The Murder of the Jews in German-Occupied Lithuania (1941-1944)

by

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This article deals with the chronology, scope, and process by which the Jews were exterminated in German-occupied Lithuania on the eve of the German occupation.

The Holocaust in Lithuania and its implementation were part of the Nazi-German policy toward the Jews in all of the occupied territories of the Soviet Union. It was characterized by three main elements:

1. The Jews in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union were the first group of Jews in German-occupied Europe to face physical and total extermination.

2. The killing was carried out by shooting, openly and in the vicinity of the localities in which the Jews lived, and was witnessed by the local population.

3. The German propaganda stressed that Soviet Jewry were the bearers of Bolshevik ideology and the ruling elite in the Soviet Union, and that the target of the war was their elimination and the destruction of the communist state. For the other nations of the Soviet Union German propaganda claimed that "their enemies are not the people of the Soviet Union but the Judo-Bolshevik rulers" and that the German Army brings them freedom and liberation from Stalin's and the Jewish yoke.

However, the Holocaust in Lithuania (as in Latvia and Western Ukraine) had its uniqueness in the attitude and role of the Lithuanian people in carrying out this German policy, especially in the first half year of German occupation when the overwhelming majority of the Lithuanian Jews were murdered. Therefore, this article focuses on the role of the local collaborators and their participation in the extermination of the Jews. It does not, however, encompass some other important aspects of the Holocaust in Lithuania: the structure and operations of the German-occupation authorities, such as the *Generalkommissariat* Lithuania, the *Wehrmacht*, the SS, and the German and local police; the Jews, their life in the ghettos, their awareness of the situation and their reactions, their struggle for survival and armed resistance; the local municipal authorities; the churches and general population (the so-called bystanders), especially their attitude, behaviour, and relation to the Jews who were so desperately in need of their help in their struggle for survival; and those Righteous among the Nations, who risked their lives in order to save Jews. Despite the fact that they were few in number, these outstanding individuals deserve to be remembered with admiration.

The true story of the tragic fate of the once-flourishing Jewish community in Lithuania must be told – for the sake of Jewish history, Lithuanian history, and the history of humankind in general. This period must also be a lesson for the future – how far racist theories, anti-Semitism, narrow-minded national-ism, and dictatorship can lead people and nations.

Demography and Statistics

Before undertaking any analysis or description of the extermination of Li-thuanian Jewry, it is necessary to establish how many Jews lived in Lithuania previously and how many of them were still living there at the beginning of the German occupation. This is essential in order to arrive at some estimate as to the number of Lithuanian Jews murdered at that time and how many of them survived.

As no census of the population in Lithuania was taken on the eve of World War II, i.e., in Soviet Lithuania in 1940/41, we have to base our estimates on earlier censuses. In the pre-World War II Lithuanian borders, there were be-tween 146,000 and 147,000 Jews.[1] In Vilnius and its surroundings, which be-came part of Lithuania at the end of October 1939, there were between 65,000 and 67,000 Jews.[2] About 14,000 Jewish refugees arrived in Lithuania after September 1939 from German-occupied Poland.[3] Thus, according to this estimate, in the first half of 1940, there were approximately 225,000 to 228,000 Jews on Lithuanian territory. From this number of Jews, how many remained under German occupation?

About 6,500 Jewish refugees from Poland left Lithuania for Eretz Israel, the United States, the Far East, and other places in the world before the German occupation. According to my estimates, 3,000 Jews were deported to the interior of the Soviet Union as "anti-Soviet elements".[4] About 12,000 to

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[1] Pinkas Hakehillot. Encyclopaedia of Jewish Communities from their Foundation till after the Holocaust. Lithuania, ed. by DOV LEVIN, Jerusalem 1996, pp. 46-47. In 1926, there were 157,527 Jews in Lithuania. The natural growth between the two world wars was 13,833. During the same period 25,088 emigrated from Lithuania. Therefore, the number of Jews in Lithuania on the eve of World War II was 146,272.

[2] In the last population census in Poland, in 1931, the number of Jews in Vilnius was 54,600. We may assume that this number of around 55,000 Jews did not change drastically until 1939. In the small townships in the Vilnius area (Švenčionys, Švenčionėliai, Adutiškis, Ignalina), which became part of Lithuania, about 10,000-12,000 Jews were living there.

[3] YITZHAK ARAD: Ghetto in Flames, Jerusalem 1980, p. 17.

[4] Organy gosudarstvennoj bezopasnosti SSSR v Velikoj Otečestvennoj vojne. Sbornik dokumentov [The Agencies of State Security of USSR in the Great Patriotic War. Collection of Documents], Tom 1: Nakanune, kniga vtoraja (1 janvarja – 21 ijunja 1941 g.) [Vol. 1: On the Eve, Second Book (January 1 – June 21, 1941)], ed. by S.V. STE-PAŠIN et al., Moskva 1995, pp. 247-248, doc. 254. According to this document, dated June 17, 1941, signed by Merkulov, the head of the NKGB of the Soviet Union, and

12,500 Jews tried to reach the interior of the Soviet Union during the first days of the German invasion. Some of them subsequently died as a result of attacks, bombing, and so on. Between 21,500 and 22,000 Lithuanian Jews did not remain under German occupation, yet between 203,000 and 207,000 Jews did and therefore faced extermination. These estimates are lower than those cited in other sources.[5]

Periodicity of the Extermination Actions

The murder of the Jews in Lithuania lasted through the entire German occupation; however, there were differences in the intensity of these murder actions. In this respect, the murder of the Jews in occupied Lithuania, or, as the Nazis called it, the "Final Solution", can be divided into three periods:

A. The first period: June 22 – December 1941
This period was characterized by the murder of some 80 percent of the Lithuanian Jews under German occupation. The killing was carried out by the *Einsatzgruppen* of the German Security Police and SD, with wide-scale participation of Lithuanian collaborator units.

B. The second period: January 1942 – March 1943
This period can be called the "relatively quiet period". German policy during this period was aimed at maximum exploitation of the Jewish labour force, which was enclosed in the ghettos of Vilnius, Kaunas, Šiauliai, and Švenčionys.

C. The third period: April 1943 – July 1944 (until the expulsion of the German forces from Lithuania)
This period was characterized by the gradual liquidation of the existing ghettos and of the remnants of the Jews either by murder and/or deportation to camps in Germany.

The Murder Actions in the First Period

The first period lasted from June 22 to December 1941, and can be divided into two stages.

During the first stage, June 22 to July 5, 1941, that is, from the beginning of the German occupation until the arrival of the *Einsatzgruppen* of the German Security Police and SD in Lithuania, a wave of pogroms initiated and

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addressed to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Soviet Union, a total of 15,851 people were deported from Lithuania, including family members.

