

Disinformation from the Mossad office
Historical forgery about a mysterious homicide case in Montevideo

On March 6th, 1965, Uruguayan police officer Alejandro Otero was informed that the Bonn office of the Reuters news agency had received an anonymous letter from a group calling themselves, "Who can never forget ". It said that in Shangrilá, Uruguay, the Latvian war criminal Herbert Cukurs had been executed for his murders of some 30,000 Jews during World War II.

When the policeman went to the indicated address, he found that the doors and windows were closed. Otero remembers: "What I could see from outside, was frightening: The whole room was covered with blood".

Found inside, and placed beside the corpse was an extract from the pleading of a British accuser in the Nuremberg trials process. The next day, newspapers around the world proclaimed that these were the proofs against the executed alleged Jew's mass murderer. This was five years after the arrest of Adolf Eichmann, and the press speculated that the Israeli Secret Service, Mossad, had been at work. The government in Tel Aviv wrapped itself in silence.

Twenty years later, at the Auschwitz tribunal in Jerusalem, the then head of Mossad, Isser Harel, who himself came from Latvia, declared that the execution of Cukurs has been the last action of his Secret Service in the matter of Nazi criminals in South America. This was in 1985. And other twelve years passed, until the Israeli Keter publishing company published a book with the title " the Execution of the hangman of Riga " in which the execution of Cukurs' is described in detail.

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The authors claimed, that with this action, they wanted to influence the debate of the statutes of limitation of Nazi crimes on-going within the German Bundestag. Neither the German government nor the parliament have protested against this blackmailing of their democratic institutions by an other state. Journalists and historians then accepted, without any checks, the description from the Mossad. „The Execution of the Hangman of Riga " was then translated in German, and in Latvian and praised worldwide as an "important historical document ".

Four years ago, the book appeared in English, with a preface by general Meir Amit, the Mossad Chief at that time. He writes in it: "The state of Israel had decided to eliminate the leading nazi war criminals. This was a specific, selective and efficient elimination. One of the most prominent ones was Herbert Cukurs who had committed disastrous crimes against Latvian Jews and had escaped the persecution of the allies."

These words may well be doubted. The Cukurs operation was probably

one of the most dilettante operations of the Israeli Secret Service and the book "The Execution of the Hangman of Riga " a product of their department of "dis-information".

The author of the book is called "Anton Künzle". He has carried out the execution of the dis-information. "Künzle" is a pseudonym. He was in 1919 born in Germany and later migrated to Palestine, so it says in the book cover flap text. There he served in the ranks of the Hagana, the precursor of the Israeli army, and later the Mossad. The journalist Gad Shimron, who himself was active for ten years with the Mossad, had helped him with the writing:

“When one day my grandchildren ask me “Grandpa”, of everything you’ve ever done, what are you most proud of? I will tell them about my role in this difficult and complicated operation of settling the account with the Hangman of Riga”, reads one quote from the book.

In the Jewish museum in Riga, nevertheless, no-one is championing that book. "It is really shaming", says Margers Vestermanis, the curator, " that of the Mossad works so badly, so primitively, about (the factual) concerns of the book; The Execution of the Hangman of Riga ".

Alejandro Otero was the police officer in charge in Uruguay. Today, he is retired, however, he still remembers every detail. At the scene it stank unbearably, the corpse had lain there two weeks in summer temperatures. The dead body lay in chest and beside the chest lay the extract of the British accuser in the Nuremberg process. That sheet is in the police records on the case. In that extract is described the “special action groups" of Nazi leader Himmler. It is not referring to Cukurs or Latvia.

The Federal Police in Germany sent to Otero the letter of the anonymous group, the so-called "death sentence". It described Cukurs as a leader of a Latvian fascist's troop called Perkonkrust (Thundercross): "Because of his demonstrable personal responsibility for the death of 30,000 men, women and children, we have decided to issue to Herbert Cukurs the death sentence ".

Police officer Otero got in contact with the family of the dead person. From São Paulo came his son, Gunnars, who had already missed his father. His father had lived legally in Brazil since 1946 and in the beginning of the fifties the Jewish community had raised reproaches against him, Gunnars said. Nothing within any of these reproaches was proven to be true and after a certain time the campaign lay dormant. That is until "Anton Künzle" appeared in São Paulo and presented a commercial proposition to his father. He invited him to Uruguay and left 160 dollars for the flight from São Paulo to Montevideo. It was evidently a trap.

