Andrejs M. Mezmalis

THE
LATVIAN LEGION

***

Information
Facts
Truth

Riga, 2008
The author expresses appreciation to the Board of Directors of the global organization “Daugavas Vanagi” for supporting the publishing of this book.

***

In this book are incorporated some of the organized notes of Colonel Aleksandrs Plensners (*Information about the Latvian Legion*) that he had compiled in 1949 in Pinneberg, West Germany. These notes provided the impetus to do additional research about the Latvian Legion and the events that took place in Latvia prior to WW II, during WW II (1940-1945) and the period immediately following WW II. Colonel Plensners was a WW I veteran and participated in the War for Independence during 1918-1920. As a career officer in the Latvian Army, he was closely connected with the history of both wars and with the molding of the Latvian Army. Later, while serving as the Chief of Staff on the staff of the Inspector General of the Latvian Legion and as the Commander of the 43rd Grenadier Regiment of the Legion, he was well informed and closely associated with the events in Latvia and the Legion during that tragic period of Latvia’s history. He was fluent in German and had served as the Military Attaché of Latvia in Berlin, Germany prior to the invasion of Latvia by Soviet Russia in 1940; he was also well informed about the events in Germany and about the German politics and plans for the Baltic region. He was one of the most knowledgeable officers about the various activities and the events that took place at the Eastern Front during WW II.

***

© Andrejs Mežmalis, text, 2008
© Andrejs Mežmalis, graphical formulation, 2008

Contents

1. Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 5

2. Historical Background
   The creation of purely Latvian regiments during WW I................................................................. 6
   The First Soviet-Russian occupation of Latvia (1918-1919).......................................................... 6
   Peace Treaty of 1920 between Russia and Latvia ............................................................................ 9
   Peace, development and achievement (1920-1940) ...................................................................... 10
   The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939 .............................................................................................. 11
   World War II ........................................................................................................................................ 13
   The Second Soviet-Russian Occupation of Latvia (1940-1941) ................................................... 16

3. Latvian soldiers’ fate and national loyalty under the Soviets ......................................................... 19

4. German Occupation .......................................................................................................................... 22
   The Historical background and prevailing conditions ...................................................................... 22
   The Latvian Self-Government and the German attitudes and actions ........................................... 24

5. The Germans disarm and liquidate the Latvian-created defense units and .................................. 27
   Germans attempt to create volunteer military units ........................................................................ 27
   German immediate actions after their occupation of Latvia .......................................................... 29
   The German Security Service – SD and EK ..................................................................................... 30

6. The Germans themselves start organizing Latvian military units .................................................. 31

7. The Germans Establish the Latvian Legion ....................................................................................... 34
   Latvians object to German plans to form a Latvian Legion ............................................................. 34
   Hitler orders the formation of a Latvian Legion ............................................................................. 35
   First epithet: „volunteer” ..................................................................................................................... 35
   Second epithet – „SS” ......................................................................................................................... 36
   Germans break international laws and conventions ........................................................................ 37
   Germans issue registration and draft orders .................................................................................... 38
   Latvians seek guarantees from the Germans ..................................................................................... 40
   Germans order mobilization in Latvia .............................................................................................. 41
   The Induction process, German fears and Latvian protests ............................................................. 45

8. HiWi ..................................................................................................................................................... 47

9. The Leadership of the Latvian Legion
   A Latvian to command the Latvian Legion – declared a „mistake” ................................................. 48
   General Bangerskis appointment turns out to be a „misunderstanding” ........................................ 49
   The Command hierarchy (commanders) .......................................................................................... 50
   The Inspector General’s Office ......................................................................................................... 51

10. The Latvian Legion’s internal regulations, organization and service/rank insignia ...................... 52
    The Latvian Legion’s internal life ....................................................................................................... 52
    The uniform insignia ....................................................................................................................... 54
The legionnaires’ courage under the swastika........................................ 56

11. Additional Mobilizations...................................................................... 57
   New mobilization orders issued by the Germans.................................. 57
   Latvian aspirations and fears.............................................................. 59

12. The Latvian Legion’s Units and Their Numerical Strength .................. 60

13. The Latvian Legion’s Wartime Activities............................................ 61
   The Latvian 2nd (19th) Division activities......................................... 61
   The Latvian 1st (15th) Division activities........................................... 64
   The order of the Inspector General to the Latvian Legion: “Go West!”.... 66

14. Latvian Casualties during WW II...................................................... 67
   The third Soviet-Russian occupation of Latvia (1945-1991) - The Latvian
   soldiers as prisoners of war (POWs) of the Soviet Union.................. 67
   Latvian soldiers as POWs of the Western Allies............................... 68
   The number of Latvian soldiers killed during WW II.......................... 68

15. The tragedy of Latvian soldiers during and after WW II.................... 70

16. The Latvian legionnaires after WW II............................................... 72
   The German WW II "Act of Military Surrender"................................ 72
   Soviet-Russian and German propaganda immediately after WW II......... 75
   Western Allies’ findings in regards to the Latvian Legion..................... 76
   The former Latvian legionnaires in American and British paramilitary units..... 77
   The Soviet KGB propaganda offensive against former Latvian legionnaires in
   the West..................................................................................................... 77

17. Latvian ethnic symbols and emblems.................................................. 79
THE LATVIAN LEGION

1. Introduction

In order to have an insight and an understanding about the genesis of the Legion and the politics behind its creation, we must have an insight into some key areas that influenced the thinking and actions at that time. The history concerning the Latvian Legion, and why/how the Legion came into existence, cannot be understood without a clear understanding about the historic events and the conditions and factors that prevailed in Latvia during World War I (WW I), during Latvia’s War for Independence and the period between WW I and World War II (WW II) and the just prior to, leading up to and during WW II, all within the span of about twenty-four years. Specifically:

1. Latvian regiments, having been formed while still under czarist Russian rule, fought valiantly and very successfully on the side of the Allies during WW I against Imperial Germany (the traditional enemy, invader and brutal overlord of the Middle Ages, that subjugated the Latvian and Estonian peoples and took away their land during the Baltic Crusades; the German nobility ruled Latvia and Estonia very abusively (under the Russian Czar) until the very end of WW I);

2. Latvians, having declared their independence in 1918 (together with Estonia, Lithuania and Poland), fought both, the Soviet Red Army and the German Armed Forces (that were trying to retain and/or regain control over Latvian territory and its people); and, that Latvia obtained its independence with the assistance of the Western Allies; and, that Latvia, between the two world wars, had achieved a standard of living equivalent to or higher than that enjoyed in Scandinavia at that time;

3. Fascist Soviet Union (Russia) and Nazi Germany were secret allies under the Stalin/Molotov-Hitler/Ribbentrop Pact (as of August 1939) that divided Eastern Europe into “spheres of influence”; in reality, it meant territories to be occupied and annexed by the respective dictatorial powers;

4. Latvia was invaded and brutally occupied in 1940 by Soviet Russia and its Red Army as a consequence of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and its Secret Protocols of 1939; and, that the Soviets (1940-1941, 1944-1945) and the Germans (1941-1945), during three separate occupation periods, orchestrated mass murders and deportations, which left Latvia without its own political and military leadership; and, that the Soviets and the Germans, during their occupation periods, forcibly inducted into their armed forces Latvian youth in violation of international conventions and other norms; and, that the German-mobilized Latvian Legion divisions and other purely Latvian military units, commanded by Latvian officers, were fighting only on the Eastern Front during WW II and, for historical reasons, refused to fight against the Western Allies.

5. Overall, the Latvians had absolute unity and resolve to try to renew their nation’s independence during WW II; and,

6. The Latvian desire to do everything possible to preserve their “living resource” (especially its youth of military draft age) and to keep it together, so that the Latvian people, at the right time and of their own choosing, could realize their nation’s independence.
2. Historical Background

The creation of purely Latvian regiments during WW I. During the Latvian nation’s cruel history, Nazi Germany is not the first foreign power to take Latvia’s sons, so that they would shed their blood on foreign commands and for foreign interests. Nonetheless, whenever Latvian soldiers have had the opportunity to be together, they have never been defenders of foreign powers, but rather they have been defenders of their own nation’s interests. That is the way it was, for example, with the formation of the Latvian infantry regiments by czarist Russia during WW I. The Latvian people have never been czarist Russia’s supporters. That was proven by the 1905 revolution. But, because of the imminent threat from the Germans to their native homeland, a threat that the Russians could no longer stop, caused the Latvian regiments to be formed and to fight the Germans with such ferocity and bravery, but with very heavy losses, that they stopped the further advance by the Germans on the Eastern Front (1916-1918). This fact was stated by the German Commander in Chief, von Hindenburg, in 1916, noting that he would have occupied Riga already by Easter of 1916, had it not been for the eight “Latvian stars” (Latvian regiments) that faced the Germans and were defending Riga in the vicinity of the Daugava River. These fierce WW I battles forged the Latvian regiments into first-rate combat units. But, when WW I ended in Europe, the War for Independence was just beginning in Latvia, Finland, Poland and the other Baltic States.
Latvian infantry positions on the banks of Lielupe River during WW I.

However, just because the Latvians fought so well on the battlefield, it did not mean that the Latvian regiments became supporters of the Czar of Russia; but rather, they facilitated the conditions that led to their own nation’s and other nations’ independence, i.e., to be able finally to get from under the yoke of czarist Russia and obtain true freedom and independence for their own nation. Additionally, they also became defenders of human rights and fought on the side of the Western Allies, causing Germany to divert significant military forces from the Western Front to the Eastern Front during WW I.

View of the „first line“ of battle at „Lozmeteijkalns“ (Machine Gun Hill) during WW I.

These facts are also a matter of record among the annals of military history and were frequently referred to during and after WW I by such distinguished personalities as
President Herbert C. Hoover of the United States of America, Field Marshal Sir Alexander of Great Britain, and others, who were actually present in Latvia during this period of Latvian history.

Latvian infantrymen posing in front of captured German regimental commander’s bunker.

It is only appropriate to reemphasize here that WW I for the Latvians did not end in 1918, but it continued until 1920, after Latvia declared its independence in 1918; she had to struggle for more than two years (War for Independence) and against two enemies before her sons could go home and once again plow their fields in peace, but this time in an independent Latvia and complete freedom.

Soldiers of the Latvian Army - defenders of Riga, fall of 1919.

In 1918, when Latvia declared its independence, the Germans were still holding on to Latvia’s territory, but at the same time, Latvia was being invaded by the Soviet Russia’s Red Army forces. In order to hold back this Soviet threat, the Latvians were initially forced to join forces with the Germans (with the recommendation and
concurrency by the Allies) and to obtain weapons, uniforms and supplies from them and, for a while, fight together as allies against this „Red onslaught”. However, none of the Latvian soldiers, thereby, became defenders of German interests. On the contrary, when the Germans once more „stretched out their hands” for Latvian territory, the Latvian soldiers were also able to defeat (with some assistance from the Allies) the German regiments of Generals von Golc and Bermont. Likewise, when Latvia was invaded by Russia’s Red Army and the Soviet government set up their in-brutality trained puppet government of Stuchka, the Latvian soldiers also managed to take care of them.

The Latvian love for their native country was self evident everywhere. Jānis Goldmanis writes about this during the Russian Revolution, when a train arrives in Moscow with strēlnieki (Latvian infantry soldiers) from some Russian province, one can see red-white-red flags displayed from all the windows of the railroad cars; but, when a commissar orders to have them removed, they spitefully answer, “Come a bit closer so that we can first remove your head!” The thought here is about national identity and nationally motivated soldiers, who love their nation and their land. The Latvian writer Rainis once remarked, "A nation that has its own national armed forces is already on its way to independence." Without a doubt, Fascist Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany understood that phenomena and during the initial days of their occupation, they trampled the Latvian flags, changed the government and initiated a genocide against the Latvian nation and the other inhabitants of Latvia.

**The First Soviet Russian Occupation of Latvia (1918-1919).** The first Soviet Russian occupation, that the Latvians experienced, covered most of Latvia’s territory during the fall of 1918 and winter of 1918-1919. It lasted for only 6 months, but during this brief period, Soviet Russia (invading communists or the so-called Bolsheviks) had managed to murder over 5000 people (primarily in Riga, the capital of Latvia), and had deliberately starved to death additional 8590 inhabitants of Latvia (Ref: *George Popoff, The City of the Red Plague; E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., New
York, 1932). Thus, even prior to the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939, the Latvians had already experienced the brutality of the Bolsheviks (Soviet Russians) and had no desire to see that happen again.

* Bolshevik killed clergy in Riga in 1919.

Most of those killed were various denomination clergy, other intelligentsia and farmers; numerous other inhabitants simply „vanished“. The Soviet authority in Riga at that time was a hard core communist named Simon Berg from Russia. The Bolsheviks (communists) themselves stated that they had not killed enough, as it was later attested by the „stooge“ Latvian USSR President Peter Stuchka (P. Stuchka, Soviet Latvia’s 6 Months). Later, in the 1930s, Soviet Russia also murdered 70000 Latvians (mostly males) inside the Soviet Union; these were the Latvians (including many Latvian soldiers from WW I) and their families that were trapped within the Soviet Union borders after WW I. Here we have to note again, that during 1918-1920, the Latvians fought against the Soviet Union’s Red Army and the German Armed Forces, inside Latvia, to achieve their independence. Both of these invading armies were driven out of Latvia by the Latvian Armed Forces during the 1918-1920 periods, with armed assistance from the Western Allies.

**Peace Treaty of 1920 between Russia and Latvia.** A peace treaty between Latvia and Soviet Russia was concluded on August 11, 1920; paragraph 2 of this peace treaty states: „Based on the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic’s proclaimed all-nation rights of self-determination, including complete separation from the Union, to which they belong, and recognizing the Latvian Nation’s absolute desire to become an independent nation, Russia without any reservation recognizes the independence, self-determination and sovereignty of Latvia, and that Russia, of its own free will and forever, renounces all sovereign claims, that belonged to Russia in regards to the Latvian people and land, including those based on the former judicial government establishment and international agreements, which in this identified instance lose their force for all future times. By having been formerly been part of Russia, the Latvian People and Nation has no ties (obligations) in regards to Russia.” (Note: We have to recognize here, that Latvia was never part of the Soviet Union during the 1918-1919 period; the Soviet Red Army invaded Latvia, after Latvia had declared its independence. The so-called Stuchka government was a puppet
government, that was created by Soviet Russia during 1918-1919 to follow the Red Army into Latvia, with a mandate from the Soviet leadership in Moscow, to take over Latvia and to liquidate, i.e. kill, any opposition; it specifically demonstrated that Latvia had never joined or been part of the Soviet Union.

Peace, Development and Achievement (1920-1940). During their War for Independence, 1918-1920, the Latvians achieved their independence primarily due to: (1) the fall of Czarist Russia and Imperial Germany; (2) the victory by the Allies over Germany; (3) well-trained, experienced and highly motivated Latvian regiments; and, (4) the Allies’ assistance to Latvia. During bloody battles, the Latvians had to defend themselves against Soviet Russia’s and the German Weimar Republic’s quest for Latvian territory. This previously noted Allied support to Latvia, during the Latvian struggle for freedom, had created deep sympathy, loyalty and trust for the Allies among all of the Latvian people; and, their national policies of the various governments during the years of independence (1918-1940) were always true to the ideologies of the West, no matter what was the parliamentary or political majority that composed the Latvian Government. This is known by anyone who knows and has studied the history of Latvia.

Latvia was very prosperous during these years of independence (1920-1940) and had achieved a standard of living and an education level at that time that was equivalent to or higher than that of Scandinavia. When WW II broke out, it was not a secret that Latvian sympathies were on the side of the Western Allies. And, after Latvia lost her independence, it was not only these sympathies alone that dictated the Latvian pro-Western Allied orientation. Her own will and the interest to preserve the lives of her people, clearly pointed out, that perhaps also this time she can keep her independence, but only if the Allies are victorious. Latvia’s military was well trained and equipped and her youth were well educated and imbued with democratic ideals. No one suspected that the German repatriation of 1939 was in fact the prelude to the terror that was to follow. On 6-7 October, 1939, an order was issued by Berlin to the Germans residing in the Baltic States to repatriate to Greater Germany, which was taken as an announcement that Germany’s nationalist interests in the Baltic States have ended. [Ref: Dunsdorfs, Edgars. Kārla Ulmana dzīve. Publisher: Daugava, 1978; 464.lpp.]. That same year on October 30th, Latvia and
Germany signed a “Repatriation Treaty” and approximately 60,000 Baltic Germans left Latvia for Germany. [Note: Many of these same Baltic Germans, however, returned together with the German occupation army in June 1941 (after Germany attacked the Soviet Union) and assumed virtually all of the important positions at all levels in the so called Ostland (Eastland, which included Latvia) administration – internal security agencies, police, manufacturing establishments, mobilization, labor offices, etc., thus literally subjugating the Latvians once again.]
Latvia had a small, but well trained military force at that time. In addition to the regular army, Latvia also had reserve regiments and well-trained National Guard regiments (about 20 such regiments, see below).

Due to very severe political crises at the time, caused by "far-left" and "far-right" political forces in neighboring Russia and Germany, respectively, Latvia established an authoritarian type government in 1934 to avoid political chaos; this government under Dr. Karlis Ulmanis lasted until the Soviet Russian occupation of Latvia in June 1940. During this very benign authoritarian period, no one was being repressed for their political beliefs. Some were, however, imprisoned for advocating violent overthrow of the government, especially those from the far left (Communists and Lenin-Stalin fundamentalists) or the far right (supporters of Nazi Germany's interests). Both of these groups, however, were very small in numbers and most Latvians simply wanted to be left alone and to avoid any involvement in the "inevitable" war that was being predicted at the time.

**The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939.** Soviet Russia broke the Latvian-Russian Peace Treaty of August 11, 1920, including other internationally recognized treaties and conventions, when the Soviet Union and Germany signed the infamous Molotov-Ribbentrop Non-Aggression Pact and its attendant "Secret Protocols" of August 23 and September 28, 1939. This pact allowed Soviet Russia to attack Finland, to barbarically occupy and subjugate the Baltic States and to invade and occupy Poland jointly with Germany that initiated WW II.
Aus Anlass der Unterzeichnung des Nichtangriffsvertrages zwischen dem Deutschen Reich und der Union der Sozialistischen Sowjetrepubliken haben die unterzeichneten Bevollmächtigten der beiden Teile in streng vertraulicher Aussprache die Frage der Abgrenzung der beiderseitigen Interessensphären in Osteuropa erörtert. Diese Aussprache hat zu folgenden Ergebnis geführt:

1. Für den Fall einer territorial-politischen Umgestaltung in den zu den baltischen Staaten (Finland, Estland, Lettland, Litauen) gehörenden Gebieten bildet die nördliche Grenze Litauens zugleich die Grenze der Interessensphären Deutschlands und der UdSSR. Hierbei wird das Interesse Litauens an Wilnser Gebiet beiderseits anerkannt.

2. Für den Fall einer territorial-politischen Umgestaltung der zum polnischen Staate gehörenden Gebiete werden die Interessensphären Deutschlands und der UdSSR umgefahren durch die Linie der Flüsse Narew, Weichsel und San abgegrenzt.

Die Frage, ob die beiderseitigen Interessen die Erhaltung eines unabhängigen polnischen Staates erwünscht erscheinen lassen und wie dieser Staat abzugrenzen wäre, kann endgültig erst im Laufe der weiteren politischen
The German-USSR Non-Aggression Pact additional Secret Protocol (translation):

*Secret Additional Protocol*

In connection with Germany’s and the Soviet Socialist Republics Union’s signing of the Non-Aggression Pact, the authorized representatives of both nations, that have signed this Pact, especially confidentially discussed the question regarding the creation of both their own spheres-of-influence boundaries in Eastern Europe. The results of these discussions are as follows:

NKVD SECRET DEPORTATION PLAN
(Strictly Secret Order No. 001223, dated October 11, 1939), prepared shortly after the signing of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, outlined the procedures for the mass deportation of Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians. This horrific genocide plan was signed by Ivan Serov, the Deputy Peoples’ Commissar of Public Security of the USSR. (Ref: Alfreds Berzins, *The Unpunished Crime*, 1963; pg. 109-119.)
1. In case of territorial political changes regarding the Baltic States’ region (Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), the Lithuania’s northern border is the common sphere-of-influence border between Germany and USSR. Lithuanian interests in connection with Vilnius region are agreed upon by both parties.

2. In case of territorial political changes, the regions belonging to Poland, the sphere-of-influence boundary between Germany and USSR is set by a line created by the rivers: Narva, Visla and Sana. The question regarding Poland, whether it is in the interest of both parties to preserve it as an independent nation and what should be its boundaries, will be determined only during the course of further political developments. In any case, both governments agree to solve this question in a spirit of friendly cooperation.

