

PAĻČEVSKIS, Jāzeps
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Russian
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In this interview, Jāzeps Paļčevskis, born on January 25, 1933, in Daugavpils, discusses his wartime experiences during the German occupation of his native city. Paļčevskis was a child when the Germans arrived and the round-ups and shootings of the Jews began. He witnessed the arrest of his neighbors' family and he also went to the Zolotaya Gora (Zolotaya Gorka) (Golden Mountain) massacre site shortly after the shooting took place. He saw how local policemen buried the bodies of victims, while some women [*presumably relatives of the policemen*] dug for gold at the shooting site. He also describes seeing piles of corpses of prisoners of war near the railroad station. Finally, he talks about the reburial of the bodies of victims after Germans retreated from the city and discusses the current situation of Holocaust commemoration in Daugavpils.

File 1 of 1

[01:] 00:00:00 – [01:] 30:20:00
00:00 – 31:20

[01:] 00:59:18 – [01:] 02:40:03
00:46 – 02:31

Q: Good evening.

A: Good evening.

Q: Thank you for letting us come to your place and videotape this interview. First of all, I would like to ask you to tell us your first and last name, and the date of your birth.

A: Jāzeps Paļčevskis. January 25, in 1933.

Q: Let's recall your childhood and the pre-war years. Where did you live at that time?

A: Well, I was born in this city and lived in Vecā Forštadte (Old Fortress – district in Daugavpils) on Zeltkalna Street, 26. I lived there until—30 years, until [19]63. I come from a working class family. My dad worked here, at—now it is called the Joint Stock Company, “**Lokum**,” but back then it was simply called The Main Railroad Shop, “Daugavpils lokomotīvu remonta rūpnīca.” He was a senior-level mechanic and he worked in the tool shop. My mother was a housekeeper. There were three of us, sons—I had two older brothers—my older brother was born in [19]24, and the other one was born in [19]31. The one born in [19]24 perished [*in the war*]. In [19]41, as soon as the

Germans came, my dad was taken to prison, and he never returned from it. So I was left without my dad at the age of nine and a half.

[01:] 02:40:04 – [01:] 05:09:14

02:32 – 05:07

Q: Do you remember the first days of the war in Daugavpils well?

A: Very well. Even right now I can see the image, how two of my brothers and I, and Pirozhok Anton Anufrievich (In Latvian, his name is Antons Pirožoks. An interview with Mr. Piržoks is available: RG-50.568*0005) we, boys, went to the lake to swim, and that part of the lake was called “a passage”—there was a passage there—a peninsula—from one big lake to another. That was our favorite place for swimming. As soon as we came there—it was around 10 o’clock in the morning—you can imagine what kind of sense of time boys back then could have had—we determined the time by the sun, and as soon as it got warm enough, we would go swimming. We just began undressing, when we suddenly heard an airplane very high above us. Before the war, we were not used to the sound of planes—there were no airports here, there were more horses here than airports. *[He laughs.]* And for some reason, Pirozhok suddenly said, “Look, that’s a German *[airplane]* flying there.” And my older brother said, “Where would a German *[airplane]* come here from?” We hadn’t heard anything—it was Sunday—we hadn’t heard anything about the beginning of the war. Well, probably, because we were not listening to the radio—we didn’t have radio outlets back then, and also there were no newspapers. Indeed, two other planes—back then we called them Soviet Istreboks—YaK-3, I believe—they were round-nosed, but very shifty—came flying toward the first plane. Then, the third one took off, and they landed him *[the German airplane]* at the airport over the Dvina River. That was how the war started. Then another German plane appeared and dropped a bomb. It dropped one bomb here, at Jaunbūve (RUSSIAN: Новое Строение; New Settlement – district in Daugavpils), and hit a new Catholic church; and it dropped a second one at Vecā Forštadte, and a man died there. We went to look at that man—to see how it was possible that a man was living, and suddenly he was dead? We had already heard a bit about the war, because, for example, in my family, my dad subscribed to a newspaper. It was called the *Журнал для всех* (Magazine for Everyone) or *Газета для всех* (Newspaper for Everyone)—it was kind of yellowish—and there were pictures there and articles about how the war was going in Europe. So, when the war was declared, and when it started, for some reason I—I even started to cry. *[He laughs.]*

[01:] 05:09:15 – [01:] 07:44:21

05:08 – 07:48

Q: Did you study in a Latvian or Russian school?

A: Well, no. I went to school in [19]40, it was in September, and in June the Reds came, as we called them. The Red Army came, and I went to a Russian school.

Q: Were there Jewish children in your class?

