

Nazi hunters give Holocaust museum papers

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WASHINGTON — The paper had yellowed, its edges frayed. But it clearly bore the signature of Lithuanian policeman Aleksandras Lileikis, ordering a Jewish woman and her 6-year-old daughter to be shot in a Nazi death pit in 1941.

With that, the U.S. Justice Department was able to prove that an elderly Massachusetts man had decades earlier committed Nazi war crimes and to order him from the country.

The death warrant was one of about 50,000 Justice Department trial documents donated last week to the U.S. Holocaust

Memorial Museum. The bound copies of evidence papers, hearing transcripts and court orders show how the department's Office of Special Investigations hunted down Nazis hiding in the United States over the past three decades and deported them.

Attorney General Michael Mukasey called the documents "the largest body of English-language primary source materials relating to the prosecution of Nazi criminals publicly available anywhere in the world."

"The documents we donate today perpetuate the memory of those men, women and children who perished, by ensuring that the truth of their fate — that their stories — survive in paper and ink for future generations," Mukasey told an audience at the Holocaust Museum in Washington.

"The documents are a per-

manent record of what happened, and a safeguard against those who might forget or, even worse, deny," he said.

A second copy of the papers will be donated to Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem.

The Office of Special Investigations was created in 1979 to prosecute U.S. citizens involved with Nazi war crimes during World War II. Since then it has won more than 100 denaturalization and deportation cases, removing 65 people from the country.

Eli Rosenbaum, who heads the Justice Department unit, said his investigators work regularly with museum historians to interpret records and unearth pictures for trial that clearly show the horrors of the Nazi regime.

In Lileikis' case, Rosenbaum recounted, the Massachusetts resident initially denied being

part of the Nazi-allied Lithuanian security police's "mobile killing units" that rounded up Jews and brought them to forest pits where their bodies were left after being shot.

"Show me something I signed," Lileikis told investigators in June 1983, disputing records that he was among those who carried out the killings.

Years later, after digging through Soviet archives, investigators did just that, using the December 1941 death warrant against Gitta Kaplan and her 6-year-old daughter, Frumaas, as proof that Lileikis should be deported.

"We found the bureaucratic documentation reporting that they had been, quote, 'handled according to orders,' unquote — a Nazi euphemism for murder," Mukasey said.

Investigators also gave the trial judge a photo of a death pit, showing a crowd of people

gathered around a pile of bodies at the bottom of a crater in the forest.

Lileikis was stripped of his U.S. citizenship and returned to Lithuania, Rosenbaum said. He was briefly put on trial there, but legal proceedings ultimately were suspended because of his failing health, Rosenbaum said. Lileikis died in Lithuania in 2000.

The Justice Department decided to donate the records to the Holocaust museum as the number of surviving Holocaust victims — and the Nazis who sought to kill them — dwindles with time. Rosenbaum said a few dozen cases against suspected Nazis remain open, although his unit since 2004 has begun to focus on others living in the United States who are suspected of genocide, torture or other war crimes in Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia or elsewhere around the globe.

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