

THE ANTI-SOVIET OFFENSIVE BY THE GERMAN 6TH RESERVE CORPS IN THE BALTIC (MARCH 1919): A CASE STUDY OF MISSION COMMAND

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ABSTRACT

Following the Bolshevik Red Army's invasion of what it considered to be the 'western fringes' of the former Imperial Russia in November 1918, the Latvian Provisional Government, which claimed part of this territory, concluded an agreement with August Winnig, the plenipotentiary of the German government, on 29 December 1918, to provide aid in its defence. After being promised land, volunteers recruited in Germany headed eastwards to reinforce the units that had already begun to be formed there from the forces of the armed Baltic Germans or the remnants of the retreating German army. Major General Rüdiger von der Goltz, who arrived in Liepāja at the beginning of 1919, took command of all anti-Soviet forces in west Latvia and northwest Lithuania, which were merged into the 6th Reserve Corps. In March 1919, the 6th Reserve Corps launched the *Tauwetter*, *Eisgang* and *Frühlingswind* offensive operations. The offensive resulted in the defeat of the 1st Rifle Brigade and the 2nd Rifle Division of the Soviet Latvian Army, and the liberation of Kurzeme (Kurland) up to the River Lielupe. The article discusses the structure and battle strength of the opposing forces, and the plans drawn up by both sides, and describes in detail the course of the fighting. The aim of the research is to analyse the factors that enable one side or another to implement the principles of mission command while executing manoeuvre warfare.

KEYWORDS: Latvian War of Independence, German campaign in the Baltic, Army of Soviet Latvia, mission command, manoeuvre warfare.

ANOTACIJA

1918 m. lapkritį bolševikų Raudonajai armijai pradėjus invaziją į tai, ką ji laikė buvusios imperinės Rusijos „vakariniais pakraščiais“, Latvijos laikinoji vyriausybė, kuri pretendavo į dalį šios teritorijos, sudarė susitarimą su Vokietijos vyriausybės įgaliotiniu Augustu Winnigu (1918 m. gruodžio 29 d.) dėl pagalbos ginant jos teritoriją. Gavę pažadą dėl žemės, Vokietijoje verbuojami savanoriai vyko į rytus, papildydami dalinius, ten jau pradėtus kurti iš besiginkluojančių Baltijos vokiečių arba atsitraukiančios Vokietijos kariuomenės likučių. Visos antisovietinės pajėgos, kurios veikė vakarinėje Latvijoje ir šiaurės vakaruose Lietuvoje, netrukus buvo sujungtos į VI rezervo korpusą, kuriam vadovauti ėmė 1919 m. pradžioje į Liepoją atvykęs gen. mjr. Rüdigeris von der Goltzas. 1919 m. kovą VI rezervo korpusas pradėjo puolimo operacijas „Atodrėkis“ (*Tauwetter*), „Ledonešis“ (*Eisgang*) ir „Pavasario vėjas“ (*Frühlingswind*). Dėl šio puolimo buvo sutriuškinta Sovietų Latvijos kariuomenės 1-oji šaulių brigada ir 2-oji šaulių divizija, išvadotas Kuršas iki Lielupės upės. Straipsnyje aptariama priešiškų pajėgų struktūra ir kovinė galia, abiejų pusių sudaryti planai, išsamiai aprašoma kovų eiga. Tyrimo tikslas – išanalizuoti veiksnius, leidusius vienai ar kitai pusei įgyvendinti tikslinio vadovavimo principus vykdant manevrinį karą.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: Latvijos nepriklausomybės karas, Vokietijos kampanija Baltijos šalyse, Sovietų Latvijos kariuomenė, tikslinis vadovavimas, manevrinis karas.

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FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM IN THE EASTERN BALTIC, 1918–1920

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Introduction

The Baltic Wars of Independence have been quite extensively studied and described, but the use of these studies to analyse specific issues of military history is limited. Historians of the Baltic States have focused mostly on the struggle for independence of each individual country, with less attention to the battles within operational areas. Consequently, the operations taking place on one side or another of political borders are often not addressed.¹ The hostilities of 1918 and 1919 were not shaped by political boundaries, but took place along lines of communication, usually railways, and other key terrain.

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A second challenge to the analysis of warfare is the traditional focus of studies only on their own national units. For example, studies of the Latvian War of Independence, both those published before the Second World War and more recent ones, look only at the activities of Latvian units, omitting the operational level of the warfare.² This attitude was also characteristic of the Soviet period, when historians described in detail only the forces friendly to the regime of the time, the Soviet armed units; on the other hand, the enemy's combat composition and actual plans were only superficially sketched. From the point of view of general historical research, it is important to look at specific processes, such as the history of Soviet Latvia, but the analysis of military operations requires a comparable analysis of the activities of the two opponents.

The aim of this study is to use primary sources to describe in detail the military operations of March 1919, in order to analyse the use of one of the most widely mentioned military principles, the mission command. This principle is still relevant in the training and combat operations of armed forces around the world. For example, the US Department of the Army describes mission command as 'the Army's approach to command and control that empowers subordinate decision making and decentralised execution appropriate to the situation'.³ Although this definition seems simple, a more detailed explanation of the actual application may vary considerably from one publication to another, and in practice is associated with various challenges relating to the military environment. It is notable that the pamphlet quoted uses several historical examples, called vignettes, to describe some principles.

¹ KAASIK, Peeter; VAHTRE, Lauri; SALO, Urmas, et al. *Eesti Vabadussõja ajalugu*. I–II osa. Toim. Lauri VAHTRE. Tallinn, 2020; ALIŠAUSKAS, Kazys. *The Lithuanian Wars of Independence 1918–1920*. Vilnius, 2024.

² PENIŅIS, Mārtiņš. *Latvijas armijas sākums un cīņas Latvijā līdz 1919. gada jūlijam*. Rīga, 1932; *Cīņa par brīvību: Latvijas Neatkarības karš (1918–1920) Latvijas Valsts vēstures arhīva dokumentos*. 1. d. Sast. Ēriks JĒKABSONS, Jānis ŠILIŅŠ. Rīga, 2019.

³ *Army Doctrine Publication No. 6–0. Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces*. Approved for public release by the HEADQUARTERS, DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY. Washington, DC, 2019, pp. 1–3.

The authors of the pamphlet use the Second World War 1940 campaign, when German Wehrmacht units invaded France, to describe the principle of command and control. On two pages, the conflict between General Heinz Guderian, the commander of the German 19th Corps, and General Ewald von Kleist, his commander, is described.⁴ Guderian had the audacity to ignore Panzergruppe von Kleist's orders, and make decisions according to his own understanding of the situation. From a historical point of view, the chosen example is described in a very superficial way, which leads to many uncertainties about exactly what circumstances orders from a superior commander can or cannot be ignored in. It is interesting that the two German generals in question were officers of the German Iron Division in the spring of 1919, and took part in the attack of the 6th Reserve Corps. The research design of this article is to identify and analyse the factors influencing the likelihood of the use of mission command in manoeuvre warfare, by describing in detail the organisation, plans and the course of the battle between the two belligerents.

The Red Army's invasion of the Baltic

The attack by the German 6th Reserve Corps in Kurzeme and northern Lithuania was only possible because of mistakes made by the Red Army of the Soviet Russian Republic during its invasion of the Baltic. Two days after the end of the First World War on 11 November 1918, Soviet Russia annulled the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, and began planning the occupation of territories of the former Russian Empire, following the movement of the demoralised units of the German armed forces to fight back.

On 18 November 1918, the Red Army commander-in-chief J. Vācietis, in his directive, stated the exact objectives of the invasion: 'I set the following general task for the whole Baltic area: movement from Jamburg, Narva to Tallinn, from Pskov to Valka and the seizure of Tallinn and Valka. At the same time there will be a movement from Polotsk in the direction of Krustpils and Daugavpils.'⁵ On 28 November, the Northern Front commander Dmitry Nadezhny ordered the 7th Army to start moving to seize Valka and Tallinn. On the same day, the Soviets entered Narva, marking the beginning of the Baltic Wars of Independence. The directive of 10 December 1918 stated the pragmatic objectives for the next stage.⁶ It envisaged the Northern Front capturing the entire coast of the Gulf of Riga from Riga to Pärnu, as well as Tallinn

⁴ *Army Doctrine Publication No. 6-0. Mission Command...*, p. 3.

⁵ Direktiva Glavnogo komandovaniia Komandovaniiu Severnogo fronta ob osvobozhdenii Revelia i Valka, 18.11.1918 g. In *Direktivy Glavnogo komandovaniia Krasnoi armii (1917-1920)*. Sbornik dokumentov. Otv. sost. T[at'iana] KARIAEVA. Moskva, 1969, c. 177.

⁶ Direktiva Glavnogo komandovaniia Komandovaniiu Severnogo fronta i Zapadnoi armii o prodolzhenii nastupleniia v Pribaltike i Belorussii, 10.12.1918 g. In *Direktivy Glavnogo komandovaniia...*, s. 183.

in northern Estonia. Further south, the Western Army, which two days earlier had formed the Special Latvian Group, was ordered to secure the Krustpils–Daugavpils line, and then attack in the direction of Jelgava (Mitau),⁷ Panevėžys, Vilnius, Lida, Baranovichi, Pinsk and Mozir. The directives of early December show clearly the intention and the main effort of the Red Army, to seize the whole of Estonia initially, and, after regrouping, to continue the offensive westwards.

On 29 December 1919 a turning point took place in the Red Army's invasion. Its northern commander established a new border between the Northern Front and the Western Army, taking into account the fact that two days earlier the Special Latvian Group had been incorporated into the 7th Army of the Northern Front.⁸ The border between the fronts was now on the Daugavpils–Panevėžys–Radviliškis–Šauliai (Schawli)–Palanga (Polangen) line. According to the new plan, Latvian units and the International Division were to start active operations towards Riga, Jelgava and Panevėžys before Estonia was secured.

