

Interviewee:	<u>LERNER</u> , Leo	Date:	October 15, 1999
Interviewer:	Marcia Goldberg		
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SUMMARY

Leo Lerner was born September 3, 1929 in Goeppingen, Württemberg, Germany. His father, an impoverished cantor, was taken to *Gestapo* headquarters in Stuttgart after *Kristallnacht*. As a Polish illegal resident with a “Stateless” passport, he was ordered to leave Germany.

In June 1939, financed by the Jewish community in Goeppingen, Leo sailed with his parents and sister on a luxury liner to Shanghai. Housed temporarily in a Hongkew refugee camp run by the Joint Distribution Committee, they later settled into a one-room apartment with no indoor plumbing. The father’s occasional work outside the ghetto was insufficient to supplement their meager Red Cross rations and the family suffered from hunger.

Leo attended a secular Jewish school in the morning and an orthodox *Cheder* in the afternoon, where a sandwich and hot tea was his main meal. He describes a lavish wedding feast for the rabbi’s daughter and a Lithuanian yeshiva member; referring to the life of those refugees who “lived like kings” outside the ghetto in the French Concession and British sectors. He mentions indignities imposed on refugees by the Japanese administrator Ghoya, known as “King of the Jews”, in the ghetto, but believes there was no policy of persecution.

In 1945, six weeks before the war ended, he experienced bombings by Americans and reports fatalities in the ghetto. Leo left Shanghai for San Francisco in February 1949. His family followed him in 1950. After menial work, he entered the jewelry trade. His father enjoyed a decade of success as a cantor in Stockton, California. Leo remains grateful for his family’s survival and good lives in the United States.

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SUBJECT HEADINGS

Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945) Personal narratives
Jewish ghettos - Shanghai
Refugees - Jewish - Shanghai