

AUGUST 5, 2009

Gerald Schwab: A German Jewish Refugee Returns as an American Soldier

BORN: FEBRUARY 19, 1925, FREIBURG, GERMANY

Gerald was born to a conservative Jewish family in Freiburg, Germany. His father was a businessman. His company was based in Germany and the warehouse was located in Switzerland. His mother helped his father with the business.

Gerald attended a German school until April 1933. The government issued a boycott on Jewish business. They traveled to Switzerland but were unable to stay. Instead they moved to St. Louis, [France](#), where the family lived for a few years. His father ventured back and forth from France into Switzerland to sell supplies to retailers. In 1935, the French allowed refugees to live in France only if they moved 100 km from the border. This made it extremely difficult for his father to conduct business since he needed to travel from France. The family moved to Loerrach, Germany because of this situation.

The Schwab family wanted to leave Germany in 1938. Gerald attended a German school until two days after [the Night of Broken Glass](#) on November 9, 1938. By now the Germans began to add the letter J in red to passports of Jews. His father could no longer travel for business.

March 1939, Gerald joined the [Kindertransport](#). He lived with a farmer near Zurich, Switzerland from April till December and then stayed with a Christian family until May 1940. On May 10, 1940, his parent's received the family's Visas (the same day the Germans invaded Belgium and Holland). One week later they left for Italy and sailed to the United States on the S.S. Washington.

Gerald was 15 years old when he arrived in New York. His family first lived in Long Branch, New Jersey. After a year in the United States, the family acquired a poultry farm in central New

Jersey and Gerald was schooled. In 1944, he was drafted into the U.S. Army and achieved the rank of Corporal by the time he was discharged.



Paula Schwab poses with her two children Gerd and Margot in Freiburg, Germany. —US Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Gerald Schwab

Message of Gerd Müller and Christiane Walesch-Schneller from the Blue Haus in Breisach on April 5th 2014 :

Susan Schwab informed us about the death of his father, Gerald A.Schwab on April 2. 2014. He came with his wife Joan several times to Breisach, to visit the Blue Haus, for the first time for the inauguration, and for the last time in summer 2010, for the 70th anniversary of the return from deportation of the Jews of Breisach what he had suffered from as a young boy aged 15.

He was with us on the 60th anniversary of the liberation, where he showed us the photos he took in 1945 and 1946 in the home town of his parents Paula and David Schwab. The interview with Prof. Wette on his memory of the nazi time, when he escaped and returned as GI, as well as his work as translator in the trial in Nürnberg and his diplomatic carrier has been broadcasted.

One year later he accompanied his friend Fred Mayer, who talked for the first time in his home town (Freiburg) and in Breisach about his successfull resistance in Innsbruck. During his retirement, Gerry Schwab wrote a book (in 1996) about the story of Fred Mayer, while thereafter a canadian team made a film « The real inglorious Bastards » (2013).

In November 2008, Gerry and Joan Schwab were hosted in Breisach when it was remembered in the Martin-Schongauer about the destruction of the Synagogue in 1938 and the fate of four Jewish families (Family Eisemann, Bähr, Levy und Weil, see Blaues Heft Nr. 1). Both Fred Mayer and Gerry Schwab were invited to the inauguration of the new synagogue of Lörrach, where Gerry Schwab was the last young boy to be Bar Mitzwa.

In summer 2010 they came back both together to Breisach with survivors and descendants to take part with citizens of Breisach to the remembrance of the deportation, 70 years earlier. They participated to a ceremony in front of the TRIMPIN's sculpture at the « Radbrunnen » with more than 100 persons.

On each of his visit, Gerry Schwab talked to pupils and in public as witness and it moved many people.

Message of Susan Schwab on April 4th 2014 :

It is with great sadness that we share with you that husband and dad, Gerald Schwab, died late last night at 89. He is survived by his wife of 67 years, Joan Schwab, and daughters Susan Schwab and Teresa Marshall.

Gerald was born in Breisach, Germany, and escaped with his immediate family to emigrate to the United States in 1940. He returned to Europe during World War II as part of the 10th Mountain Division and stayed on afterwards as a translator-interpreter with the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg.

He eventually joined the US Department of State and USAID, followed by a second career at the International Labor Organization in Geneva. His career took him and his family to live in Africa, Asia and Europe.

In retirement, he authored two books, "The Day the Holocaust Began: The Odyssey of Herschel Grynszpan" and "OSS Agents in Hitler's Heartland," that became the basis for the 2013 documentary, "The Real Inglorious Bastards". And he helped with German-language research at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Gerald Schwab attended the University of Chicago, Stanford University and The George Washington University.

He will be buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

Anyone wishing to make a donation in his memory should contribute to their favorite charity or consider giving to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (on line via <http://act.ushmm.org/page/s/tribute-card> or by check to United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 100 Raoul Wallenberg Place, SW; Washington, DC 20024) or by check to Blaues Haus in Breisach via the Obermayer Foundation (instructions attached).

