

DAMAŠEVIČIENĖ, Janina  
Lithuania Documentation Project  
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Box 1, Tape 1

In this interview, Janina Damaševičienė, maiden name Janina Tomelytė, born on December 22, 1922 in Trakiškio village in the Panevežys region, describes her experience as a witness to the mass murder of 10,000 Jews in Pajuostė. She identifies by name four men who had joined the local collaborators group, the “Black flag,” and who participated in the transport and killings in Pajuostė. Their names are: Stasys and Petras Šeibokas, Mackevičius, and Balčiūnas. She describes in detail the process of the killings, the number of victims, people’s behavior, and her own personal experience. She also details several other incidents leading up to the mass killings in Pajuostė including the shooting and burning of young Jewish men in the Žalioji forest, the establishment of the ghetto, and the transportation to the site of the mass graves.

**[01:] 00:34:50 – [01:] 08:29:24**

00:00 – 08:38

She introduces herself as Janina Damaševičienė, maiden name Janina Tomelytė, born on December 22, 1922 in Trakiškio village in the Panevežys region, attended school in Kurganava through the fourth grade and then studied in Panevežys at a trade school; she specialized as a seamstress, cook, culinary artist, and confectioner. She asserts that she remembers the start of the war and the Russian occupation because she was not too young; recalls how her classmates were excited for the arrival of the Germans because they thought it would bring freedom; remembers that the teacher vehemently disagreed. She talks about the day when the war began; that as she was walking to the church in Miežiškiai, bombs were dropped on Pajuostė, the bombing continued until 12 o’clock at which point the Germans arrived on horseback, dressed neatly, greeting everyone in German; she asserts that no one greeted the Germans. She describes the area near the airport in Pajuostė: Lithuanian and Russian soldiers had set up camp there, those who were not killed by the bombing fled. She states that when the Germans arrived, Lithuania became Germany, the Lithuanian people chose their paths- some joined the army, went to the front, and some joined the group of local collaborators, “Juodoji vėliava,” (Black flag). She explains that after about a year the “Black flag” began persecuting Jews, three men from her village joined the “Black flag” and went to kill Jews; she lists these men, now deceased: two brothers surname Šeibokas, and Mackevičius. She quickly explains the organizational structure of the “Black flag:” a German office in town, although she does not know exactly how many Lithuanians joined the “Black Flag;” she compares them to the Soviet security forces; explains that they did and went where they were told, among them were three men from her village who transported and killed Jews and who guarded the ghetto. She talks about how Jews were rounded up into the ghetto in the spring and then in the autumn, a month before the killings, they were taken to a military building in Pajuostė. She recalls that the Jews hoped that they would be taken to see the men, but she asserts that there were no longer any young Jewish men, only old men, children, and women; explains that the young men had already been transported to the prison, although she did not see this herself. She mentions that the Jewish women brought along many

of their belongings to Pajuostė because they thought they were going to see the men, that they were in Pajuostė for a month. She describes the large graves that were dug in the Pajuostė forest; explains that in the past, Jews would go on holiday to that same location.

**[01:] 08:31:06 – [01:] 14:41:05**

08:39 – 15:05

She describes how Jews were driven from Pajuostė and compares it to May 1st celebration events, that they were taken in well-organized groups of 100, that two partisans led the Jews and two stood at the foot of the graves. She explains that others indicated that these men were German, but she asserts that she saw no Germans, only Lithuanians. She insists that if she were taken to the grave and undressed to be shot, that she would have run away, that she would rather they shoot her as she ran away. Describes the size of the graves [*indicates the length and depth of the grave with her arms*]. She describes the shootings: the Jews are ordered to lie down in the grave, shot, then covered in bleach and black earth, even though some of the people were still alive. The interviewer explicitly asks her if she witnessed this; she confirms that she saw this with her own eyes. She explains how she happened to be in this location at this particular time: she was visiting her sister at the school where her sister worked for a teacher. She explains that currently the location looks very different, that nothing remains except for a monument. She goes on to describe what she saw after she and her sister climbed up to the second floor of the building: there was a square pit dug for the children, how at six o'clock in the morning a truck full of children arrived at the site, how the children were all shot and tossed into the grave, in her words "like piglets," and then buried. She explains that the school was about 200 meters from the graves, that the shootings took place from early morning until nine o'clock at night, that prisoners dug and shoveled the soil. She says that she was told that the local residents were taken from their home so that no harm would come to them, that the residents returned to their homes in the afternoon to take a look. She describes the groups of Jews being led to the site and remembers an incident when a Jewish woman asked her aunt, her uncle's wife, to take a baby carriage with a child and full of goods, the aunt refused because she remembered the saying: "If you help even one Jew, you'll end up in the grave too" (rhyme is intentional). She talks about how the Jews tossed their belongings from the bridge into the **Sielipio** stream and that old men would search the stream for goods. She goes on to describe the shooting and burial, how those who shot the Jews took the piles of clothing, although she did not see this herself. She says that her mother knew several Jews and that she spent that day sitting inside a well in fear. She bemoans the difficulty of remembering and describing the incident; she says she does not understand how the Jews could just lie down in the graves and why they did not try to run away and insists that she would have run toward the forest. She describes the scene: everyone was to undress, that she heard shouts, cries, and screams, that only the first group went quietly, but then later groups screamed because they told one another what was happening. She mentions that she doesn't know whether the shots were heard in Panevežys. The interviewer asks her how many groups were led to the site; she responds saying that 10,000 people were killed.

