



After 72 years, Italian POW's Utah grave visited by relatives

By **PAUL ROLLY** | The Salt Lake Tribune

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Anna Pocaro | Courtesy Piero Montedoro and Donatella Daugenti, the nephew and niece of POW Nicola Daugenti, visit Nicola's grave site at the Fort Douglas Cemetery on Monday July 20, 2015.

Beneath the protective shade of a large poplar tree in the southeast corner of the historic Fort Douglas Cemetery lies the grave of Nicola Daugenti, the first Italian World War II prisoner of war to die in Utah.

His family was informed of the 21-year-old sailor's death in 1943, but relatives had no idea of his whereabouts until last year.

That was when Italian artist and filmmaker Roberto Dal Bosco came to Utah to present his Renaissance painting video animation at The Leonardo in downtown Salt Lake City. He learned that 12 of his countrymen were buried in the cemetery, and he became passionate about who they were, where they hailed from in Italy and what became of their families.

He tracked down Daugenti's brother, Domenico, now 84 and living in Milan, who grew emotional, Dal Bosco said, when he finally learned where his brother was buried.

Nicola Daugenti's remains have been at the cemetery, just southeast of the University of Utah campus, along with 11 other Italian POWs who died in the Beehive State, for more than 70 years and have never been visited by a family member.

"We come in the name of our parents," said Domenico Daugenti's daughter, Donatella, who with a cousin, Piero Montedoro, traveled from Italy this week to visit the grave of their uncle.

Speaking through interpreter Michael Homer, Italy's honorary consul to Utah, Donatella said her octogenarian father remains spry and healthy enough to have made the trip, but it was too emotional for him.

Nicola's death, on Aug. 27, 1943, had a profound effect on the family. Domenico and another brother had to put off their plans for college and labor as fishermen to support the family because their father went into a deep depression over the loss of his son and couldn't work.

The niece and nephew who mounted the trek to visit Nicola's grave on behalf of the family were born long after he died. Piero's mother, Antonia, was only 2 when her eldest brother perished.

Donatella and Piero said they knew little about their uncle. But about 20 years ago, Antonia had a dream about Nicola and, then, during a family holiday at their ancestral village, Torre a Mare, Domenico, who had become an Italian police officer and later an agent with Interpol, told the younger family members about his sister's dream. He then looked out at the sea and said, "We have to bring Nicola home," Donatella remembered.

Nicola's journey to Utah began when the submarine he was on was torpedoed by an Allied vessel off the coast of North Africa. The captain ordered the crew to abandon ship. Most were captured and sent to the United States as POWs.

Nicola was kept at an Ogden camp, which later became the Defense Depot Ogden. He died after going into shock from a drug he received during a surgical procedure.

He was the first of the 12 Italians, nicknamed the "Twelve Apostles," buried at Fort Douglas. Although POWs, they were part of the community and often had dinners with the families of Italian immigrants who had settled in Utah in the late 19th century. They also had jobs, often on farms, and had died of illnesses or farm accidents — unlike nine of their German neighbors at the cemetery who were gunned down at a prison camp in Salina by a deranged guard July 7, 1945, after their country had already surrendered.

Dal Bosco recalled touching moments when he found family members of the 12 Italians, noting that Donatella told him, "when you called, it was like our uncle calling." He produced a short film about Salt Lake City's Italian heritage that aired on an Italian television network.

He is working with Homer and Kelly Nelson of Desk Top History on a feature documentary about the Italian POWs at Fort Douglas called "The Twelve Left Behind."

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