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Defense Orientation Conference Association



DOCA's Visit to France, Italy & Germany

June 2013

DOCA members recently returned from a fascinating visit to Europe where we learned a great deal about the current state of the EU, our diplomatic relationships with France and Italy, the missions and resources of our armed forces in southern Europe and more.

Our journey began with an optional weekend visit to the historic sites of Normandy: Omaha Beach, Pointe du Hoc, museums and the contrast between the starkness of the German cemetery and the pristine beauty of the American cemetery. It was a moving and certainly memorable experience.

As the week began, we got down to business with a visit to the U.S. Embassy in Paris. Briefings from the Deputy Chief of Mission and the Country Team were followed by a visit to L'Ecole Militaire, France's premier military school, where we were briefed by the staff and enjoyed lunch. That evening, Embassy staff and French government officials joined us for a reception at the George C. Marshall Center at the famous Talleyrand Hotel where the Marshall Plan was signed.

The next morning, we flew on to Rome and met with the senior staff at the Embassy including Deputy Chief of Mission Douglas Hengel. A very full day on Thursday included meetings with Mr. Mario Mesquita, Chargé d'Affaires to the Embassy to the Holy See, a tour of the Vatican Museum arranged by the Embassy, briefings from the Italian Defense General Staff and a reception that evening at the home of U.S. Ambassador David Thorne. We wrapped up our first week on Friday with a meeting with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in the morning and with Italian parliamentarians in the afternoon.

The weekend provided time to re-charge our batteries and tour Rome and Pompeii before spending Memorial Day in a most appropriate fashion: attending the annual ceremony at the Sicily-Rome American Cemetery where nearly 8,000 American World War II casualties are buried.

The rest of the week seemed like a whirlwind tour of Joint Force Command and Commander U.S. Naval Forces Europe in Naples, the U.S. 31st Air Wing in Aviano, the 173rd Airborne Brigade in Vicenza, and finally the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies in Garmisch-Partenkirchen Germany.

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