

September 19, 1991

State # 1349-023

Interviewee: Mr. Rudolph Herz

Interviewer: Tom Downey

Notetaker: Rose Shames

0:00 - Rudolph Herz born in small town near Cologne, Germany 23 August 1925. Family had lived in this town for over 200 years. Father in grain business. No antisemitism prevalent.

1:40 - 1930 family moved to nearby town where Rudy began school. In 1933, the school had a new flag with swastika.

3:30 - New Nazi anthem; SA storm troopers

4:00 - Overt antisemitism begins

4:48 - 1934-35 a song sung by storm troopers contained a line "When Jews blood drips off knives..."

5:45 - 1936 Nuremberg Laws come into effect

6:30 - School treatment changed. Nationalistic slant emphasized Teutonic heritage.

8:10 - Family told to leave village and go to Cologne.

9:30 - Jewish school in Cologne. Laws of racial purity. Punishment for Jew having firearm was death.

11:23 - Family consisted of 4 brothers, 1 sister, parents and grandmother. In Cologne, father did small hauling for income.

12:13 - 1940 the family business was forbidden; signs in store windows "Jews not welcome"; antisemitism became institutionalized.

13:35 - description of synagogue life in Cologne

14:10 - 1939 Kristallnacht description

15:30 - Home burned; physical abuse of grandmother

17:00 - Family wants to leave but borders closed

18:00 This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word. It is not the primary source, and it has not been checked for spelling or accuracy.  
"I found menial work in Cologne. Eventually became apprentice in  
woodworking."

19:45 - September 1 began war with Poland; then with France and England.

20:21 - As a 14 year old boy, felt excitement about war.

21:00 - 1941-42 Resettlement orders. 64 family members taken away to Lodz Ghetto, to Riga and to Kiev. Those taken to Kiev were shot as they left the railroad cars. Of whole family, only 2 survived.

24:20 - Massive bombing of Cologne.

25:00 - Rudy and immediate family were resettled; 3 day train ride to Czechoslovakia.

26:45 - From trains the marching began; grandmother lost.

27:23 - Czech militia checked belongings at entrance to camp. Men and women were separated in Theresienstadt ghetto, and assigned space. There was reasonable organization.

30:45 - Description of barracks, ration cards; 1 cup of coffee, bread slice, margarine.

31:24 - Began work as grave digger. Elderly, dying all around; bodies piled high had to be buried.

34:00 - Work in Youth workshop. Daily life of camp, still wearing yellow star.

38:00 - 1943-44 Mental defects sent off to be gassed.

39:33 - 1944 Resettlement to east. Rudy tried to get reprieve from Mr. Epstein but didn't work.

42:30 - Whole family in cattle car; no stopping along the way. 80-100 people per car; some food and water.

44:50 - Arrival in Auschwitz. Saw women working in fields in stripped uniforms. Roush Roush! Left belongings in train.

47:00 - From train, people assembled in rows. Marched up and down street for 4 hours; barbed wire, guard towers.

48:15 - Realization that they were in death camp. People kept marching for hours. Rudy crying to G-d (emotional break)

54:13 - B-camp of Auschwitz

55:30 - Bunks in 3 levels, mattress of straw in burlap

56:00 - Routine in camp: breakfast was 2 slices of bread, coffee made of toasted corns, lunch was potatoes and beets; dinner was bread and coffee.

58:30 - Starvation begins

59:00 - Counting of prisoners; rough treatment

60:12 - In Auschwitz there was no resistance, no organization. It was hopeless.

61:52 - Still didn't realize they would be gassed, but did see smoke of crematorium and sensed the sickly smell.

63:30 - Description of brutality; beating of old man (emotional break)

65:30 - Still in contact with parents; mother had no hair.

68:00 - Starvation. July, 1944 news of upheaval in German government; assassination attempt.

71:30 - Death by hunger; bodies stacked at end of barracks like cord wood, naked, 4 feet high; bodies thrown on cart and carried away. Still no knowledge of gas chambers.

74:55 - Nothing to do in camp, just talking and waiting.

76:50 - Rudy and brother called to camp to work for German industry in August 1944

78:30 - Mother came to barracks to say goodbye - (Emotional crack)

80:30 - Sachsenhausen; marched past crematorium, told to undress.

82:00 - Shaved completely, head and body totally, given striped uniform and number 35,501. Yellow triangle/red triangle.

84:00 - Loaded to cattle cars. Guards in holes in the ground. Total darkness, no way to escape. Arrive in camp \_\_\_\_\_ in Germany. Barb wire, no food or drink.

87:00 - Assigned barracks, still with brother. Given rules of camp. Unloading  
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90:00 - Hands blistered and bleeding. Guards beat prisoners on back with butt of gun.

91:50 - Found lunch pail in underground bunker, ate it and fell asleep. Guard beat him for not reporting it. Bleeding from mouth, had to keep standing.

93:55 - Still bleeding so taken to hospital. Brother came to visit.

95:14 - Only thought was of food. Camp bombed, barracks destroyed, carnage.

97:30 - Hospital orderly required him to have oral sex. Tried sodomy 3-4 times.

