

CHAPTER X

BALTIC STATES AND MEMEL: 1939-1945

A. GENERAL

1. Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania were recognised as independent Republics at the Peace Conference in 1920 and they remained independent Republics until World War II.

2. On August 23, 1939, Germany and Russia signed a treaty of mutual non-aggression and soon after this Soviet Russia concluded an agreement with Latvia for the occupation of naval bases within that country. These bases, along the entire Baltic Coast, were occupied by Soviet Russia about September 15, 1939.

3. On June 17, 1940, Russia occupied the Baltic States and later that year Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia were incorporated into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. This occupation, however, was not of long duration because after Germany declared war on Soviet Russia on June 22, 1941, she attacked and invaded the Baltic countries and, during a two week period in July 1941, occupied Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. It was not until August, 1944, that the advancing Soviet Armies re-occupied the Baltic States: first Estonia, followed by Latvia and finally Lithuania. These countries have now been re-incorporated into the USSR.

4. After the German occupation, the three Baltic States together with Byelorussia were organised into one administrative unit known as the Ostland with a Reichskommissar (former Gauleiter Hinrik Lohse) at its head. A subordinate, known as a Generalkommissar, headed the government in each of the four districts. A semblance of self-government was always maintained although the amount of autonomy permitted to the local authorities seems to have varied somewhat in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

B. ESTONIA

5. Before the occupation of Estonia and the other Baltic States by the USSR, agreements were made between them and Germany that persons of German ethnic origin could repatriate to Germany. All persons who opted for this resettlement were registered with the Einwandererzentralstelle. They were generally issued with such documents as Ausweis der Deutschen Volksliste, the Umsiedler Ausweis, and the Rückkehrerausweis (see Chapter XXVII on Identity Documents). These persons were given every assistance, settled down in the German community and were promised German citizenship. This agreement was concluded on 15 October, 1939, and about 12,000 persons were registered from Estonia.

6. During the German occupation compulsory military service was enforced. Many of the soldiers were drafted into the so-called Estonian Border Defence Regiments and Estonian Reserve Regiments which were activated to disguise the fact that mobilisation of the citizens of an occupied country was going on in contravention of International

Law. Others were drafted for service in the Wehrmacht or the Kriegsmarine and paramilitary organisations, such as the Organisation Todt. These did not include the plan whereby certain students were drafted or volunteered for the Reich Arbeitsdienst. The slogan current at this time was "Defend your country from the East". The majority of these troops were in fact ordered to the Eastern Front where they fought against the armies of the USSR.

7. The various mobilisation decrees were as follows :—

- (a) Men born between 1918-1924 were drafted for the RAD (Reichsarbeitsdienst) in April-May of 1943. They were later transferred to the armed forces.
- (b) Men born in 1925 were conscripted into the armed forces by an ordinance dated 26th October 1943.
- (c) A general mobilisation (Ordinance No. 3) became effective on 30th January, 1944 of men born between the years 1904-1923 and officers up to the age of 60 and non-commissioned officers up to the age of 55.
- (d) Persons born in 1926 were conscripted into the armed forces by an ordinance (No. 17) dated 3rd August, 1944.

8. After the occupation by the Germans a Quisling Government was established in Estonia called the "Estonian Self-Government" which was under the leadership of Dr. Hjalmar Mäe. The "Self-Government" lasted from July 1941 to August 1944.

9. Immediately after the occupation of the Baltic States the Germans re-organised the local civic police forces and created in their stead semi-military units called "Schutzmannschaften" which were mostly composed of volunteers, although some persons were conscripted. At first they acted as normal police but later were used to fight the Russians. Some found their way into the S.S. Legions. This policy was also implemented in Estonia. On December 19, 1941 the Germans decreed that all Estonian citizens were compelled to register for obligatory labour service (Arbeitspflicht).

