

BATÂR, Nicolae
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In this interview, Nicolae Batâr, born in 1925 in the village of Oniscani, discusses the shooting of more than 20 Jews outside his village during World War II. As a teenage boy, Nicolae personally saw how the Jews were taken to a field and how three Romanian soldiers started shooting them near a pit. At that point he ran away, but he remembers hearing stories about how a few of his fellow villagers took off some of the Jews' clothes before burying them. He explains that one of the villagers helped the soldiers by throwing an old Jewish woman in the pit. The woman's daughter later took revenge on the man by poisoning him. He also remembers that before the war, the Jews in his village were hiding when the Cuzists came. He shares several stories that he heard from other peasants about how Jews were treated in his and the surrounding villages.

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[01:] 00:00:00 – [01:] 18:16:25
00:00 – 18:16

[01:] 00:31:10 – [01:] 03:20:10
00:31 – 03:20

Q: Please tell me your name and surname.

A: What?

Q: Please tell me your name and surname.

A: Now?

Q: Yes.

A: Batâr Nicolae Gheorghe.

Q: Which year were you born?

A: 1925.

Q: And where were you born?

A: Excuse me?

Q: Where were you born?

A: Here. But not in this house; there was another house.

Q: In Oniscani village.

A: Oniscani.

Q: A few weeks ago, we were here in your home, and you told us about what you had seen in 1941 and what happened to the Jews.

A: But I think I told you already that I was...

Q: Well, we came to ask you to tell us, to remember again...

A: Yes. Back then I was 16 years of age and I was with the boys in the fields on a Sunday. And on the way back to the village, we, the boys who were there, [saw] some soldiers taking the Jews away in a queue.

Q: Where were they taking them away from?

A: From the village.

Q: Aha, they were taking them away from the village.

A: There were some from the village and some were strangers who ran from **Bălți**—I don't remember details about the families. And we turned back [towards the field] with them. We went all the way back to the—how is that called—Cula (the river Cula). There were huge trenches there, two meters deep and four wide. And they threw them in that trench and started shooting at them. And when they started shooting at them, I ran, I ran away over the hill. And it was here, close to the village, when those soldiers were coming back, they met—a captain was coming riding a horse—he met those soldiers. He asked them where they were coming from. And they, those soldiers, said that they were shooting Jews. And the captain said, “You, you filled your life with a lot of sins.” They [the soldiers] said, “If that was the order... and a soldier is a soldier.” And that is all I saw.

Q: So, first you saw them in a column at the edge of the village or were they still in the village?

A: At the edge of the village. At the edge of the village.

Q: At the edge of the village. And...

A: They were outside the village.

Q: And how many were there in that column?

A: I can't possibly know how many they were. Some were older, some were younger.

Q: Were there kids among them as well?

A: I think there were. There weren't really small ones, but some young ones, about my age back then. There were a few. They, the Jews, there were many here in the village. They were tailors because back then there weren't ready-made clothes like nowadays. People were buying fabric and sewing it. They were making clothes.

[01:] 03:20:10 – [01:] 05:44:10

03:20 – 05:44

Q: And did you know anybody from the column?

A: Well, there was an old man here, he was also a tailor. His name was Smil. He had a beard. And he had a son. His son ran away. And after the war was over, some Jews came back. And they lived here in the village. __. His name was Hierscu, was called Hierscu.

Q: Did you see Smil in that column?

A: I saw him, yes. And I saw an old Jewish woman and how a man from the village took her on his back—because she couldn't get off the cart, they brought her there by cart—and he took her on his back and threw her in that trench, that Jewish woman.

Q: Did you see this, there at the pit, how...?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: What was the name of that Jewish woman?

A: Her name was Ita. But her daughter—she was a doctor in Calarasi—I have forgotten what her name was. And then, who was there [as her patient] from the Balerca family she poisoned him—that man didn't live anymore.

Q: How do you know about such happenings?

A: I know because the whole village knew. I have forgotten her name, that Jewish woman. She saddened many of the Balerca family.

Q: But who was the man who you said threw [the old woman] in the pit?

A: Ion Balerca.

Q: Ion Balerca.

A: Yes, Balerca Ion.

Q: The old woman, Ita, did she come on foot with the column or...?

A: She came with the column but was brought by the cart...she couldn't walk on foot.

Q: Who brought her on the cart?

A: Well, those people aren't alive anymore, but he was from Grecu's family, Ion Grecu.

Q: Ion Grecu was with the cart.

A: Yes.

[01:] 05:44:10 – [01:] 08:38:10

05:44 – 08:38

Q: And was only this old woman, Ita, in the cart, or were there others too?

A: Only her. Only her. The others were walking.

Q: About how many were in that column? Were there 10, 20, 100? Or approximately...

A: I can't say how many. Maybe about 20. Could there have been more of them? I can't ___. The last time [when you were here] you asked me and I told you that he came and collected their bones. Smil's son gathered them. And I remembered it was after I worked at the kolhoz—this was around the 60s and 70s—during those years they collected their bones. (A 'kolhoz' was a form of collective farming. The word is a contraction of the Russian term 'kollektivnoe hozyaistvo' or 'collective farm'.)

