a simple shaped stone which had an inscribing of some of the events that took place. However some of the beaches had a more modern abstract memorial, such as the Wings of Hope in Omaha beach. It was a unique shaped metal sculpture that symbolized different parts of the war. There were also markers remembering the soldier's who perished every km from the beaches to Bastogne. Most of the beaches also had a museum or historical dedicated to some part of the D-Day operation.

Airborne Museum

This was a museum dedicated to the accomplishments of the Airborne troops. It had a full size glider and a bomber as primary exhibits. Around the aircraft was various gear worn and used by Airborne troops and some of the equipment and gear of their enemies. The way the weapons were presented there, I felt, was superior to the Imperial War Museum. They had walls of weapons sorted by who used them. This museum deals with more then just facts. It almost allows you to experience the war from the airborne point of view. There was a video there but I didn't watch it. There was also some outdoor display of some equipment, including a tank. I wasn't sure if the mock-up of the glider was accurate. The material covering it seemed way too flimsy to be actually used in battle. It looked like that if anything exploded near the glider, everyone would be ripped apart by shrapnel. There was also a lot of pictures and medals for the various soldiers but I didn't take a close look at it.

Omaha Beach Museum

This museum was dedicated to the landing on Omaha beach. They had a short video showing all the phases of the operation in both English and French. The video was a well done video, however I think the video from the D-Day exhibit in the Imperial War Museum was better. There was also a lot of life size displays showing action scenes from the landing and the following operations. The action scenes contained a low detail painting of the background and then some life sized models of the troops in action. There were also real artifacts that have been recovered from the ocean and beaches recently. They showed signs of weathering and damage from the sea. There was great attention paid to making sure every aspect of the D-Day invasion. One really cool display was of vintage rations from Allied troops. I saw some of the stuff they carried with them, the cigarettes was interesting. I expected them to be army issues brands, not name brand stuff.

Point du Hoc

This was the site where Army Rangers attacked what was thought to be German heavy weapons. But in reality, the guns were not even ready and just waiting a few km back. The battle field was incredible. There were huge craters everywhere. Everything except for the bodies and munitions were left the way it was after the Allies defeated the Germans there. It was really nice being able to see and touch the remains of the bunkers. We weren't allowed near the cliff edge because it was degrading and we couldn't really appreciate the true difficulty of the allied assault. For some reason, the field didn't feel sad. It felt more like an active battleground that would have been sweet to play paint ball or something like that in. Perhaps, this is due to the lack of marked graves or simple and solemn memorials marking key points at the field. Anyways, looking at the bombed out bunkers really got me excited about the war. I don't know why but the fields of Point du Hoc, made me feel for the war a lot more then the ruins at the beaches. Perhaps it was how the entire terrain has been transformed because of the war.

St. Mer Iglease

This is a small town that was the site of the airborne museum and a church where an Allied

airborne soldier got caught in the chapel. We didn't spend much time there, but the time I spent there I noticed that there was a lot more WWII related stores and materials there. I ate lunch at a small cafe there and the food was decent. The owner also knew a bit of English so the experience was quite pleasant. The business part of the town looked quite small, with most of the shops contained in a small area that was walkable in about 15 minutes. The people there seemed nice. The main attractions there was the church and the airborne museum. I really have nothing much to say on the city itself. The church was nice, it was done in an older style so it had more stained glass and a darker inside than St Paul's. The rubber soldier on the top of the church looks realistic and is a nice touch for a memorial to the airborne troops of WWII.

Carenten

This is another small French town that was a key point for the Allies to take. It was basically on top of a hill with a lot of roads leading to it. The failure to capture the site would mean great difficulties for the Allied advance following D-Day. We visited this site because it was shown in Band of Brothers and we can see how it was related to the course material. There was a memorial in the center of the town documenting some of the accomplishments of the Allied forces. Some key physical things that I noticed about the town was the small size of the sidewalks and sometimes, the inability to distinguish between sidewalk and street. Another thing was that most of the people there didn't speak much English at all. My friend and I tried to buy a bottle of good local wine and we almost ended up buying a bottle of brandy.

