

ACTIVITY OF JONAS NOREIKA (GENERAL VĒTRA) IN NAZI-OCCUPIED LITHUANIA

Historians of the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania (hereinafter referred to as Centre) examined the activity of Jonas Noreika (nom de guerre General Vėtra) during the period of German and Soviet occupation in details.

During the first year of Soviet occupation, the activity of J. Noreika is characterized by obvious signs of patriotic, resistance activity. This conclusion is based on his life facts, related with membership in Lithuanian anti-soviet resistance movement of 1940-1941, service in Lithuanian administration. On 22nd of June, 1941, as Germany – Soviet Union war started, the members of Lithuanian anti-soviet resistance movement moved from underground activity to armed resistance to Soviet regime. June Uprising took place in 1941. The formed Lithuanian troops started military actions against Red Army, Soviet regime supporters, seeking to establish themselves in the centres of counties, parishes until the German army comes. There is some information that J. Noreika organized the group of 12 fighters in Plungė parish, Mardosų village. The rebels, led by him, faced the Red Army next to Nausodis Village, along the homestead of Liudas Meškauskas, near the Stonaičių bridge (Lietuvių tautos sukilimas: 1941 m. birželio 23–28 d., Vilnius, p. 397). The members of June Uprising 1941 initiated the actions to restore the activity of governmental establishments, police structures, army, other social units, which had functioned until 15th of June, 1940.

The research on activity of J. Noreika during German occupation led to conclusion that it cannot be considered unambiguously. Information on activity of J. Noreika after uprising, i.e., at the end of June and July, 1941, is quite fragmented. There are some data that J. Noreika was working in Lithuanian commandant in Plungė. It was witnessed by priest of Plungė church Povilas Pukys, who was convicted after war, during the interrogation of 4th of August, 1945. He told that on the first day of occupation, commandant was established in Plungė. It was led by unknown military officer with the degree of captain. Two days later, this position was transferred to military officer Povilas Alimas (LYA, f. K"1, ap. 58, b. 34851/3, l. 15 a.p "16). There also is some information that J. Noreika resided in Telšiai in July of 1941. Here, he led Šiauliai Country LAF and took an active part in social activity. While leading the headquarters of local activists, he contributed to the criminal prosecution of the persons, who had cooperated with Soviet occupation regimen during the period of 1940–1941. On 30th of July, 1941, Telšiai commission with the leader of activists captain Noreika, Telšiai Country chief Ramanauskas, Telšiai Region Security Police Chief Čipkus, other persons adopted the resolution for three months of imprisonment for Jurgis Endriuška in labour camp (V. Ašmenskas, Generolas Vėtra, Vilnius, 1997, p. 24; Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje 1941–1944 m., Vilnius, 1973, d. 2, p. 286).

In summary, it might be stated that in July of 1941, captain Jonas Noreika had official relationships with two establishments – Telšiai LAF and Plungė commandant. There is some information that in July of 1941, Telšiai Country commandant (governor) Svilas and Telšiai County chief Ramanauskas invited captain J. Noreika to the meeting of Telšiai City intellectuals, which took place in Ramanauskas' room at the beginning of July, 1941, in the presence of 30 people. The meeting considered the following matters:

- 1) organization of celebration for liberation from Bolsheviks;
- 2) preparation of rally resolution;
- 3) organization of rally on the first Sunday of July (first Sunday was 6th of July, 1941). The committee of 12 persons was elected for organization of celebration, one of members of which was J. Noreika. He prepared resolution, whereby Telšiai residents welcome the Provisional Government of Lithuania, led by Prof. J. Ambrazevičius, and express their trust in it. During rally, J. Noreika spoke by highlighting the harm, made by Soviets to Lithuanian nation, by arguing that Soviets will lose the war, that Lithuania will be free and independent. The resolution was read during rally, and organizers collected approximately 300 signatures below the resolution. Then, the resolution was brought to Kaunas and handed to Provisional Government, i.e., Prime Minister J. Ambrazevičius (V. Ašmenskas, Generolas Vėtra, Vilnius, 1997, p. 24–25; LYA, f. K"1, ap. 58, b. 9792/3, t. 1, l. 125–127).

