

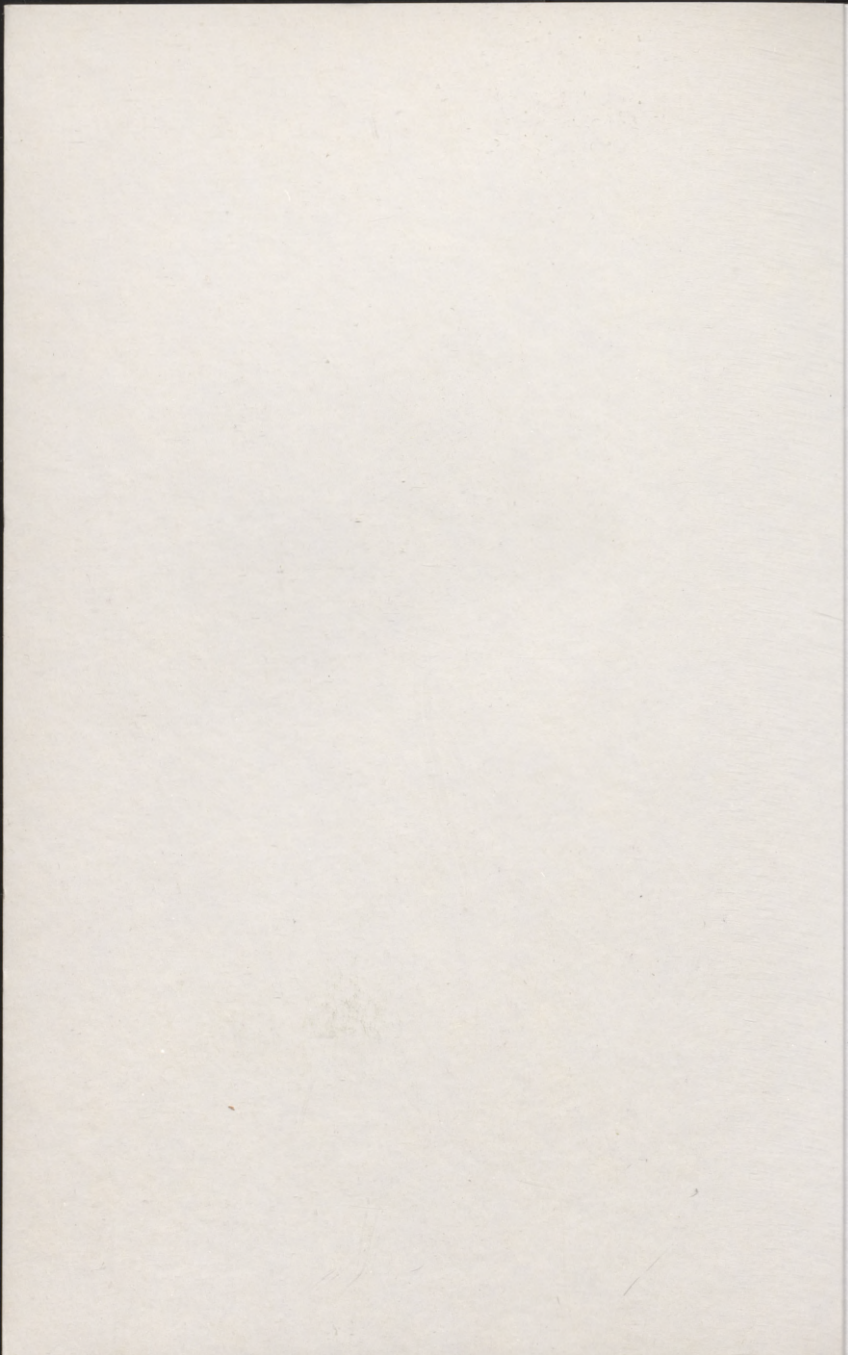
VALENTINS SILAMIKELIS

# WITH THE BALTIC FLAG

THROUGH THREE OCCUPATIONS



JUMAVA



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## INTRODUCTION

The majority of young Baltic men of my generation either perished during World War II or in Soviet concentration camps after the war. Even most of those that survived by now have passed away — either in exile or in their native countries that were occupied by the Soviet Union from 1945 to 1991. They had to live in silence, and now they will never tell their story to the next generations. They will never tell about this heroic and tragic era.

To them I dedicate my book.

support of  
The majority of young Latvians who  
my generation after perished during  
World War II or the Soviet occupation  
years after the war have not even met those  
-- those who survived by now have passed away  
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from 1945 to 1991. They had to live in  
silence and now they will never tell their  
stories to the next generations. They will  
never tell about the hardships and trials  
to which I dedicate my book.

Translation by *Martha Korte*

Graphic design by *Milka Hestberg*

Photographs by *Milo Kravins, Ansis Lapins, Volter Vircis, Edgars  
Jans, Vladimirs, Ilmars, Sarmis, Ansis Galantins, David An, Mihails,  
Ivars, Kaspars, Ansis, Raimonds, Ansis, Viktors and Valdemars  
Cedars, Dagnija, Ansis, Sarmis, Viktors and Hans Ludvigs, Ansis,  
Ivars, Sarmis, Kaspars, Viktors and Ivars, Ansis,  
Ansis, Viktors, Ansis, Ansis, Ansis, Viktors, Ansis, Viktors, Ansis,  
and Sarmis, Ansis's songs are used in the book.*

## INTRODUCTION

This is a very significant book. It tells about one of the soldiers that were extradited to the Soviet Union by the Swedish Government eight months after the end of World War II. 2,518 men were forcefully handed over to the enemy that had been able neither to win them in combat nor to take them as prisoners of war. The majority of these former soldiers were Germans, but among them were 146 of Baltic origin: 130 Latvians, 9 Lithuanians, and 7 Estonians. (Over 1,000 Germans never came back from the Soviet concentration camps and never saw their country again.)

In this book one of the Latvian soldiers tells about his fate.

In Swedish media this event soon was named "The Baltic Handover" — in spite of the fact that most of the soldiers were Germans, and beside the three Baltic nationalities there was also a small number of ten other nationalities. They all came from the Eastern front and had escaped to Sweden at the very end of the war. But Swedish people were mostly interested in the fate of these young men from the Baltic States; it was their handover they wanted to stop.

One can say that in the recent Swedish history this episode of "The Baltic Handover" was more discussed and analyzed in the media than anything else. There are several books written on this subject and countless newspaper columns — in Swedish and other languages. Then why is this book so important? There are several reasons. I will mention some of them. First of all, this book is based strictly on facts. Beginning with 1940 when Valentins Silamikelis was a high school student, he had written a diary — during the first year of Soviet occupation in 1940/41 and during the three years of German occupation in 1941-1944. So everything in this book is his own personal experience. He continued his diary during the time he was enlisted in Latvian Legion that was a part of German army — in 1944/45. He also described his escape to Sweden, his life in the internment camp, and the return to Latvia with the "help" of Swedish government, branded as a "traitor of one's country" in Soviet opinion.

Their country was devastated by war and the following Soviet system. This book tells how Valentins Silamikelis was punished for his

"crimes" and how he had to fight for an education and for a chance to live a normal life in the Soviet system. This is the first time the story is told by one of the Baltic men himself — from the viewpoint of those that have been victims three times, suffering first under the Soviet, then the German occupation, and finally from the action taken by the Swedish government.

The book reveals the author as a capable and a very generous person with high moral standards and sensible political views, based on facts. In the hard fight for existence he has gained the ability to think objectively, and this is a very significant part of his story; an objective person is capable of understanding the motive of the enemy, even if he does not agree with it.

I have read the memoranda the interned Baltic men sent to various government offices back in 1945, hoping to avoid the extradition to the enemy that had so brutally occupied their countries and oppressed their nations. I found out that everything Valentins tells in his book **we already knew in 1945**. The Baltic men were well aware of what they could expect from the Soviets, and they told about it in their memoranda. But ignorance, maybe the lack of interest, maybe even a deliberate political disinformation about the true situation in the Soviet Union was the reason the Swedish government offices and many influential persons joined the slogan, published by one of the evening newspapers: "Out with the bums!" And this meant not only the interned soldiers but also the 30,000 Baltic civilian refugees, which today are known as maybe the most valuable immigrant group that ever came to our country. The sentiments of the above newspaper were shared by our prime minister of those days Per Albin Hanson. He announced it made no difference to him whether we sent the interned home through Denmark or through the Soviet Union.

Did not the leader of the foreign committee see any risk in sending "home" the former Baltic Legionaries when their countries were occupied by Soviet Union? He should have been better informed.

Diplomats were just as ignorant. Only now we know that the Swedish State Department cooperated with the Soviet Embassy and gave the Embassy personnel almost a free hand to "take over" the camps of civilian refugees during the war. Very secretly one such group really was "sent home" in the fall of 1944. It was just as forceful as the handover of Legionaries because the civilians did not want to return either. According to the Soviet law they were traitors and punishable by death. After the war for three years the death sentence was commuted to 25 years in concentration camps because the state needed cheap labor. This was the fate that awaited everybody who returned.

And even if they survived the sentence, they remained forever third class citizens.

However, our Secretary of State in those days (Undersecretary of State) kept emphasizing again and again that the Soviet Union observed the same laws concerning prisoners of war and interned ones as the Western States. Today we also know that the State Department had connections with KGB commissions that came to Sweden in order to repatriate Baltic refugees. Our ambassador in Moscow, when asked directly, admitted knowing nothing about the conditions in the three Baltic States. In those days **Swedes were not allowed to travel there**. And who in those days knew about the Baltic territory anyway? Everything happened in the secrecy of war.

One question comes to mind: why did the government officials not consider the facts presented in the Baltic memoranda? They told about the personal experience of these people — how human beings were treated in the Soviet Union. Now we have proof that our government had ordered the government offices not to answer those memoranda (from the interned and also from Swedish people) until after the Baltic extradition. Until that time the memoranda were simply kept **ad acta** — with the papers.

Only now, fifty years later, the **truth** has finally come to light in cruel clarity, and it can not be denied, because Valentins Silamikelis proves in his book how true was everything German and Baltic soldiers told of their personal experience in 1945/46. In those days there were persons that considered it to be lies, fabricated by war criminals that were afraid to go back to their countries because a well deserved punishment awaited them there.

This is mind-shattering. The truth has been considered a false accusation by guilty persons. And at the same time those government officials did not have any information themselves about the situation on the other shore of the Baltic Sea. And this ignorance lasted fifty years! Now and then there were persons that received the permission to visit the Baltic republics — because they supported the ideology of the oppressors. But their stories upon returning were only half-truths at the best or a plain smoke screen.

The Baltic Legionaries that were extradited to the Soviet Union were kept in a filtration camp for half-a-year, then released — for the sake of propaganda. Filtration camps had a hard regime. The word “filtration” meant that some inmates were released, some were sentenced to death, but most people were kept in the camp for several years with hard labor, half-starved, brutally treated. That most of the former Legionaries were released — that was unusual.

Only sparse news reached Sweden but they seemed to confirm the theory of war criminals. Those that had ordered the extradition could now say: "What did we say? There **were** Nazi's among the Balts, and they have been punished. The rest have been released." But Silamikelis tells how many, including himself, were quietly arrested later. And even those that were not arrested had to live their lives as third class citizens. It was the same for those that returned from GULAG camps when the so called "thaw" came (after Stalin's death) and many prisoners were released.

Valentins considered himself lucky; otherwise he would not have been able to write this book. As many have already done before him, he shows the Soviet system of torture from inside. The years in Soviet concentration camps with hard labor, starving, and guard brutality meant death sentence for many. The majority of those that survived returned as invalids. Those that did not survive can not tell any more of their suffering. Therefore this book by Valentins Silamikelis is so important — it gives us a unique glimpse into true life events.

Oddly enough, even in the present generation there are people in our country that keep saying that the Baltic and German soldiers that were extradited had received their "just deserts". They do not realize these men were defending the Baltic territory against the most cruel invader and oppressor in history. Let them read this book! And those who decided to hand over the interned ones should ask for forgiveness. "We did not know what we were doing to these people that had sought refuge with us!" they could say. Already since ancient times there has been a rule in all **civilized** countries not to hand over prisoners of war to an enemy that threatens their life and health. Should not our government observe this rule?

*Kurt Ekholm, PhD*

Kurt Ekholm was a young officer in a small Swedish town Eksjoe where the internment camp Raenneslaett was located. In 1945, the interned Baltic soldiers were located in this camp. Kurt Ekholm had a long military career, reached the rank of major, but after retiring from the army in 1984 he defended his PhD dissertation on the subject "The Extradition of Baltic and German Soldiers in 1945/46". The second edition of his book was published in 1996.

The following letters of gratitude were received. The first one is from the Latvian President at that time Guntis Ulmanis.

Latvian Republic  
President's Office  
Riga, April 29, 1995  
Dear Mr. Silamikelis!

Thank you for the materials you prepared! Your remarks and comments allow to see more clearly many complicated turns of fate in Latvian history. It may come in handy in our work.

Thank you for your trust in us!

With respect

A. Busha  
President's Press Secretary

Latvijas Republika



Valsts Prezidenta Kanceleja

God. Silamiķeļa kungs!

Pateicos par Jūsu sagatavotajiem materiāliem! Jūsu piezīmes un komentāri ļauj labāk saprast daudzus sarežģītus latviešu tautas likteņapāvērsienus. Šis atziņas mūsu darbā var lieti noderēt.

Paldies par uzticību!

Ar cieņu

Prezidenta preses sekretāre

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Buša'.

A. Buša

Rīgā 1995. gada 22. aprīlī

The other letter was from the King of Sweden.

**The Royal Court**

Castle of Stockholm, February 26, 1997

To: Mr. Valentins Silamikelis

Through: Publishing House "Contro"

P. O. Box 8052

10420 Stockholm

His Majesty, the King has asked me to convey his warmest gratitude for your kindness — sending him your book "The Baltic Extradition". The King has acquainted himself with this very unique and important book with great interest.

With kindest regards

Claes Nordstroem

Court Marshal



KUNGL. HOVSTATERNA

Stockholms Slott den 26 februari 1997

Herr Valentins Silamikelis

c/o Contra Förlag KB

Box 8052

104 20 Stockholm

Hans Majestät Konungen har bitt mig framföra ett varmt tack för Er vänlighet att låta översända den av Er skrivna boken Baltutlämningen. Konungen har med stort intresse tagit del av denna mycket unika och viktiga bok.

Med vänliga hälsningar

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Claes Nordström', written in a cursive style.

Claes Nordström

Hovmarskalk

## FOREWORD

**"We will never perish!"**

Among my comrades we made a promise: Whoever will survive this time will tell about it to the next generations. This promise was given three times.

The first time I was during the war. I was a member of the first Estonian Battalion of the Red Army during the heavy battles around Christmas, 1944, in a swampy area and the command to not discuss the war had already been given.

The second time I was during the war in Sweden where we were interned. This time we were all three Baltic nations together. It was done in the third way of making a deal — before we were attracted to the Soviet Union.

The third time it was in Helsinki in 1946, at a reconstruction camp — when Stalin was still alive. There were members of many nations.

Now I am finishing this preface.

We reconstructed in order to live again in the real life was the most exciting and dramatic thing we did then. Unfortunately, most of the events were given in a hurry, so many young lives ended before they really began, and only a few were born as fortunate as the author of this book.

This book is based on my diaries, written in Riga, Kurgama, Sweden, and Helsinki again. I have also used my notebooks and letters I wrote from Sweden as well as my work letters to my. Many of these letters were sent through without return.

In these letters in my diary, I had become a habit to write down all my thoughts — each of my life. At first I did it only for my own sake. During my childhood I also wanted to leave a record for my family, but in Sweden I was already thinking about all nations.

At a certain time in my youth, I could not tell about it for the same reason: they did not know what thoughts I had. I wanted to leave a record for my family and for the people in a way that would be useful to them. I did not know how to do it. I started to write down my thoughts in a notebook. I did it for my father and mother, but they did not know about it. When I was in my father's house, I did not know what to do.



## FOREWORD

Among my comrades we made a promise: Whoever will survive this time will tell about it to the next generations. This promise was given three times.

The first time it was during the war. I was a member of the 19th Division of **Latvian** Legion. After heavy battles around Christmas, 1944, in Kurzeme (Courland) the remnant of our platoon made this promise.

The second time it was after the war in Sweden where we were interned. This time we were all three **Baltic** nations together. It was done in the third week of hunger strike — before we were extradited to the Soviet Union.

The third time it was in Vorkuta, in GULAG concentration camp — when Stalin was still alive. There were prisoners of **many nations**.

Now I am fulfilling this promise.

My generation lived at a time when the real life was far more exciting and dramatical than any fiction. Unfortunately, most of the events were grim and tragic. So many young lives ended before they really began, and only a few have been as fortunate as the author of this book.

This book is based on my diaries, written in Riga, Kurzeme, Sweden, and Riga again. I have also used my memories and letters I wrote from Vorkuta as well as my wife's letters to me. Many of these letters were sent illegally, without censorship.

In 1942 I wrote in my diary: "It has become a habit to write down all important events of my life." At first I did it only for my own sake; during my enlistment I also wanted to leave a document for my family, but in Sweden I was already thinking about all Latvians.

After returning from Vorkuta I could not tell about it yet; **the occupants were not supposed to know our thoughts**. But before I had to leave Sweden I gave my diaries and photographs to a Swedish policeman and asked him to mail them to my Latvian friends in Stockholm. My friends in turn mailed it all to my father and sister who had emigrated to the U.S.A. When I visited my sister in 1990 I got them back.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Valentins Silamikelis was born on August 26, 1924, in Riga, Latvia. His father was an engineer. He had two sisters, but his mother passed away when he was still a child. He graduated the First High School of Riga. In 1940, during the first Soviet occupation, he was called to KGB for interrogation and expelled from school, but later, after the Soviets were driven out, he was able to return. During the German occupation Valentins Silamikelis was a member of a patriotic youth organization, led by a school teacher Julijs Brachs. The name of the organization was "National Guard". The members of the NG worked in the former KGB building, examining the graffiti on the walls in the prison cells, the documents, left behind by KGB personnel, and conducting visiting tours for groups of visitors. During those three years about 30,000 visitors came to the ominous place.

When German occupational power announced a draft, Valentins Silamikelis was one of those who had to enlist. For a year he managed to dodge the draft, but in summer of 1944 he had to go. He enlisted in communications. He belonged to a propelled artillery platoon in the 19th Division and took part in the ferocious battles during Christmas of 1944, also in January and February, 1945.

After the capitulation Silamikelis together with some other soldiers managed to cross the stormy Baltic Sea in an army motor boat and escape to Sweden.

Even though the war was over, the men were still interned.

Later approximately 170 Baltic men, former Legionaries, had to fight their last battle — this time for their lives. In this battle there were casualties like in any other battle. Several men committed suicide; Silamikelis tried too and almost succeeded.

For the sake of anti-propaganda the Soviets released most of the former Legionaries already after six months, but a year later many of them were arrested again. Out of 149 men that were extradited 59 were put in GULAG camps, and nine were sent to death.

Valentins Silamikelis was denounced by Ludis Pakalniētis as a former member of the "National Guard" in 1951. He was tried and sentenced to 25 years in GULAG. He was sent to Vorkuta coal mines. But in the years before his arrest Silamikelis managed to study architecture in Latvian State University. He also married Ilga Nimande — one month before his arrest.

Later in the concentration camp Silamikelis was able to use his professional knowledge and project some buildings around and in the camp. As soon as it was possible his wife, a physician, came to live with him. In the fall of 1955, after Stalin had passed away and Khrushchew announced his great political amnesty, both Silamikelis returned home.

## I THE TERRIBLE YEAR (1940/41)

**The events of this year are the key  
for all the future events.**

The World War II began on September 1, 1939. It was soon after the secret pact between Germany and the Soviet Union that was signed on August 23, 1939. This pact divided Poland, left the Baltic States, Finland, and part of Rumania to the Soviets, and gave Adolf Hitler his chance to start an aggression against Poland.

One month later the Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin concentrated an army of several hundred thousand men and several thousand tanks at the border of the Baltic States. **Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, under the threat of an attack, were forced to sign a "mutual assistance" pact with the Soviet Union.** They also had to agree to let the Soviet Union place army units at strategic points inside their territories. Those army units were larger than the small Baltic armies. Finland had received a similar offer but had refused to sign such a pact. As a result the Soviet army attacked Finland at the end of November. The Finnish government had been prudent enough and had the defense forces ready. Finland was farsighted and prepared for self-defense because Russia had already attacked the countries along the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea since the 16th century. Thus the so-called Winter War was started. Finnish soldiers were considered the best fighters in Europe, and Finland had twice the population of Latvia, so they also had a larger army. But the greatest help was the climate and nature of Finland that provided a natural defense. So it happened that Finland, still a small country comparing to the huge Soviet Union, was able to stand against it for four months, gaining respect and admiration from all other countries in Europe. It was an outstanding heroism and strategy that let them stand against an army forty times larger than theirs. After four months though they had to give up, give part of their territory to the Soviet Union, and let them have their army bases. But with this war Finland accomplished one thing: saved its independence.

Also the international situation had changed. The same fall of 1939 Hitler urged all Germans, living in the Baltic States, to return to their homeland. In the 13th century Germans had come to this territory as Teutonic knights on a crusade. Later they received land for their merits and remained there. Thus for 700 years Latvians and the rest of the Baltic people had lived as serfs, exploited by the German landowners. It ended only after World War I when the three Baltic States gained independence. The remaining German minority lived mainly in cities. Now they too left, and a lot of Latvians went with them — either because they had a partially German origin, or because they already foresaw the future events and were afraid of the red terror. About them our president Karlis Ulmanis said with bitterness: "Let them go and never come back!" But upon leaving the repatriants sang the Latvian anthem — as if they would foresee the future.

Our home was Chiekurkalns — one of Riga suburbs. My father had built there a two-storey house with three apartments. On our street there lived a German family. Often we had fights with their son Kurt and his German friends. In winter there were snow fights, but there were hidden pieces of ice in the snow balls. The rest of the year it was stones that sailed over our fence. Luckily there were no more serious injuries than bruises. This family was among the repatriants, but Kurt came back later as a lieutenant of the German army. He was killed, guarding Courland at the end of World War II.

Not all Germans left Latvia. There was an obstetrics nurse that helped me and my sisters to come into this world. She was married to a German man Von Ferrach who said about Hitler's call for all Germans to come home: "If a leader calls me, I go, but if a painter's apprentice calls, I do not have to obey!" (Hitler was a painter before going into politics.) So the Von Ferrach family did not return to Germany in 1939, 1941, or even in the fall of 1944. After the war when communists again occupied Latvia, Von Ferrach was arrested. He perished, although he had not done anything. For that reason he did not join other refugees — he thought he had nothing to fear.

The reason Von Ferrach and countless other innocent people were arrested was very simple. After the war when the Soviet Union had lost 20 millions of the population there was a shortage of labor. NKVD (at that time MVD) had to fill GULAG camps with prisoners. It was very easy to make a "spy" out of a foreigner. Likewise many other people thought they had nothing to fear because they had never been mixed up in politics or collaborated with the German occupational power. And just like Von Ferrach they had to pay dearly for their naive belief.

After the treaty was signed, 20 Red army divisions were located in

the Baltic territory. Many people felt depressed because they realized it was a serious threat to our independence. We had no clear knowledge about the life in the Soviet Union, but we had some ideas, gained from news media and rumors. With horror we read about the so-called "cleansing" in 1935-1939. Even high party officials and army officers were accused and "confessed" all sins incriminated to them.

Two of my mother's brothers — Arnolds and Rudolfs Emolinsh — had remained in the Soviet Union after World War I. In the late thirties we did not receive letters from them any more. Only later we found out the terrible truth. **They were both shot. The same fate had befallen to all Latvian men from 16 to 60 years who were living in the Soviet Union. That meant approximately 70,000 out of 200,000 Latvians. The reason? Simply because they were Latvians.**

This is another holocaust, similar to the well-known one that was meant to annihilate Jews. Only nobody talks about this one. *Nor about the anti-Baltic attitude Russia has even today.*

Among those that were shot were also some women. Likewise Latvian Riflemen that helped Lenin to realize the communist revolution. Stalin was afraid of Latvian Riflemen and Latvians in general, also of army officers of the Red Army, so they were liquidated first. Stalin probably killed more high-ranking officers than were killed in war. **The stamina of the Soviet people has to be admired because in spite of everything Stalin did they still won the war.**

During the years of independence neither in Latvia nor in other Baltic States there were many that believed the communist propaganda and their ideals. In spite of the fact that the Soviet Union was right next to Latvia there were only 400 members in Latvian Communist party. The majority of them were either Russians or Jews. Nevertheless, in those days there were many Latvians that said: "It is better to live under the stupid Russians than under the oppressing Germans." Germans were considered our historical enemies, while talking about Russians, they meant the tsarist government officials that were not very bright but basically good-natured. It was possible to live with them, but nobody knew what the Russian communists were like. And people paid dearly for their ignorance. Only for Jews and Gypsies Russians were the lesser evil. For all other nations it was otherwise.

The winter of 1939/40 was filled with war flames in Europe while we still were living a normal life. The only change the war had made in our country was that sugar was rationed — 2 kilograms a month per person. It was a generous ration since 2,000 grams is the equivalent of almost 4 1/2 lbs. For people out in the country there was no electricity yet in those days, so they used kerosene lamps; kerosene was also

rationed. The Latvian president of those days Karlis Ulmanis was an agriculturist, and all people respected him as a good, farsighted manager of the state economy. Especially the younger generation that had grown up in the schools of independent Latvia was enthusiastic about Karlis Ulmanis. He was not a dictator as his political opponents insist. **The living standard had risen so high it was the second highest in Europe — right after the Netherlands. In the six years of Ulmanis presidency there was no death penalty performed in Latvia.** In prisons there were mostly criminals and a small number of communists and fascists. Ulmanis political opponents were confined for a few months at the time of the coup and then released with generous pensions. Even their stately mansions were not confiscated. However, later in exile they did not hesitate to repudiate Karlis Ulmanis and his supporters. Apparently Latvians had not risen to true democracy yet. Before the Ulmanis regime there were about fifty parties in Saeima (Latvian Parliament). They fought among themselves and thought only about the good of the party, not the whole nation. There is a very similar situation even now in Latvia, only the number of meaningful parties is not as great any more.

Latvians have always been very tolerant towards other nations. Maybe it is a virtue, but it has meant a great harm for us. **All immigrants find life in our country so good that they stay.** Now here are Russians that migrated to our country in the days of the Soviet Union and make up a third of the total population. It is the same in all Baltic States, but nowhere the number of Russians is as great as in Latvia. The Russian migrants consider the Baltic territory a part of Russia, and they are reluctant to learn Baltic languages. In the major cities there are even more Russians than natives.

**The independent Latvia accepted all political refugees,** including Jews. On the other hand, prosperous Sweden did not accept Jewish refugees and handed them over to Hitler. Apparently Sweden feared Hitler — just like later Swedish government feared Stalin. Latvia and Lithuania not only accepted Jews but also refugees from Poland; their country had been divided between Germany and the Soviet Union. About 20,000 Polish citizens remained in Latvia, and they all found work because in those days there was no unemployment in Latvia.

**In Latvia all minorities had a cultural autonomy.** They had their own schools, newspapers, and non-governmental organizations. Latvia could afford such a liberal minority policy because the minorities were small in numbers. Latvians made 73% of the total population. Jewish rabin Dubin was a personal friend of Karlis Ulmanis and died in Gulag's slave labour camp. He was punished as a Zionist and a former

member of Latvian Saeima. Latvian president has even attended a service in a Jewish synagogue. Such was the treatment of minorities in the independent Latvia and other Baltic States — but later some of them showed a blatant disloyalty against Latvia and its freedom.

Next to our house was an empty lot. **On June 15, 1940**, an anti-aircraft cannon "Bofors" was placed on it. In the afternoon some new field cannons emerged from the artillery warehouse next to the lot. To us, boys, all this was very interesting but also scary. We knew about the Finnish-Soviet war and greatly admired the brave Finns. We had also heard about the Soviet ultimatum to Lithuania. Are we going to fight the Soviets?

We volunteered to help. To observe the enemy aircraft, to dig trenches, to bring ammunition, to act as messengers. We — it means the boys from our house: two brothers Ozols — Roberts and Antons — both younger than me (I was sixteen at that time) and my childhood friend, seventeen year old Viesturs Krauklis, who lived in the neighborhood. All these boys were students at the First High School of Riga. *Later we all were drafted in Latvian Legion.*

Two days later the cannons were taken away. **It was June 17, the day the Soviet Union occupied Latvia.**

At this time all the German forces were tied up at Western front, fighting French. Stalin used this opportunity to hand the ultimatum to Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia — separately. The governments of the three Baltic States had committed a grave mistake. In twenty years they had not been able to form a common defense system, foreign policy, and a military industry that would have been the only real force against the aggressor. After the occupation of Lithuania it was impossible for Latvia to resist because we were surrounded from two sides — from Lithuania border as well as along the Soviet Union border.

All these years after World War II Latvians in exile have debated and argued whether the decision not to resist, made by our president Karlis Ulmanis, was right or wrong. Many people, especially from younger generations, insist that we should have resisted — then we would be respected just like Finns while now we cannot even complain about the occupation because we voluntarily let the Soviet tanks cross our border. **Yes, our honor would have been saved by resistance, but it would have meant a total annihilation of Latvian men either on the battle field or in GULAG camps. This happened to Polish soldiers. However, the shame of surrender was washed off four years later when Latvian Legion, Estonian Legion, and Lithuanian guerrillas fought the second Soviet occupation of the Baltic States.**

On June 17 the incoming Soviet army came from Lithuania. It was

enthusiastically greeted by two minorities that in Latvia had been treated more liberally than anywhere else in Europe. There was no anti-semitism in Latvia at that time. The small pro-fascist organization "Perkonkrusts" was considered illegal and was persecuted by Latvian government just like the communist party. However, under the German occupation many of the former "Perkonkrusts" members were arrested and put into concentration camps for being Latvian patriots.

Now we saw the true face of many that we had considered loyal citizens of Latvia. They greeted the destruction of our freedom and independence. They stepped on the Latvian flag and destroyed the state symbols. Latvians were surprised, disappointed, and finally bitter.

There was also a small number of Latvians that greeted the occupants — the members of communist party and some criminal elements. Jews were relieved that they would be protected from hitlerism, but Russians considered the Baltic territory still a part of Russia and the Soviets as the renovators of the former tsarist empire that had always oppressed the small neighbor nations.

On that day, June 17, we noticed dozens of strange aircraft over Riga, but on the empty lot next to our house gathered many army trucks, filled with soldiers. We watched them with surprise.

Then this was the Soviet army? The soldiers were small and ugly, with coarse features. Their uniform was long cotton shirts, worn over the trousers. Long, old-fashioned shotguns. What a contrast after the well-dressed and stately Latvian soldiers!

Even the officers did not look much better. The only way they stood out was with their caps that had a shade and usually were worn low over the forehead. We looked at the odd letters on the trucks with displeasure. The soldiers made campfires and cooked "kasha" — Russian style porridge. Later they were placed in the army quarters near Kish-ezers (a lake on the outskirts of Riga). From there we could hear their songs and marches that sounded like a drawn-out yelling with sudden pauses and whistles.

A couple of dozen tanks remained near the artillery warehouse. Comparing to the few tanks of Latvian army that were prehistoric, these were modern ones — with guns and some with two towers. When the tanks moved they emitted black smoke and a pungent smell of oil. The tanks were dusty, but the men looked better than regular army soldiers. They had black overalls and padded caps. But they seemed tired and did not want to talk to us. They probably considered us bourgeois because of our decent clothes. Here — in the factory workers suburb Chiekurkalns!

Our mood? To lose freedom and independence was almost the

same as to lose one's parents. We did not expect anything good from the future, but we had no idea the following year would be that terrible. At first the occupants declared they would not interfere in the internal affairs of our states. We did not know yet that the Soviet propaganda was pure lies.

One day me and my friend Viesturs were hiking to Spilve airport to watch the Red aircraft. To get onto the bridge that led over the river Daugava that divides Riga we had to pass the president's residence — Castle of Riga. We found the way blocked by the so called "police helpers" that had been established after the occupation. They were formed of criminal and hostile elements because **communists could trust them better**. They told us something in Russian that we did not understand, but their gesticulation was unmistakable.

A demonstration was approaching. People carried grotesque effigies that were titled "Pig-Ulmanis" (K. Ulmanis had started out as an agronomist), "Capitalist", "Koulak". The last word we did not understand. It is Russian word for "fist", but we did not know this word also meant a well-to-do farmer — a class that now had to be wiped out. There were also slogans in a distorted Latvian language like: "Down with Ulmanis!" — and similar ones. They also shouted something that I did not understand. At the front marched Latvian communists, but in the rest of the crowd there were few Latvian faces. Maybe among the demonstrators were also those that Latvia had saved from Nazi persecutions in Germany.

Then came different people. They did not shout and did not carry slogans, only red flags. They had grim faces, and their eyes were cast down. They were Latvian workers that had been **forced** to join the demonstration. If anybody refused, he became a marked man; the names of all those were written down. If anybody talked back, their names were handed over to NKVD. These were the first letters of communist secret police that was an equivalent to German Gestapo. Later the name was changed to NKGB, then MVD, and finally to KGB.

NKVD came together with army units and started its work right away. Already after a few days they started to arrest the former members of Latvian government and other Latvian patriots. For example, on June 20 in Liepaja they arrested second lieutenant Jekabs Feldmanis, and he was never seen again. When next summer all Latvian officers were arrested at Litene summer camp, his son Fridrichs Feldmanis shot the army political educator (called "politruk" in Russian) Doronin and was killed on the spot. The rest of the officers were taken to GULAG camps. After a year a part of them were tried and executed, the rest perished by starvation, cold climate, and the cruelty of guards.

People had already heard of NKVD and were wary, so they took part in demonstrations "voluntarily". In the Soviet Union many concepts meant the exact opposite — like freedom, democracy, culture. One of the jokes of that era was that the Soviet Constitution was like French language: you write one way but pronounce differently. And so it was all through the years of the Soviet occupation.

On that day my friend Viesturs and I had an eyeful of a free show until the guards told us either to join the demonstration or to beat it.

Another political show I watched one evening at the Soviet Embassy. On the balcony appeared the emissary from Moscow — Vishinski. He was sent here to organize the sovietization of Latvia. Vishinski was a famous district attorney and judge who sentenced many people to death during the political trials of the 1930s. He invented a new judiciary system: the court does not have to prove the defendant's guilt — the defendant has to prove his innocence. That was practically impossible.

Vishinski was shouting something into the microphone, and the crowd in front of the Embassy responded in Russian. They carried slogans in Latvian, Russian, and Hebrew. At that time I could not have imagined that one day a Jewish engineer Shulmann would become my savior. He had been put in the same Soviet concentration camp where I was — for teaching Hebrew, for being a "zionist".

Every once in a while a forest of fists rose up in the air. The German fascist greeting is with an open palm and with the shout: "Heil Hitler!" The communist sympathizers used fists and shouted: "Hurrah Stalin!" In Latvian such a gesture means exactly the opposite — not a greeting but a threat. I rose up my fist, too.

Later I heard people laughing that Vishinski had called his admirers fools. He had thought the microphone was shut off and had said to somebody, standing next to him on the balcony: "When will these fools stop?" Unfortunately, there were also quite a few Latvians that believed in the "Socialistic Paradise" while still others simply tried to make a career for themselves by toadying to the new power.

\* \* \*

Every nation has its share of trash. This was the time when ours became visible. Many of them were put in high posts because they seemed trustworthy to the new power — just like the minorities. The worst were those that either carried a grudge and craved revenge or simply wanted to promote their career by denouncing other persons. Usually denounced persons were arrested without checking out whether the accusations were true.

Under the direction of Vishinski a new government was formed. The new prime minister was a professor of microbiology Augusts Kirshenshteins — an ambitious but cowardly man. There were also several newspapermen from the newspaper “Jaunakas Zinas” among the new cabinet members. So the key figures were from intelligentsia, not from the famous underground communist party, because the former were better known to people and also easier intimidated. In fact, the new government was just **marionettes**. They had to be totally obedient to Moscow. All the directions came from there. All the reports were made in eight copies, and six of them went to Moscow. This procedure was mandatory in all cases, even for... cake recipes

In July Saeima elections were announced. **There was just a single list of candidates**, so voters had no choice. This list was called “The United Block of Workers”. There should have been at least two parties, each with a separate list — communists and social-democrats. The organizers of this farce did not even bother to make it resemble real, democratic elections.

There was a group of honorable citizens that saw a small chance to re-establish true democracy in Latvia. This group, led by a poet and former Minister of Education Atis Keninsh and the former Minister of Defense Janis Balodis, made a second list to compete with “The United Block of Workers”. Were they really naive enough to believe this possible? Maybe not; maybe they were ready to sacrifice themselves for the slight chance that it just **might** work. But it didn't. They were all arrested, and their materials were all confiscated. Only one list remained for the election — “The United Block of Workers” which did not contain any real worker!

Every person that had reached age 18 had to vote. A stamp on the I.D. was put to indicate the person had voted. But there was no independent control over the process of voting or counting the ballots. In some voting stations there were cabins for voters to make their choices by crossing out some names. But those that used the cabins were registered. And many voting stations did not even have the cabins. Considering all this it is no wonder over 90% of voters voted for this only list. But the surprising fact was that abroad the results were announced already before the end of the elections.

The new Saeima, elected in such sham elections, “unanimously decided” to join the Soviet Union. **The Latvian Constitution rules that such a crucial decision can be made only by a referendum, not by Saeima alone.** Later, to justify this unlawful action, a myth about a “people's revolution” was created. But everybody knew there was no revolution in Latvia or other Baltic States — they were simply occupied

by the Soviet Union. To fool the general population there were some former army officers or members of Home Guard that had been nominated for Saeima — like Peteris Blaus and Julijs Lacis. Later they both wound up in GULAG, and Lacis died there.

Even ordinary people started to disappear, and it was impossible to find out anything about them. In August an acquaintance of mine was arrested — pilot Fricis Lama.

Already at the **beginning of August** a delegation of Saeima went to Moscow to humbly ask for Latvia to be incorporated into the Soviet Union. Among the delegates there was a general Roberts Dambitis, still wearing his Latvian army uniform while a lady member of the delegation — Ieva Ruse Paldina — wore the Latvian national costume. To put on such a national show while burying the independence of Latvia — it was a sacrilege. The leader of the delegation was Augusts Kirhenšteins. Stuttering, in a crackled voice, he read his speech from a piece of paper in Latvian which nobody understood and nobody bothered to translate. It did not matter; his request was automatically voted for acceptance. When the delegation returned, in some train stations politruks had organized “enthusiastic” crowds to greet it. The greeters were the Soviet army members and the newly emerged lackeys of the communist power.

#### **It all happened the same way in Lithuania and Estonia.**

Soon after Latvia had become LSSR (Latvian Soviet Socialistic Republic) people were pleased to have their salaries doubled. But only a short time later the prices went up five times. Our lats was made equal to the Russian rouble, and **salaries and prices were made equal to those in the Soviet Union**. Those that had really believed all the promises about a better life were crushed. The only thing that was still cheap was **vodka**, and it became the only solace.

To placate the population NKVD found a scapegoat — the price inspector Elpers. He was still left in his post from the previous government because of his great experience. It was publicly announced that Elpers is responsible for the sudden rise of prices. Elpers was accused of “harmful action” — a new term of Soviet jurisprudence. Elpers disappeared, but the high prices remained.

The next step was to **declare everything “property of people”**. It meant the destruction of such a concept as “private property”. There was no place for it in a socialistic society. **All private property was confiscated**: business, factories, shops, even private houses that were larger than 220 square meters (our house was smaller). Likewise all cars and trucks were confiscated. As for bank deposits, nobody could have more than 1,000 lats; the rest was confiscated. Our lats was made equal

to Russian rouble that had a lesser value. And early in 1941 lats was taken out of circulation.

The confiscation of private property was especially painful for farmers. Nobody could have more than 30 hectares of land. The confiscated land was distributed among farm workers that did not have any land before — 10 ha each. And the land was only given them to use; nobody could be a land owner. But 10 ha was too little for a farmer to exist and feed his family. This was done on purpose — to force farmers to agree to collective farms.

All the gold and other valuables belonging to the state were taken to Moscow — except a fraction of the gold fund Karlis Ulmanis managed to ship to England. However, later England gave that too to the Soviet Union. Thus England deceived us again. All over the country, especially in Riga, there were the red flags, communist slogans, and portraits of Lenin, Stalin, Marx, and Engels.

**The majority of Latvian nation remained faithful to the idea of the independent Latvia, rejected communism, and, naturally, hated the occupational power. Therefore this power accepted the helpful hand of minorities and criminal elements.**

The new economy was often chaotic. Since all the nationalistically oriented persons were fired from responsible positions, those that took over were often completely incompetent, because the most important requirement was either a membership in the formerly underground communist party or at least a proletarian origin. Some of them were nearly illiterate — could barely sign their name. The small business was in a better shape, because the former owners were allowed to continue to work there even after the nationalization. But the big factory or business owners were fired and later punished as capitalists.

A new bureaucracy was created that directed the economy. Nothing could be done without their approval. Among them were also NKVD informers that informed NKVD about anything suspicious and even watched each other. There had to be so many responsible persons to assure that somebody could always be accused of “harmful action” if something went wrong.

Any initiative could come only from Moscow or the local communist party leaders. The private initiative was wiped out together with private property. The popular line of that time — “No initiative will remain... unpunished!” — says it all.

At the same time the NKVD terror became more noticeable. **Many persons disappeared.** Even those that had never been mixed up in politics. The newspapers did not report the arrests, but the families found out, and the lines of family members that were bringing packages to

their imprisoned relatives grew longer and longer along the prison fences.

All the non-governmental organizations were liquidated. The Red Cross was about the only one that was left, but it was transformed after the pattern of the Soviet Red Cross.

Communists called themselves "internationalists", but at the same time they closed the schools of 16 minorities, organizations, theatres, and even minority hospitals. However, all these establishments were allowed for the Russian minority.

To hide from the Soviet people the prosperity of the capitalist West the border with the Soviet Union remained closed. So during that first year the poor, half-starved people from the Soviet Union did not overflow the Baltic States yet, as it happened after the war when the border was opened.

**In peacetime the USSR that was so rich in natural resources, fertile soil, and forests had the food rationed.**

There were changes in our school as well — the First High School of Riga. Our principal Janis Lapinsh was a very patriotic man, had taken part in the proclamation of the independent Latvia, so, of course, he was fired. The students respected him very much. The communist take-over and the loss of his beloved work was such a hard blow to him that he fell ill and passed away in the spring of 1941. Fired was also the inspector Julijs Loze. He later emigrated and continued to work as an educator; he has passed away by now. Faithful communists filled these posts: principal Zhagata and inspector Grinvalds.

We had several new subjects now: Russian, the history of communist party, political economy, darvinism, but did not have any more religious instruction. Physical education was now called "fizkultura" — physical culture. The word "culture" was overly used in communist society. For instance, office stationary was called "culture wares". There were even "Shops for Culture Wares". It seemed that by talking about it they wanted to hide the lack of it.

Luckily we still had our English teacher Janis Curiks. He was also our homeroom teacher. But instead of our previous Latvian literature and grammar teacher Rinkuss we now had a young teacher Emma Andersone — a member of communist party. She urged all the students to join the "Communist Youth" organization. However, there were only two of the whole class that joined. One was my friend Leons Markis; he came from a poor worker family. The other one — Spodris Karlivans — came from a communistically inclined family. All the rest were against occupants and against collaborators.

At the beginning of October in all schools the communist anthem

"Internationale" had to be taught. That was supposed to be our anthem now instead of "God, Bless Latvia" — the anthem of independent Latvia. For us that had been born and raised in independent Latvia it was repugnant. And we were too young to pretend and act contrary to our feelings. We did not know yet that for the people in the Soviet Union it was a matter of life and death. Literally.

In a protest the students had made up a parody of "Internationale". I was called up to recite the lyrics. At first I recited the correct words, but then a protest swelled up inside me. Why must I be like a lamb and bow to our oppressors! At the beginning of the last verse I started to recite the parody: "Neither Stalin, Molotov, nor Spure (the communist party secretary in Latvia, later shot during the war for shady deals) will bring new future for us."

Teacher Andersone was outraged. She sent me out of the class and told me to wait at the door of the principal's office. There I was told I had to show up at the dreaded NKVD that evening.

Together with my father I visited Janis Curiks that afternoon. He had already been informed about this. He had talked to the principal — should the boy really go to that horrible place for just a childish prank? The principal had agreed that it really was not important enough to bother the state security office, but teacher Andersone had informed NKVD herself, and the principal could not help any more.

It was October 10. I felt terrible. I wished I could turn into a dog or a cat — they did not have to go to NKVD. I could not seek refuge at a relatives' place either, because then NKVD would arrest my father. And what would my younger sisters Aina and Rita do then — left by themselves? And I — I could not leave my accustomed life either, not all of a sudden. It was too hard. Finally I tried to solace myself with a philosophy that later in life came in handy so often: whatever will be, will be!

So I went to the NKVD building. First of all I had to go to a room on the first floor to get a pass. I remembered buying here a map a year ago — it was a tourist agency then. Even now this place promoted "tourism" — to Siberia, Kolima, Far North, and many other places, in the company of armed "guides".

Here I saw the NKVD men with their typical blue caps, lined with red. It was similar to those, worn by tsarist gendarmes. My father asked for a permission to come with me and act as an interpreter since I spoke no Russian, but he was rudely shoved aside. So I had to go alone.

When I entered the room I was puzzled. It was a huge room with many guards. Then I saw myself and understood: the walls were covered with mirrors. A civilian sat at a desk and checked my pass and

my student's certificate, then called a soldier. He took me to the fourth or fifth floor. There I had to wait in the hall-way, and an armed guard was ordered to stay with me. I was sitting and did not even dare to move. An hour went by, then another. The guard was changed every hour. Most of them were not Russian but came from the Middle-Asian republics of the Soviet Union — I could tell by their oriental faces.

So the evening went by, and it was already near midnight when a young Latvian man was seated next to me. He looked like a college student. I was curious but did not dare to speak, not even to ask his name. I only noticed that his face had been beaten. He did not speak to me either. This safety measure was necessary; otherwise the NKVD could accuse us as a group that worked together, and it was considered a graver offense than single person's transgression. The young man sometimes fell asleep. I figured he had been interrogated day and night. At that time I did not know yet that prisoners were not allowed to sleep during the day, but interrogation usually took place during the night. Sometimes it went on two or three nights in a row. When the person fell asleep, he was doused with cold water. In such a state one was willing to sign **anything**. The young man next to me was roused by guards every time he fell asleep.

Often the NKVD personnel walked by. At one time they had with them a woman. Apparently she had been tortured and was unable to walk by herself since they were pulling her with them. One of the men shouted something, and the guard turned me to face the wall so I would not see anything. Some of the NKVD men cursed us as they walked by. Two dark-haired men conversed among themselves in Yiddish (a German dialect). They were not afraid to speak German, although the common language here was Russian. After the war it was dangerous to do so.

When morning was approaching, I finally had enough guts to ask one of the men that looked like a Latvian if I would not be blamed for coming too late since I had been ordered to come in the evening. He understood me and asked where I was supposed to go. I indicated the room, and soon I was taken there. Probably now I was "ripe" for the interrogation. Wasn't this long waiting a part of the plan to break down one's spirit? Waiting, every minute seemed like an hour.

In the room there was a man in a bright blue shirt, sitting at a massive desk. He spoke Latvian but with an accent; however, he treated me decently. I had to sit on a stool — some distance from the desk. The room was brightly lit by a chandelier at the ceiling, but a desk lamp was on as well, and its light was turned directly on my face. The interrogation began with ordinary questions about myself, my parents, and my grand-parents. (Family history was very important for communists.)

This calmed me down somewhat. Then I was told to write down what I had said at school. An instinct warned me not to mention Stalin, only Molotov and Spure. Even so, the interrogator suddenly became furious and started to curse me: "Scoundrel, sonofabitch, whore..." And many other words like that — in Russian. It was the first time in my life I heard such words. Then he asked me where I had gotten the parody. I was naive enough to tell him that I found the slip of paper in my desk. Immediately he asked who sat next to me. (At school we were sitting two at each desk.) I did not know what to say. The interrogator continued that they knew everything that was going on at school, and I better should tell the truth. Anyway — what could I make up so suddenly? I told the name of my friend Valdis Kruminsh. (Later I warned him to make up a credible story about the origin of the parody, but he was not called to NKVD.)

The interrogator tried to squeeze out of me the information about the general mood in our class. I told him we were studying as usual and the new subjects were interesting. He was not satisfied with it and looked at me sternly. I added that we had already the first "Communist Youth" members in our class. I was asked to name them, and I did. Then he asked me why I had not joined. At first I did not know what to say. Finally I told him it was a new organization and I wanted first to become familiar with it. He shouted that it was not important — the important thing was to feel like a communist, not like a bourgeois. I decided he must be a fanatical communist.

The interrogator calmed down and told me to inform them of any anti-communist talk I happened to overhear at school. I was already wise enough not to protest — I promised. Then he asked me to whom I intended to report. My answer was: teacher Andersone and the leader of "Communist Youth" Brinkmanis. He agreed, and I realized I would get out of here.

**Now I understood how silly I had acted at school by revealing my true attitude towards the communist regime. This was exactly what they wanted to find out, and I had helped them to achieve it.**

Of course, I did not intend to report anything. But I warned my class-mates not to write any more notes and to watch their language. To show resistance was harmful only for us, not for our enemy.

The NKVD man took a long time to write the report. I had to sign each page. However, I was not allowed to read it, so I did not really know what I signed. I did not even know whether it was in Latvian or in Russian. But I was too scared to ask. I was given a note in Latvian to sign, promising I would not tell a word to anyone about what I saw and experienced here. If I broke this promise I would be accused of treason

and punished accordingly. Finally the interrogator urged me to join the "Communist Youth" as soon as possible.

Outside it was already daylight. I took a deep breath and hurried away. At the other side of the street I saw my father. He had waited for me all night. The first thing he asked me was: "Did they beat you?" He knew how the NKVD interrogators acted. But I could not tell anything even to my own father, so I only shook my head. My father understood and said: "Thanks be to God!" He did not say one word of reproach, although I had submitted to danger our whole family. But after this night I noticed the first gray hair on my father's head.

After World War I many Latvians that had taken refuge from Germans remained in Russia that was now the Soviet Union. Among them were quite a few my father knew personally. In the 1930s they all perished — were killed by NKVD because they were Latvians. Only one with the last name that sounded like Lithuanian remained alive. Was Stalin afraid of the legendary Latvian Riflemen? When will we have our own holocaust museum to show what happened to Latvians?

Next day at school I received a notice about being expelled. I shuddered. What would I achieve in life without a finished secondary education? The way to higher education was closed now. I did not realize yet that **at the present time the most important thing was a mere survival. Not only for our family but for the whole Latvian nation.**

However, it was a small punishment, considering everything else that could have happened to me. If I had mentioned Stalin's name, I probably would have been finished. I would have never seen my home and family again but had perished in a Soviet concentration camp. I would have been sentenced to 10 years for anti-Soviet agitation. Another thing that helped me was the fact that our family was not rich. My father was just a land surveyor, had never been a member of a political party or the Home Guard. The latter were arrested simply for membership in this highly patriotic defense organization, similar to National Guard in the U.S.A.

After my experience with NKVD the whole student body of our school learned to keep their mouths shut. Resistance had a meaning if it was real and serious, not a childish prank like mine had been. Till the end of the school year I did not hear that anyone else would have gotten into trouble. Another boy of my class — Tuchs — joined the "Communist Youth". After the war he became an NKVD officer. Before the communist era our class published a literary magazine; my friend Valdis Kruminsh was the editor, Gunars Birkerts (an architect in the U.S.A. now), Gunars Eltermanis, and I — illustrators. Now it was closed, and the so called "wall newspaper" appeared — a bulletin board with communist propaganda.

So now I lived at home but saw my closest friends almost daily to find out about the home-work that I continued to do. Before I had not been a very diligent student, sometimes skipped the home-work, but now I did it meticulously. After I was kicked out of school I began to appreciate education.

The rest of the time I worked at our household. We even had a cow, not to mention chickens that most suburbanites had. I even helped my grandmother to cook and did our grocery shopping. It was done on credit. In those days many customers had a small copy-book where each purchase was written down, and it was paid at the end of the month; people trusted each other. I also read a lot of books. Especially I liked historical novels. Although I did not go to school I was not idle. I hardly had any time left at all. Maybe it was because of my character; I did everything slowly, so it took a lot of time.

**In the mid-winter another repatriation of Germans took place.** There had been an agreement between Hitler and Stalin that the remaining Germans in the Baltic States, that by now had had a taste of what was in store for them, would be allowed to repatriate. Many Latvians too used this chance if they could concoct a German connection — especially the former high government officials and army officers. Germany accepted everybody, but not everybody was allowed to go by NKVD.

Some people guessed already at that time that war between Germany and the Soviet Union was imminent. **So Baltic people began to wait for the war as their salvation — although they well knew that Hitler was no better than Stalin.** Germans had always been our historical enemies and considered the Baltic territory their land — just like Russians. So the wish for war was still ambivalent at this time.

Now we realized how wrong had been those people that professed at first: better under Russians than Germans. Therefore with satisfaction we listened to the British news broadcast about the friction between both “friends” — communists and Nazi's. The word “fascist” in those days was used only regarding Italians.

The third aggressor — Italy — at that time attacked Albania and Greece, but got punished by Greeks, so Germany had to come to rescue. Along the way Germany licked Yugoslavia where, after a coup, an anti-German government had been formed. It signed the pact with the Soviet Union; Hitler ignored it. Just as fast Germans invaded Greece. But this chain of events became crucial for Hitler. The campaign in Balkans delayed the plan “Barbarossa” (the attack on the Soviet Union) for a month. The communists had concentrated a huge army at their borders, waiting for the capitalists to bleed to death in their mutual wars *that*

would give the Soviet Union the chance to invade Europe. But the Red Army had no defense plan; they had been trained only to attack. Most of this army was later wiped out in the sudden preventive attack by the strong, experienced German army that had not yet been weakened by the previous campaigns. But the delay of one month became fateful — because of Russian climate.

England and Sweden repeatedly reported in their news that Germany was concentrating army units along the Eastern border. On the pretext that they needed more armed forces in occupied Norway, German forces entered Finland as well. *Contrary to other European countries, occupied by Germany, Finns welcomed this turn of events because it alleviated their deadly fear of the Soviets.*

This time it was clear what kind of “friendship” there was between the Soviet Union and Germany. **The war between the former partners seemed inevitable.** It was confirmed by an announcement by TASS — the Soviet news agency. TASS reported that rumors about a planned German attack were untrue, a malicious fantasy, spread by Western capitalists. TASS assured that both sides fulfilled their obligations “punctually”. This report had to be understood as the exact opposite, because communists were always lying. They lied about the occupation of the Baltic States, they lied about the elections, they lied about events in the Soviet Union. It was no different this time. Only fanatical communists believed this and fooled themselves.

**Then came that horrible, incomprehensible event that turned the Baltic people permanently against communism and the Soviet Union and made them wait for the war and Germans as the only possible liberators.**

This outrageous event was **deportation — a massive arrest of Baltic men, women, and children that were packed in cattle cars and taken to the Far North or Far East of the Soviet Union.** Even babies and very old or sick persons were taken. Whole families were taken, but **men were separated from their families already at the beginning.** They were sent to GULAG camps where almost all of them perished. Women and children were mostly taken to collective farms in Siberia, but their chances of survival were only a little better.

Some men had not been at their residences when their families were taken. When they found out what had happened, many of them gave themselves up willingly, hoping to be together with their families. However, it did not happen that way; they were deported separately. (To prevent more Latvians being born?)

In the evening of June 13 I happened to pass the Victory Square — a large square on the other side of the river Daugava. This square was

used for mass festivities, otherwise it was empty. To my surprise I saw that evening that the square was filled with trucks. They were guarded by NKVD men with their blue caps and also a large number of civilians that wore red armbands. During the night I also heard some shots. All this was very odd and scary. Did it mean the beginning of war?

Next morning, June 14, I went to the nearest grocery store. On my way I noticed a truck, standing in front of a small, blue painted one-storey house. Armed men, cursing in Russian (after my experience at the NKVD I understood Russian better), shoved outside some people that were not even properly dressed. Women had children hanging on to them, and one even had a baby on her arm. Children were crying loudly. A young man tried to resist, and the guards hit him with their rifle butts. An elderly man came with an armful of blankets. He threw them onto the truck and wanted to go back to the house to get something else. But he was not allowed to do so. The guards urged: "Faster, faster!" (Later I found out this was the family of a Latvian district attorney that was deported that morning. The district attorney himself had been arrested earlier.)

Then the guards noticed me and realized I was watching. One of them approached me, shouting something I did not understand. But I knew I was in danger, so I immediately ran away and hid in another yard. The truck went on to gather more victims. And they were not even allowed to get dressed properly! My hatred for communists and their lackeys increased.

Later I found out from my neighbors about scenes like the above taking place over the whole city, **throughout Latvia, and throughout the Baltic States.**

That day my father figured we should not sleep at home the following night — maybe the deportations would be continued. But finally he decided we would not feel safe anywhere. If before they had been either well-to-do people or well known patriots that had been arrested, then now they were taking even poor workers, fishermen, meager farmers.

The next night we stayed awake. We put into suitcases winter clothes, boots, non-perishable food items. We wanted to be ready when they came. Our neighbors did the same.

In the afternoon we heard rumors that freight cars with the arrested people were still at the train stations Tornakalns and Skirotava. The windows were barred, people begged for water, but the NKVD men would not let anyone near.

Only years later we found out the true extent of horrors these people went through. The cars were overloaded, people lacked water

and food, and there was only a hole in the floor to serve as a toilette. Under these conditions people had to travel for weeks. Sometimes the train was stopped and people had access to some water but never enough. For food there was given only a little bit of bread and some salted fish that only increased the thirst. In such circumstances many died — primarily the old people, the babies, and those that were ill; there was absolutely no medical help. The dead ones were simply thrown out of the train. When the destination was reached, part of the deported was placed on collective farms, but the rest was taken over waterway to the locations in the Far North. **There they were left under bare sky without any provisions and shelter. Most of them perished from cold and starvation.** Those that were placed on collective farms were fed a little better. They did not receive any salary for their work, but at least they had some kind of a shelter. As for food — many exchanged their extra clothing for food, if only they had any. If not — they tried to find some food which was possible on a farm. The local Russian people were good-natured and would have helped, but the NKVD propaganda told them Latvians were German friends. **The NKVD men were everywhere** — even in the smallest villages and collective farms. They reaped an important benefit for their work — they did not have to go to combat. There were also special units that were called “Smersh”. It meant “Death to the spies”. These units arrested anybody that seemed suspicious.

This “genial” idea of Stalin about destruction of the whole nations by deporting them to the wildest parts of the Soviet Union was conceived almost two years before it was put to work. On October 11, 1939, only days after the Baltic-Soviet pact was signed, there was an order No. 001223, given by NKVD general Serov, about the deportation of the Baltic people. When it was time to execute this order the local NKVD men and communist party members proposed the names of the deportees, but the final version of deportation lists was formed in Riga by two Latvians and two persons of other nationalities under the direction of Samuel Levinson.

Very secretly 10,000 forms were printed for deportation needs. The actual deportation was led by NKVD employees Alfons Noviks and Simon Shustin. **On the night of June 13 or early in the morning of June 14 there were arrested, put in 661 freight cars, and deported 16,206 citizens of Latvia that belonged to different nationalities.** Among them were 4,000 Jews since many of them were rich.

During the whole year in Latvia alone (from June 17, 1940 to June 22, 1941) 6,182 citizens were arrested, kept in prison, and finally either deported to GULAG camps or killed. Among them were 348 women

and 17 children under 16. 979 persons were officially sentenced to death, including 53 women and one child!

The next deportation was planned for July 2. This was supposed to be a larger one — 62,000 “enemies of people”. A third deportation was planned in August. This destruction of Latvian and other Baltic citizens was stopped by the German army. (The above data comes from the Red Cross, a Latvian war-time organization “Tautas palīdzība” (“National Help”), and the documents found by the “National Guard” in the NKVD building. More about it later.)

After June 14 there were missing persons in every school or place of employment. The remaining people were worried about the missing ones as well as about themselves. The Baltic nations were desperate. Many left their homes and became fugitives; some organized guerrilla groups and planned armed resistance. Many apartments and houses were left uninhabited and were robbed by NKVD men, militia, and communist youth. What was left was taken by criminal elements. In those dark days the scum of the nation floated to the surface.

**Is it any wonder that under such circumstances the Baltic people waited for the war to start and for the German army to come in? It was the only real force that could save us from an imminent destruction.**

I have heard a rumor that Molotov had declared quite openly already at the beginning of the occupation: **“We will not leave Latvians at the Baltic sea!”** Apparently the Latvian Riflemen in Russia had created such hatred against all Latvians that the annihilation was started already in 1937/38. Then came the deportations — in 1941, in 1949, and individual arrests and deportations continued all the time. Instead of the deported Latvians **Russian colonists were brought in. Germans had similar plans after the war. The plan “Ost” prepared to bring 150,000 German colonists to Latvia in 20 years. The Soviets brought in three times that many.**

The Soviet power made informers out of local people. One was supposed to report even about family members but especially about acquaintances. People did it not only for a career or material gains but also out of fear. Everybody was worried about one's own skin. There never were any formal announcements about the arrests and the reasons for them. At the moment of arrest people lost all their rights and had no way to defend themselves. There was a popular saying among those in power: “NKVD is always right.” Terror was justified as necessary to “build communism”. The Soviet judiciary system was meant not to punish criminals but to supply free labor for GULAG camps. And NKVD (later NKGB and KGB) was more than just a secret police. It was the prosecutor, the judge, and the exploiter of imprisoned people all in

one. If anybody ever was released people were sure it was because he had become a traitor. But even that did not guarantee release. Sometimes traitors were only promised an easier camp. Only totally naive persons believed they would be released because they were innocent.

**With the beginning of war between Germany and the Soviet Union the communist terror was intensified. Red army and NKVD people, when retreating, killed or took with them additional 12,000 victims.** About 22,000 communist sympathizers went with them willingly. Among the latter were many Jews, but not all Jews were allowed by NKVD to cross the old border between Latvia and the Soviet Union and not all left Latvia. The remaining ones were killed by Germans or put into concentration camps.

The statistics, compiled by the Red Cross, show that 36,000 citizens of Latvia were either killed or deported during the Terrible Year. The names and other data about those persons are documented. Adding those that left voluntarily it is safe to say **Latvia lost about 60,000 people that year. During the three years of German occupation Latvia lost 70,000 Jews and Gypsies, and 30,000 people of other nationalities.** At the end of war, seeing the return of the Soviet occupation, 200,000 Latvian citizens left their home and became refugees. Already before that Germans mobilized 20,000 people as workers in Germany, and 146,000 young men were drafted into German army. All together it makes about 526,000 or one fourth of the population. Only about 100,000 returned to Latvia!

In the previous sports hall near our house there was now a tank repair shop. On June 20 I noticed a damaged tank taken there. It looked as if it had been shot at. What did it mean? Had the war begun? There was an official report about a German spy plane that had been shot down near Liepaja. The crew was returned to Germany. All this indicated that war was imminent.

On June 22 I happened to be on a street-car, going downtown. I heard somebody saying in Russian: "Hitler is finished!" **War! At last!**

The radio reported about bombed Soviet cities like Kiev and Sevastopol, but only at noon there was an official announcement by Secretary of State Molotov that Germany had broken the German-Soviet pact. German army had suddenly, unexpectedly crossed the border, and the war had begun with Germany and its allies. But there was no word from Stalin. There was a silence for ten days until Stalin finally had recovered from his great fright and started to lead his people. By that time the German army was already in Riga and deep into Belaruss and Ukraine.

The next day some strange planes appeared over Riga. Only then the alarm was sounded. Dozens of Soviet fighter planes took to air but

could not catch the enemy planes. They turned out to be German scouts. The Red fighters circled the sky until they ran out of gas. After they had landed there came German bombers and bombed the Spilve airport. From our balcony I could see the smoke and hear the explosions, but no Soviet plane was seen. They were destroyed on the ground like helpless chickens.

June 24, St. John's Day, still was considered a holiday as it had always been. On that day Dad took me and my sisters to his cousin Alfred's farm in the north-eastern Latvia, near Gulbene. We always used to spend our summer vacations there. My father thought we would be safer there; nobody would bomb a farm-house.

My father had to return to work; at war time rules were especially draconic. We parted with the thought that we might never see each other again.

Midsummer Night festivities were an ancient pagan ritual that was still observed in our country, but not that year. Part of the festivities was to build a bon-fire, but that could be interpreted as signalization for enemy planes. Even without that communists were so nervous that they saw spies and traitors everywhere. Many innocent people lost their lives during those days because somebody had denounced them as spies.

We had a small radio that worked on batteries. With that we could hear Kenigsberg that broadcasted news in Latvian. So we found out about the fast pace of German army that the Soviet sources did not report. We also heard about the serious resistance at Liepaja by the harbor garrison of the Red marines. But we wished for the German army to be here sooner. At night my grandmother prayed for German soldiers.

In less than a week after our arrival here we could see on the highway to Gulbene the retreating Soviet army. The enlisted men did not even realize they were retreating. Our farm was near the highway, and some of them asked my uncle, how far it still was to Berlin! Later they were not like soldiers any more but rather like refugees — tired, dusty, with raw feet. Once a whole unit stopped at our place and cooked porridge for their supper in our yard — without milk or butter. My aunt had twenty cows and plenty of milk. She distributed all milk she had that evening. The soldiers were grateful but waited for somebody of us to drink the milk first — they were afraid we might want to poison them.

Some cannons were drawn by horses. The NKVD men with their blue-tip caps went by in trucks. Private persons used cars. In the opposite direction went some Red army units that were the former Latvian army. **Communists did not trust them and either discharged them, or**

**they had gone AWOL.** They all were just enlisted men. All the army officers, except those that managed to leave the army beforehand or were on a special mission somewhere else at that time, were gathered at summer camp Litene, disarmed, arrested, and sent to GULAG camps. After a year they were either shot or had starved to death. Later the leader of the Baltic military region — general Kuznecov — was shot for retreating from the region and discharging part of the army.

One of these former Latvian army soldiers came into our yard to ask for some water. After he had quenched his thirst he left in our yard one of his two rifles and cartridges but kept the other rifle and hand-grenades. He went to the near-by forest to gather his buddies and form a guerrilla group. I wanted to go with him because now I had a weapon, but he persuaded me to wait. He promised to let me know when the group would be ready. If he had kept his promise, I would have gone without the slightest hesitation.

Since I did not have a chance to fight in the guerrilla group I tried to be helpful on the farm. One morning I was milking the cows when I heard some shots. Very soon a neighbor's wife, highly desperate, ran into the barn. She told some of the retreating communists had seen her husband in his gray forester's uniform and taken it for a German army uniform. They had insisted he was a diversant and taken him with them. I remembered the shots, and I had a terrible suspicion. We went in the direction of the shots. There we found the poor woman's husband, lying on the ground with a bloody head and chest. Later in combat I saw many dead people, but I'll never forget this cold-blooded murder.

There were still small groups of Red army or individual soldiers on the highway. They looked very tired and slowly dragged themselves by. Suddenly I heard motor noise and saw gray trucks with soldiers in them. Not realizing how dangerous it was to be between two armies I ran out to the highway and called out: "Are you Germans?"

"Yes, yes, fellow!" was the answer, and they waved to me. The truck was decorated with flowers, and some soldiers wore flowers in their lapels. Later I found out it was the local people that had decorated them. **At our place too everybody was relieved when I told about Germans coming in.**

The very next evening my father arrived. How could he get here if there was no public transportation? It turned out he had gone out on the highway and asked one of the passing German trucks to take him along. My father spoke a perfect German, and Germans trusted those that knew their language. "Yes, please!" the truck driver had answered, and so now he was here. To celebrate the family reunion and the end of the

Soviet occupation my uncle set right away to brewing beer that was the favorite drink of Latvian farmers.

My father told me Riga had not suffered much from the war — except the Old Town along the river Daugava. Riga was once one of the Hansa Union towns in the Middle Ages, so Germans did not want to destroy it. However, it was a German cannon shot that set fire to the tower of St. Peter's Church at the center of Old Town. The Soviets had observers in the tower, so Germans responded accordingly. The tower of St. Peter's Church was the highest wooden structure in Europe — 116 m. Later, in the 1970s, the tower was reconstructed in steel.

The retreating Red army had blown up parts of the bridges over Daugava. The first group of Germans that had crossed the bridge before the blow-up had been taken prisoners. They were all killed; the bodies were found with their eyes punched out.

**The Baltic nations saluted the retreating occupants with guerrilla fire.** Guerrilla groups were formed in many places, sometimes recklessly. In Riga, when it was still full of the Red army and armed civilian communists, guerrillas fired at them from windows and rooftops. Their fight was not without loss of human lives. In Riga a whole unit, led by second lieutenant Brakse, perished. In Aluksne a dozen high school students and some army officers were killed by communist fire. The most successful guerrilla actions took place in Vidzeme and Latgale (two of Latvia's four regions). One group of hundred guerrillas, led by capt. Ernests Keselis, took the town Limbazhi and chased out a Red sailor unit that had several times that many men. During the battle a few guerrillas were killed and capt. Keselis wounded.

Lithuanians were even more energetic than Latvians. They did not wait for Germans to come in but **liberated their country themselves and renewed their state and government.** Their leader was Kazis Skirpa. During their fights with the occupants approximately 4,000 Lithuanians were killed. As a result of this German army took Lithuania almost without any battles. There were short skirmishes at Vilnius, Kaunas, and Eidkuniai, but nowhere else.

**However, Hitler's Germany did not fulfill the hopes of the Baltic nations.** The Nazi regime did not recognize the independent Lithuanian government. After six weeks it was banished and leader Kazis Skirpa arrested. Banished were also Lithuanian self-defense units.

In Latvia the German army was received with flowers and the red-and-white flags of independent Latvia. But euphoria lasted only for a few weeks. These weeks the former members of Latvian army proudly wore their uniforms. They had formed several battalions that were ready to join the German army and **fight the common enemy — the**

**Soviets.** We expected Germans to restore our independence and to let us fight along them as equal partners. But these expectations died when German military units were followed by German administrative units. They too wore uniforms but of a different color — light golden brown, so Latvians named them “golden pheasants”. Germans gave the former territory of three Baltic States one common name — **Ostland**. The high commissioner of this region was Heinrich von Loose. A lesser man, just over Latvia, was Drechsler. And then there was count von Medem, a descendant of Baltic-German barons that had lived in Courland for many generations. Now he was in charge of Courland. The German administrative power forbade the former Latvian army uniforms, the Latvian State crest, all other national emblems like an arm-band of national colors — everything that seemed nationalistic. They disbanded the Latvian battalions and confiscated arms. The same thing happened in Estonia and Lithuania.

However, Germans treated the Baltic nations better than the Slavic ones. It was because of the Nazi racial theory. They considered Germans, British, and Scandinavian nations as the superior race, Baltic nations as the second but Slavs only in the third place. After Slavs came Jews and Gypsies that were to be wiped out. Slavs were treated only a little better than that. **German actions in the occupied Belaruss, Ukraine, and Russia, also Poland, were so cruel that those people turned against them.** Sometimes it was a fight until death. It was different in the Baltic States.

In the Baltic States communists had done so much evil that hatred for them kept increasing. Especially those that had lost close relatives sought revenge. After the German army invaded the territory, the former NKVD employees, denunciators and communists were arrested, sometimes executed on the spot. Unfortunately, in those actions many innocent people suffered as well. All the communist “big shots” had retreated to the Soviet Union; only the less important ones like members of “Communist Youth”, militia, and local communist party had remained. (After the war very similar actions took place in Western Europe, seeking Nazi collaborators, although the occupation there had been milder than the communist occupation in the Baltic States, and their independence was restored.) However, the above actions were only against **communists, regardless of their nationality**. But soon after the German army came the so-called “Einsatzkomando” (Action Groups) that killed whole groups of people only because they were Jews. In these villainous actions Germans tried to involve Latvians too, but they succeeded only with a handful of sadists and scoundrels that can be found in any nation. Or with those that tried to avenge their lost rela-

tives in this way. However, real men directed their desire for revenge to more honorable ways like enlisting voluntarily into the German army already in the fall of 1941 — instead of slaughtering unarmed civilians. The Nazi propaganda especially sought to document Baltic persons that took part in killing Jews in order to justify their own actions against Jews. They announced to Europe that they were not the only Jew killers — other nations did it too. Actually the number of Latvians that took part in this was only a few hundreds. (This propaganda, created by German propagandist Goebels, sometimes gets warmed up even nowadays in order to create hatred between Jews and the Baltic people.)

**How could the Baltic people that had lost their independence and were under German occupation be responsible for German actions in their countries?!**

During Latvian independence nobody in our country was persecuted because of race or nationality. The only anti-semitic organization “Perkonkrusts” was closed by the Latvian government and its members arrested and sentenced to prison terms.

(During the early fifties the Baltic people often were together with Jews in GULAG camps. At that time, before Stalin’s death, there was an anti-semitic campaign in the Soviet Union with fabricated trials against Jewish physicians for “poisoning” patients, so there were quite a lot of Jews among inmates. The camp administration urged Russian prisoners to anti-semitism by the old slogan: “Beat the Jews, save Russia!” Jews sought refuge in the Baltic prisoners’ barracks and brigades. In turn, Jews supported the Baltic men in their strike of 1955, keeping the communications alive, sometimes risking with their lives.)

**Hatred and mutual accusations between the Baltic nations and Jews are only profitable for our common enemy — Russian imperialism.**

The infamous Arajs, whose command of a few hundred Jew killers is the black spot in Latvian history, was tried and sentenced in Germany after the war. Likewise any member of his command that had remained in Latvia. Even most of those that had sought refuge in the West were gradually found and punished. Now, after almost sixty years, there is little possibility any could still be alive. So it is almost senseless to ask for more investigation in this matter as some individuals do. But why nobody has ever mentioned the need to punish Simon Shustin, the head of NKGB in Latvia, and his employees? It was their actions that turned Latvians against communists; *the murderer Arajs and his command was the result of actions that had taken place first. Which is the reason and which the consequence?*

During the years of German occupation there were quite a lot of

cases where Latvians tried to help Jews, risking with a concentration camp or being shot on the spot. My son-in-law's grandfather Pauls Kruminsh, a music teacher in Daugavpils, saved two Jewish girls — his students. Now one of them lives in Israel, the other one in South America.

Latvian history shows there were always people of other nationalities, living in our country. This fact has taught Latvians to be tolerant. In the years of independence all minorities had their own culture and education, and there was no minority problem in Latvia. It was different during tsarist times when the official government policy for the Baltic territory was russification.

At the beginning of German occupation Jews were marked with the yellow Star of David on their clothing. They were not allowed to walk on side-walks but were supposed to use gutters when walking on the streets. Then they were all gathered in a Ghetto. Finally they disappeared altogether. We heard terrifying rumors, but the full truth was discovered only after the war. However, my grandmother, living near the train station Skirotava, told us she had seen twice German guards, chasing with dogs several thousand Jews to Rumbula forest. Each time she had heard shots and human screams from there. The Jews never returned. One injured woman had escaped and found refuge in a Latvian house near by. She related they had been told they were taken to ships to take them to Palestine. After the war **Latvians named the Rumbula road "Golgotha Way" — in memory of the killed Jews. That was the only memorial since the Soviet power did not allow to erect a monument.**

Latvians felt pity not only for Jews but also for the Soviet POW's; a helpless, unarmed enemy is no longer an enemy. Germans, on the other hand, treated them almost as badly as Jews. They were beaten and starved to death. (Hitler's propaganda called them "Untermensch" — underman, i.e. sub-human.) In Riga there were young German men from the German "Arbeitsdienst" (Work Service) to guard the prisoners. They were very cruel and beat the prisoners for the slightest reason. Once I observed an old woman, giving prisoners a piece of bread. The guard saw it, threw the bread on the ground, and stepped on it. There were also Latvian guards; they were more humane. The only hope for survival for the prisoners was to be taken as farm workers. That number was small, but everybody tried to be among the lucky ones. However, after the war there were some of them that, instead of being grateful, denounced their former employers for "exploiting" them. Anyway, it did not help them to escape GULAG where all former POW's were sent since they were considered traitors of the Soviet Union.

In the fall I returned to school. Of course, I was accepted, but I had to have exams in all the subjects since I had not graduated with my class in the spring. But all my teachers knew I had been a good student, so the exams were a mere formality. Some did not even ask anything except whether I had done my home-work and would be able to follow the current work in my class. I was very grateful to them.

Instead of the communist teacher Andersone now our Latvian literature and grammar teacher was Julijs Brachs — an outstanding Latvian patriot. The principal now was the principal of my grade school — R. Mikelsons. (He continued to work as a pedagogue also in exile.)

Our school could not return to the former building. It was used now by a German school since many of the German administration members had arrived with their families. Part of the repatriants returned too. Some after their life in war-time Germany were happy to be back in Riga and had a benevolent attitude towards Latvians. But there were also those that still had their superior airs, inherited from their ancestors — Baltic barons. Especially unsympathetic was Alfred Rosenberg — the administrator of all occupied territories in the East. He was nasty and of limited intelligence. After the war he was tried in Nuremberg and hanged. The State Germans (Reichsdeutsche) like Bavarians, also Austrians, were more understanding.

Four of my class-mates had been deported with their families. They were Ojars Sevics (his father was a policeman), Indrikis Dunens (father the chief executive of "Bacon Export"), Neiriel Kaufer (of a rich Jewish family), and Arnolds Calitis. My friend Leons Markis had joined "Communist Youth" the previous year and had been sent to Moscow shortly before the beginning of war; he did not manage to get back in time. Another boy Spodris Karlivans had a communist father that had tried to retreat with other communists but had been shot by the national guerrillas. This boy did not return to school either. However, later he came back. I remember the day Spodris entered the class-room, accompanied by Mr. Curiks. The teacher asked us if we were willing to take him back and study with him. Of course, we took him back. We did not blame him for his father's sins. **Our small nation needs every Latvian, and the state of Latvia — every loyal citizen.** (Our school, after several temporary locations, was finally placed in the former Jewish High School building.)

