

ELIOŠAITIS, Bronius  
Lithuania Documentation Project  
Lithuanian  
RG-50.473\*0016

Tape 1 Box 1

In this interview B. Eliošaitis, born in 1922, talks about the life of his family before the war, his experience in the Varniai concentration camp, where he was sent with his mother for his father's involvement in organizing the Tauragė uprising; and in Karaliaučius (Königsberg), where he went to a German school, and he describes how the situation changed as Hitler came to power and he immediately was made to sit with the only other non-German in the class, a Jew named **Izidor Izraelit**. He describes his work in the Railway company, where he worked at the beginning of the war, insisting that most of the German workers there were good people and helped the Jews and the prisoners of war out, but admits that there were cruel people too, **Eigel** being the most cruel of them. He recalls his school friend being shot to death because he threw some food to the prisoners of war. He talks about the fate of the Jews, who lived in the same house as his family – **Aranovskiai, Tamšė**; talks about the searches performed by the „white strippers“. He mentions his involvement in the anti-Hitler underground movement and his arrest; recalls an interrogator of the Lithuanian intelligence, who regretted his involvement with the Germans. He talks about how his family helped several Jews out, how Mečys Paulauskas helped to forge the papers. He remembers his neighbor **Girnius**, who belonged to a special execution team that shot the Jews; talks in detail about his character, fate, etc. Also talks in detail about another neighbor, **Grinius**, who performed searches at their home, and later went on to work for the Soviet intelligence. He goes on to talk about the units led by Plechavičius, which, following German orders, were fighting the Lithuanian partisans.

[01] 00:40:11 - [01] 07:19:15

00:00:42 - 00:07:38

He introduces himself saying that he was born in 1922 in Marijampolė, to a family of a metal-worker and a saleswoman; he had no brothers or sisters. He talks about the beginning of the war; says that it came unexpectedly, although there were rumors about it a week before it started; that German planes were flying over Kaunas, although people were made to believe that the relationship between the Germans and the Russians was good. He claims that there were people in Lithuania, who knew the exact date of when the war was to start; mentions an acquaintance of his wife, who knew the date of the beginning of the war a week before it broke out; that this man worked in the administration when the Germans came; that he fled to the West when the Russians came in 1944, but came back later; suggests that he might have been from the insurgents' movement. He says he cannot remember any signs of the impending war, except for the prevalent anxiety; that people reacted to the news about the impending war differently; that there were some who thought it was good news, but they would not talk about it in public.

[01] 07:19:15 - [01] 16:13:06

00:07:38 - 00:16:54

He says that he was brought up “in a non-militaristic spirit”; that in 1925 his parents and he lived in Tauragė and they worked in a co-operative store; that after the 1926 coup by Smetona, his parents considered his government illegitimate, although they were not politically active; that in 1927 there was an attempt for another coup – the so called “Putsch of Tauragė”; that his father was involved with the organizers; that as the coup failed, its organizers were all executed; that at that time his father was not in Tauragė, but in Skaudviliškis, where he was working; that he fled to Germany for political asylum; that his mother was deported to Marijampolė, and later – to Šiauliai; that when he was five, his mother was arrested and sent to the Šiauliai prison together with him; that later they were sent to the Varniai concentration camp. He thinks that the arrest was not justified, as his mother wasn’t even involved in any political activity. He says that his future father in law, a former member of the Seimas (the Parliament of Lithuania) and a social democrat was also in Varniai camp at that time; that many people were arrested, especially among the social democrats; that the Lithuanian government was forging law suits against them, and if it didn’t work, they would be sent to the concentration camps; that his parents were supporters of the social democrats, but that they were not active politically. He expresses his opinion that a repressive system was being created to eliminate all those with opposing opinions, since all political parties were also banned. He mentions that **Krygeris**, a lawyer from Kaunas, was also at the concentration camp. He remembers that there were two children at the Varniai camp: him and the son of Stepaitienė; that they stayed there for two or three months only; that he got really sick with diphtheritis; that the superintendent of the camp, Rudaitis, brought a Jewish doctor from Šiauliai; that as he got better, he was released with his mother; that Lithuanian newspaper in the US had written about their release.

