

“Neighbors” Didn’t Kill Jews

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

— Hitler, July 17, 1941

We shall approach the topic, first, theoretically and then, empirically.

Since the days of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe there have been two schools of explanation for it:

1. that the Holocaust was an organized, almost a mechanistic event that by its internal and intrinsic logic had to eschew happenstance, chance, and accident, and
2. that it was a spontaneous explosion of revenge, Germanless and leaderless, perpetrated by the local inhabitants.

Both versions had their genesis in Nazi offices and they continue today within and without Germany, Israel, Europe, and the United States. My paper aims to terminate this schizophrenia.

The notion that “neighbors” killed Jews is even older than the Holocaust, because it originated in the public relations offices of the Nazi Reich, prior to the attack against the USSR. It is an idea with a variety of modalities for the word “neighbors” can be stretched to mean other than people living next door: it may be twisted to mean the “natives”, the “*einheimische*”, as the Germans referred to the East Europeans or it may mean nationals of any country regardless how far they lived from the Jews that were killed. Jan Gross by “neighbors” meant the inhabitants of the same town. “One half of the town killed the other half”, proclaimed Gross.¹ The corollary to the “neighbors” thesis is that the killing of Jews in Eastern Europe was Germanless and leaderless.

¹ Actually this assertion is one of the weak points of Gross’s work. More detailed research has shown that good number of the Polish participants in the massacre were not locals. Apparently the leaders of the “locals” were not ethnic Poles.

To understand the Holocaust in Eastern Europe, one needs to understand the Nazi system of occupation. To begin with one needs to recognize that Eastern Europe was occupied by a compulsively methodical power that according to many thinkers had lost its moral moorings.²

As the war and the Holocaust commenced, the Nazis moved on several levels simultaneously: 1. imposed on the conquered lands a Nazi type of organization; and 2. commenced a full-press, many sided, public relations campaign directed at the outside world, the German public, and the victims themselves. The *Wochenschau* was one of the means the Nazis used to shape public opinion within their realm of influence. The Nazi public relations organizers contrived a tale of revenge and hatred and projected their own attitudes upon the people of Eastern Europe. By whisper and shout, the Nazis proclaimed that Eastern Europeans were like the Nazis, only more so.

In this paper I want to confirm that the Latvians and other East Europeans had a role to play in the Holocaust, but their role was a restricted and circumscribed one and not the one the Nazis in their public relations documents and films proclaimed it to be. The German occupation of Eastern Europe was a real occupation that left little to no wiggle room for the “natives” to express their desires and impulses. “Volunteerism” in the common sense of the word was prohibited. No empirical study of the German occupation of Eastern Europe so far has shown that the local desire for revenge coincided with that of the Nazis. If left alone to express their voluntarism, at least in the Baltics, the “natives” would have organized forces that would have been engaged in a hot pursuit of the Red Army towards the Urals. But the Germans rejected the native voluntarism and rechanneled³ their enthusiasm to fight the Nazi’s “inner enemies”. The concept of “inner enemy” was a Nazi import in Eastern Europe.

My aim in this paper is primarily to engage the “neighbors” argument that recently has flared up, and in passing also its corollary—the Holocaust as Germanless. If East Europeans had “volunteered” for anything, they did not volunteer for the assignment that the Germans had designed for them.

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At the outset, I want to cite three typical examples of “neighbors” killing “neighbors” stories that circulate in the Holocaust’s historical literature. At this time, I shall make no attempt to evaluate them for their truth content. I selected these examples for their genre as typical narratives of atrocities.

a. First and foremost, in the focus of our attention recently has been, Jan Gross’s book *Neighbors*. The author argues that the Jewish neighbors of Jedwabne on July 10, 1941 killed 1600 Jews: not by shooting them, but by bludgeoning them to death, using a variety of farm implements.⁴

² Unfortunately I missed this assessment in Sigfried Gasperaitis’ recent article, “‘Die Front Litauischer Aktivisten’ (LAF) und die antisowjetischen Aufstände 1941”, *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, vol. 49, 2001, pp. 886-904.

³ For a discussion of Latvian desires and expectations during the war, as viewed by Germans, Soviets, Allies, and Latvians, see Uldis Neiburgs, “Latviešu leģions kara laika acīm,” *Lauku avīze*, 3/15/02.

⁴ Jan Gross, *Neighbors*.

b. Since 1941 there has circulated a “description” of what the Nazis called a “pogrom” in Kaunas that purportedly occurred on June, 1941. In this massacre Lithuanian “neighbors” are reported to have bludgeoned to death some 2000 Jews. Three German “eyewitnesses” have left the following descriptions:

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

and

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

A third example reads thus:

June 28th. The first public execution of Jews in Kaunas, in the Lietukis garage in the Vytauto street. Over forty Jews are beaten with shovels and with iron bars until they become unconscious. Then cold water is thrown on them and they are again (beaten), but this time they are beaten to death. A political prisoner released from prison by the insurgents seated himself on top of the heap of dead bodies and began to play a polonaise on the Harmonica.⁵

A subplot to the “Neighbors killing neighbors” is a story about a “good German” who not only sympathizes with the Jews, but may even “save” them from the brutal “natives”:

When a passing **German officer expressed his anger**, a former prisoner [Lithuanian]—a chauffeur by profession—answered him as follows:

We are all human beings as are you, but the Bolshevik prison has transformed us. I have just killed my Jewish prison guard. You have not the faintest idea how much pleasure that gives me. (p. 6.)⁶

c. The saintly W.G. Sebald, meandering through Anglia’s countryside came across an article in the *Independent*, a British newspaper, and in his *The Rings of Saturn* reports how the Croats had murdered Serbs by the hundreds of thousands in a manner that even shocked the “civilized” Reich experts:

“The preferred instrument of execution were saws and sabers, axes and hammers, and leather cuff-bands with fixed blades that were fastened on the lower arm and made especially in Solingen for the purpose of cutting throats, as well as a kind of rudimentary

⁵ In some versions it is said that the Lithuanian anthem was played.

⁶ National Archive: M 1185. Roll 5.

crossbar gallows on which Serbs, Jews and Bosnians, once rounded up, were hanged in rows like crows or magpies.” (p. 96-99)

If we would dig into Holocaust literature from a variety of East European locations, especially into the “eyewitnesses” (German and Jewish) accounts, we could multiply the examples many-fold.

Latvia has not escaped the “neighbors” killing “neighbors” stories, although so far nobody has made a cogent case for it. There were numerous post-war Soviet trials, pointing in that direction but they had too many show-trial elements to make their cases credible. The most serious attempts to construct a case of Latvian neighbors killing neighbors that powerfully impacted on the world opinion was the 1962 KGB produced pamphlet *Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They?* authored by a Nazi time journalist Paulis Ducmanis. Although Stahlecker had brought his team of photographers along, no pictures illustrating Latvian “neighbors” killing neighbors have survived.⁷

The “neighbors” killing “neighbors” stories have a number of common elements: for one they are presented as Germanless and leaderless (at least the leader is never named). The people bearing witness to the massacres are usually Germans or “survivors”, although not of the massacres in question. Though the Germans were zealous photographers, unfortunately only a few pictures have survived. Germans in these stories frequently are presented as sympathetic observers who may even intercede on the behalf of the Jews, clutching them out of the arms of the raging “natives”. The oddest aspect of these accounts is the purported primitive manner of killing. Modernity has passed by these “murderers”: they kill by bludgeoning the victims, even with blunt implements.

