

Statement of Gabriel Ziwan, Escaped Riga Ghetto Jew Report of 1942 to U.S. Consul in Geneva, Switzerland

Preface

The following statement was written by Gabriel Ziwan, a Jew who escaped from the Riga Ghetto and survived by assuming a false identity, of a non-Jew. Historians consider his statement to be generally accurate, with some inaccuracies. For example, modern historians have put a finer point on the numbers by studying various census and Nazi documents. Also, the Riga Ghetto *aktions* of November 30-December 1 and December 8-9 were at Rumbula, rather than Bikernieki forest -- as described by the ghetto guard with whom Gabriel Ziwan spoke. Bikernieki was the location of earlier and later killings. Most of the other statements were accurate.

Introduction by Edward Anders

Gabriel Ziwan is a Riga Jew who escaped from the ghetto in December 1941. Through a Latvian friend he obtained false papers in the name of Gunaars Ciirulis. Ziwan then worked in Latvia until June 1942, when he enlisted in the Reichsarbeitsdienst (Youth Labor Service for 17-18-year olds, for which Latvians had just become eligible). He was sent to Stettin, and as a medical student was given a job as a hospital orderly. One night he won a bicycle in a card game, and soon boarded a train to a town near the Swiss border. He biked the rest of the way, crossed into Switzerland and asked for asylum.

The border guards told him he would have to put down a deposit of SFR 10,000, and let him call his uncle in Geneva to ask for the money. The uncle was willing to help but needed several days to raise the money. However, by Swiss law, an alien had only 24 hours to make payment. So Gabriel was to be deported that same day. At this critical moment the officer in charge of the post intervened, took Gabriel into his office and handed him the law book, opened to the relevant page. Read this very carefully, he admonished Gabriel, and left the room. Gabriel found that the 24-hour limit is extended for aliens who had committed a crime. Gabriel promptly grabbed an ink bottle and threw it at the wall. The officer returned, barely disguising his satisfaction, and started proceedings to detain Gabriel until the ink damage was properly investigated and reported. By the time this was accomplished, his uncle had produced the money and Gabriel left for Geneva.

Very soon after his arrival Gabriel prepared the following report for the World Jewish Congress representatives in Bern, and submitted it to the US Consul in Geneva. It reached Washington, but apparently was hushed up for political reasons.

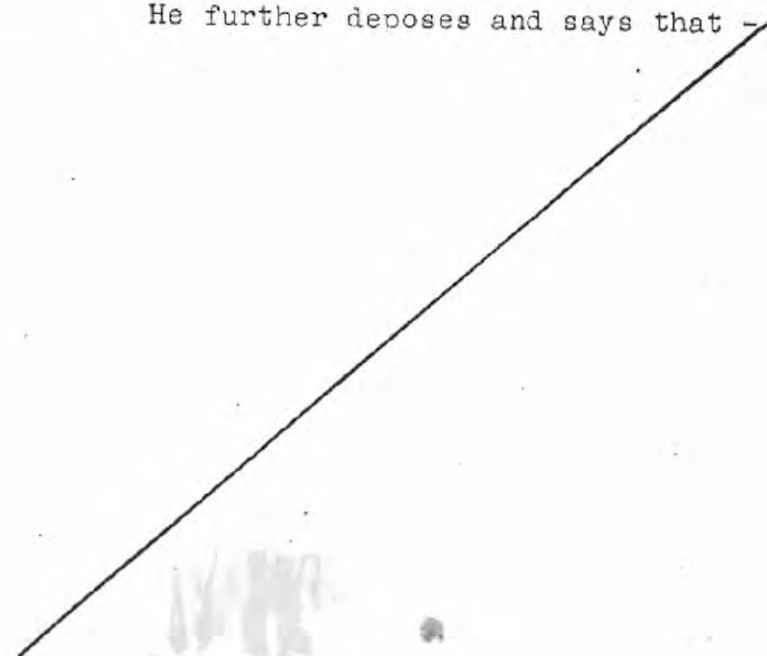
Gabriel Ziwan's report follows.