3. In South-Eastern Europe, the USSR side emphasizes its interest in Moldavia. The German side confirms its complete political disinterest in this region.

4. Both sides shall maintain this protocol in complete secrecy.

Moscow, August 23, 1939

In the name of the German Government
(Signed) J. von Ribbentrop

As authorized by USSR Government
(Signed) V. Molotov

World War II. This Hitler-Stalin Pact permitted Germany to invade Western Poland on September 1, 1939 and the Soviet Union to invade Eastern Poland on September 17, 1939 and to murder 14,000 Polish officers.

A short time later, in November 1939, USSR invaded Finland. The Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) were next on the list, first with USSR ultimatums,
followed by a brutal occupation of Latvia in June of 1940. Fake elections followed and the Baltic States were annexed by the Soviet Union (Russia) on the dates as indicated by the map on the previous page. The Baltic States had ceased to exist as independent nations; and, WW II was raging on with the force of a hurricane. In accordance with today’s viewpoints, Fascist Russia and Nazi Germany, both „secret allies” (1939-1941), would be considered as terrorist nations, and in fact, they were such at that time.

The Second Soviet-Russian Occupation of Latvia (1940-1941). Soviet Russia’s second occupation of Latvia, from June 1940 until June of 1941, lasted only one year. However, at the time when the Soviet Russians invaded Latvia, many Latvians had already in 22 years (since WW I independence), since 1918, forgotten the Bolsheviks (Communists) and thought that they may no longer be „such terrorists” (as noted previously); even if Latvians did not accept everything on face value what the occupiers preached, some of the communist „truths” did find their mark as a result of their deceptive propaganda and behavior. And, surely, the occupiers (Soviet Russians) were not the same as they had been 22 years earlier. They were demonstrating tremendous progress in deception and evil. This time, however, in the span of one year, they brutally murdered and deported to unknown destinations (only to be killed later) 34250 inhabitants of Latvia (during the night of 14th of June, 1941 alone, 15424 people were murdered or deported), young and old, men and women. And, this number pertains only to those whose names became known; many others had simply „disappeared”. An NKVD SECRET DEPORTATION PLAN (Strictly Secret Order No. 001223, dated October 11, 1939), prepared already shortly after the signing of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, outlined the procedures for the mass deportation of Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians. This “horrific genocide” plan was signed by Ivan Serov, the Deputy Peoples’ Commissar of Public Security of the USSR. [Ref: Berzins, Alfreds. The Unpunished Crime. 1963; pg. 109-119]. Here we have to note that Soviet Russia had planned to „liquidate” around 200000 inhabitants of Latvia in 1940, but Nazi Germany’s invasion of Fascist Russia stopped that extermination or „liquidation” plan in its initial stages of execution (Gen. Rudolfs Bangerskis, „My Life’s Recollections”). How many „other unknowns” were there that „vanished”? The Soviet Russians themselves are probably unable to tell us that because they were not interested in keeping accurate statistics. More than 50% of all Latvian military officers had been murdered or taken away for later torture and imprisonment in the Soviet Gulag during 1940-1941. And, it was not just the physical killings alone that comprised the Bolshevik (Communist) system of terrorism in Latvia. No less destructive was the horrific „mental terror” that was placed upon each of the „not yet” liquidated inhabitants of Latvia - the constant fear for one’s own safety and that of his or her family - the horrifying and constant stalking and spying done by the Soviet secret police (NKVD, later known as KGB) for each step taken, each word spoken, even each thought expressed, not to mention the interrogations and the forced-upon reporting on other persons.

After Soviet Russia’s (Communist) take-over in June, 1940, the Latvian National Army was abolished, keeping only the new draftees, few officers and some non-commissioned officers; these were incorporated into the Red Army and became known as the so-called Latvian Territorial Corps. All others were discharged; shortly thereafter, widespread arrests, imprisonments and executions of the Latvian military and National Guard personnel took place. But, for those inducted into the Red Army,
their destinies were not any better or safer. In June of 1941, the Russians issued an order for all Latvian army officers of independent Latvia to report for training at the summer training camp at Litene. It was trap! As soon as the officers arrived in groups, they were asked to board trucks for a short drive into the supposed Litene forest “training areas”. At “the training” destinations, the officers were led from the trucks into areas that were surrounded by well armed Soviet Russian soldiers [NKVD - KGB troops] that awaited them; all of the Latvians were disarmed. Those officers that resisted were executed on the spot; the others were loaded into prepared railroad cattle cars and taken to destination unknown. We now know that all of the senior officers were tortured and that virtually all of the deported officers were either shot or perished in Russia’s slave labor camps. Those officers that did not report for training at the Litene Camp were being hunted down; those captured were either tortured and executed or imprisoned and deported. The saving grace for those officers that remained free and alive was the fact that Hitler double-crossed his ally, Stalin, and invaded the Soviet Union a week later on June 22, 1941. Nonetheless, Latvia had lost more than 50% of its military officers; the majority of them had to experience the path of Golgotha before “final rest”.

† Soviet- Russian (NKVD-KGB) atrocities †

Some still believe the Soviet lies that their enemies are found only among the capitalists, i.e., the rich. Of course, that is totally false. If that pertained only to the differences in the economic status and the question of wealth that characterizes this system, many may not even care. But, it is precisely for these people, who feel some human worth, who believe in freedom (freer courses of action for themselves) and who have not acquired any wealth, that bolshevism (communism) for them is most torturous. Thus, it is not surprising that the Latvians, at all economic levels, were and remain firm in their beliefs that there can not be anything worse than the communist system.
3. Latvian soldiers’ fate and national loyalty under the Soviets

Especially tragic events were experienced by the Latvian soldiers after Soviet Russia’s (Communist) occupation of Latvia in 1940. During its independence (1918-1940), Latvia had maintained a regular army of 25000, which was forged out of the battle-hardened infantry regiments of WW I and the War for Independence veterans who had fought the Red Army, all imbued with deep national and religious spirit, well trained and disciplined. The Soviets themselves called them to be the best formed and trained force on their western border.

The kinds of tools and illicit-tactics that Soviet Russia used, in the footsteps of her infamous Pact of Non-Aggression with Nazi Germany, to swallow up all of Eastern Europe, is well known to everyone. Thereafter, however, unbelievably terrifying became the destiny of the army soldiers of the various Eastern European nations. The mass-murder graves of the 14000 Polish officers, that the Soviet Russians killed at Katyn while being a secret ally of Germany (1939-1940), is only one of the better known historic events. However, it is not a surprise to the Baltic States; each nation can show several such Soviet Russian evil deeds in their own countries. In addition to the arrests and executions, the fiercely Latvia-loving Latvian soldiers had to undergo also torturous mental and moral degradation; they had to take off their Latvian uniforms and put on the uniforms of a brutal power that was destroying their country; and, in place of their national emblems, they had to walk around on their foreheads with the repulsive red star and the hammer and cycle. The Latvian military units were flooded with Soviet Russian political commissars, who, day in and day out, were preaching their communist political ABCs. Nonetheless, even these Soviet-Russian created Latvian units, when they marched through the streets, were a sharp contrast to the actual Soviet Red Army soldiers; their cleanliness, military bearing and their singing of Latvian nationalistic songs proclaimed their resistance and their unbroken spirit, thus becoming the only satisfaction and a silent glimmer of hope for the subjugated inhabitants of Latvia. The Bolsheviks (Communists) finally realized that they are unable to break the spirit of these Latvian soldiers. Thus, in early June of 1941, the Soviet Bolshevik invaders liquidated even this, their own created, Latvian Territorial Corps; they discharged the young soldiers and arrested the officers and the non-commissioned officers and imprisoned them in concentration camps or simply killed them. At that same time, mass arrests, deportations and murders of the Latvian civilian population were also taking place. Those that survived...
the initial wave of terror were looking for safe haven in the forests or elsewhere. As an example, the below shown arrest order, a hand written note, was sufficient to arrest General Jānis Balodis, the former Commander of the Latvian Army during the War for Independence and the last Minister of War at the time of the Russian occupation of Latvia.

Translation: _Order_. In accordance with the 1938 Law pertaining to good order and security in the country, the Cabinet of Ministers, in their July 31st meeting of this year, decided to deport from the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic’s territory to the Soviet Socialist Union the former Minister of War, General Jānis Balodis, together with the members of his family. This order is in force as of July 31, 1940. Riga, July 31, 1940." (Signed) „Vilis Lācis, President of the Cabinet of Ministers, v.i.” (v.i. means: „the temporary executor of the position). (Note: This simple handwritten note, issued to arrest this well known Latvian general and patriot, clearly reveals the kind of „justice and judicial system“ the Soviets had established throughout the Soviet Union; there was no accounting for their actions.)

During the Soviet Russia’s occupation period from June 1940 to June 1941, as sacrificial objects became 4665 Latvian soldiers: 1086 officers (including 23 generals, 1 admiral) and 3579 non-commissioned officers. (Ref: *Latviešu karavīrs otrā pasaules karā* (Latvian Soldier During WW II), Vol. 1, pg. 225).
NKVD (KGB) Chief's (Shustin's) order carried out!

But, taking into consideration the short time span between the deportations and Germany’s attack against the Soviet Union, there were people, including Latvian Army officers, who survived, such as those shown below, that later were involved in the Latvian Legion.

For example, General Oskars Dankers, with his family, got on the last train for Germany on June 20, 1940.g. 20.jūnijā, as the Soviets were occupying Latvia, and became a political refugee there; General Rudolfs Bangerskis was hiding in Jurmala and in Kurzeme, constantly changing his whereabouts; Colonel Arturs Silgailis had fled to Germany, as a „German”, because he was fluent in German; Colonel Aleksandrs Plensners had gone to Germany as a „repatriate”. In this way, approximately 300 Latvian soldiers saved themselves from sure death and returned from Germany to Latvia on July 5, 1941, after the Germans had occupied Latvia. Later, these officers played a role in the creation of the Latvian Legion. Thus, these and others were the officers that were still alive, and that initially and later, were battling to secure overall humane conditions for the Latvian soldiers that were drafted by the Germans for the Latvian Legion. But the majority of the other officers,
non-commissioned officers, national guardsmen, policemen, teachers, national and local government officials, clergy, etc., that were still alive, had hidden themselves in the forests during these critical days, during the Soviet Russian orchestrated mass murder and deportation period and just prior to the arrival of the German occupation army and the German civilian administrators (occupation functionaries - SD, special "cleaning" units, etc.) in Latvia.

4. German Occupation

The Historical background and prevailing conditions. The Latvians did not have any illusions about another evil system, which came from the other direction, from Nazi Germany, that was established and maintained also by force of arms over the Latvian nation for four years starting in June of 1941. The Latvians had already experienced German subjugation for several hundred years prior to WW I. The way the Germans treated some of the other ethnic nations, that they had occupied, pointed out to the inhabitants of Latvia what lay in store for them, within the „living space” that the Germans had declared as their own, but only if the Germans were able to remain there. The Latvian-German relationship is marked by ancient antagonism. It is known by anyone, who has a cursory knowledge about the Baltic area history. It dates back to Baltic Crusades of the 12th-13th centuries and the German crusaders, who, under the sign of the „Christian Cross” and, in a most barbaric way, invaded (with fire and sword), occupied and subjugated the Estonians and the Latvians. And, then they ruled in a barbaric and inhumane way the Estonian and Latvian nations until the end of WW I.

The way the Germans treated the people in their other occupied countries of Eastern Europe during WW II, that treatment was also the same that the Latvians got in Latvia. Without a doubt, it was much worse in Latvia than that in the Western countries that the Germans had occupied, simply because, they wanted to make Latvia, as noted earlier, as part "their own living space”. They wanted „living space”, but not the people already living there. And especially, they did not want people that were craving for their own national and political independence.

It is absolutely wrong to pre-judge the Baltic States and have their situation compared with that of Western Europe that the Germans had occupied. The German actions in Eastern Europe were drastically different and much worse. Whereas the German occupied countries of Western Europe (Holland, Belgium, Norway, France, etc.) were waiting for the Allies and did in fact experience liberation by them, it was not so in the East; and, while awaiting them (Allies), the people of the Western nations could without any fear congratulate also the Bolshevik (Communist) drive toward the West into Germany. But, the Latvians were not in a similar geographical situation, and the Soviet Russian Red Army's approach toward the Baltic States' borders meant the approach of a new wave of destruction, terror and enslavement for the Baltic peoples. Most importantly, it was impossible to foresee what the end would be, as one could see in the West.

Of course, it was not a secret that all of the sympathies of the Latvians were on the side of the Western Allies during WW II. Since loosing her independence, it was not that these sympathies alone that dictated this pro-Western orientation, but also the Latvian own desire to regain independence; and, it could be regained only if the
Western Allies were victorious, especially if the 1917-1918 events repeat themselves and both dictatorships (Stalin and Hitler) collapse. The fact that Germany would lose WW II, it was not only the conviction of the Latvians, but also that of most of the Western nations; after all, the whole World had risen up against Germany. This belief helped the Latvians to live through four long years of heavy-handed German occupation. But, who would drive out the Soviet Russians from her land, if they were to arrive as one of the victorious equals? This dreary question subdued the Latvian nation then; and, in despair, they were awaiting an answer to that question for the next 45 years after the third brutal Soviet Russian occupation (1945-1991) after WW II. [Note: After WW II, Latvian own native language, culture, customs and traditions were being supplanted by those of Russia. Indeed, their fears and predictions had proven to be correct – Soviet Russia immediately had introduced large scale deportations and, the deportees were replaced by mostly ethnic Russians, who took over their homes, apartments, personal belongings and land as their own – a genocide was taking place and nobody cared or could do anything about it; Latvia lost one third of its population; terror, imprisonment and political murders were a common-place occurrence during that period, especially right after the WW II and until the death of Stalin and his NKVD (KGB) chief Lavrenty Beria.]

Therefore, a person can get a correct insight about the Latvian soldiers and the Latvian Legion only by understanding the historical events and the situation that the Latvian nation found itself, after the 1940 Soviet Russian occupation and the 1941 German occupation. Specifically, get an understanding:

1. That the forcefully drafted and German-created Latvian military units, nonetheless, were bravely and very desperately fighting against the Soviet Red Army near Latvia’s borders and on its territory;
2. That the Latvian soldier lived through a deep, inner-self tragedy, bothered by a force of released feelings, that he had to fight together with the Germans, on their orders, under their leadership and in their (alien) uniform;
3. That he had the courage and bravery not to hide his Latvian ideals, that, if he fights, that it happens at the calling by the voice of his own nation’s destiny, that these are only his nation’s objectives, i.e., the complete independence of Latvia, for which he stands; and, that nobody will be able to force him to fight against the Western Allies, not even by any person’s orders or coercion. These unwritten conditions faced the Germans, which they had to respect; even the German forced-upon legionnaire oath was modified and different from that of the regular German soldiers.

To be sure, the news about the fallout between the two former allies and friends (Communist-Fascist Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany), both of whom were the initiators of WW II and who were now at odds with each other, were initially received with jubilation by the Latvians and the other subdued nations as well. No matter what took place there and then, the truth is, that for those nations that were suffocating under Soviet Russia’s terrorism and inhumane treatment, the beginning of the war between Germany and the Soviet Union gave them a dawn of new hope. „It could not be any worse” was their outlook. It seemed that at the last moment God’s own finger had taken action, so that, at the height of their „injustice and subjugation” situation, a portion of their national and human rights might be regained. In this
regard, it was not an exception for the Russian people themselves, who were hiding such feelings. Of course, this does not mean that they had any sympathies for the Germans, but only for the events to come and, with those connected events, a hope for change. One can accept the fact that, if the Germans had been smarter and their policies against the Bolshevik subjugated nations different, including the Russians, the result of their war effort in the East may have taken a different course, other than the one that actually took place. But, German policies were German policies. „We do not need that we are loved, it is enough that we are feared”, such was the credo of this policy. Thus, such policy, and especially the behind-the-front functionaries’ attitudes and actions created „animosity and ice” even faster and earlier than the 1941-1942 winter cold at Stalingrad and elsewhere. Because of these actions, Hitler himself placed Stalin back on his throne from which he had already almost fallen during the first military thrusts.

**The Latvian Self-Government and the German attitudes and actions.** As could be observed and noted at that time, all inhabitants within the Soviet Union looked at the German thrust toward the East with „wait and see” attitude and tried to create their own national governments, including a rearrangement of their internal affairs that would be based on human rights foundation. The same happened in Latvia with the previously noted officers (Gen. Dankers, Gen. Bangerskis, and others), who tried to reestablish a “self-government structure” for Latvia. These officers, together with others and former government officials, that were still alive and that had survived the Bolshevik terror and murders, was the beginning for the so called „Local Government” that the Latvians organized in December 1941. The German General Commissar finally agreed to this ad-hoc group’s existence only on March 1, 1942, with a decree, that **the Local Government had no executive or decision-making powers.** At least, it was something for the Latvians, mostly an organized means to lodge protests against the German excesses when they occurred against the local population, which did occur quite frequently. The Local Government’s structure from December 1941 until March 1943, after which some changes were made, was as follows:

- Interior General Director (GD) - *Gen. O. Dankers*
- Interior GD Deputy and Chief Director of Internal Security – Lt.Col. V. Veiss
- Education GD - *prof. M. Prīmanis*
- Judicial GD - *A. Valdmanis*
- Finances GD - *J. Skujevics*
- Economics GD - V. Zāgers
- Transportation GD - *O. Leimanis*
- Audit GD - *P. Vanags*
- The Local Government’ Office Chief – Capt. A. Skrēbers

In March of 1943, A. Valdmanis was replaced by Latvia’s former President A. Kviesis, who in turn was replaced by Senator T. Zvejnieks in March 1944; at the end of 1943, V. Zāgers was replaced by O. Leimanis and the Economics GD was broken into two GDs, creating a separate Agriculture GD under J. Anderson, which previously had been part of the Economics GD. The previously noted officers (General Bangerskis, Colonel Silgailis and Lieutenant Colonel Plensners) were involved in the formation process of the Latvian Legion; but, they had no decision-making authority or any executive powers. All that they could do was to influence
that process, so that the Latvian youth (drafted soldiers and Latvia's living resource) would be somewhat protected. All civil and military executive and decision-making authority, without exception, remained in the hands of the Germans.

The renewal of independence, anything that was connected with Latvian national interests, was forbidden, even to the point of repressions being applied against the local population. In fact, all such suggestions were suppressed at the very beginning of this wish-budding. The completely absurd German executions, within their occupied territories, did create fear, but they also spawned indignation and feelings of retribution, causing local populations to go into the forests and to become more ferocious partisans. The way the prisoners of war, who had initially surrendered in such massive numbers, were treated, forced the Red Army soldiers to fight to the bitter end.

Alongside this manifestation and cruelty, was something else, not any less insulting to the "locals", even in those regions where such executions were only limited. It is true that a lot can be taken away from nations, but their honor can not be trampled upon. „A Russian is not human“ shouted Hitler in his usual “hitleristic” fashion. Just remember, as an example, the kind of feelings that such actions aroused among the outside-Russia living Russian émigrés, who had so feverishly been waiting for changes in their homeland. But, whatever the “Führer” shouted, the local German functionaries, big ones and small ones, were also then striving to emulate their leader and translated his wishes into brutal actions. And, the word „Russian“ to Hitler and to the Nazi ideology was not only a Russian nationality depiction, but it was also a representation of all the peoples living to the east of „Greater Germany“. This deliberate refusal to see the different nationalities or national peculiarities, therefore, also marked the German policy in Latvia.

Everything, that reminded the Germans about Latvia's independence, had to be eliminated and laughed at, with an identical attitude that the Latvians had already experienced under Soviet-Russian Fascism from the East. Even the word „Latvia“ was forbidden to be officially mentioned or to be used. Latvia's territory was simply incorporated into one of the German general commissariats known as Ostland. So as not to create any illusions, that the Germans were recognizing anything in particular regarding the centuries-old Baltic region formation, the word Ostland, besides the considerably more developed Baltic States, also included Byelorussia, one of the least developed regions of the Soviet Union at that time. Even the local Latvian population nationality was not recognized and in its place was used the word local (Einheimische). In general, the same can be said about the other Baltic States. However, this attitude was seen as being much more poignant in Latvia; there, the occupation-German functionaries (among whom were a large number of SS and German secret police or Gestapo personnel) also included a very large number of the Baltic Germans, who had come back to Latvia and who, with purely boyish zest, were trying to "pay back" the Latvians for having taken away from them or their families their previous privileged status as „overlords“, i.e., after the Latvians had declared and won their independence from both, the Russians and the Germans, after WW I. Every step and action taken by them had to show that the Germans are and will remain the absolute rulers in this land, and that the Latvians will remain (if they will remain at all) as the servants and the subservient category type of people. Thus, for example, General Bangerskis notes in his memoirs, that the Baltic German
Niel von Holst had written to his friend in Germany that they, the Baltic Germans, had managed to stop the renewal of the Latvian Army and, while drinking champagne at a table at the Rome Hotel in Riga, they were re-naming the streets of Riga. Indeed, it did happen that way and even Hitler had his own street named after him!

