



# The Latvian Jewish Courier

**JEWISH SURVIVORS OF LATVIA, INC.**

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

DEAR FRIENDS,  
 The officers and Board of Trustees of Jewish Survivors of Latvia are expressing their deepest gratitude for your presence and your donations at the commemoration of our annual Yizkor at the East Side Synagogue, which took place on November the ninth 2014, honoring the memory of the Jews murdered in Latvia.

## JSL's 2014 Yizkor

Our current Yizkor was held, as in all the previous years, at Park East Synagogue. However, this year, the central hall was occupied by the Israeli Embassy, and we had our event in another room of the synagogue, which we suddenly found even more cozy. The program started with an introductory word from JSL vice president Joseph Faerber, who had informed us that our President Steven Springfield, unfortunately, at this time was not able to come because of a health matter. Six memorial candles in memory of six million Jews massacred in the years of the Holocaust were lit by respected members of JSL: Nekhama Makhinson, Tevey Ratz, Bella Silberman, Sholom Sorkin, Charles Springfield, and Lev Posvolsky. A seventh candle, as an

expression of our solidarity with Israel and in memory of our brothers and sisters who have given their lives for the protection of the Jewish state, was lit by our guest from Israel Aviva Valk. Cantor Sholom Kugel sang the prayer "El Mole Rachamim" and the traditional Kaddish. George Schwab gave a short but, as always, inclusive statement about the status of the restitution of Jewish communal property in Latvia. Acting President David Silberman spoke about the work of our society in the past year, the relationships with organizations in Latvia, emphasized the activity of JSL on installing commemorative stones for the Jews killed in Latvia in a memorial park in Brooklyn. David also gave the special plaque for Steven Springfield to his son Charles –

*Lev Posvolsky lights the candle.*



*continued on next page*

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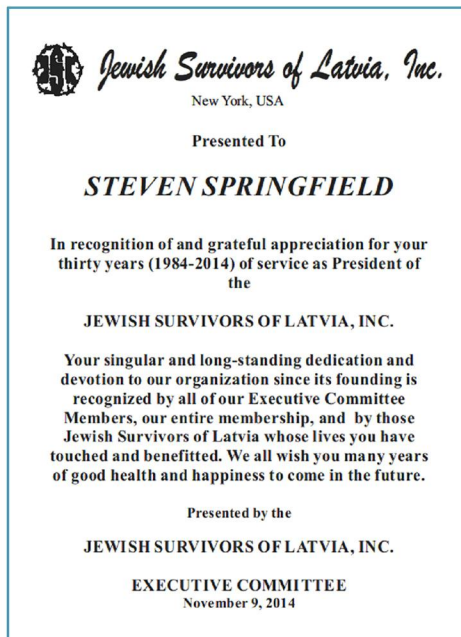
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JSL plaque presented to Steven Springfield.

who was warmly greeted by all in the room. A speech by our guest Elie Valk, the chairman of the Association of Latvian and Estonian Jews in Israel, was devoted to the activity of the association, as well as the significant extent of the work of the Archive of the Latvian Jews in kibbutz Shfaim. The texts of these last reports are placed in this issue of *The Courier*.



Park East Synagogue

In conclusion to the formal part, a short story from a German film, honoring the hundred-year anniversary of the Latvian-born great Jewish singer and cantor Michael Aleksandrovich, was shown; he performs "El Mole Rakhmim" on the ruins of Auschwitz. Our joint lunch passed very warmly. First, our dear Liuba Rakhman and then Aelita Neyhausen with her daughter Rafaella inspired everyone attending by their performance of Jewish songs that made our meeting especially memorable.



Misha Alexandrovich sings "El Mole Rakhmim" on the ruins of Auschwitz.

THOSE WHO HAVE NOT YET PAID THEIR MEMBERSHIP DUES AND DID NOT SUBMIT ANY CHANGE OF ADDRESS, UNFORTUNATELY WE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO CORRESPOND IN THE FUTURE.

## DAVID SILBERMAN'S ADDRESS AT THE YIZKOR MEMORIAL SERVICE ON NOVEMBER 9, 2014

Survivors of the Holocaust, Jewish Survivors of Latvia Members of the Organization, Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of the Jewish Survivors of Latvia in the United States, it is my privilege to welcome you all. It is the second time that the younger members of the organization have the honor of conducting the Yizkor Memorial Service. As we all remember, commemorating the Holocaust as it affected the Jewish community of Latvia in the United States goes back to the founding fathers of the organization in 1984 — and is a tradition that can even be traced further back to Max Kaufmann, Zichrono Le'Brachah (זיכרונו ליברכה), Blessed be his memory, and Steven Springfield among others.

The organization's activities in the past year included keeping the organization intact by streamlining lists of members here and abroad for which we thank Dr. Ivar Brod; encouraging children, grandchildren, and friends to join our organization; and publishing our redesigned *Courier*.

In addition, the organization is closely monitoring happenings in Latvia, especially the restitution issue of Jewish communal properties such as synagogues, schools, cultural centers, and so

forth that were desecrated by Germans and their local Nazi sympathizers and/or confiscated by the Soviet occupiers. Despite pressure from our organization and the U.S. government, Latvia is the only country in the Baltic States that still has not come to terms with this issue.

Further, together with our sister organization in Israel — Association of Latvian and Estonian Jews in Israel — and Jewish organizations in Latvia, we vehemently protested the musical performance in Latvia that glorified the notorious butcher of Jews, Herbert Cukurs. His actions during World War II by far overshadowed his prewar accomplishments as a pilot.

In both instances—that is, the Cukurs outrage and the communal property issue—the Jewish Survivors of Latvia in the United States wrote letters of protest to the president of Latvia, Andris Berzins.

In addition to publishing in color the 12-page *Courier* that featured Holocaust-related news, important events in Latvia, recollections of Latvian Holocaust survivors, and biographical sketches of well-known Latvian Jewish personalities, our organization supported the publication of the translation into English of the widely read Max Kaufmann's 1947 classic *Churban Lettland*.

Moreover, our organization continues to support the study of the Holocaust in Latvia undertaken by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington as well as the



translation into English of Katrin Reichelt's *Latvia Under German Occupation: The Latvian Participation in the Holocaust*. Toward that end, our organization contributed \$5,000 and individuals donated additional amounts for which we are most grateful.

