

**THE HOLOCAUST  
IN LITHUANIA:  
1941–1944**



# THE HOLOCAUST IN LITHUANIA: 1941–1944



GENOCIDE AND RESISTANCE  
RESEARCH CENTRE  
OF LITHUANIA

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Many of the names in this book are taken from archival material, where they were usually transliterated and/or written phonetically in the local language. The authors therefore apologize for any discrepancies in this book that may have occurred as a result.

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# **Introduction**



## Introduction

The Holocaust was undoubtedly the greatest tragedy in the history of 20th-century Lithuania. In 1941, nearly 80 percent of the Jews living in Lithuania (150,000 to 160,000 people) were killed over the course of just a few months. Never before in the history of Lithuania has such a massive number of people been massacred in such a short period of time. The Lithuanian Jewish community was essentially eradicated between July and October of 1941. The remaining Lithuanian Jews were executed in 1942–1945. In total, 195,000–196,000 people were exterminated during the Nazi occupation. Lithuanian Jews. Granted, not all of them were murdered in Lithuania – thousands perished in Nazi concentration camps in Germany, Poland, Latvia, and Estonia. However, only five to ten percent of Lithuanian Jews ultimately survived the Nazi occupation and saw the end of the war. The number of victims the tragedy claimed reveals its enormity. The destruction is not just limited to people – it also encompassed their centuries-old culture, customs, and traditions, not to mention plundered property and other treasures. As a history lesson, the Holocaust has shown future generations what people blinded by hatred and deprived of moral responsibility are capable of doing.

With this in mind, the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania passed Resolution No. XI-1017 of September 21, 2010 (*Official Gazette*, 2010, No. 113-5743) declaring 2011 the Year of Remembrance for the Victims of the Holocaust in Lithuania. Pursuant to Article 2 of the same resolution, a working group was established to draw up a program for the Year of Remembrance for the Victims of the Holocaust in Lithuania. The Government of the Republic of Lithuania approved the program (measures) proposed by the working group on December 8, 2010, by Resolution No. 1754 “On Approval of



the Measures to Commemorate the Victims of the Holocaust in Lithuania in 2011.” The Genocide and Resistance Research Center of Lithuania (hereinafter – the Center) became involved in this program with its own initiatives. One of the Center’s many ideas, although not officially included in the Government’s program, was to publish a collection of articles entitled “The Holocaust in Lithuania, 1941–1944.” Since 1997, the Center has been publishing articles on the history of the Holocaust in Lithuania in its journal, *Genocidas ir rezistencija* (“Genocide and Resistance”). The compilers felt that selecting articles that focused on various aspects of the history of the Holocaust in Lithuania and publishing them in a separate book would allow people interested in this topic to find a full range of relevant information in a single publication. The articles featured in *Genocidas ir rezistencija* were penned by both members of the Center’s staff and specialists from other dedicated institutions (such as the Lithuanian Institute of History and the Vilnius Gaon Museum of Jewish History). As a result, this book not only reflects the work of the Center’s researchers, but also, one might say, the contributions of Lithuanian historians over the past decade to the analysis of the Holocaust. Their years and years of work show that our nation’s historians have long been studying what is a painful and difficult subject for many, so it is not a random act prompted by the country’s highest institutions, but both a logical requirement and a stage in the development of Lithuanian historiography.

Thus far, the Center’s staff has primarily researched the Holocaust in the Lithuanian provinces and the role of various Lithuanian police units in the Jewish genocide (Holocaust). As a result, most of their articles in this publication are on these subjects. However, the researchers at the Vilnius Gaon Museum of Jewish History and the Lithuanian Institute of History focused mainly on the history of the major ghettos and questions concerning the rescue of Jews. It should be noted that the limited size of the publication did not allow for the inclusion of the complete series of articles published on this subject in *Genocidas ir rezistencija* and elsewhere by the Center’s staff.

With this publication, we aim to honor the victims of the Holocaust, contribute to the preservation of their memory, remind the people of Lithuania about the crimes of the occupying Nazi regime, and emphasize the impact that the spread of criminal ideologies (racism, chauvinism, etc.) has on relations between peoples and nations. To this end, the articles included in this edition are thematically divided into five chapters: (1) Resistance and the Holocaust: Historical Context, (2) The Major Ghettos of Lithuania, (3) The Holocaust in the Provinces, (4) The Repressive State Apparatus and the Holocaust, and (5) The Rescue of Jews. As none of the articles in this book describe the entire history of the Holocaust in Lithuania in general terms, we want to emphasize this aspect more in the introduction.

Once the Nazi Party came to power in Germany in 1933, anti-Semitism and the persecution of Jews became state policy. The Third Reich promulgated this policy in the European countries it occupied during World War II. So although the persecution and massacre of Jews was organized by the Nazis, in many of the countries they occupied, including Lithuania, they managed to involve part of the local population and collaborating institutions in this crime of genocide. Nazi propaganda successfully leveraged the anti-communist and anti-Jewish sentiments accumulated during the years of the Soviet occupation and annexation (1940–1941), convincing some Lithuanians that the main source of their misery and suffering was the Jews.

During Lithuania's period of independence, probably no one could have imagined that relations between Lithuanians and Jews would veer in a direction leading to so much hatred and resentment.

In preparing for war with the Soviet Union, the Third Reich planned from the outset that the warfare in the East would be very different from the warfare in Western Europe. As early as March 1941, Adolf Hitler stressed that the war with the Soviet Union would be a struggle to the death between two irreconcilable ideologies (Nazism and Bolshevism) – a war of worldviews. All real and purported enemies of Nazism had to be resolutely annihilated. In Hitler's opinion, there was no need to adhere to the customary laws and norms of war in the fight to the death against Bolshevism. According to the Nazis, the Jews were the Third Reich's worst enemy. Hitler felt that the Wehrmacht was incapable of executing the tasks required by an ideological war between worldviews. These tasks would be implemented primarily by the Einsatzgruppen – paramilitary tasks forces (also known as “death squads”) affiliated with the SD and the SiPo, and later with the SS. The Einsatzgruppen were deployed in occupied territories and were under the command of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (“Reich Security Main Office”; RSHA). In preparation for the attack on the Soviet Union, the Nazis formed four Einsatzgruppen: A, B, C, and D. Their commanders were directly appointed by Heinrich Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich. Each Army Group (North, Center, and South) had one Einsatzgruppe. Einsatzgruppe A, which was made up of Einsatzkommandos 2 and 3 and Sonderkommandos (“Special Squads”) 1a and 1b, was assigned to Army Group North, which was tasked with occupying the Baltic States and invading Leningrad. SS-Brigadeführer Franz Walter Stahlecker, who was the head of the SS security forces for the Reichskommissariat Ostland, was appointed as commander of Einsatzgruppe A. Einsatzkommando 3 operated in Lithuania and was under the command of SS-Standartenführer Karl Jäger. Historians disagree to this day on whether Hitler and the other leaders of the Third Reich made the decision to exterminate all Jews before Germany invaded the Soviet Union, or during the first weeks of the war. Recent research into the history of the Holocaust

supports the thesis that *die Endlösung* (the “final solution”) was authorized in the latter half of the summer of 1941. Before the Nazi-Soviet war, there were almost 208,000 Jews living in Lithuania. Once the war broke out, 8,000–9,000 Jews managed to evacuate deep into the Soviet Union, while the rest remained in Nazi-occupied Lithuania.

The Jewish genocide (Holocaust) in Lithuania can be divided into three periods: (1) end of June to November 1941 (with two short stages in this period standing out: (a) end of June to mid-July 1941, and (b) late July to November 1941); (2) December 1941 to March 1943; and (3) April 1943 to July 1944. The first period was the most terrible and tragic for Lithuanian Jews. It was in the first days of the war that the massacre of Jews began in Lithuania. Thousands of Jews were killed in Lithuania even before the ghettos were established (in late July-August 1941). The earliest organized Jewish massacres were carried out in the region of Lithuania bordering Germany (the districts of Kretinga and Tauragė) and in Kaunas. The massacres and pogroms were initiated by Stahlecker along with the Gestapo and SD officers subordinate to him. The regular mass killings of Jews began at the Seventh Fort in Kaunas as well as in Vilnius (Paneriai), Šiauliai, Panevėžys, and other Lithuanian cities in July 1941. Jewish ghettos and internment camps were being established simultaneously with their arrests and killings. The largest ghettos were set up in Vilnius, Kaunas, and Šiauliai. The Jews who were confined to the ghettos were not allowed to leave the ghetto or communicate with non-Jews without permission from the government. Violation of these rules was punishable by death. Jews living in the provinces (districts and counties) were driven into ghettos and special camps that were liquidated a few weeks later. The process regarding the massacre of Jews in the provinces can be divided into two stages. The first stage started in late June and lasted until mid-July 1941. During this stage, persecution was mainly driven by political motives. Jews were mostly arrested, imprisoned, and shot for being former communists, Komsomol members, or Soviet officials or supporters. People of other ethnic groups (Lithuanians, Russians, Poles, etc.) were also terrorized for the same reasons. During this stage, it was mostly Jewish men who were persecuted. Women and children were rarely killed. The persecution and killing of Jews was directed by Nazi authorities (military commanders, SiPo and SD officers, and later – Gebietskommissars). However, from the very beginning of the Nazi occupation, the Lithuanian administration (district leaders, city mayors, county governors), the Lithuanian police, and the so-called “white-armbands” (auxiliary police) were drawn into this process.

The second stage took place from late July to November 1941. This was when the racial genocide began. At this point, Jews were no longer being persecuted for political reasons, but just for being Jews. During this period, nearly all of the Jews living in the Lithuanian provinces were killed. Temporary Jewish ghettos and concentration camps

were set up before the mass extermination of Jews in the provinces. Ghettos began to be established in the provinces roughly from the end of July to mid-August 1941. During that time, preparations were made for the massacres. The massacres peaked in August and September of 1941. A particularly important moment in this stage was on August 16, 1941, when Police Department Director Vytautas Reivytiš sent Secret Circular No. 3 regarding the arrest and concentration of Jews in specially designated places. Following the orders and instructions of the Nazi and Lithuanian administration officials, all Jews living in the provinces were imprisoned in ghettos and concentration camps. And before the final liquidation of the ghettos and camps, the Jews who were left in these provinces – women, children, and the elderly – were shot.

The massacres were usually carried out in forests and fields that were several kilometers away from the ghettos and camps. The most notorious perpetrators of the massacre of Jews in the provinces was Rollkommando Hamann, the mobile task force under the command of SS-Obersturmführer Joachim Hamann. The group consisted of Germans from Einsatzkommando 3/A, Lithuanians from the 3rd Company of the TDA (*Tautinio Darbo Apsaugos*; “National Labor Service”) Battalion, local self-defense units (in Zarasai, Kupiškis, Jonava, etc.), local auxiliary police groups, and precinct police officers. These massacres were carried out by thousands of different police officers. The mass shootings were sometimes directed by Gestapo officers, but there were many provincial towns where Jews were exterminated without the direct involvement of German officials. The last Jewish massacres in the provinces took place in Lazdijai (November 3, 1941) and Vilkaviškis (November 15, 1941). By mid-November 1941, almost all of the Jews living in the provinces were effectively exterminated. Only a small number of the Jews escaped or were rescued by locals (probably no more than 3–5 percent). Thus, by December 1941, nearly 80 percent of the Jews living in Lithuania (150,000 to 160,000 people) had been killed. Only the Jews imprisoned in the ghettos in Vilnius (approximately 20,000 people), Kaunas (15,000), Šiauliai (5,000), and Švenčionys (500) were temporarily allowed to live.

No mass murders of Jews occurred during the second period of the Holocaust in Lithuania (December 1941 to March 1943). The Nazis used this period to maximize the use of the labor force made up of the surviving Jews for their own interests, but primarily for military purposes. Basically, all men and women of working age were forced to work at factories, companies, ghetto workshops, airports, peat bogs, and elsewhere. Most of the Jewish workers did the work required by the Wehrmacht and carried out military orders. Dozens of Jews died every week in the ghettos and camps due to the hard labor, lack of food, and poor medical care. The Jewish ghetto administration (the Jewish councils and their subordinate institutions) were of the opinion that the Germans

would not liquidate the ghettos as long as they were economically beneficial. To this end, the ghetto leadership sought to maximize the number of Jewish workers and increase their productivity. The occupying authority decided to liquidate the Lithuanian ghettos in the spring of 1943. Liquidation began in the eastern part of Lithuania, with the destruction of the small Jewish ghettos in the counties of Svieriai, Ashmyany, and Švenčionys. Some of the prisoners were taken to the Vilnius Ghetto, while others were shot right there, or on April 5, 1943 in Paneriai. In the summer of 1943, the Jewish labor camps in the Vilnius district that were subordinate to the Vilnius Ghetto were liquidated, and many of their workers were shot on the spot. The Vilnius Ghetto was then subsequently liquidated on September 23–24, 1943. Some 11,000 men and women who were able to work were taken to concentration and labor camps in Estonia (Vaivara, Kloga) and Latvia (Kaiserwald), while those who were unable to work (the elderly, children, the sick – roughly 3,500 in all) were deported to Nazi concentration camps in Poland (Auschwitz, Stutthof, Majdanek, etc.). A few thousand Jews from the Vilnius Ghetto were kept there through the end of the Nazi occupation (in early July 1944) to work at various companies in Vilnius. However, fewer than 5 percent of the Vilnius Jews survived the Nazi occupation.

In the autumn of 1943, the ghettos in Kaunas and Šiauliai were reorganized into concentration camps. As the Eastern Front closed in on Lithuania, the Nazis decided to eradicate these ghettos as well. The liquidation of the Kaunas Ghetto began on July 8, 1944. By mid-July, 6,000 to 7,000 people had been deported from the Kaunas Ghetto to Nazi concentration camps (Dachau, Stutthof); about a thousand were killed in the ghetto during its liquidation, but several hundred managed to escape. The ghetto buildings were set on fire and destroyed. In total, about 1,000 Jews from the Kaunas Ghetto lived to see the end of the war. In Šiauliai, roughly 2,000 Jews were taken from the ghetto to Nazi concentration camps (Dachau, Stutthof, Auschwitz) in July 1944. Some of the Šiauliai Jews who were deported to Dachau were liberated by the U.S. Army on May 2, 1945. However, just 350–500 Jews from the Šiauliai Ghetto lived to see the end of the war. Only about 8,000 Lithuanian Jews survived the Nazi occupation. The Lithuanian Jewish community (Litvaks), which was renowned for its history and culture, was basically annihilated.

The Jewish genocide in Lithuania had certain distinctive features. For example, in other countries occupied by Nazi Germany – especially in Western Europe – the persecution of Jews took place gradually, in several stages. In Lithuania, however, the killing of Jews began in the very first days of the Nazi occupation. One could say that Lithuania was one of the first countries where the Nazis immediately began to implement the policy of total physical extermination of the Jews. In contrast, in the occupied lands of Western and

Central Europe, the Jews first had their civil rights restricted, and only somewhat later were they deported to ghettos and then ultimately killed. Each of these stages lasted up to two years. The complete annihilation of the Jews was the final step in a lengthy process. In Lithuania, though, there were no clear boundaries between the above-mentioned stages. In essence, legal discrimination against Jews, the establishment of ghettos, and the physical extermination of Jews were carried out simultaneously. Jews from Western Europe were primarily killed in concentration camps in Germany and occupied Poland – not in their homeland. In contrast, most of Lithuania's Jews were shot in the vicinity of their birthplace. In addition, Jews from Austria, Germany, Czechoslovakia, and France were transported to Lithuania to be killed.<sup>1</sup> Why did the killing of Jews start so quickly and so intensively in Lithuania? Here is one hypothesis. The genocide of the Jews was inextricably linked to the Third Reich's plans for the colonization and Germanization of the Baltics. According to the Nazi racial policy, the Jews, as the greatest enemies of the Aryan race, had to be totally annihilated. Since Lithuania bordered Germany and was thus slated to become a German-colonized territory after the war, Lithuanian Jews had to be killed immediately, because as “racially undesirable elements,” they were a threat to the colonization of this strategically important territory. In order to secure the front, the Nazis tried to exterminate the Jews – who they believed to be the main cause of unrest and dissatisfaction with the occupation authorities – as soon as possible. This was also what encouraged the Nazis to exterminate Lithuanian Jews as soon as possible. Another specific feature of the Holocaust in Lithuania was that the Nazis managed to involve quite a number of Lithuanian administrative institutions and local civilians in its implementation. This is partially explained by the fact that unlike the countries of Western and Central Europe, Lithuania was occupied by the Soviets before the Nazi occupation. The injustices suffered during that Soviet occupation turned a large part of the Lithuanian population into enemies of Bolshevism and supporters of Germany. Great hopes to end the Bolshevik occupation and restore the State of Lithuania were pinned on the Nazi-Soviet war. The anti-Semitic Nazi propaganda and the Lithuanian anti-Soviet underground further spurred anti-Jewish sentiment and stereotypes (“Bolshevism is Jewish government,” etc.). As a result, Hitler's policies (including with respect to the Jews) received more support in Lithuania than in Western Europe. As they often have throughout history, the Jews became a convenient object of revenge and attack – a singular scapegoat for the misfortunes experienced by the Lithuanian

<sup>1</sup> Д. Порат (D. Porat), “Катастрофа в Литве – специфические аспекты” [*The Catastrophe in Lithuania: Specific Aspects*], *Вестник Московского еврейского университета*, Moscow, 1993, No. 2, pp. 22, 23.

nation. These factors greatly increased the scale of the Jewish catastrophe and helped the Nazis implement the policy of genocide in Lithuania more easily. The geopolitical situation before the Nazi-Soviet war created favorable conditions for hostilities to emerge between Lithuanians and Jews. Jews were afraid of war and a Nazi German invasion and sought refuge with the Soviets, while Lithuanians wanted war in the hopes that Germany would liberate Lithuania from the Soviet occupation and allow Lithuanians to restore their state. The Soviets' mass deportation of Lithuanians to Siberia right before the war strengthened these sentiments and hopes among Lithuanians. According to historian Valentinas Brandišauskas, Lithuanian participation in the Holocaust was determined by: (1) the presence of a criminal element; (2) revenge for certain Jewish crimes during the first years of Soviet rule; (3) conflicting geopolitical interests of Jews and Lithuanians (with the former looking to the Soviet Union and the latter – to Germany); (4) anti-Semitism prompted by the war and the Nazi occupation; and (5) intensified pro-Nazi and nationalist sentiments prior to the war.<sup>2</sup> The combination of the different factors listed above led to the tragedy of the Holocaust in Lithuania. The percentage of Lithuanian Jews who were killed (90–95 percent) was one of the highest in all of the German-occupied countries. Even though the “final solution of the Jewish question” was organized and initiated by the Nazis, it would not have been possible to implement it so quickly and on such a scale without the active assistance of the Lithuanian administration and the local population. The issue of the ownership of the property that belonged to the Lithuanian Jews was addressed in various ways. Jewish property and assets were officially declared Reich property and were therefore ordered to be confiscated by the Nazis. Portable property was primarily distributed and sold to local residents, while museum-quality property, archival treasures, and the more valuable books were sent to Germany. Valuable items (gold jewelry, watches, currency, etc.) appropriated by the Gestapo were sent to Germany as well. A large part of the real estate belonging to Jews remained at the disposal of the local administration and was used for their own purposes, with some of it being handed over to private residents as well. Lithuanian society has insufficient knowledge, understanding, and awareness of the scope and cruelty of the Holocaust tragedy. However, in recent years, more and more books and articles have been published on this topic in our country as well. That said, for us Lithuanians, the Holocaust is as much an issue of a much-needed lesson in history as it is a moral problem. It is very important to recognize that the Holocaust was not

<sup>2</sup> V. Brandišauskas, *Siekiai atkurti Lietuvos valstybingumą (1940 06–1941 09)* [*Aspirations to Restore Lithuanian Statehood: June 1940–September 1941*], Vilnius, 1996, p. 144.

for the Jews – it was also the full-scale destruction of our fellow citizens and a tragedy for the whole of Lithuania. Such recognition is not arrived at quickly, nor spontaneously. It requires the concerted efforts of historians, educators, politicians, and the media. It is important to acknowledge and comprehend the Holocaust in order to overcome nationalist and anti-democratic ideologies, develop a democratic society, and foster tolerance and understanding for other cultures.

*Arūnas Bubnys*



Chapter I.

# Resistance and the Holocaust: A Historical Context





Entrance to the Jewish quarter at 15 Mėsinių Street., which was later a part of Vilnius Ghetto No. 2

Darius Furmonavičius

## **Lithuanian Resistance Against the First Soviet Occupation and Nazi Occupation, and the Determination to Remain in Europe**

### **Baltic Cooperation**

Some details of the Soviet-Lithuanian Non-Aggression Pact are worthy of attention. Under Article 2 of the pact, the Soviet Union and Lithuania entered into a mutual agreement to guarantee the integrity and inviolability of their territories, while Article 3 stated that both parties mutually renounced any possible act of aggression that they could take against each other, and also agreed to observe strict neutrality in the event that either of them should be attacked by a third party. Under Article 4, both states undertook not to adhere to any agreement or coalition formed between third parties for the purpose of economic or financial boycotts against either of them. This non-aggression pact strengthened Lithuania's feeling of security, though its promulgation "occasioned great surprise throughout Europe" as "Lithuania was perceived as having weakened Europe's united front against Bolshevik Russia." Interestingly, similar non-aggression pacts were signed with the Soviet Union six years later – by Finland in January 1932, and by Latvia and Estonia in February and May of the same year. These details were, however, not the end of the story. Later in the 1930s, Finland gradually gravitated towards the Scandinavian countries, and Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania drew closer to each other. After being admitted into the League of Nations, each of these three countries, together with Finland, practiced a concerted policy in Geneva, and there was developing Baltic cooperation. On February 17, 1934, Estonia and Latvia signed a union agreement, and on April 25, 1934, Lithuania sent a memorandum to these two countries outlining principles for strengthening the solidarity of the Baltic States. Just five days later, on May 1, 1934, Estonia and Latvia invited Lithuania to join in their alliance. Later that same year, the Baltic ministers of foreign affairs met in Kaunas and Riga, and on September 12, 1934, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia signed the Treaty of Understanding and Cooperation (known as the Baltic Entente) in Geneva.

The purpose of this Baltic Entente was “to contribute to the maintenance and guarantee of the peace, and to coordinate their external policy within the spirit of the principles of the Pact of the League of Nations.” The signatories were looking for a sense of unity in foreign policy and international relations, but also wanted to form an economic community, promoting collaboration in the administrative, judicial, and social spheres. After the Baltic Entente was signed in autumn 1934, the foreign ministers of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia met regularly to coordinate foreign and domestic policy; nine such meetings took place between 1934 and 1940. The three countries took on a policy of neutrality, with each of them adopting a new neutrality law modelled on the provisions already existing between the Nordic countries. In Estonia, this was passed into law on December 6, 1938, while the Latvian Saeima adopted the provision on December 21, 1938. The Lithuanian Seimas followed suit on January 25, 1939. The Baltic States were idealistic enough to believe that they could maintain their independence by being neutral. History has shown that this hope was naïve.

### **Klaipėda Lost**

At the time, this carefully formulated neutrality of the Baltic States was immediately recognized by both the Soviet Union and Germany, the major powers in the region. However, Lithuanian-German relations became increasingly strained throughout the 1930s over the Klaipėda Region, and this tension came to a head when the Lithuanian government concluded what was arguably the first mass trial of the Nazis in Europe on March 26, 1935. No sooner had the verdicts been delivered than Nazi Germany responded with the introduction of economic sanctions against Lithuania, and on March 20, 1939, German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop presented an ultimatum to his Lithuanian counterpart, Juozas Urbšys, demanding the cession of the Klaipėda Region to the German Reich. The terms were brutally direct: “Either Lithuania surrenders Memel [the Klaipėda Region] to Germany, or the Wehrmacht moves in.” Ribbentrop warned, “In the latter case, no one can say where the Wehrmacht will stop.” Thomas Chase has described Lithuania’s plight in clear terms: “In those days, when the appeasement policy flourished in European politics, the Lithuanian government had little choice but to accept this ultimatum.” Thomas H. Preston, the British representative in Kaunas, summarized the Lithuanian situation as being “between the devil and the deep blue sea,” but despite this sympathetic comment, there was no practical help to be obtained from London, and attempts to secure any military support from Great Britain failed. Bronius Kazys Balutis, the Lithuanian envoy to the United Kingdom, inquired of the British Government: “If now or in

the future the Lithuanian government were faced with far-reaching demands going beyond the question of Memel and affecting the political or economic independence of what remained of Lithuania, would the attitude of His Majesty's government be the same as in the question of Memel, or could the Lithuanian government hope for a greater measure of assistance?" To this, Lord Halifax simply replied: "This was a part of the general question of the attitude to be adopted towards the German threat to the independence of other nations."

It might have been thought at this juncture that the issue between Lithuania and Germany had been resolved. As Bronis Kaslas has commented: "By settling the problem of Memel, Lithuania felt that it then was relieving all possible causes of conflict between Germany and itself." After all, Article 4 of the German-Lithuanian treaty had stated: "In order to strengthen their decision and to safeguard the friendly development of relations between Germany and Lithuania, both sides assume the obligation neither to proceed against the other by force, nor to support an attack from a third side against one of the two sides." Thus, the new treaty that Lithuania signed on March 22, 1939 with Germany to relinquish Memel was supposed to secure the German promise to respect Lithuania's neutral status. And after signing the treaty, Germany did actually appear to try to improve bilateral relations with Lithuania by taking Lithuania's economic interests in the region into account, albeit only briefly. However, Lithuania and the other Baltic States were only pawns in the Soviet-Nazi game, which was rapidly approaching a horrifying end.

## The Soviet-Nazi Pact

At this stage, in the first quarter of 1939, Soviet foreign policy expected German aggression to be directed towards the West, rather than the East. Georgi Astakhov, the Soviet Chargé d'affaires in Berlin, expressed great interest in the Baltic region and insisted that "the question of spheres of influence was the essential component of any political agreement with the Reich." Ernst von Weizsäcker, State Secretary in the German Foreign Office, wrote to Friedrich-Werner Graf von der Schulenburg, the German Ambassador in Moscow, stating that "if the talk [with Molotov] proceeds positively in the Baltic question too, the idea could be advanced that we will adjust our stance with regard to the Baltic in such a manner as to respect vital Soviet interests in the Baltic." Later, on August 3, Ribbentrop cabled Schulenburg to say that "there was no problem from the Baltic to the Black Sea that could not be solved" between the Reich and the Soviet Union, and that "there was no room for the two of us on the Baltic and that Russian interests by no means needed to clash with ours there." After this, Schulenburg reported that he had stressed to Astakhov the absence of opposition

of interests in foreign policy, and mentioned German readiness to reorient their behavior with regard to the Baltic States, if need be, so as to safeguard vital Soviet Baltic interests. At the mention of the Baltic States, Molotov immediately wanted to clarify “what states we meant by the term, and whether Lithuania was one of them.”

It would seem from these exchanges that there was a developing rapport between the two sides, and indeed this is confirmed by the fact that on August 23, 1939, the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany signed the now notorious “mutual non-aggression pact,” which partitioned the continent of Europe into Soviet and Nazi spheres of influence. It is now known that during Ribbentrop’s visit to Moscow, “the settlement of spheres of interest in the Baltic area” had been one of the key issues to be resolved. Lithuania was assigned to the German sphere of influence, while the other Baltic States went to the U.S.S.R., perhaps due to the fact that Lithuania did not have a border with the U.S.S.R. Once Klaipėda had been seized by Germany, the Soviets possibly did not perceive their immediate vital security interests as lying there. The first secret protocol therefore provided for the delineation of the respective spheres of interest in the Baltic States (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia), Finland, Poland, and Southeastern Europe. The Lithuanian-Latvian border was defined as forming “the boundary of the spheres of influence of Germany and the U.S.S.R.,” and both sides recognized “the interest of Lithuania in the Vilnius area.” Although it was agreed that Poland was to be divided along the Narva, Vistula, and San rivers, there was an agreement that there were further issues to be settled. In fact, Germany was preparing to incorporate Lithuania into its protectorate system. On August 29, 1939, the German government demanded “unimpeachable neutrality” from Lithuania, asking that Germany and Lithuania conclude a military convention, that a permanent German military commission be dispatched to Lithuania, and that the strength, distribution, and equipment of the Lithuanian army be regularly determined in close agreement with the Wehrmacht High Command. However, Lithuania continued its policy of strict neutrality towards Germany as well as Poland.

The German government then invited Lithuanian Foreign Minister Juozas Urbšys for a secret visit to encourage Lithuania’s take-over of the Vilnius Region. Weizsäcker gave specific directions to the German ambassador in Vilnius:

In conversations with the Lithuanian government, you are requested to express even more clearly than has already been done ... our sympathies with Lithuanian aspirations to the Vilnius area, and to state the view that, in the event of a territorial rearrangement between Germany and Poland, any Lithuanian claims to the Vilnius area might also to a large extent be taken into consideration.

Despite this prompting, the Lithuanian government did not want to abrogate its policy of strict neutrality. For this reason, Urbšys’s trip to Germany was delayed. Further,

despite the fact that the German ambassador had told the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry that he was aware that “as General Raštikis has informed [our] military attaché in the strictest confidence, the military measures taken consisted almost exclusively of troop reinforcements along the Polish frontier,” the Lithuanian army did not move any further. The situation was clearly a very difficult one, but as then Lithuanian Foreign Minister Juozas Urbšys told the author personally in 1989: “We did everything we could to swim out of a rocky river.” The important fact remains, however, that Lithuania did not make any moves to reclaim its capital of Vilnius from neighboring Poland, even though it was aware of German support and indeed – encouragement. There are still different opinions about whether Lithuania might have prevented the subsequent occupation of that region by the Soviet Union if it had sent its forces into the Vilnius Region when the Poles were forced to withdraw their army to fight the Germans in the West. Some have also suggested that Lithuania might have escaped the Soviet occupation in 1940 had it been in the German sphere of influence at that time. However, these interesting speculations serve only to emphasize the importance of the issues that lay in the balance at that most difficult stage.

On September 17, 1939, Soviet troops crossed the Polish-Soviet border and marched toward the city of Vilnius, which was quickly occupied along with its surrounding region. When Dr. Ladas Natkevičius, the Lithuanian envoy in Moscow, met Commissar for Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav Molotov to enquire into the situation two days later, Molotov laconically explained that “Soviet Russia never forgot Vilnius, and will also not forget friendly Lithuania...” Meanwhile, Lithuanian military officer and diplomat Kazys Škirpa met with Ribbentrop in Germany on September 20, 1939, and was told that the question of Vilnius would be raised in discussions with Stalin and Molotov, based on the agreement by both sides that the Vilnius Region should be returned to Lithuania. However, Ribbentrop also stated that Lithuania remained in the German sphere of influence, and indicated that he wanted to invite Lithuanian Foreign Minister Juozas Urbšys to visit him in Poland. His foreign ministry then drafted a defense agreement between the German Reich and the Republic of Lithuania, but according to Škirpa, Lithuania failed to seize this last fragile chance to save its independence. Urbšys replied by written note to Ribbentrop, affirming Lithuania’s continuing neutrality. He also provided information about a planned visit to Sopot to meet with Nikolai Pozdniakov, the Soviet representative in Kaunas. As a result, the Germans asked Urbšys to postpone this visit, which in fact never took place.

At this juncture, a new dynamic suddenly appeared, when Stalin proposed that Hitler give up Germany’s claims to Lithuania in exchange for a strip of Polish territory that had previously been assigned to the Russian sphere. The sides agreed and the proposal was incorporated in another secret protocol, signed on September 28, 1939, immediately after the Soviet Union’s occupation of eastern Poland on September 17, 1939. Initially, this protocol stipulated that one region around Marijampolė – a small part of

Lithuania with an area of about 1,800 square kilometers – would continue to belong to Germany (see Map 5 in the appendices). However, after protracted negotiations, the Germans eventually relinquished the Lithuanian territory, with Russia paying 7,500,000 gold dollars for this transfer. Molotov and Schulenburg then signed the “third secret protocol” on January 10, 1941, but by then the Soviet Union had already occupied Lithuania.

## **Soviet Occupation**

The process, which ended with Lithuania’s incorporation into the Soviet Union, started on October 3, 1939 with an ultimatum demanding that the Lithuanian government sign three treaties. The first was a pact of mutual assistance and the second was acceptance of the transfer of the Vilnius Region and the city of Vilnius to Lithuania. The third treaty concerned the cession of a part of southwestern Lithuania known as the “Marijampolė strip” to Germany. To accomplish this, Stalin called Urbšys to Moscow and announced that Soviet military bases would be established and up to 50,000 Red Army troops would be stationed in Lithuania. Despite the fact that the Soviet Union had proposed to return the Vilnius Region to Lithuania, President Antanas Smetona objected to the Soviet ultimatum, saying that the costs were too high and that it should be declined, but the government went ahead and accepted the ultimatum, resulting in the complete occupation of the country. Lithuania was not alone in this indignity – similar treaties had already been forced on Estonia on September 28, 1939 and on Latvia on October 5, 1939. Although a united Baltic anti-Bolshevik front could be imagined, it did not emerge. In Lithuania’s case, there were protracted negotiations in the Kremlin, and the number of troops to be based in Lithuania was reduced to 20,000 as a result. The Soviet Union also undertook “to respect Lithuania’s independence and neutrality.” Barely six months later, however, Moscow suddenly accused Lithuania of kidnapping Soviet soldiers from the military bases and demanded a change of government. On June 14, 1940, when the German army reached Paris, Urbšys was given another ultimatum “that free entry into the territory of Lithuania be immediately assured for units of the army of the Soviet Union, which will be stationed in the most important centers of Lithuania.” As Bronis Kaslas observed, Lithuania “accepted the ultimatum on the condition that its president would be able to designate the person whom he considered most qualified to head the new government,” but in reality, the president left the meeting of the government in protest. Early on the morning of June 15, the government appointed General Stasys Raštikis as the new prime minister. Molotov informed Urbšys within hours that “this choice would be unacceptable.” The President of Lithuania, Molotov said, “must consult



with Deputy-Commissar of Foreign Affairs Vladimir Dekanozov.” Dekanozov was on his way to Kaunas before another selection was made, but President Antanas Smetona refused to accept the Soviet ultimatum. He left the country in protest later that afternoon, on June 15, 1940. The Soviet army formally occupied the country, and Dekanozov appointed the new “people’s government”; just two days later, the new prime minister, Justas Paleckis, became the acting president of Lithuania. He faithfully obeyed all of the Kremlin’s instructions for the country’s incorporation into the Soviet Union and the deportation of a large number of the population to Soviet labor camps in Siberia. Parallel ultimatums were simultaneously presented to the governments of Latvia and Estonia. By June 17, 1940, the Soviet army had invaded all of the Baltic States.

Stalin’s system was fully poised and wholly ruthless. A program of Sovietization was immediately launched. The Communist Party was established as the single controlling force in the country. Assembled mainly from non-Lithuanian elements, with many key figures brought in from Moscow, it immediately took over the public affairs of Lithuania. Persecutions and purges began immediately, and Communist Party leader Antanas Sniečkus was appointed head of the Department of National Security. Other communists were given leading positions in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and in district administrations. All Lithuanian organizations and societies were closed, and communist collaborators gradually replaced the experienced state apparatus. The first series of mass arrests began on the night of July 11, 1940, as a prelude to the “elections” that were set to take place on July 14. The subsequent events were programmed to move quickly. The opening session of what was dubbed the “Sovereign Peoples’ Parliament” was held on July 21, 1940, when it was “unanimously agreed” that Joseph Stalin, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the U.S.S.R., should be sent a resolution requesting that the Soviet Union immediately accept Lithuania into “the Soviet family of nations.” Lithuania’s diplomats in the West actively protested against this precipitate incorporation into the Soviet Union. Lithuania was not alone in its misery – Latvia and Estonia went down the exact same path and were also subject to deportations to labor camps in Siberia soon after. In the week of June 14–21, 1941, only days before the German invasion, approximately 30,000 people (one percent of the Lithuanian population) were brutally arrested and deported to Siberia with no previous notice and no possessions. It has since come to light that the Soviets had planned beforehand to dispose of approximately one-third of the entire Lithuanian nation at the beginning of this occupation, by destroying “700,000 counter-revolutionaries.” However, the German invasion, which began on June 23, 1941, forced them to postpone this malicious plan.

## Lithuania's Resistance Against the First Soviet Occupation

Whether in political circles or among the general public in Western Europe, outside of Lithuania, there are few who remember much about Lithuania's resistance to the Soviet Empire, even if they do recall how the country became a victim of the secret Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany and was occupied by the Soviet Union in 1940 as a result.<sup>1</sup> The fact is that Lithuania rebelled a year later and managed to free itself from the Soviet army, which retreated in panic, fearing the Lithuanian insurgents and the approaching German attack.<sup>2</sup> Although now scarcely remembered elsewhere, the 1941 June Uprising was seen as "the first crack" in the structure of the Soviet Union, as *The Times* commented at the time.<sup>3</sup> However, even though Lithuania established the Provisional Government, Hitler was not prepared to contemplate the existence of any buffer state between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, and so the country was occupied, with the independent Lithuanian government being summarily and quickly dissolved by the German authorities.<sup>4</sup>

The first Soviet invasion began on October 10, 1939, when the Soviet army moved to secure their sphere of influence, forcing Lithuania to admit 20,000 military personnel. Though this brutal maneuver was clearly a cynical abrogation of the 1920 treaty between Lithuania and the Soviet Union as well as an annihilation of the rights and privileges of an independent state, it was somewhat surprisingly accompanied by the news that the city and region of Vilnius, which had been captured only days before by the Red Army, was to be ceded to Lithuania.<sup>5</sup> Moscow demanded the formation of a new government on June 14, 1940. Another 100,000 Soviet troops were sent virtually overnight into the country to reinforce the message. Once Lithuania was occupied, the left-wing journalist Justas Paleckis formed what the Soviets called a "people's government" on June 17, 1940 and announced a "general election" for the middle of July.<sup>6</sup> This resulted in the *Liaudies Seimas* – the "People's Seimas" – basically a body of quislings, whose first resolution on July 21 was to declare Lithuania a "Soviet Socialist Republic" and announce that the country was applying for membership in the Soviet Union. The application was speedily accepted. The Supreme Soviet then acknowledged the "Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic" as a Republic of the Soviet Union on August 3. Without further ado, totalitarian structures were instantly installed and the process of Sovietization began in earnest, backed by a program of intimidation that involved the immediate imprisonment and deportation to the Gulag (Soviet forced labor camps) of approximately 2,000 leading Lithuanian figures, followed by 6,500 military personnel, and the mass murder of 9,500 political prisoners out of 15,000 arrested. During the first mass deportations between June 14 and June 17, 1941, over 34,260 Lithuanian citizens were deported to forced labor camps in Siberia and other extreme northern regions beyond the Arctic Circle without trial.<sup>7</sup>

It was not surprising that after being treated in this manner, the Lithuanians rebelled again, as they already had many times before in their long history. Algirdas Martin Budreckis portrayed the uprising of 1941 as a continuation of the Lithuanian tradition of rebellion established in the uprisings of 1795, 1807, 1812, 1813, 1863, and 1905, and the Lithuanian Wars of Independence between 1918 and 1920. He commented that the brevity of the national revolt is what might strike a neutral observer, as the active or culminating phase of the uprising lasted a mere nine days. According to Budreckis, the invading Nazis attempted to dismiss the episode as a minor outburst of chaos and violence at the start of the war between the major European powers. And although the Soviets, ever ready to seize a propaganda opportunity, characterized this reclamation of the Lithuanian state as the activity of Hitler's gangs, both conflicting powers were in fact angry about this unexpected rebellion.<sup>8</sup> Speaking on Radio Moscow, Molotov furiously decried "the Lithuanian rebels" as "enemies of the people". By contrast, Germany was silent, despite the fact that media reports in London, Stockholm, Paris, and elsewhere had welcomed the proclamation of an independent Lithuania and the formation of a new government as "the first crack in the Russian bloc."<sup>9</sup>

Although short-lived, the 1941 uprising was of great significance. Vytautas Vardys has argued that the "militarily successful insurrection of 1941 showed that, under the right circumstances, the Red Army and its communist leaders were not invincible."<sup>10</sup> About the partisan war, which began in reaction to these events, Vardys has also said that "although the partisans did not achieve their ultimate goal of Lithuanian independence, the historical legacy of their struggle belied the legitimacy of the official regime," because "the making of the 'Soviet man' in Lithuania was now made more difficult."<sup>11</sup> Adolfas Damušis, a member of the Provisional Government of 1941, highlighted another important aspect, suggesting that this government helped create and develop the strategy and tactics of resistance carefully directed towards the restoration of the independence of the Lithuanian state.<sup>12</sup> However, its leaders were careful to avoid provoking a military response against the nation as a whole. They tried, therefore, to avoid actions such as the destruction of military trains or bridges. Their favored method was to respond directly and specifically whenever possible to acts of violence against the Lithuanian nation, such as deportation, persecution, and the confiscation of property, which were characteristic features of the occupation. Prof. Juozas Brazaitis, a literary historian, became one of the leaders of the resistance at that time. He was elected prime minister of the Provisional Government of Lithuania when Lithuanian envoy Kazys Škirpa, who had originally been envisioned for the role, was placed under house arrest in Berlin. It is clear that in developing the movement's strategy and tactics, Brazaitis consciously tried to intensify the defiant mood of the country, in an effort to direct the nation towards the restoration of its independence with the lowest possible number of casualties.<sup>13</sup> Kęstutis Girnius has argued that

without the partisan war, the question of whether the Lithuanian nation really valued its sovereignty would have been an open one.<sup>14</sup> However, this war – conducted against overwhelming odds and clearly commanding much broader support than the numbers who took up arms would suggest – became the clearest answer to this question. It convincingly contradicted the communist claims about Lithuania's desire to join the Soviet Union of its own free will, and remains an example of self-sacrifice for future generations, continuing the timeless traditions of Lithuanian resistance.<sup>15</sup>

Partisan war historian Nijolė Gaškaitė has noted that the intense quality of this armed resistance significantly contributed to the U.S. policy of non-recognition of the incorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union.<sup>16</sup> Documents that the partisan Juozas Lukša smuggled to the West through the Iron Curtain confirmed the determination of the Lithuanian people to defend their homeland and illustrated the wider threat of the Soviet system to humanity as a whole. Gaškaitė says that Lukša provided evidence that Lithuania had been coerced into joining the Soviet Union, and that Bolshevism was “ready to destroy Western civilization, culture and Christianity.”<sup>17</sup> Contrary to what Soviet propaganda claimed, the vigor of the partisan effort and the respect it held also undermined the process of Russification in Lithuania, but this came at a high cost, as more than 20,000 of Lithuania's most courageous men and women were lost in the early years of the partisan war. Also, the Russian special services succeeded in infiltrating into many partisan districts in the initial years of the partisan war (1945–1949). For example, Vaclovas Ivanauskas (code name Gintautas), chief commander of the Western Lithuania (Jūra) partisan region, wrote to Jonas Žemaitis, supreme commander of the Union of Lithuanian Freedom Fighters (Lithuanian: *Lietuvos laisvės kovos sąjūdis*), on July 20, 1949 that “the recent deaths were exclusively due to spies.”<sup>18</sup> This dreadful statistic brought about a significant shift in the national character in the direction of accommodation and caution.<sup>19</sup>

In contrast to Lithuanian writers, Soviet historians showed no respect for the 1941 uprising or the subsequent partisan war. Analyzing the events from their Marxist point of view, they strongly condemned the uprising, the Provisional Government of 1941, and the partisan war, writing them off as “an episode in the class struggle.” Indeed, Boleslovas Baranauskas, Povilas Štaras, Julius Būtėnas, and Aldona Gaigalaitė described the participants and organizers of the uprising simply as a “German fifth column.”<sup>20</sup> The members of what Lithuanians refer to as the “forest brotherhood” were therefore dismissed as “bourgeois nationalists, collaborators, and fascists.” More recently, however, Valentinas Brandišauskas has castigated these views as reflecting the crudeness of the political worldview of the Soviet period, rather than a consistent or scientific analysis of events.<sup>21</sup>

In his memoirs, Juozas Brazaitis, a professor of Lithuanian literature at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas who later became minister of education and acting prime minister of the Provisional Government of Lithuania, described the events of

that time as “a highly coordinated and well-prepared campaign aimed at the restoration of independent Lithuania.”<sup>22</sup> The uprising consisted of two major stages, with the first involving the establishment of the Lithuanian Activist Front (LAF; Lithuanian: *Lietuvių aktyvistų frontas*) headed by former Lithuanian military attaché to Germany Col. Kazys Škirpa, and the second being the active organization of underground groups inside the country. According to Pilypas Narutis, the LAF embodied the reaction of many Lithuanian organizations that had been dissolved by the Soviets. Vytautas Bulvyčius, who was the head of the Lithuanian LAF, had the support of the patriotic volunteer rifleman organization that had been established during the brief lifespan of the Provisional Government and was later disbanded, as well as of members of the various student groups and organizations that had continued their work underground.<sup>23</sup> These groups now acted under a centralized leadership in order to optimize local resistance, by warning individual citizens of impending arrests and providing information to protect the wider population from the violence of the Soviet army. The LAF had headquarters and staff in Kaunas and Vilnius, who were tasked with liaising with the free world, gathering and disseminating reliable information, and preparing movements for the eventual seizure of those two cities.

The actual uprising started simultaneously in Kaunas and Vilnius, after receiving a signal that German troops had crossed the Soviet border. The rebels then seized the main Russian military telephone exchange in Vilijampolė near Kaunas; the civilian telephone exchange at the Kaunas post office was also seized by its employees and handed over to the rebels, who then only allowed telephone lines that were useful for the impending uprising to operate.<sup>24</sup> The group’s leader, Leonas Prapuolenis, then deliberately misled the Soviets by notifying them that German paratroopers had landed near Kaunas. Once the telephone lines were disconnected, panic broke out in the Soviet ranks.

Dr. Adolfas Damušis, a minister of the Provisional Government, gave a personal account of the revolt:

At 3.00 a.m. on June 23, we gathered at our headquarters [which was in an old age home in Kaunas] ... where we drafted the Declaration for the Restitution of Lithuanian Independence, and a short statement which was also to be broadcast later that day. Meanwhile, the broadcasting studios were being secretly prepared for the announcement, and a fleet of Red Cross ambulances collected materials that Kaunas University students had been keeping under their beds and set to work, putting homemade mines along the roads to the broadcasting transmitter. At 9 a.m. the studios were ready to start the broadcast, and as Ažuolynas,<sup>25</sup> which was close to the transmitter in Kaunas, was full of Soviet troops, it was decided not to use loudspeakers in the streets in order to reduce the possibility of an attack. The radio broadcast was transmitted to

Lithuania and the world at half past nine, and it was followed by the national anthem, a recording of which had fortunately been found in the studio.<sup>26</sup>

Once Leonas Prapuolenis announced the restoration of Lithuanian independence and the formation of a new government, the revolt spread spontaneously across the whole of Lithuania.

Damušis described the uprising as an “expression of the legal indignation of the nation against the Soviet terror, with its killings and mass deportations to Siberia’s labor camps.”<sup>27</sup> He also regarded the uprising as embodying a brave confrontation with Nazi Germany and a “fight for freedom and for human rights against genocide and the Holocaust.” However, the NKVD, Stalin’s secret police, had already taken notice of the armed underground organization and the couriers who were crossing the Soviet borders. Fyodor Gladkov, the Commissar of Security in occupied Lithuania, had reported in a sinister tone: “We know that the counter-revolutionary element possesses large numbers of weapons in the territory of the Lithuanian S.S.R.”<sup>28</sup> However, despite the mass deportations on June 14, 1941, the organizational structure of the Lithuanian Activist Front was quickly rebuilt and the uprising was therefore successfully organized, with more than 100,000 people participating directly between June 22 and 29, 1941 (i.e. approximately three percent of the total population). However, more than 4,000 people died during this time. Unfortunately, the successful outcome was all too short-lived, and the six-week existence of the Provisional Government of Lithuania was ended by the Nazi regime. When General Commissioner of *Generalbezirk Litauen* Adrian von Renteln arrived on August 5, 1941, he simply announced that the Lithuanian Government had been dissolved. In response, the Provisional Government repeatedly rejected the German demand that its members should abandon their titles of “government ministers” in order to become mere “German civil government advisers.” Damušis said that Gestapo representative Heinz Greffe responded by warning that they would all be sent to concentration camps if this requirement was not met. The reasons why this did not happen are still unclear, but it is thought that General Franz von Roques, who was the commander of the German army in Lithuania but who was critical of the Nazi policy in Lithuania, had conceded to the appeals of Lithuanian Minister of Defense General Stasys Raštikis, saving the members of the Provisional Government from this fate.<sup>29</sup>

In assessing the importance of the 1941 uprising, Dr. Juozas Girnius observed that the events connected with this short-lived government had “restored the self-confidence of the nation.”<sup>30</sup> It undoubtedly helped the Lithuanians’ general determination not to surrender to the Nazi occupation and laid the foundation for the partisan movement of later years. Adolfas Damušis documented the work of the Provisional Government and its restoration of Lithuania’s administration.<sup>31</sup> A total of 15 ministries were re-established<sup>32</sup> and a serious attempt was made to

restore the Litas as the state currency,<sup>33</sup> as well as to return sequestered land to private ownership by allowing peasants to return to their farms, which had been forcibly collectivized by the Soviets.<sup>34</sup> Efforts were also made to restore houses,<sup>35</sup> factories,<sup>36</sup> restaurants and shops,<sup>37</sup> and pharmacies<sup>38</sup> to their rightful owners.<sup>39</sup> Stasys Raštikis, who was the minister of defense during those six weeks, said that the administration tried to do everything in its power to restore all alienated properties.<sup>40</sup> According to Provisional Government Minister of Justice Mečislovas Mackevičius, the revolt “rescinded all Bolshevik Parliament decisions” and clearly demonstrated Lithuania’s commitment to freedom and independence to the world.<sup>41</sup> A memorandum of the Provisional Government drawn up by Prof. Juozas Brazaitis stated bluntly that “the Provisional Government had been removed against its will and against the will of the Lithuanian nation.”<sup>42</sup> Despite the great efforts to maintain independence and continued Lithuanian resistance, the nation’s economy was integrated into the war economy of the German Reich rather quickly.

Regardless of its short-lived nature, the uprising of 1941 was a significant episode in Lithuania’s history. It was an investment in idealism which was finally realized by the successful liberation of Lithuania in the early 1990s. In trying to assess the long-term impact of the 1941 uprising on the contemporary history and politics of Lithuania, one can identify political, military, historical, and economic factors which remained influential. The political aspects include the continued inspiration provided by the memory of the uprising and the accompanying realization that the Soviet army could be forced to evacuate the country if a favorable international situation were to transpire. It was this vision that motivated the Lithuanian partisans of the 1950s to continue with their military struggle, hoping that the tension between the Soviet Union and the West would lead to actual hostilities, providing the opportunity to restore an independent state. This did not happen at that time, but eventually in the 1980s, Lithuania’s Sajūdis was able to successfully exploit the Soviet policies of perestroika and glasnost, actively drawing on the memories of their struggle. The Lithuanians then demanded that their constitutional right of self-determination be returned, and that the Soviet troops be returned to their homeland immediately. These demands contributed decisively to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The political importance of the 1941 declaration of independence was directly related to the earlier declaration of independence, on February 16, 1918. In both cases, the declaration encouraged the nation to fight for its freedom. In 1989, when Sajūdis declared on February 16 – Lithuanian Independence Day – that “despite the brutal ultimatum and mutual agreement between Germany and the U.S.S.R. in 1939–1940, Lithuania was annexed by the Soviet Union, but its legal international recognition as a state still exists and that Sajūdis expresses the nation’s commitment to restore its rights in a peaceful way and to live independently from any dictate,” it drew heavily on these earlier declarations and the sense of pride they engendered, allowing a weakened

and terrorized nation to find the strength to leave aside fear and uncertainty and to recover its hope for freedom.<sup>43</sup> This hope was based on historical experience, the living memory of the past, and the achievements of the Provisional Government, which provided a conscious model for Sąjūdis that was followed faithfully as soon as the movement gained power. There were conscious parallels between the performance of the Sąjūdis governments and that of the Provisional Government. Under the Provisional Government, decisions about the restoration of private property and the democratization of state institutions was accomplished within six short weeks, despite the presence of the German army on Lithuanian territory. Similarly, Sąjūdis implemented laws on the restoration of the state and a free market economy after the declaration of independence on March 11, 1990, despite the continued presence of the Soviet army. Fortunately, the international situation was considerably more favorable for Lithuania at that time than it had been in 1941.

Both in 1941 and 1990, there was broad popular support behind the independence movement. Sąjūdis recalled the experience of the spontaneous (but eventually centralized) group structure of the Lithuanian Activist Front when creating its own nationwide organization. There was often a family link between generations, which gave the process a sense of purpose. Perhaps this was most clearly expressed in the case of the Landsbergis family, where Vytautas Žemkalnis-Landsbergis was a minister in the Provisional Government, and his son Vytautas Landsbergis became the leader of Sąjūdis. It should be stressed that such personal leadership was vital both in the Provisional Government and in the Sąjūdis parliament. Under Juozas Ambrazevičius, the Provisional Government had established the need to fight for the complete independence of the country, and this insistence was riveted firmly in the national consciousness when the next opportunity came along.<sup>44</sup> The resoluteness of Landsbergis's leadership with Sąjūdis came from this source – the family aspiration coinciding with the national aspiration, as in so many other cases.

Lithuania's diplomatic corps played a key role in the preparatory phase of the 1941 uprising. The founding meeting of the Lithuanian Activist Front, which took place at the initiative of Lithuanian envoy in Germany Kazys Škirpa on November 17, 1940, suggested "joining all active forces of the nation to the Lithuanian Activist Front for the liberation of Lithuania."<sup>45</sup> This too was a precedent for later reference, and Lithuania's surviving diplomacy once again stimulated active support for Sąjūdis at the beginning of the 1990s. However, in the Sąjūdis period, the leaders favored a gradualist "evolution rather than revolution" approach to independence. This approach was not adhered to by the leaders of the Provisional Government. Emphasizing a collective ideal, which perhaps belonged to an age which was more naïve, Damušis said of his colleagues in the Provisional Government: "We were idealists, under the influence of the great humanists, Professor Brazaitis, Professor Ivinskis, and others." He distinguished this style of action "...in contrast to the current development of affairs [in the 1990s], when



everybody is looking out for themselves. That was not acceptable during our times. I liked that. Brazaitis had a very good character. He spoke and talked with everybody in the cabinet, and only then did he draw conclusions. Some say he was too mild, but I liked that approach very much.”<sup>46</sup> Clearly, there are parallels and differences between the courses taken by the two governments, but the later one was perhaps more wary of its path because of the way in which the earlier one had been outlawed by circumstances beyond its control.

In summary, the relationship between the 1941 Provisional Government and the Sąjūdis governments can be expressed by the proverb “a word teaches, but hope pulls you through.” The earlier revolt provided the later generation of Lithuanians with inspiration and aspiration. In the words of Damušis, “We were very successful. We survived. We had bright ideas and a very good advisory group. In cases like that, you either survive or die.”<sup>47</sup> Prof. Juozas Meškauskas has argued that the uprising revealed the true strength of the Lithuanian nation.<sup>48</sup> It laid the foundation for the post-war resistance. Incredibly, when Hungary revolted in 1956, Lithuania was still fighting the longest partisan war in contemporary European history. After he defected from the Russian MVD, Colonel Burlichi testified to the U.S. House of Representatives Kersten Committee in June 1954 that the underground in Lithuania “remained unbroken.”<sup>49</sup> From this evidence, we can conclude that, as another saying goes, “it is easy to light a new fire on an old hearth.” Though the embers of the freedom struggle seemed to have been extinguished by the end of the 1960s, the inspiration of the 1941 uprising remained active in the hearts of the Lithuanian people right up until the 1990s.

## Resistance Against Nazi Germany

Dr. Adolfas Damušis explained: “The Lithuanian resistance was convinced that Soviet communism and German National Socialism, because of their similar imperialistic intentions, were equal enemies of Lithuania.”<sup>50</sup> Prof. Zenonas Ivinskis explicitly highlighted the National Socialist policies in Lithuania: “Independence for Lithuania did not figure in their plans.”<sup>51</sup> The plans for the political autonomy of the Baltic States that were drawn up before Operation Barbarossa were abandoned by German officials and Hitler himself.<sup>52</sup> Lithuania was once again trapped between the ambitions of German and Slavic expansionism, repeating the experience of earlier centuries. However, while Lithuania had been able to defend itself effectively during the medieval period, and had even managed to stop the German *Drang nach Osten* for five centuries just as the Tatar drive to the West in the past, the German military might was significantly stronger than Lithuania’s during the period of the Nazi occupation,

1941–1944.<sup>53</sup> It was with this recognition that the Lithuanian government decided that the resistance to Nazi Germany must be non-violent.<sup>54</sup> The strategy deployed was designed, as Damušis pointed out, on the principle of “...furthering national esteem, promoting the recovery of independence, and guarding against collaboration with the oppressors.”<sup>55</sup> One of the main principles of this resistance was “to refuse to answer calls for mobilization in order to minimize losses during occupation.”<sup>56</sup> Other aspects of this commitment to non-violent resistance to Nazism developed over time. They included the emergence of an underground press, the non-payment of taxes, refusal to participate in labor and military units, refusal to mobilize, and the establishment of underground Lithuanian schools.<sup>57</sup>

The Nazi plans for the occupation of Lithuania were contemptuous of any concept of national independence, and would not have allowed for the continuation of the Lithuanian state after the invasion once it had been consolidated. Although directed against the Soviets, the Lithuanian uprising of June 1941 therefore immediately assumed the character of a confrontation with the Nazis. This was, however, very short-lived, as the Provisional Government only exercised its authority until August 5, when it was summarily dissolved by the incoming German occupation and immediately replaced by *Generalbezirk Litauen*. The first act of this regime was to deprive Jews of their citizenship, a move which was soon to lead to more terrible measures intended to terrorize the entire population and address “the Jewish problem.” In the meantime, the Lithuanian population was subjected to severe repression, and many people were taken for forced labor. The “recruitment of manpower” started in the spring of 1942 after Marshal Hermann Göring and other high-ranking Nazi officials repeatedly accused Reichskommissar for the Ostland Hinrich Lohse of allegedly failing to provide the necessary manpower from the Baltic States. On May 2, 1942, the decision was made to register all Lithuanians between the ages of 17 and 45 in a push to mobilize 100,000 workers. Those who did not register were fined 1,000 Reichsmarks and imprisoned for three months in the Pravieniškės, Dimitravas, and Pabradė forced labor camps.<sup>58</sup> Despite this, a resistance movement emerged that succeeded in thwarting the Nazi plans, particularly for recruiting young men into the army. The occupants were also unsuccessful in establishing a Lithuanian SS division as planned.<sup>59</sup>

The National Archives in Washington, D.C. safeguards valuable documents about the nature of the resistance at this time. The American ambassador in Stockholm reported the Nazi’s failure to organize an SS legion in Lithuania as follows:

The Lithuanian press exposed this attempt to deceive the country, and expressed strong opposition to any Lithuanian involvement. To attract Lithuanians, the Nazis promised good food, SS uniforms, equal rights, and property privileges. This German attempt to organize an SS legion was universally boycotted by Lithuanian youth. Recruiters sat idly by,

waiting at mobilization centers. The few who were enticed by the Nazis were intercepted by members of the Lithuanian underground before they got to the mobilization centers and were persuaded not to register. The organization of a Lithuanian SS division under German supervision was a complete fiasco.<sup>60</sup>

This response was so widespread that it must be regarded as having been an effectively organized boycott. As such, it caused outrage in Nazi circles.<sup>61</sup>

Now it is obvious that there were five main reasons for the reluctance of Lithuanians to join the SS:

First, National Socialism was ideologically unacceptable to the Lithuanian people. There is no evidence of a Nazi movement in the country that was prepared to welcome the occupation, or that any acceptance of the invaders was more than a passive acknowledgment of their military superiority. A nation which had just seen the withdrawal of the Soviet regime was in no position to contend against a more powerful army, but there is no evidence that it was welcome, much less that the population was ready to accept its radical ideology.<sup>62</sup>

Second, it was well known that SS forces were to be sent to both the Southern and Western Fronts, which were rapidly opening up at this stage of the war, to act as an oppressive force in support of the occupational regime of other occupied states. A publication that circulated in Lithuania in 1943 drew readers' attention to this, noting that "Lithuanians understand the value of freedom and do not want to repress it for others, but they have only one intention: to fight against the invasion of Bolshevism."<sup>63</sup> There is little doubt that this sentiment was widespread.

Third, the brutal treatment and frequent killings of farmers who were unable to deliver food requisitions for the German army was well known throughout the country, and there was widespread sympathy for them based on a recognition of the impossibility of fulfilling the quotas imposed by the occupants.<sup>64</sup>

Fourth, the arrests of Lithuanian youth for compulsory deportation to Germany or for forced labor within Lithuania created an atmosphere of resentment that militated against recruitment.

Fifth, the widespread desecration of Lithuanian religious and cultural centers did nothing to help Lithuanian nationals embrace the occupation.<sup>65</sup>

An extensive underground anti-Nazi press quickly developed. In October 1941, an underground group known as the Union of Lithuanian Freedom Fighters began publishing *Laisvės kovotojas* (“The Freedom Fighter”), which was widely read. In early 1944, the union organized a secret radio station called *Laisvosios Lietuvos Vilniaus radijas* (“Free Lithuania’s Radio Vilnius”). What was left of the Lithuanian Activist Front reformed and renamed itself the Lithuanian Front (LF, Lithuanian: *Lietuvių frontas*). Its leadership was dominated by member of Ateitis, a Catholic activist group that had been outlawed by the Nazi regime. In January 1943, they began to publish the newspaper *Į Laisvę* (“Toward Freedom”) and the weekly *Lietuvių biuletėnis* (“Lithuanian Bulletin”). Affiliates of the LF also published the newspapers *Vardan tiesos* (“In the Name of Truth”) and *Pogrindžio kuntaplis* (“The Underground Boot”), which was more satirical, as well as *Lietuvos Judas* (“The Lithuanian Judas”), which published the names of Nazi collaborators. The students and lecturers at the Vilnius and Kaunas universities published a newspaper called *Atžalynas* (“The Undergrowth”). Publications also appeared in provincial towns – for example, *Lietuva* (“Lithuania”) was published in Šiauliai. Former members of the Riflemen’s Union printed *Lietuvos laisvės trimitas* (“Lithuania’s Freedom Trumpet”), and members of other dissolved organizations had their own publications as well, including *Laisvės žodis* (“Word of Freedom”), *Lietuvos kelias* (“Lithuania’s Way”), *Baltija* (“The Baltic”), *Jaunime, budėk* (“Youth Be Prepared”). The Lithuanian Popular Peasants’ Union (Lithuanian: *Lietuvos valstiečių liaudininkų sąjunga*) published the popular and influential *Nepriklausoma Lietuva* (“Independent Lithuania”).<sup>66</sup>

In the second half of 1943, the resistance to the Nazi occupation unified. The leftist Supreme Committee of Lithuania (Lithuanian: *Vyriausiasis Lietuvių Komitetas*) and the pro-Catholic Council of Lithuania (Lithuanian: *Lietuvos Taryba*) merged into one central organization, the Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania (Lithuanian: *Vyriausiasis Lietuvos Išlaisvinimo Komitetas*). On February 16, 1944, the Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania declared:

The sovereign state of Lithuania did not cease to exist because of either the Soviet or the Nazi occupation – the functioning of the organs of the sovereign state had just been temporarily impaired. This functioning, interrupted by the Soviet occupation of June 15, 1940, and by acts committed by force and fraud under the violent pressures of this occupation, was temporarily restored by the national insurrection of June 23, 1941, and by the work of the Provisional Government.<sup>67</sup>

The Committee united all of the underground political forces and included representatives from all political parties, including the Lithuanian Christian Democratic Party (*Lietuvių krikščionių demokratų sąjunga*), the Lithuanian Labor Federation (*Lietuvos darbo federacija*), the Lithuanian Farmers Union (*Lietuvos valstiečių sąjunga*), the Lithuanian Popular Peasants’ Union (*Lietuvos valstiečių liaudininkų sąjunga*),

the Social Democratic Party of Lithuania (*Lietuvos socialdemokratų partija*) and the Lithuanian Nationalist Union (*Lietuvos tautininkų sąjunga*), as well as delegates from the four most prominent paramilitary resistance organizations – the Lithuanian Front (*Lietuvių frontas*), the Union of Lithuanian Freedom Fighters (*Lietuvos laisvės kovotojų sąjunga*), and the Lithuanian Nationalist Party (*Lietuvių nacionalistų partija*).<sup>68</sup>

Lithuanian universities and institutes were some of the first victims of the new regime. They were immediately closed, and 80 members of their teaching staff were sent to the Stutthof concentration camp – a move that was clearly in line with the Nazi policy of targeting potential sources of intellectual resistance in other occupied countries.<sup>69</sup> The pattern of brutal suppression was widespread: eight members of the Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania were imprisoned, and some 200 Lithuanian soldiers were shot without further questions for refusing to join the German army. The tragedy of the Lithuanian Territorial Defense Force (LTDF; *Lietuvos vietinė rinktinė*) is perfectly described by Prof. Zenonas Ivinskis.<sup>70</sup> Intensified activities by Soviet partisans inspired the Germans to allow the establishment of a permanent Lithuanian military force for dealing with them. Povilas Plechavičius, a popular Lithuanian general, agreed to form 20 LTDF battalions, and they were put together immediately. However, the Germans pressed for more troops not only for the defense of Lithuania, but also for the Eastern Front and the SS. This was refused, as was the order to surrender to the SS to be sent to the Western Front. As a result, Plechavičius and other members of the LTDF staff were sent to the Salaspils concentration camp near Riga (Latvia) in May 1944. The Nazis executed 100 soldiers as a reminder of the need to obey German orders, but most of the troops went into hiding; the Germans only managed to capture 3,500 soldiers, who were transferred to the Luftwaffe for various duties at military airfields in West Germany.<sup>71</sup>

The Nazis also implemented an extermination program designed to massacre approximately 150,000 Lithuanian Jews. This meant an end to the rich Jewish life in Vilnius and Kaunas – both acknowledged centers of Jewish scholarship. In the first days of the occupation, representatives from the Provisional Government made attempts to save the Jews. The leaders of the Jewish community had come to them for help, and General Raštikis met with General von Pohl on their behalf, informing him that the Lithuanian Government and the Lithuanian community were very much concerned about the actions of the Germans against the Jews. Von Pohl said that he could not do anything in this matter and suggested that Raštikis speak with General von Roques. The meeting between the two generals then took place in the presence of von Roques's chief of staff. Lieutenant Colonel Kriegsheim, his adjutant, took stenographic notes. Raštikis explained the displeasure and worry of the Lithuanian community and government regarding the persecution and extermination of Lithuanian Jews, but the local German commanders replied that “the issue had been decided in Berlin by

Hitler himself.”<sup>72</sup> The answer given to the Lithuanian Provisional Government was chilling: “Herr General, do not fret and worry, this campaign will soon be over.”

While it is clear that some Lithuanian individuals collaborated with the Nazis in the Holocaust, the Lithuanian Provisional Government, which attempted to save the Lithuanian Jews, is clearly exempt from this charge.<sup>73</sup> In the same way that Sąjūdis declared support for Gorbachev’s perestroika during its earlier period of activities, the Lithuanian Activist Front also declared support of Hitler’s anti-communist war against the Soviet Union. This, however, does not mean that in reality both anti-communist movements supported Russian or German dictators. These declarations were made in attempts to be perceived by the occupying authorities as pro-Nazi or pro-Soviet movements in their earlier periods of existence, and thus to be tolerated by the occupying authorities in Lithuania. However, while Sąjūdis succeeded in winning elections and establishing a pro-independence government, the Provisional Government of the Lithuanian Activist Front was abolished by the Nazi regime, as was mentioned earlier.

During the remainder of the occupation, many Lithuanians risked their own lives in an attempt to save innocent people. The Vilnius Gaon Jewish State Museum has a list of 3,000 people who saved Jews in Lithuania and almost the same number of people they rescued; according to Alfonsas Eidintas this is not a complete list since several families often had to cooperate to save a single Jew.<sup>74</sup> Some 474 Lithuanians have been named by Israel’s Yad Vashem Institute as “Righteous Gentiles” and the Canadian Lithuanian Journalist Society has published the impressive *A. Gurevičiaus sąrašai* (“The A. Gurevičius Lists”), which lists 6,271 Lithuanians who rescued thousands of Lithuanian Jews (10,137) who survived the Second World War.<sup>75</sup> The family of future President of Lithuania Vytautas Landsbergis is among them.<sup>76</sup>

The views of both the Nazis and these important members of the Lithuanian population clearly reflected the established attitudes in Lithuanian public life in the period before the occupation. Damušis emphasized that Hitler was particularly displeased by the sentencing of Nazi activists by a court in Klaipėda in 1935, as well as by the declaration of strict neutrality issued by the government of independent Lithuania after the start of the Second World War. On reflection, the Nazi administration decided to strictly limit the number of Lithuanians who were deemed to be of the so-called “Nordic race” and therefore eligible to become citizens of the Reich. This was done despite the Lithuanian mythological claim to Aryan roots, which figured so largely in the Nazi racial ideology.<sup>77</sup>

The Nazis had planned the destruction of both Lithuanian society and its Jewry in advance. The key figures responsible for the Holocaust in Lithuania were General Franz Stahlecker, who arrived in Kaunas on the fourth day of the occupation, and Standartenfuehrer Karl Jäger, who was head of the secret police.<sup>78</sup> Stahlecker was

tasked with kick-starting the process and getting the local Lithuanians to participate.<sup>79</sup> He was assisted in this by Jäger, Lieutenant Joachim Hamann, and Sergeant Helmut Rauca, who tried to recruit the local population to participate in the mass killings which followed. However, there is evidence of Stahlecker having complained to Himmler that “it was not a simple matter to organize an effective campaign against the Jews.”<sup>80</sup> However, while there is ample evidence of attempts by members of the Provisional Government of Lithuania to avert the impending tragedy, and of individual Lithuanians to defend the Jews, there is still controversy over local involvement in the Holocaust. Israeli historian Dina Porat has argued that there was “intense involvement of the local population in large numbers in the murder of the Jews,” alleging that this “entailed a fatal combination of Lithuanian motivation and German organization and thoroughness.”<sup>81</sup> However, Porat also admits that many Jews in Lithuania supported Stalin’s regime.<sup>82</sup> Prof. Thomas Remeikis argues that “the strategic policy of passive resistance was almost universally accepted by the clandestine anti-German groups” in Lithuania, but “the remaining fragments of the Lithuanian Communist Party, the red partisans and the Jewish underground” were all controlled by Moscow.<sup>83</sup> However, Dr. Adolfas Damušis, who was a member of the Provisional Government himself and was arrested and moved through a series of German prisons (including Isterburg, Allenstein, Landberg an der Wharte, Berlin Tegel, and Bayreuth in Bavaria) asserts that the Germans fraudulently accused the Lithuanians of the extermination of Jews, and that their documents reflect their determination to implicate the Lithuanian population. Helmut Krausnick has described the Kaunas pogrom that took place on June 25–29, 1941 quoting Stahlecker, and Dina Porat also notes Stahlecker as having reported that “Lithuanian partisans” had liquidated approximately 1,500 Jewish people on the night of June 25, 1941, after burning down some 60 homes and a number of synagogues.<sup>84</sup> However, both of these observations of alleged atrocities are based on German sources.

Damušis disputes their reports. He says that “neither executions nor fires occurred in Kaunas at that time,” and bluntly described the report that they were referring to as “misinformation ... one of Stahlecker’s many deceptions to cover up his crimes and fraudulently incriminate Lithuanian nationals.”<sup>85</sup> Indeed, there are no Lithuanian primary or secondary sources available that mention these events of June 25, 1941. Furthermore, interviews of two Lithuanians who were living in Kaunas at that time clearly suggest that such things did not happen in Kaunas on that night or near that time.<sup>86</sup> However, in the end, this argument is about the numbers involved, or the levels of popular support, indifference, and active or passive opposition to the genocide organized by the Nazis. While it is clear that some Lithuanians did contribute, there is no evidence of general enthusiasm for the Nazi crimes, and even less of active participation by the general population. Holocaust researcher Adolfas Eidintas has argued with every appearance of being objective that some 2,000–3,000 Lithuanians

can realistically be estimated to have participated in these appalling events, but he also acknowledges that the full facts of the matter are currently unresolved.<sup>87</sup> Modern Lithuania has, however, acknowledged that these questions are ones which need to be laid to rest. In 1998, the president of Lithuania formed a special commission that is currently investigating both Soviet and Nazi crimes in the country in order to determine the statistics that alone can resolve these arguments once and for all.<sup>88</sup>

Although opinion in Lithuania has tended to regard the level of citizen participation in the Nazi atrocities as having been minor, this painful question will only be decisively resolved when this commission's work is concluded. The level of German participation and responsibility in these crimes is much easier to establish, and there can be no doubt that the prime mover in the genocide was the occupying power. Lieutenant Hamann's direct responsibility for the organization and direction of the Rollkommandos used in carrying out Final Solution assignments is well-documented, and it is indisputable that these units, which consisted of eight to ten "dependable SS men" (recruited from the infamous Einsatzkommando 3/A), represented the cutting edge of the Nazi attack on the Jewish community.<sup>89</sup> If there were Lithuanians who took part in these events, examination of the command structures of the SS will make it plain that their contribution was as supporting cast and thus essentially marginal. The SS saw the extermination of the Jews as its special mission, and while it may have involved others in its evil deeds, whether these people wanted to or not, they were not assigned leading roles. When Jäger reported the executions of Jews carried out under his command and direction at the Kaunas Seventh Fort on July 4 and 6, 1941, he added that they were carried out "with the co-operation of Lithuanian partisans."<sup>90</sup> However, while his Einsatzgruppe habitually referred to their organized irregulars as "Lithuanian partisans," this was a fraudulent identification which did not necessarily imply enthusiastic support for the occupation. It was a designation of forced participation, or of what was described elsewhere in the occupied territories as "quisling" participation, which must be seen in the context of Stahlecker's instructions "to implicate as much as possible the local population in his atrocities."<sup>91</sup> Damušis explains that "the documented statements of General Stahlecker clarify that most Lithuanians resisted German suggestions of revenge."<sup>92</sup> His observations on Stahlecker's attempts to smear Lithuanians by false association, or at least by creating the impression of a much wider support for his activities, are supported by Prunskis's reports of identifiable instances when Nazis dressed their own executioners in Lithuanian uniforms and then filmed them, to give the impression that the annihilation of Jews was being carried out by Lithuanian units.<sup>93</sup>

Jäger's own reports are perhaps the clearest evidence that this horrific criminal operation was not a pogrom perpetrated by the local population, but a concerted campaign instigated and carried out by the occupying authorities.<sup>94</sup> Prunskis provides evidence of the Einsatzgruppe "conducting a planned massacre day by day, moving from town



to town". He describes how in 1941, Hamann and his Rollkommandos traveled to 18 areas of Lithuania in July, 32 in August, 30 in September, 11 in October, and 10 in November. "In five months, he visited 109 areas and executed 147,346 Jews, as well as some communists."<sup>95</sup>

It is perhaps significant to mention that Soviet, as well as some German and Jewish sources, often describe the course of the Holocaust in Lithuania without making the necessary distinction between the Gestapo's irregular helpers and members of the Lithuanian Activist Front, who were true Lithuanian partisans and patriots, and involved themselves in action against the Nazis and the Soviets equally in order to restore an independent state. Damušis explained that this results, "either intentionally or without the benefit of more painstaking research, ...in the assumption... that Stahlecker's plan to involve the local population in the extermination of the Jewish people was easily put into practice." He adds that "this ill-conceived assumption accepts at face value the highly misleading statements that local partisan groups acquiesced to the demands of the Einsatzgruppen and participated in their crimes."<sup>96</sup> The advantage to Soviet historiography of this assumption is obvious, since the thrust of Stalin's propaganda for the reoccupation of the Baltic States after the Second World War was based on allegations of Baltic complicity with Nazism (which, incidentally, continues to be the basis for Putin's Russian propaganda!), but the truth is that the Lithuanian partisans and activists were passionate fighters for national freedom. They were as much opposed to Nazi aggression as they had been to the Soviet one, and it is necessary here to attempt to redress the balance. Damušis made it clear that the true Lithuanian partisans neither supported the activities of the Nazi occupying forces, nor did they participate in the gruesome atrocities of the Einsatzgruppen. A similar opinion was expressed by Dr. Petras Kisielius, who drew my attention to a dozen books written by Jewish authors who argue rather differently.<sup>97</sup> In fact, Lithuanian partisans risked their lives in combat with both occupying forces. An estimated 1,600 were killed in the uprising which led to the establishment of the Lithuanian Provisional Government, and approximately 2,000 more fell in battles with NKVD squads, local communist units and their collaborators, and certain Red Army detachments that were terrorizing the civilian population. Although their activities did not achieve an open profile under the Nazi occupation, there were a number of occasions when the Lithuanian partisans defended themselves and the headquarters of the Lithuanian Activist Front from attacks by Nazi troops.<sup>98</sup> Lithuanians treasure the memory of the activists, partisans, and "white armbands" (Lithuanian: *baltaraiščiai*), who courageously fought in the face of insurmountable odds, and they should never be confused with the irregulars organized by the Einsatzgruppen leadership.<sup>99</sup>

In fact, a large proportion of these Einsatzgruppen irregulars were criminals who had been released from prison indiscriminately during the uprising.<sup>100</sup> However, there is additional evidence that the Gestapo recruited criminals directly from within

the prisons in order to involve them in terrorizing the population, and the Jews in particular. In July 1941 alone, 21 criminals were released by the Gestapo from the Kaunas prison and recruited for these purposes.<sup>101</sup> It is also important to note that Lithuanian Germans were recruited into SS units. As in other occupied countries, these people were of particular interest to the invading forces, to whom they could be particularly useful since they spoke fluent Lithuanian – something that clearly made them perfect for spying and other nefarious assignments within the occupied country.<sup>102</sup>

SS-Oberführer Eric Ehrlinger's July 1, 1941 report to the Reichssicherheitshauptamt on the current "situation and conditions" indicated that the Nazis had succeeded in recruiting only five men who had previously fought as partisans against the Soviets. Two of these were subsequently enrolled in the Einsatzgruppen. One of them served as a guard at the Seventh Fort, a prison in Kaunas, and the other joined a commando company with the agreement of the Fieldkommandant, and was also mainly involved in guarding the prisons in Kaunas.<sup>103</sup> The report, written for administrative rather than propaganda purposes, provides useful evidence that the Lithuanian partisans were not involved in the executions at the Seventh Fort, and also strengthens the case that the Germans completely failed to organize an SS unit in Lithuania.

This was not for a lack of trying, but considering that German recruitment yielded 50,000 volunteers in the Netherlands, 40,000 among the Belgians (half Flemish, half Walloon), 6,000 Danes, 6,000 Norwegians, and even 1,000 Finns (though their country was unoccupied), the fact that only some 8,000 Lithuanians probably served in the defense battalions (but not in the SS) seems comparatively creditable, and is certainly an effective repudiation of Soviet propaganda, which suggested mass involvement.<sup>104</sup> Though the Nazi authorities promised that these units would only be used within the respective countries, most ended up serving on the Eastern Front, and some Lithuanian units ended up serving in Poland or further away, in Yugoslavia. Their exact contribution to the German war effort remains debatable. Some of these contingents may have become involved because they saw military involvement as being a way of undoing the injustice of the earlier Russian invasion. It is, however, obvious that the tragedy of the massacre of the majority of the Lithuanian Jews would not have happened if Lithuania had not been occupied by the Nazis. Roger Petersen of the University of Chicago has said that "the issue of Lithuanian collaboration with the Germans remains controversial even in the year 2000."<sup>105</sup> He has helpfully observed that the continued controversy over the actual level of national involvement in Nazi criminality has more to do with inadequate apologies, failure to pursue suspected war criminals, and varying interpretations of the many other events which took place around June 1941, than with the actual numbers of Lithuanian collaborators.<sup>106</sup>

The arguments over this issue are important, but updated reports from the International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet

Occupation Regimes in Lithuania, which was established by the president of the Republic of Lithuania in 1998, are needed before they can be satisfactorily resolved. Scholars from Lithuania, the United States, the United Kingdom, Israel, Russia, and other countries are currently involved in the commission's activities, and many recent academic papers examine the legacy of the Second World War in Lithuania based on its work.<sup>107</sup> This section has addressed these issues briefly, and has tended to support the argument that Lithuanian complicity was limited and restricted to informal groups of citizens. The commission has submitted detailed reports on both communist and fascist crimes in occupied Lithuania, so that the matter can be resolved.<sup>108</sup>

Himmler's Generalplan Ost of 1942, which "envisaged that half of the Estonians, over half of the Latvians, and 85 percent of the Lithuanians would be deported," was undoubtedly brutal. According to Thomas Lane, however, because "these large-scale deportations were not scheduled to take place until after the capitulation of the Soviet Union," the Soviet occupation of the Baltic States was more brutal than the Nazi occupation.<sup>109</sup> He is not alone in this conclusion – for example, Prof. Andrei Zubov, a senior historian at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, argues that "communism was more terrible than Nazism and fascism because it destroyed society down to its foundations."<sup>110</sup> The Baltic people's "sufferings were acute and very long-lasting, since they remained under Soviet occupation until the restoration of their independence after the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union in 1991."<sup>111</sup> Lane says that the Soviet regime was particularly brutal in the Baltic States and Poland, where some 1.6–1.7 million people were deported to Soviet labor camps.<sup>112</sup>

## References

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g.: Adolfas Damušis, "Lithuania against the Nazi and Soviet aggression" (Chicago: The American Foundation for Lithuanian Research, 1998), p. 1

<sup>2</sup> Damušis, "Lithuania," pp. 2, 3.

<sup>3</sup> "Baltic Revolts," *The Times*, June 24, 1941; "Germany Disposes of the Baltic States," *The Times*, August 12, 1941.

<sup>4</sup> Damušis, "Lithuania," p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Lithuania's capital of Vilnius was occupied by Poland in October, 1920 and remained incorporated into it until the Second World War. The plan implemented by Stalin was the return of Vilnius to Lithuania, but also the eventual annexation of all of Lithuania to the Soviet Union (see: Chapter 2).

<sup>6</sup> The fraudulent nature of the "elections" of July 1940 is laid bare by Misiūnas and Taagepera:

"In Lithuania, no lists of eligible voters were drawn up; in effect, anyone could vote, and several times if he so desired." See: Romualdas Misiūnas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States. Years of Dependence, 1940–1990* (London: Hurst & Company, 1993), p. 27. In all three Baltic States, internal passports were stamped to identify those who had voted. However, even with this threat, the turnout was low. "Officially, the results were to the Kremlin's satisfaction: in Lithuania, 95.5 percent of the electorate allegedly voted and gave 99.2 percent of its vote to the League. [...] Privately, several leading members of the Lithuanian administration were quoted as having claimed a real total turnout not exceeding 32 percent." See: Misiūnas, *The Baltic States*, p. 27. "Acting President Paleckis of Lithuania allegedly expressed his opinion in private that the actual voter turnout in Lithuania stood at 15–16 percent." See: Juozas Brazaitis, "Pirmoji sovietinė okupacija (1940–1941)"

*Lietuvių enciklopedija*, Boston, vol. XV, 1968, pp. 356–370, quoted in Misiūnas, *The Baltic States*, p. 27. “The ballot carried only the Soviet-assigned candidate’s name. The only way to register opposition was to strike it out. Use of an isolated booth was discouraged or prevented; in many places, open ballots had to be handed to an official who dropped it in the box. The vote count was often cynical. [...] The obvious intention was the staging of a Soviet-style election with the unanimous victory of a single slate of candidates.” See: Misiūnas, *The Baltic States*, p. 26. “In Lithuania, at least two candidates appeared on the slate without the knowledge of the individuals involved; it is unlikely that they were an exception.” See: Misiūnas, *The Baltic States*, p. 26. Such is the evidence of intimidation, ballot rigging, as well as the fundamentally undemocratic nature of the electoral process, and it is central to disproving Soviet (and subsequently – Russian) claims that the Baltic nations “joined” the USSR in 1940 voluntarily.

<sup>7</sup> Damušis, *Lithuania*, p. 50. The total population lost during first Soviet occupation is estimated at 135, 860. See: Table 3 in the Appendices, “Population Lost in Lithuania during the First Soviet Occupation”.

<sup>8</sup> Algirdas M. Budreckis, *The Lithuanian National Revolt of 1941* (Chicago: Lithuanian Encyclopedia Press, 1968).

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g.: “Baltic Revolts,” *The Times*, June 24, 1941; “Germany Disposes of the Baltic States,” *The Times*, August 12, 1941.

<sup>10</sup> Vytautas S. Vardys and Judith Sedaitis, *Lithuania. The Rebel Nation* (Boston: Westview Press, 1997), pp. 83, 84.

<sup>11</sup> Adolfas Damušis, “Rezistencijos gairės,” key-note paper, presented at the 10<sup>th</sup> Lithuanian Symposium of Science and Creativity, Chicago, November 27–30, 1998, and interview with Adolfas Damušis in Chicago on November 27, 1998.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Adolfas Damušis in Chicago on November 27, 1998.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Damušis.

<sup>14</sup> Kęstutis Girnius, *Partizanų kovos Lietuvoje* (Chicago: Į Laisvę Fondas, 1987), p. 404.

<sup>15</sup> Girnius, *Partizanų kovos*, p. 405.

<sup>16</sup> Nijolė Gaškaitė, Dalia Kuodytė, Algis Kašėta, and Bonifacas Ulevičius, *Lietuvos partizanai: 1944–1953* (Kaunas: Lietuvos politinių kalinių ir tremtinių sąjunga, 1996).

<sup>17</sup> “Lietuvos Respublikos katalikų laiškas Šv. Tėvui Pijui XII Vatikane”, in: Juozas Daumantas, *Partizanai* (Vilnius: 1990), p. 420.

<sup>18</sup> “LLKS Jūros srities vado V. Ivanausko-Gintauto raštas LLKS Tarybos prezidiumo pirmininkui J. Žemaičiui-Vytautui apie partizanų didelių nuostolių priežastis ir pasiūlymai, kaip jų išvengti,” in: *Laisvės kovos 1944–1953 metais* (Kaunas: Lietuvos politinių kalinių ir tremtinių sąjunga & Pasaulio lietuvių sąjunga, 1996), pp. 385, 386.

<sup>19</sup> More analysis about the partisan war in Lithuania will follow in the next subchapter.

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g.: Boleslovas Baranauskas, “Penktoji kolona Lietuvoje”, *Mokslas ir gyvenimas*, 4 (1960): pp. 33–35; Povilas Štaras, *Lietuvių tautos kova už Tėvynės laisvę Didžiajame Tėvynės kare* (Vilnius: Vaga, 1956), pp. 7, 8; Julius Butėnas, “Buržuaziniai nacionalistai – hitlerinių okupantų talkininkai” in *Hitlerinė okupacija Lietuvoje* (Vilnius: Vaga, 1961), pp. 159–182; Aldona Gaigalaitė, “Buržuaziniai nacionalistai hitlerinės Vokietijos tarnyboje”, *Mada*, 2 (1960): pp. 133–149.

<sup>21</sup> Valentinas Brandišauskas, *Siekiai atkurti Lietuvos valstybingumą* (Vilnius: Valstybinis leidybos centras, 1996).

<sup>22</sup> Juozas Brazaitis, “Insurrection against the Soviets”, *Lituanus*, 3, 1955: pp. 8–10; Juozas Brazaitis, *Raštai. VI tomas. Vienu vieni*. (Chicago: Į Laisvę fondas lietuviškai kultūrai ugdyti, 1990).

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Dr. Pilypas Narutis, *Lithuanian Activist Front*, Chicago, November 28, 1997.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Damušis.

<sup>25</sup> Literally “Oak Grove”, Ažuolynas is a public park in Kaunas.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Damušis.

<sup>27</sup> Adolfas Damušis, “1941 metų sukilimo reikšmė”, *Į Laisvę*, No. 96 (133) (April, 1986): pp. 4, 5.

<sup>28</sup> Hearing before the Select Committee to

Investigate the Incorporation of the Baltic States into the U.S.S.R. (Washington, D.C.: House of Representatives, 1953).

<sup>29</sup> Former Commander-in-Chief of the Lithuanian Army and Lithuanian Minister of Defense General Stasys Raštikis was highly regarded by many German military leaders, and was successful in defending Lithuanian interests during the first months of the German occupation of Lithuania.

<sup>30</sup> Juozas Girnius, *Aidai*, No. 6 (1966): p. 241.

<sup>31</sup> Adolfas Damušis, “Rezistencijos siekis – Valstybinis suverenumas,” *Į Laisvę*, No. 111 (1991): pp. 7, 8.

<sup>32</sup> The members of the Provisional Government in June 1941 included: Vytautas Landsbergis-Žemkalnis (Minister of Communal Economy), General Stasys Raštikis (Minister of Defense), Professor Juozas Ambrazevičius (Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Education), Dr. Juozas Pajaujis (Minister of Labor and Social Security), Antanas Novickis (Minister of Communications), Professor Balyš Vitkus (Minister of Agriculture), Dr. Ksaveras Vencius (Minister of Health), Juozas Senkus (Director of Information), Dr. Adolfas Damušis (Minister of Industry), Vladas Nasevičius (Minister of Internal Affairs), Jonas Matulionis (Minister of Finance), Mečys Mackevičius (Minister of Justice), Pranas Vainauskas (Minister of State Control), Vytautas Statkus (Minister of Trade), Levas Prapuolenis (Representative of the Lithuanian Activist Front), Colonel Kazimieras Škirpa (Prime Minister), Rapolas Skipaitis (Minister of Foreign Affairs).

<sup>33</sup> Lietuvos Laikinosios Vyriausybės kreipimasis į Vokiečių karo vyriausybę. Lithuanian Central State Archives, *Lietuvos generalinės srities finansų valdyba*, Kaunas, 1940–1941, Part 2, Case 448, p. 125.

<sup>34</sup> Lietuvos Laikinojo Ministerių Kabineto nutarimas dėl žiemkenčių ir dobių sėjos bei dėl žemės iki 30 ha gražinimo. Lithuanian Central State Archives, *Laikinoji Lietuvos vyriausybė*, 1941–1943, Part 1, Case 6, p. 1; Žemės denacionalizacijos įstatymas. Lithuanian Central State Archives, *Laikinoji Lietuvos vyriausybė*, p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> Miestų namų ir žemės sklypų denacionalizacijos įstatymas. *Laikinoji Lietuvos vyriausybė*, p. 9.

<sup>36</sup> Pramonės įmonių denacionalizacijos įstaty-

mas. Lithuanian Central State Archives, *Lietuvos generalinės srities Zarasų apskrities viršininkas. Zarasai*, 1941–1944, p. 62.

<sup>37</sup> Prekybos ir viešojo maitinimo įmonių denacionalizavimo įstatymas. *Laikinoji Lietuvos vyriausybė*, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> Įstatymai, įsakai ir potvarkiai, išleisti Lietuvoje bolševikinės okupacijos metu, dėl turtų nacionalizacijos ir konfiskacijos. Lithuanian Central State Archives, *Lietuvos generalinės srities Darbo ir socialines apsaugos vadyba*, Kaunas, 1926–1961, Part 1, Case 26, p. 69.

<sup>39</sup> Lietuvos jūros ir upių prekybos laivyno denacionalizacijos įstatymas. *Laikinoji Lietuvos vyriausybė*, pp. 8, 9.

<sup>40</sup> Stasys Raštikis, “The relations of the Provisional Government of Lithuania with the German authorities,” *Lituanus*, No. 1, 2 (1962): pp. 16–22.

<sup>41</sup> Mečislovas Mackevičius, “1941-ųjų metų sukilimas,” *Sėja*, No. 4, 5 (1961).

<sup>42</sup> Raštikis, “Relations of the Provisional Government,” p. 22.

<sup>43</sup> Arvydas Kšanavičius, “Vasario 16-oji – neišsenkantis tautos stiprybės šaltinis,” *XXI amžius*, February 14, 2003. [http://www.xxiamzius.lt/archyvas/xxiamzius/20030214/istving\\_01.html](http://www.xxiamzius.lt/archyvas/xxiamzius/20030214/istving_01.html).

<sup>44</sup> Adolfas Damušis, “Juozas Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis archyvų dokumentuose,” *Į Laisvę*, No. 107 (1989–1990): p. 38.

<sup>45</sup> Kazys Škirpa, *Sukilimas Lietuvos suverenumui atstatyti* (Chicago, Lietuvių Fronto Bičiulių Klubas: 1980).

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Dr. Adolfas Damušis, Chicago, November 30, 1997.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Damušis.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Prof. Juozas Meškauskas, former Dean of Kaunas Medical Faculty and a member of the Lithuanian Activist Front (*Lietuvių aktyvistų frontas*), Chicago, November 28, 1997.

<sup>49</sup> MVD, Soviet Ministry of Interior Affairs. Grigorijaus Stepanovičiaus Burlickio parodymai in *Baltijos Valstybių Užgrobimo Byla. JAV Kongreso Ch. J. Kersteno komiteto dokumentai 1953–1954 metai* (Vilnius: Du Ka, 1997), p. 793.

<sup>50</sup> Adolfas Damušis, *Lithuania Against Soviet*

and Nazi Aggression (Chicago: the American Foundation for Lithuanian Research, 1998), p. 107.

<sup>51</sup> Zenonas Ivinskis, “Lithuania During the War: Resistance Against the Soviet and the Nazi Occupants” in Vytautas Vardys, *Lithuania Under the Soviets* (New York: Praeger, 1965), p. 73.

<sup>52</sup> Ivinskis, “Lithuania During the War”, p. 73.

<sup>53</sup> See: Chapter 2, “Lithuania’s European Roots”.

<sup>54</sup> Adolfas Damušis, “Juozas Brazaitis Lietuvos Rezistencijoje”, *Į Laisvę*, No. 65 (1975): pp. 42–50.

<sup>55</sup> Damušis, “Juozas Brazaitis”, pp. 42–50.

<sup>56</sup> Damušis, *Lithuania*, p. 107.

<sup>57</sup> Bronius Kviklys, *Lietuvių kova su naciais* (Memmingenas: Mintis, 1946).

<sup>58</sup> Ivinskis, “Lithuania During the War”, pp. 75–76.

<sup>59</sup> Damušis, *Lithuania*, pp. 149–160.

<sup>60</sup> “Boycott of SS Legion in Lithuania”, Report of the Ambassador of the United States in Stockholm, Sweden, sent to the State Department in Washington, D.C., May 11, 1943. National Archives, Washington, D.C., R.G. 226, Records Office. Strat. Service, 38226, 30 pages. As cited in: Damušis, *Lithuania*, p. 159.

<sup>61</sup> Damušis, *Lithuania*, p. 149.

<sup>62</sup> Damušis, *Lithuania*, p. 150.

<sup>63</sup> “Lietuviai ir SS Legijonas”, *Į Laisvę*, underground publication, November 23, 1943, p. 2. As cited in: Damušis, *Lithuania*, p. 150.

<sup>64</sup> Damušis, *Lithuania*, p. 151.

<sup>65</sup> Damušis, *Lithuania*, pp. 149–150.

<sup>66</sup> Ivinskis, “Lithuania During the War”, p. 78.

<sup>67</sup> As cited in: Ivinskis, “Lithuania During the War”, p. 82.

<sup>68</sup> Ivinskis, “Lithuania During the War”, p. 82.

<sup>69</sup> In addition, 46 members of the Lithuanian intelligentsia were arrested and sent to the Stutthof concentration camp. This group included three counselors to the Zivilverwaltung whom General von Renteln himself had appointed: Mečislovas Mackevičius (justice), Pranas Germanas-Meškauskas (education, died in the concentration camp), Stasys Puodžius (administrative control, died

in the concentration camp). Former counselor Prof. Vladas Jurgutis was sent to the Stutthof concentration camp as well. See: Ivinskis, “Lithuania During the War”, p. 80.

<sup>70</sup> Ivinskis, “Lithuania During the War”, pp. 85, 86.

<sup>71</sup> Ivinskis, “Lithuania During the War”, pp. 83, 84.

<sup>72</sup> Adolfas Damušis, “1941 metų sukilimo reikšmė”, *Į Laisvę*, no. 96 (133), (April, 1986): pp. 4, 5.

<sup>73</sup> “Apie Birželio Sukilimą ir Laikinąją Vyriausybę.” Interview with Dr. Algimantas Liekis, <http://news.mireba.lt/ml/207/birzelio.htm>. Former KGB agent Alexander Slavin published a Russian-language book in Israel about the Holocaust in Lithuania, alleging that the Lithuanian Provisional Government passed a decree ordering the annihilation of Lithuanian Jews. Dr. Algimantas Liekis argues that the document on which these accusations were based is actually a forgery (it is not even signed, while all other documents of the Provisional Government are signed). He claims that both the KGB and the Gestapo used to forge even more complicated signed documents.

<sup>74</sup> See: Alfonsas Eidintas, “Remembering the Jewish Catastrophe: 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Holocaust.” Speech at the Lithuanian Seimas special session, September 20, 2001.

<sup>75</sup> See: A. Gurevičiaus sąrašai. *Tūkstančiai lietuvių, kurie gelbėjo tūkstančius Lietuvos žydų Antrojo pasaulinio karo metais* (Vilnius: Pro-tėvių Kardas, 1999), pp. 152, 188.

<sup>76</sup> See: Vytautas Landsbergis, *Lithuania Independent Again* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), p. 19.

<sup>77</sup> See: Tables 4–6 (Appendices) for the number of victims of Nazi crimes in Lithuania.

<sup>78</sup> Standartenfuehrer, Befehlshaber der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD.

<sup>79</sup> In a letter to Heinrich Himmler of October 15, 1941, General Franz W. Stahlecker wrote: ...considering that the population of the Baltic countries suffered heavily under the government of Bolshevism and Jewry while Lithuania was occupied by the U.S.S.R., it was to be expected that after the liberation from the foreign

government they, i.e., the populace itself, would render harmless most of the enemies left behind after the retreat of the Red Army. It was the duty of the secret police to set into motion these cleansing movements and to direct them in the correct channels in order to accomplish the purpose of the cleansing operation as quickly as possible. It was no less important in the view of the future to establish the unshakeable and provable facts that the liberated population themselves took the most severe measures against the Bolshevik and Jewish enemy quite on their own, so that the direction by the German authorities could not be found out.

Franz W. Stahlecker, report to Heinrich Himmler of October 15, 1941. Helmut Krausnick, *The Truppe des Weltanschauungs-krieges, Teil 1* in Helmut Krausnick and Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges. Die Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD 1938–1942* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1981), pp. 206–209, as cited in: Damušis, *Lithuania*, p. 128.

<sup>80</sup> Damušis, *Lithuania*, p. 128.

<sup>81</sup> See, e.g.: Dina Porat, “The Holocaust in Lithuania” in David Cesarani, (ed.) *The Final Solution. Origins and Implementation* (London: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>82</sup> Porat, “Holocaust.”

<sup>83</sup> Thomas Remeikis (ed.), *Lithuania under German occupation 1941–1945. Despatches from US Legation in Stockholm* (Vilnius: Vilnius University Press, 2005), p. 10.

<sup>84</sup> Helmut Krausnick, “Die Einsatzgruppen vom Anschluss Osterreichs bis zum Feldzug gegen die Sowjetunion Entwicklung und Verhältnis zur Wehrmacht” Teil I in Krausnick, *Die Truppe*, pp. 205, 206.

<sup>85</sup> Krausnick, *Die Truppe*, p. 129.

<sup>86</sup> Interviews with Mr. Danielius Gintas and Mr. Bronius Čiudiškis, residents of Kaunas on June 25, 1940, Nottingham, December 15, 2001.

<sup>87</sup> Alfonsas Eidintas, *Lietuvos žydų žudynių byla. Dokumentų ir straipsnių rinkinys*. (The Case of the Massacre of the Lithuanian Jews: Selected Documents and Articles) (Vilnius: Vaga, 2001). See also: Alfonsas Eidintas, “Remembering the Jewish Catastrophe: 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Holocaust,” speech at the Lithuanian Seimas special session on September 20, 2001.

<sup>88</sup> Eidintas, “Remembering the Jewish Catastrophe.”

<sup>89</sup> Karl Jäger, report to Franz W. Stahlecker: Karl Jäger, der Befehlshaber der Sicherheitspolizei u. der SD Einsatzkommando 3, Report an die Einsatzgruppe A SS-Brigadefuehrer Dr. Stahlecker, in Riga, of December 1, 1941, pp. 472–480. Geheime Reichsache PS-2076/41 (no. 1 and 2). Also incorporated in the R. Heydrich file on January 25, 1942. Zentrale Stelle der LJV'en., Gestapo Archive, Ludwigsburg, Germany. As cited in: Damušis, *Lithuania*, p. 147.

<sup>90</sup> Karl Jäger, report to Franz W. Stahlecker. As cited in: Damušis, *Lithuania*, p. 147.

<sup>91</sup> Damušis, *Lithuania*, p. 130

<sup>92</sup> Damušis, *Lithuania*.

<sup>93</sup> Juozas Prunskis, *Lithuania's Jews and the Holocaust* (Chicago: Lithuanian American Council, 1979), p. 19.

<sup>94</sup> Prunskis, *Lithuania's Jews*.

<sup>95</sup> Prunskis, *Lithuania's Jews*.

<sup>96</sup> Damušis, *Lithuania*, p. 133.

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Dr. Petras Kisielius, December 13, 2001.

<sup>98</sup> Škirpa told two stories of an attack of the headquarters in Kaunas after the dissolution of the Provisional Government. See, e.g., Kazys Škirpa, *Sukilimas*, (Chicago: Lietuvių Fronto Bičiuliai, 1986).

<sup>99</sup> Damušis, *Lithuania*, pp. 133, 134.

<sup>100</sup> Damušis, *Lithuania*, p. 134. Similarly, the Soviets planned to release 6,000 criminals after Lithuania's declaration of independence, using them in a crack-down of the independent country during the planned communist coup d'état.

<sup>101</sup> Damušis, *Lithuania*, p. 134.

<sup>102</sup> Damušis, *Lithuania*, p. 134.

<sup>103</sup> “Report of Ehrlinger, SS Obersturmbahnführer of the Sicherheits Police”, as cited in: Damušis, *Lithuania*, p. 135.

<sup>104</sup> George H. Stein, *The Waffen SS: Hitler’s Elite Guard at War, 1939–1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), p. 156, as cited in: Roger D. Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion. Lessons from Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 156.

<sup>105</sup> Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion*.

<sup>106</sup> Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion*.

<sup>107</sup> See, e. g.: Saulius Sužiedėlis, “Thoughts on Lithuania’s Shadows of the Past: A Historical Essay on the Legacy of War” and “Thoughts on Lithuania’s Shadows of the Past: A Historical Essay on the Legacy of War, Part II”, *Artium*, [www.artium.lt/4/journal.html](http://www.artium.lt/4/journal.html).

<sup>108</sup> The author is aware that the U.S. Department of State applied pressure on Lithuania to split the International Commission for

the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania into two separate commissions. Lithuania resisted that pressure, confirming that both Soviet and Nazi crimes were parallel and, in fact, equal crimes against Lithuania, Western civilization, and humanity. It is important to note that the Victims of Communism Memorial in Washington, D.C. was officially dedicated “to the more than one hundred million victims of communism” on June 12, 2007. See: <http://www.victimsofcommunism.org/>.

<sup>109</sup> Thomas Lane, *Victims of Stalin and Hitler: The Exodus of Poles and Balts to Britain*, (New York: Palgrave, 2004), p. 44.

<sup>110</sup> <http://jbanc.org/mgimo.html>.

<sup>111</sup> Lane, *Victims of Stalin and Hitler*, p. 55.

<sup>112</sup> See: Darius Furmonavičius, “Victims of Stalin and Hitler: The Exodus of Poles and Balts to Britain. By Thomas Lane” in *International Affairs*, 82, No. 4 (July 2006): 811, 812.



Augustinas Idzelis

## **Demographic Aspects of the Jewish Population in Lithuania September 1939–June 1941**

Any examination of the Holocaust in Lithuania requires establishing the country's Jewish population before the German invasion. Ascertaining the number of Jews living in Lithuania between September 1, 1939 and June 22, 1941 is a difficult task due to a lack of statistical data as well as a number of events that affected the size of the Jewish population and ultimately the number of Jews killed by the Germans and their local collaborators within the territory of Lithuania.

Until Lithuania was occupied by the Soviet Union on June 14, 1940, Lithuania, as an independent state, remained neutral and was not involved in the conflict between Germany and Poland. Notwithstanding the tense and unfriendly relations between pre-war Lithuania and Poland, thousands of Polish soldiers and civilians sought – and were given – refuge in neutral Lithuania. Among the masses of refugees, there were hundreds of Polish Jews.

On September 17, 1939, pursuant to the terms of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, the Red Army occupied eastern Poland and the city of Vilnius. On October 10, 1939, Moscow turned over Vilnius and the surrounding territory to Lithuania. Lithuania not only regained its historical capital, but also a large number of indigenous Jews (Litvaks) as well as thousands of Jewish refugees from all over of Poland. The acquisition of Vilnius and surrounding territory dramatically increased the Jewish population of Lithuania.

Until Lithuania lost its independence, its government, together with foreign consuls and Jewish non-governmental organizations from abroad, did everything they could to arrange passage for Jewish refugees to places of safety outside of Europe. This process ended on June 14, 1940 with the Red Army occupying Lithuania and terminating its independence. On July 21, the occupant's puppet government in Kaunas proclaimed Lithuania to be a Soviet Socialist Republic. On August 3, 1940, Lithuania was incorporated into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.).

The incorporation of Lithuania into the Soviet Union set the stage for the arrest and mass deportation of “class enemies.” The “class enemy” label was a relative term. In practice, whether or not certain people were considered class enemies depended not on their individual actions or ethnic background, but on their status – specifically, their membership in or association with organizations or political parties deemed by Moscow to be anti-Soviet. Since political and public life in independent Lithuania was characterized by a proliferation of political parties and organizations, the Soviet concept of a class enemy meant that a sizeable portion of Lithuania’s population faced the risk of arrest, deportation, and death.

The arrest and deportation of individual class enemies began in July 1940. While this process was taking place, the People’s Commissariat for State Security (the Soviet secret police; NKVD) in Lithuania, under the leadership of Major Pyotr Gladkov, was making plans for the mass deportation of class enemies. There were plans to deport up to 700,000 individuals from occupied Lithuania. The mass deportations began on the night of June 14, 1941. The German invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941 terminated the operation. The last train full of class enemies left Vilnius on the night of June 24, 1941. Historian Dov Levin is of the opinion that of the 35,000 deportees, 7,000 – or 20 percent – were Jews.<sup>1</sup> Levin’s figures has been challenged by other historians.

On June 22, 1941, Operation Barbarossa began. Army Group North and elements of Army Group Center entered the territory of Lithuania. The German forces consisted of 700,000 men in 40 panzer tanks, motorized infantry, and infantry divisions. On June 24, German troops entered Kaunas and Vilnius. By June 27, all of Lithuania was in German hands.

Together with the German military formations, units of Einsatzgruppen A and B entered Lithuania. The Einsatzgruppen were special killing squads established and commanded by Reinhard Heydrich, chief of the Reich Security Main Office (German: *Reichssicherheitshauptamt*; RSHA). The objective of the Einsatzgruppen was the extermination of Jews. Under the command of SS-Brigadeführer Franz Walter Stahlecker, Einsatzgruppe A was attached to Army Group North. Stahlecker’s group consisted of 990 men, of whom 464 were part of the group’s headquarters unit.<sup>2</sup> Although the headquarters group reached Kaunas on June 25, Security Service (German: *Sicherheitsdienst*; SD) personnel were already observed in Kaunas on June 24.<sup>3</sup>

Geographical zones of operation were assigned to subunits of Einsatzgruppe A. With 110 men, Sonderkommando 1b under the command of SS-Oberführer Erich Ehrlinger reached Kaunas on June 28 and Daugavpils (Latvia) on July 8.<sup>4</sup> With 141 men, Einsatzkommando 3 under SS-Standartenführer Karl Jäger reached Kaunas on July 2, 1941.<sup>5</sup>

The city of Vilnius and the surrounding part of Lithuania was within the operational zone of Army Group Center. Einsatzgruppe B under the command of SS-Gruppenführer

Arthur Nebe was attached to this army group.<sup>6</sup> Vilnius was initially under the jurisdiction of Sonderkommando 7a, which was headed by SS-Standartenführer Walter Blume.<sup>7</sup> At the beginning of July, it was replaced by Einsatzkommando 9 which was commanded by SS-Obersturmbannführer Albert Filbert. Filbert's unit remained in Vilnius until the beginning of August, when it was replaced by Jäger's Einsatzkommando 3.<sup>8</sup>

A special killing unit which also operated within Lithuania was Einsatzkommando Tilsit, under the command of SS-Sturmbannführer Hans-Joachim Böhme.<sup>9</sup>

The unexpected German invasion coupled with the Lithuanian uprising and announcement on June 23 of the Provisional Government of Lithuania caused panic among the communists and Soviet government officials. A mass exodus of communist leaders and Soviet activists began on the first day of the hostilities. Paradoxically, while the top leadership was fleeing Lithuania, the rank-and-file party members and Soviet apparatchiks – the members of the so-called “Red activists” – were ordered to remain at their posts, provide assistance to the Red Army, and neutralize the insurgents.

The withdrawal of party apparatchiks and supporters of the Soviet regime was not uniform. In certain locations, the Red activists decided to stay and fight. In other locations, they joined the mass flight. The retreat from Lithuania was slow and involved numerous fights with local insurgents. Red activists who were eventually cut off went underground. Some remained in urban areas, while others fled to the forests, joined Red Army stragglers, and continued the fight. Having reached the safety of the unoccupied Soviet territories, the leadership of the Lithuanian Communist Party, pursuant to Moscow's directives, soon sent coordinators back to Lithuania and selected operatives to organize the members of the resistance into Red partisan detachments, which in time became a potent force in the Lithuanian countryside.

A distinctive aspect of the mass flight of Soviet apparatchiks and their supporters was that they were accompanied by thousands of local Jews. Only a small number of Jews fleeing Lithuania were members of the party or ranking officials of the Soviet establishment. Nevertheless, fear of Nazi persecution became an important motivating factor. Almost all of the Jews in Lithuania considered Germany to be a greater evil than Soviet Russia. Moreover, the involvement of some Jews in the mass arrests and recent deportations gave rise to a feeling that acts of violence were forthcoming from Lithuanians personally affected by these events. The exact number of Jews who fled from Lithuania or successfully reached safety in unoccupied parts of the U.S.S.R. is a matter of debate between historians.

Given all the aforementioned developments, it is difficult – but not impossible – to ascertain the size of the Jewish population in Lithuania at the beginning of the

Holocaust. In order to calculate the size of the Jewish population, it is necessary to determine the Jewish population in Lithuania proper as well as the number of Jews living in the Vilnius Region. After determining the total Jewish population (Lithuania plus the Vilnius Region), the total number of Jews who left the country between October 1939 and July 1941 using transit visas, as victims of Soviet deportations, or as refugees from the German onslaught, must be subtracted.

## Literature Review

Estimates of the Jewish population in Lithuania at the time of the German invasion tend to reflect the background of the historian who made the estimation. Israeli historians, such as Dina Porat, Solomonas Atamukas, Yitzhak Arad and Dov Levin, tend to present higher numbers. The latter three historians were Holocaust survivors with roots in Lithuania. Arad and Levin were ghetto escapees who joined the Soviet partisans in the forests outside of Kaunas and Vilnius. Atamukas was a refugee from Lithuania who found safety in the Soviet Union. There, he became a political commissar in the 16th (Lithuanian) Rifle Division of the Red Army. After the war, he became a department chairman at the Vilnius Higher Party School.

Estimates by Lithuanian historians, such as Arūnas Bubnys, Alfonsas Eidintas and Romuald Misiunas, tend to give lower numbers. Some Holocaust historians do not even attempt to make an estimate. For example, Christoph Dieckmann and Saulius Sužiedėlis submitted a report dealing with the mass murder of Lithuanian Jews during the summer and fall of 1941 to the International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania. The report was published in 2006.<sup>10</sup> Neither the report nor the Commission's conclusions addressed the question of the Jewish population. The emphasis was on the number of victims and perpetrators. Its conclusion was: "The Commission has reached a common estimate that the number of victims was between 200,000 and 206,000." Approximately 190,000 victims were Lithuanian Jews.<sup>11</sup>

The highest Jewish population estimate is given by Karen Sutton in her 2008 monograph, which focuses on the massacre of Lithuanian Jews and Lithuanian collaboration in the Holocaust. Sutton states:

"In October 1939, there were 160,000 Jews in Lithuania – seven percent of the population. The reacquisition of Vilnius boosted their number by nearly 100,000. In addition, 14,000–15,000 Jews fled to Soviet Lithuania from German-occupied Poland in 1939–1940. This brought the Jewish population to a peak of 270,000 – slightly over 10 percent of the total population."<sup>12</sup>

Dina Porat stated in a 1994 article that there was a total of 265,000 Jews in Lithuania, of whom 254,000 – or 95 percent – were killed during the Holocaust. The Jewish population of Lithuania proper was 168,000, while another 98,000 Jews were living in the Vilnius Region.<sup>13</sup>

Solomonas Atamukas estimated that 150,000 Jews lived in Lithuania proper.<sup>14</sup> He also stated that: “By and large, there was an increase of Jews in 1939 in Lithuania. Reacquired Vilnius had 60,000 Jews. Byelorussia transferred certain territories near Vilnius to Lithuania with 11,000 Jews. There were also refugees from Poland. They (Jews) numbered about 90,000 in the reacquired region of Vilnius.”<sup>15</sup> Adding this Jewish population to that of pre-war Lithuania, the total Jewish population in Lithuania comes to 240,000. However, by the time of the German invasion, the number of Jews in the country had decreased to 225,000.<sup>16</sup>

In a 1976 article, Yitzhak Arad stated that there were 150,000 Jews living in pre-war Lithuania. With the cession of a portion of the Vilnius Region, including the city of Vilnius, the Jewish population reached a grand total of 245,000. Taking into account emigration and deportations, “between 220,000 and 225,000 Jews remained in Lithuania after occupation by the Germans.”<sup>17</sup> These numbers did not take into account “the number of people who fled from Lithuania before the German invasion.”<sup>18</sup> In his 2009 study of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union, Arad made certain revisions. Here he claimed that the Jewish population at the time of the German invasion was between 205,000 and 210,000, of whom 196,000–200,000 were victims of the Holocaust. Arad stated that the number of Jewish survivors from Lithuania were between 9,000 and 10,000.<sup>19</sup>

In 1996, Dov Levin stated that the cession of the Vilnius Region “increased the Jewish population of Lithuania by 100,000, which included some 15,000 war refugees from German-occupied Poland, bringing the total Jewish population to 250,000.”<sup>20</sup> With Jews fleeing from the Germans and being deported, this number decreased to 220,000 by June 1941. According to Levin, of the quarter million Jews alive in 1939, only 25,000 – or 10 percent – survived the war.<sup>21</sup>

Historian Raul Hilberg did not combine the Jewish population of the Vilnius Region with that of Lithuania proper. He claimed that 145,000 Jews lived in pre-war Lithuania, of whom 15,000 survived the Holocaust. Hilberg aligned the Jewish population in the Vilnius Region with that of Poland.<sup>22</sup>

In their expanded and updated history of the Baltic States, Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera stated that “it is not unlikely that at the time of the Soviet takeover, there were over 200,000 Jews in Lithuania.” Of these Jews, “it is estimated that at least 170,000 ... perished.”<sup>23</sup>

The population figures presented by Lithuanian historians Sigitas Jegelevičius and Arūnas Bubnys appear to be the most reliable and definitive, since they are based on

documents found in the Lithuanian Central State Archives (LCSA, collection 743, series 5, folders 46, 47; pp. 172, 79).<sup>24</sup> Jegelevičius revealed the number of Jews living in Lithuania on July 1, 1940, while the number Bubnys presents refers to the situation on January 1, 1941. Jegelevičius's total is affirmed by historian Alfonsas Eidintas, who noted that "since this calculation is based on archival data, this figure should be nearest to the truth."<sup>25</sup>

The usefulness of Jegelevičius's data is that it is specific and based on the administrative divisions of Lithuania (see Table 1).

Table 1

JEWISH POPULATION IN LITHUANIA BY REGION AND CITY, JULY 1, 1940

1	Alytus	6,754
2.	Biržai	3,120
3.	Kaunas	6,095
4.	Kaunas City	33,760
5.	Kėdainiai	4,430
6.	Kretinga	3,835
7.	Marijampolė	5,240
8.	Mažeikiai	3,081
9.	Panevėžys	12,396
10.	Raseiniai	4,828
11.	Rokiškis	4,272
12.	Seinai	2,065
13.	Šakiai	2,756
14.	Šiauliai	13,508
15.	Švenčionėliai	1,802
16.	Tauragė	5,531
17.	Telšiai	4,054
18.	Trakai	7,054
19.	Ukmergė	7,372
20.	Utena	2,485
21.	Vilkaviškis	6,721
22.	Vilnius	4,821
23.	Vilniaus City	57,480
24.	Zarasai	3,060
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>209,070</b>

Source: Sigitas Jegelevičius, “Holokaustas Lietuvoje skaičių pinklėse”, *Lietuvos istorijos studijos, Vilniaus Universiteto mokslo darbai*, Vol. 5, 1997, p. 150. It should be noted that adding up all of the individual areas yields a number that is more than 2,000 less than the total.

Table 1 indicates that 62,301 Jews lived in the city and region of Vilnius and 146,769 in Lithuania proper. The latter number is close to the 145,000 quoted by historian Raul Hilberg.

Arūnas Bubnys, in his seminal 1998 history of the German occupation of Lithuania, stated: “It is not precisely known how many Jews were in Lithuania on the eve of the war between Germany and the Soviet Union, how many Jews were saved by the people of Lithuania, or how many awaited the war’s end in concentration camps in Germany. Different authors give very different numbers. The position of the author is this – according to the January 1, 1941 data of the Statistical Administration, there were 208,000 Jews in Lithuania in 1940 (6.86 percent of the population).”<sup>26</sup> Bubnys held to this position in his 2005 account of the Holocaust in Lithuania.<sup>27</sup>

## Acquisition of Vilnius

The October 10, 1939 cession of a portion of the Vilnius Region, including the city of Vilnius, increased the total number of Jews in Lithuania significantly. Before this, the Jewish population in Lithuania was in fact decreasing. This was due to the low natural population growth of the Jewish population coupled with a substantial out-migration of Jews to South Africa, Palestine and the United States. Between 1929 and 1939, 12,234 Jews emigrated from Lithuania.<sup>28</sup>

The first and only population census of pre-war Lithuania was carried out in 1923. The Jewish population numbered 153,746, or about 7.6 percent of the total population.<sup>29</sup> Since emigration from Lithuania was greater than natural population growth, the Jewish population in Lithuania (without the Vilnius Region) had decreased to 141,898 by 1939 (see Table 2).

Table 2

JEWISH POPULATION CHANGE IN LITHUANIA, 1924–1939

Year	Natural population increase	Emigration	Population change
1924	1,368	2,250	-882
1925	1,456	1,671	-215

Year	Natural population increase	Emigration	Population change
1926	1,191	2,828	-1,637
1927	1,188	4,441	-3,253
1928	1,412	1,664	-252
1929	913	1,825	-907
1930	752	1,736	-984
1931	819	1,098	-279
1932	811	717	+94
1933	619	1,020	-401
1934	446	1,101	-655
1935	269	1,418	-1,149
1936	313	1,007	-694
1937	198	447	-249
1938	366	426	-60
1939	107	439	-332
TOTAL	12,233	24,088	-11,855

SOURCE: Dov Levin, *The Litvaks: A Short History of Jews in Lithuania* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2000), p. 131.

Herman Kruk stated that “right before the outbreak of the war, in 1939, it was estimated that Vilnius numbered around 60,000 Jews.”<sup>30</sup> Vilnius was occupied by the Red Army on September 19, 1939. On October 10, Moscow returned the Vilnius Region to Lithuania. Nevertheless, it was not until October 27 that the last Soviets withdrew from the city. The short period of Soviet control had an immediate impact on the Jewish population. According to the wartime (1944) account of Israel Cohen: “A number of prominent men, both Zionists and socialists, had been taken away by the Red Army before it made its first withdrawal from Vilnius. On the other hand, some thousands of Jews, free from any ideological prepossession, and anxious to secure a livelihood, accepted the invitation of the Soviet authorities to follow into Russia.”<sup>31</sup>

In Lithuania, Jewish refugees replaced the Jews who had accompanied the Soviets back to Russia. Dov Levin said that by June 14, 1940, “an estimated 14,000 Jewish



refugees from Poland had reached the Vilnius area, about 70 percent from the German-occupied areas and the rest from Soviet controlled zone.”<sup>32</sup> Of these refugees, 10,370 came to Vilnius, while the rest ended up in other settlements in the region. Most of the refugees arrived in the city in December 1939 and January 1940. By June of 1940, the influx of refugees “dwindled to nearly zero.”<sup>33</sup>

According to Jegelevičius, there were 57,486 Jews in Vilnius on July 1, 1940. This number is confirmed by Irina Guzenberg.<sup>34</sup> However, this figure probably does not include the Jewish refugees. Given this circumstance, it is interesting to note that six months later, despite the fact that the influx of Jewish refugees had subsided, the number of Jews living in Vilnius had increased by 17,514 to 75,000.<sup>35</sup> Undoubtedly, this increase reflected not only the 1935-1940 influx of refugees, but also the relocation of Jews to Vilnius from other parts of the region and Lithuania proper.

Outside of the city of Vilnius, the Jewish population in the region was modest – 4,821 according to Jegelevičius. This number was more than doubled after Lithuania was declared a Republic of the Soviet Union in August 1940 and the Byelorussian S.S.R. ceded several rural portions of the Vilnius Region to Lithuania, with a population of 5,000 Jews.<sup>36</sup>

This meant that there were nearly 85,000 Jews (indigenous and refugees) living in the Vilnius Region. Adding this number to the 142,000 Jews living in Lithuania proper, we can conclude that the Jewish population was at its highest on or around January 1, 1941, with 227,000 persons.

In order to determine the size of the Jewish population at the time of the German invasion, the total number of Jews who left with transit visas, were deported by the Soviets, or fled from the invading Germans to unoccupied parts of the Soviet Union, must be subtracted from the 227,000 figure.

Herman Kruk gave an account of the situation in Vilnius before the German invasion. Having noted that 60,000 Jews lived in Vilnius in September 1939, he delineated the subsequent population movements:

That number was later increased because at the beginning of the war, Vilnius became a center for Polish refugees, where thousands and thousands from Warsaw and the surrounding area sought a temporary shelter. If we figure that a lot of refugees left Vilnius for America, Palestine, etc., during the Soviet period, and if we subtract the small number of Jews who succeeded (since most did not succeed) in fleeing with the retreating Bolsheviks, we can still ascertain that on June 22, 1941, there were at least 60,000 Jews in Vilnius.<sup>37</sup>

## Transit Out: The Sugihara Factor

The German invasion of Poland from the East coupled with the Soviet invasion of Poland from the East precipitated a stream of Jewish refugees into neutral Lithuania. The city of Vilnius became “a place of refuge, the only one of its kind in Eastern Europe, luring thousands of Jews from the Polish provinces that the Germans and Soviets had appropriated.”<sup>38</sup> The Jewish refugees who arrived in Vilnius did not view Lithuania as their final destination; hardly any intended to settle in Lithuania. They regarded the country as a “transit station only.”<sup>39</sup>

The Jewish refugee population was assisted by international Jewish welfare organizations. Of these, the two most important were the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS). These organizations helped Jewish refugees – and probably some indigenous Jews as well – in their attempts to seek refuge outside of Europe.

One early escape route was through Stockholm. The HIAS office in Vilnius reported that 735 entry visas were issued by June 15, 1940. Of these visas, “only 543 were used: 406 to Palestine, 46 to British Commonwealth countries, 41 to the United States, 37 to Latin America, and 13 to other destinations.”<sup>40</sup> The Palestine office in Kaunas negotiated with the Scandinavian airlines. The Jewish refugees “were flown from Riga to Stockholm and thence to the Netherlands or Marseilles, where they boarded ships for the run to Haifa.”<sup>41</sup>

Historian Christopher R. Browning pointed out that “In February 1940 the Lithuanian government requested permission for Polish Jewish refugees there to transit through Germany to Italy. The request was backed by the Italians, who did not want their shipping companies to lose out to Soviet ships on an alternative route through Odessa to Palestine. And the German consulate in Kaunas urged favorable consideration in view of the fact that Lithuania had accepted 1,500 Jews expelled from Suwalki.”<sup>42</sup>

Moe Beckelman played an important role in helping Jewish refugees leave Europe. An American Jew from New York, Beckelman was sent to Lithuania in the fall of 1939 by the Joint Distribution Committee – “an organization established by American Jews in 1914 to assist Jews abroad in distress.”<sup>43</sup> Beckelman established his office at the Metropole Hotel in Kaunas. The hotel café soon became a gathering place for Jewish refugees – a place where information and rumors were exchanged, and a place where the “Jewish patrons of the Metropole would compare notes on the geopolitics of life-saving scraps of paper [visas]. They were kept busy evaluating the value of rumors and of currencies, both circulating at great speeds.”<sup>44</sup>

Beckelman kept a dairy. An entry around March 22, 1940 reads:

Then there was [sic] long negotiations with the German and Russian authorities about the possibility of transit visas for Polish refugees with Palestine certificates. The Germans finally consented on the basis of sealed cars with joint Lithuanian and German escorts but the British squelched that plan by announcing that no one would be admitted to Palestine who had made transit through Germany. Negotiations with the Soviets are still going on and it is reported that they have agreed in principle to grant visas to Polish passport holders for transit purposes but so far as I know nothing has come of it. If Italy goes into the war in the near future than the road out will be completely closed...<sup>45</sup>

On June 10, 1940, Italy declared war on Great Britain and invaded France. Four days later, German forces occupied Paris. That same day, the Red Army marched into Lithuania. The French government sued for peace on June 17. The Stockholm escape route, which went through the low countries and France, was closed. "The only real routes left pointed eastward, but anything having to do with the Soviet Union evoked a sense of dread ... At the time, Stalin was as fearsome as Hitler, and so now it was a matter of choosing between fears."<sup>46</sup>

The Odessa link became important after the Soviet occupation. Traffic began in December 1940 and lasted until March 1941. The link was used by Jews who had obtained Turkish transit visas in Moscow. Some 2,400 Jews left Lithuania on the Moscow–Odessa–Istanbul route. Moreover, several hundred Jews from Lithuania obtained Iranian transit visas in Moscow with Transjordan or India as their destination. Using primarily Turkish and Iranian transit visas, more than 3,000 Jews from Lithuania were able to find refuge outside of Europe.<sup>47</sup>

The greatest number of Jews who left Lithuania before the German occupation used Japanese visas issued by Chiune Sugihara, vice-consul of the Japanese Consulate in Kaunas. Sugihara arrived in Kaunas early in September 1939 and remained in his post until September 4, 1940. In the period between June 14, 1940 and Sugihara's departure from Lithuania, there was a convergence of events that made it possible for approximately 10,000 Jews – the majority of whom were refugees from Poland – to leave Lithuania.<sup>48</sup>

After Sugihara arrived in Kaunas, he became acquainted with the Ganor family through Solly Ganor, an 11-year old boy whom Sugihara met at a candy store owned by Anushka Shtrom – the boy's aunt. The Ganors were an affluent Litvak family in the restaurant supply business and, together with the Shtrom family, were part of the Kaunas Jewish elite.

One of Solly Ganor's uncles was George Shtrom, "a businessman, one of Ichiel Shtrom's successful sons. Despite his affluence, and perhaps because of his liberal upbringing, he was a supporter of the socialists and communists, and among his friends he was known as a champion of the underdog."<sup>49</sup> George provided financial support to families of communists imprisoned under Lithuanian President Antanas Smetona. Through these activities, George Shtrom became a close friend of First Secretary of the Communist Party of Lithuania Antanas Sniečkus, who rose to power after the Soviets occupied Lithuania.

In December 1939, the Ganor family invited Sugihara and his wife to celebrate Hanukkah with them at their Kaunas home. Among the attendees was the Rosenblat family. The Rosenblats were refugees from Warsaw and were staying with the Ganor family. Mr. Rosenblat asked for permission to speak. He "spoke in German, hesitantly at the beginning, but as he warmed to his subject a hush fell over those present. He became so emotional describing what was happening to the Jews in Poland that he broke down and cried. Mr. Sugihara listened attentively, a look of dismay on his face."<sup>51</sup>

Afterwards, Sugihara asked Rosenblat "for other details about conditions in Poland under the Nazis." Rosenblat, in turn, "implored Sugihara to issue him a Japanese visa, but the consul sadly shook his head, explaining that his government had refused permission to issue such visas, not even transit visas."<sup>52</sup>

Sometime in early 1940, Rosenblat developed a friendship with Nathan Gutwirth, a young Dutch Jew who had come to Lithuania to study the Talmud at the Telshe (Telšiai) Yeshiva. Meanwhile, Gutwirth was friends with Jan Zwartendijk, the Dutch representative of Philips Electronics in Kaunas. After the fall of the Netherlands in May 1940, the Dutch ambassador in Riga, L. P. J. de Decker, replaced the current Dutch consul in Kaunas – a man with pro-Nazi sentiments – with Zwartendijk.<sup>53</sup> The German conquest of the Netherlands trapped Gutwirth and his fellow Dutch yeshiva students in Lithuania. Gutwirth contacted Zwartendijk and asked whether visas to the Netherlands/West Indies were available.

On behalf of the students, the Dutch consul made inquiries and discovered that two Dutch colonies in the Caribbean, Surinam and Curaçao, didn't require visas for immigration. Permission to enter was granted at the discretion of the Dutch governor. A putative "end visa" for these colonies, from the Dutch consul of Kaunas, would be a start. In fact, the consul agreed to issue visas to these colonies to anyone who asked for them.<sup>54</sup>

Having learned about the no-visa requirement to Surinam and Curaçao, Rosenblat approached Solly Ganor's father. The transit visa was the only problem, and Sugihara was their best bet. "Early the next morning, Father and I, Mr. Rosenblat and his daughter, and the Dutch boy all went to the Japanese consulate."<sup>55</sup> The result was unexpected:

As it turned out, Mr. Sugihara had already made his decision. Since the Soviets took power he had received many delegations of refugees. For days, they had gathered outside the consulate – families with children, women with infants in their arms. The Japanese government continued to refuse permission to issue visas, but he and his wife discussed the situation, and agreed that his humanitarian duty was clear. It overrode the policies of governments, Mr. Sugihara said. He would issue visas despite the instructions of his superiors.<sup>56</sup>

Sugihara's decision to issue transit visas to persons with Dutch end-point visas soon became known throughout the Jewish refugee community in Kaunas and all of Lithuania. The Japanese consulate on Vaižgantas Street in Kaunas began to draw throngs of visa seekers. "Suddenly escape through the Soviet Union becomes a reasonable risk, rather than a flirtation with the Gulag."<sup>57</sup>

The key question is why the Soviet Union issued transit visas to Jews with Sugihara visas. Almost all of the Jewish refugees from Poland fell into the Soviet classification of "class enemy". In fact, at the very time the NKVD was issuing transit visas, plans were being drafted for the arrest and mass deportation of "class enemies" from Lithuania. The Soviet transit visas were to be presented at the newly opened Intourist offices in Kaunas or Vilnius, which would "determine the travel schedule, terms of payment, food and board arrangements on the way, and so on."<sup>58</sup> The cost of a train ticket from Kaunas to Valdivostok was \$180–\$200 per person – a substantial amount at that time.<sup>59</sup>

The arrangement with Intourist was incredible. "Polish refugees, some of them recently sentenced to prison or banishment to inhospitable lands, were now allowed to cross the country in spacious railway cars, enjoying Intourist services, staying at grand hotels in Moscow, sometimes even venturing on visits to interesting sites in the Soviet capital – all with official sanction."<sup>60</sup>

Hillel Levine believes that two factors were involved in the Soviet decision to grant transit visas. First of all, this was an opportunity to earn hard currency. As he questioned, "How did they hit on the idea of selling Jews transit visas rather than 'selling' Jews themselves into slave labor? Clearly, they realized there was much more money to be made the former way, rather than the latter."<sup>61</sup>

Second, by mid-April 1941, the Japanese and the Soviets had successfully concluded negotiations for a non-aggression pact. "It was precisely in this period between September 1940 and April 1941 that most of the Jews with Sugihara's visas made their way across the Soviet Union. This delicate web of treaty relations might have provided extra incentives to the Soviets and Japanese to cooperate, even when it came to the passage of hapless Jewish refugees."<sup>62</sup>

Dov Levin offers a third reason. He noted that the exodus of Jews from Lithuania offered the Soviet intelligence services the possibility of planting Soviet spies in the “capitalist” world. According to Levin, the Sobolevich (a.k.a. Soblen) affair supports this inference. The entire Sobolevich family along with several family friends – nearly 20 people in all – were allowed by Soviet authorities to leave Lithuania in early 1941 and emigrate to the United States via Japan. “It was baffling. Not only were they local Jews and not refugees; they were public figures, well-known, and affluent, the kind of people whom the authorities loved to harass.”<sup>63</sup>

After protracted FBI surveillance, two members of the family were arrested in 1957 on charges of military espionage for the U.S.S.R. Levin concluded: “There is no way of knowing how many agents the Soviets planted in the controlled out flux of Polish refugees from Soviet Lithuania. One may presume, however, that the Soblen cell was not *sui generis* and that some of its counterparts have never been uncovered.”<sup>64</sup>

As the summer of 1940 was coming to an end and the Japanese consulate in Kaunas was being closed, Sugihara dramatically increased the number of transit visas he was issuing. The end-point visa requirement became irrelevant. According to Sugihara, after the 11th of August, “I gave visa to all who came to me, regardless of the fact whether or not they could produce some kind of document proving they were going to another country via Japan.”<sup>65</sup> Witnesses said that even as Sugihara’s train was leaving Kaunas for Berlin, “Sugihara continued to issue his lifesaving scraps of paper” through the train window.<sup>66</sup>

The impending closure of foreign consulates in Soviet occupied Lithuania had an impact on Thomas Preston, the British consul in Kaunas. Preston had dealings with Zorach Warhaftig, a Jewish refugee lawyer from Warsaw who was internationally prominent as a Zionist leader. Great Britain allowed its consulates to deal with local representatives of the Jewish Agency for Palestine regarding the acquisition of immigration certificates to Palestine. Through his contacts in Jerusalem, Warhaftig was able to establish the Aliya Commission in Kaunas. In his words, “Our commission received full authority from the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem and was empowered to deal independently with the British Consulate in Kaunas where the local Palestine office was a party to this arrangement.”<sup>67</sup>

A hostile relationship existed between Preston and Warhaftig over the number of immigration certificates to Palestine. Now the situation had changed. Consul General Preston and his staff now “showed signs of cooperation, perhaps even a measure of identification and compassion. ... Preston and his staff began offering unanticipated assistance to the Jewish refugees.”<sup>68</sup> Through the efforts of consulate staffer Gent, 250 Palestine visas were stamped on Polish refugee passports and 550 “notification letters” were provided to refugees who did not have passports. “Gent also was willing to give the Palestine Office people blank sheets of letterhead, imprinted prominently

with the British crown, so that they might produce additional ‘notification letters’ when necessary.”<sup>69</sup> The Palestine visas and “notification letters” were important for the acquisition of Turkish or Iranian transit visas.

The departure of Chiune Sugihara and Thomas Preston and the closing of foreign consulates in Kaunas did not terminate the documentation process necessary for the “legal” departure of Jews from Soviet Lithuania. Forging transit visas became a cottage industry. Forgers ranged from individuals who gouged their desperate clients with exorbitant fees, to Jesuit priests in Vilnius whose motives were non-monetary. Hillel Levine said: “It is impossible to estimate the number of ‘forged’ visas issued in Sugihara’s name during and after his stay in Lithuania. ...I have received a report from Professor Ryszara Frelek of Warsaw regarding some Jesuits in Vilnius who were issuing Sugihara visas with seals he had left behind and did not destroy, long after the Japanese diplomat had departed.”<sup>70</sup>

The NKVD (People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs) office in Kaunas which issued transit visas to Jews leaving the Soviet Union apparently was instructed not to interfere with the transit visa issuing process – even if the Sugihara visas used by the Jewish applicants were obvious forgeries. It also helped if the NKVP officer was a Russian Jew. Levine described several such incidents in Kaunas:

According to Moshe Zupnik, a Russian Jew by the name of Schlossberg was the NKVD representative in Kaunas issuing Soviet transit visas. A visa applicant once presented Schlossberg with obviously bogus documents, which under Soviet rule was sufficient reason to be carted off to Siberia. “You are not ashamed to give me such bad work?” said the Jewish NKVD officer. I have *rahmunis* (pity) for your children.” Twenty years of Soviet living did not eliminate his compassion for a fellow Jew in distress. Another Jewish special agent turned with violent anger on a visa seeker. “How much did you pay the Polak for the forgery?” When the applicant was palpably scared, this Jewish commissar looked to the right and looked to the left to see whether he was observed, moved closer to the frightened refugee and whispered, “*Fur gezuntihait!*” (“Have a good trip”).<sup>71</sup>

According to figures provided by Dov Levin and Hiller Levine, approximately 12,600 Jews – primarily refugees from Poland – left Soviet Lithuania. This number includes the 2,600 Jews who had Turkish or Iranian visas and left via Moscow to the Middle East. The remaining 10,000 Jews left with Sugihara visas. As noted by Levine, “all told, visas covering 10,000 Jews plus an unspecified number of other refugees is a reasonable estimate.”<sup>72</sup> According to Dov Levin, “in all 2,500–3,000 persons left Soviet Lithuania by the Moscow–Vladivostok–Japan route.”<sup>73</sup>

Given Hillel Levine’s extensive research into Sugihara’s life, his use of Japanese archives, and his numerous interviews with individuals who left Soviet Lithuania on

Sugihara visas, his estimate of 10,000 people seems more credible than that of Dov Levin. If we include the Jews that left between October 10, 1939 and June 14, 1940, the number who left Lithuania is in excess of 13,000.

## Deportations and the Cleansing of Class Enemies

The fact that Lithuania was occupied by the Red Army on June 14, 1940 and then incorporated into the Soviet Union on August 3 did not change the values or thinking of the population. Although the overwhelming majority of the country's population was shocked by the sudden turn of events and disappointed by the flight of its political leadership, few accepted the foreign invaders and the way of life they advocated. For the communist regime to successfully integrate Lithuania into the Soviet Union, it became necessary to eliminate all actual or potential obstacles. In terms of Marxist-Leninist ideology and practice, this meant the liquidation of all class enemies.

Destruction of class enemies was a key tenet of Leninist ideology. Solomonas Atamukas noted that Lenin had said that on the day of victory of the proletariat, "it would be naive to think that the intelligentsia, the middle class and the petty bourgeois would become communist."<sup>74</sup> Atamukas pointed out that while several thousand officials, army officers, policemen and other functionaries of bourgeois Lithuania fled to "Hitlerite Germany", most members of the overthrown class of exploiters remained. This included "owners of nationalized industrial, commercial and transport enterprises, as well as large residences; proprietors of estates and rich farmers who lost all or part of their land to the working peasants; officials of the bourgeois government and party functionaries, including police officers, reactionary army officers, clergymen, and leaders of the Riflemen's Union, who had lost their privileged positions. They were dissatisfied with the Soviet system and wanted to restore the old one."<sup>75</sup>

Atamukas pointed out that "In every way possible, party and state organs fought against social enemies. Since it was necessary to protect the government of the people and workers from their schemes, force as well as means of punishment were not avoided."<sup>76</sup> The words "force" and "punishment", as used by Atamukas, a Soviet historian in 1974, are euphemisms for torture, murder and mass deportations.

The identification of class enemies was a multi-faceted operation conducted by the NKVD/NKGB<sup>77</sup> with the assistance of Soviet activists, the Komsomol (the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League), and a network of informers. Torture of arrestees was a common practice used to obtain additional information – especially with respect to the location of wanted individuals. After the Soviet occupation, potential victims who were not able to flee from the country often changed addresses, moved from one town to another, or hid in the countryside.



The selection of persons for arrest and deportation was complicated by the fact that the so-called “class enemies” were part of the general population, were not segregated in any specific neighborhood, and did not have any distinguishing characteristics with respect to appearance, language or accent. Designation as a class enemy did not depend on the individual’s ethnic background. Lithuanians, Poles, Jews, and Russians living in Lithuania were all potential class enemies.

Given this reality, the linchpin of the NKVD/NKGB’s preparatory work became “operative accounting.” This refers to the compilation of lists and files of persons deemed to be class enemies. The main sources of information were member lists of various organizations operating in Lithuania and subscription lists of newspapers, magazines and journals. Operative accounting was a labor-intensive procedure which required personnel who could read Lithuanian or a minority language spoken in the country. They also had to have a basic familiarity with life in the country before the Soviet occupation. It made local collaborators very important to the NKVD/NKGB personnel from outside Lithuania who could not speak the local language. Reports from informers were also an important source of information. Some informers volunteered their services for money or career advancement, while others volunteered for ideological reasons.

The Soviets employed a two-track approach to eliminate class enemies. Both tracks were used simultaneously, but they differed in scale and speed. The first track involved the arrest of specific individuals and their interrogation at NKVD/NKGB facilities. Arrestees who were not summarily executed or killed during the course of interrogations were transferred to one of the 12 prisons in the country. Most were taken to the Ninth Fort in Kaunas or to Lukiškis Prison in Vilnius, from where they were transported in box cars to forced labor camps in the Arctic or in the subarctic regions of the Soviet Union. The death rate among these political prisoners from starvation, cold, and disease was extremely high. Very few political prisoners served out their sentences in these camps.

On January 5, 1941, Captain Kozlov, Deputy Head of the Interrogation Section of the Vilnius NKVD prepared a report entitled “Regarding the Liquidation of Counterrevolutionary Organizations and Parties in the City of Vilnius.” The report grouped arrestees according to their ethnic background. The section dealing with Jews stated:

3. Jewish counterrevolutionary nationalistic, bourgeoisie parties and organizations: Bund, Tsukunft, Zionist-Revisionist, Betar, Brith Hachajal, Combatants:
  - a) 20 persons arrested?
  - b) for various counterrevolutionary crimes – 46 persons.

Total number of Jews arrested – 66.<sup>78</sup>

The total number of arrestees given in Kozlov's edited report was 700. The number of Jewish arrestees (66) was not only disproportionately small in terms of the total number of Jews in Vilnius (75,000) – it also accounted for a very small part (9.4 percent) of the total number of arrestees. This situation could be explained by the fact that at that time, a massive out-migration of Jews carrying Sugihara visas was taking place under the supervision of the NKVD.

Between June 14, 1940 and June 14, 1941, the NKVD/NKGB arrested 6,606 class enemies, of whom 334 (5.1 percent) were Jews.<sup>80</sup> The first arrestees (July 1940) included:

Reuven Rubinstein, editor of the *Yidishe Shtime* daily; Jakov Goldberg, chairman of the board of the Union of Jewish Soldiers; Leyb Gorfinkel, former members of the Seimas and one of the leaders of Lithuania's Zionists; Hirsh Zevi Levin, leader of the Revisionist Zionism party; and Dovydas Ickovičius, leader of the Agudat Yisrael party and secretary general of the Union of Lithuanian Rabbis. In September 1940, Menachem Begin, head of the Polish branch of Betar and future Prime Minister of Israel, was arrested in Vilnius and sentenced to eight years in prison.<sup>81</sup>

The first track focused on prominent and well-known individuals. The second track involved the mass arrest and deportation of thousands of lesser-known individuals deemed by the NKVD/NKGB to be class enemies. In contrast to the first track, the arrestees were not interrogated or incarcerated; rather, they were taken by wagon or truck to railway stations and loaded into cattle cars. Cattle cars from all over the country were taken to Vilnius for this purpose. Trains, with as many as 75 cattle cars, transported the deportees to forced labor camps throughout the Soviet Union.

The organization and implementation of the mass arrest plan was slow. It entailed compiling files, making lists, deploying thousands of security personnel, and mobilizing local communists, Komsomol members, and Soviet activists.

Jurgis Glušauskas (1909-1970), who served as the Soviet People's Commissar for the Timber Industry, did not join his fellow Soviet officials in fleeing from the advancing Germans. Glušauskas was not shot by the insurgents because he was able to convince them that he was a member of the anti-communist resistance. In 1942, he published an article where he discussed the policy of mass deportations from Lithuania. According to Glušauskas, "during the first phase, approximately 700,000 Lithuanians (or 30 percent of the entire nation) were to be removed."<sup>82</sup> Since the article was published under the Nazi occupation, any reference to Jewish victims was prohibited. It would fly in the face of the basic Nazi propaganda tenet that "Jews and Bolsheviks" were one and the same.

