

Genocide
involvement of
german military ss in
latvia and lithuania in
1941 essay ...



Introduction

The country of Latvia and Lithuania were occupied by Germany in June of 1941. Both are Baltic states that became the starting ground for the Nazi mass execution or genocide of the Jewish population. Aside from local Jewish residents, Jews from other countries or from Germany were sent there to be executed in concentration camps. Although the main target had been the Latvian and Lithuanian Jews, local Latvian and Lithuanians were also targets of execution for Hitler's ultimate goal had been the extermination of all people that do not have Germanic descent. The Jews were first executed because by nature of their history of autonomy in the Baltic region, they can be easily identified.[1]

Historically speaking, to establish who ordered the extermination or genocide had been of paramount importance largely because one then can accurately attribute the guilt of all the murders. To the extent that Hitler wanted to wipe out the Jewish race, undoubtedly, the SS had played a significant role in the genocide.

It is the aim of this paper to discuss the role and responsibility of the SS in the genocide. The paper will establish the fact that the SS had both a direct and indirect involvement in the genocide after the initial invasions of Latvia and Lithuania in June of 1941.

1. SS Jewish extermination orders

One of Hitler's goals had been the extermination of people that are not Germanic, particularly the Jews. Heinrich Himmler's (SS leader) deputy,

Reinhard Heydrich was the chief planner of the Nazi program to wipe out the Jews in Europe. Heydrich's plan was entitled the "Final Solution to the Jewish problem". For the Nazis the "final solution" was genocide, the murder of an entire people. This systematic murder has come to be called the Holocaust. From all over Europe, in Latvia and Lithuania in particular, Jews were rounded up, loaded into sealed cattle cars, and shipped to death camps. They were beaten, starved and tortured to death by their guards. In fact, the Baltic states had become of the first places to experience Hitler's ruthless "final solution" of the hated Jews. [2]

Nazi Germany had regarded the SS [Schutzstaffeln, protective squadrons] to be the only groups capable to exterminate the Jewish people. In fact, it is an honor for an SS guard to complete such a mission. [3] The SS are composed of a carefully chosen group of German men who are loyal and obedient to the cause of their Führer (Hitler).[4] Toward the end of the Second World War, however, the "SS gradually lost its elite nature and instead of being the 'guards of the Führer', it became a multi-ethnic army instead". Although highly trained in racist ideas, in its need for more soldiers to fight the advancing Soviets, the SS leaders had to abandon their racist criteria and allowed the membership of "non-Germanic" people in their units. [5]

In the Baltic region, therefore, the extermination of Latvian and Lithuanian Jews, from purely racial or anti-Semitic reasons, were planned and premeditated. The genocide was organized and supervised by a special Nazi Security Service called the SD (Sicherheitsdienst) and the *Einsatzgruppe A*. The SD is the *ideological* intelligence unit of the SS. The Einsatzgruppen, on the other hand, translated as Task force, Special force or Operative Force, <https://assignbuster.com/genocide-involvement-of-german-military-ss-in-latvia-and-lithuania-in-1941-essay-sample/>

are under the command of Reichsfuhrer-SS which was first formed upon the invasion of Poland in 1939 to carry out special operations. Eventually they were involved in the annihilation of approximately 1.5 million Jews. Under the command of Major General Walter Stahlecker, these units arrived with the occupying German soldiers in the Baltic states. From November 1941, the command then transferred to the SS and Police General Friedrich Jeckeln.

[6] The goal therefore was as much as possible to completely remove or annihilate the Jews.

1. SS indirect genocide involvement A. Propaganda

The extermination of Jews occurred right after the initial invasions of Latvia and Lithuania in 1941. The killings of countless numbers of Latvian Jews began and ended that year. However, the Latvians and Lithuanians were manipulated to be involved in the murder so that it appears as if the SS were not responsible for it. [7] The Nazis had at first avoided harsher measures as they wanted to be welcomed as liberators and to make it appear as if the violence were started by the Latvians and Lithuanians themselves. [8]

Documented sources revealed that one of the tactics for the extermination of the Jews was through the instigation of "spontaneous pogroms" by the local population in the occupied Baltic states. This was a clear directive order to the Stahlecker Operational Unit A. The best way that Nazi Germany accomplished this order was through the creation of anti-Semitic propaganda and to take advantage of the Baltic region's resistance to Bolshevism (communist ideology). [9]

