

THE SOVIET ARMY IN NORTHERN LITHUANIA BETWEEN JANUARY AND JUNE 1919

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ABSTRACT

In January 1919, the Army of Soviet Latvia (ASL) emerged out of Red Army units fighting on future Latvian territory. Until its dissolution in early June 1919, units of the ASL participated in a war that covered areas claimed by both the Latvian and Lithuanian governments. The article aims to reevaluate the campaign in northern Lithuania in the first half of 1919. Until today, the fighting on the left flank of the ASL has been seen as a secondary front, and therefore usually overlooked. The article explores the plans of the ASL, the forces involved, and the actual warfare. Attention is also paid to events behind the front line, and the activities of the Soviet Latvian authorities in Lithuania.

KEY WORDS: Red Army, Army of Soviet Latvia, Latvian-Soviet war, Lithuanian-Soviet war.

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ANOTACIJA

1919 m. sausio mėn. iš Raudonosios armijos dalinių, kovojusių būsimojoje Latvijos teritorijoje, susiformavo Tarybų Latvijos kariuomenė (TLK). Iki likvidavimo 1919 m. birželio pradžioje šios kariuomenės junginiai dalyvavo kare, apėmusiame regioną, į kurį pretendavo ne tik Latvijos, bet ir Lietuvos vyriausybės. Straipsnyje siekiama naujai įvertinti TLK kampaniją Šiaurės Lietuvoje 1919 m. pirmojoje pusėje. Iki šiol kovos, vykusios TLK kairiajame flange, buvo laikomos antraplaniu frontu, todėl joms nebuvo skiriama daug dėmesio. Straipsnyje gilinamasi į TLK planus, analizuojami koviniai daliniai ir karo eiga. Taip pat kreipiamas dėmesys į įvykius fronto užnugaryje ir Tarybinės Latvijos valdžios veiksmus Lietuvoje.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: Raudonoji armija, Tarybų Latvijos kariuomenė, Latvijos ir Tarybų Rusijos karas, Lietuvos ir Tarybų Rusijos karas.

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The First World War ended on 11 November 1918 with the signing of the Armistice at Compiègne. Two days later, Soviet Russia annulled the Treaty of Brest with Germany, which had resulted in vast territories of the former Russian Empire being occupied by Germany. In the middle of November, the Red Army began gradually heading west from the German-Russian demarcation line.

On 9 December 1918, after negotiations with the local German Soldiers' Council, the Pskov Rifle Division of the Red Army marched into Daugavpils. From there, it turned towards Lithuania, heading in the direction of Kaunas.¹ Meanwhile, in Latvia, the Red Army was concentrating its forces to take Riga. All the Soviet units fighting in Latvia (the Latvian Soviet Riflemen's Division, the 2nd Novgorod Rifle Division, and some smaller units) were combined into the Latvian Army Group. The Army of Soviet Latvia (ASL) was formed on 4 January 1919, the day after Riga was occupied, on the basis of the Latvian Army Group.²

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The ASL participated in the war, not only in Latvia but also on Lithuanian territory, until it was dissolved in early June 1919. The aim of this article is to reevaluate the campaign in northern Lithuania in the first half of 1919. Until today, the fighting on the left flank of the ASL has been seen as a secondary front, and therefore usually overlooked.

Strategic considerations

After the capture of Riga, a large gap formed between the ASL and the Western Army with the Pskov Division on its right flank. The main forces of the ASL were concentrated in Riga, and the reserve near Krustpils. To fill this gap, Jukums Vācietis, the commander-in-chief of the Russian armed forces (and the former commander of the Latvian Riflemen's Division) sent the Special International Rifle Division to Daugavpils under the leadership of Mikhail Okulov. It came under the control of the ASL, with the task of attacking in northern Lithuania and maintaining contact with the Western Army. The division formed the Left Column of the ASL, or the Panevėžys Group. Its task was to attack in the direction of Panevėžys, and then Šiauliai, and to head towards East Prussia if it was successful.

In addition to the International Division, some units of the Soviet Latvian Riflemen's Division had already been in northern Lithuania since the middle of January. The

¹ The division was very weak. Its battle composition at the end of November 1918 was only 761 bayonets. In Daugavpils it was greatly supplemented and on its way to Lithuania it had already 2,473 bayonets, 65 sabres, 78 machine guns, 9 cannons and 8 planes. See: БАЛТУШИС-ЖЕМАЙТИС, Феликс. Гражданская война в Литве в 1919 году. *Война и Революция*, 1929, кн. 7, с. 88.

² ŠILIŅŠ, Jānis. *Padomju Latvija, 1918.–1919.* Rīga, 2013, 148. lpp.

Riga-Jelgava-Mažeikiai-Liepāja railway line, which crossed Lithuanian territory, was very important for the implementation of successful operations in Western Latvia. The Special Operations Latvian Riflemen's Regiment (later renamed the 10th Soviet Latvian Riflemen's Regiment), and later the 3rd Latvian Riflemen's Regiment, attacked along this railway.

As the situation changed in the spring of 1919, and the ASL switched from attack to defence, the strategic importance of northern Lithuania increased even more. The security of Daugavpils, the main support base of the ASL, depended on a successful outcome in northern Lithuania. The headquarters of the ASL, its stores, reserve formations and an important transport hub linking Riga with Soviet Russia, were located there. Therefore, the ASL used all possible reserves for the defence of Daugavpils, and eventually also took the Soviet Lithuanian Division (formerly the Pskov Division)³ under its operational control. Lithuania also played an important role in supplying the army and the population with food, which was very scarce in Latvia.

The International Division before being sent to Lithuania

The International Division was the main ASL force operating on Lithuanian territory in January 1919. Its formation began in Moscow in November 1918,⁴ using reserve militia units that were combined into the 2nd Moscow Workers' Division. As the name suggests, it was formed mainly from conscripted workers from Moscow. The division had only 350 volunteers, which was less than 10% of its composition.⁵ It should be noted that, even according to Soviet evaluations, call-ups that took place at the end of 1918 were generally unsuccessful: many recruits tried to avoid military service; there was a shortage of uniforms, footwear and food; and the morale of recruits was low. An anti-Bolshevik spirit and the presence of 'bourgeois elements' were also found in the International Division.⁶

The division started being sent to the front in December, before it was complete, when not even half the rear institutions and most of the combat units had been formed. Despite the fact that the formation of the rear institutions had begun in Moscow on 4 November 1918, the task was not complete due to the incompetence of the Moscow district military commissariats. On 17 November, when the newly

³ The Pskov Rifle Division was renamed the Lithuanian Division on January 21, 1919.

⁴ On 2 December 1918, the Division gained its new name – the Special International Rifle Division.

