

Canada

## **Auschwitz escapee Rudolf Vrba dies**

CBC News · Posted: Mar 31, 2006 9:31 PM ET | Last Updated: March 31, 2006

Rudolf Vrba, an Auschwitz death camp escapee who is credited with saving hundreds of thousands of lives, has died in Vancouver. He was 82.

Vrba, a Czech Jew, was imprisoned in Auschwitz at age 19. He was put to work removing the dead from trains arriving at the camp.

In 1944, when he learned that a million Hungarian Jews were about to be sent to Auschwitz, he decided to warn the world.

Vrba and fellow prisoner Alfred Wetzler hid inside a construction wood pile for three days.

After escaping, Vrba and Wetzler gave the first detailed accounts of the death camp and its operations.

Initially, their testimony was ignored and political leaders allowed half a million Hungarian Jews to be deported.

"Sadly they were very, very slow to act," said Bernie Farber of the Canadian Jewish Congress. "But it's calculated as a result of Rudolf Vrba's escaping Auschwitz and getting this information to the allies that possibly upward of 200,000 Jews were saved."

In 1985, Vrba's testimony was also key in convicting Holocaust denier Ernst Zundel.

"He was a man who took no guff," Farber said. "I guess that's the best way that I could put it."

Vrba became a professor of pharmacology at the University of British Columbia. He went on to write books and lecture about his experiences.

"I think he would just want to be remembered as he said, in a sense, a man of the people who made an effort to make the world a better place," said his friend, Dr. Rob Krell. "He never sought vengeance, he sought justice."

Vrba is survived by his wife, daughter and two grandchildren.