Our organization also promotes and distributes Meyer Meler's all-important book, *The Sites to Remember*. It catalogues and describes the killing grounds in Latvia, the destroyed and desecrated synagogues, Jewish cemeteries, and the once-vibrant Jewish communities.

As if all this is not enough, our organization also participated in the construction of the Janis Lipke Memorial Museum in Riga. As is well known, Lipke was a Righteous Gentile who, against all odds, rescued more than 50 Jews. I described his exploits in my book, *Like a Star in the Darkness*, in Russian and English. The book is now being translated into Latvian to be used in Latvian schools. The official opening of the museum is discussed in the October 2013 issue of the *Courier*.

In the recent past, our organization took part in the 215-year anniversary of the

founding of the Jewish community of Libau (Liepaja), in commemorating the thousands of Libau Jews killed by the Germans and their local Nazi collaborators, and in dedicating the Alley of the Righteous Gentiles at Skede. The account of the trip is discussed by Professor George Schwab in our September 2014 issue of the *Courier*.

On August 4, 2014, we took part in the Riga rally of solidarity with Israel in her war against the terrorist Hamas regime. As is well known, its ultimate aim is the destruction of Israel.

At the present time, we are engaged in a project to erect a stone memorial commemorating Jews killed in Latvia. It is to be dedicated in the Sheepshead Bay Holocaust Memorial Park, which is located in Brooklyn.

As is evident from my remarks, a focus of our endeavors is to educate and sensitize our members to the importance of enshrining our rich heritage into the consciousness of our people, especially our children and grandchildren, and to help Latvians understand the Jewish past that Nazi propaganda and Soviet anti-Semitism have succeeded in distorting.

Now a personal note that is indicative of the potential of education.

After a 50-year absence from my native town Preili, two friends and I paid it a visit in 2001 with the purpose of erecting a memorial to the victims of Preili Holocaust massacre.

We were politely received by the mayor of Preili and the chief architect. They arranged for us to visit the Jewish cemetery and the killing ground behind the cemetery. On visiting the town's museum, I was struck by an exhibition that related to the history of Jews in Preili. A large photo depicted a jubilant

crowd of Jewish-looking faces somewhere in Latvia celebrating the arrival of invading Russian Red army troops in June 1940. In anger, I asked the museum director, "Why don't you also show the triumphant entrance of Nazi troops in July 1941 and who greeted them?"

This was the strained and unfriendly beginning of our years-long changed relationship. Notwithstanding that cold starting point, we began to build the Holocaust Memorial in Preili. I supplied books for the library and publications dealing with the Holocaust and related subjects to Latvian and Russian schools, including my own writings.

Every year we met, usually in July since July 4 is the Holocaust Day commemoration in Latvia. Gradually, the mayor, the chief architect, the director of the township museum, and heads of schools among other administration officials of Preili became our friends and sympathetic to Jews, to the truth about the Holocaust, and to Israel. The director of the First Latvian School recently visited Yad-Vashem in Jerusalem where she participated in special Holocaust study courses. She now conducts seminars on the Holocaust for teachers in the district schools of Preili.

In conclusion, let me say again, I see our obligation and duty to bring our knowledge to bear on our children and grandchildren and also to the outside world.

Thank you.

David Silberman

Park East Synagogue

November 9, 2014

## ELIE VALK, CHAIRMAN OF THE ASSOCIATION OF LATVIAN AND ESTONIAN JEWS IN ISRAEL: ADDRESS AT THE YIZKOR MEMORIAL SERVICE ON NOVEMBER 9, 2014

### Dear Landsmen — Jews from Latvia in the United States!

I am proud to be here today with you. *Maine táyere fraint — lettishe yidn in Amerike.*

I had the privilege to address your IZKOR two years ago exactly in the course of Operation Pillar of Defense. Today, about two and a half months after Operation Protective Edge, I feel that I have to relate to *aheinu bnei Isróel* under the rocket barrage and first of all to our brethren Latvian Jews there. In the southern part of Israel — Beer Sheba, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Sderot, Ofakim, Kiryat Gat, Arad — as far as Yavne and Rehovot, there are 250 members of our Association. I estimate that some 700 olim from Latvia live in the south and about 10,000 live in the central area of the country, which has also become vulnerable to long-range missiles. Sixty-seven Israeli officers and soldiers were killed in the course of Operation Protective Edge. A lot has been said and shown on TV on the Protective Edge defense operation. I would like to share with you just some of it: This cartoon demonstrates the basic difference between the two sides in the Gaza war: We fire our Iron Dome rockets to protect our children and babies—they use their children and babies to protect their missiles!

About fifty-five tunnels were

discovered by the IDF during Operation Protective Edge and 31 of them were destroyed. Look where the money of international donations to Gaza goes and what could be done with this money.

4,564 rockets and mortars were fired at Israel from the Gaza Strip. As you can see, they were fired from all over — mostly from schools and hospitals.

I have with me a detailed list of losses and casualties from Operation Protective Edge that we can discuss later, but at this assembly we must first and foremost relate to the sorrowful reason we have gathered today.

Before I turn to the Holocaust of Latvian Jewry may I just remind you that we have gathered here on November 9. Seventy-six years ago Kristallnacht occurred — Jewish homes, hospitals, and schools in Germany and Austria were ransacked; the attackers demolished buildings with sledgehammers. More than 1,000 synagogues were burned and more than 7,000 Jewish businesses destroyed or damaged. Ninety-one Jews were killed in the attacks, and 30,000 were arrested and incarcerated in concentration camps. By that time, it was too late for most of German Jews to escape.

Going back to our brethren Holocaust victims in Latvia.

One cannot overestimate the spiritual importance of events such as this IZKOR. They are the practical expression of the modern motto, “to remember and to preserve” — to remember what happened to our people



and to pass the memory on to generations to come. This is an explicit manifestation of “*Am Isróel Chai!*”!

The mass murder of the Jews of Riga started 73 years ago when nearly 30,000 Jews were murdered in two days at Rumbula. Today we remember all of the Rumbula victims—young and old—killed by Germans and Latvians. But we mourn not only them—we also mourn the other tens of thousands of our brothers and sisters killed at Škede in Libau on December 14. at Windau on October 9. In the first three months of the German occupation, some 35,000 Jews were killed in tens of towns and shtetls of Latgale, Vidzeme, and Courland. On January 20, 1942, at the infamous Wansee Conference, the Nazis announced that in Latvia just 3,500 Jews remained—out of nearly 93,000 before the war.

