

# In the Torments of the Shoah

Melvyn George Fishel



*Auschwitz camp entrance. Photo David M. Fishel 2011.*

Over the years I assembled bits of family information, scanned shoe-boxes and albums full of old photographs and built a simple family tree. There were periods of intense involvement followed by long periods of reduced activity. A new flurry of activity was triggered by my son David's school-trip to Auschwitz and by requests for information from family abroad. Family members who could answer my questions were ageing. The resurgence of extremism also added urgency to the task.

It was clear I needed to focus on close family members who had suffered during the Holocaust. I realised how little the youngest generation knew about the fate of our family during the Shoah. They know generic facts, like the 6 million victims of the Shoah, they also know some names but they had few specific details. Telling the story of our deported family members became a priority project.

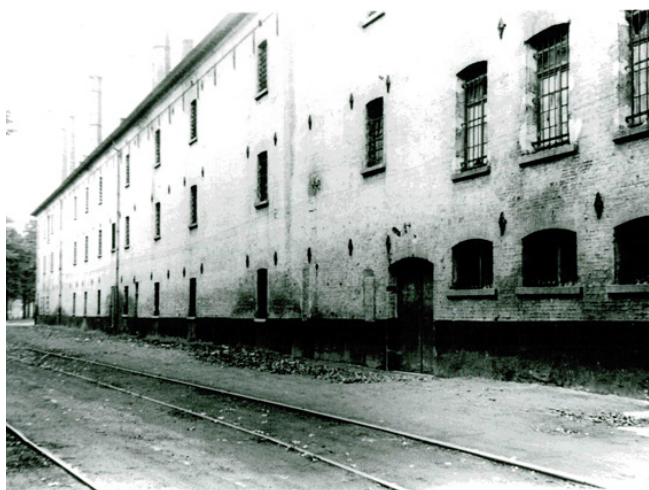
Though I wasn't an actor myself, I felt that if I didn't compile such notes soon, nobody after me probably would or could. Some of the names of deportees mean little to the young ones in the family because they never got to know the deportees. The few remaining survivors in our family were getting very old and soon I would be the eldest. I also needed the family elders to answer many of the questions I had. It was high time to scribble down some notes and throw in documents and the identifiable photos I could find. That's what I did, and here they are.

To compile my notes I used our family tree and existing family pictures as a starting point. I then visited Kazerne Dossin (previously known as the Jewish Museum of Deportation and Resistance) in Mechelen, Belgium in 2011 to obtain additional information. The museum's research centre is housed in Kazerne Dossin itself (the Dossin Barracks, la Caserne Dossin), the very place

where 25,835 Jews from Belgium were put on trains and sent to extermination camps in the East (practically all of them to Auschwitz). Some transports from Northern France also stopped there on their way to Auschwitz. The Germans found “Sammellager Mecheln” (their name for the Dossin barracks) very convenient because:

- its location was ideal (Mechelen is halfway between Antwerp and Brussels, the two towns where most of the Jews of Belgium lived)
- it was huge and could “buffer” up to 2000 people until the next convoy departed
- it was built like a prison with bars on all outside windows and people couldn't escape
- it had railway tracks conveniently running alongside the complex.

Kazerne Dossin in Mechelen (KD in short) is only 25 minutes by car from where I live. There is a museum and a documentation centre. The next pages summarize what I found out about close family members with the help of my surviving family, the family picture shoe-boxes, the KD documentation department and the Service of War Victims in Brussels. To make the events easier and more personal to understand I am also adding lots of information and pictures that do not



*Railway tracks at the barracks (the barracks still stand but the tracks are now gone). Photo courtesy of KD.*



*Trucks unloading families and their belongings at the Dossin barracks. Most of them would die a few days later in Auschwitz. Photo courtesy of Kazerne Dossin.*

originate from Kazerne Dossin or the Service of War Victims but are part of the family patrimony. References to the museum, to people and organizations that helped me, links and other information sources are all at the very end, in part 3 of these notes.

**Part 1** tells the story of our close family during the Holocaust. It includes documents and war era pictures.

**Part 2** is a collection of emotional letters written by our family members just before their deportation and their subsequent murder in Auschwitz. The last letter was written on the very day they stepped on a train in Antwerp to head to the Dossin barracks in Mechelen.

**Part 3** is a reference section with annotations, document sources, acknowledgements and useful links.

My notes were reviewed for location, people, date and convoy accuracy by the helpful people at the Kazerne Dossin research centre and I am pretty confident that all of it is correct, though obviously incomplete as many documents have vanished during the war. In particular, all the letters, photos and documents kept by the family in the house in Antwerp have disappeared during the war, together with all personal belongings taken by the Nazis.

# Part 1

**They were people,  
not numbers**

**This is the story of members of the Fishel, Brunner, Balken and Hollander families during the Holocaust. They may have had numbers tattooed on their forearms, they may have been gassed anonymously, but they were real people with real lives, real families, feelings and dreams.**

## The Belgian branch of the Fishel family before World War II

Mendel Fishel (the father of my dad Len) was born in Kedainiai (Lithuania) in 1888. He was the son of Youdel Fishel, a Lithuanian born around 1851 and who later emigrated with his family to Liverpool. Lithuania was part of the Russian Empire then. Emily Black was born in Liverpool in 1887 (though she preferred to say in 1889) and was the daughter of Isaac Black. Isaac was a Hebrew scholar and a Jewish humorist who wrote about Jewish life in Liverpool under the nom de plume “Ish Montenegro”, a wordplay on “Schwartzberg”, the original “Black” family name before it was “Englishized”.



*Mendel Fishel ca 1920*



*Emily Black ca 1920*

In August 1915 Mendel Fishel married Emily Black in Liverpool. My grandparents Mendel and Emily had two sons born in Liverpool: Maurice Bernard (Benny) born in 1916 and Leonard (my dear father Len) born in 1920.

In 1920 Mendel made several short trips to Belgium and in April 1921 he got the final authorization to settle with his whole family in Antwerp, Belgium. His wife Emily joined him with the two young boys in 1921. A third son, Leon Fishel, was born in Antwerp in December 1921.

My grandfather Mendel was a clothier (“handelaar in klerstoffen” on his papers). As a clothier, and with family in England, he had access to the best English fabrics which he sold in Belgium. He also had beautiful suits tailored for himself and the boys. Mendel was always impeccably dressed. The Fishels lived successively at St Jansplaats 50 and Markgravelei 14 (1920), Desguinlei 38 (1920-1929), Schomstraat 26 (1929-1932), Sint Vincentiusstraat 73 (1932-1934), Verdussenstraat 66 (1934-193?), De Boey 7 (193?-1938) and finally at De Leescorfstraat 53 (now 55) from 1938 until their deportation in 1942, all rented places in the Antwerp area. The children went to school in Belgium.

## Leonard Fishel and Bernard Fishel (my dad Len and his brother Benny)



*Len at Ilag VIII Tost. Len is second from right and his brother Benny is the casual one in shorts.*

were treated like civilians whose country was at war with Germany and sent to civil internment camps, also called Internierungslager or Ilag's in (what is now) Poland and Austria.

Len became internee number 240 in Tost (Upper Silesia). His prisoner card shows he was captured on July 23<sup>rd</sup> 1940 in Antwerp. It was very early in the war, the “final solution for the

In May 1940 Germany invaded Belgium. WWII was going to have an immediate impact on the family. Two of the 3 brothers, Leonard (my dad Len) and Bernard were arrested in Belgium very early in the war. The two eldest brothers had the British nationality (however younger Leon, born in Belgium, did not). Both



*Louis Levy and Len Fishel (first and second from right) at Ilag VIII Tost. Len (moustache) is wearing a snazzy French army coat which the Germans took from the defeated French army and used for their prisoners.*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----

**Personalkarte I: Personelle Angaben**


Kriegsgefangenen-Stammlager: **Ilag VIII** **Ilag Tost** Nr. 240  
 Lager: Ilag VIII D

Beschreibung der Erkennungsmarke:

Name: Fishel Staatsangehörigkeit: Britisch 29.4.22  
 Vorname: Leonard Dienstgrad: .....  
 Geburtstag und -ort: 16. 6. 1920 Liverpool Truppenteil: ..... Komp. usw.: .....  
 Religion: Jüde Zivilberuf: Kaufm. Reisender Berufs-Gr.: .....  
 Vorname des Vaters: Mendel Matrikel Nr. (Stammrolle des Heimatstaates): .....  
 Familienname der Mutter: Emily Black Gefangennamen (Ort und Datum): Antwerpen 23.7.40  
 Ob gesund, krank, verwundet eingeliefert: .....

**Lichtbild** **Nähere Personalbeschreibung**

Größe: 1.74m Haarfarbe: Schwarz Besondere Kennzeichen: .....

Fingerabdruck des rechten Zeigefingers:  Name und Anschrift der zu benachrichtigenden Person in der Heimat des Kriegsgefangenen:  
Mr. Fishel  
Antwerpen 44 Rue des Chateaux  
53 Rue de Legecorp. Bruxelles

Wenden!

Des Kriegsgefangenen

Der Kriegsgefangenen 240, Jüde Leonard Fishel

Jews” had not been worked out yet. They were not taken solely as Jews but as Brits who were Jews (see top handwritten pencil note in red on his card above) and they ended up in civilian internee camps. This most probably saved their lives because the other members of the family who remained in Antwerp were not going to be that “lucky”, as we shall see.

Leonard and Bernard Fishel didn't go to Upper Silesia immediately. They were first sent to the Centenaire in Brussels and subsequently, for a few days each, to Belgian fortresses in Liège, Huy and Dinant then only to Ilag VIII Tost (now Toszek in Poland), then to Ilag VIII Z Kreuzburg (now Kluczbork in Poland) and finally, when the Russians were advancing at the end of the war, to Ilag XVIII Spittal (on the river Drau in Austria). I found pictures my father sent or received during his almost 5 years of internment. Here are a selected few of those pictures:

Life at the camp was harsh and very boring but these were not extermination camps. They got bad food and cheap clothes but could get slow mail (all mail went through censorship of course and got a “Geprüft” stamp on it). Sometimes packs of cigarettes arrived too.



Standing from left to right John Mire, Len Fishel, Willy Lebowicz. Sitting at right is Louis Levy. My dad couldn't remember the name of the other sitting internee.

For a while Len's father Mendel, mother Emily, and younger brother Leon remained in Antwerp (all three died later in Auschwitz). They were able to send letters and photos to the interned Len and Benny to keep their sons' spirits up. Amongst other pictures, the three sent the following lovely postcard (handwritten by Leon) to my father Len, internee 240 at Ilag VIII Tost, in December 1940:



*Postcard with Len's mother Emily Fishel-Black, younger brother Leon Fishel, father Mendel Fishel in Antwerp, December 1940, just before Xmas.*



*On the back it says: "From your loving parents and brother. Mum, Dad, Leon. 23-12-40." Len was prisoner 240. The card also has the ever-present censor's stamp.*

This postcard with a photo of Emily, Leon and Mendel was received by my father Len, prisoner 240 at Ilag VIII Tost, around Xmas 1940. The photo was taken at Studio Willy in Antwerp by photographer William Herskovic who himself was deported with his wife and two children in September 1942. Before arrival, William was taken off the train and sent to a forced labour camp in Peiskretscham (an Auschwitz secondary camp) but his wife and children went on and all died in Auschwitz. Willy daringly escaped from the labour camp with two other prisoners in 1943 and reached Belgium where he went into hiding. He emigrated to America after the war.

After camp ILAG VIII Tost Leonard and Bernard were transferred with other civilian internees to ILAG VIII Z Kreuzburg. Tost was full and it became necessary to unclog it by sending internees to Kreuzburg. The transfer from Tost to Kreuzburg was prioritized by first sending the Jews,



*Ilag VIII Z Kreuzburg 1943. Leonard Fishel 4<sup>th</sup> from right sitting, Bernard Fishel 4<sup>th</sup> from left sitting. Photo Courtesy of Kazerne Dossin.*

whether alone or with several members of the same family, and then the British who were with several members of the same family, regardless of religion. The old asylum's psychiatric patients had all been euthanized by the Nazis and the civilian internees were being housed in the structure instead. The building was originally designed to prevent psychiatric patients from escaping and was therefore also perfectly suited to prevent civilian prisoners from escaping. It became Benny's and Lenny's new residence for a while.



*Dora Brunner 1943. Photo received by Len at Ilag VIII Z Kreuzburg.*

As of the summer of 1942 Len stopped getting mail from his parents and brother Leon (they were all 3 in captivity, or deported, as we will see further). From his internment camp my dad was exchanging correspondence with Mimi Balken who was still in Antwerp (there is a Mimi Balken chapter later in these notes). The correspondence had to be in a language the censors at the camps understood, i.e. German or English was fine but Flemish was not allowed. Mimi wasn't too fluent in English so she asked her cousin Dora Brunner to write to Len instead. This is how my mother Dora (Dody) started to correspond in English with a lonely Len Fishel she didn't know. She sent him this picture of herself in 1943. She herself was hiding from the Germans in Wallonia at that time.

When the end of the war neared, and the Russians were advancing westwards, Benny and Lenny were transferred to yet another camp, Ilag Spittal in Austria. After 5 very long years of internment Leonard and Bernard were liberated from Ilag

Spittal on 9<sup>th</sup> May 1945 by the British 8<sup>th</sup> Army, a day after the war ended. They returned to Belgium via Ancona, Italy and then by boat via Scotland. That boat trip took many days as they had to avoid mines that had not yet been removed. There were also German prisoners on board. Initially the liberated British civilians had to take care of the menial tasks on board. They didn't like having to work while the German prisoners did nothing on the boat. After a small mutiny the potato peeling chore was assigned to the German prisoners. Justice at last.



*Ilag XVIII Spittal a/d Drau. Last internee funeral at the camp. The war was almost over then. Photo Henry Söderberg YMCA.*



*Food and cigarettes parachuted over liberated camp Spittal on May 9<sup>th</sup> 1945. Photo Henry Söderberg YMCA.*

The two boys had lost their home and their family. Their two parents and their younger brother were killed in the Shoah. Bernard went on to live in England and founded a family in Liverpool. Leonard came back to live in Belgium where he married my mother Dora Brunner in Antwerp. They had two children: me and my sister Shirley.

## Mendel Fishel and his wife Emily Black (my paternal grandparents)

When the war broke out Len's parents Mendel and Emily Fishel were living in Borgerhout near Antwerp, at De Leescorfstraat 53 (now number 55). They were tracked by the German Sicherheitspolizei, (the security police) like all the other members of my family (including young children). The Sicherheitsdienst (SD), of which the Gestapo was a part, had headquarters at the posh Avenue Louise in Brussels where they occupied several buildings. The cellars of the buildings were used to detain and interrogate. Records were kept on cards. There were no computers, of course, but the occupier was very organized as you can see below. A lot of the SD cards were found after the war, and this made it possible to find out what had happened to those who had disappeared without a trace. Amongst the SD cards were those for



Mendel 3 November 1941



Emily ca. 1941

Mendel and Emily. They received an Arbeitseinsatzbefehl (AB). An Arbeitseinsatzbefehl is a letter ordering them to go to work for Germany (without specifying where). If questions were asked one usually got a vague answer "somewhere in the East". Mendel's AB number was 001,120, Emily's was 001,114. The AB letters were signed by members of the Jewish Council (they had no choice) and delivered personally at home, sometimes by the local police. The letters warned that those who didn't comply would be sent to a concentration camp. They simply forgot to mention that those who complied would also be sent to a concentration camp.

<b>NAME (m)</b>	FISCHEL
Vornamen	Mendel
Geboren den	10-8-1888 in Kedainau
Ehemann	BLACK, Emily
Ehefrau	
Einwanderung den	1920 aus England
Staatsangehörigkeit	1) Litauische 2) Belgische Einbürgerung den
Konfession	Jüdisch
Beruf	Vertreter, Schneider
Adresse	BORGERHOUT De Leescorf 53 ✓
Arbeitseinsatz Nr 995 den 28/8/44 c-5. AB. 11120	

<b>NAME (w)</b>	BLACK
Vornamen	Emily J.D.
Geboren den	15/2/89 in Liverpool
Ehemann	FISCHEL, Mendel
Ehefrau	
Einwanderung den	1920 aus England
Staatsangehörigkeit	1) Litauische 2) Belgische Einbürgerung den
Konfession	Jüdisch
Beruf	ohne
Adresse	BORGERHOUT, De Leescorf 53 ✓
Arbeitseinsatz Nr 996 den 28/8/44 c-5. AB. 11114	

The cards above are the SD (Sicherheitsdienst) cards that were filed by the Germans at their Avenue Louise headquarters. As you can see, the number of the AB is shown on the card as well as the date of their forced departure to Auschwitz. Sicherheitsdienst cards with such a stamp and a ticked transport list with the same names and numbers are solid proof of deportation. You will see the same deportation numbers on the transport list two pages further.

Mendel and Emily were ordered to come to Caserne Dossin in Mechelen from where they would travel by train to the East and would be “offered work, get rewarded and build a new future for themselves”. It was only 1942, the Jews of Belgium didn't know yet this was a monstrous trap. My grandparents probably also thought it would somehow allow them to be reunited with their sons in captivity in the East. They wrote them 2 letters announcing their deportation. Those are the last 2 letters you will find in Part 2 of these notes. If you read those final letters you will see that they had no clue of what would happen to them.

Mendel and Emily arrived at Kazerne Dossin on 24<sup>th</sup> August 1942 (without son Leon who, by then, was already assigned forced labour in Northern France). A day later, on the 25<sup>th</sup>, Mendel and Emily were deported on transport V (5) to



*Emily Fishel-Black 1927*

Auschwitz. There were 1,000 deportees on that train and my grandparents had numbers 995 and 996. The transport list with Mendel and Emily is on the following page.



*Mendel Fishel ca. 1940  
Photo Ferdinand Buyle.*

Their train arrived in Auschwitz on 27<sup>th</sup> August 1942 after 2 days and 2 nights in the searing heat. It is a meagre consolation, but they probably travelled in a 3<sup>rd</sup> class wagon with wooden seats. Closed cattle cars were only used by the Germans as of Dossin transport number 20. People who were to stay for a while in a death camp, for instance for forced labour, were given a number which was tattooed on their left arm. However, people above the age of 40 and young children were usually gassed immediately and therefore got no tattoo because they were killed the same day anyway. There is no tattoo number on file for my grandparents and their name does not appear on a later death certificate. As a result, we have no certainty about the exact place, time and manner of their death. Given the age of my grandparents Mendel and Emily Fishel (already in their early 50's) and the lack of tattoo records it is extremely likely that they were sent to the gas chambers immediately upon getting off the train.

Just after the war, Len went back to De Leescorfstraat. He found nobody (they all had been deported to Auschwitz) and no belongings (the Germans had subcontracted moving company Arthur-Pierre to remove all belongings). Len went to inquire and knocked on the door of a neighbour across the street. When the neighbour opened his door he was wearing one of the beautiful suits that belonged to Len's father Mendel.



