

Oral history interview with Gerald Liebenau
RG-50.030.0670

Summary

- Born in Berlin, Germany near Elssholzstrasse in November 30, 1925, but grew up in Schreuderburg.
- Has one sister who was five years younger
- His father (born 1889) was a highly decorated WWI veteran machine-gunner for the Eastern Front (Russian sector) and Western front
- Father, Kurt, was a window decorator for the Berlin department store Hermann Tietz before WWI and owned a textile store
- Mother, Helene (Lola) Organitsky Liebenau (born 1898), was a Pianist
- Had a good childhood, the family was very active in the Oberspree, Jewish rowing club on the river Spree
- Relatively peaceful childhood between 1933-1936, until Jews were no longer allowed to attend public schools in 1936
- Family moved to the Haberland Strasse section of Berlin
- 1936-1938: parents began looking into leads on how to leave Germany, mainly through an uncle's son (David Miller) in the United States, acted as family's sponsor and provided affidavit
- Kristallnacht - when became aware of what was going on
- The United States Embassy in Berlin turned down their affidavit
- His father left Germany for London in September 1938 [right before the High Holy Days] as he believed men were in the most danger
- Father sent all of their furniture to Scranton, Pennsylvania before Gestapo ransacked Jewish homes
- Received visas to London and left Berlin after Christmas 1938 -made to leave train at Dutch border - making their way to London
- Bar Mitzvahed in London
- Left London for the United States in late January 1939 on the Aquitania.
- Family settled down in Scranton, Pennsylvania - was 13 years old
- His father worked as a door-to-door salesman and a window dresser until he died at 75, mother taught piano.
- His father moved the family to New London, Connecticut in 1941
- Began dating girlfriend Vivian Shepardton
- Drafted into the United States army within a week of high school graduation and trained in Camp Blanding to be a machine gunner (approx 1942/43)
- After training was shipped to Southern Italy (1944), later sent to Caserta, Italy, then to a villa on the Adriatic where he trained to jump from airplanes. Became a part of the Austrian unit of the OSS in Vienna.
- Spent a little time in Germany searching for scientists for the United States. Briefly returned to Berlin to seek out survivors from family (1945/46)

- Left the army as a Buck Sergeant
- Attended college at Yale - studied History and Russian
- Married high school girlfriend, Vivian Shepardton
- After college moved to Arlington, VA, to work with the CIA (the OSS successor) in Washington, DC
- Briefly lived in Berlin with family for a few years due to work