Latvian Jews can serve as an example to others in the ways we remember and preserve. The Council of Jewish Communities in Latvia has established tens of memorials and plaques at the killing sites. We in Israel have four monuments: The main one at the Valley of Communities at Holon cemetery and for Libau and

Varaklian at the same cemetery. The fourth I'll show later, when speaking about the Archive in Shfaim.

Our association is proud to have contributed to the commemoration of the many communities that were destroyed and of the Jews killed in Latvia by publishing a number of books, most recently the English version of the comprehensive research by Meyer Meller, *Jewish Latvia: Sites to Remember*. It offers 1,075 photos and 200 maps in its 480 pages. Seventy-three Jewish communities, even tiny ones — their origin and destruction — are described there. Recently a Latvian translation was published as well.

This book will enable thousands of Latvian Jews all over the globe to learn about the history of our community and the Holocaust there. About 50 copies of this exceptional work have already been purchased by members of your organization.

The other important contribution of our Association to the task “to remember and to preserve” is our Historical Archive at Shfaim. In 1977, an educational compound was inaugurated next to kibbutz Shfaim. Latvian Jews from all over the globe contributed to the building of this compound, which houses an elementary school and a high school as well as a community educational area with a memorial to the Jews in Latvia and Estonia who perished in the Holocaust; our Memorial Hall and the Historical Archive are also located there.

During the past 35 years, we have gathered in this Archive thousands of documents, books, and photos on the history of the Jews in Latvia and Estonia. Presently, the volunteers who work at the Archive are converting all this material into digital media. Next spring, it will be available through the Association's Internet site. Most of the site will offer these materials in English, in Hebrew, and in Russian.

In the Archive we have the following division of the materials: Some 5,370 photos of Jewish communities, synagogues, religious life, youth movements, sporting events, and many other activities.



*The memorial Hall and Archive of Latvian Jewry in Shfaim.*

An important tool in any research on a given community or family roots is the Library of the Archive. Presently, it has about 750 books in Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian, English, Latvian, and German. Any visitor can make copies of the documents for just a small charge. Search in the files as well as copies of documents and photos can be ordered by email. The address is in the leaflet describing our Archive (to be distributed after my presentation).

One of our most important activities in Israel has been the commemoration of Jewish

communities in Latvia and the victims of the Holocaust. Since 1953, we have held an annual Memorial Event at the beginning of December. For the last three years, we have had an impressive gathering at Yad va-Shem, with more than 400 participants based in from all over Israel. Some were second- and third-generations of the families of Holocaust survivors.

Dear friends! There is something I said two years ago that I feel I have to relate to today as well: I wish to dwell on one specific victim of the Holocaust: this victim is our dear *mame-loshn* — Yiddish.

*Di merders hobn farnihtikt undzere tate-mames un mit zai iz kemat umgekumen di shprach, vos zai hobn geret. Un azoi vi mir, di vos zainen farbliben, zetsn for di geshichte fun dem folk Isroel, azoi oich lebt di shprach un existirt. Un lekoved zai, lekoved di karbÓnes, vos Yiddish iz geven zeir shprach – zog eek hot di verter in zeir loshen – Yiddish.*

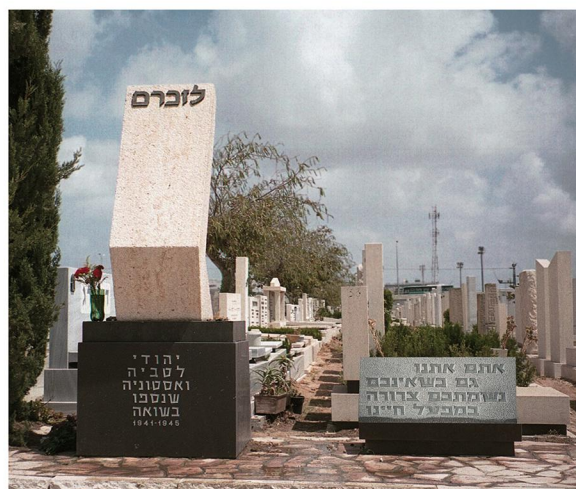
It's our duty to do the utmost to keep the Holocaust in the collective memory of our people. But the least we can do — to pass it on to our own offspring. Our board attaches great importance to the Heritage Tours to Latvia. Since 2001, we have conducted six such tours. Three times we have met members of your organization — in 2001, 2004, and 2011. I feel proud to point out that every time more and more young people of the second and third generations are taking part in the tour.

I have also to mention the

financial assistance we provide to needy Holocaust survivors and Holocaust refugees — based mostly on funds coming from membership fees and donations from our members as well as from associated members, among them activists of your organization: the JSL. In a related area, we take part in the struggle to obtain compensation for Jewish communal property in Latvia. We coordinate our activities in this matter with the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia and with your organization as well. Tomorrow I shall have an additional meeting with the officers of the World Jewish Restitutions Organization — an international body coordinating this struggle.

Most of our activities have been described in the newsletter, *Etzleinu*, which we publish in Hebrew and Russian four times a year. Copies of the last four issues are available here today as well. Before I conclude, I would like to add a very personal remark. We just heard the cantor telling us about his *zeide*. I belong to those Jews who never saw their *zeides*. Both my *zeides* were killed in August 1941 in Latvia. We are now the *zeides* of our grandchildren and it's up to us to make everything possible that they should know not only us, but about our *zeides* as well.

Dear friends! I would like to conclude my address with the same sentiments we



*Memorial Monument in Holon to Latvian and Estonian Jews killed in the Holocaust.*

expressed at the World Reunion in Israel in 2007 and in Riga in 2011. Let us be united in our struggle for our *koved*, for the legitimate rights to our spiritual and material heritage; let us be united in our aspiration to pass on to coming generations the pride of belonging to that entity known as “Latvian Jewry”!