⁵ Вопросник Высшей Военной инспекции Рабочей и Крестьянской армии, [не датирован]. *Российский Государственный военный архив (Russian State Military Archive, hereafter РГВА)*, ф. 1042, оп. 1, д. 144, л. 58.

⁶ Приказ начальника красных резервных милицейских частей, 18 ноября 1919 г. *РГВА*, ф. 1042, оп. 1, д. 1, л. 2, 3.

formed institutions came under the authority of the divisional headquarters, it turned out that almost nothing had been done.⁷ The work of the supply detachment was difficult to implement in the field, due to the lack of transport, and the food stores, artillery and light riflemen's weapons arsenal, and sanitary facilities were not complete. In these circumstances, the initial idea to use the division's supply department to meet the needs of the Latvian Army Group was unrealisable.⁸

The Cheka⁹ followed the formation of troops carefully. The assembled soldiers demanded a pay rise, and responded very negatively to the announcement that the regiment would be sent to the front. Discipline in the regiment was weak: soldiers arrived late at the barracks (mainly when food was distributed), played cards while on duty, and rarely took part in training exercises.¹⁰ Out of 1,800 people in the 39th Workers' Regiment, over 200 were considered ill, and only a little over 500 had even basic training.¹¹

On 12 December, the 39th Workers' Regiment of the division was the first to be sent to the front (to the Dryssa-Dysna-Polotsk district east of Daugavpils), as it was considered the best prepared for battle.¹² It was decided to send the entire division to the front gradually, but the process was significantly hampered by the lack of wagons. The 1st Battalion of the 39th Workers' Regiment left Moscow with 370 men on 14 December, and the 2nd Battalion with 474 men and the third echelon with 300 men left in the evening of the next day. The 47th Workers' Regiment began loading on 16 December.¹³ The 41st and 60th Workers' Regiment also left for the front at the beginning of January. In total, at the end of December, the division was supposed to consist of 6,361 people, with 31 machine-guns. The composition of the regiments, at 70% to 75% incomplete, differed considerably from what was foreseen.¹⁴ In fact, the division (especially the combat regiments) existed only on paper.

⁷ Рапорт начальника дивизии начальнику оперативного отдела при штабе округа, 22 декабря 1918 г. *РГВА*, ф. 1042, оп. 1, д. 15, л. 10.

⁸ Рапорт начальника дивизии начальнику оперативного отдела округа, 22 декабря 1918 г. *РГВА*, ф. 1042, оп. 1, д. 15, л. 5.

⁹ Soviet secret police, official name – The All-Russian Emergency Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage (in Russian: Всероссийская чрезвычайная комиссия по борьбе с контрреволюцией и саботажем, ЧК).

¹⁰ Рапорт агента ЧК Пресненского района Бориса Чернова о положении в 41-м рабочем полке, [не датирован]. *РГВА*, ф. 1042, оп. 1, д. 1, л. 3.

¹¹ Рапорт о ходе формирования 39-го рабочего полка, 5 ноября 1918 г. *РГВА*, ф. 1042, оп. 1, д. 1, л. 26.

¹² Рапорт штаба дивизии оперативному отделу округа, 19 декабря 1918 г. *РГВА*, ф. 1042, оп. 1, д. 15, л. 13.

¹³ Рапорт начальника штаба дивизии начальнику штаба армейской группы Латвии, 17 декабря 1918 г. *РГВА*, ф. 1042, оп. 1, д. 15, л. 22, 22об.

¹⁴ Вопросник Высшей Военной инспекции Рабочей и Крестьянской армии, [не датирован]. *РГВА*, ф. 1042, оп. 1, д. 1, л. 15; ф. 1042, оп. 1, д. 144, л. 58.

On 28 December 1918, the divisional headquarters (chief-of-staff Sergey Belayev) also left Moscow for Daugavpils.¹⁵ The day before, the divisional bakery and the 22nd Light Artillery Battalion 1st Battery left for the front from the Paveletsk Station in Moscow, but the Engineers' Battalion left from the Kursk freight station.¹⁶ The soldiers were in a bad mood when departing for the front. Very few wanted to leave the comfortable life of Moscow. This also included the divisional commanders. For example, chief of the divisional artillery called Rostovtsev disappeared from Moscow before the departure for the front, sending himself on a mission to Syzran, and was declared a deserter.¹⁷

The International Division in Lithuania

After arriving in Daugavpils in early January 1919, the divisional headquarters and rear institutions were located in Daugavpils, but the troops moved to Panevėžys, and thence to Šiauliai. The division moved forwards very slowly, despite all the urging from the army leadership to be more active. The ASL's intention to cut off the German forces in Latvia from East Prussia was not accomplished, even despite the fact that there were no enemies in the way. The division proceeded very slowly (up to ten kilometres a day), and in addition, did not involve all the forces (the 41st Workers' Regiment was kept in reserve in Daugavpils).¹⁸ In January 1919, the division had a combat strength of about 3,000 bayonets, 31 machine-guns, and four howitzers.¹⁹

All occupied districts of Lithuania formally came under the authority of the Lithuanian Revolutionary Soviet Government (established on 8 December 1918, its chairman was Vincas Mickevičius-Kapsukas). However, its ability to govern these territories was very limited, and unwarranted actions were taken by the rear institutions of both the International Division and the ASL. This was particularly the case in the acquisition of food, for the Soviet forces lacked it badly. The army requisitioned food from the local population.

However, in spite of the requisitions, the Soviet forces could initially even expect a rather welcoming attitude from the locals. After the Red Army reached Šiauliai at the end of January, the Žemaičių (Samogitian) Regiment was formed from local com-

¹⁵ Распоряжение о выполнении приказа Главкома, 27 декабря 1918 г. РГВА, ф. 1042, оп. 1, д. 15, л. 1.

¹⁶ Рапорты о выдвигении частей дивизии, конец декабря 1918 г. РГВА, ф. 1042, оп. 1, д. 15, л. 2, 3.

¹⁷ Заявление штаба дивизии комиссару Московского военного округа, [не датирован]. РГВА, ф. 1042, оп. 1, д. 15, л. 23.

¹⁸ Рапорт начальника дивизии начальнику штаба Армии Советской Латвии, 3 января 1919 г. РГВА, ф. 200, оп. 3, д. 582, л. 18.

¹⁹ БАЛТУШИС-ЖЕМАЙТИС, Ф. Ор. cit., с. 95.

munists and their supporters. The basis of the regiment was the unit of Red Guards which had seized the city on 9 January 1919.

The Red Army offensive in the Baltics ended at the end of January 1919. This was determined to a large extent by the failure of the Soviet forces in Estonia. The Estonian national units there defeated the 7th Army of Soviet Russia, and forced the ASL to abandon Valka, cutting rail links between Riga and Pskov. Consequently, the ASL was forced to switch from offensive to defensive actions. In Western Latvia, the front reached the banks of the River Venta.

