

# NAZI SOVIET



## DISINFORMATION

**ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST IN NAZI-OCCUPIED LATVIA**

**Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They? – Revisited**

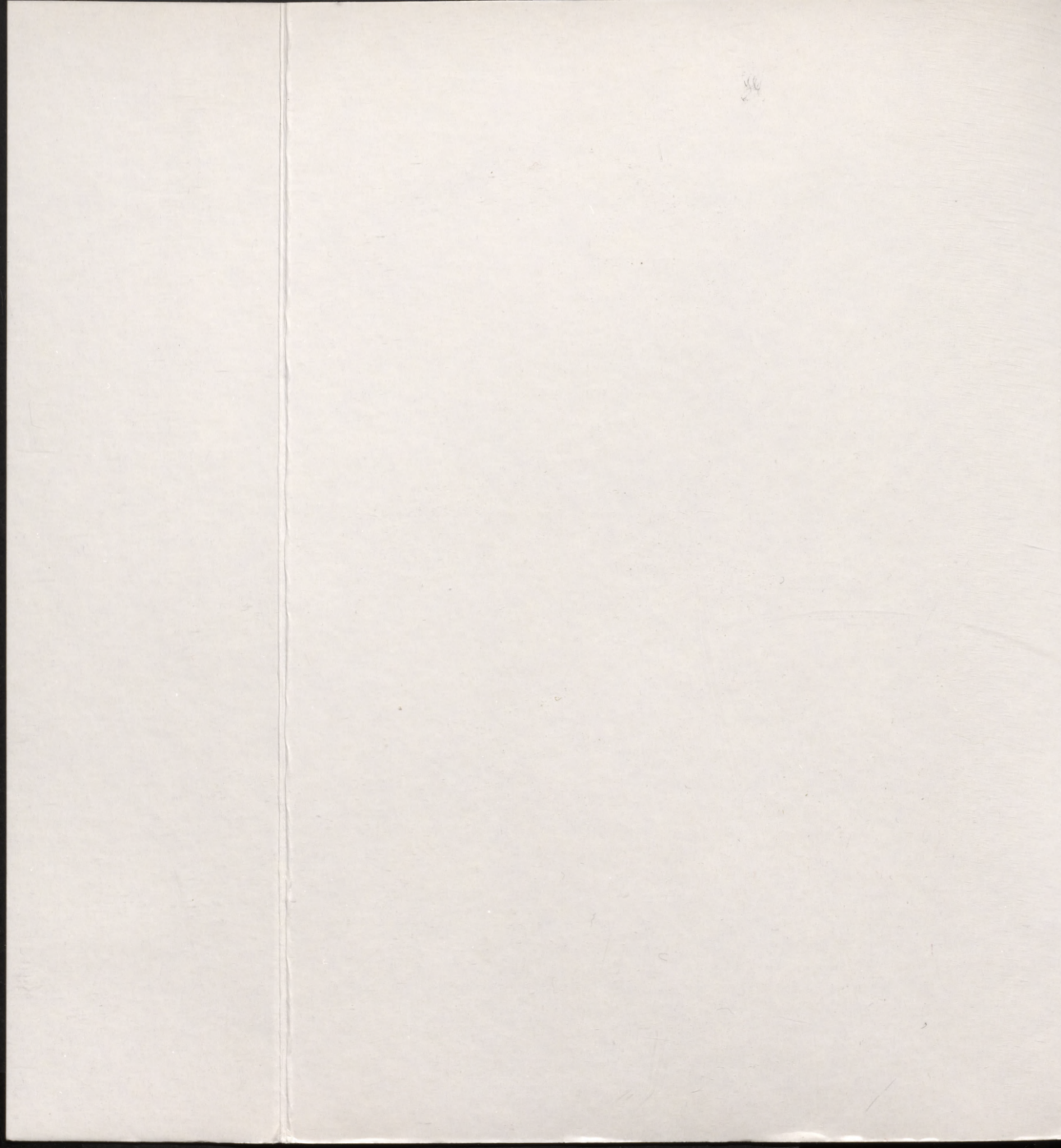
E. Avotiņš† J. Dzirkalis† V. Pētersons† **A. Ezergailis**

*Nazi/Soviet Disinformation about the Holocaust in Nazi-Occupied Latvia: Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They? Revisited* is a detailed analysis of a malicious and deceptive KGB propaganda pamphlet of the 1960s that probably worked better than its pseudonymous authors had dared to hope.

What is even more surprising is its reception among Holocaust scholars and prosecutors of Nazi crimes in the West. That it was written as propaganda should have been clear even to a non-specialist. Its rhetorical tone saturated with pathos-ridden vocabulary; its almost non-existent verifiable documentation; and its singular aim to smear Latvians, especially war veterans, living in the West, should have been giveaways. They were not. As a result, a number of court cases were tried in the USA, Germany and Canada, most of which ended in acquittals.

On the basis of his extensive knowledge of the subject, Andrew Ezergailis points out how the KGB booklet fed on and exaggerated stereotypes established by Nazi propaganda about the Holocaust in Eastern Europe as a spontaneous collective anti-Semitic outbreak by the local populations. By pinning the blame on others, the Nazis hid their own well-designed secret plans, behind-the-scenes manipulations and actions to carry out mass murder. As a former Nazi propagandist, the real author of the booklet, Pauls Ducmanis, was well qualified to adapt pernicious Nazi disinformation to KGB ends and make Latvians appear to be worse Nazis than the real Nazis.

Ezergailis does not exonerate Latvians whom the Germans recruited to carry out the mass murder. However, he points out that the organized mass murder was a German plan carried out under German guidance and supervision and that the Wehrmacht, the German *Sicherheitsdienst* and the *Einsatzgruppen* were responsible. He likewise rejects insidious wholesale Soviet linkage of the so-called Latvian Police Battalions and the Latvian Legion to the crimes of the Holocaust.



*In investigating past history, and in forming the conclusions that I have formed, it must be admitted that one cannot rely on every detail which has come down to us by way of tradition. People are inclined to accept all stories of ancient times in an uncritical way – even when those stories concern their own native countries.... I do not think that one be far wrong in accepting the conclusions I have reached from the evidence than that of the poets, who exaggerate the importance of their themes, or the prose chroniclers, who are less interested in telling the truth than in catching the attention of their public, whose authorities cannot be checked, and whose subject-matter, owing to passage of time, is mostly lost in the unreliable streams of mythology.*

Thucydides,  
*History of the Peloponnesian War.*

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**A. Ezergailis**

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IN NAZI-OCCUPIED LATVIA:

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Revisited*

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## FOREWORD

**D**augavas Vanagi: *Who Are They?* has probably given rise to more war crimes trials in the West than any other book, and in doing so, led to more acquittals in war crimes trials than any other book. There are reasons for this, and they do not have much to do with war crimes. The reasons have more to do with the politics and propaganda of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, as *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They? – Revisited* makes clear.

In 1962, the state publishing house of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic published a book entitled *Kas ir Daugavas Vanagi*. An English translation, *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* followed in 1963. The authors listed have long been known to be the pseudonym of Pauls Ducmanis, a Latvian journalist who had collaborated with the Germans during the Second World War and then later wrote *Kas ir Daugavas Vanagi* at the orders of and with the assistance of the KGB. This book purports to reveal the names and locations of members of this organization of Latvian veterans – who fought the Soviets – as monsters who were responsible for and gloried in horrible crimes against humanity, including willing, indeed enthusiastic, participation in the Holocaust in Latvia and elsewhere. Since its publication, *Kas ir Daugavas Vanagi* has been influential in prompting war crimes trials in the West, trials that have mostly failed to prove the guilt of the accused. In one such case with which I am intimately familiar, five of the six accusations against one individual made in this book were proved to be false before the trial even started, despite the notorious difficulty of proving a negative.<sup>1</sup> Many Western historians, however, have taken the book to be a worthwhile source of information. For example, the very thoroughly researched book *Justice Delayed* by British historian David Cesarani has this to say about *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?*: “The latter is a Soviet publication of cold-war vintage which sets out to discredit émigré Latvian nationalists, but much of the material it presents has since been verified independently.”<sup>2</sup> Cesarani does not say how or by whom the information was verified.

Daugavas Vanagi (Hawks of Daugava [Dūna or Dvina; the largest river flowing through Latvia]) was founded by Latvian Legion veterans on 28 December 1945, while they were prisoners of war in Zedelghem, Belgium. From the beginning,

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<sup>1</sup> This was a Canadian case, *MCI v Peteris (Peter) Arvids Vitols*, Federal Court of Canada T-310-97. See my “Canadian courts and the Latvian Past,” *Latvijas Kara muzeja gadagrāmata*, (Rīga, 2000) 128–36.

<sup>2</sup> David Cesarani, *Justice Delayed*, (London, 1992) Ch. 7, note 31.

Daugavas Vanagi was an organization of Latvian nationalists who were dogged advocates of the renewal of Latvian independence.

Daugavas Vanagi is in many ways a typical veterans' organization, very much like the British Legion, American Legion, or Royal Canadian Legion in scope and purpose – mutual support of its members, especially those disabled by war wounds, advocacy for veterans, and general charitable work in the larger community. Like the Royal Canadian Legion, over the decades Daugavas Vanagi has transformed itself from an organization solely of veterans to a more general social service society. It is, however, different from these other veterans' organizations in the West in several crucial ways, ones that made it vulnerable to attack by the Soviet Union and by others who accepted the joint German and Soviet interpretation of who they were:

- The initial members of Daugavas Vanagi were veterans of what the Germans called the "Latvian SS-Volunteer-Legion," a name that many have taken at face value.
- Latvia had been annexed to the USSR by force in 1940, and Daugavas Vanagi was always an organization that advocated, energetically, the renewal of Latvian independence from the Soviet Union.
- Because of the annexation of Latvia by the USSR, Latvian veterans had neither a functioning national government nor even a national Red Cross to represent their interests.

A few words should be said about each of these points, although there is not enough space here for anything more than a superficial introduction to the issues.

First, the Latvian Legion was neither volunteer, under Latvian command, raised under Latvian initiative, nor Waffen-SS. By 1943, according to German civil servants writing at the time, the Germans had imposed "downright universal military conscription" in Latvia.<sup>3</sup> During the German occupation of Latvia there was a so-called Latvian Self-Administration. As everything else in Latvia or any other place under Nazi occupation, the "self-administration" was under very firm German control during the German occupation. It did allow conscription notices to be sent out in its name, however, which further confuses the issue.

The United States and several other Western democracies did not ever recognize the incorporation of the Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia into the Soviet Union as legitimate. Daugavas Vanagi were not alone in holding this position; they were

<sup>3</sup> For German documents detailing the conscription of the Legion, see Chapter 2 of Mirdza Kate Baltais, *The Latvian Legion: Selected Documents*, (Toronto: Amber, 1999). Kārlis Kangeris, Andrew Ezergailis, and Uldis Neiburgs (most notably in his film *The Latvian Legion*. Rīga: Film Studio "DEVIŅI", 2000 [In Latvian with English subtitles].) have all done valuable work on this subject. See also my paper, "Brīvprātīgi iesaukti: How the Germans Conscribed 'Volunteers' for the Latvian Legion," *Latvija Otrajā pasaules karā / Latvia in World War II*, LVKR 1 (Rīga, 2000).

merely among the most persistent, for entirely understandable reasons. *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* had as its targets prominent members of Daugavas Vanagi, men who were constantly protesting the Soviet occupation, leading demonstrations, and being a persistent thorn in the side of the USSR.

In 1945, Latvian prisoners of war were moved from Putlos in Germany to Zedelghem in Belgium, where the organization Daugavas Vanagi was founded. The first postwar meeting of the League of Red Cross Societies in late 1945 had recognized the incorporation of the Baltic States in the Soviet Union, and therefore ceased to recognize the Latvian Red Cross. At just about the same time, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, of which the USSR was a member, but whose help in postwar Germany the USSR refused, denied recognition of the Latvian Red Cross as a welfare organization. The Latvian prisoners of war were therefore without a functioning national government<sup>4</sup> or a national Red Cross<sup>5</sup> to look out for their interests. So, they took matters into their own hands and created an organization to look out for each other, insofar as prisoners of war were able to do so. In 1946 the Latvian prisoners were freed from the camp and given discharges as ex-Wehrmacht personnel – the British and American armies at least did not fail to distinguish the Latvian Legion from the “Volunteer Waffen-SS.” (“Waffen-SS” was an option on the discharge form, but was deliberately not used.)

As Latvian veterans became displaced persons and later resettled to countries like Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States, so too did branches of Daugavas Vanagi spread out over the world. Their political activity spread too, denouncing the Soviet occupation of their country and demanding Latvian independence.

As the political activity of Daugavas Vanagi continued, the KGB decided to do something to discredit them throughout the West, and *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* was one of a series of books written to do just that.<sup>6</sup> The principal issue that the book raises is the most monstrous crime of the twentieth century – the Holocaust. Andrew Ezergailis is the author of the first serious scholarly attempt at a history of this crime, *The Holocaust in Latvia 1941–1994: The Missing Center.*<sup>7</sup> As the subtitle implies, Professor Ezergailis attempts to find the truth – a mean between wildly inaccurate Soviet accusations and a perception in the West that

<sup>4</sup> Latvian diplomatic missions continued to function for decades after the Second World War, and tried to influence political opinion in the West, but did not have the clout that even small nations had that were not occupied.

<sup>5</sup> The Latvian Red Cross continued to function in the Western zones of occupied Germany after this time, but without official recognition and support its ability to do more than tracing and record keeping was severely restricted.

<sup>6</sup> Others include M. Birznieks, *No SS un SD līdz ... [From SS and SD to ...]* (Riga, 1979) and J. Silabriedis and B. Arklāns, *Politiskie bēgļi bez maskas [Political Refugees Unmasked]* (Riga, 1963).

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Ezergailis, *The Holocaust in Latvia 1941–1994: The Missing Center* (Riga, 1996).

the Latvians were among the most brutal participants, on the one hand, and those who deny either that the Holocaust happened or that some Latvians willingly helped in the mass murder of citizens of their own country, on the other. Professor Ezergailis is not satisfied that *The Holocaust in Latvia* is in any sense a complete record, and has continued to research and write about this horror. He has particularly, and passionately, encouraged others to do careful historical research on both the Holocaust in Latvia and Latvian involvement in the Holocaust. (He does not pretend that these topics are exactly the same; his book is *not* entitled *Latvians in the Holocaust*.)

This work has not made Professor Ezergailis universally popular. There are those who accuse him of being an apologist for the Latvians, and there are Latvians who are displeased that he has accused any Latvians of having any role at all in the Holocaust. *The Holocaust in Latvia* has received generally favorable reviews in academic journals, although some have pointed out deficiencies in his treatment of Latvians outside Latvia, a subject he does not even pretend to have covered. More disturbing is that he has received death threats and anonymous letters. One in particular made an impression on me. It said that Ezergailis' monument would be either by the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem or by the Cheka (KGB) building in Moscow.

I very much doubt that the KGB would be happy with a monument to Andrew Ezergailis after they read this detailed analysis and critique of *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* Ezergailis is at times passionate in the present book, and I think that we have to pardon him for that. For decades he has pursued research that is unpopular with both those who accept the Soviet view of events and those who are utterly opposed to the USSR. For decades he has begged others to do serious research on these questions, whether the results support or contradict him.

In particular, Professor Ezergailis has begged others to perform a serious analysis of the truth or falsity of *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* No one has, whether from fear that it might turn out to be true or from fear that it might turn out not to be true. And since no one has analyzed the book, Ezergailis did so himself. Probably the most depressing conclusion he comes to is that *the Soviet Union could have provided useful information for the prosecution of war criminals and those who participated in the Holocaust, but for political reasons chose not to do so*. Instead, the Second World War and the Holocaust were used by the KGB for purely political purposes, and deliberately distorted to discredit their opponents in the West.

No one should read *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* without also reading *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They? – Revisited*.

Harold Otto  
St Catharines  
January 2004

## PREFACE

It is of great importance to describe historical events accurately ... inaccurate readings of history have been responsible for more evil than anything else.

– Steve Paulsson, *Internet interlocutor*

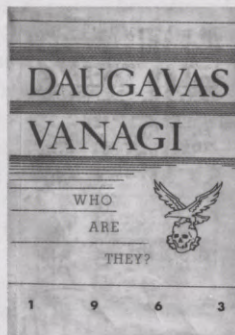
Enemies never tell me the truth

– Alexis de Tocqueville

I write this book to provide a corrective to its Soviet predecessor, *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* Forty years ago in 1962, a KGB organization in Soviet-occupied Latvia, the “Cultural Liaison Committee with Countrymen Abroad”<sup>1</sup> published a pamphlet, *Kas ir Daugavas Vanagi?*<sup>2</sup> that has managed to plague the Latvian people to the present day. In 1963, the pamphlet was translated into English as *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?*<sup>3</sup> Its author, Pauls Ducmanis, and the KGB, at whose behest he wrote the book, succeeded beyond their wildest dreams. Their little opus turned into one of the most pernicious and influential propaganda texts ever published about a nation.

This book, as was the original, is about the Holocaust in Latvia; unlike the original, it is based on twenty years of research, and its author is not beholden to any political power or agency.

*Kas ir Daugavas Vanagi*’s effect on the reputation of Latvians was similar to the one created on that of the Jews by the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Both



<sup>1</sup> Regarding the predecessors of the Cultural Liaison Committee with Countrymen Abroad. See Lilita Zaļkalne, “No repatriācijas līdz kultūras sakariem” [From Repatriation to Cultural Liaison], *Jaunā Gaita* 224–25 (2001) and “Soviet Latvian Repatriation Literature 1947–1950,” *Latvijas Kara muzeja gadagrāmata II* (Rīga, 2001) 136–49; Baiba Ekmane, “Padomju varas iestāžu politika repatriācijas jautājumā. 1944–1950” [The Repatriation Politics of Soviet Authorities 1944–1950], *Latvijas Kara muzeja gadagrāmata IV* (Rīga, 2003) 185–98.

<sup>2</sup> E. Avotiņš, J. Dzirkalis, V. Pētersons [pseud.], *Kas ir Daugavas Vanagi* (Rīga, 1962).

<sup>3</sup> E. Avotins, J. Dzirkalis, V. Petersons, *Daugavas Vanagi: Who are They?* (Rīga, 1963). Later it was also translated into German and, in an abbreviated form, into Swedish.

pamphlets were midwifed by Russian secret police: the latter by the Ohranka (the Czarist secret police) at the beginning of the twentieth century and the former by the KGB. Both pamphlets implicated their respective targets in collective crimes, treason, and conspiracy. I do not, however, want to overstate the similarities between the pamphlets. The difference exists in the consequences: while the *Protocols* arguably contributed to the Holocaust, the KGB production led to several unnecessary war-crimes trials, numerous useless investigations, and a public relations problem for Latvians in emigration, and after 1991, in Latvia.

The evil of the *Kas ir Daugavas Vanagi* pamphlet was that in a simplistic and demagogic way it accused Latvians not only collectively but also as individuals of heinous crimes. It also encouraged many well-meaning fighters for justice and searchers for truth, such as Astrid Hildebrant, Allan Ryan, Beate Klarsfeld, Per Almark, and Simon Wiesenthal to engage in wild goose chases after people who had nothing to do with Nazi crimes.

*Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* did not arise in isolation: similar pamphlets popped up in other parts of Eastern Europe. This pamphlet war was connected to a series of show-trials that the Soviets organized within their republics. *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* was linked with the trial of the 18th Police Battalion that took place in 1961. The pamphlets and the trials contained one big truth – that Jews were murdered during the German occupation – and a plethora of lies: mammoth and tiny – all gratuitous. In Soviet trials even the guilty were tried on phony evidence.

An unalterable truth of Latvia's history was that soon after the arrival of German troops in Latvia and in other parts of Eastern Europe, the Jews were murdered.<sup>4</sup> There were atrocities in the streets and there was street theater that the Germans staged. The Nazis started by making the Jews and natives conspicuous. They banned the Jews from the sidewalks and ordered them to wear a yellow star. Then they costumed the Latvian police by prohibiting their use of a uniform and making them wear a red-white-red armband on their civilian jackets. Then the costumed Latvians were ordered to impose the German laws against the costumed Jews. The pamphlets and the show-trials muddied beyond recognition the questions of legality and moral responsibility. The KGB aim was to pin a collective crime on Latvian people, and they did not care what standards of truth and of evidence they broke to attain it.

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<sup>4</sup> For details about the Holocaust in Latvia see Andrew Ezergailis, *The Holocaust in Latvia: The Missing Center* (Riga, 1996).

The Nazis and the Soviets had many things in common, among them this: they strove at all costs to maximize ethnic hatreds.<sup>5</sup> For the Nazis this was a question of ideology; for the Soviets a continuation of historical Russian imperialist nastiness and a tactic of colonial rule.<sup>6</sup> It was not sufficient for the imperial ideologues to declare that the Latvians were Nazis; they had to prove that they were worse than Nazis. The Germans, evil though they might have been, Soviet agitprop would maintain, had a modicum of rationality, while the Latvians were brutes who acted out of irrational rage and revenge.

The most recalcitrant residue from the Soviet and Nazi occupations that still lingers in the minds of Eastern Europeans is the concept of ethnic collectivities and ensuing hatreds. Between the deed and the word there cannot but be a difference, but in the case of the Holocaust the corruption of the word began at the very beginning. It was the Germans who planned the murder of the Jews, and it was also the Germans who, by leaks and plants in the Western press, wrote the first version of the event. Although the Nazis in general were unsuccessful in hiding the murder of the Jews, the Nazi point of view about the Holocaust in Eastern Europe, as evidenced in Jan Gross's *Neighbors* and the pamphlet under discussion in this study, has managed to prevail to a surprising degree. This study will show that this could not have happened without the connivance of the Soviet opinion makers. While it is true that Soviets and Nazis were at odds, it is also true that in many ways their interests coincided.

About the Holocaust and the offending pamphlet, whose fates are intrinsically conjoined, we can make two incontestable assertions:

1. The Holocaust happened in German-occupied Latvia.
2. The pamphlet *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* was written in Soviet-occupied Latvia.

Although these statements are obvious and clear as separate assertions, once they are telescoped – collapsed one into the other – they become murky, become conundrums to be disentangled, analyzed, and assessed. The meaning of the puzzles to a large measure depends on the answers we can give to the following questions:

1. Why is the folklore about the Holocaust believed more than histories of it?
2. What did it mean for Latvia to be occupied by the Nazis?
3. How did the Holocaust happen in Latvia? Was it a spontaneous explosion or a planned and organized event?

<sup>5</sup> That is the one right thing written by Jan Gross in *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton, 2001) 4. Unfortunately, by sensationalizing information gleaned from a 1949 Stalin-era show trial, he did not heed his own dictum.

<sup>6</sup> This Soviet propaganda genre, as M. Zvonov's pamphlet, *Po evrejiam ogorj* (Riga, 1993) shows, has been taken over by the present Russian secret services.

4. Was the writing of *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* planned and ordered, or did it spontaneously erupt from the head of its author?
5. Who ordered the killing of the Jews and who committed those atrocities: the German Wehrmacht, the German SD, German civil authorities, or the “natives”?
6. Who actually are the Daugavas Vanagi, how did the organization come into existence, and what relationship did it have to the killing of the Jews?
7. What is the relationship between the so-called self-defense teams, the Latvian Police Battalions, the so-called Latvian SS-Volunteer-Legion and the killing of the Jews?

Only when we have looked at these questions, we can assess the truth and the folklore about the Holocaust in Latvia and understand the fabrications that *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* contains.

## Who Are the Daugavas Vanagi?

As the real topic of the KGB opus was not the Daugavas Vanagi, so also this study will not deal extensively with that organization. Information about the organization is public and open, and it pays taxes in the countries that demand that of a charitable organization. People who look for a secret underground fascist organization aiming to revenge the defeat of Nazism will fail to find one. In general, the Daugavas Vanagi over the decades have steered clear of politics. The organization has been fiercely anti-Soviet, but that is no reason to call them *Rechtsextremisten* (right-wing extremists) unless one would also apply that name to U.S. presidents from Harry Truman to John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan.



The basic facts about the organization are the following. First and foremost, the Daugavas Vanagi is a real organization – to that degree the KGB was right. It is an organization of veterans (mostly of the Latvian Legion) that was founded by Latvian prisoners of war in Zedelghem, Belgium on 28 December 1945.

Zedelghem was a POW camp under British military authority, guarded by Belgian soldiers who patrolled the perimeter with dogs. The watchtowers were manned by men with machine guns. From the very beginning there has been nothing conspiratorial or secret about the organization. The organization's inception took place with the tacit approval of and overt scrutiny by the British military authorities. Daugavas Vanagi, although begun as a veterans' organization, spread its wings once the men left the POW camps, and established chapters on all continents and in the major cities of

Germany, England, the United States, Canada, and Australia. Daugavas Vanagi became a general social welfare organization, one of the stable cornerstones of Latvian émigré society. The legionnaires were not refugees, for they had not come to the West voluntarily. The German military command that had conscripted most of them also ordered them to Germany in the last few months of the Second World War.

The organization's name means Hawks of the Daugava. Daugava is Latvia's largest river, which originates in the Valdai Hills of Belarus and, entering Latvia in its Southeast corner, bisects the country. The river over the centuries has served as a source of sustenance, communications, myths, and defense. The phrase "Daugavas Vanagi" has a variety of origins, but the most direct one was a song that was popular during the Second World War, especially among soldiers. It is a martial dirge that projects a post-battle, post-war situation in which the battle-weary hawks who are still alive are summoned to assemble again for a forthcoming battle. The text was written by the Latvian poet Vilis Plūdons and set to music by Jēkabs Graubiņš. The song was written to commemorate the First World War, when Daugava was a battle line in Latvia, as it was not during the Second World War. During the war there was also a soldiers' newspaper by that name.

Contrary to the actual history of the Daugavas Vanagi, the KGB scribe who penned the pamphlet portrayed the organization as a dark fascist cabal harboring insidious designs on the world. In the introduction of the booklet the KGB author wrote:

*At the close of the Second World War, a considerable number of Latvian SS regiments serving under Hitler's generals, together with several Wehrmacht units, were stationed at the Zedelghem Camp for war prisoners in Belgium. And towards the end of 1945, an organization was formed at Zedelghem, the so-called "Daugavas Vanagi" (translate as: Daugava Hawks), whose purpose it was, according to its Latvian SS organizers, to help destitute and disabled members of the Latvian SS units.*

*Now, using the same name, this organization has locations and is officially registered in 13 different countries in various parts of the world. According to information given out by its central office, "Daugavas Vanagi" has a little over 8000 members.*

*Although it proclaimed itself to be a charitable organization, and still so claims, its supposed charity serves only as a Fascist Front. In reality, "Daugavas Vanagi" is a definitely fascist set-up, because its leaders as well as many of its members served VOLUNTARILY as executioners in Hitler's SS and SD, as members of the German police force, as fascist propagandists, as anti-Semites and so on. During the last war, all of them served Hitler*



**Daugavas Vanagi, house organ that has been published since 1955.**

*faithfully and of their own free will, perpetrating the most heinous crimes against the peaceful civilian populations of Latvia, Byelorussia, Poland and other places. The mass murder of tens of thousands of innocent people lies upon their conscience – should they have a conscience!*

*By escaping from the scenes of their crimes, these murderers evaded answering for their atrocities; and now they live in security as members of “Daugavas Vanagi” in 13 countries. The majority reside in West Germany, the others in Great Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia and Sweden. Representing themselves abroad as political refugees, they consider it their special mission to spread all kinds of lies about their homeland and its people – the same people against whom they committed so many unspeakable crimes. On top of this, they have become the most active and the most insistent of cold war propagandists, continually spreading false information about the Soviet Union.<sup>7</sup>*

In the pages to follow we shall parse and explicate the assertions of these paragraphs. Suffice it to say at this point that almost every sentence contains a poisonous lie. Daugavas Vanagi in reality is an open, democratically run organization whose records are available for public inspection.<sup>8</sup> The organization has published magazines, newspapers, and numerous books. It has even published a multi-volume history of itself<sup>9</sup> and is modern enough to display a home page on the Internet. There is one area of agreement between the KGB and the spokesmen for the Daugavas Vanagi: during the Cold War years it was the largest Latvian exile organization, it spanned all the continents and countries of the free world, and it was fiercely anti-communist. The two sides also agree that it was an organization of Second World War veterans who had fought under German command. In the main it consisted of veterans of the Latvian Legion. The Daugavas Vanagi had many sides to them, but at base they were what the Soviets said they were not. This was a welfare organization that assuaged the wounded, the traumatized, and the dispossessed – the victims of the war. The mission statement of 1945 statutes defined the organization’s purpose thus:



The aim of the Latvian welfare society “Daugavas Vanagi” is to provide material and cultural relief to those who have suffered in the war and their families.

During the German occupation there were Latvians who wore the “SS” insignia and there were Latvians who participated in the killing of Jews. I don’t want to shock anybody or appear to be

<sup>7</sup> *Daugavas Vanagi: Who are They?* 3.

<sup>8</sup> For example, the records of the Canadian branches of Daugavas Vanagi have been deposited in the Archives of Ontario in Toronto, where they are available to anyone who cares to examine them.

<sup>9</sup> Vilis Hāznērs, Austra Liepiņa et al., eds., *Laiks. Telpa. Ļaudis: Daugavas Vanagu organizācijas vēsture* [Time, Space, People: the History of the Daugavas Vanagi Organization], 5 vols. (Toronto, 1974–1995).

defensive about it, but they were not the same men. Any overlap was minuscule. The killing of Jews took place during 1941, but the so-called Latvian SS-Volunteer-Legion came into existence only in 1943. So far I have hesitated to apply the Nazi label to the Latvian Legion, because at this late hour it would be unseemly without an argument to give a forum to the Nazis. (See Chapter 4, below for further discussion of this point.) Perusal of the voluminous literature that Daugavas Vanagi has produced illustrates two persistent thematic preoccupations: the desire to recover the independence and sovereignty of the state of Latvia, and the desire to honor the Latvian military forces that had fought and sacrificed for Latvia's independence. Mistaken or not, the Daugavas Vanagi placed themselves within the tradition of these warriors. The history of the Legion they constructed as a struggle for Latvia. Unlike many foreigners, they perceived the Legion, even if it was wishful thinking, as a Latvian and not as a Nazi formation. Although during the war the legionnaires were forced to wear SS insignia, in the postwar activities of the Daugavas Vanagi neither SS nor any other Nazi paraphernalia played a role. As their identifying insignia Daugavas Vanagi used their own symbolic hawk and borrowed from Latvia's army the traditional symbol of the rising sun.<sup>10</sup>

## Contexts

The aim of this publication is to clarify and restate issues concerning the events that caused the Holocaust and the writing of *Daugavas Vanagi: Who are They?* This task is a difficult one, because the problems are entangled with folklore, lies, and ignorance. Because of the conditions under which the propaganda booklet was written and those under which the killing of the Jews occurred, the answer must be at once both simple and complex. The Nazi and Soviet occupiers were not fond of reason and clarity; instead they constructed walls of suspicion and malice. Even the words in which their history of occupation were couched conspired to keep us in the fog. The Nazis gave us the words: "internal enemy," "voluntary," "self-defense," "self-cleansing," "self-administration," "helpwilling (*Hilfswillige*)," and "pogrom." The Soviets for their part adopted the Nazi vocabulary, and in addition gave us the Soviet concepts of "punitive organs," "fascism," and "nationalism."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> At this point we must note that Daugavas Vanagi, as a leading émigré organization, was not without its failings. For example, concerning the war-crimes issue it could have on the one hand been more aggressive in confronting the Soviet prevarications, and on the other more open and forthcoming towards the Nazi-hunters, especially the Western judiciaries.

<sup>11</sup> Most of these words have general and common meanings, but they also had meanings that the propaganda regimes of the past century gave to them. This second meaning was often the opposite of the common meanings.

We must also note that the study of the Holocaust in the West is like no other academic field of inquiry; it marches by its own standards. What is considered as proof in historical studies in general, may or may not apply to Holocaust topics. Even among the victims of Nazism there is no consensus about some basic facts of the Holocaust. There are many people who seem not to want to penetrate the murky Soviet concoction, taking the Holocaust story as presented in various KGB propaganda works as the truth. The effectiveness of the KGB literature in general, and *Daugavas Vanagi, Who Are they?* in particular, is that narrative is couched in the language of righteousness and is linked to the folklore about the Holocaust that grew up in Latvia (and the Soviet Union generally) after the Second World War.

“Collaboration” is another word that has confounded the historians of Eastern Europe. One must remember that the concept originated in the context of the Nazi occupation of Western Europe and Scandinavia. In Eastern Europe, where the Nazis deemed entire populations racially inferior, *Untermenschen*, the concept does not have the same application as in the West. In Latvia the Germans rejected all offers of “collaboration,” and all “collaborative” projects were organized by the Germans.<sup>12</sup>

Both *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* and the events described in it, also have an Eastern European context. During the twentieth century Eastern Europe was assaulted by both the Soviet Union and Germany. At times these imperial powers attacked the Eastern Europeans in tandem, as happened during the era of Hitler–Stalin Pact, and at other times separately. In 1941, the attack against the Jews was planned and organized in Berlin, the capital of the Nazi empire; during the 1960s the propaganda attack against the Latvians and other East Europeans was organized in Moscow, the capital of the Soviet empire. Both superpowers cooperated in working out a story that the real monsters were the “disarmed” peoples of the East, instead of Nazi and Soviet armies that were armed to the teeth.

Although the wars of the twentieth century brought horrors to East European lands, nothing compared in brutality with the murder of Jews. The consequences of this crime as yet have not ceased. Who was responsible for the crime? Was it the occupying German forces or was it the native peoples among whom the Jews lived? To admit that the Germans were responsible for the murder of Jews, one needs to admit that the Germans had occupied the territories, and also that there was a system and consequences to that occupation. Although there was anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe, there has been no proof put forward that anybody in Eastern Europe held the intent, let alone the means, to murder all of the Jews of Europe. After the flight of the Red Army and the NKVD there was no

<sup>12</sup> For more detail about collaboration see Ezergailis, “Collaboration in German Occupied Latvia: Offered and Rejected,” *Latvija nacistiskās Vācijas okupācijas varā 1941–1945 / Latvia under Nazi German Occupation 1941–1945*, LVKR 11 (Rīga, 2004) 119–139.

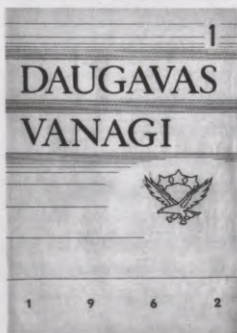
authority in Eastern Europe that could issue a command to murder anybody. It is a matter of record that at the time of the Holocaust, and even before it, the Nazis worked out a public relations line in which it was asserted that it was not the Nazis but rather East Europeans who harbored the desire to murder their Jewish "neighbors." Prior to the Holocaust no East European nation had a "Jewish problem" in the way that the German Nazis had one. Starting with the "stab-in-the-back" myth, nowhere was an ideology of hate developed to a similar point of intensity and detail as it was in Germany. By the time the killing of Europe's Jews was finished the German public relations agencies had turned it into a "European problem."<sup>13</sup> Undeniably the Shoah was a problem of German-occupied Europe – not of Spain, Portugal, Bulgaria, Sweden, and Finland.

The author of *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?*, Pauls Ducmanis, is yet another part of the Nazi/Soviet ménage – in his person he linked the German and Soviet occupations of Latvia. He worked for the KGB after the war, condemning Latvians for killing Jews, but during the German occupation he worked in the anti-Semitic press of the Nazis, urging Latvians to kill Jews.

In the pages to follow we shall examine the anatomy of this hoax that the late Soviet empire bequeathed to the world and which, like a sunken torpedo from a forgotten war, has the capacity to do mischief even after the system and its organs that occasioned it no longer exist. We shall examine some of the problems connected, on the one hand, with the writing and the contents of the *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?*, and, on the other, with the Shoah in Latvia. In Chapter 1, "The Contexts," we shall examine the reasons that a text such as *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* was found credible by Western historians and prosecutors. In Chapter 2, "The German Occupation of Latvia," we examine the system of controls and organs that the Nazis imposed upon Latvia. Chapter 3, "The Police Battalions, Blitzkrieg, and Soviet Trials," analyzes the history of the Latvian Police Battalions, especially their "connections" with war crimes. Chapter 4, "The Latvian Legion: 'SS-Freiwilligen' or 'Waffen-Grenadier Division der SS,'" explores the origins and activities of the Latvian Legion. Chapter 5, "The Committee, the Author, the Booklet," examines the committee, the biography of the author who created it, and the genesis of the pamphlet. Chapter 6, "The Holocaust in Latvia: Spontaneity versus Organization," relates the history of the killing of the Jews in Latvia. Chapter 7, "Analysis – Part One," and Chapter 8, "Analysis – Part Two," analyze and dissect the text of the pamphlet.

<sup>13</sup> This Nazi view of the Holocaust as a European problem, is represented, for example, by Imre Kertesz, the 2002 Nobel Prize recipient for literature. He wrote: "The Holocaust is not history's one time mistake. It belongs to European history, and with it, the European values of the Enlightenment collapsed," *New York Times*, 4 December 2002: E1

The core of this book is the Shoah, both what it was, and what has been written about it. The text explores the intersection of the worst that the Nazi and the Soviet had to offer. The writer here must state emphatically that many Latvians had a role to play in the Holocaust. This role, however, was not the one that the Nazi public relations crew assigned to them. Nor was it the one that the Soviets proclaimed it to be in *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* To assess the role of the Latvians fully and correctly we must first of all come to an understanding of the German occupation of Latvia in particular and Eastern Europe in general. The Holocaust in the view of this writer was an organized event that only the German occupying forces could impose upon Latvia. It was an organized event, but it was also a segmented one: before the Jews were killed, numerous individuals and agencies had a role in issuing orders, and gradually preparing the victims for the killing. From the first hours of German entrance into Latvia, the Nazi intention to eliminate the Jews weaves through numerous German orders and activities. If one wants to put it in the vocabulary current in Germany, this book is an attempt at debunking the German hyper-functional school. It is clear that the *Untermenschen* did not force the Germans to kill the Jews. The Germans brought the idea, the organization, and the wherewithal to Eastern Europe. It has not been emphasized enough that the Jews were killed by fiat, without any legal procedure. This was a radical suspension of legality that took place nowhere but in Germany and the territory it occupied by force.



Cover of *Daugavas Vanagi* monthly house organ of the same year when the original pamphlet *Kas ir Daugavas Vanagi* was written. Compare the cover designs. See p. xiii.

This present book is connected to my previous book, *The Holocaust in Latvia*. Although since the writing of that larger work some of my ideas and formulations have evolved (I hope deepened!), the older work still stands intact and represents a fuller examination of the events of the Holocaust in Latvia. The major reconsiderations concern the role that the Nazis played in planning and choreographing the Holocaust, the part that was assigned to the Wehrmacht in preparing the early stages of the killing operations; and the persistence of Nazi public relations concepts and language in contemporary discourse. Historiographically I have cleaved close to the war-crimes principles set by the Nuremberg Tribunals. Thus, I have tried hard to eschew all forms of revisionism, be it deliberately or unwittingly presented.

In writing the book I have depended on the help and advice of numerous colleagues. Among them Harold Otto who as editor and expert in war crimes

issues advised me at all stages of the manuscript. I am also grateful to him for writing a foreword to the study. The manuscript was also read and numerous changes suggested by Uldis Neiburgs, Jānis Krēsliņš, and Valters Nollendorfs. However, the “errors” that still remain and conclusions that the text contains are the sole responsibility of the author. The cover design is by Gvido Augusts.



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## Chapter 1

# CONTEXTS

When I first opened the pages of *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* I found a lot in it that seemed credible. Or to put it in a different way, I did not know enough to arouse my skepticism and I asked no questions. The pamphlet won my – and the world’s – confidence. In the 1960s there was no way of double-checking the pamphlet’s facts and assertions, because the Soviet archives were accessible to none but the most trusted officials. Retrospectively, I realize that at the time I was still a victim of folklore and propaganda that the obscurity of the topic and the power of Nazi manipulations of public opinion had engendered. While by the 1960s in the West, the searchlight of scholarship had begun to illuminate the dark corners of the Holocaust, in the Soviet sphere the topic remained unexplored: worse – it was falsified. It is sometimes wrongfully asserted that the Holocaust under the old regime was a taboo topic. The truth, however, is that it was a topic that was highly controlled; the Soviets used it both politically and diplomatically. If one wanted to write in accordance to the current agitprop line one could do it. The Ducmanis text became the Soviet canon on the Holocaust in Latvia. Ducmanis’ precepts frequently were lifted verbatim and cited in Soviet “academic studies,” often without citing the source.<sup>1</sup> *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* although factually counterfeit, was an ideological amalgam: part Nazi cover-up, part Soviet “humanism.” It piled Ossa on Pelion: Soviet propaganda upon Nazi.

As over the decades I have researched the details of the Holocaust in Latvia, it has become clear to me that the booklet contains one overarching truth – the Jews of Latvia were killed in the most brutal and uncivilized way – and a plethora of untruths. It is true in general, but false in details. The “one” truth of the booklet is beyond doubt and cannot be questioned, but there is something askew with every other factual statement: times, places, situations, and names (if they are not inventions) are mismatched. Yet for all of its shortcomings, absurdities, and obvious lies, the booklet has had a very successful reception and a long shelf life.

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<sup>1</sup> A case in point is the chapter by E. Blūmfelds, “Hitleriešu Okupācijas režīms Latvijā,” *Latvijas tautas cīņa Lielajā Tēvijas karā* (Riga, 1964) 182–243. Although Blūmfelds’ chapter has some interesting things to say about “fascist” (Blūmfelds’ concept) occupation, when it comes to Holocaust matters, he is highly orthodox – he does not depart from the concepts and information developed by the Soviet organs. In his chapter we find frequent references to the pamphlet literature that was issued by the KGB sub-branch, The Cultural Liaison Committee with Countrymen Abroad. He follows closely what we have characterized as a “Germanless” thesis of the Holocaust that the Soviets developed in the early 1960s.

Not only has this hoax been accepted as genuine by many academics, it has found favor with numerous prosecutors, whose standard of proof, for legal reasons and because they have very large budgets (they deal in millions), generally could be expected to be higher than that of professors who have only their names in play. It can be noted that the target audience of this hoax was an international, even cosmopolitan public that included Russians, Germans, Americans, Britons, Israelis, and émigré Latvians. The influence of this booklet knew no political or social boundaries. Even Holocaust revisionists and deniers were not immune to its allure. The booklet became a kind of a handbook for war crimes prosecutors in West Germany, the United States, Great Britain, Canada, and Australia.<sup>2</sup>

Among the factors for the booklet's success, the obscurity of the topic, must be on the top of the list. Even in the United States, people in the 1960s still lacked language with which to analyze the Holocaust. The name Holocaust itself had not gained currency.

Within this vacuum and befuddled vocabulary the Soviets stepped in. The professionals that they were understood that the human mind does not tolerate a vacuum – they knew that even lies are better than emptiness. Their agitprop wrapped the Jewish tragedy in Soviet/Nazi clichés and delivered it to the West. The Soviets attributed immense importance to the pamphlet: they hired, according to Soviet defector Imants Lešinskis, a Canadian poet Gladys Evans to render it into vivid English and distributed it free to foreign embassies, archives, libraries, and Jewish organizations.<sup>3</sup>

## Reasons for Success

Can we pinpoint some objective reasons for the “success” of the *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* The reasons the KGB was ordered to concoct the pamphlet are relatively easy to understand. To explain why a reductionist booklet that remade a complicated historical event like the Holocaust into a simplistic

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<sup>2</sup> Among the authors who listed the book in their bibliography, quoted or paraphrased from the KGB literature, and were influenced by its logic were Helen Fein, Gertrude Schneider, Bernhard Press, Howard Blum, Roschelle G. Sidel, and Christopher Simpson. The most surprising addition to the KGB literature was shown by Allan Ryan, the erstwhile director of the OSI, in his book *Quiet Neighbors: Prosecuting Nazi War Criminals in America*, in which the guiding metaphor of quiet neighbors is derived from Soviet literature, especially *Daugavas Vanagi, Who Are They?* Citations from the pamphlets also appear in Dov Levin, *Pinkas Hakehillot: Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities*. Even careful scholars like David Cesarani, as his study *Justice Delayed* shows, accepted much of what was written by the KGB pamphleteers. Neither have post-Soviet Latvians, for example Iğors Vārpa, in his work *Latviešu karavīrs zem kāšukrusta karoga* (Rīga:2003), been immune to KGB disinformation.

<sup>3</sup> Imants Lešinskis, “Kalpības gadi” [Years of Servitude], *Latvija šodien* 1986, 67–68. My attempt to trace Gladys Evans' biography was a failure. The opinion seems to be that she was a fellow traveler, or married to one, who lived in the USSR, where she translated Soviet, especially Ukrainian, poetry into English.

horror story became a “hit” in countries and cultures that worship pluralism is far more difficult to understand. There must be a reason that Westerners believe stories about East Europeans that they would reject as absurd if told about themselves, the French, Spaniards, Dutch, Germans, or Americans. Any atrocity alleged to have happened in a Western country would have been investigated and the facts be allowed to speak for themselves. We must, however, note that the Iron Curtain and the inability of Western researchers to penetrate the archives of the East may have had something to do with this. During the decades of isolation from the archives of the East, Western scholars, developed models of the Holocaust based on Western experience that were misleading if applied to the East.

Although by now it is established that the Holocaust was Hitler’s project, it is asserted even today, by both historians and prosecutors, that there were also numerous other local Holocausts, where Jews were killed by “neighbors” without German orders and guidance.<sup>4</sup> The concept of collective guilt in general is rejected, except when it comes to East Europeans. For example when Daniel Goldhagen<sup>5</sup> accused the German nation of collective guilt, numerous historians rose to defend the Germans. However, the reverse happened concerning Poland when Jan Gross’ book *Neighbors* implicated the Poles in collective guilt. In Gross account, the Germans killed by modern means – automatic weapons – the Poles, however, killed their victims with blunt implements. To understand the phenomenon, of this double standard, there are various factors to be considered.<sup>6</sup>

In enumerating the causes for the success of *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?*, we can list the following:

1. The booklet drew its force from a vacuum – a deafening silence that until the 1960s existed not only about the Holocaust in Latvia, but its history everywhere, including North America. Prior to the collapse of the USSR, the only ones who could have written a truthful account of the German occupation were the German perpetrators, the Latvian abettors in the killing of the Jews, and the KGB, who in a variety of ways had amassed a mountain of information about the German occupation. The KGB, however, although portraying themselves as enemies of Nazism and as on the side of the Jews, chose to sit on their information. Until about 1989 no scholar within or outside the USSR had gained unrestricted access to Soviet Holocaust depositories.

<sup>4</sup> The Nazi version of the “neighbors” thesis has sneaked into an anti-Nazi HBO film *Conspiracy*, in which Lange, the SD factotum in Latvia, is made to say that mobs of Latvian civilians killed Jews.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> Jan Gross, *Neighbors* (Princeton, 2001).

2. The Soviets exploited Western stereotypes and prejudices about the East Europeans. They used Western "cleverness" and moral righteousness to misinform them. While it is true that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries at specific places and times there had been pogroms within the frontiers of the Russian Empire, it is a false inference to assume that the whole of Eastern Europe was pogrom territory and that the locals killed Jews in German-dominated lands in 1941, in the way that Jews were molested and occasionally killed in Russian-ruled lands at the beginning of the twentieth century.
3. The Soviets piggybacked on the rhetorical force of the Nazis. They took over a series of Nazi public relations concepts and used them as if they were the truth. These borrowings included the following: "internal enemy," "pogrom," and "voluntary." They also took over a series of words prefixed with self-: "self-defense," "self-cleansing," "self-administration," and "self-help."
4. The Soviets picked up on the concepts of "nationalism" and "fascism," gave them their own Soviet twist and promiscuously misapplied them to the Latvians under the German occupation. In fact more Latvian "nationalists" filled the Nazi concentration camps than communists.
5. The pamphlet was linked to a series of show trials that, as was the case with Stalin's trials of the 1930s, might have had some credibility in the West. *Daugavas Vanagi Who Are They?* was preceded by the 18th Battalion trial of 1960.
6. Some in the West used Ducmanis tract as a scholarly work and thereafter it entered academic studies and textbook literature.<sup>7</sup>

The Soviets of the 1960s built on the Nazi stratagem of deception when they wrote the pamphlets. It was the Germans, who at the beginning of Operation Barbarossa devised a contorted plot to distance themselves from the killing actions. As the Nazis were plotting the murder of Europe's Jews, they also knew that it was an international crime, and that the rest of the world would deem it as such. To deceive the outside world, the initial phase of the Holocaust was timed with the beginning of the onslaught on the USSR. While plotting their war propaganda, the Nazi public relations offices simultaneously endeavored to distance the Germans from the crime they were slated to commit. Their gimmick was to portray the East Europeans, whom they called "natives" (*Einheimische*), as vengeful and primitive monsters who assaulted the Jews before the Germans got to them. Amazingly, this Nazi chicanery worked, as the recent controversy over Jan Gross' book *Neighbors* shows. The Nazis contrived a tale of revenge and hatred and projected their own attitudes upon the people of the East. They proclaimed

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<sup>7</sup> The "facts" of Ducmanis booklet became the "facts" of academic studies both within and without the Soviet sphere. For details see "History in the Writing: Historiography" in Chapter 6.

that East Europeans were like the Nazis, only more so.<sup>8</sup> This Nazi “historical reality” was taken over by the Soviets, who repackaged it and presented it to the world again. By 1960 the Nazi stratagem was buried under the ruins of the war. The skeptics of the West, however, found the Soviet resurrected variant irresistible. What explains the West’s gullibility? There was a broader historical context that worked for the Soviet/Nazi tandem.

## European Context

After the collapse of the European empires in 1919 and after Germany’s hegemonic ambitions were blunted, European statesmen and intellectuals who represented these empires, developed an antagonistic attitude towards some of the winners in the First World War – the newly forged independent states of Eastern Europe. The old order collapsed because the ambitions of the great powers out-reached their capacities in 1914. They entered a war that nobody could win, but instead of blaming themselves they blamed the Easterners for ruining their palatial civilization. As democratic and populist ideas penetrated European society during the second half of the nineteenth century, the centuries-old imperial structures were challenged and they began to fray at the edges. The First World War pushed the imperial powers over the brink. The Austro-Hungarian Empire dissolved in toto, the Ottoman Empire lost its last foothold in Europe, and the Russian Empire lost the tier of states from Finland to Moldova. These liberated nations included Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and parts of Yugoslavia. Ukraine, dangling on a string of independence, still precariously remained within the Moscow orbit. Self-determination and democratization of Eastern Europe was only a part of the story. Old imperial habits, however, including those among the intellectual classes were slow to die. Especially among historians the independence of the new Europe was resented, and the people of Eastern Europe were portrayed as near barbarians who did not deserve their liberation and who had mishandled their independence. Although these historians wrote as if from a universal viewpoint, in reality did so from an imperialist one, and thus ended up denigrating East European peoples. If they did not call them peasants, they called them extremists – nationalists, fascists, and anti-Semites. Eastern Europe for the imperial West became the shadow, a screen onto which to project its own criminal visage

<sup>8</sup> The Nazi version of the Holocaust began to emerge as the killings were happening. In Sweden, the Nazi version of the Holocaust was planted by a pro-German Swedish journalist, Fritz Lönnegren. As early as 14 August 1941, Lönnegren published in the pro-Nazi newspaper *Aftonbladet*, basically a Nazi version of the Holocaust in Lithuania, as cited in Stephane Bruchfeld and Paul A. Levine, *Tell Ye Your Children...: A Book About the Holocaust in Europe, 1933–1945* (Stockholm, 1998). See also Ingvar Svenberg and Mattias Tyden, *Sverige och Förintelsen: Debatt och Dokument om Europas Judar, 1939–1945* (Stockholm, 1997) 222–24.

It is true that the Easterners committed their share of crimes, but they pale in comparison with those committed by the imperial West. Lacking sufficient introspection, the Westerners magnified the crimes of the East, turned the victims of history into victimizers. Things were said and believed about them that would be considered going over the top had they been said about the "good" Europeans.<sup>9</sup> Intellectuals, especially historians at elite universities, to whom it was entrusted to interpret Europe's past and to divine its future, led the pack in negative portrayals of East Europeans. And their interpretations did not fail to deal in invective. It is well known that by Hitler's "logic" it was Jews who started the wars of the century, and well known that this was a vicious lie. It has, however, gone unnoticed by the moralists that there are hundreds of books by respected professors that attribute war guilt to the peoples of Eastern Europe. After all is said and done, the Serbian phase of the First World War was only a minuscule footnote. The assertion that the Ukrainians, Lithuanians, or Latvians were worse than Germans is frequently heard. These attitudes most clearly appear in the studies of nationalism. When studying nationalism, Western scholars mostly studied Germany, but generalized their findings to Eastern Europe.

The Great War destroyed more than the political structure of Europe – it also signaled spiritual crises. The consensus that prior to the war had existed among the political and cultural European elites gave way to fractious political ideologies and fragmented aesthetic images. The concept of alienation entered the discourse of the times. The "craft of history" was no exception to this malaise – it entered an extended crisis, from which it, as yet, has not made a full recovery: "objectivity" gave way to "schematized" history. Instead of studying the "unique" – "*wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*" – historians gave vent to anger and fingerpointing. The master historians from the universities of former empires did not have the wherewithal to accommodate the great variety of ethnicities and states that replaced the imperial order of Europe. The histories of the new Europe were abstracted boilerplates; Eastern Europe, the territory of ethnic and cultural diversity, was stereotyped, painted with the same brush. Like in cubist paintings, histories contained fragments, but they did not congeal in recognizable wholes. Two master clichés of the last century began to stalk the continent: "East Europeans are fascists" and "Jews are communists."

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<sup>9</sup> For example, Jan Gross' book *Neighbors* (note 6) about the murder of the Jedwabne Jews could not be published or be believed if it had been written about a Western country. For the same reason Jerzy Kosinski's *Painted Bird* (Boston, 1965) would have been treated as a novel and not a floodlight illuminating the Polish soul.

## German/Nazi Context

German attitudes towards the Holocaust in Eastern Europe are multiple. They have extended from the time of Hitler to our own day – from the time of planning, to the time of the prosecution of the planners, and beyond. But the break between the Nazi times and today has not been a complete one. Soon after the war, German writers assembled GRUPPE-47, who vowed to purify the German language of Nazi corruptions. To what degree the poets have been successful in their aims is one thing; in the historical literature as it pertains to Eastern Europe, the purification has not been realized. Many historians still operate with a series of concepts that the Nazis brought to Latvia.<sup>10</sup> They include the following Hitlerisms: “internal enemy,” “self-defense,” “self-cleansing,” and “self-administration.” The most successful ploy that the Nazis projected upon Eastern Europeans was their concept of “revenge,” nurtured since the time of the “stab-in-the-back.” Upon entering Eastern Europe, Hitlerites declared that East Europeans were fuming with revenge and then proclaimed to themselves and the world that they were worse than the Nazis, more primitive, brutal, and irrational.

There must have been an element of opportunism in the German decision to kill the Jews of Eastern Europe before killing German or French Jews. In Hitler’s thinking there was a reason that the war against the Soviets converged with the one against the Jews. Hitler used the war to liberate the Nazis from all juridical restraints towards Jews. The legal basis of the Jews that began to be undermined in 1933, yet to some degree still observed in 1939 was totally abandoned in 1941.<sup>11</sup> In the history of the modern state this fact perhaps has not received sufficient attention. In his 1939 Reichstag speech, Hitler defined his logic for the Holocaust: if the Jews start another war, that will be the end of Jewry in Europe. By 1941, the Nazis had one explanation for the ongoing war: the Jews started it.

## Nazi Plans

The full details of the Nazi plan to exterminate the Jews of Eastern Europe have not come to light – we do, however, catch a glimpse of them from a meeting of high Nazi officials on 29 May 1941, that is – about three weeks prior to the attack

<sup>10</sup> Gerhard P. Bassler, *Alfred Valdmanis and the Politics of Survival* (Toronto, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> Raul Hilberg, when asked what was the first most incriminating document that led to the murder of European Jews, named a Hitler letter of 1919. In the letter, Hilberg answered, Hitler rejected “anti-Semitism of emotions” and proposed “anti-Semitism of rationality” – anti-Semitism that would lead to a planned legal struggle, whose final goal would be an irreversible total removal of the Jews. That was the beginning of a rationally determined program. That is what Hitler called “anti-Semitism of rationality,” which he transmuted into a state policy that led to the murder of European Jews. *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 10 December 2002.

on the USSR. On that date the public relation's line regarding the liquidation of Nazi enemies was worked out. A meeting of NSDAP Foreign Policy Bureau (*Aussenpolitisches Amt*) was convened. It was organized and presided by Dr. Alfred Meyer.<sup>12</sup> Arno Schickedanz, Dr. Georg Leibbrant, and Dr. Otto Bräutigam participated. The Army Chief of Staff (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*) sent three high-ranking officers; the intelligence and counterintelligence service (*Abwehr*) sent three representatives; the Propaganda Ministry sent two men, one of whom was Eberhart Taubert, who later became the head of the Eastern propaganda agency; the Reich Food and Agricultural Administration sent one representative; the Foreign Ministry sent Georg-Wilhelm Großkopf. At the least, we can characterize it as a high-level conference, deserving to be examined with the same scrutiny as has been given the proceedings of the Wannsee Conference of January 1942. If the Wannsee Conference set up the second phase of the Holocaust, the 29 May 1941 event coordinated state institutional and public relations for the first.

The conference worked out the propaganda guidelines for the to-be-conquered East European lands. The propaganda line that was decided about the liquidation of the Jews and Communists was the following:

Understandably we shall portray the Jews as the main culprits, which the local inhabitants will undoubtedly welcome. To a considerable degree we shall be able to solve the Jewish question if, after the occupation of the territory, we shall allow the locals to have freedom of action. Similarly, the inhabitants will also liquidate the more radical Communist functionaries, if beforehand they have not fled.

And later:

The people themselves, we can assume, will liquidate the true oppressors, as it is generally assumed the inhabitants, especially in Ukraine, will begin Jewish pogroms and the liquidation of Communist functionaries. In other words, it would be recommended that in the beginning the squaring of the accounts with the Communist-Jewish oppressors be left to the inhabitants themselves and only after we have become acquainted with the local conditions, we would take over the settling of matters with those oppressors that have remained.<sup>13</sup>

For those who have no reason to plead the Nazi cause, or defame the Eastern Europeans, the above resolutions convey two basic points about the initial steps of the Holocaust: (1) in high Nazi offices it was broadly known that Jews would be killed and (2) that the Germans would endeavor to blame the Eastern Europeans for doing it.

<sup>12</sup> Kārlis Kangeris, "Padomju okupācija un 14. jūnija deportācija nākamās okupācijas varas – nacionālistiskās Vācijas propagandā Latvijā (1941.–1942. gads)" [Soviet Occupation and the Deportation of 14 June in the Propaganda of National Socialist Germany – the Following Occupation Power (1941–1942)], *1941. gada 14. jūnija deportācija – noziegums pret cilvēci / Deportation of 14 June 1941: Crime against Humanity*, LVKR 6 (Rīga, 2002) 154–74.

<sup>13</sup> As cited by Kangeris 159, based on AA, R. 105193.

After 29 May 1941, there must have been other meetings in which the killing operation was planned and discussed in greater detail, but those discussions would have happened mostly within the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (RSHA) offices. We know that among Heydrich's subordinates the discussion of the "fundamental orders" as the *Führerbefehl* was known, was not committed to paper. It is important to note that it was not public relations officials alone who were planning this: the Wehrmacht, the *Abwehr*, and Foreign Affairs representatives were also involved in the decision. The minutes of the 29 May gathering do not show any misunderstanding or disagreements with the plan as presented. The documents show that all of the major Nazi agencies that were involved with the occupation were informed about the Nazi intention to kill Jews and Communists, and were also to a smaller and lesser degree involved with the killing of the Jews.

The 29 May document, however, is not the only one that features the Nazi scheme to make "neighbors" responsible for killing Jews. Hitler himself promoted the 29 May line. There is an abundance of evidence that in Latvia the first organizational steps towards the killing of the Jews were made by the Wehrmacht.

## The Nazi Public Relations Line: Hitler's Colloquy with Croatian Marshal Kvaternik<sup>14</sup>

Although it was Walter Stahlecker who detailed the Nazi organizational effort, he also was no stranger to the public relations line. Stahlecker was still in Berlin, working in the Foreign Ministry, when the public relations stratagem was developed. Briefly put, the line proposed to present the killing of the Jews as an East European operation, distancing the Germans, and specifically Hitler, from the crime. One is hard put to see what revisionists today know that Nazis did not already know in 1941.

In Hitler's colloquy with Croatian Marshal Kvaternik, the public relations theme was pronounced by Hitler, the apex of the Nazi state, and became a foreign policy pronouncement to be dispersed throughout the German sphere of influence, including Sweden. The following quotation comes from a Hitler's conversation with Kvaternik on 22 July 1941, about a month after the killings in the Baltic had begun. In addition to the foreign visitor, Foreign Affairs Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and Generalfeldmarschall Wilhelm Keitel were present.

<sup>14</sup> "Aufzeichnung des Gesandten Hewel (Pers. Stab RAM). Unterredung des Führers mit Marschall Kvaternik im Beisein des Reichsministers des Auswärtigen und Generalfeldmarschalls Keitel am 22. Juli 1941 im Führerhauptquartier," *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik 1918–1945*, Serie D: 1937–1941, vol. 13.1 *Die Kriegsjahre*, vol. 6.1 23. Juni bis 14. September 1941 (Göttingen, 1970): 835–38. For more of Hitler's views about Eastern Europe, see also the minutes of his 17 July 1941 meeting with Rosenberg, Lammers, Keitel, and Bormann. Nuremberg document L-221.

After the killings began Hitler spoke very little about the killing of Jews, but it is remarkable that the one time he did, he spoke about it to a foreigner and about the Baltic:

Mighty Mongolia is pressing towards us. The old school books knew nothing about racial science, and therefore there was no clarity about Russia's racial composition. The proof from the POWs shows that today 70 to 80% of Russians are Mongols. They are short in body structure; among them there are some Slavs and few members of other races. The Marshal interjected that the situation now is much different than during the War. Then the army was made up of Russian peasants. They were destroyed by the Bolsheviks, the Führer said. The way it was done we know from the Lithuanian experience. On the second day when they [Soviets] entered there, in order to cleanse them, they ordered all shopkeepers to assemble on the street at 7 o'clock in the morning. Automatic weapons were positioned on street corners with which all of the people were killed; then the Jewish commissars took over the shops. Jews are the plague of mankind. Therefore now the Lithuanians, Estonians, and Latvians are wreaking bloody revenge on them. The Soviets from these countries deported children; it is to be noted and made clear that they did the same thing in their own regions. When Jews have free hands, as it was in the Soviet paradise, the Jews carry out the craziest plans. That is how Russia became the plague of mankind

There are several things we must note about Hitler's claims in this statement:

- He says that the killing of the Jews has begun.
- It is happening within his territories.
- The killing is Germanless.
- The murder is a collective enterprise of the Baltic peoples.
- The motive for killing Jews is anti-Semitism, especially revenge as a payback for Jewish Bolshevism.
- He is trying to influence foreign opinion.

We, however, must also say about this conversation that it is contrary to the information sent by the *Einsatzgruppen* men, Stahlecker and others, to Berlin. Estonia at the time of the conversation, was not occupied as yet.

There are many people in the world who will say that all Hitler's pronouncements are false, except the one he makes about the Baltic. For our purposes here it is important to note that Hitler is reconfirming in a more explicit way the "neighbor" idea that earlier surfaced in the 29 May 1941 document. He is selling to his foreign guest the notion that the killing of Jews is Germanless and that the Baltic people themselves are murdering them collectively. Hitler, even more clearly and forcefully than had his minions earlier, stressed that the motive for the Balts to kill Jews was *revenge*. If the 29 May message did not do it, then Hitler's statement told his subordinates in no uncertain terms that the Baltic peoples were to be profiled as vengeful killers. Thereafter it became a mantra at home, in

occupied countries and abroad (including Sweden) for German officials to portray the killing of the Jews as a native enterprise.<sup>15</sup> The same message is also evident in Joseph Grigg's reportage from Berlin and the world-famous Šķēde pictures that were snapped by an SD man.

## Heydrich's Directive

A document that provides a link between the public relations conference of 29 May and further documents reveals the German plan of deception and subterfuge is a telex message of 29 June 1941, from the Chief of Security Police and Security Service Heydrich to his men in the field, the *Einsatzgruppen* leaders. The document confirms the German intention to kill the Jews and Communists, and gives instructions to conceal the killings by making it appear that it is the locals and not the Germans who are doing the killing. The document also instructs the Germans, come hell or high water, to control the "natives," to keep them on a short leash. Heydrich's statement dashes the assertions that there was some kind of an interregnum in Eastern Europe, a free-fall time, in which Jews could have been killed without the German presence.

Referring to my previously made oral elaboration of 17 June in Berlin, I remind you of the following:

No obstacle is to be placed in the path of the self-cleansing desires of the anti-Communist and anti-Jewish circles in the newly occupied areas. Rather, they are to be intensified, when required, without a trace [leaving any evidence], and channeled onto the proper path, without giving these local "self-defense circles" any opportunity later to refer to directives or any political assurances. Since such a procedure is possible only during the initial period of the military occupation, for reasons which should be apparent to you, the *Einsatzgruppen* and *Einsatzkommandos* of the Security Police and SD, are, in concert with the military offices, to endeavor as much as they can to advance quickly into the newly occupied areas, at least with an advance detail, so that they can initiate what is required.

Only such members of the Security Police and SD who are capable of the required political sensitivity [*politisches Fingerspitzengefühl*] are to be selected to be the leaders of the advance details.

The formation of standing self-defense units under central direction is to be initially avoided, in their stead, it would be functional to unleash popular pogroms, as delineated above.<sup>16</sup>

The above document in many ways is mirrored in Stahlecker's report below.

<sup>15</sup> For statements by a variety of German officials repeating Hitler's *diktat* see A. Ezerģailis, "Folklore versus History: A Problem in Holocaust Studies," *Holokausta izpētes problēmas / The Issues of the Holocaust Research In Latvia*, LVKR 2 (Rīga, 2001) 100–20; "Assertions of Hitler's Minions" below; and "Two Nazi Versions of the Holocaust," in Chapter 6.

<sup>16</sup> Landgericht Hamburg, Arājs Trial Records, Indictment, p. 57.