By 3 January 1919, when Soviet Latvian Rifle units entered Riga, which was abandoned by local *Latvijas Zemessardze* or *Landeswehr* and German units, it seemed that the plan would be a success. On 5 January 1919, even before the other objectives had been achieved, Vācietis, the commander-in-chief of the Red Army, issued a directive establishing the Army of Soviet Latvia (ASL) out of the Latvian Rifle units of the 7th Army, the Special Latvian Group of the Western Army, and other Latvian rifle units transferred from Russia. The army was under the direct command of the commander-in-chief, who also became the commander of the ASL. The tasks of the army were formulated as such: '... to seize Jelgava and the entire coast of the Gulf of Riga (Ainaži–Daugavgrīva–Ventspils–Liepāja) ...'⁹ By the 1920s and 1930s, the motives for the decision were being discussed in the Soviet Union, and it was felt that political considerations took precedence over military ones.¹⁰ The decision of Jukums Vācietis had already *de facto* put an end to the successful Soviet offensive.

On 6 January, the ASL deputy commander Pēteris Avens issued an order with more detailed plans.¹¹ The main attack was to the west in the direction of Ventspils (Windau) and Liepāja (Libau). The ASL was divided into three groups. In the north,

⁷ Hereafter German place names are given in brackets as on the maps.

⁸ Prikaz armiiam fronta o zadachakh i raionakh deistvii armii i grupp voisk, 19.12.1918 g. In *Direktivny komandovaniia frontov Krasnoi armii (1917–1922 gg.)*. Sbornik dokumentov. T. 1: *noiabr' 1917 g.—mart 1919 g.* Otv. sost. T[at'iana] KARIAEVA. Moskva, 1971, s. 492.

⁹ Direktiva Glavnogo komandovaniia Komandovaniuu Severnogo fronta, Zapadnoi armii i Armii Latvii o zadachakh Armii Latvii, 06.01.1919 g. In *Direktivny Glavnogo komandovaniia...*, s. 185.

¹⁰ KAKURIN, N[i]kolai. *Kak srazhalas' revoliutsiia*. T. 2: *1919–1920 g.* Izdanie 2-oe, utochnennoe. Red. A[il'bert] NENAROKOV. Moskva, [1926] 1990, s. 377; IANEL', K. Ot Pskova do Vindavy i obratno (1918–1919 gg.). Istoricheskie zametki o grazhdanskoi voine v Pribaltike. *Voina i revoliutsiia*, 1928, kn. 2, s. 73–90.

¹¹ Prikaz voiskam Armii Latvii o nachale deiatel'nosti armii i boevykh zadachakh, 06.01.1919 g. In *Direktivny komandovaniia frontov...*, s. 496.

the 2nd Brigade of the Latvian Soviet Rifle Division would attack in the direction of Ventspils. In the middle the 1st Brigade of the Latvian Soviet Rifle Division would attack in the direction of Jelgava, and further in the direction of Liepāja. The southern group consisted of the International Division under Mikhail Okulov, which would attack towards Šiauliai and further towards Liepāja. However, the plan had to be changed in the following days, as the Estonian armed forces launched a successful counter-attack in southern Estonia.

On 16 January, Avens announced that the attack in the direction of Kurzeme was to be continued, but the 2nd Brigade (northern group) should be transferred to northern Latvia in order to stop an Estonian attack.¹²

In the western direction, the task of the ASL remained just as ambitious and politically oriented, only now it had to be carried out with almost half the force.

The actions of the *Landeswehr* and the German units after their departure from Riga on 3 January were influenced not directly by the threat of an ASL attack, but by the small numbers and low morale of their own forces, especially in the German units. By 12 January a rough line from Saldus (Frauenburg) to Lielaucē (Gross Autz) had been captured, where the *Oberstab* of the *Landeswehr* was stationed. The remaining *Landeswehr* units, together with the remnants of the German Iron Brigade, had already retreated towards Vaiņode. Although the *Oberstab* did not know the details of the ASL plan, reconnaissance was carried out eastwards, observing the movement of enemy units back towards Riga, and assuming that this was due to the success of the Estonian army.¹³

The 1st Brigade HQ in Jelgava issued an order for an attack westwards. The brigade consisted of the 2nd, 3rd and Saratov Special Latvian Rifle Regiments, supported by two batteries of the 1st Artillery Battalion. Of these units, only the 3rd Rifle Regiment went into combat action in Latvia, and on 3 January launched an attack along the Krustpils–Jelgava railway line. Units of the regiment entered Jelgava on 10 January. The 2nd Rifle Regiment arrived at Krustpils on 7 January, and, following behind the 3rd Rifle Regiment, entered Jelgava on 13 January. The Saratov Special Rifle Regiment also entered Latvia on 7 January, crossed the Daugava at Jaunjelgava, and proceeded via Bauska and Eleja to Žagare (Shagory), which it seized on 15 January (see Map 1).

The final objectives of the Soviet 1st Brigade's order of 16 January were set for the 2nd Rifle Regiment: Saldus, seized on 21 January, and for the Saratov Special Rifle Regiment Mažeikiai, which it reached on 24 January. On 27 January the Soviet 1st Brigade

¹² Zapis' razgovora po priamomu provodu glavkoma i komanduiushchego Armiei Latvii I. I. Vatsetisa s pom. komanduiushchego P. IA. Avenom o neobkhodimosti prodolzheniia nastupleniia na territorii Latvii, 16.01.1919 g. In *Direktivы komandovaniia frontov...*, s. 512.

¹³ SPANDEGS, Vilis. 2. *Ventspils kājnietu pulks: formēšanās, kauju gaitas Latvijas atbrīvošanas cīņās, pēckara laikmets*. Sast. Oskars CAUNIĪTS. Liepāja, 1936, 44. lpp.



Map 1. The Soviet invasion in Kurzeme, January 1919. Numbers indicate the dates when major towns were occupied. Reference map hereafter *Operationskarte Königsberg. Maßstab 1:800, 1918*. Bearbeitet in der Kartogr. Abteilung der Kgl. Preuss. Landesaufnahme

HQ issued order No 5 to continue the attack with both regiments in the direction of Liepāja. However, the order was cancelled on the evening of 28 January.¹⁴ It is clear that it was not the decision of the 1st Brigade's commander, but the order of the ASL's commander-in-chief. The postponement of further attacks was not directly related to the fighting on the banks of the Venta. The reason for the cancellation of the attack was the critical situation of the ASL in northern Latvia against the Estonian army. For two weeks, action had been taking place on two fronts and could no longer be ignored; a decision had to be made, and one of the fronts had to remain passive.¹⁵

The connection of the halting of the attack with the northern Latvia front is reinforced by the events in the northern part of Kurzeme, where Soviet activity continued without any resistance. According to the original plan of 14 January, the 2nd Brigade should have been operating towards Ventspils, but on 16 January it was sent towards Valka. The 3rd Cavalry Squadron, which was ordered to move from Tukums (Tuckum) on 22 January, was to carry out the entire task of the northern attack group, and took Kuldīga (Goldingen) on 26 January, and Ventspils on 30 January. Thus, there were no more anti-Soviet units on the eastern bank of the River Venta. The 3rd Cavalry Squadron, by order of 31 January, became part of the 1st Brigade, moving first to Kuldīga, and then on 4 February to Saldus.¹⁶

At the same time, the leadership of the *Landeswehr* was trying to guess the further course of action. On 23 January a change of command in the *Landeswehr* happened. Major von Beckmann was relieved, and Captain Dormagen now commanded a separate battalion-sized unit (*Detachment Dormagen*) under the commander of the newly created German Iron Division Major Joseph Bischoff.¹⁷ It was not a formality, but marked a different style of operation. Now anti-Soviet units began to plan more aggressive action.

The International Division started to move from Daugavpils at the beginning of January 1919. The attack started along the Jelgava–Mažeikiai railway line and along the Daugavpils–Panevėžys–Šiauliai–Mažeikiai railway line.¹⁸ The division's westward movement met no resistance, for as early as 9 January, Šiauliai was taken over by

¹⁴ Prikaz komandiru Latyšškogo polka osobogo naznacheniiia, 28.01.1919 g. *Latvijas Nacionālā arhīva Latvijas Valsts arhīvs* (Latvian State Archives of the National Archives of Latvia, hereafter LVA), 45. f., 2. apr., 117. l., 22. lp.

¹⁵ BĒRZIŅŠ, Valdis. *Latviešu strēlnieki cīņā par Padomju Latviju 1919. gadā*. Rīga, 1969, 122. lpp.

¹⁶ URBANOWITSCHS, Kārlis. 3. Atsewischkà kawalerijas diwisiona kaujas par Padomju Latwiju. In *Latwju strehlnieku wehsture*. 2. sēj. 2. d.: *Strehlnieki Padomju Latwijā*. Red. Pauls WIHKSNE, Willis STRAUSS, Kirils STUZKA. Maskawā, 1934, 40. lpp.

¹⁷ Oberstab der Baltischen Landeswehr Befehl für den 24.01.1919. *Latvijas Nacionālā arhīva Latvijas Valsts vēstures arhīvs* (The State Historical Archive of Latvia of the National Archives of Latvia, hereafter LVVA), 5627. f., 1. apr., 24. l., 175. lp.

¹⁸ The activities of the International Division in northern Lithuania are described in detail by ŠILIŅŠ, Jānis. The Soviet Army in Northern Lithuania between January and June 1919. In *The Unending War? The Baltic States after 1918* (Acta Historica Universitatis Klaipedensis, Vol. 36). Ed. by Vytautas JOKUBAUSKAS, Vasilijus SAFRONOVAS. Klaipėda, 2018, p. 27.

Soviet supporters, who began to form militia units. The 39th Rifle Regiment reached its westernmost point at noon on 28 January, when a reconnaissance unit from Seda moved towards Žemalē, where an unexpected battle took place against von Besser's cavalry unit of the German Iron Division.¹⁹

On 25 January, units of the Saratov Rifle Regiment crossed the Venta near Grieze and engaged in combat with units of the Jäger Battalion of the Iron Division.²⁰ The regiment's 3rd Company remained in Mažeikiai, and the regimental headquarters was located in Ezere. This was the last successful Soviet attack on the west bank of the Venta. On the morning of 27 January, the reinforced Borke Battalion of the Iron Division counter-attacked, forcing the Soviets to retreat to the east bank of the Venta.