**Since it was German policy to do away with anything that reminded anyone about the former independence of Latvia, the Germans, after their arrival, notified the Latvians that the formerly Soviet established laws were in effect and not the laws of independent Latvia** (those that the Latvians had already declared as being reestablished after the Soviet withdrawal). This, of course, included the recently introduced Soviet judicial and economic systems, which had been established by the Soviets, including the already nationalized Latvian private properties, land and manufacturing establishments that had been taken away from the rightful owners by the Russians. In straight language, that meant that the second bandit took over the loot from the robbery that the first bandit had committed and had in his possession. Now, the German Reich became the owner of all such Soviet nationalized properties in Latvia, those that previously were owned by the citizens of Latvia. It would be impossible here to itemize all of the Latvian legal aspects areas and the national humiliation that was being experienced by the Latvians. Even Latvian self-respect was being trampled-on by the Germans; and, it could be seen every step of the way, by their words and by their actions, big one and small ones - the changing of the street names in Old Town of Riga to Baltic German names already during the initial days of the occupation, names that were a sad historical reminder for the Latvians from the past; all cultural centers were converted into German establishments and even the ancient Latvian Society of Riga was thrown out of their old historical building. Latvians received only 1/3 of the daily food ration from that of a German; shoes, clothing and other provisions were forbidden for Latvians, even though there was plenty of everything available at that time; and finally, the hunting down of people and the illegal mobilization of Latvian youth for the German „work battalions“, „police battalions“ and the „Latvian Legion“; and, of course, the Latvian language was no longer the official language of Latvia. Instead of the Russians, now the Germans were in complete control of all affairs in Latvia, including matters of „life and death“.

We do not have to explain what it meant to the Latvian nation, that only one year earlier, before the Soviet-Russian arrival, they had been the rulers in their own land, who loved their nation and who were proud of their accomplishments. These insults and humiliations were no less offensive than the physical excesses. In this way, the Germans destroyed already at the very beginning any illusions, if anyone had such, that were initially created on the background of the Soviet-Russian „1941 atrocities and deportations“. In place of it, the Germans had renewed the historically earlier animosity and spite toward themselves. These conditions have to be taken into account, if we are to understand the Latvian military formations, in the way that they were created by the Germans and the spirit that prevailed within such units.

**Not even looking at the new Soviet threat looming across the border, the Germans were unable to create a single meaningful combat unit from Latvian volunteers, not to mention „volunteer“ divisions that eventually had to be reconstituted with draftees several times over because of casualties. But, one**
has to realize, that during forced mobilization, there are no places in Latvia where tens of thousands can go and hide.

5. The Germans disarm and liquidate the Latvian-created defense units and Germans attempt to create volunteer military units

**German immediate actions after their occupation of Latvia.** The Latvian stance of not volunteering to join the German-formed units, in addition to the background circumstances already noted, was caused to a large extent by the German disbandment of the Latvian volunteer self-defense units, immediately after the German arrival in Latvia. We already have mentioned that, especially during the spring of 1941, many Latvian Army soldiers and many others that were being sought by the communists and the Soviet NKVD (KGB) were forced to look for safe haven in the forests or elsewhere. Some had grouped themselves in small units and were trying to defend themselves and others against the Bolshevik (Soviet Russian) led executions. With the start of the Soviet-German War, a tremendous confusion reigned among the Soviet Russians that had occupied Latvia. Taking advantage of this Bolshevik chaos and, wherever possible, the Latvians tried to renew their national institutions, laws and security establishments of the previously independent Latvia, so as to have the new occupiers, the Germans, confronted with a fait accompli situation; i.e., that the Latvians have already restored their national institutions and likewise are already in position to take care of law and order in their own country. It should also be noted that the span of time between the fleeing Soviets and the arriving Germans was usually at least a few hours apart, but in most of Latvia the interval was only a couple of days or less. Somewhat longer time interval was between the German Army main units (that moved on the main roads and were attacking the retreating Red Army forces) and the arrival of the German functionaries that followed these main German combat units as they occupied the country. During this extremely short interval, the Latvians indeed felt that they were free again, and as noted previously, were striving to restore their nation's government apparatus and order, that Soviet Russia had 100% brutally liquidated; this included over 34000 government officials, policemen, clergy, army and national guard leaders (officers and non-commissioned officers) and others that the Russians had murdered or deported to Siberia (the Soviet Gulag). Thus, the Latvian soldiers, those that had survived, were gathering together in the so-called self-defense units as supporters of their government institutions and as the foundation of the eventual to-be-renewed Latvian Army; and, of course, they were dressed in their Latvian Army uniforms. **It is important to recall that Latvia had previously been recognized by Germany as an independent nation (the same as by the Soviet Russia); and, there had been normal relations between the Latvian Government and Germany, including a 1939 concluded Non-Aggression Treaty.** Likewise, a considerably number of Latvians were hoping, that for now, the Germans will be tied up with lots of work in the East and that Germany will continue to honor Latvia's independence status that was obliterated by Soviet Russia. Others, those that knew about the German objectives in the East, did not think that way; but, nonetheless, it was the wish of all Latvians to present the Germans with a fait accompli situation such that they would have to take a position in one way or another.

Just as soon as the „behind-the-front-line“ German functionaries arrived (almost together with the first German Army units): (1) the Latvian state and
local governments were closed; (2) Latvia was declared as being part of their so-called Generalkomisarit of Ostland; (3) the Latvian-repealed Soviet Government (Russia's Bolshevik) decrees and laws as being still in force; (4) the wearing of any kind Latvian uniforms was strictly forbidden; (5) under a threat of death, all types of weapons were ordered to be turned over to the Germans.

The German SS and Police Chief, General Stahlecker, who had arrived with the first invading units of the German Army together with his Sicherheitsdienst (SD) men and police units, already on July 8, 1941, issued an order that he, and he alone, is responsible for all security behind the Army’s front lines, that the wearing of any kind of uniforms, which are not German, is forbidden; simultaneously, he ordered that weapons be turned over to the Germans without delay, including those which are used by the Latvian self-defense units. Those that did not obey these orders were to be subject to the death penalty. The Latvian self-defense units were also liquidated, so that the Germans could form military units based only on German orders, instructions and whims. Soon afterwards, already on August 18, 1941, the Germans took over 100% all civil executive powers and the Latvians no longer had any say in their own country (see below).

ANORDNUNG ZUR ÜBERNAHME DER VERWALTUNG DURCH DEN REICHSKOMMISSAR FÜR DAS OSTLAND.


§ 2. Anordnungen an die Zivilbevölkerung in dem vom Reichskommissar für das Ostland verwalteten Gebieten ergehen durch die Dienststellen der deutschen Zivilverwaltung.

§ 3. Dienststellen der deutschen Zivilverwaltung sind:

- der Reichskommissar für das Ostland,
- die Generalkommissare,
- die Hauptkommissare und
- die Gebietskommissare.


Die Neuregelung der Eigentums- und Besitzverhältnisse bleibt vorbehalten. Über das Vermögen der sowjetrussischen Wehrmacht hat die deutsche Wehrmacht die Verfügungsgewalt.

§ 5. Die Amtsersprache im Reichskommissariat Ostland ist deutsch. In jedem Generalbezirk ist die Landessprache zugelassen.


Der Reichskommissar für das Ostland

LOHSE.

Translation:
OSTLAND REICHKOMISAR’s INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING THE ASSUMPTION OF CIVIL EXECUTIVE POWERS

§ 1.
In connection with the takeover of the civilian administration, the executive powers are transferred to (assumed by) the Ostland Reich Commissar.

§ 2.
Orders issued to the civilians in the regions under the authority of the Reich Commissar in Ostland are issued by German civil agencies.
The Ostland Army Commander’s authorization concerning service locations to utilize the country’s resources for the Reich’s defense purposes is not affected.

§ 3.
The German Civil Authority service locations are: the Reich Commissar of Ostland, the Chief Commissars and the Regional Commissars.

§ 4.
The German Civil Authority appropriates all of the Soviet Socialist Republic Union’s, the individual Republic’s, the existing (local) administrations’, associations’ and establishments’ fixed (real estate) and movable property owned by them, including all kinds of demands (i.e., everything or anything owed to them) that were in force as of June 20, 1941, following the most recent regulations, that have been issued or that will follow.

After June 20, 1941 any issued regulations, changes or additions are illegal, if such have not been issued by the German Civil Authority. The German Civil Authority (various location) already completed actions remain irrevocably in place. Property legal ownership rearrangement until further notice is suspended.

§ 5.
The official language at the Ostland Reich Commissariat is German. The local language is authorized in each of the general regions.

§ 6.
The instructions are in force as of the day of issuance. (V.B.1941/1)
Kauna, August 18, 1941
Ostland Reich Commissar
Lohse

***
All kinds of occupation regulations could be understood, but the Germans did it in such an insulting way, that only they knew how to do it in their „mania of greatness“. The Latvians did not forget that, and especially, when the Germans started to consider the question regarding the formation of Latvian-soldier units.
Both of these individuals, Lohse and Jeckeln, had life and death power over all inhabitants of Ostland (Eastland – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Byelorussia); Jeckeln personally supervised the killing of about 25000 of the Riga ghetto Jews in late November and early December of 1941, utilizing his own German SS body guard and his German police units.

The German Security Service – SD and EK. Here we have to point out, that the German Security Service (Sicherheitsdienst – SD) arrived in Latvia within the first few hours or literally together with the German Army units; this organization had operational teams (Einsatzkommandos – EK), composed primarily of SD personnel nearly 1000 men strong, including a few women; their mission was to immediately do the dirty work behind the front lines and in the German occupied territories. The initial “dirty work” (killing of Jews and other “undesirable elements”) was headed by German SS General Walter Stahlecker and his German EK units; German SS and Police Chief, General Walter Stahlecker also, in a report as early as October 16, 1941, in regards to the work that his German SD men and EK teams did, indicated that, „Not any less important is, taking into consideration the future, to present undisputable and verifiable fact, that the freed inhabitants (meaning Latvians) on their own initiative have taken the most brutal steps against the Bolshevik and Jewish enemy, so that the role of the German unit leaders could not be revealed.” (Ref: Igors Vārpa, Latviešu karavīrs zem kāškrusta karoga, 2003; pg. 35). From this, we can concretely see that the Germans went to great pains, to create evidence for future incrimination of the local inhabitants (disarmed citizens of the occupied territories) for the "dirty" deeds that their own German Einsatzkommandos men had carried out. This is substantiated by none other then the SS and Police Chief in Ostland, General Friedrich Jeckeln, during his trial after WW II in Riga; when questioned about war crime activities, he willingly incriminates himself, his German SS men, his German police and the German EK teams; no mention of any Latvian legionnaires, because the Legion was not even yet established. Professor A. Ezergailis notes in his book (Nazi Soviet Disinformation, Riga, 2005; pg. 12-14) that the German SS and Police Chief’s report ["Stahlecker's Consolidated Report of October 15, 1941" - Nuremberg Documents, L-180] very clearly points out that the Germans themselves organized, supervised and carried out all of the Jewish killings in Eastern Europe immediately after the Germans had occupied a territory and that the following conclusions can be made from the Stahlecker's report:

- that Jews were being killed upon higher (German) orders
- that Germans had limited success in organizing "spontaneous pogroms"
- that "pogroms" were German organized events
- that the "natives" should be killing Jews as a revenge
- that the locals were reluctant to kill Jews
- that his (Stahlecker's) assignment was to deceive the world about the killings
- that it was important to show that the Germans had nothing to do with the killings
- that the duties of organization were carried out by his (Stahlecker's) outfit, the Security Police, and by the Wehrmacht
• that the Germans were selecting only those "natives" in Lithuania for the killing squads, who had relatives that had been victims of "Bolshevisim and Jews"

We know that the German propaganda machine did a lot of work to publicize to the world, that the "natives" were behind all of the killings; even Jews have fallen for this German propaganda assertion, as noted by some distinguished historians.

Now we know conclusively, that the Germans themselves organized and did virtually most of the killings of Jews in Eastern Europe during the initial occupation stages. We also know that the Germans did recruit a small number of some local individuals to do their dirty work later, but even these individuals were under strict German SD control and orders. This has even been confirmed by the German SS and Police Chief in Ostand (the Baltic - Eastland) General Jeckeln, who clearly stated that his "operation" in Riga, the killing of about 25,000 Jews of the Riga ghetto, was all a purely German undertaking – no "natives" involved at all.

6. The Germans themselves start organizing Latvian military units

Not too long a time had passed, when the Germans were also in need of the Latvian "living resource" at the Eastern Front. Only, however, it could not be obtained on volunteer basis, at least not in meaningful numbers. Besides, it would also be connected, to an extent, with having to request and to ask, which would not be appropriate for the "master" race, especially not yet in 1941. The Germans still had enough power; and, the "masters" can demand others to serve as they wish. The local police chiefs (Germans) were directed to increase the draft for the police service. In addition, all former Latvian National Guard personnel were subordinated under the police as "Assistant Police C Group".

During the days of independence, the Latvians had a strong National Guard organization, organized after the model in Finland. Such personnel were organized locally in platoons, companies, battalions and regiments. Every administrative region had a regiment. During the independence period, Latvia had 20 such regiments. They were to complement the regular army in case of war. During the Soviet occupation, their ranks had shrunk considerably, especially their leadership (due to the previously noted Soviet-Russian murders, arrests and deportations). Nonetheless, a portion of it had survived. Since the Germans were starting to have problems at the front, especially during the winter of 1941-1942 at Stalingrad, there came up the need for the Latvian "living" resource.

The Germans, therefore, ordered these national guardsmen to be gathered together in their respective districts, adding to them a portion of the district police, and then simply notifying them that they are such and such a police battalion, that is subject to wartime laws and orders. These German actions were against all known international norms and The Hague Protocols governing actions in any occupied territory. Of course, the Germans swore that this was only for only a short period of time and for purposes of training. However, they did not adhere to their proclaimed time schedule. Many farms were left without farmers and able-bodied men. Needless to say, there was very strong resentment and bitterness among the draftees and their families. This was especially the case
when these battalions, after being very primitively armed and supplied and virtually untrained, were invariably assigned to the German Army front-line war sectors; casualties were very high. Because none of the draftees had received medical examinations, many of the guardsmen that were drafted in this way turned out to be sick and completely unfit for military service.

There was nothing that helped to alleviate this problem, either by protests from the draftees themselves or by the Latvian Self-Government institutions (which had no executive powers whatsoever). In order to reduce the possibilities for desertion, these battalions were usually sent by the Germans to the German Eastern Front combat sectors that were located farthest from Latvia. Likewise, these battalions were physically kept far apart from each other. Even though the assigned battalion commanders were Latvians, the real issuers of orders were the German liaison officers assigned to the battalions. Many and many, realizing the injustice done by the Germans, were looking for ways to get home. These, however, were being caught, tried and shot, or, the concentration camps were being filled with them (for example, the Salaspils Concentration Camp).
Note: Basically, the police battalions were not voluntarily formed, but as can be seen by the draft notice below; they were forcibly drafted, with severe penalty threats, if anybody thought of not carrying out such draft notice orders. ["Latviešu karavīrs otrā pasaules kara laikā" (The Latvian soldier During World War II, Vol. 2, pg. 57). Note: The title "Iesaukšana" means "Induction" or "draft.

One such battalion commander, a former Latvian Army Captain Prauliņš, was sentenced to death, for example, on the basis of a denunciation, that he had criticized the Germans. As a contrast, a policeman-soldier, who had shot his battalion commander, an exemplary former Latvian Army officer, was not tried or punished because he had presented arguments that the Germans liked. The Germans SD men shot, without a trial, the former Commander of the Latvian Aviation Regiment, Colonel Kandis, who had been sent by the Latvian Self-Government to establish liaison with these battalions; the Germans portrayed his death as a "suicide". During the initial stages of German occupation, another officer, a Lieutenant Colonel Deglavs, died under the same kind of "SD suicide" circumstances (with a bullet in his head); he was fiercely patriotic Latvian. And, those were not the only suicides.

In this special way, and, prior to the creation of the Latvian Legion in March of 1943, the Germans had already illegally drafted and assigned to the Eastern Front sectors more than 20 such battalions (all illegally formed in violation of the Geneva convention and other international norms which Germany had signed). As previously noted, these battalions were very primitively armed, ill-supplied and untrained for combat; they were thrown into combat and were rapidly "melting away" in the front-line combat sectors.

Needless to say, the Latvians saw in these German actions a pre-meditated German objective to disperse and destroy their "living resource" (Latvian population), without any tangible benefits to the Latvians themselves. After all that had happened, could there be any talks or even remote thinking about the formation of new Latvian "volunteer" units as proposed by the Germans! Only after a considerable effort by the Latvian Self-Government (which had no authority of its own) and, especially later, because of the efforts by the General Inspector of the Latvian Legion, did it become possible to get the remnants of these battalions back to their homeland; or, if there
was no other way, to attach them to the Legion’s units, so that at least the sick and the older personnel could be discharged.

These extremely bitter personnel, after having been deceived by the Germans, were thrown into combat; and, they fought well and would not even think about surrendering to the Bolsheviks (Soviet Russians), because they knew the Bolsheviks only too well. And, these are also the same men, a portion of them that were transported to Germany, who fought their way through enemy (Russian) lines to reach the Western Allies so that they could surrender to them.

7. The Germans Establish the Latvian Legion

Latvians object to German plans to form a Latvian Legion. It seemed clear, from what has been said previously, that when the Germans, during the fall of 1942, did raise the question about the formation of new and larger Latvian units, including the establishment of the Latvian Legion and, while starting already to “prepare” the Latvian society for this purpose, the Head of the Latvian Self-Government and Interior General Director, General Dankers (a former Latvian Army division commander) could only declare a clear Latvian viewpoint that there was not a chance at all in establishing a “volunteer” Latvian Legion (Ref: Minutes of the Latvian Self-Government of November 4, 1942). Not any less clear were the opinions of those few former Latvian Army officers with whom the Germans were talking in connection with this subject. They pointed out to the Germans, that in addition, Latvian soldiers’ mentality is not compatible with the planned Latvian inclusion in the SS units (allgemeine SS), even if they are Waffen SS (Weapon SS) units. The Germans seemed to be rather insulted about the latter and pointed out that the Weapon SS, which should never be confused with the general SS (allgemeine SS), are only combat units and the German Army’s guard; and, that the Führer was going to reorganize, in a step-by-step way, all of the German Armed Forces that way. The Latvians pointed out that Latvia has not yet been incorporated into Germany and that the Latvian people want their own country. In regards to the latter, the Germans (General Commissar) explained that even Slovakia’s status cannot be given, because it was established already prior to the war; he noted that Latvia was in a similar situation with Belgium, Holland and Estonia. If the Latvian question was to be solved already now, then others would ask for the same thing. During one such discussion, the General Commissar stated that he knew the Latvian hardships, but also sees the Latvian stance - Germans have been beaten up in the street cars; coaches-for-hire do not care to transport Germans; porters at railway stations do not want to carry German officers’ luggage; farmers do not deliver required quotas in sufficient quantities. The situation in the other Baltic lands is considered better. [Ref: Minutes of the Latvian Self-Government of December 28, 1942].

In no way could the German “Latvian Legion” aims be furthered by another situation that became known, i.e., that the Germans, through the Labor Directorates (which are part of the German administrative establishment) had already drafted a segment of Latvians for the so-called „auxiliaries“ (HiWi – Hilfswillige). This situation is noted by General Dankers’ report during a meeting of the Latvian Self-Government on December 8, 1942; it described the depressing situation of these auxiliary units, which were attached to the German Army, in regards to winter clothing and their overall treatment. The Latvian Self-Government, thereupon, asked General Dankers
to submit a request to the German General Commissar concerning this matter Ref: Minutes of the Latvian Self-Government of December 8, 1942).

