

# Valdis Lūmans on Latvians and the Holocaust in Occupied Latvia: Disillusionment Begets Myth Supplanting Myth

## **Latvia in World War II**

by *Valdis O. Lūmans*

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## INTRODUCTION

Latvians, whatever lands you may come to,—proclaim the name of Latvia!

Never and nowhere in your life will you ever hear a more beautiful word than this word; whoever of you carries this word forth, shirk not, therefore, from spreading it far and wide; cease not to praise our country—Fathers, inculcate it into your children; Mothers, sing of it by your children's and grand-children's cribs; but, if you are a child born in exile,—relent not in ceaselessly questioning your parents about this land.

Let Latvia be in your thoughts and imaginings as a distant, beautiful island in the sea of the world; as you sail your course through life, keep your prow ever pointed towards it. Day or night, dusk or dawn,—keep it in your thoughts, utter its name, fall in love with it ever more passionately!

— *Author and artist Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš (1877–1962), my translation*

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.<sup>1</sup>

— *Holocaust scholar Prof. Dr. Andrew (Andrievs) Ezergailis*

Scholars writing the history of their own peoples are routinely suspected of portraying prior generations and historical figures through rose-colored glasses, influenced as much by myth and legend as by fact. Lūmans's journey to writing *Latvia in World War II* dispels his parents' idyllic vision of Latvia.

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1 Ezergailis, “*Neighbors*” *Didn't Kill Jews*,  
at <https://haolusa.org/index.php?en/main-020-neighborsdidntkilljews.ssi>

My own cultural initiation centered on weekend Latvian school—the heart of émigré life. I studied Latvian literature, geography, history; and participated in cultural events. Where World War II was concerned, the Russians were the centuries-old mortal enemy, the Germans, centuries-old oppressors—but an improvement on the Russians. As my mother recounted during her first return to Latvia and her familial homestead after the restoration of independence, at least the Germans were sanitary. Forewarned, my parents fortuitously escaped the first Soviet mass deportation (14 June 1941), which claimed my mother’s entire extended family. They hid in the woods, not knowing what to do next; the German invasion a week later<sup>2</sup> rescued them. Once my parents returned home, their first task was to shovel mounds of human excrement out the windows of the mill-house where the “*sarkanarmieši*,” the Red Army, had barracked.

Latvians had perhaps naively hoped to repeat the miracle of their still-fresh War of Independence, in which they drove out the Russians with German assistance, then the Germans, from their ancestral homeland. Indeed, against all odds, the Latvian Legion held out in Courland<sup>3</sup> to the end of the war as Stalin threw in division after division to their slaughter in a doomed attempt to wrest away the last bit of Latvia from the Latvians. The Legionnaires did not know that Roosevelt had already informed Stalin at Tehran (1 December 1943) that Latvia was his upon Soviet re-occupation—and joked he was not prepared to go to war to preserve Latvia’s freedom.

### EPIPHANIES

The duty of the historian is to tell a story, to make sense of jumbled facts and contradictory accounts, to achieve an objective construct. Every historical narrative is inherently also written from a point of view. Lūmans’s is his loss of innocence; he details the path to his “epiphany — the realization that much of what [he] had learned about Latvia was more myth than reality.” Drawn to history in college, the realities of Latvia’s past unveiled themselves. That Latvians had participated in the Holocaust deepened and validated his disillusionment with the unblemished Latvia of his childhood.<sup>4</sup>

Nor was Latvian culpability in the Holocaust present in the narratives of my youth. My parents’ wartime experience was communicated to me as: “Everyone else was deported. We

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2 Operation Barbarossa was launched 22 June 1941. In announcing the invasion, Hitler indicated that the Soviet Union had taken “spheres of influence” too far by invading the Baltics and Romania.

3 *Kurzeme*, western Latvia. Latvians referred to it as “Kurzemes cietoksnis” (Courland Fortress), in English, typically the Courland Pocket.

4 Lūmans was born in exile, in Germany.

fled the returning Bolsheviks.<sup>5</sup> We lived in DP camps. We emigrated to America.” Pressing my parents’ generation for details was met with the universal declaration that the past was too painful to relate, to relive. We were in a new country, building new lives, keeping our culture alive as the Soviets aggressively Russified our native land.

For myself, observing Seder with the families of my Jewish-American classmates, the ritual breaking of the middle matzo bore palpable significance: “Among people everywhere the sharing of bread forms a bond of fellowship. The story of freedom begins when we join together with all the needy and oppressed. *Our redemption is bound up with the deliverance from bondage of people everywhere.*” My own redemption could not be tied more closely to the release of 100,000,000 Europeans, blood relatives included, from Soviet bondage. Nor, in my mind, could there be a closer sharing of historical memory, across Biblical to contemporary times, between Jews and Latvians. The Vilis Hāznērs deportation trial<sup>6</sup>, launched November, 1976, erased that idealistic vision of Latvian–Jewish relations: specifically, the day I passed through Rockefeller Center in New York City and encountered a gaggle of press surrounding Congressional representative Elizabeth Holtzman just as she declared: “*All Latvians are Nazis.*”

In acquiring Lūmans’s text some years ago to fill in gaps in my knowledge of Latvia in WWII, I anticipated a historical account viewed through a lens of objectivity: meaning not originating in—*inter alia*—Soviet and Nazi propaganda or blatantly apologist German scholars seeking to absolve Germans and blame the local population for the Holocaust.

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5 As civilians evacuated Courland (western Latvia, the Legion and Wehrmacht held it to the end of WWII), the only choices for escape were the treacherous voyage across the Baltic to Sweden or, as my parents, down the Baltic to Danzig (now Gdańsk, Poland). With the subsequent advance of the Red Army through central eastern Europe, my parents then fled again—east across Germany by bicycle, traveling forest trails to escape being shot, to what became the post-war American and British zones. My parents’ names were on a deportation list left behind after the initial Soviet retreat; they had to flee when the Red Army returned.

6 The Vilis Hāznērs deportation trial was the first such major action, precipitated by Soviet propaganda, of the Department of Justice (DOJ) against a former Latvian member of the Waffen-SS accused of being a Holocaust perpetrator. The trial garnered widespread attention in the media and Jewish community, and featured prominently in subsequent exposés of “Nazis” in America. When the DOJ Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) failed to make its case, the Jewish community and even the successor DOJ Office of Special Investigations (OSI), established specifically to hunt down Nazis, blamed the loss on INS ineptitude. There was no allowance for the possibility Hāznērs was innocent.

Rabbi Paul Silton, who led students wearing "DEATH TO HAZNERS" T-shirts in protest in front of Hāznērs’s home and founded *Holocaust Survivors and Friends in Pursuit of Justice* as a response to the INS charges brought against Hāznērs, maintained years afterwards (1991) that Hāznērs escaped justice because the government botched the case, and falsely maintained that the judge had, in fact, declared Hāznērs guilty of war crimes. Silton’s obsession over Hāznērs nearly brought him to financial ruin as he paid a private investigator to shadow Hāznērs to root out his imaginary network of Nazi cohorts. It was incomprehensible Hāznērs was innocent. Silton described his obsession over Hāznērs, even hallucinations, in an interview with Rochelle Saidel in June, 1980. (Saidel, *The Outraged Conscience*, 219)

Regrettably, when the time came, I encountered a narrative of questionable objectivity and veracity in ascribing Latvian intentions, responsibilities, and culpabilities in the Holocaust in Nazi-occupied Latvia.

### TREATMENT OF PROTAGONISTS

#### **Aizsargi**

Lūmans groups the *Aizsargi* (pre-war National Guard) and *Pērkonkrusts* (Latvian fascist party) together at the “extreme political right.” He contends both played “prominent roles in Latvia's transition in the 1930s from pluralistic democracy to intolerant nationalism and authoritarian dictatorship.”

The *Aizsargi* were<sup>7</sup> founded March 30, 1919 as a civic obligation of rural inhabitants, to protect lives and property from criminals and Bolshevik partisans as the front against the Russians advanced in the War of Independence. They were lightly armed, primarily with captured arms unsuitable for army use; *Aizsargi* performed guard duties on major roads and otherwise aided in policing duties. By 1920, virtually all parish<sup>8</sup> residents summoned to service had joined its various regiments. Lūmans fails to acknowledge their fulfillment of duty; he denounces the *Aizsargi* as a band of “Latvian vigilantes” from the moment of their founding.

