

ICIKAVIČIUS, Aleksandras
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In this Interview Aleksandras Icikavičius, born in 1923 in Kaunas, talks about a massacre of Jews and prisoners of war that took place in Skuodas in 1941. He says that when the war began, he was fleeing a resort in Palanga; that he was stopped in Skuodas and not allowed to go any further; that after several days had passed from his arrival, he was brought to the yard of the House of the Riflemen Union, where many people had already been brought before: Jews, prisoners of war and communists. He recounts how people would be taken away in groups to be shot in a nearby forest; that all their possessions had been taken away; that they were marched around by Lithuanians wearing white armbands. He explains that when his turn to be shot came, a German captain arrived and rescued him; that the German captain offered him to join his unit, which he did. He mentions that he went on to travel the Baltic countries with that unit and that he and the German captain remained in touch.

[01] 00:31:05 - [01] 02:29:20

00:00:07 – 00:02:05

Q: Good day, Mr. Aleksandras.

A: Good day.

Q: A few months ago, we visited you and you shared your memories about the Second World War with us. And today we returned to record these memories on video. First of all, we wanted to ask you to introduce yourself. What is your name and your surname?

A: Well, it's Aleksandras Icikavičius. I was born in Kaunas, on the 13th of December, 1923. Keeping in mind, that I am from Kaunas—while the events, during which I encountered Holocaust face to face, took place in Skuodas—I should probably make a short introduction. I can explain how I ended up in Skuodas. The thing is that I graduated from the Russian High School No. 7. It was very worthwhile for us, as there were ten grades in it, while we had 13, and later -12. Well, and of course, it was very good if you wanted to save a year. I graduated with very good marks, because before that I had studied at “Aušra” gymnasium in Kaunas. So I basically had to repeat the course. In short, I had obtained a pass for accommodation at a resort in Palanga. For the first time in my life I was on the Lithuanian coast, and I was staying at a resort full of people from Leningrad. I was the only resident of Lithuania at this resort. Next to the resort there was a pioneer camp – No. 3, as far as I remember. Well, and an Aleksandras Ramanauskas worked there, whom I had known from before the war, from our times at the gymnasium – we used to do sports together.

[01] 02:29:21 - [01] 04:17:16

00:02:06 – 00:03:52

A: He suggested I should organize sports activities at the pioneer camp No. 3. It was very good for me, as I didn't have anything to do. And in addition to that I was paid in advance – for the first time in my life – 72 rubles. So this was my first pay. Well, and so I would play with the children and we would go to swim – that was the most dangerous part, because most of the children hadn't even seen a pond. Well, and then the war broke out. It broke out all of a sudden. Well, on the 21st of July the central fire of the pioneer camp was lit and all the—

[New cut.]

Q: Tell me, please.

A: On the 21st of July there was a huge central fire at the pioneer camp. Well, and there were all kinds of concerts and so on. We, of course, didn't care for them – I socialized more with the people from Leningrad. But we returned to the resort rather late, and we stayed up sitting and talking, when all of a sudden it started rumbling and fire appeared. Then we jolted to the balcony – the night was light as day – and saw the Red Army soldiers fleeing. Some had shoes on, others didn't. In short, it was clear that it was no fun. Well, and keeping in mind that the tension had been building for a while, it was clear that a war had started.

[01] 04:17:17 - [01] 06:41:05

00:03:53 – 00:06:12

A: Well, and we were left with nothing else to do, since the leadership of the pioneer camp had fled. So we, the grown-up people who were there—together with those people at the resort, those people from Leningrad—had to take those children from the pioneer camp No. 3 away from the fire. Well, and it was decided that we should go to the shore, and we walked along the shore to Šventoji. Then we wanted to cross to Latvia, to Liepoja. I felt especially drawn there, because my family was from Liepoja – from my mother's side. And our house was there. Aunt—at that time my aunt and my grandmother were still alive. But on the border we saw a Latvian “aisargs”—they were the Latvian [version] of our Šauliai (Riflemen)—standing. In an old Latvian uniform, he didn't let us through. He told us to walk along the shore—the border—strip until the official crossing point, but that one was already crowded with German soldiers. In short, the Germans, they were—the German army was in charge. We didn't have any other place to go. They did not let us through, but told us to go back. On our way back to Šventoji, two men on bicycles intercepted us. One of them was wearing a Lithuanian uniform, the other was a “white striper”, as they were called then: in civilian clothes and a white armband, but [also] a gun. Who, where, how, what? Of course they wanted to know. In the end, we were marched to some place next to Šventoji, where a Soviet farm used to be in the Soviet times—or maybe a former manor. I can't tell you, I don't know exactly. I only know that the children were separated from the adults. We, the adults, were locked up in a barn, while the children – somewhere separately. We were not given anything to eat or drink—I understood that it didn't bode well [for us], and at night I dug underneath the barn and crawled out – and [darted] towards the road.