Q: In the 60s, 70s.

A: Yes.

Q: But this column from the village that you saw, who was it led by? Who was guarding it?

A: Soldiers.

Q: From which army?

A: Romanian.

Q: I see. And how many soldiers were there?

A: There were three soldiers. Should there have been more of them?

Q: From the place where you met that column all the way to the pit, how long of a distance did you walk with them?

A: Like this, we came from this side [*raises his hand probably indicating the direction of the road*] and then a little bit towards the valley on this very same road. But it was not asphalted back then.

Q: And about how many meters, kilometers? How far from the village?

A: Half a kilometer, just like that, not far...

Q: Half a kilometer from the village.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Back then, was it just like today or was end of the village somewhere else?

A: Just like today, because we have lived at the end of the village ever since I was born.

Q: And when the column arrived at the pit, what happened then? How did everything happen?

A: How? They threw them all in the trench; he loaded his gun and started shooting from the edge [of the trench]. And when they started shooting, I ran away. I ran. I came back over the hill.

Q: When they were thrown in the trench, were their clothes taken off or did they have their clothes on?

A: With their clothes on, as they were.

Q: Were they thrown in the pits in groups or all at once?

A: They couldn't separate them; they threw all of them in at once.

Q: Where did the soldiers stand?

A: Near the edge.

Q: Were they all on the same side or on different sides?

A: The soldiers, they were only on one side.

Q: All three were standing on one side.

A: What?

Q: All three were standing on one side.

A: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Q: And what type of guns were they using to shoot them?

A: In Russian they were called **rusnoi pulemet**, submachine gun Romanians called it. Yes.

[01:] 08:38:10 – [01:] 11:38:10

08:38 – 11:38

Q: Did they have only one submachine gun like that or did they have more of them?

A: Only one I think. I think the other ones had guns too, but I wasn't paying attention. They were shooting with that one only.

Q: Did only one or all of them shoot?

A: I am telling you that I didn't see anything after that because I ran when they started shooting. I got scared and I ran away. I ran so fast...

Q: From how far away did you see all this?

A: I was about 10 meters away, there, pretty close.

Q: From that distance, could you see what was in the pit?

A: No, no, no.

Q: You couldn't see.

A: No, no.

Q: Could you hear anything?

A: I could.

Q: What did you hear?

A: What did I hear? I heard screaming...don't you know how it is when people are terrified?—Moaning...

Q: Last time you told us that someone from the Jews told them that he wanted to be shot quickly. And last time you said that one of those Jews, one of the boys, asked to be shot, "Shoot me!"

- A: Yes, yes, apparently there was one shouting. He was cursing God and “Shoot me!” meaning that he wanted to be shot faster so he wouldn’t see everything that was happening there.
- Q: Did you learn this from other people or did you hear yourself what he said?
- A: Other people told me so, yes...
- Q: Somebody told you this.
- A: Yes, I am telling you. I ran away. When they started shooting, I ran.
- Q: After you ran, could you still hear them shooting?
- A: Yes, from where I was, I could still hear shooting.
- Q: Did you later return to the pit to see it or not?
- A: No, no. I didn’t return to the pit at all, no. I didn’t return.
- Q: But you were telling us that some people rushed to take the clothes off those Jews.
- A: Right, right. I heard. I heard others saying that some people stayed and undressed them from their clothes.
- Q: This means that you know all this from other people.
- A: Yes, I heard this.
- Q: But you, personally, you didn’t see that.
- A: No, I ran. I got scared. I was 16 years old and I ran away.
- Q: And the Jews’ belongings, what happened to them?
- A: What?
- Q: What happened to the belongings of the Jews of your village?
- A: Well, I don’t know this. What do I know? But what belongings did they have? They didn’t have anything, only a sewing machine, and that’s it.
- Q: And what happened to the sewing machine?
- A: Well, but how would I know? *[He laughs.]* I know of one person who kept the sewing machine of one of those Jews, because the Jew was a tailor. He was making clothes. And

the sewing machine was left in his house—because those Jews didn't have their own house, they lived where they could—and the man used that sewing machine. And then he became the tailor instead of the Jews. That's how it was.

[01:] 11:38:10 – [01:] 14:35:10

11:38 – 14:35

Q: And what was that man's name?

A: Huh?

Q: What was the name of that man?

A: Costea Guta. The Guta family. Yes.

Q: Besides the Jews, back then, did they kill other people or only the Jews?

A: They only went after the Jews. Yes.

Q: Do you know if the gypsies were...?

A: What?

Q: Weren't the gypsies rounded up or killed?

A: No, no, no. We heard that some were taken to **Bogdan [Bogdand]**, but they didn't round them up in our village.

Q: So you never saw that?

A: No, no.

Q: Besides this incident, did you see other cases? Cases when they took them, gathered them or killed them? Columns?

A: I didn't see anything else. But, I am telling you it was wartime. They were saying, "This is how war is." And I was 16 years old, so—they were taken to war at army age, and they enrolled me too, so I went to war. Then during the war, I saw many things there, but around here I didn't see anything else. Only when the Germans were here and they gathered...—and the houses—they took __ from the people. We were taken from the village. We lived in the forest.