The *Aizsargi* certainly evolved into a powerful paramilitary organization. However, Lūmans also ignores their role at the center of rural cultural and community life; he sarcastically derides the notion they were “apolitical” in any manner:

The *Aizsargi* displayed their true apolitical colors on May 15, 1934, when they provided the muscle for the coup that ended democracy in Latvia and established the Ulmanis dictatorship.<sup>9</sup>

In actuality, the army and police executed the 1934 coup. The reputed prominence of the *Aizsargi* grew out of subsequent propaganda, both on the part of the Ulmanis regime to emphasize popular support<sup>10</sup>; later, on the part of the Soviet Union, labeling Ulmanis and all who supported him as fascists.

#### **Ulmanis as Vadonis**

In June 1936 Ulmanis decreed himself their highest leader, or Vadonis—a term that translates

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7 “*Aizsargi*” is the plural of “*Aizsargs*,” I refer to both the organization and its members in the plural.

8 The Latvian “pagasts” is similar to the British “parish.”

9 Lūmans, 27

10 Martyn Housden, David J. Smith, Eds. *Forgotten Pages in Baltic History: Diversity and Inclusion*, Valters Ščerbinskis. Rodopi, 2011, 203

precisely as Führer<sup>11 12</sup>

Regardless of Ulmanis's cult of personality, "vadonis" (Latvian for "leader" or "guide") in "precise" meaning no more implies Hitlerite fascism than *Illustrierter Führer durch Riga* (1914) denotes an illustrated Nazi guide to Rīga. Lūmans makes the association as if Hitler's were the sole model for authoritarian regimes.

Referring to Ulmanis as "Vadonis" had already begun in 1934. It is fashionable today to contend Ulmanis's popularity was already waning prior to the bloodless coup<sup>13</sup>; nevertheless, in my mother's contemporaneous experience (she turned 23 in 1934), the adulation was genuine, the casting of flower petals in his path spontaneous.

It is morally convenient to forget authoritarianism was viewed positively in the 1930's, a bulwark of security and surety in the face of a global economic downturn compounded by the rejection of internationalism. Pre-WWII Europe fell to authoritarian rule; across the Atlantic, aides approached Roosevelt with the proposition of "president for life."

### **Pērkonkrusts (Thunder Cross)**

Ulmanis banned *Pērkonkrusts*—the Latvian fascist party. Lūmans contends Ulmanis and the fascists were mostly the same, other than in degree. Because both appealed to the right, sharing the same core constituency, Ulmanis therefore "likely"—Lūmans's characterization—outlawed *Pērkonkrusts* in a cynical move to eliminate the competition and monopolize the right's sympathies.

Lūmans ignores an alternate possibility: intolerance for extremism. Latvia acted as a transit country for Jews escaping Germany and was the only European country to ban anti-Semitic literature.

The Ulmanis regime exiled Gustavs Celmiņš, the *Pērkonkrusts* leader, in 1937. He subsequently returned to Latvia with the invading German forces as a translator. Celmiņš attempted to re-vitalize *Pērkonkrusts*—it was the only political association active in Latvia

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11 Lūmans, 27

12 Ulmanis was declared President April 11, 1936 by decree of the Cabinet of Ministers, which he controlled. It is unclear what June decree Lūmans refers to.

13 Ulmanis's Latvian Farmers' Union (LZS) never achieved more than 17 percent of the vote, 12.2 percent in 1931, the last election before Ulmanis's coup, at 14 seats, losing 2. The leading party, the Latvian Social Democratic Workers' Party (LSDSP), garnered 19.2 percent, at 21 seats, losing 4. In the prior 1928 election, the LZS held their seats (16) while the LSDSP, at 25 seats, lost 7. Following the 1931 election, the 100 seats of parliament were divided among 27 parties; 17 additional parties did not receive enough votes to merit a seat. However, those 17 parties together received 7.4 percent of the votes, behind the Latgalian Christian Peasant and Catholic Party in third place at 8.2 percent. The numbers discount the narrative of seriously eroding support and lend credence to accounts that the fragmented state of parliament and concomitant impediments to legislating were factors motivating Ulmanis's coup.

after the German occupation, but quickly outlawed (17 August 1941).<sup>14</sup> However, he also lobbied the Nazi authorities for Latvian military units to pursue retreating Soviet forces—not to collaborate in killing Jews. Following the outlawing, Celmiņš led an *anti*-German resistance group of former *Pērkonkrusts* members.<sup>15</sup> The Germans eventually jailed him for his nationalist activism.

As for Celmiņš's former associates, Lūmans joins in the portrayal of *Pērkonkrusts* along with *Korporācijas* (student and professional fraternities) members as forming the notorious collaborationist *Arājs Kommando*:

Along with the question of motive arises the question of which Latvians performed the butchery. Aside from the relatives of the victims of Soviet brutality, the most common constituency, these killing gangs also attracted men with experience in weaponry, most prominently former soldiers and policemen.<sup>16</sup> The extreme, nationalistic political right also contributed accomplices, above all the *Perkonkrusts*, whose bitterness over their persecution under the Soviets as well as their openly professed anti-Semitism converged in an orgy of violence. From their [i.e., *Arājs Kommando*] headquarters on Krisjana Valdemars Street, the *Perkonkrusts* directed a reign of terror throughout Riga. They set up their own prison in the basement, where countless Jews, both men and women, suffered the cruelest and most inhuman tortures, humiliations, rape, and murder.<sup>17</sup> Working closely with *Perkonkrusts* in these torture chambers tormenting and murdering Jews were university students, brothers from the elite *Korporācijas*, and as noted earlier, also members of the *Perkonkrusts*.<sup>18 19</sup>

Lūmans is not the only scholar to contend *Pērkonkrusts* exerted disproportionate influence over Latvian collaboration in the Holocaust; there was likely some role to the degree former *Pērkonkrusts* members inserted themselves into local administrative positions subservient to the Nazi occupation.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, the widespread meme that *Pērkonkrusts* were the majority of and force behind *Arājs Kommando* cannot be true: Arājs's war crimes trial established that of the 300 to 500 (100 to 200 core) members who comprised his unit during the Holocaust, perhaps four were former *Pērkonkrusts* members.

### The *Korporācijas*

As for the role of the *Korporācijas*, fraternities and memberships therein were extremely common. (My father was a member of an artists' *Korporācija*.) Arājs and his compatriots

14 Matthew Kott, *Fascism*, Volume 4 Issue 2 (2015), *Latvia's Pērkonkrusts Anti-German National Socialism in a Fascistogenic Milieu*

15 Ezergailis, *The Holocaust in Latvia*, 47

16 Wilhelm, *Die Truppe*, 534; Steimanis, *Latvian Jews*, 130. [Endnote 143 at Lumans, 448]

17 Felder, 47-60; Kaufmann, 56; Michelson, *I Survived Rumbuli*, 25, 51; Ezergailis, 47-49; Press, 68-72; Bassler, 107; Knop, 233-34. [Endnote 144 at Lumans, 448]

18 Felder, 47-60; Press, 44-45, 70-71; Kaufmann, 56; Bassler, 108. [Endnote 145 at Lumans, 448]

19 Lūmans, 238-239

20 Kott, *Latvia's Pērkonkrusts*

certainly reached out through their contacts to recruit those of similar anti-Semitic ilk. However, Ezergailis indicates the organization of *Arājs Kommando* proceeded more slowly than is typically portrayed, few *Korporācijas* members actually joined, and they were also the first to depart. Indeed, Ezergailis speculates that anti-Semitism aside, *Korporācijas* members were in no hurry to shoot Jews.<sup>21</sup> As with *Pērkonkrusts*, Lūmans overstates the organizational role of *Korporācijas* in the Holocaust.

### The Latvian Legion

Lūmans suggests at the outset of his discussion of the Legion that the Latvian military who returned to Latvia following the German occupation, including those who wound up in Legion command positions, were all committed “to the German cause,” albeit he does acknowledge that expediency may have played some role. The Legion did not fight “with” or “for the Nazis.” As his own father, Oļģerts, was a Legion member, I expected Lūmans to understand the Legionnaires’ sole objective was a free Latvia, rather than to depict them as Hitlerite loyalists:

Although the Legion formally applied Waffen-SS terminology for its ranks (for example, *Sturmabführer* instead of the army rank of major), unlike the true Waffen-SS, which prefaced its ranks with SS (for instance *SS Sturmabführer*), the Legion designated its ranks first with the prefix “Legion,” later with “Waffen” (for example, *Legion-Sturmabführer* and *Waffen-Sturmabführer*), both without the SS prefix. Apologists for the Legion later pointed to the omission of the SS from the rank as evidence that Latvians formally did not belong to the SS.

