

# Western Front to Normandy Tour 13-25 Sep 2018 Paris to Paris



Somme 1916 and 1918  
France and Flanders 1917  
Normandy 1944

13 days / 12 nights

\$4,295 pp \$550 single sup

Battlefield History Tours P/L

— Key AIF sites and other notable historic locations

- Accommodation and most meals included
- Escorted by Steve Larkins (Colonel ret)

Email Steve at [sandglarkins@outlook.com](mailto:sandglarkins@outlook.com) for details



# Getting there - Assembly in Paris

## Day 1 - *Paris to the Somme*



Armistice 1918 Compeigne



Town Hall, Arras



Le Mur des Fusillee—Citadelle d'Arras



L'Historial de la Grand Guerre, Peronne

### ***Thur 13 Sep 2018—Assembly***

Today is 'assembly' in Paris at Roissy Novotel adjacent to Terminal 3 at Charles de Gaulle Airport. Relax, meet Tour Leader Steve Larkins and other guests.

For your ease of reference, provided meals are marked '**B/L/D**'. Lunches are generally boxed picnic style.

### ***Fri 14 Sep 2018 - Getting There***

We will depart the hotel at 0830, heading north to our first stop, Compeigne, scene of the signing of the Armistice on 11 November 1918, and 22 years later the surrender of France to another invading German Army on 25 June 1940.

Our next stop is the beautiful provincial city of **Amiens** then on to **Arras**. There are three key points of interest.

The **Wellington Quarries**, only opened to the public in 2008, give us a glimpse of 'The Underground War' of 1914-18, so vividly described in Sebastian Faux's novel '*Birdsong*'. Kiwi tunnellers joined up a series of underground limestone quarries to create a safe haven for over 25,000 British troops in the lead up to the Arras Offensive of early 1917, unobserved and safe from German artillery.

Then we may have time to explore the centre of the town and its **two spectacular squares**. Lunch here under your own arrangements in one of the many bars and restaurants.

The **Citadel** is a 17th Century star-shaped Vauban fortress. In a portion of its former moat is the melancholy *Le Mur des Fusillee*, literally the 'Wall of the Shot'. The Nazis executed 218 Resistance members here in WW2, between 1941 and 1944.

We will then head for **Peronne**, our base for the next few days on the north bank of the Somme River and home of the excellent **L'Historial** museum. The town of Peronne was liberated by the Australian Corps on 2 September 1917, as evident by signs such as the famous 'Rue de Kanga'. Dinner in the Hotel. **B/D**



# Day 2 - The Somme 1916 - *"Hard Times"*

## Day 3 - The Somme 1918 *"Advance to Victory"*



Unexploded shells - a constant hazard—near Courcellette Cemetery . Don't touch!



The Australian National Memorial to the Missing in France—Villers Bretonneux



Dusk over the town square in Peronne



2 Div Memorial Mont St Quentin

### **Sat 15 Sep 18 - The Somme 1916**

A big day today, covering key sites of the 'First Day of the Somme' on 1 July 1916 during the course of which the British lost 20,000 killed. **La Boisselle** features the massive Lochnagar mine crater where the British attack faltered in the face of withering machine gun fire from their flanks.

Then to **Beaumont - Hamel**, one of the most compelling battlefield sites in France. Here the Newfoundland Battalion was nearly annihilated on 1 July 1916. The Canadian Government has preserved the battlefield as it was on 11 Nov 1918.

**Thiepval** was the key British objective on 1 July. The British Memorial to the Missing in France here has a new interpretive centre. This will be our stop for lunch.

