



The Freedom for Italy Network Bulletin

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The story of Gino Bartali: Tour de France champion and hero



The extraordinary story of Gino Bartali before, during and after the Second World War was told at the weekly Freedom for Italy online meeting by Canadian historian Philip Hay.

Bartali was born near Florence in July 1914. Aged 14, he started working in a bicycle shop and began to participate in bike races.

In a series of outstanding performances, he emerged as Italy's greatest competitive racer of the era, winning the Giro d'Italia for the first time in 1936 and again in 1937. He won the Tour de France in 1938.

Bartali's sporting career was interrupted by Italy's declaration of war against France and Britain in June 1940. That October, he was drafted into the Italian military but was found to have an irregular heartbeat and confined to serving as a military messenger based near Lake Trasimeno in Umbria.

In the autumn of 1943, Bartali was approached by Archbishop Elia della Costa, cardinal of Florence, to help deliver forged identity papers to Jews being hidden by the Catholic church. It is estimated that 330 Jews in Florence and 300 in Assisi and Perugia were saved. After the war, Bartali returned to racing and won the Giro d'Italia for the third time in 1946 and the Tour de France for the second time in 1948. He stopped racing when he was 40, after being injured in a road accident.

Bartali died in May 2000. His wife Adriana died aged 94 in 2014. Bartali had two sons and a daughter. In September 2013, he was recognised as a "Righteous Among the Nations" by Yad Vashem for his efforts to aid Jews during the Second World War.

Boston school to receive Tuskegee fighter model

The English High School in Boston, Massachusetts, has agreed to accept a model of the P-51 Mustang Red Tail fighter flown by Tuskegee Airmen pilot Leo Gray who graduated from the school in 1942. Gray flew 15 combat missions in P-51s for a total of 750 hours flying time.

The model is being built by Freedom for Italy Executive Chairman Robert Desourdis who will present it to the English High School this autumn.



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Tuskegee Airmen in Italy online seminar is at 8pm Italy time on 7 September.

The **2026 Monte Cassino to Rome Peace Walk** starts at the Abbey of Monte Cassino on 7 April and ends in St Peter's Square on 15 April.

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