As the strategic situation changed, the ASL leadership decided to reorganise its forces. The International Division was reformed on 30 January into the 2nd Rifle Division of Soviet Latvia, supplementing it with some already-existing and newly formed Latvian regiments. The 39th Regiment was renamed the 12th Latvian Rifle Regiment, the 41st Regiment the 14th Latvian Rifle Regiment, the 47th Regiment the 11th Latvian Rifle Regiment, and the 60th Regiment the 17th Latvian Rifle Regiment. The Liepāja Latvian Riflemen's Regiment (renamed the 13th Latvian Riflemen's Regiment), which had recently arrived in Daugavpils, was transferred to the International Division. The new division also included the Special Operations Latvian Riflemen's Regiment, which operated in northern Lithuania, and was renamed the 10th Latvian Riflemen's Regiment. Three newly formed regiments were also included in the division: the 15th Latgale Riflemen's Regiment (formed in Daugavpils), the 16th Regiment (formed in Riga, and later in Ventspils), and the 18th Regiment (formed in Jelgava). A decision was made to situate the division's reserve battalion in Jelgava, and to form one more brigade headquarters, and several cavalry, artillery and rear units.²⁰

At the end of January 1919, the movement towards the west stopped. The International Division held a more than 50-kilometre-long position, from Tirkšliai near Mažeikiai to Šaukēnai 30 kilometres southwest of Šiauliai. The division was unable to move further, as it had met some resistance. The German Iron Brigade had gathered to the west of Mažeikiai, but the German 1st Guards Reserve Division units and the first German Freikorps began to arrive in northern Lithuania at the beginning of February.

The reform of the International Division as the 2nd Soviet Latvian Rifle Division should theoretically have improved the situation of the Soviet forces in northern Lithuania. First of all, it could expect to receive new troops in the near future. Secondly, already-existing small workers' regiments were supposed to be replenished with volunteers and recruits from Latvia. There were hopes of overcoming the supply problems. The leadership of the ASL had clearly been discriminating against the International Division regarding supplies. Priority was given to units that fought in Latvia, even more

²⁰ ŠILINŠ, Jānis. Padomju Latvijas armijas skaitliskais sastāvs un tā izmaiņas no 1919. gada janvāra līdz jūnijam. *Latvijas Kara muzeja gadagrāmata*, 2010, XI sēj., 31. lpp.

so as the International Division could be transferred to the control of the Lithuanian-Belorussian Soviet Army at any moment. Therefore, to a large extent, the Soviet units in Lithuania had to look after themselves. This meant requisitioning food from the locals, which further aggravated the attitude towards the Bolsheviks.

Also, representatives of the Soviet Latvian authorities looked to Lithuania for food. There was a shortage of food in Latvia, and in many places a famine even set in; therefore, the Latvian Bolsheviks tried to obtain food in the territories that had been taken over by the ASL. This even led to a conflict at government level, as the Lithuanian-Belorussian government disagreed categorically with Latvian arbitrariness. The Latvian Soviet government received complaints about the unwarranted actions of ASL units and the transport of food to Latvia. On 7 February, Joniškis council announced it was prohibiting the transport of grain to Latvia, until the conclusion of a cross-border agreement.²¹

On 16 February, the Latvian Food Commissariat approached the government of Soviet Lithuania with a request to allow the transport of food products in agreement with local executive committees. Given the disastrous food shortage in Latvia, the government of Lithuania accepted this request. It agreed on condition that the food was not bought (the value of money had dropped sharply), but exchanged for other goods. In addition, the government of Lithuania demanded a prohibition on the army carrying out food requisitions. Latvia agreed to these terms after long deliberations, and the food supply from Lithuania resumed. On 11 March, the government of Soviet Latvia announced a ban on the ASL acquiring food and transporting it from Lithuania. Subsequently, the Lithuanian-Belorussian Soviet government allocated a 20-kilometre-wide border zone to Latvia, where Latvians could make food purchases.²²

The operation of the Army of Soviet Latvia in Lithuania in February

The ASL conducted an inspection in the former International Division at the end of February. This was apparently done because it planned to open an offensive in the direction of Liepaja and East Prussia at the beginning of March.²³ In addition, the army had only a very rough idea of the situation in the division.

The 10th Latvian Riflemen's Regiment (923 people, with 13 machine-guns) operated in northern Lithuania along with the regiments of the former International Rifle Division. As a matter of fact, the 3rd Latvian Riflemen's Regiment was located in Lielezere,

²¹ ŠILINŠ, J. *Padomju Latvija...*, 140. lpp.

²² Ibid.; Телеграмма комиссару продовольствия ЛССР, 11 марта 1919 г. *Latvijas Valsts vēstures arhīvs (Latvian State Historical Archives, hereafter LVVA)*, P-8 f., 1. apr., 16. l., 6.–7. lp.

²³ ŠILINŠ, J. *Padomju Latvija...*, 178. lpp.; Приказ штаба РВС Армии Советской Латвии, 1 марта 1919 г. *Latvijas Nacionālais arhīvs (Latvian State Archive, hereafter LVA)*, PA-45 f., 2. apr., 263. l., 36. lp.

on the border between Latvia and Lithuania (it was later relocated to Mažeikiai). The composition of the regiments of the former International Division had grown quite considerably compared to the beginning of January. For example, there were 1,120 people with 17 machine-guns in the former 39th Workers' Regiment (the 12th Latvian Rifle Regiment). However, the regiment was depressed, and soldiers often refused to carry out orders. The two-month period of idleness in the positions had completely demoralised the troops. Company representatives even threatened to arrest their commanders if they did not send the troops to the rear to rest. The mood in the 11th Latvian Rifle Regiment was just as bad. In many places, secret meetings of soldiers were held, in which communists were not allowed to participate. The situation in the 14th Regiment, which was ordered to guard the Šiauliai-Panevėžys railway line, was better, but it was very small in number (only 163 bayonets).²⁴

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Another inspector who went to review the 39th Workers' Regiment in Tirkšliai found that the town had not been occupied. The soldiers had refused to attack, arguing that the troops were unable to fight. The soldiers threatened to arrest their commanders and arbitrarily abandon their positions. Only with some persuasion and a promise to send the regiment to the rear, and with the threat of being shot, was the regiment persuaded to attack Tirkšliai. A Latvian inspector found the same situation in the 47th Workers' Regiment.²⁵ The division's 1st Brigade headquarters, which still was not completely formed after several months, was located in Šiauliai. The divisional headquarters was in Panevėžys, but it did not even know where its 3rd Brigade actually was.²⁶ The division was also supported by independent Lithuanian units, but the inspector considered them unreliable, because they consisted of many young and untrained volunteers, who would run away when the first shots were fired. Many of them had enlisted for reasons of self-interest.²⁷

At the end of February 1919, the numbers of the Panevėžys Group were still relatively low: a total of 1,992 bayonets, with 52 machine-guns. The group had only one artillery battery, with two howitzers.²⁸ The units were located at great depth along a wide front. The small regiments were isolated from each other, and were afraid of being surrounded at any time. The division's signals battalion was in the rear in Daugavpils, but it had almost no means of communication at its disposal. In the end, the battalion was mainly involved in organising dancing parties.²⁹ However, the division itself did not

²⁴ Рапорт инспекции Армии Советской Латвии комиссару военных дел ЛССР, 14 марта 1919 г. РГВА, ф. 200, оп. 1, д. 159, л. 353.

