

THE BATTALIONS OF DEATH AND DESTRUCTION by Adv. Joseph A. Melamed

On June 28, 1941, six days after the Lithuanian Activist Front (L.A.F) sponsored "Provisional Government" established the Partisan headquarters in Kaunas and dispatched the partisans to "deal" with the Jews of Lithuania, the German military command decided to relieve the Partisans of Kaunas and Vilnius of their weapons. This action was taken after six bloody days during which the partisans went on the rampage and in a series of organized and spontaneous pogroms, murdered and raped thousands of Jews and looted their property. Many others were marched to the forts outside Kaunas and murdered there. Even the Germans found the unrestrained cruelty and brutality demonstrated in public by Lithuanians abhorrent. This led to the decision to disband the partisan groups and replace them with regular police battalions, who would deal with the "Jewish problem" more efficiently under the supervision and instruction of the appropriate authorities.

There were many reasons for this move, the principal one being that local Lithuanians were dedicated and dependable and as such, could be relied on to carry out the task as efficiently and studiously as possible. Specifically, the Germans were keen to halt the popular partisan practice of carrying out pogroms against Jews in broad daylight in full view of the local population. Once established, the battalions would also be used in other activities related to the war effort. The Lithuanians, on the other hand, saw the establishment of the battalions as the nucleus of an independent army in the newly independent Lithuanian state.

The first partisan units to be disbanded were those in Kaunas and Vilnius, followed later by a substantial number of 'activist' groups, Baltarasciai (White Armband) militias and others. Most of the activists were recruited to the newly formed battalion units.

Following consultations between the military governor of Kaunas, Lt. Colonel Jurgis Bobelis, the Provisional Government representative and the German military command, it was agreed that the activities of local Lithuanian volunteers would henceforth be carried out through a network of police battalions. In accordance with a directive signed by Bobelis, acting on the orders of the Provisional Government, the first battalion was founded shortly after and assigned the number 1. Bobelis appointed Lt. Colonel Andrius Butkunas as commanding officer, with Major Antanas Impulevicius appointed as deputy CO. He also selected other senior unit officers, among them Svilpa, Barzda, Norkus, Krisciunas and Juodis. Initially called Tautos Darbo Aspauga – National Works Defense – the battalion's name was later changed to 'Self Defense' and then to 'The First Police Auxiliary Battalion.'

The first recruitment drive produced around 150 Lithuanian officers and soldiers, most of who were former 'partisans with experience.' They were divided into five companies and within three days, their ranks more than doubled, reaching 400 enlisted men and 38 officers. With the passage of time and increasing workload, two more companies were formed, drawing even more fresh recruits.

The first task assigned to the new battalion was the murder of Jews who had been abducted from their homes in Kaunas and imprisoned at the Seventh Fort. From that point onwards, Lithuanian acts of genocide were no longer spontaneous. On the orders of Bobelis, acting under direct instructions of the Provisional Government Minister of Police, Vytautas Reivytis, thousands of Kaunas Jews were abducted from their homes or off the streets in well organized operations. They were incarcerated at the seventh fort, regardless of their age, gender, political affiliation, or social status. Within the space of a week or more, the battalion massacred upwards of seven thousand Jews. This was only the beginning of a hideous killing spree which was expanded to other regions in Lithuania as the war progressed.

The battalion demonstrated an exceptional level of cruelty and sadism in the course of its work. The enthusiasm and sense of hideous purpose can be clearly seen in the following extract from the 'order of the day' issued by battalion commander Butkus, prior to the slaughter:

"Men, we embark on a period of creative work filled with satisfaction. We have been relieved of the red terror by the great leader Hitler and his glorious armies, aided by our own partisans and all Lithuanians who love their homeland. Having proved their courage and determination in the battle against the Bolsheviks and paid with their blood for the territory they liberated, we are now entrusted with the task of following in their footsteps as well as those of the volunteers in the 1919 war (also

against the Soviets). We do not expect any compensation for our efforts, as we are bound by honor to go forward with the work and struggle to build our homeland anew.” These words also indicated Lithuanian expectations that the German Reich would grant independence to Lithuania.

It is important to note that the battalion continued to receive its orders from the Provisional Government, through Colonel Bobelis, throughout July 1941.

A similar process took place in Vilnius, which was administered by a different military command. Under directive no. 1 issued by Acting Chief of Internal Security, Kostas Kalendra, on behalf of the Vilnius City Committee, a second battalion was formed with Kalendra as its commanding officer. Shortly after, the commander of German Police Reserve Battalion 11, Gestapo Major Lechthaler arrived in Lithuania and assumed overall command of the battalions and armed partisan units.