[01] 16:13:06 - [01] 25:03:17  
00:16:54 – 00:26:06

He recalls how they moved to Vištytis, where his mother’s parents lived; how they acquired the right to legally cross the border after living there for half a year; how they crossed the border and drove to Karaliaučius (Königsberg), where his father was; how he went to a German school there until 1934; how everything changed when Hitler came into power; how his teacher, **Marold**, was dismissed from the school and put a Nazi with a surname **Jotkand (Jotkant)** and a party badge in his lap in his position; how the children at school automatically began to be categorized as German or Non-German; how soon his former friends formed a “Hitler Jugend” group in his class; how they began calling him “Polak” (“Polish”); how he was made to sit at one desk with a Jew named **Izidor Izraelit** (Israelit), who came from a very educated family; how one day as he and Izidor were going home, they were surrounded by a group of boys and he hit one of them; how he was punished at the school for that. He talks about Hitler coming to power, the social democrats’ rallies, their union with the communists – the “Eisenfront”, its failure, caused by the communists. He says he doesn’t know what happened to Izidor Izraelit, but he remembers his family was planning to flee Germany. He says that he and his mother returned to Lithuania in 1934; that he studied at the “Aušra” gymnasium, and later at the technical school, from which he graduated in 1942 and went on to work in the Railway company which needed mechanical workers and people who could speak German. He explains that all Railway workers received a so called “UK” document which dismissed them from any mobilization; that Germans would come to cinemas and other gathering places of youth and take men to the “Arbeitsdienst” or to the units that were being formed and led by Plechavičius.

[01] 25:03:17 - [01] 32:37:14

00:26:06 - 00:33:59

He says that he had been stopped on the street several times; that the „UK“ documents saved him from being drafted. He recalls that he met a lot of Jews and prisoners of war, German specialists – „from the ruling to the slaves“ – as he was working at the Railway company; that most of the Germans working at the railway were good; that some German workers tried to assist and give food to the prisoners of war and the Jews. He singles out one German named **Eigel** who worked at the locomotive department, saying that he was “a real sadist”, that if he saw a group of Jews or prisoners of war, he grabbed anything that he could find and started beating them up. He also remembers the supervisor of his department, who was also a German and would scold them for not following the rules in public, but in private he would urge them to help the prisoners and the Jews out. He says that he was arrested in 1943 for his involvement in an underground anti-Hitler movement; that some communists were also involved in this movement, that they started some provocation and gave the movement in; that his mother was taken to Germany and he was released; that he was questioned by an interrogator, who worked for the Lithuanian intelligence, which was under direct control of Gestapo; that as he released him the interrogator asked, „look what I’ve become“ and warned him against the dangers of politics and advised him to never get involved in it. He says that as he left the prison he was followed by the „Arbeitsamt“ agents, who would come to his parents’ home in Zarasų street at least once a week; that he started working at a theatre managed by colonel Ivanaukas; that he got the job because he knew German and was recommended by Jokubėnas, a poet; that „Arbeitsamt“ wanted to send him to Germany, because they considered him a deserter from the Railway; that he had been arrested and he even signed a pledge to go and join „Arbeitsdienst“ as a volunteer; that he was given three days to pack and he ran away.

[01] 32:37:14 - [01] 36:25:00

00:33:59 - 00:37:56

He says that at the start of the war they lived in Zarasų street; that theirs was the only Lithuanian family in the house; that other families were Jewish; that the house had recently been bought by **Aronovskis (Aranofskis, Aronovskis, Aronofskis)**; that one apartment was occupied by the owner and his family, another – by his daughter, married to **Tamšė**, who was a Lithuanian military officer, captain, decorated with an order for his participation in the fights for Independence; and the third apartment was inhabited by a family of young Jews – there were four or five people living there. He recalls how on the second or third day of war, when the Germans had still not reached Kaunas, the insurgents began searches in Jewish homes; mentions that the insurgents’ headquarters were established at a school; says that the people who were doing the searches would always take something from the homes for themselves; that the insurgents started beating up the Jews who resisted; that the insurgents began „spreading provocations“ and told his family that the young Jews living in the third apartment were from NKVD and that they were shooting from the house; that his mother tried to object saying that she didn’t hear anything; that after that his family was also persecuted; that on the 25<sup>th</sup> or 26<sup>th</sup> of June his family’s apartment was surrounded and the insurgents started shooting at their windows.

