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The Holocaust in Estonia

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The Holocaust in Estonia refers to the [Nazi crimes](#) during the [occupation of Estonia by Nazi Germany](#). Prior to the war, there were approximately 4,300 [Estonian Jews](#). After the [Soviet 1940 occupation](#) about 10% of the Jewish population was deported to [Siberia](#), along with other [Estonians](#). About 75% of Estonian Jews, aware of the fate that awaited them from [Nazi Germany](#), escaped to the [Soviet Union](#); virtually all the remainder (between 950 and 1,000 people) were killed by [Einsatzgruppe A](#) and local collaborators before the end of 1941.^[1] [Roma](#) people of Estonia were also murdered and enslaved by the Nazi occupiers and their Estonian collaborators.

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Jewish life pre-Holocaust [edit]

Main article: [History of the Jews in Estonia](#)

Prior to World War II, Jewish life flourished with the level cultural autonomy accorded being the most extensive in all of Europe, which gave full control of education and other aspects of cultural life to the local Jewish population.^[2] In 1936, the British based Jewish newspaper [The Jewish Chronicle](#) reported that "*Estonia is the only country in Eastern Europe where neither the Government nor the people practice any discrimination against Jews and where Jews are left in peace and are allowed to lead a free and unmolested life and fashion it in accord with their national and cultural principles.*"^[3]

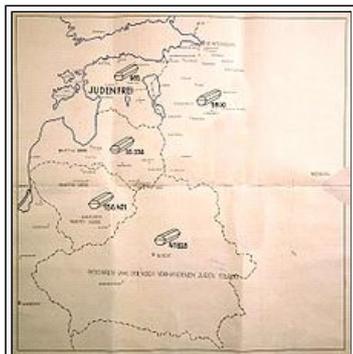
Murder of Jewish population [edit]

Round-ups and killings of the remaining Jews began immediately by the extermination squad [Einsatzkommando \(Sonderkommando\) 1A](#) under [Martin Sandberger](#), part of [Einsatzgruppe A](#) led by [Walter Stahlecker](#), who followed the arrival of the first German troops on July 7, 1941. Arrests and executions continued as the Germans, with the assistance of local collaborators, advanced through [Estonia](#). Estonia became a part of the [Reichskommissariat Ostland](#). A [Sicherheitspolizei](#) (Security Police) was established for internal security under the leadership of [Ain Mere](#) in 1942. Estonia was declared *Judenfrei* quite early by the German occupation regime at the [Wannsee Conference](#).^[4] Jews that had remained in Estonia (929 according to the most recent calculation^[5]) were killed.^[6] Fewer than a dozen Estonian Jews are known to have survived the war in Estonia.^[5]

German policy towards the Jews in Estonia [edit]

The Estonian state archives contain [death certificates](#) and lists of Jews shot dated July, August, and early September 1941. For example the official death certificate of [Rubin Teitelbaum](#), born in [Tapa](#) on January 17, 1907, states laconically in a form with item 7 already printed with only the date left blank: "7. By a decision of the [Sicherheitspolizei](#) on September 4, 1941, condemned to death, with the decision being carried out the same day in [Tallinn](#)." Teitelbaum's crime was "being a Jew" and thus constituting a "threat to the public order".

On September 11, 1941 an article entitled "Juuditäht seljal" – "A [Jewish Star](#) on the Back" appeared in the Estonian mass-circulation newspaper [Postimees](#). It stated that Dr. [Otto-Heinrich Drechsler](#), the High Commissioner of [Ostland](#), had proclaimed ordinances in accordance with which all Jewish residents of Ostland from that day onward had to wear visible yellow six-pointed [Star of David](#) at least 10 cm (4 in). in diameter on the left side of their chest and back.



Map titled "Jewish Executions Carried"

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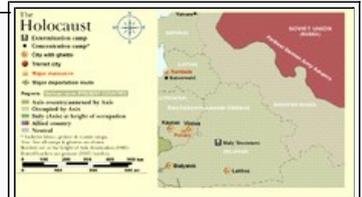
Out by **Einsatzgruppe A**" from the Stahlecker's report. Marked "Secret Reich Matter," the map shows the number of Jews shot in **Ostland**, and reads at the bottom: "the estimated number of Jews still on hand is 128,000". Estonia is marked as **judenfrei**.