[01] 06:41:06 - [01] 08:54:15

00:06:13 – 00:08:26

Q: It was almost morning. It was light already; those nights were light. I stopped a passing German truck. As chance had it, since I had to dig under, I was wearing short pants and I looked like—between us—like a true representative of Hitler Jugend: blue pants, white shirt, long white socks, and black shoes. Almost like the HJ uniform. The Germans stopped the truck right away, took me in, lifted [me up], and asked where how and what. Well, I told them what had happened. “Well,” they said, “you will have to wait for Liepoja, but we can take you along with us.” But then an exchange of fire ensued—a group of Soviet soldiers had broken through from Liepoja, and a short exchange of fire took place. They did not allow me back on the truck after it and told me to go wherever I wanted to go. Since Latvian language for me was the same as Lithuanian, or German—or Russian—I went to some people, who fed me: gave me some milk to drink and bread to eat. And I stayed overnight with them, then left the next morning. Well, so I had to head home, wherever it was. And since Liepoja had not been taken yet – it [home] was in Kaunas. So I started heading towards Kaunas. The first Lithuanian town on my way was Skuodas. I had not been there before the war; I had not even imagined it existed. So as I was approaching Skuodas, I was met by two civilian men. One of them was hunch-backed, and the second one wore a grey suit with a huge Cross of Vytis on the lapel.

[01] 08:54:16 - [01] 10:58:24

00:08:27 – 00:10:31

A: “Where are you going; whom; what; where—?” I had no passport, only a student ID. I was taken to the town, to a hotel owned by a Jewish man. They set me up in the hotel, told him to put me up that is; that I would stay there temporarily until I would be able to go to Kaunas, when the trains started going again. Well, and I lived there for a few days. I have to admit that the order in the town was quite good. The Germans did not intervene in local matters, but cards to purchase things like alcoholic drinks and cigarettes [were untrouced]. There were posters everywhere [that said]: “He who shoots will be shot”, in German: “wer plündert wird erschossen”. In short, there was iron discipline. And on the night of twenty [*thinks*] ninth—the night from 28 to 29—the night from Saturday to Sunday—at half past three in the morning there was loud noise; and German soldiers were waking all the people at the hotel up and ordering them outside. It turned out that a Russian military unit—or some group—had broken through and killed all the German commandants—there were not many. And all the people—There was a fight going on, and all the people were taken to the so-called Plechavičius’ meadow by the side of a rivulet, next to Plechavičius’ church. The church—everything—was named after Plechavičius (Lithuanian military general) in Skuodas. The church, the mill—everything was of Plechavičius.

[01] 10:58:25 - [01] 12:55:07

00:10:32 – 00:12:28

A: Well, so all of us civilians were taken there and spent the whole day in there. By the way, in the daytime Germans came and told us that the shops in center of town—where the market square was—were burning. That they were burning, and the ones, who

wanted to help, could go, and would be rewarded. Well, I had nothing to do; I was a young man, so I went. I helped to extinguish the fire. I was given a pair of shoes for my work; and we came back. In the evening a German officer arrived on horseback and asked if anyone spoke both German and Lithuanian. Well I was then—how old—17.5 years old, so a young teenager. [*He coughs.*] Excuse me. Well, and nobody stood up, nobody declared they knew it, so I had to tell him. He explained that people had to—that the danger was gone, but for their peace of mind they should go to sleep at the “pack houses” at the railway station. Well, and that was it. Well and then we started moving. But as we were walking, they said—our people, the locals, were in charge there—that the Jews should go to the house of Šauliai (Riflemen Union), while all the others – to the “pack houses”. “Pack houses” were huge storage rooms next to the railway station. The Germans had arranged a military kitchen there. They treated us with ersatz coffee and gave something to eat and to smoke. I had not smoked until then – until the beginning of the war.

[01] 12:55:08 - [01] 14:42:04

00:12:29 – 00:14:15

A: Well, and then a priest arrived to calm people down – with a huge Cross of Vytyis on his cassock, even though it sounds weird. Well, people spent the night among the artillery cannons, and everything was quiet. The next morning they said that all the residents—that it was over, the breakthrough had been contained, that all the residents could go home. Well, and I was standing with my little suitcase and did not have anywhere to go to. And so the German officer says to me: “Why are you standing here?” I say to him: “I have nowhere [to go].” “So go,” he says, “to the town. You will find a place to sleep somewhere. Make a visit the municipality at least – they will set you up. You cannot go to Kaunas.” And so I started walking, when the same [two]—the hunchback and the other one—caught up with me. They did not ask me anything, but [grabbed me] by the scuff of the neck – and straight to the House of the Riflemen [Union]. The House of the Riflemen [Union] was an ancient red brick building. But I only saw one storage room in that house – everything else took place in the yard. It was a huge yard—a huge square—full of I don’t know how many people, but very many people. Among them were—most of them were Jews, plus Soviet activists and prisoners of war, mostly injured.