One year before graduation Karlivans enlisted in German "Arbeitsdienst" (Work Service). He did it in order to avoid being drafted into German army. Later some more of my class-mates did the same. Even if we had not been threatened by a draft, we would have to enlist in "Arbeitsdienst" upon graduation from high school since it was mandatory

for everybody who wanted to go to college. However, Karlivans was killed in Germany in an air-raid.

At the beginning of December we received an invitation from our teacher Julijs Brachs to help him to do something for our Latvia and the whole Baltia.

In the yard of the former NKVD building there were left all kinds of papers and documents that now were covered with snow and ice. (That year was an unusually cold and early winter.) There were several piles. Brachs had received a permission to gather all the papers as well as to clean out and use the rooms and prison cells on the first floor and in the basement. (The NKVD prison was designed by a Sivoshishkin and finished in October 1940.) They were dirty, dark, partly filled with water. One could see they had been left in a hurry. We did not know what had happened to the prisoners. Maybe they had been shot, but no bodies were found, except a fireman's corpse in the garage.

On the first day, December 8, the work was started by Brachs and two of his students — Zigurds Raiskums and Karlis Mishke. Gradually other students from the First High School of Riga joined in, and soon there were also students from other high schools, including girls. At the beginning of 1942 there were forty young people working there — mostly high school students, but among them were also a few college students.

I started my work there in January. Karlis Mishke was my superior. I did the cleaning and repair work. We worked with much enthusiasm, as it usually is with voluntary work, although the work was highly unpleasant, especially in the basement. The cells and hall-ways looked bad and smelled worse. The toilettes were full of excrement.

**There were two newly built rooms on the first floor, next to the garage.** In the first one we found nothing but some clothing and underwear. The other room was lined with wooden planks that were covered with a black, rubberized material — bloody. The floor was of concrete tiles, with a drain. It was all too clear — **this was the shooting room with a "full hygiene"**! We found 94 bullet holes in the walls and about 200 empty shells on the floor. That meant about 100 bullets were in corpses. During executions the engines in the garage were working to disguise the sound of shots.

In the garage we found a large, silvery tent with coagulated blood spots. Apparently it had been used to cover "fresh" bodies in trucks — still bleeding. They had been buried in suburban woods. Several mass graves were discovered at Ulbroka, Bikernieki, Baltezers, and other places.

All the papers were taken to the rooms that had already been

cleaned and repaired. These rooms were on the first floor. There had been offices for the prison administration and also some prison cells, but most of the latter were in the basement. Some of the youth groups were cleaning and classifying the papers. Another group, led by Modris Gulbis, found, copied, and later photographed about 300 graffiti on the prison walls. Still others worked as guides, showing the building to interested persons. At first they were mostly relatives of erstwhile prisoners — the lucky ones that had not been arrested. (Usually the prisoners' families were deported.) Gradually the number of visitors increased. Zigurds Raiskums organized guard groups that were on duty in the hall-ways, stairs, administrative rooms, yard, and gates. A special guard was given to large visitor groups. As a result there were no excesses on the part of visitors, except one by Gestapo members.

Those students that were fluent talkers and felt at ease with strangers worked as guides. They led visitors in groups of 10-15 persons and offered explanations. Gradually we became more skilful in doing this. Sometimes we had to give explanations not only in Latvian but also in German, Russian, and even English. In the second year of our work we registered 12,400 visitors. One fourth of them was foreigners; many of them were German soldiers. But the actual number of visitors was larger — we did not manage to register everybody. Most visitors came on Sunday. Sometimes the line was several blocks long. One man confessed: "I used to be a communist and came here to see German propaganda. I came out a convinced anti-communist." This was the only NKVD prison in Europe that was opened for visitors.

We also had other tasks. Some of us gathered all the information on current events, including the situation on the front lines. **Secretly one group gathered information about the Gestapo activities in Baltic States.** This information was kept in a strong-box. In the spring of 1942 we started to have "work meetings" every other day. That's how we called them — for safety reasons. Actually we did not talk much about work. Julijs Brachs and another teacher Nikolajs Namnieks made patriotic speeches. Sometimes students did it too. We not only had discussions but also lectures. Under the disguise of "work meetings" we actually had a seminar in patriotism. We were educated to be democratic Latvian patriots and with the idea of Baltic unity in mind. This was done in the hopes of future — to form a core of educated, well informed, democratic, and patriotic people that could be the future leaders of the nation. And this was done in spite of the present occupation by a foreign power. Openly, under the nose of Gestapo. It is a wonder we managed to get away with it.

Thus during the time of German occupation National Guard was

**founded** — a patriotic youth organization with 140 active members and 160 supporters from all the high schools of Riga. However, for security reasons we did not use this title in everyday life but used instead the word “Anstallte” (Establishment). (Even after the war the MGB interrogators did not discover the name “National Guard”.) Our leader was Julijs Brachs, but the true soul of this organization was Dzihilda Birzgaile who later became Mrs. Brachs. She was the secretary, the chronicler, and the moving force behind many of our enterprises. To this organization she dedicated her whole life. When she left Latvia in 1944 she took with her all the materials and important papers, thus saving and preserving them. During the Terrible Year she led the patriotic underground organization “Degsme” in the Second State High School of Riga. The members of this organization joined the “National Guard” in the spring of 1942.

Every evening after the work we gathered in the narrow passage-way between the prison cells and had a retreat ceremony like military formations use to have. We always finished with a patriotic song “Sacred Heritage”. **The occupational power tolerated our activities because we did an important work in the fight against communism.** We had found out from our personal experience in the previous year that Stalin and his communism are the greatest evil in the history of mankind — worse than Hitler and nazism in the Western Europe because Stalin murdered ten times more innocent people than Hitler. **Only the world does not know it. Still!**

However, somebody had denounced us. (Later we found out the denunciator and Gestapo agent was our school-mate Olgerts Rozenbergs.) When the German Sicherheitsdienst (Security Service) found out that a national Latvian movement had been founded right under their noses and was active and workable, Julijs Brachs and some of his closest co-workers were arrested in April, 1943. I escaped this fate because I was habitually late. When I arrived the arrests had already taken place. Some brave boys had remained near the building to warn latecomers. They had also managed to delay the Gestapo men until all the dangerous documents were well hidden. Among them were Vilnis and Gunars Zuze, Ansis Eicens, Bruno Rubess, and others. Another factor that worked for our benefit was the popular slogan of those days: **“Do not hinder the German nation in its fight against the red monster but rather do everything to help.”** We believed in this slogan and did just that.

The few following nights I did not sleep at home but at my grandfather's place. I was afraid I might be arrested at school, yet I did not want to miss any school days, so I continued to go to school. I was lucky; nothing happened.

After one week Julijs Brachs and others were released. Brachs had managed to convince the interrogators that the denunciation was an exaggeration — that this was not a serious and dangerous resistance movement. We were not even a formal organization with by-laws and membership fees. And we were working to help them in their fight against our common enemy. If these arrests became known to the general public, it would be very upsetting, and local people would start to hate Germans.

However, it is very possible that the real reason for the release was not Julijs Brachs' convincing arguments but something entirely different. The SD (Sicherheitsdienst) commander Lange was scared to report to his superiors that for almost a year and a half a patriotic Latvian movement had been active right in front of his eyes. It would be a scandal that might cost him his career at least. Besides — who would continue the work? Germans needed it as much as we did. So we were allowed to continue, but we were forbidden to gather the actual and historical information. Officially our work was allowed only until the end of the school year; actually it continued until the Red army took Riga on October 13, 1944, and even a few years longer in exile.

On November 18, 1942 (November 18th is the Independence Day in Latvia — like July 4th in the U.S.A.) a great number of Latvian high school students went to our national sacred place — “Bralu kapi” (Brothers' Graveyard). It is the equivalent of Arlington Military Cemetery in Washington, D.C.; it is a cemetery for Latvian military men. At the time of independence there were officially organized parades of the army and students. Now young Latvians did it on their own — without a direction from their superiors. Nobody tried to stop them. However, a year later the situation was different. We found out Gestapo had placed their truck “Melna Berta” (Black Bertha) behind the central monument of Bralu kapi and was ready to arrest those that went there. The National Guard groups went to the street in front of the cemetery and warned people not to enter. Previously a mouth-to-mouth warning had been sent through the high schools of Riga — not to go to Bralu kapi or to place flowers at the Freedom Monument in the center of Riga. And as far as I know — nobody got arrested on **November 18, 1943**.

Leaflets were not a part of our activities. We decided they did more harm than good. They would only give Gestapo a good reason for arrests. There were only two ways how to fight the occupational power: by force, if we had any, and by cunning.

Julijs Brachs told us about three forms of patriotism: flowers and tears, i.e. sentimentality; loud-mouth patriotism — patriotic speeches; and finally the everyday work patriotism. We did it the third way.

Our custodian was Karlis Mishke. When he voluntarily joined the German army in the fall of 1942 to fight the murderers of his father (his father had been arrested and killed by NKVD), I took over his position. When I was drafted in July, 1944, Modris Gulbis remained in my place until October 13, 1944 — the day the Soviet occupation in Riga was renewed.

## II OSTLAND

### YEAR 1942

Beginning with the year 1942 I started to keep a diary. Here are excerpts of that diary that show the life under the German occupation — as seen by the eyes of a seventeen years old boy.

**“February 1, 1942.** Today our religion teacher told us: “The one with an immense faith and endless will-power will reach the goal. **But it is not true today when events come and wash us away like saw dust, and there is no need any more either for faith or will-power.**”

Is it really so? Don't we each have our fate that is partly genetically formed, partly by our own will? And we also have a common fate. Especially us — the guys from the First High School.”

**“February 15.** Yesterday was my name day. (In many European countries there is a name for each calendar day that is celebrated for that person almost as much as a birthday.) As usual, I did not celebrate it. But my father gave me a present — a work-overall he had received at the City Hall where he worked. He had also obtained a pound of marmalade for our food talons. All the food is rationed now. We are lucky to have our own cow. But either Dad or I have to take care of it. My youngest sister Rita is too young yet, and my other sister Aina does other housework. Our mother already for ten years rests in the Forest Cemetery near by. But her spirit is always with us and keeps watch over us.

In the morning I feed and milk the cow before going to school. If my father gets home before me, he does it in the evening. But sometimes he has to work late, and then I have to do it in the evening too.

We have a separator, so we get also cream and butter, not only milk. But it is hard for those city dwellers that do not keep a cow or a few chickens and do not raise their own vegetables. Many people on weekends go out in the country to exchange clothing and other items for food. I guess we, Latvians, eat too much. However, nobody is actually

starving — except Soviet prisoners-of-war and the poor Jews. At least we can get everything that is on coupons.”

“**February 17.** Nice day. Finished my homework for the drawing lesson — a collage about war in German style, although my teacher usually does not bow to every wind. He is Jekabs Strazdinsh — a vital painter of rural themes.

I used to take the piano lessons in my spare time. “Spare time”! I never have it and probably never will. It is because of my character — I’m always slow in everything I do. But I’m never bored.

I visited my childhood friend and neighbor Viesturs Krauklis. Then we both went to see the piano teacher Zenta Lielmane. With great pleasure I played Beethoven’s “Pathetic Sonata” Then her little son joined us, and we played double. This is a cordial family — especially the grandmother.”

“**February 23.** Today I was skiing around Mezhaparks quite late — until 8:00 p.m. On my way I stopped at Vibs’ place. They have taken in his nephew Gunars since Gunar’s parents were deported. Gunars and I get well along. Today we were skiing together for a while. It was a nice, sunny day. The scenery was beautiful. I love nature more and more.

Coming down a hill I deliberately crossed the ski-tips of two “chicks” that were with two German soldiers. Much to my surprise they started to curse in Latvian. These Germans were Latvians in German uniforms! Yes, some had enlisted voluntarily to fight against our deadly enemy. What fate awaited these Latvian guys? And us all — sons and daughters of Latvia?”

“**February 28.** The sculptor Karlis Zale has passed away. He was the author of the two most important monuments: Freedom Monument and the ensemble at Brothers’ Cemetery. He, along with our greatest poet Rainis and composer Vitols — they are the top achievers in Latvian culture. And art and culture are the only things that can make a nation of small numbers great..”

“**March 2.** There is a saying that Mondays would usually be bad days, and so it was today. But what else could I expect if I had not studied? My thoughts were somewhere else — at our evening meetings. There we work and grow to be useful for Latvia, there we have friends, and there are also nice girls — girls that we do not have at school since ours is an exclusive boys’ high school.”

|| (After this I have taken out and destroyed several pages where I told

about our organization — the National Guard. This I did after I returned from Sweden (my old diaries were still at my house), because I had to count on being arrested by NKVD any time as many others already were.)

“The household takes a great deal of time too. The cow has to be milked and fed twice a day. I also have to help with cooking. Our menu is a simple one — mostly milk soups and vegetable dishes. Our own production. My tasks are also grocery shopping and preparing of fire-wood. My sister Aina does the cleaning.

Then there is the piano. In spite of everything I do not want to forget this skill. I play late at night, disturbing my little sister Rita who is trying to sleep in the room next to mine. Father does not mind my playing. As for my elder sister Aina, I do not quarrel with her — she is quiet, an introvert.”

“**March 12.** I visit my class-mate Valdis Krumins. He shows me his diary. There he has written about his decision to study hard and not to look at girls.

We discuss our outlook and possibilities in the future. Quite realistically. We believe the soul and spirit is only a product of our brain.”

“**March 13.** Yesterday my father bought a truckload of fire-wood for a few packs of cigarettes. A whole truckload for a few packs! This is the way it is nowadays — cigarettes are more valuable than money.”

“**March 23.** Right now is the best skiing this winter. Already March, but it is still deep winter. The snow is dry, skis are gliding perfectly. Snow is glistening in the sun. At the horizon there are blue-green forests. In front of me is a frozen, snow-covered lake — Kisezers. My goal is to reach a hill on the opposite shore. Faster, faster! This is intoxicating. Only those that know skiing can imagine it.

I manage to reach the hill, then glide down. Suddenly I hear a child crying. I find a little girl, about ten, with a big basket. She had gone to fetch milk and gotten lost in the woods. With her child's mind she has managed to reach the lake to know where she was, but the snow is too deep and the milk can too heavy for her.

This is a test for my endurance: to carry the child on my back and the basket in my hand. And for several kilometers. The evening is near, wind is getting colder, but at the same time I'm perspiring. Finally I reach the girl's home. I let her go in by herself and hurry away. I still have a long way to go to get home.

Without the heavy load I quickly cross the lake. The sun has already gone down; now it is moon-light. And it is bitterly cold. If I had not

found the poor girl, she would have sat down, gone to sleep, and frozen to death.

**What was it — just a coincidence or Fate? Is it Fate that forms coincidences or do the coincidences create Fate?"**

**"March 24.** This has been an unusually severe winter. I hear in the English news that German army had barely survived in the vast Russian territory where the climate is even harsher than in Latvia. Many German generals had advised to retreat until spring. Oh, no! With their cruelty in the occupied territories the nazis turn people against them and make them fight desperately. Communists did the same with us.

I'm grateful to my English teacher Mr. Curiks. Because of his skilful teaching now I can understand the British Broadcast. But then the electricity goes out before the end of the news. This happens quite often. On those occasions we use candles for light."

**"March 25.** Today I shaved for the very first time. My friends Uldis and Janka had come to see me and did the same. Now we feel like real men.

Since the beginning of the war there are no more busses in Riga, only street-cars. It is because gasoline is needed for the army. As a result the street-cars are always crowded, even though the seats have been removed in the second cars to make more room. Only the first cars still have seats. Often I have been standing on the steps. That's OK — I'm young.

On the street-car I saw a few members of the Spanish "Blue Division". They are Spanish volunteers that fight together with Germans. One of them gave money for the ticket, but a penny dropped on the floor. Then the other one set the match to a German mark to make light and found the penny. Really daredevils!"

**"March 28.** What a shame! Today I lied to my art teacher Strazdinsh. He was collecting our drawings, and I told him I had already handed in mine the previous time — but I hadn't. He said nothing but gave me a long look — as if he knew I was lying. It was very embarrassing. I'm considered one of the three best drawers in our class. Tomorrow I definitely will hand in my drawing; I should not have lied. Not to Mr. Strazdinsh. I'm his favorite — also Mr. Curik's. No, from now on I will always tell only the truth. **Yes, but what about Gestapo, gendarmes, or — God forbid — NKVD men?"**

**"April 4.** Today was my first short bicycle trip this spring. The

spring is coming slowly this year; there is still snow and ice in many places. But even more I regret that my friends Viesturs and Leons were not with me as it used to be. Especially I miss Leons who last year was in Moscow at the beginning of the war and could not get back. Is he still alive? He had joined "Communist Youth", **but is that a reason we should not be friends any more? We are both Latvian boys...** I should go and visit his parents. I can imagine how devastated they feel. He was their only son.

On my way I stop at Janka's place. He tells me his adventures with girls at drinking parties. I have a girl too, and I long to see her, but not like that. Drinking and casual sex only spoils the true love that can be so beautiful."

**"April 12.** Collecting of scrap metal is taking place. High school students of Riga have been given special cards that allow to use street-cars for free. Of course, we take advantage of it and use them not only to gather scrap metal. First I visit a relative, living near Mezhaparks. Then we make a trip to Spilve Airport on the other side of the Daugava — to watch airplanes with my friends.

A lot of changes have taken place at the airport. The Germans — with the local labor and materials — have built many new hangars, warehouses, workshops, and barracks. They are guarded only lightly. Apparently Germans feel safe here. We jump over a ditch and come to a place where the destroyed Soviet airplane wracks are still lying around. I have two friends with me — Valdis and Ilmars. They take some instruments off these wracks for their experiments. Maybe someday they'll be scientists.

At another time we find out about an old car rusting in a school-yard. The Germans had requisitioned the building, but the guard allowed us to take the old car. He even praised our diligence in gathering scrap metal. How useful is now the German language which at first we did not want to study — considered it the enemy language! And what about English that we always liked as the language of allies? Will the time ever come when it would be as useful as German is now? (For some of us this time came — in emigration.) For the time being it is only useful to listen to the BBS news. That way we find out about the true situation in the front lines — without the German propaganda."

**"May 30.** Summer vacation has begun. I spend part of it at my relatives' farm near Gulbene where I was the previous summer. I arrived here by bicycle. There are no busses since the war began, and to use railway you need a permit. One of my duties here is to milk cows. My

aunts are amazed at my skill and are ready to keep me here for the whole summer. I'm glad to be useful.

In my spare time I make a pair of wooden sandals for each of my sisters. This is the latest fashion now — even shoe-leather is reserved only for army needs. Sandals turn out good enough, and I'm proud of my skill.

At my uncle's farm work two Soviet prisoners-of-war. One of them is a young Ukrainian — a former college student. He knows some German, so we can talk. Apparently before the war he had lived quite well. He remembers boating trips on the river Dnepra. He is glad he survived the war and right now isn't starving either. I ask him why he went to fight for Stalin who did so much harm to his native Ukraine. His answer is very simple: "All my friends and relatives are in the Red army." About communist repressions in the Ukraine he keeps silent. We each have one's own convictions.

The other man is a Russian — a simple peasant. My uncle tells me how the whole group of prisoners had expected they would be taken; how they had knelt in front of him, kissed his hands, and begged him to take them along. They knew that would save them from starvation and German cruelty — at least temporarily. My uncle had chosen three men, but the third man had not been able to restrain himself when facing the abundant food on a Latvian farm; he had eaten too much and died in great pain.

My uncle is very proud of his horses. He had five; now the Germans have requisitioned one. He is equally proud of his well kept grain fields. When we visit here it is the first thing he shows us — even when we were still little kids.

Latvian farmers are taxed heavily by the occupational power, but there is still enough left for people to eat much better than city-dwellers on their food coupons. For the food, given to the Germans, special certificates are handed to farmers — the so called "Scheinen". These certificates allow to receive cigarettes, grain alcohol, petroleum, sugar, and work shoes. Cigarettes and grain alcohol is the true currency these days; I already mentioned how my father bought a truckload of fire-wood for a few packs of cigarettes.

During the war it was quite common to produce "moonshine" but not on this farm. However, they secretly obtained gasoline from German soldiers in exchange for bacon. Salt was added to the gasoline to prevent explosion, and it was used for lamps instead of petroleum which was rationed. (Most farms did not have electricity yet.)

When I leave, all three aunts give me abundant presents: home-spun blankets, bedsheets, towels, and woolen cloth that has been pro-

duced from their sheep. All this will come in handy for our family, because now no clothing can be bought in stores; you can get it only for special permits."

(Nine years later when I got married, it was the same white woolen cloth I brought home that summer my bride's wedding gown was made of. More than thirty years after that my daughter wore the same dress at her wedding.)

"**June 6.** My grandmother has asked me to visit the place where she spent her youth — the farm "Vaisli" in Medzula county. It is beautiful here — must be one of the prettiest places in Latvia.

I realize my grandmother was once a young, beautiful maiden. And probably quite passionate too, since the main coachman of the baron's manor came to propose to her. "How could I turn him down if he came to woo me with four black horses!" grandmother had told me. "And himself with a black beard and a lot of sweet talk!" They had five children, but now only one daughter Klara is still alive. Both sons perished in the thirties in the Soviet Union in the Latvian genocide, as I have mentioned before.

I picture my grandmother walking through these rooms, these fields — right here. It is good to see one's roots. I walk through here as if it was a holy temple.

My relatives are surprised at my unexpected visit. We talk about all other close, loving people. They have not had any news for so long and probably will not have any in the future, although I promise to write."

"**June 12.** After two weeks I am home again. Today I went to Academy of Music to find out about the entrance requirements. In the well known white building there is only administration left; the other rooms are used as a war hospital. Where once was the sound of music, now there are the sounds of moaning and people are dying.

**Music is very dear to me but so is architecture.** Architecture is music that has reached a tangible form — in wood, concrete, glass."

"**July 2.** A brilliant day — after a long time I saw my friend Milda again. We walked for a long time. It seems our friendship is growing stronger. We have common interests: music, traveling, sea. And even common short-comings: to act slowly, to procrastinate, to be always late.

She was elegantly dressed — in spite of the present lack of new clothes. I like Milda a lot but really do not know yet what love is.

A new order has been issued: all the high school students have to work on farms during summer vacation. She will work on a relatives'

farm in Zemgale. I do not have to go; I can stay home because I am a member of National Guard (these words I later erased from the diary for safety sake) and will continue to work there during summer too. My task is to see that all the rooms are clean and in good order. Visitors leave the floors muddy, so they have to be washed. If something does not work it has to be repaired since nothing can be bought now. **This is the practical everyday patriotism.**"

**"At the beginning of August.** I went to see my friend Leons' parents. We all were surprised when he joined "Communist Youth", **but it did not affect our friendship.** That spring he was a member of the school delegation that was sent to Moscow to an Agricultural Exhibition. Then the war broke out, and he could not get back. (Two teachers, Sleinis and Bumbers, that went with the delegation managed to cross the front lines and returned, walking all the way from Moscow.)

Leons' parents lived in a little house on the outskirts of Riga — in Marupe. Leons' mother told me about relatives they had in Moscow. Leons was staying with them now. I tried to console Leons' mother that Leons was too young to be drafted into the Red army; so maybe at the present time he was safer over there. Here during the first stressful days after the German invasion somebody could have denounced him as a member of "Communist Youth", and he might have even been shot. I told about the other member of "Communist Youth" in our class — Karlivans — how he had returned and the class accepted him. Lately Leons' parents did not have any more news of him.

Leons' parents told me about their acquaintances that had been arrested and some of them shot. This was a surprise to me. I thought Germans persecuted only communists. **Now it turned out some totally innocent people had been shot — just because somebody had denounced them.** Germans had also started to arrest Latvian and other Baltic nationalists.

As long as it is still summer vacation I should make some more bicycle trips. Have to try to get some flour, barley, bacon from farmers. For money, if possible; if not, I can offer cigarettes. The rest of the basic foods we produce ourselves: milk products from the cow, eggs from the few chickens we have, vegetables from our vegetable patch. No, we can not complain."

**"August 27.** I'm on my way again. This time to Zemgale to visit my class-mate Imants Ronis. He had invited me already a long time ago, so — here I come!

Imants' family owns an old farm of about 100 ha. It is well kept and

prosperous. They have many horses, all farm machinery, and even a tractor. In those days it was unusual for a private farm to have a tractor; only cooperatives had them. There are also 40 dairy cows in a modern barn.

This farm is managed by Imants' mother, himself, and his sister. Besides the family there work also hired hands, Soviet POW's, and even some Russian refugee families. It isn't easy since Imants' father is no longer there. He was a former army officer and a freedom fights veteran. In 1941 he was found shot. Imants' sister is a real country girl — vital, intelligent, even beautiful in some ways, and proud." (In the fall of 1944 the three of them became refugees and now live in Australia.)

**"August 31.** Today I'm on my way to see my girl Milda. When I saw her at the beginning of summer, she gave me her summer address. What can I lose if I go there?

It was the middle of the day when I reached her relatives' farm. In Latvia farmers start their work early — as soon as the sun is up — and continue until sun-down. To be able to work such long hours they need a break during the middle of the day. So after lunch everybody takes a nap. That was the time I arrived. I did not want to disturb people, so I lay down in the grass under a birch tree. After several hours I saw an elderly man. I told him why I had come. He waked up everybody. Milda was very surprised. She was still sleepy and rubbed her eyes like a sleepy child, then slowly came down from the hay-loft where she had been sleeping. I was secretly hoping she would jump right into my arms but she did not — only pressed my hand tightly. Then I greeted her elder sister and two aunts. One of them looked like a real farm woman, but the other had an urban look.

Milda asked how I happened to be here. I told her I was making a bicycle trip and stopped by on the way. I did not dare to tell her how much I was longing to see her.

We take a walk, holding hands. Then we sit down in the orchard and eat raspberries. We have so much to talk about. I tell her about the castle of Rundale I had seen on this trip. She talks about music and her favorite composer Chopin. I tell her also about National Guard. She tells me about the School of Music and her favorite professor, I — about cows and milking! After several hours we have to part. She walks me to the little wooden bridge near the farm. I carve my initials on the hand-rail. I wish she would come here sometimes and look at them. We hold each other's hands for a long time. When will we see each other again?"

(It so happened that the next time was after 47 years in Los Angeles where her family had emigrated to.)

## YEAR 1943

A general mobilization has been announced for young Latvian men, born during 1920-24. That includes me. Those that do not appear before the draft board may wind up in a concentration camp; their families are persecuted too. In Latvia there are not enough forests for all the young men to hide in. Considering all this, I decide to go. After all, **our greatest enemy is communism that started to annihilate the Baltic nations in 1941. Germans fight it too, so we do have something in common. At least in this period of war.**

Karlis Mishke from National Guard — its first custodian — had already enlisted voluntarily to avenge his father's death. Now he has been wounded and is in a hospital in Riga. I organized a group from National Guard, and we all went to see him. He was wounded in the leg, but his spirit was not broken; he was just as lively as before. Girls were swooning over him — a live combat hero!

**Julijs Brachs warns us: "Boys, do not be like a flock of sheep, do not go blindly where you are dragged by German propaganda and be slaughtered! Your lives will be needed later for Latvia! Try to avoid enlisting; at least, try to avoid combat and stay behind the front-lines."**

We try to do that. Some are lucky — they are considered important enough to do German propaganda work and do not have to enlist. Some are enlisted but can stay in Riga. I am slightly built, and Brachs advises me to go to Dr. Silinsh at the TB Dispensary — maybe I have TB? The doctor carefully examines my lungs and gives a deep sigh; he does not find anything. Yet he puts one blue dot on my certificate. I have a blue pencil too, and at home I add more blue dots. If I was found out I could be shot, but I decide to take the chance. When the draft board sees all the blue dots they let me go. So the advice, given by Julijs Brachs, saved me from the bitter battles in Volkhova swamp where Latvian soldiers had to cover the retreating Germans.

The first Latvians that enlisted voluntarily were scattered in German units; actually not combat units but the so called "police battalions" that fought guerrillas behind the front lines. But even there they had proven to be excellent soldiers. Germans rated them as highly as Finnish soldiers, and that was a great praise. So now with the overall draft we were allowed to form our own Latvian Legion and wear a small red-and-white shield on the German uniforms as our identity. The old officers from World War I voluntarily enlisted to lead the Latvian units so they would not be under German officers. The younger officers were drafted.

In Volkhova we lost one of our National Guard members — Guntars

Gailis. We held a memorial service for him. The candles are burning, Julijs Brachs talks about duty and conscience, we sing sad songs, Gun-tars' sister Balva is crying... We all realize this is only the beginning. How many more shall we lose?

Karlis Mishke has told us about the true situation in the front lines, without the glitter of German propaganda. But he also tells about the great comradeship, unselfishness, and heroism. All are alike on the front lines. One for all, all for one. The former Latvian army officers received a good schooling. Now they can put it to use. Their military skill saves many lives. Some Latvian officers have become legendary: colonel Veiss, captains Mateass, Butkus, Adamsons.

Karlis tells about many wounded Latvian soldiers, but not many killed — approximately one for every ten wounded. The wounded return to front lines as soon as possible. The Soviet officers have a different strategy: they use the huge mass of the Red army and keep sending them against the enemy fire, leaving piles of dead bodies. There is an agreement that nobody shoots at grave-diggers; otherwise in summer the stench is unbearable.

At our regular meeting Julijs Brachs observes: "In summer of 1941 the German army attacked in all front lines, last summer only in about a half, this summer they have been stopped. It is easy to predict what would happen next summer. Germany will lose the war. The only thing that can save us is a swift attack from the Western allies. But we have to be ready too. Among the three Baltic nations there are about half a million good soldiers. Do not give up!" He also tells us to get as many weapons as possible from Germans — this is our only source. But what about the new "wonder weapons" the German propaganda brags about? He explains that only simple Germans and a few naive Latvians believe in them. And anyway — weapons alone are not the deciding factor.

**Midsummer Night.** In the Northern countries, including Latvia, it is a traditional festival, celebrated with a bon-fire, special songs, flower or oak-branch wreaths, and plenty of beer and cheese. This year I celebrate it in Vidzeme, together with my friend Valdis. This is already the second summer Valdis works hard at his father's farm here. I have been exempted from the mandatory farm work for high school students because of my work for the "establishment".

Another important event is Song Festival in the Valley of Amata. I sit next to a beautiful girl in Latvian national costume. After the concert I take the girl home. Her name is Nellija Sliede, and her family's farm is near by — Dumpuri. It turns out she has three sisters, and they are all beautiful. We are all very impressed by the Song Festival and

continue to sing. The girls are good singers and know how to sing the harmony.

After that evening Valdis and I often find our way to this farm. The vital country girls attract us like a magnet. I have half-forgotten Milda.

**Christmas.** After our summer adventure Valdis and I decide to celebrate Christmas at the farm so we could visit the Dumpuri girls again. But how to get there? Busses do not run because all gasoline is reserved for army needs. To go by train a special permit is needed. To ride a bicycle in the middle of winter? Brrr... No, we manage to persuade Valdis' father to come too. He is the director of Customs Department and has a car available, so we get there in luxury.

On the way I try my driving skill. I learned it last summer from my sister's friend Vilis Kaulinsh. He is a truck driver and drives one of the war time trucks that have appeared now: their energy is generated not by gasoline but by wood. At first my legs are trembling, and there is a forced smile on my face; I clutch the steering-wheel tightly, but gradually I get used to it and start to enjoy it. The car reacts to my every movement as if alive. This is great! .

But I enjoy a lot more the Christmas celebration at Dumpuri. We had been a little worried about how our visit would be taken, but we are accepted very cordially. We eat "piragi" — white bread rolls, filled with bacon, sing Christmas songs, and feel happy. There is only one thing that dampens our joy: **What will the future bring? Our deadly enemy is nearing our country again.**

Next spring I should graduate. Will I be able to? About half of our class is already in the Latvian Legion. Others have voluntarily enlisted in the "Arbeitsdienst" to avoid being drafted into army. My neighbor and friend Viesturs Krauklis too. Will we ever see each other again?

### **Excerpt From National Guard Chronicle**

*(Written by Dzhilda Birzgale)*

**Meeting July 24, 1944** in the 8th prison ward. Present are 20 members. Tonight we say "good-bye" to our household commandant Valentins Silamikelis and to others — Vilnis Atkalns and Imants Chikste. They have to join the Latvian Legion.

Our leader says: "These men are going to continue our work in a different way — by bearing arms. They are going to guard us. When they return they will ask us what we have done here while they were risking their lives..."

Valentins says: "We are going but leaving something behind: the Baltic unity. That was the purpose of National Guard. For that and Latvia we are willing to give our lives."

He pulls from his pocket a little three-color flag and says: "The red means Latvia, the yellow — Lithuania, the white — Estonia. We will fight under the Latvian flag but keep in our hearts this flag as well. This is our future goal — the Baltic unity."

In the conclusion we sing a few Latvian soldiers' songs, "Sacred Heritage", "Against an Evil Stranger"\*) , and the Latvian Anthem. We do not have a Baltic Anthem yet...

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\*) This song was found in the ventilation shaft of the 3rd prison ward in 1943. It was written on two pieces of cigarette paper — lyrics on one, music on the other. The authors are unknown, but it is known that in this cell the highly patriotic Latvian poet Leonids Breikshs has been kept.

### III WAR

YEAR 1944

**"July 25. The Latvian Nation has risen to fight. First of all — we, the young ones. Only we can save Latvia — we, on our own. All the young men I know are going to war, even some girls. It is better to die, bearing arms, than to see one's nation to be destroyed or deported.**

Now I do not want to avoid it any more; I'm going willingly. Yet, I know this would not be like school any more, not even like our work at the "establishment". The war might last a year, maybe more. I would like to be with the artillery. It would be more interesting. I could use my education, and I could do more damage to the enemy.

The doctors' commission found me suitable for military service. Right — I never had TB. I was sent to Jelgava."

**"July 26. The gathering place is the former Teachers College building. I have already received my uniform and equipment. On one hand — it is a pleasure to receive so many good things, useful in soldier's life. But we have to pay for it with the dearest we have — our lives. Tomorrow I have to be in Tukums — at the 15th Artillery Division. Thanks to my knowledge of the German language and the fact that my father had been an artillery officer I got my wish.**

To get to Tukums I have to go to Riga first. On the way I'll try to stop at home to see my family.

Alarm! What for? Are the reds so close already? Is not this latest mobilization and fortifications too late and futile? But at least I hope Riga would be held."

**"July 27. I managed to see my family and was naively proud of my uniform. Now I am on the train that goes to Tukums. I'm together with two others — a sergeant and a corporal. On our way we see a Latvian colonel at a train station. We have to salute him with the German greeting "Heil Hitler!" We hate it. Latvian soldiers have already invented a substitute: we shout "Drei Liter" (Three Quarts) which sounds almost**

the same. In this manner we greet now the Latvian colonel. He smiles a little but says nothing.

That night we sleep in a huge room; the floor is covered with straw. There are together all kinds of newly enlisted men: some are drunk, some are homosexuals, some have lice. This is WAR."

"**July 28.** Battle alarm! The three of us that arrived yesterday have to go to meet our unit that is coming to Tukums from Milzkalne. We meet at half-way. We are put in the communications; we receive shot-guns and bullets. This is for real.

Now I am in the position with two artillery guns — on the cross-road Riga-Jelgava. We are waiting for the enemy that has suddenly taken Jelgava. The inhabitants of Jelgava are leaving the city. They are stunned and desperate. Some just walk, some have horse-drawn wagons, only a few have cars. Some are riding horses but without any saddle; they had had barely enough time to jump on the horse. People come with children, bags, bicycles, baby carriages. There is a red mist in the direction of Jelgava — the city is burning. Even forests and swamps are burning with a pungent, specific smell. The land and the people are in misery.

Among the civilian refugees there are Russians and Germans too. And many in uniforms — policemen, railway personnel... but no soldiers.

Suddenly black limousines appear. "Golden pheasants" are sitting in them. (That's how Latvians called NSDAP party members because of their golden-brown uniforms.) Our battery commander, a German captain, stops the limos. A sharp conversation follows, but I'm too far to understand. However, I see that the party functionaries are ordered out of the limos and taken to the nearby forest. Some sergeants are ordered to come along.

After a little while I hear shots and shouts. The army men come back without the "golden pheasants". I hear they had been shot for deserting and for setting Jelgava on fire without an order. There are even rumors that one of them had been count von Medem — the third most powerful man in the Baltic territory after Lohse and Drechsler. He was the "Kreisleiter" (Region Leader) of Kurzeme and Zemgale.

German soldiers had an aversion to such party functionaries but did not talk about it; there were informers in German army too.

We are at the very front, at the crossroads. It is not pleasant, but we are not trembling. We will fight."

"**July 29.** We, 35 communications men, are sent to a different

place — the Tukums-Kuldiga highway — to wait for about 30 Soviet tanks that are supposed to come down this road en route to Tukums. We have just rifles and hand-grenades. If only we had some bazookas! ("Panzerfaust" in German.) We dig in. Soon the blood-bath will be on. I'm writing against the side of the trenches — maybe for the last time."

**"That night.** The tanks did not come, so there was no battle. Now we have to take a position behind Tukums — to guard Riga. We are the last army unit to leave Tukums in our armored car that is overcrowded. I sit on the front fender, some guys sit on the motor. One sergeant rides a motor-cycle in front of us, scouting for the enemy. Suddenly he falls down, and it seems our car runs over him. But no — he gets up again, waves his hand, mounts his motor-cycle, and continues on his way. Incredible!

Our two artillery guns are placed at the Lielupe bridge to guard it. But we are taken further to Riga. On a street near the Botanical Garden we stop and catch a few winks of sleep."

**"July 30.** It is Sunday. I am at the former Latvian Tank Regiment barracks in Riga, Sloka Street, writing. In the morning I went to my former work place — the "establishment". Julijs Brachs was there. He thinks I should still be with them, but I do not blame myself for joining the military. My opinion is that at this crucial time this is the right place for all Latvian boys and men. This fight is not for Hitler and Germany — it is for the survival of the Baltic nations. Against deportations, murders, starvation, and Russification. I am needed for this fight just like others. (Those that were not drafted in German army later were forced into the Red army where the chance for survival was much less.) **What does my single life mean when we have to defend the life of our whole nation?** I will just have to get used to the idea of dying. Nowadays it is a natural thing."

**"July 31.** Jelgava has been taken by the Red army. Probably in a few weeks we will have to give up Riga too. Unless a miracle would happen. The elderly men think the fight for the Baltic States has already been lost. And everybody in the German army is tired of war.

Riga is full of German gendarmes, so I have to be careful. If I see one, I approach him and tell I'm looking for my unit — otherwise he might consider me a deserter. But with this tactic I can manage to pass them and get to Chiekurkalns.

I urge my family to leave Riga. **It is so hard to leave one's home and the accustomed life, but it will be even harder to stay under commu-**

nists. They would have to leave anyway — only in the opposite direction.

Germans have confiscated my bike. So many memories have gone with it. Never mind — someday I'll have a car!

I say good-bye to my family, but I have a feeling I'll see them again."

"**August 1.** I happened to run into Aina Cice — one of the "establishment" girls. She told me **they lived and worked there day and night. They felt more united than ever.** How I wished to be with them! I felt as if they were my own brothers and sisters. Nothing unites people like danger and a common goal.

Enemy airplanes attack Riga. Out of 20 our artillery shot down five."

"**August 2.** Soldier's life changes people. We all become more robust. I strongly feel the loss of my individuality; now I am only a tiny part of something. I can not watch events from a distance as before — now I am in the middle of them and see only what's under my nose. I guess other guys feel the same — more or less. How proud I was of my uniform at first! Now I would much rather put on my civilian clothes. But... the guys in the headquarters are singing Mozart.

Today we learn to telegraph. This is like school."

"**August 3.** Today I went to see Mara Dombrovska — a girl from the "establishment". But she was not here any more. I was told she had volunteered to be an army nurse. Right now she is in Lithuania, near the front lines. May God and Laima (a Latvian pagan goddess) keep her safe!"

"**August 5.** The Red army has invaded Gulbene and Ape. What has happened to my relatives that had a farm near Gulbene? Have they fled from the enemy, are they hiding in the woods, or maybe — maybe they are already dead? And what has happened to the old farm, this Latvian fortress? *Our farms are the basis of our life.* If only I could, I would go right away to fight for this piece of Latvian land. The Soviets should not possess it!

Isn't it ridiculous? Instead I'm here in Riga, eating roast pork with cucumbers and tomatoes, and the sergeant sends us to bed like kids. He even gives us candy! In the bed next to me there is corporal Slips. We "click". So I'm going to stop writing for today; I want to talk to him."

"**August 6.** I want to go to see my family, but how should I get across the bridge over the Daugava if there is a patrol that checks the documents?"

I decide to take a chance... And I'm lucky — I manage to slip by unnoticed.

My sisters are glad to see me. Aina sows buttons and insignia on my spare uniform. Rita treats me with raspberries. After a long time I milk the cow again. I feel so good to be home that for a while I get a strong temptation to put on civilian clothes and go into hiding. But what would happen to my family then? No, I can not do that. It was only a short moment of weakness.

I should call my school and "establishment" buddies. It would be nice if we could get together in one unit."

"**August 7.** Lucky again — while the gendarme checked one guy I nonchalantly walked by and got back to my army base.

Now we learn to dig and mask trenches. They are not straight but with sharp curves. In the evening I go to see my class-mate Aleksandrs Gipslis' mother to find out about him — but instead I get to see himself. He has come home just for one day. He has been put in a supply division, but he wants to get into a combat unit. He has to act fast — before he gets caught as a deserter. I invite him to join my unit. Why do we try to stay together? Do we think we would be able to take care of each other? But surely in the army I will find new friends. Either fate or circumstances put us together in one class, and it is the same with army. But maybe this friendship will be tighter than in school — because it will be formed at a time of mortal danger."

"**August 9.** Riga is bombed again. We have gotten used to it. And there will still be many things we will have to get used to. Some guys keep talking about the mess we are in. Of course, we all know it, but why talk about it? There is nothing we can do about it; mentioning it only puts us in a bad mood.

One guy has returned from Jelgava. The battle had been fierce; a lot of panic but also a lot of heroism. Our boys ask about acquaintances. So often the answer is: "Dead." Or: "Lost." Or: "Injured." This is the reality of war that I have to get used to. But I hope to survive.

Last night I took a walk to Dzeguzhkalns. It is a hill near by, covered with trees and bushes. It is a favorite spot to spend the leisure hours for people that live around here. But this time I was shocked. There were many Germans with Latvian prostitutes — all drunk! There were also three drunken Russians that cursed and fought among themselves. Also some Latvians that had been considered important enough to be exempted from the draft behaved likewise. My heart aches for this part of our nation that is so rotten.

But I regain my faith in the future when I think of the National Guard. And of those four wonderful girls I met last summer. Today I ran into Dzhilda Birzgale. She told me they all had been given shot-guns, and they were wearing arm-bands in the national colors now. If only we had more people like that!"

"**August 12.** Together with civilians we are digging a tank-barrage at Riga suburb Kleisti. So many people together — like on a holiday. But this time it is a festival of misery."

"**August 16.** Twenty Soviet divisions attack Valka — a town on the Estonian border. Estonia is already lost to the enemy, and now it is Latvia's turn. I hear rumors that our division would be sent to Prague, Czechoslovakia. Anyway, I'll stay with my unit; this is the right place for me. I have no more illusions. Only God can still save us. But it would have to be a miracle."

"**August 19.** I realize I can rely only upon myself. I do not feel like a hero, but I will do my duty.

To be or not to be — our whole nation is now facing this dilemma. Sometimes it seems to me all is lost, then again I see hope — but there is little ground for it.

But even without hope — **it is better to fight and maybe die.**

Again a ship leaves Riga, bringing refugees to Germany. Maybe on it was my friend Valdis and other close people. So many lives taken away from Latvia!

The allied forces have landed at Normandy. The end of Germany is near. **The best thing to do now would be to have an armistice with Western allies, and then to turn a united force against the Soviets. But the German government is too stupid and conceited to do that, and the Western nations do not know Stalin. Such a miracle will not happen.**

I discuss the future with one of my army buddies. If we do not want to desert army and join guerrillas, then the best outcome would be to die in combat, defending our native land. It would be preferable to being slaughtered like helpless lambs when the Soviets take over.

How much blood will still be spilled in this place?

I'm writing this in twilight, sitting at a forest edge near Spilve."

"**August 24.** I gained new strength, listening to a concert given by one of our best opera singers — Adolfs Kaktinsh. Such concerts should be given to soldiers more often. It is a spiritual help."

**“August 25.** I need to see a dentist, and so I get a day off. I use this opportunity to visit the “establishment”. For 150 young people this is a place where to come together, discuss current events, and to make decisions. Some of us are not here any more — for various reasons. **But we can be proud of our work here. And our work shows us the way for the future. Our duty is not only to restore what we had before, but a new seed has been put into the ground: the Baltic unity. For this we will have to work in the future. And this union should also invite Belaruss that once was a Baltic territory. Romans called all this region Aesti.**

We sing again “Sacred Heritage” as so many times before. When will I be here again? We must come together again in the future.”

**“August 26.** Today is my birthday — I turn twenty. Gone is the childhood and teen-age years; I am a man now. The time we live in makes us older, more mature.

Riga is full of German soldiers and high officers that linger behind the front lines, but there are few real combat men.”

**“September 2.** It is time to go to front-lines. Today we arrived at Jaunpiebalga in Central Vidzeme. On the way I could see the sun setting over Dumpuri hill where the four girls live.”

**“September 3.** No, not to combat yet. We have had a training for only one month, so we are kept in reserve. Our duty is to guard the Dzerbene train station. Guard from what? The red guerrillas are not here.”

**“September 7.** Disaster has come over our farms. The retreating German army wants to leave a “scorched land” and sets fire to farms they leave behind. There are many refugees from Latgale that has already been taken by the Soviets. But they do not want to go any further. They hope we would be able to hold the enemy. Yes, I know how hard it is to leave one’s home. It hurts me to watch the serious faces and frightened eyes of little children. Their mothers are desperate. No, they should not go any further!”

**“September 9.** We continue to learn communications. At night we can hear rumbling from distant bombings. Soviet night-planes are slow and awkward, but they do their share of damage. Who could imagine they would turn out to be such a nasty weapon?

I do not feel a need for books any more. Such a change is not good.

Even by being in reserve we guard Latvia. Our superior officer is the legendary Latvian colonel Lobe.”

**“September 19.** All around us we can see burning farms. Germans want to leave for Soviets a scorched land, so they set fire to everything. More and more refugees fill the highways. The clouds of dust stand high, and smoke fills the air — day and night. Latvia is burning!

All that has been gained by twenty years of hard work is destroyed now. And not only material goods. Even worse is the loss of human lives and spiritual values. This is a time of heavy trial and tribulation for our nation.

We still can not believe what's happening. With our minds we understand the end is near, but many still believe in miracles. There is a saying: “If it looks bad — it will turn out good.” Many cling to this belief.

**It is hard to know all aspects now, being in the middle of events.**

But one thing I know: we have to hang on till the last. **Someday we will unmask German bad deeds — just like these past three years we have unmasked communists.** Those who desert the army and take to woods are only saving themselves, not Latvia. “

**“September 21.** I am on top of a land-surveying tower on the hill Slapjums and can see very far. The fire is still all around. Barely audible is a distant but constant, frightening rumbling. This is the end of Latvia — the Latvia my generation knew. Is it also the end of us?

I am close to my country's history, destiny, and ancient gods.”

**“September 22.** My unit is leaving, but I take a little AWOL. How can I leave without a short visit at Dumpuri?

I find the usually placid home in a bustle. People hurry back and forth, grabbing this and that. It is still possible to get away. I urge them to leave — the Red army is near. Their neighbors are already getting ready to leave. Livija agrees with me. “I'll not stay under communists!” she says. But their father does not want to leave his family homestead. Nellija is not sure, what should be done, but the eldest sister Aina is not at home — she is still at her position as a teacher in Straupe. I do not get to see Elvira either; in fact, I barely missed her. She was being taken away by a “Schutzmann” (German guard) to do transport duty for the army with a horse-driven cart just as I arrived. I curse my slow thinking. I'm armed; I could have frightened the guard and set her free. If anything happens to her, it will be my fault too. I wanted to help but did not manage.

So it is only a short visit and a “good-bye”. I hope it is only for a while — but who knows?

The father of the family is a strong and calm man. He and little

Daumants (a neighbor boy) are the only men in this homestead that was once so full of songs.

(Later Daumants Gailis became a famous conductor, but Livija is the mother of now famous opera singer Ingus Petersons.)

I receive a good supper and spend the night in the fresh hay in the barn. The next morning I have to leave. Livija walks me to the highway. At parting she kisses me and holds me tight, tight.

"You, boys, may not perish!" she says.

"Yes, Livija — **we will never perish!**" I reply.

Not perish — even if we have to go through hell. May this become a prophecy!"

**"September 23.** My unit has left the location; only lieutenant Shulcs and another guy are still here. So is the army ware-house. I exchange my summer uniform for a woolen one, my regular army boots for a pair of long ones. I also obtain a 2-liter Italian canteen flask, but I do not fill it with wine as Italians would — Latvians prefer milk. My army kettle I fill with butter. From my belt hangs my helmet and a few hand-grenades. I have plenty of bullets too.

The night-fall finds me on the main highway of Vidzeme. The highway is full of refugees and retreating army units. The conceited German army is running! Yes, but I am a part of it. It is light as day; the farms all around are burning. The air is full of animal and human voices. At the cross-roads there is a German mortar gun in the trench. Periodically a heavy blast leaves the gun barrels with a deep noise. Where does it fall? Does it not hit Latvian peasants somewhere? Who knows. **The guns are blind, and so is death.**"

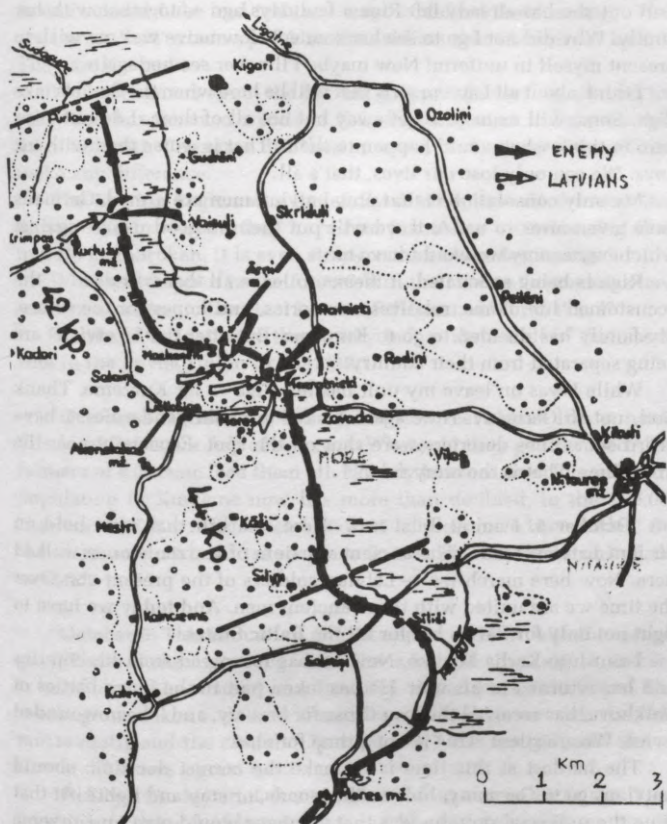
**"September 24.** At Veselava I was lucky enough to get a ride from a German truck that picked me up without any questions. Now I rush to Riga to save my family."

**"September 25.** On the way I passed my unit en route to Riga on foot. Now I am ahead of them, and that gives me one extra day. I am sitting at my upper-storey room at home — maybe for the last time. I check my belongings. The National Guard files I bury in a water-proof box behind the barn. I try to persuade my father and sisters to leave home and go to Kurzeme (Courland). I hear **that in Riga people are being caught on streets and forcefully taken to Germany. Especially young men that are not in uniform. A manhunt!**

At the train station I see some of my brothers and sisters from the "establishment". They are going to Liepaja and bringing the "establish-

ment" archives with them. They urge me again to put on civilian clothes and go with them. No. As long as there is still a chance to defend Latvia, I will not desert my duty.

On the train, next to the people from "establishment", I see two of my class-mates. How come they are here? Why are they not in uniform and bearing arms? But who is to tell which is the right way these days."



September 26–30, 1944. Latvian Legionaries by More (50 km Northeast from Riga) in a defence battle saved the retreat road to the South for refugees from Estland, northern Latvia and the German 18th army

(One of them later was a famous architect Gunars Birkerts, the other a physician Dr. Andris Ritmanis — both in the U.S.A. So for them it was the right way.)

**“October 2.** My unit is again stationed in Riga. My commander is a good-natured Latvian officer that does not deny me leave permits. I try to visit all my friends that are still in Riga. I want to see Milda, but I find out she has already left Riga a few days ago — together with her family. Why did not I go to see her sooner? How naive was my wish to present myself in uniform! Now maybe I'll never see her again.

I think about all Latvian girls that will be here when the Soviets take Riga. Some will manage to get away but not all of them. I do not even dare to think what would happen to them. That is worse than with us, boys. We can only lose our lives, that's all.

**My only consolation is that now Latvian men are armed.** Germans have given arms to us. And we will put them to good use — against whichever enemy we would have to.

**Riga is being evacuated.** It means to leave all that was dear — the accustomed life, home, relatives, memories, and hopes for the future. My family has decided to go to Kurzeme. But after that? Latvians are being separated from their country.

While I was on leave my unit has left Riga — for Kurzeme. Thank God, not to Germany. Now again I have to avoid gendarmes. I have heard sometimes deserters were shot on the spot. Especially near the front lines. That is the army rule.”

**“October 5.** I am at Talsi now. Here is a hill that once held an ancient Latvian castle. The ancient warriors of Kurzeme once walked here. Now here march we — Latvian soldiers of the present era. Over the time we are united with those ancient men. **And today we have to fight not only for Latvia but for all the Baltic States.**

I run into Karlis Mishke. Now he has recovered from his injuries and has returned to his unit. He has taken part in the fierce battles of Volkhova, has received the Iron Cross for bravery, and... been wounded twice. We are silent. This is not a time for chat.

The hardest at this time is to make the correct decision: **should Latvians go to Germany, hide in the woods, or stay and fight?** (At that time the universal opinion was that Germans would give up Kurzeme as they had already given up the rest of Latvia.) There is nobody to tell us, which is the right way. Everybody has to decide for himself and answer one's conscience.”

**“October 6.** The events start to roll faster and faster. The combat noise sometimes increases, sometimes dies down. But even here we see the red reflection of fire all around. The boys say to themselves: “Latvia will perish!” And at the same time they all hope for a miracle. Many refugees do not go further than the next county; they hope for a miracle too. And sometimes it so happens they remain under the enemy because the front line moves too swiftly. **Now even boys of fifteen come to our colonel Lobe and tell they want to defend their country.** They are braver than grown-ups. Also the soldiers that come from Latgale. They are the bravest.

We hear rumors about the Latvian group, organized by general Kurelis, that has taken to woods of Kurzeme and want to fight on their own, not with Germans. But their number is small, so they will not make any difference.

**The Latvian Legion was forcefully drafted, and all the time they mostly had to retreat; they have had just a few victories. But their morale is unbroken, it is even stronger than at the beginning.**

What will happen in the future? Will the Latvian Legionaries have an even more tragic fate than Latvian Riflemen of World War I?

The latter at least saw the victory before almost all of them were shot in the Soviet Union in 1937/38.”

**“October 7.** I found my battery and now feel almost like at home. The local farms are full of refugees. Where do they get the food? **The farmers of Kurzeme feed them all. Nobody has to starve.** I hear that the population in Kurzeme now has more than doubled; to the 200,000 “natives” 200,000 refugees and 100,000 soldiers have been added. **But the changes that have taken place in our country have united the nation.”**

**“October 8.** This is Sunday. We eat apples and flirt with the refugee girls. There is one I get along with. She is from Dagda, Latgale, and she is half Polish. She is smart and beautiful, with dark, reckless eyes. Our whole group takes a walk in the nearby park, then we visit the Nurmuiza castle and the church. Upon parting I kiss the girl, and she allows it. This was a good day.”

**“October 13.** My unit leaves Talsi and moves to Dundaga. I say good-bye to the girl of last Sunday and kiss her several times. By the way — her name is Milda.

We have decided to take to woods — the whole unit — if the fight for Kurzeme would come to an end. We will show the communists that Latvians are not licked yet. I will do what my honor and conscience

will tell me. But for the time being I have to go to Stende to find out about my family — they are supposed to be at the farm "Renchi".

**"October 14.** I do not get to see my family, but I get news of them. My sister Aina has gotten married! May all the good spirits keep her safe and give her many children! The wedding had taken place on October 6. On the same day my father and my younger sister Rita had left Riga — together with Grauds family, our relatives. They all had boarded a ship that would go to Germany. Aina with her husband corporal Spunde had remained in Riga. Did they leave later? And what should I do? Go to Germany in hopes to find my family? No, I'll wait.

I hear seventeen German ships had been bombed and drowned in the Baltic Sea. Maybe my family and relatives are already dead? And what has happened to my relatives near Gulbene? Maybe they have already been "liquidated" as koulaks (land owners). And the Dumpuri girls? What did the Soviets do to them?

I have to fight, even without hope — just to avenge those that were so dear to me.

Riga has been taken by the Soviets on October 13. Now there is a wall between us and our previous life.

We receive a special permit to help our families to evacuate. Since I do not know where my family is at this time, I use the permit to take the last free trip around the countryside."

**"October 19.** They are alive! In the harbor city Ventspils I found out about my family. The ship had stopped at Ventspils for a few days en route to Germany. And all the names are registered at the Ventspils Refugee Center."

**"October 21.** I arrived at Ventspils on October 19. But already on October 16 the ship with my family had left Ventspils. Only three days, but it was enough to miss them. Is this a parting forever? I could cry."

**"October 29.** I'm back with my unit. A whole week has passed, but we live in Dundaga peacefully. Incredible! Our communications unit has been transferred from the 15th to the 19th Division. Some have left the unit and joined the Kurelis group in the woods. I have decided not to go there. I'll stay with my unit and fight in the front lines.

Since I have a good knowledge of the German language I get to be sent as an interpreter with a German unit that is going to comb the woods and catch deserters. Damn it! Now I have a chance to get shot by

our own men. But maybe I'll have a chance to help them. At any rate, it is not for me to decide. A soldier just has to obey orders."

**"October 30.** Yes, I had to go against one of my own kind. One former Latvian Legionary was shot like a hunted animal. He only had a few meters left to the forest edge when he fell. He was one of the 15th Division that was sent to Germany, and he did not want to leave his country. Too bad I do not know his name. **How much misery the occupants along with our own traitors have brought to our country! And our fools too.**

However, I had a chance to save two civilians. They did not have any I.D. I told them to show any papers at all — Germans would not understand. Maybe they were communists, but they were Latvians. And that counts.

If only I could see the future as in the light of a flash-bulb — then I would know what to do. Should I go to the front lines, join the Kurelis group, try to reach Sweden, or get to Germany as soon as possible? But the events are so sudden we can not follow them. One thing I know: I have to write down everything that happens. Someday it will be history.

If only I could see for a moment what had happened to those that remained under the Soviets: Aina, Grandmother, Grandfather, uncle Afreds, Dumpuri girls. And what about them that are now in Germany, under allied air-raids? Father, Rita, Graudu family, my class-mates, and my buddies from the "establishment". It is so hard not to know about them, **but this is the time of patience and endurance."**

**"October 31.** Today I managed to do a good deed. There are two injured Latvians at a nearby farm. A nurse's aide had come to us for dressings. I went to a drug store and obtained dressings and medications. If the field gendarmes would know it! (For this sentence a month later I was almost shot when gendarmes really read my diary.)

The situation is similar to that of the Terrible Year. But now there is less fear of the occupational power and less informers. Still, you do not know whom to trust. You just have to rely on instinct."

**"November 1.** Now we have an order to go to the front lines. In Stende I could not find anything about my sister Aina. There are fierce battles in the direction of Liepaja. I heard rumors that Liepaja had already been taken by the Reds. Crazy! Maybe finally I'll wind up in the woods after all. I remember the English soldiers' song: "Pack up your troubles..." We learned it during our English lessons, and later we adapted it as the anthem of our school — the First High School of Riga."

**"End of November.** A lot has happened since November 1. We went by train first to Stende, then to Tukums, and then marched to Jaunpils — 20 kilometers, in tempo, and with all our belongings on our backs. The night we spent in the local school building. The next day we moved on to Lestene. Here we continue to learn communications. At least it is better than to have the regular soldiers' training with marching, saluting, and the stupid German sergeant's commands: "Hinlegen!" (Lie down!) and "Aufstehen!" (Get up!).

One of my buddies — Janis — tempts me with a sauna and pancakes. This luxury we could have if we would take AWOL to his father's farm near by — approximately 10-15 kilometers. I am reckless enough to agree. I have not had a real bath since we left Dundaga, and lice are practically devouring us.

At night we reached our destination. But all we found there was an empty building without doors and with broken windows. The rest of the farm buildings were in total ruins. We could see rockets going up. No sooner did we realize we were at the front lines when we were stopped by a German patrol. We showed our soldier's I.D.'s and would have been released, but Janis had left his ear-phone in his pocket. Now we were taken for spies and arrested. We heard the German soldiers talking: "These comrades are in big trouble!" So it was. Later we were taken to a prison in Talsi. The prison cell was small and packed with people. Lice were everywhere. Some persons that had been arrested for **spying were simply shot without a trial. But Germans, opposite to the Soviets, seldom shot innocent people — except Jews.**

Among the prisoners were criminals, communists, and also those that had tried to avoid the draft. **A few had done nothing wrong — they had simply been denounced by their neighbors** for some reason or other. How typical of Latvians! In the cell a barrel served as a toilette, and there was straw on the floor for sleeping. We were fed bread and cabbage soup.

After a few days we were taken to Irlava. There was the VI SS Latvian Corps Headquarters with the commander gen. Krieger, called "uncle", and their "Secret Field Police" No. 317.

For safety sake we probably would have been shot if I did not speak German. Now I invented a touching story that I was supposed to have a meeting with my sister at that farm. However, the crucial factor was the certificate from Julijs Brachs that I had worked at the former NKVD prison and helped with the anti-communist propaganda.

A sergeant from our unit was called to receive us — at his responsibility. The commander told him to punish us severely. Then he said to me: "The Russians would make mincemeat of both of us." He was probably right. Dog knows what he has eaten.

Before we were released there was still something that could be considered as a test for us. Germans had arrested a middle-aged, heavy set man. He had told he was a farmer from Vidzeme, did not want to stay under communists. He also told he had spent a week in a swamp and lived only on a loaf of bread. He was told to wash up. He was clean (after living in a swamp for a week?), and his hands were soft; they did not look like as farmer's hands. I was asked if a person could live for a whole week on a loaf of bread. I naively told the truth — that I did not know. Maybe this answer decided our fate.

The commander came to a conclusion that after living in a swamp for a week on a loaf of bread the man could not be so clean and would not look so well fed. The man was taken to a nearby forest. Only the policemen came back.

My conscience bothered me. No matter who this man was — he was a Latvian. Should not I have tried to save him? But in that case maybe we all three would have been shot. Why was this man shown to us and the question about bread asked? This was probably a test to see if we had told the truth about ourselves. But at that moment I did not realize it.

On the way back we stopped at a farm and had a chance to go to a sauna. We were even treated with pancakes! After all — that was the reason we had gotten into this mess.

After we got back to our unit our punishment was insignificant. A German second lieutenant just bawled us out in front of the unit: "Damned intelligentsia! Peasants — they are real soldiers!" In a way he was right. My friend Janis was like that. He did not know any German, so nobody even asked him anything. But he was a good soldier. Yes, in addition to the derogatory speech we were also put in the vegetable cellar (there was no prison cell) for 24 hours. We used this time to have a good sleep.

We did not have to suffer hunger either. Instead of bread and water our buddies brought us double portions of soup. And our guard, a ship's radio-telegraphist in civilian life, told us something interesting that hardly anybody knew.

On the last day before the German army took Riga in summer of 1941 the tower of St. Peter's Church was set to fire. There was much speculation about who had done it — the communists or Germans. Now our guard told us he had lived on the other side of the Daugava at that time. In his yard a German cannon battery was placed. The commander **had asked him whether he wanted to take a last look at the St. Peter's tower.** They were going to shoot down the tower because the Soviet observers were there. **After the second blast the tower had star-**

ted to burn in the middle. (Later I found from a book about churches, published by Latvians in exile, that the battery commander's name was Gerd Homeyer.)

This I am writing on the farm "Lielvanagi" which is our present location. I am now in the escort platoon of German 393rd Assault Gun Brigade. Our platoon is a part of the scouting battalion, led by a Latvian commander major Ernests Laumanis, of the famous 19th Division.

How do I happen to be here? Our communications unit received an offer: three men could volunteer for the escort platoon of the above brigade, and at least one of them had to be fluent in German.

Then it dawned on me that in the four months since I was wearing this uniform I had had no confrontation with the enemy. So I volunteered. With me came Aleksandrs Zhube who knows some German and the brave boy from Latgale — Aloizs Putans. Now the three of us live in a separate room about 2 kilometers from the front lines. Our unit is led by a Latvian lieutenant Bruno Stilbinsh, decorated with the Iron Cross for bravery. When the German Assault Gun Battery received our platoon and found out we were Latvians, they were very pleased."

**"November 21.** I'm waiting for the battle to begin. And I'm grateful I can still be on the Latvian soil and fight."

**"December 1.** Accidentally I ran into Gunars Silchenko. Had not seen him since summer. Now it turns out we are located near each other. He is with the anti-tank artillery, under commander Chevers. (After the war Chevers was the leader of a national guerrilla group. He was shot by a traitor Klinkans. Silchenko was in that group too. He was shot when going to see his girl who was one of the local guerrilla supporters. It was in the year 1950 — so he had held out for five years.)

**Looks like for this winter Kurzeme would be held. Still, I have no illusions about the outcome of the war and the ultimate fate of Kurzeme.**

Yes! My family is alive! At the end of November I received a letter from my father. They are in Chemnitz, Germany. They are all-right, only food rations are very small. But they still have some of the butter I brought them when visiting home for the last time. Our rations here have dwindled too. Now the only thing we get besides dry rations is soup. We make syrup of sugar beets and check potato fields for potatoes left there after harvesting. Our German Assault Gun Brigade is fed a little better. Besides, sometimes they manage to shoot a hare or a deer which they share with us. Then we have a feast.

I have heard rumors about a revolution in the Soviet Union, but I do

not believe it. Rather I would believe in the new weapons. Germans are convinced they would bring victory. Of course, what else have they left to hope for? But these weapons sound too fantastic. Rockets in stratosphere and airplanes with a speed over 1,000 miles per hour! I have also heard our 15th Division that is being trained in Germany would come back to help us. Latvians believe in it just like Germans in the new weapons. As if they could save us. But there are many of my friends. It would be nice to be together again."

**"December 4.** Sometimes I wish there was no war and I would be home with my family. And I'm scared of death. But then I remind myself what time this is. It's not the time for ordinary life and ordinary wishes. **This is a heroic time that requires us to rise above all that is ordinary. This time requires us to become heroes. Not only in words but in deeds. Idealism? No, right now it has become the only reality we have.**

It is snowing. We have a combat training. We pretend to be in a battle until we almost start to believe it. We get praised.

Tomorrow we have to move on. I regret it. This was a good place; who knows what the next quarters would be like. And I'll miss the sympathetic commanders: German second lieutenant Sauer and second lieutenant Schefer. Our lives are in their hands and their lives — in ours. But what sense does it all make? We get trained, kept in reserve, but in the end we will be slaughtered anyway.

**Are we moving in the direction of Riga? No, no!"**

**"December 5.** It is still snowing. The white snow makes me feel like on Sunday. We are still here. I spend a few hours with lieutenant Stilbins, listening to his radio. This feels like home. I also have time to read. I'm reading A. Barbis "In the Fire". But I do not like it. He depicts **war from the ugly side only. War is not only that. The truth is somewhere in the middle between the ugliness and the pathetic articles in the newspapers."**

**"December 10.** We are still here. I have written 14 letters: to my family, to Julijs Brachs, to my friend Valdis Kruminsh, and others. In spite of the war the German postal service is still regular, so I hope all these letters would reach their destination. And I hope to receive some replies.

**Gen. Kurelis group has been taken prisoners. The officers will be court-martialed. I hear rumors that of the rest every tenth one would be shot.** Was it worth it? They wanted to avoid combat where they would have been killed in battle — a death worthy of soldiers.

Nowadays the death of a human being has become too ordinary. This is the frightening side of war."

"**December 14.** I was sent to the ware-house for our canteen supplies — razor blades, letter paper, etc. When I returned my unit had moved to Rumbumuiza, near Dobele-Lestene Highway. Here we have to live in a basement, but it is safer.

Our lieutenant Stilbins is being sent to Liepaja to take a course in horse-back riding. I'll miss him. Senior lieutenant Sauer has gone to Berlin to receive the oak-leaf Wreath to his Knight's Iron Cross. This acknowledgement is given only for an exceptional bravery and was presented by Hitler himself. In Latgale Sauer and his brigade — 10 cannons — had destroyed a whole Soviet tank division. Yes, he has earned this decoration. Senior lieutenant Schefer will replace him here."

"**December 17.** I received a letter from Rita. How dear is such a piece of paper! Now she is the only one that is still with Dad. They live peacefully, but they have an ever increasing longing for Riga and home. Looks like my little sister is growing up. Yes, she will be fifteen in a month. I write another letter and send with it 200 German marks. I'll have to try to get some food for them too. German soldiers already do that — send food for their families in Germany."

"**December 19.** I received a letter from my father too. He tells they managed to get by on the food they had. But maybe he just tries to comfort me? He also tells they were together with Grauds family. I'm very pleased to receive these letters from my family. I received a letter from Valdis too. Too bad we are not in the same unit."

"**December 20.** All our dreams and longings, and half of our thoughts go back to Riga. I'm getting tired of this war — after five months. What should say those men that have been in it for over five years? If they are still alive. Personally I do not know any such man."

"**December 22.** Now I'm being sent to Prague for officers' training. One of our men had to go, and our present commander, reserve officer Vaidzinsh, has chosen me. I'm pleased. Will I really become an officer? Even more pleased I am for the chance to see other countries, maybe even my family. Chemnitz is not so far from Prague. So far I have been very lucky in this war; fate guards me. How will it be in future?"

"**December 23, 10:00 a.m.** It is on! The great Soviet attack, long awai-

ted, has begun. Artillery fire is raging just a short distance from here. Hundreds of enemy airplanes fly over us. Some grenades fall in our yard. Our basement is the safest place now. Forget about the officers' training."

"**December 23, at night.** The first battle of our platoon. Elegant. Wish all of them would be like that. (This was written still in the excitement of the battle, without choosing the words.)

The Red army attack began around 10:00 a.m. with an artillery fire in front of us and on our left. The front line is about two kilometers from Rumbumuiza. But in our basement we are brewing beer for our Christmas celebration — from the sugar-beets, gathered in the fields after they were harvested.

Our commander said to me: "Valentin, write down the names and addresses of all our men!" He is a young man, without the combat experience, but even he knew everybody would not survive this battle. However, nobody could have predicted what happened in the next few minutes.

Commander Vaidzins and some other men decided to go to the sauna — about 100 meters behind the main building. I did my task and wrote down everybody in the basement, but I also had to get the names and addresses of those men that were in the sauna. I did not want to go outside where shells were falling more and more often. But I have always held duty above everything else. So I ventured outside and managed to get to the sauna without an injury. I urged the men to hurry up, but they were thoroughly enjoying it. One said laughingly: "We have to get clean for the trip to St. Peter's!"

I ran back to the main building. Suddenly I saw three airplanes that were diving and taking an aim to the building. I dropped down behind some boulders, about half-way from the sauna.

The explosion almost blew out my eardrums. I could feel the hot air — like a breath of death. I ran to the basement. The door had been blown open. The ceiling was broken, and my place at the long desk was covered with debris. If I had been still sitting there, I probably would have been dead now. The bombs had gone through all the three storeys of the building. **It was my sense of duty that had saved me.**

Most of the men in the building were under the debris. The injured were moaning, but corporal Janis Ulpe and V. Vrublevskis were already silent forever. Injured were Zhanis Berzinsh, Modris Gaizinsh, Aleksandrs Jukmanis, and Eriks Zutis. Those that were not injured helped to dig out the men on the upper storeys. Bombs had exploded on all floors. Wherever we saw an arm or a leg we started to dig. Sometimes we found a corpse, sometimes an injured man, but sometimes nothing more than an arm or a leg.

A young fellow dug out an elderly man and cried: "Jansony, Jansony! Jansony is dead!" Sergeant Jansons had been like a father to him. How to live without him now?

After we had already brushed our clothes chaos began. The field phones kept ringing. Incoherent communication, explanations, confused commands, hassle and bustle. Somebody shouted: "Where is Vaidzins? Someone is looking for him!" My God! They were still in the sauna! But that way they escaped intact.

We, the communications group, dug our transmitters out of the debris. They were OK. So we were the first that joined the battle.

The assault guns arrived, and we had to mount them. The first battle is the hardest. Already? Is it for real? Will we survive? Maybe only get wounded? Such are our thoughts at this moment. I feel a little better after we get on top of the guns. As if they were live comrades and helpers in the battle. I try to crouch behind the platform. An assault gun does not have a turret like a tank; the whole thing has to be turned. But it is hard to spot and hit it. A weapon more terrible than a tank — because it is so low.

We crossed a field, then neared the next farm where we heard shooting. Our machine-guns were at work.

The guns rolled fast through the near-by forest, and the speed was exciting. Instead of fear we began to feel like in an car race. The first gun opened fire at a distant target. I noticed enemy soldiers in the ditches. They did not pay any attention to us, just fled in panic. The gun-men did not see them, and the guns kept rolling. I did not inform the gun-men about the soldiers in ditches. If our guns started to shoot at them — we, sitting on the guns, would be a direct target; we would be picked off like birds.

Our five guns with 50 platoon men had gone approximately 2-3 kilometers. Passing three farms, we threw handgrenades into the buildings. The battle was raging all around. The guns stopped, spread out, and opened an intensive fire. Through our transmitters we informed the gun-men about targets.

Now we were not on the guns any more but on the ground. The commander told us to dig in, but we did it slowly; we were sure we would soon have to move on. And the ground was frozen, so it was hard to do it. We did our share of shooting whenever we saw something moving in front of us. Around us we could hear explosions with a sharp sound. The experienced soldiers told us they were the small mines. We had heard explosions before, so we minded only those that were closer than 20 meters. We were told not to mind the whistling sounds of bullets; by the time you hear the sound the bullet has already passed.

There was artillery fire too, but grenades exploded far behind us — in the forest. The loudest noise came from our own guns. Some of our guys almost got concussion from lying too close in front of the gun barrels. We had no experience yet.

In the distance we could see strange piles. They were dead enemy soldiers. I was indifferent to them. In front of our guns, not further than about a mile from us, everything went up in the air: dirt, trees, people. A building caught fire. If any group of people showed up in front of us, they disappeared after the first or second shot. And armored vehicles caught fire at least after the third shot.

Then the enemy caught on where the heavy fire was coming from and aimed their artillery at us. Some heavy grenades fell real close. Lucky they did not injure anyone, but we got a good scare. Hastily the guns moved to a different position. Our task was to look for land-mines, but there was no time for it. All around was the pungent smell of burning powder which I'll always remember as the smell of death.

So we kept changing our positions and held out until dark. Then the commander said over my transmitter: "Quitting time, Latvians! Let's go home!" Yes, our work for today was finished — we had run out of grenades.

We were surprised that all through the battle nobody had been killed, not even injured. Our guns were not damaged either. We felt like after a job well done.

We returned "home" and kept talking for a long time about the battle. We were too excited to calm down; everybody wanted to tell about his experience and feelings. We decided that our commander was a great guy — cool, brave, and orderly. We had already forgotten the dead and injured ones this morning; it seemed so long ago..."

Later we found out **we had been the first to go against this enemy attack**. And we did not even go into a regular battle; we stopped the enemy with gun-fire only. Not only stopped but even chased back a few kilometers, and did not suffer any losses ourselves. Of course, it was only in our sector, the south wing; five guns and fifty Legionaries against at least ten times that many enemy troops. (Later I read an official enemy report that in this sector they had attacked with ten tanks and several hundred soldiers!) They had not expected it, and probably this surprise moment assured our success. **Our swift attack in their left flank held the whole major offensive for a day.**

(For this easy victory we had to pay dearly two days later.)

That evening, after the battle, our commander asked somebody to go back to the farm "Lielvanagi" and get our machine-gun that had been left there. Vilhelms Apinis and Rudolfs Lacis volunteered. They went

and... were gone forever. We heard shots from that direction. Later we found out the 21st German Airforce Infantry Division had not held their position at "Lielvanagi". After an artillery fire a Soviet tank division and two infantry corps had forced them out. Only at "Mazberzi" the enemy was stopped by the 1st battery of German 393rd Brigade with another five assault guns and Latvian artillery from the 19th and 15th Division, led by officers Ozols and Insbergs. They destroyed 14 tanks and stopped the enemy 70 meters from the guns.

*"December 24. Today there was again a grand battle — harder than yesterday. It is not possible to describe everything, but there was a moment when I thought the end had come. It was when all around us there was a wild enemy fire, and explosions were right under my nose. Through the smoke I could see enemy soldiers, but my automatic rifle was damaged and did not work.*

It is all over now. I'm behind the front lines with the supply unit. This is Christmas Eve, but I can not feel it. I still hear the whistling of bullets and bombs that I was listening to all day long.

My life was at stake, but I did not feel fear. We all did our duty.

We had ten wounded; two of them stayed with the unit."

Janis Balodis was missing in action. He was usually with a different group, and we did not notice if he was with us when we attacked the farm "Stari". It is possible he was either killed or wounded and remained in his hole in that farmyard. Only in the evening we found out Balodis had not been with the other group. But by that time the enemy had already taken "Stari", and we could not help him any more.