On the same day Regulations^[7] issued by the Sicherheitspolizei were delivered to all local police departments proclaiming that the **Nuremberg Laws** were in force in Ostland, defining who is a Jew, and what Jews could and could not do. Jews were prohibited from changing their place of residence, walking along the **sidewalk**, using any means of transportation, going to theatres, museums, cinema, or school. The **professions** of lawyer, physician, **notary**, banker, or real estate agent were declared closed to Jews, as was the occupation of **street hawker**. The regulations also declared that the **property** and homes of Jewish residents were to be **confiscated**. The regulations emphasized that

work to this ends was to be begun as soon as possible, and that lists of Jews, their **addresses**, and their property were to be completed by the police by September 20, 1941.

These regulations also provided for the establishment of a **concentration camp** near the south-eastern Estonian city of **Tartu**. A later decisions provided for the construction of a Jewish ghetto near the town of **Harku**, but this was never built, a small concentration camp being built there instead. The Estonian State Archives contain material **pertinent** to the cases of about 450 Estonian Jews. They were typically arrested either at home or in the street, taken to the local **police station**, and charged with the 'crime' of being Jews. They were either shot outright or sent to concentration camp and shot later. An Estonian woman, E. S. describes the arrest of her Jewish husband as follows:^[8]

As my husband did not go out of the house, I was the one to go to town every day to see what was going on. I was very frightened when I saw a poster at the corner of **Vabaduse Square** and Harju Street calling for people to show where the apartments of Jews were located. On that fatal day of September 13, I went out again because the weather was fine but I remember being very worried. I rushed home and when I got there and heard some voices in our apartment I had a foreboding that something bad had happened. There were two men in our apartment from the **Selbstschutz** who said they were taking my husband to the police station. I ran after them and went to the chief officer and asked for permission to see my husband. The chief officer said that he could not give me permission but added, in a low voice, that I should come the next morning when the prisoners would be taken to prison and perhaps I could see my husband in the corridor. I returned the next morning as I had been advised, and it was the last time I saw my husband. On September 15 I went to the German Sicherheitspolizei on **Tõnismägi** in an attempt to get information about my husband. I was told he had been shot. I asked the reason since he had not been a communist but a businessman, The answer was: "Aber er war doch ein Jude." [But he was a Jew].



Holocaust in **Reichskommissariat Ostland** (which included Estonia): a map

Concentration camps established for foreign Jews [\[edit\]](#)

With the invasion of the **Baltic States**, it was the intention of the Nazi government to use the Baltics countries as their main area of mass genocide. Consequently, Jews from countries outside the Baltics were shipped there to be killed.^[9] and an estimated 10,000 Jews were killed in Estonia after having been deported to camps there from elsewhere in Eastern Europe. The Nazi regime also established 22 **concentration and labor camps** on occupied Estonian territory for foreign Jews to be used as slave labor. The largest, **Vaivara concentration camp** served as a transit camp and processed 20,000 Jews from Latvia and the Lithuanian ghettos.^[10] Usually able bodied men were selected to work on the **oil shale** mines in northeastern Estonia. Women, children, and old people would be executed on arrival.

At least two train loads of Central European Jews were imported to Estonia for immediate extermination, killed at the **Kalevi-Liiva** site near the **Jägala concentration camp**.^[4]

Extermination of foreign Jews at Kalevi-Liiva [\[edit\]](#)

According to testimony of the survivors, at least two transports with about 2,100–2,150 Central European Jews,^[11] arrived at the railway station at **Raasiku**, one from **Theresienstadt (Terezin)** with **Czechoslovakian Jews** and one from Berlin with **German citizens**. Around 1,700–1,750 people were immediately taken to an execution site at the **Kalevi-Liiva** sand dunes and shot.^[11] About 450 people were selected for work at the **Jägala camp**.^{[11][12]}

