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Part B

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owing to the out-migration of Jews, and stood at fewer than 1,000 people (350 families).

German forces captured the town on June 22, 1941. Merkinė endured severe bombardment, and many Jewish homes were destroyed. A few local Jews attempted to escape, but they were soon forced to return to Merkinė.¹

Immediately after the seizure of the town, Lithuanian nationalists, led by Matuleitis, the head of the local detachment of Šaulys (marksman), formed a town administration and a police force, which soon implemented a series of anti-Jewish measures. Jews were marked with Stars of David, ordered into compulsory labor, and subjected to robbery and assault (including rape) by local antisemites. On June 24, 1941, the first group of Jews was murdered. On the grounds of the Jewish cemetery, Lithuanian partisans shot several Jews whom they accused of being Communists and having collaborated with the Soviet authorities.

According to the account in Rabbi Ephraim Oshry's *The Annihilation of Lithuania Jewry*, in early July, the German commandant in Merkinė took 50 Jews hostage in an attempt to force the return of Rav Shtoppel, the town's rabbi, who had gone into hiding. As no one was willing to betray the rabbi's whereabouts, the commandant then threatened to kill all the Jews. When word of this reached the rabbi, he surrendered voluntarily. He was then forced to dance and sing before being brutally killed.² Other Jews were taken to the Niemen River and drowned there.

In the first half of July 1941, all the Jews in the town were ordered to resettle into a ghetto. The area around the synagogue, the Bet Midrash, and its courtyard was designated for the ghetto. The men resided in the Bet Midrash, separated from the women and children. The ghetto was surrounded by barbed wire and guarded by armed Lithuanian police. A Judenrat with a few members was formed to oversee internal ghetto affairs. Local Lithuanians were permitted to requisition Jews for work. Some selected Jews against whom they had a grudge to take their revenge. From the ghetto, several groups of Jewish men were taken away in the direction of Alytus, then shot.

The Merkinė ghetto remained in existence for about two months. At the end of August, the Jews were made to prepare long trenches in the Jewish cemetery, which allegedly were needed for military purposes. Then a few days later, armed Lithuanians surrounded the ghetto and guarded it closely during the night to prevent anyone from escaping. The next morning, the Jews were driven out of the ghetto to the Jewish cemetery, leaving all their possessions behind.³

According to German documentation, the Germans and their collaborators shot the Jews from the Merkinė ghetto on September 10, 1941. A detachment of Einsatzkommando 3, assisted by Lithuanian policemen, shot 854 Jews (223 men, 355 women, and 276 children) in the Jewish cemetery.⁴ A few Jewish girls who managed to escape at the time of the roundup were subsequently captured and killed.

SOURCES Information about the persecution and killing of the Jews in Merkinė can be found in the following publica-

tions: B. Baranauskas and E. Rozauskas, eds., *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje (1941–1944): dokumentu rinkinys*, vol. 1 (Vilnius: Leidykla "Mintis," 1965); Joseph Rosin, "Meretch (Merkine)," available at www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/meretch/meretch1a.html; Shalom Bronstein, ed., *Yabadut Lita: Lithuanian Jewry*, vol. 4, *The Holocaust 1941–1945* (Tel Aviv: Association of Former Lithuanians in Israel, 1984), pp. 311–312; Uri Shefer, ed., *Meretch: Ayara yehudit be-Lita* (Society of Meretch Immigrants in Israel, 1988); "Meretsh," in Rabbi Ephraim Oshry, *The Annihilation of Lithuania Jewry* (New York: Judaica Press, 1995), pp. 219–221; "Merkine," in Dov Levin and Yosef Rosin, eds., *Pinkas ha-kehillot. Encyclopaedia of Jewish Communities: Lithuania* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1996), pp. 392–396; and Guy Miron, ed., *The Yad Vashem Encyclopedia of the Ghettos during the Holocaust* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2010), pp. 459–460.

Relevant documentation can be found in the following archives: LCVA; RGVA (500-1-25); and YVA.

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NOTES

1. Bronstein, *Yabadut Lita: Lithuanian Jewry*, vol. 4, pp. 311–312.
2. Oshry, *The Annihilation*, p. 221. This incident, however, is not mentioned in the account by Rosin, "Meretch (Merkine)."
3. Rosin, "Meretch (Merkine)," and Bronstein, *Yabadut Lita: Lithuanian Jewry*, vol. 4, pp. 311–312, both date the mass shooting on September 8, 1941.
4. RGVA, 500-1-25, p. 113, report of Einsatzkommando 3, December 1, 1941; Baranauskas and Rozauskas, *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje*, vol. 1, p. 135; B. Baranauskas and K. Rukšenai, *Documents Accuse* (Vilnius: Gintaras, 1970), p. 235.

