

KRIAUCIŪNAS, Jonas
Lithuania Documentation Project
Lithuanian
RG-50.473*0101

Box 1, Tape 1

In this interview, Jonas Kriaučiūnas provides information about the Žalva region and its inhabitants at the start of the war between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in 1941, when he was nine years old. He explains the important role of Jewish life and businesses in Žalva before the war and how it changed under the Nazi regime. He describes in detail witnessing an episode in which Jewish men were beaten and forced to sing the “Internationale” as they were rounded up into the synagogue by “white stripers.” He also describes hearing the nearby shootings of 60 Jewish men and then visiting the gravesite after the war. He recalls an episode in which his father and other villagers were forced to drive all the Jewish women and children to Ukmergė Prison in their wagons. He describes witnessing “white stripers” take belongings from Jewish homes. In addition, Kriaučiūnas discusses the fates of “white stripers,” hidden children, and Jewish belongings, homes and stores.

[08:] 34:16:02 – [08:] 41:39:08

Introduces himself as born in **Bikonių [Bykonių]** village, Žalva region, Ukmergė district in 1932 to a peasant family; discusses going to school in Žalva during the rapid changes in regimes from independent Lithuania in 1939, to Soviet in 1940 to the Nazi in 1941; provides information on the history of Žalva, focusing on the fact that about 500 Jews lived there before the war and that there were two synagogues; explains how on June 29, 1941, after a week had passed since the outbreak of the war, Nazis occupied Žalva; describes how a German surveillance plane landed in the stadium of the school, and how the following day, he as a nine-year-old child went to look at it with the other children in the village; describes how, while walking through the town, they witnessed the rounding-up of Jewish men; explains that in Žalva a band of about 10 policemen, called “white stripers,” had already formed; he describes witnessing Petras Maželis, the leader of the “white stripers,” beat Jewish men over their shoulders and heads with a rubber club called a “banana” while ordering them to sing the “Internationale” as they were marched to the synagogue; describes witnessing how the following day policemen with wagons took furniture and clothes from the Jews’ homes to the center of the district to be divided among themselves; recalls in great detail how villagers with horses and wagons were forced to drive Jewish women and children to Ukmergė prison, among them his father; describes hearing the shootings that took place in the Jewish cemetery, not far from the school, for three or four nights during which 60 Jewish men were shot; focuses on two Lithuanians who were among the Jews—one was shot, but one, named Rimša, managed to run away from the shooting site and provided information about who was committing the shooting before they caught up to him and killed him; mentions the names of “white stripers” Petras Maželis, Jonas **Danilevičius [Danelevičius]**, Paškevičius, and Virbalas.

[08:] 41:39:09 – [08:] 49:33:02

He discusses the fate of the “white stripers”—that some succeeded in moving to the West, that others were sentenced by the Soviet courts and sent to prison, and that a third group became “forest brothers” who fought against the Soviet regime, like Petras Maželis; talks about Maželis who not only participated in shootings of Jews, but also killed civilians from 1944 onward, and how, because of his extreme cruelty, his fellow partisans shot him; talks about an episode in which he saw 70 decomposed corpses in the fall of 1944 when the family of one of the Lithuanians, who had been shot with the Jews, decided to unearth his body from the mass grave and reburial in the Catholic cemetery; *[silence until interview resumes and people in the kitchen are asked to be quiet]*; talks about why Žalva was important for Jews, focusing on the many artisanal stores and on Žalva’s famous horse market; lists the professions of Jews in the city; discusses how some Jews would travel to the villages selling small products; stresses the good relations between the Jews and other residents of Žalva before the war, providing his father’s relations with Jews as an example; explains that Jewish and Lithuanian children studied together until 1939 without conflicts; admits to there being some minor conflicts and discusses the attitude of the Lithuanians toward the shooting of the Jews once that began; discusses certain cases of hidden children; talks about how the history of the hidden children was known by many, but kept secret from other children including himself at the time; mentions a family in Karališkių village that raised a Jewish child; speculates on the fates of the hidden children and the families that raised them; concludes that there was much respect for Jews in the Žalva region; discusses his impressions of Žalva as a child, namely that it seemed to be a predominantly Jewish town.

