1990

Cooperation or collaboration : Latvia under German occupation 1941-1945

Astra M. Apsitis
San Jose State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd_theses

Recommended Citation

Apsitis, Astra M., "Cooperation or collaboration : Latvia under German occupation 1941-1945" (1990).
Master's Theses. 34.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.6n42-5jcx>
https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd_theses/34

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Master's Theses and Graduate Research at SJSU ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of SJSU ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@sjsu.edu.

INFORMATION TO USERS

The most advanced technology has been used to photograph and reproduce this manuscript from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

U·M·I

University Microfilms International
A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600

Order Number 1342896

**Cooperation or collaboration: Latvia under German occupation,
1941–1945**

Apsitis, Astra Marita, M.A.

San Jose State University, 1990

U·M·I

300 N. Zeeb Rd.
Ann Arbor, MI 48106

NOTE TO USERS

**THE ORIGINAL DOCUMENT RECEIVED BY U.M.I. CONTAINED PAGES
WITH SLANTED PRINT. PAGES WERE FILMED AS RECEIVED.**

THIS REPRODUCTION IS THE BEST AVAILABLE COPY.

COOPERATION OR COLLABORATION:
LATVIA UNDER GERMAN OCCUPATION
1941-1945

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By

Astra M. Apsitis

December, 1990

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

Dr. Harry Gailey

Dr. Charles Burdick

Dr. Charles Kesterich

APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY

Serena W. Stanford

ABSTRACT

COOPERATION OR COLLABORATION: LATVIA UNDER GERMAN OCCUPATION 1941-1954

by Astra M. Apsitis

This thesis addresses the topic of Latvia under German occupation between 1941 and 1945, showing conditions under Nazi rule and the consequent effects. It examines the various positions held by the Latvian population regarding the occupation, and how opinions changed as conditions within Latvia worsened over the course of the war.

Research into this subject reveals the confused nature of resistance to the Nazi regime in Latvia. A certain percentage of the population worked with the Germans from the very start of the occupation believing collaboration to be the only chance for national survival. These people later came to find that their nationalistic intentions served only to strengthen German control in Latvia. Later attempts at resistance were complicated by Latvian participation in the German armed forces and in the German controlled puppet government. By the end of the war, all struggles had proved fruitless, as the Soviets reoccupied Latvia.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
I. PRELUDE TO WAR: THE SOVIET OCCUPATION.....	5
II. INTO THE FIRE: THE GERMAN OCCUPATION.....	14
III. THE STRUGGLE FOR NATIONAL SURVIVAL.....	33
IV. COOPERATION OR COLLABORATION: A DIVIDED PEOPLE.	63
V. EPILOGUE.....	91
.....	
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	99
MAPS.....	105

INTRODUCTION

World War Two crystalized preexisting prejudices and differences throughout the world, leaving no country untouched by its debilitating effects. From the cities to the battle lines, people everywhere were reduced to thoughts of survival. There were leaders and followers, collaborators and resisters. Those who survived to tell their tales spoke of oppression, persecution, victory and defeat. Countless volumes of history discuss at length the movement of troops, wartime atrocities and political decisions. The effects of war somehow seem to have slipped through the cracks in such studies. The purpose of this thesis is to examine how the German occupation affected the people of Latvia, polarizing preexisting differences and ruining any chances of effectively resisting the Germans.

War brings out the worst in people: leaders become tyrants, ordinary people march off to battle and return scarred killers. In occupied countries people are displaced or executed and worldly possessions confiscated or destroyed. The case of Latvia under German rule is no exception. The Latvian people had first been forced to accept a Soviet occupation. This was followed by a German occupation which the Latvians had not resisted.

Consequently, some suffered not just materially, but morally as well. By the end of the war in 1945, the country had once again been occupied by Soviet forces and a large percentage of Latvians, those who had not been killed, found themselves displaced.

Direct resistance to the two occupations would have been pointless, for the armies of Germany and Russia far exceeded the strength of tiny Latvia. Non-violent resistance became the method of showing discontent since armed resistance, if not impossible, was not feasible. Armed resistance was impossible. Michael Walzer, in his study of war, concluded that under conditions such as those in Latvia:

"The country will grow silent. Resistance will be a matter of individual heroism or the heroism of small groups, but not of collective struggle."¹

Such was the case in Latvia where different levels of collaboration, cooperation and resistance came together and created such confusion that an observer hardly knows the truth when seeking to understand what happened in Latvia at this time.

Historically neither the Germans nor the Russians were welcomed on Latvian soil, but after Latvia had passed through nearly a year of brutal Soviet occupation, the Germans were received with open arms as liberators. The

¹Michael Walzer, Just and Unjust Wars (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977), p. 332.

nature of the German invasion of Russia, however, placed Latvia between the swastika and the hammer. As Latvians struggled to find an identity to assert in this time of trouble, resistance was characteristically non-violent. Some persons sat still, others collaborated on different levels and a small percentage showed signs of activism as they all tried to undermine the power of the occupiers. What ultimately destroyed Latvia's fight for independence was not the people lost in battle, the toppled economy or the political oppression. The basic difficulty was a lack of unity in methodology used in combating the Germans.

Information regarding the various movements in Latvia can be found in recently declassified OSS documents from the National Archives, various unpublished memoirs and copies of personal letters. Attempting to research active anti-Nazi resistance is an exercise in futility. The nature of Latvian resistance as an independent phenomenon remains largely unexplored. The reason behind the lack of information is elementary: the common definition of active resistance simply did not exist on any measurable scale in Latvia under either occupation. Once the isolated incidents have been revealed, what emerges is a picture of disunity among the people. The Latvians all wanted their freedom, but they could not seem to decide the best way to accomplish their goal.

Though it would be easy to summarize the Latvian experience by claiming the population lived through the German occupation in dumb resignation, a chronicle of their successes and failures to gain independence shows the contrary. Resisting German occupation took courage, and despite the final outcome, a certain measure of autonomy was achieved through the efforts of the few who took risks and tried to sabotage German efforts to completely subjugate the Latvian population. Within the confines of available material covering Latvian anti-Nazi resistance, this thesis is an attempt to show the undying patriotism of the Latvian people.

This study would have proved impossible without the support of the Latvian community and its resources. Many thanks to those who provided books, papers and periodicals not available in any public institution. I also wish to thank those who patiently undertook guiding me through to completion after the untimely passing of my first advisor, Dr. Edgar Anderson: Dr. Eichhorn, Dr. Burdick and Dr. Gailey. My deepest appreciation for the helpful staff at the Hoover Archives and the National Archives. Above all, my most heartfelt thanks go to my friends and family who provided their undying support and saw me through to the end.

CHAPTER I

PRELUDE TO WAR: THE SOVIET OCCUPATION

From the first era of colonizations in the ancient world through the present day, the tiny Baltic region known as Latvia survived under the constant pressure of foreign states intent on controlling it. Desired for abundant prime agricultural land and valuable seaports, for hundreds of years Latvia existed subject at different times to the occupying forces of Germany, Poland, Sweden and Russia. The simultaneous collapse of both the German and Russian empires at the end of World War I finally brought Latvia long awaited independence in 1918. Latvia then underwent nearly 21 years of self-governance featured by a democratic government and a position in the League of Nations.

The years of independence, however, were troubled. Never having enjoyed the luxury of self-governance prior to the end of World War I, freedom opened too many doors. The new leaders attempted to imitate successful governmental systems as a solution to their relative inexperience with policy and practice. Proportional representation appeared to be the answer to endless quibbling over who was to control this new government and the fledgling Latvian government ultimately adopted a system of parliamentary

democracy. After drafting a workable constitution, this new system limped along with countless changes until Latvian statesman Karlis Ulmanis, with the aid of the Minister of War, Janis Balodis, declared a state of siege under Article 62 of the Constitution and dissolved the parliament in May, 1934.² The new government was a limited authoritarian regime which enjoyed the support of many former cabinet members. However, before the new regime got a chance to prove that a limited dictatorship was far more effective and stable than the previous system, war settled like a dark cloud over Europe.

In anticipation of a political and military struggle, the new Latvian government attempted to establish a semblance of national security. As the 1930's drew to a close, politically aware government officials realized that by having focused large amounts of energy towards curbing political strife at home, they had left their borders unprotected. To be secure in the event of another war, the support of larger nations was necessary.

In early 1939, Latvian officials approached the German ambassador in Latvia and tried to gain assurance that Germany would respect Latvian neutrality should conflict

²Igor I. Kavass and Adolf Sprudzis, Baltic States: A Study of their Origin and National Development; Their Seizure and Incorporation into the U.S.S.R. (Buffalo: William S. Hein & Co., Inc., 1972), p. 116.

arise.³ Rejection of this request brought to light the fragility of Latvia's international position, for though Latvia held seats in the League of Nations, when push came to shove, European nations tended to operate in their own best interests. Small countries such as Latvia had little to offer in return for a pledge of protection.

In April 1939, Great Britain denied the Baltic States any of the assurances or guarantees it had offered to Poland and Romania. "Our object" the British government told its Latvian ambassador "is, of course, to prevent our being dragged into war by Russia over a Baltic state without our having any voice in the matter."⁴ After August 1939, of the major world powers, only the United States declared officially that it would not acknowledge the legal incorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union.⁵

The years of Latvia's unimpeded political sovereignty and territorial integrity came to a sudden end in late August 1939. As the rest of Europe stumbled blindly into the Second World War, Latvia once again fell victim to two of the world's great powers. The signing of the Molotov-

³V. Stanley Vardys and Romuald J. Misiunas, The Baltic States in Peace and War 1917-1945 (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978), p. 103.

⁴Ibid., p. 103.

⁵Dr. Edgars Andersons, "Baltijas valšku politiskais stāvoklis laikā no Vācu iebrukuma Krievijā līdz angļu-krievu līgumam 1942. gada maijā" Universitas 6 (Fall 1959): 28.

Ribbentrop Pact on 23 August, 1939 effectively sealed the fate of the Baltic people. In an added secret protocol lay an agreement between Germany and Russia that Latvia be considered in the Soviet sphere of interest.

On 13 June 1940, Latvian Minister President Kārlis Ulmanis received a proposal from the Soviet government requesting that Latvia sign a treaty of "Mutual Assistance" with the Soviet Union. When Ulmanis asked the German ambassador in Latvia if Germany had some sort of treaty with the Soviet Union and if Germany would be willing to supply Latvia with arms should there come a time when Latvia had to defend itself, he was told that Germany was "not interested in the Baltic question."⁶ Ulmanis felt that he had little choice and accepted the Soviet proposal on 17 June, 1940. Shortly thereafter, Russia began strengthening its new border lands. Following threats of military action should the Latvians try to resist, the Soviets installed military bases on Latvian territory. As a result of this military bullying, in late September and early October Soviet officials signed treaties of "Mutual Assistance," with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, legitimizing to the rest of the world the fact that they had, for all intents and purposes, occupied the Baltic States.⁷

⁶Žanis Unāms, "Latviešu tautas traģēdija," (typewritten), Hoover Archives, Stanford, California, p. 17.

Because the Latvian government had no concrete stance or plans to oppose the Soviet occupation regime, the Soviets quickly and easily erased all semblance of a free and independent Latvia, beginning a reign of terror which was to last until the German invasion of Russia in June of 1941. No country came to the aid of the Latvians when the Soviets took control. Ulmanis believed that the occupation would be brief and the sacrifices made would be justified when the Soviet Union went to war, leaving the fate of the Latvians to the Allies. On the evening of 17 June, Ulmanis announced in a radio broadcast to the Latvian people "I am staying in my place, you stay in yours."⁸ Not making it clear that he was bowing only to military occupation, it seemed that Ulmanis not only fell to his knees before the Soviets, he crawled on his stomach as well.

Ulmanis' lack of initiative in the face of adversity outraged a great many Latvians. Even many people who had earlier supported Ulmanis turned away in disgust, seeing only that the leader of the new Latvian republic had quietly surrendered Latvia to the Soviets without a fight. Those who remained loyal to Ulmanis and his decisions later found themselves targeted as traitors to the state.

⁷Martin Gilbert, The Second World War: A Complete History (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1989), p. 16.

⁸Unāms, "Latviešu tautas traģēdija," p. 19.

The Soviets announced a new government under the control of Augusts Kirhensteins, a Soviet sympathizer, with Ulmanis at the head until elections could be held. Elections were held on 14 and 15 July 1940. A single list of candidates was supplied by the Soviet government and the Latvian people were "compelled to march from their respective places of employment in serried ranks to the ballot boxes."⁹ Soviet tanks and men with machine guns stood by as voters approached the places where they were to vote. Threatened reprisals prompted many to vote in these sham elections, and results were falsified even though most Latvian citizens had voted. The rest of the world saw only that the new Sovietized citizens participated in mock elections which legitimized the new Soviet regime. On 21 July, 1940, Soviet officials announced the "new government of the working class" and Ulmanis stepped down.¹⁰ Having been promised the freedom to leave Latvia for Switzerland, Ulmanis was sent to Southern Russia instead, where he is believed to have died in a Soviet prison.¹¹

With a new legitimized regime firmly in place, the cruel Soviet occupation began. Often referred to as Baigais

⁹Alfred Bilmanis, "Statement by the Latvian Underground Central Council February 1944, Riga, Latvia." Collection, 1944-1948, Hoover Archives, Stanford, California.

¹⁰Unāms, "Latviešu tautas traģēdija," p. 27.

¹¹Ibid., p. 27.

gads (Year of Terror), this time is remembered for Stalin's penchant for senseless executions and mass arrests. Just as in the rest of the Soviet Union, Stalin in his paranoia sought to eliminate all traces of nationalism and independent leadership. Soviet occupational policies in 1940-41 saw the deportation of many members of the Latvian business, political and educated groups. Regarded as enemies of the Soviet state, the majority of Latvian political leaders either fled into exile or found themselves in Soviet concentration camps. Some 8,000 people, mostly Latvians and Baltic Germans, left for Germany in October 1939.¹² In the years following the war, only a handful of past presidents and ministers remained alive and living in freedom.¹³

Those Latvians sympathetic to communism lived through the occupation as if nothing had changed. Nationalistic Latvians were considered enemies of the new state and treated as such. Regarded as untrustworthy, many Latvians found themselves unable to find work. In a Soviet state, those who did not work also did not eat, and many were sent to Siberia to work in slave labor camps. In February 1941, the new government issued a proclamation that all Soviet

¹²Ibid., p. 36.