Otero found out that Künzle had spoken German fluently and Spanish with an Argentine accent, as had his accomplices,. And they probably had initially planned only for kidnapping Cukurs. However, they were not professionals. At least five young men, neighbours had observed, had stayed in the house in Shangrilá, a suburb of Montevideo. Otero theorizes that, "They didn't want to execute him. Then they could simply have shot him before in Brazil. They had lured him under a pretext to Uruguay to take him away to another place. Cukurs was a very strong man in spite of his age. He preferred to die than to be caught. The fight ended with his death."

The fact that five young men could not defeat a 64-year-old, contradicts the image of the extraordinary efficiency that Mossad claimed.

"The corpse laid in a gigantic chest ", according to Otero, "and the chest had several air holes in front and on the side. There were robust metal buckles and thick belts which lay beside the chest." These belts would presumably prevent the chest from being opened from the inside. Several neighbours, according to his inquiries, had observed that during the propoorted time of that action a big ship had anchored in the bay of Shangrilá. It waited there 48 hours. However, in the national registers Otero did not find the ship.

The policeman supposed that the ship would have taken aboard the kidnapped man to be stolen away. Otero checked border crossings and airports. And he travelled to São Paulo, to speak with the Cukurs family. He found that the man who was called Anton Künzle and had lured Herbert Cukurs to Uruguay where he had rented a car. He needed an international driving licence and applied for it with the Brazilian Automobile Association. From there, Otero received the second photo of the licence, the photo of the murderer. "I wanted the help of Interpol in the international search, but Interpol officially informed me that it concerns the murder of Cukurs as a political criminal case, and in such cases Interpol does not become active". So thus, the inquiries had run into the sand.

Otero was very busy at that time. In Uruguay, it was the time when the guerrilla group Tupamaros became active and Otero was charged with persueing them. One of their founders was Tabaré Rivero, living today in Montevideo. He remembers the Cukurs case well and, above all, he remembers a certain Amodio Pérez, one of the most reckless comrades who had made a quick career inside the guerrilla apparatus.

Rivero said: "I found out that Amodio participated in the Cukurs action, he has driving the car of the operation. He used false documents which had probably been handed over to him by the Mossad. He also knew the house in Shangrilá. The Israelis had organized the

operation with very few people, among them was also the first wife of Amodio."

Amodio Perez is a Jew. And at that time, the Uruguayan left maintained close contacts with the Jews in Montevideo. One had a common enemy. The local Nazis attacked left offices at that time with bombs. The fact that Perez had taken part in the Mossad action, however, had not occurred by order of his organization, Rivero said. He had gotten to know of his participation only later. In 1972, Perez was arrested and told everything that he knew. In his army uniform he was led on the streets to identify his comrades-in-arms. Even then the rumour circulated that he was a spy inside the Tupamaros. After the military coup, he left without processing out of the country.

Only once did he appeared since then. He was involved in the middle of the eighties in the attempt to kill Nicaragua Contra leader Eden Pastora. Pastora, called also "Comandante Zero", wanted to speak in a press conference about the pressure which the CIA exercised on him. However, there was a bomb explosion, and eleven people were killed, and Pastora was injured. Journalists later showed police officer Otero a video about the press conference and he identified Perez clearly.

Margers Vestermanis leads the Jewish museum in Riga. He himself was a slave worker of the Nazis during World War II. The book "Execution of the Hangman of Riga" is " a complete nonsense ", he says. Indeed, Cukurs has been a member in the murder group of Viktor Arajs, but Herbert Cukurs was not responsible for assassination of 30,000 Jews. "Neither Viktor Arajs nor Cukurs were a member in the Perkonkrust whose history is well known."

The Perkonkrust was a nationalistic, paramilitary troop, born during the first Latvian republic under Kalis Ulmanis, an authoritarian ruler. At that time about 80,000 Jews lived in Latvia, five percent of the population. Under Ulmanis, they lived quiet well, in comparison to the era before it, as Latvia had been under Russian administration, where they could choose their professions and acquire land.