Among themselves, however, Latvians preferred to use their prewar army ranks instead of the SS equivalents. Furthermore Latvian officers and NCOs (called instructors) commanded their men in Latvian and ran their units as much as possible according to the procedures of the former Latvian army. Their ability to do so depended primarily on the inclinations of individual German superiors and the ubiquitous liaison officers. Some sympathized with the Latvians and condoned the Latvian mode of operation, while others prohibited any deviation from standard German ways. More often than not, Latvians had to defer to Germans. In common with the Waffen-SS, Latvian Legionnaires came under German military law and regulations, but unlike genuine SS men, Latvians did not receive Reich citizenship for their service; indeed, well into the occupation,

21 “Tad, kad pētīju antisemitisma un holokausta sākumu Latvijā, es nonācu strupceļā, kādēļ Arāja komandas organizēšana bija tik lēna un tanī pierakstījās tik maz korporāciju/Lettonia biedru. Un tad, kad korporeļi\* bija pierakstījušies, viņi arī bija pirmie, kuri piesita pēdu. Komandas organizēšanas tempu būtu varējuši arī noteikt Drošības policijas uzraugi, jo sākumā bija paredzēts pēc uzdevuma izpildīšanas komandu izformēt. Pirmajā fāzē vācieši varēja arī raizēties par apbruņotas nevācu vienības izaugšanu pašā Rīgas centrā. Bet varēja arī būt, ka, neskatoties uz antisemitismu, korporeļi tomēr nesteidzās šaut žīdus.”

“Then, as I was investigating the inception of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust in Latvia, I wound up at a dead end, why was the organization of Arājs’s command so slow, and why were there so few fraternity/Lettonia [the largest Latvian fraternity] members who signed on. And then, when the fraternity members had signed up, they were also the first to leave. It could be security police supervisors dictated their [Arājs’s command] pace of organization, as at the start it had been anticipated to disband them after completion of their assignment. In the first phase, the Germans might have also worried about the growth of an armed non-German unit in the very center of Rīga. But it could also be, that regardless of anti-Semitism, fraternity members nevertheless did not rush to shoot Jews.” [my translation]

at [https://jaunagaita.net/jg277/JG277\\_Gramatas.Ezergailis-par-Ruku.htm](https://jaunagaita.net/jg277/JG277_Gramatas.Ezergailis-par-Ruku.htm)

the Germans continued to regard Latvians as Soviet citizens. After considerable haggling in February 1944 Dankers persuaded the Germans to concede to the Latvians their own military court, the Legion Court, authorized to pronounce even death sentences, a dubious benefit at best. Latvian apologists also claim that, contrary to common Waffen-SS practice, the Latvians excluded National Socialist ideology from their training, and in contrast to the Waffen-SS, Legion units provided Christian chaplains for spiritual care. Nevertheless Latvians swore a personal oath to the Führer: “In God's name I swear unlimited loyalty in the fight against Bolshevism to the commander of the German military, Adolf Hitler, and as a brave soldier, will always be prepared to give my life for this oath.”<sup>22</sup>

Lūmans’s invocation of “apologists”—meaning, those who offer excuses for participation in what are thusly labeled to be immoral, if not criminal, actions and organizations—to describe those stating facts regarding the Latvian Legion is deeply troubling.

Despite Himmler organizationally heading the entire SS structure including foreign Waffen-SS units, Lūmans’s so-called “apologists” are far closer to reality: the Latvian Legion was operationally subordinated to Wehrmacht, not SS, command. Therefore, every Latvian unit would require a “ubiquitous” German liaison officer to coordinate with the Wehrmacht; as combat units, Latvians would structurally “defer” to Wehrmacht command. Latvia was occupied. There was no possibility of autonomous Latvian military action. The Nazis eventually conscripted every able-bodied man born after 1905.

Lūmans spuriously interjects Legionnaires were denied German citizenship in exchange for their service, as they were not “genuine SS men.” I can only surmise Lūmans believes Latvians had a genuine desire to get in bed with the Germans.

Regarding military court, Lūmans mocks the Latvians’ “dubious benefit” of pronouncing death sentences. He misses the purpose. The Latvians instituted their own pre-war Latvian Army rules of military tribunal under their jurisdiction. This was crucial, as the “Legion Court” presided over cases including alleged criminal acts against conscription—an offense for which the Germans summarily shot individuals.

Most tellingly, Lūmans invokes the overarching umbrella of Latvian guilt ostensibly nullifying any defense, regardless of facts, of the Legion: “Nevertheless, Latvians swore a personal oath to the Führer.”<sup>23</sup>

Legionnaires swore no oath to Nazism or German people or empire. The first few hundred inductees to the Legion did swear the Waffen-SS oath, an unconditional oath to the Führer:

I vow to you, Adolf Hitler, as Führer and chancellor of the German Reich, loyalty and bravery. I

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22 Lūmans, 290-291

23 Lūmans, 291



vow to you and to the leaders that you set for me, absolute allegiance until death. So help me God.

This caused such outrage that the oath was changed to only recognize German authority in combat at the Eastern Front against the Soviet Union:

In the name of God I solemnly swear, in the fight against Bolshevism, to unconditionally follow the orders of the head of the German military force, Adolf Hitler, and as a brave soldier to be always prepared to lay down my life in execution of this oath. [My own translation from Latvian, more literal than Lūmans's above.]

Lūmans invokes the swearing against the Legion as if it were a matter of choice. If someone is forcibly conscripted, their oath is offered under duress and irrelevant. If someone volunteers and swears an oath to obtain a rifle to exact revenge upon the power that murdered and ripped away to Siberia friends and family, their oath is irrelevant. Legionnaires wore their loyalty, a folded-up Latvian flag, under their uniforms.

### INDICTMENT OF THE LATVIAN LEGION

With the Soviets firmly in control of Latvia, the only hope for any Western sympathy for their plight and political recognition for their cause was to establish as distant a separation as possible from the SS and to characterize Latvian participation in the war primarily as a struggle against the Soviet return rather than as a pro-active campaign to help the Nazis implement their policies.

In refuting the charge of criminality virtually all apologists for the Legion have fallen back on the same argument tendered by postwar German defenders of the Waffen-SS, which also tried to distance itself from the criminal acts attributed to the SS as a whole: Those fighting in the field units of the Waffen-SS were only soldiers, no different from those of the Wehrmacht, the regular military. Similarly Latvian advocates have argued that the Latvian Legion and its Legionnaires fought exclusively as soldiers and had nothing to do with any SS-perpetrated atrocities or those ascribed to Latvian killing units such as the Arajs Commandos. The apologists, however, overlook several incriminating points. The units that formally became the Latvian Legion in January and February 1943, the Police Battalions, and before them the so-called Schuma battalions, engaged in precisely those criminal acts in which their advocates deny the Legion's complicity. Indeed the SS authorities in Latvia created these units for this very purpose, police duties that involved shooting political and racial enemies and fighting against the partisans. Apologists for the Legion — and this is also true for Waffen-SS defenders — tend to ignore the fact that some of the personnel in the combat units of the Legion at one time or another also served in units that directly and purposefully participated in acts of criminality. Likewise the Waffen-SS transferred personnel around, from frontline combat duty to other tasks that included guarding KZs or serving with the *Einsatzkommandos*. As for the Latvian Legion, most individual Legionnaires, at least the early volunteers, began their service in Latvian police units prior to fighting at the front. Even most of the Arajs Commandos eventually ended up at the front fighting as members of the Legion. Most incriminating, however, remains Himmler's inclusive, official definition of the Latvian Legion that covered all Latvian armed units operating under the auspices of the Waffen-SS and the Police. Even if one accepts that the Latvian 15th and 19th Divisions performed exclusively combat duties, and evidence contradicts this, other units that remained outside the two divisions — which Himmler nonetheless defined as being part of the Legion — guarded Latvia's KZs, exterminated partisans, and in general participated in activities subsequently judged as criminal.

