

Interview of Benjamin Lewin (BL)
12/12/95 Jewish Holocaust Centre, Melbourne, Australia.
RG-50.407*01

Note: The audio of this interview is poor; lots of background noise.

BL was born in 1926 (only the year was given) in Karlsbad (Karlovy Vary) Czech Republic. His father was a traveling salesman for a shoe manufacturer, while his mother ran a kosher "Pensionat" i.e. a small hotel, accommodating 50 guests. In 1936 because of growing Nazi agitation the family moved to Aussig (Usti nad Labem) Czech Republic. When Germany took over the Sudeten (1938) the family moved to Prague. BL describes living conditions in Prague after the German invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1939 as fraught with fear. (BL says erroneously that this event occurred in 1940) His family was active in the home manufacturing of electric kettles for export to Germany in conjunction with a workshop formerly owned by his uncle but now under non-jewish management. He also describes briefly jewish life in Prague and his becoming Bar Mitzvah.

The manufacturing job lasted till May 1941, when they ran out of production materials. BL relates that Czech farmers provided the family with food and mentions that Czech police, who hated the Germans, behaved "decently."

In May-June 1941 deportations of the Prague jews to Theresienstadt began. Lists of the Jewish population were drawn up by the Jewish administration and call-ups for "resettlement" took place in alphabetical order. BL and his family left Prague for Theresienstadt in September 1941. BL was able to work in the camp as an electrician, while his mother was assigned to the kitchen, a fact that helped him with extra rations. BL described conditions in Theresienstadt as poor. He and his father were in a barracks with German jews, whom he described as patriotic Germans and probably were upper class receiving preferential treatment. BL relates the well documented visit of the Swiss Red Cross officials and the sham perpetrated by the Germans.

In the summer of 1944 BL and his father were taken to Auschwitz and both of them survived the selection by Mengele. While in Auschwitz BL and two other youngsters were protected by a Kapo and saved from execution. After 4 weeks they were taken to Czechowitz (?) where his father died. Later they were marched to Obitz (?) and then transported in open cattle cars to Buchenwald. Of the 7,000 people on that train only 1,000 survived the cold and deprivation. Eventually he was liberated by the Russians in?? and returned to Prague in August 1945, where he found his mother and sister who

were liberated in Theresienstadt. When called up for military service in the Czech army, he left for Belgium where he studied briefly.

BL describes his adjustment to life in Australia and attributes his survival to youth.