

## **RG-50.160.0006**

### **Summary**

Rolf Reilinger, born 1919 in Stuttgart, Germany to a Catholic mother and a Jewish father shares his family's story before, during, and after World War II. He recounts how his father, Samuel Reilinger, grew-up as a "uneducated rural Jew" in Reilingen in the state of Baden, the oldest of ten children. Samuel's father died young, so he had to support his family and provide dowries for his sisters before he could start a family of his own. He married in 1913, establishing a middle-class existence for his wife and their two sons, Kurt and Rolf, by working for the Jewish cigar company Isaak Hochenheimer and Sons. Although his wife was a Christian, both parents agreed that their sons would be raised as Jews.

When Rolf Reilinger was young, his family lived in Stuttgart's Militärstraße 2 (now called Breitscheidstraße). In 1931, they moved to Äußere-Büchsenstraße, near the Hoppenlau Cemetery. Rolf attended two primary schools followed by secondary school at the Dillmann-Real-Gymnasium, one of three Jews in his class. Even after the 1933 Nazi take-over; however, he never experienced anti-Semitism in school. He cut his education short in order to be apprenticed as a cabinet-maker. Even as a very young man, he knew that he wanted to immigrate to Palestine and felt it was important to have a trade. As a Jew, he didn't receive an apprenticeship contract; however, he was paid and well treated.

Rolf repeats many times, that in Stuttgart he never experienced anti-Semitism. He recounts several examples to illustrate this. For example, in 1935 or 36, someone posted a copy of the antisemitic publication "Der Stürmer" in his school. When Rolf showed it to the teacher, the teacher told the class: "Hate-speech has no place in school." He also recounts how a gentile neighbor protected his parents on Kristallnacht. Rolf states however, that he does accuse his fellow citizens of passiveness, inaction, and indifference. Although Rolf did not experience anti-Semitism in Stuttgart, he recounts several negative experiences during trips to other parts of Germany and Switzerland.

Rolf was active in a group called the Deutsch Jüdischen Wanderbund Komraden (German Jewish Hiking Federation Comrades), an outgrowth of the 1920s Wandervögel movement. However, the members of the Jewish group were also focused on immigration to Palestine and Zionism, they were influenced by the thought of Martin Buber.

The 1938 Kristallnacht was a turning point for Rolf, his boss sent him home early to check on his family. On his way home, he saw his Jewish hiking comrades being arrested outside their community hall, which strengthened his resolve to immigrate. He prepared himself for immigration by learning Hebrew and studying the Bible (not in a religious way). He also soaked-up the good parts of German culture: music, books, theater, and opera.

After their respective apprenticeships, Rolf and his brother Kurt, a mechanic, worked on farms near Berlin. In 1939, Kurt escorted a group of Jewish children to Palestine, which was legal at that time. Foolishly, in Rolf's opinion, Kurt returned to Germany after seeing the children safely

to their destination. Shortly before the war, Kurt fled to Holland. When the Germans invaded Holland, he was able to travel freely and did not wear a yellow star due to his status as a “half-Jew”. This allowed him to support the underground, leading him to France, where he helped people flee across the Pyrenees into Spain.

Eventually, the Gestapo captured Kurt subjecting him to interrogation; however, at this time, the Germans had to evacuate Paris. Kurt was loaded into a freight car going to Germany. The train was bombed, destroying Kurt’s papers, allowing him to be treated as a political prisoner rather than a Jew. Forced to work repairing railroad lines, Kurt was rescued by the Red Cross and brought to Sweden. He planned to immigrate to Palestine. However, he returned to Holland one more time, where he was killed in an automobile accident. Rolf, was not sure whether he was murdered or accidentally killed. He was found with a hole in his skull near a British vehicle.

Just before the war broke out in September 1939, Rolf helped a group of children to make a “youth-aliyah” to Palestine, via Denmark and Russia. This was legal at the time. When the war started, he felt trapped and depressed. However, he and a group of other Jews tried to make the best of it by working on an estate near Berlin in Wulfswinkel near Fürstenwalde. Some of this group were anti-Zionist, under the leadership of a man named Gerson (SP), they received permission to work on a forestry project in Silesia. Afterward, all of this group ended-up in Auschwitz.

On October 13, 1939, after making a final visit to his parents, (his father died in 1940 and was buried in the Prag-Cemetery), Rolf took the opportunity to join an illegal transport to Palestine, via Vienna down the Danube to the Black Sea. He was allowed only twenty kilograms of luggage. He and 800 other Jews travelled on board a freighter called the “Hilda”, which was stuck in the ice in Romania for two- and one-half months during the cold winter of 1939-1940. When they finally made it to the Black Sea, they hid below-deck when the ship passed Istanbul. Soon afterward, a British destroyer stopped them, and forced them into Haifa harbor.

In Haifa, Rolf was interrogated by two Jewish officers of the Criminal Investigation Department of the Palestine Police Force. They suspected him of being a German spy. They knew all about his mother being a Christian and his brother’s return to Germany after having been in Palestine. At last; however, he was allowed to enter the country, finally settling in HaZore’a, a Kibbutz associated with a branch of his former hiking federation, called “Werkleute”.

Rolf ends his testimony with a funny yet proud recounting of the important role of German Jews, “Jeckes” in establishing Israel.