New documentary examines the murder of Jews by Latvians and Lithuanians during the Holocaust

*Kovno (Kaunas), Lithuania, June 27, 1941. Lithuanian nationalists collaborating with the Nazis clubbed a thousand Lithuanian Jews to death in a crowded street in a matter of days while German Nazis and hundreds of Lithuanian bystanders witnessed the horrific spectacle at what later became the Lietūkis **Garage Massacre** called [**image source** : Rare Historical Photos]*

*" **Today I can confirm that our objective, the solution of the Jewish problem in Lithuania, has been achieved by Einsatzkommando 3. There are no more Jews in Lithuania, except Jewish forced laborers and their families "***
[SS-Standartenführer Karl Jäger from Vilnius on December 1, 1941]

Latvia and Lithuania, among NATO's newest members, have been hailed by some as Western bastions of democracy and bulwarks against Russian expansionism. But both Baltic republics were complicit in the mass murder of their Jewish citizens during the Holocaust.

Baltic Truth , a revealing and disturbing documentary by Eugene Levin and Andrejs Hramcovs, explores this dark dimension of their history. Hosted and narrated by Israeli cantor and singer Dudu Fisher, it has been acquired by Menemsha Films.

Fisher, whose ancestors were Latvian Jews, takes viewers on a tour of murder sites in both countries, where Holocaust survivors and witnesses are interviewed.

1941. Latvian Jewish women and children are herded together by Latvian armed collaborators only to be shot by them moments later

In almost all cases, the perpetrators of these crimes were Latvian and Lithuanian fascists rather than German occupiers, as he rightly points out. But today, these assassins are hailed as nationalist heroes for their toll in resisting communism during the Soviet occupation of 1940 and the post-war period, when Latvia and Lithuania were annexed and incorporated into the Soviet Union.

With the implosion of the Soviet Union, both nations declared independence and joined the West, which downplays or ignores their complicity in the Holocaust. Critics who bring up this sensitive topic are quickly met with the standard and hackneyed refutation that Russia is trying to undermine their sovereignty.

The vast majority of Latvian and Lithuanian Jews were murdered in the summer and fall of 1941, after the German invasion of the Soviet Union. Fisher walks us through this horrific process as he travels from one place to another.

It begins in Riga, the capital of Latvia, where 100,000 Jews, including 30,000 German and Austrian Jews, were herded into a ghetto. They were shot during mass executions in the nearby Rumbula forest.

Herberts Cukurs, a Latvian national hero who would be known as the Butcher of Riga, took part in these atrocities. He was murdered by the Mossad in Montevideo in the mid-1960s.

Voldemars Veiss, a high-ranking Latvian police officer, has arrested Jews in Riga. He is buried in a cemetery in Riga, reserved for Latvian heroes.

On July 18, 1941, 175 Jews were massacred in the town of Akniste in a pogrom. The killers were Latvians, some of whom knew the victims as neighbors. One of the perpetrators, Vilis Tunkelis, is considered an anti-communist hero and is buried in a local cemetery.

The three-day action of 15-17 December 1941, which killed almost half of the Jewish community of Liepaja, took place in the dunes on the Baltic Sea beach near Skede, north of Liepaja.

Seventy thousand Lithuanian Jews from Vilnius (Vilna) were executed by Lithuanians in the Ponary Forest.

Jonas Noreika, a Lithuanian who was involved in a pogrom in the city of Siauliai in August 1941, was exposed as a criminal by his granddaughter Silvia Foti in a bestseller.

The Jews of Kaunas (Kovno) were murdered in the Ninth Fort, a facility built by Tsarist Russia to protect the city from German invasion.

As Fisher points out, Lithuanian author Ruta Vanagaite was chased out of the country after her book on the Holocaust was published.

Ten thousand Jews were murdered in Ukmerge during this period, but today a monument in this town pays tribute to Juozas Krikstaponis, one of the former residents. He murdered a relative of Shimon Peres, the former Prime Minister and President of Israel, and participated in the murder of Jews in Belarus.

Efraim Zuroff, the head of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Jerusalem, laments that Latvians tend to focus on fellow citizens who suffered under communism while ignoring the Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

His criticisms are countered by Fisher, who claims that Lithuanians and Latvians who opposed the persecution and extermination of Jews could not help them. Nevertheless, 873 Lithuanians and 423 Latvians came to their aid and were honored by Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem, as Righteous Gentiles.

Trailer: **Baltic Truth**

Sources:

- to **an article** by Alan Zeitlin " *New Documentary Examines the Murder of Jews by Latvians and Lithuanians in the Holocaust* " dated September 12, 2022 on the site of The Algemeiner

- to **an article** by Sheldon Kirshner " *Baltic Truth* " dated 23 July 2022 and **an article** by Rich Tenorio " *Blue-collar Latvian 'Schindler' saved dozens with few resources of his own* " dated 20 August 2019 on the site of The Times of Israel

- to **an article** by Peter Curry " *The Horror of the Rumbula Massacre* " dated October 30, 2018 on the History Hit (HH) site