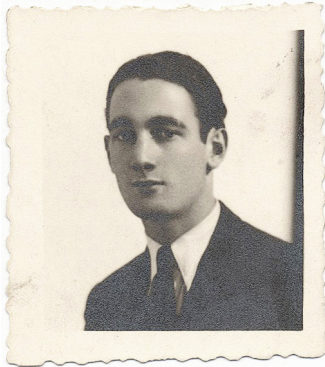
*Auschwitz-Birkenau. Photo David M. Fishel 2011.*

Mendel Fishel and Emily Fishel-Black were both on transport V:

24.8.42		V. TRANSPORT		87.	
995.	Fishel Mendel AB 01120	10.8.88 Kedaniau	X Staatenl. H	Schneider	V V
996.	<del>Black</del> Emilie AB 01114	<i>Epse Fischel Mendel.</i> 15.8.89 Liverpool	X Staatenl. F	Hausfrau	V V
997.	Wahl Abraham Jakob AB 01565	<i>Epse Seewald Esther</i> 1.3.92 Tarnobzeg	X Staatenl. H	Kaufmann	V V
998.	<del>de Wilde</del> Sara AB 01256	<i>Epse de Wilde Kawitz</i> 9.1.93 Amsterdam	X Staatenl. F	Hausfrau	V V
999.	de Wilde Max AB 01255	19.11.25 Amsterdam	X Staatenl. H	Schüler	V V
1000.	de Wilde Benjamin AB 01259	28.5.29 Amsterdam	X Staatenl. G	Schüler	V V

Transport V, the convoy with Mendel and Emily, departed on 24<sup>th</sup> August and arrived at Auschwitz extermination camp on 27<sup>th</sup> August 1942. There is no trace of them, they never returned.

## Leon Fishel (the younger brother of my father Leonard)



Leon Fishel in November 1940



Photo received by Len at Ilag Tost on New Year's eve.

At the beginning of the war there was still some limited Jewish social life in Antwerp and young Leon enjoyed playing football and meeting with friends as the photos here show. He continued to send pictures to his two brothers in captivity.



Leon and the Maccabi Antwerp team on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1941. Leon holds the ball. Nuchem Bodner is kneeling on the far left, Romek Hutterer is kneeling in the middle and Lachowski is the third from the right on the standing row. My dad forgot the other names but the faces were familiar to him.



Leon (kneeling front right) with friends in 1941. Nuchem Bodner next to him.



Leon on the Meir in Antwerp in the spring or summer of 1942 just before his deportation. Leon is wearing the compulsory star of David.

Soon Jews had to register at the Jewish Council (a creation of the Nazis) and their local municipalities and wear the distinctive star of David symbol. They got red "Jood-Juif" (Jew) stamps on their ID cards. Students were no longer allowed to attend their usual schools, parents could not exercise their normal professional activities. The hunt for Jews started and life became a nightmare.

In May or June 1942 Leon Fishel was forced, along with about 2,250 other Jewish workers, to go to France for Organisation Todt and work on jobs assigned by the German occupier. His parents were then still in Antwerp but had now seen all three sons taken away by the Nazis. Soon his parents would be deported while young Leon Fishel was forced to build the Atlantic Wall in Northern France. Leon worked successively for three companies: Ph. Holzmann, Hachez & Isselstein and Leonard Hanbuch & Sohne.

In the fall of 1942, the German occupation administration, realized that their Jew deportation quotas for

that year would not be met. The forced workers of Organisation Todt in France were then also put on deportation lists for the death camps so the extermination quotas could be met.



The sinister tracks at Birkenau.  
Photo David M. Fishel 2011.

On 29<sup>th</sup> October 1942 Leon Fishel was registered as deportee number 15 on transport XVII. His train had departed from France towards Mechelen. After a stop at the Dossin Barracks - where women and children could join their deported husbands, but men were not allowed to get off - the convoy drove on to Auschwitz. Leon, stayed no more than a day at the Dossin Barracks in Mechelen and he never got off the train as there was nobody to meet him (his parents had already been killed in Auschwitz and his two brothers were interned in an Ilag camp). Leon's train departed on the

31<sup>st</sup> and on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1942 Leon arrived in Auschwitz.

We do not know exactly what happened to Leon after his arrival but he never returned from Auschwitz. There is no tattoo number or later death certificate for Leon, but he was a young and able work force. Maybe he was gassed right upon arrival or maybe he had to work for a few months or even a year before he died of illness or exhaustion or was gassed. This uncertainty haunted my dad for years.

NAME (m) FISHEL  
 Vornamen Leon  
 Geboren den 27-12-1921 in Antwerpen  
 Ehemann  
 Ehefrau  
 Einwanderung den  
 Staatsangehörigkeit } 1) Litauische  
 2) Belgische Einbürgerung den  
 Konfession Jüdisch  
 Beruf Händler  
 Adresse BORGERHOUT De Leescorff 53  
 Arbeitsersatz Nr 15 des 31/10/42

SD card for Leon Fishel. He was deported to Auschwitz at the end of October 1942.

Five months before the end of the war my father received a printed postcard while he was still at camp Ilag Kreuzburg but only my dad's name and internee number were on it, nothing else was written on the pre-printed German-camp postcard. No text, no sender, no date, no name and no signature. My dad didn't know who sent it or when it was sent but fantasized maybe Leon was still alive then and had tried to communicate with him. He wondered who else in a German camp could have known his internee number.



Cremation ovens in Auschwitz. Photo David M. Fishel, 2001.

In reality, however, we don't know when Leon died or was gassed. All we are certain of is that Leon was 20 years old, almost 21, when he arrived at Auschwitz in November 1942, that he never returned and that Dad missed him terribly.

Here is the page of the transport list of convoy XVII with Leon Fishel as deportee number 15. His train came from Northern France, stopped 1 day at Kazerne Dossin ( SS-Samellager Mechelen) then continued on to Auschwitz. Leon's transport XVII arrived in Auschwitz on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1942. Leon was 20 and never returned.

29.10.42		TRANSPORTLISTE.					
1.	Gielhorn Jacques	28. 5.95 Lodz	X	stl.	H	Maler.	✓
2.	Danigier Feiwel	28. 5.99 Wolbrom	X	stl.	H	Schneidersge	✓
<i>Eprouve de CHAUDES Carbo</i>							
3.	Goldman Max <i>Majer</i>	14. 3.02 Tomaszow	X	stl.	H	Anstreicher.	✓
4.	Gymerman Szmul	14. 2.09 Chodel	X	stl.	H	Schneider.	✓
5.	Glater Abraham	7. 7.98 Pabjanice	X	stl.	H	Diamantarbeiter.	✓
6.	Gottesman David	6.11.95 <i>RAJEID</i> <del>Rjepid</del> <i>RATIED</i>	X	stl.	H	Schuster.	✓
7.	Aronowitz Max	8. 6.99 Wirbalen	X	stl.	H	Schneider.	✓
8.	Goldman Chaim <i>Majer</i>	14. 1.02 Sandomierz	X	stl.	H	Pelzarbeiter.	✓
9.	Gottlieb Siegfried	23.10.23 Berlin	X	stl.	H	Fachzeichner.	✓
10.	Blat Calel	12/24.9.93 Brzesing	X	stl.	H	Maler.	✓
<i>Eprouve de LAJZEROWICZ. Jera</i>							
11.	Reiner Leib	18. 8.97 <del>XXXXXXXXXXXX</del> DEBICA	X	stl.	H	Diamantsäge	✓
12.	Goldberg Piakus	12.10.02 Piotrkow	X	stl.	H	Schuh	✓
13.	Goldberger Ignace	16. 10. 11 19.11.11. Menkac <i>MURAGEVE</i>	X	stl.	H	Schr	✓
14.	Gorlicki Chil	23. 2.02 Chmielnik	X	stl.	H	So	✓
15.	<i>FISHEL</i> Fishel Leon	27.12.21 Antwerpen	X	stl.	H	K	✓

## Menasche (Maximilian) Brunner, my maternal grandfather



*Maximilian Brunner (the little boy) and his sisters Rachel (left) and Esther (right) and both parents ca. 1899.*

Max, a Austro-Hungarian citizen, was a child when he came to Belgium with his parents early in 1899. During the 1914-1918 war my grandfather Max had to go fight for the Austro-Hungarian Empire of which he was still a citizen. He obtained multiple medals and decorations (people were very fond of those back then).

After WWI Max and his wife Esther lived in Budapest for a while (at Rombachgasse 2) then came back to Belgium. My maternal grandfather established himself permanently in Belgium, but it wasn't easy because of his war antecedents.



*Max Brunner (my future grandfather) and Dora Brunner (my future mother) on the Meir in Antwerp in March 1941.*

Max Brunner, the father of my mother Dora Brunner, was born in Hungary in 1894. His parents and the parents of his wife Esther Holländer all originated from the same region of Neu Sandez in Poland. Max had two sisters, Rachel and Esther Brunner.

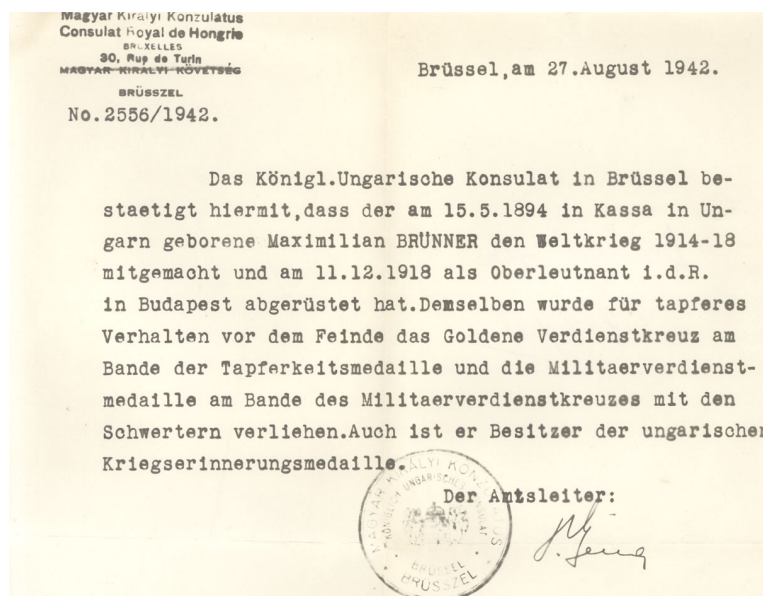


*Max Brunner as decorated officer of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He became Oberleutnant.*

Maximilian and Esther Brunner had two children in Antwerp: my mother Dora Brunner, born in 1919, and my uncle Henri Brunner, born in 1924.

My grandfather Max (I knew him as Macky) got arrested in Brussels on 11th June 1943. A German officer stopped him in the street and asked to see his papers. Max produced crisp identity papers and spoke impeccable German. The officer was going to let him go but Le Gros Jacques (an infamous traitor who was remunerated to find and denounce other Jews) had witnessed the scene from a parked car and told the officer that Max should be taken in to Gestapo headquarters for further interrogation. Max was driven to the headquarters where he was

interrogated and beaten but never revealed where his family was hiding. His brand new papers showed the real hiding address of the family in Genval but the Germans believed he had a fake ID card and therefore never went to check. Max was finally brought to Kazerne Dossin in Mechelen where his sister, Rachel Brunner (my Tante Rosa), had already been imprisoned. She belonged to the Werkleute of the camp, the maintenance and care team of the complex, and knew her way around in the camp.



Letter from the Hungarian Consulate in Brussels.

Max first ended up as deportee 704 on the June 1943 convoy number XXI to Auschwitz but, thanks to the efforts of his wife Esther Brunner-Hollander (my grandmother Bobonne) who moved heaven and earth and used Hungarian consular intervention (see letter): Max had been a decorated officer in the Austro-Hungarian Empire army during the 1914-1918 war. He was removed from this transport list while his case was reviewed. The lady who took his place on the list for transport XXI sadly died in Auschwitz.

departing on 13 December 1943. Max was nearly 50 and this last minute change of transport probably saved his life as he likely would have been gassed upon arrival in Auschwitz. Max arrived at Buchenwald on 15th December 1943. He survived the terrible ordeal and behaved remarkably. There

is even a Buchenwald picture with Max on it (he is the one holding the water pitcher). He unfortunately arrived too late to help another prisoner who had just died of exhaustion.

12.6.43

NAME (m) BRUNNER

Vornamen Max

Geboren den 15/5/1894 in Kasschau

Ehemann HOLLANDER Ester

Ehefrau

Einwanderung den 1898

Staatsangehörigkeit { 1) Heimatlos Ungarischer Herkunft  
2) Belgische Einbürgerung den

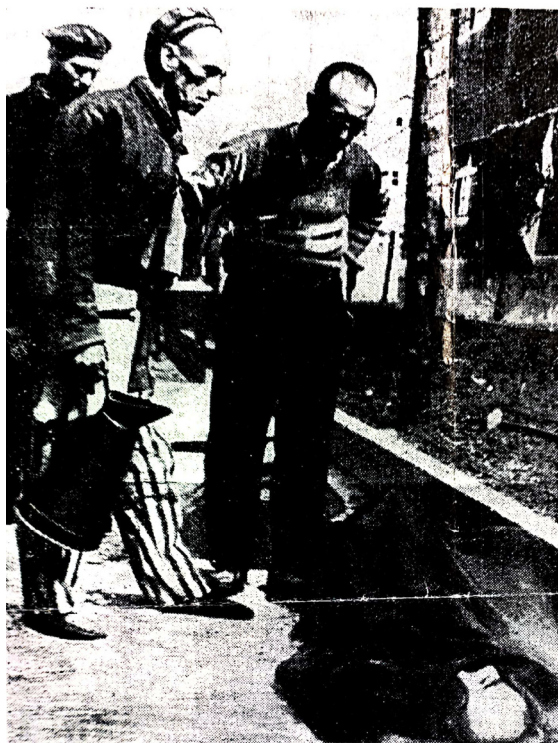
Konfession jüd

Beruf Diamantarbeiter

Adresse KAPELLEN, Prinses Elisa lei, 4

DOCUMENT trouvé  
à la Werbestell. de HASSELT  
TR 20154 Rep 467

SD card for Max discovered at the Werbestell in Hasselt.



Elend, Hunger und Tod: Häftlinge im faschistischen Konzentrationslager Buchenwald.

Here is the first transport list with Max Brunner scheduled as deportee number 704 on transport XXI. Max was taken off that transport to Auschwitz while his case was debated. He was put on another one to Buchenwald in December 1943. A 27 year old woman from Amsterdam took his place on the transport to Auschwitz. She was killed there and so were her sister and her father. There is also a Doctor in Art History, her 3 year old child, and a 12 year old student on this Auschwitz list...

12.6.43		XXI. TRANSPORT		54.	
✓	704. <del>Brunner</del> Maximilian Roggenauer	Antwerpen 57 Princessegracht Roggenauer	18.8.94 25.8.16	stl. F	Hausfrau Koch
✓	705. Reiter	St. Gilles Bail 109 Avenue Tommy	24.5.90 Nowica	stl. H	ohne Spezialiste in Mineralien
✓	706. Turner Max		20.4.31 Antwerpen	stl. G	Schüler
✓	707. Raizner	St. Gilles Israel Towie 312 Rue de Herode Ep. de HALPERN. Mania	31.3.02 Warschau	stl. H	Sticker
✓	708. Halpern Mania		27.10.05 Warschau	stl. F	Schneiderin
✓	709. Chazanowski Chazanowski	Ep. de RAIZNER. Daniel Schneider	9.1.02 Warschau	stl. H	Radioelektriker
	710. Wolf Simon Richard		18.9.94 Köln	stl.	ohne
✓	711. Wolf-Kallmann Ray Gerlinelovise Ep. de ACKERMANN. Stefan	Springer Louise	28.11.11 Köln	stl. F	Dr. in Kunst- Krankengeschichte geschichte.
✓	712. Wolf Helga	Thomas-Peter Wamb	23.12.39 Pilsen	stl. F	Schneiderin ohne
✓	713. Blau Israel Walter	St. Fosse de Noe 18 Rue de la Vierge Wien	24.2.13	stl. H	Juwelenfasser
✓	714. Rosen Bernard		23.8.11 Krakau	stl. H	Kürschner
✓	715. Kolkow Max	Antwerpen Ep. de Kupensstraat	2.4.25 Dresden	stl. H	Kürschner
✓	716. Löwenstein Josef 22 Rue Alph. Hoblat		30.1.98 Brückenaue	stl. H	ohne
✓	717. Löwenstein-Euphrat Elise Elisabeth	Ep. de EUPHRAT Elisabeth	20.4.03 Berlin	stl. F	Hausfrau
✓	718. Löwenstein Margarete	Ep. de LOWENSTEIN Josef	3.10.26 Berlin	stl. F	ohne

Here is Max Brunner's second transport list. Max finally became deportee 16 on special transport Z, this time to Buchenwald, on 13th December 1943:

N <sup>o</sup> .	Nom et prénom	lieu et date de naissance.	nationalité	profession	domicile
1-21	COHEN Y ESCALONI Dario	Salonique 15.9.1892	espagnol	commerçant	✓
2-22	COHEN Y ESCALONI née Levy, Ester	Constantinople 20.3.1902	espagnol	sans	✓
3-23	COHEN Y ESCALONI Rita	St. Gilles 29.7.1926	espagnol	sans	st. Gilles ✓
4-24	COHEN Y ESCALONI Liliane	Bruxelles, 4.4.1932.			Rue de la ✓
5-25	COHEN Y ESCALONI Silvio	Bruxelles Jo. S. J.			victoire 112 ✓
6	BEKEFI George	SZEGED 11.11.1901	hongrie	artiste	Bruxelles ✓ fiche all. belge
7	LEVY Saltana	Constantinople 10.9.1877	turque	sans	St. Gilles 112 ✓ R. d. 1; victoire
8	SACUTO Y SORIA Elias	Constantinople 15.5.1897	espagnol	courtier tapis	Bruxelles ✓ R. Capouillet 6
9	ARON Margarethe	Bucarest 1.10.1896	roumain	tailleur de diamants	Anvers ✓ Bouvensstr. 6 fiche all. belge
10	ARON Jac	Bucarest 8.8.1908	roumain	colporteur	St. Gilles 33 ✓ Fern. Bernier
11	ABRAMOWITZ, Tania	Kichineff 6.12.1923	apatride (roumain)	sans	✓
12	ABRAMOWITZ, Thigina	Thigina 10.9.1889	"	sans	Anvers ✓
13	ABRAMOWITZ, Lele	Thigina 23.4.1915	"	commerçant	Clementina- ✓ straat 54
14	ADLER Ella	Kichineff 20.8.1919	"	employé	✓
15	ADLER Ella	Berchcw 27.2.1919	hongrie	tailleuse	Bruxelles 175 ✓ Bd. E. Nockstaël
16	BRUNNER Maximilian	Kassa 15.5.1884	hongrie		✓
17	FRIED Eugen	Szatmar 17.4.1903	hongrie	technicien mécanicien	Bruxelles ✓
18	FRIED Aurelia	Sighet 13.8.1909	hongrie	sans	Bd. Anspach ✓ 159
19	ARENSTEIN Alfred	Berlin 28.2.1915	hongrie	tailleur	Bruxelles ✓ R. Maronnier 31
20	EPSTEIN Moszek-Jankiel	Klimontov 14.12.1908	portugais		✓
21	EPSTEIN Cipe - Hene	Grodno 14.8.1907	"		Bruxelles ✓ Rue van Artevelde 8
22	WEISZ Georges				✓
23	EPSTEIN Jacques Henri	Bruxelles 7.6.1929	"		✓
24	GANZO Jacques	Constantinople 19.1.1893	turque	colporteur	Mons ✓ R. d. Fripiers 5

