Irv –

My mistake on the E mail I sent you. This was a college paper written by Guerrino's granddaughter Jennifer Bau. Hope you enjoy his story. feel free To share his story with anyone who might be interested. Thanks again For your service to our country.

Ron Bau

Io Voglio Vendetta

Jennifer Bau
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Shivering, the soldier awoke to find himself lying in a ditch, covered with three feet of snow. He quickly wheeled around to look for his wife and baby, but then painfully remembered that he was thousands of miles away and that this icy trench had been his home for the past four weeks. As he warmed up his army rations in his helmet, his thoughts were not on his breakfast, but rather on his loved ones scattered near and far amidst the maelstrom of this all-encompassing, monumental war. As his "eggs" sizzled in his helmet, Guerrino Bau thought about his life in Fascist Italy before World War II and his current involvement in the war, as well as what he would do with his life when, and if, this war finally ended. His reverie was broken by the sound of gunfire, so Guerrino dumped the breakfast from his helmet, cursed in Italian, and grabbed his M1 Garand.

The story of Guerrino Bau, my grandfather, began in 1922 when he was born to Giovanni Bau and Felicia Testaguzza Bau in Nanticoke, Pennsylvania. Furthermore, 1922 was the same year that Benito Mussolini came to power in Italy. Soon after Guerrino was born, Felicia took him back to Italy, leaving Giovanni in Nanticoke to work in the coal mines. She only returned to America two more times, staying just long enough to have her other two sons, Dominic and Luigi

In February of 1929, Italian school teachers took a loyalty oath to Mussolini, which included recruiting and brainwashing Italian youth with Fascist doctrine. In his elementary school textbooks, my grandfather remembers propaganda posters glorifying "IL Duce," or Mussolini. In 1932, Guerrino was indoctrinated into the National Balilla, which was the Fascist youth organization.

He was forced to wear a uniform and was drilled and brainwashed by soldiers in Mussolini's Black Shirt army. On one of the first days of his training, ten-year-old Guerrino walked up to his command sergeant and told him that he did not want anything to do with the Black Shirts because he was an American citizen. The sergeant was offended and badly beat Guerrino. On that day, my grandfather vowed to someday strike his own blow against Fascism.

In 1936, fourteen-year-old Guerrino was inducted into the next level of the Fascist youth organization, which was the Avanguardia. At this same time in an effort to expand imperial control, Mussolini was fighting a successful war in Ethiopia. To fund this war, the Black Shirts were going door to door across Italy taking the gold wedding rings from all of the Italian women. My grandfather vividly remembers the day when the Black Shirts came to his village of Pergula. When they demanded his mother's wedding ring, she told them that the ring was in America with her husband. The soldiers did not believe this, and as they ransacked the house, my grandfather prayed that his mother had hidden the ring well because if it were found, the whole family faced imprisonment and possibly death. After a thorough search, the unconvinced soldiers left, and my grandfather never asked, or never found out, where his mother had hidden the ring on that unsettling day.

Felicia Testaguzza's cleverness and foresight once again came into play in 1939. She believed that Mussolini would lead Italy into a more serious and deadly war, so she began to take measures to protect her children. In contrast to Hitler, Mussolini, being an Italian, still held respect for the Roman Catholic church.

Therefore, Felicia decided to put her two youngest boys into the Seminary to become priests because Mussolini would not touch them there. Since Guerrino was sixteen, she gave him the choice of either the Seminary or America. Remembering how he disliked being an altar boy and not being the priestly type, Guerrino decided on America. Felicia Testaguzza, all four-feet-ten inches and ninety pounds of her, argued vehemently with local authorities to gain passage to America for Guerrino. After the authorities reluctantly granted him passage, Guerrino escaped Italy in September of 1939 and traveled alone to America to live with his father.

In 1941, Germany and Italy declared war on Russia and the United States; as a result, all communication between America and Italy ceased. At this point, Guerrino had a difficult decision to make. On one hand, he wanted to make good on his childhood vow and strike a blow against Fascism. On the other hand, he would have to fight against his family's homeland. He also had a wife and new baby in America to consider. On October 28, 1942, after much soul searching, Guerrino entered the United States Army as a paratrooper in the famous 82nd Airborne All-American Division because he realized that his family in Italy would never truly be free until the Fascists and their allies, the Nazis, were defeated.

In December of 1943, while traveling overseas on a C-47 Transport plane, Guerrino worried about having to fight in Italy. However, he worried in silence because he wanted no one to find out about his Fascist experience. He first arrived in Belfast, Ireland and then went on to Nottingham, England. At these locations, Guerrino and his unit drilled and waited for the call to combat. He

could not have imagined that he would have such a world-renowned first combat jump, but on June 6, 1944, Guerrino and the 82nd Airborne jumped behind enemy lines into Ste.-Mère-Église, France to secure roads and bridges for the Invasion of Normandy, or D-Day Invasion. Then, the 82nd Airborne fought their way to Utah Beach, completing their integral role in what most historians consider the greatest invasion of all time both because of its tactical genius and its role as the beginning of the end for the Axis powers of Germany, Italy, and Japan.