The Australians joined the battle on 23 July 1916, attacking the village of **Pozières**, culminating in the capture of the **Windmill** feature on the high ground. Focus then shifted to the **Mouquet Farm** area. In the course of five weeks they sustained 23,000 casualties. We will be returning to Peronne via **Courcellette**, **Longueval** and **Guedecourt**. A visit to the L'Historial Museum will precede dinner in our hotel. **B/L/D**

### **Sun 16 Sep 2018 - The Somme 1918**

Today we jump forward in time two years to the Spring of 1918. A massive German assault broke across the Allied Front in March 1918. The AIF was used as a 'fire brigade' to bolster the collapsing front. We will visit **Dernancourt**, where the Australian 4th Division stopped the German advance in early March. Then we will head to **Villers Bretonneux** where on the eve of ANZAC Day 1918, the 13th and 15th Brigades conducted an audacious night counter-attack to halt the German advance on Amiens. We will visit the **Adelaide Cemetery**, the **School Museum** and the **National Memorial to the Missing**. From there we will visit the Australian Memorial at **Le Hamel**, scene of Monash's triumph on 4 July 1918. Then we will follow the Australian advance of August 1918 culminating at **Mont St Quentin**, the heights above **Peronne**, and scene of "*the greatest military achievement of the war*", according to British 4th Army Commander, General Henry Rawlinson. **B/L/D**

# Day 4 - 1918 - *"To the Last Ridge"*

## Day 5 - *Flanders - 1916/17*



The Hindenburg Line at Riqueval



The "Cobbers" Statue at the Fromelles Memorial Park



The Menin Gate - Commonwealth Memorial to the 58,000 Missing of the Ypres Salient. *"He is not Missing; he is here"* – General Sir Herbert Plumer, at the 1921 opening.

### ***Mon 17 Sep 2018 - "To the Last Ridge" 1918***

Today's visits will take us further to the west, to 'the last ridge' where the AIF fought its last battles before coming out of the line on 5th October 1918 for R &R.

By the time they had captured Mont St Quentin, the AIF was exhausted. Losses had not been replaced and many Battalions were only fielding 250 men, forcing some to amalgamate. The **Hindenburg Line** was attacked in late September along the line of the Cambrai St Quentin Canal. We will visit **Bellenglise**, **Bellicourt**, and **High Tree Cemetery** at **Montbrehain**. It marks the farthest west reached by AIF formations. We will then call in at the spectacular **Riqueval** tunnel on the Cambrai - St Quentin Canal before the American Cemetery at **Bony**. On our way back to Peronne we will call in at the starkly Teutonic German Cemetery at **Maissemy**. **B/L/D**

### ***Tue 18 Sep 2018 - Flanders 1916/17***

Today we bid farewell to the Somme and head for Belgium.

1917 was to be the worst year on the Western Front for the Australians. In early 1917 the Germans surprised the Allies by withdrawing to a new defensive line. Our first stop, **Noreuil** was one of "the Outpost Villages" the Australians had to clear before the 'main event' at nearby **Bullecourt** in early 1917. The AIF fought two major battles here as part of the "Arras Offensive" in an attempt to break the new German line. We will overlook the battlefield and visit "The Digger" memorial.

Then we will head further north past Arras to **Vimy Ridge**, and the spectacular **Canadian National Memorial**. This is an expansive park and the battlefield is preserved as it was in 1918.

Next stop the melancholy battlefield at **Fromelles**, before visiting **Pheasant Wood** cemetery and museum. The cemetery is the newest on the Western Front, opened in 2010.

Our final leg will take us to our base for the next few days, Leper (Ypres in WW1) but known universally to the Diggers as "Wipers". We will have dinner in our Hotel before a short drive to witness the Last Post ceremony at Menin Gate. **B/L/D**



# Day 6 - 1917 - "Messines & Field Medicine"

## Day 7 - 1917 "Menin Road to Passchendaele"



Ieper's magnificent Cloth Hall, rebuilt from the rubble of WW1



German Pillbox at Hill 60



The Buttes Cemetery at Polygon Wood

### Wed 19 Sep 2018 – "Messines and Field Medicine"

The first of our two (2) days touring the Ieper Salient battles.

