

**Collective testimony of Mosze Ment, Icchak Markusiewicz, Naftali Ziv and Mair Smulevic,
all born in Sveksna, Lithuania, regarding their experiences in Sveksna**

English Translation by Esther Rechtschafner, March 2022

The original Yiddish documents and translation to Hebrew made be viewed at:

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Testimony

Yad VaShem #171/14

- Witnesses:
1. Mosze Ment – 15.12.1904
Father-Chaim. Mother- Yehudit
 2. Naftali Ziv -25.10.1924
Father-Mosze. Mother -: Pesia Rachel Krom
 3. Mair Shmulevic – 26.02.1910
Father -Hirshe. Mother -Elie Ladon
 4. Iccak Markovsevic – 01.08.1924
Father – Eliayhu . Mother - Tojbe-Lea Glezer

Born and lived in Sveksna. Litvania

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Testimony witnesses

1. Mosze Ment Born 15 December 1904 in Sveksna, LITVANIA. His trade was a horse dealer and farmer. Father: Chaim. Mother: Yehudit
2. Naftali Ziv: Born 25 October, 1924 in Sveksna, LITVANIA. Education: 4 classes in Lituianian high school in Sveksna. Father: Mosze. Mother: Rachel Pesia Krom
3. Mair Smulovic. Born 26 February, 1910 in Sveksna Graduate of elementary school. Trade: butcher. Father: Hirshe. Mother: Ele Ladon
4. Iccak Markosevic. Born 1 June 1924 in Sveksna. Graduate of elementary school. Trade: butcher. Father: Awrham Eliayhu. Mother: Toubé-Leja Glezer

The four witnesses lived in Svenska since they were born. At the time of the beginning of the WAR between Germany and Russia on Sunday 22 June 1941 they were in Sveksna.

They gave their testimony on 24 June 1946 in the Displaced Persons Camp Grafeling, near Munchen

The person who received and wrote down their testimony was Leib Koniuchowski.

The destruction of the Jews of the town of Sveksna

The geographic position of the town

Sveksna is located in the Taurage area: 60 km from Taurig and 18 km from Naumiestis (Zemajciu) and 7 km from the Memel border, after this area was taken from Lithuania, by the Nazis in 1939.

The Jewish population and their livelihood

In 1924 there was a big fire in the entire town. The Jewish population received help from their friends and relatives from all over the world, especially from the USA. With great vigor and stubbornness, they rebuilt their houses and as a result of the help they received, they built stone houses (the municipality forbade building wooden house in the center of the town), paved the sidewalks, and decorated the town with gardens. The town became one of the most beautiful places in the Taurig area. The Jews loved their town very much.

The Jews were proud of the nice park, where the youth spent much of their free time. On the Sabbath, after lunch (cholent) the Jewish famines would stroll there. Games were organized and the youth were happy. The older and religious Jews could not overcome a bad influence (Yeser hara) and went to the park to enjoy breathing the good air and to enjoy the scenery. The park was located on the estate of the prince (Rozen Graf Platen). His palace was located on his estate.

There was only one place in the town, where the Jews, for generations did not go to. This was Verzan Street. It was written in the town's rules that Jews were not allowed to build house or to live there. It was noted there that a few generations back, stones were thrown, by the Christians, on Jews there, when there was a funeral procession to the Jewish cemetery and many were wounded. Then the local Rabbi forbade Jews to live there. The Jews that had lived there had to move and funeral processions went another way. This warrant continued until the inhalation of the Jews of the town.

Before the War, there were 110-5 Jewish families in Sveksna. Most were merchants or small tradesman. A few worked in agriculture. Most of the Jews had their own fruit and vegetable gardens, had cows and chickens and lived as village people.

The local flour mill belonged to Hillel & Mendel Javner. The large clothing stores belonged to Jews: one to Moshe Ziv and the second to Mosze-Josef Joselevic and the third to Bajle Markus and the fourth to Chaim Rypkin and others. The Jews traded in Memel. They were dealers in agricultural products, meat and horses.

After the Memel area was annexed from Lithuania, in 1939, the economic situation of the Jews deteriorated and many received aid from relatives in other countries. The Kalukeriskiai estate that belonged to the Jew Shajevic was located 3 km from Sveksna.