Transport **Be 1.9.1942** from Theresienstadt arrived at the Raasiku station on September 5, 1942, after a five day trip.^{[13][14]} According to testimony by Ralf Gerrets, one of the accused at the **Holocaust trials in 1961**, eight busloads of Estonian **auxiliary police** had arrived from **Tallinn**.^[14] The **selection process** was supervised by **Ain-Ervin Mere**, chief of **Sicherheitspolizei** in Estonia; those not selected for slave labor were sent by bus to an execution site near the camp. Later the police^[14] in teams of 6 to 8 men^[11] would execute the Jews by machine gun fire, on other hand, during later investigation some guards of camp denied participation of police and said that execution was done by camp personnel.^[11] On the first day a total of 900 people were murdered in this way.^{[11][14]}

Gerrets told that he had fired a pistol at a victim who was still making noises in the pile of bodies.^{[14][15]} The whole operation was directed by **Obersturmführer Heinrich Bergmann** and **Oberscharführer Julius Geese**.^{[11][14]} Few witnesses pointed out Heinrich Bergmann as the key figure behind the extermination of Estonian gypsies. In the case of **Be 1.9.1942** the only ones chosen for labor and to survive the war were a small group of young women who were taken through concentration camps in Estonia, Poland and Germany to **Bergen-Belsen**, where they were liberated.^[16] Camp commandant Laak used the women as sex slaves, killing many after they had outlived their usefulness.^{[12][17]}

A number of foreign witnesses were heard at the **Holocaust trials in Soviet Estonia**, including five women, who had been transported on **Be 1.9.1942** from Theresienstadt.^[14]

*"The accused Mere, Gerrets and Viik actively participated in crimes and mass killings that were perpetrated by the Nazi invaders on the territory of the **Estonian SSR**. In accordance with the Nazi racial theory, the **Sicherheitspolizei** and **Sicherheitsdienst** were instructed to exterminate the Jews and Gypsies. For that end in August–September 1941 Mere and his collaborators set up a death camp at **Jägala**, 30 km (19 mi) from Tallinn. Mere put Aleksander Laak in charge of the camp; Ralf Gerrets was appointed his deputy. On September 5, 1942 a train with approximately 1,500 Czechoslovak citizens arrived to the **Raasiku** railway station. Mere, Laak and Gerrets personally selected who of them should be executed and who should be moved to the **Jägala** death camp. More than 1,000 people, mostly children, the old, and the infirm, were translocated to a wasteland at **Kalevi-Liiva** where they were monstrously executed in a special pit. In mid-September the second troop train with 1,500 prisoners arrived to the railway*



station from Germany. *Mere, Laak, and Gerrets selected another thousand victims that were condemned by them to extermination. This group of prisoners, which included nursing women and their new-born babies, were transported to Kalevi-Liiva where they were killed.*

In March 1943 the personnel of the Kalevi-Liiva camp executed about fifty Gypsies, half of which were under 5 years of age. Also were executed 60 Gypsy children of school age...^[18]

Roma people murdered [edit]

Few witnesses pointed out Heinrich Bergmann as the key figure behind the extermination of Estonian Roma people.^[16]

Estonian collaboration [edit]

Units of the *Eesti Omakaitse* (Estonian **Home Guard**; approximately between 1000 and 1200 men) were directly involved in criminal acts, taking part in the round-up (and possibly killing) of 200 Roma people and 950 Jews.^[1] 15,000 Soviet POW died in Estonia because of hard living, or were executed.^[1] Units of **Estonian Auxiliary Police** participated in the extermination of the Jews in Estonia and **Pskov** region of Russia and provided guards for concentration camps for Jews and Soviet POWs (**Jägala, Vaivara, Klooga, Lagedi**), where the prisoners were killed – despite the criminal activities in which numbers of policemen were engaged.^[1] All members of Police Department B-IV did participate in such crimes. Battalion Narwa was formed from the first 800 men of the Legion to have finished their training at **Dębica** (Heidelager in 1943), being sent in April 1943 to join the **5th SS Panzergrenadier Division Wiking** in **Reichskommissariat Ukraine**. On May 5, 1943 the 3rd Estonian **Waffen-SS** brigade was formed and sent to front near **Nevel**. The **Estonian military and police** units made a significant war contribution fighting for the German Armed Forces.^[19]

From 1941 to 1943 **Karl Linnas** had commanded a Nazi **concentration camp** at **Tartu**, Estonia, where he directed and personally took part in the murder of thousands of men, women, and children who were herded into anti-tank ditches.

