Headline: Beaches of Normandy tell D-Day’s story

Deckhead: Sites, museums bring to life happenings of historic day

D-Day is one of the most pivotable days in world history. June 6, 1944, is the day thousands of U.S. and Allied forces stormed the beaches of Normandy to liberate France and take a massive step toward winning World War II.

Bravery knew no bounds. Thousands of soldiers sacrificed their lives – all to make sure freedom reigned. The date is one of the most memorable ones of the year and 2024 will mark its 80th anniversary.

Books, movies and stories told by relatives tell us what happened on that fateful day. But perhaps the best way to understand the history, soldiers’ courage and impact of D-Day is to visit Normandy.

The location brings history to life. Visit museums, theaters, a cemetery and a host of other sites that bring to life untold stories.

Utah Beach and Landing Museum is the first place the Allies landed on D-Day. Fewer than 200 of the 23,000 troops lost their lives, according to the Department of Defense. And they succeeded in taking the beach.

The museum’s architecture integrates with the beach thanks to massive windows that provide an immense view. It’s extensive collection of vehicles, equipment and objects give context to the tragedy and heroism.

La Pointe Du Hoc is a cliff hanging over the English Channel about 15 minutes west of Omaha Beach. The Germans had fortified it and built concrete bunkers that seemed impregnable. The battle left scars that still can be seen today.

By standing at Pointe du Hoc, visitors will see huge craters created by the deadly assault of the Allied forces. The site is unimaginably eerie. Walk along the craters and climb down into the bunkers to learn what it must have been like to stand guard.

Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial is located in Colleville-sur-Mer. The first American cemetery on European soil in World War II, the 172.5-acre cemetery has the graves of 9,386 dead soldiers. The Walls of the Missing on the east side of the memorial enclose a quiet, semicircular garden. The 1,557 names of the missing are inscribed into those walls.

Omaha Beach – the landing point of the attack, Operation Neptune – is where the most intense fighting occurred as 2,400 lives were lost. A memorial sculpture – shaped like gleaming silver swords and tongues of fire – titled *Brave* rests in the sand.

The 360-degree Circular Cinema offers films that tell the story of D-Day. “The 100 Days of the Battle of Normandy” is a movie montage of footage from multinational archives. It begins with the D-Day landings.

The Allied forces installed a pair of portable, temporary harbors – Mulberry A and Mulberry B – to move cargo from the English Channel onto the shores of France. See the remnants of Mulberry B in Arromanches.

Bayeux Battle of Normandy Museum focuses solely on the Battle of Normandy. Tanks and other military equipment, as well as statues and artifacts come together to tell a story.

Caen Memorial Museum is 10 miles inland from the English Channel. It provides visitors with a comprehensive picture of the war in this part of France. Areas of the museum tell multiple stories, including how civilians coped with the German Occupation. See objects related to the French Resistance and listen to stories about D-Day and the Battle of Normandy.

Cutline: FREEDOM REIGNS – A statue honors the brave soldiers of the Allied forces who fought on the beaches of Normandy on D-Day. Image: Stewie Strout. Adobe Stock.