At the end of July 1941, almost a month after the establishment of the First Battalion, members of the ‘Lieutvos Nacionalistu Partija’ The L.N.P. and the Woldermarist Party staged a revolution of sorts against the ruling L.A.F. This was followed on August 5, by the dissolution of the Provisional Government by the German high command. As a result, leading officers in the Kaunas military command were replaced. Jurgis Bobelis was replaced by Captain Kvecinskas, with Gestapo chief Lechthaler appointing Major Kazys Simkus as commander of the First Battalion in place of Andrius Butkunas.

Expansion of the Battalions

On August 6, 1941 the First Battalion was split with the first, second and third companies merged to form the Second Auxiliary Police Battalion. Kazys Simkus remained in command of the first battalion while his deputy Antanas Impulevicius was promoted to commander of the newly formed Second Battalion, which was stationed in Sanciai a suburb of Kaunas. Captain Sapaga, a Woldermarist was appointed Impulevicius’ second in command. This was followed by the formation of the Third Battalion under the command of Captain Svilpa, and on August 25, a fourth battalion was formed with Captain Klimavicius as its CO. Three days later on August 28, the Fifth Battalion was formed under the command of Major Krisciunas.

Most the battalions’ new recruits were former members of activist, partisan and Sauliaist militias. Many of them had also previously belonged to underground cells organized by the L.A.F. in Berlin ahead of the planned German invasion in June 1941. Also joining the newly formed battalions were all the deserters of the Red Army 26th Corps. Nearly all the new recruits had experience of murdering Jews during the pogroms in Kovna and provincial towns in the first days of the German invasion. Other volunteers joined the battalions later on.

Every recruit was required to sign the following oath of service:

“I, the undersigned, military number....., military rank..... hereby volunteer to serve in the Auxiliary Police Battalion for a period of six months, under the leadership of the Fuhrer of the Great German nation, Adolf Hitler, who is now creating a new Europe. I undertake to carry out all orders and roles assigned to me and submit to the code of wartime military conduct and agree to be held accountable for my conduct to a court martial. I undertake not to disclose any confidential information conveyed to me, not to join any hostile organizations, nor convey any information to the enemy. Should I receive any information regarding the enemy, I agree to forward it without delay to my commanding officers.”

The First and Second Battalions were used primarily for the murder of Jews, mostly in the Fourth, Seventh and Ninth Forts outside Kaunas. From these battalions, the Lithuanians selected sixty men, who together with eight Germans Einsatzgruppen members formed a special unit named “The Mechanized Commando Unit of Haman,” under the command of SS officer Joachim Haman (and later became one of the most vicious and brutal of all the death squads operating at that time. see below). The First Battalion continued to recruit more volunteers after the transfer of the Second Battalion to Belarus.

Under the command of Captain Norbertas Gasenas who replaced Kazys Simkus, it continued its deadly killing spree at the forts and also participated in various actions against Jews of the Kaunas Ghetto, most notably the “Great Action” of October 28, 1941. After the murders at the forts were suspended temporarily, the First Battalion was transferred to Russia where it continued to mass murder local Jewish communities. It was also renamed the Thirteenth Battalion and a German officer was placed in command in place of Norbertas Gasenas.

A similar modus operandi was employed during the same period in Vilnius. Five police auxiliary battalions were formed from local recruits. Additional battalions were formed later on. Among the senior Lithuanian officers in command of the Vilnius battalions were Colonels Antanas Spokevicius and Karolis Dabulevicius. Among the battalion officers reputed for their cruelty were Majors Jonas Zemaitis-Vytautas, Misiunas, Kulikauskas, Daneitis, Pachiebautas, Jurksas, and Levizkas.

Once the formation of the battalions was complete Spokevicius and Dabulevicius published the following directive to their troops:

“To all the valiant soldiers of the auxiliary battalions.

Under the leadership of the great Adolf Hitler, the mighty German army has destroyed the forces of the Jewish Bolshevik bandits and liberated Lithuania from bondage and Jewish terror. We have now been given the historic privilege to fight alongside our German comrades, the finest soldiers in the world, and make our sacrifice in the cause of our civilization and culture.”

As in Kaunas the battalions were primarily employed to murder Jews but also occasionally acted as guards at strategic locations and storage depots. The Vilnius battalions were responsible for transferring Vilnius Jews and surrounding provinces to local ghettos, and then murdering them. They also collaborated with the “Ypatingas Burys” in the mass murders at Panerai forest (see below).

