

RG-50.407.0065

Interview: George "Gecel" Steinic, July 1996

Summary

George Steinic, born 30 September 1926 to Nahemia* and Shoshana Steinic (nee Kessenberg*), in Bedzin, Poland, near the German border and Silesia. Steinic describes: his three sisters, two older, one younger; his Orthodox family life and education; the town population of about 30,000 Jews and 20,000 Christians; the town's economy being mostly prosperous based on manufacturing; his father's awareness of developments in Western Europe and disinclination to "run" when others did so; the German invasion in September 1939; the hanging of two bakers for hiking bread prices; random killing and bribing of Jews by a Polish policeman; wearing the yellow star; beatings and harassment of Jews; the burning of the synagogue; burning to death of some 200 Jews in their houses, and a few who were saved in a church; the gradual deterioration of conditions and "resettling" of some Jews; removal of some Jews to Auschwitz and the failure of Jews to believe reports or rumors of atrocities there; being taken among about a thousand Jews on 7 April 1942 to a series of labor camps; living in barracks, where conditions were "not too bad;" the presence in the camps of British POWs; being taken to build work camps, including in Maischeid* and the attitudes of Poles being worse than the Germans; benefiting in Maischeid* from not looking Jewish; working on munitions for Krupp; hearing of the death of his family with the liquidation of the Bedzin Ghetto; being sent to a new camp where he worked as a carpenter and liquidation of the Maischeid* camp; being aware of the progress of the war; friendships made almost entirely on the basis of mutual support; never believing he would survive the war but wanting to survive to bear witness to events; the approach of Russian forces in 1945, liquidation of the camps, and forced marches during which those who could not walk were shot; arrival at Gross-Rosen, consolidation of prisoners from several camps and their brutal treatment; washing and maintaining personal hygiene as a key to survival; managing to maintain his health by obtaining food; importance to survival of doing one's work well; being sent to Buchenwald but then on to Flossenburg due to lack of room; some Jews voluntarily cooperating to survive; several people being killed by Germans and also by Americans; being liberated by U.S. Army troops on 23 April 1945 and receiving crucial help from an American captain; staying in Weiden*, Germany, where he married, until December 1945, and then settling in Brussels; returning briefly to his home in Bedzin, finding it occupied by Poles who said they now owned it and turned him away; briefly recounting the story of a Jew who was soon after killed by Poles in similar circumstances; emigrating to Israel (near Petah Tikvah), but then returning to Brussels for one year; ending in Melbourne, Australia, where he and his wife raised a son and daughter; not telling his children much about his wartime experiences in the belief that "they cannot take it"; advising future generations of Jews to fight, but not believing he can advise them on religion.

*Indicates transliteration as heard.