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A Study of THE BALTIC LEGIONS
(Volunteer Waffen-SS Divisions)

Based on interviews with members of the above mentioned organizations, leading personalities in the Baltic States as well as in the above mentioned organizations, research conducted by use of periodicals, newspapers, magazines, history books, and other material available on the subject, reports furnished by usually very reliable informants, as well as information received from the Berlin Document Center.

I. In order to understand the formation, existence and operation of the Baltic Legions, it is necessary to have a comprehensive picture of the role the Baltic States played in international politics from 1939 until 1941. The following is a condensed recent history covering that period of time:

(a) On 30 October 1939 the Soviet Union, represented by Mr. Molotov, and Germany, represented by Mr. Ribbentrop, signed a non-aggression pact which divided the Baltic States. Estonia and Latvia were to be placed in the Soviet orbit, whereas Lithuania was Russia's payment to Germany for receipt of the eastern half of Poland. Claiming that she needed air bases and naval shore batteries to counteract Germany's expansion, Russia received such bases from three Baltic States, as they were powerless to refuse their powerful and menacing neighbor. Lithuania, however, being in the German sphere, was made a target of German minority claims within that country. That is the reason for a much greater number of repatriants to Germany in 1939, 1940, and 1941 from Lithuania than from the other Baltic States. Because of this, a far greater number of Lithuanians than Latvians or Estonians were naturalized as Germany citizens.

(b) Creation of the above mentioned air bases and naval shore installations was fertile ground for Soviet agents, who appeared in the guise of air and naval experts, to begin expansion of the 5th column which up to that time had not achieved alarming proportions in Latvia and Estonia.

(c) Claiming that the Baltic States were preparing to attack the Soviet Union, this totalitarian government invaded these three nations on June 14, 1940.

(d) The Russian occupation of the Baltic States, which had a damaging effect on the population because of the atrocities, demoralization and general chaos, lasted until June 22, 1941 when Germany declared war on the Soviet Union. 6% of the Baltic inhabitants were either killed or deported by the Communists during their reign of terror which lasted one year. Fearing persecution by the Russian authorities, many people hid in the forests for as long as 3 months.

In their attempt to wipe out any evidence of their atrocities, their killings, deportations, robberies, and lootings reached unbelievable proportions in the very last days of their occupation, i. e. just prior to the entrance of the German Army into the Baltic States.

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(e) Within one week the German Armies had overrun the Baltic States and pushed deeper into Russia until they found themselves on the outskirts of Leningrad, Moscow, and Stalingrad. It should be noted that the northern part of Estonia was not occupied by the Germans until the end of August 1941.

II. Latvia

(a) In the interim period, after the Russian forces had left Latvia and the German forces had occupied Latvia, partisan groups had been formed for the purpose of preventing the forcible deportations and robberies committed by the retreating Russians. Weapons for this operation were procured from supply points which the Russians had abandoned as well as from Russian soldiers which were captured and disarmed. The ranks of the partisan groups swelled from hour to hour, because the Latvian population was so enraged at the treatment it had received from the Soviet occupation authorities, that many men pursued the retreating Russians in order to avenge the deaths, deportations and humiliations suffered by themselves, members of their families, or close friends.

These men were not organized beyond the strength of a squad or platoon and operated in an independent fashion. In their attempt to mete out their own type of justice, they no doubt persecuted innocent people in a few instances.

When the German Army was passing through Latvia, a number of these partisans requested to be incorporated into the German Army. However, they were informed that in accordance with the rules governing warfare as established by the Geneva Convention, citizens of an occupied country cannot be used in the armed forces of the occupying power. Shortly thereafter (approximately beginning of August 1941), these partisans were disarmed and instructed to disband. The order prohibiting the possession of fire arms was also accompanied by an order prohibiting the wearing of any kind of uniform other than those authorized by the German authorities.

(b) With the departure of the Russian forces, former government employees and officials who had been relieved of their duties by the Russians, returned to their old posts, thereby continuing a governmental process which had been absent for one year. The Latvians then had established a self-administration which, in these days, was not too well organized, yet enabled them to represent the Latvian people when dealing with the German civil administration which arrived in Latvia in the end of August 1941.

(c) Although the German civil administration arrived in Latvia at the end of August 1941, its true effective operation did not begin until the very beginning of 1942. Nevertheless, it did function even from the very beginning as a supreme power in Latvia. Finding difficulties in the administration of a foreign people in language, customs, courtesies, etc., the German civil administration decided to form an office of a Deputy Administrator, and for that purpose selected a former Latvian General by name of BANKERS, who had left Latvia and had come to Germany in 1939 under the "Blut ins Reich" program and had returned to Latvia with the German forces in 1941.

One of the responsibilities of the Deputy Administrator was the procurement of manpower, be it for labor purposes or for military purposes. However, this office was at all times under direct control and supervision of the German civil administration.

(d) Under German supervision and under the leadership of a German individual named Dr. LANGE, the Sicherheitsdienst unit (SD) in Latvia was created. The arriving German members of the SD comprised a small part of this organization which, at its peak, numbered approximately 300 men. The remainder of the members (other than Germans) consisted of Latvians and were organized into an SD Unit as such in the following manner:

Prior to the beginning of World War II, an organization existed in Latvia which was known as "Perkonkrusts" (Swastika Ligue). The head of this organization was a Latvian named Gustavs CELMINS. This organization, although not an official affiliate of the Nazi Party, believed in its ideology and closely followed the Nazi plan for German world-domination and racial extermination. With CELMINS at the head, this "Perkonkrusts" allied itself with the arriving German SD.

One of the Latvians who had also joined the SD, was an Latvian individual named ARAJS. Eventually in 1942, ARAJS had managed to surround himself with a large number of Latvians working in the SD office, and began an internal political fight with CELMINS which resulted in the removal of CELMINS and his supporters from the regular SD operations. This group, however, remained in the SD and operated a card file of all Latvians. Having succeeded in the internal coup, ARAJS became the Latvian Chief of the SD, was given the rank of Major by the German SD authorities and eventually became a legendary figure where atrocities and injustices were concerned. The ARAJS group soon thereafter was known as "ARAJS Battalion". ARAJS himself has been tried for war crimes by a British Military Tribunal, sentenced to spend several years in jail, and is at present rumored to be residing somewhere in southern Germany near the Swiss border.