A: Yes, there were. There were two neighbors of ours: one lived on Avenue street, and the other one named **Leva** lived on the same street, Zeltkalna, just about 150 meters away from our house—I know his first name—and his dad—I was positive it was his last name—**Moska**—during my childhood, he was always addressed as **Moska**. I did not hear any other names. Later, it turned out that it was his first name, not last. The second one [*the other neighbor*] was **Khaim**; he had a son named **Folka**. He [*Folka*] had two sisters – **Esterka** and **Badanka**. We were all walking together, and living together.

Q: What happened to them at the beginning of the war?

A: Well, this is probably a well-known fact. As soon as—in our courtyard—I remember we were sitting in the courtyard—there was a little shed there where my grandmother used to store hay—we had two cows, so we needed hay—we were sitting at the entrance to the cellar [*next to the little shed*]*—there was a cellar door there—kind of like a lid, and we were sitting on that lid, and the Germans—the first Germans were coming from where the church was and were going in the direction of a railroad station. They were not walking along the street, but rather right through the fences—they would break through them at one place, or jump over them at another. When they entered our courtyard their first words were: “Juden und Kommunisten” (GERMAN: Jews and Communists). We didn’t know German back then, for us it was—well, we understood “Juden,” because it means Jews, and we had already heard the word “Kommunisten.” So right from the start, from their first steps—we had a neighbor, Chamaev was his last name, he looked very much like a Jew—they were Baptists before the war, but in [19]38 or [19]39—I don’t remember the exact date—they accepted the Orthodox faith. So the poor man was taken as a Jew—in his underwear, in his underpants, and the strings were dragging on the ground. So they drove him also to that. They all were taken and arrested right there.*

[01:] 07:44:22 – [01:] 09:29:20

07:49 – 09:38

Q: Did you see that with your own eyes?

A: Yes, of course we saw that.

Q: Did you see many arrests?

A: No, only [*the arrests*] of **Moska’s** and **Khaim’s** families, and of that **Chamaev**.

Q: So they were taken with their children?

A: Yes, the entire family.

Q: Were they rounding people up during the day, or in the mornings? When did they usually do that?

A: No, I think that was already late evening. It means that they took **Chamaev** earlier—I don’t know where **Moska** and **Khaim** were. Maybe they were also hiding in a cellar,

because before the Germans entered the city, there was shooting there: you could hear how they were shooting from machine guns and from small arms, so some people were in a cellar, some were still inside. But we already came out, that's why the Germans found us in the courtyard, and I didn't see how they took them [*the two Jewish families he mentioned earlier*]. But they took them that same night.

Q: So you saw how they were leading them out on the street?

A: No.

Q: What did you see then?

A: I saw how **Chamaev** was arrested, but I didn't see how they were taking them [*the two Jewish families*] out. I think—you know, I can't remember this very well now—I think I saw either **Folka**, or somebody from his family after that, but they were already ordered—they had to wear those six-pointed stars—I think, they [*the six-pointed stars*] were yellow in color—at the front and at the back. And the Jews were allowed to walk only along the roadway—it was forbidden for them to walk along the sidewalk. All of the Jews were collected at the fortification in front of the bridge. And later, from there— [*He sighs.*]

[01:] 09:29:21 – [01:] 13:36:19

09:39 – 13:55

Q: Did you happen to go to the sites where shootings took place here, in Daugavpils?

A: You know, my dad was strongly against that: he didn't go there himself, and he forbade his mother—or my grandmother—from going there, but many locals still visited those places. But, once I was there—I was there with that Pirozhok, with—I think, his sister, Anya—but she is no more—and I think our neighbor, Lusya Bisokorskaya was also there with us. I think she still lives there, in Forštade. I think there were six or seven of us there, just kids—boys and girls. Despite the ban, we ran there—and before that, we heard moans, shouts, and shooting sounds coming from there almost every evening. By then, [*on the day they visited the site*] we already knew what was going on there—but at the beginning, when those first moans and shooting sounds started, we didn't know. Later, through word of mouth, as they call it, we learned that they were shooting Jews there. So we went there once. It was in the morning—also around after nine o'clock in the morning—it was a sunny day. Do you want me to tell you what was that like? We came there—it was behind Zolotaya Gora (Zolotaya Gorka) (Golden Mountain)—there was that Zolotaya Gora here, but later it was removed—behind that Zolotaya Gora, 200-300 meters away there were trenches dug, and they [*Jews*] were shot there. When we came from behind the little hill, around 150 meters away from the place—we saw—for example, I saw how they were finishing up the process of burying the bodies, so I didn't see the actual people who had been shot. I only saw the men who were burying, saw policemen, and two Germans—they had brown collars, and on their sleeves and caps—one of them was wearing a peaked cap, and another one was wearing a garrison cap—there were those symbols with a skull and three bones. There were also policemen there,

