

AFS JANUS

Newsletter for AFS Alumni & Friends | August 2026



**AFS Builds Bridges of Hope
in Italy:**
The Ukraine Project



Rebuilding Peace:
An AFS Alumni-Led
Exchange Focused on Peace



**AFS Alumni Community
Updates:**
Recent highlights



The Untold Story of the WWI AFS Drivers on the Chemin Des Dames in France



By Lisa Ann Britton

Lecturer in Foreign Languages, University of Pennsylvania

Behind the modern AFS exchange programs that seek to develop active global citizens lies a history written in courage and action. In this feature, Lisa Ann Britton—a Lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania—takes us to France in World War I through a story about two AFS Volunteer Ambulance Drivers.

Why does a century-old tragedy matter to us today?

Because AFS Volunteer Ambulance Drivers were the original “Global Citizens.” Before AFS was an exchange program, it was a volunteer ambulance corps driven by a humanitarian peace building mission. By retracing these stories, Britton shows us that the bravery required to drive an ambulance in 1917 is still an inspiration and an educational topic for young people today.



*Dans le Reflet du Ciel, by Christian Lapie.
Photo by Sergio Padura*



The Chemin des Dames is a historic road in the Aisne region of France. Named for Louis XV's daughters who traveled the road in 1784, the Chemin is renowned as one of the main stages in the theater of the Great War, most notably the calamitous Nivelle Offensive of 1917. This place of commemoration was inscribed in 2023 as a **UNESCO Funerary and Memory Site of the First World War**.

When I first walked the Chemin in 2018, my guide told me that the earth in the region is still "spitting up the war." Objects from World War I continue to be discovered today. Along with these artifacts emerge the forgotten stories of men and women engaged in this global conflict. In 2023, I collaborated with members of the community, including historian Guy Marival, to unearth the story of Gailey and Hamilton, American Field Service (AFS) volunteers who served on the Chemin des Dames in 1917.

"They offered to my country, as you all did, gentlemen, their youth, their heart, their blood."

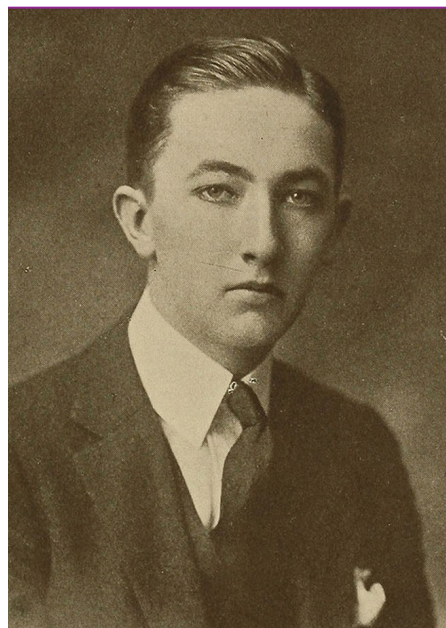
The Excavation: Gailey and Hamilton

James "Jim" Wilson Gailey (age 22), was a student at Princeton University, remembered as a "true and noble friend" who, "while he was a boy in spirit, he was all man in soul." Perley Raymond Hamilton (age 24), was a student at the New York Military Academy, "a talented artist and musician," described as "one of those cheerful, optimistic, straightforward natures which makes friends without effort."

In July 1917, only weeks after arriving in France, Gailey and Hamilton found themselves, with the other members of Sanitary Section Unit (S.S.U.) 66, on the front lines during one of the fiercest battles of the Chemin des Dames. Headquartered in Beaurieux, S.S.U. 66 served several poste de secours (dressing stations), including one in the devastated village of Vassogne. Gailey and Hamilton worked sleepless nights evacuating

the wounded, including — as Hamilton wrote — "enemy blessés." They traveled on shell-torn roads, under cover of darkness without headlights, often through dense fog and under heavy enemy fire and gas attacks.

In the early morning of July 29, 1917, Gailey and Hamilton were loading their car at the poste de secours in Vassogne when an artillery shell struck their ambulance, killing Gailey, Hamilton, and the brancardier Joineau. News of their deaths resonated deeply. Their funeral was attended by General Niessel, commander of the 9th Corps of the French Army, and AFS founder A. Piatt Andrew. General Niessel delivered the final tribute and laid the Croix de Guerre on Gailey's and Hamilton's coffins, declaring, "They offered to my country, as you all did, gentlemen, their youth, their heart, their blood."



James "Jim" Wilson Gailey
Sanitary Section Unit
(S.S.U.) 66



Perley Raymond Hamilton
Sanitary Section Unit
(S.S.U.) 66



The funeral of Gailey and Hamilton was attended by General Niessel, commander of the 9th Corps of the French Army, and AFS founder A. Piatt Andrew.