It is important to note that these primitive doings did not happen among West Europeans but only among East Europeans, the people facing Asia. I have never heard one of these bludgeoning tales told about West Europeans or the Germans themselves. It is Poles, Ukrainians, Hungarians, Lithuanians, Latvians, etc. who were purported to have carried out these atrocities. For an analogous description of beastliness, we would need to reach back into the Middle ages, the depictions of Jacqueries or the *grande peur*, the jourees of the French Revolution. Urban II’s description of Turks killing Christians in the Holy Land also comes to mind. Jerzy Kozinski’s *Painted Bird* is a 1950’s narrative that trades in similar images of East Europeans. A more recent example is Modris Eksteins’ *Walking Since Daybreak*.

The tendency of the Holocaust historians has been to declare these stories to be true without any analysis or questioning the genesis of both the event and the stories about them. So far these stories have not been subjected to genre criticism. When critiquing this literature one must realize that the pull of these stories, as of all folklore, is powerful—the Jedwabne tale has made Jan Gross a millionaire. In this context one may also recall the rise and fall of Wilkomirsky’s opus.

⁷ Among the authors who have attempted to foster the “neighbors” thesis are Bernhard Press and Maksim Zvonov.

1. Fails a Credibility Test

Do we after 55 years of Nazism's defeat still have to think like the Nazis? I have a problem with the image of the "East Europeans" that these stories trade on. Is there a reason to think that the Poles or the Latvians stood on a lower evolutionary moral rung than did the Germans? It is true that the Nazis pronounced the East European to be *Untermenschen*, but have we not outgrown Nazi racism? The Nazi also pronounced the Jews to be "insects" and "rats", and we know they were wrong about the Jews.

The *lacunae* in the "neighbors" atrocity tales are a legion. How could the Germans simultaneously occupy and not occupy a country? How could the people whom we know as control freaks surrender control to people that they called *Untermenschen*. On the one hand, the Nazis slated many East Europeans for extinctions, yet, on the other, if the "neighbors" thesis is correct, they gave to the same people life and death powers over Jews.

Even more worrisome than Germanlessness of the "neighbors" atrocities is its purported "leaderlessness". In our civilization all social activities are subordinated. Whatever the Nuremberg trials proclaim, they did not say that murder happened without leaders and orders. Things just don't happen. For any "rabbit hunt" you need an organization and a leader, yet without examining the premises of the conclusions numerous Holocaust studies aver that the murder of thousands of people could "take place" without leaders and without orders.

The "neighbors" thesis lacks not only a historically founded explanation for the phenomenon, but also it fails to provide us with a credible **motive**. Why should the "neighbors" behave like the Nazis? Or worse than the Nazis? The markers that anticipated the killing of the Jews in Germany are missing in Eastern Europe. For example in Eastern Europe there is no analog for the "stab in the back" idea that so deeply agitated the soul of Germany. To be sure anti-Semitism was present in Eastern Europe, yet the kind of motivation for killing Jews that existed in Germany was absent. There are many kinds of anti-Semitism in the world, yet, by itself, it has not materialized in the murder of Jews. There was no redemptive anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe as there was in Germany. East Europeans had lived next to Jews for centuries and nothing like it had happened while they were in power. They had all the time in the world to burn down synagogues and perhaps even murder Jews with impunity. The relationships between Jews and locals have not always been the best, but there was nothing in the pre-war politics of these countries that anticipated this brutality. In Germany, however, the Holocaust is foreshadowed in numerous ways: they had the leader, the party and the idea.

Finally, the manner in which the "neighbors" purportedly were massacred, challenges ones credibility. Even if there was a sufficient explanation for the "neighbors" attacking "neighbors" and motivation for it made clear and credible, it still would need to have an explanation why it should have been done in the primitive manner in which it is averred to have happened. The killing implements used at Bartholomew Night were more "modern" than those at Jedwabne and Kaunas. Upon German occupation a crust of civility might have been shattered, but did it mean that the "neighbors" also had to descend to a more primitive technological level? Most East Europeans over 21 years of age had undergone a basic military training!

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

We can only guess at the variety of killing scenarios that were considered by the Nazis. For example, Augusts Dzenītis, the Jekabpils District self-defense Commandant in Latvia interrogated by Soviet prosecutors, testified that prior to the murder of Jews in his District, German SD officers, having arrived from Rīga had approached him by suggesting a variety of “diplomatic” scenarios to murder Jews.^{8,8} One had been to kill the Jews by blowing up the synagogue in which Jews were housed and announce that it was he lightning that hit them. Another scenario had been to move the Jews gradually to a hospital and inoculate them with poison. Rejected by Dzenītis, the officers had agreed to leave things as before which meant that for the time being, the Jews were used as laborers. Actually, as in most of Latvia, most of the Jekabpils District Jews were killed by an itinerant contingent of German SD and Arājs Commando who killed them by shooting.

2. Nazi Plans for the “Neighbors”⁹

To prepare for the first steps of the killing of the Jews, prior to the Barborossa campaign, on May 29, 1941, Dr. Alfred Meyer, a *NSDAP Aussenpolitisches Amt* official, convened a conference to work out public relations priorities. If the Wannsee conference of 1942 was convened to coordinate murder of West Europe’s Jews, then the May meeting was to do the same for the murder of East European ones. This document was discovered by Kārlis Kangeris and as far as I know, it, as yet, has not entered the debate about **Führerbefehl** and the beginning steps of the Holocaust. The meeting started at 1 PM and was attended by about 15 Nazi dignitaries, representing the highest diplomatic, military and intelligence (Abwehr) offices. The meeting was more informative than consultative. Four documents were presented at the meeting: the first two were leaflets that were to be dropped for the Red Army and Soviet civilian consumption. Documents three and four concerned the treatment of Jews and Bolsheviks and contained the following texts:

"Daß die Juden selbstverständlich von uns als Hauptschuldige hingestellt werden, wird sicher von der gesamten Bevölkerung begrüßt werden. Die Judenfrage kann zu einem erheblichen Teil dadurch gelöst werden, daß man der Bevölkerung einige Zeit nach Inbesitznahme des Landes freie Hand läßt. Ebenso werden voraussichtlich die radikalsten bolschewistischen Funktionäre von der Bevölkerung selbst erledigt werden oder sind schon geflohen".¹⁰

It is self-evident that we will feature the Jews as the main culprits, which will be welcomed by all inhabitants. The Jewish question can be solved to a considerable

⁸ LVA—KGB Trial case No. 633.

⁹ A basic analysis of the Nazi public relations scheme is provided by **Kārlis Kangeris**, “Padomju okupācija un 14. jūnija deportācijas nakamas okupācijas varas — nacionālsociālistiskās Vācijas — propagandā latvijā (1941. – 1942. gads)”.

¹⁰ Politische Richtlinien für die Propaganda, [29.5.1941], 7. lpp. R 105193, AA.

degree if after occupation of the country we give free hand to the local inhabitants for some time. It is also anticipated that the inhabitants themselves will liquidate, if they had not fled, the most radical of the Bolshevik functionaries.

"[...] Die wirklichen Bedrücker des Volkes wird das Volk wahrscheinlich selbst erledigen, wie überhaupt anzunehmen ist, daß die Bevölkerung vor allem in der Ukraine, in großem Umfange zu Judenprogromen und Ermordungen kommunistischer Funktionäre schreiten wird. Mit einem Wort, es dürfte sich empfehlen, die Abrechnung mit den bolschewistisch-jüdischen Unterdrückern in der ersten Zeit der Bevölkerung selbst zu überlassen und sich nach näherer Unterrichtung der übriggebliebenen Unterdrücker anzunehmen".¹¹

The real oppressors probably will be liquidated by the people themselves, and we can generally assume that the people, especially in Ukraine, will carry out on a large scale pogroms against the Jews and murders of communist functionaries. In a word, it seems advisable initially to leave the reckoning with the Bolshevik-Jewish oppressors to the local inhabitants and to take care of the remaining oppressors only after we have properly informed ourselves.

