

Riga

Capital of Latvia and cultural center of Latvian Jewry. In 1935 there were 43,000 Jews in Riga.

In June 1940, Riga was annexed, along with the rest of Latvia, by the Soviet Union. A year later the Germans invaded the Soviet Union; they occupied Riga on July 1, 1941. Throughout July thousands of Jews were killed or imprisoned. Between July and October, the Germans issued a series of anti-Jewish decrees: 32,000 Jews were herded into a ghetto and a Council of Elders was formed under Michael Elyashov.

In November the Germans separated the ghetto inhabitants into two groups: the working Jews were put into the "small ghetto," while the non-working Jews remained in the "large ghetto." The large ghetto was liquidated in late November and early December and some 20,000 Jews were shot and buried in the Rumbula forest. During the first half of 1942, 16,000 Jews from the Reich were brought to the "large ghetto." Fourteen thousand were later murdered.

An underground was established in early 1942. Later that year, underground members tried to escape the ghetto and reach the Partisans. They were discovered, and most were killed. In addition, many alleged underground members were murdered in retaliation.

In November 1942 the "small" and "large" ghettos were combined and re-divided into two sections, one for Jews from the Reich and one for Latvian Jews. The reshuffling in the ghetto caused much tension between the two groups.

During the summer of 1943 the Germans moved some of the ghetto inhabitants to the Kaiserwald camp. That November they launched *aktionen* in the ghetto and the Jews' workplaces. By December, the ghetto was completely destroyed.

In 1944 some of the remaining Riga Jews were forced to participate in the gruesome work of digging up mass graves and burning the bodies to conceal evidence of mass murder (see also *Aktion 1005*). After they finished, they too were murdered. In June 1944 the Germans killed many of the prisoners in

Kaiserwald and its sub-camps. The surviving Jews were transferred to concentration camps outside Latvia.

The Soviet army liberated Riga on October 13, 1944. A few days later, about 150 Jews came out of hiding.