

Summary of Oral History: Max Arbeiter

RG#: RG-50.061.0004

This Summary was written by a USHMM Volunteer on [03/2022]

Part 1 (Summary)

Max Arbeiter was born to Haggadah (?) and Yitzchak and had four brothers: Eliyahu and Mordechai were older than him and Israel and Joseph were younger; his father had a successful tailor shop in Plotz (?), Poland where they made suits and uniforms to order with the boys and other employees worked; there were about 10 to 15,000 Jews in the community and were mostly religious; his family attended services and kept kosher but were not strictly religious; gentiles beat up the Jews one Sabbath in a garden where they congregated so the Jews beat up the gentiles the next Sabbath but this time the police arrested the Jews; he was thrown out of school when fought a student throwing ink on him; his family tried to immigrate to the US with the help of an uncle living there but were unsuccessful; Max was 18 when war with Germany began and in Polish military preparatory group but his town was soon occupied by the Germans; Judenrat organized work details for the Germans and Max worked as a tailor; their home became part of the Ghetto where Hebrew cheder school remained open; he helped manage a department store of stolen Jewish belongings; his father continued tailoring by using a neighbor's machines when his were taken; on February 27, 1941 all the Jews in his town were driven towards the Russian border where, for a few weeks, they slept on the floor of a military barracks; then they were taken to Starachowice near Radom where were placed with a Jewish family who owned a bakery; his parents used the family's machine to do tailoring and Max worked in a munitions factory; on October 27, 1942 he, with other munitions workers, were marched to Kotzi Motza (?) Polish Camp while parents and youngest brother were deported to Treblinka for gassing; Eliyahu escaped to Russia and was never found; on August 24, 1944 the camp was about to be liquidated so an attempt was made to escape, but they were captured and went on a forced march to a train to Auschwitz where Mengele selected the brothers for work.

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Part 2 (Summary)

Max was placed in the Gypsy Family Camp where commanded to lay face down on the floor while the Gypsies were removed to the gas chambers; he was marched through the large complex of Birkenau and volunteered as a mechanic, taking airplanes apart, though had no experience while Israel cleaned toilets; at the end of '44 he saw long lines of prisoners awaiting the gas chambers as war was coming to an end and thousands were sent to other camps; Max was among the last to leave except for those in the hospital; he left January 5, 1945 in heavy snow and was chosen to help push a truck with heavy equipment and after five miles and saw others shot when collapsed so walked away; arrived in Mauthausen where naked to shower and remained naked ten days before given clothes to work in Camp Melk (?) where they built ammunition factories in the mountains; bombed so transferred by truck to Avonsby (?), another ammunition factory, closer to the mountains; his shoes fell apart by standing in water so used piece of blanket to cover his feet; the war was ending and the prisoners were ordered into a tunnel but they refused and returned to barracks; liberated by the Americans; the Jewish Brigade came with trucks and Max knew some from his membership in the Halutz Zionist organization; he was taken across the Alps to Italy to DP camp in Montalto (?) run by the British who locked them in; Max escaped to the Boot of Italy to a Kibbutz in Santa Maria and met the Jewish Brigade in Bari where he organized a soccer team and made uniforms for them; Max became manager and helped distribute coupons and straw to an UNWRA run camp; and remained until Israel was established; helped Jews get to a boat for Israel but he was not permitted to join them as he was needed to remain as manager; found his two brothers; one in Felderfink (?) came by train to Bari; Max attempted to cross the alps to see his other brother but was arrested and had to return; had uncle and two aunts in US so Max (in '49) and one brother migrated to US ; went to Israel as a tourist; some of the Jews from Italy were immediately trained to fight upon arrival in Israel and got killed in the war with the Egyptians.

Note: Max states that all the brothers were together but does not indicate when they get separated from Mordechai nor when he gets separated from Israel.

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Part 3 (Summary)

Max tells how he was arrested in the Alps on his way to find his brother and was returned to Bari; his two brothers migrated to the US; explained how his brother, Israel had searched in Russia for Eliyahu but he had disappeared; Max resided in Boston with goal to fight Nazism so active in survivor group and fight against neo-Nazis; determined to be Jewish but not religious as gassing of Jews took away his belief; he believes that everyone should be informed of the Holocaust so it is not forgotten; Max sent his children to Hebrew School and Teacher's College; he believes Israel is necessary for Jews' existence; Max requested reparations for injuries incurred at the concentration camp; he has told his children about his Holocaust experiences; he feels that the US is safe as there are many minorities; Max tries to make up for the loss of five years of culture; he explained that the prisoners at Auschwitz realized that volunteers for work in Germany had been killed so they rebelled at volunteering; and he enjoyed seeing friends at the conference of survivors in Israel.

Note: The last 20 minutes are several journalists announcing different topics.