Tape 2 Box 1

[02] 00:40:11 – [02] 10:56:22

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00:00:42 - 00: 11: 24

He recalls how he and his mother were arrested; how they were taken to the headquarters of the insurgents; how they were told they would be sent to the Seventh Fort – explains that the Seventh Fort was the site of the first executions of the Jews; recalls that the insurgents wanted to get approval of a German officer from a unit that was stationed next to his family's home; that he came over to the German officer and pleaded with him that his unit would have heard the shootings if they did take place; that the German officer sent his interpreter to ask around the quarter about his family; that nobody said anything bad about them so they were released. He explains that the officer was a Wehrmacht officer and not a SS officer. He recalls that the young men who lived in the third apartment were taken away by the „white strikers“ and never came back; that Tamšė was not arrested the same day, but he disappeared later; that the owner's family stayed in the house until the establishment of the ghetto [a cat is meowing through the last few sentences; the camera stops, then resumes]. He says that the owner's daughter was the only one of them to survive the war; that she showed up in 1945, sold the house and fled to through Poland to Israel. He recounts that after the ghetto was established and the Jews moved out, the apartment of the owner was taken by a **Girnius** and his family; that Girnius was a simple worker, but he did not even try to conceal that he was going to other places in Lithuania and participating in the execution of the Jews; that he was armed all the time. He points out that the owners left almost all of their possessions in the apartment. He goes on to tell an incident, when at the end of the Summer of 1941 **Inčiūrienė**, whom he had known from the technical school, came over to his family's house wearing a star; how he and his mother tried to help her by giving food and sometimes shelter, but it was dangerous because the neighbors could give them in; how his mother, who worked at the Laundromat “Švara”, found a student's card among the clothing brought for cleaning; how they brought the card to Mečys Paulauskas, who was good at forging documents and he glued the photo of Inčiūrienė to the card; that later Inčiūrienė left for Northern Lithuania and survived until now.

[02] 10:56:22 - [02] 19:20:00

00: 11: 24 - 00:20:08

He once again confirms that the young Jews who lived in the third apartment were all taken the same day; that the searches continued beyond the arrest; that they were performed by „whoever wanted“ in groups of four or five or larger; points out that they were performed by a vary „heterogeneous public“: some were only there to loot and they were the most active ones, while the others were more cautious, and some even tried to stop the looters. He recalls an incident in which a young boy wanted to kill him for being a communist, but an older man stopped him and took his gun away. He insists once again that the insurgents were a very diverse group; that some were real patriots and those who suffered from the mass deportations in 1941. He goes on to talk about his neighbors who were the “white strikers”, who had surrounded his family's home and shot at his windows, and with whom he later got on like good neighbors and felt no bitterness. He points out that he doesn't think that they “contributed to the most awful of things”. He remembers one of them, **Grinius (Grinis)**, and goes on to tell a story how Grinius later conspired to throw out professor Kairiūkštis, his supervisor at a pharmacology lab and the latter ended up in a mental hospital. He says that one should fear normality and that explains that a person like Grinius could sacrifice anything for his career regardless of the system. He goes on to tell a story about a friend from school, **Karnovskis**, who lived in Dzūkų street with his mother, how they went to the ghetto and lived on the same block as **Jechevet (Jachevet) Inčiūrienė**; how his mother's boyfriend, who was a Jew, but had registered as a Russian didn't have to move

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to the ghetto; how he kept in touch with Karnovskis through his mother's boyfriend, and sometimes would see him at the Railway, when the Jews were brought to work there; how he visited them once in the ghetto.

**[02] 19:20:00 - [02] 28:43:06**

00:20:08 - 00:29:55

He recalls how they tried to falsify papers for Karnovskis and his mother; how Mečys Paulauskas obtained a passport of a dead woman and changed the picture; how he himself was bringing the passport to the Dzūkų street to hand it to Karnovskis mother's boyfriend; how, as he was entering the house, a woman warned him not to go the apartment, since Gestapo was there; how he turned around; how he later found out that the Karnovskis mother's boyfriend was killed when Gestapo found out that he was a Jew. He cannot remember if he saw the Jews being taken away from their home, but mentions hearing cursing as the searches were being performed; says that the people who performed the searches would always leave with a bag in hand. Once again he insists that while some were looting, the others were just watching them. He mentions one older man, who performed searches at their house; he suspects that this same man later worked for the Soviet intelligence, since his house was not nationalized and he had a phone line in 1945, while at that time only hospitals and intelligence agents had phones at all. [He sighs.] He goes on to talk about Juozas Grinius, who was sentenced to ten years in prison, but came back early; explains that people later talked that he was let out early, because he was informing and spying on others. He concludes that this man was willing to work for either system, as long as he saw how he could benefit from it. He goes on to tell Grinius' fate after the war, how he worked as an electrician, how he got sick and died, and how his son became an alcoholic. [A phone rings. The camera is switched off, then resumes.] He recalls seeing the houses in Kaunas ghetto being blown up one by one; says it lasted for about two weeks and happened around the same time as the execution of Jews in the Ninth Fort, as the Front was approaching; explains that the houses that were blown up were the ones with the suspected hide-outs.