Notes to the family can be directed to Joan Schwab, 7101 Bay Front Drive #425. Annapolis, MD 21403.

Interview of Gerald Schwab by Peter Black :

Gerald Schwab discusses his experience being drafted into the US Army in 1944 after fleeing Nazi Germany just four years earlier. After the war, he assisted with the trials of leading German officials before the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg.



GERALD SCHWAB:

I ended up in Nuremberg as a translator interpreter at the first Nuremberg Trial, the trial of the major war criminals. And if you want to know how I felt about it, I felt great.

NARRATOR:

Over 60 years after the Holocaust, hatred, antisemitism, and genocide still threaten our world. The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades and remind us of the constant need to be vigilant citizens and to stop injustice, prejudice, and hatred wherever and whenever they occur.

This podcast series presents excerpts of interviews with Holocaust survivors from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's public program First Person: Conversations with Holocaust Survivors.

In today's episode Gerald Schwab talks with guest host Dr. Peter Black about being drafted into the United States Army in 1944, after fleeing Nazi Germany for the U.S. just four years earlier. After the war Gerald went on to assist with the trials of leading German officials before the International Military Tribunal held at Nuremberg.

PETER BLACK:

When you turned 18, Gerry, what did you do?

GERALD SCHWAB:

Well, I was on the farm with my parents and going to local high school, and my father got an

exception from the draft board without my knowledge, because I became a important farmer, farm helper. When I found out about it, I called the local draft board and I said, "Don't you ever do that again." And they didn't. So, I joined the Army in 1940...44.

PETER BLACK:

Where did you serve?

GERALD SCHWAB:

Well, at first--any Floridians here? I've gotta watch what I say. I ended up in Camp Blanding, Florida. Don't ever go there. In basic training, and then went overseas and joined the 10th Mountain Division which by that time had just arrived in Italy. And was with the 10th Mountain Division in one of those real safe assignments; I was a machine gunner. So much for my German language skills. I stayed with the 10th until five days after the war was over.

PETER BLACK:

What happened after that?

GERALD SCHWAB:

Well, I became an interpreter at General Clark's headquarters then joined an intelligence outfit in Austria. And in April 1946, got an Army discharge in Vienna and went off to Nuremberg as a civilian. It sure felt good being a civilian. I was a lousy soldier. But anyhow, I ended up in Nuremberg as a translator interpreter at the first Nuremberg Trial, the trial of your, the major war criminals. And if you want to know how I felt about it, I felt great. I thought it was wonderful.

PETER BLACK:

You came back to Germany in a very different position from that which you left.

GERALD SCHWAB:

Yes.

PETER BLACK:

You interrogated some pretty interesting and high placed military personnel, did you not?

GERALD SCHWAB:

Yes, I worked in the commission and not in the main court room, but the commission had heard evidence from organizations which were on trial. A fact which has been pretty well forgotten by now and as such served as an interpreter, English-German, German-English in that commission,

it was only one interpreter who did both languages. Now if anybody wants to know how come a kid of 21 can serve as an interpreter in position such as that, let me just reach back to an old saying, that "In the land of the blind, the one-eyed is king." They needed people badly who spoke both languages. Among the people I translated for were pretty well the top, with the exception of the two top generals in the German army, pretty well everything von Runstedt which you saw in the picture and a number of others.

Also, we saw, while we did not have the main defendants testifying, we usually had the number two such as, Dieter Wisliceny, a name that's not current or not well known. He was Eichmann's deputy. And when he testified, he knew he was a dead man. He was later transferred to Poland and executed. The head of the SA [Storm Troopers] some of you may remember the name of Klaus Barbie in France, his boss, Dr. Knochen, a philologist, etc. This is the sort of the level of people that we had.

PETER BLACK:

How long were you with the International Military Tribunal?

GERALD SCHWAB:

Well, the International Tribunal was, of course, the first one that ended in October of 1946. I then moved on to Berlin to be a junior research analyst in German government files which were at Tempelhof Airport. And there worked on preparation for some of the future trials. I remember the first person we worked on was the Minister of Justice, and we worked on it pretty hard. Trouble is they forgot to tell us that he already had committed suicide two months earlier. So, it was a complete waste.

