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U.S. to Press Case Against Cleric Accused of Rumania War Crimes

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 26 — Justice Department officials say that evidence obtained last month in Rumania has helped them strengthen a long-postponed case against Bishop Valerian Trifa on charges that he deceived the American authorities about his involvement in a 1941 massacre of Rumanian Jews.

The case against Bishop Trifa, who is in a form of suspension as a prelate of the Rumanian Orthodox Episcopate of America, an affiliate of the Orthodox Church in America that has its headquarters in Grass Lake, Mich., was originally scheduled to come to trial in Detroit in July. Charges filed four years ago, which he has denied, said he misrepresented his past to become a United States citizen. He entered the country in 1950 and obtained citizenship in 1957.

Government prosecutors are attempting to prove that Bishop Trifa, as a leader of a Rumanian student movement before

World War II, assumed a central role in the Iron Guard, a pro-Nazi organization that organized a rebellion against the Rumanian Army in January 1941. Before the rebellion was crushed Iron Guard toughs rounded up hundreds, possibly thousands, of Bucharest Jews and killed them. Bishop Trifa has consistently denied taking part in either the rebellion or the massacre.

Justice Department officials said that on the basis of their newly acquired evidence they were more hopeful that the case could be won, leading to deportation proceedings and possibly to prosecutions of other alleged war criminals in this country.