



SMU | CENTER FOR
PRESIDENTIAL HISTORY



Italy: From Sicily to Rome, 1943-44: The Soft Underbelly or the Tough Old Gut

A Leadership Expedition for Hunt Scholars & Friends of SMU

May 22-June 1, 2026

Southern Methodist University's (SMU's) Center for Presidential History's Jeffrey A. Engel and Essential History Expeditions' Brian DeToy are pleased to partner for an on-site exploration of the people and places of the Italian Campaign from July 1943 to June 1944, that began Europe's liberation from Nazi rule. We will walk the beaches and cliffs and follow the operations from the Sicilian landing zones to the desperate fighting along the Gustav Line and Monte Cassino and on to the Anzio-Nettuno landings and the liberation of the Italian capital, the famed Eternal City.

The events of 1943-44 continue to inspire long after the guns have fallen silent. This Italy expedition will bring guests to the beaches, mountains and fields; and villages, towns and cities where the Greatest Generation made their most indelible mark. From the Rangers at Licata and Gela, to the American infantrymen assaulting the beaches at Paestum; from American paratroopers holding the key Biazza Ridge, and in the dizzying heights and intense fighting at Altavilla to the brutal slugfest fighting along the Rapido at San Pietro, and Monte Cassino to the 3rd Infantry Division and the Ranger Force at Anzio-Nettuno and the final Ranger battle at Cisterna. Then, we will arrive in Rome to discuss the liberation of that city on June 4th and 5th, 1944, as well as visit so many other iconic sites in the city that is like no other!

This WWII expedition unfolds over nine days and eight nights with stories of all the Allied participants as well as those of the German defenders. In addition, we will see numerous examples of ancient Greek and Roman civilization – the heart of the Western World’s legacy. Along the way, we will also be immersed in gorgeous scenery in the provinces of Sicilia, Campania and Lazio, and enjoy some of the world’s finest cuisine and wines.

Day 1, Friday, May 22nd: Catania Arrival and Expedition Overview

- Arrive by 4pm in Catania, the capital of Sicily. Our hotel, the Romano Palace Luxury Hotel, is quite near the Catania airport. Most flights will connect through Rome’s Leonardo da Vinci International Airport. Early arrivals may wish to explore the very fine Operation HUSKY museum in the town.
- Check-in to Romano Palace Luxury Hotel near Catania International Airport.
- Starting at 6pm, we will enjoy a welcome social and dinner along with an overview of the expedition and group introductions, all under the shadow of the fabled volcano, Mount Etna!
- Hotel: Romano Palace Luxury Hotel or similar



Day 2, Saturday, May 23rd: The HUSKY Landings and Initial Fights

- Breakfast and load luggage and check-out of hotel.
- Depart lodgings and drive southwest from Catania into the American landing zone.
- Visit the landing beaches of George Patton’s US 7th Army, with the Ranger Battalions and the 3rd Infantry Division at Licata and Gela. The Sicily invasion was the war’s largest in numbers of men landed on D-Day. Dwight Eisenhower, Supreme Commander in the Mediterranean, sent two armies ashore under command of General Sir Harold Alexander’s 15th Army Group. At Licata was the 3rd Division and attached Rangers. At Gela was the 1st Division and the Ranger Force.
- Walk the Gela streets and waterfront where Colonel William Darby and his Rangers hunted German tanks.
- Lunch on your own in Gela.
- In the afternoon visit the 1st Infantry Division’s inland battlesite at Casteluccio di Gela. A large Italian-German armored counterattack threatened the invasion here.
- We will visit sites of the American advance inland, including Jim Gavin and the 505th PIR holding the key Ponte Dirillo Bridge and Biazza Ridge. Some of the stiffest fighting for the 82nd Airborne in the entire war!

A tragic friendly fire incident here had lasting repercussions for further use of airborne troops. Meanwhile, the 45th Infantry Division also saw hard action nearby at Piano Lupo.