I do not know what it would be, but one may assume that there is a pro-Nazi way of reading the above passages. For the naive reader who has no reason to believe that East Europeans were *Untermenschen* or to advocate hatred against them, the passages contain first, a German plan to murder East European Jews; second, a commitment to organize the murder; and third, by extension an intention to promote the “neighbors” thesis. The passages illustrate that the Germans projected Nazism on Eastern Europeans and assumed that they will be more eager to kill Jews than the Germans themselves. To whom do you give the benefit of the doubt: the Nazis or the people of East Europe? If the document has a weakness it is the fogginess of the motive it projected upon the “neighbors”. How did they know that the “neighbors” thought like the Nazis? Generally speaking East Europeans had bigger problems to worry about than Jews. We must, however, recognize that before the Holocaust, there was no way of developing a post-Holocaust perspective.

Once the war began, the Nazis unleashed a barrage of concentrated hate against the Jews that this world has not seen before or since. I do not think that those German historians who write so cavalierly about the Holocaust in Eastern Europe have taken full cognizance of this Nazi hate literature. There was nothing like it in Germany itself. All of Nazi occupation media were mobilized for one concentrated assertion: the Jews must be **avenged** for their “Bolshevism”. To be sure the East Europeans did not remain unaffected by it. We also need to note that it left an indelible effect on the thinking of the victims, the Germans themselves, and on the world opinion.

After May 29, there must have been other meetings in which the killing operation was planned and discussed in greater detail, but those discussions must have happened mostly within the RSHA’s SD offices and we know that among Heydrich’s subordinates the discussion of the “fundamental orders” as the *Führerbefehl* was known, was not committed to paper. It is

¹¹ Nachfolgend werden einige wichtige Fragen, zu denen die Sowjetbevölkerung eine Stellungnahme erwartet, erläutert, [29.5.1941], 1.-2. lpp. R 105193, AA.

important to note that it was not the public relations officials alone who were planning it: the Wehrmacht, the Abwehr, and Foreign Affairs representatives were also involved in the decision. The minutes of the May 29th gathering do not show any misunderstanding or disagreements with the plan presented at the meeting. The documents show that all of the major Nazi agencies that were involved with the occupation were informed about the Nazi intention to kill Jews and Communists, and were also to a smaller and lesser degree involved with the killing of the Jews.

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The evidence is clear and transparent that it was the Germans who planned and planted the “neighbors” concept of the Holocaust. One cannot exclude the possibility that on some occasions the Germans were able to finagle a killing action that had some resemblance of a “neighbors” scenario. Generally, however, one must say that Germans, being efficiency hounds, would not have wanted to get into unpredictable situations, hence kept clear of “neighbors”. Either the Germans had a plan to kill the Jews or they did not. Either way, the “neighbors” scheme would have been on the chancy side.

The May 29th document, however, is not the only one that features the Nazi scheme to make “Neighbors” responsible for killing Jews. Hitler himself was called on to promote the May 29th line.

*Hitler’s Conversation*¹²

Upon Croatian Marshall Kvaternik’s visit to Berlin on July 22, 1941, one month after the start of the war, Hitler convened a high level meeting at his headquarters with Foreign Affairs Reichsminister von Ribbentrop and Generalfeldmarshal Keitel in attendance. Hitler took on to educate his guest in the science of racism and, in championing the “neighbors” line, about the killing of Jews in the Baltics.

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

¹² For further Hitler’s views about Eastern Europe also see the minutes of July 17th, 1941 Hitler’s meeting with Rosenberg, Lammers, Keitel, and Bohrmann. Nuremberg document L-221.

free hands, as it was in the Soviet paradise, the Jews carry out the craziest plans. That is how Russia became the plague of mankind.¹³

There are many people in the world who will say that all Hitler's pronouncements are false, except the one he makes about the Baltics. For our purposes here it is important to note that Hitler is reconfirming in a more explicit way the "neighbors" idea that earlier surfaced in the May 29th document. He is selling to his foreign guest the notion that the killing of Jews is Germanless and that the Baltic people themselves are murdering them collectively. Hitler even more clearly and forcefully than did his minions earlier stressed that the motive for the Balts to kill Jews was **revenge**. If the May 29th message did not do it then the Hitler's statement told his subordinates in uncertain terms that the Baltic peoples are to be profiled as revengeful killers. Thereafter it became a mantra at home, in occupied countries and abroad (included Sweden) for German officials to portray the killing of the Jews as a native enterprise.¹⁴

Heydrich Directive

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

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

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

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

¹³ Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik 1918-1945, Serie D: 1937-1941, Band XIII. 1. Diet, Sechser Band, Erster Halbband 23. Juni bis September 1941. p. 835-838.

¹⁴ For an array of statements by a variety of German officials repeating Hitler's dictate see A. Ezergailis, "Folklore v. History: A Problem in Holocaust Studies". Paper presented at the Conference on the *Research Problems of Holocaust in Latvia*, Riga, October 16-17, 2000.

The formation of standing self-defense units under central direction is to be initially avoided, in their stead, it would be functional to unleash popular pogroms, as delineated above.¹⁵

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

“Germans now are spreading a fairy tale, that it had been the Latvians who carried out the most brutal reckoning with the Jews. In this respect Germans have been active in Geneva, America and here [Stockholm].”¹⁶

Stahlecker's reports

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

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

If we eliminate the Nazi-time “eyewitnesses” as trustworthy, the case against the East Europeans collapses. All eyewitnesses are not of the same quality. The ones at the top knew what those at the bottom could never know. A more trustworthy witness than the German “passers-by” and “photographers” is Stahlecker, the Commander of the Einsatzgruppe A, and his accessories, those people who were entrusted with the killing the Jews. Stahlecker’s witnessing was highly privileged since he knew what no one else could know.¹⁷ Stahlecker’s reports were confidential and secret and they were intended for his superiors to whom he could boast but not lie. It must be noted that Stahlecker as one who was involved in the drafting the “neighbors” policy was an interested party in making it a success. Testimony from EK 1a Commander Sandberger indicates that Stahlecker was aggressively pushing the “neighbors” scenario, yet his reports document its failure.

Stahlecker’s secret reports (that have not been secret since 1945) show yet another side of the German effort to blame the “natives”. In the Stahlecker report of October 15th, 1941, this relationship with the “natives”, specifically the Lithuanians, appears in a different light than it appears in the “eyewitness” testimonies. The message that Stahlecker delivered to his Berlin RSHA offices was that **to obtain Lithuanian “cooperation” was not easy and that pressure**

¹⁵ Arājs Trial Records, Indictment, p. 57.

¹⁶ Leonids Siliņš, *Nacistiskās Vācijas okupanti: mūsu tautas lielās cerības un rūgtā vilšanās*, Fonds Latvijas vēsture, Rīga, 2001, p. 151.

¹⁷ We may note that Sigfried Gasperaitis in the above cited article does not refer to Stahlecker’s reports.

and trickery had to be applied to create the Kaunas “pogrom”.¹⁸ If, on the one hand, Stahlecker in his report continues to use the “pogrom” concept, he also undercuts it by documenting its failure.

