

VELIČKA, Stasys
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In this interview, Stasys Velička, born in 1917, describes how from June 1941 to the summer of 1942 he worked as an army cook in a Lithuanian self-defense police battalion (the Second Auxiliary Police Service Battalion), which, after having been stationed in Kaunas for a few months, was sent to Minsk and tasked with shooting Jews and hunting Soviet partisans. He describes at some length the volunteers who carried out the executions, stating that they plundered the Jews' money and possessions in the course of the killings. He also recounts how they prepared in the morning and how they drank and partied a few days in a row after the executions. He recalls a Jewish man who used to come from the Minsk ghetto to their barracks to fix furnaces and he would give him leftover soup for his family in the ghetto and explains that the man gave him a note in Yiddish and in Russian describing his good deeds which later saved him during interrogation at the Soviet Ministry for State Security (MGB). He fled his service in Minsk in the summer of 1942 and went into hiding for two years.

Box 1, Tape 1

[01:] 00:40:13 – [01:] 09:02:18
00:35 – 09:17

The interviewee introduces himself as Stasys Velička, born in 1917 to a family of farmers in the village of Kvesai, located in Vilkija district, Kaunas region; says that his family owned a lot of land (29 hectares) and that he worked at his parents' farm until he left for the army and then for another year after he came back; says that later he enrolled to serve at the Lithuanian self-defense battalion in Kaunas; states that he believed that the goal of the battalion was to prevent looting (by the Russians); reports that the battalion was first stationed in central Kaunas, then moved to Žaliakalnis, and later to Šančiai; remembers that he served in the army of Independent Lithuania under Smetona (Antanas Smetona was the first President of Lithuania from April 4, 1919 to June 19, 1920) from 1938 until June 1940, when the Russians took over his battalion and they were moved to Marijampolė where they stayed for about two months; explains that he was always an army cook and that is why he was not punished by the Soviet government *[at this point, he jumps to the period when he served in the Lithuanian self-defense battalion, which was under direct German control and was stationed in Minsk, Belarus]*; recalls that there were 29 Ukrainian prisoners of war there who later were trained by the Germans and sent to the front; mentions that he would secretly give them leftover food.

[01:] 09:02:19 – [01:] 17:52:03
09:18 – 18:29

He says that a Jewish man from the Minsk ghetto would come to their barracks to fix furnaces and he would always give him eight cans of soup and the man would bring them to his family in the ghetto; says that once in the spring of 1942 the Jewish man thanked him and said what a wonderful person he was; reports that he predicted that the Germans may not win the war and he asked the Jew to write a testimony of how he had helped him; says that the Jewish man wrote a note in Yiddish and in Russian; states that later, when he was arrested in 1947, he gave the note the Soviet Ministry for State Security (MGB), whose head happened to be Jewish and that the head told him that if all the people were like him, the Jews wouldn't have lost so many people, and that he was released; claims he does not know what was written in that note; explains that the Jewish man had permission to leave the ghetto to come to work at the barracks; states that he always treated Jews well; explains that they were sent to Minsk in the fall (1941) and that they were told it would only be for two weeks so they could hunt down Soviet partisans but in reality they were assigned to shoot the Jews; adds that in the winter (1941) he was granted permission to go home to Vilkiija for the holidays, and that he later returned to Minsk but saved the permit to leave and in the summer (1942) changed the date of the permission and fled his service in Minsk; says that he knew that the war was approaching (in 1941) and, being convinced that the shops would be empty, he bought a lot of vodka and cigarettes; says that he was in Raudondvaris (near Kaunas) buying more products when the war broke out; recalls how the Russian tanks unsuccessfully tried to shoot down German planes and how the Germans bombed the bridges; recalls on Monday (June 22, 1941, the day of the German invasion of Lithuania) he saw German scouts on their motorbikes; says that he read about the formation of a Lithuanian self-defense battalion in a newspaper, or maybe heard on the radio, and that he went to the Vilkiija branch to enroll on June 22, 1941 but was sent to Kaunas instead, where he walked to enroll about a week later; states that he took with him a friend named Kvedaravičius who was later killed; recalls that when they arrived they were not given uniforms right away because the Lithuanian army uniforms had been looted so they had to bring uniforms from Latvia; states that they were given guns and had to stand guard at the headquarters; adds that there were trainings but says he already knew how to shoot; says that until they had uniforms they wore civilian clothes and a yellow band with a German stamp which said "Schutzpolizei," explaining that it means "field police."

**[01:] 17:52:04 – [01:] 26:58:24
18:30 – 27:59**

He says that he only stood guard for one day when the army cook offered him his place as he felt like he was losing out while others who were going on missions to arrest Jews were bringing home treasures; states that the man gave him a bottle of vodka in addition so he gladly agreed; describes that the men from his battalion were mostly arresting Jews in Viliampolė (a district in Kaunas) where Jews from the central parts of the city had already been arrested by the Germans; adds that people were turning in anyone suspected of being a communist and that the suspected communists were sent to the prison in the Ninth Fort; recounts how they were sent to Minsk in the fall (1941) where some men from his battalion participated in the execution of Jews which they called "operations"; adds that participation in them was mostly voluntary and that after the men came back from the shootings they did not eat the soup he had prepared, so there was more left for the prisoners of war and the Jewish man [*mentioned earlier in the interview as someone to whom he was giving soup*]; points out that there was always enough soup for the Jewish man,