[5] Pinkas Hakehillot Lithuania (cf. footnote 1), pp. 49, 82-83, cites that, before World War II, about 150,000 Jews lived in Lithuania and between 240,000 and 250,000 in Soviet Lithuania. According this source 7,000 Jews were deported into the depths of the Soviet Union, and 15,000 escaped or were evacuated in the first days of the German invasion; on p. 101 there is a reference to 220,000 Jews who remained under German occupation.

carried out by local people – Lithuanian anti-Soviet partisans[6] and other armed groups (with or without the encouragement of the Germans) – spread through Lithuania. It started in Kaunas and expanded to other localities. A report by Franz Stahlecker, the commander of *Einsatzgruppe* A, which operated in the Baltic countries, dated October 15, 1941, stated:

> "To our surprise it was not easy at first to set any large anti-Jewish pogrom in motion in Kaunas. Klimaitis, the leader of the partisan unit mentioned above [...] succeeded in launching pogroms on the basis of advice given to him by a small advanced detachment operating in Kaunas. In the first pogrom during the nights of June 23 through June 26, the Lithuanian partisans did away with more than 1,500 Jews, set fire to several synagogues [...] and burned down a Jewish residential quarter consisting of about 60 houses. During the following nights, approximately 2,300 Jews were rendered harmless in a similar way. In other parts of Lithuania, similar actions followed the example of Kaunas, though on a smaller scale."[7]

Leib Garfunkel, who was a witness to this pogrom, wrote in his memoirs:

> "Lithuanian partisans and ordinary Lithuanians who joined them, carried out a terrible massacre of Jews in Slobodka – a suburb of Kaunas – on the night of June 25 [...] the rioters in their bloody actions made no distinction between men and women, children and elderly. Their cruelty was limitless. They shot with bullets, they slaughtered with knives, they killed with axes [...] a house where some Jews found refuge was set on fire and the partisans did not permit the firemen who arrived to put out the fire. The miserable Jews were burned alive. People were drowned in the Vilia [Neris] river [...] others were forced to dig the graves for themselves [...]"[8]

Stahlecker had begun his report with the words "it was not easy at first to set any large anti-Jewish pogroms" – in order to stress the importance of the activity of his advance unit. Even if we accept this sentence literally, the

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[6] With the onset of the Nazi-German invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, an anti-Soviet uprising broke out in Lithuania, staged by the Lithuanian nationalist underground and units of the Lithuanian 29th Rifle Corps in the Red Army. The organization of the underground and orders for the uprising came from the anti-Soviet "Lithuanian Activist Front" (*Lietuvių Aktyvistų Frontas*, LAF), established in Germany on November 17, 1940, by representatives of most of the Lithuanian political parties who had escaped from Lithuania. The people who took part in the uprising were called "partisans" in the German documents and in Jewish sources.

[7] Nuremberg Document L-180. (Nuremberg Documents is a collection of documents prepared and submitted as evidence during the "Nuremberg Trials" of Nazi-German war criminals in the years 1945-1946. The term "Nuremberg Trials" embraces both the International Military Tribunal [IMT] and the Nuremberg Military Tribunals [NMT] established by the victorious Allied Countries. Each document selected for possible use in one of the Nuremberg trials was given a symbol and a number [like L-180]. Many of the documents admitted in evidence were also printed in official publications, one of which is the multi-volume so-called "Green Series". The document L-180 is to be found there in vol. 4, pp. 154-170.)

[8] LEIB GARFUNKEL: Kovna Haihudit b'Churbana [The Jewish Kaunas Being Ruined], Jerusalem 1959, pp. 31, 329, 345.

Lithuanian anti-Soviet partisans and others who carried out the pogroms and murder were not forced to do what they did. They did it willingly and enthusiastically as is attested by Leib Garfunkel.

During those days about 1,000 Jews were murdered in Šiauliai, and massacres were carried out in Panevėžys, Plungė, Kėdainiai, and hundreds of other places in Lithuania.[9] The following description of the events in the small township of Linkuva in the Šiauliai district, where about 1,000 Jews – both locals and refugees from surrounding townships – were present on the day that the German forces occupied it, is typical of the events in other localities in Lithuania:

> "On the second day of the German invasion, when it became known that the Soviets were retreating, Jews from Linkuva started to escape. On this same day Lithuanian 'activists' started their actions. Their first steps were to murder Jews. They ambushed the escaping Jews outside the township and shot them [...] On June 29 the Lithuanian 'activists' ordered all the Jews to report to the police. Lithuanians took over the initiative of the persecution of the Jews and carried out the murder of the Jews in Linkuva. The commander of the police was Sintaris who in the past served in the Lithuanian border police; among his advisors were the priest Biliackas and other Lithuanians. The Jews reported to the police were closed in a stable and some stores. There they were beaten, the beards of elderly Jews were cut off and, despite the heat, they did not receive any water and food. On June 30, ten youngsters aged 18-20, were taken and shot close to the Catholic cemetery [...] The Lithuanian 'activists', the day after the murder of the youngsters, took all the adult and old Jews, brought them to the Atkuciunai forest, close to the Musa river, and murdered them [...] On July 2, four o'clock in the morning, whole families were taken from their homes, according to a prepared list. These were residents from the township and refugees, all told some 125 people. They were brought to the prison in Šiauliai. The women and children were released, 57 men remained there [...] A second group of Jews who were taken the same day did not reach the prison in Šiauliai. All of them were murdered on the way by their Lithuanian guards. Among those murdered was Rabbi Dudman [...] On July 23 [...] 700 of the remaining Jews in Linkuva were taken to the Atkuciunai forest and shot. In these actions Lithuanians distinguished themselves, in particular three sons of the pharmacist Jasukaitis, Sintaris, Janauskas [...] [more names of Lithuanians who participated in the murder]."[10]

In contrast to Kaunas and other localities, no large-scale murder or pogrom of Jews was carried out in Vilnius in those days. Why not? Did the Lithuanian authorities who took control in Vilnius have a different attitude toward the Jews than those in Kaunas? The answer is no. There were different reasons for their behaviour, which can be found in the German reports regarding the situation in Vilnius at that time. For example, the *Einsatzgruppen* report of July 9, 1941, reads as follows:

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[9]   Yahadut Lita [Lithuanian Jewry], ed. by Leib Garfunkel et al., Tel Aviv 1984, pp. 185, 329, 345.

[10] Ibidem, pp. 306-307.

"The Lithuanian activists are trying every way possible to exploit the unclear situation and to give the city of Vilnius a purely Lithuanian character, by decorating the city with eye-catching Lithuanian flags. Nevertheless, the Lithuanian element constitutes a minority [in Vilnius] [...] The Lithuanian institutions, especially the police, made immediate attempts to halt the non-Lithuanian groupings (Belorussian and Polish) in their effort to play down the Lithuanian character of the city."[11]

Stahlecker wrote in his report: "As far as the Lithuanian population in Vilnius is concerned, the Jewish problem is secondary to the Polish."[12]

Based on these reports, we may assume that the Lithuanian authorities who took over the rule in Vilnius were interested in proving to the German military administration that they, and not the Poles who made up a large segment of the population of the city (which between the two world wars was part of Poland), were in full control of the situation and that there was no disorder in the streets. Mass attacks on Jews were liable to cause chaos in the city and thus imperil the Lithuanian local authorities' intentions and position.

No comprehensive research exists on these first few weeks of the German occupation and the pogroms carried out before the *Einsatzkommandos* of the German Security Police and SD reached Lithuania and put into effect their planned and controlled killing operations. (The *Einsatzkommando* was a company-size sub-unit of an *Einsatzgruppe*, numbering 100-150 servicemen; hereafter EK.)

The exact number of Jews who were murdered in these pogroms is not known. According to estimates, they number 7,000 to 8,000.[13]

The second stage lasted from early July to December 1941 and was characterized by the planned and organized mass murder of Lithuanian Jewry by the *Einsatzgruppen* of the German Security Police and SD, with the large-scale participation of the Lithuanian police and other local volunteer units.

These mass-murder actions were carried out during the month of July, when Lithuania was under German military administration. They continued from the beginning of August, when the German civilian administration took over and the *Generalkommissariat* of Lithuania, headed by Theodor-Adrian von Renteln, as part of the *Reichskommissariat Ostland*, headed by Hinrich Lohse was created. *Reichskommissariat Ostland*, in addition to Lithuania, included the *Generalkommissariate* of Estonia, Latvia and Belorussia (Western Belorussia and the city of Minsk).

From June 23, 1941, until August 5, "Provisional Lithuanian Government", headed by Juozas Ambrazevičius, existed in Kaunas. This government started to reestablish government institutions, as well as the Lithuanian army and police. The German military authorities, during the first two weeks of

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[11] Yad Vashem Archives 0-51/57-1, pp. 10-12, Einsatzgruppen report no. 17.