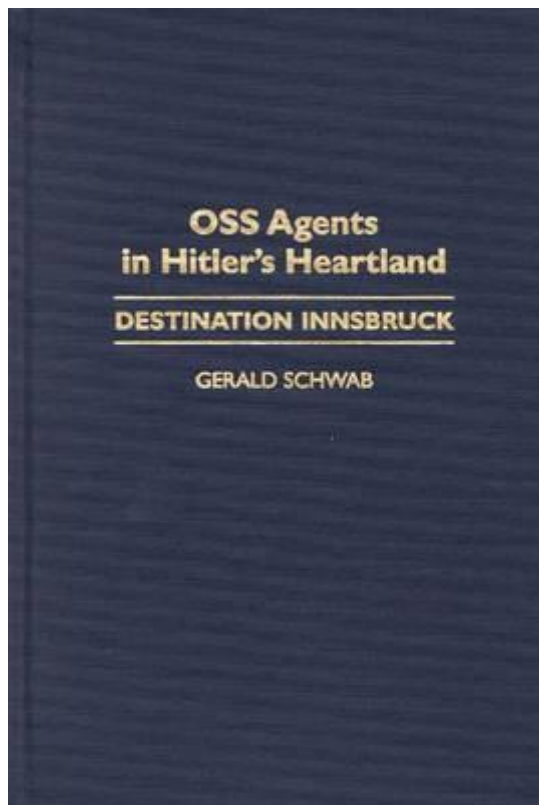
But in, about May 1947, I decided having only two years of high school, I better get back home, go to school. And I went to, being from New Jersey, I went to Rutgers to talk to these people and they said, "Well you're gonna have to finish high school." Well after having been an interpreter at Nuremberg and a junior research analyst for a trial, in another trial, major trial, I figured that pushing a desk, third year high school was not exactly what I was fit for. And so I went to the only school that would accept me with only two years of high school.

PETER BLACK:

And that was?

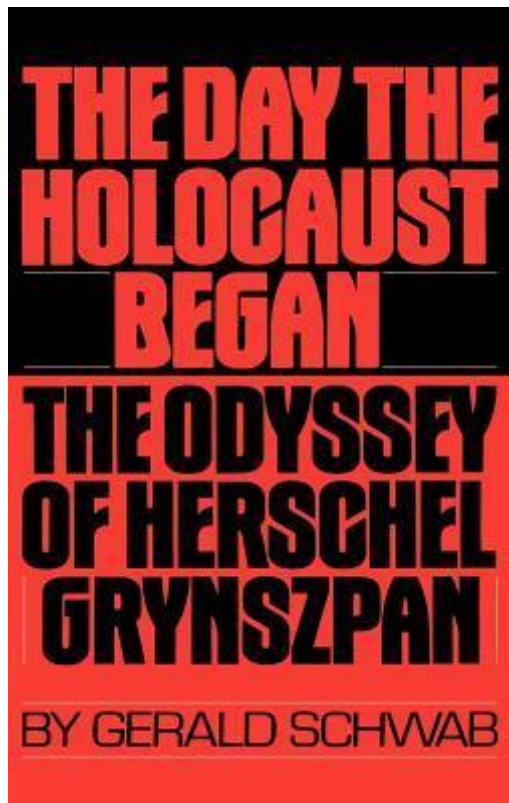
GERALD SCHWAB:

University of Chicago.



Oss Agents In Hitler's Heartland: Destination Innsbruck by **Gerald Schwab**

This book tells the history of one of the most successful OSS operations of World War II. Three OSS agents--two young immigrants, one from Germany, the other from Holland, and a former Austrian Wehrmacht officer--in the midst of winter make a night jump into the Austrian Alps, landing hip-deep in snow at 10,000 feet. William Casey--then an OSS official and later head of the CIA--called it by far the most successful of the operations mounted from the OSS base at Bari. Thanks to this intrepid threesome, rail and road communications between the Italian front and Germany were seriously hampered and the city of Innsbruck in the heart of the Nazi's vaunted stronghold called the National Redoubt, fell to American troops without a shot being fired.



On November 7, 1938, Herschel Grynszpan, a 17-year old Polish-German Jew, walked into the German Embassy in Paris and shot Third Secretary, Ernst vom Rath, who died shortly after. Vom Rath's death triggered the destruction and mahem which became known as Kristallnacht, or The Night of Broken Glass, resulting in the death of hundreds, the razing of 265 synagogues and 200 houses, the demolition of 7,500 business establishments, and the incarceration of 30,000 Jews in concentration camps. Herschel Grynszpan was immediately arrested. France's foremost criminal lawyer took over his defense. On June 8, 1940, two days before the French Government evacuated Paris, the youth was indicted for murder. A month later he was in Nazi hands, being interrogated by the Gestapo in anticipation of a major show trial.

Little has been known in the past about this extraordinary young man. Using German documents never before revealed, including a startling coded testament, Gerald Schwab examines his background and the events culminating in the shooting. The book describes, in considerable detail, Grynszpan's experiences in French and German hands and his trial which was to become Nazi Germany's justification of the Holocaust. It also challenges some commonly held ideas about the cause of the shooting and its aftermath. The "Day the Holocaust Began" describes the life of a mixed-up, emotionally immature youngster who developed into one of the most amazing and unlikely heroes of modern history, demonstrating the power of the human spirit against overwhelming odds. Anyone interested in modern European history, the Nazi Government, the persecution of the European Jews, as well as students of the Holocaust and its many ramifications, will find The Day the Holocaust Began invaluable reading.