[08:] 49:33:03 – [08:] 56:50:04

He returns to the episode of the round-up of Jews into the synagogue, describing in great detail how the Jews sang the “Internationale,” focusing on their mood and the fact that they sang in Lithuanian; focuses in great detail on their apparel, explaining that the group consisted of 20–30 men who had yellow stars on civilian clothes; explains that they were being rounded up to the synagogue, and that the men were later shot nearby while women and children were taken to Ukmergė and Pivonijos Šilė; discusses how everyone knew from hearsay that the Jews were shot, focusing on the rumors that the Jews had to dig their own graves; mentions again the account of the Lithuanian escapee; explains that 3–4 policemen were rounding the Jews up into the synagogue, among them Petras Maželis; recounts episodes that he had heard about Petras Maželis and talks about his reputation as the most cruel of the leaders; describes hearing the shots of handguns, machine guns, and rifles while in his village that was two kilometers away from the shooting site; explains how in the morning people talked about how Jews were shot at the Jewish cemetery; returns to the episode in which Jewish valuables were being taken from their homes, focusing on the fact that there were no Jews in the houses; remembers hearing of two Jews who were shot through the windows while still in their houses; explains how the “white stripers” would come to the house and take what they could; discusses how long he observed the “white stripers” taking belongings from houses, mentioning that the policemen tried to drive away the children looking on; specifies that he saw three or four “white stripers” taking the belongings; describes in detail the objects that were taken, namely, furniture, sheets, and clothing; specifies that he only saw two wagons but knows that there were more.

[08:] 56:50:05 – [09:] 02:17:02

He returns to the episode of the villagers driving Jewish women and children to Ukmergė recounting how his father was forced to drive them in his wagon; how the “white stripers” tricked them into believing that they were simply moving to Ukmergė; explains that he did not see how the women and children were forced out of their homes, but that he did see a line of six or seven horse-drawn wagons driving them to Ukmergė; discusses knowing that his dad was in the group but not seeing him specifically; describes the behavior of the mothers and children in the wagons as they were being driven away, that they were crying and moaning; recounts his father’s descriptions of his passengers; talks about how they were all shot in Pivonijos Šile; explains how Pivonijos Šile was the center for the killing of Jews from surrounding towns; he lists the towns Giedraiciai, Balkininkai, Kovarskas, Deltuvas, Siesikai Pabaiskas, and Vepri; discusses that in each town there are Jewish cemeteries, mentioning Šešuolius; specifies that he stood 30–40 meters away from the group of wagons with the women and children; describes hearing the moaning of women and the cries of children, and deduces that the women understood that this was their final journey; describes the path that the wagons took, mentioning that in the final wagon of the line were sitting five or six “white stripers” with guns.

[09:] 02:17:03 – [09:] 09:09:05

He responds to the question of whether he recognized any of the Jews who were being forced to sing the “Internationale” by mentioning that they are all listed in the local museum; discusses recognizing some faces of the Jews who were being beaten; mentions the name **Hamke**, a violinist who played at his parents’ wedding in 1930; describes the behavior and posture of the Jews who were being rounded up [*mimes beating and lowers his head demonstrating the posture of the Jews*] and explains that the only witnesses at the scene were children like himself; explains that he did not go to the place where the Jews were shot until 1944 when it was unearthed; [*silence until interview resumes*]; explains that he found out about the two Jews who had been shot through the windows in their homes through hearsay; talks about how many nights he heard the shootings; explains that the group of “white stripers” in Žalva remained constant from the start of the war, that no new members joined the group, and that it was always the same policemen who participated in each of the episodes; explains that he saw Maželis only once when he drove the Jewish men into the synagogue; explains that later a large part of the perpetrators and all of their families were deported to Siberia—that none of their relatives remained in Žalva; explains that he moved to Žalva for good in 1961 after living elsewhere for ten years.

[09:] 09:09:06 – [09:] 14:24:24

He talks about what became of the Jewish stores once there were no more Jews—that before they were shot, some of the Jews brought their goods to certain trustworthy Lithuanians in the villages for safekeeping, but that the rest of their goods were plundered by “white stripers” and other civilians; specifies that not a single store was restored, that they were all destroyed and remained empty after the war when the collective farms (kolkhozes) resold the buildings to people; mentions that a large number of buildings burned toward the end of the war; talks about one

synagogue that was destroyed in 1941 in order to use its bricks to rebuild the burned **Kiaukliu** church, and another synagogue that remains standing and empty; explains that the houses of the Jews also remained empty until the end of the war when the buildings were resold by the state and people were moved to the city from the villages; describes in detail the condition of these empty buildings during the war; comments on how the policemen, their families, and friends who, after plundering the belongings of the Jews, noticeably improved their standard of living; mentions how, in comparison, his own peasant family suffered and how they baked bread out of beets and almost starved.

-- 0 --

total time: 40 min 25 sec.