but not always for the prisoners of war; states that the executioners had pockets full of money and drank and partied for a few days after each execution; adds that there were tens of volunteers and that while at first there were few, more volunteered when they saw the others coming back with money; says that the “operations” took place in **Sluckas [Slutsk; Слуцк]**, **Baranovičiai [Baranovichi; Баранавічы]**, **Kleckas [Kletsk; Клецк]**; says that in **Kleckas** the Jews had already been killed by local police before the men of his battalion got there; mentions that the battalion was also persecuting Soviet partisans who were blowing up railways; states that he once went on a mission to find the partisans since they needed a cook for the extended mission; adds that they did not take him when they went on “operations” since they usually came back the same night; describes how sometimes the executioners went to drink after the “operations” and arrived back late; mentions that the Germans gave a tablespoon of vodka a day for everybody, including him; speculates that they probably gave more for the executioners – “for the courage”; explains that there were no conflicts between the ones who went on the execution missions and the ones who did not since the participation was mostly voluntary and the volunteers were content with the opportunity to loot, while the others were glad they were not forced to participate in killing innocent people.

[01:] 26:58:25 – [01:] 34:20:09
28:00 – 35:39

He recounts that the executioners did not talk much about their “operations”; remembers once having seen how other executioners were making fun of a **Varnas** from Šiauliai who was tasked with hanging three Komsomol members who were suspected of being partisans; states that **Varnas** was red and agitated; adds that usually the executioners did not discuss their work with the others and that they drank separately; recalls that a train full of Jews from France and Austria arrived in Minsk and that the Jews were taken to the ghetto and later executed while their belongings stayed in the trains that were guarded by German guards; describes how some of the executioners managed to steal a few suitcases and brought back clothes, women’s tights, umbrellas and the like; says that they did not usually bring objects or clothes from the executions and speculates that maybe the Jews were not allowed to take anything with them as they were led to the execution sites outside the city; adds that the Jews from Belarus were not very well off and did not possess expensive things so the executioners just robbed them of their last money; states that a few thousand Jews from the Minsk ghetto were executed each week or two; says that the executioners had Russian as well as German guns and that the commander was **Impulevičius**; lists the rest of the officers: **Martišauskas**, **Klimavičius**, **Juodis**, and **Gicevičius**; recalls that one, whose name he cannot remember, had too much to drink one night and suffocated in his own vomit while sleeping; after being asked if his surname was **Norkus**, since there is a **Norkus** mentioned in the archives who allegedly died after falling off a horse, Velička responds that there were no horses there but that, in any case, he does not remember such a name.

Box 1, Tape 2

[02:] 00:40:22 – [02:] 10:02:14
00:35 – 10:19

He talks in more detail about his escape from the battalion; explains that he felt deceived since he enrolled thinking he was going to defend Lithuania but ended up serving at a battalion tasked with killing innocent people; mentions that he only received 50 marks per month; recounts an incident which helped him to decide to flee: he wrote a complaint to the Germans about an officer named **Klimavičius**, who was drinking too much and terrorizing the soldiers, and **Klimavičius** started threatening him; says he thinks he was the first one to leave the battalion in June 1942; adds that that there were not many who fled; mentions that one of the executioners, **Knyrimas**, also fled; explains that **Knyrimas** was selling the bullets he took from the Germans to the Soviet partisans and was later executed by the Russians; claims that he did not socialize much with the volunteer executioners; states that he does not condone their actions; remembers how he once asked a **Balčius** from Jonava how he can shoot people, and **Balčius** answered that shooting a Jew is the same as shooting a pig; notes that the executioners had lost their human shape; speculates about possible reasons for their cruelty, saying that some may have wanted to revenge for their families or friends, since the leaders of MGB [*reference to Soviet Secret forces*] were often Jews, but others were simply greedy; says that in the battalion there were fewer who volunteered to kill than those who refused; explains that there was no need for more; goes on to say that he had heard that there were approximately 12 men lined up in front of the pit to shoot 20-30 Jews in one group; adds that the Jews were made to stand at the brink of the pit; states that some fainted and fell into the pit alive and, as he claims to have read in the paper, were finished off by shooting into the pit.

[02:] 10:02:15 – [02:] 19:24:08
10:20 –20:04

When asked if Germans were also shooting, he insists that he does not know since he did not see it, but when encouraged to retell what he had heard from the others, says that Germans were sometimes shooting too; says he thinks that the Jews in Belarus were not made to undress before the executions since their clothes were not of good quality but insists again that he does not know since he did not see it himself; says that he did not express his opinions about the killings for fear of being shot; says he does not know the names of the executioners, except for **Knyrimas** and **Varnas**, since he was working in the kitchen and did not participate in the roll calls; claims that he learned about the “operations” on the same morning that they happened and thinks that the executioners themselves also learned about it on the same morning; speculates that only the officers knew in advance; says that there were not many volunteers and that sometimes they may have taken men who did not volunteer but they were not forced to shoot, only to stand guard; says that the priest of the battalion was **Ignatavičius** and that almost everybody participated in the Mass regularly.

[02:] 19:24:09 – [02:] 29:38:05
20:05 – 30:44

He claims that he had not heard that the executioners would regret their deeds; describes hiding from the Germans for two years, saying that it was announced that a piece of cloth sufficient for two suits would be given to anyone who would give him in; recounts in detail how he was caught by the Germans but managed to escape; explains that if he had not fled he probably would have

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been sent to the front or executed; recalls how Colonel **Grajauskas** was looking for him; claims that the Jews of Vilkija were massacred by the locals, not by his battalion; insists again that he cannot talk much about the executions themselves since he has not witnessed them; asks if the interviewer believes that what has been said is true, *[a woman starts shouting in the background, the camera turns off]*.