Social life

There was Hebrew elementary school, a cheder (elementary Torah study school for boys, a Study Hall and a Prayer house. Some Jewish families, who had a bit of money sent their children to the Lithuanian high school. Most of the youth belonged to Zionist organizations where they spent their free time. A few took part in illegal activities of the communist party, during the period of the Smetanas regime., before Lithuania was captured by the Soviet Union and afterwards by Germany.

Relations with the Lithuanians

These relations were never actually good. The local youth who studied in the local high school were Anti-Semitic. Not only did they study sciences in high school; but they also learned how to harass Jews. They did so, with any Jew who annoyed them in any way in social and economic aspects. They believed in the blood-libels of the middle-ages, where it was believed that Jews killed Christian children so that they could use their blood for baking matzot for Passover. Before every Passover, the Jews feared the Anti-Semitic uprisings. Before a Passover in the 1930's the Lithuanians plotted against the Jew Ruven Srulovic, saying that he slaughtered a Lithuanian boy for baking matzot. A crowd burst into his house to look for the slaughtered boy and everything in the house was damaged and belongings were stolen.

The next day the boy was found, and the Lithuanians claimed that the Jews were rightened and returned the boy. The frightened Jews spent that Passover, closed inside their houses.

After Memel was annexed to be part of the German state (the third Reich) there were many incidents. Tar was spread on the signs of Jewish shops, and notices were distributed that called for the Christian population to boycott Jewish shops.

After the Soviets captured Lithuania in the summer of 1940, the Anti-Semites felt like hurt dogs and started to try to suck up and to become friends with the Jews. The condition of the lower income class Jews got a bit better; but the condition of the merchants got worse. During the Soviet regime, like equal people and were not frightened by Jew-haters. Most of the Jewish youth, like the Lithuanians, took part in the economic and social-political life of the town.

The outbreak of the WAR

Soviet lieutenants lived on the estate of the count Platter. On 11 June 1941 the residents of the town felt a nervousness in the army offices and with the Soviet citizens.

The next day, Sunday, at 4 in the morning, the sound of a German artillery attack came from the estate. The Jews were in panic. They all took their needed belongings and fled, some in wagons and some by foot, to the nearby villages. The Germans captured Sveksna on that day. The farmers and the villagers immediately began to expel the Jews from their houses and farms. Some even threatened to shoot them and shouted "you had enough good days! You will not sing Soviet songs". By Friday 27 June, 1941 all the Jews that has fled to the villages, returned to Sveksna.

When they returned to their homes, they didn't find their agricultural equipment. The local Lithuanians managed to take their cows, horses, wagons and so had also looted some household belongings. The S.S men were stationed there. German army units marched in the streets. Town people and people from the villages appeared on the streets with white ribbons on their sleeves. They were all armed, and happy.

The local citizens government

Many Lithuanians, who had worked for the government at the time of the Sematnstregime (free Lithuania), were fired at the tie of the Soviet rule. They appeared again, armed and renewed the local citizens government The head of the town was Penkauskas, a farmer from the village Inkakliai, who had previously had an important post. The Lithuanian Lomsargis, who also had been active in the free Lithuanian government, who lived in Sveksna, held a position in this government. The commanders of the police and of the Partisans (Fascists, who sided with the Germans and participated in the inhalation of the Jews) were Lomsargis, from the village Vilkeenai , about 2 km from Sveksna, and Penkauskas a local Lithuanian, who was in the border police force at the time of Free Lithuania. The main job that the local government wanted to do was ' to solve the problem of Sveksna Jews".

The first victims

Mosze Shapiro had been a member of the committee of the local communist party, at the time of the Soviet rule, which lasted one year. He was in charge of the collection of produce from the farmers. He fled the town, on the first day of the outbreak of the WAR. However, the farmers from the village of Kurmial found him and attacked him. As is told, Mosze defended himself and shot a few times and thereby wounded one of his attackers. Then the farmers caught him, cruelly tortured him until he bled and at the end cut his stomach and poured seeds into it. Mosze was buried in the secular cemetery. During the first days of the German rule, the Partisans arrested the young brothers Jechiel and Leizer Lacon, and members of the communist youth - Komsomol: Zelda Lurie, Bluma Ickowic and Aida Kacon. They murdered the three girls, in the park on 26 June 1941. It was told that three naked girls were shot in the public garden. Exact facts are not known to the witnesses.