Throughout the war, the Allies were instructed to turn over any enemies that they apprehended to their superior officers. The prisoners would then be taken to prison camps. However, by this point in the war, there were rumors that captured prisoners were simply being shot because the Allies could not waste the time or manpower to transport the prisoners. Guerrino and his comrades were aware of this; consequently, they did not have the heart to take prisoners into custody. My grandfather can recall several times taking weapons from a scared enemy and telling him to go home because, by this point, the enemy soldiers were teenage boys. In the faces of those boys, twenty-two-year-old Guerrino saw himself as he was only a few years before, so even though the United States Army would find fault in what they did, Guerrino and his comrades had to follow their hearts.

The 82nd Airborne's next combat jump was on September ~~16~~ 17, 1944 into Holland. Guerrino was injured in combat on September 17 and was in a tent hospital on the front lines for three weeks, during which time his Missing In Action

status worried his young wife at home. Yet, Guerrino recovered, rejoined his unit, and Helen Bau's mind was put to rest.

Just before Christmas of 1944, Guerrino and the 82nd Airborne All-Americans marched into the Battle of the Bulge in the Ardennes forest in Belgium because the blinding snow prohibited paratrooping. After this, the division fought their way to France and waited for orders to invade Japan. They would have gone in a few weeks if it had not been for the atomic bombing of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 and Nagasaki on August 9, 1945. My grandfather and his comrades wholeheartedly believed that the bombs saved their lives because experts gave estimates of one million American casualties if Japan had to be invaded. Japan surrendered on August 14, 1945, and World War II officially ended on September 2.

After the war, my grandfather journeyed to Pergula to see his mother. Since all American communication to Italy was stopped when Germany and Italy declared war on Russia and the United States, Felicia had not known the whereabouts of her eldest son for four years. She never would have dreamed that he had been in Europe the whole time fighting for the United States Army. When Guerrino walked into his old hometown wearing his American uniform, people who knew him as a teenager looked upon him in disbelief. He went straight to the home of the sharecropper who worked his family's land and asked him to tell his mother that he was home and then come back to get him when she was informed. The sharecropper ran the half mile to Felicia's house, and she insisted on hurrying the half mile back to the sharecropper's house because she

could not wait another minute to see her son. Felicia had succeeded in keeping her sons away from the clutches of the Black Shirts, but one of them had gone to war anyway. However, she was not angry with Guerrino for fighting as an American. She was just happy that he was alive.

During the war, Guerrino's childhood friends had all been Black Shirts, and the few that had been lucky enough to return home had a banquet in Guerrino's honor. My grandfather always stresses that the Italians were good people, but that they were forced to listen to Mussolini. Only luck had allowed him to escape the same fate.

Guerrino stayed in Italy for one month, then took a boat to New York City, a train to Harrisburg, and hitchhiked to Nanticoke to reunite with his wife and son. Having only an eighth grade education, Guerrino had to use wits and hard work to support his family. His first business attempt, a pool hall, flopped, but then he went from being a door to door salesman to owning his own door to door sales business. He also started a successful pizza shop in Bloomsburg and then in Hanover Township. After these endeavors, he became the supervisor of building and grounds for the Greater Nanticoke Area school district, a position from which he recently retired at the age of seventy-five.

From Guerrino Bau, I have learned that drive and determination are necessary components of a successful endeavor. A solid education allows one to rise above a mediocre existence. Religious beliefs and honesty are the cornerstones of both individual character and a strong family unit. He instilled in me a sense of duty and honor to a higher moral commitment, rather than simply

blind patriotism. Also, taking risks and rocking the boat are sometimes necessary to cross stagnant waters to a new frontier. During World War II, my grandfather took these risks in order to make a difference and ended up rocking the boat on two different continents.

My grandfather also taught me a unique lesson, the distinction between "good guys" and "bad guys." Many people have commented on the nobility of the fact that my grandfather turned from one of the Black Shirt "bad guys" into one of the American "good guys." However, some of my grandfather's best friends fought as Black Shirts. They were not bad, just simply forced to fight for the prevailing beliefs of their government. The majority of the Italian people did not agree with Fascism, but could only disagree in silence. If they resisted publicly, they would face a beating, as my grandfather did, or, in many cases, receive much worse. The privates in the Black Shirt and Nazi armies fought because they had to and because they loved their respective countries, not necessarily because they believed in their governments' cause. The higher ranking officers of both forces were the ones who wanted to spread the Fascist and Nazi ideals. My grandfather did not view his experience of a private fighting against other privates as a struggle between "good guys" and "bad guys." They were all just "guys," but he was the lucky one who got to fight against what he always vowed to avenge.

Some say that this story is fit for a movie. My grandfather escaped Fascist Italy, signed up for the United States army with the famous 82nd Airborne All-American Division, fought in D-Day, and returned home to have a positive impact

on his community. Interestingly, I was recently watching a movie with my granddad about another man who stood up against all opposition for a cause that he believed to be just. Vernon Johns was relieved of his position as pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama because he wanted to start a civil rights movement. The church community told Johns that they were bringing in a young minister named Martin Luther King, Jr. because they did not want to start any trouble. At the end of the movie, when Johns was moving on to try to fuel his civil rights movement elsewhere, he said, "If you see a good fight, get in it."

My grandfather turned to me and said, "You see, [my story] is not such an incredible story. I just wanted to do what was right." What he does not realize is that it was the *courage* to do what was right that is so incredible.