



**THE KINDER-AKTION (CHILDREN'S ACTION) IN THE KOVNO GHETTO:  
MARCH 27-28, 1944**

*Lisa Anne Storer, an intern of the History Department of Kaunas Ninth Fort Museum, a student of Haifa University's Weiss-Livnat International MA Program in Holocaust Studies*

The night before the *Children's Action*, on March 26, 1944, the Kovno Ghetto Jewish police force was notified to line up in formation on the following morning. They were told that the Germans would inspect their ranks and then provide air raid training. Instead, on the morning of March 27, after the Jewish policemen were abruptly commanded to sit on the ground, the Germans arrested over 133 of them and sent them to the Ninth Fort where they were locked into three prison cells. Ghetto inhabitants were shocked at the arrests because many believed that Jewish ghetto policemen worked hand in hand as tools of the Germans. A majority of Jewish policemen were hated and feared in the ghetto.

In oral testimony, Judith Meisel, who was 12 years old when she and her family were imprisoned in the Kovno Ghetto in August 1941, describes Jewish policemen as loathsome and vicious. When they rounded up Jews for forced labor brigades or to fill German quotas during actions and deportations, "...they [Jewish policemen] *didn't give up their families. They gave strangers...they gave people they didn't know.*" Meisel's name appeared on a list to be rounded up and taken from the ghetto, but by mistake a child of a Jewish policeman who lived next door was taken in her place. When the policeman returned home, he realized the error and beat her up. She explains, "*We feared them very much, the Jewish police.*"

Harry Gordon, another child survivor, describes them, "*We suffered from the blows and kicks of the [Jewish] police and being dragged out of our homes into one working brigade or another, not knowing if we would return.*"

On the morning of March 27, on the first day of the *Children's Action*, after the arrest and removal of Jewish policemen from the ghetto, the Germans and their accomplices rounded up 1,000 ghetto inmates – snatching children under the age of 12 and adults over the age of 55. It is believed that they were deported to Auschwitz or Majdanek. On the second day, March 28, an additional 300 children and older adults hiding in the secretly built ghetto hideouts, known as *malines*, were discovered. They were taken to the Ninth Fort and executed. During the *Children's Action*, an additional 500 children and adults considered unfit to work were rounded up from the satellite camps many of which were populated by inmates from the Kovno Ghetto. Over 1,800 Jews were murdered in the *Children's Action*. Moreover, from March 27 to March 30, as many as 39 of the 133 arrested Jewish policemen were murdered in the Ninth Fort.

The policemen's arrests and murders attest to the fact that Meisel's and Gordon's experiences of Jewish policemen in the Kovno Ghetto present only one part of their story. A number of them worked secretly with the underground to help those in the ghetto survive. They protected the building and locations of the *malines*, smuggled children out of the ghetto, and trained and facilitated the escape of resistance fighters to join partisan units in the forests. One such policeman was Yehuda Zupovitz (1914-1944). Prior to the German invasion, he lived with his wife, Dita (nee Katz, b. 1922), in Kaunas on Ozeskiene Street, and worked as an engineer for the dairy association, Pieno centras. In the ghetto, he became a deputy chief of the Kovno Ghetto Jewish police force.