¹³Osvalds Freivalds, Kurzemes Cietoksnis II (Copenhagen: Imanta, 1954), p. 146.

citizens must register for passports, showing proof of employment as well as personal documents. Latvian citizens were thus categorized and the lists later used for organized deportations.¹⁴

The people grew rightfully frightened and in February and March 1941 came the second wave of migrations to Germany. This time, however, the conditions were more strict than before. To leave Latvia for Germany in 1939, one had but to say that they were either German or sympathetic to the German cause. To qualify for leaving in 1941, one needed to show concrete proof of German ancestry with documents.¹⁵ Falsified documents and connections helped some Latvians get through, but these options proved both risky and often expensive.

On the night of 13-14 June 1941, the Soviets deported some 14,000 Latvians to the far reaches of Siberia. Soviet police arrived in the middle of the night and carried away those who were not fortunate enough to escape into the woods. In the days that followed, everyone in Latvia knew what had happened. If the Russians had not taken a family member, perhaps a neighbor or a friend had disappeared. The entire country cowered in fear of the Soviets, waiting for

¹⁴Unāms, "Latviešu tautas traģēdija," p. 33.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 36.

someone to rid their lives of this unbearable oppression.

One week later, their wish was to finally come true.

CHAPTER II
INTO THE FIRE: THE GERMAN OCCUPATION

On the morning of 22 June, 1941, Germany launched "Operation Barbarossa"--a full offensive against the Soviet Union. Caught off guard and unprepared for such an assault, the Soviets were pushed back across the Latvian/Russian border. In their rush to leave, the Soviets wreaked havoc on everything in their path. A general directive from Moscow issued on 29 June specifically demanded a scorched earth policy: withdrawing Soviets troops had orders to remove anything of any use, "leaving the enemy not a single locomotive, not a truck, not a loaf of bread, not a litre of fuel."¹⁶ Remaining Soviet partisans assumed charge of "blowing up bridges, railway tracks, destroying enemy telephone and telegraph communications (and) blowing up enemy ammunition dumps."¹⁷ As German troops rolled through the Baltic States, the Soviets retreated with the Germans at their heels.

The German Army Group North under the leadership of Field Marshal Ritter von Leeb led the invasion of Russia

¹⁶Gilbert, The Second World War, p. 204.

¹⁷Ibid.

from Central Prussia through the Baltic States toward the eventual goal--Leningrad. Hitler's plan for the attack centered on the need for a fast and furious offensive meant to destroy the enemy with "lightning speed," as the term "Blitzkrieg" implies. German troops enjoyed quick success in their initial strike at the Soviet Union and soon drove the Soviets out of the Baltic territory.

As news that the Germans had arrived reached those who had been in hiding for fear of being deported by the Soviets, men emerged from the woods and began partisan activity against the fleeing Soviets. Many of these partisans began fighting the Soviet stragglers before German troops reached outlying areas in Latvia. By 1 July, these partisans had organized and armed themselves with weapons which had been hoarded away during the time of Soviet occupation. Many of these partisans had arms available through the maintenance of a number of special arms storage centers, stocked for later use in anticipation of conflict. Other weapons were obtained as a result of the Soviet retreat--as the Soviets pulled out of Latvia, many Russian soldiers threw aside weapons in their haste to leave, making easy pickings for those fortunate enough to find and collect the discarded arms.¹⁸ Because Latvian partisans fought in

¹⁸Henri Michel, The Shadow War: Resistance in Europe 1939-1945, trans. Richard Barry (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1972), p. 82.

their own territory, effective ambushes caught many an unwary Soviet soldier.

To more effectively drive Soviet stragglers from Latvia, former Latvian Army commanders such as Voldemars Veide organized special Latvian "self-defense" units. Though the German officials accepted the military assistance offered, they soon made efforts to curb the nationalistic bent of these groups. Help in fighting the Soviets was fine so long as it complied with German goals. The Latvian "self-defense" units under Latvian leadership were destined to be short-lived. Soon after the Germans discovered these bands of soldiers, they immediately disarmed them, using force when needed. After firmly securing military control of all potential Latvian power bases the Germans ordered the dissolution of Latvian Army units requiring all men to surrender their arms and ammunition under the threat of death.¹⁹ Members of the Latvian "self-defense" units were forbidden to carry arms or wear Latvian uniforms.²⁰ Many gave up their arms and joined the German forces while others hid away their guns, anticipating the need for later employment.

¹⁹I. Joseph Vizulis, Nations Under Duress: The Baltic States (Port Washington, N.Y.: Associated Faculty Press, 1985), p. 78.

²⁰Visvaldis Mangulis, Latvia in the Wars of the 20th Century (Princeton Junction: Cognition Books, 1983), p. 96.

These early ad hoc units were replaced by battalions formed under German supervision. Within weeks of the initial occupation, the SS embarked on a mission to recruit Baltic volunteers to forward its own purposes, calling them Schützmanns-Bataillone (security battalions). Many volunteers joined eagerly, believing that these military formations would be used to defend Latvia. Of those who joined the new battalions, some went believing promises of freedom and many went seeking vengeance for misdeeds against friends and family who had unnecessarily suffered under Soviet occupation. Some participated to escape accusations that they had collaborated with the Soviets (or to avoid false accusations to that effect). Still others went for pro-Nazi beliefs, and some simply as adventurers.²¹

The fact that many Latvians willingly joined forces with the Germans in 1941 is indicative of the general sentiments of Latvians following the removal of Soviet rule. Though for centuries Latvians harbored feelings of resentment towards the Germans for the many years they had spent under German control, this sudden liberation clouded their vision. The Germans found themselves welcomed in Latvia with open arms. German radio broadcasts led people to believe that restored independence loomed ahead. Latvian

²¹Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, The Baltic States: Years of Dependence (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 54-55.

flags flew for the first time in over a year and the Latvian anthem "Dievs Svētī Latviju" (God Bless Latvia) resounded in Riga as news spread across the land that the Soviet threat no longer existed. In a broadcast speech, Hitler explicitly declared Soviet annexation of the Baltic States null and void.²² A German newsreel in 1941 showed Latvian nationalists burning a hall which had been used as a prison and torture chamber by the Soviets.²³ Mass graves were unearthed and survivors released from NKVD prisons told of the ghastly and inhuman practices of their Soviet captors. It seemed as if the worst had passed. The country was alive with the feeling of freedom.

Not everyone, however, was caught up in the flurry of excitement which followed the release from Soviet rule. On 23 June, only two days after Operation Barbarossa had been successfully launched against the Soviets, a hopeful Dr. M. Krieviņš, former Latvian Minister to Germany, approached the German Foreign Ministry and requested that his position as Latvian Minister in Berlin be restored and that members of the Latvian Legation be allowed to resume activity.²⁴ The request was flatly denied.

²²Boriss Zemgals, Dienas baltās, nebaltās (Geneva: Leonīds Zemgals, 1949), p. 52.

²³Robert Edwin Herzstein, Adolf Hitler and the German Trauma 1913-1945 (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1974), p. 226.

During the closing days of June and beginning of July 1941 there was utter chaos in Riga. Public transport stood paralyzed and civil disobedience soared as people looted stores and storage centers.²⁵ Riga was threatened with a food shortage as looting diminished supplies and Germans took complete control of the city. On 3 July, only two days after German troops entered the capital city of Riga, SS officials struck the first chord of reality by rejecting a Latvian attempt at establishing a provisional government.²⁶

Seeing the economy at the brink of collapse, an informal group of colleagues, calling themselves Latvijas Organizācijas Centrs (Latvian Organization Center, or LOC), set out to guard Latvian interests and remedy the increasingly desperate situation. They began activity in the week before German troops took Riga. In reaction to the food shortage, the LOC set its goal as the reestablishment of the agricultural community. In seeking a leader, LOC members chose Latvian nationalist Alfreds Valdmanis, former Latvian Minister of Finance. Until the Germans arrived in Riga, the LOC even controlled the Riga radio station.²⁷ When the Germans reached Riga on 1 July, however, it slowly

²⁴Vizulis, Nations Under Duress, p. 87.

²⁵Zemgals, Dienas baltās, nebaltās, p. 58.

²⁶Mangulis, Latvia in the Wars of the 20th Century, p. 97.

²⁷Zemgals, Dienas baltās, nebaltās, p. 54.

became clear that without German authorization, the LOC would enjoy only a short-lived period of influence, if any at all.

Valdmanis set out to gain German authorization for the organization. When he approached the local German authorities, he was told that such questions must be decided in Berlin.²⁸ It did not take long for local German authorities to believe that the LOC was attempting to undermine German efforts to completely control Riga and to establish the LOC as an organ similar to a provisional government.

Valdmanis soon found himself approached by a representative of the local German authorities and informed that the Germans wished to meet with him--to this, Valdmanis replied:

"Inform the German general that there exists only two variations. One is that the German administration acknowledges me as an official Latvian representative, and in this case I need not go to him but rather he must come and stand before me. The other variation is that the occupying force does not acknowledge me as an official representative. Then I am a private citizen from whom the German general needs nothing and for that reason will not bother this gentleman."²⁹

²⁸Ibid., p. 54.

²⁹Ibid., p. 58.

Within weeks, LOC headquarters in Riga were taken over by the German civil administration and the LOC ceased to exist.³⁰

Step by step, in a calculated fashion, Hitler's plans for subjugating the Baltic region moved towards total German control, both military and political. Though there existed a percentage of the Latvian population who remained faithful to the Germans throughout the wartime years, those who remained politically aware soon realized that the German administration was acting in a manner frighteningly similar to that of the Soviets.

The Germans proved remarkably efficient at establishing organized governmental control of the newly occupied territory. Within weeks, the Reich hierarchy had firmly imposed a strict occupation government. Riga was made the seat of power for all of the Eastern Occupied territories. On 17 July, Hitler appointed Alfred Rosenberg Reich Minister for the Occupied Eastern Region.³¹ Hitler chose Rosenberg on the grounds that he wanted someone with firsthand knowledge of the Eastern territory. Rosenberg was strongly anti-Semitic, a loyal repatriated Baltic German who had fled from his home in Estonia when the Soviets took control in

³⁰Ibid., p. 61.

³¹Mangulis, Latvia in the Wars of the 20th Century, p. 98.

1940. Rosenberg fancied the Baltic States as German protectorates which would fit perfectly into Hitler's grand scheme of a greater Reich. Once the "undesirables" had been eradicated, Rosenberg saw himself leader of a pure, Aryan Eastern territory under his personal jurisdiction and control.

Rosenberg established an office in Riga for the purpose of studying how to convince the local people to accept German culture and ideology. He employed approximately 20 people, mostly academics, for this purpose.³² The same office also closely monitored the press and censored books considered to be in conflict with the propagation of German patriotism.

Rosenberg was not, however, the great leader he fancied himself to be. He is described as having been "incapable of intrigue...(and) incapable of straightforward outspokenness to the Führer."³³ As a result, the political struggles which characterized most of the German administration as a whole troubled administration in the Eastern territory as well. The new German administrative appointments were kept secret until November. On 18 November (Latvian Independence Day), Rosenberg announced that the occupied Baltic

³²Unāms, "Latviešu tautas traģēdija," p. 85.

³³Alexander Dallin, German Rule in Russia 1941-1945: A Study in Occupation Policies (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1957), p. 26.

territories were from that time on to be called the "Ostland."³⁴ Rosenberg ultimately enjoyed very little actual administrative authority over the countries in his jurisdiction.

Heinrich Himmler, leader of the German SS, over the vehement protests of Rosenberg was given full authority by Hitler himself to police the occupied territory. To Rosenberg, this signified a loss of administrative control, which, in fact, was true. Himmler had been granted authority to "appoint police officials and dispatch forces into the areas of civil government" acting "independently and on his own responsibility."³⁵ Himmler's security branch, the Sicherheitsdienst or SD, often wielded greater power than the German administrative agencies, and it was not long before the initials "SD" became as intimidating and fear-invoking as "NKVD" had been.

Making rules and ensuring the words of the proclamations were heard and obeyed required the establishment of an effective police state. Arrests and other attempts directed at discouraging resistors fell under the direction of the German Geheime Feldpolizei (Secret Field Police). The Feldpolizei operated under the control

³⁴Mangulis, Latvia in the Wars of the 20th Century, p. 98.

³⁵Dallin, German Rule in Russia 1941-1945, p. 27.

of the German Abwehr (German Armed Services), the organization in charge of protecting German interests in the event of subversive activities against the Reich. This assignment included the responsibility of predicting or otherwise finding out enemy plans. As operational under the wing of the Reich's central intelligence and security authority, the Geheime Feldpolizei could be found "in field grey or plain clothes, as they chose" and were as fearsome and unpredictable as the underground forces they aimed to destroy.³⁶

The Germans determined policing policies in the occupied territories based upon their experiences in occupied territories. Allies (Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria) and "potential allies" (Holland, Denmark, Norway) required only local policing. Enemy countries (i.e. unfriendly occupied territories) were actively policed, falling subject to policies of "total repression, the destruction of local cadres, and eventually of extermination."³⁷ As the Germans learned of the extreme nationalism of many Latvians, the system of control grew tighter. Latvia ultimately was considered unfriendly territory.

³⁶Brian Chapman, "The German Counter-Resistance," in Resistance in Europe, eds. Stephen Hawkes and Ralph White (London: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1975), p. 174.

³⁷Ibid., p. 172.

This policy was largely the result of early Latvian efforts to gain some measure of autonomy. First attempts at autonomy were quickly quelled, as is evidenced by the short lived LOC. Those who believed that even under German occupation Latvians must be left in control of their own affairs quickly irritated the local German administration. Some of these first activists were quietly urged to discontinue their efforts, such as members of the LOC who found themselves without authorization and lacking a building in which to hold their meetings. Warnings not heeded often resulted in arrests. The fate of others was worse still.

The Gestapo, the police branch of the SD, succeeded in infiltrating almost every branch of civil activity--libraries, schools, public offices--to obtain information and keep a close watch on the locals. A person could never be sure that their neighbor actually was the nationalist he claimed to be or a Nazi informant, baiting conversation to entrap true Latvian nationalists. The German administration soon had successfully placed the Latvian population in a state of fear.