*Ich wil farendiken mit di werter wos drikn ois undzer gefil haint zu tog:*

*Tsušpreit, ober fareinikt!*

**Dispersed, but united!**

Elie Valk

Park East Synagogue

November 9, 2014

## LATVIAN MUSICAL ON NAZI COLLABORATOR AROUSES REVOLT

by Ivar Brod

A prewar famous Latvian aviator who joined a sadly famous Arajs Kommando unit was brought to life in October in the musical *Cukurs, Herbert Cukurs*. This musical has outraged Jews in Latvia and beyond. The musical, which had been planned to be performed across Latvia until February 2015, is an attempt to whitewash Herbert Cukurs and his legacy. (Cukurs was killed by Israeli agents in South America in 1965 for his role in the Holocaust.) Producer Juris Millers maintains that because Cukurs was never put on trial, the extent of his participation in the atrocities committed by the notorious Arajs Kommando remains unclear. Arajs is blamed for murdering 30,000 people, mostly Jews, during the 1941–1944 Nazi occupation of Latvia.

In the 1930s, Cukurs gained fame in Latvia as an aviation pioneer with his flights to Gambia and Japan. But, during World War II, he served as one of the leaders of auxiliary police unit formed after German forces captured Latvia. The unit played a central role in the near-annihilation of Latvia's Jewish community. More than 73,000 Latvian Jews, over 80 percent of the prewar Jewish population, were killed during the Nazi occupation.

This musical is not the first attempt to vindicate Cukurs and to paint him as a victim of slander; allegedly, he only functioned as a driver during Arajs Kommando

raids. The testimonies of those who were there are being swept aside, branded as unreliable — while emphasis is being placed on “no court found Cukurs guilty of the atrocities committed against humanity” during the Holocaust. What is well-known, however, is that immediately after 1945, the Soviets did not place the murders of Jews into separate legal proceedings. It is also known that, in 2006, the Office of the Attorney General of Latvia opened a criminal case to investigate Cukurs's participation in mass murder of the Jewish population in Latvia. The investigation is ongoing and, hopefully, legal attention will be paid to all available evidence.

For reasons unknown, many in present-day Latvian society are either ignoring or not recognizing as trustworthy more than a dozen written testimonies of Jews — former prisoners of ghettos who saw the brutalities of Cukurs and those like him. It appears that such a “convenient” point of view is accepted primarily because these testimonies have been given by the victims, i.e., Jews. Dismissal and/or the nonrecognition of evidence given by these former citizens of the Republic of Latvia — Ella Medalje, Isaac (Leo) Kram, Abram Shapiro, and others — the accounts given and certified in full compliance with the procedure adopted by the countries of post-war residence of witnesses — are both shameful and harmful. To baldly allege that the information contained in these accounts is not based on facts simply because these testimonies have been given by victims — this alone readily demonstrates the immaturity of

such a society, its unwillingness to honestly assess the country's past. A significant part of Latvian society apparently desires to remain in a “state of ignorance” about those terrible times and deeds—not mature enough to take the steps necessary to shed light on and interpret the many events of the early 1940s. Forget eyewitness testimonies, journalists and writers do not even seek to make available to the general public genuine facts and conclusions already cited and published by the Commission of Historians of Latvia!

The officials and public organizations in several countries have condemned the appearance of this musical. The Russian and Israeli governments have strongly condemned the show by issuing special statements.



*The premiere of the notorious musical took place on October 11th in Liepaja, Cukurs' hometown. On the approach to the theater, audiences were met by bloodied children's dolls with yellow Stars of David, symbolizing the victims of Cukurs. The action had been prepared by members of the local partnership "Russian Zarya."*

Latvia's government has also criticized it, while noting that it is protected by freedom of speech. “Being a member of the Arajs Kommando is not worth singing about,” Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics said in a statement. “Let those who attend the performance appraise the production for themselves; however, the position of the

*continued on next page*



government is that this is not in good taste." A few years ago, Latvian government officials (prosecutors) rejected requests made by Cukurs's relatives to have his memory rehabilitated. At a meeting in Vienna, Latvia's OSCE representative, Ambassador Bahtijors Hasans, presented Latvia's position on a musical about Herbert Cukurs. He said that this is a private initiative of an independent producer and an independent creative group, and they are fully responsible for it. A special statement was issued by the head Nazi hunter at the Simon Wisenthal Center, Efraim Zuroff. "No matter which way you look at this issue, there is no doubt that Herbert Cukurs is a major war criminal," Zuroff said. A detailed consideration of the sinister role of Cukurs in the Holocaust in Latvia, using well-known and previously unknown facts and evidence, has resulted in a major article published in several of Latvia's newspapers. This article was written by Riga ghetto survivor historian Margers



More than a dozen protesters dressed in uniforms like those worn by Jews in Nazi concentration camps stood outside the Academy of Sciences in Riga where the musical was performed. "The author wanted, as he said, 'to initiate the public discussion,' and our opinion is: We consider him a war criminal," said the participants. However, one of the audience members said: "What shocked me was that after the show, they all gave it a standing ovation. Hundreds of people, they applauded. Suddenly this Nazi officer can be a national hero. For me it was shocking."

Vestermanis, the chairman of the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia Arkady Suharenko, and the director of the museum The Jews in Latvia Ilya Lenskiy.

The play has garnered mixed reviews in Latvia. The *Courier* is printing a few statements and responses regarding this below.

**From the interview of Vitalij Gotlib, head of the Board of Trustees of Latvian Jewish Community:**

There is a group of people who have been engaged in glorification of Cukurs for many years. There are books, exhibitions, now a musical. Presumably, we should expect a ballet in the nearest future.

To these people, Cukurs is a real hero, an outstanding aviator, and his participation in Arajs's execution squad is merely a misunderstanding.

However, we are not talking about the social and political component, but rather about a claim to a certain historical concept that leads to the following conclusions:

1. *The Jews (all of them, including infants) are to blame for all misfortunes of Latvia.*
2. *The horrors of the Holocaust are exaggerated by the Jews themselves.*
3. *The Arajs squad is just a reaction to the behavior of the Jews after the Soviet occupation.*

In their opinion, Cukurs's rehabilitation would allow the restoration of the reputation of many war criminals. If a membership in a criminal organization is not a crime per se, then the Arajs squad could be

presented as a team of actual nice guys. It's just that some of them (no one knows who exactly) simply went a little bit too far. Of course, killing is bad, but it is the fault of the Jews themselves and of the historical situation. Those were the times, and even if Cukurs did do something, on the scales of history his heroic flights outweigh by far the lives of some thousands of Jews. It seems that when they talk about Cukurs's controversial personality, they mean just that.

