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**ESTONIAN  
WAR OF INDEPENDENCE**

1918-1920

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TALLINN, 1938

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1918—1920

PUBLICATION OF THE HISTORICAL COMMITTEE  
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## **Preface.**

The War of Independence 1918—1920 is the greatest and most important event in the history of the Estonian nation. In this war the Estonian people finally won freedom and independence. The struggle was carried on by a united nation with military command in the hands of one man. In this publication, which is a summary of the Estonian edition "Estonian War of Independence 1918—1920", it is desired to give a concise picture of this most momentous event in Estonian history. As an introduction a short survey is given of the attempt of the Estonian people to gain independence during the period up to the Russian revolution of February, 1917. The main part of the work, however, embraces the events from 1917—1920, namely, the beginning of the struggle until the end of the war. Documents from the Estonian war archives have been used as the basis of this work, recourse having also been made to material in other archives at home, in the Finnish and Latvian war archives and other appropriate literature. This summary aims at acquainting the public abroad with the outstanding facts of the Estonian War of Independence.

## **Preliminary events.**

### **Rebirth of Estonian independence.**

No nation has appeared on the stage of history as independent overnight. Cultural, economic, and finally political independence have been achieved by peoples only as a result of long historical development and continued struggle. The history of the Estonian people bears out this general truth.

The Estonian nation has lived and developed as a free people on its present site since prehistoric times. Seven hundred years ago the nation was politically still entirely independent. Alternating with peaceful evolution numerous warlike struggles developed with neighbours in the East, South and West. The most protracted was the sanguinary fight for independence las-

ting for two decades (1208—1227), which ended in the overrunning of the land by the German Knights of the Sword.

Though conquered in war the Estonians did not submit in spirit to the Germans, Danes, Swedes, Poles and Russians, who ruled the land in turn during the seven subsequent centuries. The Estonian lands and people have also never been completely annexed as an integral part of those states and nations, either constitutionally, culturally or politically. Throughout this period the Estonian people, to a large extent, preserved their national traditions and customs. Economic and political guidance of the country only passed gradually from the original inhabitants to the alien nobility and clergy. The Estonian national leaders were systematically suppressed and the people ground down to the level of peasantry. In spite of this, the Estonian people continued to be the original source of economic power and the mainstay of defence.

Having lost self-government in his own land, the Estonian was also gradually deprived of the rights of a free human being. He sank to the position of a serf — a condition which in those days was common throughout Europe. But even during those difficult times the Estonian preserved his own original language and heroic spirit. Outward expressions of this were the frequent risings, the most important of which occurred on the eve of St. George's Day in 1343. The ideas of freedom which developed in Western Europe towards the end of the 18th century also spread through Estonia at the beginning of the 19th century. Under their influence and for other internal reasons, the liberation of the Estonian peasants from serfdom began in Estonia at the beginning of 1816 and in Livonia in 1819. Having attained personal freedom, the Estonian commenced the fight against economic domination and the cultural tutelage of local nobility. This struggle occupied the latter part of the 19th century, its most important results being the abolition of serfdom and the purchase, for permanent tenure, of farms from the landowning nobility, thus making the Estonian peasant economically independent. Thanks to the diligence, industry and thrift of the peasant, the economic well-being of the nation increased with a consequent rise in the standard of education.

In the second half of the nineteenth century the Estonian people passed through a national renaissance of cultural life. During that time the foundation of national social life was laid, the Estonian national epic "Kalevipoeg" appeared in print (1857—61), the regular publication of the first Estonian newspaper was commenced (1857) and the struggle was begun for social and political rights and cultural independence.

During the events of the Russian revolution in 1905, the Estonian national leaders formulated a claim for Estonian autonomy, but owing to the resistance of the higher Russian authorities and Baltic nobility it was impossible to realise this aim. More real prospects for the obtaining of autonomy were presented by the Russian revolution of 1917. On April 12th, 1917, it became possible to obtain from the Russian Provisional Government confirmation of the law of self-governing autonomy for Estonia. The national representation — National Council — elected by the people in conformity with this law, entered office in Tallinn on July 14th, 1917. This was a great achievement. But the development of the Russian revolution took a turn which did not appear favourable for the Estonian people; disorder and lawlessness, increas-

ing from day to day, became even worse when the Bolsheviks assumed power. The Estonian national leaders now began to look about for ways to separate Estonia from the disintegrating Russian State. This task was facilitated by the fact that the right of self-determination of nations had been proclaimed by the Russian Bolshevik Government. At its meeting on November 28th, 1917, the National Council declared itself the supreme power in Estonia, thus embarking on the way to national independence.

The National Council was actually unable to take over the government of the land as the supreme power, for, towards its conclusion, the meeting was broken up by the Bolsheviks. A period of Bolshevik government followed, with the support of the bolshevised Russian troops still in the country. The National Council, however, continued to meet in secret, and carried on its work for Estonian independence. In February 1918, the general political situation had become such that the advance of the German army with the aim of conquering the Baltic countries was inevitable. It was the last opportunity for the proclamation of Estonian independence, if Estonia were to be able to stand aside as a neutral State in the conflict between two great powers, Germany and Russia.

This step was taken on February 24th, 1918, by the proclamation of Estonian independence following the actual taking over of power from the Bolsheviks. At the same time a Provisional Estonian Government was formed to govern the land under the leadership of the Prime Minister, Konstantin Päts.

### **Organisation of the Estonian National Defence Forces.**

For the maintenance of order and public safety before the War of Liberation, special national military units, incorporated in the Russian army, were organised on Estonian territory for self-defence and as national defence forces.

Self-defence sprang into being spontaneously as the people's undertaking at the time of the Russian revolution, its aim being to guarantee the safety of citizens in times of revolutionary disorder. The Tallinn self-defence unit was deprived of power by the Bolsheviks on November 24th, 1917, but this did not put a stop to its activities, and the organisation continued to exist underground. The taking over of government from the Bolsheviks in Tallinn before the German invasion was effected by national military units and the self-defence forces. During the subsequent German occupation self-defence organisations outside Tallinn were strictly prohibited, the national military units were disbanded and the Tallinn self-defence units were subordinated to the Germans and converted into auxiliary police forces. As a result of this, some Estonians withdrew from the self-defence organisations, but others, however, continued to co-operate with the aim of procuring weapons, which might in future be used in Estonian national interests. Concurrently with legal self-defence, officers of the Estonian national military units began to meet together and to organise reliable men, who, in case of necessity, would support the Estonian Provisional Government.

A great national achievement during the days of the Russian revolution was the formation of national military units from Estonian soldiers scattered

throughout the Russian Army. The total number of Estonians serving in the former Russian Army may be estimated at 100,000 men. The infiltration of officers from the former Russian Army into the Estonian national Army rose to 2,132 men, 13 of whom had received higher military education, while 177 belonged to the peace time regular Army.

For the organisation of Estonian soldiers, it became possible after overcoming various difficulties to obtain permission from the Russian authorities for the formation of Estonian national regiments within the composition of the Russian Army itself. With this object in view, a start was made in April 1917 for the assembly of Estonian soldiers at home who were drafted into the first Estonian regiment. Later, as Estonian soldiers continued to return home, the organisation of the national forces was expanded to a Division. At the beginning of 1918, the Division consisted of 4 Infantry Regiments, one Cavalry Regiment, a Brigade of Artillery and a Company of Engineers. The commander of the Division was Colonel J. Laidoner. Efforts were made by the Russian chauvinists and Bolsheviks to put obstacles in the way of the creation of national forces. After the advent to power of the Bolsheviks after the October revolution, the national forces experienced an especially difficult period. Despite the subversive agitation of the Bolsheviks, the national Army constituted the force which prevented wide-spread pillaging by the Russian forces which were evacuating the country.

On the landing of the German troops of occupation, the national Army, as the military force of a neutral State, stood apart from the Russo-German War. Actually the authorities of occupation tolerated the existence of the Estonian Division for a whole month after the landing of the German forces. Orders for disarming were then issued, and all weapons and other supplies had to be handed over to the German authorities of occupation.

### **German occupation of Estonia.**

After the break-down of the German-Russian peace negotiations at Brest-Litovsk in February 1918, the German Army began to press forward with a view to final liquidation of the Russian front. Owing to the disintegration of the Russian military units, the German advance took the form of an easy occupation of the desired regions. The process of occupying Estonian territory lasted from February 20th until March 5th.

The authorities of occupation proclaimed martial law. The activities of the Estonian National Council and Provisional Government were suspended. Official institutions were created anew or remodelled. The German language was made compulsory for the conducting of affairs in official institutions and in the schools. The freedom of the press was limited by a strict censorship. Side by side with the authorities of occupation the Baltic German nobility, insignificant in number, commenced to play a leading part. From the standpoint of foreign policy, the endeavours of the Germans were directed towards the uniting of Estonia and the other Baltic countries with Germany. Efforts were made to suffocate Estonian national opposition by detention of the national leaders and their being sent to concentration camps. Among others, the German occupation authorities also interned the Prime Minister of the

Estonian Provisional Government, Konstantin Päts. Apart from political pressure the Germans systematically denuded the country of property and especially of foodstuffs, which were transported in large quantities to impoverished Germany.