Once the Vilnius battalions had gained sufficient experience in the mass murder of Jews, the Second and Third Battalions were dispatched to the concentration camps at Auschwitz, Birkenau, Maidanek and other locations. There they worked as guards, herding victims into the gas chambers and then incinerating their bodies in the crematoriums. The other three battalions stayed behind in Vilnius and continued to murder local Jews in their thousands. The First Battalion, under the command of Colonel Jonas Junkevicius and the Fourth Battalion guarded the surviving Jews in the Vilnius Ghetto until September 23, 1943, when they were deported to Estonia or murdered at Panerai Forest. The Fifth Battalion guarded the railroads and assisted occasionally in guarding and the murdering of Jews. Eventually, some of the Vilnius battalions were used in the war against local Soviet partisan groups, suffering heavy casualties.

Several other points should be stressed with regard to the Second Vilnius Battalion. After murdering thousands of Jews in Vilnius and the surrounding areas it was dispatched to Poland to continue its work there. The unit was commanded by Major Jonas Zemaitis, who having proved his efficiency and diligence in murdering Jews, was rewarded by the SS and promoted to the rank of Colonel.

Although Lithuanian, Zemaitis was born in the town of Lumze in Poland and spoke Polish and thus proved a very able assistant to the SS in the genocide of Polish Jewry. At a later stage, the Battalion was transferred to Warsaw where, together with the Seventh Battalion, it assisted the German troops in destroying the Warsaw Ghetto following the uprising of 1943. After this task had been completed, it moved again to Lublin and continued to murder Jews at concentration camps in Poland.

In all more than thirty battalions were formed during the Nazi period (twenty five auxiliary police battalions, five construction battalions and several others for several duties). Their names were changed periodically, as were their commissioned ranks and enlisted personnel. Units comprising soldiers from different battalions were formed for special missions. Many soldiers

were killed in battles with Soviet partisans and Red army troops and sometimes complete battalions were destroyed in the fighting. Others were formed in their place and the ranks of two of the battalions were later bolstered by recruits from other countries.

These battalions became the Nazis most loyal henchmen and showed their exceptional diligence in the mass murder of innocent men, women, children and the elderly. The documents we have received show that these militias brutally murdered upwards of 400,000 people, excluding prisoners in Polish death camps, about who we have as yet not received any specific data.

Although, the battalions were all formed in Kaunas and Vilnius, as mentioned earlier, not all of them were confined to Lithuanian territory. Eleven battalions also operated outside Lithuania, principally in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and Poland. The documents we have received indicate that four of these were from the Vilnius-based network (Second, Third, Fourth and Fifteenth Battalions), with the other seven from the Kaunas sector (Fifth, Seventh, Eighth, Eleventh, Twelfth, Thirteenth and 256th Battalions). According to documents found in Lithuanian, Russian and German archives, as of August 26, 1942, 8,388 Lithuanians served in these battalions. These comprised 341 officers, 1,772 junior officers and 6,275 rank and file soldiers.

According to estimates up to that date, around 2,000 soldiers had been killed or had died of related causes, from which it can be deduced that the original number of Lithuanian recruits to these battalions was in excess of 10,000. The battalions were in effect an entire army, with its own trucks, communications equipment and field cookhouses. It even published its own newspapers and recruited priests to serve as military chaplains, some of who also participated in the murders.

This article will focus in more depth on four of the special Lithuanian units that murdered hundreds of thousands of Jews mainly in Lithuania, Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. These units were: The Second Battalion, which later became the Twelfth; The 'Ypatingas Burys', whose core field of operations was the mass murder site at Panerai; The Mechanized Unit of Haman, which murdered Jews in Lithuanian provincial towns and villages and the Seventh Battalion under the command the mass murderer Shamaska. Before dealing with the above, I will first provide some key information on several other battalions, chiefly those that operated outside Lithuania.

We have already mentioned the Second and Third Vilnius Battalions, which participated in the mass murder of Jews at the various concentration camps. After completing its gruesome duties in Poland and several changes in senior ranks, including the appointment of a German officer named Miller as the new CO, the Third Battalion was transferred to Minsk, where, among other things, it carried out more mass murders in collaboration with the Twelfth Battalion. Its ranks also included several Ukrainian recruits.

Also active in this region was the Fifteenth Battalion, which was stationed at Branovitch and spent most of its time guarding the Minsk – Vilnius railway line, although its soldiers were often recruited to assist the Twelfth Battalion in murdering Jews. The Fourth Vilnius Battalion operated in the Ukraine and participated in the mass murder of Jews in Kirovgrad, Karastin, Stalino and other cities.

