

U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum  
Interview with Fritz Schoenbach  
July 23, 1996  
Margaret Garrett, Interviewer

Tape 1 of 3, side A

Born Fritz or Friedrich Schoenbach, now Schonbach; Vienna, Austria; July 1, 1920.

Grew up in an almost suburb of Vienna, close in. Lived there from 4 to 18. Before lived closer in. Lived modestly but well. Only child. Went to private school in Grinzing, suburb of Vienna, until March 1938. 50% of students Jewish; most of teachers not Jewish. Relationships in school and effect of Nazi takeover. Anti-semitism in Austria. Pre 1938 increase in terrorist acts and verbal assaults against Jews.

Father's upbringing orthodox. Mother not so. Together tried half-heartedly to give religious education. Bar Mitzvah. Aware of Jewish heritage but it didn't take.

TAPE 1 of 3, side B

Austrian persecution of Jews. Still hidden residue of anti-semitism.

In 30's knowledge of concentration camps. Precautions and preparation to leave in a hurry. Efforts to get out of Austria.

1938 escape to school in Switzerland, St. Gallen, for one year. 1939 joined parents in Italy. August 1939 in London. Teamed up with other refugees. Rented house in Wilesdon, suburb of London. Wish to be artist. Art school one or two months.

End of 1939 appeared before Tribunal. English misunderstanding of Austrian Jews. Exempt from internment until further notice. Depression and fears of internment.

Spring 1940, "Intern the lot."

Tape 2 of 3, side A

Internment began. Description of internees. Holding camp at stable. Paraded through London. Kempton Park Race Course for 1 to 3 weeks under heavy guard. Mixed experience. One of a group of youngsters. Feeling of relief from dread of going to internment camp. Did gymnastics, sang. Remembers as-- having been an only child was being socialized. Made money for extra food by doing chores for older internees.

Bus or train to Bury near Manchester--abandoned cotton mill, one week. To Isle of Man for 4 weeks. Again rations short. Coincident with Dunkirk. Feared Nazis would arrive.

July 10, motor launch to Liverpool. Boarded Dunera--prison ship. Soldiers ripped open suitcases and searched persons for valuables. In hold, long tables. Two or three times more people than planned. Hammocks and blankets. Some slept on floor, tables, benches. Crowded. Buckets. Toilets across decks.

Irish sea choppy. Got sick. After one day, struck by torpedo which did not explode. Was able to go on deck. After 2 weeks realized ship going south. Part of internees were Nazis from Andorra Star, which had been torpedoed. Did drawings on ship. Caricatures. Relief to be able to draw.

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FRITZ SCHONBACH; TAPE 2, SIDE B

Had been only child. Socialization in camp and more socialization on ship. Older man helped him reconcile himself to internment. Each table formed community. Played bridge with older man, fairly young Quaker German refugee, other man practically the same age. Still friends with latter. He had raincoat which they shared. Time of attachments. Many non-Jews, political refugees. Some blue collar. Had been in German prisons. No big deal for them. Some of Jews were devastated. People at his table took lightly. Just one more prison. One young boy died in fist fight. Drawings. Older friend. Guards became accustomed. Buying, smuggling, trading.

In Australia taken off ship. Relieved. Put on train. Guards older men. Friendly. Camp Hay. Several hundred miles inland. Organized selves into groups. Nine months. Drawings for camp newspaper, "Der Lager Spiegel," "Camp Mirror." Sold cartoons. Cartoons of what happened on ship, bird's-eye views of camp. Depression--harder for young ones--lack of freedom, lack of sex, losing time, felt should be fighting Nazis, couldn't help. Mail from parents. Dependent as boy but not free. Relief when left home. On his own. Able to do his art.

Permitted to join Australian forces--auxiliary unit--Labor Corps. Loading and unloading goods. Four years.

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FRITZ SCHONBACH; TAPE 3, SIDE A (final side)

Loading supplies at break-of-gauge. Political refugees who were anti-Nazis were in internment camps. Communists kept to themselves. Also Catholic clerics. Most Jewish. Captain Broughton, Maori.

Stayed on for one year after war, total 4 years. Never promoted. Several times court martialled for AWOL etc.

1946 discharged from Army. Benefits equivalent to GI Bill. Enrolled in art school with help of friends. Married. Visited Europe and parents. Lived in London briefly. Buenos Aires to 1959. Two children born. To US in 1959.

Almost all family on father's side died in Holocaust. Mother's family, many died.

Name Schonbach gone. None with that name survived. His son's probably will not have children.