10/11/1942

Before me, Paul C. SQUIRE, Consul of the United States of America in and for the consular district of Geneva, Switzerland, duly commissioned and qualified, personally came Gabriel ZIWIAN who, being duly sworn deposes and says that -

He was born at Riga, Latvia on October 8, 1923; that he is of Latvian nationality; that his home was always in Riga, that he was compelled to reside in the district of the Ghetto beginning October 2, 1941, this Ghetto having been closed to the outside world on October 25, 1941; that he remained in said Ghetto until December 18, 1941, on which date he ran away; that he escaped from Latvia on June 8, 1942 and arrived at Stettin, Germany, from which seaport he proceeded clandestinely to Switzerland and arrived at Geneva on September 22, 1942, and that he is now residing with his uncle at 4 Rue Dentand, Geneva, Switzerland. That he is identified by a receipt for an Application for Regularisation of Sojourn issued by the Sojourn-Permit Office at Geneva on September 30, 1942.

He further deposes and says that -



Report concerning the Jews in Latvia

The following report is based on statements made by an eye-witness who was in Latvia during the critical period in the second half of the year 1941 :

When the German troops entered Latvia in June 1941, there were about 100,000 Jews in the country, 32,000 of them in Riga. Before leaving the country on 16.VI.1941, the Russians had deported some 3 to 4,000 Jews to Russia, i.e. persons who from the Russian point of view were not regarded as reliable.

When the Germans arrived, only a small part of the Jewish population was able to leave the country in time. While the Jews of Estonia had sufficient time to escape - they numbered only 5,000 - the Germans progressed so quickly in Latvia that only a few Jews were able to flee and of them also a certain number did not reach safety in Russian territory but were killed when crossing the fighting line.

The situation of the Jews in Latvia after the Russian withdrawal was the same as that of the other population, i.e. their business-undertakings had been nationalised so that the Jews who formerly were in possession of their business-undertakings were now only employees in these same undertakings.

The German occupation of Riga on July 1st, created panic among the Jews. Many of them were arrested and used for forced labour of every description, especially the clearing of the streets. About 1,500 Jews were arrested and imprisoned. Later it became known that they were shot in a forest on July 20th.

On July 3rd, the Latvian police (so-called auxiliary police) started actions against the Jews by breaking into their dwellings and taking along everything they liked. At the same time the Jews were requested by the Latvian police to report on the following morning at police headquarters for labour-service. They were threatened with all sorts of reprisals, should they not be willing to do so. On the following day many Jews reported at the police and were used for work of various kind. Old Jews were seen washing cars and doing other work under the supervision of the police who constantly abused and man-handled them. They had to work for twelve hours and did not receive any food.

Many others were hiding in their houses. There was no question of doing any regular work or trying to make a living because the Jews were no longer in possession of their business-undertakings and did not dare to go there.

At the same time an order was issued stating that Jews were not allowed to form lines at the entrances of the shops; that made it impossible for them to buy food. In fact there was so little food in the city that at the entrances

of all shops long lines of people were standing, trying to get some. Wherever Jews were to be seen they were beaten up by the Latvian population or driven away by stone-throwing.

In the course of July most of the Jewish men had to do forced labour-service while women and children were not yet molested.

At the end of July, the names of all Jews were registered. Two days later, an order was issued that all Jews had to wear the Star of David on the left breast. Two days later came a new order that the star was to be borne not on the left but on the right side. The Jews having no longer radio-sets and not being allowed to buy a newspaper did not know about this change. In consequence of this, many who did not comply with the new order were arrested in the streets.

In August the women also were used for forced labour service. At the same time the Latvian authorities started an action with a view to get hold of the dwellings of the Jews. They were forced to leave their houses or flats and were brought to police headquarters. Some found shelter with friends, others were placed in the so-called Moscow-Suburb by an office created ad hoc for this purpose.