**[01:] 14:43:00 – [01:] 22:08:10**

15:06 – 22:51

She explains that she was aware that Jews were going to be rounded up and killed ahead of time, that she and her friend went to look at the graves, they climbed inside them; she indicates their size; explains that there were four graves, including a square one meant for children. She says that she slid down into one of the graves and knew their final purpose, emphasized by her repeating the phrase: “they will kill the Jews.” She clarifies that she only knew a few Jews in Panevežys and that she did not recognize any specific faces. She expresses her own sense of fear and that of the people being led to the graves. She details the process of the mass killing and burial: the Jews were shot with automatic weapons, they were ordered to lie down in the grave, shot, bleach and earth was poured over the bodies, and then the next group was led over. Explains that she recognized the prisoners. She goes on to talk about Šeibokas, that he went insane, that everyone feared him after the killings, that he told of an incident when a Jewish woman was hiding money at her breasts, and he found it and ordered her to hand it over and that he would let her go. She explains that Šeibokas was sentenced to 15 years, that he returned, lived for five years, and then died, that after the killings he would come by in the evenings and talk about everything that had happened. She explains that Lithuanian and Russian prisoners stood at the edge of the graves and dug dirt and poured bleach; that the “Black flag” brought their own bleach to the site, and that the dirt was already there from when the pits were dug. She explains that there were about four prisoners digging and three men shooting, that one man did not want to shoot people, so he ran away, that she recognized three of the men from her village. Then she remembers the name of the fourth man: Balčiūnas. She enumerates the fates of the men: Balčiūnas died in the forest, Stasys Šeibokas died after serving a 15 year sentence; Petras Šeibokas was shot dead near Rauguvėlė; Mackevičius died in the forest. Explains that those who belonged to the “Black flag” wore German uniforms with German insignia.

**[01:] 22:16:01 – [01:] 31:08:01**

22:58 – 32:14

She explains that she did not stay and watch the shootings until the very end. She explains that she did not see the Jews being rounded up into the ghetto, though she did go over to see the ghetto, that it was enclosed by a barbed-wire fence, that it was guarded by about 10 German soldiers and members of the “Black flag,” that the Jews walked around freely inside the ghetto, that the territorial size of the ghetto was about three to four square kilometers near the military cemetery and Daukanto street, that Lithuanians, not Jews, lived in this area beforehand, that the Jews were brought from the city center. She goes on to talk about how young Jewish men were rounded up from their homes, transported to the prison, interrogated, taken to a cell near Kaunas and then shot and burned; she explains that she did not witness this, but heard about it. She discusses the distance between Panevežys and Žalioji forest and that the shots were not audible in Panevežys; she talks about the cemetery in the Žalioji forest, how Jews, Lithuanians, and others are buried in this cemetery. She explains that she saw Jews being taken from the ghetto to a military barracks before the shooting; that her a Jewish man asked her father to drive him to the ghetto and he did so. She talks about how the Jews walked from the ghetto to the barracks [?!?]; compares this incident to May 1<sup>st</sup> ceremonies in its organization and proceedings, how the Jews took along their belongings, but when they realized what was to happen, they left everything in the barracks or threw them away or into the small river. She says that she saw Jews being led in small groups of about 100 to the barracks as she passed by. The interviewer then realizes that Damaševičienė is not talking about the walk to the barracks, but instead the walk to the killing

site and asks her to explain it again. Damaševičienė says that the Jews were transported in vehicles from the ghetto to the military barracks, but she did not see this. Explains that the graves were dug in the spring and the Jews were killed in the early autumn, that there were very few men led to the killing site, that three or four men stood guard for every group of 100 Jews, that there were about eight or ten men in total, that after one group was shot, another was brought over in succession.