[01] 14:42:05 - [01] 16:55:03

00:14:16 – 00:16:28

A: Well, and around—I am hesitant to say exactly—before noon, they started lining up groups of people. I am hesitant to say how many of them were there—around 20 or 30. They would be lined up and—accompanied by men with guns on their shoulders—they would be taken to a small forest nearby. A few minutes later we would hear machine gun and rifle salvos; and the men would return. The civilians though, the ones who had been marched there, didn’t come back. It was clear that mass killing of local people—the Jews plus Soviet activists and prisoners of war—was taking place. Well, and as we stood there, my turn arrived, and I was lined up. I had—a thought crossed my mind: “My Lord, I didn’t have a chance to live much, and I will have to say goodbye to my life soon.” At that time the same German officer arrived in a car—a captain named

Liutkė [Lütke], as I learned later—and asked: “What is this one doing here?” Well, nobody could respond to him, of course, so I had to translate [what was said] about me. I had known him a little from the night before. He said: “Where are your things? Take all of your belongings.” He put me in the car and said: “You are not allowed to go back to Kaunas. The hotel here has been burnt down. I allow you to join the one hundred—four hundred twelfth company of the railway battalion—the military unit’s number is 14529.”

[01] 16:55:04 - [01] 18:56:06

00:16:29 – 00:18:40

A: “So you will help us when we need to communicate with the local authorities, if something needs to be taken care of. Besides, you will have to copy announcements by the military authorities so that they could be printed and hung up on the wall in the office.” And that’s how my presence at that German unit began. I—when that unit remained in Skuodas, the people who had been held in the House of the Riflemen [Union], were gone. Where—how they dealt with the graves later, what happened there, I cannot tell you, because I did not meet anyone from Skuodas until many years later. I can only talk about what I saw: that people in groups were—I [want] to emphasize that not a single German was there, only our people, Lithuanians—taken to the forest and shot. That’s all.

Q: I would like to ask you some additional questions, if I’m allowed.

A: Please. Please.

Q: You said that “there were only our people, there were no Germans”. Was the hunchback and the other one among those “our people”?

A: They were! They were, of course! The one with the Cross of Vytis was there, and so was the hunchback. They were there.

Q: Was the priest with the Cross of Vytis somewhere around?

A: Who?

Q: The priest.

A: The priest had only showed up on Sunday night at the Railway station.

Q: Mhm.

[01] 18:56:07 - [01] 21:01:04

00:18:41 – 00:20:44

A: But during the shootings—the ones at the House of the Riflemen [Union] he was not present.

Q: What were those “our people”—what were they wearing?

A: Civilian [clothes]. Some had the Riflemen [Union] uniform; some were with our old Lithuanian military uniform – the green one. But most were wearing civilian [clothes].

Q: Did all of them have—were they all armed?

A: All of them! Some with Russian rifles—they had shot quite a few Russians, and at that time they already possessed the 10 shot rifles. There were very few machine guns as such. At least I don’t recall seeing machine guns. But there were those—the so called 10-shot automatic rifles.

Q: Did they have some kind of identifying marks?

A: I did not see any; I cannot tell you.

Q: But you mentioned that you had met the “white stripers”. Were they wearing white armbands?

A: Yes, yes! So all of those, who were marching [them] to be shot were “white stripers”. All of them were wearing white armbands.

Q: On those—

A: I just don’t know their ranks. Maybe the ones in military uniforms had a military rank, but the group, which lined me up – there were no officers among them.

Q: How many people were there in the group that was lining you up?

A: Well, maybe 20-30.

Q: I mean—

A: Do you mean the ones, who were lining up, or the ones, who were lined up?

Q: I want to know both: the ones, who were lining up, and the ones, who were lined up.

A: Well, there were maybe 20 or 30 of those, who were lined up.

Q: Yes—

A: And there were four to six of those, who were lining up. Not more.

[01] 21:01:05 - [01] 23:25:13

00:20:45 – 00:23:09

Q: How many of those “white stripers” were there in total?

A: It's hard to say, [nobody] counted. But when you think of it: a group marches [people] away, while the other group is getting ready, the third [group] is lining [people] up, others run around the yard, taking care of things, plundering the storage rooms, everything there—everything had been taken away from people. Well, I think at least 40 for sure.

