

## Hans Heinz Blech

Hans Heinz Blech is born in Cologne, Germany, on 7 July 1915 to Sali Blech and Amalie Seligmann. He has two elderly sisters Herta (1908 – 1994) and Lotty Sybille (1911-1970) who both settle in respectively Cape Town, South-Africa and Triëste, Italy with their husbands before the outbreak of WWII.

As a young man, Hans Heinz works as a purchaser in his father's shoe store in Cologne, named Boa Shuh. At the age of 19 -in 1934- he moves to the Rue de Stassart 75 in Brussels and is educated in commerce and technique at the Ecole Pigier. Hans Heinz stays in Belgium on a temporary residence permit. Following his graduation, Hans Heinz moves to the Rue de La Poste no 58 in Montzen, Belgium in 1936. Montzen is a small village at ca. 40 kms from Maastricht and located near the village Moresnet where he works; at the age of 21, he and his fellow countryman Alfred Voss are appointed managing directors of the ceramic factory "La Céramique de L'Est S.A." in Moresnet, Belgium. At this stage, Hans Heinz is not (yet) the owner of the factory that produces decorated ceramics.

From 1937 onwards, Hans Heinz repeatedly applies for a permanent resident card, underscoring the need for his daily presence in the factory that offers employment and serves other economic interests. Also his lawyer and the mayor of Moresnet advocate for a permanent resident card for Hans Heinz at the national authorities. But their efforts are to no avail; an extension of Hans Heinz' temporary residence permit is the highest attainable. One of the reasons for the refusal of a permanent residence card is the fact that Hans Heinz does not own the minimum number of shares in the factory, as is required by law. The Belgian authorities regularly make inquiries whether this situation has changed.

In April 1938, Hans Heinz has moved from Montzen to Verviers where he lives at the Rue de Liège no.60. In May 1938, Hans Heinz acquires the majority of the factory's shares and invests ca. € 9,000.00 in the factory. With the share issue settled, his lawyer asks the Belgian authorities to finally grant a permanent resident card for his client. But the Department of Economic Affairs gives a negative advice arguing that the investment is made by a foreigner and it thus does not concern an investment financed with Belgian money – an argument that is not shared with Hans Heinz nor his lawyer.

On January 5th, 1939, the factory is set on fire. Hans Heinz' father Sali –who owns a small number of the factory's shares- is the suspected to be the perpetrator and is charged with arson. From then on gaps exist in the reconstruction of events. In a letter of 25 November 1940, Belgium is then occupied by Germany, the Verviers police note that Hans Heinz has 'secretly' left Verviers and that his destination is unknown. On 26 November 1940, the foreign police issue a 'notice of departure' stating that Hans Heinz has been removed from the register of foreigners as from 26 November 1940, while his temporary residence permit is valid until 27 February 1941.

On 10 September 1941, at 2:15 PM, Sali and Hans Heinz are arrested during a raid on the house at the Dorpsstraat 14A, where Sali lives. The arrest is commanded by of Max Strobel, head of the German *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD) in Maastricht. It is not unlikely that Hans Heinz' illegal stay prompted this action. If so, the question arises who betrayed him. Following the arrest, the men are brought to the house of detention at the Minderbroederberg. The Maastricht police commander is then

requested by the National Aliens Registration Authority in The Hague to transfer Sali and Hans Heinz to camp Westerbork, where they arrive on 12 September 1941. At that time, Westerbork functioned as a refugee camp for Jews before it was designated as a transit camp for Jews as from 1st July 1942. After an eleven months stay, Hans Heinz is deported to Auschwitz on 15 July 1942 where he is murdered on 25 August 1942. Hans Heinz dies at the age of 27.

After being detained in Westerbork for over 2.5 years, Hans Heinz' father Sali is deported to Bergen-Belsen where he is murdered on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1945. His sisters Herta and Lotte Sybille survive the war. As does his mother Amalie who migrates to Cape-Town, South-Africa when the war came to an end. She passes away on 16 December 1953.