**[01:] 31:09:06 – [01:] 40:33:07**

32:14 – 42:02

She describes the uniforms worn by the men who belonged to the “Black flag:” German, light green. She explains that the men who transported and shot the Jews gathered up, distributed and sold their belongings. She again repeats the fate of Šeibokas: he served a 15 year sentence, returned, and then died. She explains that she did not see the selling of Jewish goods, that she only heard about it, how one had to gather various goods from the murderers – if you bought one shoe from one man, you would have to find the matching pair with another and pay a few cents for it, although she does not know this specifically. She explains that the Šeibokas brothers, Mackevičius, and Balčiūnas did not live better lives or become wealthy after the killings, that in fact they were worse off – sent to prison, killed in the forest, exiled to Siberia. She returns to the killings: children were brought to the site in the early morning, she does not know where the children came from, she speculates that they were brought from an orphanage or a Jewish children’s home, continues to describe how the children were shot and tossed into the graves, that four or five men dug the earth and four men did the shooting, that she heard the children’s voices. She estimates that there were 60-100 children, from two to five years of age, that there were no children among the later groups of adults, only teenagers and babies in strollers. She recounts an instance when her uncle’s wife was asked to take a stroller with a child and full of money and goods by a Jewish woman, but she did not take it because she was afraid of the Germans. She explains that people said that, at the time, Germans watched over everything and kept order while dressed as civilians, she does not know about this and did not see it. She remembers that she and her sister did not sit at the window watching the killings all day, that she left at five o’clock in the evening, that she went home to find her mother sitting in a well and her father gone into the forest. She explains that the local residents who had been driven out of their homes near the killing site returned home in the early evening, that the residents were removed so that no harm would come to them, fearing how the Jews would behave at the site; that they were afraid of being shot or their homes being burned. She confirms that as she was walking home she still heard the sound of shots and cries, but that the local residents who lived about a kilometer or half a kilometer from the site nevertheless returned home. She laments that innocent people were killed. She recalls that her mother-in-law who lived in Ramygala talked about the Jews that lived on her street and how she worked for them; she discusses how Jews were primarily merchants.

**[01:] 40:46:10 – [01:] 50:53:03**

42:15 – 52:47

When the interviewer asks her how she knows that 10,000 people were killed, she responds saying that she did not count them herself, but instead heard this from other people and from the men who did the killing, that Šeibokas confirmed this. She explains that she did not see the men

being transported from the prison to the killing site; that she does not know if the killers were in the same vehicles, that she only heard about how the Jews were told to lie down in the vehicles, that Jews, Lithuanians, Russians and others were shot. She describes the behavior of the Jews, even though the interviewer had asked her to describe the behavior of the shooters, that the Jews went quietly- they calmly laid down in the graves and then they were shot, that they did not resist, that one group after another was placed in the graves, shot, and then bleach was poured over the bodies. She repeats the procedure of the killings: a group of about 100 people is led to the grave, they are undressed and then told to lie down in the pit; she indicates the size of the pit, explaining that it was twice or three times the size of the room in which the interview is being conducted, that the pit was long and large. She continues to describe how the people lay down in the graves and were shot with automatic weapons and how she was able to determine the gender of the people because the distance from the school was not far and also the forest was not dense. She asserts that she saw all of this and repeats her sense of fear at the time; she recalls that people told her that she would now be shot because she was a witness, that many other Lithuanians were shot and burned. She explains that toward the end of the day, the pile of clothing at the killing site grew very large, that the 15-20 people working there took the clothes, though she did not see this herself; she repeats that women would go buy clothes from these men. She affirms that all three pits were filled with corpses and that Šeibokas said that they shot 10,000 people; she expresses that Šeibokas was a half-wit and that everyone was afraid of him, that the other Šeibokas brother was shot shortly thereafter. She confirms that she saw Šeibokas at the killing site, that Balčiūnas and Mackevičius were part of the group that led people to the graves; she repeats that Stasys Šeibokas and Petras Šeibokas shot people and that there were perhaps two others, but she did not recognize them, that she used to spend time with the Šeibokas brothers. She remembers that after the killings she asked Šeibokas why he participated in the killings and whether or not he embarrassed by his actions; she says that he replied only by talking nonsense. She explains that the priest at church did not mention the incident during his sermons because he was afraid of the Germans. She describes a museum established by the Germans, that the museum exhibited photographs of tortured and murdered people. She talks about her neighbor's son who was killed at the sugar factory. She explains that the Germans opened this museum to show that Russians tortured, oppressed, and killed people, though she does not know if there were any anti-Jewish items in the museum, that the museum focused on Lithuanians killed by Russians, that there were photographs of torture victims near the sugar factory. She explains that there were no priests among the murdered because priests were exiled to Siberia.