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MIELNIK, Bogdan
Polish Witnesses to the Holocaust Project
Polish
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In this interview, Bogdan Mielnik, born October 5, 1936 and a resident of **Telechany** [**Telekhany**] during World War II, discusses witnessing the killing of Jews. He remembers Jewish locals and talks about the killing of Jews near his residence. In the end of the interview he remembers the arrival of Latvian and Lithuanian troops to the town, but concentrates on the Hungarian troops that were comprised of both non-Jews and Jews alike.

Box 1, Tape 1

[01:] 00:50:04 – [01:] 04:57:10
00:00 – 06:34

Mielnik begins by explaining that during the time of occupation lived in the Polesie Region, in the Brzeskie Voivodeship, in a small town **Telechany**; notes that it is about 50 kilometers north of the town **Pińsk**; describes the composition of the locals in the Region: Belarusians, Russians, a few Poles and Lithuanians, and Jews; notes that some Jews lived in large villages, but mostly in small towns and towns; describes the composition of **Telechany**: a few Lithuanian families, many Russians, not many Poles, and almost half of the inhabitants were Jews.

[01:] 04:57:11 – [01:] 07:44:11
06:35 – 09:26

Mielnik remembers the Soviet occupation; says it lasted since from around September 20, 1939 to June 24, 1941; says it was only one week later that the Germans appeared; notes that local peasants took advantage of the week without a ruler, who began local raids and robbed Jewish houses; says this course of action was stopped when the first German soldiers appeared and the German occupation began.

[01:] 07:44:12 – [01:] 18:42:14
09:27 – 20:52

He remembers that due to the war, two Jewish families came from Warsaw to **Telechany**; says the family of the sculptor **Spielvogel** was openly Jewish; indicates that the second family, of a painter, survived because the Germans could not prove that they were Jews; tells that at first the Jews welcomed the arriving Germans to **Telechany** very nicely and enthusiastically because they [*the Germans*] stopped the peasants from robbing the Jews; lists the actions and laws by the Germans against the Jews: ordered to wear a yellow bandage on their forearm, forced the Jews to do tough labor, such as paving streets or cleaning the sewer of the gendarmerie building.

[01:] 18:42:15 – [01:] 26:37:04
20:53 – 29:07

Mielnik comments that before the war there were not any regular pogroms ordered by the local authorities; remembers, however, that shortly after the beginning of the new school year in 1939, Jewish children were bullied, hit and abused by Christian Belarusians, who in all probability were under the influence of two young male strangers; comments that for the most part, **Telechany** locals sympathized with the Jews and there was not any harassment from the local population; comments on his two Jewish friends, children of his neighbor, **Bernstein**, a carpenter; also remembers the **Spielvogel** family, who lived with the **Bernstein** family.

[01:] 26:37:05 – [01:] 34:40:08
29:08 – 37:31

Mielnik tells that the killing of the Jews began in August 1941; he remembers that the Jewish elders and the rabbi had to get in touch with the colonel, who imposed a contribution on them: every Jewish household had to hand over \$1000 and 100 kg of oats within one day; the quota was not fulfilled by the Jews because it was not possible; the next day SS men began to move Jews from their houses to the nearby shacks where they would be executed.

Box 1, Tape 2

[02:] 00:40:06 – [02:] 01:59:16
00:00 – 03:37

[Repetition; interruption by the interviewer]

[02:] 01:59:17 – [02:] 08:53:10
03:38 – 10:48

Mielnik describes the killing of Jews more precisely: after they were pulled out of their houses, groups of two to three Jewish families were accompanied to the shacks by one or two German soldiers; local scoundrels arrived who began to pull Jews out of their houses; says the scoundrels pushed and punched the Jewish families, whereas the Germans did not use any violence; mentions that the Germans nonetheless organized the whole action with an enormous attention to detail; says they brought a vehicle with shovels, a chair, and a ladder; says the young Jews were ordered to dig out long, large holes 2 meters wide and deep; describes how the ladder was let down into the pits and a certain number of Jews had to go down and lie down next to each other with their face downwards; says that one SS man was sitting in the chair with a rifle letting go a series of shots; mentions that the process then continued and the next group of Jews had to go down into the pit, lie on the dead and were killed the same way; says that the children had to kneel down before the hole and they were pushed into the pit after they were shot; tells that the killing was witnessed only by the local scoundrels who had helped to pull out the Jews out of their houses; says he heard the story afterwards but did not directly witness.