It must be understood that anti-Semitic feelings were already brewing up in the Baltic regions prior to the occupation of the Germans. The Jews were successful businessmen in both countries and although they were granted minority rights and occupy some government positions or were represented in their own Councils they were not, for the most part, were able to successfully assimilate to the native populations. Mostly, they confined themselves to their own respective Jewish communities. A growing anti-Semitic sentiment had occurred because of the competition for jobs in both states and because in Lithuania in particular, the non-Jews there had felt that Jews who enjoyed a status of autonomy in the region hinders the establishment of a Lithuanian people and identity. [10] The same thing is occurring in Latvia. The Jews there had enjoyed autonomy and were granted minority rights. The autonomy had further enlarged the gulf between the Jews and non-Jews in Latvia. For the same reason, there were competition in job positions. Moreover, the Jews were increasingly seen as Bolshevik supporters (followers of Lenin and communism ideology). [11] Although there may be some members of the Jewish community that did follow this ideology, historical records show that their numbers were exaggerated. [12] Anti-Semitic feelings were further aggravated by the elevated status of the Jews in the administrative position of the states during the Soviet occupation. [13]

The leading advocates of anti-Semitism in Lithuania were the Lithuanian Businessmen's Association who urged the people not to patronize the Jewish businesses. On the other hand, anti-Semitism in Latvia was represented by the Perkonkrusts (Thundercross). These were a right-wing group that were

first and foremost very nationalistic, of which members had eventually become Nazism followers who executed some Jews although the Nazis avoided from recruiting them because they also exhibited animosity against any Baltic German.[14]

The German invaders had used anti-Semitic feelings to stir up hatred for the Latvian and Lithuanian Jews and eventually to solicit local executioners. The Germans had convinced Latvians that all or majority of the Jews adheres to Bolshevism of the Soviets and therefore should be exterminated. The SS propagandists were smart enough to realize that to equate the Jews to Bolshevism would enable them to execute unrestrained murder of the populace in Latvia and Lithuania without arousing negative repercussions from the non-Jewish local citizens (although there are Latvians and Lithuanians who had tried to save the Jews).

The Baltic people had resented the Soviets because of the reign of terror that they practiced when they occupied their countries a year ago.

Implicating Jewish connections with the Soviets was a good tool to stir up hatred to non-Jews in the Baltic regions. In fact, the Germans were so successful to the extent that according to historical records, although the murders of the Jews and forcing some to ghettos were already practiced in German occupied territories, in the Baltic region these hideous acts were carried out to a larger extent and swiftness. [15]

In the first day of the occupation, the Germans justified their murder of the Jews through their racist and dehumanizing German propaganda publicized in posters, newspapers and exhibitions. The Germans at home had formed

an organization of special propaganda units just for that purpose. They made it to appear that the financial and property losses of the native population during the Soviet takeover was due to the concept of " Jewish Bolshevism". Furthermore, they made it appear as if the Jews were communists who were responsible for murders of many Latvians during the year. The Germans located mass graves and accused the Jews of committing the atrocities just to incite Latvian hatred against them.

As a result, the Jews were publicly ostracized, tortured and humiliated. To identify them, they were ordered to wear the Star of David, and were forbidden to walk on sidewalks, to be seen in public places and to shop. In short, they were restricted to live ordinary lives. The worst has come when in July-August of 1941, the First Phase of Annihilation occurred. Groups of Jews were herded into one place and were shot in places such as Riga, Daugavpils and in many smaller towns. Others were placed in ghettos with posted guards. An investigation into the historical records revealed that these killings, although were actually done by the Latvian themselves, were organized by the German SS units, through propaganda. [16]In this sense, they were responsible for the execution of the Jews although in these instances they were not directly carrying out the murders.

1. Latvian Conscription

Some of the executions of Jews may be attributed to the non-Jewish citizens of Latvia and Lithuania. But in the light of the historical perspective, without excusing them of their guilt, many of these Latvian units were forcibly conscripted to the Nazi SS army. The Latvians had experienced Soviet

atrocities such as mass deportations and executions and were glad when the Germans drove the Soviets out of their territory. Historically speaking, the Baltic people are not sympathetic to the German ideologies but they were welcomed as liberators from the Soviets. [17] Because of such views, many Latvians in the early days of the occupation did volunteer to fight against the Soviets.