*"A gypsy woman had told Karlis Vitelis that he would be killed in his first battle. That was yesterday, and he felt very relieved that he had survived. But today was the first real battle, and in this battle he was killed with a bullet in his forehead. I remember seeing a sort of "fog" in his eyes the night before when he told me about the prophecy. Was that a sign of death? (I fear to say that there were others in whose eyes I saw such a "fog", and they all were either killed or seriously wounded in the next few days.)*

*The other group, led by non-commissioned officer Vaidzinsh, took "Annuzhi" today, but had to leave it again before the nightfall. My group took "Stari" — and had to leave it too."*

This is the last excerpt of the diary. After that I did not have time to write any more. I started to write again after we had reached Sweden. The following description of battles was written in Oerebro hospital, in the shadow of death, before the extradition.

"During the night between December 23 and 24 the Red army in

small groups had slithered behind our positions. They had managed to do it without any loss of human lives, which they had not been able to do the previous day in a frontal attack, leaving piles of dead men. On the 24th we started a counter attack. One group went to "Annuzi", the other to "Stari". The assault guns remained at the edge of the forest, approximately 400 meters from the farm buildings, but we ran across the field where we saw several corpses. One was an old man with a beard; the others were young men with Latvian features. These Latvians did not wear our national colors on their uniforms like the Legionaries, but we could tell they were Latvians from their faces. We took the buildings the enemy had left, chased out by our gun-fire. Lieutenant Gaigals and his group had been in these buildings, surrounded by the Reds, but we did not find them there either. Probably they got away through the ditch as soon as the enemy retreated.

Only ruins were left of the former farm buildings, but in the yard we found trenches and individual fox-holes, covered with thin logs. They came in handy when the enemy had spotted us. They opened a fierce artillery and small mine fire. We hid in the fox-holes and waited. It seemed even the earth was moaning. Dirt and shells fell on the roof, and the small mines seemed to explode directly above us. My ears were temporary deafened by the noise, and the air pressure sometimes took my breath away. "This is the end," I thought. I prayed: "Our Father who art in heaven..." Never before had I prayed so sincerely. Then a close explosion flattened my shelter, and a shell hit my automatic pistol. It seemed the time had stopped. How long can one stand this? I felt like running away but had enough sense not to do it. It was hard to breathe in all the dust and smoke, and again I smelled the burning powder — the smell of death.

Then I heard a machine-gun through all the explosions. Now I did not wait any longer but ventured outside. The first person I saw was corporal Arvids Klavinsh, shooting with his machine-gun. The farm building ruins were leveled to the ground, but all around I saw our men wriggling out. They were covered with dirt and soot, dazed, and half-deaf. Some quickly came to their senses and started to shoot. My automatic pistol had been rendered useless, but I still had hand grenades. I settled next to corp. Klavinsh that was on one knee. The artillery fire had died down. Our guns were silent too. After the infernal noise the silence seemed weird. We could hear only distant shot-gun and machine-gun blasts.

Then I saw quite near many enemy figures. But they did not come toward us with their usual "Hurrah!" Instead they slowly dragged themselves away in small groups, moving from side to side. Maybe they



were wounded or just dazed. When we did not see anyone near, corp. Klavinsh shouted: "Let's get out of here!" We ran back to our guns so the enemy would not capture them.

From this farm a ditch goes toward the forest. It was not quite the direction we needed, but we felt safer in the ditch than on an open field. We kept crawling towards the forest. At the end of the ditch we found a young soldier from the lieutenant Gaigals' group. He looked very scared. I told him not to fear — we were almost safe (relatively speaking). Seeing how scared this boy was I felt almost brave.

In the forest I looked for our assault guns. If they prepared the way with their fire, we would go back where we came from. Instead I saw the green Soviet tanks! Have they really surrounded us? I already clutched a hand grenade, but then I noticed German crosses painted on the tanks. Is this a disguise? Finally I saw a man in the black German tanker's uniform and asked for their identity. The man shouted back: "Damned Soviet tanks — a trophy!" Now we knew we could safely continue our way. German soldiers respected Latvians and gladly talked to those that would speak German. This man explained to me that in comparison to German tanks these were not so comfortable inside, higher, and with a weaker engine. But they were more fireproof since they used not gasoline but petroleum.

Our guns had retreated deeper into the forest — to avoid enemy fire. I indicated the targets, and they started to shoot again until they ran out of ammunition. They said they had an order to wait until dark and then go back to Rumbas — our original quarters. Our orders are to stay with the guns. But it is still a long time till the dark. What should we do? We really should go back to "Stari" and try to hold the farm. But we did not dare to do it without a supporting gun fire. And there was no other group in the vicinity that could come to replace us.

At night we did not sleep well. Some screamed in their sleep. I was sent to the supply unit. There I wrote about the battle and listed the dead and the injured. I had a temptation to stay here the whole night and have a good sleep. But my conscience made me remember my duty — to be with my unit. So it is back to the pandemonium."

**"December 25.** The battle goes on. Yesterday I volunteered to go again, but today I was scared. Not really scared, but I could not make myself to mount the gun. Was it a foreboding? Non-commissioned officer Vaidzinsh probably understood and spared me. He told me to stay in Rumbas with the brigade commander as a communicator. He told the two other communicators — Aloizis Putans and Aleksandrs Zhube — to go each with a separate group and listen to my messages. So they would

not have to ask the gunmen; during the battle they do not open their hatches, and in the noise you cannot hear anyway. Vaidzinsh himself mounted the gun without hesitation and went off. Who could have foreseen at that time how fateful it was? Our platoon was almost destroyed in this battle.

Non-commissioned officer Vaidzinsh was wounded. Zhube too — worse. But the worst injury happened to Aloizis Putans. He had part of his jaw-bone cut off. At night one of the wounded showed me he wanted some water — he could not speak. At first I did not recognize him. But I could see he was in bad pain, and I could hardly keep from crying. His mouth was one bloody clot, and I realized I should not put even a drop of water there. Only in the morning it was possible to move the injured to safety, and the pain-killers we had were soon all used up.

The beginning of that day was the same as the previous day. Our guys mounted the assault guns and went against the enemy fire. The brigade had ten guns; seven went in this attack. But the enemy fire was fierce, and there was an overwhelming number of tanks. So they had to stop. They could only shoot. The men lay on the ground next to their guns. They had no time to dig in. But they managed to guard their guns from the enemy infantry men. And guns kept shooting, preventing the 19th enemy tank corps from moving toward Rumbas. Later there was dirt dug up and mixed together with shells and tree branches, and no trace any more of the thin layer of snow that had covered the ground before the battle.

However, since the guns were standing still, three of them got shot. One gun burned down, another one exploded, and the third one's barrel was cut off. Eight German gunmen were killed, their commander, second lieutenant Schefer, slightly wounded in the mouth. (Later he died of blood poisoning.) The battle-hardened soldiers had tears in their eyes when they mentioned their killed comrades that evening. They praised our men for bravery. They had no cover, but they stayed to guard the guns. Sergeant Grossmann was very upset. He took my hand in his and asked to forgive. Why me? Maybe just because of my knowledge of the German language. During the battle he had told one of our guys — Rekerts — to seek cover under the gun. As soon as he did, a grenade exploded right there. It was just an unfortunate coincidence, but sergeant Grossmann felt guilty about it. (Grossmann was killed in another battle later.)

At the beginning of the battle I was able to communicate with Zhube, but later I only heard statics. In the evening I found out a bullet had hit his antenna. At least I had already told him the order to stay with the guns, **but not to move ahead by themselves**. Aloizis Putans, of

course, could not answer because of his injury. Besides him and Zhube there were fifteen more injured men, some of them seriously. One man was sent to hospital with hepatitis. The damaged guns that could not shoot any more were used to bring back the injured. Those with slight injuries walked back. We put the injured in the basement where they lay on straw.

In this battle another man of our unit was killed — Slishans. He raised his head from a grenade hole to look around, and at that moment a shell cut off his head.”

This was one of the most ferocious battles in Kurzeme. The 19th Division of Latvians and the 393rd German Assault Gun Brigade helped to stop it. This brigade was one of those millstones that, gradually being ground to nothing, crushed countless enemy units in the process... and also Balts, drafted into the Red army.

These battles did not change the outcome of the war. They only left graveyards — for us and larger ones for the enemy. But they saved many thousand people from Siberia; while the fighting was going on in Kurzeme, at least 200,000 Latvian civilians had a chance to seek refuge abroad. Besides, these battles kept a large part of the Soviet army (between 42 and 74 divisions) tied down in Kurzeme and thus slowed its progress. Because of Stronghold of Kurzeme the allied armies could advance further and meet the Soviets at the river Elbe in East Germany, instead of the Rhein. And four days before the capitulation it was the British army, not the Red army, that occupied Denmark.

Here I want to remark that in those days we received a group of strange helpmates. They were in various uniforms: Home Guard, police, Legionary, and partly in private clothes. They seemed to come from hospitals, from rear job positions, and a part of them had been in the Kurelis group. The non-commissioned officer Varna had at one time invited me to join “the real Latvian army”; now he was bringing help to his “gang” at the front lines that was famous throughout the whole 19th Division. **To guard the last hope of Latvian nation — Kurzeme.** He was killed in March battles.

About the battle of December 25 I had written only a short note at that time: *“December 25, Christmas. A battle near Rumbas — heavy artillery fire.”* I could not write more since I did not take part in that battle. But non-commissioned officer Vaidzinsh later told me more about it.

The order had been to go to “Lielvanagi”, but nobody knew for sure where the enemy was. They had to play by ear. They stopped in a wooded area approximately two kilometers from Rumbas. There were

no other units in the flanks, and the vicinity was not surveyable. However, the guns turned left and went north.

Officer Vaidzinsh led a ten men scouting unit along a forest path towards "Berzi". Suddenly about 40 meters ahead a Red army soldier came out of a ditch with raised hands. Officer Vaidzinsh hesitated. Is this maybe a trap? While he was thinking there was a shot, and the Red soldier disappeared.

During the night our units had left all the previously gained positions, and now the attack went against Rumbas. We had made the correct turn and filled the gap in the front line.

Officer Vaidzinsh ordered his men to scatter and run back. He himself with sergeant Skudrinsh remained in the rear. Suddenly there was a shower of bullets. Sergeant Skudrinsh cried out: "Hit in the chest! I'm gone!" He took one more step, fell down, and did not move any more. The next moment there was a salvo from the so called "Stalin's organ". It was a reactive mine-thrower. The shots came slowly, with a great noise, every second, and exploded when hitting the ground. Shells, fire, and smoke were all around. Every next row of shots were 10 meters further to enemy side. A shot formed a funnel-shaped hole and left a pipe of 20 cm in diameter with a split end and a sharp smell of powder. Altogether it was an area of 120 m x 40 m that seemed like a boiling kettle.

Our men hid in the grenade holes and did not suffer any casualties. This weapon is more dangerous psychologically than physically. It makes soldiers panic and want to jump up and run, but that would mean a sure death.

They gathered at the edge of the forest and informed the assault guns about the enemy position. The guns opened fire right away. But the enemy noticed us and did the same. The guns and the men kept changing positions, **but the explosions were all around — as if without an aim.** Between explosions there the noise of tanks was heard.

One after another many of our men got wounded, and two were killed. The guns were put out of order too, and eight gunmen were killed. It was hard to dig in because the ground was frozen, but later men found shelter in grenade holes. The lightly wounded crawled away themselves; the heavily wounded were taken out by the damaged guns.

Through the smoke there could be seen many fires on the enemy side; their tanks were burning. That was the result of our gun-fire.

The enemy fire lasted all day long. But our men did not get to see any more enemy soldiers, and they hardly had a chance to use their rifles. When the darkness fell they went back to Rumbas, accompa-

nied by the enemy fire. There were no fresh units that could take their place.

Before it seemed odd to me that infantry men, lightly armed, had to guard assault guns. After this battle I understood. We lost only three men, they — three times that many. But we had more wounded ones.

Later I heard that we — seven assault guns and 40 Legionaries — had stopped the Soviet 19th Tank Corps and the 100th Infantry Corps in their attack on Rumbas. The enemy had at least 50 tanks.

**“December 26.** Today there was an order to leave Rumbas. The injured were taken away early this morning. Last night when the shooting died down after dark, the remaining men came back here. For food we had only raisin bread, some luncheon meat, candy, and cigarettes, but no real food. The drinking water situation was even worse. There was nothing else to drink but the remnants of our beer that we brewed for Christmas. That was no good any more. It was full of pieces of plaster and wood — from the explosion the other day. There was a well outside in the yard, but it was dangerous to go out there because of the shooting.

We were moving towards Janukrogs. At the cross-roads before Janukrogs there was a group of German tanks that looked mightily threatening. This was the first time I saw the famous German “tigers”. Their ferocious look gave us new hope. We understood the German 12th Tank Division was the backbone of their Courland defense. But this “tiger” tank unit No. 510 Germans kept as the last reserve. It had not taken part in battles yet but was always near.

We felt bitter. While they hesitated the infantry bled to death. But high officers and many guns perished too.

Besides artillery fire the Soviets also attacked us with their assault planes. Germans called them “Schwartzte Todt” (Black Death) because these “birds” were painted black. They flew low so German fighter planes “Focke-Wulf” would not see them. (The famous “Messerschmitt” fighters were probably all destroyed by now.) They often caused us heavy losses but not today. Then right next to us we heard the famous “Stalin’s Organ”. The look from the side was horrifying. About half a hectare was burning and smoking with a terrible noise. But it was much ado over nothing. If you lie still and do not get hit directly by one of the small mines, you’ll be safe. Just close your eyes and ears, and wait. Do not think of jumping up to run away. We had a taste of it already yesterday and did not lose a single man.

But then came the infantry attack against “Silgaili” with just a handful of men there. They could not hold their position and started to run.

At first just a couple of them, then the whole group. They crouched and ran towards us. We hit the ground. We were ready to "welcome" the oncoming enemy. Unfortunately our gun had already gone further. I tried to reach them with my transmitter but did not succeed. Officer Vaidzins muttered: "We'll do it by ourselves!" So we held the position — only 12 men with infantry weapons — until another unit made a counter attack and gained back "Silgaili". In all this I did not fire a single shot because I was busy with my transmitter. In situations like this panic is worse than real danger.

Later I found out my former school-mate and "National Guard" first commandant Karlis Mishke that had already earned the prestigious Iron Cross for bravery, had held Rumbas with a handful of men for two more days after we left. Among the fallen comrades and mounds of enemy corpses. Because of this heroic deed Lestene and Kundzini, just a couple of kilometers behind Rumbas, was still a rear area."

**"December 27.** We were at Kundzini. Out of the original 64 men there were only 19 left. Sergeant Klavinsh and private Buncis had stayed with us in spite of their injuries, suffered on December 25. On December 27 they were taken to the field hospital in Irlava. In that hospital one of the "National Guard" members — Lt. Richards Augstmanis died. He died in the arms of another "National Guard" member Osvalds Gasjuns who worked there as an orderly."

**"December 28.** *On the way to Jaunpils. Kukuruzhnik".*

This short note brings back memories of a curious incident. I went to our warehouse in Jaunpils to get supplies. I was driving a horse-drawn wagon. It was a moonlit night. I went through a thin forest that sometimes gave way to meadows and copses. I heard a rushing noise above and then one explosion. I noticed a disappearing plane. It was one of the Soviet small single-engine planes that we called "kukuruzhnik" (Corn Plane). I calmly continued my way until another, closer explosion almost tipped over my wagon. The horse was frightened and wild. Only now I realized the plane was after me. What an honor! I hid the wagon under a spreading evergreen tree, but the Soviet pilot was so persistent I thought he might be a Latvian. Something came down with a terrible noise and fell behind the tree. It was just a piece of iron rail.

**"December 29.** *"Stuetzpunkt" (base) at Lestene pastorate."*

We were located at the pastorate of Lestene. It was a large building with many spacious rooms. But it had no fortification. It was above ground, and there was no dirt piled up around the outer walls. But we

were lucky — there were no more battles during those three days we stayed there. We were kept in reserve and not sent to the front lines. If the need arose then we would be a handy “cannon fodder”.

*“December 31. Mines on the pastorate. A “piglet” behind the window.”*

On the previous day mines exploded over and next to the bunkers at the edge of the forest. The roofs were four layers of thick logs, so no harm was done. But today a great bomb was dropped from a “Black Death” plane\* — right next to a window. If the bomb had exploded, half of the building could have been shattered. But again we were lucky — it did not explode. Otherwise half of the building could have been shattered.

One of these evenings we were assembled together to listen to a speech — by the legendary major Ernests Laumanis. He said:

**“Boys, we do not want to fight on either side. Now we are drafted in German army, but if we were not here, we would be drafted in the Red army. Here the most of us will survive — even if we get wounded. On the Soviet side hardly anyone survives.”**

We had seen it ourselves that for every killed Legionary at least six Red army soldiers died, and often they were Latvians. It meant the draft into the German army saved us from being drafted into the Red army and, consequently, from death.

On the New Year’s Eve I wrote:

*In 1944 I had to leave Riga and my home, had to part from my family and other relatives, had to leave the girls of my country to our deadly enemy. As for myself, I became a soldier and experienced the first battles.*

## YEAR 1945

*“January 1. This year should be better than the previous one.”* But I really did not have the faith.

The truth was even worse than I could imagine at that time. The belated “proclamation” of an independent Latvia at Potsdam was a delusion at best or even a ridicule on the part of Germans. At five minutes to twelve it had no meaning any more.

*“January 5. On that day we were located in the county seat at Lestene. The night was glum with little sleep, because we had been told*

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\* These planes flew low therefore were painted black.

we would attack in the morning. I had a feeling I would get seriously wounded. I did not want to think about the possibility of dying. But I used the day to write the last letters. Many other men did the same. In the battle some of them got killed, some escaped, but **they were all called heroes afterwards. Actually they were just ordinary Latvian boys.**"

"**January 6.** We were riding on three assault guns across an open field and spotted a destroyed German armored car that had been burning and still exuded the odor of burning oil, burning rubber, and the smell of roasting flesh. These armored cars were called "coffins", and the smell for a long time reminded me of the terrible death those men had suffered.

Before we started to cross this deadly field our artillery fired six reactive shots. We called them "mooring cows". This was the most horrible weapon I ever got to see. They gave out a mooring sound (hence the name), then went off, leaving trails of smoke behind them. They fell and exploded at the forest edge, quite a distance away. Later we saw there, lying on the front trench, the men that were supposed to work the anti-tank guns — dead. They were not injured, only bleeding from their mouths, noses, and eyes. It was because these explosions burned so much oxygen they created a vacuum around them. This deadly weapon was forbidden by Geneva Convention, but Germans used it anyway.

There were trenches in the middle of the field. Apparently this far our men had gotten yesterday. We got off the assault guns and started to run. Immediately the men in the trenches jumped out with a loud "Hurrah!" and joined us. This was a relief — we were not alone. From the forest came artillery fire directly at us and machine-gun fire from the sides. In front of us were ruins of the farm "Ermes".

We moved ahead in "goose line" fashion — one after another, not spread out. That way the ones in front were a cover for the rest.

We were lucky enough to reach the ruins without any casualties. I led the group alongside the remains of a barn that was a partial shelter from the forest. At the corner I looked back to see if the rest were following me. At that moment a grenade exploded right behind the corner. If I had not stopped to look back, I would have been killed. Even now the explosion threw me on the ground, but the shells did not hit me. "Mikelis is dead!" I heard somebody screaming. "No!" I whispered. I got up but had to sit down again because I was out of breath. I waved my hand to show the rest to go ahead. Only now I began to realize what had happened, and fear overwhelmed me. I kept sitting until all the men had gone past me. Then I forced myself to get up; I was ashamed

in front of my comrades that had already reached the forest. The assault guns moved to a new position. The trenches were empty; now the shots resounded in the forest. We were directing the attack against the farm "Paugibeli" behind the forest. We were waiting for our guns but then noticed they had gotten stuck in the soft forest ground. So it was the other unit that took "Paugibeli". We received the order to guard the guns. Only the first gun could still shoot but without seeing a target; here we could not give any directions.

It was bad to be in the woods during enemy fire — the grenades exploded, hitting branches, and shells were raining upon us. Nobody got killed, but many were injured — nine enlisted men and sergeant Girts Grencions. We did not get into a close combat, but we had a chance to shoot. Some men joined us from behind. My friend Karlis Mishke was among them. The legendary hero of Rumbas! He said, somewhat arrogantly: "You too are here!" He could say it like that because he had been in the Latvian Legion from the first day.

Towards evening help came and got our guns on a firm ground again. In this battle no one in our unit was killed but ten were wounded. Then we returned home. Home? What is home for a soldier? Not the trenches or a bunker but the men one is used to be with. But we had our own bunker that we had named "Keep Cool". It was located at the forest edge between the highway and Lestene pastorate."

From January 5 to February 14 we lived in that bunker and really "kept cool". Our damaged assault guns were being repaired. We were left to guard them — 17 men. Our non-comm. officer Vaidzins received the Iron Cross for bravery in the last battle and was promoted to lieutenant. In those days our unit as an excellent one received new weapons that were given to the best divisions in Kurzeme — assault automatic rifles.

**"January 24.** On that day we received supplement to our reduced unit — 36 men from the 34th Regiment. They were volunteers from the 15th Division that had been sent to Poland for training. My task was to register them. They arrived in two trucks. I went out to greet them. One man jumped out of the truck and almost knocked me down. Valdis Kruminsh — my best friend!

It was already dark, so at first I did not recognize him. When I realized it was him I cried out: "Yohaidee!" (A typical exclamation of young men at that time.) He had received my letter and asked to be transferred here. I was extremely glad. Maybe it is just an illusion, but war seems easier with a good friend next to you. Really — it is a bit easier.

We fed the newcomers and informed them about the situation. I pretended to be real cool when a mine exploded near by and the newcomers startled. Then they went to get some shut-eye. Soldiers never know when they would have to go to battle, so they have to sleep whenever they get a chance.

However, the next day was still calm. We had plenty of time to tell each other our adventures. The men of the 15th Division had been located in Poland. The food had been very bad — they were half-starved. They had had military training but without real weapons. They were surprised about our modern automatic rifles. Even Germans nearby did not have such weapons. Their officers came over to look and to try out these automatic rifles with shortened cartridges.

**Latvian men wanted to stay here and fight for their own land, not somewhere in Germany or Poland. These men were the real fighters."**

*"February 14. Now I have time to continue my soldier's diary that I started on July 25 and continued until Christmas. After that I had time only for short notes. I'm glad I have written down all about this time of national misery and about our feelings. It has to be engraved in our memory.*

So now I'm writing again. The room is warm and pleasant, I have satisfied my hunger, have had enough sleep, and feel well. And I have plenty of time. Also, I'm glad I can write now; in danger writing does not come to mind.

A lot has happened during this time. The main thing — Valdis dropped here as if from heaven! We used to be school buddies and had spent time with girls — now we will be comrades in war. It is good to have a friend you can trust and tell everything.

We have not taken part in battles since January 6th. I wish I could have gone to military school I was assigned to on December 22nd but... the next day the big battle started. Now it's probably too late; at least this war seems to be near the end. Behind a rosy mist of hopes there looms a dark and threatening future. I'm partly prepared for the worst — but it remains to be seen. Maybe later I'll be writing about it?"

On the 14th and 15th of February it was "all calm on the eastern front". There were no battles, so we could sit peacefully at the table in a well-lit room. The only unpleasantness was the food that had turned bad lately. But we still had some sugar. Adding sugared water to bread and boiling it, one can get soup and the illusion of a full stomach.

**"February 17. Last night we had to attack the farm "Vidini". Only the infantry, without the assault guns. We started before midnight.**

24.11

Troop, left to parade

1st Lt. Schmitt	Rev. 6.1	in uniform
Staff Sergeant Ostr	rev. 22.1	in uniform
1st Lt. Elias Adels	rev. 23	in uniform
2nd Lt. Erik	rev. 24	in uniform
3rd Lt. Erik	rev. 24	in uniform
4th Lt. Erik	rev. 24	in uniform
5th Lt. Erik	rev. 24	in uniform
6th Lt. Erik	rev. 24	in uniform
7th Lt. Erik	rev. 24	in uniform
8th Lt. Erik	rev. 24	in uniform
9th Lt. Erik	rev. 24	in uniform
10th Lt. Erik	rev. 24	in uniform
11th Lt. Erik	rev. 24	in uniform
12th Lt. Erik	rev. 24	in uniform
13th Lt. Erik	rev. 24	in uniform
14th Lt. Erik	rev. 24	in uniform
15th Lt. Erik	rev. 24	in uniform
16th Lt. Erik	rev. 24	in uniform
17th Lt. Erik	rev. 24	in uniform
18th Lt. Erik	rev. 24	in uniform
19th Lt. Erik	rev. 24	in uniform
20th Lt. Erik	rev. 24	in uniform

1st Lt. Schmitt

Staff Sergeant Ostr

1st Lt. Elias Adels

2nd Lt. Erik

3rd Lt. Erik

4th Lt. Erik

5th Lt. Erik

6th Lt. Erik

7th Lt. Erik

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10th Lt. Erik

11th Lt. Erik

12th Lt. Erik

13th Lt. Erik

14th Lt. Erik

15th Lt. Erik

16th Lt. Erik

17th Lt. Erik

18th Lt. Erik

19th Lt. Erik

20th Lt. Erik

1st Lt. Schmitt

Staff Sergeant Ostr

1st Lt. Elias Adels

2nd Lt. Erik

3rd Lt. Erik

4th Lt. Erik

5th Lt. Erik

6th Lt. Erik

7th Lt. Erik

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10th Lt. Erik

11th Lt. Erik

12th Lt. Erik

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14th Lt. Erik

15th Lt. Erik

16th Lt. Erik

17th Lt. Erik

18th Lt. Erik

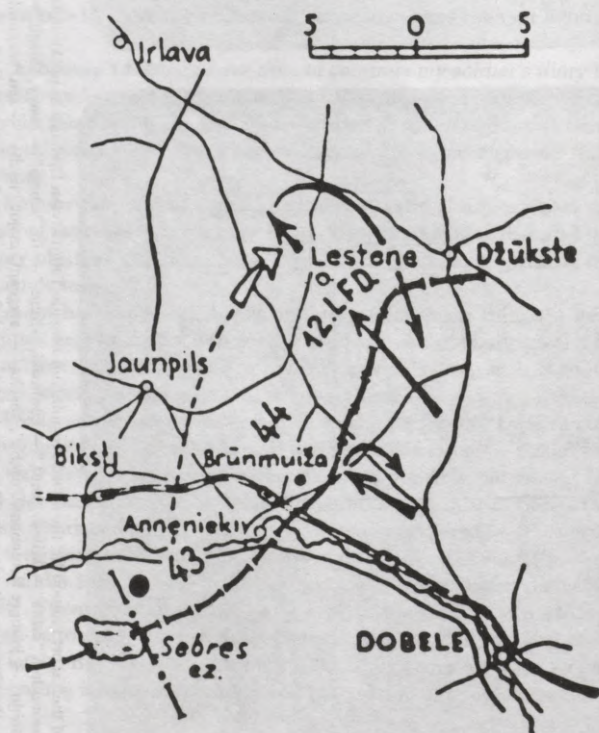
19th Lt. Erik

20th Lt. Erik

The register of the Escort Platoon for the 383rd Assault Gun Brigade 19th Latvian Division from December 23, 1944 until February 17, 1945. Mark "iev." means wounded, "kritis" — killed, "kont." — contused, "slimn." — ill, "smagi" — heavy, "vieglit" — light, "braucejs" — horseman, "ustuf" — lieutenant, "stobju" — younger lieutenant, "oscha" — sergeant, "uscha" — sen. corporal, "schitz" — private, "rif.stm." — younger corporal. After the Christmas Battle only 20 men out of 64 were left in the Unit. 7 men were killed

Covered by darkness and dropping to the ground every time a rocket lit the sky we reached "Vidini". The farm buildings were still standing. We did not know whether the enemy was there. In silence we made a run for the buildings. Again a rocket went up. So they were here. An upper storey window lit up, a Soviet soldier opened it, shook his fist and cursed at us. We responded with the same, but the light went out, and we could not see where to shoot. One of us called out in German: "Schweinhund!" (Pigdog). The soldier answered in plain Latvian: "Damned Germans!" He was a Latvian! Many Latvians from the territory already occupied by the Soviets were forced to join the Red army.

So we did not shoot but told him to get his comrades and get out of here as fast as possible. They did just that. They probably had just come



The 5th Battle in the siege of Courland by Lestene February 12 – 19, 1945

to this deserted farm to loot. Sergeant Kravalis told us to fire a few shots in the air so later we could tell our superiors we had taken "Vidini" in a "brave battle". This was a lucky break, without casualties. No — there was one: Andrejs Akitis got injured by a mine. He was next to me on my left at that moment, and when later I undressed I wondered why I had blood on the left side of my underpants. But then I felt an injury in my hip. So a sliver had hit me too. In the excitement of the battle I had not even felt it since it was just a small wound.

Later that night a unit of real frontsmen — "ditch fellows" — took over, and we could return to our bunker. Their heroism of patience is greater than our "instant heroism" that is short-lived."

From February 18th to 22nd we again spent peaceful days. I was reading "Tomcat Murry" by E. T. A. Hoffmann and dreaming about my girlfriend Milda.

One of these days I received letters — from my sister Rita and my young cousin Gunars in Germany. They had been written a month ago. I wrote a reply right away, telling I was still alive and uninjured. But if it would be only after a month they'll receive this letter — will it still be true? Such a thought crossed my mind, but I was sure of my luck. I worried more about them in Germany — under the allied air-raids. But I still believed that at the end everything would be all right. Meanwhile the Soviets had gotten as far as the park, surrounding Lestene castle.

**"February 24.** Last night we attacked the forestry and the grade-school building. The enemy shooting was irregular, and we crossed the open field without any casualties. This time we had one assault gun that blasted several well-aimed shots against the forestry. We followed with our machine-gun fire. I transmitted over the radio Lt. Stilbins' command to gunners to stop shooting and take the building before the enemy artillery would start its fire. We accomplished this task. We stormed the building with our machine-gun fire and much shouting. The enemy answered with a similar fire, but we did not pay attention to it because nobody got killed. Some got injured but not seriously and stayed in line. Then the enemy anti-tank gun started to shoot. But we were already behind the building, which gave us a shelter. Near us were enemy trenches. We divided in two groups to take them. But the Soviets had already left the trenches and moved to the nearby school buildings, so there were no fights. The school buildings were about 200 meters away. Between them and us there was a small stream.

Suddenly we heard somebody moaning near the stream. At first we rushed to help, but then we heard in Russian: "Pomogi!" ("Help!"). Immediately somebody opened fire although our commander shouted:

"Don't!" A short while before the man who shot was ready to jump into fire to help. How the war changes people and makes them more evil than beasts!

Our assault gun was covered by the forestry building. The gun rounded the corner, fired, and then quickly moved back. There was a bunker in front of the stream. Some men, including Lt. Stilbinsh, a German communicator, Elmars Ositis, and me with my transmitter, hid in there.

The Soviets periodically shot out rockets. To take the school we had to cross the stream that had only one bridge, and then we had to make it up the hill and take several buildings. There was absolutely no cover — no boulders, bushes, or a ditch. The school was in an ideal position for defense. And behind the buildings we heard motor noise and rattling — Soviet tanks!

It seemed this would be the end of us all. Lt. Stilbinsh sat very silent at the exit. The Soviet guns kept firing. Our assault gun shot at them. The commander dared to get out of the gun, observing targets through holes in the wall. The shooting was done, taking aim at the flashes.

Our commander told me to ask if the assault gun could come with us and overcome the stream. Is the gun in good working order, and do they still have plenty of ammunition? The German men had already appreciated the situation and understood the question. They answered that they could not get across the stream and would soon run out of ammunition. Then our commander decided not to attack without the assault gun support. But the previous order had been to attack as soon as the gun would stop the fire. That was all the men knew.

I was the communicator. It was my duty to inform the men. Lt. Stilbins did not send me through the enemy fire. But if I did not go the rest of the men might perish. I could not have their lives on my conscience. I decided to take the chance. After one blast there was a short interval until the next one. I managed to run 30 or 40 meters to the corner of the forestry building. After the next blast I reached the others. "Thanks!" said sergeant Licis. But he also said they would not be such fools to attack only by themselves while the others would sleep. So my bravery had not really been so crucial. I ran back and was lucky enough to get to the bunker untouched. But during my absence it had been smashed — hit by an anti-tank grenade. Not through the roof and four layers of logs but through the dirt wall on the stream side — the enemy side. The men were under dirt and pieces of wood. I heard moans. Lt. Stilbins had suffered a concussion but crawled out by himself. I pulled out Ositis with a bloody head. He moaned and complained of not seeing anything. The German communicator was buried deeper. When we

got him out he was already dead. Probably died instantly since a shell had hit him in the chest. His I.D. was torn to shreds, we could not find his dog-tag either, so we never found out his name and could not report his death. **Maybe a wife and children somewhere in Germany will keep waiting for a long time for the lost husband and father. But so will another mother in a Russian village wait in vain for her son lost here, and many Latvian mothers too.**

Lt. Stilbinsh' concussion was not serious. After a short rest he got up and resumed commanding. He gave the order to stop the attack and return to Lestene. We had already one gain — we had beaten the enemy out of the forestry building. It was great for the defense. The assault gun went back and brought the seriously injured Ositis along with our less seriously wounded to take care of him. Towards morning we all went back. (A long time later I heard that a blind veteran Ositis died in 1996 in the U.S.A.)

On December 25th Lt. Vaidzinsh saved me, allowing me to stay on the base. **Lt. Stilbinsh on February 24 saved the whole platoon, assuming the authority to give the retreating order. It took a much greater bravery to do that rather than to obey the original order, written by the Staff while not knowing the actual circumstances, and simply sending the men against the enemy fire.** Lt. Stilbinsh, like any truly brave officer (you did not get an Iron Cross for nothing), knew how to spare his men. On the hill in front of the school buildings under the fire from the Soviet tanks probably no one would have survived. Especially the young, inexperienced ones.

In the morning our unit went back to Lestene. I went as the last one and brought back a fresh unit to the forestry. It was already daylight, and we had to crawl about 300 meters through an open space. Enemy was only 150 meters from us and could observe the space. Here I had to wait from 5:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. until the next unit arrived. Never in my life moments had dragged by so slowly!"

The next three days all was calm, but I came down with recurring hepatitis and a high fever. So I did not have any qualms about leaving the combat zone on February 26. My illness was so serious that from the field hospital I was taken to a hospital for infectious diseases in Renda. Not long after that my friend Valdis wound up in hospital too — he had a bad case of carbuncles. (In Kurzeme quite a lot of front line soldiers were ill with infectious hepatitis.)

March went by peacefully, but on March 20 our unit was moved to Upesmuizha near Blidene. There had been another large Soviet attack. Our unit was without assault guns. When the men arrived at Upesmuizha, they met a German unit that was fleeing in panic. A higher

German officer with an Iron Cross on his chest tried to stop the men but without any success. When he noticed the Latvian unit moving past him in a counterattack, he was very pleased and shouted: "Bravo, Latvians!" This stopped the panic among German soldiers; they pulled themselves together and joined the Latvians. All together they regained the lost position.

**"March 21.** At the Blidene railway station our unit suffered a serious enemy fire. Lieutenant Vaidzinsh gave me about it the following account.

*There was a big explosion next to me, but I did not get wounded — the shells flew above me. There were also big chunks of frozen dirt up in the air, but they fell down further away. One of such chunks injured commander Stilbinsh' leg.*

He was taken away, and I had to take his place. After the Christmas battles I had been promoted to the rank of lieutenant.

At Blidene Roberts Pone and three more men of our unit were killed and several injured. Finally I too got a serious injury in my right leg above the knee. Later complications set in, and so I did not get back to my unit.

My friend Valdis took part in these battles too. In February he was in hospital but recovered from his carbuncles and returned to the unit.

Private Ernests Petersons was another one that gave his account of the March battles.

*During the battle at Blidene our group, including me, got separated from the unit. One soldier got wounded and was brought inside the bunker. Then the group commander got killed. We had to retreat and leave them. Some more men got wounded — they were sent back, away from the front lines. Corporal Dingelis became the leader of the group. A police battalion replaced us and the German unit next to us.*

In April sergeant Kravalis and other men that had been wounded returned from the hospital. Our last battles were on May 7 at Remte and May 8 at Gaiki. We were covering the retreat of our division, because we were armed with the latest weapons — assault rifles.

**"April 6.** At this time I was still in the hospital. I had been bed-ridden for more than a month. The first week I was barely conscious and do not remember anything except lying in bed and having pain in my side. I could not eat either. In addition to hepatitis I came down with malaria too, and my fever sometimes reached 104°F. It was cured pleasantly — with mulled wine. Only after Easter (April 1) I finally got back on my feet and could eat normally. We were nine men in this upper storey room — all with hepatitis.

Latvian nurses took good care of us. Doctors were Germans, but they

were nice too. One of them — either Dr. Wilde or Dr. Meileffert — told me: "It makes no sense to hurry back to front lines now." He advised me to pretend I still had pain in my side, so I could stay in the hospital longer."

"April 24. It looks like the war is at the end. At least so is the German resistance. But it also means the end of the Stronghold of Kurzeme — we have no illusion about that. If I survive the remaining battles, then I will have only two choices: either to continue the hopeless fight, joining the national guerrillas, or to save my own skin. Which way should I choose?"

I have to find out about Valdis. I will make no choices without him. I have gotten used to the constant noise of war not very far from us.

Last night we were talking about battles and realized how petty and shallow-minded it was to worry about things like the look of our uniforms. Ordinary worries, joys, petty intrigues, and frictions that sometimes arose between some individuals — it was all so insignificant, comparing to what awaited us. For a while I have been away from the war, but instinctively I prepare myself for hard times to come."

"April 26. There is a bedlam. The hospital is getting ready to be moved, but nobody knew where. However, I am offered a sick leave — away from the hospital but still in a lawful absence from combat. I was asked if I had any acquaintances in Kurzeme where I could stay. I remembered the name and address of a farmer, a former comrade from the "establishment" Drullis had told me about, and indicated that place."

"April 27. Renda — Stende. Emaciated people are still digging trenches. Even now! A field hospital is placed in the local church. The wounded men are lying on straw on the floor. The sacristy is used as the operating room. Comparing to this our hospital had been a luxurious one. In our menu there were meat-dishes, stewed fruit, even canned pineapple. In siege, at the end of war! Unbelievable!

I had to go to Talsi. I stood at the crossroads and waited for a truck that could take me there. Several trucks passed me by because they were overcrowded. Finally there came one that could still take me. Halfway to Stende we saw the previous truck burning — it had hit a land-mine. The latter had been placed by "Red Arrow" — the red guerrillas that had been sent in by Moscow. They not only killed Germans and Legionaries but terrorized peaceful farmers too. They took their food by brutal force.

Again my fate had saved me."

"April 28. At Talsi the field hospital was in a school — a beautiful

new building with comfortable, well lit classrooms. And here I met Valdis again. When he saw me he gave a shout that resounded through the whole building: "Mikel!!!"

He told me our platoon was wiped out, but there were not many killed — most of them were just wounded. Two of them were in this hospital — Karlis Mainis and Alfons Ramats. Our platoon is being organized again.

Valdis also told me about a tragic incident that had happened during March battles. At night somebody shouted in the bunker, probably in his sleep: "Russians are coming!" Everybody jumped outside. They saw something moving and fired at it. It turned out to be their own guard. The bullet pierced his helmet, and he died instantly. Another man, sergeant Klavins, was killed while resisting an attack. He was definitely the best fighter in our unit, and in the rage of the battle he had jumped on the edge of the trench to take a better aim at the flank. He fell at once, hit by a bullet."

**"May 1.** Now they are fighting already in Berlin. German government had offered a separate armistice to the Western allies, but the latter had refused. **But I still believe in the future of Latvia. Thank God the fighting is still going on here!** Germany has not surrendered to the Soviet Union."

**"May 2.** Today we heard about the death of Adolf Hitler. **We had been willing to have an alliance with the devil himself, if only that would be a way to fight the greatest evil of mankind — stalinism.** The latter was even worse than hitlerism — many times worse and carefully hidden. Hitler killed 10 million civilians, Stalin — 60 million.

In Kurzeme there were also people that had not recognized the true face of communism during the Terrible Year but still believed the Soviet propaganda. One of them said to me: "Well, comrade — Hitler is dead!" He probably thought we were Hitler's supporters since we were wearing German uniforms."

**"May 5.** At present time this is an incredible idyll I'm living in now at the farm "Emuzhi". Even the flies, buzzing in the warm sunshine, delight me; it is such a comfortable sound. My clothes have been cleaned, and I have thoroughly cleansed myself in the sauna. Now I feel totally clean — not only my body but my soul as well. Only I feel embarrassed to sit at the table and eat without having done any work. I presented my host with the white cotton winter camouflage suit that still had dried out blood spots from the wounded Elmars Ositis."

People here have a fragrance of the nearby sea. There are mostly women at the farm — the men are drafted. A young girl named Milda (again!) practically reads all my wishes before I have put them into words. She did my laundry, and she is the one I see most of the time. But I have nothing more to repay her kindness with than a chocolate bar I was given at the hospital.

Milda has an older sister Annie — about my age. She does not live at home any more but visits here often. Maybe because of me? How would it be if we could spend a night together? She is nice, good looking, young, and healthy. I am a young man that has often been near death. Now I would have a chance to live a little. But it is a long way from thoughts to deeds.

In the evening I always go to a neighbor's farm. They have a radio, and we listen to foreign news — I to English and German, the others to Russian. When I come back there is a mixture of fear and a faint hope in my mind."

**"May 6.** Roosevelt and Churchill have refused a separate armistice with Germany and would not go with Germans against the Soviets, as we had hoped. No, on the contrary: **they have sold the Baltics and half of the Europe to the Soviets.** Again Europe is divided up. If there was a chance at the end to be captured by the allies, not the Soviets, the German army would fight in Kurzeme to the last man, even after the official surrender. Now Kurzeme will be overrun by the Soviets, and Latvian men will have to escape across the sea or in the woods.

Will I have enough smartness, courage, and energy to do the first? Of course, I would do that only together with Valdis. It is all in the hands of fate.

**Death does not seem as terrifying as before. I have gotten used to it.** The main thing is not to die in one's bed, for nothing, but in combat.

How is it on the other side of the front line? It is the same Latvian soil, the same people, but a totally different world. All covered with the red fog. The fog smothers, as do the unknown future and the lack of information about their loved ones. When they hear the rumbling in the west they probably pray to God for Kurzeme to hold out longer. This is a great time when such battles go on and we have a chance to fight for our freedom. This is a time of enormous sorrow for everybody, but there could be also the greatest joy."

**"May 7.** Farewell, "Emuzhi!" The time is up. Annie walked me to the highway. And I, bumpkin, only dared to kiss her lightly on the forehead. Now she is at the mercy of Red soldiers."

## IV OH, THE SEA!

(Written in Gotland)

"May 7. I left at noon. I had missed the train to Talsi, so I had to walk. It was 14 kilometers to the train station, then 25 kilometers more to Talsi. I hoped to get a ride, but it happened only after 12 kilometers when my feet were already raw. I arrived at Talsi at 5:00 p.m. I had hoped to find Valdis, but he and other Latvian Legionaries were no longer in the hospital. They had been transferred someplace else the day before. Probably to Ventspils.

So I have been too late again. Why did I not come yesterday? To take my mind off the heavy thoughts and foreboding I went to movies. But I didn't enjoy it. It was a wasted time.

I spent the night with the only family I knew at Talsi. They received me very cordially because I was one of Latvian Legionaries — fighters for Latvia. In the evening I was taken to a neighbor's house to listen to the radio. **The next day at 3:00 p.m. there would be Churchill's speech and peace. I could not quite comprehend the meaning of this.**

The lady who owned the radio was a fortune teller (not a professional). Quickly I asked her to look at the cards and give me just a "yes" or "no" answer to the question I had in mind: whether I should go to Sweden. It was almost an unpleasant surprise when the answer was "yes". I kept it in mind, maybe even more in my subconscious mind. But it seemed impossible.

"May 8. Last night I could not fall asleep for a long time. I had to decide what to do now. Finally I decided to go to Ventspils. After this decision I felt better and fell asleep.

On my leave slip as my destination was written "Stende". I changed it to "Windau" (Ventspils in German). I wanted to get there in hopes to find our hospital and Valdis.

In the morning I found out the other people of that household had not slept at all. All kinds of crazy rumors swarmed around. Everybody was upset, but I already had some experience, so I remained calm. I had

no family and no belongings to worry about. I was free as a bird. I wanted to go to Sweden if at all possible. I knew the Soviets would be there in a few days. (At that time I did not know actually it was just a matter of hours, not days.)

In a conversation with my hostess I was informed Valdis might be in Vandzene. I decided to find out. I was lucky enough to get a ride. But Valdis was not there. He had not been there either. What to do now? I could take a train from here to Ventspils, but I did not have my backpack with me. Some hospital trucks went to Talsi, so I went back there. I arrived at noon. Got my back-pack and decided to have a good meal before traveling further. In a local diner there was still horse meat available, so I stuffed myself with it the last day before capitulation. Then I went to crossroads to wait for a truck that would go to Ventspils. Here a German gendarme stopped me. He checked my leave slip and asked me why I was not at my destination. I tried to tell him about troubles on the road, but he didn't listen and put me into a vehicle that went to Stende — together with a couple of red guerrillas. An armed guard went with us. Would I get shot in the last hours before the surrender?

In Stende I went to a guard and asked for the time. He told me it was 3:00 p.m. After hearing this I simply walked away. The guard called something after me but did not shoot. I was free.

I went to see captain Ganins. There I stayed until evening, waiting for news. Churchill had said all nations would lay down arms today. **But what about our Latvian Legion in Kurzeme? Will we have enough time to get away before the Soviets take over? At that time we did not know everything yet, but I had a reasonable fear Latvian soldiers would have to stay a long time in the Soviet P.O.W. camps.**

I decided to take a chance and try to get to Ventspils. If Valdis was not there and there was no chance to get to Sweden, I would come back here. But I had to make sure.

I went to Stende railway station. There were many people, waiting for the train — in both directions. Actually I had not really decided whether to go to Ventspils or to return to my unit. A train arrived, and I saw a man I had already met thrice since my enlistment. He was corporal Incekals. The first time I met him on the train, going to Dundaga. A man in civilian clothes asked me about the overall mood among Latvian soldiers, and I told him my opinion — that it was not worth to join the Kurelis group. Only drunkards and people that wanted to save their own skin went there, not real men. Then the stranger looked at me sharply and revealed he was a corporal, had received the Iron Cross, and now he was in the woods with his whole unit.

The second time was in November when I was taken by gendarmes

to the 6th SS Army Corps Headquarters in Irlava. He was in the same truck. This time he was heading back to the front lines.

The third time I met him after the Christmas battles, behind the front lines, when I was taking a comrade that had suffered a concussion during a battle — Alfreds Buncis to the field hospital. I could have stayed in the supply unit, but I chose to join the already known corporal who was taking a group of former Home Guard members and some civilians (from the Kurelis group?) to the front lines. I was grateful that he had helped me to make this decision and overcome the desire to stay behind the front lines. So I gave him the best of my two machine-pistols (a battle trophy). Never before did I feel so elated and calm, walking through explosions of grenades and mines, as that time when I was returning "home" — to my unit.

Now I met Incekalns again. By this time he was already a non-commissioned officer and had received the second Iron Cross. He asked me where I was going. To my own surprise I told him I was going to Ventspils — as if I had already decided. He asked me if I did not want to stay here and continue to fight. But I was thinking of Valdis and stayed with the decision to go to Ventspils. However, after a short while I changed my mind and went back to find this man again. I wanted to tell him I had decided to join him, but he was not there any more. At that moment I heard again the shout I had heard already several times before: "Mikel!" And somebody touched my shoulder. It was Arvids Grinbergs that had been with me in the hospital at Renda. He told me the Soviets were already in Sabile and we were in big trouble. His plan was to get to Ugale forests and join the national guerrillas. He told me about Gunars Silchenko who was still in good health in the headquarters. He pulled me into the train with him, and I followed without a hesitation. **Outside I noticed commander Bruno Stilbinsh.** He probably had a wound in his leg because he was limping. But the train started to move right away — to Ventspils.

It was already evening, and the train was not lighted. In the darkness I heard a familiar voice. It turned out to be Zigurds Raiskums — **my schoolmate and comrade from the National Guard.** He had been wounded in the head and now was transported from Sabile hospital to Ventspils. We had not seen each other since retreating from Tukums. Zigis had finished a military course and had been promoted to the rank of corporal. Together with him was a decent German boy — injured by a shell from the same bomb.

Again I had to make a decision. Arvids Grinbergs urged me to go with him to Ugale forests. But since I already was on a train to Ventspils I decided to go there first. I still hoped to find Valdis there. If I did not

find him I would try to get back to Uga. As for Zigurds, I was glad he was being sent to Denmark, as Germans did with most that were seriously wounded. That meant he would become British, not the Soviet P.O.W."

"**May 9.** Near Ventspils the train slowed down and finally stopped — about a kilometer from the station. We heard rumors that tonight at 7:00 p.m. the last ship would leave Ventspils harbor; after that the Soviets would take over. A stream of refugees and German soldiers was coming out of the town. Now and then some explosions were heard, and a cloud of smoke was rising over Ventspils. There was nothing else to do but to leave the train — as soon as possible. But where to go? **The overall feeling was like before the end.** Another train with anti-aircraft artillery and injured men went by and stopped. Zigurds asked about the injured transport to Denmark. An officer answered that he did not know, but he invited us to get on this train and go to Liepaja, and we did. The train crossed Venta (a large river in Kurzeme). This was again an incredible luck; who knows if we would have been able to cross Venta at any other place. I stuck with Zigurds and his German friend. There were also two young Latvian boys — Luftwaffe (German Air Force) helpers. The rest were German anti-aircraft gunmen. We ate some candy, and there was a bottle going around. I worried that some would get drunk. Especially I was troubled about Zigurds since he was wounded.

There were all kinds of things lying along the way — even rifles. The overall look was gloomy. Many Germans were drunk. A lot of things were lying around on our train too. Our car was full of combat rations and blankets. They seemed worthless now. Most of the officers had disappeared.

I saw army trucks with white flags. Likewise, white flags were at all army buildings. Surrender! Where were now the promised new weapons — V-3? (But no Latvian raised a white flag or other piece of cloth.)

Slowly I began to realize we were prisoners-of-war already. Especially it dawned on me at the time one German officer asked me to throw away my weapons — the rifle and some hand-grenades. He said the Soviets would kill us all if they saw any weapons. Such words from a member of the proud and conceited German army! But I did not want to discard them — I was not ready to give up yet.

When the train stopped for a while, I persuaded the two Latvian boys and some others to leave the train. Zigurds' German friend stayed on the train — he was seriously wounded. But Zigurds came with us in spite of his injury. There was another wounded man in our group. One Latvian Legionary was drunk. We were 13 men altogether.

Zigurds and I decided that such a group was too large. We wanted to get across the Baltic Sea at any cost, but the chance was slim to find a place in a boat for so many men. We decided to ask to come with us the Latvians and the German officer.

We were going in the direction of the sea, but it was still quite a distance away. I decided I had too many belongings and threw out everything except my diary, a blanket, food, and my school pants that came in very handy later. I advised others to do the same. When Zigurds went to a nearby house to ask for the shortest way to the sea, I used this chance and took out of his back-pack all the pieces of soap he had saved.

On our way to the sea we ran into a group of anti-aircraft gunmen. Their officer told us there was no sense in wandering around; even in woods we would not last long. His advice was to surrender willingly. He offered to register us as a part of his unit. We would surrender all together and all would have the same fate. But if we would come out of the woods later, then nobody could tell what the Soviets would do to us. The advice was good and sound — for Germans. We were in a different situation. We knew communists would find anything to incriminate us with. This was clear to me already two years ago that we could not live under the Soviet occupation.

There was no use to waste time, talking to Germans — every minute counted now. Besides, we felt bitter about their betrayal of Kurzeme. **We could have continued to fight if Germans had not surrendered.** Now we had to get to the sea. But when we got there we saw several groups like ours. They all were hoping to get to Sweden. Now the Germans in our group became doubtful. We too felt our courage draining. Only the two young boys and the drunken Legionary were still brave. They advised to hurry up so we could be the first to get to an available boat. But Zigurds and I decided to wait. The drunken man went away by himself. Good riddance! The Germans discussed the situation and decided to return to the officer we had talked to. The commander of their group wanted to stay with us, but after a short while he said: **his duty was to stay with his men. They had followed him all the time — he could not desert them now. So he gave up a chance to escape in order to be with his men! I take off my hat to him.**

Only one young, good looking German man decided to stay with us. His opinion was: better dead than to be a Soviet P.O.W.!

A short while later the German commander came back and tried to persuade the young man to stay with the group. Zigurds and I told him to make up his mind. If he wanted to stay with us, we would be glad to have him. He stayed but soon changed his mind. When we were ready to move on he shook our hands and took his leave. He left us his pistol

and binocular that might come in handy. We waved to him as if parting from a brother.

Now the two young boys became doubtful too. Zigurds advised them to go to the nearest farm and get rid of their uniforms. In civilian clothes they could be reasonably sure such young boys would not be persecuted. They left. Zigis and I were alone. Thus our group that at first was too large had dissolved by itself.

We walked on in silence. We found a deserted bunker and picked up some ammunition that was left there. The sea was rough, and there was no sign of a fisherman's boat. We did not come across a fishermen's village either. We only saw more Germans — either along the shore or over the dunes, walking towards their native land. In the direction of Ventpils we could hear explosions and see clouds of smoke. Every once in a while enemy aircraft flew over us. We stood still, and they did not pay any attention to us.

Finally we decided to sit down and evaluate the situation. Ventpils harbor would be the best place to find something that floats. But the Soviets had already occupied it since this morning. Maybe we should go to Dundaga where Zigis had a friend? But I was reluctant to go back. Better to go forward to Usma. I was also thinking of Pavilosta. We should get there first to look for a boat. If we had no luck, then we could go to Usma along the banks of Uzhava river. I remembered the young deserter that was killed in Dundaga woods. Was this the fate that was awaiting me? It was scary. If only we had a better map! But I had only a small one that I obtained on my last day in Riga.

At noon we lay down in a field of heather to take a nap. We began to fully realize our situation. We only had food for about a week. And how would we spend the nights that were still cold? We threw away the warm underwear that seemed too heavy to carry along. The cold was especially dangerous for Zigis who was wounded. We did not have fresh dressings either. How long would we survive? Maybe a week, maybe longer, **but the end would come anyway. Nobody would come to save us. So it was only either a fight or the end without a struggle.**

Yes, the end was near. I did not believe any more that we would survive. I had been lucky so far, but now my luck had run out. **How many hours until we would see uniformed men with a red star at the cap, coming towards us? Zigis checked the loaded pistol and said: "One for you, one for me. Two should be enough."** He aimed at a branch. The branch fell down. Yes, the pistol will work!

**So now the moment I was hoping would never come was here. Would all Latvian men have the same fate? Why? What have we done? We just loved our country, that's all.**

Maybe we should surrender after all? To kill ourselves if necessary we would always have a chance. The will to live tries to grab at a straw. No, we have to be strong and calm. We decided to take off our insignia. (The previous winter the SS insignia on our uniforms were replaced by a Latvian fire cross for the 19th and sun for the 15th Division.) We only left the Latvian colors on our sleeves. For the safety's sake I tore up some letters. Then we loaded all our weapons. Who knows — maybe we still would have a chance to fight? "Zigi!" I shouted in a sudden burst of energy and bravery. "We have to get across! We have to survive these days! We will! Zigi, believe me!"

I wanted it to be true. Never had I wanted anything that much. But Zigis said: "Know what? Talis is dead." It was **Talivaldis Bols of the National Guard**.

"Talis? Oh, no!" He was so healthy and always in good spirits. Who will now know the many songs he did? Who will keep the history of our "establishment"?

But soon I forgot about Talis; our own fate was on our minds. We got up and started to walk again. I took Zigis' back-pack because of his injury. But two back-packs were too heavy; I could not carry them for long. So Zigis took his back-pack back, but I still carried his rifle. We watched the sea, but it was still empty. Only enemy planes were still flying overhead. By this time we had gotten used to them and were not frightened any more.

After about an hour we met a row of Germans. We joined them — it felt better to be a part of a group. They were all elderly men. One man told us he was a seaman. Another one went up the dunes to get a better look at the sea. Suddenly he shouted: "A ship!"

It really was something that looked like a ship — approximately 5 kilometers from the shore. We hurried to the water edge. But after a while we noticed the ship had not come any closer. It turned out to be just a beacon.

A short while later I looked at the pines that covered the dunes and saw — could it be? **There was a long boat, carefully masked.**

"Zigi — a boat!" I shouted.

There was not only one but two boats. How did they happen to be there? We all ran towards them. But there was already a swarm of Germans near the boats that told us there was no more room. There were about 60 of them. A vehicle full of officers arrived. Among them the same officer that advised us to surrender. Was there really no hope?

No, we had to get across! This was our last chance. I suggested we stayed here until the boats would be ready to leave. If there really was no room, then we could continue our way. Maybe some of the Germans

would get drunk and we could get their places? It was not easy to persuade Zigis; he thought we were wasting precious hours while the roads were still open. But finally I managed to convince him, and he was willing to stay.

There were rumors about British ships at Liepaja harbor. The officers got back into vehicle and went back to Liepaja. Zigurds wanted to go with them and sent me to get our belongings. But by the time I got back the vehicle was gone.

Our German comrades that had come with us continued their way. I started to talk to the Germans around the boat and soon found out who the organizers were. They were two strapping and calm men. I told them pathetically: "Better to drown at sea than to become Soviet prisoners-of-war! For us both that would be a more terrible death!" They in turn informed us about finding these boats that had been left by their owners in a marine base not far away. They had worked all day until they got the boats here. They were motor-boats in lafette carriages on wheels. They had managed to get the gas too. Now they were waiting for the darkness and for the sea to calm down. One of them thought the sea was still too rough, but the other one was ready to go in any kind of weather if only it was dark. He also told us they were twelve for one boat, so there was still room for two more. We should just stick around and wait for the nightfall. I felt relieved.

Zigis was not so sure about it. He urged me to go. I insisted on waiting. I felt like that afternoon back in 1940 when I had to go to the NKVD building. What was in store for me? Escape or doom? Yes or no?

I tried not to think. The time dragged on slowly. Every once in a while somebody went to watch the sea. Zigis and I did the same. We saw a small ship going to Ventspils. It had a dark flag, maybe red — definitely not white. That was all.

In the dunes Zigis found an acquaintance — sportsman and artist Tannis. There was also Atvars-Eichfuss — told us he was a doctor — and lieutenant Matisons. We stayed with them.

As soon as it was getting dark we started to move the boats. It was a hard and slow work, but in two hours we had both boats at the water edge. Some men brought down three rubber pontoons; in each was room for ten men. (Later one of them saved our lives.) But we made a grave mistake. The weather was still chilly at night, and the men did not want to get their legs wet, so they stopped pushing a few meters after water was reached. The boat wheels sank into the wet sand and would not budge any more. The boats themselves were about a meter over the surface and were too heavy to be pushed into the water. I did not want to get wet either, but there was no other way to get the boats

into water. Soon we all were wet, but after an hour's work the boats still did not budge. **It became clear that the boats could not be simply pushed into the water.** Instead of the former elation now all were downcast and ready to give up. The second lieutenant who was leading the work got disgusted and went to take a rest. Was the situation really that bad? We still had the whole night — is it possible that so many men would not get the boats in when the rear end was already in water?

Many Germans wandered by. They took a look at us and went on. And even some of our crowd lost their nerve and disappeared. This worried me.

The leader of the blue boat was still here. He was pleading, encouraging, giving orders. Everybody that wanted to go with this boat had to take part. I did not hesitate to get into water up to my arm-pits and tried to move the end of the boat. Who knows which boat the fate had designed for me — the blue one or the yellow one? The midnight came, but the boats still were not in the water. A spite came over me. For devil's sake — will we really not get them in? We had to!

Only about a half of the original crowd was still here, and they were all elderly men. If everybody tried together — it should move! But they still tried to grab the boat where it was more convenient. The fools! Now it was only a matter of hours they would have to suffer discomfort, but in a Soviet P.O.W. camp they would have to suffer for years! I did not even feel the cold any more because of the excitement and hard work. We had to concentrate all our strength and work harder than ever.

I looked for Zigi — he was easy to spot in darkness with his white bandage around the head. But now I did not see him any more. He had worked with others, but now I found him lying down and resting. I reminded him to stay near me — maybe we would have to get into the boat instantly. We had been promised two places in the yellow boat.

"Zigi, you definitely have to get into that boat — you're wounded!" I said.

"Alone — without you? Never!"

Usually Zigurds had been the strongest of the two of us, but at that time it was I."

**"May 10.** We were working all night. At one time I looked in the direction of Ventspils and saw the sky getting lighter. Is it really dawn? Damn it! Before daylight we had to get away from the shore, otherwise we were lost — we would be seen from a distance of five kilometers! The very first plane would shoot at us. I tried to give advice to the old boatman and kept repeating: "We will make it!" And I really believed it.

Zigis had worked with us in spite of his injury. But now he was too tired. He sat down and tried to sleep. But shortly before daylight when we were almost giving up hope he came again to help. No, we had to keep trying — until the Soviets would come. And then we had to fight as long as our ammunition would last.

One man was scanning the sea-shore with his binocular. Suddenly his hand began to tremble and he let the binocular fall. Had he spotted the Soviets? I could not see that far, but I noticed some men taking off for the dunes. Instantly I jerked my pistol out of the pocket. To keep the rest from running away I yelled: "They're ours!" At that moment I was sure death was near, but I wanted to keep fighting to the last and then turn the pistol against myself. Here, in the water between the two boats, would be my grave. How old am I?

No, my life did not end on that beach. Zigis took the dropped binocular and looked again. There was nothing in sight. Maybe they had been Germans? Then my shout would have been correct.

I stopped for a moment to catch my breath. For a while Zigurds was working for us both. Then I started to think rationally again. Yes, this time we had been lucky, but at some time or the other Soviets would definitely come. **God, please, let us live one more day! No, that's impossible. A few more hours then?** The Soviet planes would surely spot us if we stayed on the open beach. And where would we go with our clothes all wet and torn? No, we have no other way but across the sea. We have to get the boat into water! I went again to help. The commander kept urging the men: "Just half a meter more, and then we will be across in three hours! Just half a meter! This boat can make 60 kilometers an hour! Believe me, nobody would catch us! Half a meter!"

Yes, after rocking the boat for a hundred or more times it finally moved one or two centimeters. Sometimes we rocked one boat, sometimes the other. Around 7:00 a.m. it looked like one boat would make it. The men resumed work with a new energy, but I began to feel how cold and tired I was. I had to take a little rest. I used the time out to bring our belongings closer to the dunes — in case we would have to take to woods after all. But while I was doing that, a young German had hit upon a genial idea: to join both boats with a cable and then spin it with the help of a log, pulling both boats together. We did it with the front ends and then with the rear ends. The boats were standing about 7 meters apart, in their wood-lined holders. The wood had expanded in dampness, and the boats were wedged in tightly. But now they started to move. Millimeter after millimeter, but they were moving. After an hour the yellow boat was in the water! What a feeling it was I can't describe. A few minutes later the blue boat was in the water too.

Our crazy work and will-power had succeeded. The incredible had happened — both boats were rocking in the waves with the morning sun shining upon them. Which boat to take? Maybe each of them would have a different fate?

\* \* \*

I carried our belongings down again and placed them in the pontoon behind the yellow boat. I filled my 2-liter Italian canteen bottle with fresh water from a nearby well. Germans were taking with them vodka and cognac, but we took weapons: machine-gun, called "bone saw", and hand grenades. I reminded Zigis that we would be in the yellow boat — our belongings were already in the pontoon. Germans were jumping into the pontoon that was ready to go to the boat. I was standing near the pontoon and sat on the edge. Zigurds was standing about 10 meters from me. I shouted to him to get in. But he did not listen. He was looking in the direction of Ventspils. Now I noticed there a horse-drawn carriage about 50-70 meters from us. A civilian man and a woman were sitting in the carriage. Zigis started to run towards them, shouting to them to wait; seeing Germans, they had turned around.

The yellow boat was about 15 meters from the shore. Nobody wanted to get into water again, so the pontoon came back to get the last people. They got in. Meanwhile Zigurds was near the carriage and was calling something to the persons in there, but I was too far to understand the conversation. I shouted: "Zigi, come here!" He hurried, but the pontoon was already a few meters from the shore. He too did not want to get into the water. He stopped and looked at the disappearing carriage. What was going on?

Our pontoon had already reached the yellow boat. In that were two of the Latvians that were in our group — Dr. Elmars Eichfuss-Atvars and Georgs Matisons. The commander remembered Zigurds and reminded me that the Latvian corporal should be in this boat too. "Zigi, Zigi!" I shouted. But he was still standing there. One German that had been working at the blue boat was rejected from our boat to make room for Zigurds.

The blue boat was ready to leave and was coursing around us. Its commander was an old assault-boat leader that had commanded the work at night. He took in his boat the German that was rejected from the yellow boat. Now both boats had the same number of persons each. I tried to get in that boat too since I wanted to be together with Zigurds. Besides, the commander of that boat seemed to be more trustworthy and knowledgeable than ours. But our commander persuaded me to stay, promising my comrade could come in our boat later, after we got

further from the shore. We still had to get the sea compass and some other instruments from the blue boat, and it was imperative to get away from the shore as soon as possible.

I still tried to shout: "Zigi, Zigurd!" But he did not budge — probably did not hear me. So I gave up, believing we would get together later.

The yellow boat started to leave. I heard others talking the blue boat had some water on the bottom. Also the motor was overheated, so they had to wait a while.

We were already about 200 meters from the shore. A bottle of blood-red liquor made rounds among the men. I looked at Kurzeme shore and drank the last toast to my native land. Would I ever see it again? In spite of the joy and relief that we were able to get away, it was very painful to leave. At the same time I also felt a deep hatred for the Western world that had let the Asian hordes overrun the Baltic territory. But at least I was still able to do something to create the united Baltic country — Aestia.

Still I felt bad about deserting my country. Maybe the right thing to do was to take to woods like so many Legionaries did? And to fight the hardest battle of all? **Maybe, living in exile, my conscience will trouble me for cowardly saving my own skin and leaving Kurzeme? Not at that moment yet — it was the will of fate.**

The weather was sunny, and the sea had calmed down. I listened to the monotonous sound of the engine, the slight rustling of waves, felt the tender sea-breeze on my face, and felt as if going on a vacation trip. All the fear and tension of the last hours had evaporated. I had a desire to lie down, turn my face to the sun, and just enjoy the blessed moment. A sea-gull circled our boat. I considered it my lucky bird. My feeling would have been the best if Zigis had been beside me. But the other boat had not left the shore yet. What took them so long? I suggested to the commander we should wait, but with a quick jerk he turned the boat and was heading full speed in the direction of Ventspils. Why there? There were the Soviets! But then I noticed a plane flying low over us — with a red star on the wing. I understood. We had turned towards Ventspils to fool the plane — to make the pilot think we were the Soviets. But as soon as the plane disappeared we changed the direction and went back. A short while later we saw a small ship on Ventspils' side. Now we turned directly across the sea.

The binocular had remained in the other boat, and we were as if without eyes. I looked with naked eyes but could not see the blue boat. Some of the men said they could see it, but the others denied it. Maybe the boat had gone south to escape the small ship? After half an hour the shore could not be seen any more, but there still was no sign of the

blue boat. Now we began to worry. Our goal was either to reach Bornholm — an island that belonged to Denmark — or to turn into a German harbor. There were rumors that the Soviets had landed troops on the Swedish island Gotland and were already waiting for the refugees, therefore we did not plan to go there. But first we wanted to see the other boat. A bright blue boat should be seen already from a distance. For a while we cruised along the shore line in both directions but to no good. Finally we started on our course away from the shore.

The sun showed it was about noon, but my watch said 3:00 o'clock. I realized I had gotten it wet while working on the boat, and now it had stopped.

Then the sun disappeared. The clouds grew darker, it started to rain. Now it was not a pleasant excursion any more. The waves increased, and white caps appeared.

Up to now we had still gone slowly, hoping for the other boat to catch up with us. Now we started to go full speed. Waves grew higher all the time. Now we had to change the course so the boat could mount the waves sideways. If the boat went straight, the water was gushing in. However, later we had to change the direction and go perpendicularly across the crest of a wave to avoid the boat being capsized. But after that we had to go sideways again. It was not so hard as long as the waves came only from one side. But now they started to change their direction. The man at the helm had to be very careful in order to follow these unpredictable movements. But his attention was sometimes diverted by the man sitting next to him — he poured a glass of vodka into the helmsman's mouth to perk him up. At those times water gushed in. We tried to hold it back with our tarpaulin tents, but it did not work for long. If not the first, then the second or third gust of wind tore up the fabric, and it was carried away. The boat started to fill with water. We had a pump, and I with two other men were working at it all the time, but it did not seem to do any good. Other men used empty cans to remove the water, and that was all we could do.

Finally it was a real storm. We felt so insignificant next to this primeval force of nature. We were all wet. And most of the men, except the helmsman, the man next to him, and me, became seasick. It makes a person apathetic to everything. There is only one wish — to reach the shore as soon as possible. No matter how skillfully the helmsman conducted the boat, it was impossible to avoid the gushes of water that were beating us like huge palms. The helmsman changed the course and tried to avoid the biggest waves. The sea is like a book, and our leader knew how to read it. It turned out he was an old fisherman from Hamburg, Germany. His name was Hugo Koenig. When we started our

trip he took off his soldier's cap and replaced it with a fisherman's leather storm-hat he pulled out of his bossom. Had he carried it with him all through the war?

It was getting dark. That meant it was increasingly harder to see the threatening waves, and the boat kept filling with water. Several men, among them Matisons and Eichfuss-Atvars, dared to sit in the pontoon that was tied to the boat — to relieve the weight on the boat. All the luggage that was in the pontoon went overboard. For a while it seemed to me the pontoon was safer than the boat; it was filled with air that kept it afloat. Then came a new alarm: the pontoon had a leak! The air was running out. And the air-pump was in the blue boat. Now the men on the pontoon wanted to come back, but the boat was already full of water, and we could not take them. So the men fought for their lives: put band-aides on the leak, tried to hold it with their hands. It helped some. The good thing was that each section of the little rubber boat was filled with air separately, so the other sections were still holding it afloat.

It was not only dark around us, but the men's mood was just as gloomy. Especially depressed were those that were seasick. They did not want to do anything. "What's the use?" they grumbled. "In halfan hour we'll be dead anyway!" They wanted to turn back. One man even got up and tried to take the helm. Wet rags! I yanked my pistol out of the pocket and made sure everybody saw my finger on the trigger. The helmsman swore at first, then calmly said: "We are halfway across already. So it makes no difference which way we go. But if anybody does not want to go with us — you are free to get out!" His helper — a non-comm. officer — took out his "Parabellum" and threatened with it. This calmed down the men. The pontoon still held air.

No, we have to get across! We have to! We would hold on until either the boat would sink or a cross-wave would capsize it. It would have happened already if the helmsman had not been so careful. I watched his face. The struggle with the storm had changed his features, and now this Prussian man's face was like a true symbol of manliness. He did not talk much but made every word count. "Don't be afraid! Keep pumping!" And the men listened to him as if he was a prophet. Only now I realized what a true leader meant.

The wind and waves kept increasing. It was so dark I had to feel with my hand to find the distance to the surf from the edge of the boat. In front and back of the boat there were air-tanks to keep the boat afloat. The front of the boat was still above the surf, but the end was already below the water. I threw overboard the wet blankets and even the spare gasoline. But will it help?

A wave churned up foam next to the boat. I saw the face of death grinning there and yanked the pistol out again — this time for myself. If the boat would really go down then better to kill myself than to wait for the water to take my breath. **It would have been easier to die in combat.**

I grabbed the pump again. I pumped with my right hand, then with the left, then with the right hand again. It was strange, but for a while a feeling of relief and safety came over me — as if I were in my mother's lap. Was it a premonition?

The helmsman asked for a drink again so he could keep his eyes open. He did not dare to let the helm go, so the non-comm. officer poured some cognac into his mouth. He repeated it from time to time, but under the tension the helmsman did not get intoxicated. My tension was so great I began to feel sleepy; just like during a battle when the explosions were too close — like in a relatively safe "pill-box".

The other men had already fallen asleep. In the boat we were only three that were still awake: the helmsman, the young officer, and I. In the pontoon it was only one — Eichfuss-Atvars. And soon I felt I would not be able to keep awake either. This was already the third night without sleeping. I did not know any more when my eyes were open and when shut. The sea seemed to be a swampy forest, full of animals and Soviet soldiers. Then there were only bodies and body parts that were coming at us. A strong wave flushed me with water, and I opened my eyes, but then closed them again, and now the sea seemed like a gigantic mouth that was about to swallow us. This went on for some time until an unusual noise waked me up.

It was our men, screaming with terror. The pontoon had become loose. The men with pale, barely visible faces, distorted with horror, disappeared in the darkness. The boat increased speed. Really? Were we going to leave them?

No — before I realized it the helmsman had already turned the boat around and approached the pontoon from behind. How could he do it in darkness and such waves? This was again a piece of luck that might happen only once in a hundred times. Without it the fourteen men would have definitely perished — there was no water and no oars in the pontoon.

Even on the boat I had been the only one that had thought of water. The others had collected only expensive cognac and other hard liquor; not even wine that could be useful for quenching thirst. So now we had only 2 liters of water for 17 men. On the other hand — the men's greed for liquor played a part in our escape. Germans put it and their back-packs in the rubber pontoon which at first we did not even want to take

with us — the helmsman objected that the pontoon would slow down the boat. But later, during the storm, when our boat threatened to sink, all the cargo was thrown overboard and fourteen men climbed into the pontoon. This relieved the boat and kept it afloat.

The helmsman shouted to the men, and they came out of their stupor. After several unsuccessful tries we finally managed to tie the pontoon alongside the boat.

Was this our last test, sent by devil himself? We had stopped the boat while trying to tie the pontoon and now discovered this way the



A map of Sweden's island Gotland — 180 km from Latvia. Gotland was the dream for people of Baltia under the Soviet and German occupations

waves did not flush so much water into the boat. Maybe the pontoon next to the boat helped too — both objects together formed a broad raft against overturning. I decided we would not sink — at any rate, not so soon. I did not know whether it was midnight or close to the morning, but I just had to get some sleep. Only for a few moments — but as soon as I closed my eyes I fell into a deep sleep and had slept for several hours in spite of the storm. As if I would have been rocking in this boat for the most part of my life.”

“**May 11.** When I woke up it was already dawn. I saw the others asleep too. Joyfully I shouted to Koenig that the sea was calming down. He got up and started the motor that worked without any trouble. We went faster and faster until we rocked into the sun, and the waves, comparing to the storm at night, now seemed almost calm. Now it was again a pleasant excursion. We tried to keep our course to the southwest, using the sun as our guide.

After several hours men that were sitting at the front of the boat shouted they could see something — either a beacon or a smokestack of a ship. After a while they shouted again that it did not come closer but grew bigger. At first I did not dare to look — I wanted to spare the disappointment if it turned out not to be land. Now I figured it might be Gotland. We had planned to go to Bornholm and tried to keep our course towards it, but the storm and waves had brought us northward.

Our escape could be divided in four equally difficult parts. First we had to reach the sea, then find a boat, then cross the sea, and finally — to land at the right destination. But now I did not worry about the last part any more. The main thing was to get across; now I let the Germans worry about the rest. What will be — will be! I did not have such a rap-  
ture either as I had expected because the crucial part was the storm at

*Zu Kameradschaft  
Hugo Koenig*

Helman's Hugo Koenig's dedication to author — “for comradeship”

night. When I woke up this morning and the waves had diminished — already then it was clear that we were safe.

We came near the land and could see the unfamiliar scenery. Instead of our sandy beaches this shore was grassy and full of boulders. The small cottages looked strange too — all painted red. Yes, this had to be Gotland. This was my first time abroad — maybe that's why all impressions were so vivid.

The boat slowed down. Considering the time we had spent on our trip, all men agreed this had to be Gotland; Bornholm would have been further away, and so would be Sweden.

Directly opposite us we saw a concrete stronghold and a barbed wire entanglement around it. We stopped about 200 meters from the shore. Helmsman Hugo said: "Got to investigate!" He had saved our lives at sea, so we obeyed him instantly. The two Latvian men in the pontoon volunteered to go ashore. We let them row the pontoon and covered them with our machine-gun at the front of the boat. By this time everybody had recovered from the seasickness, and we all were alert. Slowly and carefully the scouts rowed the little boat towards the concrete wall. There was not a living soul to be seen. They went further along the shore and disappeared behind the wall. We did not hear any sound, but a while later one of the men appeared on the top of the wall, holding a little Swedish flag in his hand. He told us this was a little fishermen's harbor, but there were no guards.

So now we knew for sure we were in Swedish territorial waters. But how could we go ashore if there was our enemy? The concrete stronghold (later it turned out to be just a projecting part for the fishermen's harbor) looked too formidable, so we slowly went south for several hours. Finally we found a good stopping place. It looked like an old fishermen's wharf.

We could not get closer than 100 meters from the shore, so we had to wade ashore. Our clothes were still wet, and we were very thirsty. That morning we had finished the water that was in my canteen. I let the bottle go round for everybody to take a mouthful. We should get some water and dry our clothes, then decide what to do. The Germans could go across to their country. We, Latvians, had our country taken from us; we could go to Sweden.

It was a sunny day. After the warfare in Kurzeme it seemed so odd that here all was peaceful and quiet. Yes — now we were abroad. Quite different from our country. Even sea-gulls were different here. Not all white like ours but with black heads and wings.

We took off our clothes and warmed ourselves in the sun. We were on a small meadow. Around us — maybe 50-70 meters away — were

short evergreens and juniper trees. Gotland has only a thin layer of soil covering the rocky ground, so big trees do not grow here.

Finally some people appeared. It was a plump, elderly couple. They approached us without fear, and I got up to meet them. We talked partly in English, partly in German. I asked them where we were and whether any Soviets were here. The local couple confirmed this was Gotland and told there were no Soviets.

