

KUKLIKHINA, Irina
Latvian Witness to the Holocaust
Russian Language
RG-50.568.0014.01.01

Original language: В данном интервью, взятом 22 ноября 2003 года, Ирина Куклихина 1926 года рождения делится случаем, который ей пришлось наблюдать в пятнадцатилетнем возрасте в Латвийском селе Вишках. Это произошло в самом начале войны, а именно в последних числах июля 1941 года, на третий день после бомбежки. Сама Ирина из Латвийского города Даугавпилса, где она прожила практически всю свою жизнь. Каждое лето она ездила на дачу к бабушке и дедушке, проживавших в селе Вишки. Тем далеким июльским днем 1941 года она выходила из аптеки и заметила приближающуюся толпу из 30-40 людей, идущих под конвоем. В самом начале шли два охранника с красно-белыми повязками. За ними следовали двое молодых юношей, несущих старенькую женщину. Ирина рассказывает, что эта бабуля ужасно кричала на иврите, убивалась и звала своих детей. Вслед за ними следовали женщины с грудничками и маленькими детьми возрастом от трех до семи лет. За ними шли два охранника в форме, как бы разделяя женщин и детей от идущих сзади пожилых мужчин. Вооруженные винтовками охранники шли по обеим сторонам этих измученных, голодных и грязных людей. Когда колонна приблизилась, Ирина заметила как ее знакомая учительница Лялина Любовь Васильевна пыталась ткнуть женщинам с грудничками каравай и крынку молока, но ее оттолкнул охранник. Она упала и ударилась головой об землю. Ирина помогла ей присесть и хотела догнать уже прошедшую колонну и все-таки отдать этим людям молоко и хлеб, но ее учительница уговорила ее этого не делать и сказала, что этим людям уже ничем не помочь. Тогда в свои пятнадцать лет Ирине и в голову не приходило, кто были эти люди и что вообще происходило в стране. Она понятия не имела, что эти бедные евреи были жильцами из села Аглоны и что шли они в свой последний путь - на расстрел. Ирине не приходилось видеть расстрелы, но по ночам в ее село доходили звуки криков и выстрелов.

Translation: In this interview, conducted on 22 November 2003, Irina Kuklikhina, born in 1926, talks about an incident that she had witnessed at the age of 15 in Latvian village of Vishki. It occurred at the very beginning of the war, at the end of July, three days after bombing. Irina is originally from Daugavpils, Latvia, and she lived there most of her life. Each summer she would go visit her grandmother and grandfather, who lived in the village of Vishki, and would stay with them for the summer. On that day in July 1941 as she was walking out of the pharmacy, she noticed an approaching crowd of about 30-40 people, escorted by armed guards. In front of everyone walked two guards with white and red armbands. Then followed two teenage boys. They carried an elderly woman. Irina remembers her screaming in Hebrew, panicking and calling out the names of her children. Then followed women with infants and small children, who were about 3-7 years old. After women walked two armed guards, as if trying to separate women and

children from elderly men, who followed them. The group of these poor exhausted and hungry people were meticulously guarded on each side. Then Irina noticed as Lyalina, Lyubov Vasilyevna, a teacher she knew very well, approached some women with infants to give them some bread and milk. One of the guards yelled and pushed her so hard that she fell down and hit her head on the pavement. Irina helped her sit up, picked up the bread, and was going to run after the group to give it to them, but her teacher asked her not to take a chance and said that those people could no longer be helped. Back then, when Irina was just fifteen years old, she had no idea who these people were and what was going on in the country. She was completely unaware that those poor people were Jews from the village of Aglona and that execution by shooting was what they were walking to. Irina did not see any executions with her own eyes, but she heard screaming and shooting when the sun would go down in her grandparents' village of Vishki.

01:00:42:01 - 01:05:17:06

0:33 - 5:09

File 1 of 1

Q: Good afternoon.

A: Hello.

Q: First I would like to thank you for letting us come here, to your home, and letting us conduct this interview. Thank you very much.

A: You are welcome. You are always welcome here.

Q: Please, say your first name, your given name, and your date of birth.

A: Irina Kuklikhina. 1926.

Q: Let's go back to pre-war time and think back on your childhood. Where did you live? Who were your parents?

A: Well, I always lived in Daugavpils. My father was a teacher in Russian gymnasium. My mother was a housewife. At first, there were two us, children, in the family, but in 1940, another sibling was born, my brother. I was born in the shtetl of Vishki only because we would spend each summer in a country house where my grandmother and grandfather lived. The shtetl was known as "Moscow Sadja". The war caught up with us in Daugavpils during the summer. On the third day after bombing, that is on July 23, we went to Vishki, and we stayed there all summer.

Q: Could you, please, talk about the beginning of war?

A: You know, I did not see much of what was going on since it was one kilometer from Vishki. Also, I was a teenager, and at fifteen years of age I wasn't allowed to go that far from home. Of course, adults understood what was going on. However, I did witness one incident, if you can call it that way, at the end of July. I do not remember exact date, but I am sure it was at the very end of July. That day I was sent to a pharmacy to buy some medications, and as I was leaving the pharmacy, I heard a noise and screaming. At first, I didn't make sense of it, but when I walked out to the Aglonas Street, I saw a walking crowd of people, led by guards (as I understood later) with armbands and rifles. Then I saw walking women with infants, then teenagers, and men. These were elderly men. I did not notice anyone young among them. This group consisted of about 30-40 people, I believe. Ahead of everyone walked two teenage boys. They carried an elderly woman, sitting on a makeshift stretcher made of wood and ropes that were tied around boys shoulders. She was either paralyzed or simply old. She screamed very loud. She probably shouted the names of her children, "Vasya, Riva, Tsylya!" She cried for them.

