

KMIELIAUSKAS, Antanas
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In this interview Antanas Kmieliauskas, born in 1932 in the village of Olendernė, Butrimonys district, Alytus region, to a family of landowners, describes in detail—and sketches the scene as he remembers it on a sheet of paper—the massacre of the Jews of Butrimonys town, which he has witnessed as a nine year old child. Kmieliauskas also talks about a Jewish farm that had bordered his parents' land, and recalls it being empty of people, but filled with possessions after the massacre, before somebody moved in. He retells the stories about Jewish possessions being handed out by the Germans that he has heard from his parents.

Tape 1 of 2

[01] 01:10:24 – [01] 04:20:12

00:01:06 – 00:04:24

Q: So now, Mr. Antanas, tell me your name and surname, your date and location of birth.

A: I am Antanas Kmieliauskas, born on the 8th of March in 1932 in the village of Olendernė, Butrimonys district, Alytus region.

Q: And now tell me something about your family.

A: Well, I lived on a piece land of 7 ha that had been bought by my grandfather Antanas Kmieliauskas. He bought it after he had worked at an iron factory in America, in Pittsburg. So he bought it, and our land was located where the Tiškevičius' (a famous noble family of Lithuania) manor used to be; so they sold the manor in pieces and the population in our village was very diverse: Polish, Gypsies, Jews and Lithuanians—people of various ethnicities.

Q: Who bought the land—

A: [People] from different places. It was not a village that had been established long time ago. What interests me about the manor—my father recounted this interesting story to me—is that some person had bought it, because there used to be beautiful oak forests there. Then he fell the forests and sold it to someone else. But I cannot remember this part very well. My grandmother would tell me about the oak forests – how they would let the pigs loose from the pigsty; and they would run to the forest and nuzzle in the snow, swallowing acorns. And the older pigs would surround the piglets in order to protect them, because the wolves were howling in the winter. She told me about the howling of the wolves. Those stories go back to antiquity, so they are difficult for us to imagine. And since my father ached for those forests, he planted forest—fir trees—on parts of his estate. He really ached for the forests. He also had ponds and raised fish, although there were no fish around. Also, my grandfather, when he was in America, he got convinced that it is hard for uneducated people to make a living. And so he wanted my father to go study, but

he didn't really want to study, so he tried everything else – even went to learn to play violin. He probably studied playing violin with Jews, because he would recall that he played at weddings with the Jews, and he really liked it. Together. And he had a violin. Of course, he was a village musician. But such...He would recount very often the traditions, because since they played at the weddings, their relationship were pretty intimate.

[01] 04:20:12 - [01] 05:40:06

00:04:24 – 00:05:47

Q: But they played at the Jewish weddings?

A: [He played] together with the Jews. So maybe at Jewish weddings too.

Q: And what would he tell you about the traditions?

A: Well, they knew a lot of those traditions— they socialized as children, but I will not be able to describe them appropriately now.

Q: What do you remember about your Jewish neighbors? You mentioned that your land bordered that of the Jews.

A: Well, our lands bordered each other, and I think their agriculture was more advanced. The farmstead was nice and orderly as well. You see, the buildings—I cannot say anything special—the land, of course, was cultivated by— as was everybody else's— ploughs drawn by horses, so I cannot say anything particular about them.

Q: But did they have more land?

A: I think that not so much. Maybe about 15 hectares. The farms were not that big. My grandfather had seven hectares.

Q: Well, and the differences in farming— do you remember anything about it?

A: You see, I was a small child, so it's hard for me to say anything specific.

Q: But what stayed in your mind?

A: [Shrugs his shoulders] Something—

[01] 05:40:06 - [01] 07:54:11

00:05:47 – 00:08:07

Q: You mentioned something about Saturday—

A: Oh, on Saturday—since we had a garden filled with apples, and the Jews would buy those apples from us, they would come over quite often, and us children would pick up the fallen fruits from the ground, pile them together, and they would take them. Well, and on Saturdays, we Lithuanians would work, but they would celebrate. So they would come over to talk. They liked to chat. And my father and my grandfather were also very fond of socializing.

Q: How would they buy the entire garden? What kind of custom was it—to sell the garden to the Jew?

A: At first they would buy all the apples on the trees. Well, you leave maybe one apple tree for yourself to eat, but the remaining apples on the other trees are sold, and they would come to pick them.

Q: The Jews would pick them themselves?

A: Yes, the Jews would pick them. Sometimes we, the children, would help: we would pick up and prepare all the fallen apples, so that nobody treads on them. That was...And since the garden belonged to my grandfather, and he himself had neither the time nor the skill to take the apples anywhere to sell, he was content that everything was taken care of.

Q: So who were the Jews who bought those apples?

A: Well, from Butrimonys. I don't know their surname.

Q: And the Jews from the town—as you mentioned, your [closest] town was Butrimonys?

