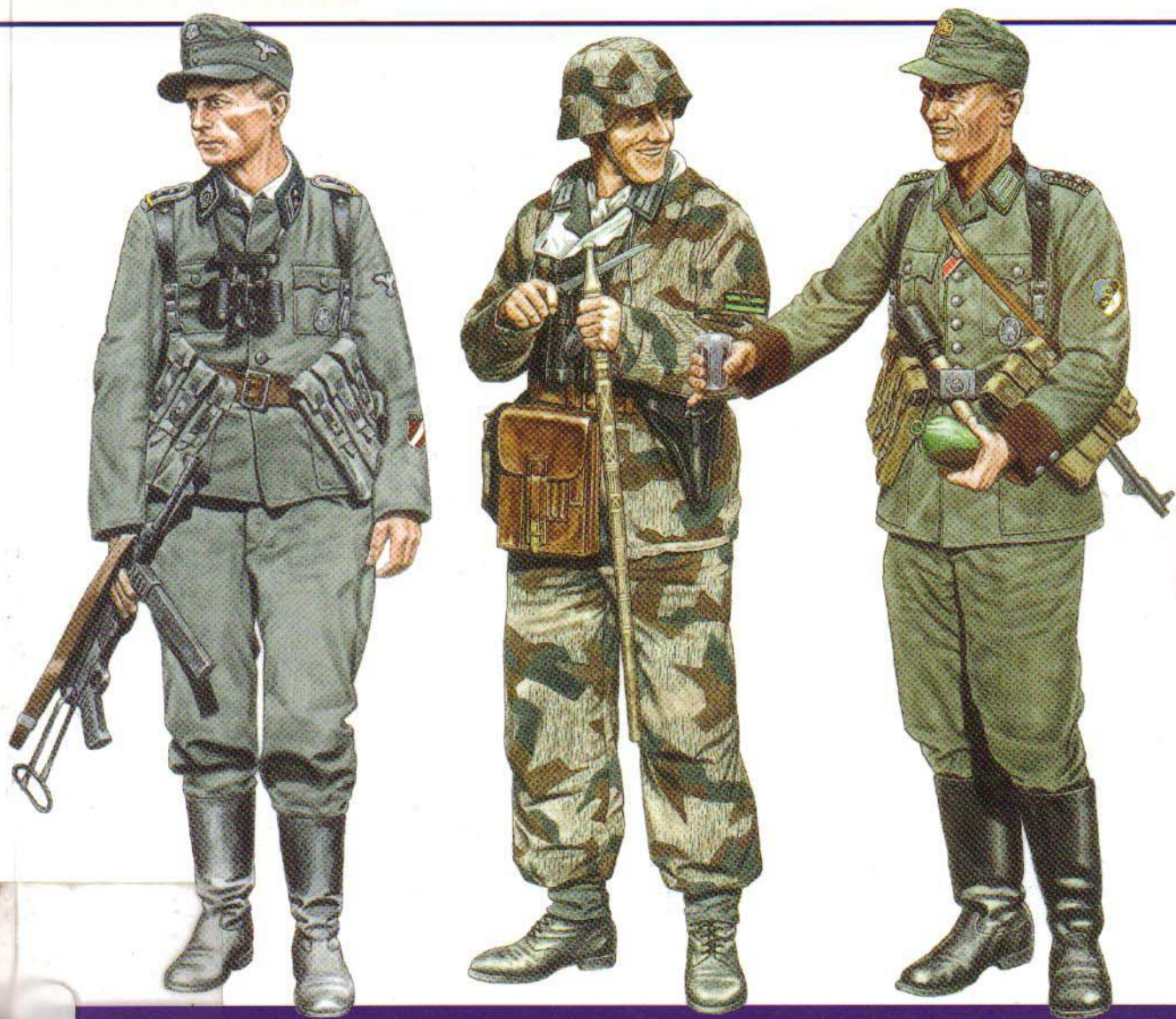


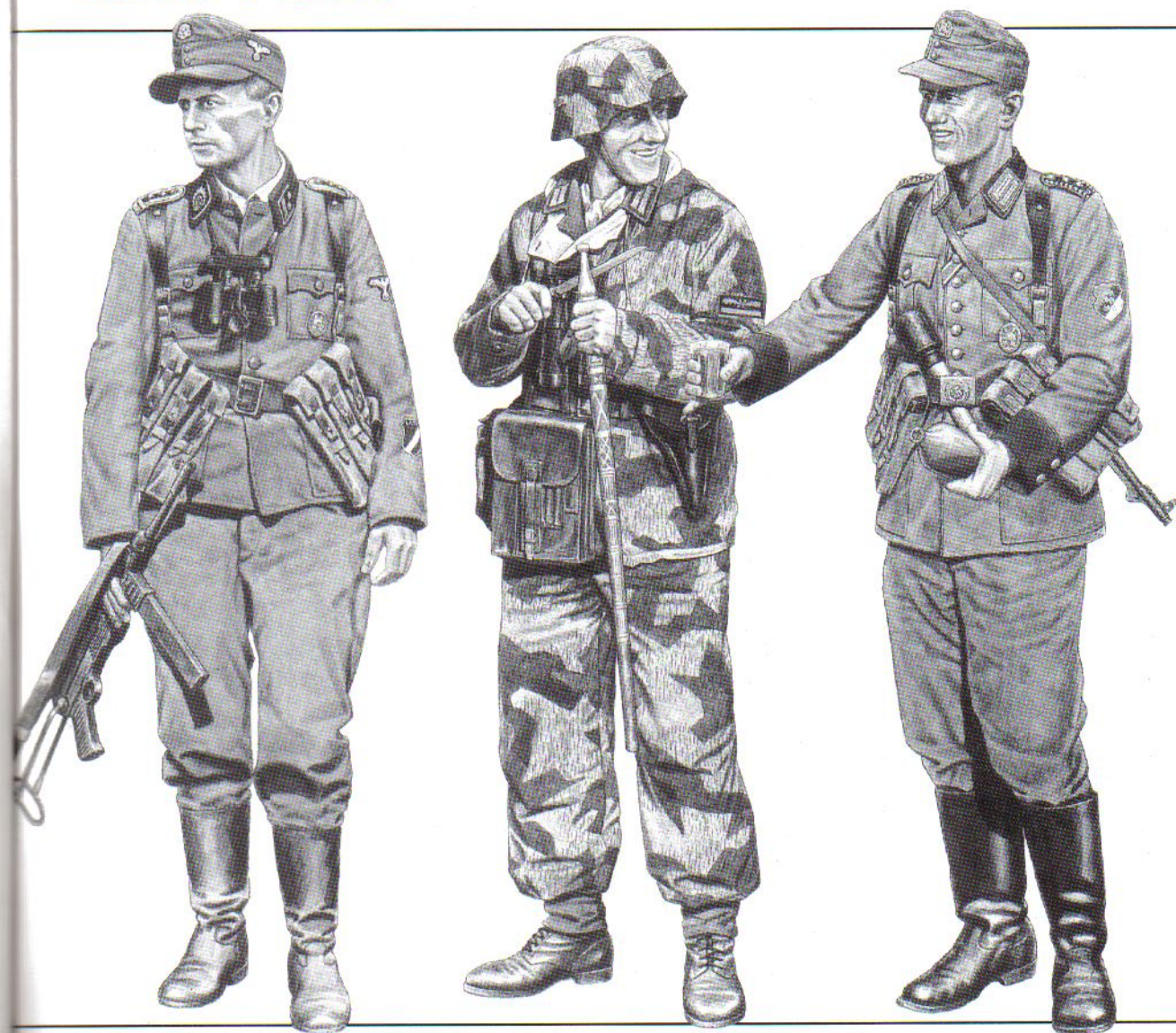
# Germany's Eastern Front Allies (2)

Baltic Forces



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C Caballero Jurado & N Thomas • Illustrated by D Pavlovic

Series editor Martin Windrow

First published in Great Britain in 2002 by Osprey Publishing,  
Elms Court, Chapel Way, Botley, Oxford OX2 9LP, United Kingdom.  
Email: [info@ospreypublishing.com](mailto:info@ospreypublishing.com)

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ISBN 1 84176 193 1

Editor: Martin Windrow  
Design: Alan Hamp  
Index by Alan Rutter  
Map by Darko Pavlovic  
Originated by Magnet Harlequin, Uxbridge, UK  
Printed in China through World Print Ltd.

02 03 04 05 06 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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## Dedication

This book is respectfully dedicated to the late Henry Rütel, former Estonian Luftwaffenhelfer, who did so much to publicise the Baltic cause in the West.

## Acknowledgements

This book would not have been possible without the generous help of many people. Carlos Caballero would like to thank the late Arturs Silgailis and Hans Werner Neulen; Nigel Thomas wishes to record his gratitude to Henry L.Gaidis, the late Friedrich Herrmann, Antonio Muñoz and Pierre C.T.Verheye, and also his wife Heather and sons Alexander and Dominick. Both authors especially wish to acknowledge the debt owed to the late Henry Rütel.

## Artist's Note

Readers may care to note that the original paintings from which the colour plates in this book were prepared are available for private sale. All reproduction copyright whatsoever is retained by the Publishers. All enquiries should be addressed to:

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# GERMANY'S EASTERN FRONT ALLIES (2)

## BALTIC FORCES



**SS & Police Lt.Gen.**  
**(SS-Obergruppenführer und**  
**General der Waffen-SS und**  
**Polizei) Friedrich Jeckeln, SS &**  
**Police Commander in the Baltic**  
**states, Belarus and northern**  
**Russia. He is wearing a German**  
**Army general officer's M1935**  
**field tunic with second type**  
**Waffen-SS general officers'**  
**collar patches, introduced**  
**20 April 1942. His collar is**  
**open, common practice later in**  
**the war. His Knight's Cross was**  
**awarded 27 August 1944 for**  
**halting a Red Army advance near**  
**Lake Peipus at the head of his**  
**German-Latvian battle group. As**  
**the senior SS officer Jeckeln was**  
**hanged in Riga in February 1946**  
**for atrocities committed in the**  
**Baltic region. (Henry Rüütel**  
**Memorial Archive)**

### THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

**A**LTHOUGH ESTONIANS, LATVIANS AND LITHUANIANS had lived for thousands of years in the Baltic region of North-Eastern Europe, from 1219 these peoples endured systematic foreign domination by Denmark, Sweden, Poland, and particularly by Germany and Russia. By 1793 all three Baltic states formed part of the Russian Empire. At the same time Estonia and Latvia were administered by ethnic German landowners descended from the Teutonic Order – the so-called ‘Baltic barons’ – while Lithuania was dominated by ethnic Polish aristocrats.

From the middle of the 19th century the Baltic nations began to be more aware of their own identity; and during the Russian revolution of October–December 1905 they expressed their determination to free themselves from the Baltic barons and Poles, and to halt the Russification of their lands.

The Great War found the Baltic states embroiled in the struggle between Germany and Russia. Lithuania was occupied by the Germans in September 1915. The Latvians feared that the Germans would increase the domination of the Baltic barons; and on 1 August 1915 they were permitted by Tsar Nicholas II to establish the 1st to 8th Latvian Rifle Battalions (expanded in October 1916 into eight regiments in two brigades), which fought effectively to help block the German advance. However, the Tsar's abdication in February 1917 and the Bolshevik coup d'état of October 1917 caused political chaos, allowing the Imperial German Army to occupy Latvia in September 1917 and Estonia in April 1918.

On 16 February 1918 Lithuania declared her independence, followed by Estonia on 24 February, although both were under German occupation. These declarations were confirmed when German forces withdrew following the Armistice of 11 November, followed by Latvian independence on 18 November. Now the Red Army – ironically, under Jakums Vatsietis, a former Latvian Rifles colonel now leading pro-Bolshevik riflemen – invaded the Baltic states. Estonia formed its armed forces (under Maj.Gen. Johann Laidoner) on 2 December 1917, followed by Lithuania (Maj.Gen. Silvestras Zukauskas) on 23 November 1918, and Latvia (Maj.Gen. Janis Balodis) on 3 December 1918.

These forces were initially too weak and disorganised to withstand the Bolshevik onslaught. Nevertheless, in Estonia the British Royal Navy prevented the fall of Tallinn in December 1918, allowing the Estonian Army to force Red Army units back. By June 1919 the Lithuanian Army had evicted the invaders with Polish assistance; but on 9 October 1919 the Polish-Lithuanian Gen. Lucjan Zeligowski occupied the Vilnius-Suvalkai region of eastern Lithuania, including the Lithuanian capital Vilnius,



Lithuanian soldiers of the Red Army's 29th Rifle Corps deserting to German lines, June 1941. They wear pre-1941 Lithuanian Army uniforms with the Red Army cap badges, M1940 collar patches and officers' cuff rank chevrons prescribed for these corps. The officer (left) is wearing the distinctive M1931 *Posalmis* peaked field cap, M1934 officer's field tunic, breeches, riding boots, and brown leather belt and cross belt. The lieutenant (centre) wears the same uniform and carries a Lithuanian-issued German M1916 helmet, a Soviet M1891 Mosin-Nagant rifle and bayonet, and M1933 Tokarev 7.62mm semi-automatic pistol. The lieutenant (right) and the soldiers (background) wear Red Army M1929 *gymnastjorka* pull-over shirt-tunics. (Friedrich Herrmann Memorial Collection)

annexing it to Poland on 8 January 1922. By January 1919 Latvia had been conquered by the Red Army, but in February the Latvian Army counterattacked with Estonian, Baltic German Army (*Baltische Landeswehr*) and German *Freikorps* units<sup>1</sup>, forcing the Bolsheviks back; with Estonian help they defeated the Germans in their turn on 22 June. The Soviet Union recognised the independence of Estonia on 2 February 1920, of Latvia on 1 August and of Lithuania on 25 August.

Independence proved difficult for the Baltic states in a troubled inter-war Europe. Social, political and economic problems led to the establishment of nationalist presidential governments: in December 1926, by Antanas Smetona in Lithuania; in March 1934, by Konstantin Päts in Estonia; and in May 1934, by Karlis Ulmanis in Latvia. However, the greatest threat was the growing might of the Soviet Union and German Third Reich, against which the Baltic states, with combined armed forces of only 68,450, could offer little resistance. In 1940 Estonia (Gen. Johan Laidoner) had 17,000-strong armed forces, Latvia (Maj.Gen. Hugo Rozensteins) 27,450, and Lithuania (Gen. Vincas Vitkauskas) 24,000 men. On 23 March 1939 Nazi Germany annexed the Memel (Lithuanian: *Klaipėda*) district, taking Lithuania's main port. However, following the joint Soviet-German occupation of Poland in September 1939 the Soviet Union restored to Lithuania on 10 October 1939 the Vilnius region which Poland had occupied twenty years before.

## THE FIRST SOVIET OCCUPATION

On 20 August 1939 Stalin and Hitler concluded the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact by which Hitler, in order to prevent the Red Army attacking Germany whilst Germany was engaged against France, appeased the USSR by partitioning Poland and allotting the Baltic states to the Soviet 'sphere of influence'. At the beginning of World War II, in September and October 1939, Stalin pressured the Baltic states to accept 'treaties' allowing him to station Red Army garrisons on their territory.

On 15 June 1940, one month after the launch of Hitler's Western offensive, the Red Army occupied the Baltic states, and in August the USSR annexed them as Soviet Socialist Republics. Now these countries endured twelve months of property confiscation, religious persecution, summary execution and, on 13 June 1941 – a week before the German

<sup>1</sup> See Osprey Elite 76, *The German Freikorps 1918-23*

invasion – mass deportations to Siberia. The First Soviet Occupation cost the lives of about 100,000 Baltic citizens, an experience which proved so traumatic that Wehrmacht troops, advancing into the Baltic states from 22 June under Operation Barbarossa, were welcomed as liberators.

The Soviets had organised selected Baltic armed forces personnel into three 7,500-strong Red Army ‘Territorial Corps’ in June 1940. Estonia formed the 22nd Rifle Corps (180 & 182 Rifle Divs); Latvia, the 24th Rifle Corps (181 & 183 Rifle Divs); and Lithuania, the 29th Rifle Corps (179 & 184 Rifle Divisions). During the German attack in June 1941 all three Territorial Corps suffered mass desertions to the Germans; the Soviet High Command transferred them deep into Russia before disbanding them at the end of 1941, and hundreds of officers subsequently died in *Gulag* labour-camps while the other ranks were transferred to military labour duties. Last-minute Soviet attempts to mobilise Baltic civilians were largely unsuccessful.

In June 1940 some Estonian politicians and troops had fled to Finland, where on 23 June 1940 they formed, with German Abwehr support, a special 65-strong commando group designated ERNA, trained by German and Finnish instructors and commanded by Estonian Col. Henn-Ants Kurg. ERNA, dressed in Finnish Army uniforms, landed in northern Estonia in two detachments – by sea on 9 July and by parachute on 26 July – where it supported local Estonian guerrillas against the Red Army; on 18 August it was reorganised as ERNA II Battalion. Many Latvians had also gone into exile during the Soviet occupation and a group of 200, mostly military personnel, were recruited and trained by the Abwehr. The Abwehr also trained 200 Lithuanian exiles under Col. Kazys Skirpa, commanding the main Lithuanian resistance organisation (Lithuanian Activist Front – *Lietuviu Aktyvistu Frontas*, LAF); but the Germans refused to form a Lithuanian Legion to fight with the Wehrmacht when it attacked the Soviet Union, for fear of compromising the secrecy of Operation Barbarossa.

Meanwhile, in each of the Baltic states guerrilla units were organised from armed forces personnel who had not been integrated into, or had escaped from, the Red Army; from





**Kalju Saar, a member of the élite Estonian guerrilla unit, the Captain Talpak Company, at the victory parade celebrating the liberation of Tallinn from the Red Army, 28 August 1941. As a deserter from the Red Army's 22nd Territorial Corps he wears a Red Army M1935 pilotka cap with a home-made cloth Estonian tricolour flag badge, and the M1936 Estonian Army summer pull-over shirt-tunic, distinguished from the Red Army M1929 gymnastiorka by the integral shoulder straps. Note the canvas ammunition bandoliers, and the flowers given by a grateful civilian. (Henry Rüütel Memorial Archive)**

members of the disbanded Home Guard organisations; and from police officers who had escaped deportation. The brutality of the Soviet regime prevented them organising effectively, however, and most of them were easily neutralised by the NKVD forces. In Estonia and Latvia small, unco-ordinated groups of 'Forest Brothers' hid in rural areas, ready to fight when hostilities broke out between the Nazi and Soviet empires. However, it was characteristically the Lithuanians who established the largest and best organised guerrilla movement – the LAF – formed on 9 October 1940 with about 36,000 men under Col. Skirpa.

### **1941: Operation Barbarossa**

On 22 June 1941 Operation Barbarossa began. As Field-Marshal Wilhelm Ritter von Leeb's Army Group North (4 Panzer Group, 16th & 18th Armies) advanced through Lithuania, Latvia and finally Estonia, Baltic guerrillas mobilised to attack the Red Army and NKVD, including the mixed NKVD Soviet-Baltic Demolition Bns formed to carry out 'scorched earth' operations to cover the Soviet retreat. Often the guerrillas were able to liberate towns before the Germans arrived, and in this the Lithuanians were the most successful;

about 100,000 Lithuanians answered the LAF call for a general insurrection, and on 23 June guerrillas captured Lithuania's largest city, Kaunas. Also on 23rd June the exiled Col. Kazys Skirpa, against German orders, announced the formation of a Lithuanian Provisional Government and the restoration of the Lithuanian Army and Home Guard (*Sauliu Sajunga*). Latvian guerrillas increased their harassment of Soviet forces but had little time to accomplish much before 1 July when the German 18th Army occupied Riga, where they promptly formed a Latvian Provisional Government.

