

PALŠAUSKAS, Juozas  
Lithuania Documentation Project  
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Tape 1 of 1

In this interview, Juozas Palšauskas, a resident of Ariogala, discusses his relationship, as an 18 year old, with the local Jewish community before the war. He recalls witnessing Jews of **Josvainis** being driven into the Ariogala ghetto, the mass shooting of Jews, as well lesser atrocities. He discusses the rumor of Germans transporting the Jews to Palestine rather than the reality of driving them to be shot. He recounts a mass execution of Jews by Lithuanian collaborators, including the slogans shouted by Jews and two unsuccessful attempts to escape. He describes how the Jews were ordered to undress and then shot; men first, then women and children. He comments on how witnessing this scene affected him psychologically. He explains that after the shooting was over, local Lithuanians who had been forced to dig the pit were then forced to bury the corpses and that the collaborators celebrated for the rest of the day. He also mentions the fate of Jewish belongings and houses as well as the attitude of some of his neighbors toward the “white-stripers.” He concludes by recounting how after the war he was charged as a collaborator even though he had only witnessed the events.

[01:] 00:32:06 – [01:] 07:23:15

He introduces himself as born in 1922 in Ariogala; explains that prior to the war there were not many Jews in Ariogala, but that he happened to witness how hundreds of Jews were driven from **Josvainis** into the Ariogala ghetto by Lithuanian collaborators including **Dabavkas [Dabapkas]** and led by the policeman **Leonavičius** on horseback; describes his good relationship with the Jews of Ariogala, to whom he sold mustard and decks of cards and for whom his brother herded cows; discusses the fact that under the Soviet regime many Jews were pro-communist, mentioning the especially outspoken **Šimkus**, and talks about their fate after the Germans invaded; discusses atrocities he witnessed before a mass-shooting, including an incident when soldiers lined a group of Jewish girls up against a wall and began firing at the brick chimney behind them to scare them; specifies there were only a couple of Germans and that most of those driving the Jews were Lithuanians wearing white stripes on their arms; names the local collaborators he remembers: **Kadaras, Šeplevitskas, Pužauskas**, focusing on that they were dressed in civilian clothes; comments that many people did not take the “white-stripers” seriously, mentioning rumors suggesting the Jews would be taken to Palestine; discusses the restrictions put on the Jews when they were trapped in the ghetto, and how once the ghetto was taken down, the Jews were locked in two synagogues; explains the ghetto lasted about a month and describes its setting; talks about a woman named **Švelnienė**, who would carry food to the Jews in the ghetto; mentions the “white-stripers” who guarded the ghetto.

[01:] 07:23:16 – [01:] 11:38:20

He discusses witnessing how Germans and collaborators forced Jews out of their homes and into the ghetto; explains how after the ghetto was taken down, the Jews were told they were being taken to Palestine but that when the trucks took a wrong turn there was a great uproar as people understood they were being taken to be shot; explains he was exempted from digging trenches because he had a job with the government, but that he went to see his friend **Katinskas** who had been forced to dig them; describes witnessing the shooting in great detail, how the first group of Jewish men was brought over by one German and thirty Lithuanian collaborators in uniform, that two machine guns were set up on either side of the trench, and that the trenches had already been dug by the time he got there; comments that many large men had been forced to dig the trenches, focusing on the fact that they were all shaking from fear once the shooting began; specifies that the German lieutenant gave the order to shoot, killing the entire first column of Jews, but that a couple of Jews from the second column tried to run away -- one in the direction where he was hiding in the bushes, and another who ran in the other direction; recounts both of the runaways' fates: the one who ran toward him was later shot by the river, while the second was caught by a digger who hit him on the head with a spade until a collaborator came and shot him; comments on how the scene affected him, how his breath seemed cold to him; mentions that the guards dragged both corpses back into the pit by their feet.

[01:] 11:38:21 – [01:] 14:50:14

He talks about the process of the shooting, how at first all were shot into the trench, and then those who were still living were shot again from above with a machine gun; comments on how he knew the Jew who tried to run away; talks about another Jew named **Samkus** who had assimilated into Lithuanian society so much that no one believed that he would be shot, but he was killed anyway; describes in great detail how he watched him get shot, how the Jews who had taken their clothes off were shaking from fear; talks about how he, being 18 years old, did not take any of it seriously at first, but once he came home and lay down, he started screaming and shouting until his mother came and gave him medicine, and from that point he understood the gravity of what he had witnessed; talks about how the collaborators drank and celebrated on the river bank for a long time after the shooting while they divided the clothes amongst themselves; specifies that the execution had begun in the early afternoon.

