

## **Independence Day, Any Year**

*by Harry Zirkelbach 05-04-2010*

**Ten years ago, concluding a five day visit to the city of Florence Italy, our party of six had stayed at a small roadside Hotel at Commune de Greve in Chianti. The Hotel front door fronts a small road that wends its way through hills south of Florence, Italy. That road passes one of the two American WW II cemeteries in Italy, this named after the city of Florence. It lies 2 miles south of the Milan-Rome autostrada. On that leisure day the family decided to visit this cemetery, now remember it well.**

**There are 14 permanent US WW II military cemeteries world wide. Each is considered American soil. They contain a landscaped grave area, a nonsectarian chapel, sculptures, museum area with battle map, and narrative depicting the course of the war in that region, plus a visitor reception facility. Interred here are 93,243 WW II war dead. Sometimes forgotten, each cemetery Commemorates, individually, by name, on stone tablets, the servicemen and women who where Missing in Action, lost or buried at sea, in their general region of WW II.**

**These grounds honor in perpetuity, the Dead of war.**

**By the end of WW II several hundred temporary burial grounds had been established by the Army on the battlefields of that war. In 1947 14 permanent sites were selected in foreign countries, corresponding closely to the course of military operations. All temporary cemeteries were disestablished by the War Department, remains interred according to the directions of next of kin. In a few instances that relative directed the isolated burials be left undistributed, the kin assuming complete responsibility for their care.**

**The Florence Cemetery covers 70 acres. Visible from the road, it is chiefly west of the Greve stream. Wooded hills which frame the upper limit, rise several hundred feet above the entrance. Here, two entrance buildings, between them a bridge leading to the burial area where the headstones of 4,402 of our military dead are arrayed in symmetrical rising curved rows on the hillside.**

**On this sunny Monday morning the wide expanse of green grass with geometrically placed crosses impressed. We enter, walk the grounds for a few hours. We visit random graves, then reach the topmost of three broad terraces, look at the sculpture. We view the Tablets of the Missing, there inscribed names of an additional 1,209 who gave their lives, rest in unknown graves.**

**There are two atrium. The left serves as the court for the Chapel; the other contains marble operation maps, recording the engagements of American Forces in this region, by name, area, date of conflicts, breakthrough information.**

**Finally we meet the Italian care taker who answers questions, courteously. We mention names of some we knew who did not return from Europe. On typing each name, learn the Cemetery, grave site, date of death. Notes are made by those inquiring.**

**The 10th Mountain Division of Camp Hale Colorado fame fought here, to France and beyond. Those troops are too well represented in the Florence Cemetery.**

**This Independence Day at Fort Logan, many American visitors will pay respect to their friends who served in the Armed Forces. That is as it should be. The six of us from that visit years ago will also pray for the 5,811 who are remembered for service in the hills and valleys of Italy in 1944 and 1945, stayed there, more than 65 years ago.**