The German occupation lasted for over eight months. The end came after the defeat of the German forces on the Western front and the German revolution in 1918. In accordance with the World War armistice treaty the forces of occupation were compelled to leave the country and to hand over power to its lawful government — the Estonian Provisional Government.

## **Conditions at the beginning of the War of Independence.**

### **Russian Civil War.**

Civil war broke out in Russia soon after the advent of the Bolsheviks to power. The revolution of October 1917, resulted in the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia, where the supreme power of State had to be vested in a single political group — the communist party. The new Bolshevik order of State incited a wide-spread anti-Bolshevist or so-called "White Movement" in Russia. This degenerated into civil war, which split the Russian State into two hostile factions. The anti-Bolsheviks were supported by the Allied States, especially France and England, which countries, owing to the repudiation of foreign debts by Soviet Russia, had sustained big financial losses from loans granted to Imperial Russia. The Russian civil war greatly influenced conditions in the Estonian War of Independence.

### **Military plans of Soviet Russia after the World War.**

The military plans of Soviet Russia after the World War consisted in the liquidation of the anti-Bolshevist fronts in South Russia and Siberia, the conquering of the new States which had arisen on the Western frontier of Russia, the creation of direct contact with revolutionary Germany and Austria-Hungary, the bolshevisation of these countries and ultimately of the whole of Europe. Thus the plan of campaign of Soviet Russia was also influenced by the historical urge to expand the Russian possessions, apart from the idea of World Revolution. The leaders of Soviet Russia tried to hide their imperialistic designs from the workers of Western Europe by endeavouring to give their drive to the West the appearance of class warfare.

### **External political situation of Estonia.**

During the German occupation, an Estonian foreign delegation was active in Western Europe and Scandinavia, the foremost task of the delega-

tion was the obtaining of recognition and support of Estonian independence by the Allied Powers. As a result of the work of the foreign delegation England, France and Italy in May 1918 recognised de facto the Estonian National Council as the supreme power in Estonia, pending the assembly of the General Peace Conference, where the question of the recognition of the independence of Estonia had to be finally decided. The defeat of the Germans in the World War created a situation whereby, the final part could be played by the friendly Allied Powers in deciding the fate of Estonia. By the Autumn of 1918, Estonian diplomatic relations with the more important Western European countries were regulated. Relations with Soviet Russia only remained to be settled. Representatives of the Russian Whites were trying to gain the co-operation of the Allied Powers in the reconstruction of a united Russia, and were unwilling even to hear of the independence of Estonia. Bolshevik Russia was making preparations for a military onslaught. Against the first enemy a diplomatic fight was in progress, and against the second, military operations were set on foot by the Estonian Provisional Government after the attack on Estonia by Soviet Russia.

### **Internal political situation of Estonia.**

The Estonian Provisional Government resumed its interrupted activity on November 11th, 1918. There was no properly constructed machinery of government at its disposal. This still had to be created. It was necessary to organise Government institutions and to establish order in the State. Owing to the presence of the German authorities of occupation in the country, the work of the Provisional Government was impeded and made difficult in many ways until the latter part of December 1918, when the withdrawal of the forces of occupation was completed. The Provisional Government had thus to organise the machinery of government, to wrest power from the Germans, to combat the Bolshevik agitation at home, and from November 28th, 1918, to deal with the invading red army of Soviet Russia.

### **Economic situation.**

During the World War, Estonian territory had been considerably devastated by the frequent requisitions and pillaging of the Russian armies. Of what remained the major part was commandeered by the German authorities of occupation and sent out of the country. The economic position of the young State was, therefore, precarious when the Provisional Government came into office. Agriculture had been crippled by the requisitions of the Russian and German armies, industrial life was dislocated, and the State treasury was empty. The first outlays of the Provisional Government were covered by voluntary donations and loans from private institutions and persons. Later foreign assistance had inevitably to be resorted to for laying the foundation of economic life. The strictest economy had to be observed in meeting requirements of secondary importance.

## **Creation of the Estonian Defence Forces and organisation of State Defence.**

As the first armed force to be formed, the Estonian Defence League placed itself at the disposal of the Estonian Provisional Government on November 11th, 1918, and commenced its activities simultaneously. The Estonian Defence League was a voluntary, armed organisation composed of citizens and led by officers. Thanks to the preliminary work carried out in secret by the officers of the Estonian national military units during the German occupation, the Estonian Defence League was already in a position to offer support to the Provisional Government during the first days of its work.

The Estonian Defence League was in the first place adapted for internal defence. Against the threatening danger from beyond the frontier a regular army had to be created, and on November 16th, 1918, a proclamation was made for the enlistment of volunteers. For various reasons, the chief being, the internal political situation and general war weariness, volunteers did not come forward in the numbers expected. At the beginning of the War of Independence on November 28th, 1918 about 2,000 volunteers assembled. Immediately after this, general mobilisation was proclaimed, the results of which were not apparent until December. The War of Independence had thus to be commenced with an army in the initial stage of mobilisation.

From the men who enlisted the following units were formed under the command of Major-General A. Tõnisson, one Infantry Division consisting of six Infantry Regiments, one Artillery Regiment, one Cavalry Regiment and one Pioneer Battalion. In support of the infantry a number of armoured trains was organised, and for the protection of the capital, Tallinn, from the sea, plans had to be made for the organisation of coastal defence and the creation of naval forces. The former Russian gunboat which was renamed "Lembit" became the nucleus of the naval forces, of which Captain J. Pitka was appointed chief. The armed forces were subordinate to the War Minister, and a General Staff was created to act under him, with the Chief of the General Staff at its head to lead and organise the army.

The position of supplies for the army and particularly armaments was very difficult. On the disbanding of the Estonian National Division in the Spring of 1918, the German authorities of occupation had commandeered the entire stock of armaments and supplies, the main part of which was consigned to Germany. After the army of occupation had evacuated the country, the armaments left behind in the former local stores were only rifles of various types, mainly damaged and without bolts, a small number of machine-guns and 4 field guns in good order.

Approaches were made to Great Britain and Finland for military assistance and war supplies.

On the whole the general position of Estonia on the eve of the War of Independence was extremely complicated. No preparations had been made for the defence of the State, that itself being a temptation for the enemy to attack. The utmost efforts had to be made to organise the government of the State and the army, and at the same time to carry on war against an outside enemy.

# **Invasion of Estonia by the Red Army.**

## **Military activity on the Viru Front.**

The Command of the Seventh Army of Soviet Russia, stationed at Petrograd began the attack and supported by the fleet, directed the main blow for the conquest of Estonia, in the Narva-Tallinn direction, with a subsidiary attack from the south in the direction Pihkva, Võru-Tartu and Võru-Valga-Viljandi.

The Sixth enemy Division invading the north of Estonia consisted of 2,800 infantrymen, 6 cannon, 1 armoured train and 2 armoured cars, supported by warships a naval landing party of 700 men. The Estonian forces which were brought up to oppose the enemy consisted of sections of the 4th Regiment, still in process of formation and units of the Defence League, 114 officers, 481 men and 150 members of the Defence League, making a total of 745 men. On November 28th the German rear guard of the occupation troops in Narva and on the River Narva amounted approximately to the same number, but they did not all participate in the fighting. The attack of the Reds commenced on November 28th, 1918, but was repulsed by the defenders. On the evening of November 28th, Narva was, nevertheless, abandoned, as the landing party which came ashore at Narva-Jõesuu threatened to cut off the retreat of the defenders of Narva.

In the beginning of December, the Sixth enemy Division resumed the attack with its main forces in the general direction of the Narva-Tallinn railway line, despatching one Brigade, approximately 1,000 men, via Vasknarva-Mustvee to Paide. In spite of the stubborn resistance of the Estonian forces and gradual arrival of new units at the front (5th Infantry Regiment, 2nd armoured train and 2 batteries) the enemy continued to push forward. Rakvere fell on December 15th, Tapa on the 24th. The enemy detachment, which operated via Vasknarva-Mustvee took Koeru on December 25th, and continued its advance on Paide, which, however, it did not succeed in taking. The retreat of the Estonian forces in the direction Narva and Tallinn continued until the end of December. On January 2nd, 1919, the retreating forces reached the general line Valkla-Priske-Vetla, the nearest point of which was only about 40 kilometres distant from Tallinn. This proved to be the ultimate limit of the retreat, for here the military operations underwent a change in favour of the Estonian forces.

## **Military activity on the Southern Front.**

On November 25th, 1918, the Red Army launched an attack on Pihkva. After taking the town, the Red military units halted to await reinforcements. On their arrival the Soviet Russian forces advanced towards the region Pihkva-Põtalovo, their objective being the occupying of Southern Estonia and Northern Latvia. The units of the independent Northern Corps of Russian Whites, which had been formed in Pihkva on the initiative of the German authorities of occupation and with their support, became demoralised on retreating from Pihkva, the main body retired to Estonian territory. On the basis of the agreement concluded with the Corps Command, the Estonian

Provisional Government took over its maintenance, the Corps becoming subordinate to the Estonian Commander-in-Chief.