At the end of July, 1941, while visiting Kaunas, J. Noreika met the former colonel of Lithuanian army Šlepetys, who then was the Minister of Interior of the Provisional Government. J. Noreika had known him since his service in Lithuanian army. The Minister offered J. Noreika to hold the position of Šiauliai County chief. He agreed and Šlepetys immediately signed the order for his appointment to this position. Next day, J. Noreika went to Šiauliai and took over the position of County chief from Ignas Urbaitis on 3rd of August, 1941 (LYA, f. K"1, ap. 58, b. 9792/3, t. 1, l. 127–128). According to other data, he started holding the position of County chief from 5th of August (LCVA, f. R"1099, ap. 1, b. 1, l. 107).

From the first days of occupation, Nazi regimen started implemented the policy of Jewish persecution and extermination, which had been pre-planned before war, in Lithuania. From the end of June, 1941 till the middle of September, 1941, first Jews were isolated, i.e., brought to temporary concentration camps, small ghettos in province, large ghettos in Vilnius, Kaunas, Šiauliai. Some days or weeks later, Jews destruction operations used to take place. Nazi succeeded to involve a part of national residents, working in civil administration, various positions of Lithuanian police, in the persecution and destruction of Jews. However, the repeated detailed research, carried out by historians of the Centre, failed to confirm the statements, presented in memoirs of Aleksandras Pakalniškis, who had worked in Plungė commandant, that J. Noreika was a member of mass destruction operations of Jews. On 15-16th of July, 1941, in Telšiai Country, Plungė Parish, Kaušėnai Village, Rudelis mountain (4 km north west from Plungė, 600 m from Plungė-Kretinga road), 1800 people were killed (Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje (1941–1944 m.), Vilnius, 1973, d. 2, p. 409). Pakalniškis writes: "On the night of 12-13 July all the Jews of Plungė were murdered, including the women and children. Before that, they were locked up in synagogues, whence they were taken in small groups every night to the forest and shot. On July 12th several who had escaped lit fires in the city in three places. When the spread of the fire was halted, the massacres began. They continued all night until the next day, Sunday afternoon. During *summa* [Lithuanian Catholic week of prayers for the welfare of the parish] the last Jews of Plungė were buried. I worked in the office of the Plungė kommandant for several days before the massacre. Captain Noreika was the kommandant. There were more Lithuanian officers at the Kommandatur, including captain Vensclauskis from Juodeikiai. They mobilized the young men of the Plungė rural district, so they had a considerable number of armed men under their command. In Plungė at that time there were just two sickly German soldiers. When the fire was stopped, one of the two little soldiers came to the Kommandatur and shaking somewhat from excitement asked the kommandant 'What are you planning to do with those Jews locked up in the synagogue?' 'I already issued the order to shoot every last one,' Lithuanian kommandant captain Noreika answered. Out of respect for that little weakling German he remained standing." (A. Pakalniškis, *Per dvidešimtąjį amžių*, Chicago, 1995, p. 119). Thus, according to A. Pakalniškis' memoirs, it turns out that these victims were shot upon the order of Plungė commandant captain Jonas Noreika. Following the analysis of available archival documents, historians of the Centre found out that the circumstances of aforementioned events deny the statements, presented in A. Pakalniškis' memoirs.

First. In the Office of the Chief Archivist of Lithuania (LYA), there are the case files of members of Plungė Auxiliary Police, other persons, convicted after the war, as well as other type cases (LYA, f. K"1, ap. 58, b. 15668/3, 4619/3, 832/3, 34861/3, 6964/3, 1236/3, 12410/3, P"14200, 2833/3, P"16600, b. 35402/3, b. 29105/3, b. 17051/3, b. 21015/3, b. P"16827, b. 21012/3, b. 11284/3, ap. 46, b.1254). The interrogated former members of Plungė Auxiliary Police and witnesses Zenonas Rudavičius, Jonas Buivydas, Jonas Šližius, Zigmās Daržinskas, Leonas Laurinavičius, priest Povilas Pukys indicated that Plungė City commandant was Lithuanian military officer Povilas Alimas (LYA, f. K"1, ap. 58, b. 6964/3, l. 24, 38 a.p., 45, b. 34851/3, l.15 a.p., 16, b. 12410/3, l. 15 a.p., b. 21015/3, l. 19).

Following their evidence (especially of priest Povilas Pukys), it should be concluded that J. Noreika had never been the commandant of Plungė City.

