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JUSTICE DEPARTMENT SEEKS DEPORTATION OF FORMER MEMBER OF NAZI KILLING SQUAD

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Department of Justice has asked a federal immigration court to deport a Sunny Hills, Fla., man for participating in the Nazi-sponsored murder of Jews and other civilians during World War II while serving in a Nazi-led mobile killing unit in Lithuania and Byelorussia (now Belarus).

A charging document filed today in the United States Immigration Court in Elizabeth, N.J., by the Office of Special Investigations (OSI), part of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, alleges that Vytautas Gecas, 80, served in the notorious Second Lithuanian Schutzmannschaft Battalion during the time that it killed thousands of Jewish men, women, and children; suspected communists and their families; as well as Soviet military prisoners in mass shootings in both Lithuania and Byelorussia. The case will be heard in the federal Immigration Court in New Orleans.

Assistant Attorney General Michael Chertoff, head of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, said, "The crimes committed in Belarus by the Second Battalion were so ghastly that the Nazis themselves considered prosecuting the German officers under whose command they operated."

Gecas immigrated to England in 1947 and lived there for 15 years, working as a miner. In 1962, he moved to Chicago, where he worked as an electrician. At the time of his admission to this country, Gecas falsely claimed that he had been a "pupil" during the war. He never became a U.S. citizen. He was previously jailed for 18 months for defying a federal court order requiring him to answer OSI investigators' questions.

A recent U.S. Court of Appeals decision affirming the deportation of another Second Battalion member noted that, during October 1941, the Battalion assisted the Germans "in a series of killing missions in which they executed over 11,000 men, women and children." The court concluded that members of the Battalion participated in these missions by surrounding villages, marching victims to killing fields, forcing them to undress and lie in pits and then shooting them. In 1962, Major Franz Lechthaler, the German officer under whose command the

Battalion conducted the killing operations in Byelorussia, was convicted in Germany on murder charges based on these killings.

“The crimes committed by the men of the Second Battalion are among the most infamous atrocities of the Holocaust,” said OSI Director Eli M. Rosenbaum.

Furthermore, he noted that Heinrich Carl, the German District Commissioner in Byelorussia, sent a secret report to his Nazi superiors in 1941, complaining of what he termed the “indescribable brutality” that the battalion had employed in executing Jews in Slutsk, Belarus. In the report, which was later used as a prosecution exhibit at the postwar Nuremberg trials, Carl described looting and wanton cruelties that “bordered on sadism.” Carl’s report further stated, “It should suffice if I point out that persons who were shot have worked themselves out of their graves some time after they have been covered.”

The case filed against Gecas was the result of OSI's ongoing efforts to prevent former participants in Nazi persecution from entering the United States and to take action against those found here. Since OSI began operations in 1979, 71 Nazi persecutors have been stripped of U.S. citizenship, and 57 such individuals have been removed from the United States. In addition, OSI’s border control “watchlist” program has succeeded in preventing more than 160 Nazi persecutors from entering the United States.

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