

Mario Pomponio, an American Hero

Mario Pomponio would be about 88 years of age, had he not died on a battlefield in France in 1945. If he had survived and lived a long life in this community, I suspect we would celebrate his decades of accomplishments and contributions to Perinton. Of this there is little doubt, based on the few short years he spent here in his youth.

Orazio and Anna Pomponio and their young children left Italy in 1935, and started their new life in America in Tuckahoe, Westchester County, New York. Five years later, the family relocated to Fairport after the death of a relative, Camillo Pomponio, to lend support to his grieving widow. With three boys in tow, the family settled on the north side of the village at 24 Deland Park B. The children were enrolled in Fairport schools, with the reality of war in Europe escalating by the day.



Pomponio home at 24 Deland Park B in Fairport

Mario was the oldest son, and he set a fine example for his younger brothers, immersing himself in activities, sports, and his education. He was awarded the Harvard Prize in his junior year at Fairport High School, as the outstanding student in his class. In his senior year, Mario began a term with the Fairport Rotary Club as the community's Junior Rotarian, while also helping to lead Fairport High's basketball and baseball teams, earning the school's coveted Sportsman's Cup. In addition, he was elected President of the Alpha Beta Phi Fraternity, and was manager of the school's yearbook committee.

News of the war was relentless during Mario's high school years, and over 500 Perinton residents were in the armed forces during WWII. Letters from the hometown soldiers were regularly published in the local newspaper, along with the sad news of those who died in service. Patriotism was infectious, and local folks found many ways to support the war effort, from recycling to bond drives. To prepare for a possible invasion, citizens young and old learned to identify the silhouette of enemy aircraft on the horizon.

In the spring of 1944, the student body assembled in the school auditorium to learn the rankings of the senior class. Mario Pomponio was named valedictorian with the highest grade point average. The local newspaper said it took some doing to get a statement from the ever-modest Pomponio, but he relented, confirming that he was "really surprised and feels it a privilege to be the top person in the best class ever to graduate from F.H.S.". His valedictory speech was entitled, "The Effect of Baseball on Everyday Life."

Mario's reference to "everyday life" would soon be a distant memory. He was inducted into military service in June of 1944, the same month he graduated from high school.

Next: "He became a legend, I have never known a braver man."

Written by Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian

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