

Walking in their footsteps

Students retrace paths of WWI, WWII veterans during study-abroad trip

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Dr. Derek Frisby, assistant professor of history at MTSU, and the students in his “Warfare and Public Memory in Western Europe” visited World War I and World War II battlefields during their 16-day tour of the continent.

The study-abroad experience included stops at Normandy, Paris, the Meuse-Argonne, Verdun, Bastogne, Waterloo, Arnhem (the site of the airborne “Operation Market Garden” invasion), the Sgt. Alvin C. York battlefield site, Dachau and Adolf Hitler’s retreat at Berchtesgaden, known as “Eagle’s Nest.”

Along the way, as Frisby lectured, the students delivered “battle briefs” explaining key engagements using personal accounts of veterans, official reports and their own analyses. They also kept journals of their experiences.

In Normandy, the group visited the gravesites of MTSU alumni Thomas Hicks and Robert Sarvis, who were killed in action in the weeks following D-Day.

A Canadian native attached to the U.S. Army Air Corps in Europe, Sarvis was killed on July 25, 1944, when his B-25 bomber reportedly was strafed by a German fighter near Carquebut, France, as he returned from a bombing raid.

“Sarvis valiantly regained control of his aircraft and steered the plane over Normandy to give his crew a chance to bail out over friendly territory,” Frisby wrote in an email during the trip. “Unfortunately, Allied anti-aircraft accidentally fired upon the aircraft and sent it into an unrecoverable dive.

“Sarvis ordered the rest of the crew to bail out immediately while he stayed at the controls to ensure they could make the jump. The crew escaped and was later rescued, but Sarvis didn’t get a chance to get out of the cockpit before it crashed. He was buried in the Normandy Cemetery overlooking Omaha Beach.”

Frisby says an English citizen, living near Carquebut, located Sarvis’ crash site and contacted him a few years ago about it.

“On this trip, MTSU students paid their respects at Sarvis’ final resting place, inspected recovered wreckage from the crash site at a museum in nearby Sainte-Mère-Église and visited the crash site itself,” Frisby wrote.



REMEMBERING HISTORY—MTSU students in Dr. Derek Frisby’s “Warfare and Public Memory in Western Europe” summer course hold Tennessee and MTSU flags in front of a World War II-era tank near the famous church at Sainte-Mère-Église, the first town in Normandy, France, liberated by American troops on D-Day. The effigy dangling from the church’s steeple honors U.S. Army Private John Steele, a paratrooper with the 82nd Airborne who was stranded there in the early morning before the town’s liberation. Frisby is standing fourth from left, holding a corner of the Tennessee state flag.

In the photo below, Frisby explains the details of “Operation Overlord,” the code name for the Allied forces’ Normandy invasion that began June 6, 1944, to MTSU students during a 16-day study-abroad trip. The marker detailing the invasion overlooks Omaha Beach and the English Channel.

photos submitted

