

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

ERVIN BELIK

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer:	Edith Millman
Date:	June 30, 1988

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EW - Ervin Belik [interviewee]
EM - Edith Millman [interviewer]
Date: June 30, 1988

Tape one, side one:

EM: This is Edith Millman interviewing Mr. Ervin Belik--today is June 30, 1988. Mr. Belik, can you tell me when and where you were born?

EB: I was born on the 2nd of June, 1918, in the town of Mistek, Czechoslovakia. My father's name was Bleiweiss. Later I will explain why I changed the name.

EM: Can you tell me how large was your family?

EB: We have been a big family. We have been five kids in our family, three brothers and two sisters. My oldest sister was Elsa Bleiweiss, then it was Ernst Bleiweiss, later it was Olga Bleiweiss and Eric Bleiweiss and I was the last one in the family, Ervin Bleiweiss.

EM: What did your father do for a living?

EB: My father came from Kosov, near Kolomea. He was fourteen-years-old and he came to our town, Mistek. He was working in a textile factory and my mother had later on a grocery shop and later on even after the war, my father joined the grocery shop as well. There were two working in the grocery shop.

EM: You mean after the First World War?

EB: After First World War.

EM: Could you tell me if your family was a religious family--did you have a religious upbringing?

EB: My father was quite religious. I can't say he was very strong religious, but he had very strong feelings about Jewishness and he always told me when I was very young--you don't have to be very often in the temple, but you have to make mitzvah. What is mitzvah, he explained to me--he said washing the bodies of the dead people, the dead men and he said that's the biggest mitzvah and to be in the *Chevra Kadisha*. That was his special mitzvah.

EM: Did you have any religious education?

EB: In the first four classes in our school, Jewish School in Frydek, we had been--they taught us--religion, but it wasn't very strict Orthodox because we had a temple there. They had been singing in the temple. They had an organ.

EM: An organ in the temple?

EB: An organ, and even for the big holidays, they took from the opera a singer who made all the songs.

EM: A cantor?

EB: Yes.

EM: Did the women sit next to their husbands or were they separated?

EB: They had been separated. They were sitting upstairs and downstairs the men.

EM: Do you remember any antisemitism when you were growing up as a child and later on?

EB: I can't remember exactly a special antisemitism in the first years, but I know from the talking from my parents that there had been some antisemitism in our town, but I myself, I didn't feel it so much, because later I went to a Czech school and I was in a Czech sports club and I can't say that openly there was a strong antisemitism, but of course it was. I am sure it was.

EM: But you didn't feel it?

EB: I didn't feel it.

EM: Did you belong to any Zionist organization?

EB: Then I didn't belong to any Zionist organization, only later on, when I was playing football and hockey. I was in Macabee Bohumin, playing football and hockey and I went to Macabee for sports.

EM: For sports. What do you remember of your life in 1938 and 1939 before the Germans came in?

EB: What I remember exactly is that in the year after the occupation of all Czechoslovakia in March '39, my friend that was actually from a German family, the next day he was wearing a SS uniform and started to ask me about a gun from my father who died in 1937.

EM: Your father died in 1937?

EB: In 1937.

EM: And he had a gun?

EB: He knew that I had a gun because we had been shooting the gun near the river, so he knew I had it.

EM: Did you go hunting with the gun?

EB: No, it was a Browning.

EM: So when the Germans came in what changed occurred in your family?

EB: It changed very much because, in the meantime, we had in our flat, we took in our flat some people from the First Sudetan Gebiet, occupied from Karlsbad. Mother and a daughter, they had been living with us.

EM: Refugees from Sudetenland?

EB: They were refugees from October '38 and we heard the news what's going on in Germany with the Jews, so we had been awaiting that maybe it would happen to us the same. And after March '39, when I had a conflict with this friend, what was his name, Willie Tauchmann, he started to ask, as I said before, for the gun. So I had a conflict with him, and the next thing, when I arrived in my town again, the people told me to go away because they were waiting for me, the SS men.

EM: What do you mean to come to the town again? Where were you?

EB: I was working in another town and city, in Moravia, and for every weekend I came home to my home town.

EM: So you were warned to go away?

