

RG-50.120*0227
Benesh, Avraham
2 videotapes
Recorded: November 2, 1995
In Hebrew

TAPE I

- 1.00 He was born Adolph Avraham Benesh on November 17, 1906 in Moravia [Konice?] There were five brothers. All of them had academic professions in law and medicine. The family was traditional but not religious. They kept kosher at home, which was typical of Jewish families in Moravia. Avraham went to elementary and high school near Uherské Hradiště for elementary school and high school. The language was Czech, but he also knew German; he used the latter to communicate with his mother, both orally and in correspondence. While in high school, he was active in a Zionist movement. While in college, he was a member of the Zionist professional association. Avraham was also a member of Young Maccabi and of the Zionist movement Tnu'a Tziyonit Klalit. In Brno, he was also among the directors of the Zionist Histadrut.
- 1.05 Avraham went to law school in Brno and then opened an office there. He enlisted in the army and went to officer school near Terezin. He got to know Terezin very well, as they were sent there for guard duty at a small fortress every Saturday night until Sunday. It was also where they trained. The officer's school was nearby, in Litoměřice. At the end of the two years, he was sent back to Brno, after which he did his specialization in law and opened an independent bureau.
- 1.08 Describes family life. His father had a large store which the oldest brother later took over. Two other brothers were lawyers and one was a doctor. He experienced no anti-Semitism. Life was comfortable. While at the university, his parents could not support the children, so they made their needed income by giving private lessons. His mother had trained all five boys to be independent. His mother was from Moravia, from a rabbinical family. She kept the traditions; his father wouldn't have minded to eat non-kosher foods. His father's parents were from the Czech Republic.
- 1.13 Describes the outbreak of WWI in 1914 when he was 8 years old. Sings songs of the time. During WWI, the family housed Polish refugees.
- 1.24 Describes religious holidays at home. Going to high school involved a 45-minute walk three times a day; this shows the importance of education.
- 1.37 After the Munich agreement, many Jews from the Sudetenland moved to Prague. In 1938, when Hitler annexed Austria, more Jews escaped to Czechoslovakia. The Czech Jews did not think it would happen to them.
- 1.41 Describes Brno before Hitler. Avraham was active in the Zionist student

- organization and then became secretary of it. Describes the meaning of Zionism to him at the time. Describes Edelstein and the activities of the Zionist organization in Brno.
- 1.48 Describes the functions of the Zionist organization.
- 1.51 Describes the training farms (hachsharot).
- 1.52 His father died of cancer before WWII broke out. A week after the war broke out, Jews were taken to Uherský Ostroh.
- 1.53 In the autumn of 1939, he went to Prague and worked as Edelstein's deputy in the Eretz, Israel office, dealing with visas, Youth Aliya, Hachshara, Jewish school, etc. He worked there until April 1940.
- 1.57 In that office, he worked obtaining certificates for immigration to Palestine. Since these certifications were given, for the most part, to young single men (a waste of a certificate), Avraham's role was to find women to marry these men fictitiously. Many of these marriages lasted. His own certificate came in 1940, but then he could no longer leave. He also carried on a fruitful correspondence with Turkey to obtain certificates. Avraham had another role, internal censorship of correspondence.
- 2.01 Talks about Edelstein's plans and the difficulties of the work. The Germans wanted the Jews to leave and those who could get visas did. 26,000 left. Edelstein aspired to save as many Jews as possible, to Eretz, Israel or even to other countries. This was before the extermination policy took effect, right after the occupation of the Czech Republic. Then, there was interest in getting the Jews to leave.
- 2.04 Describes the entry of the Germans into Brno. The Jewish reaction was one of shock and disbelief. His youngest brother was taken to Mauthausen. The family received a notice from the camp saying he had committed suicide by throwing himself on an electric fence.
- 2.10 Adolph comes face-to-face with a Nazi in Prague.
- 2.11 Edelstein returned from Palestine with a positive outlook, but the feeling was that Ben Gurion and Sharet did not do enough to influence other countries to provide visas. Dr. Goldman agrees with these conclusions in his memoirs.
- 2.18 In Brno, there were many Polish Jews who had arrived as refugees. There were also many in Ostrava. It was decided to settle all these Jews in Nisko. Edelstein was sent there as a delegate from the protectorate. Edelstein described that the place was dismal and failed. Since this obviously wasn't the way to get the Jews out of the way, the idea of the convoys began. After that, the transports to the East

started. In November of 1941, five transports went to Lodz and Minsk. Avraham talks about the idea to settle Jews in one place in the German protectorate. The Germans wanted it to be a Jewish settlement, under Jewish jurisdiction. It was decided on Theresienstadt. Instead of being under Jewish jurisdiction, it was under the command of Gunter from the Gestapo.