A: Butrimonys, yes.

Q: [Do you remember] anything of the life of the Jews who lived in the town?

A: I remember how my father took me to the town, when I was still a child; and there was—or so it seemed to a child from the countryside—a beautiful room; and he bought me lemonade. And I thought it was delicious. It was treat. That's what I remember. It was a Jewish place.

Q: So it was a kind of a tea-room?

A: Probably—

Q: Or did you go to visit someone?

A: No, my father probably—everything—it probably was like a tea-room...That's what I recall – that it was extremely tasty.

[01] 07:54:11 - [01] 09:24:23

00:08:07 – 00:09:41

Q: What was Butrimonys like? You had began describing it, but we did not film it at that time. What was Butrimonys like?

A: Well, in Butrimonys, you see, the central part was very valuable, since there was a market there. It was packed with houses, and all of them had shops in them. And then there was a Jewish synagogue, a school, and I remember that we were intigued by their unfamiliar script. That I remember—that their script was completely different.

Q: Where would you see their script?

A: Well, sometimes we would see it. I don't know. We we would run around, as children do. There were newspapers. That's my small memories, as I was just a child—

Q: How many synagogues were there in Butrimonys?

A: I know only one. But maybe there were more, I don't know. But that one I know for sure—it was big building and everything—

Q: What percentage of Butrimonys did the Jews constitute?

A: I think that they were probably the majority, but I cannot tell for sure. At least in the center, I think they were the majority. Because they were mostly into trading, they had stores—I don't know any Lithuanians [who had stores]. The Lithuanians probably lived more on the side streets.

[01] 09:24:23 - [01] 11:27:00

00:09:41 – 00:11:48

Q: Now tell me about the very start of the war. People remember it very differently: for some it was completely unexpected, the other saw it coming a few days before the war. People remember seeing omens, from which they either suspected something, or not. Was the war unexpected for you, or did you feel something coming? The last three days before the war—

A: Before the war started—it's hard to say, as I was just a child. I only know that we sometimes—I received my [first] Communion the day that the war started, and as we were leaving the church, I—I was just a child—noticed many people, Jewish people, gathered in Butrimonys. And they were shouting and screaming all excited about the war having started. They came running, all excited—many of them. I still can see that image. And then we went on— and the planes, the planes were flying. German and the Russian planes shooting at each other. One plane was hit—I think that probably it was a Russian plane. And the [pilot] landed with a parachute. And as the parachute was descending, a plane was flying around it and shooting into it. And then my father says, „it's terrible—the war [has started].“ And he used to have—it was a rare thing at that time—a radio, and he listened to it. And he, my father, also knew Russian- and Polish-languages. He was listening to the radio and was surprised to hear it declared from Moscow that these were only maneuvers—it was announced from Moscow. My father says, „how can these be maneuvers? We saw it all ourselves: planes shooting at each other and falling down. These cannot be maneuvers. So it means it is...“ I don't know. Half of that day Moscow tried to convince us that it was only maneuvers, not war. I don't know what...So that's how much I can tell about the beginning of the war.

[01] 11:27:00 - [01] 14:48:22

00:11:48 – 00:15:19

Q: And not tell me, that misfortune of the Jews...What were the first signs of it—anyone being beaten or hustled around?

A: First of all I have to mention that when the war started, everyone was terrified. And also—when the [persecution of the] Jews had not started yet—first of all, something happened in Alytus. Somehow as the Germans arrived, two of them were shot. And then people were talking that they lost their temper, “the Germans were shot! Who shot the Germans?!” And they [the people who shot the Germans] had already fled. So they [the Germans] gathered 200 completely innocent people – a priest among them – and shot them all. So people were baffled that completely innocent people were shot; and the priest— he really had not done anything, his occupation would not allow it, but he was shot anyway. Especially since the Germans...since the Germans considered themselves religious and Christians and so on...So this inconceivable event happened – and then there were more of such occurrences. My father would tell me – I know this only from his stories – that there was a man wearing a white band—probably one of those Lithuanian volunteers—and holding a Browning gun, who ran over to greet the Germans; but he did not know German-language, and a German asks him, “where are you running?”; he responds, “to shoot the Communists.” So the German says, “Communist? Ok!” – and shot him. That’s what happened...Then another German walks into some place and finds a drunken man. The drunken man says “pig” in German– and he was also shot. Well, so in the beginning people told many stories about [the Germans’] disrespect for human life...So that was before the execution of the Jews. People immediately felt that they were not being respected as humans. And then later, after that, the Jews were registered and those yellow stars were pinned on them. Yellow stars – right here [points to his chest]. So that was comparatively fine. But it was very unpleasant when there was a star on the back, as if it was meant especially as a shooting target—very offensive. And first the younger – the youngest – men were separated...the young...and supposedly taken to Alytus to work. The women and the elderly stayed. So even now I can recall how my grandfather was indignant that those Jews were forced to dismantle the pavement. At that time, the pavement was made of stones; and they were made to dismantle it; so my grandfather says, “what nonsense are they doing here? The pavement is completely fine, and the Germans are forcing them to dismantle it anyway.” You could see the absurdities and injustices happening from the very beginning.