Second. J. Noreika does not appear in aforementioned cases as organizer or participant of mass massacre along Kaušėnai Village. The accused ones and witnesses evidenced that the organizers were Germans, while conveying and shooting of Jews was led by Povilas Alimas and his assistant Pabrėža (LYA, f. K"1, ap. 58, b. 6964/3, l. 18, 18 a.p., 24 a.p., 76 a.p., b. 15668/3, t. 1, 29, 56, 56 a.p.).

Third. J. Noreika could not order to shoot Plungė Jews (men, women, children) at his own initiative. The historical research on Nazi occupational governing system allows stating that employees of Lithuanian police structures, who took part in mass destruction operations of all Jews – men, women, and children – were obedient executors of orders, given by German security police and SD officers, i.e., were strictly subordinated.

The named results of research led to conclusion that Nazi occupation authority failed to involve J. Noreika in Jews destruction operation in July, 1941, in Telšiai Country, Plungė Parish. However, the available archival data, historical papers demonstrate that the activity of captain J. Noreika during the period, when he held the position of chief of Šiauliai County, was related with isolation of Jews. The process of Jews isolation, which took place in Šiauliai County, could be divided into two stages. During the first stage, from the end of June until 18th of July, 1941, preparation to specific works of Jews isolation took place. A part of Jews from Šiauliai City had to move to the ghetto, established in the city, while other Jews had to move to Žagarė (Šiaulių getas: kalinių sąrašai 1942, Vilnius, 2002, p. 75). Ignas Urbaitis, who held the position of Šiauliai County chief in July of 1941, on 23rd of July, 1941, issued the document No. 6, whereby all Jews of County towns were ordered to wear the Star of David on the left side of chest, to walk and appear in public places from 6 to 20 h from 25th of July. The Jews from towns had to move to the places, specified by heads of districts and mayors of towns from 25th of July to 15th of August, 1941. Those Jews, who would not implement these orders, had to be punished (Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje 1941–1944 m. Dokumentų rinkinys, Vilnius, 1973, d. 2, p. 225–226; Šiaulių getas: kalinių sąrašai 1942, Vilnius, 2002, p. 72–80).

J. Noreika did not take part in aforementioned actions of Jews discrimination and isolation because he took over the position of Šiauliai County chief from I. Urbutis on 3rd (5th?) of August, 1941. On the second half of August, 1941, the letters, signed by Šiauliai County chief J. Noreika, appeared. They were related with isolation of Jews.

On 13th of August, Reichskommissar of Reichskommissariat Ostland Hinrich Lohse announced provisional directives on behaviour with Jews, who resided in the territory of Reichskommissar of Reichskommissariat Ostland. They specified that rural areas must be cleaned of Jews. Jews must be concentrated in cities or areas of large cities, where ghettos should be established (Уничтожение евреев СССР в годы немецкой оккупации (1941–1944). Сборник документов и материалов. – Иерусалим: Яд Вашем, 1991, с. 47–48). While implementing these directives, Šiauliai Region Commissioner Hans Gewecke ordered the county chiefs and city mayors to move all Jews to ghettos on 14th of August, 1941 (LCVA, f. R"1099, ap. 1, b. 1, l. 151–152).

On 22nd of August, 1941, J. Noreika's letter "To all heads of districts and mayors of secondary towns of Šiauliai County) appeared, where it was announced that Šiauliai Region Commissioner had ordered to move Jews, half-Jews from districts and towns, and accommodate them in one district – in ghetto. It was indicated that all Jews from districts, secondary cities and towns must be moved to Žagarė from 25th to 29th of August. Appropriate municipalities should take care of relocation. The lists of left property of Jews had to be delivered to county chief. Heads and mayors had to inform the chief on fulfilment of order until 29th of August (LCVA, f. R"1099, ap. 1, b. 1, l. 156). On 10th of September, 1941, his other letter "Orders to liquidate movable property of Jews and escaped communists" was issued, which was dedicated for heads of districts and mayors of secondary towns. The orders announced that one part of property (luxurious furniture, rolls of materials, unused clothes) must be stored until separate order. It was planned to dedicate a part of the property to schools, districts, post offices, shelters, hospitals, other establishments. It was also planned to distribute a part of the property to war victims and to sell at auction. Livestock and deadstock had to be rented for temporal tenants. Money for the sold property must be delivered to the cash office of county board (LCVA, f. R"1099, ap. 1, b. 1, l. 239).