The final acts of liquidating the camps, such as **Klooga**, which involved the mass-shooting of roughly 2,000 prisoners, were committed by Estonians under German command, that is by units of the **Estonian Security Police and SD** and (presumably) the **Schutzmannschaftsbataillon** of the **KdS**. Survivors report that, during these last days before liberation, when Jewish slave labourers were visible, the Estonian population in part attempted to help the Jews by providing food and so on.^{[1][20]}

War crimes trials [edit]

Four Estonians most responsible for the murders at Kalevi-Liiva were accused at **war crimes trials in 1961**. Two were later executed, while the Soviet occupation authorities were unable to press charges against two who lived in exile.^[21] There have been several known **7 ethnic Estonians**: **Ralf Gerrets**, **Ain-Ervin Mere**, **Jaan Viik**, **Juhan Jüriste**, **Karl Linnas**, **Aleksander Laak** and **Ervin Viks** who have faced trials for crimes against humanity committed during the Nazi occupation in Estonia. The accused were charged with murdering up to 5000 **German** and **Czechoslovakian** Jews and **Romani people** near the **Kalevi-Liiva** concentration camp in 1942–1943. **Ain-Ervin Mere**, commander of the Estonian Security Police (Group B of the **Sicherheitspolizei**) under the **Estonian Self-Administration**, was tried **in absentia**.

Before the trial Mere was an active member of the Estonian community in England, contributing to Estonian language publications.^[22] At the time of the trial he was however held in captivity, accused of murder. He was never deported^[23] and died a free man in England in 1969. **Ralf Gerrets**, the deputy commandant at the **Jägala** camp. **Jaan Viik**, (*Jan Wijk, Jan Viik*), a guard at the **Jägala** labor camp was singled out for prosecution out of the hundreds of Estonian camp guards and police for his particular brutality.^[18] He was testified as throwing small children into the air and shooting them. He did not deny the charge.^[15] A fourth accused, camp commandant, **Aleksander Laak** (*Alexander Laak*) was discovered in Canada but committed suicide.

In January 1962 another trial was held in **Tartu**. **Juhan Jüriste**, **Karl Linnas** and **Ervin Viks** were accused of murdering 12,000 civilians in the **Tartu concentration camp**.

Number of victims [edit]

Soviet-era Estonian era sources estimate the total number of Soviet citizens and foreigners to be murdered in Nazi-occupied **Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic** to be 125,000.^{[24][25][26][27][28]} The bulk of this number consists Jews from Central and Western Europe and Soviet prisoners-of-war killed or starved to death in **prisoner-of-war camps** on Estonian territory.^{[27][28]}

The Estonian History Commission estimates the total number of victims to be roughly 35,000, consisting of the following groups:

- 1000 **Estonian Jews**,
- about 10,000 foreign Jews,
- 1000 Estonian Roma.
- 7000 other Estonians.
- 15,000 Soviet POWs.

The number of Estonian Jews killed is less than 1,000; the German Holocaust perpetrators **Martin Sandberger** and **Walter Stahlecker** cite the numbers 921 and 963 respectively. In 1994 **Evgenia Goorin-Loov** calculated the exact number to be 929.^[5]

Modern memorials [edit]

Since the reestablishment of the Estonian independence markers were put in place for the 60th anniversary of the mass executions that were carried out at the **Lagedi, Vaivara** and **Klooga** (Kalevi-Liiva) camps in September 1944.^[29] On February 5, 1945 in Berlin, Ain Mere founded the ***Eesti Vabadusliit*** together with SS-Obersturmbannführer **Harald Riipalu**.^[30] He was sentenced to the capital punishment during the **Holocaust trials in Soviet Estonia** but was not extradited by Great Britain and died there in peace. In 2002 the **Government of the Republic of Estonia** decided to officially commemorate the **Holocaust**. In the same year, the **Simon Wiesenthal Center** had provided the Estonian government with information on alleged Estonian war criminals, all former members of the **36th Estonian Police Battalion**.