**Should the state react to such contradictory plays, books, etc.? If yes, in what way? Do you believe the state's reaction in this case was sufficient?**

The state has enough possibilities to adequately react to the activities of Cukurs's fans. The Presidential Commission of the Historians of Latvia could have made a statement. The problem is that some members of this commission have participated personally in several anti-Semitic creations (for example, "The Scaffold" by Andris Grutups) as editors and reviewers.

At the same time, it should be noted that back in 2006 the leaders of the Jewish community appealed to President Vaira Vike-Freiberga and received a letter signed by her, wherein she expressed her support of the critical attitude of the Jewish community toward Cukurs's name popularization. The statement of Edgars Rinkevichs, head of The Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on behalf of the government is also quite clear.

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**STATEMENT OF THE  
ASSOCIATION OF LATVIAN  
AND ESTONIAN JEWS IN ISRAEL:  
DO NOT PRAISE A MURDERER**

The Association of Latvian and Estonian Jews in Israel would like to voice its strong protest against a new attempt to whitewash the murderer of Riga Jews Herbert Cukurs. On Oct. 11th 2014, a round of performances of a musical *Cukurs, Herbert Cukurs* began in Liepaja, the town where he was born.

This campaign started several years ago with the issuing of envelopes carrying Cukurs's likeness, then an exhibition "Herberts Cukurs: The Presumption of Innocence," was set up and a documentary film that aimed to promote his innocence was produced. To understand this campaign, one must be aware of Cukurs's status as a Latvian national hero during the 1930s. But there were Holocaust survivors among our members, who witnessed scenes on the streets of Riga's ghetto with Cukurs "bravely" smashing Jewish infants. And we, Israelis of Latvian extraction, cannot remain silent.

We are hardly surprised that the society where former SS Legionnaires are marching undisturbed through the capital's avenues wants to see Herbert Cukurs just as a Great Mechanic-Aviator; we are not surprised that there are composers and producers ready to laud this "national hero."

But we are surprised and angered by the fact that no condemnation of such praise for the murderer was made by any Latvian official or public figure. We have heard just a rather vague reaction of the Foreign Minister E. Rinkevich who said: "such a musical is in 'bad taste' and we don't support it." No denunciation has come from the

parliament of Latvia. At least 1,500 Latvians took part in killing some 74,000 Jews. The victims couldn't name all their killers, but the face of Herbert Cukurs was known to everyone in Latvia. Therefore, those who survived couldn't be mistaken in their testimonies: *It was Cukurs who murdered Jews in the Riga ghetto, especially Jewish infants.*

Next January, Latvia will assume the presidency of the Council of the European Union. The presidency is not a position of an individual, but rather it is held by a national government. Perhaps public opinion in the countries of the European Union will clarify to Latvians that lauding or just attempting to rehabilitate an active member of a killing squad (Arājs Kommando) is inconsistent with any concept of "freedom of speech" and with a full-fledged participation in modern civilized society.

**Elie Valk**

Chairman, Association of Latvian and Estonian Jews in Israel  
October 15, 2014

**THE LETTER FROM THE JSL TO  
THE PRESIDENT OF LATVIA:**

Honorable Sir,

We, the Jewish Survivors of the Holocaust in Latvia now residing in the United States, are outraged by the disgraceful appearance in Latvia of a musical performance, *Cukurs, Herbert Cukurs* — an obvious attempt to glorify, whitewash, and present as a hero an intimate member of the Arajs Kommando, an extermination squad guilty of mass murder of thousands of Jews in Latvia and other territories occupied by Hitler's Nazis.

Cukurs, himself, committed horrendous crimes that have been documented by the numerous eyewitness accounts of Holocaust survivors. Cukurs

personally shot and killed small children and elderly individuals who were unable to keep up with those herded to the mass shooting in Rumbula Forest on November 30 and December 8, 1941; he is also responsible for many other unimaginable crimes and atrocities.

We, former citizens of Latvia, Jews who miraculously survived the Nazi Holocaust in Latvia and escaped the oppressive discriminatory Soviet occupation of Latvia that followed, are especially sensitive to any troubling current event in Latvia. We are deeply concerned about the tolerance Latvian society is showing for Nazi criminals and their crimes and the interpretation of these Nazis as freedom fighters against the Soviet occupation — a grave symptom of the distortion of public perception and purposeful brain washing reminiscent of acts that occurred in 1930s Germany.

The annual triumphant march of the Waffen SS legionnaires and theatrical performances in Latvia that glorify a well-known Nazi criminal have nothing in common with the freedom of speech or expression in the democratic, civilized parts of our world.

We join our voice in solidarity with our sister organization of Latvian and Estonian Jews in Israel and with the organization of Jews in Latvia in protest against the glorifying and making a hero of a condemned Nazi criminal, and we urge the Government of Latvia to undertake the steps necessary to prevent public perversion of the historical facts and the whitewashing the Nazi collaborators.

Respectfully and with deep concern,

**David Silberman**, Acting President  
The Jewish Survivors of Latvia, Inc.  
October 30, 2014

# News from Riga

On November 30, 2014, the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia held a mourning ceremony at the place of 1941's mass shooting of Jews in Rumbula. The ceremony was led by the director of museum, Jews in Latvia, Iliya Lenskiy. The speakers included the Deputy Chairman of the Council of Jewish Communities Benjamin Kayem, Israeli Ambassador Hagit Ben-Yakov, and Rabbi Mordekhai Glzman. The representatives of delegation of Israeli Defense Army officers participated in the ceremony as well.

The 9th International Conference *Jews in a Changing World* was held on November 24 and 25 in Riga at the Riga House of Riga Jewish community; it was devoted to the 25-year anniversary of the recovery of the Jewish community in Latvia. The conference was attended by around 20 researchers from Latvia, Israel, Estonia, the United States, Russia, and Germany. Reports were presented on Margher Vestermanis's "Society, Jews and Saviors during the Holocaust in Nazi-occupied Latvia," Joseph Rochko's "The Fate of the Jews Deported from Latgale on 14th June 1941," Olga Aleksejeva's "Jews in Latvia in the 1970s and the Restoration of the Community in the Late 1980s," and others, were heard with great interest. At the main session of the

conference, the Latvian Foreign Ministry's political director, Eduards Stiprais, expressed heartfelt congratulations to all Jews of Latvia, saying that "the history of the Latvian state and that of its Jewish community are inextricably connected." On the day of the conference, an exhibition was opened titled "Jewish Holders of the State Honors of Latvia."