who were guarding the place. They were wearing regular civilian clothes, but they had yellow—white—I think, white bands on their sleeves. And there were piles there, like little haystacks. Yes, like haystacks. One was a pile of shoes, another was a pile of clothes, and there were around—well, I wasn't counting them, but from what I remember—four or five of these piles. They were just thrown there. And many local people—that was something that impressed me as a little boy—there was only yellow sand there, where even normal grass couldn't grow—but they [*the local residents*] were there with some kind of hoes, those that you would use to dig potatoes, and they were digging in the sand there. Well, it is my understanding that, when people dig for potatoes, they go along the rows—the way the potato usually grows—but here they were moving in a chaotic way. First, we couldn't figure out what they were doing there—that was a wild scene for me. But later, the older kids told us that they were scrounging for golden items there, like rings, bracelets, and other things, which Jews were burying right before being shot. Later, indeed, these golden things began to appear at a bazaar—at a second-hand market—for sale—one could see them. We used to go into the city to get newspapers—it was later, maybe the next year, when those things started to show up. That was the scene we saw.

[01:] 13:36:20 – [01:] 15:52:20

13:56 – 16:17

Q: What language did the policemen speak, and what language did those who were burying the bodies speak to each other?

A: You know, those who were burying, I didn't hear them speak. They were doing that in silence. They had weary and gray appearances, and I didn't hear them speak. But the policemen were speaking Latgalian, Russian, and Latvian, so there were different people there.

Q: Did the Germans also speak?

A: Yes, they did, but that was German, and back then I didn't know German, so we didn't understand anything.

Q: Were they giving orders?

A: Yes, they were giving—directions. They were saying something—the way directions are normally given—and the “**Schutzmann**” (GERMAN: policemen) were running around those people, who were doing the burying, urging them, “Hurry, hurry!”

Q: Did you recognize anyone among the policemen?

A: You know, I don't remember him very well—there was that **Shpak** [*surname*]. I believe he lived on **Litinskaya** Street. He was about 1.65 meters tall—well, that's my current estimation, back then I wasn't trying to estimate. His height was below average, he was heavysset and dark-haired—brunette. Like that. I remembered this one's face, but the others—no, I don't remember.

Q: And those, who were doing the burying, were also unknown to you?

A: No. But that was done very easily: they were doing that right before the shooting. Later, we knew when the shooting would take place. If, say, today there is a round-up on the market, if they are gathering men, it means that at night there will be a shooting. That was a rule.

Q: It means they were locals?

A: There were different people there. Most of them were probably locals; but back then, who was there on the market? People were mostly buying their groceries on the market—at the so-called bazaar—back then we called it a bazaar. And they were rounding people up at that bazaar.

Q: Were there people from other towns?

A: Of course, there were people from other towns. Those who brought their goods for sale—they were also rounded up, and their carts were standing there abandoned.

[01:] 15:52:21 – [01:] 18:06:24

16:18 – 18:36

Q: You said you were looking at that place from about 150 meters away. Did you happen to get closer there, or did you leave right away?

A: No, no, no—the view was not a pleasant one, and we were not inclined to scrutinize it. Besides, there were policemen standing there, and those people who were standing bent over, creeping and digging there, with their butts sticking out, searching for something—that was a horrible thing to watch even without seeing the dead. But we saw dead people a bit earlier, only they were prisoners of war.

Q: When and where was that?

A: You mean the prisoners of war? There were echelons constantly going through the Dvinsk-2 station (Dvinsk is the Russian name of the city of Daugavpils)—here, in the city, there was Dvinsk-1 station, but there in Forštade there was Dvinsk-2—that was the name for the station on the railroad from St. Petersburg to Warsaw. It took place in June, July, and August, especially in July. I remember it was hot, and they were carrying prisoners in open cars—without a roof. And so—we, boys, were standing there—there was a garden there—well, not a garden, but, I believe, there were tall poplar trees growing there in two rows. And between these poplar trees, there were stacked piles of prisoners of war. They were stacked like logs: the piles were around one and a half meters high, maybe a bit higher. They [*the bodies*] were all mostly naked, some were in underwear, some were in underpants, some were in shirts, some were completely naked; and they were stacked like logs. And there were three of these piles of prisoners of war there.

Q: Did you see that before the shooting of the Jews?

