

WINCZUK, Jan
Polish Witnesses to the Holocaust Project
Polish
RG-50.488*0217

Box 1, Tape 1

In this interview, Jan Winczuk, born on February 14, 1933 discusses his life in Pruszkow (where he still resides), during the occupation. He explains his parents' house was 100 meters away from the place where the execution of Jews took place and that he could observe the executions from the window of his house when he used binoculars. He describes a number of executions that were carried out and how sometimes he knew the people who were being executed. He discusses how the Germans often harassed and tortured the victims prior to executing them. He explains how the bodies were buried in shallow graves and that dogs dragged them all over the fields. As a result, he questions whether the exhumations after the war could accurately estimate the number of dead. He also mention's a book *Martylogia Pruszkowska* written by **Tadeusz Jarosz** which describes the history of 62 patients in the psychiatric hospital in Tworki who were evacuated and most likely killed. He points out that their remains were not found.

[01:] 00:33:00 – [01:] 09:26:24

Jan Winczuk, gives his birth date as February 14, 1933 and place of birth as Pruszkow (which is about 10 miles west of Warsaw); explains that he lived there during the occupation and resides there currently; explains that his family's farm was approximately 100 meters away from a place of execution; explains that the execution spot was in an open field, with unobstructed visibility; discusses how his parents, who were members of "Armia Krajowa" (Home Army, literally The Country's Army) were ordered by their command to watch and report on the crimes; explains how, observing from the window of their house by using binoculars, they were able to recognize familiar faces during the executions; explains that his mother asked him and his brother to watch and to remember what they saw because she assumed that she herself would not survive the war [*he has an emotional moment*] explains that executions were more than just the shooting of the victims, it also included their harassment and torture; explains that the most difficult part to watch was when children were being shot; explains that he does not remember seeing any executions until late 1940; explains that the highest number of the executions took place in January and February 1941; points out that during that time the ghetto in Pruszkow was being liquidated and the people were either killed or moved to the Warsaw ghetto; explains that the Germans intensified the arrests of Jews who might have been in hiding and brought them up for execution;. remembers an incident in which a family, a couple with two small children were brought up for execution; points out that one of the executioners was riding a horse; mentions that the other executioner seemed hesitant to shoot a baby, so the first officer jumped off his horse, pulled the baby from the carriage

by its foot and crashed the baby's head on the wall of the nearby building [*the building is shown in the photograph*]; explains that he saw similar events repeatedly.

[01:] 09:26:25 – [01:] 17:20:25

He explains how following the liquidation of the ghetto, the skilled workers (tailors, shoemakers, etc.) were left in Pruszkow to work for the Germans; remembers one particular incident when a tailor, whom his family knew and whose nickname was "Szpulka" (a reel of cotton) was executed; mentions another time, when a Gestapo officer whose name was Zimmerman along with another German, brought a family of three or four to be executed; explains that the father of the family hit Zimmerman on the forehead with a tool he had in his pocket; remembers another case in which a woman, **Sonia Perle**, who worked with his aunt as a translator until she worked as a secretary in the Germans' office confessed to being Jewish, after which she was also executed; thinks that she was the daughter of the editor of the Socialist Party (PPS) newspaper named "Robotnik" (The Worker); remembers watching a "competition" that several German executioners took part in, in which, they shot and killed young men whom they forced to run and jump in the ditches; points out that there is a memorial stone in Pruszkow on which the number 800 was carved, to represent the number of Poles executed; says that he doubts that this is an accurate number of people executed; points out that exhumations conducted after the war were very sketchy; explains that the bodies were buried in shallow ditches, and during the summer dogs would drag the bodies from the graves; explains that there were flies all over the place; points out that his mother, who worked for the sanitary service, convinced a chief physician to approach the German officials about the health hazard to the Germans stationed nearby and only then some steps were taken to prevent the bodies from being dragged all over the place.

