

## **RG-50.477.0497**

### **Oral history interview with John Steiner**

#### **Summary**

This collection comprises ten interviews with John Steiner. The first interview comprises one videotape and was conducted by Sandra Benayan, Brian Paris, and Carol Hurwitz on March 27, 1991; the second interview comprises two videotapes and was conducted by Sandra Benayan, Brian Paris, and Carol Hurwitz on June 6, 1991; the third interview comprises two videotapes with accompanying transcript and was conducted by Sandra Bendayan on August 22, 1991; the fourth interview comprises two videotapes with accompanying transcript and was conducted by Sandra Benayan, Brian Paris, and Carol Hurwitz on November 11, 1991; the fifth interview comprises two videotapes and was conducted by Sandra Benayan, Brian Paris, and Sylvia Prozan on December 2, 1993; the sixth interview comprises two videotapes and was conducted by Sandra Benayan and Carol Hurwitz on December 17, 1993; the seventh interview comprises one videotape and was conducted by Sandra Benayan and Carol Hurwitz on February 4, 1994; the eighth interview comprises two videotapes and was conducted by Sandra Bendayan on April 1, 1994; the ninth interview comprises one videotape and was conducted by Sandra Bendayan on July 11, 1994; the tenth interview comprises one videotape and was conducted by Sandra Bendayan and Josh Knapp on July 25, 1994. All interviews were conducted on behalf of the Holocaust Oral History Project. John Steiner is a Holocaust survivor.

The interviews describe Mr. Steiner's childhood in Prague, Czechoslovakia (now Czech Republic); his assimilated family life; and his education in a German primary school. He describes the antisemitism he experienced in school, his family's attempts to get him out of the country, and the changes he experienced after the German occupation began in 1938. He discusses his deportation to Terezin (Theresienstadt) in August 1942, the work he performed, and the people he met. Mr. Steiner describes his deportation to Auschwitz in the spring of 1943, the cruelty and kindness of the guards, the conditions there, his illness, and his transfer with his father to Blechhammer in early 1944. He describes the conditions there, the work he performed, and the brutality of the guards. He discusses his experiences on the death march to Dachau beginning in January 1945, the long walk, the cattle cars, and his arrival at Dachau. He describes liberation by the United States Army in April 1945, his work as an interpreter for the Americans, and his return to Prague in July 1945.

Mr. Steiner discusses his life after liberation, the emotional impact of his experiences that he felt while living in Prague, and his decision to immigrate to Australia. He discusses his subsequent journey to the United States, his education, and his dissertation research in Germany that led to a series of interviews with German SS perpetrators, and his work as a lecturer and university professor. He describes his interviews with the perpetrators, the things he learned, and his emotions surrounding the research. He discusses his thoughts about the human capacity for good and evil, morality during difficult times, responses to authoritarianism, and his nuanced view of perpetrators as individuals.