[01] 14:48:22 - [01] 18:02:22

00:15:19 – 00:18:41

Q: And what did you see?

A: I saw the Jews walking around wearing those stars, how they...of course, the women, who were carrying younger children, were very sad and were crying. But they were forbidden to cry. They would learn somehow about the execution in Alytus or something...and they would start...they would learn about it somehow secretly – they were told that [the men] were working there. But they would learn that they had been executed or something, and would tell [the others], and they would start crying, but Germans had forbidden them to cry. So they would cry secretly, and they would be punished by one...My parents, of course, were indignant, “can you imagine, they are not even allowed to cry?!” So those lies continued...

Q: Were there Germans in Butrimonys?

A: Well, there were some, but I am not good at telling them apart. But since – there were some wearing the Lithuanian uniform too – but I cannot tell you right now, as it wasn't clear to me then who was who. But there were some superiors. However, I cannot say anything more specific, I cannot give you specific information, as I was a child then. But of course the German were in control of everything.

Q: And now tell me, on the day of the massacre, what was the first sign that indicated that the massacre would happen on that day – when you witnessed the massacre?

A: You know, first of all, I overheard my parents or somebody else saying that the Jews had been gathered in the square and made to remove their clothes. And they were without clothes – of course, it was complete horror.

Q: So that was a few days before the massacre?

A: I think that this happened on the same day. Maybe that day they—the town is not far and those—things trouble them [his parents]—they came back, and at home they were sighing and wondering; and us children overheard them and understood that something terrible was going on.

Q: And later?

A: And later, in the evening, well, in the afternoon – the sky was somewhat pink, as the town of Butrimonys faces the West. Maybe that is only how it remained in my imagination, but I recall it being red. And we somehow heard moaning. Probably they were being hustled and beaten. Because we could hear moaning, and it was clearly coming from the direction of Butrimonys. They were massacred nearby – maybe half a kilometer away. And we ran over there with the children of our neighbors, who were older. I know that we ran over there, but then the children were pushed away—we were not allowed [to approach]. So we stood further away.

[01]18:02:22 – [01]20:37:02

00:18:41 – 00:21:21

Q: So as you were running, what were you hoping to see?

A: To see what was going on.

Q: Did you know they were going to be executed?

A: Well, some kind of... [The others] probably knew something. I am telling you, I was younger, while the others were older, and the older ones probably knew why we were going there. Because people had been talking that the pits had been dug in advance. If the pits had been dug, people probably knew about the upcoming shooting. Of course.

Q: And you knew what the pits were for, right?

A: Well, yes, they knew there was going to be an execution. And probably—one more thing I remember is that they—probably in order to prove that the execution was just, they [tried to prove] that the Jews had been exploiting people: “they are rich, so they had been exploiting you”. And I think it is really strange that there were poor people, who believed that they were poor, because they had been exploited by the Jews. And later, as the collective farms were being established, the same people, who had contributed [to the killing of Jews], helped in organizing the deportation to Siberia, working on the same assumption that they had been exploited by the rich. This pretence was used by the Germans and Russians alike and directed at people of the lower strata—they mostly were alcoholics, sluggards and impoverished and had to be convinced that they were poor, because they had been exploited by the Jew, or later—because the farmer was living well. So their method was almost identical. And I was told—I’m afraid to be wrong here, as the man is already dead—about our neighbor, Pilevičius was his name, I think, who worked for Jew, delivering salt to Kaunas. [I heard that] he later went and took some of the Jewish clothes, explaining that, „I had been exploited by a Jew“. So that kind of...instead of [being grateful] that the Jew gave him an opportunity to earn his bread, he had been persuaded by the Germans to hate...I know that my father was mad at him—you see, the Jew provided him with an opportunity—he was a drunkard and a sluggard, and would have nothing to eat—to earn money. He would take the salt from Butrimonys by a horse—since in Butrimonys they obtained that salt from the Polish somehow. He would take it to Kaunas and had the opportunity to earn some, and therefore later he announced that he had been a servant of the Jew. I recall my parents being exasperated about it.

[01]20:37:02 - [01]22:53:10

00:21:21 – 00:23:43

Q: So the Jewish possessions were given out for free...