As Army Group North advanced towards Leningrad (now St Petersburg), Estonia was occupied by the 18th Army (Gen. Georg von Küchler) between 4 July and 28 August, reaching Tallinn on 20 August. The relative slowness of the German advance in this sector allowed about 12,000 Estonian 'Forest Brothers' (*Metsavennad*) to organise in small local units, corresponding to the 13 county regiments of the pre-1940 Home Guard (*Kaitseliit* – KL). The most important were the 1,500-strong South Estonian Guerrillas (Maj. August Vask); 500 Pärnumaa Home Guard (led by the German Col. Hippler); the Tartu Guerrilla Battalion, from August the 300-strong Captain Talpak Company (Capt. Karl Talpak); and the 300-strong Major Hirvalaan Battalion (Maj. Hans Hirvalaan). The Forest Brothers attacked Soviet garrisons, forcing part of the Red Army to retreat into Latvia, liberating towns and villages and occupying key installations. Meanwhile the ERNA II Bn helped the Talpak Co and Hirvalaan Bn to liberate Tallinn between 20 and 28 August, going on to free the Estonian islands before disbanding on 10 November.

In general German Army commanders were sympathetic to the Baltic peoples' wish to restore their independence, but as the German-Soviet front line moved away into north-western Russia the military were replaced by Nazi political and police officials. These newcomers, answerable to Heinrich Himmler, the *Reichsführer-SS* and Head of the German Police, emphatically disapproved of Baltic nationalist aspirations. Nevertheless, the Baltic states and the Third Reich adopted a policy of collaboration much closer than that which existed in occupied Russia, Belarus or Ukraine.

## THE GERMAN OCCUPATION

Historians who judge the extent of Baltic military collaboration with Germany during World War II usually ignore the fact that German plans for the Baltic states were highly classified. Only at the Nuremberg Trials (November 1945–February 1947) was it revealed that Hitler had planned a massive deportation of Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians and to fill the Baltic region with German colonists – plans of which the Baltic nations were totally unaware. As throughout German-occupied Europe, the Third Reich fostered the widespread impression that collaboration would be properly rewarded following a German victory. German propaganda, which constantly stressed the 'European crusade against Bolshevism', encouraged many Baltic citizens to believe that collaboration with Germany would promote their ambitions for restored independence. In fact, attempts by the Balts to restore independent governments were frustrated and activists were arrested.

On 17 July 1941 the Germans established a Ministry for the Eastern Occupied Territories, the *Ostministerium* under Alfred Rosenberg – a Baltic German born in Tallinn. Rosenberg's initial attempts to give the Baltic states a certain degree of autonomy were immediately vetoed by Hitler. The Reich Eastern States Commission (*Reichskommissariat Ostland*),

under Reich Commissioner Hinrich Lohse, was established, with the three Baltic states and Belarus as four 'Districts-General' (*Generalbezirke*) each with a German *Generalkommissar* controlling a native 'Civil Administration' (*Zivilverwaltung*). Each District-General was further subdivided into Districts (*Gebiete*) under German *Gebietskommissare*. A Senior SS and Police Leader (*Höherer SS und Polizeiführer* – HSSPF) controlled *Ostland* and Northern Russia (*Ostland und Rußland-Nord*), based in Riga – a post held successively by SS Brig.

The staff of the Võru District of the Estonian Home Guard (*Omakaitse*), July 1942. The seated commander, Acting 2nd Lt. August Püvi, wears Estonian Army M1936 officers' non-cavalry service uniform with infantry collar badges, regulation cuff rank insignia (see chart on page 42), and officers' breeches. His companions wear M1936 *Kaitseliit* NCOs' service uniform, although the man at left has no collar rank stars. All wear a German Police green armband with black lettering describing their staff appointments in Estonian, and German Occupation Sub-District (*Feldkommandantur*) stamps. (Henry Rütel Memorial Archive)





Hans Prützmann (29.6.1941–1.11.1941), SS Maj.Gen., later Lt.Gen. Friedrich Jeckeln (1.11.1941–30.1.1945), and SS Maj.Gen. Hermann Behrends (acting 30.1.1945–8.5.1945). An SS and Police Leader (*SS und Polizeiführer* – SSPF) controlled each District-General.

Nevertheless, German occupation policy was more benign in the Baltic states than in the rest of the occupied USSR, with the Germanic-looking Estonians enjoying particular favour. Latvians and Lithuanians were generally mistrusted, although the Latvians gained more respect through their large contribution to the German forces. Using their limited powers, the Civil Administrations re-opened local schools, universities and museums, and re-established judicial systems which reprivatised parts of the economy collectivised by the Soviets. They also pressed for the re-establishment of their respective national armed forces. The Germans refused to countenance this, although they did show an increasing interest in recruiting Balts into German-controlled military units.

### Auxiliary police organisation

In August 1941 the German Police began to recruit Baltic nationals into an auxiliary police service (*Schutzmannschaft*, literally 'Defence Troops', in post-war publications abbreviated to *Schuma*), which was re-organised on 6 November 1941 into four branches. Personnel on normal police duties – usually former members of the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian national police forces – joined the Civil Police (*Einzeldienst*); fire-fighters joined the Fire Defence Troops (*Feuerschutzmannschaft*); part-time auxiliaries, often members of the paramilitary Home Guards disbanded in August 1940, formed the Auxiliary Defence Troops (*Hilfsschutzmannschaft*). However, most personnel were formed into paramilitary Defence Battalions (*Schutzmannschaft-Bataillone*), divided into front-line (*F* – *Front*), rear area Guard (*Wacht* – *W*), Depot (*Ersatz* – *E*) or Labour (*Pioniere* – *P*) battalions. A 460-man, later 501-man battalion – often in practice exceeding 700 – had a five-strong battalion staff and three, later four rifle companies, each with one machine gun platoon and three rifle platoons, each divided into three sections. Unlike the Belarussian and Ukrainian battalions, which had a cadre of German officers and NCOs, the Baltic battalions had only a German liaison officer and administrative official. In spite of poor equipment and inadequate training they generally acquitted themselves well in combat.

During the battles of winter 1941–42 many of these battalions were sent to the front line, with others joining them between 1942 and September 1944. Most units, however, were employed on security operations in rear areas. Since partisan activity in the Baltic states was minimal, many battalions were sent to north-western Russia, Belarus or Ukraine, where they came under German Army tactical command.

The battalion-sized SS Action Group A (*SS-Einsatzgruppe A*) of the SS Security Service (SD), under SS Brig. Walther Stahlecker (succeeded by SS Cols. Jost, Achamer-Pifrader, Panzinger and Fuchs), operated in the Baltic states, arresting and massacring Jews, gypsies and Communists. The Action Group comprised two 'special companies' (*Sonderkommando 1a* & *1b*) and two 'action companies' (*Einsatzkommando 2* & *3*). Stahlecker also recruited auxiliary companies of Baltic criminals, undesirables and extreme nationalists,



The most highly decorated, and probably the most talented and charismatic Baltic soldier of the war was the Estonian Maj. Alfons Rebane, photographed on 23 February 1944 when he was awarded the Knight's Cross. A former Estonian Army lieutenant, 'Forest Brother' and Viru County Home Guard commander, Capt. Rebane commanded the 184th Security Bn and, as a major, the 658th Eastern/Estonian Bn, before reluctantly transferring with his battalion to the 20th SS Inf Div in April 1944. There he commanded the 47th Regt as a colonel and deputy divisional commander. Nicknamed the 'Estonian Rommel' for his leadership and tactical skills (*rebane* is Estonian for 'fox'), he was one of only two non-Germans to win the Knight's Cross with Oakleaves (the other being the Belgian-Walloon officer Léon Degrelle). Rebane took part in the British SIS 'Operation Jungle' after the war, and died in March 1976 in Augsburg, Germany. Although a professional soldier not associated with German atrocities, his reburial in Estonia in June 1999 caused controversy.

Here Rebane wears standard German Army uniform with a right-sleeve tricolour arm shield, the Iron Cross 1st and 2nd Class and the Infantry Assault Badge. (Henry Rüütel Memorial Archive)

The Russian-Estonian Maj. Sobolev (left), commander of the Estonian 39F Defence Bn, with his second-in-command Lt. P.Kivastik, photographed in 1942. The 38F, 39F and 40F Defence Bns wore German Army uniforms from formation in November 1941 until receiving Police uniforms in spring 1943. Kivastik displays in his buttonhole the green ribbon of his bronze Eastern Peoples' Bravery and Service Decoration, 2nd Class. (Henry Rūitel Memorial Archive)



history of Baltic co-operation with the Third Reich – and allowing Soviet propaganda unjustly to portray all Balts as pro-Nazi anti-Semites.

Some Baltic defence battalions and civil police were implicated by guarding the victims prior to extermination by the Action Group. A network of concentration camps was set up in the Baltic states, the most notorious being Salaspils (Riga), Fort IX (Kaunas) and Tallinn. Established as labour camps, they were later used to exterminate Jews, gypsies and political prisoners.

In August 1942 Himmler, as 'Reich Commissioner for the promotion of Germanism', planned to 'Germanise' the Baltic states. He decreed that while the rest of the occupied Soviet Union would provide volunteers for the German Army's 'Eastern Troops' (*Osttruppen*), Baltic personnel would enlist in the *Waffen-SS*<sup>2</sup>. From early 1943 the Germans planned to recruit as many Balts as possible for military service; but it was not until February 1944, with the Red Army once again on the Baltic frontiers, that the Baltic civil administrations themselves proclaimed a mobilisation which was generally answered. Baltic personnel served in separate units in the German Army, Air Force, *Waffen-SS*, Police and OT construction organisation, and elsewhere as individual volunteers. Estonians and Latvians were generally willing to join German military units, while the more independently-minded and anti-German Lithuanians exhibited a marked reluctance.

## ESTONIA

With an area of 18,360 square miles, and a population in 1938 of just 1,131,000, Estonia was the smallest and least populous Baltic state, contributing 69,000 men to the German forces (6.1 per cent of her population). The Estonians are ethnically related to the Finns, the Ingrians of the Leningrad region, the 'Volga Finns' (Komis, Mari, Mordvin, Udmurt), and, more distantly, to the Hungarians. During the Estonian Independence War (1918–20) against the USSR, Finnish volunteers fought alongside the Estonians; and during the Finno-Soviet 'Winter War' (1939–40) some Estonians served in the Finnish Army. After June 1941 Finland, a German ally, supported the Estonian cause, thereby easing Estonian relations with the German occupiers.

This Estonian auxiliary policeman on coastal watch is wearing a German Police M1936 greatcoat and field cap, with the M1943 'German Army'-type Estonian tricolour arm shield. The black shoulder straps bear the mouse-grey thread swastika prescribed on 13 April 1943 for Baltic, Belarussian and Ukrainian auxiliary police but in fact rarely worn by Baltic personnel. He wears German rifle ammunition pouches and carries a Soviet Mosin-Nagant rifle. (Henry Rūitel Memorial Archive)



<sup>2</sup> See also MAA 147 *Foreign Volunteers of the Wehrmacht*, and MAA 34 *The Waffen-SS*.

The Estonian Commissioner-General was SA Lt.Gen. Karl-Sigismund Litzmann, with Dr Hjalmar Mäe leading the Civil Administration. Estonia was divided into six Districts, each containing one or two Police Prefectures and two or three Self-Defence Districts: Arensburg (Lääne-Saare), Dorpat (Tartu-Valga), Pernau (Viljandi-Pärnu), Petschur (Petseri-Võru), Reval (Tallinn-Harju), and Wesenberg (Viru-Järva, Narva).

**Table 1: Estonian Units in the German Police 1941-1945**

**Auxiliary Police (Schutzmannschaften) 1941-1944**

<i>August 1941 – 5 Nov.1941</i>	<i>6 Nov.1941 / 9 Dec.1943</i>	<i>Disbandment or reassignment</i>
5.11.1941:1 Estonian Guard Bn Home Guard	28.11.1941: 29F Schuma /Estonian Police Bn	7.7.1944: > 37-8 Pol.Bn.
-	17.1.1943: 30W Schuma /Estonian Police Bn	7.7.1944: disbanded
-	Jan.1943: 31W Schuma /Estonian Police Bn	7.7.1944: > 37-8 Pol.Bn.
-	Summ.1943: 32W Schuma /Estonian Police Bn	7.7.1944: disbanded
-	Feb.1942: 33F Schuma Bn	Jan.1943: > 287 Pol.Bn
-	Feb.1943: 33W Schuma /Estonian Police Bn	7.7.1944: disbanded
-	Feb.1942: 34W Schuma Bn	May 1942: disbanded
-	Jan.1942: 35E Schuma /Estonian Police Bn	Dec.1944: disbanded
-	Nov.1941: 36F Schuma Bn	Jan.1944: > 287/289 Pol.Bn.
29.8.1941: Schuma Bn Dorpat	Nov.1941: 37F Schuma /Estonian Police Bn	Dec.1944: 20.Waffen-Gren-Div.
Sep.1941: Schuma Bn Fellin	Nov.1941: 38F Schuma /Estonian Police Bn	Dec.1944: 20.Waffen-Gren-Div.
Sep.1941: Schuma Bn Poltsama	Nov.1941: 39F Schuma Bn	Apr.1943: > 287 Pol.Bn.
Aug.1941: Security Bn Pskov	Nov.1941: 40F Schuma /Estonian Police Bn	20.8.1944: > 38 Bn.
Sep.1941: Schuma Depot Bn	Nov.1941: 41E Schuma /Estonian Police Bn	July 1944: > 35 Pol.Bn
Sep.1941: Schuma Eng. Bn Civil Police	Nov.1941: 42P Schuma /Estonian Police Bn	Dec.1944: disbanded
(22 Rifle Corps, Red Army)	Mar.1943: 286F Schuma /Estonian Police Bn	Dec.1944: disbanded
-	Apr.1943: 287W Schuma /Estonian Police Bn	29.10.1944: > 20.Waffen-Gren-Div.
-	Nov.1943: 288F Schuma /Estonian Police Bn	Sep.1944: captured
-	Oct.1943: 289F Schuma /Estonian Police Bn	Jun.1944: disbanded
-	Oct.1943: 290F Schuma /Estonian Police Bn	Dec.1944: disbanded
-	Oct.1943: 291F Schuma /Estonian Police Bn	Dec.1944: disbanded
-	Oct.1943: 292F Schuma /Estonian Police Bn	Dec.1944: disbanded
11.4.1944: 1 Estonian Police Regt (Tallinn) – 286,288,291,292 Police Bn (F)		20.8.1944: disbanded
7.7.1944: 2 Estonian Police Regt (Tallinn) – 37,38,40 Police Bn (F)		Sep.1944: disbanded

**Estonian Frontier Guard Regiments (Police) / by 14.5.1944: SS-Frontier Guard Regiments**

7.2.1944: 1 Estonian / SS - Frontier Guard Regt - Rakvere (I-III Bns)	17.9.1944: destroyed
7.2.1944: 2 Estonian / SS - Frontier Guard Regt - Tartu (I-III Bns)	17.9.1944: destroyed
7.2.1944: 3 Estonian / SS - Frontier Guard Regt - Pärnu (I-III Bns)	17.9.1944: destroyed
26.2.1944: 4 Estonian / SS - Frontier Guard Regt - Võru (I-III Bns)	Late 1944: destroyed
26.2.1944: 5 Estonian / SS - Frontier Guard Regt - Paide (I-III Bns)	Late 1944: destroyed
26.2.1944: 6 Estonian / SS - Frontier Guard Regt - Kilingi-Nõmme (I-III Bns)	Late 1944: destroyed
26.2.1944: 1 Frontier Guard Depot Regt - Viljandi	1945: disbanded

**Estonian Home Guard (Est. Omakaitse. Ger. Selbstschutz) 1941-1945**

<i>13 Jun. 1941 – 1 Aug. 1941</i>	<i>2 Aug.1941 – February 1944</i>	<i>February – September 1944</i>
Läänemaa County, Hiiumaa	Lääne (Wierland) OK (Haapsalu)	I & II Bn / Laeva OK Battle Group
Saaremaa County	Saare (Õsel) OK (Kuressaare)	-
Tartumaa County, Talpak Coy.	Tartu (Dorpat) OK (Tartu)	Kitsapea, Vesilo, Uder Tartu OK Combat Bns
Valgamaa County	Valga (Walk) OK (Valga)	Valga OK Combat Battalion
Viljandimaa County	Viljandi (Fellin) OK (Viljandi)	I Bn / Tānasilma OK Combat Rgt
		III Bn / Laeva OK Battle Group
Pärnumaa County	Pärnu (Pernau) OK (Pärnu)	I & II Bn / Mustla OK Combat Rgt
Petserimaa County	Petseri (Petschur) OK (Petseri)	-
Võrumaa County	Võru (Werro) OK (Võru)	Võru Home Guard Combat Regiment
Tallinn City, Hirvelaan Bn	Tallinn (Reval) OK (Tallinn)	-
Harjumaa County	Harju (Harrien) OK (Tallinn)	-
Virumaa County	Viru (Wiek) OK (Rakvere)	Viru OK Combat Battalion
Järvamaa County	Järva (Jerwen) OK (Paide)	II Bn / Tānasilma OK Combat Rgt
Narva City	Narva (Narwa) OK (Narva)	-
-	Railway OK (Tallinn) - July 1944	-
23.6.1941: ERNA (I) Group		18.8.1941 > ERNA II
18.8.1941: ERNA II Battalion		10.11.1941: disbanded
10.2.1944: Tallinn Regiment - I (Tallinn), II (Pärnu), III(Tartu,Viljandi) Bns		Late February 1944: destroyed

A section leader (*Jaguülem*) of the Võru District Estonian Home Guard, July 1942. He wears the officers' and NCOs' M1936 *Kaitseliit* khaki service uniform. The cap has an M1936 Estonian Army badge below a *Kaitseliit* 20mm cockade in light blue-black-white (reading inwards). His tunic has a black collar piped in yellow with two 10mm silver rank stars. On the shoulder straps the brass Võru District badge is worn below brass infantry crossed rifles; and on his left breast pocket is another Võru District badge. Note the Iron Cross 2nd Class ribbon. (Henry Rütel Memorial Archive)



July 1943. In February 1944, Col. Sinka reorganised them into four Combat Regiments, one Battle Group and four Combat Battalions; these units were destroyed in September 1944 by overwhelming Soviet forces.

### Security, Defence & Police Battalions

Although German policy was initially not to enlist Baltic volunteers into the German Army, Gen. von Kuchler, GOC 18th Army, was so impressed by the Estonians that from August 1941 he formed 26 Estonian Security Detachments (*Sicherungsabteilungen*) into five 700-strong Security Battalions (181st–185th) and the 186th Depot Battalion. Personnel wore German Army uniforms. Although intended for guard duties in Estonia, these units were committed to front-line service with 18th Army from October 1941, achieving a good combat reputation.

On 23 October 1942 the Security Bns were reorganised as 658th–660th Eastern (on 1 January 1943, 'Estonian') Bns, 657th Co, and the 'Eastern Depot Bn Narva' (*Ost Ersatz Bataillon Narva*), wearing the 'German Army'-style Estonian tricolour arm-shield on the right upper sleeve from March 1943<sup>3</sup>. They distinguished themselves at the siege of Leningrad and on the Volkhov front; and on 23 February 1944 the 658th Bn commander, Maj. Alfons Rebane, was awarded the Knight's Cross. From July 1943 these battalions were progressively transferred to the Waffen-SS.

From August 1941 the German Police began to organise Defence Detachments (*Schutzmannschaft-Abteilungen*) to be stationed in Estonia to combat the increasing threat of Soviet partisans.

The Estonian 33F Defence Bn parades in Tartu in spring 1942 wearing Estonian Army M1936 winter field uniforms. The battalion commander, Capt. V.Pärilin (left), wears an officers'/ NCOs' service cap and has sewn home-made cavalry rank chevrons to his Latvian Army greatcoat. The lieutenant behind him has a regulation winter field cap and officer's double-breasted greatcoat with branch-colour collar patches. (Henry Rütel Memorial Archive)



<sup>3</sup> See MAA 330 German Army 1939-45 (4): Eastern Front 1943-45



Men of the 659th Estonian (formerly 'Eastern') Bn on their way to the Narva front, February 1944. They wear standard German Army uniforms with the M1943 scoop-shaped 'German Army'-type right sleeve shield (see officer at top right). The four officers (back row, second left middle row) are wearing enlisted ranks' M1936 field tunics, with officers' collar patches on added dark green collars, officers' shoulder boards and aluminium wire breast eagles. The troops are wearing M1943 peaked field caps and M1942 padded winter overjackets reversible from white to *Zeltbahn 31* camouflage – cf Plate B3. (Henry Rütel Memorial Archive)

On 6 November 1941 all police auxiliary battalions organised by the Germans in the occupied USSR were reorganised as *Schutzmannschaft-Bataillone*. In October 1942 there were 5,400 Estonians in 14 battalions, and a further 5,100 civil police. Unlike the Estonian 'East Battalions' these units were poorly armed and trained, although they were sometimes deployed on the same front line.

