

# THE ROLE OF THE GERMAN ARMED FORCES IN THE FINNISH WAR OF INDEPENDENCE IN 1918

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## ABSTRACT

The Grand Duchy of Finland was the first region to declare independence from the Russian Empire in the final stages of the First World War. However, the declaration of independence in December 1917 was insufficient, and Finland fought a war of independence until the country's sovereignty and its democratic political system were finally secured. The fiercest phase of the war was in the spring of 1918. The main parties were, on one hand, the Finnish left, which received support from the Russian Bolsheviks, and on the other hand, the non-socialist groups supported by Germany. The German armed forces played a significant role in the fact that the war ended with the victory of the Finnish democratic government. Previous research has investigated thoroughly the details of the military operations by the German forces, but the role and importance of the German armed forces in the overall picture of the war has received relatively little attention. This article analyses in more detail what kind of contribution the German troops made. There are indications that their importance was greater than most scholars have estimated.

**KEYWORDS:** First World War, Finnish war of independence, Russian Civil War, Ostsee-Division.

## ANOTACIJA

Finlandijos (Suomijos) Didžioji Kunigaikštystė buvo pirmasis regionas, paskutiniu Pirmojo pasaulinio karo etapu paskelbęs nepriklausomybę nuo Rusijos imperijos. Tačiau 1917 m. gruodžio Nepriklausomybės deklaracijos nepakako, ir, kol šalies suverenitetas ir demokratinė politinė sistema galiausiai buvo užtikrinti, Suomija turėjo kovoti Nepriklausomybės karą. Aršiausias karo etapas vyko 1918 m. pavasarį. Pagrindinės šalys buvo Suomijos kairieji, kurie sulaukė paramos iš Rusijos bolševikų, vienoje pusėje ir Vokietijos remiamos nesocialistinės grupės kitoje pusėje. Vokietijos ginkluotosios pajėgos svariai prisidėjo prie to, kad karas baigtųsi Suomijos demokratinės vyriausybės pergale. Ankstesni tyrimai jau išsamiai nagrinėjo karių operacijų, kuriose dalyvavo Vokietijos pajėgos, detales, tačiau Vokietijos ginkluotųjų pajėgų vaidmeniui ir svarbai bendrame karo kontekste jie skyrė palyginti nedaug dėmesio. Šiame straipsnyje Vokietijos kariuomenės įnašas analizuojamas išsamiau. Esama požymių, kad jos reikšmė buvo didesnė, nei dauguma tyrinėtojų vertino iki šiol.

**PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI:** Pirmasis pasaulinis karas, Suomijos karas dėl nepriklausomybės, Rusijos pilietinis karas, Baltijos jūros divizija.

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## Introduction

Like the conference presentation on which it is based, this article aims to give an international readership a condensed overview of the role of the German armed forces in the Finnish War of Independence in 1918. While it summarises the actual military operations carried out by the German forces, the main focus is on assessing the importance of the German forces on a tactical, operational and strategic level, especially regarding operational and strategic questions, bringing new perspectives that have not been discussed before or have only received superficial attention.

This is a review-type article, mainly based on previously published research literature (books and articles). In addition to literature, archival materials are also used to some extent to paint a clearer picture. In these cases, the central source materials are entities related to the activities of the German forces stored in the National Archives of Finland, and memoirs of German commanders. Whenever necessary, the article mentions the possibly differing information and interpretations of previous researchers. It is evident that the descriptions of the role of the German armed forces in the Finnish War of Independence have changed over time. The methodological basis of the article is historical source criticism, or, more precisely, close reading which emphasises contextualisation. Moreover, aspects related to mental images are applied.

The course of actual war events has been thoroughly investigated in previous studies. As a matter of fact, the first relevant studies appeared in the period between the world wars.<sup>1</sup> The picture has been completed in terms of details since the Second World War.<sup>2</sup> Since the 1950s, the main object of researchers' interest has been the political relations between Germany and Finland in 1918, and military issues have only been discussed in relation to them. The presence of the German armed forces in Finland in 1918 was naturally linked to what was otherwise agreed between the Finnish and German governments regarding the countries' bilateral relations.<sup>3</sup> In summary, it can be stated that researchers have disagreed about how closely Finland became tied to German control and guidance, and how 'successful' or 'unsuccessful' the actions of the Finnish government in that sense were in 1918.

<sup>1</sup> *Suomen vapaussota. VII: Saksan joukkojen toiminta Etelä-Suomessa*. Toim. Kai DONNER, T. SVEDLIN, Heikki NURMIO. Jyväskylä, 1922; IGNATIUS, Hannes et al. *Suomen vapaussota vuonna 1918*. VI. Helsinki, 1925; WEGELIUS, K. A. *Suomen leijona ja Saksan kotka. Aseveljeyden historiaa 1914–1918*. Porvoo, 1938; *Ensimmäiset aseveljemme. Saksalaiset Suomen vapaussodassa 1918*. Toim. Kauko REKOLA. Tampere, 1943 (a compilation containing memoirs of high-ranking German officers who served in Finland in 1918).

<sup>2</sup> ARIMO, R. *Saksalaisten sotilaallinen toiminta Suomessa 1918*. Rovaniemi, 1991; AHTO, Sampo. *Saksalaisten sotatoimet Suomessa*. In *Itsenäistymisen vuodet 1917–1920. Osa 2: Taistelu vallasta*. Toim. Ohto MANNINEN. Helsinki 1993, p. 355–410; HOPPU, Tuomas. *Vallatkaa Helsinki. Saksan hyökkäys punaiseen pääkaupunkiin 1918*. Helsinki, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> NURMIO, Yrjö. *Suomen itsenäistyminen ja Saksa*. Porvoo, 1957; HENTILÄ, Marjalliisa; HENTILÄ, Seppo. *Saksalainen Suomi 1918*. Helsinki, 2016; VARES, Vesa. *Viileää veljeyttä. Suomi ja Saksa 1918–1939*. Helsinki, 2018; PERKO, Touko. *Haastaja Saksasta 1918: von der Goltz ja Mannerheim*. Jyväskylä, 2018.

## The background: the fight against Russification and the beginning of secret cooperation with Germany before 1918

In order to understand the events of 1918, it is also necessary to create a brief overview of the preceding events. They explain why German armed forces were fighting on Finnish soil in the first place. Based on the general development of the First World War, that would not necessarily have been the case, as the eastern front between Germany and Russia did not actually extend into the territory of Finland. The activities of the Germans in Finland were more related to the Russian civil war, and Finland was one of the first areas where the general situation of the civil war between the radical left-wing revolutionary movement and the opposing forces escalated into a full-scale war. The Finnish War of Independence, the war of freedom, the civil war, or the rebellion (the war has many names in Finland, depending on the point of view and political emphasis) was, on one hand, a local armed struggle for power; on the other hand, it was a concrete reflection of the social causes that caused similar phenomena throughout Eastern Europe in the years 1918 to 1920, including Germany.<sup>4</sup>

The course of developments that led to the events of 1918 has clear roots in the previous 20 years. In 1809, Russia took Finland from Sweden and formed the Grand Duchy of Finland, which enjoyed fairly extensive autonomy. The Finns were quite satisfied with their 'semi-independent' status until the turn of the century, when the situation changed due to the Russification policy initiated by Russia. The purpose of the radical measures that began in 1899 was to abolish autonomy and assimilate the Finns with the Russians. The change divided Finns into two camps: some tried to adapt and strive for amicable solutions with the Russian authorities; others clearly opposed. The backlash of the latter was a large-scale passive resistance that was also accompanied by some active forms, such as the assassination of Russian Governor-General Nikolai Bobrikov in 1904. The 1905 revolution in Russia temporarily eased the situation for the Finns, but from 1910 onwards, the Russification policy accelerated again.<sup>5</sup>

Russia announced a new large-scale Russification programme in the autumn of 1914, the goal of which was the destruction of Finnish national culture. At this point in history, Finnish national activists concluded that the difficulties for Russia caused by the war had to be used to separate Finland from the Russian Empire. As foreign support for the independence movement was essential, Finnish activists first turned to Sweden with the aim of young Finnish men receiving military training there to lead a possible uprising. This was important because Finns had been exempted from

<sup>4</sup> HAAPALA, Pertti. Sota ja sen nimet. In *Sisällissodan pikkujättiläinen*. Toim. Pertti HAAPALA, Tuomas HOPPU. Helsinki, 2009, p. 10–17.