[12] Nuremberg Documents L-180, Summary report dated October 15, 1941.

[13] In Pinkas Hakehillot Lithuania (cf. footnote 1), p. 91, the number of about 10,000 Jews murdered during this period is cited here.

occupation, made no objections to these actions. Only in July, after the arrival of the *Einsatzgruppen*, did the military authorities announce that the formation of a Lithuanian army was illegitimate. Consequently, the newly created Lithuanian army units were reorganized into police battalions. However, the Provisional Lithuanian Government, during the six weeks of its existence, did have some control and influence over the Lithuanian police and the partisan groups before these groups were disbanded. Therefore they bear at least partial responsibility for the murder of the Jews carried out by these police or partisan units during this period. The Lithuanian historian Alfonsas Eidintas, in his address to the Lithuanian *Seimas* (parliament), on September 20, 2001, said:

> "During the first weeks of war, after the first 'pogroms' [...] even the Provisional Lithuanian Government did not condemn the acts but established a concentration camp in the 7th Fort of Kaunas. It proclaimed Jews as aliens to the Lithuanian State [...] Anti-Jewish indoctrination was proclaimed over the radio and in the press by some prominent Lithuanians. People with white stripes on their hands [partisans] searched for the Jews who were hiding. There was no difference if they were Jews or the communists. Lynch courts were popular [...] The Lithuanian police, which had been founded for patriotic purposes, became collaborators with white stripes [...]"[14]

Einsatzgruppen units arrived in Lithuania in the first week of July 1941. During July three *Einsatzkommandos* operated in Lithuania: EK 3, commanded by Karl Jäger in Kaunas and central-western Lithuania; EK 9, commanded by Alfred Filberg in the Vilnius area; EK 2, commanded by Eduard Strauch in Šiauliai and northern Lithuania. A special unit of the Security Police and SD from Tilsit carried out the mass murder of Jews in Lithuania in the areas close to the border with East Prussia. The Tilsit unit carried out its murder actions, in conjunction with Einsatzgruppe A, in a 25-kilometer strip along the Lithuanian side of the border. At the beginning of August, EK 3 took control of the Vilnius area, and, at the beginning of October, they enlarged this to the Šiauliai area as well. From that time EK 3, as the Security Police and SD authority, was in control of the entire *Generalkommissariat* Lithuania.

The *Einsatzgruppen* acted without any restrictions in their murder operations. The scope of the killings and the timetable for implementation were dictated only by their physical ability. As the *Einsatzkommandos* were small units, they could carry out large-scale murder only with the help of additional forces – either German units, such as the battalions of the German Order Police, or police units composed of local volunteers.

From the very beginning of their operations in Lithuania, they received the full help and cooperation of the local Lithuanian Order Police, the Lithuanian

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[14] ALFONSAS EIDINTAS: Remembering the Jewish Catastrophe, p. 3 (A speech given at the Lithuanian Seimas, on September 20, 2001. The author of this article attended the Seimas when the speech was given and has in his possession a copy of the speech.)

municipal authorities, and the Lithuanian Security Police. The latter had been organized by the Lithuanian Provisional Government but continued to exist even after the dissolution of this government, as part of the German Security Police. The Lithuanian Police Battalions assisted the EK, and, in many localities, they constituted the main force in the murder operations. Franz Stahlecker wrote as follows in his report of October 15:

> "From the very beginning it was clear that the Jewish problem in the *Ostland* cannot be solved only by pogroms [...] Large-scale killing operations were therefore carried out in cities and the countryside by the S.K., which were reinforced by units selected from the partisan groups in Lithuania and parties of the Latvian auxiliary police. The work of the execution units was carried out smoothly [...]"[15]

The vast majority of the Jewish victims in Lithuania – as in other places in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union – who were murdered in July/ middle of August 1941, as planned and implemented by the *Einsatzgruppen*, were young and middle-aged males. According to the estimates, at least 15,000 men and around 1,000 women were murdered in this first wave of *Einsatzgruppen* actions.

Jewish men were seized on the streets or forced from their homes. In most cases, they were told that they were being taken for labour. They were then transported outside the town, where they were shot and buried. The executions were carried out at Paneriai near Vilnius, Forts 7 and 9 in Kaunas, the Kužiai forest outside Šiauliai, the Pajuostė forest near Panevėžys, at the 'Polygon forest' near Švenčionėliai, and in hundreds of other places throughout Lithuania.

From the middle of August 1941, however, the Jewish victims in Lithuania, as in other areas of German-occupied territories of the Soviet Union, began including women and children. This strengthens the assumption that the first orders given to the *Einsatzgruppen*, on the eve of the invasion of the Soviet Union, were to kill males, and only in the second half/end of July 1941, did the German authorities decide to carry out the murder of all the Jews in the occupied territories. The killings of Jewish men only could be seen and described as executions of pro-Soviet elements and a means of eliminating those people who might oppose German occupation and became a security problem.

This change to the wholesale murder of all Jews took place after a meeting at Hitler's headquarters attended by the top Nazi leadership on July 16, 1941. The subject discussed at this meeting was the administration and political future of the occupied territories, as the collapse of the Soviet Union was expected to happen soon. Hitler had stated as early as July 4, 1941 that "to all

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[15] Nuremberg Documents L-180.

intents and purposes the Russians have lost the war".[16] At this meeting Hitler
also noted "that Stalin's call for partisan warfare had its advantages: it gives
us the opportunity to exterminate whatever stands in our way."[17] Jews were
not mentioned, but it was clear in the minds of Hitler and other Nazi leaders
that Jews were at the forefront of those who "stand in our [his] way". The
extermination of the Jews was often carried out under the guise of anti-
partisan actions.

The decision regarding the total extermination of the Jews taken in the
second half of July was influenced by the favorable German military situation
at that time: Smolensk was captured on July 16, which opened the way to
Moscow. The crucial issue discussed at Hitler's headquarters in those days
was whether to continue with the armored armies the drive and conquest of
Moscow or to postpone this move and give priority to the conquest of Lenin-
grad and encirclement of huge Soviet forces east of Kiev. But the estimate of
situation was that the victory was close and the war with the Soviet Union
may soon end.[18]

It can be assumed, that Hitler and Himmler believed that the wartime
situation gave them the opportunity to carry out the total murder of Soviet
Jewry, something that in peacetime would have been complicated by world
public opinion, mainly American, as the United States was not yet at war with
Germany. Therefore, the total extermination of the Jews in the occupied
territories of the Soviet Union, had to be accomplished before the end of the
war. In his speech in the Reichstag of January 30, 1939 Hitler had said that
another world war would "result not in the Bolshevization of the earth, and
thus the victory of Jewry, but in the annihilation of the Jewish race in
Europe".[19] The time was ripe to carry out this "prophecy". Goebbels wrote in
his diary about his meeting with Hitler on August 19, 1941:

> "We also spoke about the Jewish problem. The Führer is of the conviction that his
> earlier prophecy in the Reichstag – that if the Jews succeeded in provoking a
> world war once again, it would end with the extermination of the Jews – was

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[16] WALTER WARLIMONT: Inside Hitler's Headquarters 1939-1945, Novato/CA 1962, p.
     180. General Warlimont was the Chief of Operations Staff of the *Oberkommando der*
     Wehrmacht (OKW).

[17] Nuremberg Documents L-221.

[18] WARLIMONT (cf. footnote 16), pp. 180-181, wrote that in the *Wehrmacht* headquarter
     Hitler gave instructions to prepare plans to reduce the size of the army. And further he
     wrote: "There were certain additional instructions which bore witness to his [Hitler's]
     complete confidence in the outcome of the Russian campaign."