Himmler's Gestapo received assistance from a Latvian anti-Ulmanite fascist group who called themselves Pērkonkrusts (Cross of Thunder), formerly known as Ugunskrusts (Cross of Fire). Pērkonkrusts as an active

political entity was outlawed by the Latvian government in 1934, at which time the group dispersed and its leader Gustavs Celmiņš fled to Finland. The Soviet reign of terror saw many former anti-Ulmanite Pērkonkrusts members arrested by the communists, and among those who survived, anti-communist feeling flared hotter than ever before. When the Soviets had been driven from Latvia, Pērkonkrusts regrouped and captured roughly 98% of the Gestapo positions in Latvia.³⁸

The Germans gladly accepted the support of these Latvian fascists, and over the next year and a half, members of Pērkonkrusts aided in capturing and liquidating many Latvian nationalists who had earlier supported the Ulmanis regime. When Pērkonkrusts had served its purpose for the Germans and began to advertise their own political intentions, the Germans promptly outlawed them just as they had been by Ulmanis in 1934.³⁹ Collaborative work towards strengthened German control proved the only grounds under which Latvian cooperation was accepted by the German authorities. Hitler's policy towards collaborators was "purely pragmatic...to the Nazi leaders the only groups who counted were those which could assist them in specific

³⁸Unāms, "Latviešu tautas traģēdija," p. 57.

³⁹Osvalds Freivalds, Kurzemes Cietoksnis I (Copenhagen: Imanta, 1954), p. 127.

circumstances towards a definite object. They supported some and abandoned others according to the efficiency they showed...."⁴⁰ Once Pērkonkrusts had fulfilled their purpose for the Germans, there existed no need for keeping them.

Local administration was primarily economic. Two days after Rosenberg received his appointment, Heinrich Löhse was appointed Reich Commissar (civilian chief) for the same area.⁴¹ Where Rosenberg may have been soft, Löhse was a diehard Nazi with superior administrative capabilities and a head for details. As a result of his policies and leadership, "the industrial capacity of Ostland contributed far more to the war effort of the Reich than that of other, potentially richer areas."⁴² Often, however, such efficiency proved the result of oppressive brutality. It was Löhse who issued a decree adopted throughout the eastern territories that every Jew:

"wear 2 yellow badges--one on the chest, one on the back--not to walk on the pavements, not to use public transport, not to visit parks, playgrounds, theatres, cinemas, libraries or museums; and to receive only food which was surplus to local needs."⁴³

⁴⁰Michel, The Shadow War, p. 38.

⁴¹Clarence A. Manning, The Forgotten Republics (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1952), p. 223.

⁴²Alan Clark, Barbarossa: The Russian-German Conflict, 1941-45 (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1965), p. 69.

⁴³Gilbert, The Second World War, p. 223.

Such oppressive, restrictive anti-Semitic ordinances enforced Nazism and increased overall brutality. Later, in mid-October, such policies allowed for the establishment of ghettos in Riga to hold approximately 30,000 Latvian Jews.⁴⁴ Between 1941-1945, approximately 70,000 Latvian Jews are believed to have been brutally slain.⁴⁵ Löhse appears to have had no room for compassion--in November 1941, he ordered a halt to killings in Liepāja (Libava), but for economic rather than moral reasons. It seems that Lohse was concerned that useful manpower was being wasted.⁴⁶ In the interests of maintaining peace and therefore productivity, Lohse proposed an idea accepted by Adolf Eichmann. He suggested that Jews coming by train should "after reaching Riga, be killed by mobile gas vans", thus avoiding public spectacle and saving regular army officers from having to shoot "women and children in cold blood."⁴⁷ This policy, among others, was adopted throughout Reich territory. Already in the first week of German occupation, mass

⁴⁴Reuben Ainsztein, Jewish Resistance in Occupied Eastern Europe (London: Elek Books Limited, 1974), p. 231.

⁴⁵Mangulis, Latvia in the Wars of the 20th Century, p. 102.

⁴⁶Gilbert, The Second World War, p. 256.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 251.

slaughter of Jews and other "undesirables" was taking place throughout Latvia.⁴⁸

The local German administration immediately had set about creating and enforcing new laws. Perhaps the most constricting of measures taken was the declaration that any form of public gathering or speechmaking on the part of the Latvian people was illegal and non-compliance with this mandate was a reason for arrest.⁴⁹ As one interpretation puts it, the policies maintained by the Germans were characterized by "brutal political possession, racial intolerance, economic plunder and total lack of sensitivity for the national aspirations of the Balts."⁵⁰

A report published later in the war by the Latvian embassy in the United States describes the following conditions in Latvia under German occupation:

"The wages of the workers in the Baltic States were fixed at 30-50% of those paid to German workers. The official food rations fail to supply even half of the minimum of calories. To buy food in excess of the official rations is a very serious crime (Reich Germans are allowed to purchase and to export as much as they like)... The working hours were prolonged to 9-11 hours a day (and it is) practically next to impossible to buy clothing, footwear and underwear."⁵¹

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 213.

⁴⁹Eriks Pārups, "Pretestības organizācijas laikraksti vācu laikā," Jaunā Gaita 165 (December 1987): 33.

⁵⁰Ludmilla Alexiev, Soviet Dissent ((Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1985), p. 5.

In addition to restricting the economic power of the locals in the cities and towns of Latvia, farmers were shaken down in the country and their produce taken or bought at far below worth and sent to Germany.⁵² German soldiers confiscated livestock, leaving many farms with only one cow and one pig or sheep.⁵³ Later as the war situation grew more desperate, German soldiers stood by as produce was gathered and grain was milled.

Nearly all methods employed by the Germans in the physical subjugation of the Latvians were based upon continuing what the Soviets had begun. Following along the lines of German self-serving policies in occupied territory, rightful owners of private property found themselves denied basic rights. Systems such as trade unions and social insurance introduced by the Soviet regime remained firmly in place. All enterprises which had been expropriated by the Soviets were taken over by German firms created expressly for that purpose.⁵⁴ Opportunist businessmen came from

⁵¹Alfred Bilmanis, "To the International Federation of Trade Unions," Collection, 1944-1948, Hoover Archives, Stanford, California.

⁵²Anastāsijs Čakste, "Konstantīns Čakste--Latviešu pretestības kustība," Papers, 1927-1976, Hoover Archives, Stanford, California.

⁵³Edgar Anderson, "Memoirs of Captain Leonid I. Ujerts, liaison man in Stockholm," Miscellaneous papers, 1944-1984, Hoover Archives, Stanford, California.

⁵⁴Misiunas and Taagepera, The Baltic States: Years of Dependence, p. 51.

Germany and built up "private industrial empires," taking advantage of the situation by using confiscated businesses to "manufacture and market luxuries..which were banned in the more tightly organized economy of the Reich."⁵⁵ The Germans masterfully introduced companies which exemplified capitalism, a concept the locals knew very little about. In place of ethics and morality, the Germans supported their actions with politically expedient arguments, sanctifying their shameless thievery by proclaiming the German Reich "legal heir to the Soviet inheritance."⁵⁶

These conditions increased preexisting differences. Just as during the brief period of Latvian independence political factions held dissenting opinions as to how the new government was to be run, opinions regarding how the occupation should be handled differed as well. With the economy and the administration German controlled, German occupation in Latvia was complete. Short of Allied intervention, the conditions were bound to remain as such. Sabotaging German influence required a knowledge of how to work within the existing German framework.

German intelligence was a far reaching web, and the Germans used Latvian efforts so long as they were anti-Soviet. Once activity was seen as anti-German as well,

⁵⁵Clark, Barbarossa, p. 69.

⁵⁶Manning, The Forgotten Republics, p. 224.

these groups were destroyed. Two ideas emerged as solutions to the situation: do just as the Germans wished and hope that things would somehow work themselves out or find a way to operate undetected within the occupational structure to sabotage the Germans. These two ideas manifested themselves in two ways: some participated in a German controlled provisional government while others attempted individual programs. Rather than work together in an effort to maintain a certain level of self-reliance, the two groups which were so similar in nature, chose to, for the most part, ignore or condemn the activities of the other. The development of both lines of reasoning reflects the disharmony between the two.

CHAPTER III

THE STRUGGLE FOR NATIONAL SURVIVAL

Soon after the initial occupation, the Germans took steps to utilize the anti-Soviet sentiments of the Latvians to their benefit. Operating in foreign territory, the Germans soon realized that alienating locals made the effort of occupying and maintaining control difficult. On 16 July 1941, Hitler held a conference with top Reich officials where he discussed his plans now that Russia had been invaded. So as not to "prematurely antagonize" the Balts, Hitler proposed that the Germans continue to appease the Latvians by playing the role of liberators and further to justify the high level of control over civic affairs by pleading wartime conditions the reason for strict policies.⁵⁷ Allowing the Latvians autonomy, however, remained out of the question. "The road to self-governance leads to independence...(and) one cannot keep by democratic institutions what one has acquired by force," Hitler told his officials.⁵⁸

⁵⁷Mangulis, Latvia in the Wars of the 20th Century, p. 98.

⁵⁸Dallin, German Rule in Russia 1941-1945, p. 57.

As German occupied territory grew in size, Reich leaders began allowing lower level administrations to develop among nationalities considered "racially acceptable," into which category the Latvians fell. One method for ensuring continued Latvian support involved allowing a small measure of self-administration, though not as an organization with the authority to decide policy. What the Germans succeeded in creating was an organization which would aid in the management of Latvia. Soon after Rosenberg's appointment, those who had been attempting to establish a provisional government in Latvia were told that such plans had already been laid in Berlin: a cabinet made up of Rosenberg's uzticības štābs (loyal staff), consisting of 1939 and 1941 repatriated citizens, would soon arrive in Latvia to begin work as the new Latvian government.⁵⁹

Repatriated citizens were Latvians who had left Latvia for Germany while the Soviets occupied Latvia. Repatriated citizens were brought back with a purpose and not allowed to return to their homes and earlier places of employment.⁶⁰ Oskars Dankers was one such Latvian and was appointed by the Germans as head of the new Latvian Self-Administration on 21 August 1941. Dankers, former commander of a division in the Latvian Army prior to the war, had retired from military

⁵⁹Zemgals, Dienas baltās, nebaltās, p. 64.

⁶⁰Unāms, "Latviešu tautas traģēdija," p. 58.

service in January 1940 and fled to Germany in July, fearing that his high position in the military meant certain death under the Soviets. In July 1941, Dankers returned to Latvia and accepted the position, believing that any measure of power granted to the Latvians was far more agreeable than total German control. After discussing the issue with those who had earlier tried to establish a Latvian provisional government in July, Dankers selected the members and completed the organization of the new Latvian Self-Administration in December 1941. The organization received official German approval on 18 March 1942.⁶¹

The formation of the Self-Administration led by respected Latvians drove the first great wedge between Latvians willing to submit to German rule and those who were diametrically opposed to such an idea. A group with German approval for many was translated as the road to freedom or, if nothing else, would give Latvians some control over civic administration. Membership in the new provisional self-government reflected how the political makeup of Latvia had been drastically altered since the unexpected loss of independence in 1939. In 1940-41, Latvian nationalists who spoke out against the Soviet occupation found themselves quickly forced underground or into exile. The communists

⁶¹Mangulis, Latvia in the Wars of the 20th Century, p. 100.

had murdered or deported the last twenty Saeima (the Latvian government before the war) leaders as well as countless political activists.⁶² By the time Latvian Self-Administration became a reality, nearly all previously active politicians were gone. Of the most well-known, the only former political leaders involved in the Self-Administration were Alberts Kviesis (former Latvian national president) and Alfreds Valdmanis (former minister of finance), both of whom participated for a short time in a judicial capacity.

Those who participated hoped that cooperation would mean security and that Latvians would be remembered favorably when Germany won the war and got around to granting large measures of autonomy to occupied territories. Also, there existed a chance that a certain measure of control could be exercised over German decisions involving Latvian soldiers. As it turned out, the Self-Administration accomplished only a few minor victories over German policies and never amounted to being more than a puppet of the German state, ready to carry out orders and not upset the occupational regime lest it decide to persecute even more Latvians.

⁶²Osvalds Freivalds, Latviesu Politiskas Partijas 60 Gados (Copenhagen: Imanta, 1961), p. 148.

The Latvian Self-Administration, by being a German sanctified organ, stood for many Latvians as a concretized nationalist program, capable of operating within the context of German administration to gain autonomy. The power of the Self-Administration, however, was a myth. The German administration played the members as puppets, using their influence to sway public opinion to best suit German needs. This became especially significant when Germany recognized the need to employ Latvians in their armed forces.

The number of people involved in either joining the German armed forces or, on the contrary, resisting such participation was not great in the beginning. In the months that followed the German occupation, the characteristic percentage of resisters and collaborators combined was "hardly ever...as high a proportion as 5 percent of each occupied population."⁶³ The numbers are revealing only in that they evidence the complicated and confusing nature of the Soviet-German conflict as viewed by the Latvians. As the harshness of German rule and poor conditions in volunteer ranks became evident, the number of volunteers in the German battalions dropped.

The first military endeavors of the Latvians so grateful to see the Soviets out of Latvia ended in disaster.

⁶³M.R.D. Foot, Resistance: European Resistance to Nazism 1940-1945 (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1977), p. 152.

In theory and presentation, these battalions had been advertised by the Germans as border patrols. Men either having volunteered or been drafted into these battalions, however, often found themselves sent to the front as reserves, poorly equipped and lacking the necessary training.⁶⁴ These first Latvian battalions, as well as similar battalions formed in neighboring Estonia, found themselves during the first winter "thrown into the front line to plug gaps."⁶⁵ Thousands died that first winter, believing they were fighting for the independence of Latvia.

Already in 1941 Germany experienced a decrease in available manpower. The new war industry demanded a substantial increase in both military and labor organizations. Before launching Operation Barbarossa, Hitler had been told that the strength of Soviet troops would match his own (approximately 155 divisions). By the end of 1941, German intelligence was finding out that the military strength of the Soviet Union far exceeded that of Germany: Stalin had at his disposal 200 infantry divisions, 35 cavalry divisions and 40 armored brigades plus more potential sources of manpower in the far reaches of the

⁶⁴Artūrs Silgailis, Latviešu Leģions (Copenhagen: Imanta, 1962), p. 15.

⁶⁵George H. Stein, The Waffen SS: Hitler's Elite Guard at War 1939-1945 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), p. 174.

Soviet Union.⁶⁶ By November 1941, feeling assured that the Japanese would strike to the South rather than North toward Mongolia and Siberia, the Soviets turned their troops from Far East positions to the Moscow front. On 1 December, Hitler ordered an attack on Moscow, believing the Soviet defenses weak at best.

By this time, the Germans had a 200 mile semicircle line on the Northern front, comprised of divisions from the Army Groups North and Center. On 6 December, the Soviets launched an effective attack on the German Army Group Center and succeeded in driving the German line back 40 miles. As the war escalated, Soviet troops grew stronger as sources of German manpower were slowly exhausted. As the icy Russian winter set in, German soldiers and divisions from the occupied territory suffered under poor conditions on the Russian front. German uniforms replaced Latvian Army uniforms, made of wool and capable of withstanding wet, sub-zero temperatures, with standard German issue uniforms of synthetic blends, hardly appropriate for conditions on the Russian front. By early 1942, the Wehrmacht had suffered losses totalling nearly "35% of the total force committed"--over a million casualties.⁶⁷ Himmler's Waffen SS suffered

⁶⁶Rupert Butler, The Black Angels: A History of the Waffen SS (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), pp. 119-120.

