

1939

23 August

The Soviet Union and Nazi Germany conclude a non-aggression treaty. The secret Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, in which the major powers divide their spheres of influence at the expense of third countries, is an integral part of that treaty. Latvia is placed under the Soviet sphere of influence.

1 September

World War II starts.

5 October

In violation of international law and threatening the use of force, the USSR forces the Latvian government to sign an assistance agreement, allowing Red Army military bases to be located in Latvia.

1940

14-15 June

USSR NKVD special forces attack a number of guard posts along Latvia's eastern border. The Maslenki border point is destroyed, three border guards and three civilians are killed in the fighting. 37 Latvian citizens are detained near the Latvian border and taken across the border into Russia.

16 June

In violation of the peace treaty (1920) and the non-aggression pact (1935) they signed earlier, the Soviet government submits an ultimatum to the Latvian government demanding that it resign and that an unlimited number of Soviet troops be admitted to Latvia. The Latvian government decides to accept the ultimatum, because it believes that resistance will lead to bloodshed, but would not save the Latvian state. Latvian President Ulmanis remains in office until the country is totally occupied and is forced to execute the orders of the occupying power.

17 June

The USSR completes the military occupation of Latvia. The Red Army enters Latvia, including the Cēsis District. The occupation is coordinated by the USSR Embassy in Riga and an operational unit of the USSR NKVD, which has been operating under the guidance of the Embassy since May.

November

the Russian Criminal Code (1926 version) officially enters into force in occupied Latvia, even though 1 254 Latvian citizens have already been arrested for political reasons up to November and the number arrested rises to 1 579 by the end of the month.

1941

26 February

The Latvian SSR NKGB (KGB) is established and will now carry out repressions against Latvian citizens.

13/14 June

Mass arrests and the first mass deportation of Latvian people to Siberia are carried out. The Soviet occupying power deports 15 443 Latvian citizens, including nearly 100 infants under one year of age and more than 3 000 children aged under 16. The intelligentsia are hit the hardest, Latvia's Jews are also relatively badly affected, being only 5% of the population, they constitute more than 11% of deportees.

22 June

Nazi Germany attacks the Soviet Union. World War operations in Latvia and the Nazi military occupation of Latvia commence.

Right up to the beginning of July

The Soviet occupying power, even as it withdraws from Latvia, continues its blood-stained terror against the Latvian population: at least 176 political prisoners are killed without trial, others, about 3 380 are 'evacuated' to Russia, where the majority are murdered. Arrests and punishment without any investigation continue.

Early July

The first phase of the Soviet occupation of Latvia ends. In the people's historical memories, it gains the designation Baigais gads (Year of Terror), because 25 000 Latvian residents suffered Soviet-regime repression during this year.

As the Soviet authorities evacuate and the army retreats, 50 000 refugees, military, railway and other transport workers are forced to go to the USSR.

8 July

Nazi Germany completes the military occupation of Latvia. German military commandants' offices take over power in Latvia and German secret and security services commence operations.

9 July

The Nazi occupying authority allows voluntary units, police battalions (Schutzmannschafts-Bataillone) to be established, initially expecting only to employ them to carry out the policing and repressive duties of the Nazi occupying power within Latvia. Applications to enlist in the police battalions can be submitted at district police stations. Initial interest is high, because Latvian residents hope that the police battalions will help overcome the disorder caused by the Soviet occupation of Latvia. Five battalions are formed by the end of the year.

16 July

Ignoring the de jure existence of Latvia's statehood, Berlin combines its Occupied Eastern Territories into Ostland, in which Latvia is only one of the four Eastern Territories. A special ministry is established to run the Baltic region and a part of Belarus.

1 September

The German commandants officially transfer power to the German civil administration in Latvia. The security service network continues to operate, in charge of the police, prisons and the inmates of labour camps.

21 October

The Nazi army High Command, in contravention of its original promises, sends the first Latvian police battalion to the Eastern Front.

By 25 October

All Jews living in Riga have to move into the ghetto. Those who do not obey this order face the death penalty.

30 November

The mass elimination of Riga ghetto dwellers commences. In total, the Holocaust resulted in 70 000 Jews being killed in Latvia. 400 Latvian Jews are saved thanks to the efforts of local people.

5 December

The German army is defeated outside Moscow.

19 December

The regulations proclaimed by Eastern Reich Minister A. Rosenberg – On the Introduction of Work Obligations in the Occupied Eastern Territories – enter into force and recruitment of the Latvian population into the labour service begins. Up to 1944, 20 000 Latvian citizens are forcibly removed to Germany.

1942**11 February**

A major recruitment campaign for Latvian police battalions begins, resulting in another 16 battalions being formed by 1 July, but 21 battalions are formed by the end of the war. In total, 30 000 Latvian residents are conscripted into these battalions.