Gustavs CELMINS was located in Rome, Italy, shortly after the World War II and is rumored to have just recently immigrated to the U.S.

(e) During the German occupation of Latvia 1941 to 1945, a great number of military as well as para-military units existed in Latvia. These units, facts regarding their creation, and their functions, are described below:

(1) Creation of the police battalions and regiments in Latvia can be attributed to two Latvian Colonels, COL. KRIBS (deceased) and Col. OSIS (at present in England) and was accomplished in the following manner:

When Latvia was freed from communist oppression by the German Army, the Latvian leaders believed that their country would become an independent unit, with all rights granted, within the German empire. Consequently, two Latvian Colonels, Col. PIEMENERS (at present in Sweden) and Col. DEGLAVS (deceased), attempted to rearm the Latvian Army for the purpose of combating the remaining Russian Army pockets, subsequent apprehension of all gangs of robbers which were terrorizing the farmers, and re-establishing the former Latvian borders in case of any future Red Army attacks.

The most enthusiastic of the two colonels was DEGLAVS, who had actually procured the German Army's consent to such a plan.

However, two other Latvian Colonels, Col. WEISS and Col. SIS, were more interested in collaborating with the German officials, thereby gaining more personal power. Opposed also to the plan of DEGLAVS and PLESNERS was the SD unit which at that time was under the command of Gustavs CELMINS. Although it has never been established the SD unit, in cooperation with WEISS and SIS, is suspected of having shot Col. DEGLAVS. The death of Col. DEGLAVS, the driving power behind the plan to establish an independent Latvian Army, enabled SIS and WEISS to approach the German Lt. Gen. of the SS JAEGERLEN, Chief of the Police in the Baltic States, and present to him a plan of organizing police battalions which could not only estimate the Russian pockets of opposition still remaining, but also furnish a power which could enforce all laws and subdue the existing gangs, engaged in pillaging, robbing, and raping the population.

Because of the existing unemployment situation, WEISS and SIS had no difficulty in obtaining employees for these police battalions. However, personnel applying for employment with these police battalions, firmly believed that they would be used as regular policemen, as this police was known as the Ordnungspolizei (order police). In some places, a certain amount of coercion was used by requesting men in certain areas groups to appear at the District Commander's office and sign a list that they were willing to serve as police men in the Ordnungspolizei. If they refused to sign such a list, another list was placed before them which was known as "red list". Having signed this "red list" that they did not wish to participate in the Ordnungspolizei, they were considered as Communist sympathizers and were in some cases prosecuted. Those who did sign for duty with the Ordnungspolizei, signed an agreement to remain for one year.

It is not possible to ascertain the exact number of battalions which were subsequently formed. However, it appears that approximately 12 such battalions consisting of 3000 men (Ordnungspolizisten) existed in Latvia.

After the authorized strength of the individual battalion was procured, these battalions were engaged in military training, and, having completed such training, were assigned to guarding strategic installations, such as power plants, factories manufacturing war materials, bridges, and rail roads.

In December 1941, these units were alerted and - using the pretext that border skirmishes instigated by guerrilla groups needed immediate attention - these police battalions were hurriedly transported to the Baltic - Russian borders and then, without stopping, were sent further into Russia and ordered to fight on the Russian front in the vicinity of Leningrad, where they were placed under the command of the local German Army commander. The first to be alerted and sent to the front was the 16th Police Battalion. By summer 1942, the majority of these Battalions had reached the Russian front, and most of those reaching the front were committed in the vicinity of Leningrad.

Two of these battalions were sent to Warsaw, Poland, where they were being used as guards in the local Ghetto, and whence they were taken from Latvia by the German SS-Lt Col. TAUBE. A certain amount of suspicion exists that two other battalions participated in atrocities somewhere in southern Russia, however, this could not be substantiated. The majority of the battalions - those engaged in fighting in the vicinity of Leningrad - have never participated in atrocities. In fact, it has been found that very seldom if ever have any frontline units of the German Army participated in atrocities.

Shortly after their arrival on the Russian front, the Battalions were consolidated into Regiments and a Headquarters of Police Regiments established in Riga. This Headquarters was under the command of Col. J. S. S. whose Chief of Staff was Col. LOBE, E. C. No. 26 193, declared not to be within the I.R.O. mandate in 1949, and at present residing in DP Camp Neustadt Schleswig-Holstein. Col. WEISS, although a member of the Police Battalions, was first assistant to General DANKERS and his liaison between the Police Battalions and his Office of the Deputy Civil Administrator.

In the summer of 1942 - when the Police Battalions were consolidated into Police Regiments - these units were officially known as Schutzmannschaften and retained this name until April 1943.

When the members of these Police Battalions had fulfilled their one year's service, many demanded release from these units. However, this was not granted, as the German Army Field Commanders were badly in need of men. As a result, some members deserted on the spot, and others failed to return to their units after completion of a furlough at home.

2. The organization known as AIZSARGI (Home Guard) was first formed at the end of World War I. The best translation of AIZSARGI is Protective Organization, and as such an organization their duties consisted at that time of protecting the local population from dangers such as floods, fires, forest fires, robbers, accidents, etc. It could be said that this organization performed the duties of an auxiliary police.

On 15 May 1934 the last Latvian President Karlis URMANIS, a graduate of the University of Nebraska, managed to obtain control of the Latvian Government by means of coup d'etat and proclaimed himself leader of the Latvian people. Although URMANIS' regime, which lasted from 1934 to 1940, was a dictatorship, URMANIS governed the country in as democratic a way as was possible under a dictatorship, and is credited with having saved his country from financial bankruptcy and political doom.

In his attempt to rid his country of political parasites which were sponging on the government, he being a member of the Farmers Party, utilized the Aissargi, who were also for the main part farmers and thereby supporters of the Farmers Party, to arrest all known Communists and Fascists in Latvia. Consequently, the Aissargi were the first targets of Russian killings and deportations as they believed them to be their arch enemies. The Aissargi became a forbidden organization after the Russian invasion of Latvia on June 17, 1940.

