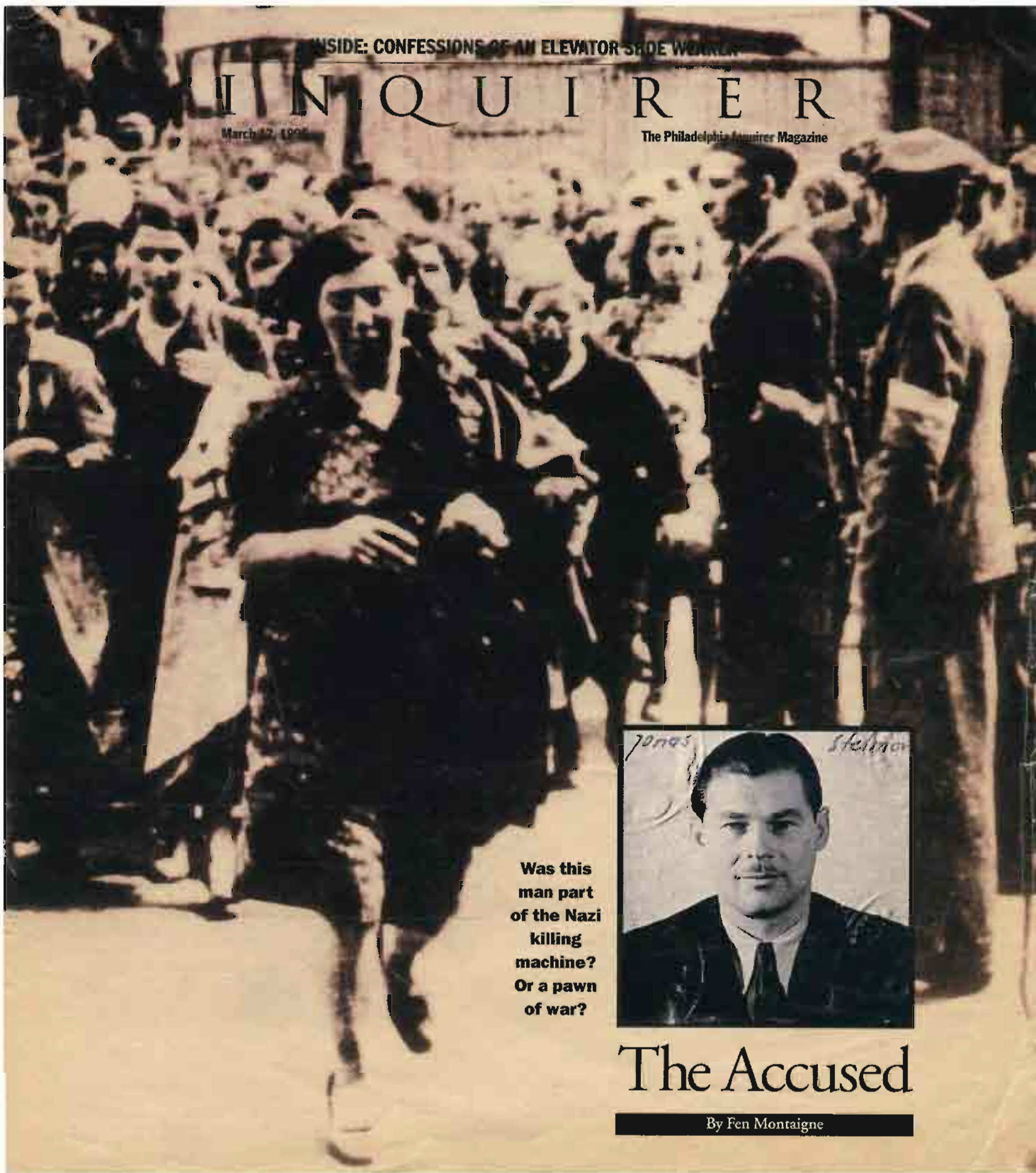


INSIDE: CONFESSIONS OF AN ELEVATOR-SIDE WITNESS

INQUIRER

March 12, 1995

The Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine



**Was this
man part
of the Nazi
killing
machine?
Or a pawn
of war?**



The Accused

By Fen Montaigne

Half a century ago, 200,000 Jews were The U.S. says he played a role. He says

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Lithuanian guards search members of a Jewish labor detail as they are escorted into Kaunas ghetto in 1941. Stelmokas (inset, in a 1975 photo) was a member of a police battalion that guarded the ghetto. Map shows three villages, Simnas, Seirijai and Leipalingis, where, prosecutors contend, Stelmokas' unit was involved in the killing of Jews.

murdered in Lithuania.

he's battling misplaced vengeance.