EB: Yeah, they told me they were waiting for me, not only a few but the SS men, so I decided to run away to Poland.

EM: What month was it? What year, what month? Was it March or in April-- when was it?

EB: It was exactly on the second day of May of '39. I went over the border to Poland, near Czechin.

EM: How do you spell that?

EB: C-I-E-S-Z-Y-N.

EM: Where was it? Near which town?

EB: Because it was in '38 the Polish took the Zabisie. They took a piece of Czechoslovakia as well, so it wasn't far to go over the border [unclear] bus to the last station and then, with another Jewish girl, I went over the border on the Polish side, and from there to Czechin where my aunt was living. Later on I came to Bielitz, Bielsko Bielitz-Biala. I spent a few weeks and then I heard they are building up Czechoslovak Army in exile, so I went to Krakow and wanted to join the Army. It wasn't so easy then to join the Army because the Czech officers there which had been sitting. There I could feel the antisemitism.

EM: And that was in Krakow?

EB: That was in Krakow and the Czechoslovak Consulate in exile. But through another friend which I met there in Krakow they took me because he advised them to take me and so I joined the Czechoslovak Army in Poland. Then came Colonel Svoboda, he was the commander and I got very friendly with him.

EM: He was a Czech?

EB: Yes. He had been living first in Krakow on the Grovny Rynek Turisticni dum [tourist house] and later on we got a camp near Krakow. The name was Midlanki, near Krakow.

EM: Can you tell me how many people were in this camp in this Army, this Czech Army?

EB: When in Krakow there had been 11 people, 11 boys.

EM: 11 boys and you were the only Jew among them?

EB: I wasn't the only Jew, but there had been only a few Jews.

EM: A few Jews?

EB: Not many, in any case, not many.

EM: A few Jews?

EB: Well, there were only 11 of you.

EB: Yeah, but I can count them on my own fingers.

EM: So where did you go? What happened when the war broke out?

EB: Before the war broke out on September the first, a few days before they took us on the train and we went to the north of Poland. It was a place Leszna, Okolo Baranowic. It was another training camp for us. When we arrived there we just heard the news that the Germans started the war, so after two or three days they took us again on the train and they started moving down in the direction to Lvov, to Lemberg, and the war was already in full swing, and our train was bombed a few times, and we were very lucky that nothing happened to us. They didn't touch the trains, the bombs.

EM: How many people were there on the train, in that Army, in that Czech Army?

EB: That's what I said before, about 11 people.

EM: 11 people?

EB: 11 people--that was the whole unit.

EM: 11?

EB: 11,000.

EM: 11,000?

EB: No, *elef*, 1,000 people.

EM: This is in a way of clarification. Mr. Belik meant about 1,000 people--eleven is the Hebrew word. Excuse me, the Hebrew word is *elef*, not eleven, so there were about 1,000 people, Czech people, Czech boys who were in the Army.

EB: And they arrived in a train near Tarnopol. The train couldn't move any further and we got off the train and started going on our own feet and when we came to Cherkov, it was near the Rumanian border, where the Russian Army, which moved in into Poland as well, caught us. After the first night spent under Russian gunfire, the next day we started to walk over the Bug to a place.

EM: Over the River Bug?

EB: Over the River Bug, to, go to Kamenec, Pogolsz. It was about 70 kilometers from there. And there we got a real Russian military camp, so we could clean ourselves and so on. We were staying in this camp about four week and then they took us on lorries and sent us to another place in the Ukraine. We had a very bad time, even nothing to eat sometimes, because the supply did not come.

EM: Well, who were the commanders, were they Czech commanders or Russian?

EB: It was a Czech commander with Russian officers, which took us over. We were living like in a jail, a closed camp. We couldn't get out and so on, but later on when most probably they knew it was a Czech unit, we had some better conditions there. In March '40 they put us on a train again. We had been '38 and '39 on a train and we arrived in Suzdal, that's near Gorky, Baronovicz, Gorky.

EM: That's Suzdal?

EB: Suzdal, that's the name of the place.

EM: Near Gorky?

EB: Near Gorky, or by the town of Baronovicz, that's what I know.

EM: That's in Russia?

EB: No, that was about 200 miles from east/north from Moscow.

EM: From Moscow.

EB: There we spent nearly one year.

