

# HONORING THE BRAVE

SPECIAL PROGRAM AT DU'S ITALIAN CAMPUS LINKS  
STUDENTS TO WORLD WAR II SOLDIERS KILLED IN ITALY

*By Megan Tressler*





Studying a war that occurred 70 years ago in a country thousands of miles away is educational, to be sure. But, researching the life of one soldier in the place where he died in battle offers an intimacy far beyond the history lesson.

At Duquesne University's campus in Rome, the young men and women of today are connecting with the young soldiers of World War II through a special program that gives students deep insight into the heroes of yesterday.

"Duquesne students see young people nearly their same age that came to Italy, not to study abroad, but they came to liberate and lost their lives as they served their nation. This is humbling and grounding for young Duquesne students. They come away from the project with a better understanding of the privilege that we have to live and study in Rome and I think it affects their overall approach to their semester in the Eternal City," says Michael Wright, director of Duquesne's European programs.

The "Be the Difference - Never Again" project was started by Elizabeth Bettina Nicolosi in New York in 2014 as a way to remember those who gave their lives during World War II. It was adopted by the Italian campus in 2016 and continues to be a transformative experience for 120 students each semester.

Through the program, students research the lives of some of the 7,860 soldiers buried at the Sicily-Rome American Cemetery in Nettuno, Italy. After finishing their research, students travel to the cemetery for a memorial service. They read poetry in English and Italian and place wreaths in the cemetery chapel. Students spend the rest of the day "meeting" their soldier by visiting the tomb. There, they pay homage to the soldier with poems or songs or by leaving memorabilia or flowers.

As part of the program, Duquesne students conduct the research in partnership with students from the Istituto Vittorio Bachelet High School in Rome.

"Students are touched by this experience as we are visiting and honoring those so far away from home that lay at rest on the beautiful Italian shores," says Wright. "It is our way to give back to those that gave their lives, educate our young people about brutal realities of the past, and help create bonds of friendship between young American and Italian students."

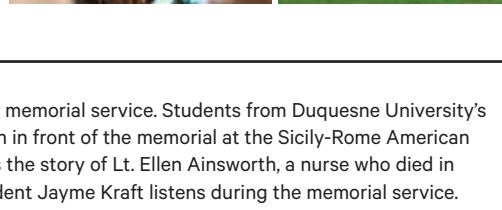
Last year, Pope Francis visited the cemetery to pay tribute to those who made the ultimate sacrifice. The Duquesne students and Italian high school students were in the cemetery with the pope and attended his special Mass there.

Rebecca Lord discovered that her soldier, George J. Bacher Jr. from Pennsylvania, died at age 28 in Corsica in 1944.

"World War II is rife with tragic, beautiful and haunting stories of men and women from all nations performing heroic actions throughout the war. To learn and research solely on one person, George Bacher, allows us to truly know and respect him, as well as honor his sacrifice," she says. "Many of these soldiers have never had visitors, so to be able to 'speak' to them and remember them not only for their part in the war, but also for being a person just like us, is truly an honor."

The students' projects will ultimately be compiled into volumes that will be given to the Sicily-Rome American Cemetery. And, Italian campus students will continue researching soldiers.

"A Spiritan education is about opening young people to service, global vision and justice which makes students more open to understanding global concerns and ultimately more open to the Holy Spirit. This project gives students the opportunity to serve the community in which they are living and studying, build friendships and cultural understanding while confronting historical events that left nations destroyed and families heartbroken," says Wright. "The ultimate goal of the Italian campus is to help put students on the path to global citizenship where they will be able to put into practice the things they learned during their semester in Italy to better the United States and to work towards a more peaceful world." ♦



Top to bottom: The color guard from Naples American High School presents the flags during the joint memorial service. Students from Duquesne University's Italian campus, Rome's Vittorio Bachelet High School and the Naples American High School are shown in front of the memorial at the Sicily-Rome American Cemetery. Students search for the tomb of their soldier. Assistant Superintendent David Americo tells the story of Lt. Ellen Ainsworth, a nurse who died in 1944 after a German bomb exploded near her tent in Anzio, Italy. Duquesne occupational therapy student Jayme Kraft listens during the memorial service. Students from the Italian campus and Vittorio Bachelet High School lay a wreath during the memorial service.