Perley Raymond Hamilton in 1915

Transmission: From Battlefield to Classroom

Gailey and Hamilton's story is featured in the Spring Penn Global Studies (PGS) course Caves, Cathedrals & Curiosities: Unearthing Stories on the Chemin des Dames. Fourteen undergraduates will encounter AFS history through the study of documents and artifacts from the AFS Archives in New York before traveling to the Chemin des Dames in May to retrace

Gailey's and Hamilton's story on the landscape where it unfolded. **AFS history offers a compelling model for global engagement, aligning with the learning objectives of the PGS course: to foster "a prismatic understanding of peoples, cultures, and ideas," and to develop "a global perspective in order to understand and do good in the world."**

AFS history offers a compelling model for global engagement: to develop a global perspective in order to understand and do good in the world.

Commemoration:
A Living Memorial

In 2027, a memorial by French artist Christian Lapie will be inaugurated in Vassogne to mark the 110th anniversary of Gailey's and Hamilton's deaths. The sculpture, L'Arbre des défis, will honor the fallen drivers and the extraordinary service of AFS members during the Great War, reviving the friendship that inspired the AFS motto, "Friends of France." As Lapie observes: "In 1917, rather than joining the combat ranks, Gailey and Hamilton chose to serve as ambulance drivers on the European front. They willingly risked their lives to rescue the wounded, regardless of nationality. This choice, motivated by profound humanity, was also a deeply personal commitment."

Through this tribute to Gailey and Hamilton, we hope to inspire a lasting commitment to service and international cooperation among future generations.

 Please donate to the AFS Global Impact Fund at afs.org/donate to support the work of AFS.



| L'Arbre des défis

AFS WWII Volunteer
Ambulance Drivers
Last Post



Dr. Bayard D. Clarkson
(1926–2025)
(CM 90)



James W. Sharp
(1924–2025)
(FR 4)



Lloyd Stephen Riford, Jr.
(1924–2025)
(ME 32, CM 41, FR 1)



David K. Ford
(1925–2024)
(CM 567)

Find out more at afs.org/lastpost

From exchange students to future leaders:
The AFS class of 2026

 A new generation of exchange students complete their AFS program



As another exchange year draws to a close, a remarkable group of young people is preparing to head home. This month, another generation of AFS exchange students is completing their journey, leaving behind host families who have become parents and siblings, and schools where they were once strangers but are now friends.

For nearly 80 years, AFS has brought exchange programs to young people and families around the world. We do this because we believe that friendships, connections and community formed this way can make the world a more just and peaceful place.

The impact of this exchange experience is profound. As Pushpendra, an exchange student from India, shared:

"AFS has truly shaped me into a more open-minded, empathetic, and culturally aware individual."

This transformation extends far beyond the students. Our host families experience "global learning at home." A host family from Costa Rica reflected on the bittersweet nature of these departures:

"You know that you played a part in that personal growth, and you will carry him in your heart forever, just like a son who lives far away."

To ensure these life-changing journeys are accessible to all, regardless of financial background, AFS is committed to bridging the gap through more scholarships. More than 40% of AFS exchange students receive some scholarship support to join our programs.

AFS receives support from donors from around the world, which allows us to turn young people's dreams into reality. These donations ensure that more students and families can say, as one South African family did:

"Everything about this program was just extraordinary. We are now officially part of the AFS family."

 Support AFS exchanges by donating to the AFS Global Impact Fund at afs.org/donate



AFS Builds Bridges of Hope in Italy: The Ukraine Project

 Intercultura in partnership with the Ukranian and Italian National Association of School Principals (ANP)



As conflict started to unfold in Ukraine, the AFS community faced a fundamental question: *How do we stay true to our mission of peace in a time of war?* The response from Intercultura (AFS Italy) was clear: **this is the time to show solidarity and take action.**

In partnership with the Italian National Association of School Principals (ANP) and their counterparts in Ukraine, Intercultura launched a scholarship program for Ukrainian students to spend one high school year in Italy.

The stories of Ukrainian students who are currently navigating their exchange year in Italy, reveal the profound impact of intercultural immersion:



For Volodymyr (“Vova”) in Modena, this program is a **chance to recover a “piece of a normal adolescence” that the war attempted to steal.** “Acceptance,” his host parents reflect, “is a way to return a fragment of stolen time”.



Arina is hosted by a family in Pisa that viewed her arrival as a **precious opportunity to challenge their own preconceptions and teach their five-year-old son the importance of welcoming others.**



Living in the bilingual reality of South Tyrol, Yurii has watched **his future horizons expand supported by a mentor and his host family** who share his love for board games and typical Ukrainian cooking.

“”



“Our task remains to shape the future in the present, building bridges of peace through dialogue”.