The Fifth Kaunas Battalion under the command of the Lithuanian Major Krisciunas and the Thirteenth (previously the First) Battalion under the command of a German officer, were transferred to the city Dedavitzi where in addition to murdering Jews, both units fought alongside other units against Soviet partisan groups and suffered heavy losses. The 252nd Battalion was later also dispatched to Poland.

The Seventh Battalion was stationed in the Ukrainian town of Lisin and like the Fourth Vilnius Battalion, it too participated in the murder of Ukrainian Jews. Also stationed in the Ukraine were the Eighth and Eleventh Battalions, which were attached to the Twelfth Battalion in Minsk and were under the command of the two arch-murderers Impulevicius and Simkus, to whom we will refer again in further depth. The 250th Kaunas Battalion was stationed in the Russian town

of Paskov and its soldiers operated along a wide front reaching to the entrance of Leningrad where it too fought alongside other troops against Soviet Partisans. This battalion also suffered heavy losses and one of its officers Lt. Bronius Norkus, who previously served as deputy CO of the Mechanized Unit of Haman committed suicide (see article on this unit).

Nine battalions operated inside Lithuania. The Tenth Battalion was stationed at Panavežys. After carrying out together with the Mechanized Unit of Haman and local activists, the mass murder of local Jews and those from surrounding settlements, the unit was sent to guard and then murder Jews at other locations.

The Fifteenth Battalion, operated in Siauliai and the surrounding area. Its members also served as guards the Siauliai Ghetto, the Daugeliai camp and other smaller camps. They also carried out the “action of the children and elderly” together with a Ukrainian unit and a small number of Germans. These units were also sent on ‘special duties’ at locations outside Lithuania. The Ninth, 251st, 252nd and 253rd battalions functioned as ‘contingency units’ and recruited soldiers and ‘professional’ killers experienced in mass murders to fill the ranks of other battalions. Some of them were sent behind enemy lines after undergoing special training.

In addition to the above, the Lithuanians also formed a large cavalry unit and military orchestra and these too were often used on special duties. Also formed was a representative unit whose task was to appear at official functions. Only tall, well built men were chosen for this unit but they too were dispatched, due to the shortage of manpower, to assist other battalions in the fighting against Soviet partisans but more frequently, the mass murder of Jews (most notable of which was its role in the murder of the Jewish community of Eišiškės).

The Lithuanians took great pride in their military record and murders of Jews, as can be seen in the following excerpt from a letter issued by the L.L.K.S.- “The Freedom Fighters Association” from June 7, 1942:

“Adolf Hitler has announced that German forces on the eastern front have assisted all European countries in the region. He made special mention of the Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, Ukrainians and Tartars. We estimate the number of our volunteers at the front to be between 8,000 – 10,000 and therefore, relatively the Lithuanians have made a larger contribution than the other nations.

By the time Russian forces recaptured Lithuania in 1944, most of the members of the murderous battalions had fled the country together with retreating German troops. Those who were unable to escape hid in forests in Lithuania and organized themselves in groups known as “Zaliukai” (men of the forest), until they were captured or killed by Russian N.K.V.D. forces.

After Lithuania regained its independence in 1991, those murderers who survived the Soviet era by remaining in hiding or serving prison sentences were freed and rehabilitated by the Lithuanian government which saw no cause to hold them accountable for their crimes. Not only were they spared the inconvenience of standing trial in a court of law but they also became part of the ruling political establishment, wielding considerable influence on policy making in the new independent state. The ranks of these criminals were swelled even further by the return to Lithuania of many of those who fled together with the Germans, including several who settled in Western countries after the war and had been deported once details of their criminal past became known.

In conclusion, it can be said that the majority of Lithuanian battalions participated directly in the mass murder of Jews. Some battalions did nothing else during this entire period. Others were also assigned other activities occasionally but always returned to killing Jews, either on their own or in cooperation with other battalions, once their services were no longer required elsewhere. Apparently, whenever the Germans occupied in a country with a sizable Jewish community, they called in their “experts” to attend to the mass murder of such people.

These experts were usually the battalions from Lithuania. Documentation recently discovered in archives across Europe has revealed the extensive role of these battalions in genocide in Yugoslavia, Hungary, Germany, Austria and Italy. They also murdered British prisoners of war at a POW camp in Dresden. But they were nevertheless formed principally for the task of mass murdering Jews, with the key activities carried out by four units, the details of whom follow below.