## Stahlecker's Report

To help a reader to understand the Holocaust in occupied Latvia one must needs begin with the texts of Stahlecker's reports. They are more than just another eyewitness account. The reports are the first histories and chronicles of the Holocaust. The quotations below are taken from Stahlecker's Consolidated Report of 15 October 1941<sup>17</sup>:

During the first hours after our arrival, albeit under considerable difficulties, indigenous anti-Semitic forces were incited to pogroms against Jews. As ordered, the Security Police was determined to solve the Jewish question by any means and with complete resolve. It was desirable, however, that the Jewish question not be raised immediately, as the usual tough measures would also have created shock in German circles. It had to appear to the outside that the indigenous population itself reacted naturally against the decades of oppression by the Jews and against the terror created by the Communists in its recent history, and that the indigenous population carried out these first measures of its own accord. [p. 3].

In light of the expansion of the operational area and the multitude of Security Police tasks, an attempt was made at the beginning that the reliable members of the population themselves should participate in the fight against the parasites of their country, i.e., in particular, the Jews and communists. [p. 9]

After the arrival of German troops in Latvia, a self-defense force was formed which consisted of members from all walks of life [...] In Riga the Security Police itself undertook the initial establishment of [...] Sicherheitskommandos. [p.12]

In light of the consideration that the population of the Baltic countries had suffered most heavily under the rule of Bolshevism and Judaism during the period of integration into the USSR, it could be expected that after the liberation from this foreign domination they would eliminate the enemies who were remaining in the country after the retreat of the Red Army. It was the duty of the Security Police to initiate these self-purging efforts and to guide them in the proper channels, so that the goal set for cleaning the area is reached as quickly as possible. It was no less important to establish for the future the firm and demonstrable fact that the liberated population on their own accord had taken the harshest measures against the Bolsheviks and Jewish enemy, without any direction from German agencies. [p.16]

It was significantly more difficult to start similar cleansing operations and pogroms in Latvia. The reason for this could be traced to the fact that the entire national leadership, especially in Riga, was murdered and carried off by the Soviets. However, after exerting appropriate influence on the Latvian Auxiliary Police, it was possible to initiate a Jewish pogrom in Riga during which all synagogues were destroyed and approximately 400 Jews were killed. Since the general pacification of the population in Riga occurred very quickly, further pogroms were no longer viable. [...] In Estonia there was no possibility of introducing pogroms, as there was only a relatively small number of Jews. [p.18].

From the very beginning it was expected that pogroms alone would not solve the Jewish problem in Ostland. On the other hand, the goal of the cleaning operations of the

<sup>17</sup> "Stahlecker's Consolidated Report, October 15, 1941," Nuremberg Documents, L-180.

Sicherheitspolizei, in accordance with the fundamental orders, was the most comprehensive elimination of Jews possible. [p.23]

When assigning Lithuanian and Latvian personnel for the Execution Commandos, particular attention was paid in choosing those men whose families had been murdered or carried off by the Russians. [p. 24]

At the beginning of the Eastern campaign in Lithuania, national activist forces formed so-called partisan units in order to actively participate in the fight against Bolshevism. According to their own records they had 4,000 casualties as a result.

In Kaunas four large partisan groups had been formed, which the advance command contacted immediately. There was no unified leadership for these groups. Instead, each group tried to outrank the other and attempted to nurture a close relationship with the Wehrmacht in order to be included in a future military campaign against the Soviet Army. They also hoped to capitalize during a later reorganization of Lithuania and to be able to create a new Lithuanian Army. Although the military use of partisans was not considered for political reasons, a deployable auxiliary squad, consisting of 300 men was quickly formed from the reliable elements of the undisciplined partisan groups under the leadership of the Lithuanian journalist KLIMATIS. This group has been deployed during the continuing pacification not only in Kaunas itself but in numerous towns in Lithuania, and has, under the constant supervision of the Einsatzkommando performed its assigned duties, especially the operation and participation in the implementation of larger liquidation actions, without any major complaints.

The remaining partisan groups were disarmed without incident. During the first days, apart from the formation of the partisan auxiliary squad, a Lithuanian Security Police and Criminal Police force was created. Initially, 40 former Lithuanian police officers, most of whom had been released from prisons, were deployed under the leadership of a higher Lithuanian police officer, DENAUSKAS. In addition, after careful investigation the extra auxiliary personnel needed was brought in. The Lithuanian Security and Criminal Police operates according to the orders and guidelines provided to them by Einsatzkommando 3 and its activities are under constant surveillance and, as much as possible, they are used for Security Police work which cannot be performed by the SD's own personnel, particularly searches, arrests, and investigations. Substantial portions of the investigative material which had been taken away by the retreating Russians was found in Vilnius and was evaluated by the police.

Stahlecker has told us many things about the beginning of the Holocaust in Latvia and other Baltic States, among them the following:

- that Jews were killed upon higher orders;
- that Jews and Bolsheviks are synonyms;
- that he had a limited success in organizing "spontaneous pogroms";
- that the "pogroms" were organized events;
- that the "natives" should be killing Jews as a revenge;
- that the locals were reluctant to kill Jews;
- that his assignment was to deceive the world about killings;
- that it was important to show that Germans had nothing to do with the killings;

- that a more thorough organization will be needed to carry out further killings;
- that the duties of organization were carried out by his outfit, the Security Police, and by the Wehrmacht;
- that the “natives” whom he had selected in the killing squads were relatives of victims of “Bolshevism and Jews”;
- that there were too many partisans whose agenda was different from the Nazi ones: the Lithuanians wanted to have a national army and an independent state – the Germans denied both. In Lithuania the majority of the partisans were disarmed and disbanded. Three hundred men were re-channeled to do the bidding of the Germans, among other things to kill the Jews.

We should note that it was Stahlecker’s reports that have served as the basis for the post-war Nazi trials in Germany and elsewhere, but it is Hitler’s words that dominate the world’s media and many history books. What exactly Stahlecker did mean by “pogrom” we do not know. In Nazi vocabulary the word was introduced in 1938, with the *Kristallnacht* burning of synagogues and sacking of Jewish business enterprises.

### Assertions of Hitler’s Minions: Nazi Plans for the “Natives”<sup>18</sup>

The *internal circulation* of the Nazi line was instantaneous. Hitler’s declaration became the mantra of Nazi officialdom within the Baltic and the Reich offices. In general terms, Hitler’s message as we now know was also communicated to American journalists in Berlin.

Upon his appointment as the *Reichskommissar für das Ostland*, Hinrich Lohse participated at a meeting with *Reichsminister* Alfred Rosenberg on 1 August 1941 (only eight days after Hitler’s meeting with Marshal Kvaternik). At the meeting Lohse was called to report about the situation in his satrapy. In the main his statement follows Hitler’s formula, although it is also to be noted for minimizing the scale of the Jewish problem:

A weighty problem is the Jewish question. Up to now about 10,000 Jews have been liquidated by the Lithuanian people. These executions are still continuing every night. For the Jews labor camps have been erected. Jewish women will also be drafted into labor service. The *Reichsführer-SS* will decide the fate of the three thousand Communists that at the time are found in jails.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> A basic analysis of the Nazi public relations scheme is provided by Kangeris (note 11).

<sup>19</sup> BA, R6/300

Soon thereafter Lohse's subordinate Freiherr von Medem arrived in Latvia, assuming the position of Jelgava *Gebietskomissar*. In his first report on 12 August 1941, after a trip through his Jelgava District, he wrote:

Brutalities and resettlement [German euphemism for killing] first of all came from Latvians and were directed against local Jews and Communists. The Latvian people liberated themselves from the Jews in spontaneous hatred, and there was also a bloody reckoning with local Latvian elements.<sup>20</sup>

Rosenberg's emissary Trampedach traveling through Latvia wrote in a report of 12 August 1941, with an emphasis on the revenge theme:

The hatred of Bolsheviks and Jews by that part of the Latvian population, especially the owners of a large farms that had suffered from the Bolshevik terror, was monstrous. The self-defense groups that were organized from this class killed the Jews and the native Bolsheviks, so far as they had the power and opportunity.<sup>21</sup>

Hitler's design also appears in a report by W.H.A. von Brummer, a Foreign Ministry information official, which he wrote after a trip to the Eastern front:

The Jewish question was solved radically. The enraged Latvian people, after the German takeover had killed countless Jews. Of the estimated 100,000 Jews that lived in Riga, 10,000 fled to the Soviet Union, next 10,000 had run away to the countryside and 10,000 were beaten to death. The remainder, which is still considerable, will be moved to a ghetto. In the small Latvian towns, the local inhabitants had completely rooted out the Jews, including the children.<sup>22</sup>

A similar tale, but with a self-revelatory twist, was left by Consul Dr. Otto Eckert, a Foreign Ministry official. He arrived in the Baltic region with one point of view and left with another. He took his assignment to report the truth seriously and thus broke the spell of Hitler. After arrival in the Baltic countries, Eckert discovered that Hitler's story, the mantra of the Foreign Ministry, was true only in part. He discovered that Jews had indeed been killed in the Baltic countries, but that did not happen without the Germans. He considered this disturbing and he saw it as an international public relations problem.

<sup>20</sup> Latvijas Valsts vēstures arhīvs (State Historical Archive of Latvia) LVVA, P-69-1a-17-pp.162-63. Von Medem's prevarication is evident from the materials found in the case of Alfred Becu and Wilhelm Adelt. See *Abschlussbericht*, Ludwigsburg 18.1.71. Concerning the murder of Jews in Medem's territory, German judges concluded: "From the German side the ones responsible for NS-Crimes first of all were the members of the Einsatzkommando 2" (p. 2). In addition to the Becu massacre in Jelgava there might have been also some smaller ones, but their existence as yet has not been established.

<sup>21</sup> BA, R90/115. Original found the Yivo Archive in New York, Occ E3bB. If Latvia's peasants killed Jews, as Trampedach asserts, very few Jews would have been killed. Jews did not live where the peasants lived. For an additional citation of the same Hitler theme, see Wehrmacht Chaplain Walter S.'s report in Modris Eksteins' *Walking Since Daybreak* (New York, 1999) 148.

<sup>22</sup> Auswärtiges Amt (AA), Pol., XIII, Bd. 12/I

In the beginning the Jewish liquidation in some places was carried out by local Lithuanians, and as it was often told to me, on German orders. By far, most had been liquidated by a twelve-man commando of German policemen. As it was told to me, they traveled through the countryside killing Jews in specific towns. I will not evaluate this fact from a moral point of view; it's important to assess it from the political perspective, because this information is public knowledge not only among the Germans but also Lithuanians who often speak about the matter in all its unpleasant details.

In any case the Jewish question already now casts a shadow over the German policy in Lithuania.<sup>23</sup>

Note that Consul Eckert's "discovery" confirms the correctness of *Einsatzgruppe* leader Stahlecker's statements, especially those found in the Consolidated Report of 15 October 1941 cited above.

While Stahlecker's report yielded its secrets only after the German defeat, Hitler's version became a formula of the German Foreign Affairs establishment and the officialdom in the Baltic immediately. Soon after the conversation with Marshal Kvaternik, Hitler's view also became known abroad, for example, in neutral Sweden.

As part of the strategy to make the Holocaust appear to be Germanless, Heydrich's killing teams took along photographers, whose assignment, as the well-known Šķēde pictures illustrate, was to feature the natives as the killers of Jews.

This German subterfuge did not remain a secret to observers at the time. Among the Latvians who had an opportunity to observe the Germans photographing the killing scenes, it became common knowledge that they were doing it to place the responsibility for the murder of Jews on the locals. Even in the Riga salons it was noted that the German picture-taking activity might have had an insidious purpose. In the diplomatic arena, for example, the former Latvian Ambassador to Stockholm, Voldemārs Salnais, wrote in 1943:

Germans now are spreading a fairy tale, that it had been the Latvians who carried out the most brutal reckoning with the Jews. In this respect Germans have been active in Geneva, America and here [Stockholm].<sup>24</sup>

A vivid example of German endeavor to foist the "neighbors" version on the West can be seen in Joseph Grigg's 1 June 1942 dispatch to the *New York World-Telegram*.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> AA, Pol. XIII, Bd. 19. Eckert writes his report from Siverskaja near Gatchina on October 2, 1941. The report is entitled: "Stimmung in baltischen Ländern."

<sup>24</sup> Leonids Šiliņš, *Nacistiskās Vācijas okupanti: mūsu tautas lielās cerības un rūgtā vilšanās* [The Occupiers of Nazi Germany: Our Nation's Great Hope and Bitter Disappointment] (Riga, 2001) 151.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph Grigg reported from Berlin until Germany declared the war against the United States in December 1941, which also coincides with the final liquidation of Jews in Latvia. Historiographically, it is noteworthy that during the summer and autumn of 1941 some information about the killing of the Jews, mostly filtered through their Nazi handlers, reached the American press corps in Berlin. Grigg's dispatch is reprinted in the Annex of this study.

First and foremost, in the focus of our attention recently has been Jan Gross book *Neighbors*. Gross argues that the neighbors of Jews in the Polish town of Jedwabne killed 1600 Jews on 10 July 1941 – not by shooting them, but by bludgeoning them to death, using a variety of farm implements.<sup>26</sup>

With the defeat of Nazism, the German attitude towards the Holocaust took a turn. After the Nuremberg trials that the occupation forces organized in defeated Germany, the responsibility for apprehending Nazi war criminals became the duty of the prosecutors of democratic Germany.

As the Soviet investigations of the Holocaust crimes continued and their show trials peaked in the 1960s, on the German side investigations also picked up a momentum that in the 1970s materialized in a series of trials that covered the Holocaust events in Latvia. The trial records contained the first post-war histories of the Holocaust in Latvia. Among these trials the most noteworthy were Erhard Grauel's trial in Hannover, Friedrich Jahnke's trial in Hamburg, and that of Viktors Arājs in Hamburg. In comparison to the information collected by the Soviets, the German approach was more ordered and pluralistic. The German information, the indictments and verdicts that they collated and wrote, correspond, except for the odd error, to the standard of presentation of evidence that is acceptable by the historical profession. One can, however, note that neither German prosecutors nor historians have fully purged themselves of the Hitlerian language with which the Nazis entered Eastern Europe. To repeat: the Nazi concepts "pogrom," "inner enemy," and all of the concepts prefixed by self-, such as "self-defense" and "self-cleansing" are still littered in German texts.

## Soviet/Russian Context

The Russians had their own circles to square: though putatively enemies of the Germans, since the 1920s, ironically the USSR had been operating in a symbiosis with Germany. Not only had the Russian Right, especially with the publication of the anti-Semitic hoax, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, inspired the Nazis; the Soviets were the only major power in Eastern Europe who in a continuing series of agreements, culminating in the August 1939 Hitler–Stalin Pact, struck up an alliance with them. To further the irony, no other non-German group cleaved as closely to the Nazis as did some Russian émigré groups.<sup>27</sup> After the war, when the Soviets began to promote the Russians as the most heroic of peoples, they had to confront an unpleasant historical fact: during the Second World War more fully armed Russians

<sup>26</sup> Gross (note 6).

<sup>27</sup> John J. Stephan, *The Russian Fascists: Tragedy and Farce In Exile, 1925–1945* (New York, 1978).

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surrendered to the Nazi forces than had surrendered from any other army in history. Russian soldiers had allowed the German penetration deep into Russia's motherland. Under the leadership of Russian General Vlasov, more Russians served in the German armed forces than all other non-Germans put together. This massive defection to and collaboration with the Nazis could not be explained away.

Instead of introspection the Russians went the other way – outward. Instead of self-examination they chose to ignore their own Second World War record and began to shift the blame for Nazi crimes on East Europeans, the people between Russia and Germany. In effect, the basic Soviet interpretation of the Holocaust became what Hitler's officials began to feed to the world in 1941.

*Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* was published at a peculiar turning point in the history of the USSR. It was not an accident that it came more or less at the same time as Nikita Khrushchev's Communist Party program that promised to catch up with the West by 1980. After the death of Stalin, an overhaul of the system was undertaken by Khrushchev and his cabal. Although Khrushchev had profited from Stalin's "Revolution," he strove to distance himself and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from the bloody dictator and reorient the USSR towards "socialism." It has not been properly recognized that Nikita Khrushchev's destalinization program in part was carried out at the expense of the empire's nationalities. The Hungarian Revolution in 1956 and riots in Poland made Khrushchev fear "nationalities." After the traumas of the 1950s, Khrushchev agreed to ratchet up the Russification of the system in order to stabilize it and to assert the integrity of the Party. Soviet "internationalism" – what was left of it after Stalin – gave up the ghost during the 1960s. As the Soviet Union underwent Khrushchev's "liberalization," the dynamics of the power struggle in the Kremlin between destalinizers and Stalinists at the time mandated a crackdown on nationalities that included the Latvians, Lithuanians, and Ukrainians, but it did not exclude the Jews. To bolster the shaky Soviet ship of state the Soviet establishment decided to fictionalize the Nazi occupation of Eastern Europe. The Soviets chose to use the Jewish tragedy propagandistically, as an extension of imperial policy. With new intensity the crimes of "collaboration" that Soviet diplomats had already begun to raise in 1941<sup>28</sup> were resurrected. A way had to be found to mask the "shame" of the Russians. The Kremlin developed a double agenda: to purify the Russian people and to smear the others. The attack on nationalities that began about 1959 was staged to cover for the five million Russians who had voluntarily surrendered to and collaborated with the Nazis. To regain equilibrium, to buy off the Russian Stalinists, it was decided in a collective way to portray East Europeans as the criminal allies of the

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<sup>28</sup> Soviet wartime attitude towards the Latvians in part can be garnered from Gregory Meikins' wartime diatribe, *The Baltic Riddle* (New York, 1943). Also see the "Roots of Holocaust Folklore," in the Annex of this study.

Nazis. To gild the lily, it was averred that they were worse than the Nazis. A significant part of this assault on East Europeans was the staging of series of show trials in which charges of war crimes, specifically the killing of the Jews were concocted.<sup>29</sup> After Khrushchev's fall this stratagem was taken over, if anything – with even more virulence, by the Brezhnev group.

In general we can say that the Soviets had two versions of the Holocaust in Latvia: one that the archives held and a second that it presented to the public, domestic and foreign. As the war was winding down, the Soviets started two investigations of the crimes committed during the Nazi occupation. There was the All-Soviet, state level Extraordinary Commission whose assignment was to document Nazi crimes in general. The All-Soviet Commission broke down by Soviet Socialist Republics, and in turn branched into District Commissions that had sub-units in all localities of Latvia – each town, village, and civil parish (*pagasts*). The positive aspect of the Extraordinary Commission's work was that they did carry out an investigation! Although it is not without errors and superficialities, a record of the Nazi-time brutalities was committed to paper. The strong parts of the Extraordinary Commission's reports were the pinpointing of the locations of murder and in most cases also the determination of the dates of the killings. The weakest part was the number of the executed. Since the commission was a centralized organization, the center had given an order to up the numbers of victims three, four, or even five-fold. In cases when the local chapters did not increase the count of the victims, it was done by a higher authority.

The second Soviet undertaking that documented the events of the Holocaust were the trials organized by the NKVD and later the KGB. After the war, in effect, all Latvian males of certain age brackets became suspects in the eyes of the Soviet investigative organs. Many were sent to what the Soviet called the "filtration camps." For Latvian men born between 1917 and 1927 it was next to impossible to evade incarceration and punishment. The search for suspects and their trials peaked during 1945 and 1946, but they continued through the 1960s. As the distance between the events of the Second World War and the trials grew, the trials took on more and more the qualities of a theater. (See "Latvia Opens War Crimes Trial," in the Annex of this study.) A special KGB unit was created to trace the activities of the members of the Arājs Commando.<sup>30</sup> Although the information

<sup>29</sup> The Soviet legal system had many aspects at variance with that in the West, yet only a few of the procedures could be used to put on show trials.

<sup>30</sup> This KGB unit collated their information about the Arājs Commando into cross-indexed volumes, altogether twelve in number. Except for the twelfth, the other eleven volumes were removed to Russia in 1991 when the KGB left Latvia. Volume 12 is found in the LVVA (Latvian State Historical Archive). Note the study by Rudite Viksne, "Members of the Arājs Commando In Soviet Court Files: Social Position, Education, Reasons for Volunteering, Penalty," *The Hidden and Forbidden History of Latvia under Soviet and Nazi Occupations 1940–1991*, LVKR 14 (Riga, 2005) 199–206.

collected by the Soviets was chaotic and not used for truthful ends, and in spite of their ideological bent, it was still information. Had the Soviets wanted to they could have written a reasonably full and truthful book about the Holocaust in Latvia. It must be noted, though, that as long as the Soviet Union existed, the word "Holocaust" was not part of the Soviet vocabulary.

## Vocabulary

**Nationalism.** The concept of "nationalism," instead of serving as an analytical tool, has become a potent hate-mongering, weapon in historical, sociological, and general discourse. To be sure, nations commit violent acts, and individuals murder for political reasons, but historians of nationalism have come to reduce the causes for the evils that human beings for state or political reasons commit against each other to "nationalism." This is an extreme form of reductionism. Surely there must be a more complicated chain of causality.

This concept fails to distinguish between the evils of empires and those of small nations. It is applied to states that conquer as it is to those that defend. Occupiers and resisters of occupation cannot be motivated by an identical impulse. There ought to be differentiations and distinctions, but the users of the "nationalist" concept fudge the issues.

The concept became what it is because of the confluence of interests between the apologists for imperial and Marxist "internationalist" order, to designate the dangerous "other." As a concept of rigor it has lost its core, if it ever had one. By the time of the Second World War, the concept had been a soccer ball kicked around in the ideological wars of the 1920s and 1930s. Although from time to time there have arisen naive historians and political journalists who claimed to know what nationalism means, their effort to distill its meaning, over and over has led to confusion. One problem of "nationalism" is not that it lacks meaning, but that it has too many meanings. Whose authority can we accept as the truth: Mazzini's, Hitler's, Mussolini's, Milosevich's, Herder's, Fichte's, Isiah Berlin's, William Pfiaff's, John Lukacs', Hans Kohn's? Sticking to the Latvian context, who were the nationalists: Krišjānis Valdemārs, Juris Alunāns, Rūdolfs Blaumanis, Gustavs Celmiņš, Kārlis Ulmanis, Felikss Cielēns, Viktors Arājs, Miķelis Valters, Imants Ziedonis, Dainis Ivāns, or Vaira Viķe-Freiberga?

One fears that the differences between these proponents of nationalism are much greater than any similarity between them. The common elements to them all, in the best of cases, may amount only to a thimbleful of platitudes. In contemporary usage the word is more often than not applied to explain violent conflicts – any conflicts – even those that may be occasioned by religion, race, power politics, imperialism, or stupidity. Of what use is a word that simultaneously describes those who fight for imperialist conquests and those who do the opposite – that in one fell swoop purports to explain a fracas at a soccer game and global conflicts in space. Can we really place all nationalists, those that follow democratic, communist, or totalitarian impulses on the same plane? The Soviets, for example, as evidenced in the Ducmanis pamphlet, placed an equal sign between fascism and nationalism.

Many prognosticators will say that it was nationalism that shattered the USSR. If that was the case, power in the post-Soviet countries would be held by "nationalist" parties, which is not the case. Only in the imperial center does "ethnic belligerency" hold sway. In much of Holocaust literature, nationalists are named as the killers of Jews. In Latvian case during the

German occupation, however, more nationalists than communists were in concentration camps.<sup>31</sup>

**Fascism.** Fascism, if possible, has suffered a worse etymological contortion than nationalism. While the word was restricted to Italy it described an idiosyncratic post-First World War movement. In Benito Mussolini's words it designated a search for the third way between liberalism and communism. It rejected the pluralism of the former and collectivism of the latter. It was anti-parliamentarian and anti-capitalist and emphasized Il Duce's and the Fascist Party's leadership in Italian politics. It borrowed more heavily from Marxism than Liberalism. It had elements of soft totalitarianism but shied away from the racism that animated the Nazi movement. But during the 1920s Soviet agitprop wrenched "fascism" out of its Italian context and made it into a portmanteau hate-mongering concept that simultaneously conflated all Soviet "enemies" from Roosevelt to Hitler into one ideological framework. "Nazism," as the Ducmanis opus illustrates, disappeared from Soviet-influenced writings. This profligate use of "fascism" is a reductionism that leads to a simplistic view of history and politics, especially those of Eastern Europe. To call all non-democratic non-laissez-faire governments fascist leads to a confusion of political systems and ultimately to misreading the world. The Soviet portrayal of East Europeans as fascist has been so pervasive that even today Western journalists travel to Eastern Europe hoping to find fascists.<sup>32</sup>

**Revisionism.** Among historians "revisionism" is an honored and positive concept that reflects one's yearning to revise the story of the patriarchs. It denotes a dialogue between generations and spans political divide. Revisionism keeps history alive and "current." In the history of the Holocaust, however, the word is used with a minus sign before it. With "Holocaust revisionism" one designates "nazified" interpretations, such as those by David Irving, of the Holocaust. Holocaust revisionists strive to minimize Hitler's role in ordering the killing of the Jews and deny the existence of "fundamental orders." In an extreme form revisionist historians deny the existence of the Holocaust and then they are known as "Holocaust deniers." At times, however, the defense of Holocaust "orthodoxy" may turn into zealotry and thus impede scholarship. Overemphasis on East Europeans as perpetrators of the Holocaust is a form of "revisionism."

**Pogrom.** An organized event that pretends to be spontaneous. The Russian origin word was taken over by the Nazis in 1938. In Czarist Russia a pogrom meant the beating up of Jews and destroying their domiciles. During the Party-generated *Kristallnacht* in 1938, the fury was turned against the synagogues and plate glass windows of Jewish shops. The early killings in Eastern Europe in 1941 the Germans also presented as pogroms. To date one has yet to encounter a pogrom that was spontaneous.

<sup>31</sup> For a post-Soviet view of Nationalism see Tares Kuzio, "Anti-Semitism as an integral component of Soviet Belorussian Nationalism and Pan-Eastern Slavism," *RGE/RL Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine Report*, vol. 4, no. 31, 20 August 2002.

<sup>32</sup> Among the Westerners who after the liberation went fascist hunting to Latvia, we can name Anatol Lieven, as evidenced in his *The Baltic Revolution* (New Haven, 1993) and Eva Clarita Onken, as evidenced in *Revisionismus schon vor der Geschichte. Aktuelle Kontroversen in Lettland um die Judenvernichtung und die lettische Kollaboration während der nationalsozialistischen Besatzung* (Berlin, 1999).

**Anti-Semitism or Anti-Semitisms.** The Holocaust may contribute more to an understanding of anti-Semitism than anti-Semitism to an understanding the Holocaust. Too many historians are beholden to the fallacy that the Holocaust was caused by "anti-Semitism." Without anti-Semitism, to be sure, there would have been no Shoah, yet it is simplistic to proclaim that anti-Semitism was the exclusive cause for it. If that were so, then since the Middle Ages there would have been an uninterrupted massacre of the Jews. European history is a proof that anti-Semitism and Jews can co-exist. Anti-Semitism has been ever present; yet an event such as the Holocaust in European history was confined to a five-year (twelve-year if one wants to stretch it) spell of time that coincided with the time of Adolf Hitler's rule in Europe. It may be correct to say that anti-Semitism was a European problem, yet to say that the Holocaust is also a European or world problem is historically and sociologically inexact. Even the Christian-induced attacks on Jews during the Middle Ages or the pogroms within the confines of the Russian empire were pinpricks in comparison to the Holocaust. All of the previous attacks on Jews lacked the scale, technology, and eliminationist ideology of the Holocaust. Anti-Semitism was a composite of strands, a river with many tributaries that each had its own history.<sup>33</sup> Although Daniel Goldhagen was not rigorous in his analysis, he was correct in identifying a strand that he called "eliminationist" anti-Semitism. As one cannot predict the direction and power of the river by fording the tributaries, so one could not have foreseen that the many anti-Semitisms would have added up to Hitlerism. Only in the late nineteenth century did there arise a "biological/scientific" form of anti-Semitism that absorbed the others and poisoned some of the best minds in Europe, and by its "rationality" mandated the destruction of Jews. Its connection to Darwinian chain of evolution, from primal soup to *homo sapiens*, gave an opportunity for the scientific anti-Semites to subdivide humanity between the lower and higher forms, and placed the Jews among the lower forms, the pests and vermin, and others, especially the Nordics, among the angels. Up to Hitler's time, if push came to shove, in the worst of circumstances, a Jew could, by conversion, or a pretended conversion, renouncing the faith of Moses, escape persecution. Only in Nazi ideology this escape route was blocked. Not only Goldhagen, but also the patriarch of Holocaust studies, Raul Hilberg, has marked this historical novelty as a crucial turn in European history. Diachronic and synchronic study of anti-Semitism would reveal both the presence of the multiplicity of anti-Semitisms, and the uneven geographical and cultural distribution of its various strands. The new biological anti-Semitism was mainly concentrated in Western Europe, and was only sparsely present in Eastern Europe. Generally speaking "scientific anti-Semitism was an avocation of university professors that did not reach the *hoi polloi*. Only in Germany were films like *Der ewige Jude* made. Note that the Nazis upon entering Eastern Europe in their propaganda underemphasized the biological brand of anti-Semitism, although *Der ewige Jude* was pushed on audiences in the occupied lands.

On the one hand, the Holocaust may be one of the events that cannot be explained by a linear chain of causation, for the static and noise is too dense for us to get a clear signal from the galaxy we call the past. On the other hand, by following the tributaries upstream and casting the searchlight of the "future" upon the past, some clarity may emerge.

The oldest brand, the foundation for all branches of anti-Semitisms, came out of the Gospels – let's call it Christian anti-Semitism. A paradoxical offshoot to the Gospels' variant

<sup>33</sup> For a discussion of the varieties of anti-Semitisms in modern history see A. Ezergailis, "Antisemitisms pasaules un Latvijas vēsturē" [Anti-Semitism in World and Latvian History], *Neatkarīgā Cīņa*, 6 October 1993, and the annex *PolitikAntropos*, 19 January 1994 and 14 February 1994.

was the Nietzschean corollary that faulted the Jews for springing an ethic of meekness upon the "good Europeans." Karl Marx on his part blamed the Jews for pushing a predatory and underhanded capitalist ethic. The latter school culminated in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, an *Ohranka* forgery of 1900, a screed that to this day has plagued the Jewish people. Chronologically, the next branch of anti-Semitism also came out of Russia. This was one in which the Jews were blamed for midwifing and fostering Communism, and were the enemies of Capitalism. Biological anti-Semitism originated in the nineteenth century but matured in the early decades of the twentieth. It was the mainstay of Hitlerism, although the Nazis, when needed, did not disdain other varieties of anti-Semitism. The main variant (there is no universal agreement on this) that has come into existence since the Nazis is anti-Zionism. It originated in the USSR of the 1920s and today is flourishing in the Middle East. A peculiarity of anti-Semitism is that no variant vanishes, but, however paradoxical, contradictory, and illogical they may be, they coexist.

German anti-Semitism was a unique cocktail that no other people of the world imbibed. Not only was it "scientific," it was also wrapped in an ideology of revenge and redemption, the myth of the *Dolchstoss* of 1919, and, as Saul Friedländer has argued, the eschatology of salvation. During the 1920s, many Germans came to believe that the liberation of their nation could occur only after ridding it of its Jews,<sup>34</sup> that one race could live only by the death of another.

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<sup>34</sup> Saul Friedländer, "Ideology and Extermination: The Immediate Origins of the Final Solution," *Lessons and Legacies V: The Holocaust and Justice* (Evanston, IL, 2002) 31. For a history of anti-Semitism and its subtypes in Latvia see Leo Dribins. *Antisemitisms un ta izpausmes Latvijā: Vēstures atskats* [Antisemitism und its Expressions in Latvia: a Historical Survey], LVKR 4 (Rīga, 2001).

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## Chapter 2

# THE GERMAN OCCUPATION OF LATVIA

One incontrovertible fact of the “German occupation” was that in the lands between the Black and the Baltic Seas it started as a “military occupation.”<sup>1</sup> This meant that the orders imposed upon these territories were more or less uniform. Orders that were issued in one location were similar to those everywhere. Military systems do not tolerate variations, and we have no reason to assume that the German army reinvented the wheel as they moved from country to country. When studying the impositions of the Wehrmacht and the *Einsatzgruppen* (special SS killing units sent to Eastern Europe), we must ask where and how the Eastern European “natives” found the time, space, and wherewithal to carry out the so-called spontaneous pogroms that they are reputed to have carried out. An unbiased study of the German order of occupation would show that there was little or nothing that the natives could do to influence the preordained Nazi system or their plans.<sup>2</sup> The German occupation had some unconventional features, but surrender of power and control to people that the Nazis deemed *Untermenschen* was not one of them.

There are many reasons why the German military occupation, especially relating to the Holocaust, has lacked transparency. The war and the occupations of the territories not only created an information blackout, but the Germans also filled the vacuum with misinformation. For example, it was impossible for the local populations, Jews and non-Jews, to grasp the larger pattern of Nazi intentions and plans. Max Michelson in his memoirs *City of Life, City of Death* testified that Jews lacked an overall understanding of Nazi intentions.<sup>3</sup> He claims that the Jews of Riga

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<sup>1</sup> Latvian historians have shown considerable interest in the German occupation, including the Holocaust, since the renewal of independence. For a historiographical overview see the series *Latvijas vēsturnieku komisijas raksti / Symposium of the Commission* Vols. 1–14, esp. the English-language volume 14: *The Hidden and Forbidden History of Latvia under Soviet and Nazi Occupations 1940–1991*, ed. Valters Nollendorfs and Erwin Oberländer (Riga, 2005). Also Inesis Feldmanis, “‘Vācu laiks’ Latvijā (1941–1945): aktuālās izpētes problēmas un risinājumi;” and Antonijs Zunda, “‘Vācu laiks’ Latvijā (1941–1945): izvērtējums historiogrāfijā,” *Latvijas vēsture* 3 (2003).

<sup>2</sup> For example, contrary to some popular opinion, the Germans upon their arrival in Latvia did not allow the reconstruction of the pre-war Latvian police system. Roberts Stiglics, the man whom Stahlecker installed as Prefect of Riga police, in 1945 wrote: “At the very beginning I received a directive from Stahlecker that the prefecture is similar to a German police presidium and that the prefecture needs to be organized in accordance with the model of Germany.” Stiglics’ report to the Police Liquidation Headquarters. 20.I.45. Hoover Institution.

<sup>3</sup> Max Michelson, *City of Life, City of Death*, (Boulder, CO, 2001). Michelson has persisted in this belief to this day.



**German Wehrmacht (circa 29 June 1941 before the bridges were blown up) from the left bank of Daugava probing Soviet defenses on the right shore.** Photo: Courtesy Herder-Institut Marburg.

themselves. For example, the first “self-defense” units that the Germans organized were forbidden to wear uniforms. At the time, this rule was presented as a military necessity, but now we know that the Nazis engaged in a strategy of deception, making it appear that the attacks on Jews were carried out by local civilians, simulating a pogrom. The Nazi deception was crafty enough to hoodwink the natives, the victims, and the conquerors themselves – not only at the time but also in posterity.

This chapter will not be either a history or even a synopsis of the German occupation.<sup>4</sup> Rather, we shall cover a series of topics that in some measure defined

believed that the initial attack on Jews was locally generated, perpetrated by Latvians, and that the Germans had nothing to do with it. The German dissimulation was so good that some Jews apparently even believed that the Germans would be their saviors and went to them to find protection from the Latvians.

The BBC radio service, which was about the only venue of free opinion that both Jews and “natives” heeded, was mute about German intentions towards the Jews. Today, however, there is no longer any reason for lacking perspective and knowledge about the German plans and context of the Holocaust. We must also note that the Nazis entered Eastern Europe with a multifaceted plan, as revealed in the Stahlecker documents, to deceive everybody: the “natives,” the Jews, the world, and the Germans

<sup>4</sup> For a more comprehensive discussion of the German occupation see Andrew Ezergailis, ed., *Stockholm Documents. The German Occupation of Latvia, 1941–1945. What Did America Know?* (Riga, 2002).

the German occupation and have occasioned misunderstanding and even blindness:

1. The Character of German Occupation.
2. Self-Defense Organizations.
3. *Schutzmannschaften*.
3. Latvian SD – The Arājs Commando.
4. Vocabulary: “volunteerism,” “collaboration,” “higher orders,” “collaboration.”

## The Character of German Occupation: Two Documents

The two Nazi documents discussed below will provide some detail about the system of German occupation and illustrate the controls that the Nazis imposed on Latvia. The first comes from the Hitler’s well-known *roundtable colloquy* with his minions in the East Prussian den at the outset of the war. Martin Bormann transcribed the conversation, which in the main was a monologue by Hitler.

Therefore we shall emphasize again that we were forced to occupy, administer, and secure a certain area; it was in the interest of the inhabitants that we provided order, food, traffic, etc., hence our measures. Nobody shall be able to recognize that it initiates a final settlement. This need not prevent our taking all necessary measures – shooting, resettling, etc. – and we shall take them ... To do nothing that might obstruct the final settlement, but to prepare for it only in secret ... To emphasize that we are liberators ... This partisan war again has some advantage for us; it enables us to eradicate everyone who opposes us ... Our iron principle is and has to remain: We must never permit anybody but the Germans to carry arms! ... The Führer emphasizes that the entire Baltic countries will have to be incorporated into Germany. Hitler 17 July 1941.<sup>5</sup>

*...to do nothing that  
might obstruct the  
final settlement,  
but to prepare for it  
only in secret ...*

Hitler, 17 July 1941

The Führer’s concept of deception was worked out in multiple ways by his public relations men: the occupation forces arrived with camera crews in tow and skilled propagandists to befuddle the thinking of all, Jew and Gentile, German and native, peasant and townsman. Among the words that Hitler’s minions coined and refined for the occupation and Holocaust were: *volunteerism, self-defense, self-cleansing, self-administration, pogrom, revenge, and inner enemy*. We know that after the war the Germans were serious about purging their language of Nazi impurities. Historians and journalists, however, have failed to penetrate this language of occupation. The quintessence of the Nazi line during the first year

<sup>5</sup> *Military Tribunal (Nuremberg)*, vol. 38, document 221 L, pp. 86–96.

of occupation was the transplantation of their ideas of revenge that since the end of the First World War had evolved in Germany. East Europeans were no strangers to anti-Semitism, yet their product was no match for the German-imported hate literature. In addition to the printed literature, the Germans also introduced films, such as *Der ewige Jude* and *Jud Süß*.<sup>6</sup>

## The Occupation of Bauska

A more concrete example of German occupation of Latvia can be gleaned from the newspaper *Bauskas vēstnesis* (The Bauska Messenger, no. 1 came out on 8 July 1941). It reprinted German directives and orders more fully than other small town newspapers. Since all newspapers were under German military control, we know that it would have been dangerous for the editor to misrepresent German orders and intentions.<sup>7</sup> There is every reason to think that similar orders prevailed in all East European lands overrun by Nazi forces.

At the top of the paper's second page there is a description of the final days of Soviet occupation and German entrance in the afternoon of 28 June into Bauska. The article tells us that the last communists left Bauska at 3:00 PM and the German tanks entered at 3:30. In other words, in Bauska there was a thirty-minute interregnum. The left side and the center of the page is taken up by orders that the Wehrmacht *Kommandantur* (local headquarters) issued to the locals. The designation of the local headquarters was *I. (V) 859*. On 1 July the commandant, signed *Hauptmann*, issued order No. 1, which had thirteen paragraphs. The highest measure of punishment was threatened for disobeying the rules. The following is a summary of the order:

- § 1 The commandant claims full powers in the area of his responsibility that includes garrison rights and duties.
- § 2 Gives the address of the local headquarters, Padomju ielā, at the market square.
- § 3 Says that the Latvian police is subordinated to the German local headquarters and is ordered to receive its daily orders from the local headquarters at specified times. "The Latvian police temporarily must *carry out its assignments without weapons.*"

<sup>6</sup> For the best history of anti-Semitism see Leo Dribins, *Antisemitisms un tā izpausmes Latvijā: Vēstures atskats* [Anti-Semitism and Its Manifestations In Latvia. A Historical Review], LVKR 4 (Rīga: 2001). Also Aivars Stranga, *Ebreji un diktatūras Baltijā 1926–1940* [Jews and Dictatorships in the Baltic 1926–1940] (Rīga, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> For a fuller view of Bauska's occupation see Aigars Urtāns, "Civildzīvotāju slepkavošana Latvijas provincē 1941–1942 – Bauskas pilsēta un apriņķis" [The Murder of Civilians in the Latvian Provinces 1941–1942 – the City and District of Bauska], *Latvijas vēsture*, 3 (2000), continued in 1, 2, and 3 (2001).

- § 4 Orders all goods and food reserves left by the Russians to be turned over to the local headquarters. Also, all Russian soldiers are ordered to be turned over to the local headquarters. The local headquarters also must be informed about all *Commissars* found within the area.
- § 5 The local headquarters must be notified about all goods belonging to the Soviet government.
- § 6 "It is prohibited to draw, photograph, or paint in the streets or to portray streets and squares from inside of houses."
- § 7 Rental of apartments is allowed only with permission of the local headquarters.
- § 8 By 7:00 PM on 2 July, the town council must turn in to the local headquarters (in the German language) a list in three copies of all vacant apartments where German officers could be quartered.
- § 9 The town council must turn in a list (in German) of all rooms and buildings that were occupied by Soviets.
- § 10 The Latvian police must organize a Civil Air Defense, specifying the location of shelters, organize a firemen's brigade, and inform the local headquarters of the brigade's readiness, providing it with a roster of its members.
- § 11 The Latvian police must inform the public about the rules of blackout. All lighted buildings at the onset of darkness must be blacked out.
- § 12 The local headquarters must be informed about all weapons and all kinds of ammunition still found in private hands.
- § 13 Local inhabitants are allowed to be on the streets from 5:00 AM to 10:00 PM. To be outside after 10:00 PM is prohibited. *Jews are allowed on the streets only from 7:00 AM to 6:00 PM.*

After 1 July the local headquarters continued to put out numerous directives, all with a threat of death appended to them. On 4 July the local headquarters turned against the Jews in a more serious way. It ordered the Bauska "self-defense" unit to register Jewish men and women from the ages of 18 to 50, and to confiscate their radios.

From the remaining orders decreed until 8 July, we can see that the Wehrmacht showed special solicitude for loose property and weapons.

- An order of 5 July threatened to shoot all civilians on whom a weapon would be found.
- An order of 5 July threatened death for hiding a Red Army soldier or failing to report any Red Army straggler or terrorist.
- All unemployed men and women were ordered to farm work under the threat of punishment.

- On 7 July the local headquarters ordered the Security Police to take charge of those properties that during the course of the war had ended up in private hands.
- The same order required the Security Police to register all empty buildings and apartments and take charge of the belongings of those people who had fled or otherwise vacated their domiciles. The neighbors who failed to report such properties were threatened with a punishment according to the laws of war.
- On 7 July the local headquarters issued an order to maintain prices as they had been prior to the war. "Those disobeying will be arrested."

## Self-Defense Organization

The self-defense organizations that emerged during the first days of German control form one of the most obscure and least understood topics in the history of the occupation. It was the Wehrmacht that quite naturally was responsible for giving an organizational shape to the conquered territory. It was not part of the German military mind, let alone that of the SD, contrary to Soviet assertions, to surrender control to the conquered people. One can also note that upon German entrance into Latvia, Latvians for administrative purposes needed the Germans. After the Soviet retreat the Latvian societal structure was in shambles. At least in the countryside the Latvians had no wherewithal nor authority to take control of their land. The Soviet deportations of 14 June in many localities had left an administrative vacuum.

The awkward historical paradox that still abides in the minds historians and journalists about the self-defense units is that, despite the paper trail that the Nazis left behind, there are many people at the time and today who believe that they sprang into existence spontaneously as a result of Latvian own organizational effort. The editors of the *Latviešu karavīrs otra pasaules kara laikā* in 1972 wrote that by the time when the self-defense units were liquidated "with certainty we could say that Latvians themselves had established security and order in their land."<sup>8</sup>

The Germans could have opted for building a system of order from the partisans or the "greens" that in many places had come into existence during the last days of Soviet rule. Upon the German entrance into Latvia there were practically no civil organs and organizations extant. In Tukums, for example, only the firemen still maintained an organizational coherence. In some places Germans could have relied on the partisans, but the Germans chose to disband them and

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<sup>8</sup> *Latviešu karavīrs Otrā pasaules kara laikā: Dokumentu un atmiņu krājums* [Latvian Soldier in World War II: Collection of Documents and Recollections], 11 vols. (N.p., 1970–1993); cited 2: 25.

establish a chain of command that was fully German. From the Nazi point of view the partisans were either too few or too many, and in either case they were people with the wrong ideas: they wanted to organize a Latvian army and to fight the Communists. They believed in Latvia as a nation, an independent state with internationally recognized boundaries. The Germans, on their part, desired to end Latvia as a centralized entity, break it up into nineteen districts, and include it into a new satellite state, the Ostland. There was nothing spontaneous about the organization of the self-defense, for it was built, wherever they could be found, on former members of the Aizsargi organization (Home Guard, a mainly rural militia in independent Latvia). In effect, the Germans carried out a draft of the ex-*aizsargi* and ex-policemen. The Latvian self-defense men themselves frequently did not know who issued the order to organize.<sup>9</sup> The concept of self-defense was a confusing one to many men in the force. In trial depositions some identified it as service in the police, others called it partisans, and yet others *aizsargi* or *Schutzmannschaft*.

Even before the crossing of the Baltic frontier, as Stahlecker admitted, the Germans knew that for the "solution of the Jewish problem" an organization was needed. In the "self-defense" system they found a vehicle that in part could be used for that purpose.

It was the Wehrmacht local headquarters that usually, if not always, issued the orders to organize the "self-defense" teams in Latvia, although in many cases we do not know how the order to set up the units was communicated, by word of mouth, telephone, or radio signal. It was also the Wehrmacht that ordered the use of the civilian clothes and the wearing of Latvian colors, the red-white-red armband, as a sign of recognition and issued an ID card to its members. Within a week of occupation, self-defense headquarters existed in all of Latvia's administrative subdivisions: districts, towns, and civil parishes (*pagasts*). The pivotal Latvian supervising headquarters was the district unit, but the German orders allowed for local German military and SD commandants to bypass the Latvian chain of command. The leader of each unit was called a "commandant." Thus after the German occupation in Latvia about six hundred self-defense commandantures and commandants came into existence. The folklore about the origins of the self-defense teams tells us that they begun at the grass roots and percolated up. In reality, however, there is abundant evidence that shows us that they began at the top.

<sup>9</sup> For example Lt. Ernests Laumanis in Liepāja on 29 June heard on the radio that Germans were organizing a self-defense unit. Thus he ended up in the Wire Factory, where he encountered a German lieutenant and a Latvian named Lazdiņš in German uniform. Since Laumanis was a lieutenant, the German made him the leader of the group. The first armband that he received was white with a swastika on it. Later he received a red-white-red armband. (LVA, kriminālieta 14738). In Liepāja the information about the formation of the self-defense unit was also distributed by leaflets.

The nature, activities, and powers of the Latvian self-defense units were defined in an order issued by the military commander of the 291st Infantry Division on about 30 June 1941.<sup>10</sup> This order yet in another way shows the German system of organization and their intentions:

- First, “the organization of Latvian self-defense forces are to be encouraged, but at the same time the forces are limited to pacifying the land and cleansing it of Bolshevik terror and scattered Russian stragglers.”
- The second point, which is a restatement of the already noted Heydrich directive of 29 June, speaks for itself: “The organization of the self-defense forces may not lead to premature political arrangements concerning the future of the land. Therefore no army is allowed, but only auxiliary forces.”
- A third point addresses the problem of controlling the forces: “The regiment and its permanent units must establish contacts with the Latvian self-defense leaders, guide them in their tasks, and supply them with the necessary weapons and ammunition.”
- The level of arms is defined in point five: “The Latvian self-defense units are to be armed only with small arms (including ammunition) [bolt-action rifles and pistols are meant], which have been obtained as war booty from Russians. Machine guns and cannons are not to be given to the self-defense units.”
- Point six lists the places in Liepāja, Kuldīga, and Ventspils districts where weapons and ammunition are to be distributed. The seventh and last point specifies that only two percent of the population are allowed to enter the self-defense units and be given weapons. It means that a community of one thousand people would be allowed a 20-man self-defense teams.

On 2 July the precinct commander of Ventspils, Lieutenant Colonel Althoff, issued a Latvian-language variant of the seven-point order, giving it a more specific and narrower interpretation. Althoff's order specified that only rifles and pistols were allowed; among the prohibited weapons were automatic rifles and sub-machine guns. He repeated that the self-defense units were not part of the military, but an auxiliary police to aid the army. The order also commanded the leaders of the self-defense units to register with the local army commander and to obey his orders. Within the Ventspils district, self-defense units were to be organized in Dundaga, Ance, Gipka, Kolka, and Mazirbe. In addition, the document prohibited the confiscation of motorized equipment by self-defense units.<sup>11</sup>

Two conclusions follow from these two documents. Although these orders may appear to grant permission to organize Latvian self-defense teams, as if to endow them with power, in reality they were intended to control the Latvians and to limit the scope of their activities. Read in this light, the orders were just one step away from disarming the Latvians. After the Russian retreat in some locations

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<sup>10</sup> Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv RH 26-291/7, p. 160, as cited and translated into Latvian by Haralds Biezais “Nacionālie partizāņi” [The National Partisans], *Kaŗa Invalids* 29 (1984): 14.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 15.

there was a surfeit of weapons; in others, however there were none. Those locations that had too many weapons had to surrender them; others had to travel to the district capital to get weapons. The self-defense men were restricted to the simplest of arms (a shotgun was not an infrequent weapon), and their activities were limited to those permitted or ordered by the local German commandant. In Bauska, as we saw, Latvians were prohibited from carrying arms. Read in yet another way, we can see these orders as re-channeling of the Latvian agenda, the desire for an independent state and a national army, towards the sinister purposes that the Nazis were harboring.

The self-defense units fulfilled several functions for the Germans: in part they performed simultaneously police and military functions. One of the functions was anticipated in Heydrich's memos and Stahlecker's reports, a function that the Latvians never saw or heard about and was sprung on them at the last moment, frequently on the day of the killing. In general we can conclude that the Germans needed the self-defense teams less for the killing actions than for general stability and pacification that they imposed upon the countryside, thus giving the killing teams some space of security.

The Latvian self-defense teams served as auxiliaries primarily to the German Wehrmacht, although there is a lot of evidence that the SD could and did use them as well. The first assignment for the self-defense was to establish order in their localities: guard the streets, bridges, and railroads, and in some places to comb the woods for Red Army stragglers. At first, when the self-defense units were organized, the issue of killing Communists and Jews was not raised. As the first anti-Jewish directives, such as the registering of Jews, began to be issued, the self-defense units were also ordered to impose them. It must be said that the killing of the Jews or any other matter in which Jews were involved could not have happened without the Wehrmacht's knowledge and orders. During the killing period more Latvian towns had a Wehrmacht than an SD presence. The Heydrich and Stahlecker directive to the Germans to hide behind the backs of Latvians was generally observed. The basic principle of the German plan was for the SD to organize and carry out the killings, yet in locations where there were no SD personnel, the Wehrmacht was obliged to take over.

The selection of the membership in the self-defense was very varied: the word "voluntary," in spite of the folklore about it, only applies in some cases. In reality, in all instances the self-defense units were organized: one could not simply sign up for one. The main anchor of the self-defense system was the District Commandant, of whom there were nineteen. They were selected by the Germans and

*In reality the self-defense teams were intended to control the Latvians to limit the scope of their activities.*

served at their pleasure. The commandants had to please the Germans or they would be replaced.<sup>12</sup> The members of the self-defense units were solicited by invitation, telephone, or even a home visit. For example, we have evidence of Lieutenant Tauriņš, who on 28 July received a telephone call from Pēteris Kalniņš, former commander of Viesīte Aizsargi, who told him that the Germans were in a rush to find a Latvian officer. The German Commandant, Kunze, made Tauriņš the Latvian Commandant of the town.<sup>13</sup> Hugo Vanags, threatened with punishment, for a brief period was appointed to the position of Bauska Police commandant by Martiņš Vagulāns of Jelgava, who acted as the Latvian District Commandant.<sup>14</sup> The people picked for the self-defense teams were men with stable backgrounds, usually ones in their thirties and forties, members of the former Aizsargi organization, those least likely to engage in mindless behavior. But by the same token they were men with a culture of obedience, ones who could not say no to an order. From the German point of view they also preferred to place in the leadership positions, if they could find them, the least stable ones, victims of Communism, those with cause of revenge, or men whose families had been deported to Siberia.

In Rīga the existence of the self-defense organization was a very brief one – from about 3 July to 20 July 1941. On 7 July Voldemārs Veiss was appointed the commander of the Rīga self-defense, and on 20 July the unit was converted into the recruiting reserve of the Rīga Auxiliary Order Police.<sup>15</sup> The dissolution of the unit was connected with the assassination of Viktors Deglavs.

In sum, we can conclude that the self-defense units, instead of consisting of “volunteers,” were patched together by a variety of stratagems. To understand the Holocaust in Latvia and elsewhere in Eastern Europe, we must understand the organizational scheme imposed on Latvia. Generally, we must also conclude that

<sup>12</sup> A case in point is Lt. Hugo Vanags of Bauska, who was dismissed for disobeying German Commandant Nepel's order to prepare Jews for murder. See Aigars Urtāns, “Divu okupācijas režīmu vienāds spriedums” [The Same Verdict by Two Occupation Regimes], *Latvijas Vēsture* 1 (2000): 106–09. Cēsis, for example, was one of the cities that was liberated by Latvian partisans on 4 July 1941, under the leadership of Col. Mārtiņš Kasparsons. Captain Alberts Ameriks and Kārlis Liepiņš began to establish order in the city. On 5 July, when the Germans entered the city, the partisans were disarmed and the Wehrmacht Commandant replaced Ameriks and Liepiņš with Alberts Ziediņš. On 10 July Ziediņš was replaced by Captain Felixs Bergs. “Cēsu aprīņķa priekšnieks Latviešu policijas galvenās direkcijas likvidēšanas štābam,” *Latvijas Centrālās komitejas arhīvs, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Box 122*. For further information about Cēsis see *Latviešu karavīru otra pasaules kara laikā*, 2: 25–27. Many of the men in the original self-defense unit were not only disarmed; they were also apprehended as deserters from the Red Army and sent to East Prussia as POWs.

<sup>13</sup> KGB Trial Records, The case of P. Tauriņš, No. 1912, Vol. 4. p. 220. Parenthetically we can also note that the same Kunze, on 1 July, ordered Tauriņš to expel Viesīte Jewish citizens from their homes. Tauriņš also identified a second German, Hofenhein, who was also giving orders.

<sup>14</sup> See Urtāns 106.

<sup>15</sup> *Latviešu karavīru otra pasaules kara laikā*, 2: 28–31.

the self-defense units had a less bloody history than folklore and Soviet propagandists have attributed to them: we must remember that in most of the locations where self-defense teams existed Jews did not reside. To be sure, Germans liked anti-Semites, but it must be noted that anti-Semitism was not a litmus test for membership in either the self-defense or a killing team.

## The *Schutzmannschaften*

*Schutzmannschaften* (literally guardsman societies; but in fact the auxiliary police) was the name Germans gave to the Latvian police formations that they commanded.<sup>16</sup> For their own idiosyncratic and ideological reasons, the Germans militarized the auxiliary police (*Schutzmannschaften*) and named their Latvian military units *Hilfspolizei*, auxiliary police. By calling the Latvian auxiliary police *Schutzmannschaften*, the standing of the police was reduced by one more semantic peg. Thus arose the confusion that still exists about the Latvian police, soldiers, SS, and the SD. The Latvian auxiliary police forces under the occupation paralleled the two branches of police with which the Germans entered Latvia: the SS and SD, and the *Ordnungspolizei* (Order Police, that is, the closest thing that Nazi Germany had to an ordinary street-level police force). Although on the upper command level the two police systems were joined – Himmler ruled over them all – on the operational level their assignments and functions were different. The *Schutzmannschaften* constituted a very large and ungainly organization. It encompassed the police in large and small towns, Rīga, and the provinces. It also had units that were in everything but name military, as well as the street police in the cities, the constabularies of the countryside, and the police battalions fighting on the Leningrad front and against the partisans in Belorussia. Two incompatible branches, one military, the other police, were forced into one organizational network. In June 1942 the two branches were separated.

The name *Schutzmannschaften*, as well as the police-military linkage, was chosen to circumvent Hitler's prohibition against arming the "natives." The German police units that controlled the *Schutzmannschaften* were called *Ordnungspolizei*. The units that the Germans called *Schutzmannschaften* the Latvians called *Kārtības policija* (Order Police), a direct translation of the German *Ordnungspolizei*. But the Germans, when speaking or writing in German, wanting to emphasize the subsidiary and auxiliary nature of the Latvian police, called them *Schutzmannschaften*.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Officially the name was given by a Himmler decree of 6 November 1941. For a full discussion of Latvian military formations, especially the Latvian Legion, see Haralds Biezais, *Latvija kāškrusta varā: Sveši kungi, pašu laudis* [Latvia Under the Swastika] (East Lansing, 1992).

<sup>17</sup> The Latvians did not like the name because the word "Schutz" alliterated with the word "Schmutz," meaning dirt. On the official level the Latvians used the name *Schutzmannschaften* only in correspondence with the Germans.

The distinction between the German *Ordnungspolizei* and the Latvian *Schutzmannschaften* was justified, because their functions were not identical. The former managed the Latvian police, watched over the populace, and oversaw the occupation and annexation of Latvia. The Latvians performed the street-level duties or were posted to military assignments in Russia. In terms of killing Jews, there was also a difference. From the first days the German *Ordnungspolizei* performed as the first SD reserve in the killing actions,<sup>18</sup> while the involvement of the Latvian *Schutzmannschaften* was, if there was any at all, episodic, local, even at times accidental. The killing of the Jews took place during the "self-defense" phase. By the time the *Schutzmannschaften* came into existence, there were no more Jews to kill in Latvia.<sup>19</sup>

The German police units were mobile and the Latvian ones stationary. For example, the Latvian police, whether called "self-defense" or *Schutzmannschaft*, of Jēkabpils, though they may have participated in the killings locally, were not dispatched to Madona, or those of Rēzekne sent to Daugavpils. But the fundamental difference between the German *Ordnungspolizei* and the Latvian *Schutzmannschaften* was that the former gave orders and the latter obeyed them. To emphasize the auxiliary status of the Latvian police, all precincts had German overseers. One of the deceptive aspects of *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* was to befuddle the issue by drawing no distinctions between the Latvian police, the self-defense, and the SS and the SD killing teams.

The dissolution of the self-defense teams took place during the month of August 1941. The setting up of local police forces (*Schutzmannschaften*) was ordered after that. In most places the leading personnel carried over from the self-defense teams, although their ranks were much reduced and altered. The self-defense stage of the occupation coincided with the killing period that was not compatible with stability and order. The establishment of the *Schutzmannschaft* signaled the turning away from the period of turbulence. The Latvian rural police was subdivided into three groups: A, B, and C. The "A" group comprised the professional and permanent staff, who were paid for their work. The "B" group we may describe as an active reserve who were called up as needed and were paid for their days of service. The "C" group was a relatively inactive reserve whose members were called out in emergencies, for example when the need to comb the forests for partisans came up. Many members of the "C" group were older men, farmers for example, and had belonged to the former Aizsargi. In many districts the "C" group was dormant; yet in others it was called out frequently. When organizing the Police Battalions, the Germans frequently ordered the "C" members to "volunteer" to fill in the ranks. In Ducmanis treatment the "C" group became, as if, the *avant garde* of Nazism.

<sup>18</sup> Landesgericht Hamburg: *Urteil gegen Jahnke und andere*, p. 46. This is especially true about the 9th *Ordnungspolizei* Battalion.

<sup>19</sup> As a generalization it is true for countryside towns.

## The Latvian SD – The Arājs Commando

At the same time as the Wehrmacht was organizing the self-defense teams, SS-Brigadeführer Dr. Walter Stahlecker, the commander of *Einsatzgruppe A*, organized Latvian SD chapters, of which the largest was the Arājs Commando. These units, especially the itinerant Arājs Commando, were intended specifically for the killing of the Jews. Although in some locations the self-defense units were ordered to participate in the killings, the overwhelming majority of the victims were liquidated by Arājs men or some itinerant unit of the German *Einsatzgruppe*. At first, the Germans intended the Latvian SD units, the same as the self-defense ones, to be temporary. That is, they were to be abolished after the atrocities were completed. During the killing period, when *Einsatzgruppe A* was operating, in addition to the self-defense teams, in some, but not all districts, parallel SD units were set up. In the districts with SD teams, in general, the onus of handling and killing Jews fell to them. The Madona District is one example of this. In 1942, stationary SD teams were set up in all districts. Those units that were planned to be abolished were abolished: the Germans made them and the Germans unmade them. The exception was the Arājs Commando; after finishing its primary duty it was converted into a permanent presence and new assignments were found for it. From the 300-man contingent during the killing phase, it grew, at its maximum, into a 1200-man, two-battalion unit. One battalion continued to be led by Arājs; the other was commanded by Major Kārlis Ozols, a man with military schooling.<sup>20</sup> In 1942, the assignments of the Latvian SD were divided into three functions: the part that stayed in Latvia in the main began to perform as a guard unit; the contingent sent to the region of Minsk continued to be occupied with killing Jews; and the third group became partisan hunters in the Russian territories. The latter group also participated in some front-line battles where they took heavy casualties. By July 1944 the SD unit was only 847 strong; it had been reduced by 511 casualties, 365 of them killed. At war's end in 1945, the Latvian SD was dispersed. Some personnel were ordered to join the Legion, while others were sent to Germany, where they scattered amongst a variety of military and civilian groupings. Before retreating to Kurzeme in 1944, there was a high rate of desertion, even among the SD men. Arājs himself, as an SD major, was given a chance to command a Legion battalion, but he failed the assignment.<sup>21</sup>

The first Latvian unit that was sent to the Leningrad front to fight the partisans was a Latvian SD company, led by Lieutenant Konrāds Kalējs and/or Harijs Sviķeris. It was about 150-man strong, and left Latvia at the beginning of October 1941.

<sup>20</sup> Not to be confused with Lt. Kārlis Ozols, a member of the Latvian SD contingent in Minsk.

<sup>21</sup> After the war, for a short period of time, he ended up among the legionnaires at Zedelghem, Belgium, but some Latvian prisoner for two bottles of beer betrayed him to the British, who transferred Arājs to a camp for war criminals. Andrew Ezergailis, *The Holocaust in Latvia* (Riga, 1996) 179.

They operated under the direct command of SS-Brigadeführer Stahlecker and were the first Latvians who wore German uniform. This Latvian unit was in the battle area when Stahlecker was mortally wounded on 23 March 1942. Because the SD operated without written orders and kept no records, we know very little about its activities. Soviet trial records perhaps are the best source that in part can help us to document its activities.<sup>22</sup>

## Vocabulary

**Volunteerism.** It is frequently asserted that nobody was ever punished for opting out of a killing assignment. That may be true. But it is also true that frequently volunteers were not solicited and participation was coerced by an order. Once the killing procedures became routine, the issue of volunteerism did not arise. For example, even the Arājs Commando divided into those who did the killing and those who did the guarding. If one could opt out of a killing assignment one could not do so from a guarding one. For disobeying an order to guard or escort one would face a court-martial. Insubordination within the German system could have drawn a death sentence. Too frequently in the history of the Holocaust and that of German occupation, volunteerism is confused with organization. Many people, even

today agree with the Nazis that everything Latvians did during the war they did voluntarily. It seems proper to say that if a historian uses the word voluntary once, it may be correct; if twice it is an exaggeration, and if thrice – he is promoting Nazi propaganda.



**You Must Also Fight for Latvia!** Although Hitler's map of "New Europe" did not have place for Latvia, at the end of the war appeal to patriotism was fostered.

**Higher orders.** Higher orders were not a figment of the Nazi imagination. The volumes of documents that the Nuremberg Tribunal collected proved that Hitler's system was a hierarchical one that existed on giving and obeying orders. The Tribunal also held that "higher orders" could not be used as exoneration for a crime. If anything, higher orders bind one to a crime rather than free one. The error by many historians and other experts of the Holocaust is to say that orders cannot (dare not) be an explanation for criminal activities. If orders were eliminated as an explanation then the Holocaust would become a greater mystery than it is. There is also the error of confusing the high-ranking Nazis tried at Nuremberg, those whose duty was to formulate orders with those down the line who passed the orders and those at the bottom of the ladder who had to carry out the orders. Ignoring the existence of these orders is as dangerous as trying to use the orders as an excuse.

**Collaboration.** In reference to the Holocaust literature on Eastern Europe, especially that from Germany, there is an overuse of the concept of collaboration, which had its origins in

<sup>22</sup> For more details about the Arājs Commando see Ezergailis, *The Holocaust in Latvia*.

Western Europe and Scandinavia. Every second article written by a German scholar about Eastern Europe has the word collaboration in it. In Eastern Europe, the population of which the Nazis considered to be *Untermenschen*, collaboration could not but have different modalities from those in the West. For example, one needs to note that in Latvia *all Latvian offers of collaboration were rejected by the Nazis, and all of the "collaborations" that existed were organized by the Nazis, some by coercion*. The manner in which the Germans rejected proposed collaborations tended to take an extreme form. For example, Viktors Deglavs was murdered on 18 July 1941; Gustavs Celmiņš, the former leader of the Pērkonkrusts, was incarcerated in 1944; and Alfrēds Valdmanis was banished from Latvia in 1943. There is no doubt that some Latvians freely entered the civil, police, and military structures that the Germans had organized, but they could only do so on German terms. The structure could not but determine the content: there was no reciprocity between Germans and the "natives." The most visible moment of "collaboration," the "Latvian SS-Volunteer-Legion" was also the most fully documented coerced one. The Germans imposed "a full military conscription" for the Legion: men born in the years from 1908 to 1926 were ordered to the mustering.<sup>23</sup> As far as I know, there was no Latvian collaborationist who would measure up to a Quisling or a Petain.<sup>24</sup> Collaboration cannot be understood without understanding the conditions of occupation; the one influences the other. The paradox is that the lighter the rules of occupation, as for example in Denmark, the deeper and more extensive was the collaboration.<sup>25</sup>



**The General Director of the "Self-Administration of the Land," Oskars Dankers, should be known more as a facilitator than a collaborationist. He had no decision-making powers, but was used to cover for illegal Nazi undertakings. Dankers delivers a pep talk to a Liepāja Police Battalion that was organized contrary to the Hague Convention of 1907. Note that the men are wearing Latvian Army uniforms, not German ones as asserted in Ducmanis booklet. Note also the German SD man behind the speaker.**

<sup>23</sup> For German documents regarding the conscription of the Legion, see Mirdza Kate Baltais, *The Latvian Legion: Selected Documents* (Toronto, 1999) 40–56. Boys born in 1927–28 were drafted in Auxilliary Air Defense formations.