— **Andrea Franzoi**
Secretary General of Intercultura

Rooted in the AFS history as volunteer ambulance drivers, our commitment today continues through the creation of bridges of peace. By promoting intercultural dialogue and global citizenship, we aim to transform the legacy of conflict into a future of mutual understanding.



The project’s success is built on the footsteps of those who came before. Anhelina, who spent the 2024-25 year in Parma, recently shared her story at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Today, back in Kyiv, Anhelina describes Italy as her “second home” as she dreams of becoming an international civil activist.

This initiative would be impossible without the strategic support of school leaders in both Italy and Ukraine.

For the upcoming academic year, the program will expand to four fully-funded scholarships thanks to an additional grant from the ANP Foundation. Furthermore, AFS Germany has pledged to join the initiative by hosting three additional Ukrainian students.

As Andrea Franzoi, Secretary General of Intercultura, concludes: “Our task remains to shape the future in the present, building bridges of peace through dialogue”.



At the very beginning of the war in Ukraine, **Intercultura rapidly fundraised from 110 individual donors to purchase an ambulance for the Odessa region.** The funding provided for a volunteer-led convoy in partnership with the Missionland association consisting of two ambulances, a mobile clinic, and a service vehicle stocked with essential medicines and surgical equipment. The mission delivered these life-saving resources to assist with medical transport and the evacuation of the wounded. This initiative honors Intercultura’s historical roots, which began with humanitarian ambulance services during the World Wars.

Rebuilding Peace: An AFS Alumni-Led Exchange Focused on Peace

Initiative by AFS Switzerland, supported by alumni philanthropy



The “Rebuilding Peace” initiative by AFS Switzerland proves the value of intercultural exchanges and the need to build friendships between individuals from communities in conflict. Inspired by Liechtenstein’s presidency of the Council of Europe and its theme, “Serious about Human Rights,” this project would not be possible without the AFS alumni network.

The initiative provided scholarships for a young student from Gaza and Israel to participate in the AFS high school year program. The journey began with Max Marxer, a local lawyer and AFS Alumnus, who connected with AFS Switzerland, then Liechtenstein’s private school *Formatio* and the youth information centre *Aha*. Selection and preparation

of our two scholars was shared by *The Intercultural Communication Center* and AFS Egypt. Finally, the support of a visionary group of private donors and two local host families allowed this unique exchange year to start in August 2024.

Our fully funded scholars spent a year immersed in host families in Liechtenstein and supported by dedicated AFS volunteers. The program reached its emotional peak at Castle Vaduz, where the students shared their reflections before the project’s patron, HRH Hereditary Princess Sophie. Their words remind us why the AFS mission remains vital:

“I chose this program because I believe that peace is possible. Yahli’s presence showed me that we really can live in peace. We shared adventures and learned a lot together—she was a wonderful friend and companion along the way.”

— Aizen (Gaza)

“For the first time in my life, I met a Palestinian boy, Aizen. Even though I grew up in a family of peace activists, it’s something entirely different to meet someone from the “other side” in person. It allowed me to see, understand, and truly believe: we are all the same. We have the same desires—to grow up, to learn, to have fun, and to live our lives without suffering from wars that do not help us.”

— Yahli (Israel)



This experience was made possible by the intersection of alumni initiative and philanthropic bridge-building—directly influencing young students and entire communities.

Note that students’ names have been altered for privacy reasons



PEACE: AFS Cultivates the Architects of a United Future

PEACE Programme (Peace through Exchange and Active Citizenship Education)



“I realized that change starts with me. Every small action is an opportunity to reshape the world.”

The quote above is a reflection and commitment to peace from one AFS participant. For the high school students participating in the **PEACE Programme (Peace through Exchange and Active Citizenship Education)**, this is the culmination of a journey that brings the AFS mission to life.

The PEACE Programme is a unique opportunity for students and families that starts with a trimester exchange program. The journey culminates in the PEACE Camp in Belgium—a five-day educational youth camp focused on Active Global Citizenship organized by the European Federation for

Intercultural Learning (EFIL), the umbrella organization for AFS in Europe.

The highlight of the camp (organized two times per year) for many is the day spent in Brussels, the *Capital of Europe*. Here, the abstract concepts of governance and human rights become reality. Since it first began in 2009, the program has empowered more than 3,900 participants. The impact is measurable: in 2025, 62% of participants reported a significant increase in their sense of agency as active citizens.

The success of the European model is now paving the way for global expansion, and in summer 2027 the **PEACE Programme will relaunch in Asia**. This expansion represents our commitment to bringing the AFS brand of peace-building to all corners of the globe. Programs like this demonstrate that an AFS experience is not just about hosting students; we are training the peace-builders the world needs most.

