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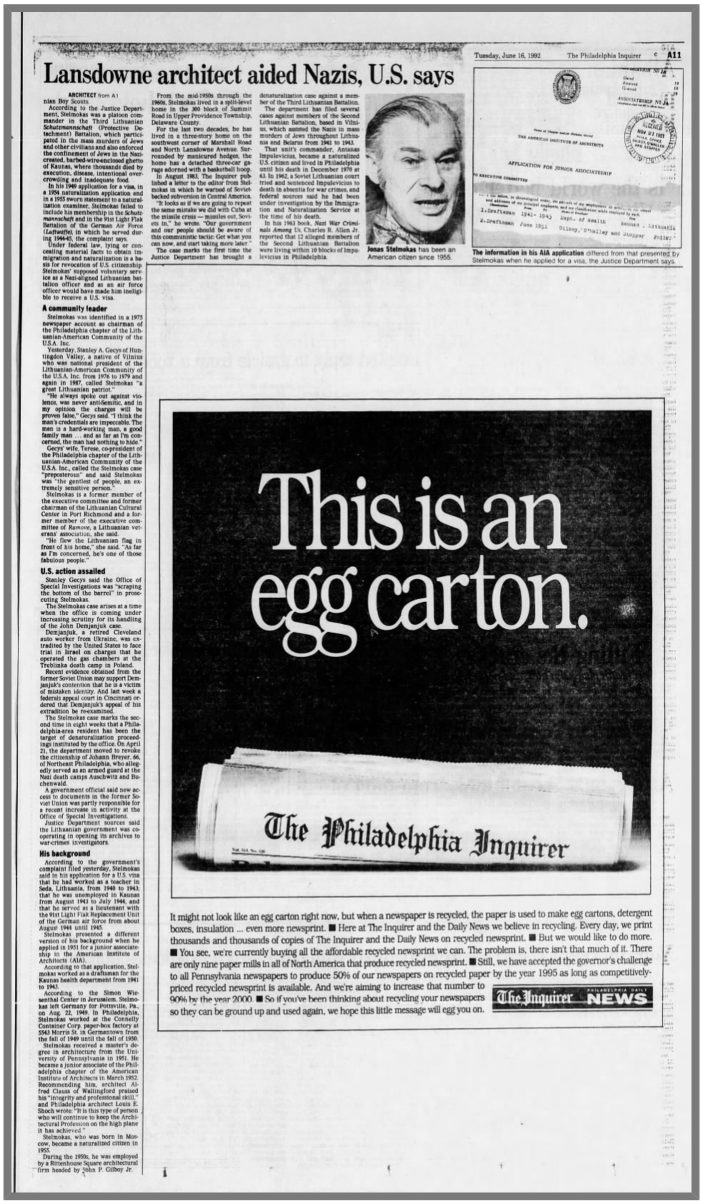

Lansdowne architect aided Nazis, U.S. says

ARCHITECT from A1

nian Boy Scouts.

According to the Justice Department, Stelmokas was a platoon commander in the Third Lithuanian *Schutzmannschaft* (Protective Detachment) Battalion, which participated in the mass murders of Jews and other civilians and also enforced the confinement of Jews in the Nazi-created, barbed-wire-enclosed ghetto of Kaunas, where thousands died by execution, disease, intentional overcrowding and inadequate food.

In his 1949 application for a visa, in a 1954 naturalization application and in a 1955 sworn statement to a naturalization examiner, Stelmokas failed to include his membership in the *Schutzmannschaft* and in the 91st Light Flak Battalion of the German Air Force (*Luftwaffe*), in which he served during 1944-45, the complaint says.

Under federal law, lying or concealing material facts to obtain immigration and naturalization is a basis for revocation of U.S. citizenship. Stelmokas' supposed voluntary service as a Nazi-aligned Lithuanian battalion officer and as an air force officer would have made him ineligible to receive a U.S. visa.

A community leader

Stelmokas was identified in a 1975 newspaper account as chairman of the Philadelphia chapter of the Lithuanian-American Community of the U.S.A. Inc.

Yesterday, Stanley A. Gecys of Huntingdon Valley, a native of Vilnius who was national president of the Lithuanian-American Community of the U.S.A. Inc. from 1976 to 1979 and again in 1987, called Stelmokas "a great Lithuanian patriot."

"He always spoke out against violence, was never anti-Semitic, and in my opinion the charges will be proven false," Gecys said. "I think the man's credentials are impeccable. The man is a hard-working man, a good family man … and as far as I'm concerned, the man had nothing to hide."

Gecys' wife, Terese, co-president of the Philadelphia chapter of the Lithuanian-American Community of the U.S.A. Inc., called the Stelmokas case "preposterous" and said Stelmokas was "the gentlest of people, an extremely sensitive person."