[19] The Speeches of Adolf Hitler. April 1922 – August 1939, ed. by NORMAN H. BAYNES,
     vol. 1, London 1942, pp. 740-741.

coming true. In these weeks and months it has proven accurate with an almost uncanny certainty. In the East the Jews have to pay the price [...]"[20]

Some prominent German historians, Christian Gerlach and Christoph Dieckmann, in their recently published research, relate the decision of total extermination of Soviet Jews, including women and children, mainly to the food scarcity for the German army on their Eastern front. By killing all Soviet Jews, whom they defined as "useless eaters" (*nutzlose Esser*), they would reduce the number of mouths to feed.[21] No doubt the total murder of the Jews reduced the number of people to be fed, but this was not the decisive reason of this resolution. The decisive reason was the racist anti-Jewish Nazi theories and their relation to the Soviet Jews as bearers of communist ideology, the ruling elite of the Soviet state and mortal enemies of Nazi Germany. We may assume that the decisions regarding the mass murder of Jews and their fate in the occupied territories of Soviet Union, would not have been different had there been no food shortage. The decision to murder Soviet Jews in their entirety was part of the cumulative radicalization of the Nazi "Final Solution" policy.

The order to begin the total murder of Soviet Jews was given to the *Einsatzgruppen* and other SS units verbally by Himmler, who visited the SS units subordinated to him in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union in the second half of July 1941. This order also sealed the fate of the Jews of Lithuania. As mentioned, the indiscriminate murder of Jews took place from mid-August in Lithuania. No distinction was made between those able to work or not able. The first localities where this policy was implemented, according to Karl Jäger's report, were Rokiškis (3,200 Jews on August 16), Raseiniai (298 Jews on August 16), Kaunas (1,811 Jews on August 18), Ukmergė (643 Jews on August 19), Panevėžys (7,523 Jews on August 23), and then spread throughout all of Lithuania.[22] In some localities, parallel to the extermination actions, ghettos were established. While forcing Jews into the ghetto in Vilnius in the first two weeks of September, at least 7,000 Jews

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[20] CHRISTOPH DIECKMANN: The War and the Killing of the Lithuanian Jews, in: National Socialist Extermination Policies, ed. by ULRICH HERBERT, New York 2000, pp. 240-275, p. 265.

[21] CHRISTIAN GERLACH: German Economic Interests, Occupation Policy, and the Murder of the Jews in Belorussia, 1941/1943, in: National Socialist Extermination Policies (cf. footnote 20), pp. 210-239, here p. 227: "Economic interests and crises were far more important influences on the tempo of liquidation of the Jews [...] Anti-Semitism and anti-Bolshevism were necessary preconditions for these murders [...] but economic pressure led to the massive killing campaigns, to the horrible dynamics of mass murder." DIECKMANN (cf. footnote 20), p. 262, wrote: "[...] it is clear that provision problems in Lithuania and in the region of Army Group North in general constituted an important, and possibly a decisive, factor in the decision to kill, instead of feeding 'useless' Jewish women and children."

[22] Yad Vashem Archives 0-18/245, pp. 2-3.

were murdered.[23] The commander of the Lithuanian city police, who was in charge of closing the Jews into the ghetto, Antanas Iskauskas, reported as follows:

> "The ghetto operation in Vilnius began at 6 A.M. on September 6, 1941 [...] Guards were posted along all roads out of the city to prevent Jews from fleeing [...] The operation was executed by police and soldiers from guard units [police battalions]. The police evicted the Jews from the houses and the soldiers herded them into the places chosen for their residence [...]"[24]

The killings in Paneriai were carried out by a Lithuanian unit under the command of German Security Police and SD in Vilnius. A sixteen-year-old Jewish girl, Pesye Shloss, was wounded but survived Paneriai. At night, after the murderers had left, she was able to escape from the pit and return to the ghetto. Her testimony was recorded in a diary written in those days in Vilnius ghetto:

> "She tells: on September 2, at about 4 in the afternoon, the Lithuanians came into their home, ordered them to come along [...] They were taken to Lukiszki [prison]. They stayed there until four in the morning. Then they were ordered to undress, ostensibly to be taken to work [...]

> Few people knew that we were in Ponar [Paneriai], and few imagined what they were going to do with us there. But we saw it with our own eyes, as the shootings were taking place no more than 200 steps from us [...] There were whole mountains of people lying [...] All the work was done by the Lithuanians. They were supervised by one German [...]

> The narrator came to the execution in the very last group of 10. It was already sunset [...]"[25]

In the middle of September 1941, there was some change in the German policy of indiscriminate killings of Jews. This change was limited to the cities of Vilnius, Kaunas, and Šiauliai, where German *Gebietskommissare* were stationed and army installations located. Jews there who were working in German enterprises – mostly young and middle-aged men and women – were now temporarily spared, along with their families. According this change in the policy, in Vilnius, Kaunas and Šiauliai two ghettos were established, one for the working Jews and their families and the second where all the others who were doomed for extermination were concentrated. In Vilnius it was Ghetto no. 1 for the working Jews and Ghetto no. 2 for all the others, in Kaunas the "Big Ghetto" was for the working Jews and the "Small Ghetto"

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[23] Ibidem, pp. 5-6. According to Jewish sources, the number of murdered Jews in those days was around 10,000.

[24] Documents Accuse, ed. by E. ROZAUSKAS, Vilnius 1970, pp. 217-218.

[25] HERMAN KRUK: The Last Days of the Jerusalem of Lithuania. Chronicles from the Vilna Ghetto and the Camps 1939-1944, ed. and introduced by BENJAMIN HARSHAV, New Haven – London 2002, p. 91. Part of the given quotation is as written by the recorder and part as direct story of Pesye Shloss.

for the non-working, and in Šiauliai the "Synagoge" served as a place where
those who were doomed for annihilation were assembled.

The so-called "Large Action" in the Kaunas Ghetto on October 28, 1941,
characterizes this new policy of the German administration. All the Jews in
the Kaunas ghetto were ordered to gather at 6 o'clock in the morning at the
Demokratų Square, grouped by families and according to their places of
work. SS *Oberscharführer* Helmut Rauke, who was in charge of the ghetto,
carried out the selection. Avraham Tori, who was among the 27,000 Jews
who gathered at the Demokratų Square that day, wrote in his diary:

> "Columns marched [...] Rauke who was staying on a low hill, marking with his
> right hand, decided the fate of the people. Old and sick, families with many
> children, single women and every one whose outward appearance did not impress
> him as fit for work, were ordered to go to the right. There German police and
> Lithuanian 'Partisans' guarded and beat them [...] In the evening the selection
> was accomplished, but not before Rauke verified that the quota of 10,000 [unfit
> for work] had been reached. They were transferred to the 'small ghetto' and the
> 17,000 people who went through the selection 'peacefully' returned to their homes
> [...] The march of the column of the 10,000 Jews from the 'small ghetto' to the
> Ninth Fort continued from the [next] morning until noon time [...] inside the fort
> the Lithuanian murderers took away from the miserable [victims] all their valua-
> bles – gold rings, earrings, bracelets, forced them to undress, pushed them into the
> pits and shot them."[26]

In the ghettos of Vilnius and Šiauliai the selection of the non-working Jews
was carried out differently, but the results were similar. In Šiauliai, over
1,000 non-working Jews, who were concentrated in the "Synagoge" area,
were murdered on September 3, 1941.[27] In Vilnius, Ghetto no. 2 was liqui-
dated in the period of September 15 to October 21, 1941, and about 7,000 of
the Jews concentrated there were murdered.[28]

Between June 22 and December 1941, 160,000 to 164,000 Lithuanian Jews
were murdered. This total number of murdered Jews is based mainly on
German reports and partly on estimates. In the report of Karl Jäger, the com-
mander of EK 3, there are details concerning 111,000 Lithuanian Jews.[29] In
his report, however, for some reason, there is no mention of the "Yom Kippur
action" on October 1 in Vilnius, at which time about 3,000 Jews were mur-
dered. In addition, about 800 Jews were murdered in Vilnius in December
1941, after the report was submitted. Therefore, the total number of Jews
murdered by EK 3 and collaborating Lithuanian police units or under their
direct command was around 114,000 Lithuanian Jews. These numbers do not
include the Jews murdered by units of EK 3 in Daugavpils (Latvia), in the

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[26] AVRAHAM TORY: Ghetto Yom Yom [Ghetto Everyday, Diary], Tel Aviv 1988, pp. 66-
75 [Hebrew].