The crucial quotation from the Stahlecker’s report, though known to Holocaust scholars since 1945, yet ignored by them (Gross in particular), is reprinted below. He begins with a recapitulation of the policy worked out at the May 29 public relations session and reformulated by Heydrich in his June 29 memorandum.

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

The above quote shows that the Nazi plan had a fall-back position: if the predicted “spontaneity” goes sour, Stahlecker’s men were ready to impose their organizational scheme.

In Lithuania this was accomplished for the first time in Kaunas by using partisans. **Surprisingly, at first, it was not easy to initiate a large scale pogroms there.** The leader of the previous mentioned partisan group, KLIMATIS, who was primarily used there, succeeded in initiating a pogrom as a result of the advice given to him by a small advanced detachment deployed in Kaunas, without any visible indication to the outside world of a German order or any German suggestion. During the first course of the first pogrom on the night of June 25 to June 26 June more than 1500 Jews were eliminated by the Lithuanian partisans; several synagogues were burned or otherwise destroyed and the Jewish residential quarter with approximately 60 houses was also burned down. During the following nights, 2300 Jews were eliminated in the same manner. In other parts of Lithuania similar actions took place according to the example set in Kaunas, although on a smaller scale, extending also to those communists who had stayed behind.

By means of instructions given by the Wehrmacht agencies, which understood such activities thoroughly, the self-purging actions progressed without any problems. At the same time it was clear from the beginning that only the first few days of the occupation would provide the opportunity for carrying out pogroms. After the disarming of the partisans the self-purging activities, of necessity, had to cease.

¹⁸ The killing of Jews by “pogroms” was a favored Stahlecker’s tactic that for example his subordinate Martin Sandberger, commander of Einsatzcommando 1a, found objectionable. As Sandberger testified at his trial he thought that inducing people to carry out pogroms was especially brutal. See Sandberger’s testimony at the Einsatzgruppen Case, Vol. 6. pp. 2175-76. Concerning the burning of the synagogues in Riga, Sandberger expressly testified that Stahlecker had told him that he induced the Latvian auxiliaries to burn them. p. 2180.

To sum up the above quotation, we can say that Stahlecker is conversant with the denial line worked out by the Holocaust planners. We can see that the Nazis were worried about international opinion and from this perspective the Lithuanians, without being aware of it, were shilling for the Nazis. We have reason to think that the target of the Nazi public relations effort were not only Germans and but also Jews and the native people themselves who were trapped into this crime.

On several occasions Stahlecker admits, though grudgingly, that the so called “pogrom” would not have started had not his men micromanaged the Lithuanian partisans. The most important aspect of Stahlecker’s report is that it, front-and-center, contradicts Hitler’s and the “neighbors” version of the Holocaust in the Baltics. In many different ways he confirms that the killing of the Jews was a German project. His satisfaction with the “natives” is not without reservations. Although he could not but approve of the Lithuanians doing some of the killings, he did not think them to be fully reliable. He recognized that it will need to be the Germans who will have to carry the project to completion.

Stahlecker’s statement about the Wehrmacht perhaps should be taken more seriously than we are wont to do. The experience in Latvia would indicate that the Wehrmacht performed a number of preparatory steps before the killing began. If we see the Holocaust as a segmented event, that step by step led to the gruesome end, then the role of the Wehrmacht cannot be ignored.

In as much as the Lithuanians were not killing Jews of their own, the most interesting aspect about the Kaunas massacre (unfortunately Klimatis, who died in Hamburg, has taken this knowledge to his grave) was: what the Stahlecker men said that induced him to attack the Jews and what did he tell his men to get them to follow him. It is noteworthy that Stahlecker said nothing about the Jews being killed with blunt implements. To the contrary, he informs us that the Lithuanians had weapons which were taken away from them after the massacre. There is no reason to challenge Stahlecker’s testimony that the Jews were killed with shooting weapons, thus delivering the bludgeoning and blunt implements stories to the realm of folklore. Wrong in one, wrong in all!

We may assume that Klimatis and his men were anti-Semitic, but by noting this, we must not fall into a cliché about the killings in Eastern Europe that the Nazis were prompted to promote. The famous picture of the Kaunas massacre, one that is reprinted in *Der Spiegel* with regularity, is a Nazi picture, snapped by a public relations crew that were sent in to distance the Germans from the atrocities. Unfortunately for those historians who are trying to get to the bottom of the Jedwabne story, they do not have a Stahlecker report to countermand the Nazi public relations line.

More Stahlecker: On Organizing the “Natives”

In general, the revisionist historians and those promoting the “neighbors” thesis have paid scant attention to the Stahlecker documents. Especially the following passage in the *October 15th Report* that lays out the Nazi organizational scheme for the *Hilfspolizei* [Auxiliary Police] and the *Schutzmannschaften* has been ignored.

The creation of the *Hilfspolizei* [Auxiliary Police] and the *Schutzmannschaften*.

In light of the expansion of the operational area and the multitude of Security Police tasks, an attempt was made at the beginning that the reliable members of the population themselves should participate in the fight against the parasites of their country, i.e., in particular, the Jews and the Communists. Beyond providing guidance for the first spontaneous actions, which will be discussed in greater detail in another context, precautions had to be taken to deploy reliable personnel in the self-purge and to make them permanent auxiliary units of the Security Police. Here, too, the different special circumstances in various parts of the operations area had to be considered as well.

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

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

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

In a similar manner useful auxiliary organs were set up in Vilnyus and Siauliai from the Lithuanian self-defense forces who had established themselves on their own initiative under the name of the "Lithuanian Security and Criminal Police". In Vilnyus in particular, a drastic personnel purge was required because there, for the most part, unemployed government officials and employees without any qualifications, and even some politically

accused, elements, had banded together in the Lithuanian Security Police. After the removal of the accused and unfit personnel and under the constant surveillance of Einsatzkommando 3, the Lithuanian Security and Criminal Police produced entirely satisfactory work as well.

The difficulties in various areas resulting from the multiple national groups living in the Vilnyus region, i.e., Lithuanians, Poles, Belorussians and Russians, can also be detected in the deployment of the auxiliary police organs. In the districts of Saleimnikai, Oschmiana and Lyda which are largely populated by Poles, Polish Auxiliary Police Forces are still active there at this time. The insurmountable hatred between the Poles and the Lithuanians here make it necessary to place Lithuanian officials under German protection when they carry out investigations and arrests. The Polish Auxiliary Police will soon be disbanded.

When adding personnel to the Lithuanian Auxiliary Police, they are recruited mainly from, among the partisan groups. As long as executions and pacification actions must still be implemented on a large scale, the above mentioned partisan squad will remain intact in addition to the Lithuanian Security and Criminal Police, and later will probably be used in another section of the operational area outside of Lithuania.

After the arrival of German troops in Latvia, a self-defense force was formed which consisted of members from all walks of life; some of whom were totally unfit for police-related work. The object was to form a useful squad out of these indiscriminately assembled troops, who were armed with various weapons, and above all to eliminate those elements who tried to hide their Communist beliefs or their otherwise tarnished past by membership in the self-defense Forces.

