

Hans Meissinger Biography – by Joyce Arnon

Hans Friedrich Meissinger was born in Villingen, Germany on November 25, 1918.

Hans spent most of his childhood in Frankfurt and attended Lessing Gymnasium. After 1933 Hans suffered more and more discrimination at school due to being a “Mischling 1. Grad”. Things got more difficult after the Nürnberg Laws were passed in 1935 and he had to refer to himself as a “half-Jew” or “non-Aryan” in official documents. He was excluded from band, wasn’t allowed to participate in athletic events, and wasn’t allowed to go on school field trips.

In 1937, Hans graduated from Lessing Gymnasium (completed his Abitur) at the top of his class, with honors. The school principal allowed this to happen despite the objection of many of the teachers.

After graduating, Hans did 7 months of Arbeitsdienst in Siegen.

He then began his academic studies in mechanical engineering at the Technical University of Berlin in 1938, the only university that would take him regardless of his background. The family tried to emigrate to the US in 1938 and 1939 but was told by the U.S. consulate that the family was not sufficiently threatened to warrant immigration visas. Despite his being half-Jewish, Hans was drafted into the Wehrmacht 1939, after 3 semesters at the university. Both he and his brother Ernst, did not want to fight in Hitler’s army, but faced imprisonment or death if they refused, and they had no choice but to serve. They also thought that serving as soldiers might protect their Jewish mother.

Hans started his basic training at the Küstrin infantry base on August 25, 1939. Hans’s company was part of the invasion of France in May 1940 and took part in the battles of Sedan, Verdun and Toul. He worked as a scout and messenger, drew maps, and kept the lines of communication open between his company and battalion headquarters. Hans was proud of the fact that he never had to fire a gun in battle. In April 1940 Hans’s commander informed half-Jewish soldiers that due to a change in regulations they were to be dismissed from the army. Ernst also knew that he might be dismissed from the army, but tragically he was killed in action in Bouilly, France on June 11, 1940 before the dismissal. Hans was officially dismissed from the army in August 1940 and declared “wehrunwürdig” and a civilian.

Hans tried to resume his studies in Berlin and applied for federal financial assistance. He was told that as a “non-German” he was disqualified from federal aid. He was never officially told that he could continue his studies, but his professors “looked the other way” and told him to finish his courses as quickly as possible. He received his Dip. Ing. Degree in 1942. With the help of Professor Karl Klotter, Hans found work at the DVL (Deutsche Versuchsanstalt für Luftfahrt) (aviation research institute) in Berlin-Adlershof and he worked there until the end of the war. He later learned that DVL also allowed other half-Jews to work there, and the supervisors took repeated steps to protect them from the Nazis. In 1944 the Meissingers’ apartment had been bombed and they could no longer live there. Hans moved to Bad Saulgau in southern Germany, where the DVL research facilities had moved due to the ongoing destruction of Berlin.

Rosa and Marlies were in hiding in Altshausen starting in late 1944.

After the war, the Meissinger family lived in an UNRRA camp (Displaced persons camp) in Degerloch (Stuttgart) until February 1947. Hans was able to take graduate courses in applied mathematics and mechanics at the Stuttgart Technical University during this time. Rosa, Lilli, Hans, and Marlies emigrated to the US in February 1947, arriving in New York in March 1947.

Hans had recommendations from German professors and found work at Reeves Instrument Corp. in New York within 3 weeks. He married Hannah Ruth Gerber on November 23, 1949. She was also a half-

Jewish refugee from Frankfurt who had survived the war and emigrated to the US in 1948. They had been acquainted in Frankfurt and in fact Marlies had been in school together with Hannah.

Hans and Hannah moved to Los Angeles, California in 1955. They had one daughter, Joyce, in May 1956. Hans worked as a senior aerospace engineer and specialized in designing deep space exploration missions, first at Hughes Aircraft, and later at TRW, and Microcosm. Hans died in Los Angeles on February 12, 2009, at the age of 90.