The Twelfth (previously Second) Battalion

This bloodthirsty group was responsible for the largest number of murders of Jews, far more than any of its counterparts. It started as a company of the First Battalion and then split to become a separate unit named the Second Battalion later renumbered the Twelfth. Its commander was the infamous Lithuanian major Antanas Impulevicius who was originally deputy commander of the First Battalion and became infamous as a vicious sadist and the executor of the bloody orders issued jointly by the Provisional Government and SS. He remained commander of the unit until it disbanded shortly before the Red army reoccupied Lithuania.

At the peak of its activities the battalion had a complement of more than 1,000 men, 80 of who were officers. Impulevicius was born in 1907 and served in the staff headquarters of the Lithuanian army during the Smetona regime, reaching the rank of major. As soon as it had been formed, the battalion began its murderous killing spree against the Jews of Kaunas, carrying out mass murders at the Fourth, Seventh and Ninth Forts.

After approximately three months, during which it murdered thousands of Jews and gained experience in conducting organized acts of genocide, the battalion was transferred to Minsk in Belarus. Its mission there was to conduct 'secret operations' beginning October 6, 1941. By this time the battalion comprised 487 men, including 23 officers. On October 4, before they left Lithuania, Impulevicius issued a directive to his men, which read as follows:

"Soldiers, I address you, as former partisans. On the instructions of our great leader Adolf Hitler, you will participate in the final solution and the liquidation of the Jewish Bolsheviks. On October 6, you will be stationed in the region of Minsk-Borisov-Slutzk where you will represent the people of Lithuania."

The first mission of the battalion was the murder of the Jews of Minsk who had been arrested and imprisoned in the city ghetto. The work was carried out with extreme cruelty and within a number of days, 11,000 Jews had been murdered. The battalion did not waste time and once its work in Minsk was complete, several companies moved on to other towns and cities in Belarus (although the battalion headquarters remained in Minsk).

On October 8, they murdered the Jews of the town of Doker (Pukhovitz District); on October 10-11 they murdered around 1,300 Jews in the town of Smilvitz. They then moved on to murder almost 1,000 Jews in Keidanova on October 21 and moved on from there to the ghetto at Slutsk, where on October 28-29, they murdered around 5,000 Jews. They then moved on to the town of Nasviz where over the following two days, they murdered around 1,500 local Jews. On November 10, they murdered nearly 8,000 Jews at the Borisov Ghetto (in the Minsk region) and then went on to murder a further 3,000 Jews at the Kletzk Ghetto and 1,000 Jews from the town of Berezin (both in the Minsk region).

In addition to murdering Jews, the battalion also killed more than 2,000 communists, prisoners of war and partisans, hanging scores of them. According to documents introduced at war crimes trials held at the end of the war, during the five weeks from October 6 through November 15, 1941, the battalion murdered 34,401 men, women and children. These murders were carried out with such extreme cruelty that even local German officers were nauseated by them and objected to the battalion's presence, complaining profusely to their superiors. The German commissar wrote a strongly worded letter to the German high command describing the barbaric behavior of the battalion during the murder of Slutsk Jews and concluded his letter with a request, "in future, I beg you, keep this battalion away from me."

Despite these protests, the work of the Lithuanian battalions, particularly the Twelfth Battalion, was a source of great satisfaction to senior officials in Berlin, especially Himmler and Heydrich who ordered

that the battalions be expanded and integrated into the framework of SS and German security units. Having already achieved notoriety in Germany for its “efficiency” the Twelfth Battalion was cited for its work and transferred from the local command of Captain Lechaler to the direct command of General Engel, head of the German security service in Lithuania.

The battalion spent more than a year outside Lithuania, leaving a trail of devastation throughout the cities of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. Eventually, it was stationed permanently at Minsk where the Germans continued to bring thousands of Jews from countries across Europe to be killed. This was a task for the “experienced” executioners of the Twelfth Battalion who went about their task with a gruesome efficiency, murdering everyone down to the last man.

Most of the officers and soldiers of the battalion never stood trial for their horrendous crimes. Some were killed in clashes with Soviet partisans and others were tried in Soviet Lithuania. The rest fled with retreating German forces and made their way to countries in the West after the war. Among them was the arch murderer Impulevicius. He eventually settled in the United States and despite attempts by the Soviet Union to extradite him, he lived undisturbed in comfort for many years until his death of old age.

he Special Unit - Ypatingas Burys

The Ypatingas Burys were the most notorious of all the Lithuanian units assigned the task of murdering Jews. It comprised 200 men who had already volunteered to murder Jews during the first few days of the German invasion. They were chosen for the task since they were already experienced killers and had a reputation for wanton cruelty.

