

FLORCZAK, Mieczysław
Polish Witnesses to the Holocaust Project
Polish
RG-50.488*0155

Box 1, Tape 1

In this interview, Mieczysław Florczak, born in 1922 and a lifelong resident of Piątek, talks about his experiences during World War II, including the bombing of the village. He describes briefly the victimization and hanging of Jewish residents and how he helped the Jews to rescue their Torah from the local synagogue.

[01:] 00:30:15 – [01:] 05:59:00

Mieczysław Florczak notes he was born on August 27, 1922 in the village of Piątek; says he was 17 at the outbreak of World War II in Poland; mentions his job as a cow herdsman after finishing school; his activity of working with the local youth; remembers the first bombing of Piątek on September 6, 1939; notes that as result of the bombing the center of the village, the old school, and other buildings were destroyed; describes the return of the Germans and their use of machine guns; mentions the screams of gathered people, mainly Jews from Piątek, heard in nearby **Młynów** [no location near Piątek named **Młynów**, but *Michałówka, Moraków, and Mystówka, are all within two miles of Piątek*]; remembers the monthly local fairs where products were mostly offered by Jews; mentions his parents living with a Jewish family.

[01:] 05:59:01 – [01:] 08:49:01

He again discusses the beginning of the war and the bombing of Piątek; notes the invasion of the Germans and describes the Polish planes; remembers hearing news that main parts of the German Hannoversche Infanterie were stationed at Piątek; indicates that Polish soldiers from the Gostynin, **Gombińsk**, and Sochaczew areas were also stationed at Piątek.

[01:] 08:49:02 – [01:] 16:56:20

He remembers the German occupation of Piątek in October; says that some Jews began to speak a little German; recalls a conversation with his colleague **Dawid Jojn** who missed his familiar Poland; talks about the opening of the ghetto in Piątek; recalls his parents and he being forced to leave their flat; describes the ghetto as consisting of eight buildings and the huge wooden synagogue; discusses his change of work place to Łódź when the Jews were brought to Dębica; remembers that the Jews were locked in the church before the transport to Dębica; them being driven into the church; remembers being a witness of the hanging of a Jew who escaped from the Żychlin ghetto; says the Jew was hanging for about five hours after his death; discusses three other hangings of Jews—two women and one man—in the local park; describes the bad and cruel treatment of Jews; remembers the transportation of Jews to Dębica and the destruction of their houses in the ghetto; recalls the tearing down of the synagogue by the Germans in February and the wood used as fuel.

[01:] 16:56:21 – [01:] 20:59:06

He remembers a conversation with a synagogue beadle who doubted the existence of God; talks about his fear of entering the ghetto; describes his assistance to the porter in order to rescue the Torah scrolls from the synagogue before its destruction; guesses the scrolls must be buried somewhere in the village; remembers the paintings inside the synagogue; answers the question of whether he remembers one Jew who survived the ghetto: **Mietek**, a baker, whose wish to meet him never happened; adds that he learned after the war that more Jews from Piątek had survived the Holocaust.

[01:] 20:59:07 – [01:] 26:49:20

He remembers other incidents of victimization of Jews; recalls witnessing the beating and bullying of Jews; says that those who did the beating and bullying were mainly German civilians and later even **Wolynioki**; describes the maltreatment of Jews near the mill: the gathering of Jews on the embankment by German police, the police taking pictures, putting the Jews into troughs, opening the water sluice, the icy water covering them, one saying he enjoyed the bath, one elderly man nearly drowning; adds there were about ten Jews not dying.

[01:] 26:49:21 – [01:] 30:24:00

He remembers the detainment of Polish soldiers already in 1939 in the same church where Jews were gathered; adds that he does not know how long the Jews were kept there, because once gathered no one could escape from the church; mentions his mother, sister, and other women being forced to clean the church after the deportation of the Jews to Dębica; talks about the existence of Jewish police in the ghetto; mentions one policeman, **Siajo**; describes his physical appearance, clothes, and armband with Star of David; remembers rumors about Jews managing to give this policeman a good thrashing and the scene of pushing and shoving of Jews by those policemen.

[01:] 30:24:01 – [01:] 37:56:00

He talks about his work at the coal mine in Helmstedt where he was brought from Łódź on May 1, 1942; describes initially staying in Berlin through autumn and the transport to Helmstedt; describes his work with laborers of various nationalities; remembers the scene when the Germans gathered and detained prisoners, many of whom were Jewish underground; mentions his work in the warehouse; remembers his German boss handing out liquor to the prisoners; mentions the work of certain prisoners in the nearby quarries; remembers his visit with others there on a Sunday and his observation of the prisoners building a latrine in the stones; mentions that the quarries were about 20 meters deep.