- Drive through the rugged mountains to Siracusa in the British and Canadian zone. Siracusa is famed for its millennia of history. A crossroads of empires.
- We will enjoy a walking tour of the Old Town on the island of Ortigia. Ancient Greek city states fought bitterly here for Mediterranean domination. Later, the Carthaginians and Romans did the same.
- Social hour at the hotel and lecture with post-doc.
- Group dinner (Optional mentor session) at the hotel.
- Hotel: Ortea Palace by Autograph Collection or similar in Siracusa



Day 3, Sunday, May 24th: The British Landings and Ancient Siracusa

- Breakfast
- Visit British Commando and glider battlesites at Ponte Grande Bridge and on the Maddalena Peninsula as the British and Canadians attempt to gain a foothold. General Bernard Montgomery's 8th Army, fresh from North African victories, had a tough fight up the eastern coast.
- Visit the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery at Siracusa. We will later visit Polish and American cemeteries on the mainland.
- The entire afternoon and evening are on your own to explore the fascinating Old Town of Siracusa. A visit to the ancient Greek and Roman sites is also recommended. Sites in the Neapolis include Dionysius' Ear – an auditory marvel of a cave, and the ancient Roman amphitheater.
- Dinner on your own in the Old Town with its myriad restaurants.
- Hotel: Ortea Palace



Day 4, Monday, May 25th: 8th Army Advance on Catania & Flight to Naples

- Breakfast
- Drive north along the British 8th Army route to the strategic Catania Plain, the focus of the British advance. The terrain on the east coast is cut by numerous rivers and streams and was well-suited to the German defense. In addition, the Germans brought in crack reinforcements from the mainland France.
- Visit the incredible dayslong battlesite at Primosole Bridge, perhaps the toughest British action in the entire war. Elite units from both sides battled in brutal terrain and heat. By the time the British breakthrough, the Germans have been enabled to withdraw their troops from the trap of Patton's encircling Americans.
- Lunch on your own at the airport, followed by an early afternoon flight from Catania to Naples.
- Meet the bus on arrival at Naples and drive to Pompeii.
- Visit the famed ancient Roman city, covered with ash by the eruption of nearby Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD. The sudden eruption and massive ash cloud has preserved the city to this day. A remarkable window into ancient life.
- Continue to drive south to Paestum on the Salerno plains and beaches and check-in to lodgings. This area is much more built-up post-WWII and the village we see today hardly existed in September 1943.
- Lecture with Professor Engle followed by group dinner with optional mentor discussion at the hotel.
- Hotel: Mec Paestum or similar



Day 5, Tuesday, May 26th: Operation AVALANCHE and Paestum

- Breakfast
- Explore the landing beaches of Mark Clark's US 5th Army, especially the 36th Division at Paestum in Operation AVALANCHE. The 8th Fleet under Vice Admiral Kent Hewitt delivered the forces on time but the Germans were waiting, almost in ambush. The battle for the beachhead was touch-and-go for nearly a week. Clark contemplated withdrawal under pressure, but reinforcements saved the day.
- A visit to the ancient Greek ruins of Paestum is followed by lunch on your own near the museum. This *Magna Graecia* site is one of the oldest, largest and best-preserved in the ancient world. The amazing temple to Zeus is as large as the Parthenon and older than the buildings on the Acropolis!
- Drive to lodgings in Amalfi, the famed town on the idyllic coast of the Sorrento peninsula. We will have on our own time to explore the beautiful cliffside village.
- Dinner on your own in Amalfi.
- Hotel: Hotel Luna Convento (or similar)