The Germans needed the military services of the Latvians and Lithuania against their Soviet attack. Yet they cannot force the Baltic people to serve in their army because it will violate the 1907 Hague convention. Therefore, all that the Nazi can do is to rely in volunteers and use it as a cover for illegal conscription. In December 1941, the Germans decreed to use the Labor Service as a cover for the illegal conscription. These conscripted soldiers were assigned in military duties. However, the Germans considered them inferior to their armed forces and called them “ auxiliary police” (*Schutzmannschaft*) instead. Although their primary duty was to serve as combat units, there were times when they also conducted raids against Soviet Red guerrillas and to perform ghetto guard duties.

In 1943, Hitler declared an all out war against the Soviets and ordered the formation of foreign combat units under the Waffen SS. In February 10, 1943, he ordered the formation of Latvian SS Volunteer Legion”. The Nazis made it to appear that to enlist in the Legion is to enlist for a fight against Bolshevism so that the Latvians felt they were patriots fighting for their homeland. However, there are those who evade drafting who consequently suffered the consequences of being publicly humiliated and condemned and issued with threats.

<https://assignbuster.com/genocide-involvement-of-german-military-ss-in-latvia-and-lithuania-in-1941-essay-sample/>

It must be understood at this point that despite its title, the Latvian Legion was neither real “SS” nor “volunteer”. The Post-War International Crimes Tribunal had declared that they did not identify and are connected with Hitler’s purely Germanic elite SS unit. These forced Latvian conscripts never fought with the Nazi for advancing Nazi ideology or the “New Europe”. They never advocated in the National Socialism. In fact, history proves that for the most part they were never concerned with Germany’s ideology or military goals for their primary purpose was to prevent the re-occupation of Soviet Russia in the Baltic region. Therefore, it is wrong to compare them to the Waffen SS unit who committed the genocide for their association to the German SS was only a formality. The German SS never regarded them as official members of the SS organization. In close investigation, the two groups were so different in goals, ideologies, operations and constitutions.

It is estimated that only 15% did volunteers while the rest were forcibly enlisted. In fighting, they obeyed orders from German commanders. The Latvian highest military rank was that of an Inspector General, but even then, it served only in a limited function and was not actually part of the command structure of a German Army. [18] Moreover, it is wrong to associate the genocide to the Latvian Legion for the mass genocide had been virtually completed after the Legion was established. This was the time when the Nazi had already seen that they were no longer viewed as “liberators”. [19] Therefore, forced conscription was the only recourse. The Latvian SS Legion for the most part only served as combatant units and did not engage in crimes against humanity such as the slaughter of civilians or

the mass murder of the Jews. The genocide was carried out, along with the deception of the Latvian auxiliaries, by the Nazi SD. [20]

On the other hand, the Nazis were also trying to form such legion in Lithuania but they were unsuccessful. The primary reason may have been that the Lithuanians have a higher level of state-consciousness as compared to their Latvian counterparts. [21]

1. Direct Involvement

The second phase of annihilation occurred between November-December of 1941. This was already a direct genocide involvement of the SS for Friedrich Jeckeln had supervised the murdered of 25, 000 Jews. These Jews were taken out of the Riga ghetto and were transported in foot to Rumbula to be murdered mercilessly. These mass murders occurred in two separate occasions, one in November 30 and the second in December 8. This time, the SS men personally shot the Jewish victims while the Latvian soldiers acted as guards.[22] The genocide was carried out in a centralized manner, strictly supervised by the SS in accordance from orders in Germany. [23] The SD wore black uniforms and carry black flag so they were called “ black power”.[24] Moreover, about 3, 000 Jews were from other towns were also murdered between December 15-17. Added to that are some 20, 000 Jews murdered who were brought from Germany, Austria and Czech Republic. All in all the mass murder of Latvian Jews reaches to approximately 70, 000.[25] Also it was clearly stated that *Einsatzgruppe A* killed 30, 025 Jews in Latvia before October 1941. [26]Historical records shows that in December of 1941 the mass annihilation of Jews in Latvia ended. [27]

