



Ernest Hemingway, recuperating from his wounds at the American Red Cross Hospital, Milan, Italy. September 1918. Bassano del Grappa, Museum of Hemingway and of the Great War – Luca Foundation



War & Art

WWI – USA in ITALY

Cultural Preservation Exhibit
Formal Dedication
The Pentagon
U.S. Department of Defense
October 12, 2017

Destruction and protection of Italian Cultural Heritage during World War I

October 2017–October 2018

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We would also express our sincere appreciation to those who worked on this catalogue, in particular

F. Saverio Suaria
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Massimo Pieretti
Filippo Schena

With the support of



Centenario Prima Guerra
Mondiale 2014/2018
Strutturati di Missione per
gli anniversari di interesse
nazionale



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Front cover: Padua. Works of art damaged by air raid in the Civic Museum
December 1917. Museo della Battaglia di Vittorio Veneto – Marzocchi Collection

WWI – USA in Italy

When World War I erupted in 1914, President Woodrow Wilson pledged neutrality for the United States, a position that the vast majority of Americans favored. Britain, however, was one of America's closest trading partners, and tension soon arose between the United States and Germany over the latter's attempted quarantine of the British Isles. Several U.S. ships traveling to Britain were damaged or sunk by German mines, and in February 1915 Germany announced unrestricted warfare against all ships, neutral or otherwise, that entered the war zone around Britain.

In 1917, Germany, determined to win its war of attrition against the Allies, announced the resumption of unrestricted warfare in war-zone waters. Three days later, the United States broke diplomatic relations with Germany, and just hours after that the American liner *Housatonic* was sunk by a German U-boat. On February 22, Congress passed a \$250 million arms appropriations bill intended to make the United States ready for war and on April 2 President Wilson appeared before Congress and called for a declaration of war against Germany.

Four days later, his request was granted: on April 6, 1917, America entered World War I.

The first U.S. infantry troops arrived on the European continent in June 1917. In October, the first American soldiers entered combat, in France. That December, the U.S. declared war against Austria-Hungary.

The 332nd Infantry Regiment, 83rd Division, with attached medical and supply units, was sent to the Italian front in July 1918 in response to urgent requests from the Italian Government. Its principal missions were to build up Italian morale and to depress that of the enemy by creating the impression that a large force of Americans had reached that front and was preparing to enter the battle line and to take an active part in the fighting. A pivotal role was also to protect Italian works of art from the bombings, as we can see from the unique exhibition now on display at the Pentagon.

The United States 332nd Infantry Regiment had a distinctive and unique role in WWI as the sole American combat unit to serve and fight alongside the Allies in Italy. The men of the “*reggimento americano*,” some of whom were killed or died while serving on the Italian Front, trained with the gallant soldiers of the Italian Army, crossed the Piave and successfully engaged the enemy in combat at the Tagliamento during the Battle of Vittorio Veneto. Quite a few of the men in the regiment were born in Italy and returned to their homeland as American soldiers in the 332nd Infantry.

In addition, nearly 500 American volunteer Army Air cadets had flight training in Foggia, in southern Italy. They were under the command of Captain, Fiorello LaGuardia. Known today as the *Foggiani*, they took part in an extraordinary operation, which combined the vision of Major Giulio Douhet, the genius of Engineer Giovanni Caproni, and the cooperation of American and Italian Army Commands.

When the war concluded in November 1918, with a victory for the Allies, more than 2 million U.S. troops had served at the Western Front in Europe, and more than 50,000 of them died. “War & Art: USA in Italy” was created to honor them.