Collaborators [edit]





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Holocaust memorial at the site of the former **Klooga concentration camp**, opened on July 24, 2005

- [Ralf Gerrets](#)
- [Juhan Jüriste](#)
- [Friedrich Kurg](#)^[31]^[32]
- [Aleksander Laak](#)
- [Karl Linnas](#)
- [Ain-Ervin Mere](#)
- [Hjalmar Mäe](#)
- [Jaan Viik](#)
- [Ervin Viks](#)

Organizations [edit]

- [Einsatzgruppe A](#)
- [Estonian Auxiliary Police](#)
- [Omakaitse](#)
- [Ordnungspolizei](#)
- [Sonderkommando 1a](#)
- [Sicherheitspolizei](#)

Concentration camps [edit]

KZ-Stammlager [edit]

- [KZ Vaivara](#)
 - [Klooga](#)

KZ-Außenlager [edit]

- [KZ Aseri](#)
- [KZ Auvere](#)
- [KZ Erides](#)
- [KZ Goldfields \(Kohtla\)](#)
- [KZ Ilinurme](#)
- [KZ Jewe](#)
- [KZ Kerestowo](#) (Karstala in Viru Ingria, now in [Gatchinsky District](#))
- [KZ Kiviõli](#)
- [KZ Kukruse](#)
- [KZ Kunda](#)
- [KZ Kuremaa](#)
- [KZ Lagedi](#)

- [KZ Klooga, Lodensee](#). Commandant [SS-Untersturmführer Wilhelm Werle](#). (b. 1907, d. 1966),^[33] September 1943 – September 1944. There were hold 2 000 – 3 000 prisoners, most of them the [Lithuanian Jews](#). When the [Red Army](#) approached, [SS](#)-men shot the 2 500 prisoners on September 19, 1944 and burned most of the bodies. The fewer than 100 prisoners succeeded in surviving by hiding. There is a monument on the location of the concentration camp.

- [KZ Narwa](#)
- [KZ Narwa-Hungerburg](#)
- [KZ Putki](#) (in Piiri Parish, near [Slantsy](#))
- [KZ Reval \(Ülemiste?\)](#)
- [KZ Saka](#)
- [KZ Sonda](#)
- [KZ Soski](#) (in [Vasknarva Parish](#))
- [KZ Wiwikond](#)
- [KZ Ülenurme](#)

^[34]

Arbeits- und Erziehungslager [edit]

- [AEL Jägala](#) (August 1942 – September 1943)
- [AEL Murru](#)
- [AEL Reval](#)
 - [Harku](#) (243 Estonian [Romani people](#) were executed in the Harku concentration camp on 27 October 1942)^[35]
 - [Lasnamäe](#)
- [AEL Tartu](#) (commandant [Karl Linnas](#))
- [AEL Turba](#) (in [Ellamaa](#))^[36]

Prisons [edit]

- [Haapsalu](#)
- [Kuressaare](#)
- [Narva](#) (in Vestervalli Street, 1941–1944)
- [Petseri](#)
- [Pärnu](#)
- [Tartu](#)

- Valga
- Võru

Other concentration camps [edit]

- Dvigatel^[37]
- Essu
- Järvakandi
- Laitse
- Lavassaare^[38]
- Lehtse
- Lelle^[39] (1942 – May 1943)
- Roela
- Sitsi (In Tallinn, at the end of Tööstuse Street where was 10 barracks; until 17 September 1944)^[40]
- Vasalemma
- Vaste

This list is incomplete; you can help by expanding it.

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- ↑ ^{***a b***} From Ghetto Terezin to Lithuania and Estonia [c]
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- [Extermination of the Gypsies in Estonia during World War II](#)
- [Operation 1005 in Riga by Jens Hoffmann](#)

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| Major perpetrators | Hans Aumeier Karl Jäger Ernst Kaltenbrunner Aleksander Laak Hinrich Lohse Alfred Rosenberg Martin Sandberger Rudolf Joachim Seck Franz Walter Stahlecker | |
| Nazi occupation and organizations | Einsatzgruppen Reichskommissariat Ostland | |
| Notable collaborators | Karl Linnas Evald Mikson | |
| Concentration camps | Klooga Jägala Vaivara | |
| Documentation | Jäger Report Judenfrei | |
| Concealment | Sonderaktion 1005 | |
| War crimes investigations and trials | Einsatzgruppen Trial Holocaust trials in Soviet Estonia Estonian International Commission | |
| Righteous among the Nations | Uku Masing Eha Masing Polina Lentsman | |
| Related articles | History of the Jews in Estonia Estonia in World War II Occupation of Estonia by Nazi Germany | |

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