<sup>24</sup> For patterns of collaboration in France see Robert Paxton, "The Trials of Holocaust Perpetrators in France," *Lessons and Legacies V: The Holocaust and Justice* (Chicago, 2000) 240. For example, no Latvian agency, even one that the Nazis installed in Latvia was asked, as they did in Vichy France, to pass any anti-Semitic laws. See Michael Curtis, *Verdict on Vichy: Power and Prejudice in the Vichy France Regime* (New York, 2002).

<sup>25</sup> For additional discussion of collaboration in Latvia see A. Ezerģailis, "Collaboration in Latvia: Offered and Rejected," *Latvija nacistiskās Vācijas okupācijas varā 1941–1945 / Latvia under Nazi German Occupation 1941–1945*, LVKR 11 (Rīga 2004).



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### Chapter 3

## POLICE BATTALIONS, *BLITZKRIEG* AND SOVIET TRIALS<sup>1</sup>

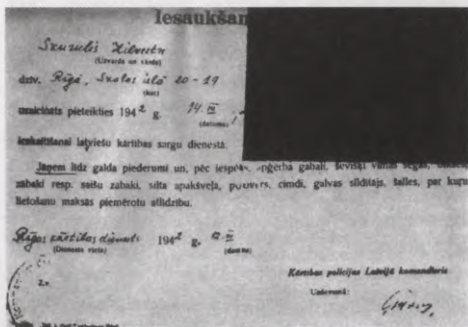
In late 1941, as the *Blitzkrieg* euphoria began to fade, the lessons of the Moscow debacle sank in, the partisan war began to intensify, and as the front line became more porous, the Germans began to realize that they did not have enough manpower. In July 1941 the Germans had proclaimed that they could topple Communism without the help of the *Untermenschen* of Eastern Europe. But the Eastern Front was not kind to the Nazis: readjustments were forced upon them that they found difficult to make. Even during the darkest hours, when German boys were bleeding and mothers weeping, the Nazis found it difficult to abandon their racial ideology. Hitler proclaimed: "We must never permit anybody but the Germans to carry arms!" He was fearful that arming the natives might also translate into political demands that would thwart his plans of annexation and enslavement. The Germans, for reasons of their own, had been kind to Latvian men until early 1942. Their failure to take Moscow signaled the end of the *Blitzkrieg*, and adjustments in their attitude towards the natives were forced on the Nazis. The Germans became eager for Latvian "volunteers," but ironically by that time the Latvian desire to "volunteer" had diminished to a trickle. A frantic campaign to organize police battalions began in February 1942.

Altogether, from 1941 to 1944, the Germans organized about forty police battalions with Latvian personnel. Some of them were special-assignment battalions that were disbanded after the completion of the task. The police (*Schutzmannschaft*) battalions fulfilled a different need for the Germans than did the SD and the Legion, for they continued to be organized and used after the Legion was set up. Six police battalions with front-line battle experience, however, were transferred to the Legion in March 1943. In addition to the Latvian police battalions, seven (no. 263, 314, 315, 325, 326, 327, 328) were Russian battalions that were transferred to the Vlasov Army in 1944.

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<sup>1</sup> The fullest record about the Police Battalions is found in *Latviešu karavīrs otra pasaules kara laikā: Dokumentu un atmiņu krājums*, vol. 2, ed. Osvalds Freivalds (n.p., 1972). For an alternate view of Soviet prosecution see Alexander Viktor Prusin, "Fascist Criminals to the Gallows!": The Holocaust and the Soviet War Crimes Trials, December 1945–1946," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, (Spring 2003): 1–30. Also see the publications of Kārlis Kangeris in the bibliography, esp. his "'Closed' Units of Latvian Police – Lettische Schutzmannschafts-Battalione: Research Issues and Pre-History," *The Hidden and Forbidden History of Latvia under Soviet and Nazi Occupations 1940–1944*, LVKR 14 (Riga, 2005) 104–121.

The first tentative steps towards the establishment of the police battalions were made on 20 July 1941, when Stahlecker allowed Lieutenant Colonel Voldemārs Veiss to organize what were called “closed units” – 500-man “recruiting reserves” as an appendage to Riga Police. This unit consisted of volunteers, was housed in the Boldarāja barracks, and was trained by a military manual. At first the “recruiting reserves” were organized in companies (in Liepāja, the Germans had organized a 300-man *Schutzmannschaft-Abteilung* that was subdivided into *Hundertschaften* in October 1941), and only in October did the concept of “battalion” begun to appear in correspondence. The Germans became serious in organizing police battalions in December 1941, when they worked out an organizational chart and assigned numbers to the battalions. The anticipated Latvian battalions received numbers 16 to 28. Later the list of numbers was much expanded.



**Failing to obtain sufficient volunteers, the Germans, as the order of induction above shows, by March 1942 introduced a limited draft in Latvia. The order specifies that the inductee is to appear at a location and date specified and bring along warm clothing.**

While in general we can say that the first two battalions consisted of volunteers, members of the ones organized in 1942 and thereafter were by and large “coerced volunteers.” How many true volunteers there were, we cannot tell. The coercion took various forms: first and foremost the Germans used a labor requirement as a wedge. Service in the police battalions earned labor credits that were needed for entrance to the university. Service in a battalion also freed one from service in the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (RAD; State Labor Service) that mandated labor in Germany. There were also the group “B” and “C” *Schutzmänner*, policemen, whom the Germans could without much ado order into service in the police battalions. And, finally, the Germans resorted to an outright draft. The legionnaires conscripted in

The first police battalion, under the name Independent Riga Order Police Battalion, was sent to Sol'tsi, Russia on 21 October 1941, where it fought partisans. In January 1942 the battalion received the number 16 and was renamed the Zemgale Battalion. The organization of two more battalions was begun in 1941. One became the 18th (Kurzeme) Battalion and was sent out to Russia. The second received the number 20 and stayed in Riga, serving as a reserve battalion.

1943 were not the first men to be drafted. A limited draft began in 1942. The big deception was the so-called contract. Men joining the battalion were asked to sign a "six-month contract," at the end of which, supposedly, the service period would end. However, when the six months had ended, the men were coerced to sign a contract until the end of the war. If the members of the battalions could be called, as the Germans were eager to name them, "volunteers" for the first six months, they certainly cannot be called volunteers thereafter.



**The Germans already lacked sufficient "volunteers" in 1942 and resorted to signing up children in combat units.**

## Police Battalions and Jews

The Soviets endeavored in their propaganda to make the police battalions appear to be gangs of voluntary murderers. The usual Soviet phrase they used was "punitive bands." The specific Soviet anger at the battalions had little to do with the Jews, but rather that they had battled the Red partisans and the Red Army. To get at the police battalions, however, starting with the 1960s the Soviets also accused them of killing Jews in Belorussia and elsewhere. The question is not without complexity, but in general one can say that no one has made a cogent case for Latvian police battalions killing Jews. Although the liquidation of Jews was important to the Germans, they also had to worry about the partisans and the Russians breaking through at the front. The Germans had the SD and other teams to handle the Jewish matters – they did not need everybody to do everything all the time. If the battalions had engaged in the killing of Jews, there would not have been anyone to battle the partisans. Unlike the records of the SD, the police battalion records are generally available. We now know their itineraries, and by and large we know the names of the membership. No war crimes case of a member of a police battalion has been successfully prosecuted in any Western jurisdiction. In the Pēteris Vitols case, for example, the Canadian Department of Justice tried to accuse him of war crimes because he had been a member of a battalion that participated in the *Winterzauber* action of February and March of 1943 in Belorussia near the Latvian border. The judge in that case declared Vitols to be innocent of

war crimes, and the Canadian government ended up paying him court costs.<sup>2</sup> Western authorities have left alone, for good reasons, even members of those units that were tried by the Soviets.

## Partisans and the Laws of War

Did the members of the battalions commit war crimes in their battles against the Soviet partisans? With the exception of the Soviets, the world has answered the question with *perhaps not*. The Soviets themselves were not without guilt in the matter. If the Germans in fighting the partisans broke the international laws of war, so did the Soviets. The laws of war are not kind to “illegal combatants”: perfidy is not tolerated. By using armed combatants without proper military insignia distinguishing them from the civilian population, the Soviet Union transgressed the Hague Convention of 1907, the applicable law during the Second World War. Captured combatants in civilian clothes, without any distinguishing insignia, are not afforded the same rights as prisoners of war who are captured in uniform. This was held by the U.S. Military Tribunal in Nuremberg to mean that to execute an “illegal” combatant is not a war crime, just as killing a spy is not. The Germans on their part did commit war crimes by taking and killing hostages, willfully burning villages, and meting out other forms of collective punishment. There is no question that the Latvian SD participated in retributions against villagers in the *Winterzauber* operation, but we have no evidence that the members of the police battalions did so. The operation order for the SD, however, specified that

all executions in partisan actions be carried out by the SD, so to erase all evidence. In those cases when SD is not close by and executions need to be carried out by regular soldiers inside of the building, the corpses must be covered with straw or hay and the house must be torched.<sup>3</sup>

During the Soviet period, the rhetoric about the battalions was vitriolic, and the legal judgments harsh, but generally the Soviets did not organize collective trials of the battalions that their rhetoric mandated they should. For example, the Soviets could have organized a trial of the Rīga police for their role in the Rumbula action. They could also have organized a trial of the 22nd Battalion for their role in the transport of Jews from Warsaw to Treblinka in August 1942. It appears that the Soviets felt more comfortable inventing crimes than basing trials on real situations.

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<sup>2</sup> Harold Otto, “Canadian Courts and the Latvian Past: The Case of Pēteris (Peter) Vītols.” *Latvijas Kara muzeja gadagrāmata / Yearbook of the War Museum of Latvia* (Rīga, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> *Mēs apsūdzam: Dokumenti un materiāli par hitlerisko okupantu un latviešu buržuazisko nacionālistu [undarbibām Latvijas Padomju Sociālistiskajā Republikā, 1941–1945]* [We Accuse: Documents and Materials about the Crimes of Hitlerian Occupants and Latvian Bourgeois Nationalists in the Latvian SSR 1941–1945] (Rīga, 1965) 45.

Did the battalions participate in the killing of the Jews? The Soviets tried hard to prove that they did, and for that purpose they staged two show trials. This is to say that, since they had to resort to fabricated evidence, they overplayed their hand, in effect proving the opposite. In assessing this question we need to consider the trials of the 18th and 21st Battalions, and the presence of the 22nd and 272nd Battalions and their activities in Warsaw during August and September 1942.<sup>4</sup> The resort to show trials may indicate that the battalions were less involved with war crimes than has been widely believed

## The Alleged Crimes of the 18th Battalion

If the members of the 18th Battalion had committed true crimes, the Soviets would not have needed to concoct false evidence. There was very little to distinguish the 18th Police Battalion from the forty others that the Germans organized during the course of the occupation, except that the Soviets in 1959 staged a show trial, accusing it of atrocities at Slonim, Belorussia. As the other battalions, the 18th trudged through the forests of Russia chasing down partisans, which was an activity permitted by the Hague Convention. The “crimes” of the 18th Battalion were not greater or lesser than those of the other Latvian police (*Schutzmannschaften*) battalions. If the “crimes” had been there, there would have been an unending stream of trials in the Soviet Union and the West. To the contrary, in 1949 the Latvian NKVD chief Vēvers sent a message concerning the activities of Jānis Apermanis, who had served in the 18th Battalion in Belorussia, to the president of the investigation secretariat, Jesaulov, that it was impossible to find anything criminal about the accused during his stint in Belorussia.<sup>5</sup>

The 18th Battalion left for Minsk on 4 May 1942. It consisted of 430 men and was led by Captain Fridrichs Rubenis. The German liaison, or oversight, functions were performed by Captain Sichert and, from 27 July 1942, by Captain Egon Erzum. In Minsk the battalion was housed in barracks formerly used by Soviet armored troops. With Minsk as a base, the 18th Battalion was sent out on a variety of sorties to fight the partisans. Then they were moved to the town of Stolbtsi.<sup>6</sup> With a small detachment remaining in Stolbtsi, the battalion was dispatched to Slonim for an assignment that lasted from 18 to 22 August 1942.

What happened in Slonim has given rise to one of the greatest controversies surrounding Latvian soldiering during the Second World War. In March 1961,

<sup>4</sup> Trial records show that one company of the 22nd Battalion was posted to guard the Jewish transports to the Treblinka death camp.

<sup>5</sup> Jānis Apermanis case, LVVA (Latvian State Historical Archive) No. 29176.

<sup>6</sup> LCK files, 18. bataljona paveles. Among the partisan units that the battalion battled in late July, near Stolbtsi, were some Jewish partisan formations.

the Soviets in Riga placed nine members of the battalion on trial.<sup>7</sup> They were charged with atrocities committed in Belorussia, specifically the killing of the Jews of Slonim. Five defendants were sentenced to death and four to fifteen years of hard labor. The death sentences were carried out on 31 May 1961.

That was not the end of it. Following the trial, the KGB engaged Pauls Ducmanis,<sup>8</sup> to write a pamphlet about the Latvian war veterans' organization Daugavas Vanagi. Ducmanis was given the assignment of tying the crimes of the 18th Battalion to the Daugavas Vanagi and Latvians at large. He was sent to the trial and purported to summarize the proceedings.

The crucial passage in the KGB pamphlet is as follows:

*In the early summer of 1942, the German Security police (SD) handed over the little town of Slonim, in Byelorussia, to the 18th Latvian Police Battalion. Slonim is about 70 kilometres from the town of Baranovichy, and lies between Grodno and Brest. The first job given the 18th Latvian Police Battalion was the extermination of all the inhabitants of the Jewish ghetto in Slonim. RUBENIS, the battalion Commandant, called for volunteer executioners; and a number of officers and men stepped forward. The slaughter began. From then on, steady staccato bursts of gunfire could be heard from early morning till late at night. The Latvian execution squad, wearing German uniforms, vied with one another to see who could kill the greatest number of inmates from the ghetto.<sup>9</sup>*

Then Ducmanis continues to enumerate the alleged atrocities committed by the 18th Battalion, which included robbery and killing of children. Without getting into any deep analysis of the Ducmanis text, one can note that it contains two factual errors. The German records indicate that the killing of the Jews in Slonim began in July of 1941 and continued through 1942. One especially large massacre, when about 4,000 Jews were killed, took place on 29 June 1942,<sup>10</sup> but the 18th Battalion arrived in Slonim only on 18 August. The second error is that the battalion soldiers of the 18th Battalion were dressed in Latvian army uniforms, not German ones. The record further shows that on 29 June the 18th Battalion was stationed in Stolbtsi, about one hundred kilometers from Slonim and was hunting partisans near Nalibotski.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> LVA (Latvian State Archive), KGB Trial Archive, Kriminālīeta 44109. Lt. Jānis Bumbērs, 1st Lt. Francis Eglājs, Lt. Osvalds Lapiņš, Corp. Jevgenijs Lūsis, Corp. Edgars Vilnis, V. Ogrīņš, Eduards Šķeters, Valdemārs Širmachers, and Jāzeps Zlamets.

<sup>8</sup> Pauls Ducmanis comes from a bourgeois Latvian family, worked in the Nazi propaganda apparatus during the German occupation. After the war, he was arrested by the KGB in Kurzeme and sent to Siberia, where he was coerced to work in the Soviet propaganda establishment. He retired and lived in Riga until his death in 2000. Much of this information comes from a personal conversation with Ducmanis in 1989. For more information about Ducmanis see Chapter 5.

<sup>9</sup> I am using the Gladys Evans translation of the Ducmanis book, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Helmut Krausnick and Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges* (Stuttgart, 1981) 595.

<sup>11</sup> The movements of the 18th Battalion, in addition to the battalion's orders found at the Hoover Institution, are confirmed by the deposition of Johannes Feder, in the records of the Heuser Trial.

A significant piece of evidence about the trial of members of the 18th Battalion and the writing of the Ducmanis pamphlet was provided by Imants Lešinskis, a KGB major, who defected to the United States in 1979. In 1962 Lešinskis headed the Cultural Liaison Committee with Countrymen Abroad, and in that capacity he attended the trial of the 18th Battalion. His conclusion was that the trial was staged. Its purpose was not to ascertain the guilt or innocence of the accused. The trial, according to Lešinskis, was a KGB operation that had little to do with justice, and even violated some very basic Soviet laws. The trial was proclaimed to be open, but only people with KGB passes were admitted. All of the accused had become prisoners of war at the time of capitulation in Kurzeme and had been sent to Siberia for an extended period. At the time of the Khrushchev amnesty, the men had returned to Latvia. In 1961 they were picked up again and tried for the crimes at Slonim. The trial and the accusations were part of a larger pattern in a series of trials that took place in other Soviet-occupied territories at the same time. Lešinskis allowed that the soldiers of the 18th Battalion had been in Slonim, but that the evidence and the testimony presented should have been judged too inconclusive to condemn members of the 18th Battalion to death.<sup>12</sup>

An examination of the trial files in the Riga KGB archives leads one to agree with Lešinskis' judgment. We can make some provisional conclusions about the trial: (1) heavy-handed Soviet propaganda permeated the indictment, testimony, and judgment; (2) the men were convicted without specifying the date of their alleged crime; (3) the judgment was reached on the basis of accusations and evidence from participants in the events of Slonim who were never accused and never tried for the crime;<sup>13</sup> (4) the convictions were based on confessions and self-accusations; (5) the convictions lacked "objective evidence."

There is no doubt that the 18th Battalion was in Slonim between 18 and 22 August 1942. The records of the 18th Battalion in the Hoover Institution testify to that. There is no mention in those records, however, of the killing of the Slonim Jews. From Israeli sources we know that there were several major killings in Slonim during the summer of 1942, and we know that Latvian SD men took part in them. We also know that on 20 August, within the time frame when the 18th Battalion was in Slonim, about 400 Jews were removed from the ghetto and killed.

Three types of evidence, one general, the other two concrete, indicate that the 18th Battalion did not engage in the actual killing, meaning that they were not guilty of the charges levied against them. It would have been contrary to established SD practice to order a Latvian *Schutzmannschaft* battalion untutored for

<sup>12</sup> Imants Lešinskis, "Kalpibas gadi," *Latvija šodien* 1986, 63-69.

<sup>13</sup> LVA, KGB Trial Archive, Kriminālieta 44109.

the assignment to do the killing. If that were so, it would have been the only known case. A number of Jewish authors have written about the massacre and none has noted the presence of the 18th Battalion in the massacre. According to the Soviet courts, the Latvian *Schutzmannschaft* acted alone and on their own initiative. If any Latvians on 20 August did participate in the Slonim killings, it seems more likely to have been the Latvian SD units, who at that time were active near Minsk.<sup>14</sup> The two previous killings in Slonim were performed by the SD.<sup>15</sup> The likelihood is that if a Latvian *Schutzmannschaft* unit had been ordered to participate in the liquidation of the Slonim ghetto, it would have been only in the capacity of guards. That would have been consistent with other situations such as the Rumbula and Šķēde massacres, where the local police units were ordered to do the guarding and escorting tasks. One can allow that on 20 August perhaps one of the battalion's companies was posted to guard the ghetto. The Soviet case against the nine members of the 18th Battalion, however, was not made against them as guards, but as the actual killers who liquidated the whole ghetto, performing the role of guards, escorts, and killers.

Second, an eyewitness, 18th Battalion Corporal K. Zirnis, has left his recollections. In many ways Zirnis corroborated the official battalion records, but also included a few remarks about what he did and saw. On the top of the third of his handwritten pages he wrote: "We were transferred to Slonim, where we had to stand guard, because the SD men were liquidating the ghetto."<sup>16</sup> Zirnis also adds that he witnessed the atrocities of the SD men:

Some ghetto inmates had the fortune of escaping from the ghetto; they and two other women were later caught. The man, for the purpose of some laughs, was beaten with a whip, and was forced to copulate with the two women. The man said that he was too old for it, but, being beaten, he finally had to do it.

Zirnis' brief observation confirms the speculation that it was not likely that the SD would have ordered a Latvian *Schutzmannschaft* to kill the Jews. The third piece of evidence comes from Shalom Cholawski's entry "Slonim," in the *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, in which he cites other sources that on 20 August 1941, 400 Jews were killed in the city.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Among Latvian SD units that operated in the region was one led by Lt. Kārlis Aleksandrs Ozols. A vita of Ozols can be found in the Berlin Document Center.

<sup>15</sup> LVA, KGB Trial Archive, Kriminālieta 45134 in the matter of Točs. A more specific testimony of Latvian SD members killing Jews in Slonim comes from Ansis Kīselis testimony in the matter of Līcis et al., KGB Archive, Kriminālieta 2782. He testified that he was in Slonim from 11 to 12 July 1942, when, under the leadership of a German officer named Strau, thousands of Jews were killed.

<sup>16</sup> LCK files, Box 1, K. Zirnis, reminiscences written on 14 August 1945. Zirnis wrote these notes while in a British POW camp, when he had no obvious reason to lie or dissimulate.

<sup>17</sup> Shalom Cholawski, "Slonim," *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, ed. Israel Gutman, 1363. Cholawski's information is based on vol. 2, p. 23. Kaplinski says that the August massacre was perpetrated by Germans. He marks no Latvian presence on 20 August, although they are mentioned in the earlier massacres.

The Soviet court did not even attempt to establish the presence of the SD at the massacre and in the ghetto. The oral evidence collected by the Soviet prosecutors was so contradictory that a completely different conclusion could have been reached. There was not even a consensus about the killing procedure for which the men were condemned. Some testified that the victims were positioned at the edge of the pit and then killed by rifle shots. Others testified that the victims were driven inside the pit and that killers with automatics stood on the edge of it.

Still others maintained that the murder occurred in Jeckeln's sardine-packing style. If the killing occurred in the manner the trial accounts described, it was the most disorganized massacre on record. The Soviet court failed to mediate between conflicting testimonies, as is the practice in Western courts, but drew their conclusions from two or three individuals who appear to have been prepared witnesses.

The evidence is similarly confused when it comes to the question of whether the 18th Battalion men volunteered for the action. The Soviet prosecutors asserted that the Latvians had volunteered for the action, but the evidence for this was contradictory, denied by everyone except the seemingly prepared witnesses.<sup>18</sup> The trial records are also vague as to how many men of the battalion participated – the whole battalion or only one or two companies. Battalion Order Number 97 indicates that on 21 August the 1st and 2nd companies fought a fierce battle at Ostrovo village, near Slonim, where several members of the battalion were killed and wounded. This order is critical in determining the battalion's presence in Slonim, because it limits the time during which at least those elements of the battalion could have participated in the massacre and also limits the number of men who could have been part of it, even as guards.<sup>19</sup>

In conclusion, we can note that there is no independent source (Russian, German, Jewish, or Latvian) that confirms the KGB trial's version of the massacre. There is, however, living proof that the 18th Battalion brought out a Jewish boy that they had found in the Belorussia forest. The boy became the



**Uldis Kurzemnieks, a Jewish foundling from a Belorussia forest, became the 18th Battalion's mascot.**

<sup>18</sup> According to the prosecutors, the Latvians volunteered on the night before the action, but, with the exception of the seemingly prepared witnesses, nobody confirmed this assertion. Some testified that the volunteering took place at the edge of the pit about an hour before the action began.

<sup>19</sup> After the appearance of the pamphlet, German authorities picked up the battalion's liaison officer Egon Erzum, but finding no crime, did not prosecute him.

battalion's mascot and later when the unit was transferred to the Latvian Legion he was a mascot of a Legion regiment until he was brought to Rīga and was adopted by a Latvian family. The regiment, not knowing the boy's name, called him Uldis Kurzemnieks, from the name of the regiment. The boy was found prior to Slonim and if there the alleged massacre did occur, Kurzemnieks may be able to enlighten an inquiring historian, for he is still alive and lives in Australia.<sup>20</sup>

## The Alleged Crime of the 21st Battalion – Murder in Liepāja<sup>21</sup>

The trial of the 18th Battalion lacked confirming evidence, but the trial of the 21st Battalion was worse. There is a surfeit of sources that directly contradict the evidence and the conclusions of the trial of the 21st Battalion. The major counterweight that shows up the 21st Battalion trial's falsity is the 1972 trial of Grauel et al. in Hannover, Germany.

In 1972, the Soviets, perhaps spurred by the Hannover trial, began to plan a major mass war-crimes case of the members of the 21st Battalion. When it came to fruition in 1974/75, the trial was broken up into six parts in which twenty-four men were tried, of whom seven were sentenced to death.<sup>22</sup> The trial purported to unmask the murder of Liepāja Jews in 1941, but from various perspectives we can assert they accomplished the opposite – the case was a total fabrication and had more to do with trials of the 1930s organized by Andrei Vyshinsky than with the tragic events in Liepāja. The Soviets dealt with one overarching truth: the Jews of Liepāja were killed in 1941. Almost every other detail brought out in the trial is false or at least cannot be validated. Two sources attest to the “show trial” status of the 21st Battalion case: the records of the Grauel et al. case in Hannover, Germany and the exhaustive analysis that Latvian prosecutor Astra Leičenko made of the trial records in 1999.

<sup>20</sup> Kurzemnieks' son Mark Kurzem is writing a book about his father. A summary of his book “My father was a child mascot for the SS,” appeared in *The Observer Review*, 29 February 2004. The article contains some basic factual errors, which I hope he will correct in his book.

<sup>21</sup> Also see Edward Anders and Juris Dubrovskis, *Jews of Liepāja, Latvia, 1941–45: A Memorial Book* (Burlingame, CA., 2001).

<sup>22</sup> Pāvelkops, Rūdolfs (1903) death; Krikmanis, Gunārs (1922) death. Kūla, Alberts (1917) death; Skuja, Miķelis (1916) death; Bārs, Pēteris (1909) death; Vecvagars, Frīcis (1917) 15 years; Pūce, Konstantīns (1922) 15 years; Bibis, Kārlis (1920) 15 years; Kļava, Frīcis (1915) 15 years; Vecvagars, Nikolajs (1910) 15 years; Andersons, Kristaps (1913) 15 years; Smilkte, Jēkabs (1909) 15 years; Endols, Kārlis (1909) 15 years; Ķepars, Alfrēds (1918) 15 years; Dinters, Kārlis (1904) death; Koppi, Teodors (1919) death; Pāvelsons, Jānis (1911) 15 years; Štibelis, Juris (1920) 15 years; Poga, Alfrēds (1921) 15 years; Tīda, Jānis (1921) 15 years; Smaģis, Miķelis (1912) 15 years; Caune, Ruperts (1919) 15 years. Klammers, Aleksandrs (1911) death; Ritiņš, Juris (1919) 15 years.

## The Grauel Case: Hannover, Germany

If the Soviets were right in their story and conclusions, then those of the Grauel et al. case that the German Landesgericht of Hannover prosecuted in 1972 were wrong, and we should start a movement to rehabilitate the German SD men who were sentenced. An objective investigator is forced to choose between the standard of justice as delivered by a democratic judiciary in Germany and that of the Soviets, with their decades-long history of show trials. Although the two trials – the German one of 1972 and the Soviet one of 1974 – examined the same event, there was practically no overlap between them: the witnesses, the documents, the indictments, and the conclusions were like oil and water. Since the Hannover case came before the Soviet one, the Soviets should have given some notice to it. In a democratic system, the German depositions and evidence would have been at least debated, and allowed by the defense to use as exculpatory evidence. On these grounds alone Western jurists would annul the Soviet case.



**The above is at once a true and a misleading photograph. It shows a group of armed Latvians guarding a group of Jewish women and children about to be killed in Šķēde dunes near Liepāja in December 1941. While photographs prove that Latvians had a role to play in the Holocaust, they were cropped to misinform the world that the Holocaust in Latvia was Germanless. The Šķēde pictures are part and parcel of the Nazi public relations line that has been documented in this study. Note that the Šķēde pictures, although they served the Nazi line, also suited the Soviet prosecutors who organized the show trial of the 21st Battalion in 1974. The Šķēde photos, as good as they are, show none of the German or Latvian SD killing teams that we know were there.**

## Analysis by Astra Leičenko<sup>23</sup>

A thorough examination of the Soviet case was made in 1999 by Latvia's prosecutor, Astra Leičenko, who in many details and particulars confirmed that the case was a "show trial." Whether or not any of the twenty-four men ever had

<sup>23</sup> Leičenko's analysis can be found attached to the archival cases found in the LVA. For example, see cases Nr. 45233, 6.sēj. l. lpp. 57–70. and Nr. 45225, 10. sēj. l. lpp. 179–190.

anything to do with the killing of the Jews we will never know, because even if they did, their conviction was made on patched-together evidence and falsified testimony. It is true that most of the accused in the summer of 1941 served in the Liepāja self-defense and in 1942 had joined the 21st Battalion, but no objective evidence was presented that they had killed Jews in Liepāja. The evidence in the Grauel trial tells us that the local self-defense/police men did not have an opportunity during the summer and autumn to kill Jews, but there is evidence that at least some did perform arresting, guarding, and escorting functions. Whether anyone of the accused did these things, we do not know. The killing in Liepāja was carried out by German SD teams, and for the largest actions the Arājs unit was called out from Rīga. In September 1941 the Liepāja SD under its auspices established a Latvian SD guard squad that did carry out killings, but this squad was separate from the Liepāja self-defense and precinct police. The Germans believed in subordination and specialization.

The Soviet case, however, was not about the activities of the self-defense force. Most of the defendants were returnees from Siberia, and after the war they already had been punished, in part for membership in the self-defense. The 1974 trial was about membership and activities in the 21st Battalion, and therein lies the rub. The Soviet problem was that the time frame of the 21st Battalion did not mesh with the killing schedule of the Jews in Liepāja. By 17 December 1941, the killings in Liepāja were finished; the first time a document mentioned the intended establishment of the 21st Battalion was December 13, two days before the massacre. Even if today's defenders of the Soviet trials may think that a Police Battalion could have been set up in two days, the Soviet organizers of the trial in writing their scenario did not rely on a reed so frail.

The Soviets opted to go for the *big lie* and cut the script out of whole cloth. The defendants were accused of three major massacres: in September, December, and February. Thus they had to move the beginning of the 21st Battalion to September 1941<sup>24</sup> and the major Liepāja massacres from the middle of December to the end of September.<sup>25</sup> Twenty-four of the accused were coerced to testify that they volunteered to join the 21st Battalion in September of 1941. They could not have done so – the battalion did not yet exist. Prosecutor Leičenko also found direct falsification of depositions: the Soviet prosecutors used, verbatim, identical depositions that had

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<sup>24</sup> The *Schutzmannschaft-Abteilung* was transferred to the 21st Battalion. Only at the beginning of 1942, we find that the *Schutzmannschaft-Abteilung* is designated as the 21st Battalion. The real organization of the 21st Battalion began in February 1942.

<sup>25</sup> The Soviets in fact posited three major Liepāja massacres: in September and December of 1941 and February of 1942, as if the same people could be killed more than once. It is true that during the month of September Liepāja Jews were killed, but these killings corresponded neither in date nor in number to the information in the trial. Prosecutor Leišenko found no Liepāja massacre in of the scale described in the indictments in February 1942.

purportedly been given by different defendants and recorded at different times with different investigators.<sup>26</sup> Even Vyshinsky did not resort to that level of fraud. The February massacre was a complete Soviet fiction, and Leičenko found no traces of it in Liepāja.

In other words, in the 1999 review of the case the prosecutor found that in September 1941 there was neither a 21st Battalion nor a major massacre. In February 1942 the organization of the 21st Battalion was going on, but there was no massacre as described in the Soviet trial script. There was a major massacre from 15

to 17 December 1941, but the 21st Battalion at that time had only a paper existence. According to the Grauel case, the killing teams were a German SD group, Arājs men, and the Liepāja Latvian SD squad. According to Soviet testimonies, unsubstantiated by the Hannover prosecutors, there was also a Latvian *Schutzmannschaft* team of killers, as if consisting of volunteers. The identity of these *Schutzmannschaft* men at this point in our knowledge cannot be determined. Most likely the *Schutzmannschaft* group, if there was one, was put together from the men of the precinct police. In assessing this matter, one needs to consider expertise in killing procedures. The Germans would not have wanted to entrust the killings to novices.

## The Warsaw Ghetto Guards<sup>27</sup>

Just as one may wonder why the Soviets picked on battalions whose complicity in the killing of the Jews they could not prove by honest means, one may also



Although none of the Šķēde pictures show us the killing teams at work, from the photo above we may infer how the killing was done. The victims were killed in approximately ten-person groups who were forced to march out on the edge of the pit and position themselves with their backs to the pit. The killing team stood at about fifteen paces on the opposite bank of the ditch. The impact of the shots and gravity were supposed to propel the victims into the pit. Yet, as the picture shows the victims more often than not collapsed on the edge of the ditch, necessitating a kicker (at work in distance).

<sup>26</sup> For a comparison see LVVA case Nr. 45233, 6.vol. pp 57–70. and case Nr. 45225, Vol. 10. pp. 179–190.

<sup>27</sup> The first objective study of this topic is by Eriks Jēkabsons and Uldis Neiburgs, “Latviešu policijas bataljoni Varšavā” [Latvian Police Battalions In Warsaw], *Lauku Avīze*, 18 January 2002. A fuller version of the article is by Eriks Jēkabsons, Uldis Neiburgs and Kaspars Zellis, “Latviešu karavīri Vācijas militārajā dienestā Polijā 1942.–1945.gadā” [Latvian Soldiers in German Military Service in Poland 1942–1945]. *Okupācijas režīmi Latvijā 1940.–1956. gadā / Occupation Regimes in Latvia in 1940–1956*, LVKR 7 (Rīga, 2002) 179–218.

ask why they left alone those, which during the vagaries of war had come within the proximity of war crimes. Whether they committed them is a matter beyond our capacity to resolve in this study. However, it is a matter of record that during August and September of 1942 the 22nd (556-man strong) and 272nd (403-man strong) battalions were dispatched to Warsaw. The battalions arrived in Warsaw on 31 July 1942 and were transferred out by mid-October. This was a pivotal time in the history of the Warsaw Ghetto, because within this period its inhabitants began to be transported to the Treblinka death camp, which had begun its operations. Were the battalions transferred to Warsaw to facilitate this transportation? That could have been the German motive. The daily operating records of these battalions are available to us, and from them we can determine that their basic assignment was to guard the ghetto fence. These Latvians were neither volunteers nor SS, although occasionally they are so designated. If we substituted "shanghaied" for "volunteer," it could be closer to the truth because their destination was kept a secret until they arrived in Warsaw. The battalions with full equipment, horses, carts, and field kitchen, went by train from Riga to Warsaw.<sup>28</sup> The 22nd Battalion was one of the best trained of the *Schutzmannschaften* battalions, but the 272nd was thrown together thirty days before departure Warsaw, poorly prepared, poorly armed, and poorly supplied. Both battalions wore Latvian army uniforms and carried Soviet-made weapons. Later the 272nd Battalion received nondescript black overcoats.

Since the writing of my book *The Holocaust in Latvia*, we have learned, that at least one company of the 22nd Battalion, in addition to guard duties, also doubled as escorts of transports from Warsaw to Treblinka. We learned of this function from a report that Lieutenant Augusts Viksne wrote on 27 September 1942 about a breakout of Jewish prisoners that Viksne had witnessed on 23 September en route from Warsaw to Sokolov, the last depot before Treblinka. Viksne and the Latvian guards were riding in the last car of the transport, when at 9:30 am they observed Jewish prisoners jumping out of the wagons. They opened fire at the escapees, but the train could not be stopped due to its length. It is not known whether anyone was hit. At the next stop it was found that the prisoners had sawn holes in their wagons to escape. A ricocheting bullet, however, hit Viksne's hands, and it was his incapacitation that occasioned the report. More information about the Latvians in Warsaw can be found in the KGB trial archive in Riga.

For reasons of their own the Soviets chose to let this information slumber in the files in the archive. Apparently they felt safer in fabricating scenarios of crimes that had no connection with reality.

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<sup>28</sup> The 272nd Battalion was commanded by Lt. Col. Juris Taube and the 22nd by Lt. Col. Kārlis Gerbers. The German overseer of both battalions in Warsaw was Capt. Prūgel.

## Vocabulary

**Show trials.** Lacking legitimacy and wanting to commence a new historical epoch, the Bolsheviks strove to establish a new system of justice that would not need to rely on bourgeois juridical norms and practices. One aspect of the “revolutionary” jurisprudence was to deemphasize, if not ignore, “objective evidence.” The social origin of the accused and the witnesses counted far more than forensic evidence. In judging class enemies and counterrevolutionaries, especially during the Civil War, “field justice” replaced the courtroom. A premium began to be placed on confessions, suspicions, and self-incrimination. Presumption of guilt became a cornerstone of Soviet justice that lasted until the end of the system. A trial was needed to confirm the guilt, not to ascertain it. Under Stalin, surface changes were introduced. Trials were returned to the courtroom, but, if possible, they were emptied of evidentiary substance. Elements of “show trials” were part of Soviet justice from the beginning, but they reached their maturity during Stalin’s time in the 1930s. After the war the central All-Union “show trials” were not revived, but – with klieg lights, scripted confessions, prosecutorial grandstanding, applause, and all of the Vyshinskyan paraphernalia – they continued to be staged in the provinces and republics. In Latvia the “show trials” arrived as mocked up war-crimes trials during Khrushchev’s and Brezhnev’s rule. In Latvia there were at least three fraudulent Holocaust trials: the 18th Battalion one in 1961, the Rēzekne trial in which three émigrés, Maikovskis, Puntulis, and Eichelis, were tried in absentia in 1965; and that of the 21st Battalion in 1974–75. The Latvian trials in all particulars were replicas of Vyshinsky’s prototypes. American journalist Stephen Nordlinger, writing for the *Baltimore Sun*, was present at the Rēzekne trial in 1965. He wrote:

Much of the trial was conducted in the glare of klieg lights provided for television, and movies. Thirty places were reserved in the auditorium for the Soviet and foreign press. The stage setting and the smooth flow of the action made the proceedings appear like a Broadway melodrama. It was difficult to grasp that a court trial was unfolding with capital punishment a possible result for the three defendants present.<sup>29</sup>

If any of the accused actually had committed war crimes, we will never know, because the evidence at the trial was befuddled for eternity.

**Aizsargi.** The *aizsargi* (members of the Home Guard organization Aizsargi) were neither quintessential fascists, as Soviets proclaimed them, nor *Rechtsextremisten*, as “progressive” Germans may call them. Their notoriety as extremists and killers of Jews, although, as a collective tag without merit, is explainable by the convergence of two strands of opinion. The Soviets, needing to find an ideological punching bag, picked out the *aizsargi* as their “class enemy.” The second line of argument is more sinister and unfortunate and it relates to the obscurity of the Holocaust events in Latvia that prevailed for the duration of the Soviet occupation. Searching for an explanation for the killing of the Jews in Latvia and finding no obvious candidates as their killers, a number of agencies had a stake in finding an indigenous Latvian group that would explain the killings. The German public relations offices needed to portray the Holocaust as Germanless and spread the news that the killers were Latvian farmers; the Soviet agitprop, for their own obstreperous reason, picked on their “class enemy” as the murderous avant-garde. In truth the *aizsargi* had only a peripheral connection with the

<sup>29</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, 12 October 1965. Full transcript of the article is in the Annex.

killing of the Jews, and no accusation about the *aizsargi* could be generalized to all them or even the majority of them. In July 1941, having been outlawed by the Soviets, no organization by the name existed. During the Soviet occupation the organization was heavily victimized by the Soviets, and on 14 June 1941 most of its central and local leadership was deported to Siberia.

The Aizsargi (Home Guard) organization was founded during the post-First World War turbulence in 1919 to fight brigandage in the countryside. It was fashioned after Finnish and Swiss models. Although originally there was no ideological reason for organizing the Aizsargi, it is also true that in time the membership, and certainly the leadership, descended in the hands of the better-off farmers. Yet, to call them ideological fanatics would be missing the mark. As most farmers of the world, also Latvian ones, were conformists and political moderates who had a stake in business as usual. They worried about crops, manure, and harvest. It is also true that Kārlis Ulmanis was able to befriend the central leadership of the Aizsargi and during the coup in 1934 used them as a protective stratum. It is, however, also to be noted that the Ulmanis coup was targeted against two parties, the Social Democrats and the fascists, who in early 1930 in the guise of Pērkonkrusts (Thundercross) were making waves. The tragedy of the *aizsargi* was that upon the Nazis' entrance in Latvia, many of them answered the German call to join the so-called self-defense teams. How many of those who joined the units did so voluntarily, we will never know. We can, however, be safe in saying that most of them joined the self-defense as a measure of devotion to their country to come to its aid at a difficult crossroads. In 1941 most of the *aizsargi* were in their late thirties and forties, men beyond the hot-headed age. Although the killing of Jews was sometimes thrust upon them, which is not to say that some Latvians did not join the killing gangs with zest, Latvians like Viktors Arājs did not need to belong to the Aizsargi organization to join the killing units. In any case, membership in the self-defense units were not an *aizsargi* monopoly.

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## Chapter 4

# THE LATVIAN LEGION: “SS-Freiwilligen” OR “Waffen-Grenadier Division der SS”

*But by 1944–45 great losses meant that standards for the Waffen SS had relaxed substantially. In recruitment of foreign volunteers, efforts to keep a strictly Nordic membership were pretty much abandoned, with more latitude given to recruiting in Eastern Europe.*  
– Cheri Pugh

The Latvian “SS-Volunteer-Legion” was neither “SS,” “volunteer,” a “Legion” – nor for that matter “Latvian.” The higher ranks, regimental commanders and above, were Germans who made all important decisions, from writing the induction notices and the dress code to battle tactics. The Legion was not a consolidated fighting force; its units came into being gradually and were scattered in numerous locations on the northern front and in East Prussia. It started with two regiments that grew into two divisions, the 15th and the 19th. Some units were fighting, some training, others digging trenches. The Legion’s status was further diluted by attempts to include within its administrative purview other uniformed Latvians: the Police, Construction, and Frontier Battalions that did not carry the “SS” insignia. There was a Latvian concept of the Legion, and it was not the same as the German one. For Latvians, the core of the Legion consisted of the men of the 15th and the 19th Divisions (approximately 52,000 men). The Germans included everybody who wore a uniform, about 110,000 men.<sup>1</sup> At the end of the Second World War, about 25,400 Latvian soldiers found themselves in the West. These men, prisoners of war in the Western zones, founded the organization Daugavas Vanagi, which in part is the subject of this book.

By early 1943, the German manpower problem had gone from bad to worse: more serious military deficiencies began to show up. After Moscow they went for the police battalions, and after their defeat at Stalingrad the Germans were ready to upgrade the “native” fighting forces. There is no mystery why the Germans in early 1943 wanted to organize the Latvian Legion. The novelty in this enterprise was to dress the “natives” in German uniforms, train them, and give them

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<sup>1</sup> On the numbers of Latvians in German service see Kārlis Kangeris, “Nacionālsociālistiskās Vācijas militārajos formējumos ieskaitītie Latvijas iedzīvotāji: skaita problēma,” *Latvijas Kara muzeja gada grāmata* (Rīga, 2000). Also Piezīmes pie Jautājumu kompleksa “Latviešu leģions” in Andrievs Ezerģails, ed., *Latviešu Leģions. Varoņi, nacisti, vai upurī?* (Rīga, 1998) 118.

German weapons. Yet even at this hour the Germans were not willing to consider the "natives" their equals: they pinned the "SS" insignia on them, but granted them only apparent, not real parity.<sup>2</sup>

The Latvians had no choice in the matter. From the beginning it was clear to the Germans that conscription would be needed, because volunteers in the numbers called for would clearly not be forthcoming.<sup>3</sup> The Germans, however, felt that to organize the Legion they needed the appearance of some, ever so slight and indirect, "Latvian" consent. The forum from which they sought the assent was the so-called Latvian Land Self-Administration, whose members were hand-picked by the Germans. As it turned out even these Latvian collaborationists resisted the formation of an armed Latvian force, citing international law. Finding no support there, the Germans ordered the mobilization anyway, and just told the Latvian Self-Administration to carry out the project. Faced with the inevitable, the Latvian Self-Administration, especially the General Director, Oskars Dankers, in the end joined the effort. All conscription stations in Latvia were set up and run by Germans. Altogether, about one third of those liable to conscription, avoided the draft by desertion, or hiding.<sup>4</sup>

Although the Latvians were not happy about the Legion, they had one sliver of hope in their thinking: that the Legion might turn into a good thing. The Latvian leaders, whoever and wherever they might have been, at home and abroad, in prison or free, fooled themselves by a false historical analogy. Just as they thought that the Latvian Riflemen (*Strēlnieki*) in World War I had led to an independent

<sup>2</sup> The best sources about the Legion are: an eleven volume work *Latviešu karavīrs otra pasaules kara laikā* (1970–1980), Silgailis, *Latviešu leģions* (1962). Usable are also the books by Roger James Bender, *Uniforms, Organization, and History of the Waffen-SS*, vols. 4 and 5.

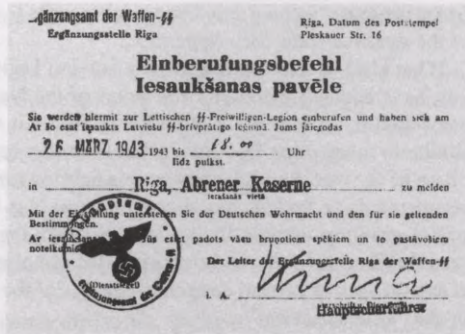
<sup>3</sup> Dave Cheney of Crossing The Wire Museum posted this commentary about Himmler's "SS" Legions on the Internet: "Himmler broadened the scope of SS recruitment by creating so-called 'Germanic Divisions' or legions within the Waffen-SS to help stem the attrition from the battlefield and from the ever increasing size of the SS industry that demanded more and more participants. These recruits for the Waffen-SS came, for the most part, from the occupied lands and sympathetic, parallel organizations. This hodge-podge of nationalities consisted of Bosnian Moslems, Turkish, Ukrainians, Russian Cosacks, etc. Each unit was outfitted in SS looking uniforms but usually wearing distinctive insignia and headgear. The Moslems, for example, wore a red or green fez with an SS death's head insignia on the front. Wearing of the SS runes was generally not allowed for non-Germanic SS members. Himmler did not have good luck with most of these strange SS units, some being difficult to nearly impossible to train to SS standards and some even mutinying. Ultimately, the fate of these units ended with them being disbanded or cannon fodder. At the end of the war surviving Russian Waffen-SS volunteers were sent back to Stalin and he, reportedly, had all of them executed." See also Inesis Feldmanis, "Waffen-SS Units of Latvians and Other Non-Germanic Peoples In World War II: Methods of Formation, Ideology and Goals," *The Hidden and Forbidden History of Latvia under Soviet and Nazi Occupations 1940–1991*, LVKR 14 (Riga, 2005) 122–131.

<sup>4</sup> Haralds Biezais, "Latviešu Leģions un dezertieri" [The Latvian Legion and Deserters], *Kara Invalīds* 31 (1986).

Latvia, so they also thought the Legion might have the same historical consequences. The Germans knew about this analogy and played on it. They granted the Latvians small “victories” – the Latvian anthem played in some secluded courtyard, a flag displayed where nobody could see it, or Latvian insignia on the sleeve, but on the big issues the Germans held firm – no autonomy or national army for the “natives.” From the very beginning of the German occupation there were some Latvians who offered the Germans a 100,000-man

force if they would grant them autonomy, sometimes presented as “Slovakia status.” The 100,000-man concept was still in play in 1943, and by hook and by crook the Germans got the 100,000 men without making any promises of Latvian autonomy, Slovakia status, or a Latvian force under a Latvian command. It was remarkable that this historical analogy persisted until the end in 1945, when the 19th Division was battling in the Kurzeme encirclement. As the liberation of Latvia started from the Venta in 1919, so, it was hoped, it would in 1945 too. The movement of General Kurelis was also animated by this logic and, as a result, thousands of Latvian fighting men went into the forests in 1945, where they fought the Soviets as “National partisans” until about 1956.<sup>5</sup>

It is clear that the Germans attached the word “volunteer” to the Legion to avoid appearing to break international law, but it is not altogether clear why they tagged it “SS.” In fact, the Germans were not so eager to give the SS name to this unit, comprised of *Untermenschen*. In the beginning the Germans danced around the issue, not wanting to grant the elitist “SS” insignia to Latvians. Other alternatives were attempted. Some of the early Legion’s units were given the Latvian



This March 1943 draft notice illustrates the coercive nature of the German occupation. The notice specifies that the recipient herewith is drafted into the Latvian SS-Volunteer-Legion and the draftee is subject to the standing rules of the German Armed Forces. The notice was issued by the Riga Waffen-SS Replacements Administrator and signed by its commanding officer.

<sup>5</sup> Heinrihs Strods, *Latvijas nacionālo partizānu karš. 1944–1956*. [The War of the Latvian National Partisans, 1944–1956], 3 vols. (Rīga, 1996–2003).

Army insignia: "a rising sun." Some other units were marked by a Latvian version of the swastika rune. (See Appendix.)

What kind of a formation was the Latvian Legion? Some people, even historians, have equated them with the worst of the Nazi torturers. Some others have associated them with the Waffen-SS. In reality it was neither – it was *sui generis*, similar to many other SS-Legions that Himmler ordered organized during the last phase of the war. Basically they were a fighting unit – that either trained for war, recuperated, or fought. No war-crimes case has been made against the legionnaires within or without the Soviet Union.<sup>6</sup> In the beginning, the Soviets considered the "Legion" a Nazi crime and the legionnaires victims.<sup>7</sup> Only when the Soviet assault against Latvian emigrants began, did the Soviets start to present them as brutal "killers of Jews."

The Germans called it an "SS" Legion, but they did not mean it. Hitler, in announcing the formation of the Legion, wrote; "Ich befehle die Aufstellung einer Lettischen SS-Freiwilligen-Legion." (Note the use of the words and hyphens.<sup>8</sup>) But what the Nazis said openly they circumscribed privately. The Nazis did not tell the world that no person of non-German blood could be a Reich citizen, which was a *sine qua non* for being an "SS" man. Although the Germans designated the Legion as *SS-Freiwilligen* no Latvian officer other than Rūdolfs Bangerskis received an "SS" rank. Latvian officers, for example, were not designated as "SS-Scharführer" but rather as *Leg.-* (or later *Waff.-Gren.*) *Scharführer*. There were differences between the "SS" and the "SS-Freiwilligen" in organization and practice. For example, in the Latvian Legion there were chaplains, pastors and priests, a practice that did not exist in the, *gottesgläubigen*, German "SS." The German "SS" social clubs, even "houses of pleasure," were off limits for the Latvian *SS-Freiwilligen*. For internal use the Nazis undercut the *SS-Freiwilligen* in yet a more basic semantic way. For example, the Latvian formations in German documents could be referred to in two different ways. What the Latvians designated as the Latvian SS-Volunteer 19th Division, the Germans would refer to as *19. Waffen-Grenadierdivision der SS* in their organizational charts. Meaning that the Division was not "SS" but belonging (in the sense of ownership) to the "SS."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> For the Legion and Nuremberg justice see Ivars Bērziņš, "Leģionāru legalizācija" [Legalization of the Legonnaires], *Kara Invalīds* 23 (1978): 27–32. The Soviets punished Latvian men en masse, but these punishments were not explicitly for their service in the Legion.

<sup>7</sup> See USSR Security Commissar Merkulo's 25 July 1943 memorandum to Kalnbērziņš in. my *Latviešu Leģions: Varoņi, nacisti vai upuri?* (Riga, 1998) 107.

<sup>8</sup> The hyphenated structure of the two words may denote that the Legion was not "SS," but a unit belonging to the "SS."

<sup>9</sup> This analysis has been provided by Aleksandrs Plensners, Bangerskis' staff officer, in *Latviešu karavīrs otra pasaules kara laikā*, vol. 3: 136. Also see John Keegan, *Waffen-SS: The Asphalt Soldiers* (New York, 1970) on non-Germans in the SS. For specifics on the Latvian Legion, see Mirdza Kate Baltais, *The Latvian Legion: Selected Documents* (Toronto, 1999)

In effect, the world in judgments about the *SS-Freiwilligen* has been blinded by Nazi terminology.<sup>10</sup>

The only Latvian above the rank of colonel who served in the Legion was General (*SS-Obergruppenführer*) Rūdōlfs Bangerskis, a Russo-Japanese War veteran who was called the "Inspector General" of the Legion. He had no say about the tactics, strategy, location, or composition of the Legion. He had no power to include or exclude anybody. Headquartered in Rīga, Bangerskis job was administrative and symbolic, to make the Legion palatable to the Latvian public. Yet he on occasion turned out to be more than just a puppet. Once Bangerskis rebuked the Germans when without consulting with him they sent out an induction notice in his name.

The "Legion" came into existence during the spring of 1943 at Krasnoye-Selo. The Germans ordered the conversion of the 16th, 19th, and 21st Police Battalions, already positioned at the Leningrad front, into the 1st SS-Voluntary Latvian Regiment. The decision came as a fiat and nobody, neither the commanders nor the men, involved were polled on this matter. The unit was ready by the end of April 1943 and had about 1500 men in its ranks.

Soon thereafter, in the same location, the 2nd Latvian SS-Volunteer Regiment, consisting of the 18th, 24th, and 26th Police battalions, was organized. The reorganization was completed by 1 July 1943. Already starting in April various units of the 2nd Regiment were transferred to the Volkhov front, on the left bank of the Volkhov river. Out of the 1st Regiment evolved the 15th Latvian SS-Volunteer Division, which the Germans for a period of time called a Legion. The 2nd Regiment was reorganized into the 19th Division in early 1944. To fill the two divisions the Germans carried out four mobilization drives.

The first draft was announced in March 1943, when men born in the years 1919 to 1924 were called up. The German justification for the first draft was Rosenberg's 1941 Labor Law, which mandated severe penalties for avoiding labor duties in occupied territories. The Hague Protocols forbade induction of occupied people into military service, but allowed conscription for labor service. The Nazis used conscription for labor as a threat to scare people into "volunteering." The second campaign was started in October 1943, when men born from 1919 to 1925 were rechecked and called up. The third campaign began in December 1943, when the years 1917 to 1918 were called up and the years 1922 to 1924 were

<sup>10</sup> The Düsseldorf judiciary after the war also decided that a Latvian could not be an SS man. The president of the court informed Col. R. Kociņš that a real SS man could be only be a German one with Aryan origins; Germanic people such as Flemish, Dutch, Danes, Norwegians and Swedes were classified as lower; they could be "SS-Freiwillige." Eastern peoples such as Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, or Ukrainians could not receive an "SS" designation. See Rūdōlfs Kociņš' introduction to *Latviešu karavīrs otra pasaules kara laikā*, vol. 5: 8.



**The wounds of a legionnaire are treated in a field hospital at the Volkhov front.** Photo Jānis Tālavš, Latvijas Fotogrāfijas muzejs.

rechecked. The fourth campaign began in February 1944, when the years 1906 to 1916 were called up. In July 1944, a total mobilization was announced: all eligible years and exemptions were rechecked, and years from 1925 to 1926 were called up. Those born in 1927 to 1928 were drafted into air-defense forces. In other words, by 1944 the Germans had called up all men aged 16 to 38.

The draftees as a rule had to sign a document that they have joined the Legion voluntarily. On 15 July 1943, fifty draftees refused to sign the agreement. They were held overnight to think it over. By next morning all but ten agreed to sign. The ten refusers were taken to Salaspils Concentration Camp where they had to spend six months. They were released with the proviso that they will join the Legion.<sup>11</sup>

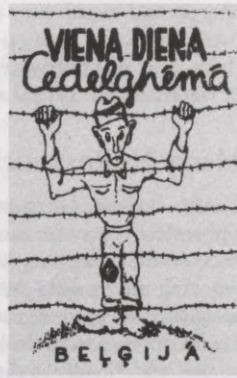
In addition, women were also conscripted: starting in 1942 young women were forced into the *Reichsarbeitsdienst*, which meant service in Germany.

The activities of the Latvian SS-Volunteer Legion are an open book: we know where they served, battle for battle, where they were furloughed, and where they were when the war ended.

The Legion's first site of service in April 1943 was the Volkhov swamp that guarded the approaches to Leningrad. During 1943 and early 1944, units of the Legion were positioned in a variety of locations stretching from Novgorod southward approximately along the frontier of Latvia. In general, having been organized during the second half of the war, the Legion saw only defensive and evasive action. If the Latvian Legion had any military accomplishment, it was, at times, an adroit coverage for retreating German forces. By the middle of 1944, the two Latvian divisions had retreated within the frontiers of Latvia. During the 1944 battles, the 15th Division had taken severe materiel and manpower losses, and thus was taken out of battle lines to recuperate and to be reconstituted. Finding no proper training ground in Latvia, it was transported to East Prussia in August 1944. During August and September, the 19th Division battled in Vidzeme and retreated to Kurzeme. Rīga fell on 13 October 1944. Until the end of the war on 8 May 1945, the division participated in the defense of the Kurzeme encirclement.

<sup>11</sup> Testimony by V. Miltiņš, *Latviešu karavīrs otra pasaules kara laikā*, vol. 3: 43.

During the spring of 1945, the 15th Division was involved in battles, retreats, and flights from the Red Army in northeastern Germany. During the last month of the war, the tactic of the 15th Division's leadership was to evade the Russians and surrender to the Allied forces: Canadians, British, and Americans. Although some Latvians were captured by the Soviets (which guaranteed them at best exile in Siberia), the majority accomplished their mission. They were taken prisoner by the Western Allies and ended up in a variety of POW camps. Altogether about 25,400 Latvian prisoners of war were in the hands of either the United States or Great Britain. About 12,000 of them were imprisoned at Zedelghem in Belgium.<sup>12</sup> It was this camp that gave birth to the Daugavas Vanagi organization.



Did the Latvian Legionnaires commit war crimes? If they did the world does not know it, or have had a problem documenting it, for until now no member of the Legion has been tried for atrocities committed within the context of the Legion. Even if they had

wanted to kill Jews they could not have done so, because the Legion came into being two years after the Jews of Latvia were already killed. Also, their area of action was in Northern Russia where, except for the city of Leningrad, which the Germans never managed to occupy, no Jews resided. It is true that the Soviets accused the 18th and the 21st Battalions, which in 1943 became part of the Legion, of war-crimes (see Chapter 3). To "prove" it they contrived



While some Legion veterans were working for the Americans and parading in Nuremberg (see Chapter 8), the great majority of them were biding their time in POW camps in Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, and Egypt.

<sup>12</sup> For Latvian POW's under Allied control see Kārlis Kangeris, "Pārskats par latviešu karavīru gūstu Rietumos," *Arhīvs XXV* (Melbourne, 1985) 145.

charges and staged show trials. As analyzed above, there is much evidence to disprove the Soviet accusations, and no one so far has come forth to substantiate them. It is also noteworthy that no Nazi hunter in the West has picked up the Soviet trials and charged any former member of the two battalions for war crimes.

## Harry N. Rosenfield Letter

After the war, American attitudes towards the Latvian legionnaires were schizophrenic: on the one hand, they were invited to join the Labor Service Companies, on the other, they were forbidden to live in DP camps and prevented from enjoying the benefits that UNRRA showered on refugees. The image of the SS insignia even then was sufficiently forbidding to make some potential friends keep a distance from the legionnaires. In general we can say that the military personnel was friendly to the Latvians, while the UNRRA officials, mostly civilians, regarded them with suspicion and called them fascists. From 1945 to 1950, there was an ongoing investigation in the background in the legionnaires. Memos flew back and forth. The OSS followed this debate and in their files accumulated these memos that still slumber on the shelves of National Archives in Washington, DC. Some of this controversy I have collected in a pamphlet, *The Latvian Legion: Heroes, Nazis, or Victims?* (Riga, 1997). The tug of war continued until 1950 when the US Displaced Persons Commission resolved the question in favor of the legionnaires by disentangling them from association with German SS. This decision allowed the legionnaires to enter the Displaced Persons camps in Germany and opened the way for them to emigrate to the USA and other Allied countries. The decision reached Latvians by letter from Commissioner Harry N. Rosenfield to Dr. J. Feldmanis, the Latvian Ambassador to the United States.

September 12, 1950  
Dr. J. Feldmans  
Chargé d'Affaires of Latvia  
Latvian Legation  
1346 Connecticut Avenue  
Washington 6, D.C.

Dear Dr. Feldmans:

Please pardon the delayed acknowledgment of your letter of August 2, 1950. By now, of course, you know the decision of the Commission. It has approved the following motion:

"That the Baltic Waffen S.S. Units (Baltic Legions) are to be considered as separate and distinct in purpose, ideology, activities, and qualifications for membership from the German S.S., and therefore the Commission holds them not to be a movement hostile to the Government of the United States under Section 13 of the Displaced Persons Act, as amended."

Sincerely yours,

Harry N. Rosenfield, Commissioner

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## Chapter 5

# THE COMMITTEE, THE AUTHOR, THE BOOKLET

The origins of the Cultural Liaison Committee with Countrymen Abroad, under whose roof the offending pamphlet was written, go back to the Yalta Conference, when the great powers agreed to repatriate nationals to their respective countries. After the war, about 5,500,000 people whom the Soviets called their citizens resided in the “Western zones” and were to be repatriated to the Soviet Union. The Soviets interpreted the agreement as requiring “forced repatriation.” For a period of time the Allies agreed, but when the project of “forced repatriation” turned out to be too bloody, they turned to a more moderate interpretation of the agreement. Because the Baltic States were not part of the USSR in 1939 and the United States had not recognized the annexation of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania, the Balts were exempted from this agreement early.<sup>1</sup> The Soviets had to resort to persuasion to get their people back. In numerous towns in Germany, the Soviet Union established repatriation centers that by a variety of means endeavored to entice “their” people, including the Balts, to return. The results in relation to the expense and effort expended were minuscule – yet they did not give up. In 1955 the Soviets established a Committee for Returning to Homeland, which was headquartered in Berlin, Behrenstrasse 65. From the beginning this was a KGB operation.<sup>2</sup>

From 1955 on, the Soviets published a Latvian-language newspaper, *Returning to Homeland*, which, in the main, consisted of translations from the Russian. In 1958, the Latvian edition acquired its classic name, *Homeland's Voice* (*Dzimtenes Bals*). The newspaper was printed in Rīga, and then sent to Berlin, from where it was dispatched to select émigrés. This newspaper was not available in Latvia until 1968.

In parallel with Khrushchev's Russification of the Communist Party and its state apparatus, the Soviets assumed an aggressive stance towards the non-Russians in the West. From members of “the fraternal community of Soviet people,” the people in the West were redefined as “fascists” and “nationalists.” Although

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<sup>1</sup> See Mirdza Kate Baltais, “Latvia at Teheran and Yalta Conferences – Issues and Sources,” *Latvija Otrajā Pasaules karā / Latvia In World War II*, LVKR 1 (Rīga, 2000) 330–35.

<sup>2</sup> For the early history of the repatriation campaign see Lilita Zalkalne, “No repatriācijas līdz kultūras sakariem” [From Repatriation to Cultural Relations], *Jaunā Gaita* 224 and 225 (2001). Some of the information in this section was taken from her article.

from Moscow's perspective the main force of fascism resided abroad, there was a spillover to the nationalities at home – they, too, were painted with the same brush of fascism.

Perhaps for insidious purposes, Khrushchev began to allow greater latitude to the ethnic components of the Committee for Returning to Homeland. In 1961 in Rīga, a branch of the Moscow Committee for Returning to Homeland was organized under the name of The Committee for Returning to Homeland and Cultural Relations with Countrymen Abroad. In 1964, the name of the committee was Latvianized and reduced to The Liaison Committee for Cultural Relations with Countrymen Abroad. The committee also took over the publication of the *Homeland's Voice*.



The masthead of *Homeland's Voice* in May 1961 about the time when Ducmanis wrote *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* This issue contains the "exposé" of Jānis Zēgners (see Chapter 8).

managing of the "headache" that the exiles represented.<sup>3</sup> The Baltic émigrés by that time had settled in numerous countries of the world, mainly in the United States, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Germany. Each of these countries had a Latvian organization like, for example, the American Latvian Association (ALA), and these all networked into a global organization the World Federation of Free Latvians (PBLA – Pasaules Brīvo Latviešu Apvienība). In each of the countries there were also youth organizations that globally interconnected. There was also the Baltic American Freedom League (BAFL) and the Assembly of Captive European Nations (ACEN). These multi-ethnic organizations, financed in part by the CIA, undercut the Soviets from yet another side. In addition, there were also the Daugavas Vanagi, the fraternities, and the Social Democrats with chapters on all continents. Numerically the smallest group was the Social Democrats, yet their influence went beyond their numbers, for they had friends and associates in many European countries including, from the Soviet point of view most perilously, Israel.<sup>4</sup>

Especially in the United States, Latvian voters conjoined with other East European ethnics were influencing policies that were hostile to the USSR, in the

By the late 1950s, the purposes of the repatriation effort had considerably changed. No longer did Moscow hope to reclaim the living bodies of the exiles. On the one hand, it became a struggle for the hearts and minds of the emigrants, on the other, the effort switched to ideological concerns, the

Congress in particular. Numerous American politicians began to vie for the Baltic vote. More than one American presidential candidate spoke at Latvian events. Therefore, by the late 1950s the Soviets encountered a new and unprecedented international situation that they chose to take on. The new Soviet mission statement had to come to grips with the new international situation and ethnic politics in the democratic West. The Latvian Liaison Committee defined its function thus:

One of the republic's KGB tasks is to carry out disorganization of the Latvian emigration centers in the West and to carry out "patriotic" work with that part of the émigrés who are loyal or are neutral towards the Soviet power in the republic.<sup>5</sup>

In practice, however, the program had a much more sinister edge. According to Imants Lešinskis, who was present at the organizational meeting of the Liaison Committee and for a number of years served as its presiding officer, the Committee defined its purpose thus:

On the one hand the purpose of the Committee and its organ *Homeland's Voice*, had to emphasize and accent Soviet power's "humane" attitude towards the masses of the émigrés, who were proclaimed to be separated from their motherland Latvia, were miserably drifting throughout foreign lands, were at the core "decent and loyal," while at the same time the émigré leadership was condemned as hostile to the people and if at all possible were to be identified as "Jew killers" or at least collaborationists with Nazism.<sup>6</sup>

In the words of an editor of the *Homeland's Voice*, perhaps Žanis Zakenfelds, the policy came out thus:

Already more than once we have turned society's attention to the so-called exile national-political warriors and the émigré mob leaders and showed that they are nothing more than mass murderers of Hitler's occupation, hiding behind the mask of anti-communism, or fellow-travelers of these killers.<sup>7</sup>

At its peak the Committee was a large organization with many branches in which many of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic's "creative intellectuals" were engaged. Because it was a KGB operation, we do not know the number of people who worked at the Committee, but we do know that at least four persons worked at accumulating information about the emigrants. That involved compiling an

<sup>4</sup> In fact, the two organizations that worried the KGB the most were the Daugavas Vanagi and the Social Democrats. For example, in 1973 alone, the *Homeland Voice* published 87 negative articles about the former and 20 that "unmasked" Bruno Kalniņš, the leader of the Latvian Social Democratic Party. See Indulis Zālīte, "Kā čeka taisīja 'Kulturas sakarus'" [How the Cheka Organized "Cultural Relations"], *Lauku Avīze*, 5 September 1998.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Imants Lešinskis, "Kalpības gadi," *Latvija šodien* 1986, 47.

