

Knee Deep Into History Battlefield Tours

5-Day Flanders Fields and the Somme International Small Group Battlefield Tour 19 – 23 September 2021



Tyne Cot Commonwealth Cemetery, Flanders.

Knee Deep Into History... Today, Flanders Fields and the Somme battlefields of WW1 stand as symbols of the futility of WW1 trench warfare and the thousands of casualties that it produced. More important, each of these battlefields also tells the story of changing strategies, tactics and weapons to try to break out of the Western Front stalemate.

Flanders fields is just 20 miles or so from the North Sea coast. In 1914 it played a key role in the “Race to the Sea” during the First Battle of Ypres; with British and Belgian forces managing to hold on to a tiny sliver of Belgian territory. In 1915 the Imperial German Army launched its first gas attack during the Second Battle of Ypres; seeking to push the British lines west of Ypres and to reduce the threat of a British combined land / sea operation. In 1917 it was the British turn to attack; hoping to push the Germans back and to eliminate the North Sea U-boat bases that were wreaking havoc on British shipping. This Third Battle of Ypres (also known as Passchendaele) would become synonymous with the horrors of trench warfare, in part because of the incessant rains that reduced the battlefield to a morass.

The Somme has become equally symbolic. The two-week preparatory bombardment, combined with the blowing of mines on day 1, was unheard of until that time. In spite of this, Kitchener’s Army would suffer their worst day in history, producing 60,000 casualties in just one day, as leaders were slow to grasp the bombardment’s failure. The French Army would have better outcomes, but it would still suffer. In September 1916 the British Expeditionary Forces would use tanks for the first time; hoping to break the stalemate. However, the early tanks were far too unreliable to bring victory.

Today, the landscape of these two battlefields is dotted with countless cemeteries, memorials and preserved battlefield parks that tell the story of the once-giant trench warfare battles that occurred here. **Equally important, participants will attend the Last Post Ceremony at the Menin Gate, assuming Coronavirus restrictions are lifted by September. Explore these two areas with us and prepare to get knee deep into history.**

Schedule: (Subject to Modification)

The Tour Begins in Europe. Participants are responsible for arranging their own transportation to the TGV Gare (Train Station) Haute-Picardie, southwest of Péronne, France. It is an easy thirty-minute TGV ride from Charles de Gaulle Airport (CDG.)

Day 1—Sunday, 19 September—Pickup by Markus and Randy when you arrive at the Haute-Picardie TGV Station. Drive to Hotel Le Prieuré, a 3-star hotel situated in Rancourt, France. <http://www.hotel-le-prieure.fr/> 19h00 introduction dinner and briefing.

Day 2—Monday, 20 September—Somme Battlefields and overnight at Hotel Le Prieuré.

Day 3—Tuesday, 21 September—Somme Battlefields, including the Somme American Cemetery at Bony, France. Also visit the Flanders Fields American Cemetery and Memorial in Waregem, Belgium. Overnight stay at Novotel Ieper Centrum, a 3-star hotel situated in Ypres not far from the Menin Gate. <https://all.accor.com/hotel/3172/index.en.shtml>

Day 4—Wednesday, 22 September—Ypres Salient, including the Last Post Ceremony at the Menin Gate. Overnight stay at Novotel Ieper Centrum.

Day 5—Thursday, 23 September—Ypres Salient and late afternoon drive back to TGV Station Haute-Picardie.



Lochnagar Crater, La Boisselle, Somme—Always a Moving Expérience !

About Knee Deep Into History Battlefield Tours and its Philosophy

Knee Deep Into History Battlefield Tours was founded by Randy Gaulke after he spent eight months during 2017-18 as a freelance guide to the American battlefields of WW1. During those eight months (and the prior thirty years) Randy's tour philosophy has evolved. Key tenets of his philosophy include:

1. A preference for guiding small-group over large-group tours; to ensure greater interaction with the guides.
2. Getting clients into the field as much as possible; in contrast to a "museum and memorials" tour.
3. Attempting to present a balanced view of both sides of the story.
4. Designing a tour for those seriously interested in history.
5. Introducing clients to local, not American, culture.

