

MARKEVIČIENĖ, Janina  
Lithuania Documentation Project  
Lithuanian  
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Tape 1 of 1

In this interview, Janina Markevičienė, born in 1922 (or, according to her passport, in 1924) recounts in great detail, the bombing and invasion of Kaunas by the Germans, as a local resident (as of 1941) of the area, specifically the town of Jonuva. She focuses on the heavy fighting and fires that persisted for several days in Rūkla. She mentions that Jews were forced to clean the river of corpses afterward. She talks about how four Jewish families were housed in the residence she lived in because their homes were destroyed in the fighting. She talks about how the Jewish men were forced to work in the town and were later taken away, in waves based on age, to work at the forts, without returning. She discusses the fates of the Jewish women and children who were later taken to barracks that would become the ghetto. She describes witnessing columns of women before they were taken to be shot, and then hearing the shooting. She mentions that not all collaborators were required to participate in the shooting, stressing that all of the shooters collaborated of their own will. She mentions the fate of the Jew's belongings, how most items were put on trains and taken abroad. She discusses in great detail witnessing an execution of four Jewish men that occurred prior to the mass shootings. She recalls visiting the mass-grave site after the shooting, to pray. She also mentions several collaborators by name, discussing individual acts of cruelty.

**[01:] 00:39:04 – [01:] 10:20:27**

Markevičienė explains she and her family (specifically her father) lived, in her early years, on a farmstead between Gardinas and Horža; describes her father's farm being situated on the border between Lithuania and Poland, focusing on the land, mill, and animals he owned; explains her father moved to the town of Horža, took over the mill whose owners had died, and from there moved to the town of Suwalki; explains that after Suwalki was annexed by Germany, her father chose to leave for Lithuania rather than accept German citizenship, and moved to the town of Jonuva in the beginning of March 1941; talks about the German invasion of Kaunas, retelling how on a Sunday she saw airplanes with the German insignia fly low and drop a small number of bombs, and the following Wednesday, the Germans entered the city on motorcycles; recounts how, while hiding in the basement of a Jewish house with her family, she saw motorcycles arrive; describes the tactics by which the German motorcyclists were able to take over the city and seize 5,000 prisoners; describes in great detail the night bombings of Rūkla and how the river was full of tanks and bodies for many days after.

**[01:] 10:20:28 – [01:] 16:50:06**

She explains that all of the Jews from the Tauras side of the river were rounded-up and forced to extract corpses from the river; describes an episode in which she witnessed bodies of a Russian soldier, a woman, and three children being pulled out of the river; explains that large trenches were dug along the river bank where the bodies were thrown in and buried; explains only Jews were put to the task of hauling corpses, and that she had recognized some of the Jews; discusses the good relations between Jews and non-Jews that had been before the war; describes the military engagements that persisted for several days in Rūkla near Jonuva, focusing on the widespread fires that resulted from it; vividly recounts an episode in which she was almost hit by machine gun shot which ultimately killed a Jewish family and their horse near the river; discusses how the lives of Russians became difficult once the Germans took over because many were taken as prisoners under the strict supervision of the head of the Gestapo named **Hans**; explains that Jews did not suffer right away, and many returned to their homes if the buildings had not been destroyed, but if the Jews had nowhere else to go, they were taken in by people who had room; remembers that in the building in which she lived, four Jewish families moved into the kitchen for several months; describes how her family survived on rations and shared what they could with the Jews living there; describes how she secretly would go to Ukmergė to buy food for Jews living in their house.

[01:] 16:50:07 – [01:] 20:13:02

Talks about how the Germans looted a few Jewish stores, loading their motorcycles with booze and cigarettes, and that one store burned down an hour later; talks about other Jews, in particular **Azikas**, who kept Sabbath, owned a mill, and worked all day to provide electricity for all of Jonuva; talks about the widespread fire in which the mill burned down during the three days of fighting; mentions a neighbor, **Rukauskas**, who was fatally injured, but that they could not retrieve a coffin for him because of the fighting; talks about the German troops and their rapid advance toward Moscow; discusses the German military tactics: after surrounding a town, some personnel stayed behind to deal with prisoners while the rest moved on; explains that she herself did not witness the looting of Jewish stores, but that her father did and told her about it.

[01:] 20:13:03 – [01:] 29:45:16

She explains that the Jews could not shop for groceries themselves because they had yellow stars sewn to their clothes, were subjected to a stricter curfew than Lithuanians, and were only allowed food once all the Lithuanians claimed their rations, at which point there was usually no food left; says that before a large butchery was burned down, the Germans handed out free meat to anyone who came to claim it; names the Jews who lived in her kitchen: **Juda**, a butcher's wife, and **Hanka [Chanka]**, a restaurant-cafeteria owner; explains that Jewish men were taken to the butchery to work and fix the city during the day and then returned in the evenings; explains that later all of the younger men up to age twenty-five were rounded-up and taken to the forts to work; discusses how the Commander demanded a ransom, in gold, from Jewish families to allow them to see their sons; explains that the Jews brought even more gold than required by the Commander; tangentially describes how her husband was later deported by the Russians and did not have time to gather many belongings; explains that women and older men gathered their gold as a ransom; recounts in great detail the second round-up of remaining men up to age forty at night, describing how four people, one Lithuanian and three Germans, ordered men to wake up

and dress, saying they were going to the forts to work; recounts an episode when a neighbor, the wife of one of the collaborators, told her family to hide their men because soldiers were gathering all males to help dig trenches over night in the forest; approximates the dimensions of the trenches: thirty meters long, four meters deep; talks about visiting the site after the shooting when all five trenches were covered up already; explains that all the Germans and collaborating Lithuanians wore uniforms and probably carried weapons; returns to the night when the remaining Jewish men were rounded-up and taken to the fort, focusing on the interactions of the Jewish families, how they knew what would happen, and were saying their goodbyes in the kitchen.