Q: Tell me, where you guarded or was there a wall surrounding you – how was it?

A: The yard was enclosed. And if anyone was shooting—if anyone guarded—I cannot tell you. I didn't see it, and I don't know. Probably, as the yard was enclosed. The guards must have been standing somewhere. But I cannot remember any guard towers. I can't remember such a thing.

Q: So I want to make this clear: when you met the hunch-back for the second time...

A: Yes?

Q: ...who was walking with the other one, the one with the Cross of Vytis—they accompanied you to the door of the House of the Riflemen [Union]?

A: They led me straight to the House of the Riflemen [Union]. They took us to a barn—not a barn, but a big room. They took away my suitcase that contained my—they took away my watch, and they took away the rubles that I had there. In short, they took away everything. I remained standing with short pants, white socks, black shoes and white shirt. With blond hair—I had more hair then, of course—I looked like a member of Hitler Jugend. I have a photograph.

Q: Show it.

A: It was taken a few months later, but I had not changed in any significant way. That's what I looked like [*shows the photograph*].

Camera man: Hold it, hold it.

A: Like a real German from Hitler Jugend [*laughs*]. You see?

Camera man: Hold it, hold it.

Q: Hold the photograph for a little while.

A: Here you are [*holds the photograph*].

Q: We want to film it.

Camera man: We want to take a better look at it.

[He shows the photograph.]

Camera man: Thank you.

Q: Thank you.

[01] 23:25:14 - [01] 25:37:23

00:23:10 – 00:25:21

Q: And tell me please; try to remember when you appeared there. I wonder—can you describe in detail, what you saw there?

A: It was something—some kind of misunderstanding, a chaos. Many people in the yard, standing in groups – probably families, mostly Jewish, crying. Others were tearing on their side locks—the long hair right here, still others – praying. Only the Russian prisoners were standing proudly and didn't mind anything at all. They were cursing everything that was going on in the foulest of words. One—I think he was an officer—was explaining that there was a convention, according to which the prisoners of war were not to be shot, but that nobody minded it. Well, the Soviet Union didn't mind it. So if both sides don't mind it, it doesn't matter. Well, but just try to imagine the chaos: people understand that they are kept in the yard, from which they are taken in groups to the forest nearby to be shot. They hear constant gunshots, and the men, who had marched [them], come back, but not the people [who were marched]. So it was a natural thing: the number of people in the square decreasing, and the frequency of gunshots increasing – you can imagine what kind of mood prevailed there.

Q: Tell me please; do you maybe remember what day of the month it was?

A: I can tell you exactly. The 29th of June, Sunday—[it was] the 30th, Monday. The 30th of June, 1941.

[01] 25:37:24 - [01] 27:47:04

00:25:22 – 00:27:31

Q: So as far as I understand you got there in the morning?

A: Well, when they released us from the railway station, from the “pack houses”. [They said] that we could go home, and all the people set foot towards the town. It was a short walk from the railway station to the town. Well, the town of Skuodas had actually suffered a lot. A lot.

Q: Tell me please, you mentioned that gunshots were heard and the number of people was decreasing—when you arrived there, had the shooting already started?

A: It had. When I was brought there, the shootings were already taking place.

Q: How did you know that, as you mentioned, the majority of the people were Jewish? How did you know they were Jewish?

A: Well, I'm sorry, but a resident of the pre-war Lithuania had no difficulty telling a Jewish person apart. The appearance, the clothes, well, and maybe, I don't know—the language. Of course, even when they spoke Lithuanian, they [spoke it] with a very typically Jewish accent.

Q: And were they Jewish men, women or—

A: Men, women, children, elderly – everyone. No exceptions.

Q: And when they were lined up in groups, were the people somehow, well—

A: Mostly—the groups mostly—at first, as far as I witnessed, they took the elderly – the older people. Then, when they were gone, they started taking middle-aged people. And I don't know about the others—the last ones—as I did not see it. Because I, as I mentioned, I was put in a car and driven away.

[01] 27:47:05 - [01] 29:44:22

00:27:32– 00:29:28

Q: And tell me, the Russian prisoners—

A: Oh, they would stand courageously likes this [*he pushes his chest forward*]: “Streiliaj” (Russian: “Shoot”). Well, they would be beaten with gun barrels a little, but in general—if one could say so—they were courageously looking death in the eyes.

Q: Did they—in what order did they end up in that—

A: It was the group that had broken into in several trucks from Liepoja.

Q: I understand, but I would like to reconstruct the timeline [of what happened] in the yard. Were they in the very beginning, I mean—

A: This I don't know.

Q: Were they—

A: When I—when I was brought in, they were already there.

Q: Yes, yes, but they—when you were being lined up, were they still in the yard?

