



NAVY MEDICINE IN ITALY

A Historical Review



USS Constitution

THE SURGEON, THE KING, AND THE POPE

- On **Aug. 1, 1849**, while anchored in the Bay of Naples, the **USS Constitution** played host to **King Ferdinand II of the Two Sicilies** and **Pope Pius IX**.
- Surgeon **Charles Guillou**, the ship's senior medical officer, served as the escort and translator for the dignitaries.
- Upon seeing the Pontiff take a seat and looking visibly pale, **Guillou recognized the symptoms of seasickness**, and provided a remedy that offered **Pope Pius immediate relief**.
- The following day, the Pope's emissary returned to the ship to distribute rosaries to the crew and a **personal invitation for Surgeon Guillou to visit St. Peter's Basilica**.



Pius IX

HA1c PILEWSKI AND THE SAVANNAH

- During the Allied landings near Salerno, Italy (Operation Avalanche, Sept. 3-17, 1943), the **Western Naval Task Force (TF-80)** landed over **170,000 troops**. This mission came with a heavy cost. The U.S. Navy suffered the loss of **800 Sailors** and **three destroyers** (Bristol, Buck, and Rowan) while the **light cruiser USS Savannah (CL 42)** was **nearly destroyed**.
- On **Sept. 11, 1943**, while Savannah was providing critical shore bombardment it was struck by a German radio-controlled glide bomb. **The bomb pierced the ship's armor, igniting fires aboard which filled the ship with dense smoke and toxic gases**. Within minutes of the attack the cruiser plunged into darkness as electrical power failed.
- Amidst the chaos and the looming threat of a magazine explosion, **Hospital Apprentice First Class (HA1c) George Pilewski** went into action. With disregard for his own safety, Pilewski repeatedly entered the smoke-filled turrets to evacuate Sailors. He continued lifesaving efforts until he was overcome by toxic smoke while administering artificial respiration to a Sailor. **Pilewski was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross**.



DID YOU KNOW? U.S. Navy medical personnel have served in Italy—and before 1861 on the Italian peninsula states—as far back as 1804 when a naval hospital was established in Syracuse, Kingdom of Sicily. Through the years, naval personnel have operated medical / dental facilities in Afrogola, Capodichino, Gaeta, La Maddalena, Leghorn (Livorna), Pisa, Genoa, Naples, Palermo, Pinetamare, and Sigonella in support of the Mediterranean / European Squadron and later U.S. 5th / 6th Fleets, and Navy Region Europe, Africa, Central (EURAFCENT).

BSO-18 NAVY MEDICAL ACTIVITIES IN ITALY

NMRTC NAPLES

- 1951. Naval dispensary established in Naples.
- 1968. Original Naval Hospital Naples is commissioned.
- 2019. Navy Medicine Readiness & Training Command (NMRTC) Naples is established.



NMRTC SIGONELLA

- 1959. Naval dispensary established at Naval Air Facility (NAF) Sigonella.
- 1993. Naval Hospital Sigonella is commissioned.
- 2019. NMRTC Sigonella is established.



NAMRU-EURAFCENT

- 1946. Naval Medical Research Unit No. 3. (NAMRU-3) opens in Cairo, Egypt
- 2019. NAMRU-3 relocates to Sigonella.
- 2023. NAMRU-3 is redesignated NAMRU-EURAFCENT.