[27] ELIESER YERUSHALMI: Pinkas Shavli [Šiauliai Journal], Jerusalem 1958, p. 38.

[28] ARAD (cf. footnote 3), pp. 133-142.

[29] Ibidem.

Minsk area (Belorussia) nor the 5,000 German Jews murdered in October 1941 in Kaunas.

EK 9 murdered 5,000 Jews in Vilnius in July 1941.

EK 2, with the help of the Lithuanian police and German Order Police (Orpo) battalion 65, murdered about 26,000 to 28,000 Jews in Šiauliai and north Lithuania (Telšiai, Mažeikiai, Biržai districts).

A Security Police and SD unit from Tilsit, with the cooperation of the local police, murdered about 8,000 to 9,000 Jews in the border area (Tauragė, Šakiai, Vilkaviškis districts).

Lithuanian partisans and anti-Semitic elements in Lithuanian society murdered 7,000 to 8,000 Jews in the first two weeks of the German invasion, most of them in Kaunas.

At the end of this period, i.e., at the end of December 1941, some 43,000 Jews remained in the ghettos of Lithuania: in Vilnius, about 20,000; in Kaunas, 17,500; in Šiauliai, 5,000 to 5,500; and in Švenčionys, 500.[30]

Which were the units and who were the people who carried out the murder of 80 percent of Lithuanian Jewry? The German *Einsatzkommandos* that planned and participated in the murder were mentioned earlier. They numbered a few hundred servicemen. EK 3, which was in charge of killing the large majority of Lithuanian Jews, was a company-size unit, with about 120 members. They were able to carry out their large-scale murder actions in quite a short period only because, as stated in the above-mentioned Stahlecker report, they had at their disposal thousands of Lithuanians who served in local Order Police stations and in the mobile police battalions (in the first weeks they were called "National Labour Service Battalions" [*Tautinio darbo apsauga*, TDA]; or, in Vilnius, the "Vilnius Construction Battalion" [*Vilniaus atstatymo tarnyba*, VAT]), or in units such as the *Ypatingi Būriai* ("special detachment"), which was under the direct command of the German Security Police and SD in Vilnius. In a study done by Arūnas B u b n y s, the author mentions ten battalions out of the twenty-five Lithuanian police battalions that participated in murder operations of Jews, not only in Lithuania, but also in Belorussia, Ukraine, and other places.[31]

In Kaunas the 1st Police Battalion was organized under the command of Colonel Andrius Butkūnas. It was formed by July 4, 1941, and carried out the murder of 26,000 Jews in Forts 4, 7, and 9 in Kaunas between July 4 and December 11, 1941.[32] Members of this battalion participated in the murder of Jews in many other places in Lithuania, as is mentioned in the Jäger report, with the German Security Police and SD mobile unit, under the command of

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[30] These numbers are higher than those given in Jäger's report, which are: Šiauliai – 4,500; Kaunas – 15,000; Vilnius – 15,000. Švenčionys was not mentioned in Jäger's report.

[31] ARŪNAS BUBNYS: Lithuanian Police Battalions and the Holocaust (1941-1943), Vilnius 2001, pp. 5, 31.

[32] This number includes 5,000 German Jews murdered in November 1941.

Obersturmführer Hamman's unit, which numbered only eight to ten Germans. The number of Jews murdered by this battalion in Lithuania, with the help of the local Lithuanian police and, in some places, with the participation of a few *Einsatzkommando* members, was close to 40,000.[33]

In Vilnius, the Lithuanian Special Detachment, which numbered about 150 people, with only a few Germans from the Security Police and SD, carried out the shooting of tens of thousands of Jews in Paneriai. An *Einsatzgruppen* report, dated July 13, 1941, stated:

> "In Vilnius […] The Lithuanian Ordnungsdienst which was placed under the Einsatzkommando […] was instructed to take part in the liquidation of the Jews. One hundred and fifty Lithuanian officials were assigned to this task. They arrested the Jews and put them into concentration camps, where they were subjected the same day to special treatment [*Sonderbehandlung*]. This work has now begun and thus about 500 Jews, saboteurs among them, are liquidated daily."[34]

The capture of the Jews and the escorting them to Paneriai was carried out by members of the 2nd Vilnius Police Battalion, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Jonas Juknevičius.[35]

In Panevėžys the 10th Lithuanian Police Battalion, under the command of Major Ernest Bliudnik, was the main force that carried out the extermination of all the Jews there in August 1941, in the forests of Žalioji and Pajuostė.[36] The 14th Lithuanian Police Battalion, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Petras Verteilis, and a detachment of local partisans carried out the murder of the Šiauliai Jews in the Žagarė ghetto, on October 2, 1941.[37] Similar murder actions with the participation of police battalions and the local Lithuanian Order Police took place in hundreds of other places.

Lithuania was the first country in Europe to experience the mass murder of Jews. Nowhere else in Europe, except Latvia, had 80 percent of the Jews already been exterminated before the end of 1941. This could be accomplished in such a short period only because of the widespread local collaboration and the fact that EK 3, which planned and organized the mass murder of the Jews, remained all that time in Lithuania. Jäger, in his summary report dated December 1, 1941, stated:

> "The goal to clear Lithuania of Jews could be achieved only thanks to the setting up of a flying squad of tried men under SS Obersturmführer Hamman who

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[33] BUBNYS (cf. footnote 31), p. 13.

[34] The Einsatzgruppen Reports, ed. by YITZHAK ARAD, SHMUEL KRAKOWSKI and SHMUEL SPECTOR, New York 1989, p. 22, Operational Situation Report USSR, no. 21. The "one hundred and fifty Lithuanian officials" mentioned in this report were the *Ypatingi Būriai* unit.

[35] BUBNYS (cf. footnote 31), p. 22.

[36] Ibidem, p. 28.

[37] Ibidem, pp. 29-30.

adopted my goal without any reservations and managed to secure the cooperation of the Lithuanian partisans and the respective offices."[38]

What were the reasons for such pervasive cooperation and collaboration? What turned people into the murderers of neighbours with whom they had coexisted for generations? A partial answer can be found in the following German reports. Stahlecker, the commander of *Einsatzgruppe* A, wrote in his report of October 15, 1941: "The active anti-Semitism, which flared up quickly after the German occupation, did not falter. Lithuanians are voluntarily and untiringly at our disposal for all measures against Jews: sometimes they even execute such measures on their own."[39]

Traditional, popular anti-Semitism, in its religious, economic, and political forms, had existed previously in Lithuania, as it had in other countries. Although it may even have been less-encompassing than in neighbouring areas populated by Russians and Poles, it was still a prevailing factor in Lithuania. While, however, the existence of an entrenched, popular anti-Semitism was a necessary factor in subsequent anti-Semitic behaviour, it does not suffice to explain the outburst of hatred toward Jews and the widespread participation in the murderous actions. One must also mention additional factors that shaped the behaviour of thousands of Lithuanians during the German occupation.