⁶⁷Stein, The Waffen SS: Hitler's Elite Guard at War, p. 167.

the most, a result of following Hitler's every directive, regardless of how insane, to the letter. Many Latvians died this first winter, and as a result, the number of volunteers for the Wehrmacht's "self-defense" units dropped significantly.

The Soviet Army, having recovered from the initial shock of German invasion, regrouped and gained a partial initiative, backing up their military efforts with what appeared to be an inexhaustible supply of men. In February 1942, the Germans restabilized their front as it appeared that the Russian counteroffensive along the Northern front threatened to break through German defenses. In anticipation of having to defend the Ostland, discussion in the Wehrmacht turned favorably towards the idea of a large military mobilization in the Baltic region. Upon being informed of the Wehrmacht's intention, the Baltic SS representative demanded that, should such a situation arise, the SS be entrusted with the task, arguing that only under SS supervision would the Balts receive "the proper ideological orientation and National Socialist leadership."⁶⁸ Immediate danger in the North soon passed, but the idea of forming national legions in the Baltic region had taken root in Berlin.

⁶⁸George H. Stein, The Waffen SS: Hitler's Elite Guard at War, p. 137.

The summer of 1942 saw the German occupation of Stalingrad. Bloody battles on the streets of city kept the Germans from enjoying an occupation such as the one already secured in the Baltic States. By the end of September, flags emblazoned with swastikas flew over the city and it seemed as though their ideal had been realized. As the Germans basked in their success, Soviet military leaders planned their counteroffensive.

In November 1942, Soviet forces encircled Stalingrad with a startling display of tactics and execution, effectively cutting off the German 6th Army's communication and supply lines. Hitler ordered his troops to stand their ground; to suffer defeat at Stalingrad meant the loss of the "most substantial achievement of the war."⁶⁹ Over the next few months, German troops in Stalingrad lay under a state of siege and ultimately lost their ground. The war had turned against the Germans. Despite all attempts to regain territory lost in the Soviet counteroffensive, the Germans were forced to retreat.

After capitulating in Stalingrad to the Soviets on 2 February 1943, the Germans found themselves withdrawing from their aggressive offensive. As German troops fell back defeated, the confidence German troops exuded in the first

⁶⁹Earl F. Ziemke, Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968), p. 58.

sweep of Operation Barbarossa had been visibly shaken. Morale in the German Army suffered as the effects of Hitler's charisma began to fade. At Stalingrad alone, German forces lost over 200,000 soldiers.⁷⁰ Alternative sources of manpower would be necessary for the Germans to stand any chance of regaining the offensive.

Early in 1943, the Latvian Self-Administration petitioned to reestablish the Latvian Army at the strength of 100,000 men: the request was denied, but as a result SS General Gotlob Berger suggested to Himmler that the SS "create a unit of volunteers who are racially acceptable and put them at the disposal of the Reichsführer SS...(and) if they are suitable, as a Latvian Legion."⁷¹ As a result of the increasingly desperate situation on the Northern front, the proposal gained the support of SS leader Heinrich Himmler and later the support of Hitler as well.

Germany restabilized their position on the Northern Front and Hitler renewed his offensive on the Soviet Union. In July 1943, German troops launched Operation Citadel, an all-out attack on the Kursk salient in Central Russia. The goal of this operation was to straighten out the German line and throw the Russians off balance long enough for the

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 69.

⁷¹Stein, The Waffen SS: Hitler's Elite Guard at War, p. 176.

Germans to take Leningrad. The goal was never realized: in what came to be the largest tank battle of World War, German Panzer divisions faced the sheer brute strength of the Soviets in a clash of armor the likes of which the world had never seen. The German 6th Army captured 17,000 Soviet soldiers and suffered 23,855 casualties.⁷² The battle came at a high price--the Germans lost many men and most of their held territory by the end of 1943.

Soon after the German defeat at Kursk, the Self-Administration was finally granted one of its many requests--that Latvia be allowed to establish a Latvian Army. As it turned out, there was a significant condition. The army would be a legion of Latvian men, operating under the auspices of Hitler's most elite and deadly fighting force, the Waffen SS.

The Waffen SS had been originally organized as a defense corps, and began its existence as a small, highly disciplined personal bodyguard for Hitler. Later, under the leadership of Heinrich Himmler, it became the elite corps of the Nazi party. As the Waffen SS emerged as the elite German fighting force, it was quickly discovered just how severe the recruiting problem within German borders had become. Nearly all eligible men had already been drafted into the German Army by 1942. In a push to build up their

⁷²Ziemke, Stalingrad to Berlin, p. 138.

fighting force, Waffen SS leaders turned to conscription beyond German borders in occupied territories where no Wehrmacht general could interfere with recruitment.⁷³ Also, the Baltic States were far enough away from Germany that the extent of Nazi atrocities was not common knowledge, a fact which significantly aided recruitment efforts.

Now that the goal of establishing a Latvian Legion had been decided, thoughts turned to matters of recruitment. Previous drafts, presented as labor drafts, had left the Latvians distrustful of official mandates direct from the Reich. Without softening the order by filtering it through a Latvian organization, chances were that mobilization for the Latvian Legion also would have failed.

Conveniently, at this time, rumors regarding the restoration of Latvian independence began circulating around the Self-Administration. As a result, when it came to time to decide whether or not to comply with the German request to help mobilize a Latvian Legion, opinion leaned more favorably towards acceptance. Meeting after meeting of the Self-Administration took place; constant dissention kept them from reaching consensus. Voices against the mobilization spoke of distrust for the Germans. Perhaps Alfreds Valdmanis expressed it best by asking:

⁷³Heinz Hohne, Order of the Death's Head: The Story of Hitler's SS (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1969), p. 457.

"What shall we tell the people they are fighting for? Give us independence, then we'll fight. The answer is brief--the Fuhrer can not be troubled with such trivialities, he must concentrate on ridding the world of communism."⁷⁴

So as to prevent further outbursts which could potentially sway opinion, Valdmanis soon found himself exiled in Germany for the rest of the war. Finally, the Self-Administration decided that a Latvian Legion could help the Latvian situation, as long as it was administered through the Self-Administration under the leadership of Latvian ex-Minister of War Rudolfs Bangerskis.⁷⁵ On 23 March, 1943, Bangerskis addressed the Latvian people urging participation in the Latvian Legion.

As it stood, many eligible Latvians recognized the threat of Soviet reoccupation and joined the Latvian Legion voluntarily. Many men escaped the draft, having been classified UK (unabkoemlich, translated as meaning indispensable and therefore exempt from military service), "in order to keep the economy running and meet the requirements of the new war industry."⁷⁶ For a price (and the right connections), UK status could be bought for 4,000-10,000 RM.⁷⁷ For the rest, the Germans had their

⁷⁴E. Jurka, Atbalss, November/December 1980, p. 8.

⁷⁵Unāms, Latviešu tautas traģēdija, p. 181.

⁷⁶Taylor, Uniforms, History and Organization of the Waffen SS, p. 16.

⁷⁷Unāms, "Latviešu tautas traģēdija," p. 305.

ways. Men of draft age received three written "invitations." If the third notice was ignored, the SS took over and forced the men to "voluntarily" enlist.⁷⁸ When men refused to go of their own volition, they were often carried away from their homes by the local police. Further resistance to conscription requests often resulted in arrests. By the end of 1943, some 6000 Latvian men, many of whom had resisted the Germans, found themselves incarcerated at Salaspils, a concentration camp in Latvia.⁷⁹ With information flowing from a number of different sources, the Germans, when they wished, found it no great trick to effectively conscript the men, calling on any and all records at their disposal. Common wartime practices such as rationing and conscription served only to reinforce the existing documentation by churches and records from identification cards issued during Latvia's independence.⁸⁰

Having the Self-Administration support the mobilization aided the German effort to a considerable degree, but still many Latvians refused to believe that a Latvian Legion under the Germans would be in Latvia's best interests. Local German authorities began issuing decrees and signing the

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 182.

⁷⁹Anastāsijs Čakste, Papers 1927-1976.

⁸⁰Chapman, "The German Counter-Resistance," p. 173.

name of Bangerskis to them without his knowledge.⁸¹ Still, this was not enough. A summarized report forwarded to Himmler in May 1943 from the Waffen SS headquarters "collated 13 reports from the recruiting centers and they told a story of complete failure." Of the Baltic States the report described "home influence unfavourable."⁸²

To combat anti-German sentiments required a special skill for which the Nazis remain infamous--propaganda. Latvian recruits found themselves drowning in sophisticated nationalistic propaganda. The message was, after all, what the Latvians wished to hear: German recruiting squad leaders promised the so-called volunteers that "by serving Germany in the war they would assure their country's independence in Adolf Hitler's New Germany."⁸³ As more and more nationalistic and hopeful Latvians listened they heard:

"Latvia has already been granted self-government; no restrictions are placed on its cultural life; even its economy is beginning to revive...after the war, Latvia will continue to enjoy independence and in close association with the Reich will once more blossom in every way."⁸⁴

⁸¹Unāms, "Latviešu tautas traģēdija," p. 182.

⁸²Louis L. Snyder, ed., Hitler's Third Reich: A Documentary History Snyder, Documentary History (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, Inc., 1981) p. 287.

⁸³Hohne, Order of the Death's Head, p. 477.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 510.

Nearly two years after the German invasion of Russia and two years before Germany capitulated in 1945, Berger's suggestion had brought to life the Latvian Legion, as well as attempts to establish similar legions in the other two Baltic states. Much of the Latvian work force was taken--this considerably hurt the agricultural community at harvest time. Some 15,000 Latvians had been recruited into the Latvian Legion, but "shortages in equipment, lack of barracks, and other shortcomings in the administration of the program delayed their induction" so that by 15 April, the Legion consisted of only 2,478 Latvians.⁸⁵ The first Latvian troops combined Latvians recruits and German infantry brigades to make the Waffen-Grenadierdivision der SS Lettische No. 1. By September 1943, the soldiers of the Waffen SS constituted more than 5% of the strength of the entire German Army.⁸⁶ By the end of the war, the number of non-Germans serving in the ranks of the Waffen SS far exceeded the number of Germans. Of the 38 SS divisions existing in 1945, none was composed entirely of native Germans and 19 consisted almost exclusively of foreign personnel.⁸⁷

⁸⁵Stein, The Waffen SS: Hitler's Elite Guard at War, p. 176.

⁸⁶Matthew Cooper, The Germany Army 1933-45: Its Political and Military Failure (New York: Stein and Day, p. 1978), p. 450.

The Germans appointed Bangerskis "General Inspector" of the newly formed Legion. Once the mobilizations were complete, the Germans conveniently forgot their promise to appoint Latvian commanders for the troops and Bangerskis soon discovered that his role of General Inspector exercised virtually no control over the fate of the troops.⁸⁸ Where the troops were to be sent, transfers and dismissals all fell to the whims of the SS. Conditions in the Latvian Legion were poor. Lack of both arms and necessary training whittled away at morale. Had it not been for the dual fear of reprisals by the SS and of Soviet troops crossing over into Latvia again, most of the Latvian soldiers would not have remained in the Legion ranks at all.

As the war continued, the Latvian economy teetered on the brink of collapse. Large numbers of young men had been shipped off to war, leaving farms and factories attended only by wives, children and the older population. Clearly, some plan was required to save what remained of pre-war Latvia. On 30 July 1944, Dankers called a meeting of 30-35 people to discuss military, economic and administrative issues. Should there be another mobilization, he pointed out, the result would be devastating; a serious weapons shortage already existed and by taking more men away from

⁸⁷Stein, The Waffen SS: Hitler's Elite Guard at War, p. 137.

⁸⁸Unāms, "Latviešu tautas traģēdija," p. 183.

their farms and jobs, the country's administrative and agricultural communities were bound to suffer even more.⁸⁹

The German administration was also aware of how a second mobilization in Latvia could potentially cause many more problems, but winning the war had become paramount. In their eyes, the war had to be won at any cost. The second mobilization took place in early July 1944. By 19 July, Soviet troops had penetrated the Latvian border in Vidzeme. The Latvian Legion trudged off to war, poorly equipped and lacking training. Though they fought courageously, believing that somehow they could save their homeland from its inevitable fate, the Latvian Legion was useless against the heavy artillery and overwhelming numbers of Soviet troops. Those who stayed at home continued to feel the effects of a desperate war and many began to turn away from supporting the Germans.

Mobilization in 1944 went more slowly than before as a result of German practices in the first draft. Of 40,000 men called to service, about 10,000 did not respond. Of those who did join the forces, 3-5% deserted.⁹⁰ The second mobilization created a Legion that was primarily Latvian, both in membership and immediate military leadership. Men

⁸⁹Rudolfs Bangerskis, Mana mūža atmiņas (Copenhagen: Imanta, 1960), p. 10.

⁹⁰Unāms, "Latviešu tautas traģēdija," p. 305.

born in 1925-26 were targeted in this mobilization, for many of them had been serving in the labor forces and could more easily be found and drafted. As the Legion expanded into divisions, the Latvian security battalions were absorbed as well. The first Latvian Legion thus became the 15th Waffen-Grenadierdivision der SS (Lett. No. 1) and the second was named the 19th. When the Germans withdrew most of their fighting force from the Baltic States, the 15th division was decimated in defending Pomerania. The 19th division remained in Kurland and those who did not desert fought until the final days of the war in 1945.

Even through the final days of the war, many of the Latvian legionnaires believed they participated in a fight for Latvian independence, not for German imperialism. Patriotism led many Latvian men to participate in the Legion. The same patriotism led others to resist. Those who did not cooperate with the Self-Administration and the Legion drafts were perhaps the closest to what could be called resistance. They saw the Germans as equivalent to the Soviets and refused to participate in what they construed as supporting the German occupation.

