

Transcript of the *Shoah* Interview with Fred Baer
Translation by Uta Allers - Volunteer – Visitor Services – October 2014

NY 68 Baer

(Interview with a Veteran Frontline Soldier)

A: My name is Fred Baer. My real name is Friedrich Fritz Baer in Germany. I was born on March 4, 1899 in Cologne on the Rhine. During World War I, I was in the Field Battalion 83, Cologne Riehl as a German soldier. There was already a lot of anti-Semitism back then. I had a sergeant who harassed me with "You Jewish pig".

Q: You Jewish pig?

A: Yes. So I went to the head officer and told him what I heard... what I had been called. He said he couldn't do anything about it. He was sorry. Then I said to him, "I want to go to the Front". And then they sent me to the Front south of... near La... La...

Q: Cambrey?

A: Cambrey, yes. I was there till the war; I was discharged in 1918 with medals of honor, the Iron Cross and a wounded warrior badge, for I was wounded on my right leg, and...

Q: Excuse me?

A: Then I was discharged with fifty Deutschmark and a suit, a civilian suit. Then I was...

Q: Excuse me, where were you born?

A: In Cologne, I'm sorry. Then I went home, of course, and was hired by a department store in Gelsenkirchen as a salesman and department head. I was there about three years. Then the Nazis came into the store and got rid of a number of Jews who were working there.

Q: Yes, and what was going through your mind?

A: They said, "Out with the Jews. We have... we don't want any Jews in the store." Yet the owner himself was a Jew. The owner, the manager. It was a business. Then I went home and from there to Herme in Westphalia. I worked there in a department store. I got to know my wife there and we got married. And...

Q: And what...

A: That's my wife. And then I was in Herme... Then, of course, the Nazis came and I went from one town to another: to Gelsenkirchen, to Cologne, to Duesseldorf, to Duisburg, so the Nazis wouldn't get me. Then suddenly my wife phoned me, "All's quiet – you can come home." Then I went home and when I got there, people said, "The Nazis are coming – you have to get registered". I registered myself, of course, and as I was coming out of the office... was coming out where the Nazis were, one Nazi said to me, "You're registering yourself voluntarily?" I said, "Yes, that's what I have to do. I'm a Jew". He said, "That's good". Then they sent me to Dortmund. From Dortmund I was sent to Oranienburg, to the concentration camp.

Q: What year was that?

A: That was 1939.

Q: '39?

A: Yes. Then I was... about... how long... '38. Yes. '38. Then I was... how long? I was in the camp for only a month and then they... then they opened the gates and said, "You can go". No money. No nothing. My suit had been in the delousing station and was completely messed up. Then my wife came to get me. We wanted to get back home

by train; then the conductor, the one in charge, wouldn't let us. "We don't... don't take Jews." Then we stood on the platform for a while, and then were able to get home by train after all. And...

Q: With a different train.

A: Yes, a different train took us. We were able to ride home. And then I emigrated to Panama. I was in Panama for seven and a half years. And I was separated from my wife, of course. I emigrated to Panama by myself; I had no visa for my wife because the consulate charged such an enormous amount for a visa.

Q: The Panamanian Consulate?

A: The Panamanian Consulate.

Q: How much?

A: Oh, I don't recall now, about... how much could it have been? How much did they take?

Q: Enormous?

A: Yes, it was a high sum. So that I couldn't come up with such amount again for my wife. Then I was in Panama for seven and a half years and, after the seven and a half years, received word from the Red... from the Red Cross that my wife had been rescued, that she was in Sweden.

Q: And your wife was in...

A: ... in a concentration camp in Riga. I didn't hear anything from her, nor see anything.

Q: For seven years?

Q: Yes, and in the camp it was... in the camp in Oranienburg it wasn't as bad then as it was later in other camps. Although, there was a case there, there was an attorney... there was a Nazi who was looking for an attorney, who had convicted him at some point. And they found that attorney. Then they beat the attorney so badly that he was lying lifeless on the train tracks, and couldn't move.

Q: Yes. And you are now eighty years old?

A: Yes, I'm eighty now.

Q: Yes. Cut.