

## THE ALEXANDRIA HARMONIZERS VISIT NORMANDY

### June 2014

The Alexandria Harmonizers, an International award winning a cappella men's chorus, was invited to participate in the 70th anniversary D-Day ceremonies in Normandy, France in June. Thus began a never -to-be-forgotten experience for Tom and me.

We flew from Dulles to Paris and boarded four busses which would be like home before the week was over. We began our tour at Arromanches where we were captivated by a 360 degree Cyclorama which depicted the sights and sounds of D-Day, a fitting way to begin our journey.

The Chorus sang at several American cemeteries beginning in Brittany. The sun was shining brightly over row upon row of white crosses. Imagine the chorus singing "Deep River" in this setting. Then we moved to the American cemetery at Normandy. The strains of "Let There Be Peace on Earth" will ring in our ears for years to come. One of our choristers found his grandfather's grave and the name on the Memorial; he was the first of his family to be in Normandy since his Grandfather died here, seventy years ago.



The day spent in St. Mere Eglise, the town where the famous picture of the paratrooper caught on the church steeple during a drop that killed all his buddies, was full of surprises. The Harmonizers joined a band from U of Texas, Austin and a trio of women

named Reveille III (who specialized in WW II songs) to present an hour long performance before a packed audience. The Chorus later participated in a parade where thousands of appreciative folks along the route gave "hi fives" and reached out to thank the Americans.

Perhaps the highlight of the trip came at Les Ventes. There we met Peggy Harris whose husband, Lt. Harris, had flown his crippled plane into a field in 1944, rather than hit the village. Peggy searched for official word about her husband for 60 years and only recently found out about his heroic death. She gathers with the village each D-Day to "remember". The Harmonizers sang for the ceremony – imagine, if you will, hearing the Chorus of 110 men sing "Bring Him Home" from *Les Misérables*. It's safe to say there was not a dry eye on the lawn of the Mayor's office.

The Chorus completed the French part of the tour by singing at Chartres Cathedral, built in 1145 and representing breathtakingly beautiful French Gothic architecture. The Chorus sang a contemporary setting of "Ave Maria" and the reverberations resounded through the magnificent vaulted ceilings. Being there was as close to heaven as we expect to experience in this world.

The Harmonizers continued to Cologne, Germany, to sing at the Cologne Cathedral and to join the Cologne Barbershop Chorus in an evening performance. Imagine 240 men on stage singing in both languages to a sold out audience of over 1000.



The week was filled with grand experiences, new friends made in the lengthy bus trips, elegant and not-so-elegant food, and spine-tingling memories that are hard to express. It's a joy and a privilege for Tom to be part of the Alexandria Harmonizers. I guess that explains our driving to Alexandria most Tuesday nights in order for Tom to participate.

The music tour ended in Paris and we added on another sightseeing week in Ireland, making Dublin our headquarters. We visited lots of pubs, saw the sights from east to west coast and enjoyed learning the history and eating the delicious food of the area.

All great tours must end and we returned to Patriots Colony, filled with fabulous memories and thankful for all those who died that we might live in freedom. God Bless America and Vive la France.

Written by: --- *Ina Berkey*