In Lithuania, the direct involvement of the SS was in the second phase of the extermination of the Jews which occurred in July 5-31, 1941 by the Einsatzgruppen (plural of *Einsatzgruppe*). When the Germans take over Lithuania, the Einsatzgruppen implemented the annihilation of Lithuanian Jews together with the Lithuanian Police and vigilantes and the cooperation of Municipal officials. Furthermore in a report in document 2273-PS it was revealed that the SD assisted Lithuanian pogroms and executed 3, 800 Jews in Kauen and 1, 200 in the smaller towns of Lithuania.[28] Historical records also show that in a Lithuanian province of Jurbarkas, the first killing of Jews occurred in the fourth day of the occupation. It was administered by German SS members in a Jewish cemetery. [29]

III. Conclusion

There is no doubt that the German military SS was involved in the genocide after the initial invasions in Latvia and Lithuanian in June 1941. They deliberately planned the extermination and executed it in indirect and direct means. In an indirect manner, they published and exhibited anti-Semitic propagandas which incited the execution of Jews by Latvian and Lithuanian police auxiliaries and forcibly conscripted non-Jewish Latvians and Lithuanians to the German army to aid in the execution. The SS direct involvement in the genocide executions were carried out by the SS mobile killing groups, Einsatzgruppen and the SD.

Bibliography

<https://assignbuster.com/genocide-involvement-of-german-military-ss-in-latvia-and-lithuania-in-1941-essay-sample/>

_____A Tragedy of False Premises. *Crimes against Humanity Latvia Site* . [no date], accessed May 5, 2008 ; available from http://vip.latnet.lv/LPRA/fg_tragedy.htm

Feldmanesis, Inesis and Kārlis Kangeris. The Volunteer SS Legion in Latvia. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia* . [no date], accessed May 5, 2008 ; available from <http://www.am.gov.lv/en/latvia/history/legion/>

Miller-Korpi, Katy. The Holocaust in the Baltics. *University of Washington* . 1998, accessed May 5, 2008 , available from depts.washington.edu/baltic/papers/holocaust.html

Nollendorfs, Valters and Uldis Neiburgs. History of the Occupation of Latvia (1940-1991). Briefing paper 01: Latvians in the Armed Forces of Germany in World War II. 2006, accessed May 5, 2008; available from <http://www.am.gov.lv/en/latvia/History-of-Occupation/briefing-paper1/>

Nollendorfs, Valters and Uldis Neiburgs. Briefing paper 03: The Holocaust in German-Occupied Latvia. 2006, accessed May 5, 2008 ; available from <http://www.am.gov.lv/en/latvia/History-of-Occupation/briefing-paper3/>

Perry, Marvin. *A World in History*. New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 1988.

_____Operation: Last Chance. *Simon Wiesenthal Center 2007 and Targum Shlishi* . 2007, accessed May 5, 2008; available from http://www.operationlastchance.org/LITHUANIA_Holocaust_English-1702.htm

_____Stahlecker, Jeckeln, Arājs, Cukurs. *Crimes against Humanity Latvia Site* . [No date}, accessed May 5, 2008 available from http://vip.latnet.lv/LPRA/fg_stahlecker.htm

Stein, S. D. Extract from Report by Einsatzgruppe A.(Source: *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression* , Vol. IV. USGPO, Washington, 1946, pp. 944-949). October 1, 2007, accessed May 5, 2008 ; available from <http://www.ess.uwe.ac.uk/genocide/einsatzArep.htm>

Stein, S. D. SS Ideological Statements. *ESS Homepage* . 1998. Accessed May 5, 2008 available from http://www.ess.uwe.ac.uk/genocide/SS_ideology.htm.

Stein, SD. Organization and Obligations of the SS and the Police Heinrich Himmler. [Source: *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*, Vol. IV. USGPO, Washington, 1946, pp. 616-634,] 1999 , accessed May 5, 2008 ; available from [avwww.ess.uwe.ac.uk/genocide/SS2.htm](http://www.ess.uwe.ac.uk/genocide/SS2.htm)

Vestermanis, Margers. Extermination of the Latvian Jews in 1941. Director of the “ Jews in Latvia” Museum/Documentation Centre. [*Crimes against Humanity Latvian Site*, 2005. accessed May 5, 2008] ; available from <http://vip.latnet.lv/LPRA/default.htm>

Zarins, Vilnis. Latvia under two occupational powers: problems and paradigms. *University of Latvia Institute of Philosophy and Sociology* [no date] ; accessed May 5, 2008 ; available from <http://vip.latnet.lv/LPRA/zarins.htm>

[1] Marvin Perry. *A World in History* (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 1988), 706. <https://assignbuster.com/genocide-involvement-of-german-military-ss-in-latvia-and-lithuania-in-1941-essay-sample/>