[01:] 14:50:15 – [01:] 22:00:15

He talks about how he watched the Jews march from the ghetto to the execution site; talks again about witnessing, from a distance, the uproar on the road resulting from the Jews' realization that were not being taken to Palestine; specifies that he witnessed the shooting from about a hundred meters; specifies there were either two trenches or one very long one; specifies the leader of the militia named **Čiapas** and one German major gave the signals to shoot; remembers the phrases that one Jew shouted at the perpetrators, such as "Perish you Hooligans!" and "Long live Stalin!;" explains he only heard the order to the Jews to undress, but did not see it because he was on the other side of a hill; remembers hearing the spiteful words of the Jews; talks about how easily the first group of Jews was shot, and that they were first shot into the pit by thirty soldiers lined up with guns, and then once they fell in, machine guns were set on the edges and shot into the trenches; specifies that the shooters were dressed in Lithuanian uniforms and that the Jews were shot in their underwear; explains that first a group of men was shot, and then

women and children; describes in great detail how the Jews and shooters were lined up along the trenches, and the types of sounds he heard, such as moaning and wailing along with the above-mentioned slogans; comments on the weak security around the area and his own interpretation that the Jews were a cowardly people, because if they had all wanted to, they could have all tried to run away, and that if he were in their shoes he would have grabbed the German officer by the throat; specifies that the soldiers who performed the shooting had been brought from Kaunas; explains how after the shooting, all those who were standing around were given shovels and forced to bury the bodies; focuses on how the digger **Šaukliuks** fainted from nausea when forced to bury bodies and interprets this as a sign that God exists; remembers a horrible smell coming from the corpses.

**[01:] 22:00:16 – [01:] 27:49:22**

Admits that he saw the corpses in the pit but asks the interviewer not to question him about it because it makes him feel ill; *[voice cracks, almost begins to cry, silence until interview resumes]*; explains what the soldiers and collaborators did afterwards, how his friend who was brought to dig the trenches and bury corpses found a pillow which he brought home, and later discovered a large sum of money inside; describes how the perpetrators sang and shot guns in celebration for the rest of the day by the river near the shooting site; mentions there was only one German; talks about what became of the Jewish belongings after the day of the shooting, that they were taken to the Maironis Hall where they were sold; recounts how he forbid his own mother to buy anything that belonged to a Jew, even though they could have used some furniture, but because of his psychological condition after witnessing the shooting, she obeyed him; mentions that everything was being sold; discusses the auditorium itself and for what functions it had been used; talks about going to church, and how he didn't like to because he feared God and people said that God was in the church; does not remember if the priest mentioned anything about the Jews during mass *[silence until interview resumes]*.

**[01:] 27:49:23 – [01:] 34:13:14**

He specifies there were rumors that the Jews were going to be taken to Palestine; talks about how he did not hear anything directly from the collaborators; returns to discussing the two Jews who tried to run away from the shooting; explains that the one that ran towards him was not shot until he reached the bank of Dubysa, and then the “**kadaras**” dragged the corpse back to the pit by the feet which were tied together with string; explains that some villagers called the white-strippers “little hammers” because they were such awful people; discusses how none of his friends considered the collaborators to be people in the first place because they had committed mass murder; reiterates that the commander who had caught up to the run-away Jew, shot him, and later fainted, proved to him that there is a God; comments on how he himself would like to know the fate of the collaborators *[grins]*; explains that he saw the execution of two groups of Jewish men; describes in detail his hiding place behind some trees and bushes amongst others who had been digging the trenches; describes the location of the trenches and the surrounding area; explains he did not see how the white-strippers separated the clothes amongst themselves but heard how they celebrated loudly and remembers the stench of alcohol in the area.

**[01:] 34:13:15 – [01:] 41:04:05**

He talks about how he did not witness the clothes being taken to Maironis Hall; comments on his nerves; notes how at the time he felt very manly in watching the murders, but soon realized that was not the case; specifies that the shooting lasted more than a couple of hours; comments on how he does not remember what month or what year this occurred in; makes a broad statement about how Lithuania should not have taken part in these actions, that the Germans could have carried out their own agenda and that Lithuanians should not have collaborated; comments on how at the time everything was interesting to him, but that now he would not go to witness such events; explains he does not remember how life changed or what people talked about in Ariogala after the elimination of the Jews; explains that the houses of Jews were given to other people, and even he had lived in the room of a Jewish house, but when he came back from the war, all the houses had been burned; describes the room of the Jewish house that he lived in; talks about how after the war he and his friend **Kvetinskis** were interrogated in Estonia on charges of collaborating with Nazis and shooting Jews, even though they had only witnessed the events; admits that when he came home from the front he shared food with some German soldiers, but claims he never shot a gun in his life.