The Germans planned 26 Estonian Defence Bns numbered 29–45, 50 and 286–293, but only 21 were actually formed (leaving

43–45, 50 and 293 vacant). Six battalions (one security, five defence) raised in August–September 1941 were numbered 37–42 and designated the 1st Wave, with the 41st Bn functioning as the depot battalion. Eight more Defence Bns (29–36) were formed between November 1941 and February 1943 as the 2nd Wave. From March 1943 seven 3rd Wave battalions (286–292) were mobilised, comprising former Civil Police, personnel from disbanded 1st and 2nd Wave battalions, and deserters from the Red Army's Estonian 249th Rifle Division, who had crossed the line at Velikye Luki in March 1943.

On 9 December 1943 the remaining 18 units were redesignated as Estonian Police Battalions. Eleven served outside Estonia: seven (29F, 30–31W, 33F, 38–9F, 42P) on the Leningrad front and in north-western Russia; three (40F, 286F, 288F) in Belarus, and one (36F) in Ukraine. In January 1943 the three best front line battalions (29F, 33F, 36F) were disbanded (they were later reraised), their members joining the Estonian Legion or other defence battalions.

From spring 1943 the defence battalions were used to form larger units and many personnel volunteered for the Estonian Legion, formed in October 1942. In April 1944 four 3rd Wave Estonian Police Bns formed the 1st Estonian Police Regt, but in view of their poor equipment and training were only assigned to coastal defence duties. In July a 2nd Regt was formed from three veteran 1st Wave battalions, reinforced

OPPOSITE Three officers of the Estonian SS Volunteer Brigade in training at Heidelberg near Debica, southern Poland. Estonian Lts. Kaarheiding (left) and Bruus (centre) and German Lt. Steinpick all wear the parade uniform of M1935 helmets and field tunics with Waffen-SS M1939 collar patches and shoulder boards. Kaarheiding wears a German Army M1935 officer's tunic with an SS-runes right collar patch (technically forbidden to non-Germans) and M1932 officer's dress belt, and Steinpick the same. Bruus wears a German Army enlisted ranks' M1942 all field grey tunic with blank right collar patch (regulation before autumn 1943); note the green buttonhole ribbon of the bronze Eastern Peoples' Bravery and Service Decoration 2nd Class; and on his left pocket the Wound Badge in silver (three and four wounds) below a pre-1940 Estonian Artillery badge. (Henry Rütel Memorial Archive)

**Table 2: Estonian Units in the German Armed Forces 1941–1945**

**Units in the German Army 1941–1945**

August 1941 – 22.Oct.1942	23.Oct.1942 / 1 Jan.1943	24 April 1944 – 8.May 1945
181 Security Bn (Tartu); 1–4 Coys	658 East Bn (Estonian) / Estonian Bn	24.4.1944 > II / SS-Freiw.Gren.Rgt 47
182 Security Bn (Tartu); 5–8 Coys	659 East Bn (Estonian) / Estonian Bn	24.4.1944 > I / SS-Freiw.Gren.Rgt 47
183 Security Bn (Pärnu); 9–12 Coys	-	-
13 Coy / 184 Security Bn (Vaivara)	657 Eastern Coy (Estonian)	Jul.1943 > SS-Freiw.Gren.Rgt 2 [46]
184 Security Bn (Rakvere); 14–18 Coys	660 East Bn (Estonian) / Estonian Bn	Jul.1943 > SS-Freiw.Gren.Rgt 2 [46]
185 Security Bn (Tallinn); 19–22 Coys	-	-
186 Security Bn (Narva)	Depot Bn 'Narva'	-
1 Estonian Construction Bn (4.1944)	-	12.1944: disbanded
2 Estonian Construction Bn (4.1944)	-	12.1944: disbanded
3 Estonian Construction Bn (4.1944)	-	12.1944: disbanded
4 Estonian Construction Bn (4.1944)	-	12.1944: disbanded
5 Estonian Construction Bn (5.1944)	-	5.1945: surrendered

**Estonian units in the German Waffen-SS 1942–1945**

Estonian Legion formed 1.10.1942 with I–III Bns (3.1943: SS-Freiwilliges Regiment 1) and Legion support services.

<i>Estonische Legion</i>	<i>Estonische SS-Freiw.Brigade</i>	<i>3. Estonische SS-Freiwillige-Brig</i>	<i>20.Est.SS-Freiwillige-Division</i>	<i>20. Waffen-Grenadier Division der SS</i>	<i>Type of unit</i>
1.10.1942	5.5.1943	22.10.1943	23.1.1944	26.5.1944–8.5.1945	
SS-Freiwilligen-Rgt.1	SS-Freiw.Rgt.2	SS-Freiw.Gren.Rgt.45	SS-Fr.Gren.Rgt.47	Waffen-Gren.Rgt der SS 45	Inf.Regt
-	-	SS-Freiw.Gren.Rgt.46	SS-Fr.Art.Rgt.20	Waffen-Gren.Rgt der SS 46	Inf.Regt
-	-	Artillerie-Abt. 53	Waffen-Art.Rgt der SS 20	Waffen-Gren.Rgt der SS 47	Inf.Regt
-	-	Brig. services 53	Divisional services 20	-	Art.Regt

**Units of the German Air Force 1943–1944**

12.2.1942	1.4.1943	1.6.1943	19.10.1943–7.10.1944	<i>Type of unit</i>
Sonderst.Buschmann	1./Aufklärungsgr.127	1./Aufklärungsgr.(See) 127	Aufklärungsgr.(See)127	Recce Squadron
-	2./Aufklärungsgr.127	2./Aufklärungsg.(See) 127	1./Nachtschlachtgr.11	Recce/Night Attack
-	3./Aufklärungsgr.127	3./Aufklärungsg.(See) 127	2./Nachtschlachtgr.11	Recce/Night Attack
-	-	-	3./Nachtschlachtgr.11	Night Attack

**Estonian Volunteers in the Finnish Army**

8.2.1944: 200 Infantry Regt (I–II Inf.Bn, support units) 20.8.1944 disbanded. I Inf.Bn > Waffen-Gren.Rgt III/46



by personnel from less experienced battalions, and integrated in 'Battle Group Jeckeln' (*Kampfgruppe Jeckeln*)<sup>4</sup>. This group, which included Latvian units, was formed to resist the Red Army's advance into the Baltic states after the destruction of Army Group Centre in June 1944. The badly mauled 2nd Regt subsequently retreated into Estonia and was disbanded in September 1944, its

4 This was the second battle group commanded by Lt.Gen. Jeckeln; the first, consisting of Estonian and Latvian defence battalions, had fought on the Leningrad front from February to August 1942.

surviving personnel joining the Estonian 20th SS Infantry Division.

With the arrival of the Red Army at the Estonian frontier in February 1944 all remaining Estonian Police Bns were sent to the front, where some were destroyed and others disbanded in December 1944 after irreplaceable losses. Remaining personnel were transferred to Germany for reassignment to the 20th SS Infantry Division.

### **The Estonian SS Legion, Brigade & Division**

On 28 August 1942 the Germans announced the formation of an Estonian SS Legion (*Eesti Leegioni*) under SS Lt.Col. Franz Augsberger. The Estonians would have preferred to reform the Estonian National Army; nevertheless, enough men volunteered for the Legion for it to be formally established on 1 October 1942 at Heidelager near Debica, in occupied Poland. Initially the Legion only comprised the 1st SS Volunteer Regt under Estonian SS Col. Johannes Soodla, and in April 1943 its 1st Bn was detached and assigned to the Nordic 5.SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Division 'Wiking' as Freiwillige-Bataillon 'Narwa', replacing the Finnish Volunteer SS Bn which had just returned to Finland. The Narva Bn (not to be confused with Ost Ersatz Bataillon Narwa – see above) fought with 'Wiking' until July 1944, distinguishing itself in the Ukraine at Izjum in July 1943, Hadnitsa in August 1943 and Merevka in September 1943, before joining the 20th SS Infantry Division in Estonia in July 1944.

Faced with increasing demands for troops, the Germans expanded the Estonian Legion to form a brigade in May 1943, in October redesignated as 3rd Estonian SS Vol Bde, under SS Col. Augsberger, with the 45th and 46th Infantry Regiments. The brigade resorted to the conscription of young Estonians to complete its establishment. Most NCOs and officers, including regimental commanders, were Estonian, and in December 1943 the brigade had 5,099 men.

From November 1943 the 3rd SS Vol Bde was fighting Soviet partisans in Nevel, near Velikye Luki in north-west Russia, and in December joined German 16th Army at the front further north at Staraya Rusa. In January 1944 it was sent to Estonia to defend the Narva sector against the advancing Red Army. At the same time it was expanded to form the 20th Estonian SS Vol Div, in May 1944 redesignated the 20th SS 'Armed Grenadier' (i.e. Infantry) Division<sup>5</sup> under SS Senior Col. (*Oberführer*) Augsberger, on 21 June promoted brigadier. A third infantry regiment, the 47th, was formed from veterans of the Estonian Eastern Battalions. On 1 September 1944 SS Brig. Soodla was appointed to the honorary post of Inspector-General of the Estonian Waffen-SS.



**A member of the Estonian 20th SS Infantry Division – 20. Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (estnische Nr.1) – on the Narva front, September 1944. Visible on his field tunic are black M1939 Waffen-SS shoulder straps piped with infantry white; the right collar patch is the unpopular 'sword and E' prescribed by the Germans but only worn from June to October 1944. As a former member of an Estonian Defence Battalion he wears the M1943 Schutzmannschaft arm shield in the 1941 position on the left forearm – of ornate 'scooped' shape, with three golden lions superimposed over the diagonal blue/black/white stripes. By regulation the Waffen-SS style shield should have been worn on the left upper sleeve after 1 June 1944. (Henry Rützel Memorial Archive)**

<sup>5</sup> Baltic SS units, as 'non-Germanic', were initially designated 'Volunteer' (*Freiwillige, Freiwilliger, Freiwilligen*), receiving instead the prefix 'Armed' (*Waffen*) in May 1944. Divisions and infantry regiments were numbered internally according to their nationality.

Disillusioned by German policies and resentful of the introduction of conscription in early 1943, some Estonians under Capt. Karl Talpak fled to Finland and enlisted in the Finnish Army. By spring 1943 Estonians formed two companies of 3rd Bn, 47th Inf Regt, nicknamed the 'Vallila Bn'; and by autumn the whole battalion was Estonian, defending the Mannerheim Line on the Karelian Isthmus under Finnish 18th Infantry Division. In February 1944 it helped form the Finnish 200th Inf Regt (Finnish Lt.Col. Eino Kuusela), with 310 Finns and 2,340 Estonians. The regiment helped defend the Mannerheim Line and on 11 June 1944, under Finnish 10th Inf Div, it took the brunt of the decisive Soviet offensive which forced Finland to conclude an armistice in September 1944. The regiment was disbanded on 16 August 1944 and 1,800 Estonian personnel returned to Estonia on 19 August, where they joined the 20th SS Division. About 400 Estonians served in the Finnish Navy.

### Frontier Guard Regiments

With the approach of the Red Army the Estonian Civil Administration declared general mobilisation on 30 January 1944, an appeal which inevitably provided more recruits than the previous German mobilisations. Six Estonian Frontier Guard Regts and a Depot Regt were immediately formed, each regiment comprising 2,800 men in I-III Battalions. They were poorly trained and equipped with American, Czech, Dutch, French and Russian light arms and even some British heavy weapons. These were technically German Police units but under German Army tactical command and wearing German Army uniforms. In May 1944 they were redesignated 'SS Frontier Guard Regiments (Police)'. Estonians who could not be accommodated in the Frontier Guard regiments were formed into five German Army Construction Bns from April 1944.

The Frontier Guard regiments were immediately sent to the Estonian-Russian border. Three (2, 4 & 6) formed the German 300th Special Duty Div (Division zbV 300)<sup>6</sup>; the others served with the German 207th and 227th Infantry Divisions. These units suffered heavy losses as the Red Army advanced into Estonia, and by September they had been virtually wiped out, the survivors retreating to Germany or becoming 'Forest Brothers'.

By spring 1944 there were 20,000 Estonians in the 20th SS Div; 20,000 in the Frontier Guard Regts; 9,000 in the Defence Bns and Police Regts; 5,000 in Army Construction Bns, and 5,000 in the Home Guard. A further 10,000 individuals were serving in the German Navy, Air Force, Air Force auxiliaries and other Wehrmacht auxiliary forces such as the RAD and OT<sup>7</sup>. The grand total, about

The Estonian Cpl. (*Waffen-Unterscharführer*) Harald Nugiseks won the Knight's Cross – usually an officer's decoration – on 9 April 1944 for leading his platoon of 1st Co, 46th Inf Regt, 20th SS Inf Div in hand-to-hand combat at Vepsküla, Narva front, in February 1944. In this late 1944 photograph he wears a German Army M1943 field tunic with the second pattern 'arm, sword and E' collar patch introduced in October 1944. Nugiseks was promoted to sergeant in summer 1944 but 'busted' back to corporal after fighting with German soldiers who were harassing Estonian Red Cross nurses. He was captured by the Czechs in May 1945 and turned over to the Red Army; when released in 1958 he had a Soviet medal for meritorious service on the railways. (Henry Rützel Memorial Archive)



<sup>6</sup> zbV = 'for special duties', signifying a 'scratch' division lacking a full divisional staff and support units.

<sup>7</sup> See MAA 254 *Wehrmacht Auxiliary Forces*





**A *Waffen-Sturm*mann (lance-corporal) of the 20th SS Signal Bn, 20th SS Inf Div mends a telephone cable under Soviet artillery fire on the Oder front near Breslau (now Wrocław, Poland) in February 1945. He wears an M1942 helmet and a German Army M1942 field tunic with *Waffen-SS* badges; note black shoulder straps piped Signals lemon-yellow, the second pattern 'arm, sword and E' divisional right collar patch, and a section leader's red whistle lanyard to his right breast pocket. Unable to obtain an Estonian arm shield, he wears an unofficial enamel Estonian flag badge on his left breast pocket. He carries a captured Soviet PPSH41 sub-machine gun. (Henry Rüütel Memorial Archive)**

70,000 men, was huge for such a small country; but of these forces only the 20th SS Div could be considered a fully equipped and organised fighting force. Himmler's plans to form a second Estonian SS division in July 1944 and to group the two divisions into an Estonian SS Army Corps in October were not realised. Only two Estonians besides SS Brig. Soodla – Johann Tuuling and Alfons Rebane, successive commanders of the 46th Regt – reached the rank of 'non-Germanic SS colonel' (*Waffen-Standartenführer*). Four Estonians won the coveted Knight's Cross, equivalent to the British Distinguished Service Order (DSO): Col. Rebane (with Oakleaves); Lt.Col. Harald Riipalu, Capt. Paul Maitla and Cpl. Harald Nugiseks.

### **The 1944 campaign**

Until 10 July 1944 the front remained more or less static on the Estonian-Russian border, comprising the Narva sector, Lake Peipus and the Petseri sector. The Red Army offensive which opened on that date was initially repulsed by the 20th SS Div in the Narva sector, earning Lt.Col. Riipalu and Capt. Maitla the Knight's Cross; but on 10 August the enemy broke the line in the Petseri sector, advancing deep into Estonia. By 27 September the Red Army had occupied eastern Latvia, and on 23 September Army Group North was forced to evacuate Estonia in order to avoid encirclement.

Many small Estonian units were unable to retreat in time, but the remnants of the 20th SS Div and other units left Estonia on 20 September, reaching German East Prussia in early October. Meanwhile the *Omakaitse* combat units staged a last ditch defence of Tallinn, which fell to the Red Army on 20 September. By the end of November 1944 all Estonia was under Soviet control.

One of the Red Army formations involved in the conquest of Estonia in 1944 was the 8th Rifle Corps, awarded the battle-honour 'Estonian' for its contribution. This corps was formed in 1944 from Estonian conscripts who had retreated into Russia in July 1941; reliable Estonian troops from 22nd Territorial Corps (disbanded July 1941); and Estonians who had emigrated to various parts of Russia during the Tsarist period. The 8th Corps had the 7th and 249th Rifle Divs, each with three regiments. The 249th had been the first Estonian unit organised in 1942; during its first battle that December 1,000 men deserted, many later joining the *Schutzmannschaft*.

### **Other services**

Estonians served in other German organisations. The Wehrmacht Intelligence Service, the Abwehr, always preserved excellent relations with the Estonian military, allowing them to establish an intelligence element, the 'Reinhard Unit'. Initially under German Navy control, this

comprised 120 Estonians under Estonian Capt. A.Kalmus, monitoring Red Army radio traffic until May 1945. Meanwhile on 15 August 1944 the German Navy began recruiting about 200 Estonian volunteers; but on 22 August these were shipped to Waren, northern Germany, where they were forcibly transferred to the 20th SS Division.

The Luftwaffe was particularly interested in Estonian flying personnel, but the first air unit was the personal initiative of an Abwehr officer born in Estonia, Gerhard Buschmann, who was convinced that the German Navy would support the establishment of an Estonian air squadron to patrol the Gulf of Finland. Accordingly in February 1942 the 'Buschmann Special Squadron' (Sonderstaffel Buschmann) began patrols, and by early 1943 had 200 personnel flying 40–50 Estonian, Latvian and German aircraft. In April 1943 the unit formally joined the Luftwaffe as 127th (later Sea) Reconnaissance Wing, 1st Sqn flying Arado Ar95A-1 floatplanes, the 2nd and 3rd operating obsolete Heinkel He50s as night bombers. In October 1943 the He50s were reorganised into the 11th Night Attack Wing, adding a 3rd Sqn on 27 December. The Estonians established a good reputation, and on 31 May 1944 a fighter squadron was authorised and ten pilots were transferred to Germany for training.

As the Red Army advanced towards Estonia the 11th Wing was ordered to retreat to Germany in September 1944. However, with the fall of Tallinn the Estonians grew more reluctant to fight for Germany, and from 22 September to 31 October seven Estonian pilots flew to sanctuary in neutral Sweden, causing the Luftwaffe to disband all Estonian and Latvian squadrons. The planned Estonian fighter squadron was cancelled, but the pilots were reassigned to the 4th and 54th Fighter Groups (JG4, JG54) where they flew Focke-Wulf Fw190A fighters, losing four dead. Other pilots and ground crews served in the 20th SS Div or Luftwaffe anti-aircraft units as auxiliaries (*Kampfhelfer*).

Under the Baltic agreement of 31 March 1944 the Germans began accepting Estonian boys aged 15–20 years old as air force auxiliaries (*Luftwaffenhelfer*) to defend Estonia in anti-aircraft (*Flak*) units. Initially these boys were volunteers but on 1 August conscription was introduced, and from 1 June female volunteers were accepted. By August 1944 3,000 Estonians, mostly boys, had left their classrooms and enlisted; some fought in the Courland Pocket with 127th Flak Battalion. In September 1944 about 1,000 were evacuated to the Reich, where groups served until May 1945, at Eger (now Cheb, Czech Republic), then Lübeck and

**Lt.Col. Paul Lilleleht (left), commanding the Estonian 6th Frontier Guard Regt, greets the German major-general commanding 300th Special Duty Division, March 1944. Lilleleht wears a German enlisted ranks' M1942 field tunic with officers' collar patches and breast eagle, and the graduation breast badge of the Estonian Army's Higher Military Academy. On his right sleeve is a clear example of the 'German Army'-type Estonian arm shield, of ornate shape with diagonal blue/black/white stripes, but no lions or lettering. Behind Lilleleht is the Pernau District Commissioner wearing the light brown Eastern Official's (*Ostbeamte*) uniform introduced 25 March 1942. (Henry Rüütel Memorial Archive)**





**2nd Lt. Remi Milk of the Estonian 127th Sea Reconnaissance Wing in the cockpit of his Arado Ar95A-1 floatplane, with his observer, 2nd Lt. K.Kallas. Milk is wearing M1940 Fl.30 550 dark-lensed anti-fragmentation goggles on his officer's M1935 grey-blue field cap, and the yellow cotton 10-76A kapok life-vest for flights over water. On his M1935 Luftwaffe tunic he displays the M1944 'Luftwaffe'-type Estonian arm shield – horizontal tricolour set on a black shield with gold 'ESTLAND' on the upper black edge. Milk led the three Arados which flew to neutral Sweden on 22 September 1944, provoking the Germans to disband Estonian and Latvian flying units; he lived in Sweden after the war. (Henry Rütel Memorial Archive)**



Wismar; in March 1945 they joined the 20th SS Division. (The girls served near Berlin, later at Rostock.) A total of 346 boys joined the German Navy as Naval Auxiliaries (*Marinehelfer*).

