

One Life in Lodi: A brief Biography of Anthony Dispoto

By Artie Maglionico

This story was originally printed in the Weekly News on February 15, 2002

Anthony Dispoto was a fighting member of the 5th Armored Victory Division in Europe during the height of WWII. The memory of each battle, from the Rhine River to the Elbe, remains with him even now. When he talks about it his expression becomes somber as if he were still there stunned by the carnage around him and overcome by the ravages of war. Part of him remains there on that scorched landscape and in the fray of battle he fights on and on and on.

Anthony Dispoto was born on October 31, 1920. His father, Joseph, arrived in America from Camarado Sicily in 1902 when he was 5 years old. His mother, Josephine, came to the USA from Palermo Sicily in 1906. The couple married on February 1, 1920 at Mount Virgin Church in Garfield. They purchased a home on MacArthur Avenue not far from the church and in that home raised five healthy children: Mary, Joseph, Thomas, Rudy and Anthony. "My dad worked as a postman during the 1920s," said Anthony. " He later became a union delegate at the United Piece Dye Works in Lodi."

In the summer of 1940, the Dispoto family sold their home in Garfield and moved to Sidney Street in Lodi. " In those days you had to be tough to get by," recalled Anthony ." I hung out with the Maglionico Brothers--Vito, Mike, Armando and Phil."

Anthony found work at a ship yard in Kearney NJ and remained there until 1944 when he was called to serve his country on the European Front during the thick of WWII. "I had to say farewell to my sweetheart Millie," explained Anthony. " I met her in 1938." Anthony was sent to Fort Dix in New Jersey ,then to Camp Robinson in Arkansas where he received training as an Infantry Soldier. "They ask if you can drive a truck and they give you a wheel barrow," laughed Anthony. "After that I never volunteered for anything."

In December of 1944, after a short stay at Camp Meade MD., Anthony set sail for South Hampton England. The morning after his arrival, Anthony was sent to France where he joined the 5th Armored Battalion or 9th Army. From France, the 5th Armored Division fought their way to Belgium. "We'd go in with armored trucks and take over towns and villages," recalled Anthony. " The German buzz bombs creased the air above our heads and when they hit, the impact shook the ground like an earthquake and rattled our helmets." Anthony remembers digging five fox holes in one morning in an attempt to escape the bloody onslaught of the Nazi war planes. "Once, me and my buddy saw an artillery shell heading straight for us," said Anthony." Thanks to the grace of God it didn't go off or we'd have been blown into eternity."

During the heat of battle, Anthony witnessed the loss of many lives both American and German. Both sides, according to Anthony, were bombarding one other from one village to another and the killing didn't stop until the 9th Army and the English forces reached Berlin. Anthony recalled seeing the lifeless

bodies of German soldiers who were killed in action, draped over their still smoking machine guns. "The Germans had an 88 millimeter machine gun that could go through anything," said Anthony. " Took a lot of American lives...young boys just like me."

Overhead , American Paratroopers were landing in the midst of hellacious ground assaults...three or four thousand at a time. The heaviest fighting, according to Anthony, took place in towns like Rohrberge, Wesendorf, Brome and other hot spots along the Elbe River. Finally, upon reaching the Elbe, the 5th Armored division became the nearest American Division to Hitler's Berlin. On the 12th of April, Anthony and the 5th Armored reached the river only to find that all the bridges had been destroyed by the Nazi war machine. Plans to force a crossing and construct a bridge had been suddenly changed. The Division had no recourse but to hold the Elbe River line under fierce enemy bombardment until it was relieved on the 16th of April. The 5th Armored then fought its way west to the Ehra-Brome Salzwedel area where it repelled a vicious attack from the north. The entire German Von Clausewitz Division was then destroyed. "The Nazis were 400 yards away," recalled Anthony. " Every 10 seconds another American Infantry man fell and the screams of the dying haunt me still."

In April of 1946 Anthony was discharged from military service. Then on July 14th of the same year he and his sweetheart Millie were married. The couple moved to their current home on First Street in Lodi in 1947. The stress of battle remained with Anthony for 20 years after the final shot was fired. "I never forgot the guns, the war planes and the carnage that was all around me, " he said. " There were 134,000 American casualties in three months."

Anthony retired from the Hackensack Board of Education in April of 1985. He and Millie have one son, Anthony Junior, one granddaughter, Danielle, and great grandson John Anthony Iurato. Anthony's community affiliations include VFW, ARRP and St Joseph Church where he has been serving as an Usher for 25 years. "We love Lodi" boasts Anthony and Millie "We wouldn't live anywhere else."

This story is one of my favorites since Anthony, through many emotional moments, did not hold back when he spoke of his wartime experiences and the things he saw in the heat of battle. Thank you Mr. Dispoto.