

## Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

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

**Name of interviewee:** Arons, Hans

**Date of interview:** 8/23/1990; 10/16/1991

**Summary:** (Deceased 1997)

Hans was born in 1914 in Hanover (Hannover), Germany. He was an only child. In 1918, his mother died, and he went to live with his paternal grandparents in northern Germany. He had first experienced anti-Semitism in the late 1920's, with public taunting by school kids, but was never physically harmed. He was schooled in horticulture, in Hanover (Hannover), and graduated in 1934 as a gardener. After a few short-lived jobs, it was increasingly difficult to find work, as Jews were not being hired. He found work on a farm with other Jews in Yastro or Gasto (check sp), Germany, near Berlin, where the landowner, a Catholic, was sympathetic to Jews – and later was killed for this outreach.

In December 1936, the Nazi's ordered all of the Jews off the farm where he worked and transported them via train to Buchenwald. In Buchenwald, Hans performed heavy labor, carrying cement bags, bricks and rocks, which he learned after the war were used to build the ovens there. After about six months, he became sick, and was transferred to Sachsenhausen, because it had a hospital. In Sachsenhausen, he was treated. After becoming well, he labored as a gardener, in the camp kitchen, and collected and chopped wood. He explained the worsening of conditions in Sachsenhausen following "Kristallnacht". Hans was forced to work hard, and fed little, but was never otherwise physically abused in either camp. He learned of others experiencing torture, but never personally witnessed this.

In December 1938, Hans, and about 15 others, was unexpectedly released from Sachsenhausen. He immediately returned to his father, who had relocated to Berlin and had remarried. Upon returning to Berlin, he had learned that his stepmother had successfully negotiated with the Gestapo office in Berlin for his release. He also learned that his stepmother had obtained three travel tickets, but she could not secure all to the same destination. His parents were going to emigrate to Havana, Cuba, and it was decided that he'd go alone to Shanghai, China, which had no visa requirements or quotas, to survive.

Hans left Berlin via train for Italy, and from there he boarded a ship to Shanghai, China, arriving in January 1939. For the next eight years, he lived in the Ward Road Camp for stateless refugees. He described his many experiences there, including his work, recreation, kosher food, the involvement of Jewish agencies and individuals, and that it was "a very good life" there. He also discussed being stranded there after the Pearl Harbor attack, changes brought by the Japanese occupation, and the Nazi presence during the war years. He did not consider the Japanese anti-Semitic, but they were very strict. He also mentioned the Japanese were building a concentration camp, at the bequest of the Germans, but he was uncertain if it was completed or occupied.

In November 1947, Hans immigrated to San Francisco. His parents had

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immigrated earlier, in 1941, to New York. He moved to Albuquerque, NM for work, where, in 1948, he joined the US. Army. After basic training, he was stationed in Korea, Hawaii, and the Presidio in San Francisco. In San Francisco, he met and married his wife, also a former Berliner. He was discharged from the military in the early 1950's, and settled in San Francisco. Hans never returned to Shanghai, but returned several times to Germany.

In the second tape session (10/16/91), photos were discussed but, unfortunately, not shown to the camera. Also, Hans had mentioned an earlier tape session in 1984(audio); if available, this should be combined with the subject tapes.