MICHALISZKI

Pre-1939: Michaliszki, town, Wilno województwo, Poland; 1939–1941: Mikhalishki, Vileika oblast', Belorussian SSR; 1941–1944: initially Michaliszki, Kreis Swir, Gebiet Wilejka, Generalkommissariat Weissruthenien, then from April 1, 1942, Gebiet Wilna-Land, Generalkommissariat Litauen; post-1991: Mikhalishki, Astravets raen, Hrodna voblasts', Republic of Belarus

Michaliszki is located 56 kilometers (35 miles) northeast of Wilno. In 1897, the Jewish population of the town was 951, out of a total of 1,224. Before World War II, there were about 800 Jews living there.

German forces captured the town on June 24, 1941. As the Germans arrived, many Jews fled into the forests. The non-Jewish local inhabitants exploited this opportunity to loot Jewish property. In response to a German order, warning that Jews who did not come home by a certain date would be punished, most of the fugitive Jews returned.

In the summer of 1941, the Germans ordered the chairman of the existing Jewish community (gmina) in Michaliszki, Ora Bleicher, to organize a Jewish Council (Judenrat). However, according to Bleicher's account, when it came to an

election, nobody wanted the position, as they were all afraid of the onerous responsibilities.¹ Nevertheless, a Judenrat was formed, which included the following as members: Yitzhak Świrski (chairman), Josef Chit, Szyjn Miller, Salmun Baruch, Salome Rabinowicz, and Szymon Eystein.

A ghetto was established in Michaliszki by October 1941 on two unpaved streets near the center of town. The spaces between the houses were boarded up with wooden planks, and there was only one exit to the ghetto, guarded internally by the Jewish Police and externally by non-Jewish local policemen. Inside the ghetto, several families had to share a single dwelling.² The Jews who performed forced labor left the ghetto area on a daily basis. The Jews worked mostly in the construction or reconstruction of bridges, roads, and railroad tracks, in mills, and in electrical companies. In addition, they had to clear the rubble and snow from the roads. Some Jews were also sent away from the ghetto for a period to cut lumber in the forests.

On April 1, 1942, the region including Michaliszki was transferred from Generalkommissariat Weissruthenien to Generalkommissariat Litauen and became part of Gebiet Wilna-Land. At this time, Lithuanians came in and took over the local administration and local police. Among the restrictions imposed officially on the Jews living in the ghettos in this region were a curfew from 7:00 P.M. to 7:00 A.M. and a prohibition on any personal or economic contacts with non-Jews.³ At the end of May 1942, there were 787 Jews in the Michaliszki ghetto: 363 men and 424 women.⁴ In July 1942, a total of 35 prisoners from the Michaliszki ghetto were sent to work in the eastern branch of the Włokiennicze cardboard company.⁵

A document dated November 6, 1942, from the office of the Gebietskommissar Wilna-Land, noted that Michaliszki had been recognized as a main ghetto, now subordinated to the administration of the Judenrat in Wilno, and that it had two subghettos, one in Łyntupy and a second in Świr.⁶ According to one report, some of the Jews capable of work may have been transferred to the Michaliszki ghetto from Kiemieliszki and Bystrzyca when those ghettos were liquidated at the end of October.⁷ Other Jews arrived in Michaliszki after fleeing from Aktions in nearby ghettos, including Świr. Among them was Yehoshua Swidler, who was told by the Judenrat on November 7 that he must leave Michaliszki, as German orders barred the absorption of refugees from other towns. However, instead, he was added to the next transport of laborers to the ghetto in Wilno.⁸ At the end of 1942, about 500 inmates of the Świr ghetto were transferred to the Michaliszki ghetto. Only 60 "specialized" Jewish workers then remained in Świr.⁹

In a strictly confidential letter dated March 9, 1943, the Gebietskommissar Wilna-Land informed the Organisation Todt and the Giesler construction company of an order calling for the transfer of all the Jews working in these companies back to the ghettos in Oszmiana, Świr, Michaliszki, and Święciany by March 22, 1943. He also recommended in this memorandum that no appeal should be made against this order.¹⁰

In early March 1943, a group of young Jews from the Michaliszki ghetto managed to escape to the forests with the aim of joining the anti-German partisans.¹¹