The war of Jonas Stelmokas

BY FEN MONTAIGNE

JONAS STELMOKAS OPENS THE door of his spacious Lansdowne home, unfailingly courteous as he ushers in a visitor who has come to inquire about the events of a lifetime ago. The 78-year-old immigrant, a distinguished-looking figure in a dark turtleneck, walks slowly into his dimly lit living room. He takes a seat amid the pictures, books and furnishings that symbolize the success he has enjoyed since coming to America in 1949.

With his blue eyes, slicked-back white hair, and closely trimmed gray mustache, Stelmokas looks like an aging matinee idol. His manners are courtly. But in a matter of minutes his decorous demeanor begins to

crack as he holds forth on "Jewish terror" and Jewish conspiracies. With his wife perched nervously on a couch opposite him, this retired architect and prominent member of Philadelphia's Lithuanian community blames the Jews for the unending troubles that have shattered the tranquility of his life in the New World.

After all, he asks, hasn't this Holocaust thing been worked to death? And, he wonders aloud, weren't the Jews themselves partly to blame for the cruelties Hitler inflicted upon them?

A half-century after Jonas Stelmokas fled his native Lithuania, the past has taken hold of him and will not let him go.

This month, after nearly three years of legal machinations and stinging publicity, Stelmokas faces deportation hearings in Philadelphia, accused by the U.S. Justice Department of being a cog in the Nazi killing machine that murdered 90 percent of Lithuania's 210,000 Jews during World War II.

The government alleges that, when he came to America, Stelmokas concealed his past as a lieutenant in one of Lithuania's police battalions, units that played a pivotal role in seizing, guarding and murdering Lithuania's Jews. The Lithuanian

genocide was part of the first phase of the Holocaust — before the advent of the gas chambers — in which approximately one million Soviet Jews were shot by the Germans and their local collaborators.

Prosecutors are seeking to revoke Stelmokas' U.S. citizenship and deport him. Stelmokas insists he is an innocent man.

Sitting in his Delaware County living room just before his deportation trial in U.S. District Court, he accuses the government and press of "lynching" him. He declines to discuss the specifics of the allegations against him, but offers a general, angry rebuttal of the charges.

Yes, Stelmokas acknowledges, he was a junior lieutenant in the Third Lithuanian Auxiliary Police Battalion. But he says he never hurt Jews, never shot anyone. His and other police battalions did not participate in the murder of Lithuania's Jews, he maintains: "This was between the Germans and the Jews." He says he didn't even know about the mass killings of Lithuanian Jews until he was in a displaced-persons camp in Germany after the war.

But a conversation with Stelmokas only deepens the mysteries of a case already riddled with them. In the fall of 1941, when his battalion was guarding the Jewish ghetto in Kaunas, Lithuania's pre-war capital, did

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FEN MONTAIGNE is an Inquirer staff writer.



Map by B. F. Birnik



Stelmokas

continued from previous page

Stelmokas fail to notice that roughly 20,000 Jews were hauled out of the ghetto and executed? And is it plausible to maintain that Lithuania's police battalions were not part of the Holocaust, when well-documented historical evidence shows that thousands of battalion members herded the Jews together, drove them into forests and forts, and shot them?

The Justice Department's Nazi-hunting unit, the Office of Special Investigations, has amassed documentary evidence that Stelmokas and his battalion were part of the Nazi killing apparatus. And in a musty file in Lithuania's KGB archives, there are allegations that he beat Jews and stole their property.

But there are no known living eyewitnesses to testify against Stelmokas, no allegations that he personally killed Jews. A half-century after the fact, the Holocaust is receding into history, as the murderers and survivors are disappearing from the earth. Soon, all that will remain of the people who carried out and witnessed the destruction of nearly six million Jews will be documents, and photographs, and voices on tape.

"I did nothing wrong . . . I never killed anybody, I never harmed Jews," says Stelmokas, his hands trembling slightly. "I had a gun. I never used it. There was no need to . . . We had nothing to do with it. It was the Germans."

Then, fixing a visitor with an intense look, he asks, "Fifty years later, is this Holocaust really interesting to you?"

THE FORMER KGB HEADQUARTERS IN Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital, is an imposing stone structure on the city's central square, which once was dominated by a statue of Lenin. These days, Lithuanians come to the cavernous reading room mainly to pore over files on relatives who were among an estimated 200,000 Lithuanians murdered or exiled by Stalin. Few come to read about their fellow countrymen who collaborated with the Nazis. It is not a subject widely discussed in Lithuania, or among Lithuanians in America. Both at home and in the Lithuanian diaspora, there



Jewish women near Kaunas (top) dig a mass grave for themselves or for male members of their group, whose bodies lie nearby. Above, Jews being executed at a pit in or near Kaunas.

is widespread denial of the extent of Lithuanian involvement in the Holocaust.

