

An Original Source Interview with / Interviu su:

Juozas Jakavonis and his family

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Translation Text

Could you introduce yourself?

I am Juozas Jakavonis. I was born in 1925 and on July 10th I will be 81 years old. I was born in this Kašiūnų village which has a long history that I will not go into now. When the war was with Germany, the German army was here and we got to see what Germans were like; afterwards when the [war] front returned we knew what was waiting for us with the return of Russians. They returned in 1944 and were brutal to the Lithuanians. They shot those they took into the army. They would take young men, march them away, and would just shoot them, not taking them alive. So we started to hide. By the fall, no, it was June of 1944, the Free Lithuania Army and General Daukantas who withdrew with the Germans and who later died in America, was the first to organize here. Afterwards when the Russians came back and started shooting young men, we became partisans. At the time I started, I was 21 years old and met Colonel Kazimieraitis, who was the leader of the eastern Lithuanian command. Two months later, I met Adolfas Ramanauskas, codename Hawk, who was a leader here. We had established summertime bunkers but in the winter of 1944, Hawk asked me and, of course, I asked my father who let us dig a bunker here to hide in. I am now the only one left alive who was part of this [partisan] staff.

The bunker was made during the fall 1945? Was the bunker made to get ready for winter?

Yes, we made the bunker to get ready for winter. We spent the winter here, waiting for help from the Americans so, here it is, only after 65 years do we finally see Americans who are here to film.. Then we were waiting for any help, for any kind of weapons, but it never came. Adolfas Ramanauskas who was born in America was especially hopeful and my cousin, Būtėnas at the time was serving [in the U.S. armed forces], fought the Japanese, he was a Captain in Vietnam.

Now, let's talk about that moment when the Russian soldiers surrounded your farm and the bunker and when the Russian soldiers tried to find the bunker by poking iron rods into the ground. Tell us the date when this happened and why they came to be here. Was it through a betrayal or just happened to search?

There were several incidents in this bunker and one such event happened in the spring of 1946. Maybe someone noticed or saw something and so 50 NKVD (secret Soviet security forces) surrounded the house. They brought my father to this place. They made him stand and watched his psychology, his reaction as they poked rods into the ground. We were warned of the attack so I had camouflaged the bunker and I ran to another bunker near the Merkys river and got in. I got my gun ready and had some hand grenades alongside. The others remained, Colonel Kazimieraitis, Hawk and two other partisans, codenames Cuckoo and Thrush. They loaded their guns and were lying down. Ramanauskas was writing, lamps were lit, a small lamp burnt while he wrote: How does a man feel before his death” in his notebook. Colonel Kazimieraitis was praying, the other two had loaded their weapons, and you know that underground you get sleepy from the lack of air. After 3 hours of searching the place, I got the news from my sister and I opened the entrance to the other bunker, which had no ventilation. Kazimieraitis, who was older

was out of breath when I let them out. Together we embraced and rejoiced that we were still alive.

Now about the moment when your father was alongside during the search. There was that moment when the bunker could have been found, but they didn't find it?

Our whole luck was as if God allowed this to occur.. There were poles in a heap on top of the bunker where the ground was soft, but just like in a miracle, the bunker remained undetected.

Now, let's go over again that moment when the soldiers were searching with rods and we want you to show us visually how they stabbed so that we can imagine it ...

When they were stabbing with poles around the bunker, around the edge, they were thinking there must be an entry. Others were watching my father's reaction. Father was placed there so they could watch his reaction. He was scared but kept repeating, there was nothing here. While they kept saying there must be something, thinking they'll find something. As I said it must have been God's will that they didn't find anything, maybe it was all the prayers said by my mother, my grandmother even Kazimieraitis prayed... maybe it was God, just like a miracle.

Going into the forest and joining the ranks of the partisans, you were in essence risking your life, you could have picked a more neutral path without risk. What forced you to risk your life?

What forced me to risk...well, as I mentioned earlier about them it was shooting the young men. Supposedly they were recruiting you into the army, taking you away and then shooting you somewhere along the road. Still in 1944 when the [Russian] front came, there was no partisan movement. All of my relatives, my mother's birthplace, uncle.. everything was burnt, many were shot dead...

All this is understandable. But by joining the partisans, you could expect to be shot and you still picked to fight rather than collaborate or make some sort of compromise, you chose to fight. What determined your decision?