We had heard rumors that the Soviets had landed on Gotland, but later we found out it was wrong. It was not Gotland but Bornholm that was occupied by the Soviets on May 8. (We would not have been surprised if the Soviets, under the mask of "liberation", had started to occupy the whole Scandinavia.) However, German army that was in Denmark had surrendered to British troops already on May 4, so the Soviets had to leave Bornholm that belonged to Denmark. (They did it only after a year.)

I asked the kind couple if there was any water near by. They told us there was a little store, and they would bring us milk and soda. **(This was our first meeting with Swedes, and already at this first time they cheated us.)**

We waited, but instead of the elderly couple with milk and soda there ran armed men out of the forest. They had bayonets on their rifles, their helmets were masked with tree branches, and they wore camouflage uniforms. Are they Soviets after all? And our weapons had remained in the boat! But this was our luck. If we had the weapons, we would not have hesitated to use them. The combat instinct was still in our blood.

Then we noticed in front of the group two men in strange uniforms. The group approached us as in combat — but we were unarmed! Finally we realized these were not fighters, were not the Soviets but Swedes. The two men in front of the group were officers. We started a conversation with them — in English, German, and sign language.

The officers solemnly announced that the war was over. "Hitler kaputt!" they said. As if we did not know it! We informed them that we would like to dry ourselves, to get something to drink, and then we would leave. According to the international law we had a right to stay in a neutral country for 24 hours without being interned. Their answer was typically Swedish: "Germany lost the war, so Germans are outside the international law!" We managed to persuade them to let us go to Germany, but we had to leave at once — wet and thirsty. We, Latvians, figured it would be better to stay in Sweden. In Germany we would be prisoners-of-war. We persuaded Germans to stay too; they would be able to go to their country later, when they would not be considered P.O.W.s any more. We already had some civilian clothes, so we did not

look like soldiers any more. I was wearing my black high school pants and my gray army shirt without insignia. We tried to make the Swedes believe we were civilian refugees and had put on German army clothes only to be able to go together with the army transport.

But the Swedes could only take us to the internment camp. They told us the civilian refugee camp was too far away. In the internment camp we would be screened and found out which was which. **At that time we did not think there was much difference between the two camps.** Maybe we would have to spend a month in quarantine — that's all. I still had my little pistol with me. Now we had to give up all weapons. For a moment I wondered if I should not hide my pistol but then decided I would not need it any more. The war was over, and we were in a peaceful, humane country.

Meanwhile our boat had been found by a different group — in black uniforms. Probably coast-guards. They took ashore all our personal belongings but confiscated the weapons and the boat. However, Koenig was given a receipt for it. (Later he put it to a good use.)

Then an army truck came along. We were given hot coffee, milk, and rolls. We had not eaten anything for so long that we were not hungry any more, only thirsty. We were given blankets too, so now we were no longer cold. All seventeen of us were put into the truck. One guard remained with us — a young fellow, obviously in a good mood: he kept whistling a merry tune. He guarded his rifle against moisture with a handkerchief, stuffed in the barrel.

I still could not believe it was true. **We had escaped, we were safe! We had been extremely lucky. It was like a fairy-tale.**

It was a peaceful and clean country, full of light. The roads were all covered with asphalt. We passed several communities of small family houses — like Mezhaparks in Riga. The houses were neatly painted. Everything was painted here — even telephone poles. But everything was in miniature. No huge apartment buildings, no big trees. We saw also farms. They did not consist of as many buildings as Latvian farms, did not have as many trees around them, and did not have large orchards. People were dressed just like in cities. Bicycles were brightly painted — blue, green, red. Our bicycles were either painted black or covered with nickel. What a strange tradition!

We saw also cars with strange looking trailers behind them. (Later we found out there were wood-burning gas generators — just like Germans used. During the war Swedes too were short of oil and short of... coffee. The Swedish tradition requires to drink coffee five times a day. But coffee was rationed — only 1 kg a month per person. So they told us how badly they had suffered from the war...)

Even the camp of internment was quite far away. It was getting dark, but we were still on our way. Now I could see a sight I had not seen in four years: lighted city streets, beautiful shop windows, glowing windows of private houses. In Riga during the war everything was dark. After the dangers of war, after all the violence, blood, and lice this seemed again like an incredible fairy-tale — a journey in a totally different world. We were alive! My life continued.

It was late at night when we finally reached the camp at Havdhem. The first thing — into the sauna, and our clothes were disinfected. Since my hospital stay I had no more lice, but others came directly from the front lines, they had an abundance. Each of us received a towel and a piece of soap. For us it meant more than just ordinary things, necessary for the daily living. It meant a new life, cleanliness, and peace.

Before the sauna we were registered. This simple act and a piece of paper meant a continuation of seventeen lives. For some for many years to come, for some — only for half a year when they met with death. But we could not guess it at that time."

"**May 12.** The first night and day I was still together with my comrades from the boat. When I woke up that morning, at first I could not understand where I was. Then I remembered. It was peace, it was Sweden, and I had escaped.

I said "Good morning!" in Latvian, but nobody answered. Of course — my comrades did not know any Latvian. This was the first day in my life when I had to talk only in a foreign language. But when I got together with other Baltic men, I felt almost like in my homeland. **There is no difference between Latvians, Lithuanians, and Estonians. There is one fate and one future for Baltia.**

The camp was surrounded by a single barbed wire. It was just a symbolical fence. Gotland's *landfiskal* Bertil Bonde did not want us to feel like prisoners. Once in a while a guard circled the camp. In this camp there were approximately 500 Germans, 7 Estonians, 9 Lithuanians, and 21 Latvians. Of the Baltic nations this small number was the only ones that were interned as soldiers. Practically it meant we were even here prisoners-of-war — the fate we had tried to avoid.

There were also about 30 German "gold pheasants" that were considered civilians. Such is the "justice of the world"!

The place was nice. It was not far from the Havdhem village, at the edge of a forest, a field with small evergreens and junipers. The village has paved streets and electricity; the houses resemble our summer cottages — modern and neat, also nice stores. Lots of flowers around the houses. And it is just an ordinary village.



Author of the book Valentins Silamikelis (born August 26, 1924) on July 23, 1944, after graduating from Riga City High School no.1

Father Antons Silamikelis (1893–1981) an officer of the Russian Tsarist army in 1917 in Petrograd



Valentins in 1971 in Riga — then architect of the collective farm "Nakotne", district Dobele



Milda (1897–1932) mother of Valentins, Aina (born January 8, 1926) and Rita (born January 13, 1930) on her confirmation day in Valka, on May 10, 1916



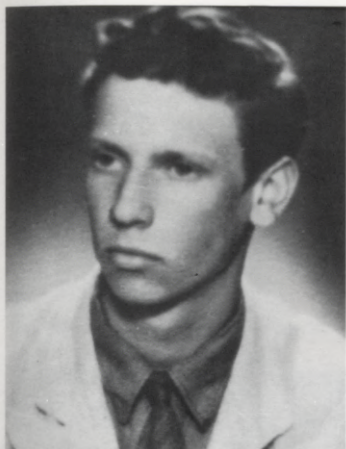
The victims of communists. Instructor in Tsarist Army Oskars Ilgazhs, killed in Russia revolution 1917 by communists. Officer in the Tsarist Army Antons Silamikelis before the second occupation of Baltia had to live in the exile. A rich farmer in free Latvia, but a poor kolhoznik in Soviet Latvia Alfreds Ilgazhs. Petrograd 1916

Mother's brother Arnolds Emolinsh with his wife Nina on April 24, 1923 in Vladivostok. Member of communist party, shot in 1937 in Moscow



Mother's brother Rudolfs Emolinsh with his wife Vera on April 26, 1927 in Riga. Shot in 1937/38 in Dnyepetrovsk, Ukraine. Vera was in Gulag 1946-1955, died in 1956. Their daughter Irena was brought up by relatives in Riga





Comrades in Fate. A childhood friend Uldis Berzs, 1944 in Riga. Was in Legion, in Sweden, extradited

Zigurds Raiskums (1922–1995) the leader of sentry in "National Guard". Was in Legion, 8 years in Gulag, died in Riga. Photo 1943



Author's classmate Valdis Kruminsh, 1944 in Riga. Was in Legion, died in Gulag, on September 28, 1945 in Blagoveshchensk



Teacher Julijs Brachs, the organizer and leader of the resistance movement of Latvian and Lithuanian youth "National Guard" in Riga under the German occupation. Later in exile he worked as a teacher

October, 1944 in the centre of Riga. Desperate refugees flee from the Soviet terror



The group of "National Guard" on April 19, 1943 in Riga in front of the former NKVD building. Members (ab. 150) gathered and studied the documents left by communists, led the groups of callers through this prison (ab. 30,000) and educated them selves patriotically

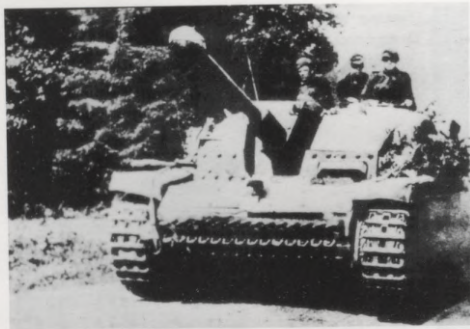


Summer 1944. These Latvian fellows drafted in the German Army better gave their lives, than suffered again the "Terrible Year" of repeated Soviet occupation

In War. "Brother to the war must go.." Author with his sisters Rita and Aina at home on July 27, 1944



On December 27, 1944 the 3rd Company of the 42nd Regiment, 19th Division, defended the farm "Zvejnieki". This farmstead changed hands 17 times that day!



The 393rd Assault Gun Brigade was sent to help the 19th Latvian Division

Latvians in the Red Army. General Alfreds Kalnīns, commander of the 43rd Guard Division in the 130th Latvian Corps of the Red Army



Ltn. Arturs Vaidziņš was the commander of the Assault-Gun Escort Platoon. Honored with an order and three times wounded



Latvian Legionaries in Czechoslovakia, learning to operate assault-guns





The leadership of the 121st Latvian Regiment, 43rd Guard Division of the Red Army. Sitting at the left — political leader Zutis



Across the Sea. Hugo Koenig, a German sergeant major, a fisherman before the war in Hamburg. He managed to cross the stormy Baltic Sea in a motor-boat and saved 3 Latvian and 14 German soldiers

A boat with refugees from Kurzeme on May 8, 1945. After a few hours 70 of them were shot by a fire, opened from Soviet speed-boats. The refugee boat afterwards was taken to Gotland by a tugboat "Gulbis". The hobby of the communists is to shoot people





On March 30, 1945, 5:00 p.m., two small Latvian ships "Potrimps" and "Alnis" landed on the Danish island Bornholm, port Svaneke. They were steered by capt. Keselis and Dr. Slaidinsh and brought about 170 Latvian gunmen of the 15th Latvian Division from the siege of Danzig

On May 5, 1945 at Roenne, Bornholm, Latvian soldiers gave up their weapons to Danish guerrillas after the German army had surrendered to the British army on May 4, 1945. On the slope ltn. Voldemars Eltermanis. In the front corp. Janis Voika and Danish guerrilla courier Bent Kyhn



Roenne. On May 7, 1945, the Soviet airplanes bombed the city Roenne on Bornholm island. It destroyed the plank-way and the bathhouse where Latvian soldiers were settled. 5 men were killed instantly, 12 died later in hospitals. Also 9 Danes died





In the cemetery of Roenne there is a memorial for 17 Latvian legionnaires, 61 German soldiers, and 22 civilian refugees, killed in the Soviet air-raid



The author of Bornholm, Raenneslaett, and Oerebro diaries — private Oskars Daugulis (1923–1993, 6 years in Gulag)

A street in Roenne, the main city of Bornholm, after the Soviet bombardment on May 7, 1945. 9 Danes, 17 Latvian legionnaires, 22 civil refugees, and 61 German soldiers were killed in that air-raid. After that the commandant of Bornholm, sea-captain von Kamtz, ordered the evacuation of all towns and villages. So in the second raid on May 8, 1945 only one Dane was killed — an old man that had refused to leave his home





Interned Latvian soldiers artillerists from 15th Division who arrived from Bornholm, in Raenneslaett July 2, 1945 with Latvian singer Mariss Vetra

The First Unit of Baltic Soldiers on June 24, 1945. Latvians, Lithuanians and Estonians for the first time in history are marching from the internment camp in Havdhem to the church service in Groetlingboo as ONE MILITARY UNIT





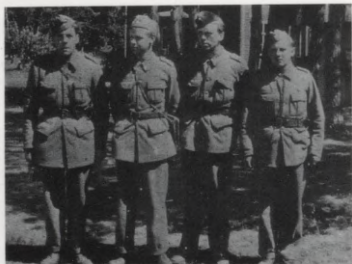
August, 1945 Marteboo peat swamp. Working there are interned Latvian soldiers Aleksandrs Austrums and Olgerts Abrams

The internment camps were equipped with heated tents, located near or in the woods



On June 4, 1945 in Havdhem there was a Sports Festival. Girls were playing foot-ball right next to the internment camp. Of course, the fellows appreciated it. There was just a single barbed wire around the camp. The Governor (Landfiscal) of Gotland Bertil Bonde did not want the interned to feel like prisoners





Swedish guards at the Marteboo peat swamp. Seven of them were punished for a too liberal attitude towards the interned Baltic, French, and Austrian soldiers who were working there



German Soldiers — Our Comrades in War and in Captivity. The interned German soldiers in Sweden are marching past an ancient building, built of dolomite stones with a roof of sod. Instead of weapons they are carrying birch branches. The summer of 1945 in Sweden was pleasant, but the end was tragic: of 2,500 men only 1,500 survived Gulag



Baltic fellows in Swedish army coats

A part of Latvia also in Sweden





July 2, 1945 Raenneslaett. Latvian opera singer Mariss Vetra gives a concert to interned Latvian soldiers, which arrived in Ystad, Sweden May 8, from Bornholm



June 24 — St. John's Day, 1945, Summer Camp Raenneslaett Dr. Janis Slaidinsh — the doctor whose unselfishness let ab. 170 Legionnaires escape from the besieged Danzig

Interred Latvian soldiers are going to help the Swedish farmers to gather the harvest



Baltic soldiers in Swedish army coats and winter hats behind barbed wires at the winter camp in Raenneslaett, November, 1945





The day after the hunger strike began pastor Vilnis came to give the Holy Communion to the internees. For many it was the first and the last



The youngest among us was the Air Force helper Aleksandrs Austrums — 16. Dr. Elmars Eichfuss-Atvars was 33, and the eldest was lt. Ernest Kalsons — 62

November – December 1945, January 1946. Demonstrations, pickets, letters and telegrams (100 000) to the King and Government, collective protests





Pickets with posters against the deportation of the internees



Storm over Sweden. On November 23, 1945 in the small garrison town Eksjö near Raenneslaett pastors Gustav Brodin and Juns Stahle gave a service to the townspeople. They were praying for the interned Baltic soldiers

On November 27, 1945 a doctors' commission from Stockholm came to camp Raenneslaett to examine the internees and to determine if their state of health permitted deportation. They decided to send all Balts that had been starving for a week to hospitals





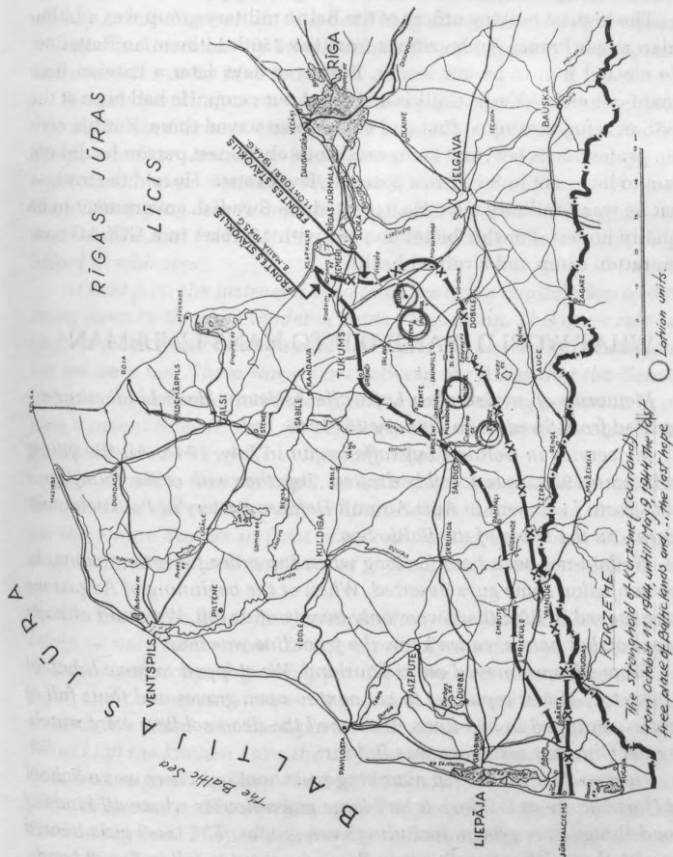
Hospital in Ekshjoe. Internees and staff. In the centre: head nurse Greta Rydberg



Nurse Aina Skoogvald (nee Eriksen). Design by internee Elmars Heics during the hunger-strike. She and Marie Carlsson wished to accompany us to the USSR

On November 28, 1945 the interned Balts were transported from camp Raenneslaett to many hospitals throughout Sweden — in small groups and isolation





*The stronghold of Kurzeme (Courland) from October 11, 1944, until May 9, 1944. The last half-free place of Baltic lands and... the last hope*

The stronghold of Kurzeme (Courland) from October 11, 1944, until May 9, 1944.  
The last half-free place of Baltic lands and ...the last hope

We have to give credit to Swedish diligence, to their love for order, but the fact that there has not been a war on the Swedish soil since the Northern War 200 years ago has some merit too.

As in all Gotland villages the most impressive building is the church — large, original, with a multi-edged steeple and roof.

The highest ranking officer of the Baltic military group was a Lithuanian major Pranas Ambraziunas from the 256th Lithuanian Battalion. We elected him to be our leader. But three days later a Latvian lieutenant-colonel — Karlis Gailitis arrived at our camp. He had been at the civilian refugee camp at first and could have stayed there. But his civilian profession is law, and being an absolutely honest person he did not want to lie — not in Sweden, a peaceful, lawful state. He told the truth — that he was a military man. He expected the Swedish government to be equally honest. For this belief he paid with 17 years in a GULAG concentration camp and a ruined health.

## WHAT WORLD WAR II DID TO HANS LINDEMAN

*Memories of an Estonian Luftwaffe Assistant Hans Lindeman, extradited from Sweden on January 25, 1946.*

*My service in German Luftwaffe began in July, 1944. All the young men, born 1927, were forcibly drafted. Together with other young guys from Tartu I was sent to Anti-Aircraft Defense Battery in Paekuela near Pärnu, on the shore of the Baltic Sea.*

*We had not been here for long when the order for retreat came. In the confusion some guys deserted. When at the beginning of August we were moved to Riga there were only twenty of us left. We could already hear combat noises, so we knew the front line was near.*

*From Riga we moved on to Courland. We stopped to have lunch at a cemetery. It was repulsive to eat next to open graves and tents full of bodies, wrapped in bed-linen. It seemed the dead soldiers were watching us. Our next residence was Bulduri.*

*Here we had training in marching and shooting. There was a School of Horticulture at Bulduri. It had large green-houses where all kinds of good things were grown, including even grapes. The local girls treated us with these delicacies. But soon Riga was about to fall in Soviet hands, so we had to keep moving westward.*

*The next stopping place was Ventspils — a sea-port city. It was part of the famous Courland Stronghold. That meant we had no other place to go — we had reached the sea. The task for our anti-aircraft guns was to guard the harbor from being bombed. We fired whenever we saw*

enemy aircraft, and once we were lucky enough to down a plane. So the time went by, and the spring of 1945 began.

All the time there were ferocious battles in Courland but the front line held tight. All the tank forces of the German 18th Army were concentrated there. Especially crucial place was Tukums. Soviets took it already in late summer of 1944, but finally it remained on German side. We expected more enemy attacks, but before it happened the capitulation came. It was on May 8, 1945.

It was a beautiful, sunny day. All was quiet, and the breath of spring was in the air. Our anti-aircraft guns were silent. Our commander had disappeared; an instructor had taken his place. I was in the bunker, together with some Germans. There were also some air force men among them. Their plan was to high-jack a plane, as I could hear from their conversation, but I did not understand where the plane was since they talked in whispers.

At 2:00 p.m. the instructor read to us the act of capitulation and the order, given by the commander of Ventspils garrison. This order released us from service and turned us into civilians. We should have been glad, but we were not. There was a pact between the Allies that the German army had to surrender to whatever forces were standing against it. In our case it meant Soviets. And we definitely did not want to become Soviet POWs. We knew very well — it meant Siberia.

The deadline was midnight, so we had ten hours to save ourselves. But how? We did not have any civilian clothes, and we had nowhere to go; there were Soviets in front of us and behind us the sea. Our superiors had not prepared any kind of evacuation, so we were left on our own.

We, Estonians, went first to the kitchen. The food had been terrible lately — only horse-meat. It was especially hard on us — teenagers that had not stopped growing yet. Now the ever angry sergeant was gone, and the supplies were not guarded; we could take whatever we wanted. We filled our back-packs with canned meat and chocolate. When I left the kitchen I saw the air force men coming out of the bunker. I decided to go with them. We went to the harbor. There was a hydroplane in the water. The harbor was full of people — mostly Latvian and German soldiers. They all tried to find a floating object that could save them. But there were no ships or boats since there was no evacuation plan. I decided my only chance was to try and jump on the plane that was guarded by Germans, armed with machine-guns. When I did they yelled: "Back, back!" I yelled back that I had no place to go — I could not get back on the high pier. So I just ran inside the plane and found my German comrades already sitting there. The plane kept filling, and

soon there were more than forty people. I was afraid they would chase me out since I was an Estonian and only a Luftwaffe helper. But nobody paid any attention to me. Sheer luck!

The pilot started the engines, but the plane turned out to be too heavy. He tried again and again but no chance. It got dark, and midnight was near. Then the order came to throw out all luggage. That helped, and the plane finally took off. We were immensely relieved. We were told the plane was going to Germany. The cabin was dark. Suddenly it turned bright as day-light: we were at the center of crossing flood-lights. We thought we were goners. But we were not shot at — it was the first day of truce. Again we were lucky since Soviets did not always observe this. They had shot at refugee boats, ships, planes.

After a while we saw a city below — brightly lit. It was so unusual after all the years of war and darkened cities. The pilot said it was Stetina. I could not believe a German city could look so nice. I was positive it must be a Swedish city near the sea-shore.

Our destination was a Swedish harbor Trelleborg. We landed on May 9th, early in the morning. We had to wait for a long time until finally Swedes dared to approach us. The first thing they did was to send us to a sauna. It was a luxurious one. We were given clean underwear, but we had to put on the same uniforms, only without coats — they were ditched when we could not get airborne.

Afterwards we were put into trucks and taken to a large POW camp near Malme. There were about 2,000 interned soldiers — all Germans. Mostly they were army men, but there were also tankmen and sailors. Most of them had deserted already before the capitulation and come to Sweden. That meant they really were not prisoners-of-war. The latter status applied only to those that had been at their positions on May 8th, 12:00 p.m. The deserters, on the other hand, should have been given a refugee status. And just like the interned Baltic men they should not have been extradited.

There was a barbed wire fence around the camp, and it was guarded by Swedish soldiers. We were sleeping in heated tents. Our work was at a road construction. On Saturdays and Sundays we were free. Then we took part in sports. Among the Germans there were 170 Baltic men that had come here from Danish island Bornholm when it was invaded by Soviets. They had formed a good football unit, and I joined in. I turned 18 at that time.

Finally I joined Latvians for good. There was a Latvian officer that could speak Estonian. He told me: "Why should you be alone among Germans? Come to us!" He assured me they would soon be released and could stay in Sweden. The Swedish camp commander had told

him so. (At that time Swedes really thought so. They said civilians would be kept in quarantine for a month, service men twice as long.)

Later it turned out not to be true. And it was a big mistake on my part that I did not stay with the Germans. They managed to convince Swedish authorities that they came from Norway and should be turned over to British, not Soviets. That way they escaped from Soviet concentration camps.

Latvians, on the other hand, and I with them, were separated from Germans and sent to the Baltic camp. At that time we did not know yet the reason for this was the June, 1945, decision of the Swedish Riksdag, according to Soviet demand, to turn over to Soviets all Baltic men that had served in German army.

(According to Swedish professor Kurt Ekholm, the Swedish government simply wanted to get rid of the 2,700 Germans that came to Sweden from the Eastern front because to keep them was too costly — they not only had to be fed, but they also received a salary that was equal to Swedish army salary. So the Germans were first offered to the British-American authorities. The latter refused because of the pact they had with Soviet Union that all Germans, coming from Eastern front, belonged to Soviets. Then the Soviet ambassador in Stockholm was contacted. He had to get directions from Moscow. Moscow informed the Swedish government it was up to them to decide what to do, but if they decided to turn over the interned men, Soviets would accept them.

So around June 15th the Social-Democratic Swedish government decided to extradite to the Soviet Union all those that came from the Eastern front as well as those that were with them. That meant 2,700 people were condemned to slavery. The Swedish Secretary of State Uden had cynically said that it made no difference whether the interned were sent home through Denmark or through the Soviet Union. Sweden should not consider the Soviet Union a bad place since it had a socialistic regime. Upon the question what Uden personally knew about the conditions in the Soviet Union, he replied that during the war no one was allowed to visit the Soviet Union. A member of Swedish government mentioned that there were also Balts among the Germans. When Uden heard that their number was only around 150 he said it did not matter. But this decision had to be kept as a state secret. Later the Prime Minister Per Albin Hanson added to the protocol in his own handwriting that it did not matter either that the Baltic group deserted from Bornholm before the deadline — May 8th, 12:00 p.m. At that time they had been in Sweden already for several hours.

How badly Soviets "needed" the POWs is shown by the fact that for half a year they did not send a transport for them. Only after, on

November 21, 1945, the government decision was made public, resulting in a wide publicity in the press, demonstrations, and a hunger strike by the interned soldiers, the Soviet Union demanded the prisoners and gave a solemn promise nobody would be punished!)

For almost half a year we did not know about all this. At that time we were 146 Baltic men at the camp. (Extradited were 148 interned men and two civilians to replace ltn. Peteris Vabulis that committed suicide and Herberts Shulmanis that went beserk.) The camp was near a garrison city Eksjoe. There I met 7 more Estonians from our battery and 9 Lithuanians. The rest were Latvians.

The camp had a double barbed wire fence. Between the two fences walked dog patrols. Every 20 meters there was a flood light. I also heard there had been hidden gendarmes in the surrounding bushes.

Our guards were the 12th Regiment of Jencheping-Kalmar under colonel Goeth and the Getha Field Engineer unit under colonel Halgreen. They protested against our extradition and were substituted by policemen. Now the police authorities are responsible for this dirty matter.

When in the evening of November 21st we first found out about the extradition — all the interned men were very upset. Especially the SS officers; they knew what to expect. One of the Luftwaffe helpers — Edgar Kurgpold — had an uncle, living in Sweden as a civilian refugee. This uncle managed to get him released. Later Edgar Kurgpold emigrated to Canada. By now he has passed away. After his release there were only 7 Estonians left.

The days were tense, even torturing. A young Latvian lieutenant, doctor Elmars Eichfuss-Atvars, speaker of several languages, assumed the leadership. Our communication with Latvians and Lithuanians was either in German or in Russian. Eichfuss was busy, receiving reporters and giving interviews; he did not have time for us. He demanded from the Swedish government to cancel their decision about the extradition of Baltic men. Unfortunately the Swedish government turned a deaf ear. There was no answer to all the letters and memoranda that were pouring in. According to Ekholm, all the materials were put away in the archive until after the extradition. There was no help from the Estonian Committee in Sweden either. (There was 30,000 Estonian civilian refugees in Sweden 5,000 Latvians, and a small number of Lithuanians.) Nor from the Estonian government in exile. Maybe it was because the civilian refugees were scared the Soviets might demand their extradition as well. (Similarly acted Latvian leadership in Sweden. Social-Democrats even called us fascists along with the Swedish government.)

On November 22nd a hunger strike was announced in the camp.

Three times a day we walked through the mess hall but did not touch any food and gave back clean plates. Of course, it was a torture. Journalists photographed this, even took moving pictures. After five days of this we had a visit from the Estonian church representative — dean Taehevaeli. He gave us the absolution and told us we could loose only our flesh but our souls would remain. (He knew we had decided to starve ourselves to death but not let Soviets to take us alive.)

But what do souls matter to us — we are young and want to live!

On his next visit dean Taehevaeli handed us Bibles and gave us the Holy Communion. The thin wafer and the sip of wine momentarily dissolved in our hungry throats. Actually we were not supposed to have it since after the third day of starving the gastric juices do not function any more. But this was our preparation for what would await us in Siberia.

The hunger strike continued. We were guarded even more closely. One of the Estonians — Jaan Piirimae — was so weak he was sent to the army hospital in Eksjoe. This was a hard time. We smoked a lot and drank water, sometimes licked a little salt. But we grew apathetic. There was a greater number of Latvians, so more of them had to be hospitalized.

After six days of hunger strike the government decided to hospitalize all of us. There were more and more demonstrations by the Swedish people. There was a lot of information about us in the world press. The Swedish government understood the extradition of 160 people would be a worldwide scandal. (Maybe the Secret Service of the West even wanted it because they had favored the Soviet Union and Stalin so far but now had to turn everything round, closer to the truth. Only a month after our extradition Winston Churchill started to talk about the "Iron Curtain", and the cold war began.) So the Swedish government tried to delay the extradition by insisting we were too weak. Another reason for the hospitalization was the wish to isolate us. We were distributed among many hospitals. A special commission of doctors, sent from Stockholm, testified about our condition.

The Red Cross army trucks took us to hospitals. But we continued the hunger strike even there. Policemen were guarding the door of every hospital room with the Baltic men, and police patrols walked outside.

December 13th is a big holiday in Sweden — St. Lucy's Day. On that morning the nurses came into our rooms, carrying burning candles. One of them was St. Lucy with a coronet of burning candles on her head. They all sang the song "Santa Lucia" and tried to give us cakes. Surprised we eyed the procession but did not touch the cakes — the hunger strike was still on.

Soon after that there was an official announcement about the King of Sweden asking Stalin to delay our extradition for a year. We were also informed about groups in other hospitals giving up the hunger strike. And we were promised an international commission that would investigate each individual case, and those that were forcefully drafted would not be extradited. Some of us really were interrogated by some men from Stockholm, and several hospitals ended the hunger strike. But it was all just a pretense — to pacify the Swedish public that grew more and more upset. And God forbid that any of the interned would die! So the hunger strike had to be stopped. The Latvian Committee in Sweden sided with the government and urged us to stop the hunger strike but did not give any support. It was only private persons — Latvians and Estonians — that visited us, presented us with treats and national symbols. Some choirs even gave concerts.

Since the hunger strike was not united any more we stopped it too. Our stomachs had not had any work for 23 days, so at first we were fed only a thin rice gruel. When we were already in a better shape we were moved to army barracks near Trelleborg harbor in the southern part of Sweden. (Later this was the place of extradition.) We decided Swedish government wanted to exchange us for coal of Silesia (a part of Poland).

(We heard the Swedish industrialists had offered to Soviets 10,000 kronas for each interned Baltic man they would leave in Sweden. But even this offer was turned down.)

So we lived on in constant fear and ignorance as to what would happen to us. We could not even read because the tension was too great. We just ate, slept, and played cards or chess. I made friends with one of the Swedish policemen. He was a good man and felt sorry for us.

While we were still in hospitals and after we had stopped the hunger strike we received mail and Swedish newspapers. We did not receive anything in the barracks. An Estonian girl sent us for Christmas a package of cookies and chocolate candy. The candy was wrapped each piece in an individual wrapper. The policemen checked the package before giving it to us. After we had eaten the candy we wanted to throw out the wrappers. Then a Lithuanian officer thought of checking the wrappers first. In one of them he found a piece of a telegraph tape. It said in German: "You will be extradited."

When dean Taehevaeli visited us again he told us his wife had a habit of opening the Bible to see what verse would happen to be in that place. We decided to do the same. One morning one of the Estonians, Elmar Sosi, opened the Bible at the place that told about Jesus' disciples escaping the storm. This gave us hope that maybe we would escape too. But it did not happen.

The terrible day was January 25, 1946. Early in the morning when we were still asleep groups of policemen entered the camp. These were strange policemen, not the previous guards that we already knew. Apparently they were not trusted. There were at least two policemen for each interned man. We were told to get dressed quickly and to take our personal belongings. When we went out in the hall-way we saw a horrible sight. On the floor in a pool of blood lay two Latvian officers that had cut open their veins. (One of them could have been lieutenant Arturs Plume. He survived and remained in Sweden, later emigrated to Canada. The other one could have been lieutenant Peteris Vabulis. He died, but he did it only on the bus. Hans Lindeman wrote his memories only in 1991, so he might have mixed these two events together.)

*We were taken to Trelleborg harbor by busses. Some of them had their windows covered by plywood — for safety reasons? The Soviet steamship "Beloostrov" was already waiting. Before boarding the ship a Latvian Legionary (Valentins Silamikelis) cut his left hand by breaking a bus window. He was bleeding profusely but was taken to the ship anyway — like a wounded animal. Any resistance was hopeless. The area around the ship was fenced in by a high wooden fence; the boards were so tight together one could not see through, so nobody would see what was going on. Outside the fence there was even a tank.*

*Among the persons that awaited us aboard the ship was also an Estonian man. He promised we would be released as soon as we reached Estonia. Then we could go home or to relatives, or wherever we wanted. We did not believe him, but at the end it really happened. (This Estonian man probably knew about the secret decree, issued by the Soviet Union in the fall of 1945 that the enlisted Baltic men would not be punished for their service in the German army, escaping to Sweden, and anti-Soviet propaganda — if they had not committed other "crimes".)*

*There was a strict control in the harbor. The impression was that we were accounted for like animals at the slaughter-house. On both sides of us Soviet soldiers were standing with machine guns. It was as if we were dangerous criminals — Stalin himself had demanded our extradition and punishment.*

*We were desperate. We went down to the cargo room that had been equipped with bunks for us and lay down. For our toilette needs we had to go up to the deck, accompanied by a guard. The deck was icy; we had to walk very carefully in order to avoid slipping and finding ourselves in the cold water. The toilette itself was very primitive: it was actually an outhouse, hanging over the railings. We felt utterly hopeless. At night a storm was raging on the sea.*

*In the morning of January 26th we reached Liepaja harbor in*

Courland. Germans were pleased to see Courland instead of Siberia. This was a friendly country — almost like Germany. We were received by border guards with dogs; they took us to a POW camp in Liepaja. There everything we had was taken away from us, including the Bibles.

A few months later, in May, we were taken to a filtration camp in Jelgava. There we were interrogated, and we had to work very hard at a brick factory near Svete river. The brick-making was very primitive. There was a machine that was worked by a horse; everything else was done by human hands. Doing such a hard work we were fed just a thin gruel. We supplemented it with sorrels — weeds with a strong, sour taste. At least it was a source of vitamins. Our guards were former criminals. The interrogation took place at night — just like it was practiced formerly at NKVD, presently MGB. My native city was Narva — on the Estonian-Soviet border — so I knew some Russian. For this reason I was designated as an interpreter for other Estonians. We were asked about the way we were enlisted in the German army. We tried to explain that the draft was unlawful and that everybody could not take to the woods. We were mainly accused for our flight to Sweden. It was called treason, and the usual punishment for it was 25 years in Siberia. But since we were so young — only 19 by this time — and had been only in an auxiliary service, not the regular army, all seven of us were released.

We were sent to Tallinn, to a work unit. Maybe some part in our release was played by the wide publicity our extradition had created. It was very unpleasant for Soviets, so they tried to prove our expectations were wrong. Every year on January 25th the Estonian community in Sweden held a memorial for us. As a reaction to it the Soviet newspaper "Izvestia" published an article titled "For Whom the Bell Tolls?" Even Swedish reporters came to interview us and could confirm that we were alive. (In Latvia the only reporter that showed up was the pro-communistic Per Enquist.) But we had to be very careful, answering their questions, since all our answers were available to MGB. (Such a reporter as Enquist probably told everything himself. In those days people thought one thing, said another, and did still something else. To be open and honest meant to risk being arrested. But MGB was mostly interested in people's thoughts).

We were working in Estonian woods — without pay — for a year. We received one hot meal a day and half a loaf of bread. We were officially free but we had no I.D., so we could not go anywhere.

Only at the end of 1947 we were completely released. Friends helped me to get a job in a textile factory in Keila, Estonia. There I worked for 45 years — till my retirement.

## The Conclusion — an Atonement

In 1993 the Swedish ambassador in Estonia Lars Freden gave an interview to one of the Estonian newspapers — "Paevaleht". He repudiated the extradition of Baltic men, especially the under-age boys. This gave me an idea — to give Sweden a chance to make amends.

I met with Mr. Freden and gave him a memorandum.

In May, 1994, there was a meeting of the Secretaries of State of all the countries around Baltic Sea. The Consul of Sweden arranged for me to meet the Swedish Secretary of State. On May 25th at the Swedish Embassy Margaret af Ugglas announced the decision of the Swedish government: Per Albin Hanson's decision to extradite the former Baltic soldiers to Soviets was a mistake. She also extended an apology. Mrs. af Ugglas informed me that the Swedish government was organizing a visit to Sweden for those Baltic men that had suffered the extradition. They would also have a chance to revisit the places where they had been interned in Sweden. (Estonians are harsher by their nature than Latvians. Lindeman's conversation with Margaret af Ugglas showed it too. In 1992 the King of Sweden visited Latvia. Valentins Silamikelis met the King and informed him about the fate of Baltic men after the extradition. The King listened with great interest, but Latvians did not intend to ask for anything. Only the next day when prof. Slaidins had an audience with the King he mentioned about a possibility for the surviving victims to visit Sweden. The King's reply was that it could be done but it would take time.)

We took a flight to Riga. There were four of us left: Jaan Piirimae of Marjama, Elmar Sosi of Moisaakuella, Elmar Suurpere of Saarema, and I — of Tallinn. Three had already passed away: Johan Indres, Mihail Bogdanov, and Hillar Koikson.

On June 20th we had a cordial meeting with our Latvian comrades. Their organizer was Valentins Silamikelis — the one who cut his hand on the bus at Trelleborg harbor. He had spent four years in Vorkuta. We found out that about one fourth of the extradited Latvians had been either shot or sent to GULAG camps. The total number of those that were either dead by this time or unknown was 90 — out of 131 extradited men. Part of those 90 ended their lives in the concentration camps.

We arrived at Orlando airport near Stockholm on June 20th. We had a solemn reception with flowers and handshakes. There were Swedish radio and television personnel. Then we were taken in a special bus to Stockholm to a luxurious hotel. There we had to get ready for the audience with the King of Sweden.

The King Carl XVI Gustav awaited us in his palace at 11:00 a.m. In

the courtyard we were received by administration representatives, army members, and TV operators from Sweden and Finland. The latter interviewed me. We entered the palace through a guard of honor by Swedish officers and gladly responded to their greetings. There were 35 Latvians, 4 Estonians, and one Lithuanian. (Stasys Dranseika was the only Lithuanian out of nine that was still able to take the trip. They had all been mature officers; seven of them had been sent to GULAG camps and had perished there.)

When we had all taken our places in the great hall the King entered. He greeted each of us with a handshake and a few words. One representative of each nation was designated to have a conversation with the King. I had the honor to be the Estonian representative.

I thanked the King for this audience and for the honor we had been shown. I also thanked the Swedish army for protesting against our extradition. After the audience that lasted a whole hour instead of the planned half an hour we were shown the palace.

At 2:00 p.m. we had a formal dinner at the State Department. There were speeches and toasts. Secretary of State expressed her regret for the bitter events — bitter for both sides — and a hope for atonement. The dinner was followed by a press conference, conducted by the Secretary of State. Since I was the Estonian representative I had to answer many questions.

After the press conference we visited the St. Frederik's Cemetery in the center of Stockholm where the two Latvian officers who committed suicide are buried — lieutenants Oskars Lapa and Peteris Vabulis. There is a monument now with both names engraved. (At the same place there are buried about 20 Latvian civilians.) We laid down a wreath and flowers in their national colors — red and white. There was also a wreath from the Swedish government and another one from the Latvian organization "Daugavas Vanagi" (Hawks of Daugava).

Finally we had a cruise round the Stockholm sea-coast. (Oddly there was no excursion round the Stockholm city. Was the government afraid of incidents?) At the end of the day there was a formal supper.

The next day we were invited to visit Eksjoe. We were received by the city mayor Bengt Asprng.

There was a church service in our honor. In the sermon the minister Hylton-Cavelius asked for the Swedish nation to be forgiven. We could not help it — we had tears in our eyes. It was the same later when we met people that remembered those long ago events. Among those were even some that had helped us at that time.

Our next stop was camp Raenneslaett where the three Baltic flags were raised along with the Swedish flag. The Swedish military band

played solemnly. A Swedish officer and our representative Arnolds Smits-Petersons gave speeches. We took pictures; the press photographers were not permitted except for a Latvian video operator Zigurds Vidins — because we insisted. (Maybe because the building looked shabby? In January, 1996, a memorial was erected there, and at that time the building had been repaired.)

We also visited the Eksjoe hospital where some Baltic men were placed when their health collapsed because of the hunger strike. The head-nurse Greta Ridberg still worked there — she remembered us. Finally we had supper with Swedish officers and city administration members.

The next day, June 22nd, we took a flight to Gotland. The island is beautiful, and so is the capital Visby. The architecture is historical — the streets are so narrow our bus barely could get through. In Middle Ages Visby was one of the Hansa Union cities.

We visited Havadhem where the Baltic men that first came to Gotland were interned. (Thanks to the land fiscal Bertil Bonde this camp was a better one than camp Raenneslaett.)

The local people were kind and friendly and treated us with coffee and sweet rolls. Here too we met people that remembered us. (Including one of the guards Lars Klint. We gave several interviews in German and English.)

After a pleasant dinner in the city Hemse near Havadhem we flew to Riga. The flight from Gotland to Riga took only half an hour. From Riga we returned to Estonia.

This was the end of World War II for us. But we will never forget it.

Hans Lindeman

(This was translated from Russian and supplemented with extra information and comments by Valentins Silamikelis — one of the extra-dited.)

## V IN SWEDEN — IN PEACE

**“May 13.** Sunday. In the evening I wrote letters to my father and sister. What a joy it would be for them to find out I was alive and in Sweden! But who knows if they were still alive.”

**“May 14.** Today we had a visit from the governor of Gotland — landfiskal Bertil Bonde. He favored Baltic men — had been an ambassador in Riga at one time. He understood our situation. He even gave an order to improve our food at the camp. (Only later I understood he did not want us to feel like prisoners.)

In the afternoon we were idle — after such a long, long time. Tomorrow I have to start to write down all my adventures.”

**“May 15.** There are so many Latvian refugees in Sweden that they even have a Latvian newspaper. Today I got a copy of it. I found out about their life. It was not easy, but the worst part was the quarrels between different groups. It is typical of Latvians. When will we get rid of this calamity?

Our last president Karlis Ulmanis managed to unite the nation. Also in Kurzeme we were united. But as soon as we started a normal life the old quarrels between different political views were renewed.”

**“May 20.** Today I started to write my diary again. Ever since the fierce battle of Christmas time I had put down only short notes so I would not forget the most important events. Now I started to describe in detail everything that had happened since that time.”

**“May 23.** Today a Latvian minister Svikis visited our camp. He told us about the civilian refugees in Sweden. I began to realize how hard they had to fight for their daily existence. A few days ago we were each given 10 kronas (Swedish equivalent for dollars). But only now I understood how valuable they would be after we were released from the camp and left on our own. I decided to be very thrifty. No, I would not spend my money, I would save it. I would not buy anything but Swedish sweet rolls that were very tasty and cost only 5 ores each

(Swedish equivalent for cents). But rev. Svikis also told about the same malady I had already noticed in the Latvian newspaper. Why is it that we always split up as soon as the life becomes halfway normal? Are we too individualistic? Does it come from the historical fact that Latvians have always lived in separate farms, not in villages like many other nations? Now there were even some persons that, hoping to gain who knows what, accused other Latvians of being fascists and Jew-killers — not realizing they were jeopardizing the whole mass of Latvian refugees in Sweden. And at the same time these individuals were also moving forward to be the leaders of all kinds of Latvian committees in Sweden. After the fierce battles in Kurzeme and our idealistic readiness to die for our country the Latvian “leading” society in Sweden seemed to me petty and narrow-minded.

But never mind! We got work to do here as well. We, the former Legionaries, were not only ready to die in combat, but we also want to fight for our rights. **Our fight was against the greatest evil of the present world — communism.** It would have been easy to join them, knowing they would win anyway. But we were standing for our rights and would do it again.

**Our memory is not so short and our strength not so meager that we could not preserve our Latvian World even in exile.”**

“**June 4.** The local Swedes had a sports festival. The Havdhem girls had to play football in the meadow right next to our camp. Obligatory here! Of course, we appreciated it. During the previous months we had forgotten all about girls. Now dreams and longings were awakened. Whatever experiences are in store for us? Girls and their touch of love.”

“**June 5.** Today I was sent to have a chest X-ray. This was the first time I was outside the camp. Havdhem is a really nice place. Apple trees are blooming and lilacs give out their fragrance. Havdhem with its paved streets, neat houses, and stores makes me think again of our Mezhaparks. But what is it like at home, in my beloved Chiekurkalns? No, my home is the camp now. All the rest of the world seems to be so far away.”

“**June 7.** Today a Swedish major Lindeberg and adjutant Lindevall visited the camp and spoke to us. Amazing! They had the right notion about the Baltic nations. It turned out they had been there. At the end they announced that we — 30 Baltic men and some Austrians, Alsacians, Dutchmen, and Frenchmen — would go to work. This pleased me. **Thank God, at last we were rid of Germans and their supremacy!**”

“**June 9.** Today two regions in Germany that were originally occupied by American troops — Saxien and Thuringen — were handed over to Soviets. In that territory was Chemnitz — the city my father and sister Rita had lived last winter. What would happen to them and other relatives that were there too? Hopefully they managed to get out in time. The Western countries did not consider Baltic States a part of the Soviet Union and did not force the Baltic refugees to return. If only they managed to get out they would be safe. Maybe I should be closer to my family? I could go to Denmark or England. I decided to save money for the passage.”

“**June 23.** A new life has begun for me. I have managed to put behind me the dangers of combat and the army life. Now I have to start a fight for existence as a civilian — in a strange country.

I should find out about Dad and Rita. But I can not write to my other sister Aina who got married and remained in Riga. I was looking for her in Kurzeme, but she was not with her in-laws. Her husband was a Legionary and away at the front lines. In Kurzeme I realized for the first time how lonely a person was without a family. Now the war was over, but I'm still far away from my loved ones. However, I found out a childhood friend Uldis Berzs was in Sweden. That's good news.

We should all pray for a new war that would wipe out communism just like the previous war had wiped out fascism. But it looks like there is **no hope for an early World War III. I had no illusions about the fate of Kurzeme, and I'm equally resigned now.** There are some rumors floating around that we would soon go home, but it is only a dope for our souls; there is no substance in such talk. But what about me — if the war really began — am I ready to take up arms again?

Right now there is something else to do that is just as important: we **have to work at the Baltic unity because that is the only way how Baltic States could be independent in future. And the first thing is to make a Baltic flag like I already had made back in 1944 — at our “establishment”: yellow for Lithuania, dark red for Latvia, and white for Estonia.**

This is Midsummer Night . We have to get a permission to make a bon-fire, and to stay up all night and sing. Then we will get together with Lithuanians — they celebrate Midsummer Night the same way Latvians do.”

“**June 24.** This is St. John's Day. Last night we celebrated quite officially. Together with us there were not only Lithuanians but also Estonians, Germans, and even Swedes — the guards that had their time

off. Germans still try to pretend they're something better than the rest of us, but apart from that I admire their manliness, their military bearing — even now, after a lost war.

Instead of Latvian beer we were drinking Swedish "drika" which is lighter. But the birch trees have the same aroma as in Latvia, and we had a huge bon-fire. It was a night of songs and memories. Almost like in the years before, but something was missing: girls.

During the day there was a church service. Church! After such a long time! The minister spoke in a foreign language, but it was still the same Lutheran service. It was an unforgettable experience. I had to think of my family — Dad, Rita, Aina.

Here is peace and a happy life. Nobody fears to be awakened at night and arrested. Or to be killed in combat or in a concentration camp. The local people can not even understand that such things could happen. But the red plague is near even here. **Bornholm is already occupied by the Soviets.** It could be the beginning of the occupation of Scandinavia.

Going to church, we marched together — Latvian, Lithuanian, Estonian soldiers. Baltic soldiers as one unit. For the first time in history!

At night we again had a bon-fire and singing, and this time there were only Latvians and Lithuanians. That was better — our nations are related, and we have common traditions. I was thinking of Piebalga and the "Dumpuri" girls. I also remembered my comrades from the "establishment" that remained on the battle field: Talivaldis Bols, Rihards Augstkalns, Guntars Gailis, Janis Celinsh, Karlis Apinis, and others. They do not even have proper graves."

"**June 28-29.** I received a letter from my friend Valdis' father. He did not know about Valdis' whereabouts, but it was very nice to receive a letter from a caring person. Here, in a strange country, it is very important to have contact with acquaintances.

Hugo Koenig, the helmsman of our boat, wants to flee from the camp and go to Germany — to his family. **He invites me to go with him.** Yes, I have my family there too, but I can't do that. Soon we will have to start to work in a peat swamp, and after that we will be free. To flee would mean to spoil everything — for us, Baltic men, and for everybody else. No, I can't do that. Besides, I hope in time to be able to bring my family over here. Here you can live a normal life — you can work and support yourself, you can get clothes, and you do not have to starve.

There are many of us that have families in Germany, but two of us even here in Sweden: Gunars Zvejnieks and Osvalds Licis. However,

they are not allowed to see them. **To preserve good relations with Swedes we obey.**

I hope the Baltic civilians in Sweden would do something to help us. Gunars Zvejnieks has his father here — he probably will get out. We are all young and want to live. Only some of the officers are over thirty. Five of our group are only seventeen or eighteen — they were not in Latvian Legion but were drafted into German Luftwaffe Auxiliary group. So were the Estonians.

Olgerts — a Latvian boy — is the youngest of all. He was not even seventeen when drafted. We each have a story to tell, but Olgerts' story is the most tragic of all.

He had been in a big army descent boat that held several hundred people — German soldiers and Latvian civilians. A Soviet speed-boat had caught up with their boat and opened fire. They had continued to shoot until it looked like there was nobody alive on the boat. Olgerts was lucky — he was not even wounded — but next to him a little girl died of a shot through her chest. Altogether 70 people were killed. When the boat reached Gotland, the blood was still running, and Swedish medics fainted at the horrible sight. A Latvian ship "Gulbis" had helped the boat to reach Gotland. Who knows how many such tragedies occurred? **Shooting people is a favorite sport of communists.**

Maybe it was God's hand that sent us the terrible storm. We barely survived it, but without it the Soviets probably would have spotted us too.

Every day at the camp we take advantage of a comfort that was denied to us for so long: a daily bath. In addition to the bath we also receive a massage by a Latvian physician Dr. Eichfuss. He is one of the men that were in the pontoon when we crossed the sea. The massage added to our comfort and pleasure. Many thanks to him! Maybe this meticulous cleanliness is a belated reaction to lice we had at the front lines?

At this point I want to tell about other Latvians in our group. Here are two brothers — Evalds and Manfreds Liepinsh, sportsmen. Janis Bergs comes from a farm; he is a strong but quiet man. His opposite is lieutenant Olgerts Lacis — intelligent and refined. The other lieutenant Augusts Dupurs has a disposition to irony.

However, for soldiers the most important man is the "spies" — supply sergeant. For our Baltic group it is sgt. Augusts Kaneps. He has a quiet manner of speaking but golden hands at work. A diligent man is also Corporal Ernests Balodis. He is always mending, or repairing something, or cleaning our tent. Here is also the other man from the pontoon — lieutenant George Matisons. He spends most of the time reading. We have books in Latvian and German.

Estonians and Lithuanians each have a tent, but Latvians have two.

The most dignified persons among Lithuanians are major Pranas Ambraziunas and doctor Vincas Zenkevicius. There is also a temperamental captain from the coast guards — Voldemars Langis. He is spirited and lively. During the year 1944/45 the coast of Kurzeme was guarded by Lithuanians, enlisted in German army — the 256th Lithuanian Battalion.

We have to thank those coast guards that so many civilian refugees were able to leave Kurzeme — going to Sweden and other places. When Germans finally discovered it, seven officers of this Battalion were shot and the Battalion was sent to the front lines.”

“June 30. We went to Martebo as if going on a pleasant excursion but arrived at a peat swamp. We still wore the same clothes as in the camp; **we do not have any other clothes.** I have a pair of black pants that's part of my high school uniform and an army shirt without insignia. Many of our group are dressed the same way: somebody has a civilian jacket, somebody a coat, and so on. But there were also those that did not have any civilian clothes. They still wore their uniforms, only without insignia. We took off all insignia except the small shield on the sleeve in national colors. But lieutenant-colonel Karlis Gailitis informed us that according to international law it is not allowed to remove insignia while in an internment camp. We did not listen to him, but the officers did. They arrived at the peat swamp, dressed in full uniforms, including insignia. (German eagle and scull with cross-bones.)

So we came to the swamp and had to go right back. The Swedish workers adamantly refused to work with “murderers” as they called us because of our uniforms and insignia.”

“July 1. Today is Sunday. We were told we would go to the peat swamp after all. Farewell to the soldier's life! This is our first step towards a normal, independent life.

Already last summer it was clear that Germany would lose the war. But it was important to slow down the Red army and keep it busy in the Baltic States while the Western allies managed to roll over Europe. From the both evil tyrants Stalin and Hitler the latter was less dangerous for the Baltic nations — simply because he had a lesser opportunity to perform genocide in the Baltic States. Stalin on the other hand started it already in year 1937 by putting to death 70,000 Latvian men, aged 16 to 60, out of 200,000 Latvians that lived in the Soviet Union. This was followed by the deportation of about 15,000 Latvian citizens on June 14, 1941.

What about my mother's brothers — Arnolds and Rudolfs Emolinsh? What would they do to others if they treat like this some of their own?

For Germany free Baltic States would be more convenient. Scandinavia definitely wants them free. But Russia will always try to get us out of the way because the Baltic nations prevent access to the Baltic Sea that is vitally important for Russia.

We had hoped to get help from Sweden or Great Britain — our allies in our fight for freedom after World War I. But this time they did not help. It was Germany that gave us weapons — true, in order to fulfill their own plans, but it was at least partly up to us, how we used them. **If the destruction of a nation is inevitable then it is better to die bearing arms than to be helplessly killed by oppression or perish in Siberia.**"

"**July 2.** We returned to Martebo. There is unemployment in Sweden, but hardly anybody wants to do heavy work like this. So our work there was badly needed for the local factory, and the manager Rundvaal explained to Swedish workers, who we really were. We were allowed to return; of course, without the conspicuous insignia.

Here we are guarded more carefully. This is our first working day after such a long time. And so much has happened since last summer. Now I feel like a normal, private person again. And after last winter I know how to appreciate it. I know other Legionaries that remained in Kurzeme would be happy if they could even for a day work peacefully like this and be well fed too. The first day we worked only half-time. Then we received work clothes and boots. When I took off my remaining uniform and put on the work clothes I remembered, how proudly I had put on my uniform last summer. What a naive boy was I then! Now I'm equally pleased to take it off. There is a right time for everything.

We heard rumors that in Germany Latvian Legionaries got organized again and expected soon to be able to go to war again — to chase the enemy out of our country. Should not we be there too?

So we will live in Martebo. It is a small village at the Northeast corner of Gotland. The whole island is only 100 x 30 kilometers. It was nice to cross it and see the scenery. It is a peculiar, clean, and orderly land. There are villages as well as separate farms. But once in a while we also see deserted farms, taken over by weeds. In each village there is quite a big church, and each one is different — at least the steeple. It seems the ancient viking spirit is still here. Somebody told me from **each open place you can see at least three of the ninety-two churches on the island.** They had been built from the 9th till the 14th century. **This is an admirable folk architecture — a real miracle of Gotland.**

The villages are modern — with paved, well-lit streets, modern

shops — like our Mezhaparks. The farm buildings are smaller, and there are not so many trees around them as in the Baltic farms. Especially our farm buildings in Kurzeme are bigger and sturdier.”

“**July 3.** The beginning of new work is always hard. But there is also something pleasant: the Swedish girls that periodically come to quench our thirst. It is so long since we have seen any females this close. I look at their slender waists and long to put my arm around one of them. When will we have this pleasure? But then I think of our Latvian girls in Kurzeme. What’s happening to them? No, it is better not to think.

We are like an army unit — all in similar gray work-clothes, only without insignia.”

“**July 4.** This morning we had to put barbed wire around our tents. The order is stricter here. The factory manager is upset — German and Polish comrades have done something wrong. But Alsacians are nice colleagues.

We were given questionnaires where we had to put all kind of information about ourselves, including our religious belief — this is very important here.

My family is Lutheran, which is the main denomination in Sweden, but I personally am more inclined toward the ancient Latvian pagan religion. So I put down “Latvian” instead of “Lutheran”. My combat experience has made me stubborn; it seems very important to tell the whole truth.

Our work is to dig peat and put into wagonettes. My molly-coddle hands are not used to such work. When wagonettes are full we push them to the main road. A Swedish student Vestin works here to earn his college tuition. There is a small locomotive, made out of an old car. With it he takes the full wagonettes away and brings back the empty ones. We have to move the tracks which seems hard at first, but we get used to it.

My muscles grow, and at night there is a pleasant tiredness and satisfaction: the day has not been wasted in idleness. I have earned 10 kronas — enough to buy shoes for my little sister.

Our foreman is a Swedish farmer Bulin from a neighboring farm. Getting some extra income. He has a big thermos of coffee with him; he opens it every couple of hours and drinks it with his huge sandwiches. On the bread there is butter, luncheon meat, cheese, an egg, and a tomato. He is a swell guy and kind to us, and he probably needs the money more than we do.

"July 5. I have written letters to Uldis and Karlis. We were given great boots to wear at work — they look like skiing boots. They will come in handy for skiing in Scandinavian hills. Skiing is my favorite sport. But I have to save money — I want to go to college. And first of all I have to find my family. I still have my father's watch that I use at work to see, how long I still have to work. But when the Swedish student Vestin blows his horn, signaling the end of the work day, I still try to work some more; we are paid for the work done, not for the hours spent here. However, we are only human, and after a day's work we are tired.

The summer is hot and sunny, but every day, usually around 2:00 p.m., there is also rain for a couple of hours. This reminds us that we are in the middle of a sea. I work together with lieutenant Matisons, one of the young boys, and the Lithuanian captain Langis. He says: "**All Baltic nations should be united — we are too few to live separately.**"

Tonight I finished the letter I started to write to my friend Valdis' parents two days ago. I tried to assure them Valdis should be in Germany since he was not here."

"July 6. I should write to the Latvian Association in Sweden (LAZ) and ask to be accepted as a member. What about university? I should also look over the refugee lists and see if I could find any acquaintances — from the First High School of Riga and from the 19th Division. But I want no part of social democrats; they continue the same they did before — try to split up the Latvian society. They have learned nothing.

To work with one's hands is easier than soldier's work: it has limited hours, and it is not so dangerous. **Soldiering is the hardest work of all.** Latvians are not militant by nature; they fight only if they have to. But they are diligent workers. **And they do a good job as soldiers too.**

Why is the whole world against us, calling us fascists? Will we have enough strength to endure it and tell the truth — that we were only defending our country? Will such a time ever come?

Actually Gotland is not a very safe place either. Any time here as well as on Bornholm bombs may start to fall and grenades explode. No, I have no illusions about our future — just like in Kurzeme

Maybe we and the 500 interned Germans should be the first to face our enemy again. **We gladly would be ready any time, and this time Scandinavians would go with us.** One of our guards secretly told us he had fought as a volunteer in the Finnish-Soviet war in winter of 1939/40. But he could not talk about it among Swedes."

"July 7. Today at work again the same Swedish girl came to me and

gave me some water. Her smile brightens up the whole day. It is a beam of light in our prison."

"**July 8.** It is Sunday again, and this time I really feel it. We have visitors — three Latvian girls that have come here from Visby. That's the capital of Gotland. The girls are nice and pretty. We walk, talk, take pictures, and sing songs.

We have a football game with Swedish workers. The management is trying to create friendship between us. That's good.

I wish I could go to Visby — to see its architecture and hear a concert of classical music. That would make me feel like home. For my first salary I bought a gray windbreaker. Now I do not have to wear army clothes any more. Some of my buddies have managed to dye their uniforms black.

I look at pictures in a Swedish newspaper. The recent Midsummer Night celebration is shown there. Half-naked people are drinking cocktails with luxury yachts in the background. They have lost the ancient traditions.

Three years ago my friend Alfons' mother told us her dream. She had seen me and her son coming to the sea of blood with cut-off heads floating in it. Hitler's and Stalin's heads had fallen into the sea too. Then an angel had appeared and taken us out along a narrow thread to a white shore. With me it really happened. Dreams sometimes turn to reality."

"**July 9.** Today there was a solar eclipse. It was almost frightening. The previous eclipse I watched together with my friend Viesturs from the trigonometrical tower my father had built in Mezhaparks. But when the sun gradually became bright again I thought: the same way we, step by step, will regain our Latvia. And then we will work at the Baltic unity.

Working together, I become better acquainted with Swedes, and we, the interned, become closer among ourselves. My new acquaintances are an Estonian engineer Indras and some Lithuanians. I wrote down some Lithuanian songs."

"**July 10.** I am philosophizing too much; I should write more about actual happenings. For example, I noticed one Swedish worker, a young boy, throwing peat not into the wagonette but down into the ditch — because it is easier. And we get paid not for the volume of peat in the wagonettes but for the volume taken off the pile, and this was the only factor important to him. I doubt if any Latvian worker would do that.

One of our guards and even the manager Randval himself joined in our football game. Can you imagine!

Today some men with toothache were taken to a dentist in Visby. They were accompanied by a guard with a machine-gun instead of a regular pistol in the pocket as before. **Seven guards were punished for being too soft with us.**

About all these things I wrote a letter to Koenig in Havdhem. How a day and night, spent together in danger, can make former strangers close!

This country and its people seem odd to us, and I do not doubt we seem just as odd to them.

A small railroad passes our swamp — the only one in Gotland. I have seen the engine-man wearing a white uniform while the conductor is wearing a white shirt and a bow tie. All this while the train gets energy from wood and peat!

Also surprising is the fact that Swedes eat not three but five times a day. Each worker has with him several thermoses with coffee and a pile of sandwiches — the so called "Swedish Plate". Yes, there was a time when we did not know the worth of the daily bread.

I'm beginning to understand the Swedish language. Today I had a conversation with a Swedish girl Gunnel Borgh. Of course, most of our conversation was in German — the most common foreign language in Sweden. But I definitely want to learn the beautiful Swedish language. I do it by practice. First of all I try to memorize words that are needed at work."

"**July 11.** Sometimes I think of joining the British army. Mainly because that would be a way how to see my father and sister again. **They did not want to go to Germany** but were looking for me in Kurzeme until the last possibility.

Except for the short period of independence this has always been the fate of Latvian soldiers — to wear a foreign army uniform. But our goal has always been the same: to fight for the freedom of our native land.

**Sometimes I feel rather pessimistic about our future. But that does not mean I'm not ready to fight, if there would be such a chance."**

"**July 12.** I received my first week's salary — 53 kronas (about 30 pounds). While interned we received only 7 kronas a week. I'm very proud I'm earning a real salary now and **do not have to live on Swedish government charity any more.** For food we have to pay 25 kronas a week. The rest I want to save for the time I'll be able to visit my family.

I need money not only for the passage, but I also want to buy presents for everybody: shoes for Rita, a jacket for Dad, and canned goods for all the relatives. But for my little nephew Gunars the best present would be an assault-gun ...

For myself I want to buy: new glasses, a writing tablet, a suitcase, a skiing jacket, and a real suit. The latter costs two weeks' salary. Also I have to find out about college. I want to study architecture."

"**July 14.** As I started to work and was earning a salary I began to feel free — in spite of the armed guards around. Now I was reminded again of my interned status. I found out we might write letters only in Swedish, German, or English, not in Latvian. And we were not allowed to take any goods out of Sweden. There goes my dream about bringing presents for my family!"

"**July 15.** It is Sunday again, and after a week of hard work I thoroughly enjoy my leisure. I think of making a bon-fire and singing in the evening. And we could decorate the camp gates. In the camp territory there grow also some pines besides the usual small evergreens and junipers. We live in four tents at the edge of the forest by the road, near the two-storey building where the administration, kitchen, and storage rooms are located. Like almost all wooden buildings in Sweden it is painted dark red with white window frames and borders.

For dinner today we have liver, and white bread with apple jam and milk for dessert. This is exactly the meal Livija treated me with on my last day at their place."

"**July 16.** The leader of my work group is a young Swedish farmer Bulin. He is a good-looking, dark-haired man — calm and helpful. We get along well. He understands us. If he sees any of the teenagers lack enough strength to push the wagonette, he lends his shoulder. The pay he figures out precisely and justly. Those who take smoking breaks get less.

In our group there are: colonel Gailitis, major Ambraziunas, captains Apkalns and Langis. The rest of us are just enlisted men and the young boys from the air-force auxiliary group. **But here we are all equal.**"

"**July 17.** My friend Uldis Berzs from the 15th Division is interned at the camp Raenneslaett in Sweden. From there he had written a letter to his former teacher Marta Ziverte, living in Stockholm now. Here are his adventures.

"Sincere thanks for your postcard and good wishes. I am very pleased to hear from you and to find out you're in Sweden too. How did you get here? And how do you feel, living in Stockholm?"

In the confusion of war events I went over to Germany, then Czechoslovakia, finally in the hopes of getting back to Kurzeme to fight for our own country I came to Poland. In the local villages there is incredible dirt, poverty, and misery. In such an atmosphere I had to spend a lot of time of my wonderful youth.

The German eagle began to lose its feathers. We retreated to Danzig. I remembered this city as it was before the eager hand of war had started to demolish it. Now it was a sad reunion. Ivan was constantly bombing it. The city was smoking, buildings were burning, deep grenade holes were gaping everywhere. Loose horses were madly galloping through the streets. In an alley at a bare linden tree branch a human being was hanging. German army units were getting surrounded closer and closer. We kept moving until one day we reached the sea, and now we had nowhere to go. But we were still lucky. There was a small Latvian ship "Potrimps". At one time it had coursed between Riga and Jelgava. Now it kindly took us aboard. At 2:00 p.m. the ship trembled and started to move. The burning city in the cloak of smoke remained at the horizon. But our passage was not without its share of dramatic moments. We experienced a stormy sea, and finally we had no drinking water and no firewood, not to mention food. But just like in a novel — when it already looked like we would not make it, there appeared at the horizon the island Bornholm with the Danish flag.

Living in Denmark was an excellent chance to improve our physical condition. After the meager German fare which we tried to brighten up by giving it colorful names like "Hound's Delight", "Blue Danube", or "The Green King", our stomachs now were surprised by milk, cream, butter, ham, sausages, fish, cakes, candy, and all kinds of snacks that flew into them in abundance.

Danish people were not very sympathetic. Living in their land of plenty, they had stuck their heads into sand and did not comprehend the world events. But nice days rolled by at Roenne, the capital of Bornholm. The dove of peace was about to hatch, and we hoped never to hear any shots again. However, the events turned out differently. On that day we were enjoying the sun on the public beach next to the harbor and expecting British troops. Instead at noon two Soviet airplanes appeared in the sky. (Latvians called them "Stalin's Eagles".) They gave a volley of machine-gun fire. There was a row of small bullet holes in our cabin roof. This was followed by bombs. One bomb hit the stately Danish post ship "Rotna" not far from us, the other one fell into water

between "Rotna" and the public beach, the third one pulverized the bath-house. Many men were on "Potrimps" at that time. In panic they ran ashore, but rows of bullets awaited them there. Thirty Latvians were either dead or injured. The Danish civilians suffered losses too. The flags went down in half-mast. Later in the evening Soviet fighter planes flew over the city and dropped leaflets with the invitation to surrender. Now, miraculously "Potrimps" had suffered only a slight damage, and at midnight we glided out to sea, leaving behind the dead and the seriously wounded that were put in the local hospital. Early in the morning "Potrimps" was already splashing in Swedish waters. On May 8th we arrived at the harbor of Ystad, and I took my first step on the Swedish soil. We were sent to a military internment camp.

In this camp there are about a thousand men: 120 Latvians, the rest are Germans. Nothing to complain about. Here is a large library. I read as much as a book a day. We have the radio too. The men play football, volleyball, or go swimming. Sometimes a clergyman visits us and tries to comfort us with rich promises. On July 2nd we had a concert: opera singer Mariss Vetra, cellist Ozolins, and pianist Paberza. It was a good one. At the camp we have a band and a stage, including the curtains, scenery, lights, etc. It's grand. Saturday night we had a variety show. We were immensely pleased. One Swedish lady presented us with the piano when she found out the camp had none.

I do not know yet what I'll do in Sweden. Now I have to bury my lightheartedness and be careful not to slip on the parquet of the world. I am by myself. Since last October I have not had any news from my parents. But I'm all right. I'm still the same as you maybe remember me. I do not want to lament like the Latvian newspaper does. It seems odd to me how Latvians in Sweden have split up in spite of their small number. But I'm still young, and the world is large enough. I'll find my place somewhere. Nothing to worry about.

**Before the piece of soap I'm using will run out I hope to be outside the barbed wire fence.**

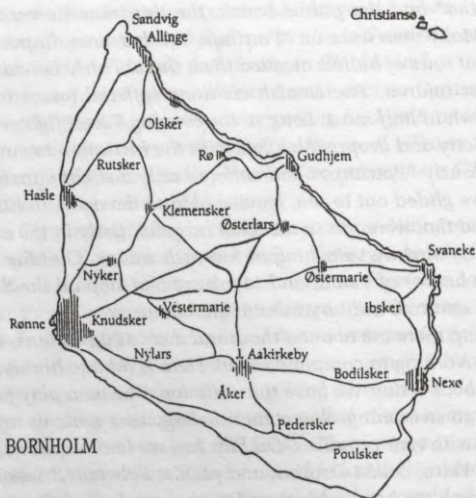
If you are not too busy — I would be very pleased to receive a letter from you.

With a Latvian greeting

Uldis Berzs.

**July 19.** Today Janis Bergs was taken to hospital with a high fever. We hope it's nothing serious.

Today is payday again. Soon I'll be able to buy something bigger. Most of all I need new glasses. I hope to get to Visby soon.



Denmark's island Bornholm. Latvian Legionaries fled there from the siege of Danzig and stayed from 30th March until 8th May 1945. There they left 17 comrades killed during Soviet bombardment of island in the last day of war

Around the camp small stores grow like mushrooms. Apparently they hope to profit from us. In one shop you can get clothes, even a suit. You are supposed to have coupons for it (in Sweden clothes were still rationed like in Germany during the war), but if you are willing to pay a little more, you can get it without coupons. Apparently Swedes are more lax in this than Germans. In another shop you can get newspapers, magazines, paperback books, and pin-ups. The shopkeeper probably thought we — young men without an access to females — would buy them like crazy. But he's wrong; we are not going to spend a whole krona for junk like this.

I have a suspicion the shopkeepers here charge us higher than normal prices. They can easily do that since we do not know what the prices are supposed to be. They do not steal, no — they are the honest Swedes. We should try to find out from the guards."

"July 22. Sunday again and the enjoyable leisure. It is raining outside, so I have to stay in the tent. I write a letter to Uldis Berzs — in German, as we are supposed to. Uldis knows German very well, better than I do. Now I regret I did not study German as hard as English. I have

discovered Swedish is very similar to German and English — something in the middle of both these languages.

Our “pretty boy” — corporal Osvalds Licis — gets a great present: a visit from his wife. She had managed to get to Gotland from Kurzeme with a civilian refugee transport that was organized by Latvians already in Sweden. Our humane guards have allowed her to see her husband. Of course, it was done secretly. If anybody told about it, the guards would get punished. Lucky Osvalds!

Here we are all single men, but we are not lonely as we perhaps would be in civilian life. Here we are still a unit — just like in combat. And I do not mean only Latvians but Lithuanians and Estonians as well. We, Baltic men, stick together and are like one.

There are only a few Lithuanian civilians in Sweden — they did not have a chance to escape in that direction. Latvian civilians are approximately 5,000 but Estonians — 30,000. For them it was easier to get to Sweden because of their location further north and islands in the Baltic Sea.”

“July 23. Yesterday another group of Germans was brought here. Too bad! The more we are the less chance to get free. I pour out my heart into my diary — it is a good way to quench the unrest. Especially in the evenings.

This week we work only until 1:00 p.m. and get the whole afternoon off.

A year ago this was my last day in civilian life. So much has happened since then. And how long do I have to wait until I'll be a civilian again? Until then I predict lack of money and longing for my family. But there is also a possibility that I would have to wear still another uniform.”

“July 24. We are being watched. Frenchmen who work next to us warned us that Swedes are gathering information about us. Maybe it meant they had interrogated the Frenchmen. We have not been called for interrogation yet. I remind myself to keep my eyes and ears open but my mouth shut.

But in the evening when the setting sun peeks at me behind a small, white cloud — one such moment gives fulfillment for the whole day. Maybe it was a greeting from my late mother? Is she watching over me?”

“July 25. It is already evening. I'm writing by the light of a table lamp. Over me one of the Gotland pines sways its branches. The lamp and the mirror on the table, and my sister Aina's fountain pen — all this

gives me an illusion of home. I'm also pleased about my friend Uldis' letter that I received today. He really knows how to write; he has a good sense of humor and irony. And not only that. He even has a talent for drawing cartoons. He should put it to good use.

Today at work we, 16 men, filled 65 wagonettes. This is considered a good speed. For dinner tonight we had the new potatoes for the first time.

How the time flies! When we arrived at Gotland the potatoes were just being planted. Now we are eating them. But they look different from our potatoes — they are oddly shaped and with a scabby skin. Probably because the layer of soil is so thin here. It is a wonder anything grows here at all. It requires hard work — harder than in Latvia. No wonder I have often seen deserted farms here; their owners have given up and moved to a city or to the small villages with grand churches. I'll never stop admiring them. They come from the Middle Ages and carry the breath of eternity.

This is our daily order. In the morning we have to get up very early — at 3:45 a.m. We sleep till the last minute. We get dressed and grab our canteen bottles that we take to work. Then we have to form a line and march to the mess hall. Some fellows with stronger nerves even manage to wash themselves properly, but then they stand in line with untied boots. We call the mess hall "Big House"; it is at the edge of the swamp.

The food is excellent. Here we fill our canteen bottles with milk, coffee, or flavored water. Latvian style sour milk would be the most refreshing, but Swedes do not know it. They do not know anything sour like sour cream, cottage-cheese, or sauerkraut. And they do not cook soups except one — pea soup. But very tasty are their cooked beans with cream and sugar. Tasty and healthy are rose-tip preserves that are especially popular in Sweden.

Once we asked our cook for sour milk. She told us how hard she had labored to fulfill our wish. First she had to get the recipe, then borrow a kilogram of cinnamon from a neighbor, then spend hours mixing the 25 liter can of milk with sugar. Of course, we thanked her for her efforts, but from then on we made our own sour milk which is so simple: you simply let the milk get sour until it resembles custard. Another thing we could not eat was the sausages that Swedes hang on a fence in the hot summer sun to let them rot a little — to improve the taste.

Our cook here is an elderly Swedish "lotta" — that means a woman of the Swedish self-defense organization. She admires Stalin and wishes him to lead Sweden to socialism too. When we asked her why she did not love their king and wanted him to be replaced by Stalin, she did not understand us. She thought the king would continue to reign as before.

She did not believe us when we told her how in Latvia almost all members of our self-defense organization Home Guard were punished by the Soviets. "It would be impossible in Sweden!" she said. "The self-defense members are the best people!"

For dinner there is always a line. Sometimes we have to wait five minutes, sometimes a half-an-hour. In Kurzeme the food lately was so bad it became our greatest ambition in life — to get enough food. On the other hand, in Havdhem we were fed so well it was a real pleasure. Here, at Martebo, we are already used to it, but it is our duty to eat and be strong for work.

Even in our tents we have snacks — crackers and soft drinks. On the free afternoon I read and write letters. And diligently keep my diary. **But around us is a barbed wire and above us a strange sky. Now and probably still for a long time.**

The most unpleasant quality of Swedes is their hypocrisy. They are very kind and pleasant in front of you but contempting and conceited behind your back. On the other hand — Latvians are often capable of treason. At the "establishment" we had one man with such a "talent" — Olgerts Rozenbergs. He was a good psychologist and actually was a Gestapo agent. Here in Sweden such a man is capt. Kreicbergs — a Soviet agent."

"**July 27.** Sometimes, while working, I'm plagued by gloomy thoughts. I figure the most important are not the circumstances around us but our attitude — how we take it.

If I feel gloomy, my escape is to write my diary. Doing that I feel free — I can think and write whatever I please. Another escape is work and the beautiful sunset behind the pines.

Yesterday we were taken outside for a walk — for the first time. Of course, we were doubly guarded like dangerous criminals. We walked two kilometers to the nearest village Tingstad. When I had a chance to see the outside world I realized how much I had lost this summer, spending it behind the barbed wire. And I wish we would not have to see four times a day young girls with naked arms, shoulders, necks, and well noticeable breasts under their thin dresses or blouses. It drives me crazy!"

"**July 28.** There is a Latvian church service in the Tingstad church with the Latvian minister Svikis officiating. There is also a soloist — the young opera star Marija Vintere. And she sings Latvian songs. This was a greater experience than a concert of Beethoven would have been. After the months in Kurzeme and the last months in here I had almost forgotten such things existed. Latvian songs, sung by a Latvian woman!

The brooch with the symbol of Latvian Republic on her breast moves in the rhythm with each breath.