In the middle of 1944, a former Latvian general, KUFELIS, received permission from the German authorities to re-activate the Aissargi for the purpose of protecting Latvia from the advancing Communists. However, KUFELIS along with a few other Latvian patriots, intended to use the Aissargi as a core for a Latvian Army which was to drive the crumbling German Army out of Latvia, fortify the Latvian borders, and stop the Red Army from entering Latvia. This was the only Latvian resistance group, as having been outfitted and supplied with weapons by the Germans, they operated in the woods and ambushed German Army units and German Army transports. As a result, a German regular SS (Allgemeine SS) unit was ordered to disband this organization and apprehend all its leaders. In the fall of 1944, General KUFELIS and his staff were arrested, eight members of his staff shot, and he along with some other members sent to Germany and remained under guard until the end of World War II.

It is extremely difficult to establish whether a Latvian served in the Latvian active underground (Aissargi) in 1944, as no records have been kept of this organization. At the present time, a Latvian named RAUDZINS, who claims to be a member of this underground movement, is issuing certificates to Latvian males to the effect that they have been members of the underground in Latvia in 1944.

It is the opinion of the undersigned that such certificates are worthless, as it is impossible to establish who had been a member of this organization in 1944.

3. Youths of the ages of 16, 17, and in some cases even older were conscripted for service with the German Luftwaffe from 1941 to 1944 and were known as Luftwaffenhelfer. Although some of these youths possessed skills needed in the German Airforce, they were utilized mainly as laborers in kitchens, on construction of airfields and to perform general military housekeeping duties. In some cases even older men were conscripted for this service as they possessed needed qualifications, yet were not permitted to perform any duties other than manual labor because of security regulation. In some cases these Luftwaffenhelfer were uniformed, in other cases performed the duties in civilian garb. In all cases none of them received any weapons while members of the Luftwaffe.

4. Latvian youths of the ages of 16 and 17 were also conscripted for service as Hilfswillige in 1943 and 1944. The Hilfswillige were not placed in an organization as such, but rather sent to German Army units where they were utilized by the German Army in the same manner as the Luftwaffenhelfer in the German Airforce. These men were not members of the Baltic Legions, wore uniforms in some instances and in most all instances carried no arms.

5. In the end of 1941, the German occupation authorities ordered that two Construction Battalions (Pionier Battalions) were to be formed, the main power being supplied by the German Labor Office who ordered a sufficient number of Latvian youths to begin service with these two Construction Battalions. Having received a slight amount of military training, these two battalions were sent to the Russian front and were assigned to the German Army Field Commander of the central Russian front area.

6. Members of the organization Stralo (Strassen-Verkehrs-Leitung "Ost") Surface Transportation East, were civilians, yet wore the uniform of a respective transportation organization. In Latvia, members of this organization worked on the state railways and as mechanics, welders, drivers, etc. for German army motorpools and other government installations. Later, having been transferred to Germany, the railroad men continued to work for the Reichsbahn. Members of this organization were never armed.

7. The RAD (Reichsarbeitsdienst) began demanding man power in Latvia as early as the end of 1941. On orders from Berlin, the German Civil Administration in Latvia ordered the Labor Office to procure this manpower, however, persons conscripted in this manner had no way of avoiding this service, and were extremely opposed to, as it sent them out of Latvia and into Germany.

Because the officials of some local areas had large Legion and R.A.D. quotas to fill in 1943, they gave men called for military service a choice of serving in the Legion or the R.A.D. Since service in the R.A.D. meant leaving the homeland, most Latvians chose the Legion, because the German authorities stated that the Legion would only have to fight in Latvia and never elsewhere.

8. When the German armies, which up to 1943 had victoriously conquered a substantial amount of Russian territory, began suffering defeats in their attempt to hold their gains and thereby lost a great number of men, the German Government saw no reason why man power of occupied countries could not be utilized to spearhead the advances of the German armies and to hold their gains, and thereby diminish the casualties which the German Army was suffering. There was, however, one obstacle to be surmounted in conscripting civilians of a conquered country, and this obstacle was the code of rules governing warfare as established by the Geneva Convention. Up to the beginning of 1943, the German Government had transgressed against the above mentioned rules in a comparatively small number of instances. However, in the beginning of 1943, when a mass conscription of man power was being contemplated, the German authorities were attempting to find a way to circumvent the rules of the Geneva Convention.

This problem was solved by a decision to form the so-called "foreign legions" which would be known as "Volunteer Waffen-SS Divisions".

Consequently, a member of these divisions who was captured would have to state that his unit was a volunteer unit of the Waffen-SS. They believed that any of the allied powers, capturing a member of these units, would never hesitate to believe that a man in the Waffen-SS could be nothing else but a volunteer.

As an experiment of this idea, some of the aforementioned police regiments which were serving in the vicinity of Stalingrad, were selected in the end of December 1942. As previously stated, these regiments were at that time known as Schutzmannschaften and had already been placed in the 2nd Waffen-SS Brigade which consisted of men of various nationalities. The decision to form the so-called Baltic Legions actually came about as a result of a conference between Heinrich Himmler and Adolf Hitler. During this conference Hitler approved Himmler's idea of the formation of the Baltic Legions and issued the order for the creation of a Latvian Legion February 10, 1943. This order stated the following:

"I order the creation of the Latvian SS voluntary Legion. The size and type of the organization is dependent upon the number of Latvian men available".

The fact that an order for the creation of a Latvian Legion will be forthcoming was told to the chief of the SS and the Police in the Baltic States SS Lt. Gen. JEKELN who was Himmler's son-in-law and who for a long period of time had been attempting to exalt himself in the decoration known as the RITTERKREUZ. Armed with this information JEKELN believed he could obtain the RITTERKREUZ if he would start the formation of the Legion in Latvia prior to the receipt of the actual order. As a result he informed SS Maj. Gen. SCHRÖDER, Chief of SS and Police in Latvia who in turn informed the local administration in the beginning of January 1943 to begin accepting volunteers for the Latvian Legion. The self administration informed SCHRÖDER that volunteers would not be forthcoming. Consequently on January 26, 1943 and again on February 6, 1943 SCHRÖDER AND JEKELN attempted to procure the aid of the self administration in the recruitment of volunteers. In view of the fact that the self administration was continually stating that no one will volunteer for service in the Legions JEKELN informed the self administration on the 6th February that there is no need to quibble about this matter as a Latvian Legion had already been formed.