\* \* \*

Estonians paid a heavy price for fighting to defend their country. The Germans demanded that most Estonian military personnel evacuate to Germany in September 1944 to continue fighting for the Axis. Many naturally refused to abandon their homeland and instead joined revived guerrilla units, but those who did agree were drafted into the 20th SS Div, which was reformed from November 1944 at Neuhammer near Breslau (now Wrocław, Poland). On 21 January 1945 the Red Army attacked across the Oder, and the partly formed division, under German 17th Army, helped stabilise the Silesian front; their commander, SS Brig. Augsburg, was killed on 19 March. In April the shattered division, under SS Col., later Brig. Berthold Maack, retreated to Melnik, near Prague, surrendering to the Red Army on 8 May 1945.

Estonia's geographical remoteness from Western Europe prevented many Estonian troops fighting for the Western Allies. Nevertheless four Estonian pilots – Mihkel Kristiani, Jan Liblikmaa, Peeter Olt and Endel Susi – did serve with the Polish Air Force in Great Britain.

**Four 17-year-old Estonian Luftwaffe auxiliaries (see Plate C3), evacuated to Denmark, a country traditionally sympathetic to Estonia. They are photographed on leave in March 1945 in Copenhagen just before transferring to the Estonian 20th SS Division's depot regiment in Odense. They wear regulation M1943 Luftwaffe auxiliary peaked field caps and pull-over tunics, and (second right) an M1935 Luftwaffe enlisted men's greatcoat. They are wearing the Estonian Youth cap diamond, with the M1943 'German Army'-type arm shield (second right), or walking-out dress Estonian Youth brassard (again, see Plate C3 for details). Danish resistance fighters who surreptitiously felt this brassard at night would not attack the young Estonians. Three boys, unusually, have M1941 blue-grey canvas anklets. At second left is Henry Rütel, who settled after the war in Hemel Hempstead, England. (Henry Rütel Memorial Archive)**

**Table 3: Latvian Units in the German Police 1941–1945**

<i>Ordnungshilfspolizei</i> 20 Jul – 5.Nov.1941	<b>Schutzmannschaften</b> 6.Nov.1941 / May 1943	<i>Reassignment</i>
1. Indep. 'Riga' Bn	22.10.1941: 16F 'Zemgale' Schuma Battalion	8.2.1943 > III Bn / Latvian Legion
-	21.12.1941: 17F 'Vidzeme' Schuma Battalion	5.1943 > 25F Bn.
1.' Riga' Bn	13.1.1942: 18F 'Kurzeme' Schuma Battalion	5.1943 > II / SS-Freiw.Rgt. 2
-	16.12.41: 19F 'Latgale' Schuma Battalion	30.1.1943 > II Bn / Latvian Legion
2.' Riga' Bn	4.1942: 20W 'Riga' Schuma /Latvian Police Bn	1.1944 > 15.Waffen-Gren.Div.
-	25.2.1942: 21F 'Liepaja' Schuma /Latvian Police Bn	30.1.1943 > I Bn / Latvian Legion
-	25.2.1942: 22F 'Daugava' Schuma /Latvian Police Bn	7.2.1944 > I Bn / 2 Pol.Regt.
-	25.2.1942: 23F 'Gauja' Schuma /Latvian Police Bn	8.5.1945: surrendered
-	1.3.1942: 24F 'Talsi' Schuma Battalion	18.4.1943 > I / SS-Freiw.Rgt 2
-	6.3.1942: 25F 'Abava' Schuma /Latvian Police Battalion	7.2.1944 > II Bn / 2 Pol.Regt.
-	6.3.1942: 26F 'Tukums' Schuma /Latvian Police Battalion	23.4.1943 > III / SS-Freiw.Rgt 2
-	14.3.1942: 27F 'Burtnieki' Schuma /Latvian Police Battalion	4.1943: disbanded
-	9.3.1942: 28F 'Barta' Schuma /Latvian Police Battalion	13.7.1943 > Latv.Legion
-	18.5.1942:266E (21.3.1942: 16E) Schuma /Latvian Police Bn	11.1944 > 15.Waffen-Gren.Div.
-	18.5.1942:267F 'Rezekne'(18.3.1942:17E)Schuma/Latv.Pol.Bn	1.6.1943 > III / SS-Freiw.Rgt.2
-	18.5.1942:268E 'Ergli' (18.3.1942:18E) Schuma /Latv.Pol.Bn	3.2.1944: disbanded
Customs Guards	18.5.1942: 269W (18.3.1942:19E) Schuma /Latv.Pol.Bn	6.1943: disbanded
-	18.5.1942: 270F (9.5.1942: 20E 'Abrene') Schuma /Latv.Pol.Bn	18.2.1943: > 672 Latv.East Eng.Bn
-	15.1.1943:271F 'Valmiera' Schuma/Latvian Police Battalion	10.1944: > Waffen-Gren.Rgt 43
-	1.7.1942: 272F 'Daugavgrīva' Schuma /Latvian Police Bn	4.1943: > Latv.Legion
-	1.7.1942: 273F 'Ludza' Schuma /Latvian Police Battalion	15.7.1943: > 276 Bn.
-	1.10.1942: 274F Schuma /Latvian Police Battalion	30.9.1944: disbanded.
-	16.10.1942: 275F Schuma /Latvian Police Battalion	6.1943 > 276 Bn.
-	7.12.1942: 276F 'Kuldīga' Schuma /Latvian Police Battalion	11.8.1943: > IV Bn / 1 Pol.Rgt
-	7.12.1942: 277F 'Sigulda' Schuma /Latvian Police Battalion	11.8.1943: > I Bn / 1 Pol.Rgt
-	7.12.1942: 278F 'Dobele' Schuma /Latvian Police Battalion	11.8.1943: > II Bn / 1 Pol.Rgt
-	4.1.1943:279F 'Cesu' Schuma /Latvian Police Battalion	15.7.1943: > 278 Bn.
-	23.1.1943:280F 'Bolderaja' Schuma /Latvian Police Battalion	9.4.1943: disbanded.
-	23.1.1943: 281F 'Abrene' Schuma /Latvian Police Battalion	9.4.1943: disbanded.
-	1942: 282F 'Venta' (6.1942: 24E) Schuma /Latvian Pol. Bn	15.7.1943: > 277 Bn.
-	7.1942: 283F (6.1942: 25E) Schuma /Latvian Police Bn	5.1944: > 283 (Construction) Bn.
-	5.1944: 283 (Construction) Latvian Police Battalion	12.1944: disbanded
-	12.5.1943: 311F 'Valmeira' Latvian Police Battalion.	2.7.1943: disbanded
-	15.5.1943: 312F Latvian Police Battalion	11.8.1943 > III Bn / 1 Pol.Rgt
-	2.8.1943: 313F Latvian Police Battalion	7.2.1944 > III Bn / 2 Pol.Regt.
-	5.1944: 314 (Construction) Latvian Police Battalion	7.1944 > IV Construction Bn
-	1.1944: 315 (Construction) Latvian Police Battalion	4.1945: disbanded
-	2.8.1943: 316F Latvian Police Battalion	7.2.1944 > IV Bn / 2 Pol.Regt.
-	18.10.1943: 317F Latvian Police Battalion	14.2.1944 > I Bn / 3 Pol.Regt.
C-Group	25.10.1943: 318F Latvian Police Battalion	14.2.1944 > II Bn / 3 Pol.Regt.
C-Group	25.10.1943: 319F Latvian Police Battalion	8.5.1945: surrendered
-	21.12.1943: 320W Latvian Police Battalion	20.9.1944: disbanded
C-Group	22.12.1943: 321F Latvian Police Battalion	14.2.1944 > III Bn / 3 Pol.Regt.
-	23.7.1944: 322F Latvian Police Battalion	8.5.1945: surrendered
-	3.1944: 325F Latvian Police Battalion	12.1944: destroyed
-	3.1944: 326F Latvian Police Battalion	5.1944 > 326 Construction Bn
-	3.1944: 327 (Construction) Latvian Police Battalion	4.1944 > 327 Construction Bn
-	3.1944: 328 (Construction) Latvian Police Battalion	7.1944 > 327 Construction Bn
-	10.1944: 1 'Meiers' Police Depot (z.b.V.) Battalion	
-	10.1944: 2 Police Depot (z.b.V.) Battalion	
1.8.1943:'Riga'(4.9.1943: 1'Riga')Vol.Pol.Regt-I(277), II(278), III(312), IV(276) Bn.		19.11.1944 > 15.Waffen-Gren.Div.
2.1944: 2 'Liepaja' (9.1944: 'Kurzeme') Pol.Regt - I(22), II(25), III(313), IV(316) Bn		26.10.1944 > 15.Waffen-Gren.Div.
2.1944: 3 'Cesis' Police Regt - I (317), II (318), III (321) Bn		8.1944 > 1 Pol.Regt.

**Latvian Frontier Guard Regiments (Police) / by 14.5.1944: SS-Frontier Guard Regiments (Police)**

2.1944: 1 Latvian Frontier Guard Regiment - Riga (I-IV Bns)	3.1944: disbanded
2.1944: 2 Latvian / SS-Frontier Guard Regiment - Riga (I-IV Bns)	10.1944 > Waffen-Gren.Regt 106
2.1944: 3 Latvian / SS-Frontier Guard Regiment - Riga (I-IV Bns)	7.1944 > 19.Waffen-Grenadier-Div.
2.1944: 4 Latvian / SS-Frontier Guard Regiment - Tukums (I-IV Bns)	8. 1944> 2 & 5 Front.Guard Regts
2.1944: 5 Latvian / SS-Frontier Guard Regiment - Aizpute (I-IV Bns)	10.1944 > Waffen-Gren.Regt 106
2.1944: 6 Latvian / SS-Frontier Guard Regiment - Kuldiga (I-IV Bns)	8. 1944> 2 & 5 Front.Guard Regts

## LATVIA

Latvia (area 25,400 square miles; 1938 population, 1,971,000) was the largest Baltic state, and made the largest nett contribution – at least 148,000 men – to the German forces. The Latvians are ethnically related to the Lithuanians. Latvia is divided into four provinces: west, Courland (Latvian: *Kurzeme*, German: *Kurland*); central, Zemgalia (*Zemgale*); north-east, Livonia (*Vidzeme*); and south-east, Latgalia (*Latgale*).

German-Latvian relations had traditionally been poor before 1941. In 1905 the Latvians had led the struggle against the 'Baltic barons'; in 1917 many Latvians had sympathised with Communism; and in 1919 Latvian nationalists and Communists had fought the German Freikorps. However, a year under Soviet occupation in 1940–41 convinced the Latvians that the Germans were a lesser evil, and the advancing Wehrmacht were welcomed as liberators in July 1941.

Nevertheless, the Germans refused to recognise the Provisional Government functioning in Riga in July 1941, and appointed instead as Commissioner-General Dr Otto Heinrich Drechsler, with Latvian Maj.Gen. Oskars Dankers as head of the Civil Administration. Latvia was divided into six Districts: Dünaburg (Daugavpils); Libau (Liepaja); Mitau (Jelgava); Riga-Stadt (Riga city); Riga-Land (Riga surroundings); and Wolmar (Valmiera).

In July 1941 Drechsler began recruiting a Latvian police force of 2,500 men: the 'A-Group', supported by a reserve, the 'B-Group' on limited contracts, and the 'C-Group' – former *Aizsargi* Home Guards to be mobilised in emergencies. A 500-strong Depot Bn was formed, which in October 1941 served with the German Army on security duties in Russia. On 6 November 1941 all Latvian forces in the German Police were reorganised in auxiliary defence units (*Schutzmannschaft*); and by October 1942, 9,000 A-Group were serving in the Civil Police and 9,000 B-Group in Defence Battalions. General Dankers' Civil Administration demanded the re-establishment of the Latvian Army but, faced with German refusal, decided to support the defence battalions as a first step towards this ultimate goal.

In November 1941 the Germans planned 13 '1st Wave' defence battalions (16–28 series), but when more volunteers came forward a further five depot battalions (16E–20E) were formed – redesignated in May 1942 as numbers 266–270. In June 1942 a 2nd Wave of 11 battalions (271–281) and four depot battalions (24E–27E, from July 282–285) were planned, but two (26E/284 & 27E/285) were not raised and one (25E/283F) was reformed as a construction battalion from the Russian minority in Latgalia. In May 1943 a 3rd Wave of 12 defence battalions (311–313, 316–324) and six Latvian-Russian Construction Bns (314–315, 325–328) were planned, but 323 and 324 were not raised. There were also two police depots.

A total of 47 Latvian Defence Bns were formed – more than half the total Baltic contribution – but during 1942–43 no more than 25 to 30 existed together, due to redesignations, amalgamations, and transfers to the Waffen-SS. In all 22 battalions

**SS-Brigadeführer Fritz von Scholz, an Austrian aristocrat, commanded the Latvian SS Volunteer Brigade from May to September 1943. He then commanded the senior non-German Waffen-SS division, the Danish-Norwegian 11.SS-Freiwilligen-Panzer-Grenadier-Division 'Nordland', before dying of wounds in July 1944. Here von Scholz, in a German Army M1943 field cap and leather greatcoat, decorates Latvian members of the brigade with the Iron Cross 2nd Class, tying the medal and ribbon to the third buttonhole in the traditional manner. The soldier (right) is wearing a German M1916 helmet and M1940 field tunic, without shoulder straps but with the collar patches of a Latvian Army warrant officer second class (see chart on page 44); note at extreme bottom right the M1943 'German Army'-type Latvian arm shield. The two second lieutenants to his right are wearing the same helmet and tunic but with Waffen-SS collar patches and shoulder boards. (Signal Magazine)**





Men of the Latvian 280F Defence (Shuma) Bn, soon to be redesignated Latvian Police Bn, photographed in April 1943. The five in the foreground wear German Police M1936 uniforms with regulation collar patches and green thread eagle, swastika and wreath arm badges – officially forbidden to non-German policemen, though the absence of cap badges and some shoulder straps suggests that they are Latvians and not German cadre personnel. The other men are wearing pre-1940 Latvian Civil Police uniforms with Latvian Army collar patches. The man at the right also wears the M1943 Latvian *Schutzmansschaft* arm shield (see Plate E1); and he, and others, have the M1923 Latvian Army 'sun and stars' enamel cap badge. Later that year these troops would all be issued German Police M1936 uniforms with Latvian cap badges, collar patches and arm shields. (Friedrich Herrmann Memorial Collection)

organised into the former *Aizsargi's* 19 territorial regiments, wearing pre-1940 Latvian Army or *Aizsargi* uniforms.

In contrast to their policy in Estonia, the German Army did not recruit Latvian 'Eastern battalions'. However, some defence units were transferred to the Army – the 652nd (Latvian) Eastern Guard Co, 672nd (Latvian) Eastern Engineer Bn, and three Latvian-Russian construction battalions redesignated 'Latgalian' units. In return the defence battalions provided a huge pool of recruits for the Waffen-SS.

### Latvian Waffen-SS

In January 1943 Himmler inspected the 2nd SS Inf Bde on the Leningrad front. Reformed in 1942, the brigade comprised the Dutch, Flemish and Norwegian SS Legions, with Latvian 19F and 21F Defence Bns attached. Impressed by the Latvians' 'Germanic bearing', Himmler was given permission by Hitler to form a Latvian SS Volunteer Legion on 8 February 1943. The Latvian people supported the unit, hoping that it would be the core of a national army. (Note that unlike the term 'Estonian Legion', referring specifically to the 3rd Estonian SS Bde/20th SS Div, 'Latvian Legion' was applied collectively to all Latvian units in the Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS.) The 1st Vol Regt (Latvian SS Col. Voldemars Veiss) was formed in April from Defence Bns 16F, 19F & 21F, followed in May by a second regiment, artillery and support services to form the Latvian SS Vol Bde, replacing the 2nd SS Inf Bde on the Volkhov front. The brigade commander – SS Brig. Fritz von Scholz; from September 1943, SS Sen.Col. Hinrich Schuldt – and half the officers and NCOs were German, but the rest, including the regimental commanders, were Latvian.

On 25 February 1943 a Latvian SS Volunteer Division was formed in Latvia with three infantry regiments and supporting units. The request for a Latvian divisional commander was vetoed by the Germans, who appointed SS Brig. Peter Hansen, and from May SS Brig. Carl Graf von Pückler-Burghaus. Instead, a distinguished major-general of the Latvian Army, the 65-year-old Rudolf Bangerskis, was appointed SS lieutenant-general and Inspector-General of the Latvian Legion, responsible for all non-operational matters such as recruitment and welfare. Personnel were initially provided by voluntary enlistment and by transfer of troops from the defence battalions, but later by conscription.

served outside Latvia: seven (16F, 18–19F, 21F, 24F, 26F, 267F) in Poland, Latvia and north-western Russia; eleven (17F, 18F, 22F, 24F, 26F, 271–272F, 274F, 312–313F, 316F) in Belarus; and seven (17F, 22–23F, 25F, 27–28F, 268F, 272F) in the Ukraine. In May 1943 they were redesignated Latvian Police Battalions.