A: Well, the clothes were later given away somewhere. We had gone to visit that neighbor, and I remember as if it was today—the one who transported the Jewish possessions as well—so we entered and saw clothes tucked away in the corners. We felt uncomfortable. And my father said—there was a farm not too far from our home, and we were passing by the farm after the Jews of that farm had already been arrested and the house was empty. And there was a cellar—a basement—with an open door and filled with all kinds of things. Since the Jews of Butrimonys were very rich, they owned stores, and the farms stood here, so at first they moved the more valuable objects to the farms—they did not know what was going to happen to them. So my father was walking by and said, „here, the basement is open, I could take whatever I want, but I don’t want to take anything, because I don’t want to benefit from another person’s misfortune.“ So we didn’t take a smallest thing. And we children were especially horrified that a person could take the clothes of people, who had been executed, or have something...So this is a very unpleasant memory. And then later I know that the same people helped in deporting others to Siberia, and the collective farms...They served the Russians, as well as the Germans. So that kind of...I think that they exploited people’s ignorance.

Q: Have you witnessed the Jewish possessions being handed away?

A: I have not witnessed it myself. Only my parents recounted to me that the clothes were tied in bundles, put on a rope, and lowered from the first floor and given away—most probably for free. There were people who would take them. Of course, it was a very disgusting thing—to profit from the possessions of people, who had been murdered.

Q: And who was handing the possessions out?

A: Well, the Germans, the superiors, who else? I did not see it myself.

[01]22:53:10 – [01]26:10:12

00:23:43 – 00:27:09

Q: So now tell me about that day. So you heard the sound of people being marched—

A: And we went there, and watched it from behind a house, since the children were not allowed to approach. They marched in the elderly, who had been stripped naked—maybe they had some clothes on to cover them, but mostly they had no clothes. They were lined up; from what I saw, there were maybe ten of them. And the ones who were shooting, were standing maybe ten meters away from them, from behind—they fired, and everyone fell down. Well, we ran away after that. The horror, of course, stayed with me all my life. And later I started thinking about how this could have happened...some kind of injustice is always present, and I should never in my life take part in it. Like I mentioned, we had neighbors, who made use of the Jewish possessions, [but for us] it was impossible, because my parents seriously condemned it. No...not only one...there could be no excuses, because the people were innocent—there were children and the elderly among them.

Q: Where did you watch the massacre from?

A: The road from Butrimonys goes like this [draws an imaginary line with his hands]—the West would be here [points to one side of the road], and our Olendernès village is here [points to the other side of the road]—so we were here, on the East side, facing the West.

Q: So there is a rivulet running by the side of the road—

A: There is a rivulet, and then bushes—

Q: And the site of the massacre was on the opposite bank of the rivulet, right?

A: Right.

Q: So now, were you on the side of the rivulet that the pit was on, or on the side that the road was on?

A: We were on the side that the road was on. I recall we were standing behind some house and watched it, and that terrifying impression has stayed with me since.

Q: So what was the distance from the pit approximately? [Long pause.] Approximately. 50 or 200?

A: Well, maybe around 200 meters—it was pretty far. We were scared.

Q: The people who were killed, they were—

A: They had no clothes on.

Q: Completely naked?

A: Well, maybe they wore underpants or something else, but generally I remember them being naked. Later, of course, people talked a lot about it. That place was haunted. And the people—the massacre took place next to their homes—would go and moan there. People talked about it for a long time.

[01]26:10:12 - [01]29:30:12

00:27:09 – 00:30:37

Q: The people, who were being shot, were they made to stand on the edge of the pit, or inside of the pit?

A: They were...they stood on the edge of the pit. Right next to the pit. And when they were shot, I don't know, maybe some of them fell into the pit, while the others next to it. But they were not in the pit, when they were shot.

Q: So they were not shot in the pit. And the ones, who were shooting, did they stand on the opposite side of the pit?

A: They stood—well, if the pit is here [shows with his hands], the ones who were about to be shot are made to stand here [shows where]. And they [the perpetrators] stood behind them. And that's how—they were marched from the direction of the town, and when they arrived, they were sent right next to the pit, and those—well—

Q: Along which edge were they lined up? The one—

A: They stood on the side of the town, and they shot them from behind.

Q: So the people had their back to the perpetrators?

A: The backs, yes, they were shot from behind. They were marched to the edge of the pit, and shot from behind. And their hands were tied, I think—I'm afraid to say for sure, but that's my impression that I think is quite accurate, quite accurate. I was watching from a little further, and I think the hands were tied. That's my impression [imitates having his hands tied]— that they were somehow—

Q: What did the perpetrators look like?

A: I think they were wearing some kind of uniforms. They were in uniforms.

Q: Can you recall what they uniforms looked like?

A: Somewhat greenish, but I cannot tell you now exactly. I cannot. Those memories of mine would not be accurate. [Long pause, interruption.] There was a man in Butrimonys—I just don't know his surname or whether he was just beating the Jews, or shot them too. His nickname was Perkūnsargis. Maybe you heard about him, when you visited Butrimonys? He was...people called him Perkūnsargis, because he was very tall.

Q: Did you know him?

