

INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE EVALUATION OF THE CRIMES  
OF THE NAZI AND SOVIET OCCUPATION REGIMES IN LITHUANIA

**The Nazi Occupation of 1941-1944. The Holocaust and other Nazi Crimes**

**The Persecution and Mass Murder of Lithuanian Jews during Summer and Fall  
of 1941: Sources and Analysis**

**CONCLUSIONS**

*Approved on 20 April 2005*

The Commission discussed the report submitted by Dr. Saulius Sužiedėlis and Dr. Christoph Dieckmann, as well as the appropriate reviews and a comment submitted by Prof. Liudas Truska and Dr. Barbara Mihok. The period between mid-August and the end of October 1941 constitutes the bloodiest period in the modern history of Lithuania. The Commission approved the following general conclusions concerning the June-December 1941 period based on the research conducted:

**1. Conditions and Background.** The Nazi preparations for a war of annihilation against the Soviet Union in the spring of 1941 and the subsequent occupation of Lithuania were the necessary pre-conditions for the Holocaust. Indigenous cooperation considerably facilitated the persecution, ghettoization and mass murder of the Jews. Anti-Semitism had become more influential in Lithuania in the second half of the thirties and especially during the brief Soviet regime 1940-1941, as indicated in the Commission reports of Vygantas Vareikis and Liudas Truska.

**2. The Stages of the Holocaust.** In general, the murder of the Jews in Lithuania falls into three clearly discernible stages of which the first two are analyzed in this report:

a) The pogroms and initial large-scale shootings aimed primarily at Jewish men before August 1941. The justification for these killings was the anti-Semitic propaganda equating Jews and Bolshevism, which fell on fertile soil. In practice the victims included mainly able bodied Jewish men of working age, approximately between 15 and 60 years of age. [On non-Jewish victims of this period see the report by Dr. R. Zizas]

b) The killing operations which engulfed entire communities from early August through December 1941 and resulted in the destruction of the vast majority of Lithuanian Jewry; over 40,000 Jewish men, women and children were subject to forced labour and extremely harsh living conditions in the few remaining ghettos and work-camps;

c) The periodic selections and murder of Jews on a relatively smaller scale in the so-called “calmer period” of 1942-1943. Later, during 1943-1944, the ghettos and work-camps were destroyed. Many of the Jews were murdered and others deported to Latvia, Estonia, Poland and Germany. Only approximately 9,000 Lithuanian Jews survived the war.

**3. Early Attacks: Pogroms and Organized Shootings before August 1941.** The first murders of Jews occurred against the background of lawlessness and chaos created by the war, the anti-Soviet rebellion, the retreat of the Red Army and the rapid advance of the German army.

Lithuanian, Jewish and German sources confirm that there was considerable anti-Jewish violence before the arrival of the Germans although frequently we cannot determine in sufficient detail the locale and time of the attacks. An indeterminate number of Jews suffered arbitrary arrest, rape and death as a result of attacks both in their locales and while attempting to flee the Nazi advance. According to the reports and documents examined by the Commission, most of the Jewish victims were killed soon after the arrival of the German military and the Nazi security police.

The largest massacres of the first week of the war consisted of both pogroms and systematically organized shootings, namely: a) the first killings in the border zones (Gargždai, Kretinga, Palanga, Skuodas (*Sonderkommando 1a*), Tauragė, Jurbarkas, Marijampolė and other small villages, carried out by the German Security Police with the assistance of locals and auxiliary police formations; b) the pogroms of 25-26 June 1941 in Viliampolė (Slobodka) and the killings conducted at the Lietūkis garage on 27 June 1941, carried out predominantly by Lithuanian irregulars with the encouragement of the German security police; c) the attacks on Jews in Vilnius, inspired by *Sonderkommando 7a* and *Einsatzkommando (EK) 9*, including the kidnapping and killing of men, but on a smaller scale than the atrocities noted above; d) attacks in Žemaitija, in the operational area of EK 2 (and where few contemporary documents are available), but sources confirm the attacks and killings of at least several hundred Jews in Šiauliai, carried out by EK 2 and local Lithuanian partisans.

After the formation of the Lithuanian auxiliary police, the killing of the Jews was undertaken by militarized police units under the command of the German Security Police, particularly EK3 and formally reporting to the Lithuanian Commandant of Kaunas. As outlined in the reports, the murders, mostly of Jewish men, which took place on 4 and 6 July 1941 at the Seventh Fort in Kaunas constituted the largest massacre of this period. Additional killings during the period of July to mid-August 1941 are also indicated in the documents. However, before early August 1941 vast majority of the Jewish community was still alive.