The loss of the Nīgrande bridgehead was the first setback for the ASL on the Kurzeme front. After the first success, on the evening of 27 January, the order of the Dormagen Battalion of the anti-Soviet forces confirmed the intention to attack on the morning of 29 January and seize Skrunda (Schrunden), where the Soviets lost their last bridgehead on the west side of the Venta.²¹

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The plan for the liberation of Kurzeme

The beginning of February 1919 in Kurzeme was marked not only by the halting of the ASL attack, but also by significant changes in the structure of the anti-Soviet forces. On 1 February 1919, Major General Rüdiger von der Goltz, the newly appointed military governor of the German occupying forces in Liepāja, arrived in Liepāja dressed in civilian clothes. Three days later, he was appointed commander of the German 6th Reserve Corps, tasked with defending Germany's borders against Soviet attack. From the moment of his arrival, he took consistent actions to ensure the centralised command of the anti-Soviet forces, planning operations and organising supplies. The commander of the 6th Reserve Corps was not only the bearer of the authority of the German occupation, but also the actual head of the war effort, at the same time allowing very wide discretion to subordinate commanders during combat operations. Unlike the ASL Kurzeme front, the *Landeswehr*, German units and even Latvians operated in a highly coordinated manner.

On 5 February 1919, Major Alfred Fletcher took over the command of the *Landeswehr*. He played a major role in the transformation of the *Landeswehr* into a combat-

¹⁹ Doklad nachal'nika razvedki 39-go internatsional'nogo polka, 29.01.1919 g. LVA, 45. f., 2. apr., 117. l., 33. lp.; BESSER, Hans, von. Der Erste Sieg. *Der Reiter gen Osten*, September 1937, Folge 9, S. 4.

²⁰ Telegramma komandira 1-oi latyshskoi brigady, 24.01.1919 g. LVA, 45. f., 2. apr., 117. l., 26. lp.; BAIDIŅŠ, A. 10. latviešu strēlnieku pulks. In *Par Padomju Latviju. Cīņtāju atmiņas: 1918.–1919.* I daļa. Rīga, 1958, 404. lpp.

²¹ Detachment Dormagen Befehl für den 30.01.1919. LWA, 5434. f., 3. apr., 25. l., 92. lp.

ready unit. One of the most important steps was to transform the *Oberstab* of the *Landeswehr* so that it was capable of leading units in battle. Initially, the composition of the HQ, approved on 14 December 1918 by the Latvian Provisional Government, was designed to preserve a national balance. There were political reasons for this plan, but in reality it did not work in January 1919. Major Fletcher reorganised the *Oberstab* according to the principles of the divisional headquarters of the German army, and moved it to Kazdanga, leaving only one officer in Liepāja, whose duties were to provide supplies.²² The *Oberstab* now consisted of 12 officers, and ensured the effective planning of combat operations. One of the unexpected positive benefits was a reduction in the effectiveness of Soviet intelligence. Before that, Dūdiņš, the commander of the ASL 1st Brigade, received detailed intelligence reports on German and Latvian forces in Liepāja. This information was very precise and came from an agent of the Liepāja Revolutionary Committee.²³

On 10 February, the *Oberstab* ordered the reformation and merger of all units into self-sufficient battalions (*Detachment*). The new organisation was an important factor in improving the combat capability of the units. During the first offensive operations, individual infantry companies and artillery platoons went into action separately, but by the end of February there was already a solid organisation under capable commanders.²⁴ Each of the combat battalions had a cavalry unit for reconnaissance, infantry units, and fire support units (heavy machine guns, artillery, and, for some battalions, mortars and engineer units as well). In his memoirs, Rüdiger von der Goltz states that when he first met Major Joseph Bischoff, he heard from him the idea of forming small self-sufficient units. From this account, it appears that Major Bischoff appreciated the advantages of such units from his African experience.²⁵

Unlike the ASL, which was set up as a large structure from the beginning, and only then started to search for commanders and soldiers, the *Landeswehr* used small cohesive units under authoritative commanders, and reinforced them with new volunteers, weapons and equipment.

Three days after assuming command, Major Fletcher was already planning his first operation, the capture of Kuldīga. The order was sent to the units involved on 9 February, and it was very complex, requiring coordination and discipline that had never been seen before.²⁶ The attack, with the codeword *Festnacht* (Festive Night), was

²² Geschäfts-Ordnung der Oberstab der Baltische Landeswehr (undated). *LWA*, 5434. f. 3. apr., 539. l., 18. lp.

²³ Razvedyvatel'naia telegramma komandira 1-oi latyshskoi brigady, 29.02.1919 g. *LVA*, 45. f., 1. apr., 117. l., 96. lp.

²⁴ Vorläufige Organisation der Baltischen Landeswehr, 10.02.1919. *LWA*, 5434. f., 3. apr., 539. l., 19. lp.

²⁵ GOLTZ, Rüdiger. *Meine Sendung in Finnland und im Baltikum*. Leipzig, 1920, S. 140.

²⁶ Befehl des Oberstab der Baltischen Landeswehr, 09.02.1919. *Bundesarchiv, Abteilung Militärarchiv* (Military Archives of the German Federal Archives, hereafter *BA MA*), R8025, 1, 0173.

carried out according to plan, and was surprisingly successful. The only casualties, two killed in action, came from a friendly fire incident.²⁷

On 14 February, Major Fletcher sent out an order for further action, which included the regrouping of units in order to complete the formation of 'combat battalions'. The regrouping had to be completed as soon as possible in order to ensure the achievement of the next objective, the capture of Ventspils.²⁸ The operation to take Ventspils (codeword Alfred) was carried out on 24 February.²⁹

In February 1919 the Iron Division also carried out successful reconnaissance operations on its own. One of the raids played a crucial role. On 16 February at 6am, the Germans surrounded the town of Mažeikiai and attacked the railway station. The important traffic junction was protected by the 3rd Company of the 3rd Soviet Rifle Regiment with a cavalry troop. After a short battle, the Soviets retreated, losing two platoon commanders and five soldiers killed, and two soldiers wounded.³⁰ This battle gave Major Bischoff confidence in his preferred battle tactics. The Soviet 3rd Rifle Regiment drew conclusions as well, and on 26 February assigned the commander of the 2nd Battalion with two rifle companies to defend Mažeikiai station.³¹

Both the *Landeswehr* and the Iron Division tried to gather and disseminate as quickly as possible the lessons learned from the fighting. The *Oberstab* report on battle management, which circulated on 20 February 1919, stressed the initiative of each commander to carry out attacks, opting for outflanking manoeuvres wherever possible.³² The need to maintain close communication with each other was also emphasised, and if a neighbouring unit was attacked, it was not necessary to wait for a separate order, but to attack aggressively.

After the first successes, the German 6th Reserve Corps formulated further tasks in an order on 15 February 1919.³³ The plan was based on the *Oberkommando Ost* order of 7 February 1919, which provided as the end state of the attack the capture of the Liepāja–Šiauliai–Kėdainiai railway line and the River Venta line³⁴ (see Map 2). To achieve this, on 14 February the Corps leadership had already promised to move the

²⁷ VOCKRODT, Percy. Goldingen. In *Die Baltische Landeswehr im Befreiungskampf gegen den Bolschewismus. Ein Gedenkbuch*. [Hrsg. von Wilhelm von FIRCKS, Eberhard von PANDER, Percy VOCKRODT, Reinhard WITTRAM.] Riga, 1929, S. 70.

²⁸ Befehl des Oberstab der Baltischen Landeswehr, 16.02.1919. *BA MA*, R8025, 1, 0169.

²⁹ Kriegstagebuch der Deutsch-Baltische Landeswehr Kompanie Mitau, 24.02.1919. *LWA*, 5627. f., 1. apr., 52. l., 6. lp.: Chronik der 3. Compagnie, Detachement von Hahn, 23.02.1919. *LWA*, 5627. f., 1. apr., 53. l., 16. lp.

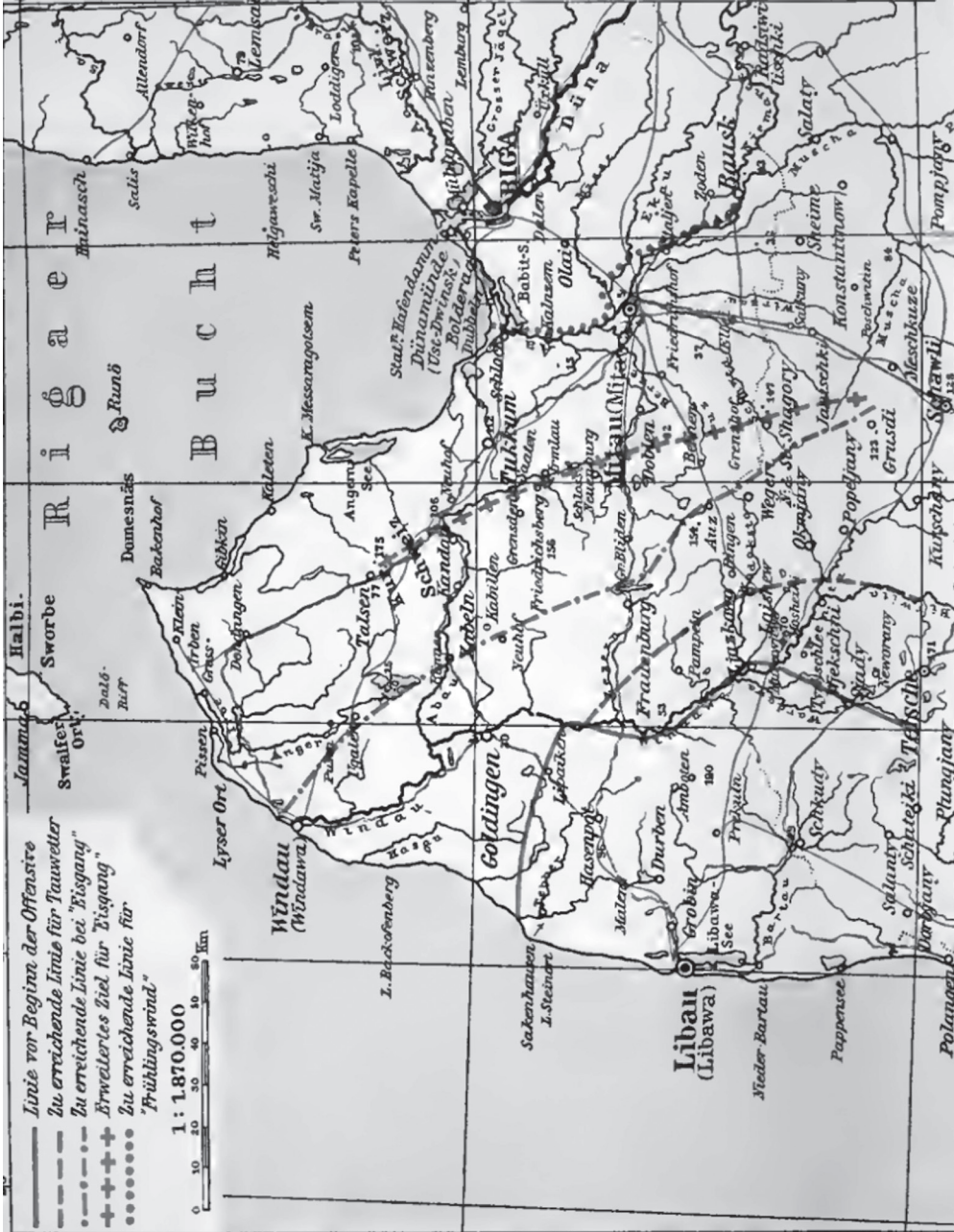
³⁰ Zhurnal voennykh deistvii 3-Latyshskogo strelkovogo polka, 16.02.1919 g. *LVA*, 45. f., 2. apr., 191. l., 40. lp.