In this statement JEKELN was referring to three Police Regiments which had been transferred to the 2nd Waffen SS Brigade which at the time of their transfer consisted of many nationalities. Shortly thereafter units which consisted of nationalities other than Latvian were removed from the 2nd SS Brigade leaving the 2nd Brigade with three Regiments. Maj. Gen. SCHOLZ, Commanding General of all German Army troops fighting in the vicinity of Stalingrad was informed that the 2nd Waffen SS Brigade should be assigned to him for his use. When this Brigade arrived however SCHOLZ found that it consisted of only three Regiments and these Regiments had suffered a great amount of casualties and were thereby understaffed. Consequently he complained to JEKELN who then - on the 26th of February ordered the local authorities to conscript one thousand Latvians for military service. Due to the lack of an organization for the conscription of these men, it was not until eighteen days later i. e. in the middle of March when these one thousand men actually began their careers as members of the Latvian Legion. Having received a very slight amount of training these one thousand men were sent to the Russian front on March 30, 1943 and were assigned to the 2nd SS Brigade which at this time was known as the 19th Division of the Latvian Legion.

In the very beginning of March SS Maj. Gen. HANSEN arrived from Germany in Riga with the assignment to organize the Latvian Legion. Under his direction the Latvian self administration and the office of the Deputy Administrator were charged with the physical formation of the Legion i. e. recruitment of manpower, establishing of supply channels, and procurement of arms, ammunition, food and clothing. It appears that although JEKELN attempted to direct the Legion even after the arrival of HANSEN all matters pertaining to the Legion were handled by HANSEN and JEKELN seems to have been eliminated from the Latvian Legion organization.

The population of Latvia was sceptical although not totally opposed to the formation of the Legion. The reason for this approval of such an organization was the fact that the Germans claimed that this Legion would be a national Army and would be committed only to fight on Latvian soil whenever Communist forces were to re-enter and or reappear. In fact the Legion in Latvia was known to most people as the Latvian Army.

However, when the population was informed that Hitler had only allowed the formation of such a Legion under the supervision and direction of the Waffen SS a great amount of opposition - passive and not active - originated. Nevertheless these conscription orders for military duty had to be obeyed for non-compliance with such direct orders resulted in severe penalties which in some cases amounted to death sentences.

The initial step in the physical organization of the Latvian Legion was to obtain a leader for the Legion. The Germans were very particular as to the type of person they desired to be the figurehead leader of the Legion. This particular person should not be of an aggressive character - therefore a man in his fifties, should have a certain amount of prestige in Latvia, and should accept the fate of a figurehead and not assert himself. The German authorities believed that they had found such a person in the former Latvian General BANCERSKIS who had been in retirement, in his fifties and had no particular political interests other than being a Latvian nationalist.

The headquarters of the Latvian Legion was known to the Inspectorate of the Latvian Legion and BANCERSKIS the figurehead chief as the Inspector. Throughout the existence of the Latvian Legion BANCERSKIS had never obtained a directive outlining his functions and his authority in fact a part of his staff was assigned to him by the German authorities without his knowledge and without his consultation.

a. As already stated the 19th Division of the Latvian Legion was proclaimed as such in the very early days of March 1943 and at that time consisted of three Police Regiments. On March 20th one thousand conscriptees were added to this Division. It was soon realized that these conscriptees could never be used in the front lines because of the negligible amount of training they had received. Consequently they remained in the immediate rear and received further military training upon the completion of which they were placed in the front lines. Using these one thousand men the 42nd and 43rd Regiments commanded by Col. WEISS and Col. LORBE respectively were formed. In the fall of 1943 another Regiment - the 44th commanded by Col. KOONS was formed of conscriptees. Two Police Battalions were also added to this - the 44th Regiment. Consequently at full strength - and fighting on the Russian front and in the vicinity of KOLCHOW, Russia, this Division consisted of six Regiments, the original three the 42nd 43rd and 44th. In January 1944 the Division retreated to LUGA where it remained until March 1944 at which time it retreated to STARAYA, RUSSIA. In April 1944 the Division retreated to OPOCHKA and subsequent to that it retreated before heavy Russian advances to Latvia where it held the Russian onslaught in the vicinity of MADONA. In July 1944 unable to stem the Russian advances the Division retreated further through Latvia and fought in the vicinity of DOBELIE and DZUKSTE, retreating further and further along with the rest of the German forces until it reached the Northwestern part of Latvia and kept this "island of opposition" from Russian occupation until the 9th May 1945 when the Allies ordered the capitulating German authorities to inform these fighting units that they were to surrender to the Russian forces. When this order was received by the 19th Division a substantial number of Latvians deserted and hid in the forests of KURZEME (KURLAND). These men constituted the first Guerrillas that effectively operated in Latvia against the present Russian occupation. Some members of the 19th Division managed to leave Latvia for Germany with the last transports - by ship - as late as May 4th, 5th and 6th, 1945. The 19th Division - during its existence was commanded by SS Maj. Gen. SHULZ, SS Maj. Gen. SCHULZ, and SS Col. Lat. Brig. Gen. STRICKENBACH.

b. Men born in the years 1910 to 1925 were conscripted for service with the 15th Division of Latvian Legion in the middle of April 1945. Also the officers which comprised the cadre of this Division were conscripted for service in March and April 1943. In the beginning the 15th Division consisted of the 32nd Regiment (also known as the 3rd Latvian Regiment) commanded by Col. KRIPENS later by Lt. Col. APERATS and Lt. Col. CELIE, the 33rd Regiment was known as the 4th Latvian Regiment and was commanded by Col. JANONS. The 34th Regiment was known as the 5th Latvian Regiment, commanded by Col. APSITIS, later by Col. DZENITS-ZENINS and Lt Col. VIKSNE, the artillery Regiment commanded by Col. SKAISTLAUKS and later by Lt Col. REBERGS.

It should be noted that while all Divisions were commanded by German officers the Regiments, battalions, etc. were commanded by Latvians.

While engaged in military training the 15th Division was stationed in Latvia, the 32nd Regiment being in PAMPLAKA the 33rd Regiment in VAINODE, the 34th Regiment in VENTSPILS and the artillery Regiment in JELGAVA. The headquarters of the 15th Division was stationed in Riga during this time. The 32nd and 34th Regiments were for a while used as training Regiments engaged in instruction of newly recruited men which were subsequently sent as replacements for the 19th Division in Russia.