For the defence of Southern Estonia, the organisation of the 2nd, 3rd and 6th Regiments was being carried on in Tartu, Võru and Viljandi respectively, but progress was very slow owing to lack of armaments and supplies, and obstacles put in the way by the German authorities of occupation. The 3rd Regiment in Võru was too small to stem the forward movement of the superior invading Bolshevik forces.

Estonia was invaded in the direction of Petseri-Võru-Tartu by the 49th Rifle Regiment of the 2nd Novgorod Division (1,500 infantry and 4 cannon) and in the direction of Petseri-Võru-Valga-Riga by the 2nd Latvian Red Rifle Brigade (2,850 infantry, 2 armoured trains and 8 cannon). The German occupation forces retiring from the country took no part in the fighting, the Soldiers' Councils in the German Army even concluded agreements with the Red units by which the Germans left Võru on December 7th and Valga on December 17th, 1918, without offering resistance.

In the middle of December, the Reds resumed their forward push from Tartu. By this time the strength of the 2nd Regiment, in process of formation at Tartu, was 111 officers and 710 other ranks, but it was unable to hold up the enemy's advance on Tartu and abandoned the town on December 21st. The units of the 2nd Regiment and the Defence League retreated into the Põltsamaa-Puurman region.

Small forces of the 3rd Regiment, which were also skirmishing with the enemy in the Nõo area, were compelled to retreat owing to the fall of Tartu, and fell back on Vaibla—Leie. On December 27th, the Bolsheviks resumed their advance from Valga in the direction of Pärnu and took the Mõisaküla Junction. After these successes the enemy made no further advance in Southern Estonia.

### **Organisation of interior State Defence during the retreat.**

General war weariness and over estimation of the enemy strength at the beginning of the War, coupled with the retreat of the feeble home forces at the fronts, paralysed the resisting capacity of the nation. The most active and conscientious element to oppose the enemy in the first instance had been officers and schoolboys. The example set by them was an important factor in winning over the masses for the work of State Defence, which Bolshevik agitation was endeavouring to undermine. On December 17th, 1918, a communist rising took place in Tallinn with the object of overthrowing the Estonian Provisional Government, but this outbreak was suppressed. Henceforth, the Provisional Government began to take a firmer hand against internal anti-State elements, thus creating a more stable situation behind the lines.

In spite of the setback at the front the organising of the army and the obtaining of supplies was continued and new units were formed. The forces at the front were supplemented and reinforced with armoured trains and artillery. In the higher Command the office of Commander-in-Chief was created on December 23rd, 1918, and filled by Colonel J. Laidoner with Colonel J. Soots as Chief of Staff. To facilitate the leading of the armed

forces a 2nd Division was created, Colonel V. Puskar being given the command. The 1st Division was fighting on the Viru Front, and the 2nd Division on the Southern Front.

During the retreat, several British warships, under the command of Admiral E. A. Sinclair, arrived in the Tallinn Roads on December 12th, 1918, at the request of the Estonian authorities, and assured to Estonia the free use of the sea. The Soviet Russian Fleet had to withdraw into the eastern region of the Gulf of Finland. Some rifles and light machine-guns were also supplied by the British Fleet. On December 26th and 27th, the British Fleet captured two Soviet Russian destroyers at sea near Tallinn, which after reconditioning and manning were absorbed into the Estonian Fleet at the beginning of 1919 under the names of "Lennuk" and "Vambola".

At the beginning of December 1918, Estonia was able to purchase from Finland 20 pieces of light out-of-date cannon, 2,000 rifles with ammunition and several machine-guns. A loan of 10 million Finnish marks was also secured from Finland in December 1918 and a further 10 million marks in the beginning of 1919. A band of volunteers was organised by social circles in Finland, of which two units were formed: one Battalion comprising 4 Companies, and one Regiment of 2 Battalions equipped with 10 cannon. The first unit arrived in Estonia and went into action at the beginning of January 1919, and the other at the end of January, in the same year.

## **Counter-offensive of the Estonian forces for liberation of the Country.**

### **Battles which turned the tide.**

As a result of indefatigable and successful organisation, it was possible during the early part of January to reinforce the front line by newly formed units (1st Infantry Regiment, the Kalev Battalion, 1st Cavalry Regiment, Järvamaa Defence Battalion, Kuperjanov Partisan Battalion, Viljandi Defence Battalion, Scouts' Unit, and 3 batteries). Reinforcing the front, the Commander-in-Chief, Colonel J. Laidoner called for active operations by the units. On the arrival of new reinforcements, the total strength of the Estonian forces on all fronts was, on January 3rd, 1919, approximately 147 machine-guns, 21 cannon, 3 broad-gauge and one narrow-gauge armoured trains and 4,800 officers and men. The strength of the enemy was 6,200—6,500 all ranks with 79 machine-guns and 34 cannon. The numerical superiority of the enemy on all fronts was thus not very great.

Between January 2nd and 7th the turning point was reached in the War of Independence. In the direction of Tallinn-Narva, on the front in which the 1st Division was operating, the Estonian forces operating in the region of Valkla-Priske-Kehra and 10 km east of Paide repulsed the attack of the 6th Division of the Red Army by a counter-attack and forced it into a defensive position. In the Põltsamaa-Tartu direction in the region of Aidu-Puurman, and in the direction Viljandi-Valga in the vicinity of Kärstna-Taagepera,

the units of the 2nd Estonian Division finally held up the attack of the 2nd Novgorod Division. On the whole, during the first part of January 1919, the Estonian forces broke down the opposition of the attackers and wrested the initiative from them.

### **General counter-offensive.**

The victories which turned the tide in the War of Independence created favourable conditions for a general counter-offensive. An attack was launched on the front of the 1st Division on January 7th, supported by landing parties on the north Estonian coast, which came ashore at the Bay of Hara on January 8th, under covering fire from the "Lembit" and "Lennuk" and joined the units of the 4th Regiment on the Tallinn-Narva route. In the direction of the railway, Tapa was taken by armoured trains on January 9th. On the same day orders to take Rakvere were issued to the 1st Division by the Commander-in-Chief, Colonel J. Laidoner. The Fleet co-operated in this movement by putting a landing party ashore at Kunda on January 10th and 11th. At the same time a successful offensive was continuing on the front of the 1st Division. The enemy was compelled to evacuate Rakvere during the night of January 11th/12th. Armoured trains and units attacking from Paide arrived simultaneously at Rakke on the Tapa-Tartu railway line.

On January 14th, orders were given to the 1st Division by the Commander-in-Chief for taking Narva with the support of the Fleet. During the night of the 16th/17th, the 1st Division captured Jõhvi Junction. On January 18th the enemy position at Vaivara Sinimäed fell into the hands of the 1st Infantry Regiment. On January 17th and 18th, an Estonian landing party of one Battalion and the 1st Finnish Volunteer Battalion, a total of 1,000 men, were disembarked at Utria under covering fire from the Fleet. In the evening of January 18th, two Finnish Companies, together with a detachment of Narva schoolboys, entered Narva and took the northern part of the town as far as the Tallinn road. Detachments of the 5th Infantry and 1st Cavalry Regiments arrived at Narva on the morning of January 19th and occupied the remaining part of the town. After the taking of Narva, the 1st Division took over the defence of the eastern frontier on the general line of the River Narva, and on a semi-circular position round Narva.

By the time the counter-attack was launched on the fronts of the 1st Division, the general position of the Estonian forces on the front of the 2nd Division had also become favourable.

Taking this into consideration, the Commander-in-Chief, General J. Laidoner, charged the 2nd Division with the task of taking Tartu. But before the 2nd Division could proceed with this operation, Tartu was taken by an unexpected attack delivered by the armoured trains and Kuperjanov partisans on January 14th.

After the capture of Tartu the offensive was continued by the 2nd Division for the final liberation of Southern Estonia. Attacks in the direction of Mõisaküla-Valga and Viljandi-Valga continued with varied success during the whole of the latter half of January, Ruhja being taken on January 19th and Tõrva on the 30th. Units attacking Tartu in the direction of Valga took Rõngu and Puka on the 25th, and Sangaste railway station on January

28th. The battle for the Paju Estate on January 31st, was a decisive factor in the fate of Valga. Severe fighting lasted the whole day, but a combined assault launched by Estonians and the Finnish Volunteers resulted in the capture of the Estate before nightfall.

Valga was taken on February 1st. In the direction of the Tartu-Võru highway, the Tallinn Defence Battalion broke down the resistance of the enemy at Tilleoru on January 30th, and reached Võru on February 1st. In the direction of Tartu-Petseri, the advanced guard of the 2nd Regiment arrived at Tuderna on the Võru-Petseri railway line on January 30th and took Petseri on February 4th.