A: I have seen him somewhere. He was extremely tall. Taller—abnormally tall. And when the Russians arrived and the partisans were still here, he served for the Russians and tortured those partisans. My father had somehow lost his passport and arrested in Butrimonys. He, of course, had done nothing. And there was another acquaintance in Butrimonys, a Lithuanian man—so that night the so-called Perkūnsargis came over to him and said, „let's go to the interrogation“—my father was released in a few days, so he recounted what had happened—„let's go to the interrogation,“ and then in the morning the man was found shot in the garden. The man, supposedly, tried to flee and was shot. But it was planned...Then, after some time had passed and only a few partisans had left, he was exposed by the Russian authorities to have killed Jews. He was arrested, taken to the Lukiškės prison in Vilnius, and people talked that other prisoners, upon learning what he had done, simply killed him.

[01]29:30:12 - [01]32:42:20

00:30:37 – 00:33:57

Q: Those Lithuanians did?

A: Lithuanians. The ones who...

Q: Political [prisoners]?

A: Political prisoners. So that is interesting – that he killed both Jews and Lithuanians (Lithuanian partisans). It makes me think that some people are simply more prone to some kind of sadism. They would shoot anyone. Look what is happening in today's Lithuania – the explosion in Šiauliai, so what...Doesn't matter whether a person is innocent or not—where there's a child or not. If it happened now that the Chinese would order people to shoot the painters—because they don't work, just exploit—there would be some who would. All you need is for there to exist an authority, an organizer. Probably there is a type of people, as I mentioned, characterized by a lower intellect or level of education. They are probably easily persuaded. It's a pity, but such people have existed and they probably will exist at all times.

Q: What day of the year was it? What season? Maybe you could tell me the approximate month? Maybe—you know, in the countryside memories are recorded against the backdrop of apples, potatoes or—

A: I really cannot tell you. Well, I think it might have been fall. But maybe it was summer. I think that maybe it was summer. Because I think it was warm.

Q: But it was afternoon already, the sun setting, right?

A: Yes, it was afternoon. In my imagination I see a red sky, for some reason. But maybe it's just my imagination, filled with fear.

Q: And when you saw the masscre, was it already dark, at dusk?

A: No, you could still see.

Q: It was light?

A: Well, maybe it was getting dark. But there was still some kind of light. Then somebody saw us and sent us away. Kicked us out of there. Probably they didn't want us to have such a memory to haunt us. Because the memory, you see, is very sad.

Q: What do you think, how long did you stay watching the execution?

A: At first there were the pits, and people were talking about the upcoming execution. So we waited a little bit...And we heard moaning—they were probably beaten while they were walking, while they were walking still—

Q: Did you also hear the moaning when they were being shot?

A: Because when we were—No. When we heard some kind of moaning—and the rumors had been going around—that's when we ran over to see.

Q: [To see] who was moaning?

A: So we arrived—the moaning—we waited—and we saw. So I don't know, it could have lasted, I don't know, maybe about 15 minutes.

[01]32:42:20 - [01]36:25:04

00:33:57 – 00:37:49

Q: Tell me, so you saw the people being shot, you saw them falling into the pit. And what about the others – the ones, who were waiting for their destiny – where were they at that moment, did you see?

A: No, there were none who were waiting. They were simply marched in and shot. Probably there were more people brought in after we had been sent away—we did not stay after that. They probably brought some, shot them, and then brought the others. But it wasn't that the people, who had been marched in, would stand for a while. They were brought in and shot right away. They arrived and were immediately shot, after they had been marched to the pit. They were neither addressed nor waiting— were they shot right away.

Q: So they were marched from the town in separate groups?

A: They were marched from the town in separate groups—they were probably undressed there, and then marched. But mostly—the ones we saw were mostly elderly people, since, as I already mentioned, the younger ones had been already taken away to Alytus earlier. The

ones—the German authorities probably tried to prevent any kind of resistance—who were younger, more energetic and so on. At first they were supposedly taken away to work, and when only women and the elderly remained, it was more difficult for them to organize themselves. Probably that's why it was done this way.

Q: Did you see the faces of the perpetrators—and of the victims—at the time of the execution?

A: It was a little too far for me to see. Just an image—I could almost draw the image, an image, seen from afar. Almost like a painting, with no features.

Q: Tell me, how long could the shooting be heard after you had left for home?

A: Well, I cannot tell you now, but I think that the shooting went on for a relatively long time—maybe even through the night. I only know that everyone was terrified: “what is going on?”, and so on. My parents explained to me that innocent people were being shot. It was said about the Germans that they did not respect people. There was such a... And then later, after a few years had passed and the uprising near Warsaw took place in Poland, people talked that the same fate that befell the Jews, was waiting for the Polish now, and the Germans will shoot them. You see, people were very scared, because... Well, probably it is true what people talked—that the Germans were given an order to exterminate, to shoot as many people as possible so that the Germans could have enough “living space”. Well, that's what people talked. The Jews, of course, were entirely killed, but they also killed Lithuanians and others... People were convinced that their goal was to shoot as many as possible. And the after all that, there was, of course, the marching of the Russian prisoners. That was also horrible. Maybe no one else has talked about it, but for us it left—they were marched in thousands. There were very many of them, and they were extremely hungry. They were hungry, so people from the countryside felt sorry for them, and, as I know, even at our home—to eat—they had been starving, so if they eat something, they could die of it—so somebody had to steam the potatoes for them.