The issue of criminality extends beyond the Legion's ties to the SS. As already noted, the Soviets regarded Latvians as citizens of the Soviet Union and therefore on legal grounds their fighting on the German side against the Soviet Union amounted to treacherous treason, even

though virtually one and all, with the exception of the Soviets and their sympathizers, have regarded the Soviet annexation of the Baltic States as an illegal act itself. Furthermore, the creation of the Legion violated the Hague Convention, which prohibited an occupying power from mobilizing conquered people into their armed forces. Therefore according to international law the Latvian Legion, created by the Germans, was an illegal organization.<sup>24</sup>

Lūmans's indictment is certainly sweeping.

### **German and Latvian Waffen-SS, their apologists all make the same excuse**

That the Latvian Legion served as Wehrmacht-subordinated combat units on the Eastern Front is established fact. Lūmans notes both Latvian defenders of the Latvian Legion Waffen-SS and German defenders of the elite Nazi Waffen-SS contend theirs were only “combat” units. However, the Latvian Legion never swore an oath to Nazism, were never Nazi party members. That the Germans freely transferred their Waffen-SS members into and out of Holocaust-involved units has no bearing on the Latvian Legion.

On the other hand, the German Waffen-SS had been the weaponized Nazi elite since 1934, growing into an armed force that even the Wehrmacht feared. Not to mention, that at least initially, recruiting requirements to the Nazi Waffen-SS included 20/20 eyesight and cavity-free teeth.

Lūmans's equivalency fails scrutiny: German “apologists” seek to distance their Waffen-SS from documented crimes committed by individuals while in service of the organization, whereas no one has ever been accused of a war crime while in service of the Latvian Legion—not even those, such as *Arājs Kommando*, whose crimes prior to their unit's inclusion in the Latvian Legion late in the war critics, including Lūmans, invoke to denounce the whole.

### **The Latvian Legion was formed and consisted of Holocaust criminals**

Lūmans fails to account for the amorphous relationship Latvian units under German command had with their title, command structure, and assigned responsibilities. The police battalions which participated in the Holocaust in Latvia and ranging westward to Belarus and beyond were divorced from the police battalions which served in combat on the Eastern Front under the Wehrmacht.

More than a few Latvians immediately volunteered to serve on the Eastern Front to pursue the Red Army, to insure the Soviets never returned. The Germans had disarmed the populace (under penalty of death) upon arrival—the only option for a rifle was a German one. It was these men already serving on the Eastern Front, not Holocaust perpetrators, who

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24 Lūmans, 387-388

eventually formed the core of the Latvian Legion. As Ezergailis documents<sup>25</sup>:

The overwhelming number of the *Schutzmannschaften*, those serving in the battalions, and most of those guarding the streets, had no involvement at all with the killing of the Jews.

Ezergailis footnotes his own text to note that German records clarify the difference between *Schutzmannschaften* and *Sicherheitsdienst* (“SD” collaborationist) units.

To state that every police battalion was involved in the Holocaust, that the Latvian Legion was initially composed of such war criminals and was therefore criminal at its root, is contrary to fact.

### **Himmler defined all Latvian forces including collaborators as the “Latvian Legion”**

Lūmans contends the Legion is culpable in the Holocaust because Himmler defined concentration camp guards and anti-partisan units to be part of the Legion. Per *Latvju Enciklopedija* (1952), unattributed English translation in Central Intelligence Agency files:

Himmler, in an order issued on 24 May 1943, specified that the term “Latvian Legion” was to be a comprehensive denomination for all Latvian units serving in the Waffen SS and police forces. Therefore, Latvian battalions which previously had been called gendarmerie, were renamed Latvian Police Battalions. The formation and training of these battalions since 1942 was entrusted to Lt.-Col. R. Osis, whose chief of staff until November of 1942 was Lt.-Col. K. Lobe. The volunteers had to sign a contract for one year of service.

Himmler included collaborators such as concentration camp guards in the German Waffen-SS from the very start of Hitler’s extermination of the Jews. His “definition” is neither surprising nor reflective of the operational structure of Latvian SD collaborators versus Waffen-SS combat units under Wehrmacht command.

Lūmans’s invocation of Himmler’s definition to declare the “Legion” criminal is another example of visiting the crimes of the guilty upon the innocent. This is no different from declaring the Legion criminal because collaborator units were joined to it as combat units late in the war.

### **Legionnaires were Soviet traitors**

The Republic of Latvia was the sole legitimate sovereign power over Latvian territory. To fight against either Nazis or Bolsheviks could only be an act of patriotism. The question is one of motivation. Were Latvians mobilized by either of the occupiers fighting for the ideals and goals of “their” side? Against the sovereign Latvian Republic? Or were they simply fighting against one invader, hoping to defeat them and then turn on the other— “their” — side in a replay of the War of Independence? The historical DNA of the Latvian Republic

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25 Ezergailis, *The Holocaust in Latvia*, 44

dictates the latter.

Lūmans correctly asserts that Soviet authorities considered all citizens of the pre-war Latvian Republic to be Soviet citizens (under Soviet law) following the annexation of Latvia. To fight against the USSR was treason in the eyes of the Kremlin. But for Lūmans to contemplate Legionnaires committed treason against the USSR is patently absurd. No special status was bestowed upon the USSR because it invaded first.

*I wonder how Lūmans might have felt if, as he was growing up, striving to become “American,” the authorities had arrived one pre-dawn morning and extradited his parents to the USSR to stand trial for treason—where they were then convicted in a public show trial and deported to the GULAG, or shot, as an example to others. Defection—a crime every post-war Latvian refugee was guilty of under Soviet law—was equally deemed an act of treason.*

### **Hitler’s mobilization of Latvians was illegal**

True. However, this has no bearing on whether the Legion or Legionnaires were criminal.

### **In summary, guilt by convolution**

Continuing Lūmans’s passage above:

The fact that one could conceivably levy three separate indictments of criminality against the Legion and its members — association with the SS, treason against the Soviet Union, and violation of international law — impinges on yet another critical issue, the nature of service in the Legion. If on one hand its members were compelled to join, then one could argue that the charge of criminality against individual members cannot be sustained. If, on the other hand, the soldiers of the Legion joined on their own volition as volunteers, then the criminality charge could justifiably apply.<sup>26</sup>

There is no criminality to be discerned here, only tendentious accusations of guilt by association, treason against the Soviet Union, and criminal volunteerism—if not conscripted—to insure Soviet occupiers never return.

### **THE CASE OF VOLDEMĀRS VEISS**

Lūmans’s repetition of the narrative greatly overstating the prominence of the *Pērkonkrusts* and *Korporācijas* in forming *Arājs Kommando* prompted the search for a specific example to deconstruct, leading to Lūmans’s indictment of Voldemārs Veiss as a Holocaust collaborator. The most discouraging aspect is not that his charge of Holocaust criminality—including an alleged radio address summoning collaborators the first day of the Nazi occupation of Rīga—is false, but that he directly cites Soviet propaganda for substantiation:

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26 Lūmans, 387-388

Stahlecker, with the help of Rikards and others, also recruited local Latvians to do his bidding, some described as “savage Jew haters.”<sup>27</sup> Among Stahlecker's local Latvian recruits were Lt. Col. Voldemars Veiss and Viktors Arajs. With Stahlecker's blessing, on July 1 Veiss quickly organized an auxiliary police unit of some 400 Latvians to seek out, apprehend and destroy the “enemy,” primarily communists and Jews. Although it is unclear whether he did so before or after his meeting with Stahlecker, on July 1 Veiss broadcast a call for Latvian volunteers over Riga radio to enlist with his “auxiliary police” and rid Latvia of traitors, including Soviet functionaries, communists, and Jews.<sup>28</sup>

Aware of Plensners's and Deglavs's ties with the Wehrmacht, and probably suspicious of their intention to use the self-defense units as a step toward resurrecting a Latvian military, Stahlecker preempted their efforts on July 7 by placing [Voldemārs] Veiss in charge of organizing self-defense forces around Riga — under SS authority. Veiss and his sidekick, Lt. Col. Roberts Osis, formed these units as auxiliary police, similar to Arajs's group. ... On [July 20] Stahlecker also ordered Veiss to create an additional armed formation of 500 men, named the Recruiting Reserve, divided into five companies that became the first Latvian “military” units in the war.<sup>29</sup>

But before Veiss and his men commenced military activities, they participated in the “cleansing” operations in and around Riga, which included the shooting of communists, political enemies, and Jews. Veiss's subsequent accomplishments as an undeniably courageous, skillful, and popular combat officer cannot erase his earlier record as a killer working for the SS.<sup>30</sup>

### Similar to Arajs's group

Voldemārs Veiss had been posted as the military attaché to Estonia (formerly also including Finland<sup>31</sup>) when the first Soviet invasion came. Relieved of his post, Veiss had returned to Latvia, subsequently also relieved of his army commission. He had relocated to Rīga in March, 1941.