Two youths were kept in jail until Friday 27 June, 1941. Then they were sent to the study hall and were sent away the next day (Shabbat) with additional males to camps near the town of Heidkrug.

Israel Gesel had been secretary of the communist party at the time of Soviet rule. When the WAR broke out, he fled to a village near Silale. The Germans caught him and forced him to return to Sveksna. On the way, he met Jews who were returning from the villages and they suggested to him that he not return to Sveksna. He was caught by Partisans and shot him dead in Kveserna. he was buried on Thursday, 26 June, 1941 in the Jewish cemetery.

Decrees and small orders

During the first days of the German invasion, the Partisans ordered the Jews to bring immediately their radios, bicycles, gold, silver and everything of value to their headquarters. This was in the building that was previously used by the communist party and belonged to the Jew Shaje Aserovic. The Jews were forbidden to walk on the sidewalks and had a curfew to be inside their houses at certain hours. They had to put yellow star patches on their clothes, and on their front doors, they had to put a sign saying (dwelling of Jews' (Zyda Namas).

Every day the Partisans made the Jews leave their houses and do various physical jobs. The men were forced to clean the streets. The women worked cleaning windows and floors in German and Lithuanian buildings. In the afternoons they were allowed to return to their houses and eat, and immediately afterwards were forced to return to their tasks until early evening.

Armed Partisans watched them. They were not permitted to speak to each other while they worked and whoever did do so was hit. This continued until the end of the week.

The deportation of the Jewish men to camps

On Friday, 27 June 1941, during the afternoon hours, German S.S.manim and Lithuanian Partisans arrived in Sveksna in light cars, and went to all the Jewish houses and drove out all the males from the ages of 13-14 and up. They were ordered to take metal dishes and spoons with them. They

were forced to run to the yard of the Study Hall and to stand in a line there. Every time a group of them were sent into the corridor, where there were tables. S.S. manim sat at these tables. Others stood with sticks in their hands and with braided thick ropes. Every Jew received a portion of beatings when he entered the Study Hall. The voices of the hurt Jews were heard in the yard and those still there were sure that their friends had already been hung in the corridor...

The Jews were ordered to give all their money to the S.S. manim who sat at the first table, and their watches, wedding rings and other valuables at the second table. They were beaten with the sticks and the ropes at every opportunity, for example when their behavior was not liked by these clerks: when they did not approach a table in army order, when they did not stand at attention, and when they did not walk according to "standard" and other strange reasons. For all of these actions, they were beaten by the murderers until they bled.

These sadists pulled out Icchak Markulusevic's molar tooth. Mair Smulevic was entirely covered in blood, etc. at the third table, they were required to hand over all of personal identity cards and to answer a few contrary questions. All the men were listed. after these three tables they were examined by a Lithuanian doctor from Sveksna, by the name of Biliunas. He stood angry and mixed up in the corridor. This doctor was a good man and understood well what the Germans would do to the men that he would declare not fit to endeavor. Therefore, this good doctor declared them all fit for work.

This big corridor led to a smaller corridor, and then to steps that led to the top of the Synagogue. The Lithuanian barber Ivanauskas stood there. He was a known Jew hater and a partisan. He shaved their heads with a haircutting machine. This despicable person tore the hair from their heads and tore the beards from the religious.

After the "haircut" the men were forced to go upstairs to the "women's section". The S.S. stood on both sides of the steps with their sticks and beat everyone cruelly. They tried not to walk or even to run,; but to "fly" up the steps in order to not get beaten on their heads and as understood, the elderly received the most beatings, for they could not run very quickly.

They had to immediately stand in line in the "women's section". The monsters of the S.S. forced them to continuously do sport exercises without a break, to run, to fall and again to get up. They were beaten while doing these exercises. These despicable people did not pity the old and weak. They were also forced to exercise. The murderers of the S.S. tortured these unfortunate Jews with various sport exercises for about three hours.

It was hot outside and the "women's section" was suffocating and unbarable. The Jews were thirsty. The S.S. Mannim brought a bowl of cold water and played with their hands in it and showed "water"; but they didn't let the exhausted people drink. At about 6 PM they notified the women that they could bring their husbands food. They ate the very best food themselves.