**4. The Campaign of Mass Extermination in Summer and Fall of 1941.** Beginning in early August of 1941 a rapidly escalating policy of mass detentions and shootings virtually destroyed the Jewish communities of Lithuania. The association between Judaism and Bolshevism which provided the justification for the killings of the earlier period was, for all practical purposes, abandoned. Jews were killed explicitly because they were Jews. The isolation, concentration and expropriation of the victims were the result of coordinated work between German and Lithuanian civil and police administrations. The campaign of extermination was directed by the head of the police in occupied Lithuania (that is, *SS und Polizeifuehrer Litauen*) and primarily executed by EK 2 and EK 3 of the German Security Police and SD with extensive support from the headquarters of the Lithuanian Police Department in Kaunas, local precincts, German and Lithuanian police battalion personnel and local volunteers.

**5. Number of Victims.** The precise number of victims of the Holocaust in Lithuania remains difficult to determine. The Commission has reached a common estimate that the number of victims was between 200,000 and 206,000:

- approximately 190,000 Lithuanian Jews;
- 8,000 to 10,000 Jewish refugees from Poland;
- nearly 5,000 Jews from Austria and Germany
- 878 French Jews.

During the first two weeks of German occupation approximately 6,000 Jews were killed in Kaunas. Adding the victims of the early killings in the border areas, in Šiauliai and other places, an estimate of 8,000 to 10,000 victims, mostly Jewish men, seems appropriate.

Until the middle of August 1941, that is, before the murder of whole communities commenced, the estimate of 15,000 Jewish men and 1,000 Jewish women seems reasonable. It is impossible to determine the exact number because of the lack of sources for some regions in Lithuania. In December 1941 more than 40,000 Jews are estimated to have survived, albeit temporarily, in ghettos and work-camps. The Commission estimates the number of Jewish victims between August and December 1941 to be about 130,000 to 140,000.

Shortly before the destruction of the ghetto in Vilnius, in September 1943, the German civil administration estimated the total number of murdered Jews between June 1941 and August 1943 as 156,000.

**6. Responsible Agencies.** A number of agencies and institutions expedited the definition (marking), expropriation, concentration and, finally, the extermination of the victims. The most important German agencies were:

- a) The German Security Police and SD structures mentioned above;
- b) The Wehrmacht, principally the 207<sup>th</sup>, the 281<sup>st</sup>, the 285<sup>th</sup> and 403<sup>rd</sup> Security Divisions and the *Feldkommandanturen*;
- c) German Police Battalions, primarily the 11<sup>th</sup> Battalion; in addition, the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 65<sup>th</sup>, 105<sup>th</sup> and 131<sup>st</sup> Battalions also operated in Lithuania and participated in the detention and murder of Jews;
- d) The German Civilian Administration (*Zivilverwaltung*), including the political and economic departments as well as the labour department (*Arbeitsamt*) were involved in the process of destruction.

The German agencies, which controlled the scale and pace of the genocide, used and utilized a number of Lithuanian paramilitary, police and administrative organizations in the persecution and extermination of the Jews:

- a) Elements of irregular forces which arose spontaneously or were quickly organized at the outset of the war;
- b) Units of the TDA (*Tautinio darbo apsauga*), later termed the Self-Defence Battalions, also known in the literature as the *Schutzmannschaften*, which played a significant role in the Holocaust, participating in the killings of Jews not only in Lithuania, but in other countries as well, especially Belarus and Ukraine;
- c) The Police Department headquartered in Kaunas and much of the local constabulary across the country;
- d) Agents and officers of the Lithuanian Security Police;
- e) Significant elements of the Lithuanian civilian administration.

Several of the subunits of the organizational categories listed above played a disproportionate role in mass executions, including the Klimaitis gang during the first days of the war, the *Rollkommando* centred in Kaunas, and the *Ypatingasis būrys* in Vilnius. At the same time, a considerably larger number of local auxiliaries took part in sporadic actions and served in secondary roles – guarding detainees, securing the perimeters of killing operations and hunting for Jews in hiding.

While it is difficult to quantify, the attitude and mind-set of the population at large towards the murder of the Jews was an important factor in the progress of the genocide. The Commission encourages further research into the contemporary attitudes and stance of the population towards the Holocaust.

The highest Lithuanian civilian authority, the Lithuanian Provisional Government (PG) and its cohort, the Vilnius Citizens' Committee, played a controversial, if less direct role, in the process of persecution and destruction. The PG's ambiguous position emanated from the paradoxical political morass in which it found itself: the regime, such as it was, claimed sovereignty, but never effectively exercised power. However, the anti-Semitic attitudes of the LAF and PG have been well-documented. The most comprehensive expression of the PG's official anti-Semitism was the draft of the "Regulations on the Situation of the Jews" (*Žydų padėties nuostatai*) of 1 August 1941. But the cabinet, even as it approved decrees segregating and expropriating the Jews, avoided endorsing public organized slaughter. The PG, which claimed to speak on behalf of the nation and more than once insisted on its own moral authority, did not publicly disassociate itself from the murder of Lithuania's Jewish citizens.

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