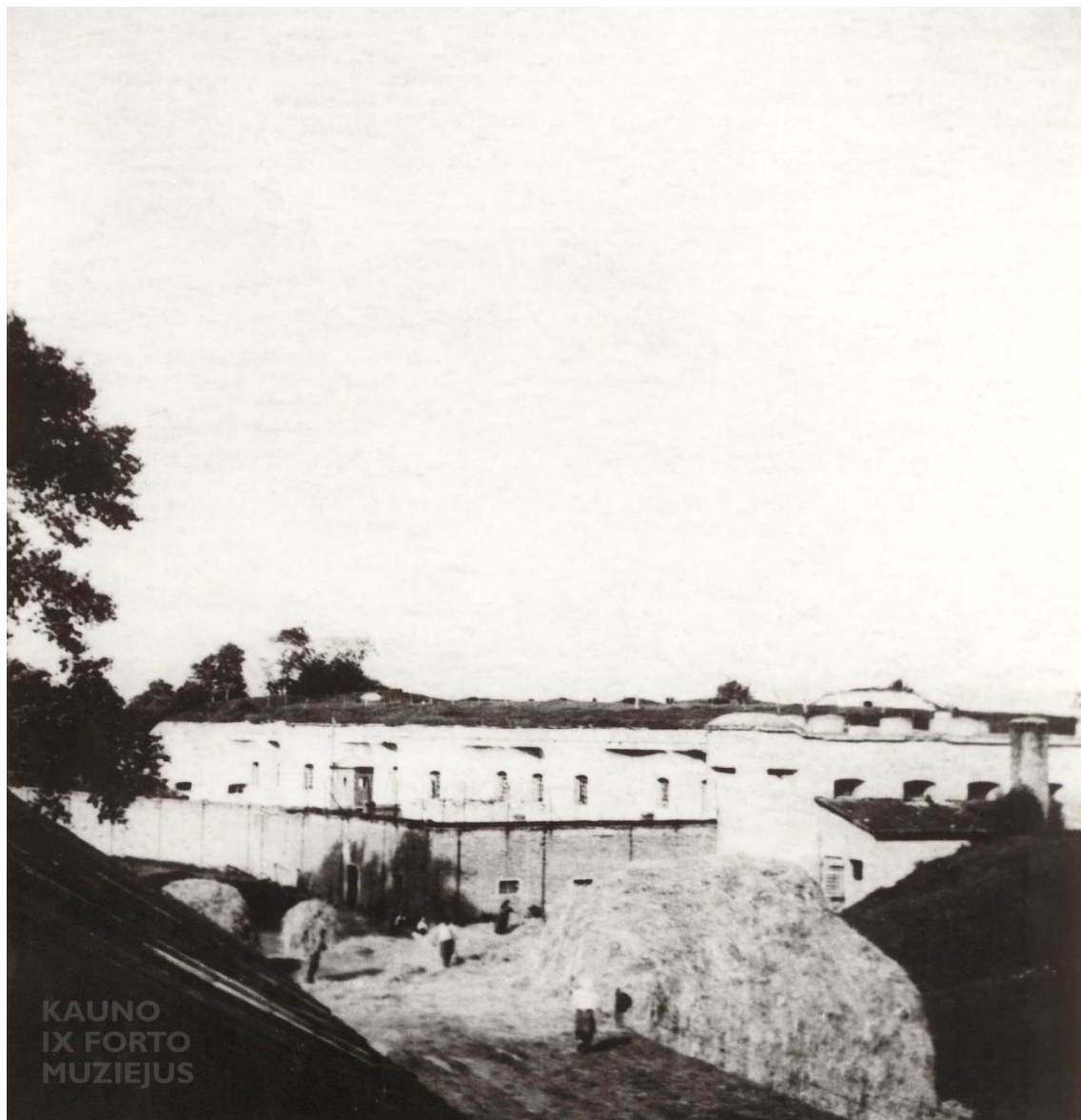
Josef Shuster (1948 testimony), a ghetto survivor, remembers him, "*At the gate waiting for us were the [deputy] Chief of Police, Zupovich, and a few Jewish policemen who were supposed to help us get out of the ghetto. When we arrived*

*at the gate we had to wait a little while. At the moment that a kommando arrived and blocked the German's view, Zupovich took us by the hand and led us out of the ghetto."* Ghetto survivors Jack Brauns (1998 testimony), Lasar Gotz (1995 testimony), and Shlomoh Shafir (1995 testimony) explain that the arrests of Jewish policemen on the morning of March 27 were the result of an informant. Prior to the first day of the *Children's Action*, a source had tipped off the Germans that Jewish policemen knew the locations of the *malines* where many families hid their children during actions. On the first day of the action, the Germans tricked the unsuspecting policemen into standing at attention in anticipation of an inspection. Instead, they were arrested and sent to the Ninth Fort where many, primarily the police leadership, were tortured to reveal the locations of the *malines* and information about their resistance work in the ghetto.

Zupovitz was repeatedly beaten in the Ninth Fort, for he refused to betray the locations of the *malinas* or information related to the ghetto's resistance. Overseeing the vicious interrogations was a 34-year-old SS-Oberscharführer, Bruno Kittel (1910-na). He demanded that Jewish policemen reveal the locations of the *malines*, the inner workings of the underground, and a secret collection of ghetto materials. Zupovich had full knowledge of all that Kittel pressed for, but he withstood the savage beatings that fractured his skull, slashed his ears, and gouged out an eye. During his final return to his cell, Zupovich told his fellow policemen to accept death rather than betray the ghetto. His refusal to cooperate ended his life at 29 years old, but several Jewish policemen did break down and returned to the ghetto with German escorts to reveal the locations of *malines* where children and adults were hiding.

Survivors of the *Children's Action* were stunned to learn that a number of Kovno Ghetto Jewish policemen did not betray them, "*Word spread of the conduct of Moshe Levin, Ika Greenberg, Yehuda Zupovitz, and their companions. Their names were spoken with admiration by the ghetto residents, who until that day had little love for the police, as they were unaware of its activities behind the*

scenes.” Of the Jewish policemen murdered in the Ninth Fort, twenty-one have been identified as working with the ghetto underground. It is believed that 200 children hidden in the Kovno Ghetto survived the *Children’s Action*.



Kaunas Ninth Fort, the end of the 1940s.



Deputy Police Chief Yehuda Zupovitz poses with his wife, Dita, in their apartment in the Kaunas ghetto two weeks before his arrest, Kaunas, 1944. © United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Yehudit Katz Sperling



A group of Jews return to the ghetto after forced labor on the outside. They wait to be searched as they reenter the ghetto. A Jewish policeman holding a stick keeps the laborers in line, Kaunas, 1941–1944. © United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of George Kadish/Zvi Kadushin



Deputy Police Chief Yehuda Zupovitz at his desk in the Kaunas ghetto, Kaunas, 1944. © United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Yehudit Katz Sperling



Two prisoners and a Jewish policeman standing in front of the ghetto jail. The two men were arrested on orders from the Gestapo for theft outside of the ghetto. For lack of proof, they were released by the Jewish police and sent to the underground to hiding, Kaunas, 1941–1943.

© United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of George Kadish/Zvi Kadushin