Some time later a new order was issued forcing the Jews to wear the Jewish Star not only on the front-side but also on the back-side of their clothes, so that they could be recognised from all sides. Also the Jews were not allowed to use the side-walks of the streets but only the road.

During the months of July and August terrible scenes happened all over Latvia in the smaller towns and villages. Under the supervision of the Germans who were assisted by the Latvian police and the mob, practically all Jews living in the smaller towns or rural districts were killed. The Jews were forced to dig trenches and some days later they were shot and buried in these trenches together with their women and children.

At the end of August, it was decided to create a Ghetto in the so-called Moscow-suburb of Riga which until then was mainly inhabited by Russians. These Russians refused to leave their dwellings which made the creation of the Ghetto very difficult. It was decided that 9,000 square-meters living-space should be placed at the disposal of the whole Jewish population. A Jewish committee was formed which had to look after the installation of this Ghetto and which later on became a sort of "Judenrat" (Jewish Council). The members of this committee were : Dr. Blumenfeld, Advocate Minz, Minsker, Blumenau, Eliaschoff, Kaufer, and a German Jew who soon became arrested and disappeared.

This committee first decided that for each person five square-meters should be provided. The main object of the committee was to provide rooms and to distribute them among the Jewish population, in accordance with this plan.

On the middle of September, a fence was constructed around the Ghetto. At the same time the Russians living in the Ghetto-part of the Moscow-suburb were ordered to leave at once and they were to receive other rooms outside the Ghetto. At the end of September one house after the other in Riga was cleared of all Jews who were forced to settle in the Ghetto. Also an order was issued designing the streets in which Jews were allowed to walk and those where they were not allowed to walk. But when going in the morning to their places of work, they had to choose the shortest way, also if this made it necessary for them to go through the forbidden streets. No Jew was allowed to be in the streets after 8 o'clock in the evening.

This action of driving the Jews from all other parts of the town into the Ghetto went on during the first days of October. The Jews had to leave their former rooms after two hours notice.

The police officials decided what the Jews were allowed to take along and when visiting the Jewish houses or flats they destroyed much property. In most cases it was decided that the Jews were allowed to take along : For one person one chair; for two persons one bed, and for each family one table and one cupboard. Then the rooms were sealed and the Jews had to leave, with the little property left to them, for the Ghetto.

A real exodus started through the streets of Riga. Often the Jews were stopped on their way to the Ghetto by the Germans, who took from the few belongings left to them whatever they liked to take. After their arrival in the Ghetto, it became clear that there was not sufficient space to make room at once for all these Jews. There were terrible scenes in the committee. Many of those who had arrived in the Ghetto had to camp for a long time in backyards without shelter. Between the 15th and 20th of October, nearly all Jews had been sent to the Ghetto. An order was issued that the transfer of the Jewish population should be finished on October 22nd. On October 25th, the Ghetto was closed and shut off from the outside world.

The internal administration of the Ghetto was managed by the above-mentioned committee. A Jewish Ghetto-police was established and armed with rubber-clubs. The committee found it necessary to reduce the space allowed to each person from 5 square-meters to 3 square-meters. Groceries, etc, were established in the Ghetto, all in all 17 shops where foodstuffs could be bought. The rations for the Jews were at that time 120 gr. of butter

per week, 300 gr. of bread per day, 175 gr. of meat per week and so forth. But these rations for which rationing-cards were issued, were soon reduced, for instance bread from 300 to 150 and finally to 100 gr. per day.