Day 6, Wednesday, May 27th: The Battles at the GUSTAV Line and Cassino

- Breakfast and load luggage and check-out of hotel.
- Depart for San Pietro Infine and Cassino.
- At San Pietro, we will observe the brutal fight against a formidable enemy and equally formidable terrain. The 36th Division sustained many losses but took the town (though totally destroyed and now a national park). Famed war correspondent Ernie Pyle wrote his most eloquent dispatch about this fight – “The Death of Captain Waskow.” John Huston made an acclaimed war documentary during the battle.
- Our next stop is the Rapido River crossings at Sant Angelo in Theodice. The battle here, to break the stalemate at Cassino, resulted in one of the bloodiest setbacks of the war in Italy. Veterans of the 36th Division, Texas own National Guard outfit, carried a bitter feeling toward Clark for decades.
- Box lunch along the riverside.
- In the rebuilt city of Cassino, we will discuss the four attacks by Americans, New Zealanders, Indians and finally Poles to capture the high-ground behind. Cassino and the abbey above and behind it, dominated the main road to Rome. Any advance had to capture these first. The campaign took five long months, one of the longest tactical fights anywhere!
- We will visit the amazing Abbey of Monte Cassino, one of the most important sites in all Christendom and one that dominates the road to Rome. Its destruction by allied bombing remains one of the most controversial decisions of the entire war. Built by St Benedict, the patron Saint of Europe (most nations have a patron saint; Benedict is the only saint of an entire Continent!)
- We will also explore the nearby Polish Cemetery where we can observe the final fight up the forbidding terrain resulting in its capture. The Poles, their homeland under Nazi domination, were the best fighters (along with the French Expeditionary Corps) on the Allied side.
- Drive to Nettuno or Latina
- Dinner on your own in one of the many boutique restaurants in Nettuno.
- Hotel: Astura Palace or similar



Day 7, Thursday, May 28th: Operation SHINGLE & Breaking the Line

- Breakfast
- In the pre-dawn darkness of January 22nd, the Ranger Force landed at Anzio and quickly seized the vital port, spearheading the invasion in Operation SHINGLE, an attempt to turn the Germans out of their Gustav Line positions at Cassino. The main American force landed at nearby Nettuno and we will visit the beach.
- Our next stop is one of the most pivotal actions for the Rangers in WWII. At Cisterna, on January 30th, Darby's Ranger force faced overwhelming odds and was itself destroyed in a fierce battle that few survived. The remains of the 1st, 3rd and 4th Battalions were dismantled and the survivors sent back stateside to train new Rangers.
- Group lunch (final optional mentor discussion) in Aprilia.
- In the afternoon, visit the battle of the Caves from February 1944, the most desperate action of the beachhead. The TV series, *The Liberator*, captures scenes here.
- Visit the nearby Sicily-Rome American Cemetery where over 7,000 Americans lie in a spectacularly beautiful resting place maintained by the American Battlefields Monuments Commission.
- Social hour, with Reflections, followed by dinner on your own in Nettuno.
- Hotel: Astura Palace (or lodgings in the Alban Hills near castle Gandolfo)



Day 8, Friday, May 29th: The Capture & Liberation of Rome

- Breakfast and load luggage and check-out of hotel.
- Continuing on to Rome, we will follow the May 1944 breakout from the beachhead by MG Lucian Truscott's VI Corps.
- Upon arrival in Rome, we will visit the moving Ardeatine Cave Massacre site and memorial. Italian civilians were brutally murdered here in April 1944 by German SS in retaliation for a partisan ambush in Rome.
- We will also visit sites of Rome's June 1944 liberation by the US-Canadian 1st Special Service Force, as well as battles against the Germans by Italians in September 1943.
- In the afternoon, we will visit the vibrant Jewish Quarter and its synagogue and Shoah museum.
- Group lunch in the Jewish Quarter.
- Drive to central Rome lodgings and check-in, the 5-star Eitch Borromini, a 17th century palace designed by Borromini overlooking the Piazza Navona.
- Final group dinner and lecture with Professor Engel in Rome.
- Hotel: Eitch Borromini or similar (students may be in a nearby hotel)



Day 9-10, Saturday-Sunday, May 30th and 31st: Roam Like a Roman

- Breakfast
- End of trip for non-Hunt Scholar Students.
- For Hunt Scholar Students: These days are yours to explore the Eternal City and all its magical treasures!
- Lunches on your own with dinner on own for Saturday and possible final group dinner on Sunday.
- Hotel: Eitch Borromoni or nearby hotel



Day 11, Monday, June 1st: End of the Expedition and Departures

Breakfast, followed by departures and onward journeys.



Important Information for Your Upcoming Trip to Italy

Contact Information: Brian DeToy phone 253.468.7374 and email brian@historyexp.com or Sheryl Shafer phone 303.517.9676 and email sheryl@historyexp.com.