Perkonkrust did the agitation against these people with his 6,000 members. They saluted "Kampf Heil", with the fascist's greeting and were against all foreigners. Their slogan was "Hit the Jews and the Germans"! In 1940, the Red Army annexed the Baltic States. And this was the first time for contacts and physical connections between the Perkonkrust and the German Abwehr - against the common enemy, the Communists.

But Cukurs never was a member of the resistance, says Vestermanis, but a daredevil and adventurer who loved the risk, enjoyed travelling, pleasures and a good life. On the flea market he bought

an old Citroen motor and inserted it in a scrapped airplane with which he flew to Gambia. The newspapers of Latvia financed his adventure and from all stations he cabled reports to Riga. Then he became a special correspondent in the war of Abyssinia and in Japan.

Cukurs became a media event, a national hero, and the Latvian air force hired him as a captain. He was not known as an anti-Semite, says Vestermanis. He rather tried to take advantage of all situations for himself. Even later, under the Soviet occupation of Latvia, he presented himself as a convinced anti-communist, but he still made an arrangement with the Russians. On the 9th April 41 he went to Moscow and offered his collaboration, probably to do personal business with the Soviet air force. With which authorities he had contact in the Soviet Union, never became known.

On the 16th of April 1941 he went back on his farm in Latvia where he was at the time of the invasion of the German armed forces. Many suspected him as a Russian spy because of his Moscow trip, and the situation had become dangerous for him, speculates Vestermanis. Probably to prove his loyalty to the new rulers, Cukurs enlisted into the special command of Victor Arajs.

The mass murder of the Latvian Jews happened in several great actions. The first homicide action began a few days after the invasion of the Germans by Latvian fascist's groups. With the second, at the end of 1941, the Germans killed 25,000 ghetto inhabitants in the forest. Germany later announced the transport of Jews to Riga as there was a claim to need space in the ghetto.

Herbert Cukurs membership within the Arajs command is proven. He was his chauffeur and his right hand man. The fact that those troops committed heavy crimes - shootings, tortures, synagogues burned - is likewise recorded. Whether and how Cukurs was involved in these actions personally, cannot be proven today. With certainty, he carries a joint responsibility for his membership in this terrorist group, but whether he carries a penal responsibility, is not clear.

Margers Vestermanis knows well the documents, both for, and against him. For him, two Jewish women have spoken out. Ella Medalje (born Ella Guttman), was aided in escaping her being shot because she had presented herself as an "Aryan". Cukurs had driven her to the Waldemar Street nazi headquarter s building and he did not betrayed her, although he knew that she was a Jew. And later, Miriam Keitzner gave testimony in Brazil saying that Cukurs had hidden her on his farm.

However, during the executions in November, 1941, Cukurs had been present, says Vestermanis, under direct orders, he fired blindly in the mass of prisonars. These massacres were ordered and organised

the by the German SS. Primarily, three persons were responsible: SS-group leader Friedrich Jeckeln who had come from the Ukraine where he had been very active in the murder of the Jews of Kiev. SS-leader and commander of the Riga ghetto, Eduard Roschmann who became known as the "butcher of Riga ". And Viktor Arajs, the Latvian boss of a special murder group.

Herbert Cukurs was often at the nazi headquarter at number 19 Waldemar Street. It was an expropriated building of a former Jewish banker, where the Arajs group had their offices. There was the garage of their cars for which Cukurs was responsible. In the basement, there were torture cells for prisoners, Jews and partisans.

On the third floor of that building, were the rooms of the Perkonkrust. However, after only one month of German occupation, these Latvian fascists got into trouble with the Germans and were forbidden to remain within the building.

The book " The Execution of the Hangman of Riga " quotes eight witness's statements of surviving prisoners of Waldemar Street. They have been filed before Jewish organisations. The originals are in the archive of the memorial Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, copies in the Jewish museum in Riga.

The fact that these witnesses were victims of the worst humiliations, is excepted without any question. However, something in these statements is inexact, something even wrong, means Vestermanis. The fact that in it Cukurs is named as a member of the Perkonkrust, proves nothing. The witnesses have been tormented and been traumatised and would have hardly differentiated anyone on the other side according to their party affiliation.

