

One Life in Lodi-005

A brief biography of Alfio Nucifora

By Artie Maglionico

This story was originally printed in the Weekly News on Friday July 13, 2001. Mr. Nucifora has since passed away.

Alfio A. Nucifora , known by family and friends as “Al” speaks with gusto and pride about his town of Lodi NJ its people and the role that he played in its development. His dedicated service as a police officer along with his concern about the welfare of the community makes him one of Lodi’s most valued citizens.

Al was born on June 1, 1919. His parents Filadelfio and Theresa arrived in the United States from Sicily in the early 20’s. After a short stay in New York City the Nucifora family, this included sons Charles, Al and Freddi, moved across the Hudson into the wide open spaces Of Lodi.

“We arrived on James Street in June of 1923.” Recalls Al “I was three years old.” As a youngster Al attended Columbus School on Westervelt Place where he graduated in 1932. With the building of the new high school in its early stages Al and his class mates completed their freshman and sophomore years at the same Columbus school. “ We entered Lodi High upon its completion in 1934 as Juniors.” Remembers Al. “ Mine was the first graduating class in 1936.”

As is well known by students of Lodi history the Borough, for the most part, was comprised of dirt roads, open fields, cow pastures along with a scattering of homes and businesses. Al recalls such Families as the Pizzamenti's and the Poliato's from the area that is now Woodside Avenue. Near the Nucifora's James Street home were the Martini's, Ernie and Mike Fogge, Scibetta's meat market and the Nardi family. "Our home was built by the Laproto family." Says Al.

During the Summer months Al and his buddies frequented the Lodi pool that was owned and operated by the Tucci family. When the pool became too crowded the boys would dam up the brook on Bell Avenue. We'd all go swimming there." Recalls Al " The river wasn't polluted yet."

Al's other teenage recollections include playing base ball and football for an organization known as the Grove Athletic club. "Stan Piela used to loan us helmets and pads." Recalls Al. " We played where now stands the Hilltop School."

After high school Al found work in the garment district in NYC. On April 1, 1940, just 19 years old, Al Nucifora joined the Army. "It was either join or get drafted." Laughed Al. " I figured I'd beat them to the punch." Upon completion of boot camp at Fort Dix Al joined the ranks of the 28th Infantry Division, 229th field Artillery. His rank was Sergeant. " I signed up at the Lincoln School in Hasbrouck Heights." Recalls Al. " Sooner or later all the boys passed through there."

Sergeant Nucifora learned of the Pearl Harbor attack after returning home from maneuvers. A month later his entire Division was shipped to England. Before leaving the 229th spent a few weeks in Florida learning shoot the 105 Howitzer known as the work horse of the Army. “We’d practice getting off of a landing craft.” Says Al “ Once ashore the Howitzer was transported by truck.”

During the Normandy invasion Al’s Howitzer fired the most rounds of the entire Battalion. 25,915 rounds were let loose wearing out the barrel of the big gun in the process.

Al’s Division landed on Omaha beach 2 weeks after the June 6th invasion. The 229th dug in and fought their way to Saint Lo and onward to Saint Mere Englaise where the heaviest of the fighting was taking place. “ We took a hell of a pounding.” Recalls Al “Our fox holes were 8 feet deep and our tanks used to pull over us for our protection. There were heavy casualties on both sides and still the carnage continued. From there we fought our way into Paris.”

On their way to Paris the 229th met a German tank division in the Ardennes forest who opened fire at point blank range. The assault inflicted much punishment on the men from the 107th, 108th , the 109th , and the 229th. Somehow, not without a tremendous loss of life, our boys turned them back. “ We had 4 Howitzers shooting directly at the tanks.” Recalls Al “ That’s where the battle of the bulge began.”

After fighting their way through the German infested forest U.S. Soldiers crossed the Aare River into Southern France. Knowing that the Germans were approaching from the rear the American soldiers proceeded to blow up strategic bridges to prevent enemy interference. “We were hit very hard.” Says Al. “ From the day I entered France till the end of the war I never left the front line.” Al ,at 22, was the youngest Sergeant in his outfit and was in charge of 10 men all of whom were 10 years his senior. Among them were Privates Beasly, Pisic, Dagler, Rael and Sturdivent. “They were with me from the beginning.” Says Nucifora.

The war ended on May 8,1945 and by October of that same year this war weary American boy from Lodi returned home. “I worked at the United piece dye works until 1953 when I joined the Lodi Police Force.” Remembers Al “ I married my wife Ann Klimeczko from Passaic soon afterwards.” He retired in 1970. Among his affiliations are the VFW, PBA and the ST Joseph R.C. Church.

“ I love Lodi” says Al “ I live here and I’ll die here. It’s the only home I have ever known.”