²⁵ Рапорт инспектору Армии Советской Латвии, 6 марта 1919 г. РГВА, ф. 200, оп. 1, д. 159, л. 356.

²⁶ Ibid., л. 358.

²⁷ Ibid., л. 358об.

²⁸ Рапорт инспектора артиллерии Армии Советской Латвии начальнику штаба армии, 26 февраля 1919 г. LVA, PA-45 f., 2. arg., 33. l., 57.-60. lp.

²⁹ Рапорт командира заградотряда инспектору Армии Советской Латвии, март 1919 г. РГВА, ф. 200, оп. 1, д. 159, л. 230, 230об.

show great responsiveness towards the military authorities, and operated in a rather independent way. For example, it ignored the requests of the ASL inspector to provide information on the composition of its units, or provided only very approximate figures.³⁰ The supply of the army was hampered by the very slow change of railway lines from the German gauge to the Russian gauge. As a result, the regiments of the International Division received almost no reinforcements. The units even lacked supporters and money, not to mention certain commodities, such as sugar.³¹

Of all the forces of the Panevėžys Group, more than a third (700 bayonets) were concentrated in the Žemaičių Regiment. There were about 1,000 people in total, but later only about half could be sent to the front. The regiment was formed in a hurry from local Bolshevik supporters, but they were very poorly trained. The fighting skills of the regiment were very low. This was proven by the very first military operation in which it participated. At the end of February, the Panevėžys Group tried to take Telšiai with an attack of the 1st Battalion of the 39th Workers Regiment. At the same time, the Žemaičių Regiment went to Luokė, ten kilometres southeast of Telšiai. Telšiai was taken without a struggle, but the 1st Battalion of the Žemaičių Regiment was unexpectedly attacked by a German unit on 27 February. The battalion scattered at the first sound of machine-gun fire, lost 150 people, and fled to Šiauliai, leaving its treasury to the enemy.³² This failure alarmed the leadership of the International Division, who even wanted to flee Panevėžys, but did not know where to go.³³

Battles of the Army of Soviet Latvia in Lithuania in March

Anti-Bolshevik forces began their offensive in Kurzeme and northern Lithuania on 3 March 1919. It should be noted that the attack was not unexpected. For example, a member of the ASL inspection received information about it at the end of February at the headquarters of the 2nd Soviet Latvia Rifle Division in Panevėžys. The division's leadership predicted that the attack would begin on 1 March, and it would not be possible to stand up to it, due to the lack of forces and poor communications.³⁴

These expectations were fulfilled completely. In a few days, the ASL front in Kurzeme and northern Lithuania collapsed. The 1st Guard Reserve Division suddenly attacked

³⁰ Отчет о действии инспекции Армии Советской Латвии в апреле 1919 г. *РГВА*, ф. 200, оп. 1, д. 159, л. 225, 129об.

³¹ Рапорт инспекции Армии Советской Латвии комиссару военных дел ЛССР, 14 марта 1919 г. *РГВА*, ф. 200, оп. 1, д. 159, л. 353.

³² Рапорт инспектору Армии Советской Латвии, 6 марта 1919 г. *РГВА*, ф. 200, оп. 1, д. 159, л. 358об; БАЛТУШИС-ЖЕМАЙТИС, Ф. Ор. cit., с. 98.

³³ Рапорт инспектору Армии Советской Латвии, 6 марта 1919 г. *РГВА*, ф. 200, оп. 1, д. 159, л. 358.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, л. 358 об.

Tirkšliai, and the Iron Division attacked Mažeikiai on 3 March. The 12th Rifle Regiment in Tirkšliai was completely defeated, and, abandoning both howitzers (all the division's artillery), hastily withdrew towards Šiauliai. Seeing its neighbours withdraw, the 11th Rifle Regiment also withdrew from Šaukėnai to Šiauliai.³⁵ Panic also struck the 17th Rifle Regiment waiting in the rear in the Šiauliai-Radviliškis area, which, along with the other retreating units, went arbitrarily towards Panevėžys. There were even cases when soldiers opened fire on commanders who tried to stop them fleeing.³⁶

The attack by the German Iron Division on Mažeikiai, defended by the 3rd Latvian Riflemen's Regiment, was not so successful. Admittedly, the Germans occupied the town easily at the beginning, but after a counterattack by the ASL, with support from an armoured train, they were forced to withdraw. A new attack on Mažeikiai by the Iron Division and the 1st Guard Reserve Division followed from three sides on 5 March. This time, the 3rd Latvian Riflemen's Regiment was forced to withdraw in the direction of Laižuva and Reņģe, leaving behind the 5th and 6th Companies; however, they later broke out of the encirclement.³⁷

After leaving Mažeikiai, a wide gap appeared between the ASL Jelgava and Panevėžys Groups which was not protected. Local communists and their supporters were armed, in order to hold back the German attack. The ASL tried unsuccessfully to stop the enemy's offensive on 8 March near Laižuva, but was forced to retreat to Žagarė. At that time, the ASL forces in Lithuania were no longer able to put up any resistance to the attackers, and the German advance was only hindered by their small number of units. Panic also took over the divisional headquarters, which moved from Panevėžys to Joniškis, to escape further in the direction of Riga if necessary.

The collapse of the front in Lithuania was a source of concern for the ASL leadership, as it was afraid of a possible further German advance, going around Jelgava and Riga from the south and east to surround all the forces on the left bank of the River Daugava. The ASL did not have the resources to hold the front in northern Lithuania. In order to save the Panevėžys Group, the ASL's 18th Regiment and the 2nd Cavalry Troop of the 1st Moscow Separate Cavalry Squadron were sent to Šiauliai from Jelgava. The 8th Latvian Riflemen's Regiment in Jelgava was also joined by the 5th Company of the Žemaičių Regiment who had fled to the town.³⁸ On 9 March, one of the

³⁵ БАЛТУШИС-ЖЕМАЙТИС, Ф. О.р. cit., с. 98; PENIŲIS, Mārtiņš. Marta uzbrukums no Ventas līdz Lielupei. *Latvijas Kareivis*, 1931, 9.dec., 2. lpp.