End of tape.

[01]36:25:04

00:37:49

Tape 2 of 2

[02]00:20:09 - [02]00:40:21

00:00:13 – 00:00:34

[The conversation is taking place in the background, while the slate is being displayed.]

Q: SO what you saw—now I understand—was the main pit, where the grown-up victims were buried; and then there was a separate pit for the children.

A: Then later I—I heard that there was a separate pit for the children.

Q: Separate.

A: And somebody said—I was told this, I did not see it myself—that children and women were pushed to the pit—

[02]00:40:21 – [02]03:45:21

00:00:34 – 00:03:47

A: When the war prisoners were marched, they were hungry, and they would come with their legs swollen; they fall down with their legs flying in the air and just lie there. And my parents and all the neighbors would bring them steamed potatoes. And when they saw [food], they would try to elbow their way through to them and could trample each other—those starving Russian war prisoners. So the women would bring pots full of potatoes. The prisoners were located behind a dairy farm—there was a small field behind the dairy farm in Butrimonys, and that's where they were kept. There was a huge pile of those war prisoners living there. So the men would take the potatoes and throw them over the top of the roof; and when they're thrown, they try to grab the potatoes one over the other and eat them. Because it was not allowed to simply give anything to them directly. They were completely starved. And then also, the Germans ordered my grandfather to take the prisoners who cannot walk on the cart. So he said that by the time they went from Butrimonys to Alytus—that is 18 kilometers—seven of those prisoners were shot dead. They walk, and then they cannot walk anymore, so there is a young German is sitting around and shooting them. And he recounted how one man, who couldn't walk anymore, sat down, and the German fired at him. But he was still standing and staring at him. [The German] fires again, and he is still sitting and staring at him. So the German was terrified—he had shot several times, and the man was still sitting and not falling down; he could not understand. So my grandfather told me that it was horrible for him. But that German disrespect for people was inconceivable. And then later other people also told me that—who told me that? —the dean of the church told me—but he was also told by somebody else—that there was a pit dug out for the Jews to be shot in, and the Germans were lined up and waiting for the batch [of Jews] to arrive. They're sitting and enjoying themselves as if nothing had happened. [The Jews] are brought, they shoot them, and then they start [enjoying themselves] again. Everybody was puzzled the Nazi education: that they are a superior race, and they [Jews] were non-human. They had no psychological—as if they were completely—when you think about it, the person, who is shooting, should be very—but for them it was nothing—it was probably crammed into their heads—

[02]03:45:21 – [02]06:54:06

00:03:47 – 00:07:03

Q: People often recount that the ones who were young—Germans of the younger generation, who had grown up there—were especially cruel. So this confirms—

A: That's what he said," young Germans, handsome, attractive and everything."

Q: The older ones—from them you could at least expect some humanity, some compassion.

A: And my father, since he knew German and Polish, so he told me that as the Germans were passing, he was astonished by them. He met one German officer and asked him, “when you win the war—what will you do then?” And the German says to him, “it’s doubtful we will win—this doesn’t mean anything.” Then my father says, “you see, not all the Germans think alike,” –the older ones probably... I was also surprised that a German would say to a Lithuanian like this: “it is doubtful that we will win”. That was, I would say, incredible.

Q: I would like to ask you, have you gone to see the grave?

A: I went there, but there was nothing at the time. We went to take a look. The pits had fallen in. But I have not been recently.

Q: How long after did you go there?

A: I went there during the Soviet times; I have not been there after the independence. I think there is a small monument there now. It is fenced in.

Q: Yes, there is a fence; it is planted over with fir trees. But I am interested if you went to take a look at the grave when you were still a child.

A: We went there after a while. I think we went there to take a look. The earth had cracked. But I cannot tell you how much time had passed—if it was that same year or the following one. But I know that we did go there later.

Q: But not the next day?

A: Maybe after some more time had passed. We—we were terrified and taken by some kind of fear. It’s not clear what happens after such events. We were scared of everything after it. And in general, whenever we saw a soldier in a military uniform coming from the direction of the town, we would start trembling—we were scared. We did not know if they were not going to shoot us. There was a—I think all the people were scared and terrified then.

Q: Could you remember—when you ran away—when you were told to go away—how many salves had you witnessed by then?

A: That day we—one group was executed and then we did not—

Q: Where did run to?