No information and no hints was found in the examined archival documents and historical papers that J. Noreika would have been a member of mass massacre of Jews that took place in Šiauliai County. It should be emphasized that he could not perform these functions because German occupation authority used

officers of police structures, and not the officers of Lithuanian civil authority for Jews destruction operations. J. Noreika was the employee and head of civil establishment, and not of police structure. In summary, it can be stated that during the period of German occupation, Jonas Noreika did not take part in mass destruction operations of Jews in Telšiai and Šiauliai County. However, Nazi authority succeeded to involve him, as well as other officers of Lithuanian civil administration, in the matters, related with isolation of Jews.

It should be noted that during the period of German occupation, the activity of J. Noreika is characterized by anti-Nazi provisions and actions. Damijonas Riauka, the fellow of J. Noreika, who collected lot of information about him, noted in his publications that "Jonas Noreika did not divide the occupier to close and strangers. When asked how we should behave with Germans, he replied: "Russians are not our friends, and Germans are not our brothers". What is more, J. Noreika "together with 10 intellectuals from Žemaitija requested German authority to ban genocide against Lithuanians and Jews, and to grant the self-governance to Lithuania". In February, 1943, wrote an article "Current Germany", where he revealed the destructive nature of Nazi regimen to Lithuanians as well as to Germany. It was published in Šiauliai newspaper "Tėvynė" („Ūkininkas“, Nr. 51, 1994 m. vasaris, „Trimitas“, Nr. 3, 1996 m. kovas).

At the beginning of 1943, J. Noreika took an active part in contributing to the disruption of establishment of SS-legion in Lithuania. Being the chief of Šiauliai County, J. Noreika informed the general associate judges that he would not implement the orders, related with mobilization of Lithuanians to SS legion (J. Matulionis, *Neramios dienos*, Torontas, 1975, p. 221). On 23rd of February, 1943, J. Noreika was called to the head of Political Department of Šiauliai County Commissariat, who told that as a result of failure to fulfil the orders of German civil authority and because of tendentious article about the trip to German cities, he is dismissed from the position of Šiauliai County chief and arrested on 23rd of February, 1943 (LYA, f. K"1, ap. 58, b. 9792/3, t. 1, l. 168). First, J. Noreika was imprisoned in Šiauliai prison. Later, on 26th of March, he was brought to Stutthof concentration camp in Germany (LYA, f. K"1, ap. 61, krt. 15), where he stayed until 11th of March (V. Ašmenskas, *Generolas Vėtra*, Vilnius, 1997, p. 33, 35). He and other prisoners were released by Red Army. Then J. Noreika lived in Endau town. He was mobilized by Soviets to the Red Army as soldier. He served until 27th of November, 1945. After demobilization, came back to Vilnius (LYA, f. K"1, ap. 58, b. 9792, t. 1. 168–170). On 10th of December, 1945, was employed as jurist consultant in Academy of Sciences in Vilnius (Laisvės kovų archyvas, Kaunas, 1993, t. 7, l. 173). He worked there until arrest on 16th of March, 1946.

Following the data of criminal case, in January of 1946, J. Noreika with others established National Council of Lithuania (hereinafter referred to as LTT) as organizational centre, which had to join all underground organizations. Senior Management of Lithuanian Armed Forces (hereinafter referred to as LGPVV) also operated under LTT. J. Noreika (General Vėtra) was appointed as head of LGPVV in March of 1946 (LYA, f. K"1, ap. 58, b. 9792/3, t. 1, l. 149–150). LTT was preparing to organize uprising in case of the possible war, had issued several directives and orders, related with structure of organization. The main aim of LTT was to restore independent sovereign state of Lithuania, governed on the principles of democracy. The indictment criminal case (LYA, f. K"1, ap. 58, b. 9792/3, t. 4, l. 200–222) and judgement (LYA, f. K"1, ap. 58, b. 9792/3, s. b., l. 148–153) did not accuse J. Noreika of killing people (LYA, f. K"1, ap. 58, b. 9792/3, t. 4, l. 200–222)., On 20th – 22nd of November, 1946, Vilnius Garrison Military Tribunal found Jonas Noreika guilty, according to article "a" of RSFSR BK 5811, and imposed the death sentence – to shoot by seizing all his property (ibid, t. 4, l. 261–265). The sentence was executed on 26th of February, 1947, in Vilnius (S. Vaitiekus, *Tuskulėnai: egzekucijų aukos ir budeliai (1944–1947)*, Vilnius, 2002, p. 246).

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This historical reference was given to:

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