

June 2008

## Aldo De Tomasi oral history interview by Michael Hirsh, June 30, 2008

Aldo De Tomasi (Interviewee)

Michael Hirsh (Interviewer)

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### Scholar Commons Citation

De Tomasi, Aldo (Interviewee) and Hirsh, Michael (Interviewer), "Aldo De Tomasi oral history interview by Michael Hirsh, June 30, 2008" (2008). *Digital Collection - Holocaust & Genocide Studies Center Oral Histories*. Paper 44.  
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Concentration Camp Liberators Oral History Project  
Oral History Program  
Florida Studies Center  
University of South Florida, Tampa Library

Digital Object Identifier: C65-00027  
Interviewee: Aldo De Tomasi (AD)  
Interviewer: Michael Hirsh (MH)  
Interview date: June 30, 2008  
Interview location: Conducted by telephone  
Transcribed by: Kathy Kirkland  
Transcription date: November 25, 2008  
Audit Edit by: Mary Beth Isaacson, MLS  
Audit Edit date: January 27, 2010  
Final Edit by: Kimberly Nordon  
Final Edit date: February 8, 2010

[Transcriber's note: The Interviewee's personal information has been removed, at the request of the Interviewee. This omission is indicated with ellipses.]

**Michael Hirsh:** Okay. Could you just spell your name for me, please?

**Aldo De Tomasi:** Yeah, it's D-e capital T-o-m-a-s-i.

MH: Is it capital D?

AD: Capital D-e capital T-o-m-a-s-i.

MH: A-s-i.

AD: It's two words.

MH: And your first name is Aldo, A-l-d-o.

AD: Right.

MH: And you live at...

AD: Right. Now, they got the whole thing about me on the Internet, you know.

MH: Uh, I'll look for it.

AD: The whole story on the Internet. Go ahead; I was just telling you—look it up on the Internet later on, too.

MH: Let me just put your phone number in; it's... What's your date of birth?

AD: 7-21-25 [July 21, 1925].

MH: When did you go into the Army?

AD: Into Nordhausen?

MH: No, into the Army.

AD: Nineteen forty-four.

MH: Forty-four [1944]. And you were how old at that time?

AD: Eighteen.

MH: Eighteen. So you were right out of high school?

AD: Right out of high school, right.

MH: Were you drafted or enlisted?

AD: I was drafted.

MH: Where'd they send you?

AD: They sent me to Fort Ord, and I was only there a couple of—then I went to Camp Hood for two weeks. And I went to Newport News, and I got on a ship and they sent me over to Africa. From there I went to repo depot in Italy, and from there I joined the Timberwolves at the Bulge.

MH: You joined the Timberwolves. Did you see action in North Africa?

AD: No, not at all. We were only there for about a week.

MH: What was the first action you saw?

AD: As soon as I hit my outfit at the Bulge.

MH: And what was your outfit?

AD: 104<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.

MH: And the regiment?

AD: It was the 104<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, 415<sup>th</sup> [Infantry] C Company.

MH: Okay. So what was your rank by that time?

AD: At that time, private.

MH: Private. What was your first combat experience?

AD: My first, sittin' in a foxhole, and it was rainin' like hell. You got there at night—my buddy and I, we got there at night. It was raining and they were fighting, and they threw us in a foxhole. And the next day, we just joined the group, and we kept going.

MH: How did you react to the combat experience?

AD: Well, right now it's one of the best experiences I've ever had. At that time, who knows? Kind of scary.

MH: I'm curious why you say it was one of the best experiences you had.

AD: Well, I got to see all of Europe, and I got to see Germany, and I got—after the war was over, I stayed over there as occupation. I just had a real good deal, you know. I wouldn't trade that experience, 'cause I'm alive. It was a hell of an experience.

MH: I have to tell you, I have the exact same reaction to Vietnam.

AD: Yeah. You do, yeah.