The competition devoted to the memory of Michael Aleksandrovich began at the Riga Jewish Community House (6 Skolas Street) at the end of November. The aim of this competition is: to promote the conservation and development of Jewish cultural heritage, to encourage intercultural dialogue, to identify talented young singers in Latvia, to help young singers to develop their talent and skills in performing musical works in different styles and languages, and to enable the young singers to participate in joint concerts with experienced musicians. The Max Goldin Society of the Jewish Cultural Heritage and the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia organized the competition, which was attended by young artists between 9 and 30 years of age (Misha Alexandrovich gave his first public concert at the age of 9 years). The competition had three rounds; 10 of the best, selected by the jury and second-round singers, advanced to



**Jewish holders of the state decorations of Latvia**

<p><b>Rafails Rozentāls</b> Transpārtācijas centra vadītājs, Latvijas Zinātņu Akadēmijas akademiķis, profesors Tēva Zvaigžņu ordenis V šķirā, 2001 Head of Latvian Transport Center, academician of the Latvian Academy of Sciences, professor The Order of Three Stars V class, 2001</p>	<p><b>Arkādijs Suharenko</b> Izglītības, kultūras, izglītības un zinātnes ministrs, izglītības un kultūras padomes priekšsēdētājs Tēva Zvaigžņu ordenis IV šķirā, 2002 Minister of Education, Culture and Science, Chairman of the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia The Order of Three Stars IV class, 2002</p>
<p><b>Inna Šteinbuka</b> Ekonomiste, profesore, Latvijas Zinātņu Akadēmijas locekle, Eiropas Komisijas pārstāvētā Latvijas valdībā Tēva Zvaigžņu ordenis III šķirā, 2008 Economist, professor, member of the Latvian Academy of Sciences, head of the European Commission Representation in Latvia The Order of Three Stars III class, 2008</p>	<p><b>Jakovs Rafalsons</b> Aktieris Tēva Zvaigžņu ordenis IV šķirā, 2003 Actor The Order of Three Stars IV class, 2003</p>
<p><b>Boriss Rezniks</b> Komponists un producenti Tēva Zvaigžņu ordenis IV šķirā, 2010 Composer and producer The Order of Three Stars IV class, 2010</p>	<p><b>Ādolfs Šapiro</b> Teātra režisors un pedagogs Tēva Zvaigžņu ordenis III šķirā, 2011 Theater director and pedagogue The Order of Three Stars III class, 2011</p>
<p><b>Semjons Štrihs</b> Rīgas Atrās medicīniskās stacijas galvenais ārsts Tēva Zvaigžņu ordenis V šķirā, 2001 Chief doctor of the Riga station of the Emergency Medical Service The Order of Three Stars V class, 2001</p>	<p><b>Stivens Springfilds</b> Izdevniecības un publicitātes darbināks, izdevniecības izdevnieks, Latvijas žurnālistikas asociācijas prezidents XIV Tēva Zvaigžņu ordenis III šķirā, 2002 Public figure and politician, president of the Association of Latvian Jewish Journalists The Order of Three Stars III class, 2002</p>

continued on next page

the third round. Songs by Latvian composers and songs in Yiddish or Hebrew were mandatory in the last round. Desirable (but not required) was the performance of a song or aria from the repertoire of Mikhael Aleksandrovich. The names of laureates and prize winners will be published in the next issue of *The Courier*.



*Installation of commemorative plaque at the building on 32, Brivibas Street.*

On October 16, the Memorial of Zhanis Lipke initiated a project called "Clandestine Riga." This project involves conducting tours of the places where, from 1941 to 1944, Riga citizens, at the risk of their lives and that of their loved ones, provided refuge for Jews. In the course of the guided tour, the historian/tour guide tells about those who went into hiding. At the entrances to 10 such buildings in Riga are installed small commemorative plaques. The first

installation of such a sign was held on September 18 near the building on 32 Brivibas Street where the electrician Janis Ozols and his wife Lilia hid tortured Jews. The unveiling of this sign was attended by the president of the Memorial of Zhanis Lipke Society, Maris Gailis, former slave in the ghetto as well as historian Margers Vestermanis, historian Gustavs Strenga, director of the Zhanis Lipke Memorial, Lolita Thomson, and others. Here are a few addresses where signs are installed: 56 Terbatas Street where Elvira Rhone hid the father of famous violinist Gidon Kremer; 86 Mezha Prospect, where the priest Vilnis Casimir gave shelter to David Patskin who fled from the ghetto. The project is carried out under the auspices of the program Riga-2014.

The world premiere of the opera *Valentine* by famous Latvian composer Arthur Maskat (based on the book by Valentina Freimane, *Goodbye, Atlantis*) was staged on December 5 by the Latvian National Opera. The opera reflects the dramatic history of the Republic of Latvia from 1939 to 1944. Valentina's parents were killed in the Riga ghetto, her young husband was killed by fascists, and she hid in the home of some good people until the end of the war. Now Valentine Freimane lives and works in Berlin and in Riga. The director of this production, Viesturs Kairishis, said: "The participation of Latvians in the Holocaust is a topic that must be dealt with special care, and I have the honor to participate in the decision making."

*Compiled by Ivar Brod*

## OPHTHALMOLOGIST S. MAGILNITSKY

*In the fall of 2010 we began to compile articles about outstanding Jews native to Latvia, to be included in the Latvian Jewish Encyclopedia, planned for printing by Shamir in Riga.*

Solomon (Alexander) Magilnitsky  
(09/13/1903 – 04/17/1990)

Ophthalmologist, surgeon, preeminent historian with a doctoral degree in medical science. He was born in Riga, into the family of an antique dealer. After graduation from a tertiary prep school, he studied in Jena and Hamburg, Germany and Vienna, Austria. In 1929, he graduated from the Vienna University Medical School with a specialization in ophthalmology. On his return to Latvia in 1932, he earned his Latvian MD diploma and joined Professor I. Yu. Rupert's clinic at the Riga First Municipal Clinical Hospital.