In September 1943 the 15th Division was considered by the German authorities as sufficiently trained and sent to the Russian front where it fought in the vicinity of NOVO-SAKOLNIKI. In the end of January 1944 the 15th Division retreated

to OPOTCHKA. At the end of July 1944 the 15th Division was withdrawn from the front because of tremendous casualties and sent to Latvia where it was located in the vicinity of CESIS. On the 20th August 1944 the Division began sending its units to Germany via the port of LIEPAJA. Upon arrival in the free city of Danzig these units were sent further and were stationed in the vicinity of BUTOWA-SOFIENWALDE. By the end of 1945 virtually all units of the 15th Division had been transported by ship from LIEPAJA to the free city of Danzig and later to the area of BUTOWA-SOFIENWALDE. In Latvia the German authorities were still drafting men and assigning them to the 15th Division. Upon conscription these men would be sent by the above mentioned route to BUTOWA-SOFIENWALDE which had become the collection center and training ground of the 15th Division. On January 19, 1945 the Russian forces broke through the German lines in the vicinity of HÄCKEL and the 15th Division was sent to stem their advances. Most all units of the 15th Division left the BUTOWA-SOFIENWALDE area at that time, a few untrained troops remaining behind. Because of the heavy casualties suffered when the Russian break-through was checked, the 32nd Regiment of the 15th Division was disbanded and the remaining units assigned the 33rd and 34th Regiments.

Described below is the retreat of the 15th Division of the Latvian Legion beginning with 22 January 1945.

22 Jan. 1945	to	KONITZ
25 " "	to	SCHALUFENSEE
27 " "	to	WELLERSEE
28 " "	to	WILKENSWALDE
30 " "	to	FLATOW
31 " "	to	JASTROW
3 Feb	to	FLEISERBORN
4 " "	to	KRUMMENSEE
5 " "	to	BOSCHERUG
10 " "	to	KANMIN
14 " "	to	KLAUSFELDE
17 " "	to	BOSCHWINKEL
18 " "	to	PETERSWALDE
25 " "	to	SCHOWERDER
27 " "	to	SPAARSEE
28 " "	to	LIEGUST
2 March	to	GAMMENZ
3 " "	to	ZUCH
4 " "	to	DOBEL-DAMEN-LASBECK
5 " "	to	WUSTERBAR-NEMIN
6 " "	to	GEIGELITZ
8 " "	to	STOLITZ
9 " "	to	GUNTOW-FISCHEKATEN
10 " "	to	MITTELSHAGEN
11 " "	to	LICHENTEN
12 " "	to	DIWENOW
13 " "	to	HAFENHORST
14 " "	to	LABOMITZ

While located in the vicinity of Labomitz on 16th March 1945 an order from Hialer was received by the Divisional Commander who in turn disseminated this order to the Regimental Commanders that all arms belonging to the 15th Division of the Latvian Legion were to be collected and forwarded to the Com

manding General of the area. Consequently from that date on the 15th Division of the Latvian Legion was used as a construction unit engaged in the construction of anti-tank fortifications, air raid shelters, and trenches.

21 February	to	BOLDENKOW-MARIENHOF
28 "	to	KOLPIN
30 March	to	LICHTENBERG
20 April	to	HERZFELD
21 "	to	SCHLOCKWITZ
22 "	to	BLANKENFELDE
23 "	to	FICHTENWALDE
24 "	to	VERLEZENWALDE-WASSER
25 "	to	EICHENQUAST
26 "	to	LINDAU
27 "	to	GUTERGLUCK

In GUTERGLUCK the Regimental Commander of the 33rd Regiment found that a U. S. Army spearhead had crossed the Elbe River in that vicinity. This spearhead was finally located and the 33rd Regiment surrendered to the U. S. Forces in the very last days of April in the vicinity of SCHORA. At the time of the surrender of the 33rd Regiment it consisted of 40 officers, 126 NCO's and 658 enlisted men. The 34th Regiment attempted to locate the Latvian Legion headquarters in the vicinity of Lubeck and surrendered in unison with that headquarters in the very first days of May 1945.

From its inception in the middle of April 1943 until its capitulation the 15th Division of Latvian Legion was commanded by the following officers:

Maj. Gen. VON HANSEN
 Maj. Gen. GRAF VON PUCKLER
 Brig. Gen. HELMANN
 Brig. Gen. VON OEWURZER
 Brig. Gen. BURK

The locations of the headquarters of the 15th Division are as follows: From the creation until September 1943 in Riga. At the front in the vicinity of VELIKLI-LUKI until the middle of July 1944 in PRIEKULE Latvia until 20th August then via the free city of Danzig to SOPIENWALDE. From SOPIENWALDE with incidental short stops in various locations to LUBECK.

The headquarters of the Latvian Legion was located in the following places: From March 1943 until 10th October 1944 in RIGA. On 11 October to LIEPAJA via KULDIGA. A forward echelon was then sent to DANZIG WHERE it remained until 4 February 1944. Then the forward echelon moved to NEU BRANDENBURG where it remained until the end of February 1944. It then moved to GUSTROW where it was joined by the rear echelon in the beginning of April 1944. The rear and forward echelons then moved to LUBECK where the entire Latvian Legion which had been sent to Germany surrendered to the U.S. Forces.

III. ESTONIA

Estonia was no exception to the atrocities which the Russians committed in the Baltic States and as a result when the German Army entered Estonia in the end of July 1941 many Estonians banded together into individual partisan groups

in an attempt to drive out the hated Russian forces. The occupation of Estonia was not as easy for the German Army as the occupation of Lithuania and Latvia. Having cut off the Northeastern part of Estonia which otherwise would have served as an escape route for the remaining Russian forces in Estonia, the German Army found substantial resistance from these remaining Russian forces which had no retreat out of Estonia other than the Gulf of Finland. Needing as many fighting units as could possibly be obtained for her push into Russia Germany welcomed the partisan units to fight with its Army thereby enabling badly needed battalions and Regiments to proceed deeper into Russia. These partisan units which were known as Forest brethren molded into Battalions and Regiments and had hidden in forests prior to the German entrance in order to escape an imminent conscription into the Russian fighting forces.

The SD unit in Estonia was formed on the same lines as the SD unit in Latvia. The German Chief of the SD unit was Dr. SANDBERGER, while the Estonian Chief was WERE.