By means of the offensive resumed in February, it became possible to advance the Southern Front to the general line: Salatsi and Säde River, Egle-Marienburg-Pangevitsa-Kosselka and Irboska railway station. At the same time it was evident that the enemy forces were being reinforced and becoming continually stronger, so that resistance increased until the enemy managed to seize the initiative.

### **The effect of the counter-offensive on the military, internal and external situation.**

In January 1919, the Estonian forces liberated their country from the enemy by launching a determined attack, thus saving the lives of many citizens. 450 citizens had already been killed as a result of the Red terror.

By their counter-attack, the Estonian forces completely smashed 8 enemy regiments, while the remaining hostile units which had fought against Estonia lost 20 to 50 per cent of their men. Among the more important booty captured were 35 cannon, 7 naval guns, 118 machine-guns, 2,000 rifles, 2 aeroplanes, 9 railway locomotives, 180 railway carriages, 4 ships, 13,000 shells, and a large quantity of rifle ammunition, which contributed to a considerable extent towards replenishing the scanty stock of Estonian munitions.

The moral results of the victory were also great. Quick success in battle banished the lack of self-reliance which had been felt in the army at the beginning of the war, and strengthened its belief in its own strength.

The great success of the Estonians also influenced the situation on the other fronts of Soviet Russia. The Red Army Command was compelled to bring up against the Estonians large forces from its strategical reserves as well as from other fronts. The Estonian victories particularly influenced the activity of the Red Army in Courland. The Latvian Red Rifles, which at that time were preparing to deal a final blow against the German and Latvian national forces at Libau, fell under the thrust of the Estonians from the North. The right wing of the army was endangered and the Command was compelled to move the major part of its forces from Libau to Valga and Võru. The victorious counter-offensive of the Estonian forces in January 1919, thus did not only save Libau, but helped to a considerable extent towards preventing the communistic military forces of Soviet Russia from assisting the revolutionary movement in Germany.

The victories of the army also had a favourable influence on the internal political situation. Increased optimism at home and the growing spiritual

understanding between the nation and the Army paved the way for the victorious conclusion of the war. But the military success at the front also had a negative effect on the internal political situation. This was due to the fact that after the danger had passed, the political groups of the left wanted to weaken order enforced by martial law at home and to restrict the powers of the Commander-in-Chief expecting to gain, by these measures, the support of the masses during the pending elections for the Constituent Assembly. Intrigues were on foot against the Commander-in-Chief. But thanks to the wisdom of the leading politicians these machinations were brought to an end without their producing any noteworthy results.

The counter-offensive also had an influence on the external political situation. The military success of the Army brought the name of Estonia before the Western European public to a greater extent and more effectively than could have been possible otherwise. As propaganda it helped best to gain sympathy abroad.

## **The offensive of the Soviet Russian Red Army to reconquer Estonia.**

### **The military position of Soviet Russia in February 1919.**

In the beginning of 1919, the activity of the Soviet Russian Red Army on other fronts had on the whole been successful. The more remarkable, therefore, was its misfortune on the Western front against Estonia. Whereas the Supreme Command of the Red Army could estimate conditions on other fronts as being generally satisfactory, its concern for the Western front was all the greater. Apart from the Estonian and Finnish Armies, the Bolshevik Army Command on the Western front was in fear of the German volunteers still active in Courland at that time, and of the gradually increasing Polish forces. The importance of the Soviet Russian Western front had grown considerably in the beginning of 1919. In the view of the High Command of the Red Army, it had even become more vital than the other fronts. These circumstances caused the Red Army to launch attacks on a large scale against the Western front beginning from February 1919. As the detachments of volunteers of General R. von der Goltz in conjunction with the Latvian National Battalion were only able to engage a small portion of the Red Army, and Finland withdrew from the war with Soviet Russia, the bulk of the fighting had subsequently to be carried on by the Estonian and Polish Armies. The period which followed in the Estonian War of Independence was the most difficult of the whole war.

### **Military activity on the Viru front.**

The enemy commenced attacks on the Viru front on February 18th, 1919, with the object re-taking Narva. Thanks to the stubborn resistance of the Estonian forces the attacks ceased on February 25th without yield-

ing any results. The enemy struck again on March 4th, 5th and 29th and April 25th. Though these attacks were not of any consequence to the front, the losses sustained by the inhabitants of Narva from the bombardment were considerable. On April 25th, 161 buildings were destroyed by artillery fire by the enemy. The position on the Viru front enabled the Commander-in-Chief, Major-General J. Laidoner, to transfer certain Estonian units from there to the Southern front, and to replace them in the meantime by reorganised units of the Northern Corps of the White Russians. In March 1919, the 1st Finnish Volunteer Battalion which had been operating on the Viru front left Estonia. The front was maintained on the line of the River Narva until May 1919, when a joint offensive was launched by the Estonian forces and the Northern Corps.

### **Military activity on the Southern front.**

The general attack of the Red Army begun in February proved especially strong on the Estonian Southern front. By the middle of February the Red Army had attained nearly a twofold preponderance, but the Estonian 2nd Division had also been strengthened in the meantime. The enemy counter-attack commenced on February 16th. On February 28th, the Estonian forces were compelled to abandon Marienburg and to withdraw to the Riia-Pihkva highway. Petseri fell also on March 11th. In spite of the enemy's considerable preponderance in numbers (21,000 men against the Estonian 11,000) the Estonian forces launched an attack on March 14th, as a result of which Petseri was retaken on March 26th, the Estonian forces again advancing up to Marienburg. On April 17th the enemy commenced a fierce attack for the possession of Võru. By this operation the enemy was also pursuing political aims hoping to hinder the convening of the Estonian Constituent Assembly, which nevertheless took place in Tallinn on April 23rd, 1919.

By the evening of the same day the Estonian forces were pressed back to the outskirts of Võru, but counter-attacking later pushed back the enemy from Võru. The final effort of the enemy to take Võru, which commenced on May 5th, ended similarly without results. In May 1919, the last two Battalions of the Finnish Volunteers left Estonia.

On the right wing of the Southern front, the enemy succeeded in taking Heinaste and Salatsi in February, and Ruhja on April 25th, by a surprise attack. But the Estonian counter-offensive launched on May 1st liquidated the enemy's success, and took the Estonian forces up to the line Salatsi and Säde River, where the front became stabilised. In this region the Estonian 3rd Division, under the Command of Major-General E. Pödder, had been fighting since the beginning of April.

During May the attacks of the enemy ceased on the whole Southern front. Weary and exhausted by the great losses sustained, the Red Army was compelled again to relinquish the initiative in action to the Estonian forces.

Thus in May 1919, the Estonian Army had reached a stage where on all fronts, in the East as well as in the South, it could in turn take up the offensive in order to carry military activity beyond the confines of the country.

# **Organisation of Defence after the Defeat of the Enemy on Estonian Territory.**

## **Consolidation of Law and Order.**

The Estonian Government quickly established law and order in the territories freed of the enemy. Proper Government and Municipal Institutions were established and courts of law and police commenced their duties. In respect of law and security the entire territory was made subject to the C.-in-C., General J. Laidoner. In the war zone and its close proximity the Commanders, Armed Forces were responsible for law and order while the Chief of Home Defence, Major-General E. Põdder, who had at his disposal 32,000 men of the Defence League, was responsible for the remainder of the country. On 31st March, the office of Chief of Home Defence was abolished and his duties were taken over by the Chief of the Defence League to which post Mr. E. Alver was appointed.

Bolshevik propaganda, which abated after the defeat of the Red Army, was resumed in the Summer. In this respect the objective of the campaign was the army, in particular the new recruits, and industrial workers and agricultural labourers were singled out for intensive propaganda, which, however, had no noticeable results.

## **Organisation of Government and Formation of an Assembly representative of the People.**

The Provisional Government, under the Prime Minister, Mr. K. Päts, strove for three main objects: 1. To free the Country of the enemy. 2. To organise the Government of the Country. 3. To convene the Constituent Assembly.

The first object had been brilliantly accomplished by the army. The organisation of the Government went on successfully. The Constituent Assembly, elected by the entire population and the army, met on 23rd April and began its work under the presidency of Mr. A. Rei. On May 18th, 1919, the first Government of the Republic was formed under O. Strandman as Prime Minister. On May 19th, 1919, the Constituent Assembly passed a special declaration of Estonian independence and sovereignty and proceeded to work out a Constitution for the Country and the Land Reform Bill. The provisional Constitution was passed on 4th June, 1919.

## **Organisation of National Economy.**

The Government had difficulty in providing food for the people and the army. By rigid control it was possible to make our own grain supplies last until February 1919, when the first consignments came from England and the American Relief Committee, which covered two-thirds of the people's and one-third of the army's requirements in bread. The Ministry of Agriculture at once did everything to increase the agricultural output, taking large estates under control and making it compulsory for farmers to cultivate all arable land.