By May 1941, operative accounting – at least for the first phase of deportations – was completed. On May 13, 1941, Major Pyotr Gladkov, head of the NKGB in the

Lithuanian S.S.R., telegraphed a report to Vsevolod Nikolayevich Merkulov, the head of the NKGB in Moscow. Gladkov's report summarized the number of persons in each class enemy category, the number of persons in leadership positions within each category, and the envisaged number of arrestees within each category.<sup>83</sup>

In total, Gladkov identified 218,500 class enemies.<sup>84</sup> In practice, the Soviet policy was to deport not just the head of a given household that had been identified as a class enemy, but the entire family. Accordingly, in order to estimate the number of persons who were to be removed from Lithuania, the number of class enemies (218,500) should be multiplied by the average family size (3). This figure – 655,500 – is close to the 700,000 quoted by Glušauskas.

Given the enormous number of individuals designated as class enemies, their removal was to be done in discrete stages and magnitudes. The detainment and removal operation was to begin on June 14, 1941 – eight days before the German attack on the Soviet Union. According to Gladkov's telegram, the number of persons to be deported was 22,967, or approximately 10.5 percent of the total number of class enemies.<sup>85</sup>

Since Gladkov's report used the classification scheme set forth in his Order No. 0023, the ethnic background of the persons listed can be ascertained on the basis of their affiliated political party or organization. While certain class enemy categories were neutral in terms of ethnicity, they accounted for a relatively small percentage of the persons listed.

The ninth section of Gladkov's telegram dealt with "nationalistic Jewish counterrevolutionary organizations." This section included Zionist organizations, the Bund, and the so-called "militarized and fascist" organizations. The number of class enemies included in this section came to 11,158 persons (5.1 percent of the total class enemies). The people to be arrested included 453 Jews – a very modest number.

After finding out that they were on the deportation lists, some Jews with connections in the Soviet administration were able to avoid arrest and deportation. One such individual was Avraham Tory, the secretary of the Jewish Council at the Kaunas Ghetto and author of one of the most widely published Holocaust diaries in the world. Historian Mark Gilbert points out: "Tory knew from his brother-in-law, Benjamin Romanovski – a high official in the Soviet government of Lithuania – that he was on the list of those to be deported to Siberia, and expected to be arrested at any moment. Fearful of deportation, Tory left Kaunas for Vilnius, where he was in hiding during the last weeks of Soviet rule in Lithuania."<sup>87</sup>

Solly Ganor, a Holocaust survivor from Kaunas, notes that after his brother Herman became a member of a Soviet "intelligence unit," he happened to see his father's name – Chaim Ganor – on a list of people slated for arrest and deportation. Herman was able to convince the Soviet captain to delay the arrest of his father. Chaim Ganor was never arrested or deported. After the German invasion, Chaim and part of his family

were able to escape from Kaunas and find refuge in the Soviet Union. Chaim eventually emigrated to Israel and died in Tel Aviv in 1966.<sup>88</sup>

The situation of the Ganor family was not unique. Schoschana Rabinovici, a Holocaust survivor from a wealthy family in Vilnius, described a situation where money played key role. Rabinovici's father's family, the Wekslers, owned a candy factory. After the factory was nationalized, her divorced father, Isak Weksler, stayed on at the factory as a technical advisor, while her grandfather continued to manage the company – not as an owner, but as a salaried director. Meanwhile, her mother got remarried to a man named Julek Rauch. Rauch learned that members of the family, including Schoschana, her mother (Raja Indurski-Weksler) and her maternal grandparents (the Indurskis), were on a deportation list. Rauch took measures to remedy the situation:

Julek had influential friends. He sought to delay the deportation of Grandfather Indurski and his family, because my mother was also on the list. The whole business took a long while; in the meantime we waited with packed bags, ready to be displaced. Then, at the last minute, and by paying a lot of money, Julek was able to get us crossed off the deportation list. There were three deportations sent from Vilnius to Siberia, and we were among the lucky ones who succeeded in buying their freedom.<sup>89</sup>

The mass deportation of class enemies from Lithuania began on June 14, 1941. Trains with deportees continued to depart from Vilnius even after the German invasion began. The last train from Vilnius, with 1,700 prisoners, left on June 24, at 4:00 A.M. The train was guarded by troops from the 42nd Convoy Forces Security Division under the command of Lieutenant Dyakov. The train was attacked by insurgents who were able to detach the last 50 cars and save 1,100 prisoners.<sup>90</sup>

Many memoirs of Holocaust survivors from Lithuania take note of the mass deportations. William W. Mishell, a Holocaust survivor from Kaunas, wrote:

On 15 June 1941 the deportations started. It was a terrible day. Hundreds of friends of mine were among the deportees, since all of them were either Zionists or from well-to-do families. Without wasting much time, our family went into hiding. For several nights we slept in Williampole [sic] at the house of my uncle. After several days, the deportations stopped and all the people were move out of Lithuania in echelons towards Siberia.<sup>91</sup>

Yitzhak Arad was a teenager in the town of Švenčionys (Swienciany) in the Vilnius Region during the time of the mass Soviet deportations. He noted that “scores of Swienciany families were exiled. We knew most of these people, particularly the Jews among them, the social elite of the Jewish community.”<sup>92</sup>

In June of 1941, Harry Gordon was a 16-year old in Kaunas. His middle-class extended family did not suffer under the Soviets: “My father was still at the textile factory and had even gotten a promotion. Uncle Borach worked as a commissar, supplying the Russian army with food. And Uncle Yenchik was still in the cattle business.”<sup>93</sup> Gordon was aware of the mass deportations taking place in Kaunas:

The Russians began deporting large groups of people to Siberia. They wanted to take possible subversives away from the border, but instead they got the old and ill and the Jewish people on the list. ... They allowed no time for packing even extra clothes but took people to the trains. At the depot boxcars were waiting, and the people were loaded onto them like animals, one hundred and fifty to two hundred in a car. Each car had only one small window for ventilation, which was covered with barbed wire to prevent escapes. On each boxcar, written in Russian in large white letters, were the words ‘traitors to the country.’<sup>94</sup>

The number of Jews deported from Lithuania has not been determined. This is not surprising, considering that there is no consensus regarding the total number of people deported from Lithuania between June 14, 1941 and June 24, 1941. Estimates range from a low of 18,000<sup>95</sup> to a high of 40,000<sup>96</sup> arrestees and deportees. In his 2012 monograph, historian Arvydas Anušauskas estimates that approximately 30,000 citizens of Lithuania became victims of Soviet terror. Of these people, 2,000 were murdered in Lithuania and 21,000 ended up in the Gulag (Soviet forced labor camps) or exile.<sup>97</sup>

Dov Levin estimated that of the 35,000 deportees, 7,000 – or 20 percent – were Jews.<sup>98</sup> In his 1979 autobiography, Yitzhak Arad wrote that between 5,000 and 6,000 Jews were deported.<sup>99</sup> In 2004, Arad gave a revised figure: “According to my estimates, 3,000 Jews were deported to the interior of the Soviet Union for being, as defined by the communist authorities, ‘anti-Soviet elements.’ This number was about 20 percent of all those deported in this way from Lithuania.”<sup>100</sup>

According to Anušauskas, 2,300 Jews, or 10.9 percent of the total number of deportees, were deported to the Gulag Archipelago. This is a much higher number than the one found in Gladkov’s May 13, 1941 telegram to Merkulov. The difference can be explained by the fact that Gladkov’s numbers refer only to “heads of households”, i.e., individuals. During the actual roundup of class enemies, entire families were removed. Jewish families, especially among the religiously conservative segments of Jewish society, tended to be large.

It can be concluded with reasonable certainty that approximately 3,000 Jews were deported from Lithuania. Paradoxically, what initially appeared to be a death sentence actually resulted in many of the deportees surviving the Holocaust. Some, like Menachem Begin, even reached Israel.

## Flight from the German Invaders: June 23–July 1, 1941

The German invasion of the Soviet Union began on Sunday, June 22, 1941. Most of Lithuania fell within the operational zone of Army Group North (commander – Field Marshal General Wilhelm Ritter von Leeb), whose objective was Leningrad, 500 miles away. The city and region of Vilnius was within the operational zone of Army Group Center under the command of Field Marshal Fedor von Bock. Its objective was to capture Moscow. The size of the German forces that crossed the frontier into Lithuania was enormous: 40 panzer tanks, motorized infantry, and infantry divisions, 700,000 soldiers, 1,500 tanks, 12,000 pieces of artillery, and more than 1,200 aircraft.<sup>101</sup>

June 22 also marked the beginning of the anti-Soviet insurrection in Kaunas. Vilnius was meant to have been the focal point of the insurrection, but this did not occur. The NKVD, under the direction of Lieutenant Colonel Aleksandras Slavinas (head of counter-intelligence, German desk), used information obtained from the Sicherheitsdienst (Security Service; SD) to liquidate the Vilnius Lithuanian Activist Front (LAF) headquarters in early June. Major Vytautas Bulvičius, the prospective Minister of Defense in the Provisional Government of Lithuania, Vladas Nasevičius, the prospective Minister of Internal Affairs, and others were arrested and taken on the last train from Vilnius to Gorky in the Soviet Union.<sup>102</sup>

The burden of the insurrection now fell on the Kaunas LAF. In contrast to Vilnius where the tactical emphasis was placed on Lithuanian soldiers serving in the 29th Territorial Rifle Corps of the Red Army, the Kaunas insurgents used guile and psychological warfare.

A prime example of the Kaunas approach is illustrated by the actions of Juozas Rudokas and his men. Rudokas was the manager of a postal service supply department. The central post office in Kaunas became his main target. The target's significance was that this is where the main offices of the Kaunas telephone and telegraph system were located.

At 2:00 P.M., the LAF headquarters telephoned Rudokas and informed him that the insurrection was about to begin, and that he should proceed against his target. At 5:00 P.M., Rudokas called back and reported that the post office had been taken over without any casualties. He also said that before the military lines were disconnected, all Soviet military posts were informed in Russian that German paratroopers had landed and taken over the city. After this false message was spread, all of the telephone lines were disconnected.<sup>103</sup> According to Adolfas Damušis, one of the leaders of Kaunas LAF and a member of the Provisional Government, the actions of the Rudokas group in destroying “both the military and civil communications network had an immense impact on the panic-stricken Soviet forces.”<sup>104</sup> The story concocted by Rudokas that

Kaunas was being attacked by German paratroopers had an immediate impact on the Red Army command. A report of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Lithuania describes the situation that Sunday afternoon:

At about 4:00 or 5:00 PM on June 22, 1941, the leadership of the 11th Army warned the Central Committee that it should immediately evacuate Kaunas since the city was being surrounded by the Germans. The Central Committee ordered the evacuation of the Kaunas activists by city transport vehicles, while the entire Soviet apparatus departed to districts further away from the front. Prior to that, several trains filled with party, Soviet and military family members were dispatched from Kaunas with documents and bank funds.<sup>105</sup>

On the evening of Sunday, June 22, the Soviet leadership began to gather at the NKVD headquarters on Savanorių Avenue in Kaunas. Approximately 600 men and more than 50 motor vehicles were assembled. On the night of June 22, the convoy left Kaunas and proceeded northeast toward the town of Jonava. The main escape route from Kaunas was the Jonava–Ukmergė–Zarasai highway, which continued on to the town of Daugavpils in Latvia. Nikolay Pozniakov, a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and Moscow’s chief enforcer in Lithuania, became the self-appointed convoy commander.<sup>106</sup> The convoy was protected by an NKVD detachment, which, according to Anušauskas, “carried out punitive operations in the districts of Ukmergė, Utena and Zarasai together with Soviet activists before leaving Lithuanian territory on June 23–24.”<sup>107</sup>

While the communist and Soviet leadership fled from Lithuania during the first night of the war, rank-and-file supporters of the regime were ordered to defend the most important facilities, fight saboteurs and paratroopers, and help the Red Army in every way possible.<sup>108</sup> A large number of supporters responded. “During the first days of the war, 37 party and Soviet activist detachments and dozens of resistance groups were formed with 10,000 fighters in their ranks. About 5,000 activists were killed...”<sup>109</sup>

Undoubtedly, some of the 5,000 victims were Jewish supporters of the Soviet regime. It would not be surprising to surmise that some of the victims were classified by SS-Brigadeführer Franz Walter Stahlecker in his October 15, 1941 report as victims of “pogroms”. The Germans, especially the S.S., did not want to give any credit to the insurgents or recognize any positive military role they played in the war against the Soviets.

The German campaign in Lithuania was not a cakewalk. It took eight days for the Germans to defeat organized Soviet resistance. On June 24, the Wehrmacht entered Vilnius, followed by Kaunas and Panevėžys on June 25 and Rokiškis on June 27. The Germans lost 3,362 soldiers – including 218 officers – during their drive through Lithuania. Civilian deaths were considerable. During the first day alone, 4,000

civilians were killed – mainly by Luftwaffe bombardments.<sup>110</sup> The insurgents lost between 2,000 and 4,000 fighters.<sup>111</sup>

In his September 14, 1942 report to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Antanas Sniečkus, First Secretary of the Communist Party of Lithuania, stated that of the 4,625 members of the party, 2,533 – or 53 percent of the total membership – were able to reach unoccupied Soviet territory.<sup>112</sup> According to historian Nijolė Maslauskienė, total membership in the Communist Party of Lithuania on June 22, 1941 was 4,739, of whom 597 – or 12.6 percent – were Jews. Of these Jews, 360 – or 60 percent – escaped from Lithuania.<sup>113</sup> The remaining 237 were killed in battles with insurgents, in action as Red partisans, or as victims of the Holocaust.

Approximately 619 communists – or 26 percent of the total escapees – were from the city of Kaunas. The ethnic background of this group was as follows: 266 Russians (42.6 percent); 266 Lithuanians (42.6 percent); and 148 Jews (24.0 percent).<sup>114</sup> Most of the individuals who escaped from Kaunas were top Communist Party and Soviet government leaders. In June 1941, all of the main offices of the party and government were still located in Kaunas. The planned relocation to Vilnius was not to begin until later that year.<sup>115</sup>

Most of the high ranking Jews in the Communist Party of Lithuania (CPL) were able to reach safety in Moscow or other unoccupied cities in the Soviet Union. The highest ranking Jew within the ranks of the CPL was Icikas Meskupas (Itzik Meskup, a.k.a. Adomas), 1907–1942. In 1941, he became Second Secretary of the Communist Party of Lithuania. As Second Secretary, Meskupas was particularly concerned with cadre policy, i.e., the selection of persons for key positions within the Soviet administrative infrastructure.<sup>116</sup>

A second key Jew on the Central Committee was Chaimas Aizenas, who became deputy head of the Cadre Department of the Central Committee in 1941. In 1939 and 1940, while Antanas Sniečkus was in prison and Icikas Meskupas was in Moscow, Aizenas became the de facto head of the Communist Party of Lithuania. After the occupation of Lithuania by the Red Army, Aizenas was in charge of organizing the sham July 14, 1940 elections to the so-called “People’s Seimas.” After escaping to the interior of the Soviet Union in June 1941, Aizenas was involved in the organization of the Red Army’s 16th Lithuanian Rifle Division.<sup>117</sup>

Other Jewish members of the Central Committee in 1941 who escaped were Berelis Fridmanas, Alteris Kleineris, and Jankelis Vinickis. Fridmanas, a 1931 graduate of the Vytautas Magnus University School of Law, was also a judge on the bench of the Supreme Court of Soviet Lithuania. Meanwhile, Kleineris was also the first party secretary in Šiauliai, and Vinickis had the same duties in Vilnius.<sup>118</sup>

An important apparatchik on the Central Committee was Aleksandras Jacovskis (1917–1942). Within the Central Committee, Jacovskis was the personal assistant



to First Secretary of the Communist Party of Lithuania Antanas Sniečkus Antanas Sniečkus (1903–1974). In 1939–1940, Jacovskis was a student at the Vytautas Magnus University Department of Technology. He escaped in June 1941 and was killed in action when he returned to Lithuania in March 1942 with a special operational group.<sup>119</sup>

Jews were particularly active in the Komsomol, the main political youth organization in the Soviet Union. Given the fanaticism and aggressiveness exhibited by many of its members, the Komsomol became the cutting edge of the Sovietization process in Lithuania. The zealotry of Komsomol members not only intimidated the general public – it also fed the growing anti-Soviet resistance in the country, especially among young people.

Membership in the Komsomol increased dramatically during the period between the occupation of Lithuania and the German invasion. In June 1940, the then clandestine Komsomol had approximately 1,000 members.<sup>120</sup> By time of the German attack in June of 1941, total membership in the Komsomol had reached 14,000.<sup>121</sup> In 1940, Jews made up about one-half of the membership of the clandestine organization.<sup>122</sup> By January 1, 1941, the Komsomol had 1,755 Jewish members, which accounted for 23.8 percent of total membership. Between January and June of 1941, the Jewish percentage dropped to 17.5 percent of total membership.<sup>123</sup> However, given the overall growth of membership, the number of Jews increased to a total of 2,450.<sup>124</sup>

Jewish members of the CPL played a key role in running the Komsomol. The Second Secretary of the Central Committee of the Komsomol was Mira Bordonaitė. Bordonaitė's position was enhanced by the fact that she was Antanas Sniečkus's wife.<sup>125</sup> A second key individual on the Central Committee of the Komsomol was Izraelis Ickovičius. As secretary for cadre (personnel) matters, he played a key role in the organization and growth of the Komsomol. Ickovičius escaped in June 1941, but returned early in 1942 on a special mission led by Meskupas.<sup>126</sup> Together with others, he was killed in action in the District of Biržai in 1942. Kuselis Eljasevas was a third key member of the Komsomol's Central Committee. He was the head of the agitation and propaganda department. After escaping from the invading Germans in June, he returned in March 1942 as member of a special operations group and was killed in action.<sup>127</sup>

Among district leaders, one standout was Solomonas Kancedikas, a 22-year old activist from Kaunas. He became the Komsomol's First Secretary in the city of Vilnius. After escaping from Lithuania, Kancedikas served in the 16th Lithuanian Rifle Division of the Red Army.<sup>128</sup>

Since the Communist Party and the Komsomol were banned organizations in independent Lithuania, the main pro-Communist organization able to function in the open was Lietuvos raudonoji pagalba (Lithuanian Red Aid). In 1937, the name of the organization was changed to the Lithuanian People's Aid Union. The

declared purpose of the organization was to give financial and material assistance to families with members incarcerated for anti-government activity. In reality, the organization became a front for the Communist Party, and its membership included clandestine communists as well as leftists who supported the objective and policies of the Communist Party. Lithuanian Red Aid was closely associated with (and had the same objective as) International Red Aid (MOPR) – the Moscow-run international social-service organization.<sup>129</sup>

Lithuanian Red Aid membership increased from 2,500 in 1935 to 6,000 by the end of 1939.<sup>130</sup> Jews accounted for one-half of the total membership.<sup>131</sup> In urban areas, the Jewish percentage was much higher. According to Dov Levin:

MOPR provided the Communist Party with important assistance. The fact that Jews accounted for much (if not most) of the MOPR membership in many locations had a strong effect on the nature of the activity. Much cultural activity, for example, was conducted in Yiddish. It should be noted that the new regime fondly recalled the Jews' support of MOPR under the previous regime and did them no harm, even when they belonged to the "capitalist and employers" class.<sup>132</sup>

After the Soviet occupation, the Lithuanian People's Aid Union continued to function as an adjunct to the Communist Party. At the beginning of 1941, total membership in the organization reached 60,000.<sup>133</sup> The percentage of Jews among the members of the Lithuanian People's Aid Union at the beginning of 1941 is not known. If it was analogous to the percentage of Jews in the Communist Party of Lithuania at that time (17.5 percent), then it could be estimated that 10,500 Jews were members.

The organizational structure of Red Aid paralleled that of the Communist Party. The main governing body was the Central Committee, which was headed by the First Secretary. The high ranking official in the Lithuanian People's Aid Union was Cilė Maginskienė (née Grinbergaitė). Maginskienė had been a member of the Communist Party of Lithuania since 1937. In 1939, she became a member of the Lithuanian People's Aid Union Central Committee. After the Soviet occupation of Lithuania, Maginskienė became the First Secretary of the Central Committee and head of the Lithuanian People's Aid Union. She escaped from Lithuania and after the war was the head clerk of the Supreme Court of the Lithuanian S.S.R. (1947–58).<sup>134</sup>

Mass media played a key role in projecting the policies and power of the Communist Party in Lithuania. All non-communist newspapers and magazines were banned. The official publication of the Communist Party was the daily newspaper *Tiesa* ("Truth"). The chief editor of the newspaper was Genrikas Zimanas.<sup>135</sup> Before he became editor, Zimanas served as chairman of the Commission for Ethnic Minorities under the Central Committee of the LKP from 1937 to 1940. The task of the commission was to

“recruit Jews into anti-government communist activities.”<sup>136</sup> Zimanas was successful at this task:

A standout among the Jews who had climbed to the top of the Communist apparatus was G. Ziman (Zimanas). ...

In Jewish public opinion, he was regarded as a very important authoritative figure, if not the only one, in making of Party decisions affecting the Jews.<sup>137</sup>

As editor of *Tiesa*, Zimanas recruited many Jews to work in the newspaper. Zimanas's deputy was Leiba Sausa. In 1938-1940, Sausa worked with Zimanas on the Commission for Ethnic Minorities and followed him to *Tiesa*. Like many of their co-workers at the newspaper, Zimanas and Sausa escaped from Lithuania. In 1942, Zimanas was appointed deputy commander of the Red partisans in Lithuania. He returned to Lithuania in 1943 and directed partisan operations against German forces in the country.<sup>138</sup>

The Yiddish-language equivalent of *Tiesa*, the Lithuanian communist daily, was *Der Eme*. The editor of the publication was Joselis Sochatas (Yosl Sochat), a veteran member of the Communist Party of Lithuania.<sup>139</sup> The purpose of the newspaper was to appeal to the Yiddish-speaking population of Lithuania, raise its pro-Soviet consciousness, and integrate non-Communist Jewish intellectuals into the new order being established. It is not surprising that non-Communists became important members of the *Der Eme* editorial board.

Jokūbas Josadė became a member of the editorial board of *Der Eme*. One of the members of the Jewish intelligentsia recruited for positions at the newspaper was Giršas Ošerovičius – a poet and 1933 graduate of Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas. Ošerovičius became the secretary of the *Der Eme* editorial board. Like Josadė, he was not a member of the Komsomol or the Communist Party. Among the party activists employed at *Der Eme* was Taubė Gersanovičiūtė, who became a member of the Communist Party of Lithuania in 1936. She worked as a department head on the editorial board.<sup>140</sup> All of the aforementioned individuals escaped from Lithuania. Josadė served in the 16th Lithuanian Rifle Division of the Red Army and was wounded in combat.

Members of the NKVD and the NKGB were especially anxious, for obvious reasons, to escape from Lithuania. These two organizations had 975 Communist Party members, of whom 536 – or about 55 percent – managed to escape from Lithuania. The number of Jews who worked in the NKGB system was relatively modest. According to Liudas Truska, in March 1941, the NKGB “had a staff of 208 persons (excluding the personnel of the internal prison), 60 of whom (29 percent) were Lithuanians, 35 (16.8 percent) were local Jews, and the remaining 113 (53.6 percent) were Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, and others.”<sup>142</sup>

The statistics presented by Truska are misleading. The Russians included in the “remaining 113” number also included Russian Jews. Truska ignores this fact. Actually, the highest position in the Lithuanian branch of the NKGB was held by a Russian Jew – L.S.S.R. People’s Commissar of State Security Pyotr Gladkov. He came to Lithuania in June 1940 and quickly moved up the ranks, becoming the head of the NKGB in Lithuania in March 1941. Gladkov was responsible for the organization and implementation of the June 1941 mass deportations, as well as the murder of political prisoners removed from NKGB facilities during the first days of the German invasion.<sup>143</sup>

Gladkov’s deputy was Major of State Security David Bykov – a Russian Jew who was appointed by Lavrentiy Beria to supervise the transformation of the local Lithuanian Security Police into a Soviet agency. Bykov arrived in Lithuania in June 1940 together with U.S.S.R. Deputy-Commissar of Foreign Affairs Vladimir Dekanozov. Bykov headed the operational headquarters responsible for carrying out the mass deportation of class enemies in June 1941.

The most important subdivision of the NKGB in terms of function and size was the Secret Political Department (SPO; later renamed the Secret Political Directorate – SPU). Its purpose was to identify and target for liquidation class enemies found in the country. Its First Section was tasked with identifying members of political parties active in Lithuania before the Soviet takeover, as well as civic and community leaders. Its head was Lieutenant Izrail Zaidenvurm – a Russian Jew.<sup>145</sup> Pursuant to Zaidenvurmas’s instructions, the registration of members of political parties and organizations covered 320,00 persons. With the addition of their family members, approximately 50 percent of the Lithuanian population was to be deported to Siberia.<sup>146</sup>

Referring to the role of local Jews, Truska was correct in stating that: “Jews held only several but nevertheless important executive posts: Danielius Todesas was the director of the Special Section (i. e., Special Political Department), Eusiejus Rozauskas was the director of the Interrogation Division, Benjaminas Fogelevičius was the chief NKGB inspector, and Aleksandras Slavinas occupied the post of director of the Counterintelligence Section.”<sup>147</sup> All of the aforementioned officials escaped from Lithuania.

The Communist Party of Lithuania was an elite organization with a very small membership. Its members occupied and controlled all instruments of power. Nevertheless, only 55 percent of the party members managed to escape. Russians and Jews accounted for about 74 percent of the escapees. The great majority of the Jews, regardless of whether or not they were supporters of the Soviet regime, had to find their own way out of Lithuania. They were not part of any organized evacuation scheme.

Levin noted that certain groups of Jews realized that they had no choice but to flee from Lithuania in order to save themselves from the advancing Germans as well as reprisals from the local element. Levin identified the following groups:

1. Members of the Communist Party and the Komsomol, and senior officials in the party apparatus, trade unions, Interior Ministry (especially the police services, including the secret police), NKVD, and militias.
2. Administrators responsible for the implementation of Sovietization policies, especially in economic contexts such as the nationalization of enterprises and land (this group included Jews whose integration into the Soviet state apparatus coincided with the ouster of non-Jews).
3. Persons who, while not affiliated with official Soviet agencies, were regarded as sympathizers with the regime and who confirmed this publicly in workplaces or at mass assemblies.<sup>149</sup>

Some Jews who were not part of any organized evacuation scheme were afraid to do anything without orders or instructions. Avraham Tory's diary entry for June 22, 1941 describes the predicament that the Jews in Kaunas faced. "In the afternoon, most military institutions began to make preparations for departure. Directors of other public institutions instructed their employees to stay put. They even threatened heavy punishment against those attempting to leave their posts. [...] ...most Jews preferred to await instructions from the government and other public institutions. They feared to act on their own and to risk standing trial later for desertion and treason."<sup>150</sup>

While some Jews were afraid of the Germans, others, remembering the behavior of German troops during the First World War and contrasting it with the actions of Russian peasants serving in the Czarist Army, had a more favorable view of the Germans. They realized that life under German occupation would be difficult, but they nevertheless believed that it would be possible to deal with the Germans because they were people of a "high culture."<sup>151</sup>

In 1941, Kaunas had a Jewish population of 34,000.<sup>152</sup> Another 6,000 Jews lived in the surrounding district.<sup>153</sup> The main escape route from the city was the Jonava– Ukmergė– Zarasai highway. Zarasai was the last town in Lithuania before Daugavpils in Latvia.

A secondary escape route went north to Panevėžys. From Panevėžys, it was possible for escapees to go west to Šiauliai, north to Biržai, or east to Rokiškis. The initial end point of all these routes was Latvia, and then Russia. The secondary route was used chiefly by some of the 26,000 Jews living in the districts of Panevėžys and Šiauliai.<sup>154</sup> The distance to Latvia was relatively short. Escape through Latvia was facilitated by the Soviet resistance groups that were active in northern Lithuania until June 29, 1941.

Holocaust survivor Sidney Iwens (Shaya Iwensky) described the situation in Jonava on the morning of Monday, June 23: "The first refugees appeared early in the morning. Initially there were only a few. Tired looking, carrying small bundles, they would stop for a snack and a short rest, then they would push on toward Ukmerge."<sup>155</sup> As the

day progressed, the number of people fleeing from Kaunas increased. “The trickle soon became a torrent. Some took the highway bypassing the town, but enough of them came through Jonava to make it appear that most of the Jewish population of Kaunas was on the run.”<sup>156</sup>

Solly Ganor gave a similar account of the flight of Jews from Kaunas: “The narrow road leading toward Ukmerge and the Latvian border was choked with refugees and retreating Soviet troops. An endless variety of vehicles, horse-drawn wagons, motorcycles, and bicycles threaded their way through a huge swarm of people on foot. Although ragged columns of Soviet soldiers mingled among them, most of those on foot were civilians and most of them were Jews.”<sup>157</sup>

Sidney Iwens wanted to find a Red unit and join the fight against the invading Germans. This did not happen. Iwens and about a dozen of his friends joined the mass of refugees. On June 24, he reunited with the rest of his family in Ukmerge and proceeded east on the highway toward the town of Utena. During the trek from Ukmerge to Utena, friends from Jonava or Jews from other towns would fall in step beside Iwens and tell “frightening tales of attacks on Jewish refugees by Lithuanian guerillas, German sympathizers.”<sup>158</sup> During his trip from Jonava, which began on June 23 and ended in the Latvian town of Daugavpils on June 26, 1941, Iwens did not witness any such attacks on Jewish refugees by Lithuanians.

Many of the Jonava Jews, as well as the Jews from Kaunas and other towns who took this escape route, were arrested in Daugavpils. Most of these Jewish detainees in Daugavpils were soon executed in mass killings that were initially conducted by Ehlinger’s Einsatzkommando 1b, and later by execution squads from Einsatzkommando 3 under the command of SS-Obersturmführer Joachim Hamann. Sidney Iwens represented a unique situation.<sup>159</sup> He managed to survive not only the mass killings in Daugavpils, but also the Holocaust itself. Nevertheless, a large number of Lithuanian Jews succeeded in reaching the safety of Russia via Daugavpils. Most of them passed through the Latvian town before June 27, 1941.

The main urban center in northern Lithuania was Šiauliai. Approximately 8,000 Jews were living in Šiauliai when the hostilities began between Germany and the Soviet Union. After Einsatzkommando 2 entered Šiauliai, it reported that only 2,000 Jews were left in the city: “The others have fled. The prison is empty. In order to keep the war plants and factories vital for the population operational, the Wehrmacht is, for the time being, not in a position to dispose of the Jewish manpower still available and fit for work.”<sup>160</sup>

Jews living in Šiauliai and the surrounding area fled north to Latvia to escape the Germans. Nathan Katz, a Holocaust survivor from Šiauliai, described his family’s escape. After news of the German invasion reached Šiauliai, Katz, his parents, his brother Lieba, his fiancée Sima, and her aunt and uncle decided to flee from Lithuania. The family reached Latvia after a week of walking, but were overtaken by a column of

German soldiers. The refugees were ordered to get off the road to allow the troops to pass.<sup>161</sup>

Nathan's brother Lieba, who had been traveling ahead on a bicycle, was separated from the rest of the family by the advancing Germans (he was able to reach Russia, where he joined the Red Army and was killed in action in 1943). The question of escape from the Germans became moot. The Katz family was taken in by a gentile woman who provided them with food and lodging. They decided to return home. The family – four men and two women – walked back to Šiauliai.<sup>162</sup>

The situation concerning the flight of Jews from Vilnius was different from that in Kaunas or Šiauliai. The Jewish population in Vilnius was considerably larger than that in Kaunas. Kruk and Arad both concur that 60,000 Jews lived in Vilnius on the eve of the German invasion.<sup>163</sup> The time period between the outbreak of hostilities and the German occupation of Vilnius on June 24, 1941 was relatively short and non-violent. The small Lithuanian insurgent forces were able to seize key Soviet facilities in the city without any major battle or opposition from the Red Army or Soviet activists. The Red Army opted not to defend Vilnius.

The civilian population, including Jews, were able to leave Vilnius without any interference from the insurgents and join the Red Army columns retreating toward Minsk. The flight of civilians from Vilnius was facilitated by the fact that the Byelorussian S.S.R. was only 38 kilometers away. The surrounding countryside was heavily wooded. The most direct route from Vilnius to Minsk was the Vilnius–Medininkai highway. A secondary route, which avoided the German advance toward Minsk, was from Vilnius to Švenčionys. From here, it was possible for escapees to continue north to Daukavpils or northeast to Byelorussia.

Arad noted that “Jewish sources – books, diaries, and articles on the subject of the Jewish flight from Vilnius on the two days in question – refer to the total in terms of ‘tens of thousands’ or ‘thousands,’ and it is clear that these are only general estimates.”<sup>164</sup> Arad himself made a conservative estimate. In his opinion, only about 3,000 Jews “were able to leave Vilnius on June 22 and 23, 1941, and reach the interior of the Soviet Union – by any means of transport.”<sup>165</sup>

The number of persons who “left” Vilnius and the number who “reached” the interior of Russia must be differentiated. Many Jews from Vilnius were killed on the highways by strafing German aircraft. An even larger number found temporary safety in the Byelorussian S.S.R. According to Arad, from the German occupation of Vilnius until the end of 1941, approximately 3,500 Jews “fled to Belorussia or went into hiding outside the ghetto.”<sup>166</sup> If this considerable number of Jews managed to escape, then it is reasonable to estimate that about 9,000 Jews fled Vilnius before the Germans were able to introduce strict occupational restrictions on the Jewish population in the city.

There is no consensus among historians regarding the number of Jews who were evacuated or fled as refugees from Lithuania before the Germans established occupational control. Dieckmann and Sužiedėlis present the following summary of the situation:

(According to recently discovered documents of the Soviet government, by the end of 1941 more than ten million people had been evacuated from the lands occupied by the Germans, including 42,500 people from Lithuania, although it is unclear how many of them were Jews). Dov Levin assumes that about 15,000 men and women of Jewish nationality managed to flee Lithuania in time. Yitzhak Arad's estimate is that 4,000 to 6,000 people succeeded in escaping. According to the researcher of the International Commission, Rimantas Zizas, some 8,000 people escaped.<sup>167</sup>

Dov Levin is the most consistent in claiming in his research that 15,000 Jews were able to reach safety in the parts of the Soviet Union not occupied by the Germans. According to Levin, "In the end only some 15,000 Jews succeeded in crossing the Soviet border or the front line, reaching the interior of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941 and settling in kolkhozes or finding work in factories or in urban centers."<sup>168</sup>

The "15,000" number refers to Jews who "succeeded" in reaching the interior of the Soviet Union. It does not include the Jews who escaped from Lithuania, but did not succeed in reaching safety in unoccupied Soviet territories. For example, in the German occupied town of Radun (in Byelorussia, not far from Lida), some 1,000 Jews from Lithuania found temporary safety (but were later killed in May 1942). Demographically, the 1,000 Jews in Radun were part of the Jewish population of Lithuania. They became victims of the Holocaust – but not the Holocaust in Lithuania.<sup>169</sup>

Dieckmann and Sužiedėlis cite Arad and assert that he estimated that 4,000 to 6,000 people managed to escape. In fact, Arad was not referring to escapees. In the article cited, Arad stated that "between 4,000–6,000 emigrated during the months prior to the Nazi invasion, and a similar number were deported to the Soviet Union in June 1941."<sup>170</sup> The people who "emigrated" were Jews who left Lithuania with Sugihara transit visas. In a later article, Arad wrote that "12,000–12,500 Jews tried to reach the interior of the Soviet Union during the first days of the German invasion. Some of them died as a result of attacks, bombing, and so on, while trying to escape."<sup>171</sup>

Dieckmann and Sužiedėlis also cite Rimantas Zizas, a researcher with the International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania, who supposedly claims that 8,000 Jews escaped from Lithuania. Zizas, in turn, cites a 1958 Soviet history of the Communist Party of Lithuania claiming that 20,000 people escaped from Lithuania. According to this Soviet publication, 8,500 of these people – or 42.5 percent – were Jews.<sup>172</sup> If the same



percentage is applied to the figure of 42,500 escapees found in the newly discovered documents of the Soviet government, then it can conservatively be estimated that 18,000 of the escapees were Jews.

It is very likely that as many as 24,000 Jews escaped from Lithuania before the German occupation was secure. Approximately 9,000 Jews fled from Vilnius and neighboring communities. Some 8,000–9,000 Jews fled from Kaunas – a city with a Jewish population of almost 34,000.<sup>173</sup> The Jewish community of Šiauliai “was the third largest in Lithuania and had numbered at least 8,000 before the war.”<sup>174</sup> According to the July 3, 1941 report of Einsatzkommando 2, only 2,000 Jews were found in the city when it was occupied by the Germans.<sup>175</sup> Some 6,000 Jews had fled – mostly to nearby Latvia.

The assumption that as many as 24,000 Jews escaped from Lithuania is consistent with Levin’s 15,000 figure of Jews who succeeded in reaching safety in unoccupied Soviet territories. The vast majority of the remaining 9,000 Jews were killed during the course of the Holocaust outside of Lithuania.

## Conclusion

Estimates of the Jewish population in Lithuania ranged from 270,000 (Karen Sutton) to 200,000 (Misiunas and Taagepera). A review of available statistical data, Holocaust memoirs, and historical studies indicates that these estimates are not only too high, but also lacking in supporting documentation.

The conclusion reached in this paper is that the Jewish population at the start of the German invasion was 187,000. A total of 227,000 Jews lived or passed through Lithuania between September 1939 and the end of June 1941. Of this number, 13,000 left Lithuania with Sugihara visas or other legal or forged transit papers. Approximately 3,000 Jews were deported to the Soviet Gulag as “class enemies”. As many as 24,000 Jews fled from the invading Germans. Roughly 9,000 of these people did not manage to reach safety in unoccupied Soviet territories, and were killed during the Holocaust outside of Lithuania. Most of the remaining Jews were killed in Lithuania by the Germans and local collaborators during the summer and fall of 1941.

## References

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- <sup>2</sup> French L. Maclean, *The Field Men: The SS Officers Who Led the Einsatzkommandos – the Nazi Mobile Killing Units* (Atglen, Pa.: Schiffler Military History, 1999), p. 13.
- <sup>3</sup> “Report of an Oberst,” in *“The Good Old Days”: The Holocaust as Seen by its Perpetrators and Bystanders*, edited by Ernst Klee, Willi Dressen, Volker Riess, foreword by Hugh Trevor-Roper, translated by Deborah Burnstone (New York: Konecky & Konecky, 1991), p. 31.
- <sup>4</sup> Maclean, p. 26.
- <sup>5</sup> Maclean, p. 27; *The Einsatzgruppen Reports: Selections from the Dispatches of the Nazi Death Squads' Campaign Against the Jews July 1941–January 1943*, edited by Yitzhak Arad, Shmuel Krawkowski, Shmuel Spector (New York: Holocaust Library, 1989), p. x.
- <sup>6</sup> Maclean, pp. 22, 92.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28, 42.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28, 55.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.
- <sup>10</sup> Christoph Dieckmann, Saulius Sužiedėlis, *The Persecution and Mass Murder of Lithuanian Jews during Summer and Fall of 1941* (Vilnius: Margi Raštai, 2006).
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 279.
- <sup>12</sup> Karen Sutton, *The Massacre of the Jews of Lithuania: Lithuanian Collaboration in the Final Solution 1941–1944* (Jerusalem/New York: Gefen Publishing House, 2008), p. 85. The source of Sutton's data is *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 2, 1970, p. 213. Most of the Jewish refugee came to Lithuania before it became “Soviet” Lithuania.
- <sup>13</sup> Dina Porat, “The Holocaust in Lithuania: Some Unique Aspects,” in David Cesarani, *The Final Solution: Origins and Implementation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 160. The source of Porat's data is the Hebrew language original edition of the *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, 1990.
- <sup>14</sup> Solomonas Atamukas, *Lietuvos žydų kelias* (Vilnius: Alma Littera publishing house, 2005), p. 234.
- <sup>15</sup> Solomonas Atamukas, “Sunkus kelias į tiesą,” *Metmenys*, 83(2003), p. 147.
- <sup>16</sup> S. Atamukas, *Lietuvos žydų kelias*, p. 239.
- <sup>17</sup> Yitzhak Arad, “The ‘Final Solution’ in Lithuania in the Light of German Documentation,” *Yad Vashem Studies*, 11 (1976), p. 234.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup> Yitzhak Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (Lincoln and Jerusalem: University of Nebraska Press and Yad Vashem, 2009), p. 525.
- <sup>20</sup> Dov Levin, “Lithuania,” in *The World Reacts to the Holocaust*, edited by David S. Wyman (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 329.
- <sup>21</sup> Dov Levin, *Trumpa žydų istorija Lietuvoje*, translated by Jonas Morkus (Vilnius: Embassy of Israel et al, 2000), p. 188.
- <sup>22</sup> Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews: Revised and Definitive Edition, Vol. 3* (New York & London: Holmes and Meir, 1985), pp. 1048, 1220.
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- <sup>24</sup> Sigitas Jegelevičius, “Holokaustas Lietuvoje skaičių pinklėse,” Lietuvos istorijos studijos, Vilniaus Universiteto mokslo darbai, Vol. 5, 1997, p. 150; Arūnas Bubnys, *Vokiečių okupuota Lietuva (1941–1944)* (Vilnius: Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, 1998), p. 206.
- <sup>25</sup> Alfonsas Eidintas, *Žydai, lietuviai ir holokaustas* (Vilnius: Vaga, 2002), p. 182.
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- <sup>28</sup> Levin, *Trumpa žydų istorija Lietuvoje*, p. 90.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.
- <sup>30</sup> Herman Kruk, *The Last Days of the Jerusalem of Lithuania: Chronicles from the Vilnius Ghetto and the Camps, 1939–1944*, translated from Yiddish by Barbara Harshav, edited by Benjamin Harshav, introduction by Benjamin Harshav (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 284.
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- <sup>34</sup> Irina Guzenberg, “The Vilnius Ghetto and the Population Census of 1942,” in *Vilnius Ghetto: Lists of Prisoners, Vol. 1* (Vilnius: Lietuvos valstybinis žydų muziejus, 1996), p. 8.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- <sup>36</sup> Levin, *Trumpa žydų istorija Lietuvoje*, p. 91.
- <sup>37</sup> Kruk, *The Last Days of the Jerusalem of Lithuania*, p. 284.
- <sup>38</sup> Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils*, p. 199.
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- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>47</sup> Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils*, pp. 207, 208.
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- <sup>49</sup> Solly Ganor, *Light One Candle: A Survivor’s Tale from Lithuania to Jerusalem to Jerusalem* (New York: Kodansha International, 1995), p. 49.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>53</sup> Levine, *In Search of Sugihara*, p. 230.
- <sup>54</sup> Ganor, *Light One Candle*, p. 45.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.
- <sup>57</sup> Levine, *In Search of Sugihara*, p. 233.
- <sup>58</sup> Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils*, p. 297.
- <sup>59</sup> Levine, *In Search of Sugihara*, p. 297.
- <sup>60</sup> Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils*, pp. 206, 207.
- <sup>61</sup> Levine, *In Search of Sugihara*, p. 219.
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>63</sup> Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils*, pp. 216, 217.
- <sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.
- <sup>65</sup> Levine, *In Search of Sugihara*, p. 202.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.
- <sup>69</sup> Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils*, pp. 211, 212.
- <sup>70</sup> Levine, *In Search of Sugihara*, pp. 285, 286.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.
- <sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 286.
- <sup>73</sup> Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils*, p. 207.
- <sup>74</sup> Solomonas Atamukas, *Nauja Lietuva, nauji kadrai* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1974), p. 107. Atamukas was accepted into the Communist party in 1937. During the first Soviet occupation, he carried out “party work” in Kaunas. He escaped from the Nazis and served in the Red Army’s 16th (Lithuanian) Rifle Division. In 1953, Atamukas became an instructor at the Vilnius Higher Party School. In 1965 he was promoted to department chairman. After the end of Soviet rule in Lithuania, Atamukas settled in Israel and worked as a historian, specializing in the history of Lithuanian Jewry.
- <sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 107, 108.
- <sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.
- <sup>77</sup> NKVD is an abbreviation for the People’s

Commissariat for Internal Affairs, the interior ministry of the Soviet Union. Aleksandras Gudaitis-Guzevičius, a veteran of the Communist Part, was appointed as chief of the NKVD in the Lithuanian S.S.R. in August 1940. In February 1941, Stalin split the NKVD into two commissariats. The security police functions were removed from the NKVD and given to the newly created People's Commissariat for State Security (NKGB). The original NKVD remained in place, but its jurisdiction was limited to non-security matters. In Lithuania, this split resulted in Pyotr Gladkov being named head of the NKGB, with David Bykov as his deputy. Both of these men were Russian Jews. Gudaitis-Guzevičius retained his position as the head of the L.S.S.R. NKVD. Fridis Krastinis – a Lithuanian of Latvian descent – was named as his deputy.

<sup>78</sup> Arvydas Anušauskas, *Lietuvių tautos sovietinis naikinimas 1940–1958 metais* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1996), p. 53.

<sup>79</sup> Guzenberg, *Vilnius Ghetto*, p. 52.

<sup>80</sup> A. Anušauskas et al., *Lietuva 1940–1990*, p. 137.

<sup>81</sup> Liudas Truska, Vygantas Vareikis, *The Pre-conditions for the Holocaust: Anti-Semitism in Lithuania* (Vilnius: Margi raštai, 2004),

<sup>82</sup> Jurgis Glužauskas, “Negirdėtas smurtas socializmo vardu,” in *Lietuvių archyvas: Bolševizmo metai, III* (Kaunas: Studijų biuro leidinys, 1942), p. 95.

<sup>83</sup> Arvydas Anušauskas, *Lietuvių tautos sovietinis naikinimas 1940–1958 metais* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1996), pp. 83–89.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>87</sup> Avraham Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust: The Kauno Ghetto Diary*, edited by Martin Gilbert (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 80.

<sup>88</sup> Solly Ganor, *Light One Candle*, pp. 48, 49.

<sup>89</sup> Schoschana Rabinovici, *Thanks to My Mother* (New York: Dial Books, 1998), p. 10.

<sup>90</sup> Algirdas Šerėnas, *Vorkutos mirties lageriai* (Vilnius: Genocide and Resistance Research

Centre of Lithuania, 1997), pp. 336, 337; P. M., “1940 metų birželis (prisiminimai)”, *Karys*, No. 7 (1980), p. 304.

<sup>91</sup> William W. Mishell, *Kaddish for Kauno: Life and Death in a Lithuanian Ghetto 1941–1945* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1998).

<sup>92</sup> Yitzhak Arad, *The Partisan: From the Valley of Death to Mount Zion* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1979), p. 27.

<sup>93</sup> Harry Gordon, *The Shadow of Death: The Holocaust in Lithuania* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1992), p. 22.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 21.

<sup>95</sup> Saulius Sužiedėlis, “Thoughts on Lithuania’s Shadows of the Past: A Historical Essay on the Legacy of War,” *Vilnius*, Summer 1998, pp. 145, 146.

<sup>96</sup> A. Merkėlis, “Masinis lietuvių išvežimas į SSSR,” in *Lietuvių archyvas: Bolševizmo metai* (Brooklyn, 1952), pp. 65, 66.

<sup>97</sup> Arvydas Anušauskas, *Teroras: 1940–1958 m.* (Vilnius: Versus aureus, 2012), p. 84.

<sup>98</sup> Levin, *Fighting Back*, p. 23.

<sup>99</sup> Arad, *The Partisan*, p. 27.

<sup>100</sup> Yitzhak Arad, “The Murder of the Jews in German-Occupied Lithuania,” in: Alvydas Nikžentaitis, Stefan Schreiner, Darius Staliūnas, *The Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews* (Amsterdam–New York: Rodopi), p. 2004.

<sup>101</sup> Anušauskas et al., *Lietuva 1940–1990*, p. 161.

<sup>102</sup> Pilypas Narutis, *Tautos sukilimas 1941 Lietuvos nepriklausomybei atstatyti, Pirmoji dalis* (Oak Lawn, Illinois, 1994), pp. 227, 228. Slavina’s role is discussed elsewhere in this book.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256

<sup>104</sup> Adolfas Damušis, *Lithuania Against Soviet and Nazi Aggression* (American Foundation for Lithuanian Research, Inc., 1998), p. 81.

<sup>105</sup> “Iš LKP(b) CK ataskaitos apie LKP(b) CK veiklą pirmosioms Didžiojo karo dienoms,” in Povilas Štaras, *Lietuvos liaudis Didžiajame Tėvynės kare, 1941–1945: dokumentų ir medžiagos rinkinys* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1982), p. 25.

<sup>106</sup> Albinas Gražiūnas, *Lietuva dviejų okupacijų replėse: 1940–1944* (Vilnius, 1996), p. 67.

<sup>107</sup> Anušauskas, *Teroras: 1940–1958 m.*, p. 78.

- <sup>108</sup> Konstantinas Surblys, “Liaudies pergalės Didžiajame Kare organizatorė”, in: *Laikas ir įvykiai*, No. 22 (1200), 1984, p. 2.
- <sup>109</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>110</sup> Anušauskas et al., *Lietuva 1940–1990*, p. 164.
- <sup>111</sup> Algirdas Rakūnas, *Lietuvos liaudies kova prieš Hitlerinę okupaciją* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1970), p. 16.
- <sup>112</sup> Antanas Sniečkus, “Iš LKP(b) ataskaitos VKP(b) CK apie LKP(b) CK veiklą organizuojant kovą su okupantais vokiečiais 1941–1942 m. rugpjūčio mėn. Lietuvoje”, in Štaras, *Lietuvos liaudies Didžiajame Tėvynės kare*, p. 84.
- <sup>113</sup> Nijolė Maslauskienė, “Lietuvos komunistų sudėtis 1940 m. spalio–1941 m. birželio mėn.” *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, 2 (6), 1999, pp. 41, 46.
- <sup>114</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>115</sup> Henrikas Šadžius, Regina Žepkaitė, Juozas Žiugžda, *Vilniaus miesto istorija nuo Spalio revoliucijos iki dabartinių dienų* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1972), p. 124.
- <sup>116</sup> “Meskupas,” in: *Mažoji lietuviškoji tarybinė enciklopedija* (hereinafter – *MLTE*), II, p. 562; Vytautas Tininis, *Sovietų Lietuva ir jos veikėjai* (Vilnius: Enciklopedija, 1994), pp. 201, 202.
- <sup>117</sup> “Aizenas,” *MLTE*, I, p. 24; Ramutė Kudarauskienė, “Darėme ką širdis liepė, Chaimo Aizenos gimimo 80-osioms metinėms”, *Komunistas*, No. 9 (1986), pp. 83–85.
- <sup>118</sup> “Fridmanas,” *MLTE*, I, pp. 508, 509; “Kleineris,” *MLTE*, II, p. 160.
- <sup>119</sup> “Jacovskis,” *MLTE*, I, p. 661.
- <sup>120</sup> “Lietuvos Lenino komunistinė jaunimo sąjunga,” *MLTE*, II, p. 390.
- <sup>121</sup> Rakūnas, *Lietuvos liaudies kova*, p. 22.
- <sup>122</sup> Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils*, p. 58.
- <sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 59.
- <sup>124</sup> Liudas Truska, “Lietuvos žydų padėtis pirmuoju sovietmečiu, jų vaidmuo valdžios struktūrose 1940–1941 metais”, during “Praktinis seminaras-diskusija. Lietuvos žydų santykiai. Istoriniai, teisiniai ir politiniai aspektai” Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 1999, p. 13; Rakūnas, *Lietuvos liaudies kova*, p. 22.
- <sup>125</sup> “Bordonaitė,” *MLTE*, I, p. 253.
- <sup>126</sup> “Ickovičius,” *MLTE*, I, p. 633; Solomonas Kancedikas, “Mes prisimename Richardą,” *Komunistas*, No. 9 (1984), pp. 94–96.
- <sup>127</sup> “Eljasevas,” *MLTE*, II, p. 40.
- <sup>128</sup> “Kancedikas,” *MLTE*, II, p. 40.
- <sup>129</sup> “Lietuvos raudonoji pagalba,” *MLTE*, II, pp. 393, 394.
- <sup>130</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>131</sup> Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils*, p. 58.
- <sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 59.
- <sup>133</sup> “Lietuvos raudonoji pagalba,” *MLTE*, II, p. 394.
- <sup>134</sup> “Maganskienė,” *MLTE*, II, p. 49.
- <sup>135</sup> “Zimanas,” *MLTE*, III, p. 847.
- <sup>136</sup> Tininis, *Sovietinė Lietuva*, pp. 301–306.
- <sup>137</sup> Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils*, p. 59.
- <sup>138</sup> “Zimanas,” *MLTE*, III, p. 847.
- <sup>139</sup> “Sochatas,” *MLTE*, III, p. 424.
- <sup>140</sup> “Gersanovičiūtė,” *MLTE*, III, p. 522.
- <sup>141</sup> Maslauskienė, “Lietuvos komunistų sudėtis,” p. 41.
- <sup>142</sup> Truska, Vareikis, *The Preconditions for the Holocaust*, p. 185.
- <sup>143</sup> Ibid., Maslauskienė, “Lietuvos komunistų sudėtis,” p. 41.
- <sup>144</sup> Maslauskienė, “Lietuvos komunistų sudėtis,” p. 41; Truska, Vareikis, *The Preconditions for the Holocaust*, p. 205.
- <sup>145</sup> Liudas Truska, Arvydas Anušauskas, Inga Petravičiūtė, *Sovietinis saugumas Lietuvoje 1940–1953 metais* (Vilnius: Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, 1999), pp. 19, 390.
- <sup>146</sup> Anušauskas, *Lietuvos tautos sovietinis naikinimas*, p. 45.
- <sup>147</sup> Truska, Vareikis, *The Preconditions for the Holocaust*, p. 185.
- <sup>149</sup> Maslauskienė, “Lietuvos komunistų sudėtis,” pp. 41, 46.
- <sup>149</sup> Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils*, p. 279.
- <sup>150</sup> Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust*, p. 4.
- <sup>151</sup> Mishell, *Kaddish for Kauno*, pp. 10, 11.

- <sup>152</sup> Jegelevičius, “Holokaustas Lietuvoje skaičių pinklėse,” p. 150.
- <sup>153</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>154</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>155</sup> Sidney Iwens, *How Dark the Heavens: 1400 Days in the Grip of Nazi Terror* (New York: Shengold Publishers, Inc., 1992), p. 12.
- <sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. 13.
- <sup>157</sup> Ganor, *Light One Candle*, p. 54.
- <sup>158</sup> Iwens, *How Dark the Heavens*, p. 18.
- <sup>159</sup> Andrew Ezergailis, *The Holocaust in Latvia, 1941–1944: The Missing Center* (Riga: Historical Institute of Latvia in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1996), pp. 272–279.
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- <sup>161</sup> Natanas Kacas, *Išmokyk mus skaičiuoti mūsų dienas* (Kaunas: Judex, 2001), pp. 101–104.
- <sup>162</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>163</sup> Kruk, *The Last Days of the Jerusalem of Lithuania*, p. 284; Yitzhak Arad, *Ghetto in Flames: The Struggle and Destruction of the Jews in Vilnius in the Holocaust* (New York, 1982), p. 31.
- <sup>164</sup> As cited in Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, p. 34.
- <sup>165</sup> Ibid., p. 35.
- <sup>166</sup> Ibid., p. 215.
- <sup>167</sup> Dieckmann, Sužiedėlis, *The Persecution and Mass Murder of Lithuanian Jews*, p. 104.
- <sup>168</sup> Levin, *Fighting Back*, pp. 28, 29.
- <sup>169</sup> Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust: A History of the Jews of Europe During the Second World War* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1987), p. 335.
- <sup>170</sup> Arad, “The ‘Final Solution’ in Lithuania in the Light of German Documentation,” p. 737.
- <sup>171</sup> Yitzhak Arad, “The Murder of Jews in German-Occupied Lithuania,” *The Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews*, edited by Alvydas Nikžentaitis, Stefan Schreiner, and Darius Staliūnas (Netherlands: Rodopi, 2004), p. 176.
- <sup>172</sup> Rimantas Zizas, “Ne žydų kilmės Lietuvos piliečių persekiojimas, civilių gyventojų žudynės,” [https://www.komisija.lt/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/R.Zizo-Civiliai-20031008\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.komisija.lt/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/R.Zizo-Civiliai-20031008_ENG.pdf), p. 30.
- <sup>173</sup> Jewish Black Book Committee, *The Black Book: The Nazi Crime Against the Jewish People* (New York, 1946), p. 324.
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Ignas K. Skrupskelis

## Interpreting Documents of Occupied Lithuania

The vast majority of the Jews who were killed in Lithuania – somewhere around 99 percent – were killed after the country was occupied by Germany, as a result of policies established by the occupying power. This is clear from the fact that not all of the Jews who were killed in Lithuania were Lithuanian. Thousands of German and French Jews were killed as well. Not all Lithuanian Jews were killed in Lithuania. Many died in Latvia and elsewhere. Many Lithuanians first learned about the Holocaust from the memoirs of a Lithuanian priest who described the arrival at Stutthof of Jews from Hungary, Poland, and Lithuania.<sup>1</sup> Not all Lithuanian Jews were killed by Lithuanians. Some were killed by German soldiers, who occasionally wore Lithuanian uniforms to mask German involvement. One massacre was carried out by the Jewish ghetto police.<sup>2</sup> A notorious Lithuanian police battalion committed many of its crimes in the Byelorussian S.S.R. – present-day Belarus. Several other battalions operated mostly outside of Lithuania. Thus, the Holocaust was not an operation in individual countries, but in conquered space, carried out by the conqueror, but using local resources to some extent.

According to German historian Wolfram Wette, on June 17, 1941 – that is, a few days before the invasion of the Soviet Union – Reinhard Heydrich informed SS officers being sent to Lithuania that all Jews in Lithuania were to be exterminated.<sup>3</sup> The index to his book makes clear that in the first weeks, when Jews were being moved into ghettos, the occupational authorities had more contact with Jewish leaders than Lithuanian ones. Some Lithuanians who are targeted by Holocaust activists are not even mentioned.

Any account that ignores the German occupation is at best incomplete, and at worst – an attribution of collective guilt in the service of Soviet (and now Russian) propaganda. Both the Nazis and the communists relied on collective guilt, a concept that has been repudiated by modern social thought. Guilt can only be personal. Since the Jewish policy was the creation of the occupying power, there is no broader Lithuanian responsibility arising from the actions of a lawful government.

There is not enough space here for an account of the remaining – perhaps several thousand – victims. Suffice it to say that little is clear, as the killings took place in the chaotic days between the Soviet flight and the German occupation. Prisons were left unguarded, police stations, power stations, and water supply facilities were left without anyone in charge, and isolated towns were in the hands of armed teenagers, fearing that the Soviets would return. It is probable that German agents were at work even then. The possibility that some killings were organized by Soviet agents cannot be ruled out either. Furthermore, the month of June also saw massacres of political prisoners that were carried out by fleeing communists, with over a thousand Lithuanian victims.

The war and the uprising must also be taken into account – innocent people were dying. There was collateral damage, with fleeing Jews being strafed by German fighter planes and shelled by German artillery. There are reports that some Jews who were members of the Komsomol (the Soviet communist youth organization) were armed and were shot at by Lithuanian partisans. Several German officers out sightseeing were killed by Jewish civilians, evoking reprisals. As for this one percent killed before the German occupation, it would be a mistake to generalize from one or two cases because of the chaos and uncertainty. Some Lithuanians did attack Jews, but there are no actual statistics regarding either the attackers or the victims.

The fact of occupation is also important for interpreting documents. Interpreters should not assume (although many do) that a simple word-for-word reading reveals the actual intentions of the authors. In this paper, I will argue that when read in context, one document that is often cited as evidence of Lithuanian culpability actually suggests an attempt to ease the plight of Jews.

First, some background. The Soviets first occupied Lithuania on June 15, 1940, when newspapers announced the fall of Paris. The ensuing terror culminated in the mass deportations that began on the night of June 14, 1941, when some 20,000 persons, with the family regarded as a unit, were taken from their homes and loaded into cattle cars. When the Germans began their invasion in the early hours of June 22, 1941, several of the slave trains were still in the country.<sup>4</sup> Many came out of hiding, relieved, since they believed – and rightly so, as later research shows – that if the war had not started, many more would have been deported, perhaps 500,000–1,000,000, out of a population of roughly 3,000,000. The body count of a prolonged Soviet occupation would have probably been similar to that of the German.

Political and criminal prisoners broke out of unguarded prisons. Reports and rumors of massacres began to circulate. Many rushed around for news of friends and relatives and to find out whether they themselves had been slated for deportation. Such apolitical human responses must be kept in mind when reading Soviet propaganda about Nazi sympathizers. Lithuanian–German relations had been strained before the



war. Distrust of German intentions was widespread. However, the Soviet occupation overwhelmed many, and the Germans were seen as liberators, at least for a while.

There was an uprising, to some extent planned, to some extent spontaneous. On the morning of June 23, 1941, with Soviet soldiers still in Kaunas, Kaunas radio announced the restoration of independence and the formation of the Provisional Government (PG) of Lithuania, in defiance of German warnings. The objective of the PG was to restore order by rebuilding the administrative structure. Six weeks later, on August 5, the PG suspended operations “against its will,” with most of its members rejecting offers to join the German civil administration. The PG had very limited means of communication and no military units. Since Vilnius was occupied by a different division of the German Army, the PG had little knowledge of, or influence upon, the events there. The Kaunas daily *I Laisvę* (“Toward Freedom”) did not mention the PG by name after June 28 – evidence that by then, German censorship was in effect.

The German authorities did nothing to recognize the PG. The military only communicated with it through intermediaries. Kazys Škirpa was named prime minister of the PG, but he was in Berlin and the Germans put him under house arrest to prevent him from returning and assuming his post. Juozas Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis (1903–1974) stepped in as acting prime minister.

Since one occupation was followed by another, the military effort was directed against the Soviets, while the political consequences enabled Lithuanians to better survive the German occupation. There is evidence that over the course of several weeks, the members of the PG had become convinced that the Germans were not liberators. The euphoria of the first days quickly dissipated, with rhetoric being one thing, and actions – another. There was considerable emphasis on Soviet crimes, which were real and plentiful, and the German mission of destroying Bolshevism. When the war began, Stalin’s body count was already hovering around 10 million, while Hitler still had not reached his first hundred thousand, clearly making him the lesser of two evils.

The document I will examine is the so-called “Jewish Statute,” dated August 1, 1941. This is the name given to the document on pages 144–146 of *Documents Accuse*, which is the English translation of *Faktai kaltina* (1970), the Soviet publication often cited in Holocaust literature. This is not an academic publication, but a propaganda volume prepared not by historians, but by communist activists. I have yet to come across any English-language authors who are aware of this fact. There were three editors, or rather – one editor and two “political officers.” One, Eusiejus Rozauskas (1907–1990), was a Jewish war criminal who served as supervisor of interrogations at the Kaunas prison in 1940–1941. His signature appears in hundreds of files of political prisoners who perished in the camps (including my father). From 1960 to 1973, Rozauskas served as director of archives. The second political officer was Boleslovas Baranauskas

(1902–1975), a Lithuanian communist activist who was a high-ranking NKVD officer in 1940–1941 and likely also a war criminal. The editor, Kazimieras Rukšėnas (1935–2014), at least had an academic background, just not as a historian, but as professor of modern languages. Rukšėnas likely did the work, with the other two ensuring that it was in line with the political narrative.

The published English translation is incomplete. The missing part is an anti-Semitic preamble asserting that for centuries, Jews have exploited and corrupted Lithuanians, and that they fought against an independent Lithuania under Bolshevism. It is worth remembering that deception and guile are weapons often used by the powerless. Apparently, the translation in *Documents Accuse* was made from a compilation of decisions of the PG prepared in 1942 by the Lithuanian counselors (*tarėjai*) to the German civil administration. This abbreviated version is preserved in the library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences in Vilnius.

The complete text can be found in the manuscript division of the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania, together with minutes of the PG sessions, which, according to accession records, the library acquired in 1976–1977. The Jewish Statute was typed. The typed text is not dated; “August 1” was added in two places, but in different handwriting. It is signed in green ink by Acting Prime Minister Juozas Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis, who often used green ink during this time, and by Minister of Internal Affairs Jonas Šlepetys (1894–1981). The paper has distinctive watermarks. I have seen nothing to suggest that it is a forgery. The Jewish Statute, together with the minutes and associated documents, was published on pages 135–137 of *Lietuvos laikinoji vyriausybė: Posėdžių protokolai* (“The Provisional Government of Lithuania: Minutes of Sessions”; edited by Arvydas Anušauskas, Vilnius, 2001), with a facsimile between pages 96 and 97.

It is unknown who entered the August 1 date, and why. In fact, there is nothing to establish that the Jewish Statute was even adopted. The minutes of three sessions, including that of August 1, are missing. My guess is that the editors of *Documents Accuse* did not have them either, but we cannot rule out the possibility that the missing pages were removed on purpose and are currently in some Moscow archive. Who had them in the 35 years before the library acquired them is unknown. In recent years, some librarians have suggested that the accession record is misleading. I was not able to establish that the alleged donor ever existed.

We do not know which of several possible versions of the Jewish Statute survived. According to the minutes, the PG considered it on July 28, made some revisions, agreed that in general they were acceptable, and referred the matter to a committee of jurists to prepare a final version. The surviving document shows no revisions. Is it the text that was considered on July 28? The text sent to be finalized? The final version, prepared by the lawyers? It is possible that the text has a pre-history. There is

some evidence that, several weeks earlier, a proposal was examined and approved by a prominent Jewish lawyer. Yet even if this is true, we do not know what he saw and what he approved.

Thus, there remain many unknowns. At the same time, it is certain that the Jewish Statute was never implemented, and that Jews never lived under its provisions. Nor was it published at the time. Thus, it played no role in Jewish history. The question of what effect this had should have occurred to any attentive reader. The minutes explicitly state that the PG is not introducing new regulations, but is only ensuring their uniformity. The obvious question is: What were the regulations that had already been established by different German agencies? For example, the PG minutes show that on July 7, the German military, through an intermediary, informed the PG that there would be no more mass executions of Jews, and that according to a German directive, Kaunas Jews had four weeks to move into a ghetto. I would like to emphasize that the PG was only being informed of decisions that had been made by a German general.

In connection with the Kaunas Ghetto, the city administration established a bureau where Lithuanians moving out of the ghetto area could exchange buildings with Jews moving in. The transactions were to be notarized and completed by August 15.<sup>5</sup> In these first weeks but certainly not some months later – ghettos could be seen as safe havens, sheltering Jews from random violence. There is evidence that some Jews wanted to move into the ghettos. It was not clear where Jews would be better off. After all, in those early days, with the possible exception of several high-ranking German officials, nobody was thinking of ghettos as traps, the first step towards the Final Solution.

Vilnius Jews were moved into a ghetto in early September, under very different circumstances.

On July 28, 1941 – the same day that the PG considered the Jewish Statute – the front page of *Į Laisvę* featured Decree No. 1 in both German and Lithuanian. This was a set of Jewish regulations signed by SS-Gebietskommissar Hans Cramer, the head of the newly established German civil administration, the formation of which was also announced that same day. As I interpreted them, these regulations of the PG were additions to those already in effect. Ghettos could have been seen as safe havens, or one of the necessities of war to ensure a secure rear, similar to the later internment of the Japanese in the United States. By contrast, Cramer's decree can be understood in only one way it was an attempt to humiliate the Jews, to show them that they were inferior, "dirty," and unfit for association with proper humans. It could well have been aimed at Lithuanian public opinion as well. Incidentally, it exposed Jews to common, apolitical, juvenile pranks. The decree barred Jews from walking on sidewalks. They were to walk in single file next to the sidewalk, on the right side of the road. One can only imagine the bewilderment of a child looking out the window and seeing this

strange procession – are they even human? Jews were barred from public parks and public transportation. Owners of public transport had to display signs that Jews were not accepted. Jews could not rest on public benches. The decree warned that anyone who violates the regulations will be severely punished.

It is not known if this decree is what prompted the PG to take up the Jewish question. In any case, the PG had the decree at some point in its deliberations. Whatever their intentions, had their Jewish Statute been implemented, Jews would not have suffered such humiliation.

It was also Cramer who, on July 31, issued Public Decree No. 2, which was published that same day in both German and Lithuanian on page 4 of *Į Laisvę*. This barred Jews who had fled the city at the outbreak of war from returning – landlords were not to allow them to return to their homes. Furthermore, all Jews, including women and children, were to wear a yellow star 8–10 centimeters wide. Finally, all Jews were to move to the ghetto by August 15, getting detailed information from the Kaunas Housing Office in accordance with rules established by the mayor of the city. The newspaper published a third decree, not related to Jewish affairs, but showing how detailed German control was. Landlords were commanded to report vacant apartments to the Housing Office. The extent of control is shown by an order published on August 4, whereby owners of printing presses and other publishing equipment were required to register them with German military offices. Pigeons and pigeon rookeries had to be registered as well. Two decrees concerning Jews that had been issued by the commissar for the district of Kaunas were published on page 4 of the same August 4 issue of *Į Laisvę*. The first decree repeated the prohibition against the use of sidewalks, parks, and public transportation, as well as the requirement to wear the yellow star. It also established a curfew and ordered Jews not to hire or live with Gentiles. The second decree barred Jews from selling their land, homes, or other possessions.

Whether the PG was aware of the July 31 decree is uncertain, since, as mentioned above, the minutes are missing. For the sake of completeness, I must add that the Jewish regulations established by the commissar for the district of Vilnius were published on page 3 of the August 4 issue of the Vilnius daily *Naujoji Lietuva* (“The New Lithuania”). In essence, they repeated the prohibitions of July 28 and required that the yellow star be worn.

Due to the widespread misleading suggestions in Holocaust literature, I must emphasize that the Jewish regulations were established by various German authorities, military and civilian. Where Lithuanians became involved, typically in city and town administrations, they worked out some of the details, but played no role in policy making.

Now for the Jewish Statute. The anti-Semitic preamble is followed by Section 1, which divides Jews into two categories. Jews who were members of the Communist Party,

or had actively supported the Bolsheviks, were to be arrested and placed on trial. The remaining were to move into “designated areas” and wear a round yellow patch with the letter “J.”

Holocaust literature, in broad strokes, suggests that Lithuanians blamed Jews for the Soviet occupation. The PG did not, though it did recognize that some Jews were members of the Communist Party. In pre-war Lithuania, the Communist Party was considered a subversive organization. There is also no doubt that some Jews actively supported the occupation and were guilty of treason under Lithuanian law. This fact is attested to by the Jewish historian Solomonas Atamukas (1918–2014), who argued that the occupation created career opportunities for many Jews.<sup>6</sup> Atamukas was a mid-grade Party apparatchik in 1940–1941, who, after the war, pushed the “many good Soviet people died” version of Holocaust denial, while the only Lithuanians to suffer were the ones who deserved it.

In Section 8, we find the provision that Jews who had volunteered for service in the Lithuanian army before March 5, 1919 (that is, who had taken part in the wars of independence) or had been awarded Lithuanian military medals were not subject to the Jewish Statute. This provision suggests that the PG was not thinking in terms of Nazi-style racial theories. After all, military service has no effect on Jewish “blood.” Thus, even patriotic Jews posed the risk of “racial contamination.” This provision is a point of honor from the Lithuanian point of view.

The fact that Jewish traitors were to be tried, and Jews who served Lithuania were to be exempt, implies that Jews were citizens subject to Lithuanian laws and courts. This is reinforced in Section 7, which provides that Jews who violated these provisions could be placed in labor camps by Lithuanian authorities for up to a year, while according to Section 9, all disputes and appeals were to be resolved by the minister of internal affairs. Evidently, even Jews had the right of appeal. Thus, the Jewish Statute challenged the German provision that Germans and Jews were not subject to Lithuanian jurisdiction.

There are other provisions in the Jewish Statute as well. For example, that Jews could not leave the ghetto without police permission, that they had two weeks to sell their movable property, that they could not possess radios, typewriters, cars, motorcycles, bicycles, pianos, cameras, or medical equipment, and that they could not employ Gentiles. I do not know how much of this is German in origin and how much is Lithuanian, since there has been no attempt to catalog the various decrees.

Yet again, I would like to emphasize that there is nothing about sidewalks, parks, or public transport in the Jewish Statute. Thus, had the Jewish Statute been implemented, the condition of Jews would have improved. Nevertheless, this tells us little about the intentions of the PG. And first, we need to know who they were. Yale historian Timothy Snyder wrote: “A provisional Lithuanian government, composed of the

Lithuanian extreme right, introduced its own anti-Semitic legislation and carried out its own policies of murdering Jews.”<sup>77</sup> That members of the PG did not belong to the “extreme right” can be deduced from the *Encyclopedia Lituanica* in English. Most were, before the war, members of the democratic opposition, and were at times critical of extreme nationalism and anti-Semitism. One member has been honored by Israel for rescuing Jews. The acting prime minister was investigated by an American congressional committee, which found no evidence of anti-Semitism. A Lithuanian extreme right did exist, and even staged a partially successful coup. They were unhappy because they were not getting the jobs they wanted.

Snyder’s remark about the PG murdering Jews is blatantly false, if for no other reason than the fact that the PG never commanded the manpower. Snyder rarely gets it right where Lithuania is concerned. However, his ignorance has not kept him from writing. It is significant that in *Karl Jäger, Wette* does not mention a single member of the PG, although he is familiar with *Documents Accuse*.

We have no reason to assume that the PG approached the Jewish questions with malice. We must also remember that they were in effect a committee – while reaching similar conclusions, the members could have had different motives and intentions. Perhaps some wanted to help the Jews and some wanted to punish them, while others were only interested in making the rear more secure, fearing that Jewish communities were harboring Soviet spies and agents. Given different evaluations of the situation and different priorities, the Jewish Statute could be seen as accomplishing different ends. It is even possible that the Jewish question was incidental. In interpreting it, historians need self-discipline and must never assume that historical agents knew what we know. Nothing suggests that the members of the PG were thinking in terms of the Final Solution. Though before the war, many expected an allied victory, by 1941, with France defeated and the United States standing aside, there was little hope for such a desirable outcome. Thus, German rule in the region was an inescapable fact. The members of the PG believed that they were taking steps towards restoring Lithuania’s independence. It was important to ascertain the German position. Would Germany recognize them as a government – in effect, recognizing the restoration of Lithuanian independence? When asked, the German military was evasive, claiming not to meddle in politics. Perhaps the decisive fact was the transition from military to civil administration, which was publicly announced on July 28. Perhaps the PG was just probing with the Jewish question as a pretext. Or perhaps they hoped that the Germans would be tempted to transfer the burden of Jews to them, and give Lithuania at least formal independence as a sign of gratitude?

I mentioned that deception is often resorted to by the powerless. Some have said that when the Soviets were in power, they inserted real and imaginary quotes from Lenin to distract people from what was written. Perhaps the anti-Semitic preamble

performed a similar function, in the hope that the Germans would be pleased with it, and then not notice the rest – namely, that Jews were citizens of Lithuania, and subject to its laws. In retrospect, such hopes would have been unrealistic, but there are situations where grasping at straws is more rational than doing nothing.

## References

<sup>1</sup> Stasys Yla, *Žmonės ir žvėrys dievų miške* (Men and Beasts in the Forest of the Gods), 1951, English translation, A Priest in Stutthof, 1971.

<sup>2</sup> The case of Jacob Gens (1903–1943), head of the Judenrat in Vilnius.

<sup>3</sup> See Wolfram Wette, *Karl Jäger: Mörder der litauischen Juden*, Fischer Verlag, 2012, p. 48.

<sup>4</sup> Why the Soviets, a week before the war, burdened their railways to such an extent I do not understand. The Soviets planned to remove some 50,000 from Lithuania and the other victims of the Soviet-Nazi alliance, Latvia, Estonia, and Moldova, that June. These numbers do not include tens of thousands from Soviet occupied Poland. Officially, they were removing socially dangerous elements as defined by Marxist ideology, and criminals and prostitutes. Especially because women and children were also targeted, I suspect that these were old-fashioned slave raids,

to help satisfy Soviet needs for cheap labor. Some planning documents are published in *Lietuvos gyventojų trėmimai 1940–1941, 1944–1953 metais sovietinės okupacinės valdžios dokumentuose* (The Deportations of the Inhabitants of Lithuania in 1940–1941, 1944–1953 According to Documents of the Soviet Occupational Government), ed. Antanas Tyla, Vilnius: Lietuvos Istorijos Institutas, 1995, especially pp. 162, 163.

<sup>5</sup> “Norintiems pasikeisti nekilnojamo turto” (To those desiring to exchange real estate), *Į Laisvę*, July 17, 1941, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Solomonas Atamukas, *Lietuvos žydų kelias: Nuo XIV amžiaus iki XX a. pabaigos* (The Path of Lithuania's Jews: From the XIV Century to the End of the XX), 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Timothy Snyder, “Hitler's Logical Holocaust,” a review of seven works, *New York Review of Books*, December 20, 2012, pp. 63–65. The Review declined to publish a correction of such false and prejudicial claims.

Dainius Noreika

## The Intersection of Different Narratives: the Holocaust, the June Uprising and the Partisan War

### Problem

The Holocaust, the Lithuanian anti-Soviet 1941 June Uprising (hereinafter referred to as “the Uprising”), and the Lithuanian partisan war of 1944–1953 are three events caused by different circumstances. They have no direct causal relationship and represent very different phenomena. The Holocaust is a case of the most brutal crime against humanity. The initiator and organizer of the Holocaust – the Nazi regime – is the case of a political system that mobilized significant resources of the state and society to implement totalitarian goals based on racial ideology. The residents of the occupied countries who collaborated with the Nazis (including Lithuanians) reflect the image of cooperation with the occupants typical of all wars and armed conflicts. The Uprising and the partisan war represent phenomena of a different nature – both of them were individual processes in the struggle for independence from the totalitarian Soviet regime, and the people involved were freedom fighters.

Unfortunately, the scenes of Lithuanian historical reality during the Second World War linking the Holocaust, the Uprising, and the partisan war have ruthlessly twisted these different phenomena of collaboration with the occupants and resistance to them. The Soviet occupation of Lithuania in June 1940 and the ensuing annexation processes created a favorable environment for various forms of collaboration and resistance. The intensity scales of both phenomena encompassed various conditions, ranging from voluntary collaborative initiative to passive reconciliation with the new reality; from patient attitudes of internal opposition to open armed resistance. Between the poles of extreme choices, there was also a space in which actions contradicted beliefs and beliefs contradicted actions. Collaboration and resistance were often interrelated, sometimes even in the activities of the same person. During the Uprising, the restoration of Lithuanian statehood was announced. However, after the German occupation, the Lithuanian efforts to restore local government, ensure its protection, and re-establish the Lithuanian military forces began to overlap with



collaboration. Collaboration manifested itself not only in the establishment of the Nazi occupational administration and the economic exploitation of the land, but also in participation in the crimes of the regime, including the Holocaust.

Historical research in the past two decades<sup>1</sup> has confirmed Raul Hilberg's claim that there were no truly spontaneous pogroms that were free from the influence of the Einsatzgruppen (deployment groups that operated under the administration of the Schutzstaffel (SS))<sup>2</sup> in Lithuania and the other Eastern European territories occupied by the Wehrmacht. However, anti-Semitic attacks and mass killings were mostly carried out by Lithuanians, some of whom were former or future fighters against the Soviet occupation, i.e. members of the Uprising and/or partisans.

The fact that some anti-Soviet fighting units that were formed during the Uprising were involved in the mass killings by the Nazis is not new.<sup>3</sup> However, this does not mean that all of the former insurgents were murderers. The partisan unit of Salakas Township (Zarasai District) that was established on June 22, 1941 and participated in the Uprising until the end of August consisted of 155 members.<sup>4</sup> However, in August, when the unit was used to kill civilians (victims: "3 Lithuanians, 26 Russians, and 110 Jews"<sup>5</sup>), it only had 53 members.<sup>6</sup> Only groups of approximately 10 people, referred to as "striking forces," carried out arrests and shootings.<sup>7</sup> For comparison, out of the 22 partisans in the Stelmužė unit,<sup>8</sup> only four shot people.<sup>9</sup> There were 10 members in the Kiviškiai unit,<sup>10</sup> seven of whom were involved in the massacres.<sup>11</sup>

In August and September 1941, the Lithuanian self-defense units were reformed into police structures subordinate to the occupational regime. After 1944, some of the former members of the self-defense units and policemen who worked for the occupational Nazi regime became partisans. It is estimated that roughly 35 percent of all partisan commanders (members of the Council of the Union of Lithuanian Freedom Fighters, heads of regions and districts) had served in Nazi-affiliated police structures.<sup>12</sup> In 1944–1945, 18–21 percent of all members of the partisan formations in Northeast Lithuania (Zarasai, Rokiškis, and Utena districts) came from the former Nazi-affiliated self-defense units and the municipal and auxiliary police.<sup>13</sup> Some partisans who served in police structures during the Nazi occupation not only maintained public order or fought against Soviet partisans, but also participated in the Holocaust process. For example, it has been established that in 1941, partisan military district commander Juozas Krištaponis, partisan company commander Stasys Čėpla-Vilkas, and partisan unit commanders Juozas Ūselis-Pakalnis and Edvardas Guoga-Glaudys arrested civilians – mainly Jews – and took them to killing sites while serving in the Nazi-affiliated 2nd Lithuanian Auxiliary Police Battalion.<sup>14</sup>

The situation described shows several tendencies: (a) some of the insurgents and partisans who fought for Lithuania's freedom collaborated with the Nazis (served in the security forces and the local police subordinate to the Nazi command), and some

of them participated in the mass killings initiated by the regime; (b) on the other hand, the Nazi collaborators – especially the ones who murdered people – constituted a small part of all of the insurgents and even a smaller part of the partisans; (c) participation of the same person in the Holocaust, the Uprising, and the partisan war are separate phenomena of a different nature, revealing the complexity of the processes of the time, and showing that the same person could become a collaborator and a freedom fighter at different times.

Unfortunately, such facts and considerations are largely alien to both Holocaust research and literature about Lithuania's armed anti-Soviet resistance. Discussions about the participation of insurgents and partisans in the massacre of Jews and collaboration with the Nazis are often influenced by ideological evaluation. For example, in different texts, anti-communist fighters are either associated with the murderers of Jews, or are completely isolated from this problematic context. In both cases, the facts do not really play a decisive role. An additional obstacle to a critical and objective consideration of participation in the Holocaust and the anti-Soviet struggle is the assumption accepted by both of the aforementioned ideological perspectives that the murderers of the Jews were dehumanized individuals from the margins of society of those times.<sup>15</sup> Was this really the case? And what chance is there of overcoming the divide offered by the two perspectives?

### **How did Partisans become Killers?**

One chapter of a doctoral dissertation defended last year in the United States is titled “The ‘Death Dealer’ of Kaunas: Juozas Lukša.”<sup>16</sup> Juozas Lukša, a well-known Lithuanian partisan leader who went by various code names, including Daumantas and Skirmantas, played a leading role in this research, which analyzes how the Western countries – and especially their intelligence – used ex-Nazis and their collaborators in the confrontation with the U.S.S.R. during the Cold War. Author David Albanese argues that Lukša – a Nazi collaborator, a member of the Lithuanian Activist Front (which organized the Uprising), and a participant in the Jewish pogrom at the Lietūkis garage in Kaunas on June 27, 1941 – became an important figure in the post-war anti-Soviet resistance, making him a very convenient collaborator for the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and that today, he is seen as an exemplary hero for Lithuanians strengthening their national identity. As Albanese claims, the CIA's decision to choose the “lesser evil,” i.e. collaboration with Lukša, a criminal, was conditioned by the circumstances of the Cold War. However, the author feels that the fact that Lukša has been turned into a hero in present-day Lithuania

demonstrates the problem of value prioritization, which probably stems from “the additional baggage carried by the post-Communist states.”<sup>17</sup>

Albanese is right. Personal patriotism, efforts to achieve the political independence of a nation, or other merits cannot become absolution for crimes against humanity, and a biography cannot be constructed by selectively removing unpleasant records. Therefore, considerable attention should be given to these statements of the author. However, the discussion about Lukša’s cooperation with the Nazis and his participation in the massacre of Jews is not grounded. The evidence used to support these claims actually discredits them. The author refers to a book edited by Russian propagandist Alexander Dyukov<sup>18</sup> and a photo of an unidentified person with a bar or a club posing against the background of the murdered victims.<sup>19</sup> First, the information source is of questionable quality, and second, there are obvious anatomical differences between Lukša and the Jewish murderer in the photo. These fallacies may be due to a lack of professionalism or a biased approach. However, what is more likely is that the author simply followed the established historiographical tradition, which emphasizes a strong link between the Lithuanian partisans and the killers of the Jews. This is typical among authors conducting new research, who do not even try to verify this paradigm.<sup>20</sup>

Similar tendencies are also seen in opinion journalism and popular science, which have a much larger audience compared to academic research. Robert van Voren’s book, which was published in the Netherlands and Lithuania several years ago, is one of the best examples of indifference to the credibility of the facts. The author identifies the anti-Soviet activities of Lithuanians with Nazi views, the post-war partisans are only mentioned in the context of killing Jews, and the Uprising is associated with the Lithuanian Activist Front, which in turn is associated with the Nazis.<sup>21</sup> In addition, the post-war partisans are blamed not only for participating in the Holocaust, but also for forgetting this fact. The author claims that because of the threats of the “forest brothers” (the partisans), even people who were saving the Jews from repression were afraid to admit what they had done.<sup>22</sup> Other factual problems can be seen in the description of the liquidation of the Lithuanian Territorial Defense Force (LTDF; Lithuanian: *Lietuvos vietinė rinktinė*):

Of the 13,000 troops that were to be demobilized, only some 3,500 did so. Most of the others fled to the forest with their arms and many of these formed the core of the partisan forces fighting the Soviets until well into the 1950s. The tragedy is that among those who bravely fought against the Soviet oppressor, were those who also actively participated in the killing of Jews.<sup>23</sup>

The question is, why is the killing of Jews attributed to the LTDF, which had nothing to do with it? These accusations are probably only made because of the fact that the

LTDF was formed during the Nazi occupation. It is interesting why the author overlooks the fact that the period of existence of the LTDF and the peak of the massacre of the Jews did not coincide chronologically. It is clear that the LTDF included people who had previously participated in Jewish massacres or pogroms and later became partisans, but this nuanced interpretation is not reflected in the text.

An analogous path of factual errors can be seen in the book by Rūta Vanagaitė and Efraim Zuroff, which has received considerable media and public attention.<sup>24</sup> Despite the loudly proclaimed “new approach” to the problem under consideration, the authors nevertheless follow the tradition of not making a distinction between Lithuania’s anti-Soviet resistance, aspirations for the restoration of independence, and crimes against humanity. The Lithuanian Activist Front, the Lithuanian Nationalist Party, the Uprising, the Provisional Government, the Lithuanian administration, the Catholic Church, the units of the Lithuanian TDA Battalion and Rollkommando Hamann, and the Vilnius Special Squad are all treated equally as criminal structures. The reader’s attention is captured not by the details of the historical context, but by the emotionally moving excerpts from the interrogation protocols or testimonies of witnesses.<sup>25</sup>

The basic idea behind one of the latest pieces on the topic, which was written by Arkadijus Vinokūras, that “the children of executioners are not guilty of their parents’ crimes”<sup>26</sup> is implemented in a truly innovative way (by publishing 35 interviews with children and relatives of people who killed Jews or were otherwise involved in the genocide). The author’s introduction to the book reflects sensitive and profound thoughts. However, when discussing the issue of unjustified “worshiping of post-war ‘heroes,’”<sup>27</sup> the author recalls the biography of one of the organizers of the anti-Soviet underground, Jonas Noreika (code name “Generolas Vėtra”), and expresses his personal view on the topic by using a quote from an internet portal:

[Y]es, Jonas Noreika fought against the Russians. Did not we all fight against the Russians? Jonas Noreika did what many Lithuanians did, but he also organized the Jewish ghetto, which led to the killing of thousands of our Lithuanian citizens. He arrested the unsuspecting Lithuanian citizens who were busy with their daily work. He ordered the confiscation of their property, he robbed them and prepared for destruction. Stalin behaved likewise.<sup>28</sup>

However, it is interesting why the author himself does not discuss the topic of previous cooperation of Lithuanian partisans with the Nazis. There are no attempts to address the historical context or critically evaluate the sources. Instead, an incompetent opinion devoid of the mentioned elements is chosen as evidence. To illustrate, research by Alfredas Rukšėnas has revealed that Noreika was neither an initiator nor an organizer of the mass killings, which were performed by the operational groups

of the Nazi Security Police. Noreika did not arrest the victims, as this was done by members of the Lithuanian police. When Noreika was appointed to the Šiauliai County administration, the Žagarė ghetto had already been established. On August 22, 1941, as the head of Šiauliai County, Noreika handed over an order issued by Šiauliai Gebietskommissar Hans Gewecke to the mayors of the townships and towns regarding the transfer of the county's Jews to the Žagarė ghetto. He also organized the expropriation of Jewish property for the county administration.<sup>29</sup> Noreika was a Nazi collaborator and participant in part of the Holocaust process; however, a collaborator and a murderer are not one and the same.

Where does the tradition of historical texts that these works represent come from? There are two possible sources. First, the Second World War created an attitude that divided the world into two blocs – the Axis powers and the anti-Hitler coalition. In this two-pillar structure, a certain place was reserved for various partisans – the Soviet/communist partisans were perceived as an appendage to the anti-Hitler coalition, whereas the Lithuanian partisans, the participants in the Uprising, the members of the Lithuanian Territorial Defense Force and the Fatherland Defense Force (TAR; Lithuanian: *Tėvynės apsaugos rinktinė*), and the Lithuanian Freedom Army reconnaissance troops who were trained in Germany were classified as pro-Nazi subjects. This perspective took root after the war, and for a long time, there was neither academic interest nor a favorable political situation for more explicit exploration of the above-mentioned phenomena.<sup>30</sup>

The historical context of the postwar and Cold War periods influenced the politically motivated evaluation of the Nazis and their collaborators as well as the directions of Holocaust research.<sup>31</sup> This situation was especially convenient for targeted Soviet activities, which are the second source of the historiographical paradigm that identified the Lithuanian partisans with the killers of the Jews. The Soviets highlighted the ideological similarity between Lithuanian anti-Soviet fighters and the Nazis, arguing that the Lithuanians, working together with the Nazis, carried out mass killings of civilians and later used the same methods in partisan activities. According to Mingailė Jurkutė, the Soviet regime “presented the mass murders carried out by the Nazis in parallel with the ‘crimes of the bandits’ [Lithuanian partisans], thus implying the equal status and weight of the crimes, i.e., the National Socialist crimes against humanity condemned by the entire free world and the crimes of the ‘gangs of bandits’ operating in Lithuania against the peaceful population.”<sup>32</sup> These narratives reached Western societies due to the systematic efforts of the KGB, which were aimed at discrediting Lithuanian aspirations for freedom and pitting the Jewish community against Lithuanians.<sup>33</sup> Later, publications appeared arguing that Jonas Žemaitis-Vytautas, Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas, Lukša, Noreika, and other prominent partisan commanders and fighters against the Soviet regime were among the murderers of the Jews.<sup>34</sup> The myth about Lithuanian partisans being

affiliated with the Nazis is still alive not only in Russia, but also in the West and even in Lithuania. Moreover, it continues to be incorporated into new texts – even academic ones. If the historical texts support this narrative, there will be no need for source criticism, fact-checking, and sensitivity to the uniqueness of local processes, or an assessment of the historical context.

### **The Price of Idealization**

The processes of the Uprising and the partisan war have received considerable scholarly attention. Kęstutis Girnius's monograph, which was published 30 years ago in both the United States and Lithuania,<sup>35</sup> is a comprehensive study of the social reality in Lithuania during the Second World War, combining the theoretical perspective of social sciences and historical research. The author demonstrated that by investigating the available resources in a professional manner, it is possible to objectively handle the fragmentary nature or questionable reliability of the data. Yet most importantly, he understood the principle that "one myth [the Soviet version of history] should not be replaced by another."<sup>36</sup> Drawing on this principle, Girnius's research showed that the discussion about the armed anti-Soviet struggle in Lithuania cannot be a pillar of an ideologized or politicized paradigm; rather, it must reveal an objective representation of the various processes in the occupied country, introduce the variations in human behavior in certain historical circumstances, develop critical thinking, and so on. Thus, this work is an excellent example of historical research, which was understood differently in occupied Lithuania.

Girnius provided an in-depth discussion of a topic of relevance to this research – evaluation of the rebels who fought for the independence of Lithuania, the partisans who collaborated with the Nazis, and their participation in killing Jews. He formulated several well-grounded theses (based on an analysis of the sources available at the time), which laid the foundation for a deeper understanding of historical phenomena, including that: (a) some former Nazi collaborators – even those who participated in the mass killings of civilians, mainly Jews – became partisans at the beginning of the second Soviet occupation ("even those who got used to killing in the years of the Nazi occupation went into the forests");<sup>37</sup> (b) former Nazi collaborators (most of whom went into hiding or emigrated to the West during the interwar period) made up only a small part of the partisans, who were mostly younger people fighting against the repressive Soviet regime; (c) without a comprehensive empirical study, generalizations of this problem are conditional. Only a detailed empirical investigation would make it possible to answer the question of the relationship between the Lithuanian partisan war and the former cooperation of Lithuanians with the Nazis.<sup>38</sup> It can be assumed that

with the free access to Soviet archives, the increasing number of authentic sources, and the newly discovered hidden documents of partisan actions, the conceptual framework proposed by Girnius has been further developed.

However, the situation has not changed. Research on the Uprising and the partisan war that has been published since Girnius's aforementioned study has not succeeded in addressing all of the necessary issues. Even before March 11, 1990, when Lithuania was still occupied, Lithuanian partisans and participants of the Uprising began to be referred to as "freedom fighters." In the context of the restoration of statehood, historical images were revived as a source of formation of national identity and patriotism, and the narrative of the armed struggle against the U.S.S.R. became on point once again. The narrative was formed primarily as a counterbalance to Soviet propaganda, which was unacceptable to those who had knowledge of the anti-Soviet struggle from their immediate social environment, and to those for whom it was linked to other already debunked propaganda images. Consequently, the concept of anti-Soviet resistance began to be based on an idealized narrative, which was greatly influenced by the work of the Lithuanian émigré, particularly – writing by Juozas Lukša-Daumantas<sup>39</sup> and Juozas Brazaitis-Ambrasevičius,<sup>40</sup> which depicted rebels and partisans as freedom fighters, victims of Soviet repression, and, at the same time, defenders of civilians.

The idealized narrative created by Lithuanians abroad was greatly influenced by the tradition of history writing in interwar Lithuanian as well as the situational circumstances of the war and the post-war period. The authors of the first pieces about the resistance were particularly sensitive to the controversies of Lithuanian cooperation with the Nazis and Lithuanian aspirations for freedom. Thus, it is not surprising that they tried to avoid associating freedom fighters with the killers. As a result, Brazaitis-Ambrasevičius, whose activities during the Nazi occupation were also investigated by the Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, and International Law of the U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary (leading to him being removed from the list of suspected Nazi war criminals living in the U.S. due to inconclusive evidence), is portrayed as a man for whom the June Uprising was "an existential decision" and the partisan war "the most heroic ... action of armed resistance."<sup>41</sup> The rallying of the rebels was explained in figurative terms as "a selection of the nation's knights" with "motives of duty and heart."<sup>42</sup>

The topic of the involvement of the insurgents and partisans in the massacre of the Jews (or collaboration with the Nazis in general) has been neglected to an extent by Lithuanian researchers. It was suggested that the majority of the Uprising participants went back to their farms after the retreat of the Soviet Union and did not participate in criminal activities. In 1944, most of the killers and collaborators fled to the West, where they went into hiding or worked for the Soviets. Tomas Remeikis only mentions this topic in passing,<sup>43</sup> whereas Romualdas Misiūnas (Romuald Misiunas) and

Rein Taagepera discuss it in more detail, claiming that the Nazi collaborators fled to Germany or started cooperating with Moscow, often changing their names.<sup>44</sup> This statement speaks of the choices made by some Nazi collaborators, but it is too narrow and does not reflect the actual situation. It is wrong to assume that a person who collaborated with the occupiers was just an opportunist who could only act in two ways, that is, when the occupation regime changed, this type of person either fled with the old master or began to serve the new one. However, similar to pre-war and post-war Lithuania, the historical reality of the Second World War was conducive for various forms of cooperation and resistance, including opportunistic double<sup>45</sup> or even triple collaboration,<sup>46</sup> and cooperation with one occupant in order to defend oneself from another occupant. Today it is obvious that the Nazi collaborators did not simply rush to the West or start working for Moscow. Many of them continued to fight against the Soviets. However, these issues were not considered by the Lithuania émigré at that time.

In 1990, after the restoration of Lithuania's independence, the clash of the new national and old Soviet narratives did not result in the creation of a new perspective. On the contrary – local authors continued to develop the idealized narrative created by the Lithuanian émigré. Objective but inconvenient evidence and facts were ignored. Since they had been the core of earlier Soviet propaganda, they were associated with all the lies of the fallen Soviet regime. Thus, facts about possible links between the partisans and the Nazi occupation were either not mentioned or were superficially denied by referring to “convenient” sources. For example, the claim made by Nijolė Gaškaitė et al. that only eight percent of the partisans were accused of collaborating with the Nazis is based on the statistics of biographical data of partisans who died between August 1951 and January 1953. However, data from 1944–1946 would more objectively and accurately reflect the actual situation.<sup>47</sup>

In summary, it can be said that the idealized approach was focused solely on the perspective of Lithuanian victimization and suffering, whereby the partisan war became isolated from the problematic relationship with the Second World War. In this way, the formation of a new approach based on an objective interpretation of events and critical thinking was not encouraged.<sup>48</sup> As a result, pieces that idealize the partisan war are viewed by some historians not as academic research, but as a historical perspective of the past that was born “after years of being banned from talking”;<sup>49</sup> others see these texts as attempts by certain political forces to monopolize the “martyrological discourse” in order to please a “particular electorate”<sup>50</sup> (it should be noted that this perspective is often as ideological as the one previously discussed). Despite this criticism, a lack of critical and analytical approaches is evident in today's research as well.<sup>51</sup> For example, it is particularly strange to deliberate that a person who participated in the anti-Soviet resistance and suffered repressions is pardoned of crimes against humanity committed in the past, claiming that “only a vile person would dare to call him a collaborator or a Jew killer.”<sup>52</sup>



## Are All Collaborators the Same?

History writers who support the idealized partisan war paradigm a priori tend to reject (or at least marginalize) any relations between the freedom fighters and the Nazi collaborators and killers, especially in light of the prevailing tendency to dehumanize them, i.e., to treat them as racists, sadists, and criminals. But is this a well-grounded approach?

Collaboration or cooperation with the occupant or enemy is typical of the history of all wars and conflicts of humanity. It is collaboration with Nazi Germany that has garnered the most attention.<sup>53</sup> This historical period gave rise to a number of definitions of collaboration and synonyms used to refer to this phenomenon, such as “quisling.” Cooperation is usually seen as a synonym of treason or as an antonym of patriotism; however, this superficial approach does not reflect the complexity and ambiguity of historical reality.<sup>54</sup>

In Lithuania, the concept of collaboration is strongly influenced by the harsh evaluation of collaboration with the Soviets, although the definitions are quite universal. For example, in Vytautas Tininis’s research, a collaborator is predominantly a “traitor of the homeland.” According to Tininis, “collaborators are people who betrayed their homeland and its independence due to political or ideological beliefs, and who voluntarily cooperated with the occupants.”<sup>55</sup> This is a relatively straightforward and superficial definition in comparison to the one given by Vincas Trumpa in 1989, who claims that sometimes “it is difficult to draw the line between a freedom fighter and a collaborator,” because in different historical circumstances, the same person could be both a traitor and a hero.<sup>56</sup> However, a number of historians could not accept the fact that two images – that of a heroic freedom fighter and that of a dehumanized traitor – could be reconciled in one person, which is why, according to Joachim Tauber, the related discussions have been stifled by “the categorical clichés of ‘either-or.’”<sup>57</sup>

During the post-war period, the pieces written by the Lithuanian émigré about collaboration with the Nazis or the Holocaust largely overlooked any collaboration of Lithuanians with the occupants or Lithuanian participation in the crimes against humanity. Some of the authors blamed people of other nationalities,<sup>58</sup> while others argued that although there were some Lithuanians among the collaborators, they mostly came from the margins of society and were therefore aliens.<sup>59</sup> This approach merged with the approach of liberal intellectuals to look at the problem directly and influenced Lithuanian academic texts. This trend is visible in the claim made by Romualdas Misiūnas and Rein Taagepera that collaborating Lithuanians were a “handful of scums,”<sup>60</sup> or in Vygintas Vareikis’s statement that “the majority of Lithuanian collaborators were people from the margins of society.”<sup>61</sup> This type of discourse portrayed Nazi collaborators as distant, alien, dehumanized, and relegated to the fringes of society, which in some ways explained the reasons for their actions.

These historiographical trends have confused the phenomena of collaboration with the Germans (in general) and participation in the massacre of Jews (in particular). For example, Saulius Sužiedėlis, who is one of the most prominent researchers of the Holocaust, enumerates the reasons that motivated Lithuanians to participate in killing Jews: (1) opportunistic outbreak of the criminal element; (2) the desire to take revenge for the crimes committed by some Jews against Lithuanians during the first Bolshevik period; (3) the sudden formation of opposing geopolitical interests of the two communities; (4) traditional anti-Semitism, which manifested at the height of the war and occupation; (5) fascist and nationalist sentiments that emerged among Lithuanians before the war, encouraging anti-Jewish actions.<sup>62</sup>

Sužiedėlis applies a similar scheme not only for explaining Lithuanian participation in killing Jews, but also for collaboration in general. In this case, the author distinguishes: (1) nationalist idealism; (2) political naiveté; (3) ideological contamination; (4) obsequious opportunism; and (5) criminal intent.<sup>63</sup>

It is clear that both definitions of collaboration are interrelated, and that the second explanation is largely influenced by the first, i.e., the reasons for killing Jews affect the concept of collaboration in general. It can be agreed that Lithuanian intentions to collaborate with the Nazis (before the outbreak and at the very beginning of the German-Soviet war) were dictated by geopolitical interests, as well as political or social opportunism, but it is difficult to estimate the role of “criminal intentions.” Of course, during the military actions and the Uprising, favorable conditions were created for robbery, confiscation of property, violence, murder, and other criminal activities; however, it is doubtful that this had anything to do with collaboration. The activities of the Provisional Government of Lithuania, which cooperated with the Germans for strategic reasons, as well as the actions of the Lithuanian police or self-defense units that cooperated for tactical or social reasons, were primarily aimed at the prevention of criminal events, not at their initiation. The reason for the first brutal murders and pogroms was not criminal intent, but rather – opportunism on the part of the collaborators, or their attempts to show loyalty to the new regime and avoid punishment for collaborating with the Soviets. These factors could also be applied to the re-established Lithuanian security and criminal police and other institutions. Criminal action was not the primary goal, but the result or the price paid to achieve certain goals.<sup>64</sup>

Furthermore, Sužiedėlis’s use of the words “naiveté,” “contamination,” and “obsequious” imply a prejudice against Nazi collaborators, conveying the knowledge of the outcome of the Second World War and the resulting assessment of collaboration and National Socialism. The narrative, which fused various phenomena of that time (criminal intent, racist anti-Semitism, and immoral opportunism), contributed to the formation of the premise that cooperation with the Nazis was equivalent to crimes

against humanity and betrayal of the interests of the people of Lithuania. On the other hand, emotionally neutral words could be used to describe the motives and factors of collaboration. For example, Stathis Kalyvas, who has researched Greek service in the Nazi auxiliary police in 1941-1944, explains that this choice of the Greek people was determined by strategic political orientation, the choice of the “lesser evil,” material interests, and avoidance of Nazi violence.<sup>65</sup>

## Conclusions

Due to the specific circumstances of the Second World War and the related processes, the same person could be both a collaborator and a freedom fighter. This fact neither condemns nor justifies this group of people, but rather – reflects the complexity of that particular period of time. The use of the bipolar formula of “patriots or killers” simplifies the historic reality, which can only be revealed by a multi-layered and multi-perspective evaluation of the Uprising, the period of the Nazi occupation, and the partisan war. Such an academic approach would allow for objectively portraying facts representing a different perspective of the same historical phenomenon, creating a coherent and critical narrative. The reconstruction of factual social reality rather than simplified social reality would help create the preconditions for understanding the past with all of its light and dark undertones, instead of just painting it in black and white.

From this point of view, discussing the facts of collaboration with the Nazis (or even participation in the mass killings) in the biographies of the participants of the Uprising or the partisan war would not destroy the image of the anti-Soviet resistance as a fight for Lithuanian freedom, as both facts represent a historical reality. Crimes against humanity were committed not by fanatical, dehumanized individuals, but by “normal” members of society. The choices of Lithuanians were mainly determined by objectively and subjectively rational models of actions tested by historical experience, as well as the perception of forms of collective action that prevailed in society at that time. People had to obey the orders issued by the leadership and conform to social pressure. The Nazi government (which was real and absolute at that time) played an important role by initiating and legitimizing the mass killings and the intensifying war phenomena as active anti-Semitic propaganda, thus deepening the polarization and brutalization of society, routinization, and tolerance for the killings. Some former Nazi collaborators and perpetrators of the Holocaust took part in the Uprising or became partisans after 1944 and fought against the Soviet occupation. Taking part in the struggle for freedom does not negate any of their previous social roles and does

not atone for their crimes, just as their crimes do not take away their status as freedom fighters. This perspective allows modern society to better understand the totality of past events, and also allows academic research to realize its didactic function, that is, to reflect the nature of war and the processes taking place in a country occupied by a totalitarian regime.

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Chapter II.

# The Major Ghettos of Lithuania





The Kaunas Ghetto.  
A prisoner with a winter coat and a canister



Arūnas Bubnys

## The Massacres of Vilnius Jews and the Vilnius Ghetto (1941–1944)

The history of the Jewish community in Vilnius has garnered considerable attention from historians worldwide. Before the Second World War, Vilnius was one of the most important centers of European Jewish culture, science, education, and rabbinical scholarship. When the Nazi-Soviet war began, there were an estimated 58,000 Jews living in Vilnius. However, only a few thousands of them survived to see the end of the war and the Nazi occupation. The tragic loss of “the Jerusalem of Lithuania” is still a matter of concern for both Lithuanian and foreign historians, as well as the general public. This period of Vilnius Jewish history is quite extensively covered in world historiography and individual memoirs. Most of the work written about the genocide of the Vilnius Jews thus far was published in Israel and the United States. In the past few years, however, Holocaust research has been increasing in Lithuania as well. The work by the researchers at the Vilnius Gaon Jewish State Museum stand out the most. However, perhaps the most important academic treatise on the Vilnius Ghetto and the massacre of its Jews is *Ghetto in Flames*, a book published in New York in 1982 by Israeli professor Yitzhak Arad.<sup>1</sup> Arad examined the most important events and stages in the history of the Vilnius Ghetto: the 1941 Paneriai massacre, the period of stability (1942–1943), and the liquidation of the ghetto (September 1943). The book includes statistics on the victims, as well as a description of the structure and function of the ghetto’s internal administration, the ghetto’s anti-fascist underground operation, and the activities of the occupation regime that committed the genocide.

When it comes to piecing together the history of the Vilnius Ghetto, surviving diaries and memoirs are a very important source. Literature of this genre has been published in many different languages of the world. The author of this article relies on diaries of Holocaust survivors or eyewitnesses that have been published in Lithuanian, German, Polish, and English. Some of the most valuable diaries and memoirs about the Vilnius Ghetto and the massacres of Vilnius Jews are those by Grigory Schur, Herman Kruk, Kazimierz Sakowicz, Abraham Sutzkever, and Macha Rolnikas (Marija Rolnikaitė).<sup>2</sup> Research into the genocide of the Jews in Vilnius was greatly encouraged at the

international conference held in 1993 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the liquidation of the Vilnius Ghetto. The presentations made at the conference were later published in three languages.<sup>3</sup> Among the latest historical analyses of the Vilnius Ghetto, the publications released by the Vilnius Gaon Jewish State Museum should be acknowledged first.<sup>4</sup> These publications include many new facts about the number of prisoners in the Vilnius Ghetto, ghetto labor camps located in the provinces, and the spiritual and cultural life in the Vilnius Ghetto. As global literature on the obliteration of the Vilnius Jewish community reflects dozens – or even hundreds – of positions, this article is based exclusively on the most important and recent publications mentioned above.

There are few original archival documents about the genocide of the Jews in Vilnius. These documents are preserved in the Lithuanian Central State Archive (hereinafter – the LCSA). Among the most important LCSA archives for the issue under investigation is that of the German Security Police and SD Commander in Lithuania (R-1399). This contains monthly written reports to the Reich Main Security Office (RSHA) in Berlin about the political, economic, and cultural situation in Nazi-occupied Lithuania between 1942 and 1943. Those reports had special subsections allocated to partisan activities, the resistance movement, and Jews. These archival documents also contain important statistical data on the number of prisoners in the Vilnius Ghetto, the utilization of ghetto residents for various jobs, ghetto escapes, and so on. Important information about the persecution (arrests, interrogations) of Vilnius Jews can be found in the archival documents of the Vilnius units of the Lithuanian Security Police (R-1673, R-681) and in the archival documents of the Vilnius City Police chief (R-689). The archives for the German civil occupation authorities also contain documents reflecting the situation of the prisoners of the Vilnius Ghetto. The archival documents of the commissioner (German: *Gebietskommissar*) for the city of Vilnius (R-614) should be mentioned first. These contain documents about the utilization of Vilnius Ghetto prisoners for labor, confiscated Jewish property and its appropriation for the needs of the occupation regime and private individuals, the export of Jewish cultural values to Germany, the ghetto's food supply, ghetto workers' wages, the price of goods in the ghetto, and other issues. Important information about the Vilnius Ghetto and its dwellers is also stored in other LCSA archival holdings: the Vilnius City Municipality archive (R-643; this archive contains data from the May 1942 general census of the Vilnius Ghetto population); the Vilnius County Governor archive (R-685); the archive of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce working groups for the occupied territories of Lithuania (R-633); the Vilnius hard labor prison archive (R-730); and – especially – the Vilnius Jewish ghetto archives (R-1421). The latter archive contains surviving decrees, orders, and instructions of the Nazi occupation regime directed at Jews, as well as documents from the ghetto's internal administration (the Jewish Council, the Jewish Ghetto Police) on various issues of ghetto life.

The documents stored at the Lithuanian Special Archives (hereinafter – the LSA) are the second most important group of archival documents. These include criminal cases for those arrested by the NKVD/MGB/KGB and convicted in the post-war years for participating in the Holocaust. They are stored in the LSA Criminal Case Records section (f. K-1, ap. 58). These documents reflect the genocide of the Jews of Vilnius through the eyes of the perpetrators of the Holocaust. The author of this article managed to find dozens of cases of members of the infamous Vilnius Special Squad. This squad is known to have executed tens of thousands of Jews in Paneriai. The same archive contains many other criminal cases important to investigation of the genocide of the Jews in Vilnius: cases involving former German and Lithuanian officials and officials of the internal administration of the Vilnius Ghetto, including Vilnius Ghetto administrator Franz Murer, Vilnius Jewish Ghetto Police officers Solomon Alpern and Berh Meshchansut, and ghetto administration employee Yefim Mintz, as well as criminal proceedings against many others. Important documents about the genocide of the Jews of Vilnius can also be found in other LSA records (f. K-1, ap. 8, 45, 46). Other archival sources and literature used in this article are cited in the sources section.

The aforementioned literature and archival sources provide Holocaust researchers with the opportunity to thoroughly analyze the history of the Vilnius Jewish community and the Vilnius Ghetto during the Nazi occupation.

Vilnius was home to country's oldest and largest Jewish community, and was known throughout the world as "the Jerusalem of Lithuania." However, determining the exact number of Jews living in Vilnius before the Holocaust began is difficult. According to the general census of Vilnius carried out in 1931, the city of Vilnius had a total population of 195,100, including 54,000 Jews. According to the Department of Statistics, 58,263 Jews (27.78 percent of the city's total population) were living in Vilnius on January 1, 1941.<sup>5</sup>

The German army occupied Vilnius on June 24, 1941. Thousands of Vilnius Jews also tried to flee into the depths of the Soviet Union along with the retreating Soviet army. Some 3,000 of them may have succeeded in escaping, but a large number of refugees failed and were forced to return to Vilnius.<sup>6</sup> As the Soviets withdrew from the city, Lithuanian partisans and insurgents began occupying the city's most important buildings in order to create a temporary government. The Citizens' Committee of Vilnius City and Region (hereinafter – the Committee) started functioning on June 24, 1941. Vilnius University Professor Stasys Žakevičius was elected as its chairman. The Committee appointed administrators for its various areas of activity (internal affairs, finance, industry, etc.). Antanas Krutulius became the interim mayor of Vilnius (he was later replaced by Karolis Dabulevičius).<sup>7</sup> On June 25, Žakevičius and Lieutenant Colonel Karl von Ostman, the German military commandant for Vilnius, signed an order introducing martial law in Vilnius beginning that same day. The manager of

internal affairs, Kostas Kalendra, was tasked with organizing the administration and the police in the Vilnius Region (Vilnius, Švenčionys and Trakai districts). Antanas Iškauskas was appointed chief of the Vilnius City Police.<sup>8</sup> However, the German military administration held supreme power over the city (until August 1941, when German civil administration was introduced throughout Lithuania). The German military authorities did not consider the Committee to be an equal partner and prohibited its function as a Lithuanian government authority. In July 1941, the German military administration prohibited the Committee from using the terms “Republic of Lithuania” and “ministries” in any documents, and emphasized that “German army, German garrison, security police and SD actions take precedence over actions of Lithuanian judicial authorities.”<sup>9</sup> The Committee’s activities were suspended on September 15, 1941, by order of General Commissioner of *Generalbezirk Litauen* Adrian von Renteln.<sup>10</sup>

The persecution of Jews in Vilnius began during the first days of the Nazi occupation. On June 29, 1941, Žakevičius spoke on Vilnius radio, accusing and threatening Jews: “...The Jews, on whom the bloody terror of the Bolsheviks relied, and who were the most active servants of the 20th century red hunters of humans, will be stricken from the political, economic and cultural life of Lithuania. ... However, all this will be determined by government legislation.”<sup>11</sup>

Grigory Schur wrote in his diary that although there were no large-scale Jewish pogroms in Vilnius during the first days of the occupation like there were in Kaunas, Lithuanian activists (that is, members of the Lithuanian Activist Front (LAF)) did shoot dozens of Soviet prisoners of war and Jews in the garden of the Franciscan Church on Trakai Street on June 24, 1941. The bodies of those who were shot lay in the garden all day long, and were only collected and taken outside the city limits in the evening. The townspeople (mostly Lithuanian and Polish women) who came to see the shootings allegedly expressed great outrage and went off on the Bolsheviks and Jews.<sup>12</sup> Most Vilnius Jews had no idea that the worst was yet to come, and that only a very small part would manage to survive the terrible years of the Nazi occupation. On July 4, 1941, an announcement signed by Žakevičius and Iškauskas was distributed throughout the city. It said that pursuant to an order issued by the German military commandant (von Ostman) on July 3, 1941, all Jews were required to wear a circular yellow patch 10 centimeters in diameter with the letter “J” (Jude) in the middle on both their front and their back. In addition, Jews were not permitted to be out on the streets from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. The order came into effect on July 8. There were severe penalties for not following the rules. Examples of the insignia designated for Jews were displayed at all police stations.<sup>13</sup>

Orders and directives discriminating against Jews increased. As of July 5, 1941, Jews were only allowed to buy food at specially designated shops and during a narrow time frame – between 4 p.m. and 6 p.m., when the shops were almost empty. The authorities

allocated 30 shops and 10 bakeries to the Jews. Jews began to be fired from their jobs en masse, and their vehicles were confiscated (cars, motorcycles, adult bicycles), as were their radios. Jews were forbidden to be treated by non-Jewish doctors and in general hospitals. Hospital No. 2 on Pylimo Street was assigned to them, and the Jewish community was ordered to maintain it at its own expense. The authorities forbade Jewish doctors from treating Gentiles and dismissed them en masse from all medical institutions.<sup>14</sup>

Political discrimination against Jews grew stronger and living conditions steadily worsened. In early August, the German military government was replaced by the German civil administration. Hans Hingst was appointed Vilnius city commissioner, and Horst Wulff was appointed Vilnius district commissioner. The occupation authorities put more and more pressure on the Jews. On August 2, 1941, Hingst issued Decree No. 1, by which all Jews were required to wear the yellow Star of David on the left side of their chest and their back; Jews were also prohibited from using recreational areas and public parks, as well as sidewalks and means of public transportation – taxis, buses, steamboats, carriages, and so on. This decree entered into force on the day of its publication.<sup>15</sup>

Hingst also issued an order forbidding Jews to walk on the most important streets of Vilnius: Gedimino, J. Basanavičiaus, Savanorių, Trakų, Dominikonų, Šv. Jono, Didžioji, Kalvarijų, Pylimo, Magdalenos, Vokiečių, Jogailos, Sodų, Stoties, Aušros Vartų and Bazilijonų. Jews living on these streets were only permitted to walk from their apartment to the nearest side street. The precinct police were charged with monitoring the order's enforcement.<sup>16</sup>

The Jewish Council (Judenrat) was meant to become the mediator between the occupation regime and the Jewish community. The Nazi order for the election of the Jewish Council was issued on July 4, 1941. Representatives of 57 different Jewish parties and social strata participated in the council elections. The Jewish Council was elected from prominent representatives of the city's Jewish community. It initially had 10 members, but was expanded to 24 members on July 24, 1941. Engineer Saul Trocki\* was elected chairman of the council, with engineer Anatol Fried as his deputy and merchant Abraham Zaidshnur as secretary. The Jewish Council was based at 6 M. Strašūno Street.<sup>17</sup> One of the most important tasks of the Jewish Council (which was initially named the Vilnius City Jewish Committee) was to provide military and civilian institutions with Jewish manpower. Every day, roughly 2,000 Jews were sent to various institutions to work.

\* Saul Trocki was executed by the Gestapo in Paneriai in September 1941.

## Mass Arrests and Massacres

Mass arrests and shootings of Jews began in mid-July 1941. In early July, Jews were forced to do various forms of hard labor and dirty physical jobs. They were often beaten and demeaned while doing these jobs, but there were no mass killings until mid-July, which is also when the mass arrests of Jews began. Jews were arrested without any clear reason in the streets or in their apartments and places of work. The arrests were carried out by German Gestapo officers, members of the special squad, and Lithuanian police officers. The detainees were sent to Lukiškės Prison, where they were kept for several days without food; their money, valuables, and clothes were confiscated. A few days later, the detainees were taken in groups of several hundred people to Paneriai, where they were shot by members of the German security police and the SD special squad (German: *Sonderkommando*). Kazimierz Sakowicz, a Polish journalist who lived near the execution site (also known as the “base”), was a witness and chronicler of many of the massacres, and secretly kept a diary of the horrific events. The first entry in his diary is dated July 11, 1941. According to Sakowicz, roughly 200 Jews were shot that afternoon. The shooting took several hours. Massacres took place on other days as well. Sakowicz wrote that the shootings took place over a period of 17 days in Paneriai (July 12–19, 23–26, 28–31), and that a total of about 5,000 people were killed.<sup>18</sup> The facts recorded in this diary are also confirmed by surviving archival documents. The Jews who were transported to Paneriai were told they were being sent to work. However, no one returned from those “jobs.” On July 11, 1941, the warden of Lukiškės Prison wrote on the back of a list of 364 arrested Jews: “I took 168 people to work [to be shot].” Another document openly noted: “I took 179 Jewish prisoners [to be shot].”<sup>19</sup>

According to German security police and SD special-ops unit reports, the arrests in Vilnius began on June 26, 1941, and the pogroms began on July 4–5. Report No. 21 of July 13 states that the Lithuanian Order Service, which had been transferred to the disposal of the special-ops unit, was tasked with participating in the Jewish liquidation campaign. 150 Lithuanian officials were selected to round up Jews and lock them up in a concentration camp for “special processing” (i.e. to be murdered in Paneriai). This work had allegedly already begun, with 500 Jews and saboteurs being liquidated every day. The money and valuables belonging to the people who were murdered were appropriated by the Reich.<sup>20</sup>

The mass arrests and disappearances of people greatly disturbed the Vilnius Jewish community. On July 24, 1941, the Jewish Council wrote to the chief of the Vilnius City and District Police regarding the mass arrests of Jews:

“Jewish men are being detained en masse on the streets and in their apartments by individuals with – and sometimes without – police

armbands, and taken to Lukiškės Prison. As far as we know, those detained in this manner number in the thousands. The detainees were told that they were being taken for work, even though the detainees included children, the elderly, and the disabled. The Jews of Vilnius are deeply shocked. Mothers and wives are very upset about the fate of their children and husbands. All this completely disorganizes the activities of the Jewish Committee. Representatives of the Jewish Committee were forced to repeatedly appeal to the Military Field Commandant's Office, as well as to Lithuanian authorities. We were told that this matter would be taken care of. However, these incidents continued yesterday and today. ... As a result, the Jewish Committee is forced to repeatedly turn to the authorities [requesting] the elimination of said adverse phenomena that disorganize Jewish life, as well as the activities of the Jewish Committee.<sup>21</sup>

However, the requests and complaints of the Jewish Council (Committee) remained unanswered. The conveyor belt of death in Paneriai was moving faster and faster.

On August 6, 1941, City Commissioner Hans Hingst issued an order assigning the Jews a "contribution" of 5 million rubles (0.5 million Reichsmark). This was to be collected within 24 hours. After negotiations with the leaders of the Jewish community, the Nazis agreed to extend the payment deadline by a few days. At the urging of the community leaders, the Jews brought their money, gold and silverware, furs, leather jackets, and other valuables. The Germans weighed, valued, and priced the things they brought in rubles. The campaign was controlled by Franz Murer, Hingst's adjutant and rapporteur on Jewish affairs. Under his orders, 10 Jews who were collecting funds were taken hostage. Nine hostages were taken away and never returned. However, paying the contribution did not end the massacres.<sup>22</sup>

According to Kazimierz Sakowicz, there were shootings in Paneriai on the following days in August 1941: August 1–2 (with approximately 300 people shot each day), August 6 (approximately 300), August 8 (approximately 200), August 11 and 16 (approximately 200, including a number of minors aged 12–15 and elderly people), August 19 (approximately 100, including many young people), August 22 (on that day, a Jew hit a German on the head with a bottle and he fell down, and over 100 people were shot in total), August 23 (12 young Jews), and August 26 (88 people, including 6 Jewish women). Sakowicz claims that a total of roughly 2,000 Jews were shot in Paneriai that August. The famous Karl Jäger report states that between August 12 and September 1, 1941, 461 people were shot in Vilnius: 425 Jewish men, 19 Jewish women, 8 male communists, and 9 female communists.<sup>23</sup>

Called the "Day of Provocation," August 31, 1941 was one of the most tragic days in the history of Vilnius Jews. Grigory Schur wrote in his diary that on Sunday, August 31, two Lithuanian "partisans" dressed in civilian clothes entered an apartment in the

building on the corner of Stiklių and Didžioji Streets and fired twice through the window. There was a crowd of German soldiers standing near the entrance to the nearby Pano cinema. The “partisans” ran into the street and began shouting that the Jews living in the building were shooting. Together with the German soldiers, they broke into the Jewish apartment, pulled two people out, and shot them on the spot. This was the signal to start the pogrom and arrest the Jews living on Stiklių, Mėsinių, Gaono, and Žydų Streets, as well as on part of Vokiečių, M. Strašūno, Šiaulių and Ligoninės Streets. The wave of arrests lasted two days. The campaign was headed by German Gestapo officer Horst Schweinberger, together with his assistants Martin Weiss and August Hering. Arrests were carried out by Gestapo officers and members of the special squad. Thousands of arrested Jews were herded to Lukiškės Prison and put in overcrowded cells. They were beaten terribly there, and forced to endure torture and bullying by various guards. As later events showed, the August 31 campaign was aimed at preparing the Old Town district for the future Jewish ghetto.<sup>24</sup>

The arrested Jews were escorted from Lukiškės Prison by Lithuanian police battalions to Paneriai, where they were shot by the German security police and an SD special squad. According to the Jäger report, 3,700 Jews were shot at Paneriai on September 2, 1941: 864 men, 2,019 women, and 817 children. Jäger noted that it was “a special campaign, as Jews had shot at German soldiers.”<sup>25</sup>

Kazimierz Sakowicz, who had secretly observed the September 2 massacre, wrote that the column of Jews herded to Paneriai was two kilometers long. It was a rainy, windy, and cold day. When the condemned turned towards the forest, many realized that they were facing death, and began to shout “save us” and wail. The Jews were shot by approximately 80 executioners, while another 100 or so guarded the massacre site. Before the shooting, the Jews were severely beaten with clubs and rifle butts. The women were stripped down to their underwear. Many were injured. Some wounded Jews managed to escape from the scene of the massacre. After the massacre, the perpetrators drank for two days and sold the victims’ clothes, shoes, and other items in bulk to the residents of Paneriai and the surrounding villages.<sup>26</sup>

On September 1, 1941, an announcement issued by Vilnius City Commissioner Hans Hingst was distributed throughout the city. It read:

“Yesterday, on Sunday afternoon, German soldiers were shot at in an ambush.

Two cowardly bandits were identified – they were Jews. The villains paid for it with their lives. They were shot immediately. In order to prevent similar malicious deeds in the future, a series of the strictest restrictions have been provided for. The responsibility falls on the entire Jewish community.



First of all, Jews of both sexes are prohibited, with immediate effect, from leaving their apartments from 3 p.m. until 10 a.m. The only exceptions to this are Jewish men and women who have a clear work order...<sup>27</sup>

Two days later (September 3), Hingst issued a decree on the seizure of Jewish property. Jews were ordered to immediately deliver local and foreign currency, securities, shares, bills of exchange, bank and savings trust books, gold, silver, and other precious metal products and jewelry, and stocks of various goods (leather, haberdashery, etc.) to police stations.<sup>28</sup>

The day of establishment of the Vilnius Ghetto was getting closer and closer. However, the creation of the ghetto in Vilnius took longer than in Kaunas. The Nazi authorities had planned on establishing the ghetto much earlier. A commission had been formed in Vilnius as early as June 30, 1941 to allocate living quarters to the Jews. On July 18, Kostas Kalendra, the manager of internal affairs for the Citizens' Committee of Vilnius City and Region, informed the Committee about the technical preparations for the Jewish quarter (ghetto). Taking into account the proposal of the German military commandant to establish a ghetto for 20,000 Jews, and to move others out of the Vilnius Region, plans were made to establish the ghetto in the part of the city where the majority (78 percent) of the population were Jews.<sup>29</sup> A decision was made on July 30 to transfer the Jews to the ghetto by August 15 (the same date as for the Jews in Kaunas to be moved to the ghetto). However, everything ended with correspondence and the preparation of various projects. Vilnius City rapporteur on Jewish affairs Jonas Čiuberkis informed the city's mayor on August 14, 1941 that the German commissariat had been offered three options for the ghetto's establishment: Šnipiškės, Naujininkai, or the barracks of the former military summer camp in Kairėnai (10 kilometers outside of Vilnius).<sup>30</sup>

In late August 1941, Hingst received an order from Reich Commissar for the Ostland Hinrich Lohse to establish a ghetto in the part of the city where the majority of the Jews lived. The German authorities decided to set up the ghetto in the Old Town.<sup>31</sup> The pretext for establishing the ghetto was the aforementioned provocation that occurred on August 31, 1941. Gentiles living in the Old Town were ordered to move to other areas of the city. The September 2 massacre resulted in more residential space in the designated ghetto area. Jews were moved to the ghetto on September 6, 1941. The transfer went according to plan. It started from Žvėrynas (i.e. Quarter IV); later, Jews were evicted from the Lukiškės district (Quarter III), and then from Quarters II and I. As the chiefs of police stations (there were seven of them in Vilnius) wrote in their reports, the transfer took place in an orderly manner and without interference. According to one report: "The exit from the city was protected by three pairs of military guards under the command of a non-commissioned officer. Two groups of soldiers herded the Jewish columns to the prearranged places, while the evictions from the apartments were carried out by the police, under the direction of precinct

officials. ... The relocation campaign was completed at 11 p.m.”<sup>32</sup> According to police station reports, the transfer of Jews to the ghetto was carried out by the Lithuanian public police and self-defense unit soldiers. The property left in the apartments of the Jews who were moved to the ghetto was locked and sealed, and the keys to the apartments and rooms, marked with the address and the names of the former owners, were delivered to the police station offices.<sup>33</sup> In the eyes of the Jews, the relocation to the ghetto did not look as nice as described in the police chief reports. Grigory Schur described the events of that time in his diary as follows: “When driving the Jews to the ghetto, the perpetrators acted completely arbitrarily. Instead of being taken to the ghetto, many were sent to prison, from which almost no one came out alive, while others were taken to the first ghetto (Rūdinkų Street district) or the second ghetto (Žydų Street district). There were incidents where people from the same house – even the same family – were separated by activists, with some taken to prison and others to the ghetto. Sometimes everything was determined by opportunities and resourcefulness. Detainees destined for the devastating prison were able to avoid it by slipping the escorts some money or valuables they had hidden.”<sup>34</sup>

The Jews of Vilnius were put in two ghettos – the Small Ghetto (Antokolskio and Žydų Streets, and part of Gaono and Stiklių Streets) and the Large Ghetto (Ašmenos, Dysnos, Ligoninės, Mėsinių, Rūdinkų, M. Strašūno, and Šiaulių Streets, and part of one side of Arklių, Karmelių, Lydos and Pylimo Streets). The ghettos were separated by Vokiečių Street. Approximately 29,000 Jews were put in the Large Ghetto and approximately 9,000 – in the Small Ghetto.<sup>35</sup> The ghettos were overcrowded. The ghetto prisoners were housed not only in rooms, but also in kitchens, attics, corridors, and basements. There were roughly 1.5 square meters of living space per ghetto inhabitant. The Nazis “solved” the problem of overpopulation with mass killings (“campaigns”). They tried to only leave able-bodied workers or craftsmen in the ghetto, and to exterminate everyone else. The pretext for new campaigns was usually the checking and replacement of work permits. Initially, working Jews in the ghetto had white permits that specified the person’s nationality, workplace, and specialty. The permit had to be submitted together with an identity card, and was valid for a specific time period. In preparation for a new killing campaign (called “cleansings”), many Jews had their white work permits (German: *Scheine*) taken away, and those who had lost them were forbidden to leave the ghetto. New *Scheine* were distributed. They were also white, but had a red stamp that read “*Facharbeiter*” (skilled worker). These permits had to be stamped with the seal of the employment office (German: *Arbeitsamt*), which featured a swastika.

The ghetto’s first “cleansing” campaign was carried out on September 15, 1941. The occupying authorities declared that the Jews had not been moved to the ghetto properly – that skilled workers should have been put in the Large Ghetto (also called Ghetto No. 1), and unskilled worker and Jews without a specialty should have been

put in the Small Ghetto (Ghetto No. 2). By order of the authorities, the Jews began to be moved from one ghetto to the other. During the move, the police arrested 1,200-1,500 Jews and took them to Lukiškės Prison.<sup>36</sup> The Jews who were arrested on September 15 were shot in Paneriai on September 17. According to the Jäger report, 1,271 Jews were shot: 337 men, 687 women, and 247 children. However, an even bigger massacre took place earlier – on September 12. That was when Jews who had been arrested during the August 31 provocation and the ghetto establishment were shot. According to the Jäger report, a total of 3,434 Jews were killed on September 12: 993 men, 1,670 women, and 771 children.<sup>37</sup>

Another “cleansing” campaign was carried out in the ghetto on October 1, 1941, during an important Jewish holiday – the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). During this holiday, religious Jews pray and fast. The German Gestapo and Lithuanian policemen raided the ghetto in the evening. They demanded that the ghetto administration immediately give them hammers, axes, and candles. Thereafter, the invaders began to inspect basements, warehouses, and shelters in search of Jews hiding in hideouts (the so-called “malinas”) who did not have work permits. During this campaign, 2,000–2,300 Jews were arrested in the ghetto. The campaign was carried out under the pretext of registering work permits. The detainees were taken to Lukiškės Prison and shot in Paneriai a few days later.<sup>38</sup>

According to the Jäger report, 1,983 Jews were shot on October 4: 432 men, 1,115 women, and 436 children. The massacre probably continued for several days in a row, as Kazimierz Sakowicz wrote in his diary that there were shootings in Paneriai on October 2 and 3.<sup>39</sup>

However, even after these massacres, in the opinion of the Nazis, the population of the ghetto was still too large. On October 15, 1941, 3,000 yellow permit cards (German: *Gelbe Scheine*) were issued to the ghetto. They were issued by the employment office in response to requests from German institutions for Jewish labor. The Jewish Council also received some permits. It allocated those permits to ghetto residents who had diplomas as specialists or the testimony of two witnesses. This gave rise to various speculations and scams. There were numerous cases where *Gelbe Scheine* were issued not to qualified specialists, but to various impostors, in exchange for money or in other ways. The residents of the ghetto realized that the yellow permits guaranteed that they would be left alive, so they made every effort to acquire them. The price for *Gelbe Scheine* increased from 15,000 to 80,000 rubles.<sup>40</sup>

The “cleansing” campaigns began shortly after the introduction of the yellow permits. The first campaign was carried out in the Small Ghetto (No. 2) around October 15. At night, the Jewish police started to wake up the ghetto residents and told *Gelb Schein* holders to go to the Jewish Council building (at 6 M. Strašūno Street) to register their permits. Panic broke out in the ghetto. Indescribable crowds and chaos ensued

inside and outside the Jewish Council building. Special commissioners registered Gelb Schein holders and their family members, and issued blue cards with a number to the latter. It later became clear that these cards were a guarantee that they would be left alive. People who did not have yellow permits begged those fortunate to have one to add them to their family list so they could get a blue card. However, many refused to do so, fearing strict controls that might end up in them being shot. Registration took all night. Gestapo officers and members of the special squad checked Gelb Schein holders and their families leaving the ghetto. Permit holders were not allowed to take children over 16 or their parents with them. The latter were immediately arrested by the controllers. Those who tried to get through without a numbered card were shot on the spot, right there between the gates. After all the Gelb Schein holders were let out, the German Gestapo officers and Lithuanian policemen raided the ghetto. They arrested all of the people who were left in the ghetto without permits and crammed them into trucks parked nearby. Most of these detainees were women, children, and the elderly. Some tried to hide in malinas, while others tried to escape from the ghetto through fences and over roofs. Many of them were shot. The “cleansing” campaign in the Small Ghetto continued until the end of October, when the Small Ghetto was finally liquidated. These campaigns are known to have been organized on October 16, 21, 23, 24, and 31, 1941.<sup>41</sup> Arrested Jews were taken to Paneriai and shot there. According to Jäger, 1,146 Jews were shot in Paneriai on October 16, 1941: 382 men, 507 women, and 257 children.<sup>42</sup> Another 2,367 Jews were shot in Paneriai on October 21.<sup>43</sup>

On October 24, 1941, the occupation authorities ordered all specialists and their families to leave the ghetto and go to their places of work. Once that was done, the ghetto was raided by the Gestapo and the police, who began to catch the Jews who had not managed to hide. Some sickly old people begged for mercy, but the executioners shot them on the spot. Roughly 25 old people were shot in total. These criminals took several thousand Jewish men, women, and children from the ghetto to Lukiškės Prison. The next day, Jews who had been taken to Paneriai were ordered to play and sing Russian songs.<sup>44</sup> Kazimierz Sakowicz described the massacre of October 25, 1941 in great detail. A column of Jews (mostly women and children) was escorted to Paneriai in the morning. Some of the condemned were brought to Paneriai by two trucks before the column arrived. One woman asked the guard what kind of place this was. Upon hearing the response – “Paneriai” – there was a commotion in the column and people started crying. The column stopped moving. Then the guards began to beat the Jewish women with rifle butts and herd them to the pits. The shooting continued throughout the day. After one row of victims was shot, another group was brought onto their corpses and shot next. Some Jewish women who had been wounded attempted to escape during the night after the massacre ended. Shots reverberated throughout the forest all night long. According to Jäger, 2,578 Jews were killed in Paneriai on October 25, 1941: 1,766 women and 812 children.<sup>45</sup>

The Jäger report goes on to say that another 1,203 Jews were shot in Paneriai on October 27: 946 men, 184 women, and 73 children. Writing about that massacre, Sakowicz said that the vast majority of the people who were shot that day were men, including about 15 Soviet prisoners of war. One Jewish woman and two Jewish teenagers tried to escape. One of the teenagers was shot, but the woman and the other teenager managed to escape.<sup>46</sup>

The last “cleansing” in the Small Ghetto took place on October 30, 1941. After this campaign, the Small Ghetto was liquidated and only one ghetto (the Large Ghetto) was left in Vilnius. On October 30, 1941, 1,533 Jews were shot in Paneriai: 382 men, 789 women, and 362 children. Kazimierz Sakowicz described this massacre in great detail in his diary. It was a sunny day. Four trucks filled with Lithuanian officers and soldiers arrived in Paneriai at about 9 a.m. Soon, trucks with women and children arrived. Shots rang out. An hour later, a long column of Jews appeared. The shooting continued until the evening. Some Jews who had only been wounded waited for it to get dark and then tried to escape. Single shots reverberated throughout the forest again. The massacre continued on November 1 (All Saints Day) as well. Not even a religious holiday could prevent the executioners from continuing their bloody work.<sup>47</sup>

Another campaign was organized in the ghetto on November 3–5, 1941. All Jews who had yellow permits were transferred to the area of the former Small Ghetto and kept there for three days. During that time, roughly 1,200 people who did not have work permits and had been hiding in malinas were removed from the Large Ghetto.<sup>48</sup> These people were shot in Paneriai on November 6, 1941. According to the Jäger report, 1,341 Jews were killed: 340 men, 749 women, and 252 children.<sup>49</sup> This was, in fact, the last major extermination campaign against the Jews of Vilnius (when a thousand or more people were shot in a single day). Small groups of Jews were killed in Paneriai until the end of 1941. According to the Jäger report, 171 Jews were shot in Paneriai on November 19: 76 men, 77 women, and 18 children. Another 63 Jews were shot on November 25: 9 men, 46 women, and 8 children.<sup>50</sup> In his diary, Kazimierz Sakowicz wrote that the killings continued in Paneriai on November 17, November 19, November 21, and December 5 (about 360 people were killed, mostly women and enfeebled Jewish workers).<sup>51</sup> According to Grigory Schur, 78 people were sent to Paneriai on December 3–4, 1941, and on December 20–22, after a general inspection of the apartments, another 400 people were arrested in the ghetto.<sup>52</sup> So the ghetto had approximately 40,000 inhabitants at the time of its establishment, but by the end of December 1941, there were only about 20,000 residents left. During this period (September–November), roughly 20,000 Jews were shot (20,686 according to the Jäger report). From the beginning of the occupation to the end of 1941, 33,000–34,000 Jews were killed in all.<sup>53</sup>

According to the occupation authorities' official November 23, 1941 data, there were 3,705 Jewish specialists and members of the Jewish Council administration living in the ghetto (of whom 2,983 were men and 722 were women). At that time, 3,231 Jews were working at various jobs, while others (474 men) formed a reserve, i.e., were temporarily unemployed. There were 7,742 Jewish family members who were working during that period, while the total population of the ghetto was 13,647.<sup>54</sup> In reality, the population of the ghetto was likely higher, as there were a lot of Jews without permits who did not register and were hiding in the ghetto, for fear of being shot.

After the mass shootings of 1941, the so-called period of stability, or peace, began in the ghetto. This lasted until March 1943. No mass killings were carried out during this period. Individuals or small groups of ghetto prisoners were sometimes shot for petty offenses. Ghetto life was on track to become relatively stable and mundane. The internal administrative structure of the ghetto was established, and daily work was carried out. The ghetto transitioned into a unique "state within a state," with its own government, police, workshops, forms of spiritual and cultural life, and institutions.

### The Ghetto Administration

The highest self-governing body of the ghetto was the **Jewish Council**. The Jewish Council was put in place after the establishment of the Vilnius Ghetto. Most of the members of the first Jewish Council (committee), which was headed by Saul Trocki, were arrested and shot by the Nazis in August 1941. Back when there were still two ghettos, Anatol Fried was the chairman of the Jewish Council in the Large Ghetto (No. 1), and Ibich (Icchok) Leibowicz was the chairman of the Jewish Council in the Small Ghetto (No. 2).<sup>55</sup> The Jewish Council (consisting of five members) supervised various departments. The ghetto had labor, health, social welfare, food, and housing departments, as well as the Jewish Ghetto Police. It also had a court, post office, schools, hospital, pharmacy, workshops, saunas, hairdressers, library, theater, and so on. In August 1943, the ghetto administration employed a total of 888 people, excluding the Jewish Ghetto Police.<sup>56</sup>

The **Department of Labor** was the most important administrative division in the ghetto. The ghetto leadership believed that as long as the Germans were benefitting economically from the work of the ghetto prisoners, they would not liquidate the ghetto. Work was considered to be the basis of the ghetto's survival. The Department of Labor consisted of three subdivisions (manpower utilization, filing, and office). The department employed a total of 27 people. Aharon Broido was the head of the Department of Labor. He had significant influence on the ghetto administration. The

manpower utilization subdivision was headed by Barganski, the office was headed by Siegmund (Moses) Heller, and the filing subdivision was headed by Niderman.<sup>57</sup> All workers' files were stored in the department. According to Department of Labor statistics, 6,609 Jews in the Vilnius Ghetto were working in May 1942, and by December of the same year, the number had increased to 8,874.<sup>58</sup> So the economic utilization of the ghetto population was increasing. German and Lithuanian institutions would send orders for Jewish manpower, and the ghetto's Department of Labor was responsible for fulfilling these orders. The Department of Labor issued the famous yellow permits to the ghetto workers until April 18, 1942, at which point they began issuing workbooks (which served as an identity card, work permit, and record of daily job locations).<sup>59</sup> Every day, thousands of ghetto prisoners were taken to work at various places inside and outside the city (for example, to the Kailis forced labor camp, the weapons workshop, etc.). After a 10-hour day, they were returned to the ghetto. In the summer of 1943, approximately 14,000 Jews in the Vilnius Ghetto (two-thirds of the ghetto population) were working for various companies and in Jewish labor camps.<sup>60</sup>

On November 5, 1942, Vilnius City Commissioner Hans Hingst issued regulations regarding the utilization of Jewish labor. According to these regulations, Jewish workers were to be assigned through the employment office (which, in 1942, was called the social security office – German: *Sozialamt*). Orders for Jewish manpower had to be sent to this institution. Jews were to be taken to and from work in column formation and under armed guard. There had to be at least 10 Jewish workers in a single workplace. The employment of individual Jews at workplaces outside the ghetto was banned. Exceptions were only made in cases where Gentile specialists were not available to perform the required work. Jewish workers had to be returned to the ghetto by 8 p.m. (to prevent them from escaping in the dark). Hourly wages were set for Jewish workers as follows: 0.15 RM (Reichsmark) for men over the age of 16 working outside the ghetto, 0.12 RM for women over the age of 16 working outside the ghetto, and 0.10 RM for Jews under the age of 16. Private companies and trusts had to pay wages at the Vilnius City Commissariat's Cashier's desk for the use of Jewish labor. Gentiles were strictly forbidden from having any relationships with Jewish workers outside of work. Gentiles who violated this requirement were to be treated as Jews. Employers who violated these regulations could lose their Jewish workers.<sup>61</sup>

The **Department of Social Welfare** issued benefits to the ghetto's poor and sick residents, and decided who should be exempted from tax for their apartment, hospital treatment, medicines, and other services provided by ghetto institutions.<sup>62</sup> In 1942, the department was headed by the lawyer Benjamin Srolowicz. Social welfare was extremely important in the conditions of the ghetto. A significant part of the ghetto population was unable to independently secure food, clothing, footwear, or shelter.

