

BÂRSAN, Lucian  
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Box 1, Tape 1

In this interview, Lucian Gheorghe Bârsan, born in February of 1932 in his home village of Giurgiu, discusses events concerning the German Army entering the capital of the country, Bucharest, during World War II, during his time there. He comments on the situation in Bucharest as it descended into chaos and describes a traumatic incident from that period: at the age of nine seeing approximately a hundred and fifty Jewish corpses on a highway near Bucharest.

**[01:] 00:31:09 – [01:] 05:05:00**

**Q:** Please tell us your name.

**A:** My name is Bârsan Gheorghe Lucian; I am a Romanian citizen and an Orthodox Christian.

**Q:** When were you born?

**A:** I was born on February 16, 1932.

**Q:** Where were you born?

**A:** I was born in Giurgiu, 60 km from Bucharest.

**Q:** Were you nine years old in January 1941?

**A:** Yes, I was almost nine.

**Q:** How did you arrive in Bucharest?

**A:** My grandparents were living in Sighișoara at that time and my grandfather died. On January 20, 1941, we received a telegram calling my father and me to the funeral. My father had a 1933 model Ford and we got in the car, drove to Bucharest to pick up my uncle who was living there, and then went to Sighișoara together by train. However, the rebellion broke loose on the following day.

**Q:** Did this happen on the 20th?

**A:** Yes, and on the 21st, in the early morning, the rebellion started. We heard on the radio that all railway stations and everything else had been closed, so we could not get to Sighișoara anymore.

It was then that my father and I decided to go back to Giurgiu. We got in the car and drove through the rebellion; it was a nightmare. We arrived with great difficulty at 10 p.m. at the Filaret railway station, which was guarded by the army.

**Q:** Do you remember what you saw on your way through the city?

**A:** I saw wounded, dead, fire, fights between the army and the Iron Guard; it was a nightmare for a nine year old.

**Q:** You were on your way to the Filaret railway station?

**A:** We actually wanted to flee Bucharest, but we did not manage to. Other people were telling us, "Go to the Filaret railway station; that is where the army is." We knew we could not get out of Bucharest, so we told ourselves, "Let's go to the Filaret station, leave the car there and take the first train to Giurgiu." Only it did not happen this way; we reached the Filaret station at 10 p.m., the army allowed us to sit in the waiting room, so we stayed there all night. It was there that my father met a colonel from Giurgiu, together with his eight-year-old daughter; they were also stuck in Bucharest due to the rebellion. On the second day, due to the fact that he was a colonel and in charge of a regiment in our home town, we managed to get in the car in the early morning and leave for Giurgiu. However, we had to stop close to the Calul Bălan Inn, approximately where Progresu Square is now located, as the German Army entered Bucharest. They were coming from Giurgiu. They had been there since October 1940. The German Army's parade lasted approximately two hours. Afterwards, we got back in the car and drove away. We were shot at by the first military barrage, but because the colonel from Giurgiu traveled with us, he identified himself, the soldiers saw there were two children in the car, and there were no Iron-Guardists fleeing Bucharest, so they let us through. We drove through the town of Jilava, over the bridge guarding the Sabaru River; further along the road, on the right-hand side, there is a grove, an area of the Sabaru River liable to inundation. There were a lot of people gathered on the highway as we arrived [*he sighs*]; approximately 50 dead bodies were lying on the left side of the road—the people were saying there were fifty of them—while on the right side, there were more than a hundred. Every one of them was naked; every one had been stripped of everything they had on them during the night, rings had been snatched from them, their teeth had been pulled out.

**[01:] 05:05:01 – [01:] 11:11:11**

**Q:** Is this what you heard then?

**A:** No, this is what I saw with my own eyes. My father had heard in Giurgiu that a very skilled Jewish doctor had been taken away, so he left us, children, in the car and went to look for this man, with the colonel. They moved away from the car, wandering from one corpse to another. At some point, we ended up alone, with dead bodies all around us, and we got scared, got out of the car, grabbed each other's hands and ran after our parents. We leapt over the dead bodies, ran through them, so of course I saw them up close. What I saw was appalling. There was snow outside and the corpses were frozen, yellow; their fingers and teeth had been pulled out.

**Q:** Do you remember their approximate age?

**A:** They were grown-ups and all of them were men.

**Q:** All men?

**A:** Only men and all of them were adults, not young people. We ran through the dead bodies until we reached our parents. They clasped us to their hearts, covered our heads with their coats and carried us back to the car in their arms; then we drove away, to Giurgiu. After this event, I could not sleep for a month; I had nightmares and kept waking up in the middle of the night, screaming.

**Q:** Did any of the bystanders tell you the dead men were Jews?

**A:** Everyone was saying that they were Jews and had been shot there the night before by the Iron-Guardists. They had been brought from Bucharest in trucks and shot in the back. I am telling you what the people gathered there were saying, and there was a crowd of villagers, a lot of persons, all stating that the deceased persons were Jews, shot by the Iron-Guardists and robbed by the locals.

**Q:** And then you left?

**A:** We drove to Giurgiu. We arrived there, the colonel left and my father went back, as he had been called up and was working as a driver on an ambulance from the hospital. As for us...the schools closed for a while and I kept having nightmares, I constantly woke up screaming and wailing. This went on for a month, until what I had seen faded from my memory a little, but I saw everything too close, we leapt over dead bodies—a nine-year-old boy and an eight-year-old girl, holding hands. I will never be able to forget this dreadful image. This must not happen again. I would like my testimony to also be an appeal: do everything possible to prevent this from ever happening again. *[Silence until interview resumes]*

**Q:** Did you stay at home, in Giurgiu, during the war?

**A:** Yes, I stayed in Giurgiu. On April 12, 1942, the town of Giurgiu was flooded, we were evacuated and we moved to Bucharest. Since then, May 1942, I have been living in Bucharest. We lost everything we had in Giurgiu, the house, the furniture, the car, all because of the flood. Our house remained three meters under water for three months. When we went to see it, there was nothing left but a hillock of silt. Those were hard and unfortunate times...hard and unfortunate. *[Silence until interview resumes]*

**Q:** You were saying that the corpses had been robbed a night before. Did you hear about this on the same day?

**A:** Yes, people from the towns of Jilava and from Adunații Copăceni gathered on the highway and were saying that Roma people had robbed the dead bodies during the night.

**Q:** Did you hear this while you were standing there?

**A:** Yes, right there, on the spot, and my father and the colonel kept talking about it on our way to Giurgiu: "Look what they have done...", because, as I have told you, those people had also torn out the dead bodies' fingers...

**Q:** Were they all naked?

**A:** All their clothes had been removed and they had all been shot in the back.

**Q:** Shot in the back?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** Were there no knife wounds or any other type of wounds?

**A:** No, just bullet wounds on their backs.

**Q:** Did you manage to find out whether they had been brought there naked?

**A:** They had been brought there with their clothes on, they had been shot and then those who had brought them left them there; then, during the night, they had been stripped of their clothes and robbed.

**Q:** Were the locals saying that the ones who did this were Roma people?

**A:** Yes, they were saying Roma people had stolen their clothes.