A: They had already been shot. They were shot in the very beginning with the elderly.

Q: And you mentioned that somehow there were some Soviet activists there—how did you know [who they were]?

A: Well, you could see by looking at the person. There—finally, you talk to someone: “Who is he?” So they say: “Oh, he was a clerk at the rural district”. And another – a propagandist, the third one – something else, I don’t know – a communist. I, for example, was also accused: when the German approached; when he arrived and asked, “What is it here? Why is this child standing here?” The hunch-back explained to him and said: “Communist”. So the German responded to him: “Sie sind ein Idiot, (GERMAN: “You are an idiot”). He is only a child.” And then he ordered: “Raus!” – and away from the formation immediately.

[01] 29:44:23 - [01] 32:12:18

00:29:29 – 00:31:57

A: But generally nobody talked to anyone. If it wasn’t for that German, I would have been rotten a long time ago. It was—so that was my first—my first acquaintance with the Holocaust. I did not even know that word then. Well, and later I got to see many things. Because I travelled as far as Tartu with that military unit. At first we were transferred from Skuodas to Kretinga. There were no shootings in Kretinga. Then from Kretinga we went through Liepoja into Riga. We saw Jews and prisoners of war fixing railway tracks. In Riga we lived in a windmill ____ or ____ in Daugava. We did not see any Jews around there, and I did not see any whenever I went out. In Tartu they worked at the railway. You see, the difference in railway [tracks] is that the European railway [tracks] are narrower than the Russian ones. And all the tracks had to be rebuilt. And all the works were carried out by prisoner of war and Jews. At least from what I saw. Maybe they did other tasks somewhere else, I cannot tell you. Because later in Kaunas I witnessed that they worked everywhere: they worked at the airport, at the construction of the railway. And finally, when I worked at the “Versalis” restaurant, they would do the laundry for us at the ghetto. And we would go to pick it up. And finally, they would come to us to do the dirty work: to sort out potatoes. The potatoes—they were not allowed to peel the potatoes, only to sort them out in those huge storage rooms, where they were kept through the winter. They had to select good potatoes from bad.

[01] 32:12:19 - [01] 34:30:15

00:31:58 – 00:34:14

A: Well, but they received food from us and also brought as many potatoes as they could to the ghetto. Whether they were searched there – this I don’t know.

Q: And tell me please, during those travels—as you were traversed towns—did you ever see any instances of violence against Jews, Polish or other civilians?

A: I saw it in Pskov. Before we were deployed to Tartu, it was planned that we would be deployed in Pskov. And so we went by car to Pskov. In Pskov I saw men hanging on telegraph poles with signs [saying] “Bolshevik”.

Q: How many such people were there?

A: You know, dear, it didn’t come to my mind to count. Not at all.

Q: But one—

A: Not one, no! Well, there was a line of poles along the street – and that’s how many of them were hanging there. I didn’t see any Jews there. I didn’t see any Jews in Pskov. Maybe they were gone by then.

Q: What year did you see those poles in? Was in the [nineteen] forty—

A: [19] 41 I can say. Approximately. Well, in Tartu we stayed for about three weeks, so it was in July, [19] 41 – the beginning of August, to be more precise.

Q: Mhm. I would now like to return to that square, from which you were taken to spend a night at the railway station. You said—

A: Oh, from the square—from the so-called meadow—

Q: Yeah, from the meadow—

A: Yes. So there was a rivulet flowing there—I don’t know what rivulet runs there—and there was a huge meadow in front of the church. Well, there was a lot of space. And all the townspeople had been gathered there.

Q: Mhm.

A: Ethnicities did not matter there anymore.

[01] 34:30:16 - [01] 36:04:10

00:34:15 – 00:35:48

Q: Mhm.

A: Because, for example, when I went shopping to a store, there was a Jew who was engaged in commerce at that store; and he would sell me cigarettes for the coupons provided to me by the local authorities.

Q: Tell me, who issued the command for the Jews to go to the House of the Riflemen [Union]?

A: Who issued the command? I am afraid to say anything definite to you now. Just that it was not the German! The German said what he had to say and rode off. He was riding a horse. But who gave the order I cannot tell you exactly. I don’t know. You see, the square was big, there was noise, commotion. Just imagine, what it means, when—I don’t know how many residents Skuodas had—five thousand or six—and everyone was buzzing—somebody could not return home, had to go somewhere. And then we would hear a command: that the Jews should not go to the “pack houses”, but to the House of the Riflemen [Union] instead. Who was shouting it out – this I cannot tell you.

Q: When you yourself ended up at the House of the Riflemen [Union], did you know that you were—because you didn't know the town well—did you know that you were at the House of the Riflemen [Union]?