- 2.28 Avraham stayed in Prague, taking care of the Jewish community there. Terezin had facilities to house the Jews, and it was situated near the railroad tracks. The Jewish committee decided on that place, and then had to convince the Germans to evacuate the local Czechs from there, as well as to empty the military hospital and the barracks.
- 2.35 Describes the reasons there was no Jewish underground in Czechoslovakia. Edelstein organized the Jews in the ghetto to work for the Germans.
- 2.40 Avraham did not go to the ghetto. Therefore, his work began as secretary of the Jewish community of Prague.
- 2.47 Describes how transports were arranged.
- 2.55 His organization provided for the needs of the Jews in Terezin. When no more Jews were left, the Kramer commission dealt with the belongings of the transported Jews. When Kramer went to Terezin, he was made the head of the Treuhaltstelle and dealt with the German Central bureau. Avraham describes his connection with Terezin and his functions there.
- 3.04 Describes searches and the difficult situation after the murder of Heydrich.
- 3.09 When the transports were finished, he and other heads of the organization were sent to Terezin. He was part of the 'prominent' who had special conditions in Terezin. Describes his work (construction) and the social and cultural life in Terezin.
- 3.17 When he was ordered for transport to Auschwitz, he chose not to go with the 'prominent,' who were gassed on arrival.
- 3.26 He gives the names of 'prominent' friends: Munk, Springer, Dr. Kahn, and Zucker.
- 3.32 Edelstein was held responsible when the number of people who arrived did not match the number on the German list and he was sent to Auschwitz.
- 3.36 Describes Edelstein, Leo Beck, Munk, Fleishman, Pavel, and Haas.
- 3.53 Avraham didn't have any relationship with the Jew who was in charge of the Judicial business of the ghetto.

- 3.55 His impressions of the children in Terezin. The sickly and the elderly suffered the most there.
- 3.57 As a construction worker, he was very involved with building the music pavilion and the children's playground for the visit of the Red Cross (even though he did not witness the visit itself).

TAPE II

- 4.00 Avraham describes again the transports in 1944. Describes how the Germans mislead them. He gives many examples of the lies they were fed. It was 1944.
- 4.04 Talks about Rabbi Frichiger(?) and his son (the chief rabbi of Denmark).
- 4.14 Talks about the spring of 1944 and the preparations for the Red Cross visit.
- 4.20 Describes the cultural activities in Terezin.
- 4.28 Describes the transport to Auschwitz in October 1944, and the arrival, selection and his first impressions. Describes life in Auschwitz.
- 4.46 After four days, he was taken in cattle train to Dachau and then to Kaufering IV. Describes the camp and work in the forest, and the cement works from October to April. He got #115206.
- 4.55 Describes the sanitary conditions. There was a typhoid outbreak and other diseases in the camp. Camp IV was designated 'sick camp'. Dr. Kafka acted as doctor. The mortality was high.
- 5.10 Avraham talks about social relations in the camp and how he kept his spirits up.
- 5.19 He describes the evacuation of the camp and the four day death march to camp Allach. Describes the liberation by the Americans.
- 5.27 In May, he went to Prague and reunited with his mother and surviving brother.
- 5.33 He became active in the Jewish community and later the director of the Joint. Describes his activities as the head of the Zionist organization and his work. His lawyer's credentials had been taken away from him by his Czech colleagues, even before Hitler came into power. The "Bericha" (escape) functioned at the Joint; it was the only place in the world that was that way. He knew many of the movers and shakers who came from Israel in order to organize the refugees' immigration to Israel but, upon his own immigration, Avraham never exploited or used his connections. He continued working for the Joint.
- 5.44 Describes the treatment by the Czech authorities. Describes his own physical and emotional condition and that of others.

- 5.54 He gives the reasons for not talking about his experiences.
- 5.59 He became the head of the council for the commemoration of the victims of Terezin.
- 6.00 Describes the Israeli attitude and reaction to survivors.