Existing anti-Semitic sentiments were no doubt strengthened during the period between June 1940 and June 1941 when the Soviets ruled Lithuania. Lithuanians blamed the Jews for having welcomed the Soviet annexation of June 1940. It is a fact that the Jews welcomed the Soviet rule in Lithuania. However, this was not because of their disloyalty toward Lithuania or their love of communism. Rather, the reason lay in the fact that Lithuania, given the political and military situation in Europe in summer of 1940, could not preserve its independence, but had only the alternatives of Soviet or German rule. Jews preferred Soviet rule because they knew of the German persecution of Jews. Most Lithuanians, on the other hand, preferred Nazi-German rule to the Soviets. Thus, the Jews had a different attitude to the Soviet rule in Lithuania than did most Lithuanians. Moreover, the Lithuanians identified the Jews with the hated communist regime. As a result of their attitude to the Soviet rule, the Jews were over-represented in the middle or low ranks of government institutions at the time of Soviet rule. This factor also strengthened anti-Jewish feelings among many Lithuanians.

Yet because of Soviet nationality policy even these marginal numbers of Jews were gradually replaced by Lithuanians and officials who came from the Soviet Union. What the Lithuanians did not understand was that, in fact, the Jews as individuals and as a nation suffered even more than the Lithuanians from Soviet rule. Jews were doomed by Soviet rule and communist ideology to disappear as a nation by assimilation – to become Russians, Ukrainians,

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[38] Yad Vashem Archives 0-18/245.

[39] Nuremberg Document L-180.

Lithuanians, and so on. All their national, cultural, and religious institutions were disbanded. Because of their economic and class structure, Jews also suffered more than others from property confiscation and other actions that were a result of communist economic policy. Moreover, the estimated number of 3,000 Jews who were deported into the Soviet Union, as "anti-Soviet elements", was 17 percent of the total number of those who were deported from Lithuania, which was much higher than their percentage among the population in Lithuania. Liudas Truska, a leading historian of this period in Lithuania, has written:

> "In general, research conducted by historians demonstrates that the Jews did not play any special role in the Sovietization of Lithuania and the repressing of its people, while the losses suffered by the Jews themselves in 1940-1941 [the first period of Soviet occupation] were even bigger than those of Lithuanians."[40]

The true Jewish attitude to Soviet rule in Lithuania is most obvious in the fact that any Jew who could emigrate from Lithuania at that time did so. They numbered in the thousands.

The intensified anti-Jewish feelings among the Lithuanians were further inflamed by the anti-Semitic propaganda of the leadership of the anti-Soviet "Lithuanian Activist Front". It was headed by Colonel Kazys Skirpa and was backed by a large organized underground within Lithuania. Leaflets prepared by the LAF and distributed in the thousands in Lithuania focused wide attention on the Jewish issue. According to a leaflet published by the LAF on March 19, 1941, "the hour of Lithuania's liberation is close [...] Local Communists and other traitors of Lithuania must be arrested [...] (The traitor will be pardoned only provided he proves beyond doubts that he has killed one Jew at least)."[41]

A further leaflet of March 24, 1941, included instructions on Lithuania's liberation: "[...] When driving the Red Army away from Lithuania [...] it is very important to take the occasion to get rid of Jews. Therefore, the climate in the country must become intolerable for them [...]"[42]

Yet another leaflet released from the spring of 1941, entitled "Let Us For Eternity Free Lithuania from the Yoke of Jewry", proclaimed that:

> "Russian Communism and its eternal servant the Jew represent a common enemy. Elimination of the occupation by Russian Communism and slavery imposed by Jews is our shared and most sacred task [...] Jews have been and are the most heinous Chekists, informers and torturers of Lithuanians [...] the right of asylum

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[40] LIUDAS TRUSKA: The Upsurge of Anti-Semitism in Lithuania in the Years of Soviet Occupation (1940-1941), Vilnius 2001, p. 5. Truska, p. 18, mentioned the number of 3,000 Jews deported by the Soviets.

[41] Documents Accuse (cf. footnote 24), p. 123. TRUSKA (cf. footnote 40), p. 27, claims that the sentence in brackets was not inserted by the LAF center in Berlin but added by an individual multiplying the LAF leaflets in Lithuania.

[42] TRUSKA (cf. footnote 40), p. 23.

granted to Jews by Vytautas the Great is cancelled altogether and completely [...]"[43]

A manifesto-type essay, "What Are the Activists Fighting For?", stated similarly that:

"The Lithuanian Activist Front, by restoring the new Lithuania, is determined to carry out an immediate and fundamental purging of the Lithuanian nation and its land of Jews [...] [This] shall be one of the most essential preconditions for starting a new life [...]"[44]

The LAF did not call openly for the total physical extermination of the Jews in Lithuania, but it should be stressed that even the Nazi-German leadership was not yet speaking of the total extermination of Jews in the period when these leaflets were published and distributed. Expressions in the leaflets like "when driving the Red Army away from Lithuania it is very important to take this occasion to get rid of the Jews" were understood by much of the Lithuanian population as a call for pogroms and, turned, with the German invasion, into a wave of murder costing the lives of thousands of innocent Jews.

In such an anti-Semitic atmosphere, which prevailed in Lithuania during the German occupation, the chances that a Jew would find refuge among the Lithuanian population were very limited. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that over 500 Lithuanians have been recognized by Yad Vashem as "Righteous Among the Nations", people who risked their lives in order to save Jews.

The organized massacres and mass murder of the Lithuanian Jews in the first period, from the beginning of July 1941, were suspended in December 1941. By the end of 1941, only about 43,000 of the 203,000 to 207,000 Jews who were in Lithuania at the beginning of the German occupation, were still alive. They were incarcerated in the four ghettos: Vilnius, Kaunas, Šiauliai and Švenčionys.

The suspension of the mass extermination actions at the end of 1941 was the result of the controversy within the German administration as to whether to liquidate totally the Jews in Lithuania and other places in the *Reichskommissariat Ostland*, or to spare temporarily those Jews and their families who were working in German enterprises that were serving the war economy. This conflict, which was waged from September to November 1941, involved all three German authorities operating in the *Reichskommissariat Ostland*: the civil administration headed by Heinrich Lohse (and the governing authority in the *Ostland*); the army commander in charge of exploiting the economic resources of the rear areas for military needs; and the SS authorities who took charge of the extermination of the Jews. The dispute over the fate of the Jews in the *Ostland* reached Alfred Rosenberg, the minister of the Eastern Occupied Territories in Berlin. A letter dated December 18, 1941, from Rosenberg's office regarding the fate of the working Jews stated as follows: "Eco-

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[43] Ibidem, p. 24.

[44] Ibidem, pp. 24-25.

nomic considerations should basically not be considered in the settlement of the problem. Moreover, it is requested that questions arising be settled directly with the Chief SS and Police Leader."[45]

The decision to leave the remaining ghettos in the *Ostland* in operation was accepted in November 1941 by the German authorities there before Rosenberg's reply was received. The main reason was the demands of the *Wehrmacht*, which bore responsibility for supplying the eastern front and faced a ponderous military situation. It was clear that the war would not end before the winter – neither had Moscow been captured nor had the Soviet regime collapsed – and the German army, which had already suffered heavy losses, now had to prepare itself for a winter war which it had not anticipated. Thousands of Jews in the ghettos of Vilnius, Kaunas, and Šiauliai worked in enterprises important to the German war economy and the economic needs and services of the local German administration. The army, supported by the civilian administration in the *Ostland*, demanded that these Jews be temporarily spared. Although SS authorities opposed any halt in the annihilation of the remaining Jews, they eventually gave in. Jäger wrote as follows in his report of December 1, 1941:

> "I can state today that Einsatzkommando 3 has realized the solution of the Jewish problem in Lithuania. There are no longer any Jews in Lithuania except the working Jews and their families, whose approximate totals are as follows: 4,500 in Schaulen, 15,000 in Kauen, and 15,000 in Wilna. I intended to kill these working Jews as well as their families, but met with the strongest protest from the civilian administration; in addition I received an order from the Wehrmacht prohibiting me from killing these Jews and their families [...] The working Jews and Jewesses left alive are badly needed for the time being and I presume that even after the winter is over this Jewish labour force will still be badly needed."[46]