A: No, I did not know. What it was I only learned later.

[01] 36:04:11 - [01] 38:08:01

00:35:49 – 00:37:52

Q: And did you ever try to find out who were that hunch-back and the other one?

A: I'll tell you this: around the end of [19]44 – the beginning of [19]45, as I was returning from a mission—I was wearing a German uniform at that time—I was overtaken by a wave of revenge. I wanted to find them and shoot them dead. To pay them back, so to say. To settle the score. But then I thought that it would have been an act of disobedience, and that there had to be order in the military. Besides, we were travelling in a tarpaulin-covered American truck, and could not see much [of what was going on] on the street. Had I spotted them, maybe I would have jumped out; would not have been able to control myself. But—I'm telling you, there was a wave of revenge. I had such thoughts, but didn't do anything and did not see them.

Q: When you were in that yard and heard gunshots – could you define what kind of gunshots were they, the ones that you heard?

A: From machine guns and individual rifles. Mostly they were machine gun salvos; and then probably the ones, who had survived, were shot from the rifles by the men. But mostly they were machine gun salvos.

Q: The men who were marching—well, let's say, as you mentioned, there was a group of 20-30 people—you said that that group would be selected by four to six—

A: Four to six people.

Q: So those four to six would also take them away?

A: They would take them away.

[01] 38:08:02 - [01] 40:18:18

00:37:53 – 00:40:01

Q: And then the four—

A: They would arrange a group and take it away. Then they would return and arrange a new group.

Q: How much time would it take approximately?

- A: Oh, hard to say. So many years have passed, who could have thought. Well, I don't know, I am afraid to tell a lie. But probably around half an hour. Probably.
- Q: Were they drunk, those people?
- A: No! It was in the morning, they were not drunk yet.
- Q: And when did your turn come?
- A: Excuse me?
- Q: I said: when did your turn come?
- A: My turn came, well, around lunch time. Before lunch. Because my lunch was had at the German military unit already. I don't know exactly – at twelve, half past twelve. It's hard to say, I don't know. My watch had been taken away; I had no way of tracking [time]. Only the number of people in the yard of the Riflemen Union was decreasing—but nobody told us anything.
- Q: Could you hear any voices from the site of the shooting?
- A: No! I could not hear any voices. Well, they must have been marched quite a distance. It's hard to say. I cannot tell you, I don't know. Nobody—then, when I was in Skuodas—many years later I would visit Skuodas quite often for purposes related to sports, but I never inquired about this issue. And maybe I simply did not want to remember it.

[01] 40:18:19 - [01] 42:07:09

00:40:02 – 00:41:51

- Q: And that last group that you were in—what was it composed of, do you recall?
- A: Civilians.
- Q: Of whom?
- A: Civilians. Civilian people. Jews or non-Jews, I don't know. Nobody asked about our ethnicity. People were lined up, [they were] told: “Stand, stand, stand”. That's it. There wasn't much talk.
- Q: Did those people, who were in the yard, have any possessions with them?
- A: They didn't have anything, they were completely—I'm telling you, everything had been taken away from me; so they had everything taken away as well. But all were wearing clothes. Nobody was undressed. So that nobody would say—because there are rumors that—maybe they were undressed at the pit, where they were shot – that may

have well been, I did not see it. But they would be taken away still in their clothes. Plain, simple clothes; with shoes; women in dresses, men – in pants.

Q: And that German, who arrived and noticed you – what had he come there for?

A: He had been assigned a war commandant. Captain **Liutké**, the leader of the unit—company—No. 1429, was assigned a military commandant in the place of the destroyed military leadership in Skuodas. And so he brought me to the headquarters. Well, and at the headquarters we smoked—

[01] 42:07:10 - [01] 44:07:16

00:41:52 – 00:43:51

A: By the way, an interesting conversation ensued there. I don't know how relevant this is, but we started smoking, and **Liutké** said: "Well, you see, you cannot go neither to Kaunas, nor to Liepoja – you'll have to wait a while." I said: "Well, the war should end soon." He says to me: "We lost this war." I understood that it could be a provocation, so I say: "But captain, what are you saying?" He says: "Russia is no Holland, no France and no Poland – Russia is vast spaces and inhuman resources. We don't have enough manpower to put at least one person per square kilometer." Those were his words; and the conversation was a little like a provocation.

Q: And how old was he, this **Liutké**?

A: He was—forty—well, around 42 or 45. He was—well, we started talking later—he had been a railway construction engineer, when he was mobilized to join the war.

Q: Tell me please, did he comment on the events in Skuodas somehow? I mean the events at the House of the Riflemen [Union].

A: We never talked about it. We would drink beer and walk around the town—around Riga, also Tartu—together, he never mentioned it. Never.