<sup>5</sup> MEINANDER, Henrik. *A History of Finland*. Oxford, 2013, pp. 117–120.

conscription in 1905 as a result of the large-scale national resistance movement; no Finns served in the Russian army during the Great War, except for a few hundred volunteers and professional soldiers. However, Sweden refused to offer this help to the Finns.<sup>6</sup>

After Sweden's refusal, the Finnish activists turned to the German government, where the reception was more positive. Military training for Finnish volunteers commenced in Germany at the beginning of 1915, which was a secret operation called the Jäger Movement. A separate unit (Königlich Preussisches Jägerbataillon Nr. 27) was formed in August 1915 from nearly 2,000 men who had travelled to Germany. As part of the military training, the battalion also acquired front-line experience in the Latvian area between 1916 and 1917. The main body of the Jägers returned to Finland in February 1918 when the Finnish Civil War had just started. The Jägers formed the core of the officers and non-commissioned officers of the Finnish army during the War of Independence. Researchers agree that, thanks to the skills of the Jägers, leadership in the Finnish army was significantly better in the Red Guards, which greatly impacted the outcome of the war.<sup>7</sup> The military training provided by Germany was thus an essential part of the role of the German armed forces in the Finnish War of Independence.

Throughout 1917, Finland inevitably participated in the process of dismantling the Russian Empire. All major political factions in Finland saw the full national sovereignty of Finland as their goal in the autumn of 1917, but views on how to achieve this were not completely unified. An even bigger difference concerned the direction of the development of Finland's internal politics; as elsewhere in the territory of the Russian Empire, and in Europe in general, the main dividing line was between socialist and non-socialist parties. Both sides started to establish armed guards to fill the power vacuum created by the collapse of the Russian state apparatus. At the same time, the armed guards (in Finland, the Red Guards on the left, and the Defence Corps on the right) functioned as a force that could promote the political goals of one's own side.<sup>8</sup>

The Bolshevik coup in Russia at the beginning of November 1917 gave a decisive impetus to Finland, which was also drifting into civil war. The left had long been frustrated that the realisation of socialist ideals through the parliamentary system seemed slow and uncertain. The Bolshevik takeover in St Petersburg set an example for everyone who considered the possibility of an armed revolution, and the

<sup>6</sup> HOPPU, Tuomas. Suomi ja ensimmäinen maailmansota. In *Sisällissodan pikkujättiläinen*. Toim. Pertti HAAPALA, Tuomas HOPPU. Helsinki, 2009, p. 32–42.

<sup>7</sup> LACKMAN, Matti. Jääkäriiliike. In *Sisällissodan pikkujättiläinen*. Toim. Pertti HAAPALA, Tuomas HOPPU. Helsinki, 2009, p. 48–57; PERKO, T. Op. cit., p. 297–298.

<sup>8</sup> VAHTOLA, Jouko. *Suomen historia. Jääkaudesta Euroopan unioniin*. Helsinki, 2003, p. 258.

Bolshevik government also promised to support its comrades in Finland and elsewhere in the border areas of the empire. The Finnish Social Democratic Party started an armed coup at the end of January 1918. On the same day, the Finnish democratic government, and the Defence Corps, which supported it, began to disarm the Russian troops that were still in Finland and were under the influence of the Bolsheviks, and to fight against the left's Red Guards.<sup>9</sup> Over the next three months, a full-scale civil war took place in Finland.

The cooperation between the Finnish independence movement and the German government between 1915 and 1917 formed a natural basis for cooperation between Finland and Germany in 1918 as well. Finland had declared its independence in December 1917, and at the turn of the year, Finland received official recognition of its independence from Soviet Russia and several European countries, such as France, Germany and Sweden. Nevertheless, Soviet Russia supported the Finnish Reds in the fight against the Finnish democratic government by sending a considerable amount of military aid. In addition, 5,000 to 10,000 Russians (the exact number is not known) participated in the battles among the ranks of the Finnish Red Guards, or by acting as military trainers.<sup>10</sup>

The Finnish Red government and its troops managed to take control of most of southern Finland at the beginning of the war, and the situation looked critical from the perspective of the Finnish democratic government. In mid-February 1918, the Finnish government turned to Germany and proposed that 'in the name of the Finnish people and state, the legal government of Finland requests [...] urgent and powerful help from the mighty German Empire.'<sup>11</sup> In practice, it would only be possible if Germany sent its armed forces to Finland. Germany responded affirmatively to the request about a week later and began military preparations to carry out the operation. Finland's request for help fitted perfectly into Germany's broader strategic plans, which also covered the Baltic region and Ukraine. Germany's goal in the spring of 1918 was to form a zone of buffer states against Russia and connect these countries to support the German war economy. At the same time, the main part of the German troops on the Eastern Front could be transferred to the Western Front and strive to end the war victoriously against the Western Powers.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> MEINANDER, H. Op. cit., pp. 125–126.

<sup>10</sup> MANNINEN, Ohto. Sodanjohto ja strategia. In *Itsenäistymisen vuodet 1917–1920. Osa 2: Taistelu vallasta*. Toim. Ohto MANNINEN. Helsinki, 1993, p. 73; MEINANDER, H. Op. cit., p. 127.

<sup>11</sup> HENTILÄ, M.; HENTILÄ, S. Op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>12</sup> PERKO, T. Op. cit., p. 46.

## The formation of the German auxiliary expedition and its first mission: saving Åland for Finland

The German forces sent to Finland consisted of four separate parts. For the navy, a separate naval division (*Sonderverband Ostsee*) was formed, headed by Rear Admiral Hugo Meurer. In its core were two battleships, and in total, the division consisted of about 30 smaller ships. The most important task of the *Sonderverband* was the transport of German troops to Finland, as well as supporting the ground forces in landing operations and in battles near the coast.<sup>13</sup>

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In this context, it is important to note that the German navy had significant special missions in Finland even before the formation of the German expedition in the spring of 1918. Germany also supplied a significant number of weapons and ammunition to the Finnish independence movement prior to Finland's official independence. Between October and December 1917, the arms aid included, among other equipment, almost 30,000 rifles and 100 machine guns, plenty of cartridges, and explosives. In February 1918, Germany sent an additional 70,000 rifles, 70 machine guns, millions of cartridges, and 20 cannons that were bought by the Finnish democratic government. It was a truly significant help, as these amounts sufficiently equipped the entire Finnish army. The German troops distributed some of the weapons centrally to the Finnish government and some to the Finns as they occupied the territories. In the conquered areas, thousands of volunteers signed up for the ranks of the Defence Corps, and they immediately received the necessary equipment from the Germans.<sup>14</sup>

The latest studies have generally ignored Germany's substantial arms aid to Finland. Contrary to this, the matter was considered important in works published in the interwar period, when German-Finnish cooperation was regularly remembered and celebrated. Lauerma's work from 1966 was the last to discuss the issue in detail, which is based on a brief summary of Arimo's work in 1991.<sup>15</sup> The omission of material support, however important, can be considered one reflection of the research focus shifting to the political relations between Finland and Germany, instead of assessing the military side of the issue.