MH: So, I understand exactly what you're saying.

AD: You come out alive.

MH: Yeah, if you come out alive and okay—

AD: What's that?

MH: I said, if you come out alive and okay, it's an experience that—

AD: You'll never have another one like it.

MH: Right. And I wouldn't want to do it again.

AD: Oh, no, not me either. Well, I'm too old now.

MH: So, what was going on as you guys approached Nordhausen?

AD: Well, what happened is, we were moving pretty fast. We were walking and riding fast and movin'. We were going right through Italy, you know, right through Germany, right through Germany there; we were moving [through] Halle, and all that there. How it happened was we were on a truck, ten of us, and the truck had a flat tire. So, they got out, fixed the flat tire, and our division kept going and went down maybe five, ten miles, whatever. There was a fork in the road, and the division took a left turn going to a town, I guess, to liberate it. The lieutenant we had, we called him "Yard Block." He made a right turn and we went right into Nordhausen. So, we were the first ones there, ten of us.

MH: And when you say Nordhausen, you mean the death camp or the slave labor camp?

AD: The labor camp, and then right after the labor camp was the town. So, we went right into the labor camp first.

MH: So was that Dora?

AD: Who?

MH: Was that Dora-Mittelbau?

AD: What, the town?

MH: The camp, the first camp you got to.

AD: Nordhausen; they called it Nordhausen.

MH: It was Nordhausen. So, what did you see?

AD: I saw—I didn't want to go inside too much. We saw all the prisoners in the—you know, in their uniforms, like the striped stuff, and saw a little bit of the bodies on the ground, and that was about it. I didn't want to go in and see all of that garbage.

MH: Were the gates still shut when you got there?

AD: Oh, we opened them.

MH: How'd you do that?

AD: We just walked in. They had—there was a few SSers there. You know what an SS is?

MH: Yeah, I know what they are. What'd you do with them?

AD: I didn't stick around to find out what happened to 'em. We just went to the outskirts of town and there were Germans there, and we waited for our group to catch up to us.

MH: Was there a firefight at the camp?

AD: No, no fighting at all.

MH: So, what did the SSers do, they just give up?

AD: Well, I guess they took off, I don't know. You know, I didn't bother to find out.

MH: But you did go inside the fence?

AD: No, I stayed outside by the fence, never did exactly go in; I was right outside the fence. I saw all that stuff, and that was enough for me.

MH: Had you ever seen anything like that before?

AD: Nope.

MH: You ever see anything like it after that?

AD: Nope.

MH: So, there were ten or eleven guys on the truck.

AD: Ten of us, yes.

MH: Ten. What did the other guys do; did they go in?

AD: Some of them did, I guess. See, I was there with the guy I went to school with—we were together all the time—my buddy. And we just went to town. A lot of them went to town, and we just split up, you know: a couple of us go in one house; a couple of the other one go in another house. And we just stayed there and we waited for our group to catch up to us. There were Germans there in that town, though.

MH: Was there any fighting in the town?

AD: A little bit, not that much, 'cause we were moving—they, at that time, they were kind of retreating, you know.

MH: Can you—what kind of a day was it? Rainy? Sunny?

AD: I guess normal—I guess.

MH: Okay—

AD: I know it wasn't raining, so it had to be a normal day.

MH: So, I imagine what's it like—I mean, what's it like? You're in what, a deuce-and-a-half truck?

AD: What's that?

MH: You're in a deuce-and-a-half, a two-and-a-half-ton truck?

AD: It was one of those big—yeah, one of the big ones. A big truck, you know. I don't know, two and a half ton, I guess.

MH: Was the canvas up or down?

AD: What?

MH: Was the canvas on top of the—

AD: Everything was down.

MH: Everything's down.

AD: We were sitting out in the open.

MH: So, who saw the camp first?

AD: Who saw it? We did.

MH: I mean, you all were looking out the front, and you see this camp?

