

Archives shed new light on Nazi cases

By David Lee Preston
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Jonas Stelmokas definitely was not hiding.

So why did it take the U.S. Justice Department 43 years to find him and accuse him of complicity in the Nazi murder of Lithuanian Jews?

This after all, was a man who stepped off the boat in 1949, earned a master's degree in architecture from Penn in 1951, and joined the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects a year later.

Here was a man who flew the Lithuanian flag in front of his Lansdowne home and kept a high ethnic profile as president of the local chapter of the Lithuanian Engineers and Architects Association; as chairman of the local chapter of the Lithuanian-American Community of the U.S.A. Inc.; as chairman of the Lithuanian Cultural Center; as a member of the executive committee of Ramova, a Lithuanian veterans' association.

Here, indeed, was a man who seemed to seek the spotlight. He even went back to Lithuania last year with a film crew from a Philadelphia television station.

So why are charges being brought after all this time?

Ironically, the answer lies in large part in the success of the Lithuanian cause that Stelmokas and his countrymen worked so fervently to achieve.

With the breakup of the Soviet Union and the declaration of an independent Lithuania, long-closed archives are being opened. In this new climate, war-crimes researchers and Holocaust historians alike are getting more access than ever before to Nazi-era documents in Russia, Ukraine and the Baltic states.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center in Jerusalem says the Justice Department has had Stelmokas' name for several years, but only within the last few months was enough documentation obtained to enable authorities to act.

They acted on Monday: The Justice Department filed a complaint in federal court in Philadelphia accusing Stelmokas, 75, of hiding information and lying about his background when he applied for a U.S. visa in 1949 and when he applied for citizenship in 1954.

In its request for denaturalization — revocation of citizenship — the department charged that Stelmokas had "advocated, assisted, participated or acquiesced in the murder and other persecution of Jews and other unarmed citizens" during World War II.

The case is based on his alleged participation as a high-ranking officer in a volunteer unit that helped the Nazis murder Lithuanian Jews and other unarmed civilians in 1941 and 1942.

Stelmokas has denied the allegations against him, saying they were fabricated by the Soviet KGB.

The Justice Department says Stelmokas told U.S. immigration authorities that the only organization he belonged to before 1945

See **STELMOKAS** on C4

June 21, 1992, Stelmokas

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