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3 days ago · Our family there introduced us in 2023 to Virgil’s niece, Brenda, who had never known her uncle because her mother was only 11 when her brother Virgil died. We spoke about Nettuno

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Monday, May 26, 2025

Sicily-Rome American Cemetery and Memorial [As Prepared for Delivery]

Distinguished guests, friends and allies, honored veterans, and cherished family members of the fallen, thank you for joining us today.

It is a deep honor to be with you here at the hallowed grounds of the Sicily-Rome American Cemetery and Memorial. In places such as this, Americans and their friends gather on Memorial Day to remember the sacrifices made, so that we may live in freedom. Today we are here to honor all those who have made the ultimate sacrifice, but specifically those recognized in Nettuno by the 7,860 headstones and 3,096 names on the wall of the missing.

One of them is Private First Class Virgil Fiori, who is buried in plot G, row 10, grave 37. He was one of seven children born to Mary and Pete Fiori of Tontitown, a small community in Arkansas that had been settled by immigrants from Italy. Virgil was only 19 years old when he enlisted and was posted to the 125th Field Artillery Battalion of the 34th Infantry Division. He was sent to Algiers in 1942 and landed ten months later near Salerno. On December 19, 1943, he wrote his sister and told her, quote "I am still out here in Italy and every thing is fine. Only I miss home, I guess everybody does, but we have a job to do." End quote. And they did their job. Heavily engaged in the struggle for the Gustav line, the division participated in fierce fighting near Mount Cassino. It was there on January 19, 1944, that Virgil was mortally wounded by enemy fire near Sant Angelo in Theodice. He was initially buried in Marsanello Nuovo Cemetery and then transferred here to the Sicily-Rome American Cemetery and interred on October 5, 1948. He was one of nearly 3,500 soldiers from the division killed or missing in action during the war.

Today, our daughter and grandchildren live near Tontitown. Our family there introduced us in 2023 to Virgil's niece, Brenda, who had never known her uncle because her mother was only 11 when her brother Virgil died. We spoke about Nettuno and the sacrifices her Uncle had made. In 2024, Brenda's sister Silvia and her cousin Vince made their first trip to Nettuno to see Virgil's final resting place. When you witness two family members preparing to see their relative's grave for the first time, watch them sign the book in the office, and observe the sanding ceremony, you have a much better personal understanding of the price paid for our freedom and for the pride and admiration we all should have for those who gave their last full measure of devotion.

Today, Virgil's memory, like the memories of the almost 11,000 people commemorated here, lives on in the hearts and minds of their families. The freedoms we too often take for granted were born from their loss. Their story is one of courage and sacrifice for a cause larger than themselves.

To the descendants of the fallen, your family's sacrifice is eternal, and so is our gratitude.

To those who wear the uniform today, thank you for your service.

Ai nostri ospiti italiani, grazie per il vostro incrollabile sostegno a questo luogo sacro. La vostra collaborazione onora la memoria dei caduti e rafforza la duratura alleanza tra le nostre nazioni.

This cemetery reminds us that history is not written only in books, but carved into the marble crosses and Stars of David that stretch across these lawns. Thank you.