³¹ Zhurnal voennykh deistvii 3-Latyshskogo strelkovogo polka, 26.02.1919 g. *LVA*, 45. f., 2. apr., 191. l., 45. lp.

³² Oberstab der Baltischen Landeswehr Merkblatt für die Kampfführung, 20.02.1919. *BA MA*, R8025, 1, 0157.

³³ Generalkommando VI. Reservekorps Korpsbefehl, 15.02.1919. *BA MA*, R8025, 8, 0155.

³⁴ Bericht über die Operationen des VI. Reservekorps, die zur Einnahme der Aa-Linie von Bausk bis Schlok führten, 16.04.1919. *Dokumentensammlung des Herder-Instituts Marburg* (Document Collection at the Marburg Herder Institute for Historical Research on East Central Europe, hereafter *DSHI*), 120, 2, B/23.



Map 2. The 6th Reserve Corps plan. Lines from west to east show the positions at the start of the attack and the planned targets Tauwetter, Eisgang, Erweiterte Eisgang and Frühlingswind. From GOLTZ, Rüdiger von der. *Meine Sendung in Finnland und im Baltikum*. Leipzig, 1920, S. 317

1st Guards Reserve Division from Germany to Liepāja. The corps' area of responsibility was thus divided into three offensive sectors. In the north, from the mouth of the Baltic Sea near Ventspils to the Durbe–Skrunda–Gaiķi line, the *Landeswehr* planned an attack. In the middle sector, with the southern border Priekule–Vainode–Pikeliai–Leckava–Laižuva–Klykoliai–Wegeriai, the Iron Division under Major Bischoff would attack. In the southern section, with the southern border Lake Biržulis –Kuršēnai–Joniškis–Bauska, the 1st Guards Reserve Division under Major General Paul Tiede was to concentrate. Initially, the corps planned to reach the line Šakyna–Auce–Zvārde–Saldus–Gaiķi–Kabile–Lake Usma–Ventspils.

On 17 February, the commander of the *Landeswehr*, Major Fletcher, sent letters to the unit commanders informing them of the 6th Reserve Corps' attack plans, adding that he had decided to ignore Major General Goltz's order, and attack far beyond the indicated line to reach the Gaiķi–Tukums–Gulf of Riga line. It is noteworthy that both German and Latvian units received identical letters, despite their supposed political unreliability.³⁵

On 24 February, the Iron Division proposed that the whole operation be divided into three phases, named Tauwetter, Eisgang and Frühlingswind. Each phase was to reach a certain line, the line specified in the corps' order was to be reached during Eisgang, if the attack developed successfully, Frühlingswind would result in reaching the Lielupe line.³⁶

The implementation of the Tauwetter phase, the main objective of which was to enable the German 1st Guards Reserve Division to take up an advance position, was agreed on 25 February. As the 1st Guards Reserve Division arrived in Liepāja between 12 and 20 February by sea and railway, it was most efficient to use the Liepāja–Mažeikiai railway to reach the planned line of departure. Since the Iron Division was already in this area, it would have to regroup to the north. In order not to give the Soviets any sign of the beginning of an attack, it was decided to carry out this manoeuvre in the form of an attack, taking the settlements of Mažeikiai and Laižuva. As early as 27 February, the Iron Division HQ had already fixed the first day of the attack Tau 1 for 3 March 1919, so that the entire Tauwetter operation had to be completed by 10 March, when the Eisgang phase was to begin.³⁷

On 28 February, clarifying the previous order, it was decided that on Tau 1 the Latvian Battalion would attack and occupy Jaunāmuiža in the north. This order shows for the first time the mission of the Latvian Battalion on the following Tau days. The purpose of the attack was to help the *Landeswehr* establish a bridgehead on the right bank of the River Venta, east of Skrunda. The bridgehead was intended to facilitate the *Landeswehr's* attack towards Tukums. The general attack (Eisgang) would start on Tau 8 (10 March).

³⁵ Oberstab der Baltischen Landeswehr Brief, 17.02.1919. *BA MA*, R8025, 8, 0158.

³⁶ Eiserne Division an Generalkommando VI. Reservekorps, 28.02.1919. *DShI*, 120, 2, B/26.

³⁷ Eiserne Division Divisionbefehl, 27.02.1919. *Lietuvos centrinis valstybės archyvas* (Lithuanian Central State Archives, hereafter *LCVA*), f. 929, ap. 3, b. 51, l. 242.

The 2nd Soviet Latvian Rifle Regiment, one of the strongest units of the Soviet Latvian army, commanded by Fricis Rieksts, took up positions in the Skrunda area. The Iron Division was interested in the success of the Latvians, as this would fix strong enemy units north of Ezere and Mažeikiai.

The most important part of Tauwetter was the capture of Mažeikiai on Tau 1 by a battalion of the Iron Division, which would create the conditions to defeat the main forces of the Soviet 3rd Rifle Regiment in the vicinity of Ezere on Tau 2. At the same time, the 1st Guards Reserve Division planned to attack along two axes of advance. In the northern part, three reinforced battalions under Major von Brederlow, the commander of the 1st Guards Reserve Regiment, would attack through Mažeikiai towards Laižuva, and partly towards Vieķšņiai (Wekschni). In the southern part, the 2nd Guards Reserve Regiment, under the command of Colonel von Plehwe, would attack through Telšiai towards Vieķšņiai. The southern group also included the Schlenther Battalion of the 52nd Army Corps, with the task of reaching Kuršēnai (Kurschany) later on.³⁸

During the planning phase, it was decided to regroup all units, including the 1st Guards Reserve Division, into battalion-size battle groups. Each battalion would have infantry, cavalry, artillery, and, if possible, engineers. The regrouping of forces and the fine-tuning of plans continued until the last minute, which also influenced the initial course of action.

The exact strength of the 6th Reserve Corps on 3 March 1919 is not known. The biggest challenge is to estimate the ratio of the 'paper strength' to the 'combat strength'. The opposing sides took different approaches based on their experience from the First World War. For example, in the *Landeswehr* on 13 February 1919 Rahden's Company had ten officers, 21 NCOs and 209 other ranks (239 in total). Of these, eight officers, 15 NCOs, and 92 soldiers (115 in total) were at the front at Skrunda. Of the rest, 58 were sick, 18 were untrained recruits, and 48 were on the company trains. The combat strength was 55% of the total, which was much lower than the combat strength of ASL regiments, as the sick and untrained were not counted on the roster. This approach allowed the German units to maintain their combat capability at a steady level, to carry out training, and to quickly compensate for daily losses, which in winter conditions were mostly sick.³⁹ The percentage of combat personnel in the *Landeswehr* was lower than in Soviet units, but that is what allowed them to reach a higher combat capability faster, and sustain it over a longer period of time.

³⁸ 1. Garde Reserve Division an Generalkommando VI. Reservekorps, 24.02.1919. *DSHI*, 120, 2, B/29.

³⁹ Deutsch-Baltische Landeswehr Kompanie Mitau Antwortmeldung, 13.02.1919. *LWVA*, 5627. I., 1. apr., 24. I., 108. lp.

At the end of February 1919, the total strength of the *Landeswehr* could be estimated at around 4,000 soldiers, of whom 2,500 were combat troops.⁴⁰ At the same time the Iron Division could have had approximately 4,000 soldiers, about 2,500 of them in combat units. The 1st Guards Reserve Division was the largest formation: according to various accounts, it had 5,000 soldiers, and up to 3,000 in combat formations.⁴¹ All in all, there were roughly 13,000 soldiers in total, of whom about 8,000 were in combat units, armed with 400 machine guns, 50 guns, one armoured train, one armoured car, and 20 combat-ready aircraft. During the Eisgang phase of the operation, three battalion-size units of the 52nd Army Corps, consisting of about 1,000 soldiers in total, also attacked in the direction of Šiauliai.

The composition and plans of the ASL's Kurzeme front at the end of February 1919

After the offensive by the Soviet 1st Brigade was stopped, it was necessary to make appropriate adjustments. The Red Army high command took an important decision to correct the mistakes of early January, and on 12 February 1919 ordered the creation of the Western Front, consisting of the 7th Army in the north against the Estonian army, the ASL in Latvia, and the Western Army on Lithuanian territory.⁴² The ASL leadership finally, after one month of hesitation, took the decision on how the ASL would be formed. So far, each unit, usually a regiment, would separately recruit and train volunteers, while at the same time various volunteer militia units formed outside independently. Now the new structure of two divisions was established by order, with the International Division being renamed the 2nd Rifle Division, and its regiments also renumbered accordingly.⁴³ Militia units under the supervision of the Military Commissariat, including those in Kurzeme, remained outside the new structure. The activities at the beginning of 1919 had a remarkable characteristic: both sides tried to create an army simultaneously while fighting was going. Normally, these processes are mutually exclusive, but in this case it was not possible. The

⁴⁰ Kriegstagebuch der Deutsch-Baltische Landeswehr Kompanie von Kleist, 10.02.1919. *LVA*, 5627. f., 1. apr., 51. l., 12. lp; Bataillon Malmede Stärkenachweis für den 15. Februar 1919. *LVA*, 5434. f., 1. apr., 551. l., 26. lp; GRIMM, Claus. *Vor den toren Europas 1918–1920*. Hamburg, 1963, S. 114, 137, 138.