³⁶ Журнал военных действий Армии Советской Латвии, 7 марта 1919 г. *РГВА*, ф. 200, оп. 3, д. 232, л. 47.

³⁷ Оперативная сводка Армии Советской Латвии, 5 марта 1919 г. *РГВА*, ф. 200, оп. 3, д. 173, л. 45; ф. 200, оп. 3, д. 232, л. 48.

³⁸ KALNIŅŠ, Frīdrihs. 8. Latvju strēlnieku pulka kaujas Kurzemē. Kaujas Žagares un Mežu muižas rajonā. In *Latvju strēlnieku vēsture*. II sējums, 2. daļa: *Strēlnieki Padomju Latvijā. Atmiņas un apraksti*. Red. Latvju strēlnieku vēstures komisija. Maskavā, 1934, 309. lpp.

few army reserves arrived in Jelgava, the 8th Latvian Riflemen's Regiment, consisting of four companies. The regiment was ordered to retake Šiauliai, which had been abandoned by the Bolsheviks on 11 March. The Vitebsk Cheka Regiment Battalion was also sent from Daugavpils to reinforce the Panevėžys Group. It moved forwards together with the armoured train in the direction of Kuršėnai on 9 March, but after meeting the enemy it scattered and fled. Regiments of the 4th Rifle Division (the 31st, 32nd and 33rd Regiments) were also sent to help the Panevėžys Group, arriving gradually in Daugavpils from Russia.³⁹

Realising that the reason for the collapse of the Panevėžys Group was mainly the lack of discipline and low morale, the ASL leadership sent the Communist Barrier Troop unit from Riga to the front in order to restore order. On 9 March, at three o'clock in the afternoon, 49 communists and 11 militiamen departed from Riga in three trucks. After arriving in Jelgava, 23 men were sent in the direction of Vecauce to stop the Vitebsk Cheka Regiment Battalion fleeing to Krimūnas. The other communists went to Joniškis. They surprised the local council and militiamen there who were about to flee. Under the threat of being shot, the council was forced to stay in the town. At that time in Joniškis, there were 15 local Lithuanian militiamen and around 60 armed workers.⁴⁰

A Latvian called Jansons was appointed village commander. Since Šiauliai was occupied, a unit of Latvian communists went to Panevėžys on 11 March. On arriving in the town of Linkuva, the local executive committee chairman called Šidlovskis reported that the local bourgeoisie had 'raised their heads'. The Latvian communists ordered the most influential and wealthiest *kulaks* (rich farmers) to be arrested and held prisoner. The communists managed to capture three kulaks.⁴¹ On 12 March, nine marauding deserters were arrested in Joniškėlis and sent before the Revolutionary War Tribunal of the Panevėžys Group. Another revolutionary tribunal was established in the 2nd Soviet Latvian Division.

By that time, the wave of deserters had already reached Biržai. Local communists were given the power to disarm, and, if necessary, shoot them. All local workers and communist supporters were given weapons. Two hundred armed workers from Joniškėlis were sent to the front, and a few hundred others to the surrounding areas to catch deserters and stop local rioting.⁴²

On 13 March, a unit of Latvian communists left for Panevėžys, which was in total chaos. A German armoured train had reached Radviliškis on that day, and proceed-

³⁹ Журнал военных действий Армии Советской Латвии, 9 марта 1919 г. РГВА, ф. 200, оп. 3, д. 232, л. 48, 51.

⁴⁰ Рапорт командира заградотряда инспектору Армии Советской Латвии, март 1919 г. РГВА, ф. 200, оп. 1, д. 159, л. 226.

⁴¹ Ibid., л. 226об, 227.

⁴² Ibid., л. 227.

ed towards Šeduva. Nobody kept order in Panevėžys, the town had been flooded by crowds of fleeing soldiers. The railway, telegraph and telephone lines were poorly guarded, resulting in the town's isolation from the outside world. Members of both the ASL and the War Revolutionary Tribunal of the Western Front had come to establish order, but that did not help much.⁴³

The next day, the 31st Rifle Regiment from the reserve of the commander-in-chief arrived; however, it refused to go to the front. The head of the War Revolutionary Tribunal, a Latvian called Krišjānis Krūmiņš, together with eight armed assistants, forced one of the battalions of the regiment into wagons late at night to leave for the front. From 50 to 60 armed communists were sent together with the battalion to keep order.⁴⁴

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A Soviet armoured train also arrived in Panevėžys. However, its locomotive was too small, and the train got stuck on a hill on the way to Šeduva in the enemy's line of fire. The crew removed the breech of the only cannon, took six machine guns off the train, and escaped.⁴⁵

In the end, the Latvian Barrier Unit was forced to admit that it was unable to carry out its task and stop the fleeing troops. The front could not be held by a few dozen armed communists. On arriving on the main deserter's escape route (Šiauliai-Daugavpils), only eight people had remained in the unit.⁴⁶ Georgy Andreyev, the newly appointed commander of the division, was described by the Latvian communists as a 'tireless old man', and the chief of the headquarters (a former divisional commander) Mikhail Okulov was described as a coward and a thief. During the withdrawal, he disappeared in a car in the direction of Daugavpils, taking along valuable engravings and silverware from the headquarters.⁴⁷ One might ask, though, why there were valuables in the headquarters of an army unit.

In addition to the 31st Rifle Regiment, the Panevėžys Group was reinforced in the first half of March by the Vitebsk Cheka Regiment Battalion, the recently formed Battalion of the 18th Latvian Riflemen's Regiment,⁴⁸ and three artillery batteries with eight cannons. However, the ASL forces in Lithuania had shrunk significantly, even despite the considerable reinforcements. The 11th and 12th Regiments had lost about a third of their men in a week, while the Žemaičių Regiment was completely destroyed. On 12 March, the Panevėžys Group reported that 1,923 bayonets, 69 sabres, 49 ma-

⁴³ Ibid., л. 229.

⁴⁴ Ibid., л. 227.

⁴⁵ Ibid., л. 228.

⁴⁶ Ibid., л. 229об.

⁴⁷ Ibid., л. 228.