After the concert we were allowed to greet the minister and the soloist. But when I said a few words in Latvian to a civilian, the guard shouted and lifted his rifle. There are also trained dogs that guard us.

I escaped from Kurzeme, but the war for me is not over. I regret I do not have a weapon any more. I'm afraid we would be handed over to the Soviets if a miracle did not take place. I try to prepare myself for it. Maybe there is another way — a diplomatic way? I rely on fate."

"**July 30.** I finally get to go to Visby. It reminds me of our Jurmala or maybe the center of Jelgava or Bauska. Around the old part of the city there is still the ancient wall - "Ringamurar". In the very center of the city there is the market place — "Tingplats". The need for new glasses gave me the chance to get here and see the city.

I was mostly impressed by the new apartment buildings at the outskirts of the city. There are several blocks of them. The architecture is similar, yet each building has a different facade. It shows the good taste and aesthetic expression of Swedish people.

I noticed two kinds of women. Some were tall, statuesque blondes, the others small, graceful brunettes. And all people were well and tastefully dressed. Nowhere I could see farmers in gray homespun suits and elderly country women with white kerchiefs as one still can see in Latvia. And the aromatic sea air — I have to think again of our Jurmala, the sea-shore city at the Bay of Riga.

A guard had taken me there in a car. After I bought the glasses we returned to the camp. How long will I look through the new glasses and what will I see? It was a day of frequent rain showers, therefore my buddies had not worked that day. So I did not miss any work time."

"**August 3.** Before the war I had a pen-pal in Flint, England — a girl named Connie Hughes. Now I have renewed my correspondence with her. I already wrote her one letter from Gotland. I wrote it with the assumption she knew all about communists and about our reasons to fight with Germans against the Soviets. But actually she does not know. Nobody in England knows. So in my second letter I will try to explain everything to her.

I had written to Uldis about my idea — that we should join the British army. Now he writes to me that it would not be possible — "*there are no regulations about it*". After all — we do not have to act as prostitutes, offering ourselves to any foreign service. Has not the Latvian blood been spilled enough?

Together with Uldis' letter I received a letter from the Latvian Association in Sweden. I admire their ability to form such an organization here since Sweden does not look favorably upon us, Latvians — including the civilian refugees. Although Sweden was neutral during the war there was a certain support towards Germans. **Now the Swedish government has to make up for this sin by appeasing the Soviets.**

**“August 4.** Today I wrote another letter to Uldis in English. Should I not write the next letter in Swedish? It would be a good exercise. I have had enough exercise of writing in German. But God forbid that I would have to learn Russian! In this letter I also included some money.

I wonder what our next job would be. Maybe after the “refined job” in the peat swamp we will be sent to a stone quarry? We are not free people and have no rights.”

**“August 5.** Sunday again. This is the time to wash my work clothes and sew buttons on my coat. Also a day for writing letters. To Connie Hughes, Mr. Kruminsh, and my sister's friend Vilis Kaulinsh that managed to get over to Sweden last summer with his tugboat. I found him through an advertisement in the Latvian newspaper. I should also study Swedish and English.”

**“August 8.** Today we heard about the atom bomb Americans had dropped on Japan. This is a dreadful weapon. **Now the big nations are just as vulnerable as the small ones. Now we all are in the same boat.**

Japan is finished now. Hopefully, Americans will take advantage of this fact. **At least there is no fear any more that the Soviets would try to occupy Scandinavia and the rest of Europe — because of the atom bomb possessed by the U.S.A.**

While working, I was thinking of a new strategy that was needed now for the Latvian nation. Latvian women should bear a child every year as it was in the old times. That was how our ancestors filled the land again after the war and plague had emptied it.

Life. Now I see it in a new light — like something that is threatened. When you walk in a shadow of death you begin to understand how precious it is. And at the same time — how cheap it is...

Yesterday Lieutenant Plevakas gave me some Lithuanian songs. Maybe for us the Baltic unity is more important than atom bombs far away?”

**“August 11.** I sent some postcards to Germany. Maybe with good luck my relatives will receive them. In my letter to Uldis I put 25 kronas.

I have sent an advertisement to the Latvian newspaper in Sweden that I was searching for my family. I hope I would receive a response.

— Today I started to write about my adventures in Kurzeme and our trip over the sea.”

“**August 12.** There is a possibility that after the work here was finished we would be simply returned to the camp in Havdhem. That would be bad. Then this work would be without a meaning, if it did not give us freedom.

There are also a few Latvian civilians working at the swamp, but we are not allowed to talk to them. Today one of them has a visitor — a young girl. She smiles at us. It is like a sudden sunshine. Will I ever find the right girl who would love and understand me? I would love and support her.

It is written in the Latvian newspaper that at least 1,5 million Latvians are necessary to continue the nation's culture and to create new cultural values. Right!”

“**August 14.** The capitulation of Japan. Peace is now all over the world — but not in Baltia which is occupied.”

“**August 15.** Now we already know our fate. After the peat swamp our work would be in the woods. At least we would not have to go back to the camp. But now it's clear Swedes are fooling us; there will be no change in our status.

I heard from the Alsacians that Swedes had the complete information about each of us. That meant: even here, in the democratic Sweden, we had to be careful about what we said! Even the king had said we should go home. Go where — to the Soviets, our enemy? Are Swedes really that ignorant?”

“**August 17.** Today I finally bought a suit and paid for it only 150 kronas. It is not quite what I would have liked, but it is cheap, and the salesman told me it looked good on me. Of course — what else would he say! I also bought a pair of skiing pants (20 kronas), two dress-shirts (18 kronas), a suit-case for Rita (20 kronas), a pair of long boots for Dad (used ones, for 22 kronas), and some ties for myself — 17 kronas. Together I have spent about 250 kronas.”

“**August 18.** This is our last day in the swamp. We had to work the afternoon shift. When we finished it was already dark, and the moon gave a mystical mood. The feeling of finished work is keener than usually.

I feel excited — as if before a new adventure. This is similar to my mood before a battle. We went home, riding on the edges of the wago-nettes, and this reminded me of the times I rode on the attack gun — or on the deck of the motor boat. Was I heading for something similar to that?"

**"August 21.** Now we are at the Kapelshamn forest. Here we have a sympathetic chief of guards. He has attended university at Upsala. He is a humane person and understands our situation.. He represents the best Swedish qualities and is not conceited like many of Swedes are.

When we arrived at Martebo I did not expect anything good, and I was right. My only gain from that place was a suitcase full of goods and well developed muscles. So the time spent there has not been a total loss after all."

**"August 23.** Today was our first work day in the woods. The place looks better than Martebo, and the work is lighter, but the pay is less. I will not be able to buy as much as with my previous salary. Our work here is to cut down the slender evergreen trees, to cut off branches, cut them in smaller pieces, and form piles.

Here a Red Cross representative came to visit us and explained our situation. **We were regarded the same as Germans, so we would not be released but sent to Germany.** (At best.) But this is not comparable to our situation in Kurzeme. We will live even through the worst..

Now it is getting dark already at 8:00 p.m., so I have to wind up my writing for today.

We live here in tents which reminds me of my boy-scout days. We even had a bon-fire and sang Latvian songs. But we miss our buddy Osvalds Licis. He fell ill and was taken to a hospital. Right now I have 10 kronas."

**"August 24.** We have to build a fence around our four tents. One of our men — Peteris Ziemelis — made an elegant wooden bench with a back. What a great feeling, sitting there! This way it is much easier to write than while lying in the tent. We made a permanent place for the bon-fire by placing stones around it. We were promised army bikes to ride to work.

Opposite our camp there is an old garden with a pond. Further we can see some buildings; but aside of that it is just a forest.

The saws here are different from those I have used to see — not for two men but for one. After every fourth tooth there is a notch for the sawdust to fall out. I remember how my grandfather bragged about his saw that was a real Swedish steel. Here it is — Swedish steel.

It is twilight. We have made a bon-fire. One of my buddies — Evalds Liepinsh — is singing a sentimental song. Second lieutenant Olgerts Lacis and lieutenant Oskars Rekis are playing chess. Captain Peteris Apkalns is smoking silently; maybe he is thinking about his family far away or remembering the time he spent in the German concentration camp in Saksenhausen. Peteris Ziemelis is trying to enlighten the chief of guards. He starts with different methods of work and ends with communism. At this point two more of our men join the conversation. As always, it will wind up with the question of returning home. The guard agrees with us, but it seems he has not quite understood. Of course — **who can understand the evil, villainy, and absurdity of communism except those that have experienced all of it on their own skin? Oh, well — let's forget it and sing a song.**"

**August 26.** This is my birthday. I'm becoming of age — 21. Actually I have acted as a grown-up already for the last three years — since I started to work as a custodian of the "establishment". Now I am without my family and relatives, without a home, without my country, without the customary circumstances. But I'm not alone. Next to me are my buddies that share my fate. Two of my best friends — Uldis and Karlis — can be reached by letters. And the whole world lies before us — to be conquered by us, Latvian men.

I'm alive and healthy, so I can say those months in Kurzeme and this summer in Gotland — it has been a good apprenticeship in the school of life. A year ago I wrote in my diary: "I'm facing the dark future with faith, hope, and reliance upon myself." This I have managed to do. Also I have strengthened my will. During hard times I have acquired greater understanding of life. I believe in my fate. This year has been a threshold.

During the following year I have to find my relatives. I have to find a home for me and my family. Maybe the following year will not be so full of meaningful events, but — who knows... So I celebrate my birthday only in my thoughts, not mentioning it to anyone else.

Life is peaceful now: work, rest, meals, sleep. The only other thing I can do is remembering, thinking, and writing my diary. And I enjoy the evening when we sit around the bon-fire and sing. The Swedish guards like our songs. They come and sit down with us to listen — in spite of the fact they are forbidden to fraternize with us."

**August 29.** Two of our group have decided to return to Havdhem. Was the work too hard for them? Or have they decided it was not worth to work if we do not get released? True, the pay is small, but I prefer

working to living idle. And the work in the woods is more interesting and not as hard as the work in the peat swamp.

Our craftsmen — Ziemelis and Kaneps — now have managed to make a table and benches around it. We receive a radio. This is a great joy for all of us. Our days are richer now. In Sweden the dinner time is 7:00 p.m. After that we can lie down, listen to Mozart or some other good music, and we know in this country everything is in good order and tomorrow will be just like today. At night I sometimes see myself in high school again; sometimes I see Milda.

I wish I could see again my classmates and my teachers. But the society that was mine once is gone now. Here I am in a different society. And our main task here is — to remain Latvians."

**"August 31.** It is only a couple of kilometers we have to go every morning to get to our work place, but we were given bicycles. Now we can go like gentlemen — elegantly riding our bikes.

In one sector of the forest there is an army warehouse. That's where our bikes came from. There were also trucks, guns, ammunition — but no guards, just a simple key. Apparently Swedes were sure nobody would steel such things.

Sweden remained neutral in World War II, but Swedes had been ready for war. When we are moved from one camp to another we receive dry army rations. They include sweets and even toilette paper.

Going home from work we decide to race our bikes. The guards remain far behind, but they do not worry. They know we would not run away. We, Baltic men — Latvians, Lithuanians, Estonians — are honest, obedient, and disciplined."

**"September 1.** On this day six years ago World War II was started. We can not even figure out our losses in this war. And the end still has not come. Hitler is dead, Japan has surrendered, but what about Stalin? Today we went swimming in the stony bay of Kapelshamn."

**"September 2.** We celebrate birthdays if any comes around — with cakes and delicacies like canned shrimp.

We heard Stalin's speech over the radio. This murderer tries to wipe out the Latvian nation. "

**"September 3.** Today I made gates for our camp."

**"September 8.** A week has passed without any important events. I received a letter from my classmate Adolfs Donins and another one

from my sister's friend Vilis Kaulinsh. In Summer of 1944 he invited our family to flee with his tug-boat to Sweden. Now he was repairing bikes in Stockholm.

It is fall now, and after work and dinner we only have an half-an-hour of daylight, so I do not have much chance to write. The main writing is on Saturdays, especially letters. But on Sundays I want to take it easy."

**"September 19.** Today Kaneps and capt. Apkalns were taken to camp Havdhem. Now we are short of two good singers, but our unity is better. Capt. Apkalns was a **fierce German hater. We all were — until the year 1940 and the Soviet occupation.** Then we found out who our real enemy was."

**"September 20.** Just as I went to war without fear — now I'll start to conquer the world. It will be easier because now I'm not attached to anyone or any place. The first person of my past that I'll see will be Uldis — he lives in Sweden.

Olgerts Lacis thinks only the future would show whether we did the right thing, coming to Sweden. **I still have not forgotten the Baltic unity — going to war for the sake of Latvia."**

**"September 22.** Today I wrote a letter to Latvian playwright Martinsh Ziverts, who lives in Stockholm. In the name of our National Guard I thanked him for his play "Vara" (Power). The main character in this play is Mindaugas — the Lithuanian king that tried to unite the separate Baltic tribes back in the 13th century."

**"September 23.** We have succumbed to sin. In a corner of our tent we fermented the light Swedish beer "drika", and now it has an increased alcohol volume. We all have become merry — artificially. Tonight, instead of the usual coffee, we drink cocoa at a white, covered table. What if the white tablecloth is only paper! It is a long time since we last had a chance to sit at a covered table. We sing all together, including Germans. We sing each in our own language, but the melody is the same. It is a well known German student song: "Drink, brother, drink!" After all — we fought together with Germans and crossed the sea together. Somewhere else two stalwart artillery captains crossed the sea in a small "Volkswagen" amphibian in two days and in an eight-ball storm.

**"September 28.** Today it is raining, and it is our last day here.

Tomorrow we go back to Havdhem, and on October 2nd we supposedly will be taken to Sweden. We do not know where, but it still seems to be a step forward. Maybe closer to freedom? Yes, Baltic men have to live behind barbed wire not only in the Soviet and German concentration camps but even here — in humane, democratic Sweden. Why?

Now we have to pack again. **During World War I Latvians had to go east, now it is west. The first time they came back — but how will it be now?**"

"**October 3.** I remember how a year ago, on October 4th, I went home for the last time and played Chopin on the piano. Now too a march would be in order, but I'm not sure whether it should be a merry march or a mournful march. I feel a little sad, leaving camp Havdhem.

While I am writing, others take leave from the 400 German boys with a friendly cursing: "Heinz, du — Schweinhund!" (Pigdog). That is the worst cussword in German. In this "art" they are far behind Russians. In our soldiers' slang we call all Germans "Fritz", Russians "Ivan", Estonians "Kurrat". Now our vocabulary has increased by one more word like that: "Fan". That's how we have started to call Swedes because they use this word almost in every sentence. It means "devil".

A German corporal named Fuchs once pulled out the tent supports of the tent where the "Golden Pheasants" — Nazi party functionaries slept. The tent collapsed and almost burned down because there was fire in the stove. The common German soldiers could not stand these cowards that stayed safely in the rear while the soldiers fought in the front lines.

At the end of June a German man of our group Koenig — the helmsman of the motor boat — invited me to run away with him to Germany, to look for our relatives. He, I, and a German officer were the only men that did not get seasick while crossing the sea. That might be one reason he asked me to go with him. Besides, we had fought together and felt camaraderie between us. I appreciated his trust in me but turned down his invitation. Why? Because it happened at the time we had to move to Martebo to work at the peat swamp. At that time we still believed after that we would be released, and I did not want to ruin the chances for others with my escape.

So in July Koenig escaped together with a young German officer from our boat — the same who did not get seasick. A few more Germans went with him, but I did not know them. Now we finally received news of them.

They had taken bikes from a near-by army store and gone to a small harbor where they stole a yacht. But there was no wind, so they had to

come back the same way. On their way back they were stopped, but they showed **the receipt we got when we handed over our boat to the Swedish coast guards**. So now they could say they had delivered the German boat to the coast guards, and they returned to Havdhem but could not get into the camp. They sought refuge in the church. But soon they were found. They had tried to justify their presence there with a desire to pray since there was no place of worship within the camp. The camp administration took a notice of it, and already in the next few days there were erected a cross and an altar. However, the "fervent worshippers" did not take advantage of the new convenience but escaped again. This time they stole a motor boat and left in place a generous receipt for money exceeding the value of the boat. At that time we were at Martebo and heard over with my escape radio about escaping "war criminals". A day later we heard they had "robbed" a kiosk, taking several bottles of soft drinks and packs of cigarettes. Actually they did not steal these goods — they left whatever money they still had of the seven kronas a week we were given in the camp at that time. That was already in Sweden, so we knew Koenig and others were on their way to Germany. Later we received a post card from them — from Hamburg, Germany. But I did not regret I did not go with them. **We each had our own fate.**

Here, at Gotland, we are in the center of the Baltic Sea. This gives me an idea. Living around it, we all love the sea — not only the Baltic nations but also Swedes, Danes, Germans, Poles, Finns, and even Russians. **Then why could not we all be one close, friendly family? This is not a utopia, this is a natural, logical future development.**"

**"October 4, Rinkaby, Skone.** This is our first camp at Sweden mainland. We were taken here by a Swedish ship "Regina". Before the war this ship was often seen at Riga passenger harbor. Isn't it symbolic? Now this ship once again took Latvian and German passengers to Sweden — just like in the old times. And yet it was not like old times because this time we were not tourists but prisoners-of-war. We were placed in the cargo room down below the deck. Nevertheless, I managed to notice the piano in the guest room. Do I still remember how to play Beethoven and Chopin?

When the dawn came over the Baltic Sea I remembered one of the songs the "Dumpuri" sisters liked to sing — about the only star in the dark sky before dawn. Such a star for me is the Baltic unity. There are songs like leading stars that awaken memories and strengthen the soul. Such a song is also the Latvian patriotic song "Sacred Heritage" we used to sing at the "National Guard" — every day after the work as a

retreat, gathering in the narrow passage way between the erstwhile prison cells.

The Rinkaby camp has barracks, so we do not have to live in tents any more. After living in tents for half-a-year like in a summer camp it seems quite strange to return to rooms and civilization: a bed, a table, a cabinet, and running water. There are also rumors about us being released. The conference in London had ended with a noisy break-up. Maybe soon the world would understand we did not gain anything from this war — it only might be the cause for a new war”.

**“October 6.** The first swallow of spring — Gunars Zvejnieks is released! His father is a lawyer, and he is in Sweden, so he managed to get his son out.

But the same good news await the rest of us. A Swedish major came to us and told about it. Friday, October 12th, we would be taken to Eksjoe — to a civilian camp. There were already 140 interned Latvians in that camp. (Did he really not know the truth, or did he deliberately lied to us so we would not try to escape on the way?)

The boys are confused with the electric light we have in the barracks. While living in tents, our day ended at 8:00 p.m. because it was dark; we could not do anything. Now we stay up until 11:00 p.m. Some are bored but I, as always, do not even have enough time for everything I would like to do. Many of us are reading or writing letters, the old colonel is trying to tell our fortune by cards. But he does not tell us the answer he got. It seems to me a net has encircled us and is hauling us somewhere.”

**“October 7.** This is Sunday — maybe the last one when we are still military men. I wrote the last letter to Uldis — in Eksjoe we will be together. In the evening I went to the local garrison cafe. It is in a barrack too, but inside it is neatly painted. On the wall many old war flags are hanging — Swedish and enemies’. More of the Swedish.”

**“October 12.** Now we are at camp Raenneslaett, near Eksjoe. On our way from camp Rinkaby we went through a city — Kristianstad. This is a real city, not like the small, provincial towns we have seen so far. It reminds me of Riga. Later we went by electric train — first such trip in my life.

In camp Raenneslaett there is a barbed wire fence with flood lights, armed guards with dogs. Some civilian camp — damn it! We have been cheated again.

The only good thing about this camp is the fact that here we are

more Baltic men together and without Germans. And here is Uldis. Upon our first meeting we enthusiastically hugged and kissed each other. "Cheer up!" he said. "We are in a stew, but we are still alive!" After that we were telling each other our adventures for most of the night. About Kurzeme, about Valdis Kruminsh and other friends, about "Dumpuri" sisters he does not know. We do not even dare to think what might have happened to them."

"**October 13.** Here we have no porcelain plates — we eat out of aluminum bowls. How soft have we become in that short time at Rinkaby that we even notice such things!

The Latvians here are different from our group. We all shared the same fate and were equal — regardless of the rank. Here the former officers at first still wanted to order around the enlisted men. They had forgotten we were already half-way civilians and would not obey. But if they want to pull the rank — the highest in rank and authority is our colonel Gailitis. He is a real Latvian man, and finally all other officers listen to him."

"**October 18.** There is a separate building for the kitchen and the dining-hall, and the officers' club. And in this room there is a piano. Lieutenant Presnikov has attended a music academy. He sometimes plays, and once even I got a chance. This was the first time I was playing since crossing the sea. My fingers are a little stiff. When will I be able to have a piano of my own?

There are others that can play a musical instrument. Lieutenant Bundzha plays accordion, Minichs — guitar, and Rimicans has saved all this time his *kokle* (a specific Latvian string instrument) that he has taken along with him from home."

"**October 20.** Gotland seems so far away now. Our barracks are next to the highway, and we can see through windows and barbed wire the continuous traffic that brings us closer to life. If not for the barbed wire, armed guards, and dogs, life here would be like in a sanatorium. (90 policemen are hiding in the nearby bushes and watching us. What an honor!)

I project an impressive gate for our camp. And there should be a sign "Baltic Camp". But will Swedes allow such an "advertisement"? They are so afraid of the Soviets."

"**October 23.** Yesterday I got a book by Latvian author Akuraters — "Kalpa zena vasara" (The Farm Boy's Summer). And a copy of Latvian

literary magazine "Daugava". This means more to me than to receive a new, beautiful dress-shirt. Refugees have taken books with them as the greatest treasure. Now we exchange them among ourselves. But what will happen to my diary? The written word lives much longer than the person who wrote it.

I wonder about those in Siberia. Four of my class-mates were deported on June 14, 1941, together with their families: Arnolds Calitis, Olgerts Dinsbergs, Indrikis Dunens, and Ojars Shevics. Are they still alive? Maybe they were drafted into the Red army; maybe they have been killed in combat. But here we eat four times a day as much as we want and drink real, aromatic coffee. We receive clean straw and Swedish army blankets for our beds. After the summer work we feel strong and healthy.

I and Elmars try to improve our English by conversing in it. We have a book of English and Irish folk songs that we want to read. The Irish songs in minor key touch deeply my soul. I'm going to ask for forms required to get a permission for my relatives to come to this country."

**"October 25.** Today I have an ominous foreboding. There are such moments when I feel a strange weakness, and gloomy thoughts come over me. This is one of those days. Maybe one of my friends is dying today — either in Kurzeme or in Siberia?

Yesterday I turned down a gift, sent by Latvians in Boston — because there was not enough for all the Baltic men. They had sent 150 items, but together with Lithuanians and Estonians we are 168. Was it stupidity or a narrow egotism? Now we have flowers in our rooms and even some reproductions of paintings at the walls — the local people have given them to us. Many do not believe any more we're fascists, but some of our own dear countrymen do.

After dinner we stayed for a while in the dining-hall and listened to the Swedish radio. Now we already can understand something. We also have a chat with the men who work in the kitchen. Augusts Ivbulis tells us the adventures of his life.

Back at the barrack I hear Vincents Rimicans playing his kokle, and through the daily living I can feel a typical Latvian atmosphere. It is the same when I look at the green enamel teakettle with Latvian ornaments scraped on it.

Sometimes we fall asleep during the day, so at night we are not sleepy. Many are bored and do not know what to do with the time on their hands. Our debt to Sweden must be some hundred thousand kronas by now and growing daily. We would much rather work and

support ourselves than be supported by Swedish government. But now we just walk from room to room, from barrack to barrack, whistling and chatting. In the evenings we also have teasing, romping, and even pillow fights. After all — **we are overgrown children with our youth taken prematurely away from us.**

I think we should form a choir — to have something to do. We should imagine our free time would last **only two weeks** — then we would get more done.”

“**October 26.** Today we were digging holes for posts and building another barbed wire fence — for ourselves. Isn't it ridiculous? The other work we had for a while was better: we worked at the nearby army polygon, repairing targets.

Once, when we were marching by, some mines exploded at the polygon — about 100 meters from us. We calmly kept marching and did not miss a step while our guard panicked and hit the ground. We have observed the reservists that come here for training one month a year. They do not live here but get to go home every evening and on weekends. Even in prison we and Germans have a better military bearing than Swedes.

**If somebody attacked Sweden we would gladly help and fight against Germans, Russians, or the devil himself.**

Uldis, Elmars, and I — we three learn drawing from our artist Eriks Zhilinskis.

Yesterday our officers were moved to a different barrack. We refused to carry their stuff. Old colonel Gailitis was the only one we were willing to help out. As for the others — they are strong and healthy like us, they can carry their belongings themselves. I — a fellow of the 19th Division — wouldn't be a lackey. It is disgusting to toady.”

“**October 27.** I have already learned something in my drawing lessons — today I managed to draw a portrait of Ivbulis. Learning to draw means getting ready for my career as an architect. My goal is to study architecture after I'll get out of here. Besides, I want to learn to draw so I could draw the scenes of fighting in Kurzeme.

I'm definitely against the foul, vulgar language soldiers use. Not because I was such a saint but because we should keep up our soldiers' pride.

I would give anything to be able to wake up home one day instead of here. Adventure is fine, but this is going on too long.”

“**October 28.** There was an advertisement in the Latvian newspaper

"Latvju Zinas". An engineer K. Sirmais was trying to locate his wife and son in Sweden. He lives in Belgium. I know his son Alis — he remained in Kurzeme. At best he might have managed to get to Germany. Maybe his mother has saved him? I hope so. But I have no information I could pass on to Mr. Sirmais.

Here is an excerpt from another Latvian newspaper "Latvju Vards":

*Our Latvian Legion is with us in Sweden too. All men to the last are proud of their fights and full of contempt for those that try to gain with loud words or servitude the fame that can be gained only in a fight. Looking back the Legion is like a bird with a broken wing from the internment camp at its recent magnificent flight.*

Because of this article three outstanding Latvians were banished from Stockholm and had to move to periphery. They were the well known poet and the editor of the above newspaper Andrejs Eglitis, professor Straubergs, and Mr. Vilkančis.

**"November 2.** Our artist Zilinskis said today: "It is not good for a man to divide himself. It is better to go to one goal, and lucky is the man that has found his goal."

**"November 5.** Old colonel Gailitis has resigned from his position as the camp leader. Captain Keselis is taking over. But the boys do not want him. Our reaction is swift: we produce a petition with 30 signatures. Later my conscience bothers me for joining the others in a complaint to strangers about one of our own. "Everybody did it!" is not a good excuse. If others act like fools — do I have to do the same? We talk about capt. Keselis behind his back what we would not dare to say to his face."

**"November 7.** Captain Keselis has found out about the overall mood among the enlisted men. All respect to him — he resigns himself. Capt. Keselis is a freedom fight veteran from the year 1919, an honor-roll graduate from Latvian Military Academy, and a hero of the year 1941 guerrilla fights. He also led many enlisted men out of danger in Danzig and Bornholm, the signers of the petition among them.

Now the second lieutenant Pauls Lielkaja is elected camp leader.

Among the enlisted men there are some I do not like. Especially the two that tease me, calling me "four eyes" because of my glasses and "high brow". Finally I had no choice — I had to give them a knock-out. That helped; "big mouths" usually are cowards. **We are all not so pure and white, but we will remain united, and that's our strength. We will stick together even after being released.**" (It was that way even after 55 years — in the independent Latvia.)

"**November 8.** Now we are working at a saw-mill. This reminds me of the time we spent in Gotland. Some thought there was a difference where one had served — in Latvian Legion, Building Corps, Security Service, or Military Police. At that time we did not realize yet how little our fate depended on us. Now we have to laugh about it.

Colonel Gailitis said the best words about that: "It does not matter where one served; the important thing is — what he did there."

Right now the men are singing a church hymn: "Up there, behind the stars..." Sometimes singing helps more than anything else."

"**November 9.** This is late fall — it is very windy, and wet snow is already falling. It covers the trees. Soon it will be winter."

"**November 11.** In the Western countries this is known as Armistice Day or Veterans' Day in memory of World War I. We call it Veterans' Day too, and it is in memory of our freedom fights in year 1919. On November 11, 1919, the newly formed Latvian army chased the German army out of Riga. **On this day we remember all our soldiers. We are not allowed to let our flag fly as we used to do in our own country, but three Latvian men are carrying it.** Indeed, that much Latvian blood has been spilled as the two broad dark red stripes in our flag, and only that many have survived as the thin white stripe in the middle. Uldis is standing next to me and an elderly man that fought already in World War I. He, I — we all are Latvian army. **Next to us there are Lithuanian officers and Estonian Air Force helpers. We are the Baltic army.**

This is the first time I see the Latvian flag since November 18th last year. Such moments lift us above the material world and make one feel close to the divine.

Near by we hear some grenades exploding on the Swedish military polygon. Just like before the big battles last year. Stay awake!"

"**November 13.** Today I drew the map of Aestia (Baltia together with Baltrutenia). We have a choir now, and from my memory I wrote the song we — National Guard — once found in a prison cell: "Against the Evil Stranger". We often sang it at our "establishment" meetings. Now I gave it to the choir, and this song will be sung again. Lt. Presnikov will write the harmony for it. It will be part of the program we are preparing for the November 18th — the Latvian Day of Independence. I will recite a patriotic poem in that program. I'm also preparing a speech colonel Gailitis will give. I know what to say, but I'm not an orator."

"**November 18.** Today it is 27 years since the proclamation of the independent state of Latvia.

Colonel Gailitis gives an excellent speech: "Let us remain Latvians, stick together, and look forward to the future. Let us not split up and cater to strangers. We have lost our material goods, but we still have our Latvian heritage — our culture, our knowledge, and our ability to work. Nobody can take that away from us."

After that he read my lecture. To the 160 interned Baltic men I told about the Baltic unity and the Baltic flag in Gotland. Even Lithuanians and Estonians congratulated me afterwards.

Today Latvian Reverend Terins came to see us. He told "the clouds were gathering" around us. We already suspected it; we noticed the guard system becoming more and more strict. Even the church service is not allowed in Latvian — it has to be in German. One of our men translates it in Latvian.

After the service Reverend Terins soon left. He was afraid to talk to us personally because it was forbidden. But what if he had done it? I doubt he would have been arrested for it. And even if he had been — that would only meant he shared the fate of his flock.

We are upset about our fate, but colonel Gailitis tries to calm us. He uses logic and tells us there were 35,000 Baltic refugees in Sweden. It is impossible to extradite such a large number, even though the Soviet Union claims they are Soviet citizens and demands their extradition. We will all have the same fate.

My conclusion after all this is that one possibility is to be handed over to Soviets, the other one — to be shipped to the West. The least likely possibility is freedom, the most likely — that nothing will happen until spring. Maybe by that time they would have decided our fate. But it is bad that it is kept in secret."

At this point I would like to add excerpts from another diary. It was written by Oskars Daugulis — one of those that came to Sweden from Bornholm. So his adventures are different from mine. Even after coming to the camp Raenneslaett he reflects the daily events from a different aspect.

*"**March 28, 1945.** The only possibility to get out of the surrounded Danzig is across the sea. There are three small Latvian ships in Danzig harbor: "Alnis", "Potrimps", and "Augusts". We start our voyage in the afternoon, but the Soviets notice us and try to sink our ships from the air. They do not succeed because of German war ships that open heavy fire at their planes.*

*After a while we find ourselves back at the harbor because none of*

the ships have a compass. The officers start to argue among themselves. Some think we have to give up — we would not get anywhere with such small ships. However, finally we are on the right course."

"**March 29.** The sea is rough. Our small "Potrimps" is being rocked like a piece of wood. If the storm increases we might drown. In the afternoon we find "Augusts" has developed a leak. We move the men and coal aboard "Potrimps" and leave "Augusts" adrift. It is foggy now, so there is no danger from Soviet planes."

"**March 30.** At noon we see the shore but do not know where we have arrived. We move closer, and now we can see a Danish flag with the help of a binocular. At 5:00 p.m. we reach a fishermen's port — Svaneke. Here we drop the anchor. Soon the local Danes gather to look at us and stay there until late at night. We are a sight — dirty, exhausted, and tired to death."

"**March 31.** We find out it is the Danish island Bornholm we have arrived at. Early in the morning, already at dawn, the local people gather again at Svaneke harbor. We try to speak to them in German, but they only understand Danish. We look around. It is so strange to see neat, whole houses instead of ruins and not to hear the roar of airplanes and grenade explosions. This is a true harbor of peace.

Later we go ashore and see more wonders. Denmark is occupied by Germans, but we hardly see any German soldiers here. In grocery stores one can buy eggs, luncheon meat, cakes — all without food coupons but for Danish money only, and we do not have any. Finally we get our salary in Danish kronas, and now we go on a shopping spree. We buy milk, cream, and most of all eggs since tomorrow is Easter."

"**April 1.** This morning we all went to church and took part in the familiar Lutheran service. Then we returned to our ship, boiled the eggs, and peacefully celebrated Easter."

"**April 5.** Now we continue our voyage. We go to a larger harbor — Roenne. We arrive at 5:00 p.m. The city is larger too, but the local German commander does not give us permission to come ashore. His order is to return to Germany. We are outraged. What sense did it make to risk our lives, crossing the sea, if we have to go back? Danes start to gather at the coast, some of them wave to us."

"**April 6.** The next morning the situation has changed. Our captain

Keselis has reached an agreement with the commander. Our two ships need to be repaired, so for the time being we are allowed to stay here. At 12:00 p.m. we go to a sauna. After a good wash and getting rid of lice we feel again like human beings. The next morning we are placed in the hotel "Foenix."

"**April 7.** Danish people hate German uniforms. They are under German occupation which took place on April 10th, and they remember this date every year. We are given weapons and ammunition to make sure Danes would not surprise us unprepared. We are in a state of alarm, sleep with our clothes on, weapons ready. There is a double guard at our hotel."

"**April 10.** At night we heard a few shots. In the morning we found out two Germans were killed and a third one injured. Apart from that everything seems calm. But to be on the safe side we still sleep with our clothes on, ready for alarm."

"**April 16.** Today our training was resumed — soldiers are not supposed to be idle. We are sick of the infantry drill; the same thing is repeated again and again. They should rather train us to use tank destroyers (Panzerfaust). There are many among us that do not know this weapon yet.

We had not sung properly at the reveille; now, as a punishment, we have to do a night march — 30 kilometers! In the evening we are lined up with our back-packs and weapons. I'm the first of the machine-gun crew — I have to carry the gun that weighs 16 kg (34 lbs). When we have finished half of the trip I'm already tired, and my feet hurt from the hard pavement. But we still have to go back.

We get back at 3:00 a.m. At 7:00 a.m. we have to be ready for the drill, so we go to bed right away. We are being awakened at 6:30 a.m. I'm still sleepy, and my feet hurt terribly. Others do not feel any better. But in spite of our tiredness we march to the drill place with a song and do not fall out of step.

In the grocery stores one can buy very tasty cakes with whipped cream and without food coupons. But you may not speak in German. We show Danes our Latvian colors we wear on our sleeves, and they turn friendly. They explain: if we did not harm them, they would not harm us."

"**April 24.** Today the German commander of Bornholm came to see us. We are lined up, and he greets us and praises us as good soldiers.

He also wishes us a good rest at this peaceful place. However, we should soon return to Germany and continue the fight. We march by him in a dashing step but know positively we would not run back to hell — not now when the end of the war is already in sight.”

“**April 28.** Today we have a drill on the beach. There are many boats and small ships in the water. People are fleeing Germany. We talk to some that have come ashore, and they tell us the Soviets were already near Hela peninsula. There were a lot of civilians and soldiers that were being shot at from airplanes and artillery, and many killed; also many women were raped by Soviet soldiers.

Soon Roenne is full of German soldiers, and now you can not get anything in grocery stores. Germans have observed that Danes do sell the goods to us. So they come with us, and now the merchants do not sell the goods to us either.”

“**May 4.** Tonight I went to movies. Suddenly the performance was interrupted. Somebody came out in front of the audience and told something in Danish. People were shouting “Hurrah!” and running outside. I did not understand what had happened and wondered, if it might be a riot. Secretly I checked my pistol. Coming out of the movie theater, I saw the square full of people. They laughed at Germans but did not touch them. On the way to the hotel a Dane tried to explain to me that Hitler was dead **and soon the British army would be here. This makes me glad too.** But there is still an increased guard at the hotel.”

“**May 5.** We were given ammunition, and now we are in a state of alarm. In the evening we took positions at the sea-shore. Our orders are: **If the Soviets come near the island, we are supposed to fight to the last man. If it is the British army, we have to surrender without a fight.** So we keep guard all through the night, but nothing happens. At dawn Germans take over, and we can go home and rest. On our way we came across Danish guerrillas, but they did not touch us. **They explained they did not like the Soviets either.**”

“**May 6.** Today we moved back to our ships that are still in the harbor, next to the public beach. We sleep until evening, then take again our positions at the sea and all night long **we, Latvians, guard this Danish island against a Soviet attack.**”

“**May 7.** The morning is sunny and warm. Some of us already take a swim, then lie down in the sun. I have just come back from the night

watch. I eat my breakfast and go to sleep. It is 11:00 a.m. when I wake up. The day is still beautiful, and I decide to take a sun-bath later. But I notice some strange airplanes flying over the island.

Together with our hospital aide I go to town to do some shopping. He soon returns to the ship, but I'm delayed at a bakery. Suddenly there is a roar from low-flying planes and explosions. **Danes are surprised.** The sales-girls are screaming. When the attack is over I go back to our ship. **The town has changed completely. Some buildings are in ruins, some have lost their windows. There are also some casualties.** When I reach our ship I see aides carrying the wounded and the dead off the plank-way. I understand what had happened. When bombs started to fall some men had left the ship and run ashore. Here they met their death.

We see somebody in the water with a burning cigarette in his hand. It is instructor Pauzulis — dead. Private Vitalijs Dimants is holding on to a post and screaming for help. Stenders and Skromanis pull him out of the water. When they place him on a door his intestines roll out — his belly is split open. Later he died in the hospital. Even among those that were sun-bathing on the beach there are some dead and injured. After the attack there were five of us dead, and twelve that were seriously injured died later. The wounded were placed in the Bornholm hospital — nineteen all together. Nine Danes were killed in this Soviet attack on Roenne.

The Danish guerrillas come to our help with their ambulance. They tell us a bomb had hit the passenger ship "Rotna". The ship is burning now, and several people are dead and injured. Danes are outraged at the Soviets but show kindness to us with hot coffee and dry clothes.

Next we find out the Soviet army will occupy Bornholm. Now we can not wait any longer. The same evening we lift our anchors and take to the sea again.

(Later we heard the Danish hospital personnel had hidden the injured Latvians until a local communist had betrayed them to the occupants. So they all wound up in a GULAG concentration camp. Only the Latvian minister Rolle was saved by the Danish ministers. )

(The Soviets presented the Germans in Bornholm with an ultimatum to give up the island by 10:00 a.m. May 8th, but began the second bombardment of Roenne already at 9:45 a.m. So in the last hours of WWII — from 9:45 a.m. until 10:45 a.m. on May 8, 1945 (armistice was at 12:00 p.m.) — the Soviets bombed for the second time the largest city of Bornholm Roenne and another city Noeksje. Out of 3,700 buildings in Roenne only 300 remained intact but of 900 buildings in Noeksje — none.)

The sea is rough. Some of us refuse to go and warn others that it is impossible to brave the stormy sea with our small ships.

Last night I only slept a few hours, so now I simply lie down and go to sleep."

"**May 8.** My buddies wake me up when we are already near the Swedish coast. A motor-boat comes out to meet us. We have to give up our weapons, only then we can move on. We arrive at Ystad harbor. Swedish soldiers await us with bayonets but treat us kindly. They show us a place where we can stay, bring us some straw to lie upon, and give us a good lunch. Such a three-course meal we have not had for a long time. Later there is a three-course dinner too. After dinner we soon fall asleep and try to regain the sleep we have missed during the war."

"**May 9.** Today we have to be deloused. At the same time we are tested for infectious diseases. The local Swedes are friendly, but after all the procedures we find ourselves behind a barbed wire fence. In these barracks we are together with Germans and are guarded as prisoners-of-war.

Then comes in a Latvian civilian and asks about his son — a Legionary. Unfortunately none of us knows him, so we can not give the anxious father any **information about his son's whereabouts. There are so many desperate parents like him — with the same question.** Is somebody asking about me? I do not even know where my father is now, but my mother was deported on June 14, 1941. Are they still alive? Do they think of me and pray for me?

We are curious about our future fate. The overall opinion is that **we would be kept in quarantine, then released** to work in the woods or as farm hands. We hear that there are about 5,000 Latvian civilian refugees and 30,000 Estonians in Sweden. We are lucky to have found our refuge here. Unbelievable!

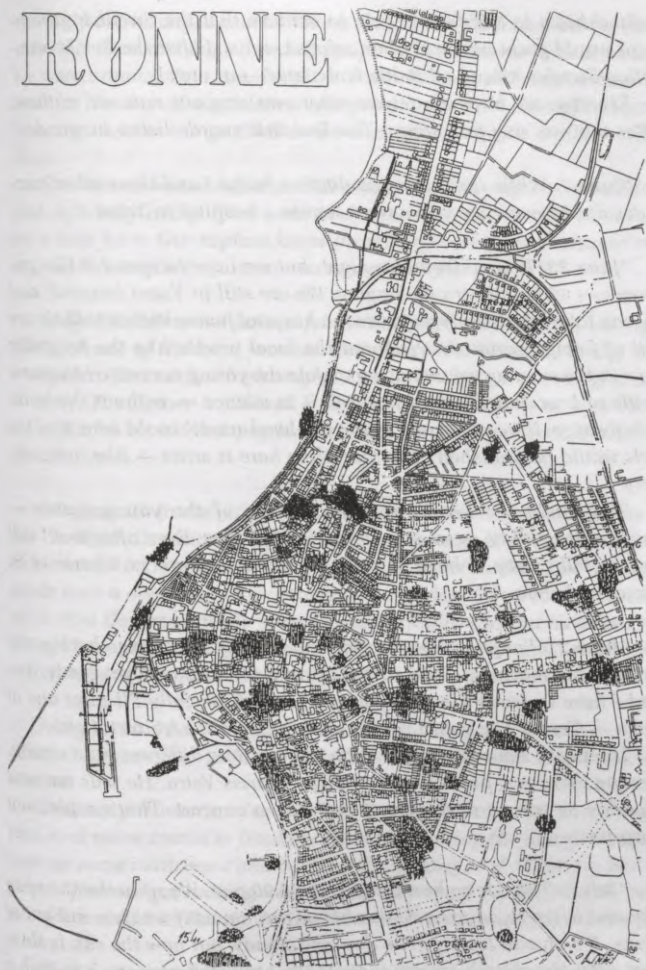
Now we are already used to the good meals here. There is only one thing wrong: Swedes add sugar to everything."

"**May 10.** We are being shipped to a different camp. We travel in comfortable railway cars, but armed guards are with us. We arrive at another camp where we have to lie in tents, but the tents are heated. More we mind the barbed wire fence again. Here too we are together with Germans. They had arrived a couple of weeks before us.

When we watch the Swedish guards, we feel as if they had taken over and relieved us — not for a couple of hours but forever. We can sleep, eat, rest — the Swedish soldiers guard us against all dangers! We feel like lords.

Our captain Keselis has written to the former Latvian ambassador

# RÖNNE



The main town in Denmark's island Bornholm with 3700 houses. It was bombarded by Soviet aviation in the last hour of World War II 8th May 1945 from 9:45 until 10:40 or by Soviet time 10:45 until 11:45 (Armistice began at 12:00 o'clock that day). 3400 houses were destroyed or damaged, but in another town — Nexjoe all 900 houses. 10 Danes died, some dozens were wounded.

After the Ultimatum the island's German commandant cap. von Kamtz ordered to evacuate people from all the towns and willages of the island

in Stockholm to ask for his help to achieve that the Swedish government would grant us the civilian refugee status. (After the Soviet occupation Sweden closed all Baltic embassies — at once!)

Evenings we have the retreat where we sing our national anthem. After that we sing folk songs. The Swedish guards listen in wonder."

"**June 7.** While in quarantine doctors found I and three other comrades did have germs, so we were sent to a hospital in Ystad."

"**June 23.** It is midsummer night, but we have to spend it like prisoners — without beer and singing. We are still in Ystad hospital, and we can take a walk only as far as the hospital fence. We are told we are full of foreign germs that frighten the local people like the Judgment Day. In the evening we manage to cajole the young nurses to bring us a bottle of beer. But we have to drink it in silence — without the traditional songs. If we made any noise, the head-nurse would hear, and the girls would be punished. The discipline here is strict — like in a nunnery.

That night the head-nurse is off. One of the young nurses — Anne — is on duty, so we stay up until 11:00 p.m. Even after that I still cannot fall asleep. I have to think of those that are in Siberia or in occupied Latvia. "

"**June 27.** I'm free of germs now and healthy. Have to go back to the camp. This morning I had to get up at 3:00 a.m. and get ready. Too bad I have to leave the nice young nurses. Especially I'll miss one of them — Gerda. The guard comes, and we go to the train station.

Later I see some Latvian civilian refugees at a different train station. Among them is a popular opera singer Mariss Vetra. He tells me next Monday he will be at our camp and give a concert. That's a pleasant surprise."

"**July 3.** There is a church service at 6:00 p.m. We sit under the open sky and listen to minister Slokenbergs' sermon as if we were cut out of stone. It's an odd feeling. The day was cloudy, but now the sun is shining. After the church service there is the promised concert. It is such a long time since we last heard a concert.

Later we have our picture taken together with the soloist. Mariss Vetra wants to talk to us, but captain Keselis takes him away. We are upset about it.

Today we heard rumors we would be released already this month. This is good news."

**July 6.** Evenings I usually take a walk along the fence. On the other side of it there are some Swedish people. They come to look at us as if we were animals in a zoo. I look at them with envy — they're free. We wait for the day of our release with great impatience. We talk about it mornings and evenings. This is the main thing on our minds — freedom.

Sometimes we are sullen and ill-tempered. Probably out of boredom and safe, easy living. If we were in danger and hardships we would not have time for it. Our captain keeps promising we would be released this month, but maybe he just says so to make us feel better."

**July 27.** Today we have a job: with the guard watching we dig a ditch for one of the local farmers. Everybody has his norm to dig, and we work so fast we finish already at 11:00 a.m. But we can not go home so early. The farmer is pleased with our work and treats us with sweet rolls. Six for each! We repay his kindness by digging one more ditch in the afternoon."

**August 10.** In the name of us all capt. Keselis has written letters to the Swedish Department of Defense, requesting that our two small ships would be returned to us so we could travel further. But we never made such a decision; we want to stay in Sweden. So we too wrote a letter to that Department. As soon as Keselis found this out he called me out of the tent, cursed at me, and threatened to arrest me. Let him punish me, but I wouldn't beg for mercy!"

**August 20.** I have dyed my German army uniform, forced on me by "Fritzs". (Equivalent to "Krauts".) That's the only way to get civilian clothes.

Yesterday it was raining all day. Our tent is old with a worn-out roof, and water comes in from the sides too. To stop the deluge we have torn up some mattresses and covered the leaking roof. When we had to get our food we got soaking wet. And no way to get dry because the tent is cold. Just like in Russia during the war. But here at least we are fed well.

That was yesterday, but today it is sunny again. The weather here changes quickly. In the evening Germans put on a variety show. We do not understand all of it, but we do get some laughs. This is our only entertainment."

**August 27.** A year ago on this date I stood guard at a Soviet POW camp. Who could have known that after a year I'll be behind a barbed

wire fence myself! At that time there was still a hope to return to Latvia. Now our country is under the red monster.

Nights are getting colder, and our tent does not have a pot-belly stove like the others, so at night we feel cold.

Anxiously we are waiting for the outcome of Potsdam conference. Will the Western allies order the Soviets out of the Baltic States? We also talk about the atomic bomb. One should be dropped on Kremlin to wipe out Stalin! And if there was another war, I would go with great pleasure even in the middle of night to fight for my country."

**"September 17.** A Red Cross representative has come to our camp. We expect to find out from him about our status. In the evening we find out he had not said anything. So our hopes lasted only one day. We read in the Latvian newspaper about another concert to come. There are rumors about a Latvian division that has been organized in Germany with a strict military training."

**"September 19.** Today came our expected guests — opera singer Marija Vintere and Latvian minister Terins. Even the Swedish personnel attended the concert. They are all favorably disposed towards us. After that a movie was shown — "Beautiful Sweden". Unfortunately it was interrupted by a rain shower."

**"September 23.** Today we found out we would be separated from Germans. That is already a step forward and long expected. But we still do not hear anything about being released. Was it only a dream? Today we had another church service. After the service we were allowed to talk to the minister. We hear rumors that Stalin had resigned, but I do not believe it. **He is the root of all evil.**"

**"September 25.** Today I woke up at 4:30 a.m. There was a big noise in our camp because Germans were leaving. They did it with music and singing. I'm glad we are finally rid of them. We hear we would soon be transferred too — to a different camp."

**"September 28.** Sometimes I listen to radio from Latvia. But it is all in Russian. It seems there are only a few Latvians left."

**"October 1.** It is almost five months since we have been in the camp. We still do not hear anything about our release. We work but do not get paid for it. We have been promised each a private suit, but by now we know how little we can rely on Swedish promises. We hear those inter-

ned Latvians that came to Gotland had received salary for their work. **We can write letters only in German — the censorship does not allow to write in Latvian.** We hear the Soviets had protested against our release. Swedes are in fear of the Soviets, that's why we have to languish here."

"**October 12.** Tonight the long expected Gotland group arrived. This group is much smaller than ours. We came from Germany but they from Kurzeme. Only a few managed to get across the sea. Among them are also our brothers Lithuanians and Estonians.

It is already dark; the camp is lighted by flood-lights. The arrived soldiers get out of the trucks. They are grave and silent. Then the gates open, and we can meet them. One of them — private Silamikelis — sees his childhood friend Uldis Berzs. They hug each other and hardly can hold back tears.

We talk late into the night. About battles in Kurzeme and Pomerania. And about the voyage across the sea. We also remember with longing and sadness the erstwhile happy life in Riga and other places in Latvia. But it can not all be told in one night. We will still be talking about it for days."

"**October 13.** On this day a year ago the Red army took Riga. This morning, upon awakening, I listened to the Latvian radio. A communist functionary Kruminsh bragged about his bravery in war. He had suffered a concussion but still worked the anti-tank gun. Eight men held back eight attacks! Well — such fairy tales he can tell his children but not us, experienced veterans. When I think of Latvians in Latvia and Siberia, my heart grows heavy.

Today we were given old Swedish army clothes without insignia — from the year 1912. The jacket and pants are brown, the overcoat gray. They have folds in back that can be unbuttoned, and then the coat becomes a blanket. The white fur winter caps look great but they do not cover ears. For that there are leather ear-shields that can be let down. Boots are regular ones, not as good as German army boots — long boots or boots with gaiters.

Our barracks we put together ourselves; now we do not have to live in tents any more. We decided to put aside part of our pay and paint the inside walls and ceilings with Latvian ornaments."

"**October 15.** Tonight we heard the interned Germans in their camp had had a fight with communist toadies, the so called "anti-fascists", or maybe true democrats. Two men have head injuries, one is unconscious."

**"October 18.** Captain Keselis resigned from his post as a liaison officer between us and the Swedish government. In his place comes colonel Gailitis from the Gotland group. He is a very kind, understanding, and helpful person."

**"November 2.** Yesterday we were given radios. We put them to use right away. I'm surprised we're allowed this enjoyment. This morning I was awakened by music, and it gives a home-like feeling. For a while we can forget we are behind a barbed wire fence.

American president Harry Truman has said all countries should be free. We too want nothing more than to liberate our country and the other Baltic States. To throw off the yoke of communism we are ready to fight again — right away.

Today I secretly sent a letter to my friend with somebody transporting food. It is forbidden to do so — all letters have to go through the censorship. If anybody gets caught doing otherwise he's punished. But we are already punished — put behind a barbed wire because we fought for our native land. Additional punishment does not frighten us any more."

**"November 4.** A Lithuanian minister came to the camp this morning. Although he had a permission from the Staff the camp commandant did not allow him to enter the camp. Acquaintances came to see some of the interned men but were not permitted to visit. We were very shocked and felt like criminals."

**"November 11.** This date was known as Armistice Day. Later it was changed to Veterans' Day. Latvians celebrate it too, especially remembering those that fought in our freedom fights after World War I. Here in the camp we get ready for the celebration and ask the camp commander for his permission to sing our national anthem that begins with words "God, bless Latvia!" But we do not get the permission. In this Christian country we are not allowed to pray for Latvia!

We did it anyway. No power on earth can forbid that. A Swedish officer was present. Maybe he did not understand, but maybe he just pretended not to understand.

The Swedish flag is flying from the flagpost. Three men are holding the Latvian flag; we are not allowed to fly it. Colonel Gailitis gives a speech. Since the celebration takes place outside there are many local people behind the fence. They watch our celebration with great interest. For them it is so strange and unusual."

**"November 16.** Latvian general Tepfers has come to see us. He congratulates us with the Independence Day which is only two days away. But he does not tell anything about our future fate.

Swedes apparently think the barbed wire fence and the armed guards are not enough. Now there are dogs tied to the fence posts. Of course, dogs are more alert and hear better than humans. One would think Swedes had never had criminals as dangerous as us!

Our mood is sad. The only thing to cheer us up is the promise of a church service and a concert by Latvian singers on November 18th. But we can never be sure if even this is not forbidden at the last moment."

**"November 18.** After the church service and the concert we have our holiday feast. Our mood gradually improves, and the light-hearted Latvian soldiers' songs begin. Cheer up — we have been in worse troubles than these!"

**"November 19.** Despite their indigence Latvian civilian refugees have donated clothes and shoes. They are of various quality and value, so we organize a lottery. I have a good luck — I get a pair of brand new sports shoes. But another man gets a pair of old working boots; besides, they are too small for him. Shame on those Latvians that make fun of us! But it is also possible that somebody took a pair of good shoes and substituted them with this good-for-nothing pair on the way."

**"November 20.** Today we worked again at the shooting range. When we returned to the camp we found the gates locked. Later we found out the Latvian general Tepfers had come here a few days ago without a permission. He had a permission to come here on November 18th, but he came on the 16th. Some crime! But the Swedish administration is very upset. We are told the inner gate that connects our barracks with the dining-hall and officers' quarters would be locked now. As for the outer gates there is always a guard standing there, so it does not really matter whether they are locked or not — we can never leave the camp on our own.

We also hear the guard that let the general in might be sentenced to several months in prison."

## VI IN SWEDEN — IN FIGHT

In this chapter I have used the excerpts from my diary alternately with the excerpts from Oskars Daugulis' diary — to keep the right sequence of events.

**“November 21.** Damned — we will be extradited! One of us — Eriks — called out at the end of the barrack: “Hey, guys, we’re goners — Swedes will hand us over to Ivan!” He had just heard it over the radio. What to do now? Do I prepare to run away? Must put my belongings in order, destroy excessive papers, draw a map.

One thing is clear to everybody: we will resist with all our might. **They will not take us peacefully like lambs for slaughter.”**

*“November 21. (O.D.) We hear over the radio news broadcast we’ll be extradited. Also the Swedish newspaper “Stockholm Tidningen” says the same. Right away we prepare a petition where we explain the difference between the “Latvian Legion” and German “Waffen-SS”. If Swedes ignore our petition, then the Soviets will only get our dead bodies. We all have strictly decided so. Tomorrow we start a hunger strike. And everybody signed the petition.”*

**“November 22. We do start a united fight — a hunger strike.** We have elected a committee to represent us. As leaders of the committee we have chosen the young and energetic officer and physician, speaker of several languages, Dr. Helmars Eichfuss and the Lithuanian doctor Vincas Zenkevicius. We have also written a memorandum to the King of Sweden and the Swedish Parliament. In this memorandum we protest against transgressing the rights of refugees and interned persons. We ask to release us from captivity since war has ended already a long time ago and to give us permission to emigrate to other countries. The Soviet Union has simply occupied our country; we are not Soviet citizens.

We also decide what to do if more than six Swedes would come into the camp and start to transport us:

1. undress and naked tie up ourselves with a barbed wire;

2. burn our clothes;

3. commit suicide.

**And we do not tremble, thinking of this.**

We write letters to everybody we can think of. They go to England, France, the Red Cross, the United Nations, etc. Latvian civilians in Sweden help all they can. They send letters and go personally to foreign embassies in Stockholm. Even Latvian Lutheran Church is involved.

Tonight the Latvian Baptist minister Brother Lamberts held a service for us. He is really like a brother. How on earth did he manage to get inside the camp?"

*"November 22. (O.D.) This morning we started the hunger strike in protest against our extradition. Already at 6:00 a.m. we handed in our announcement to the camp commander. However, we still go to work. And we behave — we keep order and do not say a word against Swedes. If we had to die, it would not be a simple, ordinary suicide — we will die for our Latvian cause.*

*We are still strong enough to work. With all the tension I do not even feel hungry. The others are the same — they are alert and energetic. The long waiting and uncertainty is over; now we are involved in a fight again. **The local people have completely changed their attitude.** At first they called us fascists, and kids threw stones and mud at us. Now they ride their bicycles along the fence and are ready to warn us if the transport would be coming after us. A Latvian woman sent in a coded note for second lieutenant Raiskums.*

*The Swedish government is in an awkward position. Something like this has never happened in this country before.*

*The camp commander has become very kind and helpful. Probably he has finally understood we're not criminals. At 8:00 p.m. a Latvian Baptist minister Lamberts came to us. He remembered us in this hour of need.*

*Beginning with tonight we are allowed to use only one of our barrack doors. On the inside of the fence there is our patrol marching along it — to make sure somebody did not try to escape or do anything else foolish."*

*"November 23. We march along the breakfast table in silence, not touching any food. Our fate will be told us today at 2:00 p.m. But it is all the same to us. We only have two choices. One would be easier for us, but the other is more meaningful — it is to fight. One way or the other — **the Soviets would not get us alive.** For men it is more fitting to die in combat.*

Yes, the other is the right way — to show the world how horrible the communist system is, to wake up those that believe it is something good from a rosy dream. We are happy to fight not only for our lives but to help other Baltic men too. People will talk about us.

Maybe it was for a purpose that our lives were spared on the battleground of Kurzeme and on the stormy sea. **Now, in front of the whole world, our sacrifice will be more meaningful.** Despair? No — we are not desperate; we know what we're doing.

Yesterday corporal Osvalds Licis' wife came from Gotland. Today is the third day of our hunger strike, and it is getting easier. The first day I was hungry, yesterday dizzy. We chew salt crystals to fool our hunger. One of us even tried to lick tooth-paste. **But nobody tries to snatch a bite to eat secretly. We starve ourselves to save our lives.** Dr. Slaidins comforts us that it would get easier all the time because the gastric juices would not be secreted any more as long as we do not eat anything. He also tells it isn't hard to die of starvation. A pleasant consolation.

It is interesting to describe feelings. This time I'm not delving into prayers as I did once on the battle field.

Nobody is allowed to see us. Now even the curious onlookers are allowed near by any more. Only reporters and photographers with special permits are let by the fence. They bring red and white chrysanthemums — our national colors. Later in the evening we receive more flowers. Holy smoke! For the retreat we will appear decorated with flowers."

*"November 23. (O.D.) Today we write letters — maybe the last ones. In the evening there is a church service again (Lutheran) with the Holy Communion. Together with reverend Terins a Latvian Catholic priest Vilnis has come. He will stay here until Sunday. Now we know for sure we would be handed over to the Soviets.*

*We made a collect to send telegrams to King of Sweden and British and American Embassies. The hunger strike will go on — until we will die."*

Here is an excerpt from a letter Uldis Berzs wrote to his teacher Marta Ziverte in Stockholm.

*"Raenneslaett, November 23. Alea iacta est!(The dice is cast!)*

*Have there not been enough atrocities, are there too few murders, too few tortures — is there a need for more blood?*

*But they will not take us alive! If there really is no justice in the world, if this humane country really would hand us over to the Soviets, they will only receive our dead bodies. This is our clear and final deci-*

sion. We will continue the hunger strike until we get our justice. If they took us by force, we would take off our clothes and burn them. We would tie ourselves to beds with barbed wire.

If all was lost, the last way out is to take our own lives and die an honorable death. This is the last battle the Latvian soldiers will fight.

Please, tell about this to other Latvians. And many thanks for your moral support. With kindest regards — Uldis Berzs. P.S. Please, excuse me for writing with a pencil”

“**November 24.** Yesterday it was announced the Swedish government stood with the extradition decision, but our cause would still be examined. The hope is slim.

If we stuck together till the end, if we were released and allowed to go to the West, then it would be our victory. Already the whole world sees our action. But if we lacked unity and will power, if some of us willingly stepped aboard the Soviet ship, if some tried to desert and leave the camp — that would show we were not real soldiers and were unable to endure till the end. And then we would be losers.

We live as if on a stage. In addition to the double barbed wire fence, guards, and dogs now there are a dozen of flood-lights and a lamp on every post. Today Germans have started their hunger strike — they would be extradited too.

The churches of the world are upset, including Vatican. A Swedish women's organization sent us flowers in Swedish national colors — blue and yellow. The King of Sweden is “bombed” with protests against our extradition. He had **asked his lawyers whether he had a right to veto the government decision.** In the history of Sweden it has seldom happened, but it would mean so much to us.

Yesterday the church service, the minister's words, the Holy Communion, and flowers — all this was resembling a funeral. After the service reverend Terins could not stay with us — he was expected at a dinner party. On the third day of hunger strike he tells us about having dinner!

But let us not feel sorry for ourselves. Better to sing a reckless soldiers' song: “When I'll be dead, my grave will be bare; who will put a flower there? I'll try to get up, if only I dare, to put myself a flower there.”

This helps to keep up the spirit. It seems to me people outside worry more about us than we do ourselves. My friend Uldis asks me: “Say — am I getting interestingly pale already?”

“**November 24. (O.D.)** Today we did not let the Swedish commander into the camp; he had more than six men with him that was the limit

specified in our memorandum. Then only the commander and a doctor came in. The latter told us tomorrow we would have an overall medical examination to check if anyone had any ill effects from the hunger strike.

More flowers came during the evening. Even the guards are on our side. The **12th Jencheping-Kalmar Regiment with the commander colonel Verner Goet and the 2nd Jeta Pioneer Unit with colonel Inge Hellgren protested against our shameful deportation.** After this they were immediately replaced by policemen, and both commanders were punished. But they saved the honor of the Swedish army."

"**November 25.** Today I wrote a petition to the King of Sweden. I do not know enough Swedish yet, but I wrote it in German. This reminds me of the year 1929 when the king Gustav V visited Riga and I, a five year old, stood with other children and greeted him with a little Swedish flag.

I also wrote a letter to Mr. Kruminsh, my friend Valdis' father, and called him "uncle". Maybe as a relative he could do something for me? We all try to grab at the last straw.

Some of us are so weak they have been taken to the hospital in Eksjoe. But they continue the hunger strike even there. Really dare-devils — they are some guys! It gives us fresh enthusiasm.

We talk among ourselves that our last resort would be suicide. But how to accomplish it? We decide to fasten a razor-blade to our bodies with a band-aide. One of us has a pocket knife, but it probably will be confiscated.

We hear people in Stockholm talk a lot about us. Students stage protest demonstrations in front of the King's palace. Gustav V has received thousands of letters and telegrams, even from abroad. A member of Swedish Parliament prof. Lundkvist has said that in seventeen years he had been at his post there had not been such a **shameful action by the government.** All Swedish churches pray for us. Many thanks! Latvian ministers visit us. Especially kind and cordial is the Catholic priest Vilnis; the Lutheran minister Sakarnis is more distant.

The flood-lights that light our camp are like stage lights — they have put us at the world attention. We had an assembly where doctor Eichfuss and colonel Gailitis talked to us and urged us to be strong, brave, relentless. We wished them the same. Especially I liked the colonel's speech. He talked about being on world stage and about the spirits of ancient Latvian warriors.

Now we have forgotten the differences we had with captain Keselis; we ask him to return to us. He does — and not to the officers' house but to our barrack. **When facing danger Latvians know how to be united.**

The guys talk about the King — how hard it is for him; he is old, and he has to answer about everything going on in Sweden, including mistakes made by the government.

I have made a will about the few worldly goods I have. I want Mr. Kruminsh to get them. I sent again letters to Germany and also an advertisement to the Latvian newspaper in Germany that I'm looking for my relatives. Maybe my father will see it? But maybe it is better for them not to know about my fate."

*"November 25. (O.D.) Nothing has changed. Today is Sunday. Outside the fence there have gathered many of our supporters with flowers, little flags, and posters, but they are not allowed to come closer than 200 meters from the fence. We and our behavior — all this is a big sensation for them.*

*We hear about demonstrations on our behalf in Stockholm. Even factory workers have gone on strike. And churches all over Sweden pray for us.*

*We feel like we had been sentenced to death. I have made up my mind: if they came after me, I would kill myself. But the starvation has made me tired. Sometimes I have a headache or a gnawing sensation in my stomach."*

**"November 26.** Corporal Gustavs Vilks tried to kill himself last night. He thrust a pocket-knife into his chest but missed the heart and is still alive. The second lieutenant Arturs Plume had cut open his stomach and is unconscious. They both were taken to the hospital. Dear God, help them survive!

Some more men are taken to the hospital because of their physical condition. But they continue the hunger strike in the hospital.

I'm weak too. I have to get up very slowly or I get dizzy. I have some discomfort in my stomach. But I do not feel a sharp hunger any more. The first two days I could not think of anything but food. I could not even concentrate on reading. The only substance we take in small amounts is salt. I'm not sure if it really helps — maybe the effect is just psychological.

I want to hold out three more days. I have to! But will it be enough to get any results? Even if we continued the hunger strike, we would still be alive for some time. Who will hold out longer — we or the Swedish government?

In the morning about 20 reporters had come to the camp. Uldis and I decide to give them some sensational material. We take off our clothes except underwear, untie our shoe-laces, cover ourselves with a bed-sheet,

and stagger outside to the toilette near the fence. At the toilette door we reel. The reporters run to the fence, take pictures and notes. But not all of them; some wave their posters to cheer us up, others throw flowers over the fence.

Inside the outhouse we have some laughs, then we go back — this time not staggering so much.

Yes, we have not lost our sense of humor yet. Uldis has three ideas about what we should do:

1. to sneak into the church and die there; (no good — we will be fished out anyway.)

2. to pretend to be crazy; (no use — even such ones will be extradited.)

3. to bequeath our dead bodies to the Swedish Academy; (will be afraid to accept because the corpses are the property of the Soviet Union.)

The whole free world has news about us on the front pages. The Soviet radio threatens to punish us as “war criminals”. Probably the Red press does the same — bragging, but not on the first pages.

In the evening we had a visit from Brother Lamberts and a Swedish minister. Brother Lamberts has the right words to strengthen us: “Man is thinking, God is doing — everybody has his fate, and so have whole groups of people.”

*“November 26. (O.D.) In the morning reverend Lamberts’ daughters had come to the camp, but we were not allowed to talk to them. Some more guys were taken to the hospital. Our number here is dwindling, but nobody thinks of breaking the hunger strike.*

*Some members of the Parliament come and take pictures: the oldest interned — second lieutenant Ernests Kalsons, 63; Dr. Helmars Eichfuss, 30; and the youngest one — sixteen year old Sasha Austrums.*

*The guards are not army men any more; the Swedish government does not trust them because they are friendly to us. Now we are guarded by policemen in black uniforms.”*

*“November 27. Today one of us — Ozolinsh — has his birthday. Some birthday! But Uldis and I give him a present: a book titled “Meness upe” (Moon River). It is a book of good poetry that gives us strength. But the flood-lights remind us of the reality. We are close to the border of life and death.”*

*“November 27. (O.D.) Our situation has improved. A commission of doctors has come from Stockholm. They checked us all and pro-*

*mised that we would not be extradited. Since I'm still under the age Mr. Grins (one of Latvian civilian refugees in Sweden) has agreed to be my guardian. Such guardians have been appointed to all those that are under the age."*

**"November 28.** Last night lieutenant Oskars Lapa killed himself. He had cut open his arteries and thrust a knife right into his heart. Recently he found out his wife and children were safe in Germany. At least they will be able to find his grave.

More than a month ago a group of interned Latvian soldiers went in line over the Raenneslaett hill; just like in Kurzeme when they went to combat. This is the peaceful Sweden — will their rows dwindle here as well as over there? Who will be the next? And when will it end?

I give the Lithuanian major Pranas Ambraziunas the map of Aestia. He shakes my hand in gratitude.

No, this is not the end yet. This is not the last battle for our country!

**Later that evening.** We are in Oerebro hospital. Saved! At least for the time being.

The government representative declared we were so weak we had to be hospitalized and ordered doctors to examine us. Of course, we agreed to be "sick" and became "sicker" by the minute. But we let the doctors into the camp only after we were assured by the government official and clergymen we would not be extradited and taken to the Soviet ship. They explained hospitalization was the only way to save us, Baltic men, and to separate us from Germans. Besides, this way we gained some time.

Ambulances were taking us to hospitals. We looked through windows at the outside world that seemed so far away. We saw bright city lights, merry young people — boys and girls — talking, laughing, eating, and hugging. We also saw well dressed elderly people taking a walk in all their dignity.

We arrived at Oerebro — a city of 50,000 in the middle of Sweden. Our environment — the moon-lit shore of a lake and some meadows with small bushes. **But under these meadows no Swedish soldiers have found their final resting place. While the meadows and lake-shores of my country — how many of my friends remained there! And I barely escaped the same fate.**

At the hospital we are received by Swedish nurses and a Latvian physician Dr. Viklands. **One of the nurses, young and beautiful, took off my boots, although I did not want to let her. Then she washed my feet and wept over us. Her name is Aina Eriksen, and I still feel the touch of her hand on my cheek and forehead. Aina will forever remain**

for me as the symbol of a real Sweden. Yes, this too is Sweden that receives us with kindness and love. These are Swedish maidens who "take the shoes off their tired feet", as it is said in a poem Latvian poetess Ilze Kalnare has dedicated to Latvian Legionaries. Here we are — some of them; dirty, after a week of starvation, weak, and desperate."

"**November 29.** We are in isolation, and all our belongings have been taken away. If Dr. Viklands had not warned beforehand, I would not have my writing block and pen any more. All our belongings are in the hospital basement now, and we have no access to them. We are ten men in this room, ten men in another, but a policeman Sjoestroem is on duty all the time."

"**December 1.** In camp Raenneslaett, on November 28 when we were brought here, we were separated from those we kept together with when coming out of the barracks. This was a smart, cunning plan, organized beforehand. We thought we would be put all in the same hospital, so we did not protest. Nobody told us we would be isolated and distributed in small groups between various hospitals.

The government representative and the Swedish clergymen assured us the hospital was our only refuge. They gave us their word of honor we would not be extradited. Maybe they really believed it?

They were right — we were not taken to a Soviet ship yet. **What the Swedish government did not dare to do forcibly they tried to accomplish by cheating us.** If we had known their plan, we would have refused to leave the camp — it was our fortress. But our resistance still is not broken."

"**December 2.** There are good news and bad news. Our only hope now is to stay at the hospital as long as possible. The Latvian physician has been fired, and nobody is allowed to see us — not even clergymen. The radios have been taken away from us, and it is strictly forbidden to give us newspapers. There is a police patrol guarding the hospital all the time. But they have forgotten about the nurses! The nurses tell us everything — in half-Swedish, half-German, half-English, and we understand everything. I don't know how, but we do. All our wishes they read in our eyes. There is only one thing we have differences about, and that is the thermometer. We are used to put the thermometer under the armpit, but here they treat even grown-ups like babies: one hand yanks off the blanket, the other hand turns the patient, and the thermometer goes in per anum. When we protest and ask the temperature to be taken our

way, they tell us a Swedish proverb: "Do not come in a strange church with your own hymn — you have to sing the psalm that is written!"

The nurses help us to keep on the hunger strike. The administration has told them to entice us with tempting meals, but they don't."

*"December 4. (O.D.) The hunger strike has lasted for two weeks now. At night I felt nauseated and could not sleep. Tonight it happened again, and I almost fainted. I received an injection for the heart — it helped. There are no changes in our situation, so we have to continue the hunger strike."*

"December 4. The nurses have put to shame the policemen, and they move out of our rooms and into the hallway. At the other end of the hallway there is a room with ten more interned men. We are not allowed to visit them, and now we do not have the strength to walk there anyway. We do not even walk to the toilette any more but use urinals, given to us by the kind nurse's aide Mrs Carlsson. We do not even remember when we last had a bowel movement. As soon as we got here we were "delighted" with an enema. The hospital doctor grumbled that it should have been done at the very beginning of the hunger strike.

The nurses tell us everything, but even they do not know anything new. They just tell us to continue the strike and "hoppas" (hope) for the best."

"December 6. We are getting injections for improving the heart. I don't need it. My heart works perfectly. Looks like the rest of us don't need heart medicine either. But the government is very afraid any of us might die.

That time is still far ahead when we would eat again. Now we regret we did not eat more before. On the other hand — it seems odd now that a person has to eat every day, and even three times a day! If I still live after this, maybe I should have such a starvation regimen once a year to purge my body.

We are in isolation, and we are told we're the only ones still continuing the hunger strike. But the nurses tell us the truth — **the Baltic men continue the hunger strike everywhere**. This keeps up our will power and fighting spirit.

When I sit up I feel dizzy. I have no pain except an occasional headache. Maybe this is the result of cooling myself in the ditch at the Martebo peat swamp after a hot work-day. Or maybe because in the tent I slept near the entrance? But I take no medicine."

**"December 8.** The young boy Oskars Daugulis has a critically low pulse — only 39 beats per minute. He is put into a separate room. There he is given heart medicine. **He still refuses to stop the hunger strike.**

Captain Keselis and Dr. Eichfuss on December 6th have even given up water to receive an answer sooner. Maybe we should do the same? We discuss it and finally decide to wait for the news from others. (Capt. Keselis, instructor Chikste, and instructor Kamerilovs were fasting for 40 days!)

I received a letter from Mr. Kruminsh. He is willing to be my guardian. We do not expect much from this, but at least it is something that is being done on our behalf. We have given an oath not to try to escape individually, **but our goal is for us all to get free. All or nothing — the justice is on our side.**

In another hospital in Kalmar a nurse Margit Karlsen had organized an escape to Denmark for six men that were placed there. At midnight all the guards had disappeared, but the men refused to go because all 15 men from this hospital could not escape. Besides, individual flight from our fight was considered a desertion. "All free or no one" — that was the decision."

In my dreams I'm often in Riga and at home. Riga is free, and people are joyful, although poorly dressed. I'm waiting for the night to escape the captivity in a dream.

Supply sergeant Kaneps tells about meals in Hotel de Rome in Riga and in Moscow. We listen with our mouths open. Soups have been not with meat but with mushrooms. We would like to try it. And we long for sauerkraut that people here do not know. In the evening we always talk about eating. If you talk about it you don't feel hungry any more. Especially in the morning.

At night I have been in a different world. Then I wake up in the evil reality and remember: "Oh, yes, I'm in Oerebro — fasting and sentenced to death."

Another dream: I publish in Latvia a book about the Baltic nations. Culture, history, many maps and sketches but few figures. These books I distribute for free to Baltic friends."

**"December 9.** Today we received news that an allied commission would interrogate us to find out who were drafted and who enlisted willingly, and why; also if our relatives suffered repressions from communists. The above categories would not be considered a part of German army. Does this mean we have won? And when will this commission come?"

"December 10. Dr. Eichfuss has decided the hunger strike has lost its meaning and has resigned as the strike leader. But he himself is continuing it. Since December 6th he does not even drink water any more. We hear in another hospital men have given up hunger strike after 18 days. But others still continue it. Lately we are given sugar water instead of the usual sour tasting one. We adamantly refuse to drink it. Two commission members from Stockholm have arrived and interrogate Dr. Slaidinsh and second lieutenant Raiskums." (Therefore we decided to interrupt the strike.)

"December 11. Today we too gave up the hunger strike — after 20 days. Last time we ate was November 21st, 6:00 a.m. Maybe that's the only pleasure we still have left in this world — to eat once again and to celebrate Christmas that's coming soon.

Yes, we start to eat again. At 9:00 a.m. we get a 1/3 cup of warm milk. At 2:00 p.m. it is 1/2 cup of warm milk and two melba toasts. At 6:00 p.m. we get a 1/3 cup of rhubarb sauce. Together with food warmth returns to our bodies, and our mood brightens too. The heck with it — we're still alive!

But at night the rhubarb sauce gives me diarrhea. We were indignant at the small portions; now I understand they were necessary for our digestive system to get used to digesting food again."

August Kaneps  
från  
Syster Ingrid

'Himmel och jord  
ska brinna, men  
den som tror  
skall finnas"

Oerebroo hospital's nurses Ingrid Lindell's dedication to serg. Augusts Kaneps —  
"Heaven and earth can burn, but that one who believes will find out..."

*"December 11. (O.D.) My heart is better. We interrupted the hunger strike because a commission has come to investigate us. If they found out we were drafted, we would be allowed to stay here."*

**"December 12.** The Soviet ship "Kuban" has come after us and Germans. The slave ship.

Tonight I made up my mind: I will not get on that ship. I have only two choices: to get on the ship and hope to survive or — to die. My mind is made up."

**"December 13. This is St. Lucy's Day** — a big holiday in Sweden. Early in the morning St. Lucy appears in a long, white dress, and she has a coronet of burning candles on her head. **It is like a miracle.** She is accompanied by a bevy of girls all dressed in white. They come to our beds, offer us their smiles, mulled wine, heart-shaped cookies, and a part of their hearts too.

I take her hand in mine and caress it. Some of them are crying, and even some of the men have tears in their eyes. They should not feel ashamed — these are holy tears.

But I feel strong because I've made up my mind. This day is like a wonderful reward for the agony I went through last night. And now I begin to believe **we'll live!**

It's snowing outside. The flakes are large, and the snow is already deep. We hear jingle bells from outside that bring back memories. Outside the hospital walls there is a normal, peaceful life, but inside there is a battle going on — a battle for truth.