An active and fairly effective social welfare system was established in the ghetto. The key components of this system were the Department of Social Welfare, the Public Committee for Social Welfare, and the Winter Aid Committee established through the initiative of Jacob Gens in October 1942.<sup>63</sup> The Department of Social Welfare subsidized childcare facilities and homes for the elderly, supported Jewish labor camps in the provinces, and funded public cafeterias. Nearly half of the ghetto residents used the help of social welfare institutions in 1942. During the first six months of 1942, the Department of Social Welfare spent 151,318 RM, and in the second half of the year – 247,928 RM. Social welfare in the Vilnius Ghetto was better developed than in many other Eastern European ghettos, so starvation and mortality rates were lower there than in the Warsaw Ghetto or the Łódź Ghetto.<sup>64</sup>

The **Finance Department** was headed by S. Kashuk, a former bank director. All working residents of the ghetto were required to pay taxes: men between the ages of 18 and 20 and 50 and 60 paid 10 RM, men between the age of 20 and 50 paid 15 RM, women between the age of 18 and 20 paid 8 RM, and women between the age of 50 and 60 paid 12 RM. 15 percent was deducted from these amounts for dependent children. Residents of the ghetto who did not pay taxes did not receive food products, which were issued according to food cards.<sup>65</sup>

The **Technical Department** (which was reorganized into the Industrial Department in December 1942) was headed by M. S. Shreiberg (who was later replaced by the engineer Grzegorz Guchman). Through the efforts of the department, a variety of workshops were established. Even German officials were not ashamed of ordering the high-quality furniture produced in the furniture workshop. The electrical repair workshop fixed various household appliances.<sup>66</sup> On March 28, 1942, the chairman of the Jewish Council informed the Vilnius City rapporteur on Jewish affairs about the activities of ghetto's specialists and workshops:

“In general, it should be pointed out that since the New Year, i.e., from the time when it was decided not to do any more removals [not to carry out any more mass extermination campaigns], the Jews have shown an upsurge in industriousness and even great creative work. The ghetto, through its independent efforts and only using a collection of old materials and tools, has set up woodworking, locksmithing, tinsmithing and electrical repair workshops; a modern, albeit small, sauna with a disinfectant, which can accommodate 300 people in a 16-hour period, with a second, even larger sauna of the same type nearing completion; as well as a laundry service, a separate disinfection station and an outpatient clinic that serves 400 people daily, including 150 dental patients. ... A machine was constructed in the ghetto to thaw frozen pipes. This machine, which is the only one in the city of Vilnius, is used



by the city municipality and various military and other institutions. The machine is serviced by Jewish specialists.

The ghetto has submitted a proposal to the Sozialamt to set up a women's knitting and crochet workshop in the ghetto itself, which could employ up to 500 women to work especially for the military. We also want to establish workshops for brushes, cardboard boxes, etc. within this ghetto for military and governmental purposes.<sup>67</sup>

The specialists in the Technical Department made great efforts to facilitate the living conditions and needs of the ghetto residents. The carpentry workshop produced a lot of clogs, since leather shoes were very scarce. Ghetto specialists built special stoves that required little firewood. Firewood was very expensive in the ghetto because, like food, the residents were not allowed to bring it in. The stoves made in the ghetto were much cheaper than those made in the city, so they were ordered by German and Lithuanian institutions. The ghetto workshops were profitable, so the Jewish Council paid salaries to their administration and tried to create better working conditions for the workers.<sup>68</sup>

The **Department of Housing** (Josef Glazman was appointed its head in July 1942) allocated living space to ghetto residents, and looked after the repair and adaptation of premises. The building managers and guards under its authority were responsible for maintaining order and cleanliness. The Department of Housing was later headed by Baran.<sup>69</sup> Homes and apartments were overcrowded with people after the establishment of the ghetto. As mentioned, one person had about 1.5 square meters of living space. However, after the massive ghetto "cleansing" campaigns in 1941 and the extermination of thousands of Jews, more room was left for the remaining ghetto prisoners.

The **Food Department** was required to provide food to ghetto residents. The department was headed by Chaim Trainer (according to other documentation – Chaim Trapid). There were four shops operating in the Vilnius Ghetto. They issued products according to food cards. There were also five cafeterias in the ghetto that prepared 4,000 lunches daily.<sup>70</sup> The Jews smuggled a lot of food into the ghetto. This could be done more easily by workers who worked outside the ghetto and had the opportunity to exchange various items for food products. However, food was still very scarce. At the initiative of the Department of Health, several teahouses were opened in the ghetto, where hot boiled water was available for a symbolic price. In June 1942, there were five such teahouses in the ghetto, which provided ghetto residents with 113,000 liters of boiled water and 20,800 liters of hot water. A new café opened in the ghetto in June 1942. It worked from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. The café was a place where ghetto residents could get cheap coffee and food. Residents who wanted to have lunch at the café had to submit the appropriate food card coupons. The café then got the food supplies it needed with those coupons. The café served 2,000–2,500 people daily.<sup>71</sup> Another teahouse/café opened in the ghetto in July 1942. This establishment served 450 lunches and 800 cups of black coffee daily.<sup>72</sup>

The **Department of Health** (headed by Shabtai Milkonovicki) did a lot for the residents of the ghetto. The department had a staff of about 150 doctors, nurses, and technical workers. The ghetto had a very well equipped hospital (director: Elijah Sedlis) with 165 beds. The Department of Health also had outpatient clinics, an emergency department, and saunas with disinfection chambers. In the saunas, residents could not only take a bath, but also disinfect their clothes. In addition, the ghetto had a mechanized laundry service that could wash 100 kilograms of laundry per day. The ghetto administration was especially concerned about the health and cleanliness of the ghetto population, as it feared that any epidemics would provide the Nazis with a pretext to liquidate the ghetto. The Sanitation and Epidemics Section had an enormous amount of work to do. The workload increased significantly in spring, when the dirt and debris that had accumulated during the winter had to be removed. Through the efforts of this section, the territory of the ghetto was cleaned quickly and well. Throughout the ghetto's existence, there were no infectious disease epidemics. Vaccinations against typhoid fever and smallpox were mandatory in the ghetto.<sup>73</sup> According to census data from May 29, 1942, there were 15,278 Jews living in the ghetto (including Jews who worked at the Kailis forced labor camp).<sup>74</sup> That May, the ghetto outpatient clinic provided medical care to 11,436 patients, 2,500 people were vaccinated against infectious diseases, the public laundry washed approximately 2,500 kilograms of laundry, 11,580 kilograms of clothes were disinfected at the disinfection station, sanitary brigades inspected 3,500 apartments for cleanliness, 13,200 people visited the ghetto saunas, and 650 truckloads of trash were removed from the ghetto.<sup>75</sup> The natural mortality rate of the ghetto population during the period of stability was not particularly high. For example, 34 people (out of approximately 16,000 inhabitants) died in the ghetto in June 1942, and 18 people died in September.<sup>76</sup> The mortality rate of prisoners in the Vilnius Ghetto (excluding murders) was lower than in the Warsaw Ghetto. In 1942, 522 Jews died of natural causes in the Vilnius Ghetto (constituting 2.9 percent of its population). During peacetime (1932–1937), the mortality rate among Vilnius Jews was 1.9 percent.<sup>77</sup>

Although the women in the ghetto were strictly forbidden to have children, some were determined to do so. The ghetto had a secret gynecological sub-section that took care of pregnant mothers. When they were born, these children were initially hidden in the ghetto hospital, and when they became a little older, they were recorded in the ghetto population lists as having been born before the ghetto was established.<sup>78</sup>

The **Department of Culture and Education** (headed by Grysha Yashunski, then Dr. Leo Bernstein, and finally – Israel Dimentman) looked after the spiritual and cultural life of the ghetto residents. The department was established in February 1942. Four schools were opened in the ghetto, where children studied from the age of seven. Regular education of children was established in November 1941. In total, 700–900 children studied at the school and were taught by over 100 teachers. There

were also two kindergartens in the ghetto for children aged 3–6, a boarding school for homeless children (opened on March 8, 1942), and courses for older children who had previously attended high school. The cultural and educational institutions helped the children of the ghetto maintain their moral fortitude, and not give in to resignation and waiting. The ghetto also had a music school with 11 teachers and roughly 100 students. The Society for the Dissemination of Scientific Knowledge had a library as well (at 6 M. Strašūno Street). The library was managed by Herman Kruk, who had come from Warsaw. The library had already begun operating on September 11, 1941. The Germans mandated that books of a communist nature and books by various Jewish authors be removed from the library, but a large amount of fiction in different languages, as well as scientific literature, remained. The library held about 45,000 books in total. The library had a reading room that was constantly full of people reading.<sup>79</sup> In November 1942, the 100,000th book was issued to readers. The library organized a festive evening to celebrate that occasion.<sup>80</sup> The Archives and Scientific Knowledge section was established as a branch of the library, headed by Zalman Kalmanovich. This section collected various documents, including Nazi government decrees, ghetto administration orders, instructions, and the testimonies of Jews who had survived the massacres.<sup>81</sup>

The ghetto had a theater as well – it was located at 6 Rūdinkų Street. The first performance took place on January 18, 1942, just a few months after the massacres began. The opening of the theater was controversial for the ghetto residents. Chalk graffiti appeared on the walls of the houses: “A cemetery is not a theater.” One of the initiators of the establishment of the theater was the head of the ghetto, Jacob Gens. The theater’s artistic director was Israel Segal. To the surprise of many, the performances and concerts drew in large audiences. Tickets were always sold out. The money received for the tickets was used to support the ghetto’s poor. Gens considered the theater an important tool for maintaining the moral spirit of the ghetto residents and giving them something to focus on. Over the course of the year, the ghetto theater organized 111 performances and sold 34,804 tickets.<sup>82</sup>

An arts festival was held in the ghetto to mark the theater’s anniversary. During the festival, the theater’s first performances were repeated, and there were Yiddish choir concerts, musical recitals, popular music concerts, and a concert by a jazz band known as Jazz 6. The *Ghetto Yediess* (“Ghetto News”) covered the festival in an article published on January 24, 1943, claiming that even the most authoritative cultural capital of Europe would have been proud of such an event.<sup>83</sup>

The ghetto also had a symphony orchestra consisting of 17 musicians conducted by Volf Durmashkin. The Germans allowed musicians to get back their musical instruments from their former apartments, and some instruments were brought into the ghetto illegally. The ghetto symphony orchestra performed its first public concert on January 18, 1942. The concert was financed by Gens and the Jewish Ghetto Police. The concert featured a performance by the famous singer Liuba Lewicka. The concert

proceeds – totaling 4,000 rubles – were allocated to social welfare.<sup>84</sup> There were two choirs in the ghetto as well, which also held concerts and provided a distraction from the dreary everyday life of the ghetto.

The ghetto administration began publishing a weekly Yiddish-language newspaper, the *Ghetto News*, in September 1942. It published announcements of the ghetto administration, and wrote up everyday news and events. The newspaper had 6–16 pages; it was distributed through ghetto institutions and posted on advertising poles. The *Ghetto News* ran right up until the liquidation of the ghetto. The newspaper was edited by journalist and writer Dr. Tzemakh Feldshtein.<sup>85</sup>

A meeting of writers and artists of the ghetto took place on February 17, 1942. Somewhere around 100 writers, musicians, artists, and performers attended. The group elected a board, with the philologist Zelig Hirsch Kalmanovich appointed as chairman. In addition to organizing literary evenings, the board compiled lists of the artists who had died and collected their works.<sup>86</sup> So despite the brutal Nazi terror and difficult living conditions, the ghetto residents tried to stay strong and lead an active cultural life, seeking scientific knowledge, reading books, and attending concerts and performances.

The **Jewish Ghetto Police** was established in the ghetto in the fall of 1941. Jacob Gens became its first chief. Josef Glazman was initially his deputy, but was later replaced by Salk (Saul) Dessler. The Jewish ghetto police started out with approximately 150 police officers, but this number had increased to 226 by August 1943.

The structure of the Jewish Ghetto Police was straightforward. The ghetto was divided into three precincts (commissariats) – A, B, C – each of which was staffed by 15–20 policemen. The commissioner of the first commissariat (A) was Noson Ring (with Bernstein as his deputy), and the commissioner of the second (B) commissariat was Isydor Frucht. The police's criminal unit was headed by commissioner Oster, and Meir Lev was in charge of the ghetto gate guard, with Salomon Gens as his deputy. There was also the labor police unit, the prison guard unit and the sanitary police unit. In the first half of 1942, the Jewish Ghetto Police employed 200 people. Józef Muszkat was the police inspector. The ghetto jail was on Lydos Skersgatvis. It was continually guarded by 12 police officers. The prisoner had 135 prisoners in January 1942, followed by 211 in February and 341 in March. Most of the prisoners were sentenced to one or two days of imprisonment.<sup>87</sup>

A large part of the ghetto population was unhappy with the activities of the Jewish Ghetto Police. According to Grigory Schur, other ghettos did not have such a strict regime as the Vilnius Ghetto. Under the command of Meir Lev, the ghetto gate guard brutally beat any Jew who tried to secretly bring food into the ghetto. The gate guards were particularly overzealous when their work was being observed by German Gestapo officers.<sup>88</sup> Among the ghetto policemen, the Gestapo had its own

agents and informants. Salk (Saul) Dessler, who was the deputy chief of the Jewish Ghetto Police, was recruited by the Gestapo in 1941. Through his agents, Dessler collected information about the frame of mind of the ghetto residents and followed the activities of the ghetto's underground organization. He was in contact with the German Security Police and SD Vilnius Branch rapporteur on Jewish affairs August Meyer and SD special squad commander Martin Weiss. On the instructions of the Gestapo, Dessler selected the Jews to be shot, and also participated in the liquidation of the ghettos in Ashmyany, Švenčionys, Michalishki, and Salos.<sup>89</sup>

On October 19, 1942, 22 Jewish policemen from the Vilnius Ghetto were sent to the Ashmyany Ghetto to carry out Jewish liquidation campaigns. They were issued military caps, on which the Jewish policemen attached the Star of David. The punitive expedition was headed by Weiss, and Dessler was put in command of the Jewish policemen. They selected 406 Jews to be shot at the Ashmyany Ghetto. The Gestapo originally wanted to shoot 1,500 women and children, but Gens and Dessler managed to "negotiate" this number down to 406. A total of 404 elderly Jews and two small children were shot.<sup>90</sup> It is not known for certain whether the Jewish policemen themselves participated in the shooting of the Ashmyany Jews. Nevertheless, the prisoners of the Vilnius Ghetto had a very negative view of the participation of the Jewish Ghetto Police in this campaign. In his diary, Grigory Schur assessed the actions of the ghetto policemen as follows: "The Jewish policemen who came back in Lithuanian uniform caps looked disgusting. The Jewish policemen serving the murderers of their own people became immersed in their alleged role as the real masters of the life and death of their unfortunate brothers. They felt like they were almost Germans from the Gestapo themselves, and thought that they would win a life for themselves through despicable acts and submission. However, as we have now learned, the German Gestapo in Baranavichy [present-day Belarus] massacred the entire ghetto of 9,000 Jews, including the policemen with the commandant and the ghetto council."<sup>91</sup>

However, it would be wrong to judge the role of the Jewish Ghetto Police unambiguously. On the one hand, they carried out or helped carry out the occupant's orders, but on the other hand – they tried to mitigate the demands of the Nazis and help their fellow Jews. Some of the ghetto policemen became members of the ghetto's anti-fascist underground. For example, the United Partisan Organization (Yiddish: *Fareynikte Partizaner Organizatsye*; FPO) was founded on January 21, 1942 in the apartment of Josef Glazman, the deputy chief of the Vilnius Jewish Ghetto Police. The FPO united Jewish resistance groups, and Glazman became a member of its staff.<sup>92</sup>

Officially, the Jewish Ghetto Police were subordinate to the Jewish Council, but over time, the influence and power of Jacob Gens, the chief of the Jewish Ghetto Police, surpassed that of the Jewish Council. On July 12, 1942, the Jewish Council was dissolved by the decision of the commissioner for the city of Vilnius. That same day, Gens was appointed as the sole head of the ghetto. After receiving the approval

of the commissioner, Gens appointed the engineer Anatol Fried as his deputy for administrative affairs, and Dessler as his deputy for police affairs.<sup>93</sup>

Gens's wife Elvyra was Lithuanian and lived in Vilnius with their daughter, Ada. In the ghetto, Gens distinguished himself as a good administrator and had great authority among the ghetto residents. The changes in the ghetto government made the ghetto residents fear for the fate of the ghetto. Gens reassured his fellow Jews, explaining that only the form of government was changing – the Germans wanted the ghetto to be headed by one person who would be accountable to them, because orders would then be executed more accurately and strictly. Gens left most of the members of the Jewish Council to work for him as department heads. Abram Notes was appointed head of the General Department, with the engineer Grzegorz Guchman head of the Technical Department, Josef Glazman head of the Department of Housing, Shabtai Milkonovicki head of the Department of Health, Benjamin Srolowicz head of the Department of Social Welfare, Grysha Yashunski head of the Department of Culture and Education, Chaim Trapid head of the Food Department, Joel Fishman head of the craftsmen's workshops, and Marian Nisbaum head of the Department of Labor. Aharon Broido was responsible for maintaining relations between the Department of Labor and the employment office. To celebrate Gens being appointed as the head of the ghetto, a lavish party was organized for the ghetto management, and several persons detained in the ghetto jail on Lydos Skersgatvis were granted amnesty.<sup>94</sup> Nevertheless, ghetto life did not fundamentally change and stayed on the same course until the spring of 1943.

The relatively quiet life of the ghetto was disrupted by the events of July 1942. The Nazi authorities demanded the "surrender" of 500 ghetto prisoners. Prior to that, there were orders to "hand over" children under the age of 13, but the Jewish Council took various measures to delay the execution of the order (allegedly, this was the reason for the new demand). The Gestapo ordered the ghetto leadership to compile lists of people to be condemned to death. Gens decided that it would be better to sacrifice all these people to avoid even greater losses. The list primarily included the elderly, the disabled, and the sick. The Jewish Ghetto Police rounded up the condemned and put them in the ghetto jail on Lydos Skersgatvis. On July 17, 1942, Gestapo officer Martin Weiss took 86 of the elderly prisoners to a boarding house in Papiškės, near Vilnius. At first, the Gestapo took great care of the deportees. They were well fed and cared for by nurses. On July 24, Weiss came to the boarding house with representatives of the International Red Cross and photojournalists. The guests were shown how the Nazi government took care of old and sick Jews, and were told that all the talk about shooting Jews was just a lie being spread by Germany's enemies. Once the delegation left, these elderly prisoners were driven to Paneriai in covered trucks on July 27 and shot there. Kazimierz Sakowicz noted in his diary that on July 30, 1942, approximately 150 elderly Jews were shot in Paneriai. Some of the old people who had been wounded, but not killed, were buried alive.<sup>95</sup> Smaller groups of Jews were also

killed in Paneriai on August 6 and 26.<sup>96</sup> Jews were in constant danger. They could be arrested and shot for going outside after curfew, for not wearing the yellow badge, for buying food products illegally, for leaving the ghetto, and so on. Detainees were taken to Lukiškės Prison or to the Gestapo building on Gediminas Avenue. There, they were interrogated, with the interrogation protocols being signed by Rudolf Neugebauer, who headed the Vilnius Gestapo. He usually wrote “B. B.” (German: *Besondere Behandlung* – “special treatment”, i.e., shooting) on the protocol. The detainees were then taken to Paneriai and shot there.<sup>97</sup> The ghetto residents were constantly plagued not only by difficult material conditions, starvation, and slave labor, but also by constant stress and fear of the future and that the ghetto would be liquidated.

On August 26, 1942, Sakowicz wrote in his diary that 20 Jews who had been hiding in the forests and were arrested by the police had been shot in Paneriai.<sup>98</sup> According to Sakowicz, dozens of elderly Jews were shot in Paneriai on October 13 and 20 that same year.<sup>99</sup>

On August 31, 1942, the Nazi government demanded that 400 women between the ages of 16 and 26 be handed over. An announcement that Gens had issued was posted in the ghetto, requiring all women of that age to register. However, almost no one registered voluntarily. Then, on the night of September 2, the Jewish Ghetto Police began to search apartments and arrest women between the ages of 16 and 25. No one knew what awaited these women – whether they would be sent to work or shot.<sup>100</sup>

The period of stability, or peace, ended in the Vilnius Ghetto in April 1943. In March 1943, by the order of the commissioner for Vilnius, some of the Jews in Švenčionys, Ashmyany, and other small towns in Eastern Lithuania (approximately 3,000 in all) were moved to the Vilnius Ghetto, while others were told that they would be put in the Kaunas Ghetto. Even before that, Gens visited the smaller ghettos in the Vilnius Region (Ashmyany, Salos, Michalishki) on the instructions of the Nazis and assured the residents that they were not in danger – that this was being done to protect the Jews from accusations that they were in contact with Soviet partisans. The residents of the small ghettos who were relocated were allowed to take their possessions and food. The first large group (several hundred people) was brought in to the Vilnius Ghetto from the ghetto in Švenčionys. Upon arrival, they calmed down and readily began preparations for the trip to Kaunas. There were also quite a few long-time Vilnius Ghetto residents who wanted to move to live with their relatives in Kaunas. On April 4, 1943, the first group of prisoners (about 400 people) left the ghetto, ready to go to Kaunas. They were loaded into freight wagons, which railway workers had clad with wire and nailed shut with boards. Under the command of Gens and Dessler, the ghetto policemen who were supposed to accompany the Jews to the Kaunas Ghetto were seated in the last railcar. Gens had a letter from Vilnius City Commissioner Hans Hingst that the train was traveling to Kaunas. However, on the morning of April 5, 1943, the train stopped at the Paneriai station. In order to

reassure and mislead the Jews locked in the wagons, the Gestapo ordered doctors to go to Paneriai and provide them with any assistance they may need. The Gestapo officers and Lithuanian self-defense unit soldiers arrived in Paneriai around 6 a.m. The first wagons were opened and the Jews were ordered to get out without their belongings. As they got off, the Jews were surrounded by a dense chain of guards. The first group of Jews was taken to the shooting site. Seeing the large pits, the younger Jews started to run. A massacre of unprecedented cruelty began. Just before the execution, Gestapo officer Martin Weiss opened the last wagon and ordered the Jewish policemen to immediately get into the truck and go to Vilnius. This is how the Jewish Ghetto Police avoided death. A commotion arose at the Paneriai station. The Jews began to break down the doors of the wagons and run away out of despair and panic. In broad daylight, the guards chased down and shot the Jews condemned to death. Some young men tried to attack their executioners with their bare hands. Two Lithuanian self-defense soldiers were killed and a German Gestapo officer was injured. However, the majority (mostly women and young children) obediently met their death. The victims were taken next to the pits, where they were told to undress. Then the guards moved them into the pits and shot them from the edge of the pit above. Women who begged for mercy or resisted were ruthlessly beaten with rifle butts, kicked with heavy boots, or shot on the spot. After one group of people was shot, the next group of victims was brought from the train. Some mothers tried to hide their babies in the piles of clothes near the pits, but the guards found them and threw them into the pits by their feet. By 11 a.m., 11 large groups of Jews had been shot. The possessions that the victims had left on the train were dumped onto the ground. Mountains of bedding, clothing, bundles, baby carriages, and food products were left next to the railroad bed. In total, 49 wagons (about 2,500 people) were shot in four hours. Only about 50 Jews managed to escape. This number could have been much higher if large groups of people had attempted to escape, but most attempts were made by individuals or small groups, who were easily shot by the guards.<sup>101</sup>

A second train with Jews arrived at the Paneriai station around noon. When they saw the fields seeded with corpses, they immediately understood what kind of “Kaunas” was in store. After the condemned were driven from the wagons and started to be lined up in columns, large groups of Jews tried to escape. Again, a terrible commotion and scattered shooting ensued. A manhunt began right in front of the residents of Paneriai. This time, a larger number of Jews managed to escape. However, most of the Jews on the second train (especially women with young children and the elderly) were killed in the same way as the victims on the first train. In total, nine large groups of Jews from the second train were shot – approximately 5,000 in all. The massacre ended around 4 p.m.<sup>102</sup>

The April 5 events shocked all the residents of the ghetto. Grigory Schur did a good job capturing the frame of mind of the ghetto prisoners: “There seems to have never



been such an insidious mass murder in the entire history of human extermination. According to a premeditated plan, the Germans lured thousands of young, healthy people into their trap with disgusting lies. They were killed like animals in a slaughterhouse. Skilled workers, excellent craftsmen – these healthy, young people always worked hard for the Germans and therefore hoped to remain alive. But the Gestapo did not need their work – they needed to destroy them. If they had only known that they were being taken to be shot, as has been done in Vilnius and elsewhere – if they had realized that it was, in other words, just another cleansing – then they would have been ready to defend themselves and would not have given their young lives so cheaply. The Gestapo most likely understood this as well, so they adopted a new satanic plan against the strong provincials, with the help of the Vilnius ghetto police who had been duped.”<sup>103</sup>

The next day, Weiss took 25 Jewish policemen from the ghetto to the site of the massacre. They had to collect the Jewish corpses strewn across the fields and bury them. This took several days. In addition, the police loaded the clothes of the victims into wagons and took them to the Gestapo warehouses in Vilnius. The Germans took the best clothes and items for themselves, and sent everything else to the Vilnius Ghetto.<sup>104</sup>

A gloomy, pessimistic mood prevailed in the ghetto for some time after the April 5, 1943 massacres. Most of the Jews realized that sooner or later, the Nazis would still try to exterminate all of them, just like they had done in Warsaw and other big cities. However, the ghetto leadership (primarily Gens) continued with the strategy of sacrificing part of the ghetto population to the Nazis so that the others could survive until the end of the war.

## The Liquidation of the Ghetto

The Vilnius Ghetto labor camps were in line to be liquidated in the summer of 1943. On June 21, Heinrich Himmler ordered the destruction of all the ghettos in the Ostland territory. Able-bodied Jews were to be transferred to concentration camps run by the SS. Most of the Vilnius Ghetto labor camps had emerged back in the summer of 1941, before the ghetto was even established. Since Jews were being fired en masse from their workplaces, the issue of employment and survival became very sensitive for them. The labor camps were a way to avoid the mass arrests and shootings that were taking place in the city. Jewish labor camps subordinate to the Vilnius Ghetto were established at the Baltoji Vokė peatlands, in Bezdonys, and in other places to provide manpower for digging peat, felling forests, and performing other heavy physical labor. The camps were guarded by the Lithuanian police.<sup>105</sup>

The Baltoji Vokė Jewish labor camp (approximately 11 kilometers from Vilnius) was set up even before the establishment of the Vilnius Ghetto. The Jews living in this camp dug peat and felled the forest. There were roughly 200 Jews working there at the beginning of the summer of 1943. On June 24, six Jews escaped from the Baltoji Vokė camp after stealing the guards' weapons. They joined the Soviet partisans. On June 28, Bruno Kittel – who would eventually be in charge of the liquidation of the Vilnius Ghetto – arrived at the camp. The Gestapo shot 68 workers. Shortly thereafter, in July 1943, the Baltoji Vokė camp was liquidated. Some of the Jews ran away, while others were taken to the Vilnius Ghetto; 22 young people who were members of the FPO retreated into the forest with the Soviet partisans.<sup>106</sup>

The Bezdonyš Jewish labor camp (21 kilometers from Vilnius) was established in the summer of 1941. The Jews imprisoned here worked in the Buzaraitis peat bog. There were about 330 Jews working in the camp in May 1943. The camp was guarded by officers from the 1st Lithuanian Police Battalion. Kittel came to the camp with a group of Gestapo officers on July 9, 1943. He praised the Jews for their good work, treated them to cigarettes, and then ordered everyone to gather in the barracks. There, their valuables were taken from them. A group of men was ordered to dig a large pit near the barracks. After digging the pit, the Jews were ordered to leave the barracks in groups of 10, but they refused to do so. Then the Gestapo and the policemen shot into and set fire to the barracks. The Jews who tried to save themselves were shot. Most of the victims burned to death in the barracks. In total, 300–350 Jews were murdered at the Bezdonyš camp. Only those who were not in the camp during the massacre survived. Abraham Shabrinski, a former prisoner at the Bezdonyš camp who escaped death, was amazed by Kittel's insidious behavior. Prior to the execution, he promised the Jews that he would increase food rations for their good work, and then went to the Jewish camp barber to get a shave. Once he was cleanly shaven, Kittel ordered the killing of Jews to begin.<sup>107</sup>

The Kena Jewish labor camp at the Margiai peat bog (25 kilometers from Vilnius) was established in the autumn of 1942. There were 320 Jews working in the camp in May 1943. Kittel arrived at the camp on July 8. He summoned the Jewish workers and gave them a speech, urging all of them to work diligently and promising peace and life in return. After finishing his speech, Kittel left the camp and ordered the Gestapo officers and special squad executioners who had come with him to begin liquidating the camp. The barracks were pelted with grenades and set on fire. The Jews who tried to escape were shot by the perpetrators surrounding the camp. All the Jews in the camp (about 240 people) were killed in this way.<sup>108</sup>

After learning about the liquidation of the Kena and Bezdonyš camps, the Jews at the Riešė camp (12 kilometers from Vilnius) fled. A large part of the fugitives secretly returned to the Vilnius Ghetto.<sup>109</sup>

In order to calm the Jews who were distressed by the liquidation of the Kena and Bezdonys camps, the leadership of the Vilnius Ghetto announced that these camps had been liquidated because the Jews who lived in them were in contact with Soviet partisans, and that the former ghetto leaders were right to prevent young Jews from fleeing to the forests. The German authorities warned the ghetto residents that the actions of these irresponsible individuals put the entire ghetto at risk. The ghetto leadership banned meetings and other collective events of the ghetto residents.<sup>110</sup> After the aforementioned tragic event, the ghetto was permeated with tension and despair, as everyone was expecting the ghetto to be liquidated in the near future. On July 13, 1942, Gens and Dessler were received by Vilnius City Commissioner Hans Hingst. Hingst informed the ghetto leaders that the residents of the Vilnius Ghetto would not be killed. Tensions in the ghetto temporarily subsided, but smaller-scale killing campaigns continued.<sup>111</sup> On the order of the Gestapo, the Jewish Ghetto Police arrested 11 Jewish column brigade leaders with their families on the night of July 25. The reason for the arrest was the constant flight of Jews into the forests. The families of fugitives were also arrested. On the same day, a Gestapo truck took 32 people to Paneriai. Gens tried to rescue the brigade leaders, but without success. Many well-known and popular people in the ghetto were among those shot. When Kittel came to the ghetto, he threatened that if the flights into the forests did not stop, the ghetto would face even more brutal repression.<sup>112</sup> Kazimierz Sakowicz noted in his diary that on July 24, 1943, a car and a truck arrived at Paneriai. Carbine and revolver shots were heard. He added that it was probably Jews who had been shot – punishment for other Jews escaping from the ghetto. A similar execution was carried out in Paneriai on July 26. Three German Gestapo officers and a large number of Lithuanian police officers arrived at the scene of the shooting. Among those shot were a number of women and young children. The Gestapo also brought a wolfhound with them, which they were training to catch the people to be killed. The Gestapo ordered the condemned to run, and then sicced the wolfhound on them.<sup>113</sup>

At the end of July 1943, one of the last Jewish labor camps outside Vilnius was liquidated – Naujoji Vilnia. The Jews in this camp worked on railway maintenance. There were 52 people working there in February 1943. On July 24, 14 Jews ran away from this camp to join the Soviet partisans. On the way to the forest, near the bridge over the Vilnelė, the fugitives were ambushed. Nine people were killed. The others hid in the surrounding forests, joining the partisans shortly thereafter. The Gestapo decided to immediately liquidate the Naujoji Vilnia camp. The Jews left in the camp were taken to Paneriai and shot. The Vilnius Ghetto learned about the liquidation of the Naujoji Vilnia camp on July 28.<sup>114</sup> Sakowicz recorded the massacres that took place in Paneriai on July 29-30 in his diary. According to him, a vehicle loaded with telephone poles arrived in Paneriai on July 30. They were unloaded by four Jewish men and three women. After finishing the work, the Jews were shot.<sup>115</sup>

Internal order and controls in the Vilnius Ghetto were tightened even more as a result of the mass flight of Jews into the forest. All residents of the ghetto had to be in their apartments by 8 p.m., and at 9 p.m., the commandants of the apartments had to inform the police about who was missing. Escape threatened the escapee's family with death, and sometimes other people as well.<sup>116</sup>

The gradual liquidation of the Vilnius Ghetto began in August 1943. At the beginning of August, the leadership of the Vilnius Gestapo informed the leaders of the ghetto that the residents of the Vilnius Ghetto would be transferred to Estonia and Latvia. They also demanded that the Jews voluntarily register for work, and threatened that otherwise, the Gestapo would have to resort to campaigns of terror. Having learned their lesson from bitter experience, the Jews refused to register. On August 5, Bruno Kittel demanded that 2,000 people be rounded up for deportation. As they did not expect to get a group together that quickly, the Gestapo again turned to deception – Jewish workers were arrested on their way to work (to Kirtimai, the railway, etc.). Several hundred Estonian policemen were sent to Vilnius to capture Jews. Jews who attempted to escape were shot. Several dozen Jews (20–50) were shot in total. The Jews who were captured were held in barracks near the railway station. On August 6, 1943, they were herded into freight wagons and taken via Riga to Vaivara and other Estonian camps to work. A total of 1,000–1,200 people were deported. Soon, those who were deported sent dozens of letters to the Vilnius Ghetto, writing that they were alive and living in large barracks by the sea.<sup>117</sup> These letters calmed the ghetto residents down to some extent. The Jews understood that the April 5, 1943 tragedy had not been repeated.

The second campaign for deporting ghetto prisoners to Estonian camps was carried out on August 24–25, 1943. This time, it was carried out by the ghetto administration itself. The Jewish Ghetto Police went to the apartments of the people scheduled for deportation and gave them summons. According to the ghetto leaders, 4,000 people were to be removed within two months. The family members of those deported on August 6 were the first to be included on the deportation lists. The gathering spot for the deportees was set up in the former ghetto teahouse at 1 Šiaulių Street. Most of those summoned were forcibly brought in by the ghetto police. Relatives or neighbors were taken in place of people who were hiding. On August 25, the people who had been rounded up were taken out of the ghetto and crammed into wagons at the branch line on Rasų Street. This time, 1,200–1,500 Jews were taken from the Vilnius Ghetto to the Estonian camps. A few days later, a Gestapo official arrived in Vilnius from Estonia bearing letters from those who had been deported on August 25. The letters said that the Jews were working at various jobs and were allegedly well fed.<sup>118</sup>

September 1943 was the last and perhaps the most tragic period in the history of the Vilnius Ghetto. Another deportation campaign to Estonian camps was carried out on September 1–4. Around 5 a.m. on September 1, the ghetto was raided by the

Gestapo and Estonian police. They ordered 1,000 healthy men to be rounded up. If the required number of men were not rounded up within a couple of hours, a manhunt would begin. With the help of the ghetto policemen, the intruders ransacked houses and apartments, arrested the people they found, and blew up ghetto hideouts. Dozens of people died under the rubble. The ghetto looked like a battlefield. In several places (M. Strašūno and Ašmenos Streets), members of the ghetto underground resisted the Gestapo officers and policemen with weapons. The nightmare lasted for four days. Approximately 500 Jews were killed during the campaign (most of them under the rubble of buildings that had been blown up). Most of the doctors at the ghetto hospital were arrested. One nurse's husband tried to hide in the hospital, but was found and shot by a ghetto policeman named Tovbin. Some ghetto administration officials were among those who were caught (such as Aharon Broido, the head of the ghetto employment office). Groups of detainees were transported by truck to the train station and crammed into freight wagons. The wagons were subsequently wrapped with wire and sealed shut. Once one train was done, another was formed. During the September 1–4, 1943 campaign, 7,000–8,000 Jews were deported in all. Some 10,000–12,000 prisoners were left in the ghetto. On September 5, the ghetto was declared closed – no one was permitted to go in or out without a special permit. Food prices in the ghetto skyrocketed. The ghetto's connection with the outside world was cut off. The remaining ghetto inhabitants moved about with faces sunken from famine and fear. The events of September 1–4 caused many to go mad.<sup>119</sup>

On September 14, 1943, Jacob Gens was summoned to the Gestapo and executed there. Gestapo officers Rudolf Neugebauer and Martin Weiss spread a rumor that Gens had been in contact with the partisans.<sup>120</sup> The mood in the ghetto plummeted even further. Everyone realized that they were at death's doorstep. Ultimately, Gens's wait-and-see strategy did not pay off – when he was no longer necessary, the Gestapo shot him without any scruples.

As Grigory Schur wrote, after Gens's death, the commandant of the ghetto became "the scoundrel, the traitor, and the utter scumbag Saul Dessler, who, seeing the approaching catastrophe and the demise of the ghetto, ran away with Lev, the chief of the ghetto gate guard, who did not forget to grab a briefcase with gold taken from the people and large sums of public money..."<sup>121</sup> After Dessler ran away, Oberhard was named the new chief of the Jewish Ghetto Police, and Kittel appointed Boruch Beniakonski from Kaunas as the head of the ghetto administration.<sup>122</sup> Nevertheless, after Gens's death, the ghetto administration basically collapsed. The residents of the ghetto hid in malinas, and the younger ones tried to escape from the ghetto through the underground sewer and water pipes.

The final stage of the liquidation of the Vilnius Ghetto began on September 23, 1943. The day before, Kittel announced to the ghetto residents that the ghetto would be "evacuated" the following day – the Jews would be transferred to Estonian labor

camps. Anyone who tried to hide would be shot, and the ghetto buildings would be blown up. At 11:30 a.m. on September 23, the ghetto was surrounded by Gestapo officers and Latvian and Ukrainian soldiers. The Jews were driven in groups through the ghetto gates to Rasų Street. Along the way, the men were separated from the women and children on Subačiaus Street and sent to a gathering point. There, they were loaded onto wagons and taken to Estonian camps. The women and children were herded to the courtyard of the employment office and the adjacent courtyard of the Church of the Ascension. They were held outside in the rain for two days. They were not provided with food and water. Avraham Chvoynik, Yakob Kaplan, Grigori Levin, and Asia Big, who were all members of the ghetto underground, were brought in for shooting two Gestapo officers. They were hanged in the yard of the employment office (19 Subačiaus Street). Another “selection” (German: *Selektion*) took place on September 25: younger and able-bodied women were sent to the right, while older women, the elderly, and homeless children were sent to the left. Then everyone was herded to Rasų Street and crammed into wagons. Most of the detainees, women, and children (5,000–7,000) were taken to German concentration camps (Auschwitz, Treblinka, etc.). Several hundred elderly and sick people were shot in Paneriai. Between 1,600 and 2,000 men were taken to Estonian labor camps, and between 1,400 and 1,700 young women were taken to the Kaiserwald concentration camp near Riga.<sup>123</sup>

After the liquidation of the ghetto, approximately 1,000 Jews were left to work at the Kailis forced labor camp; roughly the same number was left to work at the army motor vehicle repair park (German: *Heereskraftfahrpark*; HKP), while about 50 people stayed on at the military hospital and 70 – in the Gestapo workshops. Several hundred more Jews were hiding in ghetto hideouts. However, due to lack of air, food, and water, they were forced to come out of hiding and were usually arrested by the police and then taken to Paneriai to be shot. The people who were arrested often betrayed the people who remained in hiding. The lives of the latter would also end in Paneriai. The hunt for Jews hiding in the ghetto continued for several weeks after the liquidation of the ghetto.<sup>124</sup>

According to a November 11, 1943 report of the German Security Police and the SD Vilnius Branch, 24,108 Jews were imprisoned in ghettos and concentration camps in the Vilnius Region. Prior to the date of the report, 8,019 Jews had been killed, 14,000 had been deported to Estonia, 2,382 had been left in Vilnius, and 1,720 were still living in the countryside.<sup>125</sup>

The tragic events of the liquidation of the ghetto are also reflected in Lithuanian public police precinct reports. Every day, they were full of news about the arrested Jews who had been hiding. The largest number of these reports came from the 4th Police Precinct, whose area of operation included the Vilnius Ghetto. On September 27, 1943, this precinct’s police detained 32 Jews who had attempted to leave the ghetto during

the day. The arrested were handed over to the German security police.<sup>126</sup> Without a doubt, they were taken to Paneriai and shot there. On September 30 and October 1, police arrested another 59 Jews trying to escape from the ghetto. They were handed over to the German security police.<sup>127</sup> On October 2, 38 Jews trying to escape from the ghetto were arrested, and a Jewish woman was shot by the ghetto guards.<sup>128</sup> On October 3, policemen arrested 23 Jewish men in the ghetto district, followed by 30 on October 4, 40 on October 5, and 115 Jewish men, women, and children on October 6. On October 7 they arrested 111 Jewish men, followed by 161 on October 8, 89 on October 9–10, 11 on October 11, 85 on October 12, 63 on October 13, 57 on October 14, 61 on October 15, 21 on October 16–17, 8 on October 19, 8 on October 20, 2 on October 22, 2 on October 23, 6 on October 25, 2 on October 26, 31 on October 27, 2 on October 28, 1 Jewish woman on October 29, and another 17 Jewish men on October 31.<sup>129</sup> The Jews who were arrested were handed over to the security police and taken to Paneriai to be shot. The empty houses of the ghetto were first looted by the soldiers and policemen who liquidated the ghetto, and later by locals. In September-October, 1943, many of the entries in Kazimierz Sakowicz's diary were about the shootings that took place in Paneriai. On September 9, 1943, 14 Jews were shot for attempting to escape from the ghetto on Rasų Street. On September 24, the executioners from the special squad shot Jewish children and men who had been brought to Paneriai by bus.<sup>130</sup> On October 1, Jews who had been caught in the ghetto were taken to Paneriai in two trucks. Before being shot, they were ordered to strip and climb into the pits. In total, about 100 Jews were shot. Four Jews who had agreed to reveal the ghetto's hideouts were temporarily allowed to live. Another 150 Jews were brought in on October 4. The four Jews who had told the Gestapo about the hideouts that they knew of were among them. They were shot along with the newly captured Jews. This method of searching for hidden Jews proved to be quite effective. Temporarily left to live, the traitors did not understand that the same fate awaited them as all Jews.<sup>131</sup> Approximately 400 Jewish men, women, and children were shot in Paneriai on October 6. The shooting began in the evening and continued at night in the moonlight. A total of eight large trucks brought people condemned to death to Paneriai. The shooting was carried out by Gestapo officers and members of the special squad. After the massacre ended, the executioners drank all night and sold the victims' clothes the next day. The massacres in Paneriai continued for the next two days (October 7–8).<sup>132</sup> Another eight large trucks came to Paneriai on October 11. About 300 Jews were shot that day. According to Sakowicz, smaller groups of people were shot in Paneriai on October 13–15, 18 (32 shots were counted), 25, and 28, 1943.<sup>133</sup> A new batch of Jews was brought to Paneriai on November 3. Most of the victims were women and children.<sup>134</sup> This is how all the Jews found and arrested in the ghetto were shot. From the end of September to the beginning of November 1943, about 1,000 former prisoners of the Vilnius Ghetto were probably shot.

## Jewish Labor Camps in Vilnius after the Liquidation of the Ghetto

After the liquidation of the Vilnius Ghetto, about 3,000 Jews were left to work in Vilnius. As mentioned previously, they worked at the Kailis forced labor camp, the army motor vehicle repair park, the military hospital, and the Gestapo workshops.

Jews had been working at the Kailis forced labor camp – a fur and leather factory that mostly produced clothing for the German military – since the beginning of the Nazi occupation. Oscar Glik, a Jew who had escaped from Vienna, deserves credit for saving the lives of the Jews who worked at this factory. He managed to conceal his Jewish roots and obtain documents as a person of German origin (German: *Volksdeutsche*). Glik tried to save as many Jews as possible from death. During the mass killings of Jews in the autumn of 1941, he suggested to the German major Hausler, the chief of army supply in Riga, that they resume production of important products for the Wehrmacht at the Kailis factory. Glik proposed moving Jewish specialists and their families from the ghetto and housing them in separate buildings. High-level German authorities considered Glik's project and approved it. In this way, several thousand Jews were saved from death during the 1941 campaigns. This decision also affected the entire Vilnius Ghetto. The Nazi authorities decided to stop the general extermination of the Jews of Vilnius and leave Jewish specialists of different professions to do the work necessary for the German war economy. Glik, in effect, became director of the Kailis factory.<sup>135</sup>

In October 1941, the Kailis factory was moved to the former premises of the Elektritas radio factory at 16a M. Mindaugienės Street. That same month, Jewish specialists and their family members (a total of 800–1,000 people) were moved out of the ghetto. Nearly all of the Jewish workers received yellow permits, giving them the right to work and live. As a result, many ghetto inhabitants considered the workers at the Kailis forced labor camp to be privileged.<sup>136</sup>

On January 18, 1942, there was a large fire at the Kailis factory. During the investigation of what caused the fire, the Gestapo discovered that Glik was a Jew. He was arrested at the end of January and executed shortly thereafter. His wife Mina Dolgicer was killed as well.<sup>137</sup>

The Lithuanian census of May 27–29, 1942 also recorded the number of Jews living in Vilnius. At that time, there were 1,016 Jews living in the two buildings of the Kailis factory. The Jewish police maintained order at the Kailis forced labor camp. There was an outpatient clinic, schooling for children, and a library. However, moving from the Kailis forced labor camp to the Vilnius Ghetto was only possible with special permits and police escort.<sup>138</sup>

During the liquidation of the ghetto, several hundred more Jews secretly moved to the Kailis forced labor camp. The building leaders had to answer for concealing them



with their own life. Some of the Jews who came to the Kailis forced labor camp illegally managed to become legal. There were approximately 1,250 Jews living at the Kailis forced labor camp in autumn of 1943. The regime in the camp was strict, and it was forbidden to leave the camp territory. The commander of the Kailis forced labor camp was an SS officer named Richter. He was constantly searching the camp for violations and controlling everything. Knowing that refugees from the ghetto were hiding in the Kailis camp, the Germans conducted an inspection on October 15, 1943. Bruno Kittel, the terror of Vilnius Jews, came to the camp as well. He personally inspected the Jewish workers. Roughly 30 Jews who were living illegally in the camp were arrested, put on a truck, and taken to Paneriai to be shot. Similar inspections of the Jews at the Kailis camp were conducted later as well – on October 30 and November 4 and 6, 1943.<sup>139</sup> In December, the Gestapo arrested several heads of the Kailis forced labor camp administration, including the commandant of the first building, Leon Burak, the actual factory director, engineer I. Pape, and several ordinary Jews. To the great joy and surprise of the camp prisoners, Pape and Burak were returned to the camp a short while later.<sup>140</sup>

A brutal child abduction campaign was conducted at the Kailis forced labor camp and the army motor vehicle repair park on March 27, 1944. It was headed by Gestapo officers Martin Weiss, W. Schroeder, and others. The lists of children to be removed were compiled by Richter, the commander of the Kailis forced labor camp. He summoned the children at the Kailis forced labor camp for a routine inspection (German: *Appel*) and a supposed medical examination on March 27. After their parents went to work at the factory, the children were called to the hospital premises. Suddenly, trucks with Gestapo officers and Lithuanian policemen appeared. The Jewish children were taken out into the yard and put into the trucks. Hospital patients were taken as well. The detainees were transported to Rasų Street and crammed into wagons. All of the children on the list from the first building were removed. The commandant of the second building refused to hand over the children on the list. The Gestapo and police then stormed the building and began hunting the children down. The actor Herbst and the teacher Moshe Olicki were taken with the children and tried to protect them. Only a few children managed to hide and avoid deportation. Upon returning from work, the parents learned about the tragedy that had taken place. The buildings were overcome with grief. No one ate or slept. As usual, they had to return to work the next day. Approximately 250 children and elderly persons were removed from the Kailis camp to an unknown destination.<sup>141</sup>

At the end of April, 80 men and six women were taken from the Kailis forced labor camp to Paneriai to burn corpses. They never returned to the camp – before leaving, the Gestapo shot them in Paneriai.<sup>142</sup> In 1944, a group of Kailis workers was taken to Kazlų Rūda to work.<sup>143</sup>

On July 2–3, 1944, Kailis and other Jewish camps were surrounded by the SS. There was a terrible panic in the camps. The Jews were told that they would be taken to Kaunas. The aforementioned Richter was in charge of the liquidation of the Kailis forced labor camp. The Jews were loaded onto trucks and taken to Paneriai to be shot. Approximately 450 people were removed from the Kailis camp. On July 2–3, 1944, 2,000–2,300 of the Jews remaining in Vilnius were shot.<sup>144</sup>

The army motor vehicle repair park (Heereskraftfahrpark/Ost/562, hereinafter – HKP 562) forced labor camp was established on September 17, 1943. Roughly 1,500 Jews lived there. The head of the camp was Major Karl Plagge, who was friendly towards Jews. Satellite camps were scattered in several parts of the city. The main workshop of the HKP 562 was located at 12 Olandų Street, in the premises of the technical school. The Jews who worked at the HKP 562 forced labor camp lived in building at 37 Subačiaus Street. During the liquidation of the ghetto, Jews who had escaped deportation and arrest came to the camp illegally. Brigade leader Kołysz was elected commandant of the Jewish camp. Car mechanics, carpenters, and other skilled Jews lived at the camp with their families. The camp was guarded by armed German and Lithuanian guards.<sup>145</sup> Escape from the camp was punishable by death. One time, a Jewish couple who was looking for their young daughter was detained in the city. The detainees were brought back to the HKP 562 forced labor camp and hanged in public. Jewish brigade leader Grisza Szneider acted as the hangman. The infamous Bruno Kittel was in charge of the execution. The rope broke during the hanging, and the condemned began to ask for mercy. Kittel shot the couple and their daughter with a pistol.<sup>146</sup> David Zalkind and his wife ran away from the HKP 562 forced labor camp on October 28, 1943. As a result, Gestapo officers arrested and shot 30 Jewish workers and five Jewish police officers that same day. Zalkind was also arrested and hanged.<sup>147</sup>

In December 1943, Kittel demanded the extradition of Salk (Saul) Dessler, Jacob Gens's former deputy, who was in hiding. One Jewish policeman revealed Dessler's hideout, which was on S. Batoro Street. Another 30 Jews were arrested along with Dessler. The detainees were taken to the Gestapo headquarters. The older Jews were shot by the Gestapo, others died in prison, and yet others were sent to the Kailis and HKP 562 forced labor camps. Dessler and his wife were also shot by the Gestapo.<sup>148</sup> In mid-February 1944, there were 1,243 Jews living in the HKP 562 camp: 499 men, 554 women, and 190 children.<sup>149</sup>

On March 27, 1944, a child abduction campaign was conducted at the HKP 562 forced labor camp as well. SS-Oberscharführer Richter arrived at the camp gate early in the morning. He was accompanied by Gestapo officers (including Martin Weiss) and the police. Camp commandant Kołysz was told that a campaign to remove people who were not able to work (children, the elderly, the sick) was being executed in all Ostland camps on the orders of Heinrich Himmler. Some parents attempted to hide

their children. The residents of the camp were shocked and panicked. The intruders began to search for children and elderly people. Those who were found were herded to the square near the camp gate. A total of 150–200 children were rounded up. Mothers who tried to protect their children were brutally beaten. One woman (Zhukovska) called Weiss a child killer. He knocked the woman to the ground and shot her with a pistol in the back of the head. The children were then thrown into trucks and taken to an unknown destination. Only a few children managed to hide and avoid deportation. They remained, living in the camp illegally until it was liquidated.<sup>150</sup>

At the end of May, an order was given to send part of the camp's Jews to the Kazlų Rūda peat bog. No one volunteered to go. Then the Germans, together with the Jewish police, rounded up about 200 people and sent them to Kazlų Rūda. Only a handful of the people sent there survived. Roughly 900 Jews remained at the HKP 562 forced labor camp up until July 1944. Sensing the impending liquidation of the camp, some Jews organized hideouts, while others prepared for active resistance. On June 30, 1944, Plagge informed the Jews about the upcoming evacuation of the camp and tried to reassure the frightened Jews. That same evening, a group of Jews tried to escape through a hole that had been cut out of the locksmith workshop wall. They were spotted by the guards, who began firing at them. Some managed to escape, but several were shot, including David Aizenfeld, the foreman of the carpentry workshop and a member of a partisan group.<sup>151</sup> The next day, an inspection of the prisoners was held in the camp. Many people stayed in hiding and did not register. Armed Gestapo and SS officers arrived at the HKP 562 forced labor camp early in the morning of July 2. All Jews were ordered to leave their apartments and hiding places and get into trucks. They were told not to take their belongings with them. Many despondent Jews obeyed the Nazi orders, but others remained in hiding. Trucks brought new victims to Paneriai every 20 minutes. The Jews from the HKP 562 camp were shot on the same days as the Jews from the Kailis camp. On July 2–3, 1944, approximately 600 Jews from the HKP 562 forced labor camp were shot in Paneriai. Several hundred others hid in hideouts. The Soviet air force bombed Vilnius on the night of July 4. The camp's resistance group came out of hiding, killed several SS officers, and then fled the city. Some of the Jews found in hiding were shot by the Germans on the morning of the same day. Only about 120–150 Jews survived.<sup>152</sup>

The Jewish labor camp under the military hospital in Antakalnis was liquidated during the first few days of July 1944. About 80 Jews who worked there were brought to the Kailis forced labor camp. One of them was Dr. Samuel Margol, who was well-known in Europe as a radiologist. These people were shot in Paneriai together with the workers from the Kailis factory on July 3, 1944.<sup>153</sup>

About 80 Jews worked in the Jewish labor camp that was subordinate to the Gestapo. They were housed in a small prison on Rasų Street. The Gestapo took them to Kaunas and executed them at Ninth Fort in early July 1944.<sup>154</sup>

Only 2,000–3,000 of the Jews in Vilnius (of the nearly 60,000 who lived there prior to the war) survived through to the end of the Nazi occupation.<sup>155</sup> “The Jerusalem of Lithuania” was completely obliterated.

### **The Ghetto Anti-Fascist Underground and Partisans**

After the massacres in the autumn of 1941, the mood of resistance among the youth of the ghetto grew stronger. The first pamphlet and manifesto was released in the ghetto on January 1, 1942. The text was penned by Abba Kovner. The pamphlet began with the slogan: “Let us not go like lambs to the slaughter!” The pamphlet stated that Hitler had decided to exterminate all the Jews of Europe, and that the Jews of Vilnius were destined to be the first witnesses to this tragedy. It went on to urge people to remain free and die fighting, rather than to accept the will of the killers and passively wait for death.<sup>156</sup> The plan to establish a ghetto resistance organization was the brainchild of Josef Glazman, head of the Zionist Betar organization. Glazman and Kovner held the founding meeting on January 21, 1942 in Glazman’s apartment. It was decided to establish the United Partisan Organization. This organization would unite Jews of various political views: Zionists, Communists, Bundists. Yitzkhak Wittenberg (FPO commandant; Communist), Josef Glazman (member of Betar), Abba Kovner, Avraham Chvoynik, and Nison Reznik (representatives of the Zionists and the Bund) were elected to the FPO staff. The organization was first founded on the principle of triads, then pentads. The pentads formed squads, and the squads formed two battalions, which were under the command of Kovner and Glazman. The FPO had about 300 members in total. There were also intelligence, communications, and military instructor units.<sup>157</sup> The FPO considered its main operational goal to be the organization of an armed uprising in the ghetto. This was intended to protect the Jews who were left in the ghetto from total annihilation. The FPO recruited new members, stockpiled weapons, carried out acts of diversion and sabotage, and networked with Soviet partisans and underground members. The FPO headquarters prepared combat instructions, which discussed action plans in case of an alarm, urban warfare tactics, and other combat actions. The password “Liza is calling!” was chosen as the signal for the armed uprising (in honor of Liza Magun, a member of the resistance who had died).<sup>158</sup>

Jews working in the Burbiškės military warehouses would steal weapons that were kept there and sneak them into the ghetto. Boris Goldstein excelled in this extremely risky job – he managed to bring a considerable number of weapons to the ghetto and hand them over to the FPO. In a relatively short time, the ghetto underground acquired five machine guns, 50 grenades, 30 revolvers, several rifles, and a large amount of ammunition.<sup>159</sup>

The FPO sought contact with other anti-fascist groups and organizations operating in Vilnius. In early 1942, long-time communist Jan Przewalski got the Union of Active Struggle (Polish: *Związek Walki Czynnej*; ZWC), a Polish pro-communist anti-fascist organization, running in Vilnius. It had 60-80 members. In the spring of 1942, the FPO established contacts with the ZWC, headed by Przewalski, and later with the underground Vilnius City Committee of the Communist Party, which was initially headed by Juozas Vitas. Jan Przewalski (codename: Jankovskis), Makar Korablikov (Volodia), FPO commandant Yitzkhak Wittenberg (Leonas), B. Shereshevski (Juodaitis), and Vacys Kazlauskas (Biliūnas) were also elected to the LKP (b) Vilnius City Committee.<sup>160</sup>

Non-Jewish anti-fascists also joined the activities of the FPO. The FPO maintained contacts with the ghettos in Warsaw, Kaunas, and Šiauliai through Irena Adamovich, who was Polish. Anton Schmidt, an Austrian company sergeant major, used his truck to transport ghetto couriers to Warsaw and Białystok. In April 1942, he was arrested and shot for aiding Jews.<sup>161</sup> There were other Gentiles who assisted the ghetto underground as well. Jews working for German institutions tried to harm the occupants in every way possible through acts of diversion and sabotage. Engineer Izak Ratner, who worked in Burbiškės, built a miniature chemical device, which, when thrown into a tank's fuel tank, caused an explosion eight hours later. Lev Distel, a member of the ghetto partisan group, was responsible for repairing German anti-aircraft guns in a military workshop. He damaged 43 cannons over a period of several months in 1942. Under the leadership of FPO member Girsh Levin, some Jews who worked in the Bezdonys labor camp damaged more than 100 kilometers of rails on the Vilnius-Ignalina railway line on February 20, 1942. With the help of Polish and Lithuanian workers, FPO members organized a large fire at the Kailis forced labor camp in January 1942. During the fire, tens of thousands of sheepskin coats made for the German army were destroyed. There were many acts of sabotage like these. Almost all ghetto workers considered it their duty to harm the Nazis as much as possible.<sup>162</sup>

In May 1942, a group of ghetto fighters carried out an act of rail sabotage near Naujoji Vilnia, blowing up a German train bound for Polotsk and derailing 12 wagons with weapons and soldiers.<sup>163</sup>

After the April 5, 1943 massacres, conflicting sentiments spread among the prisoners of the Vilnius Ghetto. Some just waited passively and fearfully for what was to come, hoping for a miraculous salvation, while others (primarily the ghetto youth) were increasingly overcome by a mood of resolute resistance. More and more Jews tried to escape from the ghetto into the forests to join the Soviet partisans operating there, while others joined the anti-fascist underground. The youth also began to oppose the collaborative policy of the ghetto leadership, and an inevitable conflict was brewing between the ghetto leadership (Gens) and the FPO. Gens considered Glazman to be

the key instigator of the resistance and decided to get rid of him. On June 26, 1943, on the order of Gens, Oster, who was the head of the ghetto's crime search unit, arrested Glazman at the ghetto gates when he was returning from work. The detainee was to be sent to the Riešė labor camp. That same day, Jewish policemen were attacked by FPO members and Glazman was freed. Gens's authority plummeted after this incident. Nevertheless, Glazman ended up going to the Riešė camp with a group of his supporters on their own accord.<sup>164</sup>

In late June 1943, the Gestapo arrested several members of the underground Vilnius City Committee of the Communist Party (Juozas Vitas, V. Kazlauskas). Subjected to torture, the detainees gave the Gestapo Yitzkhak Wittenberg's name. On July 8, Kittel demanded that the ghetto authorities extradite Wittenberg. The police arrested Wittenberg on July 15, but he was freed by members of the FPO as he was being brought in. The next day, the Gestapo issued an ultimatum: If Wittenberg does not come to the police by 6 p.m. on July 16, the ghetto will be destroyed. The ghetto authorities persuaded Wittenberg to surrender. He did, and appointed Abba Kovner as the new commander of the FPO. That same day, Yitzkhak Wittenberg came out of hiding and was arrested by the Gestapo at the ghetto gates. The next day, it was already known in the ghetto that the Gestapo had tortured Wittenberg.<sup>165</sup> Wittenberg's actions moved the entire ghetto. The ghetto inhabitants spoke of him as a great hero who had sacrificed his life for other Jews. The FPO's authority in the ghetto grew exponentially. After this incident, the FPO decided to send its members to Soviet partisan units.

The first group left the ghetto on July 24, 1943.<sup>166</sup> The SS began moving Jews from the Vilnius Ghetto to Estonian labor camps at the beginning of August, and the ghetto's liquidation began soon thereafter. This was further incentive for FPO members and other Jews to leave the ghetto and join the partisans. Other FPO members were preparing for armed resistance in the ghetto itself. Another deportation campaign to Estonian labor camps was carried out in the ghetto in the first few days of September. The FPO members who remained in the ghetto decided to resist. They began building a barricade on Ligoninės Street, but then the police suddenly came and arrested the young people who were there – clearly someone had betrayed them. The detainees were taken to the Gestapo, where officers interrogated them brutally and demanded that they tell them who the other members of the underground were and where their hideouts were located. Some of them were even taken to the ghetto to show the Gestapo where the weapons and the people were being hidden. Another barricade was put up next to the building at 12 M. Strašūno Street. The ghetto partisans greeted the policemen who came there with gunfire. Battalion commander Yekhiel Sheinboim was killed in the shootout. Then the Germans blew up the building. Roughly 100 people died under the rubble.<sup>167</sup> On September 11, 1943, a group of fighters from the Vilnius Ghetto was sent to Fyodor Markov's partisan brigade near Lake Narutis; they

managed to reach the brigade camp without casualties. On the last day of the ghetto's existence (September 23, 1943), about 150 members of the FPO managed to escape the surrounded ghetto through the sewers and reach Rūdinkai Forest.<sup>168</sup> Joining the Soviet partisans gave Jews a chance to avoid death and participate in the armed struggle against fascism, as well as to avenge the mass murder of Jews by the Nazis. In the summer and autumn of 1943, roughly 360 fighters from the Vilnius Ghetto left to join Soviet partisan units. Some of them were killed on the way to the forest. Antanas Sniečkus, the chief of staff of the Soviet Lithuanian Partisan Movement, received information from Rūdinkai Forest on November 5, 1943 that it had been decided to form four squads of Jewish partisans, consisting of 65 people each. Abba Kovner, M. Brandt, Samuil Kaplinski, and A. Aranovich were appointed as squad leaders. These squads were later named "Avenger", "For Victory", "Death to Fascism" and "Fight". The Jews from the Kaunas Ghetto formed a partisan squad called "Death to the Occupants", which consisted of more than 200 partisans. So apparently, most of the Soviet partisans (about 500 out of 650) operating in Rūdinkai Forest at the end of 1943 were Jews, and only half of the partisans were armed.<sup>169</sup> According to the Lithuanian Partisan Movement headquarters, of the 3,904 Soviet partisans operating in Lithuania, 676 were Jews.<sup>170</sup> However, the leaders of the Soviet partisan movement did not tolerate squads built purely along ethnic lines. "Fight" and "Death to Fascism" were merged with Lithuanian squads, leaving only two Jewish squads – "Avenger" and "For Victory".<sup>171</sup> There were more than 200 partisans in these two squads. Jewish partisans carried out several major combat operations. They overturned three German trains on the Vilnius–Varėna railway section, set fire to three bridges, blew up a factory in Valkininkai and a power station in Vilnius, and so on. Jewish partisans Isaac Rudnitzki (Arad), Vitka Kempner, Grigory Gurevich, Chaim Lazar, and Zelda Treger were some of the fighters who stood out in the fight against the Nazis.<sup>172</sup>

According to Prof. Dov Levin's research, roughly 1,150 members of Jewish underground organizations and 650 nonaffiliated Jews joined the Soviet partisans (64 percent of whom were Jews from the Vilnius Ghetto). Another 200 Jews fled, but never reached the partisan units for various reasons (usually because they were killed along the way). Approximately 850 Jewish partisans fought in Lithuanian partisan units and 450 – in Byelorussian partisan units (such as the Vorshilov and Spartak Brigades), while some 250 hid in the forests together with their families. An estimated 156 Jews were killed in partisan squads, and 150 – while fleeing the ghetto.<sup>173</sup>

It is safe to say that the role of Jews in the Soviet partisan movement was significant. Jews participated in the movement more actively than people of other ethnic groups living in Lithuania. The Jews managed not to succumb to the cruel fate and fought for their life, freedom, and national honor under the most adverse conditions.

## Jews from the Vilnius Ghetto in Estonian Labor Camps

After the liquidation of the Vilnius Ghetto, between 8,500 and 9,500 former ghetto prisoners were taken to Estonian labor camps.<sup>174</sup> The Vaivara concentration and labor camp operated in Estonia in 1943–1944. It had 27 satellite camps in different parts of Estonia. The commandant of the Vaivara camp complex was SS-Hauptsturmführer Hans Aumeier. The prisoners were guarded by German and Estonian members of the SS.<sup>175</sup> The largest camps were located in Vaivara, Klooga, and Lagedi. They each had 1,000–2,000 prisoners working there.

The first group of prisoners from the Vilnius Ghetto was sent from Vaivara to the Klooga camp. At that time, about 400 men and 150 women were imprisoned there. The prisoners were divided into brigades and were forced to do hard physical labor. The men carried bags of cement from the factory to the train station (about 150 meters away). The supervisors would beat the prisoners with clubs. Other prisoners worked in the cement factory or slate quarries, or felled forests. Women did the same hard labor as men. The working day lasted 10–12 hours. For the slightest rule infractions, prisoners were given 25 lashes with a whip. All of the prisoners had their own number. The food rations at the camp were very poor – every day, the prisoners received 340 grams of bread, a bowl of watery soup, and a coffee substitute (German: *Ersatzkaffe*). Because of the unbearable living conditions in the camps, diseases began to spread. Sick prisoners were not treated. SS-Obersturmführer Franz von Bodmann served as the camp physician at the Klooga camp. At his behest, patients were killed by injecting poison into their veins.<sup>176</sup> Within a few months, 600 of the 1,000 prisoners at the Vaivara concentration camp had died.<sup>177</sup>

Selections were carried out regularly in the camps, with the elderly, the sick, and children usually the ones designated for death. In February 1944, about 800 Jewish patients, children, and elderly from Vilnius were taken from the Estonian camps to concentration camps in Poland to be exterminated.<sup>178</sup> Most of the camps were in the eastern part of Estonia, in marshy, wooded, and sparsely populated areas. Escaping from them was nearly impossible. However, the prisoners from the Vilnius Ghetto who were in Estonian camps also formed underground groups and made every effort to maintain a spirit of mutual solidarity and assistance. Sometimes prisoners attempted to escape from the camp. One time, 14 prisoners escaped from the Ereda camp. They hid in the forest for 56 days until the Red Army arrived.<sup>179</sup>

The Jews from the Vilnius Ghetto were imprisoned in different Vaivara satellite camps. They are known to have been imprisoned in Klooga, Kivioli, Auvere, Viivikonna, Lagedi, Ereda, and other camps. The writer Herman Kruk was in the Lagedi camp. There, he continued to chronicle his experiences in the Vilnius Ghetto. Before the camp was liquidated, Kruk showed his friends where he had buried his diary. After



liberation, Nisan Anolik took the diary and gave it to Abba Kovner, who took it to Israel.<sup>180</sup>

The liquidation of the Estonian camps began in the summer of 1944. Some of the prisoners were sent to the Stutthof concentration camp as well as to camps in East Prussia. The majority died there.<sup>181</sup> In July 1944, all of the elderly and sick in the Kivioli camp were murdered. Even before that, the Ereda camp was liquidated. As the Red Army approached, the Nazis decided to liquidate all the remaining camps. On September 19, 1944, the male prisoners in the Klooga camp were lined up for inspection. Roughly 300 of the healthier looking men were taken, supposedly to transport firewood. Around noon, shots rang out in the forest. After some time, armed SS officers returned to the camp and took 30 prisoners. Soon after, shots rang out in the forest again. Everyone understood that they were about to be killed. The prisoners who were still in the camp rushed to hide. Some of the Klooga camp prisoners were able to save themselves in this way.<sup>182</sup>

According to witnesses, approximately 2,500 prisoners were killed in the Klooga camp. The corpses of the victims were burned in several large pyres. Only 82 prisoners survived.<sup>183</sup>

## Conclusions

The history of the Vilnius Jews and the Vilnius Ghetto during the Nazi occupation can be divided into different periods: (1) the period of discrimination and killing of Jews before the establishment of the ghetto (June 24, 1941–August 1941); (2) the period of formation of ghettos (No. 1 and No. 2) and mass killings (September–November 1941); (3) the period of stability (December 1941–March 1943); (4) the period of liquidation of the small ghettos, labor camps, and the Vilnius Ghetto (April–September 1943); (5) imprisonment of the remaining inhabitants of the Vilnius Ghetto in Estonian concentration camps and Vilnius labor camps (October 1943–September 1944).

The discrimination and persecution of Vilnius Jews began in the first days of the Nazi occupation. The German Military Command and Security Police and the Lithuanian administration assisting the Nazis (the Citizens' Committee of Vilnius City and Region, self-defense units) issued regulations and orders discriminating against Jews, and organized the arrests, imprisonment, and first executions of Jews. Jews were ordered to wear insignia, and they were not permitted to walk in the central streets of the city. Their options for buying food products were restricted, and they were fired en masse from their workplaces. Their means of communication and radios were taken away, and they were not allowed to use public transportation, recreational areas, and

so on. In early August 1941, when the German military government was replaced by the German civil administration (commissars), the political discrimination and terrorization of Jews intensified even more. Mass arrests and shootings of Jews began in mid-July 1941. At first they were quite disorganized and chaotic. Jews were arrested in the streets, at their workplaces, and in their apartments. The detainees were initially taken to Lukiškės Prison, and from there they were taken to Paneriai to be shot. Arrests and transport were handled by German Gestapo officers along with the Lithuanian public police, self-defense units, and special squad members. The mass killings in Paneriai were mostly carried out by the special squad (German: *Sonderkommando*), which was subordinate to the German security police and the SD. The Jews who were taken to be shot were told they were being sent to work. During the first mass campaigns, it was mostly Jewish men who were shot. The money and valuables of the people who were killed were confiscated by the Nazi authorities. Probably close to 7,000 Vilnius Jews had been killed by September of 1941.

The largest massacres were carried out during the initial period of the ghetto's formation and existence. They began in the first days of September 1941. More than 8,000 Vilnius Jews were killed in September alone. During these campaigns, not only men, but also women and children were shot en masse. The aforementioned special squad did the shooting, and was sometimes assisted by Lithuanian police battalions stationed in Vilnius.

The Vilnius Ghetto was established on September 6, 1941. There were two ghettos in the Old Town (the Large Ghetto and the Small Ghetto, or No. 1 and No. 2). Approximately 29,000 Jews were put in the Large Ghetto and approximately 9,000 – in the Small Ghetto. The ghettos were overcrowded. The Nazis “solved” the housing problem of with mass killings (“campaigns”). The occupation authorities only planned to keep able-bodied and skilled craftsmen with their families alive, at least temporarily. Other Jews were to be shot. The Small Ghetto was completely liquidated during several campaigns in October 1941. However, the massacres continued almost until the end of 1941. Approximately 33,000 Jews in Vilnius (of the 58,000 who lived there prior to the war) were killed from the beginning of the war to 1942. Roughly 15,000 Jews remained in the ghetto.

From the end of 1941 to March 1943, there were no mass killings of Jews. This period was called the period of stability, or peace. When Germany failed to win its blitzkrieg against the Soviet Union, the need for manpower for the German war economy increased significantly. As a result, the Nazi authorities decided to temporarily spare skilled Jewish workers and their families. During this period, life in the ghetto became relatively normal and stable. The administrative structure of the ghetto was established, and daily work was carried out. The ghetto transitioned into a unique “state within a state,” with its own government, police, workshops, forms of spiritual and cultural life, and institutions. The highest self-governing body of the ghetto was the Jewish Council

(Judenrat). The Jewish Ghetto Police and various departments (labor, health, social welfare, food, housing) were all subordinate to the Jewish Council. The Department of Labor was particularly important. The ghetto leadership believed that as long as the Germans were benefitting economically from the work of the Jews, they would not liquidate the ghetto. This was their main hope for the survival and preservation of the ghetto. Almost all Jewish men and women of working age worked in various factories, workshops, and labor camps. In the summer of 1943, approximately 14,000 Jews in the Vilnius Ghetto (two-thirds of the ghetto population) were working at various jobs. In July 1942, the Jewish Council was dissolved by decision of the German authorities, and Jacob Gens was appointed as the sole head of the ghetto.

The period of stability in the Vilnius Ghetto lasted until March 1943. This is when the small ghettos in Vilnius Region (Švenčionys, Ashmyany, Salos) were liquidated. Some of their inhabitants were moved to the Vilnius Ghetto, while others were taken by train to Paneriai and shot there (about 5,000 people in total).

The Vilnius Ghetto Jewish labor camps located in the provinces (Baltoji Vokė, Bezdony, Kena) were liquidated in the summer of 1943. Several hundred people were killed during these Gestapo campaigns. As per Heinrich Himmler's June 21, 1943 order to liquidate all of the ghettos in Ostland, the gradual liquidation of the Vilnius Ghetto began in August 1943. SS-Oberscharführer Bruno Kittel was in charge of this campaign. The last stage of the liquidation of the ghetto was carried out in September 1943. By the end of September, the Vilnius Ghetto had been liquidated. Most of the women and children (5,000–7,000) were taken to German concentration camps and killed there. As many as 2,000 Jewish men were taken to Estonian labor camps, and between 1,400 and 1,700 young women were taken to the Kaiserwald concentration camp near Riga. Several hundred elderly and sick people were shot in Paneriai during the liquidation of the ghetto.

After the liquidation of the Vilnius Ghetto, a few thousand Jews were left to work at the Kailis forced labor camp, the army motor vehicle repair park (HKP), the military hospital, and the Gestapo workshops. As the Red Army approached Vilnius in early July 1944, most of the Jews who worked in these camps were murdered. The Nazis did the exact same thing to the Vilnius Jews imprisoned in Estonian labor camps in September 1944. Only 2,000–3,000 Vilnius Jews survived to see the end of the war and the Nazi occupation. Comparing the history of the Vilnius Ghetto with that of the Kaunas Ghetto and the Šiauliai Ghetto, certain differences are noticeable. The Vilnius Ghetto only existed for two years (from September 6, 1941 to September 23, 1943), while the ghettos in Kaunas and Šiauliai were in operation for almost three years (from mid-August 1941 to mid-July 1944). The latter two ghettos were liquidated at the very end of the Nazi occupation, whereas the Vilnius Ghetto was already liquidated in September 1943. Furthermore, the Vilnius Ghetto was established almost a month later than the ghettos in Kaunas and Šiauliai. The early liquidation of the

Vilnius Ghetto was probably due to the strengthening of the Soviet partisan movement in the Vilnius Region. From the point of view of the German security police, the Vilnius Ghetto was a potential source of danger, as young Jews were fleeing from it in large numbers and joining the ranks of Soviet partisans operating in the Vilnius Region. As a result, the occupation authorities decided not to transform the Vilnius Ghetto into an SS concentration camp, as had been done with the ghettos in Kaunas and Šiauliai, but to liquidate it immediately.

Another unique feature in the history of the Vilnius Ghetto was its extremely active cultural life. The inhabitants of the Vilnius Ghetto continued the traditions of “the Jerusalem of Lithuania” and did not lose their interest in art, science, literature, self-education, and spiritual development – even in the face of death.

## Resources

<sup>1</sup> Y. Arad, *Ghetto in Flames: The Struggle and Destruction of the Jews in Vilnius in the Holocaust*, New York, 1982.

<sup>2</sup> G. Šuras (Shur), *Užrašai: Vilniaus geto kronika 1941–1944* [*Chronicles of the Vilnius Ghetto 1941–1944*], Vilnius, 1997; H. Kruk, *The Last Days of the Jerusalem of Lithuania: Chronicles from the Vilnius Ghetto and the Camps, 1939–1944*, New Haven and London, 2002; K. Sakowicz, *Dziennik pisany w Ponarach od 11 lipca 1941 r. do 6 listopada 1943 r.* [A diary written in Ponary from July 11, 1941 to November 6, 1943], Bydgoszcz, 1999; A. Суцкевер (A. Sutzkever), “Виленское гетто,” *Черная книга, Вильнюс* [“The Vilnius Ghetto,” *Black Book, Vilnius*], 1993; M. Rolnikaitė (M. Rolnikas), *Turiu papasakoti* [I Have to Speak Out], Vilnius, 1963.

<sup>3</sup> *Atminties dienos: Tarptautinė konferencija, skirta Vilniaus geto sunaikinimo 50-mečiui. 1993 m. spalio mėn. 11–16 d.* [The Days of Memory: International Conference in Commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the liquidation of the Vilnius Ghetto. October 11–16, 1993], compiled by E. Zingeris, Vilnius, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> *Vilniaus getas: kalinių sąrašai* [Vilnius Ghetto: Lists of Prisoners], compiled by I. Guzenberg, Vol. 1, Vilnius, 1996; Vol. 2, Vilnius, 1998; *Žydų darbo stovykla HKP: Dokumentai* [The Jewish HKP Labor Camp: Documents],

compiled by I. Guzenberg, Vilnius, 2002; R. Kostanian-Danzig, *Spiritual Resistance in the Vilnius Ghetto*, Vilnius, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> I. Guzenberg, “Vilniaus getas ir 1942 m. gyventojų surašymas”; *Vilniaus getas: kalinių sąrašai* [“The Vilnius Ghetto and the 1942 Census”; *Vilnius Ghetto: Lists of Prisoners*], Vol. 1, pp. 8, 9; *Statistikos valdybos 1941 m. sausio 1 d. duomenys apie Lietuvos gyventojų tautinę sudėtį* [Board of Statistics January 1, 1941 data on the ethnic composition of the Lithuanian population], Lithuanian Central State Archives (hereinafter – LCSA), f. R-743, ap. 5, b. 46, l. 172.

<sup>6</sup> “Wilna,” *Enzyklopedie des Holocaust* [“Vilnius,” *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*], München–Zürich, 1995, Bd. III, S. 1599.

<sup>7</sup> V. Brandišauskas, *Siekiai atkurti Lietuvos valstybingumą: 1940 06–1941 09* [Aspirations to Restore Lithuanian Statehood: June 1940–September 1941], Vilnius, 1996, p. 101.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 102, 103.

<sup>9</sup> 814-osios karo lauko komendantūros komendanto 1941 m. liepos 25 d. raštas Vilniaus miesto ir srities piliečių komiteto pirmininkui [July 25, 1941 letter sent by the commandant of the 814th Field Command to the chairman of the Citizens’ Committee of Vilnius City and Region], LCSA, f. R-685, ap. 5, b. 2, l. 15.

<sup>10</sup> V. Brandišauskas, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

<sup>11</sup> S. Žakevičiaus per Vilniaus radiją 1941 m. birželio 29 d. pasakytos kalbos tekstas [Transcript

of Žakevičius June 29, 1941 speech on Vilnius radio], Lithuanian Academy of Sciences Manuscripts Department (hereinafter – LMA RS), f. 165–167, l. 9–10.

<sup>12</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., pp. 26, 27.

<sup>13</sup> 1941 m. liepos 4 d. S. Žakevičiaus ir A. Iškausko pasirašytas skelbimas [July 4, 1941 announcement signed by S. Žakevičius and A. Iškauskas], LCSA, f. R-677, ap. 1, b. 1, l. 11; G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., pp. 28, 29.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp. 30, 31; A. Суцкевер (Sutzkever), op. cit., p. 217.

<sup>15</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje 1941–1944: Dokumentų rinkinys* [Mass Killings in Lithuania 1941–1944: Document Collection], compiled by G. Erslavaitė, Vilnius, 1973, Part 2, pp. 28, 29.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., Vilnius, 1965, Part 1, p. 108.

<sup>17</sup> “Wilna”, *Enzyklopedie des Holocaust*, p. 1599; *Wilna unter dem Nazijoch. Berichte von Dr. Med. Mozes Feigenberg aufgenommen von Mosze Wajsberg* [Vilnius Under the Nazi Yoke. Reports from Dr. Med. Mozes Feigenberg recorded by Mosze Wajsberg], Landsberg, 1946, p. 6; Y. Arad, op. cit., pp. 59–61.

<sup>18</sup> K. Sakowicz, op. cit., pp. 45, 46.

<sup>19</sup> LCSA, f. R-730, ap. 2, b. 36, l. 80 a. p.

<sup>20</sup> Reports from the U.S.S.R., No. 21, Bundesarchivabteilungen Potsdam (BAP), R58/214, p. 147.

<sup>21</sup> Vilniaus miesto žydų komiteto 1941 m. liepos 24 d. raštas Vilniaus miesto ir apskrities policijos vadui [July 24, 1941 letter sent by the Vilnius City Jewish Committee to the chief of the Vilnius City and County Police], LCSA, f. R-689, ap. 1, b. 9, pp. 244, 245.

<sup>22</sup> “Wilna”, *Enzyklopedie des Holocaust*, p. 9, 1600; G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>23</sup> K. Sakowicz, op. cit., pp. 46–51; *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje 1941–1944*, Part 1, p. 136.

<sup>24</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., p. 35; A. Суцкевер (Sutzkever), op. cit., p. 219.

<sup>25</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Part 1, p. 136.

<sup>26</sup> K. Sakowicz, op. cit., pp. 51, 52.

<sup>27</sup> Vilniaus miesto komisaro H. Hingsto 1941 m. rugsėjo 1 d. skelbimas [Vilnius City Commissioner H. Hingst’s September 1, 1941

announcement], Lithuanian Special Archives (hereinafter – LSA), f. K-1, ap. 45, b. 1848, l. 189–20.

<sup>28</sup> Vilniaus miesto komisaro H. Hingsto 1941 m. rugsėjo 3 d. potvarkis Nr. 5 [Vilnius City Commissioner H. Hingst’s September 3, 1941 Decree No. 5], ibid., l. 189–9.

<sup>29</sup> I. Guzenberg, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 11.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> LCSA, f. R-689, ap. 1, b. 10, l. 37.

<sup>33</sup> I. Guzenberg, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 13.

<sup>34</sup> As cited in G. Šuras (Schur), *Užrašai*, p. 36.

<sup>35</sup> I. Guzenberg, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 13; G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., p. 37. The number of ghetto residents given by various authors and witnesses varies, but usually does not exceed 40,000 people.

<sup>36</sup> G. Schur, op. cit., p. 37, 38; K. Gershter’s December 22, 1945 interrogation protocol, former Latvian S.S.R. KGB Archive, F. Jeckeln criminal case No. N-18313, Vol. 3, pp. 81, 82.

<sup>37</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Part 1, p. 136.

<sup>38</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., p. 40; K. Gershter’s December 22, 1945 interrogation protocol, p. 82.

<sup>39</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Part 1, p. 136; K. Sakowicz, op. cit., p. 53.

<sup>40</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., pp. 40, 41.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., pp. 42–45; A. Rindziunskio parodymai apie Vilniaus žydų žudynes nacių okupacijos metais [Testimony of A. Rindziunski about the massacre of Vilnius Jews during the Nazi occupation], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 8, b. 161, p. 142.

<sup>42</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Part 1, p. 137.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> A. Rindziunski’s December 21, 1945 interrogation protocol, former Latvian S.S.R. KGB Archive, criminal case No. N-18313, Vol. 3, p. 161.

<sup>45</sup> K. Sakowicz, op. cit., pp. 53–56; *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Part 1, p. 137.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.; K. Sakowicz, op. cit., p. 56.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>48</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., p. 50; K. Gershter’s

December 22, 1945 interrogation protocol, Vol. 3, pp. 82-83.

<sup>49</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Part 1, p. 137.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> K. Sakowicz, op. cit., pp. 58–60.

<sup>52</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>53</sup> “Wilna”, *Enzyklopedie des Holocaust*, p. 1601.

<sup>54</sup> Vilniaus m. savivaldybės referento žydų reikalams 1941 m. lapkričio 28 d. raštas Vilniaus miesto apygardos komisariui [*November 28, 1941 letter sent by the rapporteur on Jewish affairs in the municipality of Vilnius to the Gebietskommissar for the city of Vilnius*], LCSA, f. R-643, ap. 3, b. 195, p. 152.

<sup>55</sup> “Wilna”, *Enzyklopedie des Holocaust*, p. 1600.

<sup>56</sup> Vilniaus gete dirbančių žydų 1943 m. rugpjūčio 20 d. statistiniai duomenys [*August 20, 1943 statistics on Jews working in the Vilnius Ghetto*], LCSA, f. R-614, ap. 1, b. 269, p. 44.

<sup>57</sup> Vilniaus geto darbo skyriaus etatų sąrašas (be datos) [*List of positions in the Vilnius Ghetto employment office (no date)*], *ibid.*, f. R-626, ap. 1, b. 214, l. 18; Geto Darbo skyriaus veiklos schema [*Operational diagram of the ghetto employment office*], *ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>58</sup> Vilniaus geto Darbo skyriaus statistiniai duomenys apie žydų darbininkų skaičių 1942 ir 1943 m. [*Vilnius Ghetto employment office statistics on the number of Jewish workers in 1942 and 1943*], *ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>59</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., pp. 49, 50.

<sup>60</sup> “Wilna”, *Enzyklopedie des Holocaust*, p. 1601.

<sup>61</sup> Vilniaus miesto komisaro 1942 m. lapkričio 5 d. nuostatai dėl žydų darbininkų panaudojimo [*November 5, 1942 regulations issued by the Gebietskommissar for the city of Vilnius on the use of Jewish workers*], LCSA, f. R-659, ap. 1, b. 3, p. 43–43 a. p.

<sup>62</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., p. 51.

<sup>63</sup> R. Kastanian-Danzig, op. cit., p. 103; H. Kruk, op. cit., p. 391.

<sup>64</sup> R. Kastanian-Danzig, op. cit., pp. 105, 106.

<sup>65</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., pp. 51, 52.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53; Geto administracijos schema [*Ghetto administration diagram*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 45, b. 1843, p. 27; Y. Arad, op. cit., p. 329.

<sup>67</sup> Vilniaus geto Žydų tarybos pirmininko 1942 m. kovo 28 d. raštas referentui žydų reikalams [*March 28, 1942 letter sent by the chairman of the Vilnius Ghetto Jewish Council to the rapporteur on Jewish affairs*], LCSA, f. R-643, ap. 3, b. 195, pp. 100–102.

<sup>68</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., pp. 53, 54.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54; Geto administracijos schema, p. 27.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Žydų tarybos 1942 m. birželio mėn. statistiniai duomenys [*Jewish Council: June 1942 statistics*], LCSA, f. R-643, ap. 3, b. 195, p. 44.

<sup>72</sup> Žydų tarybos 1942 m. liepos mėn. statistiniai duomenys [*Jewish Council: July 1942 statistics*], *ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>73</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., p. 55, 56; Vilniaus geto Žydų tarybos pirmininko 1942 m. kovo 28 d. raštas referentui žydų reikalams, pp. 99, 100; Y. Arad, op. cit., p. 315.

<sup>74</sup> Vilniaus geto Registracijos skyriaus 1942 m. birželio 24 d. raštas referentui žydų reikalams [*June 24, 1942 letter sent by the Vilnius Ghetto Department of Registration to the rapporteur on Jewish affairs*], LCSA, f. R-643, ap. 3, b. 195, p. 46.

<sup>75</sup> Žydų tarybos 1942 m. gegužės mėn. statistiniai duomenys [*Jewish Council: May 1942 statistics*], *ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>76</sup> Žydų tarybos 1942 m. birželio 26 d. raštas referentui žydų reikalams [*June 24, 1942 letter sent by the Jewish Council to the rapporteur on Jewish affairs*], *ibid.*, pp. 6, 42.

<sup>77</sup> Y. Arad, op. cit., p. 318.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 316.

<sup>79</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., pp. 56-57; Y. Arad, op. cit., pp. 318–320, 326, 327.

<sup>80</sup> A. Суцкевер (Sutzkever), op. cit., p. 234.

<sup>81</sup> Y. Arad, op. cit., pp. 320-321.

<sup>82</sup> J. Sobol, “Gyvenimo geismas Vilniaus gete” [*The Passion of Life in the Ghetto*], *Atminties dienos*, pp. 251, 252.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.

<sup>84</sup> Y. Arad, op. cit., p. 321.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 331.

<sup>86</sup> A. Суцкевер (Sutzkever), op. cit., pp. 234, 235.

- <sup>87</sup> Y. Arad, op. cit., pp. 273-275; LSSR NKGB 4-osios valdybos 2-ojo skyriaus viršininko Makliarskio 1943 m. lapkričio 9 d. specialus pranešimas B. Kobulovui [*Chief of the 2nd Department of the L.S.S.R. NKGB 4th Directorate Makliarsky's 9 November 1943 special report to B. Kobulov*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 45, b. 1843, pp. 5, 6.
- <sup>88</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., p. 63.
- <sup>89</sup> LSA, f. K-1, ap. 45, b. 1843, p. 6.
- <sup>90</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., p. 85.
- <sup>91</sup> As cited in G. Šuras (Schur), *Užrašai*, pp. 85, 86.
- <sup>92</sup> Г. Аграновский, И. Гузенберг (G. Agranovskiy, I. Guzenberg), *Литовский Иерусалим [Lithuanian Jerusalem]*, Vilnius, 1992, pp. 27, 28.
- <sup>93</sup> July 10, 1941 letter from Schroeder, adjutant to the Vilnius City Commissioner, to J. Gens, chief of the Vilnius Jewish Ghetto Police, Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen Ludwigsburg (ZSL), Sygn. UdSSR Ordn. 245, Bl. 59. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., p. 70.
- <sup>94</sup> Ibid., pp. 71, 72.
- <sup>95</sup> Ibid., pp. 72-74; A. Суцкевер (Sutzkever), op. cit., pp. 226, 227; K. Sakowicz, op. cit., p. 63.
- <sup>96</sup> Ibid., pp. 64, 65.
- <sup>97</sup> A. Суцкевер (Sutzkever), op. cit., p. 227.
- <sup>98</sup> K. Sakowicz, op. cit., p. 65.
- <sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 67.
- <sup>100</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., p. 81.
- 101 Ibid., pp. 106-109; K. Sakowicz, op. cit., pp. 79-83.
- <sup>102</sup> Ibid., pp. 83, 84; *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Part 1, p. 172.
- <sup>103</sup> As cited in G. Šuras (Schur), *Užrašai*, p. 110.
- <sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 111; A. Rindziunski's December 21, 1945 interrogation protocol, Vol. 3, p. 163.
- <sup>105</sup> I. Guzenberg, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 11.
- <sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 12; *Wilna unter dem Nazijoch*, pp. 23, 24.
- <sup>107</sup> I. Guzenberg, op. cit., Vol. 2, pp. 12, 13; A. Rindziunski's December 21, 1945 interrogation protocol, Vol. 3, p. 164.
- <sup>108</sup> Ibid., l. 14; G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., pp. 118, 119.
- <sup>109</sup> *Wilna unter dem Nazijoch*, p. 24.
- <sup>110</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., pp. 119, 120.
- <sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 121.
- <sup>112</sup> Ibid., pp. 123, 124.
- <sup>113</sup> K. Sakowicz, op. cit., pp. 96, 97.
- <sup>114</sup> I. Guzenberg, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 15; G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., p. 125.
- <sup>115</sup> K. Sakowicz, op. cit., p. 104.
- <sup>116</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., p. 126.
- <sup>117</sup> Ibid., pp. 127-129, 131; *Wilna unter dem Nazijoch*, pp. 28, 29; A. Rindziunski's December 21, 1945 interrogation protocol, Vol. 3, pp. 164, 165; Y. Arad, op. cit., pp. 404, 405.
- <sup>118</sup> Ibid., pp. 131-134, 165, 407, 408.
- <sup>119</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., pp. 136-141; A. Rindziunski's December 21, 1945 interrogation protocol, Vol. 3, p. 165; *Wilna unter dem Nazijoch*, pp. 29-31.
- <sup>120</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., p. 141; *Wilna unter dem Nazijoch*, p. 32.
- <sup>121</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., pp. 141-144.
- <sup>122</sup> Y. Arad, op. cit., pp. 428, 429.
- <sup>123</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., pp. 147-150; *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Part 1, p. 172; A. Rindziunski's December 21, 1945 interrogation protocol, Vol. 3, pp. 165, 166; Y. Arad, op. cit., p. 432.
- <sup>124</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., pp. 151, 152.
- <sup>125</sup> Vokiečių saugumo policijos ir SD Vilniaus skyriaus 1943 m. lapkričio 11 d. pranešimas [*November 11, 1943 announcement of the German Security Police and the SD Vilnius Branch*], LCSA, f. R-1399, ap. 1, b. 33, p. 4.
- <sup>126</sup> Žinios apie įvykius Vilniaus m. policijos 4-ojoje nuovadoje 1943 m. rugsėjo 27 d. [*News regarding the events at the 4th Vilnius Police Station on September 27, 1943*], ibid., f. R-689, ap. 1, b. 318, p. 23.
- <sup>127</sup> Ibid., b. 315, p. 67.
- <sup>128</sup> Ibid., b. 318, p. 27.
- <sup>129</sup> Policijos nuovadų pranešimai apie sulaukytus žydus [*Police station reports regarding detained Jews*], ibid., b. 315, pp. 67-71, 73-94; b. 317, pp. 32, 41; b. 318, pp. 27-29, 38.

- <sup>130</sup> K. Sakowicz, op. cit., pp. 107, 108, 112, 113.
- <sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 117.
- <sup>132</sup> Ibid., pp. 117–119.
- <sup>133</sup> Ibid., pp. 121–131.
- <sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 132.
- <sup>135</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., pp. 58, 59.
- <sup>136</sup> I. Guzenberg, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 6.
- <sup>137</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., p. 60.
- <sup>138</sup> I. Guzenberg, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 7.
- <sup>139</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., pp. 156–159.
- <sup>140</sup> Ibid., pp. 160–162.
- <sup>141</sup> Ibid., pp. 164–166; L. Zlatkovičiaus 1944 m. rugpjūčio 19 d. apklausos protokolas [L. Zlatkovičius's August 19, 1944 interrogation protocol], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 45, b. 1848, p. 80.
- <sup>142</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>143</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>144</sup> I. Guzenberg, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 8.
- <sup>145</sup> *Wilna unter dem Nazijoch*, p. 36; I. Guzenberg, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 9.
- <sup>146</sup> *Wilna unter dem Nazijoch*, p. 39.
- <sup>147</sup> Vokiečių saugumo policijos ir SD Vilniaus skyriaus viršininko R. Neugebauerio 1943 m. spalio 29 d. pranešimas [October 29, 1943 report of R. Neugebauer, Chief of the German Security Police and Vilnius Branch of the SD], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 46, b. 1290, p. 41.
- <sup>148</sup> *Wilna unter dem Nazijoch*, pp. 40, 41.
- <sup>149</sup> H. K. P. Ost 562 administracijos 1944 m. vasario 19 d. raštas [February 19, 1944 letter from the administration of HKP/Ost/562], LCsA, f. R-1550, ap. 1, b. 6, p. 58.
- <sup>150</sup> *Wilna unter dem Nazijoch*, pp. 46–48; A. Сутцкевер (Sutzkever), op. cit., pp. 229, 230.
- <sup>151</sup> *Wilna unter dem Nazijoch*, p. 51.
- <sup>152</sup> Ibid., p. 52; I. Guzenberg, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 10; R. Geršono 1944 m. rugpjūčio 19 d. apklausos protokolas [R. Gershon's August 19, 1944 interrogation protocol], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 45, b. 1848, p. 77.
- <sup>153</sup> *Wilna unter dem Nazijoch*, pp. 59, 60; I. Guzenberg, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 10.
- <sup>154</sup> *Wilna unter dem Nazijoch*, p. 60; I. Guzenberg, op. cit., pp. 10, 11.
- <sup>155</sup> Y. Arad, op. cit., p. 470.
- <sup>156</sup> A. Сутцкевер (Sutzkever), op. cit., p. 240.
- <sup>157</sup> Y. Arad, op. cit., pp. 234–237; R. Margolis, “Pogrindinė antifašistinė organizacija FPO Vilniaus gete (1942–1943)” [“The Underground Antifascist Organization FPO in the Vilnius Ghetto (1942–1943)”], *Atminties dienos*, pp. 300, 301.
- <sup>158</sup> A. Сутцкевер (Sutzkever), op. cit., p. 241.
- <sup>159</sup> Ibid., p. 242.
- <sup>160</sup> Y. Arad, op. cit., pp. 249, 250; P. Štaras, *Partizaninis judėjimas Lietuvoje Didžiojo Tėvynės karo metais* [The Partisan Movement in Lithuania During the Great Patriotic War], Vilnius, 1966, pp. 106, 107.
- <sup>161</sup> Y. Arad, op. cit., pp. 247, 522.
- <sup>162</sup> A. Сутцкевер (Sutzkever), op. cit., pp. 244, 245.
- <sup>163</sup> Ibid., pp. 245–247.
- <sup>164</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., pp. 114, 115.
- <sup>165</sup> R. Margolis, op. cit., pp. 305, 306; A. Сутцкевер (Sutzkever), op. cit., p. 254.
- <sup>166</sup> Ibid., p. 306.
- <sup>167</sup> Ibid., p. 255; G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., p. 137.
- <sup>168</sup> R. Margolis, op. cit., pp. 308, 309.
- <sup>169</sup> R. Zizas, „Vilniaus geto žydų ginkluota kova prieš nacius (1941–1944)” [“Armed Struggle of the Vilnius Ghetto Jews Against the Nazis in 1941–1944”], *Atminties dienos*, pp. 320, 321.
- <sup>170</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>171</sup> A. Сутцкевер (Sutzkever), op. cit., p. 257.
- <sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 258, 259.
- <sup>173</sup> D. Levin, *Trumpa žydų istorija Lietuvoje* [A Brief History of Jews in Lithuania], Vilnius, 2000, pp. 183–184; D. Levin, “Die Beteiligung der litauischen Juden im Zweiten Weltkrieg” [The Participation of Lithuanian Jews in World War II], *Acta Baltica*, 1977, T. XVI, pp. 182, 183.
- <sup>174</sup> Y. Arad, op. cit., p. 466.



<sup>175</sup> R. Hilberg, *Nusikaltėliai. Aukos. Stebėtojai: Žydų tragedija 1933–1945* [*Perpetrators Victims Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933–1945*], Vilnius, 1999, p. 110.

<sup>176</sup> “Лагерь в Клоога”, Черная книга [*The Camp in Klooga*], *The Black Book*, pp. 395, 396.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 397.

<sup>178</sup> Y. Arad, *op. cit.*, p. 477.

<sup>179</sup> B. Anolik, “Nacių koncentracijos stovyklos Estijoje” [*Nazi Concentration Camps in Estonia*], *Atminties dienos*, pp. 203, 206.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 205, 206.

<sup>181</sup> Y. Arad, *op. cit.*, p. 449.

<sup>176</sup> “Лагерь в Клоога”, p. 397.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 399; B. Anolik, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

Arūnas Bubnys

## The Kaunas Ghetto (1941–1944)

In terms of the size and the importance of the Jewish community in Kaunas, it was second only to the Jewish community in Vilnius. With their Slobodka (Vilijampolė) yeshiva, Hebrew education system, and Zionist activities, Kaunas Jews were famous throughout Eastern Europe. According to unofficial Statistics Department data, there were 32,595 Jews living in Kaunas as of January 1, 1941 (20.84 percent of the population).<sup>1</sup> The history of the Kaunas Jewish community and its decimation during the Nazi occupation has attracted great interest among the world's historians. The fate of Kaunas Jews during the German occupation has primarily been examined by historians from Israel, Lithuania, and Germany. However, no academic research has yet been written that summarizes the Kaunas Ghetto in the way that Israeli historian Prof. Yitzhak Arad's monograph summarizes the Vilnius Ghetto.<sup>2</sup>

Most of Israeli historical work and the memoirs of Kaunas Holocaust survivors are written in Hebrew, so they are inaccessible to most foreign historians. This is why the author of this article based his research on literature published in Lithuanian, German, Russian, English, and Polish. When it comes to piecing together the history of the Kaunas Ghetto, surviving diaries and memoirs are a very important source. Literature of this genre has been published in many different languages. One source of particular value is the diary of Avraham Tory, the former secretary of the Kaunas Ghetto Council of Elders, which has also been translated into Lithuanian.<sup>3</sup> Tory's duties allowed him to access information about the most important events in the life of the ghetto and the relations of the ghetto administration with the German government, as well as to understand the most important areas of ghetto life. For three and a half years, the author made notes in his diary on a nearly daily basis about significant events in the ghetto, accompanied by his own experiences and remarks, and he supplemented the diary with original documents from the ghetto administration and various Nazi offices. Tory's diary could therefore be considered a chronicle of the Kaunas Ghetto – a particularly valuable work of this genre and a unique testament to the Jewish community of Kaunas that perished. Among the works published about the Kaunas

Ghetto abroad, the books by William W. Mishell, Alex Faitelson, and Ephraim Oshry stand out.<sup>4</sup> Basing his work on abundant literature, including memoirs and documents in Lithuanian and other archives around the world, Faitelson provides a comprehensive history of the Kaunas Ghetto, and particularly the ghetto's underground anti-fascist activities, thus supplementing the existing historiography with new facts. However, the value of Faitelson's work is diminished by the fact that he magnifies his own role without grounds and amplifies the role of Lithuanian institutions and individuals in the Holocaust (for example, Col. Jurgis Bobelis, commandant of the Kaunas Military Command), while downplaying the role of German institutions (German special-ops units, the Gestapo, and so on).

Rabbi Ephraim Oshry, a former Kaunas Ghetto prisoner, describes in his book the history of the Kaunas Ghetto and the obliteration of Jewish communities in 44 Lithuanian villages. Oshry supplements the history of the Kaunas Ghetto with valuable facts about the ghetto's religious and spiritual life. To date, there is very little research on this aspect of the history of the ghetto.

The book written by Dr. Sara Ginaitė-Rubinson (presently living in Israel) about the history of anti-fascist underground activities in the Kaunas Ghetto is very valuable.<sup>5</sup> The author herself was an active member of the ghetto's underground and partisan resistance. Based on her personal experience, as well as historical literature, memoirs, and documents found in archives, the author supplemented the history of the resistance of the Kaunas Jews with new facts and assessments. Dr. Ginaitė-Rubinson also published previously little-known facts about how Col. Jurgis Bobelis, commandant of the Kaunas Military Command, helped Jewish prisoners who were slated for execution at the Seventh Fort.

In recent years, German historians have become increasingly interested in the genocide of Jews in Lithuania.<sup>6</sup> Part of their work is specifically dedicated to the Kaunas Jewish community and the Kaunas Ghetto. German historians Christopher Dieckmann and Jurgen Matthäus wrote a valuable article about the massacre of Jews in Kaunas and the Kaunas Ghetto based on ample historical literature and documents found in German and other archives.<sup>7</sup> Dieckmann is probably also the first writer to split the history of the Kaunas Jews during the Nazi occupation into five periods, while also providing a brief description of their characteristics.

The interest of foreign historians and museologists in the history of the Kaunas Ghetto is evidenced by the fact that the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum held a special exhibit about the Kaunas Ghetto in 1997–1998. An illustrated catalog was published in the United States for this exhibit.<sup>8</sup>

Israeli historian Dina Porat wrote an important article about the unique court and judicial system that operated in the ghettos of Lithuania during the Nazi occupation.<sup>9</sup> She dedicates a significant portion of the article to the Kaunas Ghetto.

During the Soviet occupation, a considerable number of books, document collections, and articles were published about the massacre of Jews in Kaunas, as well as about the Kaunas Ghetto and its underground anti-fascist activities. Despite the ideological stamp characteristic of Soviet historiography and the tendency towards bias in the selection of documents, some of these publications have proved to be of some value to the present day.<sup>10</sup> Among the collection of documents, the most valuable is the two-part publication entitled *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje 1941–1944: Dokumentų rinkinys* (“Mass Killings in Lithuania 1941–1944: Document Collection”). The first part of the collection provides extensive information about the massacre of Jews in Kaunas and about the Kaunas Ghetto. It should be mentioned that in Soviet historiography, the genocide of Jews (the Holocaust) was almost never analyzed as a separate subject. The Holocaust was treated as a mass killing of “Soviet citizens” without mentioning the nationality of the victims. The Soviet authorities wanted to emphasize that all nationalities of the Lithuanian population suffered equally from the fascist occupation. Of course, this was a deliberate falsification of history that hid the true enormity of the tragedy. The works devoted to the Jewish genocide were usually inserted into publications discussing broader issues or lumped together with massacres of communists of various nationalities, members of communist youth organizations, and Soviet activists.

After the restoration of Lithuania’s independence, Holocaust research intensified, particularly around 1998. Valuable books and academic and journalistic articles have already been published on this subject. However, we still do not have a comprehensive academic study of the history of the Holocaust in Lithuania that examines the most important aspects of the Holocaust from every perspective. In terms of the work published after the restoration of Lithuania’s independence that reflects various aspects of the history of the Jewish community and ghettos, of mention are the following authors: Alfonsas Eidintas, Solomon Atamukas, Valentinas Brandišauskas, Arūnas Bubnys, Saliamonas Vaintraubas, Alex Faitelson, Judelis Beilesas, Dmitri Gelpern, and Stasys Knezy.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, it should be noted that Lithuanian historians have so far not produced any academic works specifically about the Kaunas Ghetto. Research about the Vilnius Jewish community and the Vilnius Ghetto has been much more abundant. This might be explained, in part, by the fact that Vilnius is home to the active Vilnius Gaon Jewish State Museum, whereas there is no such institution in Kaunas.

A fairly detailed history of the Kaunas Ghetto can be reconstructed from abundant archival sources. The author of this article based his research mostly on documents that are held in Lithuanian archives. The most important documents for the analysis of this subject are kept in the Lithuanian Central State Archives (hereinafter – LCSA) and the Lithuanian Special Archives (hereinafter – LSA). The LCSA have an especially important collection from the Vilijampolė Jewish Ghetto Police (R-973). It consists

of 1,036 original legal proceedings during the period of the Nazi occupation. Records of the documents are written in Lithuanian, German, and Yiddish. The documents in this file are mostly about the activities of the ghetto's Jewish police, and the structure and composition of its personnel. There are also surviving documents concerning the decrees of the Council of Elders, minutes of meetings, orders, and proclamations of the German government, monthly reports about the activities of various subunits, reports about everyday events in the ghetto, and so on. Other documents related to the history of the Kaunas Ghetto are held in other LCSA funds as well (for example, R-615, R-616, R-1399, etc.).

The LSA have several surviving documents about criminal cases against former Jewish ghetto policemen. The criminal case of former Kaunas Jewish Ghetto Police Chief Mikhail Kopelman is particularly valuable. Among the other LSA documents, a very valuable resource is the history of the Kaunas Ghetto Jewish Police that was written by the ghetto policemen themselves. Its manuscript was written in Yiddish and is held by the LCSA, while its Russian translation is preserved in the LSA. Valuable information about the massacres of Jews can be found in the criminal cases against former members of the Tautos darbo apsauga ("National Labor Protection"; hereinafter – TDA) Battalion, as well as against policemen of the city of Kaunas and participants in the 1941 anti-Soviet uprising. Since there are dozens of similar cases of this nature, the documents related to these cases will not be discussed in this article. Information about them be given in the "References" section.

### **The Massacre of Kaunas Jews Before the Establishment of the Ghetto**

The war caught the Jews by surprise, leaving them confused and frightened. The majority of them understood that dismal and difficult times were ahead, but few suspected that the reality of the future Nazi occupation would exceed their worst nightmares and foreboding. Thousands of Kaunas Jews attempted to retreat to the East by train, bus, horse-drawn carriage, and foot, but due to the rapidly advancing German army, they were unable to make it to Russia and were forced to return to Kaunas. Dozens – or perhaps hundreds – died during the bombings or at the hands of German soldiers and anti-Soviet Lithuanian partisans. In fact, rebels led by the Lithuanian Activist Front (LAF) were already taking control of the city of Kaunas on June 23, 1941. Arrests of Jews began that same day. However, until the arrival of the German army and German Security Police special-ops units in Kaunas (the first units of the German army entered Kaunas on the afternoon of June 24), there were no pogroms or mass killings of Jews in the city. Some authors (such as Faitelson) assert that the massacres of Jews had already begun on June 22–23<sup>12</sup>, but neither archival documents

nor authoritative historians confirm this. Jews who were arrested by the rebels (who called themselves partisans) during the first days of the war were usually held in the central prison on A. Mickevičiaus Street. The partisans arrested Jews suspected of collaborating with the Soviet authorities or of shooting partisans. It is certainly possible that innocent Jews may have been killed in the turmoil and gunfights, and that crimes may have been committed (murders, robberies, etc.). However, the real persecution of Kaunas Jews, as a people, began on June 25, 1941, when the German army and German security forces took control of the city.

Military and administrative power was concentrated in the hands of General Robert von Pohl, commandant of the 821st Field Command. Special-ops groups (German: *Einsatzgruppen*) under the German Security Police (SiPo) and Security Service (SD) were tasked with dealing with the Jewish question. Einsatzgruppe A commander SS-Brigadeführer Franz Walter Stahlecker arrived in Kaunas with an advance detachment (German: *Vorkommando*) on June 25, 1941. One of the most important tasks of Einsatzgruppe A was to organize the killing of Jews and involve the local residents in pogroms in order to conceal the culpability of the Nazis. In the first days of the German occupation, Sonderkommando 1b, a sub-group of Einsatzgruppe A, operated in Kaunas. Sonderkommando 1b was under the command of SS-Oberführer Erich Ehrlinger. Though they were met with great difficulties, Stahlecker and Ehrlinger finally managed to encourage some armed Lithuanians to carry out pogroms against the Jews in Kaunas. Later (on October 15, 1941), Stahlecker reported to his superior, Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler:

In Lithuania, this was first achieved in Kaunas, using partisans. It suddenly became clear that immediately organizing a larger-scale Jewish pogrom was rather difficult. Here we first of all used the above-mentioned partisan commander Klimaitis [Algirdas Jonas Klimaitis, who was not subordinate to the LAF or to the Provisional Government of Lithuania], who was instructed in this matter by our small advance detachment in Kaunas. Klimaitis managed to make ready for and start the pogrom in such a way that neither the instructions we gave nor our initiative came to light. During the first pogrom, on the night of June 25th to the 26th, Lithuanian partisans killed more than 1,500 Jews, burned down or otherwise destroyed several synagogues, and set 60 houses on fire in the section where Jews were living. During the following nights, 2,300 Jews were rendered “harmless” in the same way. Following the example of Kaunas, similar campaigns were carried out in other Lithuanian towns on a smaller scale. It also included the remaining local communists.<sup>13</sup>

The largest pogroms against Jews took place in Vilijampolė, which had a large Jewish population. Here, the robbing and killing of residents began on June 25. Armed partisan groups (called *baltaraiščiai* – “white armbands”) conducted searches in all Jewish homes, and arrested, beat, and murdered victims on Jurbarko, Sinagogos, Veliunos, Vidurinės, and other streets. Not only Jewish men were killed, but also women, children, and the elderly. People were killed in their apartments or taken out into the yard, lined up against the wall of the building, and shot. The partisans herded a group of Jews into the apartment of the famous athlete Mishelski (at 9 Mėsininkų Street) and slaughtered them on the spot.<sup>14</sup> The entire family of Akiva Puchart, a worker at the Drobė factory, was murdered in their house at 10 Ariogalos Street. On the night of June 26, the criminals also killed Shrag Feivel Hurvitz, the head of the yeshiva. By the Vilijampolė bridge, partisans arrested approximately 30 young Jews during the day and then brutally beat them and forced them to sing Soviet songs. Then, after making the victims dig pits and kneel down beside them, they shot them all. Among the Jews who perished at the Vilijampolė bridge were father and son Yitzhak and Shmuel Kaplan; brothers Chaim and Yitzhak Ragolsky; the tailor Baranov; and the physician Shmuel Matz. These murders were committed in broad daylight with crowds looking on.<sup>15</sup> Rabbi Ephraim Oshry was one of the many witnesses. As he put it:

It is impossible to describe all that happened in Slobodka (Vilijampolė) that night (June 25). Horrors that the world had never seen. We hid with 12 yeshiva rabbis and several students in the apartment of our dean, Rebbe Grodzenski. We spent the night praying and weeping. When it got dark, Lithuanian Nazis, accompanied by a mob and carrying axes and hand saws, invaded the Jewish part of Slobodka. The pogrom began on Jurbarko Street. They went from house to house, from apartment to apartment, from room to room, killing every Jew they encountered, young or old. ... The butchers invaded the apartment of Mordecha Yatkunsky and his wife, the dentist Stein-Yatkunsky; they cut off their hands, their feet, and their sexual organs, and then finished both of them off, as well as their son. Then they turned to the neighboring streets, murdering everyone they encountered, no matter who they were – rabbi, Zionist, or communist. ... One of the most terrible moments of this heinous slaughter was the death of Slobodka Rabbi Zalman Osovsky, who was respected by everyone – may the Almighty take vengeance on them. They tied his hand and foot to a chair, then placed his head on an open volume of the Talmud and sawed it off. Then they murdered his son, the young genius Yudel Osovsky, and shot his wife. When we entered the apartment, the rabbi's beheaded body was “sitting” on the chair next to the desk. The Talmud was open – he

was reading it when they took him by surprise. We saw his head on the windowsill with a note next to it: “THIS IS WHAT WE’LL DO TO ALL THE JEWS.” Dozens of our students were murdered as well. After finishing their criminal work in the apartments, the Lithuanians turned to the commercial quarter. They shot the blacksmith on the corner of Jurbarko Street, followed by 26 more Jews who had been lined up at a wall, and 34 people were buried alive next to the bridge (over the Neris). The next morning, we went from door to door together with the other survivors. We collected the corpses and buried them in a common grave in the Slobodka cemetery. I was never managed to erase the horrible events of that night from my memory.<sup>16</sup>

There are very few remaining archival documents about the pogroms in Vilijampolė, but the ones that do exist confirm the facts of the arrests and massacres that happened there. Antanas Vitkauskas, who lived at 7 K. Griniaus Street, joined the partisans on June 24, 1941, and was sent the next day to join the group of partisans in Vilijampolė. He headed the 5th partisan detachment that arrested Jews on Jurbarko and Veliuonos Streets. This detachment arrested 50–60 Jews and turned them over to the partisan headquarters in Vilijampolė.<sup>17</sup> On June 27, a shot was fired at Vitkauskas’s detachment. Vitkauskas told one of the partisans to throw a grenade into the synagogue. After the blast, three Jews ran out of the synagogue and were shot by the partisans. Six more Jews were found in the synagogue, one of whom was wounded. Vitkauskas’s detachment arrested them and drove them to the partisan headquarters on Skirsnemunės Street. On the night of June 27, there were about 500 Jews who had been arrested being held at the Vilijampolė partisan headquarters.<sup>18</sup> The fate of these Jews is unknown, but it is assumed that some of them were shot either in Vilijampolė or at the Kaunas Seventh Fort.

According to the testimony of witnesses, one of the detachments operating in Vilijampolė, supposedly under the command of Domeika, was brutally murdering Jews on Ariogalos and other streets. It is known that Abrom and Liuba Lifshitz, Itsik Friedman with his wife and two children, and Naphtali and his wife and two-year-old daughter were among the Jews that they murdered.<sup>19</sup> The exact number of Jews that were killed in Vilijampolė is not known, but there could have been several hundred victims. One source states that approximately 600 Jews were massacred in Vilijampolė on June 25–26.<sup>20</sup>

Jews were not only killed in Vilijampolė – they were murdered in the city center and old town as well. The June 27, 1941 massacre at the Lietūkis garage on Vytautas Avenue was particularly notorious. There, men dressed in civilian clothes (possibly former prisoners who were freed at the beginning of the war) killed several dozen Jews with crowbars. Among those killed were Icchak Kurliandschik, store owner Chaim Tzukerman, laborer Icchak Grin, musician Shliom Goldstein, and brothers Peisach



and Moisei Goldberg. The massacre was carried out during the day with a large crowd of townsfolk and German soldiers looking on. The arrested Jews were brought into the yard of the garage by the so-called partisans. Although the German army was tasked with maintaining peace in the occupied countries, it did not get involved in public torture and killing at all. The Lietūkis Garage Massacre took place just 200 meters away from the 16th German Army headquarters. German soldiers watched and photographed the massacre. When Generaloberst Ernst Busch (commander of the 16th Army) was informed about the pogroms taking place in Kaunas, he replied that there was nothing he could do about it.<sup>21</sup> All matters concerning Jews were turned over to Stahlecker, and the Wehrmacht was ordered not to get involved “in any conflicts between Lithuanians and Jews.” The Lietūkis Garage Massacre caused considerable outrage, with a large part of the Kaunas population condemning these events. They were discussed at a meeting of the Lithuanian Provisional Government, which was not particularly well disposed towards the Jews. At the meeting on June 27, Minister of Communal Economy Vytautas Landsbergis-Žemkalis informed the government about the unbelievably brutal torture of Jews at the Lietūkis garage in Kaunas. During the same session, the Provisional Government of Lithuania resolved:

Notwithstanding all of the measures that need to be taken against the Jews for their communist activities and damage to the German army, the partisans and the designated population are to avoid public executions of Jews. It has been learned that these actions were committed by people who have nothing to do with the Activist Headquarters, the Partisan Headquarters, or the Provisional Government of Lithuania.<sup>22</sup>

The pogroms staged by the Gestapo continued until June 29. According to Stahlecker’s statements, 3,800 Jews were massacred during these pogroms.<sup>23</sup> It is difficult to say whether these numbers are accurate, but no other data could be found about the number of Jews massacred in Kaunas on June 26–29, 1941.

After the wave of Gestapo-organized pogroms ended, regular shootings of Jews at the Kaunas forts began in July 1941. The TDA Battalion had a particularly significant role in these shootings. The TDA Battalion began to be formed on June 28, 1941. The authorization to form a Lithuanian battalion was given by the German field command the day before, on June 27. The news was sent to the Provisional Government of Lithuania, which received it “with joy” and decided to “support, finance, and – if there were possibilities – expand defense of this nature, particularly in the provinces.”<sup>24</sup> Kaunas military commandant Col. Jurgis Bobelis was tasked with putting this battalion together. On June 28, Bobelis issued Order No. 9 on the reorganization of former partisan detachments into a regular formation.<sup>25</sup> At its meeting on June 30, the Provisional Government of Lithuania listened to Bobelis’s report about the formation of the TDA Battalion and decided to “provide a 10-day advance for the

maintenance of the battalion, at the rate of 7,492 rubles per day.” At the same meeting, the government decided to approve the organization of a concentration camp for Jews and to put Bobelis and Vice-Minister of Communal Economy Vladas Švipas in charge.<sup>26</sup>

Col. Andrius Butkunas was appointed as the first commander of the TDA Battalion. It was primarily former members of the partisan forces and the Lithuanian Army who joined the battalion. The TDA Battalion was put together very quickly. By July 4, 1941, it had 724 non-commissioned officers and soldiers.<sup>27</sup>

At first, the TDA battalion only guarded military and economic facilities, but by the beginning of July 1941, it was already involved in the mass killing of Jews at the initiative of the SiPo and the SD. At the end of June 1941, Sonderkommando 1b commander SS-Oberführer Eric Ehrlinger began organizing regular arrests and shootings of Jews in Kaunas. The Seventh Fort was selected as the site for the first mass killing of Jews. In his July 1, 1941 report to the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA) in Berlin, Ehrlinger wrote that two companies reported to his Sonderkommando, one of which guarded the Jewish concentration camp set up at the Seventh Fort and carried out executions. On July 2, the functions of the SiPo in Kaunas were taken over from Ehrlinger by SS-Standartenführer Karl Jäger, commander of Einsatzkommando 3 under Einsatzgruppe A. By the time Ehrlinger left Kaunas, Sonderkommando 1b had already killed approximately 1,500 Jews.<sup>28</sup>

As per Jäger’s orders, 463 Jews were killed at the Seventh Fort on July 4, followed by 463 more on July 6.<sup>29</sup> A July 6, 1941 report of Einsatzgruppe A to the RSHA stated that approximately 1,500 Jews were being held at the Seventh Fort, and that there were plans to set up a camp for them at the Ninth Fort. In addition, there were 1,869 Jews, 214 Lithuanians, 134 Russians, one Latvian and 16 Poles being held at the Kaunas Central Prison.<sup>30</sup> A July 11, 1941 report of Einsatzkommando 3 informed the RSHA in Berlin that 7,800 Jews had been “liquidated” at that point.<sup>31</sup>

To prevent the Jews who had escaped from returning to Kaunas, the Nazi special-ops group arranged for the Lithuanian public police to guard Kaunas.<sup>32</sup> Jews who tried to return to Kaunas were arrested and taken to be shot at the Seventh Fort.

From the testimonies of convicted TDA Battalion soldiers to Soviet security, it can be concluded that the 1st and 3rd Companies of the TDA Battalion participated in the massacre of Jews at the Seventh Fort. The most frequent participants in later killings were members of the 3rd Company, under the command of Lieutenants Anatolijus Dagys, Juozas Barzda and Bronius Norkus. When extremely large extermination campaigns were carried out, almost the entire battalion participated in them, aside from soldiers who were performing other assignments.<sup>33</sup> The Jewish men who were imprisoned at the Seventh Fort in Žaliakalnis were held outside, while the women and girls were kept in the tunnels inside the fort. The prisoners were subject to constant mocking, beatings, hunger, and thirst. The young girls were often raped and

beaten. According to the testimonies of battalion soldiers who had taken part in the July 4 massacre, the Jews were killed in a ditch in the inner courtyard of the fort. The commands to shoot were given by Lt. Bronius Norkus and Jr. Lt. Juozas Obelenis, who also shot the Jews with pistols. The soldiers fired rifles. Other convicted soldiers have testified that German officers and TDA Lieutenants Juozas Barzda and Jurgis Skaržinskas also participated in the killing.<sup>34</sup> After the massacre ended, the corpses were buried by Soviet prisoners of war.

The 3rd Company of the TDA Battalion also took part in the mass killing of Jews at the Seventh Fort on July 6, 1941. The shooting was done in the valley next to the fort. This time, the Jews were shot with machine guns as well. Barzda, Dagys and Norkus were in charge of the shooting. Members of the German Gestapo participated in the massacre as well. The Jews were brought to the pits in groups of 20. Then TDA Battalion soldiers shot them in the back from just a few meters away.<sup>35</sup>

Secret Order No. 3 issued by the TDA Battalion commander on July 7, 1941 directed the Seventh Fort to be guarded by a Type-I watch consisting of 49 guards. The fort was to be guarded around the clock. In terms of the number of guards, it was the TDA Battalion's most guarded facility. At that same time, there were only eight people guarding the building of the Provisional Government of Lithuania (70 Laisvės Alėja).<sup>36</sup> According to the information available, the Seventh Fort was guarded by the battalion's 1st Company in early July. This company also participated in the killing of Jews at this fort.<sup>37</sup>

One of the massacres at the Seventh Fort took two days. That time, a group of 400–500 Jewish men was being shot. Lt. Juozas Barzda was in charge of the execution. Since the shooting was done in small groups, the massacre went on until nightfall. Then Barzda stopped the shooting and left part of the company's soldiers to guard the doomed for the night. The next day, several machine guns were brought to the scene of the massacre and the shooting resumed. This time, all of the Jewish men who had been taken to the Seventh Fort the night before were shot.<sup>38</sup> It should be noted that the testimonies of the accused often differ from the numbers of victims and dates of the massacres mentioned in the Jäger's infamous December 1, 1941 report. For example, the Jäger Report does not include any data about the campaign at the Seventh Fort that lasted two days. It can be assumed that the shootings at the Seventh Fort were more frequent than the Jäger Report indicates. On the other hand, the number of victims of several smaller campaigns may have been added to the number of those killed in a large campaign. This is especially true of the July 6, 1941 massacre, when 2,514 Jews were shot. Nowhere in the testimonies of witnesses is such a large number of Jews being killed at the Seventh Fort in one day mentioned. It is likely that this figure was obtained by adding together the number of persons killed in several smaller campaigns.

During one of the shootings at the Seventh Fort, the doomed tried to break through the guards and escape, but were unsuccessful. The Jews were shot in a ravine with slopes that were 10–15 meters high. The guards had enough time to shoot the unarmed people.<sup>39</sup> There is information that this act of resistance at the Seventh Fort was spontaneously initiated by Borris Chodosh, a doctor from Kaunas. However, he, like the others, was shot. On July 7, 1941, the Jewish women imprisoned in the dungeons of the Seventh Fort were transferred to the Ninth Fort and were soon released.<sup>40</sup>

Only a few Jews who were imprisoned at the Seventh Fort manage to escape death. Some did so by bribing the guards. At the request of lawyer Jakov Goldberg, Col. Jurgis Bobelis freed 30 Jews who had participated in the fight for Lithuania's independence. The former army volunteers were transferred to the prison on A. Mickevičiaus Street and were released two weeks later.<sup>41</sup> In her book, Dr. Ginaitė-Rubinson describes how Bobelis freed her sister's husband, Philip Benyaminovich. She claims that 70 Jewish men who were volunteers in the Lithuanian Army in 1918–1919 were released from the Seventh Fort.<sup>42</sup>

After the mass murder on July 6, 1941, Jewish extermination campaigns were only carried out at the Seventh Fort on a smaller scale. On July 9, 21 Jewish men and three Jewish women were killed there. One of the former TDA Battalion soldiers who served in the 3rd Company recalls that in mid-July, some of the company's soldiers, under the command of Lt. Bronius Norkus, took a group of Jewish men and women (about 30 people) from the prison on A. Mickevičiaus Street and brought them to the Seventh Fort. Another small group of Jews was brought to the fort by truck. A ditch about 10 meters long had been dug out inside the fort. The Jews were herded to the ditch and shot. The corpses were buried by the Jews who had been brought in from the prison, who were then returned to the prison. Judging from this testimony, this must have been the July 19 massacre, because the witness himself had only enlisted in the TDA Battalion on July 15.<sup>43</sup>

This was the last massacre at the Seventh Fort. That day, 26 people were shot at the fort: 17 Jewish men, two Jewish women, four male Lithuanian communists, two female Lithuanian communists, and one male German communist. Secret Order No. 4 issued by the TDA Battalion commander on July 14, 1941 notes that the fort was guarded by a total of 49 guards, but "in the absence of detainees, the composition of the guard shall be reduced to seven people at the discretion of the fort commandant."<sup>44</sup> In other words, once the Jews imprisoned at the Seventh Fort had all been murdered, the need to heavily guard the fort disappeared.

Before the mass killings, the soldiers in the TDA Battalion had never participated in similar campaigns. This had a negative effect on the mental health and morale of these soldiers. Unable to openly oppose the Nazis, many of them tried to leave the service or otherwise avoid participating in the massacres. On July 5–11, 1941,

117 soldiers were released from service in the battalion. On July 15–17, nine soldiers deserted from the 1st Company alone. Unable to endure the atrocities he experienced, commander of the 1st Company of the TDA Battalion Capt. Bronius Kirkila shot himself on July 12, 1941. 1st Company Deputy Battalion Commander Lt. Stepas Paulauskas and two unit commanders, Jr. Lt. Povilas Kulakauskas and Jr. Lt. Jonas Ralys, asked to be, and were, dismissed from service.<sup>45</sup> However, these forms of protest could not change the Nazi policy towards Jews. The TDA Battalion continued to be used to murder Jewish people.

The first campaign at the Kaunas Fourth Fort was carried out on August 2, 1941. A total of 209 people were shot that day: 170 Jewish men, 33 Jewish women, one Jewish American man, one Jewish American woman, and four Lithuanian communists.<sup>46</sup> The TDA Battalion soldiers, under the command of Lt. Juozas Barzda and Lt. Jurgis Skaržinskas, took the doomed from the prison on A. Mickevičiaus Street and herded them to the Fourth Fort. There were already some 10 German officers and soldiers waiting for them there. A ditch several meters long and several meters wide had been dug out between the slopes. The Jews were stripped down to their underwear and herded in groups to the ditch, where they were shot by several dozen TDA soldiers and Germans. Barzda gave the command to shoot. The other soldiers from the battalion guarded the scene of the massacre. The massacre lasted about two hours.<sup>47</sup>

On September 6, 1941, the Gestapo arrested 26 Jews who were caught buying food products on Panerių Street. These people were then shot by the highway. This massacre was ordered by the commandant of the ghetto, Fritz Jordan.<sup>48</sup>

Killing on a much larger scale took place at the Fourth Fort on August 9, 1941. That day, the entire 3rd Company went to the prison on A. Mickevičiaus Street. The prison guards ran 500–600 Jewish men and women out of the prison. The company was headed by Lt. Juozas Barzda and Lt. Anatolijus Dagys. Accompanied by guards, the Jews were herded to the Fourth Fort in Aukštoji Panemunė. Inside the fort, the men and women were separated. A German SS officer and several soldiers arrived at the fort in a passenger car. Several large pits had already been dug out in the fort by Soviet prisoners of war. Before the shooting, CSM Zigmas Arlauskas gave the soldiers a drink of vodka (which had been brought to the fort by the Germans). The women were shot first. They were herded in groups to a pit and shot in the back. Barzda, Dagys and the Germans shot the victims who were still alive in the pits with pistols to finish them off. After shooting the women, they started herding the Jewish men to the pits. The men were stripped down to their underwear, lined up at the edge of the pits and shot. After a group of Jews was shot, Soviet prisoners of war would cover them with a thin layer of dirt before the next group was brought over. The shooting began in the afternoon and lasted until the evening. Almost all of the

soldiers of the 3rd Company who were at the fort at that time were involved in the shooting. After the massacre, the corpses were buried by Soviet prisoners of war. According to the Jäger Report, 534 Jews were shot at the Fourth Fort on August 9, 1941: 484 men and 50 women.<sup>49</sup>

### **Mass Killings of Jews During the Existence of the Ghetto in 1941**

The establishment of the Kaunas Ghetto was completed on August 15, 1941. On August 18, 1941, the Jewish Council at the Kaunas Ghetto received an order from the commandant of the ghetto, Fritz Jordan, to gather men from the Jewish intelligentsia and send them to the ghetto gates. Mikas Kaminskas, who handled Jewish affairs in Kaunas Municipality, told the ghetto representatives that Jewish intellectuals were needed for work in the Kaunas city archives. Lured by this offer (due to the nature of the work and the better salary), 534 Jews gathered. All of them were taken to the Fourth Fort and shot on the same day.<sup>50</sup> Among those killed were violinist and Opera and Ballet Theater concertmaster Robertas Stenderis, the renowned film director Mareks Martens, who had come to Lithuania from Poland, painter A. Kaplan, journalist Maksas Volfovičius, and numerous doctors, engineers, attorneys at law and teachers.<sup>51</sup> Unfortunately, it was not possible to determine who exactly carried out this execution. It was probably the work of German Gestapo officers and the 3rd Company of the TDA Battalion, which had gained considerable experience in killing. According to the testimonies of convicted TDA Battalion soldiers, the battalion shot Jews several times at the Fourth Fort in August 1941. Until the end of August 1941, only the TDA Battalion operated in Kaunas. The 2nd Lithuanian Auxiliary Police Battalion was actually only formed at the end of August.

On September 17, 1941, the “Small Ghetto” was surrounded by groups of German and Lithuanian policemen. The inhabitants of the Small Ghetto were herded to Sajungos Square outside the ghetto. All of the patients and medical personnel in the surgery department at the ghetto hospital were among those taken away. Two extremely ill patients passed out and died. Dr. Alex Feinberg (who was the president of the Association of Kaunas Physicians before the war) and the children from the orphanage operating near the hospital were taken to the Ninth Fort. Personnel and patients from the ghetto infectious diseases hospital were ordered to remain where they were. The Jews who had been brought to the square were lined up in rows, and then the Germans began selection. Those who had Jewish craftsman certificates (which the Jews in the ghetto called “Jordan certificates”) were sent to the right, while the others were sent to the left. Armed guards were brought in to the hospital in trucks. Then a car drove up and Jordan stepped out. He handed an envelope to

SS-Hauptsturmführer Alfred Tormbaum, who was in charge of the campaign. After reading the letter, Tormbaum ordered the campaign to be stopped. The Jews who had been brought to the square were told to return to their apartments. Dr. Feinberg and the orphans were released from the Ninth Fort as well.<sup>52</sup> It is unclear why this campaign was revoked. Perhaps it was a rehearsal for future campaigns, to see if the Nazis could easily round up the Jews who were condemned to die. Or perhaps it was an attempt to get the Jews to let their guard down, by giving them reason to believe that these actions did not necessarily mean a massacre.

On September 26, 1941, German and Lithuanian policemen surrounded Ariogalos and Veliuonos Streets in the ghetto. The Jews were thrown out of their apartments and selection began. This time, “Jordan certificates” made no difference. The elderly, the sick, and women were selected as the first to die. The people who were arrested were taken to the Fourth Fort and shot. The official reason given for this was that the Jews had allegedly shot at a German police officer. According to the Jäger Report, 1,608 Jews were shot at the Fourth Fort (or, according to other sources – at the Ninth Fort) that day: 412 men, 615 women, and 581 children. That same day, an order was issued to lock up and seal the apartments of the Jews who had been taken away. A few days later, the Germans removed the victims’ furniture and other possessions from the ghetto.<sup>53</sup>

The massacres of Jews at the Ninth Fort began in October 1941. Executions were carried out here until the very end of the Hitler occupation. The first mass killing campaign was carried out at this location on October 4, 1941. However, preparations for the massacres at the Ninth Fort began much earlier. More than a month before the October 4 campaign, three Gestapo officers came to the Ninth Fort prison (with Gestapo officer Josef Stütz mentioned among them). They ordered the prison warden to clear the field next to the fort (it was sown with oats and peas). Then a few hundred Soviet prisoners of war were sent to the fort. They dug several long trenches over the course of a month.<sup>54</sup>

Somewhere around 6 a.m. on October 4, 1941, approximately 50 German policemen and 100 Lithuanian policemen arrived at the Small Ghetto. They blocked the entrance to the ghetto. Only a small group of people with “Jordan certificates” were allowed to leave the ghetto. The inhabitants of the Small Ghetto were herded to Sajungos Square outside the ghetto. The Jews with “Jordan certificates” were then taken to the “Large Ghetto”, and those without were taken to the Ninth Fort. All of the patients in the surgery and therapy department at the ghetto hospital were among those taken away. A total of 141 children and nannies were taken from the orphanage. Babies were kicked and thrown like sticks into a truck covered with a tarpaulin. The truck drove off in the direction of the Ninth Fort. From the ghetto infectious diseases hospital, 67 patients, doctors and healthy prisoners of the Small Ghetto who tried to hide there were taken away. The infectious diseases hospital was set on fire, with all the

equipment and documents inside.<sup>55</sup> The Jews brought to the Ninth Fort from the Small Ghetto were shot in trenches dug by prisoners of war. Almost the entire 3rd Company of the 1st Lithuanian Police Battalion (formerly the TDA) was involved in the shooting. Roughly 20 German soldiers also took part in the massacre. The Lithuanian self-defense unit soldiers were under the command of Lt. Bronius Norkus.<sup>56</sup> According to the Jäger Report, 1,845 Jews were shot on October 4, 1941: 315 men, 712 women, and 818 children.<sup>57</sup>

The largest massacre of Jews not only in Kaunas, but in all of Lithuania, was carried out at the Ninth Fort on October 29, 1941.

The attempts of the Council of Elders to get an explanation about the actual goals of the Gestapo at the Kaunas Department of Labor on October 25 were unsuccessful. After lengthy deliberations, discussions, and consultations with Chief Rabbi Avraham Shapira, the council decided to publish the notification required by the Gestapo. The notification was posted around the ghetto in Yiddish and German on October 27.<sup>58</sup> The residents of the ghetto were petrified. Barely anyone slept that night. Many of the Jews wept and read religious psalms.

In the early morning of October 28, all the residents of the ghetto were lined up in 10 columns in Demokratų Square, with the members of the ghetto's Council of Elders and their families in the first column, the ghetto policemen and their families in the second column, employees of the ghetto administration and their families in the third column, and workers and their families in the remaining columns. All of those chosen had to go through the selection of Fritz Jordan, Josef Stütz, Alfred Tornbau, Helmut Rauca and other members of the SS. Some were sent to the right (to die), while others were sent to the left (temporarily left to live). The Jews were confused, not knowing which direction was better. The Council of Elders and the Jewish Ghetto Police succeeded in transferring a few hundred people to the left. Large families and people who were physically weak and ill were selected to be killed first. Many families were separated. The doomed were taken to the territory of the Small Ghetto, and the next day they were herded to the Ninth Fort to be shot.<sup>59</sup>

Soldiers from the 1st Lithuanian Police Battalion also participated in the selection of ghetto prisoners. The battalion went to the ghetto in separate companies. Only those on duty remained in the battalion barracks, which were located in the police premises in Žaliakalnis. Each soldier in the battalion had 30-40 rounds of ammunition in their cartridge pouch. Lieutenants Anatolijus Dagys, Juozas Barzda and Bronius Norkus and Junior Lieutenant Norbertas Jakubauskas went together with the 3rd Company. Soldiers from other police battalions and German policemen were also sent to the ghetto. Most of the 1st Battalion soldiers stood guard around the ghetto, while others were on guard in Demokratų Square. Maj. Kazys Šimkus, who was the commander of the 1st Battalion, also came to the ghetto on October 28.



After selecting approximately 10,000 Jews to be shot, the 3rd Company of the 1st Battalion returned to the barracks.

The next morning (October 29), the 3rd Company went to the ghetto. Other companies of the 1st Battalion came as well. The officers of the 1st Battalion and part of the soldiers went from the ghetto to the Ninth Fort. The remaining soldiers in the battalion lined the Jews up in columns and herded them to the fort. Once they got there, the Jews were led to the western slope of the fort, where several trenches approximately 200 meters long, 3 meters wide and 2 meters deep had been dug out. Then, in groups of 100–150, the doomed were led to the ditches and thrown in. They were stripped down to their underwear before being shot. The battalion soldiers surrounded the trenches on three sides and, at the command of the officers, started shooting the people in the trenches. When one group was shot, prisoners of war covered the corpses with a layer of dirt, and then a new group of victims was brought in. Several dozen soldiers from the 3rd Company fired at once. Lieutenants Anatolijus Dagys, Bronius Norkus and Juozas Barzda, who had already distinguished themselves in campaigns like this, participated in the massacre. Some 20 German officers and soldiers also took part in the shooting. The German soldiers fired assault rifles, while the officers used pistols. The groups of shooters took turns.

It was already getting dark by the time the killing ended. After the massacre, the battalion soldiers went through the victims' belongings and picked out the better clothing and other items. The soldiers returned to the barracks in trucks. According to the Jäger Report, 9,200 Jews were shot at the Ninth Fort on October 29, 1941: 2,007 men, 2,920 women, and 4,273 children. The October 29 massacre was cynically described in the Jäger Report as “purging the ghetto of unnecessary Jews.” In the history of Lithuania, there has probably never been a massacre of such a scale, when close to 10,000 people – innocent civilians – were murdered in a single day. Only one person miraculously managed to escape from the scene of the massacre – an 11-year-old boy named Judelis Beilesas.<sup>60</sup> After the *Große Aktion* (the Kaunas massacre of October 29, 1941), there were roughly 17,000 people left in the ghetto. The tragedy touched almost every family. As Avraham Tory wrote: “There was an emptiness in every home in which a silent, paralyzing horror existed – that the same fate awaits you.” However, after the October 29, 1941 massacre, there were no more mass killings of Jews from the Kaunas Ghetto right up until March 26, 1944. However, in November and December 1941, Jews brought in from other German-occupied lands were killed at the Ninth Fort.

The so-called “period of stability” in the ghetto began after the mass killings in the autumn of 1941 and lasted until the end of March 1944. According to the Nazis, the ghetto had been purged of “unnecessary” Jews, that is, Jews who were unable to work and contribute to the German military cause. No massacres of the ghetto population

took place during this period.\* The Nazis strove to maximize the use of Jewish workers to meet the needs of the military and the occupant administration. The ghetto leadership believed that as long as the Germans were benefitting economically from the work of the ghetto prisoners, they would not liquidate the ghetto. For this reason, they tried to employ as many Jews as possible while increasing their productivity.

### The Establishment of the Ghetto

On July 7, 1941 (according to other sources – July 4, 1941), five prominent members of the Kaunas Jewish community were brought in to see the head of the SiPo and SD in Lithuania, Karl Jäger: lawyers Leyb Gorfinkel and Jakov Goldberg (former chairman of the board of the Union of Jewish Soldiers, who had been imprisoned with Gorfinkel in the same cell during the Soviet occupation), renowned gynecologist Dr. Efraim Rabinovitz, and Rabbis Schmuelis Aba Sniegas and Jokob Moshe Schmukler. As the meeting was breaking up, Jäger told the Jewish representatives that he could no longer allow chaos to rule the city and Jews to be murdered. Lithuanians supposedly no longer wanted to live with Jews, so it would be better for the Jews to move to the ghetto in Vilijampolė for their own good. The Jewish representatives tried to explain to him that 8,000 people lived in Vilijampolė, making it much too small for all of the 30,000 Jews in Kaunas. Nevertheless, Jäger appointed these Jewish representatives to the Jewish Committee, and instructed them handle the transfer of Jews to the ghetto. The Jewish Committee was also instructed prepare a transfer plan without delay, and was allowed to add new members to the committee. As a gesture of good will, Jäger promised to free all of the women and children who were imprisoned at the Seventh Fort and the Ninth Fort.<sup>61</sup>

The Jewish Committee wrote a memorandum to the self-government of the city of Kaunas on July 10, explaining the problems and inconveniences that would arise from concentrating all of the city's Jews in Vilijampolė. The Jewish Committee asked the self-government authorities not to relocate Jews living in the suburbs to Vilijampolė, but to expand the borders of the planned ghetto to include the Kaunas Old Town all the way to E. Ožeškienės, I. Kanto and Telšių Streets. Jewish commercial, cultural, and community life were concentrated in the Kaunas Old Town, where there were also many important medical, educational, and commercial institutions, as well as synagogues. However, the memorandum was ignored.<sup>62</sup>

\* One exception – the February 4, 1943 campaign, when the Germans, avenging the defeat at Stalingrad, arrested and shot 44 Jews at the Ninth Fort: 17 children and 27 adults (see A. Tory, *Ghetto of Kaunas*, pp. 193–195; A. Файтельсон, *Непокорившиеся*, Tel Aviv, 2001, p. 200).

On July 10, 1941, Kaunas military commandant Jurgis Bobelis and mayor Kazys Palčiauskas issued an order regarding the transfer of Jews to the ghetto that was in the process of being established in Vilijampolė. Jews had to be relocated to the ghetto within one month – between July 15 and August 15. The officers of the Kaunas Military Command and the Kaunas Police were tasked with supervising the relocation process. Those who did not move within the specified time frame would be arrested. Jews who had fled from Kaunas were prohibited from returning to the city. As of July 12, all Jews living in Kaunas, regardless of their gender or age, were to wear a yellow star 8-10 centimeters wide on the left side of their chest. Jews were only allowed to walk on the street and be in public places between 6 a.m. and 8 p.m.

Jews being relocated to Vilijampolė were only allowed to bring their professional tools and the belongings they needed for their new living conditions. The remainder of their property was to be relinquished to the Kaunas City Municipality. The boundaries of the ghetto were to run to Veliuonos, K. Naujalio, Dvaro, Kelmės, Goštautų, A. Stulginskio, Linkuvos, Kaltinėnų, and Kuršėnų Streets. The Neris River served as the boundary on the southeast side.<sup>63</sup>

The relocation of the Jews to Vilijampolė was managed by a special committee headed by Dr. Grigori Wolfas. Transportation and finance divisions were organized, as well as a secretariat. The committee initially worked at the Kaunas Town Hall, but a week later it moved to the premises of the elementary school at 24 M. Daukšos Street. A relocation (evacuation) plan was put together. Relocation was to begin with the Jews living in the Old Town and in the vicinity of the train station. The orderly resettlement was hindered not only by the lack of means of transportation and funds, but also by the mass looting of Jewish apartments by the occupying authorities and private individuals, with the Jewish owners simply being driven out onto the street. The victims turned to the committee for help. Unbearable living conditions were created for the Jews. Food products for some 30,000 Jews were sold in only three stores. For that reason alone, the Jews themselves were rushing to move to the ghetto.<sup>64</sup> By September 1, 1941, about 90 percent of the city's Jews had been relocated.

At the end of July, the German military government was replaced by the German civil administration. SA-Oberführer Hans Cramer was appointed as commissar of the city of Kaunas. From the end of July 1941 until the autumn of 1943, all issues regarding the ghetto administration, Jewish property, and the use of Jewish manpower were in Cramer's hands. Cramer appointed personal rapporteur and head of the Main Department II policy division (German: *Hauptabteilung (HA) II Politik*) as manager of ghetto affairs. Jordan worked closely with Wiedmann, who was chief of the city commissariat's economic department (this office managed matters concerning confiscated Jewish property).<sup>65</sup> Prior to Cramer's arrival, communications between the Jewish community and the Kaunas authorities were maintained through municipal

official Mikas Kaminskas. As Avraham Tory wrote in his diary, Kaminskas talked to the Jewish representatives in severe “orders and decrees” and in a demonstratively cold voice.<sup>66</sup> When the Nazi civil authorities arrived, they took matters of managing the Jews into their own hands. Some of the anti-Semitic ordinances that had been issued previously by the Lithuanian administration were reprinted. On July 28, 1941, Cramer signed Order No. 1, which barred Jews from using sidewalks, recreational areas, parks, and squares. They were also prohibited from using means of public transportation – taxis, buses, steamboats, and so on. There were severe penalties for not following the rules.<sup>67</sup>

On July 31, 1941, Cramer signed Public Notice No. 2 (German: *Öffentliche Bekanntmachung*). This notice once again banned Jews who had fled Kaunas from returning to the city, and property owners and managers from taking Jews who had returned under their roof. It also repeated that the Jews must move to Viliampolė by August 15, and that they were prohibited from selling, exchanging, or otherwise disposing of their movable and immovable property in any way.<sup>68</sup>

In the second half of July, the Jewish Committee received instructions from the mayor of Kaunas to select the “Head Jew” (German: *Oberjude*) and his deputy, who, together with their advisers, would form the Council of Elders (German: *Ältestenrat*). This council would be responsible for management of the ghetto’s internal affairs. The Council of Elders (previously called the Jewish Committee) also had to appoint a ghetto police chief. On August 4, the last meeting of the Jewish community was held at the Jewish primary school at 24 M. Daukšos Street, with 28 community members present. The meeting was held to elect the Council of Elders and its chairman. Understanding the dire situation and the enormous responsibility, no one wanted to take on the difficult duties and become the proverbial scapegoat for the future misfortunes and hardships of the Jews. A mood of hopelessness and confusion prevailed during the meeting. After emotional speeches and pleadings, Dr. Elchanan Elkes agreed to serve as chairman of the Council of Elders. During the period of Lithuania’s independence, Elkes had been the chief of the Department of Internal Medicine at the Jewish hospital and also had a private practice. He knew his profession well and was a very educated and honest individual, but had little experience in public affairs.<sup>69</sup> The Council of Elders was also elected, with some of the members of the former Jewish Committee becoming members. Leyb Gorfinkel was elected as Elkes’s deputy, and Jakov Goldberg, Rabbi Schmuëlis Aba Sniegas, insurance company director Mikhail Kopelman, and Dr. Efraim Rabinovitz were elected as members. Attorney Israel Bernstein became the secretary (with Avraham Golub replacing him as of July 5, 1942). Later, there were only insignificant changes to the council’s membership.