⁴⁸ Battle strength of the battalion was 260 men: Рапорт инспектора Армии Советской Латвии военному комиссару ЛССР, начало марта 1919 г. РГВА, ф. 200, оп. 1, д. 159, л. 219.

chine-guns, ten cannons and 536 horses remained in its possession. The total combat composition of the group reached about 3,000 to 4,000 people.⁴⁹

Bad news continued to arrive from Lithuania in the second half of March. On 16 March, the 11th Latvian Rifle Regiment arbitrarily left their positions and fled to Panevėžys. Only the commanders of the regiment and some Red Army soldiers remained in position. To fill the gap, the Combat Unit of the War Revolutionary Tribunal, under the leadership of a comrade called Kalman, was sent to the front as the last reserve. However, it also refused to take up position.⁵⁰ The situation was so bad that the ASL started the evacuation of Daugavpils, assuming that the withdrawal could continue.

The anti-Bolshevik forces approached Panevėžys at the end of March. On 25 March 1919, after a few rounds of artillery were fired on the town, its defenders (the 31st Rifle Regiment and the 14th Latvian Rifle Regiment) scattered and fled to Kupiškis, leaving Panevėžys in the hands of the enemy.⁵¹ However, the advance guard of the Lithuanian army's Kėdainiai Group entered Panevėžys only two days later (27 March).

In order to remedy the dangerous situation, the ASL sent the last available reserves to Lithuania, including the 3rd Battalion of the 15th Latvian Riflemen's Regiment (formerly the 1st Latgalian Soviet Regiment), consisting of 318 people. This unit, although small in number, was still more disciplined than other units in the Panevėžys Group. On 4 April, the 15th Regiment, the 17th Latvian Rifle Regiment and the Battalion of the Vitebsk Cheka Regiment were included in the assault force that retook Panevėžys, which the enemy did not intend to defend seriously.⁵² After the repossession of Panevėžys, the action in Lithuania ended for a few weeks, as the state of the roads was too bad, and the combat readiness of the Soviet forces was close to zero.

The operations of the Army of Soviet Latvia in Lithuania in April and May

In the middle of April, the actual numbers of the Panevėžys Group reached 14,717 people and 2,719 horses. These are not high figures if we take into account the fact that there were supposed to be 16,771 people and 2,721 horses just in the rear under the provision of the Daugavpils garrison. In total, there were 47,452 people in the 2nd Soviet

⁴⁹ Телеграмма начальника оперативного отдела штаба Армии Советской Латвии командарму, 19 марта 1919 г. *ЛВВА*, РА-45 ф., 2. apr., 33. l., 107.-111. lp.

⁵⁰ Журнал военных действий Армии Советской Латвии, 16 марта 1919 г. *РГВА*, ф. 200, оп. 3, д. 232, л. 67, 71.

⁵¹ Журнал военных действий Армии Советской Латвии, 25 марта 1919 г. *РГВА*, ф. 200, оп. 3, д. 232, л. 92.

⁵² Журнал военных действий Армии Советской Латвии, 1 апреля 1919 г. *РГВА*, ф. 200, оп. 3, д. 232, л. 107; *Latvju strēlnieku vēsture...*, 135. lpp.

Latvian Rifle Division, and 9,477 horses, but most of the division were fighting in Latvia. On 13 April, besides the regiments of the 2nd Soviet Latvian Rifle Division, the Russian 31st and 32nd Rifle Regiments, the Vitebsk Cheka Regiment Battalion, the Joniškėlis Communist Unit, the Kupiškis Communist Unit and four artillery batteries were operating on Lithuanian territory.⁵³ It should be noted, however, that the local Lithuanian communist units were very small in number: there were 73 people in the Joniškėlis Communist Unit, and 89 people in the Kupiškis Unit. By the beginning of May, the 33rd Rifle Regiment, the 98th Rifle Regiment, the 1st Barrier Troops Detachment, the 1st and 2nd Squadron of the 1st Cavalry Division, two artillery batteries, and the 3rd Aviation Unit with three planes and the ASL 1st Armoured Train had also arrived in Lithuania.⁵⁴

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The food reserves of the division were negligible at this time: only 4,600 poods of flour (about 75 tonnes) and 9,700 units of tinned food.⁵⁵ This was only enough for a couple of days. However, the army inspection found that the commanders greatly exaggerated the numbers of units in their reports, in order to obtain more food supplies. For example, the Daugavpils garrison turned out to be only 10,000 instead of 16,000 people after an inspection. The inspector conceded that the situation on the front was even worse.⁵⁶ In the 33rd Rifle Regiment, 200 'dead souls' were counted, but in the 45th Workers' Regiment, there were as many as between 400 and 1,500.⁵⁷ However, not even deception in reporting the numbers of units could attract enough supplies, for both the army and the civilian population were desperately short of food.

The Polish army (the Cavalry Group of General Edward Ridz-Smigly) occupied Vilnius on 23 April, driving out the Red Army. The Poles were very efficient, and managed to defeat opponents that were superior in numbers. First, near Pabradė, they defeated the 45th Workers' Regiment, in which many Latvians were serving. Two hundred men were taken prisoner, and the regiment fled to Švenčionys.⁵⁸

On 30 April, the Lithuanian Division, which had fallen back to Ukmergė and was cut off from other units of the Lithuanian-Belorussian Soviet Army, was overwhelmed by the ASL. There were only 50 to 80 bayonets left in each of the division's regiments.⁵⁹ Most soldiers simply deserted. On 10 May 1919, the Lithuanian Division still had

⁵³ In total there were 2,904 bayonets, 74 machine guns and 15 cannons. However, only a small part of the Panevėžys Group was at the front line. On April 17, there were 170 bayonets in the 17th Riflemen Regiment, in the 15th Riflemen Regiment – 220 bayonets, in the 14th Riflemen Regiment – 455 bayonets, while the Sapper Battalion had 36 people: Состав дивизии на 13 апреля 1919 г. РГВА, ф. 1042, оп. 1, д. 144, л. 116.

⁵⁴ Состав дивизии на 10 мая 1919 г. РГВА, ф. 1042, оп. 1, д. 144, л. 143.

⁵⁵ Обзор Хозяйственного совета о состоянии войск, 18 апреля 1919 г. РГВА, ф. 200, оп. 1, д. 159, л. 162.

⁵⁶ Ibid., л. 162об.

⁵⁷ Отчет инспектора Армии Советской Латвии о ревизии гарнизона Даугавпилса, 3 мая 1919 г. РГВА, ф. 200, оп. 1, д. 159, л. 136, 137.

⁵⁸ PENIŅIS, Mārtiņš. *Latvijas armijas sākums un cīņas Latvijā līdz 1919. g. jūlijam*. Rīga, 1932, 142. lpp.

⁵⁹ BĒRZIŅŠ, Valdis. *Latviešu strēlnieki cīņā par Padomju Latviju 1919. gadā*. Rīga, 1969, 179. lpp.

