

PETKEVIČIUS, Vytautas
Lithuania Documentation Project
Lithuanian
RG-50.473*0104

Tape 1, Box 1

In this interview, Vytautas Petkevičius, who was a schoolboy in Kaunas at the time of the Nazi occupation of Soviet Lithuania during World War II, discusses his memories of the violence that he witnessed committed against the Jews. He describes in detail witnessing the **Lietūkis** [**Lietūkio**] Garage Massacre. He also describes witnessing from up close a column of Jews being marched to be shot at the Fifth Fort as well as seeing other columns being marched or driven into the Ninth Fort and finally hearing the shootings. He recalls Nazi tactics of using tractors to muffle the sounds of the shootings in the forts and discusses in detail the mass burning of Jewish corpses that occurred toward the end of the war as the Germans were preparing to retreat. Petkevičius discusses how his family briefly housed two hidden children. He talks about the local collaborators, their apparel, and the security surrounding the forts and ghetto. He also talks about the Vilijampolė ghetto, its establishment, and the burning of its hospital. Throughout the interview Petkevičius often expresses indignation at the law that was passed after the Lietūkis Garage massacre prohibiting the torturing or killing of Jews in a public place. In addition, he discusses the vocabulary used to refer to collaborators and describes billboards and propaganda posters promoting collaboration.

[00:] 00:38:13 – [00:] 10:23:22

Introduces himself as a writer born in Kaunas in 1930; talks about his education mentioning that his high school was next to the famous garages (**Lietūkis** Garage); talks about where he lived in Kaunas—**Šančiuose Fredoj, Birutės** [**Birutė**] village; talks about the large population of Jews in Kaunas providing exact numbers; discusses his impression of Kaunas as a child—that there were more Lithuanians than Jews but that Šančiai was a multicultural suburb that included Poles, Russians, Lithuanians, Jews, and Germans; explains the professions of each ethnic group; describes the **Lietūkis** Garage incident as a massacre of large group of Jewish women and men at the start of the war; describes witnessing the massacre on his way to buy bread with a friend, **Ričardas Pukulis** [**Pokulis**], whose father worked at the garage; mentions that seeing many *baltaraiščiai* (“white-strippers”—Nazi collaborators) on the way, and mentions that the administrative buildings of the garages had been taken over by the **Klimaičiai** partisans; describes the massacre at the garage; explains since Jews were only allowed to walk in the street, they were easily rounded up to be beaten; mentions the weapons used to beat the Jews; discusses how long the massacre lasted and how he left the scene because his teacher dragged them away in the early afternoon; discusses the apparel and weapons of the perpetrators; describes the corpses he saw on the ground and how blood was being washed away with hoses; discusses his state of shock and horror at seeing this scene as a child; explains how everybody knew those being beaten were Jews because of the difference in their physical appearance, because some of them were wore the Star of David, and because most of the locals knew who was a Jew; talks

about a book that the Jewish Museum published that examines the law which was passed: no executions of Jews could take place in a public space, Jews had to be shot elsewhere out of public view.

[00:] 10:23:23 – [00:] 20:15:20

He discusses why there were very few onlookers at the garage massacre; explains that most people upon seeing such a scene instinctively ran away; admits that a couple people watched, but there was no throng; describes the garage—four entrances, one was equipped for washing cars in the winter; talks about false rumors that the NKVD (Narodnyy Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del, Peoples Commissariat for Internal Affairs) used that space to torture people; talks about how he used to frequent the garage because his friend's father would give them a ride back home from school; explains why he and his friend went near the **Lietūkis** Garage to buy their groceries; describes the appearance of Jewish stores at the beginning of the war, how they were vandalized and robbed; discusses the process of nationalization; explains how the store was always on the first floor and that the Jew who owned it lived on the second floor; discusses witnessing a column of Jews being marched to be shot at the Fifth Fort focusing on the fact that they were all wearing suits; mentions how the Germans, upon retreating, uncovered the mass graves and burned the bodies; talks about how he recognized Jews who were in the column and recalls an exchange of words with one friend as he was marched by; describes hearing the shootings while in Freda and his father's explanation of them; mentions how tractors without mufflers were used to drown out the sound of the guns; mentions going to school in **Senava** which was between the Third and Fourth Forts; talks about how everyone knew that the Jews were being shot; discusses the types of weapons used and who was guarding the columns; recalls that his Jewish friend's name was **Grudzkis [Grudskis]** and that his father was a tailor; briefly discusses going to the shooting site after the shootings noticing the large earth mounds covering the trenches; explains that the first shootings took place a week after the **Lietūkis** Garage Massacre.

[00:] 20:15:21 – [00:] 29:13:17

Discusses walking around the **Vilijampolė [Vilijampole]** ghetto; describes the location of the ghetto; mentions that he never went inside but walked past it frequently; talks about the security surrounding the ghetto and rumors that the fences were electric; describes seeing a group of Jews who were forced to work at a factory chopping wood for gas generators; describes how Jews tried to bargain for food; mentions that after the hospital was burned and mass shootings began, Jews were no longer forced to work; discusses the burning of the hospital speculating that it may have happened a year after the ghetto was established; explains that his mother saw the hospital burn and told him about it; mentions an incident in which his mother was accidentally pushed into a column of Jews, but released after the “white-strippers” noticed the cross on her necklace; comments on the beast-like, rowdy behavior of the “white-strippers”; talks about the “white-strippers” that he knew; mentions the brothers **Zigmas** and **Aloizas Juodis, Zablonskis, Aukštikalnis** and **Erštikaitis [Raštikaitis]**; talks about how the “white-strippers” performed the shake-down of houses in search of weapons and arms, which they then collected and sold for drinking money; talks about **Zigmas Juodis** as an activist patriot; discusses how there were no “white-strippers” from his high school; remembers the name **Liumpinai**; mentions studying together with Jews; mentions the name of the Jewish critic **Grigoraitis**, who had been hidden as

