



## Former Oregon Air Guard commander shares Holocaust experiences

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4/20/2009 - **PORTLAND, Ore.** -- A former commander of the Oregon Air National Guard recently recounted his experiences during the Holocaust here at Portland Air National Guard Base.

Retired Brig. Gen. Fred M. Rosenbaum spoke at an event sponsored by the 142nd Fighter Wing's Diversity Council as part of their Holocaust Remembrance observances.

About 80 airmen attended the presentation during the fighter wing's monthly training assembly to hear Rosenbaum, who is Jewish and was born in Austria more than a decade before World War II, discuss how the advent of the war affected his life.



Retired Oregon Air National Guard Brigadier General Fred M. Rosenbaum, meets with Col. John Kent, commander of the 142nd Fighter Wing, following Rosenbaum's presentation on his personal experiences during the Holocaust was the focus of the wing's Diversity Council observances for Holocaust Remembrance Month. (Photo by Staff Sgt. John Hughel, Oregon Air National Guard Public Affairs)

"German soldiers marched past my father's business, and the skies were filled with German planes," Rosenbaum said of the Nazi invasion of Austria in the latter part of 1938. "The entire country changed in the span of 24 hours."

"Imagine waking up one day and people are trying to kill you," he said.

After facing months of persecution and rising threats of violence, Rosenbaum said one day he and other Jewish students were herded into their school basement by Hitler Youth members, who beat them with riding crops and belts.

Rosenbaum climbed out a window and ran straight home. "That was the last time I ever saw that school," he said.

Within days, the then 12-year old Rosenbaum was on a train headed to London, England. His immediate family would join him 18 months later. The family eventually moved to the Pacific Northwest, where they settled in Portland, Ore., after Rosenbaum was admitted to Reed College.

During the presentation, Rosenbaum showed the audience his German passport, which was stamped with a large red "J."

The letter designated him as a Jew, he said.

"Whenever life gets me down, I pull out this passport and look at it," he said. "Then I think, 'life ain't that bad.'"

Rosenbaum joined the Army in 1944 and hoped to be sent to Europe so he could fight the Nazis, but instead served as a paratrooper with the 11th Airborne Division in the Pacific Theater.

After leaving the Army in 1948, he joined the Oregon Air National Guard. He received his commission in 1953, and worked his way through several leadership positions in the Oregon Air Guard before finally being named as the assistant adjutant general in 1980. He retired from the military in 1986.

"I never knew that I would achieve what I did in the United States," Rosenbaum said. "The military certainly had a large part of that."

Rosenbaum said while he had personally faced adversity and challenges, other family members had not been so lucky.

On a business trip to Austria in 1999, he inquired through a friend as to the fate of his grandparents. He

eventually learned they had been detained and sent to Minsk, Poland, where they were executed on the way to a Nazi concentration camp in November 1941.

"To have this life in the United States on one hand, and the life and death in Vienna on the other hand--to say that was night and day doesn't even come close," Rosenbaum said.

"The greatest blessing," he continued, "is to come to this country and take advantage of citizenship and the opportunity to help others."

Rosenbaum is known for his many civic contributions, including the creation of an annual at-risk youth camp which bears his name, Camp Rosenbaum.

Celebrating its 39th year, the nationally-recognized camp is a model for other states' efforts for early-intervention youth programs.

Rosenbaum is also responsible for establishing one of the nation's first permanent downtown housing for low-income families, and the nation's first suburban low-income housing project. He continues to be active in public housing issues, lobbying on behalf of tenants and housing authority boards. He served on the Housing Authority of Portland Commission for 17 years, 15 of them as chairman.

He also served as the chairman of the Portland Metropolitan Human Relations Commission, OMSI board chairman, and member of the Reed College Board of Trustees--his alma mater, which also voted him as "Trustee Emeritus" in 1996.

Rosenbaum is the recipient of the Humanitarian Award of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, the Lifetime Achievement Award for Military and Humanitarian contributions in support of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's "Keeping the Dream Alive", the Wally Z. Schneider Memorial Humanitarian Award, and the Russel A. Peyton Human Relations Award for his contributions to the entire Portland community.

In 2006, the government of Austria bestowed its highest civilian honor on Rosenbaum, with the Grand Decoration of Honor in Silver for his service to the republic of Austria.

Rosenbaum continues to remain active in local business and civic issues. He is currently the senior partner of Rosenbaum Financial, and continues to oversee planning and execution for Camp Rosenbaum, which he founded in 1972.