

## **RG-50.154.0004**

### **Oral history interview with Oscar Baron**

#### **Summary**

Oscar Baron, born in 1903, in Prague, Czech Republic (then Czechoslovakia), describes his experience of surviving captivity in German concentration camps during WWII. His mother, a housewife, died when he was very young, and his father, an engineer, during WWI. After he went to public school in Prague, he went to Hamburg in 1920, where he studied fermentation at the University. He stayed there until 1932.

Before, 1918 when Czechoslovakia was established as an independent country, the Czech people were not anti-Semitic. But after 1918 when other nationalities (Slovaks, Poles, Hungarians and Germans) joined the Republic, there was some discrimination against the Jews in certain areas, e.g. Sudetenland, but still Jews could live, work and prosper without any restrictions. After 1939, when the Germany invaded Czechoslovakia, things became very bad for the Jews, especially in the capital Prague; they had to wear "insignia", could not go out after 5:00 pm, could not go to public places (coffee house, etc.), the children could go to public schools, etc.

When Oscar came back from Hamburg, started working at a chemical factory. Later, he decided to become a teacher because the Jewish schools did not have enough. He was married to his first wife in 1941, just days before he was deported.

In 1941, The Germans deported all the Jews of Prague to Lodz, Poland. Lodz was an industrial city (the third largest in Poland, at the time). The Germans expelled all the non-Jews and turned it into a large ghetto/ transportation center for Jews, about 180,000. People were deported to other (death) camps, mainly Auschwitz, and more came to replace them. Everybody in Lodz was working for the Germans. As long as you were needed, you stayed there. Conditions were bad, but nearly as bad as Auschwitz. They were living in houses, and were given two kilos of bread a week, some soup and potatoes, and occasionally some sausage and a little meat. Oscar and his wife stayed there for about 4 years. He knew how to make soap and they needed him. The Germans closed the camp in March, 1944, when the Russians were near it and expected to liberate it. They sent all the Jews to Auschwitz, about three days away, by cattle car. Unfortunately, the Russians never came to Lodz.

Auschwitz and, its neighboring camp, Birkenau were not towns, like Lodz. All the prisoners were living in barracks. Every day the Germans will take them out for various jobs, and almost every other day they would select out the sick and weak for the gas chambers. Oscar and his wife were separated when they went to Auschwitz. He later learned that she had died in Bergen-Belsen. After six weeks in Auschwitz, he was sent to another camp, called Lidalow, and then to Dachau. While in Dachau, he was assigned to work as a foreman at a Messerschmitt airplane plant. He also served in another "nasty" camp in Germany, called Riderlo. The people there were sick with typhus. He conceived black typhus from lice. Fortunately, the American liberated them and cured him. He was at the hospital for seven weeks in Munich.

From Munich, the Americans brought him back to Prague, where eventually he met his second wife, Lilly. They migrated to London in 1948, and to Canada three years later.