99:18 - Transported by truck to Liber Rosa (?) camp. Assigned for work detail.

103:30 - German Kapo; mistreatment, beatings.

107:00 - Description of camp rules, beatings, cane floggings, victim had to count as they were beaten.

110:30 - Corporeal punishment sessions; Polish prisoner hanging (forced to look but devoid of feeling).

Third tape begins.

2:00 - Winter in camp, trying to keep warm. Beaten for putting paper bag under jacket to keep warm.

3:30 - Jews had to stand guard over wood piles at night. Thoughts on why?

5:00 - Trying to survive. Horse stew. August, 1944 - February, 1945 in Liber Rosa

6:20 - Hint that Allied troops near. SS guard told them that they would be killed before liberation.

8:00 - Given 2 loaves of bread. Death March begun. 8000 left Liber Rosa, 1500 arrived at next camp. There were 700 left behind who were burned and shot to death.

10:30 - Marching. People who could not walk were shot. Freezing.

15:00 - Found cod liver oil which saved life.

15:30 - Religious observance in camp. Survived by hoping to see end.

18:43 - Rode in German boat but did not know where he was. Got to place where "Final Solution" was planned. Let off and marched to Sachsenhausen. Irony of life-able to read "come all ye who are heavy laden" on church.

21:15 - Describes march. Saw destruction by Allies.

22:55 - Jan/Feb 1945 Berlin is waiting for Russians.

23:25 - Met someone with patch that was different (Blue) Spanish community who were caught in France. Variety of people. Stayed 14 days. Knew the end was near.

25:30 - German barbers shaved heads and faces. Describes taking hat off (grabbing and slapping on leg) to show sign of total and abject dehumanization.

27:36 - Block Kapo assembled people . Told of transport to go to Mauthausen. Marched to rail cars.

28:48 - Cattle cars. But guards sat inside railroad cars with prisoners.

29:40 - Knew they were going south by reasoning.

30:25 - Heard air raid sirens but no place to go.

31:24 - Had seen more corpses than needed for a lifetime. Describes what they did with people who died in train car...stacked corpses up and sat on them. Travel about 5 days. About 20-30 people got out of his car at Mauthausen.

34:45 - Drinking dirty water. Prepared to die.

36:20 - Describes showering and being run out into the cold.

37:40 - Realized that as Jews they were lower than the lowest. Guard calls out "are their Germans among us...." answered yes and guard spat "Jew"

39:05 - Sent to Grußen - Aircraft factory.

41:30 - Three people assigned to a bunk which was 3 feet wide. Could not stir. Scabies.

43:20 - Supposed to jump on moving railroad car and taken underground to work on Messerschmidt plane ; assistant welder.

45:43 - Two methods of showing they were prisoners; hair short with stripe of naked scalp or with tag. No longer prison clothes, German clothing factory couldn't keep up.  
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48:14 - Five or six German Kapos forced 200 starved skeletons out into the snow. Heard them dying from 9 PM to 7 AM. Terrible sound. Stacked bodies up in nice neat German rows.

50:10 - Method of execution; SS hung man on a nail. SS did not delegate the killing, they did it themselves.

51:50 - Going to the wire

54:15 - Talks about Polish prisoners and selection to be re-patriated. Felt he would have volunteered. He was at the end.

55:52 - Underground factory began to destroy documents.

56:50 - 20th to 24th of April. 1st Red Cross packages arrived. SS went away. Austrians began guarding.

57:58 - May 5th; Tank came up to his barracks. Spoke in Yiddish and English - You are free. Told to stay there. Weapons taken from Austrians and burned. The liberator was from Brooklyn, New York. Jewish.

New tape

1:22 - Hanged German Kapos. Tried to get a rifle. Tried to go back to Germany to go home. Everybody concentrated on southern part of Germany.

3:41 - Hospital; narrowly escaped being shot by US soldier. Got grain to trade for food.

4:39 - On way to Linz, US soldiers picked him up and had a harmonica. He played German songs. Gave him food and helped him get closer to Linz. General Patch had review of his troops. Army marched without making sound which impressed him.

7:20 - Desert Storm was a milk run!

10:00 - Went to Holland. Describes destruction of Germany.

12:15 - Americans were not friends of the Germans. I can't forget.

13:15 - Returns to Cologne. Torn as never before; in Country where he had always lived....didn't know whether to go or stay.

18:08 - Jewish Brigade; went to France. Found out in France that one brother was alive in New York.

19:20 - At age of 25 year old he was drafted to go to Korea. Was trained in Louisiana. Frontline duty with 45th Infantry. Had been out of concentration camp only 4 years and was not yet a citizen.

22:10- Came back to Chicago. Then went to France. Met his wife who is German. Asked friends to get him back to US as watch-maker/jeweler. Found a place in Augusta, Ga. Didn't work out because of difficult economy. Then found job in Myrtle Beach.

24:26 The South is different. You are an individual.

26:50 - Felt "survivors guilt". There has been no day in last 40 years when he hasn't thought of camps.

28:30 - "My soul ~~died~~ died in Auschwitz" Have never lived a normal life.