What determined it, it was patriotism. From my young days, I was taught to love my homeland, Lithuania and God. You sacrifice for that. Those who were afraid to die, they registered with Soviets and went to jail. But still, most [men] stayed in the ranks and fought for their homeland, knowing there is death, they still fought on for their country.

What would you like to say to young people who have not seen these things, about love for one's homeland, why should they need to know the history of the decisions you made or about any of this?

How should I say this... You see, the youth today is not like what we were growing up. Because over these fifty years or more of Soviet occupation, they wanted to turn us into some kind of robots that we wouldn't know anything about where we came from or what our homeland is or anything about our own history. So while I'm still alive I want to talk, I even wrote a book so that people would know what Communism is. We had believed that the Communism would bring well-being, instead it brought to me, brought to all humanity not just in Lithuania but even

to America the greatest wrong. If youth doesn't come together as a body against this Communism, then it will be no good.

Do you carry anger towards Communism or the whole system that brought evil to Lithuania and do you think they should have to repent or apologize for this?

It was such a system itself. I had lived in Russia for 12 years and I saw how they destroyed, killed their own people. But now they have come to their senses - they destroyed their churches and now they are building them again. They themselves are disillusioned with that Communism.

Do you think that this system - maybe Russia which represented and ruled that system - should apologize, somehow repent? Is this needed?

I don't think that their apology will be of any use. Those brutal times are gone. More importantly, there should be peace, that they would not repeat those errors which they committed earlier.

What do you think about Lithuanian collaborators, those who went along and who still live, about these people? What do you think about them?

They, you know, they will pass away the way they are. They worshipped that god that was not theirs.. They will not change from what they've always been until they all pass away.

Do you think that they need to be put somehow on trial - through legal means?

I don't think that a conviction would be better than they themselves perform repentance - a trial can't solve these things..

Interview with Juozas Jakavonis wife

I'm Jakavonienė Zosė from the village of Kapyniskės. I was born in 1931.

Tell us what happened in 1941?

It was in 1940 first, when they took my father. There were five of us, children left behind. I was the oldest, nine years old while the youngest was only 2 weeks old, and then my mother and grandmother were also left behind. They took him and we knew nothing about what happened to him. He just disappeared and was gone. Then later in 1946 when mother had left to take food to my brother who was jailed in Alytus and I wasn't at home, only the small children - one was 8 years old, another 10 and a brother 7 years old. My grandmother was ill then but they still threw her into that car and then they took all of them away and deported.

And deported?

Deported

To Siberia?

To Siberia and over the Ural. It was very cold, snowdrifts, 30 degrees below Celsius (minus 22 Fahrenheit), taken away in wagons.

Tell us about your father who was taken in 1940, did he return?

They took him then to jail. For how long, I don't know. Then after a year or more he sent a short letter of maybe twenty words: "live whatever way you can, because I probably won't be able to return"..

Did he return?

No. He didn't return. We never saw him again.

We want to ask you about your family's state of mind and the family's feelings in 1940s when your father was arrested. Russians just arrived and suddenly it all started - repressions started. What did you feel?

What do you think, a small two week old child was left after feeding, the baby started to cry and cry and then died after four months. My mother ran to [the town of] Marcinkonys to look for my father everywhere but did not find him. While arresting they only said that my farther possessed a rifle. My farther responded: "Look for it and if you find the rifle, shoot me on spot". They even didn't search for it, they just took my farther and that's it. My mother was desperate - nothing was left behind, not even the doors, everything was turned over, even the potatoes were taken, nothing was left, everything overturned. Mother took another horse, she couldn't use ours and she rode to Marcinkonys and then later to Vilnius, going to where they might be but she was not allowed to see them. They told to her: "when they (children) grow up, they will come back home by themselves". And that's all.

That was in 1946?

Yes, in 1946.

Now I want to ask you about 1948 when you were deported to Siberia?

I also wanted to say that they [the children] were in Russia for nine months and when they returned, mother hardly recognized them but they knew her. Their health had deteriorated and they had been ill and almost died. Afterwards in spring 1948 they deported us. They took mother, myself and the children who had returned, then we all were deported. Well, later they said we were innocent.. But, they were ordered to deport us and they deported us.

Could you tell more details how you were deported?

