Press Release

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Fort Drum Public Affairs

Wreath-laying ceremony honors WWII Italian POW buried in Fort Drum cemetery

FORT DRUM, N.Y. (Nov. 6, 2020) -- It is the smallest among the 40 U.S Army cemeteries, but its significance looms large in the history of Fort Drum and the North Country.

Members of the Fort Drum community gathered at the POW (Prisoners of War) Cemetery on Nov. 4 to place a wreath at the grave of Pvt. Rino Carlutti, an Italian service member and World War II veteran.

Carlutti was born on April 14, 1922, in S. Daniele del Friuli, Udine, and was raised in a village northwest of Venice at the foot of the Dolomites. While serving in the Italian army, Carlutti was captured in Tunisia. He died in an automobile accident and was buried at Pine Camp with the date of Oct. 17, 1944.

POWs at Pine Camp

During World War II, Pine Camp (now Fort Drum) was the site of an internment camp for German and Italian prisoners of war.

Italian POWs were transported to Pine Camp from other internment camps throughout the country. They were organized as a temporary military unit with an Italian chain of command and assisted by American officers. The POWs were tasked with various duties to support the war effort.

“We know that they were sent up to the Adirondacks for logging, and they also picked vegetables and helped farmers during the harvest,” said Dr. Laurie Rush, Fort Drum Cultural Resources manager.

By all accounts, they were well-treated – POWs were instructed in English and were sometimes permitted to leave post.

“Italian families would welcome the Italian POWs into their homes, invite them for dinner, and there were all sorts of interaction,” Rush said.

By May 1946, all POWs had left the area, but the remains of several deceased soldiers were buried in what is now known as the POW Cemetery. A second Italian soldier, Pvt. Renato Faccini, was disinterred from the POW Cemetery and transported to Italy in August 1957.

In 1974, the Italian ambassador had attempted to locate Carlutti’s relatives, in response to a request by Henry V. Cumoletti. Cumoletti served as an assistant clerk and stenographer at Pine Camp and was an interpreter for the Italian POWs. After the war, he served on a court stenographer team at the first Nuremberg trials and later worked as a court reporter in the Watertown City Court.

Rush said that she first placed a wreath at the grave in 2012 before it became an official request of the Italian Embassy to conduct a wreath-laying ceremony to coincide with Italy’s Armed Forces Day. Nov. 4 is also National Unity Day.

The POW Cemetery is located outside the cantonment area on Route 26, next to Sheepfold Cemetery. For more information, visit https://fortdrum.isportsman.net/Cemeteries.aspx.

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Caption Photo #1: Members of the Fort Drum Cultural Resources staff, Karen Koekenberg, Carris Campbell and Dr. Laurie Rush, participate in the wreath-laying ceremony Nov. 4 for the Italian soldier buried at the POW (Prisoner of War) Cemetery on Route 26. The annual ceremony at the request of the Italian Embassy, to coincide with Italy’s National Unity Day and Armed Forces Day. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

Caption Photo #2 & #5: Cpl. Nicholas Smith, a bugler with the 10th Mountain Division Band, plays “Taps” during the wreath-laying ceremony Nov. 4 at the POW (Prisoner of War) Cemetery on Route 26, across from Fort Drum. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

Caption Photo #3: Pvt. Rino Carlutti served in the Italian army during World War II and was captured in Tunisia. Hundreds of Italian and German prisoners of war (POWs) were transported to Pine Camp (now Fort Drum) between 1943 and 1944. By May 10, 1946, all of the POWs had left the area. Carlutti died at the age of 22 from injuries sustained from an automobile accident and was buried at the POW Cemetery. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

Caption Photo #4: Pvt. Rino Carlutti served in the Italian army during World War II and was captured in Tunisia. Hundreds of Italian and German prisoners of war (POWs) were transported to Pine Camp (now Fort Drum) between 1943 and 1944. By May 10, 1946, all of the POWs had left the area. Carlutti died at the age of 22 from injuries sustained from an automobile accident and was buried at the POW Cemetery. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)