The Latvian nationalists who resisted German control, however, realized that a certain amount of cooperation was necessary to achieve any semblance of autonomy. The Germans decided every aspect of the economic and political structure

of Latvia and working independently of such a force was an exercise in futility. The first attempts at securing some degree of autonomy exempt from German control failed miserably. In 1941, as plans for a German controlled provisional government were being formulated, some Latvians tried to forge their own trails toward independence. Alfreds Valdmanis of the LOC (Latvian Organization Center) attempted to gain the support of Latvians known to have influence with the Germans. Valdmanis sought the aid of former Latvian Army commander Viktors Deglavs. Deglavs, previously Latvia's military attache in Berlin, had remained in Germany while the Soviets occupied Latvia. Along with General Aleksandrs Plesners (Latvian military attache from Kaunas), he had devised a plan for an autonomous Latvian government while still in Germany. Reich officials in Berlin accepted their plan, but constantly postponed its execution.⁹¹ On returning to Latvia, Plesners and Deglavs were basically told that decisions in Latvia would be made by the military and civil issues would be discussed at some later time.

In later meetings with local German officials, Deglavs had been given the impression, along with Oskars Dankers and General Aleksandrs Plesners, that there was a chance of establishing an independent Latvian government. As with all

⁹¹Ibid., p. 49.

proposals which seemed too good to be true, however, a significant condition existed. The Latvians would be granted a Self-Administration, but battalions of volunteers must be formed to help the German war effort. When Plesners and Deglavs approached Valdmanis and asked that he participate in the new Self-Administration as minister of agricultural affairs, Valdmanis turned down the offer, knowing that such a move would inevitably compromise the Latvian people.⁹²

It did not take long for Deglavs to realize that the Germans were less interested in working with Latvians than they were in the subjugation of his countrymen. Deglavs took on the job of organizing Latvian Army units, but attempted to make them Latvian nationalist units rather than a part of the German Army. The German administration got more than they bargained for in Deglavs and soon began to mistrust his motives in cooperating. Deglavs publicly expressed his anti-Nazi views in an attempt to educate others about how the Germans were taking advantage of the Latvian people. Within days of Deglavs' expression of dissatisfaction, he was found murdered on the front steps of Plesners' home, a bullet in his head.⁹³ At the time of his death, Deglavs reportedly had in his possession a briefcase

⁹²Zemgals, Dienas baltās, nebaltās, p. 56.

⁹³Ibid., p. 64.

containing documents, thought by many to have included written promises of the restoration of Latvian sovereignty.⁹⁴ This briefcase was missing when Deglavs' body was discovered. Local German officials shrugged off the death as suicide and discouraged all attempts at investigation.⁹⁵

Another individual who tried to make a difference was Gustavs Celmiņš. A fanatic Latvian nationalist and former leader of Pērkonkrusts, Celmiņš was a staunch believer in both fascism and Latvian autonomy. He believed an ideal balance could be achieved under the Germans. His terms, however, were strict--already at the end of June 1941, only days after the German invasion of Russia, Celmiņš declared "If our national flag will not fly above the Kremlin next to the flag of Germany, then our independence is lost for all time."⁹⁶

Celmiņš returned to Latvia in September of 1942, believing in the Germans, much the same as many other Latvians. Following attempts to work with German officials in Berlin for the good of Latvia, Celmiņš eventually saw the Germans in their true light and changed his position with

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 64.

⁹⁵Mangulis, Latvia in the Wars of the 20th Century, p. 98.

⁹⁶Zemgals, Dienas baltās, nebaltās, p. 52.

regard to cooperating with them. He began working to educate his fellow countrymen by publishing an underground journal called Brīvā Latvija (Free Latvia) in which he set out to inform the Latvian population of Germany's plan for the occupied region. The journal he published, contained "violent attacks against the Germans."⁹⁷

Celmiņš became suspect in the eyes of the local German administration and one day was visited at his workplace by an SD officer. The officer politely invited Celmiņš to move to Germany. "With your skills and knowledge," he began, "it will not be difficult to find appropriate work and a safer existence than here." He continued by adding that, so as not to be seen as an exile, the move need last only until the end of the war or perhaps even more than six months-- only until matters got "straightened out" in Latvia. If the invitation was not accepted, the SD official informed him, Celmiņš should be aware that the Gestapo had information against him.⁹⁸ Following a publishing career which saw the periodical through 13 volumes and a circulation of 2000,

⁹⁷Document No. 96079, "Translation of a report dated 20 March 1944 about conditions in Latvia," Stockholm, Sweden, 19 June 1944, OSS and Department of State Research and Analysis, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁹⁸Gustavs Celmiņš, Eiropas krustcelos (Heidenheim: C.F. Rees, 1947), p. 4.

Celmiņš was apprehended by the Gestapo on the afternoon of 14 March 1944 and sent to a German concentration camp.⁹⁹

In a related incident, the employees of VEF, the State Electric Works, had distributed a leaflet against the German mobilization of Latvian citizens to help with the German war effort. The German authorities traced the work and about 200 employees were arrested as a result. Some were "interned in concentration camps in Latvia, but others were reported 'missing'."¹⁰⁰

These two incidents were examples of German officials monitoring all forms of the media. By the end of July 1941 the Germans had established firm control and censorship of the communications industry. In response and as a reaction, many leaflets and newspapers were printed on underground presses and circulated throughout the local populations. Often these publications served to pass along information kept from public knowledge, urging locals to adhere to anti-Nazi convictions and openly oppose German requests, most expressly those concerning mobilizations. By 1944, underground publications had become organized newspapers,

⁹⁹Felikss Cielēns, Laikmetu Mainā, vol. 3 (Lidingo, Sweden: Memento, 1964), p. 249.

¹⁰⁰Document No. 59764, "Memorandum from American Legation in Stockholm, Sweden to Secretary of State in Washington, D.C.," 26 November 1943, OSS and Department of State Research and Analysis, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

distributed to "propagate the ideas of democracy and the principles of political and personal freedom, and openly express hope for a total victory of the Western Democracies."¹⁰¹ When apprehended, those responsible for production and distribution of anti-Nazi literature were regarded by the Germans as common criminals and treated as such.

Other smaller organizations which distributed anti-Nazi literature included Patriotu Organizācija (Patriots Organization) in 1941 with Feliks Cielēns as editor; Latviešu Nacionālā Organizācija (Latvian National Organization), established February 1942 and broken up between May and November of the same year; and Brīvā Latvija (Free Latvia) which operated in early 1942.¹⁰² Information about the publications other than the fact that they existed is elusive. Small organizations such as these were often short-lived but presumably their influence served to educate and motivate Latvian citizens into resisting German decrees in whatever ways necessary to undermine the occupying power. This proved a difficult task as German propaganda had led many Latvians to believe that the only way to succeed in the

¹⁰¹Document No. 96595, "Confidential memorandum to Washington Secretary of State regarding the struggle of the Latvian people for national and political freedom," 28 June 1944, OSS and Department of State Research and Analysis, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹⁰²Pārups, "Pretestības organizācijas," p. 36.

war against the Soviet Union was to fully cooperate with the German administration. For many Latvians, this idea held more truth than they later cared to admit.

Despite German propaganda to the contrary, a heavy blanket of oppression lay over the land. With the policing and monitoring methods extant in Latvia, speaking out in public against the Germans proved to be a mere exercise in futility. The few anti-German incidents which did arise only served to incense the Germans, giving more excuses for mass arrests, sending more Latvian citizens to prisons and concentration camps. The constant threat of danger hanging over every written protest and demonstration made traditional methods of airing discontents obsolete in effectiveness.

Nevertheless, by the end of 1943, resistance had started to take on a more active form, however sporadic the attempts were. As anti-Nazi literature circulated, educating locals about wartime conditions and Nazi lies, more and more Latvians fell away from supporting the Germans. Later in the war, people grew more daring and incidents of physical sabotage occurred on a larger scale. By 1943 a communications network allowed for information regarding resistance activity in Latvia to pass to representatives outside Latvia, most expressly through Sweden. In March of 1944, one such report stated that an

operating underground had issued directives at preventing German exports from Latvia. Perhaps the most effective manifestation of this directive was the destruction of commodities intended for export. In 1943 many flour mills were burned, in January of 1944 a grain elevator was set afire in the Riga harbor area and a number of gasoline tanks destroyed.¹⁰³ Another such report from July 1943 contains the observation: "Farmers are using all manners of subterfuge to avoid delivery of their produce."¹⁰⁴ Farmers in the occupied territories fought their own form of passive and active resistance and successfully ensured that total subjugation and control remained an unattainable goal for the Germans.

Similar incidents demonstrating civilian noncompliance were rampant in the other occupied areas as well. German controlled presses in Estonia reported the arrest of 20 Estonian farmers in 1943 for "violation of war effort regulation."¹⁰⁵ Written appeals directed at Estonian farmers screamed out:

¹⁰³Document No. 3087, "Enclosure to confidential memo from American Legation in Stockholm, Sweden to Secretary of State in Washington, D.C.," 29 March 1944, OSS and Department of State Research and Analysis, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington D.C.

¹⁰⁴Document No.45509 "Despatch #1969 from American Legation," Stockholm, Sweden, 20 July 1943, OSS and Department of State Research and Analysis, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

"Farmers! Surrender your quotas only to the extent that is absolutely necessary! Help, through private channels, your own people in the cities and in the country. Do not sell food to the Germans--the profiteers at the rear. Give employment preferably to the Estonians."¹⁰⁶

Such pleas rarely fell on deaf ears. Authorities did not often apprehend those responsible for sabotaging German supplies. Owners and operators of mills always claimed unexplained fires the result of "some technical defect, such as the lack of spare parts."¹⁰⁷ Repercussions from such malicious mischief, however, resulted in persecution of the innocent and obviously discouraged some activists from repeating the efforts elsewhere. Incidents where large quantities of grain and flour mysteriously disappeared stopped shortly after Germans began arresting the often innocent managers of the enterprises concerned.¹⁰⁸

The Soviets also held a vested interest in promoting anti-German efforts. In the larger cities, they enjoyed only limited success, as the majority of Latvian workers were anti-communist. Many Soviet efforts were sabotaged by the Latvian Social Democrats or reported to the police by

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶Document No. 65922, "Summary of illegal pamphlet distributed in Estonia," 21 February 1944, OSS and Department of State Research and Analysis, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹⁰⁷OSS Document No. 3087.

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

others.¹⁰⁹ Soviet radio broadcasts delivered messages in a threatening fashion, calling on Latvians to revolt against their German oppressors, specifically "threatening to persecute for high treason the civil leaders who failed to carry out this command."¹¹⁰

As the threat of Soviet reoccupation grew, confusion among Latvian nationalists grew as well. Food supplies dwindled and lands farmed for generations lay dormant for lack of manpower or were destroyed as a result of military maneuvers and action. The Latvian Legion had led the nation's young men into a bloody conflict on the Russian front which there was no hope of winning. The Latvian Self-Administration was a puppet of the Reich. Leaflets, railroad sabotage and even martyrdom was not going to change the situation. Individual efforts and small groups wielded no power. What they lacked was central leadership, independent of German control.

The Latvian Self-Administration bowed to the whims of the local German administration for fear of invoking its wrath as independent Latvian nationalists watched frustrated at the sidelines. Individuals not supporting the Self-

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

¹¹⁰Document No. 62066, "'Report from American Legation in Stockholm, Sweden," 2 March 1944, OSS and Department of State Research and Analysis, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Administration and the Latvian Legion realized that they were unprepared for any turn of events, be it reoccupation or independence. The answer lay part in the formulation of a plan to focus all efforts towards the singular goal of recapturing Latvian independence.

Certainly the Latvian Legion was doing its best to keep the Soviets away from Latvian borders, but this did little to solve problems on the home front. An ultimate clash between the Self-Administration and more fanatical Latvian nationalists loomed ahead as the latter group began to organize their own provisional government.

CHAPTER IV

COOPERATION OR COLLABORATION: A DIVIDED PEOPLE

As the situation grew steadily more desperate on the front, Latvians at home on the shores of the Baltic became increasingly aware of the seriousness of their position under German occupation. As the situation stood, no central resistance organization existed. Smaller groups and individual efforts continued to attempt to chip away at German morale and control, but these smaller organizations were relatively powerless with no central governing body. Political structure in Latvia was limited to the Self-Administration. Especially after the way the Germans had controlled the recruitment for the Latvian Legion, it became clear that the Self-Administration was a powerless puppet government. Had the war ended and Latvians left to their own accord, politically and economically the country would have been in shambles.

During all this time, through both the Soviet and German occupations, Baltic diplomats in Stockholm had been meeting regularly to discuss events in their homelands. At the end of 1942, after discussing how to establish communications with their countrymen, these Baltic officials

learned that mail was being sent through Finland to Estonia and possibly as far as Latvia. Voldemārs Salnais, Latvia's ambassador to Sweden, upon learning of this route, set about arranging to use this mail route to gain firsthand information about conditions in Latvia. Finally, on 29 March 1943, Salnais handed off a letter to be delivered to leaders of resistance efforts in Latvia.¹¹¹

In the letter, Salnais noted that capitulation to the Soviets in 1940 without resistance left the outside world with the impression that Latvians had willingly accepted their new position.¹¹² Salnais spoke of an illegal resistance organization already existent in Estonia which worked to unite the people and their resistance efforts. He urged the Latvians to take advantage of "legal" means and follow suit. The Baltic diplomats in Stockholm met on 4 April and decided to write a proclamation of protest to the Allies and the United Nations. Salnais asked in his letter that Latvian resistance leaders forward a letter describing conditions under the Germans which could be used in the formation of such a declaration.¹¹³ Salnais received no answer for months after sending his letter.

¹¹¹Anastasija Cakste, Papers, 1927-1976.

¹¹²A. Dravnieks, "Ka radas kureliesu kustiba," Treji varti (Fall 1980): 3.

¹¹³Anastasija Cakste, Papers, 1927-1976.

On 22 July 1943, active resistance participant Leonids Silins reached the shores of Sweden, having travelled across the Baltic by fishing boat, carrying with him a wealth of periodicals, photographs and original documents showing the state of affairs in occupied Latvia.¹¹⁴ Included in the documents Silins brought were official printed German notices, decrees and laws, as well as many copies of the German newspaper Deutsche Zeitung im Ostland.¹¹⁵ From this time until the end of the war, the Latvian Legation in Sweden gathered information and issued reports, many of which have been recently declassified by the United States, to inform the free world of the situation in Latvia. At last there existed a glimmer of hope that the world would not stand by and quietly witness the destruction of the Baltic States.

Contact with Latvian representatives in the outside world had a dual effect. Most clearly, the existence of open channels of communication between occupied Latvia and representatives in the free world allowed for information regarding the situation under German occupation to be passed on to the outside. Without this information, it is very possible that the Allies would have continued to regard

¹¹⁴Edgars Andersons, "Latvijas Centrālā Padome," (typewritten), VII-186.

¹¹⁵Anastāsija Čakste, Papers, 1927-1976.