After the Country was freed of the enemy, it was possible to take up commercial relations with foreign countries to a greater extent than hitherto. Flax and timber were exported to England and spirit and cement were added later. Imports consisted of coal, kerosene, petrol and lubricating oils.

At the same time, steps were taken to revive industries which had suffered through the war.

The financial position of the Country, too, was difficult. Revenue was low and expenditure had to be met by the issue of treasury notes. The right of issue belonged to the Treasury only. On 7th March, 1919, the Bank of Estonia was established to regulate and manage and generally control the circulation of currency. For the most urgent needs foreign currency was obtained by export trade, but munitions from Great Britain and other goods, bought from the American Relief Committee, were obtained on credit.

### **Organisation of Armed Forces.**

The mobilisation of recruits and the organisation of armed forces were continued. On 23rd February, in order to facilitate the Higher Command, the Staff of the C.-in-C., was formed under Major-General J. Soots, whereas the Operative Staff was organised into the Administration of the General Staff. The 3rd Army Division was formed on the southern front to simplify command and Major-General E. Pödder was appointed its G. O. C. Armoured trains were organised into one division under Captain K. Parts. Some alterations were effected in the command of the naval forces under Captain J. Pitka.

New units of all arms were formed and the existing Formations were strengthened by artillery and armoured units. By the end of May 1919, there were altogether, 9 infantry regiments, 6 independent battalions, 2 cavalry regiments, 33 batteries of light and heavy artillery with 102 guns, 9 armoured trains and a detachment of 6 armoured cars. At the end of May 1919, the Estonian army numbered altogether 74,500 officers and men, of whom 1,500 were Latvians, 300 Ingermanlanders, 300 Finns, Swedes and Danes and 2,750 of the Northern Corps of White Russians.

A military school was opened for the training of officers on the 22nd April, and for replenishing N. C. O. cadres, training companies were established at the various units.

### **Army Supplies.**

Owing to the difficult economic position of the Country the provision of adequate supplies to the army was very difficult. Victualling was satisfactory, thanks to the great efforts of the appropriate authorities. As sufficient clothing was not available the percentage of sickness was very high and greatly reduced the fighting strength of the Army.

In regard to armaments the position was better. There were enough rifles for all men though they were of various makes; many of them, however, were badly worn. Most of the heavy machine guns had been captured from the enemy while light machine guns were bought from Great Britain. The guns were old and extremely varied in type. We had received 24 modern guns from abroad and captured 27 from the enemy. In

the first half of 1919, there was no shortage of ammunition. There were still some old Russian stores on our territory, some ammunition was captured from the enemy and some bought from Great Britain and Finland.

The Red Cross service was organised by the Army Medical Administration under Dr. A. Lossmann. By the end of May 1919, there were 5,000 beds in the military hospitals. There was a great shortage of drugs, bandages and surgical appliances.

Generally, and in spite of all difficulties, the work of organisation developed satisfactorily. As a result Estonia's power of resistance was constantly growing, and by the Spring of 1919, the army not only repulsed all the attacks of Soviet Russia's forces but herself launched an attack as soon as an opportunity occurred.

## **Carrying the Offensive into Soviet Russian Territory.**

### **General Position.**

The Estonian C.-in-C., General J. Laidoner, decided upon the plan of carrying the war into the enemy's territory as early as the end of January 1919. The object of this was to carry on a war of active defence to enable our neighbours, the Latvians, Ingermanlanders and Russians to become organised on their own soil for the fight with Soviet Russia, which would also assist the defence of our own frontiers. A favourable opportunity for an attack presented itself in May 1919.

The Red Armies, composed of Estonian and Latvian nationals and part of the 7th Russian Army, had suffered heavy losses in their attack against Estonia in the Winter and Spring of 1919. They were unable to make good these losses, for at the same time Russia was engaged in civil war. This did not permit the Soviet High Command to strengthen the Estonian front.

### **Offensive in the Direction of Narva—Petrograd (in Ingermanland) in the Spring of 1919.**

For political reasons the Estonian C.-in-C. decided to leave the initiative of the attack in the Spring of 1919 to the Russian (White) Northern Corps, which was under his command.

The Northern Corps, after its retreat from Pihkva (Pskov) in December 1918, continued its re-organisation on Estonian territory and at Estonian expense. The Command of the Northern Corps was composed of Russians and Baltic Germans, who did not accept the idea of an independent Estonia, for which reason the Estonian High Command had some difficulty in cooperating with the Corps.

During April 1919, General J. Laidoner transferred the Corps to the Viru front between Narva and Peipsi, from which position it was directed for an attack on Petrograd. The strength of the Corps at the time, was 3,000 officers and men <sup>1)</sup> with 83 machine guns and 15 guns. The enemy on our Viru front

<sup>1)</sup> Everywhere in this book, with the exception of pp. 6, 18 and 29, "infantry", "officers and men" and "men of all ranks" mean only those fighting in the front line with a bayonet or sword. Artillery and machinegunners are not included in these numbers. The number of men fighting with a rifle or sword amounted only to about 30% of the total forces.

consisted of the 6th Army Division which was double the strength of the Northern Corps, but owing to the disposition of its troops the Northern Corps had almost a threefold superiority in the direction of the main attack Kriva-soo (Kriūša) and Vasknarva (Syrenets).

The attack of the Northern Corps was launched on 13th May, supported by the 1st Estonian Army Division, under General A. Tõnisson. From the sea the attack was supported by a British Squadron, under Admiral Sir W. Cowan, and the Estonian Fleet, under Captain J. Pitka. In the south support was given by our fleet on Lake Peipsi and later by the 2nd Army Division. Attacked simultaneously on the south and north the enemy retreated in disorder, leaving behind trains and heavy artillery. On 20th May, an important junction, Volossovo, was occupied as well as the base of the Red Fleet on the eastern shore of Lake Peipsi at the Raskopel Bay.

The garrison of Krasnaja Gorka mutinied and on the 14th June surrendered to our Ingermanland Battalion. At this point the attack had reached its objective. As the Northern Corps was now on Russian territory, in accordance with an earlier signed agreement, the Estonian C.-in-C., General J. Laidoner, relinquished his command on the 19th June. The Northern Corps was reorganised as the North Western Army with the object of fighting the Bolshevik rule in Russia.

On the 19th June, the Soviet Russian 7th Army, after having brought up their 6th and 2nd Divisions, with altogether 23,000 officers and men, against the Northern Corps of 16,500 officers and men, launched a counter-attack and forced the Corps to withdraw. The counter-attack was checked on the line Strugi-Belaja station — Luga River and Ingermanland lakes. The Estonian troops occupied the front from the Narva—Petrograd railway to the sea.

### **Capture of Pihkva.**

To support the attack of the White Russian Northern Corps, the C.-in-C. General J. Laidoner, on 16th May ordered the 2nd Division under Colonel V. Puskar, to launch an attack in the direction of Pihkva and Marienburg (Alūksne).

The attack was launched on the night of 23/24 May. In a pitched battle the enemy was put to flight on the whole front, and on the 26th May Pihkva was occupied. Parts of the armoured train division organised the defence of the town after its occupation. A part of the 1st Brigade of the 2nd Army Division was withdrawn to the present Estonian frontier where they began to fortify it on the line Laura—Irboska—Vidavīši. On the 29th May, Pihkva was handed over to a portion of the White Russian Northern Corps, leaving, as a precaution, some Estonian troops who were actually responsible for the defence of the town.

### **Liberation of Northern Latvia.**

#### **Clearing Northern Latvia of Soviet Russian Troops.**

At the same time as the Estonian 2nd Division operated in the direction of Pihkva, the C.-in-C., General J. Laidoner, ordered on 16th May the Commander of the 3rd Division, General E. Pödder, to launch an attack, support-

ed by armoured trains on the front between Riga Bay and Valga. The object was to defend Estonia from the South outside the ethnographic border, to free Northern Latvia and support the attack of the Northern Corps of the White Russians.

The offensive was launched on 24th May. By determined attacks the enemy's resistance was soon broken and on the 26th May Volmari (Valmiera) was captured, on 27th May Lemsalu (Limbaži), on 29th May Smiltē, and on 30th May Võnnu (Cēsis). Owing to the simultaneous advance of the German Baltic *Landeswehr* from Riga in the direction of Valga, the 3rd Division stopped pursuing the defeated Soviet Russian troops.

The occupation of Pihkva and Volmari by Estonian troops created a favourable situation for the advance of the right wing of the 2nd Division in the direction of Võru—Marienburg. The attack was launched on the 27th May and on the 5th June, the first Cavalry Regiment reached Väina (Daugava) river, occupying Kreuzburg (Krustpils) and Jakobstadt (Jēkabpils), south of which the left flank of the Polish Anti-Bolshevik forces was operating.

Thus the Estonian troops by a brilliant manoeuvre had freed Northern Latvia from the Bolsheviks, entirely destroying the Red Latvian army.