⁴¹ The Iron Division numbers are based on the known combat composition on 17 January 1919, 6 and 16 March 1919. BISCHOFF, Josef. *Die letzte Front. Geschichte der Eisernen Division im Baltikum 1919*. Berlin, 1935, S. 33, 65; Vorläufige Kriegsgliederung der Eisernen Division, 16.03.1919. *LCVA*, f. 929, ap. 3, b. 51, l. 260. 1st Guards Reserve Division numbers are based on GRIMM, C. Op. cit., S. 166.

⁴² Direktiva Glavnogo komandovaniia o sozdanii Zapadnogo fronta, 12.02.1919 g. In *Direktivы Glavnogo komandovaniia...*, s. 361.

⁴³ Prikaz Armii Sovetskoi Latvii, 12.02.1919 g. *LVA*, 45. f., 2. apr., 263. l., 3.–5. lp.

outcome of the fighting was influenced significantly by the ability to carry out these processes at the same time, and the ASL approach was not the most effective.

The Saratov Special Rifle Regiment in Ezere was formally incorporated into the Soviet 2nd Rifle Division and given the number 10. At the beginning of February, the 3rd Rifle Regiment received an order to move to Ezere and replace the 10th Rifle Regiment, whose three rifle companies had no more than 150 soldiers left. After the replacement, it had to return to Vecauce, where the recruitment and training of volunteers was to begin.⁴⁴ The 3rd Cavalry Squadron, which after the capture of Ventspils moved to Kuldīga in order to prepare for an attack towards Liepāja, withdrew to the Saldus area. For the 1st Brigade to defend a 100-kilometre-wide area, it was more important to concentrate the units as close as possible to provide support in case of an attack. Mažeikiai was certainly key terrain, as it was on the railway line and provided cooperation with the units of the 2nd Rifle Division in northern Lithuania.

The position of the 39th and 47th Rifle Regiments of the 1st Brigade of the 2nd Rifle Division to the south of the 1st Brigade was also appropriate. At the beginning of February, the 39th Rifle Regiment headquarters moved to Vieکشniai, and the units moved on to the defensive on the Tirkšliai–Telšiai line.⁴⁵

The capture of Kuldīga on 14 February 1919 was also an important turning point for the ASL. On the morning of 13 February there were no ASL units in the whole of northern Kurzeme. The military leadership was transferred to the Military Commissariat of Soviet Latvia, which did not coordinate its activities with the ASL in any way. Instead, militia units of various sizes and combat capabilities, usually of company size, were formed spontaneously. The militia commanders tried to request support, but the attitude of the ASL leadership was very reserved, and the 1st Brigade was forbidden to send any forces.⁴⁶ It was not until late in the evening of 14 February that an order was issued to clarify the situation.⁴⁷ As late as 15 February, the ASL leadership did not think that the loss of Kuldīga would be a big problem.

From 16 February, the Kurzeme front, which until now was a passive area from which units could be withdrawn to deal with the crisis in northern Latvia, not only became a place of combat action, but also began to demand the reserves that were so badly needed elsewhere.

On 21 February, the ASL headquarters finally decided to disband and incorporate the Ventspils and other militia units into the 16th Rifle Regiment of the 3rd Brigade of the

⁴⁴ Zhurnal voennykh deistvii 3-Latyshskogo strelkovogo polka, 14.02.1919 g. *LVA*, 45. f., 2. apr., 191. l., 20. lp.; Boevoi sostav i raspolozhenie Armii Sovetskoi Latvii, 26.02.1919 g. *LVA*, 45. f., 2. apr., 33. l., 59. lp.; Donesenie komandiru Polka osobogo naznachenii, 07.02.1919 g. *LVA*, 45. f., 2. apr., 117. l., 53. lp.

⁴⁵ Donesenie 39-go internatsional'nogo polka, 04.02.1919 g. *LVA*, 45. f., 2. apr., 117. l., 47. lp.

⁴⁶ Telegramma nachal'nika shtaba Armii Sovetskoi Latvii, 10.02.1919 g. *LVA*, 45. f., 2. apr., 33. l., 34. lp.

⁴⁷ Prikaz komandira Pervoi brigady Armii Sovetskoi Latvii, 14.02.1919 g. *LVA*, 45. f., 2. apr., 117. l., 76. lp.

2nd Rifle Division, which had been training in Riga since the beginning of February.⁴⁸ On 22 February, the 1st Brigade Commander ordered the 10th Rifle Regiment in Veauce to go to Kuldīga, where they were to attack on 28 February.⁴⁹ Even before the offensive began, the ASL leadership redeployed a Vitebsk VChK regiment of 2,600 soldiers to Kurzeme to be used for the attack in the direction of Liepāja.⁵⁰ It is clear that the ASL leadership did not look at defensive options, but only to attack as far as Liepāja was considered. There was still a lot of correspondence about the final version of the plan, because the 1st Brigade commander Dūdiņš felt that Ventspils had to be taken first, and that the command structure had to be reorganised. Before 13 February, the 1st Brigade's task organisation was adequate for the mission at hand. On 1 March the frontline was already 160 kilometres long, and the 1st Brigade had no reserves left (see Map 3). The most important flaw in the ASL plans was the lack of a unified command on the Kurzeme front. Everything was handled by the ASL headquarters itself, which at this point had a priority in northern Latvia. All this created the conditions for the successful attack of the German 6th Reserve Corps, which began on 3 March 1919.

At the end of February 1919, the 2nd Rifle Division also became active in northern Lithuania. On 16 February, the ASL commander sent a telegram with a categorical order to occupy the Tirkšļiai (Tyrkschle)–Telšiai (Telsche) line in order to establish close contact with the 1st Brigade in Mažeikiai.⁵¹ The 39th Rifle Regiment captured the towns of Tirkšļiai, Nevarėnai and Telšiai on 26 February, but was forced to retreat in some places. At the same time, in order to cover the gap between the 39th Rifle Regiment and the 47th Rifle Regiment, the 1st Battalion of the Žemaičių Regiment attacked from Kuršėnai towards Luoke (Lukniki) on 26 February. The town was captured, but when Schlentner's unit of the German 52nd Corps counter-attacked the next day, the 1st Battalion was completely defeated, and, having lost 150 men, retreated northwards in panic.⁵²

According to reports at the end of February 1919, the Jelgava and Panevėžys groups, including units sent to the battle area at the last moment, had about 12,000 armed soldiers (about 500 men in various militia units, 7,500 men in the 1st Brigade, and about 4,000 in the 2nd Rifle Division).⁵³ The armament consisted of about 138 machine guns, 17 guns, one armoured train, one armoured car, and six aircraft. The actual combat strength is more difficult to determine, as the ASL adopted the

⁴⁸ Prikaz komandira Armii Sovetskoj Latvii, 21.02.1919 g. *LVA*, 45. f., 2. apr., 33. l., 53. lp.

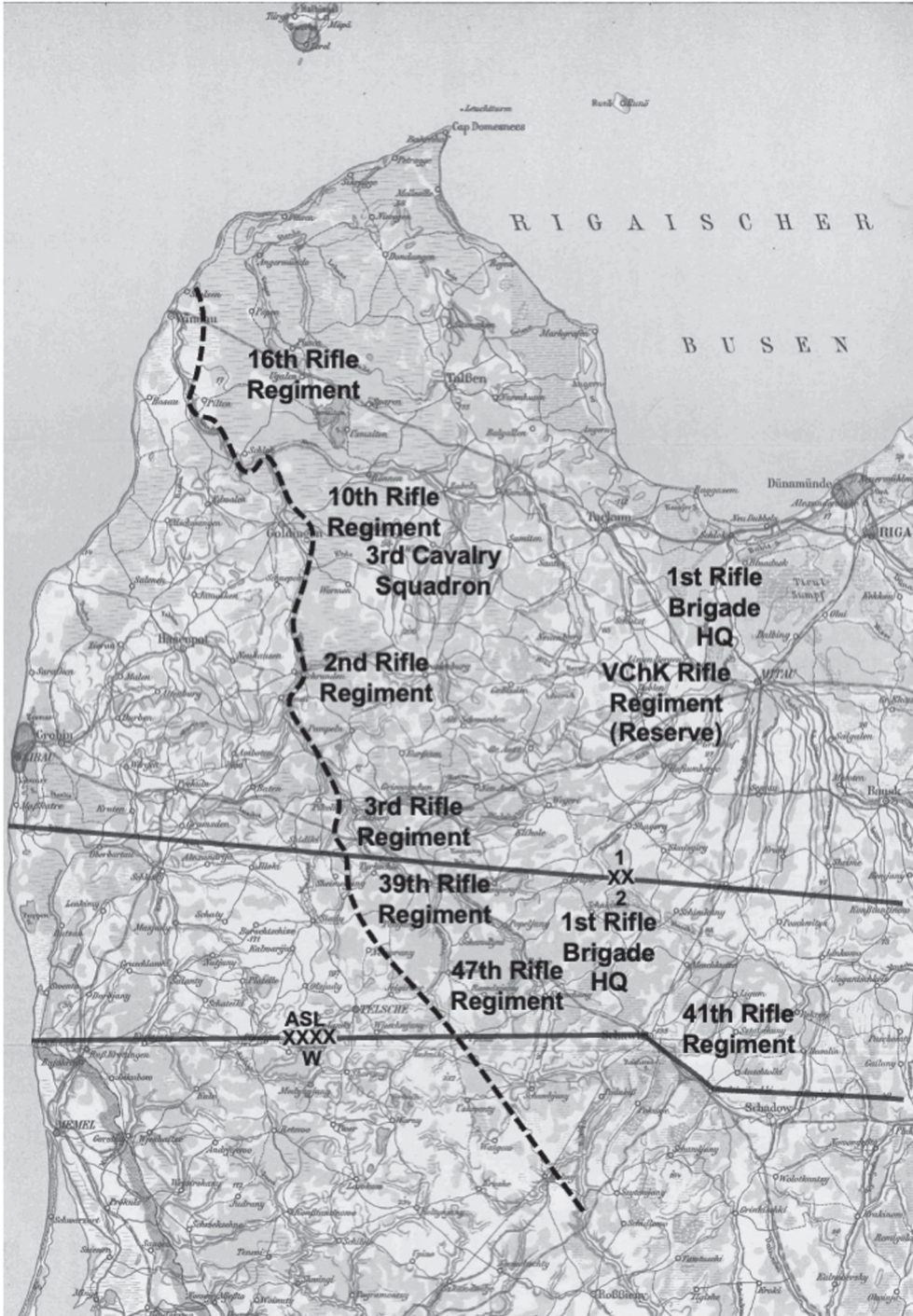
⁴⁹ Prikaz komandiru 10-go strelkovogo polka Armii Sovetskoj Latvii, 22.02.1919 g. *LVA*, 45. f., 2. apr., 117. l., 88. lp.