General Tour Format

- The tour begins with a pick-up at the TGV Gare (Train Station) Haute-Picardie. The train ride is thirty minutes from CDG. We will pick you up when you arrive.
 - Likewise, at the conclusion of the tour participants will be dropped off at the Haute-Picardie TGV Gare in the late afternoon on Saturday, 23 September. This will enable an easy trip back into Paris or elsewhere.
- The tour will be conducted in Randy's and Markus' cars; unless tour size grows to the point a coach is needed.
- We will be staying in two separate hotels: The Hotel Le Prieuré, a 3-star hotel in Rancourt on the Somme Battlefields for the first two nights; and the Novotel Ieper Centrum, a 3-star hotel in Ypres near the Menin Gate for the last two nights.
- This small-group tour is designed to enable maximum interaction between participants and guides.
 - Size is limited to about 16 participants and two tour guides.
- Both battlefields are quite "manicured," making it difficult to organize meaningful walks in the field.
 - That said, the preserved parts and cemeteries of both battlefields, such as Beaumont Hamel Newfoundland Memorial Park, are quite large and need time for exploration.
- Participants should expect to be "in the field" from 09h00 to somewhere around 17h00, regardless of weather.
 - Participants should bring appropriate clothing for the field, and nicer clothes for evening meals.
- Spouses and mature young adults are welcome, but please understand that there will be limited down time for sightseeing or time off.
 - Participants could opt out of a tour day; especially in the Belgian city of Ypres.
- Regarding meals:
 - Continental breakfast will be served at the hotel.
 - Boxed lunches will generally be eaten "in the field" to conserve time.
 - Afternoon beverages and snacks will also be available.
 - Multi-course dinners will generally be eaten at the hotel restaurant starting around 19h00.
 - Traditional European dinners often last two hours +/-; and this gives participants a chance to socialize and share their thoughts on the days' activities.
 - Participants are responsible for their beverage costs at dinner.
- We will attend the Last Post Ceremony at the Menin Gate in Ypres, Belgium assuming Coronavirus restrictions are lifted by September 2021.
- While the tour will not specifically focus on the American participation in these sectors in late 1918, We will be visiting the Somme American Cemetery in Bony, France as well as the Flanders Fields American Cemetery and Memorial in Waregem, Belgium.
- German historian and retired Bundeswehr officer Markus Klauer is bringing his expertise as a second tour guide. (Many military history tours offer only one guide per tour.)
- We hope to make this an "international" trip, as the tour is being marketed to Markus' European clients too.



Beaumont Hamel, Newfoundland Memorial Park, Somme.

Meet Tour Guides, Randy Gaulke and Markus Klauer

Randy Gaulke has been visiting battlefields since the mid-1980s. In 2017 he left the corporate world and in 2017-18 he lived and worked eight months in France as a freelance guide to the WW1 battlefields during the WW1 Centennial. His experiences during those eight months convinced him to follow his passion and start a tour business. Randy has visited the Ardennes several times since 2010. He lives in Gillette, NJ and speaks English and German fluently. He is becoming more proficient in French. He also maintains the website, <https://meuse-argonne.com> and the Meuse-Argonne.com Facebook group.

Markus Klauer retired from the Bundeswehr in early 2018. His military career included five years in an armored division. With his newly-found free time Markus has been expanding his battlefield research to the battlefields of WW2, including the Ardennes, Sedan 1940, Normandy and the Seelow Heights near Berlin. Like Randy, Markus has been a passionate student of WW1 history for several decades, and he has guided countless German, French and American groups. He has also written five books in German and his website can be viewed at <https://gb.weltkriegsbuch.de>. Markus lives in Lille, France. He speaks German English and French fluently.