They came at night and said, "Get ready to go to Siberia". Mother said to them: "We were once deported by mistake and now you want to deport us again?". They said: "We were ordered and we're deporting you" and they didn't say anything more.

What sort of things did you take with you? Did they put you into cars?

Nothing, what could you take.. Into the horse-drawn wagon, there was nothing you could bring..

Was it in 1948 they took you?

In 1948. Mother, myself and two sisters and a brother - the five of us.

Your mother and her four children, all underaged?

The youngest girl was already dead.

We want to understand better the scale of the deportations. They took your family.. Did they take your neighbors or families from surrounding villages?

From our Kapinėškių village only us were deported, even though it was a large village. While from other villages, yes they deported people. For example, they took Juozas' father, also from Marcinkonys village. They took some at one time, others at a different time. Not all of them at once.

If we consider the deportations during the time from 1945 to 1952, would you say that a lot of families in southern Lithuania suffered from deportations?

Of course, very many.. Around here one third of the families..

What sort of feelings do you have now towards these people – let's call them communists or collaborators who carried all of this out against Lithuanian nation?

It was not good but what can you do.. So many years have gone by, you just want to forget.. It was impossible to live..

Was it very difficult to live?

Of course. We almost died of hunger.

What was the hardest moment?

When our youngest children were taken. They were jaundiced and ill.. Afterwards they were sick for a long time and couldn't eat anything. We had to endure so much in that one and half years and then again we were deported. And our home, nothing remains there, our presence was wiped away, they moved everything away, there's nothing there...

You feel the most sorry for your little brothers and sisters?

Yes.

How about your mother?

My mother took everything deeply into her heart, she tortured herself and died from the nervous strain. She was still young, she passed away 45 years old.

Did she die in Siberia or after she returned?

After she returned, but already in Siberia she was not well...

But as you had said, in a Catholic sense, you don't hold anger? Much time has gone by...

Exactly, I don't want even to remember. Let God judge them.

Interview with Juozas Jakavonis' grandson

I am Justas Kindras, I was born in 1985 in Druskininkai. Currently I am studying at University. Lithuanian history is very important for me because of my grandparents, also my grandfather is a former partisan. I am myself very interested in history, try to understand it deeper. I respect my grandparents and their story inspires me to leave something positive after myself.

What is your opinion about current Lithuanian young people- are they interested in Lithuanian history?

Maybe not enough. From another side, it is possible to blame Lithuanian state strategy which doesn't really encourage such interest in Lithuanian history. However, while I am visiting my grandparents, I see often enough when young people come to visit the bunker that my grandfather re-created in his backyard (in the original location), listen to his stories about his partisan's times. So, it is interesting to them and I think that such interest will increase in the future.

What is your personal perspective on the Communist system that occupied Lithuania for the last 50 years?

I think that they are guilty but we need to look at the future and we need to communicate with them in a constructive way, especially with Russia. We are neighbors with them anyway. But they could remember all this history and acknowledge it, not ignore it.

Do you feel any anger towards the Soviet system or Russians?

At the moment I don't feel any hatred. However, as also our Seimas (Parliament) approved the declaration, I would prefer that they would acknowledge the history and apologize. It would make our communication much easier. Currently, they just ignore us.

Interview with Juozas Jakavonis in his home

In April 1947 we were taken by train along this line (on the map) through Khabarovsk, Buchta Vanina. Then we were loaded into a ship, we thought that they were bringing us to United States when we passed the Japan, and eventually were brought to Magadan. Then, along the Kalymos river up to the concentration camp.

How many years did spend in this concentration camp?

I spent 7 years in that camp. Then I spent additional 2 years in exile not far from that camp. They also wanted to fly me to Anadyr but their plane broke down. Around that time, two Yakuts wanted to escape to Alaska through frozen sea but they were caught.

Tell us why did you write this book, how did you come up with the idea?

I can say that the first idea came up when I was still in the jail here and people were shot. We were asked to inform their relatives but we even didn't have where to write on. The only name I can remember was Major Semaška, mentioned by me earlier, I can't remember other names anymore. They asked us to let people know about their fate if we survived. That was one of my key motivations.

But only now you were able to publish the book? It's better later than never?

Yes. It was not possible to publish it during the Soviet times. And lately I was working on the material, finding witnesses.