AD: Well, we drove up to it. We all got off the truck and went in and looked at it.

MH: Did the prisoners try and talk to you?

AD: A few of them hollered, some hollered. I think there was a mixture of Polish, Italians and Jewish in there. To my memory, I heard a couple of them talk Italian, 'cause I'm Italian, Italian or something. But we didn't have that much to do with it. We just wanted to get out of there. We wanted to get to town. Under cover, more or less.

MH: You had no orders to keep them in or let 'em out or anything?

AD: No, no.

MH: Did they start pouring out after you opened the gate?

AD: Well, they come runnin' out to us, and we moved in—our outfit came in right after us, and they kind of went for 'em, more or less. Then the medics got in there after we did.

MH: How do you react to seeing something like that?

AD: At that time, it wasn't very nice to see. We were so busy moving and everything, it didn't, you know, hit me until I got home, and because when I heard about the Holocaust and all of that there, I went, "Wow, there was more prison camps and everything else." And then you see all this stuff in the movies and all that—which they claim it wasn't true, but it was, I guarantee you. They say it never happened, but it did. I don't know how the Nordhausen people didn't smell the burning bodies and all that stuff. See, Nordhausen, was there by a big mountain, so they were making these big, big bombs in there, inside the mountain. They had it all dug out, and they had a factory, like, and they were making bombs.

MH: So, these were slave laborers.

AD: Definitely, yeah. Slave laborers is what they were. Well, they were prisoners, but slave laborers.

MH: Did you guys go into the tunnels in the mountains?

AD: No, I didn't. I saw part of it. See, I went back there again, maybe ten years ago; we went through everywhere we were during the war. But I still didn't go into that hill.

MH: What was it like going back there ten years ago?

AD: Like I said, I'm glad I went. We went to Brussels—and then, see, before I got there, our outfit liberated Holland. And we went all through Holland, all through Germany, up to Berlin. Then we went through the fields we were in and saw a lot of the stuff, a lot of the places we were. And it brought back memories, but it was nice. It was a great trip.

MH: Yeah.

AD: That's another trip I wouldn't trade for nothing.

MH: Did you go back to where Nordhausen was?

AD: Yeah, we went there. We went there.

MH: So what was still there when you went there?

AD: There was nothing there, really. Nothing.

MH: What kind of emotions go through you when you go to a place like that?

AD: Well, at that time, you know, we're all together and we looked at a few of the things. But I just—really, I can't explain it. I really can't. I can't explain it. Because you know with the German people and all that—it's just hard to explain. You know, we fought them and we're over there, and then we're talking to 'em like nothing happened and everything. We went through that whole area that we went through during the war, the 104<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. We went through everything.

MH: How did you deal with Germans saying during the war, "We didn't know about this, we didn't know what was going on," when—?

AD: Well, I didn't hear that until I got home. It's a bunch of baloney They keep saying there wasn't no such thing, but it was there. I saw it with my own eyes.

MH: Right, but I mean, even Germans who lived next to the camps said, “Oh, we never saw. We never knew.”

AD: I didn't talk to 'em, so I don't know.

MH: Oh, okay.

AD: We never talked to them, because when we got there, there were a few soldiers there and we captured them, and then the German people who lived there got in the houses and we never saw 'em. We just kept moving, you know, 'cause we were moving pretty good at that time. It was in forty-four [1944], and we were moving pretty good.

MH: This was already April of forty-five [1945]. This is just a few weeks before V-E Day.

AD: No, let's see. Well, yeah; this was after I got in. Yeah. From there, we went through, and then we went to—I forgot the name of the town. Then we had to sit outside of Berlin for two weeks and wait for the Russians to get there

MH: Oh, because they wouldn't let the Americans take Berlin.

AD: The Russians had to take Berlin. We couldn't take it. So, we were out there comparing weapons and everything else, and they'd get mad because our weapons were more superior than theirs. They're really mean, them Russians—at that time. They had a lot of women soldiers, and they were mean.