Pegesaus Bridge

This was the first site we visited in France. It was a bridge that the Airborne troops took before D-Day began and had to hold until the forces from the beach reached it. The military implication of losing the bridge was huge and this was one of the key points for the D-Day invasion to be successful. The guns from WWII are still there and add to the history of the bridge. There are also some simple stone memorials that show approximately where the allied troops landed near the bridge. There was also a museum close to the bridge showing some of the equipment and the original span of the bridge.

Mont Saint Michel

Ummmm, I think that this place had nothing to do with war. Still it was a really cool place, the site was originally an island, but they built a road from the mainland to it. It is really nice when the tide comes in, you can literally see the water rising around the island. It was a nice place to have a nice dinner and watch the tide come in. The dinner there was also good. I really can't think of much WWII or course related material to write about this.

Arc de Triomphe

The arc was built by Napoleon to symbolize his victories in the name of France. Since then, the arc has been expanded to include other significant events. There has been an addition of an eternal flame to symbolize the missing or unknown soldiers of WWII. There were also various plaques on the floor dedicated to the accomplishments of soldiers in WWI and WWII. We also got to the top of the memorial. There was a lot of stairs but the view was well worth it. This place, in my opinion is not a good memorial to WWII, it was built as a memorial to Napoleon, with some aspects of WWI added to it and then a little bit more for WWII.

French Jewish Deportation Memorial

This memorial was a very interesting memorial. It is mostly under ground level, with a small display at the entrance. The entire memorial was basically made with concrete and black steel. It had a very ominous feeling in it, almost like going to a graveyard. Once inside there is a semi-light room with

lots of dim lights, each one representing one Jew who died in the Holocaust. There were also black iron bars that lined the “windows” and the way out. It gave almost a feeling of being in a prison. There was also a nice park just outside the memorial for people to reflect on their feeling for the memorial.

Luxembourg and Belgium Site Visits

St Vith

Here we saw two different memorials to the Allied holdout against the German counterattack in the Battle of Bulge. The first one was a simple stone with a plaque and the American flag flying near it. I personally don't like this kind of memorial, it doesn't give much of an image for people to remember. The second memorial was a bunch of pictures showing the town back in the day of WWII. There was also a plaque near city hall. As a city it was nice, there was an open air market that we walked through it, there was some nice stuff on sale. The only interesting thing there was that such a small town had memorials to the American troops. Most small town in America do not have anything like it. The people there seemed really nice, I didn't feel any real anti-Americanism there.

Malmadie

In Malmadie we saw the site of the Malmadie Massacre. This was where the SS brutally murdered numerous American POW's. An interesting thing about this event, it that there are several memorials dedicated to it, all were built independently. The main one is a 5 pointed star near the wall where the soldiers were killed. All the names of the soldiers are on the wall and there are lots of roses within the star, all were donated by a company in Texas, the home state of most of the murdered soldiers. A little further up the road, there is a second memorial dedicated to 8 soldiers who got gunned down while having dinner at a local restaurant. The owner of the restaurant put up a small memorial in their honor not far from the restaurant. There was also a couple of memorials dedicated to the civilians who got killed or displaced in WWI and WWII. One was a simple design but it give off a sense of sadness. Another one was a little more complex. It was a cross in front of a bunch of massive stone panels. On each panel there was the names of civilians who died in the the war. This was one of the few larger memorials that I have seen dedicated to the civilians. The last memorial we saw there was one dedicated to the re liberation of Malmadie. During the battle of the bulge, Malmadie was lost to the Germans but was eventually recaptured at great cost by the Allies.

Bastone

Here I saw what I considered to be the largest WWII memorial. It is a massive 5 point star laying flat on the earth and towering above the people. All 48 states form 1945 and the 2 territories were listed on the star. Also engraved onto the star was every unit that helped in the defense of Bastone. There was also a story of the initial invasion, the German counterattack and the Allied hold out at Bastone. The view from the top of the memorial was impressive. You can see unobstructed for 360 degrees from there. In my opinion this was probaly the most impressive structure built for the sole purpose of paying respect to the troops who died in the course of the war.

