

TRANSLATION PROVIDED BY *DEFENDING HISTORY*:

Respublika, 22 April 2006

THE EXPERT WITH BLOOD ON HIS HANDS

An NKVD storm trooper who sends Lithuanians to prison will perhaps not be tried for his crimes against our country

by Julius Girdvainis

The red partisan, whose gang used to pillage and kill peaceful inhabitants of the Vilnius region, and burned down their houses and villages during the years of the WWII. This is the dark side of the life of the general of defense forces brigadier of Israel Yitzhak Arad. However, in America and Lithuania, Mr. Arad is still valued as an expert of history, who determines the fate of Lithuanians who are blamed for persecuting the Jews.

The courts believe the partisan

Recently in Vilnius, the 85 year old Algimantas Dailidė was taken to court for collaboration with the Nazis; as a 20 year old man he had worked as a clerk for the Lithuanian security police.

A. Dailide was found guilty, but due to his advanced age, the court has not sent him to prison. The General Prosecutor's Office appealed against the court's decision.

Among those who had initiated the deportation of A. Dailidė from the USA was indeed Yitzhak Arad. The Israeli general, whose past as a red partisan casts a shadow over him, was a consultant to the organization "Office of Special Investigations" (OSI) in America.

American lawyer Augustinas Idzelis, who observed A. Dailidė's trial in Vilnius, stated to *Respublika* that "the OSI is a group of fanatics, seeking to make the Holocaust live forever, so that it will not be erased from the memory of people."

The lawyer Augustinas Idzelis thinks that the best way they can do it is to forever find a person whose surname figured in any document concerning the Nazis and the Lithuanian security police.

A very rare book has come to the hands of this *Respublika* journalist; it is called *The Partisan. From the Valley of Death to Mount of Zion*. The author of the memoirs, published by the Holocaust Museum in New York in 1979 – the same Dr. Yitzhak Arad.

Even though in the beginning of the war the general-to-be was only fifteen, in his memoirs Y. Arad does not conceal that he liked cruel adventures and killing peaceful people.

Only the reader of *The Partisan* can decide whether the young Jew from Švenčionys was saving his own life by joining the NKVD storm trooper squad, or whether he was enjoying this way of life. Many Jews who escaped from the ghetto did not kill together with the Soviet partisans, but formed their own squads of self-defense.

What was Y. Arad, today crowned a history expert in America, doing during the war? Respublika brings you a few excerpts from book *The Partisan* written by the general himself.

“Economic actions” of the Bandits

In his book Y. Arad acknowledges that wishing to pillage sufficient food from peaceful farmers, they would rob them completely, leaving nothing to their victims as they would take even more food than they could carry and would also take from the people their means of support, the domestic animals.

“Until then we had purchased what we needed from farmers, but our money was gone and it became necessary to requisition foodstuffs by threat of force. The partisans referred to this as an ‘economic action’ but the farmers called it robbery, after which they were more apt to supply the Germans with information about the whereabouts of the partisans. We knew this but had no choice and decided to undertake our ‘economic actions’ in areas some distance from the Cerkliszki Forest, as we needed the cooperation of the farmers in our immediate vicinity.

“As the objective of our first ‘economic action’ we chose the farm of a Lithuanian some seven kilometers from Cerkliszki, on the way to Swienciany. Eight of us went out on this sortie as we needed extra people to carry back the provisions. Dogs greeted us as we approached the farm. We surrounded the house and knocked at the door. There was no answer. We knew that the people had woken up, and guessed that they were attempting to ignore our knocking. Boris who was in command of the action and had an authentic Russian accent, called out in a loud voice that we were Soviet partisans, and if the door were not opened at once we would break it down. A light shown from within, we heard footsteps, and the door opened. Boris, Israel Wolfson, and I entered. We tried to hide our Jewish identity. We knew that if the farmers realized we were Jews, they would immediately inform the police. On the other hand, as long as they were under the impression that we were Soviet partisans, there was a chance of their keeping quiet in fear of reprisals – or even in case the Russians regained power here and decided to punish informers. [in the article it’s a slightly different version — *Tr.*]

“We gathered the entire family into one room, and Israel stayed there to guard them. Our search of the house and outbuildings yielded more provisions than we could possibly carry away. As we were leaving, we warned the farmer against informing the authorities. [...]. The bottles of strong sprit we had requisitioned from the arm helped lighten our mood. For the first time, there was merriment in the camp. [...]