In the late evening the exhausted and hurt men had to lie down to sleep on the floor. The S.S. Mannim guarded them; so that they would know what to "EXPECT" the next day, what sadistic torture awaited them. The German murderers talked purposely loudly between themselves. In the middle of the night, they woke up different Jews at different times and ordered them "to hand over

their weapons” and at this opportunity beat them. The next day, on the Sabbath morning 28 June 1941 the S.S. Mannim woke Rabbi Levitan and took him downstairs. They forced the Rabbi to gather up all the hairs from the haircuts and to burn them. The Rabbi explained to them that it was his Sabbath and he refused to fulfil this order.

The murderers hit the old Rabbi with their browning pistols, and even one time hit him on top of his head. The Rabbi did not obey the order. One of the S.S. murderers called from the "women's section" one of these testimony witnesses- Mosze Ment and made him pick up the hairs from the floor. They lit a piece of paper, and with this lit the hairs. Mosze was not allowed to take the hairs out of his hands. After this they hit the Rabbi and Mosze with murderous slaps and led them to the yard. On Friday night, at the beginning of Shabbat, they forced some of the youngest men to take the Torah scrolls and prayer books from the Study Hall and then they had to burn them. After the burning of the hairs, the S.S. murderers ordered Mosze to mix this burning hot dust with the dust from the burning of the Torah Scrolls, which was still hot. While doing this mixing, Mosze showed the Rabbi a piece of a Torah Scroll that didn't get completely burnt and read "remember what Amalek did to you".

The sadistic S.S. shot in the air a few times and the Jews who were closed in the "women's section" thought were sure that they had killed the Rabbi and Mosze Ment. Afterwards the Germans forced the Rabi and Mosze Ment to run to the "women's section".

On this same Friday in the late afternoon other men were forced to bring the Holy 'books from the Rabbi's house and from all the houses of Jews to the cemetery and to burn them there.

On Shabbat, 28 June, two trucks arrived at the Study Hall, with boards hanging on them. The young and the healthy men were chased out or the "women's section" and forced to-'fly" quickly down the stairs, and go into these trucks, without touching the hanging boards while running. These were high trucks and whoever touched a board was "honored" with beatings. There were two transports of men, each with 30 men. They were taken to a camp not far from the town of Heidhebrog. The remaining Jews were sent to other camps. All together, on this Shabbat about 120 men were sent from Sveksna. The old and the weak were not sent.

Aside from the heads of the local police and the Partisans, whose names were already stated, many Lithuanians from Sveksna and the surrounding villages took part in expelling the Jews from their homes. These are some of them:

1. Stonkus – a leather worker, who worked for Jews.
2. Jablonskis - a leather worker, who worked for Jews.
3. Zutautas- a Sveksna farmer.
4. Zutautas Juoras - Sveksna farmer.
5. Rupsas – a Sveksna farmer.
6. Jonas Rokas- a worker, who worked for Jews.
7. Justanas Montvidas
8. Juozas Montvidas
9. Antanas Slajis- a fisherman.
10. Petras Kaulakis- a high school student, the son of the pharmacist.
11. Stankus - a high school student.

There were also women among the Partisan Fascists, who excelled in their cruelty:

1. Kungit - a high school student.
2. Ona Gailute - a high school student from the town of Andrievė.
3. Bronia Kondratenkaite- a local high school student.

Many of the Sveksna high school students also took part in the expelling of the Jews; but these testimony witnesses do not remember their names.

The men were taken to 2 camps in -Heidenkrug they were examined by a doctor and received injections. After they finished with their registration, they were sent to the Piktaten camp, and to the Siwen camp. It is possible to read about life in these camps in a group testimony about the Heidheberg camp.

The annihilation of the remaining Svksna Jews

Since they were in various camps, the men found out about their wives from the Lithuanians. The children, and the old and weak people were put in the ghetto on "the Jewish Street" (Zydu Gatve). Nothing is exactly known about the men who remained in Sveksna, about life in this ghetto and about their tragic ending. However, it is well known that they were annihilated by the Lithuanian Partisans in the Raudiskiai-Inkakliai region, about six km from Sveksna. They were killed on 20 September, 1941, on Shabbat 20 Elul.

Comments by the testimony witnesses

All the information about the annihilation of the Jews of Sveksna, all the facts, the dates, names of people and geographic information that we gave in this group testimony, was given by us. We personally authorize this testimony and have signed our names on a separate document.

End of the English Translation