The structure of the Council of Elders was confirmed by Cramer on August 18, 1941.<sup>70</sup> The majority of the members of the Council of Elders had previously participated in the activities of various Zionist parties and other organizations. According to the regulations of the Vilijampolė Jewish Ghetto Community, the Council of Elders was obligated to manage all ghetto matters: housing, food, health care, education, public order, employment, and so on. The council had the right to impose taxes, levies, and obligations on ghetto residents and businesses. The Council of Elders was required to hold meetings at least once a week. The chairman of the council had the right to appoint or dismiss the employees of any ghetto institution, and to punish residents with monetary fines and obligations in kind for non-compliance with the council's resolutions and orders. The council also approved the budget.<sup>71</sup>

The council began creating branches of the ghetto's internal administration and the Jewish Ghetto Police. The leaders of various branches of the ghetto administration were appointed in the first orders of the Council of Elders. Moisei Ozinski was appointed head of the Food Department, while Nikolai Gemelitzki was named head of the Department of Economic Affairs, Benjamin Sacharin – head of the Department of Health, Chaim Kagan – head of the Department of Statistics, Leo Ritt – head of the Technical Department, Lazar Frenkel – head of the Department of Labor, Volf Lurie – head of the Department of Justice, and David Itzikovitz – head of the Department of Housing.<sup>72</sup> The lists of personnel of the various departments was also confirmed at meetings of the Council of Elders. In establishing the administrative system, the Council issued work regulations for the officials of the institutions subordinate to it. Employees could be penalized for misconduct through warnings, reprimands, or termination.<sup>73</sup>

On August 15, 1941, the ghetto was fenced in completely with barbed wire on and separated from the outside world. Some 12,000 people lived in the area prior to the establishment of the ghetto. Then, almost 30,000 people had to fit in the same space. Each resident received six square meters of living space (or 3.5 square meters of usable space). In reality, this allotment was much smaller because only part of the Vilijampolė district was assigned to the ghetto. The ghetto occupied a territory that was about two kilometers long and one kilometer wide. It was divided into the Large Ghetto and the Small Ghetto, which were connected by the bridge over Panerių Street. There were roughly 350 buildings within the ghetto's territory. The Vilijampolė district was already disorderly and dirty prior to the ghetto's establishment – there was no water supply, sewerage, disinfection facilities, saunas, or outpatient clinics. Such unsanitary conditions put the ghetto at risk for epidemics. The ghetto was guarded by Lithuanian and German policemen. Police posts were deployed every 100–200 meters. The chief (commandant) of security was initially Will Kozlowski. The commandant's office was located outside the ghetto, on Veliuonos Street.<sup>74</sup>

Jewish life in the ghetto was continuously restricted by various German prohibitions and requirements. It was prohibited to leave the ghetto without permission, bring food into the ghetto, and trade food products within the ghetto. It was strictly forbidden to leave the workplace, associate with non-Jews and prisoners of war, buy and read newspapers, listen to radio broadcasts or possess a radio, send or receive letters, give birth, and so on. The lack of food was a particularly acute problem in the first period of the ghetto's existence. The food rations set by the Germans were delivered to the ghetto administration, which distributed them to the ghetto residents. A weekly ration for one individual consisted of 700 grams of bread, 125 grams of flour, 125 grams of meat (mostly frozen horse meat), and a substitute for coffee or tea. Despite the very strict prohibitions and controls imposed by the occupation authorities, the inhabitants of the ghetto constantly took risks and brought food products they had bought in the city into the ghetto, and trade expanded inside the ghetto as well as along the ghetto fences.<sup>75</sup>

### **The Internal Administration Ghetto (“Self-Government”)**

In the autumn of 1941, a broad and branched administrative system was established in the ghetto, headed by the Council of Elders. This system operated until April 4, 1944, at which point it was dissolved and Elkes was appointed Head Jew. However, Elkes's actual power was greatly diminished after the dismissal of the Council of Elders.<sup>76</sup>

On August 4, 1942, the Council of Elders distributed a circular about the mandatory issuance of a ghetto passport. As of August 5, every ghetto resident had to have a personal identification certificate – a ghetto passport, which had to include the person's surname, first name, father's name, date of birth or age, and address. The circular was sent to all of the departments of the Council of Elders. The list of recipients shows that the ghetto administration consisted of nine departments at that time: the Food Department, the Department of Labor, the Department of Social Welfare, the Department of Health, the Police, the Department of Registration, the Department of Housing, the Department of Economic Affairs, and Department of Education.<sup>77</sup> Ghetto life saw significant changes in August 1942. The German government approved the new composition of the Council of Elders (chairman – Elchanan Elkes, deputy chairman – Leyb Gorfinkel, member – Jakov Goldberg, secretary – Avraham Golub). The Council of Elders was tasked with executing the orders of the representatives of the city commissariat and cooperating with the SD's Jewish representative, Binjamin Lipcer.<sup>78</sup> Decrees issued by the city's commissar regulated food rationing for the Jews

and strictly prohibited bringing food products into the ghetto. The supply of food, fuel, and goods to the ghetto was completely in the hands of the Kaunas City Commissariat. Monetary transactions were totally prohibited in the ghetto. The Council of Elders' treasury was confiscated by the German authorities. The ghetto administration was prohibited from collecting taxes, imposing levies, paying wages, etc. Food and social services were to be provided to the ghetto residents free of charge. The occupation authorities forbade Jews to perform religious ceremonies. Orders were issued by the commissariat that reduced the number of ghetto establishments and employees.<sup>79</sup>

Next, we will look at the activities of various departments of the ghetto self-government.

The **Department of Labor** was probably the most important administrative division in the ghetto. The survival of the ghetto depended on the efficient use of Jewish labor. A labor bureau was established even before the establishment of the ghetto (late July 1941). In the first week of the Nazi occupation, all Jews were fired from their jobs, leaving them unemployed and without a source of livelihood. The so-called "partisans" and policemen would simply catch Jews on the streets and force them to do various types of hard physical labor. In order to regulate the chaotic and disorderly use of Jews for hard labor, the Jewish Committee established a labor bureau and asked the occupation authorities to send orders for Jewish manpower to this office. The situation improved. Jews working in German institutions received workers' certificates, which provided some protection against arrest and forced mobilization for various jobs. The labor bureau moved to Vilijampolė on July 25, 1941.<sup>80</sup>

During the ghetto's existence, the Department of Labor was headed by lawyer Jakov Goldberg, who was a member of the Council of Elders.\* Initially, the most important job that required Jewish manpower was the Aleksotas airfield. On September 10, 1941, an order was received from the Germans to deliver 500 Jewish workers to the airfield for the night shift. Remembering the August 18, 1941 "intelligentsia campaign," the Jews were afraid to register, because they thought that they, too, would be shot. The Jewish Ghetto Police only managed to round up about 200 men by force. Everyone anxiously waited for the next day to come, but the men returned from the airfield safe and sound. This encouraged the Jews to register for work more actively, leaving the Jewish Ghetto Police with less work to do. The Council of Elders urged the workers to perform their duties conscientiously, as the fate of the entire ghetto could depend on it.

Work at the airfield was very difficult – the workers worked outside digging and loading and unloading railway wagons. They also had to endure bullying and beating by guards. The workers had to walk 16 kilometers round trip. It was easier for the Jewish

\* Goldberg held this position until June 24, 1943. He was replaced by Herman Frenkel, who was previously the head of the Food Department.

brigades working in the city. The Jews working there had an opportunity to buy food from peasants (for money or in exchange for clothes, etc.). Jewish craftsmen were the first to be hired for various jobs in the city.<sup>81</sup>

On August 15, 1941, Fritz Jordan gave the Council of Elders 5,000 work permits. They were to be distributed to Jewish craftsmen and 11 physicians. One permit was to be allocated per family. No permits were issued to other specialists. This meant that the Germans did not need them and that they should be annihilated.<sup>82</sup>

On October 1, 1941, Jordan demanded that 1,000 workers be provided for both day and night shifts at the airfield. The Council of Elders decided that all men between the ages of 17 and 55 had to work at the airfield. Three shifts were established, which had to take turns around the clock. The Jewish Ghetto Police were in charge of making sure that the necessary number of workers was provided. On November 8, the Department of Labor issued white armbands that were stamped by the Germans to the Jewish airfield workers, as there were many Jews avoiding hard labor at the airfield.

The Council of Elders made a special appeal to the residents of the ghetto, reminding them to perform their duties conscientiously, as the fate of the entire ghetto could depend on it. The demand for Jewish manpower continued to increase. Because of the mass extermination of Jews in the provinces and the high mortality among Soviet prisoners of war, the occupying government began to experience a shortage of labor by the autumn of 1941. The shortage forced them to employ more and more Jews from the Kaunas Ghetto.<sup>83</sup>

After the *Große Aktion* (the Kaunas massacre of October 29, 1941) the ghetto's Department of Labor ruled that women between the ages of 17 and 45 – with the exception of mothers raising children under the age of eight – were required to work at the airfield. However, it was very difficult for the Jewish Ghetto Police to round up the required number of workers. The Department of Labor provided the Jews working at the airfield with food rations and daily remuneration (10 rubles for men and 5 rubles for women).<sup>84</sup>

An important role in the structure of the Department of Labor was played by the labor recruitment (mobilization) division. This division was headed by Pavel Margolis, who had considerable influence on the ghetto administration. The ghetto was divided into districts, and a labor inspector was assigned to each district. The inspectors, who were subordinate to Margolis, were responsible for the formation of labor brigades, compiling lists of workers, and imposing penalties for transgressions in work discipline. Margolis maintained a good work relationship with Gustav Hoermann, who was the head of the employment office (German: *Arbeitsamt*) that had been established in the ghetto by the Germans. Hoermann allowed Margolis



to terminate people from their jobs, transfer them to a better brigade, and arrest transgressors.<sup>85</sup>

The Department of Labor made great efforts to introduce order and control within the work brigades. Numbered cards were issued to all of the workers in the brigades. Each brigade had its own number. This was a way to prevent the arbitrary transfer of workers from one brigade to another. Men were required to work every day, with the exception of the sick, who were inspected by a special commission of the Department of Labor. Women had to work every other day. Brigade leaders had to report to the Department of Labor about the individuals who worked each day. Absentees were placed on special lists, which were sent to district labor inspectors. Individuals who avoided work without reason were put in the ghetto prison for 24 hours and were immediately sent back to work after completing their sentence.<sup>86</sup>

On December 5, 1941, city commissar Hans Cramer ordered the Council of Elders to establish workshops and a laundry in the ghetto. By January 1942, the workshops were already operating and expanding rapidly. The men's clothing workshop, where 55 people worked repairing military uniforms, was one of the first to be launched. The linens workshop, which fulfilled orders from the army and the police, also started working at the same time. A brush workshop that produced shoe cleaning brushes, paint brushes, and brooms was also opened. The laundry began working in February and laundered 600 pieces of underwear per day. The shoemaker workshop opened in March. In addition to these, the ghetto opened a soap and candle making workshop, a wool combing workshop, a sock workshop, a toy making workshop, a cabinet-making workshop, a leather workshop, a tinsmithing workshop (which repaired small military bowls), and a maintenance detail in the beginning of 1942. By the end of April, there was a total of 14 workshops employing 400 workers (half of them were women). The workers used materials provided by the customers. Each worker earned 0.71 DM per day (February 1942). The workshops were headed by an administration of five individuals appointed by the Council of Elders, which, in turn, was chaired by Nikolai Gemelitzki, the head of the Department of Economic Affairs. The workshop administration was accountable to the Council of Elders.<sup>87</sup> The ghetto workshops expanded rapidly and employed roughly 1,400 men and women by 1943. Another 2,000 Jews worked in brigades outside the ghetto. A February 1943 SiPo and SD report stated that 9,600 Jews in the Kaunas Ghetto were working in 140 locations every day. The majority did jobs required by the Wehrmacht and fulfilled orders from the military. Due to the hard labor, lack of food, and diseases, about 50 Jews died per day in the Kaunas Ghetto.<sup>88</sup>

In summer of 1942, labor camps were established in the vicinity of Kaunas for brigades working outside the ghetto. People working at these camps did not have to return to the ghetto every day. There were labor camps like this in Jonava (about 100 people),

Palemonas (about 100 people), Kėdainiai (250–300 people), Kaišiadorys (300 people), and Babtai (about 1,500 people). In 1943, more than 60 percent of the Jews imprisoned in the Kaunas Ghetto were doing the work necessary for the German war economy.<sup>89</sup>

In his report for the month of August 1943, the commander of the SiPo and SD stated that after the SD took over the Kaunas Ghetto, the number of work details was reduced from 93 to 44. Eight concentration camps were planned, with 2,500 Jews in the Aleksotas barracks, 1,200 in Ežerėliai, 1,200 in the Šančiai artillery barracks, 600 in the military parking lot in Petrašiūnai, 500 in Palemonas, 500 in the Kaunas rubber factory, 400 in Marijampolė, 400 in Kaišiadorys, and 2,000 in the Kaunas Ghetto.<sup>90</sup>

Jews from the Kaunas Ghetto were also sent to do jobs outside of Lithuania. On February 5–6, 1942, the Germans demanded that 500 men be rounded up to work in the Riga (Latvia) Ghetto. Although they promised to bring them back to Kaunas within three months, no one wanted to be separated from their families, as they feared that this might be another German provocation. With the help of the Jewish Ghetto Police, the Third Department of the German Police under the command of SS-Hauptsturmführer Alfred Tornbaum managed to seize about 200 men on the first day. An additional 300 people were captured the next day. Then the men were herded to the railway station and put on a train to Riga. According to other documents, 380 Jews were deported to Riga, including 140 women. These Jews were not returned to Kaunas. Of the Jews who were taken to Riga, only about 20 lived to see the end of the war.<sup>91</sup> The Council of Elders (represented by secretary Avraham Tory) and the Department of Labor (Volf Lurie) were also involved in rounding up workers – they participated in the selection of Jews to be sent to Riga.<sup>92</sup>

On October 23, 1942, another 369 Jews were sent to Riga from the Kaunas Ghetto. The deportees were allowed to take their belonging and families with them. The Jewish Ghetto Police captured the Jews who were to be deported. These Jews were then held in the ghetto prison before being taken away. The mood in the ghetto was very despondent after this, as the residents did not know if they would ever return to Kaunas or what fate awaited them.<sup>93</sup>

On October 26, 1943, the Germans ordered Jewish workers to be rounded up for deportation to Estonia. The people who were slated to be deported (the majority of whom were elderly, incapacitated, or sick) received a summons from the Council of Elders, but none of them came at the appointed time. German and Lithuanian policemen were then called in to take the people by force. Different sources estimate that 2,700–3,000 Jews were deported to Estonia in all. Some of those arrested (approximately 750) were taken to Auschwitz.<sup>94</sup>

**The Department of Health.** During the entire existence of the ghetto (from August 1941 to mid-July 1944), this department was headed by the renowned surgeon, Dr. Benjamin Sacharin. The Department of Health ran the ghetto hospital, a secret

infectious diseases hospital, a children's clinic, and a secret home for the elderly and disabled. Some 25–30 physicians worked for the Department of Health. The labor bureau and ghetto workshops had their own physicians who were not subordinate to the Department of Health. Sacharin was not only the head of the Department of Health – he also worked as a surgeon and operated nearly every day.<sup>95</sup> The surgical hospital and the infectious diseases hospital were located in the Small Ghetto prior to its liquidation on October 4, 1941. During the liquidation campaign, the infectious diseases hospital was burned to the ground, together with its patients, medical personnel, and expensive equipment. The head of the infectious diseases hospital, Dr. Moishe Braun, only escaped death by accident.<sup>96</sup> After the liquidation of the Small Ghetto, a new system for supervising health institutions had to be built. The ghetto doctors had to be extremely vigilant in concealing cases of infectious diseases, because their discovery could pose a serious threat to the existence of the entire ghetto. On October 15, 1942, a commission of Lithuanian physicians examined the sanitary conditions in the ghetto. They were particularly interested in whether the ghetto was truly free of infectious diseases, since the ghetto doctors had not reported any cases to the Department of Health. Any Jews who were ill were treated in secret by Dr. Braun. The unsanitary living conditions of the ghetto prisoners were very conducive to the emergence and spread of infectious diseases. The ghetto administration made all efforts to maintain cleanliness and hygiene in the ghetto. A public bathhouse was opened in the ghetto on April 22, 1942. There were 29 Jews in the ghetto with spotted typhus when the Lithuanian doctors visited. The patients stayed in their apartments and were treated by their families and physicians. The commission did not find any ill patients. Braun treated 70 typhus patients. Even without sufficient medication, only three patients (4.3 percent) died. There were cases of other infectious diseases (dysentery, intestinal typhus, hepatitis A) in the ghetto, but all these diseases were successfully treated and did not spread. The occupation authorities never found out about them.<sup>97</sup>

Children aged 1–4 were housed in a special ward in the hospital. Orphans were cared for by Department of Health staff supervised by Dr. Benjamin Sacharin. The Department of Social Welfare staff also looked after them (by providing food for them and hiring nannies). Since the orphans received care from the heads of two departments (Dr. Sacharin and Dr. Eliahu Segal), there were disputes regarding responsibility.<sup>98</sup> The activities of the Department of Health were reflected in their monthly reports. For instance, in June 1942, ghetto physicians treated 9,187 people in their outpatient clinics.<sup>99</sup> In July 1943, 82 patients were treated in the ghetto hospital, and ghetto physicians performed 82 operations, including 55 abortions (women in the ghetto were prohibited from giving birth); the Department of Health's Sanitation Section inspected 342 apartments and disinfected 19 of them, and 2,153 people bathed in the bathhouse. However, the physicians could not always help seriously ill patients. In September 1942, 15 patients died.<sup>100</sup>

The **Food Department**. When the Food Department was established, Moisei Ozinski was appointed department head, with Syoma Arlyuk and Joseph Burstein as his deputies. Shmuel Kagan Rapoport replaced Ozinski as department head on July 5, 1942.<sup>101</sup> According to the list of personnel approved by the Council of Elders, the department had 11 employees.<sup>102</sup> It was the job of the Food Department to arrange the supply and distribution of food products to the residents of the ghetto. The department managed the ghetto grocery stores and warehouses. The problem of nutrition was always a pressing one, but it was especially acute in the first weeks of the ghetto's existence. On August 8, 1941, the department sent a letter to the Nutrition Board describing the poor conditions in the ghetto and the increasing mortality among ghetto children due to food shortages.<sup>103</sup> As more and more Jews began working outside of the ghetto, they had an opportunity to exchange various items for food and smuggle it into the ghetto. Even though it was strictly prohibited, intense trade with Lithuanians was also established along the ghetto fence, which helped alleviate the food shortage problem somewhat.

The **Department of Housing**. When the Department of Housing was established, David Itzikovitz was appointed department head, with Naum (Nachum) Girshovich as his deputy. Former Department of Labor adviser for city brigades Pesakh Meshkutz was named head of the Department of Housing on March 17, 1942.<sup>104</sup> The Department of Housing initially had 58 employees, but there were only five left by 1942.<sup>105</sup> Availability of living space was a serious problem in the first months of the ghetto's existence, when almost 30,000 people were crammed into the relatively small space. The housing problem was resolved after the mass killings in the autumn of 1941. The number of department staff was reduced in line with the reduced workload. In July 1942, the department carried out an audit of the apartments in the second quarter of the ghetto, and found that on average, one ghetto resident was allocated 2.67 square meters of living space. An evaluation of the housing conditions concluded that 22.5 percent were good, 44 percent were average, and 33.5 percent were poor.<sup>106</sup> Frequent reductions in the ghetto territory resulted in many problems for the department's employees, as they had to find new housing for the people who were being displaced. In September 1942, the Germans demanded that 1,700 Jews be moved out of the Demokratų Street district. They were moved into apartments that were already occupied, which reduced the average living space per ghetto resident to 2.25 square meters.<sup>107</sup>

The **Department of Economic Affairs** was established on September 11, 1941 to replace the Department of Finance, which had been abolished. Nikolai Gemelitzki was named head of the department, but was quickly replaced by Mark Potrukh.<sup>108</sup> At that time, the department was composed of the transportation, energy (electricity), artisans, and horticulture divisions, as well as the maintenance workshops and bathhouses. In June 1942, all economics and resident service institutions were

merged into the Department of Economic Affairs. The pharmacy, tailoring workshop, and new laundry were also incorporated into this department.<sup>109</sup> The activities of the Department of Economic Affairs expanded continually as it handled all of the residents' needs. New workshops were established, and the horticulture division was expanded. In July 1942, 159 ghetto residents were planting, weeding, and fertilizing vegetables. A special group was created to guard the fields. The majority of the harvest was allotted to the ghetto hospital and to workers performing hard labor.<sup>110</sup>

The **Department of Social Welfare** was established on March 17, 1942. Dr. Eliahu Segal was appointed as the department head, but also continued working as head of the first ghetto outpatient clinic.<sup>111</sup> One of the department's most important institutions was the public cafeteria that fed the ghetto's poorest residents. In July 1941, the cafeteria distributed 13,229 lunches free of charge, and an additional 10,000 lunches were sold at a reduced price. On average, the cafeteria prepared 780 meals per day. The expansion of the cafeteria's operations was limited by the scarcity of food products.<sup>112</sup> The Department of Social Welfare provided ghetto residents with food, as well as clothing, firewood, and similar items. In July 1942, the department's employees distributed 792 pieces of clothing, 21 cubic meters of firewood, 180 kilograms of coal, and 280 kilograms of bread. The department also established its own bakery, where residents were allowed to bake bread under favorable conditions.<sup>113</sup>

The **Department of Education** was established on November 25, 1941. It was originally called the Department of Culture and Education. The Council of Elders, in cooperation with the department, decided to establish a school for children aged 7–14 on Ramygalos Street. Only religious subjects were to be taught at the school on Saturdays.<sup>114</sup> Dr. Nachman Shapiro was appointed director, with Chaja Sniegiene as secretary; 12 people were hired as teachers.<sup>115</sup> At the beginning of July 1942, the ghetto's administrative system was cut back by order of the Nazi government, which led to the closure of two schools along with other institutions.<sup>116</sup> The occupation authorities, seeing the benefits of the ghetto workshops, allowed the establishment of vocational courses and trade schools. Courses for masonry, carpentry, blacksmithing, plumbing, and other professions began being held in the ghetto.<sup>117</sup> In October 1942, there were 79 individuals studying locksmithing and carpentry at the school.<sup>118</sup>

The **Department of Registration**. It is not known exactly when this department was established. In January 1942, the ghetto administration had a population movement and control office, which consisted of a vital statistics division and an address bureau.<sup>119</sup> This office was basically responsible for population registration and statistics. On July 5, 1942, journalist Rudolf Valsonok was appointed head of the Department of Registration.<sup>120</sup> That same month, at the request of the Germans, the department compiled a list of all ghetto residents. Department employees distributed various certificates to the administration and the residents and prepared statistics and summaries.<sup>121</sup> For example, the address bureau provided ghetto offices with 2,019

reports, and private individuals with 265 reports. That same month, the vital statistics division registered 18 marriages, three births, and 25 deaths in the ghetto.<sup>122</sup>

Other institutions (judicial, technical, and financial) also existed for some time in the administration of the ghetto, but were either abolished or incorporated into other departments, and therefore did not leave any footprints in the history of the ghetto.

**The Jewish Ghetto Police.** On August 6, 1941, the Council of Elders decided to establish a ghetto police force to maintain order in the ghetto. The registration of volunteers began on August 10. The Council of Elders appointed Mikhail Kopelman (who was also a member of the Council of Elders) as the chief of the Jewish Ghetto Police, and Capt. Mikhail Bramson as his deputy. Physically strong, healthy men who had served in the army were the first to be accepted into the police. The Jewish Ghetto Police began operating on August 15, 1941. Initially, only 60 men served in the Jewish Ghetto Police.<sup>123</sup> Over time, it grew into a large, well-organized, disciplined, and structured department. The ghetto was divided into four police districts (precincts). The chiefs of the precincts at various times were Kopel Gudinski (who held this position until mid-1943), Chaim Rubinson (who was the chief of the Small Ghetto precinct until its liquidation on October 4, 1941), David Tamshe, Yehoshua (Ika) Grinberg (chief of the 1st Precinct, who was shot on March 26, 1944 at the Ninth Fort),\* and Josif Panemunski (who was shot on October 4, 1944 at the Ninth Fort). The ghetto's criminal police were headed by Mikhail Bramson, while the ghetto gate guard was headed by Lev Aronovski (who was shot on March 26, 1944 at the Ninth Fort).

Moisei Levin (who was shot on October 4, 1944 at the Ninth Fort) served as head of the Criminal Department of the Jewish Ghetto Police for some time as well. There were 15-20 senior police officers.<sup>124</sup>

On September 1, 1941, there were 172 people serving on the Jewish Ghetto Police; later, the number of policemen increased to 220-230. According to January 1, 1942 data, the Jewish Ghetto Police staff breakdown was as follows:

- a) active service and command – 158 people;
- b) interrogators, information service employees and prosecutors – 10 people;
- c) office workers – 10 people;
- d) medical personnel – 3 people;
- e) address office – 9 people;
- f) couriers – 6 people;
- g) other – 10 people;

Total – 208 people.<sup>125</sup>

\*According to other sources, the ghetto policemen were shot at the Ninth Fort on March 27, 1944.

There were changes in the police command as well. On December 1, 1941, former chief of the 3rd Precinct Yehuda Zupovitz was appointed as the new deputy to the chief of the Jewish Ghetto Police, Mikhail Kopelman (a position he held until late June 1942, at which point this position was taken over by the former judge of the ghetto court, Yakov Abramovich, and Zupovitz was appointed police inspector), while Ika Grinberg was named police inspector and Abraham Shulman was made head of the office.<sup>126</sup> The new police command undertook work and reforms with resolve.

In December 1941, the Jewish Ghetto Police statute was adopted, ranks and insignia were put in place, and a prison was established. The precinct chiefs and the inspector had the right to use physical means of enforcement on unruly ghetto residents; they could also punish them with fines (up to 100 rb) or up to seven days in jail.<sup>127</sup>

The elderly, physically weak, and other persons unfit for this service were dismissed from the police force. Many young and energetic people were recruited. The ghetto's criminal police were established in December 1941. It originally had 17 policemen (chief Mikhail Bramson, deputy Peretz Padison).<sup>128</sup>

One of the functions of the Jewish Ghetto Police was to prevent ghetto residents from leaving the ghetto illegally. The ghetto policemen on duty reported cases like these to their superiors on an almost daily basis. The latter would then report this to the chairman of the Council of Elders. On January 25, 1942, the police chief on duty informed the chairman of the Council of Elders that on January 22, the German ghetto guard had brought a boy to the 3rd Precinct – 13-year-old Henry Wolfson, who had tried to leave the ghetto. “According to my Criminal Ruling No 122,” wrote the policeman on duty, “Citizen Wolfson was sentenced to three days of arrest.”<sup>129</sup>

On February 8, 1942, the ghetto policeman on duty forwarded a list of 15 residents who had escaped to the chief of the 1st Precinct and ordered him “to immediately take measures and put them in prison.”<sup>130</sup>

The Jewish Ghetto Police also provided daily updates on events related to the ghetto and its residents. On June 15, 1942, the policeman on duty reported that a German guard had shot 50-year-old Moisei Rozenberg, who was trying to get out through the fence, on Panerių Street.<sup>131</sup>

On March 29, 1942, the Council of Elders was informed about two Jewish workers – Nachman Sroka and Yosel Fryd – who had been shot by German guards at the airfield on March 23. Both were shot for trying to buy groceries. The corpses were brought to the ghetto and buried in the ghetto cemetery.<sup>132</sup>

The **ghetto court** was established on October 24, 1941 by decision of the Council of Elders. Its main purpose was to try the Jews who intentionally evaded their labor obligation, thereby endangering the entire ghetto. The court could put offenders in prison for up to one month.<sup>133</sup> After the *Große Aktion* of October 29, 1941, the court

mainly dealt with property disputes. At that time, there were frequent conflicts over the property of the people who had been killed, with relatives and neighbors of the victims laying claim to it. The ghetto court established a rule that the property of ghetto residents who were murdered or missing belongs to their children or grandchildren. If there are no children or grandchildren, then it goes to the parents; if there are no parents, then it goes to their brothers and sisters; if there are no brothers and sisters, then it goes to the Council of Elders. The latter usually distributed the property left without heirs to the poorest or the hardest working ghetto residents. The court also examined criminal (theft, fights, etc.) and civil (divorce, etc.) cases. Appointed as the chairman of the court was the prominent legal specialist Prof. Simon Beliackin (who later suffered from depression and was killed on March 27, 1944 at the Ninth Fort). The deputy chairman was attorney Yakov (Yakub) Abramavich, with Moshe (Israel) Tabachnik, Moshe Zak, Isak Cherny, and Efraim Buch (who also served as a prosecutor) appointed as members of the court. The court existed as such until July 5, 1942, when it was liquidated by order of the Germans. Court documents were then transferred to the secretariat of the Council of Elders. Later, the court was restructured into a judicial commission under the Jewish Ghetto Police.<sup>134</sup>

On July 14, 1943, the Council of Elders approved the regulations of the Punishment (Penal) Department (the former court) under the Jewish Ghetto Police. According to the regulations, the Jewish Ghetto Police were authorized to deal with the civil and criminal affairs of the ghetto residents. The Punishment Department was to consist of three police officers whose ranks had to correspond to those of precinct chiefs. They examined cases based on the laws and procedures of the Republic of Lithuania and the decrees and instructions of the Council of Elders. The Punishment Department examined cases submitted to it by the Criminal Department under the Jewish Ghetto Police, the precinct chiefs and the heads of other institutions under the Council of Elders; it also examined complaints and statements from private persons. The decisions of the Punishment Department could be appealed to the Council of Elders Complaints Committee. The decisions of the latter were final.<sup>135</sup>

All cases considered by the Punishment Department and the Complaints Committee were heard by three judges, who took turns acting as chairman. The members of the Punishment Department were attorneys Efraim Buch, Isak Cherny and Moshe Zak. The members of the Complaints Committee were attorneys Israel Bernstein, Natan Markovski and Moshe Tabachnik. The ghetto court (later the Punishment Department) essentially worked illegally, since the Gestapo considered itself the only institution that could try Jews. At the beginning of the ghetto's existence, the most frequent disputes concerned living space. The Department of Housing was unable to provide living space for all of the Jews who had been moved into the ghetto, and referred these disputes to the court. The court imposed severe penalties for appropriating the apartments or



property of people who had been killed or deported. The activities of the ghetto court helped to strengthen morale among residents and reduce crime.<sup>136</sup>

The majority of the prisoners were sentenced under the administrative procedure. Their numbers increased steadily. This indicated that more and more misdemeanors and crimes were being uncovered. In 1941, six ghetto residents were punished for various crimes in August (insulting the Jewish Ghetto Police or administration employees, evading the labor obligation, fighting, etc.), followed by 12 in September, 21 in October, 111 in November (when as many as 80 people were sentenced for violations of sanitary care), 92 in December, 86 in January 1942, and 207 in February 1942.<sup>137</sup>

The prosecutor and the prison played a key role in the ghetto law enforcement system. The prosecutor (Efraim Buch) was subordinate to the chief of the Jewish Ghetto Police. He reviewed all cases tried by all police precincts and the criminal police, wrote indictments, and referred them to the ghetto court. The prosecutor had the right to control all investigative bodies (this was the case until the end of July 1943, when the Punishment Department was established).<sup>138</sup>

After the *Große Aktion* of October 29, 1941, a prison was established in the ghetto. This was needed to maintain discipline and order. The prison was usually used for people who were evading work or who had committed crimes. The emergence of the prison helped reduce these offences, since the people committing them realized that they could receive real punishment. The prison was subordinate to the chief of the Jewish Ghetto Police as a separate administrative unit. The prison (lock-up) was established in the 2nd Precinct in a building that had become vacant after the *Große Aktion*. It was officially opened on December 5, 1941. Six people worked in the prison administration – the warden, the secretary, the Wachtmeister and three guards. They worked according to the statute and instructions approved by the chief of the Jewish Ghetto Police. In the prison, men and women were kept in separate cells. The detainees had to work eight hours a day. Persons sentenced to a longer term had the right to one 15-minute visit per week. Persons who violated the prison rules could be punished – they could be denied outdoor exercise and visitors, their food ration could be reduced, or they could be put in solitary confinement. Detainees had the right to appeal the actions of prison administration employees to the prison warden (these positions were held at various times by Iudl Aronovski, Benzion Bukantz, and Isak Melamdavich).<sup>139</sup>

The ghetto policemen took their oath on November 1, 1942. A solemn swearing-in ceremony was held in the yeshiva hall. The ceremony was attended by 152 Jewish policemen, the members of the Council of Elders, and other representatives of the ghetto administration. The deputy secretary of the Council of Elders read the text of the oath in Hebrew and Yiddish, and the policemen repeated it:

I, as an employee of the Vilijampolė Jewish Ghetto Police, solemnly swear, in the presence of the chairman of the Jewish Council and the chief of police:

- to carry out the duties entrusted to me in spite of the danger and the time this may take;
- not to seek benefits from the position I hold, neither for myself, nor for my friends, nor for my acquaintances;
- to keep the secrets of my service strictly confidential;
- to devote all my strength and knowledge to the benefit of the ghetto's Jewish community.<sup>140</sup>

Then all of the policemen present at the ceremony walked to the table and signed under the text of the oath. The swearing-in ceremony was presided over by Yehuda Zupovitz, who was the deputy chief of the Jewish Ghetto Police at the time. At the end of the ceremony, all those present sang “Hatikvah”, the Zionist anthem.<sup>141</sup> An orchestra (“Viltis”) had been established under the Jewish Ghetto Police in early 1942, with Michael Hofmekler as conductor and Abraham Stupel as concertmaster.<sup>142</sup>

On March 27, 1944, the Germans accused the Jewish Ghetto Police of having ties with the anti-fascist underground and organizing escapes from the ghetto. The Jewish policemen were taken to the Ninth Fort, where they were interrogated and pressed to reveal where the ghetto hiding places (the so-called “malinas”) were located. The interrogation was headed by SS-Oberscharführer Bruno Kittel. After being investigated and tortured, 34 policemen who refused to show the Gestapo where the hiding places were in the ghetto were shot. The rest of the policemen were taken back to the ghetto. The Jewish Ghetto Police were reorganized into the Jewish Order Service (German: *Jüdischer Ordnungsdienst*), headed by Binjamin Lipcer, who had close ties with the Gestapo, with Tankhum Aronshtam and Chaim Grossman as his deputies. The Jewish Order Service (43 people) operated until the liquidation of the Kaunas Ghetto.

Most of the ghetto residents disliked the Jewish Ghetto Police. The Jewish Ghetto Police had to carry out the instructions of the occupation authorities and the Council of Elders, which were often painful and unpleasant for the ghetto residents – forcing people to go work and removing them from the ghetto (such as when some of the ghetto residents were taken to Riga, Latvia in February 1942), acting as guards, carrying out arrests and searches, and prosecuting persons who had violated the established ghetto order. Jewish policemen often took advantage of their official position (for example, demanding that Jews returning from the city give them food, or confiscating and appropriating residents' valuables during searches) and even beat their fellow Jews.<sup>143</sup>

Still, there were many honest and decent people among the ghetto policemen who tried their best to help their fellow Jews; a number of policemen also supported the

ghetto anti-fascist underground or participated in its activities themselves. Several dozen Jewish policemen were shot at the Ninth Fort for this (including Yehuda Zupovitz and Yehoshua Grinberg).

As former Kaunas Ghetto resident Sara Ginaitė-Rubinson pointed out, even in the ghetto conditions, the Jewish police force operated as all bureaucracies do:

Employees of the administrative apparatus and their relatives and friends enjoyed various privileges and benefits. They often felt like all-powerful rulers in their chairs. They treated people who came to see them rudely and arrogantly. Members of the Committee, the administration's employees, and the foremen of the ghetto work brigades and workshops comprised the ghetto community's elite. ... The Jewish administration made every effort to preserve the ghetto and extend its existence. However, this was often done at the expense of individual groups of ghetto residents. At the request of the Germans, the Jewish administration increased the number of workers, urged them to carry out the German orders and not to oppose them, and insisted on observing all the rules governing life in the ghetto. They were forced by the Nazis to draw up lists of deportees, organize their arrest, and hand them over to the Germans. As a result, the Jewish administration frequently had to make difficult decisions – who would be deported, and who would be allowed to live for the time being. There is no doubt that Jewish administration staff, while living in the ghetto, was forced to cooperate with the Nazis in one way or another. However, the Jewish administration was doomed to the same fate as all of the other ghetto residents.<sup>144</sup>

### **The Reorganization of the Ghetto into a Concentration Camp**

In the autumn of 1943, there were major changes at the Kaunas Ghetto – it was reorganized into a concentration camp. On June 21 of that year, Heinrich Himmler ordered Reichskommissariat Ostland Friedrich Jeckeln to reorganize all the ghettos in the area into concentration camps. Jews were to be forbidden to work outside of the camps. Some of the Jews were to be sent to Estonia to work in shale oil extraction. Jews who were unfit for work (the elderly, sick, and minor children) were to be annihilated.<sup>145</sup> Governing of the ghetto was to be assumed by the SS civil administration (the city commissariat). The ghetto was a very important source of income and profit for the German civil administration, so the administration tried to delay the transfer of the governance of the ghetto to the SS for as long as possible. The

SS assumed control of the Kaunas Ghetto in September-October 1943 and converted it into the Kauen concentration camp. SS-Obersturmbannführer Wilhelm Göcke was appointed as commander of the Kauen concentration camp. Control of Jews tightened further. The buildings were re-numbered, and the elder of each building (block) had to verify the number of inhabitants daily. Jews at the Kauen-Alexoten and Kauen-Schanzen sub-camps of the Kauen concentration camp were dressed in striped uniforms.<sup>146</sup> The concentration camp administration was established, with SS-Obersturmbannführer Wilhelm Göcke as commandant, SS-Unterscharführer Josef Pilgram as the head of security, and SS-Oberscharführer Franz Auer as the head of labor deployment. The Jews could only work at camps – working in civilian offices in the city was forbidden.<sup>147</sup> The transformation of the ghetto into a concentration camp caused great fear and anxiety among the Jews. Many believed that the camp would soon be liquidated, as had been done with the Vilnius Ghetto (in September 1943). However, the camp survived until the end of the Nazi occupation. Approximately 4,000 ghetto prisoners were distributed to the Kauen-Alexoten and Kauen-Schanzen sub-camps. Some 8,000 people remained in the ghetto, the majority of whom worked in the ghetto workshops.<sup>148</sup>

On March 27, 1944, SS-Oberführer Wilhelm Fuchs, SS-Hauptsturmführer Spitz, and SS-Oberscharführer Bruno Kittel oversaw an extremely cruel campaign to remove children from the ghetto. The Nazi logic behind this campaign was that the concentration camps should be reserved for able-bodied adults, so the children and the elderly should be killed. Members of the SS and the Ukrainian Liberation Army invaded the ghetto, and then went from building to building, removing children under the age of 12 and throwing them into buses and trucks. Mothers who resisted were beaten with rifle butts and attacked by dogs. Old people who were unable to work were arrested as well. Approximately 1,700 children and elderly were arrested in all. Roughly 130 ghetto policemen were arrested that same day – 34 were shot at the Ninth Fort, and the others were later taken back to the ghetto. The exact fate of the children and elderly who were deported is unknown. They were most likely taken to the Auschwitz or Majdanek concentration camps.<sup>149</sup> The Gestapo scoured the ghetto for secret hiding places. Some of the Jewish policemen who were arrested told them what they knew. From March 27 to mid-April, 1944, the Gestapo found and destroyed 25 well-concealed bunkers. Some of the bunkers had heat, electricity, and water, as well as sufficient food provisions to survive for an extended period of time. Weapons and ammunition were also found. According to an April 19, 1944 SiPo and SD report to the RSHA, an estimated 1,500 Jews had escaped from the Kauen concentration camp and its satellite camps in other parts of Lithuania, which had significantly increased the number of active Soviet partisans in the southwestern districts of Lithuania.<sup>150</sup>

The reorganization of the ghetto into a concentration camp meant a sharp increase in SS control and discipline, restraints on ghetto self-government (dissolving the

Council of Elders, making the Jewish Ghetto Police subordinate to the SS command), decentralization of the ghetto (division into smaller camps), and the appointment of individuals whom the SS trusted to important positions (e.g., Binjamin Lipcer was appointed head of the Jewish Order Service).<sup>151</sup>

### **Liquidation of the Kaunas Ghetto and the Imprisonment of Jews in German Concentration Camps**

As the front was approaching Kaunas, the Nazis decided to liquidate all of the Jewish camps entirely. On July 5, 1944, the ghetto was surrounded by reinforced SS groups. Many prisoners did not want to leave and hid in the basements. On July 8, 1,200 Jews were removed and taken away on barges, and on July 10, another 900 Jews were taken away by train. The remaining Jews were taken away on July 13. On July 12, the Germans began setting the ghetto buildings on fire. Those who tried to flee were shot, and almost all of the buildings and workshops were completely burned down. Hundreds of people were burned to death or shot. Some 6,000–7,000 Jews were deported from the Kaunas Ghetto, and about 1,000 were killed during the ghetto's liquidation; only 300–400 Jews managed to escape. The ghetto was on fire until July 29. All that was left in the ghetto was rubble and chimneys; personal belongings and charred corpses were scattered all around. "The smell of death and deteriorating bodies" was everywhere.<sup>152</sup>

On August 1, 1944, Kaunas was occupied by the Soviet Army. Before long, the registration of Jews began – 634 Jews were registered in all.<sup>153</sup> A tiny remnant of the more than 30,000 Jews who lived in Kaunas before the war.

Jewish men were sent from the Kaunas Ghetto to the Dachau concentration camp, and the women were sent to Stutthof. There were approximately 2,000 men in the Dachau-Kaufering I sub-camp. Kaunas Jews were the first prisoners in this new sub-camp. The square camp complex was surrounded by two rows of barbed wire fencing and guard towers. There were small brick barracks that housed 18–20 prisoners each. In addition to other work, the Jews brought in from Kaunas worked in bunkers that were meant to produce different components of the Messerschmitt aircraft. The contractor was the privately owned Leonard Mollis company. Several prisoners died every day from exhaustion. The mortality rate was particularly high in October and November 1944.<sup>154</sup> Former Kaunas Ghetto Council of Elders chairman Elchanan Elkes also died in Dachau in 1944. Debilitated prisoners were sent by the concentration camp physicians and their assistants to Dachau-Kaufering IV and VII. Prisoners who were sick, weak, or unable to work for other reasons were held in these

sub-camps. The number of patients in the labor camp could not be more than 10–15 percent of the prisoners. If the percentage exceeded this number, the food ration for the entire camp was halved. This happened at the Dachau-Kaufering II sub-camp. Former head of the Kaunas Ghetto Department of Health Dr. Benjamin Sacharin worked in Dachau-Kaufering I. Sacharin took great pains to help sick prisoners, and performed hundreds of surgical procedures under very difficult circumstances at Dachau.<sup>155</sup> The Dachau concentration camp prisoners were liberated in April 1945 by American troops. Roughly 1,000 Lithuanian Jews were among the prisoners who were liberated. Almost 100 returned to Lithuania, while the others stayed in the West.<sup>156</sup>

The women and children who were deported from the Kaunas Ghetto were first taken to the Stutthof concentration camp. On July 19, 1944, there were 1,208 women and children imprisoned in Stutthof.<sup>157</sup> The women from the Kaunas Ghetto were initially kept in the 19th block. They were later assigned to different brigades and worked outside of the camp (in neighboring villages and towns).<sup>158</sup> On July 26, 1,893 Jews from the ghettos in Kaunas and Šiauliai were taken from Stutthof to Auschwitz (801 women, 546 girls, and 546 boys).<sup>159</sup> Very few survived, but some of the women from the Kaunas Ghetto who were imprisoned in Stutthof were eventually liberated. On May 3, 1945, as the Soviet front was approaching, the Germans began evacuating the camp. The prisoners were transported by barge to the Baltic Sea and taken to the West. The Jews from Kaunas were among them. Prisoners evacuated near the town of Neustadt were liberated by British troops.

### **Anti-Fascist Resistance in the Kaunas Ghetto**

Not all of the Kaunas Jews sat back and let themselves be killed – some (especially young people) did everything they could to resist the occupying Nazis and the Holocaust. At the end of 1941, illegal communist – and Zionist-leaning resistance groups began appearing spontaneously in the Kaunas Ghetto. On the initiative of writer Chaim Yellin,\* small, secret, communist and pro-Soviet cells and larger groups united into a large resistance organization with a common goal called the Anti-Fascist Organization (AFO). Yellin prepared the AFO program, statutes, conspiracy rules, and oath. The AFO executive committee was appointed during the first meeting. Yellin was elected as the head (secretary) of the committee, and Alte Boruchovitch-Teper, Peisach Gordon, Meishe Sherman, and Meir Lan – as members. Dmitri Gelpert was added to the committee in 1942 as Yellin's deputy and head of the propaganda

\*Chaim Yellin was arrested by the Gestapo on April 6, 1944 and killed at the end of the month.

division. L. Tzimerman, M. Grinberg, D. Markowski, Shimon Ratner, and P. Shater became members of the committee later. Misha Rubinson was appointed as secretary of the Communist Youth Organization and the head of the youth division.<sup>160</sup> The AFO consisted of two sections: combat and assistance. The former recruited partisans, and the latter (which included those who were not fit for combat) was tasked with providing the organization with material resources. The AFO was created on the principle of triads. Seven triads formed a group. The AFO's primary goal was the active armed struggle against the Nazis. The organization sought to include as many of its members as possible in partisan detachments, harm the occupiers with acts of diversion and sabotage, recruit new members, procure weapons, and inform the ghetto residents about the situation on various fronts and in Lithuania. The AFO acquired a radio receiver, recorded the news they heard, and published a news bulletin. Throughout the ghetto's existence, the AFO had 500 members (including 21 communists and 50 communist youths).<sup>161</sup>

At the end of 1943, the AFO began sending its members to Soviet partisan groups. Initially, it was planned to dispatch the members of the underground to bases set up in the Augustów Forest (approximately 160 kilometers from Kaunas). However, this was not properly planned, as the conditions in the Augustów Forest were very unfavorable to partisan activities (it was far from the Kaunas Ghetto, the locals did not like the Soviet partisans, and there was a high concentration of military and police units). The first ghetto combat group left for the Augustów Forest on October 21, 1943, and the last one – on October 28. Both groups were basically obliterated. Of the 71 partisans, three partisans were killed in clashes with police, and 35 were arrested by the Gestapo and taken to the Ninth Fort; the rest were returned to the ghetto. Only three combatants reached their planned destination: Nechemia Endlin, Shmuelik Markowski, and Ida Pilovnik-Vilenchiuk.<sup>162</sup> After these failures, the AFO received permission from the LCP (b) Southern Area Underground Committee and partisan commander Henrik Ziman (a.k.a. Genrikas Zimanas) to send its members to the “Death to the Occupiers” partisan detachment that was being formed in Rūdninkai Forest. Its core consisted of AFO members. The formation of this detachment had begun in October 1943. Kosta Radionov (Captain Smirnov), a Soviet paratrooper from Murava Village who had parachuted into Lithuania, was appointed as the detachment commander, and former prisoner of war Dimitriy Parfionov was appointed commissar. The detachment was based in Rūdninkai Forest near the villages of Žagarinė and Senieji Maceliai. The detachment was continually supplemented by members of the AFO from the Kaunas Ghetto.<sup>163</sup> Despite the fact that the dispatch of the first groups to Rūdninkai Forest ended in failure, later groups were relatively successful, driving trucks and using forged documents. On December 14, 1943, 17 underground members from the Kaunas Ghetto traveled to the Rūdninkai Forest. AFO committee members Peisach Gordon and Moisei Sherman,

youth leader Misha Rubinson, and Sara Ginaitė-Rubinson were among them. They reached the partisan detachment successfully.<sup>164</sup> Only the departure of the last truck to Rūdninkai Forest in 1944 was unsuccessful. On April 15, 1944, after being betrayed by the driver, the ghetto combatants were ambushed by the Gestapo and outnumbered in the city of Kaunas. Seven AFO members were killed in the shootout. Approximately 250 underground combatants were sent from the Kaunas Ghetto to Soviet partisan bases in all.<sup>165</sup>

One of the most notable accomplishments of the anti-fascist movement was the breakout of 64 prisoners from the Ninth Fort on the night of December 25, 1943. Of the escapees, 14 hid in the Kaunas Ghetto, where they signed a declaration about the Nazi crimes there, and later joined the partisans in early January 1944.<sup>166</sup>

Like other Soviet partisan detachments, “Death to the Occupiers” blew up railways, attacked police checkpoints, carried out other combat operations, and did not avoid requisitioning civilians. The largest operation took place on April 10, 1944, when the detachment helped attack the German and Latvian garrison in Vėčioriškės Village. In the fierce battle, the German garrison was only saved from complete destruction by a convoy of trucks that quickly arrived from Vilnius. The partisans also experienced major losses. The following AFO members perished in the battle: C. Berman, S. Birger, S. Eidelson, L. Ekman, I. Fabrowski, I. Holzman, Z. Kravec, A. Maneiskin, M. Raichman, D. Sandler, I. Suskitzki, M. Taratatzki, V. Vinishky, and S. Volk. Altogether, 16 partisans died.<sup>167</sup> “Death to the Occupiers” ended its fight in the battles for Vilnius on July 11–13, 1944.<sup>168</sup> A total of 100 underground members from the Kaunas Ghetto died while fighting in partisan detachments.<sup>169</sup>

The Kaunas Ghetto Zionist underground also became organized. Various Zionist groups (such as the Irgun, Betar, Hashomer Hatzair, Hechalutz Hatzair, etc.) united into MACOK. I. Grinberg, A. Melamed, A. Skrebnitzki, and I. Shapiro were among the group’s leaders. The priority of the Zionist underground was not armed combat, sabotage, and diversions, but rather – preparing personnel for cultural, educational, and ideological work for the future state of Israel, as well as hiding and rescuing Jews. Some of the Zionist youth were not happy with the passive activities of these organizations and looked for ways to leave the ghetto and join Soviet partisan detachments. In the spring of 1943, MACOK made contact with the AFO. The ghetto administration (Council of Elders, Jewish Ghetto Police) that the Zionists were subordinate to not only did not interfere with AFO activities – they often even facilitated them. A “military-technical commission” was established in the ghetto to coordinate the activities of all underground organizations (communist and Zionist). The ghetto administration began supporting the preparation of partisan detachments and sending them to the forests. All of the organizations understood that the goal of Nazism was to exterminate all Jews, and that it was therefore imperative to resist the Nazis together.<sup>170</sup>



## Conclusions

The history of the Kaunas Jewish community and the Kaunas Ghetto can be divided into five stages: (1) the period prior to the establishment of the ghetto (June 23–August 15, 1941); (2) the period of mass killings (“campaigns”) of the Jews in the ghetto (August 15–October 1941); (3) the period of stability (November 1941 – September 1943); (4) reorganization of the ghetto into a concentration camp (October 1943–mid-July 1944); and (5) liquidation of the Kaunas Ghetto (Kaunas concentration camp) and deportation of the Kaunas Jews to concentration camps in Germany (mid-July 1944–April 1945).

Discrimination and persecution of the Jews in Kaunas already began in the first days of the war. In fact, Lithuanian anti-Soviet partisans started controlling the situation in the city on June 23, 1941. After Einsatzgruppe A commander SS-Brigadeführer Franz Walter Stahlecker arrived in Kaunas in late June 1941, the Nazis immediately began organizing pogroms. Massive pogroms took place in Viliampolė. The massacre of Jews was carried out by armed Lithuanian units subordinated to German security (the so-called “partisans,” prisoners released from Soviet prisons and criminals). Several thousand Jews were massacred during the pogroms (including women and children). The mass killing of Jews at the Seventh Fort began in early July 1941. The victims were executed by members of the Gestapo and the National Labor Protection (TDA) Battalion. From the beginning of the war until the establishment of the ghetto (August 15, 1941), close to 8,000 Jews may have been killed in Kaunas. The mass killings continued after the establishment of the ghetto as well. Jews were massacred in Kaunas at the Fourth Fort and the Ninth Fort. The largest killing campaign at the Ninth Fort was on October 29, 1941, when 9,200 Jews were massacred. Not only Jewish men were killed, but also women, children, and the elderly. The mass killings were executed by the German Gestapo and the 1st Lithuanian Police (formerly TDA) Battalion. Along with the arrests and massacres, there was also legal and property discrimination against Jews.

After the *Große Aktion* (the Kaunas massacre of October 29, 1941) the period of stability began and lasted until September 1943. There were roughly 17,000 Jews living in the ghetto at that time (roughly half of the number of Jews who lived in Kaunas before the German-Soviet war). According to the Nazis, the ghetto had been purged of “unnecessary” Jews, that is, Jews who were unable to work and contribute to the German military cause. The mass killing of Jews stopped. A broad ghetto administrative structure was created during this period of stability, led by the Council of Elders. The ghetto transitioned into a unique “state within a state,” with its own government, economy, and forms of spiritual and cultural life. The ghetto leadership paid particular attention to the deployment of Jewish labor, work intensity,

and increasing the number of workers and labor institutions. The Council of Elders believed that as long as the Germans were benefitting economically from the work of the ghetto prisoners, they would not liquidate the ghetto. The most important units of the ghetto's internal administration were the Department of Labor, the Department of Economic Affairs, the Department of Health, the Department of Social Welfare, the Food Department, the Jewish Ghetto Police, the ghetto court, and the statistics division.

The most important job that required Jewish manpower was the Aleksotas airfield. In 1943, 9,600 of the 17,000 Jews in the Kaunas Ghetto were working in 140 locations every day. The majority did jobs required by the Wehrmacht and fulfilled orders from the military.

In autumn, the Kaunas Ghetto was reorganized into an SS concentration camp. The SS assumed control of the ghetto from the German civil authorities. Control over Jewish life became much stricter. The Jews could only work at camps – working in civilian offices in the city was forbidden. Approximately 4,000 ghetto prisoners were distributed to the Kauen-Alexoten and Kauen-Schanzen sub-camps. The period of stability ended in the ghetto on March 27, 1943, when an extremely cruel campaign to remove children from the ghetto was carried out. Approximately 1,700 children and elderly were arrested, taken away, and shot. This atrocity was executed by members of the SS and the Ukrainian Liberation Army. The Gestapo also disbanded the Jewish Ghetto Police (34 policemen were shot at the Ninth Fort) and terminated the activities of the Council of Elders. Self-governance in the ghetto was basically abolished, and the SS increased its control.

The Kaunas Ghetto was liquidated on July 8–13, 1944, as the front was approaching – all of the buildings were burned down, 6,000–7,000 Jews were deported to concentration camps in Germany (Dachau, Stutthof and others), and about 1,000 were killed during the liquidation campaign; only 300–400 Jews managed to escape. Only a few hundred Kaunas Jews survived to be liberated from the Nazi concentration camps.

In Lithuania, the ghettos in Kaunas and Šiauliai were in operation the longest (from mid-July 1941 to mid-July 1944). During the period of the Nazi occupation, the Kaunas Jewish community suffered enormous losses. Because of the very fast approach of the German army, only a small number of Jews managed to escape to the East. In the very first days of the Nazi occupation, one of the largest pogroms in all of Eastern Europe was carried out in Kaunas. This is also where the first mass killings of local Jews in Lithuania took place (with the shootings at the Kaunas forts). Since the conditions for partisan activities in Kaunas were not as favorable as in the Vilnius Region, fewer members of the anti-fascist underground were able to retreat to the forests than were from the Vilnius Ghetto. Kaunas was the administrative center of the Nazi occupation forces in Lithuania. According to the Nazi reasoning, the Jews in

these cities had to be exterminated first in order to guarantee the security of the occupying power and allow the Germans to carry out colonization and Germanization. These factors were what determined the extraordinary losses of the Kaunas Jews and their very slim chances of survival.

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- <sup>56</sup> V. Barkausko 1968 m. rugpjūčio 21 d. apklausos protokolas [*V. Barkauskas's August 21, 1968 investigation protocol*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 47558/3, Vol. 1, pp. 9–23.
- <sup>57</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Part 1, p. 135.
- <sup>58</sup> A. Tory, *op. cit.*, pp. 45–49.
- <sup>59</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Part 1, p. 251..
- <sup>60</sup> P. Matiuko 1962 m. sausio 15 d. apklausos protokolas [*P. Matiukas's January 15, 1962 interrogation protocol*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 47337/3, Vol. 1, pp. 226, 237; *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Part 1, p. 135; A. Tory, *op. cit.*, p. 59; J. Beilesas, *op. cit.*, pp. 39–42.
- <sup>61</sup> A. Tory, *op. cit.*, pp. 9, 10.
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15, 16.
- <sup>63</sup> Kauno komendantas ir Kauno miesto burmistro 1941 m. liepos 10 d. įsakymas Nr. 15 [*Order Nr. 15 of July 10, 1941 from the Kaunas commander and the Kaunas mayor*], LCSA, f. R-1444, ap. 1, b. 6, pl. 5; Tarpžinybinio pasitarimo, įvykusio 1941 m. liepos 25 d. Kaune dėl žydų perkėlimo į Vilijampolę, protokolas [*Protocol from the Kaunas interdepartmental meeting of July 25, 1941 on the transfer of Jews to Vilijampolė*], *ibid.*, pp. 2–4.
- <sup>64</sup> A. Tory, *op. cit.*, p. 25; Kauno geto žydų policijos istorija, p. 7.
- <sup>65</sup> C. Dieckmann, *op. cit.*, S. 443.
- <sup>66</sup> A. Tory, *op. cit.*, pp. 26, 27.
- <sup>67</sup> Amtsblatt des Generalkommissars in Kauen [*Official gazette of the Commissioner General in Kauen*], November 1, 1941, No. 2, p. 1.
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2.
- <sup>69</sup> A. Tory, *op. cit.*, pp. 27–30.
- <sup>70</sup> T. Aronštamo 1944 m. rugsėjo 22 d. tardymo protokolas [*T. Aronstamas's September 22, 1944 investigation protocol*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 11236/3, Vol. 1, l. 34–35; A. Tory, *op. cit.*, p. 32; *Einsatz im "Reichskommissariat Ostland"* p. 185.
- <sup>71</sup> Vilijampolės žydų geto bendruomenės įstatai [*Vilijampolė Jewish Ghetto Community*

*Statute*], no date, LCSA, f. R-973, ap. 2, b. 2, l. 10–11.

<sup>72</sup> Seniūnų tarybos pirmininko įsakymai [*Orders of the Chairman of the Council of Elders*], No. 1, 2, 3, 5, *ibid.*, ap. 3, b. 4, pp. 17, 18, 20, 23.

<sup>73</sup> Seniūnų tarybos įstaigų ir skyrių pareigūnų darbo taisyklės. 1941 m. rugpjūčio 18 d. [*Work Regulations for the Council of Elders Institutions and Division Officials*], *ibid.*, ap. 2, b. 2, p. 10.

<sup>74</sup> Pažyma apie vokiečių okupantų įvykdytas piktadarybes žydams Kauno mieste [*Statement regarding the atrocities committed by the German occupiers against Jews in Kaunas*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 10, b. 16, pp. 91–93; A. Tory, *op. cit.*, pp. 30, 31; A. Файтельсон (A. Faitelson), *op. cit.*, p. 98.

<sup>75</sup> S. Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *op. cit.*; A. Tory, *op. cit.*, p. 90; *Einsatz im "Reichskommissariat Ostland"* pp. 185, 186.

<sup>76</sup> C. Dieckmann, *op. cit.*, S. 457.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, S. 457.

<sup>78</sup> Seniūnų tarybos 1942 m. rugpjūčio mėn. veiklos ataskaita [*Council of Elders August 1942 activity report*], LCSA, f. R- 973, ap. 2, b. 40, p. 53.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>80</sup> Kauno geto žydų policijos istorija, pp. 8, 9.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 30–33.

<sup>82</sup> A. Tory, *op. cit.*, pp. 37, 39.

<sup>83</sup> C. Dieckmann, *op. cit.*, S. 449.

<sup>84</sup> Kauno geto žydų policijos istorija, pp. 58–61.

<sup>85</sup> P. Margolio 1944 m. gruodžio 13 d. parodymai Kauno įgulos Karo tribunolo teismo posėdyje [*P. Margolis's December 13, 1944 testimony at the Kaunas war garrison's court-martial tribunal meeting*], *ibid.*, ap. 8, b. 198, p. 171; A. Tory, *op. cit.*, p. 458.

<sup>86</sup> Kauno geto žydų policijos istorija, pp. 87, 88.

<sup>87</sup> A. Tory, *op. cit.*, pp. 80–86.

<sup>88</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Part 1, p. 243.

<sup>89</sup> C. Dieckmann, *op. cit.*, S. 451.

<sup>90</sup> Vokiečių saugumo policijos ir SD 1943 m. rugsėjo mėn. pranešimas RSHA Berlyne

[*German SiPo and SD's August 1943 report to the RSHA in Berlin*], LCSA, f. R-1399, ap. 1, b. 62, pp. 60, 61.

<sup>91</sup> A. Tory, *op. cit.*, pp. 67, 68.

<sup>92</sup> B. Zacharino 1950 m. liepos 21 d. tardymo protokolas [*B. Sacharin's July 21, 1950 investigation protocol*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 34423/3, pp. 44, 47.

<sup>93</sup> A. Tory, *op. cit.*, pp. 146, 147.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46; C. Gordono 1944 m. rugpjūčio 18 d. parodymai [*C. Gordonas's August 18, 1944 testimony*], Lithuanian Academy of Sciences Manuscripts Department (hereinafter – LMA RS), f. 159–25, p. 4 a. p.; C. Dieckmann, *op. cit.*, p. 455.

<sup>95</sup> B. Zacharino 1950 m. liepos 21 d. tardymo protokolas, p. 38.

<sup>96</sup> A. Tory, *op. cit.*, pp. 43, 44.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 140–142.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 226–228.

<sup>99</sup> Seniūnų tarybos 1942 m. birželio mėn. veiklos ataskaita [*Council of Elders June 1942 activity report*], f. R-973, ap. 2, b. 40, p. 76.

<sup>100</sup> Seniūnų tarybos 1942 m. rugsėjo ir 1943 m. liepos mėn. veiklos ataskaita [*Council of Elders September 1942 and July 1943 activity report*], *ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>101</sup> Seniūnų tarybos 1941 m. rugpjūčio 18 d. įsakymas Nr. 2 ir 1942 m. liepos 5 d. įsakymas Nr. 34 [*Council of Elders August 18, 1941 Order No. 2 and July 5, 1942 Order No. 34*], *ibid.*, ap. 2, b. 4, p. 6; ap. 3, b. 4, p. 43.

<sup>102</sup> Seniūnų tarybos 1941 m. rugpjūčio 18 d. posėdžio protokolas Nr. 2 [*Minutes No. 2 of the August 18, 1941 meeting of the Council of Elders*], *ibid.*, ap. 3, b. 4, p. 150.

<sup>103</sup> Maitinimo skyriaus 1941 m. rugpjūčio 28 d. raštas Maitinimo valdybai [*August 28, 1941 letter from the Food Department to the Nutrition Board*], *ibid.*, ap. 2, b. 4, p. 6.

<sup>104</sup> Seniūnų tarybos pirmininko 1941 m. rugsėjo 14 d. įsakymas Nr. 15 ir 1942 m. kovo 15 d. įsakymas Nr. 2 [*August 14, 1941 Order No. 15 and March 15, 1942 Order No. 2 of the chairman of the Council of Elders*], *ibid.*, ap. 3, b. 4, pp. 23, 34.

<sup>105</sup> Seniūnų tarybos pirmininko 1942 m.

liepos 5 d. įsakymas Nr. 36 [July 5, 1942 Order No. 36 of the chairman of the Council of Elders], *ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>106</sup> Seniūnų tarybos 1942 m. liepos mėn. veiklos ataskaita [Council of Elders July 1942 activity report], *ibid.*, ap. 2, b. 40, p. 65.

<sup>107</sup> Seniūnų tarybos 1942 m. rugsėjo mėn. veiklos ataskaita [Council of Elders September 1942 activity report], *ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>108</sup> Seniūnų tarybos pirmininko 1942 m. liepos 5 d. ir 1942 m. rugpjūčio 11 d. įsakymai Nr. 53 ir 64 [July 5, 1942 and August 11, 1942 Orders No. 53 and 64 of the chairman of the Council of Elders], *ibid.*, ap. 3, b. 4, pp. 40, 52.

<sup>109</sup> Seniūnų tarybos 1942 m. birželio mėn. veiklos ataskaita, p. 75.

<sup>110</sup> Seniūnų tarybos 1942 m. liepos mėn. veiklos ataskaita, p. 64.

<sup>111</sup> Seniūnų tarybos pirmininko 1942 m. kovo 15 d. įsakymas Nr. 2 [March 15, 1942 Order No. 2 of the chairman of the Council of Elders], *ibid.*, ap. 3, b. 4, p. 34.

<sup>112</sup> Seniūnų tarybos 1942 m. liepos mėn. veiklos ataskaita, p. 62.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 63.

<sup>114</sup> Seniūnų tarybos 1941 m. lapkričio 25 d. posėdžio protokolas Nr. 21 [Minutes No. 21 of the November 25, 1941 meeting of the Council of Elders], *ibid.*, ap. 3, b. 4, p. 162.

<sup>115</sup> Seniūnų tarybos pirmininko 1942 m. liepos 5 d. įsakymas Nr. 32 [July 5, 1942 Order No. 32 of the chairman of the Council of Elders], *ibid.*, p. 42; Shapiro was also appointed inspector of trade courses in September 1942. At the end of the occupation, he was shot at the Ninth Fort together with his wife and son.

<sup>116</sup> Seniūnų tarybos 1942 m. liepos mėn. veiklos ataskaita, p. 61.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 65.

<sup>118</sup> Seniūnų tarybos 1942 m. spalio mėn. veiklos ataskaita [Council of Elders October 1942 activity report], *ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>119</sup> Gyventojų judėjimo ir kontrolės įstaigos personalinė sudėtis, 1942 m. sausis [Personnel of the Population Movement and Control Office, January, 1942], *ibid.*, ap. 1, b. 1, p. 301.

<sup>120</sup> Seniūnų tarybos pirmininko 1942 m. liepos 5 d. įsakymas Nr. 38 [July 5, 1942

Order No. 38 of the chairman of the Council of Elders], *ibid.*, ap. 3, b. 4, p. 44.

<sup>121</sup> Seniūnų tarybos 1942 m. liepos mėn. veiklos ataskaita, p. 64.

<sup>122</sup> Seniūnų tarybos 1942 m. rugsėjo mėn. veiklos ataskaita, p. 51.

<sup>123</sup> Kauno geto žydų policijos istorija, pp. 11–13.

<sup>124</sup> M. Kopelmano 1944 m. rugsėjo 4 d. tardymo protokolas [M. Kopelman's September 4, 1944 investigation protocol], *ibid.*, ap. 58, b. 11236/3, Vol. 1, pp. 75, 76; T. Aronštamo 1944 m. rugpjūčio 16 d. tardymo protokolas [T. Aronstamas's August 16, 1944 investigation protocol], *ibid.*, ap. 8, b. 198, p. 151.

<sup>125</sup> Kauno geto žydų policijos istorija, pp. 98–100.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 91; A. Tory, op. cit., pp. 99, 100.

<sup>127</sup> Kauno geto žydų policijos istorija, p. 104.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 95, 96.

<sup>129</sup> Žydų geto policijos budinčiojo 1942 m. sausio 25 d. raportas Seniūnų tarybos pirmininkui [Jewish Ghetto Police on-duty officer's January 25, 1942 report to the chairman of the Council of Elders], LCSA, f. R-973, ap. 2, b. 33, p. 546.

<sup>130</sup> Žydų geto policijos budinčiojo 1942 m. vasario 8 d. raportas 1-osios nuovados viršininkui [Jewish Ghetto Police on-duty officer's February 8, 1942 report to the chief of the 1st precinct], *ibid.*, p. 453.

<sup>131</sup> Žydų geto policijos budinčiojo 1942 m. birželio 15 d. raportas geto policijos viršininkui [Jewish Ghetto Police on-duty officer's June 15, 1942 report to the chief of the Jewish Ghetto Police], *ibid.*, b. 34, p. 109.

<sup>132</sup> Geto policijos savaitinės žinios (1942 m. kovo 23–29 d.) [Jewish Ghetto Police Weekly News (23–29 March 1942)], *ibid.*, b. 33, p. 15 a. p.

<sup>133</sup> A. Tory, op. cit., p. 66.

<sup>134</sup> T. Aronštamo 1944 m. rugpjūčio 21 d. tardymo protokolas [T. Aronstamas's August 21, 1944 investigation protocol], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 8, b. 198, l. 159; Seniūnų tarybos pirmininko 1942 m. liepos 5 d. įsakymas Nr. 43 [July 5, 1942 Order No. 43 of the chairman of the Council of Elders], LCSA, f. R-973, ap. 3, b. 4, p. 46.

- <sup>135</sup> A. Tory, op. cit., p. 424.
- <sup>136</sup> Ibid., pp. 425–427.
- <sup>137</sup> Kauno geto žydų policijos istorija, pp. 118–123.
- <sup>138</sup> Ibid., l. 102.
- <sup>139</sup> Ibid., l. 116–116; T. Aronštamo 1944 m. rugpjūčio 16 d. tardymo protokolas, p. 16 a. p.
- <sup>140</sup> As cited in J. Beilesas, p. 128.
- <sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 127.
- <sup>142</sup> M. Kopelmano 1944 m. rugsėjo 3 d. savarankiški parodymai [*M. Kopelman's independent September 3, 1944 testimony*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 11236/3, p. 72.
- <sup>143</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Part 2, p. 336; T. Aronštamo 1944 m. rugpjūčio 16 d. tardymo protokolas pp. 153, 154.
- <sup>144</sup> S. Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, op. cit., pp. 69, 70.
- <sup>145</sup> C. Dieckmann, op. cit., S. 453.
- <sup>146</sup> BAP, R 58/1027, S. 313; *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Part 1, pp. 251, 252.
- <sup>147</sup> C. Dieckmann, op. cit., S. 455.
- <sup>148</sup> Ibid., S. 456.
- <sup>149</sup> LSA, f. K-1, ap. 10, b. 16, l. 94.
- <sup>150</sup> LCSA, f. R-1399, ap. 1, b. 102, l. 217.
- <sup>151</sup> C. Dieckmann, op. cit., S. 458.
- <sup>152</sup> LSA, f. K-1, ap. 10, b. 102, l. 217; C. Gordonono 1944 m. rugpjūčio 12 d. parodymai [*C. Gordonas's August 12, 1944 testimony*], LMA RS, f. 159–25, p. 5 a. p.
- <sup>153</sup> 1944 m. rugsėjo 6 d. pažyma apie Kauno žydų sunaikinimą vokiečių fašistinės okupacijos metais [*September 6, 1944 certificate about the extermination of the Kaunas Jews during the years of the fascist German occupation*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 46, b. 1251, p. 12.
- <sup>154</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Part 1, 247, 248.
- <sup>155</sup> B. Zacharino 1950 m. birželio 23 d. tardymo protokolas [*B. Sacharin's June 23, 1950 investigation protocol*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 34423/3, pp. 52, 54.
- <sup>156</sup> Ibid., l. 71.
- <sup>157</sup> July 20, 1944 list of prisoners, Archiwum Muzeum Stutthof, Sygn. I–II B-10, pp. 169–189.
- <sup>158</sup> L. Levinos 1953 m. sausio 5 d. tardymo protokolas [*L. Levinas's January 5, 1953 investigation protocol*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 24994/3, p. 21.
- <sup>159</sup> Stutthof Museum Archives, Sygn. I–II C-3, pp. 43–67.
- <sup>160</sup> D. Gelpernas, op. cit., p. 325; S. Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, op. cit., p. 100.
- <sup>161</sup> Ibid., p. 101; Pažyma apie partinę ir komjaunimo organizacijas, veikusias Kauno gete 1941–1944 m. [*Certificate about party and Komsomol organizations that operated in the Kaunas Ghetto in 1941–1944*], 1958, LSA, f. 15409, ap. 1, b. 1, p. 25.
- <sup>162</sup> S. Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, op. cit., p. 119; Я. Йосаде (Y. Iosade), “Борцы Каунасского гетто” [*Fighters of the Kaunas Ghetto*], in *Чёрная книга* [*The Black Book*], compiled by И. Эренбург (I. Ehrenburg) and В. Гроссман (V. Grossman), Vilnius, 1993, p. 293.
- <sup>163</sup> S. Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, op. cit., pp. 139–141.
- <sup>164</sup> Ibid., pp. 128, 129.
- <sup>165</sup> See M. Elinas, D. Gelpernas, op. cit., pp. 52–95.
- <sup>166</sup> A. Tory, op. cit., pp. 513–524; А. Файтельсон (A. Faitelson), op. cit., pp. 340–378.
- <sup>167</sup> S. Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, op. cit., pp. 168, 169; А. Файтельсон (A. Faitelson), op. cit., pp. 477–483.
- <sup>168</sup> S. Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, op. cit., pp. 175, 176.
- <sup>169</sup> “Kowno”, *Enzyklopedie des Holocaust: Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden* [*Kaunas*], *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, München–Zürich, 1995, Bd. II, p. 806.
- <sup>170</sup> S. Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, op. cit., pp. 103, 104.



Arūnas Bubnys

## The Kaunas and Vilnius Jewish Ghetto Police (1941–1944)

In the ever-expanding historiography of the Holocaust in Lithuania, there is a dearth of academic research on the Jewish Ghetto Police (German: *Jüdische Ghetto-Polizei*). One might say that this topic has been studied very little in the global historiography of the Holocaust as well. Why this issue is so unpopular can be partly explained by both psychological and political reasons. Jewish Holocaust survivors and their relatives find it difficult to remember, comprehend and talk about the activities of the Jewish Ghetto Police during the Nazi occupation. This topic contradicts the established image and concept of the Holocaust. Historians trying to study this problem must write not only about the sufferings and tragedies experienced by the Jewish people; they also face the unusual problems of preserving the humanity of the suffering, humiliated victims and collaboration with the Nazis. Researchers interested in the history of the ghettos note that the Jewish community imprisoned there was not homogeneous – there were differences in terms of people's position in the internal administration of the ghetto, as well as their jobs, professions, age, and so on. All these factors had a great impact on the situation of the ghetto prisoners and their families, their standard of living, and their opportunities to delay their death or even to save themselves from it. In the ghettos, the Jewish policemen held a privileged position – they had authority over the other ghetto residents and a chance of avoiding the killing campaigns until the final liquidation of the ghettos. They also had more options to ensure better material conditions (flats, food) for their families. It is very difficult to evaluate the activities of the Jewish Ghetto Police. Historians are forced to address the pressing issue of the Jewish Ghetto Police's collaboration with the occupation authorities. The activities of the Jewish Ghetto Police were multifaceted – they included many instances not only of collaboration, but also of resistance to the occupants, as well as providing assistance to their fellow Jews who were suffering. The contradictions are so intertwined that it is usually impossible to present generalized and unequivocal assessments. The author of the article adheres to the position that the activities of the Jewish Ghetto Police and its individual officers must be assessed as specifically, individually and objectively as possible.

To the best of the author's knowledge, no special academic papers have been written about the Kaunas and Vilnius Jewish Ghetto Police to date. As a result, the article is primarily based on archival documents and memoirs, diaries and academic papers that have been published of a more general nature. The work done by the Israeli historians Prof. Yitzhak Arad<sup>1</sup> and Prof. Dina Porat<sup>2</sup> are important for the topic under consideration. Arad's monograph about the Vilnius Ghetto briefly describes the establishment and functioning of the Vilnius Jewish Ghetto Police, and also extensively discusses the activities of Jacob Gens, the chief of the Vilnius Jewish Ghetto Police who later served as the head of the ghetto administration. Porat's article examines the original system of law and order that was put in place in the Lithuanian ghettos, and also allocates considerable attention to the Jewish Ghetto Police as an integral part of this system. Meanwhile, Isaiah Trunk's *Judenrat*<sup>3</sup> is very important for the topic under consideration from a methodological point of view. It also contains many facts about the activities of the Vilnius and Kaunas Jewish Ghetto Police. In terms of Lithuanian historians, of mention is Petras Stankeras, who provides a brief overview of the activities of the Vilnius and Kaunas Jewish Ghetto Police among the various police structures in his monograph.<sup>4</sup> Significant facts and observations about the activities of the Jewish police are presented in the diaries and memoirs of Holocaust witnesses Avraham Tory, Judelis Beilesas, Grigory Schur, Herman Kruk and Macha Rolnikas (Marija Rolnikaitė).<sup>5</sup>

Archival documents relevant to the topic under consideration are stored in the Lithuanian Central State Archives (hereinafter – the LCSA) and the Lithuanian Special Archives (hereinafter – the LSA). Of the LCSA fonds, of mention are the Jewish Ghetto Police in Vilijampolė fonds (R-973) and the Vilnius Jewish Ghetto fonds (R-1421). The first one contains as many as 1,036 files, including correspondence regarding the police personnel, administrative matters and fines, reports on incidents in the ghetto, resolutions and protocols of the Jewish Ghetto Police, rulings of the ghetto court, reports on persons who had violated the internal rules of the ghetto and on the arrests of ghetto residents, various orders and announcements of the German authorities, decrees of the Jewish Council (German: *Judenrat*) on police matters, orders of the chief of the Jewish Ghetto Police, and other documents. Most of the documents in the fonds are written in Yiddish, but there are documents in Lithuanian and German as well. The Vilnius Jewish Ghetto fonds has 790 files, most of which are written in Yiddish or German. This fonds contains many documents issued by the Vilnius Jewish Ghetto Police, such as orders, instructions and announcements on current issues of ghetto life.

Another important group of archival documents is the collection of criminal cases of former Jewish ghetto policemen safeguarded in the LSA. When the Soviets reoccupied Lithuania in 1944, some of the former Vilnius and Kaunas Ghetto Jewish policemen were arrested and sentenced for collaborating with the occupation authorities. There

are roughly a dozen such cases safeguarded in the LSA. The criminal case of former Kaunas Jewish Ghetto Police Chief Mikhail Kopelman is particularly valuable. Among the other LSA documents, a very valuable resource is the history of the Kaunas Ghetto Jewish Police that was written by the ghetto policemen themselves during the Nazi occupation.<sup>6</sup> Its manuscript was written in Yiddish, and its Russian translation is preserved in the LSA. The manuscript reflects the most important events in the Kaunas Ghetto until the autumn of 1943. The focus is on the history of the Jewish Ghetto Police – its establishment, reorganization, structure and functions; it presents statistical data on the composition of the police, character sketches of the chiefs, crime and punishment, as well as the opinion that the ghetto residents had of the Jewish police. This document is extremely important for research on the history of the Kaunas Ghetto.

The said literature and archival sources provide an opportunity for Holocaust researchers to examine in detail a unique phenomenon of Jewish history – the Jewish Ghetto Police.

Holocaust researchers emphasize the fact that the Jewish Ghetto Police – an institution created by the Jews themselves to control their public life and carry out punishments – was a new and unprecedented phenomenon in Jewish history. In traditional Jewish communities that have existed for centuries, there has never been anything like it. As a rule, Jews were always given orders, controlled and supervised by foreigners, i.e. the public authorities of the state where the Jewish community lived. Under the new conditions, the Jewish Councils largely corresponded to the traditions of Jewish communal self-government and were often established on the initiative of the Jews themselves, while the Jewish Ghetto Police was usually established in the Nazi-occupied countries by order of the occupation authorities.<sup>7</sup> It is difficult to say precisely whether this was done in Lithuania as well, because there are no orders of the Nazi authorities regarding the establishment of the Jewish Ghetto Police to be found. Historian Algirdas Jakubčionis claims that the issue of establishing the Jewish Ghetto Police was discussed at a meeting of the Gebietskommissars in Kaunas on July 27, 1941, i.e. even before the establishment of ghettos.<sup>8</sup> According to the testimonies of former Jewish policemen, the instructions to establish the Jewish Ghetto Police came from the Jewish Council. It is very likely that the Jewish Councils received corresponding instructions from the occupation authorities. The need to establish the Jewish Ghetto Police was brought about by the extreme living conditions, attacks on Jews by hooligans as well as robberies and pogroms, and the need to maintain order in moving Jews to the ghetto and addressing accommodation, food supply, assembly of workers, the fulfilment of various obligations and other issues. The Jewish Ghetto Police was vital in the big ghettos (in Vilnius, Kaunas and Šiauliai), because thousands of people had to be managed and controlled there. Changes in the population of the ghettos also led to quantitative changes in the Jewish Ghetto Police.

Holocaust researchers divide the functions of the Jewish Ghetto Police into three groups, according to their relationship with the occupation authorities: (1) execution of the orders and demands of the German authorities; (2) execution of the instructions of the Jewish Council that were not directly related to the orders of the occupation authorities; (3) performance of tasks related to the needs of the ghetto residents.<sup>9</sup>

This division is in principle suitable for describing the activities of the Lithuanian Jewish Ghetto Police as well. The Vilnius and Kaunas Jewish Ghetto Police were controlled by the Gebietskommissars – the German civil authorities for the corresponding districts. They had the unrestricted right to give orders to the Jewish Ghetto Police through the Jewish Councils or directly, change its leadership, staff composition or number, carry out reorganizations and punish policemen who had done wrong.

Next, the article shall specifically examine the functions, organizational structure and operating results of the Lithuanian Jewish Ghetto Police.

### **The Kaunas Jewish Ghetto Police**

On August 6, 1941, the Council of Elders (German: *Aeltestenrat*; the ghetto's highest body of self-government) decided to establish the Jewish Ghetto Police to maintain order in the Kaunas Ghetto. Throughout the ghetto's existence, the Jewish Ghetto Police were subordinate to the Council of Elders and carried out its orders. The main task of the Jewish Ghetto Police was to maintain public order in the ghetto. Residents were informed about the establishment of the Jewish Ghetto Police in a special announcement issued by the Council of Elders:

Please be informed that the Jewish Ghetto Police has been established under the Council of Elders to maintain internal order. Police officers shall wear a white armband with a blue Star of David and the inscription “Juedische Ghetto Polizei” on their left sleeve. All residents of the ghetto must comply with the mandatory orders of the authorities and the chairman of the Council of Elders and strictly follow the instructions of the police.<sup>10</sup>

Registration of volunteers began on August 10. The Council of Elders appointed Mikhail Kopelman\* as the chief of the Jewish Ghetto Police (he was also a member of the Council of Elders), and Capt. Mikhail Bramson was elected as his deputy.

\* Mikhail Kopelman worked as the chief of the Jewish Ghetto Police until mid-January 1944. Later, this position was taken over by Moisei Levin, the former head of the Criminal Department of the Jewish Ghetto Police.

Physically strong, healthy men who had served in the army were the first to be accepted into the police. The Jewish Ghetto Police began operating on August 15, 1941. That same day, the main site of the Kaunas Ghetto that had been established in the neighborhood of Vilijampolė was completed with a fence and barbed wire and completely isolated from the rest of the city. Initially, only 60 men served in the Jewish Ghetto Police.<sup>11</sup> This number was clearly insufficient for police tasks, as some 25,000 people had been driven into the ghetto. On August 22, 1941, the Council of Elders approved the list of positions in the Jewish Ghetto Police, with 186 in all.<sup>12</sup> At first, there were not many who wanted to become policemen – people did not know what a terrifying future awaited them, and they did not want to become executors of the anti-Semitic orders of the Nazi authorities. The first volunteers of the Jewish police service were idealists who wanted to help their fellow Jews who were suffering – they worked day and night without giving up. In the first days of the ghetto's existence, the issue of flats was a sore point. There was a massive shortage of living space, and people were angry; there were constant fights and conflicts that required police officers to step in. People who had lost their patience often beat up even the ghetto policemen. The ghetto policemen also maintained order in queues at the grocery stores, and assembled workers for German and Lithuanian institutions in the city.<sup>13</sup> Over time, the Jewish Ghetto Police grew into a well-organized, well-staffed and disciplined operation. The structure of the Jewish Ghetto Police settled into shape – the police command (called the “Zentralamt” in documents), the Fines Department, the Criminal Department, the prison and workshop guard, the sanitation service, the fire brigade (headed by Moisei Abramovich), the telephone exchange and the police stations. The post of police inspector was established in March 1942, and in July, a conflict resolution commission consisting of three police officers was formed, which performed the functions of the ghetto court.<sup>14</sup>

The police command (Zentralamt) managed and supervised the activities of the police bodies. The Zentralamt was headed by the chief of police and his deputy. This body was subordinate to the Council of Elders and reported to it on the work of the police. The office, the police stations, the Criminal Department and the ghetto prison were under its command.<sup>15</sup> The Zentralamt was located at Varnių g. 32, Block A.<sup>16</sup>

The ghetto was divided into four police districts (precincts). The 1st Precinct included Linkuvos, Stulginskio, Dvaro, Naujalio, and Panerių Streets. The 2nd Precinct included part of Panerių Street and Veliuonos, Kriščiukaičio, Ariogalos, and Skirgailos Streets. The 3rd Precinct included part of Kriščiukaičio Street, Brolių, and Goštautų Streets, part of Stulginskio and Linkuvos Streets, and Mindaugo, Vytenio, Aukuro, Liutavaro, and Varnių Streets. The 4th Precinct included Kuršėnų Street, part of Panerių, Mindaugo, Vytenio, Aukuro, Liutavaro, and Varnių Streets, and Demokratų Street.<sup>17</sup> The number of precincts in the ghetto changed. Three were left after the “Little Ghetto” was liquidated in October 1941, and only two were left by January 1944. The chiefs of

the districts (precincts) at various times were Kopel Gudinski (who held this position until the middle of 1943), Chaim Rubinson (who was the chief of the Small Ghetto district until its liquidation on October 4, 1941), David Tamsche, Yehoshua (Ika) Grinberg (chief of the 1st district, who was shot on March 26, 1944 at the Ninth Fort), and Josif Panemunski (who was also shot on March 26, 1944 at the Ninth Fort).<sup>\*</sup> The ghetto's criminal police were headed by Mikhail Bramson, while the ghetto gate guard was headed by Lev Aronovski (who was shot on March 26, 1944 at the Ninth Fort). There were 15–20 senior police officers.<sup>18</sup> On September 1, 1941, there were 172 people serving on the Jewish Ghetto Police; later, the number of policemen increased to 220–230. According to January 1, 1942 data, the Jewish Ghetto Police staff breakdown was as follows:

- (a) active service and command – 158 people;
  - (b) interrogators, information service employees  
and prosecutors – 10 people;
  - (c) office workers – 10 people;
  - (d) medical personnel – 3 people;
  - (e) address office – 9 people;
  - (f) couriers – 6 people;
  - (g) other – 10 people;
- Total – 208 people.<sup>19</sup>

In order to improve the work of the police, the police command was changed and the organizational structure and normative documents regulating the work of the police were reorganized. The documents regulating the work of the police emphasized that police officers must treat the residents with courtesy, justice and lawfulness. The policemen were allowed to use physical force against undisciplined and disorderly ghetto residents. Policemen were required to write a report of every crime or misdemeanor they noticed and present it to their immediate superior. The chief of police, after examining the case presented to him, would pass a criminal ruling; the person being punished would receive a copy of the ruling and be notified of the appeal procedure.<sup>20</sup> On 1 December 1941, former chief of the 3rd Precinct Yehuda Zupovitz\*\* was appointed as the new deputy to the chief of the Jewish Ghetto Police, Mikhail Kopelman, while Ika Grinberg was named police inspector and Abraham Shulman was made head of the office.<sup>21</sup> The new police command undertook work

\* According to other sources, the ghetto policemen were shot at the Ninth Fort on March 27, 1944.

\*\* Yehuda Zupovitz served as the deputy to the Kaunas Jewish Ghetto Police Chief until late June 1942, at which point this position was taken over from him by the former judge of the ghetto court, Yakov Abramovich, and Zupovitz was appointed police inspector.

and reforms with resolve. In December 1941, the Jewish Ghetto Police statute was adopted, ranks and insignia were established, and a prison was established. Ordinary policemen wore hats with the Star of David and their policeman number written on them. Each precinct had its own numbering. The precinct chiefs and the inspector had the right to use physical means of enforcement on unruly ghetto residents; they could also punish them with fines (up to 100 rb) or up to seven days in jail. The record-keeping for the Jewish Ghetto Police bodies was done in Lithuanian until February 1, 1943, after which it switched to Yiddish.<sup>22</sup>

The elderly, physically weak and other persons unfit for this service were dismissed from the police force. Many young and energetic people were recruited. The ghetto's criminal police force was established in December 1941. It originally had 17 policemen (chief Mikhail Bramson, deputy Peretz Padison).<sup>23</sup> The ghetto's criminal police was initially an autonomous unit. Its staff was reduced in April 1942, and in July of that same year, the autonomy of the criminal police was abolished and it became the Criminal Department of the Jewish Ghetto Police. The number of employees in the department was further reduced, and Moisei Levin was appointed as its new head.<sup>24</sup> The Criminal Department consisted of three parts – general, investigation and information. Criminal Department officers had the right to conduct searches, arrest suspects and detain them for up to 72 hours. Detainees could only be held longer by court order. The department's operational rules stated that the Criminal Department “warns, observes and investigates criminal acts, and submits cases with its conclusions to the court.”<sup>25</sup> The main lines of work of the Criminal Department were combatting theft, misappropriation of property and illegal trade.

According to the amended statute of the Kaunas Jewish Ghetto Police (January 1, 1943), the work of the police throughout the entire territory of the ghetto was the responsibility of the police chief, who was subordinate to the chairman of the Council of Elders. The area of the ghetto was divided into precincts in terms of the police service. The chief of the Jewish Ghetto Police had the right to determine the number of precincts and their boundaries with the approval of the chairman of the Council of Elders. The following ranks were established in the Jewish Ghetto Police: regular policeman, senior policeman, assistant precinct chief, precinct chief, police inspector, deputy chief of police, chief of police. The chief of police could change ranks and transfer officers to another place of service. The police statute defined the operational functions and tasks of the police: maintenance of peace and order, protection of public and private property, supervision of the execution of orders and decrees of the ghetto authorities, execution of the decisions of court authorities, prevention and investigation of crimes, control of cleanliness and sanitation requirements. For violations of orders or public order, the chief of police had the right to impose a fine or arrest the person for up to 10 days. Police officers were required to inform their immediate superiors immediately after using physical force against order violators.<sup>26</sup>

One of the many functions of the Jewish Ghetto Police was the registration of ghetto residents. All residents, regardless of their age and gender, had to be registered at the ghetto police stations. This was done in order to correctly distribute food cards to the residents and reduce the number of various forgeries and frauds.<sup>27</sup> The Jewish Ghetto Police was also tasked with controlling cleanliness in the streets and yards, ensuring that there was no illegal trade at the ghetto fence with people on the outside, and so on. In autumn 1941, one of the most important tasks of the Jewish Ghetto Police became gathering workers for hard labor at the Aleksotas airfield. On September 10, 1941, an order was received from the Germans to deliver 500 Jewish workers to the airfield for the night shift. Remembering the “intelligentsia campaign” (when, on August 18, 1941, 534 Jewish intellectuals were taken from the ghetto, allegedly to manage the Kaunas archives, and were later murdered that same day at the Fourth Fort), the Jews were afraid to register, because they thought that they too would be shot. The Jewish Ghetto Police only managed to round up about 200 men by force. Everyone anxiously waited for the next day to come, but the men returned from the airfield safe and sound. This encouraged the Jews to register for work more actively, leaving the Jewish Ghetto Police with less work to do.<sup>28</sup> However, with the ever-increasing demand for Jewish labor in the city, gathering the required number of workers was not an easy task. Night and day shifts were introduced in Aleksotas, each of which required a thousand workers. The ghetto policemen went from flat to flat every day and drove the men to work. The ghetto administration realized that the fate of the entire ghetto would depend on the work of the Jewish workers. Those who avoided work were punished with fines and sent to the ghetto prison (lock-up).

One of the functions of the Jewish Ghetto Police was to prevent ghetto residents from leaving the ghetto illegally. The ghetto policeman on duty reported cases like these to his superiors on an almost daily basis. The latter would then report this to the chairman of the Council of Elders. On January 25, 1942, the police chief on duty informed the chairman of the Council of Elders that on January 22, the German ghetto guard had brought a boy to the 3rd Precinct – 13-year-old Henry Wolfson, who had tried to leave the ghetto. “According to my Criminal Ruling No. 122,” wrote the policeman on duty, “Citizen Wolfson was sentenced to three days of arrest.”<sup>29</sup>

On February 8, 1942, the ghetto policeman on duty forwarded a list of 15 residents who had escaped to the chief of the 1st Precinct and ordered him “to immediately take measures and put them in prison.”<sup>30</sup>

The Jewish Ghetto Police also provided daily updates on events related to the ghetto and its residents. On June 15, 1942, the policeman on duty reported that on that day, a German guard shot 50-year-old Moisei Rozenberg, who was trying to get out through the fence, on Paneriu Street.<sup>31</sup>



On March 29, 1942, the Council of Elders was informed about two Jewish workers – Nachman Sroka and Yosel Fryd – who had been shot by German guards at the airfield on March 23. Both were shot for trying to buy groceries. The corpses were brought to the ghetto and buried in the ghetto cemetery.<sup>32</sup>

The ghetto policemen took their oath on November 1, 1942. A solemn swearing-in ceremony was held in the yeshiva hall. The ceremony was attended by 152 Jewish policemen, the members of the Council of Elders and other representatives of the ghetto administration. The deputy secretary of the Council of Elders read the text of the oath in Hebrew and Yiddish, and the policemen repeated it:

I, an employee of the Vilijampolė Jewish Ghetto Police, solemnly swear, in the presence of the chairman of the Jewish Council and the chief of police:

- to carry out the duties entrusted to me in spite of the danger and the time this may take;
- not to seek benefits from the position I hold, neither for myself, nor for my friends, nor for my acquaintances;
- to keep the secrets of my service strictly confidential;
- to devote all my strength and knowledge to the benefit of the ghetto's Jewish community.<sup>33</sup>

Then all of the policemen present at the ceremony walked to the table and signed under the text of the oath. The swearing-in ceremony was presided over by Yehuda Zupovitz, who was the deputy chief of the Jewish Ghetto Police at the time. At the end of the ceremony, all those present sang “Hatikvah,” the Zionist anthem.<sup>34</sup> An orchestra (“Viltis”) had been established under the ghetto police in early 1942, with Michael Hofmekler as conductor and Abraham Stupel as concertmaster.<sup>35</sup>

On March 26–27, 1944, the Germans accused the Jewish Ghetto Police of having ties with the anti-fascist underground and organizing escapes from the ghetto. The Jewish policemen were taken to the Kaunas Ninth Fort, where they were interrogated and pressed to reveal where the ghetto hiding places (the so-called “malinas”) were. The interrogation was headed by SS-Oberscharführer Bruno Kittel, who was in charge of the Vilnius Ghetto liquidation operation in September 1943. After being investigated and tortured, 34 policemen who refused to show the Gestapo where the hiding places were located in the ghetto were shot. Among those shot were Jewish Ghetto Police Chief Moisei Levin and two of his deputies: Yehuda Zupovitz and Yehoshua (Ika) Grinberg. The rest of the policemen were taken back to the ghetto.

After the March 26–27, 1944 campaign, the Jewish Ghetto Police was reorganized into the Jewish Order Service (German: *Jüdischer Ordnungsdienst*), headed by Benjamin Lipcer, who had close ties with the Gestapo, with Tankhum Aronshtam and Chaim Grossman as his deputies. The Jewish Order Service (43 people) operated until the liquidation of the Kaunas Ghetto.<sup>36</sup>

Most of the ghetto policemen faced the same dilemma on almost a daily basis – whether to serve the occupant in an attempt to save their own lives and secure better living conditions, or to risk of their lives in order to help their fellow Jews. Some policemen chose the path of collaboration and others chose the path of resistance, but most of them simply tried to go with the flow and survive. The Gestapo managed to recruit agents and informants among the ghetto policemen. These policemen informed the Gestapo about the frame of mind and plans of the ghetto residents, their hiding places, and the activities of the underground organizations. Tzvanye Baider, who worked in the sanitary subdivision of the Jewish Ghetto Police, had written permission from the Gestapo to go into the city and without the identification badges obligatory for Jews. He also met with Hauptscharführer Helmut Rauca, the Kaunas Gestapo officer who managed the affairs of the ghetto.<sup>37</sup>

After the March 26–27, 1944, some of the Jewish policemen were brought back from the Kaunas Ninth Fort to the ghetto, and showed the Gestapo where children and old people were hiding to avoid death. The people who were found in the hiding places were arrested and taken to the Ninth Fort to be shot. There is information that Isser Gutner, Abraham Rabinovich, Boruch Shliachter, Menachem Wilenski, Grigori Zundelovitch, and Bentsel Zemait were among the ghetto policemen who helped the Gestapo find the hiding places. According to other data, seven Jewish policemen could not endure the Gestapo interrogations and became traitors.<sup>38</sup>

Most of the ghetto residents hated and feared the Jewish Ghetto Police. The Jewish Ghetto Police had to carry out the instructions of the occupation authorities and the Council of Elders, which were often painful and unpleasant for the ghetto residents – forcing people to go work and removing them from the ghetto (such as when some of the ghetto residents were taken to Riga, Latvia in February 1942), acting as guards, carrying out arrests and searches, and prosecuting persons who had violated the established ghetto order. In general, any encounter that ordinary citizens had with the Jewish Ghetto Police usually meant trouble – investigations, arrests, fines, etc. Jewish policemen often took advantage of their official position (for example, demanding that Jews returning from the city give them food, or confiscating and appropriating residents' valuables during searches) and even beat their fellow Jews. Like in other branches of the ghetto administration, the police force eventually became rife with corruption and protectionism. As former Kaunas Ghetto resident Sara Ginaitė-Rubinson pointed out, even in the ghetto conditions, the Jewish police force operated as all bureaucracies do:

Employees of the administrative apparatus and their relatives and friends enjoyed various privileges and benefits. They often felt like all-powerful rulers in their chairs. They treated people who came to see them rudely and arrogantly. Members of the Committee, the administration's employees, and the foremen of the ghetto work brigades and workshops comprised the ghetto community's elite.<sup>39</sup>

On the other hand, there were many honest and decent people among the ghetto policemen who tried their best to help their fellow Jews; a number of policemen also supported the ghetto anti-fascist underground or participated in its activities themselves. Several dozen Jewish policemen were shot at the Ninth Fort for this.

The **ghetto court** occupied an important place in the ghetto law enforcement system. It was established on October 24, 1941 by the decision of the Council of Elders and was called the Labor Court. Its main purpose was to try the Jews who intentionally evaded their labor obligation, thereby endangering the entire ghetto. The court could put offenders in the lock-up for up to one month, temporarily deprive them of food cards, evict them from their flats, or hand them over to the German commandant of the ghetto, who ordered physical punishments (whipping). Court rulings were publicly announced and hung on the walls of houses.<sup>40</sup> The decisions of the court were enforced by the Jewish Ghetto Police. This court did not last long – a new court was established on 8 December 1941. Appointed as the chairman of the court was the prominent legal specialist Prof. Simon Beliackin (who later suffered from depression and was killed on March 27, 1944 at the Ninth Fort). The deputy chairman was attorney Yakov (Yakub) Abramavich, with Moshe (Israel) Tabachnik, Moshe Zak, Isak Cherny, Efraim Buch (who also served as a prosecutor), Natan Naftali, Nathan Schimberg, and L. Telzaka appointed as members of the court. The court was located at Griniaus g. 28. The court existed as such until July 5, 1942. Later, it was restructured into a judicial commission under the Jewish Ghetto Police.<sup>41</sup> On October 1, 1942, the chief of the Jewish Ghetto Police approved the operating instructions for the Penal Department of the Jewish Ghetto Police. According to these instructions, two permanent adjudicators and a secretary were to work in the Penal Department. Cases and conflicts were to be resolved by three police officers – the two permanent adjudicators and one invitee. The Criminal Department of the Jewish Ghetto Police would present the cases at the court hearings. Cases examined by the Penal Department were approved by the chief of the Jewish Ghetto Police.<sup>42</sup> After the “great campaign” (when a third of the ghetto residents – more than 9,000 Jews – were killed at the Kaunas Ninth Fort on October 29, 1941), the court mainly dealt with property disputes. At that time, there were frequent conflicts over the property of the people who had been murdered, with relatives and neighbors of the victims laying claim to it. The ghetto court established a rule that the property of ghetto residents who were murdered or missing belongs to their children or grandchildren. If there are no children or grandchildren, then it goes to the parents; if there are no parents, then it goes to their brothers and sisters; if there are no brothers and sisters, then it goes to the Council of Elders. The latter usually distributed the property left without heirs to the poorest or the hardest working ghetto residents. The court also examined criminal (theft, fights, etc.) and civil (divorce, etc.) cases.<sup>43</sup>

On April 17, 1942, the Council of Elders approved the operational regulations of the court prosecutor. The prosecutor was to perform his duties according to the laws of

the Republic of Lithuania, to the extent that they did not contradict the existing order. He also had to perform the duties of interrogator on the control commission.<sup>44</sup> The prosecutor was subordinate to the chief of police.

On July 20, 1942, the Council of Elders changed the regulations and status of the Jewish Ghetto Police – henceforth, the Jewish police force was authorized to investigate criminal and civil cases.<sup>45</sup> This was done because the Germans had issued an order to terminate the activities of the ghetto court. The ghetto's criminal police took over the functions of the court. A separate criminal case was opened for each crime. Suspects, victims and witnesses were interviewed during investigation of the case. The most common crime was theft. A group of professional thieves formed in the ghetto, which the officers of the Criminal Department eventually became very familiar with. Inveterate thieves and robbers were treated harshly – they were beaten until they confessed and showed where they had hidden the stolen items. The number of crimes in the ghetto began to decline. The Criminal Department sent daily and monthly reports to the Jewish Ghetto Police command about the crimes that had been committed and the investigation thereof.<sup>46</sup>

On July 14, 1943, the Council of Elders approved the regulations of the Punishment (Penal) Department (the former court) under the Jewish Ghetto Police. According to the regulations, the Jewish Ghetto Police was authorized to deal with the civil and criminal affairs of the ghetto residents. The Punishment Department was to consist of three police officers. They examined cases based on the laws and procedures of the Republic of Lithuania and the decrees and instructions of the Council of Elders. The Punishment Department examined cases submitted to it by the Criminal Department under the Jewish Ghetto Police, the precinct commanders and the heads of other institutions under the Council of Elders; it also examined complaints and statements from private persons. The decisions of the Punishment Department could be appealed to the Council of Elders Complaints Committee. The decisions of the latter were final.<sup>47</sup>

All cases considered by the Punishment Department and the Complaints Committee were heard by three judges, who took turns acting as chairman. The members of the Punishment Department were attorneys Efraim Buch, Isak Cherny and Moshe Zak. The members of the Complaints Committee were attorneys Israel Bernstein, Natan Markovski and Moshe Tabachnik. The ghetto court (later the Penal Department) essentially worked illegally, since the Gestapo considered itself the only institution that could try Jews. The activities of the ghetto court helped to strengthen morale among residents and reduce crime. As Avraham Tory wrote, the Punishment Department “filled a gap in resolving disputes among the ghetto residents; at the same time, this department also assumed the moral duty of ‘removing evil from evil itself.’”<sup>48</sup> In its activities, the Punishment Department followed the principle established by the Council of Elders not to divulge any information that could lead to Jews falling into

the hands of the Gestapo. If that happened, the sentence would be more severe and the culprit would most likely be sentenced to death.

After the “great campaign,” a prison (lock-up) was established in the Kaunas Ghetto (at Kriščiukaičio g. 23, then later at Našlaičių g. 15, and finally at Margio g. 11). This was needed to maintain discipline and order. The prison was usually used for people who were evading work or who had committed crimes. The emergence of the prison helped reduce these offences, since the people committing them realized that they could receive real punishment. The prison was subordinate to the chief of the Jewish Ghetto Police as a separate administrative unit. The prison was established in the 2nd Precinct (and was officially opened on 5 December 1941). Six people worked in the prison administration – the warden, the secretary, the Wachtmeister, and three guards. They worked according to the statute and instructions approved by the chief of the Jewish Ghetto Police. In the prison, men and women were kept in separate cells. The detainees had to work eight hours a day. Persons sentenced to a longer term had the right to one 15-minute visit per week. Persons who violated the prison rules could be punished – they could be denied outdoor exercise and visitors, their food ration could be reduced, or they could be put in solitary confinement. Detainees had the right to appeal the actions of prison administration employees to the prison warden (these positions were held at various times by Iudl Aronovski, Benzion Bukantz and Isak Melamdavich).<sup>49</sup> The prisoner registration book shows that 1,490 persons served sentences in the ghetto prison (from December 3, 1941 to October 22, 1943).<sup>50</sup>

The majority of the prisoners were sentenced under the administrative procedure. Their numbers increased steadily. This indicated that more and more misdemeanors and crimes were being uncovered. In 1941, five ghetto residents were punished for various crimes in August (insulting the Jewish Ghetto Police or administration employees, evading the labor obligation, fighting, etc.), followed by 12 in September, 21 in October, 111 in November (when as many as 80 people were sentenced for violations of sanitary care), 92 in December, 86 in January 1942 and 207 in February 1942.<sup>51</sup> In January 1943, the Penal Department under the Jewish Ghetto Police sentenced 26 persons to 214 days of arrest for various misdemeanors. At the same time, another 40 persons were sentenced under the administrative procedure to 69.5 days of arrest.<sup>52</sup>

In conclusion, it can be noted that an autonomous, universal and effective law enforcement system had been formed in the Kaunas Ghetto in 1941. Its key components were the Jewish Ghetto Police, the courts, the prosecutors and the prison. This system guaranteed public order in the ghetto and punishment for criminals and other offenders, ensured that the orders of the Council of Elders were carried out, and allowed the ghetto prisoners to be used to resolve pressing problems.

## The Vilnius Jewish Ghetto Police

After the Jews in Vilnius were forced into the ghetto on September 6, 1941, the internal administration of the ghetto was formed – the Jewish Council with its subordinate departments and the Jewish Ghetto Police. Until the end of October, there were two ghettos in Vilnius – the Large Ghetto (Ašmenos, Dysnos, Ligoninės, Mėsinių, Rūdinkų, Strašūno, and Šiaulių Streets, part of one side of Arklių, Karmelitų, Lydos and Pylimo Streets) and the Small Ghetto (Antokolskio and Žydų Streets, part of Gaono and Stiklių Streets). The ghettos were separated by Vokiečių Street. Approximately 29,000 Jews were put in the Large Ghetto and roughly 9,000 were put in the Small Ghetto.<sup>53</sup> Jewish councils and police were established in both ghettos and operated separately. The German authorities appointed former bank employee Anatol Fried as the chairman of the Jewish Council of the Large Ghetto, and the merchant Itzhak Lejbowicz as the chairman of the Jewish Council of the Small Ghetto.<sup>54</sup> In the Large Ghetto, the police began to be organized on the very first day of its operation – September 7, 1941. Advertisements were posted on the walls of the ghetto houses urging young men to join the Jewish Ghetto Police. Fried appointed former Lithuanian Army Capt. Jacob Gens as the chief of the Jewish Ghetto Police. His deputy was attorney Józef Muszkat, a 1939 war refugee from Warsaw. Both men sympathized with the right-wing Revisionist Zionism movement. Before the war, most of the police officers had been members of Betar\* and had some sort of military training.<sup>55</sup> When the Jewish Ghetto Police command was being put together, there was a conflict between the right and the left (Betar and the Bund\*\*). Initially, a Bundist activist named Herman Kruk was nominated for the position of deputy chief of the Jewish Ghetto Police, but when he became familiar with the views and methods of operation of the police command, he turned down the offer. During the war, Kruk had secretly kept a diary. In his September 16, 1941 entry, he wrote about Gens and Muszkat in a negative light. Kruk particularly did not like that these people preferred physical violence (since allegedly, without beatings, the ghetto residents would not listen to the police) and liked to “ride on the necks of the ghetto residents.”<sup>56</sup> Even though the rightists took power in the Jewish Ghetto Police, the tension between the right and the left did not disappear, since the Bundists had more influence on the Jewish Council. Formally, the Jewish Ghetto Police was subordinate to the Jewish Council and had to carry out its orders, but the situation in the Vilnius Ghetto was

\* Betar was a radical militant right-wing Zionist youth organization subordinate to the Revisionist Zionism party headed by Vladimir (Zėv) Jabotinsky.

\*\* The Bund (which means “union” in Yiddish) was a social democratic party of Lithuanian, Polish and Russian Jewish workers. It was founded in Vilnius in 1897.

rather complicated. The disagreements and competition between the Jewish Council and the police continued until mid-July 1942, when, by the decision of the Nazi authorities, the Jewish Council was abolished and Gens was appointed the sole head of the ghetto. The Jewish Council and the police headquarters were located in the same building – Rūdninkų g. 6.<sup>57</sup> The Small Ghetto also had a Jewish police force, but it did not operate for long and was liquidated together with the Small Ghetto. It is known that Shafir was the chief of the Jewish police in the Small Ghetto.<sup>58</sup>

Between 1941 and 1942, the structure of the Jewish Ghetto Police took shape. The police headquarters were under the command of Jacob Gens. Josef Glazman was initially his deputy, but was later replaced by Salk (Saul) Dessler. The ghetto was divided into three precincts\* (commissariats): A, B, and C. Each of them had 15–20 policemen. Initially, there were approximately 150 policemen serving on the Vilnius Jewish Ghetto Police, but by August 1943, this number had increased to 226. The commissioner of the first commissariat (A) was initially Józef Muszkat, who was later replaced by Noson Ring; the commissioner of the second (B) commissariat was Isydor Frucht. The police's criminal unit was headed at different times by commissioners Oberhard, Oster, and Henrik Zagaiski, and Meir Lev was in charge of the ghetto gate guard. There was also the labor police unit (headed by Taubin), the prison guard unit, and the sanitary police unit (headed by Goldman), as well as the prosecutor's office. Józef Muszkat held the position of police inspector. The ghetto prison (with Landau and later Beigel as warden) was located on Lydos Street. It was constantly guarded by 12 policemen.<sup>59</sup>

Grigory Schur wrote in his diary that police stations in the ghetto were on duty around the clock, and all the necessary documentation was kept there; policemen wore a blue armband with a white Star of David on their left arm – lower-ranking policemen had a number on the armband, while higher-ranking officers had more insignia.<sup>60</sup> The ghetto policemen were armed with rubber and wooden batons, whips, and, in exceptional cases, firearms.

A unique system of law and order was created in the Vilnius Ghetto. Alongside the police, the courts and the prosecutor's office were important components of this system. In February 1942, with the permission of the Nazi authorities, the Jewish Council began to create a legal system in the ghetto – the courts and the prosecutor's office were established, a code was drawn up, and a corps of attorneys was formed. Lower courts and appellate courts were established. They consisted of several judges headed by the president of the court.<sup>61</sup> However, as Yitzhak Arad noted, the ghetto courts

\* Some authors indicate that there were two police stations in the Vilnius Ghetto in mid-1942. See: I. Trunk, *Judenrat*, New York, 1972, p. 495; P. Stankeras, *Lietuvių policija 1941–1944 metais*, Vilnius, 1998, p. 88.

were not autonomous – they were subordinate to the Jewish Council, and later to the head of the ghetto, Jacob Gens. The prosecutor's office was subordinate to the Jewish Ghetto Police command.<sup>62</sup> The ghetto court and the prosecutor's office were already functioning in March 1942. On March 7, 1942, Herman Kruk wrote in his diary about a meeting where the problems of delinquency among children in the ghetto were discussed. In addition to the other responsible officials from the ghetto administration, the prosecutor, Adolf Povirskeri (who was later replaced by Nusbaum) and the president of the ghetto court, Benjamin Srolowicz, were also present at the meeting.<sup>63</sup>

The ghetto civil and appeal courts were formed in early August 1942. Israel Kaplan became the president of the civil court, and Avraham Chvoynik, Solomon Deul, Noson Gawendo, Shimon Markus, and Abram Notes were appointed as members. Shepsel Milkanovitsk was elected as the president of the court of appeal, and Grysha Yashunski, Daniel Kacenelson, and B. Srolovich were named as members.<sup>64</sup> However, even after the establishment of the courts, some crimes (for example, leaving the ghetto without a permit, escaping from custody, disobeying police officers) continued to be handled by the Jewish Ghetto Police. In the first half of 1942, 115 court hearings were held in the Vilnius Ghetto, in which 172 defendants were tried. The Jewish Ghetto Police and other authorities additionally prosecuted another 183 persons during the same period. In most cases, the defendants were sentenced to imprisonment ranging from a few hours to six weeks, or were given fines or warnings. Juvenile offenders were handed over to the supervision of a special police officer.<sup>65</sup> In January 1942, 135 prisoners did time in the ghetto prison on Lydos Street, followed by 211 prisoners in February and 341 in March. Most of the prisoners were sentenced to one or two days of imprisonment. In comparing the legal systems of the Lithuanian ghettos, Israeli historian Dina Porat noted that the courts in the Kaunas and Šiauliai Ghettos were less dependent on the police and had greater authority among the residents than in the Vilnius Ghetto.<sup>66</sup>

A death sentence handed down by the ghetto court to six criminals caused a major commotion. On July 3, 1942, a gang of criminals brutally killed small trader Yosef Gershtein on Šiaulių Street. The next day, the Jewish Ghetto Police had already found the criminals, and the ghetto court sentenced them to death. The sentence was carried out at 4 p.m. on that same day. Along with the five criminals (Isaak and Ilya Geivush, Yakov Politkovski, Hirsh Vituchovski, Leib Grodzenski), Yankel Avidon was also hanged. Avidon was officially accused of beating a policeman, but this was actually retribution for turning in Jews who had escaped from Vilnius to the Gestapo in the Lida Ghetto. Most of the ghetto residents supported the death sentence. The Germans were also pleased that the Jews had learned to be executioners.<sup>67</sup> After this incident, the criminal elements of the ghetto did not commit a single murder.



Officially, the Jewish Ghetto Police was subordinate to the Jewish Council and was obliged to carry out orders and tasks from it and Nazi officials. The Jewish Ghetto Police maintained public order in the ghetto, fought crime and saboteurs of the labor obligation, assembled ghetto residents for various jobs, and occasionally arrested people who were condemned to be shot and handed them over to the Nazis. The sanitary police were responsible for maintaining cleanliness in the ghetto and punishing violators of sanitary regulations. The functions of the Jewish Ghetto Police were partly reflected in the March 28, 1942 letter of the chairman of the Jewish Council to the adviser on Jewish affairs in Vilnius:

Efforts are made to perform all of the instructions received from Mr. Gebietskommissar and yourself with complete precision, and they are. It should be added here that in fulfilling verbal and written orders (for example, regarding the management of going to and from work, etc.), the Jewish Ghetto Police has to operate not only in the ghetto itself, but also outside the ghetto.

It is also necessary to mention the energy-intensive and difficult work of the police at the gates of the ghetto, checking for and taking away foodstuffs and fuel. However, the police perform this task rather well.

Currently, the Jewish Ghetto Police are also tasked with overseeing the ghetto's external isolation. The police do this job well too.<sup>68</sup>

The majority of the ghetto residents hated the Jewish Ghetto Police, as a penal institution cooperating with the Nazi occupation authorities. Herman Kruk, Grigory Schur, Macha Rolnikas, and others chroniclers of the Vilnius Ghetto spare no criticism for the Vilnius Ghetto Jewish Police. According to Schur, other ghettos did not have such a strict regime as the Vilnius Ghetto. Under the command of Meir Lev, the ghetto gate guard brutally beat any Jew who tried to secretly bring food into the ghetto. The gate guards were particularly overzealous when their work was being observed by German Gestapo officers.<sup>69</sup> Most often, the ghetto police were blamed for their brutal and immoral behavior, corruption, appeasement of the Nazis, and arrogant stance with respect to ordinary ghetto residents. Kruk wrote that the ghetto policemen demanded bribes from the ghetto residents for even the smallest services, and that their standard of living was much higher than that of the other Jews. He noted ironically that police service is the best means of livelihood.<sup>70</sup>

The most hideous aspect of the ghetto police's activities was assisting the occupation authorities in killing campaigns targeting the ghetto residents. These campaigns were mainly carried out in autumn 1941, during the period of mass killings. When the Gestapo demanded that the Jews condemned to death be rounded up, the Jewish Council assigned this task to the Jewish policemen. The latter would go from flat to flat and order the ghetto residents to re-register their work permits (the so-called

“Gelb Schein”) at the Jewish Council. Those who had a work permit were sent home, while the others were arrested by German Gestapo officers and Lithuanian policemen. The condemned were taken to Lukiškės Prison, and from there – to Paneriai to be shot. The belongings and foodstuffs of the Jews who were taken to be shot were often appropriated by the Jewish policemen. There were cases when the Jewish policemen would tell the Nazis and their collaborators about the hiding places in the ghetto that the Jews were using in an attempt to escape death.<sup>71</sup> The Gestapo had its own agents and informants among the ghetto policemen. Salk (Saul) Dessler, who was the deputy chief of the Jewish Ghetto Police, was recruited by the Gestapo in autumn 1941. Through his agents, Dessler collected information about the frame of mind of the ghetto residents and followed the activities of the ghetto’s underground organization. He was in contact with SiPo and the SD Vilnius Branch Adviser on Jewish Affairs August Meyer and SD Sonderkommando Commander Martin Weiss. On the instructions of the Gestapo, Dessler organized the selection of Jews to be shot, and also participated in the liquidation of the ghettos in Ashmyany, Švenčionys, Michalishki and Salos.<sup>72</sup>

The Nazis often carried out Jewish arrest and killing campaigns directly, without the mediation of the ghetto administration (the Jewish Council and the Jewish Ghetto Police). German Gestapo officers and Lithuanian policemen would break into the ghetto, conduct searches and take the people they found to be shot. Israeli historian Prof. Yitzhak Arad noted that they organized campaigns like this when they wanted to exterminate large numbers of Jews indiscriminately. This is how the Small Ghetto was liquidated in October 1941. When they were only planning on exterminating a certain category of Jews (such as the disabled, the sick or the elderly), the Nazis did so with the Jewish Council and the mediation of the Jewish Ghetto Police. The Jewish Council would give instructions to the Jewish Ghetto Police, who would round up people in the specific category and hand them over to the Nazis. The Jewish administration was of the opinion that it was better to sacrifice some of the ghetto residents in order to save the lives of the majority. Even though the Jewish Council of the Large Ghetto already knew in late September 1941 that the Small Ghetto was doomed, they basically did nothing to save even one of the residents of the Small Ghetto. Thus, the ghetto administration assisted the Nazis in carrying out the partial extermination of the ghetto population.<sup>73</sup>

The Vilnius Jewish Ghetto Police notoriously participated in the Ashmyany massacre in October 1942. On October 19, 22\* Jewish policemen from the Vilnius Ghetto were sent to Ashmyany. They were issued military caps, on which the Jewish policemen attached the Star of David. The punitive expedition was headed by Dessler and Martin

\* Herman Kruk wrote that 20 Jewish policemen from the Vilnius Ghetto had gone to Ashmyany (H. Kruk, *Paskutinės Lietuvos Jeruzalės dienos*, Vilnius, 2004, p. 386).

Weiss, a Gestapo officer. In the Ashmyany Ghetto, the Jewish policemen selected 406 Jews who were old and unwell to be shot. The Gestapo originally wanted to shoot 1,500 women and children, but Gens and Dessler managed to “negotiate” this number down to 406. On October 23, 1942, 404 elderly Jews and two small children were shot.<sup>74</sup> The involvement of the ghetto policemen in this campaign caused a storm of indignation in the Vilnius Ghetto. In his diary, Grigory Schur assessed the actions of the ghetto policemen as follows:

The Jewish policemen who came back in Lithuanian uniform caps looked disgusting. The Jewish policemen serving the murderers of their own people became immersed in their alleged role as the real masters of the life and death of their unfortunate brothers. They felt like they were almost Germans from the Gestapo themselves, and thought that they would win a life for themselves through despicable acts and submission. However, as we have now learned, the German Gestapo in Baranavichy massacred the entire ghetto of 9,000 Jews, including the policemen with the commandant and the ghetto council.<sup>75</sup>

It is not known for certain whether the Jewish policemen themselves participated in the shooting of the Ashmyany Jews. Kruk wrote that eight Lithuanian and seven Jewish policemen participated in the execution. Senior policemen (Dessler, Ring, Lev) were armed with revolvers during the campaign. Some of the ghetto policemen returned from Ashmyany with bags full of money and jewels.<sup>76</sup>

The tension between the Jewish Council and the Jewish Ghetto Police command increased even more in the spring of 1942. Jacob Gens was increasingly interfering in the affairs of the ghetto management and showed little consideration for the Jewish Council headed by Anatol Fried. Seeing the harsh treatment of the Jews by the ghetto police, the German authorities had more faith in Gens, with his strict and firm personality, than they did in Fried, who was weak-willed and unpopular. As Kruk wrote, Gens was on good terms with representatives of the German authorities (Franz Murer, etc.) and became their favorite.<sup>77</sup> Gens’s dominance in the ghetto administration was approbated by Murer’s special decree of April 29, 1942 on the powers of the Jewish Ghetto Police:

According to the principle that the Jewish people must manage their own affairs, all of the decrees of the Gebietskommissar for the city of Vilnius will be implemented with the help of the Jewish Ghetto Police. Lithuanian security will only function as a supervisory body. The rules of operation of the Jewish Ghetto Police are as follows:

1. The Jewish police is subordinate to the chief of the Jewish Ghetto Police, Jacob Gens.

2. Under the instructions of the chief of the Jewish Ghetto Police, the Jewish Ghetto Police will control order and security in the ghetto.
3. The main function of this police force will be to execute the decrees and instructions of the Gebietskommissar for the city of Vilnius without any reservations. The chief of the Jewish Ghetto Police ... will be accountable to me ...
4. The death penalty will be applied in all cases where ... the Jewish Ghetto Police violates the orders of the Gebietskommissar for the city of Vilnius.<sup>78</sup>

In Murer's aforementioned decree, the Jewish Council was not mentioned at all. The Jewish Ghetto Police under the command of Jacob Gens was effectively legitimized as the only institution maintaining contact with the occupation authorities and carrying out their orders. Gens finally became the sole head of the ghetto by the July 10, 1942 decision of the Gebietskommissar for the city of Vilnius, by which the Jewish Council was dissolved and Gens was declared the chief of the ghetto and the Jewish Ghetto Police. After receiving the approval of the Gebietskommissar, he appointed former Jewish Council Chairman Anatol Fried as his deputy for administrative affairs and Salk (Saul) Dessler as his deputy for police affairs.<sup>79</sup> Most of the former heads of the ghetto administration departments declared their loyalty to Gens and remained in their posts.<sup>80</sup>

However, Gens's hegemony was threatened when an underground anti-Nazi resistance organization (the *Fareynikte Partizaner Organizatsye*; FPO) was formed in the ghetto. The FPO was founded on January 21, 1942 in the flat of Josef Glazman, the deputy chief of the Vilnius Jewish Ghetto Police. It united Jews of various political views: Zionists, Communists, Bundists. Yitzkhak Wittenberg (FPO commandant; Communist), Josef Glazman (member of Betar), Abba Kovner, Avraham Chvoinek, and Nison Reznik to the FPO staff. Roughly 300 people became members of the FPO.<sup>81</sup> Over time, the influence of the underground grew stronger and began to pose a threat to the ghetto administration headed by Gens. The key objective of the FPO's activities was to prepare an armed uprising in the ghetto. Understandably, this aspiration clashed with the wait-and-see strategy advocated by Gens. Gens was of the opinion that the careless actions of the underground could provoke the destruction of the entire ghetto. He considered Glazman to be the biggest instigator of the resistance and decided to get rid of him. On June 26, 1943, on the order of Gens, Oster, who was the head of the ghetto's crime search unit, arrested Glazman at the ghetto gates when he was returning from work. The detainee was planned to be sent to the Riešė labor camp. That same day, FPO members attacked the Jewish policemen and set Glazman free. Gens's authority plummeted after this incident. Nevertheless, Glazman

ended up going to the Riešė camp with a group of his supporters on their own accord. Since Glazman also had supporters among the ghetto policemen, Gens had 11 people removed from the force and sent to do hard labor in Kirtimai and elsewhere. Returning to the ghetto in the evening, those who had been removed from the police were greeted tumultuously by Jews standing in the streets.<sup>82</sup> This reflected the changing mood of the ghetto residents and the growing support for Gens's opponents.

In order to obtain important information, the FPO intentionally sent its members to serve in the Jewish Ghetto Police. The underground was especially interested in the ghetto gate guard. Starting in mid-1943, incidents between the Jewish Ghetto Police and members of the underground became more and more frequent. The members of the FPO would leave the ghetto in an organized manner and go to the forests to join the Soviet partisans. This sometimes led to conflicts between the underground and the ghetto gate guards. Before dawn on June 9, 1943, some 30 young people from the ghetto were preparing to go join the partisans. They were supposed to be accompanied by two members of the underground from Švenčionys. One of them was Chaim Levin. The ghetto gate guard detained him and began to search him. Then he pulled out a revolver and shot a Jewish policeman named Moses Gingold. Upon arriving at the scene, Gens shot Levin, who was resisting. The Gestapo took the weapon of the member of the underground who had died. This tragic event further strengthened the Gestapo's confidence in the Jewish Ghetto Police. Gingold was solemnly buried that same day. Gens and the Jewish Ghetto Police command attended the funeral.<sup>83</sup> Gingold was the second victim of the Vilnius Ghetto policemen.<sup>84</sup> In mid-1943, FPO member Pilovnik (Pilovski) tried to bring ammunition into the ghetto, but he was detained by the police at the ghetto gates. Pilovnik started to run, but ghetto policeman Leonid Ferdman caught up with him and handed him over to the Jewish Ghetto Police command. The latter was going to hand over the arrested member of the underground to the Gestapo, but Pilovnik was freed through the efforts of the FPO headquarters. The FPO headquarters instructed the members of the organization not to bring weapons into the ghetto during Ferdman's watch.<sup>85</sup>

On July 15, 1943, FPO Commandant Wittenberg was detained on Dessler's order. On his way to the police, the FPO members freed their commander. The next day, the Gestapo issued an ultimatum – if Wittenberg does not come to the police by 6 p.m. on July 16, the ghetto will be destroyed. Gens sent two squads of Jewish policemen and armed hooligans to search for Wittenberg. There was a clash between the armed underground and the police, and the latter was forced to retreat. Not wanting to risk the existence of the ghetto, Wittenberg decided to surrender that same day and appointed Kovner as the commander of the FPO. Yitzkhak Wittenberg came out of hiding and was arrested by the Gestapo at the ghetto gates. The next day, it was already known in the ghetto that the Gestapo had tortured Wittenberg.<sup>86</sup>

After this tragic event, the authority of the FPO and the determination of the resistance in the ghetto became even stronger. Young people began to flee en masse into the forests to join the Soviet partisans. On July 26, 1943, the Jewish Ghetto Police arrested 11 Jewish brigade workers and their families by order of the Gestapo and locked them up in the ghetto jail on Lydos Skersgatvis. That same day, a Gestapo vehicle took the detainees to Paneriai to be shot. A total of 32 people were killed. The brigade workers and their family members paid with their lives for the Jews who fled to join the partisans. The Gestapo announced that they were shot for failing to report the Jews who had fled in time.<sup>87</sup>

The gradual liquidation of the Vilnius Ghetto began in August 1943. Ghetto residents began to be moved to labor camps in Estonia and Latvia. The first group (1,000–1,200 Jews) was taken to Estonia by train on August 6, 1943.<sup>88</sup>

The second campaign for the removal of ghetto residents to Estonian labor camps was carried out on August 24–25, 1943. This time it was carried out by the ghetto administration itself, without the intervention of the occupation authorities. The Jewish Ghetto Police went to the flats of the people scheduled for deportation and gave them summons. According to the ghetto leaders, 4,000 people were to be removed within two months. Most of the people summoned were forcibly taken away by the ghetto policemen. Relatives or neighbors were taken in place of people who were hiding. On August 25, the people who had been rounded up were taken out of the ghetto and crammed into wagons at the branch line on Rasų Street. This time, 1,200–1,500 Jews were taken from the Vilnius Ghetto to Estonian labor camps.<sup>89</sup> In his diary, Grigory Schur is very critical of the efforts of the ghetto administration to send the number of people required by the Nazis to the Estonian labor camps by force:

And the worst thing of all is that the leaders of the ghetto, Mr. Gens, Mr. Broido and others, who are true to their principle – to give the Germans the required number of victims in order to save some others, participate in the extermination operation, and even took it upon themselves to lead it. All their statements about the nature of the carriage, about the procedure for their preparation, the deadlines, the set number of people turned out to be a hoax. In the past two years, the residents of the ghetto have seen all kinds of purges and extermination campaigns. But no one could have imagined that the Jewish leaders of the ghetto, the Jewish police, could have taken it upon themselves, using the help of the darkest inhabitants of the criminal world – thieves, robbers – promising them that they would not be deported themselves, that they would keep them in the ghetto until the end, and that, possibly, they might even survive. It's a disgrace, an unprecedented disgrace! It's a disgrace when the Jewish leaders of the ghetto take up the "job" themselves – sending Jews to die. Let the Gestapo do this, after all, it's a disgrace when

the “chosen ones” are promised life for the fulfilment of this work. Many in the ghetto are convinced that everyone must live together or perish together.<sup>90</sup>

Another campaign to move Jews to Estonian labor camps was carried out on September 1–4, 1943. Around 5 a.m. on September 1, Gestapo officers and Estonian policemen broke into the ghetto. They ordered a thousand healthy men to be rounded up. If the required number of men were not rounded up within a couple of hours, a manhunt would begin. With the help of the ghetto policemen, the intruders ransacked houses and flats, arrested people and blew up hiding places in the ghetto. Dozens of people died under the rubble. In several places (Strašūno and Ašmenos Streets), members of the ghetto underground resisted the Gestapo officers and policemen with weapons. A total of 7,000–8,000 Jews were removed during the campaign.<sup>91</sup> Gens put together a Jewish auxiliary police unit expressly for the September 1–4 campaign that was supposed to help the Jewish Ghetto Police arrest people for deportation to Estonia and, if necessary, fight off the FPO without the intervention of the Gestapo. Members of this unit wore armbands with the German inscription “Hilfspolizei” (auxiliary police) on their sleeves. The auxiliary Jewish Ghetto Police unit began operations on September 2, 1943.<sup>92</sup> It had a few hundred men and took an active part in capturing ghetto residents for deportation to Estonian labor camps.

On September 14, 1943, the head of the ghetto, Jacob Gens, was summoned to the Gestapo and killed there. Gestapo officers Rudolf Neugebauer and Martin Weiss spread a rumor that Gens had been in contact with the partisans.<sup>93</sup> As Grigory Schur wrote, after Gens’s death, the commandant of the ghetto became “the scoundrel, the traitor, and the utter scumbag Saul Dessler, who, seeing the approaching catastrophe and the demise of the ghetto, ran away with Lev, the chief of the ghetto gate guard, who did not forget to grab a briefcase with gold taken from the people and large sums of public money...”<sup>94</sup> After Dessler ran away, Oberhard, who was considered a “useful Jew” by the Germans and had the right to be outside without wearing the Star of David, was appointed as the new chief of the Jewish Ghetto Police. Gestapo officer Bruno Kittel appointed Boruch Beniakonski from Kaunas as the head of the ghetto administration.<sup>95</sup> However, the Vilnius Ghetto was in its last days and the ghetto administration was no longer actually functioning. The Vilnius Ghetto was liquidated for good on September 23–24, 1943. Most of the men in the ghetto were taken to Estonian labor camps, while the women and children were taken to German (Auschwitz, Treblinka, etc.) and Latvian (Kaizerwald) concentration camps.

## Conclusions

The topic of the Jewish Ghetto Police has hardly been studied in global and Lithuanian historiography. Research on this topic is hindered not only by objective reasons (the lack of archival sources), but also by subjective reasons of a moral and psychological nature (the problem of the Jewish Ghetto Police's collaboration with the Nazis, the need for a differentiated assessment of the situation and behavior of individual strata of the ghetto population).

Like in other European countries occupied by the Nazis, Jewish ghettos were established in Lithuania with an administration that managed internal affairs (self-government). One of the most important components of the ghetto administration was the Jewish Ghetto Police. Forces were formed in all of the major Lithuanian ghettos (Vilnius, Kaunas, and Šiauliai) and operated throughout the entire period of existence of the ghettos. The Jewish Ghetto Police was a new and unprecedented phenomenon in Jewish history. A unique legal system was created in the Lithuanian ghettos, the most important component of which was the Jewish Ghetto Police; the ghetto courts, the prosecutor's office and the prison also performed important functions. The Jewish Ghetto Police was responsible for maintaining public order, fighting crime and saboteurs of the labor obligation, and carrying out the orders of the occupation authorities and the Jewish Councils. The Jewish Ghetto Police was usually established by order of the occupation authorities, but its establishment was accelerated by the extreme conditions of Jewish life (the need to maintain public order, guarantee that the needs of the ghetto residents were at least minimally met, organize the execution of the orders of the Nazi authorities, and so on). The Jewish police in Kaunas and Vilnius were established during the formation of the ghettos. It was organized shortly after the establishment of the Jewish Councils. The size of the Jewish Ghetto Police was determined by the population of the ghetto, the scale of the tasks set by the Nazi authorities, and the internal needs of the ghetto. The structure of the Jewish Ghetto Police and the number of policemen were similar in the Vilnius and Kaunas Ghettos. The most important elements of the Jewish Ghetto Police were the command, the precincts (commissariats), the criminal police and the gate guard.

Activists from right-wing Zionist Jewish parties and organizations dominated the police in the Vilnius and Kaunas Ghettos. Relations between the Jewish Councils and the Jewish Ghetto Police were different in the Vilnius and Kaunas Ghettos. Formally, the Jewish Ghetto Police were subordinate to the Jewish Councils and had to carry out their orders and instructions. In the Kaunas Ghetto, this legal and actual subordination of the Jewish Ghetto Police was basically maintained throughout the ghetto's existence. The struggle for power between the Jewish Council and the Jewish



Ghetto Police in the Vilnius Ghetto ended with the victory of Jacob Gens, the chief of the Jewish Ghetto Police, in July 1942.

The majority of the ghetto residents viewed the Jewish police negatively, as a criminal body carrying out the orders of the occupation authorities. The unpopularity of the ghetto police was further increased by the rampant corruption, bribery, protectionism, and brutal and immoral treatment of the ghetto residents. The members of the Jewish Ghetto Police were essentially a privileged stratum of the ghetto population. The families of the policemen had more opportunities to secure better material living conditions and temporarily avoid the mass killing campaigns. The attitude of the ghetto residents towards the ghetto courts was more favorable. This is especially true of the Kaunas Ghetto court, where authoritative legal experts worked; moreover, the Kaunas Ghetto court was less dependent on the ghetto administration than the Vilnius Ghetto courts.

Because of its operational functions, the Jewish Ghetto Police inevitably had to collaborate with the Nazi authorities. However, the extent and forms of collaboration differed in the Vilnius and Kaunas Ghettos. The Vilnius Ghetto Jewish Police cooperated with the Nazis more intensively. In part, this was due to Chief of Police Jacob Gens's tactic of sacrificing part of the ghetto population (especially elderly, sick and disabled Jews) to the Nazis in order to save the others. The Vilnius Ghetto Jewish Police was more frequently involved in arresting and handing over ghetto residents to the Nazis (especially during the period of mass killings in the autumn of 1941 and during the liquidation of the ghetto and deportation to Estonia in the autumn of 1943). The Kaunas Ghetto Jewish Police did not avoid campaigns like this either. Among the ghetto policemen, the Gestapo had its own agents who informed them about the frame of mind of the ghetto residents and the activities of the anti-fascist underground.

However, the Jewish Ghetto Police cannot be seen solely as a tool of Nazi criminal policy. A significant number of Jewish policemen tried their best to help their fellow Jews in various ways, and some even became active members of the anti-fascist underground and partisans. Several dozen Kaunas Ghetto Jewish policemen were shot with their commanders at the Kaunas Ninth Fort in March 1944.

Some of the functions of the Jewish Ghetto Police (combating criminals, maintaining public order and cleanliness, organizing cultural and sports events) corresponded to the needs and interests of the ghetto residents.

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- <sup>16</sup> Seniūnų tarybos įstaigų sąrašas [*List of institutions of the Council of Elders*], ibid., b. 4, p. 4.
- <sup>17</sup> Seniūnų tarybos pirmininko įsakymas Nr. 4 [*Order No. 4 of the Chairman of the Council of Elders*], ibid., b. 12, p. 28.
- <sup>18</sup> M. Kopelmano 1944 m. rugsėjo 4 d. tardymo protokolas [*M. Kopelman's September 4, 1944 investigation protocol*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 11236/3, t. 1, pp. 75, 76; T. Aronštamo 1944 m. rugpjūčio 16 d. tardymo protokolo išrašas [*excerpt from T. Aronstam's August 16, 1944 investigation protocol*], ibid., ap. 8, b. 198, p. 151.
- <sup>19</sup> Kauno geto žydų policijos istorija [*History of the Kaunas Jewish Ghetto Police*], ibid., ap. without No, b. 345, p. 96.
- <sup>20</sup> Vilijampolės žydų geto vidaus tvarkos taisyklės [*Vilijampolė Jewish Ghetto Internal Rules of Procedure*], LCSA, f. R-973, ap. 2, b. 13, pp. 33–39.
- <sup>21</sup> Kauno geto žydų policijos istorija [*History of the Kaunas Jewish Ghetto Police*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. without No, b. 345, p. 91; A. Tory, op. cit., pp. 99, 100.
- <sup>22</sup> Kauno geto žydų policijos istorija [*History of the Kaunas Jewish Ghetto Police*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. without No, b. 345, pp. 98, 99, 104.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 95, 96.
- <sup>24</sup> Žydų geto policijos Centro įstaigos 1942 m. liepos 6 d. raštas vokiečių saugumo policijai Kaune [*July 6, 1942 letter from the Jewish Ghetto Police Zentralamt to the Sicherheitspolizei in Kaunas*], LCSA, f. R-973, ap. 2, b. 69, p. 22.
- <sup>25</sup> Vilijampolės geto policijos Kriminalinio skyriaus veiklos taisyklės [*Rules of operation of the Vilijampolė Jewish Ghetto Police Criminal Department*], ibid., b. 14, p. 34.
- <sup>26</sup> Vilijampolės žydų geto 1943 m. sausio 1 d. statutai [*January 1, 1943 statute of the Vilijampolė Jewish Ghetto*], ibid., b. 21, pp. 28–30.

- <sup>27</sup> Kauno geto žydų policijos istorija [*History of the Kaunas Jewish Ghetto Police*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. without No, b. 345, pp. 20, 21.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 30–33.
- <sup>29</sup> Žydų geto policijos budėtojo 1942 m. sausio 25 d. raportas Seniūnų tarybos pirmininkui [*January 25, 1942 report of the Jewish Ghetto Police duty officer to the chairman of the Council of Elders*], LCSA, f. R-973, ap. 2, b. 33, p. 546.
- <sup>30</sup> Geto policijos budėtojo 1942 m. vasario 8 d. raportas 1-osios nuovados viršininkui [*February 8, 1942 report of the Jewish Ghetto Police duty officer to the chief of the 1st Precinct*], *ibid.*, p. 453.
- <sup>31</sup> Geto policijos budėtojo 1942 m. birželio 15 d. raportas geto policijos viršininkui [*June 15, 1942 report of the Jewish Ghetto Police duty officer to the chief of the Jewish Ghetto Police*], *ibid.*, b. 34, p. 9.
- <sup>32</sup> Geto policijos savaitinės žinios (1942 m. kovo 23–29 d.) [*Jewish Ghetto Police Weekly News (March 23–29, 1942)*], *ibid.*, b. 33, p. 15 a. p.
- <sup>33</sup> As cited in: J. Beilesas, *Judkė*, p. 128.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.
- <sup>35</sup> M. Kopelmano 1944 m. rugsėjo 3 d. savarankiški parodymai [*M. Kopelman's September 3, 1944 independent testimony*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 11236/3, p. 72.
- <sup>36</sup> T. Aronštamo 1944 m. rugpjūčio 16 d. tardymo protokolo išrašas [*excerpt from T. Aronshtam's August 16, 1944 investigation protocol*], *ibid.*, ap. 8, b. 198, pp. 153–154.
- <sup>37</sup> A. Файтельсон, *Непокорившиеся*, Тель Авив, 2001, pp. 390, 391.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 448; T. Aronštamo 1944 m. rugpjūčio 16 d. tardymo protokolo išrašas [*excerpt from T. Aronshtam's August 16, 1944 investigation protocol*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 8, b. 198, pp. 153–155; I. Trunk, op. cit., p. 522.
- <sup>39</sup> S. Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Atminimo knyga: Kauno žydų bendruomenė 1941–1944 metais*, Vilnius, 1999, p. 69.
- <sup>40</sup> A. Tory, op. cit., p. 66; Kauno geto žydų policijos istorija [*History of the Kaunas Jewish Ghetto Police*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. without No, b. 345, pp. 84, 85; D. Porat, op. cit., p. 57.
- <sup>41</sup> T. Aronštamo 1944 m. rugpjūčio 21 d. tardymo protokolas [*T. Aronshtam's August 21, 1944 investigation protocol*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 8, b. 198, p. 159; Seniūnų tarybos 1941 m. gruodžio 9 d. skelbimas [*Council of Elders' 9 December 1941 announcement*], LCSA, f. R-973, ap. 2, b. 1, p. 130; Seniūnų tarybos pirmininko įsakymas No. 43 [*Order No. 43 of the Chairman of the Council of Elders*], LYA, f. K-1, ap. 3, b. 4, p. 46.
- <sup>41</sup> Žydų geto policijos Baudžiamojo skyriaus instrukcija [*Instructions of the Jewish Ghetto Police Penal Department*], *ibid.*, ap. 2, b. 5, p. 1.
- <sup>43</sup> A. Tory, op. cit., pp. 65, 66, 68.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.
- <sup>46</sup> Kauno geto žydų policijos istorija [*History of the Kaunas Jewish Ghetto Police*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. without No, b. 345, p. 112.
- <sup>47</sup> A. Tory, op. cit., p. 424.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 425–427.
- <sup>49</sup> Kauno geto žydų policijos istorija [*History of the Kaunas Jewish Ghetto Police*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. without No, b. 345, pp. 113–117; T. Aronštamo 1944 m. rugpjūčio 16 d. tardymo protokolas [*T. Aronshtam's August 16, 1944 investigation protocol*], *ibid.*, ap. 58, b. 11236/3, t. 1, l. 16 a. p.
- <sup>50</sup> Nubaustųjų knyga [*Book of the punished*], LCSA, f. R-973, ap. 2, b. 129, pp. 1–112.
- <sup>51</sup> Kauno geto žydų policijos istorija [*History of the Kaunas Jewish Ghetto Police*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. without No, b. 345, pp. 118–123.
- <sup>52</sup> Vilijampolės geto policijos Baudžiamojo skyriaus nubaustųjų statistika 1943 m. sausio mėnesį [*Vilijampolė Jewish Ghetto Police Penal Department January 1943 statistics of people who were punished*], LCSA, f. R-973, ap. 2, b. 43, p. 2.
- <sup>53</sup> I. Guzenberg, “Vilniaus getas ir 1942 m. gyventojų surašymas,” *Vilniaus getas: kalinių sąrašai*, Vol. 1, Vilnius, 1996, p. 13; G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., p. 37.
- <sup>54</sup> Y. Arad, op. cit., p. 124, 125.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 125, 126.
- <sup>56</sup> H. Kruk, op. cit., p. 112.