The Ypatingas Burys was responsible for murdering most of the Jews of the Vilnius region at the mass murder site at Panerai. They were, in fact, the ones who selected the location and carried out the killings there. They began rounding up Jews and murdering them at the site even before the arrival of the German Einsatzkommando 9, which had been specifically trained for this task.

Panerai was a wooded area outside Vilnius and had originally been used by the Soviet as a storage site for fuel tanks. The Ypatingas Burys considered this a suitable site for mass murder and this was to be its principal purpose for the next two years. During the first few days of the German invasion, they murdered 300 local businessmen and intellectuals who they had previously rounded up and imprisoned in jails nearby. When the German Einsatzgruppen soldiers arrived they found this murder site and a group of enthusiastic accomplices on hand to carry out the gruesome task.

The Ypatingas men virtually never left the site at Panerai. The victims were brought to the site by another unit connected to the Ypatingas Burys, who ferried the victims in groups to the site from Lukiskiai jail in Vilnius. After suffering torture and abuse at the jail, the victims were transported to Panerai and murdered, following which the unit would immediately return to the jail to bring the next group.

According to estimates, the Ypatingas Burys murdered nearly 100,000 people, most of them Jews and buried their bodies in three large pits. The combined German – Lithuanian force operating in Panerai was composed of three separate sub-units:

1. A unit responsible for transporting victims to site from Lukiskiai jail. This consisted of local Lithuanians working in cooperation with the Ypatingas and a small group of German Einsatzgruppen members. When larger operations were carried out, soldiers of the Vilnius battalions assisted them in transporting victims to the site.
2. A unit responsible for guarding the site to prevent curious bystanders from accidentally straying into the killing area. This comprised mainly Germans who guarded the site perimeter against uninvited visitors, especially German soldiers and officers not involved in the killing activities.
3. A unit which carried out the murders composed almost entirely of Lithuanian members of the Ypatingas Burys. Very few Germans actually participated in the murders since there was no shortage

of local Lithuanian volunteers. The Einsatzkommando men usually attended to the planning and coordination of activities and also served as drivers.

The commanders of the Ypatingas Buryys were Lieutenant Juozas Sidlauskas; Lieutenant Balys Lukosius; Second Lieutenant Balys Norvaisa and Staff Sergeant Jonas Tomas. They were subsequently replaced as commanding officers by Lieutenants Mecis Butkus and Antanas Granickas (see list of murderers in article on "Panerai").

Thousands of Jews were abducted off the streets and from their homes, either at random or according to lists of names drawn up by the murderers, and imprisoned at Lukiskiai jail in Vilnius, from where they were then transported to Panerai and murdered. Later victims included Jews rounded up in the 'Vilnius Ghetto' actions as well as those outside the ghetto and individuals caught with forged identity documents. The task of catching Jews and transporting them to Lukiskiai jail was carried out principally by four groups:

1. The "Khapunes." These were Lithuanian volunteers who during the initial period following the invasion abducted Jews off the streets and from their homes and handed them over to the authorities for transfer to Lukiskiai jail. They received payment for each Jew brought in.
2. The Lithuanian battalions (see above).
3. Lithuanian civil police under the command of police commissioner Iskauskas. Lithuanian police played an active role in kidnapping Jews and also assisted battalion soldiers during killing actions in the ghettos.
4. The Lithuanian security police, "Sagumas", under the command of Aleksandas Lileikis and his deputy Kazys Gimzauskas. This unit's main task was to find, detain and hand over hapless Jews to the killing squads. It also attended to the gruesome task of managing Lukiskiai jail and savagely torturing the bewildered victims held there prior to their transportation to the killing site. So sadistic was the torture inflicted on prisoners that many died or went insane.

Local Gestapo and German security officials also assisted in rounding up Jews and transporting them to the jail. Often, when the jail was overcrowded, Jews were taken directly to the killing site at Panerai. Ypatingas members joined German soldiers in looting substantial quantities of victims' clothing and valuables. Out of the 200 Ypatingas members, only a few were caught and executed following the war. The others fled Lithuania together with retreating German troops and even continued to work at labor camps inside Germany itself.

Most of the mass murders at Panerai were carried during the period July through December 1941. An average of 300 people a day were murdered by the Lithuanian group which worked in teams of 20-30 men in each shift. At the end of 1942, the number of regular murderers at Panerai was reduced to around 50-60. Those who left joined other killing squads and continued to murder Jews at various sites throughout Lithuania, including the Ninth Fort at Kaunas.