A: Right, before the shootings. Jews were shot in autumn—well, closer to autumn—it was probably already in August, because they were driving them already at dusk. And the twilight then came at about eight o'clock—around eight o'clock. I believe, it was in August, or September, but the weather was warm.

[01:] 18:06:25 – [01:] 20:34:23

18:37 – 21:11

Q: So you went to Zolotaya Gora only once?

A: Yes, I was there once.

Q: Why did all of you go there back then?

A: Well, there were rumors—before we went—some substantial time had already passed, the shootings continued for already about two weeks. They took place quite often: two, three times a week for sure, and they drove groups of about 300 people every time, simply in columns.

Q: Did you see that?

A: Well, sure, of course. They were driving them past us—our house was situated one house away from Avenu Street, along which they were leading them [*the Jews*]. There were old people, children, and men there. We saw how two young Jews escaped, and the policemen were shooting at them—but how could they possibly hit them if they were drunk, those policemen? For some reason they [*It is unclear whether he is referring to the policemen or the two young men who escaped.*] were scolded, and later we were told that they were scolded because they used to run away. But those two lads escaped. There was a forest not far from there, and they ran into that forest.

Q: Who were those policemen?

A: Well, what do you mean “who”? They were some local people.

Q: What language did they speak?

A: As I already told you, they spoke Latgalian, Russian, and some of them spoke Latvian.

Q: You mean those who were convoying, right?

A: Right. When they were in the convoy, they didn't speak much. They were walking in silence, only cursing at times, but they were cursing in Russian.

Q: Did you also hear the shots?

A: Yes, because as soon as the shooting started, we would hear the sound of shooting, and it would continue throughout the night. They would stop only at dawn.

Q: So they were shooting for a long time?

A: Excuse me?

Q: Were they shooting for a long time?

A: You know, it's hard for me to say now—maybe two hours, maybe more—that the execution lasted.

Q: And it went on non-stop, right?

A: Right. At night.

Q: At night?

A: Yes.

Q: So why did you go there then? You were very little.

A: I don't know; I was probably dying of curiosity. We were interested in finally seeing what was going on there.

Q: Was it scary?

A: Well, probably the scarier—the better.

Q: You went there together, and you returned together?

A: Yes, we ran away from there. We were not returning, we were running away from there. When we saw all that, we fled away from there.

[01:] 20:34:24 – [01:] 22:47:23

21:12 – 23:29

Q: Did you talk about that at home?

A: Well, if we said something, we said that to other kids, our friends. But we couldn't say anything to our parents, because it was strictly forbidden [*to go to the shooting site*], and if I admitted that I went there, I would have gotten it in the neck. My dad was still—no, my dad wasn't there anymore, but my older brother was—I would have been in serious trouble. So, we didn't say anything to our parents, but they knew everything without us. On the contrary, we learned from them—we heard what was going on there when they were talking to each other.

Q: What were your parents talking about?

A: Well, they were talking—they saw when people they knew were driven by—they were talking about who they saw, who was behaving how, and how gloomy their faces were. But we could see for ourselves their emotional condition as they were walking.

Q: So, it was discussed at home?

A: Of course it was discussed, how could it not be—

Q: And it was also discussed in the city, right?

A: You know, back then, I was too little to go to the city. Well, only sometimes, we would run there illegally: to the market to see what was going on there—curiosity, you know.

Q: Did you go to Zolotaya Gora and to other shooting sites after the war?

A: In [19]44, as soon as the Reds, as we called them, came back, there was a commission that came to that site. There were many Jews in civilian clothes there, people from the KGB—they were wearing peaked caps with blue bands—we knew that it [*the uniform*] signaled the KGB officers—and there were a lot of military there. They were—but again, we were not allowed to go near there. They were deciding what to work on and where, and were uncovering those graves. I didn't see how they were uncovering the graves, but they removed the bodies from there.

Q: So they excavated [*the bodies*]?

A: Yes, they excavated them from there.

**[01:] 22:47:24 – [01:] 24:40:17
23:30 – 25:27**

Q: How do you know that?

A: First of all, because the plan was to build a factory there. Second, I don't know, maybe because the place was in the middle of nowhere—there was a Jewish graveyard not far from the lake, here on Valkas [*Street*]—not far from here, there was a Jewish graveyard, and there was another one in Forštadte, but it was old and abandoned, but there was at least a place. But they were moved to Pogulyanka (Pogulanka), and they were reburied at Pogulyanka.

Q: Those from Zolotaya Gora?

A: Right. They were shooting them not on Zolotaya Gora itself: if you look from Forštadte it was behind the mountain, but if you look from here, it was in front of the mountain.