KL: Max Brunner Jude

**Häftlings-Personal-Karte**

Fam.-Name: Brunner Überstellt: \_\_\_\_\_ Personen-Beschreibung **Politisch erfährt**

Vorname: Max am: \_\_\_\_\_ an KL. Größe: 167 cm

Geb. am: 15.5.94 in: Kaschau 2 am: \_\_\_\_\_ an KL. Gestalt: schlank

Stand: verh. Kinder: \_\_\_\_\_ am: \_\_\_\_\_ an KL. Gesicht: oval

Wohnort: Kapellen, Princes Elisa- am: \_\_\_\_\_ an KL. Augen: grau

Strasse: bethlei 4., Fr. Antwerpen am: \_\_\_\_\_ an KL. Nase: gebogen

Religion: mos. Staatsang.: Ungarn am: \_\_\_\_\_ an KL. Mund: gewöhnlich

Wohnort d. Angehörigen: Ehefrau: am: \_\_\_\_\_ an KL. Ohren: abstehend

Esther Br., Kapellen, am: \_\_\_\_\_ an KL. Zähne: lückenhaft

W.O. am: \_\_\_\_\_ an KL. Haare: kastan. grau

Eingewiesen am: 15.12.1943 am: \_\_\_\_\_ an KL. Sprache: ungar., franz.,

durch: Sipo.-Brüssel am: \_\_\_\_\_ an KL. niedrl. deutsch

in KL.: Buchenwald am: \_\_\_\_\_ an KL. Bes. Kennzeichen: keine

Grund: Polit. Ungare-Jude Entlassung: \_\_\_\_\_ durch KL.: \_\_\_\_\_

Vorstrafen: keine am: \_\_\_\_\_ durch KL.: \_\_\_\_\_

mit Verfügung v. \_\_\_\_\_

Strafen im Lager: \_\_\_\_\_

Grund: \_\_\_\_\_ Art: \_\_\_\_\_ ung: \_\_\_\_\_

I. I. S. FOTO Nr. 2193 keine

Körperliche Verfassung: \_\_\_\_\_

Charakt.-Eigenschaften: \_\_\_\_\_

Sicherheit b. Einsatz: \_\_\_\_\_

KL 54.43 - 50000 2058a/8

Max Brunner was prisoner number 30049 at the horrid Buchenwald concentration camp near Weimar. My grandfather Max did not get a number tattooed on his arm (prisoners did not get tattoos in Buchenwald) but he had to wear a pin with his prisoner number. His pin is now kept at the Jewish Museum in Brussels and I quickly made a picture of it when it was shown to me. After the war Max had a tie-clip custom-made with his Buchenwald prisoner number 30049



on it and he wore it whenever he wore a tie, so as never to let anyone forget. By coincidence I made a picture of him on my cheap Kodak box camera when I was a kid and he wore the Buchenwald number tie clip that day too (see picture).



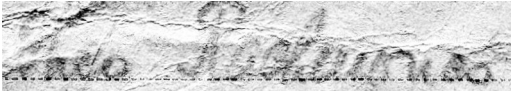
Max fought to survive. He could not write directly and ask for Red Cross packets, his letter would have been censored. So he used a trick to obtain Red Cross packets which he could eat or barter with others in the camp. He had heard that

his daughter Dody (in hiding in Belgium) was corresponding with a prisoner in another German camp (Kreuzburg), a guy he didn't know, a certain Leonard Fishel (yes, my father). He sent a German postcard under

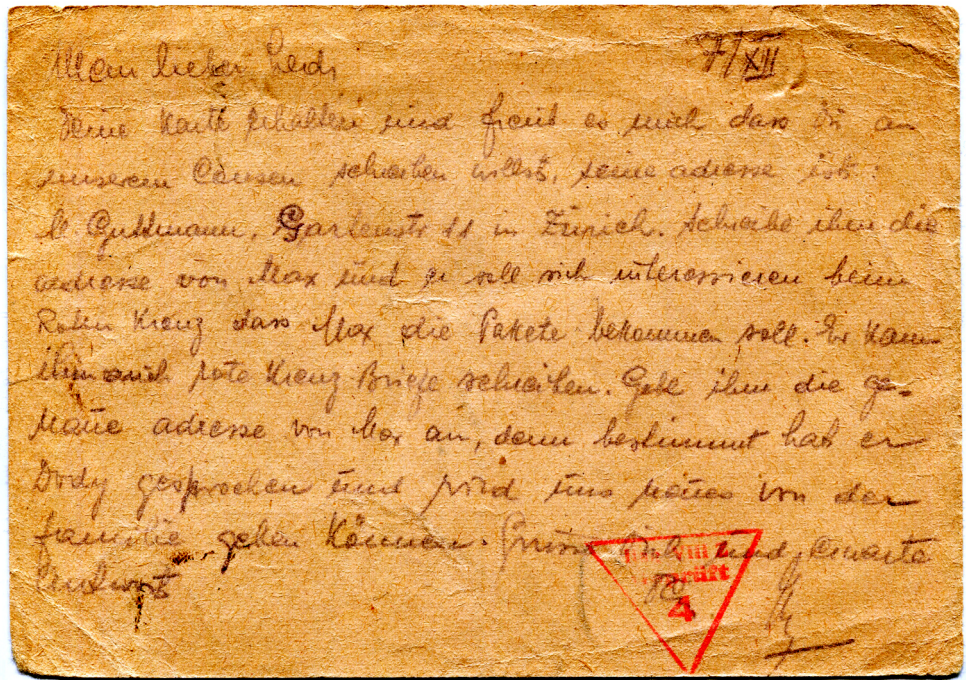
a fake name to this Leonard and asked him to relay to his daughter Dody (my future mother) instructions to have Red Cross packets sent to a certain Max Brunner (his own real name) in Buchenwald, via someone he knew in Zürich. He didn't give the family name of Dody or use his real name. He used a stratagem, the name of the card sender on the back of the card (Absender at top left)

was a fake pseudo-name "Theo Rachmones" which is a clever word-play using a mixture of Greek and Yiddish. Theo means God and rachmones means mercy, so his pseudo-name on the card meant "God have mercy". Len and Dody got it but the German censors were fooled and soon Red Cross packets began arriving for Max in Buchenwald. My dad Leonard kept the card until his own liberation.





Text side of Max Brunner's card to my father Leonard (they didn't know each other and had never met). Max pretends to be a fictitious guy Theo Rachmones (see Absender on back of card) and gives instructions on how to tell his daughter Dody to request Red Cross packets to be sent to a certain Max (meaning himself in fact). The name Brunner is never mentioned on the card. Dody was exchanging letters with Leonard then. My parents got married after the war.



Max survived the terrible ordeal and was freed in Buchenwald by the American army on April 28th 1945. On May 3rd 1945 Maximilian Brunner (a.k.a. Max or Menashe) was repatriated to Belgium through Turin. Max had suffered a lot and weighed barely 42 kg when he arrived in Belgium. Max is the one waving after getting off the airplane.

Upon their return, an emotional heroes' welcome was organized for the freed Buchenwald prisoners at the Cirque Royal in Brussels. The picture of my grandfather Max reunited with his wife Esther and son Henri made it to the front-page of two major Belgian newspapers: "Le Soir" and "La Dernière Heure". It is an iconic photo in the family. Henri had volunteered for the Belgian army and was in uniform.



Max Brunner returned from Buchenwald and was reunited with his wife, daughter and son at the Cirque Royal in Brussels. This very picture appeared on the front-page of newspapers Le Soir and La Dernière Heure on 4th May 1945.

## Rachel (Rosa) Brunner, husband Osias (Oscar) Balken and 4 children

My grandfather Max had two sisters: **Rachel** and **Esther**. Rachel Brunner (also known as aunt Rosa), was married to **Oscar** Balken and they had 4 children: two daughters (**Mina** and **Yolande**) and two sons (**Bernard** and **Aron**). At the onset of war it was a large family of 6.



Yolande Balken

**Yolande Balken** was born 13<sup>th</sup> May 1926. She was the first member of the Balken family to be deported. Yolande came to the Dossin barracks on 5<sup>th</sup> August 1942 because she had received Arbeitseinsatzbefehl number 004,188. Yolande became deportee number 800 on transport convoy II. This train, one of the earliest to leave Mechelen for Auschwitz, departed on 11<sup>th</sup> August 1942 and arrived in Auschwitz on 13<sup>th</sup> August 1942. We do not know what happened to Yolande after her arrival at the extermination camp. There is no tattoo number or death certificate on file. She was young but we don't know in what state of fatigue she arrived after the voyage. Perhaps she was gassed immediately, perhaps she died later. We don't know the exact date, place and circumstances of her death but we know that she never came back from Auschwitz. Yolande was a 16 year old student when she was deported and killed.

NAME (w) \_\_\_\_\_ BALKEN \_\_\_\_\_

Vornamen \_\_\_\_\_ Yolande \_\_\_\_\_ JD

Geboren den 13/5/1926 in Berchem

Ehemann \_\_\_\_\_

Ehefrau \_\_\_\_\_

Einwanderung den \_\_\_\_\_

Staatsangehörigkeit } 1) Stl. aus Prof.

2) Belgische Einbürgerung den \_\_\_\_\_

Konfession \_\_\_\_\_ Jüdisch

Beruf \_\_\_\_\_ ohne \_\_\_\_\_

Adresse \_\_\_\_\_ ANTWERPEN Isabellalei 24 ←

*C. 2*

Arbeitsinsatz Nr. 800 den 16/8/42

CB. 4188

SD card for Yolande Balken

Yolande Balken left as deportee 800 on transport II:

5-8-42		II-TRANSPORT		55	
✓ 791.	Broder Karel-Johannes AB. 8322	7-11-24 Borgerhout (Antwerpen)	Staatenl. H	Schüler	V T
792.	Klaper Nina AB. 2408	27-10-19 Göttingen	Staatenl. F	Verkauferrin	V V
793.	Offen Wali AB. 4389	10-12-24 Berlin	STAATENL. F	Haushalt	V V
✓ 794.	Rens Pauline AB. 4270	11-2-20 Amsterdam	Staatenl. F	Kontoristin	V V
✓ 795.	Abas Be/tje AB. 4331	8-4-18 Rotterdam	Staatenl. F	Typistin	V T
796.	Gobus Elisabeth AB. 4338	22-8-23 Amsterdam	Staatenl. F	Diamantschneiderin	V T
797.	Gobus Abraham 4210	31-7-27 Borgerhout (Antwerpen)	Staatenl. G	Gertherschule	V T
798.	<b>DA CUNKA</b> Da Cunka Abraham AB. 4325	21-12-13 Antwerpen	Staatenl. H	Artist	V T
✓ 799.	Berlstein Salomea AB. 4187	28-6-26 Lemberg	Staatenl. F	Buchhalterin	V T
✓ 800.	Balken Yolande AB. 4188	13-5-26 Berchem (Antwerpen)	Staatenl. F	Handelschule	V T

Yolande's transport arrived at Auschwitz on 13<sup>th</sup> August 1942. Yolande was a student, she was 16. She never came back or was heard of again. When her mother Rachel was sent to Auschwitz later on she couldn't find a trace of her, Yolande was long dead..

## Abraham Osias (Oscar) Balken

Oscar Balken, the husband of Rachel Brunner (my Tante Rosa) and father of Yolande and 3 other children, was given compulsory labour by Organisation Todt. He was forced to work for company H. Micka in Northern France. On 29<sup>th</sup> October 1942, Oscar was added to transport XVI as deportee number 771 to Auschwitz. This train left the North of France on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1942 and arrived at Auschwitz (after a detour via Kazerne Dossin in Mechelen) on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1942.



*Oscar Balken*

Oscar Balken and Leon Fishel departed to Auschwitz on the same date but they were not on the same train. Anyway I don't think they knew each other as the Fishel and Brunner/Balken families only got close when my parents married in 1945 (even though Len Fishel and Mimi Balken,

Oscar's daughter, had exchanged correspondence). I am sure they didn't meet on the arrival quay at Auschwitz while people were selected for the gas chambers. They probably didn't meet earlier in Northern France while working on the Atlantic Wall construction either because Oscar worked in Camiers while Leon worked in Boulogne-sur-mer and Istres. We will never know, as both died in Auschwitz.

We do not know what happened to Oscar after his arrival in Auschwitz. There is no known tattoo number or death certificate for him. Oscar never returned from Auschwitz. The precise date,



*From left: Oscar Balken, Yolande Balken, Rosa Balken, Mina Balken et al. In the early 1930's.*

NAME (w)	BALKEN
Vornamen	Abraham Osias
Geboren den	28-1-1895 in Kolomsya
Ehemann Ehefrau	BRUNNER, Rachel
Einwanderung den	1911 aus Polen
Staatsangehörigkeit	1) Stl. russ. Urspr.
	2) Belgische Einbürgerung den
Konfession	Jüdisch
Beruf	Polzarbeiter Diamantarbeiter
Adresse	ANTWERPEN - Iacobellelei - 24 SCHAERBEEK, Chée de Haecht, 406, 22/7/42
Arbeitsersatz Nr 771 den 31/10/42	

Sicherheitsdienst card Oscar Balken

place or circumstances of Oscar's death are therefore unknown but, because of his age (47), he was probably gassed immediately upon arrival. Oscar had a wife and 4 children and all 6 of them would be severely impacted by the war. Three members of the Balken family died as a result of their deportation to Auschwitz, read on to find out more...



*Esther Hollander-Brunner, Oscar Balken, Max Brunner, Rosa Balken-Brunner, Yolande Balken in the 1930's.*

Here is the list of transport XVI with Abraham Osias Balken (Oscar) as deportee 771. There are only men on this train. It was full of Organisation Todt forced labourers being sent to die in Auschwitz so that Nazi extermination targets would be met.

9.10.42		XVI TRANSPORT	
X	767. Horyn "oj sze <i>Epa de LEVENBERG, Pesa</i>	18.5.1899 Baluti	X Stl. ✓ H Schreiner ✓ ✓
O	768. Broder Emanuel <i>Epa de De WILDE, Belona</i>	12.10.98 Podgorze	X Stl. ✓ H Diamantschneider ✓ ✓
O	769. Broder Jacob	8.2.23 Antwerpen - <i>Bor GERHOUT</i>	X Stl. ✓ H Diamantschneider ✓
✓	770. Abraham Ludwig	8.1.01 Popievo	X Stl. ✓ H Diamantschneider ✓
✓	771. Balken Abraham <i>Epa de BRUNNER, Tschel</i>	28.1.95 Kolomna YA	X Stl. ✓ H Pelzarbeiter ✓
O	772. Binder Lucien <i>MUSEM-LEIB Epa de KORB, Pesa</i>	21.7.92 Sihawa	X Stl. ✓ H Pelzarbeiter ✓
O	773. Borgenicht Isaak <i>Epa de JAKONT, Jana</i>	12.5.1903 Zalubinsse NOWY-SAKZ	X Stl. ✓ H Arbeiter ✓
O	774. Blacher P. Schepsel <i>Epa de NIEWIARSKI, Brayna</i>	9.11.09 Porozow	X Stl. ✓ H Diamantsaeger ✓
X	775. Himmel P. Bernard <i>Epa de RECHTER, Regi</i>	9.9.1909 Nizni-Verechy	X Stl. ✓ H Pelzarbeiter ✓
O	776. Boksenbaum P. Kiwa <i>Epa de <del>KERSZENBERG</del> TROVICE</i>	15/10/03 TROVICE	X Stl. ✓ H Pelzarbeiter ✓
O	777. Blog Lodewijk	24.2.23 Amsterdam	X Stl. ✓ H Diamantschleifer ✓
O	778. <i>BORENSZTAJN</i> Bernstein Wolf	24.7.02 Wodzislaw	X Stl. ✓ H Anstreicher ✓
O	779. Brand Julius	11.4.1923 Berchovo	X Stl. ✓ H Kuerschner ✓
O	780. Breuer Erno	12.5.1910 XHandzinsopron	X Stl. ✓ H Mechaniker ✓

Oscar arrived in Auschwitz on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1942 and never returned. He had 4 children before the war. His two girls didn't return either.

## Rachel (Rosa) Balken - Brunner



Rachel (Rosa) Balken-Brunner

Rachel Brunner (my Tante Rosa, the wife of Oscar Balken) was arrested in January 1943 and arrived at the Dossin Barracks on 28<sup>th</sup> January 1943. The scribbled notes found on a brown envelope in which some of her personal effects were kept show how her two very young sons Bernard and Aron had initially accompanied her to the Dossin Barracks. In the end the little boys were not added to a deportation list, but were placed in a Jewish orphanage in Wezembeek-Oppem near Brussels.

Rachel Brunner worked more than a year at Kazerne Dossin. She belonged to the Werkleute of the camp, the maintenance and care team of the barracks. She had some earlier Red Cross training, spoke many languages fluently and had



Rachel Brunner as young Red Cross volunteer.

professional sewing abilities. On 4<sup>th</sup> April 1944 she was placed on transport XXIV to Auschwitz (with her daughter Mina). Rachel was deportee number 146. Their train arrived in Auschwitz on 7<sup>th</sup> April 1944. Rosa's arm was tattooed with number 76609. In February 1945 Rosa was moved to the dreaded Ravensbrück camp. It is quite possible that a part of this trip was a death march. The purpose of death marches was to kill as many surviving prisoners as possible. Later in 1945 Rosa was transferred to Neustadt - Glewe where she was liberated on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1945 by the Russian army. On 5<sup>th</sup> June 1945 Rachel was repatriated to Belgium.

Bond der Kroostrijke Gezinnen van België  
Vereeniging zonder winstgevend doel

Afdeeling van Antwerpen 117 Nr. 1 12410

Lidkaart (Werkend Lid) **1942**

Naam en Voornamen: Balken Rosa

Adres: Isbellalei 24

Beroep: diamantbewerker

De Algemeen Secretaris, Dr. FRANSEN. De Algemeen Voorzitter, L. LEMERCIER.

NAMENS HET VLAAMSCH CENTRAAL COMITE, De Secretaris, L. SCHEERE. De Voorzitter, J. VAN CAENEGEM.

Zieh U reeds LID van een HULP-FONDS voor Weduwen en Weezen?

Rosa Balken carried this member card of the Union of Large Families with her when she arrived at Kazerne Dossin. She had a family of 6. After the war she had lost her husband and 2 daughters in the Shoah and no longer fulfilled the requirements for such a card.

Rachel lost her husband and her two daughters to the Shoah and narrowly escaped herself.

After the war Rosa worked very hard and devoted the rest of her life to her two surviving boys. I remember she knitted many woollen jumpers (but the ones she made for me were never in the colour I had chosen). She often helped in the kitchen at Pension Brunner, a kosher hotel in Heide-Kalmthout. I loved her delicious meatballs with gravy.

117-43 WJ 76609 AA R

NAME (m) BRUNNER

Vornamen Rachel

Geboren den 9/11/1897 in Szezanonice

Ehemann BALKEN Abraham  
Ehefrau

Einwanderung den 1899 Poland

Staatsangehörigkeit } 1) Polen  
2) Belgische Einbürgerung den

Konfession isrl.