1943**11 February**

The German High Command, Adolf Hitler and Heinrich Himmler, sign an order on the establishment of a 'volunteer' Latvian Legion as part of SS forces. The SS are German Nazi volunteer troops, but the Latvian Legion is created by means of forced conscription.

23 February

The first illegal conscription for the SS Legion is announced, of Latvian residents born between 1919 and 1924. The initial penalty for non-compliance is six months in prison.

26 March

The second illegal conscription of Latvian residents, born between 1919 and 1925, into Nazi German forces begins. In fact, they are conscripted into the German army auxiliary, the Latvian SS Legion, motorised labour units and auxiliary police battalions.

16 November

The third illegal conscription of Latvian residents – those born between 1904 and 1924 – into the Nazi German forces begins. The penalty for evading conscription is death.

28 November

The Allied leaders, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Soviet leader Joseph Stalin meet at the Tehran conference in Iran. Stalin gains agreement on the USSR's freedom of action in the Baltic States and Eastern Europe after the war.

1944

July

a general conscription of Latvian residents into the Nazi German army is announced, a series of orders conscript those born between 1906 and 1928, including 4 139 fifteen-year-old boys from the Riga, Madona, Bauska, Cēsis, Valmiera and Valka districts to serve as air force auxiliaries. Since the beginning of the war, around 110 000 Latvian citizens have been conscripted into different parts of the German forces.

July

The Latvian SSR government and the Latvian Communist (Bolshevik) Party (LC(B)P) Central Committee arrive in Ludza from Moscow, later moving to Daugavpils, then to Riga.

18 July

Driving the German army out of Šķaune in the Ludza District, the Red Army crosses the Latvian border. The second Soviet occupation of Latvia begins.

1 December

A top secret order of the USSR NKVD establishes the internal administration of Baltic Military District forces. USSR NKVD and MVD troops, who had successfully participated in the repression of the peoples of the Caucasus, are sent to the Baltics. The 5th Infantry Division of the USSR NKVD, the 48th NKVD Convoy Division, the 152nd NKVD Railway Protection Regiment and a number of border guard regiments are deployed in Latvia. 25 000 soldiers in total. These military forces are responsible for completing the second occupation of Latvia and suppressing the national resistance movement.

1945

5 February

The leaders of the US, USSR and UK meet in Yalta. USSR demands are accepted. The USSR once again invades Latvia and incorporates it in the communist Eastern bloc.

25 April

The Founding Conference of the United Nations (UN) commences in San Francisco, US.

30 April

Adolf Hitler commits suicide in his bunker in Berlin.

9 May

Second World War operations end within the territory of Latvia, various German forces, including the 19th Latvian Legionnaires division surrender in Kurzeme. 50% of the division's Legionnaires (about 4 000 men) desert, going underground, hiding in the forests and the majority become resistance fighters.

During the period Latvia is a theatre of Second World War operations, 120 000 military personnel and civilians are killed or go missing. Additionally, between 1944 and 1945, the Soviet occupying power arrests, deports to filtration camps or kills a total of 20 000 Latvian residents. In 1945, 20 000 Latvian military personnel become prisoners of war of the Western Allies.

6 October

Latvian SSR Supreme Soviet members in Daugavpils approve Moscow's proposal to incorporate the town of Abrene and six surrounding parishes – 1 201.76 km² of Latvia's territory and around 35 000 Latvian residents – into the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic.

20 November

the Nuremberg military tribunal begins its investigations into Nazi war crimes.

1949

29 January

The USSR Council of Ministers issues an order on the deportation of national resistance fighters, their sympathisers and the most prosperous farmers (kulaks) from Latvia to Siberia, consequently the MGB start preparations for a completely covert operation Krasta banga (Coastal Surf).

28 February

The USSR MVD senior officers receives a secret order on the execution of operation Krasta banga and implement it, led by Lieutenant-General P. Burmak, MVD Chief of Staff.

17 March

The Latvian SSR Council of Ministers adopts a secret resolution – On the Deportation of Kulak Families outside the Latvian SSR – which provides for 10 000 families to be deported from Latvia.

25 March

The Soviet occupying authority implements the second mass deportation of Latvian residents to Siberia. 42 322 people are deported, being taken to 55 railway stations by 3 316 vehicles, loaded into 1 974 cattle wagons formed into 33 trains, guarded by the 48th Convoy Division. Only 119 people manage to evade deportation.

March-April

The property of deported farmers is impounded immediately after their arrest, their land and buildings nationalised, making the establishment of collective farms – to look after the seized cattle and work in the fields – urgent.

July

The repressive policy of the Soviet occupying power results in the number of collective farms in Latvia increasing threefold, 3 857 being established.

December

The number of collective farms in Latvian reaches 4 103.