One can assume that there is a Nazi or a revisionist way of reading or ignoring the above passages. To those who are free of bias against Eastern Europeans the above text proves on the one hand that German-organized native formations participated in the murder of Jews, and on the other that there was not a free-for-all but a programmed and organized operation. Stahlecker was clear enough that to shape the Lithuanians in his image, he had to cut and paste. If the killing actions were not carried out by the Germans, they were supervised by them at every step. In numerous ways Stahlecker is telling us that the Baltics were German occupied and controlled lands. The native killer formation in Lithuania was set to about 300 men, which is about the same as the size of the Arājs commando during the killing period. Were the killing events organized or “voluntary”? Stahlecker tells us that he disarmed all but 300 of the partisans. In other words, the others had no “voluntary” way of joining the killing teams had they wanted to do so. **He also tells us that the Lithuanians wanted to organize an army against the Communists, but that he blocked that effort and rechanneled them to kill the Jews.** Stahlecker’s report does not allow us to say that in Lithuania there is a strong case for “neighbors” killing “neighbors” scenarios.

*

The following quotations from the *Ereigniss Meldungen* and Stahlecker’s October report further illustrate the thesis that the killing of the Jews in Eastern Europe was a German organized project and that the “neighbors” not only did not kill the Jews, they could not have done so had

they wanted to. There could not have been an equal partnership between the Nazis and the “natives”, criminal or otherwise. Stahlecker in his reports, unlike many historians, never forgets to designate the native teams as “auxiliary”. As you can not have a son without a father, you can not have an auxiliary force without the main force.

Police will be organized by the former Riga Chief of Political Police [Stiglics], whom we have brought along from Berlin, and it will be filled only with reliable personnel. They will be used exclusively for tracking down communists and Red Army soldiers. According to the headquarters of the 18th Army, in Liepaja, civilians have also engaged in fighting against the Germans. Therefore in addition to the EK 1a, a part of EK 2 has been ordered there with the assignment to deal with the situation ruthlessly.

In his second Ereignismeldung from Riga, on July 7, more detail and clearer plans emerge:

The Group Leader [Stahlecker] arrived in Riga together with EK 1a and 2. The security of the city has been organized with the help of Hilfspolizei (400 men); hence, the troops no longer are disturbed by snipers. The Hilfspolizei so far have suffered four dead. Lieutenant Colonel Veiss has been made the leader of the Hilfspolizei; care has been taken to assure that these troops would not become a Latvian militia. In addition to these Hilfspolizei troops, two further independent units have been established for the purpose of carrying out pogroms. All synagogues have been destroyed; so far 400 Jews have been liquidated.

In Riga, Bolsheviks had killed twenty German prisoners of war in a barracks. Documentary proof has been found. In the process [we found out that] the last remaining German soldier had been beaten to death by a Riga Jew.

Therefore on 4.7.1941, in the very spot, Security Police and SD Commando shot one hundred Jews.¹⁹

It was significantly more difficult to start similar clean-up operations and pogroms in Latvia. However, after exerting appropriate influence on the Latvian Auxiliary Police, it was possible to initiate a Jewish pogrom in Riga during which all synagogues were destroyed and approximately 400 Jews were killed. Since the general pacification of the population in Riga occurred very quickly, further pogroms were no longer viable.²⁰

The initial killing of the Jews in Daugavpils (Dvinsk), in early July 1941, is most fully chronicled in EM No. 24 of July 16, whose author probably was Ehrlinger, the Commander of Einsatzkommando 1c:

Daugavpils was occupied by German troops on June 26. During the following two to three days the larger part of the city burned down. Only a small part of the city was damaged by battle activity. During the following days fires were caused by arson. Before leaving, the Russians had issued a proclamation announcing the burning of the city. The Jews

¹⁹ At this time EG A units were located numerous other places; in Kaunas, Daugavpils were located main commandos, but Teilkommandos were in Īliai, Liepāja, Jelgava, Wenden [Cēsis], Dorpat [Tartu], and Pskov. Stahlecker also reported that another part of EK 1a was intended for Reval [Tallinn], and it was already on the march. The rest of EK 2, he reported, remained in Liepāja. It was planned that all other parts of the Einsatzgruppe were to assemble in Rīga (EM July 6 and 7).

²⁰ Stahlecker's Consolidated Report, 15 October 1941, pp. 17-18.

decisively participated in setting the city on fire. During the first three days five Jews were caught in the act, and immediately shot. Of the vital businesses servicing the city, the electrical works were fully burned out, while the reservoir and the water tower have only been damaged, so that it is possible to supply the city with water on a limited basis. The sewers are in order. The people, except for a small remnant, have fled the city. It may be that at this time one would again find about 8,000 people in the city. The inhabitants are gradually returning. The mood of the Latvians is absolutely positive. **Their attention is directed only towards creating circumstances in the city that would make it possible, at the least, to arrange conditions so life's necessities could be met.** Political alignments could not be determined to date. The reconstruction of the city is the one object of interest to the leading Latvians who have stepped forward. **The Latvians, including the leading active ones, have so far behaved passively towards the Jews** (emphasis added), and did not dare to rise against them. In Daugavpils about 45,000 inhabitants had lived up to now, of whom 50 percent had been Jews. They ruled the city absolutely. When the Russians left, they spread the rumor that the Russians would soon return. So it happened that, as opposed to the active attitude of the Lithuanians, the Latvians have hesitated in organizing and mobilizing themselves against the Jews. A considerable weakening of the Latvian activity is also derived from the fact that the Russians, in the last fourteen days before the beginning of the war, transported about 500 Latvian families who could be counted among the intelligentsia, to inner Russia. Since July 3, the Latvians have established a city government and police. The leader of both organizations is the erstwhile Latvian Captain Petersons. The Auxiliary Police consists of erstwhile policemen, members of the erstwhile Latvian army, and the erstwhile *Aizsargi* organization. The latter were organized by the dictator Ulmanis. The individual members have not been sworn in. In the meantime the Auxiliary Police have been tightly organized on the initiative of EK. The strength of the unit at the moment is about 240 men. Additional men will be recruited gradually. They serve as an auxiliary to the EK, to be at its call, and at the same time comprise the men for the six police precincts of the city. Some of the members have been selected for criminal police work and some for Security Police tasks. Up to July 7, the Latvians have, mostly during the last few days, imprisoned 1,125 Jews, thirty-two political prisoners, eighty-five Russian workers, and two criminal women. This occurred as a consequence of the fact that the EK has strengthened the back of the Latvians. The actions against the Jews are progressing with intensity. On the EK initiative the houses are being vacated of Jews, and non-Jews are being assigned to them. The Jewish families are being driven out of the town by the Latvians, while the men are arrested. The supply of the necessities of life is difficult because almost all the provisions have been burnt. The arrested Jewish men are being killed and buried in graves prepared beforehand. As of now the EK 1b has killed 1,150 Jews in Daugavpils.²¹

²¹ Ereignismeldungen, No. 24, July 16, 1941.

As far as possible, in Kaunas as well as Rīga, movies and photographs captured the fact that the first spontaneous executions of Jews and communists were conducted by Lithuanians and Latvians.²²

The photographing of the “native” killing squads went on for the whole of the killing period.²³ In numerous other passages of the Consolidated Report of October 15, 1941, Stahlecker referred to the necessity to shroud the Germans:

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

In the light of the expansion of the operational area and the multitude of Security Police tasks, an attempt was made at the beginning that the reliable members of the population themselves should participate in the fight against the parasites of their country, i. e., in particular, the Jews and the communists. Beyond providing guidance for the first spontaneous actions, precautions had to be taken to deploy reliable personnel in the self-purge and to make them permanent auxiliary units of the Security Police.

After the arrival of German troops in Latvia, a self-defense force was formed which consisted of men from all walks of life; some of whom were totally unfit for police-related work. The object was to form a useful squad out of these indiscriminately assembled troops, who were armed with various weapons, and above all to eliminate those elements who tried to hide their communist beliefs or their otherwise tarnished past by membership in the Self-Protective Forces.