American Cemetery and German Cemetery

This cemetery at Luxembourg was the site where General Patton was buried. The main difference between this cemetery and the one in Omaha beach is the presence of Patton's gravestone at the head of all of the other's. There was also a massive block with the names of all who were unidentified at the end of the war. There was also a chapel like the other cemetery. A short way away from the American Cemetery is a German cemetery. Although they are both cemeteries, they have a huge difference between them. First off, the German cemetery was much more wild. The lawn was not

mowed as frequently and that there was more than one kind of grass growing. Also in the German cemetery, there were 4 bodies buried with each stone, compared to the 1 per American stone. Also the colors in the German cemetery were much darker than the ones in the American cemetery. As a memorial to the fallen troops, with an unbiased point of view, I would have to say that the German cemetery conveys a greater sense of loss and disappointment. The American cemetery was too well kept to have a really sad feeling, it did have a solemn and down feeling but the German cemetery has a stronger feeling to it. Although the American site was more majestic and "proper," I think the German idea for the cemetery lets us feel sorry for the troops better.

Germany Site Visits Buchenwald

There are no words to describe the feeling that one gets when he or she steps into a concentration camp for the first time. You are awed by the sheer enormity of the camp. Just walking along the path that the prisoners had to walk was powerful. Then you see the main gate of the camp leading to the inmate section. All you can see after the entrance is the charred remains of the barracks that used to house the prisoners. Perhaps, it wasn't the actual remains, but there was a section of light stone surrounding a section of darker stones. Scattered throughout the remains of the barracks there are memorials dedicated to the various groups that have lived in the camps. This included a memorial of to the gypsies, the Jews, and several others that I couldn't read. Also in the camp, there was a special section dedicated to the "little camp" It was a simple memorial with a plaque describing the horrific conditions that existed there and the names of all the camps in Europe. Following the tour of the barrack area, we went to look at the crematorium. As soon as you entered it you felt obligated to stay silent and pay respect to the millions of Jews who have died in similar crematoriums. The building was a simple looking building on both the outside and the inside, but if you have read about it, you cannot go into it without feeling something.

After the visit to the inmate area, we went to see a short movie documenting the events within the camp. The movie was very moving, and powerful. It was presented in a documentary format, they had the voices of the survivors and mixed it with old footage taken from when the Allies liberated the camps.

To try to describe the torrent of emotion that I felt when I entered the camp is nearly impossible. At first I was awed by the massive size of the camp. Then when we got inside the camp and saw all the barren land, I was kind of disappointed. I had expected more building and larger memorials to the people who perished there. The feeling of disappointment was quickly replaced with an indescribable feeling. Upon closer inspection of the camp grounds, you get a better sense of how it was back in the day of the Holocaust. You see a lot of remains that survived the time. All the feelings that I felt before, were erased and replaced with a feeling of respect and great sadness. Then we had the film to end the tour. The film seemed a great way to reinforce everything that we have seen and experienced. There was a lot of the camp we didn't see because of the time constraints, by the part that I did see was really moving for me.

Topography of Terror

This memorial is unfinished, work began in the early 90's but was stalled due to monetary issues. Currently it is an open air exhibit within and excavation of the original Gestapo headquarters. Most of the exhibits were in German so I really couldn't understand much, but there was one picture that stood out in my mind. It was a picture of several Nazis executing a group of helpless Jews. I noticed the face of horror on the Jew and also the laughing face on the Nazi. Those people took great pleasure in the killing of innocents. Also at the exhibit was a display for the Nuremberg Trials. There were excerpts in English from the trials and also a summary of all the defendants and outcomes in the trial. I feel angry

at the German government for delaying this memorial so long. To say that you do not have enough money to build a memorial to remember those who you have brutally murdered is wrong. There is no excuse not to finish the Topography of Terror.

Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe

We only got to see part of this memorial. What we saw was the field of concrete blocks. It is a very abstract memorial, just by looking at it you will not know that it was a memorial to the Jewish people. It has a very regular grid pattern combined with a seemingly random heights for all the blocks.

This combination of regular and irregular is seldom found, and presents the mind an interesting thought. There was also a museum section under the main memorial, but we did not have time to visit it. What I found disappointing was the presence of adolescents that were running and having fun in what was suppose to be a solemn place. The memorial was a whole is an interesting memorial, I feel it would have benifited from more signs explaining the significance of its design.