At the end of March, the Germans liquidated the Michaliszki ghetto. H. Kruk records that 400 wagons with Jews and their possessions arrived in Wilno from Michaliszki. They were accommodated temporarily on Strashun and Oszmiana Streets. Then in early April, many of the Michaliszki Jews were added to a train containing other Jews from the region, reputedly headed for Kaunas. Instead, the train went only to Ponary, where all the Jews were shot. The train contained Jews from the ghettos of Soly, Oszmiana, Gudogaj, and Ostrowiec, as well as Michaliszki, about 2,500 in total. Only about 50 Jews from this transport managed to escape. A number of Jews from Michaliszki, however, were selected for labor and remained in the Wilno ghetto or were sent to various labor camps subordinated to it, including the camp at Vievis.¹²

SOURCES Information on the ghetto in Michaliszki can be found in these publications: Arūnas Bubnys, "The Fate of the Jews in the Švenčionys, Oshmyany and Svir Regions (1941–1943)," in Irena Guzenberg et al., eds., *The Ghettos of Oshmyany, Svir, Švenčionys Regions: Lists of Prisoners, 1942* (Vilnius: Valstybinis Vilniaus Gaono žydu muziejus, 2009), pp. 83–118, here pp. 114–115; Shalom Cholawsky, *The Jews of Bielorussia during World War II* (Amsterdam: Harwood, 1998); Christoph Dieckmann, "Deutsche Besatzungspolitik in Litauen 1941–1944" (Ph.D. diss., Universität Freiburg, 2002), section F.1.8.1; Guy Miron, ed., *The Yad Vashem Encyclopedia of the Ghettos during the Holocaust* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2010), pp. 464–465; Yitzhak Arad, *Ghetto in Flames: The Struggle and Destruction of the Jews in Vilna in the Holocaust* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1982); and Herman Kruk, *The Last Days of the Jerusalem of Lithuania: Chronicles from the Vilna Ghetto and the Camps, 1939–1944* (New Haven, CT: YIVO, 2002).

Relevant documentation can be found in these archives: BA-DH (ZM 1641, A 23); LCVA (R 614-1-736, R 626-1-124, R 677-1-46); USHMM; VHF (e.g., # 30396, 35318, 39703); YIVO (RG-104 I, no. 611); and YVA (e.g., M-1/E/286).

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NOTES

1. YVA, M-1/E/286, testimony of Ore Bleicher, as cited by Cholawsky, *The Jews of Bielorussia*, pp. 252–253.
2. VHF, # 39703, testimony of Martin Kulbak; # 35318, testimony of Abraham Rudnick.
3. Anordnung Betr.: Ghettoisierung der Juden, issued by Gebietskommissar Wilna-Land, May 13, 1942, reproduced in Guzenberg et al., *The Ghettos of Oshmyany, Svir*, p. 130.
4. LCVA, R 743-2-10274, pp. 31 and verso, as cited by Bubnys, "The Fate of the Jews," p. 114.
5. LCVA, R 626-1-124, p. 48.
6. Ibid., R 614-1-736, p. 299.
7. YIVO, RG-104 I, no. 611, report of Shmuel Kalmanovich, as cited by Dieckmann, "Deutsche Besatzungspolitik," section F.1.8.1.
8. Yitzhak Siegelman, ed., *Sefer Kobylnik* (Haifa: Va'ad Yozei Kobylnik b'Israel, Committee of Former Residents of Kobylnik in Israel, 1967), p. 151, as cited by Cholawsky, *The Jews of Bielorussia*, p. 151.

9. BA-DH, ZM 1641, A 23, p. 129 (the case of Gite Mular); Cholawsky, *The Jews of Bielorrussia*, p. 86.
10. LCVA, R 677-1-46, p. 5.
11. Kruk, *The Last Days*, p. 494.
12. Ibid., p. 534; BA-DH, ZM 1641, A 23, p. 129 (the case of Gite Mular); Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, p. 359; VHF, # 39703, # 35318, and # 30396, testimony of Jack Wysoki.

NAUMIESTIS

Pre-1940: Naumiēstis (Yiddish: Neishtot-Tavrig), town, Tauragė apskritis, Lithuania; 1940–1941: Naumiēstis/Naumestis, Taurage uezd, Lithuanian SSR; 1941–1944: Neustadt, Kreis Tauroggen, Gebiet Schaulen-Land, Generalkommissariat Litauen; post-1991: Žemaičių Naumiēstis, Šilutė rajonas, Tauragė apskritis, Republic of Lithuania

Naumiēstis is located 150 kilometers (93 miles) west-northwest of Kaunas. According to the 1923 census, there were 667 Jews living in Naumiēstis, 37 percent of the town's total population. About 120 Jewish families remained in Naumiēstis by the time of the Soviet occupation in June 1940.

