

CZYŻ, Mieczysław
Polish Witnesses to the Holocaust Project
Polish RG-50.488*0162
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Interview length: 32 min.

In this interview the witness, Mieczysław Czyż, describes the mass executions of Jews in Mołczadź, a majority Jewish town. He also mentions the collaboration of the Belarusian and Ukrainian police in the pogrom as well as the reaction of the local villagers, which included looting the property of the Jews and handing any hidden survivors to the Germans. He remarks that during his last visit in 1980, he did not find any official acknowledgment, memorial or signs commemorating the pogrom.

[01]:01:05-[01]:04:05

00:00-03:00

The witness introduces himself states that he was born the 19th March 1929 in Baranowic, where he lived until the beginning of the war. He witnessed the Russian advance and narrates his first interaction with Russian soldiers. In response to more detailed questions regarding the relations between Jews, Polish and Russians, he states that during the Russian presence starting 1939, he was only 11 years old, but specified that his father was arrested by the Russian “Narodnyj Komissariat Wnutriennich Dieł” (NKWD) in Easter 1940 and deported to Russia for his involvement in the legions, upon which his family moved to Mołczadź in 1940, 28 km away, where he stayed until 1944.

Commenting on the question on the Russian invasion, he tells that he does not remember the villagers preparing any particular welcome.

[01]:04:05-[01]:07:29

00:00- 03:24

He describes the structure of the town, specifying that half its population was Jewish, amongst them his neighbors; he narrates incidents where Jews attempted to hide in their garden from the Germans, who were persecuting them.

Referring to a question about relations with the Russians, he specifies that there were few Polish in the village, as many were arrested by the Bolsheviks and deported to Siberia, and that the majority of inhabitants were Russians; he himself attended a Russian school and remembers that children often teased each other; he remembers that Russian émigré Jews lived in his house as well as in the neighboring houses and that children played together.

[01]:07:29- [01]:10:48

00:00-03:19

He narrates the German invasion in 1941, the Germans at first only marched through Mołczadź, extorting monetary contributions from the Jews, but not attacking them further at that time; he describes how Jews were forced to display the stars of David on the front and back of their clothing and on their houses; Jews were allowed to work, for example, as tailors and repairing the roads. He remembers a Jewish landowner, who possessed about 50 hectares of land and hired local workers; he describes that until the pogrom, the Germans only extorted valuables, such as gold, from the Jews.

[01]:10:48-[01]:17:50

00:00-07:02

He describes the pogrom; he is not sure if it happened in 1942 or 1943; he describes how the Germans surrounded the village, then chased the Jews out of the houses, executing the sick, weak and old and transporting the dead bodies to the cemetery; the Jews were rounded up in the market square, then marched to the Christian orthodox cemetery, behind which there were ditches excavated by Jews; the Germans proceeded to execute the Jews.

He describes how the Jews from the neighboring houses jumped into his family's garden in an attempt to hide and how the Germans found them; he remembers the story of one young Jewish lady, who was forced to crawl on her knees while the Germans shot at her.

He confirms that the shooting was heard by all villagers, and that the shooting continued the entire day; he describes, who took part in the pogrom, specifying the Belarusian police in dark blue uniforms, which they referred to as crows in popular language, and the numerous Ukrainian police in light green uniforms, in addition to the many Germans in dark green uniforms.

He tells how after the pogrom, the Germans build a ghetto by the market square, to detain the Jews, who managed to hide during the mass executions.

[01]:17:50- [01]:21:33

00:00- 03:43

He narrates an event he describes as traumatic: he describes how after the pogrom, surrounding villagers descended with their carts to loot the property of the Jews; he specifies that often, when these villagers found a hidden Jew, they gave him up to the Germans.

He remembers only one Jew, who survived fighting with the partisans and whom he met again after the war.

[01]:21:33 – [01]:25:28

00:00- 3:55

He talks of the partisans, who operated 5 km from Mołczadź, and burned the houses and barns of people, who collaborated with the Germans; the Germans resided in a school that was adapted to this purpose and highly protected; he adds that in these regions the Armia Krajowa (AK) was also active, but he only knows of one of his friends, who was part of them; he remembers how the partisans sabotaged train tracks that the Germans used for transport.

[01]:25:28 – [01]:30:32

00:00- 05:04

The witness tells of how after the war, he tried to find some of the Jews he knew or to gain inform about their fate, but he failed to do so; he visited the town after the war on multiple occasions, the last time in 1980; answering questions, he confirms that at the time, there were no signs of the mass graves or of the old Jewish cemetery and that even though the residents of the town were aware of the pogrom, there were no official signs or information on the event.

Answering questions on prominent Jewish figures, like for example the Rabi, he responds that he does not know of their fate and describes some of the Jewish prayer rituals before the war.