

Summary of Oral History: ANDRE SCHEINMAN

RG#: RG-50.832.0001

This Summary was written by a USHMM Volunteer on [03/2022]

André Scheinman was born in Munich, Germany in 1933. His father, originally from Poland, was a political militant opposed to the Nazis and therefore moved his family to France in the coal region of Pas de Calais (town of Bruay-en-Artois) in northern France. André was eighteen at the time. His father opened a small clothing store where André and his mother worked. André and his sister went to school, and he finished high school there. There was a large Polish contingent in the town working in the mines. Since the elder Scheinman spoke both Polish and German, as well as French, the family got along well, especially during the good economic times between 1933 to 1935. The family did not get citizenship but felt protected by the French government because of their integration into French life.

The situation changed in 1938 as the possibility of war drew closer. Both André and his father joined the French Army, but both left the army when the Prime Minister of England, Neville Chamberlain, gave up Czechoslovakia to the Nazis and staved off war. When the war broke out André reenlisted, but his father could not because of his health. André was sent to Belgium, was injured, and was sent to a hospital. When the Germans occupied Belgium André escaped from the hospital with others and got false papers. He then got a job with the Belgian railroad as an interpreter between the French speaking Belgians and the Germans, including the Gestapo. (The interviewee became a little confused here.) For some reason (unstated) Scheinman made contact in 1940 with a woman who lived off the coast of Brittany. He went there and helped several British aviators escape back to England.

Scheinman then went to England on a two week leave with the approval of the Germans. There he learned secret radio techniques and returned to France with grenades and other explosive devices. When he returned to his job (at the railroad?) he was arrested by the Nazis and put in prison in Fresnes, near Paris, in solitary confinement for eleven months. He was then put in a prison cell with others and then in a solitary "hole" beneath the prison. Altogether, he spent seventeen months in prison.

The Germans then sent Scheinman to the Stutthof concentration camp in Germany. He said that he was a "*nacht und nebel*" prisoner, meaning he was not to be heard from again. He stayed in Stutthof from July 1943 to July 1944, and for most of that time acted as a translator between French prisoners and Nazi guards and later became a Kapo. He said that he treated the other prisoners well. The camp was not for Jews, and therefore Scheinman hid his identity. In July 1944 he was sent to Dachau. He survived Dachau and was liberated by the American Army in April 1945. Having caught Typhus, he weighed only 56 pounds.

After liberation Scheinman was driven back to France by Black drivers who were part of Patton's army. He eventually came to Paris where he lived and married until he came to the United States in 1952. (Scheinman did not say what happened to his parents or sister.)