3,377 bayonets and sabres, 41 machine-guns and eight cannons.⁶⁰ The ASL also took over the Švenčionys Group, which had been defeated by the Poles and had withdrawn from Vilnius to Daugavpils. Consequently, the ASL's front extended for about 100 kilometres, and all of northeast Lithuania came under its control. The need to defend Daugavpils from the south presented new challenges to the army, which already lacked reserves.

First, the 18th Latvian Riflemen's Regiment from Rēzekne (where it was moved after the unsuccessful battles near Jelgava) and the 'Soviet Latvia' armoured train was sent to the aid of the Švenčionys Group. On 7 May, the Poles surrounded the 18th Latvian Riflemen's Regiment, and defeated it. In order to save the situation, the powerful 8th and 9th Tver Rifle Regiments from Riga were also sent to help. They were followed by the 17th Latvian Rifle Regiment.⁶¹ However, even the involvement of such large forces did not halt the advance of the enemy (the 1st Infantry Brigade of the Polish Legion 1st Division with the 5th and 6th Legionary Regiments, and the Poznan Battalion, a total of five infantry battalions, with one and a half artillery batteries).⁶² On 14 May, the Poles occupied Švenčionys, but on the next day the two companies of the 5th Legionary Regiment took Ignalina in a surprise raid. On the same day, the ASL leadership summoned the 6th Latvian Riflemen's Regiment from northern Latvia (the Alūksne area) to Daugavpils.⁶³

On 18 May, units of the Lithuanian army opened an attack on the ASL's Panevėžys Group and the Lithuanian Soviet Division. The next day, the Lithuanians managed to take Panevėžys. The attack was also supported by four Lithuanian planes that fired at the retreating enemy and at the last train leaving the town with stolen goods. The train crashed seven kilometres from Panevėžys, due to either the rails being damaged by Lithuanian guerrillas or a successful air attack.⁶⁴ The Bolsheviks fled from Panevėžys. In order to save the situation, the 6th Regiment (1,425 people and ten machine-guns) were sent from Daugavpils, not to Ignalina against the Poles, but to Panevėžys against the Lithuanians.⁶⁵ It was a comparatively strong and experienced regiment, so that by moving along the railway line, it managed to retake Panevėžys on 21 May. Regaining the town was the last successful operation by the ASL in its history.

On 22 May 1919, an attack on anti-Bolshevik forces began near Riga. The Bolsheviks left the Latvian capital the same day. The Kurzeme front had collapsed, and the ASL units in Vidzeme also withdrew. On the way to Latgale, about 60% of the ASL's soldiers deserted. In these circumstances, it was not possible to continue fighting

⁶⁰ STRAUSS, Wilis. *Padomju Latvija un starptautiskā kontrrevolūcija*. Maskavā, 1931, 79. lpp.

⁶¹ BĒRZIŅŠ, V. Op. cit., 179. lpp.

⁶² STRAUSS, W. Op. cit., 101. lpp.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 101. lpp.; BĒRZIŅŠ, V. Op. cit., 181. lpp.

⁶⁴ PENIŅIS, M. *Latvijas armijas sākums...*, 145. lpp.

⁶⁵ BĒRZIŅŠ, V. Op. cit., 184. lpp.

in Lithuania, and the Panevėžys Group and the Lithuanian Division, as well as the Švenčionys Group, withdrew to Daugavpils.⁶⁶ On 24 May, the Lithuanian army decided to attack Panevėžys again, but there was no enemy there: the Bolsheviks had hastily withdrawn to the east.

On 7 June 1919, Jukums Vācietis, the commander-in-chief of the Russian armed forces, ordered the Western Front to reorganise the Army of Soviet Latvia into the 15th Army. The army command was also changed. At that time, the ASL controlled only a small area of Lithuania around Zarasai near Daugavpils. In the second half of June, the former 2nd Soviet Latvian Rifle Division was disbanded, including its regiments in the 1st Latvian Division. Several former regiments of the International Division were incorporated into other units of the Red Army: the 12th and 17th Rifle Regiments into the 4th Rifle Division, and the 13th Regiment into the 2nd Brigade of the 11th Riflemen's Division.⁶⁷ Thus, the history of the ASL and its exploits in Lithuania ended.

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Conclusions

Looking back at the battles in Lithuania in the first half of 1919, it can be concluded that their course was determined to a large extent by the low combat capability, lack of discipline and reluctance to fight of the International Division, the Pskov Division, and other Russian units. The Soviet side could also not count on the support of the local people. Soviet units formed from Lithuanians were small, and even less combat-ready than the Russian regiments.

The campaign in Lithuania turned out to be fatal for the ASL. The battles against the Germans, the Lithuanian national units and the Poles exhausted all the reserves of the ASL, which were much needed for the fighting in Latvia. The catastrophe of 22 May 1919, when the front collapsed and Riga fell in one day, was largely due to the fact that the ASL no longer had any combat-ready reserves available for fighting. They were all sent to Daugavpils and Lithuania. Therefore, one could argue that the fighting in northern Lithuania was much more important in the Red Army's Baltic campaign than it was perceived to be before.

⁶⁶ On 3 June 1919, the Panevėžys Group had 3,314 bayonets, 277 sabres, 91 machine guns and 21 cannons; in the Lithuanian Division – 2,588 bayonets, 270 sabres, 97 machine guns and 6 cannons; in the Švenčionys Group – 2,457 bayonets, 60 sabres, 32 machine guns and 9 cannons: Оценка численности Армии Советской Латвии, 3 июня 1919 г. РГВА, ф. 200, оп. 8, д. 34, л. 43.

⁶⁷ ŠILIŅŠ, J. *Padomju Latvija...*, 211. lpp.; Выписка из приказа 15-й армии, 30 июня 1919 г. LVA, PA-45 f., 2. apr., 35. l., 54., 55. lp.

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RAUDONOJI ARMĪJA ŠIAURĒS LIETUVOJE 1919 METŪ PIRMOJOJE PUSĒJĒ

43

Jānis Šiliņš

Santrauka

Praējus diviem dienoms po to, kai 1918 m. lapkričio 11 d. buvo pasirašytos Pirmąjį pasaulinį karą formaliai užbaigusios Kompjeno paliaubos, Tarybų Rusija anuliavo su Vokietija sudarytą Brest Litovsko taikos sutartį. Tų pačių metų gruodžio 9 d., po derybų su vietine vokiečių kareivių taryba (*Soldatenrat*), Raudonosios armijos Pskovo šaulių divizija ižygiavo į Daugpilį. Iš ten ji pasuko į Lietuvą ir žygiavo Kauno kryptimi. Tuo metu Raudonoji armija telkė pajėgas Rygai užimti. Visi jos daliniai, kovoję būsimosios Latvijos teritorijoje, buvo sujungti į Latvijos armijos grupę. Kitą dieną po Rygos užėmimo, 1919 m. sausio 4 d., jos pagrindu buvo sukurta Tarybų Latvijos kariuomenė (TLK).