**[02] 28:43:06 - [02] 36:14:23**

00:29:55 - 00:37:45

He claims that he has not witnessed any killings; that he only saw the Jews being beaten up in the Railway by the sadist (*Eigel*) and some guards, as well as at their house during the searches; he discusses the dress of the insurgents, saying that they wore white bands and civilian clothes – suits most of the time, but explains that everybody wore suits then; mentions that some wore military jackets at the headquarters, but not full uniforms. He recounts an incident, in which a classmate of his was picking up cabbages in his garden in Aleksotas, as he saw a group of prisoners of war, who had obviously been starving; he threw a cabbage to them and was immediately shot to death by a German "Arbeistdienst" soldier. [Pause, as he tries to remember the name of the classmate, but fails.] He notes that "Hitler Jugend" or "Arbeitsdienst" members were the most violent, while he cannot say anything bad about the civilian workers. He goes on to talk about his mother, how she was sent to Germany to work at the end of 1943 of the beginning of 1944 and how she escaped with other "Civilarbeiter" taking a train from Berlin, while it was being bombed, to the border near Kybartai, and how she went on to hide in Marijampolė. [A discussion ensues in the background whether the tape should be changed.]

[03] 00:20:13 - [03] 00:42:02

00:00:13 - 00:00:36

[An incidental conversation takes place in the background, while the title card is shown.]

[03] 00:42:02 - [03] 07:47:14

00:00:36 - 00:07:59

He claims that the “white strippers” movement did not last long – no longer than two weeks; that his neighbors who took part in it took off their white bands, gave away their weapons and went back to their normal lives; that some insurgents joined the so-called self-defense battalions that were being formed; that these battalions were charged with guarding the ghetto, guarding the bridges, etc.; that the battalions were primarily formed from former insurgents; that they wore uniforms; that still others – and Girnius among them – belonged to a special execution team. He remembers that Girnius did not wear a uniform; that months after the “white strippers” were gone, he would leave with his gun for a few days or a week; that nobody came to take him, that he would walk to what B. Eliošaitis thinks was a meeting point. He claims that Girnius did not become very rich, but that he had more money and food than the others; that if he had treasures, he did not boast about it – he suspects that Girnius might have sold the treasures later; that he always brought something back with him from his trips. He remembers Girnius as a sullen, but a self-confident man, who boasted about his physical strength, although he was not very tall. He recalls Girnius talking about an execution in Ukmergė, but not mentioning that he was also shooting.

[03] 07:47:14 - [03]:16:06:04

00:07:59 – 00:16:38

He talks about the units led by Plechavičius, saying that some joined voluntarily, while others were drafted by force. He recalls his friend from the technical school, **Feliksas Valtas (Felix Valt, Felix Walt)**, who joined such a unit voluntarily and was sent near the Belarusian border to fight the Lithuanian partisans. He remembers how F. Valtas mentioned them burning down villages; explains that F. Valtas was an interpreter, since he knew German, and that the Germans would convey their orders to the unit through him; that these units were under direct control of the SS. He recalls how F. Valtas came back to Kaunas in 1944 and reported himself to the Komsomolsk – „to redeem himself“ – and mentioned that he was given a task in the German home front, since he spoke German, but B. Eliošaitis thinks he was simply executed. He claims that F. Valtas did not mention anything about the executions of the Jews; that F. Valtas had helped J. Inčiūrienė hide in his home. He goes on to talk about the end of the war, how he was not mobilized in 1944 because he was a technician; how later everybody was wondering why he – a former member of an underground anti-Hitler movement – did not join the Komsomolsk or the party, but that the thought it was immoral to join the party after the mass deportations had taken place. He starts talking about his career at the university.

[03]:16:06:04 - [03]:24:53:13

00:16:38 - 00:25:49

[The setting changes to outside, street noises can be heard in the background.] He explains that they are standing in front of the house where he lived with his parents at the beginning of the war; that Jews lived in the other apartments; points out where exactly they had been living [the camera focuses on the house.] He claims that the Jews must have been well off, that they bought the house in 1939 from **Varekojis**. When asked about the fate of the Jews who lived in that

house, he repeats that the young family that had lived on the second floor was arrested. He recounts that he later saw a group of a few hundred Jews being led by the “white stripers” in Savanoriq Avenue; he says they were mostly men. He repeats once again that the owners of the house went to the ghetto; that their daughter came back; that he doesn’t know the fate of her husband. He recounts an incident, how a young man with a white band came to the house and asked him to go with him to search on the second floor; how, as they were ascending, the man tried to hand him a revolver, but he refused; how the young man went to a crack in the attic [the camera focuses on where the crack used to be] to inform people downstairs that he found no one; how somebody shot him to death. He suspects that it was intended as a provocation and that the bullet was planned for him. He claims that after this incident the searches in their house stopped. He starts saying something, but mumbles that it’s not for the camera. [The camera focuses on the house again.]

**[03]:24:53:13 - [03]:26:02:07**

00:25:49 - 00:27:01

[The camera resumes.] He claims that a man, who had just passed them by, was one of the “white stripers”. [A man is shown walking away, then the camera stops; as it resumes, the street is shown as a couple is walking away.]