A week later I was part of a group of ten sent on an ‘economic action.’ A Polish village near Hoduciszki was chosen as the target. [...] We went from house to house taking sacks of potatoes, flour and meat. We took two cows as well. After loading the booty on the Hoduciszki wagons and tying the cows behind, we started out for the base, the owners of the wagons driving.”

Photo: During the years of World War II the red partisans were as big a horror as the Hitlerists.

The inhabitants resisted

In the Vilnius region farmers themselves tried to resist in the years of the war, and they also expected for support of the Lithuanian policemen. Y. Arad remembers that they recruited those Lithuanians who came into hands of the red partisans, only the younger ones, those who had served in the police forces of independent Lithuania, would be mercilessly murdered.

“Most of us had adequate winter clothing, which we had appropriated along with provisions during ‘economic actions.’ Those of us, who had participated in many such actions and were frequently in farmers’ houses, had the best apparel. [...] I had a good pair of boots that came from a farm near Novo-Swienciany and a long, light-weight fur coat from a village in the Hoduciszki area. [...]

“A few days after I returned from the base, thirty of us went out on an ‘economic action.’ The target was a large Lithuanian village twenty-five kilometers from partisan territory, near the town of Konstantinava.

“By this time there was nothing to take from villages nearby, as they had gradually been relieved of their food reserves and cattle by many partisans in the Narotsh region. [...].

“‘Halt! Who goes there?’ A few figures jumped from the sleigh into the snow. I called out: ‘Raise your arms and come over here!’ One after another the figures rose and came to us. Five black-uniformed Lithuanian police, apparently under the impression that they had encountered a large partisan force, stood before us. I ordered them to lie down side by side, face down; so that they would not see that we were only two.

“I pointed my gun at them, while Vanushka went from one to the other, took there guns and a few hand grenades and removed their belts. The police were traveling in two large sleighs loaded with big bundles. We decided to bring the prisoners back to the base. We turned around, ordered the five men to lie down in one of the sleighs, tied them to one another with their belts and took off their shoes so that escape would be difficult. The return trip was slow, but by morning we were again in partisan territory and felt secure.

“At the base we were praised highly. The police were interrogated. Four of them were young men who claimed that they volunteered for the police force in order to avoid compulsory labor in Germany. The fifth was older and had served in the independent Lithuanian police for many years.

“About a month later, when I returned to the base, I found the four young policemen as partisans – one in the Vilnius unit, the rest in other units. The older man who had been in the police force in prewar days was shot, as the command did not trust him and the partisans usually did not hold prisoners.

Houses were burnt without mercy

Unable to suffer permanent pillaging, Lithuanian farmers sometimes fought also with arms. Y. Arad describes how during the operations of diversion he burnt the houses of peaceful inhabitants who had resisted, and people would be left homeless even in winter.

“The last operation I participated in that winter was a punitive action against Girdan, a large Lithuanian village on the road between Hoduciszki and Swienciany. The inhabitants of the village were prepared for self-defense and had been armed by the Germans.

“We used to make a detour around the village on our way to sabotage operations, to avoid armed clashes. During February, when a Vilnius force had tried to enter the village to requisition provisions, the inhabitants opened fire and killed two partisans. Our command decided to punish them.

“About twenty of us went to this retaliatory mission, which would serve also as a warning to other villages. We broke into the village from two different directions and the defenders fled after putting up feeble resistance. We took the residents out of several houses in the section of the village where our two comrades fell and burned down their houses. Never again were partisans fired on from this village.”

Prayers of a Pole did not help

In the years of the war in the Vilnius region, squads of the White Poles also functioned. Y. Arad, who later became a history expert, was a member of execution in the woods of one Polish captain from Armia Krajowa.