Siekiant užpildyti tarp raudonųjų pajėgų (TLK ir Vakarų armijos su Pskovo divizija jos dešiniąjame flange) susidariusį tarpą, į Daugpilį buvo pasiųsta Tarptautinė šaulių divizija – pradėta formuoti Maskvoje 1918 m. lapkričio mėn. iš ten mobilizuotų darbininkų, tačiau prastai motyvuotų ir ekipuotų. Gruodžio 12–14 d. ji buvo išsiųsta į frontą netgi nespėjus baigti formuoti užnugario institucijų. Sausio pradžioje atvykusi į perkėlimo vietą, Daugpilyje ji tapo pavaldi TLK ir gavo užduotį pulti Šiaurės Lietuvoje siekiant susijungti su Vakarų armija. Ši divizija suformavo vadinamąją Panevėžio grupę, turėjusią pulti Panevėžio ir Šaulių kryptimi, o sėkmės atveju veržtis tolyn į Rytų Prūsiją, šitaip atkertant vokiečių pajėgas Kurlandijoje nuo Rytų Prūsijos. Pradėję veiksmus Šiaurės Lietuvoje, kariai beveik iškart pradėjo atiminėti iš civilių maistą, kurio jiems labai trūko, ir ėmėsi kitų civilius piktinusių veiksmų. Nepaisant to, bent iš pradžių ne visur šios pajėgos buvo pasitiktos be entuziazmo, pvz., Raudonajai armijai pasiekus Šiaulius, iš vietinių bolševikų ir jų rėmėjų buvo sukurtas Žemaičių pulkas. Tačiau TLK aiškiai diskriminavo Tarptautinę šaulių diviziją, teikdama prioritetą Latvijos teritorijoje kariavusių dalių aprūpinimui. Todėl Lietuvoje kariavę daliniai didžiąja dalimi turėjo rūpintis savimi patys. Tai didino karių demotyvaciją ir reiškė dar didesnes rekvizicijas iš vietinių bei pastarųjų priešišką nusiteikimą bolševikų atžvilgiu.

Kartu su Tarptautine šaulių divizija Šiaurės Lietuvoje nuo 1919 m. sausio mėn. vidurio veikė kai kurie raudonieji Latvių šaulių divizijos junginiai. Sėkmingam visų šių pajėgų operacijų vykdymui didžiulę reikšmę turėjo geležinkelio Ryga–Jelgava–Mažeikiai–Liepoja linija.

Jau 1919 m. sausio mėn. daugiausia dėl nesėkmingų karinių veiksmų Estijoje TLK turėjo pasitraukti iš Valkos, dėl to nutrūko geležinkelio transportas tarp Rygos ir Pskovo. Šiaurės Lietuvoje ir Kurlandijoje raudonieji susidūrė su pasipriešinimu ir pirmaisiais vokiečių savanorių korpusų daliniais. Kovo 3 d. antibolševikinės jėgos pradėjo puolimą. Pakitus padėčiai, TLK turėjo pereiti iš puolimo į gynybą, bet Šiaurės Lietuvos strateginė svarba dėl to dar labiau išaugo. Nuo sėkmingos raudoniesiems karo veiksmų eigos Šiaurės Lietuvoje priklausė pagrindinės TLK tiekimo bazės Daugpilyje saugumas. Ten buvo dislokuotas TLK štabas, kariniai sandėliai, rezervo daliniai, galop tai buvo svarbus transporto mazgas, siejantis Rygą su Tarybų Rusija. TLK neturėjo daug išteklių frontui stabilizuoti, susidūrė su masiniu dezertyravimu ir baiminosi vokiečių dalinių prasiveržimo Jelgavos link. Nors kovo mėn. jai kuriam laikui pavyko sustiprinti Panevėžio grupę, galiausiai TLK turėjo mesti visas jėgas Daugpiliui ginti ir į savo operacinę kontrolę perimti taip pat ir Lietuvių (buv. Pskovo) diviziją. Gegužės mėnesį tuo metu jau ir rezervų stokojusiai kariuomenei naują iššūkį metė poreikis ginti Daugpilį nuo iš pietų priartėjusios Lenkijos kariuomenės.

1919 m. gegužės 22 d. antibolševikinės jėgos pradėjo puolimą prie Rygos. Kuršo (Kurlandijos, Kurzemės) frontas suiro, o TLK daliniai pasitraukė ir iš buvusios Liflandijos gubernijos (Vidzemės) teritorijos. Pakeliui į Latgalą (buvusią Vitebsko gubernijos teritoriją Latvijoje) dezertyravo apie 60 proc. TLK pajėgų. Tokiomis aplinkybėmis tęsti mūšių Šiaurės Lietuvoje buvo neįmanoma, tad Raudonosios armijos daliniai iš ten pasitraukė į Daugpilį. 1919 m. birželio 7 d. Raudonosios armijos vyriausiasis vadas Joakimas Vacietis (Jukums Vācietis) įsakė Vakarų frontui reorganizuoti Tarybų Latvijos kariuomenę į XV armiją. Iš tiesų tuo metu TLK tebekontroliavo tik labai nedidelį plotą Lietuvoje, Zarasų prieigose, prie Daugpilio.

Vertinant mūšius, 1919 m. pirmojoje pusėje vykusius būsimoje Lietuvos teritorijoje, akivaizdu, kad jų baigčiai didelę įtaką turėjo Tarptautinės divizijos, Pskovo divizijos ir kitų Tarybų Rusijos junginių menkas karinis pajėgumas, disciplinos stoka ir nenoras kautis. Raudonieji negalėjo kliautis didele vietinių gyventojų parama, o iš lietuvių sukurti daliniai buvo nedideli ir net dar mažiau pajėgūs kautis nei Rusijoje suformuoti pulkai. Kampanija Lietuvoje TLK buvo lemiama. Mūšiai su vokiečiais, Lietuvos Respublikos daliniais ir lenkais išsekino visus TLK rezervus, kurių jai labai reikėjo mūšiams Latvijoje. 1919 m. gegužės 22 d. katastrofą, kai Ryga krito per vieną dieną, didele dalimi lėmė tai, kad TLK nebeturėjo kautis pasirengusių rezervų: dauguma jų buvo jau išnaudota siunčiant į Daugpilį ar Lietuvą. Todėl galima teigti, kad kovos Šiaurės Lietuvoje turėjo daug didesnę įtaką visai Raudonosios armijos kampanijos prie Baltijos eigai, nei manyta iki šiol.