The second part of the German forces was the separate *Jäger Battalion Nr. 14*, with a strength of about 1,000 troops, which served as a type of advance unit before the main forces arrived in Finland. Its task was to secure the Åland Islands, and

<sup>13</sup> Belegung der Schiffe der Transportflotte durch die Ostsee-Division. Bestimmungen über die Abbeförderung der Ostseedivision nach Finnland, 1.3.1918. *Kansallisarkisto* (Finnish National Archives, hereafter KA), Ostsee-Division (hereafter OD), K2.

<sup>14</sup> WEGELIUS, K. Op. cit., p. 393. Original documents (from 1917), cited p. 278–345.

<sup>15</sup> IGNATIUS, H. et al. Op. cit. I. Helsinki, 1921, p. 284–289; *Suomen vapaussota...*, p. 46–47; WEGELIUS, K. Op. cit., p. 393–395; LAUERMA, Matti. *Kuninkaallinen Preussin Jääkäripataljoona 27: vaiheet ja vaikutus*. Porvoo, 1966, p. 754–791, 800–833; ARIMO, R. Op. cit., p. 16–18.

subsequently create favourable conditions for further operations. The battalion prepared for the mission in the last week of February, and the naval transport to Finland began from Kiel on 27 February 1918.<sup>16</sup>

The third, and at the same time clearly the largest, part was *Die Ostsee-Division*, which was formed in Danzig at the end of February specifically for this purpose from units detached from the German Eastern Front. Its composition differed from that of a normal German infantry division, as the *Ostsee-Division* was supposed to operate much more independently than those divisions that were in close proximity to the higher command of the supporting army organisation. The strength of the *Ostsee-Division* was about 10,000 troops, and its commander was Major General Count Rüdiger von der Goltz. After *Jäger Battalion Nr. 14* had completed its mission in the Åland Islands, it was attached to the *Ostsee-Division*.<sup>17</sup>

The fourth part, *Detachment Brandenstein*, also called *Brigade Brandenstein*, was established in Tallinn at the end of March. Its structure was also unique, because it was constructed as precisely as possible for the operation that awaited the *Detachment* in Finland. The task of the brigade was to make a landing on the southern coast of Finland, and thus support the battle of the *Ostsee-Division*. The strength of the brigade was about 3,000 soldiers, and its commander was Colonel Otto von Brandenstein. This brigade was later incorporated into the *Ostsee-Division* as well.<sup>18</sup>

The first operation of the German forces was the seizure of the Åland Islands, which took place on 6 March. The islands were of strategic importance because it was possible to control the northern Baltic Sea from them, although the situation at the beginning of 1918 was complicated. During the first two weeks of the Finnish War of Independence, at the end of January and the beginning of February, the Defence Corps of the Finnish democratic government had surrounded the relatively small Russian forces on the islands (about 2,000 soldiers). However, the Russians continued to resist, and the Finnish Reds arrived to help them. Thus, the situation was not yet resolved, even though the Defence Corps had conducted their operations rather successfully. At the same time, it was significant that Sweden was interested in the islands, because about 98% of the inhabitants of the area spoke Swedish. The inhabitants had also expressed their will in an unofficial referendum that they wanted the islands to be annexed by the Kingdom of Sweden.<sup>19</sup> Having the islands in Sweden's possession would also have strengthened Stockholm's defence from external threats coming via the sea; after all, the distance was only a few dozen kilometres.

<sup>16</sup> Auszug aus dem Entwurfe zu einer Bataillongeschichte nach den Akten, Jäger-Bataillon Nr. 14, [no date]. KA, OD, K33.

<sup>17</sup> Ostsee-Division. Kriegstagebuch des Stabes, 28.2.–31.3.1918. KA, OD, K1.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> ARIMO, R. Op. cit., p. 24.

Sweden decided to take advantage of the confused situation and sent a naval detachment to Åland, which carried out a landing on 15 February. The Russians had no desire to fight the Swedish forces, and they either surrendered or withdrew from Åland with the Finnish Reds. The Swedes also managed to convince the Defence Corps to leave the islands by making them believe that the commander-in-chief of the Finnish army, General Mannerheim, had ordered the Finnish troops to move to other parts of Finland. As communications were cut, the Defence Corps was unable to verify the matter, but believed the assurances of the Swedes. A diplomatic scandal arose from this hoax. The Finnish government issued a strong objection to the Swedish government, explaining that the Swedish troops had arrived in Åland only to protect the local inhabitants, and Sweden had no intention of occupying the area permanently.<sup>20</sup>

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It was not possible for the Finnish government to expel the Swedish troops from Åland. Finland did not have a sufficient naval department or army units available, as all the forces were needed for the fight against the Reds. Before anything else, the Finnish government also had no desire to sever its relations with Sweden, from which it was rather hoping for an alliance and help in the fight to secure Finland's independence and democratic political system.<sup>21</sup> However, Finland was in danger of losing Åland because it did not have the means to defend itself against Sweden's ambitions and the de facto occupation of the islands by Swedish forces.

The role of Germany and its forces proved to be strategically crucial in solving this dilemma. Germany informed Sweden that it intended to take over the islands in order to effectively help Finland in the fight against Bolshevism and hoped that it would happen in agreement with Sweden. Sweden did not consider itself able to oppose Germany on this issue, and the landing of German troops on Åland on 6 March took place without military incident.<sup>22</sup> The last Swedish units withdrew from Åland in May 1918, when the civil war in Finland had ended. It was then no longer possible for Sweden to justify the presence of troops by appealing to its protection of the local population from the Bolsheviks. Germany, on the other hand, returned the islands to the control of the Finnish government. Sweden later appealed to the League of Nations to allow Sweden to annex Åland as part of the kingdom. However, the League of Nations finally resolved the matter in favour of Finland in 1921.<sup>23</sup>

It is impossible to know for sure whether the outcome would have been the same if Åland had been in the possession of Swedish troops from the spring of 1918. In

<sup>20</sup> AHTO, S. Op. cit., p. 358–362.

<sup>21</sup> PIETIÄINEN, Jukka-Pekka. Suomen ulkopoliitikan alku. In *Itsenäistymisen vuodet 1917–1920*. Osa 3: *Katsetulevaisuuteen*. Toim. Ohto MANNINEN. Helsinki, 1992, p. 424–426.

<sup>22</sup> Auszug aus dem Entwurfe zu einer Bataillongeschichte nach den Akten, Jäger-Bataillon Nr. 14, [no date]. KA, OD, K33.

<sup>23</sup> PIETIÄINEN, J. Op. cit., p. 431–434.



a Finnish military history work (Wegelius, 1938) published between the wars, it was estimated that the landing of German troops on Åland saved the area for Finland.<sup>24</sup> Works published after the Second World War have not taken a stand on this question. It may be that the changed geopolitical and bilateral situation has influenced the matter. Until the early 1930s, relations between Finland and Sweden were tense, largely because of the Åland issue, and because there were open contradictions in Finland's nationalist atmosphere between the Finnish-speaking majority and the Swedish-speaking minority. Back then, it was certainly easier in Finland to criticise Sweden's annexation policy as well. After the Second World War, the questions of the status of Åland and language issues in Finland have almost lost their importance, and the relations between Finland and Sweden have generally become very close.