Beruf ohne

Adresse ANTWERPEN, Isbellalei, 24 ✓

Document from 117-43  
in Werbestat 146 de Hasselt  
Arbeitseinsatz Nr. 146  
Kap 402

SD (Sicherheitsdienst) card for Rachel Brunner

## Mina (Mimi) Balken

**NAME** (M) BALKEN  
 Vornamen Mina  
 Geboren den 16-10-1923 in Berchem  
 Ehemann \_\_\_\_\_  
 Ehefrau \_\_\_\_\_  
 Einwanderung den \_\_\_\_\_  
 Staatsangehörigkeit { 1) belgische  
 2) Belgische Einbürgerung den \_\_\_\_\_  
 Konfession Jüdische  
 Beruf ohne  
 Adresse ANTWERPEN Isabellalei 24  
 Arbeitseinsatz Nr 144 den 4.4.44

Sicherheitsdeinst (SD) card for Mina Balken

Mimi Balken was the eldest daughter of Oscar and Rosa. Mimi was taken during a horrid razzia of the Flemish SS and imprisoned in Antwerp on 11th March 1943, but was released on 20th March. On 28th May 1943 she was again arrested in Antwerp. The 19 year old Mimi stayed in prison in Antwerp, until 16th September 1943, the day she was transferred to the Dossin Barracks in Mechelen. In the barracks, she was reunited with her mother Rachel who was there already.

On 4th April 1944 Rachel and Mina were both deported to Auschwitz on the same convoy. Mina Balken was deportee number 147 on transport XXIV. Upon arrival at Auschwitz, the number 76608 was tattooed on Mina's arm. Mina remained in Auschwitz until the camp's evacuation to Ravensbrück by the end of the war though the exact date of her evacuation is unknown. Treatment in Ravensbrück was again horrendous. She was released on 2nd May 1945 and liberated in Ravensbrück. On 30th May 1945 Mimi was repatriated to Belgium via Brussels.

After of all she went through during the horrid Antwerp razzias and at the Auschwitz and Ravensbrück camps, Mimi was terminally ill. She suffered from pleurisy, typhoid and general exhaustion. Mimi couldn't survive. Mina Balken died 2 months later in Westmalle, Belgium on 6th August 1945. Mimi was buried in Putte, just over the border in Holland (like so many Antwerp Jews because concessions in Holland were unlimited in time). Only one single person of the family was able to attend poor Mimi's burial. At war's end the border with Holland was still closed and only my uncle Henri Brunner, who was in Belgian military uniform at the time, was able to cross the border into Holland without visa. Mimi was 21 when she died as a result of her deportation.

Aan te bieden bij elke woonstverandering.  
**N° A 72531**  
 Naam Balken  
 Vornamen Mina  
 Burgerstand ongehuwd  
 Nationaliteit **BELG**  
 geboren te Berchem (a.)  
 den 16. October 1923  
 Beroep abt  
 Vorig verblijf Berchem (a.)  
 Tweede verblijf 10. 1. 25  
 Ingeschreven Boek \_\_\_\_\_ Blad \_\_\_\_\_  
 District **ANTWERPEN I**  
Kurenborg straat, nr 27  
 den 12-5-1943  
**JOOD-JUIF**  
**N° A 72531**  
 Lijfrentkas Wet van 10-12-24. N° der Rekening \_\_\_\_\_  
 Handtekening des draag. M. Balken  
 Lengte: een meter cent  
 ANTWERPEN den 12-5-1943  
 De Ambtenaar van den Burgerlijken Staat  
 (hof zijn afgevaardigde)  
Rauwen  
**N° A 72531**  
 Datum \_\_\_\_\_  
 Wijk \_\_\_\_\_  
 Nr \_\_\_\_\_  
 STRAAT \_\_\_\_\_  
 DISTRICT \_\_\_\_\_  
 District \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Zie zijde)  
 Hernieuwing van N° 988649241 e.f.  
 Achtereenvolgende woningen in ANTWERPEN  
 Aanmerking: Al wie eene wijziging toebrengt aan deze kaart, 't zij aan den tekst of aan het portret, zal gerechtelijk vervolgd worden. Koninklijk besluit 31 Augustus 1932.

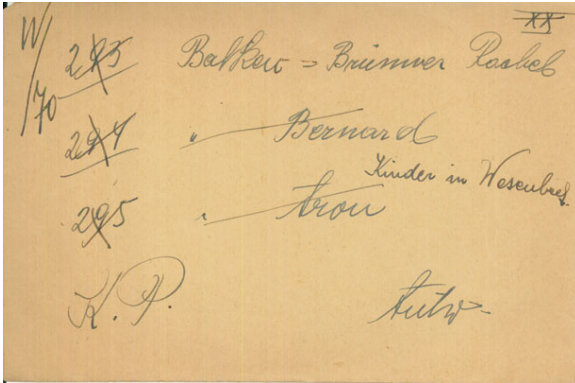
Wartime ID card of 19 year old Mimi Balken, daughter of Oscar and Rosa Balken, sister of Yolande, Bernard and Aron Balken.

Here is the list of transport XXIV with Rachel Balken Brunner and her daughter Mina Balken:

XXIV. Transport		- 11 -	
X	141. Colthof Zadok	30.6.97 Gordijk	stl. H Kaufmann
X	142. Colthof - Troostwijk Kaatje <i>épouse de COLTHOF, Zadok.</i>	23.6.01 Zwolle	stl. F Krankenschwester
X	143. Walg - Troostwijk Marianne <i>épouse de WALG</i>	28.6.04 Zwolle	stl. F Krankenschwester
✓	144. Walg Max	9.4.29 Zwolle	stl. G Schüler
✓	145. Walg Sari	12.7.38 Zwolle	stl. FL ohne
○	146. Balken - Brünner P. Rachel <i>épouse de BALKEN Elisabeth</i>	9.11.97 Scaynea	stl. F Schneiderin
✓	147. Balken P. Mina <i>épouse de BALKEN</i>	16.10.23 Antwerpen	stl. F Näherin
✓	148. Goler Szymon <i>épouse de GOLER, Szymon</i>	7.3.02 Janow	stl. H Schuhmacher
✓	149. Wajnberg Hana <i>épouse de WAJNBERG, Hana</i>	8/21.3.05 Dzialeszyn	stl. F Hausfrau
✓	150. Goler Leo	12.3.43 Brüssel	stl. G ohne
✓	151. Rosner Moses <i>épouse de ROSNER, Henna</i>	19.10.05 Ochodza	stl. H Schuhmacher
✓	152. Rosner - Leitner Henna <i>épouse de ROSNER, Hana</i>	28.1.07 Sanok	stl. F Schneiderin
X	153. Wajnacht-Jamačka SURA-Dwora <i>épouse de WAJNACHT</i>	20.9.31 <sup>9</sup> Warschau	stl. F Näherin
✓	154. Wajnacht Rachel	21.7.28 Brüssel	stl. FL Schülerin

# Bernard and Aron Balken

Bernard and Aron were the two very young (5 and 7 years old) sons of Oscar and Rachel Balken. The boys had arrived with their mother at Kazerne Dossin. The daughter of a Jewish immigrant, whom the Balken family had helped in Antwerp in the 30's, was also held at the barracks as an assistant to the commanding officer. To show her gratitude she intervened in favour of the boys and managed to convince her boss to send the boys to a Jewish orphanage in Wezembeek, a suburb on the Eastern outskirts of Brussels. This orphanage was managed by the Jewish Council ("Association des Juifs en Belgique", "Joden Vereeniging in België"), an organization set up by decree (Verordnung) of the German occupier in 1941 and which had local committees in every major city.



Scribbled notes on a brown envelope. The two boys, Bernard and Aron had accompanied their mother Rachel to Kazerne Dossin but were placed in and orphanage in Wezembeek.



Bernard and Aron during the war. Photo taken rue de l'Église in Stockel.

This intervention saved the two boys, they were not deported. Aron and Bernard stayed in Wezembeek until nearly the end of the war (when the AJB orphanage was dismantled) and they survived. Their large family had become small. A few weeks after the war had ended the boys were alive and well but their father Oscar and sisters Yolande and Mimi were gone forever.

ASSOCIATION DES JUIFS EN BELGIQUE  
COMITÉ LOCAL DE

JODEN VEREENIGING IN BELGIE  
LOKAALKOMITEIT VAN Antwerpen

Basé sur le verbi de l'Ordonnance de l'Autorité Occupante du 25-11-41, Verordnungsbilatt page 799  
Opgericht ingevolge de Verordening van de Bezetzende Overheid Aan 25-11-41, Verordnungsbilatt page 799

Numéro de quittance provisoire : 12640 Date : 4/12/42 Grandeur de la demeure (sans cuisine) 4 places  
Inscriptionsnummer : Datum : Grootte der woning (zonder keuken) Plaatsen

Nom et prénoms *Balken, Abraham - Oscar* habitant (localité) *Antwerpen* rue *Salvador* No 24  
Naam en voornaam *woonende (plaats)* straat

a) Propre demeure b) Locataire chez : Nom *Cassiers* habitant rue *Salvador* No 22  
Eigen woning Huurder bij : Naam wonende straat

c) Sous-loc. chez : Nom habitant rue No  
Onderhuur bij : Naam wonende straat

Numéro regu provisoire Inscrip- tion Nummer	NOM - NAAM	Prénom Voornaam	Naissance Geboorte		Profession Beroep	Religion Godsdienst	a) Nationalité Nationaliteit		a) Arrivé en Belgique le Aankomst in België den	b) venue de (liste et plus) komst van (plaats en land)	a) Etat civil - Burgerl. st. b) Relation avec le chef de famille (p. ex. épouse, fils, fille, oncle, sous-locataire, femme de ménage) Verhouding, gezinshoofd (p. ex. echtgenote, oom, dochter, oom onderhuur- der, dienstbode)
			Date Datum	Lieu Plaats			a) Nationalité Nationaliteit	b) venue de (liste et plus) komst van (plaats en land)			
12640	BALDINGER	Abraham	28/1/95	Kolowaize	Wasmakker	J	A B	26.12.11	Hollandse (S)	A B	gezinshoofd
29214	BRUNNER	Rachel	7/1/97	Bozawica	Zonder	J	A B	18.09	Polen	A B	edigevoet
49404	BALDINGER	Mina	16/9/23	Berchen	"	J	A B	"	"	A B	dochter
49405	BALKEN	Jolande	23/5/26	Berchen	"	J	A B	"	"	A B	dochter
	BALKEN	Bernard	12/12/35	Antwerpen	"	J	A B	"	"	A B	oom
	BALKEN	Arnon - Oscar	4/1/37	Antwerpen	"	J	A B	"	"	A B	oom

\*) Biffer l'inutile - Het onnodige schrappen.

REMARQUE : Dans ce questionnaire doivent être compris toutes les personnes habitant régulièrement ou même provisoirement chez la famille. Les personnes se trouvant seulement en passage chez la famille, seront mentionnées dans la colonne 11 sous b) (p. ex. : mère visite).

AANMERKING : Op deze vragenlijst zijn alle in de Joodsche familie voortdurend of ook slechts voorbijgaand woonachtige personen aan te geven. Bij personen die slechts op bezoek zijn, moet dit in kolom 11 onder b) worden aangegeven. (B.v. : Moeder-bezoek).

Remarques - Aanmerkingen :

Pour le comité local : - Voor het lokaalkomiteit : Signature : - Handteeken :

AJB - JVB registration of the Balken family as ordered by the occupier.

## Esther Süssel Brunner and Sigmund Holländer

**Esther Brunner**, (my Tante Esther) the other sister of my grandfather Max Brunner, was married to **Sigmund Holländer**. They had no children.

Sigmund was captured while Esther witnessed the scene. They were living with Rifka Kendel Holländer (the mother of Max, Rachel and Esther) in an apartment at Uitbreidingsstraat 564 in Antwerp. The elder mother had the Belgian nationality and was 70 so, in principle, she didn't need to hide as the Germans weren't supposed to take her (then). Sigmund and Esther had set up a hiding place in the apartment. They had placed a large wardrobe in front of a flush walled closet. They entered through the wardrobe which had a hidden access at the back and this allowed them to hide in the closet whenever the Germans, assisted by the Flemish SS, organized a Jew hunt. When the Germans opened the wardrobe they didn't see there was another closet behind it. This worked fine a few times and every time the Germans came Esther and Sigmund hid in the closet behind the wardrobe and were not found while the elderly Rifka calmly welcomed the visitors.

One day however, the Germans irrupted unexpectedly fast and only Esther was able to hide behind the wardrobe. Sigmund was caught in the apartment while Esther, in the closet barely a few feet away, listened in on how Sigmund had to pack his luggage. Esther and Sigmund were even able to whisper a few words through the wooden panels. This was their very last conversation. The Germans were in a bad mood so they took not only Sigmund but also the elderly Rifka (she was guilty of having hidden Sigmund). Both were brought to Caserne Dossin.



Tante Esther after the war, ca. 1952



Sigmund Holländer long before the war

NAME (M)	HOLLÄNDER
Vornamen	Sigmund, Susskind, Sussel
Geboren den	2-2-1894 in Blazowa
Ehemann	B. BRUNNER Esther Süssel
Ehefrau	
Einwanderung den	1930 Neuren
Staatsangehörigkeit	1) Poland / SH.
	2) Belgische Einbürgerung den
Konfession	isl
Beruf	Diamantkaufman
Adresse	Antwerpen BERGHEM Velodroomstr. 46

Arbeitseinsatz Nr. 298 den 19/4/43

When the Germans left the apartment, with Sigmund and Rifka, Esther got out of her hiding place. She was all alone, her husband and mother were captive. With the help of friends Esther found a hiding place in a convent in Maisières, near Mons, where she stayed for the rest of the war. Flanders was not the best place for Jews to hide. Most members of my family who went into hiding from the Germans went to Wallonia, the southern part of Belgium, as the probability to be denounced wasn't so high. My family members were hiding in Brussels, Genval, Maisières, Spa. I suggest you read my uncle Henri's memoirs to find out how my family survived half in hiding and half in the open.

After his capture Sigmund arrived at Kazerne Dossin on 28th January 1943. He was deported to Auschwitz on 19th April 1943. His transport had 1,631 people on board of freight wagons (with barbed wire protecting the vents). It was the famous transport XX which was attacked near Boortmeerbeek by 3 heroic students: Youra Livschitz, Jean Franklemon and Robert Maistriau.

They were armed with only a lantern and a single pistol. They managed to stop the train and free 17 prisoners themselves but in the confusion as much as 232 deportees managed to escape from the

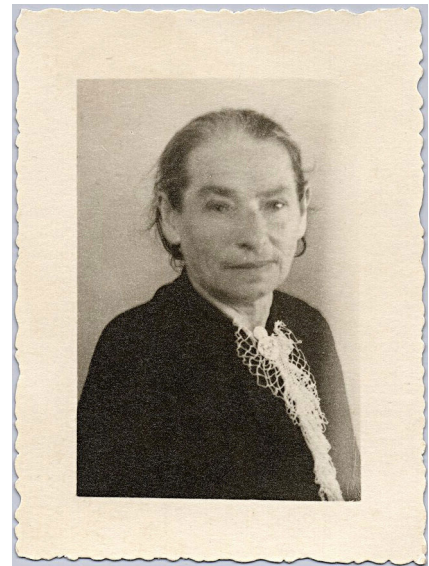
convoy. Sigmund did not escape, however, and arrived in Auschwitz on 22nd April 1943. Sigmund never returned. Tante Esther had lost her husband and had no children, she became a very lonely widow

26.I.43		XX. TRANSPORT		22.	
X	273. Vidokle Icek	8.1.75 Kedainai	1	stl. ohne	✓
X	274. Vleeschdrager-Schem Bathscha <del>Rodriguez</del> <i>épouse de VLEESCHDRAGER, Harlog.</i>	27.5.79 Amsterdam	1	stl. ohne	✓
✓	275. Zeit Ep <sup>x</sup> de Nachin <i>BIKSZENSPAN</i>	26.2.07 Barnow	1	stl. Schneider	✓
X	276. Souritz Abraham Echiel	22.3.94 Pskow	1	stl. Kaufmann	✓
X	277. Souritz Pauline	10.4.28 Antwerpen	1	stl. Schflerin	✓
X	278. Hollander Süsskind-Süssel <i>Sigmund - Süsskind - Süssel époux de BRUNER, Esther - Süssel.</i>	26.2.94 Blazowa	1	stl. Restaurateur	✓
✓	279. Freifeld Abraham <i>ép<sup>x</sup> de HAMEL, Rosa</i>	25.1.83 Pomaretz	1	stl. ohne	✓
X	280. Sternova Ida	6.8.14 Zavidovo	1	stl. Haushälterin	✓
X	281. Stern Leopold	8.9.42 Antwerpen	1	stl. ohne	✓
X	282. Van Gelder Benjamin	4.9.70 Brüssel	1	stl. ohne	✓
X	283. Van Gelder Jozefina	16.4.96 Amsterdam	1	stl. ohne	✓
✓	284. Freifeld Chaim <i>Ep<sup>x</sup> de FRISEK, Blima</i>	29.4.95 Budolowice	1	stl. Kaufmann	✓
X	285. <del>Gross-Ostreicher</del> Kozala <i>Ep<sup>x</sup> GROSZ - SZTERNFELD</i>	3.7.07 Satu Mare	1	stl. Hausfrau	✓
X	286. <del>Rosen</del> Joseph <i>(Mauer)</i>	<del>11.11.14 - Otwock</del> <del>14.10.42</del> Antwerpen <i>A62</i>		stl. ohne	✓ <i>Sederarbeit</i>

Look closely at the convoy page above, there is a little Leopold aged 7 months and Pauline, a 14 year old student and... 1,629 other civilians of all ages on this death train.

## Rifka Kendel Holländer

Rifka, the wife of Baruch Brunner and mother of Maximilian, Esther and Rachel Brunner, was my great-grandmother, we called her “Grande-Bobonne”. Together with her two daughters she kept a kosher hotel in Heide-Kalmthout called “Pension Brunner”. She was taken the same day and in the same apartment as Sigmund and spent time at the Dossin Barracks but, thanks to an utterly crazy and dangerous initiative of my mother Dora who went to complain at the Kommandantur (because of Rifka's age and nationality) Rifka was not deported. She was released and even got her luggage and apartment back. Because of the above episode, and her subsequent release, Rifka's address was crossed out from the to-be-hunted Jew list the Germans used and Rifka was kind of “forgotten” during ensuing razzias where even Belgians and elderly people were captured. She was able to live in Antwerp for a short while but, because of the omnipresent danger of denunciations by neighbours, she eventually went in hiding in Wallonia in the same convent in Maisières, near Mons, where her daughter Esther was already in hiding.