<sup>7</sup> *Dzimtenes Bals* 42, May 1961.



The staff of the Liaison Committee circa 1978, Pauls Ducmanis is first on the left.

address file, recording their activities, maintaining correspondence, arranging visits to Latvia, surveillance and entertainment of visitors in Riga. It also involved arranging of tours of Latvia's artists, writers, and musicians to emigration centers in the West. The Committee's subordinate branches were: literature, art, music, science and technology, youth, and film.<sup>8</sup> To undercut the political power of émigrés in the West, the KGB was willing to loosen the reins on their intelligentsia, thus perhaps in part creating the turmoil that led to the demise of the USSR. For the first time since the occupation, numerous Latvian artists, writers, musicians, theater groups, and filmmakers were allowed to go abroad and meet with their counterparts in the West under relatively free circumstances. Many of the meetings were one-on-one encounters that were beyond the reach of Soviet surveillance organs. But there was a price that everyone had to pay – both those who accepted the Committee's invitation to visit their homeland and those who visited the West. Overtly or tacitly, they all had to attest to the image projected by the KGB of Latvians as the killers of Jews and collaborators with Nazism. Any contact with the Committee, like a handshake with the devil, legitimated its work.<sup>9</sup> While the pleasurable moments of the exchange meetings that the Committee provided for those at home and abroad by now have evaporated, the black image of Latvians created by pamphlets, such as Ducmanis', *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?*, lingers on.

<sup>8</sup> Zālite.

<sup>9</sup> Inasmuch as this writer also accepted emoluments from the Committee, these comments are delivered in the spirit of frankness, not judgment. As a consequence of association with the Liaison Committee, a number of émigré writers, such as Velta Toma, Olafs Stumbrs, and Valdis Krāslavietis, suffered ostracism by fellow exiles. Daugavas Vanagi was the most critical of exile organizations.

The Liaison Committee of Cultural Relations with Countrymen Abroad survived until the end of the Soviet Empire. In 1991 it ran out of funds, as did many other Soviet establishments. Pauls Ducmanis was the last editor of the *Homeland's Voice*. Until the end of his days, he remained a loyal KGB man, as he had not been to the Gestapo, and received a pension from Moscow. Before the *Homeland's Voice* folded, however, once more on the rhetorical level, Ducmanis changed his tune: he delivered paeans of praise to Daugavas Vanagi and all of the other émigrés whom he had earlier accused of war crimes.

## Pauls Ducmanis – the Author

The authors whose names appeared on the title page of the booklet are E. Avotiņš, J. Dzirkalis, and V. Pētersons. The names are pseudonyms of KGB operatives, and no one to date has deciphered them. However, since only one of the authors, Pauls Ducmanis (1921–2000), received an honorarium for writing the pamphlet, we cannot be sure that Avotiņš and Pētersons were real persons, or, even if they were, had much to do with the writing. We do know for sure that behind the pseudonym of J. Dzirkalis, by his own admission, stood a real person, Pauls Ducmanis. According to Ducmanis himself, the other two were KGB insiders, whose names until the end of his life he would not divulge, who provided the documents to him. Some have speculated that the others were KGB heavies named Borgs and Rupeika. In a 1989 conversation with me Ducmanis presented himself as a blind hand, who had nothing to do with the ideology or even the contents of the book – “only writing down what I was told to write.” Although he never has denied writing it, he has minimized his contribution. He insisted that, since he was not allowed in the archives, he had nothing to do with the selection of the documents that were brought to him by the two KGB operatives.<sup>10</sup> Because the use of the Jewish tragedy and the line of attack against the East European peoples was worked out in Moscow, one can agree with Ducmanis that the outline and the thrust of the text were predetermined, and he was not allowed to depart from them. For example, the use of the word “fascist,” “nationalist,” “punitive organs,” and certain other stock Soviet phrases were mandated by his



**Pauls Ducmanis in 2000,  
the year of his death.**

<sup>10</sup> A certain Kārlis Kalniņš in a letter admitted that he had done some archival work for Ducmanis as a German language expert.

superiors, but the choice of Latvian-language adjectives could only be Ducmanis' own. As a propaganda broadside, the Ducmanis opus was not unique, because similar pamphlets began to pop up in other republics, although not with the same effect. There were also show trials staged and "documentary" films made that followed a similar script and ideological bent. Ducmanis' contribution was its Latvian application and a gratuitous vitriol towards his former companions.

For many reasons from the KGB point of view Ducmanis<sup>11</sup> was a good catch: he was well connected and prior to the war counted as one of the golden youths of independent Latvia to whom the world as it was at the time was open. His family represented the stable center of the independent Latvian state and was devoted to its welfare. His uncle served Latvia as a diplomat and a legal expert at home and abroad. In 1936 he was appointed to the Senate of Latvia, which served as the court of highest instance. Pauls' father was a distinguished educator. Before the war, from all appearances, he was a person of deep patriotic feelings, but he was not a man of extremes or one who stood out in a crowd. If anything, he was taciturn, and his calm and quiet bearing inspired confidence and gave an impression of competence. In his life he had done enough to be killed by the Nazis and/or the Soviets, yet he ended up making successful careers under both. He must have had a streak of opportunism that his contemporaries were unable to detect.

Ducmanis liked sports, and on the junior level he had won a number of races in sprint that even national newspapers noted. Yet his talent as an athlete was not quite sufficient to make him an elite runner. Ducmanis turned towards sports journalism, and already during the late 1930s he began to write short articles for *Jaunākās Ziņas* (The Latest News) and *Sporta Pasaule* (The World of Sports). As meager as this journalistic experience was, it served him as a stepping stone during the occupation. During his youth he showed no inclination towards anti-Semitism or extremist causes. Under the Nazis, however, his rise was meteoric. Soon after the Nazi occupation, he was appointed to be deputy editor of *Daugavas Vēstnesis* (Daugava Messenger), a vitriolic anti-Semitic newspaper that was fierce in defending everything about the German occupation, as all occupation newspapers were mandated to do. To obtain a job of that nature there was only one litmus test: one had to be a supporter of the Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy myth.

But this was only the beginning of Ducmanis' "success." At the time when his contemporaries entered underground cells and did the utmost to dodge the draft, Ducmanis' path led him into a deeper and deeper collaboration. Exactly when all of the prisons and concentration camps were filling up with Latvian patriots, his

<sup>11</sup> Much of the biographical information about Ducmanis is taken from Ojārs Salna's study, "Kā Pauls kļuva par Pavļiku" [How Paul Became Pavlik], *Nacionālā Neatkarība* 13–17 (1995).

career with the Nazis picked up. While many young men were trapped into military or police forces, in which one could not avoid obeying orders, Ducmanis made all of his career moves voluntarily. In 1942, his SD overseers selected him for a propaganda school in Berlin, where he gained further experience and understanding of Nazism: he became conversant with Nazi-style "racial science." In 1944, when men of his age were drafted into the Legion, Ducmanis avoided serving at the front by becoming a "war correspondent / propagandist."<sup>12</sup> His basic assignment was to present the war as a Jewish conspiracy, and even as the German front was collapsing – as a victory of the Germanic race. On 27 July 1944 Daugavpils fell; a few days later the Red Army occupied Jelgava, and some tanks broke through to the Gulf of Rīga. At this perilous time the Nazis called on Ducmanis again. In the 7 August 1944 issue of *Tēvija*, he wrote a "rousing" editorial: "Latvians, Awake, Rise Up and Struggle." In effect, he asked his school friends to lay down their lives for Hitler. On the surface the article was couched in a high-style Latvian patriotism, but in all particulars the subtext supported the Nazi line as it was at the time.<sup>13</sup> The Nazis were so enthused by it that his handler Jobst Gesling made Ducmanis the manager of the front-line edition of *Tēvija*.

*As a chameleon,  
Ducmanis has  
no equal in  
Latvian history*

But nothing that Ducmanis wrote could keep the Red Army at bay. The last issue of *Tēvija* in Rīga came out on 10 October 1944, three days before the Red Army entered the city. Ducmanis lost his job at *Tēvija*, but soon after his flight to Kurzeme he was made an editor of *Kurzemnieks*, published in Kuldīga. Here he served from October 1944 until 8 May 1945, the day of German capitulation. As the Third Reich was rushing towards its downfall, Ducmanis still had two moments in which he showed his loyalty to Nazism: Hitler's birthday and his death. On the latter occasion he delivered a lachrymose panegyric to Hitler.

During the final days of the war, Ducmanis was slated to flee to Sweden, where he had planned to continue his dastardly work, but he missed a connection and thus came under Soviet rule. By all rights, from the viewpoint of the Soviets, Ducmanis had earned a bullet in the neck. However, to the contrary he not only survived but prevailed. By the late 1950s, he was back in the editorial offices of Soviet newspapers.

Right after the conquest of Kurzeme, the Soviets deported *en masse* all males aged 16 to 60, either to "filtration" camps or to Siberia. From the Soviet

<sup>12</sup> In "Miti un patiesība par okupāciju Latvijā: žurnālists Leo Švarcs apstrīd prof. Andrieva Ezergaiļa apgalvojumus" [Myths and Truth about the Occupation in Latvia: Journalist Leo Švarcs Contests the Contentions of Professor Ezergaiļis], *Latvija Amerikā*, 19 and 26 May 2001, Leo Švarcs reports about his experience at the school in Berlin that Pauls Ducmanis also attended.

<sup>13</sup> See Jeckeln's proclamation: "Latvian People!" *Tēvija*, 17 July 1944.

perspective, Ducmanis in all particulars was an enemy: he had bourgeois origins; he was putatively a nationalist and/or fascist; during the German occupation he had made his mark as an anti-Communist; and he had behaved more like a Nazi than a real Nazi. According to one version, Ducmanis evaded the initial NKVD/SMERSH roundup. With the help of false identification papers he made it to Rīga, where he hid out by changing residences. According to another, perhaps more believable, version, he was picked up and sent to a filtration camp. The "miracle" was that by 1947 he was living openly in Rīga. The version that he told this writer was that his cover was blown in a Siberian camp, where he struck up a deal with the KGB. Initially the deal did not involve ghost writing, but rather the betrayal of his former comrades, whom he had encouraged to fight the Communists during the Nazi rule. Concretely, the Soviets used him as a shill to befriend the national partisans who swarmed in the forests after the war. While spouting Nazi propaganda, he had also in an underhanded way managed to develop some repute as a patriot. He used his journalistic and sports contacts to befriend the partisans whom he then turned over to the Soviet punitive forces.

As a chameleon, Ducmanis has no equal in Latvian history.

The facts of Ducmanis' life during the first ten years of Soviet occupation after the Second World War are obscure. The first known legitimate job that he held in the late 1940s was the management of a Soviet sports club. By the middle of the 1950s, Ducmanis was working in *Cīņa*, the Communist Party organ in Latvia. In 1957 Ducmanis became the sports editor of *Rīgas Balss* (Rīga's Voice), a newly started thaw-time paper thought by some at the time to be an alternative to the official press. At that time, he befriended the daughter of Anna Sakse, a hardcore Bolshevik writer. Ducmanis divorced his first wife, Silvija, and as a counterweight to his bourgeois past, married Sakse's daughter, whose name was also Silvija. No longer was he without Communist credentials. The KGB, however, was not about to let him slide into the life of the Soviet *nomenklatura* – he had to earn his lifestyle. Although there were no longer national partisans to infiltrate, there were still Latvian exiles who lived abroad, many of whom had been Ducmanis' friends and associates.

Despite all of the negatives in Ducmanis' biography, the KGB finally found a niche for this compromised person. They restyled him to become an ideological pit-bull in the struggle against his own people at home and abroad. He was yanked out of the sports editorship at *Rīgas Balss* and given an option that he could not reject. He had to become a staff writer at the newly founded *Dzimtenes Balss* (Homeland's Voice), a newspaper that came out in Rīga, but could not be bought in Latvia. As detailed above, it was intended for the émigrés, to antagonize the majority and to fish for a few errant souls. For this work Ducmanis had advantages that Moscow-oriented people or people of the postwar generation did not and could not have. He knew the Latvians in emigration and had been a friend of some

of them. He “knew where the bodies were buried.” For example, he was a friend of the poet Andrejs Eglitis, one of the most highly honored poets in emigration. Ducmanis’ greatest advantage was his war-time schooling and immersion in Nazism and anti-Semitism. He knew how to project his own shameful Nazi-time views on the entire nation. He knew whom to include and exclude. For example, his companion Teodors Zeltiņš, a fierce anti-Semite, was omitted from his writings. His skill as a writer and his ability to find the proper invective also helped.

## The Booklet

The KGB-produced tract, *Kas ir Daugavas Vanagi* (*Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?*) came out in 1962. It has 126 pages. Those are two of the very few unchallengeable pieces of information that the booklet contains. The booklet consists of five parts: a Preface; Part I (39 pages) entitled “Their Deeds in Fascist Service,” (in the English version “Brute Servants of Fascism”); Part II (40 pages), “They Themselves” (“The Hawks Themselves”); Part III (45 pages) entitled “Their Deeds and Activities Today” (“Their Present Business and Aims”). The booklet is richly illustrated and contains a collection of documents that follow the numbered pages. The documents as documents, although frequently misused, appear authentic. The pictures frequently are drawn from a variety of disparate European sources unconnected to Latvia and in the main are misleading if not false. Most of the photographs are of unidentified provenance. The English-language version, after the document section, also contains an added picture section consisting of photographs from Auschwitz, Buchenwald, and other Nazi centers of death and torture.

For the cover, the KGB operatives endeavored to introduce an element of merit: they reproduced the design of the monthly magazine *Daugavas Vanagi* that at that time was published in Germany. The design was sparse. In addition to the title there was the image of a hawk, the logo of the organization. The KGB novelty was that the raptor held in its talons a human skull (see the Preface for a facsimile of the cover.)

In the brief preface, Pauls Ducmanis lays out the case for the “prosecution.” Here the author reveals his skill of mixing truth with falsehood and blending tragedy with farce. The charges are so outré that the author and his KGB associates could not but have written the text in a seizure of giggles. The KGB men were not the first ones to invent the idea of a Germanless Holocaust in occupied Latvia, but they were the first ones who managed to bring the idea to the attention of the world, to scholars and to prosecutors hunting Nazis.<sup>14</sup> It is true that during the

<sup>14</sup> For a brief history of the killings of the Jews in Latvia see the chapter “The Holocaust in Occupied Latvia,” Chapter 6 of this book, or my book *The Holocaust in Latvia* (Riga, 1996).

four years of German occupation there was organized collaboration and that there were Latvians who voluntarily participated in the killing of the Jews. There were also Latvians who were dressed in a uniform that carried SS insignia. It is a matter of historical record, however, that the overlap between the two categories was small, less than one percent. Ducmanis' assignment, however, was not to draw distinctions but rather to paint the whole nation with one accusatory brush. Ducmanis and his KGB sidekicks conflated the multiplicity of experiences that transpired during the German occupation, drawing no distinctions among time, place, and activities. The two most frequently used words in the booklet are "fascist," and, closely behind – "nationalist."

Although numerous passages from the Ducmanis opus have made it into the indictments of war crimes prosecutors, the booklet itself does not begin as a legal brief but cuts quickly to the chase, with an atrocity story that the Soviet judiciary had cooked up about the killing of the Jews of Slonim, Belarus. The first few pages pretend to review the "show trial" that the Soviets staged of nine members of the 18th Battalion in 1960. Gradually the tale moves into a general description of the alleged atrocity itself. The assertion is that the Latvian battalion, on its own initiative,



**This is the most existential of the Šķēde pictures. It shows a group of Jewish women, children, and youngsters isolated, helpless, and severed from the protection of law and community driven along the edge of a killing pit to be killed shortly thereafter. With fear and disbelief the victims gaze into the bottom of the pit, where they see a layer of dead Jews who had trod the brow of the pit minutes before them.<sup>15</sup>**

in a barbaric way attacked and in a one-day operation murdered thousands of Slonim's Jews (for details on what really happened, see Chapter 3). Then, on page nine, the narrative switches to Riga of July 1941, where allegedly the Latvians on their own behaved in a similar way as they had at Slonim.

In the first chapter, Ducmanis "establishes" that the Latvians were incorrigible "fascists" and anti-Semites who killed Jews without any prompting by the Germans. For the balance of the chapter

<sup>15</sup> For a full complement of the Šķēde photographs, consult the picture holdings at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. <http://www.ushmm.org>.

the author touches upon a number of the events of the Holocaust during the German occupation. The import of his argument is that the Latvians were worse than the Germans. Most of the illustrative material in the chapter, with the exception of some of the pictures from Šķēde, the massacre site in the dunes near Liepāja, does not depict events in Latvia.

In Chapter 2, "They Themselves," Ducmanis regurgitates many of the same events, except that he ties the atrocities to individual Latvians, such as Jānis Zēgners, who were residing in emigration. Selected leaders of a variety of émigré organizations, such as *Daugavas Vanagi*, received special attention. It appears that the Soviets were especially annoyed by the Latvian Legion veterans who were serving in American guard companies and labor battalions in Germany, and wore black U.S. uniforms (for more details see Chapter 8).

Among the individuals that Ducmanis zeroes in on are mostly the obvious ones: Vilis Janums, Oskars Dankers, Rūdolfs Bangerskis, Alfreds J. Bērziņš, Kārlis Lobe, Roberts Osis, Vilis Hāznerns, Ādolfs Šilde, Jānis Cīrulis, Kārlis Siljakovs, Tāivaldis Kārklīņš, Kārlis Ozols, Oskars Perro, and Boļeslavs Maikovskis. But the pages are also littered with names of complete innocents, such as Pēteris Vītols, Jānis Zēgners, and Arvīds Oše. Their only "crime" was having worked for the Latvian cause in the United States, Germany, Canada, or Sweden.

All of the above were active during the German occupation and some, to say the least, skated close to being facilitators of the Nazi cause. The names named in Chapters 2 and 3 of the pamphlet constitute a mixture of the guilty and the innocent. All of the above, with the exception of Šilde, were investigated by prosecutors of a variety of countries. Dankers and Bangerskis were investigated by the Nuremberg prosecutors, but the cases were dropped. Lobe, Hāznerns, Vītols, and Maikovskis were tried, but only Maikovskis was convicted in a civil case (for more information about the criminal charges see Chapter 8: "Analysis Two").

There is a problem of illustrating the atrocities in Latvia, as with the Holocaust at large. We practically have no objective pictures of the Holocaust – all that we have were snapped by Nazi public relations crews who had a special assignment to skew the evidence: to show the Holocaust as Germanless. Because the KGB and the Nazi public relations lines coincided on this point, the booklet contains numerous Nazi-time pictures.

The order to write a pamphlet like *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* came from Moscow, and it was coordinated with similar publications in other parts of the Soviet realm. Moscow's aim in publishing this literature was to trump real and potential enemies of the Soviet empire, and to delegitimize East Europeans, to belittle their standing in the community of nations. In general, the assignment to compile these pamphlets fell on the local KGB branches. In Latvia it was the Cultural Liaison Committee with Countrymen Abroad. The director of that committee at the time was

Imants Lešinskis, who later in 1978, when he was appointed to work at the Soviet UN Mission in New York, defected and worked for the CIA. After his defection he wrote his memoirs under the title "Kalpibas gadi" (The Years of Servitude)<sup>16</sup> where he named names and described the particulars of the pamphlet's genesis.

The impact of *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* started with the trials of Boļeslavs Maikovskis and Vilis Hāznerns in 1976 in the United States. Why this delay from 1962 to 1976? We may assume that initially the booklet was dismissed as propaganda. Dr. Gertrude Schneider claims to be an intermediary in the transmission of the pamphlet from Latvia to the United States. In 1971 she went on a research trip to Latvia, where she was persuaded by KGB operatives, among them Lešinskis, that there are many Latvian war criminals in the USA. She was given the English version of the pamphlet, and after her return she began to popularize it.<sup>17</sup>

The international repercussions of this pamphlet were extensive: it defined the Holocaust in Latvia for many decades, and it still continues to profile the Latvian people as incorrigible Nazis and haters of Jews. The accusatory power of the pamphlet was so immense that it, in effect, reversed the presumption of innocence accepted in the civilized countries. Instead of the accusers having to prove Latvian crimes, the Latvians needed to prove their innocence. Although the specific accusations against most of the people named in *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* are maliciously false, for decades it has been a basic resource for many Holocaust scholars in the West, and a "handbook" for war crime prosecutors in Germany, the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and Australia. For example, the famous Wiesenthal Institute lists that were submitted to all of the above governments come from the Ducmanis opus. All of the names named in the pamphlet have been pored over, checked, and double-checked. Although war crimes prosecutors time and again have burned their fingers trying to prosecute cases that were generated by the "facts" found in the pamphlet, some prosecutors until recently have doggedly persisted to rely on the booklet's information. In an ironic way, by sending prosecutors down a cold trail the booklet has been good for those Latvians who were truly guilty of war crimes. The booklet is as noteworthy for the people it names as for the ones it fails to name. The booklet's reception puts to test the notion that in our "skeptical" age people are hard to deceive.

That several Western democracies, beguiled by the pamphlet's "facts," have spent millions of dollars in pursuit of crimes for which there was no evidence may be of secondary importance. As a measure of verisimilitude of the pamphlet, we

<sup>16</sup> The memoirs never came out as a book. First they were published in the Latvian newspaper *Laiks* (published in New York City) and republished by *Latvija šodien* in 1986.

<sup>17</sup> Rochelle G. Sidel, *The Outraged Conscience: Seekers of Justice for Nazi War Criminals in America* (Albany, NY, 1984) 13–15.

can note that in the United States alone, the pamphlet inspired seven war crimes trials, of which only one, that of Boļeslavs Maikovskis, ended in a successful prosecution.<sup>18</sup> It took several decades for the prosecutors of the world to realize that there is something rotten with the pamphlet's "facts."

The power of this booklet derived from its descriptions of situations, purporting to be based on archival and eyewitness evidence; it listed the names of several hundred Latvian participants in the killings. To unravel all the untruths, half-truths, and exaggerations in *Daugavas Vanagi* would take a book in itself. (See Chapter 7 for the beginnings of an attempt.) Suffice it to say that although perhaps 10 percent of the statements in it are true, the remainder is false. How false the facts, the pictures, the situations presented in the booklet are, can only be unraveled by examining the details of the assertions.<sup>19</sup> Western scholars and journalists have so far lacked the patience and knowledge of history to penetrate the deception.

What the Nazis said and did as they planned the Holocaust, a topic broadly studied and debated, is one thing. Different pressures operated on the minds of the Soviets, who were the caretakers of the Russian Empire. In their treatment of the Holocaust they displayed several attitudes: the verbal attack on Nazism, which they called "fascism," was loud and savage, yet initially after the war the Soviets did not depart very far from the tenets of the Nuremberg trials. They proclaimed that the perpetrators of the Holocaust were the Germans; the East Europeans along with the Jews were considered to be victim nations. They did not exonerate the "collaborationists," but throughout the 1950s all Soviet peoples continued to be "fraternal." The Soviets avoided the collective accusation of nations. Their attitudes, however, changed after the death of Stalin, as the system became more Russified and the control of Eastern Europe became more problematic.

*Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* was followed by a number of other similar pamphlets that in general were repetitive, recycling the same arguments, situations and stories. Soon after *Daugavas Vanagi*, other pamphlets of similar type were J. Silabriedis un B. Arklāns (pseud. of Arvīds Rupeika), *Politiskie bēgļi bez maskas*

<sup>18</sup> The cases prosecuted by the American Office of Special Investigations (OSI) were civil cases in which the guilt of the accused needed to be implied by membership in a "criminal" organization, not individually proven. Even under these lax rules the conviction of Maikovskis did not come easily. The second successful OSI prosecution was that of Konrāds Kalējs, who was not named by Ducmanis.

<sup>19</sup> At a certain point in my study *The Holocaust in Latvia*, for polemical purposes, I asserted that about 75 percent of the booklet was true. That was at the beginning. The deeper I have entered the subject, the falsier the booklet has turned out to be: pictures and documents are misidentified; the guilty and the innocent are mismatched with the time and place of the atrocities described. Today Bernard Press, in his *Judenmord in Lettland, 1941–1945* (Berlin, 1992), is the major continuer of the KGB tradition. He has taken pictures from various European cities where Jews were mistreated and identified them as scenes on a Riga street in 1941. He has also printed a photo of the burning of a Berlin synagogue in 1938 and identified it as the burning of a Riga synagogue in 1941.

(Political Refugees Unmasked) (Rīga, 1963); B. Arklāns, J. Dzirkalis, J. Silabriedis, *Viņi bez maskas* (They Without a Mask) (Rīga, 1966); J. Dzirkalis, *Kāpēc viņi bēga? Patiesība par Latviešu nacionālo fondu Zviedrijā* (Why Did They Flee? The Truth about the Latvian National Foundation In Sweden) (Rīga, 1965); and M. Birznieks, *No SS un SD līdz ...* (From the SS to ...) (Rīga, 1979). A specialized sub-genre was one that picked out Latvian churchmen as guilty of Nazi crimes. See the anonymous *Cilvēki bez sirdsapziņas* (People without Conscience) (Rīga, 1961); and E. Stabiņš, *Kangari talāros* (Traitors in Clerical Garb) (Rīga, 1968).

None of the sequels, however, was as influential as was the first Ducmanis opus. The Soviets also made three “documentary” films that treated the topic in a similar vein: *Vilkači* (1963), *Spriedums* (1965), and *Vēsture apsūdz* (1970). Also, for example, the show trials of the 18th Battalion, the Rēzekne group, Maikovskis et al., and the 21st Battalion were filmed.



**Pictures of unknown provenance like the one above littered the pages of the offending pamphlet. By the assemblage of these pictures, the KGB intended to portray Latvia as the locus of the most horrendous of Nazi crimes. Nazi hunters in the West had no wherewithal to decode the deception.**

The latest blossoming of the pamphlet’s “information” we saw in the Pēteris Vītols case that was prosecuted by the Canadian Justice Department in 1998. The Canadian Crown lost the case and paid expenses to the defense. The Vītols case showed that the pamphlet’s “facts,” although they still may tarry in the minds of some prosecutors, cannot withstand the scrutiny of an open courtroom.<sup>20</sup>

Soon after the debacle of the Vītols case the Canadian government in 1999 also suffered a loss in the Eduard Podiņš matter. As far as it is publicly known the two losses have closed down any further active investigations of Latvian “Nazis” in Canada. Certainly no new cases have since been announced by the Canadian government. The blame for this sad ending, the collapse of a noble pursuit – the prosecution of Nazi criminals – must be a shared one: the diabolical power of the KGB’s dead finger to beckon and the inability of ministers and officials in Canada to penetrate deception.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> It must also be noted that Vītols was faced with a civil, not a criminal case, with the prosecutor needing to meet a lower level of proof, “a balance of probabilities,” rather than “proof beyond a reasonable doubt,” as in a criminal case. See Harold Otto, “Canadian Courts and the Latvian Past: The Case of Pēteris (Peter) Vītols.” *Latvijas Kara muzeja Gadagrāmata / Yearbook of the War Museum of Latvia* (Rīga, 2000).

<sup>21</sup> The failure to penetrate the KGB chicanery, as his discussion of Jānis Zēgners matter shows, was also demonstrated by Latvian author Igors Vārpa in his book, *Latviešu karavīrs zem kāšķrusta karoga* [Latvian Soldiers under the Swastika] (Rīga, 2003).

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## Chapter 6

# THE HOLOCAUST IN LATVIA UNDER NAZI GERMAN OCCUPATION: SPONTANEITY VERSUS ORGANIZATION

*The implementation of the "final solution of the Jewish question in Europe" was to be guided exclusively, centrally, and without regard to geographic boundaries from the office of the Reichsführer SS Himmler ...*

Paraphrase of Reinhard Heydrich

*It was the duty of the Security Police to initiate these self-purging efforts and to guide them into the proper channels, so that the goal set for cleaning the area is reached as quickly as possible. It was no less important to establish for the future the firm and demonstrable fact that the liberated populations on their own accord had taken the harshest measures against the Bolshevist and Jewish enemy, without any direction from the German agencies.*

SS-Brigadeführer Walter Stahlecker

The Holocaust was not a crime of passion. All of the instruments of modernity – technology, science, ideology, communications, psychology, history, and banking – were put to use. This monstrous crime could not have been committed without railroads, telegraphs, trucks, sidecar motorcycles, and propaganda. Holocaust was more than anti-Semitism; it was an enterprise that medieval men with daggers and blunt implements could not have carried out. It was also more than the pictorial snippets that the Nazi *Wochenschau* films have left about the killing of the Jews in Eastern Europe.<sup>1</sup>

This viewpoint is substantiated by Zygmunt Bauman, who in his *Modernity of the Holocaust* avers that for the Holocaust to have taken place in a modern world three conditions needed to be met: (1) that violence be authorized by a legitimate authority; (2) that violent actions be routinized; and (3) that the victims be dehumanized.<sup>2</sup> The German occupation created all of these conditions, and this was

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<sup>1</sup> It has been previously noted that the Nazis effectively used *Wochenschau* images, such as the Polish cavalry storming German tanks, to influence the writing of Poland's history. A similar canard, concerning the killing of Jews in Latvia, was released on the German newsreels in 1941. The basic image that Goebbels' cinema people wanted to leave with the world was that Latvians were killing Jews before the Germans arrived and without their involvement and that their motive for doing so was revenge. Also see Joseph Grigg's article in the Appendix and Hitler's conversation with Croatian Marshal Kvaternik in Chapter 1.

<sup>2</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity of the Holocaust* (Ithaca, 2001). Bauman's necessary conditions could be supplemented by inclusion of the need for a system of modern communication and persuasion.



This world-famous picture can be taken as a microcosm of the Holocaust in Latvia: a moment of order surrounded by chaos and foreboding of death. As its foreground portrays the Jewish victims of many generations, its background illustrates the role of rifle-toting Latvians. The picture is conspicuous for the missing Germans, except the eye of the photographer, the organizer of the scene, and the SD-man Carl-Emil Strott, who managed to arrange the group just minutes before killing. The women in the picture are of the Epstein family: Sorella (10), her mother Roza (43), an unidentified family friend, Mia (18), and her mother Emma (47). Roza's husband had been killed in July 1941; Emma's had been deported to Siberia, where he died in 1942 (Edward Anders, "Who died in the Holocaust? Recovering names from Official Records," *Genocide and Holocaust Studies* 17.1, 2003).

public relations documents and films. One must note that all of the pictures and film clips that today are used to illustrate the Holocaust, were taken by German public relations crews that, by their own assertion, were sent in to tilt the world's knowledge of the killing of Jews, to prove that it was the "natives" and not the Germans who did the killing. It would have been dangerous for local photographers to use a camera.

I do not think that the Germans should be judged more harshly than are/were the East Europeans. I simply tilt towards equality of treatment, for there is no reason to assume that East Europeans were more primitive and, especially, more brutal than were the Germans. The "categorical imperatives" were alive and well among the East European peasantry. If anything, on the civilization's moral scale, it was Nazi Germany that had hit a historic low.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The "primitiveness" of Eastern Europeans was a Nazi-choreographed canard. For example, the Nazis prohibited the self-defense men to wear uniforms. They wanted to have pictures showing civilians committing

Although on the one hand the Germans would have wanted to have the locals kill the Jews, on the other they kept them on a short leash, and even if the “natives” had been willing, the Germans would not have agreed to surrender so much power to them. The occupation of Latvia was a real occupation that left little or no wiggle room for the “natives” to express their desire for revenge even if they had harbored it. There is no reason to pretend that after the war no participants in the killings joined the Daugavas Vanagi. It is unlikely, however, that the veterans organization would have attracted larger number of killers of Jews than other émigré organizations, for example, some fraternities or sports groups. Edgars Inde, for example, who was identified as a man of the Arājs Commando, was a member of a drama group in Minneapolis. The intense hunt for “Nazis” that has taken place since the 1970s among Latvian emigrants have yielded very disappointing results, and no pattern of Daugavas Vanagi shielding killers of Jews has emerged. From the beginning during the war the relationship between the legionnaires and SD men was not an easy one, for the former considered the Arājs men to be shirkers, the “rats of the rear.”

Since the days of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe there have been two schools of explanation for it: (1) that the Holocaust was an organized, almost a mechanistic event that by its internal and intrinsic logic had to eschew happenstance, chance, and accident, and (2) that there were spontaneous multiple Holocausts, explosions of hate and irrational “revenge” that were beyond German control. The corollary of this second viewpoint is that the killings were Germanless and leaderless. Each version had its genesis in Nazi offices and each continues today within and without Germany, Israel, Europe, and the United States. My discourse aims to terminate this schizophrenia in favor of the former alternative.<sup>4</sup> One cannot begin to understand the killing of the Jews, if one rejects the principles of “modernity,” of subordination and higher orders. Nuremberg did not say that there was no such thing as “higher orders” – it asserted that illegal orders are not an excuse for a crime committed.

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atrocities. On the other hand, the *Red Star* in Moscow on 20 May 1942 reported that near Kursk the Germans donned Russian uniforms and killed 400 people. “German cameramen and cinematic operators [cf. Gross’ scene in *Neighbors*] photographed the scene of the shooting.” *New York World-Telegram*, 20 May 1942.

<sup>4</sup> The main spokesman for Holocaust as an organized event is Raul Hilberg, in his magisterial *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York, 1985).

## History in the Writing: Historiography of the Holocaust in Latvia

The history of the Holocaust in Latvia by now, in addition to the book penned by this author, has been written many times. The first to write an account of the Holocaust was the oft-mentioned SS-Brigadeführer Walter Stahlecker, the Commander of *Einsatzgruppe A*, the man who was responsible for the initial killings in the Baltic. Historiographically, his reports have the status of a chronicle, but unlike the Primary Chronicle of Russian History that was written two centuries after the events it described, Stahlecker's account was written as the Holocaust was evolving.

The second version of the Holocaust was written in a more chaotic way by the Soviets, who by 1944 began to recover the territories invaded and occupied by the Nazis. Even before the end of the war Soviet investigative agencies, the NKVD and SMERSH, began to investigate Nazi crimes in Latvia. In 1944 the Soviets established an Extraordinary Commission for Investigating the Crimes of Fascism that wrote grossly inflated reports about the Nazi crimes.<sup>5</sup> In addition, they organized thousands of trials in which the Holocaust experience was collated.

After the war the writing of Holocaust history moved to Germany, in whose courts numerous participants in the atrocities in Latvia were tried. The trials at Hamburg and Hannover are especially noteworthy.

The three accounts, although they are of varying quality, agree to a surprisingly high degree on the basic facts about the Holocaust in occupied Latvia. They: (1) testify against the Nazi "public relations" version of the Holocaust, and (2) support the organizational thesis, laid out by Stahlecker and a plethora of Wehrmacht, Police, and SD documents, in which one finds the oft-repeated formula that Germans had the commanding powers and the "natives" the function of obedience.

## Two Nazi Versions of the Holocaust

*However this war may end, we have won a war against you; none of you will be left to bear witness, but even if some were to survive, the world **will not believe him... people will say that the events are too monstrous to be believed...** We will be the ones to dictate the history of the Lager.*

Omar Bartov, citing a Nazi officer

Even before the Holocaust, the Nazis, in accordance to the maxim that who controls the past controls the future, began to shape the historical opinion of the

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Heinrich Strods, "Salaspils koncentrācijas nometne 1941-1944" [The Concentration Camp of Salaspils 1941-1944], *Latvijas Okupācijas muzeja gadagrāmata / Yearbook of the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia 2000* (Riga, 2001) 97-101.

event to be. One aspect of Nazi propaganda about the Jew that emerged already in the mid-1930s was to project their attitude about the Jews upon the rest of the world, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and France. In one aspect the Nazis began to use their diplomatic clout to pressure their allies to promulgate anti-Jewish laws that would be similar to the ones accepted in Nazi Germany. Only Italy, Hungary, and Rumania took the hint, but even in those countries the laws lacked the implementing bite that the laws had in Germany. With this self-induced, bogus evidence the Nazis proclaimed that the world disliked the Jews as much as they did, except that the Germans were more honest about it. When it came to the killing phase, the Nazis in a parallel way, as the 29 May 1941 conference shows, projected their desire to kill the Jews upon the East Europeans (see Chapter 1, "The Contexts"). Although anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe was free-floating and prevalent, the "Jewish question" as it was conceived by the Nazis did not exist there. There was no East European state or statesman that advocated or planned the killing of their Jews, and there was no special *European* "pre-Auschwitz" attitude towards the Jews. In Latvia, even the anti-Semitic organizations that did exist never harbored a plan for such an action. To the degree that today there are historians and journalists who proclaim that Eastern Europe was more Nazi than the Nazis and that there were locally generated Holocausts, to that degree we can say that the Nazi public relations program has been a success. In that respect the Nazis still dominate our thinking.<sup>6</sup>

Nazi influence on history writing has been a bifurcated one. On the one hand, there was Brigadeführer Stahlecker, the head of *Einsatzgruppe A*, who was mandated to write reports from the killing fields to the Security Police Headquarters in Berlin. His writings we can call the first history of the Holocaust in Latvia. On the other hand there was Adolf Hitler himself (see Hitler's conversation with Marshal Kvaternik in Chapter 1) and his officials, who endeavored to give to the world a "German" version of the killings. Already then empiricism began to compete with vivid assertions. Out of Stahlecker's reports came the school of interpretation that emphasizes intention, orders, function, and organization in the killing of the Jews; and out of Hitler's public relations officialdom came the revisionist school that minimized Hitler's and Germany's role in the killings and presented the Holocaust as a spontaneous revenge by the locals in the Baltic. Already then folklore began to compete with a factually based account of the event. Among the contemporary German witnesses, be they "passers-by" or people of rank such as Lohse or von Medem,

<sup>6</sup> Although anti-Semitism was prevalent in Eastern Europe, only in Germany was it obsessively "scientific" and "redemptive," that is eschatological, an idea that saw the liberation of one nation occurring only at the expense of another. See Saul Friedländer, "Ideology and Extermination: The Immediate Origins of the Final Solution," *Lessons and Legacies: The Holocaust and Justice*, 5 (2002): 31. See also the discussion of anti-Semitism at the end of Chapter 1.

almost all testified in unison with Hitler's line on the Holocaust. The one major exception was Stahlecker, the man who was actually in charge of the initial phase of the killing of Jews in the Baltic. Stahlecker wrote about the German scheme of organization and the problems that they encountered in carrying out their scheme,

## Holocaust Folklore

*[A] bystander who takes no action becomes a facilitator.*  
Deborah Lipstadt

*BUT let us not forget that not many victims NOR all survivors really understood what was going on all around them. Having experienced (and survived) the suffering does not necessarily an expert make.*

Charlotte Opfermann – Internet interlocutor  
Tuesday, 6 May 2003, 11:31 PM

Upon Hitler's orders with the help of Holocaust folklore and revisionist historians, the Germans have almost gotten away with murder of the Baltic Jews. Who killed the Jews of Latvia? For those who have wanted to listen, as noted above, this is a question that has been answered many times. It has been answered by the Nazis in their on site dispatches as the Holocaust was happening; it has been answered by the KGB and SMERSH agents after the war, whose records only since the 1991 have become available; it has also been answered by the Nuremberg Tribunal and a series of war crimes trials in Germany.

Anyone who has followed the recent "discussion" about the Holocaust in Latvia, if "discussion" is the right word for it, will have noticed that there are, like oil and water, two incompatible tales, two ships passing in the night. There is the viewpoint that I have characterized as folklore that originated already during the Nazi occupation and was started in large part by the Fuehrer's *pronouncements*. And there is history that bases its conclusions on a smorgasbord of sources that include Nazi and Soviet documents and does not exclude the eyewitness accounts of survivors. Unlike the survivors, however, especially with the opening of new archival materials, historians can penetrate prison walls, can leap over concentration camp fences, and can enter the chambers of power where decisions were made and orders issued.

The telltale folklore clues about the Holocaust in occupied Latvia are the following assertions:

- There was a Latvian uprising prior to the German arrival.
- The Latvians started the killing of Jews prior to German arrival.
- Jews were clubbed to death.
- The Perkonkrusts party organized and carried out the massacres.

- Colonel Veiss was the inspirer and leader of the massacres.
- Veiss and Arājs were Pērkonkrusts members.
- Veiss announced on the radio that all patriotic Latvians must attack the “internal enemy,” meaning Jews.
- The Latvians were more vicious than Germans.
- The killings were a matter of revenge.
- Latvians were killing Jews while the Germans were saving them.
- It was a collective action by the Latvians.
- Naming the *aizsargi* as the murderers.
- Calling Latvian auxiliary police “SS.”
- Anti-Semitism as an explanation for the Holocaust.
- The use of the German phrase *Lettische Rechtsextremisten*.

The latter is a favorite cliché in Germany, especially among *Der Spiegel* writers.

The quarrel between historians and the folklorists is not about the fact of the Holocaust. The debate is about the timing and the orders: who ordered whom, to do what when. The disagreement is about documents and the power of documents as opposed to folklore and the power of folklore. Even if Latvians had wanted to kill Jews without the Germans, they could not have done it without leaders and orders. To date no name of a Latvian leader or an order of Latvian provenance has emerged. A historian must aim for truth, while a folklorist may be indifferent to it. In this context, I want to designate as folklore those elements that are repetitive and have no basis in the world of facts and on the face of it can be demonstrated as false. As an example of the latter we can use the view that before the German entrance there was an interregnum in Latvia.

What have I said and not said? I have said that all human events, and they do not need to be epochal or traumatic, create folklore. It is the nature of our species to spin tales and embellish our experiences to make sense out of them. That is true about Jews, Latvians, and Germans, or anyone else, people living in igloos and those residing in plush big-city apartments. It cannot be emphasized enough that we do not speak here about normal times, but about a brutal occupation when martial law prevailed and a news blackout was the rule. It was a time when many people, not only Jews, lived in fear. A special category of “eyewitnesses” were the German Jews who in late 1941 and early 1942, were transported to Latvia from their comfortable domiciles in Berlin, Hamburg, and Vienna. They underwent a special measure of disorientation because they arrived in a situation for which they were ill prepared. They did not understand Latvian, and coming from countries with an imperialist mindset, they carried along with them peculiar German and European attitudes about Eastern Europe. If the Holocaust experience was disorienting for Latvian Jews, it was doubly so for West European ones.

## Pogrom

A pogrom is an organized event that pretends to be spontaneous. So it was in the country of the words origin, and nothing changed when the Nazis began to use the term on 9 November 1938, the *Kristallnacht*. The *Kristallnacht* differed from the pogroms in the country of the tsars only in one respect: the guiding hand of the Nazi state and party was open and transparent. In 1941 the word again received broad currency, especially in Stahlecker's communications. In 1938 usage, the word is more associated with the burning of synagogues and the destruction of Jewish property, but in 1941 it seems to point towards the killing of Jews. Although in time, later in 1941, the Nazis began to use the word to denote any *Einsatzgruppe* killings, in the beginning of the campaign it appears Stahlecker's men used the word for especially brutal killings, not by shooting but using blunt instruments to bludgeon Jews.<sup>7</sup> That the killing by "pogroms" was something fearsome is indicated by Martin Sandberger, commander of *Einsatzkommando 1a*, who accompanied Stahlecker to Riga. He indicates that the pogrom method was too horrible to entertain and had registered his objections to Stahlecker. The Kaunas killings, as described below, may be what Sandberger protested against.

It must be noted that the "pogroms" of the *Kristallnacht* were a failure: the German people did not rise up against the Jews as the Nazis had anticipated. They hoped for much more than what happened. The unintended irony is that the plan that misfired in Germany in 1938, the Nazi public relations people claimed to be successful in the Baltic in 1941.<sup>8</sup>

Since June 1941 Nazi "eyewitnesses" have circulated "description" of what the Nazis called a "pogrom" in Kaunas in which Lithuanian partisans are alleged to have killed some 2,000 Jews. No doubt Jews were killed in that incident; the question, however, remains as to who organized the massacre and how they did so. Unfortunately we only have German "eyewitnesses" leaving us descriptions of the scene, and most of them, we can assume, were part of the German public relations crew that accompanied the *Einsatzgruppe*.

When I reached the square, around 15–20 bodies were lying there. They were cleared away by the Lithuanians, and the pools of blood were hosed away ... Finally, another group of delinquents was driven and pushed into the square and, without any great fuss, simply beaten to death by civilians armed with iron bars ... (Report by a sergeant of Baker Company 562, 16th Army)

<sup>7</sup> He thought that inducing people to carry out pogroms was especially brutal. See Sandberger's testimony at the Nuremberg Einsatzgruppen Trial 1947–48, Vol. 6: 2175–76.

<sup>8</sup> For information about the Kristallnacht pogrom see Uwe Dietrich Adam, "Wie spontan war der Pogrom?" *Der Judenpogrom 1938: Von der "Reichskristallnacht" zum Völkermord*, ed. Walter H. Pehle (Berlin, 1988).

## Another one:

A young man with rolled up sleeves was armed with an iron crowbar. He yanked a man from a group [and] killed him with one or several blows to the back of his head. In this manner, within three quarters of an hour, he slew a group of from 45 to 50 persons. (Report by a photographer on the pogrom at Kaunas. In effect, here the photographer has described his own picture that has been reprinted a million times by people who purportedly have been enemies of Nazism.)

## A third example reads thus:

June 28th. The first public execution of Jews in Kaunas, in the Lietukis garage in the Vytauto Street. Over forty Jews are beaten with shovels and with iron bars until they become unconscious. Then cold water is thrown on them and they are again (beaten), but this time they are beaten to death. A political prisoner released from prison by the insurgents seated himself on top of the heap of dead bodies and began to play a polonaise on the Harmonica.<sup>9</sup>

A subplot of this and like stories was insertion of a “good German” who not only sympathizes with the Jews, but may even “save” them:

When a passing German officer expressed his anger, a former [Lithuanian] prisoner a chauffeur by profession – answered him as follows: “We are all human beings as are you, but the Bolshevik prison has transformed us. I have just killed my Jewish prison guard. You have not the faintest idea how much pleasure that gives me.”<sup>10</sup>

Do these “eyewitness” accounts describe a real event or do they represent a horror story genre that is ageless and has no beginning or an end? There are several aspects about these stories that raise questions about their credibility. For one – the witnesses, so far ascertained, are *Germans* who could have been part of the public relations crew or been instructed to testify in preset tropes. The *motive* that is attributed to these “natives” directly mirrors Nazi policy and propaganda, namely that Jews are killed because of native revenge and their Bolshevism. This view has been accepted without any proof that the “natives” thought like the Nazis, or even sympathized with them.<sup>11</sup>

The markers that anticipated the killing of the Jews in Germany are missing in Eastern Europe. For example, in Eastern Europe there is no analog for the “stab in the back” idea that so deeply agitated the soul of Germany. To be sure,

<sup>9</sup> In some versions it is said that the Lithuanian anthem was played.

<sup>10</sup> All of the above: National Archives: M 1185. Roll 5, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> For the true Latvian opinion during the occupation one needs to turn to the underground literature that began to appear in the fall of 1941. The major theme in this literature was the lost sovereignty of Latvia. There was no attention paid to the “Jewish question.” See Uldis Neiburgs, “Latviešu nacionālās pretošanās kustības preses izdevumi Latvijā vācu okupācijas laikā (1941–1945)” [Publications of Latvian National Resistance during the German Occupation], *Latvijas Zinātņu Akadēmijas Vēstis* 43 (2000): 58.

anti-Semitism was present in Eastern Europe, but the kind of motivation for killing Jews that existed in Germany was absent. There are many kinds of anti-Semitism in the world, yet, by itself anti-Semitism has not resulted in the murder of Jews. East Europeans had lived next to Jews for centuries and nothing like this had happened while they were in power. They had all the time in the world to burn down synagogues and perhaps even murder Jews with impunity. The relationships between Jews and locals had not always been the best, but there was nothing in the pre-war politics of these countries that anticipated this brutality. In Germany, however, the Holocaust is foreshadowed in numerous ways: they had the leader, the party, and the idea.

Finally, the *manner* in which the “neighbors” purportedly were massacred challenges credibility. Even if there were a sufficient explanation for the “natives” attacking Jews and motivation for it made clear and credible, it still would be necessary to have an explanation of why these attacks should have been carried out in the primitive manner in which it is averred to have happened. The killing implements used in the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre were more “modern” than those at Jedwabne and Kaunas. Upon German occupation, a crust of civility might have been shattered, but did it mean that the “natives” also had to descend to a more primitive technological level? Most East European men over 21 years of age had undergone basic military training!

The pogroms of Tsarist Russia were pin-pricks in comparison. There is nothing in the history of Poland to anticipate the purported Jedwabne massacre as described by Jan Gross. On the contrary, there is every reason to think that it was Nazism that pushed Germany to an unanticipated level of barbarism. I would contend that it took a primitive mindset even to think up these stories.

This German subterfuge did not remain a secret to observers at the time. Whatever the truth of the Kaunas and similar incidents, we can be assured that the Germans induced the event and then told the story that has entered many textbooks of the Holocaust. Among the Latvians who had an opportunity to observe the Germans photographing the killing scenes it became common knowledge that they were doing it to place the responsibility for the murder of Jews on the locals. Even in the Rīga salons it was noted that the German picture-taking activity might have had an insidious purpose. In the diplomatic arena, for example, the former Latvian Ambassador to Stockholm, Voldemārs Salnais wrote in 1943:

Germans now are spreading a fairy tale, that it had been the Latvians who carried out the most brutal reckoning with the Jews. In this respect Germans have been active in Geneva, America and here [Stockholm].<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Leonīds Siliņš, *Nacistiskās Vācijas okupanti: mūsu tautas lielās cerības un rūgtā vilšanās* [The Nazi German Occupants: The Great Hope and Disappointment of Our Nation]. (Rīga, 2001) 151.

The presence of Nazi propaganda in the United States was noted by the Latvian ambassador to Washington already in June 1942. Ambassador Alfrēds Bilmanis, responding to former UP correspondent in Berlin, Joseph W. Grigg's article in the *New York World-Telegram*,<sup>13</sup> wrote:

With deep sorrow and profound indignation I read Joseph Grigg's information about a slaughter of Jews by German Nazis in 1941. The Nazi commentators insinuation that "Latvian irregulars" participated in this abominable crime against humanity is absolutely incredible, and contradicts the traditional friendship between Latvians and Jews, both being oppressed races for centuries.

It is an evident German-Nazi provocation to disseminate hatred between Jews and Latvians abroad ... Latvians can be free only when Jews are free and post-war Latvia shall be a fully democratic Latvia with equal rights for all citizens and cultural autonomy for Latvian Jews.<sup>14</sup>

## The School of the 1970s<sup>15</sup>

From the end of the war until the 1960s, the core of the Nuremberg judgments held firm. In the 1970s, however, a new view, or rather an attitude, about the Holocaust in Latvia began to emerge in the West. The new attitude was a pervasive one and appeared not only in the works of journalists but also among historians; it also influenced prosecutors the world over. The new view softened the legalism of Nuremberg – the assumption that the SS, the Himmler–Heydrich team, were the perpetrators of the Holocaust. Histories, legal briefs, and works of journalism began to appear in which it was contended, in the most extreme cases, that the native peoples in the East, in their relations to the victimized Jews, were worse than the Germans. To a high degree the origins of this view can be traced to the Soviets, but to designate it as the Soviet School alone would be too narrow. At the root it was a kind of second coming of the Nazi line, the point of view that was espoused in *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* – the view that the Nazis had wanted to project to the world.

There is one positive aspect to the school of the 1970s: the original Nuremberg legalists, basing their indictments on the paper trail left by the Security Police and SD forces, had failed to note that in the eastern territories (except for Poland) the

<sup>13</sup> Joseph W. Grigg, as a UP staff writer was one of the last Americans who stayed in Berlin until December 1941, a time when the Jews of Latvia had been killed. It is reasonable to assume that the Nazis had an opportunity to use foreign correspondents to plant information abroad. See Appendix.

<sup>14</sup> *New York World-Telegram*, 9 June 1942. Grigg's information, so far unnoticed by Holocaust scholars, is one of the earliest known sources about the killings in Eastern Europe. Bilmanis' letter, however, illustrates that at the time he also was ill informed about the conditions in Nazi-occupied Latvia. Bilmanis was wrong in denying that Latvians participated in the killings, but right in sensing that the Nazis were hatemongering.

<sup>15</sup> The biographical section to a large degree has been borrowed from my book *The Holocaust in Latvia: The Missing Center* (Riga, 1996).

native police units had been heavily involved in the killing of their countrymen. In books like Allan Ryan's *The Quiet Neighbors*, the school of the 1970s revived the idea of general and collective guilt, but this time the accusation of collective guilt was not turned against the Germans, as in the 1940s and 1950s, but against the East Europeans, among them the Latvians.<sup>16</sup>

To trace the origins of this new school for all of Eastern Europe is beyond the scope of this work, but as far as the accusation of collective guilt against the Latvians goes there are two sources.

The first is Max Kaufmann's *Die Vernichtung der Juden Lettlands*, published in 1947.<sup>17</sup> One of the early Holocaust memoirs, it vividly brought forth the travails and cruelties that the Jews of Latvia suffered during the Nazi occupation. It is also a sweeping indictment of the Latvians. The basic premise of the book is that the Latvians were rejoicing over the killing of the Jews:

The cruelties of the Latvians grew from day to day. They were accompanying the Jews to the various work places and on the streets they not only beat them horribly, they even murdered many.<sup>18</sup>

Kaufmann attributed to Latvian police and authorities all of the Nazi atrocities: anti-Semitic propaganda, the anti-Jewish laws, sidewalk rules, food-supply regulations, yellow star rules, and the killings themselves.

In 1971, Kaufmann assessed the Latvian role in the Holocaust in these terms:

But shortly after the German occupation of Latvia, the Latvians, too, prepared their version of the final solution of Latvian Jews. While the Germans were still busy with occupation questions, Latvian volunteer groups were organized with German blessing; and these volunteers rounded up Jews in the provinces and to an extent also cities. Later these Latvians also organized voluntary military formations, and together with German units they murdered Jews inside and outside Latvia. In so doing the Latvians won the confidence of the Germans, and therefore the Germans did not hesitate to transport thousands upon thousands of Jews from other countries to be murdered in Latvia. This was confirmed in 1946 at the Riga trial of the former German commissioner for occupied territories, Jeckeln, and five other generals who were tried simultaneously ... Much archival research is being conducted on the number of Latvian and other Jews killed in Latvia by the Germans. I believe, however, that the exact number will never be accurately determined since Latvians had murdered many Latvian Jews even before the Germans took over ... As an eye-witness to the great tragedy I cannot minimize the German guilt. But from the Latvians, with whom we had co-existed for several hundred years, and with whom we had passed through

<sup>16</sup> One of the authors who worked in this genre was Helen Fein, *Accounting for Genocide* (New York, 1979). The premise of Fein's book is that the Holocaust is not so much explained by the Nazi occupation as by the social attitudes of the local people.

<sup>17</sup> Max Kaufmann, *Die Vernichtung der Juden Lettlands* (Munich, 1947) 542 pages.

<sup>18</sup> Kaufmann 62. Murder in the streets had not been documented. The Nazis in their newsreels, however, reported a four-day massacre in the streets of Riga. See Grigg's dispatch above.

good times as well as bad, we should have expected human rather than an animal treatment.<sup>19</sup>

The second source for the new history leads to a series of KGB pamphlets written in the early 1960s, among which the most significant was *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* – the subject of this study. The surprising and unexpected consequence was that these pamphlets, especially *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* entered the scholarly literature in the West and were taken as serious documents by numerous authors.<sup>20</sup> *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* was much more frequently cited than were Kaufmann's memoirs.

### The Three "Truths" of Jeckeln<sup>21</sup>

The most interesting aspect of the new viewpoint is that much of the logic and collective accusation against the Latvians was based in large part on three statements that General Friedrich Jeckeln did not make at his trial in Riga in 1946.<sup>22</sup>

- "Truth No. 1" is the assertion that Latvians killed a large, indeterminable number of Jews before the Germans arrived in Latvia.
- "Truth No. 2" is that the Latvians had more nerve for killing Jews than did the Germans.
- "Truth No. 3" is that Jews from the West were brought to Latvia "because the Latvians had created the proper conditions for it."<sup>23</sup>

The unraveling of these three statements is a matter of more than just passing importance. Even though today we know that Jeckeln never said these things, in

<sup>19</sup> Max Kaufmann, "The War Years in Latvia Revisited," *The Jews in Latvia*, ed. M. Bobe. (Tel Aviv, 1971) 365–66. The author shows no knowledge of the occupation press. He seems to have bought into the Nazi concept of "volunteerism."

<sup>20</sup> For more detailed discussion of the KGB's literature's crossover to scholarly literature, see the section "The School of the 1970s" of this chapter.

<sup>21</sup> The first use of the Jeckeln legend is found in Kaufmann's 1947 opus.

<sup>22</sup> In November 1941, Himmler dispatched Jeckeln to Riga, appointed him as the *Höherer SS- und Polizeiführer* (HSSPF), and ordered him to empty Riga and the other Baltic ghettos of their Jews. In November, Jeckeln took over from Stahlecker the assignment to kill the Jews of Ostland and Russia's North. At a minimum, during his stay from November 1941 to September 1944, when he left Riga, Jeckeln was responsible for 150,000 deaths in the Baltic. If one includes all of the Jews he ordered killed in Ukraine, before arriving in Riga, and all of the Jews killed in Belorussia, this figure easily can be doubled or even tripled. In Latvia alone he was responsible for at least 45,000 Jewish deaths. Jeckeln was sentenced to die for war crimes, and hanged on Uzvaras laukums in Riga, on 3 February 1946.

<sup>23</sup> Kaufmann, *Die Vernichtung* 536. The same idea, differently phrased, is also found on p. 68. For a contrast to Kaufmann's explanation see Wolfgang Scheffler and Diana Schulle, *Buch der Erinnerung: Die ins Baltikum deportierten deutschen, österreichischen und tschechoslowakischen Juden* (Munich, 2003) 2 vols.; Peter Klein, "Strategy or Improvisation: The Ghetto of Riga as the Destination of Deportation from Western Europe," *Holokausta izpētes problēmas Latvijā / Problems of Holocaust Research in Latvia*, LVKR 2 (Riga, 2001) 74.

Western works treating the subject of the Holocaust they are still frequently cited as "truths" about the involvement of Latvians.

There are three questions about these alleged Jeckeln "truths": Did Jeckeln actually say them? Could he have said them? Even if he had not said them, could they be true?

The three statements, when they appear in Western literature, sometimes are put in quotation marks, sometimes they are paraphrased, and sometimes used without any attribution at all. Although those assertions are already found in Kaufmann's book, the Western authors invariably refer to *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* as the source of the quotations. *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* however, does not give the source of the quotations, but asserts that Jeckeln made these statements at his trial. Considering that Jeckeln, adding up the number of Jewish victims alone in Ukraine, the Baltic, and Belorussia, was responsible for a minimum of 300,000 to 500,000 deaths, an unusually high degree of credibility has been accorded to the three alleged statements. In fact, the rhetorical point seems to be that Jeckeln's criminal past invests the statements with a higher credibility than if they had been made by a statistician. It could be argued that Jeckeln had a motive to lie, to deflect attention from his own guilt. A skeptical historian could also argue that even if Jeckeln himself had not wanted to make the statements, the NKVD interrogator could have coerced them from him.

But we no longer have to rely on the KGB-filtered information to assess the truth about Jeckeln's statements. By now we have a considerable amount of the records of his interrogation available in the West.<sup>24</sup> The records of the entire Jeckeln trial have been microfilmed and are held at the archives of Yad Vashem and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Indulis Ronis, former Director of the Institute of History of Latvia, also has perused the full file in Moscow. Now we can say with full assurance that Jeckeln did not dodge (or the Soviet prosecutors did not allow him to) his responsibility; neither did he try to prevaricate about his crimes. Latvia was a peripheral issue, since the prosecutorial line of questioning was focused on connections with Berlin: Himmler and Göring. The Soviet courts, from the point of view of a historian, were narrowly channeled to prove one thing and only one – the criminality of the Nazi regime. In none of Jeckeln's testimony or depositions did he touch upon Latvian responsibility for killing Jews. Historians and journalists who want to continue, as some will, to rely on Jeckeln's allegations for understanding the Holocaust in Latvia will have to rely on other than the official documents for their assertions.

<sup>24</sup> Some of Jeckeln's interrogation documents were obtained by the Hamburg Landesgericht in connection with the war crimes trials of Maywald and Arājs. Most of them are reprinted in Helmut Krausnick and Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges* (Stuttgart, 1981); also in Gerald Fleming, *Hitler and the Final Solution* (Berkeley, 1982) 95-100. Some of Jeckeln's testimony is also found in *Tiesas prāva: Par vācu-fašistisko iebrucēju ļaundarbībām Latvijā* [The Tribunal: The Evil Deeds of the German-Fascistic Aggressors in Latvia] (Rīga, 1946).

The purpose of the Jeckeln trial was to convict Jeckeln and the Nazis – not Latvians. Pēteris Krupņikovs, now a retired Professor of History at the University of Latvia, served as a translator for the Soviet interrogator and prosecutors prior to and during Jeckeln's trial. He did not remember Jeckeln in any context ever making any of the three statements.<sup>25</sup>

The first of the purported Jeckeln allegations has two versions. The first of these is Kaufmann's of 1947:

The number of the Jews brought from abroad to Latvia is not precisely known to me, nor is the number of Jews killed in Latvia. Already before we Germans took over power, so many Jews were murdered by the Latvians, that no exact number could be determined.<sup>26</sup>

In the *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* the critical lines are:

*It's impossible for me to tell you the precise number. When I arrived in Rīga in the summer of 1941, I discovered that the Latvians themselves had already killed many thousands of Jews. And this had been going on in all other cities and towns throughout Latvia.*<sup>27</sup>

The *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* version is the more fantastic and absurd one. Both authors give the citation as a direct quotation, but in the *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* version Jeckeln claims to have arrived in Latvia in the summer of 1941, which is an impossibility because at the time he was posted in Ukraine, and it is well documented that he arrived in Riga only in mid-November 1941.

The next quotation comes from Jeckeln's interrogation transcript and to a high degree parallels Kaufmann's version. Jeckeln is talking about the number of Jews killed before his arrival, although the exchange came up in an indirect way. The question is about Jeckeln's arrival in Riga, but Kaufmann and Ducmanis rephrase the question as if it is about German arrival in Latvia. Jeckeln says that he cannot be exact about the number of Jews brought to Latvia, and then he gets into the question of Jews killed before his arrival in the Baltic:

Jeckeln: ... I must however say, that already before my arrival in Rīga, [meaning November 1941] a large number of Jews had been killed in Ostland and in Belorussia. That was reported to me.

Question: Who reported it?

Jeckeln: Stahlecker, Prützmann, Generalmajor Schröder, the SS-Police Commander of Latvia, Generalmajor Möller, the SS-Police Commander of Estonia, and Generalmajor Wysocki, the SS-Police Commander of Lithuania.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> My conversation with Pēteris Krupņikovs in May 1989.

<sup>26</sup> Kaufmann, *Die Vernichtung* 67.

<sup>27</sup> *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* 13.

<sup>28</sup> Krausnick and Wilhelm 569.

Jeckeln's statement in the transcript corresponds to the facts as they existed in 1941. It is true, as he asserts, that many Jews were killed in the Baltic and Belorussia prior to his arrival. (In Latvia about 30,000 Jews had been murdered). It is also reasonable to assume that upon his arrival Jeckeln asked his subordinates to inform him about the situation. The contents of the reports to Jeckeln we do not know, but there is no indication that anybody said that Latvians had killed an unaccounted for number of Jews before the German arrival. It is important to note that in structure and content Jeckeln's answer is similar to Kaufmann's statement, except that the official version, contrary to Kaufmann's, does not have anything to say about the unaccounted for number of Jews killed by the Latvians. After the war, in 1946, Kaufmann returned to Latvia for a visit, and he claims to have been present at the Jeckeln trial, but it must be noted that in neither version, that of 1947 nor that of 1971, when he wrote a brief article about the Holocaust in Latvia, did Kaufmann claim to have himself heard the statements from Jeckeln. That Kaufmann brought the notion out of Latvia in 1946 seems, however, clear. How he obtained the altered quotation, he did not clarify. As to the source, the KGB pamphlets of the 1960s and 1970s are also silent.

As there is no reason to think Jeckeln himself to have been the author of "Jeckeln's" first statement, there are equally shaky grounds for believing that he made the second and third statements.

Did Jeckeln ever say that the Latvians had a better nerve for killing Jews than did the Germans? There is no certified or archival document that connects Jeckeln with the statement, and it is questionable that this paragon of Nazism, an extreme proponent of the master race, would have said it. Even if he had, there are two cases on record in which he could have appointed Latvians instead of Germans to kill Jews; but he chose Germans instead.

The first and the largest was the Rumbula action itself. To kill the Jews at Rumbula, Jeckeln ordered twelve men of his own retinue to carry out the assignment. The Arājs Commando and Latvian policemen at that time performed non-shooting assignments. The second case involves the search for weapons in the ghetto in the fall of 1942. Jeckeln ordered Lange's SD team to make the search and thereafter to execute the Jewish resistance fighters. In general, Jeckeln could not have been a good judge of Latvians as killers: he was too high in the hierarchy, too far removed from the Latvians. Lange and Stahlecker could have given more credible testimony than did Jeckeln, and on several occasions, Stahlecker was known to have complained that the Latvians were killing too slowly.<sup>29</sup>

Jeckeln's third statement is equally insupportable. The Reich Jews began to be shipped to Latvia very shortly after Jeckeln arrived there, and everyone involved

<sup>29</sup> Landesgericht Hamburg: Urteil, Heinz Georg Theodor Trühe, 29 April 1975, p. 28.

in Latvia, including Lange, seemed to have been unprepared and surprised when the shipments of Jews began to arrive in Riga. The decision to ship Jews to Latvia was made in Berlin, and it is not known whether Himmler, Heydrich, or Eichmann ever consulted anybody in the Baltic.<sup>30</sup> In fact, the plans to send Jews to the Ostland were more ambitious than the eventual outcome. The German civilian administration in the Baltic, especially in the person of Hinrich Lohse, was against the transport of Jews to the Ostland.