Perhaps after the Second World War, Finnish historians have considered the Swedish military operation in Åland a passing curiosity and not a serious attempt to annex the region as part of Sweden. The attempt failed right from the start, when German troops took over Åland and Sweden had to withdraw its troops. With very good and close neighbourly relations prevailing during and after the Cold War, some researchers may have considered it inappropriate to raise the Åland incident as a subject of research. After all, the political solution to the matter through the League of Nations was decisive, and the consideration of the role of the German armed forces has perhaps understandably been overshadowed by it.

## German landings on the south coast create an operational and strategic turn

The operational starting point of the German expeditionary forces was clear: the whole of southern Finland was under the control of the Finnish socialist government, so the only way to move troops to Finland was by sea. A land connection to Finland could only have been created by continuing the war against Russia and advancing from Estonia via St Petersburg to southeast Finland. However, the recent Treaty of Brest-Litovsk prevented the continuation of hostilities, and in any case a ground operation would have required considerable resources. As is stated above, Germany's goal in the big picture was exactly the opposite: to conclude an armistice in the East and move all the troops released from there to the West. From Germany's point of view, it made the most sense to give aid to Finland only to the extent that the Finnish democratic government would emerge victorious from the war against the Finnish and Russian Reds.<sup>25</sup> The *Ostsee-Division* and its supporting smaller units,

<sup>24</sup> WEGELIUS, K. Op. cit., p. 411, 431.

<sup>25</sup> VARES, V., Op. cit., p. 32.

totalling about 14,000 troops, and the naval division necessary for transport and to control the northern part of the Baltic Sea, were a resource that Germany judged sufficient for this purpose.

Finnish studies have not evaluated the strategic-operational plans of the German armed forces and the military reasons behind them, so the logic of the operations below and in this article as a whole must be brought out mainly from the perspective of general strategic-operational skills. The most important source material is the memoirs of the German admirals Bastian and Meurer, and Colonel (later General) von Brandenstein.<sup>26</sup> However, Finnish researchers have described the course of the operations, even if the descriptions contain no strategic-operational analysis. The most detailed descriptions are included in works published in the 1930s, as well as works by Reino Arimo (1991) and Sampo Ahto (1993).<sup>27</sup> Arimo was a general, and Ahto was a colonel in the Finnish armed forces, which obviously explains the interest.

It was operationally sensible that Germany would not bring its troops to the Gulf of Bothnia, north of Åland, where the advantage would have been, in principle, that the troops could have landed peacefully in an area controlled by the Finnish democratic government and then formed a common front against the Reds. An even more effective operational move, however, was that the German forces would specifically attack the rear of the Reds by sea and force them to divide their forces into a two-front war. In addition, to enhance the effect of surprise, the Germans decided to make two separate landings instead of one, further complicating logistics for the Reds and the concentration of forces for an effective defence.<sup>28</sup> The forces of the Finnish democratic government would thus attack with all their strength from the north, and the Germans at the same time from the south.

The first landing carried out by the *Ostsee-Division* took place at Hanko on 3 April, 130 kilometres west of the capital Helsinki. The Reds retreated from the city without a fight in the face of German superiority, and formed the first line of defence only in Karjaa, 50 kilometres north of Hanko. At Karjaa, the first battle between German reconnaissance units and the Reds took place on 5 April. The previous two days had mostly been spent in bringing the entire German division ashore, after which the division was ready to continue advancing northeast towards Helsinki.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> MEURER, Hugo. Itämeren-erikoisryhmän osallistuminen Suomen vapaustaisteluun 1918. In *Ensimmäiset aseveljemme...*, p. 15–19; BASTIAN, H. Kaksikymmentäviisi vuotta sitten. In *Ensimmäiset aseveljemme...*, p. 20–29; BRANDENSTEIN, Otto von. Brandensteinin maihinnousuosasto Suomessa. In *Ensimmäiset aseveljemme...*, p. 40–47.

<sup>27</sup> *Suomen vapaussota...*, p. 11–16; WEGELIUS, K. Op. cit., p. 400–430; ARIMO, R., Op. cit., p. 24–76; AHTO, S. Op. cit., p. 355–410.

<sup>28</sup> MEURER, H., Op. cit., p. 17–19.

<sup>29</sup> ARIMO, R., Op. cit., p. 29–30; AHTO, S. Op. cit., p. 374–375.

The second landing took place on 7 April at Loviisa, 80 kilometres east of Helsinki. It was carried out by the *Brigade Brandenstein*. The operation came as a complete surprise to the local Reds, and they withdrew from the city the same day after suffering heavy losses. In the following days, the first landing units were content to secure a bridgehead position, but nevertheless fought small-scale battles against the Reds around Loviisa. All parts of the brigade were brought from Tallinn to Loviisa by 11 April, after which it began wider operations to expand the bridgehead and continue the advance north and east.<sup>30</sup>

Over the next few days, the brigade conducted reconnaissance attacks in both directions. In the east, the Germans encountered Red troops, which were clearly stronger than them in numbers, and the advance stopped at Ahvenkoski, just under 20 kilometres from Loviisa. The Germans set up defensive positions there to secure the eastern flank of the main attack, which headed north. In the north, the brigade quickly achieved considerable success. It advanced in three days (11 to 14 April) about 80 kilometres from Loviisa to the east of Lahti and cut the operationally important east-west railway line. The train line extended from Tampere, the most important support area of the Reds, via Lahti and Vyborg, to St Petersburg. It was thus a vital logistical route for the Reds, and at the same time the only rail link through which they had contact with the Russian Bolsheviks.<sup>31</sup>

Further west, the *Ostsee-Division* carried out an operation to capture Helsinki at the same time. German troops advancing northeast of Hanko reached the western parts of the capital on 11 April. From 6 to 11 April the Reds repeatedly tried to block the German attacks, but were only able to slow down the German advance. It took five days for the *Ostsee-Division* to cover more than 70 kilometres, which was quite fast progress.<sup>32</sup> Taking over a big city like Helsinki was a demanding operation, where one had to prepare for street battles and taking the city block by block. Conditions in the big city would favour the defenders if they had time to prepare. The leadership of the Reds had given their troops the order to delay the German advance as long and as effectively as possible, so that the Germans would be tied to this front and could not participate in the more important battles further north. However, the Reds only had around 2,000 armed soldiers at their disposal for the defence of Helsinki, and approximately the same number of different kinds of auxiliaries, who practically did not participate in the battles.<sup>33</sup> The *Ostsee-Division* thus had clear superiority in manpower and heavy weapons as well.

In order to save the city from extensive damage and to avoid potentially high losses, the Germans tried to force the defenders of Helsinki to surrender. Between 10 and

<sup>30</sup> BRANDENSTEIN, O., Op. cit., p. 40–42.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 42–43.

<sup>32</sup> Die Lage in Finnland, 8.4.1918. KA, OD, K2.

<sup>33</sup> HOPPU, T. *Vallatkaa Helsinki...*, p. 74–75.