Stelmokas is a former member of the executive committee and former chairman of the Lithuanian Cultural Center in Port Richmond and a former member of the executive committee of *Ramove*, a Lithuanian veterans' association, she said.

"He flew the Lithuanian flag in front of his home," she said. "As far as I'm concerned, he's one of those fabulous people."

U.S. action assailed

Stanley Gecys said the Office of Special Investigations was "scraping the bottom of the barrel" in prosecuting Stelmokas.

The Stelmokas case arises at a time when the office is coming under increasing scrutiny for its handling of the John Demjanjuk case.

Demjanjuk, a retired Cleveland auto worker from Ukraine, was extradited by the United States to face trial in Israel on charges that he operated the gas chambers at the Treblinka death camp in Poland.

Recent evidence obtained from the former Soviet Union may support Demjanjuk's contention that he is a victim of mistaken identity. And last week a federals appeal court in Cincinnati ordered that Demjanjuk's appeal of his extradition be re-examined.

The Stelmokas case marks the second time in eight weeks that a Philadelphia-area resident has been the target of denaturalization proceedings instituted by the office. On April 21, the department moved to revoke the citizenship of Johann Breyer, 66, of Northeast Philadelphia, who allegedly served as an armed guard at the Nazi death camps Auschwitz and Buchenwald.

A government official said new access to documents in the former Soviet Union was partly responsible for a recent increase in activity at the Office of Special Investigations.

Justice Department sources said the Lithuanian government was cooperating in opening its archives to war-crimes investigators.

His background

According to the government's complaint filed yesterday, Stelmokas said in his application for a U.S. visa that he had worked as a teacher in Seda, Lithuania, from 1940 to 1943; that he was unemployed in Kaunas from August 1943 to July 1944, and that he served as a lieutenant with the 91st Light Flak Replacement Unit of the German air force from about August 1944 until 1945.

Stelmokas presented a different version of his background when he applied in 1951 for a junior associateship in the American Institute of Architects (AIA).

According to that application, Stelmokas worked as a draftsman for the Kaunas health department from 1941 to 1943.

According to the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Jerusalem, Stelmokas left Germany for Pottsville, Pa., on Aug. 22, 1949. In Philadelphia, Stelmokas worked at the Connelly Container Corp. paper-box factory at 5543 Morris St. in Germantown from the fall of 1949 until the fall of 1950.

Stelmokas received a master's degree in architecture from the University of Pennsylvania in 1951. He became a junior associate of the Philadelphia chapter of the American Institute of Architects in March 1952. Recommending him, architect Alfred Clauss of Wallingford praised his "integrity and professional skill," and Philadelphia architect Louis E. Shoch wrote: "It is this type of person who will continue to keep the Architectural Profession on the high plane it has achieved."

Stelmokas, who was born in Moscow, became a naturalized citizen in 1955.

During the 1950s, he was employed by a Rittenhouse Square architectural firm headed by John P. Gilboy Jr.

From the mid-1950s through the 1960s, Stelmokas lived in a split-level home in the 300 block of Summit Road in Upper Providence Township, Delaware County.

For the last two decades, he has lived in a three-story home on the southwest corner of Marshall Road and North Lansdowne Avenue. Surrounded by manicured hedges, the home has a detached three-car garage adorned with a basketball hoop.

In August 1983, The Inquirer published a letter to the editor from Stelmokas in which he warned of Soviet-backed subversion in Central America.

"It looks as if we are going to repeat the same mistake we did with Cuba at the missile crisis — missiles out, Soviets in," he wrote. "Our government and our people should be aware of this communistic tactic: Get what you can now, and start taking more later."

The case marks the first time the Justice Department has brought a denaturalization case against a member of the Third Lithuanian Battalion.

The department has filed several cases against members of the Second Lithuanian Battalion, based in Vilnius, which assisted the Nazis in mass murders of Jews throughout Lithuania and Belarus from 1941 to 1943.

That unit's commander, Antanas Impulevicius, became a naturalized U.S. citizen and lived in Philadelphia until his death in December 1970 at 63. In 1962, a Soviet Lithuanian court tried and sentenced Impulevicius to death in absentia for war crimes, and federal sources said he had been under investigation by the Immigration and Naturalization Service at the time of his death.

In his 1963 book, *Nazi War Criminals Among Us*, Charles R. Allen Jr. reported that 12 alleged members of the Second Lithuanian Battalion were living within 10 blocks of Impulevicius in Philadelphia.

Jonas Stelmokas has been an American citizen since 1955.

The information in his AIA application differed from that presented by Stelmokas when he applied for a visa, the Justice Department says.

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The Philadelphia Inquirer

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