Trip Details

Trip Inclusions/Exclusions

- Nine days and eight nights of in-depth guided tours.
- Full-time military historian.
- Full-time presidential historian.
- Full-time post-doc.
- Full-time trip manager.
- All single occupancy lodging in best hotel available in each location: 1 night in Catania, 2 nights in Siracusa, 1 night in Amalfi, 2 nights in Nettuno and 2 nights in Rome.
- All museum and other entrance fees per itinerary.
- Daily transportation on luxury bus with driver.
- Personalized tour support.
- Most meals (all breakfasts) as per itinerary.
- Flight from Catania to Naples.
- Pricing: \$6,750 per person, double occupancy; \$750 single occupancy supplement.

Exclusions

- Flights to/from Europe
- Alcohol

Deposit, Payment and Cancellation Policy

EHE requires a deposit of \$1,000 per person to confirm the trip. For any cancellation made 90 days before the tour start date, EHE will refund all payments minus itemized sunk costs by EHE and a \$250 per person administrative fee.

- Cancellations received by EHE between 90 and 60 days of the tour start date will result in forfeiture of the deposit.
- For cancellations received by EHE between 30 and 60 days of the tour start date, the guests will be responsible for 50 percent of the tour cost to cover sunk costs.
- For cancellations received by EHE less than 30 days of the tour start date, the guests will be responsible for the total tour cost.

Leadership Team

SMU

Dr. Jeffrey A. Engel is founding director of the Center for Presidential History at Southern Methodist University and Professor in the Clements Department of History. A Senior Fellow of the Norwegian Nobel Institute and of the John Goodwin Tower Center for Political Studies, he graduated magna cum laude from Cornell University. He additionally studied at St. Catherine's College, Oxford University, and received his M.A. and Ph.D. in American history from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, before holding a John M. Olin Postdoctoral Fellow in International Security Studies at Yale University.

SMU Post-doc: TBD

Dr. Crystal L. Clayton, Senior Executive Director, Hegi Family Career Development Center

Crystal Clayton, a career-management professional with more than 20 years of experience working with graduate and undergraduate students, began her work as the executive director of the Hegi Family Career Development Center at Southern Methodist University in August 2017.

As the executive director for the Hegi Family Career Development Center, Dr. Clayton provides leadership and oversight to the Offices of Career Development and Employer Relations in the Hegi Family Career Development Center. The Hegi Center includes nine professional staff, two graduate assistants, five student career consultants, three student assistants, a Career Development Ambassadors group, Board Fellows Organization, Student Advisory Board, and the Hegi Career Leaders premier professional development program. Since 2017, Dr. Clayton created the Hegi Career Leaders Professional Development Program which prepares student talent for full-time work and career leadership, developed the Board Fellows Program allowing SMU students to serve as nonprofit board members in the DFW metropolitan area, and launched the Hegi Student Advisory Board.

Clayton currently serves on the Board of Directors for the Plano Chamber of Commerce and is involved with the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE). She is the past chair for the executive committee of the University of Missouri Alumni Association's Griffiths Leadership Society. From 2009 to 2012, she served as a board member of the American College Personnel Association's Commission for Career Development. A native of St. Louis, MO, Clayton received her B.A. degree in English from Truman State University. She earned an M.A. in educational leadership and policy analysis from the University of Missouri-Columbia, and an Ed.D. degree in educational leadership and higher education from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Jade Weaver, M.Ed., Associate Director for the Hunt Leadership Scholars Program

Jade Weaver is responsible for managing the Hunt Leadership Scholars Program. This includes oversight for 60+ students, logistics and recruitment for potential and incoming Scholars, career advising and developing, event programming, and mentorship, both direct and indirect.

Jade Weaver is a student affairs practitioner, with nearly a decade of experience in supporting student growth and leadership development. Jade began her journey on the Hilltop in 2020, as a graduate student in the Simmons School of Education. She worked as the Student Involvement Graduate Assistant, supporting student organizations, fraternities, and sororities. During her tenure as a graduate student, Jade was offered a full-time staff position as Assistant Director for Fraternity & Sorority Life. In this role, she oversaw two of the four Greek councils on Southern Methodist University's campus. She developed deep and meaningful relationships with students, campus partners, and alumni advisors.

