

TAPE OF INTERVIEW WITH SALVATORE BENATI, 10:15 a. m. October 20, 1989 at the
Holocaust Center of Greater Pittsburgh

He was born in Garfield, New Jersey on October 20, 1929. He is of Italian background. His parents came to the U. S. in 1894. Married here in the states. They were hard-working people. His father worked in construction and his mother was a seamstress. At one time they were on Relief. His parents were from Sicily and speak broken English and understand it well. He has four brothers, two sisters - Salvatore was the next to the youngest. Now his parents are dead. His four brothers and one sister are still alive. He attended the Garfield Elementary and High Schools. He had a football scholarship to Temple University, prior to being drafted into the Army. He spent 27 months in the service - 18 of them overseas. He was drafted at the age of 18 and had one semester in college. His brothers were in the service also. In the Navy and Coastguard and he was in the Infantry. His home was very religious - Catholic. They went to public schools. There was not much political discussion at home. It was basically an Italian neighborhood. He didn't really know of any prejudice. There were black people there - but hardly any went to high school. When the Depression hit them - they were looking for work. His sister had a job so they could keep their house. They were on Relief. They had fun times growing up. Didn't know any Jewish people except for his elementary school teachers. No students - they were 90% Italian. He doesn't recall any anti-Catholic prejudice. Ethnic groups tended to stay together.

He was drafted in March, 1944 and taken to Fort Dix...then to Camp Wheeling in Georgia for six weeks basic training. A law was passed that no 18 year olds could go overseas. Also, in 1944, D Day occurred. They were put into the 89th division at Camp Butler (?), North Carolina. The 89th Division came from the West Coast and was made up of anti-aircraft people who noone needed as there was no real threat of bombing. They tried out new weapons. Finally, when the Battle of the Bulge came along (December, 1944), they were sent over there. They left just before Christmas to go to Camp Miles Standish in the Boston Area. They were put on troop ships and took the Southern route in the Atlantic to avoid submarines. Hundreds of ships were all around them. Originally scheduled to land in England, but their orders changed and they landed in Le Harve, France. They were the first American troops to come from the U. S. and land in Le Harve - right on the dock. They were taken in open trucks to a cigarette camp (camps named after cigarettes. They went to Camp Lucky Strike. Tents were laying on the ground and they had to set them up - it was 20°. It was a mixed type of group.

His best friend was Noah Frankel.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word. It is not the primary source, and it has not been checked for spelling or accuracy.

They slept on cots - there was snow on the ground the first morning...it thawed and everything turned to mud. There was alot of dysintery the first weeks. The camp did become a permanent camp. He was there for two weeks and got a case of trench foot. His feet swelled up and fortunately they went down and they didn't have to be amputated. He recovered, joined his squad and they rode to Lusembourg on railraod freight cars. The news was good - the Germans were being pushed back.

In February and March, it rained almost every day. Toward the end, the "slave camp" was liberated by them. They didn't get any preparation by their commanders as to what they would see.

They crossed the Mozel River and encountered a warehouse with Mozel wines. Before the camps. they encountered some displaced perons, mostly men trying to get back home. This was in Germany. They asked them for food and told how they were forced to work and were trying to get back home. The first camp reached was a slave labor camp - had mostly Slavs. The barracks were neat and clean. They liberated it and moved on. When they came in they made sure there were no Germans and left.

They never ran into any Germans. The inmates were surprised when they came in. They were mostly Hungarians, Slavs - in their 30's - women and men. And they didn't seem to be in bad condition.

They continued on into Germany. Their company was 7 km. from the Czech border when hostilities stopped. They went to small towns and conducted house-to-house search for Germans. The German army was made up also of Hungarians, Bulgarians and Czechs. They were told not to fraternize with anyone and they kept to themselves.

They went to the Concentration camp at Audruff (ph). They had been walking and his feet were hurting him - he was selected in April to go to Audruff.

They stayed in a modern castle - pulling guard duty. The concentration camp was right below the hill they were on - about 1 1/2 blocks away. The castle belonged to a German manufacturer. The first night they pulled guard duty outside the walls of the camp, the prisoners had guns and fired on them. Some were drunk and roudy. These were the inmates - he had to take them back. Then he pulled guard duty inside the wall of the camp. When they came they liberated the camp. The people here were emaciated. The camp was a training camp for SS officers. It was not an extermination camp. He saw the graves and the mass grave. It was just a big trench with bodies in it, and lime. He was not prepared to see this kind of thing. Eventually they did dig up the bodies and gave them decent burial.

People in Audruff put up markers. Residents claimed they didn't know what was going on. The town was within walking distance.

They captured thousands and thousands of Germans.

Everyone had had enough.

They didn't encounter any other camps.

His reaction: He couldn't believe people could do these things to other people.

After, they went to Lintz (ph), Austria and got to an area where there was a Jewish Ghetto - the homes were nice. Just across there was another camp for other-than-Jewish people. They were called to sleep in a police station in the Jewish ghetto - to watch out for any problems. The people were free at that time to go into town. At night they counted heads and they didn't lose one person.

Then they were brought back as a unit to the cigarette camps in France. They were set up as redeployment camps...they ran these camps - this was after the war in 1945.

When they got into town, people put out white pillowcases - meaning surrender - On the other side of the town, they ran into Germans and resistance. This was May 5 or 6, a day before ceasefire. Sometimes they were hit by their own men. Their Lieutenant went back to report to the Colonel and was shot by a sniper - in the foot - so Salvatore went down to get him.

SHOWS PICTURES:

- 1) bodies covered with lime
- 2) makeshift crematorium
- 3) General Eisenhower looking at bodies
- 4) General Eisenhower looking at bodies
- 5) People who were shot
- 6) In the camp

This was in the town of Audruff.

His feelings about Germany now:

He feels alot of resentment. This is inexcusable anywhere by anyone.

He today won't buy a Japanese car. The Germans still believe they are a superrace. He sees that in his business when he comes into contact with them. They have the attitude that if it's not German, it's not good.

He doesn't think this (the Holocaust) will happen again, but is bothered by our Government allowing the Nazi party here in the states. It should be outlawed.

He hasn't run into anti-semitism here.

He moved to Pittsburgh and is comfortable here. He has a family of four children and eight grandchildren. He is ready to retire.

ABOUT THE FUTURE: He feels that everyone realizes that everyone will have to pull together - the future will be very good.

END OF INTERVIEW