

COORDINATED WITH

DoJ/OSI

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XAN-1601  
7 September 1988

MEMORANDUM FOR: [redacted] Office of General Counsel

FROM : [redacted] IMS/LSS

SUBJECT : Nazi War Crimes Investigation-  
Viktors Arajs and Herberts Cukurs

REFERENCE : OGC 88-51906 dated 22 June 1988

1. In response to the reference request, the files and indices of the Directorate of Operations were reviewed for information on the Subjects. A summary of information contained in the files of the individuals follows:

a. All of the following information probably relates to the Viktors Arajs of your request. One fnu Arajs aka Abols was a Latvian born circa 1910. He studied "Jurisprudence" at the University of Riga until 1938 or 1939 and had a reputation of being a brilliant student. He spoke Latvian, Russian, and German fluently and probably spoke a little of other languages. Upon leaving the University, he joined the Latvian Police in a junior administrative position. His reputation inside the police service was that of an energetic and promising young man who was extremely anti-Russian and anti-Communist. When the Germans occupied Latvia (a constituent republic of the U.S.S.R.), Arajs at once joined the German Security Police (Sicherheitsdienst); he quickly attained the rank of major and was given command of a special task force of about 150 to 200 individuals. The task force operated against the ~~partisan bands~~ resisting in the forests, and several times they were ordered over the Latvian border into Russia. While the task force duties on those occasions were ostensibly the combatting of partisan resistance, it was generally understood that they took part in pogroms ordered by the Germans against Russian Jews. In the summer of 1944 one fnu Arajs was a member of the Latvian Nazi organization "Perkonkrusts." He was the leader of the Gestapo's special execution commando, the so-called "Sondergruppe A." With his commando he attended to the notorious executions of the Jewish people in Latvia, and Minsk, U.S.S.R. In October/November 1944, Arajs was seen in uniform in Libau, Latvia. When the Germans retreated from Latvia, Arajs came to Germany with them. His wife also came to Germany and lived in the southern part of Bavaria. When the war ended, Arajs adopted the name Abols (a common Latvian

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name) in order to conceal his true identity. He appeared in Lubeck, West Germany, in 1945 under the latter name. In late 1945 or early 1946, he was arrested by the British War Crimes Commission and released around Christmas in 1948. (S)

b. There is also information concerning one fnu Araj's activities during 1942. I have not been able to determine if it is consistent with the information in paragraph a. above. This information identifies Araj's as 28-30 years old and a corporal in the former Latvian Army. He apparently was in charge of a "Kommando" group probably consisting of no more than a thousand men. The command was made up of, principally, Riga gutter-snipes according to the source. (S)

c. According to our information, Herberts Cukurs was born on 17 May 1900 in Liepaja, Latvian. His mother was Anna nee Skudra and his father was Janis Cukurs an artisan. Herberts Cukurs was married to Milda nee Berzupe. He had children but it was not certain how many. He participated in the Liberation Wars of Latvia 1918-1920 and was commissioned due to valor. He attended an unidentified military aviation school and served in the Latvian Air Force as an officer. Cukurs' last known rank was that of a captain and he was known among Latvians as "kapteinis Cukurs." He worked on plane construction and was known as a good mechanic. Cukurs quit the Air Force in the 1930's. He acquired his own airplane and made flights in 1933 and 1934 to the former Latvian colony of Gambia in Africa crossing the Sahara Desert. Later, he made his living by publishing his experiences. He eventually became famous because he popularized the ancient Latvian history by visiting the former colonies. Cukurs wanted to visit Tobago, another former Latvian colony in the 17th century, but was refused permission by the British. Cukurs also visited several European states by plane and was known to every child in Latvia. During the German occupation, Cukurs was with the German SD in the ill-famed Araj's group. Cukurs was believed to have participated in the persecution of Jews. It was also reported that he, along with Araj's, was a member of the Latvian Nazi organization, "Perkonkrusts," and the "Sondergruppe A" and was active in the killing of Jewish people. During an unspecified time period Cukurs' superior, Major Araj's, was arrested in the a/m (meaning of term unknown) POW camp where he had hidden himself under the false name of Abele. Later it became known that Cukurs was in Brazil where he operated a boats-for-rent operation on a lake. He had difficulties because the local Jewish population tried to achieve his expulsion from Brazil and even destroyed his enterprise. Circa 1950, Cukurs wrote a letter to the Latvian Veterans' Organization, "Daugavas Vanagi," in Germany asking for a letter showing that he had not committed any

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atrocities during the German occupation. The request was refused. A New York Times article dated 10 March 1965 reported that Herbert Albert Cukurs, a Nazi war criminal, had been killed in Montevideo, Uruguay. (S)

2. Attached are ~~two~~<sup>three</sup> documents originated by the Department of State which were located in Cukurs' file. Please forward them to State for coordination. (U)

3. The files on the Subjects are available for review by the Department of Justice once appropriate coordinations have been obtained. (U)

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