Latvia

Country on the Baltic Sea. After World War II broke out Latvia was first occupied and later annexed by the Soviet Union, according to the terms of the Nazi- Soviet Pact. However, in June 1941 Germany attacked its former ally, the Soviet Union. Soviet-held territories like Latvia were immediately occupied by German troops. Incorporated into the reichskommissariat Ostland, Latvia became known as *Generalbezirk Lettlend.* A civil administration was appointed under D. Heinrich Drechsler and was made up of Latvians. At that point, some 70,000 Jews lived in Latvia.

At the end of July 1941, the mobile killing units of Einsatzgruppe A carried out the first mass murder of Jews in Latvia. From July to October 1941 some 34,000 Jews were massacred, including 4,000 inhabitants of Latvia's capital, Riga. At the end of October about 32,000 Jews from Riga were forced into two Ghettos. At the same time, higher SS and police leader Friedrich Jeckeln arrived to take over the extermination of the remaining Jews in Latvia. His orders, straight from SS chief Heinrich Himmler, were to "empty the ghetto." On November 30 and again on December 7, thousands of Jews were taken from the ghetto and shot to death in the Rumbala Forest. About 25,000 Jews were murdered in this *Aktion,* nicknamed the Jeckeln *Aktion.* The Jews imprisoned in the ghettos in Dvinsk and Liepaja were also annihilated in November and December 1941. A commando of Latvians under Viktor Arajs was responsible for the murder of many Latvian Jews.

In November about 20,000 Jews from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia were brought to Latvia and moved into the Riga Ghetto in place of the Riga Jews who were being killed. A small number were used by the Germans as forced laborers, but the majority---some 14,000---were killed in the forests from January to July 1942, just like the Jews of Latvia.

By the beginning of 1943 only 5,000 Jews remained in Latvia, either in the ghettos or in a few Forced Labor Camps, such as Kaiserwald. That fall, the Jews that were left in the ghettos were moved to Kaiserwald. In the late summer of 1944, as the Soviet army drew near, the last Jews in Latvia were

sent to camps in Germany; many died en route. By war's end, nearly all of the 70,000 Jews living in Latvia in 1941 had perished.