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Summary

Erich Cahn, born May 31, 1922 in Hamburg Germany. One younger sister. Father Zigmund and mother Esther (Elsa) Liebenbach. Whole family lived in Hamburg. Maternal grandparents, Chaim and Chana, owned shoe factory and paternal grandparents had a cutlery business and grandfather taught Talmud. He went to Talmud Torah primary school. Raised Orthodox, although parents divorced. Father remarried to Klara Koh and ran a dry-cleaning business for 6 months in 1931 in Hanover. After being unable to rent an apartment due to being Jewish, they returned after 6 months to Hamburg where Erich resumed school at the Talmud Torah. He briefly had gone to school in Hanover in a gymnasium where the principal later became Hitler's Minister of Education. Father, while working in a furniture factory, became the cantor for 3 combined congregations. Mother became a dental surgeon and also remarried. In 1937, he visited relatives in London who urged him to leave Germany. In 1938, during Kristallnacht, his father hid in the Jewish hospital and escaped problems. At one point, he read a book about concentration camps and was appalled. Also, in 1938, at the time of the Anschluss, father was convinced war was coming and listed Erich for Kindertransport. He was accepted, and he left Germany on December 13, 1938, arriving in England. In the meantime, mother and sister moved to Holland. When he arrived in Harwich, a doctor did not believe he was only 16 and tried to exclude him, but eventually he was accepted and sent to Lowestoft and then to several other camps. Finally, as an Orthodox refugee, he and some others were sent to Westgate-on-Sea to a Jewish hotel for 5 months. May, 1939 he was sent to Derby to an Orthodox family where he worked in a newsstand and studied Talmud. In May, 1940, he, as an "enemy alien," was briefly interned in a camp in York. For some reason, he was chosen to lead services and gave a sermon. Then he was sent to the Isle of Man to a refugee camp where he conducted Rosh Hashanah services. In December 1940 he was offered the opportunity to join the army and he did so. He spent nearly 2 years in a camp near Darlington, where he met and married his wife, Olga Jackson, in 1943. In July 1944, around the time of his son Michael's birth, he shipped out to Caen, France, where he later again conducted Rosh Hashanah services for Jewish soldiers. Later, he moved on to Brussels to attend interpreter's school and was then attached to the Canadian army. He went to Westerbork concentration camp where he discovered his sister was a prisoner and they were reunited. He learned his mother had been rescued by the Swedish Red Cross. Then he moved on to Germany where he helped arrest members of the SS and SA and interrogated them in Dusseldorf.

After demobilization, He returned to Brighton and began study to be a Rabbi at the Jewish College in Swansea. In 1952 he went to a Conservative congregation in Lancashire where he stayed for 11 years. In 1963 he emigrated to Australia and became rabbi of a Liberal congregation in Melbourne for 3 years. He then moved on to a more conservative congregation for the next 20 years, retiring in 1986. He has been the president of B'nai Brith chapters and an active member of the Labor Party. He helped found in works on the Kingston Interfaith Council

where he has served as a chairman. He has 2 granddaughters, Rachel and Sonya, and still conducts services when asked.