Police Battalions which were later formed into Regiments were also formed in Estonia in the latter part of 1941 and the beginning of 1942 and were committed on the Russian front in the same manner as the Latvian Police Regiments. It has been found that the Estonian Police Battalions also participated in a certain amount of atrocities which is emphasized by the fact that the individual named WERE, Chief of SD, was a member of the Police Battalions in Estonia.

Luftwaffen Helfer, Hilfswillige and some pioneer (construction units) were formed in Estonia and utilized similarly to those units in Latvia.

In March 1943 the German units were contemplating to establish an Estonian Legion along similar lines as the Latvian Legion and as a result forcibly conscripted a former Estonian Col. J. SOODLA, promoted him to the rank of General and proclaimed him to be the Inspector of the Estonian Legion in charge of the Estonian Inspectorate.

When he assumed the responsibility of the position of the Inspector of the Estonian Legion SOODLA realized that the various Estonian units assigned to the WEHRMACHT on the Russian front were sent there in violation of the rules governing warfare as established by the Geneva Convention. He consequently undertook to bring all Estonian units into the fold of the Estonian Legion i. e. the 20th Division. He accomplished this task in March 1944 in spite of opposition from German Army commanders who were reluctant to release fighting units.

The 20th Division of the Estonian Legion began as a Police Regiment which was assigned to this Division. Later by addition of more Police Regiments and Battalions as well as other Estonian units which were added this became known as the 1st Brigade. Subsequently this Brigade was known as the 20th Division and in October and November 1943 fought in the vicinity of NEWELJ, Russia. In the end of November the 20th Division was withdrawn from the front and returned to Estonia. In the end of 1943 and the beginning of 1944 the majority of the Units of the 20th Division were engaged in courageous and sacrificing battles at NARVA near the PEIPUS lake.

The Estonian Legion (20th Division) as such did not actually become an organized unit until the middle of 1944. This is due to the fact that the Russian forces entered and occupied almost all of Estonia prior to Latvia. Consequently isolated units, belonging to the 20th Division, various Police Regiments and other units assigned to the WEHRMACHT were forced to leave Estonia and proceed to NEU-

HAMMER Germany, via the free city of DANZIG. NEUHAMMER became the headquarters, the collection point and the training center for the Estonian Legion. While the Estonian Legion was in NEUHAMMER all the Estonian Units were eventually consolidated into the 20th Division. While in MARVA SOCDLA procured the promise of the German authorities that the Estonian Legion would not be used in front line fighting anymore. He based his request on the fact that a great amount of Estonian men had been lost in the previous fights on the Russian front in the vicinity of NEMELJ and MARVA. Any further losses of Estonian manpower would practically annihilate the Estonian nation. This promise however was not kept and the 20th Estonian Division was sent to the front in February 1945 in order to stem the Russian break-through in the vicinity of OPEL-NEISE. In this location the 20th Division was under the direct command of the Commanding General of the 17th German Army.

The reserves of the 20th Division were formed into construction Battalions and were located in the vicinity of UKLEI and later retreated along the 20th Division which surrendered to the U.S. Forces in the very early days of May 1945 in the vicinity of LUBECK and at other points on the ELBE River.

The 20th Division was commanded by the SS Maj. Gen. AUGSBURGER and consisted of three Regiments the 45th commanded by Col. KURO, Col. TORING and Lt. Col. REBANE. The 46th commanded by Lt. Col. RIIPALW and Capt. MAITLA and the 47th by Maj. VENT.

IV. LITHUANIA

As already stated Lithuania had been placed in the German orbit in 1939 and consequently was trusted by the German authorities as they believed that the Lithuanian people had turned pro-German. Consequently no attempt in the initial period of German occupation, 1941 to 1943 had been made to place any Estonian units directly under the Waffen SS. In Lithuania the same as in Estonia and Latvia the following units existed; The SD, Police Regiments, Construction Units, Luftwaffenhilfe, Hilfswillige, STRAIO, and Border Guard Regiments. Members of these organizations were utilized in the same manner as in the other two Baltic states.

In the end of 1942 a Lithuanian nobleman General VON PLECHAVICIUS realized that the same fate would befall the Lithuanian youth as the youth in Latvia and Estonia i. e. that Lithuania would eventually be conscripted for military service and placed under direct command of the Waffen SS. Consequently he - being a very great personality and a beloved leader in Lithuania - undertook to create a Lithuanian fighting force for the protection of Lithuania. Contacting the German Army authorities he proposed the formation of such an Army, such proposal being welcomed by the German Army and resulted in permission for him to form a Lithuanian Army to be used as the German Army authorities in Lithuania deemed necessary. PLECHAVICIUS further procured promises from the German authorities that his Army would never be used outside of Lithuania and would never be placed under the jurisdiction of the Waffen SS.

However, in the latter part of 1943 the German Army authorities informed PLECHAVICIUS that a shortage of manpower on the Russian front would necessitate utilization of the Lithuanian Army in Russia. In their attempt to convince Genral VON PLECHAVICIUS that committing his troops against the Russians in Russia would benefit him greatly the Germans used the strongest arguments in their favor, depicting Germany's favoritism toward Lithuania both in the past and in the present. It should be noted that the German authorities could not

simply order the Lithuanian Army to proceed to the Russian front without the consent of its leaders, since PLECHAVICIUS was a well known and well liked Lithuanian patriot and his support of this operation would be backed by the majority of the Lithuanians whereas his opposition would result in mutiny and possible uprising of the people.

PLECHAVICIUS however continued to demand that the Germans adhere to their original commitments i. e. to use the Lithuanian forces only in their homeland and flatly refused to order any of his troops outside of Lithuania. Fearing that such disobedience would be followed by another country if it were allowed to persist, the Germans arrested PLECHAVICIUS and members of his staff, placed some of his staff members in concentration camps in Germany, sent PLECHAVICIUS for a short period of time to RIGA, Latvia where he was confined to a house under guard, disbanded his Army, jailing some members and eventually sent PLECHAVICIUS to Germany where he was kept under guard until the end of World War II.

Many of the members of PLECHAVICIUS Army fearing arrest hid in forests and being unable to proceed to Germany formed the original partisan groups which fought the Russian occupation forces subsequent to the end of World War II.