10. Soon after the Germans marched into the Baltic States some Baltic nationals volunteered into the so-called Selbstschutz or Partisan units whose self-appointed tasks were to help evict the Russians and to persecute Jewish populations. After the occupation of the Baltic States by the Germans and before the general mobilisation decrees were promulgated, some of the Balts were called to military service by means of personal mobilisation orders. An indeterminate number of these early recruits (as well as a few of the later ones) were, when called forward by the drafting commissions, given a choice of being drafted into the Labour Service (Reichsarbeitsdienst), with the Wehrmacht, or serving in the Waffen S.S. In addition some of these nationals joined or worked in conjunction with the Einsatzgruppen and Security Police whose main task was to exterminate the Jewish populations in the Baltic States. From the information available, the above state of affairs applied to Latvia and Lithuania as well as to Estonia.

11. The No. 1 Estonian Waffen S.S. Division was formed in the autumn of 1943 and was known as the 20th S.S. Infantry Division (See Section 2 Chapter XXV).

C. LATVIA

12. Latvia underwent a similar experience to Estonia. By the terms of an agreement dated 30 October, 1939, approximately 51,000 persons of German ethnic origin left Latvia for Germany. The identity documents issued to these persons are described in Chapter XXVII.

13. As in Estonia, obligatory labour and conscription acts were enforced. The

labour recruiting began on the same date as Estonia, December 19, 1941. The various mobilisation decrees for military service were as follows :—

- (a) Men born between 1915-1924 were conscripted into the armed forces by a mobilisation order dated April 17, 1943.
- (b) A general mobilisation of officers, non-commissioned officers and men born between the years 1915-1924 became effective on November 25, 1943.
- (c) Persons born in 1906-1915 were conscripted by an order issued on 28 January, 1944.
- (d) All categories of persons born between 1906-1926 whose mobilisation had been deferred for various reasons, were conscripted by an order dated 15th September, 1944.
- (e) During the summer and autumn of 1944 youths born in 1927-1928, amongst others, were called up for service and sent to Germany as air force auxiliaries.

14. As in Estonia various Latvian units were formed. These were :

- (a) The first para-military organisations which the Germans established were the Schutz battalions (Schutzmannschaften). There were approximately 30 such battalions which were between 300 and 400 men in strength. Evidence indicates that a large number of this group were volunteers. They were used for police and guard duties and operated from the Black Sea to the Baltic.
- (b) Five to six "Bau" battalions were formed by the end of 1943 which were used as service or pioneer troops. Two of these groups were formed from the earlier Schutz battalions, the remainder being comprised of prisoners and conscripts.
- (c) There was a number of S.S. Polizei (Police) Regiments formed in 1941 which consisted of volunteers. The number of such regiments formed in 1941 is not known, although there were twenty battalions in existence by 1944. In addition, there were three police regiments in service at this time.
- (d) There was an unknown number of Latvians who worked in conjunction with, or in the Einsatzgruppen. The functions of the Einsatzgruppen were to break the resistance of the populations lying behind the German Armies in the East and to exterminate the Jews in those areas. Most of these Latvians were members of the so-called "Partisan" groups which were formed to help evict the Russians and persecute Jewish populations.
- (e) The First Latvian Division (19th S.S. Infantry Division) was formed in March, 1943 near Stalingrad from three of the Schutz battalions which had been formed into a brigade and had already seen action. Later, eight more Schutz Battalions were absorbed into this Division which finally reached full strength in August. This Division was composed of the 42nd, 43rd and 44th Grenadier Regiments, the 19th Artillery Regiment, the 19th Engineer Battalion, 19th Signal Battalion and the 19th A. A. Battalion. The Second Latvian Division (15th S.S. Infantry Division) was formed at approximately the same time in Latvia. For some time this division was used as a training division for new recruits who were later sent to the 19th Division which was fighting in Russia. It was composed of the 32nd, 33rd and 34th Grenadier Regiments, the 15th Artillery Regiment, 15th Engineer Battalion, 15th Signal Battalion and the 15th A.A. Battalion.

D. LITHUANIA

15. 40,000 ethnic Germans from Lithuania moved to Germany by agreements made in 1939. In addition, a number of Lithuanians and other Balts were moved into Germany in 1941 under the terms of an arrangement made between Germany and the USSR. Some of these were not of German ethnic origin but took advantage of the scheme to escape the Soviet regime. Compulsory labour and conscription decrees were issued which were essentially the same as in Estonia. Persons mobilised under the labour regulations were often transferred to the Wehrmacht.

