

**Werner E. Michel**

**Tape 1, Side A**

**June 9, 1998**

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### **Abstract**

This is a follow-up of Werner's September 19, 1997 interview with the Holocaust History Foundation and will focus on his post-Holocaust experiences. Werner was born September 2, 1924 in Landau, Germany. He left Hamburg, Germany in November 1936 on a Kinder transport and arrived in New York on December 4, 1936. He was sent to the Landau family in St. Louis, Missouri where his sister had arrived a year earlier. The language and the culture were a challenge for him. He was placed in kindergarten and slowly made it to high school which he left after Pearl Harbor to work for his brother-in-law in St. Louis. As an enemy alien, he could not enlist in the Army but joined the First Missouri State Infantry. In July, 1943 he was allowed to join the Army as an enemy alien. In July '44, after basic and armor training, Werner was selected to attend Officer Infantry Candidate School in Benning, Georgia and graduated as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant. He first went to England, then to France and then arrived in Germany as the War was ending. He was assigned to the 9<sup>th</sup> Division in Ingolstadt, the 270 IPW camp with over 100,000 German prisoners. Werner helped administer it and identify prisoners for debriefing or those who were SS, Gestapo or on published wanted lists. In late '46 or '47 he was transferred to counter-intelligence to stop interference with the British Consulate. In '47 they started to give visas to DPs to come to the US and he was charged with the visa screening process. By late '48 interrogation was reduced and he was transferred to the counter-intelligence corps and manned region 4 in Munich. From Germany, Werner transferred to Fort Holabird (?) in Baltimore where he taught German and German political systems at the Intelligence School. He spent two years teaching and was supposed to return to Germany but as he was born in Germany, he could not be trusted and was sent to the Presidio in San Francisco in late '49. There he met his wife. He remained in Counter-Intelligence Corps 115 Unit which covered six western states of the US until '52 when he went to Korea briefly and then sent to Japan because of his knowledge of German. Werner spent three years in Counter-Intelligence in Japan as Chief of Soviet Counter-espionage in Tokyo.

### **Summary**

00:00 This is a follow-up of the September 19, 1997 interview with the Holocaust History Foundation and will focus on his post-Holocaust experiences. He was born September 2, 1924 in Landau, Germany as Emile Michel. His mother added the name, Werner, after an uncle who had been injured. In the service, Michel was mispronounced as Michael so he shortened it to Mike and was called Mike Michel. He left Hamburg, Germany in

November 1936 on a Kinder transport and arrived by an American Line ship in New York on December 4, 1936. The Kinder transport children were sent to families all over the US and he was sent to St. Louis, Missouri. It was a challenge for him as he came from a small town and was unprepared for the differences in culture. He had studied French and only two weeks of English in school. He was placed with a sophisticated family in a large city. Werner entered 7<sup>th</sup> grade in the Eugene Field School. He sat like a deaf person in class and did not understand the babble. He failed an aptitude test and at age 12 and ½ was placed in kindergarten. There he was immersed in language and after a month he was advanced to 1<sup>st</sup> grade for two weeks and continued to be promoted as his language improved. He feels it was mechanically good and psychologically no good as he acquired no friends.

05:00 It took Werner a year to almost catch up to grade level. It was coincidental that the family he was placed in was Landau. His foster parents were Milton and Emilia. His legal status was "Kinder Anschluss," similar to a passport. He was a legal immigrant until the war broke out and then became an enemy alien as he was a German citizen. He was not eligible to become a US citizen until he turned 21. His sister came to St. Louis a year earlier and he saw her every month or two. He had contact with his mother and grandmother but not with his father who went to France around the same time that Werner came to the US. In '39 when the War broke out, Werner had graduated from grade school and was attending high school. He was concerned about his family. Germany had overrun Poland and Czechoslovakia and in early '40 overrun the low countries. People in the US seemed to have various levels of interest in the War. The Jewish community had intense interest but the average person such as his classmates understood but it was a remote and distant experience for them. He read the St. Louis newspaper which gave good coverage.