In Riga the Security Police itself undertook the establishment and, as in other larger cities of Latvia, Sicherheitskommandos were formed initially which were later changed into an Auxiliary Police Force, which now consisted entirely of selected, dependable and professionally trained forces. In the larger cities a prefect was placed at the head of the Auxiliary Police. The Auxiliary Police formations were divided into Sicherheitspolizei [Security Police] and Ordnungspolizei [Order Police]. The Auxiliary Security Police [Arājs commando is meant], which works under the constant supervision of the Einsatzkommando 2, from whom it receives its work guidelines and to whom it must continually **furnish detailed reports on its activity**, is divided into political and criminal sections.

²² Stahlecker's Consolidated Report, 15 October 1941, p. 18.

²³ The best-known pictures showing the killings in Latvia come from the dunes of Liepāja. Although the Liepāja killings were committed both by Germans and Latvians, the pictures show only Latvians. The photographing was done by Kügler, the Liepāja SD Chief.

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

From the very beginning it was to be expected that pogroms alone would not solve the Jewish problem in the Ostland. On the other hand, the goal of the cleaning-up operation of the Sicherheitspolizei, in accordance with the **fundamental orders**, was the most comprehensive elimination of Jews possible. Accordingly, with the aid of Sonderkommandos, to which were added selected personnel (in Lithuania, partisan troops; in Latvia, troops of the Latvian Auxiliary Police), extensive executions were conducted in the cities and in the countryside. The use of Execution commandos worked well. When assigning Lithuanian and Latvian personnel for the Execution commandos, particular attention was paid to choosing men whose family or relatives had been murdered or carried off by the Russians.²⁴

The EG reports document the occupation from above. They are sufficient to show that the killing could not have been planned by the “neighbors”. The Germans were much too controlling to share decision making with the “natives”. The killings were a step by step program whose labors were compartmentalized and subordinated.

We do not need to rely on Stahlecker’s report alone, to show how the Germans did it: there is also documentation from below.

3. The Occupation of Latvia: Organization

The killing of the Jews in Latvia, despite the folklore about it, was neither Germanless nor leaderless. Soviet and Latvian sources confirm Stahlecker’s reports that Latvia from early hours was reshaped in an German image. The occupation forces preempted decisions on all weighty matters that included both the future of Latvia and that of Jews. War booty and Jewish property was high on their desideratum.

A fundamental rule of the occupation was that on all matters, large and small, the “natives” were reduced to auxiliary functions. In this section I shall comment on the occupation of smaller country towns of Latvia since information about that is less accessible and the issue of “neighbors killing neighbors” is more likely to be raised there than about the bigger centers.

If one wants to accumulate empirical data about the German system of occupation, one needs to consult the following categories of documents:

1. The Einsatzgruppen documents cited above is one source.
2. The Wehrmacht documents, their orders, maps, diaries, and situation reports is another. This by and large is still an underutilized source.
3. The Latvian press of the times. There one can find numerous references, descriptions, and reprints of German orders and directives. Many newspapers had articles about the

²⁴ All of the above passages are taken from the Stahlecker's Consolidated report of 15 October 1941.

German arrival in their towns. The newspaper was an extension of German occupation and it was used for announcements of a variety of directives. For example, the order for the Jews to carry a yellow marking on their garments was frequently announced in the newspaper.

4. The Soviet trial records. The State Archive of Latvia contains about 49,000 KGB trial records of which at least half concern World War II. For example there must be some 3,000 trial records of the Latvian self-defense men, the men who were the first to be subordinated to the German occupation authorities. Of those records, especially valuable are those of Latvian self-defense commandants, who had direct contacts with the German overseers.
5. Of some use are also the Archives of the Soviet Extraordinary Commission.

To begin to understand the German occupation, one needs to know: that the Germans when entering Latvia entered a political, administrative, and military vacuum. In most localities there were no official Latvian authorities to greet them. The Germans frequently had to hunt up Latvians they could trust. The Soviet authorities who ruled Latvia until the point of occupation had fled to the Soviet Union or melted away. It is true that some of Ulmanis time officials, policemen, officers, and Aizsargi, if they had not been deported to Siberia, were somewhere in Latvia, but they were people without authority, unless the Germans opted to endow them with it. The Soviets had effectively broken the backbone of legitimacy in Latvia. The Germans brought along a skeleton of officials from Berlin, whom they installed at higher positions, such as Stiglics, as the Prefect of Riga Police. In some isolated places, especially in Vidzeme, there was some serious partisan activity but, as in Lithuania they were a “mixed blessing”. The partisans by and large were thinking of Latvia as an administrative unity, while the Germans were intent to destroy that image, to expunge the concept of Riga as a centralizing focus. In other words, in July 1941, the Germans had a unique opportunity to shape Latvia in their image. And their desire was to subdivide it into nineteen districts. The German scheme of organization in Riga differed somewhat from that they used in the countryside situations, but generally the Germans attempted to reach back towards the pre-Soviet Latvian officialdom. One of the first announcements that Latvians found posted on the walls, published in newspapers, and read on airwaves, was an order/invitation for the pre-war Aizsargi, policemen, firemen, and officers to return to their stations or report at the local administrative center. The announcement was couched in patriotic language, as if Latvia, now liberated, but still endangered, needed their services again. Little did those who answered the call know that they would become “volunteers” in Nazi service. But that is how the Nazi public relations men, spewing their information at home and abroad, chose to designate them. From their point of view everything that the Latvians did during the occupation they did it “voluntarily”, culminating in the designation of the Latvian Legion as the “Voluntary SS Latvian Legion” in 1943. Whatever the truth of this “voluntary” matter, it is to be noted that it was the Nazis who hanged this ‘voluntary’ tag around the neck of Latvians that every friend and enemy of Latvia and Latvians still, repeat with predictable frequency. In effect upon entrance into Latvia the Germans carried out a kind of draft, but to avoid the injunctions of the Hague protocols, they called it “volunteerism”.

As in Lithuania, so also in Latvia there were Latvian military men who upon German arrival desired to organize a Latvian “army” to fight the Communists; as in Lithuania, Stahlecker

immediately forbade the recruiting operation, and told the Latvians that the *Führer* was too busy to make a determination about either a national state or a national army.

Upon entering Latvia the Germans introduced a series of words prefixed with “self-”—self-defense, self-administration, self-cleansing, and self-help. The prefix has meant a variety of things to a variety of people. For Nazis it was a code word designating that they were German controlled agencies. The most important of these self-organizations that have left a footprint in Latvia’s history was “self-defense”.