**[01:] 29:45:17 – [01:] 41:14:09**

Talks about how in 1939, while in Gardinas she was separated from her father for three years because her parents were in Suwalki under the German regime; talks about how after the Jewish men were round-up and taken away, the Jewish women remained living in her kitchen for at least two months until they were taken to military barracks where they lived for a month; remembers conversations in which German soldiers told the women to bring everything they could because they were being taken to see their husbands and says they brought clothing, furniture; describes how, when passing by the ghetto, she would bring food for a little girl named **Gytė** who had lived in her kitchen; describes how she and a friend sewed money into the hem of **Gytė's** mother's dress before they were taken away; describes an episode in which she and a friend were hiding behind a wall, watching the columns of Jewish women being led to their execution and that **Gytė** ran up to her (**Markevičienė**), wanting to stay, but her mother came and took her and said her goodbyes to them [*begins to cry*]; explains that about twenty groups of Jewish women were taken to be shot; explains that she not only heard, but saw the flames of machine guns from her second story house; explains that the shooting lasted from noon until dusk; describes how groups were rounded-up but that the little kids would scamper off to pick flowers from the fields; talks about how her brother, while riding a bicycle and lighting lanterns together with a German, confessed that his conscience wouldn't let him watch the event, and the German soldier sympathized; talks about the dogs that had been brought from Germany to guard the columns of Jewish women and children; mentions that at the end of the day, four or five wagons of the elderly and sick were driven over to be shot, describes coming out of the post office with a group of people including the priest, **Čiužauskas**, and neighbors to see off the last of the Jews.

**[01:] 41:14:10 – [01:] 52:00:00**

She explains that the priest did not mention anything about the shooting in church, that people in general did not talk about that day because they had all seen it and all understood that they could not change what had happened; [*voice cracks and almost begins to cry*]; talks about what happened to the Jews' belongings that had been driven to the barracks of the prisoners, in particular how **Bundulė Andriuškevičiūtė**, a teacher, along with ten other women, sifted through the belongings, and put anything of worth onto a train to be taken away; talks about the German takeover of Suwalki and the tactics used to defeat Poland; specifies that she herself did not see the women sorting clothes; mentions the name of the collaborator **Kunevičius** who refused to shoot the Jews because his conscience would not allow him; specifies that the Germans stressed that people should only shoot Jews voluntarily and talks about a large party

that the Germans threw at which they asked the collaborators to sign their names voluntarily to be shooters, and if some refused, they were positioned elsewhere as guards; mentions the name **Pinkauskas**, nicknamed **Puida**, and how he humiliated several Jews on the street in passing by forcing them to kneel into puddles; describes witnessing how a week after the German takeover, a non-Jew and a Jew got into an argument about the ownership of a house, and where overheard by Germans who then beat the Jew; explains how she happened upon the scene together with her friend **Vanda Šafronavičiutė**, on their way back from church; describes how the two sons and father **Keidanskiai [Jedinskai] [Edenskai]** were driven from their house to outside of the city where the ground was sandy, given shovels and were forced to dig a pit; describes in great detail how the four Jewish men, the house owner and the Jedinskas family members, were shot into the pit by the Commander **Hans** himself with a pistol; recounts how she and her friend ran away from the scene immediately, and en route were questioned by the wife of **Keidanskis** as to the whereabouts of her family; mentions that **Keidanskis** was a teacher.

[01:] 52:00:01 – [02:] 00:01:10

She talks about how this was the first horrible moment of her life and that she could not visit the spot after that; describes how after the mass-shooting that happened much later, she, with **Vanda**, went to the site after three days had passed; describes how, apart from saying Lithuanian prayers for the murdered Jews, they stood in silence; mentions that there were no belongings scattered around the site and how she had heard that the Jews were forced to take off their clothes and put them into neat piles, were made to get into the pit and were shot from above with machine guns; recounts an episode in which one Jew was not yet killed, but only shot in the arm and whispered to a man named **Jaskutis** to help him, the latter began telling him to roll toward the corner of the pit when a shooter named **Gineika** overheard them; discusses what a cruel person **Gineika** was and his fate; explains how **Gineika** wanted to shoot **Jaskutis** together with the injured Jew, but **Jaskutis** pleaded for his life and other Lithuanians around the pit defended him; specifies that she heard this story from **Jaskutis** who, along with others, had been driven over there and forced to bury the bodies; explains that she saw how the Germans rounded up all of the young Jewish men and in the morning marched them down Kauno Street in three or four columns of twenty or thirty men each; explains that she heard the story of the ball where the collaborators were given vodka to drink and then asked to sign agreements from her younger brother, who heard it from the shooters during a card game; mentions how her older brother scolded the collaborators for allowing such a young boy to play cards with them and brought their younger brother home.