In the musty archives, among the tens of thousands of investigations opened by Stalin's secret police against Lithuanian citizens, is Case 37,198. The defendant in the case was Matas M. Lekavicius, arrested in Kaunas in 1949 for his wartime activities and for kicking over the bust of a Soviet Communist Party leader.

In questioning Lekavicius, those long-ago KGB investigators elicited some information that still echoes in Philadelphia today. Lekavicius, it turned out, was a member of the Third Lithuanian Auxiliary Police Battalion.

In his interrogation, Lekavicius recounted how his battalion was assigned to guard the 40,000 Jews of the Kaunas ghetto from its creation in August 1941 through November of that year.

The interrogator asked Lekavicius to discuss the battalion's officers.

"The commander of [my] platoon of the Third Battalion," answered Lekavicius, according to the neat, handwritten Russian script of the KGB interrogation record, "was junior lieutenant of the Bourgeois Lithuanian Army, Stelmokas, his given and middle names unknown to me, approximately 28

years old, a resident of Kaunas. Stelmokas, as chief of the platoon, fulfilled the orders of the commander of the battalion concerning the guarding of the ghetto and the arrest of Soviet citizens of Jewish nationality. He harshly treated these Soviet citizens, beat them, and stole their property."

Lekavicius was asked if members of his company participated in the mass shooting of Jews in Kaunas. He replied that they had, although he claimed he personally was not involved.

"At the beginning of September 1941," Lekavicius told his interrogators, "one platoon of our company returned from guarding the ghetto, and the soldiers said they had taken part in the mass shooting of Soviet citizens of Jewish nationality. The executions allegedly occurred at the Ninth Fort. . . . They did not say how many Soviet citizens [Jews] had been shot."

Lekavicius, who was sentenced to five years in exile in northern Russia for treason, died sometime before 1991, according to his case record.

On Sept. 26, 1941, 1,545 Jews from the Kaunas ghetto — 412 men, 615 women and 518 children — were arrested in retaliation for a reported attempt to shoot a German officer. According to the memoirs of three survivors

of the Kaunas ghetto, the Jews were driven to the Ninth Fort — one of a series of czarist-era fortifications in which Jews were murdered — and executed.

Now, nearly half a century later, Stelmokas says he cannot recall a soldier named Lekavicius in his platoon, and dismisses the allegations as false statements made by a man who would say anything to please his KGB interrogators. The case against him, Stelmokas insists, is a web of KGB lies.

"The Jews," said Stelmokas, "are doing the work of the KGB."

JONAS STELMOKAS WAS BORN ON AUG. 20, 1916, in Moscow. At the time, his father was serving in the czarist army during World War I. In 1918, when Lithuania became an independent nation, the Stelmokas family returned to its native land.

Stelmokas grew up in a Lithuania where Jews had been an integral part of society for 500 years. In the 1930s, Jews lived in roughly 200 towns and villages throughout Lithuania. In rural areas and in large cities such as Kaunas and Vilnius, Jews occupied elite positions in the community — doctors, pharmacists, shopowners.

Jewish life in Lithuania was vibrant. Most villages and small towns had synagogues, and larger cities boasted Yiddish newspapers, theater troupes and Hebrew academies. Vilnius was one of the great centers of Jewish culture and education in Europe.

As in all of Eastern Europe, anti-Semitism was deeply ingrained in the local population. But in the 1920s, there were generally smooth relations between Jews and other Lithuanians, although Jews largely remained an unassimilated, alien presence. In the early to mid-1930s, an increasingly nationalistic, anti-Semitic mood — fanned by army officers and politicians — took hold in the land. Jews were evicted from government and academia, and the Lithuanian Business Association worked to shut down Jewish businesses.

When Stalin invaded and annexed Lithuania in June 1940, the seeds of a violent, anti-Semitic movement were sown. For Lithuanians, the Soviet occupation would prove to be oppressive, although some Jews — given the choice of being swallowed by Stalin or Hitler — found Stalin the lesser of two evils.

Jews occupied positions of leadership in the Lithuanian Communist Party and secret police in only slightly higher proportion to their percentage of the population, about 8 percent.

But the myth arose that the Jews were the foundation of the Communist government; when the Germans invaded a year later, some Lithuanians would seek vengeance on the Jews as the reputed symbols of the hated Communist regime.

Stelmokas graduated from high school in 1936 and entered the Lithuanian army officers school in Kaunas that same year. He graduated in 1939 and was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Lithuanian army.