As mentioned earlier most of the Ypatingas members never faced trial, even by the Soviets and, like thousands of other Lithuanian murderers, they still remain at large. The former Saguma chief Lileikis and his deputy Gimzauskas were both deported from the United States but by the time Lithuanian authorities finally approved indictments against both men, Lileikis had died and Gimzauskas was pronounced unfit to stand trial. The Lithuanians have no interest in prosecuting mass murderers since such an act would reveal the historical truth regarding the active participation by thousands of Lithuanians in the genocide of Lithuanian Jewry.

The Mechanized Commando Unit of Haman

This was another sadistic band of mass murderers, which participated, in the brutal slaughter of tens of thousands of innocent Jewish men, women, children and infants. It managed to kill the largest number of Lithuanian Jews outside of the main killing sites at the forts of Kaunas and Panerai forest, focusing primarily on Jewish communities in outlying areas, villages and agricultural settlements. This unit's

existence and functioning has added significance since its modus operandi provided clear proof of the involvement of the Lithuanian Provisional Government in the genocide of Lithuanian Jewry.

All the mass murders carried out by this unit were on the direct initiative and in full cooperation with representatives of the Provisional Government. These included area commanders, city mayors, local councils, Lithuanian police and local activists who previously had belonged to the Saulist, Partisan and White armband militias. They, as described below, played key role in the "preparation" of victims prior to their murder and also took part in the killing themselves.

It should be stressed that the ranks of the activists included people from all walks of life in Lithuanian society. Doctors, engineers, lawyers, teachers, industrial tradesmen, clerics, police, army officers, soldiers, civil servants, university students and high school pupils were all among those who joined the ranks of local activist groups when assistance was required in killing local Jews. Before relating the horrific murders it committed, I will first provide some background information on the macabre events that led to the formation of this particular death squad.

The German commander of this infamous unit had a name, which has unique significance for the Jewish people because of its association with persecution throughout the ages. He was called Joachim Haman and his earliest namesake appeared in the biblical scroll of Esther as an oppressor of Jews during period of Babylonian exile. Born in 1913, Haman joined the SS in 1938 and rose rapidly through the organization's ranks. By 1940 he had already been promoted to the rank of obersturmführer and was just 28 years old when he was assigned the task of forming the unit that bore his name.

Haman arrived in Kaunas several days after the launch of the invasion at the head of the Einsatzgruppen's EK3 Division. He also served as an aide to local SS Colonel Karl Jaeger and was ordered by General Stahlecker, with the approval of Jaeger, to form a mechanized commando unit. He selected eight German Einsatzgruppen members to assist him and began recruiting Lithuanians for his new unit. The primary mission of the commando unit, he explained to the new recruits, would be the **extermination of the Jews of Lithuania.**

he recruitment for Haman's own commando unit coincided with the formation of the much larger First Battalion mentioned earlier, and the latter provided an ideal source of manpower for Haman's venture. He recruited 58 men from the battalion's fourth company and appointed Lieutenant Bronius Norkus as senior Lithuanian officer with SS Sergeant Herman Rauca serving as deputy CO. Norkus had a reputation for extreme cruelty and Rauca went on following the disbanding of the unit, to assume command of the forces guarding the remaining Jews in the Kaunas Ghetto.

Most of the Lithuanian recruits to the Mechanized Commando Unit of Haman had previous experience of murdering Jews, having participated in mass pogroms and assisted in the mass murders at the forts of Kaunas. The new unit's principal task was, as mentioned earlier, the murder of Jews in provincial towns and villages throughout Lithuania. During its brief existence from July 7 through October 2, 1941 the unit murdered approximately 70,000 Jewish men, women and children at 54 locations throughout Lithuania (although Haman initially reported a total of only 43,677). These mass murders would not have been possible without the close cooperation of the Provisional Government's various executive bodies and the thousands of local activists.

The task of apprehending, arresting and imprisoning Jews at the various locations and then reducing them to a state of mental lethargy by consistent torture was a complex logistical operation that required time. Immediately following the forming of the Provisional Government on July 23, local police officials began collating information on Jews in local towns and villages and reported it to local area commanders who in turn, forwarded the information to the Provisional Government's Minister of Police Reivytis. All activities against the Jews were recorded in code and a detailed information base was developed at police headquarters in Kaunas.

On Reivytis' orders, Jews from local towns and villages were rounded up and transferred to key detention centers in the nearest major city. This task often met with resistance from local activist groups who insisted that they themselves be given the task of murdering the Jews. Provincial Jews were imprisoned at designated detention centers selected by local police or other authorities, in regional

cities together with local Jewish communities. They were usually held in synagogues, military barracks and derelict buildings in the poorest part of the city.