MILESTONES

- **Nov. 10, 1804:** Surgeon Edward Cutbush establishes U.S. Naval Hospital Syracuse, Sicily.
- **1821:** Surgeon Thomas Salter establishes a naval hospital in Pisa, Grand Duchy of Tuscany.
- **1849:** USS Constitution visits Naples.
- **1860-1861:** Italian Unification.
- **1908-1909:** U.S. Navy provides disaster relief to Messina, Sicily following devastating earthquake / tsunami.
- **Sept.-Dec. 1918:** U.S. Navy operates a hospital in Genoa.
- **July 9, 1943-May 2, 1945:** Allied Italian campaign (Sicily, Salerno, Anzio). The U.S. Navy operates a wartime dispensary in Palermo, Sicily which treats campaign casualties as well as a severe enteric fever outbreak in 1944.
- **Feb. 12, 1950:** U.S. 6th Fleet is established.
- **July 10, 1951:** July 10, 1951: Allied Forces Southern Europe is established
- **Oct. 3, 1951:** Naval Support Activity (NSA) Naples is established. The Navy establishes a dispensary in Naples.
- **May 2, 1957:** Navy Preventive Medicine Unit (later Navy Environmental and Preventive Medicine Unit) No. 7 is commissioned in Naples. Disestablished in 2006, it is later reestablished in Rota, Spain (June 20, 2014).
- **June 15, 1959:** Naval Air Facility (NAF), later Naval Air Station, Sigonella is established. The Navy establishes a NAF dispensary.
- **Jan. 20, 1967:** U.S. 6th Fleet moves from Villefranche-sur-Mer, France to Gaeta, Italy. Flagship USS Little Rock (CLG 4) relocates to Italy. The Navy establishes a clinic in Gaeta (disestablished in 2004).
- **July 1, 1968:** Naval Hospital Naples is commissioned.
- **Jan. 1, 1973:** Navy Support Office La Maddalena, Sardinia, Italy is commissioned. La Maddalena serves as the home to Submarine Squadron 22 as well as a medical / dental clinic until decommissioned in 2008.
- **Nov. 23, 1980:** The Navy, Army and Air Force provide disaster relief following devastating earthquake in Avellino, Italy.
- **Jan. 20, 1993:** Naval Hospital Sigonella opens.
- **Nov. 2001:** Navy Region Europe is established.
- **July 21, 2003:** The new Naval Hospital Naples opens in Gricignano di Aversa.
- **March 15, 2004:** Allied Joint Force Command Naples is activated (formerly known as Allied Forces Southern Europe).
- **Sept. 20, 2005:** Naval Forces Europe and U.S. 6th Fleet merge.
- **Jan. 23, 2009:** Navy Region Europe is redesignated Navy Region Europe, Africa, Southwest Asia (EURAFSWA).
- **Aug. 1, 2019:** Navy Region EURAFSWA is redesignated Navy Region Europe, Africa, Central (EURAFCENT).
- **2019-2020:** Navy Medicine Readiness and Training Commands established. NAMRU-3 relocates to Sigonella.

COMMON TERMS AND THEIR ITALIAN ORIGINS

QUARANTINE

Derived from the Italian word “quaranta,” meaning “forty.” In the 14th century, Venice required ships arriving from plague-stricken ports to anchor in isolation for quaranta giorni (forty days) before landing.

LAZARETTO

Quarantine station for maritime travelers originating on the island of Santa Maria di Nazaret in Venice, where the first such station was established in 1423. Originally “nazaretto” (Nazareth) but later morphed into “lazaretto” because of its association with leper hospitals (lazar houses) and named after St. Lazarus, the patron saint of lepers.

INFLUENZA

Originally an Italian word meaning “influence”— based on the astrological belief that the stars and planets influenced the spread of diseases like the flu.

MALARIA

From the Medieval Italian phrase, “mala aria” meaning “bad air.” Before it was known that mosquitoes were disease vectors, ill health was associated with noxious air and influences (miasmatic theory of disease).

SCENARIO

Theatrical term meaning “scene setting” or “plot outline.” Term first associated with “hypothetical situations” (e.g., war) in the 1950s.



USS Mt. Whitney

U.S. 6th Fleet Flag Ships Based in Italy

1967-1976: USS Little Rock (CLG 4)

1976-1980: USS Albany (CA 123)

1980-1985: USS Puget Sound (AD 38)

1985-1986: USS Coronado (AGF 11)

1986-1994: USS Belknap (CG 26)

1994-2005: USS La Salle (AGF 3)

2005-Present: USS Mount Whitney (LCC 20)