*Rifka Kendel Holländer fancied to be called Rebecca Caroline. Tough luck, we called her Grande-Bobonne.*

## Aron Holländer

My uncle Aron was the brother of my maternal grandmother Esther Brunner-Hollander (Bobonne). Aron had left Antwerp and was hiding in Brussels with the help of a friend, François Duez. He was denounced to the Germans by the same traitor “Le Gros Jacques” who

NAME (M)	HOLLÄNDER
Vornamen	Aron-Efraim
Geboren den	15/10/1897 in Roswadow
Ehemann Ehefrau	
Einwanderung den	
Staatsangehörigkeit	1) <i>All.</i>
	2) Belgische Einbürgerung den
Konfession	
Beruf	Diamanthändler
Adresse	ANTWERPEN, Quinten Matsyslei, 27

*C18*  
*Arbeitseinsatz Nr 199 15.1.43*

denounced my grandfather Max, the husband of Bobonne. Aron was brought to Kazerne Dossin in Mechelen (where all the deportees in my family were deported from) in January 1943 and was put on a convoy to Auschwitz on 15th January 1943. Aron managed to jump from that train (with his friend Sam Schönberg) and was able to rally the Walloon city of Spa, where a friend of his lived, a certain Philippe Fecht. This friend happened to be of South African descent and his grandfather had been a general for the Boer's. For some reason the Germans considered that his granddad having been an enemy of the English, Fecht therefore had to be a friend of the Germans. This gave Fecht great freedom to act. He knew his way around and helped Aron find a family in Spa where he could hide for the rest of the war. Aron was not caught again.



*Aron Holländer*

Aron Hollander was put on transport XVIII to Auschwitz as deportee 199. Aron was 45 and managed to jump from the train and thereby save his life. He wasn't the only one to jump from this train as you can see on this very page (the word "Évadé" written in pencil means escaped). Little Joseph, however, couldn't jump: he was only 3 years old...

XVIII. TRANSPORT.								
✓	195.	Feldberg - Joseph	28.1.40 Etterbeek	stl.	G	ohne	X ✓	
✓	196.	Marber - Fanni	31.5.31 Forest BRUSSEL	stl.	FL	Schülerin	X ✓	
✓	197.	Mayer - Hedwig	21.6.91 Budapest	stl.	F	ohne	X ✓	
✓	198.	Wwe Mayer-Schwartz - Dilha	30.6.68 Balassagyarmat W <sup>ve</sup> MAYER	stl.	F	ohne	X ✓	
✓	199.	Holländer - P. Aron	15.10.97 Roswadow	stl.	H	Kaufmann	X ✓	
X	✓	<del>Berger</del> <i>Ezvi</i> <del>Leopold</del> <i>Karel</i>	<del>12.1.98</del> <i>2.1.95</i> <del>Budapest</del> <i>Crapovo</i>	stl.	H	Reisender Bankbeamter	X ✓	
X	✓	<del>Berger</del> <i>CATZ</i> <del>Abramowicz</del> <i>Fanny</i>	<del>3.3.92</del> <i>23.3.09</i> <del>Bendzin</del> <i>Bratka</i>	stl.	F	ohne Krankenschwester	X ✓	
✓	202.	Schoenberg - Sami	27.4.17 Olmütz	stl.	H	Angestellter	X ✓	
✓	203.	Modzowic-Gelfajer - Lusia	20.3.97 Warschau	stl.	F	Handnäherin	X ✓	
X	✓	204.	Modzowicz - Lotte	12.10.26 Warschau	stl.	F	Schneider-Lehr- linge	X ✓
✓	205.	Baum-Dunska - Fajgla	15.5.02 Przedborg	stl.	F	Wäschenäherin	X ✓	

## Now you see them in town, now they're hiding and you don't

Amongst the very close family members only 3 never ended up at Kazerne Dossin. My mother **Dora Brunner**, her brother (my uncle) **Henri Brunner** and their mother **Esther Brunner-Hollander** (Bobonne, wife of Max Brunner). They had left Antwerp, for fear of denunciation there, and were hiding from the Germans. In the process they had several successive residences and several identities. They lived first in Brussels (several places in Uccle) and later in Genval (at 142 rue Gevaert) where they were given shelter by **Paul and Maria Balzat**, may their memory be blessed.



*Maria Balzat and Dora Brunner (my mum to be) at the Genval safe house*



*Henri Brunner (my future uncle) and his mother Esther in Genval*



*Maria Balzat and Esther (Bobonne, my future grandmother) at the safe house in Genval*

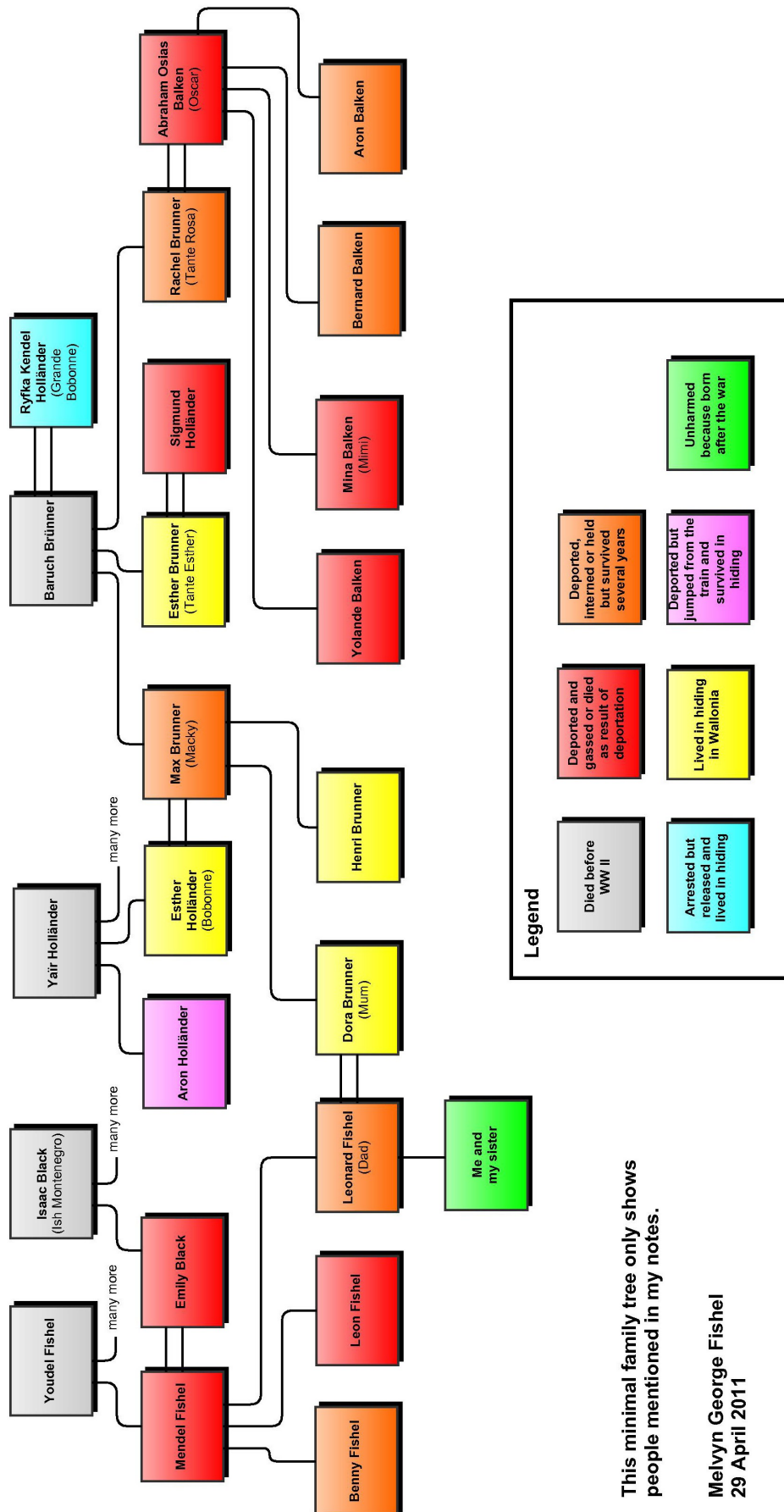
While they were hiding to avoid deportation they also helped other members of the family, who were held at Kazerne Dossin or Buchenwald, with food supplies. They needed to earn a living, had to do errands and therefore had to venture outside. My uncle Henri also describes this dangerous period in his memoirs. It is well written, full of detailed anecdotes (Henri kept a personal diary during the war) and it has extraordinary, sometimes funny, stories about how they helped each other and survived while they were in hiding. There is very little overlap with my notes as I focus more on the deportees and their struggle to avoid or delay deportation, their convoys to death camps, their known or unknown fate.

You won't regret taking the time to read Henri's memoirs as it sheds light on what life in clandestinity was for Jews living in Belgium during WWII. As Henri reported his first-hand experience in his war memories I wasn't going to duplicate any of it here. This is an important part of my family's history. It is both in English and in French. I can provide you with an electronic copy of Henri's War Memories if you are interested (or get a link to it in the comments and links pages).





# Impact of the Shoah on our closest family



## Considerations

Writing about the hardship of close family was a difficult exercise. Believe me, it wasn't easy to put all this on paper while watching the photographs, deciphering the transport lists, and reading the letters. I choked many times, I'm glad I persevered though.

I wasn't even born during the traumatic events I describe, I am a lucky postwar baby. I am reporting what I found in the family papers and in my mum's photo shoe-boxes, what I discovered when I visited Kazerne Dossin, what is available in public archives and what members of my family (who effectively participated in the events) told me first-hand. My dad Len and my uncle Henri helped me a lot. Hundreds of books and studies, have been published on the Holocaust and its 6 million Jewish victims. I'm not trying to write another one nor am I trying to entertain anyone. If these notes prove useful to someone else too, the better, but my primary intention is to inform my family, friends and acquaintances (and in particular my children and their future offsprings) of what our family went through during the Shoah. I don't want those individuals and these events ever to get erased from our collective memory. They were people, not numbers.

To get an idea of the sheer magnitude of the Shoah, simply consider that because of the number of casualties in my close family, you would have to read roughly one million stories like these to have a reasonable picture of the death and devastation caused by the Holocaust. By the way, the murderous pogroms of Russia, Lithuania, Romania, Ukraine, Poland are not even mentioned here.

No party that discriminates people on criteria such as religion, language, culture, nationality, soil or skin colour should ever come to power again. Once they are in power, even democratically elected, they change the rules of the game to stay in power and have to be dislodged by force. We see nationalism, populism, separatism and even Holocaust denial show their ugly faces again in some countries. Sadly, weak minds are easily lured by simplistic slogans. Authoritarian systems lead to collective loss of individual conscience, ultimately resulting in atrocities. That's why we have to remember, teach the lessons of the past, and fight. These notes should help.

Duty of memory is more than an homage to the victims. Telling the individual stories of the Shoah is part of ensuring such abominations never happen again. Let's stay vigilant while we enjoy life. Lechayim.

Melvyn George Fishel

Last revision August 8th, 2022

# Part 2

## Letters from Antwerp

**These are letters Mendel and Emily Fishel (my grandparents) and Leon Fishel (Dad's younger brother) sent from Antwerp to my father and his elder brother (both in captivity). Dad kept the letters. We found them hidden in a drawer at home but our parents had never mentioned them. They included the last letters his parents wrote just before deportation.**

Antvers 20/8/42

My dearst loving Sons.  
 Its with great regret that I  
 ve to tell you that we must also leave  
 for the moment tomorrow we are just  
 in the more other Jewish  
 Antvers 21/8/42

Dearest Dots  
 We are just ready to go to  
 Antvers 18/6/42  
 53 De Leescorff sta

dearst Boy:  
 I received yours feet loving card  
 12th inst also yours Bernards love  
 at the 14th inst you its a matter  
 delighted to hear the

Antvers 10/4/42  
 53 De Leescorff

My dearst Sons  
 We received your  
 loving card of the 29/3/42. 2 days ago  
 We are delighted to hear you are both  
 good health, as it leaves us all he

Antvers 1st apr  
 53 De Leescorff

My dearst Sons  
 Just a few lines to  
 You know we are all in good health. I go  
 Antwerpen, den 16<sup>e</sup> April 1942.  
 Liefste Lenny en Benny,  
 Juist enkele woorden om  
 te weten dat bij ons alles  
 voor  
 een  
 dan  
 Ik heb  
 geven en  
 ze zei  
 nap  
 hoor!!!  
 al ik  
 in de  
 zore  
 war  
 geval  
 nuen  
 eise,

Antwerpen, den 15<sup>e</sup> Juni 1942.  
 Liefste Broeders Lenny en  
 Benny,  
 Ik schrijf jullie dezen  
 brief en ik bedank jullie van gansche  
 harte om het pakket welke Benny  
 mij heeft opgestuurd. Ik weet echt  
 niet wat te zeggen maar ik hoop  
 dat jullie alles zullen naar ons  
 toesturen en daarna allen zelf  
 naar huis komen. Dat is ook mijn  
 eenigste wensch. Wij ontvingen Benny's  
 kaartje van den 4<sup>e</sup> en brief van den  
 7<sup>e</sup> Juli en Lenny's brief van den 5<sup>e</sup>  
 Juli en wij waren heel tevreden om  
 te vernemen dat jullie zich allen  
 in de beste gezondheid vertoeven  
 zoals het met ons ook is. Wij vonden  
 daarin de 6 fotos welke ons heel

Antwerpen, den 10<sup>e</sup> Juli 1942.  
 Liefste Broeders Lenny en  
 Benny,  
 Ik schrijf jullie dezen  
 brief en ik bedank jullie van gansche  
 harte om het pakket welke Benny  
 mij heeft opgestuurd. Ik weet echt  
 niet wat te zeggen maar ik hoop  
 dat jullie alles zullen naar ons  
 toesturen en daarna allen zelf  
 naar huis komen. Dat is ook mijn  
 eenigste wensch. Wij ontvingen Benny's  
 kaartje van den 4<sup>e</sup> en brief van den  
 7<sup>e</sup> Juli en Lenny's brief van den 5<sup>e</sup>  
 Juli en wij waren heel tevreden om  
 te vernemen dat jullie zich allen  
 in de beste gezondheid vertoeven  
 zoals het met ons ook is. Wij vonden  
 daarin de 6 fotos welke ons heel

Antwerpen, den 10<sup>e</sup> Juli 1942.  
 Liefste Broeders Lenny en  
 Benny,  
 Ik schrijf jullie dezen  
 brief en ik bedank jullie van gansche  
 harte om het pakket welke Benny  
 mij heeft opgestuurd. Ik weet echt  
 niet wat te zeggen maar ik hoop  
 dat jullie alles zullen naar ons  
 toesturen en daarna allen zelf  
 naar huis komen. Dat is ook mijn  
 eenigste wensch. Wij ontvingen Benny's  
 kaartje van den 4<sup>e</sup> en brief van den  
 7<sup>e</sup> Juli en Lenny's brief van den 5<sup>e</sup>  
 Juli en wij waren heel tevreden om  
 te vernemen dat jullie zich allen  
 in de beste gezondheid vertoeven  
 zoals het met ons ook is. Wij vonden  
 daarin de 6 fotos welke ons heel

## Letters from Antwerp

My sister and I found an envelope hidden in a drawer at the Antwerp apartment of our late parents after Dad passed away in 2017. The envelope contained very old letters, written in 1942. Dad (Leonard) was a British prisoner in a German camp at that time and had kept these letters. The letters were written by Dad's father Mendel Fishel, his mother Emily (our paternal grandparents) and by his junior brother Leon, all of them still alive in Antwerp then. My parents had never mentioned these letters. It was a major surprise to find snapshots of what the family experienced during the war and what their preoccupations were just before being deported and murdered in Auschwitz. The last letter was written the day they took the train to SS Sammellager Mecheln (the Dossin barracks), their last stop before Auschwitz. My parents had never mentioned these letters. It's likely that our mother had kept them out of sight so our father wouldn't read them all the time.

Mendel and Emily Fishel had three boys: Bernard, Leonard (Dad) and Leon. In early 1940 the whole family lived in Antwerp. Bernard and Leonard had the British nationality but Leon, born in Belgium, was Belgian. In July 1940, early in World War II, a local Antwerp policeman came by the house and asked if Bernard and Leonard were at home. After finding out they were, he left. The next day, very early in the morning, a German open military vehicle stopped by the house. Leonard Fishel (our dad, also known as Len, Lenny or Led) and his brother Bernard Fishel (Benny), both in their early twenties, were arrested by the Germans and driven away. They were not allowed to pack belongings and were told they'd be back home soon anyway. In reality, the boys were interned as British civilian internees in camp Ilag Tost [1] and would be prisoners for the next 5 years. Their parents, Emily and Mendel, and their younger brother Leon remained at home, in Antwerp. At that time the family believed the two captured boys were the ones suffering the most as they were prisoners in the East while the rest of the family was still "free" in occupied Antwerp. Little did Mendel, Emily and Leon know that they, in fact, would soon suffer the most. Letters and parcels were exchanged between the two boys at Ilag Tost (their camp in Upper Silesia) and the rest of the family remaining in Antwerp. The correspondence was censored by the German authorities (you will notice the censor's stamps on every letter). As you will see, they were trying to keep their spirits up and even sent each other some basic necessities. Only the last few letters sent to the boys in 1942 have been preserved (my dad kept them while in captivity). The letters sent by the interned boys to the family in Antwerp were lost with all the belongings that were taken away by the Nazis (and by some opportunistic neighbours).

The handwritten 1942 letters are shown hereafter. You can actually read the handwritten letters directly from the scans if you want. However, I also transcribed each letter to typed text the best I could and corrected some obvious spelling, punctuation or capitalization mistakes for legibility. I otherwise left the content intact, including some unusual wordings and phrase constructions (Mendel was born in Lithuania). Mendel and Emily wrote in English while Leon wrote in Flemish. I transcribed the Flemish text too but, additionally, also translated Leon's letters to English for your convenience. Where comments were useful, I added footnotes. You will find the 1942 handwritten letters and the typewritten transcriptions and translations in the following pages.

[1] Ilag VIII Tost = Internierungslager VIII a camp for British civilian internees set up by the Germans in Tost, Upper Silesia (now Toszec in Poland).

Anvers 1st Apr 1942.

My dearest sons

53. De Leescorf str

just a few lines to let  
You know we are all in good health p. God.  
I hope and trust this letter will find you both  
in the very best of good health and in best courage.  
dearest Bernard here in Antwerp there's no  
Swiss Consulate but well in Bruxelles.  
so when I go to Bruxelles I will go and have  
a talk to them. about you both, but I do not  
think there's any allowance at all, from the  
British Government, and I do not seek any  
as long as they look after you both.  
Well my dearest boys I am very delighted I sent  
you on the Passover cake, as it was for you both  
and has nothing to do with our ration as we get  
enough, and have enough, all we need so I  
ask you again and again my dearest loving  
boys, not too worry about us, as we have all we  
need, it's only you both we miss, and please God,  
the day will soon arrive when you also will join  
us all at home.

Anvers 1st Apr 1942  
53 De Leescorf str

My dearest sons,

Just a few lines to let you know we are all in good health p. God. I hope and trust this letter will find you both in the very best of good health and in best courage. Dearest Bernard here in Antwerp there's no Swiss consulate but well in Bruxelles so when I go to Bruxelles I will go and have a talk to them about you both, but I do not think there's any allowance at all from the British Government and I do not seek any as long as they look after you both.

