



ALEKSAS ALEKSANDRAVIČIUS

(Šiluva, Lithuania 1919 - Lithuania, unknown¹)



A. Aleksandravičius in 1998. This photograph is a screenshot taken from an USHMM oral history video

Aleksas Aleksandravičius was born in the small town, Šiluva, and spent his childhood in the south-eastern foothills of the Samogitians highland. Aleksandravičius and his family led a nomadic way of life.

Aleksandravičius recalls that during the first year of the German occupation, the scope of Roma persecution was limited to the confiscation of horses and wagons. When the intensity of repressions increased, Aleksandravičius continued to travel across the region, **avoiding arrest and escaping**

detention by running away on foot and even jumping from a moving train. He explains, “*We ran. We would run away many times. The Germans were not so cunning at the beginning, and we would jump off the trains*”.

After German soldiers killed his uncle and arrested many Roma, **Aleksandravičius joined seven to eight Roma families in the woods**. He remembers finding shelter in the density of trees from 1942 to 1943, and constantly moving in the forest-rich part of the country: “*Hiding was necessary. We went from one forest to another. The Germans were afraid to go to the woods, so we went into distant forests, hiding deep. We hid in the winter, and we hid in the summer. They would take us, but we would run away again.*”

On March 6, 1943, Aleksandravičius was arrested and taken to the **Pravieniškės camp**, where he witnessed the deaths of elderly Roma and children². Later, Aleksandravičius, together with other prisoners, were sent to locations across France. Aleksandravičius was imprisoned in several different camps and was later transferred to Germany, where he was

1. Unless indicated otherwise, this biography is based on Aleksas Aleksandravičius' Oral history interview by Saulius Berzinis. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, 1998. Video file. <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn508587>

2 Toleikis, Vytautas. 2005. “Lithuanian Roma During the Years of the Nazi occupation,” in Murders of Prisoners of War and of Civilian Population in Lithuania 1941-1944, edited by Christoph Dieckmann, Vytautas Toleikis, Rimantas Zizas. P. 59-60

forced to do hard labour, including digging pits and trenches. When he, together with a couple of other prisoners got caught in a crossfire between German and Allied forces, they used the opportunity to break free: “There was a forest with a couple of spruces which we climbed. We did not go to work; we stayed for three weeks under the spruces”.

The group **walked for several weeks** until they were recaptured by German soldiers and detained in a nearby town. Aleksandravičius escaped again by mingling with a group of women allowed to walk to a hospital in Mainz. Having witnessed Mainz burning after the bombing, he **survived the air raids** and, along with other prisoners, was sent to Leipzig by American forces. From there he walked approximately **1,200 kilometres back to Lithuania**.

After the Second World War, Aleksandravičius continued his life in Soviet-occupied Lithuania. **He recalls protesting against the Soviet government, resulting in his deportation to the Komi Republic in Siberia:** “There was a village with a church near Šiluva, we guys – you know, villagers – went there. There was a poster with Stalin’s portrait, and we ripped it up every which way, desecrating that portrait. Someone reported us, and after that, they caught all of us. I was sentenced to seven, others – ten, fifteen years in the North.” After serving his term, Aleksandravičius returned to Lithuania.

The story of Aleksandravičius is documented in an **oral history interview kept in USHMM Collection**. There is no available information about Aleksandravičius’ life after the interview. It is known that sometime between 1991 and 2005 he was interviewed by Vytautas Toleikis, but interview transcripts are stored in his personal archive and not available to the public. A fragment from an interview with Aleksandravičius, conducted by Toleikis, is quoted in several texts about the Roma genocide in Lithuania.

Aleksandravičius demonstrated incredible vitality and the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties by constantly resisting arrest and escaping detention, either alone or in a group. Although he confronted and was oppressed by both Nazi and Stalinist regimes, Aleksandravičius’ story has not been commemorated.

Sources and further informaton:

1. Aleksandravičius, Aleksas. 1998. Oral history interview by Saulius Berzinis. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, courtesy of the Jeff and Toby Herr Foundation Video file.

<https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn508587>

2. Toleikis, Vytautas. 2005. “Lithuanian Roma During the Years of the Nazi occupation,” in Murders of Prisoners of War and of Civilian Population in Lithuania 1941-1944, edited by Christoph Dieckmann, Vytautas Toleikis, Rimantas Zizas, 55-75. Vilnius: Margi Raštai.

This biography has been written by Aurėja Jutelytė