

Soldier's graves bring reality home to students

By Nick Martin

GRADE 11 student Luke Lazaruk stood in an Italian cemetery and suddenly the reality sank home — there was a man buried beneath his feet, a man who died in battle when he was barely older than Lazaruk.

“The experience was so moving. Your soldier was under your feet, and 65 years ago, he was walking around,” said a solemn Lazaruk.

He was one of 33 students from Miles Macdonell Collegiate, and another 14 from Kildonan East Collegiate, who was among 1,375 Canadian high school students to stand behind gravestones in the Canadian war cemetery in Ortona, Italy, last month, each student representing a Canadian who died there 65 years ago.

“Remembrance Day is there for a reason — people are actually dead,” Lazaruk said he realized that day.

Miles Mac student Amanda Gyori said Remembrance Day will always

seem far more significant from now on: “We stood upon their graves — they died for us.”

Some of the students in teacher Kara Street's history class said they hadn't known previously about the eight-day house-to-house battle to take Ortona from the Germans. Most hadn't known much if anything about the Italian campaign.

Kelsey Howard was an exception. “My great-great-uncle fought in Ortona,” said Howard, who met a lot of distant relatives in researching his ancestor's life.

And Street herself had a grandfather who fought in the battle.

One student on the trip had a great-uncle who died in Ortona, said Street. “She was the first one in her family to visit the grave.”

It was just about a year ago that Miles Mac students heard about the trip, and the 33 quickly signed up and agreed to cover their own costs.

nick.martin@freepress.mb.ca



MIKE DEAL / WINKIFEG FREE PRESS

These are some of the Miles Mac Collegiate students and teachers who have just returned from a tour of an Italian battlefield. (Back row, from left) Luke Lazaruk, Kelsey Howard, Hailley Cameron, Julie Oryniak, teachers Chris Chartier and Carrie Gillis. (Front row from left) Teacher Kara Wickstrom-Street, Catherine Land, Dixie Monk, Amanda Gyori, Juli Shewchenko and teacher Cindy Feduniw.