As the Russians were still retreating, Veiss organized volunteers to pursue and intercept retreating Red Army. Veiss was appointed to head up an *Ordnungs-Hilfspolizei Riga* unit; the *Hilfspolizei* reported to Voldemārs Skaistlauks, a Latvian, under Rīga Commandant Wilhelm Ullersperger of the Wehrmacht. As Lūmans documents, Veiss's unit shortly thereafter transitioned to act as a recruiting reserve, *Rekrutierungsreserve*, of some 500 men in five separate companies serving at the Eastern Front. Organizationally, Veiss's unit transitioned to the *Selbstschutz*, later *Schutzmannschaften*—but was never involved in the Holocaust.

Lūmans appears to invoke so-called “sidekick” Roberts Osis to implicate Veiss based on Osis's subsequent—and completely unrelated to Veiss—participation in the Holocaust. Veiss's unit was not “similar” to *Arājs Kommando*. At Vilis Hāzners's deportation trial, a since-retired U.S. intelligence expert testified that Veiss's “Annas Street headquarters had not

27 Bobe, [*The Jews in Latvia*], 73-74; Felder, 57-60 [Endnote 135 at Lūmans, 447]

28 Lūmans, 237

29 Lūmans, 266

30 Lūmans, 287-288

31 Lūmans mentions Finland only.

been involved in any atrocities and was not connected with the Riga police headquarters.”<sup>32</sup>

### **To seek out, apprehend and destroy the “enemy,” primarily communists and Jews**

Vilis Hāzners recounts his experience under Veiss in his memoir. Having just recovered from escaping Soviet incarceration as a result of the Soviet retreat, Hāzners went to find out in what manner he could assist in apprehending the retreating Red Army. He quickly tracked down his old army friend, Veiss, who was organizing volunteers. Veiss dispatched Hāzners, leading a group of about 200 men, to Mangaļsala, a suburb downriver from Rīga where the Red Army were attempting to escape west to east from Bolderāja across the Daugava river in small boats. Hāzners and his men simply waited until the Russians got close to the river bank, then surprised them, shouting “Hands up!”, had them toss their weapons into the river, and took them into custody. Hāzners felt sorry for them, most were still teenagers—and he was thankful that not a single life was lost on either side.

The “enemy” Veiss’s officers and men sought to apprehend were Soviet forces, not their fellow Latvian citizens. Hāzners went on to serve as Veiss’s adjutant.

### **On July 1 Veiss broadcast a call for Latvian volunteers**

Ezergailis’s research reveals Veiss’s alleged broadcast over Rīga radio calling for volunteers to “rid Latvia of traitors, including Soviet functionaries, communists, and Jews” took place only in Soviet propaganda.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, this accusation appears repeatedly in scholarly works, including Andrej Angrick’s and Peter Klein’s well regarded *The “Final Solution” in Riga* (2011). They provide no citation for Veiss’s address, nor for other allegations of Latvian complicity in the Holocaust. Their predisposition to paint the locals as savages,<sup>34</sup> echoing propaganda, mars an otherwise useful work.<sup>35</sup>

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32 Quotation is from the post-trial judicial review, witness testimony cited to transcript pp. 1311, 1312. Regarding the witness, from the review:

“A very important witness on the respondent's behalf was Mr. Paul Hartman. Mr. Hartman served in the United States army during World War II and later became a civilian employee of the United States government. During the war he was in the counter-intelligence corps and became an investigator for the Displaced Persons Commission working out of the British zone headquarters (Tr. p. 1260-1262). Afterwards, he worked for the Central Intelligence Agency and became an expert on the Baltic states, particularly Latvia. He is fluent in Latvian as well as German and he is presently retired. He testified that while working for the Displaced Persons Commission as an investigator he was assigned to investigate the Latvian Legion because at that time there was uncertainty about that organization's character (Tr. p. 1262).”

33 viz., for example, Ezergailis, *Shifting interpretations of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe*, “Paulis Ducmanis”, at <https://haolusa.org/index.php?en/main-010-shiftinginterpretations.ssi>

34 viz. Ezergailis’s review of the German original, *Die “Endlösung” in Riga: Ausbeutung und Vernichtung 1941-1944* (2007), at [https://haolusa.org/index.php?en/German/review-100-AngrickKlein\\_DieEnlosung.wiki](https://haolusa.org/index.php?en/German/review-100-AngrickKlein_DieEnlosung.wiki)

For his own instantiation of the bogus radio address accusation, Lūmans cites multiple sources: “*Latviesu Tautas Cīņa, 195; Kaufmann, 49; Steimanis, Latvian Jews, 129-130; Browning, Origins of the Final Solution, 310-311.*”<sup>36</sup>

*Lūmans’s source: Latviešu Tautas Cīņa*

*Latviešu Tautas Cīņa*, the “Struggle of the Latvian People,” more fully, *Latviešu tautas cīņa Lielajā Tēvijas Karā (1941 -1945)*—“The Struggle of the Latvian People in the Great Patriotic War”, was published by the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic Academy of Sciences (1966) at the height of the Soviet disinformation campaign against Latvian émigré leadership. Lūmans’s citation leads to the following extended text regarding Veiss:

On 1 July 1944, Corporal-Lieutenant V Veiss, formerly Latvia’s military attache in Estonia, turned up at Rīga radio, and ordered the announcer to read an appeal, an invitation to take up the extermination of the “domestic enemy.” “Domestic enemy” was to be understood as Soviet activists, Communists and their family members, anti-fascists, as well as all Jews regardless of their political affiliations. Veiss, together with a number of other bourgeoisie Latvia’s most senior officers, together with the leaders of the fascist organization “Pērkonkrusts” organized armed fascist Latvian bands. Initially, they began by spying on and attempting to catch Communists and Komsomol members, Soviet activists and foremost workers, MOPR [*Международная организация помощи борцам революции*, International Red Aid] members, et al., not forgetting, obviously, observant Jews, at whose expense they could enrich themselves without [threat of] punishment.

The bandits broke into the apartments of peaceful occupants, robbed the premises, and beat up and imprisoned the people. Prisoners were incarcerated at the Rīga Prefecture or the “Pērkonkrusts” main quarters at Valdemāra Street Nr. 19, where they were mercilessly tormented and

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“It is in the first part of the book, however, specifically in the chapter “From Pogroms to the Establishing the Ghetto,” when Angrick and Klein write about the natives, that the authors lose their footing, become restrictive in their selection of sources, and rely on folklore and also on glosses of Nazi propaganda. They present the natives as savages, subject to lower appetites, and strive to argue that Latvians were more violent and less restrained than their German superiors. Specifically my objections concern their presentation of native anti-Semitism, nationalism, and revenge, a concept that was dear to Hitlerites and one Angrick and Klein seem compelled to use when describing the behavior of the natives. The authors without debating alternative evidence argue that the Latvians were ready to kill Jews immediately upon the German occupation without any orders or even prompting from the Germans. All of this is recycled folklore that has been examined by historians and also adjudicated [disproven] in the courts of Germany, the United States, and Canada.”

35 *The “Final Solution” in Riga* was originally envisioned and commissioned by the Society of Survivors of the Riga Ghetto to be based on materials and interviews provided by its members and others. The Society engaged Prof. Henry Huttenbach of City College to produce the book, starting with the interview of over 100 individuals. Huttenbach eventually created an archive, and created and submitted a draft manuscript in 1984. Discussions of revisions lasted into 1985. Further difficulties over rights and content eventually led to a court judgement in 1988 that neither the professor nor Society could publish any of the professor’s work product without the agreement of both parties. Noted German historian Wolfgang Scheffler was next hired in 1992 to write the book within 28 months based on the tapes and documents previously collected. After three years and no book, the Society sued Scheffler in 1995; in 1997 he returned the money he was paid (\$100,000, plus legal fees) but denied having any materials. After another lawsuit, Scheffler returned tapes and documents, but allegedly not all. The book was finally completed by Angrick and Klein, associates of Scheffler, both historians and researchers affiliated with the Hamburg Foundation for the Promotion of Science and Culture, which also provided financial support for research to complete the project.