⁵⁰ Prikaz komandiru 16-go strelkovogo polka Armii Sovetskoj Latvii, 02.03.1919 g. *LVA*, 45. f., 2. apr., 117. l., 77. lp.

⁵¹ Prikaz komandira Armii Sovetskoj Latvii, 16.02.1919 g. *LVA*, 45. f., 2. apr., 33. l., 45. lp.

⁵² Bericht über die Operationen des VI. Reservekorps, die zur Einnahme der Aa-Linie von Bausk bis Schlok führten, 16.04.1919. *DSHI*, 120, 2, B/23; BALTUSHIS-ZHEMAITIS, [Feliks]. Graždanskaia voina v Litve v 1919 godu. *Voina i revoliutsiia*, 1929, kn. 7, s. 98.

⁵³ Boevoi sostav i raspolozhenie Armii Sovetskoj Latvii, 26.02.1919 g. *LVA*, 45. f., 2. apr., 33. l., 58. lp.; ŠILINŠ, Jānis. *Padomju Latvija 1918–1919*. Rīga, 2013, 179. lpp. In comparison with the calculations of Šiliņš, it is assumed that the number of militia units formed by the Military Commissariat is higher.



Map 3. The defensive positions of the Army of Soviet Latvia, March 1919

Russian army's reporting style of indicating only the total strength and the number of soldiers (bayonets) in infantry companies. The total number of 'bayonets' on the Kurzeme front was 5,500. Machine-gunners, scouts, signallers, engineers and the entire command staff of the unit was excluded. In comparison, the *Landeswehr* and Iron Division reports included all those directly participating in combat. In the 2nd Rifle Regiment in January to March 1919, on average the number of 'bayonets' was about 60% of the total strengths. Out of 1,124 soldiers, 564 were in rifle companies (bayonets), 340 in various battle support units, and 236 in the logistics company. If we use the German armed forces' reporting, the combat strength was 80%.⁵⁴ Taking into account the above-mentioned reports, the combat strength of the ASL units on the Kurzeme front can be estimated at around 9,000 soldiers.

Operation Tauwetter (3–10 March) (see Map 4)

Preparations for Operation Tauwetter began as early as 2 March 1919. At 3pm, the Latvian Battalion was ordered to concentrate at Lēnas by 5am on 3 March. On 3 March at 7am the river crossing began, and the attack started against two companies of the 2nd Soviet Latvian Rifle Regiment near Jaunāmuiža. By 10am the hamlet was occupied. Further south, the River Venta was crossed as planned by the Borke and Balla battalions of the Iron Division, which took the town of Pampāļi without resistance, and established contact with the Latvian Battalion to the north.⁵⁵

On 1 March, shortly before the start of the attack on the other sectors of the 6th Reserve Corps, the Iron Division headquarters learned that Soviet units were in Tirkšļiai and Nevarēnai. The plan had to be changed, and the towns were now to be taken together with Mažeikiai on Tau 1 instead of Tau 2. The attack on Tirkšļiai was to be carried out by the Schauroth Battalion of the 1st Guards Reserve Division (the 3rd Battalion of the 1st Guards Reserve Regiment), which was later on to move further towards Viekšņiai.⁵⁶ Even before the Tauwetter began, Nevarēnai was captured by a company of the Schauroth Battalion on 2 March, facilitating the next day's attack on Tirkšļiai.

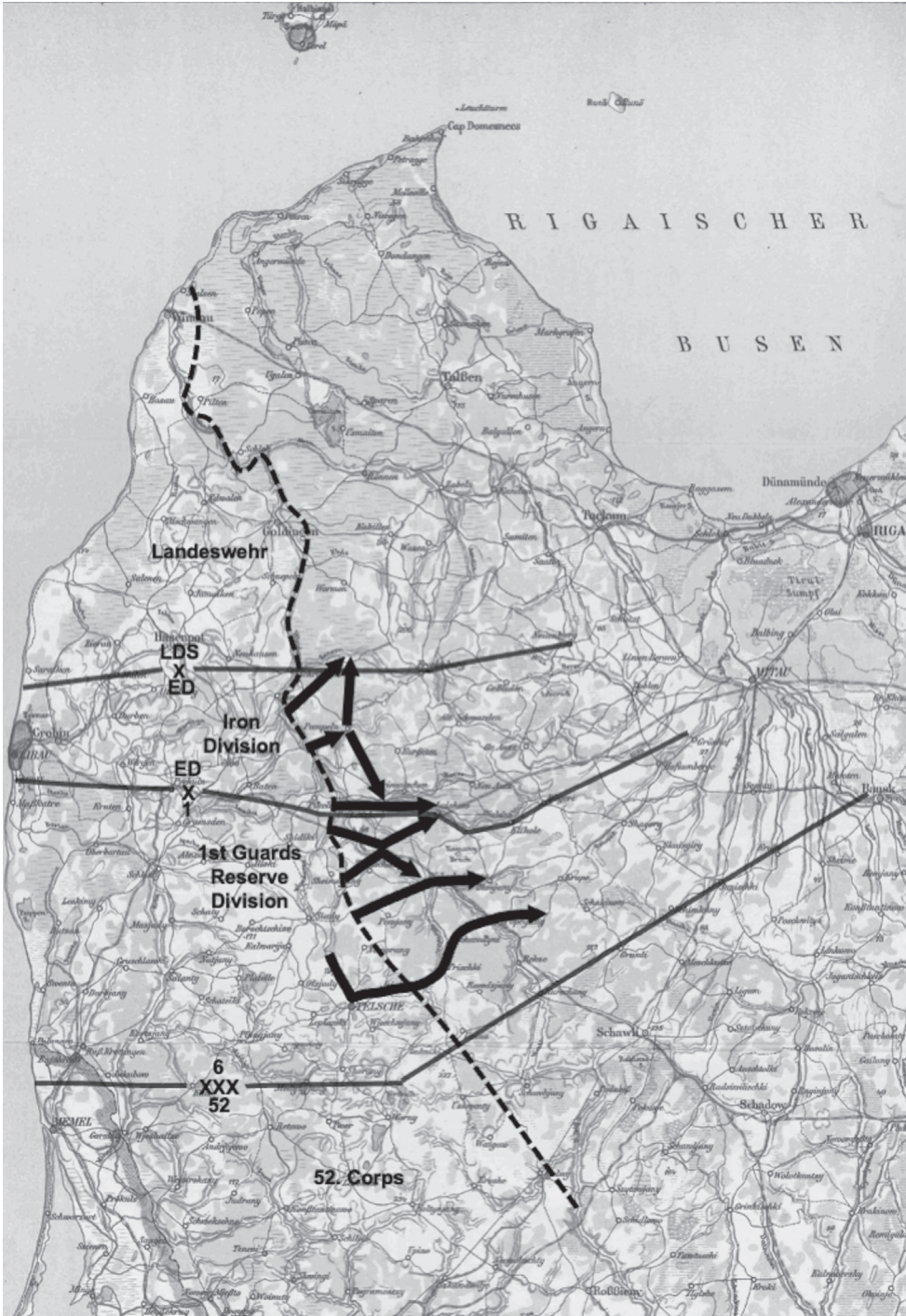
Unlike the *Landeswehr*, where combat battalions formed in mid-February 1919 and had already participated in successful battles, the Iron Division only confirmed the composition of five combat battalions on 2 March.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ STRAUSS, Aleksandrs. 2. Latvju strelneeku pulks rewoluzijas zihnās. In *Latvju strelneeku wehsture*. 2. sēj. 2. d.: *Strelneeki Padomju Latwijā*. Red. Pauls WIHKSNE, Wilis STRAUSS, Kirils STUZKA. Maskawā, 1934, 297. lpp.; Svedeniia o boevom sostave 6-go strelkovogo polka Armii Sovetskoi Latvii, 01.03.1919 g. LVA, 45. f., 2. apr., 263. l., 33. lp.

⁵⁵ SPANDEGS, V. Op. cit., 76. lpp.

⁵⁶ Eiserne Division Divisionsbefehl, 1.03.1919. LCVA, f. 929, ap. 3, b. 51, l. 243.

⁵⁷ Eiserne Division Divisionsbefehl, 2.03.1919. LCVA, f. 929, ap. 3, b. 51, l. 258.



Map 4. Operation Tauwetter, 3-10 March 1919

The attack by the Schauroth Battalion began at dawn on 3 March, and, building on the previous day's success in Nevarėnai against units of the Soviet 39th Rifle Regiment, took Tirkšliai in a fierce but short battle. Mažeikiai was attacked by Captain Doin's unit with two infantry, one machine-gun and one engineer company, as well as an artillery platoon and a cavalry squadron made up of cavalry troops of von Besser, Drachnefels and Nolde. The attack ended in a complete failure. The Soviet 3rd Rifle Regiment was a Latvian unit that had been fighting in Russia for a relatively long time and had good training and morale. The 5th and 6th companies of the 2nd Battalion, positioned in Mažeikiai, carried out routine reconnaissance for more than a week before the attack began and knew the area very well. The Doin Battalion tried to repeat the pattern of the 16 February attack, and attempted to break in simultaneously from all sides. Around midday, a Soviet armoured train rushed from Šiauliai to help. At 1pm, one Soviet infantry company counter-attacked from Ezere, which, according to the ambitious Tauwetter plan, had not been attacked by Tau 1. The Doin Battalion had been forced to retreat to its starting positions, suffering heavy casualties: one officer (Nolde, the commander of the *Landeswehr* cavalry troop) and nine soldiers were killed, three officers, including Captain Doin himself, and 22 soldiers, about 10% of the entire fighting strength, had been wounded.⁵⁸ Major Bischoff mentions that after the battle at least one company was forced to dismiss 50 soldiers along with the company commander because they were unprepared for this course of events. Here we can see the consequences of the hasty formation of the Iron Division units. The Soviet units also suffered heavy losses: seven killed and 14 wounded.⁵⁹

By the evening of the same day, the Iron Division stated that Mažeikiai was in enemy hands, and that a change of plan was necessary.⁶⁰ Captain Wehrmann took over from Captain Doin. The capture of Mažeikiai was entrusted to the Schauroth Battalion of the 1st Guards Reserve Division, which had successfully taken Tirkšliai. At the same time, the other parts of the plan remained in force. Heiberg's reinforced battalion, consisting of four infantry and four machine-gun companies, planned to attack Ezere against the main forces of the Soviet 3rd Rifle Regiment.