C-Group personnel formed the Home Guard (*Selbstschutz*). By July 1944 this had 22,262 men,



The Latvian 16th Defence Bn formed the 3rd Bn, Latvian SS Legion in February 1943. Here the battalion commander, Lt.Col. R.Kocins, decorates men with the Iron Cross 2nd Class after battles near Pulkowo on the Leningrad front in April 1943. Kocins is wearing an M1942 German Police officer's field cap, and a German Army officer's M1935 field tunic with Police M1936 collar patches. The officer, sergeant and corporal facing him (left to right) all wear German Army M1940 tunics with the regulation blank right collar patch worn until 11 March 1943, which is often mistaken in photographs for that worn by the SD. (Herrmann Memorial Collection)

**Table 4: Latvian Units in the German Armed Forces 1941-1945**

**Units in the German Army 1942-1945**

652 Latvian Eastern Guard Company (10.1942); Supply Company (1945)	9.5.1945: surrendered
672 Latvian Eastern Engineer Bn (8.7.1944)	9.5.1945: surrendered
I Latvian Construction Bn (1943), 'Kurland' Construction Bn (1944)	9.5.1945: surrendered
II Latvian Construction Bn (1943)	9.1944 > I Latv.Constr.Bn.
III Latvian Construction Bn (1943)	9.1944: disbanded
IV Latvian Construction Bn (1943)	9.5.1945: surrendered
326 Latgale Construction Bn (5.1944)	9.5.1945: surrendered
327 Latgale Construction Bn (4.1944)	4.1945 > IV Latv.Constr.Bn
328 Latgale Construction Bn (7.1944)	9.5.1945: surrendered

**Units of the German Waffen-SS 1943-1945**

				VI. Waffen-Armeeekorps der SS (lett)	Type of unit
				Waffen-Gren.Rgt der SS 106	Inf.Regt
Lettische SS-Freiw.Legion	Lettische SS-Freiw.Brigade	2.Lettische SS-Freiwillige-Brigade	19.Lett.SS-Freiwillige-Div.	19.Waffen-Gren.Div. der SS	
8.2.1943	18.5.1943	22.10.1943	7.1.1944	16.5.1944-8.5.1945	
I-III/Latv.Leg	SS-Freiwilliges-Rgt 1 / 39		SS-Freiw.Gren.Rgt 42	Waffen-Gren.Rgt der SS 42	Inf.Regt
-	SS-Freiwilliges-Rgt 2 / 40		SS-Freiw.Gren.Rgt 43	Waffen-Gren.Rgt der SS 43	Inf.Regt
-			SS-Freiw.Gren.Rgt 44	Waffen-Gren.Rgt der SS 44	Inf.Regt
-	Artillerie-Abt.	SS-Artillerie-Abt.52	SS-Fr.Art.Rgt 19	Waffen-Art.Rgt der SS 19	Art.Regt
-	Brig.services	Brig.services 52	Divisional services 19		-
Lettische SS-Freiwilligen-Division	15. Lettische SS-Freiwilligen-Division			15.Waffen-Gren.Div. der SS	Type of unit
25.2.1943	22.10.1943			6.1944	
SS-Freiwilliges-Rgt 1 / 31	SS-Freiwilliges-Rgt 31 / 32			Waffen-Gren.Rgt der SS 32	Inf.Regt
SS-Freiwilliges-Rgt 2 / 32	SS-Freiwilliges-Rgt 32 / 33			Waffen-Gren.Rgt der SS 33	Inf.Regt
SS-Freiwilliges-Rgt 2 / 32	SS-Freiwilliges-Rgt 34			Waffen-Gren.Rgt der SS 34	Inf.Regt
SS-Artillerie-Regiment	SS-Freiwilliges Artillerie-Regiment 15			Waffen-Art.Rgt der SS 15	Art.Regt
Divisional services	Divisional services 15			Divisional services 15	-

**Units of the German Air Force 1944**

Latvian Air Force Legion (Luftwaffenlegion 'Lettland') 11.8.1944 - 7.10.1944		
9.1943 - 10.8.1944	11.8.1944 - 7.10.1944	Type of unit
Ergänzungs-Nachtschlachtgruppe 'Ostland' (9.1943)	Erg.Nachtschlachtgruppe 'Lettland' (6.1944)	Training Wing
1./ Nachtschlachtgruppe 12 (1.2.1944)	1. / Nachtschlachtgruppe 12	Night Attack Sqdn
2./ Nachtschlachtgruppe 12 (22.6.1944)	2. / Nachtschlachtgruppe 12	Night Attack Sqdn
3./ Nachtschlachtgruppe 12 (7.1944)	-	Night Attack Sqdn
-	4807-9 batteries Flak-Regiment 43	AA batteries

**RIGHT** The Germans appointed Rudolfs Bangerskis, a distinguished Latvian Army major-general and minister of defence, as Inspector-General of the Latvian SS Legion on 30 April 1943, in order to give him an important but non-operational position befitting his status. He is wearing a German Army M1928 tunic (popular with 'old sweat' generals) with matt-gold general officers' buttons, and the M1942 collar patches of an *SS-Gruppenführer und Generalleutnant der Waffen-SS*. Note the M1943 'German Army'-type Latvian arm shield, in dark red and white, worn on the left forearm until 15 April 1944. Bangerskis lived in Germany after the war, dying in a car accident in Oldenburg in February 1958. (Friedrich Herrmann Memorial Collection)



**FAR RIGHT** A newly commissioned second lieutenant (*Waffen-Untersturmführer*) of the Latvian 15th SS Infantry Division in early 1945. He wears a *Waffen-SS* M1939 officer's service cap with white infantry piping, and an M1935 German Army officer's field tunic with dark green collar facing, still with enlisted ranks' black collar patches without silver cord edging. On his left patch are the three aluminium rank pips and on his right the 'sun and stars' emblem of the 15th SS Div, introduced September 1944. The stars symbolised Latvia's three original provinces - Courland, Livonia and Zemgale - and the emblem was the Latvian Army cap badge during 1923-40. (Friedrich Herrmann Memorial Collection)

On 8 October 1943 the Germans began to form VI SS Volunteer Corps under SS Maj.Gen. Karl Pfeffer-Wildenbruch, succeeded from July 1944 by SS Maj.Gen. von Treuenfeld, then SS Lt.Gen. Walter Krüger. In June 1944 the corps was renamed as 'Armed' (i.e. non-Germanic), grouping the division and the brigade; on 22 October these were respectively redesignated 15th Latvian SS Vol Div, and 2nd Latvian SS Vol Brigade. In November 1943 the 15th SS Div was sent to the front north of Nevel. In January 1944 the 2nd SS Vol Bde was ordered expanded into the 19th Latvian SS Vol Div; but with the brigade engaged at the front, this reorganisation was slow. The Red Army's Leningrad-Novgorod strategic offensive against Army Group North, launched on 14 January 1944, forced the two divisions towards the Latvian border, and from February they fought together in VI SS Corps.

### Police & Frontier Guard Regiments

As the most effective of the Baltic police units, the Latvian Police Bns were the first to be grouped into regiments. In August 1943 the 1st Latvian Volunteer (i.e. non-Germanic) Police Regt was formed and immediately sent to the front, where, although poorly equipped, it fought well. It was withdrawn to Latvia in February 1944, when the 2nd and 3rd Regts were formed.

In February 1944 the Red Army reached Latvia's eastern frontier and general mobilisation was proclaimed. The 1st-6th Latvian Frontier Guard Regts were formed to reinforce the Latvian police units and the two SS divisions, and, as with the Estonians, were redesignated in May 1944 'SS Frontier Guard Regiments (Police)'. Each regiment had 3,000 men in I-IV poorly trained and equipped battalions. In March 1944 the 1st and 2nd Regts, and in July the 3rd, were sent to reinforce the 19th SS Div, although 2nd was immediately reformed. In July 1944 Army Group Centre was virtually annihilated by the Red Army's Operation Bagration (23 June-29 August), allowing the Soviets to advance into eastern Latvia<sup>8</sup>. Six regiments (1, 2 Police; 2, 4-6 Frontier Gd) joined a reconstituted

<sup>8</sup> See Osprey Campaign 42 *Bagration 1944*



Lt. (*Waffen-Obersturmführer*) Roberts Ancans of the 180-man Close Combat Training School (*Nahkampfsschule*) of 19th Field Replacement Bn (*SS-Waffen-Feldersatz-Bataillon 19*), of the Latvian 19th SS Inf Div (*19. Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS, lettische Nr.2*) photographed in February 1945 in Courland. He was awarded the Knight's Cross on 25 January 1945 for bravery in the third 'Christmas Battle' of the six 'Courland Battles', 16 October 1944–4 April 1945. Ancans is wearing the SS-runes right collar patch widely tolerated for Latvian personnel awaiting issue of the 'thunder-cross' and 'sun and stars' patches. He also wears the Iron Cross 1st Class and Infantry Assault Badge on his left breast pocket, below the bronze Close Combat Clasp (introduced 25 November 1942 for at least 15 days of hand-to-hand combat without armoured support). The Latvian M1942 Platoon Leader's Course badge is worn on his right pocket, and the ribbons of the Iron Cross 2nd Class and bronze Eastern Peoples' Bravery and Service Decoration 2nd Class in his buttonhole. Not visible here are a silver Wound Badge on his left pocket, and a Tank Destruction badge which was worn on his right upper sleeve, as awarded from 9 March 1942 for the single-handed destruction of an enemy tank or other AFV. (Henry Rütel Memorial Archive)



were evacuated to Germany, where they were absorbed into the 15th SS Division.

### The 1944–45 campaigns

By July 1944 there were 110,200 Latvians serving with the German forces. There were 31,500 in the Latvian *Waffen-SS*; 12,100 in the Frontier Guard Regts; 600 in the *Luftwaffe*, and 900 in other SS units. There were 42,400 in the Police – 5,200 in the A-Group civil police, 14,900 in the B-Group police regiments and battalions, and 22,300 in the C-Group Home Guard. Finally, 12,100 Latvians served as *Hilfswillige* ('*Hiwis*') – auxiliaries attached to German Army divisions; and another 10,600 in various military and paramilitary units not controlled by the Latvian Legion Inspectorate. Taking into account the casualties sustained up to July 1944 and subsequent new recruits, there were about 148,000 Latvians – some sources claim 165,000 – in German service, although this figure was reached by resorting to conscription. Personnel refusing conscription were imprisoned and formed in 1943 into I–IV Army Construction Bns – not to be confused with the four 'Latgale' ex-Police construction battalions.

The best example of the tensions that existed between the Latvians and the Germans is the Karelis Home Guard Group, named after its commander, Latvian Army Maj.Gen. Karelis. In spring 1944 the *Abwehr* began to train the group to operate as guerrillas behind Soviet lines after the Red Army had re-occupied Latvia, and in July three battalions, with about 1,200 men, were authorised. However, Karelis did not limit recruitment to Home Guards, but also accepted Latvians from SS and Police units being evacuated to Germany. The Germans then discovered that the group's commanders intended to contact the Western Allies through Sweden to beg them to defend Latvia against the Soviet Union.

Battle Group Jeckeln sent to halt the Red Army. They sustained massive casualties, and many conscripts deserted.

By October 1944 all six Frontier Guard regiments had been disbanded, their personnel being sent to reinforce the 19th SS Division. The best troops formed the 106th Armed SS Inf Regt, serving as VI SS Corps troops. In August 1944 the 2nd and 3rd Police Regts were disbanded to reinforce the 1st Regt; the 2nd Regt was then reformed from Latvian Civil Police and C-Group Home Guards. Also in October 1944, both remaining police regiments



**ESTONIAN FORCES**

- 1: Lipnik (reservis), Capt Talpak's Co;  
Tallinn, August 1941**
- 2: Jaguülem abi, Valga County  
Home Guard, June 1942**
- 3: Konstaabel, Petseri-Võru Police,  
April 1943**



**ESTONIAN FORCES**

- 1: Reamees, 33F Defence Bn;  
Leningrad front, May 1942
- 2: Zugwachtmeister,  
1st Estonian Police Regt;  
Narva, July 1944
- 3: Leutnant, 4th SS Frontier  
Guard Regt; Narva, July 1944

ESTONIAN FORCES

1: Legionsrottenführer, SS Armd Inf Bn 'Narva', 5th SS Armd Div 'Viking'; Kovel, Ukraine, April 1944

2: Waffen-Stubsscharführerdiensttuer, 20th SS Arty Regt, 20th SS Inf Div; Neuhammer, Germany, January 1945

3: Luftwaffenhelfer, 127th Mixed AA Bn; Riga, Latvia, October 1944



ESTONIAN & LATVIAN FORCES

1: Vänrikki, 200th Finnish Inf Regt; Kärevere, Estonia, August 1944

2: Korporal, Riga Police; Latvia, 1943

3: Kapralis, 21F 'Liepaja' Latvian Defence Bn; Leningrad front, April 1942





LATVIAN FORCES

- 1: Oberleutnant, 25F 'Abava' Latvian Police Bn;  
- Pripjat Marshes, May 1943
- 2: Gefreiter, 5th Latvian SS Frontier Guard Regt;  
Belarus, May 1944
- 3: Oberleutnant, 1st Sqn, 12th Night Attack Wing;  
Jelgava, Latvia, August 1944

LATVIAN FORCES

1: Legionsunterscharführer, 3rd Bn, Latvian SS Legion;  
Leningrad front, March 1943

2: Waffen-Standartenoberjunker, 34th SS Inf Regt,  
15th SS Inf Div; NW Russia, September 1944

3: Waffen-Grenadier, 43rd SS Inf Regt, 19th SS Inf Div;  
Courland, April 1945



LITHUANIAN FORCES

- 1: Constable, Vilnius City Police, 1942
- 2: Unterkorporal, Schutzmannschaft, February 1943
- 3: Grandinis, 7F Defence Bn; S Russia, June 1942





LITHUANIAN FORCES

1: Hauptmann, 255F Lithuanian Police Bn;  
Belarus, April 1944

2: Unterwachtmeister, 308 LVR Bn;  
Graziskaia Valley, May 1944

3: Jaunesynis Leitenantas, Taurus Command,  
Lithuanian Liberation Army; April 1948



Thus in November 1944 the Karelis Group lost its German sponsor when the Abwehr was absorbed into the SS Security Service (SD), and on 14 July it was disarmed by the Germans. Some officers were executed and several hundred men fled into the forests, pursued by German forces.

After February 1944 the Latvian 15th SS Div was commanded successively by SS Sen.Cols. Nikolaus Heilmann, Herbert von Obwurzer, Adolf Ax and Karl Burk, while the 19th SS Div was led by SS Col. Friedrich-Wilhelm Bock, then the capable SS Sen.Col. (eventually Lt.Gen.) Bruno Streckenbach. The two divisions fought tenaciously to

defend eastern Latvia but, suffering huge casualties and after exhausting all reserves, were unable to halt the Soviet advance. On 13 October 1944 the Red Army captured Riga and reached the Baltic Sea south of Liepaja, trapping Army Group North (redesignated Army Group Courland in January 1945) in the Courland Pocket. Meanwhile, in July 1944, the 15th SS Div had been evacuated to Germany to be reformed, leaving the 19th to fight on stubbornly in Courland until 8 May 1945.

On 8 September 1944 the 15th SS Div began to reform in West Prussia. Since there were more than enough Latvian personnel to reconstitute the division, but not enough for a third Latvian SS division, the surplus personnel were formed into 1st–3rd Divisional Construction Regiments. The 15th SS Div was still not operational when it was ordered on 21 January 1945 to defend the Vistula-Oder Canal against the Red Army's January offensive. The division retreated westwards into Pomerania in March, surrendering to US forces at Schwerin in May 1945. Three battalions (I/32nd & I/33rd Inf Regt, 15 Fusilier Bn) fought in the battle of Berlin as 'Battle Group Janums'.

In June 1941 the Red Army had disbanded the 24th Latvian Territorial Corps rather than deploy it against the Wehrmacht, transporting 3,000 of its personnel into central Russia. Even so, Latvia had been the most pro-Communist of the Baltic states, and many Latvian Communists had emigrated to the USSR since Latvian independence in 1918, joining the Latvian colonists who had settled there in Tsarist times. From these groups new Latvian Red Army units were recruited, forming in August 1944 the 130th Latvian Rifle Corps (43rd Guards & 308th Rifle Divs); this was one of the first formations to enter Latvia in 1944, fighting in the battle of Riga. Meanwhile the Red Air Force formed the 1st Latvian Night Bomber Regiment.



Lt.Col. (*Waffen-Obersturmbannführer*) Nikolajs Galdins, commanding *Waffen-Grenadier-Regt der SS 42* of the Latvian 19th SS Inf Div – *19. Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (lettische Nr.2)* – in Courland, March 1945. On his German Army officer's tunic Galdins wears the large swastika emblem on the right collar patch, introduced for the 19th Div in late 1944. The swastika (in Latvian 'fire cross', *Ugunskrusts*, or later 'thunder-cross', *Perkonkrusts*) is of course a very ancient Sanskrit, North American Indian and pre-Christian European symbol. It featured on Latvian military flags and Latvian and Finnish aircraft from 1918; only its later use by the German Nazi Party, and the Latvian pro-Nazi *Perkonkrusts* Party (banned by President Ulmanis in 1934), brought it into enduring disrepute. A 'double-armed' swastika collar patch, possibly designed for a third Latvian SS division which was never formed, was authorised for non-German concentration camp guards on 27 June 1944.

Galdins wears the Knight's Cross at his throat; the Iron Cross 1st Class, Infantry Assault Badge and Wound Badge on his left pocket with the bronze Close Combat Clasp above, and the Iron Cross 2nd Class buttonhole ribbon. On his right pocket are the German Cross in Gold and a second badge, probably a wrongly positioned Anti-Partisan Battle Badge. He wears the M1943 Latvian *Schutzmannschaft* arm shield in the post-April 1944 position on the upper left sleeve. (Henry Rūitel Memorial Archive)



Sgt. (SS-Oberscharführer) Konrads Kalejs of the notorious Latvian *Arajs Kommando* SD auxiliary company, in M1938 *Allgemeine-SS* enlisted ranks' grey-green service dress as also worn by the SS Security Service (*Sicherheitsdienst - SD*). Against regulations, he wears an officer's superior quality service cap with aluminium chin cords. The SD open-necked field tunic bears non-regulation white-piped black collar patches: a blank SD patch on the right and a sergeant's two pips on the left. (Henry Rüütel Memorial Archive)

This teenage Latvian, photographed in late 1944, is wearing the M1943 grey-blue Luftwaffe auxiliary's uniform - cf Plate C3. He has moved the Latvian Youth (LJO) embroidered 'sun and stars' diamond-shaped cap badge to his left breast pocket, replacing it with the Latvian Army enamel version to emphasise his combatant status. For the same reason he has adopted a non-regulation Luftwaffe breast eagle. Note the Flying Hitler Youth shoulder straps, and a section leader's whistle lanyard on the left shoulder. The LJO brassard for walking-out dress is horizontally striped in dark red-white-dark red, with a yellow sun and stars on a white diamond. (Henry Rüütel Memorial Archive)

## Other services

Latvians also served in the Luftwaffe, forming a night attack training wing in September 1943, and the 12th Night Attack Wing (two squadrons) in February 1944, flying Arado Ar66 armed trainers on operations from May 1944. In May 1944 a Latvian fighter squadron was planned; in July, 3.Staffel/NSGr12 was formed but almost immediately disbanded through lack of aircraft; and on 11 August the Latvian air and anti-aircraft units were redesignated the 'Latvia Air Force Legion' (Latvian Lt.Col. Janis Rucels). However, the desertion of three Estonian pilots in September 1944 also led to the disbanding of the three Latvian squadrons on 7 October, with the personnel transferred to AA units as *Kampfhelfer* auxiliaries. On 31 May 1944 ten Latvians from the 1st Sqn were sent for training in Germany as fighter pilots, flying Fw190As with JG4 and JG54 and losing three killed.

In September 1943 the Luftwaffe had formed three AA batteries (4807, 4808, 4809) from Latvian volunteers, assigning them to 43rd AA Regt in Riga. Following the fall of the city in October 1944 these troops joined the 19th SS Inf Div, or other AA units in Germany.

As in Estonia, in August 1944 the Germans conscripted 3,052 young Latvian men and accepted as volunteers 562, including some girls aged 15-18, to serve as Air Force Auxiliaries. In October-November 12,500 auxiliaries were evacuated to Germany, leaving the rest trapped in the Courland Pocket with the 43rd AA Regiment. Latvians also served in paramilitary organisations such as the RAD and OT, later transferring to the 15th and 19th SS Divisions.

One Latvian - Inspector-General Rudolfs Bangerskis - reached the rank of 'non-Germanic SS lieutenant-general' (*Waffen-Gruppenführer und Generalleutnant*). Two were promoted to the rank equivalent to a senior colonel (*Waffen-Oberführer*): Arturs Silgailis, deputy commander of

the 15th SS Inf Div, and Voldemars Skaitlauks, the VI SS Corps artillery commander. Six officers, mostly regimental commanders, were promoted colonel (*Waffen-Standartenführer*): Arvids Kripens, Karlis Aperats posthumously (32nd Regt); Vilis Janums (33rd Regt); Voldemars Veiss (42nd Regt); Aleksandrs Plensners (43rd Regt); and Karlis Lobe, deputy commander of 19th SS Division. Eleven Latvians won the Knight's Cross: Lt.Col. Aperats, Cpl. Karlis Sensberg (15th SS Div); Col. Voldemars Veiss, Lt.Col. Nikolajs Galdins, Maj. Voldemars Reinholds, Capt. Zanis Butkus,





A platoon of Lithuanian Civil Police prepare to hunt Soviet partisans, Vilnius, 1942; they wear pre-1940 Lithuanian Police uniforms. The officer (left) is wearing the dark blue double-breasted dress tunic and service cap (cf Plate G1), and carries a Lithuanian Police issue Belgian M1903 Browning 9mm semi-automatic pistol. Most of the constables wear the dark blue single-breasted service tunic; the Lithuanian-issue German M1916 helmets have a large brass octagonal badge with the *Vytis* charging knight emblem. They carry M1891 Mosin-Nagant rifles. (Baltimore Lithuanian Museum Collection)

November 1943: a detachment from a Lithuanian Defence Bn parade on frozen Lake Gelve with the ruins of Trakai Castle, near Vilnius, in the background. The officers (left & third left, third right & right) are wearing Lithuanian Army M1934 khaki caps with small octagonal Lithuanian Police badges, and greatcoats with Lithuanian Army shoulder strap rank insignia. Most of the other men have German Army M1942 padded overjackets and trousers reversible from *feldgrau* to white. One man (fourth right) is wearing the M1942 black *Schutzmannschaft* greatcoat with green collar and cuffs, and a black sidecap. (Baltimore Lithuanian Museum Collection)

2,950,000, this was the most populous Baltic state, but made the smallest contribution – 36,800 men – to the German forces. While the Lithuanians were arguably the most anti-Communist and anti-Russian of the three Baltic nations, their fiercely independent spirit and traditional mistrust of Germany made them a target for Nazi racial prejudice, which regarded the Lithuanians as an inferior people scarcely superior to the despised Poles.

