

## Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

P.O. Box 25506, San Mateo, CA 94402

**Name of interviewee:** Beygel, Isaak

**Date of interview:** 2/12/1992

**Summary:** Isaak Beygel was born in June of 1922 in Lehovitsi, Ukraine, a small largely Jewish village. He moved to study in Kiev University but had to stop studying when the war started. He was called to the army in 1942 and served until 1947. After the war he came back to see the place of his birth but only found empty streets and burned houses where his parents and grandparents lived. All Jews of Lehovitsi including his parents and grandparents were killed. They did not leave, because a neighbor who was imprisoned by the Germans in 1918 told them, based on his experience, that the Germans would not kill the Jews. Later Isaak also learned about the massacre of Babi Yar from a friend in Kiev. He mentioned that while his army battalion was moving through Poland, they were finding stacks of clothes but had no idea that these were of the prisoners of concentration camps that are nearby. During the war, Isaak knew that Germans are exterminating Jews, but he could not imagine the scale.

Isaak remembers that in his family everyone spoke Yiddish and his parents were very religious – they kept kosher and observed the holidays. He remembered all the major prayers and knew Hebrew very well, which he has trouble bringing back now at his age. In the 1920's life was very tough and it became dangerous to go to synagogue. Going to synagogue was considered anti-Soviet. He also remembers collectivization against the will of farmers many of whom got imprisoned and had property taken away. His uncle Yakov Beygel got imprisoned in 1937.

In 1943 Isaak went to tank institute and became a tank operator by the end of the war. He went all the way through Belarus and Poland and was wounded near Berlin.

Isaak Beygel says that he did not experience much anti-Semitism before the war, but after the war anti-Semitism was huge. He was told by friends that in the 1950's Jews were tried in courts for returning from the army alive. Later on people became afraid to go to synagogue because they might lose their job. In more modern times, his grandson experienced anti-Semitism in school and Isaak continued to experience it on a daily basis. For example, a man verbally harassed him on a bus. This made Isaak feel terrible and wonder why does he deserve that when he gave everything to the country. Nevertheless Isaak wanted to leave the Jewish culture inside of him which he continues doing safely in the United States.