Kopel Beiralas, a Jew who attended high school and the officers academy with Stelmokas, said last month in an interview from Israel that Stelmokas was a "good man and a good friend... I never heard anything anti-Semitic from him."

When the Soviets invaded Lithuania, the Lithuanian army was incorporated into the Soviet army and renamed the 29th Territorial Lithuanian Rifles. Stelmokas was serving with that corps when Hitler attacked the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941.

That date is widely known as the start of Operation Barbarossa, Hitler's ill-fated attempt to conquer the Soviet Union. June 22, 1941, also marked the beginning of the mass killings of Jews in the Holocaust. Before the gas chambers, before Auschwitz, the German Gestapo and its local collaborators performed a feat nearly as staggering as the creation of the mass death camps: They shot to death approximately one million Soviet Jews.

This task was accomplished by four main groups of German mobile killing units, known as *Einsatzgruppen*. These Gestapo formations, following on the heels of the German army as it thrust deeper into the Soviet Union, rounded up and executed Jews. It was an enormous undertaking that could not have been accomplished without the help of tens of thousands of local collaborators in the Baltic states, Ukraine and other republics.

In Lithuania, for example, the Nazis' mobile killing squad — *Einsatzkommando 3* — had only about 140 men, including clerical staff. In the first six months of the war, they murdered 136,000 Jews. The Nazis were aided by local police and nationalist volunteers. But their main

support came from the approximately 8,300 officers and men of Lithuania's 15 to 20 auxiliary police battalions, about half of which participated in the Jewish genocide. Stelmokas' battalion was allegedly among them.

The Nazi invasion began on a warm, Sunday morning; within hours of the start of Operation Barbarossa, the fascist Lithuanian Activist Front issued the following statement from Berlin: "The crucial day of reckoning has come for the Jews at last... Not a single Jew shall have any citizenship rights or any means of sustenance in a reborn Lithuania."

On June 28, the Nazis ordered the creation of Lithuanian police battalions, composed mainly of former soldiers and officers of the Lithuanian army. Service in the battalions was voluntary; members were given uniforms, rifles and a salary.

Stelmokas joined the expanding police battalions — known in German as *Schutzmannschaft* — in Kaunas on July 28, 1941, became a platoon leader of the newly created Third Battalion on Sept. 1, 1941, and was on duty nearly continuously in Kaunas through December of that year, according to U.S.

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Stelmokas

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prosecutors. If the Justice Department's contentions are accurate, that means Stelmokas was in Kaunas while its infamous ghetto was being created. (The ghetto was sealed off from the rest of the city on Aug. 15, 1941.) Prosecutors contend that Stelmokas also was in Kaunas while 19,400 Jews were executed in six different "actions."

"Lithuanian *Schutzmannschaft* units played a vital role in the implementation of the Nazi plan for the death of the Jews of Lithuania, assisting in mass executions . . . and in guarding the ghettos," federal prosecutors said in a court motion filed in the Stelmokas case last year. "Conditions of life within the Kaunas ghetto were cruel and inhumane. Jews confined within the barbed-wire-enclosed ghetto were subject to death by execution and death resulting from inhumane conditions of inten-

tional overcrowding, inadequate food and deplorable sanitation."

In addition to periodic mass executions, the inhabitants were subjected to daily beatings, harassment, forced labor details, and indiscriminate shooting from the ghetto guards, mainly members of Lithuanian police battalions. The police units manned the 18 ghetto guard posts in shifts, with about 45 men on duty at any given time. Dmitri Gelpernas, a Kaunas ghetto survivor, gave the following description of the mainly Lithuanian guards, whom he calls "Hitlerites," in his 1969 memoirs:

"The Hitlerites would just start shooting into the crowd of people coming back [from forced labor]. This happened, for example, in October 1941 when the guards were not satisfied with a brigade that came back from the construction site of a garage. They started to shoot and killed seven people.

"It was impossible to imagine

what could come into the mind of the Hitlerites. They would shoot people who were walking with their hands in their pockets, who were not shaved, who were wearing stars [of David] that were not the required size. . . . In the evenings, shooting would start by the fence as they tried to prevent people who, under cover of darkness, tried to go through the fence and run away from the ghetto. . . . The guns of ghetto guards were constantly directed into the little houses of the ghetto."

In Lithuanian archives, U.S. prosecutors found records showing that Stelmokas and his platoon were in charge of guarding the ghetto on Sept. 16, 1941. Federal prosecutors said guard shifts usually began at 1 p.m. and lasted 24 hours. During that 24-hour period on Sept. 16-17, when Stelmokas was allegedly in command of the ghetto guard, members of the guard shot and killed two Jewish women and wounded five other Jews, in-

cluding a child, according to Lithuanian records.