Well my dearest boys I am very delighted I sent you on the Passover cake, as it was for you both and has nothing to do with our ration as we get enough and have enough, all we need. So I ask you again and again my dearest loving boys not to worry about us as we have all we need. It's only you both we miss and, please God, the day will soon arrive when you also will join us all at home.

Well dearest Led tell me how you get on with reading nice books etc... as the time is passing on. Today is the 1st Apl. and tomorrow the first Passover day and when I look back at last year's 1st Apl. it seems to me like a week passed this year. So you can imagine how my mind is running fast as you are both on my mind day and night. Well my dearest Led if you or Bernard need whatsoever in food, say havermout [2] to make porridge, or other things, you have only to say it and I will send it. I think I told you in my last letter that Leon got the postal order for 250 frs Belge at any rate. I hope you did not left yourselves short and hope all is well with you both. Again please do not forget to tell Mr Isbutsky about sending letters to his parents. How is the rest of the boys getting on write to me all the news. Did you get any letters from uncle Dave and Phil or any from U.S.A. from anyone? We have had no letters or news from anyone since last year. Mama will soon write to you both and sends her heartiest Love and Kisses etc., also from Leon, and the heartiest Love and Kisses from myself. Write to me all news and may God bless you both.

Yours Loving Dadd  
Mendel

Well dearest Led tell me how you get on with reading nice books etc... as the time is passing on. Today is the 1st Apl and tomorrow the first Passover day and when I look back at last year's 1st Apl it seems to me like a week passed this year. So you can imagine how my mind is running fast as you are both on my mind day and night. Well my dearest Led if you or Bernard need whatsoever in food, say havermout [2] to make porridge, or other things, you have only to say it and I will send it. I think I told you in my last letter that Leon got the postal order for 250 frs Belge at any rate. I hope you did not left yourselves short and hope all is well with you both. Again please do not forget to tell Mr Isbutsky about sending letters to his parents. How is the rest of the boys getting on write to me all the news. Did you get any letters from uncle Dave and Phil or any from U.S.A. from anyone? We have had no letters or news from anyone since last year. Mama will soon write to you both and sends her heartiest Love and Kisses etc., also from Leon, and the heartiest Love and Kisses from myself. Write to me all news and may God bless you both.

Yours Loving Dadd  
Mendel

[2] havermout = oat flakes

53 Rue de Leescorf 53.

Antwerpen.

April 7<sup>th</sup> 1942.



My dearest Bernard and Leonard,

We received your sweet and loving letters and cards dated the 11<sup>th</sup> 12<sup>th</sup> 15<sup>th</sup> 16<sup>th</sup> 18<sup>th</sup> 25<sup>th</sup> 28<sup>th</sup> 31<sup>st</sup> of March, also six Photos, one of Doctor Henderson and his medical staff, and another showing the theatrical group of the play called Blue-beard, then there are three Photos showing yourself dear Bernard among a group of other men dressed as boxers. Well dearest Bernard, you are looking very well and we are so happy

53 Rue de Leescorf 53  
Antwerp  
April 7th 1942

My dearest Bernard and Leonard,

We received your sweet and loving letters and cards dated the 11th 12th 15th 16th 18th 25th 28th 31st of March, also six photos, one of Doctor Henderson and his medical staff, and another showing the theatrical group of the play called Blue-beard, then there are three photos showing yourself dear Bernard among a group of other men dressed as boxers. Well dearest Bernard, you are looking very well and we are so happy

2.  
to see your dear face again, but please Bernard,  
love, don't have your photo taken any more  
dressed as a boxer as it doesn't appeal  
to me in the slightest - all your other  
photos are a million times nicer. Now  
we have still another photo showing  
a group of men at the Parcel counter -  
it is indeed a very nice and very interesting  
photo with all the Red-Cross parcels nicely  
arranged on the counter and piled up on  
the shelves. Well darlingest Bernard and  
darlingest Leonard, we are most happy  
and thankful to know that you are both  
keeping in the best of health as it leaves  
us the same here. We thank you

to see your dear face again, but please Bernard love, don't have your photo taken anymore dressed as a boxer as it doesn't appeal to me in the slightest – all your other photos are a million times nicer. Now we have still another photo showing a group of men at the parcel counter – it is indeed a very nice and very interesting photo with all the Red-Cross parcels nicely arranged on the counter and piled up on the shelves. Well darlingest Bernard and darlingest Leonard, we are most happy and thankful to know that you are both keeping in the best of health as it leaves us the same here. We thank you

<sup>3:</sup>  
both very much for all these nice Photos,  
also for the charming Photograph of  
Doctor Henderson and his Medical Staff;  
we are going to buy a special album  
for all the Photos you are sending us.  
Referring to Blue-beard, I remember seeing  
the Play some years ago - it was really  
one of the Pantomime shows. We are  
so happy to hear that you are receiving  
the British Red-Cross parcels regularly  
and we hope you are both enjoying all  
the lovely tasties they contain. All is  
well at home I am happy to say and as  
regards food-stuffs we have plenty of

both very much for all these nice photos, also for the charming photograph of Doctor Henderson and his medical staff, we are going to buy a special album for all the photos you are sending us. Referring to Blue-beard, I remember seeing the play some years ago – it was really one of the pantomime shows. We are so happy to hear that you are receiving the British Red-Cross parcels regularly and we hope you are both enjoying all the lovely tasties they contain. All is well at home I am happy to say and as regards food-stuffs we have plenty of

<sup>4</sup>  
everything, even potatoes, we have more than  
enough. Dearest Bernard and dearest Lenny, you  
must not worry about us in the slightest,  
we have got everything we need and we are  
very comfortable, I can assure you that  
everything at home is O.K. We are so  
glad to know that you received the  
matzos my lovies and we sincerely hope  
that you both enjoy it. Please believe  
me dearest Bernard and Lenny, we have  
more than enough of matzo also matzo  
meal - you may rest assured my  
dears we have got plenty of everything.  
The weather here is fine although

everything, even potatoes, we have more than enough. Dearest Bernard and dearest Lenny, you must not worry about us in the slightest, we have got everything we need and we are very comfortable, I can assure you that everything at home is O.K. We are so glad to know that you received the matzos my lovies and we sincerely hope that you both enjoy it. Please believe me dearest Bernard and Lenny, we have more than enough of matzo also matzo meal - you may rest assured my dears we have got plenty of everything.

The weather here is fine although

5.  
it keeps rather cold in the mornings,  
at mid-day the Sun appears and stays  
with us for a little while - today  
it has been raining and doesn't seem  
to want to stop. How did you like  
the show called "Around the World"?  
let me know about it in your next  
letter. Bernard love, you ask us if  
we eat Porridge every day; why of  
course, we have it for break-fast  
every morning and we hope you and  
darling Leonard are doing like-wise.  
Let us know if you would like

it keeps rather cold in the mornings, at mid-day the Sun appears and stays with us for a little while – today it has been raining and doesn't seem to want to stop. How did you like the show called "Around the World" ? Let me know about it in your next letter. Bernard love, you ask us if we eat porridge every day, why of course, we have it for break-fast every morning and we hope you and darling Leonard are doing likewise. Let us know if you would like

us to send you some Quaker Oats, we shall only be too delighted to do so.

Leonard love, don't worry about your blue costume not looking so new any more - you will both have new costumes made as soon as you return home please God <sup>and</sup> may it be very soon.

Well my lovies Bernard love and Leonard love, we hope you will both be home very soon P.G. I conclude with my fondest and heartiest love and kisses from your ever loving

Daddy and Leon send their love and kisses.



Mamma.

Leon

us to send you some Quaker Oats, we shall only be too delighted to do so.

Leonard love, don't worry about your blue costume not looking so new any more – you will both have new costumes made as soon as you return home, please God, and may it be very soon. Well my lovies Bernard love and Leonard love, we hope you will both be home very soon P. G. I conclude with my fondest and heartiest love and kisses from your ever loving

Mamma.

Daddy and Leon send their love and kisses.

240



Anvers 10/4/42.

53. De Leescorf str.

My dearest sons,

We received Yours Bernard's loving card of the 28/3/42. 2 days ago. and we are delighted to hear you are both in good health. as it leaves us all here in good health. I so glad its now much better for you about your washing your underclothes etc. Well my dearest Led you must not worry about your Blue stripe costume wear it when you like as you will get a new one when you come home please God very soon. dearest Bernard I am so glad you are taking sun rest. but its not much nice weather here. This week has been a stormy week plenty wind and rain also cold. Of course Apl is always a bad month. I got a gardener to make the garden up and

Anvers 10/4/425  
3 De Leescorf str

My dearest sons,

We received yours Bernard's loving card of the 28/3/42 2 days ago and we are delighted to hear you are both in good health as it leaves us all here in good health. So glad it's now much better for you about you washing your underclothes etc. Well my dearest Led you must not worry about your Blue stripe costume, wear it when you like as you will get a new one when you come home, please God very soon. Dearest Bernard I am so glad you are taking sun rest but it's not much nice weather here. This week has been a stormy week, plenty wind and rain, also cold. Of course Apl is always a bad month. I got a gardener to make the garden up and

We shall plant some difference vegetable last year was not much we planted salad was good, also paikes was good but, potatoes is not good in a garden, as it must have plenty sun and open air. so this year I am planting more paikes salad and bunen etc and I hope you will both be home to pluck them out.

Have you not yet got the parcels from the uncles of Liverpool also from U.S.A its about time you should have had them. I have little news as it is just after the feast days. I hope you have liked the Matzes as it was much better than last year all things is slow and calm. We are all O.K. mama is always busy preparing to eat. I and Leon are going out every day here and there to see whats doing you know just like before. and so the time flies past. will write soon again let me know all news and if you need something.  
Yours affectionate Dadd Mendel

we shall plant some different vegetables, last year was not much. We planted salad, was good, also paikes [3] was good but potatoes is not good in a garden, as it must have plenty sun and open air. So this year I am planting more paikes [3] salad and bunen [4] etc. and I hope you will both be home to pluck them out.

Have you not yet got the parcels from the uncles of Liverpool also from USA it's about time you should have had them. I have little news as it is just after the feast days. I hope you have liked the Matzes as it was much better than last year. All things is slow and calm. We are all O.K. Mama is always busy preparing to eat. I and Leon are going out every day here and there to see what's doing, you know, just like before, and so the time flies past. Will write soon again let me know all news and if you need something.

Yours affectionate Dadd

Mendel

[3] paikes = peakes = carrots

[4] bunen = bonen = beans

241

Antwerpen, den 16<sup>e</sup> April 1942.



Liefste Lenny en Benny,

Juist enkele woorden om jullie te laten weten dat bij ons alles O.K. is en ik hoop hetzelfde voor jullie. Wel Led zoo gauw ik een Gillette Razor bekomen kan, dan stuur ik het naar je toe. Ik heb Sybille de fotos van jou gegeven en zij was er heel blij mede. Ze zei: wel wel, wat is die Led knap geworden. Niet rood worden, hoor!!! Zoo gauw ik Sophie zal zien, zal ik haar vragen of zij een brief in de Fransche taal naar jullie zou schrijven, maar het zou haar veel meer plezier doen, in geval jullie naar haar zouden kunnen schrijven. Zij is toch een fijn meisje,

Antwerpen, den 16e April 1942.

Liefste Lenny en Benny,

Juist enkele woorden om jullie te laten weten dat bij ons alles O.K. is en ik hoop hetzelfde voor jullie. Wel Led zoo gauw ik een Gillette Razor bekomen kan, dan stuur ik het naar je toe. Ik heb Sybille de fotos van jou gegeven en zij was er heel blij mede. Ze zei: wel wel, wat is die Led knap geworden. Niet rood worden, hoor!!! Zoo gauw ik Sophie zal zien, zal ik haar vragen of zij een brief in de Fransche taal naar jullie zou schrijven, maar het zou haar veel meer plezier doen, in geval jullie naar haar zouden kunnen schrijven. Zij is toch een fijn meisje,

geworden. zooals ik jullie beloofd heb,  
stuur ik een foto hierbij, van me-  
zelf, getrokken in den hof van de  
Litvaks. Ik denk dat ze heel goed  
gelukt is, en ik hoop dat jullie  
er blij mede zullen zijn. Wij zullen  
nog meer en meer foto's maken  
wanneer het schoon weder blijft.  
Krijgen jullie nog regelmatig de pakken  
van het Roode - kruis? In geval jullie  
iet of wat noodig hebben, vraagt  
het ons, en wij zullen ons best doen  
om het naar jullie toe te sturen.  
Anders is hier alles O.K. dus liefste  
Lenny en Benny, ik sluit dezen brief  
met de beste groeten, van Duddy,  
Sophie, Max Sluchny, Mimi en alle  
andere vrienden en vele liefden en  
dikke kussen van Mama, Papa en  
van je broeder Leon.

geworden. Zoals ik jullie beloofd heb, stuur ik een foto hierbij van mezelf, getrokken in den hof van de Litvaks. Ik denk dat ze heel goed gelukt is, en ik hoop dat jullie er blij mede zullen zijn. Wij zullen nog meer en meer foto's maken wanneer het schoon weder blijft. Krijgen jullie nog regelmatig de pakken van het Roode-Kruis ? In geval jullie iet of wat noodig hebben, vraagt het ons, en wij zullen ons best doen om het naar jullie toe te sturen. Anders is hier alles O.K. dus liefste Lenny en Benny, ik sluit dezen brief met de beste groeten van Doddy [5], Sophie, Max Sluchny, Mimi [6] en alle andere vrienden en vele liefden en dikke kussen van Mama, Papa en van je broeder Leon.

## Translation of previous letter

Antwerp, April 16th 1942.

Dearest Lenny and Benny,

Just a few words to let you know that everything is O.K. with us and I hope it's the same for you. Well Led as soon as I can get a Gillette Razor, I'll send it to you. I gave your pictures to Sybille and she was very happy with them. She said: well well, how handsome has this Led become. Do not turn red, hey!!! As soon as I see Sophie, I will ask her if she would write you a letter in French, but it would please her much more if you could write to her. She has become a nice girl. As I promised you, I'm sending a photograph of myself, taken in the yard at the Litvaks. I think it came out very well, and I hope you will be happy with it. We will take more and more pictures if the weather stays clear. Do you still regularly get parcels from the Red-Cross? In case you need anything, just ask, and we will do our best to send it to you. Otherwise everything is O.K. here so dear Lenny and Benny, I conclude this letter with the best regards from Doddy [5], Sophie, Max Sluchny, Mimi [6] and all the other friends and much love and big kisses from Mama, Papa and your brother  
Leon.

[5] Doddy could very well be my mother Dora Brunner (Dody) who married Len after the war.

[6] Mimi could very well be Mimi Balken (see earlier chapter on Mina Balken in "They were people, not numbers").

Antwerpen, den 15<sup>e</sup> Juni 1942.

Liefste broeders Lenny en  
Benny.



Jullie laatste kaarten  
waren van den 8<sup>e</sup> Juni (Lenny) en  
9<sup>e</sup> Juni (Benny). Wij waren heel  
verheugd om te vernemen dat  
jullie zich in de beste gezondheid  
bevinden, zooals het met ons ook is.  
Wel Benny, ik ben over enkele  
weken naar de fotografist  
Buyle geweest om te vragen of  
zij een foto van me wilde maken.  
Zij zegden mij dat zij momenteel  
geen foto's kunnen maken, daar  
zij geen materiaal meer hebben.  
Dus ik zal moeten wachten voor  
de eerste en beste gelegenheid.  
Ik zal jullie nog een van mijn.

Antwerpen, den 15e Juni 1942.

Liefste broeders Lenny en Benny,

Jullie laatste kaarten waren van den 8e Juni (Lenny) en 9e Juni (Benny). Wij waren heel verheugd om te vernemen dat jullie zich in de beste gezondheid bevinden, zooals het met ons ook is.

Wel Benny, ik ben over enkele weken naar de fotografist Buyle geweest om te vragen of zij een foto van me wilden maken. Zij zeiden mij dat zij momenteel geen foto's kunnen maken daar zij geen materiaal meer hebben. Dus ik zal moeten wachten voor de eerste en beste gelegenheid. Ik zal jullie nog een van mijn

foto's hierbij sturen, genomen in den hof bij Dora. Anders is alles hier O.K. Wel Led, zooals jullie het weten dat wij de David-ster moeten dragen. Wij zijn niet de eenigsten. Laat ons maar hopen dat het snel een einde zal nemen en dat wij terug vrije menschen zullen worden. Wel Lenny, ik wensch je een gelukkige verjaardag en ik hoop dat het de laatste in dat kamp zal zijn. Wij waren, Sophie en ik, bij vrienden en brachten er den namiddag heel aangenaam door. Zoo gaan de dagen langzaam en hoopvol voorbij. Wij zullen er den moed inhouden tot het einde. Wel boys, ik besluit met de beste groeten van Sophie, Nelly, Sybil en andere vrienden en vele liefde en dikke kussen van Mama, Papa en van je lieven broeder

Leon

foto's hierbij sturen, genomen in den hof bij Dora [5]. Anders is alles hier O.K. Wel, Led, zooals jullie het weten dat wij de David-ster moeten dragen. Wij zijn niet de eenigsten. Laat ons maar hopen dat het snel een einde zal nemen en dat wij terug vrije menschen zullen worden. Wel Lenny, ik wensch je een gelukkige verjaardag en ik hoop dat het de laatste in dat kamp zal zijn. Wij waren, Sophie en ik, bij vrienden en brachten er den namiddag heel aangenaam door. Zoo gaan de dagen langzaam en hoopvol voorbij. Wij zullen er den moed inhouden tot het einde. Wel boys, ik besluit met de beste groeten van Sophie, Nelly, Sybil en andere vrienden en vele liefde en dikke kussen van Mama, Papa en van je lieven broeder

Leon

## Translation of previous letter

Antwerp, the 15th June 1942.

Dearest brothers Lenny and Benny,

Your last cards were from the 8th of June (Lenny) and 9th of June (Benny). We were very pleased to hear that you are in the best of health, just as we are.

Well Benny, I went to photographer Buyle a few weeks ago to ask if they wanted to take my picture. They told me that they cannot take pictures at the moment, because they have no material anymore. I therefore will have to wait for the first and best opportunity. I am sending you one of my photos herewith, taken in the yard at Dora's [5]. Otherwise everything here is O.K. Well, Led, as you know we have to carry the star of David. We are not the only ones. Let us hope that this will soon end and that we will become free people again. Well, Lenny, I wish you a happy birthday and I hope it will be the last one in that camp. Sophie and I were at friends and spent a very pleasant afternoon there. This is how the days pass slowly, but full of hope. We will stay courageous till the end. Well boys, I conclude with the best greetings from Sophie, Nelly, Sybil and other friends and much love and big kisses from Mama, Papa and your dear brother Leon

Just while writing I received  
your Led's letter of the 15<sup>th</sup> inst.

Anvers 18/6/42

My dearest Boy:

53 De Leescorff str



We received yours Led's loving card  
of the 12<sup>th</sup> inst also yours Bernard's loving  
letter of the 14<sup>th</sup> inst You it's a matter in  
4 days time and, delighted to hear that you  
are both in good health I. God. as it leaves  
us all the same here in good health I. God  
Well dearest Led Leon is wearing your  
raincoat so you see it's in good hands  
but please God the moment you come  
home I will buy a new raincoat of the  
best quality. The coat still looks like a  
new coat. There nothing much changed  
in Anvers all things seem to remain  
as before, not much new Buildings, all is  
reserved for after the war. I expect.