The German Army refused to recognise the Provisional Government formed in Kaunas on 23 June 1941, but initially tolerated its activities, allowing members of the anti-Soviet resistance group *Lietuvini Aktyvistu Frontas* (LAF) to undertake security tasks on its behalf. On 28 July the German Commissioner-General, Dr Adrian von Renteln, formed a Lithuanian Civil Administration headed by Lithuanian Lt.Gen. Petras Kubiliunas, and on 5 August the Provisional Government was disbanded. Lithuania was divided into six Districts: Kauena-Stadt (Kaunas city); Kauena-Land (Kaunas surroundings); Ponewesch (Panevezys); Schaulen (Siauliai); Wilna-Stadt (Vilnius city); and Wilna-Land (Vilnius surroundings). On 26 September the LAF stood down.

On 14 July 1941 the Germans formed in Kaunas and Vilnius a Lithuanian Home Guard (German, *Selbstschutz*; Lithuanian, *Lietuvini Savisaugos Daliniai* – LSD), eventually comprising 11 battalions, for internal security duties. Many Lithuanians joined in the vain hope that these units would be subordinated to the Provisional Government. In



Lt. Roberts Gaigals, 2nd Lt. Mervaldis Adamsons and Robert Ancans, Sgt. Zanis Ansons, and Cpl. Alfreds Riekstins (all 19th SS Division).

## LITHUANIA

With an area of 25,200 square miles, and an estimated population of

**Table 5: Lithuanian Units in the German Police 1941–1945**

<b>Auxiliary Units 1941–1944</b>		
Lithuanian Home Guard (LSD)	Defence Units (Ger: Schutzmannschaften. Lith: LAD)	
14 Jul. 1941 – 5 Nov. 1941	6 Nov. 1941 / 8 Feb. 1944	Disbanded / reassigned
	<i>Vilnius Region</i>	
31.7.1941: 1 Vilnius Defence Bn	7.1942: 1F <i>Schuma</i> / Lithuanian Police Bn (Vilnius)	10.1944: > Luftwaffe
31.7.1941: 2 Vilnius Service Bn	3.1942: 2W <i>Schuma</i> / Lithuanian Police Bn (Vilnius)	13.7.1944 > 1 Pol.Reg.
31.7.1941: 3 Vilnius Labour Bn	3.1942: 3F <i>Schuma</i> / Lit.Police (9.1944 Vol) Bn (Vilnius)	9.1944: > 2 Vol.Inf.Regt.
8.1941: 4 Vilnius Defence Bn	3.1942: 4F <i>Schuma</i> / Lithuanian Police Bn (Vilnius)	11.1944: disbanded
-	7.1942: 6W <i>Schuma</i> / Lithuanian Police Bn (Vilnius)	11.1944: > 256 Pol.Bn.
5 Vilnius Railway Battalion	7.1942: 15F <i>Schuma</i> / Lit.Pol.(9.1944 Vol) Bn (Vilnius)	9.1944: > 2 Vol.Inf.Regt.
-	6.1943: 253E <i>Schuma</i> / Lithuanian Police Bn (Prienai)	13.7.1944 > 1 Pol.Reg.
-	9.1943: 254E. <i>Schuma</i> / Lit.Pol. (9.1944 Vol) Bn (Vilnius)	9.1944: > 2 Vol.Inf.Regt.
-	10.1944: 257F Lithuanian Police Bn (Svyriai)	13.7.1944 > 1 Pol.Reg.
	<i>Kaunas Region</i>	
9.1941: 5 Kaunas Defence Bn	11.1941: 5F <i>Schuma</i> / Lithuanian Police Bn (Kaunas)	9.5.1945: surrendered
9.1941: 4 Kaunas Defence Bn	3.1942: 7F <i>Schuma</i> / Lithuanian Police Bn (Kaunas)	-
10.1941: 6 Kaunas Defence Bn	3.1942: 8F <i>Schuma</i> / Lithuanian Police Bn (Kaunas)	20.11.1943: disbanded
9.1941: Kaunas HQ Staff	7.1942: 9W <i>Schuma</i> / Lithuanian Police Bn (Kaunas)	10.1944: > 1 Pol.Regt.
13.8.1941: 3 Kaunas Defence Bn	3.1942: 11W <i>Schuma</i> / Lithuanian Police Bn (Kaunas)	11.1943: destroyed
7.8.1941: 2 Kaunas Defence Bn	7.1942: 12F <i>Schuma</i> / Lithuanian Police Bn (Kaunas)	-
7.8.1941: 1 Kaunas Defence Bn	3.1942: 13F <i>Schuma</i> / Lithuanian Police Bn (Kaunas)	9.1944: > 13 Constr.Bn
-	7.1942: 251W <i>Schuma</i> / Lithuanian Police Bn (Kaunas)	-
-	7.1942: 252E <i>Schuma</i> / Lithuanian Police Bn (Kaunas)	-
-	9.1942: 255F. <i>Schuma</i> / Lithuanian Police Bn (Kaunas)	8.1944: > Lietuva .Bn
-	11.1944: 256F Lithuanian Police Bn (Kaunas)	4.1945: destroyed
	<i>Panevezys Region</i>	
-	7.1942: 10W <i>Schuma</i> / Lithuanian Police Bn (Panevezys)	10.1944: .> 256 Bn.
	<i>Siauliai Region</i>	
-	7.1942: 14W <i>Schuma</i> / Lithuanian Police Bn (Siauliai)	-
-	5.1944: 263F Lithuanian Police Battalion	8.1944: disbanded
-	5.1944: 264F Lithuanian Police Battalion	8.1944: disbanded
-	5.1944: 265F Lithuanian Police Battalion	8.1944: disbanded
-	8.1944: Lietuva Lithuanian Police Battalion	9.4.1945: surrendered
13.7.1944: 1 Lithuanian Volunteer Police Regt - 2F, 9F, 253E, 257F Lithuanian Police Bns		8.1944: > Luftwaffe
9.1944: 2 Lithuanian Volunteer Infantry Regt - 3F, 15F, 254E Lithuanian Police Bns		8.5.1945: surrendered
<b>Lithuanian Special Units 1944</b> (Ger: Litauische Sonderverbände. Lith: Lietuvos Vietine Rinkine - LVR)		
3.1944: <i>Vilnius Regiment</i>		
302 Bn; 304 Bn; 306 Bn (Vilnius)		5.1944: > Luftwaffe
3.1944: <i>Kaunas Regiment</i>		
301 Bn (Marijampole); 308 Bn (Ukmerge); 310 Bn (Seredzius)		5.1944: > Luftwaffe
3.1944: <i>Marijampole Regiment</i>		
303 Bn (Trakai); 307 Bn; 311 Bn		5.1944: > Luftwaffe
3.1944: <i>Kalvarija Regiment</i>		
305 Bn (Kalvarija); 309 Bn; 312 Bn		5.1944: > Luftwaffe
3.1944: <i>Officers' Training School</i>		
313 NCO Training Bn (Marijampole)		5.1944: > Luftwaffe

November 1941 the 11 LSD battalions were reformed as auxiliary police defence units (German, *Schutzmannschaft*; Lithuanian, *Lietuviu Apsaugos Daliniai* – LAD). In August 1942 about 8,800 were serving as Civil Police and 7,900 in 17 Defence Bns (1–15, 251–252). Three more battalions (253–255) were raised subsequently, and a further six (256–257, 263–265, Lietuva) in 1944, making a total of 26 Lithuanian defence/police battalions. The Lithuanian Republic Home Guard, unlike its Estonian and Latvian equivalents, refused to reform to carry out local security duties.

The defence battalions were organised into four regional commands, with most units stationed in the vulnerable Vilnius and Kaunas regions. They were redesignated ‘Lithuanian Police Battalions’ in February 1944, and served in German Army rear areas fighting partisans. In all, 16 battalions served outside Lithuania: five (2W, 5F, 13F, 256F, Lietuva) in

Poland, Latvia and NW Russia; six (3F, 10W, 12F, 15F, 251W, 255F) in Belarus; and five (4F, 7F, 8F, 11W, 254E) in the Ukraine. The 255F Bn, reformed in Dresden in August 1944 with Lithuanian RAD personnel as the Lietuva Bn, fought in Yugoslavia against Tito's partisans until April 1945.

In February 1943 the Germans decided to form a Lithuanian SS Legion. Unwilling to allocate more Lithuanian manpower to the German forces, the Lithuanian military and political leaders refused to lead or support the unit, forcing the Germans to appeal directly for volunteers. When only 200 Lithuanians came forward the humiliated Germans cancelled the Legion on 17 March, claiming with bad grace that Lithuanians were in any case unfit to bear arms. In reprisal they conscripted young Lithuanians into seven Army Construction Bns (I–VI, 13).



### The VLIK & LVF

The vast forests made Lithuania the Baltic state most suited to guerrilla warfare, and from late 1943 Soviet partisans were operating in eastern Lithuania in force; furthermore, the Red Army was now close to the eastern frontier. On 25 November 1943 the LAF reformed as the Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania (*Vyriausias Lietuvos Išlaivsinimo Komitetas* – VLIK), and, anxious to defend Lithuania from the advancing Red Army, authorised retired Maj.Gen. Povilas Plechavičius, a distinguished regimental commander of the Lithuanian Independence War of 1918–20, to negotiate with SS Lt.Gen. Jeckeln to establish Lithuanian military forces. Plechavičius was successful, and on 16 February 1944 he called for volunteers. Over 30,000 men responded and in March 1944 Plechavičius formed 12,000 of them into the ‘Lithuanian Special Units’ (German, *Litauische Sonderverbände*; Lithuanian, *Lietuvos Vietinė Rinktinė* – LVR), unofficially called the ‘Plechavičius Legion’ and commanded by Chief of Staff Col. Oskaras Urbanas. Thirteen 750-strong battalions (*Schutzmannschaft* series 301–313) were formed into four regional regiments and a training school. However, only the Kaunas Regt saw action, with the 308th Bn fighting Soviet partisans in the Grauziskai Valley of south-eastern Lithuania in May 1944. Impressed by Plechavičius’ success in attracting volunteers, Jeckeln demanded a further 9,000 Lithuanians in 15 battalions to protect Luftwaffe airfields on the Eastern Front. However,

In May 1944 the LVR was disbanded and its personnel were transferred to anti-aircraft units in Germany as Luftwaffe auxiliaries (*Kampfhelfer*). Here former LVR men parade after Sunday mass in Berlin, wearing Luftwaffe M1935 enlisted ranks’ field caps, flight blouses, belts and trousers, with standard German cap insignia and red *Flakartillerie* collar patches each with the single rank wing of private (*Kanonier*). M1943 ‘German Army’-type Lithuanian tricolour arm shields were usually worn, although these troops have yet to receive them. (Baltimore Lithuanian Museum Collection)

**Table 6: Lithuanian Units in the German Army 1943–1945**

#### Construction Units in the German Army 1941–1944

1943: I Lithuanian Construction Bn Kaunas)	6.1944: disbanded
1943: II Lithuanian Construction Bn (Panevezys)	8.1944: disbanded
1943: III Lithuanian Construction Bn (Vilnius)	5.1944: disbanded
1943: IV Lithuanian Construction Bn (Panevezys)	9.5.1945: surrendered
11.1944: V Lithuanian Construction Bn (Panevezys)	1.1945: > 13 & 256 Pol.Bn.
11.1944: VI Lithuanian Construction Bn (Panevezys)	8.1944: disbanded
11.1944: 13 Lithuanian Construction Bn	9.5.1945: surrendered

#### Fatherland Defence Units (*Lith: Tėvynės Apsaugos Rinktinė* – TAR) 1944–1945

8.1944: 1 TAR Regiment (I–III Bns)	1.1945: > Lith.Eng.Bn
9.1944: 2 TAR Regimen (I–II Bns)	1.1945: > Lith.Eng.Bn
1.1945: Lithuanian Engineer Battalion (1–8 companies)	2.5.1945: surrendered

unwilling to follow orders not sanctioned by the VLIK, Plechavicius refused; and on 15 May 1944 he and the other senior commanders were arrested and sent to concentration camps in Germany. The LVR battalions were promptly disarmed and 3,500 of the rank and file were transferred to Luftwaffe AA units in Germany as auxiliaries (*Kampfhelfer*), while the rest escaped to join Lithuanian guerrilla units.



### **TAR & police units**

The Red Army's June offensive destroyed Army Group Centre; the Soviets entered Lithuania on 5 July, and occupied Vilnius on 13 July. Only the 13th Lithuanian Police Bn remained to defend the city. The Soviet attack was spearheaded by Lithuanian Communists in the 16th 'Order of the Red Flag' Rifle Division (156th, 167th, 249th Rifle, 224th Artillery Regiments). In western Lithuania German Brig. Helmuth Maeder organised Lithuanians from occupied eastern Lithuania in August 1944 into the 'Fatherland Defence Force' (*Tėvynės Apsaugos Rinktinė* – TAR). This was planned as a German M1939 infantry division, but only three poorly trained and under-equipped battalions (I & II Bn/1st Regt; I Bn/2nd Regt) were actually formed, taking heavy losses on the Seda-Telsiai Line in October 1944. The TAR then defended Klaipėda port until January 1945, when, with Lithuania occupied, it transferred to East Prussia as an engineer battalion.

Meanwhile, in July 1944, four Lithuanian police battalions were grouped into the 1st Volunteer Police Regt, disbanding in East Prussia in August, where the personnel joined Luftwaffe field divisions and AA units. The 2nd Vol Inf Regt was formed in September 1944 in Danzig (Gdansk), serving in Courland until May 1945.

### **Other services**

By January 1945 there were 36,800 Lithuanians in the German forces, a much lower number than Estonians and Latvians – a difference largely explained by the mutual hostility which prevented the formation of a Lithuanian SS division. Some 5,400 served in German Army construction battalions; 3,000 in police battalions; and the majority – 12,000 – were assigned by the mistrustful Germans as Luftwaffe AA auxiliaries.



OPPOSITE **A group of Fatherland Defence Force (TAR) men in September 1944, wearing green-grey German Police uniforms. These comprise the M1943 Police peaked field caps with the national cockade above an aluminium Police eagle, swastika and wreath badge; and M1942 field tunics with M1936 dark brown braid shoulder straps. Two men (rear, second & third left) have German Police M1936 collar patches; and the soldier at rear right wears an M1936 Police tunic. Lithuanian Army M1934 and German Army field uniforms were also worn. (Baltimore Lithuanian Museum Collection)**

OPPOSITE **Two Lithuanian women Luftwaffe auxiliaries in Germany, early 1945. Germany's conservative military traditions limited the mobilisation of women for industrial or military duties, but small numbers of German and Baltic women were eventually recruited. Whilst male Baltic auxiliaries wore the Flying Hitler Youth uniform, females were authorised the grey-blue uniform of German female Luftwaffe auxiliaries, introduced 11 June 1940. This consisted of a M1939 mountain cap with single-button flap; a tailored three-button tunic with two flapped skirt pockets; a light blue blouse and dark blue tie; a pleated skirt and black shoes. Some women also wore the male uniform for field duties – note the trousers worn here. The sleeve badge visible in this photo is a white cloth Vytiš charging knight emblem on a red diamond, worn both on the cap and, larger, on the left upper sleeve when the arm band was not worn. (Friedrich Herrmann Memorial Collection)**

Others served in Wehrmacht auxiliary construction units – 400 in the RAD, 15,000 in the Organisation Todt, and 1,000 in the Legion Speer. No Lithuanians were awarded the Knight's Cross.

Lithuanians from the Polish-annexed Vilnius region serving in the Polish Army had been captured by the Red Army in October 1939, and from February 1944 many fought with the Allies in the 5th *Kresowa* Inf Div of Polish 2nd Corps in Italy. Lithuanian pilots formed a French Air Force squadron in May 1940, and one, Flt.Lt. Romualdas 'Romas' Marcinkus, served in the Royal Air Force. (He was captured in February 1942 when his Hawker Hurricane fighter was shot down over the Netherlands. He subsequently took part in the 'Great Escape' from Stalag-Luft III in March 1944 but was recaptured and shot by the Gestapo.) Perhaps 100,000 Lithuanian-Americans served in the US armed forces.

## THE SECOND SOVIET OCCUPATION

From July to October 1944 the Red Army reoccupied most of the Baltic region, with the Klaipėda Pocket surrendering on 28 January 1945, followed by Courland on 8 May. In August 1944 all three Baltic states reformed guerrilla forces to resist the second Soviet occupation. These forces, in radio contact with each other, comprised former guerrillas of the first occupation (1940–41); men who had fought with the German forces; personnel transferred to Germany in late 1944, who were parachuted into the Baltic states until April 1945 to help co-ordinate resistance; and finally, civilians. These forces tied down huge numbers of the Red Army (retitled in March 1946 'Soviet Army') and NKVD (retitled in March 1946 'MVD') internal security units; they also faced NKVD-led Baltic Communist 'Demolition Battalions' reconstituted as 'Destroyer' (*istreibiteli*) units.

About 10,000 Estonians joined small independent units of 'Forest Brothers' (*Metsavennad*) organised as the 'Armed Resistance League'. Many Latvians, initially 4,500 and including former 19th SS Div personnel, fought in groups of ten to a dozen men, particularly in the forests of northern Courland. On 24 August 1945 about 6,000 Latvian guerrillas were reorganised into the 'Latvian National Partisan Union' (*Latvijas Nacionālo Partizānu Apvienība* – LNPA), but this ceased to exist as a major force after 1948.

On 24 June 1944 Lithuanian Maj.Gen. Motiejus Peculionis, the only surviving member of the VLIK War Council, reorganised existing Lithuanian guerrilla units into the 30,000-strong 'Lithuanian Freedom Army' (*Lietuvos Laisvės Armija* – LLA), and in January 1947 the LLA absorbed almost all other guerrilla units. On 1 May 1948 the LLA was redesignated the 'Lithuanian Partisans' (*Lietuvos Partizanai* – LP). The LLA/LP was divided into three Regions: North-East Lithuania (Nov.1948, East Lithuania); Southern Lithuania (Feb.1949, Nemunas); and Western Lithuania. These Regions controlled 11 Commands: A (May 1946, Dainava), Algimantas, Great Battle, Joint Kestutis (May 1948, Kestutis), Revival, Samogitian Legion (May 1946, Samogitia), Southern Lithuania, Turas, Vilnius, Vytautas and Vytiš. Each Command contained mobile 'special teams' and up to four static battalions, each with three to four companies divided into three to four platoons.





**October 1950: long after the end of World War II, a group of Lithuanian Partisan officers pose for a photograph at their forest hideout. The well-preserved Lithuanian Army uniforms indicate military service in the pre-1940 army or in the *Schutzmannschaft*. Even after six years of guerrilla warfare against implacable Soviet occupation forces their determination and military bearing are still evident. All carry captured Soviet weapons. The officer at left wears an M1934 Lithuanian Army cap and badge and a field tunic with a second lieutenant's rank star, having removed the collar patches during the German occupation. He has an officer's brown leather belt and cross belt, and carries a Tokarev SVT40 semi-automatic rifle. The man at second left wears civilian clothes and carries a 9mm Czech Samopal 25 sub-machine gun. Second right has Lithuanian Army uniform with collar patches (but omitting the brass 'Gedyminas pillars' collar badge), and an M1935 Soviet armoured troops' leather jacket, and carries a 7.62mm PPSH43 sub-machine gun. First right has an immaculate Lithuanian Army uniform without collar patches or shoulder straps. (Baltimore Lithuanian Museum Collection)**

Latvia (106 killed, 305 captured); and in Lithuania, 674 actions (1,344 killed, 3,769 captured). However, from 1948 the guerrillas, weakened by irreplaceable losses against stronger Soviet forces, became less effective. To eliminate resistance the Soviets deported 80,000 Estonians, 100,000 Latvians and 260,000 Lithuanians between 1946 and 1953, replacing them with hundreds of thousands of Russian, Belarussian and Ukrainian immigrants to weaken Baltic nationalism.