Nonetheless, during the early part of 1943, it appeared that the Germans had decided to begin “rounding up volunteers” for the Latvian Legion. In connection with this, the German General Commissar called all General Directors to report to him on January 29, 1943. These were the previously noted General Directors of the so-called Latvian Self-Government that were supposed to represent the former ministries of Latvia. During that meeting, all of the Latvian Directors repeatedly declared, that from one point of view, they understood the situation that they must get involved in the fight against the Bolsheviks; but from the other side, the conditions in the country had become such that they keep people away from volunteering. Also, the Latvian representatives pointed out that they (Latvians) were not sure whether the Führer has allowed or has ordered the Legion to be created. In the first instance, they said that they did not know who had requested this; in the second case, what had been actually ordered. The Latvians also asked not to forget the difference between the Germans and the Latvians, and because of that, the difference in the response to the Führer’s request.

The Latvians noted, "You (Germans) were called and pulled along by your own nation’s person, a man that is cast from your own bone, flesh from your own flesh. We belong to a different nation. Nonetheless, the Latvians know that the Bolsheviks (Soviet Russia’s Army) are already close to the Latvian frontier and they know what awaits them, if the Bolsheviks once more invade our land. And indeed, Mr. General Commissar is it not obvious to you that the entire nation is silent, as if taken over by a sad calmness. That is the calmness of hopelessness. You can’t live just for hate, only for destruction. There has to be also a positive goal, some hope for a brighter future. The German nation knows what they are fighting for – not only to destroy Communism, but also to secure their nation the opportunities for a better life and development. But for what should now the Latvians go and fight for? What else should they be told, besides that they must just fight the Communists? We have nothing more to say.” As a result of this meeting, the German General Commissar recognized that the recruitment of volunteers would not have any results. Therefore, he rejected it. [Ref: Special Minutes No. 2 of the Latvian Self-Government of January 29, 1943]. As far as we know, this question, i.e., the question concerning the recruitment of volunteers, was never raised again.

It is still a supposedly unclear question to many, whether the legionnaires were volunteers or inducted draftees; this question is not even relevant because there was never a noticeable volunteer recruitment ever done for the Latvian Legion or even undertaken. Likewise, there is not even a smaller unit of the Legion that is known to have been formed strictly from volunteers. That shows how absurd is the volunteer designation for the Latvian Legion.

Hitler orders the formation of a Latvian Legion. Notwithstanding the fact that the German establishment knew that recruitment of volunteers in Latvia would not have any prospects of success, and, as can be seen from the aforementioned meeting, that they had in fact rejected the idea of recruiting volunteers, nonetheless, on February 10, 1943, there comes an order from Hitler and Himmler to the local
German functionaries to establish a Latvian Legion; in addition, it is labeled as *volunteer* and SS.

**Hitler’s order to form the Latvian Legion (translation):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Führer’s Headquarters, 10.2.1943</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I order the establishment of the Latvian SS – Volunteer – Legion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The unit’s size and type depends on the number of Latvian men available.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*HH (Himmler’s initials) un Adolfs Hitlers (signature)*

Could it be that the local German functionaries (without whose knowledge this did not happen) wanted to make their Führer a laughable stock, because they knew that under the already noted conditions volunteer recruitment would give miniscule results, if any? No, they had never intended to leave such matters dependent on the Latvians and allow any misjudgments in the execution of the Führer’s order or authority; no, Hitler himself would never agree to that. That would mean to request and to beg. Who? The Latvians! “Ein Splittervolk! (Crumb nation)”

**First epithet: „volunteer“.** Many historians and the Latvians think that Hitler, by utilizing the designation „volunteer“ wanted to hide from the outside world the illegal Latvian mobilization, i.e., the disregard for recognized international norms. It is felt, however, that these international norms were the least of masks that he would look for, because he and those people surrounding him were used to describing things (which was also done by other dictators) with completely opposite words from those that actually portrayed reality. No doubt, there were inner and outer propaganda motives, causing the „volunteer“ label to be assigned to the mobilized and forcibly drafted Latvians. Say, look, how a small nation has attached itself to Germany and to the Führer! The Germans themselves very well knew what the word „volunteer“
meant from the lips of Hitler; during peacetime, prior to the war in Germany, there circulated an anecdote that Hitler can force a dog to „voluntarily“ eat mustard.

**Second epithet – „SS“.** Can it really be that Hitler wanted to include among the ranks of those most privileged men of the German National Socialist party, that requires a special scrutiny for joining (first of all, a person had to be German), the Latvians in such a massive way, a nation that up till now he had called with disgust as being among the „crumb nations“ (Ein Splittervolk), a nation that has not been even included among that group of Germanic nations that he considers as being at a much lower status level among the „Germanic nations“? Of course, the Germans did not even have the remotest thought to include of the Latvians among the ranks of the SS. And, within the Legion itself, it has always been emphasized that there is a difference between the SS and the legionnaires. In addition, the Latvian units in the Legion are not labeled as „SS“, but as „der SS“, i.e., meaning that they are the property of the SS – as an object belonging to the SS. However, the attachment of the SS label to the Legion can be done, so that the Germans can say, look, the subjugated nations do not hold any grudges against the SS, but just the opposite – they have respect and recognition. Thus, Himmler was not inhuman after all and all this would be very useful for propaganda. And besides, in whose hands would they place the larger of the Latvian units, since they could not be completely trusted? Placed under the German Army? But, Himmler does not trust the Army either. Heaven knows what they could hatch together with such Latvians! Only in the tested SS hands will there be a measure of guarantee. Thus, it is not a trust or distinction for labeling them (the Latvian Legion) as „der SS“, but rather mistrust and oversight motives. Making the Latvian legionnaires to suffer for this even after World War II and to qualify them as SS men can be done only with the same kind of logic as, for example, calling the concentration camp prisoners as SD (Gestapo) men, under whose subjugation they were.

**Germans break international laws and conventions.** As already noted, the Germans recognized that the recruitment of volunteers would not give any results; therefore, they immediately started mobilization, even though at the very beginning, they did not use the word „mobilization“. Besides, a word is meaningless, but only reality counts. [Germany itself went to war and continued the war for several years without using the „mobilization“ label. Can you believe that this huge army consisted of only of volunteers?] The Germans now completely ignored the international norms and conventions that Germany had signed – forced induction of inhabitants into their armed forces in occupied territories for direct war effort purposes. A fact to keep in mind is that many young men were called up for „work units“, but later they found themselves dressed in German Army military uniforms, with German insignia, and assigned to combat units. Thus, the Hague Convention was totally ignored, not only by the Germans, but also by the Russians as well. These international crimes cost the Latvian nation over 100000 deaths in combat casualties, not to mention more than that number in civilian casualties and twice that number in deportations and murders at the hands of the Soviet Russians. Canadian historian H. Otto in his book, *How the Germans Conscripted „Volunteers“ for the Latvian Legion*, correctly states, that the German induction of Latvian youth into their armed forces was completely against the Hague Convention and that there can not be any talk about „volunteering“ when people are forcibly drafted by threats and by force. The same applies to the Soviet drafting of Latvian youth in 1940-1941 and during 1944-1945.
Germans issue registration and draft orders. Preparing to carry out the Führer’s order to establish the Latvian Legion, the Germans already in February 1943 announced the mandatory registration of all former Latvian Army officers and non-commissioned officers at the appropriate police precincts, with threats of penalties for not registering. It turned out, that shortly prior to that, the Germans had already established an „induction or draft“ organization, SS Ersatzkommando Ostland, with an SS issued order. Immediately in February 1943, the German General Commissar gave the „work authorities“ (Arbeitsämte) an order, to prepare for the induction of all men born 1919-1925. These were the first “peacetime” period born youth, since wartime activities had ceased in Latvia in 1920, and the number for this contingent was estimated at 90000 in total. Latvian patriots were counting on those-year youth (all raised in Latvia and strongly nationalistic), but not to be killed in the service of a foreign power; this news raised immediate concern among the Latvians, when they started to receive draft notices (see a samples of 1943 draft notices below).

Here we have to repeat that the Latvians, of course, were concerned about the prospective return of the Bolsheviks (Soviet Russian Red Army). Foreseeing various alternative situations, they felt that they needed, at the appropriate moment at their disposal, their own armed forces. But, it had to be at their disposal, meaning on their own territory or close proximity to the borders of Latvia and only at the needed time, a time that had not yet arrived. Besides, taking into consideration the collective experience to date, there were no guarantees that the Germans would not again disperse such a force; they had done that previously. It was in the Latvian interests to buy some time and to shed their blood only when the oncoming Bolshevik threat was inevitable and only in such a way that would benefit their own nation’s current and later situation. Therefore, the Latvian Self-Government protested against the planned draft and very clearly pointed out to the Germans the overall situation in the country, noting the fact that the Germans had not recognized Latvia as an independent nation; they also stated that the Germans were violating international norms and also pointed out the difficulties that the Germans would create with such a draft. (Ref: Latvian Self-Government Note of March 26, 1943 submitted to the German General Commissar)

The Germans, however, maintained their own course. Already on February 6, the German SS and Police Chief had notified some of the Latvian representatives, that the Latvian Legion was in fact already established by combining three of the Latvian guard battalions into a regiment and assigning it to the 2nd SS-brigade; in addition to that, he had vehemently espoused the need for mobilization (Ref: Minutes of the Latvian Self-Government of February 8, 1943). To calm down the Latvians and to raise their spirits, he had explained that an order had been given to stop all actions that had been instigated against the Latvian nationalists. In retrospect, this was a clear acknowledgement by the Germans that they had never intended to recognize an independent Latvia since now they were willing to set free the imprisoned Latvian nationalists that had demanded Latvian self-rule. This German fervor concerning mobilization also showed in what way the Germans once again found it possible to establish, illegally, a large military unit composed of local personnel from within an occupied territory, a unit which only a few days later is labeled by Hitler as „volunteer“.

38
First step - REGISTRATION!

Please note that the above example shows that the registration is being carried out by the German Registration Commission No. 1, all under the watchful eyes of the German SS and Police Chief in Latvia (Der SS- und Polizeiführer Lettland).
Right after the aforementioned Latvian officer and noncommissioned officer registration order, it became known that the German Ersatzkommando, based on the registration data, had begun the forceful induction of these individuals into the Latvian Legion. A portion of these personnel were also sent to the militarized labor units, which were composed of Latvians and assigned to German Army units.

**Latvians seek guarantees from the Germans.** Seeing that there is going to be a forceful induction of Latvian “living resource” of much larger proportions than before, the Latvian focus was now on getting some guarantees from the Germans that were of utmost interest to them. This pertained to obtaining some improvements in the overall situation for the general population, but most importantly, in keeping together and protecting the drafted and the yet-to-be-drafted Latvian living resource (youth).

We should not forget the tragically desperate situation that the Latvian nation found itself – she was encapsulated under the yoke of one occupying power and close-by was the terrible ghostly shadow of another. Nowhere could she raise her voice that would be heard across her borders, and there was nobody from whom to obtain any help or support. Everything now depended on the Latvian own ability to decrease the magnitude of this glooming evil as much as possible.

In this case, the Latvians were forced to talk and to have discussions with the same German establishment that had issued those orders, or, that were part of those same institutions. The Latvian resistance was not so much in illegal activities, but
rather by identifying and protecting Latvian interests, as much as possible, at each of the institutions that were allowed by the Germans to exist.

The Latvian efforts with the Germans can be formulated as follows:

1. Obtain the renewal of Latvia’s international status.
2. Secure a promise from the Germans that no additional inductions will be done, or at least, bring home to Latvia those police battalions that were dispersed throughout the Eastern Front and have them discharged, as had been promised before by the Germans; or, if it was not possible to secure their release, then have them brought together for inclusion into the to-be-formed Latvian Legion.
3. If a Latvian Legion is formed, that all commanders, including the commander of the Legion, be a Latvian and that the appointment of all higher-level officers, including the appointment of the regimental commanders, must have the concurrence from the Latvian Self-Government;
4. In addition to the Legion, there would be no other Latvian units or individually dispersed Latvian soldiers;
5. That the Legion’s units receive ample time for training on Latvian territory, and that such time be not any shorter than six months;
6. That, in case of a military need for the Legion, it is be included in the front only for the defense of Latvia’s territory against Soviet Russia’s Army, kept together (not dispersed), and have it under the leadership of the German Army, not the SS;
7. That the Latvian units’ weapons, equipment and support would not be any less adequate than that of comparable German unit’s armament and logistic support;
8. That the Germans will not repeat the same method of hunting down people, as for example they had done in the police battalions, that there would not be any force applied during induction, and that those that have previously been inducted by force be given a choice, either to remain in service or to return home.

These demands were submitted to the German Reich Commissar by the Latvian Self-Government on February 23, 1943. The Latvian Legion’s Inspector General, General R. Bangerskis, continued to fight for these points later on, after his appointment to that position. The Germans basically accepted some of these demands; they also declared, that numbers 1, 2 and 4 are not currently possible, and, that number 8, i.e. agreeing not to use forced draft, is totally not acceptable. That would mean, as they declare, that would allow the “untrustworthy” to benefit at the expense of the “trustworthy”.

With this stance, the Germans once more proved that they have no intentions to adhere to the „volunteer” principle in the formation of the Legion. Not because of the „trustworthiness”, but because the number of people that is needed. In February 1943, the newspapers publish an order from the German Commissar General that the Latvians, i.e., the inhabitants of Ostland, are subject to a total call-up for service at the front.

**Germans order mobilization in Latvia.** We see that the highest ranking German SS and Police Chief in Ostland, General Friedrich Jeckeln, having not obtained the
concurrcence from the Latvian Self-Government and on his own initiative, ordered the mobilization of all Latvian young men born in 1919-1925. The mobilization was carried out by mobilization chairmen, ordered from Berlin, under the leadership of SS Colonel Hierthes (General Jeckeln’s paper of February 19, 1943 at the Nuremberg Tribunal, Document No. 3302). From those inducted, either new police battalions were formed or they were assigned to the German Army units as auxiliaries. On February 23, 1943, the Interior General Director of the Latvian Self-Government reported to his colleagues that the youth born in 1919-1925 have already received the German Labor Office notifications to report for induction (draft) on February 27, 1943. It also became known that the mobilization was to be carried out by the German SS- Ersatzkommando and that they had already prepared a leaflet for that purpose in poor Latvian language. The highest German SS and Police Chief had agreed that the regimental commanders for the training of the Legion would be Latvians, accepting also the thought that division commanders should also be Latvians, including a promise that the previously formed battalions, now engaged elsewhere, are to be returned to Latvia. After discussions within the Latvian Self-Government, noting that there were no written guarantees, neither about the Legion nor the interior condition of the country or international situation, they decided once more to submit to the Ostland General Commissar a new request (Ref: Minutes of the Latvian Self-Government of February 27, 1943). Within the next few days, the General Commissar published a leaflet in connection with forthcoming mobilization. Additionally, recruitment advertisements were published in newspapers as if it was a call for volunteers, pure propaganda, primarily for the benefit of news media and others outside the country (see the example below).

**Nodibināts Latviešu legions**


1) **Pietiekšanās punktā** Austrumzemē, Rižā, Pleskavas ielā 16, 1. slūža, tālr. 33239;
2) **Visās vēcu policijas un żandarmērijas iestādēs;**
3) **Visās latviešu policijas iestādēs.**

Katra latvieša, kas iestājas Latviešu legioni, ar to pāzu savu nesatriecamo grībru aizstāvē savu vēju un cīņties ieročiem rokā pret bojāšanu par Eiropas jaunuzbuvē un nākotni.

*Meh, 1943. g. 27. martā.*

Colonel Hierthes’ notification in the newspaper “Tēvija” (Fatherland)
A Latvian Legion has been formed

„In recognition of the brave stance by the already existing Latvian volunteer units, the Greater Germany’s leader has agreed for the establishment of a Latvian Volunteer Legion. The Legion is formed as a unified fighting unit, being incorporated into the SS weapon formations and, its units will be commanded by Latvian officers. The Legion can be joined by all 17-45 old ethnic Latvian men. Service obligation is until the end of the war. Provisioning, salary and uniforms are the same as those for the weapon SS formations. The support and provisions for the dependents corresponds to the German Armed Forces provisioning in accordance with the SS Logistics Law.

1) SS Recruitment Office - Eastland (Ostland), Riga, Pleskavas Street 16, 1st Floor, telephone: 33279;
2) At all German police gendarme establishments;
3) At all Latvian police establishments.
Every Latvian, that joins the Latvian Legion, is declaring his unshaken desire to defend his fatherland and to fight against bolshevism, with weapons in his hands for Europe’s new construction and future."

Riga, February 27, 1943

Note: Some advertisements included the „Americans” and „British” names next to the „Bolsheviks” as enemies; Latvian officials objected to such advertisement.

***

It is important to note here, that Latvian agency representatives, regarding these German advertisements, pointed out to the German authorities, that it is not connectable with Latvian mentality to mention the Americans and the British alongside the Bolsheviks. [Ref: Minutes of the Latvian Self-Government of February 27, 1943]. Thereupon, the local German Propaganda Chief, Dressler, tried to force the Latvians to come up with their own advertisements to reflect more of the „Latvian” side. The Latvian representatives, however, found that such advertisements did not have any basis for them and declined to do it (Ref: Minutes of the Latvian Self-Government of February 27 and March 2, 1943). In reality, it turned out to be just a German propaganda; already on February 26, 1943, the Germans already began forced mobilization within the entire territory of Latvia via their „labor administration offices” for the previously noted year groups (officers and non-commissioned officers), including a partial mobilization in some places even prior to February 26 for those same year groups.

In size, under the „labor administration office” mask, this was the largest mobilization to date that had taken place at that time in Latvia. It became known to the Latvians, that the Germans had envisioned the following breakdown for the draftees: Legion – 16000-17000; police battalions – 5000-6000; German Army auxiliaries – 25000; German Army important militarized labor units – 10000; all together around 56-58000 (Ref: Minutes of Latvian Self-Government of February 16, 1943). Indeed, this is the figure that they obtained because later it turned out that the auxiliaries totaled no less than 27000.

Initially, and because of Latvian pressure, the Germans held back assigning the inductees to the police battalions; however, during the summer and fall of 1943, they went ahead and did it anyways. Even though the main draft occurred in February
and March, the mobilization continued until the start of autumn because many could not be released from important jobs – railroad, post office, factories and other similar jobs; they also had difficulties in housing the draftees. Thus, there was not even "a smell" left over from the "volunteer idea" and mobilization was proceeding at full speed. From the mobilized personnel, the Germans formed new police battalions, or they assigned them to German Army units as auxiliaries. Berlin did not like that; they wanted larger Latvian units at the front-lines. In connection with this, SS Lieutenant General Berger, on May 23, 1943, sent a stern letter to Colonel Hierthes:

Translation:

"Dear Hierthes!

Under orders from the Reichführer, I had to accept and utilize you for mobilization. Besides, I was convinced that you would, in conscientious faithfulness, carry out your duties. Today, I had great unpleasantness at the Reichführer's office that you, contrary to your duties, left me in the dark about the Army unit complementation, especially with the establishment of the "Latvia" Division and the "Latvia" Brigade. Therefore it is possible, that now there is neither a Latvian division nor a Latvian brigade, but in their place there are formed police battalions.

By beginning of June 1, 1943, there must be ready a division and a brigade. In what way, it does not concern me. In the worst case situation, enough men must be taken from the battalions that have been formed during the past three months so as to obtain the necessary number of men for the division and the brigade. Report on your carrying out the order."
You yourself must report to me at 11:00 o’clock on May 28, 1943, taking along the pertinent legal documents. For your own benefit, I am informing you, that in connection with this case, I have received a clear order from the SS-Reichführer.”