[2] *ibid.*

[3] SD Stein. SS Ideological Statements. [*ESS Homepage* . 1998. Accessed May 5, 2008}; available from http://www.ess.uwe.ac.uk/genocide/SS_ideology.htm

[4] SD Stein. Organization and Obligations of the SS and the Police Heinrich Himmler . [Source: *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression* , Vol. IV. USGPO, Washington, 1946, pp. 616-634, 1999 accessed May 5, 2008]; available from [avwww.ess.uwe.ac.uk/genocide/SS2.htm](http://www.ess.uwe.ac.uk/genocide/SS2.htm)

[5] Inesis Feldmanesis and Kārlis Kangeris. The Volunteer SS Legion in Latvia. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia* .[[no date], accessed May 5, 2008]; available from <http://www.am.gov.lv/en/latvia/history/legion/>

[6] Valters Nollendorfs and Uldis Neiburgs. Briefing paper 03: The Holocaust in German-Occupied Latvia. [2006, accessed May 5, 2008]; available from <http://www.am.gov.lv/en/latvia/History-of-Occupation/briefing-paper3/>

[7] Nollendorfs & Neiburgs, 2006.

[8] _____Stahlecker, Jeckeln, Arājs, Cukurs. *Crimes against Humanity Latvia Site* . [No date}, accessed May 5, 2008]; available from http://vip.latnet.lv/LPRA/fg_stahlecker.htm

[9] Nollendorfs & Neiburgs, 2006.

[10] Miller-Korpi, Katy. The Holocaust in the Baltics. [*University of Washington* , 1998, accessed May 5, 2008]; available from depts. washington. edu/baltic/papers/holocaust. html

[11] Nollendorfs & Neiburgs, 2006.

[12] Felmanesis & Kangeris

[13] ____ A Tragedy of False Premises. [*Crimes against Humanity Latvia Site* . [no date]' accessed May 5, 2008] ; available from [http://vip. latnet. lv/LPRA/fg_tragedy. htm](http://vip.latnet.lv/LPRA/fg_tragedy.htm)

[14] Miller-Korpi, Katy, 1998.

[15] ibid.

[16]Nollendorfs & Neiburgs, 2006.

[17] Nollendorfs, Valters and Uldis Neiburgs. History of the Occupation of Latvia (1940-1991). Briefing paper 01: Latvians in the Armed Forces of Germany in World War II. [2006, accessed May 5, 2008]; available from [http://www. am. gov. lv/en/latvia/History-of-Occupation/briefing-paper1/](http://www.am.gov.lv/en/latvia/History-of-Occupation/briefing-paper1/)

[18] Nollendorfs & Neiburgs, 2006 (History of Latvia)

[19] Felmanesis & Kangeris

[20] Nollendorfs & Neiburgs, 2006 (History of Latvia)

[21] Zarins, Vilnis Zarins. Latvia under two occupational powers: problems and paradigms. [*University of Latvia Institute of Philosophy and Sociology*

<https://assignbuster.com/genocide-involvement-of-german-military-ss-in-latvia-and-lithuania-in-1941-essay-sample/>

{ no date } ; accessed May 5, 2008] ; available from <http://vip.latnet.lv/LPRA/zarins.htm>

[22] Nollendorfs & Neiburgs, 2006.

[23] Margers Vestermanis . Extermination of the Latvian Jews in 1941. Director of the ““ Jews in Latvia” Museum/Documentation Centre. [*Crimes against Humanity Latvian Site*, 2005. accessed May 5, 2008] ; available from <http://vip.latnet.lv/LPRA/default.htm>

[24] _____ Stahlecker, et. al.

[25] Nollendorfs & Neiburgs, 2006

[26]_____ Stahlecker, et. al.

[27]Nollendorfs & Neiburgs, 2006

[28] S. D. Stein. Extract from Report by Einsatzgruppe A.[Source: Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression, Vol. IV. USGPO, Washington, 1946, pp. 944-949, 2007, accessed May 5, 2008] ; available from <http://www.ess.uwe.ac.uk/genocide/einsatzArep.htm>

[29]_____Operation: Last Chance. [Simon Wiesenthal Center 2007 and Targum Shlishi. 2007, accessed May 5, 2008]; available from http://www.operationlastchance.org/LITHUANIA_Holocaust_English-1702.htm