

Carl Manuel Vallelonga

U.S. Army, Private

1923 - 2008

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Carl Manuel Vallelonga was born September 12, 1923, to Domenico Vallelonga and Mary Richison Vallelonga. Carl Vallelonga was raised in Anmoore located in Harrison County, West Virginia, alongside his four siblings: Dominick "Fred," Margaret, Rose, and Joe Vallelonga.

Carl's father Domenico arrived in the United States in 1914 from Italy and joined his brother Cosimo in West Virginia. The Vallelonga family was one of thousands of Italian immigrant families arriving in the northcentral region of the state at the time. Harrison, Marion, and Monongalia counties saw a particularly large influx of Italians. Between 1910 and 1920, Harrison County alone received between 5,000-6,000 immigrants, with a majority arriving from Italy, Poland, Spain, Belgium, Hungary, Greece, and Austria.

The Italians of northcentral West Virginia primarily found employment as coal miners, glass workers and stonemasons. These families were largely drawn from the southern regions of the Italian peninsula, including Caulonia where Domenico was raised. They brought with them longstanding culinary traditions (which soon birthed the pepperoni roll favored by Italian miners), cultural practices, and Roman Catholic faith, the impression of which are still felt today in numerous heritage organizations and festivals, as well as surviving churches. The Vallelonga brothers were both eventually employed as chemical workers.

Life during the Great Depression was difficult for many families across the United States, including the Vallelongas. Young Carl Vallelonga went to grammar school in West Virginia up until the fourth grade before ultimately dropping out. During his difficult teenage years, Carl Vallelonga found himself at the National Training School for Boys beginning in 1940.

The National Training School for Boys was a federal juvenile detention center located in Washington, DC for boys under the age of 17. In 1941, around 400 boys occupied the school, all of whom shared



The athletic fields at the National Training School for Boys in Washington D.C. circa 1937. NARA RG69-N

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the experience of having “violated the laws of the United States,” according to an informational pamphlet from the era. “They are, almost without exception, products of disrupting experience, of neglect...of absence of parental affection,” and other forms of “maladjustment,” claimed the school.

It is unclear what transgression landed Carl Vallelonga at the school, but juvenile offenders there appear to have been charged with federal crimes such as transporting a stolen car across state lines. The boys seem to have been well provided for. They were housed in three-story “cottages” for three- to four-dozen boys, “furnished and arranged to provide a pleasant, congenial atmosphere,” equipped with bathrooms, showers, games, recreation rooms, and ping pong tables. The school had recently been provided with new athletic fields by the Works Progress Administration, and possessed modern cafeterias and medical facilities. Juvenile inmates received vocational training in trades such as agriculture, woodworking, construction, or plumbing.

After at least a year receiving the “steady hand in [his] perilous climb to manhood” at the School for Boys, Carl found himself looking for employment and searching for his next step in life. He found it in 1942 in another government program, this time with the Civilian Conservation Corps.

As part of the New Deal, President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in 1933 to mitigate high unemployment rates. As a result, hundreds of thousands of young American men found jobs working on environmental conservation projects—including Carl Vallelonga. Those who enrolled in the CCC had to meet certain requirements including being between the ages of 18 and 25 years old and unmarried. Beginning in 1942, Carl enrolled in the CCC Company 560 in Downey, Idaho, before the company moved to occupy western Yellowstone National Park. At Yellowstone, Carl and his company worked on various projects, including wildfire prevention and campground maintenance in the Lake and Fishing Bridge cabin areas. By late 1942, however, the Yellowstone CCC camps were shrinking rapidly, as many of the enrollees left to enlist in the military.



A Civilian Conservation Corps work crew at Yellowstone in the 1930s.
Wyoming State Archives

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When the United States entered World War II, many young men took up the call to serve their country, including Carl Vallelonga and his brothers, Joe and Dominick. On October 14, 1942, Carl Vallelonga volunteered for the U.S. Army cavalry. Unlike their forebears from time immemorial to World War I, who rode on horseback, “cavalry” in World War II charged into battle in armored vehicles. Vallelonga likely went to Fort Bliss, Texas, where he joined the 1st Cavalry Division. Vallelonga likely spent much of 1942 and 1943 training for this new kind of warfare as the unit prepared to embark for the Pacific Theatre of war.

In June 1943 the 1st Cavalry arrived in Australia, after a month-long trip from Fort Bliss. The division joined other Allied forces assembling to protect the southwest Pacific region from the Imperial Japanese advance. During the next few months, the 1st Cavalry continued training and practiced conducting amphibious landings along the Australian coast.



