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ALEKSYNAS, Juozas
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In this interview, Juozas Aleksynas, born on September 7, 1914, a soldier in the Lithuanian Army and the Lithuanian 12th Self-Defense Battalion, describes his military service in Lithuania and his participation in several massacres of Jews in Belarus in the autumn of 1941. He provides details during his testimony, including a haunting depiction of shooting a family. When asked about his thoughts and reactions to the events, he expresses horror and revulsion. During the interview, he briefly discusses his escape, imprisonment, and exile. Aleksynas also provides the names of two Lithuanian military officers who perpetrated crimes, especially in issuing commands at mass murder sites.

Box 1, Tape 1

[01:] 00:43:03 – [01:] 05:53:03
00:37 – 05:59

He introduces himself as Juozas Aleksynas, born in 1914, in Marijampolė County, Gudeliai District, Makrickai village; describes his military service between 1936 and 1937 as serving in the 9th regiment of the Lithuanian army, conscripted according to age; says that when the war began, Petras Kubiliūnas, the Lithuanian Lieutenant General and General Counsel in the Reichskommissariat Ostland, announced on the radio that soldiers were being mobilized to ensure order in the interior; explains that the service contract was for a period of six months and at the time there was no mention of Germans, but states that his military duty in Lithuania was to guard Russian prisoners at a labor camp near the Ežerėlio peat bogs in Zapyškis; says the Lithuanians would take the Russians to work daily, but that the Germans guarded the Russians at all other hours; says that the Russians went to work calmly; explains that everyone was under the supervision of the Germans and that the prisoners worked at digging and transporting peat; describes the poor health of the Russian prisoners.

[01:] 05:53:04 – [01:] 10:06:10
06:00 – 10:23

He explains that he joined the battalion in late July 1941, that he did not serve at the locations of the ghettos or massacre sites in Lithuania, that the soldiers in the battalion first lived on Miško Street, and then in the Šančiai military barracks; he says that his battalion was sent out of Lithuania in autumn 1941 and transported to Minsk; says the battalion was the Lithuanian 12th Self-Defense Battalion that the leader was Major Impulevičius; says he served in the battalion until May or June 1942, when he ran away from Minsk with Stasys **Cėpla** [**Čėpla**], but does not know the fate of **Cėpla**; says that together they escaped to Vilnius in an empty train car; provides several reasons for his escape: there was no reason to fight for the Germans, that the Germans

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were not their true leaders, that they were merely an instrument of the Germans; comments that the Germans accompanied them everywhere, but that the Lithuanian military officers issued the commands; mentions that **Antanas Gecevičius** was the detachment commander and **Plungė** was the company commander; says **Gecevičius** knew the German language well and communicated with the Germans; says that the soldiers in Minsk were housed in small groups in rooms and notes that they did not live in barracks.

[01:] 10:06:11 – [01:] 14:26:18
10:24 – 14:54

He says his battalion was sent to many locations in Belarussia and mentions some: **Kletsk** [Клецк], **Barysau**[Barysau] [Барысаў], and **Slutsk** [Слуцк]; says the battalion participated in massacres of Jews at each of the places where they were taken; says that the Germans would accompany the battalion and that the amount of soldiers sent would depend on the size of the city; explains that the soldiers worked in shifts; says they were transported in German cars that were covered with tarpaulin and that the Germans rode at the front of the convoy; recalls that the convoy was fired upon with machine guns and that several Germans at the front were injured or killed; says that in retaliation, the Germans surrounded the village, and rounded up and killed all of the men; asked to talk about the process of the massacres, he says that when they arrived in a town, they were ordered to round up the Jews together with the local police force because the policemen knew where the Jews lived; says the Jews were brought to the town square or market square; says the Germans would select people they deemed necessary for their own purposes, such as Jewish doctors or engineers; says the remaining Jews were taken to pits that were always previously dug; explains that the Jews were rounded up from their homes and that there was no separate ghetto; explains that while the Germans surrounded the town, the Lithuanians participated in the rounding up and the transporting of victims; says that the mass graves were dug outside of the town limits, usually near a hillside; asked how many massacres he witnessed, he says that he cannot count, but estimates that he was present at ten sites.

[01:] 14:26:19 – [01:] 18:06:06
14:55 – 18:44

He says that the Lithuanians had to take the victims to the grave sites; explains that the shootings occurred in shifts and that the victims had to wait in one area and were later taken in groups to the grave; explains that the victims did not bring any belongings; explains the process of the killings: the Jews were gathered into a mass group, placed in a formation of groups of four, and taken to the killing site; says the columns of victims could be quite large depending on the size of the town and the number of victims taken to the grave site depended on the size of the grave itself; says the victims were taken to the grave, forced to lie down, and shot; explains that they shot the victims lying down and that the victims would have to lie on top of one another; asked if each group was covered with earth after being shot, he says that no earth was placed on the victims during the massacre, but that at the very end Germans would bring and pour bleach onto the grave; comments that he does not know who covered the graves in the end; says he does not know who dug the graves, but presumes they were dug by prisoners; states that the graves were always pre-made upon their arrival at the massacre site; explains that if you participated in the rounding up of victims (in the town), you did not have to participate in the killings and that the

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soldiers at the massacre site shot in shifts; asked if he could have refused to participate in the killings, he says that there was no way he had a right to refuse; says that complaints about one's health would be met with a German checking your temperature or pulse and an order to return to work; says that during the first massacre, he participated in the rounding up of Jews, that he did not shoot that time, that he does not remember the name of the city.