10:00 He took a part-time job to earn money. He realized that the economic situation was not good for most people in society. After Pearl Harbor, he left high school because of his mother's needs and went to work for his brother-in-law in St. Louis. As an enemy alien, he could not enlist in the Army but joined the First Missouri State Infantry which was a military force to replace the National Guards who were called up to duty. In July, 1943 he was allowed to join the Army as an enemy alien as long as he agreed to be drafted. Werner was not old enough to be a citizen. He was drafted at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, a small Army post, and sent to Ft. Knox, Tennessee for basic training in tanks, armor force and Morse Code radio operator. In early '44 he was sent to the 60<sup>th</sup> Gunner Division at Camp Chaffee, Arkansas. In July '44 he was selected to attend Officer Infantry Candidate School in Benning, Georgia and graduated as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Infantry in December '44. Werner attempted to tell them he was skilled in German but tank drivers and gunners were needed so it took the system a long time to recognize his talent. In early '45 Captain Joseph T. Robertson in Arkansas asked him if he knew

someone in Washington as he had special orders to go to Camp Richie in Maryland, a military intelligence training center.

- 15:00 In February '45 he was sent to Germany as an interrogator of German POWs. There was some anti-Semitism at Officer Candidate School. The course was competitive and it seemed the War was ending so they wanted to reduce the number of officers and made the course more difficult. They reduced the number of incoming student from 220 to 115 at the end of the course. Students were removed due to academic and physical reasons. They were required to rate each other for officer potential, leadership potential and physical capability. Several students gave Werner a low rating because he was Jewish. Another candidate was Catholic from Boston and spoke out that he would not be part of such a conspiracy. Two of three of the students who wanted to get rid of Werner were thrown out due to poor academics. Also, when he wanted to attend services on a Jewish holiday, he was looked at strangely as he was in a unit without other Jewish personnel. He never saw a concerted effort by the leadership of anti-Semitism.
- 20:00 The students at Camp Richie were mostly of a similar background. Some were refugees and some were German/American and all looked forward to going to Europe. He felt it a bit strange to return to Europe as he had left there seven years previously. He both loathed the idea and felt a sense of urgency as he had heard nothing from his father and grandfather. Werner had limited information of Jews in Europe. After Kristallnacht in November '38, he knew the horrors were getting worse, that people were trying to leave and that Dachau existed. His father was taken to Auschwitz. He did not know the extent of the orchestrated, systematic extermination of an entire people. He first went to England, then to France and then arrived in Germany as the War was ending. He was assigned to the 9<sup>th</sup> Division in Ingolstadt, the 270 IPW camp with over 100,000 German prisoners. He helped administer it and identify prisoners for debriefing or those who were SS, Gestapo or on published wanted lists. He was responsible for monitoring the nearby counties of Nurnberg and Traumannhausen (?) for any Nazis at the state or county level. Germany had a centralized government with ration cards and ID to prove who they were and where they were permitted to live so if they had no documentation, they were brought in.
- 25:00 The US Army arrested hundreds of people on the wanted list. Later, they took over the detachment in the south in support of the 9th Division and debriefed German officers assembled in Nurnberg (?), Germany. They were brigadiers to field marshalls. They identified those who could be used for historical purposes who were not SS or Nazi and segregated them from others. This process took about a month. It also involved apprehension of Nazis and participants in the Malmedy Massacre in the Ardennes offensive against the West where the Germans executed 120 American soldiers. There were units of SS Panzer Army under General Dietrich and a notorious colonel whose name Werner cannot recall. Dietrich was a Nazi member of the SS in the 20s and

organized "Bully Boys" to keep order at Nazi rallies. He was a non-com and worked his way up in the SS to a 4-star general. He was sentenced for war crimes and served four or five years. The colonel who was in charge of the massacre received a longer sentence and served eight or nine years. There was a large mass trial held at Dachau but not much came of it. Werner did not flaunt his Jewish background but made a point to tell his workers not to exact personal revenge and to accomplish the mission for the US Army.