36 Endnote 136 at Lūmans, 447

tortured. The former police and corporation member V. Arājs' "combat group" distinguished itself with exceptional atrocities. Every night this group's members brought their sacrifices to the Biķernieki Forest to be shot. Already, during the night from 1. to 2. July the first mass grave of peaceful citizens was created here. [Cited to B. Arklāns et al. *Viņi bez maskas* ("Those Unmasked"). Rīga, 1966, page 50; later directed against the emigre community as "*Politiskie bēgļi bez maskas*, "Political Refugees" Unmasked, published in English] As a reward for instituting the Hitlerite "New Order" Arājs received the rank of major and decoration.

The imprisoned were also locked up in Rīga's jails: the men – in the Rīga Central Prison, the women – in Brasas Prison [using the current name, the prison was closed 1 April 2019]. Soon mass extermination actions of Soviet citizens commenced in these prisons. All these "actions" were hurried along by those who had become the leaders of the Latvian police: V. Veiss, his adjutant V. Hāzners (later chief of police for Abrene county), the Prefect of Rīga – R. Štiglicis, the former head of the Ulmanis Political Administration agency [Ministry of the Interior] department, who during the years of bourgeois Latvia was already working for the German intelligence service, Lieutenant Colonel Osis, Lobe, and other officers.<sup>37</sup>

*Latviešu Tautas Cīņa's source: Viņi bez maskas*

*Viņi bez maskas*, which *Latviešu Tautas Cīņa* cites above, is a Soviet propaganda publication. The purported Veiss radio address appears as follows (here, taken from "*Politiskie bēgļi bez maskas*):

Colonel Voldemārs Veiss, who in the first day of the occupation of Rīga, with the assistance of Rīga radio, exhorted that fascist terror must commence immediately—the slaughter of former employees of the Soviet government and Jews, became O. Danker's... [my translation]

Soviet propaganda promulgates Soviet propaganda. The Veiss lie originated in *Daugavas Vanagi—Who Are They?*, first published for domestic Latvian consumption (*Kas ir Daugavas Vanagi?*, 1961), then in English (1963). Ezergailis himself admits to initially being taken in by this masterwork of propaganda.

During the course of his research Ezergailis ultimately became acquainted in Latvia with its author, Paulis Ducmanis—even visiting with him at his home. Ducmanis, who had also worked as a propagandist for the Nazi occupiers, provided Ezergailis with a singular and unique insight into the inner workings of the organized anti-Latvian propaganda machine—an entire Soviet government department—dedicated to demonizing and discrediting Latvian émigré leadership as war criminals. He confirmed *Daugavas Vanagi—Who Are They?* was a book of lies concocted, by its naming of names, to maximize believability.

Ducmanis bequeathed Ezergailis his personal list of duped Holocaust scholars.

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37 *Cīņa*, at 195-196, my translation; note Veiss and Hāzners are both falsely depicted as responsible for exterminating Jews; Hāzners was the post-war head of the Latvian soldiers' welfare organization, *Daugavas Vanagi*, and an active and ardent anti-Communist. Until the publication of *Daugavas Vanagi—Who Are They?* (in English), Hāzners had also broadcast for Radio Free Europe and had been retained by the CIA to gather and organize intelligence from Soviet-occupied Latvia (news, publications, interviews, etc.). Hāzners was a priority target. Veiss was mortally wounded in combat on the Eastern Front and died in April, 1944.



*Lūmans's source: Kaufmann*

The day of transition, 30 June, was very quiet. All one could see was individual Red Army soldiers who had been left behind. There were no people on the streets, only tanks on various street corners, whose task was to cover the Red Army's retreat. In the meantime, the Latvians prepared to greet the enemy. The red-and-white Latvian flag was brought out of storage; people also had flags bearing the swastika ready. The Pērkonkrusts organization was already working out the plans for our destruction, having no doubt that the enemy would approve of them.

On 1 July the German army forced its way into the city. The Latvians greeted the enemy with flowers, wearing their Sunday best. All the houses were decorated and ornamented with flags. The radio broadcast the old Latvian national hymn, “*Dievs Svētī Latviju*” (God Bless Latvia), and also the Horst Wessel song [*Horst-Wessel-Lied*, the Nazi anthem]. All of this made a very strong impression on the Latvians, and they were convinced that now a new era of independence would begin. But all this was only a well-prepared prelude on the part of the Germans. Power was never officially handed over to the Latvians; moreover, the playing of the Latvian hymn was never again permitted. On the same day, 1 July 1941, the Latvians announced on the radio that all nationalistic Latvians should register immediately for the struggle against the internal enemy (the Jews). The gathering point for this *Aktion* was the headquarters of the Aizsargi (Guards). This was the home of the professional associations. There, weapons and red-and-white armbands were distributed to everyone who registered, without exception. Every group was assigned a district that it was supposed to “deal with”. The call to nationalistic Latvians is associated with the name of the Latvian Captain Weiß.<sup>38</sup>

Ezergailis notes, “The first [survivor account] is Max Kaufmann's *Die Vernichtung der Juden Lettlands*, published in 1947. One of the early Holocaust memoirs, it vividly brought forth the travails and cruelties that the Jews of Latvia suffered during the Nazi occupation. It is also a sweeping indictment of the Latvians. The basic premise of the book is that the Latvians were rejoicing over the killing of the Jews.”<sup>39</sup>

That premise would have certainly been fueled by the carefully pre-planned and meticulously executed German effort to paint the “Germanless” Holocaust—including “news” reports “smuggled” to the West via Nazi operatives in Sweden.

As with other survivor accounts, events outside one's direct personal experience are by necessity hearsay. Vilis Hāznērs recounts going to the center of Rīga as the Germans were still pursuing the retreating Russians. He was surprised to see Nazi flags already hung from apartment windows. There are two possible explanations, one that Latvians were Nazi sympathizers and had their Nazi swastika flags at the ready (Kaufmann's). The other, eminently more plausible, is that the Germans brought flags with them to stage their propaganda show documenting the “liberation” of Latvia.

As Ezergailis documents, Ducmanis in writing *Daugavas Vanagi – Who Are They?* in-

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38 Kaufmann, 35-36, 2010 English edition

39 Ezergailis, *The Holocaust in Latvia*, 4

cluded among his sources Kaufmann's memoir and Soviet show trial "evidence."<sup>40</sup> Hearsay and fabrication served Ducmanis's propagandistic purposes equally well. As moving as Kaufmann's memoir is speaking of his personal experience, one should not consider it an accurate account of Latvian attitudes or actions.

*Lūmans's source: Steinmanis*

An online search of Steinmanis's text<sup>41</sup> found no mention of Veiss.

*Lūmans's source: Browning*

Browning does not mention Veiss.

### **Subsequent accomplishments cannot erase Veiss's record as a killer**

Following his false condemnation of Veiss, Lūmans echoes the baseless accusation anti-Nazism activists invoke to denounce the annual Latvian Legion procession ("march") and commemoration, that Latvians turn a blind eye to the war crimes of so-called freedom fighters because they battled against the Bolsheviks.

### **"Savage Jew-haters"**

While the implication is clear, Lūmans does not apply the description directly to Veiss; nevertheless, his invoking the meme of Latvians and other eastern Europeans as "savages" demands an examination of his sources: Bobe and Felder.

Lūmans's quote appears in Bobe's text, here in full context:

The Nazis found dedicated assistants for their murderous activities in the Latvian population. In spite of the common sufferings of the Latvians and the Jews under the German Barons in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, and the common front they had established during the revolutionary years at the beginning of the Twentieth Century against the Tsarist regime, there were savage Jew-haters among the Latvians who revealed themselves under the Nazis.

Latvia was regarded as a place where "there were convenient conditions for extermination", according to the evidence of the Chief of the Gestapo in that country [Jeckeln].

Thus, Bobe's contention of savage Latvian Jew-haters stems from Jeckeln's contention it was the Latvians themselves who made their homeland a place conducive to genocide—except Jeckeln never said anything about Latvia or Latvians in that regard. That "evidence of the Chief of the Gestapo in that country" was entirely Ducmanis's fiction.

Felder discusses the relationship of former Pērkonkrusts to SD collaborators, but makes no mention of "savages" or "Jew-haters."

