

https://buffalonews.com/news/local/dog-tag-of-buffalo-gi-killed-in-1945-discovered-near-italian-coast/article_d904ba4f-9e20-5916-8b8b-8312841dad77.html

Dog tag of Buffalo GI killed in 1945 discovered near Italian coast

By Lou Michel
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Patricia Blatner will soon have the long-lost dog tag from her uncle, Pasquale Gentile, killed in WWII.

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asquale Gentile's life was hard, short and soon forgotten.

PHe was one of five children of Italian immigrants, and they were separated after their mother died young in Buffalo.

During World War II, he returned to his parents' homeland as a GI and was killed in action April 24, 1945, just days before the war in Europe ended.

His body was buried on an Italian hillside in Florence, beneath a simple white cross in a sea of more than 4,000 crosses marking the graves of other soldiers.

Now, more than seven decades later, the memory of Pasquale Gentile has come alive through a sudden turn of events, and the niece who never met him but was named Patricia in his honor finds herself torn between joy and sadness.

A hiker found her uncle's dog tag last month in a wooded area not far from where Gentile landed on the Italian coast, and the tag will soon be in her hands.

"It gives me chills. Being orphaned and not having the chance to have a family, at least he is being remembered. The dog tag will be safe with us, his only living family," said Patricia Blatner, who lives in the Boston hills. "The only thing we had of his until now was a worn ring with a triangle on it and the words Italy and Africa."

She says those are the war zones where her uncle served.

Andrea Tamburrini, in an email, said he spotted a piece of metal sticking out of the ground while hiking, and after picking up the object realized he was holding a piece of history – the identity of an American GI who had helped liberate Italy.

"Gentile, Pasquale

32130865 T4243 0

John Gentile

304 S. Division St.

Buffalo, N.Y."

Eager to send the dog tag to Gentile's relatives, Tamburrini took it to officials at the American Battle Monuments Commission in Nettuno, where he lives. Commission worker Veronica Stasio researched Gentile's background.

"When I realized it was an American dog tag, I thought it was a sign. I found it five days before the 72nd anniversary of the landings in that area, which occurred Jan. 22, 1944," Tamburrini said. "It was almost as if destiny had determined that this soldier's story would continue during this specific time frame to mark the significance of the events."

Gentile was 30 when he was killed in Parma on April 24, 1945, more than a year after the Battle of Anzio. He was buried at the Florence American Cemetery, one of two World War II American cemeteries maintained by the commission in Italy.

Commission records listed John Gentile, as Pasquale's father and next of kin. The father, who died in 1970, decided that his son's final resting place should be in Italy.

Stasio's research also determined that the soldier had four siblings, Rose, Frances, Paul and Dominic. With that information in hand, Stasio emailed The Buffalo News, seeking help in finding a living relative. After numerous phone calls to families with the last name of Gentile locally and out of area, The News succeeded in reaching Gentile's niece.

The 58-year-old Blatner said that while she is deeply moved that the dog tag was recovered and is being sent to her, she feels a sense of loss for her uncle and all that he missed in life.

"I have a sad heart for my uncle. My dad was able to come back from the war and make a life for himself. But Pasquale was never able to do that. My dad named me Patricia in honor of his older brother," she said.

Her sadness, she explained, comes from knowing how much the family suffered, and not just because of the war.

Patricia's father, Paul, was one of five children, the three older siblings, Pasquale, Rose and Frances, and a younger sibling, Dominic, named in honor of their mother, Domenica. Domenica also went by the name of Mary and died in the 1930s.

The Gentiles lived in a neighborhood off Main Street in downtown Buffalo, and their father eked out a living working as a track man for the Steam Rail Road. When his wife died, he tried to keep the family together, but after a few years, the children were taken from him because of a lack of adult supervision while he was at work.

Paul and Dominic ended up as foster children working on a farm in North Collins. The three older children were placed in orphanages.

“My dad told me that he and Pasquale and Rose started to get to know each other when they were young adults. My dad would get a ride into the city and visit Pasquale and Rose. But the reunions did not last for long. My dad and uncle both went to serve in the war. My dad drove a tank in France and Germany.”

Paul Gentile considered himself blessed that he survived the war and was given the chance to raise a family, his daughter said.

“I remember my mom telling us how thrilled he was to have us girls, me, my sister Cathy and mom, because he never really had a family growing up,” Blatner said.

Paul Gentile and his sister, Rose, stayed in touch throughout their lives. Frances Gentile died as a teenager, they were told. Dominic Gentile, as a young man, moved to Pennsylvania. He visited once as an adult and was never heard from again.

And there is another layer of sorrow.

Years after her father and Rose died, Blatner said she, her sister and Rose's son learned that Frances Gentile had actually lived a long life, and not far from them.

“We received a letter around 15 years ago that our Aunt Frances had died. She had been living in East Aurora all those years, and there was my father living nearby in West Seneca, and he never knew,” Blatner said. “Aunt Frances lived in a room off Main

Street in East Aurora, and she was known as the ‘flower lady’ because she watered the flowers on Main Street.”

Why the family had been told Frances Gentile died as a teenager is something that was never revealed.

But Blatner said the past, as sad as it was, cannot be undone and that now there is cause for joy.

“My sister and I are honored to accept our uncle’s dog tag and will hold it with high regard,” Blatner said. “I feel it has been destined by fate that Uncle Pasquale’s story be told, and I am proud to take part in telling it.”

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