16. One ill-fated attempt was made by the Germans to establish a Waffen S.S. They invited General Plechavicius, the former Chief of Staff of the Lithuanian Army, to form a national force for the protection of his country. He agreed under certain conditions designed to ensure that the force would in fact be a Lithuanian one under his direct control. As a result of his appeals, approximately 30,000 volunteers came forward. However, because of a German attempt to make this a Waffen S.S. Unit, Plechavicius disbanded it after some fighting with Germans. Some of the officers were executed and others were sent to concentration camps.

E. MEMELANDERS

17. Lithuania obtained an outlet on the Baltic in 1923 by seizing the Klaipeda (Memel) territory which had been taken from Germany in 1919 and placed under the jurisdiction of the Allied Powers. This seizure was recognised by them in 1924 although they insisted that the territory be given a measure of autonomy.

18. Memel comprised approximately of 976 square miles in area and had a population of 145,000, of whom about half were German speaking and half Lithuanian speaking, although the people were predominately German. Many of the Lithuanians were bilingual and almost all were of Protestant religion. This is not particularly surprising in view of the fact that Memel was under German rule for 700 years.

19. On March 22, 1939, Lithuania was forced to cede Memel to Germany although Germany later granted Lithuania free port privileges in the port city of Memel. The majority of the people in the port city proper were Germans. It is also interesting to note that in the Memel Assembly (1930-1933) the Germans always elected 24 representatives to the Lithuanian's 5.

F. REFUGEES FROM BALTIC STATES

20. In addition to the ethnic Germans who repatriated into Germany as a result of the 1939 Agreements outlined above, there were a number of Balts who left in 1941, as a result of an arrangement made between Germany and Russia. Another large influx of Balts came to Germany in 1944 in order to escape from the re-occupation of their countries by the Russians. Some came to Germany as *bona fide* refugees, others came as Umsiedler (resettlers) and still others left because of their activities in those countries during the German occupation.

G. ELIGIBILITY STATUS OF ABOVE GROUPS

21. Members of the S.S. Police Regiments, the Sicherheitsdienst (Security Service), the Einsatzgruppen, and the Schutzmannschaften are *prima facie* outside the mandate of IRO under the terms of paragraph 2 of Part II of the Constitution. In the case of the Schutzmannschaften this presumption may be rebutted if the applicant can produce evidence that he was conscripted and if it is made plausible that he did not commit atrocities or otherwise persecute civilian populations.

22. Members of the Waffen S.S. Divisions who started military service before the first compulsory conscription in April 1943 will be regarded as volunteers and therefore outside the mandate of IRO unless they can give proof to the contrary.

23. Members of the Waffen S.S. who had a prior choice of serving in the Reichsarbeitsdienst or the Wehrmacht and who volunteered for the Waffen S.S. are outside the mandate of IRO.

24. All applicants who in the absence of documents present conflicting stories and make false statements should *prima facie* be regarded as not *bona fide* displaced persons or refugees falling within the mandate of IRO.

25. Members of the Quisling Governments are *prima facie* outside the mandate of IRO. It should be remembered, however, that some persons who were in government service remained at their posts under the Quisling regimes. Such persons, unless policy makers, are not deemed to have voluntarily assisted the enemy forces.

26. Persons from the Baltic States who are of Lithuanian, Estonian or Latvian origin and who voluntarily came to Germany as Umsiedler are not excluded from IRO because of their voluntary entry into Germany. A different case is presented, however, if they accepted German citizenship or voluntarily assisted the enemy forces after their entry.

27. Memelanders of German ethnic origin who are in Germany are excluded from IRO assistance under the terms of paragraph 4 of Part II of the Definitions. The status of those who are in countries other than Germany is in suspense, and they should not receive any assistance. Memelanders of Lithuanian origin may be regarded as *prima facie* within the mandate.