- <sup>57</sup> Y. Arad, op. cit., p. 123.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 181.
- <sup>59</sup> Y. Arad, op. cit., pp. 273–275; SSRS NKGB 4-osios valdybos 2-ojo skyriaus viršininko Makliarskio 1943 m. lapkričio 9 d. specialus pranešimas B. Kobulovui [*Chief of the 2nd Department of the U.S.S.R. NKGB 4th Directorate Makliarsky's November 9, 1943 special report to B. Kobulov*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 45, b. 1843, pp. 5-6; L. Ferdmano 1944 m. rugsėjo 24 d. tardymo protokolas [*L. Ferdman's September 24, 1944 investigation protocol*], ibid., ap. 58, b. 22859/3, p. 15 a. p.
- <sup>60</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., p. 52.
- <sup>61</sup> D. Porat, op. cit., p. 60.
- <sup>62</sup> Y. Arad, op. cit., p. 291.
- <sup>63</sup> H. Kruk, op. cit., p. 227.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 344.
- <sup>65</sup> D. Porat, op. cit., p. 61.
- <sup>66</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>67</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., pp. 64, 65; Y. Arad, op. cit., pp. 292–294.
- <sup>68</sup> Vilniaus geto Žydų tarybos pirmininko 1942 m. kovo 28 d. raštas referentui žydų reikalams [*March 28, 1942 letter from the Chairman of the Vilnius Ghetto Jewish Council to the Adviser on Jewish Affair*], LCSA, f. R-643, ap. 3, b. 195, p. 102.
- <sup>69</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., p. 63.
- <sup>70</sup> H. Kruk, op. cit., p. 113.
- <sup>71</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., pp. 39, 40, 45. SSRS NKGB 4-osios valdybos 2-ojo skyriaus viršininko Makliarskio 1943 m. lapkričio 9 d. specialus pranešimas B. Kobulovui, pp. 5, 6.
- <sup>73</sup> Y. Arad, op. cit., pp. 182, 183.
- <sup>74</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., p. 85; Y. Arad, op. cit., p. 342; H. Kruk writes that 410 Jews were killed in Ashmyany (H. Kruk, op. cit., p. 394).
- <sup>75</sup> As cited in: G. Šuras (Schur), *Užrašai*, pp. 85, 86.
- <sup>76</sup> H. Kruk, op. cit., p. 387.
- <sup>77</sup> Ibid., pp. 264, 265.
- <sup>78</sup> As cited in: P. Stankeras, *Lietuvių policija 1941–1944 metais*, pp. 89, 90.
- <sup>79</sup> Vilniaus miesto komisaro adjutanto Schroederio 1941 m. liepos 10 d. raštas Vilniaus geto žydų policijos viršininkui J. Gensui [*July 10, 1941 letter from Schroeder, adjutant to the Vilnius City Commissioner, to J. Gens, chief of the Vilnius Jewish Ghetto Police*], Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen Ludwigsburg (ZSL), Sygn. UdSSR Ordn. 245, Bl. 59.
- <sup>80</sup> H. Kruk, op. cit., p. 329.
- <sup>81</sup> R. Margolis, “Pogrindinė antifašistinė organizacija FPO Vilniaus gete 1942–1943”, *Atminties dienos: Tarptautinė konferencija, skirta Vilniaus geto sunaikinimo 50-mečiui. 1993 m. spalio mėn. 11–16 d.*, comp. E. Zingeris, Vilnius, 1995, pp. 300, 301.
- <sup>82</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., pp. 114–116.
- <sup>83</sup> H. Kruk, op. cit., pp. 579–581.
- <sup>84</sup> The first victim of the ghetto policemen was Noson Schlossberg, who had been mortally wounded by Soviet partisans on 7 November 1942. See: G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., p. 89.
- <sup>85</sup> J. Charmaco 1944 m. rugsėjo 20 d. apklausos protokolas [*J. Charmatz's September 20, 1944 interrogation protocol*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 22859/3, p. 29.
- <sup>86</sup> R. Margolis, op. cit., pp. 305, 306; *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje 1941–1944: Dokumentų rinkinys*, Part 1, Vilnius, 1965, pp. 174–176.
- <sup>87</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., p. 123.
- <sup>88</sup> Ibid., pp. 127–129; Y. Arad, op. cit., pp. 404, 405.
- <sup>89</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., pp. 131–134; Y. Arad, op. cit., pp. 407, 408.
- <sup>90</sup> As cited in: G. Šuras (Schur), *Užrašai*, p. 134.
- <sup>91</sup> Ibid., pp. 136–141; *Wilna unter dem Nazijoch*. Berichte von Dr. med. Mozes Feigenberg aufgenommen von Mosze Wajsborg, Landsberg, 1946, pp. 29–31.
- <sup>92</sup> Y. Arad, op. cit., pp. 414, 415.
- <sup>93</sup> *Wilna unter dem Nazijoch*, p. 32.
- <sup>94</sup> G. Šuras (Schur), op. cit., pp. 143, 144.
- <sup>95</sup> Y. Arad, op. cit., pp. 428, 429.

Before the war, the Šiauliai Jewish community was one of the largest in Lithuania. In 1902, there were 9,847 Jews living in the city (71 percent of the total population). As the Imperial German Army approached in 1915, most of the Jews in Šiauliai withdrew to Russia. Once the war was over, many of these people returned to their hometown. The Jews in Šiauliai enjoyed an active professional, cultural, and political life in independent Lithuania. They had their own trade union, banks, political party branches, houses of worship, religious schools, gymnasiums, libraries, kindergartens, hospitals, and other institutions. Before the Second World War began, there were 6,500–8,000 Jews living in Šiauliai.<sup>1</sup>

During the June 1941 deportation campaigns, the Soviets deported 202 Jews from Šiauliai.<sup>2</sup>

When Germany attacked the Soviet Union, some of Šiauliai's Jewish population attempted to retreat to Russia. The German Army occupied Šiauliai on June 26, 1941. The Soviets withdrew from the city without much resistance. Four German soldiers, 11 Lithuanian anti-Soviet partisans, and 51 civilians were killed during the occupation of Šiauliai.<sup>3</sup> Close to a thousand Jews withdrew to the East during the first days of the war. Some of those who were unable to get out in time returned to Šiauliai.<sup>4</sup>

At the beginning of the war, members of the Lithuanian Activist Front (Lithuanian: *Lietuvių aktyvistų frontas*; LAF) and anti-Soviet rebels began to operate in Šiauliai, as they did in other Lithuanian cities and counties; though they considered themselves “partisans”, people usually called them “white armbands” (Lithuanian: *baltaraiščiai*). A few weeks into the war, these units were reorganized into auxiliary police squads. The Lithuanian partisans were after Red Army soldiers, communists, Komsomol members, Soviet officials, and supporters of the Soviet government who were still in Lithuania or on their way out.

Before long, the persecution of Jews promoted by the Nazi government began. The Lithuanian administration and police were restored after the Germans occupied Šiauliai. Many Smetona-era officials and policemen returned to their former

positions. J. Vilutis, Adolfas Raulinaitis, Vladas Pauža, V. Ivanauskas and P. Juodis joined the Šiauliai LAF board. Initially, the LAF headquarters, under the command of Capt. L. Virbickas, actively interfered in matters related to management and the appointment of officials. With the establishment of the Lithuanian civil administration, the LAF's importance diminished. By an order issued by Šiauliai Gebietskommissar Hans Gewecke on September 29, 1941, the activities of the LAF were brought to a halt.<sup>5</sup>

Ignas Urbaitis was the governor of Šiauliai County when the German occupation began (until August 5, 1941).<sup>6</sup> The Mayor of Šiauliai was Juozas Naujalis, who was later replaced by Petras Linkevičius on July 5, 1941. Vaclovas Gedvila and Antanas Stankus were appointed as Naujalis's deputies. Stankus was also named the "representative for Jewish affairs" – a position he held until February 1, 1942.<sup>7</sup>

Antanas Vabolis was the first chief of the Lithuanian police for the city of Šiauliai, and Albinas Grėbliūnas was selected as his deputy. Initially, 75 policemen served on the city's police force. The Lithuanian police were obliged to follow the directives of the local German military commandant. Their most important task was to maintain order in the city and ensure the protection of its residents and their property.<sup>8</sup>

Alongside the Lithuanian administration, various German institutions were also based in Šiauliai, such as the Field Command (German: *Feldkommandantur*; which passed on its authority to the Gebietskommissar in August 1941), units of the Secret Field Police (German: *Geheime Feldpolizei*; GFP), and Einsatzkommando 2 under Einsatzgruppe A (the functions of which were later taken over by the Šiauliai division of the German Security Police (German: *Sicherheitspolizei*; SiPo) and Security Service (German: *Sicherheitsdienst*; SD). Initially, SS-Hauptscharführer Werner Gottschalk, head of the aforementioned Einsatzkommando 2, directed the killing of Jews in the city and county of Šiauliai.<sup>9</sup>

The first mass arrests of Šiauliai's Jews took place on June 30, July 1, and July 5, 1941. Among those arrested were 20 prominent members of the Šiauliai Jewish community, including Chief Rabbi Aron Baksht. The detainees were ridiculed, and had their more valuable items taken from them. They were held hostage in the city prison until July 11, 1941, when they were shot in "reprisal" for an alleged Jewish attack on German soldiers. Approximately 1,000 Šiauliai Jews were murdered before the establishment of the ghetto.<sup>10</sup>

The first massacres of Šiauliai's Jews took place in Kužiai Forest (12 kilometers from Šiauliai) on June 29, 1941. It is estimated that several thousand Jews from the city and county of Šiauliai were killed there in the summer of 1941, along with ethnic Lithuanian and Russian members of the Communist Party and the Komsomol. According to eyewitnesses, it was the Germans who carried out the shootings in Kužiai Forest.<sup>11</sup>

In July 1941, the Nazis would drive trucks full of Jews and Soviet activists being held in the Šiauliai prison to the Šiauliai–Radviliškis road (some seven kilometers from Šiauliai, near Pročiūnai Village) and shoot them there. Eight large pits containing the remains of 732 humans were unearthed at this site in 1944. According to Rakauskas, a resident of Pročiūnai Village, people were usually shot there in the daytime, with both rifles and machine guns. The executions were carried out by German SiPo and SD officers.<sup>12</sup>

In September 1941, mass murders of Šiauliai's Jews took place near the village of Bubiai (approximately 15 kilometers from Šiauliai). The victims were brought in by truck, with 10 truckloads in all. The massacres usually began in the afternoon and went on until nightfall. Before they were shot, the Jews were forced to undress, after which they were beaten and herded to the pits.<sup>13</sup> According to witnesses, the shooting was directed by German officers, but the “white armbands” also took part. The exact number of people killed is unknown, but it is estimated that several hundred people were shot at that time.<sup>14</sup>

On September 7–15, 1941, Jewish men, women, and children who had been brought in from Šiauliai were shot in the Normančiai sector of Gubernija Forest. According to local residents, a total of 25 large trucks were brought in, each of which could accommodate about 40 people. The victims were also brought in with a yellow passenger bus. The massacre took place in the afternoon, between 3 and 4 p.m. The shooting was done by “white armbands” (auxiliary police officers) under the supervision of German officers. In November 1944, a commission working at the scene of the massacre excavated four pits. The remains found in them had gunshot wounds to the head. According to the commission, some 1,000 people might have been killed there.<sup>15</sup>

The extermination of Šiauliai Jews intensified in early September 1941. It is known that on September 7, a unit under the command of Lt. Romualdas Kolokša arrested two caretakers from a Jewish orphanage along with 47 of their charges. The detainees were taken to the forest and shot. On September 13, policemen stormed into the ghetto, arrested some of the elderly, and took them to be shot. The last major massacres of Jews took place on December 8–15, 1941. In accordance with orders issued by Šiauliai Gebietskommissar Hans Gewecke and the head of the German SiPo and SD, 72 Šiauliai Jews who were working in villages were arrested and shot. The shooting was done by police officers from Kuršėnai, Stačiūnai, Radviliškis and Pakruojis.<sup>16</sup>

Statistics from autumn 1941 show a decrease in the Šiauliai Jewish population. On August 20, 1941, the Šiauliai City Municipality informed the Šiauliai Gebietskommissar that there were 36,200 people living in the city (30,801 Lithuanians and 5,034 Jews).<sup>17</sup> The Šiauliai City Municipality wrote a letter to the Gebietskommissar in November of that same year informing him that there were 39,678 people living in Šiauliai (35,000 Aryans and 4,674 Jews).<sup>18</sup>

Along with arrests and shootings, Jews were also subject to legal discrimination. They were gradually deprived of civil rights and property. On July 5, 1941, by order of the Mayor of Šiauliai, Jews were forbidden to raise Lithuanian national flags outside of their homes. On July 7, 1941, the governor of Šiauliai Country gave the same instructions to the mayors of the townships secondary towns.<sup>19</sup> On July 15, 1941, the Mayor of Šiauliai issued an announcement ordering the Jews of the city to hand over all radios in their possession to the municipality by July 16. They were to be delivered to the municipal warehouse (at 4 Tremtinių Street). Those who failed to do so were threatened with legal repercussions.<sup>20</sup>

Even before the establishment of the Jewish ghetto, Jewish registration was announced. All Jews living in the city were required to register with the municipality (at 3 Gaisrininkų Street) from July 19, 1941 to 8 p.m. on July 22, 1941. Jews were required to have an identity document with them when registering. Those who did not register were threatened with penalties.<sup>21</sup>

On July 18, 1941, the Mayor of Šiauliai, in agreement with Konovsky, the German military commandant, published an announcement on the Jewish matter. It stated that Jews who had fled Šiauliai at the beginning of the war were forbidden to return to their hometown. Those who did return would be arrested. Beginning on July 20, 1941, all Jews living in Šiauliai, regardless of gender and age, were required to wear the yellow Star of David on the left side of their chest. Jews were only permitted to walk on the street and frequent public places from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m.<sup>22</sup>

The occupation authorities began to see to the establishment of a ghetto in Šiauliai in the first half of July 1941. Antanas Stankus, who was serving as deputy to Mayor Petras Linkevičius, was appointed as the representative for Jewish affairs. The order to organize a ghetto in the city was given by the German military commandant for the city of Šiauliai. In organizing the establishment of the ghetto and the relocation of Jews to the districts designated for the ghetto, Stankus turned to prominent members of the city's Jewish community. The Jewish Committee was established to deal with Jewish resettlement issues together with the Lithuanian authorities. The members of the Jewish Committee included Mendel Leibovitsch (the owner of the car and motorcycle shop), Ber Kartun (a merchant), and Faivel Rubinstein (the owner of a workshop).<sup>23</sup>

The announcement issued by the Mayor of Šiauliai on July 18, 1941 set out the conditions for the transfer of Jews to the ghetto. All Šiauliai Jews were required to move to the places specified by the city municipality. To ensure orderly resettlement, the Šiauliai City Department of Housing, together with representatives of the Jewish community, had to establish the conditions, procedure, and sequence of the process. The relocation process was to be supervised by the Šiauliai German military commandant together with the Lithuanian city and county police. The July



18, 1941 announcement also stated that Jews were required to move to Žagarė and the Šiauliai suburb of Kaukazas. Gentiles living in these areas were entitled to move to other parts of the city. Jews who owned real estate in Šiauliai had to try to exchange it with Lithuanians who owned real estate in Žagarė and wanted to move from there. A special bureau of the Šiauliai City Municipality Department of Housing was charged with mediating in the exchange of real estate. Real estate that was not exchanged had to be transferred to the Šiauliai City Municipality in accordance with the established procedure. Jews were also forbidden to employ persons of other nationalities.<sup>24</sup>

Trakai Street and Vilniaus Street (also known as “Kaukazas”) were selected for the ghetto, with the distance between them being roughly 300 meters. The Jewish Committee had its own cabinet within the municipality. The funding for the ghetto’s fence was allocated by the municipality, while the workers were provided by the Jewish Committee. After the area was fenced in, Jews from other parts of the city began to be moved into the ghetto territory. Stankus ordered several commissions to be established for organizing the transfer of people to the ghetto. Each commission consisted of three members (a teacher, a municipal representative, and a police officer). The commissions were required to distribute summons to Jewish families to move to the ghetto; they also had to inventory Jewish property (especially gold and other valuables) and appropriate it for the municipality. The transfer of the Jews to the ghetto and the confiscation of their property took several weeks.<sup>25</sup>

On August 9, 1941, the Mayor of Šiauliai issued an announcement clarifying the matters of the establishment of the ghetto. The city’s Jews were instructed to move to Kaukazas, Trakai and Ežero Streets, and Kalnelis (although the establishment of a ghetto in Kalnelis was later scrapped). Jews were required to notify the representative for Jewish affairs about the apartments they possessed by August 13, 1941. Jews living in the districts where the ghetto was established had to inform the municipality about the location and type of apartment they would like to get.<sup>26</sup>

The Kaukazas Ghetto was inhabited first, followed by the Trakai Ghetto. The transfer of Jews to the ghettos was completed on August 15, 1941.<sup>27</sup> Some 4,000–5,000 Jews were moved to the Trakai and Kaukazas Ghettos. There was not enough space in the ghettos for some Jews, so they were locked up in the synagogue. Most of them (the elderly and the incapacitated) were later taken to Žagarė and shot.<sup>28</sup> The ghettos were fenced in with barbed wire that was two meters high. The gates were guarded around the clock by the police. Leaving the ghetto was only possible with special permits. The problem of overpopulation and lack of apartments in the ghetto was partly “resolved” by killing people. In the first days of September, some of the Jews were herded into synagogues and nursing homes (on Vilniaus Street). The Jews were registered, and the lists were handed over to Stankus. When Mendel Leibovitsch visited the synagogues on September 4, he found them empty. A few days later, nearly 50 children from the Jewish orphanage and several dozen old people were killed.<sup>29</sup>

The Šiauliai Ghetto had a grocery store and a 40-bed hospital. Beginning in September 1941, the ghetto residents were taken to work at the Zokniai aerodrome, various workshops, the Rėkyva peatbog, the Linkaičiai weapons workshop, the Pavenčiai sugar factory, and elsewhere.<sup>30</sup> The Jews were not paid for their work. The employment office (German: *Arbeitsamt*) transferred the money to the ghetto administration.<sup>31</sup>

In late August 1941, Antanas Stankus, who was the representative for Jewish affairs in Šiauliai, received instructions from the Gebietskommissar to issue the Jews new identity documents. This was done in order to find out precisely where the Jews were living. Until then, Jews often moved from the Trakai Ghetto to the Kaukazas Ghetto or vice versa. The Germans also wanted to single out incapacitated Jews and move them to Žagarė. This was to reduce the population in the overcrowded ghettos. Stankus ordered a special commission to be formed to issue new documents to the ghetto residents and identify the ones who were unable to work. The commission did this with the Jewish Committee in the Trakai Ghetto, but the documents in the Kaukazas Ghetto were not replaced. Able-bodied Jews who were specialists were issued pink certificates, and able-bodied Jews who were not specialists were issued yellow certificates. Jews who were unable to work were not issued any documents. Several dozen incapacitated Jews were sent to Žagarė and later killed there.<sup>32</sup> When Stankus and the members of the Jewish Committee tried to clarify why some Jews were being deported from Šiauliai, representatives of the district commissariat (German: *Gebietskommissariat*) said that these were orders from above, and that it was not possible to accommodate all of Šiauliai's Jews in the ghetto.<sup>33</sup>

During and after the establishment of the ghetto, the occupation authorities were particularly concerned about the property and possessions of the Jews. When the ghetto was being put in place, Jews were allowed to sell their movable and immovable property. To do this, they had to register with the municipality (at 3 Gaisrininkų Street). People who wanted to purchase Jewish property also had to obtain permission from the municipality. Without this, the sale and purchase of Jewish property was prohibited.<sup>34</sup>

After the Jews were moved to the ghettos, their confiscated gold and other valuables were later transferred to the Šiauliai Gebietskommissariat according to certificates and inventory lists. Part of the Jewish property (furniture) was taken by the officers of the Gebietskommissariat, and the other part was allowed to be sold to the local residents.<sup>35</sup> Even after the establishment of ghettos, the occupation authorities did not leave Jewish property in peace. Numerous instructions and announcements were issued on this matter.

On August 18, 1941, the representative for Jewish affairs issued an announcement requiring persons who had purchased or otherwise acquired Jewish property to register with the municipality by August 23, 1941. An exception was made for people who

had previously registered and obtained permission from the representative for Jewish affairs to purchase Jewish property.<sup>36</sup> Later, the registration deadline for holders of Jewish property kept being extended. The last time it was extended was for December 1, 1941.<sup>37</sup>

The Jewish question was discussed more broadly at the meeting of Šiauliai County governors and police chiefs that was held on September 4, 1941. Officers from the Šiauliai Gebietskommissariat explained to officials from the Lithuanian administration that “all Jewish property is to be confiscated and handled in accordance with the regulations of the Gebietskommissar. District governors are responsible for registering all Jewish movable and immovable property.”<sup>38</sup> Jews were deprived of the right to manage their property, and those arrested for violating this were to be handed over to the German police.<sup>39</sup>

On October 18, 1941, the Šiauliai Gebietskommissar sent a letter to all county governors and town mayors regarding property belonging to Jews, political parties, and organizations. Gebietskommissar Hans Gewecke ordered that all synagogues, Jewish community shops, archives, libraries and other property, apartments belonging to senior rabbis and rabbis, Jewish bookstores, and art shops be confiscated and sealed by October 23, 1941.<sup>40</sup>

In response to Gewecke’s October 18, 1941 letter, the Mayor of Šiauliai informed the Gebietskommissar that there was a synagogue in Šiauliai at 136 Tilžės Street that had a bookcase in the courtyard with religious books. He also said that there was a synagogue at 19 Varpo Street and another at 27 Varpo Street, but no Jewish books or works of art were found in either of these two synagogues. The Šiauliai National Library took about 1,300 Jewish books. They were placed in storage and not issued to readers.<sup>41</sup>

The German occupation authorities allowed part of the confiscated Jewish property to be sold to the local population. On October 14, 1941, the Šiauliai Gebietskommissar informed the county governors that “after removing the more valuable objects with the participation of the commission appointed by the county governor and the mayor, the Jewish belongings that were seized may be sold. The proceeds were to be paid into Special Account T of the Gebietskommissar at the German National Credit Fund.”<sup>42</sup> At the end of October, 1941, the Šiauliai Gebietskommissar allowed the Lithuanian administration to sell the remaining Jewish furniture. The money received was to be deposited into the aforementioned special account of the Gebietskommissar.<sup>43</sup>

Like in the ghettos in Vilnius and Kaunas, the Šiauliai Ghetto had a Jewish administration and its own Jewish Ghetto Police. The Jewish Committee was formed in July 1941, when the ghetto was just being established (members: Mendel Leibovitsch, Ber Kartun, Faivel Rubinstein). Once the ghetto was in place, the Jewish Committee was reorganized into the Jewish Council (German: *Judenrat*). The Jewish

Council managed the Trakai and Kaukazas Ghettos. Mendel Leibovitsch headed the Jewish Council until the spring of 1944. He died during the bombing of Šiauliai in the summer of 1944.<sup>44</sup> The Jewish Council had some influential members of the Šiauliai Jewish community, including Aharon Katz, Ber Kartun, Aharon Heller, and Ber Menashe Abramovich. The secretary of the council was the teacher Eliezer ((Leizer) Yerushalmi.

The Jewish Council managed the internal life of the ghettos and maintained relations with German and Lithuanian authorities. It also appointed the heads of the Trakai and Kaukazas Ghetto administrations. Samuel Burgin, S. Kulchenitski, and Khaim Cherniavski were appointed as heads of the Trakai Ghetto administration.<sup>45</sup> The ghetto administration was responsible for order, workforce deployment, food, sanitation, and other day-to-day matters.

Efroim Gens was appointed as chief of the Trakai Ghetto Jewish Police in early September 1941. He had 11–12 police officers under his command. The Jewish police did not have any weapons. They tied white armbands with the Star of David and the inscription “Jewish Ghetto Police” in both Hebrew and German on their left sleeves. The ghetto police had to keep public order inside the ghetto – they managed the accommodation and relocation of the population, fought crime (theft, speculation), maintained cleanliness, and organized labor brigades. Those who violated the order in the ghetto were given fines, time in the lock-up, or a temporary ban on work. The punishments were imposed by the ghetto court.<sup>46</sup>

Efroim Gens remained chief of police of the Trakai Ghetto until April 1944. Then, due to disagreements with the new ghetto elder, Georg Parizer, he gave up this position and became an ordinary worker. Gens was replaced by C. Berlovich.<sup>47</sup>

There were approximately 10 people serving on the Kaukazas Ghetto Jewish Police. They were under the command of David Fain, whose deputy was Zavel Gotz (who replaced Fain in 1943).<sup>48</sup>

Underground anti-fascist groups formed in the Šiauliai Ghetto. In late 1941, a secret organization was founded by activists from the youth Zionist movement. A secret self-defense organization was put together in 1942. It included both Zionists and communists. The organization stockpiled weapons, but did not carry out any armed actions. Secret newspapers were published: *Masada*, *Hatechija* and *Mimamakim*.<sup>49</sup>

Schools were established in the Trakai and Kaukazas Ghettos in 1943. There were 90 Jewish children studying in the Trakai Ghetto and 200 in the Kaukazas Ghetto.<sup>50</sup>

The Šiauliai Ghetto was under the purview of Gebietskommissar Hans Gewecke until October 1, 1943, when, like the Kaunas Ghetto, it was taken under the wing of the SS. The ghetto became a concentration camp. SS-Hauptscharführer Hermann Schlöf was put in charge. The external security of the ghetto was taken over by a squad

of 30 members of the SS under the command of SS-Rottenführer Henning. Inside the ghetto, order was maintained by the Jewish Ghetto Police (about 10 people).<sup>51</sup> A German Jew named Georg Parizer took over the internal administration as of April 1, 1944. His deputies were S. Burgin (economic affairs), Mendel Leibovitsch (administrative affairs) and C. Berlovich (chief of police). C. Cherniavski was appointed as secretary, the physician Pesachovich was named head of the Sanitation and Health Department, and Yosel Leibovitsch became head of the Housing Department.<sup>52</sup> As the camp elder, Parizer diligently followed the instructions of the German authorities and became Schlöf's secret informant. G. Parizer told the Germans about six Jews who were preparing to escape from the ghetto. These Jews were arrested and sent to even stricter concentration camps.<sup>53</sup>

After the mass exterminations of Jews in the summer and autumn of 1941, the Šiauliai Ghetto experienced a relatively quiet period. It was only on November 5, 1943 that children and incapacitated Jews were "selected." SS-Hauptsturmführer Ludwig Förster was in charge of the campaign. On that day, members of the SS and the Russian Liberation Army who had come from Kaunas captured 570 children and 260 elderly Jews and took them to German concentration camps (presumably – Auschwitz). Two members of the Jewish Council – Ber Kartun and Aharon Katz – voluntarily left together with the detainees.<sup>54</sup> In June 1943, Becalel Mazovetzki was publicly hanged in the Kaukazas Ghetto by order of Ewald Bub, the deputy to the Šiauliai Gebietskommissar, for trying to smuggle food and cigarettes into the ghetto.<sup>55</sup>

On December 12, 1943, Feldwebel Graudelis, the commandant of the Akmenė Jewish labor camp, ordered the arrest and shooting of eight children and one woman. Members of the Russian Liberation Army shot the condemned in front of everyone in the camp. The last Jewish massacre in the Šiauliai Ghetto was carried out right before the ghetto was evacuated – on July 8, 1944. When they found out about the forthcoming evacuation, the Jews who worked at the Frenkel factory began to flee. Reinhardt, the director of the factory, ordered the Jews who tried to flee to be shot. Two women and two children were killed.<sup>56</sup>

The Kaukazas Ghetto was eliminated in mid-October 1943, with only the Trakai Ghetto remaining in Šiauliai. Some Jews were transferred to the Daugiliai, Pavenčiai, and other labor camps.<sup>57</sup> The liquidation of the Šiauliai Ghetto began on July 15, 1944. Several thousand Šiauliai Jews were taken to the Stutthof concentration camp in four stages. From there, the men were taken to Dachau and the women and children were taken to Auschwitz. The Jews from the Šiauliai Ghetto who survived were liberated by American troops on May 2, 1945. Only 350-500 Šiauliai Jews lived to see the end of the war.<sup>58</sup>

The history of Šiauliai Ghetto can be divided into four periods. The first period was September–November 1941. This is when the ghetto administration was established

(the Jewish Council, various services, the Jewish Ghetto Police). At the same time (especially in September 1941), the mass killing of Jews was also being carried out. The second period (late 1941 to the summer of 1943) was marked by relative calm and stability. There was no mass killing of Jews. During the third period (September 1943 to mid-July 1944), control of the ghetto passed over from the German civil authorities to the SS, and the ghetto was converted into a concentration camp. The fourth period was the second half of July 1944. This is when the Šiauliai Ghetto was liquidated, and its inhabitants were taken to German concentration camps.<sup>59</sup>

## References

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<sup>2</sup> 1941 m. bolševikų ištremtų žydų sąrašas [1941 list of Jews deported by the Bolsheviks], Lithuanian Academy of Sciences Manuscripts Department (hereinafter – LMA RS), f. 76-190, pp. 19–23.

<sup>3</sup> Šiaulių miesto savivaldybės Administracijos skyriaus 1941 m. lapkričio 14 d. raštas Šiaulių apygardos komisariui [November 14, 1941 letter from the Šiauliai City Municipality Administration Department to the Šiauliai Gebietskommissar], *ibid.*, f. 76-179, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> *Enzyklopädie des Holocaust*, p. 1281; *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, New York, London, 1990, pp. 1348, 1349.

<sup>5</sup> Šiaulių miesto policijos vado 1941 m. spalio 1 d. raštas Šiaulių miesto burmistrui [October 1, 1941 letter from the Šiauliai City police chief to the Mayor of Šiauliai] LMAB RS, f. 76-181, p. 125; Lithuanian Central State Archives (hereinafter – LCSA), f. R-1099, ap. 1, b. 1, p. 99.

<sup>6</sup> I. Urbaičio 1944 m. gruodžio 6–7 d. parodymai sovietų saugumui [I. Urbaitis's December 6–7, 1944 testimony to Soviet security], Lithuanian Special Archives (hereinafter – LSA), f. K-1, ap. 45, b. 1389, l. 33 a. p. 34.

<sup>7</sup> Šiaulių miesto savivaldybės 1941 m. rugpjūčio 13 d. raštas Šiaulių apygardos komisariui [August 13, 1941 letter from the

Šiauliai City Municipality to the Šiauliai Gebietskommissar], LMAB RS, f. 76-181, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Vokiečių karo komendanto 1941 m. liepos 4 d. nurodymai Šiaulių miesto policijai [German military commandant's July 4, 1941 instructions to the Šiauliai city police], *ibid.*, f. 76-182, pp. 1, 2, 4.

<sup>9</sup> C. Dieckmann, “Überlegungen zur deutschen Besatzungsherrschaft in Osteuropa 1941–1944. Das Beispiel Litauen” [“Reflections on the German Occupation in Eastern Europe 1941–1944: The Lithuanian Example”], in: *Annaberger Annalen*, 1997, No. 5, p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> “Дневник А. Ерушалми, Шяуляй (Шавли)” [“The Diary of A. Yerushalmi, Šiauliai (Shavli)”], in: Чёрная книга [The Black Book], compiled by В. Гроссман (V. Grossman) and И. Еренбурга (I. Ehrenburg), Vilnius, 1993, pp. 265, 522; E. Oshry, *The Annihilation of Lithuanian Jewry*, New York, 1995, p. 248; *Enzyklopädie des Holocaust* Bd. 3, p. 1281.

<sup>11</sup> Šiaulių rajono DŽDT vykdomojo komiteto 1968 m. balandžio 4 d. pažyma [April 4, 1968 certificate issued by the Šiauliai District Office of Working People's Deputies], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 46, b. 1261, p. 86; L. Peleckienė, “Prie Šiaulių geto vartų skambėjo gedulingas ‘Requiem’” [“A mournful ‘requiem’ sounded at the gates of the Šiauliai Ghetto”], *Lietuvos rytas*, July 26, 1994, No. 144(1088).

<sup>12</sup> Šiaulių miesto gyventojų, nužudytų Pročiūnų kaimo miškelyje, 1944 m. spalio 14 d. atkasi- mo aktas [October 14, 1944 excavation certificate: residents of the city of Šiauliai who were murdered in the Pročiūnai Village woods], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 46, b. 1274, p. 32-1–32-4.

<sup>13</sup> 1973 m. vasario 7 d. LSSR KGB pažyma

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<sup>14</sup> Z. Ašmonienės 1973 m. sausio 23 d. apklausos protokolas [*Z. Ašmonienės January 23, 1973 interrogation protocol*], *ibid.*, pp. 5–7.

<sup>15</sup> Gubernijos miške nužudytų Šiaulių miesto gyventojų 1944 m. lapkričio 16 d. atkasimo aktas [*November 16, 1944 excavation certificate: residents of the city of Šiauliai who were murdered in Gubernija Forest*], *ibid.*, p. 47-1–47-2.

<sup>16</sup> Šiaulių miesto žydų gete vykusių žudynių aprašymo aktas, 1944 m. lapkričio 25 d. [*November 25, 1944 report describing the massacres that took place in the Jewish ghetto of Šiauliai*], LMAB RS, f. 159-29, p. 3-3 a. p.

<sup>17</sup> Šiaulių miesto savivaldybės 1941 m. rugpjūčio 20 d. raštas Šiaulių apygardos komisariui [*August 20, 1941 letter from the Šiauliai City Municipality to the Šiauliai Gebietskommissar*], *ibid.*, f. 76-181, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> Šiaulių miesto savivaldybės 1941 m. lapkričio 14 d. raštas Šiaulių apygardos komisariui [*November 14, 1941 letter from the Šiauliai City Municipality to the Šiauliai Gebietskommissar*], *ibid.*, f. 76-179, p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> Šiaulių miesto burmistro 1941 m. liepos 5 d. įsakymas Nr. 4 [*Order issued by the Mayor of Šiauliai on July 5, 1941*], from the author's personal archives; Šiaulių apskrities viršininko 1941 m. liepos 7 d. raštas [*July 7, 1941 letter from the Šiauliai County Governor*], LCSA, f. R-1099, ap. 1, b. 1, p. 13.

<sup>20</sup> Šiaulių miesto burmistro 1941 m. liepos 15 d. skelbimas [*July 15, 1941 announcement issued by the Mayor of Šiauliai*], from the author's personal archives.

<sup>21</sup> Šiaulių miesto savivaldybės žydams tvarkyti įgaliotinio skelbimas [*Announcement issued by the Šiauliai City Municipality representative for Jewish affairs*], *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Šiaulių miesto burmistro 1941 m. liepos 18 d. skelbimas [*July 18, 1941 announcement issued by the Mayor of Šiauliai*], *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> A. Stankaus 1950 m. spalio 20 d. tardymo protokolo išrašas [*Excerpt from A. Stankus's*

*October 20, 1950 investigation protocol*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 8, b. 182, pp. 158, 159.

<sup>24</sup> Šiaulių miesto burmistro 1941 m. liepos 18 d. skelbimas [*July 18, 1941 announcement issued by the Mayor of Šiauliai*], from the author's personal archives.

<sup>25</sup> A. Stankaus 1950 m. spalio 20 d. tardymo protokolo išrašas [*Excerpt from A. Stankus's October 20, 1950 investigation protocol*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 8, b. 182, pp. 158, 159.

<sup>26</sup> Šiaulių miesto burmistro 1941 m. rugpjūčio 9 d. skelbimas [*August 9, 1941 announcement issued by the Mayor of Šiauliai*], from the author's personal archives.

<sup>27</sup> Чёрная книга, p. 522.

<sup>28</sup> A. Stankaus 1950 m. spalio 20 d. tardymo protokolo išrašas [*Excerpt from A. Stankus's October 20, 1950 investigation protocol*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 8, b. 182, p. 160.

<sup>29</sup> “Дневник А. Ерушалми”, pp. 266, 267.

<sup>30</sup> “Schaulen”, *Enzyklop skistdie des Holocausta*, Bd. 3, p. 1281.

<sup>31</sup> A. Galiūno 1951 m. rugsėjo 6 d. tardymo protokolas [*A. Galiūnas's September 6, 1951 investigation protocol*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. P-16850, p. 19.

<sup>32</sup> A. Stankaus 1950 m. spalio 20 d. tardymo protokolo išrašas [*Excerpt from A. Stankus's October 20, 1950 investigation protocol*], *ibid.*, ap. 8, b. 182, pp. 161, 162.

<sup>33</sup> A. Stankaus 1950 m. rugsėjo 28 d. tardymo protokolas [*A. Stankus's September 28, 1950 investigation protocol*], *ibid.*, ap. 58, b. 23103/3, pp. 26, 27.

<sup>34</sup> Šiaulių miesto burmistro 1941 m. liepos 23 d. skelbimas [*July 23, 1941 announcement issued by the Mayor of Šiauliai*], LMAB RS, f. 76-183, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> A. Stankaus 1950 m. spalio 20 d. tardymo protokolo išrašas [*Excerpt from A. Stankus's October 20, 1950 investigation protocol*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 8, b. 182, pp. 159, 160.

<sup>36</sup> Žydams tvarkyti įgaliotinio 1941 m. rugpjūčio 18 d. skelbimas [*August 18, 1941 announcement issued by the representative for Jewish affairs*], LMAB RS, f. 76-183, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> Šiaulių miesto burmistro 1941 m. lapkričio 20 d. skelbimas Nr. 26 [*Announcement No. 26*

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Šiaulių apygardos komisaro 1941 m. spalio 18 d. raštas [October 18, 1941 letter from the Šiauliai Gebietskommissar], LCSA, f. R-1099, ap. 1, b. 1, p. 379.

<sup>41</sup> Šiaulių miesto burmistro raštas apygardos komisarui (be datos) [Letter from the Šiauliai City Mayor to the Gebietskommissar (no date)], LMAB RS, f. 76–181, p. 171.

<sup>42</sup> Šiaulių apygardos komisaro 1941 m. spalio 14 d. raštas [October 14, 1941 letter from the Šiauliai Gebietskommissar], *ibid.*, f. 76–180, p. 15.

<sup>43</sup> Šiaulių apygardos komisaro 1941 m. spalio 24 d. raštas [October 24, 1941 letter from the Šiauliai Gebietskommissar], *ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>44</sup> E. Genso 1948 m. sausio 21 d. tardymo protokolas [E. Gens's January 21, 1948 investigation protocol], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 42809/3, p. 18.

<sup>45</sup> E. Genso 1948 m. birželio 29 d. tardymo protokolas [E. Gens's June 28, 1948 investigation protocol], *ibid.*, p. 25; A. Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust: The Kaunas Ghetto Diary*, London, 1990, p. 460.

<sup>46</sup> E. Genso 1948 m. sausio 21 d. tardymo protokolas [E. Gens's January 21, 1948 investigation protocol], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 42809/3, pp. 13, 14.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15, 16.

<sup>48</sup> L. Lazerio 1950 m. birželio 21 d. tardymo

protokolas [L. Lazeris's June 21, 1950 investigation protocol], *ibid.*, b. 18181/3, pp. 22, 23.

<sup>49</sup> *Enzyklop skistdie des Holocausta*, p. 1281.

<sup>50</sup> “Дневник А. Ерушалми”, *Чёрная книга*, p. 269.

<sup>51</sup> G. Parizerio 1945 m. balandžio 17 d. tardymo protokolas [G. Parizer's April 17, 1945 investigation protocol], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 46, b. 1228, pp. 1-2.

<sup>52</sup> G. Parizerio 1945 m. balandžio 24 d. tardymo protokolas [G. Parizer's April 24, 1945 investigation protocol], *ibid.*, pp. 1-9–1-11.

<sup>53</sup> Karo tribunolo 1945 m. liepos 2 d. nuosprendis G. Parizeriui [July 2, 1945 Military tribunal judgment against G. Parizer], *ibid.*, pp. 1-18–1-19.

<sup>54</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje 1941–1944: Dokumentų rinkinys* [Mass Killings in Lithuania 1941–1944: Document Collection], Vilnius, 1965, Part 1, p. 342; Užrašai apie H. Schlöfo veiklą (1972 m. vasario 4 d.) [Notes on the activities of H. Schlöf (February 4, 1972)], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 46, b. 1228, pp. 1, 2.

<sup>55</sup> E. Genso 1969 m. kovo 11 d. apklausos protokolas [E. Gens's March 11, 1969 interrogation protocol], *ibid.*, pp. 14, 15.

<sup>56</sup> Šiaulių miesto žydų gete vykusių žudynių aprašymo 1944 m. lapkričio 25 d. aktas, p. 2 a. p.

<sup>57</sup> “Дневник А. Ерушалми”, *Чёрная книга*, pp. 276, 277.

<sup>58</sup> Lietuvos rytas, July 26, 1994, No. 144(1088); E. Genso 1948 m. sausio 21 d. tardymo protokolas [E. Gens's January 21, 1948 investigation protocol], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 42809/3, pp. 12, 13.

<sup>59</sup> *Enzyklop skistdie des Holocausta*, p. 1281.



Chapter III.

# The Holocaust in the Provinces





Jews being driven to work in Kėdainiai.  
Summer 1941

Arūnas Bubnys

## Small Jewish Ghettos and Internment Camps (1941–1943)

The word “ghetto” was originally used as far back as 1516 in Venice, Italy, to describe the part of the city where Jewish people were restricted to live. In medieval Europe, ghettos were established in order to minimize Jewish-Christian contact and curb Jewish economic activity. During the Nazi occupation, the establishment of ghettos was a transitional stage in the “Final Solution to the Jewish Question.”<sup>1</sup> The Nazis established the first ghetto in the occupied countries in the Polish city of Piotrków Trybunalski in October 1939. Later, ghettos began to be created en masse in other Polish cities, as well as in Russia and the Baltic States. The largest ghetto in Europe was established in November 1940 in Warsaw. Approximately 445,000 Jews were living there in 1941.<sup>2</sup>

Once the Nazis occupied Lithuania, ghettos began to be established there as well. The establishment of the first large Lithuanian ghetto began in Kaunas in July 1941. In the summer of 1941, ghettos and Jewish internment camps were established in many other Lithuanian cities and towns as well. The ghettos in Vilnius, Kaunas, and Šiauliai were the largest in Lithuania. The other Lithuanian ghettos differed from these in terms of population, internal order, and length of operation.

The main difference between the small ghettos and internment camps and the large ghettos was the number of prisoners. Roughly 15,000–20,000 Jews were imprisoned in the ghettos in Vilnius and Kaunas, and about 4,500 Jews were imprisoned in Šiauliai. The population of the small ghettos rarely exceeded 1,000 people (with the exception of the Švenčionys and Žagarė Ghettos). They usually only had a few hundred Jews.

The small Lithuanian ghettos and camps had no internal self-government. The large ghettos had a Jewish administration (Jewish Councils (Judenrat), Jewish Ghetto Police, a judicial system, various administrative units (workforce deployment, health, etc.)), whereas the small ghettos (with the exception of the Švenčionys Ghetto) did not have internal administration departments.

The small ghettos and camps existed for a much shorter period of time than the large ghettos. For example, the ghettos in Kaunas and Šiauliai survived until the end of the Nazi occupation, while the small ghettos and camps were destroyed by the end of 1941 (with the exception of the Švenčionys Ghetto, which was liquidated in April 1943). The small ghettos and camps usually operated for just a few weeks – until the local Jewish population was completely exterminated. In some cities and towns of the provinces, ghettos and camps were not established at all. Before the massacre, Jews would be rounded up and put in prisons, lock-ups, or synagogues, and from there they were taken to the massacre site and shot.

Prior to the Nazi-Soviet war, the establishment of ghettos marked the beginning of the persecution of Jews, and in the German-occupied Soviet Union and Baltic States, this occurred either simultaneously with the systematic extermination of Jews, or even after the mass killings had begun.

The purpose of this article is to recreate the process of establishing and liquidating the small Jewish ghettos and internment (concentration) camps in Lithuania, as well as the specific features of this process and its significance to the history of the Holocaust in Lithuania. Examination of the topic chosen by the author is complicated by the fact that this topic is still considered a stain on our history. Lithuanian and foreign historians have written extensively about the large Lithuanian ghettos (especially the ones in Vilnius and Kaunas) and their branches, but to date, no one has specifically examined the small ghettos and internment camps. Select facts on this topic can be found in *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje 1941–1944: Dokumentų rinkinys* (“Mass Killings in Lithuania 1941–1944: Document Collection”), as well as in books by Valentinas Brandašauskas and Yitzhak Arad, and *Lithuania: Crime and Punishment*, a periodical published in Israel.<sup>3</sup> However, these are all isolated facts within a broader context rather than a systematic study of the issue that is of interest to the author. The Holocaust in the Lithuanian provinces remains an unknown and unexplored issue within our historiography. Thus, the author’s only option was to search for and research archival documents. Many valuable documents have been preserved in the Lithuanian Central State Archives (LCSA) and in the Lithuanian Special Archives of (LSA). The LCSA has documents of the institutions of the Nazi occupation authorities (general commissar, county governors, police chiefs), while the LSA has the case files of persons who were convicted for participating in the Holocaust. These archival documents formed the source base of the article.

Researching the chosen topic revealed that ghettos or internment camps for Jews were established in practically every county in Lithuania. However, it proved impossible to investigate all of them due to the limited scope of the article and the lack of sources. Thus, the author chose the principle of regional research. An effort was made to select one or more significant ghetto or camp from each region of Lithuania (Samogitia (Lithuanian: *Žemaitija*), Aukštaitija, Sudovia (Lithuanian:

*Suvalkija*), Dzūkija, Central Lithuania, Northern Lithuania). Obviously, even in this case, the selection was determined by the quantity of surviving archival documents. In this respect, the most abundant is the surviving archival material about the regions of Samogitia and Aukštaitija, and the least abundant is about the regions of Sudovia and Northeastern Lithuania (Biržai, Rokiškis, Zarasai).

### **Nazi Government Directives and Orders to Discriminate Against and Kill Jews**

Jewish genocide (the Holocaust) became the state policy of the Third Reich after the Nazis started World War II. The Holocaust was a policy that was carried out in all countries occupied by the Nazis. However, the specific implementation of this policy in each country had specific features. The extent and pace of the persecution and killing of Jews varied from country to country. The differences were due to various factors, such as how active or passive the Nazi occupation officials were, the attitude of the local population, as well as economic and military motives. Since there was no single order from the Third Reich High Command to persecute and kill Jews, much was determined by the initiative and zeal of the local leaders of the occupation authorities.

It is indisputable that the persecution and killing of Jews was carried out at the initiative and under the direction of the Nazi occupation authorities. However, this was done in secret, often leaving no written orders or giving verbal orders and instructions to lower-ranking officers. In his October 15, 1941 report to Berlin, Einsatzgruppe A commanding officer in the Baltic States SS-Brigadeführer Franz Walter Stahlecker wrote: “In the first hours of occupying of the city, efforts were made to incite pogroms against Jews, although it was quite difficult to provoke the local anti-Semitic forces. The security police, following orders, were determined to resolve the Jewish question by all possible means and as severely as possible. But it was useful that it should at least initially operate behind the scenes, because extremely brutal measures would inevitably have caused alarm in German circles as well. Thus, publicly, it had to look as though the locals had done everything on their own initiative, responding appropriately to the communist terror and Jewish oppression they had suffered for decades.”<sup>4</sup>

At the beginning of the Nazi-Soviet war, the German Einsatzgruppen (deployment groups) and Einsatzkommandos (mobile killing squads that were a sub-group of the Einsatzgruppen) played the most important role in the persecution of Jews. During the 1947 Einsatzgruppen trial, Einsatzgruppe D commander Otto Ohlendorf admitted that a few days before leaving for the occupied territories of the U.S.S.R., the

commanders of the Einsatzgruppen and Einsatzkommandos were given orders to exterminate Jews as well as communist functionaries, partisans, and agents. According to Ohlendorf, these orders, which were given by Heinrich Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich, were relayed by Bruno Streckenbach, the head of the 1st department of the Reich Main Security Office (German: *Reichssicherheitshauptamt*; RSHA). According to the testimony of Sonderkommando 7a commander Walter Blume, Heydrich and Streckenbach told the commanders of the Einsatzgruppen and Einsatzkommandos in June 1941 that Eastern Jewry was the intellectual reservoir of Bolshevism and therefore, in the Führer's opinion, must be destroyed. Western historians remain in disagreement to this day as to whether Adolf Hitler came to the decision to exterminate all Jews prior to the invasion of the Soviet Union or during the first weeks of war with it. According to German historian Helmut Krausnick, the order to exterminate not only adult Jews, but also children, was issued in late July 1941.<sup>5</sup>

Until the announcement on the establishment of the German civil administration (July 17, 1941), the highest occupation authority in Lithuania was the military administration (Wehrmacht commanders and military commanders). They issued orders on the administration of the occupied land. The military commanders and Einsatzgruppen commanders initiated the issuance of anti-Jewish orders and directives. The occupation authorities often disguised their initiative by forcing the Lithuanian administration to sign anti-Semitic decrees in their own name. For example, on July 4, 1941, the Citizens' Committee of Vilnius City and Region issued an announcement based on an order issued by the German military command on July 3, 1941 requiring Jews to wear identification badges and prohibiting them from being on the streets from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m.<sup>6</sup> One of the most zealous persecutors of Jews in Vilnius was Lt. Gen. Wolfgang von Dittfurth, the head of the German military administration in Vilnius. Discriminatory anti-Semitic orders were issued on his instruction in July 1941, and he was one of the architects of the Vilnius Ghetto. Mass shootings of Jews began in Paneriai in July 1941.<sup>7</sup>

After the introduction of the civil administration (late July 1941), announcements and decrees regarding the persecution of Jews were issued by German commissars. These announcements and decrees were published in official German publications (for example, *Amtsblatt des Generalkommissars in Kauen* – “Official Gazette of the General Commissar for Kaunas) and passed into public law. Such decrees were issued in August 1941 by Vilnius City Gebietskommissar Hans Hingst, Kaunas Region Gebietskommissar Arnold Lentzen, Vilnius Region Gebietskommissar Horst Wulff, and Šiauliai Region Gebietskommissar Hans Gewecke.<sup>8</sup> On August 13, 1941, Reichskommissar for the Ostland Hinrich Lohse issued the “Provisional Directives for the Treatment of Jews in the Area of the Reichskommissariat Ostland.” These directives set out the procedures for the registration and identification of Jews, as well as the confiscation of their property.<sup>9</sup>

The ghettos and internment camps could not be established without the instructions and control of the German authorities. Jurgis Gepneris, who was the mayor of Jurbarkas during the German occupation and was later arrested and interrogated by Soviet security forces after the war, stated during the interrogation that in August 1941, the Šiauliai mayors and county governors met in Šiauliai to discuss the Jewish question. Šiauliai Region Gebietskommissar Hans Gewecke demanded that a ghetto be established in every city and that the Jews be held there until they were shot.<sup>10</sup>

On August 23, 1941, Vilnius Region Gebietskommissar Horst Wulff sent a letter to the county governors demanding that proposals for how to resolve the Jewish question be presented as soon as possible. Wulff wanted to know where ghettos could be established and where premises to accommodate Jews could be found. At the same time, Wulff ordered the selection of a manager for Jewish affairs in each Vilnius regional district.<sup>11</sup>

On September 19, 1941, Wulff issued a decree on the establishment of ghettos in the Vilnius district. At the time of the issuance of the decree, a Jewish ghetto was already operating in Švenčionys. Wulff's decree stated that in the cities and towns of the county where Jews have not yet been moved to ghettos, they must immediately be "relocated to ghettos established in parts of the cities or villages, surrounded by fences and barbed wire as appropriate. The ghettos must be guarded by the Lithuanian auxiliary police."<sup>12</sup> The county governors were obliged to inform Wulff as soon as possible about the execution of this decree.

One must assume that the commissioners of other counties (Kaunas, Šiauliai, Panevėžys) issued similar ordinances regarding the establishment of ghettos. There are not enough authentic documents surviving in Lithuanian archives to allow for a detailed reconstruction of the process of "ghettoization" (establishment of ghettos) in each county of Lithuania. As a result, we are often forced to use on other documents that are not always accurate and reliable. This is especially true of KGB documents. However, the author tried to find as many different individual witness accounts as possible about the same events (the establishment and existence of the ghettos and camps and the massacre of Jews). Although all this does not protect against possible errors and inaccuracies, it does reveal the essence of the process sufficiently and convincingly. The surviving authentic documents of German and Lithuanian institutions usually also confirm the general scheme and logic of the events. The ghettoization was conceived by the German occupation authorities and carried out under the orders of Nazi officials. Unfortunately, the local Lithuanian administration (city mayors, county governors, various police officers, and the so-called "partisans") was also involved in this process. One might add that this process was not unique. Ghettoization took place in a similar manner in all Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe countries. It was started in Poland and continued in the Baltic States, Belarus, and Ukraine. How long the ghettos operated depended on the situation on the front.

As the Soviet army approached, the remaining ghettos were liquidated, and their inhabitants were relocated deep into German-controlled territory.

### **The Telšiai Ghetto and the Rainiai, Viešvėnai, and Geruliai camps**

The German Army occupied Telšiai on June 25, 1941. As in other Lithuanian cities and towns, local activists (members of the Lithuanian Activist Front (LAF)) began to restore Lithuanian government institutions. Maj. Alfonsas Svilas, an air force officer, became the commandant of the city and county of Telšiai. On July 2, 1941, he issued Order No. 3 regarding the maintenance of order in the city of Telšiai. Robbery, theft, and other criminal offenses were subject to severe penalties of martial law. Residents were urged “to contribute to the cleansing of the liberated region of Samogitia from communists and other pests of society working for the benefit of the communists, and to cooperate closely with the police officers of the provisional government.”<sup>13</sup> The persecution of communists, Soviet activists, and Jews began in Telšiai County shortly thereafter.

As early as June 27, 1941, Telšiai activists drove the city’s Jews from their homes, lined them up in columns, and herded them to Rainiai Manor, a few kilometers away. An internment (concentration) camp had been established there for Jews. The Jews were put up in small houses on the manor grounds. Almost all of their property was left in their previous homes and was later confiscated by the occupation authorities or looted by locals. The Jews were also required to give up all of their jewelry and money.<sup>14</sup> Benediktas Platakis was appointed head of the Jewish camp.<sup>15</sup> Rainiai Manor was guarded by local activists. Somewhere around July 18, 1941, two Gestapo officers and a group of Lithuanian “partisans” came to the Rainiai camp\*. The “partisans” (50–60 men) ordered the Jewish men to dig several large pits. By order of the Gestapo, the Jewish men were given a “devil’s dance” and were forced to run in a circle, lie on the ground, and turn left or right at their bidding. As they ran, they were beaten with sticks and rifle butts. These “gymnastics” went on for several hours. Many of the older or weaker men were left lying on the ground.

The mass killing of Jews in the Rainiai camp began around July 20–21. German Gestapo officers were in charge of the massacres. Lithuanian police and local activists participated in them. On the day of the massacre, the Jews were run out of the barracks.

\* The author considers real partisans to be the persons who fought against the retreating Red Army soldiers and Soviet government officials in the first days of the Soviet-Nazi war. However, people who joined the armed forces during the German occupation but did not participate in battles with Soviet troops and Soviet activists often called themselves “partisans.”



The men (over 14 years of age) were separated from the women and children, and taken in groups of several dozen people to the pits in the woods (200–300 meters from the camp) and shot. The volleys of bullets were clearly audible in the camp. The massacre continued for several hours. However, not all of the Jewish men were shot that day. When heavy rains started, the slaughter was suspended. The remaining men were brought back to the barracks and shot the next day. Some sources estimate that 1,200–1,500 men were shot, while others claim it was closer to 3,000. At that time, Jews not only from Telšiai, but also from Varniai, Luokė, Alsėdžiai, Rietavas, and other towns in Telšiai County were imprisoned in the Rainiai camp. Before his death, Yitzchok Bloch, a relative of the chief rabbi of Telšiai, cursed the murderers: “Now you are shedding our innocent blood. The time will come when your bastard blood will splatter the pavement.”<sup>16</sup> Some Lithuanians were beaten for refusing to take part in the massacre. Around a dozen of the condemned tried to escape, but were shot by the guards.<sup>17</sup> A week later, due to the terrible stench of the decomposing corpses and the fear of an epidemic, the Jewish women and children were moved from the Rainiai camp to a camp located in Geruliai Village (about 7 kilometers from Telšiai).

At the end of June 1941 (on or around the 27th), the Jews in Telšiai County’s Luokė Township were arrested and driven to Pašatrija Manor by “partisans.” Jews who tried to retreat to the depths of the Soviet Union at the beginning of the war but did not make it and were returned by the Germans were also being held there. In all, several hundred Jews were interned at Pašatrija Manor. They were usually held there for a few weeks and then moved to the Viešvėnai camp (Telšiai County). Jews were brought to the Viešvėnai camp from several townships in Telšiai County. The imprisoned Jews were housed in farm buildings. Only women and children were transferred from Pašatrija Manor to the Viešvėnai camp. The men were shot before the transfer to Viešvėnai.<sup>18</sup> Approximately 200 Jews were shot in mid-July 1941 at the Pašatrija Manor camp.<sup>19</sup>

Jews began to be moved to Viešvėnai Manor in late June – early July 1941. In the Viešvėnai camp, they were housed in farm buildings, where they suffered constant hunger and were subject to abuse and brutality from the guards. They were held there for several weeks, until the end of July. In total, there were about 500–600 Jewish men, women, and children in the Viešvėnai camp. They were guarded by “partisans” (known colloquially as *baltaraiščiai* – “white armbands”<sup>\*</sup>). German officers visited the camp several times. They mocked and tortured the Jews in various ways. During one such “inspection,” a German officer shot one or two Jewish men.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>\*</sup> *Baltaraiščiai* – which means “white armbands” – was the colloquial term for Lithuanian rebels and partisans who wore a white armband. Initially, the term did not have any ideological significance – only in the Soviet era did it acquire a negative political connotation.

Several Germans came to the Viešvėnai camp in the second half of July (according to some sources – July 17 or 18, 1941). They selected about 50 Jewish men and ordered them to dig a ditch 30–40 meters long and 3–4 meters wide near the camp (about 400–500 meters away). When the job was done, the massacre of the men began, directed by German officers. The shooting lasted for several hours, during which 200–250 men were shot. During the massacre, one young Jewish man tried to flee, but a German caught up with him and shot him. A few days later, the Jewish women and children who had temporarily been allowed to live were transferred from the Viešvėnai camp to the Geruliai camp.<sup>21</sup>

The commandant of the Geruliai camp was the same Benediktas Platakis.<sup>22</sup> The camp was guarded by policemen from the liquidated Rainiai and Viešvėnai camps. In Geruliai, the Jewish women and children were put up in sheds, where bunk beds had been nailed together from boards. The camp had a German command post and a small medical station. The sheds were filthy and teeming with lice. The prisoners were subject to constant hunger and humiliation. The Germans would come to the camp at night and wake up the women; then they would make them dance and sing while they shot their pistols in the air. Many of the women and girls were raped.<sup>23</sup> The imprisoned women tried to seek the intercession of priests and the Lithuanian authorities. Telšiai Bishop Justinas Staugaitis condemned the people who were shooting Jews several times during sermons in the cathedral. However, no one could save the Jews.<sup>24</sup> Many young children died as the result of various epidemics (typhus, diphtheria, etc.).

In late August 1941 (somewhere around the 28th), two cars with armed men arrived at the Geruliai camp. Platakis spent the night drinking with them. He called in several Jewish elders and demanded that they bring money and valuables. In exchange for this, Platakis promised to save the female prisoners from execution. The Jewish women gathered about 30,000 rubles for the commandant, along with several dozen wedding rings. The massacre began the next morning. The women were driven into the square. Young women (under 30) and girls were lined up on the right, with older women and boys on the left. A total of 400–500 young women and girls were selected and sent to the ghetto being established in Telšiai. The other women and children were condemned to be shot. The victims were led in groups to a nearby grove, where they were stripped and shot next to a 150-meter-long ditch that had been dug there. The massacre lasted two days. Lithuanian self-defense unit soldiers and police officers did the shooting. A total of about 4,000 women and children were killed there on August 29–30, 1941. Some of the children were killed with rifle butts or thrown alive into the ditch. After shooting the Jews, the killers got drunk and sang songs.<sup>25</sup> The clothes of the murdered were taken to Telšiai and sold to local residents. Some of the clothes, rings, and money were stolen by the killers themselves.<sup>26</sup>

The women who were sent to Telšiai were put in several small houses on Ežero Street. There was no furniture or bedding. The prisoners slept on the floor and were barely fed. Local residents helped the ghetto prisoners out with food. Some of the women fled to the Šiauliai Ghetto. The Jewish women were sent to villages to work on farms. By order of the Šiauliai Region Gebietskommissar, the Telšiai Ghetto had to be liquidated before the New Year. Approximately 400 Jewish women from the Telšiai Ghetto were shot in Rainiai on December 23–24, 1941. Some 30 Jewish women managed to escape death.<sup>27</sup>

Jews from the towns of Samogitia were almost completely annihilated in 1941. Only the approximately 4,000 Jews in the Šiauliai Ghetto were left – that is, until that, too, was liquidated in July 1944.

The persecution and killing of the Jews in Samogitia was much like that in other regions of Lithuania. The occupying and collaborating authorities initially issued orders and regulations that deprived Jews of their civil rights and restricted their freedom of movement and action. Later, Jews were put in internment camps and ghettos. In the first months of the occupation (summer 1941), it was mostly Jewish men who were killed. Later (from the autumn of 1941), the extermination of all Jews (including women and children) began. The massacres were directed by officers from the German Sicherheitspolizei (“Security Police”; SiPo) and Sicherheitsdienst (“Security Service”; SD). Lithuanian institutions were involved in the killings as well: members of the LAF (“partisans”), the public and security police, and Lithuanian self-defense unit soldiers. Some Jewish prison camps and ghettos (e.g. Telšiai) were liquidated a bit later than in the rest of Lithuania.

### The Žagarė Ghetto

During the German occupation, Žagarė was the center of the township. Žagarė Township was part of Šiauliai County. In the very first week of the German–Soviet war (by June 29, 1941), the Red Army and Soviet activists withdrew from Žagarė to Russia. Former officials, riflemen, and police officers of the Republic of Lithuania began to establish local government institutions. The old Žagarė City Council convened on June 30, 1941. Juozas Briedis was initially named mayor of the city, but was replaced by Silvestras Rakštys a few weeks later.<sup>28</sup> On June 28, 1941, Žagarė activists established a four-person committee, whose chairman was Stanislovas Kačkys, the former commander of the Žagarė Township unit of the Riflemen’s Union. The committee decided to organize an armed squad in Žagarė to maintain order in the city. Several dozen (30–50) men joined the squad voluntarily. Most of the activists

(LAF members) used to be riflemen and police officers. With Kačkys at its helm, the committee called itself the Žagarė Activist Headquarters, as per the instructions received from Šiauliai. The Žagarė activists were armed with rifles and pistols, and also had several light machine guns. Most of the weapons were collected after the front had passed through, in the places where Soviet and German battles had taken place.<sup>29</sup>

The Žagarė activists began to arrest supporters of the Soviet government who had stayed behind. Vladas Mačernis, the former director of the Žagarė pre-gymnasium who had contributed to the deportation of the families of Žagarė's teachers to Russia, was arrested on the order of Kačkys. Several dozen people were arrested in all and put in the Žagarė jail.<sup>30</sup> In accordance with a decision made by the Activist Headquarters in early July 1941, eight detainees were shot near a Latvian cemetery not far from the town of Žagarė. Among those shot were two Jews – Eizenstat and Lazerson. The shooting was directed by Samaitis, the Žagarė police chief.<sup>31</sup>

After the crackdown on Soviet activists, the persecution of Jews began. The Activist Headquarters imposed a 30,000 ruble “contribution” on the town's Jews.<sup>32</sup> On July 2, 1941, the mayor of Žagarė, Silvestras Rakštys, issued an order prohibiting Jews who had fled from Žagarė from returning home. Homeowners and property managers were threatened with penalties if they allowed Jews returning to Žagarė to move in. As of July 26, 1941, all Žagarė Jews were required to wear the yellow Star of David on the left side of their chest, and they were not allowed to walk on the street or be in public places at night unless they had special permits. All Žagarė Jews were instructed to move – at their own expense – to a specially selected area of the city (the ghetto) between the July 26 and August 2, 1941. It was forbidden for Jews to hire non-Jews, and Jews were only allowed to shop at the market after 12 noon.<sup>33</sup> At the end of July, activists registered the Jews in Žagarė. With this, the transfer of Jews to the ghetto began. Several blocks near the market place were selected for the ghetto (Daukanto, Vilniaus, Malūnos, Pakalnio and Gedimino Streets). Non-Jews were relocated from the ghetto territory to other areas. Jews from the surrounding villages were also transported to the ghetto.<sup>34</sup>

On August 22, 1941, Šiauliai County Governor Jonas Noreika informed the mayors of the townships and secondary towns in Šiauliai County that by order of Šiauliai Region Gebietskommissar Hans Gewecke, all of the county's Jews and half-Jews had to move to Žagarė by August 29.<sup>35</sup> Jews from Šiauliai, Joniškis, Kuršėnai, Žeimelis, and other areas began to be relocated to Žagarė. On August 25, 1941, the Žagarė city mayor informed Gewecke that the ghetto covered an area of 12,135 square meters, and that there were 715 Jews living there.<sup>36</sup> The registration of “Jewish and Bolshevik” property took place along with the transfer of the Jews.<sup>37</sup> Their property was valued at 5,794,600 rubles. By August 29, 1941, 949 Jews from other areas of Šiauliai County were brought to Žagarė.<sup>38</sup> On September 20, 1941, there were 5,566 people living in Žagarė: 2,402 Jews and 3,164 non-Jews. Lithuanians received 250 grams of butter for each family member per week, whereas Jews received 100 grams each.<sup>39</sup>

On September 11, 1941, the Šiauliai County governor informed the mayors of the county's townships by telephone that by order of the Gebietskommissar, the property that had been collected from the Jews had to be delivered to the Šiauliai Gebietskommissar by September 20 along with the inventory lists.<sup>40</sup>

The Žagarė Ghetto was surrounded by a barbed wire fence and guarded by local activists and police. The Jews were forced to do various jobs – mostly felling trees and chopping firewood. Unlike the larger ghettos, the Žagarė Ghetto had no internal administration (Jewish Council or Jewish Ghetto Police). The local rabbis acted as authorities for the ghetto residents. It is known that Žagarė Rabbi Yisrael Reif was shot together with other Žagarė Jews on October 2, 1941.<sup>41</sup>

In late August 1941, Žagarė activists and police officers (under the command of police chief J. Krutulis) drove several dozen Jewish men out of the synagogue and shot them in the Jewish cemetery. Before being shot, the Jews were told to undress and were then led to a pit in groups of four. The approximately 20 men who carried out the execution took the clothes and shoes of the murdered people home, and received several dozen rubles each for their “work.”<sup>42</sup> A special commission investigating Nazi crimes had the grave excavated in 1944 and uncovered the remains of 38 men.<sup>43</sup> Manteuffel, the German commandant in Žagarė, constantly urged the local activists and police officers to handle Soviet government activists and Jews much more aggressively.<sup>44</sup>

In the last days of September 1941, local Lithuanian residents were driven by the police to the Žagarė town park, where they then dug a large ditch (120 meters long, 2–3 meters wide, and 2 meters deep). On the morning of October 2, the Jews in the Žagarė Ghetto were summoned to the market square. Commandant Manteuffel addressed the crowd in German. He said that the Jews would be taken to work. The Jews were lined up in several columns (men separately from the women, children, and elderly). Then the German blew his whistle, and “partisans” and policemen from Žagarė and elsewhere began to surround the square. Panic broke out among the Jews. Some tried to escape from the square. Then the “partisans” started shooting and beating the Jews. Several dozen shot and wounded Jews were left lying in the square. The rest were told to lay down on the pavement. Some time later, trucks arrived to transport Jews to the execution site – Naryškinas Manor Park.<sup>45</sup> Money, jewelry, and other valuable items were confiscated from the Jews being taken away. The Jews who were taken to the ditch were stripped down to their underwear and then laid in the ditch, where they were shot. The soldiers of a self-defense unit that had come from Šiauliai (under the command of Lt. Romualdas Kolokša) and members of the Linkuva “partisan” squad participated in the shooting. “White armbands” from Žagarė guarded the territory of the ghetto and escorted the condemned to the massacre site. Several German SS officers supervised and participated in the massacre. The shooting continued until late in the evening. According to the infamous report written by German SiPo and SD commander for Lithuania, SS-Standartenführer Karl Jäger, 2,236 Jews were executed

in Žagarė on October 2, 1941: 633 men, 1,107 women, and 496 children. During the riots before the massacre (in the market square), 150 Jews were allegedly shot, and seven Lithuanian “partisans” who had been guarding them were injured. In 1944, a Soviet special commission investigated the mass grave and found 2,402 corpses (530 men, 1,223 women, 625 children, and 24 breastfed babies).<sup>46</sup> The day after the massacre, captured Jews were again brought to the park and shot in the same ditch. The valuables of the Jews who were shot were taken by the Germans to Šiauliai.<sup>47</sup> The Žagarė Ghetto was completely liquidated. On October 24, 1941, the Žagarė city mayor informed the Šiauliai County Board that there was no Jewish property left in the city:

- (1) All the synagogues, of which there are six, have been confiscated and sealed; all of them were looted during the massacres of the Jews, and what was valuable in them was stolen – all that is left are some torn prayer books and a dozen pews;
- (2) Žagarė does not have and never had any Jewish community shops, archives, or libraries, etc.;
- (3) The apartments of chief rabbis and rabbis, which also housed their offices, were within the ghetto during the massacres of Jews and were looted by unknown persons – nothing was found in them apart from the bare walls.<sup>48</sup>

The Žagarė Ghetto operated for two months (from August to October 2, 1941). Jews not only from Žagarė, but also from other towns in Šiauliai County were imprisoned there. As a result, the number of Jews imprisoned and killed in Žagarė was not much lower than the number of victims in the larger Lithuanian ghettos (in Vilnius, Kaunas, and Šiauliai). Lithuanian military and political forces actively participated in the annihilation of the Jews in Žagarė (the Šiauliai 14th Police Battalion, as well as “partisans” and policemen from Žagarė, Linkuva, and Užventis).

## Joniškis

Joniškis activists (LAF members) and “partisans” began their activities on June 28, 1941. They put together a committee to protect the city and maintain order. The city municipality and the police began to be put together, and several committees were established (including the Jewish Affairs Committee, chaired by Juozas Tininis). The activist squad consisted of 104 men (54 armed and 50 unarmed). The activist headquarters was initially run by Kazys Ralys.<sup>49</sup> In early July 1941, the Joniškis Order Maintenance Committee changed its name to the Joniškis Branch of the Lithuanian

Activist Front. Stasys Kakliauskas was named chairman of the board. One of the most important tasks of the Joniškis activists was the arrest of communists, Soviet activists, and Jews. Juozas Sutkus, who had been transferred from Pakruojis, was the chief of the Joniškis Township police station.<sup>50</sup> He worked closely with the Joniškis activist headquarters, drafting orders with them regarding the arrest of Soviet activists and Jews. As early as the beginning of July 1941, the Joniškis activist headquarters planned to move the town's Jews to a separate area – the ghetto – and use them for field and public work.<sup>51</sup>

On July 11, 1941, the Joniškis LAF Headquarters Commission for Jewish Affairs issued nine anti-Jewish orders, including orders regarding Jews returning to Joniškis from the villages, and on Jews wearing the Star of David and not using sidewalks or Aryan (non-Jewish) services. On July 18, 1941, the Commission for Jewish Affairs decided to assign a 20,000 ruble “contribution” to the Joniškis Jews for not following these orders, which was to be paid to the activist headquarters by 3 p.m. on July 19.<sup>52</sup> The Joniškis Jews complied with this order on July 24, 1941. In mid-July, the Joniškis LAF Headquarters Commission for Jewish Affairs re-examined the issues of Jewish relocation. It was noted that nearly 1,200 Jews resided in Joniškis. It was proposed to put some of them in the synagogues or in the S. Dariaus ir S. Girėno Street triangle, or to move them to Žagarė. In addition, the commission instructed the city municipalities to register Jewish property and confiscate Jewish-owned farms and give them to their former owners or “reliable” persons.<sup>53</sup> In the second half of July, the Joniškis Jews were either moved to the synagogue or were left to reside in the houses around market square. The ghetto territory was guarded by the city police. Juozas Sutkus, the chief of the Joniškis Township police station, was summoned to the Šiauliai branch of the German SiPo and SD several times in July-August 1941. The Gestapo officers urged him to shoot the Jews in Joniškis as soon as possible. However, Sutkus put off carrying out these orders until the Šiauliai Gestapo showed up in Joniškis. Several Germans (including two Gestapo officers) arrived in Joniškis from Šiauliai in late August 1941. They demanded the immediate execution of the Joniškis Jews. Sutkus called in all of his policemen and ordered them to arrest the Jews in the synagogue and take them to Vilkiaušis Forest (6 kilometers from Joniškis). A large pit had already been dug out there. The Jewish men were arrested and taken to Vilkiaušis Forest by truck. There, they were stripped, and their more valuable belongings and money were taken from them. Then they were herded to the pit in small groups and shot. Joniškis policemen and “partisans” were the ones who shot them. Germans were also present and directed the massacre. At least 148 Jewish men were shot that day. Only one managed to escape death – a Jew named Resnikowitsch.<sup>54</sup>

After the Jews were shot, their clothes were loaded into trucks and taken to Joniškis. That evening, the participants in the massacre were treated to drinks. During the bender, Sutkus said that the Jews were shot because they were supporters of the

Bolsheviks and traitors to the homeland. He thanked the police officers and activists for their “good work and sacrifice for the good of the homeland.”<sup>55</sup>

The remaining Joniškis Jews – men, women, and children – were shot in Vilksiaušis Forest in September 1941. This time, the shooting was done by a Lithuanian self-defense unit that had come in from an unknown location (the nearest Lithuanian police battalion was located in Šiauliai). At least 345 Jews were killed. So in total, at least 493 Jews from Joniškis were killed in Vilksiaušis Forest.<sup>56</sup> Another 150 Joniškis Jews were moved to the Žagarė Ghetto on August 24–29, 1941 and shot there during its liquidation.<sup>57</sup>

### **Skuodas and the Dimitravas Camp**

The German Army occupied Skuodas on June 22, 1941. In the first days of the war, a squad of several dozen Lithuanian “partisans” formed in Skuodas, led by Kostas Vasaris. The Skuodas “partisans” arrested communists, Soviet activists, and Red Army soldiers.<sup>58</sup> Later, an auxiliary police force was organized from former “partisans” and riflemen. The first executions of Jews in Skuodas began at the end of June 1941. The arrested Jewish men were driven out of the Riflemen’s Union Hall in groups and shot on the outskirts of the city together with Soviet activists and Russian prisoners of war. It was usually members of Vasaris’s squad who did the shooting.<sup>59</sup>

Once they were arrested in Skuodas, Jewish men were held in the Riflemen’s Union building, and the women and children were held at the synagogue on Kudirkos Street. The men were often forced to clean the streets of the city, as many of the buildings in Skuodas had been destroyed or burned down during the war. Somewhere around July 10, members of Vasaris’s squad brought about 20 Jewish men from the Riflemen’s Union Hall to the Jewish cemetery and shot them in pits that had been blasted out by aerial bombs. A few days after this massacre, the Skuodas auxiliary police unit, along with German soldiers, killed several dozen (30–35) Jewish men in the gravel pits near the village of Kulai (about 2 kilometers from Skuodas). A few more days later, about 30 Jewish men were brought to the same location (near Kulai Village) from Skuodas. They were executed by the same auxiliary police squad. Several Germans also took part in the shooting – they finished off the wounded with pistols.<sup>60</sup> After these shootings, only about 20 Jewish men were left in Skuodas, imprisoned in the Riflemen’s Union Hall, as well as approximately 500 Jewish women and children who were in the synagogue.<sup>61</sup>

At the end of July 1941, the Jewish women from Skuodas were sent with their children, on foot, to the Dimitravas camp (41 kilometers from Skuodas). Around 20 members of the Skuodas Auxiliary Police escorted the columns. The trek took two days. The



women and children spent the night outside without any shelter near the town of Darbėnai. Women who got tired and could not go on were shot by the guards. The guards ordered peasants from the surrounding villages to bury their bodies.<sup>62</sup> Once the column arrived in Dimitravas, some police officers returned to Skuodas by bicycle, while others stayed there to guard the women and children who had been brought in.<sup>63</sup> The Jewish women and children were housed in two empty barracks. About a week later (August 3, 1941), Edmundas Tyras arrived at the Dimitravas camp from Kaunas. By order of the Ministry of the Interior, he was appointed as the acting commander of the Dimitravas camp. Tyras was tasked with organizing the administration and security of the camp. On October 1, 1941, Maj. Julius Šurna was named the permanent commander of the Dimitravas camp.<sup>64</sup>

Several dozen auxiliary police officers arrived at the Dimitravas camp from Skuodas on August 15, 1941. In the evening, they went into the barracks and told the young women to stay there, and the older women and children to go out into the yard. Several large pits had already been dug at the foot of Alka Hill in Jazdai Forest (1.5 kilometers from the camp).<sup>65</sup> The women and children were driven in large groups into the forest near the pits, where they were stripped, pushed into the pits, and shot. The shooting was done by roughly 20 Skuodas squad members, along with four local volunteers from the surrounding villages. The shooting was directed by squad member Mykolas Vitkus. After the execution, the pits were filled by the murderers themselves along with peasants who had been rounded up from the surrounding villages. Many of the children were simply thrown into the pits and buried alive. After the massacre, the auxiliary policemen returned to Skuodas. The participants of the massacre split up the clothes of the victims.<sup>66</sup>

In December 1944, a commission that was investigating the Alka Hill massacre site excavated four graves. They found the bodies of 510 murdered persons (31 children, 94 teenagers, and 385 women). No gunshot wounds were found on the children's corpses – they had all been buried alive.<sup>67</sup>

The remaining 20 Jewish men in Skuodas were shot on the same night as the Dimitravas women and children.<sup>68</sup> The roughly 40 young Jewish women who had been left in Dimitravas were driven by camp guards to the town of Darbėnai in September 1941 and locked up in the synagogue. Soon thereafter, they were all shot as well.<sup>69</sup> Later, only political prisoners were held at the Dimitravas camp. The Kretinga County Jews were annihilated in autumn 1941.

## Raseiniai

Before the beginning of the Soviet-German war, there were about 2,000 Jews living in Raseiniai. The Germans occupied Raseiniai on June 23, 1941. Two ghettos were already established in the city by mid-July 1941. Able-bodied Jewish men and women were kept in the Catholic Church's auxiliary barracks outside the city (in the direction of Jurbarkas), while old men and women with small children were put up in a few houses on Nemakščiu Street. Some Jewish communists and Soviet activists were held in the Raseiniai prison. Police constable Aleksas Grigaravičius was appointed head of the Raseiniai Ghetto, and Kostas Narbutas was appointed as his deputy (steward). The ghetto grounds were guarded by local police officers and "white armbands."<sup>70</sup> During the day, the Jews were forced to do various jobs in the city and in the fields.

The first massacre of the Raseiniai Jews was on July 29, 1941. That day, Jewish men were taken from the Raseiniai prison and ghetto and marched to the village of Žieveliškė (5 kilometers outside of Raseiniai). Pits had already been dug out in the old gravel quarry near the village. The Jews were stripped, herded to the pits, and shot. A total of 254 Jews and three Lithuanian communists were killed that day. German Gestapo officers did the shooting.<sup>71</sup> They told the Lithuanian "partisans" who were on guard to watch and learn how to shoot Jews, because next time they would have to do it themselves. After the massacre, the German officers got into cars and drove towards Raseiniai. The pits were filled by residents of the surrounding villages.<sup>72</sup>

The second Jewish killing campaign was carried out on August 5, 1941. Then, 279 Jews (213 men and 66 women) were shot.<sup>73</sup> After the first two campaigns, the Jewish ghetto in the suburbs was liquidated, and the rest of its inhabitants were moved to the ghetto on Nemakščiu Street.<sup>74</sup>

The killing continued. Jewish women and children were killed on August 9–16, 1941. A total of 298 people were shot (294 women and 4 children).<sup>75</sup> On August 24, 1941, the Raseiniai Jews were ordered to prepare to move to Biliūnai Manor. A few days later, the surviving Raseiniai Jews were relocated to Biliūnai Manor, which belonged to Count Bilevičius, who had been deported to Siberia by the Soviets.<sup>76</sup> The last of the Raseiniai Jews were killed in the village of Kurpiškės on August 29–September 6, 1941. The Jews were driven from Biliūnai Manor by "white armbands" and then shot by the Germans. During that week, 843 people were killed (16 men, 412 women, and 415 children).<sup>77</sup> Raseiniai's Jewish community was completely annihilated.

## Jurbarkas

The distance from Jurbarkas to the then German-Soviet border was only about 10 kilometers. Jurbarkas was occupied by the German Army on the first day of the war – June 22, 1941. In 1940, the city had a population of roughly 5,400, of which about 42 percent (2,300 people) were Jews.<sup>78</sup> The Jurbarkas Jewish community was one of the first in Lithuania to experience the atrocities of the Nazi Holocaust policy. Jurbarkas fell within the 25-kilometer-wide border area, which was controlled by the Tilsit Gestapo. During the first days of the war, the Lithuanian administration and police were reinstated in Jurbarkas. Jurgis Gepneris became the mayor of the city, and Mykolas Levickas became the police chief. The Tilsit Gestapo and the SD were represented in Jurbarkas by Voldemaras Kriauza, Richardas Šperbergas, Oskaras Šefleris, and Karstenis-Žebrovskis.<sup>79</sup>

The first mass shooting of Jews took place on July 3, 1941. Together with local policemen, a group of 40 Tilsit Gestapo officers who had come to Jurbarkas rounded up about 300 Jewish men and several dozen Lithuanian Soviet activists. The column of detainees was taken to the Jewish cemetery on the outskirts of the city and shot there. The German Gestapo officers did the shooting. Some 20 Lithuanians were among those shot. After this incident, police chief Mykolas Levickas went to Raseiniai and asked to be relieved of his position. Povilas Mockevičius was appointed as the new Jurbarkas police chief on July 7, 1941.<sup>80</sup> According to the German security police, the Tilsit Einsatzkommando shot 322 people in Jurbarkas on July 3, 1941. By July 11, 1941, this squad had executed 1,542 people in various parts of Lithuania. The absolute majority of those murdered were Jews.<sup>81</sup>

On July 23, 1941, Jurbarkas Mayor Jurgis Gepneris informed the Raseiniai County Board that there were still 1,055 Jews living in Jurbarkas.<sup>82</sup>

In August 1941, the Šiauliai mayors and county governors convened for a meeting in Šiauliai. Speaking there, Šiauliai Region Gebietskommissar Hans Gewecke demanded that a ghetto be established in every city and that the Jews be held there until they were shot. However, the Jurbarkas Ghetto was already operational – it had been established in July on S. Darius ir S. Girėno Street. The ghetto was guarded by the public police and the auxiliary police. As P. Kairaitis testified in the post-war years:

The ghetto is a building fenced in with barbed wire, where Jews with children and the elderly were housed. ... The Jews who were there had the rights of detainees. Their diet was poor: cabbage soup and a little bread. They were escorted to work (to clean up trash at homes and on the streets, and to do the other most horrendous and difficult jobs), and food was hard to come by.<sup>83</sup>

Jews continued to be exterminated throughout the ghetto's existence. On August 1, 1941, elderly women, children, and newborns were gathered. They were then shot at night in the forest at the 7-kilometer mark on the Jurbarkas–Smalininkai road; 105 women were murdered that day.<sup>84</sup> Younger, able-bodied women were temporarily allowed to live. They were held in the Talmud-Torah, a Jewish elementary school building. On September 8, 1941, the building was surrounded by Lithuanian and German police officers. The women were driven “to work,” but were actually shot outside Jurbarkas, near the village of Kalnėnai. According to the German SiPo and SD, 412 Jews were killed in Jurbarkas on August 29–September 6, 1941. The roughly 50 remaining Jurbarkas Jews were killed in mid-September 1941.<sup>85</sup> Only a few Jurbarkas Jews who had been hidden by peasants from the surrounding villages survived to see the end of the war. Thus, Jurbarkas lost almost half of its population during the German occupation, since the local Jewish community was completely annihilated.

## Kėdainiai

In the first days of the Soviet-Nazi war, a squad of over 30 Lithuanian activists was organized in Kėdainiai. The squad was initially put under the command of Zigmantas Knystautas, a former Lithuanian Army captain. Juozas Kungys, a bank employee who was a reserve junior lieutenant, became his deputy. The activist headquarters were located in the premises of the Kėdainiai vocational school on Gedimino Street. Two weeks later, Knystautas resigned and Kungys became commander of the squad. Reserve Jr. Lt. Juozas Merkevičius (whose parents had been deported to Russia by the Soviets in June 1941) was named as Kungys's deputy.<sup>86</sup> In Kėdainiai, as in other Lithuanian cities and towns, the activists arrested communists, Komsomol members, and officials and supporters of the Soviet government. At the end of July 1941, some 600 political prisoners were being held at the Kėdainiai prison on Gedimino Street. On July 23, 1941, by order of the Germans, 125 Soviet activists were taken from the prison to the village of Babėnai II (5 kilometers from Kėdainiai) and shot at the edge of the forest. Germans and Lithuanian “partisans” did the shootings. Lithuanians, Jews, and Russians were among those shot. According to the Jäger Report, 83 Jewish men, 12 Jewish women, 14 Russian communists, 15 Lithuanian communists, and one Russian officer/“political instructor” were shot in Kėdainiai on July 23. The other Kėdainiai political prisoners were released.<sup>87</sup> Until August 15, 1941, the Jews in Kėdainiai lived in their own apartments and were able to move freely around the city. However, they did have to wear the six-pointed star. Then, by the order of Kėdainiai County Governor Petras Dočkus, all the Jews in the city had to move to a place specially designated for them – the ghetto. The ghetto was located in the area

of Smilgos, Vandens, Kranto and Pirties Streets. Jews from other areas of Kėdainiai County – Šėtai, Žeimiai, and so on – were also sent to the ghetto.<sup>88</sup> On August 17, 1941, Kėdainiai County Police Chief Antanas Kirkutis informed the director of the police department in Kaunas that “all Jewish citizens of Kėdainiai County are grouped into three districts: 913 people in the Kėdainiai district, including 183 women; 290 people in the Ariogalas district, including 80 women; and 452 people in the Krakiai district, including 115 women.”<sup>89</sup> That same day, the chief of the Kėdainiai city police station informed the Kėdainiai County police chief that 913 Jews from city and township of Kėdainiai were locked up in barns on the Kėdainiai stud farm (about 1.5 kilometers from the center of Kėdainiai). The men were separated from the women. They were kept under guard pending a separate “order” from the Kėdainiai County police chief.<sup>90</sup> Soon after, the “partisans” drove the Jews out of the ghetto to the Kėdainiai stud farm. The men were housed in a three-story barn, and the women were put in the granary. On August 26, the remaining women in the ghetto were transferred to the stables. The Jews were forced to do various jobs. The Jews who worked at the Kėdainiai airfield were constantly harassed by the German guards (they were forced to load manure with their hands, harnessed to carriages, etc.).<sup>91</sup>

On the eve of the massacre of the Kėdainiai Jews (August 27), Soviet prisoners of war dug a large ditch (100 meters long, 3 meters wide, and 2.5 meters deep) by the Smilga stream, near the Kėdainiai-Dotnuva road. On the same day, a meeting was held to discuss the organization and execution of the massacre. The meeting was attended by a representative of the German government in Kėdainiai (county agricultural director Kreislandwirtschaftsführer Bellmer), the county police chief, the security police chief, and the head of the local activists (Kungys).<sup>92</sup> On the same day, Bellmer went to the stables and forced the Jewish women to hand over their valuables (rings, etc.).<sup>93</sup>

On August 28, 1941, several dozen German soldiers and Lithuanian “partisans” arrived at the stables in trucks. Two tractors were parked by the granary. Their engines were meant to drown out the shooting. First the old, disabled, and sick Jews were taken to be shot. Then the remaining men, women, and finally – the children – were killed. Bellmer was particularly active in the massacre. He gave orders to the killers and personally finished off the victims lying in the ditch with a pistol. The chiefs of the Kėdainiai public and security police also participated in the massacre. The Jews were stripped and then shot in the ditch. After a large group of Jews was executed, Soviet prisoners of war would cover the corpses with calcium hypochlorite and dirt, and then bring another group of Jews over to be shot. The massacre lasted from noon to dusk.<sup>94</sup> During the shooting, a Jew named Shlapobersky pushed a “white armband” named Aleksas Čižas into the ditch and started strangling him. Bellmer came to Čižas’s rescue. Shlapobersky strangled Čižas, took away Bellmer’s gun, and shot at him, but missed. Shlapobersky was stabbed by another “white armband” named Jankūnas. Čižas died on the way to the hospital.<sup>95</sup>

According to the German SiPo and SD, 2,076 Jews (710 men, 767 women, and 599 children) were shot in Kėdainiai on August 28, 1941.<sup>96</sup> After the execution, the murderers went to the home of Aleksas Mekas, a resident of Kėdainiai, to celebrate their “victory” against the Jews.<sup>97</sup> Shortly after the Jewish massacre, the Kėdainiai activist squad was disbanded.

## Vilkaviškis

The German Army occupied Vilkaviškis on June 22, 1941. A few days later, local “partisans” began to arrest communists, Komsomol youth, and Jews. On June 30, the Jewish men who had been arrested were imprisoned in a three-story building of the former Vilkaviškis seminary, which was fenced off with barbed wire and guarded by local “white armbands” and policemen. The Jews held there were brutally beaten, searched, and robbed. On July 14, 1941, the detainees were transferred from the seminary to the military barracks. The guards continued to beat the Jews often and bullied them in every way. Able-bodied Jews were herded to the city every day to clean up the streets and the rubble.<sup>98</sup>

At the end of July, the arrested Jews were taken to a training area near the barracks, where they dug a ditch about 25 meters long and several meters deep over the course of three days. On July 28, the detainees were taken to the barracks yard and separated into several groups. One group of prisoners was sent to the barracks warehouse to clean weapons. Soon, two trucks with German Gestapo officers arrived in the barracks yard. A large group of Lithuanian communists and Komsomol youth were also brought in from the city prison to the barracks. Lithuanian policemen led the detainees in groups to the ditch in the training area, where they were shot by German soldiers. Lithuanian policemen guarded the barracks and the shooting site at the training area. The massacre lasted 3–5 hours. Some 500–600 Jews and 60–70 Lithuanian communists and Soviet activists were shot that day. Only seven Jewish men escaped death.<sup>99</sup>

A month or a month and a half after the first massacres, the police ordered the remaining families to move from their apartments to the barracks. They were only permitted to take their valuables with them. Soviet prisoners of war dug new ditches in early November 1941. The last of the Vilkaviškis Jews were shot on November 15. According to the Jäger Report, 115 Jews (36 men, 48 women, and 31 children) were killed in Vilkaviškis that day. This time, the Jews were shot by the Vilkaviškis policemen themselves. The victims’ property was later sold to local residents.<sup>100</sup>

## Lazdijai

Already on the second day of the war (June 23), representatives of Lazdijai County (then called Sejny County) society got together and established a provisional Sejny County Committee. Former official Antanas Aleliūnas was elected its chairman. The committee planned to restore local government and order in the city and decided to apply to the German military commander for the city of Lazdijai with a petition to grant the committee official powers.<sup>101</sup>

The Jewish question was among the matters considered at the June 25, 1941 meeting of the committee. In the minutes of the meeting, it was noted that, by order of the German military commander, “it was decided to house the Jews who were most dangerous to public order in the barracks located on Vytauto Street.”<sup>102</sup> Soon, the arrests and interrogations of Jews who stood out for their communist activities began.

In the first days of July 1941, part of the Jews of the city and township of Lazdijai were already moved to several barracks located near the church. The rest of the city’s Jews were temporarily left free. Some of the previously arrested Jewish communists and Komsomol youth were sent to Marijampolė and later shot there.<sup>103</sup> In August 1941, by order of the chief of the Lazdijai city police, the Jews who had been living in freedom were imprisoned in the aforementioned barracks in Lazdijai. The German commandant ordered all Jews to sew six-pointed stars on the front and back of their clothing. The Jews who had been brought to the barracks could move freely around the city during the day, but had to stay in the barracks at night. The barracks were guarded by the Lazdijai city police.<sup>104</sup>

In early September 1941, a ghetto was established in the village of Katkiškė (1.5 kilometers from Lazdijai) by order of the German commandant for Lazdijai County. Jews of the city of Lazdijai and Lazdijai County (the townships of Kapčiamiestis, Šventežeris, Veisiejai, Rudamina) were moved to six former Red Army barracks. In total, about 1,600 Jews were concentrated in the ghetto. Until the end of October, the residents of the ghetto were forced to do various jobs. The ghetto’s territory was surrounded by a 1.5-meter-high barbed wire fence, and was guarded around the clock by the Lazdijai city police. Bronius Kazlauskas, a policeman from the city of Lazdijai, was appointed as the head of the ghetto.<sup>105</sup>

The Jews in of the Lazdijai Ghetto were scheduled to be exterminated at the end of October 1941. On October 23, Lazdijai City Police Chief Povilas Braška informed the ghetto residents that they would be shot on October 26. However, Rollkommando Hamann, the mobile task force under the command of SS-Obersturmführer Joachim Hamann, never showed up that day, and the ghetto residents remained alive for another week.<sup>106</sup> Before the scheduled massacre of the Jews, the police rounded up several hundred residents from the surrounding villages and ordered them to dig two (69 and 65 meter-long) ditches.

The Lazdijai Ghetto was annihilated on November 3, 1941. That morning, Rollkommando Hamann (consisting of 20–30 men) arrived in Lazdijai by bus from Kaunas. Among them were three Germans and one Lithuanian officer. The massacre began at about 11 a.m. First, sick people brought from the Lazdijai hospital were shot. Then groups of several hundred people began to be herded from the barracks to the nearby ditches (about 500 meters away). Before being shot, the condemned were stripped down to their underwear, after which they were driven into the ditches and shot from above. Most of the shooting was done by Rollkommando Hamann soldiers wearing Lithuanian army uniforms. Some Lazdijai city police officers also participated in the massacre. Others herded the Jews out of the barracks or guarded the site of the massacre. A German officer photographed the executions. After one group was shot, the corpses were lightly covered with dirt and the next group was shot on top of them. The Jewish massacre lasted several hours. Once it was over, Rollkommando Hamann left for Kaunas. The bodies were buried by residents of the surrounding villages and Lazdijai, who did this under the watch of the police.<sup>107</sup> According to the Jäger Report, 1,535 Jews (485 men, 511 women, and 539 children) were shot in Lazdijai on November 3, 1941.<sup>108</sup>

In this way, the Jewish community of Lazdijai County was wiped out. Only a few Jews who had escaped from the ghetto in Katkiškė before November 3, 1941 survived.

## Butrimonys

In the first days of the German occupation, a squad of about 40 Lithuanian “partisans” (activists) was formed in the town of Butrimonys, in Alytus County. The “partisans” began arresting communists, Komsomol youth and Soviet government activists.<sup>109</sup> In his July 15, 1941 report, K. Pilonis, the chief of the Butrimonys police station, informed the chief of the Alytus County police that so far, one communist had been shot in the town, 10 communists had been turned over to the Germans, and another 17 were in the lock-up. Regarding the Jews, the report said that “this question is very relevant, because there are over 2,000 Jews living in the town, who should be taken care of in the near future.”<sup>110</sup>

The first mass arrests of the Butrimonys Jews were carried out on August 10–12, 1941, when Jewish men aged 18–40 were arrested. Leonardas Kaspariūnas-Kasperskis, who was the chief of the Butrimonys police at the time, gave an order to take gold and silver rings and watches as well as good clothes from the Jews who were arrested. Kaspariūnas-Kasperskis summoned the Jewish elder from Butrimonys and showed him a list of which young Jews should be selected for work and brought to the market



square. Once the selected Jews had gathered, the local policemen and “partisans” arrested them and herded them to the Butrimonys lock-up; from there, they were taken to Alytus. Before the Jews were taken to Alytus, they were stripped of their jewelry and valuables. Some 120–150 Jews were arrested in all.<sup>111</sup> Jews from Alytus and the surrounding towns in the county (including Butrimonys) began to be shot in Alytus as early as August 13, 1941.

The second wave of arrests of the Butrimonys Jews took place on August 15–17 (according to other data – August 22). Police chief Kaspariūnas-Kasperskis sent for the Jewish elder again and ordered Jews to be summoned to the market square. This time, the police selected about 400 people, including women, children, and the elderly. The detainees were first taken to the town lock-up, and then to Alytus that same day. There, they were put in prison and later shot.<sup>112</sup>

In late August, on the instructions of Kaspariūnas-Kasperskis, Butrimonys Township Mayor Pranas Proškus-Praškevičius began to oversee the establishment of a ghetto. A place was chosen for the ghetto on Totorių Street and the rest of the town’s Jews (600–1,000 people) were moved there. The Stakliškės and Punia Jews were also transferred to the Butrimonys Ghetto. The ghetto, which only operated for about two weeks, was guarded by the police.<sup>113</sup> On the night before the liquidation of the ghetto, all of the Jews in Butrimonys were driven to the town’s elementary school. The next day (September 9, 1941), a bus with 20 Rollkommando Hamann soldiers on it arrived from Alytus. In the afternoon, the local policemen and “white armbands” began to drive the Jews out of the school and line them up in columns. Jews who were wearing better clothes were ordered to strip down to their underwear. The columns of Jews were marched to the nearby village of Klidžionys (2 kilometers from Butrimonys). Pits were already dug out there. The Jews were placed in a meadow near the pit, and then led in groups to the pit and shot. The shooting was done by the Rollkommando soldiers, while local police and “partisans” guarded the Jews waiting to die. A German officer with a camera also watched the massacre. The shooting of the Jews ended in the evening. Afterwards, the killers went back to Butrimonys and celebrated the completion of their “work” at the town cafeteria with moonshine and beer.<sup>114</sup> According to the commander of the German SiPo and SD in Lithuania, 740 Jews (67 men, 370 women, and 303 children) were killed in Butrimonys on September 9, 1941.<sup>115</sup> This is how the last of the Jews of Butrimonys, Stakliškės, and Punia were annihilated.

### Švenčionys and Švenčionėliai

Before World War II, approximately 9,000 people lived in Švenčionys, of whom a third (about 3,000) were Jews. During the Polish era, the Švenčionys Jews had their

own cultural and political organizations, as well as a Yiddish-language school. A Jewish person was usually appointed as Švenčionys deputy mayor. Most of the city's Jews were engaged in trade and crafts.

After the Soviets occupied Lithuania, the leaders of the Jewish parties, rabbis, and yeshiva (religious school) students in Švenčionys were allowed to move to Palestine. After the Germans attacked the Soviet Union, some of the city's Jewish communists, Komsomol members, and Soviet activists left for Russia. However, most of the Švenčionys Jews stayed in their hometown.<sup>116</sup> The Germans occupied Švenčionys on June 29, 1941.

As in other counties of Lithuania, Lithuanian "partisan" squads formed in Švenčionys County. These squads shot at retreating Red Army soldiers and Soviet government officials. The squad under the command of Capt. Jonas Kurpis was particularly active in the county.<sup>117</sup> The local administration and police were restored.

On the instructions of the authorities, the police confiscated weapons, ammunition, radios, and bicycles from the residents. The German military commander ordered the Švenčionėliai Jews to be moved to a separate area of town as early as July 1941. The Švenčionys Ghetto was established at about the same time. In mid-August 1941, Švenčionys County Police Chief Maj. Petras Januškevičius sent a secret order to the township police chiefs to put all of the Jews in the county in the barracks of the former training area near Švenčionėliai (about 1.5 kilometers from the city) and to confiscate Jewish property. The Jews who were driven to the barracks were only allowed to take bedding, clothes, and food. The confiscated Jewish property was later sold to locals for pennies.<sup>118</sup> Another 2,000–3,000 Švenčionys Jews were driven to the training area near Švenčionėliai in late September 1941.<sup>119</sup> Several hundred Švenčionys Jews fled to Belarus. The barrack grounds were fenced in with barbed wire and guarded by the police.

At the beginning of October 1941, Police Chief Januškevičius and two German security officers turned up in Švenčionėliai. They informed B. Gruzdzis, the mayor of Švenčionėliai and the head of the township police, that all of the Jews in Švenčionys County were to be shot on the instruction of the German authorities. Gruzdzis was then ordered to mobilize locals within a day to dig a ditch in the training area. That same day, the police rounded up about 300 workers, who dug a ditch near the barracks that was roughly 200 meters long, 10 meters wide, and 3 meters deep.<sup>120</sup>

An SS-Sonderkommando consisting of about 30 men under the command of Lt. Juozas Šidlauskas came to Švenčionėliai from Vilnius a few days later. This unit had already carried out massacres in Paneriai and in other parts of the Vilnius district. About 80 Švenčionys County policemen were gathered to guard the massacre in the training area. The massacre began on October 8, 1941 and lasted for two days. The Jews were led in groups from the barracks to the ditch, where they were pushed in

and shot. Men were shot first, then women and children. After the massacre, residents of Švenčionėliai were brought in to fill the ditch. According to their testimony, many of the children had been buried alive.<sup>121</sup> After these massacres, a small ghetto continued to operate in Švenčionys in the autumn of 1941.

On December 17, 1941, the Švenčionys County governor informed the Vilnius Region Gebietskommissariat that the Švenčionys Ghetto was fenced in with barbed wire and protected by armed guards. The ghetto was divided into four quarters, and each was assigned a Jewish overseer. In addition, a Jewish committee consisting of five people was formed to handle the affairs of the ghetto. Antanas Markauskas, an officer from the Švenčionys city police station, was given the responsibility of maintaining order and cleanliness in the ghetto.<sup>123</sup>

Some of the surviving ghetto inhabitants began to prepare for an armed struggle against the Nazi occupiers and their collaborators. A small group of young people banded together in the ghetto and began to stockpile weapons. The underground forced the ghetto's Jewish Council to give them 300,000 rubles so they could buy several revolvers from the Lithuanian policemen; they managed to steal other weapons from the weapons warehouse. The ghetto fighters began to seek contact with Soviet partisans operating in Švenčionys County.<sup>124</sup>

As partisan operations were strengthening in Eastern Lithuania, General Commissioner of Generalbezirk Litauen Adrian von Renteln sent a letter to Vilnius Region Gebietskommissar Horst Wulff on August 28, 1942. Von Renteln ordered him to guard the Jews working in Vilnius Region more closely. In agreement with the SS and the police chief as well as the Lithuanian security commandant, it was decided to guard working Jews more closely, and not to give Jews to establishments where Jewish escapes had taken place. It was also decided to abolish the small town ghettos as soon as possible, and to relocate their inhabitants to the ghettos in the cities of Švenčionys, Ashmyany, and Vilnius. Exceptions were only made for Jews who worked for the Wehrmacht and the Todt organization, as well as at large craft workshops located in some county centers.<sup>125</sup> According to August 6, 1942 information, there were 566 Jews living in the Švenčionys Ghetto (including 353 working men and women).<sup>126</sup> The Germans liquidated the Vidžiai Ghetto in 1942, and moved its approximately 1,000 inhabitants to the Švenčionys Ghetto. The ghetto was overcrowded, dirty, and did not have enough water, and this led to a typhus outbreak. Jacob Gens, the chief of the Vilnius Ghetto, sent a commission of doctors to the Švenčionys Ghetto, which managed to stop the epidemic.<sup>127</sup> At the end of 1942, the ghettos in Švenčionys, Ashmyany, Salai, and Mykališkės (which all belonged to Generalbezirk Litauen at the time) were still in operation.<sup>128</sup>

In the spring of 1943, the German authorities decided to liquidate the small Jewish ghettos and labor camps that were still open in Eastern Lithuania. The expanding

Soviet partisan movement in this part of county and the increasing number of ghetto escapes very likely had a major impact on this decision.

First, the Nazis decided to exterminate the Jews who could not work – the sick, the elderly, and the children. The Vilnius Ghetto Jewish Police were also involved in the preparatory work for the liquidation of ghettos and camps – they selected the Jews who were to be sent to the ghettos in Vilnius and Kaunas. From March 26 to April 2, 1943, 1,250 people were sent to the Vilnius Ghetto from the ghettos in Švenčionys, Ashmyany, and Mykališkės. Another 1,459 people were taken to the Žasliai, Žiežmariai, and Kena labor camps.<sup>129</sup> The rest of the Jews in the Švenčionys Ghetto were taken to Švenčionėliai on April 4, 1943. They were told that they would be taken to Kaunas the next day. On April 5, the Ashmyany, Salai, and Švenčionys Jews who were in Vilnius were put on a train that was allegedly bound for Kaunas. However, the train stopped at the Paneriai station. Gestapo, Vilnius Special Squad, and Lithuanian police battalion soldiers were waiting for them; they opened the wagons and began to herd the Jews to be shot. There was a terrible panic. Some Jews tried to flee, while others attacked the murderers. However, most of the Jews were shot on the spot or in the surrounding fields. Jacob Gens, the chief of the Vilnius Ghetto Jewish Police, managed to unhook two wagons with members of the Švenčionys Ghetto Jewish Council families, thus saving their lives. According to the German SiPo and SD, 4,000 Ashmyany, Salai, Mykališkės, and Švenčionys Jews were killed in Paneriai on April 5, 1943. A group of Jews who resisted during the Paneriai massacre injured a Kaunas Gestapo officer named Wille and a Lithuanian policeman.<sup>130</sup> Some Lithuanian policemen refused to shoot the Jews and told them to run for their life. For this, the German Gestapo officers shot them together with the Jews.<sup>131</sup> After the elimination of the ghettos in the eastern part of the country, only three ghettos remained in Lithuania – in Vilnius, Kaunas, and Šiauliai.

## Utena

Prior to the Nazi-Soviet war, Utena was home to a large and prosperous Jewish community. Jews made up half of the city's population. Utena had a Hebrew (Ivrit)-language Tarbut pro-gymnasium, and a Yiddish-language elementary school and pro-gymnasium. Some 770 Jewish children attended these schools. Utena also had a public Jewish library and several synagogues and religious schools. The city's Jewish community lived an active cultural life.<sup>132</sup>

The German Army occupied Utena on June 26, 1941. The majority of the city's Jews stayed in Utena and did not even attempt to retreat to the depths of the Soviet Union.

The Jews already began to be persecuted during the first days of the occupation. At first, they were forced to do various jobs, their property was looted, and their homes were marked with special inscriptions. All three Utena synagogues were robbed of their religious books and other property, and the rabbis were ridiculed. Jews were ordered to wear yellow stars, forbidden to use sidewalks, and so on. The synagogues were converted into temporary detention facilities. Some Jews were arrested and put in the Utena city prison.<sup>133</sup>

On July 14, 1941, notices were posted all over the city that the Jews had to leave Utena within 12 hours. Those who did not leave would be executed. Utena's "partisans" began herding Jews from their homes to Šilinė Forest. About 2,000 Jews ended up in the camp that had been set up there. Groups of 35–40 young Jews were taken out of the camp and shot in Rašė Forest (about 2 kilometers outside of Utena) on an almost daily basis. Jewelry, money, and other valuable items were taken from the Jews in the camp.<sup>134</sup>

The first mass shooting of Jews in Utena took place on July 31, 1941, when Rollkommando Hamann, the mobile task force under the command of SS-Obersturmführer Joachim Hamann, was sent in from Kaunas and, together with local "white armbands," shot 235 Jewish men and 16 Jewish women in Rašė Forest.<sup>135</sup>

The Utena Ghetto was small. The majority of the city's Jews were held in a camp that had been established in Šilinė Forest, while others were put in the Utena prison. The Utena Ghetto was set up in the synagogue on Ežero Street. The ghetto was fenced with barbed wire and a gate was installed. The inhabitants of the ghetto lived in unsanitary conditions, there was a severe lack of food. This led to a typhus outbreak.

The second mass killing of Jews in Utena was carried out on August 7, 1941. This time, Rollkommando Hamann and local "white armbands" shot 483 Jewish men and 87 Jewish women in Rašė Forest.<sup>136</sup> Members of the "partisan" squad that had been formed in Utena during the first days of the occupation participated actively in the arrest and killing of Jews. This squad operated under the command of Jr. Lt. Alfonsas Patalauskas. Patalauskas was in contact with Capt. Guss, the German military commander for the city of Utena, and followed his instructions. Patalauskas's squad (76 people in total) arrested the Jews in Utena and took them to the camp in Šilinė Forest and the ghetto on Ežero Street; they also guarded these places as well as the killing sites when massacres were being carried out. This squad was disbanded in early September 1941. A. Jodėnas, who was a member of the squad, was appointed commandant of the Utena Ghetto.<sup>137</sup>

The Utena Ghetto was liquidated and the surviving Utena Jews were killed on August 29, 1941. This time, not only adult men and women were shot, but also children, babies, and the elderly. Rollkommando Hamann and the Utena "white armbands" murdered a total of 3,782 Jews from Utena and Molėtai.<sup>138</sup>

A Soviet commission investigating Nazi crimes in 1944 found three large pits and several ditches in Rašė Forest. The Commission estimated that about 9,000 people had been murdered there.<sup>139</sup> However, it is more likely that the Nazis and local collaborators killed about 4,000 Jews from Utena and the surrounding area. Only a few Jews from the city of Utena managed to escape.

## Biržai

When the Nazi-Soviet war began, there were an estimated 3,000 Jews living in the county center of Biržai. The German Army occupied Biržai on June 26, 1941.<sup>140</sup> As in other Lithuanian cities, Lithuanian “partisans” began to assemble in Biržai. The Biržai “partisan” squad had a few dozen members and was led by Capt. Ignas Povilavičius. The “partisans” shot at the retreating Red Army and organized security for the most important facilities in the city. Later, some of the “partisans” either joined the police or became auxiliary police officers.<sup>141</sup>

The persecution of Jews, communists, and Soviet activists began in the early days of the German occupation. The first victim of the Biržai Jewish community was Dr. Avraham Zalman Levin. Rabbi Yehuda Leib Bernshtein of Biržai was killed soon after for trying to protect the Jewish community from persecution.<sup>142</sup>

A decree was issued on July 26, 1941 for all the city’s Jews to move to the ghetto. Local “partisans” and police forcibly evicted Jews who did not comply with the order and drove them to the ghetto. The Biržai ghetto was established in the eastern part of the city, on Vilniaus and Karaimų Streets. The ghetto consisted of a dozen or so houses around the synagogue and the Jewish religious school.<sup>143</sup>

In July 1941, several dozen Jews were taken from police custody and shot in the Biržai Jewish cemetery. It was German soldiers who did the shooting.<sup>144</sup>

The Biržai Jews were shot en masse on August 8, 1941. On the eve of the massacre, prisoners and Jews from the Biržai prison dug two large ditches in Astravas Forest (3 kilometers north of Biržai). On the day of the massacre, Petras Požėla, a former Pasvalys lawyer who was a representative of the Šiauliai Gestapo, came to Biržai along with several German SiPo and SD officers. The Jews were told to gather in the synagogue. All precious jewelry was taken from them. Afterwards, the “partisans” drove the Jews in groups of 100-200 people to Astravas Forest, where they were then shot. The massacre went on from 11 a.m. until 7 p.m. All of the Biržai Jews (men, women, and children) were shot that day.

According to data provided by the special commission, approximately 2,400 Jews were murdered in all (900 children under the age of 14, 780 women, and 720 men).

Gestapo officers, the Linkuva “white armbands” (about 30 people), and the Biržai “partisans” and police (about 50 people) participated in the massacre.<sup>145</sup> The Biržai Jewish community was completely wiped out.

## Conclusions

The establishment of Jewish ghettos and internment (concentration) camps was an integral part of the Nazi policy of Jewish genocide. The German occupation authorities (the Nazi SiPo and SD, military commanders, Gebietskommissars) took the initiative to persecute the Jews. These institutions directed the persecution and killing of Jews.

The Lithuanian administration and police, which were subordinate to the Nazi authorities, were involved in carrying out the Holocaust. City mayors and county governors issued anti-Semitic ordinances (regarding mandatory identification badges, the establishment of ghettos, various bans), and local police bodies and the so-called “partisans” actively enforced them.

Pursuant to instructions and separate orders from the occupying authorities, the establishment of ghettos and camps began in July 1941 and took place almost simultaneously throughout Lithuania. Most of the small ghettos and camps only operated for a few weeks. The last to be liquidated were the ghettos in Lazdijai, Vilkaviškis (November 1941), and Telšiai (December 1941).

A major portion of the local Jews were executed prior to the final liquidation of the ghettos and internment camps. Jewish men were shot first, followed by women and children. The massacres were mainly carried out in forests or fields several kilometers outside the ghettos and camps. The mass shootings were usually directed by German Gestapo officers. The Jews were brought to the massacre site by Lithuanian police and “partisans,” who also guarded the massacre site and often did some of the shooting themselves. Cases of Jewish resistance were extremely rare. Unarmed, the victims only had one opportunity for resistance – to try to escape from the place of imprisonment or massacre.

The victims’ more valuable possessions (jewelry, furniture, money) were usually confiscated by the German authorities. Some items (clothing, footwear) was confiscated by the killers themselves or sold to local residents for a symbolic price.

The small ghettos and internment camps were liquidated in an extremely organized and smooth manner. Discussions took place between the German occupation authorities regarding the fate of the large ghettos (the Gestapo generally wanted to

exterminate all Jews, while civil authorities and Wehrmacht officials thought it better to leave able-bodied Jews alive), but the small ghettos and camps were liquidated without much discussion or internal opposition by the occupying authorities. Presumably, the Jews in the provinces were not considered a valuable workforce, and their extermination was not perceived as a great loss to the German war economy. Thus, the establishment of ghettos and internment camps in the provinces was merely a preparatory step in the extermination of the Jews. Jews were concentrated in one place so that they could be distinguished from non-Jews, guarded, and killed in an organized manner.

In the summer and autumn of 1941, Nazis and local collaborators killed almost all of the Jews in Lithuania's small cities and towns. Only a few Jews from the provinces managed to escape from the ghetto, internment camps, and massacre sites. Some of them were rescued by Lithuanian peasants.

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- <sup>39</sup> Žagarės miesto burmistro 1941 m. rugsėjo 20 d. raštas Žagarės pieno perdirbimo bendrovei [*Letter from the Žagarė City mayor to the Žagarė milk processing company, dated September 20th, 1941*], *ibid.*, l. 70.
- <sup>40</sup> Šiaulių apskrities viršininko 1941 m. rugsėjo 11 d. Telefonograma [*Telegram via*

telephone from the Šiauliai district head, dated September 11th, 1941], *ibid.*, l. 65.

<sup>41</sup> “Žagarė”, *Lithuania: Crime and Punishment*, p. 99.

<sup>42</sup> A. Plekavičiaus 1944 m. spalio 15 d. tardymo protokolo išrašas [Excerpt from A. Plekavičius’ interrogation protocol, dated October 15th, 1944], LYA, f. K-1, ap. 8, b. 128, l. 278, 279, 284.

<sup>43</sup> Ypatingosios komisijos, tyrusios nacių nusikaltimus Žagarėje, 1944 m. rugsėjo 24 d. Aktas [Decree by the Special Nazi Crimes Investigative Commission for Žagarė, dated August 24th, 1944], *ibid.*, ap. 46, b. 1135, l. 173.

<sup>44</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje* [Mass killings in Lithuania], d. 2, p. 265.

<sup>45</sup> J. Kukšo 1946 m. lapkričio 11 d. tardymo protokolas, LYA, baudžiamoji byla [J. Kukšas’ interrogation protocol dated November 11th, 1946, LYA, criminal case] No. 6458/3, l. 36–37; LSSR KGB 1973 m. balandžio 3 d. pažyma apie masines žudynes Žagarėje ir Radviliškyje [April 3rd, 1973 LSSR KGB Report regarding the Žagarė and Radviliškis massacres], LYA, f. K-1, ap. 46, b. 1282, l. 2.

<sup>46</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje* [Mass killings in Lithuania], d. 1, p. 135; Teismo medicinos komisijos ekspertų išvada [Findings of the judicial forensic medical commission experts], LYA, f. K-1, ap. 46, b. 1282, l. 36.

<sup>47</sup> LSSR KGB 1973 m. balandžio 3 d. pažyma apie masines žudynes Žagarėje ir Radviliškyje [April 3rd, 1973 LSSR KGB Report regarding the Žagarė and Radviliškis massacres], *ibid.*, l. 3, 4.

<sup>48</sup> Žagarės miesto burmistro 1941 m. spalio 24 d. telefonograma Šiaulių apskrities valdybai [Žagarė City mayor’s telegram via telephone to the Šiauliai district administration, dated October 24th, 1941], LYA, baudžiamoji byla No. 6458/3, l. 73.

<sup>49</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje* [Mass killings in Lithuania], d. 2, pp. 227, 228.

<sup>50</sup> Kaltinamoji išvada, LYA, S. Kakliausko baudžiamoji byla [Indictment, LYA, S. Kakliauskas criminal case] No. 46599/3, t. 5, l. 342–344.

<sup>51</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje* [Mass killings in Lithuania], d. 2, p. 228.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

<sup>53</sup> Joniškių aktyvistų štabo susirinkimo žydų

tvarkymo klausimu protokolas (ne vėliau kaip 1941 m. liepos 18 d.), LYA, baudžiamoji byla [protocol from the Joniškių Activists’ Staff Meeting regarding the handling of the Jewish question ([dated-ed.] no later than July 18th, 1941), LYA, criminal case] No. 46599/3, t. 5, l. 18.

<sup>54</sup> J. Sutkaus 1961 m. sausio 7 d. tardymo protokolas, *ibid.*, baudžiamoji byla [J. Sutkus’ interrogation protocol, dated January 7th, 1961, LYA, criminal case] No. 46599/3, t. 1, l. 307–313; Pažyma apie Joniškių žydų žudynes 1941 m. [Report regarding the Joniškių massacres in 1941], LYA, f. K-1, ap. 46, b. 1257, l. 2–3.

<sup>55</sup> J. Diržinsko 1960 m. spalio 20 d. tardymo protokolas, LYA, baudžiamoji byla [J. Diržinskas’ interrogation protocol dated October 20th, 1960, LYA, criminal case] No. 46599/3, t. 3, l. 63–64.

<sup>56</sup> Joniškių rajono Vilksiaus miške rastų lavonų 1960 m. spalio 15–22 d. ekshumacijos protokolas [exhumation protocol dated October 15–22, 1960 for corpses found in the Vilksiaus forest, located in the Joniškių district], *ibid.*, t. 4, l. 231–233.

<sup>57</sup> Joniškių savivaldybės 1941 m. rugsėjo 1 d. raštas Nr. 493 Žagarės miesto burmistrui [letter No. 493 from the Joniškių municipality to the Žagarė city mayor dated August 1st, 1941], LYA, f. K-1, ap. 8, b. 194, l. 59.

<sup>58</sup> LSSR Aukščiausiojo teismo baudžiamųjų bylų kolegijos 1964 m. kovo 14 d. nuosprendis, LYA, baudžiamoji byla [LSSR Supreme Court Criminal Case Chamber verdict dated March 14th, 1964, LYA, criminal case] Nr. 47423/3, t. 11, l. 278.

<sup>59</sup> A. Arbačiauskienės 1963 m. sausio 10 d. apklausos protokolo ištrauka [Excerpt from A. Arbačiauskienės’ interview protocol, dated March 29th, 1963], LYA, f. K-1, ap. 8, b. 194, l. 106; K. Kuprio 1963 m. kovo 29 d. apklausos protokolo ištrauka [Excerpt from A. K. Kuprys’ interview protocol, dated March 29th, 1963], *ibid.*, l. 136–137.

<sup>60</sup> A. Baužio 1945 m. gegužės 27 d. tardymo protokolo ištrauka [Excerpt from A. Baužys’ interrogation protocol, dated May 27th, 1945], *ibid.*, b. 197, l. 3–6.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 6.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 7; J. Embrasas 1963 m. balandžio 29 d. tardymo protokolas, LYA, baudžiamoji byla [J. Embrasas’ interrogation protocol,

dated April 29th, 1963, LYA, criminal case] Nr. 47423/3, t. 2, l. 98.

<sup>63</sup> A. Baužio 1945 m. gegužės 27 d. tardymo protokolo ištrauka [*Excerpt from A. Baužas's interrogation protocol, dated May 27th, 1945*], LYA, f. K-1, ap. 8, b. 197, l. 8.

<sup>64</sup> E. Tyro 1945 m. vasario 15 d. tardymo protokolas, LYA, baudžiamoji byla [A. Tyras's interrogation protocol, dated February 15th, 1945, LYA, criminal case] Nr. 47423/3, t. 9, l. 149–150.

<sup>65</sup> J. Soloveičikienės-Šarnickienės 1963 m. sausio 8 d. apklausos protokolo ištrauka [*Excerpt from J. Soloveičikienė-Šarnickienė's interview protocol, dated January 8th, 1963*], LYA, f. K-1, ap. 8, b. 194, l. 78.

<sup>66</sup> J. Embrasaus 1963 m. gegužės 4 d. tardymo protokolas, LYA, baudžiamoji byla [J. Embrasas's interrogation protocol, dated May 4th, 1963, LYA, criminal case] Nr. 47423/3, t. 2, l. 106–119.

<sup>67</sup> 1944 m. gruodžio 17 d. lavonų ekshumacijos ir apžiūrėjimo aktas [*Body exhumation and examination protocol dated December 17th, 1944*], *ibid.*, t. 9, l. 127–130.

<sup>68</sup> A. Baužio 1945 m. gegužės 27 d. tardymo protokolas [A. Baužas's interrogation protocol, dated May 27th, 1945], *ibid.*, t. 8, l. 193.

<sup>69</sup> J. Soloveičikienės-Šarnickienės 1963 m. sausio 8 d. apklausos protokolo ištrauka [*Excerpt from J. Soloveičikienė-Šarnickienė's interview protocol, dated January 8th, 1963*], LYA, f. K-1, ap. 8, b. 194, l. 79–80.

<sup>70</sup> *Lithuania: Crime and Punishment*, p. 87; A. Lazarskio 1968 m. spalio 28 d. apklausos protokolas [A. Lazarskis's interview protocol, dated October 28th, 1968], LYA, f. K-1, ap. 46, b. 1269, l. 46; A. Grigaravičiaus 1947 m. lapkričio 18 d. tardymo protokolas [A. Grigaravičius's interrogation protocol, dated November 18th, 1947], *ibid.*, ap. 8, b. 144, l. 144; K. Narbuto 1944 m. lapkričio 3 d. tardymo protokolas, LYA, baudžiamoji byla [K. Narbutis's interrogation protocol, dated November 3rd, 1944, LYA, criminal case] Nr. 10830/3, l. 10–10 a. p.

<sup>71</sup> A. Kmito 1968 m. spalio 22 d. apklausos protokolas [A. Kmitas's interview protocol, dated October 22nd, 1968], LYA, f. K-1, ap. 46, b. 1269, l. 37–39; *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje* [Mass killings in Lithuania], d. 1, p. 132.

<sup>72</sup> J. Mockaus 1968 m. spalio 3 d. apklausos protokolas [J. Mockus's interview protocol, dated October 3rd, 1968], LYA, f. K-1, ap. 46, b. 1269, l. 22–23; A. Mikolaičio 1968 m. spalio 22 d. apklausos protokolas [A. Mikolaitis's

interview protocol, dated October 22nd, 1968], *ibid.*, l. 34–36.

<sup>73</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje* [Mass killings in Lithuania], d. 1, p. 132.

<sup>74</sup> *Lithuania: Crime and Punishment*, p. 87.

<sup>75</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje* [Mass killings in Lithuania], d. 1, p. 133.

<sup>76</sup> *Lithuania: Crime and Punishment*, pp. 87, 88.

<sup>77</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje* [Mass killings in Lithuania], d. 1, p. 135; S. Dulinsko 1968 m. spalio 24 d. apklausos protokolas [S. Dulinskis's interview protocol, dated October 24th, 1968], LYA, f. K-1, ap. 46, b. 1269, l. 53–55.

<sup>78</sup> *Lietuvių enciklopedija*, Bostonas, 1957, t. 10, p. 117.

<sup>79</sup> R. Puišytė, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

<sup>80</sup> M. Levicko 1948 m. lapkričio 10 d. tardymo protokolas [M. Levickis's interrogation protocol, dated November 10th, 1948], LYA, f. K-1, ap. 46, b. 1188, l. 44–45; R. Puišytė, *op. cit.*, p. 78–79.

<sup>81</sup> H. Krausnick, *op. cit.*, S. 142.

<sup>82</sup> J. Gepnerio 1941 m. liepos 23 d. raštas Raseinių apskrities valdybai [Letter from J. Gepneris dated July 3rd, 1941 to the Raseiniai district administration], LCVA, f. 1753, ap. 3, b. 13, l. 4.

<sup>83</sup> P. Kairaičio akistatos su liudytoju J. Keturausku 1948 m. birželio 21 d. protokolas, LYA, baudžiamoji byla [Protocol from the confrontation between P. Kairaitis and the witness, J. Keturauskas, dated June 21st, 1948, LYA, criminal case] Nr. P-16816-LI, l. 69–70.

<sup>84</sup> R. Puišytė, *op. cit.*, pp. 80, 81.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81; *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje* [Mass killings in Lithuania], d. 1, p. 134.

<sup>86</sup> A. Švėgždos 1976 m. gruodžio 21 d. apklausos protokolas [A. Švėgžda's interview protocol, dated December 21st, 1976], LYA, f. K-1, ap. 46, b. 1180, l. 4; LSSR KGB 1984 m. spalio 8 d. pažyma apie J. Merkevičių [October 8th, 1984 LSSR KGB Report regarding J. Merkevičius], *ibid.*, b. 1193, l. 1.

<sup>87</sup> LSSR KGB pažyma apie nacistų nusikaltimus Kėdainių apskrityje [LSSR KGB Report regarding Nazi war crimes in the Kėdainiai district], *ibid.*, b. 1279, l. 1; *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje* [Mass killings in Lithuania], d. 1, p. 132.

<sup>88</sup> Ch. Ronderio 1963 m. rugsėjo 21 d. apklaus-

sos protokolas [*Ch. Ronderis' interview protocol, dated September 21st, 1963*], LYA, f. K-1, ap. 46, b. 1181, l. 84.

<sup>89</sup> Cit. iš *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje [Mass killings in Lithuania]*, d. 2, Vilnius, 1973, p. 138.

<sup>90</sup> Kėdainių policijos nuovados viršininko 1941 m. rugpjūčio 17 d. raportas Kėdainių apskrities policijos vadui [*August 17th, 1941 Report from the Kėdainiai police station director to the Kėdainiai district police chief*], LCVA, f. R-683, ap. 2, b. 2, l. 39.

<sup>91</sup> Ch. Ronderio 1963 m. rugsėjo 21 d. apklausos protokolas [*Ch. Ronderis' interview protocol, dated September 21st, 1963*], LYA, f. K-1, ap. 46, b. 1181, l. 84.

<sup>92</sup> J. Kriūno 1963 m. rugsėjo 13 d. tardymo protokolas [*J. Kriūnas' interrogation protocol, dated September 13th, 1963*], *ibid.*, l. 68.

<sup>93</sup> A. Kubiliaus 1969 m. rugpjūčio 21 d. apklausos protokolas [*A. Kubilius' interview protocol, dated August 21st, 1969*], *ibid.*, b. 1279, l. 59, 60.

<sup>94</sup> J. Kriūno 1963 m. rugsėjo 13 d. apklausos protokolas [*J. Kriūnas' interrogation protocol, dated September 13th, 1963*], *ibid.*, l. 68–70.

<sup>95</sup> V. Silvestravičiaus 1982 m. balandžio 21 d. apklausos protokolas [*V. Silvestravičius' interrogation protocol, dated April 21st, 1982*], *ibid.*, b. 1182, l. 230.

<sup>96</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje [Mass killings in Lithuania]*, d. 1, p. 134.

<sup>97</sup> A. Vitkausko 1977 m. vasario 3 d. apklausos protokolas [*A. Vitkauskas' interrogation protocol, dated February 3rd, 1977*], LYA, f. K-1, ap. 46, b. 1180, l. 21.

<sup>98</sup> S. Belkino 1944 m. lapkričio 16 d. tardymo protokolas, LYA, baudžiamoji byla [*S. Belkinas' interrogation protocol, dated November 16th, 1944, LYA, criminal case*] Nr. 8929/3, l. 211, 212; J. Valaičio 1944 m. lapkričio 14 d. tardymo protokolo ištrauka [*Excerpt from J. Valaitis' interrogation protocol, dated November 14th, 1944*], LYA, f. K-1, ap. 8, b. 194, l. 249.

<sup>99</sup> S. Belkino 1944 m. lapkričio 16 d. tardymo protokolas [*S. Belkinas' interrogation protocol dated November 16th, 1944*], *ibid.*, l. 213; J. Valaičio 1944 m. lapkričio 14 d. tardymo protokolas [*J. Valaitis' interrogation protocol dated November 14th, 1944*], *ibid.*, l. 249.

<sup>100</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje [Mass killings in Lithuania]*, d. 1, p. 135; J. Valaičio 1944 m.

lapkričio 14 d. tardymo protokolo ištrauka [*Excerpt from J. Valaitis' interrogation protocol, dated November 14th, 1944*], LYA, f. K-1, ap. 8, b. 194, l. 149–250.

<sup>101</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje [Mass killings in Lithuania]*, d. 2, p. 152.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *Lithuania: Crime and Punishment*, p. 78; *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje [Mass killings in Lithuania]*, d. 2, pp. 153, 154.

<sup>104</sup> B. Paciukonio 1963 m. sausio 5 d. apklausos protokolas, LYA, baudžiamoji byla [*B. Paciukonis' interrogation protocol, dated January 5th, 1963, LYA, criminal case*] No 47281/3, t. 2, l. 210–212.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 213–214.

<sup>106</sup> Lazdijų apskrities komisijos vokiečių nusi-kaltimams tirti 1945 m. birželio 3 d. Aktas [*Lazdijai District Commission for the Investigation of German War Crimes Act dated in June 3rd, 1945*], *ibid.*, t. 1, l. 499.

<sup>107</sup> V. Busilo 1961 m. birželio 23 d. apklausos protokolas [*V. Busilas' interview protocol, dated June 23rd, 1961*], *ibid.*, t. 3, l. 51–72.

<sup>108</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje [Mass killings in Lithuania]*, d. 1, p. 135.

<sup>109</sup> LSSR KGB Alytaus miesto skyriaus 1972 m. vasario 23 d. Pažyma [*LSSR KGB Alytus city branch record dated February 23rd, 1972*], LYA, f. K-1, ap. 46, b. 1167, l. 46.

<sup>110</sup> Cit. iš *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje [Mass killings in Lithuania]*, d. 2, p. 78.

<sup>111</sup> A. Jauneikos 1960 m. gruodžio 9 d. tardymo protokolas, LYA, baudžiamoji byla [*A. Jauneikis' interrogation protocol, dated December 9th, 1960, LYA, criminal case*] Nr. 46392/3, t. 2, l. 101; P. Senovaičio 1944 m. rugpjūčio 31 d. tardymo protokolas [*P. Senovaitis' interrogation protocol, dated August 31st, 1944*], *ibid.*, t. 3, l. 131.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 132; LYA, f. K-1, ap. 46, b. 1167, l. 46.

<sup>113</sup> Išrašas iš P. Proškaus-Praškevičiaus 1945 m. rugsėjo 19 d. tardymo protokolo [*Extract from P. Proškaus-Praškevičius' interrogation protocol, dated September 19th, 1945*], *ibid.*, l. 176; J. Jaseliūno 1960 m. lapkričio 9 d. tardymo protokolas [*J. Jaseliūnas' interrogation protocol, dated November 9th, 1960*], *ibid.*, t. 2, l. 252.

<sup>114</sup> A. Jauneikos 1960 m. gruodžio 9 d. tardymo protokolas [A. Jauneikis' interrogation protocol, dated December 9th, 1960], *ibid.*, l. 102, 103; J. Jaseliūno 1960 m. lapkričio 9 d. tardymo protokolas [J. Jaseliūnas' interrogation protocol, dated November 9th, 1960], *ibid.*, l. 252, 253.

<sup>115</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje [Mass killings in Lithuania]*, d. 1, p. 134.

<sup>116</sup> „Neapykantos ir keršto knyga“ (Y. Arado atsiminimų knygos rec.) [“The Book of Hate and Revenge” (review of Y. Arad's memoirs)] *Karys*, 1980, Nr. 8(1565), pp. 354, 355.

<sup>117</sup> B. Gruzdzio 1944 m. gruodžio 3 d. tardymo protokolas, LYA, baudžiamoji byla [B. Gruzdis' interrogation protocol, dated December 3rd, 1944, LYA, criminal case] No. 45561/3, l. 56–57.

<sup>118</sup> Išrašas iš B. Gruzdzio 1944 m. gruodžio 23 d. tardymo protokolo [Extract from B. Gruzdis' interrogation protocol, dated December 23rd, 1944], LYA, f. K-1, ap. 8, b. 194, l. 280; Ch. Koltuno 1951 m. balandžio 13 d. tardymo protokolas, LYA, baudžiamoji byla [Ch. Koltunas' interrogation protocol, dated April 13th, 1951, LYA, criminal case] No. 24329/3, l. 64.

<sup>119</sup> P. Skrabutėno baudžiamoji byla [P. Skrabutėnis' criminal case], LYA, No. P-19287-LI, l. 81; „Neapykantos ir keršto knyga“, p. 356.

<sup>120</sup> B. Gruzdzio 1944 m. gruodžio 23 d. tardymo protokolo išrašas protokolo [Extract from B. Gruzdis' interrogation protocol, dated December 23rd, 1944], LYA, f. K-1, ap. 8, b. 194, l. 280, 281.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 281; K. Frolovo 1944 m. lapkričio 16 d. tardymo protokolo išrašas protokolo [Extract from K. Frolovas' interrogation protocol, dated November 16th, 1944], *ibid.*, l. 282, 283.

<sup>122</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje [Mass killings in Lithuania]*, d. 2, p. 136; Y. Arad, op. cit., p. 164.

<sup>123</sup> Švenčionių apskrities viršininko 1941 m. gruodžio 17 d. raštas Vilniaus apygardos komisariniam tarėjui [Letter from the Švenčionys district head to the Vilnius Regional Commissioner dated December 17th, 1941], LCVA, f. R-1548, ap. 1, b. 1, l. 132.

<sup>124</sup> „Neapykantos ir keršto knyga“, p. 357.

<sup>125</sup> Generalinio komisaro Kaune 1942 m. rugpjūčio 28 d. raštas Vilniaus apygardos komisariui [Letter from the Kaunas Commissioner

General to the Vilnius Regional Commissioner dated August 28th, 1942], LCVA, f. R-659, ap. 1, b. 3, l. 102.

<sup>126</sup> Švenčionių darbo įstaigos (socialamto) 1942 m. rugpjūčio 6 d. raštas Vilniaus socialamto viršininkui [Letter from the Švenčionys employment office (social welfare dept.) to the Vilnius social welfare department director, dated August 6th, 1942], *ibid.*, f. R-626, ap. 1, b. 211, l. 33.

<sup>127</sup> „Neapykantos ir keršto knyga“, p. 405.

<sup>128</sup> Vilniaus apygardos komisariato 1942 m. lapkričio 6 d. raštas Vilniaus miesto komisariatui [Letter from the Vilnius Regional Commissariat to the Vilnius City Commissariat, dated November 6th, 1942], LCVA, f. R-614, ap. 1, b. 336, l. 299.

<sup>129</sup> Y. Arad, op. cit., p. 359.

<sup>130</sup> Vokiečių saugumo policijos ir SD vado Lietuvoje 1943 m. balandžio mėn. pranešimas Vyriausiajai reicho saugumo valdybai Berlyne [Report from the German Security Police and SD Commander in Lithuania to the Reich's Supreme Security Administration in Berlin from April of 1943], LCVA, f. R-1399, ap. 1, b. 26, l. 55; Y. Arad, op. cit., pp. 361, 362.

<sup>131</sup> A. Torry, *Surviving the Holocaust: The Kaunas Ghetto Diary*, London, 1990, pp. 289, 290.

<sup>132</sup> L. Bekeris, *Utenos ir apylinkių žydų žūtis 1941 m.* (rankraštis rusų kalba), straipsnio autoriaus asmeninis archyvas [The death of the Jews of Utena and its surroundings: 1941. (manuscript written in the Russian language), from the article author's personal archive], pp. 3, 4.

<sup>133</sup> „Резня в местечке Утян. Воспоминания Цодика Блеймана“, *Неизвестная черная книга [The Unknown Black Book]*, c. 312.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 313, 314; L. Bekerio rankraštis [L. Bekeris' manuscript], p. 7.

<sup>135</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje [Mass killings in Lithuania]*, d. 1, p. 132.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> J. Šyvio 1985 m. gruodžio 16 d. apklausos protokolas [J. Šyvas' interview protocol, dated December 16th, 1985], LYA, f. K-1, ap. 46, b. 1212, l. 5–7; F. Kazlauskas 1951 m. gegužės 10 d. tardymo protokolo išrašas [Extract from F. Kazlauskas' interrogation protocol, dated May 10th, 1951], *ibid.*, l. 22, 23, 41.

<sup>138</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje [Mass killings in Lithuania]*, d. 1, p. 134.

<sup>139</sup> Ypatingosios valstybinės komisijos 1941 m. lapkričio 15 d. aktas, LYA, baudžiamoji byla [*Special State Commission decree dated November 15th, 1941, LYA, criminal case*] No. 41468/3, l. 319.

<sup>140</sup> “Biržai”, *Lithuania: Crime and Punishment*, p. 75.

<sup>141</sup> LSSR KGB pažyma apie Biržų partizanų būrio veiklą 1941 m. [*LSSR KGB report regarding the Biržai partisan squad's actions in 1941*], LYA, f. K-1, ap. 46, b. 1294, l. 38.

<sup>142</sup> “Biržai”, *Lithuania: Crime and Punishment*, p. 75.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.; V. Jurkšto baudžiamoji byla [*V. Jurkštas criminal case*], LYA, No. 23388/3, l. 253; A. Antanaičio 1947 m. sausio 10 d. tardymo protokolas, *ibid.*, baudžiamoji byla [*A. Antanaitis' interrogation protocol, dated*

*January 10th, 1947, ibid., criminal case*] No. 8080/3, t. 2, l. 59.

<sup>144</sup> J. Bariso 1968 m. liepos 31 d. apklausos protokolas [*J. Barisas' interview protocol dated July 31st, 1968*], LYA, f. K-1, ap. 46, b. 1268, l. 16.

<sup>145</sup> L. Kateivos 1944 m. spalio 5 d. tardymo protokolas, LYA, baudžiamoji byla [*L. Kateivas' interrogation protocol, dated October 5th, 1944, LYA, criminal case*] Nr. 1570/3, l. 19 a. p.; *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje* [*Mass killings in Lithuania*], d. 2, p. 115; A. Antanaičio 1947 m. sausio 10 d. tardymo protokolas, LYA, baudžiamoji byla [*A. Antanaitis' interrogation protocol, dated January 10th, 1947, LYA, criminal case*] No. 8080/3, t. 2, l. 58.

Arūnas Bubnys

## The Holocaust in the Lithuanian Provinces in 1941: Jewish Massacres of Kaunas District

The author tried to use all available archival sources and literature for this paper. The fonds of the Lithuanian Central State Archives (LCSA) and the Lithuanian Special Archives (LSA) form the basis for the study. For the topic under consideration, certain county governor funds are of particular importance – for example, R-1534: Der Kreischef in Kauen (“Chief of the District of the City of Kaunas”), which contains surviving documents from the Nazi occupation about legal discrimination against Jews and the confiscation and use of their property, statistics on the Jews who lived in the county and the townships, and so on. There are few surviving documents about the physical destruction of Jews. The funds of German and Lithuanian police bodies in the LCSA are also very important for the topic under consideration. Of these, the Litauische Kommandantur in Kaunas (“Military Commandant in Kaunas”) fonds (f. R-1444) and the Der lit. Verbindungs-Offizier für die Schutzmannschaft des Einzeldienstes im Stabe des Kommandeurs der Ordnungspolizei Litauen (“Liaison Officer of the Stationary Regular Police of the Lithuanian General Region under the Chief of the Ordnungspolizei in Lithuania (Kaunas)”) fonds (f. R-683) are of note. These contain orders to the Lithuanian police battalions (including the Kaunas Tautos darbo apsauga (“National Labor Protection”; hereinafter – TDA) Battalion, which “distinguished” itself in the massacre of Jews) and correspondence between Police Department Director Vytautas Reivytis and the county police chiefs regarding the August 1941 campaign for arresting Jews and concentrating them in select locations.

The LSA’s 58th archival inventory is extremely important, as it contains records of hundreds of criminal cases against individuals convicted by the Soviet government after the war for collaborating with the Nazis and participating in the massacre of Jews. Although there are inaccuracies, omissions, and forced confessions in these cases, the testimonies of several or sometimes even dozens of people about the same event can be compared to recreate a more or less realistic picture of the events. The aforementioned cases also contain testimonies of Jews who survived the Nazi occupation and of “observers” who did not participate in the Holocaust. Other LSA funds and archival holdings are also important to Holocaust research (for example,

f. K-1, ap. 15, the KGB district department files; f. 3377, ap. 55, the collection of interrogation protocols of persons convicted of collaborating with the Nazis and shooting Jews). The LSA files reveal the process of Jewish genocide in various areas of Lithuania. The abundance of archival materials provides an opportunity to reconstruct, in essence, the course of the Holocaust in all of the counties of Lithuania. Until recently, this material has been used relatively infrequently by historians researching the Holocaust in Lithuania.

We currently have very little historical literature about the Holocaust in the Lithuanian provinces. One might say that research in this direction is just beginning. Among the works that have already been published, *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje 1941–1944: Dokumentų rinkinys. 2-a dalis* (“Mass Killings in Lithuania 1941–1944: Document Collection. Vol. 2”) should be mentioned first.<sup>1</sup> This book contains documents from Lithuanian archives about the massacres of communists, Komsomol youth, Soviet activists, and Jews in 20 Lithuanian counties. Although this collection of documents was published back in 1973, it is still a valuable resource for Holocaust research today. Another valuable source is *1941 m. Birželio sukilimas* (“The 1941 June Uprising”), a collection of documents prepared by Valentinas Brandišauskas.<sup>2</sup> This includes a wealth of information about the activities of the Lithuanian rebels and partisans in the provinces of Lithuania, as well as about the attitude of local Lithuanian government officials toward Jews and their treatment of them in the first weeks of the Nazi occupation. Alfonsas Eidintas’s recently published book entitled *Lietuvos žydų žudynių byla* (“The Case of the Massacre of the Lithuanian Jews”) also contains a chapter on the massacre of Jews in Lithuania’s provinces.<sup>3</sup> In addition to the author of this article, historians Stanislovas Buchaveckas, Alfredas Rukšėnas, and Rūta Puišytė have also written academic articles about the Holocaust in the provinces.<sup>4</sup> In terms of foreign authors, the articles written by German historians Joachim Tauber, Jürgen Matthäus, and Christoph Dieckmann about the massacres of Jews by the Tilsit Gestapo Einsatzkommando in Gargždai, Kretinga, and other Lithuanian-German border towns are of mention.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, the Holocaust in the Lithuanian provinces remains, in essence, a blind spot in Lithuanian historiography. To date, there is no academic work that examines the genocide of the Jewish people not only in individual areas of Lithuania, but in all of the Lithuanian counties (of which there were 22 in 1941). The term “provinces” in this article refers to the counties of Lithuania, with the exception of the major cities of Vilnius, Kaunas, Šiauliai, and Panevėžys.

### The Persecution and Massacre of Jews in Kaunas County

Kaunas County occupies perhaps the central place in the history of the genocide (Holocaust) of Lithuanian Jews. Kaunas was the administrative and political center of Nazi-occupied Lithuania. It was in the city and county of Kaunas that the Nazi



occupation policies (including with regard to Jews) began to be implemented. As a result, Kaunas County can be considered, with stipulations, as the model for the persecution and killing of Jews for all Lithuanian provinces. During the Nazi occupation, Kaunas County consisted of 16 townships. Almost all of the township centers (with the exception of Raudondvaris, Aukštoji Panemunė, Lapės, and Pakuonis) had fairly large Jewish communities. These communities were all annihilated by early September 1941.