[01] 44:07:17 - [01] 45:58:06

00:43:52 – 00:45:42

Q: And when you—you lived in Kaunas, right?

A: Yes. I corresponded with him after the war.

Q: Yes, yes, but before the war—

A: Excuse me, during the war.

Q: Mhm. Before the war you lived in Kaunas.

A: In Kaunas.

Q: And you mentioned that there was some kind of tension. But you left for a camp in Palanga—

A: You see, the tension had been felt since the moment when Lithuania was occupied in [19]40. Back in [19]39, when Biržys said in one of his shows: “Vilnius is ours, and we are Russians”, many people understood that things were serious—that it would not end with this. Because the garrisons were stationed; for example, in Vilnius they were in Naujoji Vilnia, near Kaunas – in Šančiai, in Alytus – in Prienai.

Q: Mr. Aleksandras, I understand, but I am interested in the fact that you left for vacation in Palanga—that means you had no idea that a war was approaching?

A: No, nobody could tell the exact date for the [beginning of the] war. But it was clear that tension in Europe was building up.

Q: I mean in Kaunas—

A: Because those, who had read—excuse me [*blows his nose*]—those, who had read Hitler’s “Mein Kampf”, knew very well that his objectives were England and the Soviet Union. And since he had bad luck in England and understood that it would not be easy to invade it, so, logically, he was to attack the Soviet Union next.

[01] 45:58:07 - [01] 47:54:00

00:45:43 – 00:47:38

Q: Now I would like to return to Kaunas, as you found it when you came back from your travels.

A: I returned to Kaunas after I left Tartu in August—the second of September, actually—of [19]41.

Q: Did you see any kind of anti-Jewish propaganda in Kaunas? Like posters or something in the press.

A: I was not following the press, so I cannot say anything about it. The press, of course, was writing whatever they wanted. What they had to, let’s say. There was a newspaper “To Freedom”, which was clearly pro-fascist and published by the German authorities in Lithuanian language. But that there would be posters somewhere – no. However, I did run into the so-called announcement boards [that proclaimed] the order of the city war commandant for all people of Jewish nationality to move to Vilijampolė. The warden of my building, a mister who would always speak Polish to his wife and children at home, appeared all of a sudden in Lithuanian military uniform. When he looked at me and saw my German garrison cap, [he said] “aa” and waved me aside. But when he was forced to shoot people, he fled that military unit. He moved from the basement to the second—the third, actually—floor. Into a big Jewish corner apartment. I think it had four rooms.

[01] 47:54:01 - [01] 50:12:12

00:47:39 – 00:49:56

Q: Mr. Aleksandras, I did not understand this. You told me: “When they were forced to shoot people, he fled. Where did he flee to? From where?”

A: He fled the army. The Lithuanian army—he had joined the army, but when they had to—when they began shooting people, when they closed the ghetto—the ghetto had stayed open for a long time, and anybody could enter or leave whenever they wanted—whatever they wanted. And [then] it was closed; and when it began—wait, I will tell you—I’m hesitant—in August—no, probably in October of 19[41] the “Great Action” took place. Around 15 000 Jews were annihilated in Fort IX. And you know, the newspapers did not write about it; there was no television; the radio didn’t announce it – but everybody knew. Such things are known by everyone immediately. Especially by those, who lived nearby. Some of my acquaintances’ parents were moved from Vilijampolė to the city so that they could open a ghetto in Vilijampolė. Because it wasn’t just Jews who lived in Vilijampolė – there were a lot of Lithuanians, who lived there. Finally, there was industry there. So those people, those Lithuanian families came from Vilijampolė, while Jewish families were moved into their apartments.

Q: I see. So that Polish man moved into a Jewish apartment?

A: Yes.

Q: Oh, to a Jewish apartment somewhere in the center?

A: In our building, where I lived, next to the wharf.

Q: Oh, so he moved in from Vilijampolė, that Polish man?

A: He moved from the basement to the third floor.

Q: Oh. And how did he succeed in getting such a good apartment? Or did he take over it himself?

A: You could take whatever you wanted then. Jews were sent to the ghetto; and there were as many apartments as one liked.

Q: I see.

A: There was no such problem then.

[01] 50:12:13 - [01] 52:43:16

00:49:57 – 00:52:28

[New cut.]

Q: If you can, please try to remember: when you arrived at that yard, how many people were in it already approximately?

A: It's hard to say.

Q: 50?

A: No, not even close!

Q: 150?