11 April, negotiations took place between the Germans and the Reds, but they ended without results.<sup>34</sup> The actual German attack on Helsinki started in the morning of 12 April, and the entire city was captured by the evening of 13 April, after less than two days of fighting. The Germans took about 4,000 prisoners, and the Reds lost about 400 men who were killed in action, including a few dozen executed. The executed were Red Guard leaders who were brought by the Finns to be shot, as revenge for starting the rebellion and for the violence that the Reds had carried out in Helsinki during the previous weeks. A little over 50 Germans fell, and the losses of the Defence Corps units that supported them were more than 20 killed in action.<sup>35</sup> Thus, in a very short time, Helsinki was firmly in the hands of the German forces, and they held a spectacular victory parade in the city shortly afterwards on 14 April. German troops usually treated prisoners of war humanely and in accordance with international rules, which cannot be said about Finnish combatants on either side of the front. German soldiers also treated Finnish civilians kindly because it was emphasised to the Germans that they were not coming to Finland as conquerors, but at the request of the Finnish government and to help in the fight against the Bolsheviks.<sup>36</sup>

Already in these battles, which took place during the first two weeks of April, many things came to light that characterised the importance of the Germans in the Finnish War of Independence. On a strategic level, it can be stated that the arrival of the Germans in Finland was a significant turning point. The Reds were unprepared for the fact that large-scale landings would be made in their rear, which would result in a two-front war. Although Finnish studies do not assess the strategic importance of the operations in question, the works of Marjomaa and Ahto, who deal with the military resources and leadership of the Red Guards, support this conclusion. There were relatively few Red troops on the south coast, as their main force was needed in the Tampere area, where the largest single battle of the war took place. In general, the great majority of Red Guard forces were on the main front of the war 150 to 200 kilometres north of the shore of the Gulf of Finland, and they could not be moved from there to the south without weakening the lines in the north too much. Even Helsinki, which was symbolically important as the capital, was not defended by enough Reds due to the unanticipated German attack.<sup>37</sup>

At the operational level, the Germans demonstrated their ability by carrying out rapid offensive manoeuvres in which they advanced tens of kilometres in a few days. As a whole, the balance of power on the south coast was more or less equal, which in principle would have been an advantageous situation for the defenders. However, it was the quality, not numbers, that was decisive. Again, these are general operational considerations, which

<sup>34</sup> Kriegstagebuch des Stabes, 1.4.–30.4.1918. KA, OD, K1.

<sup>35</sup> HOPPU, T. *Vallatkaa Helsinki...*, p. 385.

<sup>36</sup> HENTILÄ, M.; HENTILÄ, S. Op. cit., p. 370–377.

<sup>37</sup> PERKO, T. Op. cit., p. 143; AHTO, S. Op. cit., p. 399–404.

Finnish studies do not address. In any case, it is a clear fact that the Finns on both sides of the front line were mainly armed civilians without military training. The leaders were also inexperienced and lacked the skills to plan and execute complex and large-scale operations.<sup>38</sup> Instead, the Germans had thorough military training and at least some previous experience on the Eastern Front in the First World War. All their military skills, as well as their discipline, were better than the Finns'. Operations that required the cooperation of different types of military branches (primarily infantry and artillery) were more successfully done by professional or semi-professional Germans than Finnish amateurs. The Germans also had more resources for maintenance and logistics, the importance of which was emphasised in the rapid advance.<sup>39</sup>

On a tactical level, the Reds often defended tenaciously, and on one hand their ability to withstand losses was relatively good. It even surprised the Germans to some extent in the first days of fighting because their Finnish contacts had underestimated the fighting will and skills of the Reds.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, the reputation of the Germans preceded them, and the Reds were aware that the great power's trained and experienced forces were a formidable opponent. In the negotiations prior to capturing Helsinki, for instance, there was initially strong support among ordinary Reds for the option to surrender, as it would be the most reasonable solution in the face of the Germans' quantitative and qualitative superiority. However, the leadership of the Red Guards managed to convince ordinary Red combatants that the opponents were not really Germans, but Finns dressed in German uniforms. It consequently turned their opinion, as the Reds decided to fight and believed that they would succeed in repelling the forces of the Defence Corps.<sup>41</sup>

During the early stages, battles were mainly short but fierce skirmishes, in which the attackers first suffered losses. After enduring these battles and losses, all aspects related to their general military skills began to affect the war immediately. The Germans managed to make flanking attacks and forced the defenders to withdraw out of fear of being surrounded. Despite the retreat of the Reds, the Germans generally succeeded in taking at least small numbers of prisoners. Furthermore, the Germans used their firepower more effectively. It usually resulted in the Red defenders retreating quickly, or the next day at the latest, after suffering multiple losses compared to the attackers.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>38</sup> MARJOMAA, Risto. *Maailmanvallankumouksen liepeillä. Vertaileva tutkimus Suomen sisällissodan kansainvälisistä ulottuvuuksista*. Helsinki, 2004, p. 33–35; PERKO, T. Op. cit., p. 143.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>40</sup> BASTIAN, H., Op. cit., p. 27; ARIMO, R. Op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>41</sup> HOPPU, Tuomas. Valkoisten voitto. In *Sisällissodan pikkujättiläinen*. Toim. Pertti HAAPALA, Tuomas HOPPU. Helsinki, 2009, p. 203; ARIMO, R. Op. cit., p. 55.

<sup>42</sup> ARIMO, R. Op. cit., p. 49–54; AHTO, S. Op. cit. p. 374–375, 402–408.

In Finnish military history literature, the professionalism of the German troops compared to the Finns has been brought out quite comprehensively. The differences between different authors are mainly in how much column space has been given to this matter or in what tone the matter has been stated. In all cases, it has been pointed out that the role of the German troops in the battles was greater than what could be concluded from the sheer numbers of troops. Ahto, Arimo, Hentilä and Hentilä, Marjomaa, Hoppu, and Roselius, agree on this main line.<sup>43</sup>

The military prowess of the Germans and their tactical and operational achievements have been presented in the most extensive and positive way in works published between the world wars or during the Second World War (Ignatius 1925; Wegelius 1938; Rekola 1943). Finnish-German cooperation during the War of Independence was seen from the clear perspective of a brotherhood-in-arms during that period, even though Finland and Germany were not very close politically before 1941.<sup>44</sup> However, the authors were activists who had fought alongside the Germans, or who otherwise had a very positive attitude towards the Finnish-German alliance in 1918. After the Second World War, open pro-Germanism was no longer in line with political trends, and the tone of the descriptions changed. Nevertheless, it was still possible to bring out the military facts in all the works that dealt with the role of the German forces from a practical military viewpoint.

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### The important role of the Germans in the encirclement and defeat of the main forces of the Reds in the latter half of April

The second half of April constitutes the latter phase of the German forces' operations in the Finnish War of Independence. The *Detachment Brandenstein* was directly attached to the *Ostsee-Division* on 16 April, so from then on, the coordination of operations was organisationally completely seamless.<sup>45</sup> The brigade commanded by Colonel Brandenstein was responsible for the eastern front of the German forces and the attack towards Lahti in the north as the main force of the joint operation. A small auxiliary force was sent from Helsinki to support Brandenstein's attack. German troops occupied Lahti between 19 and 20 April.<sup>46</sup> The main parts of the

<sup>43</sup> AHTO, S. Op. cit., p. 366, 392; ARIMO, R., Op. cit., p. 76; HENTILÄ, M.; HENTILÄ, S. Op. cit., p. 192–194; MARJOMAA, R. Op. cit., p. 38; HOPPU, T. *Vallatkaa Helsinki...*, p. 385–386; ROSELIUS, Aapo. *Sisällissodan rintamatappiot*. In *Sisällissodan pikkujättiläinen*. Toim. Pertti HAAPALA, Tuomas HOPPU. Helsinki, 2009, p. 210.

