

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Mark Weinberg
April 8, 1991
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Mark Weinberg, conducted on April 8, 1991 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

MARK WEINBERG

April 8, 1991

Q. Where were you born?

A. I was born on February 17, 1912 in Warsaw, Poland.

Q. What was your family? Brothers? Sisters? Parents' occupation?

A. I have six brothers and two sisters. My father was a businessman--worked to produce sole leather.

Q. What was your home life?

A. Very religious--not poor and not rich. We were middle class.

Q. Uncles and aunts?

A. Lots of uncles and aunts and cousins.

Q. What schools did you go to?

A. I went to a private grammar school, I went to a mechanic school and then to business school. This took three years. I had a regular job when I was 14 years old.

Q. What were Friday nights like?

A. I may go to a show with my father or go to the synagogue. It was a very traditional home.

Q. What were your most cherished moments of young life?

A. I was a sportsman, first a gymnast, boxer, ice hockey, I was on the Polish second team, ski instructor and the military.

Q. You were in the army?

A. Yes, the Polish army, Kapraba (sp?)

Q. How did you feel the antisemitic influences?

A. Saw it all the time. Churches said don't give work to the Jews, don't buy from the Jews, do nothing with the Jews.

Q. Before 1939 did you personally feel antisemitism?

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A. The wife of the prime minister of Poland Pristo (sp?) was head of the antisemitic organization in Poland. She created more and more antisemitism. She received money from, I forget his name. He printed a paper called the stilmer (sp?).

Q. Rosenberg?

A. No, Rosenberg wrote a book in the 20th century about how a German has to look and how a Jew is to look. Steiger, that is his name. He sent her a lot of money. A priest who had converted was beaten up by Christian students. My brother and sister went to Israel and my parents. Three brothers left. One was a Chalutz, sportsman and the other a capitalist.

Q. Chalutz is agriculture?

A. Yes, but my brother was an electrical technician. I sold merchandise, parts for motorcycles and bikes.

Q. When did you first see the Nazis?

A. In 1937 my cousin and I went to Germany to buy merchandise. To buy a machine to make spikes for bikes. We went to Leipzig saw the marching Nazis and all the slogans against Jews and they were singing (?) a song.

Q. How did you feel?

A. I felt bad, but I felt worse when I saw them march into Poland. I was in the second battalion for four weeks we fought the Germans. There were three Germans to one Pollock, but we fought like heroes. We had no chance. Staginsky (sp?), the prime minister told the Polish army to give up because if we didn't they would destroy everything. So they took Warsaw.

Q. Describe the early days?

A. Very little food. Day to day there was less food so we did not have enough power to resist.

Q. When were you sent to the ghetto?

A. I was not sent to the ghetto. I lived in the Polish, Christian section on the border of the ghetto. I lived on the Polish Christian side. In the beginning it was not a ghetto. In the end of '39 it started to be a ghetto.

Q. What did you do in the ghetto?

A. I did not register. I was put on the list of mechanics and was sent to the Warsaw citadel. I prepared rifles, wrapped them up. I saw millions of bullets. We only got five bullets a piece when we were fighting against the Germans. There were millions of bullets.

Q. Describe life in the ghetto? Family?

A. My brother lived in the Polish side. My sister was in Lodz. I lived in the Christian Polish section. I looked more German, so the Polish never asked for my I.D.. No one recognized me as a Pollack. Not even the Germans. They don't recognize me.

Q. What happened after the ghetto closed?

A. I belonged to underground for political rights, the (?) Party. Just a few people knew. It was very dangerous to know what I was doing. I went to the other side through holes to buy rifles, bullets and food. Or by work commandos called work police. They were Germans. We smuggled in goods or we paid off the gendarmes, volunteer police from every precinct in Germany. 50-60 thousand of them. Some were fine, some were murderers and killers. They would rob Jews and Pollacks. Some let us smuggle for nothing. Some took bribes. We knew the tricks to smuggle. I smuggled for myself and the Party.

Q. When did you leave Warsaw and under what conditions?

A. 1942. End of July. I left the ghetto to bring back food. The Germans needed workers and they were taking Christian Poles. I had fake identification that said I was a Christian Pole. I was taken to Vienna from Warsaw. I had a pistol, with a silencer, it was hard to get rid of the pistol there. If they found it, then I would have been shot. They sent us to Auschwitz. To the factory, not the camp. Then I came back to Warsaw. I smuggled myself out of the factory.

Q. What factory?

A. Don't know, they let me out because I went voluntarily.

Q. When did you get to the camps that you were in?

A. I was caught again in Warsaw by Germans. I was on the Christian Polish side. They said if I go to Vienna voluntarily to work for the Germans, I would have good food and good working conditions. I signed voluntarily. I was taken to the same place. I worked at the post office. I lived near a restaurant. I wore a "P" for Pollack. There was not enough a food. We wore Jewish clothing from the concentration camp. Then there was sabotage of trains. I informed spies of the train traffic. Franz Kopper (sp?), a Polish spy, I met in a restaurant. I gave him information. How many trains. How many soldiers. When they returned from the Russian front.