Randy and Markus have known each other for 27 years. Both share a deep love of historical research and a desire to get their clients into the field. With their language and cultural skills, both understand the “other side” and both strive to present a balanced view of the combat.



Photo by Wim Degrande

Feedback from Randy’s and Markus’ 2018 Small-Group Battlefield Walk Series

In September 2018 they organized a Small-Group Battlefield Walk Series: Meuse-Argonne and St. Mihiel that was very well received by tour participants. Additional feedback can be viewed on Randy’s Meuse-Argonne website.

“Randy and Markus, Thanks for a great tour experience. Well-chosen sites, good discussions in the field, great personal experiences—well done all around. I personally saw parts of the Meuse-Argonne in a completely different light, and so learned a lot.” John Snow, OK.

“These guys are the best. They truly walk you in the soldiers’ steps. My teenage son and I feel so lucky that we were able to have them as our guides. They provide you with a deeper understanding than any book or general tour.” Matt and Grant Treastor, KS.

“As your knowledge and great passion inspires. Thanks for helping me to connect to the American group—an aspect of WW1 you know I’m very enthusiastic about. Your organization was cool to enable great flexibility amongst people with a range of interests and great camaraderie resulted. I learnt tons and enjoy getting insight into the on-the-ground research you do. The detail appeals to me and it fits so well with my own project...” Andrew Mullen, UK.

Pricing and Payment Details:

- The price is €1,499.
 - At a €1.25 : \$1.00 exchange rate, this would be \$1,874.
- Single supplement please add €150. \$188 using the above exchange rate.
- The easiest form of payment is via PayPal using the email address lavarences@meuse-argonne.com.
 - **Please make sure to designate the payment currency as Euros.**

Refunds and Cancellation Policy:

- This tour requires a minimum of 4 participants.
 - If we do not have 4 participants by 11 June 2021, we will cancel the tour and refund your payment, less any PayPal transaction fees.
 - **For this reason, we caution you about booking non-refundable airfare prior to that date.**
- Clients may cancel at any time on or before 21 June and receive a 100% refund.
- If clients cancel between 22 June and 21 July, they will receive a 75% refund. (25% penalty)
- If clients cancel between 22 July and 20 August, they will receive a 50% refund. (50% penalty)
- Clients who cancel on or after 21 August will receive no refund, because of the tour's sunk costs. (100% penalty)

Insurance:

- Clients are encouraged to check into tour interruption / cancellation insurance to cover unforeseen incidents or family emergencies.
- American participants, especially those with chronic health conditions, are strongly encouraged to check with their health insurance provider regarding coverage overseas in case of emergency.

Terms and Conditions:

- Please review our separate 2021 Terms and Conditions; especially the Covid-19 provisions.

Questions or Concerns:

- Please contact Randy Gaulke at 908.451.0252 or lavarences@meuse-argonne.com with any questions or concerns. He is more than happy to assist you.



Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing, Ypres.

2021 Somme and Flanders Fields Tour Registration Form

Participants: _____ (Names and ages)

Primary Contact: _____

Address: _____

Contact Email: _____

Contact Phone: _____

Rooms Needed: _____

Double Rooms

Single Rooms

Emergency Contact(s): _____

Emergency Phone(s): _____

Health Concerns:

Per the Terms and Conditions, participants are required to factually state any health concerns that could affect their participation on this trip. Please outline these concerns in a brief letter.

Other Needs: _____

Reminder: To complete your registration you must send: 1) your deposit, 2) a copy of this registration form and 3) a copy of the Terms & Conditions page SIGNED BY EACH PARTICIPANT.

Please mail / email / text a copy of this form to:

Randy Gaulke, 584 Valley Road, Gillette, NJ 07933, USA.

lavarenes@meuse-argonne.com

908.451.0252

The easiest method of payment is via PayPal to lavarenes@meuse-argonne.com. Be sure to select Euros as the payment currency. If you do not wish to pay via PayPal, please contact Randy Gaulke for alternatives.