It is impossible to fight without hope. In 1919 the Western Powers had supported the Baltic states against Soviet Russia, but in June 1940 they had effectively abandoned them to Soviet and Nazi tyranny. Many Baltic exiles in the West hoped that the official commencement of the 'Cold War' in March 1947 would lead to an East-West war offering a chance for the liberation of their homelands. The Western intelligence services, particularly the British SIS, recruited Balts to support the guerrillas and spy on the Soviet Union, the most famous effort being Operation Jungle. Meanwhile in the US Zone of Germany about 20,000 Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian military personnel, displaced in Germany in 1945-46, formed the 'Baltic Guard' with 22 Labour Service Companies, and the 'Civil Guard' guarding displaced persons' camps. They wore US Army uniforms with special insignia. In the British Zone, Balts were organised into 'Civilian Mixed Service Organisation/Civil Mixed Labour Organisation' units, wearing dark blue British battledress with special insignia.

The death of Josef Stalin in March 1953 brought a comparative relaxation of Soviet oppression. However, when the West refused to intervene in the Hungarian Revolution of October 1956 most surviving Baltic guerrillas reluctantly understood that further armed resistance was hopeless; they accepted a Soviet amnesty in 1955 and returned to their homes, although isolated guerrilla incidents were reported as late as 1978. Nevertheless, the 12-year war against Soviet occupation proved that Balts had fought in the forces of the Third Reich not as Nazi mercenaries, but as patriots resisting Soviet expansionism. The collapse of Soviet power in Eastern Europe in 1989 allowed the Balts to agitate once more for political freedom; and on 11 March 1990 Lithuania declared independence, followed on 21 August 1990 by Estonia and Latvia.

From 1944 to 1948 the Baltic guerrillas were very successful against hard-pressed Soviet forces. The scale of fighting can be deduced from Soviet statistics: in 1946 in Estonia 270 guerrilla actions (188 guerrillas killed, 1,587 captured); Latvia, 696 actions (214 killed, 428 captured); Lithuania, 1,840 actions (1,584 killed, 4,461 captured). In 1947 16 actions were recorded in Estonia (39 killed, 158 captured); 60 actions in

# THE PLATES

## A: ESTONIAN FORCES

### A1: *Lipnik (reservis), Captain Talpak's Company; Tallinn, August 1941*

Guerrillas wore civilian clothes with Estonian Republic Armed Forces, Police or captured Red Army uniforms, and an Estonian tricolour armband. This former infantry reserve officer wears the Estonian Army M1936 superior quality officer's khaki service uniform. The peaked cap has the Army's brass 'three lions shield on crossed swords' badge on infantry light grey cloth. The tunic shows gold wire infantry subaltern officer's crossed rifles and oak-leaf collar badges; and gold braid cuff rank insignia with reserve officer's 'zigzag'. He carries German 6x30 binoculars and P08 ('Luger') pistol, and a Red Army PPSH41 sub-machine gun.

### A2: *Jaguülem abi, Valga County Home Guard, June 1942*

The *Omakaitse* wore their old Estonian Republic Armed Forces, Police and *Kaitseliit* uniforms, usually with German equipment and weapons. This former KL deputy section leader wears the M1936 *Kaitseliit* enlisted ranks' coarse-quality khaki service uniform, with an Estonian belt and German ammunition pouches; he carries a Soviet M1891 Mosin-Nagant bolt-action rifle. The peaked cap still bears the KL Valgamaa Corps badge on the band, but without the Estonian tricolour cockade above it. The summer pull-over tunic (derived from the Tsarist Russian *gymnastiorka* but with shoulder straps) has a 10mm silver rank star on the collar and the Valga County breast badge.

### A3: *Konstaabel, Petseri-Võru Police, April 1943*

This Civil Police sub-inspector wears the M1935 Estonian Republic officer's superior quality blue-grey uniform with white piping introduced 25 January 1935. The peaked cap has a wreathed national cockade on the dark blue band and one gold rank chinstrap loop. The tunic bears one rank pip on the shoulder straps, and on the collar the Petseri-Võru Prefecture monogram with gold subaltern's oak-leaves; the Officers' Academy graduation badge is worn above the Police badge on the breast. He carries a German P08 pistol. Many police usually wore a light green brassard with black Estonian and German lettering identifying them as German auxiliaries.

## B: ESTONIAN FORCES

### B1: *Reamees, 33F Defence Battalion; Peterhof, Leningrad front, May 1942*

Estonian Defence Battalions initially wore Estonian or German Army uniforms and insignia. Officers with M1936 Estonian uniforms had full insignia, usually omitted for NCOs and men. This private wears the M1916 German-supplied Estonian steel helmet, M1936 enlisted ranks' service tunic without collar or rank insignia, Estonian cavalry field breeches, and German marching boots. He wears the German Armed Forces Auxiliary (*Wehrmachtgefolge*) brassard introduced 30 March 1942 (black on white, 'Im Dienst der Deutschen Wehrmacht'); an Estonian Army belt and German pouches. He carries an M1891 Mosin-Nagant rifle and an M1924 German stick grenade.

### B2: *Zugwachtmeister der estnischen Polizei, 1st Estonian Police Regiment; Narva, July 1944*

From March 1943 Baltic Defence Battalions wore the

German Civil Police (Ordnungspolizei) uniform introduced 25 June 1936, with Municipal Police (Schutzpolizei) brown facings and light green piping, together with Baltic national cap insignia and arm shields. This Estonian NCO wears the enlisted ranks' coarse quality service tunic and belt with M1941 shoulder straps and M1943 standard Police peaked field cap. He also wears an Estonian M1936 cap badge on red artillery backing; an M1943 Estonian Schutzmannschaft shield on the left sleeve – of ornate outline, with diagonal stripes and three lions; and, unusually, German enlisted ranks' collar patches (introduced 2 April 1940). Note the Iron Cross 2nd Class button ribbon and silver M1939 German Wound Badge (for three and four wounds). As a platoon commander he carries an MP40 sub-machine gun with MP38/40 canvas magazine pouches.

### B3: *Leutnant, 4th SS Frontier Guard Regiment; Narva front, July 1944*

Estonian Frontier Guard regiments, security, Eastern and construction battalions wore standard German Army uniforms and full insignia. This officer wears an M1942 reversible winter overjacket and trousers in first pattern white/Zeltbahn 31 camouflage, usually restricted to German armoured infantry units, with M1942 arm rank insignia. His field tunic underneath would have on the right upper sleeve the M1943 'German Army'-type arm shield, although the Schutzmannschaft shield was also worn. He has a German M1942 steel helmet, officer's brown field belt, M1941 canvas 'retreat anklets' and ankle boots. He carries a carved 'Wolchow stick', popular on the northern Russian Front and, as a company commander, an M1935 despatch case, P08 pistol in a 'hardshell' holster, and 10x50 Zeiss binoculars.

## C: ESTONIAN FORCES

### C1: *Legionsrottenführer, SS Armoured Infantry Battalion 'Narva', 5th SS Armoured Division 'Viking'; Kovel, Ukraine, April 1944*

This senior lance-corporal wears the M1942 helmet with the SS-runes shield decal (officially ordered removed 1 November 1943). His German Army M1936 field tunic has black Waffen-SS shoulder straps piped with infantry white; a silver-grey machine-woven sleeve eagle on black wool; a 'Reich German' silver-grey thread BeVo machine-woven SS-runes right collar patch and left rank patch; and mouse-grey chevrons on black cloth. Under 1941 regulations he wears the M1943 Schutzmannschaft shield on the left forearm above the M1941 silver-grey machine-woven 'Wiking' divisional cuff-band. Note the Iron Cross ribbon, black Wound Badge (one and two wounds), and bronze motorised troops' model of the Infantry Assault Badge. He is equipped as his section's first gunner, and carries a 7.92mm MG34 general purpose light machine gun.

### C2: *Waffen-Stubsscharführerdiensttuer, 20th SS Artillery Regiment, 20th SS Infantry Division; Neuhammer, Germany, January 1945*

Shortages of senior NCOs meant that by 1945 this corporal has been appointed acting company sergeant-major, as shown by the double silver braid stripes above both cuffs and the 'reporting book' tucked into his tunic front. His enlisted ranks' peaked service cap, introduced 12 December 1939 and worn by NCOs in barracks, has the matt aluminium eagle and skull badges introduced February 1936, and red

artillery piping introduced 10 May 1940. His Army M1942 tunic has NCO collar braid, M1939 Waffen-SS shoulder straps and collar patches, and BeVo sleeve eagle. From October 1942 Estonians wore a blank 'non-Germanic' right collar patch; from autumn 1943, the unofficial *Tartu* pattern 'arm, sword and E'; from June 1944, the unpopular 'sword and E'; and from October 1944, the second pattern 'arm, sword and E' illustrated. The Estonian Waffen-SS arm shield, introduced 1 June 1944, had horizontal stripes and was worn on the left upper sleeve; note below it on the left cuff the unofficial M1944 'Estland' (Estonia) cuff-title. He displays the pin-on Iron Cross 1st Class and the ribbon of the 2nd Class.

**C3: Luftwaffenhelfer,  
127th Mixed Anti-Aircraft  
Battalion; Riga, Latvia,  
October 1944**

This 16-year-old Air Force Auxiliary volunteer wears the blue-grey 'Flying Hitler Youth' (*Flieger-Hitlerjugend*) uniform authorised 26 January 1943. It consists of a peaked field cap; pull-over blouse, with black shoulder straps piped light blue and an unofficially acquired machine-embroidered Luftwaffe breast eagle; loose trousers with buttoned pocket flaps and gathered ankles; M1935 Luftwaffe enlisted ranks' belt, and ankle boots. Baltic personnel wore a cloth cap badge of their national youth organisation; and an arm shield on the left upper sleeve, replaced in walking-out dress by a brassard in the national colours with the cap badge superimposed. Estonians wore a M1943 Estonian Youth (*Eesti Noored*) sword cap-diamond, a lion on the left cap flap, Estonian M1943 'German Army'-style arm shield, and a blue-black-white arm band with cap diamond. Latvians wore the M1943 Latvian Youth (*Latviju Jaunatnes Organizacija - LJO*) enamel 'sun and stars' cap diamond, Latvian M1943 'German Army'-type arm shield, and dark red-white-dark red arm band with cloth cap diamond. Lithuanians wore the M1943 Lithuanian Youth (*Lietuvos Jaunyste Organizacija - LJO*) white 'Vytyis' charging knight on a

red cap diamond, repeated as an arm shield and on a yellow-green-red arm band. (Some Estonian OT personnel may have worn a white machine-woven arm shield with black 'ESTLAND' above three black lions on gold, ordered 30 September 1944.)

**Estonian rank insignia 13 June 1941–January 1945**

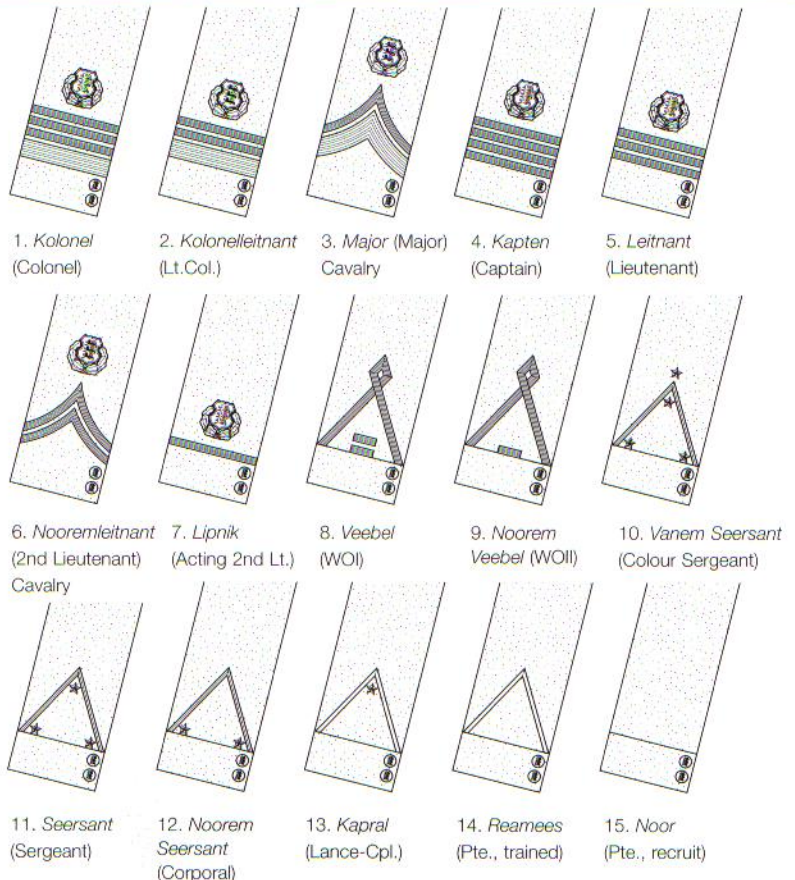
*Omakaitse* Home Guard (13.6.1941–1.1945) and *Schutzmannschaft* auxiliary police Defence Detachments (29.8–5.11.1941) and Battalions (6.11.1941–9.12.1943) wore khaki Estonian Army uniform and insignia (introduced 1.4.1936). Officers wore M1936 rank insignia on the greatcoat and service tunic. NCOs and men wore M1936 or M1939 rank insignia (introduced 1.4.1939) on enlisted ranks' greatcoat, NCOs' service tunic and men's service tunic.

FIELD OFFICERS (*Vanemohvitserid*) (1–3), and SUBALTERN OFFICERS (*Nooremohvitserid*) (4–7): Three blue braid lions on gold braid shield in gold braid oak wreath; narrow and medium gold braid sleeve rings (chevrons for ex-cavalry officers).

NCOs (*Altohvitseria*) (8–9): Gold braid chevrons with a 'curl' and short gold braid bars; (10–12), gold braid chevrons, gold metal stars.

MEN (*Sodurid*) (13–15): Branch-colour cloth chevrons (gold braid for ex-Border Guards & Tallinn Guard Detachment), gold metal stars.

BRANCH COLOURS: General staff = raspberry red; infantry & Tallinn Guard Det = light grey; artillery & armour = red; cavalry = white; engineers & signals = black; frontier guard = green.



**Notes:**

- This rank was restricted to the Home Guard.
- 7–19. All personnel holding the warrant rank of *Ohvitseri Asetaitja* had retired by 1941, and no promotions to *Vanem Veebel* (WOI) had been made.
- 8,9. Many NCOs of these ranks continued to wear the gold braid chevron and four gold metal stars of the M1936 *Veltveebel* (WOII) rank.

## **D: ESTONIAN & LATVIAN FORCES**

### **D1: Vänrikki, 200th Finnish Infantry Regiment; Kärevere, Eastern Estonia, August 1944**

This Estonian second lieutenant wears the Finnish M1936 bluish-grey field uniform with a Hungarian-made German M1935 helmet. The tunic has an officer's obsolete brass lion badge on the shoulder straps, with the brass rank rosette pinned directly to the collar omitting the green and grey collar-patch. The unofficial Estonian shield on the left upper sleeve is smaller than the German versions, here in a diagonally striped variation. This platoon commander carries a binocular case, M1935 Lahti 9mm pistol, and the highly efficient M1931 Suomi sub-machine gun.

### **D2: Korporal, Riga Police; Latvia, 1943**

This Civil Police officer on patrol wears his dark-blue Latvian Republic service uniform. The cap has a light blue band and large silver metal badge; but the tunic lacks Latvian Republic collar rank insignia, shoulder strap and cuff braids, leaving only the M1942 Schutzmannschaft left cuff rank insignia. His Latvian Police belt and cross belt support a German P08 pistol.

### **D3: Kapralis, 21F 'Liepaja' Latvian Defence Battalion; Krasnoye Selo, Leningrad front, April 1942**

Personnel of Latvian Defence Battalions initially wore Latvian Army uniforms and insignia. This corporal wears the khaki M1932 enlisted ranks' infantry summer field uniform. The M1933 German-supplied Czech Army helmet has a German Police eagle decal on the left side. The Russian-style pull-over tunic has infantry cherry red collar patches of rank. A brown Latvian belt supports a 1908/13 bayonet with black German pouches; his weapon is the M1891 Mosin-Nagant.

## **E: LATVIAN FORCES**

### **E1: Oberleutnant der lettischen Polizei, 25F 'Abava' Latvian Police Battalion; Pripjat Marshes, May 1943**

This lieutenant wears M1936 German Police officer's service uniform. His field cap has officers' silver-coloured flap piping, Schutzpolizei light green piping on the crown seams, and a Latvian Army badge. His German shoulder straps are worn in conjunction with the Latvian collar-patches of an infantry *Virsleitnants* – his equivalent Latvian rank; and note the M1943 Latvian Schutzmannschaft arm shield.

### **E2: Gefreiter, 5th Latvian SS Frontier Guard Regiment; Borkovichi, Belarus, May 1944**

Latvian Frontier Guard regiments and construction battalions wore standard German Army uniforms and insignia. This lance-corporal first gunner, carrying an MG34, wears the M1943 peaked field cap with German mouse-grey insignia, and M1942 field tunic with M1940 insignia – plain shoulder straps piped infantry white, and mouse-grey collar patches, breast eagle and rank chevron. Note the shape of the M1943 'German Army'-type Latvian arm shield, with its pointed upper edge. His M1943 belted trousers are gathered by web anklets over ankle boots.

### **E3: Oberleutnant, 1st Squadron, 12th Night Attack Wing; Jelgava, central Latvia, August 1944**

This Staffel commander wears Luftwaffe officer's blue-grey flight uniform as introduced 1 March 1935. The service cap has aluminium cord piping and chin cords, with hand-embroidered aluminium wire insignia. The flight blouse has yellow flying branch collar patches with aluminium wire rank insignia, and aluminium cord patch and collar piping. Flat aluminium braid shoulder boards on yellow underlay with gilt rank pips, and an aluminium wire breast eagle, are standard Luftwaffe insignia. He also wears the Latvian Army Air Regiment left breast badge below pilot's 'wings'. The 'German Army'-type arm shield is worn on his right sleeve (the Schutzmannschaft version was also worn). Estonian volunteers wore an M1944 'Luftwaffe'-type Estonian arm shield.

## **F: LATVIAN FORCES**

### **F1: Legionsunterscharführer, 3rd Bn, Latvian SS Legion; Verkneye Selo, Leningrad front, March 1943**

This corporal wears the M1942 helmet with M1935 decal, a field grey woollen toque, and a German Army M1942 wide-collar greatcoat with black M1940 SS shoulder straps piped infantry white. Greatcoat collar patches were permitted from 1 June 1942; the plain right 'non-Germanic' right patch was introduced 26 February 1943, and replaced after 11 March 1943 by the 'thunder-cross' swastika. He wears the M1943 flat-topped variant 'German Army'-type Latvian arm shield. As a section commander he carries 6x30 binoculars with his standard rifleman's equipment, and is armed with a Karabiner 98k bolt-action rifle.



**A platoon of the Estonian 3rd Bn, 47th Inf Regt, Finnish Army, defending the Mannerheim Line on the Karelian Isthmus as part of the Finnish 18th Inf Div in October 1943; cf Plate D1. They are wearing Hungarian helmets and Finnish M1936 field tunics. Note the service dress infantry collar patches (third left, right) and the small Estonian arm shield (right). The officer (fourth left) carries an M1935 Lahti 9mm pistol and an M1931 Suomi sub-machine gun. (Henry Rūitel Memorial Archive)**

## Latvian rank insignia 20 July 1941–8 May 1945

Latvian personnel serving in the *Ordnungshilfsspolizei* Auxiliary Police (20.7–5.11.1941), B-Group Defence Battalions and C-Group Home Guard (6.5.1941–11.1944) wore the M1932 khaki Latvian Army uniform, with rank insignia on collar patches (the left hand patch illustrated here) of the service tunic, summer tunic and greatcoat.

OFFICERS (*Virsnieki*) (1–6): Gold silk embroidered diagonal bar on branch-colour patch, gold metal four- or five-point stars; gold silk embroidered circle (4).

NCOs (*Instruktori*) (7–10): White wool diagonal bar on branch-colour patch, gold metal five-point star (7), metallic gold lace rank stripes (7–8), golden yellow cloth stripes (9–10).

