

## **Summary of Oral History Interview with Sidney Cole July 1990**

Sidney Cole was born in New York in 1914. In 1940, he enlisted for the draft and wanted to become a pilot. When he did not pass the required examinations, he went to Canada where he passed and became a Flight Officer in the Royal Canadian Air Force. After Pearl Harbor, he returned to the United States and volunteered for glides pilot training but did not like it because he was so used to engine noise. He graduated in 1942 and shows a photograph as Canadian Officers and another as 2nd lieutenant after his subsequent field--Offices training School. He then became instructor for liaison pilot whose job is to observe artillery fire from the air. He also had to undergo field artillery training.

He volunteered for overseas duty and started combat flying in the middle of 1944. He was in the "battle of the bulge" during the winter when there was a lot of bad weather. His observer missions lasted only a few minutes and he thus accumulated 126 missions. The last one was in January 1945 when he and his plane were hit by anti-aircraft fire and he lost all engine power. His observer bailed out first and landed inside the Allied lines but, as he found out much later, broke his back on coming down. His own parachute landed inside the German line. He was bleeding and became unconscious intermittently but threw his dog tag away since it identified him as Jew. While he had passed out, he was picked up by a retreating German tank and handed over to a group of Hitler youth. They were only 12 to 20 years old and interviewed and also mistreated him. He was locked up in a damp cellar for several days and then taken to a Red Cross tent by truck and subsequently transported to several camps. Once, on a train he was seen by a British prisoner of war who was a physician and removed some shrapnel and administered a tetanus shot. Finally, he ended up in Stalag IV F where he got a non removable German dog tag as prisoner of war, He shows a photograph of the tag. In the camp, there were altogether four officers and about 80 men from several countries. Jewish prisoners were taken to working parties and apparently killed because they never came back.

He claimed to be Protestant which probably saved his life. Camp conditions were extremely bad, there were no facilities and little food or water. Once, a guard gave him a loaf of bread that had been baked six years earlier but kept fresh in a sealed wooden box. Toward the end of the war, the Swiss Red Cross visited and gave them postcards to send home. In five months, his weight had dropped from 145 to 95 pounds. There was little news, but they did hear about the death of President Roosevelt and the roundup of the Jews in Germany. The Russians arrived in May 1945. They were led by a Major who had been educated in Minnesota and they also had several women physicians. He was treated very well and stayed for several months. They went to a concentration camp, probably Auschwitz, where they found a small group of inmates who were only skin and bones. They could not eat and all soon died. He also saw thousands of bodies in a ditch and was very affected by these experiences. In July, the prisoners left the Russians and they had a big ceremony. He was sent to Paris for interrogation and then to a camp in France to recuperate. In 1946, he was released from the service. He shows his prisoner-of-war medal and several other war decorations including a caterpillar pin which indicates that he was saved by a parachute.

He does not like to talk about his experiences and agreed to the interview only to help keep the memory of the Holocaust alive. He stresses that one should be proud to be a Jew and remember. The Holocaust was real and not a fiction as sometimes claimed. Go not let it happen again.