

LANKININKAS, Vytautas
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In this interview Vytautas Lankininkas, born in 1930 in Nemunaitis village tells the story of the Jews there. He went to school in the town of Nemunaitis, where his father was the headman. He discusses the pre-war life of the Jews of Nemunaitis then goes on to talk about their persecution after the arrival of the Germans, namely, the anti-Semitic posters he saw, the Stars of David that Jews were forced to wear, and the like. He recalls how the police chief from Alovė town tried to force his father to collaborate in arresting the Jews, but his father refused. He claims that he saw first the Jewish men, then the Jewish women being forced to walk to Alytus to be executed and names the local men who were leading them, but emphasizes that they did not participate in the killing. He discusses the post-war fate of the collaborators and says that all of them were sentenced to ten years of prison. He mentions several Jewish men who tried to escape and were first hiding with the priest in Nemunaitis, but later were found in Lankų village and executed. He claims that the only Jew who survived the Holocaust in Nemunaitis had been deported to Russia in 1941.

Box 1, Tape 1

[01:] 00:30:24 – [01:] 04:51:20
00:29 – 05:00

Vytautas Lankininkas introduces himself and says that he was born in 1930 in Nemunaitis village; says that before the war started he was going to school in Nemunaitis town nearby; affirms that many houses were burned down in 1944 as the Germans were retreating; says that there were 128 Jewish families living in Nemunaitis town; admits that he learned the exact number much later, but says that he knew a lot at the time because his father was the headman of the town; claims to have known all the Jewish men in town; says that he went to school with Jewish children and that there were three Jewish girls in his class; recalls that right after the war started, the Jews were forced to wear the Stars of David; says that he saw posters in which Jews were being blamed for everything; gives an example as follows:

“Who has the softest bed? The Jew.
Who eats the best food? The Jew.
Who wears the nicest clothes? The Jew.
Who has most gold? The Jew.”

He recalls that in August the police chief from Alovė town, **Kleiza**, came to Nemunaitis, and with the help of local policemen and the men from the “self-defense” groups (most of whom were former members of the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union) arrested all the Jewish men and forced them to walk to Alytus, where, in Vidzgiris, (a neighborhood in Alytus) they were executed; says

that about two weeks later the women were also rounded up and forced to walk to Alytus; claims to have seen the men and women being led to Alytus; explains that the elderly and the children were carried on carts.

[01:] 04:51:22 – [01:] 09:47:14
05:01 – 10:08

He says that the local women who watched the Jews being marched to Alytus were crying even though they were told that the men were being taken to work; says that some women even tried to bring food to them in Alytus; mentions that the Jews were arrested at night and locked up in one basement; adds that they were lined up and made to march to Alytus only after dawn; says that they were allowed to take their possessions; explains that the policemen were wearing police uniforms and the men from the “self-defense” groups were wearing uniforms of the Lithuanian Riflemens Union; emphasizes that there was not a single German in town when the Jews were being arrested and led to Alytus; says that all of the men had guns; stresses that the men from Nemunaitis did not shoot and that they only forced the Jews to walk; recalls that four Jews managed to escape including two sons of **Ruchavičius**; explains that their father had a shotgun and started shooting back, but was shot himself; says another man who had escaped was found and thrown down a steep slope of the River Nemunas; recalls that another two were hiding in Nemunaitis; says that three other Jews, who had escaped from Alytus, were found in Lankų village about a year later and executed; when asked how many people participated in leading the Jews to Alytus, he says that maybe 12 to 14 people; admits to having known some of them including the police chief from Alovė town named **Kleiza**, a policeman from Nemunaitis named **Žičkus**, who later was sentenced to ten years in prison, a policeman named **Maliuolis**, a forester named **Baleika**, who disappeared when the Germans were retreating; says that all the others were sentenced later; repeats once again that none of them participated in the massacre itself.

[01:] 09:47:15 – [01:] 14:13:15
10:09 – 14:45

He explains that the women were arrested by the same people as the men; says that the elderly and the children were brought on carts by local people who were ordered to help by the police; describes the aforementioned poster saying it had a Star of David and a picture of a Jew against a black background; explains that the posters were in print and that they were brought in from Alytus; explains that his father had been working as a headman before the war, and worked during and after the war; says that his father's main duty under the Germans was to make sure that the farmers delivered their contributions; says that most of the Jewish property was transferred to the municipal headquarters in Alovė, where it was sorted out and the valuables were sent further to Alytus; adds that the less valuable things – like furniture or clothes – were sold out to the people; explains that he heard this from his father, who witnessed the Jewish possessions being sold; says that many of the Jewish houses remained empty until 1944 when they burned down; states that only several remain; recalls that he and other children at school were given a task of going to the synagogue, collecting anything made of bronze from there, and bringing it back to school; explains that the synagogue burned down during the war.

[01:] 14:13:16 – [01:] 19:50:25

14:46 – 20:36

He says that before the war there were 17 shops owned by the Jews and that most of them were not specialized; claims that when the Jews were led to Alytus, people understood that they were going to be executed; explains why people were shaken by this knowledge; says that the Jews themselves did not believe that they would be killed; recalls being in Alytus and seeing the Jews being marched from the prison to the Jewish cemetery; says that there were Germans with dogs guarding them; clarifies that he and his brother were not allowed to approach and only saw the procession from a distance; when asked how he recognized that it was Jews marching, he replies that he recognized them from their appearance; says that the Jews were only wearing underwear; adds that they were led in several groups of at least fifty people in each; explains where exactly he met the column; recalls passing them by and then hearing shots in the distance as well as men screaming; says that several hundred men were buried together in big trenches; mentions that after the massacre he went over to the site and saw big mounds of sand; adds that now there is a memorial standing at the site and that he has given a speech in front of the memorial.

[01:] 19:51:00 – [01:] 26:56:16
20:37 – 28:01

When asked how he knew that the men leading the Jews to the execution site were Germans, he responds that he recognized them from their uniforms; adds that the members of the Lithuanian Riflemens Union also were present; recalls that the police chief **Kleiza** invited his father to come to the police headquarters, showed him a list with Jewish names and informed him that they all would be arrested the following night; says that his father tried to protest and that the policeman **Žičkus** then locked his father up in a barn so that he would not tell anyone about the plans; says they did not let him out until the morning when all the Jews were rounded up [*the light goes off, then on again*]; when asked whether he has anything to add, he says that he cannot understand how people who had grown up and lived among the Jews could raise their arms to kill them; mentions that all the men who helped in rounding the Jews up were sentenced to ten years in prison; says that the priest did not mention anything at church about the massacre but that he was hiding five Jews on the loft; recalls that they were the **Ruchavičius** brothers and three others from Alytus; explains that those Jews later left the church and were found in Lankų village; says that one of them went in the direction of Merkinė and was never seen again; when asked whether there were mixed marriage families before the war, he recalls one instance but explains that the Jewish woman was baptized before she got married; notes that she survived the war; says that of all the Jews of Nemunaitis, only **Leibas Smilga** survived; explains that he was rich and was arrested and deported by the Russians in 1941; adds that he joined the 16th Division and ended the war as an army major.