The ***GIRARDI*** family





My father served in the Italian army for 10 years. It was WWII. It was conscription for all able-bodied young men. He served throughout Europe: France, Albania, Montenegro, Greece, and Yugoslavia.

He was a member of the Alpini Regiment, the Mountain troops. These soldiers trained and served in mountainous regions where temperatures always ranged from cold to extreme winter cold. Unfortunately, the soldiers' uniforms were not made for this climate.

My father never wanted to talk about his army service, but I remember snippets.

One winter after a twelve-hour march through mountainous terrain, he and his squad found what they thought was a safe place to camp for the night. Extremely tired, they tried to cook up a meal. The only food they had was some rice which they began to cook in buckets of melted snow. Suddenly, they received a warning the enemy was nearby. Tired and hungry, they gobbled down the partially cooked rice. He was very sick that night.

While stationed in France, he learned to speak French to his great satisfaction. While in Yugoslavia he met a young woman and fell in love with her name, the name I got, Nadia.

Many of the young soldiers had left girlfriends behind with whom they wished to communicate but it was always difficult to compose original and meaningful letters. My father always loved writing and composing. He was recruited to write letters for the young soldiers to mail back home.

My father had a tattoo of an eagle on his left forearm, the symbol of the Alpini. My father always lamented getting tattooed because the process made him extremely ill at the time. My young friends were always awed by my father's tattoo. As tattoo's became fashionable, his teenage granddaughter thought her granddad was

‘very cool’ with his tattoo.

My father attained the rank of Sergeant Major, received the Medal of Valour, but most importantly, he returned home.

by *Nadia Girardi*