I feel so elated I want to share my joy, so I write letters. Then I read the magnificent short story by O'Henry — "The Christmas Present". I even managed to hear a few notes of Mozart's "The Little Night Music". **This is not only St. Lucy's Day — this is also the day our hopes returned. Oh, Sancta Lucia!**

Nurse Aina comes from outside with her fur coat still on. It has the fresh fragrance of winter outdoors, and I bury my face in the soft fur. Her eyes light up, she sits down on my bed and starts to sing a beautiful Swedish church hymn:

*"Heaven and earth may burn,  
Mountains and fields perish,  
But those that believe will find  
Salvation for their souls."*

Other nurses join in, and it seems to me the Swedish language is the

most beautiful on earth. Or maybe it just seems so because these wonderful nurses are singing it. Aina Eriksen, Dagmar Zeilitz, the little Norwegian girl Ingrid Lindell, and nurse's aide Marie Carlsson. All others are young and beautiful; the latter is an elderly woman, but she is like a mother to us — strict but loving. Sometimes other nurses come in to greet us and wish us well, but these four we see most often.

We are something unusual here and maybe will remain — even for the guards and policemen — as the most significant event in their lives.

Something else: either the end of our hunger strike or maybe St. Lucy's Day has cancelled the ban on visits."

*"December 13. (O.D.) This is St. Lucy's Day. Early in the morning we are awakened by singing. It is a choir of young girls. They are dressed in white and hold burning candles. One of them has a coronet of burning candles on her head. There are also children, portraying gnomes. One of them has his face painted black, and another one has a long, white beard pasted on his face. They sing the Italian song: "O, Santa Lucia!" I do not understand what's going on. Then somebody explains that St. Lucy's Day is a big holiday in Sweden.*

*It is snowing outside — all day. Sometimes heaven and earth is mixed together.*

*We had stewed, creamed carrots for lunch. In the evening only cream of wheat — one cup. Too little."*

"December 14. Today I smoked a cigarette — for the first time in my life. The doctor gave us each a pack of "Lucky Strike" and told even non-smokers to try it — it would help in our situation. I have graduated from high school, been a soldier, gone through the capitulation and internment without smoking. Should I start now? I guess so. It will help my nerves. But the next cigarette I will smoke only when we will be eating normally again.

So far our food is still strictly rationed. For lunch — one cup of boiled macaroni with blueberry jam. In the evening — stewed carrots again. I feel more hungry than during the hunger strike.

I'm passing the time reading. Lately I read Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Dickens. But my thoughts often wander to food — especially if the book tells about food. My present weight is 45 kg — about 100 lbs. Good thing I do not have to walk — I do not think I could.

The commission has come and left again. They did not even come into our room. It was just a play put on to make us stop the hunger strike. Again the Swedish government has cheated us.

There is a conversation about ice-fishing going on. We are hooked now just like fish. Fish or people — what's the difference?

Now they will try to fatten us — to show their humanity. But maybe they would hand us over to the Soviets the way we are if the latter insisted. Sweden was neutral in World War II but supported Germany with the Swedish steel and weapons. Now they crawl before the Soviets to pay for their "sins". They do not regard much the opinion of Great Britain and the U.S.A.; the latter are more lenient, and one can do business with them, but the Soviets do not joke with their demands."

**"December 15. My father, Rita, and other relatives are alive! Alive are also Julijs Brachs, Modris Gulbis, and other comrades from the "establishment".**

There are days that are "just out of this world". This is one of those. Today I received letters from Dad and Rita. Already on St. Lucy's Day I had a notion something was going to happen.

The letters had come already some time ago, but they were withheld during the hunger strike. Only today a Swedish nurse handed me the whole pile of them. God bless her — she is the most wonderful woman in whole Sweden!

Today it is snowing again — beautiful! And we get cookies and milk. Incredible, how happy for a while can be even a person that is actually sentenced to death.

But if we were released? **Then Oerebro would be the place for me where to take my shoes off** when coming near.

I wrote two letters to my family; one in German that I'll send through the Red Cross, and the other one in Latvian that I'll ask Mr. Kruminsh to send to them. I also placed an advertisement in the Latvian newspaper in Sweden for all my relatives and friends to let them know that I have received their letters and would answer in due time. I gave Mr. Kruminsh' address and asked them to send their letters there. I also wrote a letter to Uldis Raiskums in Denmark to tell him I was together with his brother Zigurds in Kurzeme, but we were separated when crossing the sea."

**"December 17. I would like to see the Oerebro city and the old castle.**

As if it would not be enough with the barbed wire fence around the hospital and the policemen in the hallways — now they are installing an alarm system at all the windows. Such an honor! I wonder how much it costs. In summer we worked and earned our keep, and would gladly do the same now."

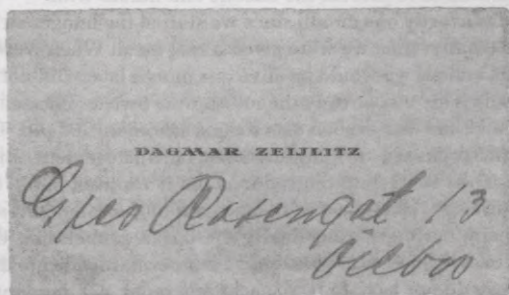
**"December 18. The white outdoors makes the mood brighter too, but hunger is a real torture now. We are still fed very meagerly.**

We received a letter from Dr. Eichfuss, written on December 8th. He tells he had gone three days even without water. He confirms the message we received at that time that after December 6th the organized hunger strike was over. Now it is up to each individual if anyone still wants to continue, but he tells there's very little hope it would help any.

We have to thank the Swedish nurses that we ever received this letter — they took care of it, even though they risked with their jobs. They are our good fairies that have taken the place of our families and relatives. They all are sweet but especially Aina, Ingrid, Dagmar, and Mrs. Carlsson. These four come to see us even on their time off. I am sure the same thing happens in other hospitals all over Sweden where the interned Baltic men have been placed: Kalmar, Malme, Eksjoe, Kristianstad, Ulrisehamn, Veksjoe, Halmstad, later Hesleholm. **When will we be able to repay with gratitude, respect, and love?** The same goes to those Swedish soldiers that on November 24th refused to guard us any longer and thus be a part of our extradition. Since then our guards have been policemen. These soldiers — 12th Jencheping-Kalmar Infantry Regiment and 2nd Jeta Pioneer Unit — saved the honor of the Swedish army. They were commanded by colonels Verner Goet and Inge Helgren which were punished for this.

We can not persuade our good nurses to give us more food. But they remember our request: "Are there some more potatoes?" Then they laugh good-naturely."

*"December 17. (O.D.) For breakfast we get one cup of milk, one slice of buttered white bread, and one boiled egg. Feeding, nursing, and*



Oerebro hospital's nurses Dagmar Zeijtitz visiting card which she gave to 20 interned Balts during their 3 weeks hunger strike

guarding us must cost a lot of money. The Swedish government has to pay for it. But it is their own fault. If they released us, we would work, support ourselves, and pay taxes.

At night I did not sleep well, woke up several times. A nurse came and sat with me. They all are so kind and sweet!"

**"December 18.** (O.D.) They fasten windows with wires and put in alarms. I saw it. No, nothing has changed in our situation."

**"December 20.** Today I ate an orange — for the first time after five years. I bought several good things to eat: oranges, apples, cookies, candy, and honey. But then I thought of my relatives in Germany — they probably have to go hungry. And how is it in Latvia? Maybe there people are even starving.

The Norwegian nurse Ingrid has a lively temperament, and she is unintentionally tempting us with her lithe, feminine movements. It is easy done with men that have not even seen women for so long. But when nurse Aina comes in — that's different. She is beautiful and proud, a real lady, and I feel as if I had known her already for a long, long time.

The guys are reading the Bible."

**"December 21.** Lieutenant Edvins Alksnis is on the death-bed. He has thrust a pencil into his eye and further into his brain — full length. Will he survive?

We can not get our belongings; they are safely guarded in the hospital basement. To while away the time I try to draw Latvian ornaments. Ojars Caune, in the bed next to me, wants to draw postcards of Latvian national costumes to present the doctors and nurses with.

**Today is exactly one month since we started the hunger strike, and today for the first time we were given a real meal.** When we started it we did not believe we would be alive one month later. Did not we give up too soon? This was already the fourth time Swedes cheated us.

The first time was as soon as we came ashore in Gotland. That elderly couple promised to bring us water but instead sent soldiers to arrest us. Then we were promised freedom if we went and worked in the peat swamp. Next — we were taken out of the camp and scattered among many hospitals. And finally the bogus commission that promised to release those that were drafted but never intended to do it.

Now we do not have to buy snacks any more. All day long we eat crackers, cookies, oranges, apples. We get these presents from our visitors — clergymen, choir members, church ladies, city delegation, even policemen. Constable Sjoestroem is a very nice and compassionate per-

son, but he does not want to lose his job — he has a large family. So he has to guard us.

I put another bright red blanket on my bed, explaining to Aina: "The last comfort." She laughs, and so do I. My reading these days is Shakespeare's "The Merry Wives of Windsor" — in German translation. It is easier to understand than the original; Shakespeare's is an ancient language. Besides, it is very possible that German mentality is closer to ours. After all, Latvians and Germans have lived together for 700 years. Something must have rubbed off. **Without them the Slavish sea probably would have flooded us over.** There is still so much I have to learn, but will there still be time? Does it make any sense even to think about it? But we still hope.

Since today was the first day we got full meals I want to write it down. For breakfast an egg sandwich and oatmeal with milk; for dinner filet of fish with mashed potatoes. And all day long — cookies. The local bakery has donated them, also candy and raisin bread. We are "living it up". This is our reward for the time we were starving."

*"December 21. (O.D.) I was moved back to the big room — together with others. This is better — not as boring as being alone. Here we can talk, joke, hear the latest news and rumors. We do not worry much about our future. That is the soldier's fate; in combat we could have been killed any minute.*

*Today is a whole month since we started the hunger strike. At that time we thought we would never eat again and die of starvation. We hear in some hospitals the strike is still going on. But if it was stopped, then by all that were in that hospital. Here in Oerebro we stopped when the allied commission came from Stockholm."*

**"December 23.** Today the Christmas tree was brought in for us, and that's another joy.

On this day and at this hour the great Christmas battle of 1944 began. In this battle Latvian Legionaries had to fight not only Russians but also their brothers Latvians and Estonians that had been drafted into the Soviet army by force. They were sent to battle by the political officers, the so called "politruks" that stayed behind the army lines, and by special "blocking units" that were better armed than army. They shot everyone — even high officers — who came back before the task was done.

Our boys have started to walk. Boys? Yes, most of them are under twenty years of age — seventeen or eighteen. I have tried it too. When I get up, at first I feel dizzy and have a needling sensation in my heels,

but I can walk by holding on to the walls. My weight has gone up to 50 kg now.

Yesterday and today we do not get a snack any more. This irritates us, but I think the doctor knows what he is doing. To recover quickly would be our loss. The doctor is on our side and tries to keep us weak as long as possible. But how soon have we gotten used to the banquet we were having lately! Not so long ago we were wondering why a person would have to eat every day, but now we gripe just for missing the daily snack.

We have not eaten enough and probably will be undernourished for a long time to come. But we do not act as prisoners that have been sentenced to death. We use every opportunity to have some laughs. For instance, yesterday we were given fine cloth napkins. One of the boys in our room, Boriss, put one napkin in front, the other on his back, and pretended to be a nurse. Everybody laughed, including our nurses. The little Norwegian nurse Ingrid often comes to our room to cry — she is longing for her country just like we long for ours.

Another one of us has figured out a way to save himself — to pretend to be mentally ill. He starts to talk nonsense and gesticulates wildly. But the others make fun of him, and soon he is “cured”. Aina was here at that time, and she laughed too. When she laughs we all brighten up. Often we sing together. We sing our folk songs, the Swedish nurses and visitors sing their folk songs or church hymns. The latter are beautiful, melodic, and unusually dynamic.”

**“December 24.** It is Christmas Eve. We listen to Midnight Mass over the radio. Our Christmas tree has electric lights instead of the usual candles that are customary in our country. Looks beautiful, but this light is cold. It does not have the warmth of candles.

On my night-stand there is a little Latvian flag — a Swedish minister’s present, and red-and-white flowers from the local Latvians. We hear there are 15 Latvians in Oerebro. I received a letter from Uldis. He is in Kalmar hospital, and he tells they had continued the hunger strike for 21 days.

We each received four packages of candy, cookies, and oranges from the Swedish Santa Claus that is called here “tomten”. (Actually the name means “gnome”.) We keep polishing it all up.

Remembering this day a year ago — being under enemy fire between ruins of a farm — I smoke a cigarette.

In the evening a Swedish minister held the Christmas service. After he left we sang Christmas carols. Nurse Aina was singing together with us. She has a good voice, and her singing gave us a greater impression

than hearing a concert over the radio. Swedes have mostly the same Christmas carols we have. When the nurses sang "Silent Night", I thought of past Christmases I had spent with my family.

While I was still in Kurzeme I understood better the ancient Latvian pagan religion that was being revived during the years of independence. Laima — goddess of fate and time, Mara — substance all is made of. Now I have come closer to the universal goodness — God, the mind of cosmos"

*"December 24. (O.D.) This is Christmas Eve. Swedes start to celebrate already in the morning. The Christmas tree is decorated with little Swedish flags and colored electric lights. The latter I see for the first time in my life. Our night-stands get festive table cloths.*

*This Christmas is full of presents. The Swedish ladies from the Red Cross brought us candy and fruit, and little Latvian flags. Then came the Swedish Santa Claus and gave us each a banana. Never in my life had I eaten such a fruit. But the greatest surprise was when a Latvian lady Mrs. Abele was allowed to visit us. She brought flowers in our national colors. We received many Christmas cards too. After the Christmas service in the evening we sing Christmas carols with nurse Aina. Swedes have the same Lutheran Christmas carols we have."*

**"December 25.** The first day of Christmas. We listen to Christmas music over the radio. The Christmas lights are on, and I can feel the fragrance of the tree. This Christmas is so different from last year but remarkable just the same.

In the evening we sing our folk songs. We sing and sing, and do not want to stop. But we also sing church hymns and Christmas carols together with the nurses. It sounds so beautiful together — men's voices in Latvian and girls' voices in Swedish.

My reading material these days is a drama by the greatest Latvian author Rainis — "Uguns un nakts" (Fire and Night). There are lines that seem to be meant for this time, although the play has been written at the beginning of this century.

I remember Christmas a year ago in Kurzeme. It was so different — it was the feast of disaster, violence, and death. The war, blood, and many, many injured and killed. But there was also endurance, altruism, and heroism. This was the baptism of fire for our unit, and we suffered losses up to 80%. That is part of **Latvian history**. (Actually only 20% were killed; others were injured and returned after two to six weeks.)

Now we live in the utmost comfort — except for two things: freedom

and ability to walk. But we have a decorated Christmas tree, and we are under the loving care of this strange nation. This is again a new experience; we are learning to know and understand the Swedish people, their songs and soul. But this is also the time of unknown, the time of fight, and the time to be ready for anything. Once more Sweden and Baltia have a common history.

At night I look outside. Yes — it's Christmas. Outside is a clear sky, lit by the silvery moon. There are ice crystals on the window pane, and I can see snowy tree branches outside. Beautiful."

**"December 26.** It is still Christmas — the second day. In Sweden they have three days of Christmas, just like in Latvia. The electric Christmas lights have one advantage over candles: you can keep them on all day. It creates a special mood and reminds of Christmas all the time.

I continue to read the same play. Sometimes it seems to talk directly to me, and it gives me peace and a greater meaning for these holidays. Somebody should translate this into Swedish. That would be one way how we could thank the Swedish people.

Over the radio I hear Haendel's "Oratorio" and the Scottish New Year song: "Should auld acquaintance be forgot..." Would I forget my friends? No, never! Especially at night I feel their souls close to me."

**"December 26.** (O.D.) *Tonight again we got cake and coffee. Festivities continue, but they are dampened by the news that Germans have been taken away today — to the Soviet Union. So it is all over for them.*

*In the evening nurse Ingrid comes into our room and asks us to sing our folk songs. Next to our room there are also two Latvian officers — Dr. Slaidinsh and second lieutenant Raiskums. They chide us for being noisy and disturbing other patients. But when they sing you can hear it down the hallway. They both are good singers.*

*We are well fed, including meat. Maybe soon we would be considered recovered and would be sent back to the camp? It would be a pity if we could not celebrate New Year here."*

**"December 27.** (O.D.) *Today is the third day of Christmas and also the name day for all Elmers. (In many European countries there is a name for each calendar day. Swedish Elmer is Elmars in Latvian, but it is the same name.) One of our boys is Elmars, so he gets congratulated on his name day by the Red Cross ladies. They bring plenty of soft drinks and four cakes for twenty men. So we celebrate again."*



November 28, 1945 till January 1946. Nurse Ingrid Aarstorp (nee Lindell) — a refugee from Norway



Near eternity. Valentins Silamikelis in Oerebro hospital after starving from November 22 untill December 12, 1945

On January 25, 1946 the internees were taken to Trelleborg by bus. Some of the bus had boarded windows. Baltia had many ways to Golgotha — one is also in Sweden — to Trelleborg





The Forcible Deportation. The Swedish government proposed the deportation Swedish policemen carry a self-mutilated German soldier with broken legs. After two months, on January 25, 1946 he was deported anyway

November 30, 1945 called "the bloody Friday" German soldiers tied themselves together to avoid deportation to the enemy — the USSR. The Swedish police beat them and used water guns



German soldiers resisted the deportation by injuring themselves: breaking their limbs, swallowing metal objects and medications. Of 2,500 men 600 were injured and not transportable





Latvian Casualties in Sweden. The night before November 28, 1945 in the camp Raenneslaett the interned Latvian officer of the 1st Artillery Regiment of the 15th Latvian Division ltn. Oskars Lapa committed suicide. He cut his veins in both hands and legs and stabbed a knife in his heart



On January 25, 1946 a Latvian officer ltn. Peteris Vabulis committed suicide by cutting his neck artery at the moment of getting off the bus at Trelleborg when the guard was not holding his hand as before

Swedish policemen carry the author — Latvian soldier Valentins Silamikelis, who broke a window on the bus and cut his wrist to the Soviet slave ship "Beloostrov"



On January 25, 1946, at the port Trelleborg a Latvian soldier Herberts Shulmanis went berserk and was left in Sweden. Here he is in a Swedish army coat



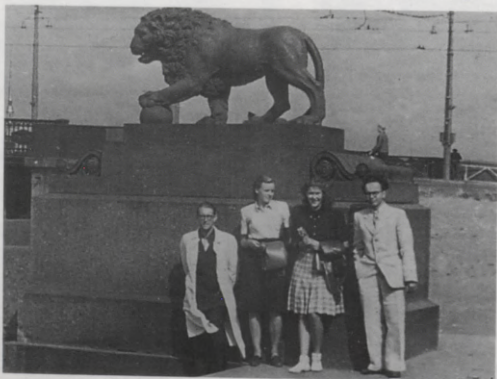


Grandmother Ede Emolinsh, nee Berzinsh, mother of author's mother Milda, died on December 24, 1953

Department of Architecture in Latvian State University. The first year — 1948



Author's birthday on August 26, 1948 in Leningrad, at the banks of Neva. Valentins Silamikelis, Aina Titmane, Ruta Kronberga, Normunds Vijups





The second year — 1949. The drawing studio  
in the Latvian State University

Authors cousin Gunars Grauds  
(1932–1975) in exile in USA. in  
1973. He was a pilot and honored  
with the Medal of Honor by  
President Ford. Died from wounds



Author's bride Ilga Nimande — a medical student  
(born April 21, 1925)



Summer of 1950 in Moscow. A former  
officer of the Red Army Edgars Puchinsh  
shows an object of architecture to his fellow  
student Valentins Silamikelis, a former  
Legionary. This excursion was organized by  
Latvian State University for the top students





December 1950. This was the funeral for Division of Architecture — communists decided to close it as "very Latvian one". Right — Gunars Priede, later a famous Latvian playwright

The wedding of Ilga Nimande and Valentins Silamikelis took place on June 24 (St. John's Day), 1951 in Riga. Behind a tchekist and two Red army officers



The beginning of Vorkuta District concentration camps was in 1933. This is a photograph of the first mine in Rudnik — a suburb of Vorkuta. The photo was taken by one of the prisoners, a former professional photographer from Moscow Ivan Borisovich Krivec, later a Vorkuta TV operator, who worked together with the author's camp-mate Janis Vaskinovichs





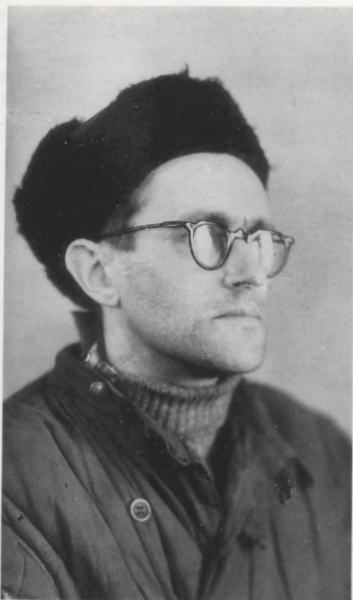
March, 1955. The labor zone of DSM — the workshop for building mobile cottages. The designer V. Silamikelis is standing at one of them. Behind is the 9th camp. On the slope — the dining hall for the 3,000 inmates of the camp — the first finished project of V. Silamikelis. In front the barrack where he pined for three years

The punishment barrack of the 9th camp



A view of Rudnik Vorkuta's suburb Rudnik with the 9th camp, house building workshop DSM, and 8th coal-mine. In front the author's mate Olgerts Rudzitis with his visiting wife Aija after the amnestion. September 1955





Valentins Silamikelis in March, 1955, prisoner (Zek) L 720 of the 9th camp by 8th coal mine in Rudnik ("Rechlag"). The glasses are from Visby

In Summer 1955, Ernests Rudzuroga and other Balts with the help of Jews organised a strike in 1953, in the district of Vorkuta. The strike was "shot down" afterwards

Tortured in a heavy work and violence and starving this International grew harder. After the amnesty in 1956 — the 29th coal mine of Vorkuta. First in the third row — Janis Zile



The poet of the camp — Imants Lerums in 1956. Later he took his wife's maiden name Ozolinsh — for the sake of safety



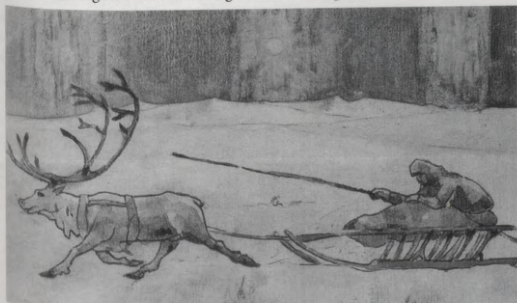


The labor-zone on the slope of river Vorkuta, near the 9th camp. Behind the third window from the left was the little room (formerly a store) where the author lived with his wife from August 16 till October 15, 1955



The mobile house, projected for the Trust Pechoruglegeologija

Watercolor painting of Valentins Silamikelis had to be done secretly while designing the projects — inmates were not allowed to draw or paint. December, 1954. An aborigine Nenez is driving a reindeer sledge





August 16, 1955 in Vorkuta — the happy hour when the author meets his wife, and freedom is near



City of Jelgava, 1957. The building of a furniture factory near river Driksna — one of the first projects after returning from Vorkuta. The author with his wife Ilga and daughter Gundega (born May 5, 1956). "Now we are three"



Apshuciems, 1963 — at the seashore, 50 km west of Riga. The author with his wife Ilga, daughter Gundega, son Viesturs (born November 18, 1957), and son Auseklis (born June 25, 1959). "Now we are five"



Riga railway station, 1969. The head of the first collective farm in Latvia "Nakotne" Arturs Čikste (in the center) returns from Moscow. For this he got a reprimand from the 1st secretary of Communist Party in Dobele — Freimanis. Why? A leader of a kolhoz was not allowed to visit official persons in Moscow without the permission of local Partbureau. On the left — Valentins Silamikelis



Collective farm "Nakotne", 1970. An apartment building with 18 apartments. Each apartment had a large kitchen and a lot of storage space. This building was designed especially for farm needs. Behind the apartment building were barns, sheds, and garages. On collective farms such buildings replaced the former individual farm-houses

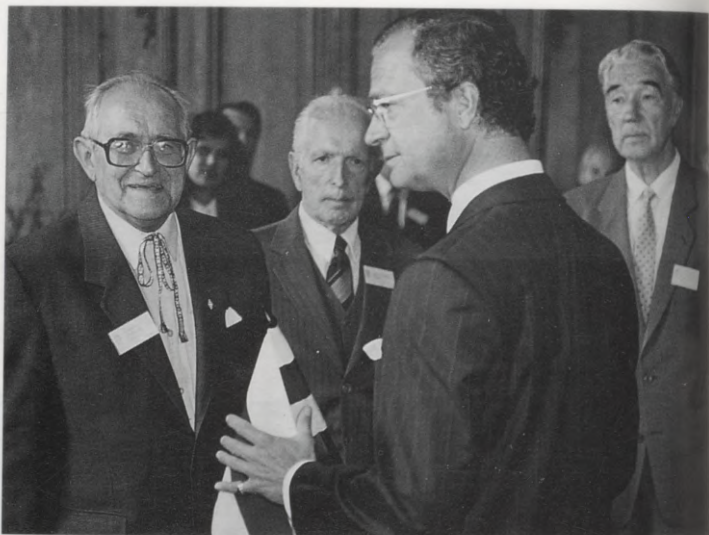
A "Monument" for Architect V. Silamikelis: Four Ancient Buildings in the Old Town of Riga that were restored during 1974-1985



The Coup d'etat in the Soviet Union on August 19, 1991. August 20, 1991 Dom's Square in Riga. A member of the special militia attack unit "Omon" is dispersing the inhabitants of Riga who look at him as at a poisonous insect. There is still a piece of barricade left from January, 1991



The Days of Barricades in Riga. Beginning with January 21, 1991, the Latvian nation got up to defend the freedom of Latvia, Baltia, and consequently all nations in the Soviet Union. In these days for the first time besides the Latvian national colors also the Russian national flag — white-blue-red — was raised



The author presents the Swedish King Carl XVI Gustav with the standard of Baltic flag that was created on June 24, 1944, under the German occupation, in the former NKVD prison cells. Behind them prof. Janis Slaidinsh and engineer Hans Lindeman

Visiting the King of Sweden Carl XVI Gustav. June 20, 1994, King's Palace. Forty extradited Baltic men that were still alive and able to take the trip visited the King of Sweden





A press conference with the Swedish Secretary of State Margaret af Uglass. Sitting from the left are: Hans Lindeman, Valentins Silamikelis, Margaret af Uglass, Janis Slaidinsh, Stasys Dranseika

The Sweden's secretary of State (foreign Minister) Margaret af Uglass. Summer 1994 in Stockholm



Frederik's churchyard in Stockholm. Oskars Lapa and Peteris Vabulis who committed suicide in winter 1945/1946 were buried there





Again in Eksjoe — the town near camp Raenneslaett. On June 21, 1994 in Eksjoe Hospital the former head nurse Greta Rydberg meets again her patients of 1945/1946 after 49 years



The Swedish Army guards of honor lifted the flags with flourish of trumpets and a roll of drums in Raenneslaett — the place of former Baltic camp

The Balts are standing at attention with their united Baltic flag: white for Estonia, dark red for Latvia, and yellow for Lithuania. On the right — prof. Dr. phil. Kurt Ekholm, a major at the time of completing the service

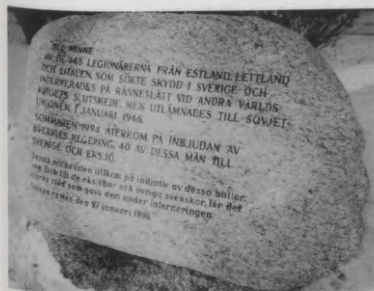




June 21, 1994 Raenneslaet. 40 former interned Baltic soldiers still alive are again in Ekshjoe. Together with garrison commander col. Wilhelm af Donner and other Swedish officers and prof. Curt Ekholm



The unveiling of Memorial for the Baltic Soldiers in Ekshjoe, Sweden on 27 January 1996. The honor guard of the Swedish Army was present



The memorial was created by a Latvian organization "Daugavas Vanagi" in Sweden (leader Zemvaldis Dzelme) and transported and erected by the Eksjoe Commune. This is the inscription: "To the memory of 146 Legionaries from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania who searched for refuge in Sweden but were interned in Raenneslaett at the end of World War II and were extradited to the Soviet Union in January, 1946. 40 of these men returned to Sweden and Eksjoe in summer of 1994, invited by the Swedish Government. This memorial is created by the initiative of these Balts and in thanks to the inhabitants of Eksjoe and other Swedes for their great support at the time of internment."



In Trelleborg, Sweden in 1999, A Memorial was unveiled for the World War II refugees that perished and were slaughtered in Baltic Sea. Also for the 2372 German and Austrian soldiers that were extradited from Sweden to the Soviet Union. On the right — the executor of this project — Helmut Schulze

January, 1992 Riga. The former from Sweden extradited Latvian soldiers are meeting every year since 1990



November, 1996 in Stockholm. A meeting at the publishing house "Contra" which published Valentins Silamikelis' book "With the Baltic Flag" in Swedish. Behind the table — the Editor-in-Chief Carl Holms

Christmas of 2001 in Riga — the author's family



**“December 28.** Aina comes into our room, and I realize I have been waiting especially for her. But we wait for them all and for news from the outside world they bring to us.

I still think of ways how to escape. Who could help? But one thing I know — I would not try to escape alone. It is not possible to run away from here, and even if it were — it would be a cowardice, similar to deserting at war time.

We gave up cookies but not cigarettes. Today I received two letters — from Mr. Kruminsh and from Brother Lamberts. They had gone through the censorship for a month and a half. But I received illegally another letter from Mr. Kruminsh that had been written recently — on December 24th. It is a touching letter.

*“Yesterday I received your letters, written on December 12th and December 19th. Today I’ll send letters to your father and Julijs Brachs. I understand you have not received my letters. I gave your regards to Karlis Mishke and told him about you.*

***My heart aches, and I can not find the right words to describe the compassion we all feel for you and your comrades. Go with proudly lifted heads your way to the Baltic Golgotha. We are helpless to do anything. Nobody in this country understands us or even wants to understand that neither Russians nor Germans have been our friends and there have never been Nazis among Latvians — the way the world understands this word.***

Our only refuge is our faith in God. We all pray for you and **believe God will guard and guide you and all Latvian men that have shown to the whole world their bravery and love for their country. God will keep you from perishing and being forgotten. Your unbreakable spirit is unique in Baltic history. Your dear friend’s father Karlis Krumins.**

Our guarding policemen have presented us with a cake. Unbelievable! It is not just politeness, it shows the true attitude of the Swedish nation. They not only have compassion for us, they are also ashamed for the cowardice of their government.”

*“December 28. (O.D.) Bad news — we still can not eat normally. Christmas is over, and beginning with tomorrow we will receive small portions again. We are not allowed to receive any food from outside either.*

*Today for the first time we were allowed to shave ourselves, but they did not let us keep the razor blades. Our own belongings are locked in basement. We can not get to them.”*

**“December 29.** The local congregation has come to comfort us and

to entertain us with their beautiful singing. Some hymns have familiar melodies, for some we even remember the words and quietly sing along. The preacher says: "God is not yet everywhere and in everyone, but He can be in ourselves. In each of us. Then we will have peace and joy, and justice will be done." He is right, but it is not easy.

Aina is sitting by my bed and singing the song I asked her to sing — the most beautiful song about heaven and earth that she has sung before. I thank for this evening to the congregation and to her. Am I falling in love with this beautiful, statuesque, tender, and — unreachable lady?"

"**December 30.** We hear it's Sunday. For us all days are alike. But we feel a feverish urge to do something — as if we were running out of time. Caune is drawing, Daugulis is writing, and I want to write too. But what about? I describe the enemy firestorm on December 24, 1944, at the farm "Stari" near Dobele.

I have also written a fake biography — that I have been working in the customs department and because of that have been exempted from the draft. This I sent to Mr. Kruminsh. If the Swedish government keeps cheating us all the time — it is no sin to respond the same way.

It is hard to predict what would happen. Sometimes I lose my faith in life, and that's the worst. As long as I believe and try to do something, all is not lost yet.

Sometimes we are as on a wave that goes up and down. **This is no laughing matter — to live a whole month, not knowing whether we would live or die.** It was easier during the hunger strike because then we were doing something, we were fighting. Now we just have to wait. This is worse than the battles in Kurzeme or being in the stormy sea.

We are here before the eyes of the whole world (the free world). We are talked and written about not only in Sweden. This is a sensation: young, strong men do not want to return to their country that won the war, where there is socialism and no unemployment. They do not want to go home! They must be either war criminals or maybe lazy-bones that do not want to work.

But after they saw our faces on photographs — mostly young boys — they began to think and understand. Before the hunger strike Swedish boys threw stones at us when we were going somewhere. Now Swedish girls throw flowers to us. And they are ready to throw themselves in front of trucks to keep us from being taken away.

It's good I'm not alone but together with my comrades. Just like in combat we are still supporting each other."

**“December 31.** This is New Year's Eve. Time to look back. This has been a year of battles. I became of age — not only chronologically but also by facing death, and several times at that. Three times in Kurzeme, then on the Baltic sea, and finally here in Raenneslaett. Maybe there will be the sixth time too?

I look at my notes that I wrote at the **beginning of 1945**: “This year has to turn over what went wrong last year. I have to return to Riga, see my family, find or avenge my married sister, and Livija.

We have to make Aestia work — the Baltic and Whiteruthenian union. To reach the above goals I have to become hard. I promise not to spare myself.”

All this goes for the year 1946 as well. With only one addition: “I had to leave home and my native country, part from my loved ones and my nation. They were left to the enemy.”

**Year 1946.** What will it be like — a year of life or a year of death? God, bless Latvia! Sweden, Oerebro, December 31, 1945.”

**“December 31. (O.D.)** I ordered a pound of honey and three candy bars for the New Year celebration.

One of the policemen is griping that he could not go to a New Year's Eve party because he has to be on duty here. To escape loneliness he spends most of the time in our room.

At midnight we each get a bottle of soft drink — a pity it isn't wine. We also get crackers, and we still have chocolate and oranges. I remember New Year's Eve last year. It was in Germany, in danger, and in a cold, unheated room, and we had nothing to eat. The only food we had was colrabi, and we had already eaten all of them. In spite of the lack of food we had training all the time. Now we sleep in soft beds in warm rooms. We are clean and well taken care of, and we have plenty of food. But we do not know what to expect from the year 1946. Will it be a happy year or full of suffering?”

## YEAR 1946

**“January 1.** I keep busy. I continue to write about the Christmas battles in Kurzeme that were the first ones for me, also about the events that followed. I write a letter to Uldis in Kalmar hospital. Maybe this is the last letter?

I listen to organ music over the radio — Chopin and Mozart. A Latvian lady has come to visit us, and we all sing Latvian songs.

Mrs. Carlsson and the nurses join in with a church hymn. We hum along, but when they sing a spirited Smoland folk song, our feet begin to move in rhythm — even in bed. But the official Lutheran hymn we already know in Swedish, so we sing all together: "A mighty fortress is our God!"

Tonight we get a nice surprise: nurse Aina brings a real candle, lights it, and places on my night-stand, next to the pictures of Valdis and the "Dumpuri" girls. There is the fragrance of freshly brewed coffee, and we get sweet rolls with it. It is so nice to see women in our room of men, and I have a desire to feel a girl physically.

**God help me not to philosophize so much in the new year — great thoughts wear out when repeated too often."**

This is the last entry in this diary. At the end I have written: "To Dad and other loved ones. To Latvia and Baltia."

*"January 1, 1946. (O.D.) What will this year bring me? Will it be better than last year or will there be more suffering?"*

*A Latvian lady Mrs. Abele visited us today. She was here at Christmas time too. She brought flowers, and an apple and orange for each of us. And she herself is only a poor refugee. Later in the evening the hospital cook brought us sweet rolls. We were singing Latvian and Swedish songs; it improved our mood."*

**"January 2.** Today we have a new doctor. He seems to be kind and sensitive. But Aina is not here today — she's down with a cold.

The government representatives from Stockholm have come to interrogate us again. They begin in the other room, so we have time to think. We have to be very careful; every word we say can make a difference. We are not allowed to go to the other room to talk to the comrades there. Even the nurses do not dare to let us do it under the eyes of their superiors; besides, a policeman sits in the hallway. Lucky he let in Mrs. Abele yesterday. She brought us Latvian style bacon rolls that are not known in Sweden. Swedes do not know Latvian rye bread either or anything else that is sour — like buttermilk, cottage cheese, sauerkraut. They only use pickled products.

There is some benefit from our hunger strike — starvation has cured all the stomach ailments anyone had. I do not know what effect it had on those that have TB; they are in other hospitals. But they too took part in the hunger strike."

**"January 5.** Dagmar tells us the real reason for the government officials' visit: it was to examine us and decide if we had recovered enough

to be transported. In other words — are the calves ready for slaughtering or do they need more fattening? Probably for this reason the visitors with baked goods were allowed — to make us recover and gain weight faster!

Of course, we are not told what the specialists' verdict was. Dagmar also reports the interned men from Kristianstad hospital have been transported to a camp. That's all she knows. She tries to comfort us with crackers and distributes little cards with her name and address.

When we get up we still feel dizzy but it is not from starvation any more; it is from lying in bed all the time."

**"January 6.** Aina is well again, and today is her birthday. We put our money together and get her a present: a flower vase with red and white flowers. How good to see her again!

When we were still in camp Raenneslaett, somebody said: "If we are sentenced to death, then let us not lament but live it up while we still can!" Yes, here are many strong men. And what about me? Sometimes — yes, sometimes — no."

**"January 7.** From a Latvian congregation in Denmark I received a letter and a calendar for the year 1946. But will I still have a need for it?

Ingrid has presented us with her greatest treasure: postcards with beautiful scenes from her native Norway. She has taken them with her upon leaving her country that was under German occupation. She is a refugee just like us."

**"January 8.** Last night Dagmar sat with those that could not sleep because of gloomy thoughts. It helped better than sleeping pills.

Today is my sister Aina's birthday. She is 20 now. Where is she? Why could I not find her in Kurzeme?

We are going to be transferred to a different hospital. Why?"

**"January 8. (O.D.)** Bad news — we will be transferred to a different hospital. Is this another ruse? Are we being prepared for the extradition?

Today, for the first time after a whole month, I had a real bath. All this time the nurses just gave us sponge baths in bed."

**"January 9.** Tomorrow we have to leave. Mrs. Marie Carlsson and Aina Eriksen will go with us — to make us feel better and to make sure we would not be taken to a Soviet ship.

All the ten men in our room have their picture taken together with the hospital personnel.

I still write the last petitions to the King. For myself and for Martins Sala — he does not know any German."

*"January 9. (O.D.) Today we are merry but maybe tomorrow we'll cry."*

**"January 10.** This is the day of parting. We are still in Oerebro, but today we'll leave. Many are crying — not only women but also some of the young boys and even policemen. Where will our way end?

**That night — in Heselholm hospital.**

This is 400 kilometers from Oerebro. We went by an ambulance train where we could lie down. Mrs. Carlsson stroked my head and said in Swedish: "Have hope, my boy!" Aina went to see us all. She kept her hand on my chest for a while. It helped a lot. I should have kissed her hand in gratitude for all she had done for us. Why didn't I? And how will we live now without those wonderful nurses that had taken the place of our relatives?

We are in the southern part of Sweden now, near sea. The environment looks gloomy, and people are different too — official, more distant. Here we have been taken from several hospitals and put in one large room.

The matches and belts are taken away from us. Our escorting ladies get the permission to stay with us until the evening. How will they get back home so late at night? We sing again: "A mighty fortress is our God!" — we in Latvian, our attendants in Swedish. Even a local Swedish doctor joins in."

**"January 11.** Today we received several cakes — the last greeting from Aina and Aunt Marie. Seven of our men have been taken here from a sanatorium. It all looks like getting ready for the extradition.

Here we hear about the extradition of Germans. It had been extremely brutal. They had been handed over all of them — including the ill, the mentally unbalanced, and those that tried to commit suicide. Taken to the ship with broken bones and cut-open veins. Several succeeded in killing themselves. Some had clasped each other so tightly they could be separated only with water from firemen's hoses.

We also received news from Belgium that the British authorities have extradited colonel Kripens. **If our erstwhile allies did that — what can we expect from Sweden that is located right next to the Soviet monster! We're lost!**

We also hear the Soviets have the atomic bomb now. Western allies should have started a war with them before it happened. The lords of the West have overslept again."

"**January 13.** Today my little sister Rita is 16. Already! I wonder what she looks like now. Probably has grown into a real beauty. I write a letter to my father.

From the Kalmar hospital 26 men are transferred here, including my friend Uldis. They tell they kept up the hunger strike for 28 days. It is good we will be all together now. The more the better."

"**January 14.** Now there is no more doubt about the extradition. But when? Tomorrow, the day after that?

Better to pack my diaries so I could send them to Mr. Krumins. The same with other things. And to destroy everything that's not essential. I still want to talk to Uldis. Maybe it will help. And I have to get some fragment of glass or a knife. "

"**January 15.** I feel sorry for my family, especially Dad and Rita. Maybe it is good they have not seen me for so long.

But we are still in fight. We fight for our lives, and at the same time it is also a fight for our nation, for freedom and justice. **Our resistance is also our fight for Riga, for Latvia, for Baltia.**

I am ready for the last battle. I was ready before Christmas, but my will to live made me wait till the last chance.

I got a fragment from a medicine measuring cup that I "accidentally" broke. But will I have a chance to use it?

**Here I am writing about myself, but it is the same with others. I am "we", "we" are I."**

"**January 16.** Last night for a while it was very hard. I felt worse than after the surrender at the end of the war. But now I'm all right. I know my soldier's duty.

The glory of battle has come over us. It is the Latvian poet Andrejs Eglitis' book "Fortress of Souls" that gives us strength. He too was in Kurzeme as a war reporter. He is one of us.

I received a postcard from Modris Gulbis, written already in October. He writes he missed me — that I should be there. No — **I have to be here now. This is the place my fate has put me in."**

"**January 17.** I wrote a letter to Aina and reminded her of what we were talking about once — about a life that is complete, worthwhile.

Now I can see my friend Uldis and others. I visit them, talk to them. They are still optimistic, and it gives me strength too.

The feeling is like before a battle — if you do not think of yourself, then you're not afraid."

**“January 18.** The guys that were transferred here from the Kalmar hospital are considered better recuperated, so now they are taken to a camp. That includes Uldis. Is this parting forever? We are herded around like a flock of sheep. Sheep at least can bleat, but who will listen to us? No — we will not be like sheep.”

**“January 19.** Soon it will be our turn. Maybe I should still try to escape when they take us away? Let them shoot me; it will be better that way.

Now it says in the Swedish newspaper that we would be extradited. That is like a death sentence to us. We send the last petitions to the British and American ambassadors. Many of us have decided not to get on the ship.”

**“January 20.** Most of us feel depressed but Boriss can still fool around and portrays again a nurse.”

**“January 21.** *(O.D.) Reverend Terins came, but he was not allowed to see us. Even a church service is denied us.”*

**“January 22.** I send my diaries and other belongings to Mr. Krumin. I am ready for the last step. Instead of the anxiety I had for the past few days now I feel at peace. I know what I have to do.”

**“Night from January 22 to 23.** We just received the Holy Communion. For me it was the first time in my life — the first and the last.

In the morning I woke up at 5:00 a.m. as I had decided — to cut the veins on my left arm and bleed to death. But then I changed my mind and postponed it for the last minute. This was probably my weakness, but I still know for sure I won't get on that ship.

I remember a scene from last winter's battles. Together with non-comm. officer Varna I put a dressing on a young man's leg — a bullet had hit the artery. He pulled out of his pocket a diary, asking somebody to send it to his brother. Our commander Lt. Stilbins and sgt. Lics took him out of the battle field; I do not know if he survived. But I remember this episode because now I am in a similar situation.”

**“January 23.** We expect the bus to come for us at any time. As soon as any of us will see it I'll do what I have to do. It will take about 20 minutes. I probably would not have a chance to do it on the bus, so it has to be here.

The knowledge of death being near is terrible. If we did not have

our combat experience from last winter, some of us would probably lose their minds.

**Afternoon.** Slowly a rage swells up inside. A rage for Sweden and the last nine months we have spent here. Some of us already shout: "Let's beat up those Swedes!" It is like in combat when the control is lost. If we all stick together we're unbreakable.

"They will not take us like lambs for slaughter!" says the old soldier Evalds Griva. "Let us fight like in the old days!"

We start to talk to each other, as if something very important should be said at the last minute. But it is only memories of better days. One guy tells about Gulbene, another one about Piebalga (places in Latvia). I show my pictures.

By 6:00 p.m. we are worn out by rage, cursing, and talking. We relax and feel somewhat relieved.

At 9:00 p.m. we are sure nothing would happen today. Looks like tomorrow we would still be here. Maybe we can live one more day? But it is not up to me, only up to Laima — my Fate. Awake or not — no more up to me.

Maybe the worst would not happen. Maybe the buddies at the camp have managed to do something. How I would like to be with Uldis and the rest of them!

**9:20 p.m.** We all get lively — as if there was a new hope. Has a miracle really happened? Or is this just the calm before the storm?"

Latvian nurse Marta Lamberte has written in her diary:

*"I was permitted to visit the internment camp in Geltofta. A lot of boys ask for advice: **should they die tonight or wait for the morning?** They all ask me to give them poison. Shulmanis is crying continuously."*

**January 24.** Today we feel ravenously hungry. After lunch most of the boys take a nap.

Today I see the sun again, and music does not get on my nerves any more. The flowers and birch branches we received a couple of days ago do not seem like meant for our funeral any more. The dreams of life and of a new spring come back again.

But if I had to part from life now, it would be much harder than yesterday. Today I have a new hope. Have I not seen quite a few miracles in my life?

But maybe this beautiful day is only a brief, shining moment before the end?

We have decided — if any of us survived, then he should write about everything that happened here.

Should not we start to do it right away?

Krigsfänge-(internerings-)kort

05:1

Krigsfänge-(internerings-)kort ex. nr 1, Nation VI-11 420 IR

Efternamn Silantkellin, Föreman Valontina

Identifikationsnummer .., Född 26. / 11. 1924 Rija

Gröd Grenadier, Trupper/band Intt. 29. SS-Division

Hemvist Riga, Gaudjeiz. 29

Närmaste anförare Fader: Antons Silantkelle,

Adress (aufenthaltsort: den Osticola) Krumina, Karlo An Pačevcaj, Pflanzlichgärtner/Schweizer

Civilt yrke Schüler

Tillfångelagen (ombändnings-) vid Oestorpan/Pattina

Ändrad till <u>Reinhold</u>	<u>3 / 10 1945</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>Hinselahn</u>	<u>11 / 5. 19 45</u>
» <u>Rausch</u>	<u>13 / 10 1945</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>19</u>		
» <u>Uden</u>	<u>28 / 11. 19 45</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>19</u>		

Krigsfänge-(internings-)läger Lingon, Havelten

Rymd .., Död ..

Gravplats och nr ..

Hemland Aftransportord nr. 3/3 Holostrov 25 / 1 19 46 Tpr

ankomst 11 / 5. 19 45  
Begrevid ..

*"January 24. (O.D.) Today I sent to Denmark my photographs and a good-bye letter."*

(Oskars Daugulis was in GULAG concentration camp from 1948 till 1953, then returned to Latvia. In July 1993, he was found on a road near his home — dead, with a broken skull.)

### **I accuse Sweden:**

1. It does worse than KGB or Gestapo — motivating its actions with humanity, covering its cruelty with it, not even allowing people to die.

2. It always emphasizes its faith in God, uses the Bible and the Red Cross sign, but does not let us, sentenced to death without a fault, to receive the Holy Communion and the last comfort from a minister that speaks our own language.

3. For nine consecutive months everybody lied to us, showed kind faces, fed us with false promises until the last moment.

4. Swedish government has treated us no better than both occupational powers, keeping us behind a barbed wire fence all this time.

5. They have sold us to the Soviets in order to get an absolution for their war time sins.

"Yes, why don't you want to go home?" they ask. "There you will have a job, there is no unemployment, there is socialism. It wouldn't be as pleasant as here — to sleep and do nothing — but isn't it better to be in one's own country? Yes, we wish you well, but we can not help. Jasaa! (Like that!)" Oh, sancta simplicitas! (Holy simplicity!).

All the flowers and urging to hope is just an irony. Some do not think about it, others are still laughing — even while facing death (Raiskums, Miemis).

The Swedish minister consoled us: "Do not be afraid — all your sins are forgiven, and you will come to Paradise."

**But... I do not harbor ill feelings towards the Swedish people.** Aina, Marie Carlsson, Lindeborg, Vestin, Bonde — they are Swedes too. From them and many others we received much light and good will.

**God, bless Baltia!**

## VII EXTRADITION AND AFTERWARDS

**January 25, 1946.** Early in the morning the door opened and in came the policemen in their black uniforms like messengers of death. There were many of them — three times the number of us. Three of them stood at each bed, searched us, then ordered us to get dressed. (When I remember this, I still tremble.) Then they grabbed us by our arms and legs and started to carry to the bus. This outraged us. We told them to let us walk. And we walked, although we had almost forgotten how to do it. But our rage gave us strength. The policemen held on to our clothes. On the bus they sat next to each of us.

Those of us that had decided not to let the Soviets take us alive knew — we had only two hours left to live. Only as long as to Trelleborg harbor. I looked out of the window, but my mind did not register anything. My glasses had been taken away from me, so I could not cut myself on a piece of glass. The policeman that sat next to me checked my right hand from time to time to make sure I was not holding a weapon. Some of the bus windows were covered with plywood. Swedes really worried about our well-being!

It seemed to me my life was like a movie. Will it continue or will it be cut short? **I did not care whether my life would be good or contained only suffering — if only it would continue! Many things that before seemed important became insignificant in the shadow of death.** Life values change, a different, deeper understanding emerges, even if it is just for a short time — for one hour that's still left.

It is not possible to describe it. Only those who have known they would die in a short while can understand it. And once you have experienced it, this revelation remains with you for the rest of your life. It fades with time but never entirely disappears.

**We had suffered under two occupations; what evil had we done to Sweden that it sent us now to more suffering and death?**

Shortly before Trelleborg a car crossed our path. The bus stopped, and corporal Osvalds Licis was taken off. We understood at once that he would not be extradited. We had heard about his wife spending these last days outside the State Department, ready to kill herself if her husband would be extradited.

There were some more men that managed to stay in Sweden for different reasons. Besides Osvalds Licis there was Gunars Zvejnieks whose father was a civilian refugee. Also Olgerts Gebauers, Vilis Kruminis, Eriks Zhilinskis, and eight fellows that were in hospital with chronic illnesses. One can imagine what they went through before and after they were released. Especially Osvalds — knowing his wife would kill herself if he was taken to the ship.

Before loading into busses, we were given our belongings that we were not allowed to have all through our hospital stay. In my suitcase there was a new suit I bought in Sweden, a windbreaker, some smaller items, and my diaries. But when I opened the suitcase, the suit was not there. I asked how it could disappear from a guarded store room. The policeman replied cynically that in the future I would have no need for a suit; besides, all goods that had been bought in Sweden had to stay in Sweden. It was all too clear — somebody of the Swedish Royal Police had simply stolen my suit.

I had already written a letter to Mr. Kruminsh, asking to give my diaries, photographs, and papers to my father when it would be possible. I put the letter inside, wrote Mr. Kruminsh's address on the suitcase, and asked an elderly policeman to send it. (I owe it to this policeman's honesty that now I have it all in my possession again.)

A lot of policemen felt the same as the Swedish nation — yet they did not protest like the soldiers did but followed the orders.

So we were taken to Trelleborg — a seaport in the southern part of Sweden. That part of the harbor where the Russian ship "Beloostrov" was standing was separated from the rest by a high fence of wooden planks and barbed wire. We heard there even was a tank near by with a machine-gun ready to fire. Nobody was allowed to come near.

Private Herbert Shulmanis went beserk and had such a spasm that several policemen could not bend him — he was absolutely stiff. He, too, was left in Sweden.

In another bus there was lieutenant Peteris Vabulis. At the time of capitulation he was injured, lying in a hospital in Liepaja — together with a German pilot. In the overall confusion they managed to grab the three-motor transport airplane Ju-52 and to take off together with more German soldiers. Soviet fighter-planes shot them down over the Baltic Sea, but Swedish fishermen saved them.

Now somebody asked Vabulis whether he would get on the ship. He replied it depended on whether he would like the ship. Nobody had any idea what he really had in mind.

We were taken on board the ship one by one. Each was held by two policemen.

There are many Golgotha Roads in Baltia, and one is also in Sweden — the road to Trelleborg.

What happened next has been described by the former officer of the guards at one of the camps, now a professor of history at University of Upsala — Kurt Ekholm.

### **The Extradition of Baltic and German Interned Men in 1945/46**

*Around 12:30 p.m. the busses from Geltoft camp arrived at Trelleborg. At that time Latvian lieutenant Peteris Vabulis, 38, committed suicide on the bus. Somehow he had managed to hide a knife; with it he cut his throat, even though a policeman sat next to him and held him. He was taken to Trelleborg hospital but died on the way.*

Another column of busses came from Hesleholm hospital. There an incident happened that newspapers wrote a lot about at that time. A Latvian soldier Valentins Silamikelis thrust his hand through the bus window and cut his wrist. The injury was bleeding profusely. He resisted policemen that took him to the emergency station. Then he was placed on a stretcher, and policemen had to hold him down tightly so he could be carried to the ship. The young man fought them and screamed. On the enclosed gangway he tried to jump into water and almost succeeded. Finally the crew of "S. S. Beloostrov" rudely grabbed him and pulled onto the ship.

***This incident as well as the suicide showed clearly the degree of desperation these men were in.***

*"S. S. Beloostrov" left Trelleborg harbor at 6:15 p.m. It was escorted by a Soviet mine ship that left Istad harbor at 4:00 p.m.*

(Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, page 270-271, Upsala, 1984.)

On the ship I was taken to a separate compartment and warned not to do anything else foolish — that it would not help. And that we had nothing to fear — we would have to work for a short time, and then we would be released. I did not believe it, but at least it did not look as if they were going to shoot us right away. In the cabin there was a mattress but nothing else. Apparently I should forget such luxuries as sheets, blankets, pillows, and towels. For a long time to come I used my Swedish coat as a blanket.

I only had a preliminary dressing on my wrist. The ship's doctor came and put a real dressing on it. In order to do so he had to take off

my wrist watch that the Swedish medics had not removed. The doctor was an intelligent person and an officer — and yet he kept my watch and never gave it back!

However, the doctor gave me my glasses that the Swedish policeman had taken away from me. Glasses were far more valuable to me than the watch, which would have been taken away later anyway — in GULAG camp.

While the ship was still in harbor a Swedish government official came to check if I was still alive. I felt like spitting in his hypocritical face.

Because I was injured I still had a relative comfort. The rest of the boys had been placed down in the cargo room where they did not even have mattresses, only wooden two-storey bunk beds. A new life had begun — full of hardships but still a life.

\* \* \*

We had lost our fight. We were on the enemy ship. But now a **new fight began — the fight for survival.**

The main thing was endurance. To endure everything — violence, starvation, hard work, humiliation. It did not look like they were going to kill us — not all of us at any rate. They needed slave workers.

To the interned Baltic soldiers two civilians were added. They were two Latvians: Osvalds Melecis and Roberts Ciritis. They had come to Sweden from Poland only at the beginning of this year and had been kept almost a month in prison without any interrogation. Were they not extradited to make up for Vagulis and Shulmanis? Just so that the numbers were right!

\* \* \*

We were heading south in the Baltic Sea. The weather was calm, so we were not seasick. Once the ship received a jolt. I remembered what it would mean at war time. But now it was only a large piece of ice.

At noon, on January 27, 1946, we reached the Liepaja harbor. The day was sunny and calm. When I felt again the sand of my native land under my feet, a bright, serene feeling came over me. Was it a prediction for the far away future?

The MGB men (by that time the name of NKVD had been changed) received us with gloomy looks, typical Russian curses, and machine-guns. A black car came; captain Keselis was separated from us and taken away. We had to walk through an alley to a POW camp on the outskirts of the city.

In the camp we found the interned Germans that had been extradited

before us. I met some acquaintances from Havdhem — some German officers. They had lost their former conceit and were nice companions now. We had had the same experience in Kurzeme and later in Sweden, so now we had similar opinions about many things. Danger tends to unite people.

The buildings were the former storage rooms of Liepaja sugar factory. Now there were three-storey bunk beds installed. In the middle of the room there were long tables. Here again those ample Swedish coats came in handy. When the three buttons on the back were unbuttoned, the coat was so wide we could use it not only as a blanket but sleep on it at the same time too. The food was never enough but not so little that we would have to think about it all the time. We received a pound of bread every day and a bowl of thin soup, sometimes barley porridge. The worst was the absolute lack of fat and protein except for the fish heads in the soup.

The Baltic men were kept in a strict isolation. The Soviets were afraid a Swedish spy might be hiding among us. They considered all of us fascists. They mistrusted us so much we did not even have to go to work outside the camp like the Germans did.

Officially it was not allowed to write letters and see relatives. But we found ways to inform them about us being here. Our German comrades did it when they were outside the camp, and civilians passed on the information. Some boys had visits from their parents, including Uldis. The guards did not let us see them, but Uldis' parents let my sister Aina know about me. She was living at our old house in Riga.

We were extremely happy when we started to receive notes from our relatives. Thank God they were still alive! Maybe things here were not really as bad as we had thought? At least none of my relatives and acquaintances had been killed and none of the women raped. But **none of the men of my age that I knew was still here. They were either killed in combat — on both sides of the front lines — or they were behind barbed wires either in the west or in the east.**

The total number of men was 3,000, among them 150 Baltic men. Since the latter were not allowed to work outside the camp we had to do all the inside work. We had to chop wood, do laundry, and everybody's dream was to get to work in the kitchen.

Once I had this privilege. I ate until I almost burst. For the first time in my life I ate millet porridge with fish oil, derived from cod livers. During my childhood cod liver oil was often prescribed by doctors for frail children, and we considered it the most horrible thing, but how good it tasted now!

Mostly our work was in the laundry room. I worked together with

Uldis and two more buddies from Raenneslaett camp. The washing was primitive: we had to scrub the clothes with a brush on a wooden wash-board. At least there was plenty of soap and hot water. Sometimes the Germans asked us to wash their laundry before it was officially considered dirty. For this they gave us either bread or cigarettes. Germans are famous for their super cleanliness, and even here it was more important to them than bread.

Soon after arriving here we, Baltic men, were assembled on the big square in the middle of the camp. The captain of "S. S. Beloostrov" asked if we had any complaints about the way we were treated during the sea voyage. But nobody spoke up. Even I did not mention my watch. What's the use? It would soon be taken away again. Then a high-ranking government official spoke — a Latvian man. He greeted us in the name of Soviet Latvian government and Latvian communist party. He praised us as strong Soviet men that had fought against the capitalists for their freedom and now happily returned home. He also promised we would soon be released and could go to our families.

So they had turned everything round — turned white into black and black into white. Apparently **it was a counter-propaganda to cover their fiasco in Sweden.** That way they tried to wipe out the effective anti-soviet actions: our hunger strike, the suicides, the Swedish demonstrations, the foreign press campaign on our behalf. Really, **in cunning, lying, and cynicism nobody can top communists.**

When we had been in the camp for a week there was an announcement that our baggage had arrived and we had to go to receive it. We were stunned. What baggage? Why? Yes, it had been shipped here from Sweden. All our belongings, including our soldiers' I.D.'s and other papers. Was this the Swedish bureaucracy or the utmost naivety and stupidity? Or just a dirty trick? **Did they really think they had sent us to a normal country instead of the bloodiest dictatorship in the history of mankind?**

My surprise was even greater when my name was called too among the others. So the Swedish policeman had not sent my suitcase to Mr. Krumins! No, it wasn't that. It was only my old soldier's back-pack that I had left in my room in Raenneslaett camp, thinking I would not need it any more. Now the few things in it that were insignificant in Sweden came in very handy here. A towel, a few pairs of socks, a soldier's kettle with a spoon, mending equipment, a pencil, and several sheets of paper. In the back-pack strap I had carved my last name, and so my back-pack had followed me, without my knowing, to Oerebro and Hesleholm hospital, to Trelleborg harbor, and finally — to Liepaja. So the Swedish policeman was a man of honor after all and had fulfilled my request.

Many of us received suitcases. The guards emptied them on the floor, kicked I.D.'s and other papers aside, but did not examine them, and that was our luck. Everything else was given back to us — except knives and fountain pens. If there were any cigarettes or watches the guards took them; they were especially greedy for watches. The things we got back we later traded to guards for bread. If somebody had a suit he could get several loaves of bread for it. At that time we had no use for civilian clothes; bread was more important. Besides, civilian clothes would be stolen by guards anyway.

Latvians have a proverb: a wise man has wise troubles. That's what happened to our supply sergeant. In Oerebro hospital he had asked nurses to exchange his suitcase for a plain bag where to put his belongings — that would be more suitable for a trip to Siberia. Now one of the guards spotted this bag and decided to use it to put in all the things he had confiscated from us. So the poor guy had to use his shirt for his belongings while the rest could exchange their neat suitcases for food.

A few weeks later an unusual number of guards came into the camp. They grabbed lieutenants Peteris Ziemelis and Oskars Rekis, corporal Ernests Balodis, and Lithuanian captain Voldemars Langis. They were ordered to keep their hands behind their backs and led away. Why?

(We never saw these men again. Later we found out the first three of them were shot. That fall Langis had been in the 317th POW camp. I do not know what happened to him after that.)

Several officers and enlisted men were taken away at the end of February. They were told they would be set free, but instead they were put in another camp at Mezhaparks, near Riga. The commander of this camp was an Ukrainian — capt. Djavchenko. He had a benevolent attitude and promised: "Latvians soon go home!"

Seven men really were set free but for a special purpose. They were ordered to speak over radio and tell what a hard time they had had in Sweden and how happy they were now to be free and home. All this was written down for them, and they were ordered to say exactly that. One of the seven — Gustavs Purmalis — had refused to do it. Under the circumstances it was heroism. Swedish journalist Enquist in his book about the extradited Baltic men later wrote that I had spoken over the radio too, but at that time I was still in Liepaja, and nobody invited me to do so. Apparently, it must have been MGB man that spoke in my name.

When all this reached Sweden, the Swedish government was naive enough to believe it: that they (i.e. people that guarded us) had organized the hunger strike by deliberately withholding food from us, had told us we would all be killed, fabricated horror stories about the life in the Soviet Union, and by an exaggerated watching had deliberately cre-

ated panic in the internment camps. They had bought the press and the demonstrators. They had not let "honest people" to come to us and tell the truth. They had refused to release the Baltic men and let them go home. (Later I found out Swedes had naively believed these lies, and there had been a great investigation.)

On February 23rd the commander of the Mezaparks camp had announced that a telegram from Moscow had ordered not to release any more men after the first seven; the rest had to go to a filtration camp.

(Two months later — April 19, 1946 — the Soviet Department of Interior gave out its order No. 363. This order was to release from GULAG camps Latvian, Lithuanian, an Estonian soldiers and instructors. They could be forgiven since they did not know the advantages of the Soviet system, being under the influence of German propaganda. Besides, they were needed for the economy — after the war Baltic territory was left almost without any men. Even Baltic communists — Snehkus, Berklavs, and others — had petitioned Moscow four times to release Baltic prisoners-of-war.)

The basis for Department of Interior to give such an order was the decree of the Soviet Parliament. And it is very possible that the issue of this decree was stimulated by our fight in Sweden, the demonstrations, and the Swedish King's letter to Stalin. *All this actualized the problem of Baltic prisoners-of-war.* The Soviet government, actually Stalin, had to decide what to do with us — former members of German army, now brought in from Sweden. At the same time they had to decide the fate of all Baltic prisoners-of-war. In general, the decision was in our favor.

So there is a certain reason to say that the extradition that meant tragedy for nine men (those that committed suicide and were killed) and suffering for hundreds — us and our families — saved thousands that otherwise might have died.

At that time in filtration camps many died every day from cold, starvation, and violence. (Later I read at least one fourth of all Baltic soldiers who were captured by the Soviets perished there.)

At the end of April or beginning of May we were taken by train to Riga. We were put in cargo cars where the windows are small, but while crossing Daugava I could see that the other bridges and buildings along the shore were in ruins. From the train station in the center of Riga we had to walk to Sarkandaugava — one of Riga suburbs. There our camp was located. It was a deep emotional experience — to be in Riga again. At first it seemed incredible. Am I really in Riga again — my Riga? Even if we have to live behind a barbed wire, guarded by strangers, but here the owners are we!

The neighborhood looked miserable. All through the war and the post-war period nothing had been renovated for such a long time; the wooden buildings were in dire need of fresh paint. The people on streets looked just as colorless and miserable — poor and depressed. Some were drunk. On every corner there was a kiosk where vodka was sold.

It was unusual to see crippled war veterans on streets. I even saw a man that had lost both legs. His torso was fastened on a board with ball-bearings underneath. He moved along by pushing on the pavement with wooden blocks he held in his hands. He was all alone.

Another thing that was hard to get used to was the dirt and refuse all around. We had gotten used to the meticulously clean Swedish cities and streets. Here, it seemed, nobody bothered to clean streets.

But we were kept here only for one day. Then we were divided into two groups. One group stayed in Riga and was sent to work in VEF (State Electronics Factory) and other factories. I with seventy other men was in the other group that was taken to Jelgava to work in a brick kiln at a former farm "Tuski-Bemberi" near river Svete.

The work here was hard. We had to dig clay out of the ground and mash it with an equipment that normally was worked by horses. Then we had to fill the forms and dry them in the kiln. The hardest thing was to get the forms out of the kiln that was blazing hot. But even worse than all that was the constant hunger. We received a pound of bread a day, 2 oz of barley, and a few salted sprats (tiny fish). But with such heavy work it was not enough — especially since we received no fat and almost no protein in our food. To add some flavor to our tasteless barley and water soup we used sorrels that grew around the camp.

Once a farmer drove his wagon into our camp. He had potatoes and other vegetables. We thought we were saved. **But we had no money to buy the vegetables, and the farmer turned around and left. It never occurred to us to steal the vegetables or to take them by force.** We just did not do such things. Later the guards laughed at us and called us stupid. They had let the farmer in on purpose — so we could improve our diet. But we received no salary for our work, so we did not have any money.

The guards occupied the farmhouse. We lived in the former barn where two-storey bunk beds were installed. There were also remains of a former fruit orchard. On Sundays we did not have to work. On such days I was lying in the grass under a berry bush, reading a book I had found in the attic of the house. But I could not concentrate on my reading because I had to think of food all the time. I remembered the potato cellar in our house at Chiekurkalns. If only I had now just one potato!

This was worse than the hunger strike in Sweden. If you do not eat at all you soon do not feel hungry any more. It is much worse to eat something but not enough. Besides, at that time we lay in bed and did not spend any energy while here we were doing hard physical work. Now even such an ordinary food as a potato seemed a treasure. Instead of "daily bread" (called solemnly) I now appreciated the value of a "daily potato"!

The guards watched us on the way to work. One of them who looked like quite an intelligent fellow had a habit of shooting birds. Probably he wanted us to see what a sharp shooter he was. It was a subtle warning. Oh — the intelligent soul!

The food improved when relatives started to visit us and bring something. A total stranger came to me and brought home-made bread that my grandmother had baked. For a few days I felt rich.

The strange man turned out to be my sister Aina's husband Arvids Kalvans. How come? In the fall of 1944 she married corporal Spunde. He was in the army and after the war wound up in a filtration camp. But when Aina went to see her husband's parents she found there also — his first wife! He had not officially divorced her and had not mentioned a word of all this to my sister.

The food, brought by relatives, caused a break between me and Uldis. He received from his parents a big loaf of bread but gave friends — me and two others — only a slice each. It was a law among soldiers to share even a little piece of bread. We continued to see each other, but it was not like before any more.

Even with the hard work and inadequate food our mood improved. We understood we would not be sent to Siberia, and there was a good chance we might be released soon.

**On August 17th** we expected a high government official to arrive at the camp. We cleaned the camp thoroughly and washed our clothes. We found an original way how to do it. We drove some wooden posts into the river bottom, tied our clothes together, and tied them to the posts. We left the clothes in the river for several days, and the current washed them clean. Nobody stole them.

It was the head of Department of Interior that came to the camp. He was a Latvian, his name was Eglitis, and he had been a member of Latvian Riflemen during World War I. (This was a Latvian army unit, as large as a division, that was a part of the Russian army, fighting Germans. Eglitis was one of the few Latvians, residing in the Soviet Union that had survived the "purge" of 1937/38.)

Eglitis announced: "Your country has forgiven you. (Forgiven what? That we fought against the Soviet occupation?) Now we are releasing

you. You will have to work in road repair service — right here in Latvia. Be strong as you were in Sweden, just do not brag about it! If anybody gives you trouble, turn directly to me." (He knew Soviet Latvia was full of denunciators.)

This sounded like a fairy tale, but it turned out to be true. We were released the same day. (By the way, Eglitis did not manage to keep his post as the head of the Department of Interior for long.)

After we got out of the barbed wire "corral" we were taken by trucks through the city of Jelgava. During the war Jelgava had suffered the heavy damage, much more than Riga. There were ruins all around and hardly any people on streets. Only in the outskirts of the city there were still some houses intact.

There were no guards any more. We could hardly believe it. Are we really free? Already since the internment in Sweden we were used to be guarded and to see weapons pointed at us.

We were taken to the road administration building that miraculously was still whole, even though it was near the railway station. It was a nice building, built shortly before the war. I had been there two years ago — in summer of 1944. When now I walked up the concrete steps, holding on to the polished wood banister, I felt as if something of my former life had come back.

Those that were originally of this vicinity the administration kept there. The rest were taken to Riga, and we were given a few days off before starting to work.

I took the streetcar No. 2 — the same as before — and went to my old house. It was like a pilgrimage. I was going home! I realized how lucky I was. There were very few of the former Legionaries that could return home.

I noticed the linden trees on my street had spread out more during the two years I had not been there. On the corner of Augstroze street I noticed a shabby bar, called "Amerikanka", that had not been there before.

When I saw my sister, our eyes filled with tears. She was only twenty, but she was very thin, and the wrinkles on her face painted a hard life.

My former room was now a nursery for my sister's little son Vilnis. But there was still my desk in the room with my picture on it and a little card where I had written: "I'm at war." Now I wrote beneath the former inscription: "I'm home." From the bookcase the portrait of the last president of Latvia Karlis Ulmanis had been removed — together with the little Baltic flag I had left there. Instead there now were photographs of Dad, Rita, and the two cousins that were with them.

Aina's husband Arvids was a good man. He was about thirty at that time, and he could not stand communists. He told me how they had been cheated — the Latvian men that were in the Red army and fought on the Soviet side. **They had been promised a free, independent Latvia** — as soon as they would help to chase out of their country their historic enemy, i.e. Germans. They had believed this promise and sung quite openly the Latvian national anthem. But they had suffered huge losses, while the communist big shots were hiding behind the front lines. There they lived it up while the soldiers had to go hungry. In each army unit there were also NKVD men. They ordered the newly enlisted men to go under the enemy fire. If anybody hesitated to obey, he was shot by the NKVD personnel. Arvids had survived because he was in the artillery. There he suffered a foot injury and was discharged. But he did not know any other survivor from those that were in the Red army with him. Before an attack they had been given alcohol freely so they would be more reckless and brave in combat. From those days Arvids had gotten used to drinking and continued even now. But he was an honorable Red army veteran and could live better than the general population — he had an office job.

For my returning my sister made a very meager dinner: boiled potatoes with a thin gravy, made of flour and water. But to me it was a fantastic feast — because I was allowed to eat until I was full. I had to eat like this for half a year to get rid of the constant feeling of hunger.

The next day I went to see my grandparents. They had a little house in Skirotava — another suburb of Riga. My grandfather was in the meadow with their cow at the moment he saw me coming. He threw his arms up in the air and shouted: "Valenti! Valenti!" Together we walked to the house. My grandmother wept and kept kissing me for some time. I felt as if I was a little boy again. My mother had passed away a long time ago; grandmother had taken her place in my life.

Grandmother told me they had hoped rather to see again my father and Rita but least of all me. When Aina had told them I was at the camp near Liepaja, they had been hardly able to believe it. Then she had hurriedly baked the home-made bread. I told her:

"I survived because I had your magic words with me and your blessing you gave me when we parted. I believed strongly in your words, so I had to return — it could not be otherwise."

But grandmother replied: "Do you really believe that nonsense?"

Yes — I believed. And it is good to believe. It makes one feel safer.

Now that I had returned from "over there", the two old people were hoping the rest of the family would soon return too. Unfortunately I did not know anything about them and could not give any information.

Last year my grandparents had raised wheat, oats, beans, vegetables, and harvested enough hay for the cow. A neighbor had helped with the latter. With a cow and a few chickens they had enough food. They had a milk separator and thus had saved a small tub of butter, expecting us all to come home after the war. But the Soviet soldiers had robbed them and almost killed them too. Grandmother had suffered a back injury, grandfather a broken skull. Neighbors had taken them to the hospital. The robbers had taken all the food they could carry and even aluminum kettles and spoons. But this year again the harvest looked good, and grandmother told me:

"Valenti, it is enough for you to roam around! You can see for yourself it does no good. Now you will stay here. Aina has a family of her own to take care of."

I agreed. And a new life began for me.

## VIII LATVIAN SSR

### YEAR 1946

Beginning with the day we were released from the camp I started to write a diary again. But not every day like I did in Sweden when I had plenty of time. Now I wrote down only the most important events.

**"August 17.** I'm home. In my room in Riga, Ciekurkalns. I have again my freedom, my country — and life. Only a few of my comrades have been that lucky."

**"August 26.** I'm living with my grandparents, but today is my 22nd birthday, and I'm celebrating it at home. It is so good to have a family again. And it is so peaceful here. Like in my school days I can read books out in the garden — and eat as much as I want. I can also listen to the radio, play with little Vilnis, milk the cow, make salad. This is the daily routine I had missed for so long, and it is the best birthday present I could have. It is more valuable to me now than presents, guests, and entertainment used to be before.

**This daily routine at home is the big present fate has given to me."**

**"October 5.** Today I saw Livija and two days ago Aina — of the Dumpuri girls. Their two sisters are at home too. They all go to college and have achieved something in these two years. Aina is reading Baltic philology, Livija — medicine."

**"November 21. Valdis Kruminsh is dead!** Passed away in the Portvanina P.O.W. camp in the Far East, on September 28, 1945 — of tonsillitis and starvation. Aleksandrs Plesums from the "establishment" told me this; he had been in the same camp.

The other day I saw **Zigis Raiskums — alive!** He remained in the other boat when we were crossing the sea. In the storm their boat had turned around and come back. He wound up in a P.O.W. camp in Siberia. He survived but was only skin and bones from starvation."

**"December 1.** I saw Mara Dombrovska. She has returned from her war-time job. She was an army nurse and had gone through hell during the battles in Lithuania. No wonder she now smokes like a chimney! She is from the "establishment" too — a great buddy. She is a philology student at the Latvian State University now. We started to converse about English culture and poetry but drifted into war memories. So many of our former friends and acquaintances are missing — the world is more empty now."

**"December 8.** Up to now I had worked near Bauska, but today I managed to be transferred to Riga. It took 4-5 hours every day to get to work and back. Besides, it was also dangerous. We had no money for transportation, so we tried to get a ride from passing trucks by jumping on them when they were moving. I was lucky to be still alive. Now I'll be working in the "Ushosdor" sector No. 217 in Riga."

**"December 24.** The first Christmas. Candles are scarce, and instead of an evergreen we have a little pine for our Christmas tree. But on the top of it there is one big, white candle. We watch it burning and think of those loved ones that are far away. Here we are all five relatives together: grandfather, grandmother, Arvids, Aina, and I. We sit around the table, and we even have a turkey roast for our holiday feast. It is so good to be with my family again. A year ago I could only dream about it."

**"December 31.** And again it is New Year's Eve. Year 1946 has been the hardest year in my life. I had been ready to die. But this year also gave back my family, my home, and my native country.

Many friends are lost, but many that were thought dead have turned up. Among the latter is my high school friend Leons Markis. He had gone to Moscow shortly before the beginning of the war and could not get back any more. Like all Latvian men of that age he had been drafted too — in the Red army. So in Kurzeme he fought against us — as an officer."

#### **Year 1947**

**"January 2.** After the robbers' attack my grandparents had boarded up the broken windows. I put in window panes. I had a quarrel with grandfather about this. He thought the boards were safer. I was cross with him. Now I'm sorry."

(The notes of the two following months — **January and February** —

I later cut out to be on the safe side in case there was an MGB search. There I wrote that I handed in my papers to Academy of Agriculture, Forestry Division. I really wanted to study architecture, but I chose this place because the investigation was not so thorough here. Once I got in I could transfer to Latvian State University later. In the mandatory "curriculum vitae" I wrote that I had been in Havdhem and Oerebro, not mentioning Sweden. Let them think I had been in Germany like most Latvian war refugees. I also told I had deliberately returned to Latvia. So it came that I was permitted to take the entrance exams, and I passed.)

**"February 27. I started to study forestry.** This brings me closer to my dream — architecture. All I have to do is to get passing grades in those subjects that are needed for architecture: physics, mathematics, physical education (called "fizkultura" — what a name!), and of course — Marxism-Leninism! After that it would not be so hard to transfer to LSU."

Some time in **April** our boss at work — an Ukrainian, former army colonel Permyakov — asked which of us was of the 19th Division. We admitted it honestly since they knew it anyway. Great was my surprise when he started to praise us as good soldiers. Then we were issued French carbines and five cartridges each. We had to guard machinery and also — our former comrades, namely German POW's.

Usually my guard shift was together with a former Legionary Valters Maike. The German POW camp was at the former china factory "Kusnetsov". We had to take them to their work at renovating buildings that had been damaged during the war. Among them were a few that we knew — they had been among the interned men in Sweden. We walked next to them and talked to them, remembering our time together and the tribulations we had been through. There was no hatred or bitterness between us; we all were simply soldiers. And our roles could have easily been reversed — there were places where German POW's guarded Latvian POW's.