*Picture: Y. Arad describes his bloody activities in the Vilnius region in the book *The Partisan*.*

“We had heard of the White Poles in the vicinity during our operations in February and March, but the first time I encountered them was on a mission at the end of April. We were waiting out the daylight hours in a small woodland southeast of Swienciany and in the late afternoon entered a nearby farm to eat supper.

“The woman of the house was Polish. She and her two daughters seemed very upset at our appearance, which was not the usual reaction. While the mother was preparing our food, we conversed with the girls. Suddenly the door opened, a young man entered, a square Polish army cap on his head, captain’s insignia on his epaulettes, and a pistol in his officer’s belt. The last time I had seen such a uniform, was on the day of Warsaw’s surrender at the end of September 1939. His entrance was so sudden that we all remained rooted to our seats. He too was surprised, but was first to regain composure. He came to each of us, shook hands, and turned to leave. I was nearest the door. I pointed my submachine to him and ordered not to move. We took his pistol away, and, after very brief questioning, realized what he was doing there – he was the son of the landlady. As a Pole and a one-time officer, he had joined the Home Army a few weeks earlier. His unit of 300 fighters was temporarily camped in a village a few kilometers away, and he came to visit his mother and sisters every day. The family had known he would be coming, which was why our arrival had confused them. Lieutenant Semionov, the commander of our group, decided to leave the house, lest other White Poles come, and we left without waiting for supper, taking the officer with us.

“The following day in the forest we questioned the Pole about the Home Army and their collaborators in the area. At first he refused to talk, but after rather rough treatment he broke down and told us a great deal about their activities. It became clear that his unit was the one that had attacked the Kostas Kalinauskas partisans and caused them heavy losses. After intensive interrogation, the Pole was executed. He begged for mercy, but that did not help him. We could not take him with us and did not want to set him free.”

Ethnic cleansing of Lithuanians

Y. Arad described in his book *The Partisan* also the action of ethnic cleansing of Lithuanians, who had taken part in the resistance. 250 Lithuanian patriots who had resisted the occupiers became its victims.

“At the beginning of 1945, I was sent to fight the Lithuanian gangs near the township of Lingmiany, a region populated entirely by Lithuanians, which added to the size and strength of the gangs operating there. There were twenty-five men in our unit, and we stayed in a building at the edge of town that had once been a flour mill.

“I participated in this mopping-up operation. We thoroughly combed the forests of the region. The deep snow made walking difficult, but it also revealed the footsteps of the Lithuanian bands. After a few days of searching we discovered their encampment. Their forest camp was fenced in and had underground bunkers. We fought with them for a whole day, but by evening none of them remained alive. The next day we counted over 250 Lithuanian dead. Some were in a field near a lake to which they had tried to escape.”

J. Paleckis evaluated the storm trooper

It is not evident why, but right after the war Y. Arad decided to run to the West. The Moscow marionette Justas Paleckis himself hurried to please the partisan, who had raged with the NKVD hangmen in peaceful villages, awarding Yitzhak with a medal for his bloody achievements. By the way, this award also turned into a headache, which the partisan describes in his book.

“We knew that Soviet soldiers made a thorough baggage check at the demarcation line between the Soviet and the British zones in Austria,” writes Y. Arad, “I had my partisan medal with me and a certificate confirming bestowal of the decoration. I was in a quandary: should I risk having it found in my possession, which would mean being arrested and sent back to the Soviet Union, with all that that implied? But I could not part with the only souvenir of my partisan days. I hid the medal and certificate in a loaf of bread I was carrying.”

A General with experience

“I feared that reports of Y. Arad from Israel became the basis for further decisions of the courts while prosecuting Lithuanians who are suspected of war crimes,” US lawyer A. Idzelis told Respublika, “A man with bloody hands who is held an expert and the Lithuanian patriots are being punished with these hands.”

A. Idzelis still cannot explain why this person with the woeful past describes his crimes against humanity in such great detail in his book *The Partisan*, published in 1979.

In the years of the Soviet Union, Y. Arad perhaps did not believe that the empire would ever collapse and its enslaved republics would ever be free, A. Idzelis reflects. Otherwise, even an Israeli general should not be so open, recounting that his and NKVD hangmen gangs burnt down villages, murdered their inhabitants and Lithuanian patriots.