1st Cavalry troops land in the second attack wave on Los Negros, 1945. *US Army Center for Military History*

On February 29th, 1944, General Douglas MacArthur launched Operation Brewer to seize Japanese airfields in the Admiralty Islands and strategically isolate Papua New Guinea, paving the way for an advance on the large Japanese base at Rabaul. The 1st Cavalry spearheaded the assault, progressing after four days from the island of Los Negros to the islands of Butjo Mokau, then Hauwei. By March 15, 1st Cavalry moved on to assault Manus, the largest of the Admiralty Islands, which they declared secure on March 25th.

Fighting was heavy throughout the campaign. A correspondent for *Yank Magazine* wrote of his experience riding in a landing craft during an assault on Los Negros:

Up front a hole gaped in the middle of the landing ramp and there were no men where there had been four. Our barge headed back toward the destroyer that had carried us to the Admiralties. White splashes of water were plunging through the six-inch gap in the wooden gate. William Siebieda, [Seaman First Class] of Wheeling, West Virginia, ducked from his position at the starboard gun and slammed his hip against the hole to plug it. He was firing a tommy gun at the shore as fast as wounded soldiers could pass him loaded clips. The water sloshed around him, running down his legs and washing the blood of the wounded into a pink frappe.

Early in the fighting, 1st Cavalry men on Los Negros were outnumbered four to one, but Allied air and naval superiority allowed them to hold their beachhead against fierce resistance. Combat in the Admiralty Islands was often brutal and close-range, and the cavalry's tanks were hampered by

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the dense jungle and rough terrain. Nevertheless, the success of the campaign is credited with saving countless American lives by isolating larger, better defended Japanese bases so they did not have to be attacked.

Three hundred twenty-six Americans were killed and 1,189 wounded during Operation Brewer. Vallelonga was among the latter, receiving a bullet wound in his forearm which necessitated evacuation. Vallelonga's recovery process proved arduous as it led him to various hospitals around the country for treatment. The arm did not have to be amputated, but medical records suggest he may have suffered considerable nerve damage, which may have severely limited the limb's mobility and required extensive physical therapy.

On February 14, 1946, Vallelonga was discharged from Percy Jones Hospital Center at Fort Custer, Michigan, almost two years after he was initially wounded. Carl was awarded a Purple Heart. His brother Dominick was also placed in the same hospital after a combat injury, and likely spent time with Carl while they were recuperating.

Following his service in the war, Carl met Rose Marie Mazza who was also a native of West Virginia and member of an Italian immigrant family. They married on May 3, 1947, in the town of Harrison, West Virginia. Carl and Rose Vallelonga remained in West Virginia for the remainder of their lives and had one daughter together, Brenda Vallelonga. Both were active participants in the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church and continued to celebrate their Italian heritage through events like the Italian Heritage Festival and Pasta Cook-off. Rose won the People's Choice and Best Red Sauce awards at the latter event.



A ward in Percy Jones Hospital, a converted sanitarium in Battle Creek, Michigan where Vallelonga spent months recovering from his wound. *Defense Logistics Agency*

Carl Manuel Vallelonga passed away March 7, 2008. He is interred at the West Virginia National Cemetery alongside his loving wife Rose, who died on May 19, 2021. Carl Vallelonga, along with his two brothers who also served, is also remembered at the World War II Memorial in Anmoore, Harrison County.

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Resting Place

West Virginia National Cemetery
42 Veterans Memorial Lane, Grafton, WV 26354
(304) 265-2044

Section 5
Site 404

Date of interment: March 10, 2008

About the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project

The West Virginia National Cemeteries Project is a program of the West Virginia Humanities Council, funded in part by the Veterans Legacy Program of the Department of Veteran Affairs and initiated in 2021. All biographies produced as part of this program are composed by West Virginia high school students, who conduct original research on veterans interred at the Grafton National Cemetery or the West Virginia National Cemetery, both of which are located in or near Grafton, Taylor County, West Virginia.

As home to one of the nation's earliest National Cemeteries, the community of Grafton has longstanding traditions of honoring America's veterans, including the longest continuously celebrated Memorial Day parade in the United States. The Grafton National Cemetery, located in the heart of the city and founded in 1867, is typically the endpoint of each year's parade. When the Grafton National Cemetery began to run short of space during the 1960s, the West Virginia National Cemetery was dedicated in 1987, just a few miles outside of Grafton in the community of Pruntytown. The same National Cemetery Administration staff cares for both facilities.

The West Virginia Humanities Council is proud to thank the following organizations for their participation in the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project: West Virginia Archives and History, the West Virginia University history department, Taylor County Historical and Genealogical Society, Taylor County Public Library, and Grafton High School.

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