Jade is a member of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA). She earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Biology from Baylor University. She holds Master's degrees in Physician Assistant Studies and Higher Education from the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center and Southern Methodist University, respectively.

Ronna Spitz joined the Center for Presidential History as Coordinator in the Fall of 2012. Her professional background includes university, government, and large corporate marketing, event planning, and project management. She has worked in multiple fields, including the petroleum industry; electricity generation, distribution and government regulation; and business intelligence software. Ronna holds a BS in finance and a MBA in marketing from Oklahoma City University. Ronna has done a tremendous job of coordinating our trip from the SMU campus. However, she will not join us in Europe.

Essential History Expeditions

Expert historian and guide, LTC **Dr. Brian DeToy** (Ret.) served as Director of the Defense & Strategic Studies program at the United States Military Academy, West Point from 2007-13. His previous assignments include Assistant Professor in the Academy's History Department, Chief of Research and Publications in the Combat Studies Institute at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and Professor of Military Science at the University of Kansas. An Airborne Ranger, DeToy also possesses the Expert Infantryman and Air Assault badges. DeToy graduated from the University of Notre Dame with a BA in History and earned a PhD from Florida State University in European History. He has presented papers, and chaired and commented on sessions at numerous conferences both in the United States and Europe. In 2009-10 he served as the Command Historian in theater for the Multi-National Corps-Iraq out of Baghdad.

Sheryl Shafer serves as full-time expedition director, committed to meeting the unique needs of each group. She has leadership experience in the start-up phase of multiple corporate and nonprofit businesses, including roles as president, consultant and board of directors member. She is passionate about exploring worldwide cultures through travel. She holds a BA in English from Texas A&M, an MA in in Education Leadership, Policy and Politics from Columbia University's Teachers College and a Master of Nonprofit Management from Regis University.

Lodging: Our lodging is as follows:

Location	Lodging (subject to change)
Catania	Romano Palace Luxury
Siracusa	Ortea Palace
Amalfi	Luna Convento
Nettuno	Astura Palace
Rome	Eitch Borromini

Tour Dates: Students: May 22-June 1. Adults/Friends of SMU: May 22-30. Arrival in Catania and departure from Rome.

Meeting Location on May 22nd: Arrive by 4pm in Catania, the capital of Sicily. Our hotel, the Romano Palace Luxury Hotel, is quite near the Catania airport. Most flights will connect through Rome's Leonardo da Vinci International Airport. Early arrivals may wish to explore the very fine Operation HUSKY museum in the town. At 6pm at our hotel, we will enjoy a welcome social and dinner along with an overview of the expedition and group introductions, all under the shadow of the fabled volcano, Mount Etna!

Passport: Please send me your passport information – either a copy of the photo page or just the full name, birth date, passport number, expiration date and nationality. I will need this information for the Brittany Ferries manifest. Students: this information will be provided through the Hunt Scholar office.

Accommodations: Please let me know if you have any medical, dietary or mobility limitations or issues so we can make every effort to accommodate you and provide the best experience. If you have dietary restrictions, I can ensure restaurants can accommodate you if I know in advance. Please also let me know if you require a walk-in shower rather than a tub/shower.

Mentoring Component: We have established a mentoring component for the students to learn from the alumni/friends. On previous SMU CPH trips, this has proven to be a wonderful success from both the alumni/friend as well as student perspective. While most of alumni/friends chose to participate, the few who did not later expressed regret for missing the engaging experience. In fact, several of our mentor/mentee relationships have continued well past the trip!

Please respond with two pieces of information: 1. Are you willing to talk with students who may be interested in your professional or life experiences at some point during the trip? 2. If so, please send me a short bio, including information you'd be willing to share with students, so that we can match up interests. If you'd prefer not to take on a mentoring role, that's absolutely fine, too. Thank you!