EM: From 1940 to?

EB: One year we had been trained and some boys went to help in the Kolchoz but it was a situation much better than before, and in March of '41 they sent me and another boy to the Middle East. We travelled from Suzdal to the next railway station, Ivanovo. It was about 40 kilometers in deep snow and minus 40 degrees Celsius. We had been walking the whole day, from the morning into the night until we arrived on the railway station. From there we went to Moscow in an Intourist Hotel. We got new clothing and we spent another week in...

EM: In Moscow?

EB: In Moscow under supervising of the NKVD.

EM: NKVD.

EB: After a week we got new clothes.

EM: But did you have a Czech officer?

EB: Yes, we had been organized in companies, but they sent us to the Middle East, 60 boys only.

EM: What do you mean by Middle East?

EB: To Middle East. Then to Palestine.

EM: So first you went to Palestine and then to Moscow?

EB: No, no.

EM: This is a correction. Mr. Belik meant he was sent first to Moscow and from there he was going to the Middle East.

EB: As I said before, there had only been sixty boys and from Moscow we went with a train to Odessa, then we spent another few days again in an Intourist Hotel because they said to us--you are the guests of the Soviet Union. From Odessa we went with a ship to Istanbul. In Istanbul we changed on the Asian side and then went on a train to a Mediterranean port, the name of Mersina. After a few days staying in Mersina, we went on a Polish cargo ship, Warsawa was the name, to Haifa. We arrived in Haifa after a week and there we joined a new Czechoslovak unit under British High Command. They took us to a transit camp near Haifa, the name was Sanlux.

EM: Sanlux?

EB: Sanlux. And there we get new uniforms as they used to be in Africa and after a few days they sent us over to Alexandria. In Alexandria we got our arms, outfits, and went right away to the border between the city Baraue and Sanlux, on the Libyan border. There we spent another two months and then the war started on the 25th of June,

the Germans against Russia. I remember the date exactly. They took us on lorries and brought us back to Palestine on the Syrian-Lebanese border.

EM: They brought you from the Libyan border back to the Syrian-Lebanese border.

EB: Where we had to attack three French units they said collaborating with the Nazis. After a few days we succeeded to get over to Merjayium [phonetic] and down to Beirut. Later on they sent us to the Syrian-Turkish border where we had to watch the border [unclear] on the old border between Syria and Turkey because the Germans had been infiltrating there to build a somewhere an airfield. Later on I got sick of malaria so they sent me back to Nazareth in Palestine to an Australian hospital, where I spent another two weeks and actually I got healthy again. Later I joined our unit, which they sent in the meantime again to Egypt, to the port of Alexandria. From there they sent us on an Australian destroyer to Tobruk, from which was then encircled from the Italian and German forces. We spent in Australia unit, about we spent in Tobruk, about eight months--every day bombardments and so on. We had some casualties there but happily didn't happen anything to me.

EM: Were the officers Czech?

EB: It was a completely Czech unit, only we had a liaison British officer.

EM: A liaison officer?

EB: After eight months that we spent in Tobruk, General Osinek [phonetic] made a push against a German and Italian unit and Tobruk was free again. So they took us out for recreation and sent us back to Palestine. The next day the Rommel took again Tobruk. We were lucky that we get out from there. In Palestine we had been training for a new job, that means an anti-aircraft unit.

EM: What unit were you in before?

EB: Infantry unit.

EM: Infantry unit.

EB: Now they sent us for an anti-aircraft unit. Four centimeter Bokov [phonetic] gun. I had been by myself stationed in the port of Haifa to defend the Haifa port and my station was on the breakwaters of Haifa.

EM: The breakwaters?

EB: The breakwaters, Haifa. By the way, I must say that my sister was living in Palestine from the year 1936 so I had actually a home in Haifa. I could visit when I was free of duty. Later, when the British prepared the offensive from El Alamein against Rommel, it was standing near Cairo already, so they took us out again from Haifa and they surrounded [unclear] and they sent us to Egypt on the push against Rommel. The push went on very well and so our unit arrived later again in Tobruk, Bengazi, and Tripoli and there we stayed until everything finished in the Middle East. Later on they sent us to a transit camp near the Suez where we had been waiting for a troop ship, which was supposed to bring us to England. Really, after ten day, the big troop ship arrived. The name was

Mauritania and we went on this big ship, about 6.000 men, from Port Suez to Aden, from Aden to Madagascar, Madagascar to Cape Town. We spent again a week, and from Cape Town to [unclear] around Africa to England. We arrived in Liverpool in England.