In papers filed in federal court last year, Stelmokas' attorneys said there is no evidence of exactly when his platoon was on guard duty Sept. 16, making it impossible to prove that members of his platoon shot the Jews. In addition, Stelmokas' lawyers said it was "ridiculous" to conclude that Stelmokas persecuted Jews just because he was a member of a police battalion. His lawyers said the government had no specific evidence that he harmed Jews. In addition, the lawyers said, there is a serious question as to whether Stelmokas voluntarily served in a police battalion.

THE BIGGEST MASS MURDER of Jews in Kaunas — indeed, the largest, one-day execution of Jews in Lithuania during the war — occurred on Oct. 29, 1941. Federal prosecutors allege that there is "clear and convincing" evidence that Stelmokas partici-

pated in this "action," in which 9,200 Jewish men, women and children were murdered.

For the several thousand Jews who survived the Kaunas ghetto and the remainder of the war, the most terrible period of their three years in the ghetto was the "big action" of Oct. 28-29, 1941. By that date, more than 10,000 of the ghetto's 40,000 inhabitants had already been murdered, and the SS wanted to pare the number by another 10,000 to "cleanse the ghetto of superfluous Jews" and "useless eaters," according to Col. Karl Jager, the head of the *Einsatzgruppen* in Lithuania.

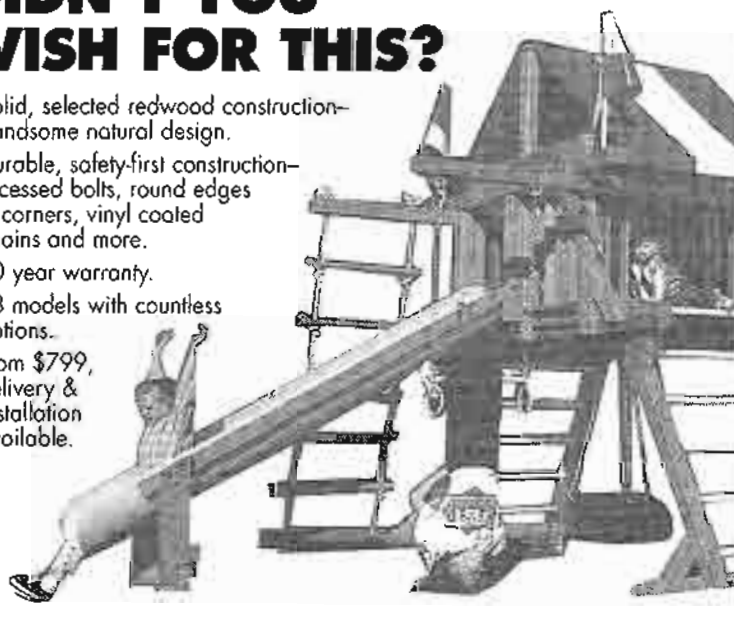
On the chill, overcast dawn of Oct. 28, with a light dusting of snow on the ground, roughly 27,000 Jews were forced out of the ghetto and ordered to gather in an open field known as Democracy Square. The Jews were surrounded by Lithuanian police battalion members, who, according to Gelpernas,

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Stelmokas

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marched into the square singing patriotic songs. Survivor William M. Mishell recalls in his memoirs that an "unusually heavy" contingent of Lithuanian battalion members was on duty that day, and that they were "heavily armed and mostly inebriated."

The Gestapo representative who would perform the selection of Jews for the execution was Master Sgt. Helmut Rauca, and when he entered the square that morning a wave of dread swept over the crowd, survivors recall. Until darkness fell, Rauca stood in the square as the Jews of Kaunas marched before him. With a flick of his finger to the right, he condemned Jews to death. Those sent to the left survived, at least until disease, hunger, or the next "action" claimed their lives.

Rauca separated parents from children, husbands from wives, sisters from brothers. When the Jews realized that the right side was the doomed one, the condemned wailed and struggled to be reunited with friends and families, only to be beaten back by Lithuanian and German guards. From time to time, Rauca would stand amid the frantic crowd and refresh himself with a glass of cognac or a sandwich delivered to him in a white napkin.

Early the next morning, members of the Lithuanian police battalions drove 2,007 Jewish men, 2,920 Jewish women, and 4,273 Jewish children toward the Ninth Fort on the outskirts of town. Those who lagged behind or attempted to escape were shot. At the fort, the Jews were taken in groups of about 100 and shot in long pits, the living often placed on top of wounded Jews who were still moaning and writhing. The shooting was carried out by members of the *Einsatzgruppen* and scores of Lithuanian police battalion members.