<sup>44</sup> IGNATIUS, H., et al., Op. cit., 183, 192, 200, 215; WEGELIUS, K. Op. cit., p. 416–431; *Ensimmäiset aseveljemme...*, p. 3–11.

<sup>45</sup> BRANDENSTEIN, O. Op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>46</sup> Vormarsch von Lovisa auf Lahti, bis 18.4., 1918. KA, OD, K18.

*Ostsee-Division* started the attack from Helsinki to the north on 19 April, and in three days advanced about 50 kilometres to Hyvinkää; and from there, another 60 kilometres to Hämeenlinna during the next three days. This town was also captured by the Germans within a few hours of the attack on 26 April.<sup>47</sup>

Until then, the overall picture of the fighting was similar to the beginning of April. The Germans advanced rapidly and quickly broke through the defence lines that the Reds tried to build, especially in small towns along the route. The balance of power was fairly even, and losses on both sides were relatively small, as local fighting usually ended soon after the Reds retreated. The losses of the Red Guards were again about three times higher than those of the German forces.<sup>48</sup>

Meanwhile, conditions changed on 26 April. The forces of the Finnish democratic government had managed to capture Tampere in the first week of April. The defeat was crushing for the Reds: they lost more than 1,000 soldiers who were killed in action, and 11,000 were captured. Losing the most important support area and the unofficial capital of socialist Finland was a heavy blow to the Reds on a more general level as well. With the forces of the Finnish democratic government pressing hard from the north, and the German forces advancing rapidly from the south at the same time, the main forces of the Reds were also threatened with being encircled by their adversaries' gigantic pincer movement. The leadership of the Reds decided that all forces had to be withdrawn east towards Vyborg, and that there should be an attempt to form a new front with the support of the Russian Bolsheviks.<sup>49</sup>

It meant that more than 20,000 Red combatants who were still between Tampere and Lahti, and at least the same number of civilian refugees, consisting of family members of Red Guard soldiers and other supporters of the Reds, tried to move east as quickly as possible. The only route ran along the main east-west railway line, and the Reds' main obstacle were the German troops who cut off the route. There were quite a few Defence Corps troops advancing from the north, especially south-east of Tampere at that stage.<sup>50</sup> When the Germans tried to stop this significantly larger and desperate retreating force, from 26 to 29 April it resulted in the most challenging and bloodiest days of the entire campaign for the Germans.

The biggest single battle took place at the village of Syrjäntaka between 28 and 29 April. The village was occupied by about 400 Germans, and they were attacked by about 5,000 Red fighters and thousands of civilian refugees. The Germans' defence broke down in the face of the tenfold superiority, and they lost around 50 men killed

<sup>47</sup> Ostsee-Division. Kriegs-Tagebuch des Stabes, 1.4.1918–30.4.1918. KA, OD, K2.

<sup>48</sup> HENTILÄ, M.; HENTILÄ, S. Op. cit., p. 166–167; AHTO, S. Op. cit., p. 402–409.

<sup>49</sup> HOPPU, Tuomas. Tampereen valtausoperaatio. In *Sisällissodan pikkujättiläinen*. Toim. Pertti HAAPALA, Tuomas HOPPU. Helsinki, 2009, p. 193–197; HOPPU, T. Valkoisten voitto..., p. 208.

<sup>50</sup> HOPPU, T. Valkoisten voitto..., p. 214–220.

in action and almost 100 wounded.<sup>51</sup> The losses of the Reds were at least 300 killed in action. The Red column was able to continue its retreat towards the east, but their escape ended in Lahti, where the Germans and Finns managed to stop and capture the remnants of the western front of the Red forces and the civilians who joined them. There were about 20,000 captured fighters.<sup>52</sup> The ferocity of the fighting is reflected in the fact that the total German losses from 26 to 29 April were a little over 100 killed in action and over 200 wounded. They were almost a third of all German losses during the entire campaign in Finland.<sup>53</sup>

The last, small-scale, battles in the war for the Germans took place in the early days of May to the east of Loviisa. The forces of the Finnish democratic government had already cut off the escape route towards Vyborg and St Petersburg for those who were near the coast of the Gulf of Finland, and the Germans' task was to prevent any possible attempts by the Reds to break out of the blockade in the west. The German navy, in turn, prevented the Reds from retreating by sea. In May, it was only a matter of minor skirmishes, in which there were hardly any losses. At this stage, both parties sought a negotiated solution, because the military situation of the Reds east of Loviisa was hopeless. The Reds in the Ahvenkoski area, barely 1,000 troops, surrendered to the Germans on 5 May, the last day of the war.<sup>54</sup>

The German losses in the Finnish War of Independence were about 360 dead in total. The losses of the Red units that fought against them were about 1,500 men, so the ratio was 4:1 in favour of the Germans. Considering that the attackers' losses were on average higher than the defenders', the situation can be considered very unusual. Moreover, it seems that almost all individual battles ended in victory for the Germans. There were only a couple of exceptions, and they were based on the fact that the numerical superiority of the Reds was at least five, or even tenfold. It can also be seen from the statistics that German units made up just under 15% of the troops that fought on the side of the Finnish democratic government, but they inflicted at least 25% of the Reds' casualties.<sup>55</sup> The key explanatory factor behind the success of the German forces is precisely their clearly better tactical and operational skills compared with their adversaries, and friendly forces as well.

The success at the tactical and operational levels also laid the foundations for the strategic role of the German forces to be considerable. All Finnish military historians agree that the Germans' operational and tactical superiority decided the battles in the Germans' favour and inflicted significant losses on the opponents. Indirectly, this

<sup>51</sup> Kriegstagebuch des 3. G. Ul. Reg., [28.4.–30.4.1918]. KA, OD, K6.

<sup>52</sup> HENTILÄ, M.; HENTILÄ, S. Op. cit., p. 167–169.

<sup>53</sup> ARIMO, R. Op. cit., p. 74.

<sup>54</sup> Ostsee-Division. Kriegs-Tagebuch des Stabes, 1.5.1918–31.7.1918. KA, OD, K3.

<sup>55</sup> ROSELIUS, A. Op. cit., p. 210; PERKO, T. Op. cit., p. 206.



military success indicates the Germans' essential importance in the course of the war.<sup>56</sup> Some have also expressed their views on how much German military aid, specifically the army and navy, affected the outcome of the war. The overall significance of the activities of the German armed forces' has slightly different interpretations, which are grouped below.

Tikka and Ahto's works are the most succinct. They state only briefly that German troops participating in the fighting made the situation difficult for the Reds, but do not give an overall assessment of the effect of German military aid.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, Arimo only states that German aid 'accelerated' the victory of the Finnish national army.<sup>58</sup> Arimo refers to a similar statement by Mannerheim, the commander-in-chief of the Finnish army; the background was Mannerheim's need to show that Finland achieved its independence and defeated the rebellion with its own forces. The researchers in this group may have wanted to emphasise the Finnish army's independent contribution, which inevitably means evaluating the role of the German armed forces as less important.

At the other end of the scale are researchers who wrote in the period between the wars and during the Second World War, whose strong pro-Germanism and desire to emphasise the brotherhood-in-arms between Finland and Germany was referred to above. It is clear that from such starting points, the importance of the German armed forces has been emphasised, and the aid has been interpreted as decisive.<sup>59</sup> Conversely, among researchers of the 21st century, those who have done the most background work to consider strategic and operational questions have emphasised the importance of German aid. Marjomaa has compared Finland to other European countries that fought wars of independence in the same period; from this broad comparative perspective, he considers the role of the German armed forces as decisive.<sup>60</sup> Perko's interpretation closely mirrors Marjomaa's.