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40 *Symposium of the Commission of the Historians of Latvia*, Volume 18, "Six Versions of the Holocaust in Latvia", pages 65 and following

41 At Google Books, URL: <https://books.google.com/books?id=4bRtAAAAMAAJ>

### THE INFILTRATION OF PROPAGANDA

An often-repeated theme of the Holocaust in occupied Latvia is that the Latvians were, as a people, passionately anti-Semitic, and thus among the most brutal, most enthusiastic, of Hitler's executioners. This "portrait" is drawn in part from the "three truths" Freidrich Jeckeln is alleged to have uttered at his trial:

- that Latvians killed a large, indeterminable number of Jews before the Germans arrived in Latvia;
- that Latvians had more nerve for killing Jews than the Germans; and
- that Jews were brought to Latvia from the West "because the Latvians had created the proper conditions for it."

Trial records<sup>42</sup> prove Jeckeln said not a word about the Latvians—his "statements" all originated in *Daugavas Vanagi—Who Are They?* Lūmans, however, perpetuates Jeckeln's alleged characterizations via the sources he cites:

Contrary to Stahlecker's laments that Latvians declined the roles of "willing executioners,"... [m]any contemporary witnesses as well as subsequent commentators confirm that Latvians did not wait for the Germans to appear before dealing with the Jews, but began their reprisals as soon as the Soviets withdrew. According to these testimonies vigilante-like bands, organized by the Latvians themselves, not by the Germans, had the bloody process well underway when the Germans arrived.<sup>43 44</sup>

Jeckeln, who believed in leading by example, supervised the entire [Rumbula massacre] operation in person. He later applauded the participating Latvians for having "strong nerves for executions of this sort."<sup>45 46</sup>

"Latvia was a suitable place for murder."<sup>47 48</sup>

The challenge for the historian is to disentangle propaganda and hearsay from fact. This task is urgent: the more time passes, the more entrenched appears to be the portrayal of the locals as the brutal, and true, perpetrators of a "Germanless" Holocaust in Eastern Europe.<sup>49</sup> Accusations of unimaginable barbarity which would be dismissed as preposterous if made

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42 Freidrich Jeckeln's trial took place in Rīga, from 26 January 1946 to 3 February 1946

43 Lūmans, 234-235

44 Bassler, 107-08; Merchant, 59-60; Myllyniemi, *The Reformation of the Balts Lander*, 77; Press, 54; Yahil, 301. [Endnote 124 at Lūmans, 447]

45 Lūmans, 250

46 Schneider, *Journey into Terror*, 14; Ezergailis, *The Holocaust in Latvia*, 254. [Endnote 204 at Lūmans, 451]; N.B., Ezergailis does not quote Jeckeln.

47 Lūmans, 235

48 Kaufman, 67-68; Michelson, 104. [Endnote 125 at Lūmans, 447]

49 viz. the examples herein of Gertrude Schneider perpetuating propaganda and amplifying accusations against Latvians.

against “western” Europeans are accepted as gospel; seemingly, the more horrific, the more believable.<sup>50</sup> Where Nazi and Soviet records are concerned, propaganda is accepted as truth and contradicting facts discounted or dismissed as outliers to the “known” narrative.

Scholarly reputation does not preclude the need for skepticism regarding sources and the origin of their contentions regarding the Holocaust. For example, mentioned in Lūmans’s *Bibliographic Essay* section:

### **Raul Hilberg**

Lūmans rightfully describes Hilberg’s three-volume magnum opus, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, as pioneering and a classic.<sup>51</sup> Yet, regarding the Rumbula massacre, the single largest organized slaughter of Jews in the Baltic states—where Germans did all the industrialized killing, Hilberg cites Ducmanis:

On the involvement of Latvian auxiliaries in the [Rumbula] massacre, see Avotins, J. Dzirkalis, and V. Petersons, *Daugavas Vanagi—Who Are They?* (Riga, 1963), pp. 22-24.

And what was that involvement? Ducmanis’s tome which placed Latvians at the epicenter of the carnage and quoted Jeckeln regarding their leading role:

It is interesting to note that after the slaughter, though the actual execution had been carried out by Latvians, the mass grave was guarded by Germans. When questioned about this at the Military Tribunal, obergruppenführer Jeckeln replied: “The Latvians had stronger nerves for such executions!”<sup>52</sup>

Ezergailis has unequivocally documented the executioners were a dozen of Jeckeln’s hand-picked men, drivers and guards in his retinue—only Germans were entrusted with automatic weapons.

Closing the loop, the Department of Justice (DOJ) employed Hilberg as an expert witness in deportation proceedings against Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians. The DOJ also entered *Daugavas Vanagi—Who Are They?*, “*Political Refugees*” *Unmasked*, and other

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50 For example, accounts describing the smashing of babies’ heads against street curbs, walls, and tree trunks are accepted as a truth. For example:

“The Latvian and Lithuanian auxiliaries attached to the Einsatzgruppe were the most savage assailants, infinitely worse than the Germans. Witnesses said that these sadists delighted in tearing away infants clinging to their mothers’ protective bosoms, then swinging the babies by the legs to smash their heads against the nearest wall, within sight of the insanely distraught, screaming mothers.”

Rubin Katz, *Gone to Pitchipoi*, Academic Studies Press. (2012), 74

Compare to this wording in a social media posting commenting on a news article (2017):

“The Latvians and Lithuanians delighted in smashing babies heads against brick walls, holding the baby up by its legs in front of the insanely distraught mother...”

at <https://worldisraelnews.com/latvian-march-honors-former-nazis/>

51 Lūmans, 488

52 *Daugavas Vanagi—Who Are They?*, 23-24

propaganda into evidence against Vilis Hāzners at his deportation trial; DOJ attorneys Martin Mendelsohn and Robert Boylan even intentionally misquoted Nuremberg trial evidence in their post-trial brief to paint a “Germanless” Holocaust of Latvians slaughtering Jews before the Nazi arrival.<sup>53</sup>

### Gertrude Schneider

Among the many illuminating eyewitness accounts stand out ... Gertrude Schneider's works, including *Journey into Terror: The Story of the Riga Ghetto*; *Muted Voices, Jewish Survivors of Latvia Remember*; and *Unfinished Road: Jewish Survivors of Latvia Look Back*.<sup>54</sup>

Gertrude Schneider's 1971 trip to Latvia marked the penetration of “Latvians are Nazis” propaganda into the mainstream. Showered by the KGB with Soviet-manufactured materials—books, brochures, and transcripts of fabricated show trials—purporting the U.S. had become a den of Latvian Nazi collaborators and Holocaust perpetrators, Schneider, herself a Holocaust survivor of the Rīga ghetto, returned home appalled and energized to root out the war criminals Soviet authorities had identified to her.

Schneider's gathering of Rīga ghetto memories formed the basis of her 1973 doctoral thesis: *The Riga Ghetto, 1941–1943*, in which she relied heavily upon on the propaganda she had received for accounts of the Holocaust at the ghetto gates and beyond. *Daugavas Vanagi—Who Are They?* featured prominently. Her subsequent *Journey into Terror* (1979) retained, even amplified, Ducmanis's fabricated allegations present in her thesis; meanwhile, all but one of her citations to *Daugavas Vanagi—Who Are They?* were removed.

Unfortunately, Schneider's promulgation of Soviet propaganda continues to persist in Holocaust scholarship.<sup>55</sup>

53 viz. DOJ OSI “Government's [Hāzners] Post Trial Brief” page 8, “Even before the arrival of the German Einsatzkommandos, 400 Jews had been killed in pogroms.” cited to: “Operational Situation Report No. 24, p. 6 ... The Nurnberg Trial, 6 F.R.D. at 118.” However, that report reads: “400 Jews were killed during pogroms in Riga, since the arrival of EK 2.” Two weeks into the occupation, the same report complained of Latvian indifference (“passivity”) in response to Nazi attempts to incite anti-Semitism.

54 Lūmans, 490

55 viz., for example, Gilbert, Martin. *Never Again: A History of the Holocaust* (2015), account by Gertrude Schneider, a deportee from Vienna to Riga:

“The killings at Rumbula were supervised by SS Major Rudolf Lange, who had a pre-war German university degree as a Doctor of Jurisprudence. He and members of his SS killing squad provided the expert knowledge of procedure; the actual shooting was done by local Latvian SS troops. After the war, the senior SS officer in Riga, SS General Friedrich Jeckeln, praised the Latvians for their ‘strong nerves for executions of this sort’—shooting thousands of human beings in such a way that they fell from the edge of the pit to which they had been driven, directly on to the bodies below.”