Our first call will be to visit the Irish Peace Park / NZ Memorial where we overlook the battlefield of **Messines Ridge**. Then it's on to **Ploegsteert Wood**, via **Prowse Point**—scene of the **1914 XMAS Truce**. **Toronto Avenue Cemetery** is located within the Wood. It is the only all-Australian cemetery in Belgium. We will then track out to the **Lissjenthoeek Hospital Cemetery**, There is an excellent interpretive centre explaining the handling of the vast number of casualties sustained in this vicinity.

We will return to Ieper via Poperinge to **Hill 60**, the northernmost of the mines fired in the Messines operation and featured in the movie, *Beneath Hill 60*. Free time in Ieper. Walk along the wall, quiet reflection around Menin gate, Cloth Hall museum. Belgian chocolates and beer abound. Dinner in our Hotel, or 'break out' in town!

**B/L/D**

### Thur 20 Sep 2018 – "Menin Road to Passchendaele"

Our last day in the Ieper Salient for tomorrow we head to Normandy for the last leg of our tour. We will head out via **Menin Road, Polygon Wood via Hooze Crater and Zonnebeke**. **Dochy Farm Cemetery** is a good location to view the start line for the assault on Passchendaele.

Then we will visit **Tyne Cot** cemetery, the largest Commonwealth Cemetery on the Western Front. It sits on ground captured by the Australians and the Cross of Sacrifice is built over a German blockhouse.

We will then travel along the **Broodseinde Ridge**, scene of an Australian rout of the German forces holding the ridge on 4 October 1917, passing Celtic Wood before returning to Ieper.

**B/L/D**

# Day 8 - *Transit Belgium to Normandy*

## Day 9-10-11—*Normandy June 1944*

### Day 12—'*ENDEX*' - return to Paris



The glider attack on the Orne Bridges at Benouville / Rancourt—"Pegasus Bridge".



Gold Beach at Arromanches, with the concrete caissons of the Mulberry harbour still clearly visible, and stencilled figures of the Fallen as installed prior to 6th June each year.



A German Gun Position—Longue sur Mer

#### Fri 21 Sep 2018 – "*Belgium to Normandy*"

A road trip today to Normandy via **St Omer** and the beautiful port of **Honfleur** with stops at each. Destination - **Bayeux** from whence one famous invasion launched (1066 and all that) and another landed (1944). Lunch on the road. **B/D**

#### Sat 22 to Mon 24 Sep 2018 - Key Normandy sites— based in Bayeux

Sites visited will include:

**Pegasus Bridge**, a critical pre H Hour operation that saw three gliders land within 150m of the Orne river bridge at Rancourt. "*perhaps the greatest feat of flying of the War*" according to Air Marshal Tedder head of the Allied Air Operation. You will think so too when you see the LZ. British troops achieved their mission; "*To capture the bridge intact and hold until relieved*". **Merville Battery**; objective of British paras.

**Strong Point Hillman** dominated routes out of Sword Beach.

**Gold Beach at Arromanches**. Site of the famous '*Mulberry*' floating harbour system. **Juno & Sword Beach** were the other two British and Canadian landing sites, where good use was made of General Percy Hobart's "*Funnies*" - specialised armoured vehicles used to get tanks ashore early and overcome beach defences.

**Utah Beach—US Zone**. **St Mer Eglise**, objective of the 82nd Airborne Division, **Pointe du Hoc** (Cliff-top German gun battery attacked by US 2nd Rangers).

**Omaha Beach** (US Landings) - so vividly depicted in '*Saving Private Ryan*'. Museum and US Cemetery. **Port en Bessin-Huppain**; the boundary between US and Commonwealth zones. **Bayeux Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery**.

Check out the **Bayeux Tapestry** before a well-deserved sherbet and our 'Last Supper' together as we take dinner in our hotel or maybe a 'break out'. Tomorrow our tour group disperses.

**B/L/D each day**

**Tue 25 Sep 2018 'ENDEX'**. Drop off at either Charles de Gaulle International Airport or to Gare du Nord station for onward movement from Paris (**recommended not before 4pm**)

**B only**