It is very strange, Vestermanis says that not in the Soviet archives nor in the Latvians archives, are there any incriminating records against Cukurs. After the war, the Soviet Union wanted to exert a big war crimes trial because of the nazi massacres in the Baltic States and, therefore, interrogated thousands. "After the war, 365 members of these fascist commands were condemned. The astonishing thing is that in the all the testimonies, there are no criminal incriminations against Cukurs".

The book about the supposed "Hangman of Riga "mentions a request for extradition by the Soviet Union to the Brazilian government. However, such a request has never existed. The Brazilian embassy in Buenos Aires informed me that, "Neither the Soviet Union, nor Israel, ever applied for the extradition of Cukur". On a list, published in 1960 in Israel, with the names of nazi war criminals, the name of Herbert Cukurs did not appear.

Today Gunnars Cukurs is 77 years old and lives in the south on São

Paulo where he had done handicrafts with his father making model airplanes and boats. He cannot remember the Jew's persecution in Latvia. With the invasion of the Germans he was ten years old. He does not believe that his father had played any active role in these crimes. The fact that he was a chauffeur and right hand of Viktor Arajš, the head of the execution command, he does not deny. He answers to my question whether his father had in this position theoretically the possibility not to take part in the crimes: "It was wartime". The fact that the Jews, women and children, were not war-leading parties, he knew, of course. "

Towards the end of 1943, his father sent his wife and children to Germany for their safety and security. He himself stayed behind in Riga.

It was in August 1944 when the red army had encircled Riga. The ones who were able to, fled by sea to Sweden and took their property with them. Cukurs was also present during those last war days with such transports. He admits this in a letter to the US-American consul in Brazil which is in the Uruguayan criminal record. The skilled pilot probably crossed the Baltic Sea by airplane. Whom and, above all what, he may have taken with himself and delivered into Sweden there can only be speculations.

After the war, those refugees that fled to Sweden were delivered back to the Soviet Union. But what has happened with the things of value which they had taken on their escape, never became known.

At the end of August, 1944, remembers Gunnars, his father returned home to the family, which had landed in Szczecin. With him was Miriam Keitzner, a young Jew that he had hidden in Riga on his farm. From there, they fled, before the red army, to the west. Near Kassel they got taken into US captivity. The young Jewish lady made some miracles happen, and after three days the family could go on. Through Marseilles, they emigrated to Brazil.

In 1956 Herbert Cukurs moved from Rio de Janeiro to São Paulo. His youngest son, Richard, had just been born, and therefore, his stay in Brazil was protected. He worked in the south of the metropolis with his sons in making new tools, for example, a small submarine for civil and military purposes which he offered of the US-Navy. However, the Navy answered that the project was too expensive.

Where were the motives behind his planned hijacking? Was the plan to get information from him? Maybe information about what had happened during the last war days in Latvia, before the red army closed the circle around Riga? Was he involved in transporting of funds? The funds of the Ostbank, brought by airplane to Sweden and deposited there in the Wallenberg bank? Was Herbert Cukurs involved at that time as the pilot?

The fact is that the Nazis had enough time to save their pillage before the coming of the red army. In August, 1944 the German defeat was foreseeable. Many Nazis fled across the Baltic Sea to Gothenburg, and Cukurs had taken part in these escape movements as he told to his children later.

To the US consul in Rio de Janeiro he confirmed that he supplied, up to the last minute, "the German forces with weapons" and - thus literally – in Danzig he saved whole "units". This letter lies in the criminal records of the Uruguayan police.

The "Ostbank" was created after the German occupation of the Baltic States, unifying the central banks of Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Weissruthenia. Into the Ostbank were paid all the taxes from the occupied areas as well as the income from the sales of "Jewish and partisan property". The so-called "Jew's property" formed a "considerable part of the economic property of the former Baltic states", this can be read in a letter of Gauleiter Hinrich Lohse to the Führer Adolf Hitler. With this money the Nazis financed their machinery of war. On the 18th of February 1944, say documents in the National Archives of Berlin, the bank accounts of the Ostbank still contained more than 84 million Reichsmark. What has happened with this fortune - as well as the foreign exchange reserves and gold reserves-, is not noted in the records.

On September 8th, 1944 the German minister sent a telex to the nazi commissioner in Riga: "In the process of saving the economic goods, the Gauleiter and the General Commissioner must report to me immediately about the realisation of the measures, signed by (Alfred) Rosenberg."