The narrative regarding the Germans providing Latvians with the “expert knowledge of procedure” is Schneider's embellishment of Ducmanis's lie as compared to his version in *Daugavas Vanagi—Who Are They?*

### “IF THE SHOE FITS” (THE NARRATIVE)

Ultimately, the issue with Lūmans’s portrayal of the Holocaust and alleged Latvian collaborators and actions is that he demonstrably fails to validate sources:

Latvians assisted in the German effort to incite other Latvians to anti-Jewish action without much if any prodding from the Germans. As early as July 1941 the Riga press, controlled by *Perkonkrusts* members and sympathizers from the ultranationalistic camp, promoted hatred toward Jews in articles such as, “The Jew — Source of Our Destruction.” This and other equally vitriolic anti-Semitic diatribes associated the Jews with the Soviet reign of terror: “Because Jews had sought to destroy the Latvian nation, they could not be permitted to survive as a national or a cultural entity, and therefore all Jews would have to die.”<sup>56</sup>

The article in question, in *Tēvija*, actually reads:

“He [the Jew] will earn [his] bread in the same manner as have our laborers. The sins of the Jews are overly grievous: they wished to annihilate our nation, therefore they must die as a cultural nation.”<sup>57</sup>

That is, Judaism can no longer exist as a culture; Jews must be assimilated into the secular working class. While grossly anti-Semitic, the passage does not call for their extermination. The text Lūmans presents as a quotation from the article is, instead, Gertrude Schneider’s falsified representation of the article.<sup>58</sup>

Nor was there a Latvian-controlled Rīga press. The notion Latvians were responsible for anything themselves was cornerstone of the Nazi narrative.<sup>59</sup> A single-sided broadsheet, *Brīvā zeme* (Free Country) appeared July 1, 1941, the day the Germans occupied Rīga. Stahlecker<sup>60</sup> shut it down and published the four-page *Tēvija* (Fatherland)—that same day. The Nazis hired and fired *Tēvija* editors at will.

56 Schneider, *Journey into Terror*, 11; Waite, 117; Dribins, *Ebreji Latvija*, 30, 370; Strods, *Zem Melnbruna Zobena*, 90; Misiunas and Taagepera, 60; Felder, 49-58. [Endnote 127 at Lūmans, 447]

57 “Žīds—mūsu iznīcinātājs,” my translation, *Tēvija* No. 10, July 11, 1941, page 1

58 Gertrude Schneider’s thesis represents the passage accurately, that having been translated properly in *Daugavas Vanagi—Who Are They?* Her subsequent *Journey into Terror* misrepresents the article in *Tēvija* as calling for the extermination of Jews.

59 The notion of Latvian responsibility and control originated with the Nazi occupiers. As Ezergailis documents:

“Markers of the German plan to mislead the world opinion, for example, are evident in the decisions at the Nazi Party conference of 29 May 1941; the dispatch of photographers and cinema crews in Eastern Europe to film and photograph German-orchestrated massacres; the injection as a part of the occupation vocabulary words (*self-defense*, *self-cleansing*, *self-administration*, *help-willing*, *voluntary*) whose meanings were the opposite of their conventional meaning; ordering their administrative cadres to write reports and memoranda claiming that it was the Latvians and not the Germans who ordered the murder of Jews; and proclaiming to the world that the Latvian motive was revenge.”

*Who Knew What and When? and Folklore*, “Roots of Holocaust Folklore” at <https://haolusa.org/index.php?en/main-650-whoknew.ssi>

60 Walter Stahlecker was head of *Einsatzgruppe A*, tasked with conducting actions in the rear of *Heeresgruppe Nord* (Army Group North), that is, across the Baltics, Belarus, and north-eastern Russia; those “actions” included the extermination of Jews, Roma, and the institutionalized mentally ill.

Finally, the Germans themselves documented, and Ezergailis corroborated in his seminal research, that their considerable efforts to stoke anti-Semitism among the Latvians failed. Yet, as with Lūmans, contradictory accounts persist that Latvians needed little to no stoking from the Germans—indeed, *self-provoked*—to attack and murder their centuries-old Jewish neighbors.

#### ASSESSMENT

I commend Lūmans's forthrightness in relating his path to this work and his effort to dispel the myths of his past. Nevertheless, Lūmans does a disservice to the reader on several counts.

First, Lūmans fails to discriminate Nazi and Soviet propaganda—even cites it.<sup>61</sup> Each power, for its own purposes, put Latvians at the forefront of the Holocaust in Latvia: the Nazis to paint the myth of the “Germanless” Holocaust, the Soviets to smear Latvian émigré leadership as war criminals.

Lūmans himself has become part of this propaganda mill, viz. Richard Rashke in his *Useful Enemies: John Demjanjuk and America's Open-Door Policy for Nazi War Criminals* (2013):

According to Lumans, two of the most rabid Latvian Nazi collaborators were Voldemars Veiss, a lieutenant colonel in the Latvian national army, and Viktors Arajs, a Latvian policeman. Veiss, who was probably an ethnic German (*Volksdeutsche*), organized an initial auxiliary police unit of about four hundred Latvian volunteers to find and execute communists and Jews. Arajs organized a similar unit of two to three hundred thugs known as “Arajs' Boys.” Both leaders took out newspaper ads seeking volunteers “to participate in the cleansing of our country of destructive elements.”

Rashke presents Veiss as a “rabid” *Volksdeutsche* Holocaust collaborator—a German serving Germans, demonstrating how swiftly disinformation compounds and multiplies. He repeats Lūmans's false allegations Veiss's unit murdered Jews and that, as for Arājs, a notice appeared (in *Tēvija*) on behalf of Veiss seeking collaborators. The only such notice was for *Arājs Kommando* per the reporting address of 19 Valdemāra street.<sup>62</sup>

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61 By my count, Lūmans cites *Latviešu tautas cīņa Lielajā Tēvijas Karā (1941 -1945)*—“*The Struggle of the Latvian People in the Great Patriotic War*” one hundred and seventy nine (179) times. He includes it in his list of essential works for the “Soviet version of events” and recommends it for its rich statistical information, et al. I question the veracity of any such information. In my experience, “version” in Soviet historiography is as likely to denote a total fabrication of facts as a viewpoint regarding established facts. N.B., *Latviešu tautas cīņa* cites both Soviet and Nazi (e.g., *Tēvija*) propaganda as sources.

*Latviešu tautas cīņa* is digitized at the Latvian National Library: <https://dom.lndb.lv/data/obj/412993.html>

62 The relevant passage in Lūmans, 237: “Arajs, as did Veiss, turned to the media for soliciting recruits and issued a plea in the semi-official newspaper, *Tēvija*, for ‘all nationally-conscious Latvians — *Perkonkrusts*

Second, Lūmans fails to identify propaganda embedded in survivor accounts in their attempts to make sense of the horrors taking place beyond their personal space and experience. There is a widespread conviction that the Germans' eradication of Eastern European Jewry could only have been so thorough with the overwhelming support if not direct participation of the local population, thereby proving said support. Such views tend to discount the meticulous planning that went into the Nazi organization and execution of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe, particularly in its gruesomely efficient industrialization, and presentation to the outside world as local and spontaneous.

Last, and most corrosively, Lūmans de-objectifies his own narrative by indicting the Latvian Legion as criminal, and its advocates as apologists. In failing to apply due diligence to sources and testimonies that condemn Latvians, Lūmans is his own proof that accounts of the Holocaust in occupied Latvia are as likely to be rooted in partisanship and choices in belief as in objective pursuit of historical fact.

My parents' generation had no illusions about the Latvia they fled; what they carried into exile and instilled in their progeny was an ideal. Whatever its faults, that ideal is less propagandistic than Lūmans's conceptualization of Latvian criminality which he offers in its stead. Perhaps he intended *Latvia in World War II* as a collective *mea culpa* for Holocaust participation both real and imagined. Unfortunately, most readers will assume that when a Latvian indicts his own, the allegations must all be true.

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members, students, officers, *Aizsargi* and others ... to participate in the cleansing of our country of destructive elements.”

Aside from the statement being false regarding Veiss, German authorities, not Latvians, would have controlled notices published in *Tēvija*. “Kaitīgi elementi” in the article, that which is to be cleansed, is more accurately translated as “harmful elements.”