### War against the *Landeswehr*.

A new dangerous enemy to Estonian independence was growing in Southern Latvia, the Baltic-German *Landeswehr* formed in Riga in December 1918, and the "Iron Division" of Reich German troops, led by General R. v. der Goltz. His object was to conquer all Baltic territory, after which it was intended to colonize the land by Germans. These aggressive aims were explained to the Allies as defence of the German Eastern frontier against the Bolsheviks.

The Germans hindered the organisation of Latvian troops in Courland so that by April 1919, Latvia only managed to form a single unit of 600 men. On 16th April, the *Landeswehr* deposed the national Latvian Government under K. Ulman, which was friendly to the Allies, and formed a pro-German Government under the Premiership of A. Needra. On the 22nd May the *Landeswehr*, together with the "Iron Division" and the Latvian unit, occupied Riga, from where the Baltic-German *Landeswehr* advanced in a north and north-east direction, to the rear of the Estonian 2nd Division and its communications in the Ramotskoje (Ieriķi) — Võnnu district.

The *Landeswehr* did not comply with the demand of the Estonian C.-in-C. that they should withdraw south of the Ramotskoje—Alt-Schwaneburg railway line as north of this line there were no Bolshevik troops, but instead launched an attack on the 5th June and occupied Võnnu on the 6th. On the 8th and 9th June fighting for Võnnu continued with alternating success. At the same time the *Landeswehr* tried to organise cooperation with the Northern Corps of the Russian Whites, but their delegates in three aeroplanes were caught and taken prisoner by the Estonian troops.

On 10th June, by intervention of the military representatives of the Allied Countries, an armistice was signed between the Estonian and *Landeswehr* Commands, and negotiations were started for the settlement of matters by peaceful means. The negotiations, however, led to no agreement as the

*Landeswehr* made an unacceptable demand, namely that the Estonian troops be withdrawn to their ethnographic frontier, which meant handing over the communications of our 2nd Division to the *Landeswehr*, without the latter taking upon itself the obligation of defending the Anti-Bolshevik front.

The time afforded by the armistice was used by the *Landeswehr* for assembling forces in the region of Võnnu and Hinzenberg (Inčukains). The Estonian 3rd Division, under Major General E. Põdder, occupied defensive lines of 100 km., having in the front line 5,000 officers and men (of whom 1,400 were Latvians), 189 machine guns, 28 guns and 2 armoured trains. The enemy had 5,300 officers and men, 310 machine guns, 50 guns, 12 trench mortars, 1 armoured train and a number of aeroplanes, thus exceeding the Estonian forces in material, and in the direction of attack, also in man-power. The main strength of the 3rd Division was disposed in defence of Lemsalu, Stolben (Stalbe), Võnnu and Ronneburg (Rauna) district.

The enemy attack began on the 19th June, 1919, by the operations of the flank defence battalion of the German "Iron Division" in the direction of Lemsalu. On 20th June, the enemy battalion was decisively beaten near Lemsalu by the 2nd battalion of the 9th Regiment. On the same day the main forces of the "Iron Division" proceeded to attack and occupied the village of Roopa (Straupe).

Early in the morning of 21st June the *Landeswehr* again attacked. Near Võnnu it broke through the front line of the Latvian 2nd Võnnu Regiment, holding the centre of the Estonian 3rd Division line, and continued its advance in the direction of Loode railway station and Volmari. By night-fall the advance troops of the enemy came to within 8 km. of Volmari. The right wing of the 3rd Division at Lemsalu, and the left wing at Ronneburg on the 21st June successfully repulsed all enemy attacks. Neither had the enemy any success at Stolben in spite of fierce attacks by the "Iron Division".

To liquidate the break-through at Võnnu, the C.-in-C., General J. Laidoner, ordered a counter-attack on the 21st June, placing the Kalevlaste Maleva (a volunteer battalion), and the 2nd battalion of the 1st Infantry Regiment together with a battery of light artillery at the disposal of the Commander of the 3rd Division. These forces together with the Kuperjanov Partisan Battalion and armoured trains put to flight the *Landeswehr* troops which had broken through. At the same time the 3rd and 6th Regiments, which were fighting on the flanks of the 3rd Division, repulsed all enemy attacks. The 9th Regiment, operating on the extreme right flank of the 3rd Division had very successfully advanced in the Lemsalu—Hinzenberg direction and threatened the main forces of the "Iron Division" from the rear, forcing the whole "Iron Division" to withdraw, in the night, from the Stolben district.

A general successful counter-attack of the Estonian forces was launched by the C. O. of the 3rd Division on 23rd June. In the early morning of that day the town of Võnnu was captured, which had been evacuated by the main enemy forces through the night. The enemy was doggedly pursued on the whole front. Its attempts at resistance were broken by spirited attacks. On 28th June, the Estonian troops reached the outskirts of Riga where the enemy stopped on the positions Jägeli (Jugla) River and Riga lakes. Continuing their attacks, the Estonian forces captured, on 2nd July, Alt-Mühlgraben (Milgrāvis) and Magnusholm (Mangalsala). At the mouth of Väina River

4 enemy ships were captured. The Estonian troops were making preparations for the capture of Riga when, at the demand of the military representatives of the Allied Countries, an armistice was concluded at Strasdenhof (Strazdu-muiža) on 3rd July. The Germans were forced to leave Riga on the 5th July and to proceed to the Miitavi (Jelgava) district of Courland. The Estonian troops, thanks to their high fighting qualities, had won a brilliant victory, defeating the enemy decisively and putting an end to the attempt to establish German rule over the Baltic region.

## **Defensive Fighting on the Soviet Russian Territory in Summer.**

### **Fighting in Ingermanland and in Pihkva region.**

After the retreat of the North West Army from Petrograd district in the Summer, the 1st Division, with the 4th and 1st Regiments, occupied from the 12th July, front line positions from the Narva—Petrograd railway to the sea and proceeded at once with their fortification. The fighting strength of our 1st Division comprised, at the time, 4,800 officers and men, 146 machine guns and 39 guns. The strength of the Russian 6th Division opposing our 1st Division was at least 3 times greater.

In spite of our small numbers, all enemy attacks on our positions, in the second half of July and first half of August, were repulsed with considerable loss to the enemy. To strengthen the front, the 9th Regiment was brought up in July from the Southern front. At the same time the Ingermanland battalion was formed into a regiment.

The 30 km. long front of the 4th Regiment was defended by 1,650 men with 40 machine guns and 16 guns. The enemy attacked this sector of the front in August in detachments of 9 regiments (7,000 officers and men). A temporary enemy success was made good on the 11th August by inflicting very heavy losses on the Russians.

On the southern front the enemy launched a general offensive for the recapture of Pihkva, on July 8th, with a force of nearly 10,000 officers and men, 38 guns and supported by 3 armoured trains. At the time, Pihkva was defended by detachments of the 2nd Division and White Russians, a force nearly 7 times smaller than that of the enemy. Between 10th—18th July, armoured trains, their infantry units and the 6th Regiment, were transferred to Pihkva from the Riga front. Heavy fighting continued until the 18th July when, by a counter-attack, the initiative was wrested from the enemy.

On the 18th July, the Estonian forces launched a counter-attack from the Pihkva region in the direction of Ostrov, Porhov and Luuga. In spite of the nearly two fold superiority of the enemy the advance of the Estonian troops proceeded satisfactorily. On the 28th July, our troops halted 6 km. from Ostrov and 12 km. from Porhov, having captured Strugi-Belaja station in the direction of Luuga.

In the middle of August, the enemy launched a counter-attack with superior forces and pressed the Estonian forces back on to the fortified line at Irboska and the general line of the Rivers Tšerehha and Kebi, in front of

Pihkva. As the relations between the Estonian troops and the North West Army of White Russians were not too cordial the defence of Pihkva was handed over to the units of the North West Army and the Estonians left the town during the night of 25th/26th August. On the same night the White Russians gave up the town to the enemy and withdrew in the direction of Oudova on the River Želtša.

The Estonian forces withdrew to the present frontier-line of the Country and took up the defence of the fortified positions.

## **General Position by the Autumn of 1919.**

### **Position on the Various Soviet Russian Fronts.**

The Military position of the Red Army had considerably improved by the Autumn of 1919. Intervention on the Northern front was being liquidated. On the Eastern front the Russian White Armies had been defeated. On the Southern and Western fronts the attacks of Russian White troops had been repulsed. Only Estonians and Poles had consistently beaten the Bolsheviks. As Estonians and Poles limited their operations to the active defence of their frontiers, the lack of success here was not particularly dangerous to the Red Army.

### **Estonian Foreign Political Position.**

An Estonian delegation, headed by her Foreign Minister, J. Poska carried on in Western Europe, and particularly at the Paris Peace Conference, an intensive campaign for the recognition of Estonia *de jure* and for procuring material assistance. Material assistance was given to us but the recognition of our independence *de jure* was made dependent on the solution of the Greater Russian problem. General Sir H. Gough, the head of the military commission of the Allies in the Baltic, warmly supported the claim for Estonian independence.