Just while writing I received  
your Led's letter of the 15<sup>th</sup> of this month [7]

Anvers 18/6/42  
53 De Leescorff str

My dearest Boys,

We received yours Led's loving card of the 12<sup>th</sup> of this month also yours Bernard's loving letter of the 14<sup>th</sup> of this month. You it's a matter in 4 days time and delighted to hear that you are both in good health p. God as it leaves us all the same here in good health p. God. Well dearest Led Leon is wearing your raincoat so you see it is in good hands but please God the moment you come home I will buy a new raincoat of the best quality. The coat still looks like a new coat. There's nothing much changed in Anvers all things seem to remain as before, not much new buildings, all is reserved for after the war I expect.

[7] inst. = instant = of the current month

Well dearest Bernard I am so pleased that you are making potato pudding etc and that you get a nice film show and piano its good you pass your time so nicely I hope you are making Quaker oats for Breakfast every morning as its very good for you both eat it every morning. Do you get it in the parcels Havermouth? I hope you do. do not forget to send us your loving photos as soon as possible. all

at home is O.K. as before, only longing to see you both home please God. Very Very soon did you get any letters from the uncles or did you not yet receive your costumes which uncles Dave sent it to you. let us all know Leon has not yet received the 10 mark. You should keep it for yourself and make use of all the cash for things you need for the both of you.

Love from mama  
Leon. myself  
Yours Loving Dadd Mendel



Well dearest Bernard, I am so pleased that you are making potato pudding etc. and that you get a nice film show and piano it's good you pass your time so nicely. I hope you are making Quaker oats for Breakfast every morning as it's very good for you both, eat it every morning. Do you get it in the parcels Havermouth? [2] I hope you do. Do not forget to send us your loving photos as soon as possible. All at home is O.K. as before, only longing to see you both home please God very very soon. Did you get any letters from the uncles or did you not yet receive your costumes which uncle Dave sent it to you. Let us all know. Leon has not yet received the 10 mark. You should keep it for yourself and make use of all the cash for things you need for the both of you.

Love from Mama Leon, myself

Yours Loving Dadd

Mendel

Antwerpen, den 10<sup>e</sup> Juli 1942.

Liefste broeders Lenny en  
Benny,



Ik schrijf jullie dezen  
brief en ik bedank jullie van ganscher  
harte om het pakket welke Benny  
mij heeft opgestuurd. Ik weet echt  
niet wat te zeggen maar ik hoop  
dat jullie alles zullen naar ons  
toesturen en daarna allen zelf  
naar huis komen. Dat is ook mijn  
eenigste wensch. Wij ontvingen Benny's  
kaartje van den 4<sup>e</sup> en brief van den  
7<sup>e</sup> Juli en Lenny's brief van den 5<sup>e</sup>  
Juli en wij waren heel tevreden om  
te vernemen dat jullie zich allen  
in de beste gezondheid vertoeven  
zoals het met ons ook is. Wij vonden  
daarin de 6 fotos welke ons heel

Antwerpen, den 10e Juli 1942.

Liefste broeders Lenny and Benny,

Ik schrijf jullie dezen brief en ik bedank jullie van ganscher harte om het pakket welke Benny mij heeft opgestuurd. Ik weet echt niet wat te zeggen maar ik hoop dat jullie alles zullen naar ons toesturen en daarna allen zelf naar huis komen. Dat is ook mijn eenigste wensch. Wij ontvingen Benny's kaartje van den 4e en brief van den 7e Juli en Lenny's brief van de 5e Juli en wij waren heel tevreden om te vernemen dat jullie zich allen in de beste gezondheid vertoeven zoals het met ons ook is. Wij vonden daarin de 6 fotos welke ons heel

goed beviel. Ik heb vandaag de convocatie ontvangen, dus ik zal het geld in een dag of twee kunnen ontvangen. Ik hoop dat het pakket niet te lang zal achterblijven en ik hoop dat de hemden mij goed zullen passen en de rest ook. Het komt mij goed van pas. Anders is hier alles O.K. en ik ben nu in de Biljart-Palace den brief aan 't schrijven. Ik zal twee van die foto's aan Lewy overhandigen en ik hoop dat het hun zal bevallen. Wanneer komen jullie al naar huis? Ik vind dat het hoogtijd wordt, vinden jullie het niet? Geen zorgen gemaakt en alles komt in orde. Nogmaals bedankt van harte voor het mooie pakket en vele groeten van Mama, Papa en van je broeder  
*Leon*

goed bevielen. Ik heb vandaag de convocatie ontvangen, dus ik zal het geld in een dag of twee kunnen ontvangen. Ik hoop dat het pakket niet te lang zal achterblijven en ik hoop dat de hemden mij goed zullen passen en de rest ook. Het komt mij goed van pas. Anders is hier alles O.K. en ik ben nu in de Biljart-Palace den brief aan 't schrijven. Ik zal twee van die foto's aan Lewy overhandigen en ik hoop dat het hun zal bevallen. Wanneer komen jullie al naar huis? Ik vind dat het hoogtijd wordt, vinden jullie het niet? Geen zorgen gemaakt en alles komt in orde. Nogmaals bedankt van harte voor het mooi pakket en vele groeten van Mama, Papa en van je broeder

Leon

## Translation of previous letter

Antwerp, the 10th of July 1942.

Dearest brothers Lenny and Benny,

I write you this letter and thank you wholeheartedly for the parcel which Benny sent me. I really do not know what to say, but I hope that you will send us everything and then come home yourselves. That is also my only wish. We received Benny's card from the 4th and letter of the 7th of July and Lenny's letter from the 5th of July and we were very pleased to learn that you are all in the best of health just as we are. We also found the 6 enclosed pictures which we liked very much. I received the convocation today, so I will be able to receive the money in a day or two. I hope the package will not be delayed too long and I hope the shirts will suit me well and the rest too. It certainly comes in handy. Otherwise everything here is O.K. and I am now writing this letter in the Billiard-Palace. I will hand over two of those photos to the Lewys and I hope they will like it. When are you at last coming home? I think it is high time, don't you think so? Let's not worry and everything will be fine. Thank you wholeheartedly again for the nice parcel and many greetings from Mama, Papa and your brother

Leon

This letter was the last letter my father Leonard ever received from his younger brother Leon. It is also the last time he received any news about him. Len and Leon were very close and were both mad about football.

Anvers 20/8/42

My dearest Loving Sons.

[It's with great regret that I have to tell you that we must also leave home for the moment. Tomorrow we are just going to Malines with many other Jewish families. Do not be uneasy about the matter. I have given instructions to the Swiss Consulate at Bruxelles to have mama's maiden nationality as a British Born and British subject back, it means British nationality. I do not know how this question will stand tomorrow for the German authorities. If I can write to you or mama, tomorrow we will let you know at once.] You can write to Beelaerts in Lange New Str 123. Anvers or uncle Beelaerts, or to madam Stoll. and as soon as we are somewhere definite I will send my address. All the neighbours have been very kind to us and, helped us with packing specially Mr uncle Beelaerts. Everything is put away in order by our neighbours next door old madam Mme Stoll Dirk Beelaerts Mme Foch. Only the furniture is all at home.

Anvers 20/8/42

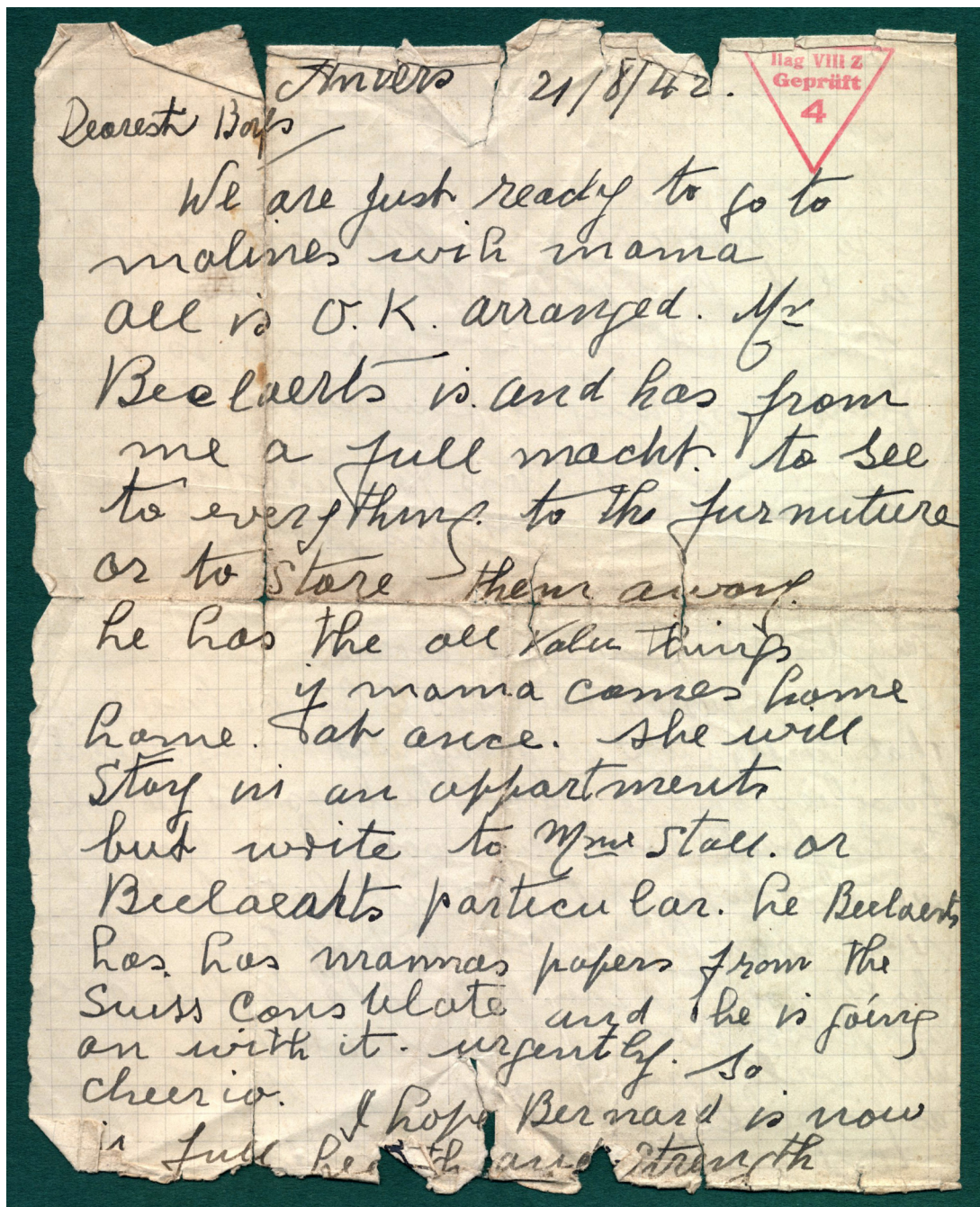
My dearest loving sons,

It's with great regret that I have to tell you that we must also leave home for the moment. Tomorrow we are just going to Malines [10] with many other Jewish families. Do not be uneasy about the matter. I have given instructions to the Swiss Consulate at Bruxelles to have Mama's maiden nationality as a British Born and British subject back, it means British nationality. I do not know how this question will stand tomorrow for the German authorities. If I can write to you, or Mama, tomorrow we will let you know at once! You can write to Beelaerts in Lange New str 123 Anvers as uncle Beelaerts or to madam Stoll. And as soon as we are somewhere definite I will send my address. All the neighbours have been very kind to us and, helped us with packing specially Mr uncle Beelaerts. Everything is put away in order by our neighbours next door old madam Mme Stoll Dirk Beelaerts Mme Foch. Only the furniture is all at home.

[I am trusting that mama will be sent home, or in an English Camp with many other English women]. The neighbours will look after our furniture and all will be O.K. when we return home very soon p. God. [I have had no further news from Leon. Something important write to M<sup>me</sup> Stoll. Your letters will go to M<sup>me</sup> Stoll. If you come home before us go to Beelaerts, or to the old M<sup>me</sup> next to our house. I trust we shall be able to correspond. How is Bernard love? I hope he is better and back with you. All I want is that you keep up with high courage. [It's possible we remain in this country only let us come together again p. God. Mama is O.K. I also [we may have to do a little work but that's nothing] so cheerio loving boys I will write as soon as possible, Mama also, so cheerio again. I shall always write to uncle Dave, and Phil. You can write to them that that is the case. all will be good. Love from mama Leon myself God Bless you both.]  
Yours ever affectionate Dadd  
Mendel

I am trusting that Mama will be sent home, or in an English camp with many other English women. The neighbours will look after our furniture and all will be O.K. when we return home very soon p. God. I have had no further news from Leon [8]. Something important write to M<sup>me</sup> Stoll. Your letters will go to M<sup>me</sup> Stoll. If you come home before us go to Beelaerts or to the old M<sup>me</sup> next to our house. I trust we shall be able to correspond. How is Bernard love? I hope he is better and back with you. All I want is that you keep up with high courage. It's possible we remain in this country only let us come together again p. God. Mama is O.K. I also. We may have to do a little work but that's nothing so cheerio loving boys I will write as soon as possible, Mama also, so cheerio again. I shall always write to uncle Dave, and Phil. You can write to them that that is the case all will be good. Love from Mama Leon myself. God Bless you both.  
Yours ever affectionate Dadd Mendel.

[8] Younger brother Leon had then already been sent to Northern France for forced labour on the Atlantic Wall and later was deported to Auschwitz



Anvers 21/8/42

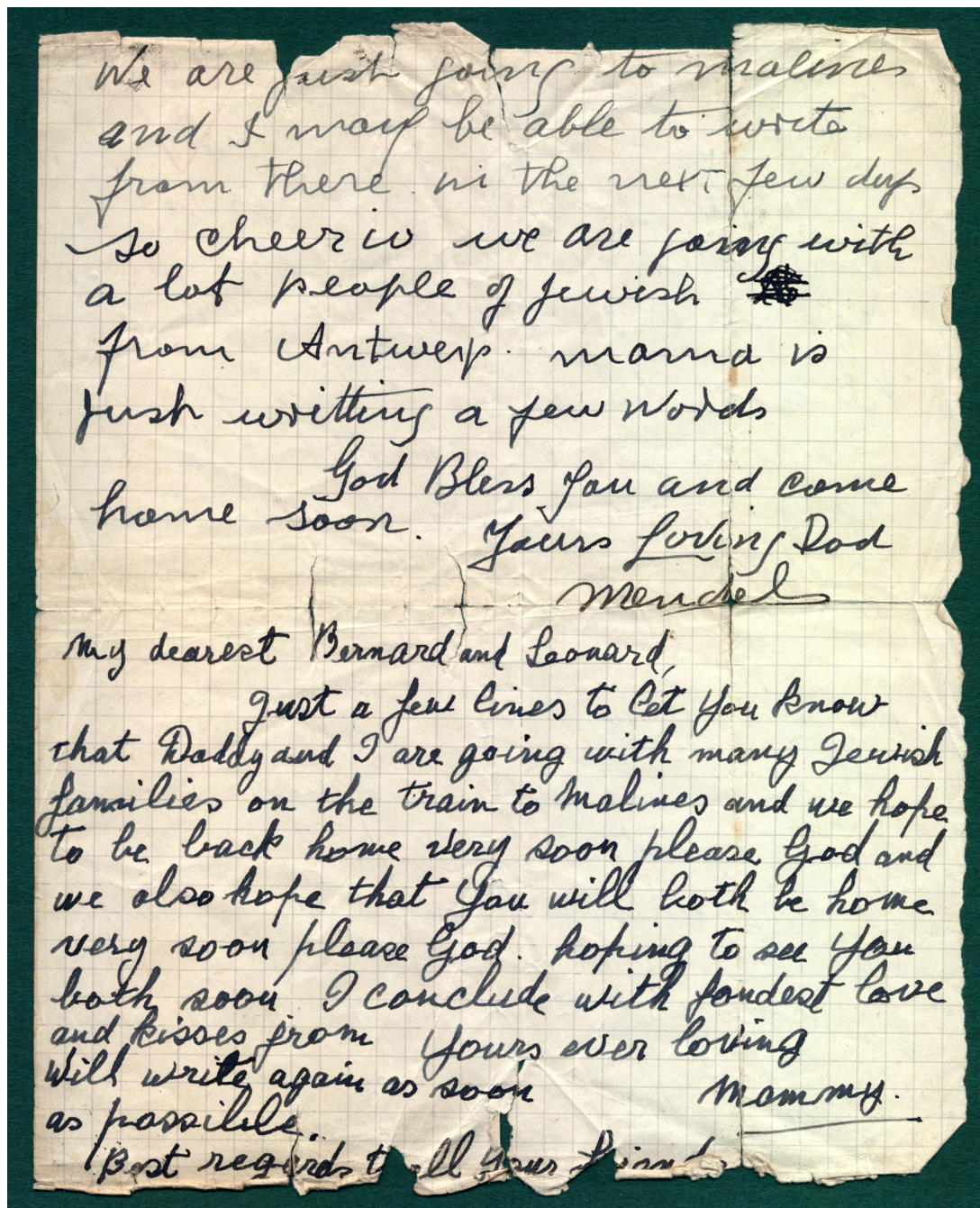
Dearest Boys,

We are just ready to go to Malines with Mama. All is O.K. arranged. Mr Beelaerts is and has from me a full macht [9] to see to everything to the furniture or to store them away.

He has all the value things.

If Mama comes home at once she will stay in an apartment but write to Mme Stoll or Beelaerts particular. He Beelaerts has Mama's papers from the Swiss Consulate and he is going on with it urgently. So cheerio.

I hope Bernard is now in full health and strength



We are just going to Malines and I may be able to write from there in the next few days so cheerio. We are with a lot people of Jewish from Antwerp. Mama is just writing a few words.  
God Bless you and come home soon.

Yours Loving Dad  
Mendel

My dearest Bernard and Leonard,

Just a few lines to let you know that Daddy and I are going with many Jewish families on the train to Malines [10] and we hope to be back home very soon please God and we also hope that you will both be home very soon please God. Hoping to see you both soon. I conclude with fondest love and kisses from  
Yours ever loving  
Mamma  
Will write again as soon as possible.  
Best regards to all your friends

[9] full macht = volmacht = proxy, empowerment

[10] Malines = Mechelen a city between Antwerp and Brussels. The deportees were assembled in transit camp Kazerne Dossin from where they were put on trains to Auschwitz.

As you can see, the very last letter was written on a piece of squared paper torn from a school notebook. The family didn't have access to real letter paper anymore and had to pack their belongings in a hurry. No other letters were ever received from either Emily or Mendel or Leon after that. None of them came back from Auschwitz or was heard of again. As you can see, all the letters have been read often but the last two letters are the ones that are the most damaged. They have obviously been read again and again many times by Dad. I was very young at the time, but today I can imagine what his pain must have been in reading these letters. Our parents never told us about the letters. My sister and I only found out recently when we had to empty Dad's apartment. The letters were hidden in an envelope in a drawer. It is likely that Mum had kept them out of sight so Dad would stop reading them and cry.