[01:] 18:06:07 – [01:] 22:22:22
18:45 – 23:11

He explains the entire scene was despicable; says that a person who has not seen this could not even imagine it; explains that the soldiers were issued Russian weapons and ammunition, that they were exploding and incendiary bullets, that the clothes of the victims lit on fire in the pits and the victims had to climb on top of burning corpses; expresses that the odor of burning bodies was unbearable; says that the victims did not resist; explains that the shots were aimed at the chest, but sometimes at the back of the head, though in this case the back of the head split open because of the type of bullets used [*raises his hand to the back of his head*]; the interviewee is asked if he saw whether or not his shots hit the victims; he responds saying that he saw how he fired because he was standing two meters from the bodies; he is unable to confirm how long the massacres took, but says that the length of time depended on the number of victims; reveals that the soldiers were not told in advance how many people would be killed on a certain day; confirms that they did not have to push victims into the pits because the victims did not resist; says that the victims carried or brought their children along with them and that everyone was destroyed; explains that if there was a child with the parents, the family would climb into the pit together, lie down, and the father would place a hand on the child; the interviewee alleges that the shooter would have to decide whether to shoot the child or the parents first; the interviewee states that it was determined beforehand that the parents must be shot first; says that children do not feel anything, that he had to consider how a parent would feel if their child was shot right next to them; says that the parents were shot first and then the child; he asserts that the victims usually did not scream or yell, that the women would sometimes cry as they walked; recalls how one male victim shouted “**Vivat Hitler. Doloj Stalin!**” at the massacre site; says that the Germans shot this man.

[01:] 22:22:23 – [01:] 28:57:01
23:12 – 30:02

He asserts that the battalion officers did not shoot the victims, but rather that they would give orders; says that the officers only fired on victims at the end of the massacre to finish off living or injured people, but that they would primarily issue orders: “get ready” and “shoot”; speaks very briefly about the people in charge, mentions **Gecevičius**; asked about his mood at the massacre site, he says he has a difficult time expressing himself; says it was frightening, that it was almost automatic, that the work was horrible, unbearable, and forced; says that they would return to Minsk at night after the killings; says they were not given vodka at the killing site, but on Saturdays after a week's work; asked when on the given day they found out that they were going to a massacre, he says they were not told ahead of time; speaks for a while about when they tried to capture a few (Jewish) partisans in the forest; explains how this attempt was unsuccessful; asked about the shift change of shooters at the massacre site, he explains that one

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had to shoot as long as there were people to be killed, that the victims were not shot in a mass group, that one line of people was made to lie down in the grave and were shot individually, that they were not shot with machine guns; says that the leaders would relieve the shooters, that there was no sense of the number of victims at the site, that the number was not determined or relayed to the soldiers ahead of time; says that the Germans rarely shot victims, and if so, usually only at the end.

[01:] 28:57:02 – [01:] 33:21:19
30:03 – 34:37

He explains that the Germans would surround the area where the massacres took place; adds that the Germans photographed the massacre proceedings; asked about how he felt when he was being photographed, he replies saying that they can all “go to hell”; says that later the Germans said that they did nothing except take photographs; says that the killings ended in the winter and that his battalion was sent to guard a military depot near the war front and then were sent to guard a freight railroad station; explains that he participated in the killings in 1941; says that the battalion was transferred from guard duties to **Gomel [Homel, Homiel] [Гомель]** because there were many partisans active in the area; states that it was at this time that he escaped; asked if talked about the massacres with people or with his children when he returned from prisons and from the internment camp, he says that he did not talk about it, that it was embarrassing and horrible; asked how he explained to himself what was happening during the massacres, he says that he blames God, if God even exists, because how could he allow humanity to murder innocent people; he says that the Germans wore a pin on their uniforms that stated: “God with us”; explains that his battalion wore Lithuanian military uniforms until the winter, that he was only given a gendarmerie uniform after he was released from prison; explains that he was on trial before a SS court, that he was defended by an attorney named **Navickas**.

[01:] 33:21:20 – [01:] 36:28:10
34:38 – 37:52

He says that in December 1943, when Kaunas was being bombarded, while he was imprisoned, he presented an application requesting to be sent to the war front, that within three days of the application he was released from prison and was to present himself for registration within two hours; says that he was in uniform and found a person to transport him, and this is how his escape began; asked if all of the killings during which he participated were all similar, he says that the killings were not dissimilar, that the graves were already dug, the victims were taken to site, and killed; that the victims were not undressed or beaten, *[the interview is abruptly cut; the tape is fast forwarded]*.