Federal prosecutors have relied on several pieces of circumstantial evidence to conclude that Stelmokas and his company participated in that "big action." First, they found records showing that Stelmokas was on duty in Kaunas two days before the action began and, in subsequent battalion orders — "which meticulously note the movements of officers," the government said — he was not transferred out of Kaunas.

Second, the scope of the big action was so sweeping — a two-day marathon involving the selection, guarding, transporting and shooting of thousands of Jews — prosecutors concluded that the entire Third Battalion must have been deployed. Finally, on the night of the mass executions, a member of Stelmokas' company boasted during a drinking spree that his unit had shot Jews that day, according to records in Lithuanian archives.

Stelmokas' lawyers, in court papers, argue the government's contentions that Stelmokas' company was involved in the "big action" were based on "pure guesswork," hearsay and flimsy evidence.

One of the great mysteries of Stelmokas' wartime service is a document, found by federal investigators, which shows that he, his company commander, and 34 enlisted men were sent to the "provinces on a secret mission" from Sept. 11 to Sept. 13, 1941. According to Holocaust historians, the phrase "secret mission" was often used for operations involving the murder of Jews. On Sept. 11 and Sept. 12, a total of 1,522 Jews were shot in three villages south of Kaunas. These murders were part of a rolling series of executions carried out by *Einsatzkommandos* and Lithuanian police in the countryside.

Although America's leading Holocaust scholar, Raul Hilberg, surmises in an affidavit that Stelmokas and his men were involved in the executions south of Kaunas, there is no proof that they were.

"The secret," Stelmokas' attorneys wrote in a brief,

"remains a secret."

In February 1942, Stelmokas' battalion was renumbered and transferred to Ukraine. It participated in "punitive expeditions" against Soviet partisans in Ukraine and Belorussia in 1942 and early 1943, and guarded railroads and strategic installations.

Later in 1943 and in 1944, Stelmokas' company was back in Lithuania, on one occasion shooting a Jew who had escaped from a labor camp, according to Lithuanian records. As the Soviet army drove back the Germans in 1944, Stelmokas was transferred to a Luftwaffe labor battalion. In late 1944, he fled in front of the advancing Russian Army to Germany, where he eventually wound up in a displaced-persons camp.

THE EXTERMINATION OF LITHUANIA'S JEWS was carried out with chilling efficiency, as evidenced by one of the most extraordinary documents to emerge from the Holocaust. It was written by SS Col. Karl Jager, commander of the *Einsatzgruppen* in Lithuania,

"Each time we look into that forest our heart stops," says an aged villager who lived in Simnas when its Jews were executed. "We know our Jews are buried there."

and in it he details for his superiors a city-by-city, village-by-village accounting of how 136,421 Lithuanian Jews were exterminated from June 22, 1941, through Feb. 1, 1942.

"I can state that the goal to solve the Jewish problem for Lithuania has been attained," Jager wrote, noting that only about 35,000 "working" Jews remained in ghettos in Kaunas, Vilnius and Siauliai. He detailed the difficulties of organizing the executions in villages, where local Jews were herded together and marched to nearby forests to be shot.

"The actions in Kaunas itself, where there were sufficient, reasonably well-trained partisans [police] available, were virtual duck-shoots compared with the enormous difficulties which were often encountered elsewhere," Jager wrote.

Today, only about 5,000 Jews remain in Lithuania, and the Jewish absence has left a haunting gap in the landscape. The old Jewish quarters of Vilnius and Kaunas are no longer recognizable. In the countryside, residents still vividly recall how the Jews who had lived in their communities for hundreds of years were wiped out in the blink of an eye.

Mykolas Stakliunas, an 87-year-old who was in the village of Simnas when its Jews were rounded up and driven to a nearby forest, said, "Each time we look into that forest our heart stops. We know our Jews are buried there."

The murderers, too, are dogged by the memories. Juozas Alexinis, who has admitted to shooting countless Jews as a member of the 12th Lithuanian Police Battalion, sat in a small, wooden house in the village of Lukseny and talked of the executions.

"I don't know how to say it, but these people [Jews] were at a loss, they were like a herd of sheep," Alexinis,

81, who has testified in war crimes trials, said on a warm day last spring. "They were going to their destiny without resistance, without even opening their mouths. Even I forget my feelings at that time. The only thing I can say is that it was really cruel."

"I just want to forget what happened, but it's not so easy. These people and these events just keep cropping up in front of me, and I see them again. It was horrible. I feel sorry for them. But I couldn't do anything in the face of this hellish machine, this inferno."

IT IS THE FALL OF 1991. AND THE SOVIET Union is collapsing. Television anchorman Jim Gardner is in Vilnius, recording the demise of the U.S.S.R. for Philadelphia viewers. He stands before the city's main cathedral, a symbol of the country's independence. With him is one of best-known members of Philadelphia's Lithuanian emigre community: Jonas Stelmokas.

