

A teen's tribute to those who served



Mike Mergen/Photo intern

Brad Hulst has been working since August to compile a list of all U.S. military veterans buried in Elmira's Ss. Peter and Paul Cemetery. The project was to be completed in time for Veterans Day, Nov. 11.

Though the cemetery is large and details on some headstones are faded or hidden from view, Brad Hulst knows many of the graves like pages in a book.

"Under the first pine tree — right here," Brad said, as he stood at the northeast corner of Ss. Peter and Paul Cemetery. "His wife called and said it was marked, but a pine tree was in the way."

Partially hidden under the tree was the grave of Paul F. Ayers, World War II U.S. Army corporal.

At the Lagonegro family's grave site, Brad observed that both the husband, William, and wife, Teresa, had served in World War II.

"The wife had a higher rank than the husband," Brad said, noting that Teresa was a captain.

In the priest section, Brad made note of Father Edward J. Waters, a World War II Army chaplain and later pastor of St. Patrick's Church. In another area, Brad pointed out a veteran's grave from way back: Theodore A. Byrne, 19, killed July 2, 1863, at the Battle of Gettysburg.

"That's the oldest (grave) I found," Brad said.

Brad, 15, spent much of August and September going through the cemetery — Elmira's second-largest — as part of an ambitious Eagle Scout project. His goal: to collect the names of all U.S. military veterans buried at Ss. Peter and Paul.

To date, Brad has collected an incredible 935 names. He has arranged them by computer, and said he planned to release a list on November 11 —

Brad, who attends St. Mary's Church in Elmira.

Brad and his father noted that they've found headstones for veterans who served the Civil, Spanish-American, Korean, Vietnam and world wars. Though many of the graves are prominently marked, others give little or no indication that a veteran is buried there.

Brad said there's no way to be sure he has identified every veteran, especially if family and friends are deceased as well.

"We haven't really gotten calls from the (cemetery's) older section," Brad said.

Even so, the project provides a tremendous resource, said Jerry Storch, Ss. Peter and Paul co-director. Storch said that for confidentiality purposes, the cemetery cannot release individuals' registered files to the general public. However, he said he does plan to make Brad's list available.

"This will be advantageous to a lot of people," Storch said.

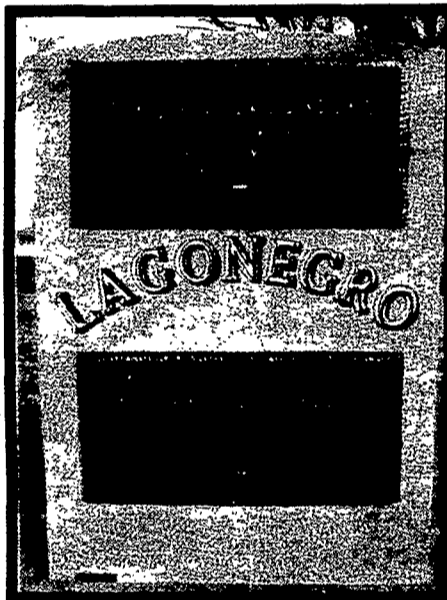
The list will also be offered to veterans' families, Brad said. For those who learn about the list after it has been released, the appropriate names can be added to the bottom of the master list.

Brad said the American Legion can now supply flags for all 935 people on his list. The flags are traditionally placed by Boy Scout and Cub Scout troops every Memorial Day. In addition, the Hultses are making efforts to get markers donated for veterans who don't already have them.

Brad said the list was the realization of an idea he got several years ago.

"I would put out flags as a Cub Scout on Memorial Day, and people would come up and ask for flags to put on their family members' graves," Brad recalled.

The project, he said, "gives me a feeling of completion."



Veterans Day.

Brad got lots of help from his dad, Carl, and other members of Boy Scout Troop 3019 which is based at the Catholic War Veterans post in Elmira Heights.

Project members examined every headstone in Ss. Peter and Paul Cemetery, checking to see if the graves acknowledged military service — during wartime or otherwise.

"We walked a lot of miles," remarked Carl Hulst — who, himself, served in the Air Force from 1978-81.

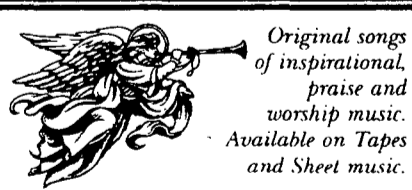
Brad spread word of his project via Elmira-area media and church bulletins, asking people to call him if they knew of veterans buried at Ss. Peter and Paul. He received numerous responses; many callers thanked him for his efforts.

"A couple of them said, 'It's about time somebody honored the veterans,'" said

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