Latvia as a wholehearted ally of Germany, believing that no resistance to the Nazi occupation existed. The Latvian Legation in Stockholm, in conjunction with similar offices in London and Washington, D.C., published reports describing conditions under the occupation, asking the Allies for aid which they never received.

Not so clear is the other major effect of open communications--the heightening and sustaining of Latvian morale. With the realization that resistance activity existed and was being undertaken by many sectors of the population, both individuals and smaller groups benefited. Activists saw that their efforts were recognized and contributed to the weakening of German control. As information was passed through to contacts outside of Latvia, news flowed back in as well. Constantly bombarded with German propaganda, obtaining accurate accounts of wartime events was exceedingly difficult. What was happening at the front was often unknown, and much information was passed by word of mouth. A link to the outside world raised the chances of receiving accurate information.

Wartime conditions, however, made a regular exchange of correspondence difficult. Representatives in Latvia never received many of the letters sent from Stockholm. Months often passed before a letter received an answer, causing

frustration on both sides of the Baltic. When Silinš arrived in Stockholm by boat with his wealth of information, the official declaration of the resistance was not among the papers. Salnais sent another letter in November 1943, requesting information on resistance which had not been received. In early January, there was still no word from Latvia. Finally on 14 February, 1944, a messenger sent by Konstantīns Čakste, head of the newly formed Latviešu Centrālā Padome (Latvian Central Council or LCP), arrived by boat with a memorandum signed by 188 well-known Latvian nationalists, asking for the reestablishment of Latvian sovereignty.¹¹⁶ At long last, an official connection regarding Latvian independence had been made between those patriots inside and outside Latvia.

The communications link with Salnais in Stockholm had done much for the formation of the LCP. The ideas presented by Salnais fell into place with plans already in the works elsewhere. In the summer of 1943, Konstantīns Čakste of the Democrats and Brūno Kalniņš of the Social Democrats had met and decided to form a central political organization along with the Peasant's Party and the Latgalian Christians. Representing the Latgalian Christians was Bishop Rancāns and for the Peasant's Party, Ādolfs Klīve. These four political parties had held the majority of seats in the last meeting

¹¹⁶Ibid.

of the Saeima (the last government of independent Latvia). The founders considered representation of all four parties in a new organization an extension of power held prior to the outbreak of war.¹¹⁷

On 12 August 1943, the leaders of all four groups had come together in Klīve's Riga apartment and formed Latvijas Centrālā Padome.¹¹⁸ A confidential memo to the Secretary of State in Washington indicated that the American diplomats in Stockholm were aware of this. It read in part:

"It is said that there is one large Latvian underground organization which includes all former Latvian political parties...The organization's name is the Latvian Central Council and its aim is the reestablishment of independent Latvia. It is opposed to both Germans and Russians."¹¹⁹

The LCP was soon seen by independent Latvian nationalists as an alternative to German controlled, virtually powerless organizations such as the Latvian Self-Administration and the Latvian Legion. LCP members held that Latvian nationalism could not be compromised for any reason. Members of this new representative organization believed that they spoke for the Latvian people and could, in the name of all resistance organizations, ask for the reestablishment of Latvian independence.¹²⁰ They held that

¹¹⁷Freivalds, Kurzemes Cietoksnis I, p. 150.

¹¹⁸Cielēns, Laikmetu mainā vol. 3, p. 253.

¹¹⁹OSS Document No. 3087.

true Latvian nationalists knelt neither before the Germans nor before the Russians, but rather worked to find a solution for maintaining Latvian integrity under occupation. Many Latvian historians either dismiss the LCP as a group of useless fanatics who accomplished nothing or glorify it to the point where one would think the members saints. In truth, the LCP exemplified the true Latvian spirit-- independent, stubborn, blind and weak.

Konstantīns Čakste, leader of the Democratic faction, emerged as the leader of the LCP as well. Son of former Latvian President Jānis Čakste, Konstantīns prior to the war had concerned himself with academics rather than politics at the university. Described as "intelligent, energetic and honest," Čakste even in his university years exhibited qualities which later contributed greatly to his strength as a leader in the Latvian underground resistance.¹²¹ As one of the leaders of the Democratic party once war broke out, Čakste displayed his organizational capabilities by establishing a core of resistance activists in Riga numbering close to 300 and maintaining contact with members in other cities.¹²² Though many of these first activists were students, a group of former Latvian Army officers also

¹²⁰Freivalds, Kurzemes Cietoksnis I, p. 150.

¹²¹Cielēns, Laikmetu Maiņā vol. 3, p. 251.

¹²²Ibid., p. 252.

participated under the direction of Captain Kristaps Upelnieks. General Jānis Kurelis, who later emerged as leader of the Kurelieši (Kurelians), also participated here. The LCP brought together many former partisans who had ceased activity and longed for some way to exercise their nationalism without working directly with the Germans.

The LCP was formed in two stages. The first stage involved the establishment of legal power and national authority by setting up ties with government representatives from before the Soviet occupation. This was, again, a move to establish legitimacy. Stage two consisted of dividing the organizational work among the four founders.¹²³ The overall work of the LCP was further divided among seven committees: foreign affairs, military, informational, judicial, economic, ways and means and communications.¹²⁴

This meticulous method of organization was established for a reason. Leaders of the LCP believed that when Germany and Russia exhausted their powers during the latter stages of the war, there again would be the opportunity to regain political sovereignty. The LCP would then be free to take over the government of a free Latvia.¹²⁵ In anticipating

¹²³Ibid., p. 253.

¹²⁴Edgars Dunsdorfs, "Fragmentāras autobiografiskas piezīmes par Latvijas centrālo padomi un agresijas upuriem," Arhivs XXVII (1987): 26.

¹²⁵Freivalds, Kurzemes cietoksnis I, p. 66.

this dream becoming a reality, the LCP set about creating a structure fully prepared to act as the government of a new state, at least until free elections could be arranged.

In practice only two of the seven committees made significant contributions to the cause: foreign affairs and military. The foreign affairs sector of the LCP included some of the most influential men of the era such as Felikss Cielēns, Ludvigs Sēja and Konstantīns Čakste. Cielēns and Čakste were the guiding forces behind the Foreign Affairs Committee, working to assert the power of the LCP in the context of German occupation. In answer to Salnais' letter, Cielēns and a colleague put together the memo documenting their pledge to fight for the independence of Latvia, which was later received in Stockholm.

The LCP forwarded the memo to General Rudolfs Bangerskis, the General Director of the Latvian Legion, and asked that he use his influence with the local German administration to see to the establishment of a new coalition government willing and able to assert the need for Latvian independence. To this Bangerskis replied that such matters should be taken elsewhere.¹²⁶ Despite the lack of support from the Self-Administration, the LCP managed to gather the signatures of 188 well know Latvian persons,

¹²⁶Anastāsijs Čakste, Papers, 1927-1976.

despite the risks involved in signing such a document.¹²⁷ Thus the LCP pitted itself against the Self-Administration. From this point on, the clash between them divided both political and military organizations and created an irreparable gap. As World War Two raged through Europe, a new war had begun within Latvian borders.

When the founders of the LCP met for the first time, they drafted a platform outlining the intentions of the organization. The platform pledged the following intentions:

1. the renewal of Latvian independence and establishment of a democratic Latvian republic.
2. to prepare for free, democratic elections and stand by the 1922 Latvian constitution until a new one could be formed.
3. to grant the new Saeima economic, judicial and legislative power; break up Latvia into voting districts and do away with the multi-party system and establish a 3-4-party system.
4. to ensure that Latvia would, in the future, be militarily secure; reestablish diplomatic relations with the world's great powers and see to the return of Latvian citizens from Germany and the Soviet Union.
5. to establish a Baltic Union with Estonia and Lithuania.

The platform was then signed by Dr. P. Kalniņš, J. Rancāns, K. Čakste, Br. Kalniņš, Ā. Klīvs and K. Pauļuks.¹²⁸ Now

¹²⁷Dravenieks, "Kā radas kureliešu kustība," p. 3.

¹²⁸Anastāsija Čakste, Papers, 1927-1976.

that the foundation had been laid, the time had come to take action to see its fulfillment.

The proposed Baltic Confederation outlined by the LCP foreign affairs committee proved quite thorough and actually quite fair with regard to equal division of responsibility between the states. Under the plan, equally shared interests would be the foreign and military areas, part interest would be held in currency, customs and financial/agricultural affairs. The plan laid out the groundwork necessary for proposed interstate cooperation. A thirty member parliament consisting of elected representatives from all three states would comprise the governing body and the capital would shift every three years between Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius.¹²⁹

In working closely with leaders in Estonia and Lithuania, the zealous Latvian nationalists found themselves joined in spirit by their equally oppressed Baltic neighbors. In a new found friendship, the three states finally stood together and were willing to combine efforts to ensure a stronger base for freedom than before the war. Representatives from the central resistance organizations of all three Baltic States met in Riga in March 1944 and again in April to discuss their plans--a meeting between the

¹²⁹Cielēns, Laikmetu Maiņā vol. 3, pp. 254-55.

groups' military leaders had been planned but canceled as a result of mass arrests in Estonia.¹³⁰

Conditions in occupied Latvia began to reflect the desperation of the Germans. In September 1943, 10,000 farmers were evicted and robbed of all their land and possessions in the Dundega region of Latvia. Several thousand people living in the Russian-Latvian border area of Latgale in the same month fell subject to a mass deportation.¹³¹ Concentration camps both in Germany and Latvia were filling up with Latvian Jews and political prisoners. A statement by the LCP written in February 1944 reports that:

"Five thousand Latvian citizens are languishing in concentration camps and prisons to which they have been sent without court or trial. German police officials apply torture as a method of examination. About 10,000 Latvians have been shot...and there is no end yet to the executions. Wholesale murders of Latvian citizens of the Jewish race have also taken place..."¹³²

The letter from Salnais to LCP leaders had stressed that Latvians must also prepare themselves militarily to fight for their country's freedom. By utilizing every

¹³⁰Document No. 39273, "Survey of the political situation in Estonia," 17 July 1944, OSS and Department of State Research and Analysis, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹³¹Alfred Bilmanis, "Statement by the Latvian Underground Central Council February 1944, Riga, Latvia," Collection, 1944-1948, Hoover Archives, Stanford, California.

¹³²Ibid.

position they had under the Germans, Salnais suggested, it would be possible to establish a military force outside of the Latvian Legion which would fight the Soviets on Latvian, not German, terms.¹³³ Though many Latvians fighting in the ranks of the Latvian Legion on the front lines saw themselves as fighting for independence, they were actually fighting for German imperialism.

Latvian soldiers returning wounded from the battle line told stories of the superiority Soviet tanks and German lack of heavy artillery and ammunition. The woods were filled with young men who had either escaped the draft or deserted the Legion. At the end of January 1944, the Moscow-Leningrad line was cleared and the 880-day siege of Leningrad ended. As Soviet troops rejoiced in their victory, a cloak of fear fell over the Latvians who understood what was happening. It appeared to be only a matter of time before the Germans would retreat through Latvia, leaving the Soviets in power. The Soviet occupation of 1940-41 had not been forgotten.

The efforts of the Latvian Legion helped only the Germans in their goal and only the Latvians to the extent that the divisions, for the time being, kept Soviet troops from reentering Latvia. It was only a matter of time, however, before the German Army and the Latvian Legion would

¹³³Anastāsijs Čakste, Papers, 1927-1976.

be fighting on Latvian soil. This had now become clear to resistance leaders as well as a small percentage of Latvian citizens. Soldiers began deserting the ranks of the Latvian Legion and LCP leaders seriously started efforts to establish a Latvian military unit which would employ Legion deserters and local partisans.

In mid-1944, the Soviets were back. Even those who had earlier abstained from taking up arms against either the Germans or the Soviets now began to fight back. The second Legion mobilizations made many Latvians aware of the desperate situation, and more men joined the Latvian Legion, hoping that the Latvian forces could succeed in driving the Soviets back. Deserters and armchair soldiers needed hope--something to hold on to. The Kurelian units were the answer to the hopes of many.

The Kurelians were the military branch of the LCP, named after their nominal leader Captain Kurelis. Kurelis had served in the military as a captain from World War I through 1940, and although 62 years old maintained his fervent patriotism. However, he had lost much of his energy and possibly his courage as well.¹³⁴ The actual military organizer of the Kurelians was 53 year old Captain Kristaps Upelnieks, a fanatic nationalist who had served the Latvian

¹³⁴Edgars Andersons, "Kurelieši," Literatūra un Māksla, 2 June 1990, p. 12.

Army as a member of Lāčplēšu Ordenis, a patriotic organization which fought valiantly at the close of World War I to capture Latvian independence. Upelnieks believed that if there were a nationalistic Latvian military unit such as Lāčplēšu Ordenis had been in World War I, answering to no one but Latvians themselves, then once again freedom would be within reach. Upelnieks secretly met with Leonids Silinš, representative of the Latvian embassy in Sweden, on 22 July 1944 and plans for an independent military division were formulated 6 days later.¹³⁵

The Germans allowed the formation of the Kurelians, assigning the group to the German Army's 16th Division as the 212th division of scouts.¹³⁶ The Germans supported the Kurelians in hopes that they would both help in the fight against the Soviet Army once the front line had moved back into Latvia, and that they would also help round up Legion deserters and fight the partisans. So long as the Kurelians served German purposes, they were free to organize a military group.

Vilis Janums, a personal friend of Upelnieks and leader of the 33rd Latvian Grenadier Division, secretly prepared plans for what it would take to sufficiently arm one Latvian

¹³⁵Ibid., p. 12.

¹³⁶J. Dzintars, "Patiesība par tā saucāmo 'nacionālo opozīciju'," Dzimtenes Balss 40, September 1966.

division and sent the plans through to Sweden.¹³⁷ From Salnais' letter, the leaders of the LCP gleaned that weapons would be provided and, once the struggle began, that Latvian military units would receive help from the outside.¹³⁸ It was hoped that the arms could be secured from Finland, Sweden or Britain. What these military fanatics failed to understand was that the Latvian diplomats on the outside received no assistance from any other country and had means far below what would be needed to finance such an endeavor. Latvian representatives in Sweden survived from the money and assets held in foreign banks and Latvian refugees often had no money at all. There was barely enough to finance their own endeavors, and certainly not enough to provide the Latvian military with arms and ammunition necessary to fight either the Germans or the Soviets.

Though Upelnieks and Kurelis anticipated the formation of four divisions, only one was actually formed.¹³⁹ By mid-August, active Kurelian ranks consisted of about 600 men. Unofficially, 800-1200 men were considered "reserves" as they participated in policing capacity under the occupation government or waited at home.¹⁴⁰ Participants in the

¹³⁷Andersons, "Kurelieši," p. 12.

