

HRAPUNOV Vasili
Latvia Documentation Project
Russian
RG-50.568*0042

Box 1, Tape 1

In this interview, Vasili Hrapunov, born March 30, 1925, and a native of Preili, talks about his experiences with Jews and local collaborators during the early years of World War II. He was 16 when the war started. As a resident of Preili, he witnessed a mass execution of local Jews by local Nazi supporters, and was imprisoned for a month because of a personal conflict with one of their leaders. He concentrates on his relationships with this local “polizei,” their participation in the execution, and shares his personal experiences at the execution, in prison, and during his postwar exile in the Soviet Union, in Magadan.

[02:] 00:32:16 – [02:] 06:55:03
00:00 – 07:09

He introduces himself, gives the date and place of his birth as March 30, 1925, in Preili; says there were a lot of Jews in Preili and describes his relationships with them; says that at the beginning of the war he was working away from his village, but eventually moved back; explains that after the arrival of the Germans, the preparations for the execution started; describes how locals gradually understood what was going to happen to the Jews; describes how the Jews were gathered at the synagogue and that pits were dug; talks about his curiosity to see the shooting and how he was taken there by force by a “polizei;” describes the preparations for the execution, seeing Jews being undressed and their possessions moved to the house of three brothers where it was organized and divided; says the “polizei” let him go, but he saw the execution nevertheless; describes the execution, expresses his surprise at the behavior of the Jews who did not show any sign of protest and seemed to be prepared to die; says that a local man, Ivan Trofimov [*note: Trofimov is USHMM interview RG-50.568*0045*] buried the dead; says that according to rumors the same thing happened in neighboring villages.

[02:] 06:55:04 – [02:] 13:45:01
07:10 – 14:15

He clarifies that the Jews were initially gathered at the local synagogue, and that the building still remains; describes Jews running away and having to be stopped by the “polizei;” mentions that at the time, the “polizei” were drunk; explains that he knew some of the “polizei,” names the **Gavr [Gavri, Gavry]** brothers, **Bech [Dech, Dechi]**; described their occupations; recalls his personal conflict with **Bech** for nonpayment for work that he (Hrapunov) had completed and his subsequent extrajudicial arrest by the **Gavr** brothers on **Bech’s** order; details his arrest, being questioned in **Bech’s** office, and a description of the office, including his table with whips on it; says he (Hrapunov) was asked who he was fighting for; says he was asked where he kept his

arms and when he denied having any, was brutally whipped until he lost consciousness; describes his emotional state when he came to and awoke in a cell and could not understand what had happened, nor could he distinguish between his skin and his shirt, as everything was in blood [*interviewee starts crying*]; returns to his description of the locals who were involved in the execution; talks about the head of the local police **Denis [Denise, David]** for whom his father had built a house; says that when his father asked Denis why his sons were arrested, he was threatened to be arrested by Denis as well.

[02:] 13:45:02 – [02:] 20:54:16
14:16 – 21:43

He describes the procession of the local Jews from the synagogue to their place of execution; names the “polizei,” **Drozhkevich**, who brought him to the shooting and whose father he knew; describes the distance between where he was standing and the graves as very short, around five meters; says it was raining and the pits were full of water; describes the length and depth of the graves; describes the behavior of the guards and the Jews upon arrival; returns to the topic of personal possessions being removed from the Jews and sent away; describes the kinds of personal things they had; the treatment of the Jews who were showing signs of protest; talks about the guards removing gold teeth from some of the Jews; says all of the “polizei” were inebriated; describes the process and length of the execution; says that people still alive fell in the graves, and that they looked as if they were ready to die; says there were no screams but quiet moaning and cries; supposes that most of the “polizei” were in their 40s.

[02:] 20:54:17 – [02:] 27:43:09
21:44 – 28:49

He says **Denis** was executed by the Germans; explains why: **Denis** planned to murder a teacher but his plan was discovered; says that upon Denis’s death, he (Hrapunov) was released from prison; describes his work in the town after the release; says the possessions taken from the Jews were taken to the house of the local **Gavari** family on carts; talks about the behavior of this family, including drinking, singing, dancing, and firing shots in the air; describes the process of possession-removal, including who worked at loading the carts and transportation; says that the only Jews who survived were the ones who had escaped from Preili; talks about the number of Jewish people in Preili pre- and postwar; says that a monument for the victims has been constructed at the mass-murder site; says that many people in Preili still remember the events of the war.

[02:] 27:43:10 – [02:] 42:20:09
28:50 – 44:02

He says that after the war was over he was sent to Magadan for ten years along with others who had worked for the Germans; describes his occupations in Magadan; says that by the time of his return to Preili in 1956 there were almost no Jews remaining; suspects that the **Gavr** and **Bech** brothers were in command during the execution; says he is not sure but thinks that the elder brothers gave orders to shoot, as well as took part in the shootings; says the number of guards was large, but cannot give an exact number; says there were no Germans among the guards and

executioners; believes that the guards did not take things for themselves at the place of execution but rather split things between themselves at the **Gavari** house; notes that among the executed Jews were also young children and elderly people; says that among German and Latvian guards he met later during the war there were good people; claims that it was easier to live under German troops; says that *aizsargi* were inhumane, cannot say anything good about them [*cries*]; says that life nowadays is good as long as there is work and faith in God, talks about the importance of good health and faith.