**"June 17.** I am out in the country — near Gulbene. I'm visiting my relatives at "Kamaldini" farm. In the little town Gulbene I ran into my buddy from Oerebro — Ojars Caune. In the hospital his bed was next to mine. Now I know how he's doing. He treats me with a drink made of birch syrup." (It is similar to maple syrup but not nearly that sweet.)

**"August 5.** I was permitted to take the entrance exams at Latvian State University. Because of my biography I had considered it impossible. I needed a recommendation from my boss, and he knew everything. He told his secretary to write it, then left. But the girl was flirting with

her boyfriend and let me write it myself. I wrote a perfect biography — with only one little “black spot” to make it credible. So I got the necessary signature, the MGB seal from an officer there, and the recommendation for the LSU. Nowhere did it say that V. Silamikelis was from “Spetskontingent”, untrustworthy, and had to be watched.

The transfer from one university to the other was easy. I was considered trustworthy because the Academy of Agriculture had accepted me. Their’s was the first responsibility. (In the Soviet system everybody tried to avoid responsibility whenever possible.)

“**August 19.** I passed the exams with flying colors. — A and B. The examiner in English was my former English teacher in high school Mr. Curiks. Of course — he really knew what my knowledge of English was.

It was because of him I was glad I passed, because of my friends, and also because of the girl who blushed when she saw me for the very first time. Her name is Aina.

Later I saw Uldis Berzs. We celebrated our release from the POW camp a year ago by smoking a cigarette and talking about our time in Sweden while sitting on a park bench under the spreading linden trees. It was near the central clock of Riga — once a popular meeting place for young people. We remembered also another childhood friend — Janis Drava. Killed in action.”

“**August 21.** I’m waiting for the classes to begin. If only tomorrow I could still live here!” (That was a time when nobody could be sure about the future. One should thank God for every peaceful day. All of us — former Legionaries — were candidates for GULAG; actually all Baltic people.)

“**August 27.** The small, sweet Ruta, one of the “establishment” and sister of Talivaldis Bols that was killed in Kurzeme, has disappeared...” (Arrested.)

“**August 30.** I had my gray Swedish army coat colored blue. Money for it I obtained by selling some “dangerous” books.” (Among them was the boy scout magazine that was considered very controversial.)

“**The first day of September.** There is a sky-diving show at the Rumbula airfield, put on by the Red Air Force. The parachutes look like white dandelions with a black dot underneath. It feels odd to hear voices high above my head. The parachutists touch ground in different

ways: some crouch, some give a jump and then move on, some remain standing. Some get tangled in the parachute, and the wind knocks them down. One parachute did not open. How the man was screaming!

Is this just a manly entertainment or preparation for a new war?"

**"September 6. I have been accepted at LSU, Division of Architecture."**

**"September 10.** My first day at LSU. It is like a continuation of the festival that started for me with passing the entrance exams. The first class was History of Art by prof. Birznieks. It was very interesting and exciting, gives a new awareness. I have this class together with Aina. So we can discuss the lecture afterwards."

**"September 15.** Because I'm a student now I got released from the mandatory work I was doing for "Ushosdor" (Department of Highways). This is great — better than I hoped for.

**One day in the university building I ran into Janis Karklins who was with me in Sweden.** He is in Engineering. Fantastic! A year and a half ago Janis took over my place in the POW camp laundry room. Now he is in the university just like me. Everybody has a fate of one's own.

But now I have new friends, so less and less I think of the old ones. **The beginning of a friendship is always pleasant, but the end can be either sudden and painful, or sometimes friendships just die out on their own.**

Yes, studying is like a holiday for me. And if it also means seeing her — then it is a double holiday."

**"September 16.** In the university I saw Mr. Curiks — my former home room teacher in the First High School, now a professor of LSU. He gave me a long, tight handshake. It was his acknowledgement for everything I had done since the graduation in the spring of 1944."

**"September 22.** Today was the official acceptance of the new students — matriculation. There were speeches, followed by a concert. We had expected some kind of an initiation ceremony, but there was nothing like that. The speeches were mostly about the rules and regulations. However, we had spruced ourselves up as for a really festive event."

**"September 25.** Must be silent... We, the newcomers, are especially watched."

**September 30.** This September has been the best month in my life so far. My dreams have come true — I'm romantically involved."

**October 1.** At night I can hear my grandfather and grandmother tossing and turning. They work too hard for their age. How could I help them? Should I look for a job? But students are not allowed to work. If found out they lose the scholarship. Scholarship can also be lost if you get less than a B in an exam.

One day I ran into another buddy from Sweden — Zebergs. He had heard rumors that we would be called back to the mandatory "Ushosdor" work. That means our studies would be threatened. Only now I completely realize how important it was to me — my studies and also my new friends."

**October 7.** Tomorrow is the name day for all Ainas. (In a Latvian calendar there is one or several names for each day of the year.) In my life there have been four wonderful Ainas: my sister, one of the Dumpuri girls, the Swedish nurse, and now the girl from our group."

**October 10.** I heard the head of the 217th precinct Permjakov, one of the rare normal people in the Soviet system, had been punished because of me. He should not have released those born in 1924; from the year indicated, they had been Legionaries. Maybe I should go to him and thank him?

My friend Valters Maike handed in his papers one day after me and did not get released. But his work shift has been arranged so that he does not have to miss school much."

**October 12.** Today we had gathered at Uldis' place. He has a lot of books and records of classical music. We listened to Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" and ate melons. Uldis had raised himself. At tea time the three of us — Uldis Berzs, Stumbris, and I — remembered our tragedy in Sweden and told our girlfriends about it. It was a nice evening. But for how long will we be able to live such a peaceful life?"

**October 13.** I did it — went to my former boss to thank him. But he "kindly" turned down my gratitude: "Go to hell!" He had told his superiors I had simply disappeared and he did not have the time to look especially for one person.

**November 5.** A big celebration is coming — the commemoration of the October Revolution. (According to the old style calendar it was

October; now the date is November 7th.) We, architects, have to draw posters, maps, and other materials for communist propaganda. I received the following lines to put on a poster:

"Soviet scientists! Enrich the science and technique with new research, inventions, and discoveries. Walk bravely the road of innovation!"

All this could be said in a shorter and simpler way: "Scientists — research, discover, and invent bravely!" But we were strictly forbidden to change anything. Every letter had to be just so — **to preserve the party discipline. Individual initiative was punishable; communists believed that would lead to chaos.**"

"**November 7.** This is the demonstration we all have to take part in. We have to march past the platform where the government and the party leaders stand. While doing that we have to show happy faces and shout: "Hurrah!" We each had to put a red paper flower into the lapel. And we are supposed to sing communist songs. But our group sings Latvian folk songs instead and even an old song that ends with the words: "I am a Latvian, and I'll always be a Latvian!" The posters are all bright red with white or yellow letters. This is supposed to be a voluntary rejoicing of the people, but actually it was mandatory to take part in the demonstration.

The air is filled with the aroma of alcohol — there are old, freezing women on street corners that sell small portions of vodka. They also sell dried out rolls and even oranges. Really — a merry folk festival according to the regulations."

"**November 13.** Terrible days! I have to stop writing the notes. I don't know when and whether I'll start them again. My only consolation is to study hard. I envy my school-mates — they can sleep peacefully."

(At that time it looked as if I was being shadowed, and I was sure I would be arrested any day. The observer might have been a student from our course.)

"**November 23.** Ten days later I am resuming my diary, and I am still at home. Praise be to God!

**My old childhood friend Viesturs Krauklis has returned home.** I remember how on September 1, 1939, Viesturs, Leons, and I were all together when we heard over the radio about the beginning of World War II. Now we are together again. It's a miracle we all are still alive.

Yesterday I visited Rasma Bodmane — also from the "establishment".

She was Karlis Mishke's girlfriend. Karlis mother was at her place, too. She wanted to know all and all about her son, and I told her — about the battles of Kurzeme and about Sweden. That day two years ago we started the hunger strike."

**"November 29. My buddy Oskars Doma is dead.** He was always in a good mood, always joking, and he was a true comrade. He was with me in Sweden, in Liepaja, and we were working together after that. Now he is dead — killed while jumping from a moving vehicle on his way to work."

(For their son's "sins" his parents — a poor fisherman and his wife — were deported to Siberia in 1949.)

**"December 7.** Today I brought some bread to my sister Aina's family. For six days the grocery stores in their neighborhood did not have any bread, so she could not get all she was supposed to get on the food coupons. I had no idea about this. Yes, in the city it is not like at my grandparents' house where they produce their own food. In the city — if you can not get food from the grocery store, you have to go hungry. Why did Aina not come to our place for help?"

**"December 8.** Ojars Caune has come to visit me. We still get along just as well as in Oerebro hospital where my bed was next to his. He had tried to get a job at the Riga Opera, in scenery workshop. **But he had not been accepted because of his time in Sweden.** Now he is working as a painter. He tries to get work at private apartment repairing — there people feed the repairmen."

**"December 13.** This is St. Lucy's Day. It is not celebrated in Latvia, but I have to think of Sweden. Do those sweet nurses — Aina, Dagmar, Ingrid, and "auntie" Carlsson — still remember us? Probably — it was something unusual. It was only two years ago but seems so far away. But it touches my heart warmly when I think of it. Is Aina Eriksen still alive?" (She had cancer.)

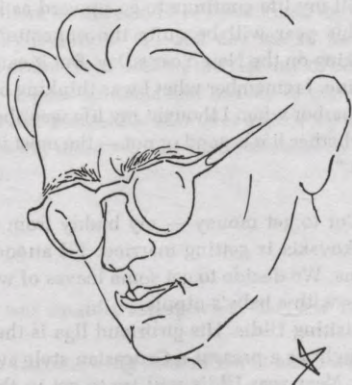
**"December 14.** Students have also military training. We are taught to shoot — again! After being in combat and using machine-guns the small shot-gun we are using now seems a joke. But it is good that this time we do not have to shoot at living targets. Out of the possible 30 points I get 25. I get praised by the trainer — a Soviet officer: "Ho-rosho!" (Good!) No! Never again should I use this skill to kill people!"

**“December 15.** A new money has been issued — the war time roubles are not valid any more. The new money is very similar to the old tsarist roubles. It is typical of the Soviet system — to remind people of the imperial times. The same can be seen in the army — Soviet officers’ uniforms are very similar to the old tsarist army uniforms. And the official Soviet policy often reminds of those times too — like the privileges for government officials and party functionaries.

Today stores are full of goods, but what will be tomorrow?”

**“December 20.** Today I received my monthly scholarship — 189 roubles. But we are supposed to donate one month’s scholarship to the state — “voluntarily”. In this system this word has a different meaning. Those with higher salaries are so “delighted” they donate twice.”

**“December 31.** It is New Year’s Eve again. Today my brother-in-law Arvids had gotten for me a loaf of real Latvian rye bread I had not eaten since my parting from home in the fall of 1944. (A big, round loaf costs 12 roubles.) In grocery stores you can get only the form bread that we call “bricks”. Swedish rye bread is very different from ours. So it is three years since I have not tasted real Latvian rye bread. This bread is meant for the privileged class; it is not allowed to sell it. How Arvids managed to get it — that’s his secret. But I have heard people often rather work



Summer 1947. Homestead “Dzeni” in the rural district Katlakalns by Riga. Author’s self-portrait

not for a bigger salary but in places where they can "organize" some groceries. ("Organize" in this case means to steal from the state.)

**Year 1947 is gone.** This was a good year. I wish all the following years would be that good! For one thing — I was accepted at the university that was my big dream. Besides, I have met many new, nice friends there — Aina, Ruta, Andris, Gunars, Felix, and others.

The peaceful life gradually peels off the hard shell I had grown while being a soldier and later a prisoner-of-war. But we still do not have any news of Dad and Rita."

This is what I wrote at that time, but it was not all that perfect. The outwardly peaceful life with the opportunity to attend university and to make something of myself was only one side of the coin. There was also the other side that nobody spoke of but everybody knew. Often I felt as if I was hanging by a hair. Some of my buddies disappeared, but we did not dare to talk about it, and it was even more dangerous to write about it. The fact was that the occupants were slowly exterminating the Baltic nations. But we could not show our true conviction. We could not say what we were really thinking — the enemy was not supposed to know.

## YEAR 1948

**"January 1.** Will my life continue to go upward as it has been last year? Or maybe this year will be quite the opposite? Such are the thoughts I am thinking on the New Year's Day. But it can not always be success and sunshine. I remember what I was thinking on the Golgotha road to Trelleborg harbor when I thought my life was about to end: it is not so important whether life is good or not — the most important thing is that it continues."

**"January 14.** Got to get money — my buddy from the "establishment" Edgars Rutkovskis is getting married. I'll attend the wedding together with Rasma. We decide to get some loaves of white bread and a bottle of cream — with a baby's nipple.

Tonight I am visiting Uldis. His girlfriend Ilga is there too. This is his birthday. I brought as a present a Caucasian style sweet bread that we ate right away. Next year Uldis will try to get in the Architecture Division at the LSU. If I managed — maybe he will be just as lucky?

I have dyed the gray Swedish army overcoat navy blue to make it look like a civilian overcoat. My schoolmates have managed to get the

necessary clothes too, but it is a far cry from the latest fashion. Many did like I did — dyed and made over foreign uniforms. I use my Swedish army coat undyed but made over into a jacket."

**"January 21.** Once again I tell Karlis' mother about her son, about the war, and about Sweden. She wants to know every tiniest detail. She still hopes someday he would come home." (She never saw her son again. Likewise my grandmother was waiting all her life for her sons **Arnolds and Rudolfs Emolins that were shot during the purge of 1937/38 in the Soviet Union.**"

**"January 25.** During the three previous years this has been a significant date in my life. In 1945 I was near Lestene when my friend Valdis Krumins arrived with the men from the 15th Division. In 1946 — Trelleborg. And last year it was the beginning of my studies at the Academy of Agriculture. This year I'm simply happy to be at home. But for how long?" (At that time I did not know yet what would happen in 1951 on that date.)

**During summer** that year I had a job. **At the end of August** I made a trip to Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) together with my school-mates Aina Titmane, Ruta Kronenberga, Andris Galeniaks, and Normunds Vijups. The city is beautiful, and there is so much to see. All the old castles and churches, and above all — the Hermitage (a famous art gallery).

We stayed there for a week. Here I celebrated my birthday — August 26th. I'm twenty-four now. On that day we all had a romantic walk along the bank of the Neva. But on the last day of our trip we had to go without eating — poor students had run out of money.

Is it always like that in life that after a great joy you have sorrow or at least troubles but more seldom after sorrow there comes great joy? I had it that way.

## YEAR 1949

This year I was soundly asleep when the New Year began.

**"March 11.** There is a big celebration at our house — we have electricity again. My grandparents had to live without electricity all these years after the war. But with the help of our neighbor Ciemgalis we made the posts, found the isolators, and our roomer Jazeps Bulis found wires. It cost 250 roubles and one week of hard work, but now the

former line that was stolen by Russians just after the war is renewed, and we have the accustomed comfort again.

Towards the end of March one night I went to see one of the "establishment" girls — the beautiful and nice Valija Damberga. A few days ago I had run into her on the street and promised to visit her to talk about old times and tell my adventures. Now she was a medical student and lived with her sister near the Riga harbor.

On my way I noticed many trucks, gathered at several places. There was also an unusual activity at a government building, and there were police patrols on the streets. All this reminded me of the night of June 13, 1941 — the night before the deportations. That time on Victory square there seemed to be nearly all trucks of Riga. I knew communists had not changed. This could mean only one thing: another mass deportation.

#### **That day was March 24, 1949.**

When I got to Valija's place I told her my observations and suspicions. I asked her and her sister a permission to stay at their place that night. Of course, they agreed. My grandparents were already so old I was sure they would not be taken — even if the MGB men came for me.

We all spent a sleepless night, listening for the sounds of trucks outside and expecting a knock on the door any time. We did not know for sure there really was a deportation planned. We tried to console ourselves with the thought there was no reason for it. The war was over; who was threatening them now? On the other hand — we knew all Soviet promises about autonomy for the Soviet republics were pure lies. During the war they had allowed Latvian soldiers in the Red army to sing our national anthem, but now one could get ten years in Siberia for singing it. In general there was a tendency to wipe out everything that was Latvian, and everything Russian was enormously praised.

That night we passed the time by the girls' stories about how they had survived up to now; also I told them my adventures. And we talked about our comrades from the "establishment" — those that we knew about. I told about Julijs Brachs and Modris Gulbis that were alive in the West. Also about Talivaldis Bols and Augstmanis that were killed in Kurzeme. Valija told me about Gastons Kreslinsh that had died of TB after returning from the filtration camp.

In the morning we were happy nothing had happened, and we promised each other to get together again soon. However, it happened only after a long, long time.

I found out nobody had looked for me at home, but to be on the safe side I did not go to university that day. Instead I went to Chiekurkalns

to see if my sister and her family was all right. Aina's husband Arvids was a Red army veteran, a celebrated hero, but in this system you could never be sure. Yes — they were at home.

Later we heard over 50,000 persons had been deported. This action was meant especially for farmers, so most of the deported were country people. In the deportation of 1941 the country and city dwellers were in approximately equal numbers. The reason for this action was simple: to establish collective farms in Latvia. Latvian farmers were not going to do it voluntarily. Only by deporting, especially the owners of the big farms, it was possible to establish collective farms in Latvia and other Baltic States. This was the devil's instrument that did it.

The other "enemies of people" were arrested, shot, or deported right after the end of the war and the beginning of the second Soviet occupation. It continued all these years. Not only cities were half-empty after most of the intelligentsia had either fled to the West or been lost in Siberia, but now the same situation was also out in the country. Part of the population had perished during the war, but even more had been deported.

The tragedy was mentioned nowhere. The official version was that the deported ones were "koulaks" — big land-owners that had supported the national guerrillas. (But among the deported there were little children, old and ill people.) When during the Gorbachev's era of "openness" Soviet historians were allowed to talk about it — this was their version too. (They ignored the fact that national guerrillas continued their fight long after the year 1949 — until Khrushchev's thaw in 1956.)

That summer I worked with architect Plaucinsh on behalf of the Monument Department. Since atheism was the official state policy in the Soviet Union the churches in Latvia were in danger. Especially in Latgale there were many old, beautiful Catholic churches. My task was to save the Catholic churches in Vilani, Varaklani, Stirniena, Gaigalava, Rikava, and Barkava from possible destroying. To measure, draw pictures, and describe them. Then we asked the department to give them historical monument status. It was granted. I did all the trips by bicycle and at the same time researched and photographed interesting old buildings as well — Latvian, Russian, and Polish architecture that all could be found in that part of Latvia. Especially interesting were the decorations carved in wood on old wooden houses.

It was a beautiful summer, but I did not have time for keeping up my diary any more. Instead of writing I was living now.

**All the people that were still left out in the country "voluntarily" organized collective farms.** They gave up their land, cattle, equipment — just so they would not be sent away.

That fall a new order was issued: all college students that had graduated from high school in the time of independent Latvia or during the German occupation had to get a Soviet diploma. For me it meant I would probably be weeded out as "undesirable". But other communist functionaries made it possible for us to take all exams again as externs and get the required diploma. In three days I had 18 exams at my old high school building and "passed" them — thanks to the understanding teachers. (Now this building served as an evening high school too.)

## YEAR 1950

A new decade has begun. What will it bring? The previous decade was a horrible one. There are few Latvian men of my generation that are still alive. And even fewer that are at home now. For me the time 1940-1950 was a time of upheaval, danger, adventure — but lucky after all.

From January 27th to February 7th I spent time in a students' skiing camp near Cesis. There was also an amateur concert that all skiers were supposed to take part in. At first my group refused — we had not been prepared for it. Then we were reminded we were **Soviet** students; we couldn't refuse. So we sang the only song we knew. It was a comical song, and the lyrics of it had been written by one of Latvian classics — Rudolfs Blaumanis. We thought we had gotten away with it, but there was a woman that accused us of popularizing "bourgeois ideology" instead of communist ideas. The new Soviet professionals should not be like that. Besides, we had shown disrespect to Stalin's portrait at the wall by dancing under it in skiing clothes and boots.

A faculty meeting was called for "confessions" and reprimand. The main singers — Ted Nigulis and Bruno Artmanis — almost got expelled. But since they did not have any previous "sins" they were left in school for the time being.

### **All this — thanks to our "conscientious" stoolpigeon!**

I was lucky again. My name was not on the skiers' list because I had come instead of somebody else who could not make it. Otherwise I definitely would have been kicked out since I was considered untrustworthy to begin with.

The Midsummer night we celebrated at the sea-shore, and it was a beautiful evening. But right after that we heard about the war in Korea. Was this the beginning of World War III? If Soviets had the atomic bomb too, then the end of the world could be near.

**"July 4. One of my comrades in Sweden — Laimdots Ozolinsh —**

has shot himself. (After the interrogation by MGB.) So again our group has dwindled. I have heard **almost all our officers were...** (arrested)." The words in parenthesis I had cut out of the diary.

July 21-23 was the time of **Song Festival**. It is an old Latvian tradition that was started towards the end of the 19th century. **This unites people and gives a sense of national awareness.** The choirs sang beautifully, and equally beautiful were their national costumes. **I decided the girl I would marry should wear the white national costume from Abrene instead of the traditional wedding gown.** (Just a year later it really happened, and the same gown was worn by my daughter Gundega 30 years after that.)

### **We will not perish!**

(For the month of July three pages are cut out of the diary.)

In July I handed in my essay on the subject "The Building Ornaments in Latgale". As a reward I received an excursion to Moscow and... a wife.

The excursion was from August 10th till the 21st. It was a group of twenty students. In that group was also a dentistry student Zinta Nimande. We celebrated her birthday during that time, and because of that she stuck in my mind.

After a few months I had a bad toothache. I remembered Zinta and sought her help. As a gratitude I drew a poster for her. When I delivered it to Zinta's place I met **her sister Ilga. The minute I set my eyes on her I knew: this is the right girl for me.**

Later I found out she had seen me before — on the excursion pictures Zinta had. And already then she had said to Zinta: "This man will be my fate."

When the winter vacation came I invited Ilga with some of her girlfriends to join me and my friends on a skiing trip. What happened on that trip is told in my letter to Ilga, written February, 1951. Here is a part of it.

*"I had a warm feeling when you hurried to me with my cap that I had lost after turning two involuntary somersaults, coming down a steep hill. But it was even nicer when later, while mending your broken ski-strap, I stroked your tiny foot. Do you remember?"*

*The strap was mended. I wished more straps would break. But you blushed and hurried away. I wished I could do much more for you. I did not know what was going on in your heart, and at that time you did not know yourself.*

*Going down the hill, I fell again. You, girls, looked back and saw me down on the ground. No, that was a shame! I got up and decided to go down the hill again. But the river bank was steep, and at one point I*

*had to make a turn. I missed it and fell down. With my head forward I was sliding down with a breath-taking speed. A tree stump, hidden in snow, bruised my shoulder, but the next moment my right leg hit the tree stump, and I felt a blow in my hip. I looked back and saw my leg in a perpendicular position. I understood — it meant it was broken. My first thought was: how good that you, girls, did not see it. But if I had slid down a little more to the right — then it would have been my head that hit the tree stump."*

So far the letter, but now I have to tell what happened after that. I straightened out the broken leg and yelled for help. The girls were too far away to hear, but my course mates Nigulis, Mincs, and Artmanis that were still on the river bank came and took care of me. From a nearby farm they got a horse-drawn sled and took me to the nearest hospital. Every little bump on the road caused the leg to hurt terribly.

The girls found out about this only on the train, going home. It was late at night by the time they reached Riga, but Zinta and Ilga still made the trip to Chiekurkalns to notify my sister.

This happened on **January 25** — five years after Trelleborg. The next day all four girls came to visit me at the hospital, but only one visitor was permitted. I asked Ilga to come in.

The following three months I spent in this provincial hospital. My leg healed, but the bones had not been put together properly. During this time Ilga made the train trip from Riga — more than an hour — every day to see me.

Neither my former girlfriend Aina nor other school mates visited me (they did not know where I had disappeared), except two: Irene Stradina and Uldis Berzs. Uldis wanted to know my plans after leaving the hospital. **He tried to persuade me to leave the university and go somewhere far away. I understood — I was in danger.** But where could I go with my bum leg? I decided to stay put — come what may.

(Irene Stradina had found out about me from her father — a famous surgeon. Uldis had been sent by MGB, but he let me know about it.)

To set my bones right I had to undergo a complicated operation in the Institute of Traumatology in Riga. It was already Midsummer when finally I could leave the hospital. Then we did not wait any longer — on June 24th Ilga and I were married.

Before the wedding I warned Ilga that I could be arrested any time. She replied: "I'll go with you!" Her father was a school teacher. He said to me: "You are a Latvian, and we are Latvians; whatever will happen, we'll take it together."

A week before the planned wedding date we had to register at the city hall. My friend Ilmars Skards had a car. I still had a cast on but with

Ilmar's help I was able to leave the hospital. However, after that, for leaving the hospital on my own I was kicked out. Luckily Ilmars with his car was still there; he took me to Ilga's place. Later the doctor took pity on me and removed the cast — one day before the wedding.

Ilga had graduated from the medical school that spring. Since she was married now she was not sent to work far away but got a job in the psychiatric hospital in Jelgava.

**The night of August 11th, a month and a half after the wedding, I was arrested.**

...

## IX VORKUTA

In this chapter my memories and letters are from the period 1951-1956. During this time GULAG camps gradually gave up the goal to destroy people. Instead they became the fulfilling establishment for the "socialistic development plan". After the death of Stalin early in 1953 the terror lessened.

Here I have described the conditions in the camps adjoining the mines No. 8 and No. 40. These camps were of the best outfitted in the coal region of Vorkuta. Supplies arrived regularly because of the nearby railroad. And packages, received from home, helped to fight starvation and survive.

Most of the persons in the management of Trust "Pechoruglegeologija" were former camp inmates, so they acted sensibly. Several times they saved me — because I was the only one capable of doing my specific job. Also the fact that I had not been arrested earlier was lucky for me. By the year 1951 I had already learned enough to work as an architect. The third lucky factor was that I was married.

## THE ARREST

I was arrested on the night of August 10th and taken to MGB building in Riga. The same place where I had worked so much during the years of German occupation, together with my comrades from the National Guard. From August 11th till October 4th I had to live through twenty interrogations. I was accused of anti-Soviet action in Sweden and anti-Soviet propaganda during the German occupation. These two protocols I refused to sign. I insisted on the version Dr. Eichfuss had advised us to use: we had acted against the Swedish government to achieve release from internment so we could return home. As for the time of German occupation, I told them I guarded the NKVD prison cells against destroying and did administrative work, so I had neither time nor interest to do any propaganda.

This enraged the interrogator Bukanov. He called it impertinent lies, threatened to send me to the most terrible camp in the Far North —

“where the white bears live” — and several times was about to smash my face but did not do it, and finally tore up the unsigned protocols. Later in my prison cell I found out from a Jewish lawyer Joffis who had been arrested as a Zionist that the interrogators were no longer allowed to beat the prisoners as they used to. Now it was allowed only in special cases when the prisoner was so important the truth had to be “beaten out of him”. And each time a written permit was needed from the head of MGB. I was not that important.

This new order was not for the sake of humanity. But by torturing the interrogators made their victims to confess even if they were not really the bandits or spies, or whatever they were accused of. So MGB did not find the real persons.

The threats about “white bears” came true: I was sent to Vorkuta that was 200 km beyond the Arctic Circle. But before that, on October 12th, I had a happy surprise — I could see my wife. She dared to come and receive my diaries I had written since my return to Latvia. They had been taken at the time of my arrest, but already before I had removed all incriminating passages. She might have been arrested and deported too — often they did that with the family members of “enemies of people”.

We could meet in one of the interrogation rooms. Ilga's face was radiant, and an immense warmth flowed from her eyes. We embraced each other, forgetting everything else. We were left alone. Was it done so they could secretly overhear our conversation? But this meeting gave us strength to bear everything that followed.

While we, the prisoners, were in the MGB cells we were longing for the Central Prison of Riga. Comparing to the basement cells here and the incarceration closets where one could neither sit nor stand and a bright light was shining all the time, a regular prison seemed like a sanatorium. At least there was more air; the lack of fresh air was another hardship here.

After two months in the MGB “hotel” we were moved to the Central Prison. And a month later, on November 12th, the trial took place. On that day I did not care about myself, only about my grandparents and my wife. It was pride that helped me to stand the trial. On that day I was with all the rest of real Baltic men who loved their country and did not cater to the occupants. Those who had the guts to resist. **And at my trial I was the only defendant.** I had not betrayed anyone else.

## THE TRIAL

The trial resembled a theatrical performance. The defendant was the main character, and the rest of the players were: a disgusting, self-satisfied, fat judge with a low brow and a leering look, used to pronounce death sentences; a stupid MGB sergeant, and a sleepy civilian that was the only jury person. The latter two never opened their mouths during the whole trial.

The judge announced that I was on trial neither for being a member of German army nor for escaping to Sweden. According to a decree by the Soviet Parliament no Latvian, Lithuanian, or Estonian soldier or instructor might be punished for this. "But anyway, we will find something to put you in a camp for — you, son-of-a-bitch!" He also cursed "damned Swedes" that had made all the noise.

It looks like there were only two types of punishment these trials were giving: either 25 years in a concentration camp plus 5 years in a settlement and loss of all rights — or the death sentence that was officially called "the highest measure" (an invention of the Soviet lawmakers). If the sentence was given in absentia, then it was lighter — 15, 10, or even just 5 years. The latter was usually given to those that were willing to betray others.

Yes, there was one more character in the play — my lawyer. My father-in-law Pauls Nimands had engaged lawyer Minsker. He had heard that this lawyer had been able to get lighter sentences for his defendants. But Minsker told him in my case he could not do anything. However, he helped out in different ways. He told my family about the trial and about my attitude. He also tried to console me that I would not have to spend all those years in a camp. For those that worked hard and behaved the sentence was cut in half. He also gave me a candy bar from my family, and in it I found a letter from my wife.

There were two witnesses — my former comrades from the "establishment": Rutendarzs who was arrested for another matter and Agris Kimenis who was still free. They told the same thing I had said — that I had been the custodian of the building and busy with administrative work. Nobody told I had taken thousands of visitors through the prison cells. They were not intimidated by the judge's threats. Especially Kimenis who risked his freedom. And none of those 40,000 visitors we had taken through the NKVD cells betrayed me either.

A witness was needed for the Swedish period as well. That was Dr. Janis Slaidins. But he too did not say anything bad about me. After his testimony the judge cursed again: "To devil with such witnesses!" But it was really not important what the witnesses said; it was impor-

tant only that there were witnesses as required by law. Their main task was just to testify that I was a member of the "establishment" and had taken part in the hunger strike in Sweden. Kimenis was not arrested. That means I was on trial mainly for Sweden, not for the membership in the National Guard.

I was given 25 plus 5 years for "betrayal of one's country", 10 years for anti-Soviet propaganda during the war, and 10 years for anti-Soviet propaganda abroad. Together it was 45 years in camp plus 5 years in settlement. But to show the Soviet court was humane it was reduced to 25 years. With the confiscation of one's estate, of course. In this case the state gained from me... a fig.

Everybody else who was on trial that day received the same sentence — 25 + 5 years. Even those that without firearms, armed only with a club, had guarded a haystack; they were accused of supplying the German army. All members of the so-called self-defense groups were punished the same way. But one of them got the "highest measure" — for armed resistance in the woods.

We all knew already beforehand about the usual punishment and took it with composure and dignity. We did not believe we would really have to stay there that long. But there was one who was so crushed he wept. "What for?" he complained. "I never did anything to them! I know they would not release anyone — but why so much? The interrogator told me I would get less if I was honest and told everything."

There are all kinds of people, but only a few were so naive as to believe such promises. It was one of the tricks of this devilish system — to get what they wanted with such promises. Of course, we all felt bad about our future, but we were determined to survive. Such softies as that one probably never came back.

There was something else. There were so many of us that we felt a consolation because of that. We were proud to be where all the best people of our nation were these days. **At this hard time — harder than during the war — I was again a part of Baltic history.** I also consoled myself with memories of Trelleborg. That was worse because then I was ready to die.

Sometimes just a little thing can help. For me such a "safeguard" was a book about the technology of metals. In the Central Prison we were given books from the prison library. I kept this one, and it was not found in any search because I had strapped it on my chest under the shirt. Now I'll be able to put my time to good use — I can study. **"You, judge, can say what you want — you are not the one to decide my fate. There is someone else above, and I can do something about it too."**

Before the trial interrogator Bukanov gave me the accusation papers

to sign. To make sure I would not deny anything (that would mean he had not done a good job) he did me a little favor: he let me know who had reported me to the Security Office.

This thing went back to the summer of 1943 when Talivaldis Bols from the "establishment" and I were celebrating Midsummer Night at his father's farm in Piebalga. The farm was rented out to somebody else, and this person had two sons — just teenagers at that time. Talivaldis bragged to those boys what an important work we were doing in the former NKVD building and that I was the custodian there.

One of these boys later joined the "Communist Youth". He also was a law student at LSU. In the fall of 1950 I was a fourth year architecture student. All students, regardless their majors, had military theory together. And it was here where this miserable individual recognized me. He did not even know my name, but he remembered what had been told about me. He wanted a merit for himself to promote his career, so he wrote a report about me, embellishing the facts he knew with his own fabrications. (My name he found out from one of my fellow students.) **The name of this denunciator was Ludis Pakalnietis.**

Later I found out he had received 500 roubles for unmasking an "enemy of people". He also moved up in the "Communist Youth" organization — he was accepted in the Central Committee. Eventually he became a professor of Marxism-Leninism in the Academy of Agriculture in Jelgava. There he had a habit of sitting unseen in the lavatory in order to listen to students' conversations and report anything "suspicious". For this he had earned a nickname "lavatory professor". Finally it was discovered he had raped some female students that had come to his house for tests. For this he lost his job and also was expelled from the communist party. His wife divorced him. The latest news I heard was that Pakalnietis had turned into an alcoholic.

Another way to torture prisoners was to deny the defendants water during the trial. The thirst was so great I had only one wish: for the trial to be over so I could return to the prison cell. Was this done on purpose — to make the defendant to agree to everything?

When I finally was back in the prison — now already at the other end — I had to quench my thirst first, only then I greeted people there. I was in a good company; they were all political prisoners.

On the way to the courthouse and back I had the last look at my beloved Riga. I said "good-bye" to it, not knowing if I would ever see it again. I heard somebody's steps, running after the prison truck. They became weaker and weaker. I did not know it had been my wife.

## THE CENTRAL PRISON

The Central Prison has several buildings. I was put in the largest one that was near the railroad tracks. On the other side was the women's building but in the middle — the walking ground. It was divided by high walls. High above, on bridges, guards watched the prisoners that were taken out for a walk; they were not allowed to stop or to talk to each other. In each division there were only prisoners of one cell.

Those that have been sentenced to death are in a separate building. It stands perpendicularly to the largest building. On the other side of the yard there are some workshops and a small building where the death sentence is performed by shooting.

After the trial I was moved to the other end of the building. We were 50 men in one cell. There were two-storey bunk beds. The windows were "improved" — boarded up, so there was a twilight even during the day. Near the door there was a 25 gallon barrel for our toilette needs. The newcomers had to sleep near it. We had only mattresses, filled with wood shavings, but my family had sent me bed-linen. So I could sleep in a relative comfort: the chamber-pot near by and enough air with "aroma". It was not allowed to sleep during the day.

This was an old prison tradition: one always listened to the heating system pipes for the knocks from the other cells — that was the way to communicate among ourselves. Another way was to leave notes in the lavatory where we were taken twice a day. In our monotonous life these trips were the highlights of the day. The creative mind of prisoners is really admirable.

Sometimes we received shabby books from the prison library — mostly Marxism-Leninism propaganda. But we read even those to ease the boredom. We were allowed no newspapers or magazines, but food packages from our families were allowed. About half of us received packages and shared them more or less. So here we were not starving — yet. These packages from home were the greatest source of joy for the prisoners. How our values had changed! Tiny things that we would not even notice in normal life gave pleasure here, while events from our past that at the time seemed almost tragic now made us smile about our erstwhile folly.

We had to sign our name for receiving packages. On the receipt was the signature of the person that had brought in the package. It was painful to see it was never my dear Ilga, only my sister and my mother-in-law. At that time I did not know Ilga was working in Jelgava, was there all day long, but packages were accepted only during certain hours, so somebody else had to come and stand in the long line. Longer and longer every year.

It is hard to express **the constant burning sensation of captivity**, the incessant longing for home and the loved ones. The wish to change oneself into a bird behind the barred window!

After the trial the prisoners were allowed to see relatives — just once before departing for a long, long time or forever for some. My turn luckily came already in January. But alas! It was not Ilga.

Behind the iron bars that stood between us there was my mother-in-law — crying. It turned out Ilga had been sent to Leningrad to some qualification improvement course for doctors. She had left a few days ago. My mother-in-law told me also about my sister. She consoled me and promised to keep sending the packages of food. In GULAG camps it was crucial. She also told me my father-in-law had paid my lawyer Minsker to appeal my sentence. Neither I nor my family had any illusions that it would help, but we thought — it would not do any harm.

Minsker warned that it could do. But we were still thinking normally, using common sense. We had not learned yet — **in this system there was no logic.**

If the highest court had really looked over my case — it was possible some judge would get the idea of making a Swedish spy out of me, and that would have cost me my life.

## AWAY

The regular shipment of beasts of burden took place in the middle of January. Comparing to the way the deported persons were transported in 1941, we were traveling in comfort. They were transported in cattle cars; we had passenger cars with benches in two stories, four prisoners on each bench. That meant 16 men in a little compartment, meant for only 4 persons.

We were mostly political prisoners, hardly any criminals. Our first trip was not long — only to Leningrad. There we were put into the distribution prison, called “peresilka”.

Somewhere in the city — maybe just a few blocks away — was my wife, but I had no way of letting her know. I had the first opportunity to do it when we were taken to sauna. The personnel there were criminals. I took a chance and gave one of them a piece of paper, folded into a triangle. On the outside of the paper was my wife's parents' address, inside a short letter. But I had no postage. We were allowed to have neither postal stamps, envelopes, nor writing paper. I had heard some of the criminals had connections with outside. And I was lucky; the stranger had mailed my letter, and my family received it.

Why did he do it? Was it a solidarity towards a fellow prisoner? To be able to work in the sauna — that was a top job, but for such a thing he might have lost this privilege. Or was this another cunning on the part of MGB? Usually such good jobs were given to informers. They were supposed to read such secret letters and report to MBG about them.

At any rate, my mother-in-law received the letter and sent a telegram to Ilga in Leningrad.

After a week I started to wait for a letter from Ilga. Never in my life had I longed for something that badly. But two weeks went by, and I still had not received any letter. I had written my first letter on February 8th, and on February 14th I wrote another one. Nothing.

We heard rumors that a transport to Far North would leave soon, probably to Vorkuta. We knew we would wind up in one of the GULAG camps, and there was more freedom than in prison. Some “oldtimers” (those that had been in camps already in the thirties) told us Vorkuta was the best place. Why?

First, because there was a railroad. That assured a regular delivery of letters and packages. Second, Vorkuta was beyond the Arctic Circle, so food in the 40 camps around the city was better than in camps elsewhere. Because of the harsh climate prisoners had to be fed better or they would not be able to work and keep up with the plan. To fulfill the plan — that was the most important thing. Sometimes a camp administrator would wind up as an inmate because of a shortage in the plan. **In those days nobody was safe.**

The day of our departure came, and I still had no new from Ilga. On that day I wrote to my mother-in-law:

*“March 1, 1952. We are moving on. Probably to Vorkuta. I heard only two letters a year are allowed from there. I will write as soon as I can. So long. Valentissimo.”*

It is hard to describe the feelings I had, writing those few lines. It was despair, mixed with spite, hope, and a “devil-may-care” attitude.

It turned out my mother-in-law had received my first letter only on March 2nd — one day after my departure from Leningrad. Ilga had written a letter to me — first in Latvian, then translated in Russian. The letter in Latvian had not been accepted. Here is Ilga’s letter.

*“March 3. Dear Valentin! My hands are trembling with joy that finally I can write to you. If only I had known all this time that you were right here in Leningrad! Last night mother called me and read your letter to me. I spent all night, writing to you, but they would not accept a*

letter, written in Latvian. So now I'm trying to translate it. But it is hard for me to express myself in Russian.

I'm with you always — every day, every minute, every step. On that terrible night when you were arrested I wrote in your diary the words of Immanuel Kant: "A moral person has to accept all suffering with patience and an inner strength." I think it is true. Just like steel is formed by hardening — isn't it what's happening to us now? Whenever my longing for you is too great I look at the ring you put on my finger. (My wedding ring was taken away from me by MGB.) And then I feel better. I wish I could give you some strength so it would not be so hard for you. If only I could at least stroke your forehead!

Tell me what you need — I'll try to get it. (Seven years after the end of the war in the Soviet Union there still was a great shortage of food.) If you are allowed to write — I'll be waiting. Not only I, we all are thinking of you. Yours more than ever — Ilga."

Unfortunately this letter came too late. Ilga went to the prison the next day but found out I had been taken away. Here is the letter she wrote to her mother that evening.

**"March 4.** Dearest Mommy! If God made me suffer, I would gladly accept it — if only by that I could help him. But now it is too late. Just lately, maybe even yesterday when they did not accept my letter, he had been taken away.

Mommy, my world is shattered. He was here — a whole month — and I did not know it! I was positive he was still in Riga. And they would not tell me where he was sent. Just jeered at me: "Gone on a mission — for twenty-five years!" No, it can not be. I do not believe it.

Yesterday I made a package for him — all the best I could get. I thought he would be pleased, and this thought pleased me too. I even hoped — maybe I'll be able to see him. When it did not work out yesterday, I thought — maybe today. And now...

Why is our fate so cruel? Is it for our own good — to make us strong? Sometimes I believe it, but then again — why? What for? I look at his letter you sent me. He writes: "There is a long way ahead." How helpless I am, how unable to give a little beam of light in this far way he has to go! His few lines are a source of strength for me; if only I could give some strength to him — that is my greatest wish right now."

Here is a letter Ilga's father wrote to her in Leningrad:

**"March 17.** Our dearest Ilgie! We are very worried about Valentins. Mommy does all that is possible — especially about food. None of us knows about the future, but it does no good to try and guess. Valentins

1. III 52

Brancei for  
Uz Vorkuta kaiman  
Sava us no tyneles  
van like 2 vestule vestit.  
Pie primas id to  
dentis.  
Uz redzešanos  
Valentissimo

1. III. 52. "I drive farther. Perhaps to Vorkuta. They say, that only 2 letters can be sent from there. I'll do it by first possibility. So long! Valentissimo"

A letter to the beloved ones. Sent from the Transitprison in Leningrad. Illegal with the help of criminals. This note was written in a deep despair and spitefulness. It was possibly the last message from me to my family

seems to be patient and endurable, has been toughened by hard experiences in his life so far. Such people do not perish but always find a way to survive.

Janis Nimanis went to see grandmother Alise at "Sadulnieki" during the winter holidays. She has suffered so much, but wants to live long enough to see her children — Oskars, Vernis, and Elvira — coming home from the POW camp and Siberia. Over there Vera and her daughter Lija work in a collective farm.

Somebody has denounced Valentins' godmother Vera Liepina as the former member of the Home Guard, and she has been fired from her work. Your Dad."

## MORE MEMORIES

We were transported to Vorkuta in the same kind of cars as before, but this time together with criminals. However — we, the political prisoners, were in the majority, so they did not dare to steal from us. I had

a piece of slab bacon in my bag; I had saved it from the package I received still in the Central Prison. When I was eating the daily bread ration I had some bacon with it. The man sitting next to me asked for a bite, and I let him take a piece. But later I noticed my winter hat was gone. (We were allowed to have our private clothes until the camp. It was also allowed to send clothes in prison. So I had received my grandfather's fur jacket, my brother-in-law's winter hat, socks, mittens, a pullover, and some warm underwear.)

When the man next to me heard about the loss of my hat, he cursed and told other criminals: "Do not touch him! He is a Baltic man!" It turned out Estonians — men of iron — had resisted criminals with knives, risking with an almost certain death, and had earned such a respect it covered all Baltic men. After a while I received my hat back.

Later I found out my neighbor was a leader of the criminals — that's why they obeyed him. Those leaders are the most cruel, cynical, and egoistic persons imaginable, but they have a "code" of behavior.

The trip lasted several days, and we were always thirsty — the guards were too lazy to fetch us some water. They did not have any compassion for the inmates. The air was terrible too. There was only one tiny window high up, near the ceiling. Our only salvation was the open door with iron bars. Without it we would suffocate.

We were heading north. We saw railway stations, fields, less and less forests, some scarce, poor-looking villages, but more and more concentration camps with barbed wire fences and watch towers. The last 1,500 km — from Kotlas to Vorkuta — were countless camps but no more villages.

The fences were lighted at night. It was strange — these lighted rectangles in the white snow. There was enough electricity, barbed wire, and guards. But there was not enough food, heat, and normal working conditions for the inmates.

The train wheels were rattling: "Balt-Balt-Baltia! Balt-Balt-Baltia!"

We arrived at Vorkuta on March 8th, 1952. I tried to console myself that it was better here than somewhere in the Far East or down south. This seemed closer to home. It was decided in Moscow where more workers were needed.

Upon arriving we were "unloaded" and put in the quarantine camp for a couple of weeks. Our first sensation, upon leaving the train, was the fresh air. Then we started to look around. Near the mine were several smoking cones. The waste products that come with coal were burning there. Later they were an excellent building material.

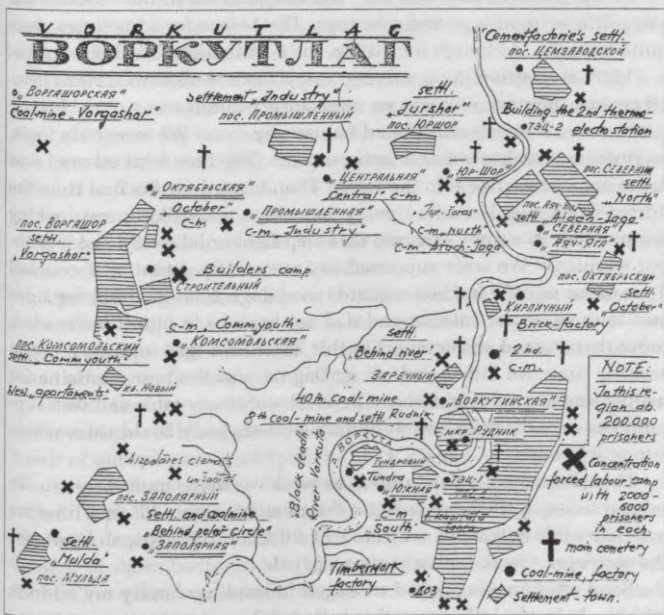
Next to each of the cones were the lighted rectangles — for the 20th century slaves.

Our address was "Mail Box No. 175/9", Vorkuta, 9th Division of Camps, at the mine No. 8, near village Rudnik.

Village Rudnik was located near the Vorkuta river, opposite the city. The mine No. 8 was the oldest. The elevator was only for coal. The workers after 10 hours of work had to climb 300 meters to get out of the mine. Some tried to get a ride up with coal but it was dangerous; many were killed this way. In 1st mine at one time the famous Russian writer and dissident Solzhenitsin had worked.

This was the place where I would have to spend many years to come. Maybe here my life would end? No, never!

The town had been growing since 1936, but we could not see it from here. The days were still very short. In the twilight all we could see was the railroad bridge. On the tracks there cargo trains moved all the time, filled with coal, and the modified passenger trains that brought here the human material. In the distance we could see the Ural Mountains. They were about 200 kilometers away, but the environment was so flat here



Map of Vorkuta district. Vorkutlag, Rechlag and Pechorlag administrations

that we could see them. For many years that was the best scenery to look at. In my mind I was telling all this to my beloved Ilga. It created a painful longing for her, for home, for Riga. So very far it was now! It would be better not to think about it but I could not help it

Under such circumstances a person needs very little to feel pleased. And there was something that made us glad: after all those months in prison we now were able to move around.

On the way here I was together with an Estonian man that was almost a carbon copy of me. We were the same height, both dressed in black, and we were both lame. Yes, we have to remember that all Baltic nations have the same fate. **But here were gathered the best patriots of all the nations that could not accept the Soviet occupation.**

In the monotonous camp life a new contingent of workers was a remarkable event. Soon everybody that was not at work or sleeping gathered around us. They showered us with questions. From where? What nationality? Maybe somebody we know? Any news about amnesty? What is the sentence now? What's new, what's new?

"What's new?" That was the classical question in the doldrums of camp life — mornings and evenings. The responses sometimes were quite fantastic. Although incredible, for a while they lifted our spirits.

My first question upon arriving was, if there were any Latvians here. Of course, there were. It was an unnecessary question.

Here we were not considered human any more. We were only tools, so instead of names we now had numbers. Together with others I was taken across the river to mine No. 8. Then I heard for the first time the "rhyme" all guards recited every morning: "No talking, no looking around, four in a row — march! One step right or left — I'll shoot without warning!" We were supposed to answer: "Ponjatno!" (Of course!) To make us understand better guards used dogs. They guarded the sides and the rear of the column and did not hesitate to bite if we made a move that seemed suspicious. For this, if we managed to catch a dog at another time, we killed and ate it. Dog fat was the best medicine for many ailments we used to have here. The ordinary table salt was supposed to cure diarrhea and dysentery — if anybody could eat a whole cup of it at once.

Upon returning to the camp from work we were counted — usually several times until the guards got the numbers right. All that time we had to tremble outside in sub-zero t°F (-30°C) until the dispatch note for the conveyed "work-horses" was accepted.

Soon after arriving here I managed to send my family my address with the help of a Lithuanian that had already served his term and now worked at the mine as a free worker with a contract. It was a very pleas-

ant surprise to receive a package from my mother-in-law already at the end of March. Immediately I did not feel being so far away any more. And for a while I did not feel hungry any more. This was some feast! Not only for me but for some others too that I shared my package with. And not only the food; we also shared the joy that was such a rarity here..

We were allowed to write and receive two letters a year but for more than a year — until summer of 1953 — we did not receive any. However, there was no restriction on packages. That was a devilish plan of the GULAG system. They took advantage of our families' love and unselfishness — sending packages while often going hungry themselves. Whole trains arrived here, loaded exclusively with those packages, especially from the Baltic States. That way the government had to spend less on feeding the inmates. Even though the first year we were not allowed to write letters, the administration made sure the stream of packages would not dry up. So we had to give our signature for receiving packages on a postcard together with a few lines. These postcards and a rare secret note in a package were the only communication we had with our loved ones. Unless we managed to send a letter illegally with the help of a free worker.

We were not allowed to keep the packages with ourselves; they had to be kept in a warehouse. From there we received every day 50 grams sugar, 50 grams fat, one onion or a clove of garlic (these were essential as a preventive for scurvy), 1/2 pound of dried bread, and a few cigarettes. If anybody was found with half a loaf of bread, he was punished by incarceration because: "Son-of-a-bitch, you are preparing to run away!" In a way such an order was for our own good — it made us not to devour the whole package at once.

Upon arriving at the camp our civilian clothes, except underwear, were taken away. They were put in the warehouse, and we were even given a receipt. But I managed to sell my civilian pants for a loaf of bread already in the quarantine camp.

The clothes we were given in camp consisted of several layers. First there was a pair of blue cotton pants and an identical shirt. Over that came a pair of quilted pants and "pufaika" — a quilted jacket without a collar. Instead of an overcoat we were given either a long, quilted jacket called "bushlat" or an old army coat. We also received quilted winter hats with face guards and felt boots without soles. But there were not enough of these boots for all the camp inmates. So the rest received "chulki" — quilted socks, and "chunji" — a weird sort of footwear, made of old inner tubes. It is amazing what the Soviets can invent to make up for the shortages, created by their laziness and lack of organization!

The above mentioned clothes sound pretty good, but they were not new. They had been worn before and were not good enough for the guards to steal and sell them; so they were given to us. The guard officers and camp administrators wore white felt boots with soles. Sometimes were seen "pimi" — the original footwear of nenci (natives of that region). These boots were made out of deer skin, lined with a fox skin. They were stylish and warm but good only in cold, dry weather — just like the felt boots without soles.

Nenci also made their clothes of the same material. It was a one-piece garment with a hood and plenty of extra space around the waist where they could keep warm the goods they were carrying. There were not many of them left any more; most of them had been wiped out by alcohol, brought in by Russians.

The best clothes were given to the camp personnel: workers' overseers, warehouse overseers, cooks, medical personnel, workshop and club leaders, and others. Yes, and some of the criminal leaders too. The camp administration tried to stay on good terms with them because they were dangerous. Sometimes an informer or a cruel guard disappeared, and nobody ever found out what had happened to him. Even criminals had their code of behavior, and killings were performed after a "court" decision. It was tragic if the greatest idealists of various nations were put in the same camp with criminals. In our camp political prisoners were in the majority, and we were united among ourselves, especially the Baltic and Ukrainian men. So we just did not let the criminals dominate us. They realized their minority status and usually did not fight us. It was a "peaceful co-existence". But it was like living on the sharp edge of a blade — you never knew when something might happen.

The camp was a 400 x 400 m square with a barbed wire fence and a watch-tower in every corner. That was called the living zone. Around it was the work zone with the mine No. 8. Near the river was another zone for the construction workshop — DSM. There was a fence around the other zones too.

In the living zone there were 30 barracks where 3,000 inmates lived — 100 in each barrack. Besides the living quarters there were barracks also for the camp kitchen, dining hall, sauna, infirmary, and several barracks for the camp administration. The only capital building, made of cinder blocks, was the place for solitary confinement. Incarceration was the usual punishment. I had to go through it twice, and physically it was the worst experience in Vorkuta.

In the camp we had to salute every member of the administration. The title was "Citizen Superior". God forbid if we called any of them

"comrade" as we had used to do at work; that alone was a crime worthy of incarceration. That was the policy here: to break the spirit of inmates. An inmate could never be a "comrade" to free people. It was disgusting to see how elderly, distinguished gentlemen, former professors with worldwide acknowledgement like the academician of chemistry prof. Medvedjev and doctor of philosophy Jensen, yanked off their caps in front of an almost illiterate guard whose vocabulary consisted mostly of expletives.

Once I did not greet humbly enough and stared boldly into the eyes of the guard superior Kiseljev that used to beat inmates. After all — I was a soldier of the famous 19th Division, while he was just an MGB man, brave only behind the front lines where he was fighting unarmed, imaginary enemies. For that I was incarcerated. Another form of torture was not to tell for how long. All the clothes were taken away, except the underwear. The confinement place was only a few square meters large, with a concrete floor and a small window that had iron bars but no window pane. The cinder block walls were covered with frost; it was about -5°F in there. It was already April, but here it still meant the deepest winter.

Besides me there was another victim — a Russian man that had not taken his place quickly enough at the roll call. Trying to generate some warmth we put our backs together and locked elbows. Then we started to jump around — slowly, so we would not wear ourselves out. We had to keep moving all the time if we hoped to stay alive. Not to give in to the apathy that comes with the cold and brings with it sleep — that would be forever!

We waited for the morning when we would get some bread and some warm water. Never in my life had time moved so slowly as that night. The incarcerated received 300 g bread daily, and once a day they were allowed to go to the outhouse — still in their underwear.

By the afternoon we were barely moving, and then we were released.

**Those who refused to work were incarcerated for several days.** After that their frozen toes were amputated in the infirmary. Often they came down with pneumonia and were admitted to the camp hospital.

On the day I had been incarcerated I wrote:

**"April 21st, 1952.** This is your birthday, Ilgie. I spent it in the "cage". On the frost-covered wall I wrote your name and "Vivat Academia!" (Long live this university!) I could live through it because of you. This is my birthday present to you."

("To consider this horrible place a university of life shows an

unbeaten spirit, fortitude, and a faith in the future", said Karl Holm, the publisher of this book's Swedish translation.)

In extreme circumstances a human being can be incredibly endurable. Very seldom anybody here caught a cold. Maybe later in life the consequences showed up — if they lived that long. For the time being I did not feel any damage. My superior lieutenant Stolbennikov let me stay home from work the next day. I went to the laundry room that was the warmest place in the camp. I felt like crawling upon the red hot stove!

Those that showed the greatest resistance or planned to escape and were betrayed by informers were put into straight-jackets. They were tied up so tightly that after one night they became cripples. They did not return to their barracks. **They were put in special camps meant for destroying people** near uranium mines or simply just shot secretly.

Our barracks were 30 m long and 6-8 m wide. They had tar-paper roofs and double board walls with a saw-dust filling. From outside the walls were covered with a mixture of clay and lime. The building had no foundation. The supporting construction was round wooden posts, driven several meters into the ground. In winter when the ground froze the posts were pushed up. They did not settle back, so the outer walls remained lifted up. The middle of the structure was not pushed up because the ground underneath did not freeze — because of the warmth in the barrack. The depth of the frozen ground varied. Likewise the permafrost was someplace deep, someplace shallow, someplace not at all.

There was only one entrance — at the end of the barrack. At night it was locked. Windows were small. From the outside the walls were covered up to the windows with dirt, in winter with snow.

There was electric light but only a few dim bulbs. For heating there was a brick stove at each end or in some barracks simply iron barrels that kept burning coal dust constantly. (The coal dust had to be wetted with water to make it stick together.) Near the stove was a trough for washing ourselves; there were no such things as wash-basins. For toilette there was only the traditional "parashka" — a barrel with handles on both sides.

For sleeping there were two- or three-storey wooden shelves. After year 1954 we also got crude night-stands — one for each four men. We were given mattresses, filled with wood shavings. There were no pillows; we used a folded jacket.

I had bed-linen that was sent to me while I was in Central Prison. I purposely kept it dirty so they would not take it away from me.

In the middle of each barrack there was a long table and benches around it. On the table there was a container of boiled water — "kipja-

toka". One of the inmates was always on duty, and one of his tasks was to see that the container would always be filled with warm water. Our camp was one of the oldest; comparing to others, it was one of the best.

The first prisoners had been taken here in 1933. The barracks had not been built yet; they had to sleep in pits, dug in the ground and covered with tarpaulin. Those that slept along the walls froze to death. The dead bodies were kept there — for isolation. It was so cold they did not have any odor.

The oldest inmates told me the first 5,000 prisoners had been taken here by cargo boats via Pechora river. The rest of the way they had to walk. Behind them tractors pulled the boats. The boats were loaded with food and primitive mining instruments. The prisoners had to walk first to prepare a road for the boats in the snow. Those in front had the hardest task, so they were exchanged with fresh ones from time to time. Those that were too tired to continue to walk sat down and froze to death. The guards did not waste bullets to shoot them. From 5,000 men only 500 reached the camp.

The first mine was dug here — in Rudnik. There had been hardly enough water to drink, so inmates soon forgot what it meant to wash themselves. At that time the fence had not been built yet, but it did not matter — there was no place where to go. How cruel to send the first people here in winter instead of summer when the climate is more bearable!

In spite of that, some hardened criminals tried to escape. They took along a small-time thief or a gullible political prisoner — for food. On the way this unfortunate person was killed and eaten. They were called "ishaks" — mules. This habit was quite wide-spread.

When the war began, part of the criminals had been drafted, but not the political prisoners. For security reasons often a hundred of them was simply shot — right behind the fence. There was a shortage of weapons, ammunition, and barbed wire for the front lines, but not here.

Already that first summer I was able to work at my real job — as an architect. I had to project the camp barber shop. On the edge of the blueprint I had written: "*Work begun on August 21, interrupted.*" The reason for the interruption was the multitude of skulls and bones that were discovered by digging. There were so many we could not dig enough holes in the ground for piles that were supposed to hold the building. The overseer cursed and said: "Why could they not take them further away and then shoot! All right — move the structure towards the center!"

During the war the whole nations like Chechens, Kalmiks, and others were deported here. They lived outside, on the banks of river Vorkuta.

The usually green river banks — in summer — had become gray because of the gray fur hats these nations from the southern region of the Soviet Union wore. However, the gray areas gradually dwindled, and in winter the banks were white. Nowadays a sports stadium was arranged at that place. On May 1st and November 7th — the memorial day of the October Revolution people had some Soviet style merriment.

Once a medical supervisor had been sent here — for the whole region. It was a woman. After a while she was shot. Why? Because she had reported to the United Nations what was going on here.

Maybe the above story was one of those pleasant rumors that circulated here simply to lift the inmates' spirit. But one way or the other — it is true that some information about us had drifted to the West. Already the next day after the big fight between the Ukrainians and criminals in September, 1955, one of my buddies Janis Vaskinovichs had secretly heard foreign news over the radio secretly (out of camp) — and they were reporting about this!

Twice a month we had the luxury of going to sauna. But there was not enough warm water. We had to stand in line with our buckets — naked — and we had to dry ourselves with whatever piece of clothing we had since there were no towels. Only later I received a towel in one of the packages from home. After the sauna our beards became soft — it was possible to shave without soap. Again we had to stand in line to get to the barber. For this service we paid either with cigarettes or with an onion. The latter was the best medicine against scurvy that was very prevalent here. Inmates themselves were not allowed to have razor blades, knives, or anything made of iron. We used a piece of string to cut bread. Barbers in the sauna were inmates too, but those that were considered trustworthy.

There was a time when inmates could not even dream about the abovementioned luxuries. Now we had the sauna and also clean underwear afterwards. All this was for one purpose: so we, the two-legged beasts of burden, would be more useful at work.

## MY MEMORIES OF OTHER INMATES

The inmates spontaneously organized into groups among themselves. The leader of our group was engineer **Olgerts Rudzitis**, the former commander of the motorized unit in the 19th Division. In the camp he worked as electrician, together with **Rudolfs Salna**. Next to our barrack was a small hut — the shoe-maker's workshop. A war veteran with one leg was working there — **Voldemars Platacis**. This place was like a

club for us. In the evenings we came together for a couple of hours to talk, exchange rumors, memories and dreams, and to smoke "mahorka" — the Russian "tobacco" that was actually nothing but cut-up stalks of tobacco leaves. This was a dangerous practice; if an informer would report to the administration that Latvian gatherings were taking place, we would all be incarcerated. But we were young and reckless. Our philosophy was: "So what!"

In our group there were also two university students. **Egils Raminsh** was a veterinary student and worked here in his profession. He was a Russian vet's assistant. This Russian **Antonov** was a kindhearted man, often helped us out with a piece of bread or some "mahorka". It did not matter that he was a convinced Great-Russian chauvinist. We returned his favors when we received packages from home. Often we saw **Andris Jaunzems**. He worked in the infirmary as a nurse's aide; it kept him busy. Both these students had fiancées that were waiting for them. But Andris did not return. He was accused of being one of the strike organizers and was sent to the punishment camp. There he supposedly committed suicide. More likely it was criminals that finished him up. He was a very patriotic Latvian and never tried to hide his conviction. But he did not believe the Latvian nation would still exist twenty years from now. **That was the result of the oppression we suffered — not only physically, but it also robbed us of our faith in the future.**

There was a musician **Klavinsh** whose fingers now worked a pickax instead of a violin. His wife once came here to visit him but was not patient enough to wait for his release. **The majority of wives remained faithful and waited.**

An authority figure among us was the impressive sea captain **Adolfs Albats**. He had been the last commander of Riga and Liepaja harbor. For his nationalistic attitude during the German occupation he once almost got arrested by the omnipotent German Chief of Police **Jeckeln**. But Capt. Albats had shown an authorization, signed by Hitler himself, and **Jeckeln** had saluted him... a Latvian! After the **Khrushchev's** amnesty Albats pretended a German origin and managed to get to Germany and later to England. There he became a sea captain once more. (He later wrote a book about **GULAG** and **Vorkuta** but I didn't get it.)

My friend **Imants Lerums** was the youngest and most lyrical of us. (Later it was **Ozolinsh**.) He wrote approximately a hundred poems about our life. At first he was shy, and it took a lot of coaxing until he would show his poems. "Imant, what have you now?" was a constant question we asked him. He wrote his poems on a strip of paper, torn off a cement bag. His poems made us sad but at the same time also gave a relief. It was something above the everyday doldrums. He had dark circles

under his eyes from coal dust. That was a tell-tale sign of all that labored underground.

There was a stout, intelligent farmer from Matishi — **Janis Aboltins**. He treated me with real cigarettes that was a pleasant change after the daily "mahorka". My family did not send me any cigarettes. Probably my somewhat puritanical mother-in-law wanted to wean me from the habit. I did not smoke at home, but in prison, especially after the interrogations, a smoke was the only consolation that relieved the hard and gloomy life. (We had very little air in that cell, but we made an exception with those that came from interrogations and let them smoke.)

**Andrejs Blomkalns**, a former school-teacher, educated us even here — both young and old. We heard so often the typical Russian cusswords that we sometimes started to use them ourselves. Then Blomkalns asked us to repeat it in Latvian. But Russian cusswords are so dirty that it was impossible to say it in our language. So the former teacher helped us to save our humanity.

The Greek-Orthodox priest **Nikolajs Okolovichs** was a man of admirable character. He refused to renounce his faith, even though he was repeatedly incarcerated for it. He said only the first time was the hardest. But from my own experience I know it isn't so. He just said it to encourage us and himself.

My work at the movable houses was together with **Stanislavs Bruveris**. **Sasha Slotov** was actually a Russian, but we considered him a Latvian because he was from Riga, an engineer. His wife and foster-daughter were in a GULAG camp in Inta — because they had belonged to the *Rerich Society* (a religious organization in Europe). That was considered anti-Soviet propaganda, punishable by ten years. From Sasha I learned a lot about the construction work. I had the theory but he was my leader in the practical work.

A real officer and gentleman, still with a military bearing, was a second lieutenant of the Latvian army **Hugo Lidums**. He made a steel ring for me with my wife's name to replace my wedding ring that had been taken away by MGB. He worked in the mechanical division. Even in the shabby prisoner's clothes one could still see he was a Latvian officer.

There was another Latvian officer — **Nikolajs Rudzitis**. He was a shy, quiet man and spoke slowly. It was impossible to imagine him shouting commands. But I have heard those quiet men are the bravest in battles. Here he had become an expert bricklayer.

Only later I found out in this camp there had been also a Latvian officer I knew from Sweden — **Valdis Knoks**. In this camp labored a couple of hundred Latvians, but we did not talk about our adventures

in Sweden. Under the circumstances it was not possible to organize any Baltic unity. It would not do any good but could create a lot of harm — in addition to what we already had. On the average every fifth inmate was an informer. Estonians and Latvians had less of them.

Most of the informers we knew and could guard against but not all of them. Often the most ambitious ones did not wake up in the morning. The investigation was only perfunctory with the conclusion: "Nobody has seen anything."

A young Latvian man **Zilpaushs** slaved underground. One day a runaway wagonette hit him, and he lost his leg. All of our Latvian group got together and with an effort managed to get a lemon. We went to see him in the hospital but... The Lithuanian surgeon told us he had passed away.

Working in mines was dangerous. Often pieces of rock fell down, injuring and killing people. The same with wagonettes that often jumped the tracks. Some were killed, trying to use the freight elevator in order to spare themselves the long climb upstairs at the end of the day. Not to mention the usual menace of mines — explosions which killed hundreds of people at one time. It was calculated each train of coal that left here cost on the average one human life. The inmates were simply "written off"; about the free workers the administration kept silent.

Accidents happened in the construction work too. Many were killed or maimed when scaffolds broke or simply lost their limbs due to extreme cold. **It was ironical to talk about any work safety here.**

In August, 1955, a group of criminals was sent to the camp No. 9 to take the place of political prisoners that were going to be released. In our former barrack now lived a group of Ukrainian patriots. Once criminals had occupied the club house where a movie was to be shown. They chased everybody else out but Ukrainians did not give in and beat them up. As a revenge the criminals set fire to their barrack and killed many of those that tried to escape. Among the dead was a Latvian man **Skadinsh** from Babite.

A young man **Antons Logins** told us about Latvian national guerrillas after the war. There was heroism, unselfishness, and endurance that seemed to surpass the humanly possible. But so was also vileness, treason, and selfishness. Communists had formed special units that were sent to wipe out the national guerrillas. At one time those "istreibitjels" ("destroyers") lost about a hundred of dead and injured when the group Logins was in blasted the mines that were placed all around the guerrilla bunker. But the leader of that group **Peteris Supe** was lost because of treason. A trustworthy farmer turned traitor when MGB arrested his family. Fearing for the lives of his young children, he mixed sleeping

pills into the food Supe was eating. While Supe was asleep MGB men came to the house. A woman — one of the guerrillas — shot the MGB men, then turned the weapon against Supe and herself but only wounded them. The destroyer units were led by a Latvian general Veveris. He personally had interrogated Logins' fourteen year old brother and beaten him so savagely that the boy died the next day.

Logins had also seen how a former guerrilla that had turned traitor had indicated to MGB men after the attack which of the guerrillas — his former comrades, classmates, and even relatives — were still alive, so they would be shot and there would not be any witnesses to his treason. (Logins had been in hiding.) Later the traitor, afraid for his own skin, moved to Leningrad.

There was a Latvian surgeon **Katlaps** in the region. He was moved from camp to camp. But his duty was to take care of our superiors, so he did not have much time for inmates.

All the above mentioned Latvians were of the 9th camp and working at the mine No. 8. Later I was transferred to the mine No. 40 — 2 km behind Rudnik. There was a well known Latvian conductor **Krisha Dekis**. He longed very much for his wife and small children. When we had a chance to hear classical music he listened eagerly. We did not have such a luxury as the radio, but there was a transmitter outside — on a pole in the center of the camp.

There is a young musical man **Janis Kalninsh**. We call him **Janka**. He composes quite nice songs. Learns harmony from **Krisha Dekis**.

The former engineering student **Zalkalns** and second lieutenant **Muncis** worked at construction now. The latter sent a letter to his relatives in Sweden with somebody who was going home — released because of disability. I took advantage of this opportunity and gave a letter, addressed to Mr. **Kruminsh** in Stockholm. I included a letter for my father and asked Mr. **Kruminsh** to send it if possible. I had no idea of the whereabouts of my father and sister, but the incredible happened: the letter reached my family that by this time had emigrated from Germany to the U.S.A.

For a while here had worked another former Legionary that had been extradited from Sweden — instructor **Ervins Chikste**. He had been arrested in 1949.

One Latvian was a member of the administration. His name was **Fricis Lama**. He was a tall man with typical Latvian features. He was always calm, and it gave us a sense of security and a reliance upon our strength. We will survive! He had married a Ukrainian woman — a former inmate.

Finally a few words about myself. Because at first I still had a lame

leg I was not sent to the mine right away. Instead I was put in the housing unit KECH — because of my knowledge of architecture. My first job there was to project the costs. That was something I had never done before. But a former bookkeeper, the quiet Ivanov from Pskov, taught me it in a couple of days. Soon afterwards I got a real job — I had to make the blueprint for the big dining hall that could seat 500 persons, also for the kitchen and warehouses.

The leader of the housing unit was lieutenant **Stolbennikov**. He was a decent man. He never treated us as inmates but as his equals. Once another former Red army lieutenant came to visit. He had been in a German POW camp and punished because of that. Both men looked at each other, stiffened, then embraced enthusiastically. "Kolja, you alive!" one of them exclaimed.

Almost all Red army members that had been prisoners-of-war were sent directly from the POW camps to GULAG camps. But those that had been in the gen. Vlasov's army (formed during the last year of war, fought on the German side) usually were shot at once.

I told about the Latvians, but there were also people of other nationalities that I remember. Simple peasants and workers were together with aristocrats and intelligentsia, warriors with criminals. Likewise there were together fascists and communists, Russian imperialists and zionists. There were probably people of all nations in Europe and Asia. (In our barrack there was one Indian and two Chinamen.) **That was the real Internationale**. Of course, the majority of inmates came from various parts of the Soviet Union. In general, it was a friendly society because all were equal.

A remarkable personality was a German professor **Jensen** from Hamburg. He was a well known philosopher. His philosophy was a consolation for us. He liked to associate with the Baltic men and especially with captain Albats. Here this brilliant person was used as a clean-up man.

An interesting personality was also **Freitag**. He was a Latvian that had emigrated to the U.S.A. already after the revolution of 1905 like quite a few Latvians did at that time. Now he considered himself an American. But in the thirties he had moved to the Soviet Union — believing the Soviet propaganda about the "workers' paradise". In 1938 he was arrested and deported. But he still defended communism that had been his conviction since the year 1905. I did not argue with him. Let the old man keep his belief. There were many like that. Under the circumstances it was dangerous to take this belief away from them — losing it, they lose all the meaning of life and soon perish.

**Georgadze** was a high communist party functionary in Georgia. The

party sent him to Switzerland to buy pure-bred horses, claiming he was the owner of a private company. Upon his return he was arrested and deported as a capitalist with foreign connections. Georgadze suspected the plot was to proclaim him bankrupt and convicted, so they would not have to pay for the horses. However, Georgadze more than anyone else was proud of Stalin, his countryman, for doing away with major enemies of Georgia — the Russians. Other Georgians did not agree with him. They cursed Stalin for bringing such a shame over their nation.

A Russian patriot — a pleasant and intelligent emigrant aristocrat **Mikhailov** had fled from the Soviet Union and lived in Yugoslavia. After the war he returned in the response to the sweet-sounding invitations by the Soviet government. But a few months later he was arrested as a spy — for sending letters to his friends abroad. He told me: "You got to understand, Valentin Antonovich — a real Russian will never be an internationalist; at least in his sub-conscious mind he will always be a chauvinist. Not caring about other nations, even hating them. Otherwise Russians would not have such a big empire — even now, under communists." At that time I did not agree with him.

Another Russian emigrant's fate was similar to that of Mikhailov's. It was the son of the **Russian general Alekseyev** who had returned to the Soviet Union from Shanghai. At the camp he stuck together with two Chinese students from Shanghai — **Lee** and **Chou**. They always kept busy, were very diligent and helpful to others. This nation will have a future because of their exceptional industriousness. I took advantage of their knowledge of English and sometimes conversed with them. Once a while somebody would ask what we were talking about. By doing this he gave himself away — he was an informer. MGB was supposed to know not only everything that was happening in the camps but even the thoughts of inmates. And thanks to the system of informers they mostly achieved this goal.

There was a small, dark-haired Finnish officer **Piparinen**. He was highly respected and admired for his strong spirit. He simply refused to speak any Russian, in principle — in prison, at interrogations, in the camp. At roll-calls somebody else answered in his place. Actually he had managed to learn some Russian and could converse at work with other inmates.

After the war Finnish officers, anticipating the possible Soviet Occupation, had gathered weapons and ammunition in well hidden places and gotten ready for a guerrilla war — just like it was in the Baltic States and Ukraine. But somehow the Soviets were notified of this and presented the Finnish government with an ultimatum. In order to avoid the occupation and preserve the independence the Finnish government

sacrificed these people. But Piparinen was not bitter about it. Ironically, even the Finnish officers were sentenced according to the paragraph No. 58 — as “traitors of one’s country”.

All the above information is just hearsay. **It would be absurd to try to get any documentary confirmation at the camp.**

I do not know if there were any Swedes in the camp. Imants Lerums and Jansons once told me they had worked together with the famous Raul Vallenberg who had smuggled Jews out of Germany. Nobody else claimed to have seen him. Under the circumstances, in this mixture of so many nations, one Swede could cause little interest.

The people we came into daily contact with caused more interest. I do not remember the name of the Indian man in our barrack, but we did talk. He had been a marketing representative in Berlin. Of course, after the Soviets took Berlin, he was arrested as a spy. He regretted he had not really become a spy. Then at least he would know why he was here. He told me **the Soviets had arrested all foreigners in Berlin** after the occupation.

Here was a true spy — a British Intelligence Service colonel, **son of lord Butler**. He was kidnapped on a street in Paris and taken to Moscow. After endless interrogations he finally wound up here with us.

They tried to “educate” us in being proper Soviet citizens by propaganda movies. We were also supposed to develop artistic skills. Of course, this time was taken away from our rest and sleep. The men in our barrack knew I played the piano. They persuaded me to give an official performance so the rest of the men would be left alone. I played Chopin and received a permission to practice in the club house.

Butler played the piano too but not classical music. He liked to play swing and other Western dances. “I feel at home then,” he used to say. Such music was considered contra-revolutionary, and he was not allowed to play. So we went to the club house together. When nobody was here he played his music. If somebody of the administration or an informer approached we quickly changed places, and I played classical music. (One of the criminals appreciated Butler’s “hot” music and always came to listen. His buddies stood guard and warned us about the approaching informers; most of them were known to criminals.)

When we parted Butler invited me to visit him in London. He lived on Appletree Street, but I have forgotten the house number. He was a firm man.

The supervisor for the construction of my first project was a former Red army major of field engineers **Akinshin**. He was a tall, lean man with sharp, masculine features. He was of a Siberian origin, from Kemerova, and he considered only Asians as real people, not the spoiled

Europeans. He continued to work here at an invention he had started as a free man — that would relieve the work of field engineers. Maybe this was the reason for his arrest; maybe somebody else coveted the premium for this work or simply wanted to promote his career by “unmasking an enemy of the people”. At any rate, he was denounced. In 1950 Akinshin was called to Moscow. **With a special decree by the Soviet Parliament he was stripped of his Soviet hero title and all the decorations — because a hero could not be arrested.** A week later he was arrested. Why?

During the war Akinshin with his unit was near Koenigsberg. The artillery could not break down the Koenigsberg fortress, so Akushin went with his field engineers to do the job. Those few that survived this operation were highly decorated. Later, when Akinshin was arrested, he asked if his merits did not matter. The MGB man replied cynically that one got punished only for bad deeds, not for the good ones. Akinshin had a “black spot” in his military career. At the very beginning of the war he was captured by Germans, together with a group of his soldiers. He himself had suffered a concussion. His soldiers had tried to help him by destroying all his documents, so Germans would not find out he was an officer. At that time German guards had been so careless that the following night they managed to escape through the bushes along the river that flew through the camp. But together with other documents Akinshin’s communist party membership card had been destroyed, and that was a mortal sin. Besides, how could an officer and a communist party member be left alive by Germans? Clearly, he was a traitor or a spy. So he was sentenced to 25 years. Earlier he would have been shot.