On the morning following the closure of the Ghetto, the Germans arrived to take the Jews away for the forced labour service. All Jews had to assemble near the inner entrance of the Ghetto while the Germans were waiting for them outside the entrance. About 15.000 Jews had to report for work. There was a terrible disorder, nobody knew where he was to work and it took some time until an organisation was created which showed the Jews how and where to work for the different services of the various SS and military authorities. For each place where a group of Jews was working, a so-called "Judenkönig" (Jew-King) was nominated who was responsible for his group. At the same time a Jewish labour exchange was organised which provided all Jews with an identity-card entitling him to leave the Ghetto. Only a few, about 100, were allowed to leave the Ghetto individually, the others had to leave and to return in groups. All sorts of work has been done by the Jews during this period. Mechanical and electro-technical work, clearing of streets, boot-polishing, cleaning of houses, light work, heavy work, in short everything which the Germans needed. No wages were paid for all this work. As a matter of fact, the German authorities had to pay a certain amount to the town of Riga for the work done by the population and many German administrations have done so. But nothing of it was given to the Jews. Some German administrations gave the Jewish workers some lunch, others did not. Nobody could say how the Jews in the Ghetto should live. There was no possibility for them to earn anything and they were forced to sell everything which was still in their possession. Much barter was done. Many who left the Ghetto in the morning tried to exchange watches, gloves, socks or stockings against foodstuffs. But when they returned in the evening it was very often taken from them and they were beaten. An instruction was issued that the German authorities were allowed to give food to the Jewish workers while at work, but that nothing should be brought into the Ghetto.

Such was the situation until November 28th. On that date an order was issued according to which a certain part of the Ghetto was to be cleared from its inhabitants. All Jews who had been living so far in this part of the Ghetto were to be placed in the other part. The district thus cleared was again separated by a fence and was called the "small Ghetto". The intention was that all men working for the German authorities outside the Ghetto should live in future in this newly established "small Ghetto". The

women and families of these men were to remain in the old, so-called "large Ghetto" which of course was now smaller than before.

On November 29th, an additional order was issued, saying that all men able for work and between the age of 18 and 60 years had to line up in a street near the newly established small Ghetto on November 30th, while the rest of the population would be sent to camps. Each person was allowed to take along 20 kg. of luggage. On November 30th, the announced selection among the male population took place. All people over 60 and all people ill or disabled were sent home to the large Ghetto and also all doctors were sent home. The result of the selection was that as from November 30th, about 4,000 men were settled in the "small Ghetto". The living conditions there were awful. There was even less space than in the former Ghetto. In a small room 16 people were living, 5 persons sleeping in one bed.

In the night of November 30th, all people living in one part of the large Ghetto, numbering 8,000, were assembled. They had their luggage of 20 kg with them. They had to stand there during the whole night without shelter and in the early hours of the morning of December 1st, they were led away by Latvian auxiliary police under German supervision. They had to pass along the fence which separated the large Ghetto from the small Ghetto, so that the men inside the small Ghetto were seeing what was going on. During their march, the group of 8,000 was treated with the utmost brutality. Those who were unable to keep pace were shot. The group of 8,000 was led to the woods, the so-called wood of Bickern and the wood near Zarnikau and there all the 8,000 were shot.

After this mass-execution, only 16,000 Jews remained in the old Ghetto.

In the following week nothing special happened. Only 800 women were arrested some day, 400 were imprisoned while the other 400 returned some time later to the Ghetto.

On December 7th, an order was issued that all women had to be at home by 7 o'clock in the evening. In the night of December 7th to December 8th, the 16,000 people still in the old Ghetto were assembled and taken away, just like the 8,000 a week before.

According to a statement of the commander of the Latvian Ghetto-guard who later told about these things to some people with whom he took drinks, the 16,000 people were led to the woods. Russian prisoners of war had to dig trenches 3 to 4 meters deep. Then the men were separated from the women and children, each group standing to one side of the trenches. Anything of any value they possessed had to be laid down at a certain spot. Then the 16,000 had to undress so that the men were completely naked while the women

were allowed to keep their shirt. All the clothes had to be put down and were collected by the police. Then the naked men were ordered to lie down in the trenches after which 5 or 6 German soldiers with machine-guns arrived and shot the men lying in the trenches. The next group had to lie down on the bodies and was shot in the same way. Women and children suffered the same fate.