Q: Did anyone from your village stay alive, besides Hierscu, the one you told us about, or only him?

A: Some did. Those who ran away beforehand. Some did and came back to Moldova, around here.

Q: So, only those who evacuated before the war, before they came... Only those stayed alive.

A: What?

Q: Of those who stayed in the village, was anyone left alive?

A: No one was left. They all died. Yes.

Q: Last time you told us that you heard about some people from Dumbravita, who went...

A: *[He laughs.]* Yes, that's what I heard. There is a town there—a town like—and there were many Jews there—there used to be a big market there. There still is a big market there. And I heard that people from a village nearby, from Dumbravita, they went with bludgeons, with sticks to kill the Jews. That's all. I just heard, I didn't see that.

Q: But this happened in which village?

A: In the same year.

Q: In the same year. But in which village? What was the name of the village?

A: Vlad.

Q: The village was called Vlad.

A: Yes.

Q: And you heard that people from Dumbravita went to Vlad?

A: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Q: Who told you this?

A: Who told me this?

Q: Yes.

A: Well, who? Like that, when people go to the market, they say this and that. And then, there [I heard].

[01:] 14:35:10 – [01:] 17:01:10

14:35 – 17:01

Q: Do you know, besides—you said that gypsies were taken to **Bogdan [Bogdand]**—but the communists, back then in [19]41, in that period weren't they rounded up or killed?

- A: But around that time there weren't any communists here. Only later there were many of them, but back then there weren't any yet.
- Q: But before the war, were there Cuzists in your village?
- A: There were Cuzists before the war. There was a mayor. There were several parties: the Cuzist Party, the Liberal Party, the Peasants Party—I don't know—the Legionnaires Party. And there was voting. There was one party [leading] for two months, next month another party. And here, there was a mayor from the Cuzist Party—and he was taken during a night in [19]40, and he died—with his kids and everyone [he was taken]. The kids and his woman came back after the Jews were taken, but he never did.
- Q: Before the war, what kind of relationship did the Cuzists have with the Jews?
- A: Well, this one I remember. I was a small kid. And those from the Cuzist Party were coming when they were the ruling party. They were coming from Hirova, singing. And they went to the mayor, the one I said was taken later with his kids and—but the Jews were hiding in basements and—they were hiding, there wasn't anybody, you couldn't find anybody. And that party was leading for a while, then another one, and it was a game like this for some time, between those parties.
- Q: But why were the Jews hiding?
- A: Well, if those people were going from door to door, how could they not hide?
- Q: They were going around the village looking for a fight?
- A: Yes, yes, yes.
- Q: So were those Cuzists only from your village, or were they from elsewhere too?
- A: Well, I told you they were coming singing from Hirova, from those parts, they were coming and gathering at the mayor's [house].
- Q: And how many of them were gathering? How many Cuzists could there have been?
- A: I can't tell you how many were gathering. There were groups of people there, I don't know how many anymore.
- Q: And did you ever see them beating any of the Jews from your village?
- A: I didn't see. I didn't see. But when they were coming and gathering and having meetings, then the Jews were hiding.
- Q: Thank you very much.

[01:] 17:01:10 – [01:] 18:16:25

17:01 – 18:16

Outside, where the events occurred.

[Both the interviewer and interviewee are part way up a small grass-covered hill in a field. They face downhill towards the valley where Nicolae explains the Jews were shot and thrown in a pit.]

Q: Tell me please, where was the column of Jews coming from?

A: From there. *[Indicates with his hand towards the top of the hill.]*

Q: The column was coming from there. *[Indicates with her hand towards the top of the hill.]*

A: Yes.

Q: Which way did they lead them?

A: They led them this way *[indicates to their right side]*, right towards the trench, they led them *[indicates downhill towards the valley]*.

Q: Where was the trench?

A: Where? Right where that man was. Right there. *[Indicates with his hand downhill.]*

Q: There, near the grass? There?

A: Yes, yes. There, near the tall grass, there.

Q: And where were you standing?

A: I was about ten meters away.

Q: Where exactly?

A: Like this, where I am standing right now. Right in this place.

Q: Right in this place, yes?

A: Yes, yes. And there were more people down there. *[Indicates the bottom of the hill.]* And the old woman from the cart *[indicates the top of the hill]*—one man took her on his back and took her there and threw her in the trench. *[The man carried the Jewish woman downhill.]* And when they started shooting, I ran away fast, over the hill. *[Indicates uphill.]*

Q: Where did the soldiers stand?

A: This way. This way. *[Indicates that the soldiers were facing towards the valley.]*

Q: This way. And when the Jews were brought all at once, where were they left?

A: Where? They threw them directly in the trench. Right there, they were thrown. *[Indicates downhill.]*

Q: Was there a place for them to walk [down into the pit] or did they simply throw them in there?

A: Straight in there, from the edge they were falling as if off a wall.

Q: Clear, I understood. Thank you very much.

[01:] 18:16:25

18:16

Conclusion of Interview