

# VERNON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



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## Rockville High School Student and Teacher Head to Hawaii to Study World War II in the Pacific

VERNON, Connecticut – Rockville High School senior Nic Angeli has long been fascinated with history, especially military history, and has been a regular participant in annual History Day competitions.

His topics have included World War I and the World War II battle for Guadalcanal.

That keen interest in military history helped earn Nic a coveted slot in a summer institute on World War II in the Pacific. He and Regina Lee, his history day advisor and the talented and gifted teacher at Vernon Center Middle School, leave this weekend for an all-expenses paid trip to Hawaii for a National History Day program called “Sacrifice for Freedom: World War II in the Pacific Student & Teacher Institute.”

They will meet and speak with scholars of the war and visit historic sites such as Pearl Harbor, the U.S.S. Arizona Memorial, the Pacific Fleet Submarine Museum, the Pearl Harbor Aviation Museum and spend a night aboard the U.S.S. Missouri, the battleship on which the Japanese formally surrendered to the Allies to end World War II.

“It’s going to be amazing,” Nic said. “It’s been a lifelong dream of mine to go to these historical places. This is where World War II for the U.S. started.”

They will also visit the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, where Nic will read a eulogy for Army Sgt. William G. Fournier, a Norwich native, who was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroic service at Guadalcanal. Fournier is buried at the cemetery.

*The Vernon Public Schools, in partnership with family and community, is committed to provide a quality education, with high expectations, in a safe environment where all students become independent learners and productive contributors to society.*

Nic has been learning all he could about Fournier, visiting veterans' organizations and museums and scouring records. Nic even tracked down a distant relative of Fournier as he sought information.

Fournier was a 29-year-old Army sergeant when he and another soldier ran to an unmanned machine gun on January 10, 1943. Although a superior Japanese force had overrun their position and they were ordered to retreat, Fournier and his colleague readied the gun and opened fire on the attacking Japanese. They inflicted heavy casualties before they were fatally wounded.

"Their sturdy defensive action was a decisive factor in the following success of the attacking battalion," Fournier's Medal of Honor citation reads.

"One of the important things we get to do is honor a veteran from our home state," Lee said.



***Regina Lee, talented and gifted teacher at Vernon Center Middle School and History Day Advisor, and Nic Angeli.***

Lee said she and Nic chose to study Fournier, but said it was hard to find information. What they could find was also confusing because his records were mixed with those of another man from Norwich named William Fournier.

They also completed regular assignments designed to help them understand the scope of World War II in the Pacific, from the earliest diplomatic fumbles with Japan to Pearl Harbor to the home front to decisive battles, including Midway and Iwo Jima.

"We became immersed," Lee said.

Nic's parents, David and Rose Marie Angeli, say Lee saw something in their son early on and has supported his fascination with history.

"It's an amazing opportunity and we're really grateful to Mrs. Lee," Rose Marie Angeli said. "She's always been supportive of Nic and his interest in history. She's an amazing teacher and Vernon is lucky to have her."

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David Angeli said getting involved in History Day opened Nic's eyes, especially as he learned many people were unaware of important events in U.S. history.

"Nic's first entry in History Day was on Guadalcanal," David Angeli said. "He did really well and came in second. The big thing he took away from it was that the three people who came to judge his entry had no idea what Guadalcanal was." That reinforced Nic's desire to learn and share what he learns.

Vernon Superintendent of Schools Dr. Joseph P. Macary said Mrs. Lee's work with students on History Day projects has been making Vernon proud for years.

"Mrs. Lee inspires her students to explore and learn about fascinating topics, and then helps them produce projects that awe the History Day judges," Dr. Macary said. "Work on these projects enhances students' critical thinking skills, makes them better writers, helps develop research skills and boosts their grades in other subjects."

Nic said he is really looking forward to spending a night on the U.S.S. Missouri and figures that will get him as close as possible to understanding what sailors experienced during World War II in the Pacific.

His dad said Nic is also looking forward to delivering the eulogy for Fournier.

"I think it's the culmination of a journey for him," David Angeli said. "It's in his soul."

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