Collaboration

In reference to the Holocaust literature in Eastern Europe, especially that of Germany, there is an overuse of the concept of collaboration, which had its origins in Western Europe and Scandinavia. Every second article written by a German scholar about Eastern Europe, has the word collaboration in it. In Eastern Europe, whom the Nazis considered to be a territory of *Untermenschen*, collaboration could not but have different modalities from those in the West. For example in Latvia, one needs to note that *all Latvian offers of collaboration were rejected by the Nazis. And all of the “collaborations” that existed were Nazi organized and some were coerced.* The manner in which the Germans rejected collaborations tended to take extreme form. For example Viktors Deglavs on July 17, 1941 was murdered; Gustavs Celmiņš, the former leader of the Pērkonkrusts was incarcerated in 1943; and Alfrēds Valdmanis was banished from Latvia in 1943. There is no doubt that some Latvians freely entered the civil, police, and military structures that the Germans had organized but they could only do so on German terms. The structure could not but determine the content: there was no reciprocity between Germans and the “natives”. The most visible moment of “collaboration” the *Voluntary SS Latvian Legion* was also the most fully documented coerced one. As far as I know there are no East European collaborationists that would measure up to a Quisling or a Petain.²⁵

Self-Defense Organization

The major agency that first got into the organization of “volunteers” was the Wehrmacht. It was the Wehrmacht commandantures that usually issued an order to organize the so called “self-defense” teams in Latvia. It was also the Wehrmacht that ordered the wearing of Latvian colors, the red-white-red arm band as a sign of recognition of the self-defense. Within a week of occupation there came into existence a plethora of self-defense commandantures. All Latvia’s administrative subdivisions: districts, towns, and pagasts had a self-defense contingent organized. Although the basic Latvian supervising commandanture was the district unit, it appears that numerous towns acted independently under local German commandants.

The nature, activities, and powers of the Latvian self-defense units was defined in an order issued by the military commander of the 291st Infantry Division on about June 30th.²⁶ This order yet in another way shows the German system of organization and their intentions:

²⁵ For patterns of collaboration in France see Robert Paxton, “The Trials of Holocaust Perpetrators in France,” *Lessons and Legacies V: The Holocaust and Justice*, Northwestern University Press, p. 240.

²⁶ Bundesarchiv—Militärarchiv RH 26-291/7, p. 160 as cited and translated into Latvian in Biezais, “Nacionālie partizāņi,” p. 14.

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

On July 2, the precinct commander of Ventspils, Lieutenant Colonel Althoff, issued a Latvian-language variant of the seven-point order, giving it a more specific and narrower interpretation. Althoff specifies that only rifles and pistols are allowed; among the prohibited weapons are automatic rifles and machine pistols. It is repeated that the self-defense units are not part of the military but are an auxiliary police, to aid the army. It also commands the leaders of the self-defense units to register with the local army commander and to obey his orders. Within the Ventspils district, self-defense units are to be organized in Dundaga, Ance, Gipka, Kolka, and Mazirbe. In addition, the document prohibits the self-defense units to confiscate motorized equipment.²⁷

Two conclusions follow from the two documents. Although the orders may appear to grant permission to organize Latvian self-defense teams, as if to endow them with power, in reality they were intended to control the Latvians and to limit the scope of their activities. Read in this light, the orders were just one step away from disarming the Latvians. They were restricted to the simplest of arms, and their activities were limited to those permitted or ordered by the local German commandant. In Bauska, as we will see, Latvians were prohibited to carry arms. Read yet in another way, these orders signaled a rechanneling of the good will with which the Germans were received in Latvia towards the sinister purposes that the Nazis were harboring. The self-defense fulfilled several functions for the Germans—one of them was anticipated in the above cited Heydrich directive.

²⁷ Bundesarchiv—Militärarchiv RH 26-291/34, p. 124, as cited and reprinted in Biezais, “Nacionālie partizāņi,” p. 15.

The Latvian self-defense teams served as auxiliaries primarily to the German Wehrmacht, although there is a lot of evidence that SD could and did use them as well. The first assignment for the self-defense was to establish order in their localities: guard the streets, bridges, railroads, and in some places to comb the woods for Red Army stragglers. At first, when the self-defense units were organized, the issue of killing Communist and Jews was not raised. As the first anti-Jewish directives, such as the registering of Jews, began to be issued, the self-defense were also ordered to impose them. It must be said that the killing of the Jews or any other matter in which Jews were involved could not have happened without the Wehrmacht's knowledge and permission. During the killing period more Latvian towns had Wehrmacht than SD presence. The Heydrich and Stahlecker directive to the Germans to hide behind the backs of Latvians was generally observed.

The selection of the membership in the self-defense was very varied: the word "voluntary", in spite of the folklore about it does not cover it. In reality in all instances the self-defense units were organized: one could not simply sign up for a self-defense unit. The main anchor of the self-defense system was the District Commandant of whom there were nineteen. The commandants had to please the Germans or they would be replaced. The members of the self-defense were solicited by invitation, telephone or even a home visit. For example we have evidence of Lt. Tauriņš, who on July 28 received a telephone call from Pēteris Kalniņš, former commander of Viesite Aizsargi, who told him that the Germans were in a rush to find a Latvian officer. The German Commandant Kunze made Tauriņš the Latvian Commandant of the town.²⁸ The people picked for the self-defense teams were on the one hand men with stable backgrounds, usually men in their thirties and forties, members of the former Aizsargi organization, on the other hand those with cause of revenge, men whose families had suffered under the Soviets.

In sum, we can conclude that the self-defense, instead of being volunteers, were patched together by a variety of stratagems.

German Occupation of Bauska

A more concrete example of German occupation of Latvia can be gleaned, for example from *Bauskas vēstis* (no. 1 came out on July 8, 1941). It reprinted German directives and orders more fully than other small town newspapers. Since all newspapers were under military control, we can have assurance that the newspapers did not misrepresent German intentions.²⁹

At the top of paper's second page there is a description of the final days of Soviet occupation and German entrance in the afternoon of July 28 into Bauska. The article tells us that the last communists left Bauska at 3:00 PM and the German tanks entered at 3:30. In other words in Bauska there was a thirty minute interregnum. The left side and the center of the page is taken up by orders that the Wehrmacht commandanture had issued to the locals. The designation of the commanding Commandanture was **I. (V) 859**. On July 1st, the commandant, signed Hauptmann,

²⁸ KGB Trial Records, The case of P. Tauriņš, No. 1912, Vol. 4. p. 220. Parenthetically we can also note that the same **Kunze** on July 1, ordered Tauriņš to expel Viesite Jewish citizens from their homes. Tauriņš also identified a second German, **Hofenheins**, who was also giving orders.

²⁹ For a fuller view of Bauska's occupation see Aigars Urtāns, "Civiliedzīvotāju slepkavošana Latvijas provincē 1941-1942—Bauskas pilsēta un apriņķis," *Latvijas vēsture*, no. 3, 2000; and continued in nos. 1, 2, and 3, 2001.

issued order No. 1 which had thirteen paragraphs. The highest measure of punishment was threatened for disobedience. In it

1. The commandant claims full powers in the area of his responsibility that includes garrison rights and duties.
2. Gave the address of the Commandanture, Padoņju ielā, at the market square.
3. Informed that the Latvian police is subordinated to the Commandanture and was ordered to receive its daily orders from it at specified times. “The Latvian police temporarily must **carry out its assignments without weapons.**”
4. Ordered all goods and food reserves left by the Russians to be turned over to the Commandanture. Also, all Russian soldiers were ordered to be turned over to the Commandanture. The Commandanture also must be informed about all **Commissars** found within the area.
5. The Commandanture must be notified about all goods belonging to the Soviet government.
6. “It is prohibited to draw, photograph, or paint in the streets or to portray streets and squares from inside of houses.”
7. Rental of apartments is allowed only with a permission of the Commandanture.
8. By 7:00 PM on July 2, the town council must turn in to the Commandanture (in German language) a list in three copies of all vacant apartments where German officers could be quartered.
9. The town council must (in German) turn in a list of all rooms and buildings that were occupied by Soviets.
10. The Latvian Police must organize a Civil Air Defense, specifying the location of shelters, organize a firemen’s brigade, and inform the Commandanture of the brigade’s readiness, providing it with a roster of its members.
11. The Latvian police must inform the public about the rules of black-out. All lighted buildings at the onset of darkness must be blacked out.
12. The Commandanture must be informed about all weapons and all kinds ammunition still found in private hands.
13. Local inhabitants are allowed to be on the streets from 5:00 AM to 10:00 PM. To be outside after 10:00 PM is prohibited. **Jews are allowed on the streets only from 7:00 AM to 6:00 PM.**

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

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

- A July 5th order threatened to shoot all civilians on whom a weapon would be found.