23.5.1943 Heil Hitler
Be/Bn gez. Berger
SS-Lieutenant General

Note: Nuremberg Tribunal Document No. 3380

***

The Induction process, German fears and Latvian protests. Even though Hitler in his order (among other things, the Latvians did not have access to this order until a year after its issue, as can be seen from the Inspector General’s note on it) had indicated the Legion’s strength is to be based on the availability of number of personnel, the Germans did not give the Legion more than 25% of the draftees. Apparently, they were afraid of larger, organized and armed Latvian units. A 60000-strong Latvian Army, if left on Latvia’s territory or at least in close proximity to it after training, and, if the police battalions were added to it, then it would be a considerable force that may not be as easily "influenced" by either the German military might or their political ambitions for Latvian territory. The Germans openly stated that they were not sure about Latvian behavior during a crisis situation. Thus, it was not a question whether there would be sufficient manpower available for the Legion, but rather “that too many Latvians” will be together. This German concern caused the Germans not to even raise the question at the induction centers where the draftees preferred to serve – the Latvian Legion or elsewhere. They had decided that only 25% would be assigned to the Legion and the other 75% to be divided among various German units and dispersed “to the winds”. Of course, the Latvians wanted to be together in their own units, close to their own country and commanded by their own officers. Therefore, there were grave protests from the Latvians that they were not given the opportunity to choose, as had been promised to them earlier. The induction commissions had been given an order by the German Ersatzkommando not to even tell the draftees to what units they were to be assigned. Medical examinations by the Germans became a major concern to the Latvians, because the Germans were more interested in their “manpower needs” and not the health, medical condition or actual medical fitness of the draftees; the medical examination was composed of just weighing and measuring the height of the inductees. Therefore, it turned out that many of the inducted men were really sick, including some having advanced tuberculosis or even being handicapped. And, “surprisingly” enough, majority of such unfit draftees were assigned to the Legion. The draftees tried to guess where they were being assigned by looking over the shoulders of the induction center personnel or by trying to establish personal contacts with an appropriate bureaucrat. None of the draftees were allowed to return home, not even to say goodbye to the persons that accompanied them to the induction centers; they were driven into special rooms that were guarded. The Germans had neither thought about feeding the inductees nor about their personal needs and frequently, for several days, they were without food. The Latvian organizations were forced to organize relief help for these individuals in such instances. Usually, only in the evening did the commissions themselves know to what categories the inductees were being assigned to; the draftees themselves found out their category only after they were notified at the next transportation point.
when the appropriate lists were read off. **In order to silence the draftee protests in reference to earlier published "right to choose", the German General Commissar issues a circular on March 8, 1943 whereby he pointed out that the inductees did not have such rights.** (Ref: Minutes from the Latvian Self-Government meeting of March 12, 1943.) Thus, we know for certain, that there was never a choice allowed or permitted. The Latvian Self-Government protests (as noted by the above noted Minutes) likewise remained without any results. "Volunteerism" here is of course a farce, a fiction of imagination! Here, the Germans had committed a real war crime, illegally drafting people in occupied territories and having them killed in combat (80000 Latvian legionnaires alone).

During this first short induction period for the Legion, the Germans drafted into the Latvian Legion fewer people than had been indicated (only about 15000 men), but on the hand, more were drafted for the German Army auxiliary "helper" units (around 27000 young men). From those that were inducted into the Legion, 1000 were immediately sent to the front to beef up the brigade that was being organized there and to form the second regiment. Almost all of these inductees did not have any prior military service (only a portion of the 1919-born youth had served in the Latvian Army). That was in sharp contrast with the German promise, i.e., to train these youngsters for at least six months on Latvian territory. This incident and all of the German actions during the induction process created new shock waves within the Latvian population at large. The rest of the draftees for the Legion (around 14000) were sent to the province of Southern Kurland of Latvia – the Paplakas region – and there began the formation of the first Latvian division.

The needed officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) for the division, and those necessary for the Leningrad front units, were mobilized in parallel with the year group being drafted, depending on the schedule of the units being formed. The officers and the NCOs were called up, not by age groups, but by the required service ranks. Besides, there was the absurd situation that developed, that the men (soldiers) were drafted and gathered prior to the required commanding officer cadre were in place. That pointed out to the fact that the Germans, at least initially and contrary to their promise, had not even intended to utilize the Latvian officer corps (those officers that had survived the "Soviet-Russian Year of Terror") in the Latvian
units, or, they had intended to decrease the number of the Latvian officers so low as not be of any significance.

8. HiWi

After completing this overview about the forced mobilization, numerically the largest draft done by the Germans in Latvia, we must also discuss briefly the so-called auxiliary (helper) unit situation of the German Army - *Hilfwillige der Wehrmacht*, abbreviated as HiWi. The HiWi group, those born during 1919-1924, was the largest group drafted (around 27000 as per SS- Ersatzkommando Chief’s own words) and also the most unfortunate and least protected. These illegally mobilized youths by the Germans, organized in small groups and mixed together with other ethnic HiWi draftees, were assigned to German Army units on the Eastern Front. Each time that a German unit moved, these people were moved along with the unit, thus eventually a few of them found themselves in the Western Front combat zone. In order to get out of this predicament and their hopeless situation overall, these draftees were continuously calling the Latvian institutions, but especially the Inspector General of the Latvian Legion, for protection and help. With the help of the latter, it became possible to get a small portion of these youngsters back. A very large number were looking for safe haven by deserting from their units, thus many became victims of German War Tribunals; or else, they were seeking safety within the Latvian Legion, if they could reach such units, because they did not dare to return home and they could not hide within the relatively small territory of Latvia. The situation was not different for those assigned to the *labor units* because most of them were forcibly converted into HiWi.

9. The Leadership of the Latvian Legion

The question concerning, who was going to train and command the Latvian soldiers, once draft became unavoidable, was one of the most important questions for the Latvians. It was not a matter of prestige, but rather a question about conserving the Latvian spirit and blood, and, a question of national objectives.

As we saw, after raising the question about the Latvian Legion and the mobilization, the Germans were promising that the commanders of the Latvian Legion would be Latvians. But, as soon as the induction began, they became much more reserved about the number of officers to be assigned to the Legion and more shadowy and detached about the question pertaining to the assignment of the commanding officers. True, the *Ersatzkommando* had already drafted, in February 1943, a few of the former Latvian officers and noncommissioned officers; but, that was still a very low number. Also, the Latvians were concerned about the real German motives and that they may be harmful to the Latvians.

The Latvian Self-Government, after discussing the Legion’s leadership question, decided to organize a Latvian Center, a “military liaison group”, that would be authorized from the Latvian side to get involved in informative discussions with the Germans; additionally, this group of officers, in time of need, could be proposed to the Germans as the military leadership of the Latvian Armed Forces. For the top position, they selected General Rudolfs Bangerskis and Colonel Arturs Silgailis was proposed as his Chief of Staff (Minutes of the Latvian Self-Government meeting of
February 16, 1943). General Bangerskis had previously served as division commander in the Latvian Army and had served several times as Minister of War. He was well known from the days of free and independent Latvia and was one of the most popular regimental commanders during WW I and, he had lots of combat experience; he was a firm believer in democracy, a very humane and religious person, always accessible by anyone. Although he did not speak a word of German, he truly understood his nation’s pains and hopes. Colonel Silgailis had served as Chief of Staff of a division; he had also been a tactics instructor at the Latvian Army War College, an energetic Latvian officer who was also fluent in German.

During this period, however, the Germans had become more unclear and reserved about the question of having Latvian officers assigned to command positions. They actually side-stepped the question and stated, that there would be a general arriving from Berlin, that will be authorized to address all questions concerning the formation of the Legion (Minutes of the Latvian Self-Government meeting of March 2, 1943). Indeed, such a person did arrive at the beginning of March 1943, but announced, that General Bangerskis’ assignment question had not been yet resolved. [Minutes of the Latvian Self-Government of March 5, 1943]. The Self-Government also ascertained that under such circumstances, there was a universal feeling among the Latvian officers to avoid the German draft as much as possible. At the same time, the Latvians became disturbed by the news that the Germans were preparing to mobilize 10000 Latvian young women and send them to Germany. The Latvian representatives’ efforts were then concentrated on this new threat, which they were trying to neutralize it. Notwithstanding all this, Latvian representatives also realized that they now had to do everything possible not to allow thousands of Latvian youth to remain by themselves in the hands of the Germans without the presence and leadership of Latvian officers and noncommissioned officers. (Ref: Minutes of Latvian Self-Government of March 26, 1943.). The question regarding the top leadership positions for the Legion remained unresolved.

A Latvian to command the Latvian Legion – declared a „mistake”. The “new Legion organizer” from Berlin announced on March 9 that there is concurrence from Berlin, via the telephone, to appoint General Bangerskis as the Commander of the Legion. This was confirmed in writing on March 19, 1943 with a „preliminary order” (See below).

Translation:

Preliminary Order

By order of the Reichführer-SS effective 1 March 1943, General Rudolf Bangerskis, born 21.7.1878, is assigned the command of the 1st Division of the Latvian SS- Volunteer Legion as a Legion-Brigadeführer and Major General of the Latvian SS- Volunteer Legion.

Signed/Hansen
SS-Brigadeführer and
Major-General of the Waffen-SS

***
However, the confirmation never came and, on 20 March 1943, it turns out that General Bangerskis is not confirmed as Commander of the Legion, but rather as Commander of the 1st Division, and Colonel Silgailis as his Chief of Staff (1a) for this division. Since it was planned to have the Legion composed of only a single division, the Latvians did not at that time pay closer attention; both soldiers presented themselves to the Latvian Self-Government offices on March 23 to receive Latvian instructions. During this meeting, all expressed relief about the appointments and expressed their hopes that all previous sacrifices had not been in vain; and, that this may now help to realize some of the Latvia’s national objectives. The Self-Government’s Security Chief asked that all efforts now be applied to ensure that the leadership, training, equipment and weapons should be up to standards to minimize casualties; he had also several times taken the position, that, if the Latvian youth are taken, then the most qualified officers must be with them. General Bangerskis thanked the Latvian officials for their prudent remarks and expressed the wish that it may become possible to unify the hopes and thoughts of the Latvian nation around the Legion (Ref: Minutes of the Latvian Self-Government of March 31, 1943).

**General Bangerskis appointment turns out to be a „misunderstanding“**. Already on March 31, 1943, General Bangerskis reported to the Latvian Self-Government that the German Brigade General Hansen has been appointed as the Commander of the Latvian Legion, but that his (Gen. Bangerskis) position is very tenuous. Apparently, a question had been raised to make Bangerskis the Inspector General of the Legion. He also asked the Self-Government to review the situation and to provide guidance to him. The Latvian representatives agreed that they have to ask the Germans that all of the other Latvian units, which are not part of the Legion, must also be under the Inspector General; and, that he must be the senior Latvian Officer. Furthermore, the Latvian representatives told the Germans that
General Bangerskis remains as their candidate for the position of Commander of the (to-be-established) Latvian Legion in Latvia. [Ref: Minutes of the meeting of the Latvian Self-Government of March 31, 1943]. However, this last Latvian request was not even considered; the appointed German Commander of the Legion returned to Germany and that position (Commander of the Latvian Legion) was not renewed.

The Germans now assigned another German as the commander of the division (of the to-be-created division), who arrived together with his own staff. However, General Bangerskis was appointed as the Inspector General of the Legion. Additionally, the Germans came forward with the „story” and an interpretation at the time of the assignment, that this appointment was a considerably higher position than that of a division commander. When the Inspector General repeatedly asked to be provided with specifically defined official duties, and most importantly, his defined authority for this „considerably higher position”, the Germans promised to provide such Berlin’s approved document within a short time of period. This “short period of time” lasted for two years, until the end of the war; and, no such document or regulation was ever provided. One thing became very clear to the Latvians, the Germans did not want to entrust the larger units to Latvian commanders; and, that they were trying, in fact, to find ways to “push aside” the newly selected Inspector General and to neutralize his position. The Germans did not define and approve his official duties and authority, so that in “case of a need”, they could simply rebuke him, “that it is not within his competence to do this or that”. After discussing the developing situation, the Latvian representatives came up with an overall consensus that to completely decline and walk away would be exactly what the Germans would want. Therefore, it was decided that General Bangerskis was to remain in his position and to try to defend the Latvian interests wherever and however he could, to the best of his ability; and, that it was necessary to establish a Latvian Military Center. By the end of April of 1943, several structures were authorized by the Germans – the Legion’s command structure and the Office of the Inspector General.

The Command hierarchy (commanders). The chain of command, that was finally implemented, was as follows:

Division commanders – Germans, with their own staffs. Also, the logistics officers, the so-called VerWaltungsführers, were Germans; all Germans, except for few weapons instructors from the German Waffen-SS.

Division Infantry Chiefs (later, both division artillery chief) – Latvians

Regimental Commanders and all lower level commanders (battalion, company, platoon, etc.) commanders – Latvians.

Noncommissioned Officers – Latvians.

Legion’s soldiers - Latvians.

Here we must note that the position of the „Division Infantry Chief” within each of the divisions was very tenuous position, without any defined authority and responsibilities. The Germans first created this position within the Latvian 1st Division (German designation – 15th Division), so as to assign to it Colonel Silgailis,
the officer that the Latvians had selected as the Chief of Staff of the Legion, i.e., the Latvian 1st Division; but later, the same thing happened in the Latvian 2nd Division (German designation – 19th Division). It was a German “move” so that they could assign to that position a regimental commander, which they wanted (for their own “untrustworthiness” reasons) removed from a regimental commander’s position, in this case, Colonel Lobe. Both of them were too nationalistic, who loved their own country and people.

**The Inspector General’s Office.** The Inspector General’s Office was a purely Latvian establishment. As already mentioned, it remained without any defined authority and responsibilities until the end of WW II. From the very beginning, the Germans were trying to ignore and to bypass this office, or simply to restrict their effectiveness by not providing office space, allowing only a very small staff (smaller than that of a regimental commander), and by saddling them with restrictions (which in any army is detrimental to good order, discipline and morale, all of primary importance); as an example, the Inspector General was forbidden to visit the Latvian units without the division commander’s knowledge and, the unit commanders were forbidden to see the Inspector General, to correspond directly with him, etc.

During the division’s formation period, the Division Commander of the Latvian 1st Division (German - 15th Division) tried to play the role of the Inspector General by placing on the Inspector General’s staff his own “commissar”, without whose knowledge, the staff and the Latvian unit commanders could not communicate with each other. Since the Inspector General and the Latvian commanders simply ignored such absurd restrictions, there was always more or less „open” or „hidden” warfare ongoing between the Germans and the Latvians.

Without personally „touching” the Inspector General in person, because of his ever growing popularity among the soldiers of the Latvian Legion, the Germans tried to „pay him back” by going after some of the people on his staff. The Inspector General's main effort was devoted to keeping the Latvian „living resource” together, to save it as much as possible from German excesses and to make life a bit easier for the Latvian soldiers. The conditions of the Latvian units, that were assigned and attached to the German Army, were in deplorable situation in terms of getting leave, logistic support and equipment; their casualty rate was also very high. Desertion was not uncommon because Latvians felt that it was not their duty to fight for the Germans in Russia in German uniforms, especially after having been illegally and forcibly drafted. So, the Inspector General paid a special attention to the soldiers that had been arrested by the German SS and police.

Without any legal rights, without any direct power or authority, without any influence on operational activities, the Inspector General’s Office of the Latvian Legion, nonetheless, became the key “defense legal center” for the Latvians. The doors were always open for either collective needs or any individual or personal concerns, including those that were still free or those that had become fugitives or had been arrested or condemned, including those involved with Latvian political, spiritual or physical labor problems. Being without any authority due to German shortsightedness, this Institution could have been more than just a confession place for Latvian grief, misery and distress. Nevertheless, thanks to the Inspector General’s tact, but also due to his consistency and perseverance, now and then, it
was possible to accomplish something. Besides, there already existed a Latvian military force and, to some extent, others (the Germans) had to take that into account. Overall, the Latvian Legion had become, in the eyes and life of the Latvian nation, a glimmer of hope in the defense of Latvia and a source of inspiration for all.

10. The Latvian Legion’s internal regulations, organization and service/rank insignia

The Latvian Legion’s internal life. Even though the Latvian Legion was the largest Latvian military organization after losing independence, the Latvian Legion was not established when and how the Latvians had wanted it themselves. The Latvian collective thought was, even under these circumstances, that the Legion was to be created as their own armed force, a renewed national army, with its own spirit and traditions.

The Latvian National Army’s officer corps had sustained heavy losses during the Bolshevik (Soviet Russia’s) occupation period due to the Soviet murders and deportations. Also, the drafting of the officers, including the assignment to positions (especially down to regimental commander level), was in the hands of the Germans. Nonetheless, the Latvians succeeded in getting good and experienced officers assigned to the regimental commander positions; all were true and tested patriots, former Latvian infantry officers that had fought during WW I and during the War for Independence, all with highest military education (war college level). The division commanders and their staffs were German. But, their direct span of control was relatively restricted due language problem barriers at the regimental and lower levels. Besides, under wartime conditions at the front lines, such direct involvement was for most part at the regimental commanders’ level involving operational and logistics matters only.

The Latvian 2nd Division (German – 19th) in reality was the senior (formed first) Latvian military unit in the Legion; it was organized at the front lines and remained there in the combat zone continuously thereafter. The internal life, as combat circumstances permitted, was at the discretion of the regimental and lower level commanders without almost any interference. But, since these units were living under constant combat conditions, it was quite natural that they would automatically utilize their former military (Latvian Army’s) system, since the other (German) was foreign to them; and, that is exactly what they did.

We need to note here, that the Latvian Legion units were never together with any German SS units, neither during combat nor in a common physical location, but always operated together with the German Army (Wermacht) units, whose organization was to an extent similar to their own. Therefore, they were never in a situation, in one way or another, whereby they could be influenced by the German SS organization or mentality.

The only time that the division leadership (Germans) could perhaps interfere in the internal life of the Latvian regiments was during the formation of the Latvian 1st Division (German – 15th) behind the front lines. These regiments were formed in the southern part of Kurzeme (Kurland) in Latvia, close to the Lithuanian border, but the 1st Division staff (German) was located in Riga and, their contacts with these units
were minimal. The Commander of the 1st Division, Count von Pückler-Burghaus at that time, seemed to be more interested in what the still relatively rich Riga had to offer in entertainment and appeared not to take seriously the formation of the Legion overall. Also, his staff officers were, in this regard and general way, trying to emulate their refined commander. The greatest interference for the regiments came from the German logistics officers that were with the units and tried, not infrequently and especially during the initial stages, to interfere with the regimental commanders’ actions. However, that was primarily connected with materiel issues.

Therefore, also in this division, the Latvian commanders were able to organize their units almost the way as they had been accustomed of doing in the Latvian Army, including the training of their units in accordance with the Latvian Army regulations. Of course, the command and working language was Latvian, except for correspondence that was sent to and from the division staff. Also, the service rank designations within the Legion’s internal life were the same as those in the Latvian Army. That meant that the Latvians from the very beginning did not accept those given by the Germans; and, by using their own, they underlined the difference between themselves and the Germans. It was never reported or heard of that any Latvian had ever addressed another as *standartenführer*, *sturmmann*, etc. Likewise, in the internal life of the Legion, they utilized only their own unit designations in accordance with Latvian traditions and nomenclature.

True, the Germans had given the divisions and regiments German designations. In addition, to differentiate them from the German SS units, they were not called "SS" but as "der SS"; this latter designation meant, for example, as if the Latvian Legions was some kind of object that belonged to the SS. Likewise, they utilized German rank designations and not the army (international) designations. Besides, to differentiate the ranks between the Legion and the German SS, at first, they inserted in place of the "SS" the abbreviation "Leg.", but later replaced it with "Waff". Thus, not a single Latvian soldier of the Legion, at least while the Legion was in existence, was ever referred to by “the SS man” or “the SS führer” designation. There was a single situation, when the Germans implied that that they were going to promote one Latvian officer to an appropriate SS rank. The Division Commander, SS-Brigadeführer Count von Pückler-Burghaus, noting this „honor” said, “I knew that he was going to be promoted, but that he was going to receive an SS rank, that was a great surprise to me.” Indeed, that turned out to be pure theatrics. Except for this “misunderstanding”, none of the Latvian soldiers in the Legion was ever designated as such; and, it was prohibited to use the SS designation next to his service rank.

In regards to service nomenclature in the German language, most of the Legion’s soldiers did not even know that. Even the Inspector General himself did not comprehend this until the end of the war. The *deciphering* and *encoding* of correspondence that was sent to the Germans was the responsibility of the unit administrative personnel that spoke German. Since the drafted youth in the Legion, those born during 1919-1924, were very nationalistic and deeply patriotic, the legionnaires’ spirit was, therefore, very much Latvian, full with unbending aspirations for a free Latvia and completely immune from any foreign ideology. The German policies in Latvia had also made these soldiers totally immune from German.
influence; the legionnaires were very much aware of their enemies, those that were against Latvia’s independence; and, they knew that such persons eventually receive their just dues that they had earned.

Like in the Latvian Army, evening taps in the Legion were not conducted in accordance with the German regulations, i.e., the singing of the German national anthem and other songs; rather, the legionnaires sang a religious carol, “God our Lord is our strong fortress”, and the Latvian national anthem - ”God Bless Latvia”. Wherever it was possible, the Inspector General got Sunday worship services instituted for all of the Legion’s units. He also got the Germans to agree to have military chaplains assigned to each of the divisions for the two largest denominations, Lutherans and Catholics. All this was in sharp contrast with the German SS units.