Dapper as always in gray turtleneck and gray topcoat and hat, Stelmokas is beaming, describing the thrill of returning to a Lithuania free, at last, of the Soviet yoke.

"Jim, I said I want to go there, even for a moment, just to be sure this is real, that this is not a dream."

It is a crowning moment for Stelmokas, who over the decades has risen from a refugee to a position of prominence and respect.

At the end of World War II, Jonas Stelmokas had been swept up in the great tide of Eastern Europeans pouring into Germany in 1945 ahead of the advancing Soviet army. He stopped in several displaced-persons camps, finally settling in Hamburg. There, he earned a degree in architecture from Baltic University. He also met his future wife, a Lithuanian refugee named Julija Mikalauskaitė.

Like hundreds of thousands of other displaced persons in Germany after the war, Stelmokas wanted to emigrate to America, and in July 1949 he went before an examiner of the U.S. Displaced Persons Commission to state his case. He told the examiner that he had been a teacher in Seda, Lithuania, from 1940 to 1943, that he had been unemployed in Kaunas until July 1944 and that he then fled west. Later, in a naturalization petition, he swore that the only organization he joined in Lithuania was the Boy Scouts.

He made no mention of his service in the Third Lithuanian Auxiliary Police battalion or other military units. If he had, he would not have received a visa, for police battalions were on a list of organizations considered "inimical" to the United States. The Displaced Persons Act also forbade issuance of visas to people who had persecuted civilians during the war or had engaged in "conduct contrary to civilization and human decency."

On the basis of his representations, Stelmokas was issued a U.S. visa, arriving in this country on Aug. 31, 1949. He became a citizen in 1955.

In its effort to deport him, the Office of Special Investigations alleges that Stelmokas falsely obtained the visa and his U.S. citizenship. Under U.S. immigration law, the Justice Department must convince the judge that Stelmokas concealed his wartime activities when he obtained American citizenship. The Office of Special Investigations also is alleging that he participated in crimes against civilian populations — a deportable offense.

In the fall of 1950, Stelmokas entered the University of Pennsylvania, where he obtained a master's degree in architecture in 1951. His fellow students remember him as fond of bow ties, courtly, and hard-working. He never spoke of his war-time experiences.

"He was a gentleman — what can I tell you?" said Joseph D. DiLullo, who attended Penn with Stelmokas and later worked with him in the architectural firm

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Stelmokas

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of Bellante, Clauss, Miller & Nolan. "He was educated, gracious. He had a charm . . . a regalness, about him. If you asked me where he came from, I wouldn't be able to tell you. I thought he was Polish, or Slovakian."

"Jonas was very quiet, not pushy," recalled fellow student John Larkin. "He had a certain middle European look about him. . . . Everyone was in their shirt sleeves when they were working, and he always had a sports jacket on. . . . He was always in the background, almost like a ghost figure."

Stelmokas joined the Philadelphia architectural firm of Gilboy, O'Malley & Stopper as a draftsman. In 1952, applying for membership in the American Institute of Architects, he provided another explanation of what he had done during the war: He said that from 1941 to 1943 he worked as a draftsman in the Department of Health in Kaunas.

In 1952, Jonas and Julija Stelmokas had a son, Minga, who was born profoundly retarded. Minga still lives with his parents.

Gilboy, O'Malley & Stopper eventually became the firm of Bellante, Clauss, Miller & Nolan, a large and politically connected Philadelphia firm that did residential and institutional architecture. Stelmokas stayed with the firm for more than three decades. He never rose to the top of the company, but former colleagues remember him as an industrious, accomplished architect.

"He always seemed to me not as loose, as free, as everybody else," said Dominic Orlando, who ran the drafting room at Bellante Clauss. "But he was very conscientious, I'll tell you that. . . . He had a habit, like a lot of Europeans do, that when he'd leave you, he would nod his head a little, a slight bow. . . . The impression I got in a nutshell was that he was so happy to be in the United States that he didn't want anything that would kick him out."

His coworkers recall, as do his fellow Lithuanian immigrants, that Stelmokas did not socialize much. People rarely saw Stelmokas' wife, and almost never saw his son.

For four decades, he was an active member of Philadelphia's Lithuanian community; he was president of the Lithuanian-American Community of Philadelphia in the mid-1970s and head of the local chapter of Lithuanian war veterans. Like nearly all his fellow Lithuanian Americans, he was an ardent anti-communist, participating in a demonstration in front of the Soviet Embassy, making placards for Lithuanian independence day, and writing letters to local newspapers denouncing the Soviet Union.

