

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF JEWISH WOMEN, CLEVELAND SECTION

HOLOCAUST ARCHIVE PROJECT

Name of Interviewee	EMERSON BATDORFF		
Name of Interviewer	Zev Harel	Date	9/6/84
Name of Abstractor	Michelle Heyer	Date	1/20/89

NARRATIVE SUMMARY

Emerson Batdorff was drafted into the American army on May 18, 1942. Due to health problems he was classified as Limited Service, but eventually he was accepted to Officer Candidate's School.

He was sent overseas in 1943 as a member of the 103rd Division, 411th Infantry Regiment. The division was assigned to Casablanca, where Emerson became an instructor in a leadership and battle training school.

His first battle experience came in 1944, when his unit landed at Naples. Emerson was shot in the leg and spent a short time in a hospital. He rejoined his unit in time to enter southern France one hour after the main Allied invasion.

In France, Emerson's unit went through Alsace and Strasbourg, and then into Germany. Because of his injury, Emerson was not active in battle. He was assigned to the 15th Corps' historical section; it was in this role that he visited Dachau.

Emerson arrived at Dachau one day after it was liberated, and stayed four hours. His other experience with concentration camp inmates came when his unit passed a train full of dead people in striped uniforms. He assumes it was a transport and the Nazi guards killed their prisoners when the train became disabled.

Emerson will soon retire from his position as entertainment editor of the Cleveland Plain Dealer. He lives in Cleveland Heights and has a son, a stepson and a stepdaughter.

Emerson Batdorff

ABSTRACT

VIDEO 1 OF 1

PRESENT LIFE

Entertainment editor of Cleveland Plain Dealer. Lives in Cleveland Heights. Has a son, stepson and stepdaughter.

DRAFTED MAY 18, 1942

Took train to Fort Hayes in Columbus. Arrived late, ate, went to bed.

HE IS CLASSIFIED AS LIMITED SERVICE

Was overweight, had poor vision.

HE DESCRIBES HIS MILITARY JOBS

HE GOES TO OFFICER CANDIDATE'S SCHOOL

Lost weight in order to be accepted.

LIFE BEFORE THE ARMY

Worked for Akron Beacon-Journal. Then was paymaster at Ravenna Arsenal.

OFFICER CANDIDATE'S SCHOOL

School was in Fort Benning, Ga. Emerson commissioned Second Lieutenant, Infantry. Began in fall 1942, finished February 1943.

EMERSON GOES HOME ON LEAVE, THEN TO CAMP CLAYBURN, LA.

Was in 103rd Division, 411th Infantry Regiment.

HE IS SENT OVERSEAS, 1943

Went to camp Patrick Henry for one week, then took a ship overseas. One marine, soldier, sailor guarded radar room at all times.

THEY LAND IN CASABLANCA

Fighting already over in North Africa. Emerson stayed one month as a platoon leader.

EMERSON RECALLS LIFE IN CASABLANCA - HYGIENE, RESTAURANTS

HE GOES TO ORAN, 1943. LEADERSHIP AND BATTLE TRAINING SCHOOL

Was there to learn survival skills. Combined American/
British staff. Stayed on as an instructor.

HE LANDS AT NAPLES, 1944

Went to a replacement depot on a confiscated dairy farm.
Assigned to third division on Anzio. Was platoon leader. Was
afraid in battle - intimidated by his troops' experience.
Colonel Lionel Simogar was regimental commander. Richard
Nederson was battalion commander. Captain Jensen was company
commander.

EMERSON IS SHOT IN THE LEG

He didn't realize his platoon was attacking; thought they
were following another platoon.

TAKEN TO HOSPITAL IN NAPLES BY BRITISH HOSPITAL SHIP

Had surgery. Discharged from hospital to make room for
casualties from south of France.

THEY CALL GERMANS "KRAUTS" BECAUSE "GERRIES" IS TOO NICE

EMERSON DISCUSSES USE OF BAYONETS

Aaron Michael Davis was the general. Very tough - wanted
his men to be tough. Made them sharpen bayonets one hour each
day.

EMERSON'S UNIT INVADES FRANCE, AUGUST 1944

Arrived one hour after main attack. Most Nazi soldiers were
disaffected Poles, Turks, Slavs. Gave up easily so Allies took
many prisoners.

EMERSON IS A LIAISON OFFICER IN COGOLIN

Was there on D-day. Not much for him to do, so he spent it
drinking wine in town.

HIS COMPANY TRAVELS UP THE RHONE, THEN TO ALSACE

Invasion was moving faster than expected. This created
logistical problems.

EMERSON DESCRIBES HIS IMPRESSIONS OF ALSACE AND STRASBOURG

THEY ENTER GERMANY

Crossed Rhine at Zweibrucken.

EMERSON HAD NO CONTACT WITH GERMAN ARMY

HE THINKS WW II WAS THE LAST "GOOD" WAR

THERE ARE MANY JEWS IN EMERSON'S UNIT. HE GRADUALLY OVERCOMES
HIS ANTI-SEMITISM

EMERSON KNOWS WHAT IS HAPPENING TO JEWS, EVEN BEFORE HE GETS TO
EUROPE

HE SEES A TRANSPORT OF DEAD JEWS

Passed a disabled train, full of dead men in striped
uniforms. Assumed guards killed prisoners when train got stuck.

EMERSON DECIDES TO SEE DACHAU

Was assigned to historical section of 15th Corps. Learned
that 45th Division had liberated Dachau. Arrived day after
liberation. Prisoners were still there. Emerson stayed four
hours. Saw dead Germans in Nazi uniforms. Thought inmates had
killed them.

EMERSON SHOWS A BOOK PUBLISHED BY SEVENTH ARMY, WITH PICTURES OF
DACHAU AT LIBERATION

EMERSON FEELS WE ENTERED THE WAR TO STOP SUCH KILLING, BUT IT
PERSISTS TODAY IN PLACES SUCH AS ARGENTINA

WHEN HE SEES CONCENTRATION CAMP INMATES HE FEELS DISGUST,
REVULSION, PITY

HIS ARMY EXPERIENCE GIVES HIM A SENSE OF PURPOSE, DISCIPLINE,
COOPERATION

EMERSON FEELS EVERYTHING COMES IN CYCLES. HE IS NOT SURE WE'VE
LEARNED FROM THE HOLOCAUST