A: We ran home to the Olendernė village, through the fields and brushes. We hid there so that—we were very scared of what was happening.

[02]06:54:06 – [02]09:06:04

00:07:03 – 00:09:20

Q: What did you say when you returned home?

A: Well, that horrible things were happening. I cannot tell you exactly now. All our impressions, all that—

Q: Maybe you can remember what the first night after you came back from the execution was like?

A: It's hard for me to tell—it was in my childhood. But I had nightmares all the time: of pits, of corpses. Maybe it's related to [what happened], maybe not—it's hard for me to tell. Maybe all children dream such things. But I know that I had such nightmares in my childhood. Maybe it is related—

Q: And that first night after the execution, did you go to sleep?

A: Hardly—I don't know. I probably could not sleep that night. We were haunted, we had nightmares. And I will tell you: that execution has probably influenced me for all my life, because it was then that I decided that I would never contribute to any kind of injustice—not a bit. No matter what the circumstances are, no matter—of course, it was my parents' merit, as my parents were very opposed to it [the massacre]. And as I mentioned, my father was walking by, and there were plenty of riches, but he did not touch anything, because you cannot benefit from another person's misfortune. It was simply his conviction, and there was not a second, when my parents would try to justify the massacre in any way. They said, „no arguments are appropriate or possible here.“ And my father would always say, „the Germans lost the war because they were killing Jews and the Russian prisoners of war. They could not have won in such a manner. It was nonsense, a misunderstanding and so on.“

[02]09:06:04 – [02]11:37:23

00:09:20 – 00:11:59

Q: I wanted to ask about your Jewish neighbors—when did they disappear from their farm? What was their fate?

A: I cannot tell you now what exactly happened, but I think that the Germans arrested all the younger ones and took them to Alytus, and these were probably also—the Jews who were left in the town were also somehow arrested. They had no freedoms, for...for as far as I can remember, there was a Lithuanian policeman in Butrimonys. He somehow tried to [rescue] some Jewish girl—she was a pretty Jewish girl, and he tried to rescue her. He asked someone to take care of her. I don't know if she was rescued or not—something happened. So there was police—they were guarded, I suppose. I don't know, but probably all of them—I'm guessing that that farmer was also arrested in the town—I was a child, I do not know anything, but they were probably—like there was a ghetto in Vilnius, and there was one there [in Butrimonys]. I am just guessing, of course.

Q: So you think that your neighbors were executed together with the others, or somewhere else?

A: I think that they were executed. There were some people who would hide them. My parents told me that people were hiding [Jews] in the countryside. But I cannot tell you anything. Several [Jews] from Butrimonys had managed to survive by hiding at people's homes.

But I don't think they had a chance to flee the town. I don't know. It would be interesting to know, what really happened, because I don't know. I think that they were hidden at homes. Because later, when the women learned that their sons had been executed, when they learned what horrible things were going on there, they would start crying and everything. So they were scolded and threatened, and the government would not allow them to cause panic. Probably there was some kind of supervision.

[02]11:37:23 – [02]13:31:22

00:11:59 – 00:13:57

Q: Have any Jews come by your house after the execution?

A: Not after the execution.

Q: Any survivors?

A: No. They did not come to us. We lived a kilometer away [from Butrimonys], and I don't think they had any chance to run away. I don't know. Probably, as I mentioned, there was a policeman, who wanted that Jewish girl to—of course, everyone felt sorry for her and tried to—something was going on, but [I don't know] anything specific.

Q: Because there were some Jews, who had escaped, and they were roaming around in the neighborhood, so maybe they came by—

A: They couldn't come to our home, because there was no forest or anything around us—almost completely bare; and the town was a kilometer away. Such a location—there were no partisans there under the Russians, and there could not have been any, as we lived in a very open place – no forest or anything. In these circumstances there simply was no chance. But a little further there is **Klydžionys**—behind those Kruonis forests—I know that some were hiding there, some Jews too. I don't know how they got there—whether they escaped on their own, or people had helped them a little.

Q: What happened to that Jewish farm? The one that you saw after the execution, filled with Jewish possessions.

A: For a while it stayed empty. Of course, all those things had been looted after a while. [Phone rings.] Who looted them. Then the house remained empty. Somebody came to live there after some time had passed. [The phone keeps ringing, the interviewer asks for a break.]

Q: That neighbors farm—I can almost visualize it, all open and empty, an emptied house full of—

A: There was a garden— a house, a beautiful garden—and it was surrounded by a fence. It was closer to the town than ours— in that direction.

[02]13:31:22 – [02]15:40:02

00:13:57 – 00:16:11

Q: Have you ever seen people carrying things from that farm—from that house, from that basement?

A: I have not seen such a thing. I don't know this. I have mostly heard about the looting from my parents. I have not seen anyone carry [anything] myself. Because we were simply scared to go to the town. Maybe our parents wouldn't let us either, I don't know. But at that time we were mostly sitting at home. We witnessed the execution of the Jews, having escaped and without our parents' knowledge.

