



Following the Bedford Boys – Retracing Their Steps

“It was a wonderful trip.” That is the comment you get when you ask any member of the BIA trip to England and France this year.

The fourth trip sponsored by the Bedford International Alliance traced the steps taken by members of A Company of the 116th Regiment of the 29th Division from 1943-44.

FIRST LEG OF THE TRIP — IVYBRIDGE

Departing on June 2, the group of 44 adults and 5 students flew to London then took a coach to Ivybridge. Many residents of the southwestern-England town had spent months planning details of the visit. Highlights included a flag raising ceremony at the Town Hall, ceremonies at the memorials at both Torcross and the War Memorial in Ivybridge, and two group dinners at the Sportsman Inn.



Rev. Cyril Short conducted the ceremony at the Ivybridge War Memorial on the afternoon of June 4.



Carol Beeson, the mayor of Ivybridge, and Tom Messier, mayor of Bedford, (pictured in the photo on the left) signed a Friendship Agreement at the Town Hall later on the afternoon of June 4.



The highlight of the group dinner at the Sportsman Inn on the evening of June 5 was the presentations by Tom to Vera Luckham. Vera, now 95, had been the barmaid at the Sportsman Inn in 1944 and had served many of the troops. Tom honored Vera with a Friendship Metal from the citizens of Bedford and honorary citizenship of Bedford. Vera was extremely happy.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS AND MEETING

January 14

Annual Meeting – Dues for 2004 payable

April 7

Board of Directors Meeting

April 23

St. George's Day

May 31

Memorial Day; Bedford 250th Anniversary Parade

June 2-June 12

BIA Trip to England & France

June 6

60th Anniversary Commemoration Event of D-Day Event at the National D-Day Memorial

June 30

Board of Directors Meeting

June 21

Students return from England/France Exchange Visit

July 10

4th Annual Bastille Day Picnic

September 22

Board of Directors Meeting

November 3

Board of Directors Meeting; 2005 planning and plans for Member Social Event

November 19

Social Event for Members

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BIA GROUP RETRACES THEIR STEPS

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The Sportsman Inn in Ivybridge hosted a cream tea and two dinners for the Alliance. The Inn was the first pub the Bedford Boys would have come to when entering Ivybridge, so many stopped by.



The merchants in downtown Ivybridge had their shop windows decorated in remembrance of the soldiers who trained there during WWII and in honor of the visiting Americans from Virginia.



The group visited Slapton Sands to see where the Allied troops trained for the D-Day landing. A wreath laying ceremony was held at the war memorial on the beach.

SECOND LEG OF THE TRIP — NORMANDY

The group traveled by ferry from Poole, England, to Cherbourg, France, on June 5. They met their French host families in Vierville sur Mer late in the afternoon.

The 60th Anniversary of the liberation of France was marked with ceremonies and celebrations in every village along the coast of France. Homes and businesses in every town were festooned with American and French flags, and the welcome the BIA travelers received was warm and welcoming.

Events planned for the group kept everyone busy. They included fireworks in 14 villages along the coast on June 5, attendance at the ceremonies at the American Cemetery at Coleville to hear addresses by Presidents George Bush and Jacques Chirac on June 6, a group luncheon with French locals in St. Laurent and a special ceremony in Vierville sur Mer honoring the veterans who had returned on June 7. In addition, each host family planned activities for their American guests during their three day visit.

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A sand sculpture on Omaha Beach was carved on all four sides and depicted the troops landing on D-Day and the unloading of equipment later.



Sunrise on Omaha Beach, June 6, 2004, from the home of Yves Cordelle, one of the French hosts.



The BIA group were guests at the ceremony at the American Cemetery at Coleville on June 6. President Bush and President Jacques Chirac were the keynote speakers.

BIA GROUP RETRACES THEIR STEPS

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The BIA group stopped for a photo at the war memorial in St. Laurent.



The June 6 ceremony in Vierville sur Mer honored the men who died liberating France and the veterans of that battle who had returned after 60 years.



The children from the towns on Omaha Beach sang two songs for the veterans at the ceremony in Vierville on the afternoon of June 6. One of the songs was "When the Saints Come Marching In." The Americans in the crowd joined in, clapping to show their enthusiasm and appreciation. The children gave flowers to the veterans when they finished their songs.

The Grange Strathmore, right, was once a private home. It is now a four-star hotel.

THIRD LEG OF THE TRIP — LONDON

The BIA travelers left Vierville by coach on the morning of June 8, heading for Paris to catch the Eurostar. The stop for lunch was at the Chateau du Breuil, a calvados distillery, where the group toured the facility and had lunch in a four star restaurant on site.

The Strathmore Grange in London was home for the next three days. The last group event planned for the trip was a full day of sightseeing in London, starting with Westminster Abbey, then on to the changing of the guards at Buckingham Palace, lunch on the River Thames, a ride on the Millennium Eye, and lots of sights around London.

June 10 and 11 were "free" days. Twenty members of the group traveled to Woburn to meet with the Duke of Bedford and see the area which gives our Bedford its name.

Others explored and shopped in London, while some visited Scotland or the Cotswolds. There were just two days to be typical "tourists," but they were two very busy days for everyone.

The trip home the following day was very quiet - finally time to rest. And even though it was a very busy trip, everyone will tell you, "It was a wonderful trip, and I want to go back."



The mascot for the Buckingham Palace guards is an Irish Wolfhound. He was standing with his handler waiting for the changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace.



This Guardsman stopped for a picture with two of our young travelers, Sarah and Sperry.



Newspaper coverage in England



Several newspapers in and around Ivybridge reported on the BIA's visit to Ivybridge. The **Gazette** featured the visit on the cover and in the center spread.

It was reported in the **Ivybridge Express** that "Members of Ivybridge Town Council are making preparations for local residents to visit Bedford next year, to further strengthen the friendship between the two towns."



The Ivybridge War Memorial to the American troops is in a park beside the River Erme.



The Vierville sur Mer War Memorial is built atop the remains of a German bunker.

Our First St George's Day Celebration

On April 23 Bedford International Alliance, Inc., members observed their first St George's Day, complete with flags, dragons, fish and chips. Dave Ballard, in the photo on the left below, introduced us to Shandys, a traditional drink in England made by mixing beer and Sprite.

This celebration is planned to be an annual event; we'll have lots of opportunities to get to know a little more about England, its people and their holidays.



Bastille Day Picnic

On Saturday, July 10, the members of the BIA joined together for the 4th Annual Bastille Day Picnic at Liberty Lake Park in Bedford. We once again had hot dogs and hamburgers as the main course. Thanks to everyone who attended and brought vegetables, salads, and desserts. Approximately 60 people enjoyed the feast and shared travel memories.

Anyone interested in helping with either of these two annual events in 2005 should let the Board of Directors know. We welcome everyone's help and participation.



A visit with the Duke of Bedford



Twenty members of the Bedford International Alliance made a day-long visit to meet the 15th Duke of Bedford, Andrew Howard, at his ancestral home in Woburn, Bedfordshire, England. The group was greeted personally by the young Duke and treated to tea. The Duke is pictured above in the center.



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