Perko has considered these questions most thoroughly in his study published in 2018. He has analysed the reasons of different groups, in addition to researchers and political actors, for interpreting things in a way that is appropriate to their own group. For instance, immediately after the war, the Red side wanted to explain that they had not lost to the Finns, but that the German intervention had decided the

<sup>56</sup> IGNATIUS, H., et al., Op. cit., p. 215–217; WEGELIUS, K. Op. cit., p. 394–395; *Ensimmäiset aseveljemme...*, p. 3; AHTO, S. Op. cit., p. 366, 392; ARIMO, R., Op. cit., p. 76; HENTILÄ, M.; HENTILÄ, S. Op. cit., p. 192–194; MARJOMAA, R. Op. cit., p. 38; HOPPU, T. *Vallatkaa Helsinki...*, p. 385–386; ROSELIUS, A. Op. cit., p. 210.

<sup>57</sup> TIKKA, Marko. Suomen sisällissodan tapahtumat. In *Rikki revitty maa. Suomen sisällissodan kokemukset ja perintö*. Toim. Tuomas TEPORA, Aapo ROSELIUS. Helsinki, 2018, p. 97; AHTO, S. Op. cit., p. 383, 391.

<sup>58</sup> ARIMO, R., Op. cit., p. 76.

<sup>59</sup> IGNATIUS, H., et al., Op. cit., p. 215–217; WEGELIUS, K. Op. cit., p. 394–395; *Ensimmäiset aseveljemme...*, p. 3.

<sup>60</sup> MARJOMAA, R., Op. cit., p. 38.

war.<sup>61</sup> Nationalist parties have also wanted to interpret the matter so that ‘in the name of national honour’ the Germans should not be given a decisive role, but only an assistant role, a more or less effective one. Based on Perko’s in-depth analysis,<sup>62</sup> it seems likely that the strategic importance of the German forces was greater than what most researchers have indicated in their interpretations over time.

Finally, a few scholars have interpretations that lie between the groups presented above. Hoppu and Vares, as well as Hentilä and Hentilä, estimate that the German armed forces participating in the war significantly shortened its duration, but they do not directly take a position on what the outcome would have been without them.<sup>63</sup> Hoppu’s wording suggests he may lean towards Marjomaa and Perko’s interpretation. The researchers in this group may have relied on Hentilä and Hentilä’s perspective, according to which a definite answer cannot be obtained regarding whether the influence of the German armed forces was decisive concerning the outcome of the war. No empirical evidence exists for counterfactual interpretations, and we can only estimate probabilities.<sup>64</sup>

As a short epilogue, it can be mentioned that even though the war ended at the beginning of May 1918, the *Ostsee-Division* and German naval units remained in Finland, based on a mutual agreement between the two countries. As long as the Great War was going on, the troops of the German relief expedition were operating in Finland as troops of the northeast front line, and, if necessary, they were prepared to carry out operations to the east of Finland’s borders, especially in the direction of the Kola Peninsula, Arkhangelsk or St Petersburg. In the summer and autumn of 1918, the German troops also played a significant role in the development of the Finnish Defence Forces after the War of Independence ended.<sup>65</sup> When the First World War ended with the surrender of Germany and its allies, the political realities also changed. German troops left Finland on 16 December 1918. They were seen off by a group of 25,000 people, who organised, as the press described it and as those present later recalled, a very festive and warm-hearted leaving party for their brothers-in-arms. It is no surprise that, in connection with this, many developed their understanding of the extremely important role of the Germans in the Finnish War of Independence.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>61</sup> PERKO, T. Op. cit., p. 333–337.

<sup>62</sup> PERKO, T. Op. cit. Perko summarises the conclusions of his analysis on pp. 295–337.

<sup>63</sup> HOPPU, T. Valkoisten voitto..., p. 199; VARES, V. Op. cit., p. 29; HENTILÄ, M.; HENTILÄ, S. Op. cit., p. 192–194.

<sup>64</sup> HENTILÄ, M.; HENTILÄ, S. Op. cit., p. 191–192.

<sup>65</sup> ARIMO, R. Op. cit., p. 98–105, 178–193; HENTILÄ, M.; HENTILÄ, S. Op. cit., p. 273–280.

<sup>66</sup> HENTILÄ, M.; HENTILÄ, S. Op. cit., p. 333–337; PERKO, T. Op. cit., p. 346–349.

## Conclusions

The role of the German armed forces in the Finnish War of Independence in 1918 was significant in many ways. The first phase began even before the war. When the Grand Duchy of Finland fought against the Russification policy of the tsarist administration, part of it was preparing for an armed struggle. In accordance with a secret agreement signed by Finnish national activist circles and the German government, the German army trained nearly 2,000 Finnish volunteers for various tasks between 1915 and 1917. These *Jäger* movement members served as officers and non-commissioned officers in the Finnish army during the War of Independence, and their skills were of great importance to the fact that the war ended with the victory of the Finnish democratic government.

Another notable contribution, which the German armed forces began in the autumn of 1917 and continued in the winter and spring of 1918, was the arming of the Finnish army. So many weapons and munitions were brought to Finland from Germany that they were enough to equip the entire Finnish army. Without this material help, the starting point of the Finnish democratic government to defend Finland's independence and democratic political order against left-wing rebels would have been significantly weaker.

The third element was the military activities of the German armed forces in Finland during the war, in accordance with the request by the Finnish democratic government in February 1918. The tactical and operational skills of the Germans were high-class, both by the standards of the world war and especially in Finland. The Finnish combatants on both sides of the front in the War of Independence were mainly armed civilians who lacked military training. The Germans were therefore able to carry out their operations quickly and efficiently, and almost always according to their plans. They regularly managed to break their adversaries' defensive lines, and made deep inroads into their adversaries' defence. German troops made two landings on the south coast of Finland in early April, and over the next three weeks they forced the Red Guards to withdraw from virtually all of southern Finland, including the capital Helsinki.

Although German armed forces units made up less than 15% of the total strength of the forces fighting on the side of the Finnish democratic government, their contribution was significantly greater. It can be documented that in three weeks they caused at least 25% of the enemy losses in the war that lasted more than three months. German operations formed the southern front of the War of Independence, while the Finnish army operated from the north. With the cooperation of these two forces, the Red Guards were surrounded and defeated at the end of April and the beginning of May.

It was also significant that the German troops landed on Åland in March, as it was an important support area for operations on the Finnish mainland. Immediately before

the Germans' arrival, Sweden had practically occupied the Åland Islands, citing the protection of the area's inhabitants from the Bolsheviks, and planned for the area to be annexed by Sweden. Sweden did not dare to oppose Germany, however, and power in Åland changed in a formal agreement without any fighting. Germany handed over the islands to the Finnish government, whose chances of having Åland back in Finland's possession had otherwise been weak. Germany thus significantly influenced the fact that Åland remained a part of Finland despite Sweden's opposing efforts.

Germany's tactical and operational skills have always been noted in Finnish military historical research, although its importance has not been particularly emphasised. Almost all researchers have estimated that the participation of German troops in the war accelerated the victory by the Finnish government, perhaps by a few weeks or a few months. The greatest recognition of Germany's contribution was given in works published in the period between the world wars, when the tendency was to interpret things from the viewpoint of the recent brotherhood-in-arms. Since the Second World War, in the changed political climate, most scholars have avoided presenting assessments at a strategic level, thereby downplaying the importance of the German armed forces in a certain way. When analysing the role of the Germans in more detail, however, it seems that its importance in terms of the outcome of the war was probably greater than scholars have generally interpreted it.