As one PEACE Programme participant concludes:

“This program changed my life, continue to do it like this. A lot of students will come out of here with a completely new perspective of the world.”

3,900+
Participants since 2009

62%
Reported a significant increase in their sense of agency as active citizens (2025)

AFS Alumni Community Updates

AFS has 500,000 alumni around the world. These are some of our community’s most recent highlights:



Harini Nireka Amarasuriya, Sri Lanka to USA 1988
Serves as the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka

Harini, a political leader and sociologist, currently serves as the 16th Prime Minister of Sri Lanka. Prior to her historic premiership, she built a career in academia and human rights activism, dedicating her life to advocating for social justice on a national scale.



Bernadette Meehan, USA to Argentina 1991
Becomes CEO of Wikimedia Foundation

Bernadette is an American diplomat who served as the United States Ambassador to Chile from 2022 to 2025. Her career includes roles as a spokesperson for the National Security Council, executive vice president of global programs at the Obama Foundation, serving as a former Foreign Service officer and Wall Street professional.



Catherine Fournier, Canada to the United States 2010
Re-elected as Mayor of Longueuil

Catherine is a political leader currently serving as the Mayor of Longueuil as the third woman to hold the office. In 2025 she published a book titled “Apprivoiser la politique” (Taming Politics). She first made waves by becoming the youngest woman ever elected to Québec’s National Assembly in 2016, at the age of 24.



Inga Ibsdotter Lilleaas, Norway to Brazil 2006
Earns an Oscar nomination for Best Supporting Actress

Inga is an acclaimed actress who recently earned an Oscar nomination and a National Board of Review Award for her nuanced performance in the 2025 film *Sentimental Value*. Before honing her craft at Nord University and achieving international cinematic success, she built a foundational understanding of diverse human experiences as an exchange student.



Paul Hegge, Belgium to the United States 1985
Becomes the General Representative of Flanders to the USA in New York

Paul is a diplomat and expert in transatlantic relations currently serving as the General Representative of Flanders to the USA in New York. Following a career spanning both the private sector and international public service, he returned to diplomacy in 2024 to spearhead cross-cultural partnerships between Europe and the United States.



Celebrating Our Community:
AFS Volunteer Award Winners

The AFS Galatti Award:
Nelly Salazar de Gasia 🇨🇴



Established to honor the organization’s founders, the AFS Galatti Award recognizes volunteers whose lifelong dedication actively advances the mission of global peace and intercultural understanding.

As the 2025 winner, Nelly Salazar de Gasia has served as an indispensable pillar for AFS Venezuela since 1989, utilizing her legal expertise to navigate severe national crises and ensure the continuous cultivation of global mindsets for countless young leaders.

The AFS Peggy and Art Howe Award:
The Torp Rivas Family 🇳🇴



Inspired by six decades of leadership, the Peggy and Art Howe Award honors volunteer families whose multi-generational dedication sustains the mission of intercultural exchange.

The Torp Rivas Family of AFS Norway has leveraged two decades of hospitality and leadership. On top of hosting AFS exchange students, family members served on AFS boards, provided training and support to exchange students, and engaged in leadership roles on the local, national and European level, even winning the Spirit of AFS Norway Prize in 2013.

The Young AFS Volunteer Award:
Priya Jadav 🇨🇦



Established to highlight the role of youth leadership, the Young AFS Volunteer Award recognizes individuals under 30 who make fundamental contributions to intercultural understanding.

Leveraging the global perspective gained during her own exchange from India to Czechia, recipient Priya Jadav of AFS Canada has delivered intercultural training and mobilized alumni initiatives across communities and schools.

The AFS Community Impact Award:
The Popayán Chapter 🇨🇴



The AFS Community Impact Award recognizes standout local chapters that demonstrate exceptional daily efforts to advance the mission of intercultural exchange.

As the 2025 recipient, the Popayán Chapter of AFS Colombia leverages nearly four decades of grassroots experience to champion diversity, utilizing innovative outreach and inclusive programming to embed global perspectives directly into their local community.



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Your Global Impact: Investing in the Future of AFS

Creating the world we want to live in requires a combining local action and global vision. Through our programs, AFS builds this world every day. But to sustain a network that spans over 50 countries, we need a strong international foundation.

When you contribute to our International Funds, you empower AFS to remain agile—directing resources exactly where they are needed most.

You can choose between:

- **AFS Global Impact Fund:** Our most comprehensive, unrestricted fund. It provides systemic support worldwide, all year round.
- **Volunteer Ambulance Drivers & A. Piatt Andrew Funds:** These funds ensure our volunteer-led mission remains a vital force for peace today.
- **AFS International Development:** Direct your support to the essential quality control, staff training, and archival preservation that sustain our global network.



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Donate using the enclosed cheque or at [afs.org/donate](https://www.afs.org/donate)



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