“We are talking about sixty year old events, but we even do not bother to pay attention to the fact that the red partisan with Lithuanian blood on his hands is trying to send to prison Lithuanian patriots,” A. Idzelis expressed his anger, having lost all hope that such persons as Y. Arad would ever be tried.

Authoritative Witness

The chief prosecutor of the Special Investigations Division of the Prosecutor General's Office, Rimvydas Valentukevicius, who has started a pretrial investigation regarding A. Dailide, confirmed to Respublika that the surname of Y. Arad figures in the case of this clerk of the Lithuanian security police.

“Is it not the one who submits decisions for the US court?” R. Valentukevicius replied with a question to a question on the former red partisan who became a history expert. “Yes, there is such an Arad, Dr Arad, a history expert for the US government.

However, such persons really consult neither the Lithuanian prosecutors or courts. We rely only on the US government institution (a division of the Justice Department) officially provided material. The court found that A. Dailide’s actions were a crime. There is nothing personal about it.”

R. Valentukevicius admitted that Y. Arad was a witness in a few cases of denaturalization, by which persons suspected of having caused atrocities of war were deported from the USA. Seeking to deport Lithuanians from America, who are suspected to have collaborated with Nazis, the red partisan based his arguments on data of the Lithuanian central state archive and the US archives and documents which he had gathered himself.

“I cannot assess the American system of courts, which acknowledges Y. Arad to be a history expert in the US appeals court,” said R. Valentukevicius. “We invited our history expert to the trial, who made his conclusion. The court acknowledged the conclusion of our history expert, not that of some Arad. As far as I am concerned, I would not invite to court an expert, the cases of whose nation’s persecution or genocide are being investigated.

Documents were falsified by NKVD

The formerly well-known dissident and current member of the Lithuanian parliament, Vytautas Bogusis doubts whether archive documents could be blindly trusted when investigating cases from the time of the war.

“This is a difficult and sensitive issue. However, I doubt whether it is possible to base arguments on the archive documents even while investigating cases of so-called Nazi collaborators,” said V. Bogusis. “Such documents could have been falsified by the NKVD and later the KGB. I particularly have many doubts about the documents regarding our compatriots, who emigrated after the war. These papers were purposely made public from time to time during Soviet times.”

In the opinion of this politician, one would be able to see a true perspective of the old histories based not only on the archival documents that are kept in Lithuania, but also on those from Germany and other countries. V. Bogusis wonders why while actively searching for persons who are suspected of crimes against the Jews and cooperation with the KGB, the bloody activities of the red partisans who murdered people together with NKVD are completely forgotten today.

“The red partisans were exactly the same occupiers as the Hitlerists, therefore, I do not wonder why the inhabitants of Lithuania fought against them; however, this historical epoch is now forgotten for some reason,” said V. Bogusis.

There was no genocide of Lithuanians?!

The head of the Center for the Lithuanian Inhabitants’ Genocide and Resistance, historian Arvydas Anušauskas also knows name Y. Arad very well; however, he was very surprised to learn from this Respublika journalist that the partisan had openly described his crimes in a book almost thirty years ago.

“Usually the red partisans would not write about such things either in questionnaires, or in autobiographies, and if they happened to mention it, then they would only say a word or two,” said a surprised A. Anušauskas was surprised. “However, their fights with the self-defense forces of villages and the burning down of villages are known. The first to suffer, as in every partisan war, were civilians. The ideological political orientation of the red partisans was directed towards Moscow. In Lithuania, there was not only the Lithuanian and Polish resistance, but also the Jewish one; however, Y. Arad was together with the Soviets.”

The historian is certain that a man with such a “significant” past as Y. Arad could be only a witness and not an expert who is required to be objective, during investigations of cases of the war period.

A. Anušauskas admitted that there was almost no hope that some of the red partisans would be tried for crimes against Lithuania.

“There is no state of limitation for the Jewish genocide, because this is approved at the international level. The genocide of Lithuanians has no such status, and for the physical extermination of our nation essentially nobody is accountable,” said A. Anušauskas.