The policy toward Jews was implemented according to the orders and directives of the *Reichskommissariat* civilian and SS authorities in Riga. They were identically applied in all the four *Generalkommissariate*: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Belorussia. How then can one explain the differing death rates during the first period of German rule (June-December 1941)? In Lithuania some 80 percent of the Jews were murdered while in Latvia the total exceeded 90 percent. In Estonia the small Jewish community (about 1,500 people) was liquidated entirely, yet in the *Generalkommissariat* Belorussia, which included most of Western Belorussia and the city of Minsk, most Jews, numbering at least 300,000, survived these early months. The reasons are to be sought in the ability of the SS in Lithuania and Latvia to avail themselves immediately of the services of thousands of local people who volunteered to carry out the extermination of the Jews. In Belorussia they did not yet have the forces needed to carry out large-scale murder. Some

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[45] Nuremberg Document PS-3666.
[46] Yad Vashem Archives 0-18/245.

of the mass executions in the Minsk area, where over 35,000 Jews were murdered in the autumn 1941, were carried out almost completely by Lithuanian Police Battalion no. 12, under the command of Major Antanas Impulevičius, which arrived there in the first half of October 1941.[47] The extermination of the majority of the Jews in Belorussia had been accomplished only by the summer of 1942, when additional German Police and local police forces became available.

The Second Period: January 1942 – March 1943 – the "Relatively Quiet Period"

The anti-Jewish policy of the German administration in Lithuania during this period was heavily influenced by the increasing need to provide workers for the German war industry. It utilized ever more Jewish labour and expanded the areas in which Jews were employed. Numbers of Jews working in factories and enterprises outside the ghettos rose and the workshops inside the ghettos that manufactured for the German administration were augmented. In addition, Jews were sent to labour camps where they were put to work cutting peat and felling trees.

Working through the *Judenrat* and the Jewish ghetto police, German authorities increased the economic exploitation of the ghetto. The number of workers among ghetto inmates rose steadily, as women and youths aged thirteen and above were enlisted and numbers employed in services inside the ghettos were reduced. Jewish labour had the additional attraction for the Germans of being much cheaper than non-Jewish.

The Germans fostered the belief among the Jews that their work was essential, and, as the number of Jewish workers increased, so did the Jews' confidence that the ghetto would not be liquidated. The idea in the ghettos was work to survive; the more work, the greater the chances of survival.

However, even in this "relatively quiet period", the murder of individual Jews and of groups of ghetto inmates accused of various crimes continued. Jews were executed for purchasing food and bringing it illegally into the ghetto, for failing to wear the yellow badge, for possessing Aryan documents, or for hiding outside the ghetto. The Germans also executed Jews considered unfit for work. In July 1942, for example, 84 elderly people and invalids from the Vilnius ghetto were executed in Paneriai.

In March 1942, the areas of Oshmiany (Ašmena), Soly (Salos) Mikhailishki (Mikališkės), and Svir (Svyriai) in Belorussia, which bordered on Lithuania, became part of the *Generalkommissariat* Lithuania, Vilnius-Land *Gebietskommissariat*. About 6,000 Jews lived in some of the small ghettos in these areas. The ghetto of Kiemeliškės, which had about 200 inhabitants, was liquidated on October 22, 1942, and the Jews there were shot in the vicinity

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[47] BUBNYS (cf. footnote 31), pp. 15-16.

of the township. Over 400 elderly and sick people from the Oshmiany ghetto were killed on October 23, 1942.

During this "relatively quiet period", the decisions and orders to carry out the "limited" killing actions were given by the German authorities, but the actual shooting of the Jews was carried out by Lithuanian police units.

The Third Period: April 1943 – July 1944 – The Liquidation of the Remaining Jews of Lithuania by Murder and Deportation

The situation of the remaining Jews in Lithuania worsened during the spring and summer of 1943. It started with the liquidation of the last small ghettos in east Lithuania Švenčionys, Oshmiany, Mikhailishki, and Soly and the murder of most of their inhabitants on April 5, 1943. The decision to liquidate these ghettos had fallen in February 1943, a period of intensified Soviet partisan activity in Belorussia, close to these ghettos, and the German administration suspected that Jews from these four ghettos would try to escape and join the partisans. To some extent this was true. There were underground groups in these ghettos, and some of the youngsters had escaped into the forests.

On the eve of their liquidation, there were some 6,500 to 6,800 Jews in these four ghettos. At the end of March and the first days of April about 2,500 of them were taken to labour camps around Vilnius or were incarcerated in the Vilnius ghetto. The remainder were told that they would be evacuated to the Vilnius or Kaunas ghettos, and thus led to believe that the 2,500 people taken a few days earlier had actually been sent to labour camps and the Vilnius ghetto, and in time would also be transferred to the Vilnius and Kaunas ghettos. On April 4-5, the last inhabitants of these ghettos duly embarked onto cargo trains, but, instead of being taken to the Vilnius and Kaunas ghettos, they were taken to Paneriai and shot. This mass murder was carried out under the command of the German Security Police in Vilnius but the main guard force in Paneriai as well as the executioners came from the Lithuanian 1st Vilnius Police Battalion under the command of Captain Juozas Truskauskas.[48]

The chief of the German Security Police and SD in Lithuania reported as follows in late April 1943:

> "During the month covered by this report, the Belorussian areas incorporated into Generalkommissariat Lithuania [...] which are under constant partisan menace, became completely free of Jews. As a result we now have a border zone 50 to 80 kilometres wide which is free of any Jews. The Jews who resided in the areas in question were concentrated in one place and selected for work. Those who were

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[48] Ibidem, pp. 22-23.

found to be unfit for work, some 4,000, underwent special treatment at Paneriai, on April 5, 1943."[49]

In June-July 1943, the labour-camps of Baltoji Vokė, Kena, Bezdonys, Riesė, and Naujoji Vilnia near Vilnius and Kaunas were liquidated, and 800-900 of their Jewish inmates were murdered. In these camps there were underground groups that had made contact with the partisans, and a few dozen of their members had escaped into the forests. The main force involved in the killing of the Jews in these camps were soldiers from the 1st Vilnius Police Battalion and from the *Ypatingi Būriai* located in Vilnius. During that period the German administration in east Lithuania adopted a strong-arm policy against the non-Jewish population as well for disobeying the orders concerning conscription of labour and assistance to partisans operating in the area.

The fate of the ghettos in Lithuania was eventually sealed by Himmler's order of June 21, 1943, to liquidate the ghettos in the *Ostland* and establish concentration camps for those people who were able to work. Concentration camps enabled much stricter control over the inmates and could prevent revolts, like the Warsaw ghetto uprising, which had been put down only a month before Himmler's order was issued. The immediate consequence of this order was the extermination of those who were unable to work; that is, the children and the elderly in the ghettos.

There were some additional reasons behind this order. The deterioration of the German military situation in the first half of 1943, and the lifting of the siege of Leningrad was a direct threat to the *Generalkommissariat* Estonia and to the entire *Ostland*. This situation created an urgent need for manpower in Estonia to build fortifications and roads and to manufacture oil-shale, and so Jews from the liquidated ghettos were sent there. In August and September, according to Himmler's order, the authority for the ghettos was transferred from the German civilian authorities and put under the exclusive control of the SS authorities. The ghettos were then turned into concentration camps.

The ghetto in Vilnius was liquidated entirely in September 1943, and over 11,000 able-bodied Jews (of a population of perhaps 19,000) were deported to concentration camps in Latvia and Estonia. Some 3,500 children, women, and elderly people deemed unfit for work were murdered, some inside Lithuania, some at the death camp of Sobibór in the *Generalgouvernement* of Poland. Another 2,200 Jews remained in four small camps in Vilnius, of whom more than a thousand escaped to the forests and joined the partisans or went into hiding.