That is how the rest of the population of the larger Ghetto of Riga was killed in the night from December 7th to December 8th, 1941. This report coming from the Latvian Ghetto-commander was later confirmed by a number of members of the Latvian police who were present. In Riga itself many people have seen how the linen and clothes of the murdered Jews were brought back. On the clothes the Jewish star was to be seen. The clothes were then sent to Germany. The action took place under the direction of the Germans. German firing squads did the killing by machine-guns, but only the participation of hundreds of Latvian policemen who led the Jews to their doom had made this action possible. Most of the Latvian police who took part have later been sent to the Russian front so that they should not be able to tell about these happenings. It is said that two of these Latvian policemen have lost their mind.

On December 9th, all Jews still living in the small Ghetto were also assembled and were led away to do some work outside the Ghetto. The doctors and the members of the Jewish committee were taken away in a bus. Two doctors, Dr. Kretzer and Guttman, took poison. Dr. Guttman died of it. Then there was suddenly a counter-order and the members of the committee and the doctors were sent back to the ghetto. Dr. Kretzer survived. But some time later several members of the committee, among them Blumenau and Eliaschoff, were shot. Dr. Blumenfeld had retired from the committee and was doing medical work in a clinic.

About the middle of December there were still 4,000 male Jews in the smaller Ghetto of Riga and in addition a few hundred women who had been arrested at the beginning of December and had been released later on.

In December the old Ghetto or larger Ghetto was empty and was then filled by the German Jews deported from Berlin, Düsseldorf, Cologne, etc. In some cases it was found that all the deportees had died in the carriages when the trains reached Riga. They had been frozen to death. Those who arrived alive came without any money and without any luggage. Most of them had a small bundle containing a few provisions or other possessions. They were

treated even worse than the Jews of Riga. They received only 50 gr of bread per day while the Jews of Riga had received 100 gr. Some of them remained in the Ghetto, some were placed in camps where they died from hunger and cold. There was no heating installation in the barracks.

Our informer does not know in detail what happened during the period from the end of December 1941 to June 1942, because during that time he was hiding somewhere in the country. But in June 1942 he was again in Riga and is able to report that at that time there was no trace left of the German Jews who had been deported to Riga. It would appear that they have all died.

The Jews of Riga living in the small Ghetto and doing work for the Germans were at that time still there. Our informer has seen several of them in the streets of Riga, wearing the Jewish star, while on their way to their work. Of course living conditions were awful, they were hungry, there was much typhoid fever among them and the doctors were unable to do anything owing to lack of medical supplies.

With regard to Jews married with non-Jews, our informer states that such people were first allowed to remain in the town of Riga. Later on the following order was issued : if the men were Jews, the women non-Jewish, the marriage was dissolved and the women were forced to sign a declaration thanking the Führer because he has freed them from their Jewish husbands. The men were sent to the Ghetto. In the case of Jewish women married to non-Jews, the older women were allowed to remain with their husbands while the younger women were sterilised.

With regard to the fate of the well-known Jewish historian, Professor Dubnow, our informer says that he has seen him in the larger Ghetto but not in the smaller Ghetto. Therefore he believes that he had to share the fate of those in the larger Ghetto.

With regard to the situation in the other Baltic States, our informer has had no opportunity to investigate the position, but he was told that the Jews of Lithuania, numbering 150,000, have been killed in the same way as the Jews of Latvia. A small group of Jews from Lithuania has once been sent to the Ghetto of Riga and has been killed like the others.

Only the 5,000 Jews of Estonia who, as already mentioned, have had sufficient time to flee to Russia, have thus been spared.

Gabriel Ziwiore

Geneva, October 1st, 1942.

The attached report concerning the Jews in Latvia, which was submitted on October 22, 1942 to His Excellency the American Minister in Bern, by Mr. R. Lichtheim and Mr. G. Riegner, is based on information I have given to Mr. G. Riegner, Secretary of the World Jewish Congress.

