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DUBAJ, Jan
Polish Witnesses to the Holocaust Project
Polish
RG-50.488*0145

Tape 1

Jan Dubaj was born July 14, 1928, in the village of Dzierążń, Poland, about five kilometers from the town of Działoszyce. Dubaj describes the liquidation of about 14,000 Jews in Działoszyce on September 2, 1942; he witnessed this event as a 14-year-old student at a school located near the town center. He also describes the aftermath of the liquidation in Działoszyce—German soldiers chasing and killing Jews trying to hide in the surrounding area. Dubaj also reflects on the 1945 pogrom in the town of Kielce.

[01:] 01:13:00 – [01:] 10:15:04

Dubaj states that before the war, there were about 7,000 Jews in Działoszyce; representing about 80 percent of the total population; remembers that Działoszyce Jews were considered prosperous, and there were several Jewish-owned banks; recalls a Jewish family **Herszel** [*he is not sure if this is the first or last name*] and that **Herszel** had two sons, **Aron** and **Zeke** and a grain trader, purchasing grain from farmers and was selling it to mills or other farmers; recalls another Jew, **Mindel**, whose son **Josek** was his close friend and sold rolls in Dzierążń and in the Działoszyce school Jan attended; he describes the occupation and that Jews in surrounding towns such as Pińczów, Busko, and Chmielnik were liquidated, and those who escaped the liquidations were settling in Działoszyce; there were about 14,000 Jews in Działoszyce at the onset of its liquidation in September of 1942; shares that after finishing the primary school, he attended a two-year trade school in Działoszyce; recalls that he and a few friends would walk about five kilometers from his village to the school in Działoszyce; at the time of liquidation, he was in the second year of the trade school; recalls that on September 2, 1942, he walked with three boys from Dzierążń to school, crossing the villages of Kwaszyn, Januszewice, and Jakubowice; says when they arrived at the outskirts of Działoszyce, they saw a machine gun manned by two or three German soldiers; remembers they were stopped by a Polish policeman, who after verifying their identities, accompanied them to their school, where their first class that day was German language taught by Mr. **Wacław Walek**, who appeared to be very emotional; he thinks his teacher knew what was about to happen since he knew about earlier liquidations in the surrounding area; recalls the teacher asking the students not to leave the school; explains that the school was located on a higher ground, near the church, and the town center was below the level of the school; remembers that during the recess, he and some other students climbed the wall that surrounded the church in order to have a good view of what was happening at the town center; says they saw there were many German soldiers forcing Jews to gather in a corner of the town center. [*The witness shows a sketch of the town center, the streets **Kielecka**, **Jakubowce**, and **Skalbmierz-Kazimierza Wielka**, the location of a stream, the school, the church, and the wall surrounding the church, the barn, the Jewish cemetery, and the synagogue*]

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[01:] 10:15:05 – [01:] 20:24:25

[The witness shows an approximate location in the town square where the Germans gathered the Jews]. Dubaj recalls the Germans separating old men and women, as well as separating women from their children and that a group of young adults were kept separately; horse-driven wagons were used to transport the Jews out of town to **Dzieskanowskie Doly**; explains in that area there were pits where the Jews were killed, and toward the Jewish cemetery where they were also killed; remembers the old people were driven out first; says the day of liquidation was very hot and children were thirsty and crying, but that babies wrapped in blankets were kept separate from their mothers and the babies were lying on the ground and their mothers were not allowed to hold them; observed a Jewish policeman beating a Jewish woman who was trying to give some water to her child and the policeman, instead of giving water to the children to drink, was simply pouring the water on them; witnessed a Jewish man limping, coming out from a garden across the street from the school heading to the town square and a German soldier taking aim, and shooting him dead in the middle of the street; remembers that about an hour later he saw a Jewish woman walking on the sidewalk of **Kielecka** Street and observed a German officer *[he believes it was a Gestapo officer based on the style of his uniform]* walking up behind the woman, pulling out his pistol and shooting her in the back of her head; the soldier did not bother to stop as she fell, rather, he continued to walk while blowing off the smoke from his gun; Dubaj believes that at the time, there were about 20 German soldiers, four or five Jewish policeman, and two Polish policemen in the town square; claims the two Polish policemen were eventually killed by members of the underground National Army; describes that during the liquidation, despite the fact that the Germans had sentinels around the town and on the roads leading out of town, some Jews managed to escape from the wagons into the countryside; notes that some Jews escaped into the countryside before the liquidation in Działoszyce; believes they knew what fate was awaiting them if they had stayed; days after the liquidation, walking home he met his cousin who warned him to avoid a certain road because of the dead Jews that were scattered in it; the German soldiers were chasing and killing any surviving Jews trying to hide in the countryside.