After the Nazis occupied Lithuania (Kaunas County was occupied during the first three days of the war), the persecution (arrests, beatings, shooting) of the remaining communists, Komsomol members, and Soviet officials began. In the ensuing weeks, until somewhere around August 1941, the Jews in Kaunas County were primarily persecuted not for reasons of race or ethnicity (i.e., because they were Jews), but for political reasons – as collaborators and supporters of the former Soviet occupation regime. At that time, the ones who suffered the most were Jews – usually men – who were communists, Komsomol members, former Soviet officials, or Soviet activists. Like in most counties of Lithuania, the general persecution of Jews in Kaunas County began in August 1941, after the introduction of German civil rule in Lithuania. In late July, SA-Oberführer Arnold Lentzen was named Gebietskommissar for the Kaunas Region (which consisted of the counties of Alytus, Kaunas, Kėdainiai, Lazdijai, Marijampolė, Šakiai, and Vilkaviškis). According to unofficial data from the Board of Statistics, on January 1, 1941, there were 83,161 Lithuanians (86.91%) and 4,363 Jews (4.56%) living in Kaunas County.<sup>6</sup>

As we know, the mass killing of Jews had already begun in Kaunas at the end of June 1941. According to the infamous report written by Karl Jäger, commander of the SD Einsatzkommando 3 (which took over the functions of the security police in Lithuania on July 2, 1941), the first larger-scale Jewish massacre in Kaunas County was in Vandžiogala on July 9, 1941, when 32 Jewish men, two Jewish women, one Lithuanian woman, two Lithuanian communists, and one Russian communist were shot.<sup>7</sup> The Nazi “solution to the Jewish question” depended on the German Sicherheitspolizei (Security Police; SiPo) and Sicherheitsdienst (Security Service; SD), but it was impossible to “solve” this question effectively and quickly without the help of the Lithuanian administration (primarily the police and the so-called “partisans” (who were frequently referred to as “white armbands” (Lithuanian: *baltaraiščiai*)\*).

\*The terms “partisans” and “white armbands” are used as synonyms in this article. Academically speaking, the term “partisan” can only be used in Lithuanian historiography when the individual (the partisan) fought against Soviet military units and retreating Soviet officials. Lithuanian partisans did not fight against the Germans in 1941 – on the contrary, they helped implement the policies of the Nazi occupation regime, including against the Jews. The use of quotation marks (“partisan”) and the alternative term “white armband” is meant to avoid misunderstandings and confusion with the actual meaning of the word “partisan.”

As Jäger wrote in his report, the extermination of the Jews “could only be achieved by setting up a Rollkommando with select men under the leadership of SS-Obersturmführer Hamann, who fully embraced my goals and knew how to guarantee collaboration with the Lithuanian partisans and the competent civil authorities.”<sup>8</sup>

However, even before the general extermination, Jews were persecuted in other ways. The initial goal was to deprive them of their civil and human rights and isolate them from other ethnic groups. Then – to concentrate them into ghettos and internment camps and confiscate their property, and finally – to annihilate them altogether. The German Gebietskommissars issued the relevant decrees on the Jewish question. For instance, on August 4, 1941, Kaunas Region Gebietskommissar Arnold Lentzen issued Announcement No. 3 to the Kaunas Region. According to this announcement, Jews who fled the city during the war were forbidden to return to Kaunas County. All homeowners and managers were strictly forbidden to take in Jews who returned. Jews were also prohibited from selling, exchanging, or otherwise disposing of their movable and immovable property in any way. There were severe penalties for not following the provisions of the announcement.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the Nazi occupation authorities were initially concerned with registering and seizing Jewish property. On August 6, 1941, the Kaunas County governor sent a letter to the all of the township mayors in the county. It included an order to provide a report by September 13 of how many Jews had not paid various taxes (state, municipal, etc.), how much they owed to persons of other nationalities, banks, cooperatives, and so on, and what Jewish property in the county had not yet been nationalized (by the Soviets): houses, farms, various businesses, and non-household assets.<sup>10</sup> The township mayors provided the relevant information to the governor of Kaunas County.<sup>11</sup> Shortly thereafter, the governor informed the township mayors that:

According to instructions from the Kaunas Region Gebietskommissar, all Jewish property, inventory, etc. remaining within the borders of the township are to go to the township mayors, who are to see to the proper management and protection of this property.<sup>12</sup>

Together with the registration and confiscation of Jewish property, Jews began to be concentrated in ghettos and internment camps. On August 7, 1941, Kaunas County Governor Vaitiekus Bortkevičius ordered all township mayors and police chiefs to put the Jews in ghettos by August 15, 1941. The ghettos were to be guarded by the so-called “partisans.” Male Jews aged 12–60 living in the ghettos were to be listed according to their specialization, and the lists were to be delivered to the township municipalities, police stations, and the Kaunas County governor. To maintain order in the ghettos themselves, a police force of 5–15 Jews was to be organized and “armed” with wooden batons. The ghettos also had to elect Jewish Committees (12 persons) to handle the internal affairs of the ghetto. Jews in the ghettos had to feed themselves at their own expense and with reduced food rations; they were not entitled to meat and

dairy products, fats, or eggs. The rationing of food for the ghetto was to be delegated to the Jewish Committee, which would handle its distribution. The township mayors and police chiefs were put in charge of establishing the ghettos and maintaining order in them.<sup>13</sup>

It should be noted that not all township centers in Kaunas County had ghettos. Larger ghettos were established in Darsūniškis, Garliava, Jonava, and Vilkija. Ghettos were usually formed in synagogues and the Jewish houses nearby. After the Jewish massacre at the Kaunas Seventh Fort in July 1941, the mass killing of Jews began in Kaunas County in early August. As previously mentioned, until that time, Jews suspected of communist activities or sympathizing with the Soviet regime were usually the ones who were killed, but this is when the massacres of all Jews (men, women, and children) began based on racial and anti-Semitic Nazi ideology. Hence, this was the beginning of the true genocide (Holocaust) – the shooting of Jews by racial (national) affiliation. In mid-August, when Jews were already locked in ghettos, it was much easier for the Nazi government to murder Jews en masse. At that time, the Jews in the city of Kaunas had already been imprisoned in the ghetto, giving the Nazi administration more power and time to “resolve” the Jewish question in Kaunas and other counties.

As per the instructions of the German SiPo and SD, Police Department Director Vytautas Reivytis sent Secret Circular No. 3 to the Kaunas County police chief on August 16, 1941, in which he wrote:

Upon receipt of this circular, immediately detain, in the places specified in the comments, all Jewish men from the age of 15 as well as women who stood out for their Bolshevik activities during the Bolshevik occupation or still stand out for such activities or insolence. Gather the detained persons near the main roads and report them to the Police Department immediately using special means of communication. When reporting, specify exactly in which place and how many Jews of this type have been detained and rounded up.

Care must be taken to ensure that the detainees are provided with food and adequate protection, and the auxiliary police may be used to do this.

This circular must be executed within two days of receipt. Hold the detained Jews until they can be taken and delivered to a camp.<sup>14</sup>

The above circular was sent to the police chiefs of other counties as well. The police chiefs reported to Reivytis about the progress of the execution of the circular. The process of gathering the Jews and preparing for the massacre went very quickly. For example, 34 Jews were arrested in Babtai, after which they were locked in the synagogue and guarded.

A total of 73 Jewish men and 46 Jewish women were detained in Garliava. They were also locked in the synagogue. By August 17, 1941, 83 men and 20 women had been detained in Jonava. The Jews rounded up in Kruonis Township were held in Darsūniškis Village. Approximately 50 old Jewish women and 30 Jewish children under the age of 15 were left in the township. A total of 54 Jews were gathered in the Petrašiūnai police station's jurisdiction. They were held in the Petrašiūnai municipality building.<sup>15</sup>

The 30 Jews who were detained in Vandžiogala were sent to Babtai. Some 280 men and 120 women were deported from Vilkija (the documents do not specify where to). There were still 18 women left in the Vilkija synagogue. They were held there together with 21 Jewish women from Čekiškė, 14 Jewish women from Veliuona, and 62 Jewish women and 14 Jewish men from Seredžius. In total, 129 Jews were locked up in the Vilkija synagogue.

There were 67 Jews (29 from Zapyškis, two from Jankai, and 36 from Paežerėliai) being held in the lock-up at the Zapyškis police station.<sup>16</sup>

Before being killed, the Jews were registered and then robbed by way of forcing them to pay contributions. On August 21, 1941, the Kaunas County governor, as per the instructions of the Kaunas Region Gebietskommissar, sent the following order to the township mayors:

On instruction of the Gebietskommissar, I order you to impose the following contributions and collect them from all Jews (of both sexes) within the borders of the township by August 25: from one to 10 Jewish heads – 1,000 rubles, from 11–20 Jewish heads – 2,000 rubles, and so on.

This demand is to be presented to the Jewish Committee Elder (balabos) with the warning that if the contributions are not paid within 24 hours, each of them faces the penalty of a firing squad.

The collected funds are to be deposited in a separate municipal account.

After executing this order, report the exact details of this work to me no later than August 26 of this year.<sup>17</sup>

Shortly thereafter, the township mayors began sending reports to the Kaunas County governor about the contributions they had collected. The reports show that 2,945 Kaunas County Jews paid 298,100 rubles in contributions by August 25, 1941.<sup>18</sup>

On August 22, 1941, Kaunas Region Gebietskommissar Arnold Lentzen urged Kaunas County Governor Vaitiekus Bortkevičius to finish rounding up the Jews in the country and determine the exact number of Jews living there.<sup>19</sup>

Based on the Gebietskommissar's instructions, Bortkevičius ordered all township mayors to inform him by August 28, 1941 about the numbers of Jews in their township, breaking the number down as follows: (1) Jewish men between the ages of 12 and 60; (2) Jewish men over the age of 60; (3) Jewish women aged 12 and up; (4) Jewish

children (boys and girls) under the age of 12; and (5) the total number of Jews. The number of men listed was also to include men who had already been previously arrested, regardless of where they were brought in from.<sup>20</sup>

Following the county governor's order, the township mayors provided the required information. At that time (August 28, 1941) only the townships of Aukštoji Panemunė and Lapės had no Jewish residents. According to August 28, 1941 data, there were 3,220 Jews living in Kaunas County.<sup>21</sup> The majority of the Jews in Raudondvaris Township had moved to the Vilijampolė Ghetto by mid-August 1941. All of the Jews in Lapės Township (20 people) had been moved there as well.<sup>22</sup>

Mass killings of Jews began throughout Kaunas County on August 28, 1941. Most of the Jewish massacres carried out not only in Kaunas County, but throughout Lithuania (except for the regions of Vilnius and Šiauliai) are associated with the previously mentioned Rollkommando Hamann, the mobile task force under the command of SS-Obersturmführer Joachim Hamann. So who was Hamann and the Rollkommando under his command? During World War II, the Germans had Einsatzgruppen – special SiPo and SD paramilitary death squads – to kill Nazi enemies in occupied territories. Right before the war with the Soviets, the Nazis created four Einsatzgruppen – A, B, C, and D. The commanders of the Einsatzgruppen were directly appointed by Heinrich Himmler and Reychard Heydrich. One Einsatzgruppen was created for each army group (North, Center, and South). Einsatzgruppen A was assigned to Army Group North, which was tasked with occupying the Baltic States and Leningrad. Einsatzgruppe A consisted of Einsatzkommandos 2 and 3 and Sonderkommandos 1a and 1b.<sup>23</sup> Einsatzgruppe A was initially under the command of SS-Brigadeführer Walter Stahlecker. Einsatzkommando 3/A, which operated in Lithuania, was under the command of SS-Standartenführer Karl Jäger. This Einsatzkommando had over 120 members, who were divided into three units (Züge). Joachim Hamann was the commander of one of the units and was Jäger's adjutant.<sup>24</sup> Hamann was known as an extremely vehement anti-Semite. Jäger and Hamann are believed to have arrived in Kaunas in the very first days of the German occupation, and the latter was tasked by Stahlecker, the commander of Einsatzgruppe A, to organize a mobile unit for the mass killing of Jews and communists.<sup>25</sup> The German SiPo and SD forces were not enough to carry out these assignments. Therefore, Einsatzkommando 3/A enlisted the help of the soldiers in the Lithuanian TDA Battalion being formed in Kaunas. It just so happened that the 3rd Company of the TDA Battalion was usually the one assigned for the mass killing of Jews. Rollkommando Hamann had no permanent structure or specific deployment location. It was usually called for ad hoc campaigns and consisted of a few German Gestapo officers and several dozen Lithuanian TDA Battalion soldiers. Often, Hamann himself did not even take part in the killing campaigns in the provinces, just giving assignments to the TDA Battalion (later renamed the 1st Police Battalion) officers (Lieutenants Anatolijus Dagys, Juozas Barzda, and Bronius

Norkus). It is speculated that Hauptscharführers Reinhold Porst, Josef Stütz, Walter Salzmann, Heinz Mack, and F. Walter Planert usually took part in the campaigns. Hamann's deputy was SS-Hauptsturmführer Helmut Rauca.<sup>26</sup>

The Rollkommando would only arrive at the scene of the campaign when all the preparatory work had been completed – the Jews condemned to death were gathered in one place with the local police and “partisans” there to guard them. A more secluded location for the killings was chosen (usually in forests or remote fields), and pits were prepared in advance. Designated soldiers of the 3rd Company or volunteers were usually the ones who went to the provinces to kill. Several German Gestapo officers would also come by car to the place prepared for the massacre. The December 1, 1941 Jäger Report includes a long list of locations where Rollkommando Hamann, together with Lithuanian “partisans,” carried out Jewish massacres. Based on available archival data, it can be concluded that TDA Battalion soldiers were not present at all of the locations listed in the Jäger Report (especially in the provinces). It can be assumed that there are quite a few places in Lithuania where Jews were killed by the local police and “partisans,” without the participation of Rollkommando Hamann.

## Petrašiūnai

Although Petrašiūnai was a suburb of Kaunas, it was noted as a separate massacre site for Jews in the Jäger Report. Therefore, the massacre of Petrašiūnai Jews is attributed here to the massacres carried out in the county, but not the city, of Kaunas. Furthermore, the massacre of Jews in Petrašiūnai was carried out at the same time as the Jewish massacres in other towns in Kaunas County.

In the first days of the war, former rifleman Vladimiras Nefiodovas organized a squad of rebels. The rebels had several battles with retreating Red Army soldiers in the vicinity of Petrašiūnai. Nefiodovas's squad was active on June 25–29, 1941, and was then disbanded. The Petrašiūnai rebels shot 10 Red Army soldiers and captured 30; they also detained roughly 50 carts with Jews moving east and sent them to the Kaunas commandant's headquarters.<sup>27</sup>

The Petrašiūnai Jews were probably shot on August 30, 1941. There is a surviving letter from Kaunas County Governor Vaitiekus Bortkevičius stating that on that day, prisoners of war buried the Jews who had been shot in Petrašiūnai.<sup>28</sup>

On the day of the massacre, about 40 soldiers from the 3rd Company of the TDA Battalion, under the command of Lieutenants Anatolijus Dagys and Bronius Pauliukonis, left for Petrašiūnai in two trucks. The list of soldiers to execute the campaign was announced by CSM Zigmas Arlauskas.<sup>29</sup>

The trucks came to a lowland overgrown with bushes near Petrašiūnai. Two ditches a dozen or so meters long had already been dug out. Jewish men, women, and children had already been herded to the field. They were guarded by armed locals dressed in civilian clothes. The condemned were led in groups to the edge of the ditches and positioned with their backs to the shooters. At Lt. Dagys's and CSM Arlauskas's command, the Jews were shot simultaneously at both ditches. The shooting was done by soldiers of the 3rd Company, while locals guarded the site of the massacre and the victims who were waiting to die. After the massacre, the members of the self-defense squad returned to Kaunas by truck.<sup>30</sup>

The German Gestapo did not participate in the massacre of the Petrašiūnai Jews. According to the Jäger Report, 125 Jews were killed in Petrašiūnai: 30 men, 72 women, and 23 children.<sup>31</sup>

Next we will examine the Jewish killing campaigns in the townships of Kaunas County.

## Jonava

Jonava had the largest Jewish community in Kaunas County. Jews had been living there since the town was founded in 1775. During the interwar period, Jews made up the majority of the city's population. There were 2,710 Jews (65% of the total population) living in Jonava in 1932, and approximately 3,000 right before the war began (when Jonava's total population was about 5,000). Jews led a vigorous economic, social, and cultural life. Most of the city's Jews worked in industrial establishments and artisan workshops or engaged in trade. Jonava had seven synagogues as well as religious and secular schools, libraries, and political, cultural, and sports organizations. The Jewish People's Bank in Jonava had 560 members in 1929.<sup>32</sup>

When the war broke out, many Jews from Kaunas and Jonava tried to move East. The retreating Jews and Soviet activists were bombed and shot at by German aircraft and Lithuanian partisans. Some of the fugitives were killed or wounded, while others hid in the surrounding villages or returned home. Some managed to escape to Russia.

Lithuanian partisans had already begun to operate in the vicinity of Jonava on June 24, 1941. They blocked the exit routes from Jonava and forced the retreating Jews to turn back. That same day, Lithuanian partisans fired at a Soviet military train traveling east from Kaunas.<sup>33</sup>

The German Army occupied Jonava on June 25. A fierce battle for Jonava took place between German and Soviets troops, during which local civilians were killed and many homes were either destroyed or set on fire. Some Jonava Jews tried to hide in Kaunas. They were arrested there and shot at the Seventh Fort in early July 1941.<sup>34</sup>

In the first days of the war, a Lithuanian partisan squad was organized in Jonava. About 50–60 men joined the detachment. The squad was put under the command of reserve officer Vladas Kulvicas. The partisan squad was later renamed the self-defense squad. This detachment was subordinate to the Wehrmacht's local commandant, and was also obliged to follow the orders of the Gestapo. In the first days of the occupation, the self-defense squad did not carry out any repressive measures. Members of the squad cleaned up the destroyed city, and collected and buried the corpses of German and Russian soldiers and civilians who had been killed. Squad members also collected the weapons that had been left on the battlefields and took them to the partisan (self-defense) squad headquarters that had been established in the municipal building. The squad also guarded the bridge over the Neris River, the railway, and other important military facilities. A few weeks later, the squad was fully armed and dressed in Lithuanian army uniforms brought from Kaunas. The squad's operational functions were expanded. Security police officers Simas Dolgačius and Jokūbas Alekna got more and more involved in the squad's activities. The squad began to be used to persecute and exterminate Soviet activists and Jews.<sup>35</sup>

On August 7, 1941, the Kaunas County governor sent instructions to all of the township mayors and police chiefs in the county to move Jews to the ghettos by August 15, 1941.<sup>36</sup>

In early August, the self-defense squad drove all Jewish men to the military barracks located near the Neris. This was where the Jewish ghetto was to be established. At around the same time, Jews who had been arrested dug several large pits in the Giraitė woods, roughly 1.5 kilometers northeast of Jonava. They were kept in the barracks for several days. On August 14, 1941, the self-defense squad lined the Jews up in a column and took them to the Giraitė woods. The detainees were told they were being taken to work. Several Gestapo officers and a squad of German soldiers also came to the site of the massacre from Kaunas. In the woods, one group of Jews realized what was going on and tried to escape. Most of them were shot, but six managed to escape. Five of the men were later arrested and shot; only one of them survived to see the end of occupation – Nochum Blumberg. The Jews were pushed into the pits and shot by the Germans and members of the Lithuanian self-defense squad.<sup>37</sup> According to the Jäger Report, 552 Jews were shot in Jonava on August 14, 1941 (497 men and 55 women).<sup>38</sup> Many party and Soviet activists were among those shot.<sup>39</sup>

In late August 1941, Vladas Kulvicas, who liked to drink, was replaced by Jr. Lt. Jonas Jurevičius as the commander of the self-defense squad.<sup>40</sup> After the first mass shooting of Jonava Jews, the remaining Jewish families were left to live in their apartments for another few weeks. Then soldiers from the self-defense squad drove them into the barracks (the ghetto). The Jews left the bulk of their things in their apartments, which led to mass looting. The barracks were guarded around the clock by 12 men from the



self-defense squad. The Jews were held in the barracks for a few days before being shot. Before being killed, the Jews were assigned contributions. On August 23–24, the Jonava Jews paid 120,000 rubles in contributions.<sup>41</sup> Before the shooting, there were 1,257 Jews in Jonava County.<sup>42</sup>

The second mass killing of Jonava Jews took place between August 31 and September 2. On the day of the massacre, by order of the chief of the Jonava security police, Jurevičius appointed 16 men from his squad to carry out the execution.<sup>43</sup> The Jews were taken in groups to the site of the massacre in the Giraitė woods. Before taking them, the self-defense soldiers were given vodka to drink. Jurevičius and the head of the Jonava security police were also present at the site of the massacre. After the first group was shot, TDA Battalion Lieutenants Bronius Norkus and Vladas Malinauskas came to Giraitė from Kaunas. They joined the Gestapo chief in conducting the massacre. Jurevičius returned to Jonava and did not participate in any more massacres.<sup>44</sup> The shooting was done by members of the Jonava squad along with “partisans” dressed in civilian clothes and a few Germans. Men were shot first, and then women and children. Before being shot, the victims were stripped down to their underwear. After one group was shot, their corpses were covered with sand and lime, and then another group was brought to the ditch and shot. Even some of the executioners could not endure the horrific images of the massacre. V. Gineitis, a member of the Jonava squad, was put in the German command’s lock-up for “weakness of spirit” during the shooting.<sup>45</sup>

During the second shooting, 1,556 Jews were killed in Jonava: 112 men, 1,200 women, and 244 children.<sup>46</sup> Only about 200 women and children were left in the Jonava Ghetto.<sup>47</sup>

The people of Jonava were very unhappy with the shooting of the Jews. Juozas Stankevičius, who was the chief of the Jonava Township police at the time, informed his superiors in Kaunas about it. Then Kęstutis Renigeris, the chief of the Kaunas City police, summoned Stankevičius to Kaunas. When he got there, they both went to see the German military commander. The latter called the Gestapo and told them that the Jews who were left in Jonava would be taken to the Kaunas Ghetto. After returning to Jonava, Stankevičius agreed with the township mayor that he would provide carts to transport the Jews to Kaunas. On October 4, 1941, the Jonava Jews were taken to the Kaunas Ghetto. In November 1941, Stankevičius was arrested by the Gestapo for helping the Jews, and criminal proceedings were instituted against him. He was sentenced to two years in prison. Stankevičius was held in the Kaunas prison until the autumn of 1942.<sup>48</sup> After the Jews were moved to the Kaunas Ghetto, Jonava’s large Jewish community was no more.

In 1943, the Jonava self-defense squad was attached to the 257th Lithuanian Police Battalion.<sup>49</sup>

At the end of the Nazi occupation (in the summer of 1944), the Germans destroyed all traces of their crimes in the Giraitė woods. For about two weeks, Jewish corpses were unearthed and burned at the site of the massacre. The burning place was surrounded by soldiers, and unauthorized persons were strictly prohibited from approaching.<sup>50</sup>

An overview of the Holocaust in the other townships in Kaunas County is presented below in alphabetical order.

## **Babtai**

Before World War I, Babtai had a population of about 1,200 people, of whom 80% were Jews. During the period of Lithuanian independence, the number of Jews decreased. Some of them emigrated to the United States or moved to other cities in Lithuania. In 1923, there were 153 Jews living in Babtai (20% of the town's population).<sup>51</sup>

The German Army occupied Babtai on June 24, 1941. Local government offices were re-established in the town. Justinas Janušauskas was named mayor of the township – he held the same position when Antanas Smetona was president. Kazys Tribunevičius was named chief of the township police. A “partisan” (“white armband”) squad was formed from former riflemen. This squad was under the command of Stanislovas Aniulis from Varekonys Village. The “partisans” carried out the orders of the township mayor and police chief.<sup>52</sup> Arrests of communists, Komsomol members, and Soviet activists already began in the first days of the occupation. Several ethnic Russians were shot (including Stepanida Patysheva and her sons – 17-year-old Leonid and 15-year-old Pimen).<sup>53</sup>

On July 17, 1941, eight communists and Soviet activists, including six Jews, were shot in Babtai.<sup>54</sup>

The general persecution of Jews began in August 1941. First, the Jews were registered. On August 11, the mayor of Babtai informed the governor of Kaunas County that there were 93 Jews living in his town.<sup>55</sup> A few days later, on the secret instruction of Vytautas Reivytiš, 34 adult Jews were arrested and imprisoned in the town's synagogue. Another 30 Jews from Vandžiogala were brought in as well.<sup>56</sup> The Jews were also ordered to pay contributions. They paid 9,000 rubles.<sup>57</sup> The Babtai and Vandžiogala Jews were executed between August 28 and September 2, 1941. According to most witnesses, this was done in early September.

On the morning of the massacre, the town elder brought a few dozen men from the town of Babtai and the surrounding areas to the site that had been selected for the massacre in the Babtai pine forest, not far from the Neris River, and ordered them to dig a ditch about 50 meters long, 1 meter wide, and 2 meters deep. It was completed at

about 2 p.m.<sup>58</sup> After the ditch was prepared, about 50 soldiers from the 3rd Company of the 1st Battalion arrived in two trucks. They were under the command of officers Bronius Norkus, Juozas Barzda, and Anatolijus Dagys. The arrested Jews were brought to the site of the massacre by local “partisans” and policemen from the town. Some of the Jews who were unable to walk (the elderly and small children) were brought to the site in carts. The Jews were stripped down to their underwear, led to the ditch in groups, and ordered to stand on the edge, facing in. Then an officer gave the command and the soldiers shot the Jews in the back. A couple of local “white armbands” also took part in the shooting. The men were shot first, then the women, children, and the elderly. All of the 3rd Company soldiers who had been brought in took turns doing the shooting. The massacre lasted several hours. According to witnesses, 300–400 Babtai and Vandžiogala Jews were shot. After the massacre, the assassins split up the victims’ better clothing and more valuable items.<sup>59</sup> According to the Jäger Report, 83 Babtai Jews and 252 Vandžiogala Jews (a total of 335 people) were shot.<sup>60</sup> This is more or less consistent with the number of victims reported by witnesses to the massacre (300–400 people). According to testimony of one witness, one German with a camera was also present at the massacre of the Babtai and Vandžiogala Jews.<sup>61</sup>

## Čekiškė

Situated on the Dubysa River, the town of Čekiškė was an important point on the Kaunas–Raseiniai road. Before World War I, there were roughly 200 Jewish families living in Čekiškė. During the interwar period, the number of Jews in the town declined. Before the Nazi-Soviet war, there were around 60 Jewish families living in Čekiškė (about 45% of the town’s population).<sup>62</sup>

Most of the Jews were engaged in crafts and market gardening. During the period of Lithuanian independence, the local Jewish community had its own bank (with 60 members), a synagogue, a Hebrew-language school, and a library. Čekiškė’s last rabbi was Shemuel-Ze’ev Melamed.<sup>63</sup>

Like in other Lithuanian counties and townships, a Lithuanian administration began to form in Čekiškė in the first days of the Nazi-Soviet war. One of the initiators of the establishment of government in Čekiškė was Bronius Semaška, a large farmer (who owned a 103-hectar farm during the Smetona era) and a member of the Lithuanian Nationalist party and the Kaunas County Board. A town meeting was convened on June 24, 1941, where it was decided to establish a provisional committee to oversee the re-establishment of local government. During the meeting, it was proposed that Stasys Stumbrys be elected as the mayor of Čekiškė Township, and Stasys Minelgas –

as the township police chief. Their nominations had to be approved by the Kaunas County governor and chief of police. They did so in Kaunas on June 26. Čekiškė was allowed to set up a police station with five employees. An auxiliary police squad (“white armbands”) was also established.<sup>64</sup> Soon, the persecution of communists, Komsomol members, Soviet activists, and Jews began. In the first days of the occupation, four communists and Soviet activists were executed in Čekiškė: Povilas Sadauskas, brothers Vincas and Kazys Žaukas, and Stasys Karpavičius.<sup>65</sup> On July 4, 1941, Aleksas Skuodis was appointed chief of the Čekiškė Township police (in place of Minelga). He received instructions from the Kaunas County police chief to arrest communists and Soviet activists first, and then Jews a little later. The arrested communists and Soviet activists were to be interrogated about their activities during the Soviet occupation, and then they were to be delivered to the security police in Kaunas together with their investigation reports. Kazys Mikelionis, the Kaunas district chief of the Lithuanian Security Police, came to Čekiškė from Kaunas in July. He sat down with Skuodis compiled a list of communists and Soviet activists who were to be arrested. In July–November 1941, the Čekiškė police arrested around a dozen communists, Komsomol members, and Soviet activists.<sup>66</sup>

One of the organizers of the auxiliary police in Čekiškė was Stasys Gudavičius, who was head of the armed detachment of the *Vilkija* command. When he arrived in Čekiškė, he organized a meeting of the town’s residents and called for the formation of an armed detachment to fight communists, Soviet officials, and Jews. After his visit, a number of men volunteered to join the armed detachment being formed. Gudavičius went to Čekiškė several times. His visits usually ended with shooting individual Jews.<sup>67</sup>

The general, mass persecution of Jews began in August 1941. In mid-August, ghettos were established in Kaunas County and a campaign was carried out to arrest Jews.

Čekiškė did not have a ghetto. However, local policemen and “white armbands” locked the Jews up in the town synagogue, and a few days later, they convoyed them to *Vilkija*, which was one of the largest Jewish concentration points in Kaunas County. In addition to the Jews from Čekiškė, Jews were also brought to *Vilkija* from *Lekėčiai*, *Seredžius*, and *Veliuona* on August 16–18, 1941. They were held in the *Vilkija* synagogue. Jews were also brought there in the following weeks.<sup>68</sup> The Jews who were moved from Čekiškė to *Vilkija* were allowed to take their clothes, shoes, and valuables with them. Jewish real estate was left in the care of the township administration.<sup>69</sup>

On August 22, 1941, the Kaunas *Gebietskommissar* sent a letter to the Kaunas County governor, demanding that the gathering of Jews be completed without delay, and that the exact number of Jews living in the county be determined.<sup>70</sup> In turn, the Kaunas County governor sent letters to the township mayors, instructing them to inform him by August 28, 1941 about how many Jews they had in their townships by age group.<sup>71</sup>

In response to the letter from the county governor, the mayor of Čekiškė Township informed him that there were 144 Jews living in his township, including 70 women and 42 children.<sup>72</sup> At that point, some of the Čekiškė Jews may have already been taken away to Vilkija. In mid-August, the majority of the Jews in Vilkija had been sent to Kaunas; it is believed that a group of Čekiškė Jews were among them. The other Vilkija Jews were shot on August 28 in Pakarklė Forest (2 kilometers from Vilkija), near the village of Jaučakiai. The Jews who were brought in from the Vilkija synagogue were shot by the 3rd Company of the 1st Auxiliary Police Service Battalion (the former TDA Battalion), under the command of Lt. Juozas Barzda.<sup>73</sup> A total of 402 Jews were shot: 76 men, 192 women, and 134 children.<sup>74</sup> The Jews from Čekiškė who were there as well were shot along with the Vilkija Jews.

There was another shooting of Čekiškė Jews on September 4, 1941. Not only were Čekiškė Jews shot that day – Jews from Seredžius, Veliuona, and Zapyškis were as well. A total of 146 Čekiškė Jews were killed: 22 men, 64 women, and 60 children.<sup>75</sup> The exact circumstances of these murders are not known to the author.

Like the Jews in other townships, the Čekiškė Jews were ordered to pay contributions before they were shot. Čekiškė Jews (144 individuals) paid 15,000 rubles in contributions.<sup>76</sup>

Regarding the issue of Jewish property, Kaunas Region Gebietskommissar Arnold Lentzen provided instructions in writing on September 5, 1941 that Jewish household items could be auctioned off. Articles of precious metals, art, and good quality carpets were prohibited from being sold – they were ordered to be registered and reported to the Gebietskommissar.<sup>77</sup> A special commission was established to register and evaluate the Jewish property left behind in Čekiškė, with Bronius Semaška as chairman. Roughly 50,000 rubles were collected from the sale of Jewish property. The money was deposited at the township municipality cashier's office. Semaška personally bought a wardrobe, a table, two beds, and four chairs.<sup>78</sup>

## Garliava

Before World War I, there were about 400 Jews (approximately 100 families) living in Garliava. The town had 206 Jews in 1921, and about 70 Jewish families before the Nazi-Soviet war. Most of the Jews in the town were engaged in small trade, crafts, and market gardening. There were also wealthy Jews in the community – owners of large estates, mills, and workshops. Joseph Schwartz owned a huge estate in Julijanava (a few kilometers from Garliava). The town's Jewish community had a synagogue, a Yavne school (with 45 children), and a Yiddish-language school (with about the same

number of students). During the interwar period, part of the town's Jews emigrated to the United States, Canada, South Africa, and Palestine.<sup>79</sup>

In the first days of the Nazi–Soviet war, Lithuanian “partisans” (“white armbands”) were active in Garliava Township. Three “partisan” squads were organized in the area: one operated in the village of Julijanava, another – in the village of Juodvaris, and the third – in the vicinity of Stanaičiai-Garliava. They had about 120 men in all.<sup>80</sup>

The mass persecution of Jews began in August 1941. Following the instructions of the occupation authorities, Jews were registered and arrested. On August 12, the Garliava Township mayor informed the Kaunas County governor that there were 285 Jews living in the township.<sup>81</sup>

Before being shot, the Jews were registered again and robbed by way of forced contributions. In late August, 247 Garliava Jews paid 25,000 rubles in contributions.<sup>82</sup>

According to the Jäger Report, the Garliava Jews were shot between August 28 and September 2.<sup>83</sup> However, according to the testimonies of participants and witnesses of the massacre, they were killed in the last days of summer, so probably between August 28 and 31. A couple of weeks before the shooting (in mid-August), local policemen and “white armbands” drove the Jews of Garliava and the surrounding villages into the town synagogue. On the day of the massacre, police officers and “white armbands” took several dozen men from the synagogue to the valley near Rinkūnai Village (1 kilometer east of Garliava) and ordered them to dig a ditch, supposedly to drain water. Realizing what the ditch was for, the Jews refused to dig. Then the policemen brought in several dozen Lithuanian men from Garliava. They dug a ditch that was 50–60 meters long, 2 meters wide, and 1.5 meters deep.<sup>84</sup>

On the day of the massacre, several dozen soldiers were selected in the barracks of the 3rd Company of the 1st Lithuanian Police Battalion in Žaliakalnis and taken to Garliava in two trucks under the command of Lt. Juozas Barzda (other witnesses mentioned Lt. Anatolijus Dagys and Lt. Bronius Norkus in their testimonies as well). In the town, the trucks stopped at the synagogue where the Jews were being held. Local policemen and “white armbands” drove the Jews – men, women, and children – from the synagogue to the site of the massacre. The policemen and “white armbands” surrounded the massacre site and led the Jews to the ditch in groups. The men were shot first. They were lined up near a ditch and shot in the back from a few meters away. The officers gave the command to shoot.<sup>85</sup> The massacre began in the early evening and ended when it was already dark out. Some of the battalion soldiers had searchlights that they used to finish off the victims who had only been wounded. According to the testimony of participants in the massacre, about 300 Jews were shot. In his report, Jäger said that 247 Jews were executed in Garliava: 73 men, 113 women, and 61 children. After the massacre, the 3rd Company soldiers returned to Garliava and went to a local pub to drink beer. At night, they returned to the barracks

by truck.<sup>86</sup> Witnesses do not mention any Germans participating in the Garliava massacre. It seems that this time, the 3rd Company, along with the local police and “white armbands,” managed to “take care of matters” on their own.

## Kruonis

During the interwar period, there were around a dozen Jewish families living in the town of Kruonis. When the occupation authorities registered Jews and their possessions in Kaunas County in late July 1941, there were 153 Jews listed in Kruonis Township. In the town of Kruonis, the Jews owned a synagogue, 20 houses, 19 cattle sheds, six granaries, and seven barns. All of the buildings were made of wood and had little value.<sup>87</sup>

In the first days of the Nazi-Soviet war, Kruonis residents Juozas Jurevičius, Jonas Jankevičius, and Jonas Arlauskas organized a rebel squad. The squad registered with the Kaunas commandant’s headquarters on June 25, 1941. It consisted of 25 men.<sup>88</sup> The squad shot at and arrested small groups of Red Army troops and individual soldiers retreating by way of the Alytus-Kaunas road. In the first days of the war, squad member Antanas Jakubauskas cut the telegraph wire of the Red Army unit headquarters and shot the guard who was guarding the headquarters. Before the Germans even arrived, squad member Jonas Sventickas tore down the red flag from the township executive committee building and hung the flag of Lithuania in its place. Then he went home, and when the Lithuanian national anthem started playing on the radio, he turned it up full blast.<sup>89</sup> In the first weeks of the Nazi occupation, the former “partisans” (“white armbands”) began to terrorize the communists, Komsomol members, Soviet activists, and Jews who were left in the town. Local government bodies and a police force were established in Kruonis. Pranas Maleckas was appointed chief of the township police. He had five policemen under his command. The communists and Soviet activists who were arrested were put in the police jail. Some 70 non-Jewish communists and Soviet activists were arrested in the summer of 1941. Most of them were sent to Kaunas and released a while later. At least six of the detainees were shot on the spot, on the outskirts of Kruonis.<sup>90</sup> On June 29, 1941 (a Sunday), policemen and “white armbands” herded all the local Jews into the town square, where they taunted and beat them. Squad member Pranas Pūras beat a Jew by the name of Yudel and his elderly mother. Jonas Arlauskas broke into Kurgan’s apartment with a pistol and drove the entire Jewish family out into the square. Kurgan’s family was brutally beaten. Then “white armbands” harnessed Kurgan to a cat and forced him to transport a load of firewood to the market square. Other Jews were ordered to roll logs from one place to another. Sunday night, “white armbands” shot the Jewish families of Chackel and

Picshter. Later, Jews were constantly forced to do various forms of physical labor by local “white armbands,” who often beat them as well.<sup>91</sup>

As per the order regarding the arrest of Jews issued by Police Department Director Vytautas Reivytis on August 16, 1941, all of the Jewish men in Kruonis Township (a total of 87 individuals) were moved in the second half of August to the ghetto that had been established in the village of Darsūniškis. Kruonis did not have its own ghetto. In late August, 25 Jewish women were shot in the Gojus woods (3 kilometers from Kruonis).<sup>92</sup> They were probably shot by “white armbands” from the town of Kruonis. The remaining Kruonis Jews were killed in Darsūniškis between August 28 and September 2, 1941. According to the Jäger Report, 99 Jews were shot there: 10 men, 69 women, and 20 children.<sup>93</sup> The circumstances of these murders are not known to the author.

Prior to the shooting, the Jews were ordered to pay monetary contributions. The township administration collected 8,000 rubles from them.<sup>94</sup> Some of the property of the Jews who had been murdered was stolen by local “white armbands.”<sup>95</sup>

## **Pakuonis**

In mid-July 1941, Juozas Stankevičius, who had come from Kaunas, was appointed chief of the Pakuonis Township police. Somewhere around the end of July or the beginning of August, he received an order from Kęstutis Renigeris, the chief of the Kaunas City police, to arrest all the Jews in the township. Stankevičius responded that he did not have enough police to arrest all of the Jews. Renigeris told him to arrest as many as he could. The Pakuonis police arrested 14 Jews. Those arrested were taken to the Garliava Ghetto (where they were probably later killed along with the Garliava Jews). Stankevičius tried to maintain order and curb violent antisemitism. He brought a criminal case against a “white armband” named Žekas for beating Jews and looting their property. As a result, Stankevičius was transferred to Jonava.<sup>96</sup> As part of the campaign to arrest Jews, they were also registered. According to August 11, 1941 data, there were 45 Jews living in Pakuonis Township.<sup>97</sup> Soon after, roughly a dozen Pakuonis Jews were sent to the Garliava Ghetto. The Pakuonis Jews were also ordered to pay monetary contributions. On August 23, 22 Pakuonis Jews paid 3,000 rubles.<sup>98</sup> The author did not manage to find any information about the fate of the last of the Pakuonis Jews. It is likely that they were killed between August 28 and September 4 1941, like most other Jews from the townships in Kaunas County.



## Rumšiškės

Before World War I, there were roughly 100 Jewish families living in Rumšiškės. In 1915, the czarist government deported all local Jews to Russia. After the war, some of them returned to their hometown. During the interwar period, there were around 50 Jewish families living in Rumšiškės. The local Jewish community was engaged in trade and crafts, and had a house of worship, a Hebrew school, and charity organizations.<sup>99</sup>

In the first week of the Nazi–Soviet war, a squad of about 30 “partisans” (“white armbands”) was formed in Rumšiškės. The squad was organized by rifleman Kazys Žydavičius, reserve Jr. Lt. Leonas Šimaitis, and reserve Lt. Kazys Medzevičius. As early as June 26, 1941 the so-called “partisans” began arresting former communists, supporters of the Soviet government, and Jews who sympathized with the Soviets. The squad members also detained small groups of Red Army soldiers and Jews who were retreating from Kaunas toward Vilnius. The Red Army soldiers who were arrested were turned over to units of the German Army.<sup>100</sup> The Jews who were arrested were often robbed by the “partisans.” In August, local “white armbands” arrested almost all of the town’s Jews and locked them up in the Rumšiškės synagogue. Only the family of the town pharmacist was left to live in freedom. Young Jewish men as well as the people who had been arrested after attempting to flee were taken to Kaunas. Jewish women, children, and the elderly were left in the Rumšiškės synagogue. They were used for various types of physical labor.<sup>101</sup>

On August 19, 1941, the chief of the Rumšiškės police station informed the Police Department director about the Jewish situation in the town of Rumšiškės: “There were 140 individuals of Jewish ethnicity in the town of Rumšiškės – men, women, and children. They were placed in one area and are under police supervision.

On August 15, 1941, after the arrival of German units and our own army units under the command of Expedition Commander Lieutenant Skaržinskas, all individuals of Jewish ethnicity between the ages of 15 and 70 who stood out under the Bolsheviks for their pro-communist activities and who are dangerous to the present administration, public order, and peace, have been removed from Rumšiškės. About 70 persons were taken away and 70 were left, who are just children and the elderly. The ones who are left have been rounded up and housed together in one area, where they are under supervision.”<sup>102</sup>

Before being shot, 78 of the town’s Jews were ordered to pay 8,000 rubles in contributions. The Jews paid this on August 23, 1941. The money was held at the township municipality cashier’s office.<sup>103</sup>

The Jews left in Rumšiškės were also killed soon thereafter. They were shot by soldiers of a Lithuanian self-defense unit (probably the 3rd Company of the 1st Battalion) that

came in from Kaunas. The Jews were shot at the edge of the Rumšiškės pine forest, not far from the old Rumšiškės–Pievelės road. The family of the town pharmacist was among those killed. The last of the Rumšiškės Jews (70–80 people) were shot on August 29, 1941.<sup>104</sup>

The property of the Jews who were arrested and murdered was sold off at auctions. The auctions were held in Rumšiškės on August 19, 25, and 26 and September 20. The sale of the Jewish property brought in 30,123 rubles, and another 8,000 rubles were collected from contributions.<sup>105</sup>

### **Seredžius**

In the mid-19th century, Seredžius had a large Jewish community (1,090 people in 1847). According to the census of 1897, the town had 1,174 Jewish residents; in 1914, this number was 800 (90% of the town's population). The number of Jews in Seredžius began to decrease in the late 19th century due to emigration to the United States and South Africa. In 1915, the czarist government deported Jews to Russia, but after the war, most of them returned to their hometown. The majority of the Jews in the town were engaged in trade, crafts, and agriculture. The Jews also had a small liqueur factory. In 1924, the Seredžius Jewish People's Bank had 143 members. During the years of Lithuania's independence, the local Jewish community had a synagogue, two cheders, a Hebrew-language school, a library, branches of various Jewish political parties and charity organizations, and the Maccabi Sports Club.<sup>106</sup>

On August 12, 1941, there were 112 Jewish families (356 people) living in Seredžius Township.<sup>107</sup> During the campaign for arresting and concentrating Jews in mid-August, 62 Jewish women and 14 Jewish men were taken from Seredžius to the Vilkija Ghetto (and were probably killed in Vilkija on August 28, 1941).<sup>108</sup> Before being killed, the Seredžius Jews were ordered to pay a contribution. 188 Seredžius Township Jews paid 18,800 rubles.<sup>109</sup> According to the Jäger Report, the Seredžius Jews were murdered on September 4, 1941. That same day, 193 people were shot near Skrebėnai Village (2 kilometers from Seredžius): 6 men, 61 women, and 126 children.<sup>110</sup> The author does not have more information about the circumstances of this tragedy.

### **Veliuona**

Before World War I, there were roughly 100 Jewish families living in Veliuona. During the war, the czarist government deported the local Jews to Russia. Some Jews

returned after the war. In 1921, there were 258 Jews living in Veliuona; before the Nazi-Soviet war there were approximately 400. Like in other Lithuanian towns, most of the Jews were engaged in small business and crafts, while others had gardens and transported goods on the Nemunas River. At the end of the 19th century, a school for rabbis (yeshiva) was founded in Veliuona. There were also two synagogues and a Yiddish-language school.<sup>111</sup>

The German Army occupied Veliuona Township on the first day of the war. Soon, local government bodies were formed in Veliuona – the Provisional Committee, a police station, and a squad of “partisans” (“white armbands”). Kazys Ramonas, who came from Kaunas, became the first chief of the township police station, while Juozas Milius became the commander of the “partisan” squad. The police station and the “partisan” squad had their headquarters in the former Veliuona police building.<sup>112</sup>

In the very first days of the German occupation, local police and “partisans” began arresting the communists, Soviet activists, and Red Army soldiers who were still there. A total of 55–60 people were arrested in all, including several Jewish men. Most of the detainees were interrogated and released; others were convoyed to Kaunas by “white armbands” and handed over to the security police (15–20 people in total).<sup>113</sup>

In early July 1941, the heads of the Veliuona Township administration changed. Officials from the Smetona era returned to their former positions. Benadas Cvirka became the mayor of the township (a position he held from 1934 to 1940), and Kazys Tautkus came in from Kaunas to take over the position of chief of the township police station. The “partisan” squad (“white armbands”) grew to 60 people. Somewhere around mid-September 1941, this squad was disbanded, and its commander, Juozas Milius, left Veliuona to live elsewhere.<sup>114</sup>

The persecution of the Veliuona Jews began in July 1941. At the beginning of the month, the occupying authorities ordered Kazys Tautkus, the township police station chief, and Benadas Cvirka, the mayor of the municipality, to mark the Jewish houses within the borders of the township. Jewish houses were marked with the inscription “Jude.” Jews were forbidden to walk on the sidewalks or go outside during prohibited hours, and were forced to do community service (digging ditches, sweeping streets, etc.). The registration and confiscation of Jewish property began shortly thereafter.<sup>115</sup>

The first Veliuona Jews were shot in the beginning of July in the town’s Jewish cemetery by order of Juozas Milius, the commander of the “partisan” squad. Three Jews were shot, but one managed to escape (he was from Jurbarkas, i.e. not a local). These Jews were shot for being Soviet activists.<sup>116</sup>

The second shooting of Veliuona Jews took place around July 20, 1941 by the Gystus stream, in the nearby pine forest. This time, a squad of about 15 armed men came in a truck from Seredžius to Veliuona. They had a list compiled by the security police and

ordered the township mayor and police chief to give them the Jews on the list. A total of 40–50 middle-aged Jewish men were arrested and imprisoned in the synagogue. The next day, they were shot in the pine forest by the Gystus stream (1.5 kilometers from Veliuona).

Thus, 50–60 Jewish men were shot during two killing campaigns that were carried out in Veliuona in July.<sup>117</sup> They were shot by locals and “white armbands” who came in from Seredžius.

In mid-August 1941, a campaign began for arresting and concentrating Jews throughout Kaunas County, thus launching preparations for the systematic extermination of Jews. In the beginning of August, four Gestapo officials arrived in Veliuona and ordered the township mayor and police chief to arrest all of the Jews living in the township and send them to the ghetto being established in Vilkija. The mayor instructed the “white armbands” to compile a list of Jews to be taken to Vilkija. Local “white armbands” locked the arrested Jews in the town’s synagogue.<sup>118</sup> On August 9, 1941, the Veliuona Township mayor reported to the Kaunas County governor that there were 237 Jews living in Veliuona Township at that time.<sup>119</sup>

The Veliuona Jews were taken to the Vilkija Ghetto in several stages. According to the testimony of former Veliuona post office employee J. Sabaliauskas, about 60 Jewish women and children were taken to Vilkija in the beginning of August, then about 100 in the end of August, and about 200 in the beginning of September. According to other witnesses, about 150 women and children were moved to Vilkija in early September 1941. According to the 1945 data of the Extraordinary State Commission, 74 Jewish families – 271 people – were taken from Veliuona in the direction of Kaunas.<sup>120</sup> The Jews taken from Veliuona to Vilkija were shot together with the Vilkija Ghetto Jews in August and September 1941. Before being shot, the Veliuona Jews were also ordered to pay a contribution. On August 22, 16,000 rubles were collected from 160 local Jews (as previously mentioned, on August 9, there were 237 Jews in Veliuona) and deposited at the municipality cashier’s office.<sup>121</sup>

According to the Jäger Report, 159 Veliuona Jews were shot on September 4, 1941: 2 men, 71 women, and 86 children. According to historian Alfredas Rukšėnas, this does not mean that they were actually killed in Veliuona. In his opinion, this date probably referred to when they were moved to and shot in Vilkija. After September 4, 1941, there were no Jews left in Veliuona.<sup>122</sup>

The arrests and shootings of the Jews were accompanied by the confiscation and sale of their property. Their more valuable possessions were inventoried and their homes were sealed. The Veliuona Township mayor put together eight commissions to appraise and sell the Jewish property left behind. Jewish property was sold off at auctions, with one auction held on September 18, 1941 for the town’s poor, another on September 19 for “partisans” (“white armbands”) and civil servants, and two more

on September 20 and 22 for farmers in the township. Roughly 200,000 rubles were collected from the sale of Jewish property.<sup>123</sup>

## Vilkija

The Vilkija Jewish community was established in the late 19th century. In 1915, the czarist government deported Jews to Russia. In 1921, there were about 800 Jews living in Vilkija (80% of the town's population). The number of Jews declined during the interwar period. Right before the Nazi–Soviet war, Vilkija only had about 400 Jews (48% of the town's population). The most important source of income for local Jews was trade (they even traded actively with East Prussia). During the years of Lithuania's independence, the local Jewish community had two synagogues, a Hebrew-language school, and various branches of Jewish political, charity, and sports organizations. In the last years of independence, a significant part of the local Jewish youth moved to Kaunas or emigrated to Palestine.<sup>124</sup>

In late June, after the Germans occupied Lithuania, a German commandant's headquarters was established in Vilkija under the command of SS-Obersturmführer Missenbaum. A “partisans” squad (“white armbands”) was formed under the commandant's headquarters with judicial officer Stasys Gudavicius at the helm. The squad had various guard post assignments, and arrested communists, Soviet activists, small groups of Red Army soldiers who were in hiding, and so on. It was later used to arrest and shoot Jews.<sup>125</sup>

On July 7–8, 1941, by order of Commandant Missenbaum, the Vilkija “white armbands” arrested 150–200 Jewish men. The majority of the detainees were taken to Kaunas, but 21 Jews were shot not far from Vilkija, near Jagminiškiai Village.<sup>126</sup> The Vilkija squad was also sent to other townships in Kaunas County to arrest and shoot Jews.

The full-scale terrorization of Jews began in August 1941. Vilkija became one of the most important Jewish round-up centers in Kaunas County. Jews from other counties were also moved to the Vilkija Ghetto. By mid-August, there were 603 Jews living in Vilkija Township.<sup>127</sup>

On August 18, 1941, the chief of the Vilkija Township police station informed Police Department Director Vytautas Reivytis that 138 Jews had been gathered from Čekiškė, Lekėčiai, Seredžius, Veliuona, and Vilkija: 23 men and 115 women.<sup>128</sup> Some of the Jews who were being detained in Vilkija were taken to Kaunas and later shot in the Kaunas forts. According to the Vilkija police station chief's letter to Reivytis, 280 men and 120 women had been removed from Vilkija.<sup>129</sup>

Before being shot, the Vilkija Jews were ordered to pay a contribution. A total of 21,400 rubles were collected from the 222 local Jews who were in Vilkija at that time.<sup>130</sup> In addition to the local Jews, 119 Jews from other townships were still being held in the Vilkija Ghetto at the end of August 1941.<sup>131</sup>

The massacre of the Jews who were being held in the Vilkija Ghetto took place on August 28, 1941. According to the Jäger Report, 402 people were shot that day: 76 men, 192 women, and 134 children.<sup>132</sup> On the day of the massacre, 25–30 (according to other data – around 40) soldiers from the 1st Police Battalion came to Vilkija in two trucks, under the command of Lt. Juozas Barzda and CSM Zigmas Arlauskas. Several German officers and soldiers were waiting for them in the town. The Jews were being guarded in the synagogue. They were lined up in a column and herded to the site of the massacre in Pakarklė Forest (about 2 kilometers from Vilkija), near Jaukaičiai Village. Some of the local “white armbands” surrounded the site, while others led the Jews to the pit in groups. The condemned were shot by the soldiers from the 3rd Company of the 1st Battalion who had come from Kaunas. Before and during the shooting, Arlauskas plied the soldiers with vodka. After the massacre, the company returned to Kaunas.<sup>133</sup>

## Zapyškis

Before World War II, there were roughly 50 Jewish families living in Zapyškis.<sup>134</sup> In the first days of the Nazi–Soviet war, a squad of Lithuanian “partisans” (“white armbands”) began operations in the vicinity of Zapyškis, under the command of teacher Kostas Barkauskas. On June 23, 1941, the “partisans” arrested a group of Soviet officials on their way to Kaunas. The detainees were taken to the partisan headquarters in the Kačerginė forestry district, and then to a forest near Kačerginė, where they were guarded in a ditch. In the evening, a Red Army unit arrived in Kačerginė; when the “partisans” found out about this, they ran off. The Soviet officials took advantage of the commotion and freed themselves.<sup>135</sup> There were 40 men in the Kačerginė “partisan” squad.<sup>136</sup>

When the Germans occupied Zapyškis Township, the arrests of communists and Soviet officials continued. In early July 1941, “white armbands” attached a portrait of Stalin to the back of a Lithuanian woman who had been arrested and told her to walk around among a group of Jews who had been driven into the street. They were forced to kiss Stalin’s portrait.<sup>137</sup>

In mid-August 1941, as per Police Department Director Vytautas Reivytiš’s circular regarding the concentration of Jews, 67 Jews were put in the Zapyškis lock-up: 29 from Zapyškis, 2 from Jankai, and 36 from Paežerėliai.<sup>138</sup> There are reports that

about 40 Jewish men were shot next to Dievogala Village (1 kilometer southeast of the town of Zapyškis) in late summer 1941.<sup>139</sup> On August 13, 1941, Zapyškis Township Mayor Andrius Jankūnas informed the Kaunas County Board that there were 141 Jews living in Zapyškis Township. He also sent a list of Zapyškis Jews who owed money to the government or other institutions (banks, cooperatives, etc.). The total amount due was 6,066.31 rubles.<sup>140</sup>

Like the Jews from the other townships in Kaunas County, the Zapyškis Jews were ordered to pay a contribution. By August 23, 1941, they paid 18,000 rubles (contributions were paid by 178 Jews).<sup>141</sup> The Zapyškis Jews were shot on September 4, 1941, on the western edge of the town. According to witness testimony, armed men came in from Kaunas on a truck (probably soldiers from the infamous 3rd Company of the TDA Battalion). Together with “white armbands,” they herded the Jews to the shooting site. There were also several Germans with cameras at the site. According to the Jäger Report, 178 Jews were shot in Zapyškis: 47 men, 118 women, and 13 children.<sup>142</sup> After the shooting, auctions were held to sell off Jewish property (on September 13 and 20, 1941).<sup>143</sup> Some of the Jewish property was taken by local authorities and residents. For example, the Zapyškis police station took one bookcase and one clock, the municipality took one closet, one desk, and six chairs, and so on.<sup>144</sup>

By October 1941, there were no Jews left in Kaunas County. The absolute majority of them were shot, and a very small part (a few hundred people) were taken to the Kaunas Ghetto. In October, the Kaunas County governor informed the Kaunas Gebietskommissar that there were “no Jews left in Kaunas County. The last of the Jews were taken from Jonava to the ghetto in Kaunas – in Vilijampolė.”<sup>145</sup> According to rough estimates (based on Jäger’s December 1, 1941 report), 4,211 Jews were killed in Kaunas County in July–September 1941. This figure more or less corresponds to the number of Jews living in Kaunas County before the Nazi–Soviet war (4,363). It is possible that a few dozen of the Jews mentioned in the Jäger Report managed to escape from the site of the massacre and hide in the homes of villagers. The majority of the Jews in Kaunas County were shot by the 3rd Company of the TDA Battalion; others were killed by local “white armbands” and policemen.

Once the massacres ended, the issue of Jewish property was addressed. It seemed to the German occupation authorities that the “white armbands,” policemen, and other people who participated in the massacre of Jews had stolen too much Jewish property. As a result, Kaunas Region Gebietskommissar Arnold Lentzen ordered the Kaunas County governor to gather information on “how much jewelry and money the Kaunas County officials who carried out the job of liquidating Jews have accepted.” On September 5, 1941, the Kaunas County governor sent a letter to Juozas Dženkaitis, the chief of the Kaunas County and City Police, regarding Jewish property. In it, he wrote: “If the station chiefs and you personally have had the said type of property or money, information about it must be provided as well as evidence regarding its use.”<sup>146</sup>

Jewish property was auctioned off in September 1941. The Kaunas Gebietskommissar permitted Jewish household items to be auctioned off to residents. The German commissar reminded the Lithuanian administration that “all Jewish property is now considered the property of the Reich.” It was forbidden to sell items made of precious metal (gold, platinum, silver), art treasures, well-preserved carpets, and consumer goods made of silver, lead, or brass. These items had to be registered separately and reported to the Gebietskommissar. The money collected from the sales had to be deposited in a special savings account belonging to the county governor. The Gebietskommissar ordered the county governor to inform him regarding the amounts of money collected from Jewish contributions, expropriations, and other revenues of a similar nature.<sup>147</sup>

Top Nazi officials did not shy away from the property of the murdered Jews either. In autumn 1941, General Commissioner of Generalbezirk Litauen Adrian von Renteln visited Kulautuva and ordered the director of the resort to repair a former Jewish villa and reserve it for him.<sup>148</sup>

On September 16, 1941, the Kaunas County governor informed all of the township mayors that the buildings in the towns that used to belong to Jews must first be given to government administration offices, and then to businesspeople, craftspeople, and other residents.<sup>149</sup>

On September 27, 1941, the Kaunas County governor, by order of the Gebietskommissar, instructed the mayors to publish an announcement that any individual or institution that has acquired or seized Jewish property must register it with the township municipality. The lists of registered property were to be submitted by October 20, 1941. Failure to register would entail a monetary fine of up to 10,000 rubles or up to one year in a forced labor camp.<sup>150</sup>

Pursuant to the county governor’s order, the Jewish property that had been acquired or seized after June 21, 1941 was to be registered in the townships. Correspondence regarding Jewish property continued in 1942 as well. On July 29, 1942, the Kaunas Gebietskommissar issued an order regarding the seizure, management, and use of Jewish property. The county governors were entrusted with the management of Jewish property. Property left without an owner was equated with Jewish property. All private individuals, institutions, and companies that had not legally purchased Jewish property were obliged to immediately register Jewish real estate at the county governor’s office. A separate procedure was provided for military institutions. Police bodies (German and Lithuanian) had to register Jewish property at the regional police chief’s office in Kaunas (at 27 Donelaičio Street). It was prohibited to sell former Jewish property that had been registered. This could only be permitted in special cases (though in which, it was not specified).<sup>151</sup> The author was unable to find any information in the archives on how these requirements were further implemented.



## Conclusions

Based on the research presented above, the process of persecution and extermination of Jews in the provinces can be roughly divided into two stages.

The first stage was from the end of June to mid-July 1941. During this period, political motives of persecution prevailed. Jews were usually arrested, imprisoned, and shot for being former communists, Komsomol members, Soviet officials, or supporters of the Soviet government. Lithuanians, Russians, Poles and others Gentiles were also persecuted for the same reasons. During this stage, it was mostly Jewish men who were terrorized. There were still no mass shootings of women or children. The persecution of Jews was done at the initiative of the German occupation authorities (military commanders, Einsatzkommandos under the SiPo and the SD, and later – Gebietskommissars). It was also Nazi institutions that directed the persecution and killing of Jews. From the very beginning of the Nazi occupation, the Lithuanian administration (county governors, city mayors), the Lithuanian police, and the so-called “partisan” squads (“white armbands”) were involved in this process.

The second stage was from late July to November 1941. This was the period of racial genocide. Jews were persecuted not for political reasons, but because they were Jews. During this stage, almost all of the Jews in the provinces of Lithuania were exterminated. The most intensive massacres took place from August to mid-September 1941. Temporary ghettos and internment camps were established even before the mass extermination of Jews in the provinces. This was a period of preparation for the mass killings. This process began in the provinces around the end of July and lasted until mid-August. On August 16, 1941, Police Department Director Vytautas Reivytiš sent Secret Circular No. 3 regarding the arrest and concentration of Jews in specially designated places. This order was executed not only in Kaunas, but also in Alytus, Kėdainiai, Marijampolė, Šakiai, and possibly in other Lithuanian counties as well (we have no information about its execution in the regions of Vilnius and Šiauliai). As per the orders and instructions of the Nazi and Lithuanian officials, all of the Jews in the provinces were driven to ghettos and internment camps. Even before the final liquidation of the ghettos and camps, Jewish men and adolescents were shot in many locations. In the final stage of the extermination of the Jews in the provinces, all the remaining Jews were shot, including women, children, and the elderly. The massacres were usually carried out in forests or fields a few kilometers away from the ghettos and camps. The main perpetrators of the massacres of the Jews in the provinces were SS-Obersturmführer Joachim Hamann's Rollkommando (with the TDA Battalion's 3rd Company as its core), local self-defense squads (from Jonava, Kupiškis, Zarasai, etc.), local “partisan” squads (“white armbands”), and Lithuanian policemen. The mass shootings were sometimes directed by Gestapo officers, but there were many

provincial towns where Jews were exterminated without the direct involvement of German officials. The victims were usually brought to the scene of the massacre by local policemen and “white armbands,” who also guarded the site during the massacre and often participated in the shooting as well. The last Jewish massacres in the provinces took place in Lazdijai (November 3, 1941) and Vilkaviškis (November 15, 1941). By mid-November 1941, almost all the Jews of the province were effectively exterminated. Only a small fraction of the Jews escaped or were rescued by locals (probably no more than 3–5%).

Jewish property was officially considered the property of the Third Reich. Part of the more valuable Jewish property (furniture, gold jewelry) was taken by German institutions, part was stolen by the murderers themselves, and the rest (clothes, small household items) was sold for a symbolic price or given free of charge to local residents.

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<sup>3</sup> *Lietuvos žydų žudynių byla: Dokumentų ir straipsnių rinkinys* [The Case of the Massacre of the Lithuanian Jews: Document Collection], compiled by A. Eidintas, Vilnius, 2001.

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<sup>6</sup> Lietuvos gyventojų tautinė sudėtis Statistikos valdybos 1941 m. sausio 1 d. duomenimis [January 1, 1941 Statistics Bureau data on the ethnic composition of the Lithuanian population], LCSA, f. R-743, ap. 5, b. 46, p. 172.

<sup>7</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Vol. 2, p. 131.

<sup>8</sup> As cited in: *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Vol. 1, p. 138.

<sup>9</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Vol. 2, p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> Kauno apskrities viršininco 1941 m. rugpjūčio 6 d. raštas visiems valsčių viršaičiams ir Kauno apskrities mokesčių inspektoriumi [Kaunas County governor’s August 6, 1941 letter to all township mayors and the Kaunas County tax inspector], LCSA, f. R-1534, ap. 1, b. 193, p. 39.

<sup>11</sup> Kauno apskrities žydų nacionalizuoto ir nenacionalizuoto nejudamo turto sąrašas

- [*List of nationalized and nationalized immovable property of Kaunas County Jews*], *ibid.*, b. 191, p. 691.
- <sup>12</sup> Kauno apskrities viršininko raštas visiems valsčių viršaičiams [*Kaunas County governor's letter to all township mayors*], *ibid.*, p. 200.
- <sup>13</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Vol. 1, pp. 290, 291.
- <sup>14</sup> Policijos departamento 1941 m. rugpjūčio 16 d. slaptas aplinkraštis Nr. 3 [*Secret Circular No. 3 issued by the Police Department on August 16, 1941*], LCSA, f. R-683, ap. 2, b. 2, p. 1.
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- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*
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- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.
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- <sup>28</sup> Kauno apskrities viršininko 1941 m. lapkričio 5 d. raštas Kauno apygardos komisariui [*Kaunas County governor's November 5, 1941 letter to the Kaunas Gebietskommissar*], LCSA, f. R-1534, ap. 1, b. 191, p. 172.
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- <sup>69</sup> Karo tribunolo 1944 m. lapkričio 24–25 d. teismo posėdžio išrašas, p. 96.
- <sup>70</sup> Kauno apygardos komisaro 1941 m. rugpjūčio 22 d. raštas Kauno apskrities viršininkui [*Kaunas Gebietskommissar's August 22, 1941 letter to the Kaunas County governor*], LCSA, f. R-1534, ap. 1, b. 186, p. 5.
- <sup>71</sup> Kauno apskrities viršininko raštas Nr. 973, p. 8.
- <sup>72</sup> Čekiškės valsčiaus viršaičio raštas Kauno apskrities viršininkui [*Čekiškė Township mayor's letter to the Kaunas County governor*], *ibid.*, p. 31.
- <sup>73</sup> A. Rukšėnas, “Veliuonos valsčiaus žydų genocidas 1941 m.”, op. cit., pp. 268, 269.
- <sup>74</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Vol. 1, p. 134.
- <sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>76</sup> Čekiškės valsčiaus viršaičio pranešimas Kauno apskrities viršininkui [*Čekiškė Township mayor's report to the Kaunas County governor*], LCSA, f. R-1534, ap. 1, b. 190, p. 14.
- <sup>77</sup> Kauno apygardos komisaro 1941 m. rugsėjo 5 d. raštas Kauno apskrities viršininkui [*Kaunas Gebietskommissar's September 5, 1941 letter to the Kaunas County governor*], *ibid.*, p. 85.
- <sup>78</sup> Karo tribunolo 1944 m. lapkričio 24–25 d. teismo posėdžio išrašas, p. 96.
- <sup>79</sup> N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, op. cit., p. 107.

- <sup>80</sup> 1941 m. *Birželio sukilimas*, p. 75.
- <sup>81</sup> Garliavos valsčiaus viršaičio 1941 m. rugpjūčio 12 d. pranešimas Kauno apskrities viršininkui [*Garliava Township mayor's August 12, 1941 report to the Kaunas County governor*], LCSA, f. R-1534, ap. 1, b. 193, p. 17.
- <sup>82</sup> Garliavos valsčiaus viršaičio 1941 m. rugpjūčio 25 d. raštas Kauno apskrities viršininkui [*Garliava Township mayor's August 25, 1941 letter to the Kaunas County governor*], *ibid.*, b. 190, p. 14.
- <sup>83</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Vol. 1, p. 134.
- <sup>84</sup> J. Ivanausko 1962 m. kovo 20 d. apklausos protokolas [*J. Ivanauskas's March 20, 1962 interrogation protocol*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 47337/3, Vol. 8, pp. 25–28.
- <sup>85</sup> J. Vosylius 1961 m. balandžio 10 d. tardymo protokolas [*J. Vosylius's April 10, 1961 investigation protocol*], *ibid.*, Vol. 1, pp. 36–38.
- <sup>86</sup> J. Palubinsko 1961 m. spalio 12 d. apklausos protokolas [*J. Palubinskas's October 12, 1961 interrogation protocol*], *ibid.*, pp. 310–315; *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Vol. 1, p. 134.
- <sup>87</sup> Kruonio valsčiaus viršaičio 1941 m. rugpjūčio 13 d. raštas Kauno apskrities viršininkui [*Kruonis Township mayor's August 13, 1941 letter to the Kaunas County governor*], LCSA, f. R-1534, ap. 1, b. 193, p. 19.
- <sup>88</sup> 1941 m. *Birželio sukilimas*, pp. 73, 75.
- <sup>89</sup> LSSR KGB 1959 m. balandžio 9 d. pažyma apie Kruonio 1941 m. sukilėlių būrį [*LSSR KGB April 9, 1959 certificate about the Kruonis 1941 rebel group*], LSA, f. 3377, ap. 55, b. 149, pp. 164, 165.
- <sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 165, 167.
- <sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.
- <sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167; *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Vol. 2, p. 392; Kauno apskrities viršininko raštas Kauno apygardos komisarui apie 1941 m. rugpjūčio 28 d. apskrityje užregistruotų žydų skaičių [*Kaunas County governor's letter to the Kaunas Gebietskommissar about the number of Jews registered in the county on August 28, 1941*], LCSA, f. 1534, ap. 1, b. 186, p. 33.
- <sup>93</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Vol. 1, p. 134.
- <sup>94</sup> Kruonio valsčiaus viršaičio pranešimas Kauno apskrities viršininkui (be datos) [*Kruonis Township mayor's report to the Kaunas County governor (undated)*], LCSA, f. R-1534, ap. 1, b. 190, p. 4.
- <sup>95</sup> LSSR KGB 1959 m. balandžio 9 d. pažyma apie Kruonio 1941 m. sukilėlių būrį, p. 167.
- <sup>96</sup> J. Stankevičiaus 1954 m. rugsėjo 28 d. tardymo protokolo išrašas, p. 156.
- <sup>97</sup> Pakuonio valsčiaus viršaičio 1941 m. rugpjūčio 11 d. raštas Kauno apskrities viršininkui [*Pakuonis Township mayor's August 11, 1941 letter to the Kaunas County governor*], LCSA, f. R-1534, ap. 1, b. 193, p. 45.
- <sup>98</sup> Pakuonio valsčiaus viršaičio 1941 m. rugpjūčio 23 d. raštas Kauno apskrities viršininkui [*Pakuonis Township mayor's August 23, 1941 letter to the Kaunas County governor*], *ibid.*, b. 190, p. 11.
- <sup>99</sup> N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, op. cit., p. 257.
- <sup>100</sup> 1941 m. *Birželio sukilimas*, pp. 84, 85.
- <sup>101</sup> M. Virbicko 1967 m. birželio 14 d. tardymo protokolas [*M. Verbickis's June 14, 1967 investigation protocol*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 47533/3, Vol. 1, pp. 53, 54.
- <sup>102</sup> Rumšiškių policijos nuovados viršininko 1941 m. rugpjūčio 19 d. raportas Policijos departamento direktoriui [*Rumšiškės police station chief's August 19, 1941 report to the Police Department director*], LCSA, f. R-683, ap. 2, b. 2, p. 63.
- <sup>103</sup> Rumšiškių valsčiaus viršaičio 1941 m. rugpjūčio 25 d. raštas Kauno apskrities viršininkui [*Rumšiškės Township mayor's August 25, 1941 letter to the Kaunas County governor*], *ibid.*, f. R-1534, ap. 1, b. 190, p. 3.
- <sup>104</sup> I. Šimkūno 1967 m. birželio 1 d. apklausos protokolas [*I. Šimkūnas's June 1, 1967 interrogation protocol*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 47533/3, Vol. 1, p. 393.
- <sup>105</sup> Rumšiškių valsčiaus viršaičio 1941 m. rugpjūčio 25 d. raštas Kauno apskrities viršininkui, p. 32.
- <sup>106</sup> N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, op. cit., pp. 296, 297.
- <sup>107</sup> Seredžiaus valsčiaus viršaičio 1941 m. rugpjūčio 12 d. raštas Kauno apskrities viršininkui [*Seredžius Township mayor's August 12, 1941 letter to the Kaunas County governor*], LCSA, f. R-1534, ap. 1, b. 193, p. 22.
- <sup>108</sup> Policijos nuovadų viršininkų raportai Policijos departamentui, pp. 20–89.
- <sup>109</sup> Seredžiaus valsčiaus viršaičio raštas Kauno

apskrities viršininkui (be datos) [*Seredžius Township mayor's letter to the Kaunas County governor (undated)*], *ibid.*, f. R-1534, ap. 1, b. 190, p. 9.

<sup>110</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Vol. 1, p. 134, Vol. 2, p. 393.

<sup>111</sup> N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *op. cit.*, p. 361, 362.

<sup>112</sup> J. Gudelio 1944 m. rugsėjo 1 d., V. Kvietkausko 1944 m. spalio 1 d., J. Sabaliausko 1944 m. spalio 7 d. tardymo protokolai [*J. Gudelis's September 1, 1944 investigation protocol, V. Kvietkauskas's October 1, 1944 investigation protocol, and J. Sabaliauskas's October 7, 1944 investigation protocol*] LSA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 34255/3, pp. 94, 95, 204, 237.

<sup>113</sup> A. Rukšėnas, "Veliuonos valsčius pirmaisiais nacių okupacijos mėnesiais" [*Veliuona Township in the first months of the Nazi occupation*], manuscript, pp. 7, 8, the author has a copy of the manuscript in his personal archive.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>115</sup> A. Rukšėnas, "Veliuonos valsčiaus žydų genocidas 1941 m.", p. 265.

<sup>116</sup> B. Mickūno 1959 m. gruodžio 14 d., J. Danilaičio 1959 m. birželio 16 d. tardymo protokolai [*B. Mickūnas's December 14, 1959 investigation protocol and J. Danilaitis's June 16, 1959 investigation protocol*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 45116/3, Vol. 1, pp. 46, 47, 217–220.

<sup>117</sup> A. Rukšėnas, "Veliuonos valsčiaus žydų genocidas 1941 m.", pp. 265, 266.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268.

<sup>119</sup> Veliuonos valsčiaus viršaičio 1941 m. rugpjūčio 9 d. raštas Kauno apskrities viršininkui [*Veliuona Township mayor's August 9, 1941 letter to the Kaunas County governor*], LCSA, f. R-1534, ap. 1, b. 193, p. 57.

<sup>120</sup> A. Rukšėnas, "Veliuonos valsčiaus žydų genocidas 1941 m.", p. 268.

<sup>121</sup> Veliuonos valsčiaus viršaičio 1941 m. rugpjūčio 25 d. raštas Kauno apskrities viršininkui [*Veliuona Township mayor's August 25, 1941 letter to the Kaunas County governor*], LCSA, f. R-1534, ap. 1, b. 190, p. 2.

<sup>122</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Vol. 1, p. 134; A. Rukšėnas, "Veliuonos valsčiaus žydų genocidas 1941 m.", p. 269.

<sup>123</sup> A. Rukšėnas, "Veliuonos valsčiaus žydų genocidas 1941 m.", p. 270; Veliuonos valsčiaus viršaičio 1941 m. rugsėjo 12 d. raštas Kauno

apskrities viršininkui [*Veliuona Township mayor's September 12, 1941 letter to the Kaunas County governor*], LCSA, f. R-1534, ap. 1, b. 191, p. 383.

<sup>124</sup> N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *op. cit.*, pp. 334, 335.

<sup>125</sup> A. Rukšėnas, "Veliuonos valsčiaus žydų genocidas 1941 m.", p. 268.

<sup>126</sup> S. Gudavičiaus 1944 m. rugpjūčio 7 d. tardymo protokolas [*S. Gudavičius's August 7, 1944 investigation protocol*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 44463/3, p. 9; J. Dailidės 1944 m. spalio 17 d. tardymo protokolas [*J. Dailidė's October 17, 1944 investigation protocol*], *ibid.*, b. 27754/3, pp. 20, 21.

<sup>127</sup> Vilkijos valsčiaus viršaičio raštas Kauno apskrities viršininkui (be datos) [*Vilkija Township mayor's letter to the Kaunas County governor (undated)*], LCSA, f. R-1534, ap. 1, b. 193, p. 25.

<sup>128</sup> Vilkijos valsčiaus policijos nuovados viršininko 1941 m. rugpjūčio 18 d. raštas Nr. 2 Policijos departamento direktoriui V. Reivyčiui [*Vilkija Township police station chief's Letter No. 2 to Police Department Director V. Reivytis*], *ibid.*, f. R-683, ap. 2, b. 2, p. 62.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> Statistiniai duomenys apie 1941 m. rugpjūčio 25 d. Vilkijoje buvusius žydus ir surinktą kontribuciją [*Statistics on the Jews who were living in Vilkija on August 25, 1941 and the contributions collected from them*], *ibid.*, f. R-1534, ap. 1, b. 190, p. 21.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, b. 186, p. 32.

<sup>132</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Vol. 1, p. 134.

<sup>133</sup> P. Zeliionkos 1968 m. gruodžio 8 d. tardymo protokolas [*P. Zeliionka's December 8, 1968 investigation protocol*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 47588/3, Vol. 2, pp. 227, 228; J. Belskio 1944 m. rugsėjo 26 d. tardymo protokolas [*J. Belskis's September 26, 1944 investigation protocol*], *ibid.*, b. 38506/3, p. 16.

<sup>134</sup> N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

<sup>135</sup> V. Bučinsko 1949 m. spalio 31 d. apklausos protokolas [*V. Bučinskas's October 31, 1949 interrogation protocol*], LSA, f. 3377, ap. 55, b. 55, pp. 200, 201.

<sup>136</sup> *1941 m. Birželio sukilimas*, p. 75.

<sup>137</sup> G. Plenaitienės 1947 m. lapkričio 17 d.

apklausos protokolas [G. Plenaitienės *November 17, 1947 interrogation protocol*], LSA, f. 3377, ap. 55, b. 55, p. 202.

<sup>138</sup> Policijos nuovadų viršininkų raportai Policijos departamentui dėl žydų sulaikymo [*Police station chief reports to the Police Department about the arrests of Jews*], LCSA, f. R-683, ap. 2, b. 2, pp. 20–89.

<sup>139</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Vol. 2, p. 394.

<sup>140</sup> Zapyškio valsčiaus viršaičio 1941 m. rugpjūčio 13 d. raštas Kauno apskrities valdybos bendrajam skyriui [*Zapyškis Township mayor's August 13, 1941 letter to the general department of the Kaunas County Board*], LCSA, f. R-1534, ap. 1, b. 193, p. 26.

<sup>141</sup> Zapyškio valsčiaus viršaičio 1941 m. rugpjūčio 23 d. raštas Kauno apskrities viršininkui [*Zapyškis Township mayor's August 23, 1941 letter to the Kaunas County governor*], *ibid.*, b. 190, p. 18.

<sup>142</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Vol. 1, p. 134; G. Plenaitienės 1947 m. lapkričio 17 d. apklausos protokolas, p. 202.

<sup>143</sup> LCSA, f. R-1534, ap. 1, b. 190, pp. 51, 72.

<sup>144</sup> Žinios apie žydų kilnojamąjį turtą, kuris buvo duotas įstaigoms ar asmenims naudotis [*Information on Jewish movable property that was given to institutions or individuals for use*], *ibid.*, b. 188, p. 61.

<sup>145</sup> Kauno apskrities viršininko 1941 m. spalio mėn. raštas Kauno apygardos komisarui

[*Kaunas County governor's October 1941 letter to the Kaunas Gebietskommissar*], *ibid.*, b. 186, pp. 33–41.

<sup>146</sup> Kauno apskrities viršininko 1941 m. rugsėjo 5 d. raštas Kauno miesto ir apskrities policijos vadui [*Kaunas County governor's September 5, 1941 letter to the chief of the Kaunas County and City Police*], *ibid.*, b. 191, p. 264.

<sup>147</sup> Kauno apygardos komisaro 1941 m. rugsėjo 5 d. raštas Kauno apskrities viršininkui, p. 85.

<sup>148</sup> Kauno apskrities viršininko 1941 m. lapkričio 25 d. raštas Kauno apygardos komisarui [*Kaunas County governor's November 25, 1941 letter to the Kaunas Gebietskommissar*], *ibid.*, b. 191, p. 666.

<sup>149</sup> Kauno apskrities viršininko 1941 m. rugsėjo 16 d. raštas valsčių viršaičiams [*Kaunas County governor's September 16, 1941 letter to the township mayors*], *ibid.*, p. 373.

<sup>150</sup> Kauno apskrities viršininko 1941 m. rugsėjo 27 d. raštas valsčių viršaičiams [*Kaunas County governor's September 27, 1941 letter to the township mayors*], *ibid.*, b. 188, p. 1.

<sup>151</sup> Kauno apygardos komisaro 1942 m. liepos 29 d. įsakymas dėl žydų turto paėmimo, valdymo ir naudojimo [*Kaunas Gebietskommissar's July 29, 1942 order regarding the appropriation, management, and usage of Jewish property*], *ibid.*, b. 194, p. 358.





Chapter IV.

# Repressive State Apparatus and the Holocaust





The Vilnius Ghetto.  
Guards checking "yellow permits"

Arūnas Bubnys

## The Lithuanian Security Police and the Holocaust (1941–1944)

Even though dozens of academic books and even more articles have been published in Lithuania about the Nazi occupation and the Holocaust, to this author's knowledge, not a single academic work has been published either in Lithuania or abroad that specifically examines the role of the Lithuanian Security Police (LSP) in the Holocaust. A special study of this aspect of the LSP's activities is required in order to eliminate this historiographical gap. Both during the Soviet era and after the restoration of Lithuania's independence (in 1990), several works have been published in Lithuania that partially reflect the activities of the LSP during the Nazi occupation. Of those written during the Soviet era, the document collections *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje 1941–1944* ("Mass Killings in Lithuania 1941–1944"; Vol. 1 and 2) and *Hitleriniai žudikai Kretingoje* ("Hitler Murderers in Kretinga") should be mentioned first.<sup>1</sup> Volume I of the first collection (*Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje 1941–1944*) also contains qualified commentary summarizing the structure and functions of the various types of Lithuanian police (including the security police). The second collection (*Hitleriniai žudikai Kretingoje*) provides a detailed reflection of the activities of Pranas Jakys, the former chief of the Kretinga Region LSP, and his officers in persecuting communists, Soviet activists, and Jews. Journalist Vytautas Žeimantas, who has authored many articles about Nazi war criminals, did not forget some former LSP employees living in the West either. In his book entitled *Procesas nesibaigia* ("The Process Does Not End"), he includes character sketches of Stasys Čenkus, the former director of the Lithuanian Security Police, and Mečys Paškevičius (later known as Mike Pasker), a former officer with the Ukmergė Region LSP.<sup>2</sup>

The activities of the Lithuanian Security Police are also fragmentarily reflected in some works about the Nazi occupation published in Lithuania after 1990.<sup>3</sup> However, these focus primarily on its organizational structure and functions, rather than on its role in the Holocaust. However, we cannot agree with Petras Stankeras's perfunctory statement that the involvement of the Lithuanian Security Police in the Holocaust

is merely an insinuation of Soviet historians.<sup>4</sup> Authentic surviving documents from the period of the Nazi occupation confirm that the Lithuanian Security Police were indeed involved in the persecution and extermination of Jews.

To the best of this author's knowledge, foreign historians have not yet written any special works on the participation of the LSP in the Holocaust.

The issue of the LSP's role in the Holocaust is also significant from a political point of view. After former chiefs of the Vilnius District LSP Aleksandras Lileikis and Kazys Gimžauskas returned to Lithuania from the United States and cases were brought against them for their participation in the Jewish genocide, a rather heated discussion ensued in Lithuania about the activities and culpability of the LSP and these officers. Lileikis himself got involved in these discussions; he gave interviews to Lithuanian newspapers and published a memoir entitled *Pažadinto laiko pėdsakais* ("In the Footsteps of Times Past").<sup>5</sup> In his apologetic memoirs, Lileikis denied any guilt at all and claimed that he actively assisted the Lithuanian anti-Nazi underground, and even ordered his subordinates not to participate in the September 6, 1941 campaign to move Jews to the ghetto.<sup>6</sup> However, the author of this article could not find any archival documents confirming Lileikis's aforementioned claims. On the contrary – the documents preserved in the Lithuanian archives show that Lileikis did in fact participate in the Holocaust. It is therefore imperative for the Lithuanian public and the responsible state institutions to know the whole truth about the activities of the LSP, because the objective understanding and practical treatment of this issue affects Lithuania's international prestige.

The author of this article relied on three groups of sources. The first group of sources consists of authentic documents from institutions that functioned during the Nazi occupation. These are stored in the Lithuanian Central State Archives (LCSA). These archives hold the surviving fonds of various security police institutions and prisons: Chief of the Security Police and SD of the Lithuanian General Region (f. R-1399), Lithuanian Security Police Section under the Commander of the German SiPo and SD in Lithuania (f. R-1216), individual LSP counties: Vilnius (f. R-1673, f. R-681), Kaunas (f. R-972), Šiauliai (f. R-718), Panevėžys (f. R-650, f. R-707), Ukmergė (f. R-970), Marijampolė (f. R-704), some LSP regions (e.g. Vilkaviškis, Šakiai, Tauragė), the Vilnius and Kaunas Hard Labor Prisons (f. R-730, f. R-731). Although these fonds do not contain many documents directly reflecting the massacre of Jews (most of the documents of this nature were destroyed at the end of the Nazi occupation), the surviving documents still make it possible to determine the main characteristics of the LSP's activities, its organizational structure, personnel composition, and number of employees, as well as to identify the categories of persecuted persons. Documents related to the activities of the LSP can also be found in other LCSA fonds.

The second group of sources consists of the documents of the former LSSR KGB archives, which are stored in the Lithuanian Special Archives (LSA). First of mention is the LSA's criminal cases inventory (f. K-1, ap. 58). This contains tens of thousands of cases compiled by Soviet security against people who had been arrested and sentenced. Among them, the author found dozens of cases against former LSP employees (Juozas Grušys, Jonas Ženauskas, Pranas Staskonis, etc.). Starting in the mid-1980s, the LSSR KGB became increasingly interested in Lithuanians who worked in the civil administration and police force during the Nazi occupation and then retreated to Germany at the end of the war, later emigrating elsewhere (to the United States, Canada, Australia, and so on). The KGB supplemented the personal files of suspected Nazi war criminals and collaborators with copies of archival documents from other state archives, as well as transcripts of interviews with the family members and relatives of former LSP co-workers. Some of these KGB files have survived and are now kept in the LSA (f. K-1, ap. 46). Of these, the files of former LSP employees Stasys Čenkus, Aleksandras Lileikis, Mečys Paškevičius, and Vincas Juralevičius are of note. They also contain information about the anti-Jewish activities of LSP officers. Although KGB documents cannot be considered primary sources (since they only appeared after the Nazi occupation as a result of the repressive activities of KGB units), investigating the involvement of the LSP and other categories of police in the Holocaust would be impossible without them. It is worth noting that the KGB documents must be critically evaluated and used with extreme caution (not only because the KGB may have fabricated the detainees' criminal offences, but also because the detainees themselves tried to conceal facts that were unfavorable to them or tried to attribute their actions to others).

The third group of sources consists of recent (post-1990) court cases. The multi-volume criminal cases of Aleksandras Lileikis and Kazys Gimžauskas, which were brought in 1995 and 1997 by the Prosecutor General's Office of the Republic of Lithuania in accordance with the Republic of Lithuania Law on Responsibility for the Genocide of Lithuanian Inhabitants, are very important for the topic under consideration.<sup>7</sup> They contain many valuable documents from both Lithuanian and foreign archives, as well as records of recent (post-1990) interviews with the accused and witnesses. The aforementioned cases are safeguarded in the Vilnius Regional Court archives.

The archival sources described above provide researchers with the opportunity to reconstruct the activities of the LSP during the Nazi occupation, including the aspect of its participation in the Holocaust. Other archival sources and literature used in the article are reflected in the endnotes.

## The organizational structure, tasks, and functions of the LSP

During the Nazi occupation, Lithuania had a rather unwieldy police apparatus that could be divided into German and Lithuanian police. The most important categories of German police were the Sicherheitspolizei (“Security Police”; SiPo) and Sicherheitsdienst (“Security Service”; SD), with their central headquarters in Kaunas and branches in Vilnius, Šiauliai, Panevėžys, and Marijampolė, along with the Ordnungspolizei (“Order Police”; Orpo), which was made up of the Schutzpolizei (“Protective Police”; Schupo) in Kaunas and Vilnius and the county gendarmerie.

The most important categories of Lithuanian police were:

- 1) the public (order) police;
- 2) the Lithuanian security and criminal police;
- 3) the Lithuanian self-defense units (police battalions);
- 4) the railway police;
- 5) the fire protection police.<sup>8</sup>

Lithuanian police units were subordinate to the corresponding German police units (for example, the Lithuanian Security Police was subordinate to the SiPo and the SD). This article examines the activities of other police categories only to the extent that they were related to the LSP in the Holocaust process.

In any country, the objectives and methods of the activities of repressive structures are dictated by the political system in that country. In democratic states, security bodies protect the country’s constitution and the democratic rights and freedoms of its citizens; in totalitarian and authoritarian states, those same special services only protect the dictatorial regime and oppress the citizens of their own country or the residents of their occupied lands. The Nazi occupation regime used local police bodies to achieve its goals in occupied territories. One of the primary goals of Nazism was the annihilation of the Jewish people. Local police bodies were more or less forced to assist the Nazis in executing the genocide of the Jewish people. Of course, this circumstance does not absolve the security officers who were directly or indirectly involved in the Holocaust or give them any kind of legal immunity. A truly paradoxical situation came about in Lithuania. In the independent state of Lithuania, the security bodies persecuted the fascist German parties in Klaipėda Region and protected the Jews of Vilnius from local pogroms in 1939. Just two years later (in 1941), the same security police units and officers were involved in the Holocaust policy being carried out by the Nazis.

The Provisional Government of Lithuania that formed after the start of the Nazi-Soviet war began to restore Lithuanian government institutions, including the State Security Department (SSD). The Provisional Government summoned all officials who had held posts before the June 15, 1940 Soviet occupation to return to their jobs.

The Ministry of the Interior, which was restored on June 24, 1941, consisted of three departments: Security, Police, and Prisons. The State Security Department was also responsible for the Criminal Police. Former security personnel of the Republic of Lithuania who had been released from prisons contributed significantly to the restoration of this department. After the dissolution of the Provisional Government, the SSD was renamed as the Lithuanian Security Police Section under the Commander of the German SiPo and SD in Lithuania. The Lithuanian Security Police had a staff of approximately 400 people (250 of whom were in Kaunas).<sup>9</sup>

The Lithuanian Security Police had its central headquarters (department) in Kaunas. The SSD was initially headed by Vytautas Reivytiš, but after the department was reorganized into the Lithuanian Security and Criminal Police, Stasys Čenkus became the new director. Čenkus had served as chief of the Marijampolė District SSD in 1933–1939, and chief of the Vilnius District SSD in 1939–1940. After the Soviets occupied Lithuania, Čenkus fled to Germany and worked for the Abwehr (the German military-intelligence service). When the war began, Čenkus returned to Lithuania and was appointed director of the Security Department. He held this position until the end of the German occupation.<sup>10</sup> Čenkus's deputies were Kazys Matulis, the head of the Security Police, and his personal secretary, Vytenis Stasiskis. The chief of the Criminal Police was Petras Pamataitis.<sup>11</sup> The LSP consisted of a central headquarters (department) in Kaunas and six district branches in Kaunas, Vilnius, Šiauliai, Panevėžys, Marijampolė, and Ukmergė. The districts were divided into regions. According to 1943 data, the central headquarters in Kaunas consisted of the Organization Directorate and the Information Directorate, with press, information and news gathering units.<sup>12</sup>

The LSP districts all had boards. The district boards typically had seven divisions (commissariats):

- 1) the Guards' Commissariat (which guarded administrative buildings and internal prisons);
- 2) the General Commissariat (which performed financial and economic functions);
- 3) the Information Commissariat (which screened applicants for government institutions, gathered operative information, compiled lists of state enemies, gathered information on political attitudes of the local population, prepared reports, and published bulletins);
- 4) the Communist Commissariat (which tracked the secret activities of communists, Soviet partisans, and the underground, recruited agents, conducted searches, carried out arrests, and questioned detainees);

- 5) the Polish Commissariat (which investigated the activities of illegal Polish organizations, carried out arrests, searches, and questioning, and had an agent network);
- 6) the Commissariat of Ethnic Minorities (which tracked and controlled the activities of Russians, Belarusians, and other ethnic minorities);
- 7) the Reconnaissance Commissariat.<sup>13</sup>

The structure of the individual district boards varied slightly. For example, the Kaunas District Board also had the Right-Wing (IV) Commissariat, which the other district boards did not have.

During the period of the German occupation, the Lithuanian Security Police operated relatively independently, but the final decision on certain issues (German and Jewish) fell exclusively within purview of the SiPo and the SD.

On September 3, 1942, the chief of the German SiPo and SD agreed with Lithuanian Security Police Director Stasys Čenkus that the LSP would investigate cases independently and conclusively. For cases that were not referred to the court, but rather – decided on the spot, the sentence had to be submitted to the chief of the SiPo and SD for approval. This commissariat persecuted former members of political parties of the Republic of Lithuania and national underground organizations established during the Nazi era. In exceptional situations, political cases of particular importance were forwarded to the chief of the SiPo and SD along with the questioning material and stored in Section II F.\* This section continually received information about arrests and releases made by the LSP and gave instructions to prisons and forced labor camps. The Lithuanian Criminal Police were obliged to send analogous information to Department IV of the German SiPo and SD. In turn, the aforementioned SiPo and SD departments had to inform the Lithuanian Security and Criminal Police units about arrests and releases.<sup>14</sup>

The competence of the LSP in the overall system of Lithuanian police bodies was only more differentiated in autumn 1941. On November 18, Lithuanian Security Police Director Stasys Čenkus informed Police Department Director Vytautas Reivytiš that “the Lithuanian public police cannot carry out arrests and searches of a political nature on their own. In the event of an urgent need to perform any of these actions, the relevant Lithuanian security police institution must be informed about it in advance by completing the attached form accurately and submitting it immediately. All records of persons arrested on political grounds or of searches carried out and the data found must be immediately forwarded to the nearest unit of the Lithuanian Security Police.”<sup>15</sup>

\* In 1941–1942, the SiPo and the SD were divided into two sections, and these sections were further divided into subsections (advisories) with letters identifying the type of work.



During the first months of the Nazi occupation, before the competence of the different police bodies was more differentiated, political arrests, questioning, and even shootings were carried out by various police units – the public and auxiliary police, and the so-called “partisan” squads. A stricter system was introduced in autumn 1941. Since the LSP was not a very large structure with an abundance of tiny administrative units (townships), it had to coordinate its activities with other police bodies and employ their assistance (especially the public police). On July 22, 1941, Čenkus went to the director of the Police Department and requested that the public and railway police be instructed to provide the SSD with a brief and clear report on all political, criminal, and other important events on a daily basis.<sup>16</sup>

Since the scope of the article does not allow for a detailed analysis of the activities of all of the LSP districts, we will limit ourselves to an analysis of a few select LSP units. We will examine the activities of the LSP bodies in the major cities of Kaunas and Vilnius, and in the provinces of Kretinga and Alytus. These areas were chosen due to the relatively large number of surviving archival documents and the importance of these security bodies (the Kaunas and Vilnius districts were the largest units in the LSP system).

### **The activities of LSP units during the Holocaust in the major cities and provinces**

**Kaunas.** On the night of June 24, 1941, SS-Brigadeführer Franz Walter Stahlecker, the commander of Einsatzgruppe A (an SS paramilitary death squad), arrived in Kaunas accompanied by Wehrmacht detachments. He was responsible for the destruction of active and potential enemies of the Third Reich (including Jews) in the Baltic States and Northern Russia. Stahlecker and his subordinates started organizing Jewish pogroms in Kaunas, trying to involve as many local residents as possible. In the early morning of June 25, Stahlecker arrived at the premises of the State Security Department that was being re-established (at 67 Vytautas Avenue) and gave a lengthy speech to the Lithuanian security officials gathered there (about 40 people). Richard Schweizer, a German from Kybartai who worked at the SiPo and SD office in Kaunas during the Nazi occupation, accompanied Stahlecker as his translator. Jonas Dainauskas, the former acting head of the reshaping SSD, recounted Stahlecker’s speech in his 1992 article.

Stahlecker spoke at length to Dainauskas about the wrongs done by the Jews to the Lithuanians and urged them to get actively involved in “resolving the Jewish problem” and to isolate the Jews from Lithuanians. Ending the conversation, Stahlecker said that “Lithuanians must understand immediately that it is in their own interest to

remove all Jews from their midst as soon as possible.”<sup>17</sup> Stahlecker’s meeting with Lithuanian security officials was also reflected in his infamous October 15, 1941 report to Heinrich Himmler. This is how Stahlecker describes the activities of his advance detachment (Vorkommando) in Kaunas in the first days of the war:

In addition to the formation of partisan units, the Lithuanian Security and Criminal Police were also formed in the first days. Under the command of senior Lithuanian police officer Denauskas [Dainauskas], 40 former Lithuanian police officers were appointed first, most of whom had been released from prison. In addition, the necessary support forces were brought in after thorough screening. The Lithuanian Security and Criminal Police work according to the instructions and directives given to them by EK [Einsatzkommando – a sub-group of the Einsatzgruppen] 3, and in the course of their activities, they carry out, under tight control, the work that the it [the German SiPo and SD] could not carry out on its own – especially manhunts, arrests, and searches. Likewise, the necessary auxiliary units were established in Vilnius and Šiauliai from the Lithuanian self-defense forces, which had been formed here independently under the name “Lithuanian Security and Criminal Police” Having removed compromised and unsuitable individuals, the Lithuanian Security and Criminal Police, under the constant supervision of EK 3, are operating entirely satisfactorily here as well.<sup>18</sup>

With the help of journalist Algirdas Klimaitis’s alleged partisan squad (in fact, Klimaitis’s squad was not subordinate to either the LAF or the Provisional Government of Lithuania), Stahlecker launched the Jewish pogroms in Kaunas on June 25. In his October 15, 1941 report, Stahlecker described the Jewish massacres that he organized openly and in great detail:

It suddenly became clear that immediately organizing a larger-scale Jewish pogrom was rather difficult. Here we first of all used the above-mentioned partisan commander Klimaitis, who was instructed in this matter by our small advance detachment in Kaunas. Klimaitis managed to make ready for the pogrom in such a way that neither the instructions we gave nor our initiative came to light. During the first pogrom on the night of June 25, Lithuanian partisans massacred more than 1,500 Jews, set fire to or otherwise destroyed several synagogues, and burned down the Jewish quarter, which had about 60 houses. In the following nights, 2,300 Jews were rendered harmless in the same way. Following the example of Kaunas, similar campaigns were carried out in other Lithuanian towns, just on a smaller scale; they also affected the remaining communists in those places.<sup>19</sup>

Although the numbers in the Stahlecker Report of the Jews killed and the houses burned down are perhaps exaggerated, the very fact of the pogroms is indisputable. Whether the Lithuanian Security Police could have contributed to the Jewish pogroms that Stahlecker organized is very difficult to ascertain due to the lack of documents. Stahlecker himself does not note anything about this in his report – he only mentions the so-called “Lithuanian partisans.” On the other hand, his visiting the SSD building on June 25 and urging Lithuanians to become actively involved in “resolving the Jewish problem” means that we cannot rule out the possibility that Lithuanian security forces may have been encouraged to get involved in the organization of pogroms. An indirect witness to this possibility was Zenonas Blynas, one of the most famous Kaunas Voldemarininkai (and later the Secretary General of the Lithuanian Nationalist Party). In his diary entries on those days, he wrote: “I ran into Petras Kliorys. According to him, Jonas Dainauskas, a former security officer who worked for security during the Soviet period, was supposedly continuing a case against some Polish organization, but was also interrogating arrested Lithuanians in Vilnius. It seems that he also arranged those Jewish beatings on the street by the cemetery. They were filmed and photographed. Great material for the Germans.”<sup>20</sup> What Blynas was referring to was the brutal massacre of Jews in the yard of the Lietūkis garage on June 27, 1941, when criminals armed with crowbars murdered dozens of Jewish men. Even though this massacre has become a symbol of the tragedy of Lithuanian Jews, the detailed circumstances of this crime have yet to be uncovered. One thing is clear – the direct perpetrators of the massacre were mostly prisoners who had been released from the Kaunas prison. However, we cannot yet say whether they acted spontaneously or were incited by forces working behind-the-scenes (and if so – which specific forces).

That Jewish affairs were handled by the SiPo and the SD is also confirmed by the testimony of some former Lithuanian Security Police officers who had been arrested by the NKVD. Pranas Staskonis worked as an interrogator for the Lithuanian Security Police in Kaunas in 1941–1942. In the first weeks of the Nazi occupation, the Kaunas Hard Labor Prison was overcrowded, as many communists and Soviet government officials of various nationalities had been arrested and imprisoned there. The LSP interrogators initially conducted the interviews in the prison. The fate of the non-Jewish prisoners was decided by a commission made up of top-level LSP employees. This commission had the right to sentence detainees to up to three years in a forced labor camp. If a more severe sentence was required, the detainees were handed over to the SiPo together with their case files. All of the Jewish cases were handed over to the Gestapo as well.<sup>21</sup>

Another important source is the criminal case of former LSP official Jonas Ženauskas. Ženauskas worked for the SSD before the Soviet occupation. He was arrested by the NKVD for this in 1940 and put in the Kaunas Hard Labor Prison. On the second day

of the war (June 23), Ženauskas, together with other prisoners, was released from prison and joined the anti-Soviet Kaunas rebels (he guarded the radio until June 26). Then Ženauskas, as a former security police official, returned to work at the SSD.<sup>22</sup> Several dozen former security police officials had already gathered in the Kaunas SSD building on June 26, including Kazys Matulis, Albinas Čiuoderis, and others who previously held high positions. Roughly 200 communists and Soviet government officials of various nationalities were being held in the SSD courtyard at that time. Matulis gave Ženauskas an alphabetized list of the detainees and ordered him to compare it to the alphabetized list of communists that had been compiled when Antanas Smetona was in office. About 35 of the detainees were not on the list and were released. The other detainees (about 170 people) were taken to the Seventh Fort that same day and handed over to Capt. Bronius Kirkilā's\* "partisan" squad, which shot the men on the spot. German Gestapo officers came to the SSD the next day and told the officers that they were not allowed to shoot detainees without their permission.<sup>23</sup>

In the first weeks of the Nazi occupation, the Lithuanian Security Police persecuted communists, Komsomol members, and Soviet activists of all nationalities. At that time, Jews were not persecuted for their ethnicity alone. The Lithuanian Security Police did not yet fully understand the Nazis' "final solution to the Jewish question," and the Gestapo had not yet ordered them to persecute all Jews without exception, regardless of their age, gender, or political beliefs.

In the first weeks of the occupation, when the fate of the Jews was not yet clear, the security police, in persecuting Jewish communists and Soviet activists, adhered to certain legal norms and juridical procedures from the times of independent Lithuania, and tried to only punish detainees after their guilt had been investigated and established. The people who were arrested were interrogated, and the testimonies of witnesses who accused Jews were verified. Lithuanian communists were arrested along with Jews. Although it was usually Lithuanians who reported Jews to the police, there were cases when Jews turned in their fellow Jews. For instance, Shalom Rybak, a Jew from Lazdijai, testified that Elimelech Lipski (another Jew) had long sympathized with the communists, actively attended Soviet rallies, welcomed the Red Army, and so on. When he was questioned, Lipski denied being a communist and claimed to have been a member of a trade union, but admitted that he had reported two local Jews to Soviet security.<sup>24</sup> When a Jew named Jakob Shapiro was arrested by the Lithuanian police and interrogated, it came to light that he had been arrested by the NKVD as an anti-communist during Soviet rule, so he was released.<sup>25</sup> Although such cases were not typical, they do demonstrate that during the first weeks of the

\* On June 28, 1941, Capt. Bronius Kirkilā was admitted to the TDA Battalion formed in Kaunas, where he was appointed commander of the 1st Company. Unable to endure the trauma of the massacres at the Seventh Fort, he took leave and shot himself at his home on July 12, 1941.

occupation, the LSP was not yet thinking in terms of Nazi anti-Semitism, and treated communist Jews in the same way as detainees of other nationalities. Jewish citizens were arrested for specific political activities or on suspicion of their participation in pro-Soviet and communist activities. On June 26, 1941, the public police arrested a Jew named Leonard Kravichin Vilnius for serving in the Soviet militia. On July 11, he was handed over to the security police.<sup>26</sup> On July 22, Fisel Kolion, who was suspected of “spying for the Communists,” was arrested at the Vilnius railway station. A few days later, he was handed over to the chief of the Vilnius District Security Police.<sup>27</sup>

On August 7, 1941, Kėdainiai Region Security Police Chief Leonas Jablonskis sent Markus Nochim to Kaunas for questioning – Nochim was a high school student in Kėdainiai who had been arrested because he “actively contributed to the organization of the Komsomol after the Bolsheviks came and wholeheartedly supported that system.”<sup>28</sup>

There were some cases where Jews who had been arrested were set free after paying fines. For example, Solomon Feinberg was arrested in Vilnius for not observing the curfew (a 6 a.m. – 6 p.m. curfew was introduced for Jews in Vilnius in early July 1941) and walking around without the Star of David. After paying a fine of 5,000 rubles, Feinberg was released on August 30, 1941.<sup>29</sup>

A Jewish woman named Liba Frenkel was arrested by a public police officer in Vilnius on August 4, 1941 for walking on the sidewalk. After paying a fine of 3,000 rubles, Frenkel was released on August 6.<sup>30</sup>

However, arrested Jews who could not pay the required fines were shot. Wolf Kadyszewicz was arrested by the public police for breaking the curfew and walking without the Star of David. He was given a 2,000 ruble fine. As he was unable to pay this amount, he was handed over to a Sonderkommando (“Special Squad”) on September 16, 1941 to be shot.<sup>31</sup>

However, this situation where Jews were released for a price did not last long. As of autumn 1941, there is basically no data in security police documents about Jews being released after paying a fine.

However, there were also cases later when arrested Jews were released for unknown reasons. On August 2, 1941, Henia Kirnitsky was arrested for obstructing a police search and agitating against police officers. On August 26, she was released from Lukiškės Prison by order of the district chief, Aleksandras Lileikis.<sup>32</sup> It could be speculated that some of the Jews released by the security police may have been recruited to work as security police informants (reporting on Jewish sentiment, anti-fascist activities, etc.). For example, Roda Epshtein was arrested in 1941 for attempting to escape to Warsaw using forged documents. She was recruited by the security forces and returned to the ghetto. When she became unnecessary, she was arrested again and then shot on October 31, 1942.<sup>33</sup>

From about mid-August 1941, the Nazi policy towards the Jews changed in essence. All Jews began to be persecuted indiscriminately and brutally. The political motives of persecution became irrelevant. Jews began to be persecuted for racial/ethnic reasons, and the true genocide of the Jewish people (the Holocaust) began – all Jews were arrested and driven to ghettos and internment camps, and then murdered in mass shootings. The functions of the Lithuanian Security Police also changed. The LSP, as per the tasks assigned to it by the SiPo and the SD, began persecuting and arresting Jews who were hiding and avoiding going to the ghettos, who had escaped from the ghettos, or who were caught not wearing the Star of David, walking in prohibited areas, illegally buying food products, and so on. Political motives for the persecution of Jews were replaced by racial/ethnic ones. In general, the LSP's actions towards the Jews became very severe. Legal procedural steps (questioning, verification of witness statements, establishment of guilt) lost all meaning. The Jews who were detained were handed over to the German SiPo and SD, locked up in prisons and ghettos, and later shot.

**Vilnius.** Aleksandras Lileikis was the chief of the Vilnius District LSP in 1941–1944. He was not an independent chief of the security police. Vilnius also had its own division of the German SiPo and SD (Aussendienststelle SiPo und SD Wilna), and the LSP also had to act in accordance with its directives. The aforementioned October 15, 1941 Stahlecker Report clearly states that unsuitable individuals had been removed from the Vilnius Lithuanian Security Police, and that it operated under the constant supervision of Einsatzkommando 3.<sup>34</sup> The mass shooting of the Vilnius Jews began in mid-July 1941, in the Ponary (now Paneriai) woods outside of Vilnius. The arrested Jews were marched or brought by trucks from Lukiškės Prison (as well as from the Vilnius Ghetto in September 1941); after they had been stripped and their valuables had been taken from them, they were herded into large pits and shot. The shooting was usually done by a Sonderkommando of the German SiPo and SD, which consisted of a few dozen Lithuanians under the command of Gestapo officers. When extremely large groups of Jews (sometimes as many as several thousand people) were to be killed, Lithuanian self-defense units (police battalions) stationed in Vilnius assisted the Sonderkommando. Some of the identity cards of the Jews who were arrested and shot have survived and are safeguarded in the LCSA. These cards were completed by the aforementioned Sonderkommando. The names of the people who were shot were crossed out on the cards with a red or blue pencil. Sometimes they contained German notes disguising the murder: “*befehlsgemäss behandelt*” (“dealt with according to orders”) or “*liqu*” (“*liquidiert*” – “liquidated”).<sup>35</sup> However, there was no direct involvement of officers from the Vilnius District LSP in the massacre of Jews. The Jews who were arrested and interrogated by the LSP were usually handed over to the SiPo and the SD or the Sonderkommando. The handing over of Jews to these Nazi security organs effectively meant their condemnation to death, because according to

Nazi plans, all Jews were to be physically exterminated. This fate of the Jews who were arrested and handed over to the German SiPo or Sonderkommando is also confirmed by surviving archival documents. However, the Lithuanian security forces were not entitled to kill Jews at their own discretion. Only the bodies of the German SiPo and SD were.

In the first months of the German occupation, the Vilnius District Communist Commissariat (department) of the LSP, which in some documents was still referred to as the “Communist-Jewish Section,” was particularly active.<sup>36</sup> The head of this department was Juozas Bagdonis. The Communist Commissariat was responsible for tracking, arresting, and questioning communists, Komsomol members, former Soviet officials, NKVD collaborators, Jews, and the Gentiles who supported them. LSP documents for the second half of 1941 are full of reports about arrested Jews that were worded as follows: “suspected of being Jewish,” “in hiding,” “a fugitive from the ghetto.” For the most part, Jews who had been hiding or who had violated the established rules were detained by the Lithuanian public (order) police and then handed over to the Lithuanian Security Police. The LSP interrogated the detainees and then handed them over to the German SiPo or Sonderkommando.

After the Vilnius Jews were driven into the ghetto in the beginning of September 1941, the number of Jews detained outside the ghetto increased significantly. The summary of events of the public police for the city of Vilnius mentioned arrested Jews on a nearly daily basis. They were arrested individually or in groups, and then handed over to the security police. On September 7, 15 Jews who had escaped or been in hiding were arrested, followed by four Jews on November 11. On November 19, as many as 54 Jews in hiding were arrested outside of the ghetto. The arrested Jews were put in Lukiškės Prison and held in the custody of the LSP.<sup>37</sup> After some time, the detainees were taken to Paneriai to be shot.

Jews faced the death penalty not only for escaping the ghetto, but also for other violations of the “order” imposed by the Nazis. For example, Hana Gordon was arrested on October 30, 1942 for attempting to bring food into the ghetto. She was shot two weeks later.<sup>38</sup>

Jewish arrests were not the most important activity of the LSP. As noted by the Israeli historian Yitzhak Arad, the Lithuanian security forces dealt with more complex cases that required a more thorough investigation (e.g. uncovering Jewish hiding places and planned escapes from the ghetto, identifying individuals who provided Jews with forged documents or otherwise supported them).<sup>39</sup>

The LCSA holds a considerable number of documents that reflect the anti-Jewish activities of the Vilnius District LSP leaders.

Aleksandras Lileikis’s first order regarding Jews is dated August 22, 1941. That day, Lileikis, who was already the chief of the Vilnius District LSP, ordered the warden of

Lukiškės Prison to hand over 52 Jews who were in his custody to the Sonderkommando. It is documented that most of the Jews on this list were “dealt with according to orders,” i.e., killed.<sup>40</sup> On August 23, 1941, Lileikis signed Directive No. 770 to hand over five persons of Jewish ethnicity to the Sonderkommando.<sup>41</sup>

On May 2, 1995, the Prosecutor General’s Office of the Republic of Lithuania instituted criminal proceedings against Aleksandras Lileikis in accordance with Article 18(6) of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Lithuania and Article 1 of the Republic of Lithuania Law on Responsibility for the Genocide of Lithuanian Inhabitants. Lileikis was accused of turning 75 Lithuanian Jews over to the German SiPo and Sonderkommando. The case established that the majority of these Jews were shot.<sup>42</sup>

Kazys Gimžauskas, who was Lileikis’s deputy from December 1, 1941 to July 1944, was also involved in the persecution of Jews. As Gimžauskas himself asserted in his March 21, 1995 explanation to the Special Investigations Department of the Prosecutor General’s Office of the Republic of Lithuania, “[his] primary function was to deal with the communists and the various forms of banditry being committed against the local population in the territory of Lithuania.”<sup>43</sup> However, surviving archival documents testify that Gimžauskas’s official duties were directed not only against communists and partisans, but also against persons of Jewish ethnicity.

On December 17, 1941, Gimžauskas signed Directive No. 30 to hand over the Jewish woman Lucina Paiewonsky-Sutarsky to the German security police (she was shot by the Sonderkommando on December 22, 1941).<sup>44</sup>

On March 8, 1942, Gimžauskas signed Directive No. 631 to hand over Jewish Lithuanian residents Efraim Lakerman and David Izraelski to the Sonderkommando.<sup>45</sup>

In order to pinpoint the ghetto escape routes used by Jews, the Lithuanian security forces sometimes organized provocations. Edvardas Raicevičius, a truck driver working for the security forces, agreed to take a group of Jews from the Vilnius Ghetto to Byenyakoni (Belarus) for money.

When the truck left the city, it was stopped by security officials. They arrested the Jews on the truck and took them to Lukiškės Prison. Then these Jews were handed over to the Sonderkommando and shot in Paneriai. On October 30, 1941, 12 Jews were detained during an operation. According to the LSP report, security officers Edvardas Skausgirdas, Leonas Kaulinis, Adolfas Milinavičius, Algimantas Dailidė, and Vincas Regina participated in this operation. The operation was similar to the previous one; the only difference was that “off. Skausgirdas went to collect the Jews in Vilnius together with the driver, thus guaranteeing that the car would not be stopped by the public police or the German police and prevent the completion of the task.”<sup>46</sup> In total, at least four such operations were conducted (on October 28 and 30, and on November 1 and 3, 1941), during which security officers arrested 36 Jews.<sup>47</sup> It is



possible that more operations of this type were carried out, but many of the security police documents were destroyed and no information about this is left.

From about August 1941, a new category of detainees appeared – Gentiles who aided Jews in various ways (for example, helping them escape from the ghetto, hiding them in their homes, providing them with the necessary identity documents, etc.).

On November 2, 1941, the security police arrested a German woman name Victoria Bayerin Vilnius for taking in Jews. She had hidden Leja Pliskin and Meir and Sender Weisman in her home. The Jews in hiding were arrested by a policeman from the 6th Precinct of the Vilnius City Public Police; he turned the detainees over to the Lithuanian Security Police.<sup>48</sup>

On December 20, 1941, the police arrested a Jewish woman named Pese Katz in E. Vaičionis's home in Vilnius. A report was drawn up and sent to the head of the Vilnius District LSP.<sup>49</sup>

There were myriad cases of this sort, and the tracking and arrests of Gentiles aiding Jews took place throughout the Nazi occupation. For instance, on February 23, 1942, an LSP official arrested Belarusians Yevgeniya Ravich and Avfiniya Karavich in Vilnius for hiding Jews.<sup>50</sup> The significance of the Jewish question diminished by the end of 1941. Over 33,000 Jews were killed in Vilnius from the beginning of the Nazi-Soviet war until December 1941.<sup>51</sup> About 15,000 Jews were left to live in the isolated and well-guarded Vilnius Ghetto. They did jobs necessary for the German war economy. The Vilnius Ghetto was liquidated for good on September 23–25, 1943. The majority of the ghetto prisoners were taken to work in concentration camps in Estonia (Vaivara, Kloga, etc.).

Beginning in 1942, the activities of the Vilnius District Lithuanian Security Police were increasingly focused on one thing – pursuing the growing communist and Polish underground. In 1942–1944, Jewish issues played a secondary and relatively insignificant role in the activities of the LSP. During this period, the LSP's priority was the search for Jews who had escaped and were in hiding, as well as the identification and arrest of persons aiding them. However, even during this period, harsher punishments were given to the Jews who were arrested than to the participants of the communist or Polish underground. One Reichssicherheitshauptamt (Reich Security Main Office; RSHA) report on events in the U.S.S.R. states that between February 16 and March 21, 1942, 319 people were arrested in Vilnius, and 137 of the detainees were shot, including 73 Jews, 23 communists, 14 Polish underground members, 20 document counterfeiters, and 7 spies.<sup>52</sup>

In researching the LSP's role in the Holocaust, it is important to compare the functioning of the security structures in the major cities (Kaunas, Vilnius) and in the provinces (counties). As is common knowledge, the major cities had very large Jewish communities. On the other hand, these cities had far more different types of police

forces. The activities of the LSP in the major cities were related to various German and Lithuanian police forces, so they were not as noticeable and clear as they were in some provincial towns. Below, we will examine some examples of LSP activities in the Lithuanian provinces.

**Kretinga.** The German Army occupied Kretinga on the first day of the war (June 22, 1941). SD-Abschnitt Tilsit agent Pranas Jakys came to Kretinga from Germany together with the Germans. During the period of Lithuanian independence, Jakys was the chief of the Kretinga Region Lithuanian Security Police. After the Soviets occupied Lithuania, he fled to Germany. Jakys, who was vested with significant authority by the Gestapo, was initially appointed chief of the Kretinga County Police, and was later named chief of the Kretinga Region Lithuanian Security Police (which was subordinate to the Šiauliai District LSP). He became the main organizer of the arrests and shootings of Jews and communists in Kretinga County. In the first days of the Nazi occupation, Jakys teamed up with local members of the LAF staff and started compiling lists of communists, Komsomol members, and Soviet activists. The lists were given to the Gestapo and the Kretinga German military commander.<sup>53</sup>

On the evening of June 25, 1941, the Gestapo officers of the Tilsit Einsatzkommando put the Kretinga communists and Jewish men arrested the night before into cars. The detainees were taken to Kveciai Forest. A few Gestapo officers arrived at the scene of the massacre along with Jakys and his deputy, Kretinga Region LSP Chief Criminal Inspector Gabrielius Bražinskas. The “trial” of the detainees began – they were summoned one by one and Jakys gave the Gestapo a brief summary of each of their activities during the Soviet occupation. Then some of the detainees were sent to the left (a total of 35 people who were later released), and the others – to the right (to be shot). After the selection process, the shooting began. Lithuanians were shot kneeling on one knee with their face toward the pit, while Jews were shot standing, facing the shooters. The shooting was done by Gestapo officers from the Tilsit Einsatzkommando and German police officers from Klaipėda. A total of 214 men and one woman were executed. The majority of the victims were Jews.<sup>54</sup>

The Jewish women and children in Kretinga who were temporarily allowed to remain alive were confined to a ghetto set up in Pryšmančiai Manor. However, Franz Behrendt, a senior assistant for the German criminal police, began to pressure the Kretinga County government to exterminate the surviving Jewish women and children as soon as possible as “useless eaters.” Jakys began to recruit Lithuanian volunteers for the extermination of the Jews. The Jewish women and children imprisoned in Pryšmančiai Manor were killed in late August/early September 1941. They were shot by Lithuanian police officers and so-called “partisans,” under the supervision of German officers.<sup>55</sup>

Jakys and his colleagues made a name for themselves in the massacre of Jews not only in the city of Kretinga, but in other towns of Kretinga County as well. In 1941 (the

exact date is unknown), Jakys directed the shooting of Jewish women in Veiviržėnai, where 300–400 women were killed. Roughly 6,000–8,000 rubles, clothing, bedding, and other items were taken from the victims. Some of the Jewish belongings were taken to the security police warehouse in Kretinga, while others were split up by the participants in the massacre. Part of the money was spent on buying vodka to treat the killers.<sup>56</sup>

After the Jewish men were shot in Palanga (on June 27, 1941), the women and children were put in a special camp outside of town. They were imprisoned there until the liquidation of the camp and its prisoners (on October 12, 1941). Before the Jewish women were shot, Jakys, Bražinskas, Kretinga County Police Chief Antanas Petrauskas, and Palanga City Police Chief Juozas Adomaitis came to the camp. Jakys told the Jewish women that they would be transferred to a ghetto near Darbėnai. He ordered the women to give him their money and valuables. These items were collected and handed over to the mayor of Palanga.<sup>57</sup> Some 7–10 days later, Jakys called Adomaitis and told him that the Jewish women and children from Palanga would have to be shot at night. One night, the Jewish women and children were taken in trucks to a massacre site in the forest. The shooting started after midnight and ended in the early hours of the morning. The headlights of the trucks were used for lighting. Jakys directed the shooting. Most of the shooting was done by security officers and policemen who had come from Kretinga, along with a few police officers from Palanga. Some 200–300 Jewish women and children were killed in all.<sup>58</sup>

Jakys would receive the instructions to shoot (“liquidate”) Jewish and non-Jewish political prisoners from the Gestapo. He was in close contact with the Tilsit Gestapo and Morasch, the chief of the Bajorai (Klaipėda Region) Gestapo. If the Gestapo directives did not give a specific date for the execution, Jakys and Bražinskas would decide on their own. When larger groups of detainees were shot, German Gestapo officers were often involved. It was usually Lithuanian security, criminal, and public police officers who took part in the executions. Some actually did the shooting, while others guarded the people waiting their turn. If there were no Gestapo officers present, the massacres were usually directed by Jakys or Bražinskas.<sup>59</sup>

As the war was coming to an end, Jakys fled to Germany, but after the war he was arrested and convicted in a trial held in Ulm in 1958 together with other officers from the Tilsit Gestapo Einsatzkommando. Jakys was charged with the murder of 818 people. He was sentenced to just seven years in prison.<sup>60</sup>

**Alytus.** The German Army occupied Alytus on the first day of the war. As soon as the Nazi occupation began, the Lithuanian county administration and public and security police were restored, and a partisan (TDA) company was formed. Reserve Lt. Pranas Zenkevičius (b. 1900) became the organizer of the Alytus Region Lithuanian Security Police and its first chief. During the period of Lithuanian independence,

Zenkevičius was the chief of the Trakai Region Border Police.<sup>61</sup> The Alytus Region LSP was subordinate to the Marijampolė District LSP. Zenkevičius served as the chief of the Alytus Region LSP until about October 1941. Due to his heavy drinking and inability to perform his official duties, he was later replaced by Petras Kausteklis.<sup>62</sup> Some witnesses identified Zenkevičius as one of the most important organizers of the massacre of communists and Jews in Alytus County. Already in the first days of the Nazi occupation, communists, Komsomol members, Soviet government officials, and Red Army soldiers hiding in the forests began to be arrested. As per the Alytus TDA company's performance review, "36 local communists, nine Red Army soldiers, and a large number of Jews were detained and arrested" according to citizen notifications.<sup>63</sup> The persecution of the Jews especially intensified starting in mid-July 1941. On July 12, Alytus County Governor Stepas Maliauskas and Alytus Security Chief (Commandant) GS Maj. Juozas Ivašauskas issued an order that regulated the situation of the Jews in detail. All Alytus County Jews were ordered to wear the Star of David, and were no longer permitted to buy food products from farmers, hire non-Jews for work, leave their place of residence without the permission of the county governor, and so on. Jews were required to do community service and to hand their radios, bicycles and motorcycles over to the local municipality or the police.<sup>64</sup>

According to the testimony of former Alytus Region Criminal Police Chief Alfonsas Nykštaitis, Obersturmführer Joachim Hamann came to Alytus before the mass shootings of Jews. Hamann stopped by the Alytus Region LSP office and talked with Zenkevičius. Since Zenkevičius did not speak German, Nykštaitis translated what Hamann said. Hamann ordered Zenkevičius to deliver the specified number of Jewish men and women from the townships of Alytus County to the city of Alytus. After Hamann left, Zenkevičius sent his officials to each township with the relevant instructions.<sup>65</sup> The fact that Zenkevičius organized the delivery of Alytus County Jews to the city of Alytus is also confirmed by other sources. Stepas Vasauskas, the former chief of the Alytus County Varėna II Township Police, testified that in August 1941, he received an order from the chief of the Alytus County Security Police (Zenkevičius) to arrest all the Jews in Varėna Township and confiscate their property. Vasauskas refused to carry out this order and agreed with Alytus County Governor Stepas Maliauskas that Vasauskas's deputy, Vincas Cidzikas, would carry it out instead.<sup>66</sup>

In mid-August 1941, the Jews in Alytus County began to be moved to the Alytus prison. Approximately 1,000 Jewish men and women were brought to Alytus in all. They were held in the prison yard.<sup>67</sup>

The first massacre of Alytus Jews took place on August 13, 1941. Before then, all of the Jews were registered. The Jews were driven into the security police courtyard and lists were drawn up. Then they were taken to the site of the massacre in the forest, where 617 Jewish men and 100 Jewish women were shot. Another 233 Jews from

the city and county of Alytus were shot by August 31.<sup>68</sup> Hamann and four German non-commissioned officers participated in the first mass shooting of Jews. Hamann agreed with the chief of the Alytus prisoner-of-war camp that he would assign prisoners of war to dig the pits. The pits were dug near the prison, in Vidzgiris Forest. The Jews who had been brought in to be killed were herded to the pits in groups; then they were laid face down in the pits and shot from the edge of the pit. Initially, German SS officers did the shooting with machine guns. The Jews were marched to the pits by local TDA company “partisans” under the command of Jonas Borevičius. Zenkevičius was hanging around the site of the shooting with a half-drunk bottle of vodka, giving various instructions. The last group of Jews herded to the pit were shot by local TDA “partisans” and a few prison guards. It was Zenkevičius who had ordered the “partisans” to come to the killing site. The corpses of the victims were buried by Soviet prisoners of war.<sup>69</sup>

A few days later, Hamann returned to Alytus with Lt. Bronius Norkus from Kaunas’s 1st Lithuanian Police Battalion. Hamann told Zenkevičius that from then on, the Jews would be shot in Alytus County by a special unit (the 3rd Company of the 1st Battalion) under Norkus’s command. By order of Hamann, all of the valuable belongings of the Jews who were shot (gold rings, watches, etc.) were to be handed over to Norkus. The day after their arrival, Hamann and Norkus organized a new Jewish killing campaign. This time, approximately 50 Jewish men were shot. The shooting was done by four German non-commissioned officers and local “partisans.”<sup>70</sup>

After these massacres, the special unit under the command of Lt. Bronius Norkus and Jr. Lt. Juozas Obelenis came to Alytus from Kaunas several more times. The unit (20-30 men) usually came by bus. The Jews were shot in the forest, near the Kaniūkai Bridge over the Nemunas.<sup>71</sup> It is likely that Hamann and Norkus took over the organization and execution of subsequent Jewish shooting campaigns, making the local security forces under Zenkevičius’s command redundant. Soon after, Zenkevičius was dismissed from the LSP.

Probably the last Jewish massacres that officers from the Alytus Region Lithuanian Security Police actively participated in were the ones carried out in Varėna and Leipalingis. In the first days of September 1941, local policemen and “partisans” drove the Varėna Jews into the town’s synagogue. They were kept there for several days. On September 10, Zenkevičius came to Varėna with his deputy, Juozas Kvedaravičius, and a group of 30–40 hitmen. Along with local collaborators, they drove the detained Jews to the outskirts of Druckūnai Village. The Jews were brought to the former training area of the Tsarist army and shot there in the old trenches. According to the Jäger Report, 831 Jews were killed in Varėna: 541 men, 141 women, and 149 children.<sup>72</sup>

In the summer of 1941, Juozas Budrevičius, the chief of the Leipalingis Township Police, received an order from the chief of the Alytus Region LSP (Zenkevičius) to

arrest the Jews in the town and lock them up in a suitable place. For this purpose, two squads of former riflemen were organized, and they arrested all of the local Jews. The Jews were locked up in the town's synagogue. On the day of the massacre (September 11, 1941), Capt. Stasys Krasnickas-Krosniūnas, the chief of the Alytus County Police, came to Leipalingis along with Zenkevičius and a few dozen soldiers from Rollkommando Hamann, the mobile task force under the command of SS-Obersturmführer Joachim Hamann. The Jews were taken to a Catholic cemetery outside of town and shot there. A total of 155 Jews were killed: 60 men, 70 women, and 25 children. Rollkommando Hamann did the shooting.<sup>73</sup>

Certain conclusions can be drawn from the example presented of Alytus County. In comparing the role of the LSP in the provinces and in the major cities of Lithuania (e.g. Alytus vs. Vilnius), we observe that the LSP persecuted Jews and were generally more active in the provinces than they were in the cities. In the provinces, LSP officers not only conducted the more complex cases of Jewish detainees and searched for and arrested Jews who had escaped from the ghettos – they also organized the very process of persecuting Jews, including their mass arrests, bringing them to detention sites, and mobilizing local police forces for the mass killing of Jews. Even though there were usually only a few officials working in the LSP offices in the county centers, they played an organizational and managerial role in the Jewish massacres, bringing in other types of police (public, auxiliary) and the so-called “partisans.” This role of the LSP is quite clearly revealed when examining the activities of the chiefs of the Lithuanian Security Police in the regions of Alytus and Kretinga (Pranas Jakys and Pranas Zenkevičius). It is possible that the role in the Holocaust of the LSP's provincial units was varied and perhaps had specific features in the different regions and counties of Lithuania, but there is no doubt that LSP units were involved in the Holocaust process and played more than just secondary role in its implementation.

## Conclusions

The Lithuanian Security Police (LSP; previously the State Security Department) was re-established at the initiative of the Provisional Government of Lithuania in the first days of the Nazi-Soviet war. The LSP had its central headquarters in Kaunas and six district branches in Kaunas, Vilnius, Šiauliai, Panevėžys, Marijampolė, and Ukmergė. The districts, in turn, were divided into smaller territorial units – regions, which more or less corresponded to county boundaries. When the Nazis suspended the activities of the Provisional Government of Lithuania in the beginning of August 1941, the State Security Department was named the Lithuanian Security Police Section under the Commander of the German SiPo and SD in Lithuania. The LSP became subordinate

to the German SiPo and SD, and operated according to Nazi security directives and under its control. The LSP's priority was the fight against the communist and Polish underground and partisans. The nature and direction of LSP activities were determined by the Nazi occupation regime. The LSP was used to persecute and exterminate real and potential enemies of Nazism (including Jews). However, the final decisions in German and Jewish cases fell not within the competence of the LSP, but within the competence of the German SiPo and SD.

Nevertheless, the LSP was inevitably involved in the genocide of the Jewish people (the Holocaust) organized by the Nazis, and became an integral part of the repressive mechanism persecuting the Jews. In this process, the LSP worked in close cooperation with other types of German and Lithuanian police (especially the German SiPo and the Lithuanian public (order) police, police battalions, and auxiliary police (or the so-called "partisans")).

The LSP's involvement in the Holocaust had certain features and was not equally intense throughout the entire period of the Nazi occupation. The LSP was much more active in the process of persecuting Jews (arrests, questioning, organization of mass shootings) during the first half of 1941; later, the "Jewish question" became less relevant and persecution of the communist and Polish underground became the primary focus. In the first few weeks of the Nazi occupation, Jews were primarily persecuted for political motives (for being communists, Komsomol members, or Soviet government officials or supporters). During this period, the LSP persecuted persons of all nationalities (including Lithuanians) who participated in communist and Soviet activities. At that time, the LSP still adhered to certain legal norms and juridical procedures, and tried to only punish people who had been arrested after their guilt had been investigated and established. Those arrested were interrogated, and the testimonies of witnesses were verified.

From about mid-August 1941, the policy towards the Jews changed in essence. All Jews began to be persecuted for their ethnicity alone. The political motives of persecution became irrelevant. Jews were arrested en masse and imprisoned in ghettos, internment camps, and prisons; the mass killing of Jews regardless of age, gender, or political beliefs began. The anti-Jewish activities of the LSP and other police units intensified. The LSP began arresting large numbers of Jews who were hiding and avoiding moving to the ghettos, or who were caught not wearing the Star of David, trying to buy food illegally, walking in prohibited areas, and so on. They also began persecuting Gentiles who tried to aid Jews in various ways (by hiding them in their homes, giving them food, helping them escape from the ghettos, and so on).

Comparing the activities of the LSP bodies in the major cities (Kaunas, Vilnius) with the activities of the corresponding bodies in the provinces, we can see certain differences. In the big cities, LSP officers usually dealt with more complex cases

that required a more thorough investigation (e.g., uncovering Jewish hiding places and ghetto escape routes, identifying individuals who provided Jews with forged documents, and so on). The LSP was also involved in recruiting informants who could provide them with information about Jewish sentiment in the ghetto, the secret anti-fascist organizations operating there, etc. LSP officers did not participate in the mass killing of Jews in the major cities. Nor were they entitled to kill Jews at their own discretion. After being questioned, arrested Jews were handed over by the LSP to the relevant bodies of the German SiPo that specialized in killing Jews (for example, the Vilnius Sonderkommando). The functioning of the LSP in the big cities was more complicated (since these cities had a wide network of various police agencies) and less noticeable.

The LSP bodies that operated in the provinces (counties) participated in the Holocaust and were generally more active than those in the big cities. In the provinces, LSP officials not only managed the cases of Jewish detainees and searched for and arrested Jews who had escaped – they also organized the very process of persecuting Jews, including their mass arrests, bringing them to the places of imprisonment and shooting, and mobilizing local police forces for their mass arrest and murder. The heads of some of the LSP bodies in the provinces (for example, in Alytus and Kretinga) directed the mass killing campaigns themselves.

Comparing the role of the LSP with the activities of other types of police in the Holocaust process, we can say that LSP officers arrested and killed far fewer Lithuanian Jews than the Lithuanian police battalions, public police, and “partisans” did. However, in the provinces, LSP bodies often played a leading and organizational role in the persecution and extermination of Jews.

## References

<sup>1</sup> See: *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje 1941–1944: Dokumentų rinkinys* [Mass Killings in Lithuania 1941–1944: Document Collection], Vol. 1, Vilnius, 1965, pp. 326–329; *Hitleriniai žudikai Kretingoje* [Hitler Murderers in Kretinga], Vilnius, 1960, p. 158.

<sup>2</sup> V. Žeimantas, *Procesas nesibaigia* [The Process Does Not End], Vilnius, 1988, pp. 135–145, 159–170.

<sup>3</sup> See: A. Bubnys, “Vokiečių ir lietuvių saugumo policija (1941–1944)” [German and Lithuanian Security Police (1941–1944)], *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, 1997, No. 1, pp. 160–175; A. Bubnys, *Vokiečių okupuota Lietuva (1941–1944)* [German-occupied Lithuania (1941–1944)], Vilnius, 1998, pp. 88–

96; P. Stankeras, *Lietuvių policija 1941–1944 metais* [Lithuanian Police, 1941–1944], Vilnius, 1998, pp. 65–72.

<sup>4</sup> P. Stankeras, op. cit., p. 71.

<sup>5</sup> F. Kauzonas, “Pakarti ar paleisti. Aleksandras Lileikis – tarp kartuvių ir išteisinimo” [Hang or Let Go. Aleksandras Lileikis – Between the Gallows and Acquittal], *Respublika*, July 17, 1996, No. 192(1907); A. Bubnys, “A. Lileikio veiklą liudija archyvai” [The archives testify to the activities of A. Lileikis], *ibid.*, September 25, 1996, No. 225(1940); A. Lileikis, *Pažadinto laiko pėdsakais: Atsiminimai, dokumentai* [In the Footsteps of Times Past: Memories, Documents], Vilnius, 2000, p. 182; J. Šimeliūnis, “Draugavo, kolaboravo ar kovojo?” [Befriended, collaborated, or fought?], *Švyturys*, 1997, No. 6, pp. 16, 17, 36; “Saugumo policija – tai akys ir ausys” [Security Police: The eyes



and ears] (interview with K. Gimžauskas), *Lietuvos aidas*, November 25, 1995, No. 238.

<sup>6</sup> A. Lileikis, op. cit., pp. 60, 61.

<sup>7</sup> A. Lileikio baudžiamoji byla [*Criminal case of A. Lileikis*] No. 09-02-14-95, 9 volumes, Vilnius Regional Court archives (hereinafter – VRCA); K. Gimžausko baudžiamoji byla [*Criminal case of K. Gimžauskas*] No. 9-2-036-97, 7 volumes, *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> For more, see: A. Bubnys, *Vokiečių okupuota Lietuva (1941–1944)*, pp. 75–138.

<sup>9</sup> P. Stankeras, “Lietuvių policijos atkūrimas vokiečių okupacijos metais (1941–1944)” [*Restoration of the Lithuanian Police during the German occupation (1941–1944)*] in: *Lietuvos karybos istorijos klausimai (tezės ir pranešimai)* [*Questions of Lithuanian Military History (Theses and Reports)*], Kaunas, 1996, pp. 143, 144.

<sup>10</sup> Pastabos apie S. Čenkų [*Notes on S. Čenkus*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 46, b. 1123, p. 54.

<sup>11</sup> J. Grušio 1945 m. vasario 19 d. tardymo protokolas [*J. Grušys February 19, 1945 investigation protocol*], *ibid.*, ap. 58, b. P-16005, Vol. 1, p. 46.

<sup>12</sup> Saugumo departamento telefonų knyga [*Security Department phone book*], Kaunas, 1943, p. 1; J. Grušio 1945 m. vasario 14 d. tardymo protokolas [*J. Grušys February 19, 1945 investigation protocol*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. P-16005, Vol. 1, p. 36 a. p.

<sup>13</sup> LSSR MGB pažyma apie Valstybės saugumo policijos struktūrą ir veiklą vokiečių okupacijos metais [*LSSR MGB certificate about the structure and activities of the State Security Police during the German occupation*], *ibid.*, b. 19542/3, pp. 111–113.

<sup>14</sup> Vokiečių saugumo policijos ir SD vado Lietuvoje 1942 m. rugsėjo 4 d. raštas [*September 4, 1942 letter of the commander of the German SiPo and SD in Lithuania*], LCSA, f. R-1399, ap. 1, b. 71, p. 16.

<sup>15</sup> Saugumo departamento direktoriaus S. Čenkus 1941 m. lapkričio 18 d. raštas Policijos departamento direktoriui V. Reivyčiui [*Lithuanian Security Police Director S. Čenkus's November 18, 1941 letter to Police Department Director V. Reivytis*], *ibid.*, f. R-708, ap. 1, b. 2, p. 80.

<sup>16</sup> VSD 1941 m. liepos 22 d. slapto rašto Nr. 22 nuorašas [*Certified copy of Secret Letter No. 22 issued by the SSD on July 22, 1941*], *ibid.*, f. R-683, ap. 2, b. 1, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> See.: J. Dainauskas, “Kodėl Lietuva dabar kaltinama žydų žudikų reabilitavimu” [*Why Lithuania is now being accused of rehabilitating Jewish murderers*], *Mūsų vytis*, Chicago, 1992, No. 4, pp. 25–27.

<sup>18</sup> *Nürnberg Prozesse. Der Prozess gegen die Hauptkriegsverbrecher vor dem Internationalen Militärgerichtshof* [*The Nuremberg Trials. Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal*], Nürnberg, Band 37, p. 678.

<sup>19</sup> As cited in: *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje 1941–1944: Dokumentų rinkinys* [*Mass Killings in Lithuania 1941–1944: Document Collection*], Vol. 2, Vilnius, 1973, p. 19.

<sup>20</sup> As cited in: *Lietuvos žydų žudynių byla: Dokumentų ir straipsnių rinkinys* [*The Case of the Massacre of the Lithuanian Jews: A Collection of Documents and Articles*], compiled by A. Eidintas, Vilnius, 2001, p. 103.

<sup>21</sup> P. Staskonio 1949 m. rugsėjo 23 d. tardymo protokolas [*P. Staskonis's September 23, 1949 investigation protocol*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 22658/3, pp. 78–79.

<sup>22</sup> 1944 m. lapkričio 3 d. kaltinamoji išvada [*November 3, 1944 indictment*], *ibid.*, b. P-15399, pp. 113–114.

<sup>23</sup> J. Ženausko 1944 m. liepos 18 d. tardymo protokolas [*J. Ženauskas's July 18, 1944 investigation protocol*], *ibid.*, p. 32 a. p.

<sup>24</sup> *Lietuvos žydų žudynių* byla, pp. 129, 130.

<sup>25</sup> P. Stankeras, *Lietuvių policija 1941–1944 metais*, pp. 96, 97.

<sup>26</sup> L. Kravičiaus kalėjimo byla [*L. Kravich's prison case*], LCSA, f. R-730, ap. 1, b. 1026.

<sup>27</sup> Vilniaus geležinkelio policijos nuovados viršininko 1941 m. liepos 25 d. raštas Vilniaus apygardos saugumo policijos viršininkui [*Vilnius Railway Police Station Chief's July 25, 1941 letter to the Vilnius District Security Police Chief*], *ibid.*, f. R-643, ap. 3, b. 40, p. 28.

<sup>28</sup> LSP Kauno rajono viršininko 1941 m. rugpjūčio 7 d. raštas VSD Klotų skyriaus viršininkui [*Kaunas Region LSP Chief's August 7, 1941 letter to the head of the SSD Questioning Department*], *ibid.*, f. R-972, ap. 1, b. 363, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> S. Fainbergo kalėjimo byla [*S. Feinberg's prison case*], *ibid.*, f. R-730, ap. 1, b. 535.

<sup>30</sup> L. Frenkel kalėjimo byla [*L. Frenkel's prison case*], *ibid.*, b. 560.

- <sup>31</sup> V. Kadiševičiaus kalėjimo byla [*W. Kadyaszewicz's prison case*], *ibid.*, b. 784.
- <sup>32</sup> Kriminalinės policijos valdininko V. Prižginto 1941 m. rugpjūčio 2 d. Nutarimas [*August 2, 1941 resolution of Criminal Police officer V. Prižgintas*], *ibid.*, ap. 1, b. 1043, p. 4; A. Lileikio 1941 m. rugpjūčio 26 d. raštas Lukiškių kalėjimo viršininkui [*A. Lileikis's August 26, 1941 letter to the warden of Lukiškės Prison*], *ibid.*, p. 5.
- <sup>33</sup> R. Epšteinaitės registracijos kortelė [*R. Epshtein's registration card*], *ibid.*, f. R-1673, ap. 1, b. 742.
- <sup>34</sup> *Nürnberg Prozesse*, Bd. 37, p. 678.
- <sup>35</sup> May 24, 1996 Decision of the U.S. District Court for the District of Massachusetts in *United States v. Lileikis, United States v. Lileikis*, No. 09-2-14-95, VRCA, Vol. 2, pp. 250, 251.
- <sup>36</sup> See: LSP Vilniaus apygardos komunistų-žydų sekcijos 1941 m. spalio 27 d. pranešimas [*October 27, 1941 announcement of the Vilnius District LSP Communist-Jewish Section*], LCSA, f. R-681, ap. 1, b. 2, p. 4.
- <sup>37</sup> Vilniaus miesto policijos pranešimai apie įvykius 1941 m. [*Vilnius City Policereports on events in 1941*], *ibid.*, f. R-689, ap. 1, b. 22, l. 7; *ibid.*, b. 23, pp. 11, 19.
- <sup>38</sup> H. Gordon registracijos kortelė [*H Gordon's registration card*], *ibid.*, f. R-1673, ap. 1, b. 927.
- <sup>39</sup> January 25, 1996 affidavit of Dr. Yitzhak Arad, *United States v. Lileikis*, No. 09-2-14-95, VRCA, Vol. 5, p. 86.
- <sup>40</sup> 1998 m. vasario 5 d. kaltinamoji išvada A. Lileikio baudžiamojoje byloje [*February 5, 1998 indictment in the criminal case of A. Lileikis*], *ibid.*, Vol. 9, p. 214.
- <sup>41</sup> A. Lileikio 1941 m. rugpjūčio 23 d. raštas Vilniaus sunkių darbų kalėjimo viršininkui [*A. Lileikis's August 23, 1941 letter to the head of the Vilnius Hard Labor Prison*], LCSA, f. R-730, ap. 1, b. 2235, p. 5.
- <sup>42</sup> 1998 m. vasario 5 d. kaltinamoji išvada A. Lileikio baudžiamojoje byloje, p. 215.
- <sup>43</sup> K. Gimžausko 1995 m. kovo 21 d. paaikškinimas Lietuvos Respublikos generalinės prokuratūros Specialiųjų tyrimų skyriui [*K. Gimžauskas's March 21, 1995 explanation to the Special Investigations Department of the Prosecutor General's Office of the Republic of Lithuania*], *ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 228.
- <sup>44</sup> K. Gimžausko 1941 m. gruodžio 17 d. raštas Nr. 3049 Vilniaus sunkių darbų kalėjimo viršininkui [*K. Gimžauskas's December 17, 1941 letter No. 3049 to the head of the Vilnius Hard Labor Prison*], LCSA, f. R-730, ap. 1, b. 1953, p. 4.
- <sup>45</sup> K. Gimžausko 1942 m. kovo 8 d. raštas Nr. 631 Vilniaus miesto policijos vadui [*K. Gimžauskas's March 8, 1942 letter No. 631 to the chief of the Vilnius City Police*], *ibid.*, f. R-689, ap. 4, b. 919, p. 94.
- <sup>46</sup> LSP Vilniaus apygardos j. vald. V. Reginos 1941 m. spalio 31 d. raportas Vilniaus apygardos viršininkui [*LSP Vilnius District jr. off. V. Regina's October 31, 1941 report to the Vilnius District Chief*], *ibid.*, f. R-681, ap. 2, b. 1, pp. 20-20 a. p.
- <sup>47</sup> Lietuvių saugumo policijos suimtų žydų sąrašas [*Lithuanian Security Police list of arrested Jews*], *ibid.*, pp. 55, 56.
- <sup>48</sup> V. Bayer suėmimo dokumentai [*V. Bayer's arrest documents*], *ibid.*, pp. 32, 33, 49.
- <sup>49</sup> Vilniaus m. policijos nuovados viršininko 1941 m. gruodžio 21 d. raportas [*Vilnius City Police Station Chief's December 21, 1941 report*], *ibid.*, f. R-689, ap. 1, b. 24, p. 267.
- <sup>50</sup> 1942 m. vasario 23 d. suimtųjų sąrašas [*February 23, 1942 list of detainees*], *ibid.*, f. R-972, ap. 1, b. 389, p. 95.
- <sup>51</sup> For more, see: Y. Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, New York, 1982, pp. 209–217.
- <sup>52</sup> January 25, 1996 affidavit of Dr. Yitzhak Arad, p. 105.
- <sup>53</sup> *Hitleriniai žudikai Kretingoje*, pp. 19–20; J. Matthäus, “Jenseits der Grenze: Die ersten Massenerschiessungen von Juden in Litauen (Juni–August 1941)” [*Beyond the Border: The First Mass Shootings of Jews in Lithuania (June–August, 1941)*], *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 1996, 44. Jahrgang, Heft 2, p. 104.
- <sup>54</sup> C. Dieckmann, “Der Krieg und die Ermordung der litauischen Juden” [*The War and the Murder of the Lithuanian Jews*], in: *Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik 1939–1945: Neue Forschungen und Kontroversen* [*The National Socialist Extermination Policy 1939-1945: New Research and Controversies*], Frankfurt am Main, 1998, p. 297; *Hitleriniai žudikai Kretingoje*, pp. 21, 22.
- <sup>55</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Vol. 2, p. 28; C. Dieckmann, *op. cit.*, p. 297.
- <sup>56</sup> *Hitleriniai žudikai Kretingoje*, pp. 117, 118.