The saving of the Nazi gold from the Baltic States was in the hands of Nazi minister Rosenberg himself. These assets had to be brought to a neutral country. Switzerland was too far away. Sweden was officially neutral. However, they maintained only narrow contacts with the Nazis.

Several Swedish commissions wanted to clear up the dark chapter of the collaboration with the Third Reich. Also the companies of the Wallenberg family were investigated. The family is known, above all, by Raoul Wallenberg: the diplomat who saved thousands of Jews before the deportation in Nazi occupied Budapest. But other members of the family co-operated with the Nazis and supplied them with armament goods.

Their Enskilda bank had taken part in the monetary laundry for the Nazis, and the Swedish central bank bought gold from Germany which presumably came from Holocaust victims. Number accounts did not exist at the Wallenberg bank, so, there were some confidential letter accounts. The Swedish commissions had no access to these accounts. So it is unclear whether on the name of Rosenberg, or

another Nazi leader, a letter account was maintained. And“ no comment“ was what I received from the Wallenberg family.

After the end of the war, the Swedish government delivered many of the fled SS officers to the Soviet Union. Is not known whether it has also returned loot and whether Israel got a share of it.

Only few persons were convicted for the massacres of the Latvian Jews: The Soviets condemned the SS-group leader Jeckeln as a war criminal and hung him in Riga. But the former SS commander of the Riga ghetto, Eduard Roschmann, moved to Argentina and moved there openly. Viktor Arajs, the leader of the shooting command, fell into British captivity. The military government soon allowed him freedom of movement within the country, sent his records to the German justice department, and then hired Arajs as a driver. The British let him go to London where he received a faked passport from the Latvian exile government. Arajs was arrested in 1975 in Frankfurt and was condemned to lifelong custody by the district court of Hamburg for of murder of at least 13,000 people.

The murder of Herbert Cukurs is considered, still to this day, as a Mossad action, which claimed as it's purpose, to punish a mass murderer. This version took presence even in the Encyclopaedia Britannica. The family of the victim protested and asked them for omission. They wanted to present documents, remembers the son Gunnars. "But the Britannica did not want to see the documents. And we had no money for a court procedure."

The Israeli Intelligence Service Mossad is keeping silence on the Cukurs case. However, the publishing company which has published the German issue of the book "The Execution of the Hangman of Riga" answered to my inquiry. They informed me by email: "We have no closer information about the pseudonym Anton Künzle. According to our information the author is protected by the Verfassungsschutz (internal German intelligence service)". They say that they made no contract with him and paid no author's fees. Whether the publishing company has received money for the publication and whether the contract was concluded with the Israeli government or a Secret Service, they refused to answer. They also refused to respond to whether and how the publishing company can protect itself against being accused participating in historical forgery.

Anyway, the rights for the book have been sold to the German Psychosozialverlag and they answered: "The questions whether, how and between whom contracts were concluded concern Internal things which we do not give out. We ask for this for understanding".

Künzles co-author, the long-standing Mossad agent Gad Shimron, gave a bit more information. He has, in the meantime, developed a career with the Israeli newspaper Maariv and maintains, he wrote me in an email, "no more contact to the Mossad". "For many years I know

mister Kuenzle. And I trust every word in his report (about the operation)".

He refused to put me in contact with Künzle. He, Shimron, is from the "old school" and might not disclose Künzle's true identity. He did not answer why he has not done research in Latvian, German, Soviet and US American archives. To the point of fact that Israel has never filed a request for extradition to Brazil, he explained with the supposition that the state had to solve "more urgent" problems. Only sporadically has the state tried "to track down" Nazi criminals like Cukurs.

How he dared to call Cukurs as a member of the fascistic "Perkonkrust" and responsible for 30,000 murders - the journalist passed on this question. But he pointed out the "fact" that "certain circles in Riga" celebrate the man again as a nationalist and have given him something like a general "denazification certificate".

This is right. There was in Riga an exhibition about the 'national hero' Herbert Cukurs in which his work was shown in the Aja's command as harmless. And a known Latvian lawyer recently published a book with the title "Schaffott". He calls the procedure against SS- group leader Jeckeln a "show process" and shows him as a victim of the Soviet justice.

However, historical falsification is no answer to historical falsification.