On 31st August, 1919, Soviet Russia made an offer to the Estonian Government to start peace negotiations. As Estonia did not want a separate peace, the Baltic States conferred in Tallinn on the 14th September, when it was decided to carry on peace negotiations together, keeping the Western European Allied States informed. Peace negotiations in Pihkva on 16th—18th September gave no results and were, therefore, broken off.

### **The Home-political and Economic Position of Estonia.**

On the 18th November, a new Government was formed under the Premiership of J. Tõnisson. Bolshevik propaganda, which had been dropped in the Spring, was intensified in the Summer. In the towns strikes were organised, and in the army it was attempted to undermine the fighting spirit of the men. The will for freedom and the determination to gain independence among the Estonians, however, proved so strong that they remained firm to the end. With unflinching tenacity the Estonian officers and men continued to fight side by side against a dangerous enemy, together enduring all hardships and difficulties. The enemy propaganda, therefore, did not yield any positive results.

On 10th October, the Constituent Assembly passed the Land Reform Bill, which was of great economic and social importance. According to the provisions of this Bill all feudal estates were to be nationalized if they did not belong to municipalities, charitable or scientific institutions, and adequate compensation was to be made. Of the total arable land in Estonia 58% belonged to large estates, owned mainly by a few hundred noble families of foreign nationality, sprung from the old feudal system. At the same time two thirds of the people in Estonia, deriving their living from agriculture, had no land of their own. In addition to the existing 74,000 small holdings 56,000 more were created by the Land Reform Bill. With the passing of this Bill the soldiers received a guarantee that the land, which they had freed and were defending, in the future belonged to the nation, which was one of the factors contributing to victory in the War of Independence.

The economic position was particularly difficult during the second half of 1919, but these difficulties were overcome quite successfully. Providing food for the towns during the summer months was a problem for the solution of which it was necessary to import in 5 months 50,000 tons of food stuffs.

### **Continued Organisation of Estonian Armed Forces in the Second Half of 1919.**

The general organisation of the Army and the Defence League had already taken shape in the first half of 1919; in the second half only smaller additions were made. To every division there was added a frontier guard battalion. The total number of effectives in the regular army on the 15th October, amounted to 78,420. The Defence League numbered 119,000 men, of whom 46,000 had received partial military training, and were fit for service in front line units.

Army supplies had improved considerably, especially in regard to clothing, as in the Summer large quantities arrived from abroad, which nearly covered the requirements of the whole army. Only winter equipment was insufficient.

The supply of arms also improved. Artillery units received some modern guns from Great Britain. Thanks to this in the Autumn there were 142 field guns, of which 56 were of heavy artillery. The number of machine guns also increased. There was sufficient small arms ammunition, but a shortage of artillery ammunition. By the Autumn it was possible to augment engineering and transport supplies as well as communications, only the shortage of field cable remained acute.

Generally the economic position of the Country had improved but it was still serious enough.

## **Military Operations on the Soviet Russian and Latvian Territories in the Autumn of 1919.**

### **The Attack of the White Russian North West Army on Petrograd.**

In the Autumn the North West Army, under the command of General N. Youdenitch, intended to launch a new and vigorous attack via Jamburg and Gatšina, with the capture of Petrograd as the main objective. The army

had been thoroughly reorganised. It had also received great quantities of war material from the Allied Governments. The effective strength of the North West Army, at that time, amounted to 18,500 officers and men, with 56 guns and armoured trains. The effective strength of the 7th Red Army was 26,500 officers and men with 148 guns but its fighting quality was not high.

On 26th August, a conference took place in Riga, under the guidance of the Allies' military representatives, between the representatives of the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian Armies, the North West Army and Colonel Bermond-Avalov. The Allies demanded that the forces of the participants at the conference should support the main offensive of the North West Army on Petrograd by an attack on their respective fronts.

The general offensive of the North West Army was launched on the 10th October and developed with great success: by October 13th, Luuga was taken and by October 20th, Tsarskoje Selo and Pavlovsk. In 10 days the army had advanced from Jamburg to the gates of Petrograd. But in the meantime, the Soviet Russian 7th Army had been considerably reinforced. It had received an additional 28—29,000 officers and men from Petrograd. On the 21st October, the 7th Army launched a counter-attack and recaptured Pavlovsk and Tsarskoje Selo. The strong attack of the Soviet Russian 15th Army, which began on 26th October in the direction of Luuga—Volossovo, penetrated far into the rear of the North West Army and forced it to withdraw quickly from Gatšina.

### **The Krasnaja Gorka Operations.**

In accordance with the Riga agreement, Estonian forces were obliged to support the North West White Russian Army. The Estonian C.-in-C., General J. Laidoner intended by a swift coup to capture Krasnaja Gorka. The British Fleet was, at the same time, operating at sea. To carry out the planned attack the C.-in-C. detailed naval forces, infantry and artillery detachments under the command of Rear-Admiral J. Pitka. By 13th October, the majority of the landing parties, altogether 1,600 men with 4 guns, arrived at Kaporje Bay and landed on the 13th and 14th October in Peipija district, whence they immediately pushed on in the direction of Krasnaja Gorka. Our landing party had to operate against the enemy's forces of 3,000 men and 12 guns. On the 16th October our troops reached the strongly fortified positions, which they did not succeed in breaking through even though, on 26th October, our landing party was reinforced by the 4th Regiment and the British Fleet supported it effectively by their fire. At the end of October, the failure of the North West Army's attack became apparent and at the beginning of November the Estonian troops withdrew from the Krasnaja Gorka positions.

### **Pihkva Operations.**

To support the offensive of the North West Army and to keep the enemy forces engaged in the Pihkva region, the armoured trains and 2nd Division, supported by our Peipsi fleet, made, by order of the C.-in-C., General J. Laidoner, 3 attacks in the direction of Pihkva, in the middle of October and the beginning of November. The attacks were successful: in parts Velikaja river

was reached, prisoners and war material were captured and many bridges across the river destroyed, after which the forces returned to their old positions.

### **Military Operations In Northern Latvia and Riga.**

After the defeat of the *Landeswehr* the Estonian 3rd Division took up positions, at the beginning of August, from Lake Luban to the Estonian frontier in defence of the frontier of Northern Latvia, as Latvia herself lacked the necessary armed forces.

In accordance with the stipulations of the Versailles Peace Treaty the German forces had to leave the Baltic Countries. To evade the stipulations of the Peace Treaty, many German armed units entered the Service of the White Russians under the Russian Commander, Colonel P. Bermond-Avalov, forming with the Russian war prisoners in Germany, the Russian Voluntary Western Army. This army actually became a tool in the hands of the German Command whose real aim was, not so much fighting Bolshevism for the building up of a German-friendly Russia, as the conquest of the Baltic for Germany.

On the 8th October, 1919, the Russian Voluntary Western Army, under Bermond, launched an offensive against Riga, and on the 9th October, the western part of Riga, down to the River Vaina, fell into the hands of Bermond. The enemy did not succeed in capturing the eastern part of the town as two Estonian armoured trains reached Riga at 3 a. m. on the 10th October, sent at the request of the Latvian Prime Minister and C.-in-C. On the arrival of Estonian assistance, the spirits of the Latvian forces rose and the advance of Bermond was checked. At the same time, the Estonian C.-in-C., General J. Laidoner, ordered the C. O. of the 3rd Division to be ready with the whole division to proceed against Bermond's forces. The Estonian armoured trains left Riga on the 23rd October, as the position there had become secure, and the Latvian forces, supported by the allied fleet and Estonian armoured trains, successfully counter-attacked. The Estonian 3rd Division, at the same time, defended the Eastern frontier of Northern Latvia from Lake Luban to the Estonian frontier, where they remained until December 14th, 1919.

## **Concluding Battles of the War on the Viru Front.**

### **The Situation Developing into the Defence of Narva.**

In the first half of November, the demoralized North Western Army of the White Russians continued to retreat quickly from the Petrograd region, abandoning the town of Jamburg on November 14th to the Red Army. It was pursued by the 7th and 15th Soviet Russian Armies, of altogether 6 divisions with 32,000 men and 190 guns. The disintegrated North Western Army, comprising some 40—50,000 men and a great number of refugees, intended to retire behind the Estonian lines and reorganise again. As the North Western Army was hostile to Estonian independence its large,

demoralized, armed forces, in the rear of our lines, proved extremely dangerous to the organisation of the defence of our Viru front. In view of this, the Estonian Government decided, on 11th November, to disarm all units of the North Western Army on their crossing on to the left shore of the Narva River which was carried out during the month of November. Only about 2,500 men of the North West Army remained at the front.

In the Autumn of 1919, three positions, north of Narva—Jamburg railway, had been prepared by the Estonian troops for the defence of Narva. South of the railway only part of the western shore of Narva River was fortified, with bridge-heads on the eastern shore at Vasknarva, Krivasoo and Vääska. All forces on the Viru front, including naval forces, were placed under the command of the G. O. C. of the 1st Division, Major-General A. Tõnisson. To strengthen the Division the C.-in-C. transferred from the Southern front 3 armoured trains, 2 infantry regiments and some artillery units.