It was here that the victims were subjected to the preliminary stages of “preparation” for their deaths. This was achieved principally by starvation, vicious beatings, appalling exercise drills and indescribable abuse. This usually included the rape of small children, cutting off beards of senior communal leaders and many other forms of sadistic torture. All these acts were documented and reported to police headquarters in Kaunas.

Once the Jews were considered “ready” officials informed central command. If sufficient local volunteers were available to carry out the murders, the task was completed immediately. Where outside assistance was needed (usually in larger towns), police headquarters would dispatch Haman’s unit to help local groups but not before all the preliminary arrangements were in place. The commando was called in once the execution pits had been dug (usually by the victims themselves) and the potential victims moved to holding sites nearby. Local activists drove the victims into the pits and commando soldiers then proceeded to kill them. In many cases, local officials, among them, mayors, school principals and priests came to watch the killings.

Once the murders had been completed the Mechanized Commando Unit returned to its barracks in Kaunas. This procedure was repeated in most of the actions in which the unit was employed. The system was used to murder thousands of Jews at Panevezys, Ukmerge, Zarasai, Kedainiai, Kaisiadorys, Utena, Mariampole, Jonava, Raseiniai, Alytus, Zagare and other locations.

After the Provisional Government was dissolved in August 1941, the management of the Mechanized Unit transferred to the successor authority, the German-elected Council of Advisers headed by the Lithuanian colonel Kubiliunas. It continued to receive briefings from local commanders and issued orders regarding the murders of Jews in provincial towns and villages.

Haman left Lithuania at the beginning of October 1941, following the dissolution of his unit. A small number of Jews were still alive in Lazdijai and Vilkaviskis and they were murdered by local activists later that month. Haman also planned to destroy the Siauliai ghetto but was blocked by an order from the German Civil Command, which deemed the ghetto to be of economic importance and should therefore be retained.

Back in Germany, Haman continued to rise through the ranks of the SS and received his most important assignment on July 20, 1944 when he was ordered to oversee the execution of the conspirators involved in the failed assassination attempt on Hitler. He was also a member of the delegation that visited Field Marshal Rommel and offered him the choice between suicide and prison (he chose suicide). Haman continued to impress the Nazi leadership and rose to the rank of general. He was appointed senior aide to Kaltenbrunner and committed suicide at the end of the war, rather than face a war crimes tribunal. His Lithuanian deputy Bronius Norkus became an alcoholic and also committed suicide in 1942 while serving with the Twelfth Battalion on the Russian front near Leningrad.

It should be stressed here that the existence of the Mechanized Commando Unit of Haman was kept in such secrecy that no disclosures concerning its activities were ever made during war crimes trials after the war’s end. Five members of the unit, Jonas Krisciunas, Matas Lekavicius, Zigmantas Packauskas, Vacys Sirocenko and Pranas Taparauskas were captured by the Soviets and tried as members of the Twelfth Battalion. But they never revealed, during the course of their trial, that they had also served in the Mechanized Unit of Haman and participated in the mass murder of Jews throughout provincial Lithuania.

The Murderous Seventh Battalion

The Seventh battalion operated primarily in the Ukraine and became notorious for the sadism and barbarity it demonstrated during the mass murder of local Jews. Under the command of arch murderer Shemaska, during 1942 the battalion massacred tens of thousands of Jews from Vinitza in Western Ukraine to Kharkov in the East. With a complement of almost 700 men, the battalion joined Field Marshall Von Paulus’ army at Stalingrad in the winter of 1942 and shortly before Von Paulus’ surrender,

it lost half its troops in a successful attempt to break through the Russian lines that encircled besieged German troops.

The battalion was awarded the "Iron Cross" for bravery by Hitler himself and after receiving reinforcements it moved to Warsaw in Poland where it assisted local German forces in destroying the ghetto and murdering thousands more Jews at various locations. It later took part in battles against the Red Army Lithuanian Division in Latvia during 1944, once more suffering heavy losses. Following the surrender of German forces, Shemaska attempted to escape to the West, disguised as a woman but was caught by Polish forces, sentenced to death and hanged.

In conclusion, I wish to stress the fact that the Lithuanian Provisional Government was directly involved in the annihilation of Lithuanian Jewry at all stages, from the mass murder of Jews at Kaunas and formation of the battalions, to the systematic destruction of Jewish communities in the provinces and outlying regions. It is perfectly clear that there is no basis to Lithuanian claims that the Lithuanian nation could not have been guilty of any complicity in the mass murder of Lithuanian Jewry in the absence of any central government to organize and support such murders. Such a government did exist and the evidence confirming its active role is irrefutable.

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