[02:] 08:53:11 – [02:] 15:27:00
10:49 – 17:37

Mielnik precisely remembers the fate of some Jews; says that an old Jewish man with a long grey beard who wore a thick winter coat was beaten on his back and pushed toward the execution pit by the local scoundrel **Antek**, who one of the first locals to volunteer with the black police, "czarnej policji," [*a group of Polish police that collaborated with the German occupation*]; mentions a Jewish teacher who was shot dead by the black police after trying to escape; says the **Spielvogel** family moved to a bigger flat from the **Bernstein** house into a house of a Christian family; says their daughter **Irena Spielvogel** was put into the family of the Christians to rescue her from killing but the scoundrels knew that the Jewish family had a daughter, pulled her out of the Christian home, and then killed the whole family; says the **Herzmann** family survived because the Germans could not prove that they were Jewish; mentions that the **Herzmann** family did suffer greatly from hunger during the occupation.

[02:] 15:27:01 – [02:] 20:55:09
17:38 – 23:20

Mielnik tells about an interesting detail that the German colonel knew **Telechany** very well because he had been there previously, during the World War I; says the day before the killing of the Jewish population, the colonel noticed a woman and called her by her name; says that the woman worked in the casino as a waitress during World War I so the colonel knew her; also mentions that one Jewish tailor **Bursztel** [**Burschtel**] saved himself from the killing and at present lives in the United States; mentions a story that he was told by **Eugenia Tredenska**, a friend of his [*Mielnik's*] mother, who worked as a teacher in school; says that the story was that **Sarah** [**Sara**], a Jewish girl from **Telechany** known to everybody because of her beauty and artistic talents, caught the attention of a German soldier on her march to the execution pit; says the German officer praised her beauty, approached her on the horse, and then took out his gun and shot her dead on the street.

[02:] 20:55:10 – [02:] 31:54:02
23:21 – 34:46

Mielnik remembers that the comments on the killing stopped quickly because the local population adapted to the new situation; says a tax for disobedience was imposed and executors collected the money; says that at first the collectors were two Czechs, afterwards two Serbs or Croats, only then two Russian-speaking Germans; says people who did not pay were brought to the local authority and whipped 50 times on the naked bottom; says that in 1943 [*Mr. Mielnik corrects himself afterwards to the late autumn 1942*] a Jewish man **Salomon Bursztyn** [**Burschtyn**, **Burschtein**, **Bernstein**] appeared in **Telechany** from the **General Government**, who legally lived in the Mielnik house; explains that because the Germans had trouble with their footwear and clothing, some Jews of some professions such as tailor and shoemakers, were spared from killing and sent to garrisons; says that in January 1943 **Bursztyn** was taken to **Ancewicze**, where were many German troops; does not know the fate of **Bursztyn**.

[02:] 31:54:03 – [02:] 34:48:07
34:47 – 37:47

Mielnik answers a question about collaborating Hungarian troops; tells that because of the well-developed and very effective local guerrilla in the region, Latvian troops were first ordered to **Telechany** to harass the partisans; mentions that Lithuanians replaced the Latvian

soldiers and they did not make any attacks in the woods; says Hungarian troops appeared last in the area, but had the strength of an entire battalion.

Box 1, Tape 3

[03:] 00:32:10 – [03:] 07:32:13

00:00 – 09:09

Mielnik remembers an incident seen by members of staff of the office [*those located in the administrative building, “rejon”*]; says the incident took place at the field kitchen which was operated by Hungarian Jews; says a German non-commissioned officer wanted to order fuel for the heating of the gendarmerie building; says he asked a Jew in German; says the Jew did not understand what was said to him and the German got angry; says the situation was resolved by a Hungarian officer who defended the Jewish man by claiming that the Jew was a Hungarian citizen, regardless of the fact he was also a Jewish man; mentions a man named **Kallmann** [**Kalmann, Kallman, Kalman**] who was a waiter from Budapest that arrived together with the Hungarian troops and lived in the house of the Mielnik family.

[03:] 07:32:14 – [03:] 09:32:13

09:10 – 11:14

Mielnik remembers, with horror, that the local population often became treasure hunters that searched for golden teeth and jewellery at the execution pits; gives additional information that the local inhabitants were forced by the Germans to bury the bodies after the executions.