"I never met a nicer gentleman," said Julia Danta, a local Lithuanian leader.

His fellow Lithuanian immigrants ask why, if Stelmokas had a sordid past, he maintained such a high profile?

In 1991, using newly opened archives in

Lithuania and Russia, the Office of Special Investigations began stepping up its efforts to locate and deport alleged war criminals in the United States. OSI obtained a list of previously unknown members of Lithuanian police battalions, then checked the list against U.S. immigration records. Stelmokas' name surfaced, and, following an intensive OSI investigation, the Justice Department filed its motion to deport him in June 1992. The accusations stunned his former coworkers and fellow Lithuanian immigrants.

"The man was totally demoralized and crushed," said Terese M. Gecys, a former president of the Lithuanian-American Community of Philadelphia. "He has just about dropped out of sight."

Gecys called the investigation of Stelmokas a "witchhunt." Her husband, Stan Gecys — a former chairman of the national Lithuanian-American Community — accused OSI of "scraping the bottom of the barrel." The Gecyses and other Lithuanian Americans said OSI is attempting to smear Lithuanian immigrants who might have served in the army or police battalions but had nothing to do with the annihilation of the Jews.

Prosecutors and Holocaust historians, though, say that Lithuanians here and in their native land have yet to come to terms with the scope of their countrymen's involvement in the Final Solution.

In recent months, the Lithuanian government and the Lithuanian-American Community of the United States have reported that roughly 300 Lithuanian collaborators "were involved in the murderous actions against Jews." But contemporary accounts show that in the first three days of the war alone, at least 300 Lithuanians participated in pogroms against Jews in Kaunas. Thousands of Lithuanians — perhaps more than 10,000 — took part in assembling, guarding, transporting and shooting Jews, Holocaust historians say.

The Lithuanian government and supreme court have rehabilitated dozens of people involved in the murder of Jews in World War II, touching off an international controversy. Since independence in 1991, the Lithuanian war crimes prosecutor has not filed any charges against those involved in murdering Jews, citing insufficient evidence or saying that the Soviet KGB already punished the guilty.

AGITATED AND BITTER, JONAS Stelmokas sits in his living room as the sun sets on a cold, sparkling day. He sees Jewish plots all around, saying it was a Jew who created the Office of Special Investigations and that Jewish groups feed OSI information, much of it false. He says the media, controlled by Jews, is inclined to repeat such lies. The deportation proceedings have ruined his reputation, he says. Lawyers' fees are exhausting his life savings.

Jews, he says, will have to answer before God for hounding men like him.

More than 50 years have passed since Jonas Stelmokas was dragged into the Lithuanian Holocaust. And still, he says, the Jews will not leave him in peace. □

Poetry Contest \$24,000 in Prizes

The National Library of Poetry to award 250 total prizes to amateur poets in coming months



Owings Mills, MD — The National Library of Poetry has just announced that \$24,000 in prizes will be awarded over the next 12 months in the North American Open Amateur Poetry Contest. The deadline for entry into the contest is March 31, 1995. Another contest begins April 1, 1995. The contest is open to everyone and entry is free.

"We're especially looking for poems from new or unpublished poets," indicated Howard Ely, spokesperson for The National Library of Poetry, "we have a ten year history of awarding large prizes to talented poets who have never before won any type of writing competition."

How To Enter

Anyone may enter the competition simply by sending in one original poem, any subject, any style to:

**The National Library of Poetry
11419 Cronridge Drive
PO Box 704-3081
Owings Mills, MD 21117**

The poem should be no more than 20 lines, and the poet's name and address must appear on the top of the page. Entries must be postmarked by March 31, 1995. "Each poem received will be acknowledged, usually within seven weeks," indicated Mr. Ely. Every poet who enters will receive an evaluation of their artistry by the judges.

Possible Publication

Many submitted poems will also be considered for inclusion in one of The National Library of Poetry's forthcoming hardbound anthologies. Previous anthologies published by the organization have included, *On the Threshold of a Dream, Days of Future's Past, Of Diamonds and Rust, and Moments More to Go*, among others.

"Our anthologies routinely sell out because they are truly enjoyable reading," added Ely, "and they are also a sought-after sourcebook for poetic talent by the publishers, recording companies, and the media."

World's Largest Poetry Organization

Having awarded over \$90,000 in prizes to over 5,000 poets worldwide in recent years, The National Library of Poetry, founded in 1982 to promote the artistic accomplishments of contemporary poets, is the largest organization of its kind in the world. Anthologies published by the organization have featured poems by more than 100,000 poets.

"We're always looking for new poetic talent," said Ely, "I hope you urge your readers to enter the contest. There is absolutely no obligation whatsoever, and they could be our next big winner."