In the 1920s, he started publishing his poetry in Berlin and Riga. He was also involved in social activities and his sociopolitical commentary was featured in various periodicals. As the publisher and executive editor of the antifascist magazine *Nord Ost* (1931–1932), he published feature articles and literary and musical reviews. In 1932, together with a group of very prominent writers and public figures, he signed an antiwar appeal.

From 1936 to 1937, he was in residency training at the Helmholtz Institute for Eye Diseases in Moscow. After returning to Latvia,

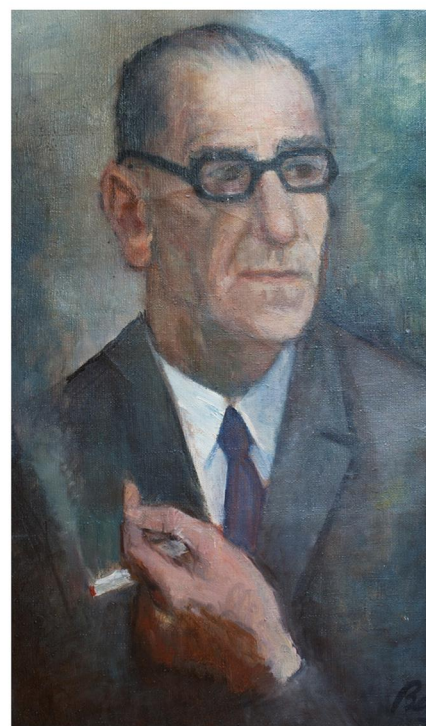
he lived and worked in Riga and Daugavpils, where he was the head of a hospital ophthalmology department. In 1940 and 1941, he was in charge of the Daugavpils Public Health Department. During World War II, he served as a physician in the medical battalion of the 201st Rifle Division and later headed ophthalmology and surgical departments in various base hospitals. From 1944 to 1980, he worked in the Ophthalmology Department of the Riga First Municipal Clinical Hospital; from 1948 to 1970, he was the head of that department. From 1966 to 1970, he held the office of chief ophthalmologist for the city of Riga. In 1965, he was elected chairman of the Latvian Ophthalmological Society, which he had first joined in 1932, and served in that capacity until 1968.

In 1953, along with his wife and several other Jewish intellectuals from Riga, he was arrested in connection with the infamous trumped-up "Jewish doctor's plot." He was freed the same year, after Stalin's death.

He published articles in medical



*Magilnitsky treating a child.*



*Magilnitsky. Painting by famous Latvian artist Alexandra Belcova.*

journals on the treatment of cataracts and surgery for malignancies of the eye. In the 1960s, he became actively engaged in the research of history of ophthalmology, defending a Ph.D. thesis on that subject in 1963. He published numerous articles in the journal *Vestnik oftalmologii* (*Ophthalmological Bulletin*) and in books series *Iz istorii meditsiny* (*From the History of Medicine*), which were published in Riga. The total number of his publications exceeds 130, of which 80 are on the history of ophthalmology, including an essay titled "Shakespeare on Eyes and Eyesight" that was published in Moscow in 1995. In addition to being one of the most competent eye surgeons in the Baltic states, Solomon Magilnitsky was also one of the last contemporary Renaissance men, having a fluent command of several languages and being a brilliant connoisseur of classical music and a passionate book collector.

*by Abraham Teitelbaum*

## MY JOURNEY TO THE PARTISANS, PART IV: (continued from previous issue)

I guessed her to be about 35 to 40 years of age, with an expressive, resolute face and dressed in a half-length sheepskin coat. She greeted us, "Welcome, comrades!" and asked how I came to know the name Turnova. Apparently, the pair of peasants we had encountered earlier had informed her about my inquiry. I told her about the bearded man from Zapolyanie camp whom I had met at the construction site in Porkhov and his advice to find the Turnova woman in Kozenogovo if I escaped.

The woman introduced herself as Turnova. The bearded man was her husband and she pointed to their daughter standing at her side. Turnova unbuttoned her coat, and I saw that she wore a Soviet military uniform with a holstered gun. She said that she was a scout from the Third Partisan Brigade and promised to bring us to the partisans.

To stay at Kozenogovo was dangerous because a German raid could come at any moment. We had a meal, after which we were led to the outskirts of the village and directed to a barn located about a kilometer away. We walked in complete darkness along the country road, when suddenly we saw green and yellow lantern lights approaching us. Could that be the Germans? We ran for the woods and stayed there overnight. It wasn't until the morning that we saw the barn, entered, and successfully hid ourselves in the hay. In the evening, we saw lights at a distance and, figuring them to be the partisans, moved in their

direction. We came to a farm and asked a man how to get to the partisans. He answered in a loud voice, asking where we had disappeared the night before. He happened to be from the partisan scout group, looking for us with the colored lanterns. After I explained that we were hiding in the woods, he told us where to go and that we would be getting directions in each of the villages along the way.

And so we journeyed from one village to the next for about twenty kilometers. When climbing a hill to the village Ivantsy, we were stopped by a command: "Who is there?" We had been confronted by armed people who surrounded us. I was taken aback at first but recovered quickly and said, "And who are you?" One of them announced, "Ha, they are those Jews! March up the hill fast!" Three more partisans were positioned at the top of the hill, manning a machine gun in ambush. They exclaimed, "Brothers! You are free men now!" and that was exactly how we felt. We chatted back and forth with the partisans and rested a little; then, in about two hours, a partisan patrol came over and escorted us to the village.

### 1. TRIAL BY FIRE

We were brought into a hut where we enjoyed a good meal. Many partisans were curious about us and dropped in just to greet us. This village was a base for one of the partisan regiments, which consisted of three companies. Sheinkman was assigned to the first

From the memoirs of Mordukh "Monia" Gleser. Transcribed by Max Michelson. Translated by Leonid Pukshansky. In the last installment, Gleser was sent from the Riga Ghetto, where he smuggled arms for the resistance, to a work detail in Porkhov.

company, I to the second, and Zalmanson to the third.

Early the next morning, I was brought to the Osoby Otdel of the Regiment. I entered and faced Commissar Lunev, a tall, slender man of about 40 years of age, with a stern bearing. His first words were, "You, the German spy! What is your task? What are your passwords and the cipher?" — and with those words, he put his pistol to my temple. I was so stunned that, at first, I couldn't move my tongue. Lunev continued, "If you don't speak, I shoot you."