Q: And would you go over to that empty Jewish farm?

A: For some reason not. We were simply afraid to go in the direction of the town.

Q: And what happened to the farmstead—with your neighbor's farmstead— later?

A: I don't know. After a while some person moved in there. But I cannot tell you how much time had passed. The farmstead remained there for a while. Tall poplar trees were growing there. A Garden.

Q: What remained there now? Is your parents' farmstead still there?

A: My father's farmstead is still there. My father and mother are dead. And when my mother died first, my father remarried and had a daughter with his second wife. So she lives there now, Stasè. She has two children. She kept it [the farmstead].

Q: Is the Jewish farmstead still there?

A: I suppose the Jewish farmstead is still there. But I have not passed it in a long time—I don't know, if it is still standing. I think there should be something there – houses, trees. I have not passed by that place in many years, because it is a little further. We have trees—birch trees—growing in front of our home, so they block—it [the Jewish farmstead] was more in the direction of the dairy farm, in that direction.

[02]15:40:02 – [02]18:09:08

00:16:11 – 00:18:46

Q: Try to compare the two memories: the pre-war Butrimonys—what was it like before the war, how do you remember it; and Butrimonys, when you saw it for the first time after the massacre of the Jews. What did Butrimonys look like? How did it differ from the Butrimonys that had existed before?

A: Try to imagine: shops, full of people; people buy; open, there is movement; there is everything in those stores; the town's residents leave the church and go to the stores. And after it everything is still; there is nothing left; the houses were looted; the windows boarded up, broken. Then everything destroyed, broken. Of course, it is impossible to compare. The town of Butrimonys suffered the most.

Q: And from the local people, was there anyone, who you knew had contributed to the execution of the Jews? Perkünsargis?

A: You see, I mentioned Perkūnsargis, because I have heard about him. I don't know anyone else, and I think that if there was anyone, they would not have survived the Soviet regime, because if one shot the Jews, one clearly served the German government. So even if the Russians did not feel sorry for the Jews, they would have hated one for his collaboration with the Germans. So one would be either killed or put in jail. So I doubt that there could have been. There could have been people in Butrimonys, who appropriated Jewish property—that's for sure. There were quite a few people in Butrimonys—maybe people lacking in culture—who did not care much about anything, and about such things too, I don't know. There could have been such people. But they, of course, are all dead by now, because so much time has passed. Maybe the children are still—but the ones who were shooting could not have remained. They either had to flee, or they were arrested.

[02]18:09:08 – [02]21:22:11

00:18:46 – 00:22:07

Q: There was no such incident, in which your father, while walking around the town, would point to someone [and say], „he is a killer“? No such thing happened to you when you were a child?

A: No, none such thing happened. Nothing like this happened.

Q: Did not?

A: No. I have no such recollection. [Phone rings again.] It's a pity that my memories are so limited.

Q: Two things are very important...[Interruptions; conversation in English behind the camera.]

[Antanas Kmieliauskas draws on a sheet of paper.]

A: Some houses over here, I think. Over there, the pit. Some soil over there. And here is where the people stood, and I think their hands had been tied behind their backs.

Q: Along this edge?

A: Along this edge. They were I don't know—around ten of them were there. And over here, in a short distance—the soldiers. They were also a few. They were standing over here—a few of them— holding guns.

Q: How many of them were there, when compared to the number of people killed? Were there more soldiers than the victims?

A: It is not easy for me to say now, but between five and ten. Somewhere around that number—approximately that number. It is possible that they each had one—maybe in groups. But they shot from a distance, and when they were shot, they fell next to the pit. And here, next to the pit, there were piles of yellow soil. And over there, not so far away, there were houses. Here some bushes, trees. Somewhere through those trees we were watching—through a crack somewhere further away. And over here—trees, a rivulet. And they shot

from a relatively short distance, and probably in response to a command, because they all fell at the same moment. They fell over here. Something like this [hands the drawing to the interviewer, the drawing is displayed in front of the camera.]

[02]21:22:11 – [02]22:07:03

00:22:07 – 00:22:54

Q: This coincides Gramauskas' version completely; it coincides Gramauskas' version completely.

A: Well, Gramauskas probably has valuable material—he lived in the town itself, so I think he—

Q: Yes.

A: I studied together with his daughter.

Q: Yes, yes. Now she moved back to live with her father, because she and her husband got divorced. She moved to live with her father.

A: We studied in one class—

Q: And they...A very beautiful girl.

A: A?

Q: Oh, so maybe it was some younger daughter, because she is younger than me.

A: So maybe its her daughter, because my—

Q: She's around 30, so maybe the granddaughter.

End of tape.

[02]21:22:11 – [02]22:07:03

00:22:07 – 00:22:54