- <sup>57</sup> J. Adomaičio 1946 m. kovo 29 d. tardymo protokolo išrašas [*Excerpt from J. Adomaitis's March 29, 1946 investigation protocol*], LSA, f. 377, ap. 55, b. 107, p. 62.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 62–64; A. Petrausko 1946 m. sausio 6 d. tardymo protokolo išrašas [*Excerpt from A. Petrauskas's January 6, 1946 investigation protocol*], *ibid.*, p. 105.
- <sup>59</sup> *Hitleriniai žudikai Kretingoje*, p. 106.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11–15, 158.
- <sup>61</sup> See: *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Vol. 2, p. 420.
- <sup>62</sup> A. Nykštaičio 1960 m. liepos 2 d. tardymo protokolas [*A. Nykštaitis's July 2, 1960 investigation protocol*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 46, b. 1163, p. 35.
- <sup>63</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Vol. 2, p. 61.
- <sup>64</sup> V. Brandišauskas, “Lietuvių ir žydų santyki-ai 1940–1941 metais” [*Lithuanian-Jewish Relations in 1940-1941*], *Darbai ir dienos*, 1996, No. 2(11), p. 56.
- <sup>65</sup> A. Nykštaičio 1960 m. birželio 28 d. tardymo protokolas [*A. Nykštaitis's June 28, 1960 investigation protocol*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 46373/3, Vol. 2, p. 56.
- <sup>66</sup> S. Vasausko 1946 m. gegužės 14 d. tardymo protokolas [*S. Vasauskas's May 14, 1946 investigation protocol*], *ibid.*, b. 36493/3, pp. 33, 34.
- <sup>67</sup> A. Nykštaičio 1960 m. birželio 29 d. tardymo protokolas [*A. Nykštaitis's June 29, 1960 investigation protocol*], *ibid.*, b. 46373/3, p. 57.
- <sup>68</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Vol. 1, pp. 133, 134.
- <sup>69</sup> A. Nykštaičio 1960 m. birželio 29 d. tardymo protokolas, pp. 57–58; P. Saulevičiaus 1944 m. rugsėjo 7 d. tardymo protokolas [*P. Saulevičius's September 7, 1944 investigation protocol*], *ibid.*, b. 34041/3, pp. 15–17; J. Borevičiaus 1960 m. liepos 4 d. tardymo protokolas [*J. Borevičius's July 4, 1960 investigation protocol*], *ibid.*, ap. 46, b. 1163, pp. 26, 27.
- <sup>70</sup> A. Nykštaičio 1960 m. birželio 29 d. tardymo protokolas, pp. 58–58 a. p.
- <sup>71</sup> *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Vol. 2, p. 72.
- <sup>72</sup> S. Samulevičius, “Negyjanti 60 metų žaizda: Kraupią Varėnos krašto žydų tragediją prisimimus” [*The non-healing wound of 60 years: Remembering the terrible tragedy of the Jews of the Varėna Region*], *Merkio kraštas*, September 8, 2001, No. 69; *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, Vol. 1, p. 135.
- <sup>73</sup> J. Budrevičiaus 1944 m. rugpjūčio 9 d. tardymo protokolas [*J. Budrevičius's August 9, 1944 investigation protocol*], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 8, b. 170, pp. 329, 330.

Augustinas Idzelis

## Vilnius 1941: The Vilnius Special Squad and the Destructions of Jews

The Nazi extermination of Jews in Lithuania was carried out by SS units belonging to Einsatzgruppen A and B. Local auxiliary units were formed to facilitate the German killing squads in their operations. In the city and surrounding region of Vilnius, the local unit given the task of killing Jews was the Vilnius Special Squad (Lithuanian: *Ypatingasis būrys*). The Vilnius Special Squad began the systematic shooting of the Vilnius Jews in July 1941. By the end of 1941, most of the Jews in Vilnius and the surrounding towns had been exterminated. Given the prominent role played by the Vilnius Special Squad in the destruction of the Vilnius Jews, the dearth of factual information about its organization, composition, and operation is a glaring gap in the history of the Holocaust in Lithuania. The cursory references of the Vilnius Special Squad in literature reflect the fact that almost all of its records and documents were intentionally destroyed in 1944 – an understandable action given the unit’s bloody record. Nevertheless, the few surviving documents, together with court documents from postwar trials of suspected members of the Vilnius Special Squad, make it possible to obtain a more definitive picture of this nefarious organization.<sup>1</sup>

The earliest surviving document that refers to the Vilnius Special Squad by name is the July 16, 1941 request from the commander of the Lithuanian auxiliary police to the Lithuanian military commandant in Vilnius for 3,000 live cartridges for Russian rifles. The request stated that the rounds were to be used by the Vilnius Special Squad. The request also noted that “Reserve Junior Lieutenant Mečys Butkus is authorized to receive the cartridges.”<sup>2</sup> Incidentally, similar requests were made for the same amount of rifle cartridges on July 11 and 12, 1941. In these requests, the officers authorized to receive the rounds were Juozas Šidlauskas and Balys Lukošius.<sup>3</sup> Although these requests did not refer to the Vilnius Special Squad by name, both of these officers held top-ranking positions in the squad.

Reserve Junior Lieutenant Mečys Butkus was one of the organizers of the Vilnius Special Squad. Butkus’s position on the squad’s command is confirmed by the November 12, 1969 testimony of Petras Černiauskas, a former Vilnius Special Squad member, who stated:

I remember that Butkus gave a speech to the members of the Squad where he exhorted the need to help the Germans in the fight with the Bolsheviks. When the first shooting of Jews took place, I saw Butkus in Paneriai [then called Ponary]; he was directing the executions and supervising the stripping of the Jews. I didn't see him again after that; I only heard that he went to study, either at the university or somewhere else. I don't know anything else about his activities. I was not a personal friend of his and only knew him as the organizer of the unit.<sup>4</sup>

Černauskas's testimony is confirmed by surviving written evidence. There is a type-written list of 347 Jews held at Lukiškės Prison in Vilnius that was compiled sometime in the beginning of July 1941. At the end of the list, Butkus wrote in his own hand: "I took 168 people to work (to be shot)."<sup>5</sup> He signed the note and dated it July 11, 1941. Under Butkus's note, Reserve Junior Lieutenant Mockevičius wrote: "I took ~~179~~ 180 Jews – prisoners – to work (be shot)."<sup>6</sup> With the corrected number, all of the listed Jews plus one unlisted Jewish prisoner were taken from the prison and executed by the Vilnius Special Squad at Paneriai.

Mečys Butkus survived the war. On December 12, 1989, he was questioned in Kaunas by W. Beale, a senior investigator for the Australian Special Investigations Unit (SIU). The questioning was part of an extensive investigation conducted by the Attorney-General of Australia in connection with the allegation that Leonas Pažūsis, who immigrated to Australia after the war, was a member of the Vilnius Special Squad. Butkus admitted that he signed the July 11, 1941 document. In explaining why he signed the document, Butkus stated that several days before July 11, he and a group of students who had joined the auxiliary police unit being organized at 2 Magdalenos Street were sent to Lukiškės Prison to put together a list of prisoners. Butkus stated that "they would take a prisoner from a cell and we had to include him in the list; first name, last name, date of birth and that's it. Such was the list we had to make."<sup>7</sup>

On July 11, 20 members of the Vilnius Special Squad arrived at the prison together with Lukošius, Šidlauskas, and Norvaiša. The prisoners were lined up to be taken out of the facility. According to Butkus, a prison officer then appeared and asked for a written order for the events that were taking place. Norvaiša went up to Butkus and said:

"You were there when these lists were drawn up, so you sign off on these workers being taken out of prison to work." But then Norvaiša came over for a moment, and while talking to someone else, said that they would be shot. When they said they were going to take them to be shot, I realized it was an important document and then I added in parentheses at the end – to be shot. Knowing all the responsibility and with no intention to hide, I wrote down my full name and signed it with my real signature – not some hieroglyphic.<sup>8</sup>

Butkus's explanation to Beale was a self-serving attempt to minimize his role in the murder of Jews at Paneriai. The July 11, 1941 document in fact acknowledges that the Jews on the list were taken from Lukiškės Prison in order to shoot them. The document indicates that 347 Jews were taken from the prison in two groups. Butkus was in charge of the detail that escorted 168 prisoners. Mockevičius and his men took the remaining 180 Jews and marched them to the death pits at Paneriai.

One of the men in Mockevičius's group was Konstantinas Čičelis. In his October 28, 1969 testimony, Čičelis gave a detailed account of the events prior to the killing of the Jews on the list:

I was in this unit from the first days of the German occupation, so I know about its activities. In the beginning of July 1941 – I don't remember the exact date – the first extermination of Jews took place in Paneriai. Armed with Russian rifles, all members of the battalion [sic] went from our headquarters to Lukiškės Prison at about noon. Officer Mockevičius told us that we would have to escort Jews from Lukiškės Prison to do some work. I remember it was a warm sunny day. When we got to Lukiškės Prison, the Jews were lined up in the prison yard in groups of four – there were no women then. Somebody gave them some bread and told them that they had to go to do some work. We surrounded them and led them through the gates of the prison into the street. There might have been about 200 arrested men.<sup>9</sup>

Čičelis noted that during the trek to the shooting site, Mockevičius was accompanied by Šidlauskas. At Paneriai, Čičelis stood by one of the killing pits and guarded it to make sure that nobody could escape. He said:

I could clearly see that Kliukas Vladas, Butkūnas, Vėlyvius Juozas, Grikštas, Sausaitis, Mekišius Juozas, and Dolgavas shot with rifles. I don't remember the others. They fired constantly, until all the condemned were shot. A German was present during the shooting, but I don't know who he was.<sup>10</sup>

A Polish journalist named Kazimierz Sakowicz lived in Paneriai, not far from the site of the mass shootings. In July 1941, he began keeping a diary. Sakowicz put the pages of his diary in bottles, which he then buried in his yard. Although Sakowicz died in the summer of 1944, his diary entries were dug up after the war.<sup>11</sup> His entry for July 11, 1941 begins:

Quite nice weather, warm, white clouds, windy, some shots from the forest. Probably exercises, because in the forest there is an ammunition dump on the way to the village of Nowosiolki. It about 4:00 p.m.; and the shot last an hour or two. I discover that many Jews have been

transported to the forest. And suddenly they shoot them. This was the first day of executions. An oppressive, overwhelming impression. The shot quiet down after 8 in the evening; later, there are no volleys but rather individual shots. The number of Jews who passed through was 200. On the Grodzienka is a Lithuanian (police) post. Those passing through have their documents inspected.<sup>12</sup>

According to Sakowicz, once the shootings began on July 11, they continued almost every day for the rest of the month. He estimated: "All together, in July, in the space of 17 days, they [the Vilnius Special Squad] have shot an average of 250–300 daily, that is, 4,675 total..."<sup>14</sup> July marked the beginning of the mass killing of Jews by the Vilnius Special Squad. The scale and frequency of shootings dropped in August, during which over 10 days of shooting, 2,000 people were shot. The August pause stands in marked contrast to the shootings in September and October. During these two months, 19,445 Jews were shot at Paneriai along with 12,909 at other sites in the district. The mass killings at Paneriai ended in November 1941.<sup>15</sup> The Vilnius Special Squad was involved in the shooting of approximately 39,000 Jews over the course of five months.

### **The Historical Milieu**

In order to explain the origins of the Vilnius Special Squad and its involvement in the killing of Jews, it is necessary to examine the developments in Vilnius before the June 22, 1941 German invasion of the Soviet Union. At that time, Vilnius was a recent addition to the territory of Lithuania – the city and surrounding region had most recently been part of Poland. On September 1, 1939, Germany attacked Poland. Just 16 days later, on September 17, the Red Army invaded Poland and occupied the eastern part of the country, including Vilnius. On October 10, the Soviet Union gave Vilnius back to Lithuania. In exchange, Lithuania had to sign a mutual assistance treaty with the U.S.S.R. and allow 20,000 Red Army troops to be stationed in the country. The Lithuanian Army entered Vilnius on October 27, 1939.

Although Vilnius was the historical capital of Lithuania, the population of the city and the surrounding region was not Lithuanian. In September 1939, Vilnius had a total of 208,000 inhabitants. This figure included 100,000 Poles, who accounted for 48 percent of the total population. In addition, there were 80,000 Jews, who accounted for 38.5 percent of the total population. The Lithuanian population was very small – between 2,000 and 3,000 inhabitants.<sup>16</sup> With the acquisition of Vilnius, the Lithuanian government in Kaunas was faced with the task of bringing Lithuanian personnel to

the city and district. The government moved hundreds of Lithuanians to Vilnius to hold various government and administrative positions. This, naturally, did not improve relations with the Poles, who had lost their positions and political power. A number of departments of the University of Kaunas, including teachers, students, and support staff, were also moved to Vilnius. All of these people came with their families, resulting in a sharp increase in the size of the Lithuanian population.

The large Polish population in Vilnius and the surrounding region had a historical hostility toward Lithuanians. In contrast to the tense situation between the Lithuanians and the Poles, cordial relations existed between the Lithuanian government and the city's Jewish population. The Jews in Vilnius considered the seven months when the city was part of Lithuania to be an exemplary period. In his 1943 book on the history of the Jewish community in Vilnius, Israel Cohen said:

The attitude of the Lithuanian government itself, however, was one of gratifying tolerance. It issued a manifesto in Yiddish to the Jews of Vilnius, guaranteeing them equality of rights. It formally recognized the legal status of the *Kehillah*. It approved the appointment of a Jew as vice-mayor. It allowed the *Vilner Tageblatt* and two other Jewish papers to resume publication. Four streets in the city were renamed in honor of popular Jewish writers: Mendele Mocher Seforim, Perez, Dick, and the distinguished Jewish communal worker, Dr. Shabad. The Lithuanian minister in Moscow was instructed to secure the assent of the Soviet authorities to the repatriation of a number of prominent Jews of Vilnius who had been deported to Russia. And for the first time in Lithuanian history, a government official was tried on charges of anti-Semitism made by 14 non-Jewish colleagues. No wonder that the Jews in Vilnius, both the regular inhabitants and the refugees, despite their material distress and the occasional hooliganism of the "Endeks," regarded themselves as particularly fortunate when they heard of the slavery, torture and starvation of their fellow Jews under the Nazis. No wonder that hundreds of Jews risked life and limb in their attempts to escape to the city of refuge, for there, at least until the Nazi invasion of the western countries, it was still possible to keep in touch with the outside world and even reach it. No wonder, too, that as month followed month, they began to indulge in the hope that they would be spared any further political upheaval.<sup>17</sup>

N. N. Schneidman, a native of Vilnius and a survivor of the ghetto there, confirmed Cohen's statement 55 years later. He wrote:

The Lithuanian government in Kaunas treated the Jews of Vilnius with consideration and respect. It guaranteed them equality of rights and



recognized the legal status of the Jewish municipal council. ... Lithuania was at that time a small but well managed country. Its agriculture produced more than its population could consume, and for close to a year, we lived in relative peace, away from both the Nazi menace and our new Soviet "friends."<sup>18</sup>

There is no history of official Lithuanian anti-Semitism in Vilnius. In fact, Lithuanian authorities even offered to arm the Vilnius Jews with weapons they would provide. The Jewish leadership did not accept the proposal: "There was a readiness among the Jews of Vilnius to accept the offer of arms, but only within an autonomous Jewish framework and not on behalf of, or under orders from, the government."<sup>19</sup>

The ethnic composition of Vilnius and the surrounding region created a weak base for the short-lived Lithuanian administration. The geopolitical implications of this situation were obvious. The numerically dominant Polish population was seen as a potentially hostile element. The sizeable Jewish community, on the other hand, was viewed by the Lithuanians as a likely ally vis-à-vis the Poles. These considerations soon became moot. On June 15, 1940, Vilnius and all of Lithuania were occupied by the Red Army.

The year-long Soviet occupation did not change the ethnic structure of the city or the region. Although Vilnius was now officially the capital of the Lithuanian S.S.R., all central Communist Party and Soviet administrative offices were still in Kaunas. The local Communist Party apparatus and Soviet administration in the city had a distinctively multi-ethnic character. Jews were now able to hold positions of power and authority. According to Yitzhak Arad: "Jews were also admitted to posts in government institutions that, in the past, during Polish and Lithuanian rule, had been denied them. Jews in considerable numbers were thus appointed to government, party and militia posts."<sup>20</sup>

A key functionary in the newly established Soviet government in Vilnius was Major David Bykov – a Russian Jew from Moscow who was the deputy head of the Vilnius NKVD. He held this position until he was promoted and transferred to Kaunas. In June 1941, Bykov became head of the committee that directed the arrest and mass deportation of so-called "class enemies" from Lithuania. Appointing a Jew to a position of authority in a repressive government body was accepted Soviet practice at the time. As pointed out by Zvi Gitelman:

Again, as in 1918-21 in the U.S.S.R. proper, the new regime relied on Jewish Communists to identify and arrest "class enemies" and "reactionary elements." Naturally, this did not endear the Jews generally to the local populations who had just lost their political independence, acquired only two decades earlier, to the Communists.<sup>21</sup>

The Jewish population in Vilnius was not a major target of Soviet repressive measures. On January 5, 1941, Captain Alexander Kozlov, who was deputy head

of the Interrogation Section of the Vilnius City NKVD, prepared a report entitled “Regarding the Liquidation of Counter-Revolutionary Organizations and Parties in the City of Vilnius.” The report stated that between the Soviet takeover of Lithuania and January 5, 1941, 699 individuals had been arrested by the NKVD in Vilnius. The report gave an ethnic and organizational breakdown of the detainees and specified that 66 Jews had been arrested.<sup>22</sup> At that time, there were 67,000–70,000 Jews living in Vilnius. Therefore, the number of Jews arrested represented not only a disproportionately small percentage of the city’s total Jewish population, but also a very small percentage (9.4 percent) of the total number of NKVD detainees.

Although Vilnius had a small Lithuanian population, it soon became the linchpin of the Lithuanian anti-Soviet movement. An important factor increasing the significance of Vilnius as a center of anti-Soviet resistance was the deployment of the 29th Territorial Rifle Corps of the Red Army in the territories immediately north and south of Vilnius. After the Soviet occupation of the country, the Lithuanian army was purged by the new regime. Remnants of the Lithuanian Army were absorbed into the 29th Territorial Rifle Corps. Even after the initial purges, there were still many patriotic Lithuanian officers and soldiers who could not accept the Soviet takeover and the transformation of the Lithuanian army into a territorial component of the occupying Red Army. A large pool of potential leaders and recruits for an armed uprising was found in the 29th Rifle Corps.

The officer who took the initiative to organize an underground resistance group within the 29th Rifle Corps was Major Vytautas Bulvičius (1908–1941). Bulvičius was a staff officer at the headquarters of the 179th infantry division based in Vilnius. After completing the Higher Officers’ Courses in 1937, he was assigned to teach a new military science course at the University of Kaunas, which was mandatory for all first-year students. In his class – as if foreseeing future events – Bulvičius emphasized the theory and tactics of partisan warfare under conditions of occupation.<sup>23</sup>

Bulvičius organized a core group of officers who became the leaders of the resistance in the 29th Rifle Corps. The Bulvičius group became part of the Lithuanian Activist Front (LAF). Plans were made for the deployment of insurgent units from the 29th Rifle Corps after the outbreak of hostilities between Germany and the U.S.S.R. The final plans for the armed uprising were drawn up during a meeting in Kaunas on April 22 between representatives of the Kaunas and Vilnius commands. During the meeting, the composition of the Provisional Government was determined. Bulvičius was to become the Provisional Government’s Minister of Defense. It was also decided that Vilnius would be the focal point of the armed uprising, and that the Vilnius command would be in charge of all military action.<sup>24</sup>

The activities of the Vilnius LAF were short-lived. Between May 22 and June 22, the civilian and military chains of the Vilnius LAF headquarters staff were uncovered and destroyed by Soviet security bodies. Bulvičius was arrested on June 13. The mass

arrests of Lithuanian officers and soldiers serving in the 29th Rifle Corps began. At this time, all the units of the 29th Rifle Corps were at summer training camps in the Pabradė and Varėna training areas. According to General Stasys Raštikis, 30 percent of all Lithuanian officers and battalion, company, and platoon commanders were arrested by special Red Army security detachments.<sup>25</sup>

On June 23, the second day of the war, the arrested members of the Vilnius LAF headquarters staff were taken from Lukiškės Prison and the basement of the NKVD headquarters building to a 60-car freight train waiting in the Vilnius station. The LAF prisoners were placed in one of the front wagons. Holding nearly 2,000 political prisoners, the train stood at the station until dark. At night, Lithuanian rebels attacked the train. One rebel, under fire, managed to uncouple the last 40 wagons. Early on the morning of Tuesday, June 24, the shortened train rolled out of Vilnius, carrying Major Bulvičius and 15 other members of the Vilnius LAF command. On July 3, the train with the remaining 600 political prisoners reached the Volga River city of Gorky. On December 16, 1941, an NKVD firing squad shot Bulvičius and seven other officers. The rest of the LAF Vilnius command were sent to Soviet forced labor camps, from which only two ever managed to return to Lithuania.

The destruction of the Vilnius LAF headquarters staff just before the outbreak of hostilities between Germany and the Soviet Union was a serious blow to the anti-Soviet resistance in Vilnius and throughout Lithuania. The Kaunas LAF organization was now responsible for carrying out the uprising and installing the Provisional Government. The losses suffered by the anti-Soviet resistance in Vilnius, together with the minority status of the Lithuanian population, did not quash the uprising, but it did give it a different character and direction. Surviving LAF activists, students, civil servants, and 29th Rifle Corps soldiers seized control of Vilnius before the arrival of the first German panzers.

After Bulvičius's arrest, the leadership of the Vilnius LAF and anti-Soviet resistance was taken over by Stasys Žakevičius (who later changed his last name to Žymantas; 1908–1973). In 1941, Žakevičius was the dean of the University of Vilnius Law School and a well-known jurist. After receiving his degree from the University of Kaunas in 1933, he specialized in political science at the Sorbonne in Paris (1934–35). After receiving a scholarship from the Rockefeller Foundation, Žakevičius studied administrative law at Harvard, the University of Chicago, and the University of London between 1935 and 1937. In 1940, he moved from Kaunas to Vilnius and became a professor of law at the University of Vilnius.<sup>27</sup>

On Monday, June 23, Žakevičius presided over a clandestine meeting of about 20 members of the anti-Soviet resistance who had escaped the recent NKVD-NKGB manhunt. Many of the participants were associated with the university. Also present were civil servants as well as the deputy commander of a Soviet militia station who

had joined the resistance. The purpose of the meeting was “to decide when and how to stage an uprising against the Russian Communist occupiers.”<sup>28</sup>

Among the participants at the meeting was Algirdas Gustaitis, a 25-year-old university student. According to Gustaitis, Žakevičius outlined the goals and problems of the Lithuanian uprising in a city where they were a minority. The goals of the uprising were (1) to protect the city from destruction by retreating Red Army soldiers and Soviet activists, and (2) to install a functioning city government before the arrival of the German Army. Žakevičius was also concerned with what he thought was “an active Polish underground, whose absolute majority, he surmised, was composed of colonists who had arrived here during the time of the Polish occupation, and Polish Army officers and soldiers who hid here after the Polish-German war.”<sup>29</sup> After all of the discussions ended, the participants passed a unanimous resolution: “The uprising in Vilnius is to begin today, on June 23, 1941, at 7:00 p.m.”<sup>30</sup>

On June 25, 1941, the rebels established the Vilnius Citizens’ Committee to oversee the administration of Vilnius and the surrounding region. The committee was to function until the Provisional Government of Lithuania in Kaunas took over administration of the city. Until this happened, the committee’s main objective was to “maintain order and security in the city, protect private and public property from the looting that had already started, and establish contact with the German military authorities.”<sup>31</sup>

The work of the Vilnius Citizens’ Committee was complicated by the fact that the city of Vilnius was in the operational zone of the German Army Group Center, while Kaunas was within the jurisdiction of Army Group North. The division of Lithuania into different German army groups cut off the Vilnius rebels from any contacts with their counterparts in Kaunas. Since the German military administration did not allow the Vilnius Citizens’ Committee to have any contacts with the Provisional Government in Kaunas, it was forced to take over the day-to-day management of activities that otherwise would have been within the purview of a central government. A mini-cabinet was established with 13 departments.

The Department of Internal Affairs, which was headed by Kostas Kalendra (1898–1980), had responsibility for the maintenance of public order and security. Kalendra served in the Tsarist Army during the First World War, and later fought with General Pyotr Wrangel against the Red Army in the Russian Civil War. In 1930, Kalendra graduated from the University of Kaunas with a degree in law and began his career as a civil servant. Three years later, in 1933, Kalendra was appointed head of the Šakiai district. In 1939, he became head of the Švenčionėliai district in the Vilnius region.<sup>32</sup>

The Department of Internal Affairs had its headquarters at 2 Magdalenos Street, in a large building facing Cathedral Square in the city center. One of Kalendra’s first tasks was to organize a police force and a security service. Although some Soviet militia officers had joined the rebels and remained at their posts, most of the new policeman

were volunteers with no previous experience in law enforcement. Rebels and students assembled at the former Soviet militia stations and became de facto police officers. The Vilnius Special Squad was put together from volunteers who gathered at 2 Magdalenos Street; on July 11, these volunteers murdered Jews at Paneriai.

The original members of the Vilnius Special Squad included Reserve Junior Lieutenant Mečys Butkus, Reserve Junior Lieutenant Mockevičius, Konstantinas Čičelis, and Vladas Kliukas. Čičelis worked as a guard in a student dormitory on Tauro Street. He was told by one of the students that an “auxiliary police” unit was being formed at the former Soviet militia station on Klaipešos Street, and that members of the newly formed unit would receive free meals. Čičelis went to the militia station together with another guard named Vladas Kliukas. They found about 30 men there, including a number of students from the dormitory. Among the students from the dormitory, Čičelis recognized Mockevičius. After the first meeting at the Klaipešos Street station, the group moved to 2 Magdalenos Street. At the new meeting place, Čičelis saw reserve officers Mečys Butkus and Juozas Šidlauskas. The volunteers were informed of the unit’s mission. Čičelis said that “one of those reserve officers told us that we would have to help the Germans and follow all of their explicit instructions. Military discipline was to be observed by members of the unit and it was to be called the Vilnius Special Squad.”<sup>33</sup>

### **Size and Ethnic Composition of the Vilnius Special Squad**

Polish historian Helena Pasierbska compiled a list of 108 persons who served in the Vilnius Special Squad between 1941 and 1944.<sup>34</sup> Lack of documentation makes it difficult to reconstruct a complete roster of the unit. Only three documents listing the names of the unit’s personnel have survived. The sole document from 1941 is a list of unit members who, in November, wanted to purchase firewood. The document lists 48 individuals by name, address, marital status, and family size.<sup>35</sup> The second list is dated July 1942 and contains 43 names.<sup>36</sup> A comparison of the two lists shows that only 26 of the men on the 1941 list were still members of the Vilnius Special Squad on July 1, 1942, which is a 54 percent turnover rate. The third list is in German – it is not dated and contains 39 names. Only 17 names on this list are also on the 1941 document.

According to Mečys Butkus, roughly 80 men initially gathered at 2 Magdalenos Street and formed the group that became known as the Vilnius Special Squad. After the first shootings in mid-July, most of the original volunteers left the unit. Butkus said: “I conferred with other friends and it was decided that this was not a job

for Lithuanians, to serve on this auxiliary police. We started to inform and warn people that Lithuanians should not belong to this type of police. And within three weeks, it went from 80 people to 30 or 35 in that group.<sup>38</sup> Butkus himself left the unit sometime in August.

With the departure of 50–55 volunteers in July and August, the depleted ranks of the unit were filled by new recruits, many of whom were non-Lithuanians. The ethnic composition of the Vilnius Special Squad has not been examined by historians. While the local commanders of the unit were Lithuanians, the same cannot be said about all of the squad members. The conventional view is that the squad was predominately, if not exclusively, Lithuanian. Solomonas Atamukas stated: “A no less lethal all-Lithuanian special unit operated in Vilnius. This so-called Vilnius Special Unit (*Ypatingas Būrys*) consisted of 100–120 Lithuanians who served by rotation.”<sup>39</sup> According to historian Arūnas Bubnys: “Most of the members of the group were Lithuanians, but there were also several Russians and Poles.”<sup>40</sup>

An examination of the surviving unit rosters tends to support the conclusions of Atamukas and Bubnys. However, their conclusions are incorrect. In fact, the officials who registered the new Polish recruits “Lithuanianized” their names. This practice is described in detail by Jan Borkowski. In July 1941, Borkowski was informed by his neighbor, Jan Dolgow (a.k.a. Jonas Dolgovas), who was a Russian member of the Vilnius Special Squad, that his unit had openings for new members:

Dolgow and I entered the building through Wilenska Street and went to the second floor. Dolgow and I entered a room where there were a few men wearing civilian clothes. Dolgow started talking to one in Lithuanian and pointed at me. I found out later that the man he was talking with was named Barauskas. After a while, Barauskas told me in Russian that I would be hired to guard state facilities. ... In my presence, Barauskas personally wrote my name in Lithuanian on the questionnaire, and I signed it after Jan Dolgow had translated it for me. My name on the questionnaire was written in Lithuanian as Jonas Barkauskas, son of Ignas. This questionnaire also included my date of birth, rank in the Polish Army, and similar information. That day, I also received a certificate stating that I was employed in the Special Squad, and that I had the right to possess a firearm (rifle)... I received an identification card, completed in Lithuanian. ... The outside of the card had an official number, also noted in my file, and an inscription which phonetically read “Ypatingas Būrys.”<sup>41</sup>

Jan Borkowski admitted during his postwar trial in Poland that he participated in the shooting of Jews at Paneriai. Borkowski told the prosecutors that “I have no reason to regret in any way the Jews who were shot at Ponary. I was never fond of them anyway.”

The only regret he had was that he had to wear a Lithuanian Army uniform: “I often wore civilian clothes to avoid advertising the fact that I was a member of the Special Squad of the Vilnius SD (Security Service). I was not afraid to wear this Lithuanian uniform outside, because at that time there was no reason to be afraid. I was ashamed, however, that I, as a Pole, had to put on the uniform of the bourgeois Lithuanian Army.”<sup>42</sup>

Witold Gilwinski was another Pole who was listed on the squad’s roster as a Lithuanian. Gilwinski was born in 1912 in Olkieniki (now Valkininkai, Lithuania) – a village about 55 kilometers southwest of Vilnius. He attended trade school in Wilno (now Vilnius, Lithuania) and served in the 33rd Regiment of the Polish Army from 1933 to 1935. Gilwinski visited his brother in Kaunas in 1938 and decided to stay in Lithuania. On November 9, 1938, Gilwinski became, at least officially, a Lithuanian: “To obtain a residence permit to live in Kaunas, Lithuania, I reported to Police Station No. 7, not far from the airport in Kaunas. There I received a temporary identity card with a photo. The name written there was Viktoras Galvanauskas, meaning I was considered a Lithuanian. I did not consider myself to be Lithuanian, but a Pole.”<sup>43</sup>

In 1940, Gilwinski-Galvanauskas moved to Vilnius, but was not able to find a job. He left the city and lived on his parents’ farm until July 1941, when he returned to Vilnius. A friend of his told him about job opportunities with the Vilnius Special Squad. He joined the unit in the end of July or the beginning of August 1941.<sup>44</sup> His Lithuanian name is found in all three of the surviving rosters.

The practice of converting Polish names into Lithuanian names makes it impossible to determine whether a person listed is a Pole or a Lithuanian. Postwar court records – as in the case of Jan Borkowski and Witold Gilwinski – become important sources for ascertaining this fact. Accordingly, it is possible to posit that Juozas Makišius (Jozef Miakisz) and Vladas Butkūnas (Wladyslaw Butkun) also were Poles – both were tried in Poland in 1972 for war crimes. Their Lithuanian names are found on all three of the surviving rosters of Vilnius Special Squad members. Unfortunately, few of the listed members have been the subject of legal proceedings. It is very likely that more than the four aforementioned Poles served in the unit.

For the most part, the Russian or Belarusian names on the roster were not Lithuanianized. The undated German roster of 39 Vilnius Special Squad members lists the following Russians or Belarusians: Vladimir Bazyluk, Ivan Favorov, Sergej Kiseliiov, Ivan Sergutin, Mikhail Nikitin, Isak Zaicov, and Anatolij Zukov.<sup>45</sup> At the very minimum, 10 of the 39 members listed, or 26 percent of the total, were non-Lithuanians.

The ethnic composition of the shooters was completely irrelevant to the victims at Paneriai. This became an issue when some Holocaust historians began to attribute responsibility for the massacre of Jews to Lithuanians as a group. For example, Dov Levin wrote: “Most, if not the vast majority, of the Jewish victims in Lithuania were

murdered by or with the active assistance of Lithuanians – most of them Catholics.<sup>46</sup> An extreme manifestation of this tendency is exhibited by historian Dina Porat, who asserted:

...even the *Einsatzgruppen*, after being trained for murder, were still murderers only in theory. Once the killings started, they became practical murderers, and the Lithuanians were the first ones to provide them with this transition from theory to practice. The Lithuanians showed them how to murder women and children, and perhaps made them accustomed to it.<sup>47</sup>

## References

<sup>1</sup> An important source of unpublished archival documents relating to the Holocaust in Lithuania is the United States Department of Justice Office of Special Investigations (OSI). This entity was set up in 1979 to investigate and take legal action against Nazi war criminals who had immigrated to the United States after the Second World War. In order to proceed against suspected Nazi war criminals in the United States, it was necessary to obtain evidence showing that their immigration application forms contained misrepresentations regarding their activities during the German occupation.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the re-establishment of an independent Lithuania, Holocaust documents found in the Lithuanian Central State Archives in Vilnius became accessible to OSI research historians such as Michael Mac Queen and OSI consultants such as Yitzhak Arad. OSI historians and consultants searched the Lithuanian archives and copied and translated into English all relevant documents. A large number of documents were processed in this manner. Some documents served as evidentiary grounds for the initiation of the denaturalization process against Lithuanians whom the OSI deemed to be Nazi war criminals. The searches conducted in the Lithuanian archives in the early 1990s made it possible for the U.S. Department of Justice to initiate the denaturalization process against Aleksandras Lileikis, Algimantas Dailidė, and Adolfas Milinavičius – all members of the Lithuanian

security forces in Vilnius during the German occupation.

During the litigation process, in accordance with the rules of discovery, the government had to provide the defendants with all the documents the OSI had obtained in Lithuania and elsewhere if they were related to the case. The archival material used in this article was made available to the author by Joseph T. McGinness, the attorney for the defendant in *United States of America v. Algimantas Dailidė*, Civil Action No. 1:94CV2499, (United States District Court, Northern District of Ohio Eastern Division). The author is grateful to Mr. McGinness for introducing him to a period of Lithuanian history that will attract the attention of historians and legal scholars for years to come.

<sup>2</sup> Request for rifle cartridges, July 16, 1941, U.S. v. Dailidė, 580-665, Bates 07957-07960.

<sup>3</sup> Request for rifle cartridges, July 11, 1941, v. Dailidė, 580-666, Bates 07962-07966; Request for rifle cartridges, July 12, 1941, pp. 580-667, Bates 07967-07962.

<sup>4</sup> Interrogation of Petras Černiauskas, Vilnius, November 12, 1969, U.S. v. Dailidė, Bates 16397.

<sup>5</sup> Lithuanian Central State Archives, F. R730, ap. 2, b. 36, pp. L76-L80.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Interrogation of M. Butkus, Kaunas, December 12, 1989, U.S. v. Dailidė, Bates 16723.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Interrogation of Konstantinas Čičelis, Vilnius, October 28, 1969, U. S. v. Dailidė, Bates 16407.



<sup>10</sup> Ibid., Bates 16407-16408.

<sup>11</sup> *Panerių muziejus: Lietuvos TSR Revoliucijos muziejaus filialas* [Paneriai Museum: A branch of the Museum of the Revolution of the Lithuanian S.S.R.], (Vilnius: Mintis, 1966), p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Diary of W. Sakowicz, U.S. v. Dailidė, 580–672, Bates 17194.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., Bates 17195.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> General survey of all executions carried out in the sphere of action of Einsatzkommando 3 up to December 1, 1941 (Jäger Report), B. Baranauskas and K. Rukšėnas, *Documents Accuse*, (Vilnius: Gintaras, 1970), pp. 231–238.

<sup>16</sup> July 18, 1941 statistical information on the population of the city of Vilnius, U.S. v. Dailidė, 580–785,

<sup>17</sup> Israel Cohen, *Vilnius: Jewish Communities Series*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1943), p. 473, 474.

<sup>18</sup> N. N. Schneidman, *Jerusalem of Lithuania: The Rise and Fall of Jewish Vilnius: A Personal Perspective*, (Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press, 1998), p. 18.

<sup>19</sup> Yitzhak Arad, *Ghetto in Flames: The Struggle and Destruction of the Jews in Vilnius in the Holocaust*, (New York: Holocaust Library, 1982), p. 13.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>21</sup> Zvi Gitelman, “Soviet Jewry before the Holocaust,” in: *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, ed. Zvi Gitelman, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 10. Bykov’s biographical data in Liudas Truska, Arvydas Anušauskas, Inga Petravičiūtė, *Sovietinis saugumas Lietuvoje 1940–1953 metais* [Soviet Security in Lithuania, 1940–1953], (Vilnius: Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, 1999), p. 205.

<sup>22</sup> Arvydas Anušauskas, *Lietuvių tautos sovietinis naikinimas: 1940–1958 metais* [Soviet Extermination of the Lithuanian Nation: 1940–1958], (Vilnius: Mintis, 1996), pp. 53, 54.

<sup>23</sup> Algimantas Liekis, *Lietuvos laikinoji vyriausybė: 1941 06 22-08 05* [The Provisional Government of Lithuania: June 22–August 5, 1941], (Vilnius: Lietuvių tauta, 2000), pp. 85–89; Pilypas Narutis, *Tautos sukilimas 1941 m.: Lietuvos nepriklausomybei atstatyti* [1941

*Uprising of the Nation: To Restore Lithuania’s Independence*], Vol. 1, (Oak Lawn, Illinois, 1994), p. 227.

<sup>24</sup> Narutis, p. 215.

<sup>25</sup> Stasys Raštikis, “Lietuvos kariuomenės tragedija” [The Tragedy of the Lithuanian Army], in: *Lietuvių archyvas. Bolševizmo metai* [Lithuanian Archive. The Years of Bolshevism], (Brooklyn, N.Y., 1952).

<sup>26</sup> P. M., “1940 metų birželis (prisiminimai)” [June 1940 (Memoirs)], *Karys*, No. 7, 1980, p. 304; Dalia Šadzevičiūtė-Vabalienė, “Byla Nr. 34229 arba rekviem Tėvui ir jo draugams” [Case No. 34229, or a Requiem for Father and his Friends], in: *Sukilimas: 1941 m. birželio 22–25 d.* [Uprising: June 22–25, 1941], comp. Antanas Martinionis, (Vilnius: Kardas, 1994), pp. 44, 48.

<sup>27</sup> Liekis, pp. 215, 217.

<sup>28</sup> Vytautas Rimkus, *Lietuvių sukilimas Vilniuje 1941 m.* [The 1941 Lithuanian Uprising in Vilnius], (London, 1984), p. 23.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>31</sup> Plk. Lt. A. Špokevičiaus raštas apie Vilniaus miesto ir srities piliečių komiteto įsisteigimą ir veiklą, 1941 m. rugpjūčio 23 d. [Lt. Col. A. Špokevičius’s August 23, 1941 letter on the establishment and activities of the Citizens’ Committee of Vilnius City and Region], in: *1941 m. birželio sukilimas. Dokumentų rinkinys* [The 1941 June Uprising: A Collection of Documents], comp. Valentinas Brandišauskas, (Vilnius: Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, 2000), pp. 189, 190.

<sup>32</sup> “Kalendra,” in: *Lietuvių enciklopedija* [Lithuanian Encyclopedia], Vol. 10, (South Boston: Lietuvių enciklopedijos leidykla), 1957, p. 309.

<sup>33</sup> Čičelis, October 28, 1969, Bates 16402–16403.

<sup>34</sup> Arūnas Bubnys, *Vokiečių okupuota Lietuva (1941–1944)* [German-occupied Lithuania (1941–1944)], (Vilnius: Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, 1998), p. 276.

<sup>35</sup> Sąrašas Ypatingo Būrio tarnautojų norinčių pirkti malkų, 1941 lapričio mėn. [List of Special Squad members who want to buy firewood, November 1941], U.S. v. Dailidė, 580–361; Bates 05469-05474.

<sup>36</sup> Vilniaus Ypatingo Būrio tarnautojų sąrašas.

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<sup>37</sup> Liste des (sic) Angesteller des Sonderkommando. o. D. [*List of Special Squad members. o. D.*], U.S. v. Dailidė, 580–674; Bates 13992–13998.

<sup>38</sup> Butkus, December 12, 1989, Bates 16713.

<sup>39</sup> Solomonas Atamukas, “The Hard Long Road Toward the Truth: On the Sixtieth Anniversary of the Holocaust in Lithuania,” *Lituanus*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (Winter 2001), p. 25.

<sup>40</sup> Bubnys, p. 272.

<sup>41</sup> Interrogation of suspect Jan Borkowski. January 29, 1973, U.S. v. Dailidė, 580–655; Bates 07819-07823.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, Bates 07882.

<sup>43</sup> Interrogation of suspect Witold Gilwinski. August 28, 1976, U. S. v. Dailidė, 580–686; Bates 08668-08669.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Angesteller des Sonderkommando [*Special Squad members*], Bates 05475-05481.

<sup>46</sup> Dov Levin, “Lithuanian Attitudes toward the Jewish Minority in the Aftermath of the Holocaust: The Lithuanian Press, 1991–1992,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Fall 1993), p. 247.

<sup>47</sup> Dina Porat, “The Holocaust in Lithuania: Some Unique Aspects,” in: *The Final Solution: Origins and Implementation*, ed. David Cesarani (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 165.

Arūnas Bubnys

## The 1st (13th) Lithuanian Police Battalion and the 1941 Jews Massacre

One of the most important topics in the history of the Holocaust in Lithuania is the participation of Lithuanian police battalions in the genocide of the Jewish people. Even though this topic was often used during the Soviet era for propaganda purposes in an effort to compromise the “bourgeois nationalists,” it did not go beyond opinion pieces and pamphlets. In Soviet historiography and opinion journalism, only Jokūbas Vicas’s study, Part 1 of the document collection “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” the pamphlet “Kaltina nužudytieji,” and the document collection “Nacionalistų talka hitlerininkams” can be singled out.<sup>1</sup> However, the activities of the Tautos darbo apsauga (“National Labor Protection;” hereinafter – TDA) Battalion are not systematically examined in Vicas’s study. Isolated facts about Jewish massacres and anti-partisan campaigns are scattered throughout the book and get lost among fragments of other battalions’ activities. The author does not provide any statistical information about the number of Jews that the battalion murdered, and only briefly mentions that the TDA Battalion killed not only in Kaunas, but also in the provinces. To be fair, Lithuanian emigrants basically ignored this topic as well (with the exception of Saulius Sužiedėlis’s work on the subject of the Holocaust). Even though the magazine *Karys* was being published in the United States and often featured memoir-like articles about the activities of the police battalions, the topic of the Holocaust was largely overlooked. Accounts of battles with Soviet and Polish partisans (*Armia Krajowa*, the “Home Army”) or units of the Red Army were the most common. The attitude of Lithuanian diaspora authors towards the Holocaust is well reflected in the book by Henry L. Gaidis about the activities of the Lithuanian armed forces during World War II.<sup>2</sup> Gaidis described the formation and activities of the Lithuanian police battalions during the Nazi occupation in detail, but, as per tradition, he kept quiet on the issue of the battalions’ participation in the Holocaust and placed all the blame for the Jewish tragedy on the Nazi occupation authorities.

After the restoration of independence (post-1990), Lithuanian historians also paid insufficient attention to the history of the Holocaust, and especially to the role of the

Lithuanian police in it. A rare exception is the article by Stasys Knezys about the activities of the TDA Battalion in Kaunas in 1941.<sup>3</sup> However, Knezys paid more attention to the process of the formation of the battalion and its organizational structure and composition than to the use of the battalion for the Jewish massacres. The aspect of the Holocaust in the activities of Lithuanian police battalions was also mentioned in Rimantas Zizas's article in *Lietuvos Archyvai*.<sup>4</sup> Without further commenting on the statistical data, Zizas concludes that not many battalion soldiers directly participated in the killings, and that they cannot be equated with the main battalion forces.

Unfortunately, Lithuanian historians are still not on par with German historians in the field of Holocaust research. Recently, several important books and articles about the genocide of the Jewish people in Lithuania have come out in Germany.<sup>5</sup> German historian Knut Stang undertook examination of the role of the Lithuanian police battalions (specifically the TDA Battalion in Kaunas) in the Holocaust.<sup>6</sup> Although he did not manage to avoid factual errors and inaccuracies in his book, he did examine the activities of the TDA Battalion quite thoroughly and objectively. However, Stang focused more on the massacres carried out by the battalion at the Kaunas forts, and did not examine in detail the campaigns carried out by the same battalion in the provinces. Furthermore, in reasoning about Rollkommando Hamann, a small mobile unit under the command of SS-Obersturmführer Joachim Hamann, Stang claimed that this squad, which was specially formed for the killing of Jews, was made up of soldiers from the 4th Company of the TDA Battalion. In fact, the basis of Rollkommando Hamann was made up of soldiers not from the 4th Company, but from the 3rd. Lt. Juozas Barzda served as commander of the 3rd Company from June 28 to August 18, 1941 (on August 18, 1941, he was appointed deputy to Maj. Antanas Impulevičius, commander of the 2nd Lithuanian Police Battalion). After Barzda was transferred to the 2nd Battalion, Lt. Anatolijus Dagys became commander of the 3rd Company of the TDA Battalion. Stang overemphasizes the role of Lt. Bronius Norkus in Hamann's unit and in general in the mass killings of Jews. In this respect, Norkus's role was no greater than that of Barzda or Dagys. Norkus was never the commander of the 3rd Company (he was in command of a unit of the 3rd Company in 1941, from June 28 to July 31, and from August 7 to September 4). On September 4, 1941, Norkus was appointed commander of the 4th Company. To the best of the author's knowledge, this company (which, on September 10, 1941, was called the 1st Company) did not directly participate in the massacre of Jews. The list that Stang presents of 57 TDA Battalion soldiers who allegedly formed the basis of Rollkommando Hamann is also questionable.<sup>7</sup> The 57 persons Stang refers to belonged to the 4th Company, which, as already mentioned, did not directly participate in the killings. It was the 3rd Company of the TDA Battalion that carried out the mass killings, and only this company can be linked to Hamann's unit.

The most important archival documents for the topic under consideration are stored in the Lithuanian Central State Archives (LCSA) and the Lithuanian Special Archives (LSA). The LCSA's Generalbezirk Litauen Kauen-Stadt Command fonds (f. R-1444) is of particular importance, as it contains the 1941 orders to the TDA Battalion. These orders make it possible to re-create the battalion's formation process, organizational structure, quantitative composition and personnel, as well as information about the facilities that the battalion protected. However, the killing campaigns carried out by the battalion are not reflected in the orders. Only by comparing the LCSA documents with the criminal cases safeguarded in the LSA of the battalion soldiers convicted after the war is it possible to ascertain what some of the phraseology used in the orders, such as "dispatched on secret service matters" actually meant. After the war, Soviet security sentenced more than 90 former officers and soldiers of the 1st (13th)\* Battalion. Their criminal cases are a very important source for researching the battalion's history and involvement in the Jewish massacres. Although there are inaccuracies in these cases, by comparing the testimonies of several or even a dozen persons about the same events, a more or less reliable picture of the events can be formed.

### **Formation of the TDA Battalion and its activities in the city of Kaunas**

The TDA Battalion began to be formed in Kaunas on June 28, 1941. The battalion was organized in the first days of the Soviet-Nazi war by the Kaunas Military Command. The first German army units arrived in Kaunas in the second half of June 24, 1941. All military and administrative power was concentrated in the hands of the commandant, Maj. Gen. Robert von Pohl of the Germans' 821st Field Command. On June 28, 1941, von Pohl ordered Col. Jurgis Bobelis, commandant of the Kaunas Military Command, to disarm the Lithuanian rebel and partisan units and bring the weapons to the Kaunas Military Command headquarters. This meant that the anti-Soviet Lithuanian partisan units were being released.<sup>8</sup> However, on that same day of June 28, 1941, Bobelis issued Order No. 9 on the reorganization of former partisan units into a regular formation.

\*The name and numbering of the 1st (13th) Lithuanian Police Battalion changed several times. From June 28 to August 7, 1941, the battalion was known as the Tautos darbo apsauga ("National Labor Protection;" TDA) Battalion, then later as the Pagalbinės policijos tarnyba ("Auxiliary Police Service;" PPT) Battalion, and then the 1st PPT Battalion, and then as of December 20 – the 13th Security Battalion.

All of the partisans' weapons and military ammunition were to be delivered to the Kaunas Military Command headquarters and re-registered. Failure to comply with the order was threatened with punishment "with all the severity of the law."<sup>9</sup>

On June 28, 1941, the Kaunas Military Commandant signed a notice regarding the establishment of a regular formation:

A Tautinio Darbo Apsauga [TDA] battalion is to be formed under the Kaunas Military Command. All noble Lithuanians who want to serve in this battalion are invited to register at the Kaunas Military Command, Gedimino g. 34, 1st floor, room 1, by 6 p.m. on the 29th of June this year. Officers, non-commissioned officers and privates who have completed active service shall be accepted. ...<sup>10</sup>

This notice issued by Bobelis on the establishment of the TDA Battalion had to have been coordinated in advance with the German military commandant Robert von Pohl, and his permission had to have been obtained. The German military administration needed armed units to perform front-line support functions (guarding military facilities and prisoners of war, maintaining public order and security), so it did not object to the establishment of an armed Lithuanian unit. Bobelis entrusted Col. Andrius Butkūnas with organizing the formation of the TDA Battalion (Butkūnas was in command of the battalion until the Voldemarininkai coup on July 24, 1941; after Butkūnas, Maj. Kazys Šimkus became commander of the TDA Battalion).<sup>11</sup> In the first days of the war, Butkūnas headed the Lithuanian rebels in Raudondvaris Township. The rebels under his command captured 68 Red Army soldiers.<sup>12</sup> It was mostly rebels from the city and county of Kaunas who participated in the 1941 June Uprising (and who usually called themselves "partisans") and soldiers from the time of independent Lithuania who joined the battalion.

The first order for the TDA Battalion was issued on July 1, 1941. It was signed by Col. Butkūnas, the battalion commander. In the order, Butkūnas thanked Adolf Hitler, the commander of "Greater Germany," for liberation from the "red terror" and called on the soldiers of the battalion to follow in the footsteps of the June Uprising rebels and 1919 volunteers who had died and work selflessly "for the rebuilding of our liberated fatherland." In the order, there was strong emphasis on the need to maintain military discipline and order. The soldiers of the battalion were duty-bound to salute German officers.<sup>13</sup>

That same day, Butkūnas issued Secret Order No. 1 for the TDA Battalion. According to this order, permanent guard posts were established as of July 1, 1941 at the following buildings: 1) the Cabinet of Ministers (the Provisional Government of Lithuania; with nine soldiers from the 2nd Company and one envoy on guard); 2) the radio station (seven members of the 1st Company); 3) the power station in Petrašiūnai (seven members of the 1st Company); and 4) at the water supply station in Kleboniškis (seven members of the 1st Company).

Temporary guard posts were also set up by the warehouses on Minkausko Street and Napoleono Street in Aleksotas.<sup>14</sup>

On July 3, 1941, the TDA Battalion officers were approved by order of the battalion commander. GS Maj. Antanas Impulevičius was appointed deputy battalion commander, while Lt. Vladas Garbenis was appointed as the battalion adjutant, Capt. Bronius Kirkila – commander of the 1st Company, Capt. Norbertas Gasėnas – commander of the 2nd Company, Lt. Juozas Barzda – commander of the 3rd Company, Lt. Anatolijus Dagys – assistant company commander, Lt. Jurgis Skaržinskas, Lt. Bronius Norkus and Jr. Lt. Stepas Dubinskas – unit commanders, Capt. Viktoras Klimavičius – commander of the 4th Company, and Capt. Juozas Truškauskas – commander of the 5th Company.<sup>15</sup>

The TDA Battalion was formed very quickly. On July 4, 1941, it had 724 non-commissioned officers and soldiers serving in it.<sup>16</sup>

At first, the TDA Battalion guarded military and economic facilities, but by the beginning of July 1941, it was already involved in the mass killing of Jews at the initiative of the Sicherheitspolizei (“Security Police;” SiPo) and the Sicherheitsdienst (“Security Service;” SD).

### **Jewish massacres at the Kaunas forts**

Erich Ehrlinger, commander of Einsatzkommando 1b under the SiPo and the SD, was already planning mass arrests and the systematic murder of Jews in the first days of the German occupation. The Seventh Fort in Kaunas was selected as the site for the first mass killing of Jews. In his July 1, 1941 report to the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (“Reich Security Main Office;” RSHA) in Berlin, Ehrlinger mentions the establishment of a Jewish concentration camp at the Seventh Fort and the carrying out of executions.<sup>17</sup>

As of June 29, 1941, Ehrlinger was in charge of the Jewish massacres. A few days later (July 2), the functions of the SiPo in Kaunas were taken over from him by SS-Standartenführer Karl Jäger, commander of Einsatzkommando 3 under Einsatzgruppe A (hereinafter – Einsatzkommando 3/A). By the time it left Kaunas, Einsatzkommando 1b, under Ehrlinger’s command, had killed roughly 1,500 Jews.<sup>18</sup>

A July 6, 1941 Einsatzgruppe A report states that on June 28, by order of the German command headquarters in Kaunas, the partisans were disarmed. Two auxiliary police units (a total of five companies) were formed from reliable partisans. Two companies (205 men) were transferred to the Einsatzgruppe, while one guarded the Jewish concentration camp set up at the Seventh Fort and carried out executions. By Jäger’s

order, 463 Jews were shot dead at the Seventh Fort on July 4, followed by another 2,514 on July 6. The aforementioned Einsatzgruppe report states that approximately 1,500 Jews were being held at the Seventh Fort, and that there were plans to set up a camp for them at the Ninth Fort. In addition, there were 1,869 Jews, 214 Lithuanians, 134 Russians, one Latvian and 16 Poles being held at the Kaunas Central Prison.<sup>19</sup>

From the testimonies of convicted TDA Battalion soldiers to Soviet security, it can be concluded that the 1st and 3rd Companies of the TDA Battalion participated in the massacre of Jews at the Seventh Fort. In subsequent Jewish massacres, it was usually the 3rd Company that took part. When extremely large extermination campaigns were carried out, almost the entire battalion participated in them, aside from soldiers who were performing other assignments.<sup>20</sup> It was primarily soldiers from the 1st Company who participated in the first massacre of Jews at the Seventh Fort in early July, but there were soldiers from other companies present as well. Approximately 700 Jews were imprisoned at the Seventh Fort (in Žaliakalnis) at that time. They were kept inside the fort in the open air. The battalion soldiers were brought in by truck to the place of execution. Inside the fort there was a large ravine. The Jews were herded in groups to the ditch and shot. The commands to shoot were given by Lt. Bronius Norkus and Jr. Lt. Juozas Obelenis, who also shot the victims with pistols. The soldiers fired rifles. After the massacre ended, the corpses were buried by Soviet prisoners of war. After the execution, the soldiers were taken back to the barracks on Laisvės Alėja.<sup>21</sup> According to the Jäger Report, 416 Jewish men and 47 Jewish women were shot at the Seventh Fort on July 4, 1941.<sup>22</sup> Others have testified that German officers and TDA lieutenants Juozas Barzda and Jurgis Skaržinskas also participated in shooting the Jews at the Seventh Fort.<sup>23</sup>

The 3rd Company of the TDA Battalion also took part in the mass killing of Jews at the Seventh Fort on July 6, 1941. The shooting was done in the valley next to the fort. This time, the victims were shot with machine guns as well. Lieutenants Barzda, Dagys and Norkus were in charge of the shooting. Members of the German Gestapo participated in the massacre as well. The Jews were brought to the pits in groups of 20. Then TDA Battalion soldiers shot them in the back from just a few meters away.<sup>24</sup> On July 6, 1941, 2,514 Jews were murdered at the Seventh Fort.<sup>25</sup>

Secret Order No. 3 issued by the TDA Battalion commander on July 7, 1941 directed the Seventh Fort to be guarded by a Type-I watch consisting of 49 guards. The fort was to be guarded around the clock. In terms of the number of guards, it was the TDA Battalion's most guarded facility. At that same time, there were only eight people guarding the building of the Provisional Government of Lithuania (Laisvės al. 70).<sup>26</sup> According to the information available, the Seventh Fort was guarded by the battalion's 1st Company in early July. This company also participated in the killing of Jews at this fort.<sup>27</sup>



One of the massacres at the Seventh Fort took two days. That time, a group of 400–500 Jewish men were being shot. Lt. Juozas Barzda was in charge of the execution. Since the shooting was done in small groups, the massacre went on until nightfall. Then Barzda stopped the shooting and left part of the company's soldiers to guard the doomed for the night. The next day, several machine guns were brought to the scene of the massacre and the shooting resumed. This time, all of the Jewish men who had been herded in the day before were shot.<sup>28</sup>

It should be noted that the testimonies of the accused often differ from the numbers of victims and the dates of the massacres mentioned in the Jäger Report. For example, the Jäger Report does not include any data about the campaign at the Seventh Fort that lasted two days. It can be assumed that the shootings at the Seventh Fort were more frequent than the Jäger Report indicates. On the other hand, the number of victims of several smaller campaigns may have been added to the number of those killed in a large campaign. This is especially true of the July 6, 1941 massacre, when 2,514 Jews were shot. Nowhere in the testimonies of witnesses is such a large number of Jews being killed at the Seventh Fort in one day mentioned. It is likely that this figure was obtained by adding together the number of persons killed in several smaller campaigns.

During one of the shootings at the Seventh Fort, the doomed tried to break through the guards and escape, but were unsuccessful. The Jews were shot in a ravine with slopes that were 10-15 meters high. The guards had enough time to shoot the unarmed people.<sup>29</sup> There is information that this act of resistance at the Seventh Fort was spontaneously inspired by Borisas Chodosas, a doctor from Kaunas. However, he, like the others, was shot. On July 7, 1941, the Jewish women imprisoned in the dungeons of the Seventh Fort were transferred to the Ninth Fort.<sup>30</sup>

After the mass murder on July 6, 1941, Jewish extermination campaigns were only carried out at the Seventh Fort on a smaller scale. On July 9, 21 Jewish men and three Jewish women were killed. One of the former TDA Battalion soldiers who served in the 3rd Company recalls that in mid-July, some of the company's soldiers, led by Lt. Bronius Norkus, took a group of Jewish men and women (about 30 people) from the prison on A. Mickevičiaus Street and brought them to the Seventh Fort. Another small group of Jews was brought to the fort by truck. A ditch about 10 meters long had been dug out inside the fort. The Jews were herded to the ditch and shot. The corpses were buried by the Jews who had been brought in from the prison, who were then returned to prison. Judging from this testimony, this must have been the July 19 massacre, because the witness himself was enlisted in the TDA Battalion on July 15.<sup>31</sup>

This was the last massacre at the Seventh Fort. That day, 26 people were shot at the fort: 17 Jewish men, two Jewish women, four male Lithuanian communists, two female Lithuanian communists and one male German communist. Secret Order No. 4

issued by the TDA Battalion commander on July 14, 1941 notes that the fort was guarded by a total of 49 guards, but “in the absence of detainees, the composition of the guard shall be reduced to seven people at the discretion of the fort commander.”<sup>32</sup> In other words, once the Jews imprisoned at the Seventh Fort had all been murdered, the need to heavily guard the fort disappeared.

Before the mass killings, the soldiers in the TDA Battalion had never participated in similar campaigns. This had a negative effect on the mental health and morale of these soldiers. Unable to openly oppose the Nazis, most of them tried to leave the service or otherwise avoid participating in the massacres. On July 5–11, 1941, 117 soldiers were released from service in the battalion. On July 15–17, nine soldiers deserted from the 1st Company alone. Unable to endure the atrocities he experienced, commander of the 1st Company of the TDA Battalion Capt. Bronius Kirkila shot himself on July 12. 1st Company Deputy Battalion Commander Lt. Stepas Paulauskas and two unit commanders, Jr. Lt. Povilas Kulakauskas and Jr. Lt. Jonas Ralys, asked to be, and were, dismissed from service.<sup>33</sup>

However, these forms of protest could not change the Nazi policy towards Jews. The TDA Battalion continued to be used to murder Jewish people.

The first campaign at the Kaunas Fourth Fort was carried out on August 2, 1941. A total of 209 people were shot that day: 170 Jewish men, 33 Jewish women, one Jewish American man, one Jewish American woman, and four Lithuanian communists.<sup>34</sup> The TDA Battalion soldiers, under the command of Lt. Juozas Barzda and Lt. Jurgis Skaržinskas, took the doomed from the prison on A. Mickevičiaus Street and herded them to the Fourth Fort. There were already some 10 German officers and soldiers waiting for them. A ditch several meters long and several meters wide had been dug out between the slopes. The Jews were stripped down to their underwear and herded in groups to the ditch, where they were shot by several dozen TDA soldiers and Germans. Barzda gave the command to shoot. The other soldiers from the battalion guarded the scene of the massacre. The massacre lasted about two hours.<sup>35</sup>

An even bigger massacre was carried out at the Fourth Fort on August 9. Then, the entire 3rd Company was taken to the prison on A. Mickevičiaus Street. The prison guards ran 500–600 Jewish men and women out of the prison. The company was headed by Lt. Juozas Barzda and Lt. Anatolijus Dagys. Accompanied by guards, the Jews were herded to the Fourth Fort in Aukštoji Panemunė. Inside the fort, the men and women were separated. A German SS officer and several soldiers arrived at the fort in a passenger car. Several large pits had already been dug out in the fort by Soviet prisoners of war. Before the shooting, CSM Zigmars Arlauskas gave the soldiers a drink of vodka (which had been brought to the fort by the Germans). The women were shot first. They were herded in groups to a pit and shot in the back. Barzda, Dagys and the Germans shot the victims who were still alive in the pits with pistols to

finish them off. After shooting the women, they started herding the Jewish men to the pits. The men were stripped down to their underwear, lined up at the edge of the pits and shot. After a group of Jews was shot, Soviet prisoners of war would cover them with a thin layer of dirt before the next group was brought over. The shooting began in the afternoon and lasted until the evening. Almost all of the soldiers of the 3rd Company who were at the fort at that time were involved in the shooting. After the massacre, the corpses were buried by Soviet prisoners of war. According to the Jäger Report, 534 Jews were shot at the Fourth Fort on August 9, 1941: 484 men and 50 women.<sup>36</sup>

On August 18, 1941, the Jewish Council at the Kaunas Ghetto received an order from the commandant of the ghetto, SA-Hauptsturmführer Fritz Jordan, to gather men from the Jewish intelligentsia and send them to the ghetto gates. Mikas Kaminskas, who handled Jewish affairs in Kaunas Municipality, told the ghetto representatives that Jewish intellectuals were needed for work in the Kaunas city archives. Lured by this offer (due to the nature of the work and the better salary), 534 Jews gathered. All of them were taken to the Fourth Fort and shot on the same day. According to the Jäger Report, a total of 1,812 people were shot at the Fourth Fort on August 18, 1941: 698 Jewish men, 402 Jewish women, one Polish woman and 711 Jewish intellectuals from the ghetto. This was punishment for an act of sabotage.<sup>37</sup> Among those killed were violinist and Opera and Ballet Theater concertmaster Robertas Stenderis, the renowned film director Mareks Martens, who had come to Lithuania from Poland, painter A. Kaplan, journalist Maksas Volfovičius, and numerous doctors, engineers, attorneys at law and teachers.<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, it was not possible to determine who exactly carried out this execution. It was probably the work of German Gestapo officers and the 3rd Company of the TDA Battalion, which had gained considerable experience in killing. According to the testimonies of convicted TDA Battalion soldiers, the battalion shot Jews several times at the Fourth Fort in August 1941. Until the end of August 1941, only the TDA Battalion operated in Kaunas. The 2nd Lithuanian Auxiliary Police Battalion was actually only formed at the end of August.

In October 1941, the Jewish massacres took place at the Ninth Fort. Executions were carried out here until the very end of the Hitler occupation. The first mass killing of Jews at the Ninth Fort was on October 4. The pretext for this campaign was an alleged attack on a German guard.<sup>39</sup>

Preparations for the massacres at the Ninth Fort began much earlier. More than a month before the October 4 campaign, three Gestapo officers came to the Ninth Fort prison (with Gestapo officer Josef Stütz mentioned among them). They ordered the prison warden to clear the field next to the fort (it was sown with oats and peas). Then a few hundred Soviet prisoners of war were sent to the fort. They dug several long trenches over the course of a month.<sup>40</sup>

Somewhere around 6 a.m. on October 4, 1941, approximately 50 German policemen and 100 Lithuanian policemen arrived at the “Little Ghetto.” They blocked the entrance to the ghetto. Only a small group of people with “Jewish craftsman certificates” (which the Jews in the ghetto called “Jordan certificates”) were allowed to leave the ghetto. The inhabitants of the Little Ghetto were herded to Sajungos Square outside the ghetto. The Jews with “Jordan certificates” were then taken to the “Big Ghetto,” and those without were taken to the Ninth Fort. All of the patients in the surgery and therapy department at the ghetto hospital were among those taken away. A total of 141 children and nannies were taken from the orphanage. Babies were kicked and thrown like sticks into a truck covered with a tarpaulin. The truck drove off in the direction of the Ninth Fort. From the ghetto infectious diseases hospital, 67 patients, doctors and healthy prisoners of the Little Ghetto who tried to hide there were taken away. The infectious diseases hospital was set on fire, with all the equipment and documents inside.<sup>41</sup> The Jews brought to the Ninth Fort from the Little Ghetto were shot in trenches dug by prisoners of war. Almost the entire 3rd Company of the 1st Lithuanian Police Battalion (formerly the TDA) was involved in the shooting. Roughly 20 German soldiers also took part in the massacre. The Lithuanian self-defense unit soldiers were under the command of Lt. Bronius Norkus.<sup>42</sup> According to the Jäger Report, 1,845 Jews were shot on October 4, 1941: 315 men, 712 women, and 818 children.<sup>43</sup>

The largest massacre of Jews at the Ninth Fort was carried out on October 29, 1941. On the eve of the massacre, all the residents of the ghetto were lined up in 10 columns in Kaunas Ghetto’s Demokratų Square, with the members of the ghetto’s Council of Elders and their families in the first column, the ghetto policemen and their families in the second column, employees of the ghetto administration and their families in the third column, and workers and their families in the remaining columns. All of those chosen had to go through the selection of Fritz Jordan, Josef Stütz, Alfred Tornbau, Helmut Rauca and other members of the SS. Some were sent to the right (to die), while others were sent to the left (temporarily left to live). Large families and people who were physically weak and ill were selected to be killed first. Families were often separated. The doomed were taken to the territory of the Small Ghetto, and the next day they were herded to the Ninth Fort to be shot.<sup>44</sup> Soldiers from the 1st Lithuanian Police Battalion also participated in the selection of ghetto prisoners. The battalion went to the ghetto in separate companies. Only those on duty remained in the battalion barracks, which were located in the police premises in Žaliakalnis. Each soldier in the battalion had 30-40 rounds of ammunition in their cartridge pouch. Lieutenants Anatolijus Dagys, Juozas Barzda and Bronius Norkus and Junior Lieutenant Norbertas Jakubauskas went together with the 3rd Company. Soldiers from other police battalions and German policemen were also sent to the ghetto. Most of the 1st Battalion soldiers stood guard around the ghetto, while others were on

guard in Demokratų Square. Maj. Kazys Šimkus, who was the commander of the 1st Battalion, came to the ghetto on October 28. After selecting approximately 10,000 Jews to be shot, the 3rd Company of the 1st Battalion returned to the barracks. The next morning, the 3rd Company went to the ghetto. Other companies of the 1st Battalion came as well. The officers of the 1st Battalion and part of the soldiers went from the ghetto to the Ninth Fort. The remaining soldiers in the battalion lined the Jews up in columns and herded them to the fort. Once they got there, the Jews were led to the western slope of the fort, where several trenches approximately 200 meters long, 3 meters wide, and 2 meters deep had been dug out. Then, in groups of 100–150, the doomed were led to the ditches and thrown in. They were stripped down to their underwear before being shot. The battalion soldiers surrounded the trenches on three sides, and at the command of the officers, started shooting the people in the trenches. When one group was shot, prisoners of war covered the corpses with a layer of dirt, and then a new group of victims was brought in. Several dozen soldiers from the 3rd Company fired at once. Lieutenants Anatolijus Dagys, Bronius Norkus and Juozas Barzda, who had already distinguished themselves in campaigns like this, participated in the massacre. Some 20 German officers and soldiers also took part in the shooting. The German soldiers fired assault rifles, while the officers used pistols. The groups of shooters took turns.

It was already getting dark by the time the killing ended. After the massacre, the battalion soldiers went through the victims' belongings and picked out the better clothing and other items. The soldiers returned to the barracks in lorries. According to the Jäger Report, 9,200 Jews were shot at the Ninth Fort on October 29, 1941: 2,007 men, 2,920 women, and 4,273 children. The October 29 massacre was cynically described in the Jäger Report as “purging the ghetto of unnecessary Jews.” In the history of Lithuania, there has probably never been a massacre of such a scale, when close to 10,000 people – innocent civilians – were murdered in a single day. Only one person miraculously managed to escape from the scene of the massacre – an 11-year-old boy named Izaak Bloch.<sup>45</sup> After the *Große Aktion* – the Kaunas massacre of October 29, 1941 – there were no more mass killings of Jews from the Kaunas Ghetto right up until March 26, 1944. However, in November and December 1941, Jews brought in from other German-occupied lands were killed at the Ninth Fort. By order of Karl Jäger, who was commander of the SiPo and SD in Lithuania, premises were vacated at the fort for the new prisoners in November 1941. The prisoners who were being held at the Ninth Fort were transferred to Kaunas Central Prison. Within a few days, thousands of Jews from foreign countries were brought to the Ninth Fort. Almost half of the prisoners did not fit in the fort's casemates and were kept in the open air in the fort yard. The detainees were only fed soup once a day. A few days before the mass killings, some 200 Soviet prisoners of war were brought to the fort. They dug four trenches, each 50 meters long, 2 meters wide, and 2 meters deep. On November 25, when everything

was ready, Standartenführer Jäger arrived at the fort with 80 Gestapo officers and German soldiers as well as Maj. Kazys Šimkus and a police unit of the 1st Battalion under the command of Lt. Juozas Barzda (approximately 50 people).<sup>46</sup>

Ignas Vylius-Velavičius, the former head of the Kaunas Hard Labor Prison, recounted the course of the massacre in detail:

The first groups lay in the water, and those who resisted were beaten with clubs and rifle butts and forced to lie down in rows ... The brutality during the shooting was unprecedented. The guards taunted them and beat the disobedient ones with clubs and rifle butts even on the way to the trenches. The entire day, the territory of the Ninth Fort was filled with groaning and women and children crying, with mothers carrying babies in their arms, and holding older children by the hand. They climbed on the corpses of the people who had already been shot, lay down in rows and waited to be shot themselves. The people who were shot weren't buried, so the others had to lie down on the dead, and then they were shot. ... In the evening, when it was already dark, the mass killing ended. Three trenches were completely full. The people who were shot weren't buried, and there were children, men and women still alive in the trenches among them. They lay there under the corpses and moaned. As I watched, many wounded and bloody men and women climbed out of the trenches and tried to run. But the watch and the Gestapo soldiers caught them, beat them, ordered them to lie back down on the corpses and shot them again. ... After the shooting, part of the Gestapo and soldiers from the Lithuanian unit loaded the good clothes into cars and took them away. The rest of the clothes were taken away the next day by workers from the Nazi Party.<sup>47</sup>

According to the Jäger Report, 2,934 Jews brought in from Berlin, Munich and Frankfurt am Main were shot at the Ninth Fort on November 25, 1941. On November 29, another 2,000 Jews brought in from Vienna and Breslau (Wrocław) were shot at the same fort.<sup>48</sup>

According to the testimonies of former soldiers of the battalion, together with Jews from the Kaunas Ghetto, Jews from Czechoslovakia were also shot in the autumn of 1941. Some 2–3 thousand of them were allegedly shot.<sup>49</sup> Alas, the Jäger Report does not mention Jews brought in from Czechoslovakia being shot at the Ninth Fort in the autumn of 1941. On the other hand, it is plausible that the Jews in German-occupied Czechoslovakia could have been listed as German Jews in the Gestapo documents. In terms of the number of victims, the massacre of Czechoslovakian Jews almost corresponds to the number of German and Austrian Jews who were murdered on November 25 and 29, 1941 (approximately 2–3 thousand). Zenonas Blynas,

the well-informed General Secretary of the Lithuanian Nationalist Party (LNP), also confirmed the fact of the massacre of Czechoslovakian Jews in his diary. On November 26, 1941, he wrote:

Brunius and Vylius mentioned that they brought in a lot of Jews to the Ninth Fort from Germany; others say they're from Czechoslovakia. Some of them have already been shot. One woman said: One shot and it's over. Whoever took their suitcases from the wagons were allowed to take them, and those who didn't have time to take them weren't allowed. Well then, the Germans want to make Lithuania a grave field for Europe's Jews.<sup>50</sup>

The following lines were entered in Blynas's diary on November 29:

The Jews who the 1st Battalion is shooting now are being brought in from Czechoslovakia. They have Brazilian, Argentine visas. They're told that they're being taken to "quarantine." Bearing in mind the new decree on the Jewish question published in *Į laisvę* (No. 136, 29.XI.41), it is clear: They renounce their "citizenship," get visas and are taken to "quarantine" – everything is legal, and they disappear along the way. The 1st Battalion takes care of them.<sup>51</sup>

Later, massacres of this magnitude (when several thousand people were shot in a day) were not carried out at the Kaunas Ninth Fort. Gestapo officials would notify the Ninth Fort's supervisors of the upcoming campaigns by telephone. The Gestapo avoided sending written orders on the organization and execution of massacres.<sup>52</sup>

According to the data of the SiPo, it can be concluded that from July 4 to December 1, 1941, the 1st Lithuanian Police Battalion, together with German Gestapo officers, shot at least 23,140 Jews (including 4,934 Jews from foreign countries) at the Kaunas forts.

### **Killing campaigns carried out by the 1st Battalion in the provinces**

A large part of the Jewish massacres that were carried out in the provinces are associated with SS-Obersturmführer Joachim Hamann's Rollkommando. In his infamous December 1, 1941 report, Jäger writes:

The goal of making Lithuania *judenfrei* could only be achieved by setting up a Rollkommando with select men under the leadership of SS-Obersturmführer Hamann, who fully embraced my goals and knew how to guarantee collaboration with the Lithuanian partisans and the competent civil authorities.<sup>53</sup>

So who was Hamann and the Rollkommando under his command? On the eve of the Soviet-Nazi war, Nazi enemies in the occupied lands were first and foremost supposed to be destroyed by Einsatzgruppen – special SiPo and SD paramilitary death squads. Right before the war with the Soviets, the Nazis created four Einsatzgruppen – A, B, C and D. The commanders of the Einsatzgruppen were directly appointed by Heinrich Himmler and Reyhard Heydrich. One Einsatzgruppen was created for each army group (North, Center and South). Einsatzgruppen A was assigned to Army Group North, which was tasked with occupying the Baltic republics and Leningrad. Einsatzgruppe A consisted of Einsatzkommandos 2 and 3 and Sonderkommandos 1a and 1b.<sup>54</sup> Einsatzgruppe A was initially under the command of SS-Brigadeführer Walter Stahlecker. As mentioned, Einsatzkommando 3/A, which operated in Lithuania, was under the command of SS-Standartenführer Karl Jäger. This Einsatzkommando had over 120 members, who were divided into three units (*Züge*). Joachim Hamann was the commander of one of the units and was Jäger's adjutant.<sup>55</sup> He was known as an extremely vehement anti-Semite. Jäger and Hamann are believed to have arrived in Kaunas in the very first days of the German occupation, and the latter was tasked by Stahlecker, the commander of Einsatzgruppe A, to organize a mobile unit for the mass killing of Jews and communists.<sup>56</sup> The German SiPo and SD forces were not enough to carry out these assignments. Therefore, Einsatzkommando 3/A enlisted the help of the soldiers in the TDA Battalion being formed in Kaunas. It just so happened that the 3rd Company of the TDA Battalion was usually the one assigned for the mass killing of Jews. Rollkommando Hamann had no permanent structure or specific deployment location. It was usually called for ad hoc campaigns and consisted of a few German Gestapo officers and several dozen Lithuanian TDA policemen. Hamann often did not even go to the killing campaigns in the provinces himself, just giving assignments to the officers of the 1st Battalion (lieutenants Anatolijus Dagsys, Juozas Barzda and Bronius Norkus). It is speculated that SS-Hauptscharführers Reinhold Porst, Josef Stütz, Walter Salzmann, Heinz Mack and F. Walter Planert usually took part in the campaigns. Hamann's deputy was SS-Hauptsturmführer Helmut Rauca.<sup>57</sup> The Rollkommando would only arrive at the scene of the campaign when all the preparatory work had been completed – the Jews condemned to death were gathered in one place with the local police used to guard them, a more secluded location for the killings was chosen (usually in forests or remote fields), and pits were dug. Designated soldiers of the 3rd Company or volunteers were usually the ones who went to the provinces to kill. Several German Gestapo officers would also come by car to the place prepared for the massacre. The December 1, 1941 Jäger Report includes a long list of locations where Rollkommando Hamann, together with the Lithuanian police and "white armbands" (auxiliary police), allegedly carried out the Jewish massacres. Based on available archival data, it can be concluded that soldiers of the 1st Police Battalion were not present at all of the locations listed in the Jäger Report (especially in the provinces). Next, we will examine the massacres that soldiers of the 3rd Company



of the 1st Battalion did take part in. It can be assumed that there are quite a few places in Lithuania where Jews were killed by the local police and the so-called “partisan units,” without the participation of Rollkommando Hamann. The Jewish massacres carried out by the battalion in Kaunas County will not be discussed here, because the author has already written about them in his article entitled “The Holocaust in the Provinces of Lithuania in 1941: The Massacre of Jews in Kaunas County.”<sup>58</sup>

After the mass killing of Jews at the Kaunas Seventh Fort, systematic massacres of Jews were also initiated in the Lithuanian provinces in July-August 1941. Up until August 1941, mostly Jewish men suspected of communist activities or support for the Soviet government were killed. The real genocide of the Jewish people (the Holocaust) began when they started killing all Jews (including women and children) based on ethnicity alone. It should be noted that the Jews in the city of Kaunas had already been driven into the ghetto, and as a result, the Nazi administration had more power and time to “resolve the Jewish question” in the counties. The Nazi government also used the Lithuanian administration (especially the police) to carry out the genocide. The Nazi authorities were primarily concerned with concentrating the Jews in ghettos and camps and separating them from the local non-Jewish population. After the “ghettoization” of the Jews, the mass killing stage began.

On August 16, 1941, following instructions from the German SiPo and SD, Police Department Director Vytautas Reivytytis sent the Kaunas County police chief Secret Circular No. 3, where he wrote:

Upon receipt of this circular, immediately detain, in the places specified in the comments, all Jewish men from the age of 15 as well as women who stood out for their Bolshevik activities during the Bolshevik occupation or still stand out for such activities or insolence. Gather the detained persons near the main roads and report them to the Police Department immediately using special means of communication. When reporting, specify exactly in which place and how many Jews of this type have been detained and rounded up. ... Care must be taken to ensure that detainees are provided with food and adequate protection, which the auxiliary police may be used to ensure. ... This circular must be executed within two days of receipt. Hold the detained Jews until they can be taken and delivered to a camp.<sup>59</sup>

The above circular was sent to the police chiefs of Kaunas and other counties. The chiefs of the police stations reported to the Police Department how the instructions were being carried out. The process of gathering the Jews and preparing for the massacre went very quickly. Next, we will examine the killing campaigns carried out by the 1st Battalion in various areas of Lithuania (apart from Kaunas County).

## Prienai

During the Nazi occupation, Prienai Township was part of Marijampolė County. Approximately 700 Jews were living in Prienai in 1939.<sup>60</sup> In the first days of the Nazi occupation, the police in Prienai only arrested communists and supporters of the Soviet government, regardless of ethnicity. In mid-July 1941, the chief of the Prienai police station sent 35 “communists and [persons] dangerous to security” to the Marijampolė prison. Of them, 22 were Jews.<sup>61</sup> On July 16, the chief of the Prienai police station sent another 17 “communists” who had been arrested to the Marijampolė prison (of whom 11 were Jews).<sup>62</sup> In mid-August, all Jewish people began to be arrested – not only Jews suspected of communist activities, but all Jews (including children and old people). As it later became clear, removal to a camp meant the shooting of all Jews. The Prienai police and the “white armbands” (auxiliary police) soon began carrying out mass arrests of Jews. Jews from the surrounding towns, such as Birštonas, Jieznas and Stakliškės, were also taken to Prienai. The people who had been arrested were held in the Prienai barracks.<sup>63</sup> It is known that 89 Jews (including 26 women) were arrested in Jieznas. They were sent to Prienai on August 16.<sup>64</sup> On August 22, the chief of the Balbieriškis police station notified Police Department Director Vytautas Reivytis that 100 Jewish men and six Jewish women had been arrested in Balbieriškis. All of them had been transferred to the Prienai Ghetto.<sup>65</sup> In order to clarify the further fate of the Jews, Reivytis sent an enquiry to commander of the Rollkommando, Obersturmführer Hamann, on August 25:

Adding to my letters of August 18, 19 and 20, 1941 that the number of Jews arrested in Prienai has increased to 493, I am hereby asking you to issue an order to remove the arrested Jews from the holding place as soon as possible, because contagious diseases are rampant among them. ... There is a risk that the contagious diseases will spread.<sup>66</sup>

He did not have to wait long for Hamann to respond. On August 25, the detained Jews were taken to dig ditches behind the barracks in the pine forest on the left bank of the Nemunas. Two large ditches were dug out. On August 27, 1941, a unit from the 3rd Company of the 1st Battalion arrived in Prienai (25–30 men) under the command of Lt. Bronius Norkus. A German non-commissioned officer also came. CSM Zigmās Arlauskas selected the soldiers for the operation from a list. The soldiers were armed with Czechoslovakian rifles and each had 45 rounds in their cartridge pouch. Another box of ammunition was brought in as well. Once the killing squad arrived, the local policemen and the “white armbands” began to herd the Jews to the shooting site. Watches, rings, money and other valuables were taken from the doomed. The victims were herded in groups to the ditch and shot. The shooting was done by soldiers of the 3rd Company at Norkus’s command. Local “white armbands” guarded the

site of the massacre and brought the Jews to the ditch. Some of the wounded victims were buried alive. After the massacre, the soldiers of the 3rd Company were treated to beer. Norkus packed the most valuable belongings of the people who had been murdered in a suitcase and took it to Kaunas.<sup>67</sup>

The Jäger Report noted that 1,078 Jews were killed in Prienai on August 27, 1941.<sup>68</sup>

## Pasvalys

There were 180 Jewish families (700 people) living in Pasvalys in 1939.<sup>69</sup> During the German occupation, Pasvalys belonged to Biržai County. Far more Jews were shot in Pasvalys in 1941 than had lived there before World War II. Most likely, Jews from neighboring townships were also killed in Pasvalys. The surviving documents of the 1st Battalion include the battalion commander's September 1, 1941 Order No. 68 regarding the soldiers of the 3rd Company being dispatched to Pasvalys from August 28 to 31.<sup>70</sup> It is known that during this "dispatch," the 3rd Company shot Jews in Babtai, Ariogala, Krakės, and Pasvalys. According to the testimony of Petras Zelionka, a former corporal in the 3rd Company, 25-30 soldiers left on lorries for this "dispatch" under the command of Lt. Juozas Barzda. First, the soldiers of the 3rd Company shot Jewish people in Babtai, and then in Ariogala, Krakės and Pasvalys. The group of killers stopped in Šiauliai as well, but did not shoot anyone there, because the Germans said that they would deal with the Jews themselves. The company spent the night in Šiauliai.<sup>71</sup>

There is uncertainty about the date of the massacre in Pasvalys. According to the testimonies of former soldiers of the battalion, Pasvalys was the final point of the "dispatch," but the Jäger Report says that the Jews in Pasvalys were shot on August 26, 1941, i.e. before the 3rd Company even left for Pasvalys. So several options are possible. Perhaps Jäger got the date wrong, or perhaps not all of the Jews in Pasvalys were killed on August 26 and were finished off a few days later when the 3rd Company got there. However, the fact of the massacre in Pasvalys is beyond doubt. The 3rd Company arrived in Pasvalys in the morning. The site of the massacre was in the Žadeikiai pine forest, a few kilometers from Pasvalys. Two large pits were dug at the site. Pasvalys policemen and "white armbands" brought in Jewish women, men and children. The doomed were sent in groups to the edge of the pit, where they were shot by the battalion soldiers. The shooting began at one pit, and when it was full of corpses – it moved to another. The massacre lasted 3-4 hours. After the massacre, the battalion soldiers went to Pasvalys and got drunk at the local canteen.<sup>72</sup> According to the Jäger Report, 1,349 Jews were shot in Pasvalys: 402 men, 738 women, and 209 children.<sup>73</sup>

## Ariogala

On the eve of the Soviet-Nazi war, roughly 450 Jews were living in Ariogala (Kėdainiai County).<sup>74</sup> Like in other Lithuanian counties and townships, the Jews in Ariogala were concentrated in ghettos and temporary isolation camps when the Nazi occupation began. In the summer of 1941, all of the Jews in Ariogala were driven into the ghetto – two large synagogue buildings surrounded by a brick wall with iron gates. Local “white armbands” took turns guarding the gates around the clock. The Jews from Josvainiai were also moved to the ghetto in Ariogala. In his August 17, 1941 report to the Police Department director, the Kėdainiai County police chief stated that there were 290 Jews in Ariogala (including 80 women).<sup>75</sup> In reality, however, this number should have been significantly higher, since it did not include Jewish children.

On the day of the massacre – September 1, 1941 – Leonas Čepas, the chief of the Ariogala police station, summoned local policemen and “white armbands.” Around noon, soldiers of the 3rd Company of the 1st Battalion arrived in Ariogala on two lorries, under the command of Lt. Juozas Barzda. According to some witnesses, German soldiers also came to Ariogala.<sup>76</sup> The local “white armbands” and the newcomers began to line the Jews up into a column and led them from the ghetto to the site of the massacre – Dubysa Valley, located some 2 kilometers from Ariogala. A ditch 50–60 m long was dug out near the Dubysa. The area was overgrown with shrubs. Before being shot, the Jews were stripped and led to the pit in groups of 30–40. The site of the massacre was guarded by local auxiliary policemen, while the battalion soldiers shot the Jews in the back from a distance of 5–6 meters. Some of the Jews were driven into the pit and then shot at from the edge of the pit above. Several local policemen and “white armbands” joined in on the shooting. After the massacre, everyone returned to Ariogala. Food and drink was arranged for them in the town restaurant.<sup>77</sup>

Before killing the Jews in Ariogala, the 3rd Company shot the Jews in Babtai, and after Ariogala they went to shoot the Jews in Krakės. According to the Jäger Report, 662 Jews were shot in Ariogala: 207 men, 260 women, and 195 children.<sup>78</sup>

## Krakės

On the eve of the Soviet-Nazi war, there were approximately 150 Jewish families living in Krakės.<sup>79</sup> A few weeks before the execution by shooting of the Jews (September 2, 1941), Kėdainiai County Commander Col. Petras Dočkus and Kėdainiai County Police Chief Antanas Kirkutis summoned their subordinates to Kėdainiai to give instructions on the Jewish question. Dočkus announced that “the Jewish people

are recognized as harmful” and must be separated from Lithuanians. The Jews in Kėdainiai County were to be concentrated in Kėdainiai, Ariogala and Krakės. Jews from the townships of Krakės, Surviliškis, Grinkiškis, Baisogala, and Gudžiūnai were ordered to be rounded up in Krakės. Jewish quarters (ghettos) were to be fenced off and isolated from the local population.<sup>80</sup>

In the first half of August 1941, the Jews from the specified townships were brought to Krakės. Jews from Krakės and from other townships were herded into the ghetto (the block between Vilniaus Street and Vasario 16-osios Street). Women and children were kept in several houses near the synagogue, while men were kept in the building of the former monastery. The Jews who had been arrested were required to perform various types of physical labour.<sup>81</sup> On August 17, the Kėdainiai County police chief notified the director of the Police Department that 452 Jews had been rounded up in Krakės (not including children).<sup>82</sup> The Jews were assigned a “contribution” – 10 chervonets per person. Krakės Township Police Chief Teodoras Kerza delivered the money collected to the Kėdainiai bank.<sup>83</sup>

In late August/early September 1941, approximately 30 soldiers from the 3rd Company of the 1st Battalion arrived in Krakės by truck, under the command of Lt. Juozas Barzda. When they got to Krakės, the soldiers of the self-defense unit gave Kerza a letter written in German and sealed, authorizing the battalion soldiers to shoot all people of Jewish descent. The letter stated that all institutions were obliged to provide the necessary assistance in carrying out this “job.” The Jews in Krakės were not shot on the day that the 3rd Company arrived. On that day, Kerza and an officer from the shooting squad (probably Lt. Juozas Barzda) chose the site of the massacre (approximately 1.5 kilometers outside of town, near the village of Peštiniukai) and ordered the mayor of the township to arrange for pits to be dug. Residents of the town and surrounding villages were brought in to dig the pits that same day. The next morning, Kerza summoned the Krakės policemen and members of the former partisan unit (16–18 men in total). They were sent to the monastery and began to herd the Jews held there to the site of the massacre. The Jewish men were taken to the site first and laid face down, not far from the pits. The doomed were stripped to their underwear and led in groups to the pit. They were positioned at the edge of the pit and shot in the back. As the second group of Jewish men was being herded to the pit, they suddenly began to run. Most of them were shot, but a small number managed to escape. The other groups of Jews waiting to be murdered did not try to escape. After the men, able-bodied Jewish women were brought in and shot. The last to be shot were Jewish children, old people and women with small children. They were brought in from the ghetto. The massacre ended around 5 p.m. After the shooting, the killing squad went to a restaurant to eat dinner and drink.<sup>84</sup> The Jewish property left in the town of Krakės was later sold to local residents.<sup>85</sup>

After the mass murder in Krakės, Kerza, together with other policemen in the surrounding villages, found and shot six Jews who had escaped from the site of the massacre.<sup>86</sup>

According to the Jäger Report, 1,125 Jews were shot in Krakės: 448 men, 476 women, and 201 children.<sup>87</sup>

So over the course of just a few days, the 3rd Company of the 1st Battalion shot a total of 1,870 Jews in Babtai, Ariogala and Krakės.

## Alytus

According to unofficial July 1, 1940 data, there were 2,216 Jews living in Alytus at that time (23.08 per cent of the city's population). According to unofficial January 1, 1941 data, there were 8,030 Jews living in all of Alytus County (4.7 per cent of the county's population).<sup>88</sup>

At the beginning of the German occupation, the Lithuanian administration and police were restored in Alytus, and a company of "partisans" (the TDA) was created. Communists who were more active in the first Soviet era, Komsomol members, Soviet government officials and Red Army soldiers who were hiding in the forests began to be arrested. As per the TDA company's performance review, "36 local communists, nine Red Army soldiers and a larger number of Jews were detained and arrested" according to citizen notifications.<sup>89</sup> Persecution of the Jews especially intensified in mid-July 1941. On July 12, Alytus County Governor Stepas Maliauskas and Alytus Security Chief (Commandant) GS Maj. Juozas Ivašauskas issued an order that regulated the situation of the Jews in detail. All Jews in Alytus County were ordered to wear the Star of David, were only allowed to buy food in shops and markets after 11 a.m., and were prohibited from buying food from farmers and on the roadside, hiring non-Jews for work, using city parks, leaving their place of residence without the permission of the county governor, and so on. Jews were required to do community service and to hand their radios, bicycles and motorcycles over to the local municipality or the police.<sup>90</sup>

In mid-August 1941, the Jews in Alytus County began to be moved to the Alytus prison. Part of the Jews arrested in the town of Jieznas (38 people) were taken to Alytus. Some of the town's Jews went into hiding in the surrounding forests.<sup>91</sup> Approximately 1,000 Jewish men and women were brought from the townships to Alytus in all.<sup>92</sup> They were held in the courtyard of the Alytus prison. The first mass killing of Jews in Alytus took place on August 13, when 617 Jewish men and 100 Jewish women were shot. Another 233 Jews from the city and county of Alytus were shot by August 31.<sup>93</sup> According to the testimony of former Alytus District Criminal Police Chief Alfonsas Nykštaitis,

Obersturmführer Joachim Hamann came to Alytus with four non-commissioned officers. He instructed Alytus District Security Police Chief Pranas Zenkevičius to bring a certain number of Jewish men and women from the townships to Alytus. Hamann agreed with the management of the Alytus prisoner-of-war camp that the prisoners of war would be assigned to dig pits. The pits were dug near the prison, in the Vidzgiris forest. The first shootings of Jews in Alytus (August 1941) were carried out by German SD officers and Alytus auxiliary policemen under Hamann's command. Alytus District Security Police Chief Pranas Zenkevičius was also present at the scene of the massacre. The corpses of those who were shot were buried by Soviet prisoners of war.<sup>94</sup>

A few days later, Hamann returned to Alytus and brought Lt. Bronius Norkus from the 1st Battalion with him. Hamann told Zenkevičius that from then on, the Jews would be shot in Alytus County by a special unit (the 3rd Company of the 1st Battalion) under Norkus's command. By order of Hamann, all of the valuable belongings of the Jews who were shot (gold rings, watches, etc.) were to be handed over to Norkus. The day after their arrival, Hamann and Norkus organized a new Jewish killing campaign. This time, approximately 50 Jewish men were shot. Four German non-commissioned officers and local "white armbands" headed by Jonas Borevičius did the shooting. Among those shot was an elderly Jewish rabbi. He was allegedly shot by the Alytus County commandant, GS Maj. Juozas Ivašauskas.<sup>95</sup>

After this massacre, a squad under the command of Lt. Bronius Norkus and Jr. Lt. Juozas Obelenis came back to Alytus a few more times. This unit of 20–30 men usually came from Kaunas by bus. The Jews were shot in the forest, near the Kaniūkai Bridge over the Nemunas.<sup>96</sup>

The largest massacre of Alytus Jews was carried out on September 9, 1941. The Jews were shot by a unit of the 3rd Company that came from Kaunas under the command of Norkus and Obelenis. The doomed were herded to the site of the massacre and guarded by local policemen and "white armbands." The more valuable belongings (watches, rings and money) were taken from the Jews before they were shot. The massacre lasted several hours. Afterwards, Norkus's unit left to murder the Jews in Seirijai.<sup>97</sup> According to the Jäger Report, 1,279 Jews were shot in Alytus on September 9, 1941: 287 men, 640 women, and 352 children.<sup>98</sup>

On that same day of September 9, 1941, Norkus's unit also managed to murder all of the Jews in the Butrimonys Ghetto, where not only the local Jews, but also the Jews from Stakliškės and Punia had been gathered. On the day of the massacre, Butrimonys policemen and "white armbands" herded the Jews to the site of the massacre (approximately 2 kilometers outside of town, near the village of Klydžionys). The Jews were shot by the soldiers in Norkus's unit. A total of 740 Jews from the Butrimonys Ghetto were killed.<sup>99</sup>

## Jieznas

In the first days of the war, the Lithuanian administration was restored in Jieznas (during the Nazi occupation, the township of Jieznas belonged to Alytus County). Jurgis Randis became the mayor of the township, Vladas Bajerčius became the chief of the police station, and Jonas Valatka became the commander of the Jieznas partisan unit (which was later called the riflemen's unit).<sup>100</sup>

During the first weeks of the Nazi occupation, local communists, Komsomol members and Soviet activists were persecuted. The detainees were locked in the basement of the township municipality and the adjacent building. Several dozen people were arrested in all, some of whom were later taken to the Alytus prison.<sup>101</sup> On June 30, 1941, Germans and local riflemen shot five of the detainees in the forest outside of Jieznas.<sup>102</sup>

As throughout Lithuania, mass arrests and shootings of Jews began in Jieznas in mid-August 1941. Police Station Chief Vladas Bajerčius asked Mayor Jurgis Randis to put together a list of all of the Jews in the town and their property. These lists (roughly 350 Jews in total) were compiled by mid-August. Soon, local policemen and riflemen began to arrest Jieznas Jews who were fit for physical labor. On August 16, Bajerčius notified the director of the Police Department that 89 Jews, including 26 women, had been detained in the town of Jieznas.<sup>103</sup> When the arrests began, some of the town's Jews went into hiding in the surrounding villages and forests. The Jews who were taken from Jieznas to Prienai were shot together with Jews from other towns on August 27. Several dozen Jews who were sent from Jieznas to Alytus were also shot in August.<sup>104</sup>

On September 1, 1941, Jieznas policemen and riflemen arrested all of the remaining Jews in the town – women, children and old people. The men were locked up in the basement of the township municipality, while the women and children were put in the synagogue. That same day, men were rounded up in town and taken to dig a ditch some 50 meters long and 5 meters wide near the lake (on the left bank of the Mekšrupis brook). The next day, five officers and roughly 20 soldiers arrived in Jieznas by truck. Three of the officers were Germans, and two of the officers and all of the soldiers were Lithuanians. This was probably the infamous Rollkommando Hamann, which consisted of several Germans and a unit from the 3rd Company of the 1st Battalion. The officers went into the headquarters of Police Station Chief Vladas Bajerčius. Soon after, the Jewish men (about 50 people) were taken out of the prison basement and ordered to strip down to their underwear. Then, Hamann's murderers and local policemen and riflemen herded the doomed to the site of the massacre. The exact same thing was done with the women and children in the synagogue.<sup>105</sup> The Jewish men were shot first, and then the women and children were murdered.



The shooting was done not only by members of Hamann's unit, but also by seven local volunteer riflemen. The other riflemen and policemen guarded the scene of the massacre. According to the Jäger Report, 144 Jews were shot in Jieznas: 26 men, 72 women, and 46 children.<sup>106</sup>

## Seirijai

Before the beginning of the Soviet-Nazi war, there were approximately 800 Jews living in Seirijai.<sup>107</sup> In the first days of the German occupation, former Alytus District Criminal Police Chief Alfonsas Nykštaitis and Township Mayor Antanas Maskeliūnas organized an armed partisan unit in Seirijai. The unit coordinated its activities with Böhme, commandant of the Geheime Feldpolizei ("Secret Field Police") in Seirijai. Registration of former Soviet officials and activists was announced. In the first weeks, 20 Soviet activists (primarily Lithuanians) were shot in Seirijai. Able-bodied Jews were forced to perform various types of hard labor. Until August, the town's Jews lived in their own homes and wore the Star of David. Jews were used for labor under Commandant Böhme's instructions.<sup>108</sup>

Before the mass execution by shooting of Jews in Seirijai (September 11, 1941), some of the town's Jewish men were taken to Alytus in carts. The Jews were told that they were being taken to work. The Jewish men were taken to the Alytus prison by the Seirijai "white armbands."<sup>109</sup> The Jews who were taken from Seirijai to Alytus were later shot together with Jews from other townships in Alytus County. Before the mass killings, the Seirijai Jews were locked up in the premises of the vocational school. On September 11, a unit of the 1st Battalion under the command of Lt. Bronius Norkus and Jr. Lt. Juozas Obelenis came to Seirijai from Alytus by bus. The first to be brought to the site of the massacre in Baraučiškė forest (approximately 3 kilometers southeast of Seirijai) were the men. They were laid in pits and shot from the edges of the pits by the soldiers of the self-defense unit. Then the women and children were brought in. They were shot in another pit. Local "white armbands" herded the Jews to the site of the massacre and guarded it during the shooting. After the massacre, all of the participants of the execution went to drink beer at the Seirijai pub.<sup>110</sup>

According to the Jäger Report, 953 Jews were shot in Seirijai on September 11, 1941: 229 men, 384 women, and 340 children.<sup>111</sup>

## Simnas

The next day, a unit under the command of Lt. Bronius Norkus shot 414 Jews (men, women, and children) in Simnas.<sup>112</sup> It was not possible to find more detailed information about the participation of the Rollkommando in the massacre of Jews in Simnas. So during their “trip” to Alytus County on September 9–12, 1941, the members of the Rollkommando killed at least 3,386 Jews.

## Lazdijai

Before the Soviet-Nazi war, there were 871 Jews living in the city of Lazdijai, and 1,194 in all of Lazdijai County (which was called Sejny County at the time).<sup>113</sup> The last massacre that the Rollkommando carried out in the provinces was in Lazdijai. The Jews of Lazdijai County were driven to a ghetto in the village of Katkiškė back in the beginning of September 1941. Jews not only from Lazdijai, but also from the townships of Veisiejai, Kapčiamiestis, Šventežeris and Rudamina, had been rounded up in the ghetto. Approximately 1,600 Jews were concentrated there in total.<sup>114</sup>

On November 3, 1941, 20–30 soldiers of the 3rd Company of the 1st Battalion came from Kaunas to Lazdijai by bus, under the command of Lt. Bronius Norkus. The bus was driven by a German soldier. The massacre began around noon. The Jews were driven in groups of several hundred people from the ghetto barracks to the ditches, where they were laid in the ditches and shot from above by the battalion soldiers. When one group was shot, the corpses were covered with a bit of dirt, and then the next group was shot on top of them. Several German officers watched the massacre. One German photographed the shooting. The massacre lasted several hours. Some local policemen and “white armbands” joined in on the shooting. Other “white armbands” herded the Jews from the ghetto to the pits and guarded the site of the massacre. After the shooting, Norkus’s unit went to Lazdijai, where they ate and drank in the city canteen. In the evening, the unit left for Kaunas.<sup>115</sup>

According to the Jäger Report, 1,535 Jews were murdered in Lazdijai on November 3, 1941: 485 men, 511 women, and 539 children.<sup>116</sup>

In summing up the massacres of Jews carried out by the 1st Police Battalion in the provinces, it can be concluded that this battalion’s 3rd Company murdered at least 11,598 Jews there. The massacres were carried out in Pasvalys and the counties of Kaunas, Alytus, Kėdainiai and Lazdijai. It is known for certain that the 3rd Company murdered Jews in Alytus, Ariogala, Babtai, Butrimonys, Garliava, Jieznas, Krakės,

Lazdijai, Pasvalys, Petrašiūnai, Prienai, Rumšiškės, Seirijai, Simnas and Vilkija, i.e. in 15 areas of Lithuania (not including Kaunas). It is possible that the 3rd Company of the 1st Battalion also participated in the massacres of Jews in other areas of Lithuania listed in the December 1, 1941 Jäger Report. However, the author was unable to find documentary evidence of this. If reliable documents were to emerge about the participation of the 3rd Company in the massacres of Jews in other Lithuanian cities and towns that Jäger mentioned, the total number of Jews killed by this company would be even higher.

### **“Dispatch” to Belarus**

In mid-September 1941, Commander of the 3rd Company Lt. Anatolijus Dagys selected 14 company soldiers for a “dispatch” to Belarus. Under the command of 2nd Company Jr. Lt. Stasys Sutkaitis, the unit left Kaunas by truck on September 17. Several SiPo officers (including SS-Untersturmführer Waldemar Amelung) went as well in a passenger car. On the way to Belarus, Sutkaitis’s unit spent the night in Vilnius before continuing on to Baranavichy. In Baranavichy, the soldiers were put up in a separate house on Pochtovaya Street. Sutkaitis’s unit was subordinate to the Baranavichy SD and carried out “special tasks” assigned by it. The unit’s soldiers guarded the premises of the German police at night and took part in several shooting campaigns against Jews. At that time, the Jews in Baranavichy still lived in their own flats. The Lithuanian self-defense unit soldiers often carried out searches of Jewish flats with the Germans and confiscated the more valuable items (rings, watches and money), which the Germans would take. One and a half to two months after the arrival of the Lithuanian self-defense unit, the Baranavichy Jews were driven into a ghetto. After the establishment of the ghetto, the killing of Jews began. The shooting took place a few kilometers from the Baranavichy railway station, near the forest. The unit under Sutkaitis’s command shot Jews from Baranavichy three times, and Jews from Slonim once.<sup>117</sup> The unit’s soldiers and the Germans would drive several hundred Jews (men, women, and children) out of the ghetto and shoot them. The Jews were stripped down to their underwear before being herded into the pits in groups and shot. Sutkaitis and German officers were in charge of the shooting. The massacres of the Baranavichy Jews took place in late autumn 1941. Usually 200–300 Jews were killed in each campaign. According to the testimonies of members of Sutkaitis’s unit, soldiers from a Lithuanian self-defense battalion that they did not know also participated in the killing of the Baranavichy Jews.<sup>118</sup>

In that same late autumn, Sutkaitis’s unit took part in the massacre of Jews in Slonim. Several SiPo and SD officers from Baranavichy went to Slonim as well. Soldiers from the unknown Lithuanian police battalion also participated in the massacre.

The Slonim Jews were shot a few kilometers from the city, near the forest. This took several hours. After the shooting, some 40 Romany men were driven to the pits. Kazys Rusinas, a member of Sutkaitis's unit, began leading men by the collar, one by one, to the pit, where he then shot them in the back of the head with a pistol. Rusinas shot about 20 Romany men this way; the others were shot by another member of the unit – JNCO Vladas Stankaitis. At least 500 people were shot in Slonim in total. In the evening, Sutkaitis's unit went back to Baranavichy.<sup>119</sup>

Sutkaitis returned to Kaunas on December 7, 1941. Some of the members of the unit came back from Baranavichy two weeks later, while others stayed there longer. There was later talk that they had died in Belarus in battles with Soviet partisans.<sup>120</sup>

So, during their “dispatch” in Belarus (in Baranavichy and Slonim), Sutkaitis's unit, together with the Germans and soldiers from another Lithuanian police battalion, shot 1,100–1,400 Jews and approximately 40 Romany men.

## Conclusions

The 3rd Company of the 1st Police Battalion (or the core of Rollkommando Hamann) was a very effective tool for the Holocaust policy organized by the Nazis. In terms of the number of Jews killed, only the SiPo and SD Sonderkommando in Vilnius or the 2nd (12th) Lithuanian Police Battalion could compare. In 1941, together with German Gestapo officers and members of the auxiliary police (“white armbands”), the 1st Lithuanian Police Battalion killed at least 36,000 Jews from Lithuania and abroad (Austria, Belarus, Czechoslovakia, Germany). Approximately 23,000 were killed in Kaunas, 11,600 in other areas of Lithuania, and 1,400 in Belarus. If it were to come to light that the 3rd Company of the 1st Battalion carried out the murders in almost all of the areas listed in the Jäger Report (apart from the districts of Vilnius and Šiauliai), then the total number of Jews killed by this company would be even higher.

The killings were directly carried out by the battalion's 3rd Company and partly by the 1st Company (the latter carried out the first shooting at the Kaunas Seventh Fort on July 4, 1941). According to the author's calculations, 104 officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers of the 3rd Company shot Jews. However, the majority of the battalion (the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Companies) was involved in the Holocaust in one way or another (including not only shooting and guarding the site of the massacre, but also conveying to the site of the massacre and guarding the ghetto and forts).

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Arūnas Bubnys

## The 2nd (Vilnius) and 252nd Lithuanian Police Battalions (1941–1944)

The activities of the Lithuanian police battalions (also known as “self-defense battalions” or “security units”) during World War II have become of increasing interest to military historians in recent years. This is evidenced by recently published monographs and articles. The monograph by the German historian Knut Stang<sup>1</sup> about the 1st TDA Battalion in Kaunas and the monograph authored by Petras Stankeras<sup>2</sup> entitled “The Lithuanian Police: 1941–1944” are particularly of note. Detailed and critical reviews of the aforementioned books have been published by Dr. Arvydas Anušauskas and Dr. Valentinas Brandišauskas, who both have a Ph.D. in the Humanities.<sup>3</sup> The books by former battalion soldiers Jonas Abraitis and Jonas Laučė are important to the history of their individual units.<sup>4</sup> The article by Dr. Rimantas Zizas (Ph.D. in Humanities) in *Lietuvos Archyvai* is also of great value.<sup>5</sup> The author of this article has written on the police battalions as well.<sup>6</sup>

At first glance, it might seem that the topic under investigation has been fairly well examined. Lithuanian and foreign historians are relatively familiar with the organizational structure of the Lithuanian police battalions, as well as the deployment of their troops and their relations with the Nazi occupying authorities; they also know about the specific activities of certain battalions. However, the history of most of the Lithuanian police battalions has not yet been thoroughly investigated. In mid-1942, there were 20 Lithuanian police battalions in operation. The majority of them were sent outside of Lithuania’s borders (to Ukraine, Belarus, Poland) at that time. What exactly did each battalion do and what happened to them in the end? The issue of the accountability of some battalion soldiers for war crimes and crimes against humanity, as well as the question of their participation in the Holocaust, remains relevant even now. As of today, the history of the 1st (13th), 5th, 253rd, 254th, and 257th Battalions has been thoroughly investigated. Information regarding the other battalions remains very fragmented. Only by knowing the history of all of the battalions will we be able to make objective conclusions and assessments regarding the activities and accountability of the Lithuanian self-defense units.

While writing the article, the dearth of original documents became a serious problem. The Lithuanian Central State Archives (LCSA) has very few surviving documents from the Nazi period about the 2nd and 252nd Battalions, and it is impossible to reconstruct the history of the battalions based on the documents that have been preserved. For this reason, additional information was sought in the Lithuanian Special Archives (LSA). The author managed to find a dozen or so criminal cases against former 2nd and 252nd Battalion soldiers. Even though case files compiled by Soviet security bodies are not a very reliable source of information, they do help to recreate the history of the battalions. By comparing the LSA documents with documents from other archives and historical literature, it is possible to form a fairly complete picture of the activities of the battalions. Nevertheless, the scarcity of sources always means that certain aspects and periods of these activities are left less researched. This particularly applies to the period of formation of the 2nd Battalion (July–August 1941) and the final stage of the battalion's activities (summer 1944). The same can be said about the formation of the 252nd Battalion (summer-autumn 1942) and the final stage of its activity (autumn 1944).

The two battalions had one thing in common – service in the Majdanek (Lublin) concentration camp. To the best of the author's knowledge, no other Lithuanian police battalions were assigned to guard Nazi concentration camps outside of Lithuania. The author therefore decided to combine the history of the two different battalions into one article.

### **The formation and activities of the 2nd Battalion before its departure for Lublin**

Right before the Nazi-Soviet war, the fighting spirit and morale among the soldiers of the Red Army (RA) 29th Lithuanian Territorial Rifle Corps were low. The Lithuanian soldiers who had been drafted into the RA struggled with the policies of Sovietization, Russification, and NKVD repression of the Lithuanian Armed Forces. It is not surprising that when the war started, the Lithuanian soldiers who served in the RA 179th and 184th Divisions deserted en masse and surrendered to the Germans without resistance, sometimes even pointing their weapons at their commanders – Russian officers. Like the majority of the Lithuanian population, the Lithuanian soldiers were waiting for the war and hoped that Germany would free Lithuania from the Bolshevik occupation and allow the restoration of the State of Lithuania. As a result, Lithuanians actively supported the Wehrmacht's march on the East, formed a provisional government, and began to restore government bodies and police and military units. At the beginning of the war, Lithuanians flocked

to enlist in the re-established units of the Lithuanian Armed Forces. In his memoirs, Jonas Abraitis wrote: “In Vilnius, the restoration of the army was moving ahead at full speed, since there were enough cadres and soldiers – hundreds of soldiers of all ranks returned every day. There were about 1,500 men in the Pabradė enlistment camp, some of whom went to Vilnius, others to Kaunas, and yet others – to the towns in their own counties. During those few weeks, a combat team and several separate companies were formed in Vilnius, and three or four battalions were put together. There were at least 3,000 armed men in Vilnius at that time, and there might have been 15,000–17,000 men in the ranks of the restored Lithuanian Army throughout Lithuania.”<sup>7</sup>

On June 28, 1941, the Vilnius Garrison temporary staff was formed (with GS Lt. Col. Jonas Juknevičius as commander) on the order of GS Lt. Col. Antanas Špokevičius, who was the commander of the Lithuanian Armed Forces Vilnius Garrison.<sup>8</sup>

Interestingly, in the first days of the occupation, the German military authorities allowed the Lithuanian Army to be mentioned by name, and did not hinder the establishment of Lithuanian military units. This development of events and the position of the German military authorities clearly displeased the German Sicherheitspolizei (Security Police; SiPo) and Sicherheitsdienst (Security Service; SD). Under pressure from the Gestapo, the German command headquarters in Vilnius began to tighten its position toward the Lithuanian military units. The commander of the German Army visited the German command headquarters in Vilnius on July 5, 1941 and said that political gatherings, the establishment of the “Lithuanian state,” and the formation of a Lithuanian “army” were not permitted. Only “local self-defense” would be allowed, under the German field command and Lithuanian officers.<sup>9</sup>

Having strengthened their rear, the Nazis set out to destroy the Lithuanian Armed Forces and reorganize it into police battalions.

Špokevičius issued his last order (No. 8) to the Lithuanian Armed Forces Vilnius Garrison on July 7, 1941. As of July 9, the Lithuanian Armed Forces units in Vilnius were called “Lithuanian self-defense units.”<sup>10</sup> On July 14, Oberstlt. Adolf Zehnpfennig, who was the German Military Field Commandant, ordered Špokevičius to form the “Vilnius Reconstruction Service” (Lithuanian: *Vilniaus atstatymo tarnyba*; VAT) and declared that “the Lithuanian Armed Forces no longer exist.” The VAT was to be divided into Safety, Order, and Labor Services.<sup>11</sup> Špokevičius was named chief of the VAT, with GS Lt. Col. Karolis Dabulevičius appointed chief of staff. The above-mentioned VAT services were the beginnings of the three police battalions formed in Vilnius. Some Lithuanian soldiers were released from service and had to return to their hometowns. According to Zehnpfennig’s instructions, the VAT Security Service was to protect the city of Vilnius and its surroundings “from robbers and remnants of the Red Army,” while the Order Service was to be used as “auxiliary police in the internal service in the city of Vilnius,” and the Labor Service – “for the construction and repair

of important roads and bridges as well as for emergency and cleaning work in and around Vilnius.”<sup>12</sup> Špokevičius’s Order No. 1 of July 31, 1941 includes the composition of the VAT staff and individual services. The officials mentioned in the order include adviser to the Order Service, GS Lt. Col. Petras Vertelis, commander of the 4th Company of the Order Service, Capt. Aleksandras Kazakevičius, and commander of the 5th Company, Lt. Ignas Račkus.<sup>13</sup> These individuals were closely related to the history of the future Vilnius 2nd Police Battalion.

On August 1, 1941, the VAT was renamed the “Self-Defense Service,” and the former Security, Order, and Labor Services were renamed the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Battalions, respectively. Former Order Service Adviser Lt. Col. Petras Vertelis was appointed commander of the 2nd Battalion and held this position until early October 1941.<sup>14</sup> He was later appointed commander of the Šiauliai 14th Police Battalion and commander of the Šiauliai District Self-Defense Unit.<sup>15</sup> Capt. Aleksandras Kazakevičius became the new commander of the 2nd Battalion. Formation of the 2nd Battalion was completed in mid-October 1941. By then, it was already clear that the Germans were planning to send the battalion to Lublin. There were 18 officers and 450 soldiers in the 2nd Battalion in mid-October.<sup>16</sup> The battalion consisted of the staff (with Kazakevičius as commander and Lt. Antanas Bražiūnas as adjutant) and three companies. The company commanders were Lt. Ignas Račkus (1st Company), Lt. Pranas Sakalas (2nd Company), and Capt. Antanas Mėšlius (3rd Company). The companies were divided into detachments, and the detachments – into divisions.<sup>17</sup> Before leaving for Lublin, the 2nd Battalion mainly guarded military depots and patrolled the city of Vilnius and its surroundings. The battalion’s soldiers also received additional military training.<sup>18</sup> They wore old Republic of Lithuania uniforms with white armbands on the left arm, and were armed with pistols and Russian rifles. The 2nd Battalion was housed with two other battalions (the 1st and the 3rd) in the barracks on Jėzuitų Street.<sup>19</sup>

There is information that the 2nd Battalion took part in moving Jews from their apartments to the ghetto and herding Jews who had been arrested to Lukiškės Prison (in late August – early September, 1941). According to the testimony of some of the battalion soldiers who were later convicted, the battalion’s 2nd Company (under Lt. Pranas Sakalas) took about 500 Jews from Lukiškės Prison in the end of August or the beginning of September, 1941 and herded them to Paneriai (a neighborhood of Vilnius that is also known by the Polish name “Ponary”). The Jews who had been brought in were shot by a German SiPo and SD Sonderkommando (“Special Squad”).

It is known from the German security police report and other sources that there was a Jewish massacre in Paneriai on September 2, 1941. On that day, the Jews from Lukiškės were taken in columns to Paneriai and shot. Around 80 policemen did the shooting, while roughly 100 guarded the site of the massacre. An announcement issued by Gebitskommissar Hans Hingst was posted all over the city that the Jews had allegedly shot at German soldiers on August 31 and were being punished for this. The

massacre took all day. According to a report by Karl Jäger, who was commander of the SiPo and SD in Lithuania, 3,700 Jews (864 men, 2019 women, and 817 children) were shot in Vilnius on September 2, 1941.<sup>20</sup>

Some of the battalion soldiers who were later convicted testified that in the end of September 1941, soldiers of the 2nd Battalion escorted a column of roughly 2,000 Jews to Paneriai and guarded the site of the massacre while the Jews were being shot. The Jews were shot by a German SiPo and SD Sonderkommando.<sup>21</sup> According to the Jäger Report, 1,983 Jews (432 men, 1,115 women, and 436 children) were shot in Vilnius on October 4, 1941.<sup>22</sup> According to available data, the 2nd Battalion did not participate in the further mass extermination of Jews.

### The 2nd Battalion in Lublin

The 2nd Police Battalion left for Lublin by train on November 11, 1941. At that time, the battalion consisted of the staff and three companies (a total of 370 people). Before leaving for Lublin, five privates deserted the battalion. The battalion arrived in Lublin on November 15.<sup>23</sup> The Majdanek concentration camp was just being set up (just 2 kilometers outside of Lublin next to the Lublin ghetto of Majdan Tatarski, the camp was nicknamed Majdanek (“little Majdan”) by local residents and the prisoners imprisoned there, and was sometime referred to as such in official German documents as well). The German occupation authorities had decided to establish a concentration camp in Lublin in the summer of 1941. Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler visited Lublin in July 1941 and ordered Lublin District SS- und Polizeiführer Odilo Globocnik to establish a concentration camp in Lublin for 25,000–50,000 prisoners. The construction of the camp was to be organized by the SS and Police Central Construction Office in Lublin. The construction of the camp began in late September 1941.

Initially, the Majdanek concentration camp operated as a prisoner-of-war camp. In the first months of the Nazi–Soviet war, German troops captured hundreds of thousands of Russian prisoners of war. The Germans were faced with the problem of where to put them. The majority of the Soviet prisoners of war were initially sent to the camps in Auschwitz and Lublin. In autumn 1941, the latter was named the Lublin SS Prisoner-Of-War Camp.<sup>24</sup> In October 1941, 2,000 Soviet prisoners of war were brought to the Majdanek concentration camp. Most of them died by the end of 1941 from hunger, exhaustion, and epidemics. When the 2nd Battalion arrived in Lublin, there were still about 600 prisoners of war left in Majdanek. Beginning in November 1941, civilians began to be brought to Majdanek, including political prisoners of various nationalities, as well as Jews, Poles, and German criminal offenders.<sup>25</sup> Jews from Germany, Poland, Slovakia, and other German-occupied countries began to

be brought en masse to Majdanek in February 1942. The Majdanek prisoner-of-war camp turned into a mass extermination camp for the civilian population (primarily Jews and Poles). The camp expanded rapidly: about 150 barracks, outbuildings, and workshops were built. It was equipped with a gas chamber and a crematorium in 1942. The camp had approximately 12,000 prisoners at any given time. About 300,000 people of different nationalities were murdered or starved to death in the Majdanek concentration camp from 1941 to 1944.<sup>26</sup>

Like in other concentration camps, the main focus in Majdanek was on guarding the prisoners. SS-Obersturmführer Walter Langleist was in charge of security at the camp. The Majdanek concentration camp was guarded by a specially trained SS unit (German: *SS-Totenkopf Sturmbann*) and the 2nd Lithuanian Police Battalion. The camp was guarded by four SS companies (470 people) in 1942. There were 370 people in the 2nd Police Battalion. Langleist was the head of the camp security department until August 1943, at which point he was replaced by SS-Hauptsturmführer Martin Melzer. The head of the security department was subordinate to the concentration camp commandant.<sup>27</sup>

There were guard posts at all three of the camp's gates. The guards controlled all incoming and outgoing people and vehicles. The camp was surrounded by a double barbed-wire fence with 18 guard towers that were manned by three guards each; the guards were armed with automatic weapons and grenades. Armed police patrolled between the towers at night, and SS officers made rounds in the camp with specially trained dogs.<sup>28</sup>

After arriving in Lublin, the 2nd Battalion was given military training (formation, shooting, etc.) before being assigned to the external security of the Majdanek concentration camp starting in February 1942.<sup>29</sup>

In late January 1942, the soldiers of the 2nd Battalion signed written pledges to serve the Third Reich faithfully.<sup>30</sup> The text of the pledge read: "I hereby undertake to serve in the self-defense units. I undertake to carry out the orders given to me by my German superiors and my self-defense unit superiors without reservations. I promise to be obedient, faithful, and brave."<sup>31</sup>

There was an SS company on duty inside the camp. The German and Lithuanian guards lived in the same barracks. Lithuanians patrolled between the towers on the outer perimeter of the barbed-wire fence. In addition, the soldiers of the battalion carried out prisoner transport from the railway station to the camp, took prisoners to work outside of the camp, and guarded them during their work.<sup>32</sup> Lithuanian battalion soldiers were not permitted to enter the camp without special permits. In the summer of 1942, the Majdanek concentration camp commandant, SS-Standartenführer Karl-Otto Koch, organized a "tour" of the camp for the battalion's officers. The commandant told the Lithuanian officers about the methods used in the imprisonment, guarding,

and extermination of prisoners. The Lithuanian officers and soldiers were warned to maintain strict confidentiality and not tell anyone about their service or about the Majdanek concentration camp. All of the soldiers of the battalion signed pledges to the camp commandant to maintain confidentiality.<sup>33</sup>

The battalion command received official orders and instructions from Walter Langleist, the head of the camp guard. Langleist gave instructions on how to guard the prisoners, but also urged the battalion command to inform him about the soldiers' morale, discipline, and plans to desert.<sup>34</sup>

The soldiers in the Lithuanian battalion were not happy with their assignment in the Majdanek concentration camp and tried to escape when the opportunity arose (usually by not returning from home after leave). Three or four soldiers from the 3rd Company deserted in this way. A German court sentenced two soldiers of this company to six months in prison for desertion.<sup>35</sup>

The Lithuanian guards were not particularly strict with the prisoners they were guarding. According to the testimony of J. Acus, a former 2nd Battalion soldier, four prisoners once escaped while he was guarding them as they worked. The Lithuanians did not even shoot at the fleeing prisoners. If the Germans had heard the shooting, they would have started looking into why the prisoners escaped and who was responsible for it. In order to avoid German investigations, the Lithuanians decided not to shoot and keep quiet about the escape.<sup>36</sup>

By Heinrich Himmler's October 20, 1942 order and the order of the commander of the Ostland Ordnungspolizei (Order Police; Orpo) given on October 26 of that same year, the 2nd Battalion was to be replaced by the 252nd Lithuanian Battalion. Ergo, the 2nd Battalion had to go to Kaunas and take over the functions of the 252nd Battalion. At the time, the 2nd Battalion had 14 officers, 59 non-commissioned officers, and 286 privates (359 people in total). Hptm. der Polizei Voigt, the battalion's liaison officer, was to stay in Lublin and take over the position of liaison officer for the 252nd Battalion from Hptm. der Polizei Heinrich Kruse. Kruse was to become the new liaison officer for the 2nd Battalion.<sup>37</sup> On November 10, 1942, the 2nd Battalion soldiers were disarmed and sent to Zamość (Poland) to rest. The battalion then returned to Lublin and left for Kaunas on December 2. The battalion reached Kaunas on December 7.<sup>38</sup>

### **The Activities of the 2nd Battalion in Lithuania, Russia, and Belarus**

After arriving in Kaunas, the 2nd Battalion did not have any assignments and carried out normal military exercises (formation, shooting). Some of the soldiers were given short-term leave. The battalion soldiers were dressed in German police uniforms.

On January 27, 1943, the 2nd Battalion was sent to Vilnius under the command of SSPF SS-Standartenführer Paul Krieg. Once in Vilnius, the battalion was prepared for deployment to the Eastern Front. Upon learning that they would be sent to the East, the battalion's soldiers began to desert en masse. In his February 1943 report, the commander of the German SiPo and SD for Lithuania wrote that one Lithuanian police battalion was supposed to leave Vilnius for the front on February 3. On the night of February 1, however, 171 soldiers fled from this battalion. The German police arrested 56 of them. This incident was investigated by the SS and Police Court. The offenders were given various prison sentences as well as one death sentence. The report noted that this incident was related to the conviction in Lithuanian nationalist circles that Lithuanian blood should only be shed on the front if Lithuania gets full independence.<sup>39</sup>

It is known that on February 8, 1943, the SS and Police Court in Kaunas sentenced 2nd Battalion soldier Zenonas Kuzmickas to death for desertion and insubordination. The execution took place on February 11. All of the battalion soldiers were informed about this sentence.<sup>40</sup>

2nd Battalion company commanders Antanas Mėšlius, Pranas Sakalas, and Ignas Račkus, as well as two detachment commanders, were also arrested for mass desertion. Capt. Antanas Mėšlius, who was the commander of the 3rd Company, was given eight months, which he spent in the Lukiškės and Kaunas prisons from February 7 to October 7, 1943. After serving his sentence, he was demobilized from the self-defense units.<sup>41</sup>

As a result of the mass desertion, the 2nd Battalion was supplemented with officers and soldiers from the disbanded 251st Battalion.<sup>42</sup>

In early February 1943, the 2nd Battalion was sent to Daugavpils (Latvia). There, the soldiers of the battalion received some brief military training before being sent to Sebezhsy District (in Pskov Oblast, Russia) to fight Soviet partisans.<sup>43</sup> The battalion operated for several weeks in Sebezhsy District. In mid-March 1943, the soldiers of the battalion encountered Soviet partisans in the forest. During the shooting, several Soviet partisans and one Lithuanian soldier were killed, and two Lithuanian soldiers were wounded. The Soviet partisans, seeing that the Lithuanian forces were more numerous, withdrew from the battle. Not knowing the area well, the Lithuanian soldiers did not pursue the partisans. Although the battalion often combed the forests in the surrounding areas, it never encountered any more partisans.<sup>44</sup>

It is known that in April 1943, major operations against Soviet partisans were organized in both Sebezhsy District and Opochetsky District. Several police battalions and other units participated in the operations. They set villages on fire, arrested civilians en masse, and sent them to Germany for forced labor. According to Soviet data, 261 civilians were shot, 581 people were arrested, and 41 houses were burned down during



the anti-partisan operations in Sebezhsy District.<sup>45</sup> It is difficult to say whether the 2nd Lithuanian Police Battalion contributed in the destruction of villages. The testimony of the soldiers of the battalion on this issue is very contradictory. Some only admitted to participating in the battles with the partisans, while others said that they also burned down villages and arrested civilians.<sup>46</sup>

The battalion returned to Vilnius from Pskov Oblast in April 1943 (over Easter). The soldiers rested for about a month before being deployed again to fight the partisans in Švenčionys County. The battalion was there for nearly a year – until May 1944.<sup>47</sup> The battalion staff stayed in the town of Adutiškis along with the 2nd Company (under the command of Capt. Bronius Balčiūnas, and later – Sr. Lt. Valentinas Irlikis). Capt. Aleksandras Kazakevičius stayed on as the commander of the battalion, with Sr. Lt. Mykolas Repečka as adjutant. The staff had three clerks and one translator. Capt. Vincas Valteris was the head of the economics unit, and Juozas Urbaitis served as physician.<sup>48</sup>

The battalion's 1st Company (under the command of Capt. Ignas Jonikas) was stationed in Vidzy (Belarus), while the 3rd Company (under the command of Capt. Jonas Jackūnas) was in Vosiūnai Village, and the 4th Company (under the command of Lt. Jurgis? Skaržinskas) was in Kamajai (Svir County). In total, there were about 300 people serving in the battalion in 1943.<sup>49</sup>

Hptm. der Polizei Gerhard Beyer, a German liaison officer, was assigned to the 2nd Battalion. He had his own staff of three Germans – a lieutenant and two sergeants. Beyer's staff was also based in Adutiškis. They mainly gathered information about the whereabouts of Soviet partisans and planned combat operations. Residents of the surrounding villages often visited Beyer to pass on information about Soviet partisans.<sup>50</sup>

On June 16–18, 1943, the Germans organized a major operation against Soviet partisans in the Dubičiai region (west of Rodūnė). The operation was directed by Oberst Hans Hachtel, who was the commander of the Ordnungspolizei in Lithuania. The 2nd and 7th Lithuanian Police Battalions, two separate police companies, and two German police companies from Kaunas participated in the operation. The infantry was supported by three armored vehicles and two German bomber squadrons.<sup>51</sup> The police battalions combed the forests for Soviet partisans in hiding. The outcome of the operation (losses on both sides) are not known.

In early 1944, the 1st Company of the 2nd Battalion fought with Soviet partisans in the vicinity of Vidzy. During the fighting, two partisans were shot. Clashes with the partisans usually took place when the battalion set up ambushes or combed the forests.<sup>52</sup>

As the number of young locals who wanted to join the battalion increased in the summer of 1943, Jr. Lt. Vladas Daraškevičius received orders to form a separate detachment. The detachment was formed and housed in the Adutiškis elementary school building. There were about 40 soldiers in Daraškevičius's detachment.<sup>53</sup>

The 2nd Battalion frequently encountered Soviet partisans in Švenčionys County. The 1st Detachment of the 3rd Company, which was under the command of Sr. Lt. Bronius Deveikis, was stationed in Vosiūnai Village. In the end of May or beginning of June 1944, the soldiers of this detachment encountered Soviet partisans in the forest during reconnaissance. One of the detachment's soldiers was injured in the shooting. The partisan losses are unknown.<sup>54</sup>

By order of HSSPF Ostland Friedrich Jeckeln, a group was formed on May 18, 1944 to fight the partisans in Lithuania under the command of Oberstlt. der Polizei Walter Titel. The group consisted of the 16th SS Police Regiment, the 2nd, 253rd, and 257th Lithuanian Police Battalions, and the Eišiškės County gendarmerie posts. The staff of Titel's group was based in Trakai. The 2nd Battalion was to be based in Varėna and was to install defensive rings.<sup>55</sup>

By Titel's June 9, 1944 order, the 2nd Battalion staff along with one company had to move from Varėna to "Powerzecze" (in the document, the Lithuanian villages were written in Polish – this is most likely the village of Paversekis), and the other three companies had to move to "Krumince" (Krūminiai), "Geniunce" (Giniūnai), and Matuizos. The 2nd Battalion was tasked with preventing partisan troops from moving around the Verseka district and fighting "thieving Polish gangs."<sup>56</sup>

When the Soviet Army invaded Lithuania, the battalion was ordered to go to Kaunas. The battalion stopped near Jonava and began digging trenches and building defensive fortifications, but they never got the chance to fight Soviet units. In mid-July, the 2nd Battalion arrived in Kaunas, where it was incorporated into the 1st Lithuanian Police Regiment (together with the 9th, 253rd, and 257th Battalions).<sup>57</sup> In late July, the 2nd Battalion received orders to withdraw in the direction of Vilkaiviškis.

On July 30, 1944, as the 2nd Battalion was retreating towards the German border in the vicinity of Sasnava (Marijampolė County), it was heavily shelled by Soviet artillery and tanks. Many of the battalion's soldiers were killed; others fled, and yet others reached Germany and were distributed among various German military units.<sup>58</sup>

## The 252nd Lithuanian Police Battalion

The first reliable information about the 252nd Lithuanian Police Battalion was recorded in May 1942. On May 25, Oberst der Polizei Wolfgang Denicke, who was the commander of the Ordnungspolizei in Lithuania, issued a special order on the reorganization of the Lithuanian police battalions. The order stated that the new 252nd E (German: *Ersatz*; "Substitute") Battalion being formed would consist of the current 1st E Lithuanian Police Battalion. The 252nd Battalion was divided into

four companies, and the place of the battalion's deployment would be Kaunas.<sup>59</sup> The battalion was housed in the Šančiai barracks. Hptm. der Polizei Heinrich Kruse became its liaison officer.<sup>60</sup>

Three companies were formed in the summer of 1942. The 1st Company was under the command of Capt. Alfonsas Petruelis, while the 2nd Company was under the command of Capt. Juozas Seliokas, and the 3rd Company was under the command of Lt. Juozas Mikšys (followed by Lt. Antanas Baltūsis). Seliokas and Mikšys were appointed commanders of the battalion companies as of November 1942.<sup>61</sup> A little later, the 4th Company was also formed (under the command of Lt. Vladas Šulskis).<sup>62</sup> The commander of the 252nd Battalion was initially Maj. Bronius Bajerčius (with Jr. Lt. Leonas Jeleniauskas as adjutant).

The battalion's composition was constantly in flux during its formation, with some officers being transferred in to serve, and others being moved to other battalions. On September 1, 1942, Lt. Algirdas Gasiūnas and Jr. Lt. Petras Šidagis were transferred from the 252nd Battalion to the 255th, and the 252nd Battalion got new detachment commanders: Lt. Aleksandras Jakubauskas and Jr. Lt. Juozas Katilius from the 255th Battalion, Jr. Lt. Vladas Šulskis from the 6th Battalion, and Jr. Lt. Juozas Jaudegis from the 254th Battalion.<sup>63</sup> On July 28, Lt. Vladas Baltrušaitis, Lt. Aleksas Jakubauskas, Jr. Lt. Juozas Jurevičius, and 121 soldiers were transferred from the 252nd Battalion to the 255th Lithuanian Police Battalion.<sup>64</sup> On September 1, Hptm. Lormann was transferred from the 252nd Battalion to the 255th Battalion to serve as commander.<sup>65</sup>

Most of the young men who joined the battalion did so voluntarily, in order to avoid being sent to work in Germany. At the battalion headquarters in Kaunas, volunteers had to fill out a form and sign a pledge for voluntary service in the 252nd Battalion. The soldiers of the battalion guarded important industrial facilities, military warehouses, and bridges in Kaunas and its surroundings. Some battalion units also guarded the prisoners at the Fourth and Ninth Forts, but were not used for executions.<sup>66</sup> The soldiers of the battalion performed formation and shooting exercises every day; they were armed with rifles, while the officers were armed with pistols.<sup>67</sup> Some units of the battalion were sent to the provinces to carry out "special assignments" – guarding Soviet prisoners of war working in the peat bogs. On June 1–26, 1942, the battalion's 2nd Company carried out "special assignments" in Alytus County and Jonava. A group of soldiers from the 2nd and 3rd Companies (14 people in total) carried out assignments in Valkininkai from June 1 to July 3. Col. Vincas Šaudzis, the acting liaison officer for the Lithuanian self-defense units, expressed his gratitude to a group of soldiers from the 252nd Battalion for capturing eight Soviet prisoners of war.<sup>68</sup>

Soldiers of the battalion were also sent to the counties of Panevėžys and Marijampolė to guard Soviet prisoners of war while they worked.<sup>69</sup> The 4th Company of the 252nd Battalion was sent to the Valkininkai district to comb the forests and arrest suspicious

persons. First the detainees were interrogated by a German officer, and then they were either released or sent to prison. During one operation, three Jews (two men and a woman) who had fled the Vilnius Ghetto were detained. They were shot by battalion soldiers.<sup>70</sup>

The formation and training of the battalion was only completed in autumn 1942. The battalion's soldiers then took an oath and were deployed to Lublin to guard the Majdanek concentration camp. According to available data, there were 21 officers, 88 non-commissioned officers, and 402 privates (511 people in all) serving in the 252nd Battalion on August 26, 1942.<sup>71</sup>

By the August 31, 1942 order of Reichsführer-SS and Chief of the German Police Heinrich Himmler, all military personnel who had served in police battalions for four weeks had to take an oath. The text of the oath was as follows: "As a member of the self-defense units, I swear to be faithful, brave, and obedient. I also swear to conscientiously perform all of my official duties, especially in the fight against Bolshevism, which is killing nations. I am willing to sacrifice my life for this oath. So help me God."<sup>72</sup>

The signatures of the persons taking the oath had to be attached to the personal files. The battalions in Lithuania had to give their oath to the Lithuanian self-defense unit liaison officer, GS Col. Antanas Špokevičius. The commanders of all of the battalions that were in Lithuania had to take their oath in Kaunas on October 26, 1942. The 252nd E Battalion was sworn in at the Šančiai barracks on October 28.<sup>73</sup>

By Himmler's October 20, 1942 order and the October 26, 1942 order of the commander of the Ostland Ordnungspolizei, the 252nd Battalion had to deploy to Lublin and replace the 2nd Lithuanian Police Battalion there. Three companies from the 252nd Battalion (13 officers, 59 non-commissioned officers, and 286 privates) were to leave for Lublin. The battalion detachment deployed in Jonava and the company of new recruits under the command of Capt. Alfonsas Petrulis were to stay in Lithuania. The 252nd Battalion was only to leave for Lublin after the 2nd Battalion arrived in Kaunas. Hptm. der Polizei Voigt, who was formerly the liaison officer for the 2nd Battalion, was appointed as the new liaison officer for the 252nd Battalion.<sup>74</sup>

According to available information, the 252nd Battalion arrived in Lublin on December 19, 1942. Once they got to Lublin, the battalion soldiers were housed in the school building on Bernardyńska Street. The battalion received a couple of months of military training before being assigned to the external security of the Majdanek concentration camp starting in late February 1943. In Majdanek, the soldiers of the battalion were housed in two barracks (about 100 meters away from the barbed-wire fence).<sup>75</sup> About 30 battalion soldiers were assigned daily to guard the camp; another 10 guarded the shoe factory, while the rest guarded the battalion's barracks or rested. The battalion received its order through the liaison officer, Hptm. Rutschinsky.<sup>76</sup> At

night, the battalion soldiers stood watch at the towers and patrolled the barbed-wire fence perimeter between the towers. The towers were usually guarded by guards of different nationalities (1–2 Lithuanians and 2–3 Germans). The same guards were on duty for 12–16 hours a day.<sup>77</sup> The battalion soldiers escorted Majdanek prisoners to do farm work outside the camp, and they also transported prisoners who had been brought to Lublin to the Majdanek camp. It is known that in 1943, a 1st Battalion company detachment (under the command of CSM Antanas Pikūnas) escorted a column of 5,000–6,000 Jews from Lublin to Majdanek.<sup>78</sup> Due to the unbearable living conditions (hunger, disease, hard physical labor), hundreds of prisoners died every day in the camp. At least 10 dead people were taken out of each barracks in the morning. Mass shootings of prisoners were sometimes carried out. On November 3, 1941, German SS officers shot about 18,000 prisoners from Majdanek and the surrounding camps (mostly Jews) near the Majdanek concentration camp.

When a smaller-scale killing campaign was carried out at Majdanek in September 1943, the soldiers of the Lithuanian and Ukrainian battalions were locked up in the barracks and forbidden to leave them.<sup>79</sup>

According to the testimony of the Germans themselves, the 252nd Battalion fielded an excessive workload. There were times when the battalion's soldiers stood guard at their posts for as much as 18 hours a day. This had a negative effect on their discipline and morale. By the September 20, 1943 order of the commander of the Lublin District Ordnungspolizei, the battalion was to have its workload reduced. At any given time, no more than one-third of the battalion's soldiers were to be on guard duty, with another third performing military exercises, and the remaining third resting.<sup>80</sup> According to available information, there were 14 officers, 29 non-commissioned officers, and 200 privates serving in the 252nd Battalion in Lublin on July 28, 1943.<sup>81</sup>

Battalion commander Capt. Bronius Bajerčius complained to Hptm. Rutschinsky, the battalion liaison officer, that in June 1943, 22 battalion soldiers were turned over to the SS and Police Court for various forms of official misconduct, and that two of the soldiers committed suicide. As a result, the battalion could only allocate one officer and 90 soldiers to guard duty.<sup>82</sup>

In late September 1943, the Majdanek concentration camp's command decided that they no longer needed the services of the 252nd Battalion. It was decided to retain 100 battalion soldiers to guard the camp, and to deploy the others to new service locations. Of the 100 soldiers from the 252nd Battalion who were kept to guard Majdanek, only 36 were left by the end of June 1944 due to arrests, illnesses, and desertions.<sup>83</sup>

In the autumn of 1943, the battalion staff and the majority of the soldiers were transferred to Wólka Profecka near the town of Puławy (Lublin District) to guard the railway. Some of the battalion's soldiers were left to guard the Majdanek concentration camp.<sup>84</sup>

While in Wólka Profecka, the battalion was housed in wooden barracks, which were guarded by Ukrainian police. The Germans did not trust the Lithuanian soldiers. Only a dozen or so days later, the soldiers of the battalion were armed and began to guard the railway and other important military facilities. About 60 soldiers (under the command of Lt. Juozas Mikšys) were sent to the Zaklików railway station to guard sawmills.<sup>85</sup> Although the communist Polish partisans (Tadeusz Kościuszko brigades) often blew up railway lines and attacked various military facilities, the soldiers of the 252nd Battalion never had to fight them.