I told him how we fled from Porkhov. He searched me thoroughly and pulled everything out of my pockets — the Soviet passport, the fake German pass, a little bit of the German money, and a matchbox with a couple of used razor blades in it. The last caught his attention first, and Lunev demanded to know the purpose of the razor blades. I answered that I carried them to commit suicide lest I betray my comrades if I were caught by the Germans. My passport was the next subject of his scrutiny. Lunev studied it, checking the likeness between the photo and my face. He then turned to the Gestapo pass. I explained that we had made that ourselves; it was counterfeit. Apparently, Lunev didn't know German, so he ordered me to translate the pass for him, warning me not to lie.

## MY JOURNEY TO THE PARTISANS, PART IV:

*continued from last page*

The pass read, "*Der lettische Hilfswillige Janis Gleser ist im Dienste der Porchower SD und hat das Recht sich im der Stadt Porchow und seiner Umgebung frei zu bewegen.*" ("The Latvian volunteer Janis Gleser is serving in SD in Porkhov and has the right of free movement in the town of Porkhov and its vicinities," signed by The Commanding Officer, Sturmabführer.

When I finished, Lunev asked me sternly what it meant. I explained that I had stolen blank forms while working as a janitor at the Gestapo headquarters in Porkhov and we filled them out ourselves in preparation for our escape. Lunev was mulling it over, and I added that I was a member of the Underground Resistance Organization at the Riga Ghetto.

"How can you prove it?" he asked, and continued, "All I can see so far is that you are wearing the German uniform and carrying a pass of a Latvian volunteer. I trust documents, not your words." I tried to argue that the pass is written in my own handwriting, which could be authenticated easily. "Well, we shall see," said Lunev.

He called up a sentry and ordered him to put me into a punishment cell. Before being led away, I managed to say, "You can shoot us, but please let the Jews in the Riga Ghetto know that the three of us made it to the partisans." Lunev said nothing in reply, but I felt that he was impressed by my plea.

The so-called punishment cell happened to be just a little bathhouse that wasn't even locked. Nevertheless, I became very

depressed. Here, we had been dreaming about joining the partisans, overcoming so many difficulties and suffering on the way here, and now we might get shot by the Soviet partisans because of the stupid fake pass. After spending a day in the cell, disheartened, I was reunited with my comrades, Sheinkman and Zalmanson, and told them about my interrogation by Lunev.

Next morning I was escorted to the village of Mishkino, to the headquarters of the Partisan Brigade that consisted of three regiments. I was brought in front of a panel comprised of a few officers and special service agents. The head of the Brigade's Osoby Otdel, Victor Kadachigov, led the interrogation. He was about 45-to-50 years old, blond, of average height, and had a pleasant face. His chest was covered with military decorations. He started, "We have collected certain information through our agents about you men. We want to double-check it." At that moment, I distinctly felt that we were being looked upon in a more favorable light than before.

Kadachigov asked, "Why haven't you tried to get in touch with partisans in Porkhov?" I explained that I was afraid of provocateurs that were known to exist among the camp prisoners. Kadachigov continued the interrogation, but my answers evidently confirmed the information collected by the Osoby Otdel.

I perked up a little bit and said with a smile, "Are you still going to

shoot us?"

Everybody in the room smiled, and Kadachigov said, "Don't even talk about it." He added, "What do you want to do now?"

I answered, "We want to fight the Fascists. Just give us weapons."

He scoffed at my request for weapons, explaining that I obviously have a poor idea about how partisans operate. Unlike the regular army, partisans get weapons from fighting with the enemy. They would send us on a combat mission as a trial but, for now, I was dismissed to return to my comrades.

I related to my comrades the substance of the second interrogation, and Sheinkman told us about his interrogation by Lunev. When Lunev asked him for a proof of our flight from the Germans, Sheinkman produced the photos of his parents and his brother killed in the Riga Ghetto, his own ID from Riga with its Jude stamp, and a pass that allowed him, a Jew, to work outside the ghetto. These documents that Sheinkman had hidden in his clothes served as sufficient proof for Lunev. He patted Sheinkman on the back and declared, "You men are great after all! I hope you will avenge your brethren!" It was the end of October 1943.

Later on the same day, after my second interrogation, Comrade Bykov, the C.O. of the reconnaissance group, led the three of us to the village of Podsukha. There were some battle-hardened partisans as well as defectors from the German side: Estonians,



## MY JOURNEY TO THE PARTISANS, PART IV:

*continued from last page*

and Vlasov's renegades. The defectors and the three of us, about 200 men total, were to be tried under fire. None of the personnel designated for the trial had weapons, but everyone has been given a little bag with ammunition.

The Germans opened mortar fire at the village and we hid in dugouts. We had been instructed to jump out of our dugouts and run forward yelling "Hurrah!" when we saw a green flare, a maneuver that was supposed to give the Germans the impression that we partisans were numerous. When we saw the green flare and ran forward, the Germans ducked into the trenches. Unknown to us, however, was that their lookout was hiding in a tree and directing the German fire from there. One of the partisans spotted and shot him.

The sentry fell to the ground, and the partisan yelled at me, "Go get his weapons, quick!" I ran to the tree, found the German dead and grabbed his carbine and ammo. The partisan ordered me to shoot, but when I pulled the trigger, nothing happened.

The partisan yelled, "Empty the spent cartridges first, load the new ones and shoot!"

I did and was stunned by my body's reaction to the first shot, but I got used to it in no time. Evidently, the ruse worked — the Germans believed that we were attacking en masse and retreated, leaving their dead on the field. Our first trial by fire was over.

Commissar Lunev galloped up to me on a horseback and said, "Well, brother, I've been watching you all this time. It looks like you really do want to fight. Good. Here is your chance to avenge your brethren. I am assigning you to the 31st Special Explosives Unit. Your comrades will go to one of the companies." I thanked Lunev for his trust in me.

The Germans started advancing again. Our firefight with them continued into the night. The Germans lost many men but they still had an overwhelming advantage in manpower; our commanders ordered a retreat. It was then that we saw the village of Podsukha in flames behind us — the Germans had burned it to the ground. We moved to another village where I parted ways with my comrades. I went to the 31st Special Explosives Unit, and Sheinkman and Zalmanson to the Third Company of the Second Regiment.

**TO BE CONTINUED**