Q: Was it a well-known site in the city?

A: Yes, of course.

Q: Apart from you, kids, did other local people go there? On that same day, was there someone else nearby?

A: Well, I only saw those who were scrambling there, mostly women. Men were burying, and women and teenagers were looking for something—well, something—I have already told you what they were searching for there. But back then we didn't know what they were looking for.

Q: Did the policemen let them go there?

A: You know, for some reason I had a feeling that they were either their relatives, or friends, because they didn't let others go there. For example, they didn't even let us get close to that place. They shouted at us, and we ran away.

Q: So the policemen saw you?

A: Yes, they saw us. There was a little hill there, and we hid behind it. But then, we probably stood up, and they shouted at us, and threatened us with their rifles, and we ran away from there.

Q: What language were they shouting in?

A: You know, I don't remember it very well; I think it was Russian.

Q: So they shouted at you because they wanted you to go away?

A: Yes.

[01:] 24:40:18 – [01:] 27:15:01

25:28 – 28:07

Q: Did you leave right away, or did you keep looking?

A: We left right away.

Q: But you remember that day well?

A: Yes, that image is still in my eyes.

Q: Did you discuss that with your friend, Anton, and with other girls?

A: Sure, of course. Somebody even said that it wasn't the first time she went there, somebody had already been there—I don't remember if it was Anton's sister, or that

Lusya—she was saying that she went there before. They were the ones who showed us the way to go there.

Q: Did they tell you what they saw?

A: Yes, they did.

Q: What did they see?

A: I don't know if what they were saying is trustworthy, but they saw—they were saying they saw still unburied bodies, that there were killed—shot people laying there. But I didn't—I saw it only when they were almost done with the burying.

Q: Thank you very much for this interview.

A: You are welcome. You know, it is hard to find that place now because there was a factory built there, and everything was redone there; but if we orient ourselves by the sun and determine approximately—it wasn't just one little grave, it was a big area.

Q: Approximately how big?

A: Well, several hectares. Because the trenches were about—about three meters wide and 30-40 meters long—something like that. We could determine that by looking at the edges—so the trenches were big. And there were barrels with carbolic acid standing there.

Q: Did you see that?

A: There was that distinct smell there—that smell stayed for a long time. They were pouring that liquid on the bodies.

Q: Why did they do that?

A: They were saying that it was allegedly to prevent an epidemic.

Q: Who was doing that, the policemen, or the Germans?

A: You know, the same workers were doing that. I didn't see it, but people were saying that the same men who were driven there to dig those trenches were doing this. They dug the trenches, they buried them, and they poured it over them.

**[01:] 27:15:02 – [01:] 30:20:00
28:08 – 31:20**

Q: Who told you about that? Was it someone from your family, or did you hear that somewhere on the street?

A: About what? What I have just told you?

Q: Yes, yes.

A: Well, sure. I am sure that neither my mother, nor my grandmother went there, but older kids did. I was eight and a half years old, but there were boys who were 12, 14, and 15 years old.

Q: After the war, did you see any of the Jewish people you knew? Did anybody survive here, in Daugavpils?

A: No. I didn't see any of the people I knew before the war. They all perished.

Q: Nowadays in Daugavpils do people remember that tragic time? Do they hold some assemblies, some commemorations?

A: Well, there is a Jewish association, they are involved in those activities; they organized the Holocaust Day.

Q: What about the city authorities?

A: The city media? *[He did not hear the question correctly.]* The city media notifies people about that. You know how they sometimes write in the newspapers—you can find those publications in newspaper binders *[He is probably talking about archival binders in libraries]*. Before 1990, I don't remember there being commemorations the way they are held now either for those Jews who were shot, or for the prisoners. Now they show that on TV—well, before there was no television, or maybe I wasn't reading newspapers back then, but in any case, people were less informed about that during the Soviet period than they are now, beginning from the 1990s.

Q: Is that because the Jewish community became more active?

A: Yes, I think so.

Q: Or the city authorities *[became more active]*?

A: No, I think it's the community. And many people started to come from abroad—before it was not so easy to come here, or for us to go there, but now many guests started to come, including visitors from Israel. They must have some relatives left here.

Q: Do they go to the assemblies?

A: Yes.

Q: To Pogulyanka?

A: To Pogulyanka. I think that is the only place where somebody commemorates those horrible days.

Q: Have you also been there?

A: No. I have been there, but I never attended those events.

Q: Thank you.

A: You are welcome.

[01:] 30:20:00

00:31:20

Conclusion of Interview