Q. How long were you there?

A. Police came to ask me questions about the sabotage. They were putting sand on the axles. Another Pole said my name was Vernsky(sp?) and that I spoke German. The police asked me how come I speak German. I said because I went to school and I sold merchandise. I said I did

not know about the sabotage. They came again and questioned me. They checked my I.D. and they knew something was wrong. I was arrested in March of 1943 and beaten up eleven times by the Gestapo. I cut my own wrist because I did not think I would be able to survive. I was taken to a hospital in Vienna. I was unconscious. The doctor said I would be alright. The nurse told me that the doctor was really just a Gestapo.

Q. Didn't they know you were a Jew from examining you?

A. Because of my strength and my features they thought I was of the fourth generation of Christian Poles... my nose , my green eyes. They said being circumcised did not tell them I was a Jew because people got circumcised for other reasons. I was taken to three jails and to many different camps, including Bruno, before I was taken to Auschwitz in September of 1943. I arrived after the Jewish New Year but before Tournament Day because they had a big selection on the New Year. We were singing Jewish songs from Yom Kippur.

Q. How come everybody was singing?

A. Everybody was together in the block, Head rabbi from Bolivia, 6 Jews and a Hungarian Jew.

Q. What was on your uniform?

A. I got a red triangle. It meant I was a political prisoner. I was not selected, political prisoners were not selected and they saved my belongings in a sack. Jews got red and yellow star and their stuff was thrown away. I was hit by a block leader and I hit him back. I was then put in line for the crematory with the other Jews. We were going to Birkenau. There were 6 boys, the rabbi, Yamnik and myself. At Auschwitz II they put us near the kitchen. I saw the old people get selected and saw them march to the gas chamber. The head Kapo asked me "What are you doing here?" I said I was a political prisoner. I was limping from being beaten by the SS and he asked me why I was limping. I said because I was a soldier. He asked me if I was a soldier for or against them. I said against you and then he asked me where I came from. I said I came from Vienna. I was sent to Block 29 instead of the gas chamber. The six boys were sent to Block 29 because they were strong. The Hungarian Jew was sent to the gas chamber. I will never forget the eyes of the soldier how he looked at me and I will never forget the eyes of the Hungarian Jew. They don't kill a political prisoner without an order from the Gestapo. If they were ordered then they could kill. The underground came to me and I was put in the kitchen. They told the kapo to treat me with respect. This was the best job in the camp. There was enough food and I could take food to others.

Q. How long were you in the kitchen?

A. Until October 1944. I had access to all the camps. I was near the uprising in the crematorium. Shamu (sp?) worked near the crematories outside the camp. During the uprising the SS shot everybody even outside the camp. He was lucky he did not get killed. I was in the kitchen during the uprising. Only one crematory was destroyed. It would have been better if uprisings were in

all the crematories. I saw two young gypsy boys, who were blond and blue eyed hidden by the kapos and saved. The SS sent out dogs and found the two boys they were taken to the gas chamber and given two shots in the head. A dry gas chamber takes three minutes to kill. A wet chamber takes twenty minutes to kill. They sprayed water in the chamber to clean up the bodies. It was the worst death because some people still stayed alive. No one can say they did not see or smell the crematories. You could see them from 50 miles away. I left Auschwitz because I was a mechanic, a good worker. I arrived in Arenbourg and worked at a bomber factory. We worked on airplanes. I was there for one week. Then we went to Sachsenhausen. The Germans asked us where are the Jews? We said we are the Jews. They did not believe that we were the Jews because we looked just like them. They were taught that the Jews looked like the devil. Sachsenhausen was a factory that printed false money. We got good treatment and good food. I was there for two weeks. Then we went to Dachau. Then to camp 11, then to 7, then to 4 and then to camp 1 where I was liberated on April 27, 1945 by the seventh American army led by General Petz (sp?)

Q. Did you believe it would ever end?

A. I believed it would end right away from Warsaw. Because I saw the Russians Bombarding and then Stalingrad was lost. I believed the Germans could do nothing. I read the papers in the kitchen and could tell by the lies that the Germans were losing.

Q. When you were liberated how did you feel?

A. I felt bad about my family. But I knew in 1943 that all the Jews in Poland were killed. Most of the surviving Jews survived from Russia.

Q. What should we do now?

A. We need to fight antisemitism all the time. Especially the farmers and bankers. Only 2-3% of bankers in the U.S. are Jewish. Most belong to Christians. The Jewish banks are far away from the farms. This is very bad. In the U.S. everybody is an immigrant. It is very bad that Jews are treated that way. The U.S. has to do something.

Q. What effect does education have?

A. In 1976 I started speaking. People cannot deny the Holocaust. Students say they learned more from me speaking then books or their teachers.

Q. Do you have a number?

A. (Shows his number) #151048. This was my name in the camp. This was how they knew me.