**The uniform insignia.** The Latvian Legion’s units in reality were different from the former Latvian Army units only in the uniforms that they were wearing. To minimize this difference even more, the Latvian Self-Government and the Inspector General issued an authorization for the Latvian soldiers to wear on their uniform right sleeves a Latvian national colors patch with the word „LATVIJA” inscribed at the top. Since the Latvian colors and the name ”Latvia” were forbidden up until then, then this was one of the first demonstrations expressed by the Latvian soldiers, which also raised the self-confidence of all other Latvian soldiers.

It is well known, that the German SS soldiers wore on the right collar the “SS” letters. For the Latvian Legion, it was forbidden to wear that insignia. For example, SS Lieutenant General Jüttner, in his secret letter concerning the formation of the Latvian 15th Division, specifically ordered that ”At the present moment, the right collar patch is without runes. The left collar patch bears the insignia of rank.” [Ref: SS- Lt. Gen. Jüttner’s secret letter: SS-Fuhrungshauptamt, Amt II, Org.Abtl. Ia/II, Tgb. Nr. II/1501/43 geh. Berlin-Wilmersdorf, Feb 26th, 43, Kaiserallee 188]. The division leadership was told to remind all Latvian units about this order. However, since the Latvian legionnaires received already used uniforms from the German Waffen-SS supply stores, then the ”SS” runes were already attached on the right collar and the Latvian commanders at the regimental level and lower did not pay any attention to that, especially under combat conditions. At the time of the uniform issues, the “SS” runes, when they were attached to the collars, had to be removed and turned in to the stores. The German supply officers were to ensure that the legionnaires did not have the runes; but, the Germans commanders themselves ignored that order, especially under combat conditions, when uniforms were frequently issued; thus, the use of the runes was widespread until the fall of 1944. Nevertheless, these German orders were specific reminders to the Latvian legionnaires that they did not belong to this „privileged class”, and that suited them just fine. **In order to differentiate themselves from the Germans, the Latvian 1st Division (German 15th) wore on the right collar the Latvian Army collar patch, the rising sun with three stars** (see 4 below); this was introduced in the division during the fall of 1944, while **the Latvian 2nd Division (German 19th) approved the ”fire cross”** (see 3 below). When the German division commanders and their chiefs of staff (I-a) wore these Latvian insignia on their collars (including the national colors patch on the sleeve), for reasons of solidarity, then the SS letters were
attached on the uniform jacket’s left side; this was usually seen only in the combat zones.

Even more pronounced was the difference in the legal status between someone belonging to the German SS within the Legion and a Latvian legionnaire. Not a single German SS, no matter how low a rank he had, was ever a subordinate under a Latvian commander. On the other hand, each one of the Germans considered themselves as being a boss of any Latvian, which of course created frequent conflicts. In such circumstances, the Germans always sided with their SS men. Otherwise, both groups in the legion led their own isolated lives.

The Latvian Legion’s collar patches, which were officially or unofficially used during 1943-1945 (Ref: Hugh Page Taylor, Uniforms, Organization and History of the Waffen-SS, Vol. 5, R. James Bender Publishing, 1982; pg. 37):

The collar patches that the Latvian legionnaires wore, most of the soldiers did not know whether they were authorized or not, simply because they usually received used uniforms from the Germans with all SS insignia already attached.

(1) "Black field". Officially: Required as of 26 Feb 1943, until replaced with the Latvian fire cross (a very ancient Latvian symbol) on 11 March 1943; this was the only collar patch that a draftee could wear as of 1 October 1944, until the Latvian Army "rising sun", was issued; however, during combat conditions, it was not even possible to even attach them to uniforms. Unofficially: used also later.

(2) "SS". Officially: Forbidden to be used by the Latvians (division) as of 26 February 1943, but, those that did not have the rising sun patches issued, the Germans permitted (unofficially) their use; such unofficial use can be seen until approximately September 1943 or later, if they did not have the new patches. Unofficially: Widespread use, especially during the German mobilization period, because the Germans issued only used uniforms from the German SS stores with the SS runes already attached.

(3) "Fire cross". Officially: Allowed for use by the Latvian Legion (therefore, also for the 15th Division) as of 11 March 1943, but officially approved for the 15th Division on 1 June 1944; later, allowed also for use by the 19th Division. The 15th Division was authorized on 9 September 1943 to keep its use until receipt of the rising sun patch. Unofficially: No data available whether it was used after the issuance of the rising sun patches. Note: The fire cross is an ancient Latvian symbol.

(4) "Rising Sun". Officially: 15th Division authorized to use it in the fall of 1944, but was still being issued in January 1945. Unofficially: No data available whether it was used outside the 15th Division. (See the examples below.)
The legionnaires’ courage under the swastika. With their brave national stance, the Latvian legionnaires were also noticeably strengthening the confidence of the entire Latvian nation; the Latvians felt that they already had their own national defense force. Similar to the Bolshevik (Soviet) period, also during the German occupation, even if not with the same kind of terror threats, the Latvians were not permitted to celebrate their independence day on the 18th of November. For the first time, after loosing their independence, the Latvian legionnaires marked their nation’s 25th anniversary, the same way as they had done it in the Latvian Army, with a Latvia’s Independence Day parade in front of the Inspector General and the Latvian Self-Government. The Germans were placed in a difficult situation – start immediate repressions and liquidate the Legion, or, permit this to happen. Perhaps, they thought of eliminating such expressions of nationalism later, when an opportunity would present itself.

We have already mentioned, that many deserters (Latvian youth) from the HiWi and the police battalions were looking at the Legion as their last safe haven; they simply did not want to be in those units and fight a war that was not theirs. For most part, these were young men, 18-20 years old and some even as young as 15 -17, that had been illegally drafted by the Germans and assigned to German units or to units outside Latvia’s territory – all under German control or command. The Latvian unit commanders found ways to include them in their units, or not to show them in their rosters. In the same way, but not too often, some politically oppressed persons found a safe place in the Legion. Among others, the Legion was "safeguarding" one of the most distinguished Latvian freedom fighters, Einbergs, a former minister of Latvia, until he was arrested in Riga by the SD, perhaps due to his own carelessness. The Inspector General of the Legion tried to secure his release but without any results. Intercession by the Inspector General on behalf of the soldiers and other youth, those that were mobilized and treated badly by the Germans, was one of his major tasks. Thus, for example, he informed the Reichführer-SS as late as April 20, 1944, that 4000 Latvian youth (16-17 years old), that were initially to be used as German Air Force (Luftwaffe) helpers in Latvia, have been designated as SS students and a portion of them had been transported to Camp Eger (Hauptlager Eger). At this camp, they were being mistreated by their German instructors by being called names that are insulting to Latvians; and, they were also being physically abused, even beaten and kicked until they were bleeding; and, two of the Latvian youths had been shot by
a German instructor with a small caliber weapon - one of the shot youth reportedly died from the gunshot wounds. (Ref: Inspector General’s letter to Reichführer-SS, Ia Az. 73/45 Tgb.Nr.149/45 geh., dated 20 April 1945 – Latviešu karavīrs otrā pasaules kara laikā, Vol.7, pg.152-153) It was not surprising that the Latvian youth, for survival’s sake, were deserting from the German units or units under German command and looking for ways to be included in the Latvian units.

It is not without importance to note, in the characterization of the psyche or essence of the Legion, that the Inspector General’s Office avoided the use of “SS” or “volunteer” whenever possible; on the office doors, for example, there were simply the words “Latvian Legion”.

11. Additional mobilizations

New mobilization orders issued by the Germans. During the fall of 1943, the Bolsheviks (Red Army) were already very close to the borders of Latvia. The Germans were preparing to initiate new mobilizations in the Baltic lands. The Germans, it seemed, had also changed their behavior against the Russian prisoners of war by preparing to organize them into the so called Vlasov’s Army; however, their behavior overall in their occupied territories remained the same. The Inspector General of the Latvian Legion had very definitely objected to any kind of new mobilizations, until the Latvian youth, those that were dispersed among the German units as HiWi (Helpers) and that were being badly decimated, were not returned to Latvia to supplement the Legion; likewise, the Latvians insisted that the police battalions, that were dispersed throughout the Eastern Front, were also returned for the defense of Latvia’s territory. The remains of the latter were finally pulled back, supplementing them with new draftees from the 1919-1924 year groups; they were organized into three police regiments and stationed at the war front, close to the Latvian borders, but not closely together. The number of the HiWi inductees that were gotten back was only a relatively small portion of those actually inducted. Both of the Latvian divisions, trying to keep the Bolsheviks (Red Army) out of their country during the fall of 1943 and because of poor logistic support, had suffered heavy casualties. The Germans now resorted to using known Latvian names on draft notices; the Latvians responded with a strong protest against the way these new mobilizations were being carried out. The Latvian Legion Inspector General, General Bangerskis, informed the German SS and Police Chief, General Jeckeln, to have the Germans stop using his name for the purpose of drafting the Latvian men. He specifically pointed out that he had not given any orders or authorized anyone to utilize the Latvian Legion Inspector General’s stamp on draft notices, which would make it appear as if the Latvians themselves were mobilizing and drafting the young men [Ref: Inspector General’s (General R. Bangerskis) letter to German SS and Police Chief, General Jeckeln, No. 3170 of October 4, 1943]. Five days later, General Bangerskis again informed General Jeckeln that the Germans are utilizing four different agencies to draft youngsters - that none of them are under his authority; and, that they want to use his name and that such a draft does not have any legal standing. He further informed the Germans that under such circumstances, the entire draft system then should be placed under him to have a legal status. [Ref: Latvian Inspector General’s letter to SS and Police Chief, General Jeckeln, No. 3299 of October 9, 1943]. Jeckeln’s response to Bangerskis was very simple and straightforward: „I am sorry to understand from that (in reference to Bangerskis’ letter), that
you, as the Inspector General of the Latvian SS-Volunteer Legion, do not find it possible, as I wanted, to sign the induction orders. Therefore, I just gave an order to the Commander of the *Ersatzkommando Ostland* with this moment forward, the same as previously, to issue the induction orders on his own cognizance.* [General Jeckeln’s letter to General Bangerskis dated October 9, 1943, Riga]. If previously the Germans had tried to hide their mobilization *modus operandi*, as discussed earlier, then now, it was an open violation of the Hague Convention and all known international norms regarding the induction of local citizens into the armed forces of Nazi Germany in their occupied countries.

Since the Germans were not interested in keeping the draftees together, but only in getting additional manpower, the German General Commissar issued a mobilization order in November 1943 for new year-groups, the same as in the other Baltic lands. This induction in Latvia, as in the other lands, was no longer masked, but styled as an outright and open mobilization. It included all former Latvian Army and Navy officers and non-commissioned officers, as well as all men born between 1915 and 1924.

Since the officers and the noncommissioned officers were openly inducted already in February 1943, and the men from the 1919-1924 year groups had already been drafted, then this order actually pertained only to the remainder of those not yet called up. By repeating these year groups in their new orders, the Germans perhaps wanted to propagandize the extent of this mobilization. The technical side of this mobilization, the same as in the other places in the Baltic area, was ordered to be done by the local authorities. That was in a way a reprieve from the previous German drafts, since now the Latvian authorities had some small authority to decide how and how many to induct. This was especially important also for those having families, since their induction affected their families’ livelihood and destinies. Likewise, it was declared that the draft is only for the Latvian Legion. The Germans, however, interfered again and were in fact circumventing this Latvian rule; they were actually directing the mobilization process overall.

By utilizing the very humane Latvian Wartime Draft Law as its basis, which permitted exclusion from the draft for a variety of reasons, such as illnesses, certain civilian jobs, continuing education deferments (contrary to the German instructions), including realistic medical examinations and taking into consideration other situations, the mobilization provided only 5000 men. That was less than half the number that the Germans had already drafted from the previously noted year groups. The German *Ersatzkommando* raised a storm with the Latvian Inspector General, who had been entrusted by the Latvian Self-Government to oversee the induction, and, he was ordered to Berlin in January 1944 to provide explanations. A very harsh letter was sent by Reichsführer-SS Himmler to the highest ranking SS and Police Chief in Ostland concerning the *Misstabei der Mobilization in Lettland* (mobilization chaos in Latvia); it also announced the arrival of a special German SS team, to check on those that were exempted from the draft; and, that members of the mobilization commission were to be turned over to a special court for trial. The Germans now again, in fact, completely took over the mobilization, like they had in reality been doing all along previously. The key enforcer of these orders from Berlin, now (as had always been the case in the past) was the highest ranking SS and Police Chief in *Ostland* (Eastland, which included the German occupied northern
territories of Russia), SS Lieutenant General Friedrich Jeckeln; in fact and in this way, the Germans drafted (mobilized), during the spring of 1944, nine additional year-groups (those born during 1906-1914); these draftees were not assigned to the Latvian Legion. In addition, they inducted those Latvian youngsters that were born during 1925-1926, primarily for the Latvian 1st Division (German 15th), but even from these years groups not all inductees were turned over to the Legion.

Later, people were even taken from the concentration camps and prisons. Thus, for example, SS Lieutenant General Jeckeln ordered that a special battalion be formed from 400 "convicted" Latvian legionnaires, that were being held at the Salapils Concentration Camp [Ref: Jeckeln's secret letter to the Legion's Inspector General received by the IG Staff on May 25, 1944, Nr. 180/III]. Several such battalions were formed from the inmates of the Riga Central Prison and the Salaspils Concentration Camp, where deserters from the Latvian Legion and other mobilized Latvian units were incarcerated.

During the fall of 1944, the Germans drafted teenagers (which is a true wartime crime, especially in occupied territories), those born during 1927-1928 and in some places even younger ones (children), as helpers (HiWi) for the German Luftwaffe (German Air Force). This was a real war time crime perpetrated against the children of an occupied country.

**Latvian aspirations and fears.** The Latvians were counting on a victory by the Western Allies. Independence seemed to the Latvians more certain, if the 1917 and 1918 events repeat themselves; that is, that during their battles in Eastern Europe, both tyrannical empires (Fascist Soviet Union and Nazi Germany) would collapse. In any case, the Latvians were hoping that the Bolshevists (Soviet Russia) would not re-occupy Latvian territory before peace talks had begun with the Western Allies. This Latvian wish is now very clearly understood and that the Latvians were correct in their collective judgment, because of the terrible „end result” that awaited them, if the outcome of the WW II was to be different (reoccupation of Latvia by Soviet Russia).

Initially, it looks perhaps dissociated that Latvian combat units, that were forcibly created by a foreign power, not to be saved but to be expended, could be looked upon as the preserver of their „living resources” (youth) and the „living resource” consolidator; and yet, that is exactly what actually took place. During its nearly 22 years of independence, after WW I, the Latvian nation had achieved amazing results, securing undisturbed development, not only for its own people, but also for the ethnic minorities (approximately 25% of the population) living within its borders. All of the occupations that followed (Soviet Russian, German and again Soviet Russian), once again very painfully proved, that the protector of Latvia's inhabitants can only be their own nation and their own armed forces. It would be difficult to ascertain a difference between all of the occupations, especially keeping in mind the Soviet mass murders and deportations of 1941 (later, the large 1949 deportations) and the German animal behavior against the Hebrews, Gypsies, medically incurable, arrested, and others, including Latvians, between 1941 and 1944 and even later. There is already a prejudgment by some Western nations and peoples regarding the Nazis, by those that have experienced a German occupation period during WW II; in contrast, however, there is none yet for most of the same nations and peoples (and many others) regarding the Soviet Union’s (Russian) behavior. Therefore, any proof
about the Soviet Russian occupation is frequently taken with a measure of skepticism, as if it were an attempt to look for sensationalism or exaggeration, not knowing that it is impossible to exaggerate anything because it did in fact take place as numerous eyewitnesses, historians and history itself have conclusively recorded these events. The Latvians have experienced horrific occupations multiple times; and, nobody should blame them in any way because they had no desire to experience another Soviet Russian occupation again. During WW II, the Latvians again were hoping that they could secure their independence, especially if both dictators (Hitler and Stalin) were to fall from their thrones. Hence, even if forcibly inducted by the Germans, the Latvians felt that they were serving Latvian national interests to stop an even greater threat from the East – Soviet Russia.

12. The Latvian Legion’s units and their numerical strength

The Germans changed the Legion’s unit names several times, including the "SS" attachment, but always so that it would be recognizably different from the German unit designations. Toward the end of WW II, the Latvian Legion consisted of the following units specifically assigned to it (German designated names):

15. Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (lettische Nr. 1) - [Latvian 1st Inf. Division]
19. Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (lettische Nr. 2) - [Latvian 2nd Inf. Division]
Flak – Abteilung - [Air Defense Unit]
Lettisches Feldersatz – Depot - [Latvian Field Depot]
Waffen-Grenadier Ausbildungs und Ersatz Bataillon 15 - [15th Division’s Inf. Training & Reserve Battalion]. Note: The Training and Reserve Battalion was composed primarily hospital returnees that were not yet suited for combat duty. Additionally, the Legion also included the Inspector General of the Latvian Legion and his staff and the Replacement Administration.

Even though the Germans never provided to the Latvian authorities accurate data concerning the number of persons that they actually drafted for uniformed service, that would allow to precisely define the total number mobilized and those assigned to the Latvian Legion, the Latvian unit numbers, at the time of capitulation after the end of WW II, were approximately as follows (by location):

Kurland – Latvian 2nd Division (19th) & Police and Construction units ...17 000
Germany – Latvian 1st Division (15th)............................................................. 9000
Field Service Support................................................................. 8000
15th Division units near Danzig................................................................ 2000
Denmark – Training and Reserve units....................................................... 2000
Total 38 000

The Latvian Aviation Legion. In late autumn of 1943, the Germans formed the Luftwaffen Legion Lettland (Air Force Legion Latvia), which consisted of several combat squadrons. The officers of these squadrons were former Latvian Army, National Guard and Air Force pilots, commissioned and non-commissioned officers that participated in combat flights against the Red Army, completing more than 5300 combat sorties. This Legion’s numerical strength consisted of approximately 800 officers and men, 80 of which were trained or partially trained as combat pilots. A typical squadron consisted of 9 officer and 10 noncommissioned officer pilots, 70
noncommissioned officers and airmen as ground crew and 18 aircraft; attached were also 1 German liaison officer and 5 German noncommissioned officers.

In general, the Latvian legionnaires, those that were in Kurzeme (Latvia) and those near Danzig (Germany, now Poland), all became prisoners of the Bolsheviks (Russian Red Army). Likewise, not all of the other units, those that the Germans transported to Germany, were able to fight their way to the West to surrender to the Western Allies.

13. The Latvian Legion’s wartime activities

In order to have a complete understanding of WW II activities in the East and the psychological phenomena that prevailed at the time, we must keep in mind the following:

1) Not a single unit of the Latvian Legion has ever engaged in any kind of un-soldierly conduct or questionable actions behind the front lines or at the front lines.

2) The Latvian Legion’s units have fought only at the front lines and only against the Bolsheviks (Red Army). Not a single unit of the Legion has ever fought against the Western Allies.

3) WW II was started by the Soviet Union, not Latvia, when the Soviets, as secret allies of Germany, attacked Finland in 1939, jointly with Germany occupied Poland in 1939 and then occupied Latvia and the other Baltic States in 1940.

4) Both, the Russians (1940-1941) and the Germans (1941-1945) committed atrocities in Latvia against Latvians and others, over which the Latvians themselves had absolutely no control whatsoever.

The Latvian Legion’s wartime activities and its eventual importance in delaying the occupation of Latvia’s territory by the Bolsheviks (Soviet Russia) require a fairly long dissertation. Therefore, we will cover only briefly the overall activities of the Legion.

The Latvian 2nd (19th) Division activities. This division in reality was the first to be formed, even though it is numbered as the 2nd division. At first, it started as a single regiment, followed by a brigade that was engaged at the Leningrad front in the beginning of 1943. From this time on and until the end of combat in Kurzeme, this division was at the front lines, and only at the front lines, for more than two years. It is understandable the effort that was demanded of the soldiers of this division; but also, it is easily recognizable that their casualty numbers were extremely high, even under the most careful treatment considerations of the soldiers during combat conditions. We can surely say that the Latvian officers treated their fellow soldiers very humanely, but the same can not be said about the German commanders, since they did not appear to value the lives of their own soldiers (good example is the battle at Stalingrad). Thus, the Latvian lives were even less important to the Germans. No matter how one looked at this problem, one fact was very clear to the Latvian officers that the German Commanders and their staffs assigned to lead the divisions of the Latvian Legion, with small exceptions, were ill prepared to do their jobs. The higher ranking officers usually were assigned from the German police, except for the brigade commanders at the very beginning, and, they neither had sufficient theoretical military knowledge nor actual combat experience or in leading
larger units. The same was applicable to the composition of the German division staff officers assigned to the Legion, who had obtained their officer ranks, not in the army, but in the German political Nazi formations. On the other hand, all of the senior Latvian officers were career officers, with highest military education and considerable actual combat experience (about 6 years) from WW I and Latvia's War for Independence. Additionally, since many of these young German officers were suffering from „neck illnesses“, as it was referred to by the Germans themselves, i.e., striving for medals, that made the Latvian situation even more difficult. Recognizing their responsibility in front of those under their command, including their better military understanding, the Latvians found themselves in almost constant „fight“ with these German "youth" (young officers). Because of these conflicts, several senior Latvian officers and other commanders were removed from command positions or delivered to military field courts for court martial.