Fighting resumed on the morning of 4 March, and by 5:15pm, the units of the Iron Division forced the Soviet 3rd Rifle Regiment to start retreating from Ezere to Reņģe railway station.⁶¹ Throughout the day, two companies of the 2nd Battalion of the 3rd Rifle Regiment, supported by an armoured train, repelled German attacks on

⁵⁸ BISCHOFF, J. Op. cit., S. 60.

⁵⁹ Zhurnal voennykh deistvii 3-Latyshskogo strelkovogo polka, 03.03.1919 g. LVA, 45. f., 2. apr. 191. l., 48. lp.

⁶⁰ Eiserne Division Divisionsbefehl, 3.03.1919. LCVA, f. 929, ap. 3, b. 51, l. 259.

⁶¹ Zhurnal voennykh deistvii 3-Latyshskogo strelkovogo polka, 04.03.1919 g. LVA, 45. f., 2. apr., 191. l., 51. lp.

Mažeikiai. In the evening, on the German side, Armoured Train No 5 joined the battle, and its appearance forced the Soviet armoured train to retreat to Šiauliai.⁶² As darkness fell, the German units withdrew, and Mažeikiai was still under enemy control.⁶³ Preparations were made to seize the town and the station the following day. The Iron Division units would only perform blocking operations to ensure a complete encirclement. The main attack was to be carried out from the south by the battalions of Schuroth and Captain von Stulpnagel (the 2nd Battalion, the 2nd Guards Reserve Infantry Regiment), who moved northwards from Seda, altering the original plan of von Plehwes' battle group. However, it did not reach combat action on 5 March, as at 8:15pm on 4 March, the Soviet 2nd Battalion broke out of the Mažeikiai encirclement. Total casualties of the 3rd Rifle Regiment on 4 March were seven killed and eight wounded.⁶⁴

When the anti-Soviet forces, including Armoured Train No 5, arrived at Mažeikiai on the morning of 5 March, they found it completely deserted. Further north, the Soviet 2nd Rifle Regiment did not want to accept the loss of Jaunmuiža, and from 3 to 5 March carried out counter-attacks which were repulsed by the Latvian Battalion.

The main result of the fighting on 5 March was the complete disintegration of the SLA 2nd Rifle Division. On 3 March, the 39th Rifle Regiment lost both its guns in the vicinity of Tirkšliai and began to retreat in a disorderly manner towards Vieکشniai, where the regimental headquarters were located. When the German units entered Mažeikiai at 7am on 5 March, they met no resistance and continued their advance towards Vieکشniai, which they also captured without a fight on the evening of 5 March. Armoured train No 5 reached Papilė station with a small landing party and met no resistance there. The armoured train was followed along the Mažeikiai–Šiauliai railway by the von Bomsdorf Battalion (the 1st Battalion of the 1st Guards Reserve Infantry Regiment), according to the original plan, and from Seda through Pievėnai towards Vieکشniai by the 1st Battalion of the 2nd regiment under the command of Captain Herrlein.⁶⁵ Vieکشniai was taken without a fight and the advance guard proceeded to Akmenė, reaching the objective of Operation Tauwetter. The attacks could have continued without resistance, but the main limiting factor was that the 1st Guards Reserve Division was still on the move towards the areas of concentration.

The SLA leadership also tried to take decisions that would influence the course of the battle and stop the attacks by the 6th Reserve Corps. On the night of 3 and 4 March, the 1st Brigade sent the 1st Battalion of the long-awaited Vitebsk VChK Regiment

⁶² Panzerzug V im Baltikum. *Der Reiter gen Osten*, September 1937, Folge 9, S. 6.

⁶³ Eiserne Division Divisionsbefehl, 4.03.1919. *LCVA*, f. 929, ap. 3, b. 51, l. 254.

⁶⁴ Zhurnal voennykh deistvii 3-Latyshskogo strelkovogo polka, 04.03.1919 g. *LVA*, 45. f., 2. apr., 191. l., 52. lp.

⁶⁵ Bericht über die Operationen des VI. Reservekorps, die zur Einnahme der Aa-Linie von Bausk bis Schlok führten, 16.04.1919. *DSHI*, 120, 2, B/23.

from Jelgava to Šiauliai.⁶⁶ This did not change the overall aggressive mood. On the evening of 4 March, the same 1st Brigade planned to use the remaining two battalions of the Vitebsk VChK Regiment to attack Kuldīga.⁶⁷ The attack plans were only cancelled on 5 March, when the 3rd Battalion of the Vitebsk VChK Regiment was also sent to Laižuve to help the 3rd Rifle Regiment.⁶⁸ On the same day, the SLA leadership decided to reinforce the Kurzeme front. Operations in northern Kurzeme were entrusted to Roberts Vaiņāns, the commander of the 3rd Brigade of the 2nd Rifle Division, ending five days of correspondence about who would be in charge.⁶⁹ The 3rd Brigade was in charge of the formation of the 16th and 18th Rifle Regiments in Ugalē and Jelgava respectively. In addition, the 8th Rifle Regiment was transferred from Valmiera to Jelgava, the 26th Armoured Car Company from Riga, and the 99th Rifle Regiment of the 11th Rifle Division was requested from the general reserve.⁷⁰

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On the evening of 5 March, the Iron Division issued an order for further attacks in the northern sector of Tauwetter. The Latvian Battalion and the Borke Battalion had to reach the Skrunda–Saldus road, the border between battalions remained in the same place, the Nushke railway station.

The attack started as planned, and two companies of the Latvian Battalion moved north of Jaunmuiža.⁷¹ The Soviet 2nd Rifle Regiment did not put up much resistance, because at the same time the attack by the Borke Battalion from Graveri began. The leadership of the 2nd Rifle Regiment decided to leave the line of the River Venta and retreat eastwards. At 10am the separate battalion was half-way towards reaching the day's objective. After a short rest, the Latvian Battalion started moving through the forest from Skrunda School towards the Nushke railway station.⁷² At the time when the main forces reached the Skrunda–Saldus road, Colonel Oskars Kalpaks received a report that there was contact with the retreating enemy. The colonel gave the order to attack the enemy along the narrow-gauge railway. Captain Jānis Puriņš, the commander of the Cēsis Company, asked for permission to form the company into a marching column, for in his opinion the Nushke station, where the border of the area of responsibility with the Borke Battalion was, had been left behind. The colonel, on the other hand, was convinced that Nushke station had not been reached yet. None of the Latvian officers knew that the Nushke station mentioned in all the orders had never existed in reality, because the German cartographers had

⁶⁶ Telegramma nachal'nika shtaba 1-oi brigady Armii Sovetskoi Latvii, 04.03.1919 g. *LVA*, 45. f., 2. apr., 117. l., 132. lp.

⁶⁷ Prikaz komandiru Vitebskogo polka VChK, 04.03.1919 g. *LVA*, 45. f., 2. apr., 263. l., 48. lp.

⁶⁸ Zhurnal voennykh deistvii 3-Latyshskogo strelkovogo polka, 05.03.1919 g. *LVA*, 45. f., 2. apr., 191. l., 54. lp.

⁶⁹ Prikaz komandiru 1-oi brigady Armii Sovetskoi Latvii, 05.03.1919 g. *LVA*, 45. f., 2. apr., 263. l., 49. lp.

⁷⁰ Prikaz pervogo pomoshchnika komandira Armii Sovetskoi Latvii, 05.03.1919 g. *LVA*, 45. f., 2. apr., 33. l., 6, 73. lp.

⁷¹ SPANDEGS, V. Op. cit., 78. lpp.

⁷² Ibid., 80. lpp.

made a mistake. The station building cannot be missed, so the units were further west than it seemed, and it was only logical to launch an attack through the forest to reach the Nushke railway station on the other side. To the west of Bundži farm, an advance cavalry patrol of the Latvian Battalion engaged the enemy, which turned out to be the Borke Battalion. As a result of friendly fire, four Latvian officers were killed, including Colonel Oskars Kalpaks, and four soldiers were wounded. In the Borke Battalion, four soldiers were killed and five were wounded.⁷³

In the other sectors of the Tauwetter, 6 March was a day of rest and regrouping. On 7 March the 1st Guards Reserve Division sent Armoured Train No 5 to Kuršēnai station into an engagement with a Soviet armoured train. The Soviet armoured train was guarding the 1st Battalion of the Vitebsk VChK Regiment, which was moving west to support the 39th Regiment in Viekšņiai. After a short battle, the Soviets fled to Šiauliai, leaving many trophies for the Germans.⁷⁴ On 7 March, Borke's and Liebermann's battalions returned to their attack sector to prepare for the attack on Laižuve which was planned for the following day.

The final stage of Tauwetter started on the morning of 8 March, when the Schauroth Battalion of the 1st Guards Reserve Division, together with the Iron Division, defeated the reinforced 3rd Rifle Regiment in a fierce battle on the Laižuve–Druva line. According to Soviet war diary entries, the main reason was the low fighting capability of the 3rd Battalion of the Vitebsk VChK Regiment. After retreating towards Rēnge station, the battalion lost all six machine guns and was left with only 80 combat-ready soldiers.⁷⁵ By 3:30pm, units of the Soviet 3rd Rifle Regiment retreated to Vecauce. The planned line of departure for Operation Eisgang was reached, and General von der Goltz had to decide on the next operations.

