



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: Dr. Michele de Maio

DATE OF BIRTH: February 9, 1915 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: July 26, 2000

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: de Maio home, Clovis, N.M.

INTERVIEWER: Cameron Saffell (Also present, Robert Hart)

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM OTHER _____

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: August 25, 2000

NUMBER OF TAPES: One

ABTRACTOR: Cameron Saffell

DATE ABSTRATED: May 3, 2001

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Dr. de Maio discusses his service as a doctor in the Italian Air Force in North Africa early in World War II, his imprisonment as a POW at Camp Hereford, Tex., and his work in an Italian Service Unit in San Pedro, Calif. Also reviews post-war period when he immigrated to the U.S. and became licensed to practice medicine in New Mexico.

DATE RANGE: 1942 – 1988

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

Michele de Maio born in 1915 in Salerno province of Italy. Went through private schools and medical schools to become a doctor of internal medicine. He was immediately selected for the Royal Italian Air Force, where he eventually became a flight surgeon for a unit in Libya and Tunisia. Surrendered to British, but somehow became a POW of the Americans. Sent by boat to New Orleans (?), then by train to Hereford, Tex. Was humiliated by experience, particularly having "only" a staff sergeant sent to communicate with Italian officers. Had a dog named "Tomorrow" because that was the frequent answer given to POWs by American guards instead of yes or no. Was in mixed compound of fascists and king's soldiers, who segregated themselves from each other. After Italy switched to the Allied side, de Maio and most of the other non-fascist officers joined (felt commanded) Italian Service Units. Was moved by train from Hereford to an American camp at San Pedro, Calif. Worked in the dispensary there. Became good friends with Ben D'Orio (spelling?), an American officer at the base, had dinner frequently at the D'Orio home. Was at San Pedro through end of war, then sent back to Italy where he was discharged.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

Did not receive mail while at Hereford, but could send letters. Picked up English during the course of his stay. Is a reader and frequently read in his spare time, both at Hereford and San Pedro. Did not practice medicine at Hereford because no officers became sick. Shipped from U.S. to Naples by boat, was discharged and paid on arrival there. Did not accumulate any pay from working in the U.S. [Presumably only his regular salary from Italian government.] Tried to practice medicine in Italy after war, but could not make a living. Refers to Roosevelt "letting the communists" into Italy. Decided after a year or so to immigrate to the U.S. First worked at Bank of America in California for a friend while getting his medical license. Soon moved to New Mexico, where doctors were desperately needed. First was in Albuquerque, then moved to Clovis. Took exams in order to get his state medical license. Practiced there until retirement in 1988. Views war as a very cruel thing. Discussion of how de Maio was drafted for service as a doctor in Korean War, but service in Italian Service Unit counted as time served in U.S. Army. Met his wife as a secretary at the doctor's office. Left Hereford for service unit in San Pedro in late 1943. de Maio does not know what happened to highest ranking officers from Hereford when the Italian Service Units were formed. There were officers up to a general at Hereford. Injured back after plane he was on was shot down [in Africa] and he parachuted.