In the same brigade with Akinshin a German officer that had defended Koenigsberg was working. **The former mortal enemies now were working together and suffering together.**

Once I was discussing with Akinshin the fact that in 1941 when the Soviets pulled out of the Baltic territory, the local people shot at them and waited for Germans as liberators. **His judgment was simple and classic: “Every nation craves for liberty.”** He had understood what so many even today still did not understand or maybe do not want to understand.

In the construction brigade the best specialist was a brick-layer Sharan from the Ukraine. He was a stout, self-confident man with slow movements; the former national guerrilla — “benderovetz”. He was dedicated to his work and happy it let him forget the gloominess of our life here. I felt the same, so we understood each other. Even though the dining-hall was a wooden construction, he made cornerstone imita-

tions on the outside of the building. It was not fitting, but I praised him for his ambitiousness.

Gradually I learned enough Ukrainian so we could converse. It was harder to understand Tulek who spoke Slovakian. He had been a well-to-do farmer and still kept his pride. He told us his daughter was a "grande dame" in the U.S.A.

I will always remember the Jewish engineer Schulmann who helped me to regain my freedom when I was arrested again. He took a big risk because he could have been incriminated as an accomplice to some unknown crime I supposedly had committed.

There are two more intelligent Jews that have supported me at crucial points of my life. Lawyer **Joffe** was my prison-mate and gave me good advice on how to conduct myself at interrogations. **Minsker** was my lawyer at the trial, and it is partly his merit that my sentence was reduced.

My direct supervisor at work was a Tartar man **Karamishew**. He had a great authority. He had been the deputy of the famous Soviet functionary Kirov. At one time he had supervised the construction work of the whole Leningrad. And he was one of the first to come here. Now he had completed his sentence and was a free man. He was a good organizer and an inspiration to others — could convince anyone with a smile.

Another Tartar man — **Tuktamishev** — was the recordkeeper. He had a great responsibility. He had to dream up jobs we had not done but the kind that could not be checked. We had to fulfill the plan to receive more food, and something had to be done, but we did not want to wear ourselves out.

Before my idea of Tartars was that they were a half-wild nation, but it is not true. At least those that I met here were more intelligent and refined than average Germans or Russians. Tartars never cursed while many others could not say anything without mixing cusswords in their language.

Finally I have to mention the MGB men. General **Derevyanko**, obeying an order from Moscow, led the shooting of strikers. The commander of the mine No. 8 was colonel **Bganko**. He seemed to be one of the rare normal persons in this service. At least I never heard anything bad about him. He had been in combat during the war — maybe that was the reason. On the other hand, operation manager **Kisiljev** was the subject of many horror stories. He used to beat the inmates and order them to be killed — sometimes by the camp criminals.

The common guards actually did not have a much better life than we. But morally the difference was immense. They had a right to shoot

us if they thought it necessary, and some of them did it just for fun. This "breed" of people is cruel, with a tendency to destroy.

The life is generally hard in the Far North — even for free men. The only entertainment is alcohol. In the afternoon you could not find any sober people in any office or factory. Only the inmates put in a whole working day — behind the barbed wire fences, under the bayonets of guards.

## LETTERS

My address was: Komi APSR, Vorkuta, Mail Box 233/6. This address meant the whole chain of camps with 200,000 prisoners.

We were allowed two letters a year at first; later, after Stalin's death, one letter a month. For safety I did not write to my wife, only to my mother-in-law. **But even she lost her job as a school teacher because of her kinship with an "enemy of the people"**. She worked at the 6th High School of Riga. **Superiors are vigilant to save their own skin** — they could be accused of supporting contra-revolutionaries.

I wrote the allowed number of letters and responded to each package I received with a postcard. Here are the letters and postcards I wrote in 1952 and early 1953.

*"June 20. Received the second package, sent on May 27. Thank you! The food did well on the way. Please, send me some thread and needles, also cranberries. And Ilgie, put in your picture, only do not write your name on it. Do not send me any money and do not come here. Send a registered letter, I'll answer whenever possible. Physically and psychologically I'm still in a good condition, doing my real job. Here too summer is coming — it's already 25°C. Greetings to everyone!"*

*"September 28. Ilgie — my pain and joy! I have received the eighth package, sent on September 12. I responded with a postcard to each package, but the next letter I will write only in winter.*

*Send only registered letters, and try to send some newspapers and magazines. Do not spend much money on packages — send only margarine, onions, and cheap candy. I can already see my work rising out there. It is the dining-hall and warehouses that were built after my blueprint — in the camp, for our own needs."*

*"November 30. Do not write letters — I do not expect them any more — only a few lines on a postcard. Send me a drafting triangle and some woolen yarn."*

**“March 13, 1953.** Since last fall I can walk normally — without the cane. The leg can be bent completely. I use my cane as a yardstick now — with carved-in markings.”

**“June 11.** Write the postcards in Russian! The changes we all are waiting for have not taken place yet...” (It was after Stalin’s death.)

The above short inscription was on a postcard. But on the same date I wrote a letter, and that was the first one my wife received. Here is an excerpt from it, followed by more letters, written later.

**“June 11.** ... You could visit me here in Vorkuta. Now it is allowed. But better wait still and do not go alone. Now I can write once a month, and I will. Do not send any more food packages — only matches and drawing paper.

Two years have passed since we parted, and all this time I have no idea how you all live. It is very painful. (Here I had to interrupt my writing because an out-of-order roll-call took place.)

Here are so many hardships, pain and sorrow, violence and injustice, and danger too — sometimes I feel ashamed that my life is relatively easy. In spite of everything I can do my beloved work here. I can work in a warm room with paper — even if it is not always white. (Sometimes it came from a cement bag.) Thanks to your packages I do not have to go hungry. But most of all — I have good comrades around. And not only Latvians. The least number of lick-spittles are among Latvians, Estonians, and Finns. This is not surprising; of each nation it is a selection that is here — the best patriots.”

**“August 7.** Received your package — thank you. As I already mentioned, now it is allowed to write one letter a month. In the next package, please, put in some gloves and some pictures of you all.

If you came here, we could spend a few days together — but better wait. I am longing for you.

I think about all my family members, but I write only to you. You are my tie to the world now, and I talk to them through you. I can imagine how hard it was for my father and Rita when they heard about the extradition.” (Later Rita told me that was the first time she had seen our father crying.)

**“August 26.** This is my 29th birthday. I receive your packages regularly once a month, so I can concentrate on my work without thinking of food. We are seven Latvians here that stick together. When somebody receives a package, we all share. The others are Olgerts Rudzitis,

Voldemars Platacis, Imants Lerums, Rudolfs Salna, Nikolajs Rudzitis, and Janis Abolinsh. There are two of us that do not receive any packages — but from each package everybody gets something. That way the joy is multiplied.

I am not lame any more, so now I do not have to use a cane. The steel rod is still in my hip; it can not be taken out until I get home."

**"January 1-19, 1954.** There is no instrument that can measure the joy and sorrow of our souls. **I think nobody feels such a pain at parting as those that have just started their life together.** Then the real life is only by being together. Here we live only in our dreams, therefore we always wait for the night to come."

**"February 4.** Do you still remember February 4th, 1951? I was lying in hospital with my broken leg in extension. I caressed your hand and told you what my heart prompted me to say. On that day I understood you were not coming every day from Riga to Sigulda just to be kind or fulfill a duty. Besides, you never knew whether you would be permitted to see me.

Since that day I already considered us betrothed. There could be no other way — we had one life to live. I was asking my conscience, how it would be if your father heard everything I said. But my conscience was calm. I knew I could safely answer for my words. And it had always been like that. It was that way in May when I was temporarily released from the hospital. How happy we were those few days at my grandparents' house! Then we had our first intimate moments under the blooming cherry trees. It was also that way when I had to leave home. And it is the same way here too. Always and everywhere."

Here is a letter Ilga wrote to me.

**"February 19.** Instead of your parents you now have my parents. They really care for you as if for their own son. It is mostly my mother that prepares the packages for you. It is really touching. They wait for you just like I do.

Your grandfather quietly passed away on New Year's Eve. Now he lies beside your mother. My grandmother is gone too. It still hurts!

When I'm so tired I'm ready to drop, I think of you. And then I have the strength to go on.

My cousins are here with me — they are reading Imants' poems. They are sending warm greetings to you, to him, and to everyone out there that have to go the way of hardships and humiliation. Forever yours — Ilga."

Early in 1954 I had a chance to send a letter to Ilga not through the official channels, so I could write the truth. Here is that letter.

*"Since September 1st last year I had been assigned to the House Building Workshop. For the time being we construct movable houses. Here I have more freedom than I had in camp. There, like anyone with a twenty-five year sentence, I was considered a very dangerous criminal. I hardly ever had a chance to get out of the camp zone, even with a convoy.*

*I can get along with people. This I learned at the "establishment". Even if earlier we have been cursing each other, now workers consider me one of them. They do not call me "engineer" but after the Russian fashion — by my first name and father's name: Valentin Antonovich.*

*I am not very busy, so I can write to you during the working hours — at my drawing board.*

*In the morning we get up ten minutes before 5:00 a.m. At the end of our barrack there is a wash-room with a trough where we can wash our hands and faces. Then we go to breakfast — the whole barrack together. Usually we get a coarse oatmeal porridge. At 6:00 a.m. is the morning roll-call. It always takes a long time, because our guards are not very skillful with numbers. They write on a board and then scrape it out again with a piece of glass. The latter is a very popular tool here. It is used to scrub the tables and even floors if "shvabra" is not enough. "Shvabra" is a strip of rubber, fastened between two small boards. This contraption is fastened perpendicularly to a long wooden handle. The man on duty dumps a bucket of water on the floor, scrubs with the "shvabra", and then mops up the water with a mop. Where the floor is even it works; the dirt in the cracks stays there. A few times a year we have the big bedbug extermination. The bedding and clothes are taken out, all the holes closed, and then the barrack is filled with hot steam from a special kettle on wheels. This procedure is called "klopomorka" ("bedbug execution"). It is a great relief to be without bedbugs, fleas, and lice.*

*The roll-call is done both mornings and evenings. Before they used to call us by numbers that each inmate has on the sleeve and the pants leg. Now they call out last names, and we have to reply with the first name and father's name. The man next to me answers with a heavy accent: "Augustus Johannesovich!" He is an Austrian. His last name is Urbanek; he is from Vienna. Actually he had been arrested instead of somebody else with a similar last name, but in this system they do not release anyone they get their hands on. This ceremony is repeated in the evening and sometimes goes on for hours.*

At 6:45 a.m. we go, chased by guards and dogs, to the work zone. It is right next to the living zone, but we have to walk along the fence almost two kilometers. Then the guards mount the watch-tower, but we slowly make our cigarettes out of the bad Russian tobacco "mahorka" and slips of newspapers. Nobody disturbs us in this action. The guards do not care whether we work or not. It is up to the brigade leader which usually is one of the criminals — the camp "aristocracy" — and keeps the inmates hopping. To keep themselves in this post they have to be brutal and cruel. But nowadays even he does not dare to interrupt the so called "smoking pause".

We, the building brigade, are lucky. Our supervisor is a Lithuanian and quite sensible. He is smart enough to make up a record that fills all day, but that does not mean we have worked all that time. He does not beat us but yells ferociously if any of the administration is near. That way nobody has any suspicions. So it is already 8:00 a.m. when we finally start to work.

The workshop overseer is a former Home Guard pilot Fricis Lama. He was arrested already in 1940, and he is one of the two that survived — out of 96 Latvians that were the first prisoners to be sent from Riga to Vorkuta. He had served his full sentence — ten years — and now was technically a free man but without rights. He was not allowed to return to Latvia, so he was working here.

Up to December mornings are colorful. The clouds not only lie horizontally but are stacked up almost vertically, leaning to one side. Sometimes there is a string of clouds from one horizon to the other. There are all kinds of colors, even brown. In winter the dominant color is green. Maybe I notice it because all I see here is snow, the edge of the town with smokestacks, and the Ural mountains far away.

Now I have to interrupt my writing — I'm being called outside to do something.

We have to hurry with putting houses together, but afterwards they sit here for a week or longer until a tractor comes and pulls them away. **But that's how it is with the Soviet system — you have to work swiftly and superficially. Obligatory.** Therefore Soviet production is of such a low quality.

Looks like I would not finish this letter today — I'm being called out again.

When I come here in the morning my first job is to light the stove. We use coal dust; we are not given whole coal. To start the fire I usually have to use some of the building material that has been transported here across thousands of miles.

The lunch is around 1:00 p.m. We boil a bucket of tea for twenty

men and eat bread we have taken with us. Almost everybody has something to eat with the bread — from the packages we receive from home. **We share with those that do not receive packages. The Jews, Ukrainians, and men from the Baltic States receive the most of packages, the least — Germans and Orientals.**

Before going home we are counted again and searched. Another search is at the gate. Sometimes we even have to take off our felt boots. But even so one man managed to take inside a bottle of alcohol. He was holding it in his hand above his head while the guard was checking his boots and pockets. Afterwards we had a good laugh.

The main meal is in the evening. Then we get soup which does not have any meat or vegetables in it. We do not even know what it's made of. The only thing we can taste is cooking oil. And it is always the same. But at least it is warm. At the evening meal we also get a pound of bread and two lumps of sugar. From this bread we have to save for the next day's lunch. Those with enough will power save also a lump of sugar for tea. Together with packages from home one can live on this kind of "diet", but for those that do not receive anything from home it is hard. This "diet" is "rich", comparing with ordinary GULAG camps, because we are 130 miles beyond the Polar Circle. Guards jeer at us: "You will stay alive but will have no desire for women."

In the Soviet Union there is a slogan: "For the Soviet people nothing is too hard." That is us — the camp inmates — for whom nothing is too difficult. Valentins."

Here are fragments from two other letters.

**"March 13/14.** Life is so monotonous here — if you can call it life; it is just a vegetating. Everything is being done automatically, without thinking. If anybody has experienced something out of the ordinary or seen an interesting dream — in the evening it is discussed as something remarkable. It brings some variety in this gray existence. The normal everyday life we used to have seems like a fairy tale here.

**There are nights I can not sleep because of painful longing — no matter how hard I have worked during the day."**

**"March 26.** Today we do not have to go to work because of the blizzard. Such a severe one has not been here since the year 1950. You can not see even five steps ahead of you. And you can not turn your face against the wind — the snow beats cruelly. Temperature is -5° F. We had to stretch ropes between barracks and the dining-hall and lavatories. I was surprised no watch-tower was blown over in the storm. **But**

*everything pertaining to this system of terror is built durable — in this state it is the most important thing."*

\* \* \*

For some time I had not received any letters from my wife. But then I received a letter from her mother, and my world shattered.

She wrote that they all had a hard time but especially Ilga. Since they lived in Riga and Ilga's work was in Jelgava, she had to leave every morning at 6:00 a.m., and she did not get back until midnight. She also had health problems, and a doctor had told her she should have a baby — that would help. How long could she still wait? She was popular with men, but who knew what I was like? Some inmates married local women and forgot those that waited at home. Also I was not interested in her work, but here she had good, caring colleagues...

So it was only an illusion that had kept me alive all these years! While I was dreaming of our everlasting love, the real life turned out to be entirely different. But why did she not write herself? I would have understood. I had told her already before that it was up to her whether she wanted to wait for me.

It was well known that our relatives were persecuted too, fired from work, even arrested and deported. To get a divorce was one way to escape repressions. I would have understood and not blamed her for doing it. But that would not mean our love had ended. However, her mother's letter told something else. My wife had found another man. Or maybe not yet, but it could happen any time. Somebody who is there, next to her, maybe working with her, while I was thousands of kilometers away. As long as she still wrote her loving words were true. But now she does not write any more because she does not want to lie to me.

\* \* \*

I wrote a letter to the whole family.

*"March 27. Dad, please — read this letter first, and if you do not think I had hurt them, the dearest women in my life — then give it to Ilga and Mother.*

*My dear, tired Mommy! What are you doing to me!? From your words and thoughts everything is breaking up that has kept me so far: a complete understanding with Ilgie, the same feelings — and something even stronger. Has it all been only my illusion? Is the real life different? Do we not understand each other? Ilgie, Ilgie — please, say it isn't so!*

*Mommy, when you say: "Ilga has such a miserable fate" — you condemn me. You do not believe in my future. Where else could I receive*

encouragement if not from you all — my family? **Did I come here on my own will? Am I not a human being, too, taken out of the real life?** Ilga said: "We have a common life and a common pain." Isn't that true?

I did not want to tell about all the hardships here — it would have hurt you. I did not tell how sometimes I almost lost my mind because of the painful longing. And you think I'm living a normal life here!

In the dark polar night snow became whiter and stars brighter when I read about Ilga's success in her profession. How can you say I was not interested in her work!

The main thing — to get back home and find Ilga well and healthy, to be with her. Everything else will come with it. Sometimes her work seems to me even more important than mine. I was thinking maybe I could inspire her. That gives a meaning to my present life.

What else can I say if you have received my letters I wrote every month? I guess I could not find the right words to express my feelings. Maybe I should not have written this letter either — it might hurt you.

Mommy, please, forgive me — yours and Milda's son is confused, tormented, and desperate. (My mother-in-law Olga called me her son, but Milda was my real mother.)

Help, dear Ilgie, please, help — fight against your own sadness and against Mother's.

Dad! You are a man too — you will understand me. As a Latvian man you will understand the way I have chosen — without doubts and regrets. Your Valentins."

Later I found out my mother-in-law had written her letter while being in a deep depression. Because of me she had been fired from her job — she was a teacher at the 6th High School of Riga. She also suffered, seeing her daughter living alone in sad longing — again because of me. Besides, a woman doctor had advised Ilga to have a baby right away — otherwise she would never have any children. And this was the reason she stopped writing to me. She knew I wanted a family and did not want to hurt me with this news. Besides, many letters — hers and mine — never even arrived. Of course, at that time I did not know all this. I wrote several letters to Ilga until finally, after a couple of months, I received the first letter from her again. Here are my letters and hers.

**"March 29.** My dear Ilgie! Please, please, write to me and tell me everything. Is it really so that you can not wait until I'll be there — to have a baby? Is it really crucial for your health that you should have somebody else — simply because he is there and I am not? If it really is

so, then do what you must and do not mind me. Maybe a baby could somewhat compensate you for my never ending love. I have only one request: if you do have someone else then, please, divorce me and do not keep my last name.

But I still do not believe it could be so. I'm praying for you. **Please, be strong and wait a while longer — I shall return.** Forever yours."

The next letter I wrote to Ilga for her birthday on April 21st.

**"April 4.** Your fate is the same as the fate of the whole Latvian nation. And not only our nation — the women of many nations now have the same fate as you.

You are waiting. It is your prayer and your promise. No matter how long; you are willing to wait all your life because you have given your life you have not lived yet to somebody else, so he would not have to go his way of suffering alone. Day and night in your thoughts and dreams you are with me, and you do it so intensely that it seems — you are right here. You guard me from evil and double my strength. But it hurts you that you can not be here yourself and go my way with me — no matter how hard. If only we could be together — then nothing would be hard.

You are waiting — maybe on a sunny day suddenly the door will open or you will hear the familiar footsteps already before, and you will forget everything else in the world. Or you will be busy at your work, and suddenly loving arms will embrace you from behind, and tears of happiness will come to your eyes. Even more in the evening when you are alone with your longing, reading a book or writing a letter, but you think of only one, and it seems to you he just called you there — behind the window. And excited you wait to hear again that beloved voice — as in those days that are so far away now and yet so near. You know it could not be yet; you still have to wait. Your mind knows it — but not your heart.

You are waiting — even though others tell you it is wrong to sacrifice your only life to someone so far away. To give up living and sacrifice your life to somebody who maybe isn't worth it and does not understand you. Even your family doubts it and grieves for you. You have to fight against all your surroundings to defend your dear one who can give you no promises and has given you more suffering than joy.

To wait — that is the basis of everything. You do not have other thoughts, other longings — whether you work or sleep. This waiting part of you is always awake.

But you are a living human being. You can not just sit and wait, and dream. So you put your love and longing into your work — you create new, living values. You are lucky to be the kind of person capable of doing it.

You are waiting because you love me.

Wait for me, my dearest! I can hear how your heart and your pulsating blood call me. Wait for me!

**I shall return because you are waiting.** Yours dearest."

**"April 6.** Dearest Ilgie! I need your support and strength. Every day I come home with a hope: maybe today your letter will have arrived. But there is nothing. It is so long now since I heard from you. Can it really be that you did not write? Why? Maybe your letters have been lost? Is this a new way how the KGB men try to torture us — by holding back letters that officially are allowed now?

I do not believe that you simply have stopped writing. What has happened?

I can not get to you. It is not in my power, but if only I could get out of here, I would crawl all the way to Jelgava where you work — not knowing if I would have enough strength to get there but not hesitating a moment."

Then finally Ilga's letter came.

**"May 19.** My dear little fool! I'm yours as I have always been. Your Ilgie — with all my heart and soul, with every cell of my body.

Since the moment the door of the MGB building closed between us I have had only one longing — to be with you. I asked the guards to take me too. I did not have any fear or doubts.

Do I still have to tell you that only love helped me to keep my wits about me — at that time and now? When the nasty doctor told me I'll never have children, I did not write about it because I did not want to hurt you. And at that time I felt totally helpless — I was no good to you then.

Should I tell you how on March 1st in Leningrad — the day you were taken away — I hurried to the prison late at night in a hope of seeing you still? And again the next morning. I wanted to see you if only for a moment and tell you not to doubt I'll be waiting. So you would have your peace of mind.

It was the same on November 12, 1951, after the trial. I desperately ran after the prison truck that took you away, but I could not stop it. I have been writing to you all the time, but it looks like many letters have been lost. Likewise I have not received all your letters either. Is someone holding them back? Yours forever — Ilgie."

**"June 9/10.** Dear Ilgie! You are my whole world. I'm writing at midnight, sitting outside, and the sun is shining! A three-colored rainbow brings me greetings from you.

*If you want to come to visit me, I have to tell you the trip takes five days and costs 300 roubles. We can stay together for seven days in the guest house. The guard will be outside, but inside we will be alone. And you will get the same food I get. I'll get the money for your trip back; just send me a telegram about your arrival. If you can not come, then, please, write and tell me. The weather in Vorkuta now is like April in Latvia. Today I got rid of my winter cap and mittens. Your Northman."*

Then comes a letter I again had a chance to send without censorship.

*"June 20. My health is all right now. Only now and then I still have a headache when there is a sudden change in the weather. The atmospheric pressure here is always lower than in Latvia, and the air has 30% less oxygen. My teeth fall out one after another.*

*Already last year the first building I designed was built in the camp. It is a dining hall for us — 3,000 inmates. There are 500 sitting-places, the kitchen, and the store room. I would have never thought the environment can change people so much, but it is true: since the new dining hall men do not curse and push each other around like they used to do in the old, dark, small, and dirty dining room.*

*The trust "Petchorgeologiya" is trying out the first movable houses. I have projected them and led the construction of them all through the spring. The trust is using them more and more instead of the old kind that had to be put together. My projects have been sent to Moscow as examples for other geologists and for possible premiums. The trust employees treat me as their equal, not as a camp inmate. The construction leader Karamishev is an intelligent and pleasant Tartar. One of the few that has survived a ten year term. Most of the trust employees are former inmates.*

*Our camp is on the other side of the river, at the village Rudnik, opposite the city. We are the 9th Section. In each section there are 3,000-6,000 inmates. There are about 40 such sections around Vorkuta — approximately 200,000 slaves."*

Here is Ilga's letter to me.

*"July 11. If only you knew how all these years I have waited for the day I could go to see you! I wish I could turn into a bird, no, even better — a wind and fly to you instantly.*

*I will travel together with Aija — Olgerts Rudzitis' wife. Last night I went to see her. How nice her children are! Yes, I long to have children like that. Is this the reason my name is Ilga? (Ilga=longing). Is it my fate — always to long for the things I want? Yours longing Ilga."*

**"July 25.** Dear Ilga! There was a time the barrack doors were locked at night. Now we are allowed to visit each other in the evening. **Some walk back and forth those 300 yards like caged animals...**

As for my work — **I'm here the only one that can make projects and oversee the practical work at building the movable houses.** Even here I try to do my work as well as possible. After all — everything I do here is for us, inmates, or for the former inmates who went through the horrors at the beginning. Even for the free people work here in the polar night is not easy. And I have a feeling someday I'll be able to show you all this. Your personal Architect."

And then came the message I had been waiting for:

**"August 10.** Valenti, Valenti — you, lucky one! Wait for me! I'm coming. Yours, yours, yours."

**"August 29.** My dear, my good one, my love! I received your telegram. You're coming! I do not have to tell you how happy I feel. I'm waiting for you with longing and excitement, also with some worry. Will I be still the same you expected me to be? About you I do not have any doubts at all. (None of us here is the same as we were at home. The life here has made us more robust and gray. Me too.)

Could I imagine on that stormy night when I first got here that someday you would be coming here to see me? Or when we came home from work, tired to death, and some of us did die? **It reminds me of the time in Kurzeme and later in Sweden: row after row of men move over a hill, and many of them disappear forever...**

**We can live together for seven days in the guarded guest house — outside the camp territory.** When you arrive at Vorkuta, ask for the "Mail Box 175/9". Everybody around here knows it means the village Rudnik on the other side of the river, opposite the city. The permit to see your husband you will receive here.

The weather is warm now — +10°–+15° C. And it is the polar day — no night at all. The tundra is green and colorful. Your husband."

Here is a letter Ilga wrote me on her way:

**"August 26, 6:30 a.m.** I had a hard time getting tickets. I could not get them for the sleeping-car, so I am traveling sitting. Did not sleep a wink last night, and there will still be five nights like that. But I'm happy — I'm going to see you."

Yes — we saw each other. The camp gates opened, and there I saw Ilga coming. I took her in my arms and held tight for a long time. At that

moment we saw neither the guards nor the barbed wire fence. And then we had seven incredibly happy days in the little room in the guest house.

## MORE LETTERS

Here are letters Ilga wrote after our meeting. The first one was written on her way home.

**"September 10, near Vologda.** Finally there can be seen some poor looking villages; up to now only the camps with fences, watch-towers, and barracks. But even here everything looks gray. No trees and green fields. Mostly bushes and weeds. Instead of roads — mud. Even around the houses there are no trees, not to mention fruit orchards or flowers. There are two reasons for this poverty: laziness and alcoholism. I prefer tundra around Vorkuta to this place — if only over there were no human bones in the ground that sometimes come out..."

**"September 13.** I got back from Vorkuta already yesterday. My parents greeted me with flowers at the train station. We were talking only about you. They say it's impossible to talk to me about anything else, and it's true. I do not have any other thoughts. I have no peace, no home while you are away. I'm living in memories of the days we were together. Those days are closer to me than the present.

When I go to sleep I knock on the northern wall to say "Good-night" to you. Do you hear it? Your other half."

**"September 23.** I am back at my work in the division of chronically ill women. My patients had been waiting for me and greeted me warmly. So did Dr. Saltups, my superior. Here is an old woman that has been in mental hospital since the year 1912. During the German occupation mental patients were simply shot. But she escaped — she had been placed with good, caring people. Usually she is sullen and without any conscious thoughts. But now, upon seeing me, she asked: "Where were you so long?" And she kissed me. I was surprised to find out I mean something even to people like that.

While I was gone, 40 new patients have been admitted, so I'm very busy. This is a work where you do not see results as soon as with physical ailments. Years and even decades go by, but we try to help so patients could perform at least simple tasks. Here I'll be working until I am able to go to see you again. Your Ilga, the doctor."

My letters to Ilga follow.

**"October 20.** *Imants Lerums has been working the hardest underground work in the mine already for a month — with a pick-ax and a shovel. And it is a long way to get there. On the way one has to watch out for wagonettes that come down the steep river bank very fast; you just hope they would not jump the tracks. The working is in a space that is only 60 cm high (about half a yard) and dark. One has to lie on the stomach on the wet ground."*

**"October 23, 1:00 p.m.** *If your work is considered "excellent" you get three days taken off your term for one working day. If it is only "good" then it is two days, otherwise just one. This is the new method. Before the same was done with six different food rations. I have figured out that, under the present circumstances, we might be able to live together starting with July, 1956, but — "man is thinking, God is doing" (an old Latvian proverb). Let us hope for the best. Valentins."*

**"November 8.** *My dear, smart housekeeper! You have included some remnants of a fabric in the package. I will have a thousand ways how to use it. First of all — I have to make a lining for my winter cap and a face mask to guard against extreme cold. Then — soles for my socks and covers for the woolen mittens to keep off the wind. The rest will be very useful to put into the felt boots so my socks would not wear out so soon."*

Ilga tried to help not only me but other Latvians as well. The following letter shows it:

**"November 30.** *I got the glasses for Janis Abolinsh. Zinta (her sister) sent a book to Imants. Streptomycin is possible to get only with a permit from the Health Department. 20 g costs 400 rubles. I'll try to get it. I'm sending you several books about architecture."*

More of my letters to Ilga.

**"December 4.** *Around 6:00 a.m. when I go to work — this is the time of dawn. First the green light appears behind the Ural Mountains — about 200 km from here. The sun is rising there. Then the whole environment takes a mystical green hue. The clouds become red at the bottom, but at the top they are still blue or gray. Sometimes a string of clouds rises at one side of the horizon and sinks again at the other. The sea captain Albats told me such a string was a thousand kilometers long.*

I should paint this beautiful sky but I lack incentive. At first it was forbidden. Once I did and was incarcerated. I was accused of drawing a placement for American guns! That was the second time I was incarcerated, and this time the guard was more human — he let me keep my felt boots. The weather was warmer too. I was saved by the construction leader Karamishev of the "Petchorgeologiya". He told I had drawn the environment on his orders — as a background for an obelisk that was planned to be erected there. So I was released. But I never painted anything again. It is hard to do it under the heaviness of captivity — there is not the necessary mood. But I will not forget what I saw here, just like I still remember the churches of Gotland, the huge boulders of Scandinavia, and the nurses of Oerebro hospital.

For just two hours — from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. — the sun can be seen low at the horizon behind the city. Then it vanishes again, leaving purple and brown colors in the sky. The dusk lasts until 2:00 p.m. The telephone poles — the only trees around here — are green on one side and red on the other against a dark blue sky. At the horizon there are still sunset colors. A few days ago I saw a red moon next to the sunset. Today it is orange and fuller. Because of its weight it has rolled over and now lies horizontally with both ends up in the air."

**"December 8.** Today I saw three suns at the sky, but the first winter there were even five. **They were united by their beams and resembled our national ornament — the sun sign. So now I know those ornaments have not been created just out of fantasy but have been observed in nature.** Apparently thousands of years ago winters in our country have been colder than now.

I was hoping all the time to see really gorgeous northern lights here but have not seen any — only pale and short ones. But the everyday colors, created by the sun, are so unique they sometimes seem unnatural. This is a feast for the eyes, but there is nothing for the ears here. There are no birds singing, no whispering waves or tree branches. The only sound, created by the wind, is a nasty howling like from a pack of wolves. And the barbed wires join in with a whistling sound. Yes, there is also the rustling of rain, and sometimes a dog barks or a distant train whistles.

As a city child I now long mostly to be in a sweet-smelling pine forest in summer or in winter to ski in a young evergreen copse and dust you with snow...To be free to go wherever I want and to do whatever I please. What it means I realize only now. Valentins."

**"December 10/11/12.** The first movable houses have been taken

away. And I have received the first references. The houses have endured well the transportation over 120 kilometers of tundra. Only the front beam on the bottom has to be enforced with metal. Now it has been worn out on the way because the tractor driver was drunk. As usual... Right now 15 new houses have been started.

A sensation: on December 1st we had here a little rain-shower — like a greeting from summer!"

Then came a remarkable letter from Ilga:

**"December 15. Dear Valenti — yes, I will go and stay with you forever. And I long for the moment I'll be able to do so. Your Soulmate."**

At Christmas time I was thinking of home, also remembered Christmas of 1945.

**"December 24. I see how you are lighting candles on the Christmas tree — for me and for us. Here we do not have even a single candle, only a burning stove. And instead of the evergreen aroma we here have the smell of burning coal. We come together and quietly hum "Silent Night". If we sang the words — that would definitely mean incarceration. "We" means us, the Baltic men, Germans, Poles, and one Czech. In our barrack there are also Russians, Ukrainians, Georgians, and two Chinamen; they, of course, do not know this song.**

Over the miles we feel the love and greetings from our loved ones, we see the bright candles, we can feel the aroma of evergreen and burning candles — and then it does not seem so far any more..."

Here is Ilga's letter to me:

**"December 28. It is so sad to write about it, but I have to tell you: your grandmother passed away yesterday, December 27th, at 5:00 p.m. She burned out quietly like a candle — without any pain and agony. She will be laid to rest next to your mother, little sister, and grandfather on December 31st. I know you would not be allowed to come to pay the last respects as it is done everywhere else in the civilized world. But her blessings will stay with us for the rest of our lives. Caressing you quietly — Ilga.**

**P.S. We do not receive all of your letters."**

It was a way of moral torture — to interrupt once a while the flow of letters, even when officially it was allowed. In our 9th Sector it was the beastly Kiseljev that did it.

## YEAR 1955

**"February 14.** Dear Ilga! I was relocated. Away from the accustomed circumstances and comrades that had shared my fate these years. Of course, nobody asked me if I was willing. That's part of the system here.

Now I'm about 20 kilometers north of the city. It is more quiet here, and it is nice to see something new after such a long time. The railroad is near here and a train station — Yachaga. This camp is near the mine No. 10 — for building the 2nd Thermoelectrostation.

Now I'll have to do physical work until I'll get again to do drafting. That's my job that I can do best, and I'm sure I'll get it again. Again I'll have to start it all over from scratch. For which time already in my life?

It was hard to part from the friends I had. I was used to them. Hardships bind people together. It's the same as in combat. Will I ever see them again? About myself I do not worry. It does not matter where I'll be tossed around — as long as I have your support."

**"February 17.** There are criminals in our former camp now, but some of my former comrades are still there. Here are many good Latvian men; they stick together even better than we did.

My work is now with a shovel and a hoe. It would not be so bad to do some physical exercise for a change, but for twelve hours a day and in a cold wind... But we have learned to take care of ourselves. Nobody is naive enough to really work all twelve hours. Our goal is to spend as much time as possible at the bonfire. One inmate said: "I was lucky today — I did not hack even a shovel's worth out of that damned frozen ground!" Since trees do not grow around here we use building materials for firewood.

Our foreman has the hard task to dream up all kinds of work we supposedly have done — the kind of work that can not be checked. He has no choice; he has to get along with us if he wants us to do anything at all.

In summer you will be able to come and visit me again. And you can safely write to me and send magazines, photographs — everything. There is still censorship at the new place but it is not as strict as before. With loving caresses — your Workman."

**"February 20.** The conditions in barracks are worse here. There is no warm place near the stove to dry our wet clothes as it was in the previous camp. Around the table there are only benches, not individual stools as we had lately at the old place. And there is not always hot

water on the table. These are tiny things but they either improve or worsen a prisoner's life. In each camp it is different, only the barbed wire fence is the same.

My spirit is unbroken. But my body is not used to physical work any more and aches in the evening. It was the same when I was working in the peat swamp in Gotland, so I know — in a few weeks the pain will be gone. Only the mood here is worse, even though we try to work as little as possible. It is rather cold —  $-30^{\circ}$  to  $40^{\circ}$  C. So we have to keep moving even if we do not work. My hip does not bother me any more. Somebody denounced us for burning the building materials, so now we can not even have a fire."

**"February 24.** It is more drab here than in Rudnik and the work we do here does not interest anyone. We build an electric station here for producing nuclear weapons. So it is a slavery for the enemy that wants to take over the world. Therefore we try to avoid it as much as possible.

My hands that used to hold a drafting pencil or to play the piano now hold a pneumatic drill. The noise reminds me of the machine-gun at war that we used to call "bone-saw". And the constant vibrations! But nobody cares if it wears out a worker — there is a surplus of them. If one will be worn out, he will be replaced. The most important thing — the machine can not stand idle. It is more precious than a human being...

I wish I could be in Riga; maybe we could attend a concert tonight. No, better yet — you should be here and break the icicle that is forming under my nose. I can't do it myself because both my hands are occupied.

But I have to continue to go this way — because of that great love. Love for my country and nation, and for defending it. Your Valentins — in the pathos of life, not words."

Here is a letter my friend Imants wrote to Ilga:

**"February 28.** Ilga! I'm leaving. Where to — don't know. But it could not be worse than before. Please, write and tell Valentins about it. I will notify of my new address. Imants."

More of my letters.

**"March 1.** In the evening. I am in a bad mood and feel like cursing. It is about the sauna. We had to stand in line four times: first to get in, then to get a bucket, then to get to a shower, and finally to get to the barber. Lucky a riot did not break out.

Andris Jaunzems came to visit me. We were together in the mine No. 8.

*He was one of the best buddies I had at that hard time in the beginning. Andris was a medical student one year behind you. In year 1949 he was arrested for having some illegal literature. He is interested in psychiatry."*

*"March 8. In the next few days I'll be transferred to the building brigade. They do not have anyone that understands drafts. So I will be working not only with an ax but with a pencil and a yard-stick as well. But the work will still be outdoors the whole day.*

*Nobody builds living quarters here — only the gigantic thermoelectrostation. Next to it, because the Vorkuta river is here, a hydroelectric station. These buildings are erected here, far away from populated areas — apparently because they plan to produce nuclear weapons here.*

*Saturday, March 5, was the first happy day this year — I received three of your letters."*

*"March 14. Rejoice with me! I am going back to the previous place. Apparently the trust "Petchorgeologiya" has bargained for me. I am eager to work there again. There are Olgerts, Imants, and the rest of my buddies. At that time I did not know yet about Imants being transferred."*

*"April 16. It's moving time: we have to move to the Mine No. 40 — 3 km behind Rudnik. At the Mine No. 8 there will remain only criminals and the former political prisoners that now have been released. But I will still be working at the construction workshop. The Trust director Afanasiev has achieved it."*

*"April 18. Yesterday I had a chance to get to the piano at the clubhouse. I was playing for you for a long time, also my own songs. My former companion at the piano — lord Butler — has left. I hope he is back in London, in his house on the Appletree Street. Professor Jensen has left too. **A new term has been created — the repressed one.** According to this new rule as one of the first the Soviet hero Akinshin was released — my former brigadier that led the construction of the dining hall."*

*"April 21. I am at the new place now. We were even given a horse-driven wagon for the moving. Are they trying to butter us up?*

*Today we have a delicacy for dinner — boiled potatoes instead of the usual porridge. This is the first time I ate potatoes here. And we even have a dessert — a fruit soup. This is a dream. **But my hopes of***

*getting outside the fence did not materialize. The administration does not like my "face", i.e. my 25 year sentence. My work is being brought here by someone who has a permit."*

*"May 8. Last night Janka Kalninsh and the former conductor Krishs Dekis were singing very merry and naughty songs — here, in our gloomy camp!*

*The GULAG system is breaking down. We build all kinds of fences inside the camp and then tear them down again. Out of 5,000 inmates about a hundred a month is being released, but there are very few Baltic men among them..."*

I received also one letter from my godmother:

*"May 20. Valentin, I have received three letters from you this past winter. For the last four years I have not been in Riga any more. I'm still taking care of my cow. It is a lot of work, but it helps to fill my meager menu..."*

*Do you remember your teacher Jekabs Strazdinsh? He was deported and spent many years in Siberia. Last fall he was released and came to live with his children. This big, strong man now is an old derelict. He was released because he was not capable of working any more — so the state would not have to feed him in vain.*

*I would like to know if your spirit is still unbroken or maybe you just pretend it in your letters? I wish you would keep on the same way and never lose your true personality. Your Godmother."*

*"June 1. Ilgie, my flame! Get in touch with nurse Erna Karklina at the First City Hospital and Ilga Zalkalne from Lielupe. They are getting ready to come and visit their husbands here. Lieutenant Muncis from the Legion is also here.*

*I am still not allowed to go outside the fence. But if we have waited this long, we can still wait a while longer. All efforts by the Trust to get me the permit came up against a wall, although already last fall there were many who did get the permits."*

Here is Ilga's letter to me:

*"June 2. Your lawyer Minsker — the same who tried to help you during your trial — is trying to locate your papers so he could initiate a new trial. Now it is not dangerous any more and might even help. Maybe the papers are in Moscow. Tomorrow my father will go to see the prosecutor. Unfortunately it is still the same that was presiding at your trial — a cynical, fat, old drunkard with a round face, low forehead,*

and leering eyes. And we have to humble ourselves in front of such people to achieve something!

Maybe we would be more successful if it was all done in Moscow. Write yourself — please, please! Now it makes sense to do it. The clever lawyer Minsker helped you as much as possible in that “theatre” back then and now has already managed to achieve the release of some people.”

“**June 25, 8:00 p.m. — the time of sunrise.** My little sparrow! Today something remarkable happened — so remarkable the men ran out of the barracks. A crow flew over our camp! Here are men that have not seen this ordinary bird for decades.

I'm writing on my night-stand. Can you imagine — now it's all mine! Not just a half of it or even a quarter as it used to be. I'm worried about Imants. He still works at the mine, and today there was a cave-in. Many people are trapped. People? No, inmates are not considered people.

I heard Imants had saved another worker, risking for two hours with his own life. Your crowman.”

“**June 29.** What should I write tonight? Have not received your letters for quite a while. Is somebody holding them up? Right now the work has stopped here — I have not drawn a line in my project for the Trust...”

Evenings are so long and sad — there is nothing to do. The only diversity is your letters. And movies on Sundays, but after that it is even more painful because for a short while we have seen the real life.

There was a strike at the Mine No. 2. The Baltic men started it, but the strike spread to other mines too. They ask for a new trial and for a revision of their cases.

At the Mine No. 40 somebody had written on the administration barrack: “No freedom — no coal.” Lithuanian workers, armed with clubs, had watched for possible strike-breakers — those that had served their term and could hope to be released anyway. But there were no strike-breakers. Everybody took part in the strike until the **KGB forces, led by gen. Derevyanko, started to shoot at strikers** at Mine No.2 and possibly at other mines too.

Just one day before the strike I was notified I would start my job as a draftsman again — the Trust had finally got it. But to work and leave my comrades alone in their fight — that would not be your Valentins. So I refused to sit at the drafting board. Now that opportunity is lost.

Now I understand why a couple of days ago Krishs Dekis was sent to the punishment camp: he had been suspected of being one of the

strike organizers. On parting we ate a can of peaches we had saved all winter, and I gave him twenty roubles; we heard the regime in the punishment camp was terrible. My comrade from the camps near mines No. 8 and No. 40 Andris Jaunzems is there too. (Later he was killed in a Vladimir prison.)

**“July 8.** My sentence has been reduced to ten years! The commission decided **the punishment had been just (!)** but too strict. Now I have a better prospect. Together with overtime it turns out I have served already half of my sentence. After two thirds you are allowed to leave the camp and live in settlement. It will be in ten months. Then you could come and live with me — if you still want it. But all these calculations could be “for the birds”. Will there really come something better?...”

**“July 12.** A Russian school-teacher came here voluntarily to do the heaviest work in the mines so she could be with her husband — an inmate. But it did not last long. Somebody told the administration, and the husband was first incarcerated, then transferred to a different camp. Everybody was incensed about it. The traitor too was “transferred” — to Kingdom-come. Such operations here are performed swiftly... Olgerts' wife Aija will be coming here in November.”

**“July 15.** I will tell you more about my friends here, near the Mine No. 40. Janka Kalninsh wanted very much to go with Krishis Dekis to the punishment camp. Of course, that did not work. Janka is the one who recited his comical poem when you were here. Today he is down-cast — there is “unrest in colonies”; he writes to six girls and now complains that for three days he had not received any letters...(!)

Janka can willingly regulate his body temperature. That way he has managed to avoid the heavy and dangerous work underground already for the third month. Even the infirmary personnel knows about it and makes fun of it: “If he has a fever — sure, he's sick!”

Imants was lucky — already for the third month he is on the alleviated regime. Now he works at reloading the batteries and handing out lamps for the work in the mine; that's better than working underground. He still has to spend the night at the camp, but during the day, after working hours, he is free.”

**“July 16.** My spring flower! Yesterday a promise came that I'll be released on the alleviated regime. The DSM manager Fricis Lama promised a separate room in the workshop building. So — if you decide to come, we will be able to live together.

If things would continue as it looks now — maybe in two or three years we could return home. Meanwhile you could work here, and you would get a two-month leave every year.

I have even heard now it is safe to send letters abroad — without the risk of being arrested and accused of spying. I should try to find out where my father and Rita are living and how they are doing...”

**“July 28.** I was released today at 5:30 p.m. For the first time I walked through the camp gate without a guard. The first thing I saw was a horse, pulling a full load, and it was driven by a man I recognized. That should be a good omen.

I can never describe accurately my present feelings. Once in a while I look back to see if a guard with a red star, a hound, and a rifle isn't following me. Can I step to the right, to the left — really? Can I go as far as I want to? Incredible!”

**“August 1.** Gradually I'm returning to life. I have a complete freedom from 6:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. By this time I have to be back at the camp where I have to spend the night. The camp is about two miles from the workshop. If I ask for a permit, I can even go to Vorkuta city.”

Ilga did not waste any time but got ready for the trip. Here is her letter to me:

**“August 3.** I'm going on August 10th — if my Dad will be lucky enough to get a train ticket. Surely you will meet me at the train station...”

The trip took five days. After three days Ilga wrote to her parents:

**“August 13.** My dear ones! My trip will soon end. Only two more days.

Going north, the nature becomes more and more sad. And those horrible camps everywhere... I just crossed the Dvina river. It is a wide, beautiful river, but on its banks — camps without end. Very seldom one can see a village, and the villages look so drab and bare — not a single green spot because there are no trees around. How can people live like that! The men are lazy and drunkards — only want to sleep on the warm stove top, maintained by their wives, and to curse. And neither men nor women have any ambition.

In Kotlasa station the train will stand for an hour, then the trip will continue. I sent a telegram to Valentins so he would know I was coming. I can feel how he is getting ready for me to live there. How will it be? My happiness is so great I still can not believe it. Take care of yourself. Ilga.”

After Ilga arrived I wrote a letter to her parents:

*"August 16. Daddy and Mommy! Now we are together. We are very happy, and all the previous suffering is forgotten. Ilga survived the trip well. She is the best daughter and the dearest wife. The only thing — I almost have to force food on her.*

*We live in our own little room in the workshop building. We have made a cozy nest here — thanks to Lama! Actually I am a free man now; only every other day I have to check in at the camp. I'm taking care of Ilgie and sending you our warmest greetings. Your son."*

Our life here wasn't all sunshine and roses as it might seem in the above letter. Here is a note Ilga left for me one day on the table in our room:

*"August 19. Valenti — the more you will chide yourself the further you will drift away from people. And the harder your life will be the more I will love you. Your little wife in our little room in Vorkuta."*

Later Ilga wrote a long letter to her parents:

*"August 22. My dear parents! We are in good health and doing all right. The main thing — we are together and happy. It is not just love; it is adoration and indulging I'm receiving here. It helps to forget the sword of Damocles that is still hanging over us.*

*We are taking long walks in tundra and discussing our future — in spite of everything. The fact is: even those that are released are not allowed to go home. Who will work at the mines if everybody would go home? But it is possible that Valentins would get a leave to go home for a visit. I inquired about a job. Yes, they have a great need for psychiatrists, so I'll be able to work here. But for the time being I'm on a leave — for a whole month yet.*

*It is quite different here from what I imagined. There is a little (some hundred yards long and wide) quadrangle at every mine where the inmates live — like cattle in corrals. They wear miserable prisoners' clothes. Now they are allowed to wear civilian clothes but hardly anyone has them by this time. They have either been stolen or exchanged for food.*

*Those that have been released can work and earn something, so they are well dressed. So are the local citizens. The city of Vorkuta is spreading, and in Rudnik you can see primitive one-storey houses, not only barracks, but the environment has not been taken care of.*

*We buy our own food and cook it on an electric hotplate. We live*

in a little room in the workshop building. Valentins works at the workshop. He has made himself the few pieces of furniture we have: a table, a few stools, and a simple bunk bed. Somewhere he has managed to get a cupboard. We have a small water tank, a sink, and a bucket. This room even has a normal window.

Last Saturday we had company — the local Latvians. They were pleased to see somebody from their native country. Here are also many Estonians and especially Lithuanians.

So far the weather is still warm and sunny. Tundra is beautiful in summer; we often take walks there. It is full of small birches, blueberries, wild roses, and purple yarrows — not white as in Latvia.

Since the summer is so short people can not grow much vegetables. They only plant radishes and onions. For cattle they raise oats.

In the north-east we can see the white outline of Ural Mountains. It does not seem to be so far away, but actually the distance is 200 kilometers. These mountains, tundra, sky, and snow is all Valentins and his comrades have seen of nature all these years. But there is another phenomenon all around that is manmade: the piles of coal remnants that are called terrakons. They represent only a fraction of the immense amount of coal that inmates have dug out. And around each of them there are camps with their barracks, fences, and watch-towers. The latter look from a distance like white, poisonous mushrooms. In the valley there flows the gloomy Vorkuta river with steep banks. But even in the gloominess there is a certain beauty.

Valentins has to walk every other day 4 km to the camp to extend his permit to live outside the camp. Several times I walked with him.

My husband is well respected here for his work. I saw the little movable houses he constructed. There is a high demand for them.

**The environment and conditions here leave their mark on everybody. Valentins is not an exception. But it does not disturb me. For this reason he needs me even more, and I'm happy to be capable of helping him. Your daughter."**

\* \* \*

Once when I had gone to the camp to extend my permit, I was stopped and ordered to keep my hands behind my back. Immediately I understood: I was being arrested again and probably would wind up in a punishment camp. That was the end of all hopes. How to notify my wife and my supervisor at work?

Many people walked by — Latvians, Germans, Russians, other Balts. They saw me but turned away as the previous bitter experience had taught them to do. If anybody dared to stop and talk to me, he very likely

would be arrested too — as an “accomplice” in a crime I did not have the faintest idea about. But there was one acquaintance that dared to stop. It was a Jewish engineer Shulmann. The guard tried to push him away, but he ignored it and asked me what had happened.

I managed to assure him I had neither done nor said anything that could warrant my arrest. Probably I was arrested because I was of the Baltic origin — in connection with the recent strike. I asked him to notify my wife and my supervisor in the Trust — Karmishev.

I was put into solitary confinement. This time it was summer and I was not freezing, but my mood was much worse than other times.

I was released in the morning — with an apology. The high commander gen. Derevyanko himself had called and ordered my release. Later I found out Shulmann had contacted the Trust director Afanasiev already in the evening. In the morning Afanasiev had talked to gen. Derevyanko — they were both communist party members and colleagues in the Vorkuta city bureau.

Ilga was already waiting for me at the camp gate — with a tear-stained face but happy.

In September, 1955, the president of West Germany Konrad Adenauer paid a visit to Khrushchev in Moscow. They discussed the problems that still existed between their countries. The main problem was all those Germans that for the tenth year now were still in GULAG camps. After their meeting the radio broadcasted Adenauer's speech. I was surprised about his perfect Russian. Did he perhaps have a Baltic origin where many Germans spoke Russian as well as German? But maybe it was just a translation.

After this first meeting — still in September — the Soviet Union announced an amnesty for all “war crimes”. That meant freedom not only for Germans but also for many Red army soldiers that had once been German prisoners-of-war; from German POW camps they had been sent directly to GULAG. And it meant freedom for the Baltic men that had been in the German army and for others that had been arrested and deported as collaborators with the German occupational power. Also many political prisoners were now released.

Apparently the Soviet government had accepted the fact that it was neither economically sound nor safe any more to keep 20-30 million inmates in concentration camps. Only the monstrous terror during Stalin's era could sustain these camps. The present government understood: if there were an uprising in one of the camps it would spread to others and beyond that — there were more concentration camps than cities in the Soviet Union.

Soon the formation of the release papers was started in camps. Ilga

repeatedly went to talk to the camp commander colonel Bganko until she achieved her goal: I was put in the very first party that left the camp. But it still took several weeks until everything was ready. We were given money for the train trip and a certificate for receiving my personal documents at the location where I was arrested.

The Trust director wanted to keep me here. He offered a tripple salary comparing to what I could earn in Latvia, a real apartment, and a two month vacation a year. The contract would be for three years. No, thanks! But when I refused, the director was decent enough not to try to prevent my leaving. He could have done it.

Not everybody was released. For example the ones that had originally been sentenced to death and later their sentence was commuted to 25 years. Among them were our **captain Keselis** and **colonel Gailitis**. Some of those that had been extradited from Sweden were not released because the amnesty was only for war crimes and their anti-Soviet propaganda took place after the war. Such was the **second lieutenant Jekabs Raiskums**. I was lucky to be released so soon — before they had had time to figure this out.

V. Silamikelis "GLĀSTS" J. LERUMS-OZOLIŅA TEĒSTS.  
VĀRKUTAS, 9. OLPIŠ 1954/55. g. pieņemstih 17.11.55.

*Moderato* kā sapnis liegs, kā pa-sa-ko kā stāsts, kā ro-zes zieds, kas rī-ta ra-sā koist, Pān-  
 smar-žu sd-dā-ko ir ra-koš glāsts, Tas ku-si at-li-do un ā-tri gait.

Bet sir-āš kad ne-bei-deo-mās il-gās kvēl Un drē-se-le kad sē-pju ē-nās grimst, Tad  
 nāc un mai-gi gā-shi vēl un vēl. Tik glā-sta vēl-dzē-jo-sā sē-pes rimst

Liec sir-di sa-vu glā-stā mai-gā-ko, Lai sa-jūt drē-se-le ko ro-ko ded-Būs  
 vi-sa dzē-vedzē-sma stā-šo-ko Kūl sir-dāš kvē-lo-ja-šās mie-ru rod

*ff*

Ilgajoties pēc sīvelītes, Āmanta peezijas iedvesmā, man radās maldējā.

V. SILAMIKELIS

A song with lyrics by Imants Lerums-Ozolins, music by V. Silamikelis dedicated to his wife Ilga

(When later the chief geologists of the Soviet Latvia invited specialists from Soviet Union to come to our country and try to find oil here, the Trust "Petchorgeologiya" director **Afanasiev**, bookkeeper **Golubev**, the **chief engineer**, and the head of DSM **Lama** all moved to Latvia. I am grateful to them for many things!)

Our friends — a truly international company — accompanied Ilga and me to the train station. Before the departure several KGB patrols carefully checked the documents and belongings. It seemed they did not even trust their own people.

On our way I had a chance to see my projected houses. One had traveled 200 km.

On the train a Russian woman told Ilga a kind of legend about a Baltic woman who had come to Vorkuta, gotten her husband out, and now they both had gone back to their country. When Ilga told her we were that couple, the woman came over and kissed Ilga.

At Riga train station we were greeted by our relatives with a bunch of flowers. Even young Ilga Mezite from distant Gulbene had come. We were all happy beyond words. **My return was just as beautiful as my departure from Riga had been gloomy. I wish many others had been that lucky!**

## X HOME

Since my return from Vorkuta I worked until the fall of 1959 as a construction foreman in Jelgava. My supervisor was **Zhanis Ozolinsh** — a former Latvian Rifleman. He accepted my past with the words: "Youth is never sensible! Now you just work — that's the main thing!" My past was also known to the employment supervisor — an Ukrainian man **Jegorenko**. He was a war veteran with a missing arm. His own relatives had been deported. Both these men were understanding and obliging by giving me a recommendation for the university. In the reference they emphasized I was a good worker and not an alcohol abuser. (Many workers were.) For this I even received a citation for my "achievements in the socialistic competition".

During my Jelgava years a furniture factory was built in Jelgava — after my project and under my supervision. Another one of my projects was a dormitory for the brick factory workers. It was a three-storey brick building with 30 one-room apartments. The building was located exactly at the same place where ten years before I had worked so hard as a filtration camp inmate. Now to see in this place my building — this was a great satisfaction.

In the fall of 1959 I resumed my architecture studies. It was the time of Kruschev's "thaw". The university was in Riga, but we lived in Jelgava where Ilga worked and the hospital gave us a two-room apartment. Before we could live there we had to do quite a lot of repairs, but we were lucky to get an apartment at all.

In May of 1956 our daughter Gundega was born. It was a gift from Vorkuta — from our time together there. On November 18 (Independence Day for Latvia), 1957, our first son Viesturs was born. And on St. John's Day, 1959, we had another son Auseklis.

My wife's parents, now both retired, came to live in Jelgava so they could help us with our family. We lived in Jelgava until the year 1968.

In 1962 I finished my architecture studies with a vacation place project as my diploma work. It was a restoration of Riga suburb Bolderaja and a new project for the island Bulli. After my graduation I could have been sent to work for three years anywhere — even outside

Latvia. But because my family lived in Jelgava I was allowed to stay there — to work as a designer at the collective farm building organization in Jelgava.

In the Soviet Union it was not allowed to celebrate Christmas because of its religious meaning. Instead people had their Christmas trees and gift exchange for New Year — that was allowed. However, our family always had the tree ready on the correct date. In year 1960 while I was still in school one of the two KGB agents in our course had reported about our early Christmas tree. The university received a warning from the Communist Party Central Committee, and all the students in that course lost their scholarships for the current school year. We were lucky not to be expelled. We were not because it would have been a scandal to expel the whole course.

Once I saw on the street the former Dean of Architecture in Latvian State University — Mergin. He worked there during the time before my deportation when I was a student there. He was also a KGB agent. He had some “merit” at my arrest and deportation. At seeing me now Mergin’s face grew pale, and he hastily passed me by. A dog knows what he has eaten...

My job after graduating was to project country houses. At first we were only three at this work, but our work load was so great that gradually our group increased until finally we were thirty — a capable group of architects, engineers, and technical workers. We had our own special rooms where to work. Later we were combined with groups from Dobele and Bauska. Finally an institution was founded that was named “Latvian Collective Farm Projects”.

During the year 1965 one day the director **Monvids Kalsers** suddenly came into the office I worked and advised me to resign. He explained that he would still keep me in the institution but in a lesser position; I was not trustworthy enough to supervise so many people. So after three years of successful work my past still caught up with me — not only the Latvian Legion but even more my flight to Sweden and my part in the hunger strike. Again I was lucky I was still left in the institution — thanks to Kalsers.

Now I was a constructor. For a year and a half I commuted daily about 60 km from Jelgava to Jugla where a division of the institution was. After that time I was not allowed to remain even in this position, although here I did not supervise any personnel. Again I was advised to resign. If I did not do it I would get a bad reference: “Unsuitable.” Of course, it had nothing to do with the quality of my work. It meant politically unsuitable.

In my work I had made a few acquaintances among the collective

farm supervisors. I liked especially one of them — **Arturs Chikste**. His opinion was: construction was the beginning of modern farming. So now I went to him.

Chikste seemed to be pleased to get an experienced constructor in his command. He told me to call him the next day. Instead it took a whole week until Chikste managed to convince the local communist party and KGB to let me work at his collective farm. But finally I got the job.

In this collective farm I worked for four years. During this time I organized and supervised the projecting and constructing there. We were five projectors and 120 men in the building brigade, led by the old, experienced mason **Ernests Gaushs**.

Our first project was a mink farm, the next — a grocery store, combined with a cafeteria. Then we started to build living quarters: individual houses and apartment buildings. All buildings had central heating and running hot water. We projected these buildings, considering the special circumstances of country living. The kitchen had to be a large one to allow preparing of food not only for people but for cattle as well. And there had to be a place to dry out the wet clothes of field workers. Apartment buildings included a garage and a small barn for each apartment — in a separate building. And a patch of land for a vegetable garden. In those days it was something new.

An unusual project was also the pig farm that occupied a whole hectare (2,47 acres) and was all under one roof. We also worked out a new project for the center of the collective farm. Our idea was decentralization: planning several small centers instead of a big one, as it was allowed in those days. Either because of a bureaucratic narrow-mindedness or in order to toady to Moscow decentralization was strictly forbidden. And no individual projects were allowed. But Chikste presented the Soviet Minister of Agriculture in Moscow with a seal skin coat for his wife and so gained his favor. Now he could complain about the resistance to decentralization, and we got the permit for our individual project. This permit worked for twenty years to come. There was more freedom for architects that worked for collective farms than for those that worked in project institutions. The latter had so many limitations to a creative imagination that most of the architects there were forced to just copy existing projects.

I was a pioneer in collective farm architecture. But soon many architects realized the advantages of this field: more freedom and a better pay. Soon several architects followed my path. If they had not done it, our countryside would look more drab.

How ironic! When the Architecture Division of Latvian State Uni-

versity was liquidated in 1950, we had an offer to transfer to Latvian Academy of Agriculture. There we would learn to project barns. We proudly refused. Project barns? No, thanks! We were dreaming of projecting castles and cities. But now one of my most impressive projects was... the pig farm! A horizontal line of one-storey red brick facades, alternating with vertical silvery silos.

We were projecting also the new office building and club house. And even though we hated this collective farm system that ruined centuries old individual Latvian farms, I nevertheless became a local patriot of this particular collective farm where I was able to make a difference. Others felt the same way. We were proud not only of our personal achievements but of the achievements of the whole farm as well, and we griped about the negative features we observed — drinking, laziness, lack of order.

However, after four years, in 1971, I was not allowed to continue my work here — again because of my biography. Our collective farm was the first in our republic, and the likes of me could not work there — I might turn into a saboteur! So informed me one of the employees that turned out to be a KGB man. Now I understood why lately there had been a certain mistrust towards me by the administration. Suddenly all my bills were checked and rechecked. Before there was always enough money for construction and a complete trust in my management.

It was a Lithuanian architect **Henrikas Shilgalis** that took my position. Chikste had met him in Vilnius when he attended the communist party school there. Shilgalis' merit was creating a village with high-rise apartment buildings that had a very special look. This was achieved by combining red brick with white plaster. He also used my style — adding natural stone details. I only disliked the closeness of the buildings; they stood twice as close as I had planned.

The children were growing up, and a two-room apartment became too crowded. In 1969 we moved to Riga where we were able to get a four-room apartment. Eventually our children graduated from the Third High School of Riga and entered LSU. Our daughter and the youngest son studied medicine, our eldest son physics.

I found a job in Riga, but in 1978 I was persuaded to work for a collective farm again. This time it was "Ezerciems" that was looking for an experienced architect.

To this collective farm were assigned two stories of a building in the Old Town of Riga — to build a store there. This building was one of those that was going to be restored at that time. Later the collective farm acquired another building in that part of Riga. So I worked there until 1986 when I retired. But even after that I continued to work at restoring

Komponists **BORIS ROZNIKIS** Teksts V. PAVLOVSKIS  
 autoris S. PAVILAITIS  
**BALTIJA** 06.11.88 R. 90.  
 H. KARMA

Trīs māsu jūrasmal: slāņ, trīs mežs un trīs pils  
 māj. Tās būvēta zeme un dabas trīs lauku gais un  
 pirts. Bet foras jū līdzo zemi, sen un jūrā bārgātes  
 sāk. Trīs mazuļi un trīs mežu māstān pur sei, patsinēt  
 māt. Atmāstas Baltija, atmāstas Baltija, Lieku, Latvija  
 Jganija Prie Atmāstas Baltija, atmāstas Baltija  
 Lieku, Latvija, Jganija Būnda Jau Baltija  
 Arāne Baltimāad  
 būnda jau Baltija, Lieku, Latvija, Estija,  
 ārgare Baltimāad, Leedamāq, Lātimāq, Estimāq!

Prie jūtas miera sevīs trīs,  
 tas sīstāga pānciņā meitāts  
 krāslāja, yq elgata pagāru  
 cildāva tautu garbēs  
 Bet vērmas likuma huadi vē!  
 trīs zeme stāgāta bāngas  
 trīs zeme is mērga stāja  
 upginti sava garbēs  
 Būnda jau Baltija, būnda jau Baltija -  
 Hetrāta, Latvija, Estija!

Kolm āde mēre palge ees -  
 trīs atnātas, trīs mēt, taut,  
 kolm māhvāt, stān sejmācēnd, hēvdēstēs  
 tēd chirtas muiste on  
 kuud forādes, lūba lēās kella hā!  
 trīs hēgrān, trīs bēdēs pūd...  
 at - stārtāst, ja eju kaitisēd  
 kolm āde vībuvād nūd.  
 Ārgare Baltimāad, ārgare Baltimāad -  
 Hetrāta, Lātimāq, Estimāq!

Baltijas himna

Boris Roznikis's song with the words in Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian by V. Pavlovskis, S. Pavilaitis and H. Karma. "Three sisters by the Baltic Sea." It can be the Hymn of Baltin

three more buildings there. Old Town is the historical part of Riga, therefore it was important to restore the old buildings. In the first buildings several stores were located — art, handicraft, and flower shops. There were also rooms for exhibitions. And the first private cafe was opened there — “Balta roze” (White Rose). The rest of the buildings were meant for office space. Under the so called Haberland house there was an old prison — from the time of Swedish occupation in the 17th century. We had an idea to form a museum there for the victims of inquisition. Besides me there were other architects working there: both Baumanis, Slavietis, also engineers Betins, Kencis, Vale, Vrublevskis, construction leader Litaunieks, and others.

My father **Antons Silamikelis** helped me in this work. **He repatriated to Riga in 1975 — to spend his last years with his son, daughter, and grandchildren.** This was his last job in Riga.

Besides restoring the old buildings I projected many other objects during those years — mostly for the collective farm but also one interior in Riga; restored two churches in Piksari and Allazi. For the Allazi church I led the restoration of a complicated roof construction.

During these years my family has increased by two daughters-in-law, one son-in-law, and ten grandchildren. Besides, we also have a foster-daughter Vita and her family.

**We shall not perish!**

## XI SWEDEN APOLOGIZES TO BALTIA

On September 8, 1992, the Swedish King and Queen visited Riga. Those of us, extradited, that were still alive, expressed our gratitude to the royal couple, the Swedish Church, and the Swedish people for supporting us. Also to the Swedish army and its Commander-in-Chief — the King. The present King of Sweden knew all about it and said in German: "Das war schrecklich" (That was horrible!)

**The King of Sweden — Carl XVI Gustav — was the first to say it.** Later, in 1994, also the moderate government of Sweden admitted that the decision of the erstwhile government — to hand over the interned Baltic men to the Soviet Union — had been a mistake. They apologized and invited us to visit Sweden.

**That was the satisfaction we had waited for forty eight years.**

Partly it was the conversation Swedish Secretary of State Margaret af Ugglas had had with the Estonian man Hans Lindeman in Tallinn, one of the extradited, that had promoted this. Also the action two Latvians — Juris Reneslācis and Peteris Lukševs — had taken in Stockholm had an impact in this. Likewise my "pilgrimage" to Örebro I had taken at the beginning of that year. It was widely publicized in Swedish press, saying that one of the extradited remembered Sweden with bitterness and gratitude, and that he "had come a full circle now."

The government of Karl Bildt has done a lot on behalf of the Baltic States. The Secretary of State Margaret af Ugglas — a fragile woman — had more courage than many men before her to officially apologize in 1994 for the action of Swedish government half a century ago.

There were only forty of us left — thirty-five Latvians, four Estonians, and one Lithuanian — that were still capable of going to Stockholm. For us the circle was indeed completed. But with each of us there were three spirits of the dead ones.

**It was not an excursion, it was a good-will mission — for us as well as for Sweden.**

We were received by the King of Sweden, the Department of State, the soldiers of Eksjö garrison near Raenneslaett, the city governments of Visby and Hemse (in Gotland). We visited the campsite at Havgdhem.

The King shook hands with all of us. He remembered professor Slaidins and me from his visit in Riga and made time for a short conversation. **He expressed his regrets for the events of 1945/46.** He hoped our memories of Sweden would not be entirely negative. He expressed his pleasure at being able to receive at least some of us in Sweden and conveyed greetings from Queen Silvia.

On our behalf I expressed our gratitude for the invitation and **reminded that King Gustav V had asked Stalin to let the 170 interned Baltic men stay in Sweden.** Later this fact relieved our fate in the Soviet Union.

**We presented the King with a miniature Baltic flag.** I told the King we had such a flag already in our camp at Havgdhem in 1945. This was the symbol we carried now through our journey in Sweden.

The King showed us respect by keeping the little flag in his hand through the conversation instead of handing it over to one of his attendants. Instead of half an hour as it had been planned the King spent with us a whole hour. He was simple and cordial. At the parting we asked him to convey our greetings to his family.

We were accompanied by the employees of Swedish Embassy in Riga, led by Eva Emneus. Our language was partly German, partly English, but Swedish was translated to us.

We were shown the King's palace that was a masterpiece of architecture. Many of us had never seen such splendor before. Likewise the luxurious five-star hotel we were staying at and the choice meals. Some of us had never even taken a plane trip before. Such a reception at the highest level for us — the former common soldiers and the underclass citizens after the war.

We had a formal dinner at the Department of State. The building displayed Swedish and Baltic flags. We brought in ours — the united Baltic flag. In Sweden there still lived the son and daughter of lieutenant Vabulis — one of those that committed suicide. They were invited to the dinner. I assured them their father's suicide proved what we tried to tell the world in our memoranda. Later the Soviet Union had to count on the reaction in the world press. The suicides and many suicide attempts made them take seriously our reports about the terror in the Soviet Union. So the sacrifices were not in vain.

At the dinner many Stockholm Latvians that had done a lot on our behalf were present: the Reneslakis family, Lukseps, Dzelme, historian Uldis Germanis. Also the Swedish journalists that had written about us — Ekholm, Enquist, Bergenstrole. We even had a conversation with the baroness Margaret af Ugglas — a very nice, sincere woman.

Unfortunately all conversations were short. We had to eat and then rush to the press conference and the boat trip in our honor. And so it

went all the time. But we, old soldiers, **stood our ground. This time we had to fight on the diplomacy front.**

Our hostess said at the dinner that it had been a grave mistake by the Swedish government — to extradite the interned Baltic men to a totalitarian regime. There is no way to correct this mistake but at least Sweden can admit it instead of sweeping it under the rug. Sweden can also apologize, hoping for understanding and forgiveness. The Secretary of State asked us to understand the situation Sweden was in at that time. It still remained as a black spot in the Swedish history, but Margaret af Ugglas expressed hope that in spite of everything we would not harbor hatred towards Sweden. She assured us the Swedish Department of State was well informed of the situation and problems in the Baltic States today. She said:

"We in Sweden are very glad that on the other shore of the Baltic Sea there are again three independent, democratic countries. We have always had a common history with the Baltic nations. For many years we could not have any contact. Now we can. **The most important meaning of your visit is the beginning of a new phase in the relations between Sweden and Baltic States.** I'm sure — you that are here agree with me. Once more — welcome in Sweden!"

At the table I was sitting next to the Secretary of State and conversed with her in English while prof. Slaidinsh sat at her other side and conversed with her in German.

I had to say the official speech on our behalf. I spoke in Latvian, and it was translated into Swedish. I said that the "black spot" was Sweden's problem and we did not have to remind about it. Our task was to tell **what had remained in our memory after all these years: the overwhelming protest of the Swedish people against the extradition of a handful of Balts.** I tried to remind of everything they had done. I told about love and good will we received from so many in those days. I also told in short what had happened to us after the extradition.

Five Latvians and one Lithuanian were tried and sentenced to death. The rest were kept in filtration camps for half a year, half-starved and at hard labor. Then they were released. But a year later trials started again. **They hit about all officers and half of the instructors, also fifteen soldiers. They were sentenced to 10-25 years in Soviet concentration camps outside their native countries.** In GULAG camps there were about 50 of the extradited. They had to stay there 4-10 years — until the Khrushchev's amnesty. But there were some that later were arrested again. Three Latvian officers — captains Apkalns and Keselis and colonel Karlis Gailitis — had to slave 17 years although they had not done anything except belonging to German army. They were not war criminals that left a trail of blood behind them.

Even the rest of us were always ready for a new arrest. All our life our past was reminded to us; we were underclass citizens. Those few that excelled in their professions often had to leave their positions and go back to a plain physical labor.

If anybody would want to blame the Swedish Department of State for inviting fascists and Jew-killers, then I reminded the U.S.A. congress' resolution already back in the year 1950 that the Baltic SS units were not identical with German SS units either in their ideology, purpose, or real action, and constituted no threat to the U.S.A. (Consequently many former Baltic Legionaries were allowed to emigrate to the U.S.A.)

Both occupants realized an unlawful draft in Baltic territory. A few escaped it, but those that took to the woods almost all perished either during the war or after the war. Of the 125,000 Latvians in the German army about one tenth was killed during the war. In the Red Army it was the other way around: of 65,000 enlisted Latvian men about one tenth survived.

However, no Latvian Legionary became a member of the National-socialistic party. In one of our soldiers' songs we sang quite openly: "We'll slay the red ones and then the bluish-grays!"

We knew the end of the war was near. The Baltic nations had to arm themselves to prevent a second Soviet occupation that threatened to annihilate us. Neither Sweden nor any other country gave us arms — only Germans. But to receive their arms we had to wear their uniforms and fight in their units. **We had no other choice. We fought so fiercely and self-denyingly not for Great Germany and Hitler but against communists that were the greatest evil on earth at that time.**

As for the killing of Jews in Baltic territory — Baltic nations can not assume the responsibility for it; since we were occupied we had no saying in this. And our occupation was harder than in other European countries because we lost our statehood.

Why does nobody call Finns fascists? They too fought against the Soviets and with German help. Is it because we wore German uniforms? **But our fight was the same — to defend our nations.**

At the parting the Swedish Secretary of State expressed her wish that we would be able to form a Baltic Union as soon as possible. She promised her unlimited support in reaching this goal.

At camp Raenneslaett we once were not allowed to raise our flags and sing our national anthems. **Now at this place the local Swedish army unit solemnly raised the flags of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. The Swedish officers stood there with the flag of Sweden, we — with our Baltic flag.**

So after half a century the fight that we lost when we were forced to board the Soviet ship on January 25, 1946, was won on June 20, 1994.

\* \* \*

**And here I will speak about the great result of our "ultaemningen" which no one could imagine before.**

How did it happen?

Our resistance with hunger strike, memoranda, suicides, Swedish demonstrations, King Gustav V appeal and world media campaign impressed Stalin. He reacted cunningly. "We will not shoot them, but will let them free and announce about it all over."

In winter 1945/46 the Supreme Soviet of the USSR issued a decree that no Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian soldier and instructor must be punished for the flight to Sweden and fighting for the German army. In this decree the Ministry of Intern-MGB (almighty secret police — "tcheka") issued order no. 363 from 19th April 1946 in which all **Baltic prisoners of war**, who were previously not punished **must be liberated** from PoW and "filtration" camps.

Due to the conditions of these camps — hunger, inhuman work without rest and violence — every fourth or third prisoner died there. Every day in Gulag died hundreds of Balts.

Then in autumn 1946 after our liberation and in 1947 more than 20,000 Balts (mostly Latvians) returned home.

Therefore great **thanks to the Swedish nation!**

We may believe or not, but the grand positive energy from prayers in churches did not disappear in vain.

**I have suspicion and, after an analysis, a hypothesis** — we, interned Balts and Swedish government, were only simple **pawns** in the hands of Western Secret Services, when they saw the bloody German extradition.

Till these days of 1945/46 their propaganda was favorable of the USSR and "Uncle Jo" — Stalin, but now they need to show the world the horrible reality of the Soviet empire and the totalitarism. A month after our deportation, in Fulton, USA Churchill delivered his famous speech about the truth in the USSR. **The cold war was beginning.**

Who can better testify the reality in the Soviet Union than these young fellows, who can be no war criminals, who **knew** the life there under the communists and Stalin? Therefore they preferred death instead of returning to "victorious, socialist homeland where there is no unemployment".

If extradition goes more bloody all the better!

Stalin had spies in all secret services — e.g. he followed the creating of atomic bomb since 1941; all Swedish spies sent to Baltia were awaited here by "tchekists" — Stalin knew their "play" and therefore changed the fates of Baltic soldiers otherwise than usually. In such a manner he could decrease the great antisoviet propaganda which came in connection with "baltultaemningen" from Sweden.

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... Stalin had spies in all secret services — e.g. he followed the crest-  
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changed the fate of Baltic soldiers otherwise than usually. In such a  
manner he could decrease the great military propagandas which came

in connection with "defensive" from Swedish and  
... of course, things are on which

... of course

Our resistance against hunger, against  
... administration. King Gustav V appeal and world peace  
... imposed. He insisted on "We will not be  
... will be the end of the world and we will live

In winter 1945/46 the Supreme Soviet of the USSR  
... that no Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian soldier and  
... punished for the fight to Sweden and fighting for the  
... In this decree the Ministry of Internal Affairs  
... "order" issued order on 10th April 1946  
... Baltic prisoners of war, who were previously not  
... liberated from POW and "filtration" camps

Due to the conditions of their camp — hunger, fatigue,  
... without rest and violence — there were  
... Every day in Gulag died

Then in autumn 1946 and in 1947 more  
... 20,000 Baltic

Therefore great thanks to the Swedish national

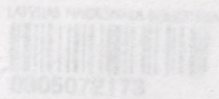
We may believe or not, but the grand positive driver force  
... in 1946 and 1947

I have proposed a situation of a hypothesis — we  
... and they are needed processes, which may  
... it was first in 1946, when they saw the

... propaganda was favorable  
... but they used to show the  
... the League of Nations and the  
... after the war, in 1946, USA  
... 1946 was the end of the  
... 1946

What are the realities in the Soviet Union then?  
... who knew the life  
... and the  
... "in 1946, when they saw the  
... 1946"

... the



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**OBLIGĀTAIS  
EKSEMPLĀRS**

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# WITH THE BALTIC FLAG

THROUGH THREE OCCUPATIONS

2005-3

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VALENTINS SILAMIKELIS  
(1924 - 2005)

Under the first Soviet Occupation of Baltia the author was interrogated by the Soviet secret police - NKVD. Under the German occupation he was drafted in the Latvian Legion. After the World War II he searched for asylum in Sweden, but together with 148 Balts was deported to the totalitarian USSR. In this repeated Soviet occupation he was punished to 25 years in the Soviet concentration camps - Gulag. Until this he had managed to study architecture and got married. Khrushchov's amnesty liberated him and he worked as an architect in Latvia. After Baltia regained its freedom, Sweden invited the former deported Balts still alive to visit Sweden and expressed regret for the deportation.



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