Thus, the Germans tried to look for younger Latvian officers, those with less authority among the Latvians, those who would carry out their orders without any questions. Thank God, the majority of the Latvian officers placed their responsibility to their men and to the Latvian nation above the loyalty to others, even under threat of punishment or some of their twisted assertions. All that has been said applies to both Latvian divisions.
The 2nd (19th) Division, having been formed during combat environment and while having been deployed constantly at the front lines, suffered heavy casualties; those losses were replaced continuously with new soldiers as time went on. Latvian efforts to have the division pulled back for rest went without any results. Likewise, while in their combat positions, the Division was also forced to surrender when the war ended. The Division’s battle locations included Leningrad, Volkhov, Velikaya River, south of Ostrov, Opochka region and, then on Latvia’s territory through Latgale and Vidzeme, finally in Kurzeme, where the division held its positions from October 1944 until the capitulation on May 8, 1945.

During WW II, the Latvian 2nd (19th) Division was also not left unnoticed by the Allies; an old intelligence report, found in USA archives, evaluated the 19th Division (2nd Latvian) as follows: „The 19th Combat Division is composed of Latvian officers, noncommissioned officers and soldiers. This is the most decorated enemy division, having high morale, vast combat experience, being very heroic and well led. The latest information indicates (1945) that this quality unit is the cornerstone of surrounded Kurzeme.” (Ref: Visvaldis Lācis, Latviešu Leģions, Riga, 2006; pg. 47-48).

The German Commander of the VI SS Corps, German SS Lieutenant General Walter Krüger, while talking about the surrounded German forces in Kurland, stated, “I can concretely state, that the Latvian 19th Division is the best infantry division in Kurland. The men of this division know what they are fighting for. There will be a Latvia, and it will rise from her soldiers’ heroic deeds.” [Ref: Neiburga, U. Latviešu karavīri Vācijas un PSRS armijā (Latvian Soldiers in Germany’s and USSR Army); pg. 201].

A report from the German Army in Kurland to the German High Command in Germany characterized the Latvian 2nd (19th) Division as follows: „From soldier to the commander, an amazing combat unit, only they can not have too much free time; likewise, they can not be kept in one place for too long, because then they think a lot about the renewal of their country and about their nation, which can suddenly have unpredictable consequences; and, that makes it difficult for a complete political trust. Otherwise, however, it is currently the best combat division in Kurland.” [Ref: The
German High Command of Kurland secret report (Ciphered: 1a Nr. 46/45g. Kdos Chef) to German High Command in Germany – Eglitis. A. 44 gadī pēc tam (44 years after that). DV Monthly Magazine, 1989, No. 3, 4; pg. 5). Note: This highlights and points to the absurd German (also Soviet-Russian) concern and thinking at the time, that the Latvian soldiers were not trustworthy because they were yearning for their own country’s independence and freedom. In fact, the Latvians, in this regard, are not any different from the people of any other nation, including the Germans themselves (also the Russians), that want their own nation’s independence and freedom.

After WW II, a U.S. Army colonel, who had served under U.S. Tank Commander, General Patton and who had done research regarding WW II on the Eastern Front, and, who subsequently was a member of the faculty and a lecturer at the US General Staff College, ended one of his lectures this way: „That, what the Latvian divisions have accomplished in battle fields, in front of an unbelievably overwhelming Russian Army, is hard to understand or to describe. I do not have the words how to express that to you, but I bow my head in front of both of these brave divisions.” (Ref: O. Perro, Neuzvarēto traģēdija (A Tragedy of the Undefeated), Toronto, 1987; pg. 251-255.

The Latvian 1st (15th) Division activities. This division started to form in the spring of 1943. Since the division was obliged to gradually provide men to the 2nd (19th) Division, then her newly assigned troop contingents were not yet completely trained, when she was ordered, in October of 1943, to the front in the Nevel and Novo-Solkolniki region of Western Russia. In addition, since this division was armed only with French training weapons (in insufficient quantities and probably shipped from German occupied France), then the actual combat weapons were provided by the Germans only at the time that the troops were actually boarding the trains. The weapons were not issued individually, but accompanied the division in containers in which they had arrived. Only after they had arrived in the combat zone, after debarkation from the trains, did the troops get the combat weapons; thereafter, the division was thrown into battle without adequately becoming familiar with the issued arms. Was this considered a German mistrust or one of their so frequently improvised politically stupid maneuvers? Additionally, they were not kept together as a division under their regimental commanders, but were split up into smaller units and assigned to German Army units. Needless to say, that created tremendous commotion among the Latvian officers and soldiers. The Latvian commanders protested and in the aftermath of this protest, two of the Latvian regimental commanders and some other commanders were immediately relieved from their command positions. The majority of the best weaponry was taken by the Germans. Of course, in the midst of this confusion, excitement and indignation, after being dispersed among the German units, the Latvian soldiers attempted to find a way back to their own units or just simply find a way back home. Also, there were very noticeable losses in other ways and, the division was not only commingled with other units, but also in large measure thrown into total disarray. Here, we have to remember, that this division had trained together for combat, and then they were without any advance notice dispersed by the Germans, completely destroying command, control and communication procedures, not to mention the language barrier problems that were created by this action between the Germans and the Latvians.
Based on the continuing protests from the Latvian soldiers and the Inspector General of the Latvian Legion and on their own initiative, the remains of the division were pulled together again. Perhaps, to cool everyone down, the German division commander was removed from his command position, who was trying to explain to the Latvians, however, that he was only following higher authority’s orders. The combat start of the division, not due to their own fault, was dismal.

In February 1944, the Division was transferred to the Staraya Russa region, but from there, to the banks of the Velikaya River in the Ostrova region. Here, both Latvian divisions came together, for the first time, to be incorporated together, with one or more German divisions, into an army corps. After having been jointly engaged in heavy combat operations in the Ostrova and the Opochka regions, both divisions were retreating, under fierce battle conditions, to Latvia’s territory. Both divisions had suffered heavy losses during these engagements and their numbers had shrunk considerably. Here, the 2nd (15th) Division was pulled out from the front lines and the remaining remnants of it were turned over to the 1st (19th) Division, keeping intact only a command “skeleton” element of personnel from the division.

In order to reconstitute the division, the Germans ordered mobilization of Latvian youth born during 1925 and 1926. It seemed that the Germans did not want to leave a larger Latvian force in Latvia under such critical conditions; thus, the newly recruited 2nd (15th) Division was then transported to Germany, with the motivation that conditions for training there were calmer and better in the Pomeranian training areas. Of course, it was promised, that after training, the Division would be returned to Latvia. The Latvians desired of course that under these circumstances their men should remain with them. The Division’s transfer to Germany was against the will of the inductees themselves as well against the Latvian population at large, while fighting was ongoing for Latvia’s territory. Many Latvians had hopes that, after the defeat of Germany, the relationship between the Western Allies and Soviet Russia would change and that an armed force would be necessary in their own country.

In Pomerania (a region of northeastern Germany, most of which is now Poland’s territory as a result of territorial rearrangements after WW II), the Germans left the Latvian 1st (15th) Division without any training for a considerable period of time and used them primarily for digging trenches behind the eastern front lines. The Division’s training and arming began only in winter of 1944, but neither was fully completely. The Division was thrown into battle against the Bolsheviks from the Danzig area against an oncoming Red Army thrust. After having been encircled and surrounded in that region by vastly numerically superior Soviet forces, the Division managed to break through the enemy lines to the Neubrandenburg-Neustrelitz region of northeastern Germany, while sustaining considerable casualties. After that, the Division was again utilized for trench digging and was not committed into combat, in part due to the intervention by the Inspector General of the Latvian Legion. Since the Division was now completely cut off from Kurland, Latvia, the main thought that occupied the legionnaires now was – to get closer to the West and surrender to the Western Allies. Their thinking was that the war for all practical purposes was over and that the fanatical German SS leadership was needlessly sacrificing human lives; many Germans were thinking the same way. Therefore, just as soon as one of the Division’s regiments was fully armed to be included in the
defense of Berlin, the regimental commander, on his own initiative and ignoring German combat orders, did not go in the ordered direction, but in the direction of the Western Allies. This unit, known as Colonel Janums Combat Group, after many difficulties and incidents with the German SS, managed to reach the American front lines at Magdeburg on April 27, 1945; after making contact with the Americans and under the protection of a white truce flag, Colonel Vilis Janums and his entire combat group laid down their arms and surrendered to the Americans. Needless to say, it was a total surprise for the Americans, that a completely intact and combat ready "German Waffen-SS" battle group had surrendered to them. The Latvians had kept their word of honor that they would not fight against the Western Allies.

The following day, on April 29, 1945, the Inspector General of the Latvian Legion issued an order to all Latvian units to go to the West and to surrender to the Western Allies so that they could be interned by them. Anyway, that happened automatically, even having not received this order, whether it was a smaller unit or individual soldiers; the Latvians took the same action everywhere.

**The order of the Inspector General to the Latvian Legion: „Go West!”**

**LATVIAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE PRESIDENT’S Order Nr. 3**

Lubeck, April 29, 1945

Latvian soldiers in Germany!

*In the course of time, you were brought here, so that here, it seemed, under more peaceful circumstances, you could again regroup and prepare for the defense and liberation of our nation.*

*Our collective objective was and remains – free and independent Latvian Nation. We are ready to sacrifice all our strength and lives only for this goal. Due to the rapidly developing war conditions, it was not possible for the majority of you to be sent back to Latvia. It was necessary for our 15th (1st Latvian) Division to be engaged here, against the same Eastern enemy; and, it has carried out its duties also here, on foreign soil and under unusually difficult conditions, with such bravery and endurance, that could only be displayed by the youth, that have so fervently loved their nation and that have grown up in an independent Latvia. A portion of you, in contrast, unarmed and not equipped, absolutely powerless in front of the enemy, had to overcome difficulties with such energy, that it does honor to your perseverance, but it has also made you bitter as soldiers.*

Latvian soldiers in Germany!

*The vast majority of you have now been left without weapons; and, I, also otherwise, do not see any other opportunity how you, as soldiers, could be useful to Latvia. I do not see any possibility and a reason to transfer you unarmed to Latvia. Besides, the Western Allies’ (British, American and French) front has come so close to our location, that I have to take care of eliminating any misunderstandings with them; during the entire time of our nation’s independence, we have looked upon them as our friends and, without whose support, it is not even conceivable to secure a better*
future for our nation, that has suffered so much. As the President of the Latvian National Committee and as the Inspector General of the Latvian Legion, that is, as the currently highest standing political and military representative, I order you all the following:

1) Our military units, the majority of which overall are completely unarmed, to pull away from the Eastern Front, with the objective to avoid being captured by the Bolsheviks.

2) In a disciplined manner, to begin movement in the westerly direction, to avoid any activities that may cause misunderstandings regarding our peaceful intentions, and to become interned in the areas occupied by the British, Americans or the French, regardless, whether that is possible at a larger or smaller unit sizes.

3) The General Secretary for War Affairs (Chief of Staff of the Legion) to continue to liquidate (disband) the agencies that are separate from the military units.

4) The items noted by the above points are applicable to the Legion, including all formations outside the Legion and all soldiers (those serving in the army, navy and air force) as well.

Latvian soldiers in Germany!

With this order, I, thus, free you from your current obligations as a soldier. Let your conscience be your reward, that you have done everything that has been possible by the human spirit and strengths for the good of your country and nation. Let this knowledge give you trust and endurance also in your future destinies, which none of us can state or foresee. As always, so also at this moment, we are not praying for ourselves, but let us pray together: God save and bless Latvia!

General R. Bangerskis
(signature)

14. Latvian casualties during WW II

The third Soviet-Russian occupation of Latvia (1945-1991) - The Latvian soldiers as prisoners of war (POWs) of the Soviet Union. We know from historical data that is available, that the Russians took 50000 uniformed Latvians as prisoners of war (POWs). [Ref: Varpa, Igors. Latviešu karavīrs zem kāškrusta karoga (Latvian soldier under the swastika flag). Riga, 2003; pg. 549], among them were 14000 legionnaires from Fortress Kurland (Kurzeme) and several thousand legionnaires in Germany after the German capitulation (15th Division and various other units). Essentially, all of these Latvian soldiers were incarcerated in the Soviet slave labor camps, where the living conditions were atrocious in the cold of the arctic and because of lack of food; it is estimated that only 10% of those imprisoned survived that ordeal. We have to note here that about 4000-6000 Latvian soldiers (mostly legionnaires) did not surrender, but continued to fight the Soviet occupation forces until the end of 1956; eventually, during this eleven-year long partisan war, most of these soldiers perished, either killed or being shot or tortured to death by the Soviet NKVD/KGB troops when captured. Russian Colonel Polikarpov of the Soviet NKVD (later known as MVD, KGB, etc.) in his absolutely secret report to his superiors on 8 January 1957, stated that, "During the period from autumn of 1944 until 31 December 1956, the security forces (KGB) in the USSR’s (Union of the
Soviet Socialist Republics) territory of Latvia....have liquidated 961 armed bandit groups (partisan groups)......Organized bandit underground has been completely suppressed as of October 1956 (the last bandit group, that was led by Pana, was liquidated on 30 October 1956.” The report also indicated that the number of detained or liquidated is 10720 former bandits (partisans), among them: killed in action or committed suicide 2407; arrested and sentenced 4370; uncovered illegal persons 2735 of which 13 killed in action, 1119 arrested and sentenced and 1606 legalized (those that reported themselves and confessed). [Ref: Strods, Heinrihs. Latvijas Nacionālo partizānu karš (The National Partisan War). Riga, 1999; pg. 587-588]. Thus, at least 5489 partisans (mostly former Latvian soldiers) were captured by the Russian KGB. We know from the Latvian partisans, those fighting the Soviet occupation forces, that the partisans usually took their wounded or killed comrades with them and did not leave them behind for the KGB forces that could then identify them. Also, we have to note that the partisan numbers were constantly being replenished by new nationally motivated volunteers or those that did not want to serve in the Soviet Red Army. Therefore, it is safe to state that the Soviets took at least 60000 Latvian soldiers as POWs after WW II.

**Latvian soldiers as POWs of the Western Allies.** In the West, the total number of Latvian POWs, after WW II, was at least 45000. Here we must note that, besides these POWs, there were a considerable number of Latvian HiWi helpers (very young personnel) and work units (laborers, 45-60 years of age) that collectively comprised tens of thousands of personnel, including women, scattered among various German units and cities as part of the German forced-labor war effort; we can estimate this number to be at least 50000 personnel that the Germans had shipped to Germany during 1943-1945. Most of these people, that the Germans had dressed in uniforms, especially during the last few months or weeks of the war, became POWs. So, the total number of uniformed Latvians that became POWs may have been approximately 50000, including the legionnaires. At first, the Latvian uniformed personnel, those that were POWs, were spread among at least 250 POW camps, the majority of them among Germans and other nationalities, where the total POW number exceeded 7,000,000. A large number of the POWs simply walked away because the Western Allies were humane and the POW camps were not that strictly guarded, especially during the initial few months; many POWs lived outside the camps and performed work on farms and other places (Denmark, Belgium, Germany, etc.) for food. This was in sharp contrast with the Soviet slave labor camps, where people were being squashed like flies. Practically, all of the POWs that were in the Western Ally occupation zones (especially the American and British zones) were liberated already in 1946; many of the former Latvian POWs, starting already in 1946, joined the America and British Guard, Labor and Engineer paramilitary units in West Germany, thus returning to civilian life, alive and well, to resume their pre-war lives (such as they were). The Americans and British, unlike the Russians and the French, had no plans to utilize the POWs for labor purposes. The French gave the Latvian POWs a choice, be repatriated to the Soviet Union (meaning death) or join the French Foreign Legion; thus, many of these Latvian Legion legionnaires (in the French Occupation Zone), became French Foreign Legion legionnaires and fought and died in the French Indochina War.

**The number of Latvian soldiers killed during WW II.** The total number of Latvian casualties at the Eastern Front was more than 80,000 [Ref: Latviešu karavīrs pēc
Some estimates now indicate that this number may be in excess of 80,000 (killed, missing or those that died from wounds later; and, those that were captured but not taken as prisoners, but shot by the Russians – there is considerable amount of proof about that). At the Latvian Legionnaires’ Cemetery at Lestene in Kurland, Latvia (where the Latvians and Germans literally made their last stand), there alone are approximately 20,000 engraved names of killed Latvian legionnaires. For a small nation, that is an unbelievable number in loss of personnel, especially after we add also the Latvian POWs that were taken by Soviet Russia; most of these POWs perished in the Soviet slave labor camps in the Russian Gulag in Siberia (less than 10% survived and even many of the survivors had become invalids from the ordeals in the Gulag). We must realize that the Latvian Legion’s units were reconstituted several times over; i.e., since the casualty rates were so high, the regiments and the battalions were replaced by new draftees (sometimes boys) several times over. This, of course, does not include civilian war casualties; these numbers run into tens of thousands, people that once existed and then simply disappeared from their homes – teachers, factory workers, doctors, politicians, ministers and priests, farmers, high school and university students, professors, women and children, etc., etc., etc.. Note: Most of the Latvian POWs in the West survived (99.9%); this is in sharp contrast with the Latvian POWs taken by the Russians, where over 90% of them perished (shot, murdered, starved or worked to death in various slave labor camps, including the coal, iron ore, uranium and other underground mines). There were also other kinds of casualties after WW II. For example, the Russians in Kurland, immediately after WW II, rounded up all men, ages 16 to 60, those that were not in uniform, and placed them in concentration camps for filtration; of these, they released only one third and shipped the rest in cattle railroad cars to Siberia, the same as the Latvian legionnaires; very few returned back to Latvia. So, what casualty number do we select here or add to the total???
15. The tragedy of Latvian soldiers during and after WW II

1. The first of Latvian soldiers’ tragedies. The Latvian military formations of WW II were organized by a foreign power. From June of 1940 until June of 1941, it was Soviet Russia, an ally of Nazi Germany, that killed 5000 Latvian soldiers (mostly officers and noncommissioned officers) and 30 000 civilians. They (Soviet Russia) formed the Territorial Corps of Latvia, primarily from previously inducted youth, and ignored all international conventions or human rights standards. Thereafter, from June of 1941 until May of 1945, it was Nazi Germany, this time an enemy of Soviet Russia. Both of these foreign powers exercised uncontrolled power and recognized no laws other than their own; both brought nothing but death and destruction to the Latvians, stole and ruined the entire country and property and ruined the lives of the entire Latvian nation. These self-made and very vicious rulers decided and ordered - what the Latvian military units were to be, if any; what they were to be called; under whom they were to serve; when and where they were to go; what they were to fight for or alongside whom, whose objectives or loyalties were not the same as those of the Latvian soldiers. This was only the first of the Latvian soldiers’ tragedies.