- A July 5th order threatened death for hiding a Red Army soldier or failing to report any Red Army straggler or terrorist.
- All unemployed men and women were ordered to farm work under the threat of punishment.
- On July 7th the Commandanture ordered the Security Police to take charge of those properties that during the course of the war had ended up in private hands.
- The same order entrusts the Security police to register all empty buildings and apartments and take charge of the belongings of those people who have fled or otherwise vacated their domiciles. The neighbors who fail to report such properties are threatened with a punishment according to the laws of war.
- On July 7th, the Commandanture issued an order to maintain prices as they had been prior to the war. “Those disobeying will be arrested.”

The Killing of the Jews: Organizational Patterns

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

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

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To analyze the accountability of the Holocaust's perpetrators there are two systems/standards of justice that we can apply. We can proclaim that everyone was guilty, the occupiers and the occupied, the Wehrmacht and the Einsatzgruppen, the Germans and the Latvians. Even those agencies that did not directly participate in the killings were a necessary binary part of it. Even if the Wehrmacht had done nothing else but pacify the conquered territories, it would have become a party to the Holocaust. Following Theodore Adorno's pronouncement that after the Holocaust poetry was impossible, we can pronounce with equal validity that also justice became impossible—that the distinctions and categories of culpability were no longer determinable. Under this system of justice subordination means little to nothing and the persons giving and receiving an order are of equal accountability. In general Eastern Europeans among them Latvians, have been judged by this standard, and thus the records show that more Latvians were punished for killing Jews than Germans. The Soviets applied a blunt instrument to judging the guilty and the innocent. For example a certain Janis Krasovskis from Subate was sentenced to death for guarding a bridge on the day when the town's Jews were expelled from their homes and on the second day when they were killed. At this stage of scholarship, we can not tell how many Latvians have been punished for killing Jews,. I would not be surprised the number were over one thousand, perhaps one hundred receiving the highest punishment. Over 300 Arājs Commando men were punished. One of the peculiarities of Soviet justice was that it frequently judged the wielder of a weapon more harshly than the one giving orders.

The second standard of judgment is the one used in "civilized" Germany, which specifies that the participation in Nazi crimes must have been personal and brutal. If this standard had been applied to Latvians, then the "neighbors" issue would not arise and the number of guilty would drop to the low hundreds, nobody receiving a capital sentence.

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In the larger towns, Riga, Liepaja, and Daugavpils, the killing began almost immediately after German entrance in the cities. By numerous trials, especially in Germany, it has been established, that it was the Germans who carried out the early killings. It is not widely known that in Riga the first killings took place on the left bank of Daugava, even before the Germans had conquered Riga itself.³⁰ In the countryside towns the beginning was slower, but once it began, the killings were fast and thorough. The killings there began in the middle of July and were completed by the end of August.

Generally speaking, the liquidation of the Jews in the countryside towns, with some exceptions, began about three weeks after the arrival of the Germans. For example on July 1, the third day of occupation in the town of Viesīte the German commandant Kunze ordered his

³⁰ I already wrote about the left-bank killings in my book, however my documentation for it consisted of two second hand "eyewitnesses", two daughters whose fathers had told them about it. Since that time, I have a first hand witness who saw the situation himself. Aleksandrs Rūdolfs Hofmanis, a philology student at the time, after arrival of German forces on the left-bank of Daugava all men under 60 were ordered to leave their homes, and assemble on an open field at Katlekalns on the city's outskirts. A similar assembling of menfolk was done in other cities in the Eastern territories. In Riga the men were held on the open field for about 48 hours until July 1, when the center of Riga was occupied. Towards the evening of the first day a group of Germans arrived and lined up all of the assembled men. The Germans inspected everyone's face and picked out some that they thought were Jews. After checking on the status of their circumcision, the Jews were separated from the group, never to be seen again. Letter March 15, 2001.

Latvian auxiliaries to expel the town's Jews from their domiciles. Before they were killed on July 19th, the Jews were confined in a barn. One is puzzled why there was such a lengthy waiting period. In Subate, on the other hand, the Jews were expelled from their homes on July 20 and killed on the 21st. The Jews of Auce were ordered out of town on about July 8th, and thereafter confined to a barn and killed by an SD commando sometime on July 12th or soon after. In all places the order to murder Jews came from Germans, except in the Viesīte case we do not know whom the Commandant Kunze represented—the Wehrmacht or the SD. Once the killing in the countryside began the liquidation was total—all men, women, and children were killed. Some Holocaust historians have endeavored to argue that the killing of women and children began only in August 1941 or later. Unfortunately those historians have failed to investigate German occupied Latvia.

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

The order to kill Jews could reach a local town by several routes. It appears that the German preferred route was to convey the order to the district self-defense Commandant who then would organize an execution squad to carry out the killings. This happened in the Ilukste District. In Jekabpils District, Commandant Dzenītis had not picked up on the SD promptings to dynamite the synagogue, and consequently the killing operation was taken over by SD teams who arrived from Riga. The local self defense men carried out guarding and escorting duties. In those Districts where there existed local SD units, most of the operational duties were taken over by the SD.

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For the following reasons the “neighbors” not only did not kill the Jews, they could not have done so, even if they had wanted to.

1. Either the Germans had a plan to kill the Jews or they did not. While there are numerous documents that testify to German intentions and plans to do so, there are none of East European origin.
2. The Germans were too scheming and clever to rely on the cruelty of “neighbors”.

3. The Latvian killing gangs and self-defense teams were organized (even conscripted) units in which more often one joined by invitation than by voluntary choice. They were subordinated and served as auxiliaries to the Germans.
4. Only German ordered organizations were allowed. As the word “voluntary” was a Nazi sham so were all agencies prefixed by “self”—“self-defense”, “self-cleansing”, “self-administration”, and “self-help”.
5. The population of Eastern Europe was too diverse to reach a consensus on the killing of the Jews. Humanity does not think by boilerplate.
6. There is no reason to believe that Eastern Europeans were of more brutal disposition or were of a lower cultural level than were the Germans. In fact there is evidence to the contrary.
7. All theoretical constructs can be trumped by empirical evidence. In the case of Latvia there exists a great amount of detailed documentary evidence about the killing of the Jews and the skein of organization that Germans imposed upon Latvia for that purpose.
8. We have no reason to believe that Eastern Europeans thought or behaved like the Nazis or that they understood what Nazism was. And even if they understood what Nazism was, there is no evidence that they sympathized with it. Nazism was hostile to East-Europeans.
9. There is no reason to take Nazi prognostications about East Europeans as if they were the only true things that the Nazis proclaimed.
10. Synagogues burned in Berlin before they burned in Eastern Europe. It is illusory to look for indigenous causes for burning synagogues in Riga.
11. All “eyewitness” observations are always amendable by other observations.
12. “Spontaneity” is not a word that can be applied to a complicated event such as the Holocaust.
13. Eastern Europe, especially the Baltics, for historical reasons were Germanophobic, hence Nazification could have occurred there, if at all, only after German occupation. As a colonized country could never be an imperial country, a Nazi occupied country could not be a Nazi country. For one, Germans would not have allowed it.