### **On the Defensive from 16th—30th November 1919.**

After the capture of Jamburg and Oudova, the Command of the Soviet Russian Western front continued its pressure on the whole front from Lake Peipsi to the Gulf of Finland. The enemy launched its offensive on 16th November. On the front, from Lake Peipsi to Narva—Petrograd railway the enemy's 15th Army drove the units of the North Western Army over Narva River from Peipsi to the village Krivasoo. The Estonian forces were in position on the western shore. On the front between Narva—Petrograd railway and the sea, the Soviet Russian 7th Army, with 19,000 men and 100 guns, attacked the units of the Estonian 1st Division whose strength at the time was only 4,700 men and 34 guns. By the 25th November, the enemy succeeded in pushing back the Estonian line in the centre and on the left flank. The loss of these positions was not dangerous, as the Narva front, extending in a semi-circle to the East, was thus shortened by 20 km. and the morale of the men was good.

### **Defensive Battles from 7th—20th December.**

The frontal attacks of the Soviet Russian troops had had no effect. For this reason their Command brought up 3 divisions, comprising 12,000 men and 80 guns, to the villages of Krivasoo and Vääska, south west of Narva. On this section Estonian forces numbered, at that time, only 1,100 men and 22 guns, and some remnants of the North Western Army. The enemy intended to break through to the Tallinn—Narva railway line and cut off the defenders of Narva. The attack was launched on the 7th December. With this attack the Russians endeavoured to influence the peace talks, which had commenced at Tartu, between Estonia and Russia, on December 5th. On the 8th, the Russian peace delegation presented their proposal for the Estonian-Russian frontier, according to which the eastern half of our Viru district and the whole Petseri district would have gone to Russia.

To stem the offensive the C.-in-C., General J. Laidoner, brought the 3rd Division from the Southern front to the Viru front to strengthen the 1st Division, and ordered the entire army to be ready for a supreme effort.

The pressure of the numerically superior forces of Soviet Russia became particularly strong from the 14th December. The enemy took the Krivasoo bridge-head on the eastern shore of Narva River and, crossing over the ice of the frozen river on the 16th December at Vääska village, advanced to Samokrassi village within 3 km. of the Tallinn—Narva railway. By a counter-attack on the 17th December, this very dangerous break-through was made good. A break-through on the night of 17th/18th at Mustjõe village was also liquidated.

Simultaneously with the attacks from the south, the Command of the Soviet Russian forces directed an offensive against Narva from the east and north. All these attacks, however, were repulsed with great losses to the enemy.

### **The Final Attempts of Soviet Russia to Break the Resistance of Estonia.**

Peace negotiations at Tartu had progressed successfully. The question of the Estonian Russian frontier had been settled. But on the 24th December, the Soviet Russian delegation suddenly and unexpectedly advanced the demand that, within 10 km. on both sides of the River Narva, Estonia should have no right to maintain any armed forces nor build fortifications. At the same time they gave us to understand that in case of need this demand would be enforced by military action. It was clear that the enemy was planning a new offensive to break Estonian resistance.

In reply to this demand our C.-in-C., General J. Laidoner arranged a transfer of fresh troops from the quieter Southern front to the Viru front. At the same time he reorganised the Commands, appointing Major-General A. Tõnisson in command of the Viru front. The forces at the disposal of the Viru front Command were the 1st Division, under Colonel O. Heinze, and the 3rd Division under Major-General E. Pödder together with artillery units. The C.-in-C. explained the significance of the moment to the Army which was prepared to repulse all enemy attacks.

The offensive of the Soviet Russian 7th and 15th Armies began on the 28th December, 1919. 19 enemy regiments attacked our Narva positions from the North East and another group of 6 regiments from the East. Repeated attacks were repulsed. On the 30th December the C. O. of the 7th Soviet Russian army had to report to his chief that only remnants, not even fit for defence, were left of his army. After that the enemy attacks ceased. At the same time the Soviet Russian peace delegation abandoned its demand of creating a neutral zone on the shores of Narva River.

### **End of the War.**

The Estonian Forces at Narva, fighting incessantly for a month and a half without a break and without relief in difficult winter weather, had crushed all enemy attacks and led the Command of the Soviet Russian army to the conviction that it was unable to break the resistance of Estonians. On 31st December, 1919, an armistice was signed in Tartu, which came into force on 3rd January, 1920, at 10.30 a. m.

As a result of the peace negotiations which followed the armistice, a Treaty was signed on 2nd February in Tartu between Estonia and Soviet Russia. By the provisions of the Peace Treaty all former Russian Government property on Estonian territory was handed over to the ownership of the Estonian Government. Of the Russian gold reserve Soviet Russia paid out the Estonian share of 15 million roubles in gold.

After the signing of the Peace Treaty, the Estonian Army was demobilised and reorganised in accordance with peace time requirements.

## General Summary.

The Estonian War of Independence began and was carried through under very difficult conditions for Estonia. At the beginning of the war, at the end of November 1918, the Estonian Government machinery and army were only in the first stages of organisation. At the beginning of the war Estonia had only managed to assemble 2,200 men against the invading force of 9,000. For this reason the small Estonian force was obliged to retreat gradually into the interior of the Country, ceding to the enemy within 6 weeks nearly half of the territory.

During that period a strong Government was built up, order in the Country was established and an army was organised. Even in the first week of January, 1919 it was possible to check the advance of the enemy. This was followed by a general victorious counter-offensive of the Estonian forces, as a result of which the territory was freed from the enemy in 3 weeks. In this, we were effectively assisted by Finnish volunteers and a British squadron. Intensive organisation proceeded throughout 1919. At the end of the war Estonia had under arms: in the army 75,000 men and in the Defence League 119,000 men. For the support of the infantry there were 39 batteries, 10 armoured trains, 8 armoured cars, 28 aeroplanes and 10 warships. Towards the end of the war, Soviet Russia was forced to bring to the Estonian front, two armies with a total of 160,000 men.

Strategically the War of Independence was a defensive war, carried out by Estonian forces actively and with great tenacity and courage. The best examples of the active nature of the defence were the brilliant offensive of Estonian troops from Võru to Jakobstadt, the capture of Pihkva and Krasnaja Gorka and the victory over the well-armed *Landeswehr*. In the concluding battles of the war, the Estonian Army defended its positions with the utmost tenacity and perseverance and undertook daring counter-attacks.

In the conduct of the War of Independence, when the Country and Army were entirely unprepared for war, the direction of the Government and Army were of paramount importance.

As the result of a sound foreign policy we received *de facto* recognition of our independence and effective foreign assistance, and concluded a satisfactory Peace Treaty with Soviet Russia. By a skilful home policy the whole nation was welded into one strong unit for the fight against a numerically superior enemy. The strategic and tactical leading of troops was successful in securing victory for us over the enemy.

# MAP OF THE THEATRE OF THE ESTONIAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE 1918 - 1920



To political and military difficulties were added economic ones, since the entire national economy was disorganised and its capacity small. Great quantities of foodstuffs and war material, altogether costing Kr. 137.4 million, had to be imported to feed the people and provide supplies for the army. As exports amounted to only Kr. 20 million, the deficiency of Kr. 117.4 million, had to be covered by external loans. To cover the war expenditure the following foreign indebtedness was incurred: to Finland Fmk. 21.5 million in cash and in war material from Great Britain £3 million, U. S. A. \$12.1 million, and France Fcs. 13.7 million. The Finnish and French loans were repaid soon after the war.

Captured war material played a large part in the supply of the army. The total captured war material and supplies was: 73 guns, 500 machine guns, 4,200 rifles, 13 ships, 18 locomotives, 503 railway carriages and flax, hemp and timber to the value of Kr. 2.8 million. Over and above that, great quantities of ammunition and other war material were captured and put to immediate use.

As a result of 13 months of heavy fighting the brave Estonian Army secured a brilliant victory, forcing Soviet Russia to recognise Estonian Independence. But the victory of the Estonian Army also influenced history beyond the Estonian national borders, helping to put the Latvian Republic on her feet, and by crushing the *Landeswehr*, checked German expansion to the North East. Estonia was the first to stop the advance of Bolshevik Soviet Russian forces westwards, which, at the time, was a great danger to Western European peace. Estonia was also the first capitalist country to conclude peace with Soviet Russia, thus displaying the strength of the new State and its inner stability. The Estonian example was soon followed by other capitalist countries. As the price of victory in the War of Independence Estonia lost 3,588 dead and 13,775 wounded. The reason for the victory lay, however, first and foremost, in the unwavering will of the whole Estonian people to secure and defend their independence, and in the great and successful organisation of the Government and Army Command. At the time when Estonia's own armed forces were being organised, timely foreign assistance, especially from the British Fleet and Finnish Volunteers, played a great part in assuring final victory. The Estonian people fully realise the value of this assistance and will thankfully remember those powers which helped her in her hour of need.

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