[01:] 20:25:00 – [01:] 30:36:25

In Kwaszyn, Dubaj recalls seeing five dead Jews, lying near a river; the German soldiers who shot them were drunk and told the mayor of Kwaszyn to dispose of the bodies; heard that some of the bodies were mutilated by one of the local people who pulled out the gold teeth from the mouths of the corpses; describes a day after he separated from his friend on the way home where a small Jewish boy about seven years old jumped up from the potato patch he was hiding in and clung to Dubaj; he did not want to let him go and begged Jan to save him; Dubaj showed him a little hut and told the boy to hide there; at that moment they heard two shots and the boy fell down and scampered away, but it appeared the shots were not directed at them; he does not know what happened to the boy; *[The witness shows another sketch of the road to his home village of Dzierżń; he also indicates where he met a Polish man who was not from the local area;]* the stranger and Jan saw a group of German soldiers who were aiming their guns at them and threatened to shoot them; when they approached the soldiers and identified themselves as Poles, they were let go; he found out later that the two shots he heard earlier with the little boy were from German soldiers killing a Jewish man and his wife; claims that although he did not see the

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bodies of the husband and wife, people in the village swore that there was a small baby with the couple; the baby was not killed by the Germans because they either did not see it or purposely left it alive; the baby was found in the arms of its father; apparently the baby lived for days before it and the bodies of its parents were discovered; that event was confirmed by many people from his village; his parents told him that in a deep pit near the village, there were bodies of 27 murdered Jews; these men and women were caught and killed in the fields around Dzierążń and their bodies were thrown into the pit; he saw the bodies and says it was a horrendous sight because the bodies were full of maggots and ants.

[01:] 30:37:00 – [01:] 36:44:25

He remembers an event that occurred before the liquidation of the ghetto in Białoszyce, involving his friend **Mindel**; in the nearby village of Szyszczyce, there was a large estate owned by a Polish squire named **Zdymek**, who hired a German to manage his estate; says he does not know the name of the German manager; large portions of the estate were cleared of trees to keep partisans away from it; the clearing of the forest left the area full of tree stumps; one day, Dubaj saw the German manager catch **Mindel** and tied his hands behind the horse; the German mounted the horse and made **Mindel** run behind the horse; after awhile the German increased the horse's speed until **Mindel** could not keep up; he lost his balance and the German kept galloping the horse among the tree stumps, dragging **Mindel** through the stumps until he killed **Mindel**; notes that he only witnessed **Mindel** being tied and starting to run to keep up with the horse; he heard about **Mindel**'s death from other villagers; recalls his Jewish friend **Zelek**, son of **Herszel**; says **Zelek** escaped the liquidation of the Działoszyce ghetto, and was able to join a group of Soviet partisans; **Zelek** would visit the Dubaj family at night and Dubaj's mother fed him during those visits; he believes **Zelek** was killed in one of the German organized round-ups near Działoszyce. *[Witness becomes very emotional, breaks down, cries].*

[01:] 36:45:00 – [01:] 37:39:25

[The following section contains only audio information]

Dubaj says cruelty towards Jews was common among German civilians and German soldiers; there was no "chivalry," or honorable behavior, of the German soldiers towards the civilian population in general.

[01:] 37:40:00 – [02:] 01:06:25

[There is a complete gap in audio and video recording]

Tape 2

[02:] 01:07:00 – [02:] 10:10:17

Dubaj remembers before the liquidation of Jews in Działoszyce, he and a friend observed Jews gathering in large groups at the Jewish cemetery and praying to their ancestors for salvation;

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many would hit their heads on tombstones until blood was pouring over their faces; they seemed to know their end was near; they prayed very intensely and were very emotional; heard a few men committed suicide before they were forced to assemble on September 2; remembers a few days after the liquidation of Jews in Działoszyce, the Germans were issuing leaflets announcing liquidation was over and remaining Jews should return to town and would be offered safety, work, and peace; remembers some returned because they either believed the Germans or could not hide anywhere; remembers that the dozens who returned were kept in a large hall near the fire station; remembers the area was surrounded by barbed wire fence; recalls a young Jewish man named **Berek**, from Działoszyce; remembers **Berek** had a gun and threatened to kill a German officer while he was hiding in a barn next to the school; says a Jewish boy betrayed **Berek**, and coaxed by the Germans, was calling on **Berek** to come out from the barn; he saw how the boy and **Berek** were shot dead as soon as **Berek** came out from the barn; *[The witness shows a sketch indicating where he was standing when he observed this killing;]* a few weeks after this incident, all the Jews that were lured by the Germans were killed and their bodies were taken to the Jewish cemetery.

[02:] 10:10:18 – [02:] 22:53:00

He talks about his uncle, **Bugaj**, who lived in the village of Wolica, that saved a nine-year-old Jewish girl; he kept her in an underground room which was under the barn; after the war, the girl left to join “her people,” and eventually left for Palestine; says that in a valley near Dzierążń, some Jews dug deep holes and built four bunkers where they survived until the end of the war; he says nine Jewish families were saved by Poles in Dzierążń; he knows a family named **Tarabów**, who saved a Jewish family in Dzierążń; Dubaj was in Kielce during the 1945 pogrom; says has bad memories about that time; says he had a friend named Imiolek who lived on **Sienkiewicza** Street; Imiolek’s mother saved a Jewish man during the pogrom; says during the pogrom, Poles were attacking not only Jews but also Poles who appeared to be Jewish; he believes the pogrom in Kielce was planned and organized; notes that at present time the Jewish cemetery in Kielce is well maintained; says he witnessed most of the events which he described in his testimony, while walking to or from school, or while in school during recesses; he did not know about any organized Jewish activity such as the Judenrat.

Time coded notes provided by Sam Ponczak