EM: What month or year was that? When was that?

EB: It was June of '43.

EM: In June of 1943 you came back to England?

EB: And so they started to teach us to in an armored brigade. We got tanks and [unclear] new weapons and lorries.

EM: New weapons?

EB: New weapons and then in England I got married to my wife, Ingeborg, once Solomon. She was a German-born girl.

EM: A Jewish girl?

EB: A Jewish girl, of course. Otherwise I wouldn't marry, and...

EM: How come she was in England?

EB: She came as a refugee girl in '39 before the war started. She was fifteen years old and she arrived in England. That's what I know about her and she was lucky she went to a very good house there. She was living with Jewish people.

EM: But her parents stayed in Germany?

EB: Her parents stayed in Germany but the Nazis finished them later on as well.

EM: Do you know where they perished, where they were taken, which camp?

EB: I don't know.

EM: You don't know. You just know they did not survive the war.

EB: I know they were finished in a gas chamber.

EM: Tell me now what happened after you got married. You were still in the Army?

EB: Of course I was still in the Army. They sent me for a special training in Scotland and later for tape-writing course in London. And in June we had already been on the ship on the sea, out of the sea before the, the invasion war. We had been awaiting the invasion outside on the ocean. The fourth day the invasion we got as well to France and right away to the front lines.

EM: Four days after the invasion?

EB: The fourth day...

EM: The fourth day of the invasion you went to France.

EB: The perimeter then was about thirteen kilometers from the beach in France, near Calais. Sorry, not Calais, Cannel was the town, Cannel. Calais was the port. After a certain time of fighting the Germans, against the Germans, they sent us over to the perimeter of Dunkirk [unclear] where the Germans had been closed in. Our unit, our company, was on the Belgian side. The place was named La Ponne or in French, De Panné. From there we made a few attacks on the German position. We had plenty of losses there, and we had been there until the war finished in May '45.

EM: In May of '45. Where did you go after the war?

EB: I have to say only another thing. They sent us over the third Patton's Army and with the Patton Army we arrived in Czechoslovakia in the American Zone.

EM: In the American Zone in Czechoslovakia?

EB: Near Pilsen.

EM: That was already after the war?

EB: No, no, before the war finished.

EM: So you were still fighting there?

EB: Yeah, and we had been in a little village staying. On the 30th of May we had a parade in Prague and from the parade we went right away again back to our village because they did not let us stay in Prague. We had been a unit from the West front.

EM: So who did not let you in?

EB: The Czechoslovakian and Russian, because we had been an American or British unit, they didn't want to let us in.

EM: The Communist units were...?

EB: In October '45 they sent me and a few other boys to the Russian front to be instructors there to build up the new Czech Army and I discharged from the Army in January '46.

EM: You were discharged.

EB: Discharged from the Army [unclear]. From there I went to my hometown, Mistek, where I met only my brother that was left from the whole family. His name is Ernst or Arnošt and he got the same name. I changed the name of Belik. Now I have to explain why I changed the name. In Krakow before the war, when I joined the Czechoslovak Army in exile, then Colonel Svoboda changed my name because it was a danger and the Germans caughted somebody from us and we got two relatives in the former Czechoslovakia they could punish maybe. They changed their name from Bleiweiss to Belik. And this is what it stayed the whole time and when I arrived home again to only my brother, so he didn't want to take another name so he changed his name officially.

Tape one, side two:

EM: Now, after the war, when did you meet your wife again?

EB: My wife arrived in October '45 from England, from London to Czechoslovakia. We had already one baby, a girl of the name Jenita, and later on Viva. It was same name, the same girl, not two girls. We had been living in Mistek till June '49 and we decided to go the state of Israel, and we actually did.

EM: In June of '49?

EB: And we decided to go and we arrived in July, the seventh of July, in Haifa again. So I was back in my own country in Israel.