A: No. Over a thousand! It's hard to say exactly. It was a big yard. Just imagine: it was a yard, in which the Riflemen would have their formation drills. It cannot be—it was not a small yard of an apartment building. It was a huge yard, where the so-called marching drills took place—marching—drilling. And it was completely full! So I cannot say exactly, I don't know, but I think it was somewhere around 1000-1500 for sure. Maybe even more—it's hard to imagine [*he takes his head in his hands*]. I am trying to return to that—to recreate that sight in my mind. That buzz. You cannot understand how oppressing the atmosphere was: people buzzing; women crying; children running around without understanding what was going on—and playing; older men standing and praying. A total disorder! Well, who could have counted how many of them were there? Who could have counted them? But I am telling you: there were around 1000-1500 of them for sure. I don't know how many there were in Skuodas [before]. It's simple: you just have to look at the statistics of how many Jews there were in Skuodas before the war – and not a single one remained [alive]. Except for those who had been deported in June of 19[41]. Or others, who had escaped to the Soviet Union. All the others were shot. Not a single one after that—after the events at the House of the Riflemen [Union] you could not find a single Jew there. Not there. Gone.

[01] 52:43:16 - [01] 55:02:06

00:52:29 – 00:54:45

Q: Did those Jews at the House of the Riflemen [Union]—the yard of the House of the Riflemen [Union]—have any kind of signs on them?

A: They did not have anything yet. The Star of David was not around yet. They didn't have it yet.

Q: And how did the guards treat the people? You mentioned that they would beat up the prisoners of war. And how did they treat ordinary people?

A: You know, I will tell you this: the prisoners of war were very proud [people]. Very courageous, [they were] seeing—looking death in the face. “Here,” they would be told, “stand,” – and a person would stand. [There was no] organized, even if faint, resistance or attempt to explain anything. They knew each other. Those people had lived together. They could have said: “Petras, listen, [why] are you shooting at me?” I didn't hear such a thing. Whether it was because of fear or some other reason, I cannot tell you. But they

didn't need to use force to form a group. How much force was needed to take their belongings away, I don't know. Because I did not see it. Maybe [force] was needed there. Because, whether you want it or not, they had watches, they had rings—everyone had a golden wedding ring – each adult person, who had been married. Finally some—not all—had savings. Some had more, others had less. They were diverse people of different [social] strata. Among the Jews there were rich, as well as poor [people].

[01] 55:02:07 - [01] 57:11:17

00:54:46 – 00:56:56

Q: And when your suitcase was taken away from you, was it—did you see other things that were—

A: Plenty! Plenty. An entire room was filled with things: suitcases, bags, shawls with their corners tied together in the middle. Plenty!

Q: Who did those things belong to?

A: To the people, who had been brought to the yard. So mainly to the Jews.

Q: And what had the room been used as before?

A: I—I am trying to remember: two windows— just like here, but there were vaults as well, there were—it could have been a garage maybe. I cannot tell.

Q: And maybe it was sports hall?

A: No! Not a sports hall for sure. It did not look like a sports—

Q: So maybe an assembly hall then?

A: It did not look like either an assembly hall, or a sports hall. Didn't look like it. Even the walls were not painted. They were brick walls.

Q: Was there anyone guarding the things?

A: Of course! They had to—unlock—[the room] would be locked. A lock was hanging; and a guard stood there. He had the key.

Q: And you were brought inside and ordered to put your suitcase—

A: I was brought in, deprived of everything, and then sent away. The procedure took a couple of minutes.

Q: So did they put your watch into a pocket, or did they put it on some shelf?

A: Somewhere, somewhere—I got it back! No, they did not put it into a pocket. Somewhere, into some—I don't know where they put it exactly, but my watch was returned to me.

[01] 57:11:17 - [01] 58:37:18

00:56:57 – 00:58:22

Q: And how did you—how did you—how did you achieve that?

A: Well, I don't know. Captain **Liutké** asked me: „What was your watch like?“ I told him: “Certina”. “Certina” were Swiss watches. Pretty good, and not very, not super expensive. But good. And he said: “Die Uhr “Certina” (GERMAN: “The “Certina” watch”), and it was right away [*shows that it was handed to him on a palm of hand*].

Q: And did they return your suitcase?

A: Excuse me?

Q: Did you get your suitcase back?

A: It was just lying there, nobody had even opened it.

Q: So you went to the storage room and took your suitcase?

A: I took my suitcase, my watch. And a curious incident with the money took place. I had 200 rubles. 200 rubles, according to the Germans, was 20 marks. The German asked me “Wie viel Geld hatten Sie?” – “How much money did you have?” I say: “Zweihundert” (GERMAN: two hundred), thinking in rubles. And he thought I meant marks, and he gave me 2000 rubles. I was a rich man! You see, how things turned out with the tragedy. Because one mark was equaled to 10 rubles.

[01] 58:37:18

00:58:22

End of interview.

Translated by: Milda Morkyte

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