Relations between the battalion soldiers and the local population were normal. This is evidenced by the following occurrence. In June 1944, Polish partisans blew up the railway near the village of Stawki and overturned a train carrying German soldiers. The German soldiers stormed the village of Stawki and captured five of its inhabitants, with the intention of shooting them. Just then, Mikšys and his men were driving by. The German soldiers stopped the Lithuanians and took Mikšys to Oberst Jedel, who ordered Mikšys's soldiers to shoot the villagers who had been arrested. Mikšys initially tried to talk his way out of it, but later agreed to do so in the hope that another train would arrive shortly and the Germans would leave. Jedel also ordered them to surround the village, shoot its inhabitants, and burn down the houses. Mikšys did not carry out Jedel's orders. When Mikšys arrived in Zaklików, there were already two German gendarmes waiting for him there who had to check whether he had carried out the orders given to him. Mikšys explained to the gendarmes that the detainees were not partisans, but villagers who had just randomly been caught. The next day, German policemen arrested Mikšys, put him on a train, and sent him west. Along the way, Mikšys managed to escape and return to Lithuania.<sup>86</sup> In 1975, Mikšys's heroic deed was confirmed by six residents of the village of Stawki.<sup>87</sup>

In July 1944, as the Soviet Army advanced deep into Poland, the 252nd Battalion was transferred from Wólka Profecka by way of Puławy to the left bank of the Vistula, where it took up defensive positions. The battalion stayed on the front line for a couple of months before being transferred to the city of Radom. Defending their positions on the Vistula, the battalion's soldiers exchange fire with the Red Army units on the other side of the river on an almost daily basis. During these exchanges, the battalion suffered minor losses.<sup>88</sup> As the Soviet Army approached, some of the battalion soldiers who had stayed in Lublin under the command of Company Commander Lt. Antanas Ragauskas left for Lithuania and then split up and went home once they reached Vilkaviškis. Some of the 252nd Battalion soldiers who were left in Majdanek were arrested by the Soviets on July 24–25, 1944.<sup>89</sup>

The core of the battalion remained in Radom until November 1944. In Radom, the soldiers of the 252nd Battalion were incorporated into the 19th SS Police Regiment and sent to fight the partisans in northern Yugoslavia. From that moment forward, the 252nd Lithuanian Police Battalion ceased to exist as an independent unit.<sup>90</sup> The

units of the 19th SS Police Regiment were stationed near the borders of the former Yugoslavia and Austria (in Prevalje, Kučevo, and other towns). In early May 1945, the 19th SS Police Regiment retreated to Austria and surrendered to British troops near Klagenfurt.<sup>91</sup> For the former soldiers of the 252nd Battalion, the end of their service coincided with the end of World War II. Some of them were captured by the Soviets and had to go through the hell of the Gulag, while others retreated to the West and were left to live in the free world.

## Conclusions

The 2nd Lithuanian Police Battalion operated throughout almost the entire period of the German occupation. The history of the battalion can more or less be divided into three periods: 1) July to mid-November, 1941; 2) mid-November 1941 to November 1942; 3) 1943 to July 1944. Throughout its history, the 2nd Battalion was mainly used for military/police purposes – the protection of military facilities and the fight against Soviet partisans. However, during the first period of its operation, the battalion was involved in the Holocaust perpetrated by the Nazis. Although the soldiers of the battalion did not directly participate in the massacre of Jews, they drove columns of Jews to Paneriai and guarded the site of the massacre on two occasions (in the autumn of 1941).

The 2nd Battalion served at the Majdanek concentration camp in 1941–1942. The battalion was assigned to the external security of the camp and did not participate in the massacre of prisoners.

During the third period of activity (1943–1944), the battalion was used to protect important military facilities and fight Soviet partisans in Eastern Lithuania, Belarus (Svir County), and Russia (Pskov Oblast). The battalion had no major battles with the partisans and hardly suffered any losses. The battalion soldiers were loyal to the civilian population and did not commit war crimes.

The history of the 2nd Battalion ended tragically in the last days of July 1944. Coming under heavy fire from Soviet armored vehicles and artillery, the battalion was defeated. Some of the soldiers were killed, while others managed to retreat to Germany or hide in Lithuania.

The 252nd Battalion was one of the few Lithuanian police battalions that survived as an independent unit until late autumn 1944, with some of its soldiers even serving until the end of World War II. The battalion was formed in autumn 1942, which is why it was not directly involved in the Nazi extermination of Jews (about 80 percent of Lithuanian Jews had already been shot by December 1941, and the rest were

imprisoned in ghettos until 1942–1944). During its service at Majdanek, the 252nd Battalion provided external security for the concentration camp and escorted its prisoners to work. The soldiers of the battalion did not participate directly in killing the prisoners. Like the 2nd Battalion, the 252nd was mainly used to protect military facilities and fight partisans.

The history of the 2nd and 252nd Battalions is unique in that they were both “long-lived” (they operated for almost three years under the same number), and they both served in Lublin (Majdanek).

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- <sup>69</sup> K. Gečionio 1949 m. liepos 28 d. tardymo protokolas [K. Gečionis's July 28, 1949 investigation protocol], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 8, b. 89, p. 140; S. Martinkaus 1945 m. birželio 7 d. tardymo protokolas [S. Martinkus's June 7, 1945 investigation protocol], *ibid.*, b. 112, pp. 233, 234.
- <sup>70</sup> V. Kižio 1948 m. birželio 25 d. tardymo protokolas [V. Kižys's June 25, 1948 investigation protocol], *ibid.*, ap. 58, b. 47003/3, pp. 22, 23.
- <sup>71</sup> SS ir policijos vado Lietuvoje sudaryta lietuvių policijos batalionų dislokacijos schema [The deployment plan for the Lithuanian police battalions as drawn up by the SS and Police Leader for Lithuania], LCSA, f. R-1018, ap. 1, b. 102, p. 28.
- <sup>72</sup> Tvarkos policijos vado Lietuvoje plk. H. Hachtelio 1942 m. spalio 15 d. įsakymas [Order issued by Oberst H. Hachtel, commander of the Ordnungspolizei in Lithuania, on October 15, 1942], *ibid.*, f. R-1444, ap. 1, b. 20, p. 23.
- <sup>73</sup> Tvarkos policijos vado Lietuvoje 1942 m. spalio 15 d. įsakymas [Order issued by the commander of the Ordnungspolizei in Lithuania on October 15, 1942], *ibid.*, f. R-1018, ap. 1, b. 93, pp. 51–53.
- <sup>74</sup> Tvarkos policijos vado Lietuvoje 1942 m. lapkričio 17 d. ypatingasis [Special Order issued by the commander of the Ordnungspolizei in Lithuania on November 17, 1942], *ibid.*, pp. 74, 75.
- <sup>75</sup> J. Mikšio 1975 m. spalio 23 d. tardymo protokolas [J. Mikšys's October 23, 1945 investigation protocol], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 22380/3, pp. 123, 124; V. Striūpo 1953 m. vasario 11 d. tardymo protokolas [V. Striūpas's February 11, 1953 investigation protocol], *ibid.*, p. 159.
- <sup>76</sup> J. Mikšio 1944 m. lapkričio 26 d. tardymo protokolas, pp. 11–11 a. p.
- <sup>77</sup> J. Janavičiaus 1953 m. vasario 4 d. tardymo protokolas [J. Janavičius's February 4, 1953 investigation protocol], *ibid.*, b. P-17460-LI, Vol. 1, pp. 39, 40.
- <sup>78</sup> A. Pikūno 1945 m. birželio 11 d. tardymo protokolas [A. Pikūnas's June 11, 1945 investigation protocol], *ibid.*, b. P-19850-LI, p. 39 a. p. 40.
- <sup>79</sup> Majdanek 1941-1944, p. 261; J. Malinausko 1945 m. vasario 5 d. tardymo protokolo išrašas [Excerpt from J. Malinauskas's February 5, 1945 investigation protocol], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 8, b. 112, pp. 70, 71.
- <sup>80</sup> Tvarkos policijos vado Liubline 1943 m. rugsėjo 13 d. raštas [Letter sent by the commander of the Ordnungspolizei in Lublin on September 13, 1943], LCSA, f. 1173, ap. 4, b. 6, p. 142.
- <sup>81</sup> 252-ojo bataliono sudėtis 1943 m. liepos 28 d. [Composition of the 252nd Battalion on July 28, 1943], *ibid.*, p. 144.
- <sup>82</sup> 252-ojo bataliono vado mjr. B. Bajerčiaus 1943 m. liepos 6 d. raštas bataliono ryšių karininkui kpt. Rutschinskiui [July 6, 1943 letter from Maj. B. Bajerčius, the commander of the 252nd Battalion, to Hptm. Rutschinsky, the battalion's liaison officer], *ibid.*, p. 164.
- <sup>83</sup> Liublino koncentracijos stovyklos apsaugos skyriaus 1944 m. birželio 26 d. raštas 252-ajam batalionui [June 26, 1944 letter from the Lublin Concentration Camp Security Division to the 252nd Battalion], *ibid.*, p. 50.
- <sup>84</sup> J. Mikšio 1944 m. birželio 26 d. tardymo protokolas [J. Mikšys's June 26, 1944 investigation protocol], LSA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 22380/3, p. 10 a. p.; V. Baranausko 1949 m. birželio 30 d. tardymo protokolas [V. Baranauskas's June 30, 1949 investigation protocol], *ibid.*, p. 171.
- <sup>85</sup> J. Mikšio 1975 m. spalio 23 d. tardymo protokolas, p. 124.
- <sup>86</sup> J. Mikšio 1974 m. kovo 15 d. pareiškimas [J. Mikšys's March 15, 1974 statement], *ibid.*, pp. 71–73; Liudytojo Adamo Bureko 1975 m. balandžio 30 d. apklausos protokolas [Adam Burek's April 30, 1975 interrogation protocol], *ibid.*, pp. 104, 105.
- <sup>87</sup> Lenkijos Liaudies Respublikos generalinės prokuratūros 1975 m. liepos 10 d. raštas LSSR generalinei prokuratūrai [July 10th, 1975 letter from the Prosecutor General's Office of the Polish People's Republic to the Prosecutor General's Office of the L.S.S.R.], *ibid.*, p. 88.
- <sup>88</sup> J. Povilonio 1949 m. liepos 21 d. tardymo protokolas [J. Povilonis's July 21, 1949 investigation protocol], *ibid.*, b. 15377/3, p. 32; J. Janavičiaus 1953 m. vasario 4 d. tardymo protokolas, pp. 40, 41.
- <sup>89</sup> A. Ragauskio 1947 m. spalio 22 d. tardymo protokolas [A. Ragauskas's October 22nd,

*1947 investigation protocol*], *ibid.*, b. 22380/3, p. 190; J. Raškevičiaus 1950 m. sausio 29 d. tardymo protokolas, p. 43.

<sup>90</sup> J. Povilonio 1949 m. liepos 21 d. tardymo protokolas, p. 33.

<sup>91</sup> V. Baranausko 1949 m. liepos 6 d. tardymo protokolas [*V. Baranauskas's July 6, 1949 investigation protocol*], *ibid.*, pp. 64, 65.

Arūnas Bubnys

## **Activities of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce in Lithuania: The Looting and Destruction of Jewish Cultural Property (1941–1944)**

The talented and educated Jewish people created a highly developed culture that enriched world culture and became an important part of national cultures. The development and prosperity of Jewish culture were interrupted by World War II and the genocide of the Jewish people – the Holocaust – that was organized and carried out by the Nazis. The Holocaust was not just the physical annihilation of the Jewish people. The Nazis also attempted to destroy Jewish cultural property or use it for their own purposes, including libraries and works by artists, scientists, philosophers, and rabbis. Enormous and often irreparable damage was done to the cultural heritage of European Jews that had been created over centuries.

One of the most important Nazi organizations tasked with orchestrating the registration, confiscation, and removal of Jewish cultural property from the occupied countries to the Third Reich was the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce (*Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg*; ERR) headed by Alfred Rosenberg. A branch of this taskforce operated in Lithuania during the Nazi occupation as well.

After the end of World War II, the countries of the anti-Hitler coalition began to search for and repatriate cultural property that had been removed, including Jewish cultural property, and return it to its rightful owners. In 1960, the government of the Federal Republic of Germany paid many countries compensation for the loss of works of art, but the Baltic States, which had been annexed by the Soviet Union by then, were not included.<sup>1</sup>

Worldwide, society's focus on Jewish cultural heritage and the restitution of cultural property has intensified in recent years. This is evidenced by the abundance of international conferences and adopted declarations. The governments and societies of the European democracies see it as their duty to perpetuate the memory of the victims of the Holocaust and at least partially restore the Jewish cultural heritage. The Washington Conference on Holocaust-Era Assets held on November 30–December 3, 1998 resulted in the Washington Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art, which has 11 general principles. According to the fifth principle: "Every effort should be made to

publicize art that is found to have been confiscated by the Nazis and not subsequently restituted in order to locate its pre-War owners or their heirs.”<sup>2</sup> Another important step in the restitution of Jewish cultural property was taken on November 19, 1999, when the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted Resolution 1205 on Looted Jewish Cultural Property, which was initiated and presented by Emanuelis Zingeris, a representative of the Republic of Lithuania. The articles of the resolution declare that “Jewish culture is a part of the heritage” and that “restitution of such looted cultural property to its original owners or their heirs (individuals, institutions or communities) or countries is a significant way of enabling the reconstitution of the place of Jewish culture in Europe itself.”<sup>3</sup> The resolution also called on European countries to organize a conference to discuss the restitution of looted Jewish cultural property.

On October 3–5, 2000 an international forum was held in Vilnius regarding the cultural property that was stolen from the victims of the Holocaust victims. The forum was organized by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania in conjunction with the International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania and the European Institute for Dispersed Ethnic Minorities. The forum discussed the legal, historical, museological, and archival issues of finding, identifying, and returning cultural property. The forum set itself the task of providing an opportunity for experts from different parts of the world to discuss the activities of global databanks and restitution organizations, as well as further work on the search, identification, and restitution of cultural property that was stolen from victims of the Holocaust.<sup>4</sup> The Vilnius forum was attended by 40 official state delegations, representatives of 17 non-governmental organizations, and guests from Lithuania and abroad. The closing plenary session concluded with the adoption of the Vilnius Declaration, calling for continued efforts in ensuring implementation of the Washington Conference Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art as well as Resolution 1205 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.<sup>5</sup> These international forums and declarations reflect that the issue of the restitution of Jewish cultural heritage and cultural property is becoming an important object of international and national policies.

Historians can also have an important say in this area. Too little has been done so far in reconstructing the “looted past” of Jewish cultural heritage in Lithuania. Holocaust historians focus mainly on the persecution and killing of Jews – the massacres in Lithuania’s major cities and provinces, the establishment and liquidation of the ghettos, the activities of the occupying and collaborative structures that carried out the genocide, and the Jewish resistance. To date, only a few articles have been written in Lithuania on the destruction and looting of Jewish cultural values. The first significant step in assessing the loss of Lithuanian Jewish culture and the activities of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce was only taken in 1993, at an international conference in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the liquidation of the

Vilnius Ghetto. During the conference, Emanuelis Zingeris, director of the Vilnius Gaon State Jewish Museum, gave a presentation entitled “Cultural values of the Lithuanian Jews: Tragic Losses and Real Hopes of Recovery.”<sup>6</sup> Zingeris touched upon the key facts behind the destruction of Jewish cultural property in Vilnius and Kaunas, discussed the attitude of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce towards Jewish cultural property, and highlighted the efforts that Lithuanian and Jewish intellectuals took to save valuable books and manuscripts. According to Zingeris, the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce destroyed about 80,000 books in Vilnius alone, and took some 20,000 more to Germany.<sup>7</sup>

Important facts on the topic can be found in articles by the historian Romualdas Samavičius.<sup>8</sup> However, the first article focuses more on the loss of Jewish culture under Soviet rule, and the second article does not provide much information on the losses caused to Jewish museums by the Nazis. In his article on the fate of Jewish property, historian Valentinas Brandišauskas presented new facts about the destruction and looting of Jewish cultural values.<sup>9</sup>

The recollections of two witnesses of the events – the renowned philologist Chackel Lemchen and the acclaimed Yiddish poet Abraham Sutzkever – are crucial to the investigation of the activities of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce.<sup>10</sup> Both of them were at the disposal of the officers of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce for quite a long time and were required to sort the Jewish books confiscated by the Nazis. Lemchen and Sutzkever provided insight into the nature of the activities of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce, presenting the colorful characters of some of its officers as well as facts about the destruction and rescue of Jewish cultural property.

Valuable facts for the topic under consideration can be found in the diaries of former Vilnius Ghetto prisoners Herman Kruk and Zelig Kalmanovitch.<sup>11</sup> Kruk, who was the head of the Vilnius Ghetto Library, wrote extensively about the activities of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce in Vilnius.

Admittedly, there is not much international literature that sheds light on the activities of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce either. Perhaps the only piece that examines the actions of this organization on a European scale is *Verschleppte Archive und Bibliotheken* (“Lost Archives and Libraries”), a book by the Dutch historian Peter M. Manasse.<sup>12</sup> This book contains a small subsection on the activities of the taskforce in the Soviet Union and the Baltic States. However, the author did not use archival documents from the republics of the former Soviet Union, so the examination of the activities of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce in the Baltic States – and especially in Lithuania – is relatively superficial.

Relevant to the topic at hand is the publication in the Moscow State University Faculty of History “Historical Sources” series on the activities of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce in the occupied areas of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus in 1941–1942.<sup>13</sup> It

contains a Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce card file of cultural objects that fell into Soviet hands after the war. The excellent introductory article and commentaries give the publication added value.

For historians who have studied the activities of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce in Eastern European countries, the article by the Ukrainian archivist T. M. Sebta on the documents of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce stored in Kyiv's Central State Archives of Supreme Bodies of Power and Government of Ukraine is also of great importance.<sup>14</sup> The author of the article reviewed the trophy documents stored in these archives and performed a relatively detailed analysis of the structure, assignments, and activities of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union.

Among other works useful for the topic under consideration, of note are the material from the Vilnius International Forum on Holocaust-Era Looted Cultural Assets,<sup>15</sup> the books by Rachel Kostanian-Danzig<sup>16</sup> and Lucy S. Dawidowicz,<sup>17</sup> and the article by Sigitas Jegelevičius.<sup>18</sup> All of these works contain facts important to the topic under analysis, but are nonetheless focused on different subjects and therefore only offer fragmented and episodic coverage of the activities of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce in Lithuania.

A historiographical review of the subject under analysis leads to the conclusion that the activities of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce in Lithuania in the looting and destruction of Jewish cultural property have not been thoroughly and systematically investigated. The most important shortcoming of most of the above-mentioned works is the insufficient examination and use of archival documents in Lithuania. Although the largest sets of Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce documents are stored in archives in Kyiv, Moscow, Paris, Washington D.C., New York, and Berlin, the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce Lithuanian Working Group fonds (f. R-633) in the Lithuanian Central State Archives (LCSA) also provides historians with an opportunity to partially reconstruct the activities of this taskforce in Lithuania. This fonds contains 30 files. Naturally, they represent a mere fraction of the documents of the Lithuanian Working Group of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce. It is known that the Lithuanian Working Group of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce sent weekly and monthly activity reports to the taskforce headquarters in Berlin. Unfortunately, the LCSA does not have these documents. Nor does it have other documents important to the subject under consideration, such as inventory lists of books compiled by staff members and lists of books sent to Germany. There is hope that these documents may have survived in archives abroad (especially in Kyiv and Moscow). However, the documents safeguarded in the LCSA also allow researchers to get an idea of the nature of the activities of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce in Lithuania, as well as its assignments and the work it carried out. The most valuable documents of the fonds are considered to be the inventory cards of cultural, religious, and other objects



completed by the taskforce experts. According to the instructions of the central command, the taskforce employees were required to complete two copies of the inventory card for each object inspected. One was sent to the taskforce headquarters in Berlin, while the other was kept by the working group itself.<sup>19</sup> In 1942, Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce experts carried out an inventory of synagogues and other Jewish institutions in Vilnius. They inspected more than a hundred synagogues in Vilnius and made a brief assessment of their condition at that time. Each card contained the name and address of the object, the date of the inspection, the items found (e.g. books, religious items, furniture), the condition of those items, and the name of the taskforce officer who inspected the object. These inventory cards are very important documents of the activities of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce in Vilnius. The taskforce experts also wrote reports on the ethnic groups living in Lithuania (Jews, Tatars, Crimean Karaites) and their cultural institutions and organizations. Some of these reports (e.g. on the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, the Strashun Library, the demographic development of Lithuanian Jews, and so on) have also survived and are now stored in the LCSA. The normative documents of the Third Reich leadership regulating the activities of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce units in the occupied countries (e.g. A. Rosenberg's order of August 20, 1941) are also relevant to the topic under discussion. Documents about the confiscation of Jewish cultural property can also be found in other LCSA fonds (f. R-614, f. R-615, f. R-1099, f. R-1421). These include orders issued by Gebietskommissars to confiscate Jewish cultural property, remove Jewish books from libraries, and seal off synagogues, bookshops, libraries, and apartments belonging to rabbis, as well as the reports of the Kaunas and Vilnius Gebietskommissars about the campaign for the confiscation of Jewish cultural property that was carried out in autumn 1941.

Important documents about the activities of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce and the fate of Jewish cultural property have also been preserved in the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences Manuscripts Department (hereinafter – LMA RS). These include the minutes of the meetings of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce officers with Lithuanian scholars, the 1941 instructions of the Citizens' Committee of Vilnius City and Region (hereinafter – CCVCR) regarding Jewish cultural institutions, and Abraham Sutzkever's September 5, 1944 letter regarding the Vilnius libraries destroyed by the Nazis (f. 159, f. 165). Other archival sources and literature used in the article are reflected in the endnotes.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the activities of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce in Lithuania in confiscating, destroying, and transporting Jewish cultural property to Germany. The focus is on the fate of Lithuanian Jewish libraries. The author shall attempt to disclose the key facts behind the destruction of Lithuanian Jewish cultural institutions and property, provide indicative statistics of the losses, and show the post-war fate of books taken to Germany as well as the most striking

facts in the rescue of cultural property. The author is also interested in the provisions and declarations of international forums on the topic of Jewish cultural property.

### Structure and Assignments of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce

Alfred Rosenberg (1893–1946) was born in Reval (now Tallinn). His father was of Estonian descent. During World War I, Rosenberg was studying architecture in Moscow. When the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia, he fled to Paris with a group of Baltic Germans. Rosenberg's worldview was strongly influenced by the English philosopher Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855–1927) and the racist, nationalist, and anti-Semitic ideas of the French poet and diplomat Joseph Arthur de Gobineau (1816–1882). Rosenberg was also a sworn enemy of Bolshevism and communism.<sup>20</sup>

After World War I, Rosenberg settled in Munich and quickly became a member of the German Workers' Party, which would later be renamed the National Socialist German Workers' Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*; NSDAP) – better known as the Nazi Party. In 1923, he was appointed editor-in-chief of the NSDAP newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter* ("Ethnic/Nationalist Observer"). Rosenberg's book *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* ("The Myth of the Twentieth Century") was published in 1930. In it, the author extolled the global mission of the Aryan (Nordic) race and explained the alleged danger of the Jewish race to Aryan civilization and culture. When Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in 1933, he made Rosenberg the "Führer's Representative for the Supervision of Intellectual and Ideological Education of the NSDAP," i.e., the chief ideologue of the Nazi Party.<sup>21</sup> On July 16, 1941, after Germany had occupied large territories of the Soviet Union, Hitler named Rosenberg Reich Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories (*Reichsminister für die besetzten Ostgebiete*).

As the chief Nazi ideologue, Rosenberg sought to scientifically substantiate the ideology of National Socialism and make it the absolute dominant worldview of the German nation – a religion of sorts. Its key elements were to be belief in the race, the deification of the German nation, and loyalty to the leader (Hitler).<sup>22</sup> Rosenberg planned to create a massive apparatus for the ideological education of Nazi Party members. The functions of coordinating party education were to be handed over to the central library of the Advanced School of the NSDAP (which was never fully established). One of Rosenberg's main concerns was to "scientifically" prove the depravity (*Verdorbenheit*) of the Jewish race and to find a "final solution to the Jewish question." A special institute and a library were planned to be set up to study the "Jewish question." The library was to collect secular and religious Jewish literature

found in the European countries occupied by Germany. Judaica and Masonic literature were to be collected in Frankfurt am Main. This is where the Institute for Research on the Jewish Question (*Institut zur Erforschung der Judenfrage*) and the Library for Research on the Jewish Question (*Bibliothek zur Erforschung der Judenfrage*) were established. The Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce (*Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg*; ERR) was set up specifically for the search and confiscation of cultural and artistic property of Jews, freemasons, communists, and other enemies of the Third Reich.

Rosenberg's first taskforce was established on July 17, 1940. It was to operate in the German-occupied Netherlands, Belgium, and the north of France, where it would combat the NSDAP's ideological enemies and confiscate the books, archives, and manuscripts that the institutions under Rosenberg's command needed in their work and take them to Germany.<sup>23</sup>

As Germany occupied more and more European countries, new taskforces were set up under Rosenberg. Over time, the centralized structure of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce became established. This included the taskforce headquarters (*Stabsführung des ERR*), which was based on Bismarck Street in Berlin. Stabsführer Gerhard Utikal assumed command of the headquarters on April 1, 1941. The headquarters consisted of three main divisions: the Organizational Division (*Hauptabteilung I "Organisation"*), which performed clerical functions; the Operational Division (*Hauptabteilung II "Einsatz"*), which took care of the search for and control of cultural objects in the occupied countries; and the Special Tasks Division (*Hauptabteilung III "Sonderaufgaben"*), which was responsible for Jewish cultural heritage and objects of art.<sup>24</sup>

The practical work in the occupied countries was carried out by the main working groups (*Hauptarbeitsgruppen*), which were subordinate to the taskforce headquarters. In 1944, there were as many as seven main working groups, covering almost the entire European continent. The Ostland Main Working Group (*Hauptarbeitsgruppe Ostland*), which was established on August 20, 1941, operated in the occupied Baltic States, Belarus, and northern Russia. Its headquarters were located in Riga. The Ostland Main Working Group consisted of four working groups: the Lithuania Working Group (*Arbeitsgruppe Litauen*, with its center in Vilnius), the Latvian Working Group, the Estonian Working Group, and the Belarusian Working Group.<sup>25</sup> By his May 1, 1941 decree, Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring ordered all units of the Nazi Party, the State, and the Wehrmacht to fully support the activities of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce working groups in the occupied territories.<sup>26</sup>

The assignments of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce in the occupied areas of the Soviet Union were formulated by Rosenberg's decrees of August 20, 1941 and October 3, 1941, along with Hitler's order of March 1, 1942. On August 20, 1941, Rosenberg instructed Reichskommissar for Ostland Hinrich Lohse to seize and

confiscate (*sicherstellen*) the cultural property of the enemies of Nazism that were needed for research. The objects selected were to be confiscated by the police and then examined and evaluated by the officers of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce. These officers also had to decide what should be left in place and what should be sent to Germany for further research and safekeeping. Lohse was also instructed to familiarize the Generalkommissars and Gebietskommissars subordinate to him with the decree.<sup>27</sup> Hitler's March 1, 1942 order authorized the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce to confiscate all libraries, archives, and other cultural institutions of the enemies of Nazism in the occupied territories and use their assets for the NSDAP's ideological tasks (propaganda) and scientific research.<sup>28</sup>

When exactly the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce Lithuanian Working Group began its operations in Lithuania is not known, but it could not have been earlier than autumn 1941 (since, as mentioned above, the Ostland Main Working Group was established on August 20, 1941). It is likely that the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce Lithuanian Working Group began its work in Vilnius in January 1942. However, even before the arrival of the staff, the Jewish cultural heritage was of interest to other institutions of the occupation authorities, especially the German Security Police (*Sicherheitspolizei*; SiPo) and Security Service (*Sicherheitsdienst*; SD).

### **The Destruction of Jewish Cultural Heritage Before the Arrival of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce Working Group**

The appropriation and destruction of Jewish cultural heritage began in the very first days of the Nazi occupation. On June 26, 1941, CCVCR Chairman Assoc. Prof. Stasys Žakevičius already told Kostas Kalendra, the manager of internal affairs who was his subordinate, to prepare to “take over Jewish belongings,” with all of the libraries going to the Academy of Sciences, valuable pieces of art – to the Art Museum, various jewels – to the pawnbroker's office to be safeguarded, musical instruments – to the Board of Arts, and doctors' offices – to the Department of Health.<sup>29</sup>

However, the Lithuanian authorities had no real power to dispose of Jewish cultural and artistic property. Until the introduction of the German civil administration in Lithuania, this issue was not actually addressed. On July 26, 1941, the CCVCR told the Museum of Arts, the Board of Arts, and the Academy of Sciences “to, if necessary, take over all works of art/musical instruments/libraries belonging to the Jews.”<sup>30</sup> The words “if necessary” in the letters indicate that the real owners of the Jewish property in question were still unknown.

On July 3, 1941, a commission from the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences sealed off the S. An-sky Museum. The museum's assets were taken over by the SD. Some of the

valuable parchments were looted.<sup>31</sup> The officers of the Wehrmacht's Baltic Propaganda Squadron No. 3 (*Propagandastaffel Baltikum III*) had already taken an interest in the Vilnius library fonds in July 1941. Some of the "Marxist-Jewish" books they had selected ended up in the basement of a German bookshop in late July 1941.<sup>32</sup> Gotthard, an adviser to Heinrich Himmler, came to Vilnius in July 1941. On his orders, the renowned philologist Noach Pryłucki and the writer Elijah Goldschmidt were arrested on August 1, 1941. Both were imprisoned in the Gestapo's basement. They were taken to the Strashun Library every day to register incunabula and the more valuable Hebrew books. After finishing this work, Pryłucki and Goldschmidt were murdered.<sup>33</sup> It was probably as early as the summer of 1941, before the arrival of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce, that the Lithuanian library fonds were rapidly reviewed and literature harmful to the Nazis were removed from them. Prior to the Nazi occupation, there were two Jewish publishing houses in Vilnius: TOMOR and the Boris Kletskin Publishing House. These publishing houses were handed over to the Vilnius branch of the State Publishing House. The books found in the publishing houses were catalogued, and then 30 copies of each book were packed up and prepared for shipment to Berlin. This work was carried out at the behest of the German police authorities.<sup>34</sup>

Much damage was done to Jewish cultural institutions in Vilnius in late August 1941, before the arrival of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce. The first losses were calculated in June 1942 by a Jewish working group subordinate to the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce. The building of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in Vilnius (at 18 A. Vivulskio Street) was taken over by a German army unit in the summer of 1941. On July 31, 1941, German SD officials went to the facilities manager at the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences and took the keys to the institution and the building "as property belonging to Jews." Prof. Mykolas Biržiška, who was the president of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, tried to mitigate the situation by submitting a letter to the CCVCR committee. Biržiška explained that there is no legal basis for removing the YIVO and the S. An-sky Museum from Lithuanian Academy of Sciences affiliation, because until then, they were legally managed by the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences. The professor asked the committee to mediate with the German institutions so that the property be left to the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences and allowed to be kept and looked after in accordance with the law.<sup>35</sup> However, Biržiška's efforts were fruitless – the aforementioned Jewish museums remained in the possession of the German institutions. In late August 1941, German soldiers removed many books, including five incunabula and other rare publications, from the first floor of the Strashun Library (at 6 Žydų Street). In the autumn and winter of 1941, even more books were destroyed and stolen, but in February 1942, there were still some rare and valuable publications left in the Strashun Library.<sup>36</sup>

After German soldiers occupied the YIVO building in late August 1941, almost the entire press archive (approximately 12,000 annual collections of Yiddish and Hebrew

newspapers and magazines) and part of the library's books and manuscripts disappeared. Some of the institute's materials were destroyed on site. Paintings were stolen as well. When the Jewish working group began itemizing the YIVO collections in February 1942, the premises were in complete chaos, with books, newspapers, paintings, and maps piled up together with pieces of broken furniture.<sup>37</sup>

The fact that the destruction and looting of Jewish libraries began as early as the summer of 1941 is confirmed by a September 24, 1941 letter from Generalkommissar Theodor Adrian von Renteln to the University of Königsberg Library, in which he reported that the libraries in Kaunas and Vilnius had already been checked, and the politically and ideologically harmful literature had been confiscated.<sup>38</sup>

On September 22, 1941, Reichskommissar for Ostland Hinrich Lohse informed Generalkommissar for Lithuania Theodor Adrian von Renteln that a unit of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce, headed by senior government adviser Griessdorf, had begun to operate in the Reichskommissariat Ostland on September 1, 1941. Lohse ordered von Renteln to arrange for the immediate confiscation and sealing of all synagogues, Jewish community buildings with archives and libraries, houses and offices belonging to rabbis, and Jewish bookshops and art shops. Von Renteln was to send Lohse a progress report by October 20, 1941.<sup>39</sup> Following Lohse's instructions of September 22, 1941, the registration, sealing, and confiscation of Jewish cultural heritage institutions intensified significantly. Most of the work was done by the German and Lithuanian police forces. Next, we will look at the progress of these activities in the districts of Generalbezirk Litauen ("General District Lithuania").

**Kaunas District.** In Kaunas, the German SD sealed synagogues and some communist party offices as early as July 1941. Part of the items that they took was sent to Berlin, and the rest was transported to the basement of the Kaunas Gestapo.<sup>40</sup>

In Kėdainiai County, 18 synagogues, 220 Jewish community institutions, one library, five apartments that belonged to rabbis, and 6,424 books in Jewish languages were sealed and/or confiscated.<sup>41</sup>

Approximately 3,000 Jewish books and 3,000 communist books were packed in the Marijampolė synagogue.<sup>42</sup>

In Šakiai County, the Šakiai, Kudirkos Naumiestis, and Kriūkai synagogues were sealed off. The Jewish writings that were found were confiscated by the Gestapo and stowed in the office of the governor of Šakiai County. The synagogue in Kudirkos Naumiestis was appropriated by the Wehrmacht and used as a hospital for prisoners of war.<sup>43</sup>

In Vilkaviškis County, both synagogues in Kybartai were found empty, looted, and damaged. The two synagogues in Virbalis were in the same condition. The approximately 1,500 Jewish and communist books that were confiscated from the Virbalis

school were transferred to the office of the county governor. One Jewish film was also seized there and handed over to the office of the Kaunas Gebietskommissar.<sup>44</sup>

**Vilnius District.** During the interwar period, Vilnius was known as one of the most important Jewish educational, cultural, and religious centers in Europe. It was rightly called “the Jerusalem of Lithuania.” The famous library of Mattityahu Strashun (1817–1885), which had a catalogue of 35,000 books, had been operating in Vilnius since the end of the 19th century. The Mefice Haskalah (“Promoters of Enlightenment”) Library held approximately 55,000 books. The YIVO Institute for Jewish Research (*Das Jiddische Wissenschaftliche Institut*) was founded in Vilnius in 1925. Before the Nazi-Soviet war, the YIVO Library had about 60,000 books, most of which were in Yiddish or Hebrew. Approximately 28,000 books were inventoried and catalogued alphabetically. There was also a bibliographic center with three catalogues (books, periodicals, and scientific articles according to the branch of science), a press archive, an archive of the history of the Jewish theater with a museum and a card file, and an archive of Jewish folklore (about 70,000 items), as well as many other dedicated archives and collections (Jewish education, literature, youth movement, etc.), a photo archive, a collection of paintings, and so on.<sup>45</sup> Vilnius also had a museum named after the Jewish writer and ethnographer S. An-sky (real name: Shloyme Rappoport, 1863–1920). Before World War II, the S. An-sky Museum had over 3,000 exhibits, including paintings and sculptures by the likes of Mark Antokolsky, M. Ginsburg, N. Treger, and Ilya Repin, as well as numismatic collections, books, and press and document collections in a variety of different languages.<sup>46</sup> The restructuring of the first Soviet period (1940–1941) changed the life of Jewish cultural institutions. On August 28, 1940, the activities of the YIVO were suspended. On November 12 of that same year, the YIVO, together with the S. An-sky Museum and the Strashun Library, were transferred to the Institute of Lithuanian Studies, and then to the Lithuanian S.S.R. Academy of Sciences in the spring of 1941. The Strashun Library was reorganized into Vilnius Public State Library No. 4, the Mefice Haskalah Library – into Library No. 5, and so on.<sup>47</sup>

Before the Nazi-Soviet war, there were about 100 synagogues in Vilnius. Most of them were private and belonged to different societies. In the autumn of 1941, the Great Synagogue (at 6 Žydu Street) was located inside the territory of the Small Vilnius Ghetto.<sup>48</sup>

During the Nazi occupation, not only was the physical genocide of the Jewish people carried out, but also the destruction of Jewish cultural heritage. First, all Jewish employees were dismissed from all higher education, scientific, educational, and cultural institutions. In the first days of the Nazi-Soviet war, the provisional government body that had been established in Vilnius – the Citizens’ Committee of Vilnius City and Region – instructed subordinate institutions to dismiss all Jewish scientists, university lecturers, and museum staff. As of June 22, 1941, N. Prilucki and

E. Goldschmidt, the heads of Vilnius Museums No. 3 (YIVO) and No. 5 (S. An-sky), were dismissed from their jobs,<sup>49</sup> and Prof. Vladas Lazerson, senior lecturer Ruvin Lakhovsky, and many others were dismissed from the University of Vilnius.<sup>50</sup>

When the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce started its work in Vilnius, it evaluated the extent of the damage that had been done to synagogues as well as to Jewish publishing houses, bookshops, and other institutions. Each object had a special inventory card, which indicated the name and address of the object, the assignment and the name of the officer performing it, and a brief description of the condition of the object and the nature of the items found in it. For instance, on January 31, 1942, Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce officer Stuhl inspected the synagogue at 110 Ukmergės Street and noted that all of the furniture had been broken and that the books had been burned at the time of the German Army's entry, i.e. in June 1941.<sup>51</sup> In another synagogue on the same street (at 70 Ukmergės Street), the same officer found broken furniture and torn books scattered on the floor. In addition, about 120 intact books were found in a cupboard, including a copy of the Babylonian Talmud.<sup>52</sup> In most synagogues in Vilnius, the furniture and books were destroyed. This was done in 1941, even before the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce came to Lithuania. It was rare to find intact books, cult objects, or other valuables in a synagogue. A larger number of books were found in the synagogue at 6 S. Dariaus ir S. Girėno Street, in the library of the Great Synagogue of Jewish Merchants at 35 Pylimo Street (the Torah and the religious and secular books that were found there were moved to the YIVO building), and in the synagogues at 4 Išganytojo Street and 6 Gėlių Street (the books found there were also moved to the YIVO building).<sup>53</sup>

Jewish cultural heritage was confiscated and sealed not only in the city, but also in the district of Vilnius. However, this campaign was carried out somewhat later in Vilnius than in the districts of Kaunas and Šiauliai. Not only the local administration, but also the Office for the Protection of Cultural Monuments and the Bureau of Studies (which investigated the policies of the Soviet occupation regime in Lithuania in 1940–1941) were involved in the campaign.<sup>54</sup>

Some 900 Jewish books were found in the synagogue in Lentvaris, religious literature was found in the apartments of the rabbis in Vievis, 130 Jewish books were found in the synagogue in Aukštadvaris, and 130 cult objects were found in Rūdiškės. The Jewish books found in Žiezmaris were taken to the town's public library.<sup>55</sup>

Approximately 800 Jewish books were found in a synagogue in the small town of Jašiūnai (Vilnius County).<sup>56</sup>

The five synagogues in Švenčionys were sealed off, and the number of Jewish books found in them was not specified (the keys were in the possession of the town's mayor, Kazys Gaižutis).<sup>57</sup>



The 1,213 Jewish books and nine Torahs found in Švenčionėliai were moved to the municipal building. Some 300–400 Jewish books were found in Kaltanėnai.<sup>58</sup>

The fate of the Jewish books and other values found in the provinces is unknown. It can be assumed that some of the more valuable literature was handed over to the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce, while other books were looted or destroyed. For instance, on November 19, 1942, the governor of Trakai County informed the General Adviser on Internal Affairs that the Jewish religious books in his county had been handed over to the staff of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce.<sup>59</sup>

**Šiauliai District.** In Šiauliai District, Lohse's September 22, 1941 order was not implemented until the second half of October 1941. On October 18, 1941, Šiauliai Gebietskommissariat Chief of Staff Schrepfer informed the county governors and town mayors that by October 23, 1941, "the buildings and so on subject to confiscation must be confiscated, sealed, and reported to the Gebietskommissariat by the exact address: 1. all synagogues; 2. all shops of the Jewish communities with archives, libraries, etc.; 3. apartments and offices of chief rabbis and rabbis; 4. all Jewish book and art workshops."<sup>60</sup>

In response to Šiauliai Gebietskommissar Hans Gewecke's letter, the mayor of Šiauliai informed him that there was a synagogue in Šiauliai at 136 Tilžės Street that had a bookcase in the courtyard with religious books. He also said that there was a synagogue at 19 Varpo Street and another at 27 Varpo Street, but no Jewish books or works of art were found in either of them. The Šiauliai State Library took about 13,000 Jewish books. The library of the Jewish High School was plundered by locals, and only what was left of it ended up in the city library. The Jewish books were placed in the library's vaults and readers could not use them.<sup>61</sup>

The mayor of Žagarė informed the Šiauliai County Board that all six synagogues in the town had been "confiscated and sealed; all of them were looted during the massacres of the Jews, and what was valuable in them was stolen – all that is left are some torn prayer books and a dozen pews."<sup>62</sup>

The governor of Tauragė County informed the Šiauliai Gebietskommissar that the Jewish cultural property had been burned, the Šilalė synagogue had been sealed, and its keys were in the possession of the township mayor.<sup>63</sup>

The situation was similar in the other counties of Lithuania. For instance, a prisoner-of-war camp was set up in the synagogue in the town of Akmenė (Mažeikiai County), while the synagogues in Ylakai, Laižuva, Tirkšliai, and Židikai were sealed with the property found in them, and the keys were handed over to the township mayors. The same was done with rabbis' apartments. The Viekišniai synagogue was turned into a potato warehouse. A larger number of books and documents were found in the Tirkšliai and Vėgeriai synagogues (the 188 Jewish books found in the latter were handed over to the police).

A total of 100 Jewish books and 100 Russian books were found in the Mažeikiai synagogue (at 21 Laisvės Street) and moved to the former Jewish school (at 3 Vydūno Street). Another 1,000 Jewish books were found in the school library. The keys to the synagogue and the school were taken by the city's mayor.<sup>64</sup>

Telšiai had long been an important religious and cultural center for Lithuanian Jews. As per Lohse's instructions, 15,000 Jewish books were confiscated in the town (at 2 Kęstučio Street). Jewish books were also brought to Telšiai from the townships of Luokė, Alsėdžiai, and Nevarėnai. The keys to the sealed premises were kept by Telšiai Deputy Mayor Mališauskas. The main synagogue in Telšiai was burned down at the beginning of the war, along with everything inside.<sup>65</sup>

### **Activities of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce Lithuanian Working Group**

The Lithuanian Working Group of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce arrived in Vilnius in January 1942. The group was made up of Johannes Pohl (an employee from the Institute for Research on the Jewish Question in Frankfurt am Main), Dr. Müller, Willi Schäfer, Sporket, Gerhardt Spinkler, and a few others. Schäfer was in command of the group (at least until the autumn of 1942); he was later replaced by Sporket. The group's headquarters were located at 18 Žygimantų Street.<sup>66</sup> The number of employees varied from 10 to 20 people.<sup>67</sup> In mid-February 1942, Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce officers went to the Vilnius Ghetto and tracked down former YIVO board member Zelig Kalmanovitch, head of the ghetto library Herman Kruk, and other Jewish intellectuals, and explained to them what they would be doing. The officers planned to move the books from the Strashun Library to the university premises (at 3 Universiteto Street), where they would be sorted. Kruk was appointed head of the Jewish working group, with Kalmanovitch as his deputy; Khaykl Lunski was appointed as expert bibliographer. Another 20 workers were taken from the ghetto to transport the books (including the poet Abraham Sutzkever and the writer Shmerke Kacerginski). An officer of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce told the Jewish intellectuals: "These are times of war. Cultural property may suffer. To protect it, we must send it to Germany."<sup>68</sup> The Jewish books had to be stacked in a large hall where Marxist–Leninist seminars were held during the Soviet period. The library of Marxist literature that was in the hall had to be moved to another room. Along with the Strashun Library, part of the books from the YIVO Library and other Jewish libraries, bookshops, publishing houses, and synagogues also had to be brought to the university premises. The Jewish intellectuals had to sort the books and make lists of them.<sup>69</sup>

The selection of books and documents was carried out in the YIVO building as well. The group of Jewish intellectuals subordinate to the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce began its work on February 18, 1942. By June 18, 1942, more than 160,000 books and brochures, over 100 Torah scrolls, and a wealth of manuscripts, paintings, photographs, and cult objects of Judaism had been collected from libraries, bookshops, publishing houses, synagogues, and private apartments. The books and objects were stored in three places: the university, the YIVO building, and a shop in the ghetto (at 7 Rūdinkų Street). Some of the books, newspapers, magazines, and manuscripts (about 50,000 items) were brought from the Strashun Library to the premises of the university, as were about 2,000 books from the Hasidic synagogue (at 21 Vilniaus Street), about 10,000 books from other libraries, and about 20 Torah scrolls from various synagogues in Vilnius, as well as part of the Strashun Library catalogue, paintings, and cult objects.<sup>70</sup>

The YIVO Library and Archives received the most attention from the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce. Books, documents, and cult objects were also transferred there from synagogues, publishing houses, and bookshops. A profusion of Marxist literature in Russian, Polish, Lithuanian, and German was also brought to the YIVO building from various bookshops in Vilnius. These books were sorted as well, and then destroyed on the orders of Officer Sporket.<sup>71</sup> A large part of the YIVO assets were destroyed and looted as early as in the summer of 1941. When the Jewish working group started its work in the YIVO building, it found the building in complete chaos and disarray. Books, newspapers, photographs, paintings, and library cards were lying in piles on the floor, all mixed up and out of order. In his March 12, 1942 diary entry, Herman Kruk wrote in dismay that it was difficult for him to express his impressions after visiting YIVO for the first time (during the Nazi occupation). The basement of the building was practically stuffed to the ceiling with books, newspapers, etc. On the floor there were piles of mixed-up library cards. Pictures, documents, letters, and photographs were strewn all around. Everything was broken, torn, messed up, and dirty. Kruk's first instruction to the Jewish workers was to rescue the remnants of the pre-war Peretz exhibition, which were lying in piles of rubbish on the floor.<sup>72</sup> Later, Kruk and Kalmanovitch discovered that almost the entire YIVO press archive and many books (including old and valuable publications) had been destroyed. Some 1,200 volumes of the folklore collections of the famous Jewish ethnographer Judah Leib Cahan (1881–1937) had disappeared from the YIVO Library, as had a number of valuable manuscripts (including those of Sholem Aleichem, I. L. Peretz, and Joseph Perl).<sup>73</sup> It took the Jewish intellectuals a great deal of time and effort to put the YIVO archives and library back in order. Books and periodicals were filed and stored separately from paintings and photographs. The remains of the card files were also taken to a separate room. On the instructions of Nazi officials, the Jewish workers had to sort the books into two groups: Judaica and non-Judaica. Two Reichsleiter

Rosenberg Taskforce officers decided which of the books to take to Germany and which to discard as worthless (i.e., to be destroyed) wastepaper. The Nazis discarded roughly 70 percent of the YIVO books as wastepaper.<sup>74</sup> The Jewish intellectuals tried to rescue valuable books and documents that were doomed to destruction (for more on this, see “Rescuing Jewish Cultural Property”).

Over 20,000 books were selected to be sent to the Library for Research on the Jewish Question in Frankfurt am Main. The remaining tens of thousands of books were sold as wastepaper to a paper mill at 19 marks per ton.<sup>75</sup> However, even the books shipped to Germany did not always reach their destination. In 1942, for example, Sporket was instructed by Pohl to send six boxes of rare books and parchments to Frankfurt am Main. Instead, he threw the books on the floor, stuffed the boxes with pork, and sent them home.<sup>76</sup>

In late autumn 1942, the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce cleaned the YIVO building to ensure that no Yiddish books were left. Half of the building’s basement was filled with sacks of potatoes, and the most valuable books from TOMOR and the Boris Kletskin Publishing House were discarded as worthless wastepaper.<sup>77</sup> Zelig Kalmanovitch described the sad fate of the YIVO Library in his diary just before the liquidation of the Vilnius Ghetto: “In the YIVO reading room, there are piles of books lying on the floor – it is a graveyard of books, ‘fraternal’ graves, victims of the Gog and Magog war, just like their owners. It is useless to talk about them: most of these books are completely worn out and unreadable. But the new books taken from bookshops may also be completely useless because they don’t have buyers.”<sup>78</sup>

The officers of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce in Vilnius not only organized the registration, selection, and removal of Jewish cultural property, but also attempted to carry out scientific research. They were mainly interested in the history of the Jewish community in Lithuania, its demographic development, the most important religious and cultural sites and institutions, and the relations of the Jews with other kinship nations (especially the Crimean Karaites). The more educated Nazi officials received great intellectual support from Herman Kruk, Zelig Kalmanovitch, and other members of the Jewish intelligentsia. Herman Kruk described his visits to the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce in Vilnius in his diary. In February 1942, he was invited there and spoke to a senior staff officer (he did not mention his name). The officer asked Kruk and Kalmanovitch about Vilnius’s synagogues, libraries, museums, archives, and so on, and took notes of their answers. From the officer’s questions and comments, Kruk got the impression that he was a well-informed, intelligent person who was seriously interested in Jewish culture and history.<sup>79</sup> The working group that Kruk was in charge of did a tremendous job. A report on the work that this group did from February 19, 1942 to July 7, 1943 has survived and is safeguarded in the LCSA. Among many other things, the group, with the help of the Jewish Ghetto Police, collected copies of the Talmud and delivered them to the Reichsleiter Rosenberg

Taskforce office in Vilnius. At the request of the officers, Kruk translated articles of interest to them from different languages and wrote various historical studies and reviews himself. Kruk wrote a 78-page typescript monograph about 117 Jewish houses of worship Vilnius, a 34-page article entitled “The Jews of Lithuania” with an abundance of statistical tables, a 20-page study entitled “Jewish Ghettos in the Baltic States,” and a 16-page paper entitled “Masonic Lodges in Lithuania.” He also wrote an article about anti-Semitic movements in Lithuania, compiled a bibliography of the Jewish problem and anti-Semitism, and wrote surveys of the composition of the YIVO Library and Archives, a major study about the Jewish cemeteries in Vilnius, and other work.<sup>80</sup> Kalmanovitch was in charge of a group of Jewish translators who also did a tremendous job in translating various works from Yiddish, Hebrew, Russian, and Polish into German over the course of the year (from June 1942 to June 1943).<sup>81</sup> Without the support of the Jewish intelligentsia, the investigative work of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce would have been virtually impossible. For instance, Dr. Herbert Kirrinis, a staff officer, “wrote” an article on the Crimean Karaites of Lithuania on the basis of material collected and summarized by Kruk and others.<sup>82</sup>

The Jewish intellectuals also helped the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce organize an exhibition in the YIVO building in the summer of 1942. Conceived by the Nazis, the exhibition was supposed to prove the supposedly Jewish nature of Bolshevism. In essence, the exhibition reflected Jewish life before World War II, the activities of charitable organizations, and so on. The Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce officers wanted to make as big an impression as possible on the visitors.<sup>83</sup> The exhibition itself was closed to the public, and only various Nazi officials were allowed to visit. *Wilnaer Zeitung*, Vilnius’s German newspaper, wrote about the exhibition.<sup>84</sup> Although the article contained many anti-Semitic sentiments, it gave an idea of the activities of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce and the exhibition. The article said that the exhibition featured 16th-century publications along with the latest Bolshevik propaganda literature, Torah scrolls, numerous photographs of everyday Jewish life, photographs of prominent Jewish public and cultural figures in Vilnius, documents from the Jewish Theater, paintings, newspapers, and so on.<sup>85</sup>

The activities of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce in Kaunas can be traced back to the autumn of 1941. There is information that officers of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce had already set up office in Kaunas at 44 Donelaičio Street in late October 1941.<sup>86</sup> It is possible that Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce officers organized the “cleansing” of Kaunas libraries, bookshops, and publishing houses to eradicate them of Jewish and Marxist literature. That was when lists of literature harmful to the Nazis were drawn up. Some of them have survived to this day and are safeguarded at the LCSA in the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce files: the list of books removed from the V. Kudirka Library,<sup>87</sup> the list of books confiscated from Viktoras Cimkauskas’s bookshop,<sup>88</sup> etc. In Kaunas in 1942, the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce confiscated

568 books belonging to the Jewish community with records of births, marriages, divorces, and deaths from 1825 to 1940.<sup>89</sup>

In the beginning of 1942, the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce in Kaunas ordered the Kaunas Ghetto Council of Elders to find five Jews who knew German, Yiddish, Hebrew, and Polish. Among the intellectuals selected was the renowned philologist Chackel Lemchen. Dr. Benke, the head of the Kaunas taskforce office, screened the men who had been selected. One candidate was deemed unsuitable, leaving just four Jewish intellectuals for the job: Chackel Lemchen, Abraham Kisin, Tzvi Kirsh, and Joseph Ryzhin. They were taken to a building on A. Mapu Street, where books in various languages were piled up. The Germans had brought these books in from the Kaunas libraries (Abba Balosher's library and others), synagogues, and private Jewish libraries.<sup>90</sup> The Jews sorted the books and marked them as either valuable or worthless. In his memoirs, Lemchen wrote: "We didn't find any priceless Jewish values, although there were one or two interesting books. Under the conditions in Kaunas, there was no way to smuggle out and hide the more precious writings like they managed to do at the Rosenberg office in Vilnius with the help of Gentiles (Lithuanians, Poles, etc.). It was very difficult to bring anything into the ghetto, because almost everyone was searched at the gate for hidden items."<sup>91</sup>

Not all the books confiscated from the Kaunas Jews were brought to A. Mapu Street. Some of them were kept in a synagogue at 25 Gardino Street that had been converted into a warehouse. A small number of them were taken to Germany, while others were burned or given as wastepaper to the Petrašiūnai paper mill.<sup>92</sup> Johannes Pohl came to Kaunas from the Vilnius office to direct the selection of Jewish books. He was very well versed in old and new Yiddish and Hebrew literature, and had been an Oriental studies student in Jerusalem for several years before the war. From the wealth of religious books, he selected valuable editions to be sent to Frankfurt am Main. After the books were sorted, the printed matter that was selected was placed in wooden crates and loaded onto a truck.<sup>93</sup>

On February 27, 1942, the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce issued an order for the inhabitants of the Kaunas Ghetto to collect all of their books together in one day, regardless of their content or language. The ghetto youth hid and saved many books from destruction, including Torah scrolls that had secretly been brought into the ghetto from the city's synagogues.<sup>94</sup>

As Avraham Tory, the secretary of the Kaunas Ghetto Council of Elders, wrote in his diary, the four Hebrew teachers finished sorting the books that had been confiscated in the ghetto on July 13, 1942.<sup>95</sup>

On October 24, 1942, Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce representative Gerhardt Spinkler came to Kaunas and demanded that all "inappropriate" books in the Kaunas Central State Library be destroyed. This resulted in the destruction of 14,120 publications.<sup>96</sup>

The Nazis were interested not only in libraries, but also in Jewish cultural property that was being safeguarded in museums and archives. The assets of the Jewish Society for History and Ethnography were transferred to the Museum of Culture on the initiative of Paulius Galaunė, the museum's director. Portraits of famous rabbis, cult objects, and archives were brought there. The archival documents and some of the cult objects were later taken from the Museum of Culture by the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce. On January 21–26, 1942, Nazi officials raided the museum deposits belonging to the Jews and confiscated Zachary Margolin's collection of antique gold coins, teacher Noachim Lidski's Judaica, a set of silver coins, and lawyer Viktoras Cimkauskas's library and ex-libris collection. The property of the Jewish Society for History and Ethnography that was being stored at the Office for the Protection of Cultural Monuments was taken away as well.<sup>97</sup>

The Germans also ordered the Jewish exhibits of the Šiauliai Aušros Museum to be given up.<sup>98</sup>

The Lithuanian office of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce was particularly active in confiscating and sorting Jewish cultural property in 1942. Later, the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce focused more on researching Bolshevik activities and spreading anti-Soviet propaganda. On July 4, 1943, the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce held a meeting with Lithuanian and Polish scientists in Vilnius. It was chaired by Rudolf, a high-ranking official at the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce headquarters who had come in from Berlin. The meeting was also attended by local officers Willi Schäfer and Gerhardt Spinkler, Lithuanian scientists Prof. Jonas Puzinas and Dr. Matas Melėnas, the head of Vilnius University Library Vincas Mačiūnas, and others. The meeting was devoted to the study of Bolshevik activities in Lithuania in 1940–1941. Rudolf declared that “the study of Bolshevik ideology and its practical impact” was one of their most important tasks. The Nazi official was not happy with the research on Bolshevism that the Lithuanian Bureau of Studies had carried out because it was more journalistic in nature and not very scientific. Rudolf invited Lithuanian and Polish scientists to become more actively involved in Bolshevism research and to cooperate more closely with the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce. The Nazi officials proposed setting up a working group of about 10 Lithuanian scientists from various fields, which would be able to submit the first results of its work to the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce in just three months. Schäfer even suggested specific topics and questions to be investigated. One of the most important aspects of the study of Bolshevism was to be the role of Jews before and during the first Soviet occupation.<sup>99</sup> However, there was then barely a year left until the end of the Nazi occupation, and the initiatives of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce did not yield any tangible results.

During the Nazi occupation, the Vilnius State Archives were turned into an important hub for transferring archives brought in from other Soviet republics. These archives

were also reviewed by officers of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce. The archives brought to Vilnius were loaded into the premises of the Benedictine monastery (at 3 Ignoto Street). In the winter of 1942/1943, four railroad cars of files from the Smolensk Oblast party archives were brought to Vilnius. These archives were given over to the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce. It was reviewed by a five-person committee headed by Dr. von Berg. After being put in order in Vilnius, the Smolensk archives were taken to Liepāja in June 1944 to be shipped to Germany. Dozens of railroad cars full of files from the Smolensk, Vitebsk, and Minsk State Archives were also brought to Vilnius.<sup>100</sup>

The last traces of the activities of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce in Lithuania were documented in late April 1944. At that time, the Smolensk party archives, exhibits of the Crimean Karaite Museum in Vilnius, samples of communist literature published in Lithuania,<sup>101</sup> and the card catalogue of churches, museums, castles, and architectural monuments in Lithuania<sup>102</sup> were being prepared to be moved from Vilnius to Germany.

During the Nazi occupation, Jewish libraries suffered particularly heavy losses. The Strashun Library had losses amounting to approximately 125 million rubles (at the old exchange rate), the YIVO Library – 100 million rubles, the Mefice Haskalah Library – 25 million rubles, the Children and Youth Library – 12.5 million rubles, and the Jewish library belonging to trade unions – 7.5 million rubles. Meanwhile, the libraries of the Jewish high schools, elementary schools, and other educational and cultural establishments lost about 50,000 books. Some 38 tons of books were taken from the Jewish libraries in Vilnius to the paper factory as wastepaper, and another 15 tons of books were taken from Jewish publishing houses and printing houses.<sup>103</sup> The cultural property that was taken to Germany included 15th- and 16th-century publications (incunabula), paintings by Ilya Repin, Isaac Levitan, and Mark Chagall, sculptures by Mark Antokolsky, M. Ginsburg, Naoum Aronson, and Nison Tregor, and manuscripts of famous writers.<sup>104</sup> According to estimates, the Nazis appropriated at least 30,000 books and manuscripts (primarily books in Yiddish and Hebrew) in Lithuania during the war.

### **Rescuing Jewish Cultural Property**

Amidst the spread of anti-Semitic terror and hatred, a number of both Jews and Gentiles appeared in Lithuania who, despite the danger to their freedom and even their lives, helped the Jews being persecuted in every way possible. One such form of assistance was the rescue of Jewish cultural property from destruction, looting, and decay. Naturally, this assistance was mainly provided by intellectuals who understood



the importance of cultural property to the cultural and social life of communities. Most of the campaigns to rescue Jewish cultural property were in Vilnius and Kaunas – there is almost no information about other Lithuanian cities and towns.

Over the course of 18 months, the working group of Jewish intellectuals at the YIVO (Zelig Kalmanovitch, Herman Kruk, Abraham Sutzkever, Shmerke Kaczerginski, Uma Olkenicki, etc.) rescued many precious books, manuscripts, and other valuables. They set up about 30 hiding places in the basement and attic of the YIVO building, where they stashed valuables that would have otherwise been destroyed or taken out of the country. With the help of Gentiles, another 30 or so hiding places were set up in the city.<sup>105</sup> The Jewish intellectuals would smuggle extremely valuable manuscripts into the ghetto and hide them there. Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce Officer Sporket allowed Sutzkever to take worthless books from the YIVO as kindling. Using Sporket's note, Sutzkever smuggled valuable property into the ghetto, including letters from Leo Tolstoy to philosopher Vladimir Solovyov, letters from Sholem Aleichem to Maxim Gorky, letters written by Romain Rolland, 15th- and 16th-century publications, Theodor Herzl's diary, and paintings by Ilya Repin and Mark Chagall. The Jewish working group hid roughly 5,000 valuable books in the hiding places inside the YIVO building.<sup>106</sup> When asked why people risked their lives to smuggle books into the ghetto, Zelig Kalmanovitch replied: "Because books don't grow on trees."<sup>107</sup> Vilnius University librarian Ona Šimaitė, writer Kazys Boruta (who worked there at the same time), and Vilnius University lecturer Marija Abramovič helped the Jewish intelligentsia hide books. In March 1942, Sutzkever gave Šimaitė the most valuable items – manuscripts of the classical Yiddish writer I. L. Peretz – for safekeeping.<sup>108</sup>

Unfortunately, the valuables hidden in the YIVO building were lost in a fire during the battles for Vilnius. When the Soviets occupied Vilnius, some 2,000 books from the Strashun Library were discovered in a basement next to the ghetto's Mefice Haskalah Library. After the war, they were handed over to the House of Books. In the hiding place at 6 Šiaulių Street, manuscripts written by Sholem Aleichem, Hayim Nahman Bialik, and David Bergelson survived along with hundreds of older publications.<sup>109</sup> On the initiative of Herman Kruk, a large number of books from the library at the I. L. Peretz High School (at 15 Pylimo Street) were saved. They were transferred to the ghetto library.<sup>110</sup>

The famous traveler Antanas Poška, who was the head of Vilnius Public Library No. 3, bribed SS guards to obtain valuable books and parchment manuscripts that had been confiscated from the Jews, and preserved them until the end of the war. Librarian T. Adomonis tried to draw the attention of the officials of the Educational Council to the sad state of Jewish books: "The Vilnius Children's Library at 21 Pylimo Street used to have about 30,000 books. A German bookshop took its shelves, and now the books are lying in piles or are being taken by outsiders. Vilnius State Library No. 5 also had about 60,000 good books. This library is now within the confines of the ghetto."<sup>111</sup>

There were also Lithuanian intellectuals in Kaunas who helped rescue Jewish cultural property. The Nazis ordered the destruction of the collections of books and periodicals formerly owned by Nachman Shapiro, an associate professor at the Vytautas Magnus University Department of Semitic Studies who had been executed. With the help of students, Viktoras Biržiška, the director of the Vytautas Magnus University Library, collected several truckloads of stationery waste and took it to the Petrašiūnai paper mill instead of the valuable collections that were meant to be destroyed. Biržiška also saved almost an entire set of Lithuanian Jewish periodicals (1922–1941).<sup>112</sup>

Juozas Rimantas, the director of Kaunas State Central Library, saved Abba Balosher's famous library by submitting a list of nationalized libraries to the Nazis in April 1941 and explaining that this library had already been nationalized in the Soviet years.<sup>113</sup> Thus, part of the Jewish cultural property was preserved for future generations through the efforts of humane and intelligent people.

### **The fate of Jewish Cultural Property During the Post-War Years**

Vilnius was one of the most important hubs in the Nazi-occupied areas of the Soviet Union for transferring cultural property (mainly books and archival documents) to Germany. This process peaked in 1943–1944 (until the end of the Nazi occupation). Judaica was taken to Frankfurt am Main, and Marxist literature and books in the social sciences and humanities were taken to the Ostbücherei Rosenberg ("Eastern Library") in Berlin. In the summer of 1944, as the Eastern Front approached the German borders, Rosenberg ordered the immediate transfer of the remaining valuable libraries and archives to the Reich.<sup>114</sup>

Under international law (the resolutions of the 1907 Hague Conference, the 1929 Geneva Conference, etc.), cultural property stolen by occupying forces must be returned to the country from which it was taken. Even before the war ended, the countries of the anti-Hitler coalition began to prepare for the search for and repatriation of looted cultural property. After the war, U.S. Army specialists in Frankfurt am Main and Hungen found almost 2 million books and other publications that had been looted by the Nazis from the occupied countries. In the summer of 1945, the Offenbach Archival Depot (OAD) was set up with the task of returning the books that had been looted by the Nazis to their rightful owners. U.S. Army Capt. Seymour Pomrenze, a Jewish archivist and records manager, was the first director of the OAD.<sup>115</sup>

In June 1945, one American sergeant wrote in a letter to his wife that she should inform YIVO, which had moved its operations to New York, that he had found part of the Vilnius YIVO Library in Frankfurt, with the books packed in a thousand boxes.

The YIVO books from Vilnius were kept together with books from libraries in other European countries. The YIVO books were found in both Frankfurt am Main and Hungen.<sup>116</sup> The books that were found were sorted according to their place of origin (country) by specialists from the U.S. Army (176 people were working there in August 1946). Books found in Berlin were also brought to Offenbach. The first consignment of repatriated books left for the Netherlands in early March 1946. After that, the books that were found were transported every month to different European countries. The OAD completed its work in April 1949. Roughly 2.5 million books had been returned to their owners, including 8,392 books that were returned to Lithuania and 236,411 that were returned to the Soviet Union. Western European countries recovered about 90 percent of the books that the Nazis took.<sup>117</sup> The Jewish communities in the Eastern European countries were virtually annihilated. As a result, Jewish institutions in the West pressured the governments of these countries to give them the cultural property that had been taken to Germany. The U.S. State Department recognized the right of YIVO in New York to take over the property of YIVO in Vilnius, which was left without an owner. Lucy S. Dawidowicz, who worked as an expert in the OAD vaults, reviewed 162,683 Yiddish and Hebrew books over a period of several months and identified the origin of over 32,000 of them, of which about 75 percent (i.e., about 24,000 books) belonged to the YIVO and Strashun Libraries in Vilnius.<sup>118</sup> On June 21, 1947, an American ship sailed from the port of Bremen to New York with 420 boxes of books and other materials from the YIVO and Strashun Libraries.<sup>119</sup> These books that once belonged to the Vilnius Jews are still stored in the YIVO Library in New York. After being sorted at the OAD, a large part of the books that had been taken from Kyiv eventually ended up in Israel.<sup>120</sup>

The remains of Jewish cultural values in Lithuania were taken care of by the surviving Jewish intelligentsia. When Vilnius was occupied by the Red Army in 1944, the Jewish Museum (at 6 M. Strašūno Street) was reopened at the initiative of Abraham Sutzkever, Shmerke Kaczerginski, and Akiva Gerszater, among others. The museum exhibited the values that managed to be preserved during the Nazi occupation. Many of the exhibits (remains of the YIVO collections, documents of the Vilnius Troupe, some exhibits from the An-sky Museum and the Theater Museum, Dr. A. Landau's Jewish lexicology cards, Z. Reisen's lexicon, etc.) were found in the territory of the former ghetto and in other hiding places. Jewish intellectuals affectionately referred to the museum as "our Louvre." However, in the midst of Stalin's anti-Semitic campaign, the Vilnius Jewish Museum was closed by the Soviet authorities on June 10, 1949. Many Jewish books were moved from the museum, Vilnius University, and various high schools to the House of Books. In 1949, Joseph Stalin ordered all Jewish books and periodicals to be removed from the libraries and destroyed. Through the efforts of Antanas Ulpis, who was the director of the House of Books at the time, and his subordinates, Jewish books were hidden and preserved. While going through the

collections of the House of Books in the Church of St. George in 1993, 173 boxes of YIVO archive material were discovered. This material was sent to the United States for microfilming. In total, 46,450 copies of Jewish books and 470 titles of periodicals in Hebrew and Yiddish were preserved in the House of Books. The Judaica Department was established in the House of Books in 1988, and the Vilnius Gaon Jewish State Museum was founded on September 6, 1989.<sup>121</sup>

## Conclusions

During the Nazi occupation, not only was the physical genocide of the Jewish people carried out, but also the destruction of Jewish cultural heritage. This destruction began in the very first days of the occupation. First, all Jewish employees were dismissed from all higher education, scientific, educational, and cultural institutions. The radical approach to Jewish cultural heritage began after the introduction of the German civil administration in Lithuania (the Generalkommissar and the institutions subordinate thereto), i.e., in early August 1941. An initial audit of Lithuanian libraries was already conducted in the summer of 1941. Jewish books, Marxist literature, and other works by anti-Nazi authors were removed from the libraries. During this period, an unidentified amount of Judaica was destroyed and looted. It is likely that some Jewish books were taken to Germany as early as in the summer or autumn of 1941. During this period, the YIVO and Strashun Libraries in Vilnius were severely affected.

The preconditions for the activities of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce in the Baltic States were established in autumn 1941. By order of the Reich Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories, Jewish religious and cultural institutions (synagogues, libraries, archives, museums) were registered, sealed, and confiscated with the help of the local authorities (city and township municipalities as well as the police). This campaign partly put an end to the previously uncontrolled destruction and looting of Jewish cultural property by both German military units and local residents. Some of the Judaica accumulated in major cities and county centers was later taken over by the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce.

The activities of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce Lithuanian Working Group were concentrated in Vilnius. This city was one of the most important centers of Jewish culture in Eastern Europe during the interwar period. In Kaunas, which remained the administrative center for Generalbezirk Litauen, there were fewer Jewish cultural values than in Vilnius. In Vilnius, the Strashun Library, the YIVO Institute, and the synagogues were the focus of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce. Most of the Jewish books were collected and brought to the premises of Vilnius University.

The selection of books was carried out by Jewish intellectuals under the supervision and direction of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce. The Nazi officers were most interested in incunabula and old and rare books. A fraction of the valuable books, press collections, and manuscripts were sent to Frankfurt am Main in Germany, while the rest were sold as wastepaper to a paper mill for a symbolic price. In the field of Jewish cultural heritage, the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce was particularly active in 1942. In 1942–1943, the taskforce's priorities switched to researching Bolshevism and spreading anti-Soviet propaganda, as well as sorting archival documents brought in from Russia and sending them to Germany. The Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce sent roughly 20,000 books to Germany from Vilnius alone (which accounted for about 20 percent of all the printed material reviewed). The rest (about 80,000 items) had to be destroyed. The Jewish libraries in Vilnius suffered losses amounting to approximately 270 million rubles (at the old exchange rate). Many valuable books, newspapers, and works of art were saved from destruction by a group of Jewish intellectuals working under the command of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce, as well as Lithuanian and Polish intellectuals. It is not known how many books were sent to Germany from other Lithuanian cities. It can be assumed that at least 30,000 books were sent to Germany by the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce.

The Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce officers not only organized the registration, selection, and removal of Jewish cultural values – they also attempted to carry out scientific research. With the support of Jewish intellectuals, they wrote reviews of Lithuanian Jewish history and demography, the most important cultural and religious sites and institutions, and Jewish relations with other peoples living in Lithuania.

After the war, some of the books that had been taken from Lithuanian libraries to Germany were found by U.S. Army specialists. Most of the recovered Judaica was taken to the YIVO Institute in New York, but over 8,000 books were returned to Lithuania. Under Stalin, tens of thousands of Jewish books were saved from destruction by the staff of the House of Books in Vilnius.

The search for and repatriation of Jewish cultural property has recently been the focus of important international conferences. All this gives hope that the Jewish cultural property that was taken from Lithuania will one day be returned to Lithuania.

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- <sup>69</sup> As cited in: “Lietuvos žydų kultūros vertybės,” p. 260.
- <sup>70</sup> H. Kruk, op. cit., pp. 212–214.
- <sup>71</sup> A. Rosenbergo štabo žydų darbo grupės veiklos ataskaita (1942 m. vasario 18–birželio 8 d.), pp. 1, 2.
- <sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 3.
- <sup>73</sup> H. Kruk, op. cit., p. 231.
- <sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 267.
- <sup>75</sup> Ibid., pp. 305, 322.
- <sup>76</sup> E. Zingeris, op. cit., p. 260.
- <sup>77</sup> Ibid., pp. 261–262.
- <sup>78</sup> H. Kruk, op. cit., p. 408.
- <sup>79</sup> Z. Kalmanovitch, op. cit., p. 76.
- <sup>80</sup> H. Kruk, op. cit., p. 215.
- <sup>81</sup> H. Kruko darbo grupės 1943 m. liepos 19 d. veiklos ataskaita [July 19, 1943 activity report of H. Kruk's working group], LCSA, f. R-633, ap. 1, b. 5, pp. 37–39.
- <sup>82</sup> Vertėjų grupės darbo (1942 m. birželis–1943 m. birželis) apžvalga [Review of the work of the translator group (June 1942–June 1943)], ibid., p. 40–42.
- <sup>83</sup> H. Kirrinis, “Die Karaimen” [The Crimean Karaites], ibid., f. R-614, ap. 1, b. 38, pp. 7–9.
- <sup>84</sup> H. Kruk, op. cit., pp. 340, 341.
- <sup>85</sup> “Die einstige Zentrale des Judentums” [The Former Center of Judaism], Wilnaer Zeitung, August 20, 1942.
- <sup>86</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>87</sup> LCSA, f. R-633, ap. 1, b. 1, p. 11.
- <sup>88</sup> Išvežtų iš V. Kudirkos bibliotekos knygų sąrašas [List of books removed from the V. Kudirka Library], ibid., pp. 91–109.
- <sup>89</sup> Konfiskuotų V. Cimkausko knygyno knygų sąrašas [List of books confiscated from the V. Cimkauskas Bookshop], ibid., pp. 42–65.
- <sup>90</sup> A. Rosenbergo štabo konfiskuojamų objektų registracijos kortelė, 1942 m. [Registration card of objects confiscated by the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce, 1942], ibid., b. 3, p. 137.
- <sup>91</sup> C. Lemchenas, op. cit., pp. 124, 125.
- <sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 126.
- <sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 128.
- <sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 129.



- <sup>95</sup> A. Tory, *Kauno getas: diena po dienos* [*The Kaunas Ghetto: Day After Day*], Vilnius, 2000, pp. 71, 72.
- <sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.
- <sup>97</sup> E. Zingeris, op. cit., p. 261.
- <sup>98</sup> R. Samavičius.
- <sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*; “Muziejų likimai sovietų ir nacių okupacijos metais (1940–1944),” p. 45.
- <sup>100</sup> V. Bulavas, *Vokiškųjų fašistų okupacinis Lietuvos valdymas (1941–1944 m.)* [*The Occupation of Lithuania by German Fascists (1941–1944)*], Vilnius, 1969, pp. 221, 222; A. Rosenbergo štabo Lietuvos darbo grupės 1943 m. liepos 5 d. pranešimas [*July 5, 1943 report of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce Lithuanian Working Group*], LMA RS, F165–175, pp. 10–14.
- <sup>101</sup> S. Jegelevičius, op. cit., pp. 13, 14.
- <sup>102</sup> G. Spinklerio 1944 m. balandžio 28 d. pažyma [*April 28, 1944 certificate issued by G. Spinkler*], LCSA, f. R-633, ap. 1, b. 30, p. 16.
- <sup>103</sup> G. Spinklerio 1944 m. balandžio 29 d. raštas A. Rosenbergo štabo vadovybei Ratibore [*April 29, 1944 letter from G. Spinkler to the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce headquarters in Ratibor*], *ibid.*, b. 8, p. 1.
- <sup>104</sup> A. Suckeverio 1944 m. rugsėjo 5 d. raštas Ypatingajai valstybinei komisijai vokiškųjų fašistinių grobikų ir jų bendrininkų piktadarybėms nustatyti ir ištirti [*September 5, 1944 letter from A. Sutzkever to the Extraordinary State Commission for Ascertaining and Investigating Crimes Perpetrated by the German-Fascist Invaders and their Accomplices*], LMA RS, F159-21, pp. 9–10 a. p.
- <sup>105</sup> Hitlerinė okupacija Lietuvoje [*The Hitler Occupation in Lithuania*], Vilnius, 1961, p. 430.
- <sup>106</sup> R. Kastanian-Danzig, op. cit., p. 76.
- <sup>107</sup> A. Сүцкевер (A. Sutzkever), op. cit., p. 236.
- <sup>108</sup> R. Kostanian-Danzig, op. cit., p. 76.
- <sup>109</sup> A. Сүцкевер (A. Sutzkever), op. cit., p. 237.
- <sup>110</sup> E. Zingeris, op. cit., p. 264.
- <sup>111</sup> H. Kruk, op. cit., p. 344.
- <sup>112</sup> As cited in: “Lietuvos žydų kultūros vertybės,” p. 263.
- <sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.
- <sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264.
- <sup>115</sup> P. M. Manasse, op. cit., pp. 112, 113.
- <sup>116</sup> P. Kennedy Grimsted, “Survivors of the Holocaust: Displaced Books and Archives Plundered from Enemies of the Nazi Regime,” *International Vilnius Forum on Holocaust-Era Looted Cultural Assets*, Vilnius, 2001, p. 329; P. M. Manasse, op. cit., pp. 119, 120.
- <sup>117</sup> L. S. Dawidowicz, op. cit., p. 246.
- <sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.
- <sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 294.
- <sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295.
- <sup>121</sup> P. Kennedy Grimsted, op. cit., p. 329, 351, 353.



Chapter V.

# The Rescue of the Jews





The Vilnius Ghetto. Samuel Bak as a child

Viktorija Sakaitė

## Jewish Aid and Rescue

“There is a legend that 36 righteous people sustain the world. They are no different from ordinary mortals and often do not feel that they are righteous. But if any one of them is missing in any given generation, human pain would destroy even the souls of newborn babies and people would drown in a sea of despair. The righteous are at the heart of humanity, where our sufferings accumulate like in a bottomless well.”<sup>1</sup>

Jewish historian Yitzhak Arad wrote: “Throughout the war, the Allies (Washington, Moscow and London) did not make a single move to save the dying Jews. Yes, they fought Germany and accelerated victory. But millions of Jews across Europe had no time to wait for victory. The fascists managed to exterminate 6 million Jews before their defeat.”<sup>2</sup>

Later, he added: “In the occupied territory of the Soviet Union, there were no organized anti-fascist or other underground movements to help the Jews. There was such assistance, albeit not on a very large scale, in some Western European countries and in the Polish underground movement, where there was a small group called Żegota.”<sup>3</sup>

It is difficult to disagree with Arad and his conclusions, especially since he explored individual cases of saving Jews in the general process of their extermination. When you look at these cases, you see that it was not the ones standing on every corner shouting: “Let there be light!” who did the rescuing. Rather, it was the ones who managed to keep the fragile candle of life from being blown out in the darkness.

Jews came to the Lithuanian lands in the 14th century during the reign of Gediminas, which was a difficult period for European Jews. Over the centuries, they created a relatively small yet very distinctive community, which long held an honorable place in the entire history of the Jewish nation. In every new location, Jewish history did not start anew, but was just a continuation of the overall development of the Jewish people over more than 5,000 years. With their solid spiritual foundation and wealth of experience, there is no place where the Jews have ever completely dissolved into the history of the other people whom they lived among. They have always adapted to the

new environment and conditions, while preserving their faith, culture, and history. Whole generations of Jews and Lithuanians lived, worked, and raised their children side by side, in perfect harmony.

In 1939, there were approximately 240,000 Jews living in Lithuania.<sup>4</sup> A startling 94 of every 100 perished. The Baltic lands had not seen such an annihilation of a nation since the Prussian uprisings.

### **Education, research and documentation, and commemoration**

Jewish mysticism speaks of the *Lamed Vavnik* – the righteous ones – simple, humble people whose very presence is a blessing. The archives of the Vilnius Gaon State Jewish Museum Righteous Gentiles Department contain documents, photos, and memoirs about Lithuanian, Polish, Russian, and Belarusian families who lived in the territory of Lithuania and rescued people during the war.

The archives also safeguard information collected from Lithuanian and foreign press about cases of Jews who were rescued, as well as correspondence between the rescuers and the rescued or their relatives or neighbors. The testimonies, letters, and photographs of the Jews who were rescued are of particular value. All the files containing information about the families of the rescuers are numbered and accompanied by a description.<sup>5</sup>

In 1953, Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center, was established in Israel by a special act of the Knesset. It has three objectives: education, research and documentation, and commemoration. Yad Vashem is a monument to the sorrow of a nation. The center reviews documents submitted by surviving Jews and awards rescuers with the honorary title “Righteous Among the Nations,” along with a commemorative medal, and a certificate of honor. The names of the Righteous are then added to the Wall of Honor in the Garden of the Righteous (in lieu of a tree planting, which was discontinued for lack of space).

In February 1975, Aldona Audėjūtė-Krutulis, the daughter of Ona and Juozas Audėjas, received a letter from Israel.<sup>6</sup> In the letter, on behalf of the rescued Jews of Lithuania, Dr. Fruma Gurvičienė (Frúme Gurvich) and writers Mejeris Elinas (Meir Yelin) and Icchokas Meras thanked her for her humanity and heroism in rescuing Rachel and Abel Freimchik.

On September 23, 1992, a group of rescuers was awarded the Life Saving Cross by the President of the Republic of Lithuania for the first time. The initiators of this

award were Chairman of the Supreme Council of Lithuania Vytautas Landsbergis and Director of the Lithuanian State Jewish Museum Emanuelis Zingeris.

### **I survived...**

There were many reasons for rescuing people – political or conjectural, societal, personal or conspiratorial, diplomatic or territorial, or other reasons that are difficult to classify but are mostly subjective.

Representatives of the progressive Lithuanian intelligentsia did not remain indifferent to the events of that difficult period. This is how Danutė (Dana) Pomerancaitė (Suzy Pomerants) survived in the family of Kipras Petrauskas. Dana Pomerants-Mazurkevich went on to become a professor at Boston University. At a meeting held by the Jewish community with relatives, acquaintances, and friends, she said:

I was a ghetto baby who never cried. When my parents found out that Kipras Petrauskas's family had agreed to take me in, they found a doctor in the ghetto who gave me an injection of sedatives. The dose was so high that everyone wondered whether I would fall asleep or die. I fell asleep, but I kept waking up, sensing that I was about to be separated from my parents. They put me in a sack with potatoes and carried me out of the ghetto. It was at the moment that a German officer asked: "What is that?"; that I woke up; I must have run out of air to breathe and started to whimper. Mr. Simonavičius, who was carrying me, replied: "A piglet." That's how I got out of the ghetto – like a piglet in a sack of potatoes.

And the Petrauskas family loved me so much that I never suspected I had other parents. When I described my life in filing an application for the title of Righteous Among the Nations for Elena Žalinkevičaitė-Petrauskienė, I wrote that her love for me was warmer than that of the sun.<sup>7</sup>

Olga Kuzmina-Dauguvietienė, a distinguished Lithuanian artist, took in and cared for Ija Taubman, Solomon Nabritzki, Boris Voshchin, Margita Stender, Fruma Vitkin, and Irutė Bagrianskytė.<sup>8</sup>

Mayor of Šiauliai Jackus Sondeckis rescued Markas Petuchauskas, who is now a prominent theater critic, and his mother.<sup>9</sup>

In Kaunas, Danutė Zubovienė, the daughter of the renowned Lithuanian composer and painter Mikolojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis, and her husband Vladimiras Zubovas hid several Jews from the ghetto, caring for them and providing them with documents.

Among them were Meir and Dvora Elin and their daughter Esther, Tamara Ratner (later Levi), Ruth Latzman (later Peer), Dita Sperling-Zupavičienė, Leon Gurevich, Anatoly Rozenblum's family of five, and Maria Kamber and her son Alik.<sup>10</sup>

Dr. Elena Kutorgienė and her son Viktoras rescued Sulamith Gordon (later Lirov), F. Schwab, and others in Kaunas.<sup>11</sup>

The Palčinskas family hid and cared for five members of the Shulgaser family in Kaunas: Sara, her daughter Violeta (b. 1942), brothers Bernard and Leon, and their wives. The poet Violeta Palčinskaitė wrote in her memoirs:

...I had no right to be born. It was then that my blond grandmother, firmly rooted in the Lithuanian countryside, said to my mother, a Jew: "Don't kill it. The war will soon be over, and we'll have a grandchild..." But the war did not end soon. They hid me in a wardrobe and a laundry basket, because if I had let out even the slightest sound, the family could have ended up being shot. It was a very rare case when a mother-in-law saved her daughter-in-law, risking the lives of her own children... It's strange, but my father rarely mentioned those terrible times. Only that last time, when my sick father was delirious on his deathbed, did he grab my mom's hand and shout: "Take our child and run!" Then, in post-war Kaunas, maybe he had a dream about that ghetto guard whom he once bribed with 50 cigars so that he could get some food rations to his relatives – behind barbed wire...<sup>12</sup>

Another Lithuanian poet – Alfonsas Bukontas – was also a rescued Jewish child. Bukontas remembers his rescuers:

Risking their lives, farmers Marija and Jeronimas Bukontas from Dapšiai Village adopted and raised me. In their house, I was not only safe, but also incredibly loved. After a while there, Fr. V. Martinkus secretly came to see me; he baptized me Alfonsas and gave me the family name of Bukontas. After that, when somebody snitched on us, the priest found himself in serious trouble with the police, but he stood his ground and won (as he wrote to me in one letter). After the Soviets came to power, Jeronimas Bukontas was arrested in 1945 and exiled to the Archangelsk Gulag, where he died in 1948 from the inhuman conditions. My adoptive mother, Marija Bukontienė, and I were put on the list of "kulaks" [wealthy peasants] to be deported to Siberia. We had to go into hiding, and that was the only way we managed to escape deportation. My mother did everything to make my life as bright and happy as possible. Being illiterate herself, she encouraged me to study, to love books, and to be honorable.<sup>13</sup>



The family of Lithuanian poet Kazys Binkis selflessly saved children and adults alike. It is hard to say today how many people were given help in the face of mortal danger by Kazys Binkis's wife Sofija Binkienė, her daughters Lilijana and Irena, and the violinist Vladas Varčikas. The first child taken in by the Binkis family was Gita Judelevich. Dr. Meyer Gink and his son Kama, as well as V. Rabinavich and the Stender family also found shelter in their home.<sup>14</sup>

Pediatrician Petras Baublys rescued T. Levin, Volodya Katz, R. Milner, Tamara Ratner (later Levi), M. Kotler, and other ghetto children in the Lopšelis orphanage in Kaunas.<sup>15</sup>

Kaunas professor Pranas Mažylis secretly transported young children from the ghetto and arranged their further protection and care.

Lithuanian villagers who were horrified by the heinous massacres also rescued Jews. Jews would come running from the execution sites, wounded and half-naked, and they would give them shelter. A great many Jewish children survived in the families of ordinary farmers. There was a prevailing idea in the consciousness of the Lithuanian peasant that the bigger the family, the richer it would be when the children grew up. A total of 20 people escaped danger in the family of Ursula and Vladas Šleževičius in Labūnava Village (Užvenčiai District).<sup>17</sup>

Dora Tallat-Kelpšienė (born Kagan) wrote in her memoirs:

A few days later, we were moved to the Jewish synagogue in Laukuva, and then we were taken to the Geruliai Jewish camp in Telšiai County. In a few more days, Stasys Šereika came to the Geruliai camp looking for me. We used to study together in the Telšiai Gymnasium. He was very modest, honest, and noble, so I was not surprised that it was him, and not someone else, who empathized so deeply with my grief. He would bring me cheese sandwiches that his mom made and warm coffee with milk. I think I even drool now when I remember how delicious it was.

In November, Stasys's mother took me home as a hired worker, even though I never worked for them; all three sons loved me like a sister, and the parents – like their daughter...<sup>18</sup>

Antanina Žemeckienė rescued Rozeta Solomovich in Vidiškiai (Ukmergė District). Rozeta remembers:

I was born on May 1, 1940. When the war broke out, my father was sent to the front (he was killed at the end of the war), and my mother and I escaped from Kaunas. When we were passing through Ukmergė, the bombing started, and the car driver ran away. My mom stayed and took me to the hospital because I had scarlet fever. Someone snitched on my mother and she got arrested by the Germans. Soon they took my mom

and a few other young women out to the road, where they put them on bicycles and said: “Only the one who passes the German will live.” My mom passed the German; he pulled out a pistol and shot her. The locals who witnessed the incident told me about it later.

I got better, but no one picked me up from the hospital. Antanina Žemeckienė was working as an orderly at the hospital. She took me in and brought me up until 1949, when my relatives turned up.<sup>19</sup>

Antanina Šneiderienė, who lived in Vilkaviškis District and had four children of her own, saved S. Frumin, R. Weber, S. Weber, a girl named Bela who escaped from the Vilkaviškis Ghetto, Shperling, and others.<sup>20</sup>

Jadvyga and Mykolas Šimelis from the Stošiūnai Forest District had five small children and saved 14 people, including M. Musel and his two children, Koren and his wife, Arinovski and his wife, and others.<sup>21</sup>

Bronė Grigalaitienė rescued and later raised Liuba Funk in Daugėliai, near Šiauliai.

The day came when the children were separated from the adults in the Daugėliai Ghetto. During the general confusion, Avraham Funk managed to whisper to Bronė Grigalaitienė’s husband, Pranas Grigalaitis, that he had hid his daughter Liuba in the sewer well. He knew him because Grigalaitis used to mediate the exchange of food for Jewish belongings.

The Jews were taken away – it was empty, quiet. Grigalaitis began opening all of the sewer wells, one after another. In one, he found the girl. The four-year-old was half buried in the sludge, but did not make a sound. He brought her home, bathed her, and called her Aldutė. The girl had dark hair, so the Grigalaitis family was very scared that someone would report her. Thankfully, the people of Daugėliai held their tongues throughout the German occupation.

Aldutė’s parents survived. They were so exhausted that they had to spend a couple of years undergoing treatment. One summer evening, two elderly people appeared on the outskirts of the village and broke into a sprint towards the Grigalaitis family’s home in the Guragai farmhand house. When they saw their daughter, they hugged her, but she kept insisting that she already had a mother – Bronė Grigalaitienė. Three days later, the child would not move a step away from her real mother.

Liuba-Aldutė lives in Israel. When she goes to Lithuania, Aldutė’s mother always says, “Bring back a loaf of rustic bread.” That’s how she keeps in touch with Lithuania.<sup>22</sup>

Most Jews survived by hiding in the countryside with farmers – the secluded farmsteads made it easier to hide from prying eyes, and the religious villagers considered saving a life a sacred duty.

There was one other motive for rescuing Jews as well – one that is very much in keeping with the Lithuanian (and especially Samogitian) character. The Germans did not

permit rescuing Jews, and Lithuanians are simply programmed to resist duress. In any case, the largest number of Jews were rescued in Samogitia.

## Forms of Rescue

There is one surviving letter from Fr. Simonas Morkūnas to Col. Balys Matulionis, a doctor:

*6839 So. Claremont Ave  
Chicago, Ill. 60636  
Regarding the rescue of Lithuanian Jews*

*Dear Balys,*

*When you were the director of the Kaunas Tuberculosis Hospital at 4 Aukštaičių Street, and I was the head of the Department of Housekeeping and Administration, you told me at around 11 a.m. on June 28, 1941 about the extremely brutal killing of several dozen Jews in a yard on Vytautas Avenue in Kaunas, which you had learned about from some very trustworthy and decent acquaintances who had been there and witnessed it. So that future history does not accuse Lithuanian society and its spiritual leadership of inaction in rescuing the Jews, we decided to go to see H. E. Metropolitan Archbishop of the Kaunas Archdiocese Juozapas J. Skvireckas, suggesting that he appeal to the German leadership on behalf of the Catholics of Lithuania to stop the murder of Jews in Lithuania. The archbishop received us very kindly and promised to spare no effort in persuading the Germans. However, His Excellency's appeal to the Germans was fruitless, because Hitler's order was to destroy not only the Jews living in Lithuania, but also the whole of Europe. We, Col. Balys, were among the first to fulfill our duty in rescuing Lithuanian Jews.*

*Fr. Simonas Morkūnas  
St. Casimir Lithuanian Roman Catholic Church  
Rector (signature)*

*February 16, 1974  
Sioux City, Iowa, U.S.A.<sup>23</sup>*

The staff of the Vilnius Gaon State Jewish Museum managed to track down nuns from the Dominican convent in Pavilniai that was closed after the war, where 17 Jews, including Aba and Mikhail Kovner, Arje Vilner, and Vitka Kempner, found temporary shelter in 1941. Sr. Cecylia (secular name: Rošakuvna) and Sr. Stefania

(secular name: Bednarska) wrote to us in 1991 from the convent in Krakow: “He [Metropolitan Archbishop of Vilnius Romuald Jałbrzykowski] only allowed people to be rescued if all the responsibility fell on the shoulders of the abbess. Later, the abbess, Sr. Bertranda (Anna Borkovska), was arrested and imprisoned.”

An attentive reader may get the impression that only rescuers wrote testimonies. This is not the case. Many testimonies were written by those who were rescued during or immediately after the war.

The museum constantly receives letters with requests:

I, Miriam Gordon-Kuperstein [return address in Israel], am looking for my rescuers: the engineer Jonas Graževičius, his wife Marija Vanda Graževičienė, and their daughter Vandutė, who was 12 years old in 1941, and Marija's brother Karolis Žalgevičius, a construction engineer. During the war, they lived at 25 Stoties Street. This brave family saved dozens of Jews in the harsh years of the occupation. Risking their own lives, they spared no effort in helping them. The Graževičius family hid us until the end of the Hitler occupation.

Dear Sir. I would be very grateful if you could help me find my rescuers and their daughter, Vandutė.<sup>24</sup>

The author of the letter did not specify the city where this street is located. After checking the lists of Lithuanian ghettos, it was found that Miriam Gordon-Kuperstein was in the Šiauliai Ghetto, and that 25 Stoties Street is an address in the city of Šiauliai.

I am writing you with a request to help me find the people who rescued me during World War II. I, Maxim Broyer, son of Shlomo, was born in Kaunas in 1941... I was smuggled out of the ghetto before its liquidation, and hidden with the Lithuanian Bagurskis family.<sup>25</sup>

And here are the details of the rescue of seven Jews, as described in a letter that Peretz Remen sent from New York on February 18, 1992.

Antanaitis [first name not given] smuggled us out of the Šiauliai Ghetto; for a few months we were kept in hiding with a family that lived near Rietavas [no place or last name given], then we stayed with the Žilevičius family, and then in the house of its manager.<sup>26</sup>

The museum staff is delighted with every piece of information – after all, the most important thing is the signal, and the search is just a matter of experience, time, and willingness.

It is worth remembering the Catholic shelter in Vaiguva, which was run by Marija Rusteikaitė. This is where 15 Jews from Kaunas and the Šiauliai Ghetto found refuge, including Dvoira Miasnikienė and her daughter Fruma, Liuba Gisaitė, Tatiana

Klibanskaya's three sons – seven-year-old Samuil and the six-year-old twins Avraam and Asaf – and Eta Gavronskaya along with her daughter Polina Froman and granddaughter Shulamit Froman (later Lev).

Rusteikaitė was a wealthy woman who set up the shelter at her own expense. She took in Jewish women and children as a Christian, without asking for any reward. She provided fake passports for the women and baptismal certificates for the children.

Here are three testimonies written immediately after the war and certified by various bodies.

1. Tatiana Klibanskaya testifies that her three sons, seven-year-old Samuil and the six-year-old twins Avraam and Asaf, were saved.
2. Polina Froman testifies about how she, her daughter Shulamit, and her mother Eta Gavronskaya, were rescued.
3. Dvoira Miasnikienė testifies about the rescue of her daughter Fruma and her granddaughter Liuba Gisaitė.

In a letter to Maria Rusteikaitė, Polina Froman later wrote:

Dear Mother,

I am eternally grateful for the help you provided in that difficult hour. If it were not for your kindness and courage, we would all have perished. When we were surrounded by enemies on all sides with nowhere to go, you extended a helping hand and sheltered us. We will never forget this. You risked your life to help us.

Dear Mother, take care of your health and think at least a little about yourself. I know very well that you have always put the interests of others first, and yours only second. You often even forget to eat.

Things are the same with us. It's hard to start all over again. There are a lot of things we don't have, but I'm already used to being content with less. Most importantly, we have freedom, and the rest will work out with time.

Vilnius, March 1945.<sup>27</sup>

Two testimonies, signed by Simon Bastitzki and David Gitelman, and certified by various Vilnius institutions, state that Aleksandra Dževecka, a good-hearted Catholic, saved eight small children in her house at 5 Užupis Street. She gave a few of them to the children's shelter at 16 Subačiaus Street after changing their names. The children mentioned in the testimony are three-month-old Sulamita Bactockaya (assumed name: Rūta Užupytė), who was given away on November 3, 1941 after the second yellow badge campaign; Grisha and Haela Shereshevski (children of the resistance

fighter, B. Shereshevski); and two-and-a-half-year-old Getele Gitelman (assumed name: Teresė). The original copies of the testimonies are kept in the Lithuanian Central State Archives.<sup>28</sup>

Priests often wanted the Jews to become Catholics – especially the children. The baptism of Jews during the war was not something unique. However, the procedure was usually carried out formally in order to get the registration record, as this protected both the rescuer and the one being rescued.

Yet here is a case when a Jew who wanted to be baptized was turned away. Fr. Stankevičius, who was teaching at the Aušros Women's Gymnasium, was involved in the rescue of a Jewish girl named Lena. At first he sent her to the convent in Pažaislis, and later he asked the priest in Gervelė, Fr. Pranciškus Leonas, to take care of her. This is how the girl came into the family of Antanas Dagilis and his wife Marija Dagilienė, who lived in the village of Jonučiai, near Gervelė.

A few words must be said about Marija Dagilienė's personality. She was a believer and a zealous parishioner. She personally knew Vaižgantas, the esteemed Lithuanian Roman Catholic priest. And she was the one who discouraged Lena, who was ready to be baptized in order to stay alive.<sup>29</sup>

In general, the circumstances of rescue are more or less similar. All the rescued people behaved in a similar way – they entrusted their lives to someone who was ready to help them.

It is another thing when a person deliberately refuses to accept help and be saved. This case says something about the individual's personality. The two testimonies below are for theoretical reflection; these are testimonies – not facts. The only fact in this case is the death of two people. We selected these examples from two people's stories.

David Getz, a philosopher and lawyer who was well versed in both Lithuanian and Western European law, refused to leave the Šiauliai Ghetto and save his life by pretending to be a Christian. Lawyers from Šiauliai who had turned to David Getz for many years for legal counselling or simply for advice made sincere efforts to save his life. (From the memoirs of the lawyer Gražina Venclauskaitė.)

Before the war, Dr. I. Kamber was renowned for his scrupulous adherence to hygiene standards. During the war, he refused to leave a brigade of Jewish workers digging peat at the Tyruliai bog. We learn about the terrible living and working conditions at the peat bogs from the notes of the German who managed this bog – he mentioned a high mortality rate. Kamber refused to leave the camp, saying that he was a doctor and could not abandon people in such a situation. (From the memoirs of his wife, Maria Kamber. She and her son Alik were rescued from the hell of the peat bogs).<sup>30</sup>

In the museum archives, there are two almost identical documents revealing events of a different nature. They are both signed by Maj. Zotov, the commander of military

unit No. 04446, and Maj. Kochanov, the head of the political department. The document, which was issued to Juozas Kerpauskas, testifies that he saved 15 Jews. It was signed on October 14, 1944. The original copy is kept at the home of the rescuer's son, Aleksandras Kerpauskas, an associate professor at the Kaunas University of Technology.<sup>31</sup>

Another document was issued to Juozas Striaupis, stating that 26 Jews had found shelter in his house. These documents are available in the book *Ir be ginklo kariai* ("Unarmed Fighters").<sup>32</sup> Both families were recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations (in the autumn of 1992, the Israeli envoy Arve Levin presented Stanislava Striaupienė with a certificate of honor and a commemorative medal). We believe that these families were remembered and nominated for the award by someone from the families of the rescued – the Factors or the Blatts, and the Shapiros or the Traubs.<sup>33</sup>

Aleksandras Kerpauskas recalls:

The land of the parents of the writer Vytautas Mačernis bordered our parents' land, so Vytautas was often at our house. I remember him more than once sitting on the lawn in the yard and asking, "What should I do? Should I flee or not?" And sometimes he would ask us, "Are you going to flee?" Our father told him that our family was a big one – 10 people – and that we weren't going anywhere. We couldn't abandon the Jews under our care in the bunker, and even though Vytautas had heard talk about that, he never asked a thing.

We think that the poet's silence revealed his character; he knew everything. Vytautas Mačernis never left his homeland. In 1944, his life was cut short by an accidental bullet. At the end of the war, many had to decide whether to emigrate or to stay in Lithuania, even if that might mean deportation to Siberia.

The large Gadeikis family lived in the village of Babrungėnai (Plungė District). The daughter, Julija, and her brother, Pranas, spent the war years at their homestead. These sincere, devout people could not stand by and watch when the Jews of the surrounding towns were being persecuted and killed. Sara Braude and her young daughter Gita, Taube Braude and Gita Litman from Alsėdžiai, Dr. David Kaplan and Dr. Blatt found refuge and safety at the Gadeikis homestead. A hiding place was set up for them in the shed, under the hay. When she brought in food, Julija would sing softly to signal that it was safe to come out. Someone in Babrungėnai might have suspected that the Gadeikis family was harboring Jews, but no one gave them away. There was enough bread for everyone.

Post-war. More violence, losses, deaths. In 1948, Julija and Pranas found themselves in Buryat-Mongolia. It was hard and exhausting work on the collective farm,

construction sites, and railways. But shoulder to shoulder, they looked out for each other as best they could. The Gadeikis siblings were the first to bring people together – to look for ways to remain human in inhuman conditions.

Their life was always accompanied by kindness of heart. That was their most precious possession. Julija Gadeikytė remained truthful to her own words, which she dedicated to her brother Pranas in 1930: “My first love was for the Almighty, and then came love for the best of mothers; my third love is love for my neighbor – may you enjoy the sweetness of serving others. Try to alleviate the misery of humankind, and to serve the people and educate them.”<sup>34</sup>

The life and work of Sofija Lukauskaitė-Jasaitienė is noteworthy. Her father, the lawyer Stanislovas Lukauskas, was a Social Democrat. Even as a student at the Liepāja Gymnasium, he was involved in the movement and was close friends with Pauls Kalniņš, a prominent member of the Latvian Social Democrats. Lukauskas was deported for distributing Lithuanian books. When he returned to Šiauliai in 1904, he and Jonas Jablonskis, Vladimiras Zubovas, and Petras Vileišis made efforts to legalize Lithuanian language press.

These few biographical details alone are enough to understand the environment in which Sofija Lukauskaitė was brought up. In 1919, she graduated from the Šiauliai Gymnasium, and in autumn of the same year, she and V. Požėla and K. Bielinis founded the headquarters of the partisan resistance against the Bermontians (with Kazimieras Ladyga in charge of the front). In 1922–1923, Sofija attended the College of Agriculture in Berlin and was involved in the activities of the Lithuanian Socialist Club. In 1925–1926, she organized the first animal husbandry exhibition in Lithuania and was an active public figure.

During World War II, Lukauskaitė did a lot to rescue the Jews imprisoned in the Šiauliai Ghetto. She later emigrated to the United States. Her sister, the poet Ona Lukauskaitė-Poškienė, was deported to Siberia.

Gen. Kazimieras Ladyga, one of the fighters for the freedom of Lithuania, headed the General Staff until 1926. In 1926, he refused to support the coup d'état being organized by Antanas Smetona and went into reserve. In 1940, Ladyga was imprisoned, and in 1941 he was deported to Siberia and executed there. His wife, Stefanija Paliulytė-Ladygienė, and their four children, Algis, Marija, Benediktas and Joana, were deported to Siberia after the war. Vilnius Pedagogical University Associate Professor Irena Veisaitė was grateful to Stefanija Ladygienė for saving her life. She recalled:

In March 1944, I moved in with the widow of Lithuanian General Kazimieras Ladyga. With six children, she took me in as her seventh. She told her children that I was an orphan who would now be their



little sister. Stefanija Ladygienė's only motive for taking me in was her deep humanity – her love for her neighbor. A devout Catholic, she became a second mother to me. She shared the last bite of bread with me during the difficult years of the occupation and the post-war years. She did not have a separate apartment, and there was an SS headquarters in the same house. If I had been caught, Stefanija Ladygienė would have been shot in Paneriai with all of her children. But her actions – I would say heroism – were so natural, as if there was no other way. It gave me an extraordinary sense of security at the time.

I lived with Stefanija Ladygienė's family until her arrest. On March 14, 1946, she was convicted by the KGB trio and imprisoned in Siberia. She died in Vilnius in my arms. My relationship with the whole family has remained very close to this day. I feel that her children are my siblings, and their children are my nephews and nieces.

I remember everyone who helped me survive: Ona and Juozas Strimaitis, the surgeon Pranas Bagdonavičius, Izidorius Rudaitis, and Marija Meškauskienė. Unfortunately, it only takes a few men with machine guns to shoot thousands of people, and they do not risk anything apart from their souls. But to save one person, it took the extraordinary dedication and tremendous courage of many people, and they risked not only their own lives, but also the lives of their children.<sup>35</sup>

Vilnius book archives employees Juozapas Stakauskas, Vladas Žemaitis, and Sr. Maria Mikulska also performed an incredible feat. They hid 12 people in the archives for an entire year, including the families of Aleksander Libo, Jakov Jaffe, and Grigori Jašunski, as well as Esther Jaffe (later Kantarovich), Miriam Rolnik (later Lisauskienė), among others.

Esther Kantarovich remembers:

We decided to get my elderly mother and my brother's little girl, who was only four years old at the time, out of the ghetto first. Žemaitis handed the girl over to two old ladies, whom he put in the central archive room. My mom was meant to live in a former convent with the archive worker, Maria Mikulska,<sup>36</sup> who willingly took her in and treated her as an aunt from the countryside.

They brought my mom to Mikulska in the evening. In the morning, she went to the bathroom, but didn't come back for a long time. Mikulska went to check it out and was horrified to find the old woman collapsed on the floor. Apparently, the death had been sudden – the old woman, who had suffered so much in the ghetto, did not have the strength to resist.

The archive employees came to work at 8 a.m. My mother's death had to be hidden from them.

All day long, Žemaitis secretly made a coffin out of boards in the room where he usually worked. It was decided to bury my mother under the floor, because there was no other solution. The floor was tiled and very difficult to dismantle. The work had to be done very quietly and very quickly so that it would be finished by morning. After digging the hole, Žemaitis and Stakauskas lowered the coffin containing my mother's remains into it. Then they covered it with earth, re-tiled the floor, and put a lot of books on top. On Sunday, Žemaitis spent the whole day carrying the dirt that they had dug out upstairs and spreading it in the attic.

The situation in the ghetto was becoming increasingly dangerous. There were 12 of us hiding in the archive. Every day, the people who rescued us would bring us a suitcase with bread and food. Every bite of bread was precious, knowing how much people were risking for us. We came back out 11 months later.

None of us have forgotten who we have to thank for having escaped a terrible death in the pits of Paneriai. At an unspeakable time, our rescues risked their lives and saved not only us, but also our faith in Man.<sup>37</sup>

Fr. Bronislovas Paukštys rarely mentioned his deeds. "You think," he wrote, "that I have done a lot to help the Jews, but it pains my heart to think that I could have done so much more, if only God Almighty had endowed me with a better understanding of the world around me."

The rescuer always walked around with empty pockets – there were too many poor for you to be rich yourself, too many in need for you to help everyone.

The Jews whom Fr. Bronislovas rescued are the ones who talk about his work. He provided "clean" passports and birth certificates for as many as 120 Jewish children; he hid Jews in parsonages and churches, fed them, and took them to the trustworthy people of Sudovia at night.

Rashel Rosenzweig wrote:

Dear Father. Let me call you that, for have you not been a father to me? When I came to you so distraught, after so many trials, did you not take me in? You didn't demand or ask anything of me. You understood everything. You just told me to stay with you, to calm down and stay for a while...

In 1946, Fr. Bronislovas was arrested by the Bolsheviks and deported to Siberia, where he spent 10 years breaking stones. He returned to Lithuania in 1956. The Soviet

authorities did not allow him to serve as a priest. For a long time, he would travel from village to village and secretly celebrate Holy Mass.

After suffering a third heart attack, Fr. Bronislovas died in 1966. The funeral was modest, as many did not dare to honor a monk, the martyr of Siberia. His tombstone was engraved with the words: “Even after they die, the Slum Birds love Mary very much.”

In 1982, a group of people rescued by Fr. Bronislovas got together and, under the leadership of the lawyer Avraham Tori, contacted Yad Vashem and asked for Fr. Bronislovas Paukštys to be declared Righteous Among the Nations. Fr. Antanas Sabaliauskas, a friend of the late priest, attended the ceremony and accepted the medal on his behalf. A tree was planted in memory of Fr. Bronislovas Paukštys in Jerusalem.<sup>38</sup>

Rachel – the daughter of Israel Segal, who was an actor with the Šiauliai Drama Theater and the founder of the Vilnius Ghetto Theater during the Holocaust – was rescued by actress Galina Jackevičiūtė. In 1961, Israel Segal wrote to Jackevičiūtė: “...I will never forget your help in saving Rachel’s life; you took such a huge risk.”<sup>39</sup>

Georgy Petrov, who was born in 1932 and now lives in Kaliningrad, comes from a mixed family – his father was Russian and his mother was Jewish. Among other hardships, during the war he had to fight to survive. Petrov was born in Lithuania and lived there for a long time. Before the war, he attended a Russian school (to honor his father) and graduated in 1938. During the war, he felt like a black sheep in the Šiauliai Ghetto, where the other prisoners communicated in Lithuanian or Yiddish. His mother hired him a Hebrew teacher for a loaf of bread. “After all, the boy has to understand which God we pray to in this ghetto.”

The material from the Šiauliai Ghetto that is stored in the Vilnius Gaon Jewish State Museum allows for an objective assessment of why one of the Jewish languages was studied. In the questionnaire about the Rubinstein family, it says that Georgy Petrov was adopted, and that his native languages were Yiddish and Lithuanian; these paragraphs were filled in with a different hand and in different ink. The entries were made later, apparently after it was decided to teach Georgy Hebrew.

The notorious “children’s campaign” did not affect Georgy because he was a relatively tall boy. As agreed, the workers hid him in the Frenkel shoe factory until the end of the shift, and then, surrounded by many Jews, he was taken outside the factory walls. The Jewish workers were escorted to and from the factory by guards, while the Lithuanian workers were only guarded by guards at the gates and did not have to march in column when they were in town.

Later, Georgy hid in various places. Ivan Petrov, his father’s brother, later came and took the boy to Daugavpils. Here, the refuge was more reliable, since Ivan Petrov used to belong to the White Guard and both of his sons served in the German Army.

Later, his uncle sent him to a remote individual farm to learn about the gospel and the Russian faith.

The last episode was as follows:

I woke up at night and saw a German officer bending over me. My first thought was that it was another “children’s campaign.” I ducked under the bed, but the officer reached out his strong, long arm and pulled me out. I remember him throwing me up in the air and saying, “Go ahead now and fly – you’ve already done enough crawling on the ground.” Then I sat on his lap at the desk with just my shirt on while Grandpa Prov examined me on my knowledge of the faith. My cousin was telling me it would be good to learn German, but there was no longer time for that...

### **The price of life**

During the war, there were various punishments for rescuing Jews. If a person caught harboring Jews explained to the authorities that he did it for money, he was sentenced to three months in prison. The people who explained their actions as the Catholic duty to protect human life were classified as partisans and their families – including young children – were shot, while their farms were burned down or given to the person who turned them in.

Here are some tragic examples:

Vytas Vaitkus – shot for helping Jews;  
Vytautas Žakevičius – shot for harboring and helping Jews;  
Bronius Jocys – died at the Ninth Fort;  
Vytautas Kadzevičius – shot;  
The entire Kerza family – shot;  
Antanas Koženauskas – shot;  
Jonas Miniotas – shot together with Jews;  
Petras Požėla – shot;  
Simonas Rimkevičius – shot;  
The Jablonskis family – shot along with the Jews they had harbored;  
The rector of Viduklė – shot together with the 30 Jewish children he tried to hide in the church;  
Juozas Rutkauskas – shot.

On November 18, 1996, the *Sydney Morning Herald* wrote: “In the Lithuanian Jewish community, Juozas Rutkauskas was known as the Oskar Schindler of Vilnius.”

Like Schindler, who was immortalized in a book and a movie for his heroic actions in saving Polish Jews during World War II, Rutkauskas hid Jews in his home and forged documents for them, thus saving more than 150 lives.

The Nazi occupants killed him in 1944.

Rutkauskas was posthumously awarded the title of Righteous Among the Nations, one of the Israeli government’s most prominent awards for non-Jews who saved Jews from being exterminated during the Holocaust.

The archival fonds of the Vilnius Hard Labor Prison includes information that Vytautas Juodka, son of Romualdas, was arrested on December 12, 1941 and put in the Vilnius Hard Labor Prison; on January 31, 1942, he was handed over to the Sonderkommando (“Special Squad”).

There is a file in the Security Police archival fonds of persons who were arrested and executed, and it includes an entry about Vytautas Juodka, who lived at 6–9 Domaševičiaus Street in Vilnius. In his apartment he hid two Jews named Mirjam and Izabela (their last names, parents’ names, and years of birth are not indicated), who had escaped from the ghetto. For this he was shot in Paneriai on January 31, 1942.<sup>40</sup>

Let it be forgiven that not all the victims are mentioned.

And one more excerpt – this time from the memoirs of E. Robert Goodkind. Goodkind was Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous that was established in 1986–1987. “In this case, our work is the belated desire of the Jewish community to pay tribute, and, when necessary, to aid those Christians who risked their lives, and often the lives of their family members, to save Jews during the Holocaust. I would think that these people, who acted alone in the darkness of the worst nightmare of the 20th century, will be the greatest heroes of that century.”

The museum archives contain material about Lithuanian clergy (Lithuanians as well as Poles, Russians, and Belarusians) who were directly or indirectly involved in rescuing Jews. When we say “indirectly,” we are talking about the members of the clergy who did not harbor Jews themselves, but advised their parishioners to do so. This was not an expression of ostentatious remorse; it was a way of forming public opinion about those parishes. They also provided Jews with forged documents, material support, and so on. In addition to those already mentioned, they include:

Fr. Pavelas Babulevičius, a priest from the town of Nečiai;

Fr. Vincas Byla, a priest from Šiauliai;

Sr. Ana Borkovska, a nun from Pavilnys;

Fr. Andžejus Grodskis, a priest from Vilnius;  
 Fr. Antanas Gobys, a priest from Pasvalys;  
 Bronius Gotautas, a monk;  
 Fr. Feliksas Jereminas, a priest from Šiauliai;  
 Fr. Jefstafijus Kaliskis, a priest from Kaunas;  
 Fr. Feliksas Kapočius, a priest from Kaunas;  
 Fr. Janas Kretovičius, a priest from Vilnius;  
 Fr. Juozas Liubšys, a priest from Joniškėlis;  
 Fr. Rapolas Liukas, a priest from Prienai;  
 Fr. Vaclovas Martinkus, a priest from Židikai;  
 Polikarpas Macijauskas, the rector Kolainiai;  
 Fr. Stanislavas Milkovskis, a priest from Naujoji Vilnia;  
 Fr. Simonas Morkūnas, a priest from Kaunas;  
 Fr. Vladas Požėla, a priest from Šiauliai;  
 Fr. Juozas Stakauskas, a priest from Vilnius;  
 Ipolitas Hruščelis, a vicar from Verkiiai;  
 Fr. Aloyzas Jaunius, a priest from Kaunas.

During the occupation, priests were imprisoned, and the fate of many of them remains unknown. Once the war ended, many of them had to emigrate, while others were deported to Siberia after the war.

### The Words Left Unspoken...

Several aspects of the rescue process stand out, when we are confronted with unspoken details that often make it difficult to understand the process in full.

In researching scientific publications on this topic (more than 200 articles in newspapers and journals, as well as books), the objectivity of the information presented and the reliability of the sources were taken into account, the words left unspoken were decrypted, and people's names and place names were verified and corrected.

Let's look at some characteristic examples of that period.

The December 14, 1944 issue of *Tiesa* ("Truth"), the official daily newspaper of the Lithuanian S.S.R., featured an essay by M. Eglinis entitled "A Female Hero," about Marija Leščinskienė. It tells in detail about the help she provided to the Jews of the Kaunas Ghetto, but not a single last name is mentioned. Much later, the identity of one of the rescued people was revealed – a Jewish girl named Gita Berezhnitski (later Abramson). The title of Righteous Among the Nations reached Lithuania half a century later, after Leščinskienė had already died.<sup>41</sup>

On March 13, 1945, *Tiesa* published another essay by the same author – “The Victory of Humanity,” about Antanina and Jonas Paulavičius. None of the Jews who were rescued were mentioned by name. We only found out about them decades later. The rescued Jews were Yohanan Fein, Aharon and Mania Neimark, the doctors Tania and Chaim Ipp, and Miriam Krakinowski. In 1983, Yad Vashem recognized Jonas and Antanina Paulavičius, as well as their children, Danutė and Kęstutis, as Righteous Among the Nations.<sup>42</sup>

On June 15, 1945, the newspaper *Tarybų Lietuva* (“Soviet Lithuania”) published yet another short story by the same author – “The Baby Rescuer,” about Julija Dautartienė. Only the Jewish girl’s name – Ariela – and her father’s second initial – “A.” – were mentioned in the story. During the investigation, it was established that the girl’s father was the doctor Jakov Abramovich.<sup>43</sup> The same story mentioned someone called “Dr. B.” This was clearly a reference to Dr. Petras Baublys, who ran the Lithuanian orphanage.<sup>44</sup>

These three old publications reflect well the spirit of the era and there is no ambiguity about them.

Now let’s take a look at a larger work and the wealth of information it contains.

In 1991-1992, the *Atgimimas* (“Rebirth”) weekly published a large volume of manuscript material entitled “The Lithuanian Struggle for the Freedom of the Jews” (16 issues in all).<sup>45</sup> The names of hundreds of people who rescued or were rescued were published, along with their occupations and pre-war, wartime, and post-war addresses; the circumstances of the rescues were included, as were the fate of the people and other details relevant for research. As the authors studied the material presented, they had more and more questions: Why were there so many discrepancies in writing about families whose rescue details have long been known and verified? Why are the same names repeated in different regions of Lithuania?

“Elena Žalinkevičaitė-Petrauskienė was hiding and taking care of Dana Pomerančaitė, a minor she had brought to Germany.”<sup>46</sup>

It was already clear in the late 1960s that “Dana Pomerančaitė” was actually Suzy Pomerants’s “Lithuanian” name. Žalinkevičaitė-Petrauskienė and her children returned to Lithuania from Germany shortly after the war.<sup>47</sup>

Three more snippets. Kuršėnai: “Teacher Pranas Laucevičius harbored and cared for Rūta Gurevičiūtė [this is how Ruta Gurvich’s name was written in *Atgimimas*] from Telšiai”,<sup>48</sup>

Telšiai: “Jadvyga Kudirkienė harbored and cared for several Jews from Telšiai”,<sup>49</sup>

“Laucevičienė harbored and cared for Gurvičiūtė from Telšiai on Ežero Street”.<sup>50</sup>

All the snippets refer to the same family from Telšiai, which actually did live on Ežero

Street: the mother, Laucevičienė, and her children, Pranas Laucevičius and Jadvyga Laucevičiūtė-Kudirkienė (whose first husband was Feliksas Kudirka). They rescued Ruta Gurvich and Telesforas, the son she had with Pranas Laucevičius.<sup>51</sup>

It was not until five years later that it became clear on what basis the manuscript and printed material was published in *Atgimimas*. In the summer of 1996, during a creative internship in Chicago, the distinguished émigré historian Jonas Dainauskas offered access to a whole sheaf of questionnaires (231 in total) that he had been keeping in his archive for years. The questionnaires had been distributed in displaced persons camp in West Germany (Hanau, Rothenburg, Lübeck, and elsewhere). The questionnaire was compiled by the Lithuanian Center for National Martyrology (hereinafter referred to as the Martyrologist). The subject of the questionnaire was the guardianship of Jews during the Nazi occupation in Lithuania – what the respondent knows about Lithuanian assistance to Jews, what kind of assistance was provided and by whom, and if the respondent knows people who suffered because of this assistance. There were tens of thousands of Lithuanian emigrants, but only 250 completed the questionnaire. However, those who did decide to dictate their answers or write them down in their own hand reported only what they knew for sure. The questionnaire was anonymous, and no one tried to embellish the truth or lie. The first questionnaire was completed on October 18, 1947 and the last – on September 1, 1948.

The authors of the manuscript published in *Atgimimas* used the Martyrologist questionnaires. By systematizing the knowledge contained in them on an administrative/geographical basis, they “corrected, verified” the data at their own discretion, often distorting the actual text of the questionnaires and changing the meaning.

*Atgimimas*: “Kaunas. Mockaitis J., accredited agronomist, sheltered and supported Shulvaser [sic], the director of the Jewish Gymnasium.”<sup>52</sup>

Martyrologist (questionnaire No. 4): “Accredited agronomist J. Mockaitis, a resident of Kaunas, made efforts to protect Shulgasier [Bernard Shulgaser], the former director of the Jewish Gymnasium, and to hide him in the event that he escaped from the Kaunas Ghetto.”<sup>53</sup>

*Atgimimas*: “Romualdas Gugis, residing on Savanorių Avenue, took care of and hid in his house one Jewish engineer, who used to live in Jonavos Street and had his own factory there.”<sup>54</sup>

Martyrologist: “Gugis Romualdas, Kaunas, Savanorių Avenue – the engineer owner of a factory in Kaunas, Jonavos Street. The engineer’s family was supported with food and their property was hidden.”<sup>55</sup>

Romualdas Gugis’s wife Elena Gugienė wrote in her memoirs that the factory belonged to the Živčiūnas family, and that the Gugises hid their property. Mrs. Živčiūnas would tell Elena Gugienė what things to get to her in the ghetto. The Živčiūnas family



was taken to a concentration camp in Estonia, but Gražina Suvalskytė hid with the Gugis family and happily lived to see the end of the war.<sup>56</sup>

The questionnaires collected at the Lithuanian Center for National Martyrology must be preserved in the original form that we received them in. They can only be commented on, as they are a very valuable historical legacy.

It is wonderful that after the creative internship, not only the Martyrologist questionnaires made their way to Lithuania. A lot of memories were taken down, and photos, letters, and other documents were received about people living in the United States: V. and A. Paulionis, O. and J. Krikščiūnas, A. Didžiulis, J. Dainauskas, J. Dagys, rev. J. Želvys, Rabbi Snieg, V. Misiūnaitė, S. Vanagaitė-Petersonienė and the entire Vanagas family, E. Stankevičiūtė-Lukauskienė, J. Paruškevičius, Prof. P. Mažylis, rev. S. Morkūnas, S. and A. Žilevičius, O. and J. Tamulaitytė, A. and J. Valaičius, Konstancija Bražėnienė, President K. Grinius, the famous traveler Antanas Poška, and Jews who were rescued – Ruvena Levitan, Gitala Goldberg, Olga Gurvich, Anna Mendelevich, Shlomke Vilkomirski.

This brought to light another detail of the story. One of the Martyrologist questionnaires mentions that “In Kaunas, O. Krikščiūnienė rescued a Jewish girl.” No more details were given. Meanwhile, Danutė Krikščiūnaitė-Karužienė, the daughter of Ona Petrauskaitė-Krikščiūnienė, found me in Chicago and told me the following story:

That girl was one of my mom’s students at the Kaunas School of Art. My mother taught pedagogy. One day in 1943, Šlapelis, who was the principal of the Kaunas Art School, came to her. He asked Ona Krikščiūnienė to take Ida Galant in as a maid. My parents talked it over and agreed. She had escaped from the Kaunas Ghetto, where her mother still was. I remember when she lived in the maid’s room, there was an antique silver comb and a hairbrush on the table. I think it was the only thing she had left from home. Judging by the age of the people she studied with, she must have been born around 1912. She had a fake documents issued to her by a priest who I didn’t know. I don’t know what last name was on the certificates, but we called her Elena. My parents only told me that she was Jewish – neither my brother nor my sister knew anything. She looked nothing like a Jew, except that she had very curly hair. She thought it looked very un-Lithuanian and would send us to buy something to wash her hair with. She kept washing and washing that hair of hers, but it seemed to me that it made it even curlier. Not even the relatives who visited our house suspected that she was Jewish. And Ida herself tried not to show her face. Even my sister, who didn’t know her nationality, would get really annoyed and say, “We have a maid but you have to open the door yourself.”<sup>57</sup>

It was a pleasure to meet and talk with Nijolė, the daughter of Konstancija Bražėnienė, a Righteous Among the Nations. She told us how her family rescued Sara Shilingovski (later Kapelovich). After her husband and all her relatives were killed, Chaya Shilingovski was determined to save her little girl. This could be done when a column of ghetto prisoners was passing through the gates. The people broke ranks, huddled together, and pushed the girl to the sidewalk, removing her yellow badge first. Sarah does not remember this, but this is probably how it happened (although sometimes children would be smuggled out in backpacks, even while they were sleeping). And that is where Auntie's (Konstancija Bražėnienė's) son Mindaugas was waiting. Sara remembers that she walked across the Vilijampolė Bridge herself and that she was very scared. Then she got to Aleksotas, to the house at 30 Dariaus ir Girėno Street, where Auntie lived.

Sara lived there for several years. The blonde, blue-eyed girl was baptized in the Church of Vytautas the Great. Sara became Kotryna Bražėnaitė, supposedly the daughter of a relative of the Bražėnas family who had died.

Auntie and her family were well aware of what would happen if the Germans found out about the Jewish girl they were harboring. No one betrayed them.

A boy was also smuggled out of the ghetto along with Sara – his name was Alexander Gringauz and he was the son of a Jewish man from Klaipėda. He also survived and is now living in the United States with his father. His mother was killed in Lithuania.

Bražėnienė was deported to Siberia by the Soviets in March 1949. Two of her daughters, twins Nijolė and Vida, had been sent to Germany for anti-German agitation at the university. At their mother's request, they never returned to Lithuania. Vida, Nijolė, and Algimantas Bražėnas tried for 17 years to free their mother from Siberian slavery through the U.S. government, but without success. Finally, through a Soviet journalist who was partial to dollars, they managed to get permission from the Soviet Union for Bražėnienė to emigrate to the United States. She was so exhausted and aged that she was carried out on a stretcher in New York. She died in 1970 at the age of 78.

A tree was planted in memory of Konstancija Bražėnienė in the Yad Vashem Garden of the Righteous Among the Nations. Nijolė Bražėnaitė was invited to come from the United States to plant it. The rescuer herself was already resting in peace.<sup>58</sup>

On December 23, 1994, the newspaper *Šiaulių kraštas* (“Šiauliai Region”) published an article entitled “The Ranks of the Righteous Are Growing.” According to the article:

In Telšiai, in the house at 16 Plungės Street, lives Adomas Žilevičius, a man of a respectable age and profession, who was born in 1905. Risking his own life and the lives of his family members, he saved 24 Jewish girls from death. On December 24, 1941, when the Telšiai Jewish ghetto was being liquidated, two “white armbands” took 24 Jewish girls and

one boy to the Rainiai woods to be shot. Near the pit, one of the “white armbands” shouted to the children: “Run. I’ll fire into the sky.” The girls ran off, hiding behind the fir trees, while the boy stayed put, saying, “If that is my fate, so be it.” And that is what happened – the boy was shot. After completing their job, the “white armbands” withdrew, and the girls went to some nearby farmers – the Žilevičius family – who hid them for two weeks and then distributed them here and there.

In Chicago, I met another brother from this family – Stasys Žilevičius, a well-known émigré folk artist who is also a Righteous Among the Nations. He added to the story:

On Christmas Eve 1941, a group of Jewish girls knocked on our door. Adomas opened it and invited them all inside; the Jewish girls were seated at the Christmas Eve table. Three of the girls stayed with our family, and the others were taken to trusted people and relatives. The neighbors knew that Jewish girls were hiding with us, but nobody reported it. We lived among good people.

Roza Olshvang (later Karpuch), Tova Schneider (later Feinstein), and Liuba Sher (later Kaplansky), who were rescued by the Žilevičius family, now live in Israel and write letters to Adomas Žilevičius in Telšiai and Stasys Žilevičius in Chicago. In one letter to Stasys Žilevičius, Roza Karpuch wrote:

After my mother’s death, I could not call any woman ‘mom’ except for your mom, dear Stasys. She had a lot of love and did not spare any effort to share it with everyone around her. She was a woman with a noble heart. May she rest in peace.<sup>59</sup>

It was pleasant and useful to talk to Fr. Juozas Prunskis, who was the first in the United States to take an interest in Lithuanian rescuers and to publish a book on the topic.

One of the first people in Lithuania to be awarded the title of Righteous Among the Nations was Ona Šimaitė. She was a publicist, but does not appear to have published any of her own books. Her writings have spread all over the world in various publications. She loved books and writing, and every book she handed out, every word she wrote, emanated the kindness of her heart. She fed and rescued people condemned to death, she gave her whole self to people, leaving nothing for herself except fatigue, pain, and suffering in Hitler’s concentration camps.

Šimaitė had an extremely sensitive personality with a strong love for nature and all living creatures. In one letter from Paris, she wrote to a friend in Lithuania: “While living in Paris, I fed pigeons for several years. They would eat 6 kg of good rice every month. And God forbid if they didn’t find the rice they had come for in due time. Then they would bang on the window with their beaks. They are cute, but very belligerent

birds – a lot of egoism – thinking only of themselves and showing no chivalry toward their ladies.”

Šimaitė died in a retirement home near Paris, and no flowers can be placed on her grave, because she does not have one. According to her last will, her body was given to the Faculty of Medicine. This noble woman saved more than 200 lives. Her greatest merit was her infinite love for people, right up to her last breath and even beyond.

### Commemorating the Rescuers

1944–1949. The Jewish Museum in Vilnius operated for five years. Small halls displayed monuments of Jewish culture and testimonies about the death of the nation, with the Holocaust being the central theme. Several displays featured portraits of Jewish rescuers, including Elena Kutorgienė and Marija Leščinskienė.

1957. Philip Friedman’s book *Mūsų brolių gelbėtojai* (“Our Brothers’ Saviors”).<sup>60</sup> The book is about K. Grinius, M. Krupavičius, J. Aleksas, A. Nekrasovas, K. Boruta and others.

1953, Israel. A public commission was set up to consider who should be awarded the title of Righteous Among the Nations with a diploma and a commemorative medal. The law on the award of this title was approved by the Knesset (Israeli Parliament). In 1966, this honorable title was awarded to Julija Vitkauskienė (diploma No. 184) and Ona Šimaitė (diploma No. 191), and in 1967 – to Sofija Binkienė (diploma No. 383). By 1998, the title of Righteous Among the Nations had been awarded to 332 Lithuanian citizens.

1967. The book *Ir be ginklo kariai* (“Unarmed Fighters”). This book lists the names of more than 400 rescuers and survivors.

1988. The Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C. Based on the data of the Yad Vashem Institute in Israel, a list of 200 rescuers from Lithuania was compiled.

1989. The Jewish Museum in Lithuania was re-opened. In 1990, when it still did not even have its own premises, the museum held an exhibition entitled “Who Responded to the SOS?”, featuring the photos of 60 rescuers.

July 28, 1992. The *Moonlight* monument was unveiled in memory of Chiune (Sempo) Sugihara, vice-consul of the Japanese Consulate in Kaunas. The monument is a token of the Jewish people’s gratitude to all the rescuers, and was therefore erected not in Kaunas, where Sugihara was based, but in Vilnius, near the museum where the Holocaust Exhibition is housed. The monument was initiated by Emanuelis Zingeris and designed by Goichi Kitagawa and Vladas Vildžiūnas.

September 23, 1992. A group of rescuers was awarded the Life Saving Cross by the President of the Republic of Lithuania for the first time. By 1998, 152 people had received this award. In the autumn of 1997, three Lithuanian living in Canadian and one living in the United States were the first people outside of Lithuania to be awarded the Life Saving Cross.

1995. Opening of the Gallery of the Righteous in the premises of the Vilnius Gaon State Jewish Museum (4 Pylimo St., Vilnius). The gallery features 102 large portraits of rescuers. The main sponsor is the American Center in Vilnius. The gallery is the work of Mikhail Erenburg, Vidas Ilčiukas, Gajane Leonenko, Jūratė Razumienė, and Viktorija Sakaitė.

1997. The book *Gyvybę ir duoną nešančios rankos...* (“Hands Bringing Life and Bread...”), compiled by Mikhail Erenburg and Viktorija Sakaitė.

1998. The “Gallery of the Righteous” travelling exhibition was prepared to be displayed in non-exhibition spaces. Designer – Henrik Kostanian, texts – Viktorija Sakaitė.

## Conclusions

The archives of the Vilnius Gaon State Jewish Museum Righteous Gentiles Department contain a list of the names of *more than 2,300 families* who rescued Jews on the territory of Lithuania. It includes the names of the rescuers, the address where they were living at the time, what they did for a living, and how many children they had, as well as how many Jews they rescued and their names. If a Jewish family or individual did not survive, their fate and that of the rescuer is described.

Based on the addresses found in documents and the testimonies of neighbors, a questionnaire was sent out that **887 families** responded to. Many photographs, recollections, press clippings, and letters were received. Survivors and their families sent them from all over the world.

There is also a list of the names of some **3,000 people** who were rescued, including where they were from, and who took them in and where. However, this figure does not include information like the following, which was published in *Atgimimas*:

“On July 16, 1941, owing to the efforts of Feliksas Bugailiškis, more than 200 people were freed from the Šiauliai prison who had refused to go to the ghetto, for which the SS arrested them and put them in prison.”<sup>61</sup>

Or: “Professor Mažyliš and teacher Petronėlė Lastienė secretly moved young Jewish children from the Kaunas Ghetto and saw to their further protection and care.”<sup>62</sup>

However, there is also information that can be used to trace the entire process of rescuing one family. For example: “The Goldstein family of four from Eržvilkas was rescued by Bronius and Vanda Ambrazevičius,<sup>63</sup> the Bandzinas family,<sup>64</sup> the Juškys family,<sup>65</sup> the Kriskys family,<sup>66</sup> the Pakutinskas family,<sup>67</sup> the Pocius family,<sup>68</sup> the Puišys family,<sup>69</sup> the Stirbys family,<sup>70</sup> the Sturonas family,<sup>71</sup> the Tarvainis family,<sup>72</sup> and Apolinaras and Ona Žemaitis.”<sup>73</sup>

People had different reasons for rescuing Jews. Devout catholic farmers could not stand by and watch their neighbors being murdered – saving a neighbor was a sacred duty for them; the intelligentsia hid Jews who they had studied or worked with. Some of the rescuers explained it simply as a desire to resist the duress of the occupiers.

The list of famous teachers, doctors, lawyers, writers, musicians, professors, and lawyers, writers, musicians, professors who rescued Jews includes *237 people*.

There are also **120 priests, two seminaries, and four monasteries** on the list of rescuers.

The rest of the people on the list of rescuers were residents of small Lithuanian towns and simple rural farmers who made their own bread and managed to share it with their neighbor.

It seems fitting to conclude this article with a passage from the Talmud:

The deeds of the righteous are grain that can lie long and quietly in the soil of history, until, having felt the warmth and the moisture, and having accumulated new and healthy sap, they begin to sprout, to blossom, and to bear abundant fruit.

All we need to do is remember and preserve. A nation is alive in its memory.

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- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, b. 77.
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- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, b. 46.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, b. 341.
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- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., b. 642.
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**Introduction to the  
Second Edition  
of Antanas Gurevičius's  
*List of Rescuers of Jews***

When I requested permission to republish *The A. Gurevičius Lists* a few years ago, I was referred to the Canadian-Lithuanian Journalist Society. Several members of this organization had published the book in Vilnius in 1999. Permission was given to the new publishers to supplement the book with new documents, which would provide a more accurate and detailed view of the scope and development of the rescue of Jews in Lithuania. This book is a monument both to those who – risking their lives and the lives of their families – rescued the condemned Jews, as well as to those who collected, registered, researched, and wrote about the work of those noble people, so that their sacrifices would endure for future generations. We should be thankful for the individuals who researched the rescue of Jews, because without their work, the majority of these virtuous people would have remained unknown, and the sacrifices they made, the risks they took, and the efforts they put in would have been overlooked. Even more importantly, all of the horrific and awful acts of the German occupation would have been recorded in history as though the entire Lithuanian nation had collaborated and not resisted.

The Jews in Lithuania were not just persecuted, betrayed, and killed – they were also rescued, hidden, supported, and protected in the full knowledge that this could mean punishment by death. Sofija Lukauskaitė-Jasaitienė, who was a member of the board of the Lithuanian Children's Society and the director of its Šiauliai branch, was involved in rescuing Jews in Šiauliai. On May 15, 1946 – barely a year after the end of World War II – she wrote to the Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania located in West Germany what is the first known report about the rescue of Jews in Lithuania: “To save a Jew was always associated with mortal danger, both for the rescuer and for his or her loved ones. The circumstances of the rescue were so difficult and complicated that in order to save one Jew, at least five to ten people had to be involved. For every person who was rescued, entire families were put in danger. Despite the risk, there appeared many Lithuanians who were determined to save the Jews...”<sup>1</sup>



These few cited lines are very important, as they show, for the first time in the literature and history of the Holocaust, how many people had to participate in the secret conspiracy to rescue one persecuted Jew. We can be proud that Lithuanian rescuers recorded this from their own experience during the years of the German occupation in Lithuania, and laid the historical foundations which were “discovered,” accepted, and used only much later by Holocaust researchers and specialists in the West.

One of these researchers was the well-known British historian Sir Martin Gilbert, who wrote an eight-volume biography of Winston Churchill as well as eight books on the Holocaust. In his 2003 study of people who rescued Jews across German-occupied Europe entitled *The Righteous. The Unsung Heroes of the Holocaust*, Gilbert affirmed what Lukauskaitė-Jasaitienė formulated in her 1946 report: that “in every instance, in order to save one Jew, it required 10 or more people.”<sup>2</sup>

Knowing how many people it took to save one Jew, it is quite simple to calculate how many rescuers of Jews there were in each of the countries occupied by the Germans (Nazis). All you have to do is take the number of rescued Jews and multiply it by ten, and you will know roughly how many people rescued Jews in that country. As Rimantas Stankevičius (*Slėptuvės aristokratai. Prisiminimai. Pasaulio tautų teisuoliai*) correctly notes: “The number of the Righteous Among the Nations in a country over time became the measure of the scale of rescues of Jews, which was used for many years by historians and publicists who wrote on the subject to draw various conclusions.”<sup>3</sup>

If we compare the number of the Righteous Among the Nations in each country with the country’s total population, Lithuania has the second highest ratio in all of Europe. Only in Holland were there more. Poland is third. In this respect (according to the Yad Vashem Righteous), Lithuania and Poland are well ahead of France, Hungary, Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Latvia, Austria, Greece, Italy, the former Yugoslavia (now Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia), and Norway. Perhaps it is for this reason (as Director of the Vilnius Gaon Museum of Jewish History Department of History Dalija Epšteinaitė writes in the introduction of the third volume of *Hands Bringing Life and Bread...*) that a Holocaust researcher from Great Britain (whom I believe to be the author of *The Righteous*) asked in a letter: “Can you explain the reasons for the disproportionately high number of Righteous Among the Nations in Lithuania?”

During the years of the German occupation (1941–1944), 2,500–4,000 Jews were rescued and hidden in Lithuania. Multiplied by 10 (using Lukauskaitė-Jasaitienė’s and Sir Martin Gilbert’s formula), we find that in Lithuania, over 25,000 people were likely involved in rescuing Jews. After 10 years of new research, it can be stated that previous estimates – that roughly 12,000 people participated in the rescue of Jews in Lithuania – are not correct.

I encourage the reader to peruse all of the books and key articles published on the subject of the rescue of Jews. *Those who Saved the World... The Rescue of Jews in Lithuania*, a book by Dalia Kuodytė and Rimantas Stankevičius that was published by the Genocide and Resistance Research Center of Lithuania, is still unrivaled.<sup>4</sup> Also good is the *Hands Bringing Life and Bread... series from the Vilnius Gaon Museum of Jewish History*. Unfortunately, out of the 10 to 12 notebooks/volumes, only three have been published. They should be published more quickly and in larger quantities. The script by the famous rescuer Ona Šimaitė is still waiting for the attention of artistic and documentary filmmakers.

As the first director of the Righteous Gentiles Department at the Vilnius Gaon Museum of Jewish History once said, "...it should be a matter of honor for Lithuania and the Lithuanians themselves to show the world that they are actually a nation of rescuers of Jews."<sup>5</sup>

It is a shame that the history experts at the Vilnius Gaon Museum of Jewish History have not answered the question of the globally recognized British Holocaust researcher as to why the number of Righteous Among the Nations is so disproportionately high in Lithuania. One researcher presents the Yad Vashem 2005 figures for comparison: Germany, with a population of 82 million, received 410 awards. Meanwhile, in Lithuania, where the population (almost 4 million) is more than 20 times smaller than in Germany, 780 people were recognized and honored as Righteous Among the Nations – that is, 370 more people than in Germany.

This huge disproportion in the number of rescuers of Lithuanian Jews was due to the fact that during the German occupation, Lithuanians were more of a nation of rescuers than murderers, as some Holocaust interpreters have stated. If the majority of Lithuanians had actually been enthusiastic German or Nazi collaborators who persecuted and killed Jews, why did the Germans need help from foreign nationals brought in from beyond Lithuania's borders? As Solomon Atamukas writes on page 249 of his critically acclaimed book, *Lietuvos žydų kelias: Nuo XIV amžiaus iki XX a. pabaigos* ("The Path of Lithuania's Jews: From the 14th Century to the End of the 20th Century"; 1998), "Ukrainian, Russian, Latvian, and Estonian groups participated in guarding the Ghettos, transporting Jews to their deaths, and shooting them."<sup>6</sup>

That more Lithuanians rescued Jews than murdered them is backed up by the fact that there was only one group of Lithuanians who carried out Jewish massacres (*Ypatingasis būrys* – the "Vilnius Special Squad"), which, according to Atamukas, consisted of 100 men. In that same period, 25,000–30,000 people likely participated in the rescue of Jews throughout Lithuania and in all layers of society according to the aforementioned calculation methodology.

Several Lithuanian historians and researchers directed my attention to the great numbers of Lithuanian rescuers I have provided here – namely, the directors of the Jewish Museum's Righteous Gentiles Department.<sup>7</sup>

I should say that when I was visiting the museum for two days in the summer of 1994, Michael Erenburg, who was the first director of this department (which is now known as the Tolerance Center), repeated several times that at least 10,000 people had rescued Jews in Lithuania during the Holocaust. Perhaps this is why he insisted that Lithuanians must show the world that “they are, in fact, a nation of Jewish rescuers.” He personally began collecting information about the Jewish rescuers around 1957, when many witnesses were still alive.

Sir Martin Gilbert, the author of *The Righteous*, did not seem to be at all surprised by the large number of rescuers. He was clearly well acquainted with the rescue the Jews in Lithuania, since in the preface of the aforementioned book, he wrote that as many as 2,000 more Lithuanians might be recognized as Righteous Among the Nations in the first decade of the 21st century.<sup>8</sup> Later in the same book, he wrote about rescue efforts in Berlin, where there were 170,000 Jews – approximately the same number as in the whole of Lithuania.<sup>9</sup>

Citing one source, Gilbert relates that 20,000–30,000 local Germans were involved in rescuing the Berlin Jews. They are believed to have saved about 2,000 people. These two completely separate situations in Lithuania and Berlin show, with their numbers and proportions, that my estimates of the number of Lithuanians who rescued Jews are not artificially inflated.

The new edition of this book, supplemented with the original writings of researchers who study the rescue of Jews, is a gift to the libraries of Lithuanian schools. I would like to address the students, to whom this book is dedicated.

It is very important not only to read this book attentively, but also to deeply analyze what lessons and meaning the story of the rescue of the Jews has for these times, for us personally, for our lives, and most importantly – for our relationships with others. In a moral sense, rescuing and helping the Jews was nothing more than defending the weak and opposing evil, injustice, and cruelty. Rescuing Jews was more than just a good deed. Many researchers who study the rescue of Jews in North America wonder why the rescuers risked so much, putting their own lives and the lives of their loved ones in danger. The answer is simple – the rescuers had a strong moral compass, and were sensitive to the suffering of those in peril.

The title of *Righteous Among the Nations* is given for self-sacrifice and bravery, for saving Jews from death and suffering. We should be proud that compared to other European nations, a large part of our ancestors earned this honorable title through their actions. We can learn from their nobility and empathy.

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- <sup>8</sup> M. Gilbert, op. cit., p. 18.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.



The main gate of the Large Vilnius Ghetto, Rüdinkų Street, 1942.



The Large Vilnius Ghetto, Rūdninkų Street, 1942.

Compiled by Dr. Arūnas Bubnys, *Holokaustas Lietuvoje 1941–1944 m.* (“The Holocaust in Lithuania, 1941–1944”) is a collection of articles that reveals various aspects of the history of the Holocaust in Lithuania in a concentrated manner. The book represents the work that has been done by many historians over the past dozen or so years on the subject of the Holocaust, and allows anyone interested in the subject to find the article they are looking for in a single publication.

The book provides photographs from the archives of the Vilnius Gaon Museum of Jewish History and the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights.

## **The Holocaust in Lithuania: 1941–1944**

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