

Mario Pomponio, an American Hero – Conclusion

The previous two columns reviewed the accomplishments of Mario Pomponio, both in our community and on the battlefield. He joined Company E of the 7th Infantry in Wihr-En-Plaine, France on January 29th, 1945, and was immediately thrust into battle. His heroics in that skirmish became legendary to the few that witnessed his bravery. He died in battle two days later.

ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

Fairport Prize Scholar Killed in France

Pvt. Mario Pomponio, 18, was killed in action in France on Jan. 31, his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Orazio Pomponio, Fairport, have been informed.



A graduate of Fairport High School, he was valedictorian of his graduating class, president of his fraternity, general manager of his school paper and holder of the school's Sportsman's Cup. In his junior year, he was awarded the Harvard prize as the outstanding student in his class. His average for four years' school work was 95.

**MARIO
POMPONIO**

Witnesses provided sworn statements detailing his incredible one-man attack against dozens of heavily armed enemy soldiers. Charles K. Blum, 2nd Lieutenant, 7th Infantry closed his statement by noting, "He was as brave a soldier as I have ever known. His company and his battalion can never forget what they owe to him." Private Robert A. Mitchell concluded his statement as follows: "Private Pomponio was a great soldier. None of us will ever forget him or what he did for us." Company Runner Alfonso P. Darchi was also moved by Private Pomponio's act of courage, stating, "In the four days he was with us, he became a legend. I have never known a braver man."

A letter from Major General Edward F. Witsell was received by the parents of Mario Pomponio in the fall of 1945. It read, in part, "I have the honor to inform you that, by direction of the President, the Distinguished Service Cross has been posthumously awarded to your son, Private Mario Pomponio, Infantry." The citation continued, "For extraordinary heroism in action on 30 January 1945, in Wihren-Plaine, France. When sixty Germans threatened to overrun his Battalion Observation Post, Private Pomponio, a reinforcement without previous combat experience, vaulted onto a six-foot wall and, while exposed to blasts of automatic fire, killed a four-man machine gun crew at fifteen yards range with his M-1 rifle. Then, charging into the core of the hostile position he killed a second machine gun crew and captured ten Germans in a fierce firefight. His intrepid singlehanded assault broke the enemy counterattack."

Captain Steven F. Momano, USN (Retired) has spent years seeking to provide recognition for countless veterans from the Rochester area. I met with him to discuss Private Pomponio. Captain Momano believes it is a tremendous oversight that no WWII veteran from this county has ever been a recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor, stating, "Monroe County was blessed to have some of the bravest and most heroic members of the Armed Forces serving overseas". Captain Momano said there are several WWII soldiers from this area whose service made them strong candidates for the honor, and is adamant that Mario Pomponio is at the top of that list, stating, "By any objective standard, the valor displayed by Private Pomponio was exceptional."

There are a few folks in our community who knew of Mario Pomponio, his heroism, and ultimate sacrifice for our country. I also spoke with his younger brother, Rear Admiral Bruno Pomponio, USN (Retired). Each believes Mario never received the recognition he deserved. I suggest we find a way to correct that, a way to help us remember Private Mario Pomponio, an American hero.

Written by Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian

Published in the Fairport-ER Post, 11/06/2014