The report summarises the facts I have observed myself in Riga until I escaped from the Ghetto on December 18, 1941 or of which I have got knowledge while hiding outside the Ghetto of Riga, from December 18, 1941 to March 25, 1942, and during my visits to that city in the second half of May 1942 and in June 1942.

Concerning the facts I have not observed personally, I am basing my statement on the following sources:

1. The statement concerning some 1,500 Jews who were arrested and imprisoned in the first days of July 1941, and who were afterwards shot on or about the 20th of July 1941 (page 1, paragraph 5 of the report) is based on a communication made to me by Mr. I. Schneider of Riga whom I have known as a reliable person during long years and who was a friend of my sister Selma. According to his statement, Mr. Schneider himself was one of the arrested people and succeeded to escape from the execution by declaring himself "a half Aryan". He then was asked to show evidence concerning his origin, which he was not able to submit. He therefore tried to commit suicide but was brought to the Jewish hospital in the Ghetto where he was saved. I have seen Mr. Schneider afterwards in the Ghetto, where the Police did not pursue him any more.

2. The statement concerning the extermination of the Latvian Jews in the smaller towns and villages in Latvia (page 2, paragraph 6 of the report) is mainly based on the following sources:

a. A lady, whose name I have forgotten but whose family name before her marriage was Rudin, was able to escape from Dagda, a small Latvian town, to Riga and paid a visit to my parents in August 1941. I have seen the lady who told us that she was the only

Jewish person who had escaped from her town while all the other Jews of Dagda had been shot.

b. During my work as a Latvian medical assistant in Indra near the Russian border, in April 1942, many inhabitants of the town and the environments, with whom I have spoken told me that all the Jews who had lived in that region had been shot during the month of July 1941.

c. While working in the hospital at Stettin in July and August 1942, - after my escape from Latvia - I have made the acquaintance of a Latvian worker named Edgar KOZLOVS from Jekabpils (Jakobstadt) who was under treatment in the hospital. According to his statement, Mr. Kozlovs has been a member of the Latvian auxiliary Police during the months of July to September 1941, and has himself taken part in the execution of Jews of Jekabpils, Krustpils and the environments. He declared that the Jews were forced to dig trenches, and some days later were shot and buried in these trenches with their women and children.

According to what I was told, the extermination of the Jews of the smaller towns and rural districts of Latvia was complete, with the exception of the cities of Liepaja (Libau) and Daugavpils (Dünaburg), where some of the Jews were still alive when I left Latvia on June 15, 1942. In Daugavpils I have seen Jews wearing the Jewish Star and working in the streets. One of them told me that there were only 500 Jews left in that city while all the others had been shot. Before the war there were about 12 000 Jews in Daugavpils.

3. The statement concerning the execution of the Jews of Riga, who were taken away from Riga in the nights of November 30th to December 1st and from December 7th to December 8th (page 5, paragraph 3 and following of the report) is based on a conversation I have had personally at the end of December 1941, with Captain OZOLIN, Commander of the Latvian Ghetto guard, to whom I had been introduced as a Latvian by Mr. Janis DULEBO of Riga, who has helped me in hiding outside the Ghetto. All the facts I have mentioned in the report with regard to the execution of the Jews of Riga have been communicated to me by Mr. Ozolin.

Friends of mine, especially Miss Anna SEEBERG of Riga, a person whom I have known from childhood have seen personally in the streets of Riga the clothes and linen of the Jews which were brought back to Riga on motor-cars after the execution, and stated to me that they also had been told by other people about the way the execution had taken place.

4. Concerning the situation in the Ghetto of Riga in June 1942 (page 7, paragraph 3 of the report) I am basing my statement on a letter written by Dr. Blumenfeld, a physician in the Riga Ghetto hospital to Dr. Idelson residing in Riga outside the Ghetto, and in which the living conditions in the small Ghetto during the months of April to June 1942 were described. I have read myself the letter in the house of Dr. Idelson.

Gabriel Zivian

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 29th day of October, 1942.

Paul C. Squire

Paul C. Squire
Consul of the United States of America.



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