30:00 There was a sad experience where teams were brutal to SS and he pointed out that if you don't resist violence, you are no better than them. He said that the mission is not for revenge. It was strange but he saw no anti-Semitism. Some Germans admitted they were National Socialist and never realized what was going on and never observed anything which showed a mass loss of memory. Werner saw a religious parade in a small town and all the Nazis were in the forefront carrying crosses and religious flags. The only concentration camp that Werner visited was Dachau where he conducted interrogations of Malmedy suspects for a month. The team's headquarters was 20 miles away in '45 and '46. He visited DP camps. The conditions were chaotic in Germany at the time so he found no meaningful information about his family. By the time he left two years later, conditions were more organized. There was a mass movement of people from the East into Germany. Werner returned to Landau where he visited an aunt who had converted to Catholicism as she had married a gentile. Landau was located in the French zone where he was not welcome so he only went two or three times.

35:00 He learned about genocide about four or five months after arriving in Germany. In Dachau he saw books maintained by the Germans of the deaths. They had a meticulous, systematic bookkeeping of the deaths. He met Germans who had been in the concentration camps. One who had been in Buchenwald told of his experience. Werner was aware of the Nuremberg trials and tried to locate documents to support the trials. **Tape 1, Side B.** He was never in the Nuremberg court. His mission was in the field to perform intelligence, collection and substantiate charges. He submitted some information to Nuremberg but does not know what was used. His field work was to locate people and documents. In the town of Sandicell (?) he found National Socialist motor corps documents and forwarded them to headquarters. Trials were important to establish a precedent so that leaders and countries who would start a war and violate human rights or the Geneva laws would be accountable.

40:00 The trial played a valuable role but not to the man on the street who thought if the people were really guilty, they would be immediately shot without the long questioning. Many Germans felt at the end of the trials, all guilt would be removed from their shoulders as the top echelon was found guilty so the rest were not guilty. Werner knew nothing of the effort to smuggle people. In late '46 or '47 he was transferred to counter-intelligence to stop interference with the British Consulate. The Irgun planned to bomb the British Consulate so they searched for the perpetrators but never located them. There was an

effort to smuggle Jews into Palestine. At that time Werner had no thoughts of going to Palestine but in '36 he belonged to Habonim and thought of it. It was not a viable alternative to being an Army officer. Morgenthau had a plan to make Germany an agricultural nation with no ability to make war again which proved impractical. The idea for the US to keep large forces in Germany so they would have no opportunity to interfere in Europe was impractical as the US did not desire to keep thousands of soldiers in occupied Germany.

45:00 The US was going to keep 16 divisions which went down to one in '48 with 30,000 US Constabulary Military Police force to assure that the Germans do not create security problems. Then the problem with the Soviet Union began. There was the Berlin Airlift. We suddenly realized that we had a new adversary to the East and NATO took hold and we brought units back to Europe. We were aware of former Nazis who became employed in intelligence or against the Soviets. In '46 there was "Operation Paperclip" whereby selected German scientists with specific capabilities and skills such as rocket scientists were brought to the US. This was not his project alone but he interviewed Professor Messerschmitt in early '46 who was not selected. The Germans started intelligence service for the US under Gellen (?), a German in the heart of German intelligence on the eastern front. Gellen (?) supplied many Russians and Ukraines, some may have been tainted. In '47 they started to give visas to DPs to come to the US and Werner was charged with the visa screening process. He had a number of missions concerning former Nazis which soon got a lower priority. A higher priority was to work on the Soviet attempt to send agents to West Germany and the Communist Party in West Germany striking against the US.

50:00 For a visa, people had to be documented that they were not Nazis. The US Army had no access to Poland and the Baltic countries so a person who was a Nazi or war criminal might bring a document from a relative who was not a Nazi. They were found out later from documents in the Soviet Union. Werner did not permit personal feelings when confronting an SS officer. He worked with a couple of people who were informants and agents whose mission was on Nazi control. His field work focused on the German Communist movement in '47 and '48 who were not former SS. Werner looked for those who could cooperate with him. By late '48 interrogation was reduced and he was transferred to the counter-intelligence corps and organized regions and sub-regions.