EM: And you stayed in Israel ever since?

EB: I stayed the whole time in Israel.

EM: And tell me, you have two children?

EB: In the meantime, when I was staying still in Czechoslovakia, the second child was born, the boy, of name Peter. And later in Israel we named him Peretz. We have already two children. When we came to Israel the girl was 4 ½-years-old and the boy was 1 ½-years-old.

EM: And you have your own business now or you retired, but did you have your own business?

EB: Yes. At first I started to work in Israel as a mechanical in a military work shop because I knew the job. Later on I started to be a drive, a lorry driver, and after five or six years I started to be self-employed and I did a transport business.

EM: Business? Could you tell me if the other soldiers in the unit, in the Czech unit, did they know that you were Jewish?

EB: Of course they knew. Then in the meantime, when we had been in the Middle East, may Czechoslovak Jews joined the Czechoslovak Army was well, so we had been then more Jews than in the beginning.

EM: Did you experience antisemitism in the Army?

EB: Of course. It wasn't the whole Army, but some people had been antisemitic, but it doesn't matter anyway because we had been strong enough...

EM: To fight back?

EB: To fight back the antisemitism.

EM: Is there anything else that you would like to add to the story?

EB: Now I have to add a few things about my own family. My brother, Eric, which was sent in '39 to the place, name was Nisko, and then came over the Lemberg, was later on when the Germans started the war against Poland, against Russia, was shot from the Germans and killed. He was already married there and his wife and his child died at birth. My mother and my sister with a little baby in arms went, were sent to Theresienstadt and from there, straight to...

EM: To Auschwitz?

EB: Not to Auschwitz, to Treblinka. They went straight to the gas chambers. From the whole family nobody was left anymore, only my sister, which was living from the year 1936 in Haifa.

EM: And your brother?

EB: And my only brother which was last six months in Theresienstadt because he was married to a non-Jewish girl before the war already, in 1936 I think it was. Married to a non-Jewish girl. So he came through with his family.

EM: What happened to his wife or did she experience any...?

EB: My brother Ernst, in the war time, had two children. And his wife had to run away with the children from the home town to be in the hills of Beskid, a few days there, a few days in another place and then she was hiding in a cellar in the home town. The upstairs had been drinking SS men and she was downstairs in the cellar hiding with the two kids.

EM: She was hiding. Who hid her? Who was hiding her?

EB: It was a Czech friend, which was a friend of my brother. And he was in the textile business as well, as my brother, and they know each other and he offered him to hide his wife and the two children.

EM: Was he in danger while he was hiding? Was there any death penalty for hiding the Jews? What was the penalty for hiding the Jews?

EB: Of course he was in hiding because they wanted to take the two boys. They had been boys away from her.

EM: Because the father was Jewish?

EB: They had been looking for the children to take them away from them.

EM: But what I meant--was the man who was hiding her--was he in danger if they had discovered that he was hiding half-Jewish children?

EB: Of course he was in danger. But he was making business with the SS men and drinking with them and he got from the information about what was planning in the town against the people.

EM: Did he warn the people?

EB: That's what he did, because for instance, the Czech underground fighters wanted to make some sabotage and they really on the railway from Frydek to Ostrawa and he know from the SS men what's going on exactly. The people, warned them when to do it and how to do it.

EM: So he was actually in contact with...

EB: Yes, but the people in town didn't know he's doing something for other people. They only had the feeling that he's drinking with the SS men and after the war even they put a finger on him and said he was collaborating with the Germans, but really he was helping some people.

EM: So did your brother come forward as a witness that this man was actually helping his wife and his children?

EB: They asked him to come as a witness to the jury and say only what is true, that he saved his wife and children from the Germans.

EM: Now, your brother stayed in Czechoslovakia after the war. You went to Israel but your brother stayed with his wife?

EB: Yes, that's right.

EM: Mr. Belik, thank you very much. You were very helpful. Thank you very much.

EB: Thank you.

EM: Mr. Belik, would you like to add anything?

EB: I would like to add only a few words that I personally had with my own satisfaction, that I was able to fight against the Hitler Germany. That's all that I can say.

EM: Okay, thank you. We all appreciate it. Mr. Belik lives in Kiryat Motzkin, Israel.