¹³⁸Dravnieks, "Kā radas kureliešu kustība," p. 4.

¹³⁹Dzintars, "Patiesība par tā saucāmo 'nacionālo opozīciju'."

Kurelians came from a wide range of backgrounds. Legion deserters wished to fight both the Russians and the Germans as did those who managed to escape the drafts or were fortunate enough to be classified UK (indispensable to the war effort). Those who could not buy their way to freedom or out of the conscription also joined. Soviet sympathizers joined to fight the Germans and hopefully to be rewarded for their activity once the Soviets took control again. The ones the Germans most wished to see, those fighting only the Soviets, numbered very few. A large number of the soldiers who participated, though many had no prior experience with the military, simply believed that they would live longer in the Kurelian ranks.

In 1945 with the formation of the Kurelians came the final split between those who believed that working with the Germans was the way to go, and those who foolishly believed that Latvian independence could be captured independently. To an extent, Kurelian leaders understood that achieving anything at all would require a certain amount of compliance on their part towards their German overlords. Unfortunately, by thinking they could cleverly outwit both the German administration and the Self-Government, the Kurelians acted without regard to future consequences.

¹⁴⁰Andersons, "Kurelieši," p. 13.

Wartime conditions affected every German military unit. Troops were fraught with endless shortages. An independent unit such as the Kurelians, even with nominal German support, received only the minimum of supplies. Despite the help of locals and underground supply lines for arms, Kurelian troops suffered under the same conditions as everyone else. As described by a local minister who served as chaplain for the Kurelians:

"There was a lack of weapons: they were promised, but not given... The Kurelians refused to walk in German uniform, but material for the proposed national army uniform was not easily found. It was easier with (other supplies)...donated to the Kurelians by local farmers. Kitchen duties were volunteered by the (local) wives and young women."¹⁴¹

The bulk of Kurelian arms were guns donated by the 5th Auxiliary Police Group of Riga, who had obtained them from French and Russian ranks. Only later, when the Kurelians made contact with the 16th Army's Abwehr group did they receive a supply sufficient enough to arm about 150 men.¹⁴²

Where the Kurelians could possibly have benefitted from working with the Legion, at least nominally, they only destroyed any chances of gaining support from anyone but those who thought the same as they did. When Soviet troops crossed over into Latvia, Bangerskis thought to use the Kurelians to chase out Soviet troops which had made a

¹⁴¹Freivalds, Kurzemes Cietoksnis II, p. 69.

¹⁴²Ibid., p. 68.

confident but unstable attack. Bangerskis made the suggestion to Veide, who by this time oversaw much of the Kurelian military organization. Bangerskis never received a concrete answer.¹⁴³

The Kurelians may have thought that they had everyone fooled as to their intentions, but they acted foolishly. Everywhere soldiers suffered from lack of arms and munitions. When it came time to move into Kurland to gain a steadier position against the advancing Soviet troops, the Kurelians found themselves in need of help but refused to accept it. Relations between Legion leaders and Kurelian leaders never developed to a point where the groups cooperated with one another.

As an example of dissention between the two groups, the following anecdote describes the poor relations between the groups. One night in September, a tired and disillusioned Kurelian representative arrived at the home of Bangerskis. The soldier wanted to help his homeland, but was not sure he knew the best way to do so. With no substantial support for Kurelian military efforts, all he had witnessed was a worsening situation. It seems that Kurelis and his men had moved to Talsis but needed to move 12 tons of supplies, arms and munitions. Bangerskis upon hearing of this dilemma called Veide, offering Legion assistance. Before he could

¹⁴³Bangerskis, Mana mūža atmiņas, vol. 4, p. 13.

even get out what he wanted to say, Bangerskis was coldly informed by Veide, "I do not understand why the good soldier has troubled you; he has been told to where the goods must be relocated, and heavy trucks have been arranged for; there was no need for him to turn to you."¹⁴⁴

The Kurelians were never a formal, well-prepared military unit, capable of recapturing Latvian independence. They were a haphazard, confused, fanatical group with little to stand on. All through the summer of 1944, plans for the impending battles were discussed. As the Kurelians technically operated under the auspices of the local German Army branch, Kurelian plans were formulated by the German Army. The military planners decided that the goal for the Kurelians would be to protect the Daugava River between Plavinas and Kegums from Soviet advances. In the event of a German retreat, the plan called for 200 men ready to go to Riga and to organize partisans for fighting in the rear of Soviet troops in case of a full scale retreat.¹⁴⁵

It seemed that everyone had their way: the Germans were assured of help in fighting the Soviets and the Kurelians were promised arms and basically left to their own accord. By fall of 1944, both the Latvian Legion and the Kurelians had headquarters in Kurland. Riga fell to the

¹⁴⁴Ibid.

¹⁴⁵Andersons, "Kurelieši," p. 13.

Soviet troops on 1 November. The gap between the Legion and Kurelians grew wider and wider. Legion deserters either became partisans, hiding and fighting the oncoming Soviets and the retreating Germans in the woods, or joined up with the Kurelians who were more than happy to accept them. As partisan activity and Legion desertion outraged the German administration, there was no way that the Self-Administration and Bangerskis could condone such behavior by the Kurelians. Kurelian leaders even attempted (and often succeeded in) luring away Legion soldiers with promises of food, clothing and arms.¹⁴⁶

By fall 1944, Soviet troops controlled all of Latvia except the Kurland peninsula. Historically referred to as the "Fortress Kurland," 30 German divisions, including many Latvian soldiers, held the Kurland line from October 1944 to May 1945.¹⁴⁷ The LCP had been dispersed by the time Fortress Kurland was established. The Gestapo in Riga had allowed them to operate as long as they saw that the LCP furthered German aims by taking a position against Soviet partisans--that is, Latvians and others who fought against the German troops. Once the partisan situation had reached a point where the partisans were a threat to the German

¹⁴⁶Bangerskis, Mana mūža atmiņas vol. 4, p. 13.

¹⁴⁷Alexander Werth, Russia at War 1941-1945 (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1964), p. 932.

forces, there was no point in allowing the LCP to continue any activity. In April 1944 German officials saw to the arrest of a few LCP members, which resulted in the disruption of LCP activity as the remaining founding members fled to freedom outside Latvia.¹⁴⁸ Čakste was arrested and sent to Stuthof, a German concentration camp where he died en route to another camp on 22 February 1945.¹⁴⁹ The LCP met one last time on 8 September, but most of the original members had by this time fled to freedom.¹⁵⁰ All that remained was the military branch--the Kurelians.

After the fall of Riga, membership in the Kurelians is reported to have numbered several thousand men.¹⁵¹ Kurelian headquarters were moved from Riga to a glass factory in Kurland, where they would answer also to the local German police under the leadership of Jeckeln. This closer German supervision resulted in the downfall of the Kurelians. The Germans had earlier allowed the Kurelians to go about their business, believing that they would help the German war effort. On 2 November, Kurelis and Upelnieks were summoned

¹⁴⁸Dzintars, "Patiesība par tā saucāmo 'nacionālo opozīciju'."

¹⁴⁹Anastāsija Čakste, Papers, 1927-1976.

¹⁵⁰Ibid.

¹⁵¹Document No. 5005, "Conditions in Latvia at the end of 1944," 3 February 1945, OSS and Department of State Research and Analysis, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

by the local SD and their motives questioned. They were asked to comply with the following requests:

1. turn over all Legion deserters and known draft dodgers to the local police and SS.
2. actively participate in anti-partisan efforts.
3. rid the land of all deserters and draft dodgers and organize a group of select soldiers to parachute behind enemy lines.¹⁵²

They were informed that as of 3 November, Kurelian ranks would fall under the leadership of the SD and in preparation, Kurelis and Upelnieks were expected to provide a list of all their men and an accounting of their munitions.¹⁵³

Jeckeln then attempted to coax Kurelis into using his good name in an official appeal to deserters and partisans to come forth and present themselves for duty in German ranks. Included in the appeal would be a statement that Latvia was nearing independence. Knowing that such a statement was an outright lie, Kurelis begged Jeckeln to write the appeal himself for Kurelis to sign. When asked about the numbers of men, Upelnieks admitted to only 500 men, roughly half the number of active participants in Kurelian ranks.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵²Jānis Dzintars, "Kāpēc Jekelns likvidēja paša izlolotos kureliešus?" Dzimtenes Balss 37, September 1971.

¹⁵³Bangerskis, Mana mūža atmiņas vol. 4, p. 19.

On 5 November, Jeckeln returned and made his offer again, knowing full well the nationalistic bent of the Kurelians. To this, Upelnieks requested authority to reestablish the Latvian Army, claiming that he could recruit 50,000 men to fight, thus relieving the German Army to do other things. He was told that this suggestion would be brought to the attention of Himmler. The following day, Upelnieks informed Kurelian soldiers that he believed everything would move along smoothly. An SD officer came to visit the following day, snapping photographs as he left "as tokens of remembrance."¹⁵⁵

On 7 November, in the woods south of Lake Engura, German SS forces lost 300 men in a battle against a division of 180 Legion deserters.¹⁵⁶ Soviet troops continued to push through Latvia, driving the Germans back into Kurland. Paranoia struck the German troops like never before. German forces lacked manpower and with the desperate situation in Latvia the latter part of 1944, there was no time for further mobilizations. Even Himmler had joined the drive to assure autonomy for Latvia and Estonia, in an effort to assert political power for the SS in the East.¹⁵⁷ Desperate

¹⁵⁴Anderson, "Kurelieši," p. 13.

¹⁵⁵Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁵⁶J. Dzintars, "Kāpēc Jeckelns likvidēja paša izlolotos kureliešus?"

¹⁵⁷Dallin, German Rule in Russia, p. 597.

attempts were launched by the Germans to capture deserters and battle the partisans. The Germans no longer questioned suspicions--the time had come to shoot first and ask questions later. To assure the Germans that the Kurelians supported German efforts and did not exist to sabotage their efforts, Kurelis on 9 November wrote that the Kurelians had no intentions of using their forces against any member of the German Army or local police.¹⁵⁸

The assurances came too late, and had they been true, the Germans probably would not have believed them anyway. When the Germans saw that not only did the Kurelians accept Legion deserters and draft dodgers and had no intention of turning any of them over the German authorities, but supported these people as well, it grew clear that such a military organization could not be allowed to exist.

On 11 November, Kurelis was approached by SS representatives and handed an official request to liquidate his forces. The reason, they told him, was that the leader of the Army Group North could not possibly continue to support the existence of special units and that therefore, regretfully, the Kurelians must be disbanded. The conditions stated that deserters would be dealt with accordingly, regular soldiers and all able bodied men would

¹⁵⁸Dzintars, "Patiesība par tā saucāmo 'nacionālo opozīciju'."

be sent to participate in Legion actions and non-mobilized or ineligible men would go free.¹⁵⁹

Kurelis was in the process of agreeing with the mandate when a sudden burst of activity in the area caused a commotion, killing three German soldiers and throwing the local German authorities into an uproar. Following the confusion, German troops captured and disarmed 454 soldiers, sending them off to Stuthof.¹⁶⁰ Late that morning, SS troops dispatched by Jeckeln surrounded the Kurelian camp and disarmed the rest of the Kurelian "soldiers."¹⁶¹ Kurelis, by the compassion of Jeckeln, was allowed to remain free and return to his family.¹⁶²

Many of the soldiers who had been sentenced to Stuthof were freed after Bangerskis appealed to Berger. As a result, some of these men were delivered into the hands of the 15th Army to fight. The rest who remained or had somehow escaped the morning of 11 November took to the woods and lived out the remainder of the war fighting as partisans. As it turned out, many of those who survived the initial arrests were either killed in battle or joined

¹⁵⁹Bangerskis, Mana mūža atmiņas vol. 4, p. 19.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁶¹Dzintars, "Patiesība par tā saucāmo 'nacionālo opozīciju'."

¹⁶²Andersons, "Kurelieši," p. 13. (note: Kurelis died in Chicago in 1954)

forces with the Germans in a last ditch effort to save Latvia from its inevitable fate.

The final days of the war ended bleakly. Approximately 14,000 Latvian soldiers remained in the Fortress Kurland when Germany capitulated in May 1945.¹⁶³ The Soviet reoccupation was not as smooth and orderly as it had been in 1940. Most Soviet sympathizers had either escaped when the Germans took Latvia or been killed by the Germans. Through the final days of the war, Soviet troops met with resistance as they reoccupied Latvia and often resorted to military action in their efforts to drive the German troops out of Latvia. The roads were crowded with refugees who fled fearing harsh Soviet reprisals. Thousands of Latvians evacuated to Germany where they lived in displaced persons camps until they found sponsorship in the United States, Australia and Canada.

Once the bombings ceased and the Germans had gone, many Latvians returned to their homes and tried to pick up the pieces of their shattered lives. The Germans had done their best to follow a scorched earth policy and had succeeded in destroying farmlands and driving away the remaining livestock.

¹⁶³Arthur Silgailis, Latvian Legion (San Jose: R. James Bender Publishing, 1968), p. 96.

The Soviet reoccupation was cruel, and for years following the war, suspected German sympathizers were tried and sentenced as enemies of the state. The majority of Latvian nationalists who had fled, anticipating the persecutions which followed the reoccupation, listened helplessly to the fate of their compatriots who remained trapped behind. In 1945-46, an estimated 60,000 people were deported from Latvia in an effort, it is believed, to break national resistance.¹⁶⁴ The war was over, and yet another struggle for independence had begun.

¹⁶⁴Misiunas and Taagepera, The Baltic States, p. 70.

CHAPTER V

EPILOGUE

World War II shattered thousand of families, demolished buildings, homes and farms and emotionally scarred hundreds of thousands of innocent people. What finally brought the war to a close, however, had nothing to do with dead soldiers and weeping mothers or demolished property. The military strength of the Soviet Union ultimately toppled the German Reich and brought the war to a close.

The Germans may have lost the war, but in the process caused great moral harm to the people of Europe. Germany employed weapons far more effective than the Soviet Union for occupying conquered territories. Through sophisticated propaganda and by playing on the fears and sympathies of the conquered peoples, the far-reaching web of German intelligence effectively controlled their occupied territories. Active resistance on a large scale was rare. Cooperation was far more often the norm.

Resistance to German occupation in Latvia emerged slowly as the result of the immediately preceding Soviet occupation. A tremendously high level of anti-Soviet sentiment existed in the population of Latvia immediately

following the German occupation and remained for many up through the final years of the war. Still, a small percentage of Latvian nationalists realized in the first months of the occupation that German control offered a poor solution to their problems. Not only would the Germans never allow an independent government to operate in Latvia, they insisted on using Latvian young men as cannon fodder to increase the territorial expanse of the Reich as well.

