

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus  
Secretary of the Navy  
Memorial Day Commemoration  
Sicily-Rome American Cemetery and Memorial  
Nettuno, Italy  
May 31, 2010

Sottosegretari (Giuseppe) Cossiga, Ambassador (David) Thorne, Admiral (Mark) Fitzgerald, Mr. Easter, I am honored to be here today in this most solemn of settings.

On the altar in the chapel here at Nettuno there is an inscription. It reads: “Nobly they ended, high their destination; Who left behind a gem-like heritage of courage and renown, a name that shall go down from age to age.”

The battles around Nettuno were some of the most hard fought of the Second World War. On the beaches of Anzio just west of here, the Allies came ashore seeking to liberate its people. For four months, from January to May 1944 they struggled to gain advantage. Victory came in mid-May, when the Allies broke the Gustav line surrounding Anzio. By June 4<sup>th</sup>, Allied troops entered Rome serenaded by the cheers of Italian citizens lining the road.

We cannot hope to know every individual act of heroism that occurred here. Many are lost to history just as the corporeal bodies of 3100 of those remembered in Nettuno are lost to us. But we can honor one of those gem-like moments of courage as a representative example of the lions that once walked these grounds.

Sergeant Sylvester Antolak was a soldier even Audie Murphy, a Medal of Honor recipient and the most decorated U.S. soldier of the war, called heroic. On May 24<sup>th</sup>, cut off from the advance by two enemy strongpoints, with his platoon in danger of collapsing, Sergeant Antolak charged across a flat, open field against the enemy.

He was hit in the shoulder and went down, he got up and kept attacking, he was hit in the arm and went down, again he got up and kept attacking. A third time he was hit and went down. His right arm useless, he wedged his gun under his good arm, got up, and attacked again.

Singlehandedly he took the first enemy position, and rather than seek medical attention – he rallied his platoon and led them against the second. During the charge he was hit a fourth time and instantly killed.

Sergeant Antolak was awarded the Medal of Honor. His courage, along with the service of all those who fought here and across the continent created modern Europe. In honoring their memory we also celebrate the enduring relationship between our two nations which grew from their sacrifice.

It is because of all those that fought here that we sit today in shared camaraderie. It is because of them that we all remain free to think as we wish and live as we do. And it is because of the world that they created for us that for the past sixty years young Americans and young Italians in uniform have stood together against terror and those who would send the world back into darkness.

Today thousands of Italians stand shoulder to shoulder with our forces in Afghanistan as part of NATO and the International Security and Assistance Force. Today almost 12,000 Americans are stationed here in Italy. We are brothers and sisters in arms – we are family.

There are no adequate words to express our thanks to those that made it so. No words can suffice for the dead buried here, or for the veterans of the war gathered here

today. You – and they – built the world that we all too often take for granted – all we can really say is thank you.

So today, under the cypress and cedar trees here at Nettuno, we remember the sacrifices of those who fought. Today we honor the memory of the fallen. Today we promise that the names and stories from the War will endure from age to age. Thank you, Dio benedica Italia, God bless America.