01:05:17:06 - 01:10:13:13

5:09 - 10:04

She was saying things, but no one responded to what she was saying. The boys were followed by two women with infants and 3-4 small children who were about 3-7 years old. They were followed by more women and by a group of about 10 men. Three men in Aizsargi uniforms walked between men and women. Then I saw a teacher whom I knew very well. Her name was Lyalina, Lyubov Vasilyevna. She had taught for many years. She had a big round loaf and a milk jug, which she wanted to give to those children and women with infants. When she came up to them, someone shouted at her. She walked away, but then decided to give the bread to other women in the group. One of the guards pushed her, and she fell. So did her bread and milk jug. I ran up to her and helped her get up. She felt dizzy and instead asked me to help her sit down, which I did. The group already passed and I wanted to catch up with these people to give them this bread, but she stopped me and asked, "Do not do that. They can no longer be helped." The last thing I saw is that they walked in the direction of the Nagorniye Vishki (I believe they are still called this way). The happening got embedded in my memory for the rest of my life.

Q: What language did the guards speak?

A: They did not speak at all for the exception of the one who pushed the teacher. He said, "Ai pron!"

Q: Did they say anything to you?

A: No, they did not say anything to me or to anyone else, and there were a lot of people, including grown-ups and children. This was a highly settled street. So many residents came out on the streets. No one could do anything; after all, there were guards. That's what got etched in my memory.

Q: Do you know what eventually happened to this group of people?

A: Some time later, probably, in about a year when I came to visit, I heard that people exiled from the village of Aglona were executed by shooting. I know that people in that group were indeed from Aglona because they were exhausted, dirty, dusty, and you just could tell that they had traveled a long distance.

Q: Did you discuss this event at home with your parents?

A: Of course. As soon as I came home, I told my family. My father and grandfather were very saddened because this was just mind-boggling to them. Since they were adults, they knew what was going on in Germany, but we, kids, had no clue what-so-ever. Only later on, after the war, we would understand.

01:10:13:13 - 01:15:50:20

10:04 - 15:42

Q: Did the residents of Daugavpils talk about what was happening to Jews?

A: Yes, they did. I heard that there were executions by shooting in the village of Pogulyanka and here in Zolotaya Gora (that is near the factory "Tingler Mashinbuver"). My grandmother lived on Gagarin Street, and at nights, we could hear shooting and screaming from her house.

Q: Have you ever been to those places?

A: No.

Q: Let's go back to that episode in Vishki. Who were the people in that group?

A: I believe they were Jews because the elderly woman was screaming in Hebrew language and the names she was saying were of Jewish origin. I do not know Hebrew but I am familiar with it well enough to recognize it.

Q: Did these people talk among themselves?

A: No. No.

Q: Did they walk quietly?

A: Yes, they walked quietly.

Q: What about the people who escorted them?

A: They were quiet too. The only time they said something was when someone would approach the group and they would order them to stay back.

Q: In what language?

A: Latvian.

Q: What did the people in the group wear?

A: They were dressed differently. It was summer time. So some women had light cotton dresses on. The elderly woman was wearing a square knitted shawl, a fabric that is worn over the shoulders. The teenagers were dressed in shirts and pants. Some men were in suit jackets, and all of them wore caps.

Q: Did they carry any personal items with them?

A: Yes, they carried bundles, small suitcases, and one woman walked with a basket. I am not sure what she had in it, but I remember her carrying it in her arm. That is what I saw from where I stood.

Q: What were the guards wearing?

A: They wore black suits with red and white armbands. Three guards, who walked between men and women as if separating them, were in Aizsargi uniforms.

Q: So guards were in military and civilian clothing?

A: Yes. Generally they were in civilian clothing.

Q: How many guards were there?

A: As far as I can tell, there were five or six because one walked in front of everyone and two on each side.

Q: Did you come to Vishki often in the first summer after the war broke out?

A: I did go, but not often. Most of the time I lived in the village one kilometer away near lake.

Q: Were any of your Jewish neighbors there?

A: No, but our close acquaintances from Vishki were: the Pogelley Family, for example. I think they were a dynasty or a clan. They owned stores, in which my grandmother and grandfather would shop and borrow money, which was a norm before the war. There were also other people we knew.

Q: Do you know what happened to them?

A: No, I do not. There were different rumors going around, but they are just rumors.

Q: Did you see them after the war?

A: No, I didn't see any Pogelleys after the war, but by then I didn't go to Vishki that much because my grandparents died and my father was persecuted for political reasons and imprisoned in Siberia. That's why we rarely went there. In fact, we didn't go there at all in the first few years after the war. My grandfather died in 1943 and grandmother in 1945. Only when my father was released and my grandparents' house was returned to him we started going there again, but that was in 1954.

Q: Thank you very much for giving this interview.

A: You are welcome.

Q: I am wishing you all the best.

A: Thank you for your kind words.