It is a Soviet invention that 240,000 Jews were sent to Latvia and murdered there. To begin with, there was not enough housing in wartime Latvia to accommodate, even on temporary basis, numbers of that scale. The two larger concentration camps, Salaspils and Mežaparks (Kaiserwald), even after being completed, could accommodate only about 6,000 each. And the Riga Ghetto, after the killing of Latvia's Jews, was never again filled up to its original population of 29,000. A makeshift camp was created in Jumpravmuiža, but that housed at its peak no more than 4,000.<sup>31</sup>

## Soviet Writings about the Holocaust

After the war, the Soviets were in possession of the physical evidence: grave sites; captured German documents; and witnesses, survivors, and participants in the killings. The Soviets from the very beginning double-dealt with the history of the Holocaust in German-occupied Latvia, as they did with the Holocaust in general. They had already begun the trail of disinformation during the war. On the one hand the Soviets came close to denying the existence of the Holocaust; on the other they incriminated all of Eastern Europe, except the Russians, for killing the Jews. As the Soviets were sinking into deep anti-Semitism after the war and even the survivors of the Holocaust were being persecuted and sent North, the authorities began to manage the information about the German atrocities in the East by publishing selected evidence – snippets of documents and books – containing disinformation or incomplete information about the role that the peoples of Eastern Europe played in the atrocities. (For a Soviet example of disinformation see the Annex.)

In the hierarchy of Soviet crimes, participation in a war against the Red Army or the Soviet partisans weighed as heavily as or sometimes even more so than

<sup>30</sup> The first time the idea of sending Jews to Riga was floated was at the end of September 1941, in Berlin, by Himmler in a letter to Geiser. The idea was again raised by Heydrich on 10 October 1941, in an RSHA meeting on the "Final Solution." Heydrich suggested that 50,000 Jews be sent to Riga and Minsk. See Hilberg 2: 402. Also see Scheffler and Schulle, *Buch der Erinnerung*.

<sup>31</sup> Gertrude Schneider, *The Riga Ghetto, 1941-1943* (New York, 1973) 44–45. She especially stresses Lohse's opposition to the movement of Jews to the Baltic.

participation in the killing of the Jews. Membership in the Nazi killing apparatus was no impediment to later participation in an NKVD or KGB network of spies, agents, and informers. In Latvia there are some well-known cases, Pauls Ducmanis being only one of them, of Nazi-era activists and journalists who were engaged in KGB work.<sup>32</sup>

Even before the war had ended, the Soviets convened an Extraordinary Commission of the Republic to investigate the crimes of Nazism.<sup>33</sup> The commission sat from 23 August 1944 to 27 July 1946, established 5,562 local commissions of inquiry, and employed about 50,000 people. The commission's reports vary in quality from location to location. On the one hand they reveal punctilious attention to detail, but on the other – a tendency to exaggerate and even fabricate data. Especially the number of victims was increased without any substantiating evidence. In addition to the Extraordinary Commission's inquiry on the political and criminal level, the NKVD and SMERSH in Latvia and in the USSR at large interrogated thousands of Latvians and Germans about Nazi crimes. Only now that the archives are open do we see the mountain of information accumulated by the Soviets. After the war, the Soviets captured at least 344 members of the Arājs Commando and, they all were interrogated, tried, and convicted.<sup>34</sup> The Second World War documents are cross-indexed and filed in accordance with the most demanding archival standards.

Only after *perestroika* and *glasnost* did the KGB start to open some of this information for limited public use. After the fall of the Soviet Union, with the exception of those files taken to Russia, full access to the once-secret holdings is

<sup>32</sup> A KGB source lists the following Arājs Commando members (some listed only by their code name) who worked as their informers in Latvia: Pekavs, Krauze, Feniks, Apse, Grigorevs, Lauks, Edvards, Kaija, Raimonds Zaļkalns, Jānis Iezēns, Aleksandrs, Andrejs, Zvejnieks, Jānis, Manfreds, Valdis, Lorencs, Ērglis, Kurošins, Kārlis Strazds, Jānis Vitols, Šterns, Boris Kintslers, Brokāns, Vitols, Tīģeris, Maršāns, Vladimirs Kļiņģeris, Jānis Zālītis, Oļģerts Lācis, Haralds Leja, Valdemārs Šulmanis, Rolfs Ozols, Bēgls, Melnais, Smilga, Jūlijs (Edgars) Vitols, Manfreds Puzuls (Ļiterņoje D'elo, vol. 12, LVA, fonds 1825, ser. 4, file 1). lieta.

<sup>33</sup> The full title of the commission read: "Republikas Ārkārtējā Komisija vācu fašistisko iebrucēju un to līdzdalībnieku pastrādāto noziegumu konstatēšanai un izmeklēšanai, kā arī Latvijas PSR pilsoņiem, lauksaimniecībai, sabiedriskajām organizācijām, valsts uzņēmumiem un iestādēm nodarīto zaudējumu konstatēšanai." *Latvijas PSR mazā enciklopēdija*, vol. 1 (Rīgā, 1967): 99–100. If anything, the commission overdid its assignment: it found that during the German occupation in the territory of Latvia 313,798 civilians, among them 39,835 children, and 330,032 POWs were killed. See *Mēs apsūdzam: Dokumenti un materiāli par hitlerisko okupantu un latviešu buržuāzisko nacionālistu ļaundarbībām Latvijas Padomju Sociālistiskajā republikā, 1941–1945* [We Accuse: Documents and Materials about the Crimes of Hitlerian Occupants and Latvian Bourgeois Nationalists in the Latvian SSR 1941–1945] (Rīga, 1965) 6. In all categories these are phenomenal numbers.

<sup>34</sup> The Arājs Commando trials comprise only a small part of the 40,000 cases that the KGB archive holds in Rīga. See Rudite Viksne, "Members of the Arājs Commando In Soviet Court Files: Social Position, Education, Reasons for Volunteering, Penalty; *The Hidden and Forbidden History of Latvia during the Soviet and Nazi Occupations 1940–1991*, LVKR 14 (Rīga, 2005) 188–206. She lists 356 cases.

possible. The Extraordinary Commission's archives were opened to foreigners in 1989, and other archives previously controlled by the KGB, such as the documents of the local police, have gradually been made accessible. The NKVD and KGB war crimes trial files came under civilian control only after the failed coup in August 1991. The files that the KGB transported to Russia from Latvia in 1991 are still closed.

The level of secrecy that the Soviets imposed upon the Holocaust archives is difficult to understand, because the Soviets, too, claimed to want to root out the Nazis.<sup>35</sup> Only in the 1970s did the Soviets begin to release selected documents (now we know that the released documents were selected and sanitized) to German and American prosecutors in war crimes cases. Nevertheless, numerous documents that could have helped to prosecute war crimes in the West were withheld by the Soviets, who subjugated the Holocaust to considerations of internal and international politics.<sup>36</sup> All the Soviet-era publications are colored by these considerations. The memory of the Nazi crimes was drowned out in Soviet dialectic.

The Soviets never gave an accurate accounting of the number of victims during the German occupation. They did not even count up the number of communists killed, which would have been easy to do. It was left to the Agitprop offices to determine the numbers, and they came up with a count that bordered on the fantastic. Some of the numbers, as they appear in the reports of the Latvian Extraordinary Commission, were not falsified at the grass-roots level but by higher authorities. The reported numbers were frequently tripled those from the actual data from the field.

The general tendency of the Soviet works on the Holocaust has been to minimize, sometimes even eliminate, the German role in the killings, and attribute the responsibility for the murders to "nationalists." The Soviets picked up and continued the Nazi theme of the spontaneity of "native" forces in the killing of the Jews. The cornerstone of Soviet historiography was to divide the Latvian people into communists and nationalists. While collective guilt ceased to be attributed even to the Germans, the Soviets and their successors continued to operate with the concept until our own day. These writings have deemphasized the German occupational grip, their rule by martial law, the Wehrmacht, the SD, and the multiple layers of civilian and Nazi Party control in Latvia. Latvia is portrayed as if Latvians themselves were in control, governing the country. As the Soviets

<sup>35</sup> The secrecy extended to the Soviet desire even to hide the number of Latvian communists killed during the occupation. See Vilis Samsons, *Kurzemes meži šalc* [The Forests of Kurzeme Are Rustling] (Riga, 1974).

<sup>36</sup> For example, the Soviets knew exactly how many men served in the Arājs Commando, but the documents were never given to the Hamburg justices. In the Maikovskis case the Soviets had the rosters of men serving under Maikovskis, but they were never given to the Americans.

fostered this view, access to the sources of information and archival evidence about the German occupation was suppressed.<sup>37</sup>

The Holocaust was a taboo subject even among the survivors of the Holocaust.<sup>38</sup> Jews were not allowed to write about the years of their torment. The Soviets suppressed information about the crimes and frequently persecuted those who had suffered under the Nazis, even Jewish survivors. As the Soviets were compiling mountains of evidence about Nazi crimes, they forbade the survivors a forum to discuss the crimes and remember the victims.<sup>39</sup>

In general, we can say that in pre-*glasnost* Latvia, it was even forbidden to write about Latvian-Jewish relations. For example, the word "Jew" was edited out of Latvian Marxist texts; Jānis Rainis classic drama *Joseph and His Brothers* was banned for long stretches from the Latvian stage, and his diary about his trip to Palestine in 1929 was excluded from his collected works.<sup>40</sup>

In spite of these strictures, Soviet Latvian historians did write about the Holocaust, simply because they lived on the site of the crime, although the information about it must be searched for in the peripheral literature: the histories and memoirs of war, partisan struggles, and resistance.

Among the Soviet Latvian books that include information about Nazi crimes are *Latviešu tautas cīņa Lielajā Tēvijas karā* (The Latvian People's Struggle in the Great Patriotic War)<sup>41</sup> and *Reiz cēlās strēlnieks sarkanais* (The Rising of the Red Riflemen),<sup>42</sup> an anthology. Furthermore, there is a series of works on communist resistance and partisan movement: Jānis Dzintars, *Neredzamā fronte* (1970); Alfrēds Raškevics and Olga Spoģe, *Avangardā komunisti* (1979); and a whole

<sup>37</sup> For Soviet attitudes towards Nazi evidence, see the article by Vilnis Zariņš, "Laupītāju filozofija" [The Philosophy of Looters], *Avots* 6–7 (1989). According to Zariņš, other people advised him to leave the topic alone because fascism had been so thoroughly defeated that its reincarnation in a scholarly study was no longer needed. He writes: "In accordance with the rules of the times, a publication about National Socialism was not allowed to contain precise citations and sources from the works of Hitler and his followers because that would give a forum to the enemies. I was told to leave out the precise citations, substituting them with paraphrases, and the interpretation of the texts – with cursing."

<sup>38</sup> The only reliable work on the Holocaust, more on the peripheral issues than about the Holocaust itself, was done by Mārgers Vestermanis. See Vestermanis, *Tā rīkojās vērmahts* [That is How Wehrmacht Behaved] (Riga, 1973). Vestermanis was also responsible for the document collection, *Mēs apsūdzam*, although his name is not mentioned in the roster of editors.

<sup>39</sup> Frida Michelson was not allowed to publish her memoirs within the Soviet Union. See her *I Survived Rumbuli*, transl. Wolf Goodman (New York, 1979) 231.

<sup>40</sup> For example, it is well established that the NKVD troops at the time of German invasion into Latvia blocked the Latvian–USSR frontier, preventing Jews from Latvia and Lithuania from escaping to the Soviet interior. Also to be noted is Stalin's radio speech of 3 July 1941, in which he fails to mention the Jews and the special danger that they faced under the Nazis. A warning by Stalin then might not have saved Latvia's Jews, but with proper warnings and help the fate of the Kiev Jews could have been much different.

<sup>41</sup> Published by the Latvian SSR Academy of Sciences (Riga, 1965).

<sup>42</sup> Published by the Party History Institute of the Latvian Communist Party Central Committee (Riga, 1965 and 1971).

series of studies and reminiscences by the academician Vilis Samsons: *Kurzemes partizāņi, Kurzemes meži šalc* (1974), and numerous other works.<sup>43</sup>

There are only three Soviet-Latvian books that more or less deal with the Holocaust issues directly: a document collection, *Mēs apsūdzam* (1968); an anthology of reminiscences, *Salaspils nāves nometnē* (1962, 1965, and 1973); and a monograph by Mārgers Vestermanis, *Tā rīkojās vēрмаhts* (1973). Within the Soviet Holocaust library one may also include *Tiesas prāva* (1946), which contains a description and partial transcript of the Jeckeln trial in 1946. During the Soviet occupation the most careful and industrious compiler of documents was Vestermanis, a Holocaust survivor, who, considering the strictures, endeavored to keep propaganda out of his writings.<sup>44</sup> Ironically, however, we can say that Vestermanis has been better at keeping Soviet than Nazi precepts out of his writings.<sup>45</sup>

Only after *perestroika* could fully honest publications about the Holocaust in Latvia appear. The publication in 1989 of Vilnis Zariņš's study of Nazi ideology was a noteworthy event.<sup>46</sup> Up to now numerous Holocaust-related articles and materials have appeared in the press and the leading historical journals *Latvijas Zinātņu Akadēmijas Vēstis* [Bulletin of the Latvian Academy of Sciences], *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls* [Journal of the Institute of the History of Latvia], *Latvijas kara muzeja gadagramata* [Yearbook of the War Museum of Latvia], *Latvijas Okupācijas muzeja gadagrāmata* [Yearbook of the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia], and *Latvijas Vēsture* [History of Latvia]. Among the authors of the post-*perestroika* writings have been Vilis Samsons, Haralds Biezais, Kārlis Kangeris, Heinrihs Strods, Uldis Neiburgs, Rudīte Viksne, Aivars Stranga, and others.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>43</sup> *Kurzemes katlā* [In the Kurzeme Cauldron] (Rīga, 1969) is an earlier version of *Kurzemes meži šalc*. Among his other works the more significant are *Partizāņu kustība Ziemeļlatvijā Lielajā Tēvijas karā* [The Partisan Movement In Northern Latvia during the Great Patriotic War] (Rīga, 1950), *Deviņpadsmitais – Sarkano partizāņu gads* [The Nineteenth – the Year of Red Partisans] (Rīga, 1970), and *Cauri puteņiem* [Through Snowstorms] (Rīga, 1983).

<sup>44</sup> For example see his "Das SS-Seelager Dondangen – ein Modell für die geplante nazistische 'Neuordnung Europas'," *Militärgeschichte* 2, ed. Militärgeschichtliches Institut der DDR (Berlin, 1986): 145–46

<sup>45</sup> In general, in his post-Soviet writings Vestermanis has cleaved close to the Germanless concept of the Holocaust in Latvia. See his most important article "Der lettische Anteil an der 'Endlösung,'" *Die Schatten der Vergangenheit*, eds. Uwe Backe Eckard et al. (Frankfurt a.M., 1989). In recent years Vestermanis has directed his efforts more in the direction of studying the saviors of Holocaust victims. For example "Pētījuma pieteikums: 'Pretdarbība holokaustam Latvijā'" [Research in Progress: "Resistance to the Holocaust in Latvia"] *Holokausta izpētes problēmas Latvijā / Problems of Holocaust Research in Latvia*, LVKR 2 (Rīga, 2001).

<sup>46</sup> Zariņš, "Laupītāju filozofija."

<sup>47</sup> The most recent publications about the Holocaust in Latvia and related topics can be found in publications of the Commission of Latvia's Historians, especially Volumes 1 to 5, 8 and 11; the *Yearbook of the Occupation Museum of Latvia*; and the *Yearbook of the War Museum of Latvia*. Selected research of the Historian Committee's research in English, including several articles on the Holocaust, is found in Volume 14: *The Hidden and Forbidden History of Latvia under Soviet and Nazi Occupations 1940–1991*, LVKR 14 (Rīga, 2005). For an assessment of the Commission's work see, A. Stranga's essay "Jāapzinās ne tikai tagadne bet arī nākotne" [We Must Be Aware Not Only of the Present but of the Future as Well], *Latvijas vēstnesis*, 25 October 2003.

In the broader context of Soviet Latvian historiography one must also include the Salaspils Memorial, which is one of the most grandiose in Europe. Although the memorial was not built to commemorate the Jewish victims alone, the Jews certainly were subsumed under the victims of Nazism. Even during the darkest days of Brezhnevite anti-Semitism, tourist guides did not fail, without being specific, to mention that Jews were killed in territory of Latvia.

## The Killing of the Jews in Occupied Latvia

Upon entering Latvia, the Germans – the Wehrmacht, and the SD – were relentless in the pursuit of Jews. Their orders – secret and open – and articles in newspapers attest that. One does not need to resort to *Wochenschau* films and pictures snapped by the Nazi public relation crews, to learn how the Germans carried out their plan to murder the Jews. There is no evidence that the “natives” showed equal interest in the people that the Nazis had selected for victimization. Whether the Wehrmacht officials fully understood what they were organizing and ordering one cannot ascertain, but in these matters ignorance is no excuse, and in the longer-range perspective it is not important to determine the degree of their awareness. It is, however, significant to register that they did issue orders and organize the countryside in a manner that facilitated the murder of Jews when the time arrived – which was a matter of days and weeks not months. It must also be noted that, as Heydrich's directive and Stahlecker's reports indicate, all Latvian attempts at autonomous organization were quashed. The Germans organizationally moved in two diametrically opposite directions: towards pacification and chaos. They needed pacification so that maximum benefits could be extracted from the territories, and to satisfy their ideological imperatives they perpetrated a “racial revolution” – purging the land of its “undesirables,” Jews and communists.

The two sides of the occupation were intrinsically incompatible, yet by stealth and by might the Germans made them coexist. The pacifying and the chaos-producing forces were parts of the same system, and hence the guilt and innocence under those conditions from a metaphysical perspective becomes problematical. There is no question that *Einsatzgruppe A* and the SD and their Latvian accessories played the satanic role. It is not generally known that the SS and SD, Stahlecker in particular, created a shadow SD network in many places in Latvia – groups in addition to the self-defense units. In locations where these SD units existed, as in Madona and Valmiera districts, the burden of dealing with the Jews was eased for the self-defense units. The situation with the Wehrmacht and the self-defense was more complicated, if not ambiguous. In general, but not always, the Wehrmacht played a stabilizing role. On the Latvian side, we can also say the

same thing about the self-defense. Especially the duality of the Wehrmacht and the self-defense teams came to a head in those localities where Jews resided.

All the documents that we have about German intentions during the early hours of occupation indicate that they were in hot pursuit of the Jews. Stahl-ecker's reports and numerous post-war trials indicate this. It is, however, evident that the killing of the Jews could not happen before an organizational framework was put in place. There is evidence that there were killings that some passing German groups carried out, but those were the exceptions.

In the larger cities, Rīga, Daugavpils, and Liepāja, the first killings happened within hours of occupation. In Rīga, we have every reason to believe the first action occurred on the left bank (Pārdaugava) of Rīga, before July 1.

I have already written about the left-bank killings in my book, *The Holocaust in Latvia*, but then my documentation for it consisted only of two second-hand "witnesses," two daughters whose fathers had told them about it. Since that time, I have obtained two first-hand witnesses who were there and saw it themselves.<sup>48</sup> Aleksandrs Rūdolfs Hofmanis, a philology student at the time, said that after the arrival of German forces on the left bank of the Daugava, all men under 60 were ordered to leave their homes and assemble in an open field at Katlakalns, on the city's outskirts. This was not unique; similar assembly of men was done in other cities in the Eastern territories, Gargzdai in Lithuania, for example. In Rīga the men were held on the open field for about 48 hours until 1 July 1941, when the center of Rīga was occupied. Towards the evening of the first day a group of Germans arrived and lined up all of the assembled men. The Germans inspected everybody's face and picked out some that they thought were Jews. The suspected group was taken aside where it was ascertained if they had been circumcised. Some from the suspected group returned to the main group – the others were taken away, never to be seen again.<sup>49</sup>

#### GERMANS ON THE LEFT BANK OF DAUGAVA IN RĪGA – 29 JUNE 1941

*I can testify that the information about German entrance in Pārdaugava on 29 June 1941 is correct. I experienced it myself because I lived behind the Āgenskalns Market at Mazā Nometņu iela 66/68 next to the Āgenskalns Bathhouse. Upon the German arrival all men on our street were ordered out of their homes and we were told that there had been shots from windows directed at them, and therefore until the circumstances were clarified men*

<sup>48</sup> The story finds an indirect substantiation in a report that Colonel Ullersberger, the commandant of Riga, wrote about the taking of Riga on 1 July 1941. Before crossing the river Ullersberger surveyed his forces on the left bank and noted that: "Bei der Erkundung sah ich, dass am westl. Dünaufer allerdings Radsfaher des Radsf. Btln. 402 lagen und auch dort in Verbindung mit unterstellten Waffen kleinere Reinigungsaktionen vornahmen ..." BA-MA, RH 24-26/64.

<sup>49</sup> Rūdolfs Hofmanis' letter 15 March 2001. It is possible that the Pārdaugava action was directed by Sandberger, the Commander of *Einsatzkommando 1a*. As far as we know he was the highest SD commander on the site, having arrived there two days before Stahl-ecker.

would be sent out of the town. So we were driven past the Āgenskalns Market, along the Arkādija Park where on the walkways I saw, perhaps killed by stray bullets, two dead men and two women, all civilians. Passing Torņakalns Cemetery, at the gate I saw a heap of piled up Red Army men. Turning in on Bauskas iela there were many crewless, destroyed (not all), Russian tanks. It appears they had wanted to get to the bridges, but the Germans coming in from the direction of Jelgava had cut them off. Thus we were driven to Katlakalns, where we were seated on the ground and put under guard. Over our heads, somewhere from behind, cannon shots were directed towards Rīga. Next day there arrived several higher German officers who ordered us to sit in such rows that made it easy for them to walk though them. We were asked to point out Communists and Jews. Since nobody spoke up, at least near me, then they walked along the rows, searching for Jewish-looking faces. Those who looked like Jews were taken away, I do not know where to. Perhaps to check their documents, if they had forgotten them. The rest of us were allowed to go home. In addition, I can add that next door to us in an apartment there lived a Latvian who was married to a Jewish woman. He showed the marriage license that they are husband and wife, and so after she was sterilized so that she could have no children, she was released to go home. Thus I have experienced this event, although some details I might have forgotten.

Visvaldis Vizbulis,  
Tukums.

It has been established by numerous trials, especially in those held in Germany, that the initial killings were carried out by German teams, most likely by units belonging to *Einsatzgruppe A*.

In the countryside towns the early phase was slower, but once it began the killings were fast and thorough. The killings in the countryside began in the middle of July and were completed by the end of August. In Zemgale, the southern part of Latvia, most of the Jews were killed by the end of July 1941.

Generally speaking, with some exceptions, the liquidation of the Jews in the country towns began about three weeks after the arrival of the Germans. For example, in the town of Viesīte the German commandant Kunze ordered his Latvian auxiliaries to expel the towns Jews from their homes on 1 July 1941, the third day of occupation. The Jews were confined in a barn before they were killed on 19 July. One is puzzled why there was such a lengthy waiting period. In Subate, on the other hand, the Jews were expelled from their homes on 20 July and killed on the next day. The Jews of Auce were ordered out of town on about 8 July, and thereafter confined to a barn and killed by an SD commando on 11 July. In Auce the German commando of ten men used the local self-defense men to facilitate the killing. In all places the order to murder Jews came from Germans, although in many cases we do not know exactly which unit or formation the Germans represented. In the Viesīte case we know the name of the German who gave the orders, but we do not know the German formation he represented or commanded. Once the killing in the countryside began, the liquidation was total – all men, women, and children were killed.

Some historians of the Holocaust like Christoph Dieckmann and Ulrich Herbert have endeavored to argue that the killing of women and children began only in August 1941 or later. Unfortunately those historians have failed to investigate German-occupied Latvia.<sup>50</sup>

We may note that the killing in the countryside began only after the Latvian self-defense units were in place, when a modicum of stability was established. The killing could only begin after the territory was safe from “surprises,” perceived or real. Whether the self-defense units did or did not participate in the killings – in some places they did, in others they did not – they were useful as a stabilizing ballast in Latvia. Regardless of who did the killing, on the killing days the “neighbors” were frequently ordered to guard the bridges and the approaches to the doomed towns. On the killing day the town was closed down and the traffic on the streets, roads, and bridges came to a standstill. From the German perspective it was not important whether the “neighbors” were the killers or not. They had tried the spontaneous “pogrom” variant, but they were not wedded to it. Ultimately, everything was sacrificed on the altar of efficiency, and they, unlike some historians, did not confuse their propaganda with the ends they were seeking. To be sure, the killings attracted their share of sadists, but the German system was not predicated on sadism. By now it has become a cliché, but it is true that the Jews were killed by ordinary men. And anti-Semitism was not a criterion for their selection for or participation in the killing.

The Holocaust was an organized and a segmented event, the culmination of a series of steps. The sequence of these steps that led to the killings began in Germany with the decision to liquidate Jews and the working out of the organizational and propaganda plans. The 29 May 1941 meeting in Berlin was one step in the planning. The implementation of the plan in Latvia differed from place to place. The steps outlined below are typical of Latvian small towns, not the large cities Riga, Daugavpils, and Liepāja:

- Step 1.** The occupation of Latvia.
- Step 2.** The introduction of martial law, which included a series of coercive measures and multiple threats.
- Step 3.** The introduction of Nazi public opinion: the non-Nazi press was prohibited and anti-Semitism became the staple of the German-regulated press.

<sup>50</sup> See Ulrich Herbert, ed., *National Socialist Extermination Policies: Contemporary German Perspectives and Controversies* (New York, 2000). For a partial rehabilitation of Helmut Krausnick, see Peter Longrich, “From Mass Murder to the ‘Final Solution’,” *From Peace to War: Germany, Soviet Russia and the World, 1939-1941*, ed. Bernd Wegner (Providence, RI, 1997). The functionalist school is well represented in Dan Stone, ed., *The Historiography of the Holocaust* (New York, 2004).

- Step 4.** The introduction of anti-Jewish laws, which was usually done by the Wehrmacht *Ortskommandant*. These laws included the requirement for Jews to wear a yellow patch, established a special curfew, prohibited Jews to walk on the sidewalks or being present in certain public places.
- Step 5.** Simultaneous with the previous steps, the Wehrmacht *Ortskommandant* ordered the organization of a Latvian network of paramilitary formations that were subordinated to the Germans and were auxiliary of the Germans. The Germans called them *self-defense*. The local self-defense units were subordinated to the Wehrmacht, the leadership of *Einsatzgruppe A*, and a Latvian District Commandant.
- Step 6.** The Wehrmacht *Ortskommandant* ordered the registration of Jews, carried out by Latvian Police or self-defense clerks.

So far all of the steps had been ordered by the Wehrmacht.

- Step 7.** Approximately after the second week of the occupation, the *Einsatzgruppe A* men entered upon the scene. First, they ordered the self-defense men, directly, going from town to town or through the Latvian District commandant, to arrest the towns Jews and confine them to some structure, such as a barn or a synagogue. In some places the first step was an order to expel Jews from their domiciles.
- Step 8.** The local self-defense men were ordered to guard and confine the Jews. The first days of confinement in some cases were rather lackadaisical, the entrapped victims still exercising some mobility.
- Step 9.** The locals were also the ones ordered to close down the town. As such, it was the locals who occupied the most visible role in the killing operation.
- Step 10.** The killing of the Jews. The killing was done by some outside German or Latvian group. As a rule, although there were some exceptions, the locals were not trusted with the killing operations.

What does the evidence say about the Holocaust in occupied Latvia? The first documents that were issued by the occupying forces and their activities show that from the first hours of entrance the Germans were relentless, as confirmed by laws, orders, and press releases, in the pursuit of Jews. Whatever the reality of the German role in the killing of the Jews was, it must be noted that the SD used the vocabulary of subterfuge even in their internal communications. "Self-cleansing," "self-defense," and "pogrom" fill their communications. Reporting on the killings of Jelgava Jews the "Tätigkeits- und Lagebericht (No. 2)" of *Einsatzgruppe A* wrote:

Die Selbstreinigungs-Bestrebungen sind an den meisten Orten nur langsam in Gang gekommen. Pogrome in Mitau führten dazu, daß sämtliche 1550 Juden nunmehr beseitigt sind.

## The Sequence of Orders

The Nazi forces attacked the USSR on 22 June 1941. On the following day, Reinhard Heydrich, the Head of the Security Police ordered the *Einsatzgruppe A*, headed by SS-Brigadeführer Walther Stahlecker, into Latvia. Stahlecker's charge, among other assignments, as revealed in numerous postwar trials, was to destroy the Jews of the occupied territory. Altogether at least 62,000 Latvian Jews were killed out of the 94,000 who resided in the country in 1935, the year of the last full census. One significant aspect in understanding the Holocaust that so far has not been emphasized is that it was a segmented event in which several German agencies had a hand. While it is

Berlin, den 25. Sept. 1941

### Die Judenfrage im Gebiet Ostland

Die ersten Massnahmen gegen die Juden auch auf  
verwaltungspolizeilichem Gebiet im  
Reichskommissariat Ostland wurden von der  
Sicherheitspolizei durchgeführt.

Ereignismeldung der USSR Nr. 94

true that *Einsatzgruppe A* and the SD had a starring role in the murder, they could not have done it as easily as they did had not the Wehrmacht and some Latvian agencies contributed to it. For example, it was the Wehrmacht that issued the first anti-Jewish laws in Latvia. They directed the Jews to wear a yellow marking and specified the shopping and sidewalk rules. It was also the Wehrmacht that initiated the census of the Jews in the small towns of Latvia. The initial Latvian contribution was in helping the Germans to arrest and guard them.

Upon entering the Baltic, Stahlecker had a plan with two options. As a first option, which misfired, he attempted to induce locals into spontaneous attacks against Jews, what he called pogroms. The second option was to set up auxiliary organizations subordinated to the Germans that could be used in the annihilation process. He set up special killing teams called *Sonderkommandos* that operated under his direct command as auxiliaries; and he participated alongside the Wehrmacht in setting up the so-called self-defense units consisting of locals, both Latvians and other ethnics. In addition, before the Latvian troops were trained, he had a certain number of German SD and *Ordnungspolizei* men available that he used in killing operations.

The Jews of Latvia were killed in two phases: the Stahlecker phase that lasted from July through August 1941, and the Jeckeln phase that took place during

November and December 1941. Those Latvian Jews who were still alive at the end of 1941 had a good chance to survive the Holocaust as working Jews. Altogether, of the 94,000 Jews living in Latvia in 1934, the Germans trapped approximately 67,000, of whom about 62,000 were killed in 1941. Since 1934 there had been a slow Jewish migration out of Latvia. During June and July 1941, perhaps as many as 20,000 Jews fled Latvia to the interior of the USSR.

The first murders of Jews took place in the large cities: Rīga, Daugavpils, and Liepāja, and that happened within the first week of the occupation. The murder of Jews in Rīga began on 30 June on the left bank of the city, when Rīga proper was still in Soviet hands. The Rīga synagogues were burned on 4 July with the help of the fledgling Arājs Commando. By mid-July, as the killings in the large cities slowed down, the grim action moved to the countryside towns. Altogether there were approximately sixty killing sites in Latvia.

The major killing instrument the Germans developed in Latvia that helped them in the murders was the Arājs *Sonderkommando*. This unit was organized during the first two days of occupation in Rīga, and perhaps already on the third, but certainly on the fourth day after some training, they participated in killings in Rīga. Prior to the war Viktors Arājs (1910–1988) was a police lieutenant and law student. During the killing period, July through August, the Arājs Commando, about 250 men strong, stationed in Rīga, was dispatched to a variety of localities to perform the killings. The task of murdering Jews was segmented into a series of functions: arrest, detention, escorting to the killing site, guarding the killing site, and finally the killing. Although a number of these functions could be performed by the same men, frequently they were not.

There were two patterns of organization that the Germans imposed upon Latvia during the killing period. In many districts, in addition to the self-defense commandantures, the *Einsatzgruppe A* leaders also organized a network of Latvian SD teams. In districts where such SD units under direct SD control existed the elimination of the Jews was basically in SD hands. From the pattern of killings that we have discovered to date it appears that the Germans preferred the local districts making the arrangements for killing their Jews. But if the district commandant did not cooperate, killing teams, German or Latvian, were sent in to carry out the killings. In all cases however, the Germans relied on the locals to perform guarding functions. We need to note that the Holocaust was not a chaotic event: it was planned and organized and it could not have taken place without orders from above. The principle of “higher orders” is not an excuse, but only an explanation.

## Killings in Rīga

In Rīga, many functions during the early phase were performed by the Arājs Commando.<sup>51</sup> In addition to the left-bank killings, the killings on the right bank began on 3 or 4 July. At first Arājs men carried out the assembling of Rīga Jews, and Germans did the killings. The Arājs Commando was responsible for torching the Rīga synagogues. The usual pattern of killings was for the Arājs Commando personnel to pick up Jewish men in their apartments and bring them to the Rīga Central Prison. After a few days another group extracted the arrested Jews from the prison and brought them to the Biķernieki pine forest, where they were killed either by some German gang or Arājs men. The German killing teams were comprised of SD personnel or members of *Ordnungspolizei* Battalion 9, who were part of the *Einsatzgruppe A*. In the early Rīga killings with some exceptions only men were killed. During the early killings the fiction was held up that the Jews were killed for their “Communism” and to affirm it, some non-Jews were intermixed with the Jews. Even within the Arājs Commando the functions of the men were subdivided: there were escorts and the guards and there were those who did the killings. While the killing teams were volunteers, the escorts and guards were under the duress of orders. The weapon of choice was the rifle, and the killings were done in groups of five, ten, or twenty. A pit had been dug before the killers and the victims arrived. The shooters were double the number of the victims. The victims could be positioned in front of or behind the pit. The killers alternately stood and kneeled. One was ordered to aim at the heart, the other at the head. By this method about one hundred Jews could be killed in an hour. From the German perspective it was a slow method for Rīga, where about 35,000 Jews lived. By mid-August 1941 about 5,000 Jews had been killed in Rīga. In the countryside, however, it worked more efficiently.

## Rural Killings

In the country towns the killings began on about the third week of occupation, second or third week of July, and they were general and total. All of the men, women, and children were killed on the same day and in the same place. In districts that did not have a SD network, the Germans involved self-defense groups. The controlling countryside agency from the Latvian side was the district self-defense commandants. From the German side the killings were coordinated by the *Einsatzgruppe* or SD personnel in Rīga. The local Wehrmacht Commandanture that controlled the Latvian self-defense groups may not have always played

<sup>51</sup> The first killings in Rīga, as noted above, happened on the left bank of Daugava.

an active part in the killings, but they did much of the organizational work. The chain reaction leading to the killings would begin by *Einsatzgruppe* leaders relaying an order to the district self-defense commandant, that all Jews in the district towns must be detained and concentrated in some holding station, such as a synagogue, school, or barn. That accomplished, the town had to wait for the killing unit to arrive. Frequently, whether it was following the SD or the self-defense pattern, it was the Arājs Commando that arrived from Rīga in a blue city public transportation bus to perform the killing. In addition to the Arājs commando there were also German commandos that in many places like Jelgava, Tukums, and Auce carried out the murders.<sup>52</sup> The killings in the rural areas were done in the same manner as in Rīga. The victims in the country towns, including Liepāja and Daugavpils, but excluding Rīga, until September 1941 added up to about 25,000. According to Stahlecker, during the *Einsatzgruppe* phase about 32,000 of Latvias inhabitants, 30,000 Jews and 2,000 Communists, were killed.

## The Second Phase of Killing

In mid-August, the German military yielded its control over the Baltic to German civilian authorities. As of that time the *Einsatzgruppe A* formally ceased to operate there. By that time all small-town Jews, with the exception of a few who had been brought to the ghettos of the large towns, had been killed. In October, about 36,000 Jews were still alive in Rīga, Daugavpils, and Liepāja. After taking over control of the Baltic, the German civilian administrators expedited the formation of ghettos. There was a problem in organizing them, because there was no strictly designated Jewish quarter in Rīga. Before Jews could be moved into a ghetto, housing had to be found for the gentiles who would be displaced to establish the ghetto.

*Reichskommissar* Hinrich Lohse arrived in early August to establish a new Nazi state, the so-called Ostland, which encompassed Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and parts of Belorussia. The *Einsatzgruppe A* continued to operate in the environs of Leningrad and in northern Russia, but its days in the Baltic States were finished. A resident SD chapter was established in Rīga that took over many of the assignments of *Einsatzgruppe A*. From then on "civilians" managed the ghettos. The intention of the civilians was to segregate the Jews from the local population and to exploit them for labor. The SD hierarchy was resentful about the turn of events, because the implication was that the killing that they had carried out had been wrong, and because they were not allowed to carry out their "fundamental

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<sup>52</sup> Documents from Auce indicate that the killing was initiated by a group of eleven Germans, who during the killings ordered the locals to help them out.

orders" fully. The final outcome of this jostling for power in the Nazi hierarchy was decided against the civilians. They were not to be the ones deciding the ultimate fate of Jews in the Baltic. In late November of 1941 Himmler's forces reasserted their power, and Himmler ordered his men to liquidate the ghettoized Jews of Latvia. Stahlecker and the Latvians were criticized for being too slow in killing Jews.

On 25 October 1941, the Rīga Ghetto gate closed. On that date more than 29,000 Rīga Jews lived behind barbed wire. The ghettos in Liepāja and Daugavpils were established later. The Germans presented the ghetto as an island of security to the Jews where they would have stores, hospitals, and protection. In reality it turned out to be the opposite. It trapped them behind a fence, thus preparing them for the big actions of November and December.

## The Rumbula Action

Himmler ordered one of his confidants, General Friedrich Jeckeln, who had been killing Jews in Ukraine during the summer and fall, north to Rīga. Before going to Rīga, Jeckeln was called out to Berlin where Himmler personally gave him an order to empty the ghettos in the Baltic. Once he arrived in Rīga, about 15 November, Jeckeln preceded with dispatch to organize the killing of the Rīga Jews.

Jeckeln kept the preparations within his own circle, even ignoring the Rīga SD men. His men surveyed the Rīga surroundings, looking for an appropriate place for the massacre. He chose a location near the Rumbula railroad station on the right bank of the Daugava about ten kilometers to the southeast of the Rīga Ghetto. Jeckeln's problem was to find a place where the water table was low enough to accommodate pits large enough to bury about 25,000 people. Jeckeln chose a pine-covered hillock between a highway and railroad tracks within sight of the Rumbula station. Initially Jeckeln had intended to kill the ghetto Jews on two consecutive days, but when the time arrived the schedule was slowed down. The killing was done on 30 November and 8 December.

The Rīga Ghetto was organized and controlled by the German civilian administration. The men most directly involved in its management were the *Generalkommissar* of the General District of Latvia, Dr. Otto Drechsler, and the Mayor of Rīga, Hugo Wittrock. The *Ordnungspolizei* men involved in the management of the Rīga police also organized the ghetto guard. The guard was comprised of Latvian policemen and German *Schutzpolizei*, who served as overseers. On the eve of the massacre, the SD took control of the ghetto. One day before the massacre there was a screening of the Jews: about 4,500 men were counted off as working Jews and moved into a designated fenced-off area, later to be known as the

Latvian or the "Little Ghetto." In addition, about 500 women were separated from those to be killed. The rest, about 24,000 people, were killed on the two designated dates.

On the day before, the ghetto Jews were informed that they would be moved to different quarters and told to take along a twenty-kilogram pack. The pandemonium began during the early hours of 30 November. The action to move out the Jews began in the western part of the ghetto. SD men entered the houses, banged on the doors, woke up the inhabitants, and told them to assemble in the street.

Initially Jeckeln had contemplated moving the Jews to the killing fields by rail; that is why the location was chosen to be next to the railroad tracks. Finally, however, the decision was made to move the victims on foot, a ten-kilometer march. To move 24,000 people – the healthy and the feeble, the infants and the aged – that distance was a complicated logistical problem. The feeble and the sick were taken to Rumbula by truck. The rest were forced into columns of about 1,000 people assembled on the ghetto streets by the SD men. There was considerable resistance within the ghetto by people who refused to leave their apartments and those who did not line up as ordered. The German orders were ruthless, and it is estimated that approximately 1,000 people were killed within the ghetto. Their bodies were brought to the Jewish cemetery within the walls of the ghetto and buried in pits that Germans dynamited.

The columns were ordered out on the city street leading to Rumbula, where they were taken over by Riga city policemen who escorted the victims to the killing grounds. At the point where the columns veered off the highway, the policemen surrendered the victims to the SD men. The SD forces funneled the victims towards the killing pits. The periphery of the Rumbula grounds was guarded by German *Ordnungspolizei*.

Jeckeln's method of killing Jews, which he had developed in Ukraine, came to be known as *Sardinenpackung* (sardine packing). As the victims were funneled towards the pits they were ordered to surrender their valuables and to undress. Huge heaps of footwear and clothing accumulated. The temperature was at the freezing point. The killing was in part automated and took place simultaneously in two pits that were dug in the form of inverted pyramids. The first set of victims were forced to lie face down on the bottom of the pit, and the gunmen, working both sides of the pit, delivered one shot per person in the nape of the neck. Every successive group was layered on the top of those already killed. The killing was done by a twelve-man team that Jeckeln personally selected from his retinue: drivers, and bodyguards. While six men rested, the other six worked both sides of the pits. The killing was done with Russian (according to some witnesses Finnish) sub-machine guns set to fire single

shots. The killing started at 8:00 in the morning and lasted until 7:00 at night, three hours after nightfall. Remarkably, the twelve-man killing unit managed to murder 12,000 people per day. The Jeckeln method of killing even surpassed the killing rates in the death-camp factories. To kill 25,000 people in two 10-hour days, it meant that 1250 were killed per hour; or 21 per minute; or one person every three seconds. Each marksman killed more than 2000 people during the two-days. In comparison, using the Stahlecker method in Liepāja, it took three days from 15–17 December, to kill 2,749 people. At Rumbula more people were killed every three hours.

## After December 1941

After December, the killing of Latvian Jews in the main came to an end. But there was yet another wave of killings. Starting in late November of 1941, the Germans began to bring Jews from other parts of Europe to Latvia. The transports continued through February 1942, and altogether about 25,000 Jews from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia arrived in Latvia. Of these Jews approximately 11,000 were murdered in Latvia. The major killings of these European Jews, mostly of the aged and the infirm, were carried out in February and April 1942. After April 1942, the Jewish population in Latvia stabilized, although throughout the following years occasional transports continued to arrive in or depart from Latvia. From 1942 and on, as some Jews arrived others were sent to Estonia, Russia, Lithuania, and other places occupied by the Reich. There were also some smaller scale killings, for example the liquidation of 80 Latvian Jewish police in October 1942, when it was discovered that they were accumulating a weapons cache within the Little Ghetto. Altogether perhaps as many as 25,000 European Jews were cycled through Latvia.<sup>53</sup> In early 1943, Himmler gave two orders: to move East European Jews from the ghettos to concentration camps, and to dig up the corpses of the people who were killed in 1941 and to incinerate them. During the spring of 1943 the pits of Biķernieki and Rumbula were reopened, and the corpses were burned in open-air incinerators. This assignment was carried out by teams of Jews, who allegedly were killed after completion of the job. The working Jews residing in Latvian ghettos during late 1943 were moved to the Mežaparks (Kaiserwald) camp. Thereafter the Mežaparks camp served as the administrative hub for most working Jews in Latvia. Although registered there, most Jews were distributed to many live-in worksites in Latvia and neighboring countries. In September 1944 all Jews who were still alive in Latvia were deported to Germany. Many ended up in Stuttgart, a very large concentration camp in East Prussia. Perhaps at the time as many as 5,000 Latvian Jews, scattered throughout

<sup>53</sup> See "Foreign Jews in Latvia" below for discussion of the question of their numbers.

concentration camps in Germany, were still alive. Although the end of the war was approaching, the travails of Latvian Jews had not ended. When the Red Army approached the camps in northern Germany, Jews were ordered to move. This move was known as the Death March, because *en route* a blizzard developed. The death rate of those on this forced march, it is said, was over 50 percent.

The killings in Latvia began with the first day of the war and did not end until the final moments of the existence of the Third Reich.

## The Role of Latvians

It needs to be repeated that some Latvian self-defense men, policemen, SD men, and *Schutzmannschaften* had a role to play in the Jewish tragedy. I have covered this in a fuller way in my book, *The Holocaust in Latvia*.<sup>54</sup> At the same time, we should be careful not to exaggerate the Latvian role in the killings by insisting that such participation was voluntary or that the Germans had nothing to do with it. After all Latvians did not occupy Latvia: the Germans did. The Holocaust was not a "European problem," as some Germans may want to insist today. Jews were killed only in German-occupied Europe. The German occupation forces made sure that there would be no "legitimate" Latvian agency that could make a decision of that magnitude.

There is no question that the men who joined the Arājs Commando were volunteers. They were volunteers in a double sense: to begin with, they voluntarily stepped over the threshold at Valdemāra iela 19, and at least in the beginning, after they knew what they had to do, they did not get out while they had an opportunity to do so. On the other hand, it must be noted that true volunteerism under the Germans was prohibited. Organization always took precedence over spontaneity. To the degree that we can reconstruct the Latvian agenda of 1941, in spite of the brutal propaganda, there was no "Jewish question."<sup>55</sup> On the higher level, the Latvians had two wishes that were in conflict with Nazi policy: to organize a Latvian army and to reconstruct a Latvian state. There have been, at least on the level of folklore and Ducmanis text *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?*, some attempts to connect various Latvians with the decision to kill Jews. People like Veiss, Dankers, Bangerskis, Celmiņš, and others have been mentioned as among the decision-makers. So far, however, no evidence has been unearthed that connects these people with the murder of the Jews. There were others, however, like Vagulāns in Jelgava, Blūzmanis in Daugavpils, and Danckops in the Rīga Ghetto,

<sup>54</sup> For fuller details about the killings in the provinces see the Latvian version of my book, *Holokausti vācu okupētajā Latvijā* (Riga, 1999).

<sup>55</sup> For a discussion of Latvian desires and expectations during the war, as viewed by Germans, Soviets, Allies, and Latvians, see Uldis Neiburgs, "Latviešu leģions kara laikā acīm" [The Latvian Legion through Wartime Eyes], *Lauku avīze*, 15 March 2002.

who directly oversaw the assembly and guarding of Jews in their towns, but even they were auxiliaries of their German overseers. There were no Latvians who were sufficiently autonomous and who could have acted alone, as a lineup of officials in Vichy France did.<sup>56</sup>

## The Number of Victims

The exact number of Latvian Jews killed in the Holocaust will always be disputed, because people rely on two different sets of statistics. For some it is tempting to start with the 1935 statistics; for others the numbers must be generated in 1941, the time of the killings. We know that in 1935, when the last census was taken, 93,479 Jews lived in Latvia. It is generally assumed that from 1934 to 1941 the Jewish population decreased. For one thing, Ulmanis anti-capitalist and anti-socialist program promoted Jewish emigration from Latvia. Palestine was a magnet for emigration and attracted numerous Zionists. The war clouds that began to gather above Eastern Europe in the late 1930s might also have worked as an additional incentive for some Jews to search for a safer haven. On the other hand, the high standard of living that many Jews enjoyed in Latvia might have been a disincentive for emigration. The Soviet occupation of 1940 under normal conditions would have created a wave of Jewish emigrants, but by that time many escape routes were closed.<sup>57</sup> The Soviets deported about 2,000 Jews to Siberia between June 1940 and June of 1941.<sup>58</sup> The Nazi attack on the USSR started a major flight of Jews towards the interior of the Soviet Union. All calculations of the Jewish population in 1941 that begin with the 1935 census are based on conjectures and presuppositions for which there is no statistical or documentary basis. Archives in Latvia may well house statistics that could establish the size of the waves of migration, but to date such data have not been discovered. For example, guesses about the number of refugees to the USSR vary from 10,000 to about 30,000.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> See Robert Paxton, "The Trials of Holocaust Perpetrators in France," *Lessons and Legacies V: The Holocaust and Justice* (Chicago, 2000) 240.

<sup>57</sup> For a statistical reconstruction of Liepāja Jews see E. Anders, "Who died in the Holocaust? Recovering names from Official Records," *Genocide and Holocaust Studies* 17.1 (2003). Also Edward Anders and Juris Dubrovskis, *Jews in Liepāja Latvia, 1941–1945: A Memorial Book* (Burlingame, CA, 2001).

<sup>58</sup> Jānis Riekstiņš, "Deportation in Latvia on 14 June 1941," *Aizvestie: 1941. gada 14. jūnijs* [The Departed: 14 June 1941], ed. Elmārs Pelkaus (Riga, 2001) 703. The mass deportation statistics show that 1771 Jews, or almost 2% of the 1935 Jewish population, were deported. This does not include those arrested and deported earlier.

<sup>59</sup> For a discussion of the problem see Aivars Stranga, "Jāapzinās ne tikai tagatne bet arī pagātne" [We Must Be Conscious not Only of the Present but Also the Past], *Latvijas vēstnesis*, 20 October 2003. Stranga, citing newly discovered Russian sources, holds out the possibility that in 1941 over 30,000 Jews might have fled to the USSR. If that proves to be the case, even the numbers generated by the Germans may turn out to be exaggerations. For Stranga's most recent attempts at calculation see his "The Holocaust In Occupied Latvia 1941–1945," *The Hidden and Forbidden History of Latvia under Soviet and Nazi Occupations 1940–1991*, LVKR 14 (Riga, 2005) 172–73.

The alternative to guessing is to examine statistics that the Germans provided for their superiors during various stages of the Holocaust. We know from numerous sources that the Germans soon after the occupation carried out a town-by-town registration of the Jews. In some documents, the Germans proclaimed that in July 1941 70,000 Jews lived in Latvia. But that is a rounded number that can only be an approximation. There was one moment in October 1941, however, when two German statistical sources coalesced: Stahlecker in his 15 October report gave us the number of Jews killed as 30,025, and Generalkommissar Drechsler, in a memorandum on 20 October to Hinrich Lohse, gave the number of Jews still alive residing in the ghettos of Riga, Daugavpils, and Liepāja. His count was 37,327. Adding the living and the dead, the total of Jews who were trapped in Latvia comes out at 67,352. These figures come from the people who were in charge of the Jews and the only ones who counted them. It seems that Drechsler's number ought to be more reliable. The Stahlecker number perhaps could be questioned. Generally it is assumed by German historians that the leaders of the *Einsatzgruppen* overstated the numbers of Jews killed to earn praise. Even if there were no motive for overstatement, there seems to be even less reason for understatement. It seems that the leadership in Berlin would have wanted accurate numbers.

Generally we can be more accurate about the numbers up to December 1941 than thereafter. After December, the numbers of Jews in Latvia stabilized. Even though there were low-grade killings taking place until the end of the occupation, there were also frequent resettlements of Jews from job site to job site, some of which were outside of Latvia. It is reasonable to conclude that of the 6,000 Latvian Jews alive in January 1942, about 5,000, still were alive in September 1944, dispersed throughout various East European job sites and camps, when the transportation of Jews to Germany began. How many of these Latvian Jews perished in Germany during the last months of the war is difficult, if not impossible, to determine. We must note that many of the survivors were captured by the Russians.

How many Latvian Jews survived the Holocaust? It depends what you take as the statistical base year. If the statistical base is 1935, then the survival rate is about 33%, or 31,479 people. If the statistical base is the Nazi count of 1941, then the rate of survival is about 7 percent, or about 5,000 people out of a pool of 67,352 people.

## Foreign Jews in Latvia

There is still the question of foreign Jews and their fate in Latvia. On this matter the Soviets entered into a realm of hyper-hyperbole. They manufactured bogus records showing that over 200,000 European Jews were brought to Latvia. By now, the latest research by Wolfgang Scheffler puts the number below 25,000.

About 20,057 arrived in the period from late November 1941 to early February 1942. These transports are reasonably well documented; we know when they arrived, where they were housed and worked, and when and where they were killed, if they were killed. Later in 1942, another four transports had arrived in Latvia. It is also certain that several hundred Hungarian Jewish women were sent to Latvia in spring 1944. What happened to these people in Latvia? Generally it seems that at least half of them were killed in Latvia by mid-1942. The documentation of massacres of Jews during the German occupation is not always easy, but that does not mean that no sources exist or that killings can be invented or that one must rely on folklore. Common sense would dictate that, whether one wished to or not, a massacre of hundreds, let alone thousands, would leave evidence that could not be hidden. The earth speaks and people speak. Latvia was sufficiently densely inhabited that no massacre could be hidden from the local people. Those massacres of foreign Jews that did occur are well documented by variety of sources. The first major one occurred on 5 February, when about 1,500 Berlin and Vienna Jews were killed, and on 15 March, the so-called *Dünamünde* action, about 4,000 Jews were killed. As far as it has been possible to determine, thereafter there were no major killings of foreign Jews in Latvia. If there had been we would know the killing site and the killers. For example there are numerous Arājs Commando men who have testified about participation in the two above-mentioned events but not about any other ones. It must be noted, however, that the death rate from disease, the elements, and malnutrition, was high. What happened to the additional 4,000 Jews who arrived after February 1942, including the Hungarian women of 1944, to date has not been possible to determine. After the spring of 1943, it is not very likely that Jews were killed in the style of Stahlecker or Jeckeln in 1941, because by that time the 1941 corpses were beginning to be dug up to be incinerated. It is true that, for example, in the fall of 1943, when the Riga Ghetto was liquidated, a transport of Jews was dispatched to Auschwitz. It also needs to be noted that by 1943 all Jews residing in Latvia were part of the Nazi labor force, and as such were shunted around from site to site. Many appear to have been sent to Germany much earlier than September 1944, when the big shipment took place. Some memoir writers tell us that just before the move to send Jews back to Germany, there were large massacres in Latvia. This contention, however, must be deemed "folklore," because to date no archival information has surfaced that would confirm the murders. For example the Soviet Extraordinary Commission records no fresh 1944 grave sites.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>60</sup> The latest and perhaps definitive account of the fate of Europe's Jews in Latvia can be found in Wolfgang Scheffler's and Diana Schulle's, *Buch der Erinnerung: Die ins Baltikum deportierten deutschen, österreichischen und tschechoslowakischen Juden* (Munich, 2003).

## Summary

Did the Nazi prognostications and gossip about East Europeans turn out to be true? Were they worse than the Germans? Were they more eager to kill the Jews than the Nazis themselves? The Nazis, the revisionist historians, a lot of Soviet agitprop declarations, and unfortunately many survivors have answered the question in the positive.

What is the evidence that would support the truth of Nazi assertions?

If we eliminate the Nazi-time "eyewitnesses" as not trustworthy, the case against the East Europeans collapses. Not all eyewitnesses are of the same quality. The ones at the top knew what those at the bottom could never know. A more trustworthy witness than the German "passers-by" and "photographers" is SS-Brigadeführer Stahlecker, the Commander of *Einsatzgruppe A*, and his accessories. Those were the people who were entrusted with the killing the Jews. Stahlecker's status as witness was highly privileged, since he knew what no one else could know.<sup>61</sup> Stahlecker's reports were secret, and they were intended for his superiors, to whom he could boast but not lie. It must be noted that Stahlecker, as one who was involved in the drafting the "neighbors" policy, was an interested party in making it a success. Testimony from *Einsatzkommando 1a* Commander Sandberger indicates that Stahlecker was aggressively pushing the "pogroms" scenario, yet his reports document its failure.

Stahlecker's secret reports (that have not been secret since 1945) show yet another side of the German effort to blame the "natives." In the Stahlecker report of 15 October 1941, this relationship with the "natives," specifically the Lithuanians, appears in a different light than it appears in the "eyewitness" testimonies. The message that Stahlecker delivered to his Berlin RSHA offices was that to obtain Lithuanian "cooperation" was not easy and that pressure and trickery had to be applied to create the Kaunas "pogrom."<sup>62</sup> If, on the one hand, Stahlecker in his report continues to use the "pogrom" concept, he also undercuts it by documenting its failure.

<sup>61</sup> We may note that Sigfried Gasperaitis in his recent article does not refer to Stahlecker's reports: "'Die Front Litauischer Aktivisten' (LAF) und die antisowjetischen Aufstände 1941," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 49 (2001): 886-904.

<sup>62</sup> The killing of Jews by "pogroms" was a favored Stahlecker tactic that for example his subordinate Martin Sandberger, commander of *Einsatzkommando 1a*, found objectionable. See Sandberger's testimony at the *Einsatzgruppen* Trial, vol. 6: 2175-76. Concerning the burning of the synagogues in Riga, Sandberger expressly testified: Stahlecker had told him that he induced the Latvian auxiliaries to burn them, p. 2180.

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## Chapter 7

# ANALYSIS – PART ONE

The text to follow consists of two parts: Italics indicate direct quotations from the original translation by Gladys Evans, pages 5 to 52. Note that the original does not include Latvian diacritical marks in the proper names. The regular print is my commentary. Readers who wish to become acquainted with the original can read the italics only. The original also contained numerous pictures that have nothing to do with Latvia; these are not reprinted here.

### Brute Servants of Fascism (And Their Crimes)



Canadian poet Gladys Evans translated the pamphlet into English, and in many respects heated up the rhetoric in comparison to the original text. An example is the translation of the title of this chapter. The original read, “Their Deeds in Fascist Servitude (*“Viņu darbi fašistu kalpībā”*)”. Note that both the original writer and the translator chose to use the Soviet word “fascism,” not the historically more precise “nazism.” As Pauls Ducmanis had built upon and exaggerated the records of the 18th Battalion trial, which he purported to report, so the translator upped the Ducmanis text that she had supposedly merely translated. (For a brief biography of Ducmanis see Chapter 5.)

Narratively, Ducmanis began with a specific case of an atrocity in Slonim, Belarus, and then slid into a general tale of horror in Latvia. In other words, he set up the Latvians for a one-two punch: as in Slonim, so in Latvia, or the other way around. The 1961 trial of the 18th Battalion is a special problem that is

discussed elsewhere in the booklet, suffice it to say that aside from confessions, which may very well have been coerced, there is no reason to assume that Latvians ever participated in a Slonim massacre. This is not to deny that the Jews of Slonim were massacred during the course of the German occupation.

*Who took this picture? Where did it come from?*

The author asserts that the photograph that opens this chapter comes from the 1961 trial records; that its photographer was Edgars Vilnis; and that it represents the massacre scene of Slonim. All three assertions are false. The origin of the picture is Šķēde, and it represents the December 1941 massacre of Liepāja Jews. Its photographer was German SD Sergeant Carl-Emil Strott, whose assignment was to compile evidence that the Holocaust was Germanless and the true murderers of Jews were Latvians. The trial records contain no pictures taken by Vilnis. Since taking pictures was against the directives, it would have been dangerous for Vilnis to wield a camera, especially if the massacre had taken place. It is not unusual for regimes in search of legitimacy to falsify history; it is, however rare that a scribe would so blatantly falsify a trial record as Ducmanis did. In general we can say that Ducmanis builds his Slonim narrative on the Šķēde scenario. The very first sentence of Ducmanis' pamphlet contains a falsity. If there had been any pictures taken by Vilnis, they would not have escaped the attention of Holocaust scholars. The Soviets used the same picture in the trial of the 21st Battalion.

*The above picture introduces a revolting story! A page of shame from the most tragic period in the history of the Latvian people.*

*But however revolting, it is a TRUE story – one which should not be hushed up. Truth requires no embellishment. Neither does it need to be enlarged upon. So we present this story simply, and support it only with facts.*

The importance of self-confessions/accusations faded from European and American courtrooms with the development of rational jurisprudence from the eighteenth century on. In the late 1930s, after the trials orchestrated by Andrei Vyshinsky, Russia took a step backwards, by proclaiming that "self-confession" was the ultimate criterion of a "criminal's" guilt. In due time the Nazis also adopted Vyshinsky's standard. Thereafter it became a daily practice for Soviet penal authorities to obtain confessions by the use of torture, intimidation, and duress. Whatever the standard of truth may be for totalitarian regimes, historians must strive to do better: to search for objective and confirming evidence. Ducmanis' problem is that he has no objective "facts" to support his claims. German and Israeli sources could have helped Ducmanis and the Soviet prosecutors to obtain objective information about the killing of Slonim Jews, but neither Ducmanis nor the prosecutors made any effort to do so. For example, a set of the 18th Battalion's daily orders were deposited at the archive of the Hoover Institution.

Although the Soviet prosecutors must have known about the existence of the documents, no effort was made to consult them.

*In part, the facts are verified by the testimony of a small-town photographer, EDGARS VILNIS, who took the above picture. We saw Vilnis for the first time in the spring of 1961, almost 20 years after the above picture was taken.*

The prosecution at the trial introduced no pictures by Vilnis. Neither is there any reason to believe that the killing in Slonim was anything like the KGB man described.

*When this story came to light, the time of year made it sound even more gruesome than it was, if such a thing were possible. People everywhere that spring were enjoying the bright sunshine, the new awakening of nature after a long winter. Human hearts were turning to thoughts of love, filling with hope and happiness.*

*But all this was suddenly changed. In the midst of their daily round, our peace-loving and industrious Soviet people were shocked to the core by the more and more terrible stories which kept coming out of the Court House every day.*

This was a typical show trial because: the scenario of the trial was written and its verdict announced prior to the trial; it took confessions as real evidence; and no real cross-examination of witnesses was allowed. The history of the Holocaust-related “show trials” in Latvia and Eastern Europe at large still awaits its historian. The trial of the 18th Battalion was the first of several phony war-crimes trials that the Soviets staged in Latvia. The Soviets were so deeply wedded to the show-trial principle that even the guilty were tried on phony charges. The three most obvious Holocaust show trials were those of the 18th Battalion in 1961, the Audriņi case in 1965, in which B. Maikovskis and A. Eichelis and H. Puntulis were tried in absentia,<sup>1</sup> and that of the 21st Battalion in 1974/75.<sup>2</sup>

*What was it all about?*

*At that particular time, for five whole weeks, evidence was being heard in the Supreme Court House, Riga, against NINE men – one might say against nine savage brutes. Five of the accused were indicted for committing the most inhuman of murderous crimes against helpless, unarmed people twenty years before: in Latvia, Byelorussia and in Poland. What made it so terrible was that the majority of their victims were women, children and old people. In spite of the twenty years which had elapsed, in 1961 these criminals were brought to justice.*

The records of the trial have been preserved and can be found in the Latvian State Archive. The tragic fate of the Slonim Jews has been retold by several Jewish historians, and their story does not corroborate the “facts” of the trial or those of the Ducmanis pamphlet.

<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of the Audriņi case see J. Rozītis, “Justizförmige Bearbeitung und öffentliche Darstellung in Lettland.” *Juristische Zeitgeschichte: NS-Verbrechen und Justiz* 4 (1996).

<sup>2</sup> For an analysis of those trials, see Chapter 3.

*In the court room of the Supreme Court of Latvia, the nine men sat with heads bent, their lowered eyes staring at the floor. Only NINE of all the Latvian WAR CRIMINALS who, dating from the summer of 1941, had VOLUNTARILY offered their services and sworn allegiance to Hitler! They had promised to carry out Hitler's orders to kill, to destroy without mercy, ordinary peaceful civilians. And this at a time when the rest of the civilized world were mobilizing all their resources to fight the German Nazi Machine, to stop the fascist hordes from overrunning the world.*

The men of the Latvian Police Battalions had taken no oath to Hitler. The Latvian Legionnaires did that, but that happened in 1943, and it is a different story. The men of the battalions took a general oath to obey orders given by German and Latvian officers. The Latvian Police Battalions were low level, poorly supplied and trained units. They were not organized for high-level assignments, nor were they trusted with any. No Latvian Police Battalion could have acted independently of the Germans, because they were auxiliary formations. The Soviet judiciary in the 1961 trial made no effort to define the context of the 18th Battalion's operations. The German military archives can help to clarify the battalion's assignments during August 1942. In the same way that the battalions were mobile units, moved from place to place, their commanding authorities also changed. Again Ducmanis is trading on the Nazi-created cliché that the Latvians were worse than the Germans.

*And one of the nine was EDGARS VILNIS, the small-town photographer – EDGARS VILNIS, of Kuldiga! For five weeks, 87 witnesses (Latvians, Lithuanians, Poles and Byelorussians) gave evidence about the heinous crimes committed by the accused. First, evidence was given regarding the criminal offences each of the prisoners had committed in Latvia; then, about those crimes in which they had all been involved as members of the 18th Latvian Volunteer Police Battalion.*

The Germans pretended that Latvians had joined the police formations "voluntarily," but they were not called "volunteer" as was the Legion. Here Ducmanis adopts the promiscuous Nazi use of the concept and again there is a confusion created with the SD and the legionnaires. The Soviet prosecutors in the trial did not establish Vilnis' activities during 1941.

The trial records show that the non-Latvian witnesses could only testify to the generalities of the atrocities in Slonim and environs, for they had nothing specific to say, nor could they positively identify any of the accused.

*Spread out on a table before the presiding judge were about thirty volumes containing a multitude of records, statements made by witnesses, documents and photographs. Besides all this collected evidence, the accused themselves disclosed details about their personal crimes as well as about those committed by their associates: the latter having escaped to live in other parts of the world – but just the same their exact whereabouts is known.*

This is the point. If there had been no self-incriminations there could not have been a trial. The second flaw of the evidence was that it was provided by witnesses

who, if their testimony were true, should have been tried themselves. It is true that many members of the 18th Battalion lived abroad, including in the United States. Their names were known in the West, but no case against any one of them was made in any Western jurisdiction. After the appearance of Ducmanis' pamphlet the German prosecutors of Ansbach investigated the 18th Battalion's German liaison officer, Egon Erzum, but this did not result in a trial.

*What infamous crimes did the accused commit? How did they disgrace their native land and the Latvian people? What relation does the photograph bear to these crimes, the photograph which Edgars VILNIS held on to for 19 years?*

Vilnis had no photographs to present, and none were presented at the trial.