As you saw in their last two letters, Mendel and Emily Fishel "voluntarily" went to Kazerne Dossin in Malines (Mechelen ) because they had received a forced labour requisition (Arbeitseinsatz Befehl). The order was delivered to their house by the local Antwerp police. They were asked to proceed to Mechelen from where they would travel by train to their "workplace" in the East. They thought it would be temporary and they would soon come back home. Mendel even thought that his wife Emily might come back to Antwerp immediately. He was wrong. Mendel and Emily arrived at the Dossin barracks a few hours after their very last letter. On the 25th they left with transport V to Auschwitz. Their train arrived in Auschwitz on 27 August 1942. In view of their age, and the fact that there are no tattoo records for them, it is highly likely that they were sent to the gas chambers immediately upon arrival, just 6 days after their last letter shown above. The story of Mendel and Emily Fishel is described in more details earlier in my notes in part 1 "They were people, not numbers".

When his parents were being deported Leon Fishel, the youngest of the 3 brothers, had already been deported from Antwerp to France by Organization Todt (likely shortly after his last letter of 10 July). Leon had to perform forced labour, together with approximately 2,250 other Jewish workers. He worked for German companies which were building the Atlantic Wall in the North of France. The Atlantic Wall was a huge network of fortifications running all the way from the Norwegian to the Spanish coast. It was intended to prevent the Allies from landing on continental beaches. A few months later, in the autumn of 1942, when the German occupants realized that they didn't meet their extermination quota for Jews that year, the forced labourers of Organization Todt were also added to the deportation lists. Dad's younger brother, Leon Fishel, was put on transport XVII. His train left on 31 October 1942 from France to Mechelen. After a short stop at Kazerne Dossin - where his parents had also been - Leon wasn't allowed to disembark (there was nobody to meet him anyway, his parents had already been deported) and Leon continued on to Auschwitz. There is no tattoo number for Leon either. He was a young workforce but was extenuated by the slave labour and the harsh conditions at the Atlantic Wall. We don't know when he died (perhaps upon arrival, perhaps later) but Leon never returned, he was 22. The story of Leon Fishel is described in more details earlier in my notes in part 1 "They were people, not numbers".

The remaining 2 brothers, Leonard (my Dad) and his brother Bernard were liberated from an internee camp in Spittal, Austria, on 9 May 1945, after 5 years in captivity. They returned to Antwerp where they found out that they were the only survivors of the family.

Melvyn George Fishel

Last revision August 8th, 2022

# Part 3

## **Annotations, sources, acknowledgements, bibliographical links.**

**This section has additional clarifications. It also identifies the helpful and knowledgeable people who assisted me. The reference information I used, and the sources of inserted pictures and documents are mentioned. There are also links to interesting books and relevant websites.**

## Clarifications, source references, gratitude, links

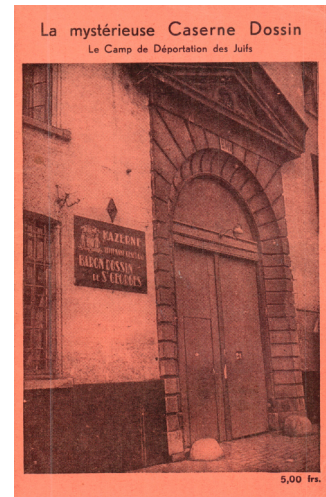
- Most of the family pictures herein came from our family's old albums and photo "shoe-boxes". I spent months digitizing them. Other documents were provided by the institutions and people identified below.
- Many thanks to Dorien Styven of Kazerne Dossin who expertly answered my trillion questions, looked up the existing archives on my family, and patiently explained how SD cards, AJB cards and transport lists etc. had to be interpreted. Without her help these notes couldn't be as comprehensive.
- Kazerne Dossin (KD) was previously known as the Jewish Museum of Deportation and Resistance. It is a memorial, a museum and a documentation centre on the Holocaust and Human rights. Many thanks to the organizers, and to Dorien Styven and Laurence Schram in particular, for helping me find archived information on my family and for validating these notes for accuracy. Part of the information in these notes was obtained through Kazerne Dossin (KD) and is included with their explicit permission. KD provided me with transport lists, some pictures and showed me personal relics taken off the people arriving at the barracks. Kazerne Dossin holds a copyright on the personal relics and documents. You may not distribute these images in another publication without their written approval. The new museum is housed next to the historic Kazerne Dossin structure, an ominous building with a central internal square located at 153 Gossin de Stassartstraat in Mechelen. It is the very place where 25,835 Jews were assembled and sent by train to be exterminated in Auschwitz. You can call Kazerne Dossin by phone at +32 15 29 06 60 or visit their website (in 4 languages) at <https://www.kazernedossin.eu> If you visit the KD digital image bank and do a search for a collection with "fishel" you will find the Fishel-Black family collection. Family members can ask me for the login to see the other pictures (they are the same as those in these notes but archived securely by Kazerne Dossin). KD are also archiving a PDF copy of these notes.
- The Dossin Barracks complex has been refurbished. The museum has now moved to a new building across the street. The research centre is housed in a small part of the old building while the rest has been converted into apartments which, believe it or not, people now inhabit happily. The events took place at the Dossin barracks, not across the street. I find it disturbing to see families live, cook dinner and play music in the barracks where people were deported from, but then that's my personal view. You can see an aerial view of the place here: <http://bit.ly/casernedossin> it is the large rectangular complex near the canal in the centre of the image, the new museum building is to the right of it. The railway tracks are now gone and are replaced by a road. You can use street-view and, as a souvenir, you will see a small monument with a few decimeters of the rail tracks that ran along the barracks during the war.
- The Service of War Victims (Service des Victimes de la Guerre) in Brussels keeps the originals of all the Transport lists and SD (Sicherheitsdienst) cards and other files. The deportation transport lists and the SD cards showing my family members are included herein with the gracious authorization of the Service of War Victims who holds a copyright on them. I wish to thank Marie Lejeune for assisting me and providing some of the documents shown herein. The Service of War Victims can be contacted at Square de l'Aviation 31, 1070 Bruxelles or by phone at +32 2 5289100. The website for the Service of War Victims is located at <http://>



*Refurbished Kazerne Dossin in 2011*

warvictims.fgov.be A complete list of all SVG references used herein with the authorisation of the Service des Victimes de la Guerre is shown on the very last page in this section of the notes.

- If you read French there is an interesting story written in 1944 by an ex deportee who was sent from the Dossin Barracks to Auschwitz but escaped from the train. His story “La mystérieuse Caserne Dossin, Le Camp de Déportation des Juifs” can be found in the University of Florida Library at <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00025055/00001> If you have a tough time accessing this site I downloaded a PDF copy which I could send to you upon request so that you can read it off-line.
- I am using Kazerne Dossin, Caserne Dossin and Dossin Barracks in my notes, somewhat in random order. During the war the Nazi terminology used was “SS Samellager Mecheln”. These are the Flemish, French, English and German names for the same *location*. The official memorial *institution’s* name is Kazerne Dossin.



- The archives of the city of Antwerp (also called Stadsarchief or Felixarchief) have a site at <http://www.felixarchief.be> The site is exclusively in Dutch. Archives can be consulted locally. It is located on Oudeleeuwenrui 29, 2000 Antwerpen. You can call them at +32 3 3389411.
- If you read Dutch, there is a historian's book on how Jews were hunted and brutally arrested in Antwerp by Flemish citizens who collaborated with the Germans: *De Jodenjagers van de Vlaamse SS*, Lieven Saerens, Uitg. Lannoo, ISBN 978-90-209-7384-6. This book even describes how a member of my family (listed in my notes here) got arrested and abused by Antwerp Nazi collaborators. Their trial is described in the book. It's too awful to describe here, read the book to know how bad it was.



- My uncle Henri Brunner (brother of my mother Dora) wrote his “Memories 40-45” wartime memoirs in 2000 (he was 76 when he bought his first PC to write these memoirs). My uncle Henri, his sister Dora (future wife of my dad Leonard Fishel, i.e. my mother) and my grandmother Esther (wife of Max Brunner) did all three hide from the Germans: briefly in Brussels and then in Genval. The memoirs vividly describe their life during the German occupation, in particular how they managed to live partly in clandestinity and partly in the open and nevertheless escaped deportation. I have Henri's memoirs as a PDF file in English and in French and can provide a copy upon request or (if the link is still alive) you can view or grab a copy from

In English:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vEbJhX0pFs37UzMU1LYIpHkgPH9wHsrB/view?usp=sharing>

In French:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qIHkL1Cgm86HpPrIS6UEKI8zF6utK\\_9a/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qIHkL1Cgm86HpPrIS6UEKI8zF6utK_9a/view?usp=sharing)

- We are apparently a family of “scribblers”. My great-grandfather Israel Isaac Black published a book in Manchester in 1903. The book is entitled “The paths of Judaism in England”. It is written entirely in Hebrew characters, without vowels, and I am not proficient enough to read it. I’ll buy dinner to anyone who wants to translate it (I don’t think I risk much here). I.I. Black was the father of my grandmother Emily Fishel-Black (who perished in Auschwitz as you read earlier in these

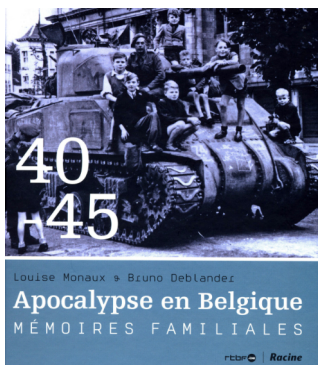
notes). There is an anecdote about the book: Israel Isaac Black's original family-name was Schwartzberg (literally black mountain). When he emigrated to England he changed his name by shortening it to Schwartz and translating it to English, he became Israel Isaac Black. When he wrote his book, however, he used his original family-name but this time in Spanish. He wrote under the pen name Israel Isaac Montenegro, as you can see on the cover-page (if you can decipher a few Hebrew characters). His book can be found here in PDF format at <http://www.hebrewbooks.org/44239>

- Many thanks to all my family members who patiently answered my painful questions. I apologize for reopening old and deep wounds. I know I have, but I felt I needed to. I got a lot of help from Len Fishel, my father and from Henri Brunner, my uncle.
- If you take the time, and have the courage, to read the included transport lists name by name you will see plenty of schoolchildren (Schüler or Schülerin in the last column), even a Doctor in the History of Art and other dangerous individuals of the same sort. Look at the birth dates of the deportees and you will find a 7 months old baby and many, many teenagers.
- The deportees of my family represent only a tiny drop in the unending sea of 6 million individuals who were methodically exterminated. Each one of them was a human being with a family, with feelings and projects and had a story similar to the stories you read here. The magnitude of the Holocaust, the magnitude of the Nazi crimes is unimaginable.
- The original transport lists have many markings on them in various colours. Some were made by the Germans, some after the war when trying to trace missing people. Some meanings: Stl. or Staatenl. meant stateless (apatride). H means man (homme), F means woman (femme), G means boy (garçon), FL means girl (fille). These are educated guesses. Many of the coloured pencil markings and ticks we cannot explain with certainty, it is not even known if they were made during the war or just after.
- Almost all the individuals on the deportation lists are shown as stateless (apatride, vaderlandsloos). Of course they were not all stateless. German Jews had lost German citizenship according to German citizenship laws. On 22nd April 1942 the German occupier promulgated a new anti-Jewish decree which stated that the belongings of all stateless Jews were now possessions of the Third Reich. To stay in accordance with their German laws they extended this principle to all Jews in countries annexed by the Reich. There was even a representative of the German instances at Caserne Dossin to make sure the new ruling was applied and to manage the liquidation of Jewish belongings. Upon arrival at the barracks the new detainees were forced to sign a statement declaring that they were transferring all their belongings to the German Reich. They even had to hand over their keys. This organized theft could be done only if the deportees were stateless and were not protected by the nationality of a country Germany had special agreements with. In other words, it could be done easily with stateless people. Therefore the Jewish deportees were simply classified as stateless by the Germans, no questions asked, problem solved.
- The German occupier founded the Jewish Council (Association of Jews in Belgium or AJB) by decree on 25th November 1941. Similar structures were set up throughout occupied Europe. It consisted of Jewish notables whose task it was to enforce German anti-Jewish decrees upon the Jewish population.
- Many thanks to Jan Bousse from Oostende who went all the way to Antwerp to find information about my grandparents in the city archives and who graciously sent me photocopies of the documents he found.
- Many thanks to Richard Casson, my second cousin from Manchester who provided me with missing information about the British (Liverpool) side of the Fishel and Black families and helped trigger the start of this research with his questions.

- Many thanks to Frédéric Turner from France who provided valuable insight on the Ilag camps and could identify people on some photos. He wrote two books on the British internees in the camps: "Les oubliés de 39-45, La rafle des Britanniques" ISBN 978-2-9538021-0-8 and "Les oubliés de 39-45, les Britanniques internés à Tost, Kreuzburg, Giromagny et Westertimke" ISBN 978-2-9538021-1-5.

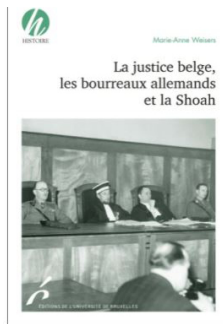


- Antwerp photographer William Herskovicz took the (for our family) iconic 1940 picture of Emily, Leon and Mendel Fishel shown in these notes. This man did incredible things: he was deported himself and lost his wife and children in Auschwitz but managed to escape from a Nazi labour camp. Read about his heroic actions at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_Herskovicz](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Herskovicz)
- Brünner, the name of my maternal grandfather, became Brunner and Holländer became Hollander after the family got established in Belgium (but there were exceptions). Some individuals continued to use the umlaut, others not. Opportunism prevailed: if one wanted to sound more “Teutonic” to the Germans the umlaut was used. Otherwise the umlaut was dropped. It's not used anymore now.
- Emily Black is called Jane on her Liverpool birth certificate but Emily on her Liverpool wedding certificate and most subsequent documents. She probably liked her middle-name Emily better, and so do I.
- My father Len remembered the names of some of the friends on pictures taken in captivity 70 years ago. He did not remember the exact spelling of their names, however, nor did he remember all the names of once familiar faces. The spelling used for the descriptions under some 1940-1945 era photographs is therefore my “best guess”. I apologize if I massacred anyone's name and I'll correct it if I get valid feedback.
- The colour pictures taken at Auschwitz and Birkenau, and used herein, were taken by my son David Fishel when he visited the twin camps with his school in March 2011. Thanks to the Belgian educative system for making such visits possible.



- At the request of Bruno Deblander, journalist at Belgian TV station RTBF, I wrote separate notes in French on the capture and captivity of my father Len and his brother Benny. My notes are included as a chapter of RTRBF-Racine book "40-45 Apocalypse en Belgique" starting on page 93. The chapter's title is “Les convois N° 5 et N° 17”. My original illustrations were not used, I don't know why (none were copyrighted). By agreement I kept the right to publish these notes on my personal website. They are available with the original illustrations and under the original title "Pour quelques heures seulement" on my own website at <https://www.fishel.net> . The complete RTBF book "Apocalypse en Belgique" is available in bookshops as ISBN 978 2 87386 929 8.
- The minimalist family genealogy chart included herein only shows the individuals mentioned in these notes, i.e. very close family members who were deported, held or hidden during WW II, and this for reasons of clarity. I still like the rest of the family...
- Many of the portrait pictures used for individuals here are either too old (long before the war) or too recent (after WWII). It is very difficult to get hold of family pictures made during the 1940-1945 period except for extremely close parents. Also, all belongings have been taken away by the Germans during the war so there are not very many pictures floating around. As I locate better pictures, more representative of the war or pre-war period, I will replace them in the text. Always look for the latest revision of my notes.

- I chose to use a factual tone and did not romanticize these notes. I provided lots of facts and their documentation. Holocaust denial is a crime and must be combatted with facts and evidence.
- Web sites change with time and page addresses become obsolete. If you can't find a link mentioned herein, or locate it after web searches, ask me and I'll try to help out if I can.
- Yad Vashem - The World Holocaust Remembrance Center is at <https://www.yadvashem.org> it has a wealth of information, educative material, testimonies and a digital library about the Holocaust. They have the old version of my notes (without the Antwerp letters, they hadn't been found yet) and will soon have the updated version with the Antwerp letters in their digital library. It is bewildering to do a name search for a family you know on the database of Shoah victim's names at <https://yvng.yadvashem.org/> and to read the testimonies. An unending sea of murders.



Marie-Anne Weisers studied the court cases of the Belgian Judiciary against Nazi war criminals after the end of the war. One particular case against Otto Siegburg, a prominent and extremely brutal member of the Sicherheitspolizei in charge of the Judenabteilung is of particular interest. My grandfather Menashe Brunner (Max Brunner is mentioned in an earlier chapter in my notes) was the pivotal witness during the court proceedings against Otto Siegburg. My grandfather was not only himself a victim of Otto Siegburg, but he also witnessed Siegburg's murder of another inmate. Dr Weisers published a book analysing the repression of war crimes in Belgium and in particular describes the proceedings in the Siegburg case and the testimonies of my grandfather and others. The book "La justice belge, les bourreaux allemands et la Shoah" is available under ISBN

978-2-8004-1688-5.

- At the end of the war the Germans tried to erase all traces of the crimes they had committed but they could not erase everything. They destroyed gas-chambers with explosives, flattened mass graves, burned documents, but they could not change themselves: they were Germans, and as such they were organized, methodical, meticulous and kept a written trace of everything they did on cards and lists. They tried to destroy documents that incriminated them at the end of the war but failed to erase all tracks for the very simple reason that they had kept several copies of documents and cards stored in different geographical locations. After the war these documents were retrieved by the allies. In their hurried flight the Germans did not have time to destroy every copy of everything everywhere. Many individuals, or companies, that had collaborated with the Nazis during the war also tried to erase all traces of their treason but they often failed too, for the same reason: they could not erase all tracks because the Germans with whom they had collaborated also had kept their own written trace of this collaboration activity.
- The Service of War Victims provided some of the transport lists used herein (the others were provided by Kazerne Dossin) and all the SD cards used herein. The transport lists and SD cards are all copyrighted by the Service des Victimes de la Guerre and are being used here with their explicit authorization. You may not distribute these in another publication without their written approval. Specifically, the Service of War Victims provided the documents with the following references and authorized their use in my notes:

SVG-SD-101204, SVG-SD-101209, SVG-SD-101211, SVG-SD-102553, SVG-SD-103974, SVG-SD-103975, SVG-SD-108202, SVG-SD-108203, SVG-SD-113181, SVG-SD-113182, SVG-SD-114429, SVG-SD-114469, SVG-SD-202787, SVG-SD-202789, SVG-SD-202792, SVG-SD-210328, SVG-SD-210355, SVG-TL-V, SVG-TL-XVII, SVG-TL-XXI, SVG-TL-II, SVG-TL-XVI, SVG-TL-XXIV, SVG-TL-XVIII, SVG-TL-XX, and SVG-TL-Z-1943.

- You can reach me by visiting my contact page at <https://www.fishel.net>. To contact me click on melvyn then on contact. I speak French, Dutch and English. I may update these notes as I find better pictures or correct typos. You can always download the latest copy of these "Torments of the Shoah" notes fom Melvyn's blog at <https://www.fishel.net>