MH: Well, the German people were running like hell from the Russians. They were trying —

AD: Well, they were scared of them; they were mean. The Russians were really mean. Boy, they didn't fool around.

MH: I was told by some of the guys I've interviewed that after they saw the concentration camps, they didn't take very many prisoners, especially among the SS.

AD: You mean the Russians?

MH: No, the Americans.

AD: Well, we didn't take that many, either, because we were moving. We took a few, but not that many. We didn't get too many prisoners, 'cause we kept going. Whenever we got an SSer—we had a German in our outfit. He got killed, the poor guy. He used to interrogating the SSers. They had to warn them, though, because every time he took them in a room to interrogate them, he'd come out, the guy was dead. He'd kill 'em, he hated them so much. But he got killed anyway. I forgot his name. The guy got shot in the neck.

MH: Nobody was particularly concerned that he was killing the SS guys?

AD: No, but the officers got on him for doing that. The SSers were mean. You know what they were, don't you?

MH: I know exactly who they were, yeah.

AD: They were stormtroopers. They were Hitler's *Jugend*, they called 'em: Hitler's children. We got in one town—I'm not sure, I think it was Halle—where Hitler had a place there for soldiers to come in and have a week or two off with German women, and they'd have kids. And if they were a girl, they'd kill it. If it were a boy, they kept it and sent it to this Hitler *Jugend* school down in the southern part of Germany. Them SSers, they were all just kids.

MH: Did you get married and have children?

AD: Yeah, I got two.

MH: You have two. Did you tell your kids about the war?

AD: Oh, yeah. Well, see, I got—[Steven] Spielberg called me up, the guy from Hollywood. He heard about me through the people here in San Francisco, the Jewish outfit in San Francisco. So, he called me up and said he'd like to interview me; took about maybe six, eight months. They sent two people up here from L.A., with the

cameras and all, and they interviewed me, and they interviewed my son also. They knew all about it, my kids did. They had sealed the whole block; nobody can come up the block or nothin'. But then, according to them, I'm supposed to have a tape in all of the museums.<sup>1</sup>

MH: Where on the Internet is your story?

AD: It's on—I don't know, a friend of mine brought it up and showed me. It's under my name, Aldo De Tomasi. If you want, I can call him and find out.

MH: If you could—'cause I'm looking at it. I'm trying to find it right now, and I'm not finding it.

AD: You're not finding it? Can you hold a minute and call me back in five minutes?

MH: Sure. I'll call you back.

AD: Okay. Let me call him now and see if I can find out.

MH: Okay. I'll call you back.

***Pause in recording***

(Phone rings)

AD: Hello?

MH: Hi, it's Mike Hirsh.

AD: Okay, I got it here for you. It's [www.google.com](http://www.google.com). And he said all you got to do is put in Nordhausen and my name, and they got the whole thing that I gave the Chicago newspaper and all the newspapers here, the write up they got. If you want to know anything, just call me anytime you want.

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<sup>1</sup>This is part of Spielberg's *Survivors of the Shoah* project.

MH: Do you know any of the other guys who were with you who are still around?

AD: Yeah, there's Mangini, my buddy.

MH: He was also—

AD: He'll tell you the same story, though.

MH: He was at Nordhausen, too?

AD: Yeah, we were together all through that.

MH: Can you give me his phone number and name?

AD: I don't know it. He lives up on the other side of Sacramento. He'll give you the same story.

MH: What's his name?

AD: Al Mangini.

MH: How do you spell Mangini?

AD: M-a-n-g-i-n-i. There might be—yeah, his name will be underneath my thing, 'cause we were together all that time.

MH: Okay.

AD: Okay?

MH: Terrific. Thank you very much, sir. I appreciate it.

AD: You're quite welcome. Bye-bye.

MH: Bye-bye.

*End of interview*