The Šiauliai ghetto was officially turned into a concentration camp and its size was reduced. Of the 4,000 to 4,500 inmates about 1,500 were sent to

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[49] Documents Accuse (cf. footnote 24), pp. 271-272.

labour camps around Šiauliai, while some 800 children and elderly were murdered on November 5, 1943. The rest, around 2,000, remained in Šiauliai.

The Kaunas ghetto was turned into a concentration camp. Of the 16,000 Jews in the ghetto, 2,700 to 2,800 were deported to camps in Estonia at the end of October 1943, about five to six thousand were sent to camps inside Lithuania, and 7,000 to 8,000 Jews stayed in the camp in the area of the former ghetto. On March 27, 1944 an *Aktion* was carried out against the children and elderly people in Kaunas and other camps, and about 1,800 mostly young inmates were deported to Auschwitz or murdered in the 9th Fort of Kaunas. Some 200 children from the camps in Vilnius were attached to the transport sent to Auschwitz.

The result of Himmler's order of June 21 was the total liquidation of the Vilnius Ghetto in September 1943. Most of the inmates in the Kaunas and Šiauliai ghettos remained in those places, although the ghettos now became concentration camps.

If Himmler's order was supposed to relate equally to all the ghettos in Lithuania, why did the fate of the Vilnius ghetto differ? The answer is to be sought in reports of the chief of German Security Police and SD in Lithuania issued on September 1, 1943:

> "In order to prevent panic among the Jews from reaching a climax, which might cause resistance and mass flight, it was agreed with the SS Economic Main Office [which was in charge of the concentration camps] and the police that it was necessary in the first place to remove the Jews from Vilnius."[50]

This report related to the situation preceding the liquidation of the Vilnius Ghetto. A report written exactly a month later reads as follows: "Due to well-known problems in the Vilnius ghetto it was completely evacuated. Several times it was necessary to use force to smash the serious resistance of the Jews. Our establishment sustained losses in the last action."[51]

The Vilnius ghetto, contrary to counterparts in Kaunas and Šiauliai, was considered by the German authorities to be a nest of Jewish resistance. Therefore it was liquidated quickly and by surprise in order to prevent greater resistance or mass escape.

In the last eighteen months of German occupation, especially after the Stalingrad defeat, the Lithuanian people gradually became disillusioned and their relations with the German occupation regime deteriorated. Willingness to collaborate with German authorities diminished, but unfortunately readiness to assist the remnants of Lithuanian Jewry did not significantly increase.

Before their retreat the Germans disbanded all the camps in Lithuania, in the course of which some of the Jewish inmates were murdered and others evacuated. About 2,000 of the remaining Jews in the camps in Vilnius were taken to Paneriai on July 2 and 3, 1944, and shot there. From Kaunas,

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[50] ARAD (cf. footnote 3), p. 439.

[51] Ibidem, p. 440.

Šiauliai, and other camps the Jews were deported to Stutthof in West Prussia and from there to camps deeper in Germany in the first half of July 1944. In Kaunas about 1,500 Jews who went into hiding in the area of the former ghetto were killed when German soldiers, before the retreat of July 12-14, burned down or blew up the houses in which they were hiding. Of the thousands of Lithuanian Jews who were deported to Latvia and Estonia in August-October 1943, part of them were murdered and part were evacuated through the Baltic Sea to Stutthof and other camps in Germany in August-September 1944. In the camps of Lagedi and Klooga in Estonia about 3,000 Jews – almost all of them Lithuanian Jews – were murdered by the German SS guards on September 18-19, 1944. That was a mere six days before the arrival of Soviet troops. Many of the Jews evacuated to Germany died or were murdered in other camps or on death marches.

Summary

According to estimates, some 6,000 to 6,500 Lithuanian Jews who were evacuated from the Baltic States on the eve of the German retreat survived in Germany. About 1,700 Jews survived in Lithuania, some 900 as partisans in the forests and the rest in hiding or with the help of Aryan documents. Some of them were aided by local people, later honored as "Righteous Among the Nations".[52]

Out of the 203,000 to 207,000 Jews who had remained in Lithuania under German occupation, less than five percent survived; among them, less than one percent within Lithuania and in the forests of West Belorussia. This percentage of surviving Jews was one of the lowest in Europe under German occupation. This distinction can be explained by the wide-scale collaboration of the local people with the Germans; many enlisted voluntarily in the police units that carried out the murder actions against the Lithuanian Jews and participated in the killings of Jews in Belorussia, the Ukraine, and the *Generalgouvernement* of Poland.

Of about 15,000 Lithuanian Jews who were deported or escaped to the Soviet Union, some 12,000 survived. Most of those who perished were soldiers in the 16th Lithuanian Division in the Soviet army and fell in battle.

The glorious history of so many generations of Lithuanian Jewry, with its famous religious and secular institutions, thus met a tragic end in the years 1941-1944.

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[52] These numbers are based on the following estimates: There were about 1,000-1,100 Jewish partisans (600-650 from the Vilnius ghetto, 250-300 from the Kaunas ghetto, 35-40 from the Švenčionys ghetto, and over 100 from other localities). About 150-200 of them perished in the forests.

Zusammenfassung

Die Ermordung der Juden im deutsch-besetzten Litauen (1941-1944)

Der Autor behandelt die Chronologie, den Umfang und den Ablauf der Ermordung der Juden in Litauen unter deutscher Besatzung, wobei er sich insbesondere auf die Rolle litauischer Kollaborateure konzentriert.

Die Vernichtung der litauischen Juden fand in drei Phasen statt. Bereits während der ersten Phase (vom deutschen Einmarsch in Litauen am 22. Juni 1941 bis zum Dezember des selben Jahres) wurden rund 80 Prozent der mehr als 200 000 unter deutsche Besatzung geratenen Juden ermordet. Ein Teil von ihnen fiel schon in den ersten Tagen der Besatzung Pogromen zum Opfer, die in der Regel freiwillig von litauischen antisowjetischen Partisanen und anderen bewaffneten Gruppen durchgeführt wurden, ehe mit dem Eintreffen der Einsatzgruppen von Sicherheitspolizei und Sicherheitsdienst (SD) in der ersten Juliwoche 1941 die geplante, massenhafte Tötung der litauischen Juden begann. Die deutschen Einsatzkräfte erhielten hierbei die volle Unterstützung der kurzzeitig bestehenden provisorischen litauischen Regierung und der ihr unterstehenden Polizeieinheiten.

Um den Jahreswechsel 1941/42 wurde die massenhafte Tötung der Juden, die seit Mitte August auch Frauen, Kinder und alte Männer erfaßt hatte, vor dem Hintergrund des steigenden Bedarfs an Zwangsarbeitskräften in der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft weitgehend ausgesetzt. Diese zweite, vergleichsweise „ruhige" Phase endete im April 1943, als mit der Liquidierung der Ghettos in den litauischen Städten und der Überführung der arbeitsfähigen jüdischen Bewohner in Konzentrationslager begonnen wurde. Vor dem Rückzug der deutschen Truppen im Juli 1944 wurden auch diese Lager aufgelöst und die verbliebenen Insassen umgebracht oder in andere Lager deportiert.

Daß insgesamt nicht einmal fünf Prozent der sich zum Zeitpunkt des deutschen Einmarschs in Litauen aufhaltenden Juden überlebten – eine der niedrigsten Raten in den besetzten Ländern Europas –, wird erst angesichts der bereitwilligen Kollaboration großer Teile der einheimischen litauischen Bevölkerung mit den deutschen Einsatzkräften recht verständlich.