*In the early summer of 1942, the German Security Police (SD) handed over the little town of Slonim, in Byelorussia, to the 18th Latvian Police Battalion. Slonim is about 70 kilometres from the town of Baranovichy, and lies between Grodno and Brest. The first job given the 18th Latvian Police Battalion was the extermination of all the inhabitants of the Jewish ghetto in Slonim. RUBENIS, the battalion Commandant, called for volunteer executioners; and a number of officers and men stepped forward. The slaughter began. From then on, steady staccato bursts of gunfire could be heard from early morning till late at night. The Latvian execution squad, wearing German uniforms, vied with one another to see who could kill the greatest number of inmates from the ghetto. According to the orders of SS Reichsführer Himmler, all victims were forced to undress before being shot, and their valuables confiscated. The latter was carried so far that if they had gold teeth these were ruthlessly knocked out of their mouths before execution. The whole business was inhuman, sadistic: for the victims, cruel and humiliating.*

No Latvian Police Battalion unit ever wore a German military uniform. This is simply wrong. They were usually garbed in stripped-down Latvian army uniforms. Only when some of the police units were transferred to the Legion in 1943 did they receive German uniforms. Some details of the SD, such as the Kalējs Company, wore German uniforms in 1942, but that was an exception. Here again a confusion is attempted with the Latvian Legion that came into existence only in 1943. The above passage is sheer confabulation. The German SD did not and could not have surrendered their control of the Slonim ghetto, because they would not have wanted to invite anarchy. To surrender control would have been against their rules of operation. Neither Ducmanis nor the prosecutor ever specified the date of the "crime." Five men were sentenced to death without knowing the date of their "crime"! Ducmanis and the Soviets in the 1960s operated with the Holocaust as a chaotic event.

Jews in Slonim began to be killed from the very beginning of the German occupation in July 1941. In June 1942 there was a major massacre in Slonim at which some Latvian SD presence had also been noted. By August 1942, when the 18th Battalion passed through, the ghetto population was much reduced. The final

clearing of the Slonim Ghetto took place in December 1942, not August, as Ducmanis asserts. The men of the 18th Battalion were accused of killing 3,000 Slonim Jews, but according to Jewish sources at the time there were fewer than 1,000 Jews left in the Slonim Ghetto. The 18th Battalion was bivouacked in Slonim from 18 to 22 August, which means that their stay overlaps with 20 August, the day of a massacre when according to a Jewish sources 400 Slonim Jews were killed. The hyperbolic and self-accusatory testimonies at the trial prevent us from ascertaining the true role, if any, the Latvians might have played on that day. Considering that the German SD men were interested in the success of the killing operation, it is unlikely that they would have turned over the town and the control of the Ghetto to a poorly trained foreign auxiliary police battalion that was only passing through and whose men had not been tested in killing operations. The daily orders of the battalion are available, and there is reason to think that at the most one company was ordered to guard the periphery of the Ghetto on the morning of 20 August, while the SD carried out its killing operation.

*In court, the accused men themselves testified that some of the loot obtained in this way (certain gold articles including gold teeth) was pocketed by the executioners. One of the accused actually confessed that he made his wife a present of some articles of gold which he had taken from his victims at the village of Petrovlicheva.*

The trial record contains no testimonies or proof for such an assertion.

*While this mass murder was going on in Slonim, Corporal Edgars Vilnis was handling two jobs. Not only did he take part in the shooting, but he also took photographs of the frightful massacre. This latter occupation doubled his income. He got his share of the loot, and sold photographs on the side to his fellow-members of the police squad, charging five ostmarks a picture.*

The activities of the men of the 18th Battalion as presented by Ducmanis and the trial records lacked the Teutonic rationalism that is characteristic of mass murder in the Holocaust. The killing operations of Jews, as they were carried out at a variety of Eastern European locations, were broken down into segments. The Nazis were well schooled in Taylorist "efficiency." These operations were planned and routinized events that left no room for local improvisation. Nobody was ordered to do everything: those who guarded did not do the escorting, and those who escorted did not do the killing. The trial records lead us to think that all Latvians were doing everything, from guarding to escorting to killing. These accusations reached utter absurdity in the case of Vilnis, for in addition to being one of the most enthusiastic killers, he was also supposed to have been photographing the massacre. In fact, Vilnis took no pictures and could not have taken part in the massacre; he therefore could not have profited from the pictures. Picture taking by Latvians was outlawed.

*It was established at the trial that the commanding officer of one company in the battalion, Sr.-Lieutenant FRANCIS EGLAJS-LEMESONOKS [sic], got his first shooting practice at Slonim – using women, children and old people as live targets. Yet this man had graduated from a religious seminary! After a hard day's work shooting people down, the execution squads got 'liquored up' to relax. During one of these sessions, our 'heroic' Sr.-Lieut. EGLAJS-LEMESONOKS boasted about his skill in shooting living victims, even little children. These were his words: "From thirty meters right into the head – for me it's simple!"*

The trial records contain no such testimony. Lemešonoks was not a graduate of a religious seminary.

*However, before long Sr.-Lieut. Eglajs-Lemesonoks and his fellow officers became rather bored with merely shooting their victims. They thirsted for more sadistic pleasures. Also, they wanted more spectacular photographs from Vilnis, as the earlier ones failed to satisfy their craving for sensation. They wanted more outrageous, more shocking photographs: and they told Vilnis this. But what further atrocities did they have in mind?*

The trial record contains no pictures of that description. A picture would have added some credibility to the story.

*They thought up something new for the village of Puzichi, just north of Brest. At Puzichi, their police detachments herded 300 local people, mainly Poles, into a barn stacked with hay. They locked the barn, set fire to it, and stood by to watch. The fire caught quickly and soon the building was engulfed in flames, all the people within being burned alive. Those who, frenzied with pain and fear, tried to break out and escape were shot down. The victims of this atrocity also were chiefly women and children, and helpless old people.*

The story sounds like a Nazi "eyewitness" account. A picture would have added some credibility to the story.

*When the fire was at its height, and the scene reached a peak of horror, the officers of the detachments suggested Vilnis to take photographs of them standing in front, with the holocaust serving as background. Such a picture, they conjectured, would be a genuine and useful souvenir for them to show afterwards, when Hitler's "New Order in Europe" should be established and they could reap the 'fruits' of their hard service. Vilnis did an excellent job. The picture of the officers and the live funeral pyre came out clear and bright.*

No picture to support the story exists.

*This is only one example. During the court proceedings, day after day one mass murder after another came to light and the guilt laid at the door of this Latvian Police Battalion.*

*As the operations of this Latvian Death Battalion in Byelorussia and Poland were slowly tracked down, day after day, during the public trial of these nine war criminals, many more acts of a pernicious character were drawn into the evidence. We shall pick out only a few.*

*Corporal JEVGENIJS LUSIS, for instance, was one of the most vicious executioners at the Slonim and Putzichi mass murders. He and his brother burnt gunpowder on the live, naked body of a captured partisan, drove a nail in the back of their victim's head, and then broke the bones of his arms and legs. Another time, entering the house of an absent Polish woodcutter, Lusiš was particularly sadistic. First he shot an infant sitting on its mother's lap, then*

*the rest of the children. But he did not kill the woman right away: he spent some time jeering at her grief and humiliating her before finally finishing her off too.*

Although the prosecutors who wrote the trial's script had no commitment to truth, Ducmanis in many ways raised it to higher level of falsehood.

*One Polish prisoner, SIKORSKI, a captain in the Polish army, was brutally tortured before being killed by Sr.-Lieut. Eglajs-Lemesonoks and by Sr.-Lieut. Voldemars ZAMUELS (now living in the U.S.A.). Sikorski was a Polish Emigrant Government sympathizer, and pro-English too.*

*In the village of Deniskovichi this police squad hung two Jewish teenagers.*

The trial contained no evidence about Voldemārs Zāmuels.

*JANIS BUMBERS, another company commander in the battalion, shot down two young nurses in Chučevichi, Byelorussia. Apparently he was not content with his shooting practice on the helpless Jewish women in Slonim, and International Red Cross regulations were non-existent as far as he was concerned.*

The 18th Battalion was an auxiliary police formation and as such it did not have independent decision-making powers. It could only go where it was ordered to go. The Soviet Union was not a signatory of the 1929 Geneva Convention. There was no such evidence about Bumpers.

*All the time, EDGARS VILNIS roamed among these degenerate criminals, camera at the ready – while back home in Kuldīga, his own wee babe lay safe in its cradle. Needless to say, he sought the most profitable kind of pictures. These were of a pornographic nature showing the Jewish women of Slonim in all their nakedness, while still alive ...*

No pictures of that description were presented at the trial. As stated earlier, to take photographs of atrocity scenes was prohibited by the Nazi laws of war. For propaganda purposes, pictures of atrocities as ordered by Heydrich were taken by the SD, although very few have survived the war.

*Many terrible crimes were not dealt with at the trial, mainly because only nine criminals were caught and brought to justice: yet the total of officers and men in the 18th Latvian Police Battalion numbered close to 500.*

That is right. Some of the men lived abroad after the war. And others were providing testimony at the same trial for which, if their testimony were true, they should also have been tried. The 18th Battalion trial, whichever way you cut it, was an example of "selective justice," another hallmark of Soviet show trials.

*In 1955 the Soviet Government granted amnesty to all Soviet citizens who fought in the ranks of Hitler's German Army and to all who worked for German occupation establishments. However, this decree of amnesty contained an exception: it did not include those who had committed extremely grave crimes against humanity by murdering peaceful civilians or prisoners of war. Therefore these nine murderers now received a severe but deserved*

judgment. Five of them were given the extreme penalty – to be shot to death. Their accomplices from the 18th Latvian Police Battalion also received suitable sentences.

If there had not been confessions, there would have been no basis for the trial.

*The courtroom rang with applause as the sentences were passed. It was evident that people never forgive murderers, especially murderers of helpless women and little children or of weak, elderly people.*

The applause at the conclusion of the trial was only one small part of the theatrics of the trials. Similar applause concluded Stalin's trials of the 1930s.

*The sentences were executed.*

*The Latvian people shook off this terrible nightmare which had cast such a dark shadow over their everyday life – a life bright with promise because of their post-war constructive efforts. And time picked up its regular tempo once more. The world was a better and cleaner place to live in, now that it was free of the presence of these murderers. Honest people with a clear conscience felt a release, an uplift of spirit.*

Since the inception of the Soviet system, it has been in need of periodic show trials. The pattern began in the 1920s, reaching an apex during the 1930s. Although after the war Stalin did not restart show trials at the all-Union level, provincial show trials continued. They were even kept up after the death of Stalin, when the system in some aspects began to be "liberalized." The Soviet need for scripted justice has been much debated; suffice it to say that it may be connected with the system's legitimacy, especially its economic inadequacy.

*But this trial, even so, left a deep impression. The macabre events that took place under the German occupation could not be blotted out from memory. Besides, one question after another continued to emerge, and answers to these were urgently demanded.*

Both regimes that Ducmanis served were macabre and could not be forgotten. One may contend that Ducmanis wrote down his nightmares.

*True, nine people had been tried. But where were the rest? Where were the scores of war hirelings of the 18th Latvian Police Battalion, who were no less guilty, and who had also carried out this bloody destruction hand in hand with SS men hardened to murder?*

Actually the Soviet judiciary punished more Latvians for collaborating with the Nazis, than Germany punished Germans. This is not to say that some guilty Latvians who escaped to the West did not get away with murder.

*Senior-Lieutenant Eglajs-Lemesonoks was guilty of killing at least 300 Jews and scores of people of other nationalities (Latvians, Russians, Poles) in the village of Riebini, Preiļi district.*

The Jews of Riebini were surely murdered, but no evidence has been found to establish Lemešonoks' culpability in their death.

*That was the start of his 'murderous career' in Latvia. Only after that did the German nazis permit him to wear the uniform of an officer of "Greater Germany." Similar crimes were committed by Lieut. OGRINS in the Jekabpils district before he volunteered for service in the Police Battalion.*

Here Ducmanis strains to equate the membership of the self-defense units with the murderers of Jews. It is true that the self-defense men in locations where Jews lived were likely to participate in the killing process, although they were not likely to carry out the killing itself. Only when Ogrīņš entered the Legion did he receive a German uniform. There was no way for a Latvian, with very few exceptions, prior to 1943 to wear a German uniform.

*Practically every one of the nine accused had first 'done something' in his native town or district. One had served in a Jewish ghetto, another had taken part in the arrest and torture of members of the resistance movement, some had worked in the prisons or in the Latvian SD police.*

Concerning the nine defendants in the 18th Battalion, substantial investigations in Latvia have not produced any credible supporting evidence of crimes.

*But were these nine the only ones to help the German fascists terrorize, torture and murder the Latvian people during the four years of the Second World War? Were they the only ones to willingly carry out the orders of Hitler's Reich (and of the gebietskommissars, Himmler's obergruppenführers and hauptsturmführers), to anticipate every wish of their bloodthirsty German masters with such nauseating, flattering obedience? Was it only they who took Hitler's orders in an attempt to win a place in its "New Order of Europe" under which so many European nations groaned and languished? How many in the 18th Latvian Police Battalion were also guilty?*

This paragraph makes it appear that it was Latvians who occupied Latvia, not Germans. Contrary to Ducmanis' implication, a lot of Latvians entered into resistance against the Germans. It would help, if Ducmanis, instead of recycling a half a dozen names, had told us who the Latvian fascists really were.

*For that matter, was the 18th Latvian Police Battalion the only one formed in Latvia? It was formed, remember, by the LATVIAN FASCISTS themselves: but under the leadership of the General of Police, SS obergruppenführer JECKELN (Chief of Police in the territory the Germans called OSTLAND), and under the leadership of DRECHSLER, the Latvian General Commissar, and LOHSE, Reichskommissar of Ostland.*

The Latvian police battalions were organized and ordered by the Germans. Part of the German occupation system was a double administrative structure. No ranking Latvian administrator could operate without a German shadow. The conscription stations for the police battalions were manned by German mustering teams that included some Latvians. Rīga was not the only center where the battalions were organized.

*Besides the 18th there were about twenty more police battalions, many SD death squads and other units: all of which carried out the same grisly deeds, of murder and torture, not just in Latvia but in Byelorussia, Poland, Lithuania, and even in Germany during the final war period. These were not soldiers or even police – but a pack of morally degenerate, bestial, greedy murderers who had lost the last vestiges of human decency and with whom the ordinary Latvian people never had anything in common.*

The equation of the police battalions and the SD does not wash and is a Bolshevik thing to say. In fact, some members trying to evade service in the SD entered the battalions. Actually during the course of the occupation there were about forty police battalions, although some of them were short-lived. Some members of the police battalions were volunteers, but in general the great majority of them were coerced into service. Generally, the battalion membership represented a cross-section of the Latvian population, including many ethnic Russians. The Germans also organized Russian battalions consisting of Russian nationals alone.

*A State Emergency Commission was appointed to search for and investigate the crimes committed in the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic by the German fascist invaders and their Latvian accomplices or stooges. This commission announced the results of their findings, as follows:*

*In Latvia, the German invaders intentionally killed more than 250,000 of the civilian population and 327,000 Soviet prisoners of war.*

Although the State Emergency Commission (its real title was the Extraordinary Commission) collected some accurate data about the German occupation, the numbers of victims as a rule was greatly exaggerated. The number of civilian victims in Latvia probably did not exceed 85,000. The fate of Soviet POWs in Nazi-occupied Latvia still awaits a post-Soviet study. It seems that after a full accounting the number of Soviet POWs killed will more likely be in the low thousands, rather than the hundreds of thousands that the Extraordinary Commission asserted.

*“In Riga alone, they killed more than 170,000 Latvian citizens – men, women and children, of all ages.”*

*“In the Riga area, the fascists set up concentration camps for civilians: at Salaspils, Mezaparks, Strazdumuiza, Bisumuiza, Milgravis etc. Thousands of citizens were arrested and put into various prisons such as the Central, the Terminal, the Citadel etc. Whether they were in camp or in prison, the prisoners were tortured and tormented in various ways. In the Central Prison from thirty to thirty-five prisoners died daily from mutilation alone. Those who were still alive after being tortured were returned to their cells unrecognizable – covered in blood, and with parts of their bodies burnt or torn to pieces.”*

The author is right about the prisons and concentration camps. The German manner of investigation included torture, yet the author exaggerates it. For example it would have been superfluous to torture Jews to make them confess that they

were Jews. The German torture of Jews mostly consisted of deprivation of food, heat and sanitary conditions.

*On one occasion, the fascists shot 46,500 civilians in Biķernieki Forest near Riga. One witness, Mrs. M. Stabulniece (pronounced Stabulnietse), who lived near by, told us:*

*"On the Friday and Saturday before Easter in 1942, all through the day and night, bus-loads of people kept coming from the city to the forest. On Friday alone, from morning till noon, I counted 41 buses which passed by my house."*

There was never a massacre in Biķernieki in which 46,500 people were killed. During the massacre (the Dünamünde operation is meant) to which the witness refers, the number of the victims was closer to 8,000. At Biķernieki, perhaps as many as 20,000 victims, mostly Jews, were killed, but not in one 24 hour period.

*In Dreiliņi Forest, 5 to 7 kilometres east of Riga near the Lubana highway, more than 13,000 people were shot. Rumbula Forest was used for mass killing. And 38,000 people were shot in the region known as "Zolotaya Gorka" near Mežciems, Daugavpils district.*

The Dreiliņi Forest as a massacre site is poorly documented. The author is correct about Rumbula, but greatly exaggerates the Mežciems numbers. Mežciems was the major massacre site for the Daugavpils Jews. Therefore the number of victims could not exceed 10,000.

*The report of the State Emergency Commission includes many other facts of a similar nature. Mass graves for the victims of fascism may be found throughout the length and breadth of Latvia.*

That is true. In total the Germans left behind them sites of as many as 100 massacres, of which about sixty were those of Jews.

*The guilty did not always have time to conceal the traces of their crimes. These fuel barrels (see Photo No. 4) were apparently taken to Bikernieki Forest to help burn the last victims, but were never used. The Hitlerites had no chance to carry out their intention due to the sudden and swift attack of the Red Army.*

*A close survey of the criminal material reveals that the German occupationists, using the Latvian fascists as catspaws, killed about a quarter of a million civilians in Latvia, if we include the tens of thousands of other nationalities who were brought from Germany, Czechoslovakia, Austria, France, etc.*

The number of civilian deaths in Latvia could not have exceeded 85,000 people. Of the people brought to Latvia, the number killed there must have been about 15,000.

*The facts prove that a very active part in these crimes was played by those Latvians who volunteered for service in Hitler's German Police and by those who enlisted in the punitive units organized by Latvian officers.*

Here the author shows his Nazi colors and training – purposefully confusing organization with voluntarism. Everything that happened in Latvia was organized by the German occupation forces, but it was important for the Nazis to proclaim

that everything was done voluntarily. In that sense the Nazis strove to appear to remain true to the Hague Protocols. There was no way that a Latvian could enter “Hitler’s German Police,” even if we knew what that organization was.

*All guilty, of course, were the officials of the local so-called self-government bodies headed by General DANKERS connected with the Latvian Security Police.*

One consequence of the occupation was the destruction of centralized government in Latvia. The German plan involved the destruction of the concept of Latvia. The Germans did not occupy Latvia as Latvia, but rather as a Soviet territory. Dankers perhaps can be condemned as a traitor of Latvia, but the order that Germans established in Latvia did not allow him to interfere in Security Police matters. By the time Dankers was installed as the General Director of the so-called Self-Administration, the Latvian Jews had already been killed.

*It is a significant fact, and prominence must be given to it, that throughout Latvia the local Latvian fascists began their slaughter of the civil population the moment German troops crossed the Latvian border. They began it on their own, not at the direction of the Germans. The latter were too busy during the initial days, and had not yet established their own Gestapo police.*

This is how the Nazis wanted to present the killing operation in Eastern Europe. It is in accord with Hitler’s dictate and the assertions of an array of German administrators. Postwar Soviet agitprop and legal agencies took over the Nazi assertion and thus helped to bring Nazi propaganda into the twenty-first century. The Germans sent in special killing teams that went to work immediately after the occupation. The folklorists of the Holocaust have claimed that atrocities began during the so-called interregnum, the spell of time between the Red Army’s retreat and the arrival of German forces. But to date those statements have remained in the realm of assertions, lacking documentation.

*Photo No. 5 confirms this, for it was taken on July 2, 1941, one day after the Germans entered Riga. This picture shows some armed Latvians driving a group of people (Latvians, Russians, Jews) along Brivibas Boulevard. Those armed are volunteer Latvian police; the others, just arrested, are doubtless doomed. The volunteer police are wearing civilian clothing in this picture, but in a few weeks they will be wearing uniforms of the German army or police.*



The picture could not have been taken on 2 July 1941, because the people in the picture are dressed too warmly for a hot July day. One does not wear overcoats in July in Rīga. On 2 July 1941, there were no police in Rīga as yet. At that date there would have been some self-defense men or members of the fledgling Arājs Com-mando. Latvians serving in the police or any other occupation formation did not wear a German uniform. In fact during the first months the Germans ordered all police, self-defense or Arājs men to wear civilian clothes. Only after the first wave of killings was finished were Latvians allowed to wear a stripped down Latvian Army uniform. The first Latvian unit to receive a German uniform was that of the Kalējs SD Company in early 1942. The uniform issue was one of the major stumbling blocks for war-crimes prosecutors.<sup>3</sup>

*The Latvian fascists understood only too well what was meant by Hitler's "New Euro-pean Order," and they knew exactly how to go about creating it. They lost no time in avail-ing themselves of the golden opportunity the first days afforded them. Now was the time to work hard and prove to the Germans that "THEY especially" (the Latvian fascists) must be accepted as members of the super-race, as "New Europeans." To this end, they did not await German orders, but set about arresting and shooting their own Latvian brothers; and they diligently "solved the Jewish problem" by mass murder.*

One wonders whom the author meant by "Latvian fascist." No known group so designated has emerged. Membership in any organization was not a criterion for a Latvian to join or be conscripted into a police or army formation. The only group so designated could have been the Pērkonkrusts, but in 1941 they were too few in number to make any difference. The rules of occupation mandated that nothing could be done without German orders. Mass murder was an invention of the Nazis, not the Latvians. The evidence of Nazi culpability is too massive for a Nazi/Soviet collaborator to suggest that the Latvians came up with the idea of the Holocaust. The one Latvian, Viktors Deglavs, who wanted to organize Latvians was murdered by the Germans. Upon the arrival of the Germans, Latvians had two preoccupations: the desire to recoup Latvian sovereignty and to organize a Latvian Army.

*When the Tribunal took place in 1946 at which time SS, police generals and gebietskom-missars were tried for crimes against humanity, SS Obergruppenführer JECKELN sat among those accused of committing crimes in the Baltic republics. He was responsible for organizing the mass murders in the territories which the Nazis designated as OSTLAND. JECKELN was asked how many Jews were murdered in Latvia from 1941 to 1944, and this was his cynical reply: "It's impossible for me to tell you the precise number. When I arrived in Riga in the summer of 1941, I discovered that the Latvians themselves had already killed many thou-sands of Jews. And this had been going on in all other cities and towns throughout Latvia."*

<sup>3</sup> A major factor in the OSI's loss of the Vilis Hazners case was reliance on a witness who testified that he was wearing a German uniform in July 1941.

No *Gebietskommissar* of German-occupied Latvia was tried in Latvia. Jeckeln did not arrive in Riga in the summer of 1941. He arrived in Latvia in November of 1941. The statement that the author attributes to Jeckeln – “When I arrived in Riga in the summer of 1941, I discovered that the Latvians themselves had already killed many thousands of Jews. And this had been going on in all other cities and towns throughout Latvia.” – was never uttered by him. The Jeckeln trial records are intact. They are available in Moscow and on microfilm at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and at the Yad Vashem in Israel. A great deal of credibility has been given to this non-existent statement.

*We must concede that Jeckeln spoke the exact truth, though it is a bitter admission to make.*

Since Jeckeln did not utter those words we cannot say that he lied. Ducmanis’ text, however, is a different matter. It is amazing how many people cling to this falsehood.

*The first German troops entered Riga on July 1, 1941. On that day the former Latvian military attaché in Tallinn (Estonia), Lt.-Col. VEISS, entered Riga’s Radio Broadcasting Station and ordered the employee in charge to make a broadcast. This was an invitation to Latvians to assemble at Riga’s Latvian Club for instructions, and stressed that the time had come to destroy the “home enemy.”*

It is true that the Germans considered Veiss as one of their supporters, but there is no record that he made a radio broadcast. As Germans took over Riga they strove to do two contradictory things: to establish order so they could exploit the fruits of the land; and to create chaos, in the wake of which they plotted to carry out the killing of Jews. The Germans had picked Veiss to help them establish the positive side of the occupation. He was put in charge of organizing the Riga precinct police. A statement was read on the radio, but it did not make any mention of the “home enemy” and the speaker was not Veiss. It was an organizational announcement for Latvians (policemen, firemen, streetcar conductors, etc.) to return to their job sites. The hate-mongering line reached Riga via the Königsberg radio starting with 22 June. In the first issue of the German-controlled newspaper *Tēvija*, Veiss published an announcement in which he ordered the surrender of weapons to German authorities, which was consistent with the role that the Germans had assigned to him. He could not have done the two things simultaneously: urge Latvians to surrender weapons and have them kill all “home enemies in sight. (See Veiss’ announcement on page 132.)

*What was meant by “home enemy?”*

*By nightfall July 1st, the answer had already been given. The “home enemy” consisted of all the employees of the local Soviet government, together with their wives children, fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers and even more distant relatives. It consisted of ALL anti-fascists, and above all JEWS no matter what their occupation.*

The persecution of Communists and Jews did not begin on 1 July. The Arājs Commando had its genesis on 2 July, and it was the first Latvian formation that terrorized the Jews. The first persecution of Jews in Riga, however, began on the left bank of the Daugava on 29 and 30 June, and it was carried out by Germans. In a number of Pārdaugava districts, the Germans ordered all men aged 16 to 60 to leave their homes and assemble on open fields. They were kept there until the occupation of central Rīga. The Jews, however, were picked out by checking to see who was circumcised. They were taken away, never to be seen again. To repeat, the phrase “home enemy” was a Nazi import, one that the Soviets adopted.

*Tēvija, July 1, 1941*

### Rikojums

Visiem pilsoņiem, pie kuriem atrodas ieroči (šautenes, patšautenes, revolveri, medību bises u.t.t.), kuŗu nēšašanai nav pagaidu kārtības dienesta atļaujas, – tie nekavējoties, bet ne vēlāk par š. g. 2. jūliju pulkst. 18, jānodod savas policijas iecirkņos. Rikojuma neizpildīšanas gadījumā draud sods pēc kara laika likumiem.

Rīgā, 1941. g. 1. jūlijā

Plkv.-ltn. V. Veiss

Pagaidu kārtības dienesta priekšnieks

**The above directive indicates that Veiss served the Nazis from the first days of occupation, yet it also shows that he did not take to the air waves or in any other way call for the killing of Jews. To the contrary, in the first issue of *Tēvija* (July 1) he played the role of a pacifier – he signed the above directive ordering the surrender of weapons. On 7 July Stahlecker appointed him as a commandant of Rīga self-defense.**

*A more precise answer was given next day. Action by the armed units organized by VEISS and other Latvian officers, combined with the pro-Hitler Latvian fascists in the “Perkonkrusts” (Thunder Cross) organization, clearly demonstrated that Enemy No. 1 of the “home enemy” comprised all the wealthy Jews of Riga and other cities. For on the second day these Latvian fascists made daylight raids on Jewish homes, confiscating all valuables and beating up the victims before arresting and carting them to jail. The Jewish homes or flats were looted thoroughly of clothing and furniture.*

There is no evidence that Veiss organized any gang to pursue Jews. It was in the interest of the Nazi occupiers to proclaim that the natives were worse than Germans (see discussion in Chapter 1). The author does not mention Arājs, who indeed did organize the gangs, but placed the blame on Veiss, who did not. Whether or not it was the wealthy Jews, as during the *Kristallnacht* in Germany, who were first selected for molestation and killing is an unproved premise. The wealthy Jews lived dispersed throughout the city and were more difficult to find. Evidence indicates that the Nazi plan in Riga was first of all to assault the concentrated pockets of Jewish residents, on and around Marijas iela. Although in 1941 the Germans strove to imitate the events of the *Kristallnacht*, we do not know whether the order to attack the rich Jews was issued. The Germans

appeared to have been impatient to start killing operations, regardless of the wealth of the victims.

*What of the Jews arrested? What happened to them? Some were taken to Riga's central police headquarters, others to the newly set-up "Perkonkrusts" building on Kr. Valdemars Street. This building formerly belonged to a Jewish financier named Smuljans. Here Jews were beaten up and subjected to every known humiliation. The Latvian fascists were particularly cruel to the Jews; and most of the atrocities were committed under the leadership of a certain VIKTORS ARAJS, a former policeman. Each night they took truck loads of victims to Bikernieki Forest. Only empty trucks came back. In the beautiful forest of Bikernieki, on the night of July 1, 1941, the first mass grave for executed Jews from Riga came into existence.*

The Kr. Valdemāra iela building became the headquarters of the Arājs Commando; there was no reason to call it a Pērkonkrusts building. It is a mystery how the name Pērkonkrusts got to be attached to the Valdemāra iela 19 building. Perhaps no more than twelve Pērkonkrusts members served in that Com-

**The Center of Organizations**  
urges the registry of all remaining automobiles, functioning auto repair shops and all weapons.

**The Center of Organizations, led by Colonel Kreišmanis, located at Merķeļa iela 13, was the one German unsanctioned group that during the first days of occupation, strove to establish a Latvian government and organize an army. It too, like the German-sanctioned Veiss, in the first issue of *Tēviņa* published a statement regarding collection of weapons and motorized vehicles.**

mando. It is true, however, that the Pērkonkrusts, after a nine-year hiatus during which it had been illegal, endeavored to reassemble its organization in July, but it appears the effort did not get beyond compiling an incomplete list of members. For a period of time they occupied a small room on the third floor of the building. In the middle of August, the Germans disbanded the organization, pushing it underground.

*From police headquarters, the Jewish men were taken to Riga's Central Jail, the women to the Terminal Jail at Brasa railway station. But Jews who were jailed did not escape the fate of those taken to the various forests. From July 4th on, the Jews in jail were also taken away to be shot. Everything possible was done to speed up the mass murder of Jews. Those responsible were VEISS, head of the Latvian Police in Riga; his adjutant, HAZNERS; STIGLICS, police chief of Riga; Lieut.-Colonels OSIS and LOBE and their associates.*

The only person who perhaps was responsible for the murder of Jews mentioned in the paragraph was Štiglics, who was brought back to Latvia by Stahlecker and installed as the Prefect of Rīga. Lobe was a case by himself and is discussed elsewhere in the study. Hāzners was linked to Veiss and Osis and served as their adjutant. Hāzners was investigated by the American OSI. In an extended trial he was acquitted of Holocaust-related charges. The acquittal of Hāzners in effect also

exonerated Veiss and Osis. The men responsible for the fate of Jews during the early days of occupation were the members of *Einsatzgruppe A*, and on the part of the Latvians, Arājs and his men. Rīga Wehrmacht Commandant Ullersberger, under whose signature appeared the first anti-Jewish laws, must also bear a measure of responsibility.

*For ten days, from July 1 to July 11, the fate of the Jews in Riga depended upon the Latvian fascists – rested only in their hands. But in other towns the rule of the Latvian fascists lasted even longer than that. It lasted up to the time a regular German administration was set up together with its security police, the Gestapo!*

Here again Ducmanis shows his Nazi roots. The German occupiers did not allow any gap in control as indicated by Ducmanis. A series of trials in Germany has established that Stahlecker and his men arrived in Rīga on the same day as did the Wehrmacht. The interregnum was a Nazi/Soviet fiction used by Ducmanis.

*To go into detail, the first shooting of Jews in Riga took place in the yard of a house located at 7 Gogol St. In Riga alone, more than 9000 Jews were arrested and executed up to July 11. Most of them belonged to the business world or else were professional people such as doctors, lawyers, engineers and artists. Their families of course were included.*

The killing in Rīga began on the left bank of the Daugava before the Germans had crossed the river into central Rīga. The killing of Jews at Gogoļa iela 7 has not been documented, and it appears to be an invention of Ducmanis. The number 9,000 is an exaggeration. According to Stahlecker's report, until 15 October, 6,378 Jews and communists had been killed in Rīga and its environs. During the first killing phase in Rīga, unlike in the provincial towns, women and children were not killed. There is no reason to think that Jews slated for killing were subdivided by professions.

*All Jewish synagogues in Riga were desecrated and then demolished or burned down together with their rabbis and cantors. Three hundred Jews from the small town of Siauliai had found shelter in the Jewish synagogue on Moscow Street. When that synagogue was burned, all these people perished with it.*

It is true that synagogues in Rīga were burned on 4 July, and it is possible that some religious Jews were also incinerated. The story of hundreds of Jews being burned, however, belongs to the folklore of the Holocaust. There was no "Moscow Street" synagogue – the author must have meant the one on Gogoļa iela.

*There was, and is, no mercy in fascist slaughter. What kind of depraved satisfaction, for instance, did the Latvian fascists get out of the following? On July 8, several hundred Jewish men were loaded into trucks at the Central jail and taken to Bikernieki Forest. They were ordered to sit down, forming three rows as you can see in the photo on the next page. Then every third person in each row was shot. Those left alive had to dig the grave and bury the dead, after which they were taken back to jail. Later on, the German SS showed the Latvian executioners a more 'efficient' system of murder. They taught them to make the victims dig the grave first, before being shot.*

Here again the author uses the Jewish tragedy to fabricate a story. The picture mentioned cannot come from Biķernieki, because the killing ground was located in a forest without open fields as seen in the picture. The picture, as many others in the booklet, may not even have come from Latvia.



*July 8 will be remembered as the day of Latvian fascist rule when several prominent members of Jewish society were put to death, namely: KACS, PRAISS, GUREVICS etc. But during the days following, many thousands of Jews were put to death. Lieutenant-Colonel VEISS, Latvian police chief at the time, mobilized all the police force and other volunteers, turning them into special shock squads led by his brother officers. It is noteworthy that at this time every Jew in the jewellery business was murdered! One prominent jeweller, VIDZERS, was mercilessly beaten before execution in order to make him point out the various places where his gold and jewels were cached. So this evidently, was the kind of "home enemy" Lt.-Col. VEISS and his men were looking for. On the other hand, what about the 1500 Jewish women from the Terminal jail who were murdered also in the forests of Biķernieki and Jugla?*

Here the author attempts to hide his mischief-making by spewing out a cloud of detail. There is no way of proving or disproving that Kacs, Praiss, Gurēvičs were killed exactly on that date. We would not need to turn to Ducmanis' diatribe to find out whether Veiss had anything to do with a special campaign to kill Rīga jewelers. There is no evidence that there ever was a special action against jewelers. Although some Jewish women were killed in the early phase of the Rīga killings, in general in Rīga, women's lives were spared until the Rumbula action in November. There may not have been any Jugla killing site.

*Who were the leaders of these Jew murdering shock squads? One, of course, was ARAJS, but there were others just as cruel and bloodthirsty as he. There was OZOLS, a policeman from Riga's Police Court No. 2, later to become an officer in the Latvian SS Legion; the well-known runner, EDGARS LAIPENIEKS. (now residing in Chile where he works as an athletics coach); SIGURDS KAKTINS, an opera singer's son, and later on a very important Gestapo man in Latvia (now living in Boston, U.S.A.). There were the Latvian fascists Cers and Kakis, officer Janis Zemitis, and Herberts Teidemanis, head of the political department in the prefecture. And there were many others, with whom we shall deal later on.*



Arājs, Cers, Kakis, Zemītis, and Teidemanis were part of the Latvian SD, so it is not only possible but likely that they took part in the killings. Laipeniekš was prosecuted by the American OSI and was acquitted. There is no reliable information about Zigurds Kaktiņš. There have been a lot of rumors about him as a killer of Jews, but nothing factually serious has surfaced.

Although there must have been some German Gestapo men in Rīga, they did not operate openly nor did they perform there any of their fabled tortures. In Rīga, the Gestapo tasks were carried out by the third Department of the SD.

There were two persons named Ozols in the Latvian SD, but they both joined the Commando in February 1942, so neither one could have led any gangs of murderers in July or August of 1941. None of the two served in the Rīga Police. The SS-man in the portrait is not Kārlis Ozols, the much investigated member of the Arājs Commando, who died in Australia in 2000. According to an expert, the uniform is a hybrid, perhaps a show costume used in a theatre, not a real one. The hat appears to be too big.

*But one Jew lived through those tragic days and was an eyewitness of the persecution and annihilation of Jews in Latvia. He saw his own son shot in 1942, in the Sloka peat bogs; and towards the end of the war witnessed the cold-blooded extermination of Jews that took place in German concentration camps. This man was Max KAUFMANN. He describes his gruesome experiences, in his book "Die Vernichtung der Juden Lettlands," printed in Munich, 1947, available to readers in Western countries.*

Ducmanis generally describes Kaufmann's reported experiences correctly. To the degree that Kaufmann in his book records his own experiences it is a good source, but too frequently when he ranges out to write about things that he did not and could not have seen, his reliability fizzles out. The basic ongoing error that he commits over and over again is his idea that after the German occupation the Latvian prewar order had been recreated. Many Latvians at the time wished that could be true. In reality Kaufmann represents the Nazi perspective of the occupation.

*We should like to quote here a few lines from Kaufmann's book, where he describes the beginning of the extermination of Jews in Latvia during the first ten days of July, 1941. He writes:*

*"The main police building was crammed with Jews. Everywhere one could hear agonizing screams. The Latvians massacred their victims here. Their sadistic depravity knew no bounds. Old and sick men were led into the yard completely naked. Men who had been socially prominent stood there, beaten up and covered with blood. Their beards were pulled. A young woman was undressed, taken into a cellar, and raped. Cold water was thrown over old and venerable Jews. They were beaten, and mocked at. Jews with very long beards were compelled to use them for cleaning the shoes of the Latvians. And in those days not one uniformed German was to be seen in the police station."*

Kaufmann does not know and could not have known that it was German policy to hide their own presence. The assembly of Jews was one of the first assignments that was given to the Arājs Commando. The main police building was not the headquarters of the Latvian Police, as it had been in 1940, but rather, during the events that Kaufmann describes, it was the headquarters of *Einsatzgruppe A*. Stahlecker, the commander, had his seat on the second floor of the building.

*Further on in the book, Kaufmann describes another house of torture, the place on Valdemars Street where the “Perkonkrusts” headquarters were located. We quote:*

*“In this ‘General Headquarters of Murderers’ lived such prominent members of the “Perkonkrusts” as ARAJS, CUKURS, TEIDEMANIS, RAZUMS and FREIMANIS. They were assisted in their ‘bloody work’ by a considerable number of rich students from the upper classes of the Latvian intelligentsia. Yet today most of these out-and-out murderers of many hundreds and thousands of people live abroad as political exiles, enjoying the fullest rights granted them by the great democracies.”*

The Valdemāra iela 19 building was the headquarters of the Arājs commando, and none of the people named above lived in the building. None of five named men were members of the Pērkonkrusts.

*M. Kaufmann’s book of more than 500 pages describes many horrible crimes perpetrated by German and Latvian fascists. The last fateful days of prominent Jews in Latvia are starkly and vividly set before the reader. Every page of the book is filled with tales of death in a continuous sequence, all of them due to the many willing hands of Latvians always ready to deal out bullets, so eager were they to please their German bosses – the occupationists!*

There is no question that all Latvian surrogates and police and paramilitary units established after the occupation, obeyed all orders that their German commanders gave them. The German system, however, which Kaufmann did not see, had two interconnected faces, one engaged in murder and exploitation, the other creating a space of order that allowed the exploitation and murder to take place. The Nazis were too smart to make everyone to do everything all the time.

*Let us quote another paragraph from Kaufmann’s book:*

*“The Germans were still occupied with military matters and all civil administration was in the hands of the Latvians.*

When the Germans entered Latvia there was no Latvian civilian administration to administer anything. The Soviet administrators were hiding or running for their life, and administrators from independent Latvia had been taken to Siberia in large numbers. All laws, not only those pertaining to Jews, but also those regulating commerce were issued by the German Commandantures. Those laws were published in newspapers that Kaufmann apparently had not read. Traffic, prices, and availability of goods were regulated by the Germans, as numerous Wehrmacht directives indicate. The Germans on entering Latvia entered an administrative vacuum.

*None supplied Jews with food. When people lined up at grocery stores, if Jews were observed they were at once dragged out of the queues. There seemed to be no end to the atrocities. For instance, one day an automobile filled with Latvian police volunteers drove up to a place on Kalna St. (Moscow district of Riga.) All Jews were ordered out of the building. They were taken to the Jewish cemetery, locked in the synagogue there, and burnt alive. The same diabolical act was repeated in the new Jewish cemetery. The well-known cantor of Riga, MINCS, was locked up in the Hall of Prayers along with his family and other Jews: all perished in the flames."*

On the second day of Riga's occupation Commandant Ullersberger issued anti-Jewish laws, which included shopping rules. While it is true that men of the Arājs Commando participated in the molestation of Jews, the stories of burning Jews in synagogues most likely are folklore. The burning of Jews was a choice that Stahlecker would have made had anyone done so. The question is whether it would have been rational to kill Jews by burning them in the middle of a city. I am persuaded that charred corpses in the middle of city was something that the Germans would not have wanted to handle.

It is amazing that already Kaufmann fell for the Nazi canard of "volunteerism." Upon the German entrance into Latvia they organized several "police/military" formations. All indigenous attempts at organization were dashed. The Germans called their organizations "volunteer," but in most cases the membership was by invitation, order, or draft. It would be wrong to call these formations entirely coerced, but the situation was not fully free of blackmail. To obtain a membership in these organizations, in most cases a Latvian had to have the "right" connections. In most places it was the Wehrmacht *Ortskommandant* who selected the leaders of the Latvian Self-Defense and police formations. They sought men with military expertise and men who had suffered under the Communists.

*The Latvian fascists treated the Jews just the way Kaufmann describes, and not only in Riga but in other towns too. Let us look at a few examples. At Līvāni, no sooner did the Germans arrive in Latvia than a signboard inscribed "Judenfrei" appeared on the highway at the town's entrance. And when the SS arrived there was nothing for them to do. Everything had already been "put in order" by the local "Perkonkrusts" leader, E. ZUNDANS: the local teacher, A. VEINBERGS, and many others.*

It is one thing for the victim of Nazism to be ignorant about the rules and system of occupation, but it is a completely a different matter for a Nazi insider to repeat it. The Jews were killed at Līvāni on July 26 – about four weeks after the occupation of the town. The German occupation of Latvia is a fact beyond dispute.

*Daugavpils was occupied on June 28, three days earlier than Riga was. But the group of Latvian fascists there hesitated over the Jewish question, preferring to await orders from Riga. Therefore, up to July 2, things were rather quiet in Daugavpils; though in other towns and villages in Latgale the massacre of Jews was in full swing. Daugavpils received instructions from Lt.-Col. Veiss when the German army entered Riga.*

Stahlecker installed Veiss as a commander of the Rīga Police, and only of the Rīga Police, on July 7. Veiss had no powers to order anybody in Daugavpils to do anything. The persecution of Jews in Daugavpils, as numerous documents and trial depositions illustrate, was locally organized by *Einsatzkommando* leaders. One aspect of the system of occupation was to eclipse the central importance of Riga. The Germans never pretended that they were going to recreate an independent Latvia.

*As a result, on July 2, the order was given out for all male Jews to assemble in the market place. They were kept standing there the whole day, and in the evening they were surrounded by a group of armed Latvian fascists. The deathbaiting began. The first one to be shot was Leizers GOLDBERGS, because he did not stand in line correctly or so it was announced. Then it was the turn of Mayers MEIROVICS: he talked with his wife, and so on ... The rest were locked up in jail, though some of them were picked out to be shot in the woods at STROPI. Again they were taken from the jail and lined up. Mocking, taunting, the Latvian fascists demanded that two Jews volunteer for execution, otherwise all would be shot. Two volunteered – FUKSS and MAGIDS, rabbis both. Once more those remaining were herded into the jail. Jail! The living conditions were abominable before the Germans took over.*

The Jews in Daugavpils were molested and killed and some were imprisoned, but the specific description above is a confabulation for which no evidence is available. Daugavpils jails came under German control within the first days of occupation. Jails usually were controlled by the SD. Magids might have been a doctor.

*While the Latvians held power, they were notorious for being sadistic and vicious.*

In occupying Latvia the Germans moved into an administrative void. The Communists who ruled in Latvia vanished before the German occupation. The occupying forces had a unique opportunity to fashion a system to their liking.

*Many people arrested were executed in the Railwaymen's Garden next the jail. Of all the merciless persecutors of Jews, certain Latvian fascists stand out: KURSITIS, MURNIEKS and BISKAPS (Ojars Biskaps later became an officer in the Latvian SS Legion, and now lives in CANADA, but P. Murnieks is in West Germany). Others are: COLONEL CIMDINS chief of the Daugavpils police, and CAPTAIN PETERSONS, the mayor – both of them persecuted the Jews even more than their superiors in Riga, General Dankers and Lt.-Col. Veiss. By the end of July 1941, all Daugavpils Jews were forced to wear the emblem of the Yellow Star (denoting the Jew) on their back, chest and left leg. Yet only on August 31 was the order for this given out by Generalkommissar Drechsler. It is easy to see that the Latvian fascists were more determined than the German ones to humiliate the Jews.*

The biographies of Kursītis, Mūrnieks, and Biskaps could not be ascertained or their activities tied to anything in Daugavpils. Captain Pētersons is the only one whose presence shows up in documents. According to some opinions he was a returnee from Germany, and Germans installed him in his position. Dankers at

this time was not even in Latvia, so he could not have given any orders to anybody in Daugavpils. The directive to wear a yellow insignia was ordered by Wehrmacht commandants during the very early hours of occupation. Drechsler represented the German civilian government, and it is true that he reconfirmed the Wehrmacht's order. Ducmanis completely blanks out Roberts Blūzmanis, the most visible Latvian in Daugavpils.

*The Jews were murdered in Rezekne, Ludza, Pasiene, Zilupe and other towns before the Germans arrived. At Rezekne, Rabbi Haim LUBOCKY was shot, and hundreds of Jews along with him. At Zilupe, the sign "JUDENFREI" quickly appeared – about 350 Jews were shot on the banks of a near-by river. At Karsava, Varaklani and Vilani similar events took place. At Kraslava, the following took an active part in murdering Jews: Mayor BRIEDIS, the Latvian SD Chief Deputy LABUTS, and a policeman named PETERSONS. But they had to send to Riga for help (the ARAJS gang), because the local people refused to lend them a hand in this work. Here, too, there was nothing left for the German Gestapo to do. About 1500 Jews lived in Preili, but by the beginning of August there were none.*

In all of the locations indicated the Jews were killed, but from trial records and the Soviet Extraordinary Commission's investigation it has been established that the killings took place during the fourth and fifth weeks of the German occupation. It is true that Arājs Commando men were sent from Riga to many locations to carry out the killings, but that only proves that the killings occurred under the auspices of the *Einsatzkommandos*. Documents show that nobody but the German SD was authorized to delegate the Arājs Commando to the provinces. The preparations and procedures of killing everywhere were similar; that would also indicate the centralized nature of the operations.

The identities of Briedis, Labuts, and Pētersons could not be determined, nor could we double-check any of the deeds and functions Ducmanis had assigned to them. Insofar as Ducmanis on occasion has a grain of truth, it would not be proper to pronounce the men totally innocent.

*"Judenfrei" signs could be commonly seen in other Latvian towns during July, 1941. The bloody hands of the Latvian fascists were at work everywhere – at Ventspils, Saldus, Sabile, Auce, Cesis, Smiltene, Valmiera and Tukums. For the ugly business of murder, these fanatics needed no urging. They did it on their own initiative, or because they were inflamed by their leaders.*

The Holocaust was not a crime of passion but of organization. By trial records and the Soviet Extraordinary Commission's investigation reports it has been established that the Jews in the locations indicated were killed three to five weeks after the arrival of German forces, and everywhere it was ordered by German forces. The first killings in Ventspils were ordered by *Teilkommando* leader Erhard Grauel and took place on 16 July; the last one took place on 26 September. In Auce the killings were carried by a ten-man commando and took place on

about 12 July. In Smiltene the killing occurred one month after the occupation, on 8 August.

*Marta Vitola of Cesis told us the following about the extermination of Jews there:*

*“Early one evening, an acquaintance of mine heard unusual noises coming from Lake Ninieris. Approaching closer to the sounds, she saw a group of armed men who were speaking Latvian. In their midst stood a woman and a small child which clasped her tightly. My acquaintance became frightened and crept away when she saw the men drag the woman away from the child. She had not gone far before she heard a shot, and then a woman’s terrible screams ...”*

Although the story may contain a great deal of truth, it is a second-hand story that already moves it into the category of folklore. Inasmuch as the witness did not recognize any of the men, we may assume that they were “outsiders.”

*Nearly all the Jews in Cesis (except the DINERS family) were murdered at Lake Ninieris.*

*It was August when signs were posted in Jelgava reading “Mitau-Jelgava ist Judenfrei.” In Jelgava, Latvians alone took care of this matter, and only later on were they under the command of the Gestapo, the gebietskommissar being MEDEM from Zemgale and he was a Baltic German.*

The Gestapo (even if they were active in Latvia) and the *Gebietskommissar* represented two different branches of the Nazi system. In Jelgava, the Jews were murdered by a German team led by SD officer Alfred Becu. This took place on 1 August or thereabouts.

*Max Kaufmann writes about Jelgava in his book:*

*“Here the most cruel methods of extermination were used. Many Jews were burned alive in their synagogues. Others were shot in the cemetery (such as Dr. Lavits). The Disenciky and Hirshman families, of the merchant class, also died in a tragic way – forced to dig their own graves. The school principal BOVSHOVER and his child were driven to the market place to be shot publicly.”*

Our attempt to substantiate Kaufmann’s stories failed. The Soviet Extraordinary Commission did not confirm Kaufmann’s stories.

*It is general knowledge that the Zionist movement started in Jelgava and spread from there throughout Latvia. This was an additional reason for the special vindictiveness shown there against the Jews. Key murderers in Jelgava were such Latvians as VEILANDS, KAULINS, LEIMANIS, PLATAIS, as well as two Baltic Germans named SCHULTZ and HOLSTEIN who sought promotion to fascist Germany.*

Veilands, Kauliņš, Leimanis, Schultz and Holstein could not be established as Jelgava activists. Only Platais is known to have hailed from there, but his participation in the Latvian self-defense could not be established. It is peculiar and significant that Ducmanis fails to mention the one most important Jelgava organizer, Mārtiņš Vagulāns, who after the war lived in Australia. That may indicate one of

two things: Ducmanis was trying to hide one of his Nazi-time associates and fellow journalists, or Vagulāns was spying for the KGB. "Zionism" was a Soviet, not a Latvian problem.

*After the first month of German occupation, therefore, only a few towns in Latvia still retained a number of Jews among the population. This was the case in Riga, Liepāja and Daugavpils. Jews there had to endure the second stage of torture, that of wearing the hated Yellow Star to denote their race and of being cooped up in ghettos to await extermination.*

This paragraph illustrates another aspect of the shoddiness of Ducmanis' approach to the Holocaust. The Jews of all towns with the exception of Rīga, Daugavpils, Liepāja and Ventspils were killed by the end of August. In the four towns the killing was finished by the middle of December. After the December killings about 6,500 Jews were held back as working Jews. In general they had a good chance of survival until 1945.

In the scale of atrocities during the German occupation, the wearing the yellow star was a small matter. In many locations the directive for Jews to wear this designation was issued immediately or soon thereafter the occupation. Thereafter it was reconfirmed several times.

*There can be no doubt whatsoever that the Latvian fascists played a decisive part in the extermination of Latvian Jews in 1941. Proof of their guilt is absolute.*

The Latvians did not occupy Latvia; the Germans did. Many Latvians have been tried and punished for their part in the killing of the Jews. The irony is that more Latvians than Germans have been punished for Nazi crimes.

*But questions still remain. Who were these cruel and heartless Latvians? Where are they today? In what countries, what cities, do they live? What kind of people do they work with, are they hiding amongst, concealing the stigma of the most terrible crime – professional murder? There is only one answer. They have escaped to places that willingly or unknowingly protect them from the just retribution they deserve for the crimes of which they stand guilty before all nations.*

Numerous war crimes agencies in the world have pored over every single name contained in Ducmanis' pamphlet. With very few exceptions (discussed elsewhere in the study), these investigations have come up dry.

*Take Lt.-Col. Veiss, for instance. He and other high officials had unlimited license in Latvia.*

To begin with, Veiss was subordinated to the Wehrmacht *Ortskommandant* and the SD in Riga. Veiss could only serve at the pleasure of his German overseers. Within the organizational chart that the Germans brought to Latvia, Veiss had no powers outside of his post as the commander of the Rīga Latvian Auxiliary Police.

*They held the power of life or death over the population during the first few weeks of the German occupation. Later Veiss became a Police Battalion inspector and commanded police squads whose business it was, like that of the 18th Police Battalion, to murder helpless citizens. Afterwards, to camouflage the blood-spilling in Poland, Lithuania and Byelorussia, he and a band of Latvian fascists entered the German army in order to look like honest soldiers. But even in this guise it was clear that his loyalty belonged to the SS gruppenführers whom Hitler and Himmler had sent to serve in the German ranks – for Veiss was the first Latvian to receive the highest order, “The Knight’s Cross.” For the same ‘loyal misdeeds’ his companions received the “Iron Cross.” Eventually Veiss was killed on the Eastern Front, in March, 1943; at which time we might ironically say he and his companions received their final “Crosses” – crosses of birchwood on their graves.*

In the above paragraph Ducmanis compresses many falsifications. For about a month in 1941, Veiss served as commander of the Riga Auxiliary Police. Thereafter he became a military adviser to the fledgling “Latvian Self-Administration of the Land.” He reentered active military service only after the Latvian Legion was started in 1943. Veiss had nothing to do with the 18th Battalion. There was no such office as Police Battalion Inspector. Veiss was killed in 1944, not 1943.

*Apart from Veiss, what happened to the others? They went on serving in the German army, their uniforms successfully masking their past. Very few remained in the SS units stationed in Kurzeme, as it was far too dangerous. We all know that those who find it easy to murder helpless people are never very brave about meeting the living wives or children of their victims. Nor are they courageous in facing the righteous anger of their nation. M. Kaufmann is right when he says that as “innocent soldiers” they begged protection from the West because they wished to fly as far as possible from the scenes of their crimes.*

The implication here is that the same men who played a role in the killing of Jews were the same as those who entered the Latvian Legion. No doubt there was some overlap, but it could not have been a large one. During the killing period, as established by *Landesgericht* Hamburg, the Arājs Commando was only about 200 to 300 men. Even if all of them had entered the Legion of about 40,000, which they did not, the rotten apple effect would have been a limited one. It is also true that some self-defense men in some locations did participate in the killings. Did they poison the police battalions and then the Legion? There was some ripple effect, but there were also reasons that the self-defense troopers entered the Legion only in limited numbers. The barrier was generational. While the Legionnaires consisted of men born from 1917 to 1925, the self-defense men were on the average ten years older, which meant that the mustering officials would not have accepted them as suited for the Legion. Latvians had no way of choosing their service location.

*The Criminal Code states that those who give the orders for murder are just as responsible for the crimes committed as those who did the deeds. The actual doers are never alone, for behind them stand the ideologists and the instigators of the crimes. Who among the*

*Latvians must answer for the crimes committed against the peoples of Latvia and other countries during the occupation period?*

Here, I can agree with Ducmanis. The Nazi-time press was full of anti-Semitic articles and caricatures, and most of them were written by Latvians. The newspaper Ducmanis edited was no exception. The general management of the press belonged to Germans. Once the killing of the Jews was finished anti-Semitism in the press abated.

*Photo No. 8 – On this page you will see a photostat of a leading article headed “THE JEW – OUR DESTROYER,” taken from the July 11, 1941, issue of the main Latvian newspaper of the time, “Tēvija,” whose vice-manager was ARTURS KRODERS. (Today he is the editor of the Latvian newspaper, “Latvju Vards,” published in Stockholm, Sweden.)*

In no way do I want to defend Kroders, for articles such as the one below do no honor to anybody. The only positive thing that one can say for Kroders was that by July 24 he was fired from the editorship of *Tēvija*. One must also note that Ducmanis' crimes were more extensive, because he served the Nazis for much longer than Kroders: four years to Kroders' twenty-four days.

*The article says:*

*“The Jewish people struck me as being very active and disciplined, as well as honest because a Jew rarely goes to jail. I could see they were intellectually talented, though I never did believe they were superior to others. Nevertheless, it seemed to me, and so it seems now, that this nation has become much degenerated after living for thousands of years in stores and basements, and is also too sexually-minded, so that the eventual ruin of this race is certain. It also appeared that Jews achieve success not through belief in a higher power, nor by organization; but by striving separately for material gains, each for his own benefit. Their wealth did not permit me to believe them to be revolutionary or eager to crush everything in their path, but one year under Soviet Power completely changed my views about this:*

*“A Jew can be classed only by his blood, not by his education nor past history. There are actually no German Jews, or Latvian or Russian Jews; for a Jew is known only as such, only as a person of Jewish blood. The Jews know very little folklore, and have scarcely any knowledge of their past. They live only for today, and strive only for money and power. The Jew is not creative, nor does he like to grow or look after anything: he is a mere bloodsucker, a parasite who likes to live through other people's efforts. Also, Jews never use money collectively to create new values. And the cities in which they live are the most dirty, decrepit, and lacking in culture. We have only to look at Latgale or Lithuania to realize that this nation, the supposed ‘elect of God,’ is not elect at all but is a nation hostile to culture: a nation which turns its dwelling place and surroundings into a rubbish heap having the appearance of a hawk's nest with its ugly litter of bones and feathers after the tearing apart of prey. But Jews like to parade themselves in the elegant homes which other nations have built. They themselves are unproductive and have, as well, a paucity of real intellectual culture.*

*“In my class at secondary school, not one Jew knew who David and Solomon were, and only one of them knew the story about Moses bringing to earth the holy tablets of law, the Ten Commandments. Also, they were unfamiliar with Biblical or Jewish history: Even then I discovered that Latvian young people knew more of the Jewish past than the Jews them*

selves. And I even said then that, if I made such a statement in public, I should not be believed ...

“... No, we do not have a path in common with such people. Jews wanted to rule our country – and they have betrayed not our people alone. Therefore, to the last man, Jews must be eliminated from Latvia. We must destroy the whole Jewish nation, remembering that each individual Jew must be held responsible for the deeds of his race. If we cannot export them, we must not permit them to be bloodsuckers in our country. Jews must be barred from all work except that of the lowest rank and file. The Jewish intelligentsia must be forced to emigrate, for if they remain here they will be given only the heaviest and most degrading work. They will have to earn their living the hard way just as our own workers have had to do.

“The sins of the Jews are great. They wanted to destroy our nation – therefore, as a nation of culture they must die.”

These views need no commentary. Articles of this sort were printed in “*Tevija*” every day. Their anti-Semitic propaganda preached the speedy extermination of the Jewish race. All anti-fascists were lauded as “freemasons.” By pouring out this hostile venom, they tried to poison the minds of the Latvian youth. The editor responsible was PAULS KOVALEVSKIS. (He now lives in Denmark under the name of PAVILS KLANS, and calls himself a writer.) Kovalevskis, Kreišmanis, the owner of “*Tevija*,” and Raitums, chief of fascist propaganda, appeared all three before Himmler in Berlin, 1942, to whom they personally reported that there was no longer a “Jewish problem” in Latvia ...

Kovaļevskis actually was a good friend of Ducmanis, and there is no reason to assume that during the Nazi period he would have disagreed with him. Ducmanis also worked in an anti-Semitic newspaper that published articles similar to the one above. The visit of Kovaļevskis, Kreišmanis, and Raitums, to Berlin to see Himmler is pure invention. Nothing like it ever took place. Himmler once came to Riga, but no Latvian, except Kārlis Lobe, ever went to Berlin to see Himmler. In 1942, while attending a Nazi indoctrination school in Berlin, Ducmanis was closer, at least spiritually, to Himmler than was Kovaļevskis.

*We must again stress that from the first days of July, 1941, the ideological center in Riga for the extermination of Jews was the Anti-Semitic Institute, led by the “Pērkonkrusts” society and its leaders, which acted on the instructions of the German fascists. All the staff of the institute were members of the “Pērkonkrusts.” They were not engaged with the theory of anti-Semitism, but with the practical realization of it – serving as executioners in police battalions or SD units. The main leaders and investigators were Gustavs CELMINS, leader-in-chief; the lawyer, Adolfs SILDE, deputy for questions of propaganda; and a professor with decided fascist tendencies called VITOLS.*

The Anti-Semitic Institute did not exist as yet in July of 1941 and therefore could not have guided the killing of the Jews. The only one connected with the Anti-Semitic Institute was Jēkabs Vitols, who, however, was not a Pērkonkrusts member. All three were far removed from the killing fields. Celmiņš was the leader of Pērkonkrusts that as an organization ended its existence in 1932. In 1941, he

returned to Latvia in German uniform. Near Liepāja he suffered a concussion and so missed the celebratory “liberation” of Latvia. He strove to play a major role in “liberated” Latvia, but the Germans gave him no first-string position. During the course of the German occupation Celmiņš wrote no anti-Semitic articles. By 1942 Celmiņš had organized a vigorous anti-Nazi resistance.

*Only afterwards was the power of the Hitler government established in the Baltic Republics, in the form of the German “Gebietskommissariat.” The representatives of Nazi Germany – Reichskommissar of Ostland LOHSE; Generalkommissar of Latvia, DRECHSLER; the head of the police and SS units of Ostland, JECKELN; many other SS generals, gebietskommissars, and even the lower SS ranks in their black and brown uniforms all were far from satisfied with the work of the Latvian quislings. They decided to employ their craven Latvian toadies more intensively to carry out their bloody plans. Therefore, the Germans themselves took over the job of directing the persecution and destruction of the “home or interior enemy” such as the Jews and many other undesirables; and with their usual German thoroughness they carried out all the instructions issued by Hitler, Himmler, Rosenberg and Goering, in the name of the ‘GREAT GERMAN’ Nazi Empire. That is, they gave the orders – while the Latvian fascists and police volunteers did the actual dirty work, diligently and even eagerly.*

In the above paragraph, more so than anywhere else, Ducmanis shows that during the stay at the propaganda school in Berlin, he did not waste his time. He had become conversant with the Nazi propaganda line that prior to the war had been worked out by Hitler’s minions. Hitler would have been happy about Ducmanis’ version of the Holocaust.

*The work of exterminating the Jews went on. The Generalkommissar of Latvia, Drechsler, issued an order on August 31, 1941, to the effect that all Jews must wear the badge of the Yellow Star. And on Oct. 23, the gebietskommissar of Riga, WITTROCK ordered all Jews to report to the ghetto in the Moscow district not later than Oct. 25. Similar orders were issued in other cities where Jews could still be found. The last act in the Jewish tragedy had begun, their final extermination.*

*On the night of Oct. 25, the Latvian police guards closed the ghetto gates, locking in about 32,000 Jews. There they stayed under guard until November 29, when all the ghetto’s inmates were commanded to come out and line up, as the order had been received to wipe out the ghetto that day.*

The actual number of Jews trapped in the ghetto was 29,602. The responsibility of the ghetto belonged to the German civilian government, whose head was Otto Drechsler. The police force that oversaw the closing of the ghetto belonged to the *Schutzpolizei*. The Latvian police could only serve in an auxiliary capacity. A special ghetto guard unit had been created whose officers were *Schutzpolizei* and the foot soldiers Latvians – in accordance with the principle that Germans commanded and natives obeyed.

*M. Kaufmann, himself an eyewitness, writes about the scene that followed:*

*“The first columns to move out took up a position near the ghetto gates ... SA men in brown uniforms appeared; and the executioner, CUKURS, got out of an automobile. Cukurs had a leather overcoat on, with a Nagant [Nagan is meant] revolver holstered at his side. He gathered the Latvian guards around him to give them their instructions. It was clear that Cukurs knew all about our terrible fate to come. Then the number of guards seemed greatly increased, and all were given plenty of vodka.*

Herberts Cukurs could not have played a commanding role in the ghetto, for his name did not show up on the ghetto's organizational chart. The Hamburg judiciary, that prosecuted a Riga Ghetto case, would not support Kaufmann's assertion. The organizing authority of the Rumbula massacre was Jeckeln, and through him the *Schutzpolizei*. Cukurs was a member of the Arājs Commando, but among the Latvian murderers, he did not rank very high. In the deposition of Arājs men found in the KGB archives, he is not mentioned often. An auxiliary of the auxiliary Security Police could not wield much power in the presence of Germans. One does not know where and how one can look for evidence to support Cukurs' "butcher" status assigned to him by Kaufmann.

*“After a long consultation, it was decided that those who worked in places outside the ghetto might go to their jobs, and the rest were ordered inside [to go to their houses]. The ghetto inmates were relieved, and accepted the order with delight. Talking it over, many of them said that perhaps the evacuation order was to be canceled.*

*“... At three o'clock, those of us who had been working returned to the ghetto. We waited outside the gate, but nobody let us in. Then, guarded by Latvians, we were taken to a new place which had been erected a few days before beside the old ghetto. As we passed along the fence of the new ghetto, we noticed the people inside seemed very discontented and restless ...*

*“Late that night, with unexpected suddenness, the bloody orgy of evacuation began. Latvians and Germans, in uniform, and wildly drunk, broke into the ghetto. Then began a real, down-to-earth human hunt! Like wild beasts they burst into the Jewish apartments, searching them, throwing everything helter-skelter. People tried to hide from the drunken beasts, but they were discovered and pulled out. Out of control, this gang smashed everything they could, fired shots at random, drove helpless and even injured Jews from their homes. Children were torn from their mothers and brutally kicked or tossed out of the windows. Like tigers or maddened elephants, they charged from house to house, from room to room. Every Jew had to dress quickly, and catch up only the barest necessities.”*

Rumbula was a major operation planned by Jeckeln and his associates. To some degree they relied on their experience in Ukraine. If Germans were Germans they did not plan for a failure. At the end of the day a lot of alcohol was used, even abused, but it is unlikely that this complicated operation would have begun by everybody getting drunk. The plan was to get the Jews to Rumbula, not to kill them within the Ghetto. Unexpectedly, the organizers found a lot of resistance, uncooperative victims. The resisters were dealt with brutally. To that degree Kaufmann is correct.

Outside they were formed into columns and marched along Moscow Street in the direction of the "Kvadrats" factory, always surrounded by their Latvian guards. The sick and weak people from the "Lina-Hazedek" Hospital were evacuated by bus.