2. The second of Latvian soldiers’ tragedy. An even greater tragedy was that he did not see the arrival of freedom for his nation (as was the case for the Western nations under Nazi yoke), after so much blood had been shed and so many lives sacrificed in hopes of saving their ancient homeland. But, with the approach of the Soviet Russian Red Army, he already could see the arrival of a new wave of terror and subjugation - mass murders and deportations, fear, despair and the renewed enslavement of his nation. In fact, that is exactly what happened after the arrival of the victorious Red Army, among whose ranks were the NKVD (KGB secret police) personnel, followed by a whole army of commissars and their foot-soldiers, all experts at inflicting physical and psychological pain on every inhabitant that they came in contact with. Of course, these people to this day want to be called „liberators”, but the only thing that they liberated the people from were their lives and their properties. The Baltic peoples know – they know what happened under the Soviet Russian totalitarian rule from 1945 until 1991 because they experienced it; even their (Soviet) falsified history books can not redeem them. The whole World was fighting against Nazi Germany and the outcome of her destiny was clear. It was a God-given right of the Latvian nation to wish and to strive to prevent one evil to be replaced by even a greater one; they knew that the fall of one dictator (Hitler) will soon bring in his place another (Stalin), whose murderous subjugation and devastation the Latvians had experienced only four years earlier. Here we have to remind ourselves that all of the Latvian Legion’s units were created and formed by the Germans, by a strictly controlled and enforced induction of the Latvian youth. However, not looking at all of these imposed conditions, the Latvian soldier, without any outside encouragement, remained loyal to the Western Allies and their democratic views, principles and human rights norms. The Latvians had declared that they will not fight against the Western Allies. It is not a statement created for purposes of conjecture. It is a proven fact, that the Latvian soldiers’ stance, while under German subordination, required more bravery and resolve, than for those that
have not undergone such trials under such mentally degrading conditions; additionally, nobody from any nation, when placed under such or otherwise coercive conditions, would have fought against the Western Allies, knowing that they (the Western Allies) are the bringers of life and freedom. Besides, the Latvian soldier had to think, first of all, about his nation’s situation (as any free country’s soldier would do, if he loved his nation). Latvia had already been subjugated by very evil and most inhumane dictator that the World had never known. Therefore, guided by this natural thought of self preservation, the Latvian soldier, even under these forced and very difficult conditions imposed by the Germans, was fighting against the Soviet Union’s Red Army, to hamper its arrival in his country; he knew what awaited the Latvian nation – arrests, murders and deportations. The Latvian soldier’s situation can be compared to a civilian person’s situation, while having been bound by one evil intruder (Nazi Germany), is being pushed into the doorway, through which an even more terrible gangster (Soviet Russia) is breaking in to murder his family. Everyone will recognize a natural reaction on the part of the bound person, that he will try his utmost, even while being in this bound and restrained condition, to try to do his utmost to prevent this more terrible gangster from reaching his family, even when the police (Western Allies) is already engaging the evil intruder who bound him in the first place. And, this situation becomes even more terrifying, that the police will not go after the terrible gangster, but that the gangster now becomes the person in charge of the house that he broke into. And, any normal person will see and agree, that the resistance of the bound person against the gangster is not abnormal or condemnable, but just the opposite, that it would have been unforgivable that someone had permitted or wished that this gangster could freely and unhampered get into this unhappy house, freely take charge and commit murders.

The third Latvian soldiers’ tragedy. The third tragedy for the Latvian soldier is that he was being vilified and slandered after WW II. This was especially done by those who saw themselves as friends of the gangster (Soviet Union) noted above. First, the vast Soviet KGB propaganda machine literally fabricated materials and propaganda (all lies) for consumption by the West; second, these material and propaganda were spoon-fed to various groups and news media in the West that tried (unsuccessfully) to discredit the Latvian legionnaires. Initially, even the Germans themselves tried to attach to the legionnaires some atrocities that they had committed themselves, until the Allies finally recognized who the real SS were. (See below, “The Latvian Legionnaires after WW II”). This is an especially bitter and continuing experience felt by the legionnaires; it touches not only his own personal situation at the present time, but it also includes the scorn that his nation had to endure during the 1945-1991 occupation years; and, that is still continuing to this day, deliberately caused by some groups that are being led by the same kind of evil monsters (”gangsters” that actually settled in Latvia after WW II) that had a hand in subjugating, deporting and murdering Latvians that resulted in their nation’s indigenous civilian population to be reduced by more than 30%. Sometimes, such scorn is met exactly there, where one would hope to find justice and satisfaction. This pertains to those who were for the first time in this war placed in the doorway of their Nation’s destiny, as well as to those, who have already selflessly stood for decades at their Nation’s guard posts. The Latvian legionnaires’ saga, with a Latvian soldier’s attitude, is in reality the continuation of the Latvian National Army. Nothing in the Latvian soldier had become different from what he had been before. There is a Russian saying that it is very
difficult for a person to prove that he is not a camel, if someone undertakes this and
swears to it. And for a while, there were those who tried to assert that the Latvian
soldiers were SS men. We can thank God that this is now in the past, except among
those evil doers, who, being led by evil objectives, even today are still misleading
themselves and others.

16. The Latvian legionnaires after WW II

The German WW II "Act of Military Surrender". In accordance with the German
"Act of Military Surrender", World War II ended officially in Europe at 23:01 on May 8,
1945. The majority of the Latvian 2nd (19th) Division soldiers and other Latvian units,
together with the German units, who had fought in defense of Fortress Kurland
(Kurzeme), became prisoners of the Russians. In contrast, the vast majority of the
Latvian 1st (15th) Division soldiers became prisoners of the Western Allies, having
remained loyal to Western values and having never turned their weapons against or
fired a shot at them.

The military leadership of "Greater Germany"
 signing the Act of Surrender at 02:41 on May 7, 1945.

Latvian legionnaires as POWs fall of 1945 - A typical "evening check."
Only this text in English is authoritative

ACT OF MILITARY SURRENDER

1. We, the undersigned, acting by authority of the German High Command, hereby surrender unconditionally to the Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Forces and simultaneously to the Soviet High Command all forces on land, sea, and in the air which are at this date under German control.

2. The German High Command will at once issue orders to all German military, naval and air authorities and to all forces under German control to cease active operations at 23:00 hours Central European time on 8 May and to remain in the positions occupied at that time. No ship, vessel, or aircraft is to be scuttled, or any damage done to their hull, machinery or equipment.

3. The German High Command will at once issue to the appropriate commandants, and ensure the carrying out of any further orders issued by the Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Forces and by the Soviet High Command.

4. This act of military surrender is without prejudice to, and will be superseded by any general instruments of surrender imposed by, or on behalf of the United Nations and applicable to CERSUNY and the German armed forces as a whole.
5. In the event of the German High Command or any of the Forces under their control failing to act in accordance with this Act of Surrender, the Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force and the Soviet High Command will take such punitive or other action as they deem appropriate.

Signed at Château-Thierry on the 7th day of May, 1945.

On behalf of the German High Command:

[Signature]

IN THE PRESENCE OF:

On behalf of the Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force:

[Signature]

On behalf of the Soviet High Command:

[Signature]

Major General, French Army (Witness)
Soviet-Russian and German propaganda immediately after WW II. Immediately after WW II, the Germans were pointing fingers at the Latvian soldiers as being SS men; there were accusations by the Soviets and the Soviet Russian propaganda, that the legionnaires were involved in the extermination of Jews at the Riga Ghetto, after the arrival of the Germans in 1941. Think about it – 1941; the Latvian Legion was formed in 1943! We now know conclusively, from the verbatim testimony of the highest ranking German SS and Police Chief in Ostland (Eastland), SS General Friedrich Jeckeln (testimony that was deliberately not made available by Soviet Russia), that after his arrival in Riga, he ordered his own German SS men from his own personal German SS unit to kill the Riga Ghetto Jews (about 25000) during a three-day operation at the end of November and beginning of December of 1941. When asked by the prosecutor how it was done and who actually carried out this hideous crime (who did the shooting), he answered: „Ten or twelve German soldiers. Surnames I do not remember.” „Undressed Jews – men, women and children -, surrounded by German police, were proceeding to the pits, where they were shot by German soldiers.” Jeckeln himself was present to oversee this operation. [Ref: Grūtups, Andris. Ešafots. 2007; pg. 40-41]. Jeckeln stated something else very important, that prior to his arrival in Latvia and prior to his operation, „I must however say, that already prior to my arrival in Riga (meaning November 1941), a large number of Jews had been killed in Ostland and in Byelorussia. That was reported to me.” When asked, who reported this, he answered, „Stahlecker, Prützmann, Major General Schröder, the SS-Police Commander of Latvia, Major General Möller, the SS-Police Commander of Estonia, and Major General Wysocki, the SS-Police Commander of Lithuania.” [Ref: A. Ezeragailis, Nazi Soviet Disinformation, Riga, 2005; pg. 93]. When asked, who carried out these operations, he answered: „Those were led by Dr. Lange”. [Ref: Grūtups, Andris. Ešafots. 2007; pg. 41].

The Latvian soldier’s and the legionnaire’s overall satisfaction is that he has neither insulted nor humiliated himself in front of his nation and humanity, but instead has sacrificed himself for both of them. Even during forced-upon fight, he has remained loyal to those principles, with which the Latvian Army had achieved her victories while fighting against injustice and inhumanity, while simultaneously remaining just and humane herself.

Note: In West Germany after the WW II, the Western Allies and the United Nation Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) established Displaced Person (DP) Camps within the Western Allies’ occupation zones in West Germany. At first, there were attempts to bar the Latvian legionnaires from these camps and not to give them refugee status (displaced person – DP) by pointing out that they had a choice whether to join the Latvian Legion or, for example, the work units or be the German Army helpers (HiWi); all this was based on German supplied documents and the German published propaganda materials (falsifications) that they had used in Latvia. All this, of course, was drastically very different from the actual reality that took place and from that what the Germans actually did and how they behaved in German occupied Latvia - breaking all international norms and conventions. True, in German publications one can find facts that such a choice was given, but in reality it was completely different – forced mobilization and assignment to units in accordance with strict German orders. The Latvians never had a choice – they were mobilized! From the very beginning of the occupation, the Germans had their own plan and distribution scheme, as we have already seen.
Western Allies' findings in regards to the Latvian Legion. After WW II, the Western Allies very quickly ascertained the difference between the German SS and the Latvian Legion soldiers. The legionnaires have never, legally, ideologically or, even by the Germans been called as SS men or leaders (führer); however, the highest German commanders, together with their staffs, that were assigned as the Legion division commanders, belonged to that group. During the latter part of WW II, also the entire German Army was placed under the German SS leadership (Himmler and his staff). Because of that, nobody has ever called them (Wermacht) as being SS. Of course, there were also Norwegian, Danish, etc. SS volunteers, but everyone seemed to forget these volunteers. After the capitulation of Germany, however, the Germans and their government agencies, in order to hide and save their own real SS men and to provide a „required number“, were pointing fingers at the Latvians and Estonians as being SS men. This German practice was seen at many hospitals and prisoner of war camps. If the Germans had never assigned this "SS honor" and privileges during their heyday of power, then now they were willingly assigning this SS shame and humiliation to others, after they had already fallen from power. To a Latvian, and especially to a Latvian soldier, who had lost his nation’s protection, had to undergo many false accusations and legal rights denials.

As noted before, the Western Allies quickly established the difference between the Latvian Legion and the German real SS units. Immediately after WW II, they had done research and had come to a conclusion, in contrast from the Soviet Russia’s approach and propaganda, that the Balts’ "Waffen SS" legions (Latvian and Estonian Legions and their soldiers) are not to be considered as being part of or ever having belonged to the "German SS". In this regard, the British refused to hand over the Baltic legionnaires to the Soviets; the British Foreign Ministry letter Nr. 231 of February 4, 1946 to the British political advisor working for the British Military Commander in Berlin, concerning the citizens (legionnaires) of the Baltic States, stated that they cannot be looked upon as war criminals or traitors only because they have fought against the Soviet Red Army. Likewise, the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, shared this view and had sent a letter to the British Army Chief of Staff, General Alexander, concerning all the military personnel who have served in the enemy (German) army; General Eisenhower indicated that they should be repatriated, except for the Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians and Poles. Thus, the Allies did not want to hand over the Balts to the Russians for obvious reasons – they would be killed by the Russians.

Later, in regards to the Displaced Persons Act, that provided also immigration opportunities to the United States of America (USA), the following letter summarizes the official USA position as follows:

**USA Government letter:**

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

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

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

Sincerely yours,
Harry N. Rosenfield, Commissioner

***

**The former Latvian legionnaires in American and British paramilitary units.** Taking into consideration all of the aforementioned facts, the Western Allies’ collective findings and conclusions, the British and the Americans opened the door already in 1946 for the former Latvian legionnaires and other Balts to serve in several voluntary paramilitary organizations (military guard, engineer and construction units); this time, however, it was based on a true volunteer principle. These men in these companies were dressed in dark blue uniforms (dyed USA and British Army uniforms). The bottom left picture shows the Latvian Viesturs Company, during a review, marching with the Latvian flag; the bottom right picture depicts a Latvian company in dark blue (dyed) British uniforms. Ironically, among the various responsibilities of the Viesturs Company (the former Latvian legionnaires), one of their duties was the guarding of the real WW II war criminals, the highest ranking German Nazi Party members and the high ranking German SS officers during the Nuremberg WW II war criminal trials in Germany. [Ref: Latviešu karavīrs pēc otrā pasaules kara (Latvian soldier after WW II, Volume 9, 1985; pg. 209 and 302]. Thus, this shows how absurd and stu7pid it is to equate the Latvian legionnaires with the German SS or to call them Nazis. But, that is exactly what Soviet Russia did after WW II, knowing full well the real story, that the legionnaires were never SS or Nazis.

![Viesturs Company in USA occupation zone](image1) ![Latvian guard company in British occupation zone](image2)

"Viesturs Company" in USA occupation zone with the Latvian flag. Latvian guard company in British occupation zone

**The Soviet KGB propaganda offensive against former Latvian legionnaires in the West.** Unable to silence the Latvian immigrants in Canada, Australia, United States, Great Britain, West Germany and elsewhere after WW II, concerning the Soviet Russia’s occupation of Latvia and the other Baltic States, including the atrocities that had been committed and that were continuing to be perpetrated by the Communist Party, the Red Army and the NKVD (former KGB and FSB) in Latvia and
the continuing deportations of their compatriots (men, women and children) to the vast slave labor camp system in the Soviet Gulag (Siberia), Moscow finally ordered the KGB to take action. We now know conclusively that the KGB organized the fabrication of false evidence and the publication of books and articles, "to illegitimatize East Europeans, to belittle their standing in the community of nations." (Ref: A. Ezergailis, Nazi Soviet Disinformation, Riga, 2005; pg. 75). First, the KGB organized in each of the Eastern European countries, those that they had occupied, a kind of cultural liaison organization to get contacts in the West. In Latvia, the KGB organized the so called Cultural Liaison Committee with Countrymen Abroad with Imants Lešinskis, a KGB major, in charge. Second, this Committee came up with the idea to publish books and articles, all pure fabrication, to discredit the leaders of Eastern European backgrounds (immigrants) within various immigrant communities in the West, by accusing them of murder and Nazi atrocities. Additionally, the Soviet Russia (KGB) held war crime trials even in the 1960s and 1970s for consumption by the West. It worked like a charm! In Latvia, they published the book entitled Vanagi: Who Are They and translated it into several languages (English, German, etc.). Based on the contents of this book and other publications, news releases, articles in newspapers or magazines and sometimes direct correspondence with eager prosecutors in the West, many prosecutors in the West were literally hooked by the KGB. As an example, one target that the KGB selected was a Latvian ex-legionnaire Jānis Zēgners, an officer by then in one of the USA established military engineer construction companies, where such units were engaged in important military construction projects for the US Army and NATO; Captain Zēgners was also a well known Latvian community leader and well respected by the American and German communities. However, he was a fierce anti-communist and did not hesitate to talk about Soviet atrocities, deportations and inhumane treatment of his countrymen by the Soviets-Russians in Latvia. Under a pseudonym of Gustavs Silis, KGB Major Imants Lešinskis started to feed fabricated information to a very eager German prosecutor about this Latvian "Nazi" Zēgners; but, West Germany was not the Soviet Union and such accusations required proof, but the accusers and the KGB had none, because it was all fiction. However, the mission was accomplished and seeds of doubt were planted in Captain Zēgners superiors' minds and the American and German communities at large. This kind of operation was repeated many times over.

Note: KGB Major Imants Lešinskis defected to the West and worked for the CIA. He confirmed that the book (Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They) and the multitude of other completely false and fabricated materials, aimed to discredit ethnic Latvians living abroad, was a KGB operation. After liberation of Latvia in 1991, one of the KGB operation "accusers" against Captain Zēgners, Karlis Kazniņš, during a radio interview, "...did not only substantiate Lešinskis story; he apologized to the Zēgners family for having been a party in besmirching him and his kin." [Ref: Ezergailis, A. Nazi Soviet Disinformation, Riga, 2005; pg. 181].

Another horrific example of a Russian KGB operation, during the late 1950s and early 1960s, when innocent people were being accused, prosecuted and executed, was the use of "prepared witnesses" to introduce false evidence during trial proceedings. These trials were specifically set up as "show trials" for Western news media consumption concerning alleged atrocities that were allegedly committed by the WW II Latvian veterans; in this case, the accusation was against the entire 18th Latvian Police Battalion that was assigned to the Eastern Front war zone by the Germans to fight the partisans during WW II. Here, the members of the 18th Police
Battalion were accused of an alleged war crime that allegedly took place at Slonim in Byelorussia. In March of 1961, nine men were tried for this alleged crime, five were sentenced to death and four were sentenced to 15 years of hard labor; the sentences were carried out by the Soviet authorities on 31 May 1961. Of course, now we know that these men were innocent and that such a crime was never committed by these men of the 18th Latvian Police Battalion. Here again, we see the Russian-German connection, even after WW II. This was not a question about guilt or innocence; it was a question about discrediting Latvians living abroad, who had served in the police battalions, and perhaps later in the Latvian Legion. The alleged crime supposedly took place in summer of 1942, when Jews were allegedly killed by the 18th Latvian Battalion wearing German uniforms at Slonim. We now know from German records that the Germans indeed killed 4000 Jews at Slonim on 29 June 1942. However, the 18th Latvian Police Battalion did not arrive at Slonim until the 18th of August 1942; and, they were wearing Latvian, not German uniforms. KGB Major Imants Lešinkskis attended this show trial in his official capacity and afterwards stated that this trial was staged. [Ref: A. Ezergailis, Nazi Soviet Disinformation, Riga, 2005; pg. 45-50.]

Few years later, in 1974, the Soviet KGB staged another "show trial" concerning the members of the Latvian 21st Police Battalion; the fabricated evidence for this Soviet trial was even worse. In "this farce" of a trial, 24 innocent men were tried and 7 were sentenced to death and executed; again, these men were innocent. It is possible that the Soviets were spurred on by the 1972 trial of Grauel et al. in Hannover, Germany. In 1999, Latvia’s prosecutor examined this trial and confirmed that indeed it was a show trial and that they were convicted on falsified evidence. The case involved the accusation that members 21st Police Battalion had killed Jews in Liepaja, Latvia in 1941, shortly after the arrival of the German Army, together with the German SD police units. We know from records that the Germans themselves did in fact carry out executions of Jews in Liepaja in 1941, not the 21st Latvian Police Battalion. The men for the 21st Police Battalion were not drafted until mid-December 1941, after the massacre by the Germans had already taken place. Also, an investigation, about the court proceedings, confirmed that testimony was coerced and fabricated; all 24 of the accused testified that they had joined the 21st Battalion in September of 1941. Additionally, the Soviet prosecutors used verbatim, identical depositions, purportedly given by the different defendants and recorded at different times by different investigators – all a Soviet fabricated "legal farce". Again here we see, to a degree, the Soviet-German connection with the Hannover trial. [Ref: A. Ezergailis, Nazi Soviet Disinformation, Riga, 2005; pg. 50-53.] Truthfully, such "show trials" benefited two interested parties, Soviet Russia and their KGB operations during the "Cold War" to discredit the Latvians and the Germans to blame others for the crimes that their SS and SD units, their fellow countrymen, had committed during WW II.

17. Latvian ethnic symbols and emblems

It is noteworthy to mention that Latvians are proud of their ancient culture and language; the Latvian language is the oldest spoken language in Europe, alongside the Lithuanian language. Likewise, they are proud of their heritage and their ancient designs and artifacts that they wear as jewelry or that they use to decorate their homes. One such design that they have is the fire cross; this should not be confused
with the German swastika that the Germans used during their authoritarian period in Europe.

![Ancient Latvian broach from the 3rd century – fire cross broach.]

After the arrival of the Bolsheviks in Latvia during WW II, and also after the war, many Latvians lost their lives (they were shot), or were deported to Siberia during the Soviet-Russian occupation, because such artifacts were found in their possession, either in their homes or on their person, items that were and still are commonly found among the Latvian culture-loving inhabitants of Latvia. The same fate was also experienced by the Latvian soldiers, who had in their possession Latvia’s military decorations, breast insignia or other items. (See below, for example, the *Kalpaks Battalion* emblem).

![The Kalpaks Battalion’s crest, from the 1918-1920 Latvia’s War of Liberation, is composed of the individual company breast insignias worn by the soldiers in each company of the battalion. Surrounded by oak leaves, the company crests are, by order of seniority, as follows: - Top (left to right): *Independence Company* and *Cesis Company.* - Bottom (left to right): *Students Company* and *Cavalry Section.*]