German forces captured the town on the morning of June 22, 1941, the first day of their invasion of the USSR. Following the killing of 14 German soldiers by gunfire, probably from Soviet stragglers, the Germans arrested a number of Jewish men as hostages, holding them in the Lutheran church. However, after the local Lithuanian priest avowed that the Jews were innocent, the men were released to return home.

Immediately after the occupation of the town, Lithuanian nationalists formed a local authority and a police force, which, together with the German Ortskommandantur (military commandant's office), introduced a series of anti-Jewish measures. Jews had to report daily to the Ortskommandantur, where they were assigned to perform forced labor. The tasks included sweeping the streets, road repairs, work in a German field kitchen, and the burial of fallen soldiers. The Jews were required to wear yellow patches on their clothes and were forbidden to walk on the sidewalks. At the end of June, the Jews were forced to remove the Torah scrolls and even the benches from the synagogue and burn them.

In early July 1941, all the town's Jews were concentrated in a few houses on Pigs Street, a derelict quarter near the Sustis River, which became the ghetto.¹ The Germans and Lithuanians removed five Jewish girls from the ghetto, and they were never heard from again.

The first Aktion took place on July 19, 1941. Initially, all Jewish males older than 14 were assembled at the synagogue. From this group, 27 able-bodied men were selected and put in the barracks. They were subsequently taken to the Heydekrug (Šilutė) labor camp. Of the remaining Jewish males, 10 were sent back to the ghetto, while the others, about 70 in all, were shot near Šiaudvyčiai along with more than 100 male Jews brought there from Vainutas. The shooting was carried out by Lithuanian police and members of the 2nd SS-

Reitersturm, SS-Reiterstandarte 20. The Reiterstandarte was commanded by SS-Hauptsturmführer Karl Struve; the Reitersturm, by SS-Untersturmführer Theodor Werner Scheu. Other participants in the killing were members of the 2nd SS-Sturmabteilung, SS-Standarte 105, and two officials of the Tilsit Gestapo.²

During the mass shooting, at least one Jew tried to flee, but he was chased down and shot, and his body was also thrown into the mass grave. One of those selected for labor, Esriel Glock, heard the shooting in the distance (about 4 kilometers [2.5 miles] away) and learned from one of the Lithuanian guards what had happened to the other group of men. After a few hours, the SS men returned to the barracks from the shooting site. The forced laborers were then permitted to return home briefly to the ghetto to fetch some additional clothing before they were sent to the Heydekrug camp.³

According to *Pinkas ha-kehillot*, other Jews from Pajūris, Švėkšna, Veiviržėnai, Kvėdarna, and Laukuva were also brought to the killing site at Šiaudvyčiai on trucks and were shot there. These were probably male Jews who had been sent initially to the Heydekrug labor camp at the end of June 1941 and after four or five weeks had been deemed unfit, following a medical examination. Apparently these men were shot, probably at Šiaudvyčiai, in the second half of July.⁴

The remaining Jews in the ghetto continued to perform forced labor and suffered from hunger and abuse. The ghetto existed until September 25, 1941, when all the Jews were taken out and shot at the Šiaudvyčiai killing site.

The male forced laborers from Naumiēstis were kept at the Heydekrug labor camp until the summer of 1943, when they were sent to Auschwitz II-Birkenau. Here, according to *Pinkas ha-kehillot*, 99 men from the group were sent to the gas chambers, and the remainder were sent in October 1943 to clear out the rubble from the Warsaw ghetto. Of the men originally from Naumiēstis, only 7 are believed to have survived the war, some of them being liberated by the U.S. Army in Bavaria, after having been transferred to a Dachau subcamp.

SOURCES Information on the fate of the Jewish community of Naumiēstis during the Holocaust can be found in the following publications: *Our Town Neishtot* (Israel: Neishtot-Tavrig Natives Committee, 1982); Dov Levin and Yosef Rosin, eds., *Pinkas ha-kehillot. Encyclopaedia of Jewish Communities: Lithuania* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1996), pp. 398–401—an English translation is available at jewishgen.org; LG-Aur, verdict of June 26, 1964, against Struve et al., in *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen*, vol. 20 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1979), Lfd. Nr. 579, pp. 318–330; Ruth Leiserowitz, "Grenzregion als Grauzone. Heydekrug—eine Stadt an der Peripherie Ostpreussens," in Christian Pletzing, ed., *Vorposten des Reichs?: Ostpreussen 1933–1945* (Munich: Meidenbauer, 2006), pp. 129–149.

Documentation regarding the persecution and murder of the Jews in Naumiēstis can be found in the following archives: BA-L (B 162/5394-5399); GARF (7021-94-429); and YVA (Leib Koniuchovsky Collection O-71, files 4, 16; M-1/E/1619).

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