

Honor an American Soldier who died on D-Day

A project (**not a Fundraiser**) of the C. W. Baker Chapter of the AATF National French Honor Society and French Club

Every other year students travel to France during April vacation. Our first stop is always Caen and the Allied invasion beaches along the Normandy coast. Ironically, many of the students discover what it is to be an American in that beautiful and sad cemetery. As they get off the bus, they are handed a flag and their passport, told that they are leaving France and will once again be on American soil. We gather in the cemetery, at a point overlooking the steep cliffs, the deserted beaches, and the rough seas of the English Channel. Aloud, they read the Gettysburg Address, whose words, meant for another time and place, are so appropriate here. When the students realize that the graves that surround them mark the lives of men barely older than they are, the mood becomes solemn and respectful. We then turn to the large American flag in the center of the cemetery and recite the pledge. It sounds like nothing ever heard in homeroom... From there students are free to wander and to choose the graves to be honored with our flags – last trip 500. The choices are such difficult ones as each grave is so deserving.

National French Honor Society began this project Veterans' Day 2002. Shortly after our return from France the following spring, Mrs. Lloyd received a letter from Dennis Stocks, Queensland Australia: **"While wandering amid the white crosses and contemplating the nature of courage, I noted with great pleasure the flag of the United States you had arranged to be placed at the grave of one of the unknown warriors resting there. Who knows the occupation or potential of that young man at rest under your flag? Yet I am convinced that he and my grandfather share a common bond – the willingness to give their all for what they know is right and just. It is a sad fact that, amid the fallen, there are some who are not identified when they are laid to rest. But the young American honoured by your compassion and actions is known to God and I am sure that your deed is truly appreciated where it matters. I know that I was touched and humbled."**

In April of 2005, 2007, and 2009, we honored the grave of a close friend of the grandfather of Baker student, Erin Rahrle. We all gathered at the gravesite and placed that message "Forever Friends" at the base of his cross. Suddenly, Normandy was not so far away from Baldwinsville. We took pictures, framed them, added some sand from the beach, and presented it to him. I am sure that my students will long remember how moved they were. Upon our return home in 2005, Ms. Cambs received an email from Don Buckhout of Minnesota and attached a picture of one of our messages. He wrote: **Walking amongst the thousands of graves at this cemetery was an awesome experience for me. I felt a tremendous appreciation for the sacrifices that those men and women had made so long ago... As I was immersed in those thoughts I started to notice several small flags with pieces of paper attached. When I looked closer I saw that they were from students at your high school. I was already full of emotion, and the thought of high school students back home being willing to honor these brave Americans this way brought tears to my eyes. I took a picture and am sending you this note as I wanted you to see that your symbols of honor and tribute were indeed placed as requested. I hope that you will be able to show these photos to Colleen Boyle, the student who wrote the note that I photographed. Of further interest to me was that there were several groups of French high school students touring the cemetery the day I was there. I hope that they saw these messages from students in the US... It was a blessing for me to see the tribute that your students had made. Thank you very much."**

In April of 2007 and 2009, just days after our return, we received two emails: one from Belgium, one from Central Square! The first, from David Buonerba, commander in the US Navy, stationed in Belgium, wrote: **"Last week, I took my family to Normandy to see a piece of history firsthand. While walking among the tombstones, my children noticed many had a piece of paper and small flag at the base. Upon reading the papers we saw handwritten notes from students at C. W. Baker High School. I am writing to give thanks to those students who gave a moment's thought to these soldiers. Their gratitude is commendable and I am thankful to serve this country on their behalf. "**

Yasuko Monroe, originally from Japan, now living in Central Square, had taken her family to France in April so that her seventh grade daughter who is in French One could have the experience of actually hearing and attempting to communicate in French. She wrote: **When we were at the American Cemetery, we saw notes attached to American flags placed at the soldiers' graves everywhere in the cemetery. First we didn't pay too much attention, but we noticed some people were reading them with tears in their eyes. It was a great experience for my daughter to see your students' work. We think that it is essential to not forget fallen soldiers and to try and not repeat history. I would like to thank your students. It is comforting to know that they were not forgotten.**

How small indeed is our planet; how important it is to remember that a seemingly small act of kindness can indeed cross borders and travel across the globe, and how important it is to remember the words inscribed in the wall of the cemetery chapel: *Think not only about their passing, remember the glory of the spirit.*

You can honor the grave of an American soldier who died capturing the beaches in Normandy during the Allied Invasion on June 6, 1944, by purchasing an American Flag from members of the *Société Honoraire de Français* and adding a personal note of gratitude to it. Our goal last trip was 500 (one of every 20 graves); our new goal is 1,000! Students traveling to France will personally place it at the foot of a soldier's grave in the American Cemetery along Omaha Beach.

Cost: \$1

Please complete the message on the next page and return it to Madame Guillet (AGuillet@bville.org), Baker High School, 29 East Oneida Street, Baldwinsville, NY 13027. It will be laminated and attached to a beautiful flag. Merci.

From: _____

C. W. Baker High School
Baldwinsville, New York
The United States of America

To the American soldiers from a grateful nation,

For your Stars & Stripes to give us back our freedom, thousands of you made the ultimate sacrifice on our beaches in 1944. In June 1944, you came to give back to our proud country a new chance, a new hope. And yet you did it knowing little about France, being so far from your homeland, so far from your familiar surroundings. Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword were chosen. Names imprinted forever in blood letters to the whole world, and even more in the Norman people's hearts, who suffered so much under friendly fire. Glory to you. Without fear under fire, and only responding to your patriotic values and courage, you came as knights to conquer our beaches that were transformed into bloody and heroic battlefields. The American cemetery of Colleville is today hallowed American soil where we come to express our gratitude. In silence, at the foot of each white marble cross and star of David, the one who comes to meditate feels with "his" soldier. You were all so young, so full of expectations for the futures, so without fear. In front of each sponsored grave, we are looking for a face for he was, undeniably, a man of honor. (message written by a native of Normandy)

Message: _____

Special Instructions:

- Please place this flag at the grave of any soldier, as they all deserve this honor.
- Please place this flag at the grave of a soldier with my last name.
- Please place this flag at the grave of a soldier from New York State.
- Please place this flag at the grave of an unknown soldier.

- Please place this flag at the grave of (name): _____

(Every effort will be made to find this soldier's grave (a database is available in the office at the entrance to the gravesite, and we will photograph the grave for you. It is truly a privilege to do this for you and your family.)