Effective anti-Nazi resistance in Latvia required and did not receive support from both the people and the provisional Self-Government from the very start. A greater number of Latvians chose to believe in the Germans. Still, resistance succeeded in hindering German efforts to impose total German control on Latvia.

The nature of Latvian anti-Nazi resistance in World War II modifies an accepted and traditional definition of resistance. French Historian Henri Michel sums up what he sees as the three phases of a resistance movement in the following way: (1) refusal to submit, (2) organization and (3) battle. In Latvia, the good feeling of having been liberated from the Soviets had to wear off before the aforementioned phases could even begin. By the time Latvians were struck with the realization that the Germans never intended to restore their pre-war status as an independent nation, the military occupation was complete.

The time for physically resisting the German occupation had already come and gone.

Still, the people of Latvia were able to express their dissatisfaction with the state of affairs, even if their negative response to German oppression came only once Germany began to lose the war. The first phase in Michel's definition of resistance, refusal to submit, is perhaps the simplest of the three phases. Submission (which, in the case of conquered peoples, would mean yielding to the wishes of an occupying government) may be the easiest route to choose, but at the same time, accomplishes the least unless practiced on a large scale. It all begins with the unseen thought. Ignoring the orders and decrees of an occupying government or not volunteering for any service play major parts in the beginning.

More active manifestations of the decision to fight existing conditions include purposely not meeting government quotas for production, withholding surpluses or storing arms and ammunition when the occupying government has expressly forbidden such actions. Simple refusal to submit is the first step towards an official movement, and one which in application enjoys widespread participation by civilians in occupied territory. Practiced active noncompliance pulls together a wide spectrum of people--women, children, bureaucrats, farmers and soldiers alike--for, at least at

the outset of occupation, most cases of refusing to submit is not a terribly risky business in which to involve one's self or family.

Refusing to be influenced by Nazi propaganda, most Latvians continued to live quietly through the occupation, keeping surplus food and supplies hidden from the German soldiers who came to collect quotas. Quiet discussions behind closed doors maintained civilian morale, as well as reading the occasional underground publication passed from hand to hand.

The organizational phase of an active resistance movement proves more complex in practice. Organization requires a more conscious effort and a certain degree of action and commitment which are not necessarily required in simply refusing to submit. Growth characterizes the organizational phase of any resistance movement. In the organizational phase, for example, coffeehouse discussions are written down, published and distributed as leaflets, later to become underground newspapers. Individuals begin to congregate with others who may hold the same ideologies, goals and convictions; formerly uninvolved civil service workers become invaluable sources of information for activists/partisans in the field. Theories are tested, mistakes are made and elaborate plans devised for future

applications. The risks are many, and only the most courageous travel beyond this point.

In Latvia, organizational phase of anti-Nazi resistance was perhaps best exemplified by the smaller organizations which produced underground newspapers and pamphlets. Incidents of sabotage such as the burning of mills and gasoline supplies required a certain measure of organization. The efforts of individuals and small groups upheld morale among those Latvians not willing to risk active resistance.

The third and final phase of Michel's model is battle. Here ideas and organization come together and comprise a script to be played out in the theater of war. In order to sabotage the efforts of the enemy, underground forces employ methods such as assassination, the severing of enemy supply lines and spying to obtain valuable information for their side. There are no dress uniforms or large armies--participants in a resistance movement accomplish their goals surreptitiously and not by the means of conventional warfare. Though guns and explosives comprise an integral part of any battle phase, by far the most necessary weapon remains the ability to operate undetected. Underground warfare is a dangerous game and mistakes are often fatal, but if successful, an underground movement can effectively reduce enemy efforts and lower morale.

Battle as a tool for anti-Nazi resistance began to show its ambivalent nature once Germany began losing the war and the Legion began losing soldiers to desertion. To fight with the Germans meant certain death once the Soviets regained control and began taking reprisals. Resisting helping the German Army in their efforts to fend off the oncoming Soviet troops only aided the Soviets. As a result, partisans fought on both sides and even against their own countrymen, confused about which way to turn.

Though all the points of Michel's model were evident in Latvia from 1941-1945, combined they amounted to very little. Too many different manifestations of nationalism confused and disjointed anything that even leaned towards defining a movement. Had the Self-Administration learned to somehow incorporate the efforts of individuals and found a way to appease the fanatical Latvians of the LCP and Kurelians, it stands to reason that perhaps more Latvians could have survived.

Where WWII German occupations were concerned, the truth stands that "everywhere there were collaborators from the start; everywhere there were resisters also."¹⁶⁵ By 1943 the German controlled press was reporting that the Reich considered existing Latvian institutions unreliable.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵Foot, Resistance, p. 152.

¹⁶⁶OSS Document No. 45509.

This was largely the result of resistance efforts to keep the population aware of wartime conditions, as the local German-controlled media failed to do. Collaborative work towards strengthened German control proved the only grounds under which Latvian cooperation was accepted by the German authorities.

Examples where the Germans accepted the help of Latvian organizations range from the Pērkonkrusts members in the Gestapo to the Self-Administration to the Kurelians. The German administration allowed these groups to operate so long as ultimate power remained in the hands of the Reich and they somehow contributed to the anti-Soviet cause. When it appeared that the groups wielded power that the Germans could no longer control or began showing signs of overt anti-Nazi influence, these groups were promptly disbanded.

The initiative lay in the hands of people who stood a chance at influencing the local German authorities; politicians who understood how to operate within the existing administrative framework. Many of these first efforts proved fruitless but the underlying spirit remained. The few who did speak out against the German occupation courageously laid the foundation for internal changes, reminding the Germans that not all Latvians believed their propaganda and were not willing to just roll over and behave.

The tragedy of the Latvian World War II experience was that Latvia from the very start was caught in the middle of a power struggle between Germany and the Soviet Union. The only hope for the Latvian people was a repeat of history. Had the German and Soviet forces exhausted themselves, perhaps the Latvian people could have recaptured their independence. But history never repeats. The Latvian people suffered through two brutal occupations only to be subjected to a third.

BIBLIOGRAPHY **PRIMARY SOURCES**

BOOKS

- Bangerskis, Rudolfs. Mana mūža atmiņas vol. 4. Copenhagen: Imanta, 1960.
- Celmiņš, Gustavs. Eiropas krustceļos. Heidenheim: C.F. Rees, 1947.
- Cielēns, Felikss. Laikmetu Mainā, vol. 3. Lidingo, Sweden: Memento, 1964.
- Freivalds, Osvalds. Kurzemes cietoksnis I. Copenhagen: Imanta, 1954.
- Freivalds, Osvalds. Kurzemes cietoksnis II. Copenhagen: Imanta, 1954.
- Silgailis, Artūrs. Latviešu Leģions. Copenhagen, Denmark: Imanta, 1962.
- Silgailis, Arthur. Latvian Legion. San Jose: R. James Bender Publishing, 1986.
- Zemgals, Boriss. Dienas baltās, nebaltās. Geneva: Leonīds Zemgals, 1949.

UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPTS

- Andersons, Dr. Edgars. "Latvijas Centrālā Padome." (typewritten).
- Klīve, Ā. "Opozīcija pret okupantiem un oportunistiem." (typewritten).

COLLECTIONS

Hoover Archives, Stanford, California

- Anderson, Dr. Edgar. Latvian-American historian. Miscellaneous papers, 1944-1984 (Correspondence, notes and photographs, relating to Latvian nationalist underground organizations and Swedish-Latvian contacts during II).
- Bilmanis, Alfreds. Collection, 1944-1948 (Mimeographed bulletins and manuscripts of writings, relating to Latvia during World War II).

Čakste, Anastāsija. Papers, 1927-1976 (Correspondence, printed matter and photographs, relating to Konstantīns Čakste).

Cielēns, Felikss. Papers, 1913-1960 (Memoirs, writings, correspondence, memoranda and printed matter relating to Latvian foreign relations and political conditions).

Dankers, Oskars. Miscellaneous papers. 1919-1978 (Correspondence, reports and a speech, relating to the administration of German-occupied Latvia in World War II).

Salnais, Voldemārs. Papers, 1901-1970 (Correspondence, reports, clippings, printed matter and photographs, relating to Latvian independence movements).

Siliņš, Leonīds. Latvijas Centrālā Padome: typescript report, n.d. (Relates to the Latvijas Centrālā Padome in World War II).

Unāms, Žanis. Latviešu tautas traģēdija: typescript memoirs, 1946 (relates to the Soviet and German occupation of Latvia, 1941-1945).

National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Office of Special Services and Department of State Research and Analysis, Record Group 59:

Document No. 3087. "Enclosure to confidential memo from American Legation in Stockholm, Sweden to Secretary of State in Washington, D.C.," Stockholm, Sweden, 29 March 1944.

Document No. 5005. "Conditions in Latvia at the end of 1944," Stockholm, Sweden, 3 February 1945.

Document No. 39273. "Survey of the political situation in Estonia," Stockholm, Sweden, 20 June 1944.

Document No. 47045. "Enclosure #1 to despatch #2037 from Stockholm, Sweden," Stockholm, Sweden, 6 August 1943.

Document No. 45509. "Despatch #1969 from American Legation, Stockholm, Sweden," Stockholm, Sweden, 20 July 1943.

Document No. 59764. "Memorandum from American Legation in Stockholm, Sweden to Secretary of State in Washington, D.C.," Stockholm, Sweden, 26 November 1943.

Document No. 62066. "Report from American Legation in Stockholm, Sweden," Stockholm, Sweden, 2 March 1944.

Document No. 65922. "Summary of illegal pamphlet distributed in Estonia," Stockholm, Sweden, 21 February 1944.

Document No. 96079. "Translation of a report dated 20 March 1944 about conditions in Latvia," Stockholm, Sweden, 19 June 1944.

Document No. 96595. "Confidential memorandum to Washington Secretary of State regarding the struggle of the Latvian people for national and political freedom," Stockholm, Sweden, 28 June 1944.

SECONDARY SOURCES

BOOKS

- Ainsztein, Reuben. Jewish Resistance in Occupied Eastern Europe. London: Elek Books Limited, 1974.
- Alexiev, Ludmilla. Soviet Dissent. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1985.
- Bilmanis, Alfreds. Baltic Essays. Washington, D.C.: Latvian Legation, 1945.
- Butler, Rupert. The Black Angels: A History of the Waffen SS. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979.
- Chapman, Brian. "The German Counter-Resistance." In Resistance in Europe, pp. 170-185, Edited by Stephen Hawkes and Ralph White. London: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1975.
- Clark, Alan. Barbarossa: The Russian-German Conflict, 1941-45. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1965.
- Cooper, Matthew. The Germany Army 1933-45: Its Political and Military Failure. New York: Stein and Day, 1978.
- Dallin, Alexander. German Rule in Russia 1941-1945: A Study in Occupation Policies. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1957.
- Dankers, Oskars. Lai vēsture spriež tiesu. Toronto: Latvian Publishers, 1965.
- Freivalds, Osvalds. Latviešu Polītiskās Partijas 60 Gados. Copenhagen: Imanta, 1961.
- Foot, M.R.D. Resistance: European Resistance to Nazism 1940- 1945. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1977.
- Gilbert, Martin. The Second World War: A Complete History. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1989.
- Herzstein, Robert Edwin. Adolf Hitler and the German Trauma 1913-1945. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1974.
- Hohne, Heinz. Order of the Death's Head: The Story of Hitler's SS. New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1969.
- Kavass, Igor I., and Sprudz, Adolf. Baltic States: A Study of their Origin and National Development; Their Seizure and Incorporation into the U.S.S.R. Buffalo: William S. Hein & Co., Inc., 1972.

- Mangulis, Visvaldis. Latvia in the Wars of the 20th Century. Princeton Junction: Cognition Books, 1983.
- Manning, Clarence A. The Forgotten Republics. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1952.
- Michel, Henri. The Shadow War: Resistance in Europe 1939 1945. Translated by Richard Barry. London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1972.
- Misiunas, Romuald, and Taagepera, Rein. The Baltic States: Years of Dependence. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.
- Pick, F.W. The Baltic Nations. London: Boreas Publishing Co., Ltd., 1945.
- Rei, August. The Drama of the Baltic Peoples. Stockholm: Kirjastus Vaba Eesti, 1970.
- Robertson, E.M. Hitler's Pre-War Policy and Military Plans 1933-1939. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 19??.
- Snyder, Louis L., ed., Hitler's Third Reich: A Documentary History Snyder, Documentary History. Chicago: Nelson-Hall, Inc., 1981.
- Stein, George H. The Waffen SS: Hitler's Elite Guard at War 1939-1945. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966.
- Taylor, Hugh Page. Uniforms, History and Organization of the Waffen SS. San Jose: R. James Bender Publishing, 1982.
- Vardys, V. Stanley, and Misiunas, Romuald J. The Baltic States in Peace and War 1917-1945. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978.
- Vizulis, I. Joseph. Nations Under Duress: The Baltic States. Port Washington, N.Y.: Associated Faculty Press, 1985.
- Walzer, Michael. Just and Unjust Wars. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977.
- Werth, Alexander. Russia at War 1941-1945. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1964.
- Ziemke, Earle F. Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968.

PERIODICALS

- Andersons, Dr. Edgars. "Baltijas valšku politiskais stāvoklis laikā no Vācu iebrukuma Krievijā' līdz angļu-krievu līgumam 1942. gada maijā." Universitas 6 (Fall, 1959): 28-35.
- Andersons, Edgars. "Kurelieši." Literatūra un Māksla (2 June 1990): 12-15.
- Dravnieks, A. "Ka radās kureliešu kustība." Treji vārti 74 (Fall 1980): 3-5.
- Dunsdorfs, Edgars. "'Fragmentāras autobiografiskas piezīmes par Latvijas centrālo padomi un agresijas upuriem." Archīvs XXVII (1987): 14-46.
- Dzintars, J. "Patiesība par tā saucāmo 'nacionālo opozīciju'." Dzimtenes Balss 40 (September 1966): 10-12.
- Dzintars, Jānis. "Tā sākās kureliešu karjera." Dzimtenes Balss 34 (August 1971): 4.
- Dzintars, Jānis. "Kāpēc Jekelns likvidēja paša izlolotos kureliešus?" Dzimtenes Balss 37 (September 1971): 25-27.
- Pārups, Ēriks. "Pretestības organizācijas laikraksti vācu laikā." Jaunā Gaita 165 (December 1987): 31-37.

Europe in 1937

The Baltic States

Cities and Regions of Independent Latvia