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## VOKIETIJOS GINKLUOTUJŲ PAJĖGŲ VAIDMUO SUOMIJOS KARE DĖL NEPRIKLAUSOMYBĖS 1918 METAIS

Kari Alenius

Santrauka

Šiuo straipsniu siekia pateikti (visų pirma tarptautinei skaitytojų auditorijai) glaustą Vokietijos ginkluotųjų pajėgų vaidmens Suomijos nepriklausomybės kare 1918 m. apžvalgą. Nors Vokietijos pajėgų vykdytas karines operacijas jis tik apibendrina, bet kartu daug dėmesio skiriama Vokietijos pajėgų dalyvavimo svarbai taktiniu, operaciniu ir strateginiu lygmenimis įvertinti. Ypač kalbant apie operacinius ir strateginius klausimus, dar esama erdvės naujoms perspektyvoms, kurios anksčiau nebuvo aptartos arba sulaukė gana

paviršutiniško dėmesio. Tai svarbu, nes iki šiol tyrinėtojai nesutaria dėl to, kaip smarkiai Suomija buvo priklausoma nuo Vokietijos kontrolės bei vadovavimo ir kiek „sėkmingi“ ar „nesėkmingi“ šia prasme buvo Suomijos vyriausybės veiksmai 1918 m.

Straipsnyje daromos išvados, kad Vokietijos ginkluotųjų pajėgų vaidmuo Suomijos nepriklausomybės kare buvo reikšmingas daugeliu atžvilgių. Pirmasis etapas, kuriame šis vaidmuo ryškėja, iš tiesų dar siekia Pirmojo pasaulinio karo ankstyvąjį periodą. Mat kai Rusija 1914 m. rudenį jos valdytoje Finlandijos (Suomijos) Didžiojoje Kunigaikštystėje paskelbė plataus masto rusifikacijos programą, suomių tautiniai aktyvistai suprato, kad atėjo laikas pasinaudoti Rusijai dėl karo kilusiais sunkumais, siekiant pagaliau atskirti Suomiją nuo Rusijos imperijos. Jiems ėmus rengtis ginkluotai kovai, pagal slaptą susitarimą, kurį suomių tautiniai aktyvistai sudarė su Vokietijos vyriausybe, 1915–1917 m. Vokietijos kariuomenė Vokietijoje parengė beveik 2 000 suomių savanorių (jėgerių) įvairioms užduotims atlikti. Pagrindinė jėgerių dalis į Suomiją grįžo 1918 m. vasarį, kai Suomijoje buvo ką tik prasidėjęs pilietinis karas. Jie sudarė branduolį tų, kurie Nepriklausomybės karo metu tarnavo Suomijos kariuomenės karininkais ir seržantais, o jų įgūdžiai turėjo didelę reikšmę tam, kad karas baigėsi Suomijos demokratinės vyriausybės pergale.

Kitas reikšmingas indėlis buvo Suomijos kariuomenės apginklavimas. Vokietijos ginkluotosios pajėgos pradėjo tai 1917 m. rudenį ir tęsė 1918 m. žiemą ir pavasarį. Iš Vokietijos į Suomiją buvo atgabenta tiek daug ginklų ir šaudmenų, kad jų užteko visai Suomijos kariuomenei aprūpinti. Be šios materialinės pagalbos, Suomijos demokratinės vyriausybės galimybės ginti Suomijos nepriklausomybę ir demokratinę politinę santvarką nuo kairiųjų sukilėlių būtų buvusios gerokai mažesnės.

Trečiąkart Vokietijos ginkluotųjų pajėgų indėlis atsiskleidė per jų tiesioginį dalyvavimą kariniuose veiksmuose Suomijoje, atsižvelgus į Suomijos demokratinės vyriausybės 1918 m. vasarį pateiktą prašymą. Vokiečių taktiniai ir operatyviniai gebėjimai buvo aukšto lygio vertinant Pirmojo pasaulinio karo standartais, ypač Suomijoje. Kovotojai abiejose Nepriklausomybės karo fronto pusėse Suomijoje daugiausia buvo ginkluoti civiliai, neturėję karinio pasirengimo. Todėl vokiečiai galėjo greitai ir efektyviai vykdyti savo operacijas, beveik visada pagal iš anksto numatytus planus. Jie beveik reguliariai pralauždavo priešininkų gynybos linijas ir įsiskverbė į jų gynybos zonas. Balandžio pradžioje Vokietijos kariuomenė du kartus išsilaipino pietinėje Suomijos pakrantėje, o per kitas tris savaites privertė Raudonąją gvardiją pasitraukti iš beveik visos pietinės Suomijos, įskaitant sostinę Helsinkį.

Nors Vokietijos ginkluotųjų pajėgų daliniai sudarė mažiau nei 15 proc. visų jėgų, kovojusių Suomijos demokratinės vyriausybės pusėje, jų indėlis buvo gerokai didesnis. Galima pagrįsti dokumentais, kad vos per tris savaites priešui jie padarė bent 25 proc. visų jo nuostolių kare, kuris truko dar daugiau nei tris mėnesius. Vokiečiai savo operacijas vykdė Nepriklausomybės karo pietiniame fronte, o Suomijos kariuomenė veikė iš šiaurės. Bendradarbiaujant šiems dviem pajėgoms, balandžio pabaigoje – gegužės pradžioje Raudonoji armija buvo apsupta ir nugalėta.

Svarbu ir tai, kad Vokietijos kariai kovo mėnesį išsilaipino Alandų salose, nes jos sudarė reikšmingą operacijų, vykusių Suomijos žemyninėje dalyje, pagalbinę zoną. Prieš pat vokiečių pajėgų atvykimą Švedija buvo iš esmės okupavusi Alandų salas, motyvuodama tai siekiu apsaugoti jų daugiausia švedakalbius gyventojus nuo bolševikų, o iš tiesų

planuodama prijungti salas prie Švedijos. Tačiau Vokietijai pasipriešinti Švedija nediršo, tad valdžia Alandų salose pasikeitė oficialiu susitarimu be kovos. Salas Vokietija perdavė Suomijos vyriausybei. Be Vokietijos indėlio šansai, kad Alandų salos vėl atiteks Suomijai, buvo menki. Taigi Vokietija turėjo didelę įtaką tam, kad Alandų salos tapo Suomijos dalimi.

Suomijos karo istorijos tyrimuose vokiečių taktiniai ir operaciniai įgūdžiai visada pažymimi, nors jų svarba nebuvo itin pabrėžiama. Beveik visų tyrinėtojų nuomone, Vokietijos kariuomenės dalyvavimas kare galbūt keliomis savaitėmis ar net keliais mėnesiais paspartino Suomijos vyriausybės pergalę. Labiausiai Vokietijos indėlis buvo pripažįstamas darbuose, išleistuose tarpukariu. Tuo metu autoriai pateikė tai per suomių ir vokiečių ginklo brolystės perspektyvą, nors iki 1941 m. Suomija ir Vokietija nebuvo itin artimos politinės sąjungininkės. Po Antrojo pasaulinio karo pasikeitus politiniam klimatui, dauguma mokslininkų vengė pateikti vertinimus strateginiu lygmeniu, taip tam tikra prasme sumenkindami Vokietijos ginkluotųjų pajėgų svarbą. Tačiau išsamiau analizuojant vokiečių vaidmenį, atrodo, kad jų reikšmė karo baigčiai tikriausiai buvo didesnė, nei tyrinėtojai dažniausiai teigia.