In Lithuania a greater number of men than in the other two Baltic states served in the German Army in some cases voluntarily. The reason for this is that in order to be able to join the German Army or to be conscripted into that Army it was necessary to be a naturalized German citizen. As previously stated a comparatively large number of Lithuanians were naturalized as German citizens because Lithuania was placed in the German orbit in 1939. Such naturalization enabled any Lithuanians who favored Germany to volunteer for military Service and also enabled the German authorities to conscript such naturalized Lithuanians both in Lithuania and in Germany.

V. Disposition of Baltic Legions shortly before the German collapse.

Even though the Baltic Legions were a part of the German fighting machine the German authorities as well as the German population still suspected in April and May of 1945 that they may be the cause of an uprising within Germany. Consequently when the Divisions of the Baltic Legions reached Germany proper they were disarmed.

In the confusion that existed shortly prior to the German capitulation, unit commanders of the Baltic Legions in search of further orders attempted to find their various headquarters. This however proved an impossible task as communications and transportation had been totally disrupted. As a result many units wandered about aimlessly and fearing capture by the Russian forces continued to move westward until they reached the Elbe River where they surrendered to the U.S. Forces. In most all cases these surrendering units were ~~six~~ unarmed.

In the hectic days of March, April and May 1945 a great number of men had been wounded or had become ill because of lack of food, clothing and medical equipment. These individuals received orders to proceed to Denmark where three recuperation Battalions of the Baltic Legions were stationed. Due to the fact that the Legions had lost most of their vehicles to the Russians or had abandoned such vehicles in their retreat and due to the fact that any and all possible transportation was virtually at a standstill, these units were forced to proceed to their destination in Denmark on foot. Some of these individuals

on their way to Denmark surrendered to U.S. Forces while others were stopped at the border city of FLENSBURG, Germany where they found that the German-Danish border had been re-established and was closed to them.

In their attempt to flee from the Baltic states because of the impending Russian occupation members of the SICHERHEITSDIENST (SD) believed that they could conceal their identity as well as their participation in atrocities by becoming members of the Baltic Legions. In some cases, as in the case of AFAJS Chief of the SD in Latvia the German authorities attempted to force members of the SD into the Legions. However, the Latvian authorities refused to conscript members of those organizations claiming that these members were not old line officers and could thereby not be given command of front line units. This explanation was accepted by the German authorities and members of the SD were not conscripted and were placed in the records of conscription. Nevertheless, as a number of former SD men appeared in BUTOW-SOFIENWALDE and NEURHAMMER when the Legions were being re-grouped there, claimed that they had been separated from their unit somewhere on the Eastern front and were therefore placed in a newly activated unit.

The greater number of SD men who gained admission into the Legion in this fashion were placed in the Construction units which were then - in the latter part of 1944 - located in the vicinity of THORN, in the Polish Corridor.

VI. The Baltic Legions subsequent to Cessation of Hostilities (May 1945).

The members of the Baltic Legions which were taken POW by the allies, were at first placed in various enclosures and later collected in major POW camps. The largest enclosures or camps existed in Putlos, 1200 and Fallingb., Ostfriesland 300 all at present in the British Zone. When the U.S. Army was withdrawn from the territory it had captured in order to confine itself to the newly created U.S. Zone, these POW's were transferred by the British authorities. Toward the end of 1945, approximately 60% of the Baltic Legionnaires who were POW's, were transferred from Germany to a Baltic POW camp in Zedelheim, Belgium, where they remained until 1946. They were then returned to Germany and discharged with instructions that they may enter displaced person camps.

THE POW's located in Ostfriesland for the main part were not transferred to Zedelheim, but remained in an area which was termed a camp, but had no physical boundaries. They were permitted to use the entire area but not to absent themselves from that area.

Many Baltic Legionnaires had families which had come to Germany separately and which were not residing in many displaced persons camps all over Germany. In order to join their families, many Baltic Legionnaires were escaping from these POW camps, and having procured civilian clothing, they in most cases attempted to withhold their military service when registering in these camps.

Shortly after the end of World War II, when information about the Baltic Legions as such began to appear in officialdom, it caused a great amount of consternation as no one was able to establish whether or not this organization was to be considered an organization inimical to the interests of the allies as well as to the U.S. The UNRRA as well had no clarification as to the disposition of these members and in the beginning refused them eligibility.

Subsequently, however, these members were given eligibility under UNRRA, but their cases remained pending until further clarification, when IRO, later, was dubious as to the real motives of this organization, and as a result the status of eligibility of the members fluctuated during both UNRRA and IRO days from ineligible to eligible, to pending, to eligible, etc. Such indecision on the part of the authorities caused members of this organization to hide their service and, in some instances, even drove them to procuring forged documents. It should be noted that this happened prior to immigration of displaced persons to the U.S. under the Displaced Persons Act of 1946.

When Germany's defeat was imminent, the Baltic Legionnaires close to the Headquarters of the Baltic Legion in Lubeck feared capture by the Russians. Having fought the Russians, and having heard that those Legionnaires captured by the Russians were suffering inhuman treatment, these Legionnaires attempted to conceal their true identity if captured by the following ruse:

When civilians of the Baltic States came to Germany as refugees from Communism in 1944, they passed through the German customs at the Free City of Danzig and Gdychafen (Gdynia), Poland, and if cleared by the German customs, received a stamp in their passport to denote such clearance and the date of that clearance. On the other hand, members of the Baltic Legions that came to Germany as military personnel, were not required to pass any custom inspection. Consequently, no such stamp should be apparent in their passports.

Such clearance stamps were, therefore, decided upon by members of the Latvian Legion staff to constitute prima facie evidence that a person in the possession of a passport stamped in this fashion has had no military service. Consequently, stamps of this type had been forged in the Headquarters of the Baltic Legion in the very end of April and beginning of May 1945 in preparation for capture by the Russians. When a Latvian or Estonian was called for military service, he reported to the draft board which examined him. In some cases where an individual was deferred from military service until further notice or until a certain date as well as, when a person was deemed unsuitable for military service, a stamp to that effect was also placed in Subject's passport, bearing the date of such deferral as well as the period of time for which the individual was deferred. Such stamps were in the possession of the Legion Headquarters and in the beginning of 1945 were placed in the passports of many Legionnaires, deferring them either indefinitely or for an extended period of time as well as unsuitable in order to escape Russian punishments when they would be captured.