Additional Hotel Nights: Adults/Friends of SMU: If you would like to extend your stay in Catania or Rome before or after the tour, I would be happy to make reservations at the pass-through rate from the hotel (no mark up). Students: Unfortunately, I will not be able to extend this offer to students.

Airport Transfers: We do not coordinate transport service to/from the airport and hotel Catania and Rome. However, if you prefer to have a car hire service rather than take public transportation or a taxi, we highly recommend Blacklane (<https://www.blacklane.com/en>). We have worked with them in multiple cities in Europe in the past and the service has always been reliable and highly professional. When organizing transportation, you have the option to select the type of car you prefer, such as Mercedes, BMW, Tesla, Audi or similar.

Earbuds: We will use audio units to ensure everyone can hear Drs Engel and DeToy clearly. We will have earbuds available but if you have pair you prefer, please be sure to bring them.

Power Converter: You will need a power converter for Italy. You can purchase these at a travel store or on Amazon. If you will have multiple devices to charge each evening, we also recommend bringing a splitter (like a mini extension cord without the cord) so that you can plug in more items into one outlet.

Transportation During Tour: We will have a bus for the transportation during the tour. The bus will include one bottle of water per person per day, but it likely will not have wifi service.

Packing: Bring layered clothing to adjust to hot or cool weather, a rain jacket, an umbrella and good walking shoes. The weather in our locations in late May can run the gamut from postcard-perfect to overcast with wind and rain to quite warm. It's springtime in Italy! (Note: Layering is key and we can always remove layers as necessary. If you have a small duffel bag, you can roll/fold it up empty in your suitcase and then bring it with extra clothing items in the bus each day of the touring). Remember, good walking shoes are important!

Luggage: There are no hard limits on luggage. The bus stowage should be sufficient for the size of bus as compared to our group size.

Family Connection: As we prepare for this trip, could you let us know if you had any relatives with ties to the Italy campaign? Perhaps a parent or grandparent who served at that time? Brian had three uncles serve in Europe and one in the first USAAF unit (a P-47 squadron) onto the continent on an airstrip carved right near Pointe du Hoc days after the landing. If you can give us the name and unit or organization, we will identify a time/place we can include that story in the touring.

Participation: Under the auspices of the CPH, Director Professor Jeff Engel's students will be portraying historical characters while we are in Europe.

Dr DeToy has developed a list of roles for people to portray. For the students, this is a mandatory exercise; for the remainder of you, this is entirely voluntary and optional but highly encouraged! For those who would like to do this, it will make the trip even more worthwhile as you dig into understanding a person who was critical to the history. Here's how it works: Brian will let you know at what location(s) he will ask you to speak to the group and for how long. He will give you a short list of possible talking points and questions you may

want to address. No worries, at all – Brian is prepared to speak and lead the entire thing. But we are confident it will be more enjoyable if we hear some other voices. For some others of you, he will provide a short reading that he will call on you to read at a specific point. There's no preparation required at all for those. Here is an initial list of possible characters and topics; if you have another that you would like to add, do not hesitate to suggest them:

- Coming Soon

If you would like to participate, please respond to this email with your character/topic choice.

Reading: If you want to do some reading beforehand, we recommend:

- *The Day of Battle: The War in Italy, 1943-1944* by Rick Atkinson (the entire Liberation Trilogy is magnificent)
- Martin Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*.
- Ernest Fisher, Jr. *Cassino to the Alps*.
- Farley Mowatt. *And No Birds Sang*.
- Audie Murphy. *To Hell and Back*.
- Bill Mauldin, *Up Front*.
- Frank Costigliola, *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances: How Personal Politics Helped Start the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).
- Richard Overly, *Why the Allies Won* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997).
- Norman Rich, *Hitler's War Aims: Ideology, The Nazi State, and the Course of Expansion* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992).
- Peter Caddick-Adams, *Monte Cassino: Ten Armies in Hell*.

Film:

- *The Devil's Brigade* (William Holden, et al. The 1st Special Service Force assault on a key part of the German line).
- *The Battle of San Pietro* (John Huston's 1945 masterpiece of a battle we shall visit).