55:00 He manned region 4 in Munich to cover the local area and determine if there was any activity by the right wing or the left wing and was approached by former German intelligence officers who wanted to tell him about Ukraine, Russia and France. This was not useful for him as he focused on the local area so he turned them over to those monitoring foreign intelligence. Twenty-five years later he learned that a German officer stationed in Lyon, France left and turned his activities over to Klaus Barbee. Warner knew the intelligence officer who located Barbee and became a sub-source and departed

and Barbee became the main source of US intelligence. Barbee moved to South America and returned to France for trial. Werner's mission was to work with the Germans who had a natural opposition to Communism as the US were concerned with having indigenous capability so that the Germans could stand on their own feet. Werner worked with University of Munich students who later became lawyers and doctors. One of Werner's relatives who was on the City Council was half-Jewish and had been in a concentration camp. He was an ideologically great human needed for Germany to start a new just and open society.

60:00 Werner enjoyed working with such convivial Democrats who were against Communism. In July '48 Werner ended his first assignment as the airlift commenced. His first tour was from May 1945 to June 1948. He made one last trip by train to the Soviet zone of Berlin carrying secret documents so tried to figure out how to get rid of them when surrounded by Soviets with fixed bayonets. After six or eight hours, he was allowed to resume travel to West Germany. Werner decided to remain in the military as the experience in Germany gave him a sense of accomplishment. He worked for something that he believed in and was highly motivated. It was exciting and an enormous responsibility for a 21-year-old. Werner felt he was doing something useful for his country and he felt the reward of a job well-done. From Germany, Werner transferred to Fort Holabird (?) in Baltimore where he taught German and German political systems at the Intelligence School. The students were going to Germany and had to know how to conduct an interview in German. He spent two years teaching and was supposed to return to Germany but as he was born in Germany, it was felt that he could not be trusted and was sent to the Presidio in San Francisco in late '49. He remained in Counter-Intelligence Corps 115 Unit which covered six western states of the US until '52 when he went to Korea briefly.

65:00 He was brought to Japan because of his knowledge of German at the Operations Office as his German student, a remnant of the Sorghum case from the War, believed such activities still existed. Werner spent three years in Counter-Intelligence in Japan as Chief of Soviet Counter-espionage in Tokyo. He met his wife in San Francisco and an old friend, Ernie Wile (?), a boy from Germany on the voyage of the damned with him. Werner met him and his wife who were from Landau which was very meaningful. Werner learned about the Jewish community in Tokyo. Some were survivors who fled tyrant Russia to China and got to Japan and some Jewish refugees fled to Shanghai and then to Japan. Werner was involved in a case concerning a Soviet intelligence officer, Chief of Soviet Intelligence in Japan who defected January 24, 1954 and Werner turned him over to the CIA and jointly debriefed him in Okinawa.

70:00 Werner debriefed an American POW from the Korean War captured by the North Koreans and Chinese who suffered in both countries. The enemies were masters of brain washing as they deprived the prisoners of sleep and turned them into whatever they

wanted. The men suffered greatly. There are still 8,000 missing Americans. This was more than those lost in Vietnam. They were watching Uri Rashwaroff (?) for sometime who was working out of the Soviet Mission. They were monitoring his activity of recruiting Japanese and Americans to become Soviet agents. Contacts reported his movements. Werner did not imagine that Rashwaroff (?) would defect to the US. A protégé of Beria was deposed and a large group of Russians dressed in skating apparel appeared in Japan which was suspicious. Werner was notified by one of his personnel and source monitoring Rostowaroff (?) that he intended to defect and Warner should meet him at the NYK Shipping Line building in downtown Tokyo at 6:30 PM. Warner drove up and a frightened man got into his car and, at first, Warner could not believe that he was defecting but it was just a provocation. Rostowaroff (?) defected and Warner turned him over to the CIA and he was debriefed in Okinawa for a month.