

KOVAČEV, Velinka  
Former Yugoslavia Witnesses Documentation Project  
Serbian  
RG-50.585\*0002

Box 1, Tape 1

In this interview **Velinka Kovačev** describes the deportation of Serbian citizens to be shot carried out by the Hungarian army, which was collaborating with Nazi regime. She describes places where the shootings took place and the techniques that were used for committing these atrocities. In addition, she gives a very detailed description of the disposal of bodies. She explains that during the war, she lost her father, who was shot in the village of **Žabalj** (present-day Vojvodina) where her whole family lived before the killings took place. She explains how afterwards, they were forced to move to Novi Sad.

**[01:] 00:34:07 – [01:] 01:10:14**

She gives details of her life, born in 1937 in **Žabalj**, where she spent the entirety of World War II; explains how after the war, she moved to Novi Sad with her grandmother; explains how on Christmas rumors were spreading that the war was about to begin and that round-ups would be organized; explains that no one thought that any specific ethnic groups would be targeted; explains that the gendarmes that spoke Hungarian gathered citizens and took them to to the municipality where [they] were registered; explains that she and her family were registered in their house; points out that gendarmes insulted her mother calling her a “Serbian whore” because she refused to register the children, believing it would save them from deportation; points out that the uniforms of the Hungarian army differed from the others because they had fur on their caps; mentions that some of the local Hungarian citizens collaborated with the occupying forces; explains how they would bring the army door to door, identifying villagers who were subjects of the occupier’s interest; explains that most of the villagers who did not want to collaborate were executed, while the rest escaped with the “Partizani” (the Communist army in Yugoslavia) and remained to live in **Žabalj** after the war; explains that Gendarmes came to round up her family and communicated with their mother in Hungarian; explains that her mother knew Hungarian because she grew up with Hungarian children; points out that because her mother knew the language, she was able to save her children; recalls that the gendarmes believed that her mother would bring up her children in a good manner because she knew “right values”; explains how the gendarmes believed that Vojvodina would remain Hungarian territory permanently; *[She shows the picture of her family that was taken one month before her father’s execution and names all the family members in the photograph].*

**[01:] 01:10:15 – [01:] 01:20:23**

She explains how when they reached the town square, children were separated from their parents and were left in the storage room while their parents were taken to be questioned; explains that the questioning lasted for a whole day; points out that by the end of the day, her parents were released but her father was so badly beaten that he could not sit and laid in her mother’s lap; explains that they were informed that they would be transported to the barn where everyone would be registered; explains that her father was chosen to go to the

registration but because he was not capable of walking they were forced to drag him to the meeting point; explains that this was the last time she saw her father alive; explains that the rest of the family was allowed to go back home but not in their actual house, rather that of their grandparents; explains that a barn was used for the daily registrations and executions; points out that bodies were transported to the **Tisa River** and thrown in; points out that two of her uncles were also captured; explains that one was transported to Germany to a labor camp while the other uncle, only 17 years old, was transported to Hungary, where he was killed; *[she shows the picture of the uncle who was killed]*; mentions that after the war, a book was published with a list of all victims from the territory around Vojvodina, and more specifically in all the various cities and villages.

[01:] 01:20:24 – [01:] 01:30:01

She notes that the bodies were carried on wagons pulled by horses and that left a bloody trail points out that the river where the corpses were thrown is 9 kilometers from the place where the shootings took place; explains that the weather was cold and snow was falling, and these conditions did not allow for the traces to be removed; points out that she is not an eyewitness for these claims, but her friend who is ten years older than her and who was strong enough to run after the wagons witnessed all specifics mentioned above; adds that the wives of men who had been killed also ran after the wagons, in order to discover the fate of their husbands, sons, and brothers; points out that her godfather **Radojčin** was also summoned to come into the town, where he was forced to carry bodies from the place of execution onto the wagons; points out that during this task he recognized among the victims two of his sons, ages 16 and 20; explains that this task was given to him in order to shock him; assures that this scene could have been avoided, but it was a psychological game for the soldiers and proof of their cruelty; talks about the time when the war was over and the Partizani came; gives details about the killings, which took place in the town square, of villagers who had collaborated with the occupiers; explains that children were present during the first round of executions but that their mother forbade them from going again; insists that only those who helped organize the killing of Serbs were executed; points out that Hungarians who had collaborated were ordered to leave the village; explains that they moved to Temerin, Bačko Gradište, and other villages in that region where round-ups were not organized and where they did not need to fear for their personal safety; explains that the villages of **Žabalj** and Čurug suffered gravely from the Hungarian occupation, therefore both villages pursued a policy of expelling collaborators; adds that ethnic Germans in the village fled with the Hungarians for fear of their own security even though there was no real danger for them; explains that this is the reason why many houses were empty and consequently were given to refugees from Bosnia.

[01:] 01:30:02 – [01:] 01:37:40

She explains how after the war the primary organizers of the round-ups were executed; points out that one of them was hanged in the center of the village, while others were taken out of the village and were executed next to the channel; remembers that different armies were present after the war: Russians, Partizani from Vojvodina, and Partizani from Bosnia; explains that because of different newcomers she cannot identify exactly who carried out the executions of convicted Hungarians; explains that those who were executed were blindfolded, with their arms tied behind their backs and then were shot by rifles; points out that it was not known which rifle was loaded with real gunpowder so that the real executioner could not be named; explains that Russians remained in the village for approximately three months; explains that many people went to see the executions take place because they lost someone

during the Hungarian occupation and wanted to be assured that the oppressors met the same fate; remembers that the court was obliged to confirm active participation in the execution of Serbs, and if the case was well-founded these Hungarians were executed.