[01:] 17:21:00 – [01:] 24:55:25

His remembers a series of executions that took place in 1944 after the Warsaw uprising; points out that the Germans brought trucks full of men; says that in the first transport about 60 men were executed and afterward the truck with the Germans went back to pick up more men; explains that his mother and aunt, both nurses, went to see if any of the shot men might need assistance and that one of the men who had been shot jumped up and ran away; explains that the man was rescued by a fisherman, who brought him to a hospital to receive first aid; points out, that after the man left the hospital, he was kept in hiding by local people; says that the men from the second transport were all shot and that a local man, a janitor at the factory nearby, buried the bodies while his wife sold valuables, most likely collected from the victims' bodies, at the market.

[01:] 24:56:00 – [01:] 33:52:25

He remembers how the gendarmes executed a four-year-old boy; explains how the police dressed in dark blue were Poles who had served in the police force before the occupation and had to serve as police under the occupation; believes that the chief of police was an honorable man and made every effort to maintain ethical behavior; speaks again about

the exhumation and that he believes that human remains were not attended to for many years; [*He shows a book named Martylogia Pruszkowska by Tadeusz Jaros*]; mentions that it includes a list of 62 people who were patients at the Tworki Psychiatric Hospital who were taken away but never arrived at the supposed destination; believes that they were most likely killed; explains that the book tells the story of the psychiatric hospital (in Tworki), lists the patients' names, their histories and their annihilation; adds, that a number of Jewish patients were rescued by the director, **Dr. Felix Kacaznowski** and by other attending psychiatrist; explains that a well-known doctor, **Joseph Handersman**, who was also in hiding but helped rescue several patients, was one of the people **Dr. Felix Kacaznowski** rescued.

[01:] 33:53:00 – [01:] 41:07:25

He talks about the exhumation of the soldiers killed in the battles in 1939; explains how in the summer of 1940 or 1941, bodies of soldiers who served in Polish military and who were thought to be Jewish were brought in wooden boxes to Pruszkow; explains that he does not know how the selection was made, but assumes that the Warsaw or Pruszkow Rabbinate were involved in identification; explains that after several days of holding the boxes, a burial took place in the Jewish cemetery, with prayers sung by a cantor; explains that he heard from others that one of the buried soldiers climbed a tree with a machine gun and killed numerous Germans before being killed; points out how this man's tomb was decorated with a helmet and remained visible until the Germans flattened the ground; explains that currently a group of young people from Germany has been taking care of the place; points out that in the recent years the number of cases of vandalism in the cemetery has declined and the place is better kept thanks to the care provided by the visiting group.

[01:] 41:08:00 – [01:] 50:16:06

[*The interviewer asks about how he knew that the buried people were Jewish.*] He speaks about his father working as an administrator for a big farm and how he met many people through that job; mentions that his father knew a Jewish family, whose daughter went to school with his older brother; says that these children escaped from the ghetto and were originally hiding with his family but his parents were concerned that they may be discovered so they found a man who took the children away to a forest far away, in **Baranovice**; explains that he does not know whether the children survived; he remembers how a young Jewish man who was very well off used his parents phone to talk to people in the Warsaw ghetto; explains that this man talked to his father and said that he expected to survive the war, but he also perished; explains that some of the men exhumed from the graves on **Kraszewski** street were bound with barbed wire; explains that he thinks that the Germans used the field near his house and the cemetery because the grounds were isolated, away from the main road and the only house nearby was his family's house.

[01:] 50:17:00 – [01:] 57:21:08

Explains that the people were walked to the executions, which took place regardless of the season; mentions that they were less frequent in winter and that most took place in the summer and daytime; [*He is asked if he saw whether the victims, before the execution, had to hand in some valuables*]; explains that he did not see this but remembers that the previously mentioned janitor, who carried out the burials, came to possess many valuables; explains that the man died of natural causes after the war; speaks again about the fact that the burial site of the soldiers who died in 1939 and who were buried in 1940 have no memorial and he hopes that their heroism will be acknowledged one day; mentions again the booklet describing the history of the psychiatric hospital and the patients who were killed; wishes that more information were available about where they were buried and how they died; assumes that nobody followed up on their fate.