Again it should be noted that such stamps were placed in the passport of the individual not for the purpose of confusing allied authorities, but rather for use in the event of capture by the Russians, as, at that time, the Baltic people had no doubt that the allies would be sympathetic to their cause and would not question their service. Having begun to tell a falsehood in the shape of withholding their military service, the Baltic Legionnaires continued to withhold such service when it became apparent that their cases were suspended from immigration to the U.S. under Displaced Persons Act of 1948. They attempted to bolster their claims in some cases by continued use of the above mentioned, falsely procured stamps in their passports.

During interviews of applicants for immigration to the U.S. under

the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 - where suspicion of possible military service existed - it was found that applicants who had withheld information of this service and/or used unauthorized stamps in their passport, stated the truth when confronted with evidence that it has been impossible for such a person to escape conscription. In some cases an interrogation of 3 to 5 days was necessary to break the individual. However, in some cases it was accomplished during an interview. It should be remembered that not all former Legionnaires attempted to withhold their military service because they feared losing their existence.

VII. Information available from Berlin Document Center regarding Baltic Legions.

During a visit to BDC it was found that the information available on Waffen SS members amounted to some 300,000 persons. However, this information in most all cases only pertains to officers who had been drafted prior to the middle of 1944. It was found that records on enlisted men and non-commissioned officers are not available in most all instances.

In most all cases the information furnished by Berlin is such that identity can definitely be established as it gives the date of birth, the person's last and first names, their previous occupation, where he was originally assigned, any moves or transfers up to the middle of 1944, decorations or citations received, and other incidental facts.

Attention is invited to the fact that an officer of the Baltic Legion would have his entrance date into the Legion in many cases stated as a date previous to the actual beginning of duty. The reason for this is that, as previously stated, the German authorities had compiled lists of former Baltic officers and in some cases made out personnel cards for the officers they intended to conscript. (These personnel cards are similar to the U.S. Army Forms 201 and 65.) Having placed the date that the cards were made out as the date that the officer was conscripted, it would appear that the officer was conscripted earlier than actual ly was the case. In most instances of this type the difference amounts to 2-3 months.

However, there is no way of ascertaining whether the officer was conscripted on the date stated by BDC or on the date he personally claims he was conscripted.

VIII. Identification of members and Legionnaires of the Sicherheitsdienst (SD).

(a) It is very difficult to establish which Baltic Legionnaire or Lithuanian national had at one time (prior to 1944) been a member of the SD. In most all cases the members of this organization had their blood group tattooed in their left armpit. These individuals would have no knowledge of operations on the Russian front of the various Baltic Divisions, Regiments and Battalions and know even less regarding the various Companies and their commanders.

In some instances their names would appear in the files of the BDC as most of those members had had some service in support of German forces prior to 1943 i.e. service in the Police Battalions or similar units. However, this is no reason to suspect that every member of the Police Regiments was a member of the SD. On the other hand all Latvians who had been members of the Fascist PERKONKRUSTS (Swastika League) in Latvia should be suspected of having been members of the SD.

(b) 1. All Baltic citizens were issued a passport at the age of sixteen. Every time that a Baltic moved from one address to another he had to report to the local Police precinct and state his old address as well as his new address. This move was then recorded in his passport. Consequently if a Baltic male claims no

Legionary service yet his last entry of civilian residence in his passport was made five years prior to 1943 such individual may be suspected for having had service in the Baltic Legions.

2. Upon conscription into the Baltic Legions all Legionnaires were forced to submit their passports to their Battalion headquarters. In many instances they procured these passports from their units when they surrendered to the U.S. Forces. Consequently an Estonian or Latvian without a passport should be suspected of having had service in the Baltic Legions.

3. Stamps placed in the passports of Baltic males stating that they cleared the custom point at Danzig or Gotenhafen (NEUHAHRWASSER) should be disregarded as such stamps in too many instances have been forged.

4. A Baltic male possessing in his passport a stamp which states that this passport can be used in place of a German foreigner's passport should be considered as evidence that this person entered Germany as a civilian on the date that is shown in this stamp. This stamp was the equivalent of a military entry permit and was needed by all civilians coming to Germany unless they came in military or paramilitary formations. In some cases however even members of such units were given this stamp. On the other hand it has been found that some civilians have not received such a stamp in their passports. The latter however are exceptions and not the rule.

5. Civilians coming to Germany from the Baltic states were obligated to exchange the currency used in the Baltic states at that time - the RITMARK - for REICHSMARKS. When exchanging such currency a stamp denoting the amount and the place of exchange was placed in their passports. Members of military and paramilitary organizations had their money exchanged through military channels and therefore would not have a stamp of this type in their passports.

6. It has been found that some former Baltic Legionnaires have their blood group tattooed in their left armpit where others had no such tattoo mark. The reason for this inconsistency is that when conscriptees of the Baltic Legions were in the vicinity of a medical unit or were placed in a hospital at some time or another for various reasons they received such tattoo marks whereas members who were removed from hospitals or medical units did not receive such tattoo marks as it was too costly to move such a large number of men to the hospital just for being tattooed.

IX. Conclusion:

No evidence has been found until the present time to indicate that the Baltic Legions were a movement or organization hostile to the United States or its form of Government. In fact it is debatable whether they can even be considered as bonafide members of the Waffen SS. In support of this claim the following facts should be mentioned:

(1) At no time did any Baltic Legionnaire have the SS insignia on his uniforms. In fact it was forbidden for the Baltic SS to wear SS insignia. In its place the various Legionnaires had the flag of their respective countries sewn onto their left sleeves.

(2) It will be found that in the Waffen SS the ranks of officers and NCO's were always preceded by the letters SS for example SS STURMBANNFUHRER. In the Baltic Legions the rank was always preceded by the word Waffen and never by the letters SS for instance WAFENSTURMBANNFUHRER.

(3) The suspicion and the allegations that members of the Baltic Legions have participated in atrocities could not be substantiated. It has been found that with very few exceptions no German front line fighting units have ever participated

in atrocities. Atrocities were generally committed by units in the rear echelons and such was the case in the Baltic states. It is possible that some units engaged in atrocities were transferred into the Legions at a later date. However those men were generally volunteers and cannot be considered as true legionaires.

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