a child; recounts how a Jewish children's doctor named **Feleris** brought his two young daughters in a backpack from the ghetto to his home where his family hid them until they found out about another family who was burned for having hidden Jewish children; explains how his mother and sister bleached the girls' hair and brought them out to his uncle's house in the country, where they survived the Holocaust; explains that Jews marched past his house on their way from the ghetto to **Renkelio** Manor where they were forced to work and at that moment the doctor brought his children in the bag; explains that his mother was returning the doctor a favor for having saved his life when he was younger.

[00:] 29:13:18 – [00:] 38:39:13

He discusses the common knowledge that two running tractors without mufflers parked along the road near the Ninth Fort indicated shootings of Jews were in progress; describes the length and mass of the columns of Jews that were brought to the Ninth Fort to be shot; mentions the security around the column, focusing on the fact that they were either marched early in the morning or at night; speculates that the Jews who were brought to the Ninth Fort in wagons were probably not local, but from Hungary and Austria; mentions graffiti on the walls of the Ninth Fort indicating the countries that the Jews had come from, which he noticed while putting together the museum; mentions briefly the belongings Jews carried with them as they were marched; discusses in great detail his impression of the Jews in the column, describing their posture, silent demeanor, and half-dead appearance; describes the clothing of the guards—that they wore both German and Lithuanian uniforms; discusses the dogs used mostly by German guards; talks about the guarding and security around the Ninth Fort, which he witnessed as he passed by frequently on his way to buy certain supplies from factories and stores; recalls seeing two tractors outside of the Ninth Fort and one tractor near the Fifth Fort; describes witnessing Jews being forced into the gates of the Ninth Fort; focuses on how the people seemed to disappear into the earth as they were marched into the underground tunnels; describes the layouts of the Forts and exploring the Third and Fourth Forts during the war; describes seeing smoke rising from the Ninth and Fifth Forts for several weeks when the Germans were preparing to retreat in 1944; recommends **Vabalas'** film about the retreat; describes the "bonfires" in detail focusing on their size and smell; explains why as a child he did not pay attention to dates.

[00:] 38:39:14 – [00:] 43:46:12

He complains about current attitudes in publications of the Jewish Center about the Holocaust in Lithuania, focusing on the hypocrisy of **Landsbergis (Vytautas Landsbergis-Žemkalnis)**, who was portrayed in the book as a hero for expressing outrage at the maltreatment of Jews in the Ninth Fort, when in actuality, he helped to pass the law forbidding Jews to be massacred in a public place, but not elsewhere; explains how **Landsbergis** helped put up propaganda posters promoting Nazi collaboration; comments on Lithuania's shame concerning the Holocaust and provides an interpretation for why Jews were brought only to Lithuania and not the other Baltic countries where the local population was willing to collaborate; mentions the Third Battalion and **Impolevičius [Impulevičius]**; describes the propaganda posters he saw; focuses specifically on the posters of Bobelis (military governor of Kaunas, Lt. Colonel Jurgis Bobelis) that were posted throughout the city listing the restrictions on Jews; discusses the various materials used to make the posters and their locations in the city; discusses the three founders of the Kaunas ghetto—the

“ burgermeister” (mayor), the minister of the interior, Colonel J. Šlepetys, and **Landsbergis**; talks about **Landsbergis**’ role in not allowing the ghetto to be established on Lūkšio street because it was part of the old town and insisted that it be established in **Vilijampolė**.

[00:] 43:46:13 – [00:] 52:24:10

He remembers seeing a large billboard near the road leading into Jurbarkas from Kaunas which stated “Free from Jews”; comments on how Jurbarkas killed all of its Jews; mentions the sculptor Grybas (Vincas Grybas); mentions a poster that he saw in Yalta; explains that the Nazi collaborators called themselves “partisans” but that the rest of the population called them “white-strippers” and later on “Jew-shooters”; discusses the term “Jew-shooter” and its origins; talks about the burnings of Jewish corpses at the end of the war; explains he did not directly see the fire in the Ninth Fort but that in the Fifth and Fourth Forts everything was visible through the chain-link fences; mentions again the Lietūkis Garages and that one could see everything because the fence was chain-link there too *[motions with his hands gesteruing the layout of the fences]*; concludes that he was probably half a kilometer away from the Ninth Fort when he witnessed the smoke from the burnings; returns to the episode of the Lietūkis Garages describing the shouts and swearing that he heard from both the perpetrators and the victims; reiterates that he was frozen in a state of shock; talks about episodes in which he saw individual corpses of Jews on the streets in Šančiai and near the army barracks; explains that whoever had a gun could use it to kill Jews; describes several days at the start of the war during which the citizens of Kaunas freely killed Jews and pillaged their stores until an order for systematic killing was established by the Nazi regime; remembers the law passed under Bobelis once the Jews had all been shot, stating that establishments such as bakeries or sport houses had to have a group of partisans guarding the valuables of the Jews.

-- 0 --