

Summary of Oral History: Eric Heinz Bondy

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Summary

Heinz Kristoff Erich Bondy was born June 2, 1924 in Gunderstein, Germany which was about 60 miles from Hamburg. He was called "Heinz" and did not want to be known as German when he served in the US Army so changed his name to "Eric Heinz Bondy." He had two older sisters, each sibling was three years older than the next. Anna Marie was the oldest and Olla was the next oldest. His paternal grandfather walked to Hamburg from Czechoslovakia and established a successful import-export business permitting Eric's family to receive a substantial inheritance upon his death. His parents used this money to open Mariondal, a co-ed boarding school where his mother worked and did not open a private psychologist practice. His father had earned a Ph.D. in art history and had been wounded in World War I. The family did not practice Judaism and spoke only German. When the Nazis came, Eric was no longer permitted to play soccer. A caretaker took care of Eric and his siblings until they left for Switzerland. His maternal grandparents died in Thereisenstadt. Eric's family escaped to Gland, Switzerland in 1935 because Jews could no longer run schools in Germany. They started a school in Gland for German refugees. After three years, they obtained a visa to the US as the Swiss were returning Germans to Germany. After six months in Manhattan, his parents started a school in Windsor, Vermont which the parents and, later, Eric managed until it closed in 1987. After graduating from Windsor, Eric attended Wagner College in Staten Island on scholarship. He was asked to leave because he was a German national and was accepted at Swarthmore due to his soccer ability. It was a time of Anti-Semitism in the US with Jews being called, "kikes." After completing one year of college, he joined the Mountain Troops in the Army because he liked skiing. Eric was stationed in Colorado where he became a citizen. Probably due to his German and French language skills, he was transferred to Fort Ritchie, Maryland where he was one of the youngest to be trained to interrogate German POWs. He was assigned to the 79th Division in Europe where he was one of a three-member unit. Eric saw many dead soldiers at Normandy where he was wounded July 11, 1944 and earned a Purple Heart. His unit traveled through France, Belgium and Luxembourg and after the war went to many places in Germany including Dachau where he interrogated about 25 SS guards, mostly Latvian and Estonian and spoke with survivors. After Eric was discharged at age 22, he attended Swarthmore for three years and graduated and then earned an MA in Modern European History at Bryn Mawr. Recently he attended a reunion of those who had been trained at Richey. Eric had not spoken about his Army experiences for 30 years. He returned to Germany once for a memorial to honor his parents. Eric was married twice and had two sons and five grandchildren. He came to DC after serving as Headmaster of the Windsor School for 35 years. Then he directed a small school until he was 78 and retired.