All victims were driven along the Riga-Daugavpils highway in the direction of Salaspils. In Rumbula Forest the huge grave pit had already been dug.

A Jewish truck driver was an eyewitness to the scene of horror that followed. This is his story:

*"Men, women and children were all forced to undress and stand there naked. The weather was biting cold. First they were beaten without mercy, and gold teeth were wrenched out of people's mouths. Then they had to stand on the edge of a deep trench, to await being shot. Many women fainted and dropped down unconscious before death could relieve them. Small children were thrown into the pit alive. Many victims who were only wounded or injured jumped down, of their own accord, among the dead lying in the grave. As death approached, men and women embraced one another in last farewells. Thousands had to stand, awaiting their own death, and watch the execution of their brothers, sisters, mothers or husbands, as the case might be. Some prayed."*

The general scene at Rumbula is pretty accurately described, although it is not likely that a Jewish truck driver would have seen the killings in the pits. Even if he had been there, a driver could not have seen the detail from the road. At least this story has not surfaced in the open. It is unlikely that the killing party on those frantic days had enough time to knock anybody's teeth out.

*M. Kaufmann carries the story further:*

*"The first bloodbath ended on Sunday morning, November 30. Part of the evacuation was finished. But the murderers returned again with guns blazing and rushed the ghetto.*

*"Ludza Street, in the centre, was literally covered with corpses, and many houses were littered with dead bodies.*

*"Blood ran like water!"*

If Kaufmann is describing the scene on 30 November, then it is more or less correct. If however, he means also the day after, that is a confabulation that finds no support in any other source.

*On December 8, the second mass extermination of Jews from the Riga ghetto took place. It was a repetition of the first. Latvian and German police guards broke in and drove thousands of Jews again to Rumbula. Once more, thousands of human victims had to undress, were beaten in their nakedness, and shot in cold blood. It is interesting to note that after the slaughter, though the actual execution had been carried out by Latvians, the mass grave was guarded by Germans.*

He is wrong about Latvians being the marksmen in the pits. Jeckeln personally selected twelve men from his retinue to do the killing on both days of the massacre (see Chapter 6).

*When questioned about this at the Military Tribunal, obergruppenführer Jeckeln replied: "The Latvians had stronger nerves for such executions!"*

In quoting this sentence, Ducmanis is doubly wrong. He is factually wrong, because Jeckeln used no Latvian as a killer, and he is wrong because Jeckeln never uttered that statement. The trial records are deposited in Moscow, and they were microfilmed by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. In none of the versions can this quotation from Jeckeln be found.

*The second extermination of Jews in the large ghetto ended at noon, December 9. At the end of these ten days of bloodshed, less than 5000 remained of the 32,000 Jews who had been locked up in the Riga ghetto. Buried in Rumbula Forest were about 27,000 Jews, including some 8000 children ranging in age from a few days to 10 years. Among those killed were many who were locally prominent as scientists or artists.*

The number of Jews killed at Rumbula was about 25,000. The number of child victims is exaggerated.

*Three very outstanding pedagogues perished in this senseless orgy of murder, namely, Professor Adolfs MECS, the pianist, and Assistant Professors M. Zalmanovica and I. Tagers. Somewhere in the mass grave also lie 67 graduates of the Conservatory of Music and other music schools, including four with special talent – the 8-year old prodigy of the ‘cello, NEI-HAUZS; his sister, the violin virtuoso; the 10-year old violinist, Judite GORDINA; and last of all SARA RASINA, 17 years old, a violinist well-known throughout the European musical world. From this you may guess how much talent must have been swallowed up by that horrible pit in Rumbula. And we have only covered one branch of science. What about the others?*

*We must not fail to mention one important victim, SIMON DUBNOV, one of the greatest historians of the Twentieth Century. In 1933, all the world was relieved to hear that this celebrated historian had escaped from fascist Germany and found refuge in Riga. In 1941, he was arrested several times. A number of Germans themselves saved him from execution. But eventually he was hunted out by a Latvian fascist called DANKKOPS, and on December 8 this great scientist perished with his brother Jews in Rumbula Forest.*

All of the above is true, except that Dankkops would not have been in a position to hunt out Dubnov. Neither is there any evidence that there were any Germans who were trying to save him. The myth of the good German is as wrong as the one of the evil Latvian. Dankkops was a Latvian officer in charge of the Latvian component of the Ghetto guards. Rules prohibited him from hunting down anybody within the Ghetto. Formally, it was the Jewish police who were in charge of the ghetto's interior.

*The ghetto in Daugavpils was wiped out in the same manner on November 7, 1941. The operation was carried out by one of the Latvian SD, SOVERS, who also took part in the massacre of Jews in Ludza two months later [sic]. For the Daugavpils operation, Sovers used reinforcements from the armed troops of the “Perkonkrusts” Organization in Riga. The reinforcements were led by a Latvian called Kalnins. The Daugavpils ghetto and the place of execution at Mezciems, with its gaping mass grave, were surrounded by local police and the Latvian SS who acted as executioners.*

The Pērkonkrusts had no “armed troops.” After August 1941, Pērkonkrusts was a forbidden organization – as it had been in independent Latvia before the Soviet annexation.

It is well known how the Jews of Daugavpils were killed. Sovers does not appear to be among the murderers in Daugavpils or Ludza. There was no “Pērkonkrusts” unit of killers. A Lieutenant Kalniņš is associated with the Arājs Commando, but from Ducmanis’ text it is not possible to determine that he is the man. In 1941, there were no Latvian SS formations. In fact, unless one uses Nazi logic, there never was a true Latvian SS. The designation that the Germans gave the Latvian Legion in 1943 was *Lettische SS-Freiwilligen-Legion*. On the Nazi organizational chart a formation so designated did not have an SS status.

*And how was the extermination of Jews carried out in Liepāja? As soon as the Germans entered the city, Latvian fascists began visiting Jewish homes. But serious action began only on July 23. Within several days after that, about 4000 Jews were arrested and executed. They were shot on the far side of the Liepāja Naval Port. A short time afterwards an additional 3500 Jews were installed in a ghetto.*

Ducmanis writes the above paragraph without any responsibility for truth. The killing of Liepāja Jews is well documented in the Grauel case that was adjudicated by the Hannover *Landesgericht*. The Liepāja Ghetto was established only in May 1942. It had about 800 inhabitants.

*As to what happened to these 3500 souls there was one man who knew all about it – K. STRODT of the Liepāja Gestapo. Like Corporal VILNIS of the Latvian 18th Battalion, he also enjoyed taking snapshots.*



**The Šķēde pictures, like the one above, are simultaneously both true and false. Strott's assignment was to “document” and prove, contrary to the reality on the ground, that the Liepāja killings were Germanless. Ducmanis and the Soviet KGB apparatus bought into this Nazi falsification.**

There is evidence that Carl-Emil Strott took the pictures, and they have been preserved. There is no proof that Vilnis ever took any pictures at all. Strott took the pictures for propagandistic purposes to prove that it was the Latvians not Germans who killed the Jews.

*Here you can see four of them. In Photo No. 10, a Latvian officer is at the left giving orders to his subordinate to kill the victims. The executioners*

are wearing dark green overcoats which were taken from the Latvian Military Stores (annexed by the Germans upon occupation).

Photo No. 11 is a reproduction of a photograph that K. Strodt took on December 15, 1941, at the Skede seashore near Liepāja. On that day and the one following, the 21st Latvian Police Battalion (some may be seen in the background) murdered all 3500 inmates of the Liepāja ghetto. As in Slonim, Riga, Daugavpils etc., all victims first of all had to undress before their executioners. (Strodt preferred pictures of naked women rather than men).

In mid-December 1941, the 21st Latvian Police Battalion was in the very early stages of formation. So it could not have taken part in the killings as a unit. There were several German and Latvian teams that carried out the killings, but none of them could have represented the 21st Battalion. In 1974/75 the Soviets staged a show trial of the 21st Battalion in which, facts notwithstanding, it was accused of the Šķēde massacre. It is true that the Germans had decided to assign numbers to fledgling Latvian police battalions in December and the number “21” was given to the forthcoming Liepāja unit. The Soviet judiciary, however, not only accused the 21st Battalion of the massacre in December, when the unit’s number had made its first appearance, but also one in September, when there was neither a battalion nor a massacre of the size described at the trial. The true story of the Liepāja massacre can be found in the records of the Grauel trial of Hannover. For a more extended discussion of the 21st Battalion’s controversy see Chapter 3.

Photo No. 12 shows some victims whose lives were snuffed out a few moments later by the bullets of the Latvian police.

In Photo No. 13, death has overtaken them. Their last moments are over, and a volunteer member of the Latvian police is rushing forward to push the dead deeper into the gaping trench.

These pictures of breath-taking horror bring to an end our story of the extermination of Jews in Latvia. No further facts are needed as proof of the mass slaughter that took place. In the following pages, we shall draw the reader’s attention to other facts which illustrate additional acts committed for, and services rendered to, the Hitler Reich by the same Latvian police.

The system of German occupation mandated that there be no such organization as Latvian police, if by that designation is meant a centralized organization. There were only local police organizations: of Rīga, Madona, Liepāja, Rēzekne etc. The Germans never referred to the Latvian police: they were either called Auxiliary Police (*Hilfspolizei*) or *Schutzmannschaften*.

Shortly after the ‘liquidation’ of Jews in the ghettos of Riga, as early as December, many trains arrived in Riga loaded with citizens of Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, France, Holland and other countries. Who were they, and who sent them to Latvia?

The shipping records show no Jews from France and Holland.

They were Jews shipped to Riga by order of the SS Hauptamt. And why? A clear answer was given by SS Gruppenführer Jeckeln, in February, 1946, when he told the Military Tribunal:

*"These Jews were sent to Riga for extermination because it was considered the most suitable place for this purpose."*

The above quote is an NKVD/KGB invention. The records of Jeckeln's trial have not been destroyed. They are deposited in Moscow, and microfilm copies are also found at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Yad Vashem archives. These records contain no such quotation. Ducmanis here continues to push his Nazi agenda.

*What a terrible accusation is contained in his words! The answer was indeed very clear. Riga was the most suitable place because a gang of viciously cruel and bestial murderers had been organized and trained there from the first days of July, 1941, by STIGLICS, Riga's Chief of Police, who now lives in Brazil. Besides this gang of murderers, there were other police units – no less bloodthirsty, trained and led by ARAJS – whose only job was to exterminate a peaceful people. And last but not least, there were the hardened, brutal police battalions, trained on quiet 14 Anna Street by such proven Latvian Hitlerites as Voldemars Veiss, Roberts Osis, Karlis Lobe, Vilis Janums, Voldemars Skaistlauks, Arturs Silgailis and many others.*

In the above paragraph Ducmanis at least does not omit Arājs. Stiglics' past has never been investigated, but we assume that he did carry out some *Einsatzgruppen* assignments. The so-called men of Annas iela, who were responsible for organization of some of the Latvian police battalions, have been raked over very thoroughly. For the role of the Annas iela men in the atrocities, see the case of Hāzners below, who was exonerated.

*Before being sent to Latvia, the foreign Jews were told that an agreement had been made between Germany and the U.S.A. for the transfer of Jews first to Sweden and then to America. Many of the new arrivals were put in the empty Riga ghetto; others were sent to concentration camps set up near Salaspils and in the vicinity of Riga; but some, immediately upon arrival, were taken to a place of execution to be shot.*

There is no evidence that the Jews were told about any agreement between Germany and the United States. It is thought that only one transport was sent directly to the killing pits at Rumbula on 30 November 1941. At the time when most of the foreign Jews arrived in Riga, the Salaspils camp as yet did not exist. It was in the process of being built, and hence several hundreds of Jews were sent there to work on construction.

*Photo No. 14 is that of a foreign Jewish boy, one of the very few who survived and lived through the mass slaughter by some strange miracle of fate. His name is WERNER GOLNIK, and he came from Kassel, Germany. At the war's end, he happened to be in the Stuttgart Concentration Camp from which he was rescued by the timely arrival of the Red Army. The photograph of this boy was taken in the summer of 1942 at the Riga ghetto, when he was 8 years old. Now, this living eyewitness of events in Latvia is twenty-nine.*

It is not likely that the boy could have been liberated at Stutthof, because by that time Red Army got there the camp was evacuated and the “death march” had begun.

*On December 3, the first Jews arrived in Riga from Nuremberg and Würzburg. The day after, more arrived from the districts of Stuttgart and Württemberg. They consisted mainly of children from 6 to 7 years, some old people, and pregnant women. More transports arrived later on. A part of the arrivals was exterminated at once in the forest of Bikernieki. In January, 1942, Jews arrived from Vienna, Austria. Foreign Jews continued to arrive right up to the end of that year. During the summer, some of them were sent to Estonia.*

Jewish families that included children were brought to Latvia. There was no special transport of children to Latvia.

*Thousands were in the camp of Jumpravmuiza, about 5 kilometres from Riga. Out of 6,500 Jews sent to this camp, only 300 were saved to work on the farms owned by the Gestapo. About 200 women were sent to the Riga ghetto in February 1942, and of this number only 2 survived, their names being KAPLAN and SPRINGENFELD. Approximately 600 Jews were transferred to the Salaspils death camp. On March 26, 1942, those remaining in the camp at Jumpravmuiza were taken to Bikernieki Forest and shot to death by Latvian volunteer police and SD-men from ARAJS' units, who were all under the command of Richard NICKEL and Rudy SECHS of the Berlin Gestapo.*

The Gestapo as such did not operate in Latvia. Ducmanis knew better, but he opted to use a Soviet cliché. The organization that was in charge of Jews was called the SD or the Security Police. Salaspils began to be built in late 1941 and finished in late summer 1942. Everything that transpired in German-occupied Latvia had an edge of cruelty to it, but nobody was taken to Salaspils to be killed there. The designation of “death camp,” meaning that it could compare to Treblinka and Auschwitz, violates common rules of language and the kind of understanding that historians have agreed on about the Nazi camps. It was, however, an especially brutal time when the Salaspils camp was being built, and many Jews died from exposure and lack of nourishment. Without defending the Nazis, we also know that many Jews survived their time at Salaspils.<sup>4</sup>

In early 1942 there were two killing actions of foreign Jews that took place at Biķernieki. In the two operations about 10,000 Jews were killed.

*The same squads also exterminated the foreign Jews from the ghetto of Riga. Only a small percentage were ‘fortunate’ enough to be sent to the Salaspils death camp and later to camps in Germany.*

<sup>4</sup> For a full post-Soviet study of the Salaspils camp see Heinrihs Strods, “Salaspils koncentrācijas nometne 1941–1944,” *Latvijas Okupācijas muzeja gadagrāmata / Yearbook of the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia 2000* (Riga: 2001) 87–150. For a review of the study see A. Ezergailis, “Latvijas okupācijas gada grāmata, 2000: komunistu un nacistu jūgā,” *Latvijas Kara muzeja gadagrāmata II* (Riga, 2001).

Salaspils camp was not a Jewish camp *per se*. After the building phase, it became a camp for political prisoners – Communists and nationalists. Salaspils was a transit and labor camp and police prison. After the autumn of 1942 only a few Jews were quartered there.

*SALASPILS DEATH CAMP (see Photo No. 15) – The Salaspils death camp was located not far from Riga on the banks of the Daugava River. In this camp from 1942 to 1944, hundreds of thousands of prisoners died. They were of all nationalities Latvians, Russians, Poles, Lithuanians, and Jews from various European countries. The camp was operated by Lange, chief of the Latvian Gestapo and SD. The commandant was Obersturmführer Krause.*

There is no reason to believe this Soviet hyperbolic count of victims. It is now established that the number of Jews brought to Latvia was fewer than 25,000, far short of hundreds of thousands. Specifically at Salaspils the number of dead probably did not reach one thousand. Those slated for death, were taken to the Riga Central Prison before being killed. No internationally agreed upon definition of “death camp” would apply to the Salaspils camp. There were neither gas chambers nor a crematorium in Salaspils.<sup>5</sup>

*In setting up this camp, the German fascists were ably assisted by a Latvian architect called KACEROVSKIS who, by the way, took pleasure in torturing the prisoners personally. In 1959, Kacerovskis was arrested in Riga, and has since paid for his crimes. Like hundreds of other Latvian fascists, Kacerovskis succeeded in hiding his identity for many years. When discovered, he was actually working as an architect, his work being the restoration of historical monuments.*

The Kačerovskis case invites one to examine it for show-trial elements. The trial started in 1959, which coincided with the beginning of Khrushchev’s war against “nationalists.” The Salaspils camp was built after the model of Dachau, as were all camps within the Nazi realm. Kačerovskis either was an architect, or he was not. How he as architect could simultaneously molest the people who built the camp escapes my imagination. He was not a member of SS, SD, or any police agency. Albert Speer, the Nazi super-architect, received a prison term at Nuremberg, Kačerovskis received a death sentence in Riga.

*Other ‘trusted servants’ of the Germans at this camp were the Latvian fascists: KANDERS, SEILIS and DZENIS.*

For once, Ducmanis is correct: these three Latvian SD-men served as the camp’s administrators.

*The Salaspils death camp was completely fenced in by six separate rows of barbed-wire fencing. The photo shows only two, but you can see how high these fences were.*

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<sup>5</sup> See Strods, “Salaspils koncentrācijas nometne 1941–1944.”

Six versus two rows of wire? One wonders what the point is here.

*Within this cruel enclosure, many peaceful citizens from all parts of Latvia suffered and died a slow death. They were the victims of their own Latvian security police; or perhaps victims of other betrayers of the Latvian nation such as collaborators who did their utmost to display loyalty to Hitler's Germany.*

There was no independent unattached Latvian security police.

*When all the Jews in Latvia had been exterminated, the same Latvian fascists – brute servants of Hitler – next turned on their own people, attacking them savagely. And especially did they loose their fury upon those who refused to serve in the SS legion. Many were put into Salaspils, along with those in sympathy with the allies, Britain and America – and, of course, whoever favored the Soviet Union. What is more, the Latvian fascists paid off personal scores by sending certain people to this death camp. Tens of thousands of civilians from Byelorussia and other Russian republics were also sent there – whoever happened to be picked up by the Latvian police battalions.*

Above Ducmanis informed us that Salaspils was a camp controlled by the German Security Police, but here he is telling us that it was run by Latvians. To repeat: Latvia was not occupied by Latvians.

*Many hundreds of officers and regular soldiers of the Polish army died in Salaspils: before execution, the majority underwent questioning and torture at the hands of two Latvians, KANDERS and SEILIS. And this is where thousands and thousands of Jews perished – Jews brought from Germany, France, Holland, Czechoslovakia etc.*

To be sure there were some Poles at the camp, but the assertion that there were hundreds of Polish soldiers and officers is without basis. Nor was Salaspils a Jewish extermination camp. There is no record that Jews from France or Holland were brought to Latvia.

*Photo No. 16 shows a list of Latvian citizens, made up by the Latvian Gestapo: there were 12 such lists. While this one contains only 126 names, 1100 more would approximate the total number. On July 24, 1942, the people listed were sent to the Buchenwald Concentration Camp. They were the lucky ones, for some at least did not die of starvation or diseases. In Salaspils, such a fate was almost a certainty.*

There was no organization by the name of “Latvian Gestapo.” The starvation rate, especially at the end of the war, at Buchenwald was much higher than at Salaspils. There is no documented transfer of prisoners from Salaspils to Buchenwald in 1942.

*The Salaspils death camp played an important role during the German occupation. All the general directors and colonels belonging to the so-called Latvian self-government, and all other Latvian fascists, knew of its existence. They not only knew about it, but took an active interest in its administration: for they gave advice, and discussed its management with SS Obergruppenführer JECKELN and Generalkommissar DRECHSLER, either in their offices or at social gatherings.*

Salaspils was an SD operation, and thus no Latvian civilian had or could have any contact with it. It is not known, nor is it very likely, that the Latvian Self-Administration had any social commerce with Jeckeln or Drechsler. Nazi racial precepts prohibited it.

*The saddest example concerns children in Poland and Byelorussia. The Latvian police battalions had in their custody thousands of children who were orphans, their parents having been shot. These children were either sent to Germany to work or shipped to the Salaspils death camp. It is true their prospects as workers on the German estates in Pomerania or Mecklenburg were not very rosy. But in comparison with such a fate, life in the Salaspils death camp was a hundred times more terrible. It was well known throughout the civilized world that doctors in many concentration camps were bleeding children to death in order to give blood transfusions to fascist officers who were ill. Because of this practice, many thousands of children in the Salaspils camp died. But many starved to death too.*

It is true that in 1943 some 300 Byelorussian children and their families ended up at Salaspils. A smallpox epidemic swept through their barracks and some 200 died. Those are the only children that are known to have been at the camp and the only deaths. We do not want to defend any German doings in Latvia, but there is no reason to think that the children were brought to Salaspils either for the purpose of experimentation or murder.

*In Photo No. 18, you will see some tags made of metal or wood. These were worn by the children, around their necks. Let us look at the inscriptions. The top tag on the right says: "Saweiko Georgijs." Notice the letter "s" at the end of the name. This proves the inscription was written by a Latvian, because only they use this letter as a name ending. Without doubt a member of some Latvian police battalion wrote this. At the lower left, you will see, a scrap of paper torn out of a German language book. Such pieces of paper were used for tags in emergencies, when no other material was available. Above the words, "Kind ohne Eltern," the handwriting is quite different, and we read: "Zaslavskis Andrejs." It was also written by a Latvian.*

*But children were not only sent to the Salaspils camp from Byelorussia and other outside places; they were sent there from Latvia too, mainly from Latgale. By whom? By Latgale's provincial administration, working hand in hand with the local police. The children's parents were either in jail or had been deported to Germany. Here are the names of the administrators responsible for this action. From Daugavpils: BUDZE, at present living in Canada. From Rezekne: VEPERS. From Abrene: KIMERALS; and his deputy, ABAKUKS, about whom we shall talk later on.*

There is no documented action against children of the type described here. It could not be established that any of the four named Latvians exercised powers described above. All punitive actions would have been initiated and carried out by police or SD authorities. Civilians would not have been permitted to play any role in it.

The whole world will always remember the tragic fate of LIDICE in Czechoslovakia. Every inhabitant of Lidice, from the smallest baby to the oldest man, was murdered by the German SS: in memory of that great murderer, HEIDRICH. And there is another village in Czechoslovakia called PLOSTINA, where Skorzeny's gang of murderers shot 27 men in April, 1945. But the Czech nation can be proud of the fact that none of its native citizens took part in these inhumane crimes, or helped in any way to carry them out.

But Latvia in Photostat No. 19, SS Obersturmführer STRAUCH describes what he did in a Latvian village in January, 1942,

This is the story. Five men, who had escaped from the Rezekne concentration camp, were hiding in the small village of Audrini consisting of 46 houses. And so every person in this village was put to death! An eyewitness reports:

There was no concentration camp at the time in Rēzekne. Perhaps a POW camp is meant.

"Suddenly, at midnight, German soldiers and Latvian police stormed into the village. They ordered every one out of his house, on the double. I could hardly persuade them to let me pick up my baby. Soon, everybody in the village was standing out in the street, half-dressed, shivering with cold and fear. Women were screaming, children crying. They were separated from the men and taken to Mokusani. The men were locked in a barn: and afterwards put in jail in Rezekne."

On January 4, all the people in Rezekne were forced to go to the market place, even those who were attending a church service at the time. This was to be a public execution. Then the men from Audrini village were taken there, ten at a time; and two rows were formed. The first row knelt down, the second remained standing. This formation meant that the bullets shot into the heads of those kneeling would pass on into the stomachs of the men standing behind.

The killers were arranged in two rows, not the victims.

Strauch says nothing about the women and children of Audrini. But they were butchered on the Ancupani hillside by the Driceni highway. So perished all the 196 residents of Audrini village; men, women and children. Let us mention one of them, Vera Glushnova, a woman 110 years old [sic]. She was executed together with the other women in her family – including her granddaughter, Mirjama, with a baby three months old; and her granddaughter, Stepanida, who had just given birth to a baby in the hospital.

The Rezekne Chief of Police, a Latvian by the name of EICHELIS, together with his deputy, MAIKOVSKIS, later received the German 'Order of Merit' for their part in this blood bath. The rank and file police got larger vodka rations. In addition, all property of the executed villagers was shared among them.

The Audriņi case has been litigated in Soviet Latvia, the United States, and Germany. The Soviets in 1964 made a show trial out of it, in which Eichelis, Puntulis, and Maikovskis were tried in absentia. The Americans tried Maikovskis in a civil court and found him deportable for having concealed his membership in the Rēzekne police force. The Münster court in Germany tried Maikovskis on criminal charges, but the result was inconclusive as to his role in the Audriņi tragedy.

Although the order to raze the Audriņi village was signed by a German SD man, no German has been tried for it. (For an American journalist's description of the trial see the Annex)

*About the same time, the Ludza District Police were not idle. The opportunity to use their guns came when the chief of the Daugavpils District Security Police, TABERTS, drew up a plan to wipe out the people in the village of Morduki. As you may see, in Photo No. 20, Taberts even saw fit to boast about his murderous exploit in the local newspaper, "Daugavas Vestnesis."*

The Audriņi and Morduki cases even as presented by Ducmanis show that it was the Germans who initiated and ordered all the atrocities in Latvia. It is, however, equally true that frequently but not always it was Latvian surrogates who carried out the orders. The basic reality of German occupation was that the Germans gave the orders and the natives obeyed them.

*And a certain public school inspector, Janis ANDRINS-ANDRUPS, a real Hitlerite and a volunteer Gestapo informer, made the following comment on the Morduki execution to the students in the Ludza Public School: "This is how we need to fight to maintain our Latvian purity of race in the New Europe!"*

Andrups was a well-known Latvian literary critic whose work is not known to have crossed over to police or SD activities. The quotation above must be considered an invention by Ducmanis, because so far it has surfaced nowhere else.

*The German fascists showed their appreciation of the fine moral qualities of ANDRINS-ANDRUPS. They praised him publicly, and gave him the job of editor on the largest literary magazine in Latvia. SOVERS, the leader of the "Ludza purification" also received his reward. He was promoted, and became the most trusted of all those working for the Chief of Security Police in Daugavpils.*

Sovers' footprints in Nazi-occupied Latvia have vanished in obscurity.

*While the Czechoslovakian people may honestly express their grief over the victims of Lidice and Plostina, and be proud that none of them had a hand in these horrible murders (the murderers being German), the Latvians cannot claim innocence where Audriņi and Morduki are concerned. The people in these Latvian villages were murdered not at the hands of the Germans but of the Latvians.*

Nobody should get away with murder. Ducmanis' text proves that all atrocities in Latvia were ordered by the Germans. Frequently the orders were carried out by Latvians.

*Can it be said that these criminals carried out their dastardly crimes only in Latgale? No, they were equally assiduous in their work throughout Latvia. Look at Photo No. 21. It was taken December 15, 1941, and shows the courtyard of the Latvian Security Police building in Liepaja. Life's last moment is close to these fourteen men. They are to be shot. Two Latvian SD men, on the right, are awaiting the arrival of a truck to take the*

executioners and their victims to some sandy, wooded corner, or to the sand-hills of the Skede seaside.

The Liepāja picture has a different context than the Audriņi situation. For a change it is a true picture, but it is unlikely that it comes from 15 December 1941. Nor is it likely that the two guards were Latvian SD men. There was no way that Ducmanis could have identified the picture that precisely.

*Now let us go up into northern Latvia, to Valka, the ancient border town between Latvia and Estonia. Perhaps there we shall be able to breathe air that is free of the smell of blood spilled in torment. So many anti-Nazi fighters have sprung from this industrial part of Latvia! Is it possible there is one place where we will find no testimony or proof that inhumane Latvian fascists have been at work?*

That is a rhetorical question to which there can be only one answer.

*But no – even here...*

*Photo No. 22 reproduces a card from the Death Files of the Valka Security Police – the card index was filled with such records – and these words are written on it: “Shot while running away ...” Peteris SIMANIS was only twenty. His whole life lay before him. He was in the bloom of adolescence and filled with its magic dreams. But let us take a closer look at what is printed at the bottom of this card. With what printing house did the Latvian SD place their orders? Of course, “ROTA” – a printing firm located at 38/40 Blauman St., Riga. Col. Ernests KREISMANIS, a devoted Hitlerite, was the manager of this printing firm, as well as being the manager of the newspaper, “Tēvija.” Anything sent to “ROTA” would be in safe hands, and considered “confidential.”*

Ducmanis follows Soviet and Nazi practice by arguing with corpses. Certainly there were a lot of corpses in Soviet- and Nazi-occupied Latvia. There is, however, no reason to believe that they are what the author says they are or that they came from Latvia. It is true that Kreišmanis was a publisher of *Tēvija* and as such bears some responsibility for the hate literature that was published in the newspaper.

*But what does the last number – 70,000 – on the lowest line mean? That was the total number of cards printed up to the given date – the number of cards needed by the Latvian SD service throughout Latvia.*

The SD operated without leaving any paper trail behind them. It is more likely that the card was printed for and filled out by the local police officers. Historians would be eager to find a Nazi period “death file,” but unfortunately none has been found.

*Was this number sufficient up to December 7, 1944, the death date of MIKELIS LOCINIEKS of Liepāja? In Photo No. 23, you will see Locinieks when he was disinterred from the grave one sunny summer day on June 12, a half year later. This happened near Liepāja’s naval port, close to the hospital. Perhaps his card also, wherever it is, bears the*

words: "Shot, while running away," written in the same fine calligraphy. Why? Was he caught listening in to the English B.B.C.? The German fascists would consider that sufficiently objectionable, because December 7, 1944, was the day the allied armies reached the Rhine ... Who knows?

Nothing about the above paragraph can be established as true. All corpses, whether of Nazi or Soviet provenance, look the same.

*Of course, the Latvian fascists were reluctant to show their brutal nature openly before their own people. But in other regions beyond the Latvian border – in Byelorussia, Poland and the Ukraine – they could rage to their heart's content.*

One again wonders whom Ducmanis designates as a Latvian fascist. There was no organization or community so named. If by that designation the police battalions are meant, then as stated elsewhere, they had no powers to generate independent orders. They had to go where they were ordered. The activities of the battalions have been thoroughly investigated and nothing like it has been identified. The Soviets staged only two trials of the battalions and they were both based on scripted evidence and unfounded facts. Those trials say more about Soviet justice than about Nazi period atrocities.

*The dead victims shown in Photo No. 24 are a grandmother, a mother and her four little ones: killed by the 18th Police Battalion in the house of a Polish woodcutter, just south of Minsk. This happened in November, 1942. A few months later, the men of this police battalion were given German army uniforms, and became soldiers in the Latvian SS Legion serving on the Eastern Front. And so the circle is complete, for we began our story following the path of horror cut by the Latvian fascists of the 18th Police Battalion.*

There is nothing that ties any Latvian battalion to this picture. At the trial of the 18th Battalion this picture was not introduced as evidence. The 18th Battalion received German uniforms in April 1943, at the time when it was transferred to the Legion. The first time Ducmanis dressed them in German uniform was in the summer of 1942 at the time of the alleged Slonim massacre.

*Further on, we were introduced to such phrases as: Prefecture of Riga; the death command of Viktors ARAJS; the "Thunder Cross;" the anti-Semite Institute; the Latvian Security Police or SD, the chiefs of the Latvian districts or regions: the headquarters on Anna Street of VEISS and some other colonels, which was later called 'the Headquarters of the Latvian Public Order Police', and finally the Latvian self-government and its general management. Add to this list about twenty Latvian volunteer police battalions, and you get a total of approximately 10,000 war criminals just from Latvia alone – all Latvians! Only their masters, the German fascists and the German SS, could possibly compete with them where atrocities are concerned.*

As discussed earlier, the Germans set up a two-edged system: on the one side was chaos and death and on the other order and production of produce and goods.

Of the above list only the Arājs Commando is known to have committed atrocities. The “Thunder Cross” (Pērkonkrusts) as an organization in reality did not exist during Nazi occupation, and the “anti-Semite institute” was a small-time operation consisting of fewer than ten people. It was not an action-oriented organization. The Latvian Security Police or SD is the same as Arājs Commando. To carry out atrocities, the Germans needed relative peace and order in the land. The Prefecture of Riga; the headquarters on Anna Street of Veiss, the Latvian Public Order Police, and twenty Latvian volunteer police battalions were part of the “peace and order” side of the ledger. The Latvian “self-government,” actually called the “Self-Administration of the Land,” was too far removed from anything that transpired in Latvia, and it was not really a government to begin with. There were many functions that the Germans needed to cover, and thus the tasks were subordinated: not everybody needed to do everything.

Since the publication of the Ducmanis opus, war-crimes investigators of the world have searched for Latvian murderers; yet this search has been crowned with only a limited success. Out of the dozens of investigations only about five have ended with convictions.

*These questions occur to us: Who encouraged these people to carry out such inhumane crimes? Who directed them to shoot and torture tens of thousands of peaceful citizens belonging to many countries?*

*The unspeakable atrocities committed by the German fascist myrmidons were provoked by the pro-Hitler National Socialist and anti-Semitic ideology. This ideology became deeply rooted in the minds of part of the Latvian intelligentsia during the rule of President ULMANIS.<sup>6</sup>*

Without defending Kārlis Ulmanis' economic or political policy, one needs to know that Ulmanis had prohibited the publication of anti-Semitic literature and jailed and dispersed the Pērkonkrusts, the organization that according to Ducmanis organized the massacres in Latvia. Because of Ulmanis, by 1941 there was no Pērkonkrusts to attack Jews. One must also note that Ulmanis had befriended Mordechai Dubin, the leader of the Agudath Israel Party, and on his urging during the 1930s admitted to Latvia hundreds of Austrian and German Jewish refugees.

*The Latvian fascists were determined, by hook or by crook, to be included in the elect “Aryan” race. As a result they put into practice the ideas of National Socialism with special enthusiasm. The character of the crimes testifies that they were committed by people lacking in all feeling, without a conscience; by people whose actions were governed by a sadistic thirst for blood, by pathological complexes. The fact that such people were anxious to obtain photographs so that later they could feast their eyes upon their victims is suggestive of their*

<sup>6</sup> For the latest study about Jewish refugees in Latvia see Aivars Stranga, *Ebreji un diktatūras Baltijā: 1926–1940* [Jews and Dictatorships in the Baltic 1926–1940] (Rīga: 2002). Stranga is less friendly to Ulmanis' Jewish policy than most commentators.

*warped nature. What other reason could VILNIS have had? He kept HIS photos – testimonials of his bloody deeds – right up to 1960!*

There was no way by which any Latvian, even a collaborationist, could lobby for a racial parity with the Nazis. In 1960, Vilnis had no pictures to present to the NKVD investigators, nor did they find them anywhere else. Picture-taking was prohibited and it would have been dangerous for Vilnis to snap any.

*But there was one exception: a policeman from Smiltene. After taking part in a massacre of harmless people in 1941, he could find no peace of mind for many days. So he shot himself, leaving this letter for his commanding officer, Lieut. ZEGNERS:*

*I can't find peace anywhere. Every night I see in my dreams the children I shot, their little hands folded in prayer ...*

Although there were several Arājs Commando men who committed suicide, it is not known that anybody in Smiltene did so.<sup>7</sup>

*But for the most part these fascists would have killed their own parents to get hold of property, gold, clothing and other stolen goods. To commit robbery without fear of punishment: this golden possibility was the chief inspiration of the murderers in the units of Arajs etc., and of those in the Latvian police battalions.*

While there is no doubt that some Latvians obtained Jewish goods, the situation as the document below shows was far from simple. The Latvian police battalions by and large came into existence after the Jews were killed in Latvia.

*How many of them, now living in the West, today have profitable positions in industrial and commercial enterprises, and have bought homes? All with the gold and diamonds they stole in Latvia during the years 1941-1942! With what pride their wives and daughters wear stolen jewellery, while the true owners have lain for twenty years in the forests of Birkernieki and Rumbula! This ugly greediness on the part of their wives and daughters was testified to by members of the 18th Latvian police battalion who were among the accused at the trial in Riga in the spring of 1961.*

The looting of Jewish goods was not a part of the 1961 case against the 18th Battalion. The Viesīte case, discussed below, certainly shows excessive cupidity on the part of Viesīte officials, but it also shows that to get hold of the goods was not easy; they had to beg and prove their worthiness to the Germans and thus perhaps exaggerate their accomplishments. The document is a proof that Germans had occupied Latvia and that the so-called self-defense organization was organized and imposed by Germans. The document also shows that the Germans had endeavored to control Jewish goods.

*Characteristic of the evidence is the report (see Photo No. 25) drawn up on Sept. 11, 1941, by the four leaders of the town of Viesīte headed by the mayor, V. NEIMANIS.*

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<sup>7</sup> For a fuller discussion of Lt. Zēgners see Chapter 8.

This is the only document of this type that has surfaced. The system of occupation governance described in the document is typical.

*So these were the typical 'merits' of former officers and police! It appears that they organized the emigration (read: shooting) of Jews from the Ludani concentration camp near Viesite. This report is a cynical document, similar to hundreds of others found in Latvia in almost every town and district.*

It is certain that the men in question participated in preparing the Jews for killing. It is not likely that the Germans would have trusted the locals to do the killings.

RECEIVED Sept. 15, 1941. No. 76.

MINUTES – No. 2

*On September 11, 1941, a meeting was held in the Boardroom by the Board of Administration of the Reconstruction Fund for the town of Viesite. A quorum was present: Mayor V. NEIMANIS; J. BITENIEKS, manager of the fund; deputy manager P. RUMBENS; and E. LEJINS, secretary of the fund. The meeting was declared open at 7 p.m., and was conducted by E. LEJINS, secretary of the fund, and J. BITENIEKS, manager of the fund.*

The untoward greed for Jewish property is the ugliest but not the most interesting aspect of this document. The Viesite officials schemed to obtain the victims' goods by "legal" means. We should assume that in addition to getting the goods "legally" there had also been some pilfering. To be noted is that the Viesite men had assimilated all of the German circumlocutions for the killing of the Jews.

**1. An account of the money and valuables received from emigrant Jews.**

*The town mayor reported that, on July 19 of this year, the Jews of Viesite donated a total sum of 5,609.28 roubles before emigration; and that a statement to this effect had been drawn up and would now be delivered to the Fund Administration Board. The above-mentioned sum was paid out for the requirements of the Department of Security [self-defense formations are meant] of Viesite and Viesite police precinct: a detailed account of these expenditures was delivered to the Fund Administration Board together with receipts and documents justifying same. A copy of the document listing the valuables similarly donated by emigrant Jews was also handed in. The valuables listed in the statement were forwarded to the Chief of the Jekabpils district by the head of the Department of Security of Viesite. After looking through the documents handed in by the mayor, and listening to his report, the Fund Administration Board found all documents valid and satisfactory in every respect; and approved their acceptance.*

**2. Re the selling of the Jewish emigrants' properties.**

*Supplementing the Minutes No. 1 (p. 4) of the meeting of the Board of Administration of the Reconstruction Fund, in September of this year, it was found necessary to sell a part of the Jewish properties to workers of the local Dept. of Security at statutory prices beyond that of sale, that is, out of hand. In addition, the Fund Administration Board is to decide which workers, in the Dept. of Security and other civil departments, are eligible to purchase the properties mentioned, out of hand, decision to be based on their service in support of the Great German Army ["Army of Greater Germany" is meant]. Similarly, the Fund Administration Board finds it necessary to deliver a part of the Jewish emigrants' properties to state*

*institutions, to the self-government and public offices: in order to facilitate fast organization to begin the creative work for Greater Germany. Separate statements are to be drawn up and supplied to these offices and institutions; the property is to be taxed, and sold for taxes out of hand, according to the desires of the said offices, as their own property.*

The assumption of the officials is that the properties really belonged to Germans and they want to be punctilious in accounting for them. The name of the German commanding officer was Hanzel.

**3. The sale of Jewish emigrants' properties the civil workers and to members of the local Dept. of Security**

*A proposal was made to the Fund Administration Board to sell the properties of Jewish emigrants to certain workers of specified outstanding merits, at statutory prices beyond that of sale. The proposal was unanimously approved.*

*The following persons were nominated as eligible candidates: 1) Paulis TAURINS; 2) Arturs SILENIEKS, chief of the Third Police precinct of the Jekabpils district; 3) Vilis NEIMANIS, mayor of Viesite; 4) Pavels RUMBENS, deputy mayor of Viesite; 5) Janis BITENIEKS, chief-deputy of the Third Police precinct of the Jekabpils district.*

*On considering the qualifications of the candidates nominated the Fund Administration Board records the following:*

The document shows a shameless self-promotion, but the short summaries of the activities of the Viesīte officials, tell us a great deal about how the establishment of the German occupation order evolved. The translator of the booklet, Gladys Evans, consistently mistranslates the concept "self-defense" (*pašaizsardzība*) as "Department of Security." After the perusal of this document, one cannot assert that Latvia was not occupied, or that the Latvian self-defense teams could operate without German supervision.

*1) Lieut. Paulis TAURINS came to Viesite at the same time the Great German Army [sic] arrived, and he was appointed First Latvian Commandant of Viesite by the Germans. He immediately organized and put into operation the Department of Security [self-defense is meant] for the town of Viesite, and remained the organizer and leader of same up to the first day of September of this year, when he was appointed inspector of the Third Police precinct in the Jekabpils district. Lieut. TAURINS together with Pavels RUMBENS (deputy-mayor of Viesite by German Army appointment) organized the expulsion of Jews from the town of Viesite to Ludāni concentration camp on the first of July, of this year. The Viesite Dept. of Security, led by Lieut. Paulis TAURINS, also captured and imprisoned 610 soldiers of the Russian Army from June 28 to July 8 of this year.*

The "Ludāni concentration camp" in reality was a farmer's barn in which the Jews were trapped. The paragraph points out that the commanding and controlling power in Viesite belonged to the occupying forces. The 1 July date for ordering Jews out of their domicile, is one of the earliest dates on record in Latvia. One wonders why the killing date was postponed until the 19th of the month.

2) Senior-Lieut. Arturs SILENIEKS deserted the army when Greater Germany declared war on Soviet Russia. He then organized the Dept. of Security [self-defense is meant] for Viesite District, consisting of 7 sections with 669 participating members. As chief of the Department of Security [self-defense] of Viesite, he organized and led the engagements and undertakings necessary for cleaning out any resistance in the precinct right to the borders; following that he organized the Third Police precinct in the Jekabpils region, of which he is now the head.

3) Vilis NEIMANIS, mayor of Viesite, previously organized temporary municipal departments in the pagasts of Zalve, Mazzalve and Memele upon the arrival of the Great German Army [sic]. He then took over his former office and undertook the duties of Chief-Deputy of Economic Affairs of the Viesite Security Department [self-defense]. As a Security officer, without question and without thought of self, he carried out special tasks devoted to cleaning up the interior of the area, on order of the authorities. He also took an active part in the Organization Committee set up to emigrate the Viesite Jews from the Ludani concentration camp on July 19 of this year.

4) Pavels RUMBENS, deputy-mayor of Viesite: on the arrival of the Great German Army [sic], he was first appointed temporary mayor by the Germans on June 29, of this year. From the first day, he and his two daughters participated in the Viesite Dept. of Security [self-defense]. Similarly, on arrival of the Great German Army [sic], he undertook the leadership of all enterprises of the local cooperatives. Together with Lt. Paulis TAURINS, chief of the Viesite Security Dept., Pavels RUMBENS organized and carried out the expulsion of all Jews in Viesite to the Ludani concentration camp on July 1, of this year, immediately after the arrival of the Great German Army [sic]. He also was an active member of the Organization Committee set up to emigrate the Viesite Jews from Ludani concentration camp on July 19 of this year.

It is certain that Viesite Jews were killed on 19 July; the question is what the assigned role for the local self-defense was. Did the locals or some outsiders do the killing? German practice would argue for outsiders. The killing team could have consisted of self-defense men assembled from the surrounding townships (*pagasts*), or they could have been sent in from the district's capital, Jekabpils. The document shows that the killing of the Jews in Latvia was not a crime of passion but a fulfillment of a deliberate plan. It supports that historical school of the Holocaust that stresses organization.

5) Janis BITENIEKS, aide-de-camp, and former overseer of the Prefecture in Riga, went to the Sauka pagasts on the arrival of the Great German Army[sic] where he helped organize a Security department [self-defense]. Dating from July 2, of this year, he was transferred to Viesite as a Security officer; when the Dept of Security of Viesite precinct was founded, he took part in organizing same, effectively assisting the chief of that department. When VON GALLEN, a soldier in the Great German Army [sic], was shot by Jews on July 19, he immediately organized and led the emigration of Jews, belonging to Viesite and its neighbourhood, from the Ludani concentration camp.

It was a typical German gimmick to tie the killing of the Jews to some crime attributed to Jews. This gimmick was already used at the time of the Kristallnacht in 1938.

He fulfilled special tasks. Further, after the founding of the Viesīte Police precinct, he took part in organizing same and is now the deputy-chief of the Third Police precinct of Viesīte in the Jekabpils district.

Taking into consideration the character and qualifications of the above-mentioned workers, devoted to the benefit of Latvia, the Fund Administration Board decided: to sell the Jewish properties to the aforementioned workers for temporary use, out of hand, and for statutory prices beyond that of sale. A detailed list of the properties thus sold, and a statement of sale, is to be supplied by every worker. The number sold is to be mentioned in detail, and all are to be valued in one joint amount.

Signature

(J. BITENIEKS)

Fund Manager.

Signature

(V. NEIMANIS)

Town Mayor.

EXECUTED

N.B. In the above text, the word "emigration" of Jews from the Ludāni concentration camp means, of course, annihilation by shooting.

The Latvian intelligentsia included many fascists who knew that HITLER, HIMMLER and ROSENBERG intended sending the local inhabitants out of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia to be used elsewhere as slaves. Many knew that these three arch-criminals meant to colonize the Baltic countries only with Germans, forming one large province of 'Greater Germany' to be known as Ostland. This intention was known especially to the Latvian fascists who repatriated to Germany when war broke out, only to return once more in July 1941.

We might mention some of them: General Oskars DANKERS, leader of the self-government set up later; Colonel Vilis JANUMS, Arturs SILGAILIS and his close assistants in organizing police battalions; almost all the leaders of the 'Thunder Cross' organization – Gustavs CELMINS, Evalds ANDERSONS, MELLINS; and so on.

At the Tribunal in 1946, SS Obergruppenführer JECKELN was asked about a conversation which he had with Himmler, soon after Jeckeln was appointed chief of the special police and SD in Ostland. Jeckeln answered:

Himmler told me my work in Ostland was to organize things so that the entire territory of the Baltic countries and Byelorussia would be at peace with Germany. All the Jews in this territory were to be exterminated to the last man. Then Himmler spoke about the other nations living there, stressing his hatred for Lithuanians, calling them a lower race.

Himmler went on to say that, after Germany proved victorious, those Estonians and Latvians who had distinguished themselves in serving Germany would be 'Germanized.' But all the rest of the Latvians and Estonians, Himmler said, would have to move out of the Baltic countries. They would be given employment as workers in Germany, and the Baltic lands would then be free to be colonized only by Germans.

The above paragraphs may represent deep down thoughts of Himmler, but Jeckeln never said them. Most likely they were inventions of Ducmanis.

Jeckeln was then asked why so many inhabitants of Latvia had been killed. He replied:

*This was done in order to subjugate this territory which, according to National-Socialist theory, was planned for occupation by Germans only.*

The quotations well summarize German intentions for the Baltic, although it may not be a direct quotation from Jeckeln's testimony. The quotation shows that Latvia was at the "mercy" of the Nazi Reich.

*Photo No. 26 – These intentions are further corroborated by Himmler in his article entitled 'Germanisieren?' (Why Germanization?) which was published in "Das Schwarze Korps," August 20, 1942. We quote:*

*The SS Reichsführer has supplied the following foreword to the edition of 'Deutsche Arbeit' which designates the tasks of German colonization in the East: 'Our task is not to Germanize the East in the old sense of the term, but to make sure that people of real German blood live there'.*

*The article continues:*

*We must prepare the ground. Let the colonizers who are sent there ... develop such biological strength that they will flood the region, completely dominating and developing it in the future.*

*This was the kind of propaganda that prodded the previously mentioned colonels and pro-fascists in Latvia to bow down before the Hitler authorities. Certainly THEY had no wish to be classed as members of a 'lower race'. No, they greatly desired to be among those Latvians 'Germanized' after the war by gracious permission of Hitler and Himmler. They therefore caught at every possibility, in their greed and anxiety to be considered Aryans. They carried out every bloody deed they could, for instance, to prove to their beloved 'führer' that the Latvian fascists had solved the Jewish problem themselves, in their 'span of power'. THAT the Latvians had exterminated a sufficient number of their fellow citizens to permit the introduction of a 'new order' in Latvia. In other words, they did their utmost to prepare Latvia for German colonization.*

Many unsavory Latvians rose to important positions during the occupation by flattering the Germans, but it was an absurdity to assert that any Latvians competed with Germans for racial purity. Racial "purity" in the eyes of the Nazis was not so easily obtainable. I would like to see this assertion documented.

*AND they fought among themselves for power, the colonels and other fascist pillars of Latvian society: DANKERS, CELMINS, the former minister, ALFREDŠ VALDMANIS (punished ten years later by a Canadian Court for his economic adventures); and Himmler's colleague of long standing in Latvia, Colonel FREIMANIS. In July, 1941, the Latvian fascists rid themselves of one contender for the post of 'Chief of Germanization'. This was Lt.-Col. Viktors DEGLAVS, who was found dead on the staircase in the home of Col. PLENSNERS, a supposed friend. His mysterious death was very opportune during this period of struggle for cabinet posts.*

You would need to stretch the meaning of government to describe the "Self-Administration" as one. The Self-Administration was cobbled together by Germans, and they served at their pleasure. On some occasion, they were allowed to

act as the German mouthpieces. They were kept on too short of a leash to do much damage to anybody. The Germans even did not want any advisory input from them. To connect them to any Nazi crimes shows a gross misreading of the conditions of occupation. The Germans needed the Self-Administration to give the occupation a patina of legitimacy.

Celmiņš, the former leader of the Pērkonkrusts, was never a director of the Self-Administration. The Germans never trusted him that much. There was no such post as the "Chief of Germanization." Deglavs was killed by the German SD on 18 July 1941, at an early point of occupation, much before the Self-Administration was operating. Deglavs was killed because he endeavored to advance a Latvian agenda, not that he was competing with anybody to please the Germans. His vision of occupation anticipated a greater Latvian involvement in self-governance than the Germans wanted to allow. Ducmanis does not tell us that Celmiņš was arrested and sent to a concentration camp and that Valdmanis was banished to Germany.

*And the lesser Latvian fascists followed their masters and also struggled to be 'Germanized'. They were so eager and submissive that they signed 'testimonies' to the fact that they were 'NEW EUROPEANS' – as was done by J. POISS, for example, (see Photo No. 27). But it paid off, for one after another they began to get back their former possessions (see Photo No. 28).*

The German approach to Latvia's occupation was a legalistic one. The Germans insisted that they had not occupied an independent national state, but confirming the Hitler–Stalin pact, a Soviet territory. One important consequence of this thinking was that all properties nationalized by the Soviets remained nationalized and thus property of the occupation forces. This rule also applied to farmlands. Only in 1943, when the Germans imposed the Latvian SS-Volunteer-Legion on Latvia, needing "volunteers" did they begin to relent on this rule.

*The Latvian fascists sheltering in the West today assert that Latvians joined the SS legion voluntarily. That this is a prevarication is proven by the summons (see Photo NO. 29) issued to Adolf's APLOCINS of Jāsvina.*

"Voluntary" was a Nazi concept that they imposed on occupied territories in the East. Its promiscuous use was taken over by the Soviets, and Ducmanis' pamphlet is a testimony of it. Latvian emigrant associations since 1945 have battled the "voluntary" designation, especially as it pertained to the Legion.

*Thus we see the face behind the mask of the Latvian fascists and police: the face of the murderer and robber who wished to make sure of a place in Hitler's 'New Europe' to be paid for by the blood of other Latvians, and by shedding the blood of other nations.*

*Photo No. 30 shows some of these 'distinguished' persons who had promised to be faithful devotees and obedient myrmidons of the occupationists, to the utmost of their strength.*

*THESE are the general directors of the Latvian 'General Region' Self-Government (but not of the State) who received permission to be 'Germanized' in the presence of the Latvian generalkommissar – the former butcher of Lübeck – Doctor DRECHSLER. But these general directors, colonels and police. the Latvian SS and all servants of the Gestapo failed to see the realization of Hitler's 'New Europe.' They gained only the dubious fame of being Latvian 'quislings' yet somehow escaped the fate of most quislings. Like Leon DEGRELE, the Belgian traitor who fled to Spain, they also scattered, afraid of having to face the consequences. Now they live all over the world.*

Whatever the guilt or innocence of the Latvians, be it of the general public or the General-Directors and colonels, one cannot say that their pasts were not investigated. Generals Rūdolfs Bangerskis and Oskars Dankers were investigated by the Nuremberg prosecutors, and their biographies were not found to be criminal. Every person that Ducmanis names has been pored over by Nazi-hunters the world over. If Ducmanis and his bosses had been more cooperative with the prosecutors of the West, more Latvian criminals would have been found. As it was, *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* induced the Western Nazi-hunters to start prosecutions, but then left them flopping in the wind, thus incurring huge expenses for several Western governments but few results.

*It may seem impossible to trace all the guilty who so far have managed to evade facing punishment for their crimes before the victims and nations whom they made to suffer.*

If the Soviets had been more accurate with the information they divulged and opened up their archives, the prosecutions could have been more successful.

*Certainly many of them have been traced. And they are not wasting their last days in regret, or being pricked by their conscience. Instead they are busy building new plans to reach the top of the present 'historical wave' along with other 'soiled flotsam'.*

*The unconditional surrender of the last German army units took place on May 9, 1945. On that day, two German armies in Kurzeme, Latvia, capitulated when the Red Army surrounded them. These armies included various units of the Latvian SS legion.*

*Most of these units were from the 19th division of the Latvian SS Grenadiers. The 19th division grew out of a Latvian SS Brigade in the spring of 1943 on the Eastern Front at the Volkhov River. Two such brigades were formed from volunteer Latvian police battalions, consisting mainly of officers and instructors. These were the brigades commanded by Colonels VEISS and LOBE.*

The vocabulary in these paragraphs is confusing. By the word brigade a regiment is meant. It is true that some police battalions were transferred to the Legion, but there is no basis for drawing the distinctions that the author does. The battalions, as those in the Legion, in large part consisted of draftees.

*Unfortunately, the organizers and those fascists and police, who had been the most active and cruel in murdering innocent people, were not found in the captured 'pot' [perhaps "kettle" or "sack" is meant] at Kurzeme. Only a few war criminals were brought before a court*

*of justice. For the most part, the prisoners of war from Kurzeme consisted of regular soldiers mobilized into the German army at the command of General DANKERS.*

Dankers, as despicable as he might have been, was not in the position to organize anything, far be it that he had the power to mobilize anybody in the Legion. The historical fact is that the General Directors of the Self-Administration protested against the draft, but were helpless in stopping the German drive. After it was clear to them that Germans are going ahead with mobilization, they supported the effort.

*How did this happen? Where did the Latvian fascists (war criminals) disappear to? For the graves of their victims were spread throughout Latvia, and in Poland, and Byelorussia. Where are these murderous VOLUNTEERS who committed the crimes of 1941 and 1942?*

Here again Ducmanis slides into Nazi concept of "volunteerism"!

*Latvian earth got too hot for them! The more timid ones had already left Latvia by the autumn of 1944, either on their own hook or as part of the 15th division. They had a single aim – to go West! To reach the comparatively safe territory of Hitler's Germany!*

Actually only a small number of Latvians left Latvia voluntarily as refugees. Most of them were ordered out and some were dragnetted on the streets and brought by force to Germany. For example, all police units and precincts were ordered to retreat to Germany. Numerous Latvian policemen, wanting to stay, by deserting, in fact disobeyed the German orders. Were there some policemen who would have fled to Germany without being ordered to do so, we do not know.

*All 'distinguished' Latvian fascists, who had fulfilled the norms required to be 'Germanized' and were real Aryans, were permitted by the SS Hauptamt to gather in Berlin. They were given a royal welcome by Himmler himself, and by the Chief-of-Staff, BERGER, and others – as told in the memoirs of General BANGERSKIS.*

There is no basis for saying that there were any sessions between Berger, Himmler, and "distinguished" Latvians.

*There were strong men who remained on the Kurzeme front for a time in the Latvian SS corps. However their nerves endured the strain only up to April, 1945. Then they disappeared, one after another: the colonels and commanders of the 19th division such as OSIS and KOCINS, and Major STIPNIEKS et al.*

There is no reason to say that there was some kind of flight of Latvian officers to Germany. In fact there was a reverse movement: many Latvian officers who in late 1944 and early 1945 found themselves in Germany looked for ways to get back to Kurzeme. More often than not, they did not get permission to return.

*During the last spring of the Second World War, the territory of Kurzeme was emptied of the murderers, criminals and mass slaughterers with their assistants. One after another, they traveled in one direction – west. Their motto was: "Get as far as possible from our*

*victims' graves, from the people, from the eyes that might incriminate us for grave crimes, from the country that holds so much proof of our guilt."*

The point is that the Soviets never supplied the West with proof of Latvian criminality. They sent them Ducmanis' pamphlet, which was a guarantee for failure.

*Where could they go? First to their masters, the German fascists. And then? Then, to disappear among all five continents and mingle with people who were ignorant of their crimes. Mingle with people warm in hospitality, who would believe any story as to why these 'unhappy sufferers' had to leave their native land.*

It is true that some Latvians with bloody pasts squeezed through, but the Soviets never supplied the West with true names and accurate information. The Soviets coerced some of the compromised people to become their informers, thus perhaps creating a fifth column in Europe and America.

*But to make their stories more credible, these criminals-in-hiding confused and intimidated thousands of their fellow citizens with the help of propaganda and of German fascists [sic]. With inexhaustible fantasy, they gave out stories about the danger represented by the Soviet Army. (At the end of 1944 and the beginning of 1945, the German SS literally took by force tens of thousands of Latvians to Germany.) Later on, in the years of peace, the Latvian war criminals made full use of these fellow citizens, exiled by force and scattered in many foreign countries. How? By exhorting [sic] from these citizens some 'mite' or tithe resulting from honest work in order to provide a living for their own parasitic selves. Eighteen years have passed since the unconditional surrender of Germany. These years have proven that the fascist colonels and their able assistants are not used to earning their living by honest labour which contributes something to society.*

*The 'distinguished heroes' described in the early pages of this book hid for a time in the wide open spaces of the world. Only some of the fascist German war criminals were punished 'in the name of mankind'. But the Latvian fascists (who committed many crimes more horrible than those of the occupationists!) for the most part got off scot-free. The years rushed by. Here and there, some of them came to light, but the majority had apparently vanished into thin air.*

Here Ducmanis again shows his training in Nazi propaganda.

*Then the conditions of international world politics changed, and our "acquaintances" – hundreds of them – like rats, came out of their holes. They gathered round the flames of the 'cold war' fires, adding their bit, chiming in accordance with fascist orders. But these "birds of prey" were disguised as love-birds. Their anti-Semitic shrieks and calls for murder were toned down to the cooing of doves. And now – oh, how they love the Latvian nation, all nations! How they love the native land they sprung from!*

One of the purposes of Ducmanis' assignment was to drive wedges between Western intelligence agencies and the Latvian emigrants. It is true that the British and Americans used the Baltic emigrants for a variety of purposes. Already in 1945 the Americans established Latvian Guard companies that were used to guard Nazi

war criminals at Nuremberg. These guard companies in the main were comprised of the veterans of the "Latvian SS-Volunteer-Legion." Later during the 1950s some Latvians, including members of the Daugavas Vanagi organization, were used by the CIA as sources of intelligence.

*First of all, these 'people' formed a common bond and terminology, among themselves. And their tendency to flock together lightened the task of those who were and are still seeking these war criminals. There are still some honest people who consider it their duty to tell the truth about these criminals, and put the beasts in the pillory as a safeguard for all nations.*

After *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* appeared, every name in the pamphlet was chased down and investigated, but in the overwhelming majority of the cases no basis for prosecution was found. Of the eight war-crime cases that U.S. Office of Special Investigation (OSI) started only one ended in success. Even in that one, no definite criminality was proven. The truth of the matter is that, instead of easing the Nazi hunter's work, the booklet confounded it.

*The best handbook of all, in searching out these criminals, proved to be the magazine, "Daugavas Vanagi," put out by their own organization, and which today appears in West Germany. For over ten years now, this press organ of the "Daugavas Vanagi" organization has been issued once every two months.*

The monthly house organ *Daugavas Vanagi* is still coming out in 2004, and no war criminal has been found through its pages.

*We began to read one copy after another, turning over page after page. Here they had all gathered! One after another, names appeared, then faces, and their whole bodies – under whose feet, crushed to death, lie the murdered women and children, the mothers, the fathers! Here are gathered the criminals who were deaf of ear, who had hearts of stone – when unprotected people begged for life, the most precious thing in the whole world!*

The reality was that if there were any Latvian "killers of Jews" they were more likely to live in seclusion and did not come out to have their pictures published in the pages of émigré publications. That perhaps was the fatal flaw that tripped the Western investigators.

*But they gave them only death by cold lead bullets, and not life. These are the ones whose hands are red with the blood of Latvia, Poland, Lithuania, Byelorussia, Czechoslovakia, Germany, France, Belgium, Austria and Russia – red with the blood of innocent people, the sons and daughters of many nations.*

*And is not the name they have chosen for their organization ironical? "DAUGAVAS VANAGI!"*

*They committed many terrible crimes by the Daugava River, that river so dear to honest and hardworking Latvians! On the quiet banks of this river, the Latvian war criminals buried thousands of people.*

*As for VANAGI (Hawks) – the German fascist swastika flaunted an eagle – how, then,*

*could THEY, the Latvian fascists, remain without their own symbol for “death and plunder?”*

Attempts to find Nazism in Latvia prior to the war have failed to materialize and so has the search for it in the postwar Latvian community.

*Truly, like hawks, they attacked all: women, children, old men and youth!*

The symbol of the “hawk” was not part of the Latvian Legion or the police battalions. Nor did it grace the crest of any fascist movement in Latvia to the degree that there were any fascist movements. Daugavas Vanagi came into existence after the war in the POW camp at Zedelghem, Belgium, and they developed the name, logos and the crest out of a mournful song about their dead comrades. The “hawk” symbol is more about sorrow than militancy.

Throughout the years of exile, Daugavas Vanagi, as all Latvians abroad, had one preoccupation: the liberation of Latvia and reestablishment of its sovereignty.



**Even in a POW camp in Zedelghem, Belgium, the Legion's veterans, as the drawing above illustrates, were thinking of an independent Latvia that is free of Nazis and Communists. Under conditions of imprisonment the POWs constructed a replica of the Freedom Monument that is located in the center of Rīga.**

*Latviešu karavīrs Otrā pasaules kara laikā, vol. 7.*



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## Chapter 8

# ANALYSIS – PART TWO

In the second and third chapters of *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* Pauls Ducmanis continues to misuse the Jewish tragedy to advance Russian imperialist goals. He keeps up his confabulations, only occasionally mooring them with a random nugget of fact. It takes a greater expertise to find a crumb of truth than of falsity, for the former is rare but the latter is pervasive. Guilt and innocence are the same to him, because he even prevaricates about the guilty. Among the plethora of names in the text, there are some persons named who truly committed war crimes. However, unless one is conversant with the subject, as most Western prosecutors were not, one is not likely to identify them. The judiciaries of the world who placed their confidence in the pamphlet learned this the expensive way, for it took them years to learn that there is less there than it seemed. As in the first chapter, Ducmanis uses facts, stories, and pictures that have no standing in the objective world of facts. The author's prose throughout the booklet is undergirded by a tone of "tongue in cheek" mockery, which the Western scholars who regarded it as authoritative did not seem to have noticed. One could perhaps even argue that Ducmanis used hyperbole to mislead the "Nazi hunters," thus in effect defending the guilty ones.

Jeckeln's "quotations" (see "The Three "Truths" of Jeckeln" in Chapter 6) are again resuscitated. We know now that Jeckeln, the paragon of Nazism, did not say these things, nor could have done so had he wanted to, because the Soviet courts were much more structured and scripted than those in the West. As noted before, the quotations attributed to Jeckeln have not been found in the trial records that are deposited in Moscow and in microfilm form at the Yad Vashem and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum archives. These trial records show that Jeckeln was tried for the crimes that the Nazi regime committed in the Baltic area, not the crimes that the Latvians did or did not commit. Although Jeckeln's headquarters were in Riga, the records show that he was too far removed from the "natives" to know much about their activities. The line of subordination that existed in occupied Latvia did not connect Latvian agencies directly with Jeckeln, and it was thus unlikely that he could have provided any first-hand evidence about the Latvians.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> During the last part of the war, Jeckeln developed some contacts with the General Directors. Communications between Jeckeln and these Latvians went through General Commissar Drechsler.

In the second chapter the author moved from a collective assault on the Latvian nation and more pointedly turned the rhetoric against individuals, leaders, and members of émigré organizations, especially of the Daugavas Vanagi and those who served in the American guard, construction, and transport companies.

We could continue a paragraph-by-paragraph analysis of the text as we did with the previous chapter, but that would be overkill and get us into idle repetitions. Many of the names mentioned in the first chapter are again recycled, but, unlike in the first chapter, the rhetorical tactic is changed to littering the text with names of people whose biographies could not be double-checked for accuracy. It is hard enough to prove the negative about known people whose lives are detailed in encyclopedias. About the “faceless multitude,” however, we can say that the justice departments of a variety of countries – Germany, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and the United States<sup>2</sup> – did not neglect them. If they were mentioned in the pamphlet, they were red-flagged, scrutinized, and investigated. Unfortunately the global pursuit of Ducmanis’ “war criminals” has yielded minimal success: only two trials – those of Eihelis and Maikovskis – resulted in convictions. To be fair to Ducmanis’ lists, we can identify perhaps about twenty whose pasts would have been worth investigating, but even in those cases the prosecutors would have needed to start with knowledge and not guesses and conjectures. In the United States, seven individuals named by Ducmanis were tried, and only one – Maikovskis – was successfully prosecuted, and that in a civil case. The worst aspect of Ducmanis’ lists is not that the booklet named the innocent ones, which is bad enough, but that he did not name many of the truly guilty ones. For example, the booklet allowed Mārtiņš Vagulāns to end his life in an Australian insane asylum. Neither did Ducmanis name his friend Teodors Zeltiņš, one of the most active anti-Semites during the Nazi occupation. The booklet, on the other hand, induced the United States Justice Department to go after Vilis Hāznerns, whom, after spending a million dollars, it failed to convict. To repeat: *Ducmanis’ contribution to the history of war crimes in Latvia was to befuddle the issue forever. If a conviction in a war crimes case would have been difficult in the best of circumstances, Daugavas Vanagi: Who are They? made a conviction almost an impossibility and acquittal problematic.*

Among the people mentioned in this chapter whose pasts might have been compromised during the Nazi occupation, we can name the following: Kārlis Siljakovs, who served in the Liepāja political police; Tāivaldis Kārklīņš, who served as the Latvian overseer at the Madona prison; Colonel Kārlis Lobe, who had an ugly episode in Ventspils; Lieutenant Kārlis Ozols, Kārlis Detlavs, and Arnolds

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<sup>2</sup> Only Sweden refused to investigate KGB-derived allegations of war crimes.

