

ZABITIS, Antanas
Lithuania Documentation Project
Lithuanian
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Box 1, Tape 1

In this interview, Antanas Zabitis, a resident of Plungė since 1940, talks about relations with Jews and villagers before the war and how their lives changed once the regime changed from the Soviet Union to Nazi Germany. He discusses how the Jews were rounded up in the synagogue and then driven away to be shot. He focuses on his impressions of an incident in which he, along with other churchgoers, were forcibly taken to the mass gravesite of Kuršėnai to bury the final group of Jews that had been shot. He describes in great detail the gravesite and the system of burial, focusing on the mood of the churchgoers, the dismembered bodies of the Jews and the soldiers and guards positioned around the site. He also discusses his psychological state after this incident.

[01:] 48:04:03 – [01:] 54:21:10

He introduces himself as born in 1919 in Videikiu village and currently a pensioner in Plungė; talks about moving to Plungė in 1940; talks about relations with Jews in his village before the war; explains in detail how Jews bought calves from the villagers and how his duty was registering the calves in the city; talks about how Jewish homes were stopover places for his family when they came into the city; talks about his work as a locksmith and his relations with Jews through this work; discusses the beginning of the war in Plungė, recalling the exact moment when he heard, while working in the fields, that Germany invaded Poland; speculates on Germany's fighting with Poland and gives his explanation of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact; mentions the Russian occupation of Lithuania in 1940, the Nazi takeover in 1941; gives a timeline of the war.

[01:] 54:21:11 – [02:] 07:06:20

He responds to the question of how Jews' lives changed in the summer of 1941 after the Germans occupied Lithuania by mentioning how they were all rounded up and forced into the synagogue; mentions that he personally did not witness any Jews being transported to the synagogue, nor from it to be shot, but that he did see bodies of Jews who had already been shot; remembers in detail an incident when, Sunday after church Germans forcibly gathered him and other churchgoers into trucks and took them to a mass grave site to bury Jews who had been shot; discusses the mood and fears of the churchgoers; gives an exact account of the orders that were given to place the bodies in a trench that had already been dug; mentions the soldiers who guarded the site who made sure no one escaped until the work was done; discusses the soldiers' uniforms and ethnicity; describes in detail his impressions of the site upon arriving; provides vivid descriptions of dismembered bodies; gives an exact explanation of the process in which the

mass graves were dug in waves by several groups of Jews; describes the shock of the churchgoers; describes how the Jews' bodies had been stripped to their underwear; gives an exact explanation of the process in which the mass graves were dug in a series—how the first wave of Jews dug their own grave and were shot along the edge, the second group had to bury the first group of Jews and then dig their own grave and so on until the last group of Jews had been shot, and the churchgoers had to be rounded up to bury them; explains again how the churchgoers were rounded up after mass, how the older persons were forced out of the church, while the younger ones like himself at 22 years of age were taken to do the burying; gives an exact description of the process of the burial, how chlorine was poured on the bodies which were arranged in layers, how people had to work from inside the grave-trench and along the edge of it, and that the burying lasted around three hours; remembers an incident in which a young Jewish boy who had survived the shooting and had been hiding under an evergreen tree tried to escape, but the guards saw him, shot him, and brought him back to be buried with the rest.

[02:] 07:06:21 – [02:] 15:57:16

He describes the landscape and vegetation around the site of the mass grave; provides information as to the owners of a hill nearby who had bought the land with the intention of creating their own cemetery; speculates that the soldiers probably staked out the spot for the Jewish burial site by looking out from that hill; talks about the shot children he saw; describes vividly the shot bodies of a mother who had been holding her infant; mentions that he did not know any of the guards; comments on the fact that the shootings were common knowledge; mentions that people in the city could probably hear the shootings; discusses how the priest did not say anything about the shootings in church; describes the rules of the regime such as curfews and blackouts in the city; gives an exact explanation of how, from his village, he could hear the series of shootings overnight, from Saturday evening until Sunday afternoon, at which point he was taken to bury the last group of Jews; focuses on the fact that the shootings were not heard inside the church; talks about the end of the burial, how the churchgoers were free to disperse and go home; focuses on his psychological state after the incident, gives a detailed description of how he would hallucinate the dead bodies when he shut his eyes; gives a vivid description of the lingering smells of blood and chlorine; interprets war as a situation where everyone has to do their job, the Russians theirs, the Germans theirs, the soldiers' theirs, and the civilians theirs.

[02:] 15:57:17 – [02:] 24:29:59

He offers to tell anecdotes, explaining that in order to remember them he must be questioned a certain way; enumerates the topics he just talked about; comments again on the exceptional relationship between his village and the Jews that lived in it before the war, that there were no conflicts; gives an exact description of the rules of moneylending between the Jews and villagers, comments on the Jewish character.

[02:] 24:30:00 – [02:] 27:49:03

He gives an exact explanation of how he found out about the system employed for burying the Jews; focuses on the fact that the churchgoers were the only other people to be allowed on the site of the shootings; describes being surrounded by soldiers and dogs; describes seeing the Jews'

clothes piled in one heap regardless of gender; comments on the mood of the churchgoers as they dispersed to go home.