MEN (*Kareivji*) (11–12): White wool diagonal bar on branch-colour patch, golden yellow cloth stripe (11).

BRANCH COLOURS: General staff = bluish-white; infantry, armour, engineers, & signals = cherry red; cavalry = golden yellow; artillery = blue; air force = cherry red, blue piping; frontier guards = emerald green; supply = black, blue piping; judge advocate's dept. = black, bluish-white piping.

1. <i>Pulkvedis</i> (Colonel) General Staff	2. <i>Pulkvedis-Leitnants</i> (Lt.Col.) Infantry	3. <i>Kapteinis</i> (Captain) Cavalry	4. <i>Kapteinis-Leitnants</i> (Senior Lt.) Artillery	5. <i>Virsleitnants</i> (Lieutenant) Engineers	6. <i>Leitnants</i> (2nd Lt.) Armour
7. <i>Virsnieka vietnieks</i> (WOI) Frontier Guard	8. <i>Virserzants</i> (Colour Sergeant) Air Force	9. <i>Serzants</i> (Sergeant) Cavalry	10. <i>Kapralis</i> (Corporal) Artillery	11. <i>Dizkareivis</i> (Lance-Corporal) Engineers	12. <i>Kareivis</i> (Private) Infantry

**Note:** 1. Rank held only by C-Group Home Guard local commanders.

### F2: *Waffen-Standartenoberjunker*, 34th SS Infantry Regiment, 15th SS Infantry Division; Ostrov, NW Russia, September 1944

This officer candidate on field probation, with his shoulder straps showing here an unofficial regimental yellow loop, wears officer's aluminium thread machine-woven cap, collar and sleeve insignia. His black velvet collar patches are edged with aluminium wire, officer style, though the left hand patch bears the two pips and two laces of *Hauptscharführer* or colour sergeant. From February 1943 this division had a plain right collar patch; from 11 March 1943 a 'thunder-cross' swastika; and from autumn 1944 this 'sun and stars' motif. The M1943 peaked field cap has officer's aluminium crown piping; the enlisted ranks' M1942 field tunic has been partly modified – as often seen throughout the German ground forces – with an unofficial officer-quality dark green collar. The M1943 'German Army'-type Latvian arm shield was replaced on 13 September 1943 by the *Schutzmannschaft*

shield, or the so-called Latvian Legion variant shown here, of ornate shape with 'LATVIJA' on a panel at the top; these were later shifted to the left forearm, then from 15 April 1944 to the left sleeve below the eagle – only to be replaced on 1 June 1944 by the *Waffen-SS* shield.

### F3: *Waffen-Grenadier*, 43rd SS Infantry Regiment, 19th SS Infantry Division; Courland, April 1945

The M1943 field cap bears the M1943 single-piece machine-woven eagle and skull insignia. The M1943 field tunic has M1940 shoulder straps, an aluminium machine-woven sleeve eagle, and the unpopular M1944 *Waffen-SS* Latvian arm shield with white 'LATVIJA' in the upper left corner, and the black backing which the troops said was in mourning for the fall of Riga to the enemy. The Latvian Legion had a plain right collar-patch in February 1943, replaced on 11 March by this 'thunder-cross', also worn by the Latvian SS Brigade and 19th SS Division. He wears the locally made 'KURLAND' cuff-title which was authorised as a battle honour on 19 March 1945. On his right sleeve he displays one M1942 tank destruction badge, and apart from rifle equipment he carries a *Panzerfaust 30* anti-tank projector. On 15 January 1945 the 43rd Regt received the title 'Hinrich Schuldt', honouring the 19th Division's German commander who was killed on 15 March 1944, and the 42nd Regt was named

'Voldemars Weiss' after the regiment's Latvian commander, killed on 17 April 1944; but no cuff-titles were authorised. (Some Latvian OT personnel may have worn a blue machine-woven arm shield with gold 'LETLAND' above a red lion on white (left) and a white griffin on red (right), ordered 30 September 1944.)

### G: LITHUANIAN FORCES

#### G1: Constable, Vilnius City Police, 1942

This Civil Police constable on patrol wears the dark blue Lithuanian Republic Police dress uniform with a brown German Army officer's belt and holstered P08 pistol. The red-banded cap bears a badge with the 'Vytyis' charging knight national emblem on a brass octagonal ground. The distinctive 'lancer-style' tunic has red piping, and brass Vilnius Prefecture shoulder strap letters; officers wore Lithuanian Army rank insignia instead of the pre-1940

# Rank insignia of Baltic units of the German Police

## 6 November 1941–8 May 1945

### First pattern insignia, 6.11.1941–30.5.1942, (1a–12a):

Probably, narrow silver shoulder cords (2a–3a) & dark green shoulder straps (4a–12a), with dark green collar patches with silver rank braids, as worn by Eastern Legions 24.4.1942–8.5.1945 – see MAA326 *The German Army 1939–45* (3). Baltic personnel preferred the rank insignia of their respective pre-1940 armies.

### Second pattern insignia, 1.6.1942–8.4.1944, (1b–12b):

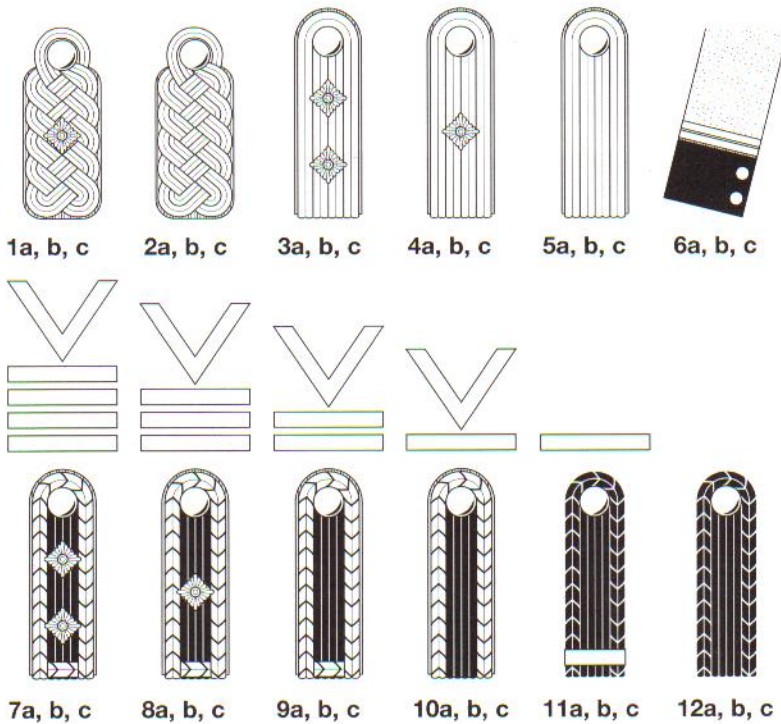
OFFICERS (1b–5b) wore German Municipal Police (*Schutzpolizei*) insignia introduced 25.6.1936. FIELD OFFICERS (*Stabsoffiziere*) (1b–2b): Gold metal pips on plaited aluminium cords, light green underlay; aluminium buttons. CAPTAINS & SUBALTERNES (*Hauptleute und Subalternoffiziere*) (3b–5b): Gold metal pips on flat aluminium cords, light green underlay; aluminium buttons. On the left lower sleeve medical and dental officers wore a light green cloth aesculapius staff, veterinaries a horseshoe, on a green-grey disc. ENLISTED RANKS (7b–12b): Silver braid chevrons & bars on left lower sleeve only.

### Third pattern insignia, 5.1943–8.5.1945, (1c–12c):

OFFICERS (1c–5c): Second pattern insignia. NCOs (*Wachtmeister (SB)*) (7c–10c): M1941 German Municipal Police insignia introduced 10.4.1941. Aluminium pips on flat brown wire cords, silver outer cords with brown V-threads, light green underlay; aluminium buttons; (6c) two silver braid rings on each lower sleeve. MEN (*Mannschaften*) (11c–12c): Flat brown wire cords with silver V-threads, silver braid loop; aluminium buttons.

Key:

- 1a. -
- 1b. *Oberstleutnant der Schuma*
- 1c. *Oberstleutnant der est/lett/lit Pol.* (Lieutenant-Colonel)
  
- 2a. *Bataillonsführer*
- 2b. *Major der Schuma*
- 2c. *Major der ... Pol.* (Major)
  
- 3a. *Kompanieführer*
- 3b. *Hauptmann der Schuma*
- 3c. *Hauptmann der ... Pol.* (Captain)
  
- 4a. *Zugführer*
- 4b. *Oberleutnant der Schuma*
- 4c. *Oberleutnant der ... Pol.* (Lieutenant)
  
- 5a. *Zugführer*
- 5b. *Leutnant der Schuma*
- 5c. *Leutnant der ... Pol.* (2nd Lieutenant)
  
- 6a. -
- 6b. -
- 6c. *Kompaniehaupt wachmeister der ... Pol.* (Warrant Officer Class II)
  
- 7a. *Zugführer*
- 7b. *Kompaniefeld webel der Schuma*
- 7c. *Hauptwachtmeister der ... Pol.* (Colour Sergeant)
  
- 8a. *Feldwebel*
- 8b. *Vizefeldwebel der Schuma*
- 8c. *Zugwachtmeister der ... Pol.* (Sergeant)
  
- 9a. *Unteroffizier*
- 9b. *Korporal der Schuma*
- 9c. *Oberwachtmeister der ... Pol.* (Lance-Sergeant)
  
- 10a. *Unteroffizier*
- 10b. *Vizekorporal der Schuma*
- 10c. *Wachtmeister der ... Pol.* (Corporal)
  
- 11a. *Schutzmann/Soldat*
- 11b. *Unterkorporal der Schuma*
- 11c. *Rottwachtmeister der ... Pol.* (Senior Lance-Corporal)
  
- 12a. *Schutzmann/Soldat*
- 12b. *Schutzmann der Schuma*
- 12c. *Unterwachtmeister der ... Pol.* (Lance-Corporal)



### Notes:

- 7–12. Due to larger number of German grades, British equivalents in brackets are approximate.
- 1b–12b. 'Schuma' is the unofficial abbreviation for *Schutzmannschaft*.
- 1c–12c. '...estnischen Polizei', '...lettischen Polizei', or '...litauischen Polizei'.
- 3b. Medical/dental/veterinary: *Haupt-arzt/-zahnarzt/-veterinär der Schuma*.
- 4b. Medical/dental/veterinary: *Bataillons-arzt/-zahnarzt/-veterinär der Schuma*.
- 6c. The senior warrant rank of *Meister* (WOI) was held only by German cadre personnel. This 'company sergeant major' appointment was usually held by a *Hauptwachtmeister* as the NCO in charge of company discipline.
- 12c. The lowest rank in *Schutzmannschaft* and German Police units. *Anwärter* (private) was never used.

Police gold six-point stars on wavy gold braids. Note the Schutzmannschaft arm band worn by the Civil Police.

**G2: Unterkorporal, Schutzmannschaft, February 1943**

From 1 June 1942 some Lithuanian Civil Police were issued the German black Schutzmannschaft uniform, in this case probably modified German M1934 Allgemeine-SS items. The field cap has a small brass octagonal Lithuanian Republic Police badge; the tunic has German Schutzpolizei-green collar, turn-back cuffs and pocket flaps, and a silver braid rank bar is just visible above the left cuff only. This policeman wears German marching boots and a Lithuanian belt and cross belt, and carries a captured Soviet 7.62mm Tokarev SVT40 semi-automatic rifle.

**G3: Grandinis, 7F Defence Battalion; Ostrogozhsk, southern Russia, June 1942**

Initially Lithuanian Defence Battalions wore the khaki M1934 uniform of the Lithuanian Republic Army; this lance-corporal displays golden-yellow infantry distinctions. His cap has yellow infantry piping and the triangular brass M1934 badge. The shoulder strap and cuff piping and the collar patches are in infantry yellow; the brass 'Gedyminas pillars' collar badges have been removed on German orders. He has Lithuanian-made German M1909 unstained equipment, German M1931 canvas bread-bag, marching boots and M1924 stick grenades, and carries an M1891 Mosin-Nagant.

**H: LITHUANIAN FORCES**

**H1: Hauptmann der litauischen Polizei, 255F Lithuanian Police Battalion; Mogilev, Belarus, April 1944**

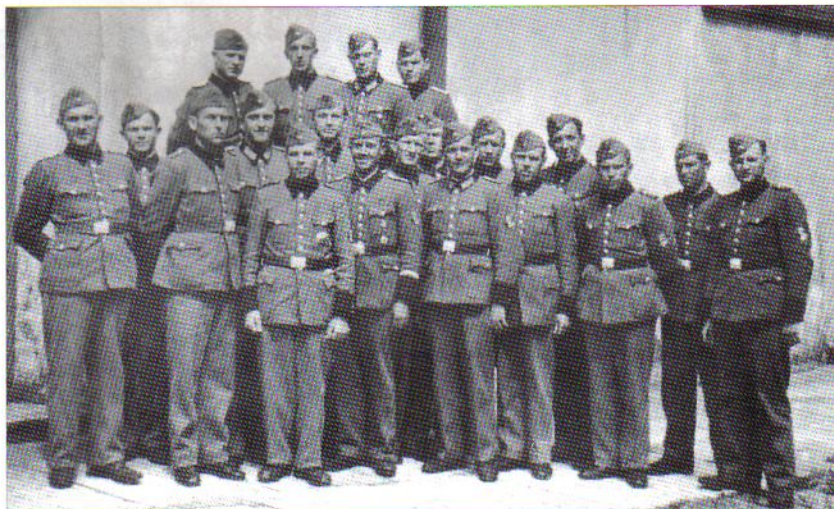
This Lithuanian officer wears the M1936 German Police officers' service uniform; his cap has officers' silver flap piping and an M1934 Lithuanian Army badge. The tunic has the regulation plain collar for Baltic units, although Estonians and Lithuanians often wore German Army, and Latvians Latvian Army collar patches. The sleeve shield is the M1943 Lithuanian Schutzmannschaft type. Instead of German M1936 shoulder straps officers of this battalion wore equivalent Lithuanian rank stars (here *Kapitonas*) on Schutzpolizei brown shoulder straps.



**H2: Unterwachtmeister, 308 LVR Battalion; Grauziskaia Valley, May 1944**

This member of an LVR rifle section wears M1942 German Police field uniform; German Army M1942 and Lithuanian Army M1934 uniforms were also worn, sometimes within the same unit. The M1943 Police field cap bears the M1936 aluminium black-white-red cockade above the Police eagle. The tunic has the regulation 'Baltic' plain collar and M1941 shoulder straps; the ornately shaped M1943 'German Army'-type sleeve shield was also seen with the aluminium letters 'LITAUEN'. He wears German ammunition pouches on his M1936 Police belt, and carries the standard Karabiner 98k bolt-action rifle and M1931 brown canvas bread-bag. Fatherland Defence Units (TAR) wore German Police or Army or Lithuanian Army uniforms; construction battalions, German Army uniform. (Lithuanian OT personnel wore a horizontal yellow-green-red tricolour arm shield, ordered replaced from 30 September 1944 by a white machine-woven 'Gedyminas pillars' emblem on red, below gold 'LITAUEN' on a dark green shield.)

OPPOSITE Members of the Latvian 273F Police Bn at Golisevas on the Russo-Latvian border, summer 1943. They are wearing German Police M1936 uniforms with Latvian cap badges, collar patches showing the equivalent Latvian Army rank, and M1943 *Schutzmannschaft* national shields on the upper left sleeve; see Plate E1. A German liaison officer is at centre left. In the background is a pre-1940 Latvian *Aiszargi* regimental flag. Visible weapons include two British .303in. Vickers medium machine guns and three Lewis light machine guns, all ex-Latvian Army. (Friedrich Herrmann Memorial Collection)



ABOVE RIGHT Members of the Estonian 286F Defence Bn in March 1943, wearing the German M1936 Police uniform worn thereafter by Estonian Defence/Police Battalions. They display an Estonian tricolour cockade on their caps and, as non-Germans, nearly all lack the M1940 Police collar patches. On the left upper sleeve they wear the M1943 *Schutzmannschaft* Estonian arm shield with three lions on the tricolour. Cf the German Police uniforms worn by Lithuanians in Plates H1 & H2. (Henry Rüütel Memorial Archive)

OPPOSITE The German black *Schutzmannschaft* uniform with left cuff rank insignia was normal in Belarus and Ukraine, but Baltic personnel were generally permitted pre-1940 police or army uniforms and insignia. Nevertheless, the black uniform was worn by the 35th Estonian Depot Defence Bn in Tallinn (their band is illustrated here), and by some Latvian and Lithuanian Civil Police; cf Plate G2. (Henry Rüütel Memorial Archive)

### H3: *Jaunesynis Leitenantas*, Taurus Command, Lithuanian Liberation Army; April 1948

Baltic guerrillas still resisting the Soviet occupation wore national or German uniforms and insignia, civilian or captured Soviet items. This Lithuanian second lieutenant wears an M1940 Soviet Army officer's cap with a

## Lithuanian rank insignia August 1941–8 April 1944

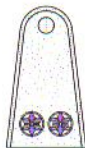
Lithuanian personnel serving in the *Schutzmannschaft* Defence Battalions (8.1941–5.11.1941) and (6.11.1941–8.4.1944), Lithuanian Special Units – LVR (3.–5.1944), & Fatherland Defence Force – TAR (6.1944–8.5.1945) wore M1934 khaki Lithuanian Army uniform, with rank insignia on the shoulder straps of the service tunic and greatcoat.

OFFICERS (*Karininkai*) (1–6): Brass stars in circles, or brass stars, on shoulder straps piped in branch colours; brass buttons.

NCOs & MEN (*Kareiviai*) (7–11): Gold braid chevrons on shoulder straps piped in branch colours; brass buttons.

BRANCH COLOURS: Infantry = golden yellow; cavalry = white; artillery & ordnance = black; engineers = red; air force & general staff = raspberry red.

- |   |   |   |   |  |   |
|---|---|---|---|--|---|
| 1. <i>Pulkininkas</i><br>(Colonel)<br>General Staff | 2. <i>Pulkininkas-Leitenantas</i><br>(Lt.Col.) Infantry | 3. <i>Majoras</i><br>(Major)<br>General Staff | 4. <i>Kapitonas</i><br>(Captain)<br>Cavalry | 5. <i>Leitenantas</i><br>(Lieutenant)<br>Artillery | 6. <i>Jaunesynis Leitenantas</i><br>(2nd Lt.) Air Force |
|---|---|---|---|--|---|



7. *Virsila*  
(Warrant Officer)  
Engineers

8. *Puskarinkas*  
(Sergeant)  
Infantry

9. *Jaunesynis Puskarinkas*  
(Corporal)  
Cavalry

10. *Grandinis*  
(Lance-Cpl.)  
Artillery

11. *Eilinis*  
(Private)  
Engineers

Note: 1. Rank held only by LVR HQ Staff, and LVR & TAR regimental commanders.

Lithuanian M1934 badge; a Lithuanian M1934 field tunic with black artillery piping at collar, cuffs and shoulder straps, no collar patches and a shoulder strap rank star; and Soviet canvas trousers. He has German marching boots and belt, an MP40 sub-machine gun and canvas magazine pouches.



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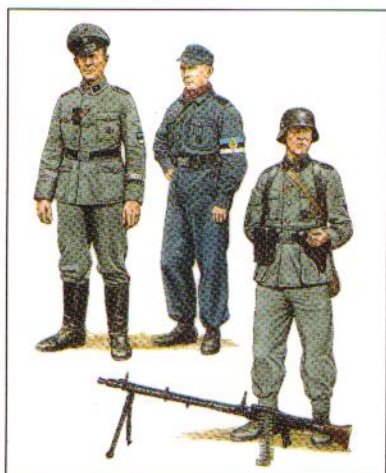
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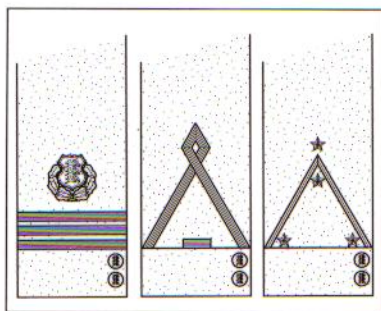
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