Trucis, who had served in the Latvian SD; and Jānis Cīrulis, who supposedly served in the Alūksne SD. All of these men have been examined, but none successfully prosecuted. On the other hand, the list of the “falsely accused” is much longer: Vilis Janums, Rūdolfs Bangerskis, Roberts Osis, Alfreds Jānis Bērziņš, Vilis Hāzners, Jānis Zēgners, Jānis Platais, Arvids Oše, Arvids Kripens, Oskars Perro, Pēteris Vitols, Voldemārs Zāmuels, and many others. They have been investigated, but none, except Hāzners and Vitols, prosecuted. Both prosecutions failed.

The Ducmanis pamphlet represents a turning point in Allied, especially American, attitudes towards Latvians. During World War II, Latvian diplomats, especially in Stockholm, had created a tight bond with the Americans. The former ambassador to Stockholm, Voldemārs Salnais, after becoming stateless and jobless, worked for the Americans, for whom he provided lengthy reports about the conditions in his homeland. For this work he earned a great deal of goodwill in the U.S. Department of State: the Americans were better informed about conditions in wartime Latvia than they were after the war.<sup>3</sup> The information that Americans amassed about Latvia gave no reason to doubt that there was a Nazi occupation and that the collaboration that existed in Latvia was coerced and organized by the Germans. Americans were so well informed about Latvia that they had no reason to think that the Latvian SS-Volunteer-Legion was “volunteer,” “SS,” a “legion,” or even Latvian. Postwar American amity, we may assume, was partly a repayment for the help that Latvian diplomats had delivered to them during the war.

If there is a documentable change towards Latvians on the part of the West, one must consider the Ducmanis pamphlet as a catalyst. By the 1960s, many of the American wartime officials who knew about the Latvians during the war had left the scene, and the new ones lacked grounding in Latvian affairs.

## Latvian Guard and Labor Units in U.S. Service<sup>4</sup>

There was one special irritant that the Soviets nursed about Latvian activities in Germany, which in reality was an aspect of the surging Cold War. It was bad enough for the Americans to overlook the “SS” tag that the Nazis had pinned on the Latvians, but the Americans immediately began to employ the legionnaires in highly visible guard functions right after the war. Instead of condemning the

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Ezergailis, ed., *Stockholm Documents. The German Occupation of Latvia, 1941-1945. What Did America Know?*, LVKR 5 (Rīga, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> For the full history of the Latvian guard and labor companies see *Latviešu karavīrs pēc otrā pasaules kara*, vol. 9: 195–310. B. Daukšts, “Latvijas karogi pēckara Nirnbergā. Nejaušs atgādinājums?” [Flags of Latvia in Post-War Nuremberg. An Accidental Reminder?] *Mājas Viesis*, 84 (2003): 8–9.



**Men of the Viesturs Guard Company display Latvian colors. Among a variety of duties the company were also entrusted with guarding of the major Nazi war criminals in Nuremberg.**

veterans as war criminals, they hired them, among other duties, to guard the Nazi criminals at the Nuremberg prison and the Palace of Justice. It is a historical fact that very soon after the war, as early as 1946, the Americans invited the Legion and police veterans to join their guard companies, which meant they were carrying loaded weapons again.<sup>5</sup> From this aspect Soviet anger is understandable, and Ducmanis' booklet may be seen

as an attempt to drive a wedge between Americans and Latvians.

Even before the victory American military forces had anticipated the use of "civilians" for what they designated as "Labor Service." There were many sides to this enterprise, but the most visible part of it was the Latvian service as guards of the Nazi war criminals in Nuremberg. <sup>6</sup>Although those serving the guard units were not exclusively legionnaires, the Americans liked them best, because they did not need to train them in military discipline and the use of weapons. In addition to the guard companies, the Americans also organized Latvian transport and construction companies. The latter were also involved in NATO maneuvers, practicing bridge building for possible spanning of Eastern European rivers – the Oder, the Vistula, and the Daugava.

Ducmanis' argument was that by employing the Latvians the Americans were helping "war criminals" to escape due justice. Among the alleged Latvian SD men who for a longer or shorter periods of time served in the companies were Kārlis Siljakovs (political police of Liepāja), Tāivaldis Kārklīšs (prison supervisor in Madona), Kārlis Ozols (SD squad leader at Minsk), and Jānis Cīrulis (Alūksne). On

<sup>5</sup> The Latvian guards in Nuremberg were dressed in American uniforms dyed black. At duty time, the uniform was complemented by a white helmet, a white belt and white gloves. In general on guard duty they carried an M-1 carbine, while those standing guard at the Palace of Justice carried a 45-caliber pistol. A magazine was in the weapon, but the chamber was not loaded. At the Motor Pool gate across from the Palace of Justice, a Latvian guard wounded an American driver who had failed to heed a warning. Pēteris Siliņš, computer message – "personal communication, 19 April 2002."

<sup>6</sup> The American Labor Service organization had numerous branches and functions and numerous Eastern Europeans were engaged in it. The guarding of Nazi war criminals was only one of them. Latvians and other East Europeans served as guards at a variety of military installations and as laborers, including those in engineering and construction battalions.

the force of Ducmanis' accusations, Siljakovs and Cīrulis were investigated by German prosecutors, but neither one was indicted. The OSI indicted Tāivaldis Kārklīņš, but he died before the case came to a trial. Under the cloud of suspicion, the much investigated Kārlis Ozols lived out his life in Australia, where he died in 2000.

## The Suspected and the Accused

**Vilis Janums** (1894–1981). The first three pages of the second chapter of Ducmanis book are devoted to malign the name of Colonel Vilis Janums, who had been one of the Legion's regimental commanders and who after the war was instrumental in founding the Daugavas Vanagi organization and guiding it through the early years of its development. From 1946 to 1969, he served as the global chairman of the organization and thus stood out as a sore thumb to the Soviet cold-war ideologues. The one fact in Ducmanis' biography of Janums is that he fled to Germany in early 1941 to escape Soviet persecution. He returned to Latvia in January 1942. By the time he returned to Latvia, the killing of Jews was finished and all of the police organizations established. It is demonstrable that until 1943, when he was inducted into the Latvian Legion, Janums played no role in any SD or police organization. Ducmanis' statement that Janums was associated with the Pērkonkrusts or played a role in organizing Latvian police or the police battalions is false. After the Self-Administration of the Land was established, Janums worked on the Administration's military advisory board. On the whole, the so-called Self-Administration was an emasculated Nazi front, and Janums' role in it was subordinate. To begin with, the police battalions were not centrally organized; nor had they any role to play in the liquidation of the Jewish ghettos in Latvia, Belarus, and Poland. The one exception is Police Battalion 22, which performed some escorting functions during August 1942, when Warsaw Jews were transported to Treblinka. As the Latvian Legion so far has not been associated with any "war crimes," so too none have been attached to Colonel Janums' name.

**Jānis Zēgners** (1917–1972). Lieutenant Jānis Zēgners perhaps is one of the most investigated Latvians in postwar history. I am one of those who have searched for Zēgners' involvement in Holocaust crimes and one of many who have failed to find any evidence. Why the KGB picked on some émigrés and not others we will never know for sure, but we can speculate: Zēgners was young, outgoing, intelligent, good looking, and active in a variety of anti-Communist causes. He had served as a lieutenant in the Legion, and after the war he was involved in a variety of émigré political activities in Germany. Among the posts he held was chairmanship of the Latvian Central Council (LCP) in Germany; he

was also a member of the Daugavas Vanagi Council. In addition, his "day job" was at the American Military Forces as a coordinator of the Latvian Construction Companies (Labor Service Units). The Americans had promoted him to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. For all of these reasons, Zēgners must have appeared to the Soviets as an attractive target. If Zēgners could be presented as a Nazi and an inveterate killer of Jews, the Soviets would simultaneously embarrass the Americans and émigré Latvians. Yet as Imants Lešinskis, the KGB defector whose name has been previously mentioned, later wrote, Zēgners was not an easy target. Zēgners' past was raked over and yet nothing incriminating was found in it. Therefore, the Cultural Liaison Committee resorted to destroying Zēgners by accusing him without evidence.

Ducmanis' attempt at Zēgners reads as follows:

*ZEGNERS was born near the little town of Smiltene in the pagasts of Bilka, Latvia. The people who live there were questioned about Janis ZEGNERS. See what P. Kalkis of Smiltene had to say:*

*... From the first days of July, 1941, the usually empty jail in Smiltene was turned into a place of inconceivable suffering. Many hundreds of men, women and children were put in this jail, and they never came out alive. First they were tortured, and then shot – without even the semblance of a court hearing. The chief organizer of these downright murders was Lt. Peteris Antens, but his willing assistant was Janis Zegners, the son of a high school teacher ... " (63)*

Ducmanis goes on:

*Janis Zegners had already begun to "Germanize" himself while still in Smiltene. He established the "New Order" long before the German Security Police arrived. But there was one little "fact" that Antens and Zegners found almost unbearable: in spite of all their efforts, they could not manage to give a political colouring to their mass carnage. For there was not a single communist among the many hundreds of innocent people whom they murdered. Instead, there were many children, especially among the 200 or more victims, mostly Jewish, who were shot down on the night of August 8, 1941, under the personal guidance of ZEGNERS himself. (63–64)*

After his defection, Imants Lešinskis wrote about *Dzimtenes Balss* and Ducmanis' campaign against Zēgners:

Unfortunately, a large number of Latvian nationalists lived out of the reach of the KGB. They could not, in accordance with the incontestable decision of Latvia's Superior Court, be surreptitiously shot in the corridors of the Central Prison ... To help out, in stepped the Soviet press, in the form of *Dzimtenes Balss* ... Since some people's napes were not accessible to the KGB men ... it was, however, possible to ruin the reputations of Latvian leaders in emigration, that is, to carry out what the Germans aptly call *Rufmord*. On a sunny day in spring, having arrived in the editorial office, I became a witness to a heated altercation between my colleague Kārlis Kalniņš and the editor Žanis Zakenfelds. It turned out that Kārlis after an assignment to Smiltene had turned in an

article about the “Latvian war criminal” Jānis Zēgners, who at the time, if I remember correctly, was the Chairman of the Latvian Central Council in Germany. The diligent Kārlis had been able to find out that Zēgners at the beginning of the German occupation for a few weeks had been a Commander of the local self-defense unit.<sup>7</sup> Kārlis in his draft had described the Nazi-inspired horrors in the small Vidzeme town, but had been unable to connect it with the name of Zēgners. Editor Zakenfelds had found the article to be weak and had made “corrections” in it. The article had become a true KGB “morsel.” “... organized the killings”...”he himself went up to the pit and fired.”...

– An article like that, editor, I cannot sign – There is no proof for it – protested Kalniņš.

– The article will be printed the way it is needed. Who is the editor here, you or me? – The article appeared as “edited” by Zakenfelds.

Lešinskis concludes:

A few weeks later, the author of this text, on the orders of the editor, translated the article into German, and thus this irresponsible fabrication began to travel to editorial, criminal intelligence, and prosecutorial offices in Germany. For more than a year I, under the pseudonym of Gustavs Sīlis, had a correspondence with an eager prosecutor in Germany, who was ready to start a suit against the newly discovered “Latvian war criminal.” Yet the Prosecutor needed documentary proof against the “Nazi” Zēgners. Kārlis Kalniņš, Gustavs Sīlis, and Žanis Zakenfelds had no such evidence. Neither did the Latvian KGB collectively. Yet the *Rufmord* against the Latvian Zēgners was accomplished.<sup>8</sup>

After the liberation of Latvia in 1991, Kārlis Kalniņš, a principal in Lešinskis’ story, was interviewed in the 1990s by the Latvian radio on the program “Laikmeta griežos.” In the interview Kalniņš, did not only substantiate Lešinskis story; he apologized to Zēgners’ family for having been a party in besmirching him and his kin.<sup>9</sup>

**Vilis Hāzners (1905–1989).**<sup>10</sup> Although Ducmanis’ accusations against Captain Hāzners were very general, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization authorities

**LCP priekšsēdis?  
8361 TSCO komandieris? Latvijas civiliedzīvotāju slepkava!**

The article on Zēgners appeared in the May 1961 issue of *Dzimtenes Balss*. The right headline reads: “The Murderer of Latvia’s Inhabitants!”. On the left side the two crossed out lines refer to Zēgners’ posts: the top one questions his chairmanship of the Latvian Central Council, and the bottom one identifies the American Labor Company in which Zēgners served as a commander. The article was signed by K. Bergs and A. Lauks.

<sup>7</sup> After an independent and thorough search no proof for the assertion that Zēgners served in the self-defense force could be established; he certainly was not the unit’s commander. In Ducmanis’ pamphlet some documents were presented that attempted to show Zēgners’ membership in the Smiltene self-defense and the SD, but they were not sufficiently solid to persuade German prosecutors.

<sup>8</sup> Lešinskis, “Kalpiņas gadi,” *Latvija šodien* 1986, 66.

<sup>9</sup> The one Latvian who still follows Ducmanis line in the Zēgners matter is Igors Vārpa, *Latviešu karavīrs zem kāšukrusta karoga* [Latvian Soldiers under the Swastika] (Riga, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> For Hāzners’ life and trial see his autobiography *Varmācības Torņi*, vols 1 and 2 (Lincoln, NE, 1977 and 1985).

picked up on them and initiated a deportation case against him in 1976. Ducmanis says:

*Major Vilis Hazners must still remember how the mass murders of innocent people were organized in and around Rīga, how the Jewish “problem” was solved, and even how many Latvian towns became “Judenfrei.” Almost a year of Hazners’ life was spent working with Veiss – to speak about the crimes committed by Veiss is actually to speak about those of Hazners. From the position of aide-de-camp to Veiss, Hazners rose to the high rank of chief of the administrative section of the Latvian Police Force, at its headquarters (his direct chiefs being Osis and Lobe). Forming police battalions – that was Hazners’ first job before his promotion to the post of police chief in the Abrene district, in 1942. His power was unlimited in this district, where the municipal chief was Kimerals – a man in his dotage, senile from old age. While devising various ways of persecuting the people of this district, Hazners freely exchanged ideas with A. ABAKUKS, Kimerals’ deputy. Although Hazners now lives in New York and Abakuks in London, their friendship has ever remained green. For they often warmly embrace each other when they meet at various gatherings of the Latvian emigrant organizations. However, to return to the past of Hazners, at the close of World War II he was an officer of the 15th Latvian SS Division. Today he hides his crimes under the guise of having been an ‘honest’ soldier. (Yet in Abrene district alone, he was personally responsible for at least 300 victims.) (85)<sup>11</sup>*

Since the pamphlet gave no specifics, the American prosecutors had to invent the details based on the peak moments of the atrocities in Latvia: they threw everything but the “kitchen sink” at him, as if Hāznerns single-handedly had murdered the Jews of Latvia. By resorting to an indiscriminate smorgasbord of accusations, the prosecutors demonstrated their ignorance about the Nazi occupation of Latvia and thus lost the case. They latched onto Ducmanis’ contention that there was no difference between occupied Latvia and Nazi Germany. They invented a Latvian government led by Oskars Dankers, as if such a thing existed on 1 July 1941. In reality, at that time Dankers was still in Germany, and the genesis of the so-called Latvian Self-Administration of the Land was a slow process that took from August 1941 to May 1942. The American prosecutors, as Ducmanis himself did not do, accused Hāznerns of molesting and killing Jews at the Riga Police Headquarters (Prefektūra), the burning of the Synagogue at Gogoļa iela, the clearing of both the Riga and Daugavpils (Dvinsk in the language of the prosecutors) ghettos. Hāznerns’ defense attorney Ivars Bērziņš was able to show that Hāznerns was not present at any of these locations and that at the times indicated Hāznerns was elsewhere. To confound the prosecutors’ case, Bērziņš showed that the witnesses against Hāznerns had been prepared and coached by Maria Radiwker, an attorney in Israel. Hāznerns was acquitted and exonerated.

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<sup>11</sup> The Jews of Abrene, as elsewhere in Latvia, were killed in 1941. Hāznerns arrived there only in 1942.

**Oskars Dankers** (1883–1965). General Dankers is a bigger historical problem than can or should be handled here; to do so fairly would take a large book devoted just to him. In 1942, the Germans appointed him to be the General Director of the (note: *not* “Latvian”) Self-Administration of the Land, and he voluntarily agreed to accept this position and the terms offered to him. Although there is no doubt that he was an anti-Semite, there is no evidence that in any way connects him to the killing of the Jews. We may want to call him a collaborationist, but to compare him to Pétain, as does Ducmanis, is stretching a point. He had some administrative powers but no right to initiate policy. The U.S. occupation authorities in Germany interned and investigated Dankers, but failed to formulate a case against him. Instead, for a period of time at Nuremberg he was used as an expert coordinator of documents.<sup>12</sup> Whatever crimes Dankers actually committed, they were too minuscule for Ducmanis, and he again resorted to fabrication of evidence. He again put words in the mouth of General Jeckeln that he never did or would have had a chance to deliver at his trial. Ducmanis writes:

*Now let us return to the Military Tribunal, 1946, where JECKELN was one of the main accused. Read what he had to say about the General-director of the Latvian ‘self-government’:*

*General DANKERS was already our man long before the Second World War, even when he was commander of the Kurzeme division of the Latvian Army. We National-Socialists considered him the most appropriate Latvian Army general for our purpose. We arrived at a complete understanding with DANKERS in April, 1939, when he attended Adolf Hitler’s anniversary celebration in Berlin, as the representative of the Latvian Government. From that time, DANKERS served us faithfully. He was a great help to us when organizing the police in Riga. Whenever we met DANKERS, he always had valuable suggestions in his briefcase.*

*JECKELN went on to say more:*

*General DANKERS kept us regularly informed about the meetings of the Latvian ‘self-government’, including the content of every address and who made it. He pointed the finger at the Latvian politicians who were against the policy of the German state. And with his help, we managed to get rid of the undesirable national elements, in time ...*

*Such was the political and moral aspect of General DANKERS: practically a copy of Marshal Pétain of France. (56)*

Even if this were true, it was not Jeckeln who made or could have made such declarations.

**The Madona Trio: Elmārs Sproģis** (1914–1991) – USA; **Pēteris Vītols** (1915) – Canada; **Roberts Siciņnieks** (1905–?) – Germany. The Madona District had relatively few Jews (about 100) compared to some other districts of Latvia, and thus the level of atrocities was lower than elsewhere. The City of Madona, however,

<sup>12</sup> Oskars Dankers, *Lai vēsture spriež tiesu*, [Let History Judge] (Toronto, 1965) 165–91.

had a concentration camp/prison that in general did not hold the Jews. In Madona District there was also a well-developed SD presence that made the killing procedures different from those in some other districts. In practical terms the difference was that the local self-defense forces and later the auxiliary police were not responsible for handling Jews and political prisoners. This distinction was unknown to the Western prosecutors, and thus they were deceived by Ducmanis. Ducmanis occasioned more investigations and trials about Madona than any other location in Latvia.

Sproģis (in the United States) and Vītols (in Canada) were prosecuted by the judiciaries of their respective countries and were acquitted. Siecinieks was investigated and interrogated, but the Germans did not prosecute him.<sup>13</sup> All three had served in the Madona *Schutzmannschaft* (Auxiliary Police) in 1941, although Vītols joined the force only in September. We may assume that the American and Canadian judiciaries were snookered into prosecuting the cases because the prosecutors were ignorant of the system of occupation that the Nazis imposed upon Latvia. Their error was to believe that the Latvians actually ruled in Latvia; that Latvians were worse than the Germans; that everybody did everything; and that the Holocaust was a crime of passion rather than of organization. On the contrary, the cases proved that the *Schutzmannschaft* of Madona had at most a minimal role to play in the killing of the local Jews. The West Germans were the first ones to decode Ducmanis – they knew better and therefore they did not prosecute Siecinieks. The Canadians were the last ones to unmask the KGB misinformation, if they have even done so yet.

Ducmanis wrote about the Madona trio thus:

*These three criminals "Introduced the 'New order' to the district of Madona," and also were in the thick of the mass slaughtering which decimated the populations of Byelorussia and Poland. There were, of course, many diligent killers in the police throughout Latvia: but out of the mass we choose these three, because once they too worked under the "leadership" of those notorious lieutenant-colonels Lobe and Veiss. (97)*

*The Madona police butchers continued their terrible "work" right on into 1942. Certain police officials, among them being REINEKE, SPROGIS, SIECINIEKS and Peteris VITOLS, were highly praised by Gebietskommissar FUCHS of the Riga region, and by SS Brigadeführer SCHROEDER who was Commander-in-Chief of the Latvian police and SS troops. (98)*

In reality, as Siecinieks testified, he received an order from Rīga to assemble the Madona Jews, about 100 people, but after his men had carried out the order, the Jews were taken over by SD men. They were killed by a gang of SD men who arrived from Rīga. The assignment of the auxiliary police on the day of the killings was to stop the traffic on the town's streets.

<sup>13</sup> Roberts Siecinieks made a deposition on 14 August 1972 at Neuss, Westphalia.

### Ducmanis writes about Sprogis:

*Sr. Lt. Elmars Sprogis, born 1914, was the son of Fridrichs Sprogis, Chief of Police in Gulbene in pre-Soviet times. From July to September, 1941, however, Elmars Sprogis was Chief of Police in Gulbene. Somehow or other, he inherited a strain of cruelty or ferocity – which sets him apart from his father – for he began persecuting and annihilating the unoffending populace on a wide scale. We shall mention only one crime he committed (during, the few months he spent in the Gulbene neighborhood. This took place in August, 1941. Sprogis directed the execution of 300 people, Latvians and Jews only, in Litene. Like Jeckeln in Riga and Ozols in Minsk, he took an active part in this operation, instructing his men by personal example. Sprogis was one of the first, in the smaller Latvian towns, to force victims to undress before death. Also there were instances where some of his victims were brutally beaten up and then killed on the spot (e.g. the photographer, Berzins) ...*

*In September, 1941, Elmars Sprogis was appointed chief of the 1st police precinct in Madona. There he was assisted by his two brothers, and he continued operating just as he had in Gulbene. The same crimes were committed by most police chiefs and their deputies all through Latvia crimes identical with those we have already uncovered in the pages of this book.*

Sprogis was prosecuted by the U.S. Department of Justice, and none of these assertions could be proven by the OSI lawyers. Thus he was acquitted. The use of KGB-prepared witnesses did not help the prosecutors. The evidence at the trial revealed that the Latvian SD activist in Gulbene was Lietuvietis.

About Pēteris Vītols Ducmanis wrote thus:

*In July, 1941, Peteris VITOLS was one of T. Karklins' band of fascists. But arrests, torture, and killing were mere trifles to Vītols. His "hour" (of triumph?) came on August 7, when his platoon was ordered to execute many Jewish victims in Smeccere Forest, 3 kilometers from Madona. On his way back from the completion of this mass murder, he posted the inscription "Judenfrei" on the first house as he entered Madona with his gang of killers. Then he received the personal congratulations of Roberts Sיעinieks, chief of the 1st Police precinct in Madona, who took part in the mass slaughter only on the first day, not the second.*

Vītols was tried in Canada, but the Crown failed to prove any of the above assertions. On the contrary, Vītols proved that he was not residing anywhere near Madona during the time indicated. Vītols was vindicated in 1998.<sup>14</sup>

About Roberts Sיעinieks Ducmanis wrote:

*For many years, right up to December 1, 1956, he was chairman of the Augustdorf committee of Daugavas Vanagi, and office manager of the Latvian Central Committee, another emigrant organization headed by Vilis Janums. He was one of Janums' "Golden Circle" .... Right up to 1940, Sיעinieks had been a senior policeman on the pre-Soviet police*

<sup>14</sup> This was a Canadian case, *MCI v Peteris (Peter) Arvids Vītols*, Federal Court of Canada T-310-97. See Harold Otto, "Canadian Courts and the Latvian Past," *Latvijas Kara muzeja gadagramata*, (Rīga, 2000) 128–36.

force in Madona. And when the German Army entered Madona in July, 1941, he immediately began organizing a fascist police, electing himself chief of the 1st police precinct for a start. He was the man that speeded up the annihilation of Jews in Madona and the surrounding area; nor did he neglect the arrest and execution of many Latvians whom he wished to be rid of. Often his hot-blooded rage could only be assuaged... if he was taking part in orgies either of mass slaughter (as on August 7) or of torture.

Siecinieks was investigated by the German criminal court of Westphalia, but was not ever charged with any crime.

**Tāivaldis Kārklīšs** (1914–1983). The most likely candidate for having committed war crimes in Madona could have been Tāivaldis Kārklīšs. The OSI indicted him, but he died before the case was formulated. Kārklīšs was a member of the SD and, along with his German supervisors, most likely was in charge of the Madona Jews. He served as a Latvian supervisor of the Madona concentration camp/prison and oversaw a group of men that performed much of the work preparing the Madona Jews for murder. The actual killing was carried out by an itinerant group of SD men that included members of the Arājs Commando. Ducmanis' tactic was to confuse the two: the auxiliary police troops supervised by Siecinieks and those commanded by Kārklīšs.<sup>15</sup> The trials of Sproģis and Vītols helped to clarify these questions.

**Oskars Perro** (1918–2003). The accusations that Ducmanis raised against Oskars Perro were very general in nature, yet they led to intense decades-long investigations of him by Canadian authorities:

*In 1941, Perro volunteered for action in the German Army. "Tevija," in its issue of August 11, 1942, printed the news that Perro was the first Latvian to be decorated with the German Iron Cross. Perro received this award early in 1942, but this "fighter for New Europe" began work in earnest when he joined Arajs' commando after being wounded. At that time he was only a corporal, but he gained attention quickly and was made an ober-scharführer (sergeant) within two months. (90)*

The first part, including the comment about the Iron Cross is true, but there is no evidence that he ever was a member of the Arājs Commando. However, for a period of time he might have been a member of an SD team that was sent to the northern front near Leningrad. After the scrutiny that Perro has received, we must conclude that he had no role in the killing of the Jews in Russia or Latvia.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> In my book *Holokausts vācu okupētajā Latvijā 367*, I implied that Valerians Reinecke, who was the district's Self-Defense and Auxiliary Police commandant, had a role to play in the liquidation of the district's Jews. Today I think his role was minimal, perhaps limited to shutting down the traffic in the town.

<sup>16</sup> He is an author of six books about his experiences in the Second World War.

Jānis Niedra (1906–1969) was not mentioned in the pamphlet under discussion, but was selected for victimization in the next Ducmanis screed, *Viņi bez maskas* (They Without a Mask). We are bringing up Niedra only because during the early years of emigration he played a very visible role in the Latvian-Canadian societal affairs, for many years serving as the head of LNAK (Latvian National Federation in Canada). The accusation against Niedra is a good example of KGB maliciousness towards Latvians in emigration. Ducmanis ascribed to him a leading role in Tukums during the early days of the German occupation, and accused him of organizing and killing the local Jews. As if relying on documentary evidence, Ducmanis writes:

*The killing of Jews was led by Niedra and Bergs. Together with them there usually arrived other "self-defense" leaders. Once to the usual killing session Niedra and Bergs arrived drunk. Niedra again wanted to command the shooting, but was so drunk that the task had to take over by Bergs. This event took place at the end of July 1941, when forty Latvians and Jews were killed.<sup>17</sup>*

It is true that at the time of the German occupation of Latvia, Niedra lived in Tukums. He could speak German and was therefore called to serve as a translator for local German and Latvian commanders. Niedra himself in a Curriculum Vitae states that during July 1941 he worked as an aide to the District Commandant. His name, however, does not show up on the rosters of Tukums self-defense or police forces. Thus, he was not in the position to command anything or to participate in any killing actions. By the time of the occupation, Niedra was an established administrator, who during the 1930s had worked at a variety of administrative departments in independent Latvia. This background would select him for office, not police work.<sup>18</sup>

Ducmanis was wrong in describing the Tukums killings as an extended operation carried out by Latvians. As in numerous other places, the Jews in Tukums were killed in a concerted, one-day operation. While it is true that the Jews were arrested and contained by local Latvians, the killings were carried out by a German contingent. Unfortunately Niedra died before the Nazi-hunters in Canada became activated and thus did not have an opportunity to clear his name in a judicial context. As it is, there are writers who to this very day continue to attribute the killing of Tukums Jews to Niedra.

<sup>17</sup> B. Arklāns, J. Dzirkalis, J. Silabriedis, *Viņi bez maskas* (Riga, 1966) 162.

<sup>18</sup> For events in Tukums also see the reminiscences of one of the Nazi-time activists L. Uljerts, "Nāves aizēnā," *Avīzīte*, 3 February 1992, nos. 3–7. For a Soviet version of the same events see D. Condorfa, "Tukumnieki Lielā Tēvijās kara sākumā," *Komunistu rīts*, 25 October, 1 and 4 November 1969.

## Latvians in Western War-Crimes Trials<sup>19</sup>

Since the end of the war there have been nineteen war-crimes trials of Latvians: thirteen in the United States, three in Canada, and three in Germany. There could have been some other prospective candidates, but since the Soviets did not supply their names, nothing was done about them. Of those who were tried about half were innocent, not only of the specific charges, but clear of any war crimes at all. Of the American cases only two, those of Boļeslavs Maikovskis (1904–1998) and Konrāds Kalējs (1913–2001), were successful. The Germans were successful in two prosecutions, and the Canadians in none. There ought to be a lesson in this. The British and the Australians also looked at a couple of cases, but lacking criminal evidence, abstained from taking the final step. Of the American cases, three were settled out of court and three did not go to trial. The following names of the accused were picked up from the Ducmanis booklet:

### In the USA

**Maikovskis, Boļeslavs** (1904–1998). This case was the first of the Latvian cases that became public. It started in 1976, and in 1987 he was found deportable. In 1988 he fled to Germany, where the Germans initiated a criminal case against him that was never finished.

**Hāznerns, Vilis**, Captain (1905–1989). Acquitted. For details see above.

**Detlavs, Kārlis** (1911–1983). This case was started in 1978, and he was acquitted in 1981. This case illustrates the OSI's ignorance about conditions in Nazi-occupied Latvia. Detlavs was a member of the SD and most likely had a role in the killing of Jews, but the OSI did not know how to prove it.

**Trucis, Arnolds** (1909–1981). The case started in 1980; he died before the trial began.

**Sproģis, Elmārs** (1914–1991). The case was started in 1982, and he was acquitted in 1985. See above.

**Kārklīņš, Tāivaldis** (1914–1983) The indictment was issued in 1981; he died before the trial.

**Laipenīeks, Edgars** (1913–2000?) The case was begun in 1981, and he was acquitted in 1986.

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<sup>19</sup> See A. Ezergailis, "Latviešu kara noziedznieki Amerikas tiesās," *Izglītība*, 30 August 1991.

### In Germany

**Arājs, Viktors** (1910–1988). Sentenced to life imprisonment in 1979.

**Eichelis, Alberts**. Convicted, but died before sentencing.

**Bajārs, Arvīds**. He died before the case could be completed in Lübeck.

### In Canada

**Vītols, Pēteris** (1915). Acquitted in 1998. See above.

**Tobiass, Eriks**. Died before the trial was completed.

The names of the following were not found in the Ducmanis booklet:

### In the USA

**Bogdanovs, Boļeslavs**, Lieutenant (1917–1984). The case began in 1983, but he died before the trial. He served as a lieutenant in the Latvian SD.

**Kalējs, Konrāds**, First Lieutenant. (1913–2001). The American indictment was issued in 1984, and in 1988 he was found to be deportable.<sup>20</sup> He was returned to Australia and then traveled to Canada, where again he was tried and found deportable. The accusations against him continued in Latvia, which asked for his extradition from Australia. He died before the extradition process was completed. Parenthetically it needs to be noted that it was a Latvian, Herman Redin, who dug up the one successful name for the American prosecutors.

**Kiršteins, Miķelis** (1916–?). The indictment was issued in 1987. Kiršteins died before completion of the process.

**Kauls, Juris**, Lieutenant. An indictment was issued in 1988. He fled the United States and was never found.

**Inde, Edgars** (1909–?) and **Didrichsons, Valdis** (1913–1990). Both cases were begun in 1988 and were settled out of court in 1990.

<sup>20</sup> From the onset, the United States Department of Justice tried the war-crime cases not as criminal, but as immigration ones, in civil courts – the difference being that in the former the required level of proof is “beyond reasonable doubt,” but in the latter “preponderance of evidence.” Although the immigration cases depended on a technicality – concealment of membership in a criminal organization, the prosecution was required to prove that the “lie” was materially significant. The prosecution was required to show that the accused had indeed participated in a criminal organization and had committed criminal acts.

## In Canada

**Podiņš, Eduards** (1918). Acquitted in 1999.

In total there have been four convictions. In general, the courts did much better if the names and accusations did not originate in *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?*

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## CONCLUSION

As modest as the KGB opus *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* was, with its flimsy covers, pulpy paper, and unfocused pictures, it managed to give a major headache to the Latvians and confuse many intelligent people in Australia, Canada, the United States, Europe, and Israel.

Although the past is unrecoverable, this KGB hoax, whose author was the Nazi leftover Pauls Ducmanis, has object lessons for those who are willing to listen to them. There is no substitute for knowledge, and if this is lacking, hard work is called for. Western historians and judiciaries have incurred problems for themselves and for Latvians, because they were short of knowledge and did not do the necessary spade work.<sup>1</sup> Too many well-meaning and rational people, including highly paid prosecutors, chose to short-circuit the process: instead of doing primary research on documents, they took the prepackaged information that was the combined product of Nazi and the KGB public relations teams. For example, the pictures and "testimonials" that Nazi officials and public relations crews left behind have had an undue influence on posterity. It is one thing for writers of memoirs to act upon first impressions; it is another for historians and jurists to make judgments on insufficient and one-sided knowledge.

In the search for truth, the experts, as opposed to eyewitnesses, are not limited to the reach of their eyesight. Only in an atmosphere of superficiality could there have arisen a number (not all) of the Latvian cases discussed in the pages above. Some people's tenacity in following *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* is exemplified by one survivor's offer of a \$100,000 reward to anyone who can show that the arguments and information in the booklet are wrong.<sup>2</sup>

... this KGB hoax,  
whose author was  
the Nazi leftover  
Pauls Ducmanis,  
has object lessons  
for those who are  
willing to listen  
to them.

The argument of my study has a number of aspects:

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<sup>1</sup> To be fair, one must note that during the Cold War it was impossible to reconstruct the true story of the Holocaust in Latvia. The Nazi hunters in the West were too ill informed to break through the Nazi and Soviet propaganda to reach the truth.

<sup>2</sup> I have accepted the challenge and promised to use the money for a major research project on the Holocaust in Latvia. Since my declaration, however, the offer has not been publicly renewed.

In Chapter 1, "Contexts," I attempt to explain the appeal of the KGB work in Western countries that include Germany, Scandinavia, the United States, Canada, and Israel. I argue that Ducmanis, knowingly or not, exploited a number of stereotypes that Western Europeans harbored about their Eastern brethren.

In Chapter 2, "The German Occupation of Latvia," I maintain that there was nothing haphazard about it; the German occupation was a real one and there was a system to it. It is true that the Germans in Eastern Europe, including Latvia, presented themselves as liberators from Communism, but as they did so they disguised their own plans and intentions. Postwar Germans themselves did not know what their forefathers had wrought in Eastern Europe. Before asking who the collaborators in Eastern Europe were, young German historians should document the system of occupation that their ancestors put in place there. The Ducmanis booklet misinformed the reader by presenting the occupation in the manner that the Nazi propaganda men would have wanted it to be presented. Because of their racism, the attitude of the Nazis towards collaboration with East Europeans was different from what it was in the West. We must note that *all Latvian offers of collaboration were rejected*; all collaborations that existed were organized by the Germans. Only the superficial inquirer would consider this to be a distinction without a difference. Too frequently Westerners have confused German attempts at organization with willing collaboration by East Europeans.

Chapters 3 and 4, "The Police Battalions, Blitzkrieg, and Soviet Trials," and "The Latvian Legion: 'SS-Freiwilligen' or 'Waffen-Grenadierdivision der SS,'" examine two cases in which posterity has in part taken the Nazi definition of "volunteerism" as a historical reality. Although the Nazis were brutal, they were not, in a technical and/or organizational sense, irrational. Not only did they understand "efficiency," but they also worshipped at the altar of Taylorism, with its principles of subordination and subdivision of tasks. The Germans knew that to have a system in which everyone did everything would have been counterproductive. There were organizations created to guard the inmates in the camps, to fight the partisans, to raise the crops, and to plug gaps at the front. There were structures intended for killing Jews and those whose purpose was to stabilize and organize the occupied countries for maximum exploitation.

This is not to say that there was absolutely no overlap. For example, the Wehrmacht, principally a battle organization, on occasion helped the Security Police and SD to kill the Jews. Yet a detailed study of the Holocaust shows that the Germans kept the overlap of functions to a minimum. The Nazi commitment to the principles of "modernism" more often than not was ignored by Western prosecutors. The Holocaust was a segmented enterprise in which the killing was only the final step.

Of the forty-nine police battalions that the Germans organized in Latvia (seven of which consisted of ethnic Russians) only about three were alleged to be partly

involved in the Holocaust. For the purpose of killing Jews, the Germans had organized the Arājs Commando as a supplement to the German *Einsatzgruppe A*. In general, all of the police battalions, and certainly the Latvian Legion, came into existence after the Jews in Latvia had already been killed. By and large they served in locations where Jews and ghettos did not exist. Had any of the battalions committed the crimes that the KGB ascribed to them, the Soviets would not have needed to stage the show trials of the 18th and 21st battalions. Judgments about the recently discovered activities of the 22nd and 272nd battalions and their service in Warsaw are still open for discussion. In general, we can perhaps conclude that the Germans committed more war crimes in organizing the battalions and the Legion, than the Latvian formations had the opportunity to commit during their service.

The origins of the offending pamphlet have their own historical context, which is examined in Chapter 5. The author, Pauls Ducmanis, who was a Latvian journalist beloved by the Nazis, bridged the German and Soviet occupations and injected in his writing much of what he had learned while serving Himmler.

It was not the KGB that invented the idea of a Germanless Holocaust, but it was their literature that brought it to the world, persuading the prosecutors of many countries that the Latvians were worse than the Germans.

Chapter 6 is devoted to the history of the Holocaust in Latvia. First, I examine the historiography of the Holocaust and then the history itself. While the Holocaust was not a crime of passion, but one of organization, KGB operatives, relying on the Nazi public relations information, reversed the priorities, placing revenge and passion ahead of organization as causal factors. The Holocaust was a segmented event in which numerous individuals and agencies participated. Latvians did have a role to play in the killing of the Jews – that is undeniable. Yet their role, as numerous secret German documents, especially the Stahlecker reports, show, was a limited one, not the one that Nazi and Soviet propaganda have attributed to them.

Unfortunately, some survivors of the Holocaust in their reconstructed memoirs tend to side with the Nazi and Soviet spokesmen. For example, contrary to any evidence, numerous survivors purport to “know” that the natives, without any German orders, in fact prior to their arrival, killed thousands of Jews. Here we are encountering a case where historical evidence confronts folklore. In absence of the German plan to murder Jews, the Holocaust could not have taken place. This chapter should not be read independently from my book *The Holocaust in Latvia: The Missing Center*. Although since the writing of the book, I have put a different emphasis on some formulations, if there is doubt about any question, the larger work should be consulted.

The final two chapters are devoted to the textual analysis of the Ducmanis pamphlet. Readers interested in the original text can consult Chapter 7.

This study aims, first and foremost, to confront the KGB hoax *Daugavas Vana-gi: Who Are They?* and to show up cracks in its totalitarian armor. During the past forty years the pamphlet has played mischievous tricks on most of the Western countries in which Latvian refugees settled after the Second World War. Late or not, an exposé of this fabrication is needed, for the sake of both Latvians and those good people of Europe, Canada, the United States, and Israel who in the pursuit of justice were misled by the pamphlet's "facts." To be sure, this study is a belated effort – it is not likely that this book will either prevent or expedite any war-crime trials – but as an excuse for its tardiness, we can say that a full history of the Holocaust could not have been written before the fall of the Soviet Union. The trick that the KGB played on the Nazi hunters was to write *Daugavas Vana-gi: Who Are They?* and other such pamphlets as if they were documented versions of the Holocaust in Latvia, while at the same time locking up their archives, preventing others from serious, honest, and necessary research. For example, we now know that the Rīga archives held a plethora of documents, not all of them exculpatory, about Boļeslavs Maikovskis' service in Rēzekne. These documents that the Soviets kept inaccessible could have helped American judges to resolve the case much more quickly and accurately.

Second, I am motivated to place the study of the Holocaust in Latvia on a documentary basis. Before my work on the Holocaust in Latvia appeared, most of the books that passed as "histories" were in reality memoirs, books of first and only impressions. In their repetitive patterning, they are more like folklore than history. I could also detect in many of them a strong influence of Ducmanis' *Daugavas Vana-gi: Who Are They?* The worst part of these books was that the few "facts" that they contained were, for the most part, at variance with the information to be found in the archives.<sup>3</sup> For example, if ten memoirs tell me that Latvians killed thousands of Jews before the arrival of the Germans, but Stahlecker, the man in charge of the killings, in his secret reports to Berlin tells us that spontaneous pogroms in Latvia did not occur, as a historian, I must prefer Stahlecker's statement as a source. Unlike in older historical fields, folklore as yet has not been purged from Holocaust studies.

In my writings on the Holocaust, I have consistently shunned collective accusations, of either Latvians or Germans. This attitude, more than anything else about my writing, has earned me the frequent reproach that my work "whitewashes" Latvians. I can do nothing to stop these judgments; I can only say that no other author has documented Latvian crimes in the Holocaust in more detail than I have done in *The Holocaust in Latvia*.

<sup>3</sup> In no sense do I want to downgrade the writers of memoirs, for many of them are indispensable. Among them the most noteworthy are Josef Katz's *One Who Came Back: The Diary of a Jewish Survivor* (New York, 1973), 2005) Frida Michelson, *I Survived Rumbuli* (New York, 1979); and Sidney Iwens, *How Dark the Heavens: 1400 Days in the Grip of Nazi Terror* (New York, 1990).

Am I whitewashing Latvians when I write that the Germans in organizing the killings kept to the principle of "specialization" and that only those who knew what they were doing and were capable of pulling the trigger were appointed to the killing teams? Who is being "whitewashed" when I insist that the Holocaust was a crime of organization and not of passion? A variety of sources, in archives in Latvia and in the West, show that out of the approximately 62,000 Latvian Jews who were killed, about one-half were murdered by Germans and the other half by Latvians. Most of those killed by Latvians were killed by the men of the Arājs Commando, and the remainder by some hastily organized "self-defense" formations.<sup>4</sup> The largest portion of the killings by Germans took place during the Rumbula massacre, when 25,000 Jews were killed in two days.

My opponents, among them spokesmen for the Wiesenthal Center, have been unable to discuss the Holocaust as a German-organized event, to take into account that in the killing procedures the Germans acted from a principle of "professionalism" and that they were "success"-oriented, entrusting the killings to people who had proven their skill – not trusting the final step to greenhorns or passers-by. The Germans took the assignment seriously. It has been said that I have minimized the Latvian participation in the Holocaust. It is true that in comparison to some of the broadside assertions that, for example, OSI prosecutor Allan Ryan made about East Europeans, my numbers, be it of victims or killers, have been rational, proceeding from the assumption that everybody did not need to do everything all the time. I have been reluctant to call every Latvian who served the Germans a murderer. For example, I had occasion to question the recent assertion of US Ambassador to Latvia, Brian Carlson, that the one thousand Rīga policemen who were ordered to escort ghetto Jews to Rumbula, were murderers. My stance was legalistic: would any European or American court judge these men for murder? Had the American and Canadian judiciaries followed my lists and standard of culpability, rather than that of Ducmanis or the spokesmen for the Wiesenthal Center, there would have been more convictions and fewer meandering fishing expeditions.

Finally, I want to assert that I wrote this study in an attempt to remove from Latvia's history some of the Nazi and Soviet residue that has up to now impeded our search for the truth. In doing so I also have endeavored to illuminate the central paradox of Holocaust history in Latvia, and unmask the reasons why, in spite of an extensive world-wide hunt for Latvian Nazis, the prosecutorial results in the West have been very minimal.

Ithaca, January 2004

<sup>4</sup> For a study of a local killing of Jews see the Latvian version of my book, *Holokausts vācu okupētajā Latvijā: 1941-1945*, Chapter XII, "Ebreju šaušana Ilūkstes apriņķī."

The following is a list of the names of the members of the American Medical Association who have been elected to the office of Secretary for the year 1938. The names are listed in alphabetical order of their last names. The names of the members who have been elected to the office of Secretary for the year 1938 are: Dr. J. H. ...

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## ANNEX

### Latvia Rejects Foreign Imports – Christmas – 1933



Traveling salesman: "Madam, please take these beautiful Christmas tree ornaments.— A-one goods!" Housewife: "No, thanks! Imports are too expensive."  
*Jaunākās ziņas* [Latest News] 23 December 1933.

*New York World-Telegram*, Monday, June 1, 1942:

### JEWS KILLED BY NAZIS PUT AT 200,000

*Millions driven  
Into Ghettos,  
Writer Asserts*

By Joseph W. Grigg.

*United Press Staff Correspondent.*

London, June 1, 1942 — Adolf Hitler's agents have killed at least 200,000 Jews in Russia, Poland and the Baltic states and driv-

en millions from their homes into medieval ghettos.

Foreign correspondents in Germany never were able to get exact figures on the dead, for they were killed so indiscriminately that no

records were kept. Thousands lie in unmarked graves, many in mass graves they were forced to dig before the firing squads of SS troops cut them down. Hitler on Jan. 30, 1939 declared that another World War would result in the destruction of the Jews and those of us who lived in Germany know that he and his agents have done everything possible to make the prophecy true.

#### **Deportations Continue.**

[Mr. Grigg only recently left the Reich]

In Germany proper Jews still are being deported to the ghettos in conquered countries at the rate of 20,000 a month. There apparently was an effort to create a "Jewish-free" Reich by April 1 as a birthday gift for Hitler, but due to transportation and other difficulties, the schedule could not be maintained. It is estimated that between 60,000 and 70,000 have been dumped in eastern Europe since September.

One of the biggest known mass slaughters of 1941, when, reasonable Nazi sources admitted, 56,000 men, women and children were killed by SS troops and Latvian irregulars.

#### **Four Days of Slaughter.**

This slaughter went on for days and there was even an official German newsreel of squads shooting Jews in the streets of Riga. The Nazi commentator describes the scenes,

as the vengeance of "the infuriated Latvian populace against the Jews," but a remarkable feature was that the "Latvians" all wore German army helmets.

In Lithuania about 30,000 Jews according to the most reliable estimate, were killed by special "clean up" squads brought from Poland with the knowledge and approval of the German civil administration.

The entire Jewish population of many towns and villages was driven into the country, forced to dig graves and then machine-gunned. In one city alone more than 8000 were killed.

#### **Ghastly in Poland**

In Kaunas the executions were not as sweeping: owing to militant opposition of the Catholic church, and in Estonia, last of the Baltic nations to fall to Hitler, comparatively few Jews were executed.

The slaughter in Poland was horrible, with 80,000 killed in reprisal for the alleged killing of 56,000 minority Germans at the outbreak of the war. Many of these were Poles but there was high percentage of Jews. The mass grave technique was used there too. When Kiev was occupied any Jew seen on the street was shot. One German rifleman boasted to correspondents that he had killed 37 in one night. Rumanians were even less reticent in boasting of their slaughter of Jews

**Joseph W. Grigg**, a correspondent for the United Press until December 1941, the onset of the war with the United States (which coincided with the last major massacres in Latvia), was stationed in Berlin. From December 1941 to April 1942, Grigg was interned along with other American journalists. Grigg's article is important for what he says about the Western knowledge of the Holocaust and what he says about the Holocaust in Eastern Europe, especially Latvia. His dispatch illustrates that the American pressmen in Berlin, and we may also assume - its diplomats, knew about the killing much earlier than it has been admitted in Holocaust literature. Grigg's account illustrates that his knowledge was limited and influenced by Nazi propaganda and newsreels. The most noteworthy aspect of Grigg's dispatch is that since he left Berlin in December 1941, the information contained in it was known to him before December, 1941. If Grigg knew it in the autumn of 1941, it means that the information was also known to American intelligence services. Concerning Latvia, Grigg did not become a shill of the Nazis but he shows that he was not free of the influence of Nazi public relations. The Nazi influence in the dispatch shows in his statements that the killings in Latvia were: (1) chaotic ("Foreign correspondents in Germany never were able to get exact figures on the dead,

for they were killed so indiscriminately that no records were kept"); (2) Germanless; and (3) were done as the revenge of the "natives" ("as a vengeance of "the infuriated Latvian populace against the Jews"). As we now know, tens of thousands of Jews were killed near Riga, but only some isolated individuals were killed in the streets of Riga. We also know that the Germans counted the dead and kept records. The Germans tried to organize chaotic killings in Latvia, but they were unsuccessful in pulling it off. There were Latvians who participated in the killings, but they were auxiliaries attached to the German SD formations, not irregulars. More than 56,000 Jews were killed in Latvia, but that was not a number for Riga, because in 1941, perhaps no more than 34,000 resided there. From the controversies that have revolved around the *Führerbefehl*, it is significant to note that Grigg connected the Nazi plan to kill the Jews with Hitler's Reichstag speech of 1939. Grigg's reference to "clean up" squads brought from Poland with the knowledge and approval of the German civil administration" illustrates knowledge of information leaks in the Nazi system that to date have not been noted in the historical literature.

*Hitler – 22 July 1941  
Jews are the plague  
of mankind.  
Therefore now the  
Lithuanians,  
Estonians, and  
Latvians are  
wreaking bloody  
revenge on them.*

## The Roots of Holocaust Folklore

It is argued in this study that the origins of the Holocaust folklore are traceable to the Nazi and Soviet public relations offices. The motives for portraying Latvians as more Nazi than the Nazis, as worse and more trigger happy than the Germans, were different for each superpower although in the end the public relations effect was the same. For the Soviets the motive was strategic and a matter of *Weltanschauung*. It began before the war, as an argument for the annexation of Latvia and continued after the war as an imperialist modality of existence. For the Nazis it was immediate and tactical, and arose from the necessity to camouflage the massacre of Jews. Markers of the German plan to mislead the world opinion, for example, are evident in the decisions at the Nazi Party conference of 29 May 1941; the dispatch of photographers and cinema crews in Eastern Europe to film and photograph German-orchestrated massacres; the injection as a part of the occupation vocabulary words (self-defense, self-cleansing, self-administration, help-willing, voluntary) whose meanings were the opposite of their conventional meaning; ordering their administrative cadres to write reports and memoranda claiming that it was the Latvians and not the Germans who ordered the murder of Jews; and proclaiming to the world that the Latvian motive was revenge. The Latvian role in the killing of the Jews was bad enough, but their crimes were far from what the Nazis accused them of. One of the first steps of disinformation that the Germans were purveying to the world can be seen in Joseph Grigg's dispatch of 1 June 1942 in the *New York World-Telegram*, reprinted above.

The Soviet attempt to paint the Latvians with the Nazi brush began at about the same time as that of the Nazis. It can be seen, for example, in Gregory Meiksins' wartime diatribe, *The Baltic Riddle* (New York, 1943). The author argues that Latvians are in a partnership with the Nazis, who cannot be trusted. Hence, as the solution he recommends American recognition of the Soviet annexation of Latvia. Similar opinions were expressed by Soviet diplomats,

Constantine Oumansky, Soviet Ambassador to the United States, and First Secretary at the Soviet Embassy, Chuvakhin, on 2 July 1941, just ten days after the German invasion of their Soviet allies. In a conversation with Loy Henderson, US Department of State official, about Baltic ships that were still plying the seas and that the Soviets wanted to appropriate, the Russians accused the statesmen of the former Baltic States of Nazism:

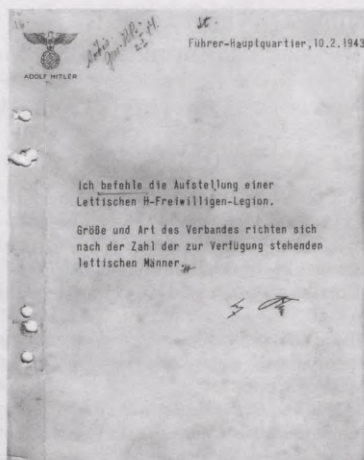
The ambassador said that he did not understand why the matter of the Baltic ships presented a difficult problem. I [Henderson] replied that the recognition on the part of the American Government of any Soviet interest in the Baltic ships would necessarily imply recognition of Soviet conquests in Eastern Europe, particularly in the Baltic. The Ambassador said that was precisely what the Soviet Government wanted. The Soviet Government expected the American Government to recognize the Baltic States as an integral part of the territory of the Soviet Union. I again pointed out to the Ambassador the futility of the renewal of discussions on this point. I pointed out that there were divergencies [sic] in principle which it did not seem possible to bridge at the present time. The Ambassador said that he was perplexed to hear that any question of principle was involved. ... The Ambassador then **launched into a vicious attack upon former Baltic officials and upon Baltic diplomats and consular representatives in the United States. He said that they were Nazis, pro-German, dishonest, hypocritical, slimy, and so forth.** I told the Ambassador that I could not discuss this subject with him any further.<sup>1</sup>

The full merger of the Nazi and Soviet points of view concerning the Holocaust in Latvia took place more than a dozen years after the defeat of Nazism. During the war, and the immediate years thereafter, the Soviets considered the Holocaust to be a crime of the Nazis. Only during the rule of the heirs of Stalin, when the difficulties of the empire began to mount, the seeds of the negativism scattered by Soviet officials and fellow-travelers during war-time blossomed into a full propaganda of hate that more than rivaled that of the Nazis. Its main feature was: the Holocaust without Germans.

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<sup>1</sup> Memorandum of Conversation by the Assistant Chief of the Division of Eastern European Affairs (Henderson) of the U.S. Dept. of State. July 2, 1941. Participants: Mr. Oumansky, Ambassador of the Soviet Embassy; Mr. Chuvakhin, First secretary of the Soviet Embassy; Mr. Henderson, Assistant Chief, Division of European Affairs. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1941*, vol 1, The Soviet Union (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office) pp. 781-785. My emphasis. I thank Harold Otto for pointing out this document and its significance.

## Hitler's Order Establishing a Latvian Legion, 10 February 1943



## Soviet Use of the Holocaust in 1941

Although in this study the responsibility for warping the history of the Holocaust, is primarily placed on the Nazi German wordsmiths, it would be wrong to minimize, as the Ducmanis' pamphlet shows, the accomplishments of the Soviets. The following example shows how brazenly agitprop conjured up a major atrocity out of an indirect references and ambiguous text. A diary was found on a dead German soldier.<sup>2</sup> The Soviet rewrite took place in September 1941 and was an early example of Soviet use of the Holocaust for political and/or diplomatic purposes. It was intended for Western consumption, but due to an inadvertency the text was reprinted in the Pravda and thus came to the attention of the Central Committee in Moscow.

### *Original:*

24 June (1941). Going through a small hamlet, I took part in sacking a small Jewish shop...

5 June (1941), At 10:00 AM we were in Kusko. From the very beginning, I did not have any desire to go out and see the sights. But after I read a trashy book, I got up and started to look for abandoned Jewish homes. Doors were broken open with axes, crowbars and other tools. All around us were hens and pigs. Our rations were skimpy and therefore after the dinner we returned to the Jewish section...

### *Soviet rewrite:*

24 June (1941). Going through Slonim together with Walter I took part in sacking of shops and apartments...

5 June (1941), At 10:00 AM we were in a place called Kletck. Immediately we took off for a search of stuff. With axes and crowbars we opened doors. The people we found in the homes, we finished off. One of us worked it with a pistol, another one with a rifle and somebody else with a bayonet. I preferred a pistol...

<sup>2</sup> G.V. Kostirchenko, *Tainaia Politika Stalina* (Moscow, 2001) 229.

## Show Trial Soviet Style:

*The Sun*, Baltimore, Tuesday Morning, October 12, 1965

### Latvia Opens War Crimes Trial

By Steven E. Nordlinger

(Moscow Bureau of the Sun)

Riga, Latvia, October: 11 – Six Men – three present and three absent – were brought to trial today for collaborating with the Nazi invaders in the extermination of 15,000 residents of a district of Latvia during World War II.

The trial before live television cameras was opened on the stage of the House of Culture of Riga's electric factory.

It is one of the largest war crime trials in the Soviet Union since the war. Authorities expect it to last more than two weeks

#### 3 Empty Chairs

Three defendants guarded by two soldiers with tommy guns solemnly sat in the prisoners dock on the stage before 800 invited guests in the audience.

There were also three empty chairs in the dock.

They were set aside for the absent defendants now living in Toronto, Mineola, N.Y., and Karlsruhe, West Germany. Each empty chair had above it the names of the missing men.

Lawyers were appointed by the republic's College of Lawyers to represent all those absent as well as present.

Judge Valfried Kauke complained to the courtroom that the countries involved refused to extradite the three missing defendants so they could be tried.

#### "Sent Special Messages"

"Our government sent special messages to the United States, Canada and West Germany but in spite of our request those governments did not give up those men," Judge Kauke said.

May we proceed without the other three men? he asked.

All three of the defendants present rose separately and nodded assent.

Are you all satisfied with the lawyers appointed? he asked then.

The three middle-aged defendants indicated satisfaction again.

Much of the trial was conducted in the glare of klieg lights provided for the television and movies. Thirty places had been reserved in the auditorium for the Soviet and foreign press.

#### Like Broadway Melodrama

The stage setting and the smooth flow of the action made the proceedings appear like a Broadway melodrama. It was difficult to grasp that a court trial was unfolding with capital punishment a possible result for the three defendants present.

Judge Kauke, silverhaired with horned rimmed glasses, sat in the deep center of the stage in a high-backed chair marked with a hammer and sickle. He was flanked by two peoples assessors who will help him to determine the sentences.

The prosecutor in a blue uniform and four witnesses also sat on the stage. One witness was unavailable for the trial.

May we proceed without that witness? Judge Kauke asked.

#### 220-Page Indictment

All three defendants rose and nodded assent.

Today's session was devoted to reading of the 220-page indictment by a team of men and women court employees. It referred to events of more than 20 years ago in grim detail.

According to the document the six men were directly involved in the killing of 15,199

persons in the Rezekne district of Latvia, a farm area about 200 miles east of here.

The district had been a center of partisan activity and the German occupants accused the residents of hiding guerrillas.

The dead included 2,000 children 5,000 Jews and 300 gypsies the indictment said.

The 30 surviving villagers were marched to a nearby town and executed in the market place "to intimidate the local population".

The village of Audrini was then burned to the ground.

#### Fled Overseas

According to the charges the three men not present today were appointed leaders in the Rezekne district by the Nazis. They fled overseas with the retreat of the German forces in 1944 – Albert Eichelis going to West Germany, Boleslavs Maikovskis to Mineola, and Harald Puntulis to Toronto.

Those present held less important posts in the district during the war.

The indictment shed no light on why it took twenty years to bring all six to trial. Judge Kauke refused to discuss this question with reporters. He said that any such conversations might influence his judgment.

However, those familiar with the case said that the material had been in the process of being gathered through all these years.

#### Recognized In Yalta

One of the men, Jasep Basankovich, who had moved to Siberia to work as miner, was recognized in Yalta a year ago. Apparently with this arrest the court authorities decided to proceed.

Janis Krasovskis, a lumber man, had fled to Poland, and was tracked down through letters he wrote to Latvians. The third defendant present, Peteris Vaichiks, was arrested in Riga.

Pictures purported to be of all the men were displayed in the lobby outside the courtroom. Two were wearing Nazi uniforms.

## Evolution of the SS Insignia

At first the Germans ordered the legionnaires to wear a simple black left collar patch with no insignia. However, in time several insignia began to evolve simultaneously. Some of the units were ordered to wear what the Latvians call a "fire-cross" (*ugunskrusts*) – a common traditional Latvian design element – as does one of the most decorated legionnaires, Captain Žanis Butkus. The designs below were also considered as alternatives. Some units for a period of time wore the Latvian traditional emblem of the rising sun (on the right). The final choice of the SS came late and considering the Nazi attitudes towards the natives, is mysterious.



## Echoes of *Daugavas Vanagi*: *Who Are They?* in Australia

# War Criminals in Australia *Daugavas Vanagi* WHO ARE THEY?

"The *Daugavas Vanagi* is the name of an organisation founded towards the end of 1945 in Belgium, for the ostensible purpose of aiding disabled members of the Latvian S.S."—(The Wiener Library Bulletin, London, October, 1963, page 56.)

The Latvian S.S. Divisions fought alongside the German S.S. and its members committed numerous atrocities, some of them more horrible than those of their German Nazi masters. The officers of the Latvian S.S. were recruited mostly from the Latvian fascist traitors and the voluntary police battalions. To gain the confidence of their German masters, they tortured and killed hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women and children in Latvia and other parts of Nazi-occupied Europe during World War II.

• Their leader, Colonel Villa Janums, who was refused entry to Australia and is now residing in West Germany, is a wanted war criminal, who organised police battalions in Nazi-occupied Latvia and is responsible for the genocide committed by them under his command. Many Latvian fascist war criminals succeeded in getting through the immigration "screening" and entered Australia. They set up their organisation here, the *Daugavas Vanagi*, with headquarters at 3 Dickens Street, Elwood, Victoria, and are carrying out military training and target-shooting practice, like the Croat Ustashi, with which they are closely allied.

• One of their leaders in Australia was a volunteer in the Latvian Police Battalion and took part in the massacre of innocent people near Minsk in 1942-1943.



Another, also in Australia now, was assistant to General Danker, who was appointed by the Nazi quisling government and who was responsible for the extermination of the Jews in Smolana (Latvia).

A prominent member of the *Daugavas Vanagi* in Melbourne took part as a commander of the Nazi Latvian security police in mass murders of Jews in Riga and Minsk.

These are only brief examples of the horrible records of some Latvian fascists, who Mr. Santa-maria's News-Weekly so eagerly tries to defend and whitewash. News-Weekly of July 16, 1964, publishes the following statement by Mr. W. Eglite: "It is ridiculous to suggest that for 15 years the Australian Government could have harbored war criminals."

We, on the contrary, do not find this ridiculous.

**WE ACCUSE** the present Federal Government that, in ignorance or otherwise, they are permitting war criminals and potential future murderers to freely walk our streets.

**WE ACCUSE** the Menzies Government of permitting these war criminals to set up their organisations and to carry out military training on our soil.

The aim of foreign fascists is not to defend our democratic country.

The members of *Daugavas Vanagi*, like the Ustashi and other Nazis, are training in the use of firearms, as they have done in the past, to enable them to complete the genocide, which they so successfully carried out during World War II.

Unless the government takes action, it will happen here too, as in Argentina and elsewhere, and we will have these fascist handits roaming our streets and attacking innocent people and our democratic institutions.

**We demand that the Federal Government take immediate action against Nazi and fascist groups operating in Australia.**

Authorised by Australian and New Settlers' Anti-Fascist Committee. Chairman: M. Jurjevic, 210 Blyth St., Brunswick  
Australia-Greek Publications, Melbourne

The document illustrates the power of the offending Ducmanis opus to deceive well-meaning and idealistic people. The accusations in the document are almost verbatim lifted from *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?*

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LATVIJAS NACIONĀLA BIBLIOTEKA



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"To do nothing that might obstruct the final settlement, but to prepare for it only in secret ..."

*Adolf Hitler 17 July 1941*

"No obstacle is to be placed in the path of the self-cleansing desires of the anti-Communist and anti-Jewish circles in the newly occupied areas. Rather, they are to be intensified, when required, without a trace [leaving no evidence], and channeled into the proper path, without giving ... any opportunity later to refer to directives or any political assurances."

*Instructions of German Chief of Security Police and Security Service, Reinhard Heydrich, to the leaders of Einsatzgruppen, 29 June 1941.*

"It had to appear to the outside that the indigenous population itself reacted naturally against the decades of oppression by the Jews and against the terror created by the Communists in its recent history, and that the indigenous population carried out these first measures of its own accord. ... From the very beginning it was expected that pogroms alone would not solve the Jewish problem in Ostland. On the other hand, the goal of the cleaning operations of the Sicherheitspolizei, in accordance with the fundamental orders, was the most comprehensive elimination of Jews possible."

*From the Consolidated Report of the Commander of Einsatzgruppe A, Brigadeführer Walter Stahlecker, 15 October 1941.*

"As over the decades I have researched details of the Holocaust in Latvia, it has become clear to me that [*Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?*] contains one overarching truth – the Jews of Latvia were killed in the most brutal and uncivilized way – and a plethora of untruths."

*Andrew Ezergailis.*

"... this KGB hoax, whose author was the Nazi leftover Pauls Ducmanis, has object lessons for those who are willing to listen to them."

*Andrew Ezergailis.*

## NAZI/SOVIET DISINFORMATION ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST IN NAZI-OCCUPIED LATVIA

**Daugavas Vanagi:  
Who Are They? – Revisited**



ANDREW EZERGAILIS

is retired Professor of History at Ithaca College, Ithaca, NY, and a Foreign Member of the Latvian Academy of Sciences. He is probably the most-quoted authority on the Holocaust and related issues in Nazi-occupied Latvia. His books on these topics include

- *The Holocaust in Latvia: The Missing Center*, Riga, 1996, published in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and its Latvian translation *Holokausts vācu okupētājā Latvijā 1941–1944*, Riga, 1999, which contains an additional chapter on the killing of the Jews in the Ilūkste District.
- *The Latvian Legion: Heroes, Nazis, or Victims*, Riga, 1997.
- *Stockholm Documents. The German Occupation of Latvia, 1941–1945. What Did America Know?* Symposium of the Commission of the Historians of Latvia 5, Riga, 2002.

"*Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* has probably given rise to more war crimes trials in the West than any other book, and in doing so, led to more acquittals in war crimes than any other book."

*Harold Otto*

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