

WORLD WAR II ON LATVIAN TERRITORY

Latvia declared neutrality when World War II broke out, but this did not prevent Latvia from losing its independence. On August 23, 1939, the two great powers – the Stalinist Soviet Union and Germany with Hitler at its fore – signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, whose secret additional protocol assigned the Baltic States to the Soviet sphere of influence. Occupation by the Red Army, a change of government and incorporation into the Soviet Union followed. During the following year of terror, 26 000 citizens of the Republic of Latvia were killed, arrested, or deported.

The war between Germany and the Soviet Union began on June 22, 1941. By July 8 military action in Latvia had ended and then started the years of German occupation. Those affected by the Soviet occupation's reign of terror joined volunteer police forces and the German side's battle against Bolshevism. But the German occupiers didn't allow Latvians to fulfil their dream of independence, either, and continued the destruction of Latvia's population.

On February 10, 1943, Hitler ordered the formation of the Latvian Legion and conscripted Latvian citizens into the German army, thereby violating international law. The resulting 15th and 19th Waffen Grenadier Divisions of the SS were involved in battles near Leningrad, Velikiye Luki and elsewhere in some of the most intense battles of the war.

Soldiers from Latvia were pulled into the war on both sides of the front – both in the German army and the Red Army.

More than 200 000 Latvian soldiers fought in World War II; half of them lost their lives on the battlefield. Approximately 265 000 people fled Latvia for the West, but tens of thousands were deported to the East.

Latvia did not regain its independence when the war ended.



The memorial park is located in the center of More on the site of the Battle of More, where soldiers of the 1st Company, 44th Regiment, 19th Waffen Grenadier Division of the Latvian Legion fought an intense battle in September 1944. The commander of the 1st Company, First Lieutenant Rolands Kovtuņenko, described the course of the battle in his book "The Battle of More".

The command post was located in the More school, and previously prepared battle positions (trenches along the Sigulda line of defence, bunkers, barbed wire fences, mine fields) were located a bit further. The forest covered the back. The Sigulda line of defence was one of the most carefully prepared positions during the German retreat from Latvia. Sections of the trenches and bunker locations have survived to the present day and can still be seen in the park.

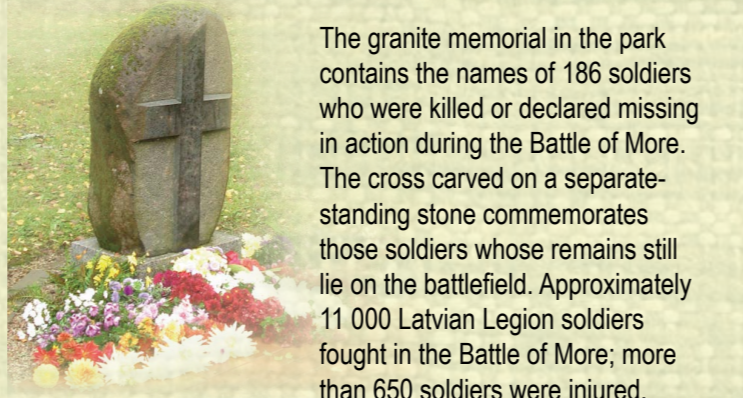
The Red Army took up positions in the forest on the other side of the field and launched its attacks from there.



The Toronto chapter of the *Daugavas Vanagi* veterans' organisation donated funds for a memorial commemorating the Battle of More. The monument, made by sculptor H. Sprincis, is located at the intersection of the More-Nītaure-Līgatne roads and was unveiled on November 10, 1992.



The granite memorial in the park contains the names of 186 soldiers who were killed or declared missing in action during the Battle of More. The cross carved on a separate-standing stone commemorates those soldiers whose remains still lie on the battlefield. Approximately 11 000 Latvian Legion soldiers fought in the Battle of More; more than 650 soldiers were injured.



BATTLE OF MORE MEMORIAL PARK

Legend:

- i** -information
- P** -parking
- rest area
- wc** -toilet
- trenches
- trenches (former)
- barbed wire fence
- barbed wire fence (former)
- mine field (former)
- attack by Red Army
- path
- former bunker locations



THE BATTLE OF MORE

In September 1944 the Red Army began military action in the Baltic area with the goal of dividing and destroying the German Army Group North.

The Red Army assault in the direction of Nītaure - Sigulda - Saulkrasti - Riga reached the German-built Sigulda line of defence in More parish on September 25. In the 10-kilometre long trenches in More parish almost exclusively were fighting soldiers from the 19th Division of the Latvian Legion. Heavy fighting continued for five days. The enemy outnumbered the Legion tenfold. Nine Red Army battalions were sent to positions in the centre of More, which was defended by only two companies; the attack was supported by artillery, aircraft and tanks. The legionnaires destroyed four tanks with rocket propelled grenades. But as they ran out of ammunition, the Latvian legionnaires were forced to defend their positions in extremely heavy and continuous hand-to-hand combat for 48 hours.

The Red Army's breach at Kārtūži on the evening of September 28 was eliminated by the next morning in a heavy battle. Many Red Army soldiers were killed, including the commander of their regiment. The attacks became weaker in subsequent days and by September 30 the Battle of More had ended. The Latvian legionnaires had stopped the enemy and fulfilled their duty fighting on their own soil.

The German army High command ordered the Latvian legionnaires to abandon positions around Sigulda on the night of October 5-6.

The Red Army and its reinforcements attacked and occupied the empty trenches in More on October 6.

The Battle of More can justifiably be considered the last battle in the defence of Riga on the Vidzeme front. The Latvian soldiers' heroic spirit and love of their country delayed the Red Army's sudden break for Riga, diverted the encirclement of the German 18th Army in North Vidzeme and Estonia, and ensured the evacuation of unprecedented numbers of military personnel and civilians.

The German forces left Riga during the Battle of More. The subsequent occupation of the capital by the Red Army met with no resistance, and as a result Riga was not destroyed.