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JUSTICE DEPARTMENT MOVES TO REVOKE U.S. CITIZENSHIP OF FORMER MEMBER OF NAZI KILLING UNIT

WASHINGTON – The Department of Justice has requested that a federal court in Seattle revoke the U.S. citizenship of a Bellevue, Wash., resident based on evidence of his role in a Nazi unit that participated in the mass murder of more than 17,000 Serbian civilians during World War II, Acting Assistant Attorney General for the Criminal Division Matthew Friedrich and U.S. Attorney Jeffrey C. Sullivan for the Western District of Washington announced today. Most of the victims of this mass murder were Jewish men, women and children.

A complaint filed today in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington alleges that Peter Egner, 86, who was born in Yugoslavia, joined the Nazi-controlled Security Police and Security Service in German-occupied Belgrade, Serbia, in April 1941 and served through September 1943. The complaint alleges that during the first nine months of Egner's service in this organization, it operated as an *Einsatzgruppe*, a Nazi mobile killing unit. Captured Nazi documents reflect that in the fall of 1941, Egner's unit participated in executing 11,164 individuals, most of them Serbian Jewish men, as well as some communists, suspected communists, and Roma and Sinti (Gypsies). In early 1942, the Security Police and Security Service Belgrade carried out the murder of 6,280 Serbian Jewish women and children. Prior to their deaths, these victims were confined in a concentration camp at Semlin, outside of Belgrade. In a process that continued daily for a period of approximately two months, the women and children were taken from the camp and forced into a specially equipped van where they were asphyxiated with carbon monoxide gas while being transported to Avala, an execution and mass burial site near Belgrade.

The complaint alleges that Egner has admitted volunteering to serve in the Security Police and Security Service and guarding prisoners as they were being transferred by that organization to Avala and to the Semlin concentration camp. Egner also admitted serving as an interpreter during interrogations of political prisoners. Interrogations conducted by the Security Police and Security Service Belgrade sometimes involved severe torture, and prisoners were often executed once their interrogations were completed.

“The Nazi unit in which Peter Egner is alleged to have participated was responsible for countless deaths and unimaginable human suffering,” said Acting Assistant Attorney General Matthew Friedrich. “By bringing this action today, we again declare our unwavering commitment to the principle that participants in Nazi crimes should not be afforded the rights and privileges of U.S. citizenship.”

Egner entered the United States in 1960 and became a U.S. citizen in 1966. The complaint asserts that his citizenship should be revoked because both his Nazi service and his concealment of that service in applying for citizenship rendered him ineligible for citizenship.

“The government alleges that Peter Egner served in a notorious Nazi unit that murdered thousands of Serbian Jews and other unarmed civilians,” said Office of Special Investigations (OSI) Director Eli M. Rosenbaum. “No one who participated, as we allege the defendant did, in the diabolical Nazi program of persecution is entitled to retain U.S. citizenship.”

“Allowing someone who participated in Nazi-sponsored crimes to continue possessing U.S. citizenship would be an affront to our country’s values and to the memory of the millions of innocent people murdered by the Nazi regime,” said U.S. Attorney Jeffrey C. Sullivan.

The proceedings initiated today are a result of OSI’s ongoing efforts to identify, investigate and take legal action against former participants in Nazi persecution who reside in the United States. Since OSI began operations in 1979, it has won cases against 107 participants in Nazi persecution. In addition, more than 180 individuals have been barred from entering the country in recent years as a result of OSI’s “Watchlist” program, which is enforced in cooperation with the Department of Homeland Security.

The complaint contains only allegations and it is the government’s burden to prove the allegations by clear, unequivocal and convincing evidence.

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