Operation Eisgang (10–17 March) (see Map 5)

On 9 March, after regrouping, the 6th Reserve Corps issued an order to reach the Eisgang line of advance (Talsi–Kandava–Saldus–Žagare–Gruzdžiai). The attack that started on 10 March exceeded all expectations. In the south, battalions of the 2nd Guards Reserve Infantry Regiment reached Kruopiai by the evening, while in the north battalions of the 1st Guards Reserve Infantry Regiment reached Vegeriai without a fight. Cavalry units of the 1st Guards Reserve Division advanced another ten kilometres to the northeast and reached Martynišķiai. On 11 March, the German units met their first resistance from the Soviet 8th Rifle Regiment, which arrived in

⁷³ Bericht über den Vormarsch der Eisernen Division in der Zeit vom 3.–21.03.1919. *DSHI*, 120, 2, B/24.

⁷⁴ Panzerzug V im Baltikum. *Der Reiter gen Osten*, September 1937, Folge 9, S. 6

⁷⁵ Zhurnal voennykh deistvii 3-Latvyskogo strelkovogo polka, 08.03.1919 g. *LVA*, 45. f., 2. apr., 191. l., 57. lp.



Map 5. Operation Eisgang, 10-17 March 1919

the vicinity of Žagare. On 13 March the right wing of the 1st Guards Reserve Division, supported by Armoured Train No 5, reached Meškučiai to the north of Šiauliai.⁷⁶

On the right flank, the 52nd Army Corps and the Schlenther Battalion took Kuršėnai, while the Randow and Brandis battalions advanced from Kelmė towards Šiauliai. On 11 March the last Soviet forces left Šiauliai, and on 12 March the German forces, following the completely disorganised units of the 2nd Rifle Division, reached Radviliškis, while on 14 March Šėduva was captured.⁷⁷

On 10 March the Iron Division started moving early in the morning and reached the Veczārde–Jaunauce–Benkava line without a fight. On 11 March, the battalions of the Iron Division reached the 3rd Rifle Regiment's positions near Vecauce, and on the morning of 12 March launched an attack to seize the positions. As early as 12:15pm, the Soviet 3rd Rifle Regiment started to withdraw towards Bēne railway station. Apart from the dispersal of the 3rd Battalion of the Vitebsk VChK Regiment, the losses were not heavy: one killed and seven wounded.⁷⁸ On 12 March the retreat continued, and the 3rd Rifle Regiment stopped just before Penkule station, where it contacted the 2nd Rifle Regiment, which had retreated from Saldus and reached the vicinity of Blīdene. The 6th Reserve Corps noted in its report that on 13 March the main objective of the Eisgang attack had been achieved.⁷⁹

Despite the complete collapse of the 2nd Rifle Division and the loss of Šiauliai, the position of the SLA 1st Brigade in Kurzeme in the early morning of 13 March was even better than it had been ten days earlier, if we assume that, given the overall strategic situation, Kurzeme was supposed to be a passive area. In northern Kurzeme, the 3rd Brigade, consisting of the 10th Rifle Regiment, the 16th Rifle Regiment and the 2nd Battalion of the Vitebsk VChK Regiment, was in control of the Kuldīga and Ventspils areas. At least three militia companies were also in the brigade's area of responsibility. In total, the brigade had 3,000 soldiers, of whom almost 1,500 were recorded as infantry, with 32 machine guns and two heavy guns on the 80-kilometre-long frontline.⁸⁰

The commander of the 1st Brigade Dūdīņš had five rifle regiments and at least three cavalry squadrons under his command, with the headquarters in Jelgava. The 2nd Rifle Regiment was deployed in the Dobele (Doblen) area, and further south the 3rd Rifle Regiment was deployed with the 3rd Battalion of the Vitebsk VChK Regiment. The

⁷⁶ Bericht über die Operationen des VI. Reservekorps, die zur Einnahme der Aa-Linie von Bausk bis Schlok führten, 16.04.1919. *DSHI*, 120, 2, B/23; KALNIŅSCH, Frīdrihs. 8. Latwju strelhneeku pulka kaujas Kursemē. Kaujas Žagares un Mežu muižas rajonā. In *Latwju strelhneeku wehsture*. 2. sēj. 2. d.: *Strelhneeki Padoņju Latvijā*. Red. Pauls WIHKSNE, Wilis STRAUSS, Kirils STUZKA. Maskawā, 1934, 312. lpp.

⁷⁷ Panzerzug V im Baltikum. *Der Reiter gen Osten*, September 1937, Folge 9, S. 6.

⁷⁸ Zhurnal voennykh deistvii 3-Latyshskogo strelkovogo polka, 12.03.1919 g. *LVA*, 45. f., 2. apr., 191. l., 61. lp.

⁷⁹ Bericht über die Operationen des VI. Reservekorps, die zur Einnahme der Aa-Linie von Bausk bis Schlok führten, 16.04.1919. *DSHI*, 120, 2, B/23.

⁸⁰ Boevoi sostav i raspolozhenie Armii Sovetskoj Latvii, 12.03.1919 g. *LVA*, 45. f., 2. apr., 33. l., 108. lp.

recently transferred 99th Rifle Regiment, together the 8th Rifle Regiment and some companies of the 18th Rifle Regiment, were in the vicinity of Bukaiši and Augstkalni. Near Joniškis (Janischki) one squadron of the Moscow VChK Cavalry Regiment, consisting of 100 soldiers, covered the Šiauliai direction. Various militia units and some troops retreating from Šiauliai were also present in the area.⁸¹ The 1st Brigade's area of responsibility was half what it had been ten days earlier. With the headquarters in Jelgava, the battle command could now be carried out more efficiently using two railway lines, both of which met in Jelgava. The 1st Brigade had a total of 8,000 troops: 4,500 active infantry, 84 machine guns, 15 guns, six aircraft, four armoured cars and one armoured train. On 12 March 1919, the Paņevežys Battle Group, now led by Commander Andreev of the 2nd Rifle Division, had some 2,000 active infantry, with 49 machine guns and 19 guns. Given the way the whole battle group had retreated chaotically from Šiauliai, this is a rather formal figure with a minimal combat capability. In total, on the morning of 13 March, some 15,000 troops, including nearly 8,000 active infantry, with 165 machine guns and 36 guns, were operating against the German 6th Reserve Corps. From a strategic point of view, the SLA position became critical, as the Kurzeme front became as strong in terms of fighting capability as the North Latvian Front against the Estonian armed forces with no clear main effort. However, it was possible to stop the German Eisgang operation. The weakest part of the position was the almost 50-kilometre-wide gap between the 3rd Brigade and the 1st Brigade.

The *Landeswehr*, whose main forces only returned from Ventspils at the end of February, planned to launch an attack against the Soviet 3rd Brigade. On 6 March the *Landeswehr's* Latvian Battalion completed the establishment of a bridgehead on the east bank of the River Venta near Skrunda. On 3 March 1919, the *Oberstab* of the *Landeswehr* sent out Battle Order No 1 with the mission for Operation Eisgang.⁸² The operation on the right flank, where the Latvian Battalion was operating, was nicknamed Ostern, and its mission was to launch an attack towards Saldus on 10 March. The Engehardt cavalry squadron was to provide liaison between the southern and northern formations. The *Landeswehr* main attack in the north was codenamed Pfingsten. The Lieven Battalion was to attack from near Kuldīga southeast to Vārme. In the middle, the Eulenburg Battalion would advance directly east along the Kabile-Vāne road. The Assault Battalion, as part of the Northern Battle Group, together with the Malmede Battalion, attacked towards Renda-Sabile-Kandava. The end state of the operation was not specified in the combat order itself, but the main supply route was specified in the supply annex to the order, ending at Tukums, much further away than indicated in the 6th Reserve Corps order for the Eisgang. The intention of the *Landeswehr* commander Major Fletcher, already formulated on 17 February,

⁸¹ Boevoi sostav i raspolozhenie Armii Sovetskoi Latvii, 12.03.1919 g. ..., 110. lp.

⁸² Oberstab der Baltischen Landeswehr Befehl Nr. 1, 9.09.1919. *BA MA*, R8025, 1, 0102.

to reach the coast at Riga east of Tukums, contrary to the plans of the corps, can be clearly seen.

A separate order was issued to regulate communications during the attack. The *Landeswehr* had three wireless stations, one of which remained at Kuldīga, one with the Northern Battle Group, and one with the Eulenburg Battalion. Major Fletcher himself planned to advance with the Northern Battle Group. For the units that did not have wireless stations, a detailed order of communications was laid down, with the most important task of ensuring the flow of information between individual columns.⁸³ Unlike other units of the 6th Reserve Corps, a precise scheme for air reconnaissance and information-gathering was laid out. All the details were discussed personally by the commanders on the evening of 9 March at the Metropole Hotel in Kuldīga.

However, the carefully worked out plans had to be hastily changed on the evening of 9 March. The efficiency of the *Landeswehr* was due to the establishment of an intelligence system throughout the area of responsibility. The *Oberstab* learned of the Soviet planned movements almost simultaneously with the enemy commanders. On the evening of 9 March, information about the Soviet attack was picked up.⁸⁴ While the Soviet 1st Brigade headquarters was still thinking how to use the Vitebsk VChK Regiment, the *Landeswehr* was already reacting. At 1am on the night of 10 March, an improvised battle group began moving towards Ventspils to repel an imaginary Soviet attack.⁸⁵ At 11:30am the column was halted half-way, and, after clarifying the incoming intelligence information, it was decided to return to Kuldīga on 11 March. The same evening the *Oberstab* confirmed the combat tasks, stating that the Eisgang would begin on the morning of 13 March. The right wing of the *Landeswehr* captured Saldus on 10 March, and continued its slow movement eastwards, maintaining contact with the Iron Division.⁸⁶

On 13 March at 5:30am the Lieven Battalion started to move towards Vārme, at 6:30am the Eulenburg Battalion moved out towards Kabile, while at 7:30am the main attack was led by the combined Northern Battle Group with the Assault Battalion's Cavalry Squadron as the leading element. Otto Eckert, the commander of the 3rd Company of the Assault Battalion, who left the most detailed description of the battle, writes that an important feature of the *Landeswehr's* offensive tactics was the attacks in column formation.⁸⁷ Behind the Cavalry Squadron was a single gun with an infantry platoon for close protection, followed by the rest of the 1st Infantry

⁸³ Oberstab der Baltischen Landeswehr Befehl (Fernsprechverbindung, Nachrichtenübermittlung und Befehlerteilung), 9.03.1919. *BA MA*, R8025, 1, 0108.

⁸⁴ Oberstab der Baltischen Landeswehr Nachrichtenblatt vom 9.03.1919. *LVA*, 3405. f., 1. apr., 70. l., 6. lp.

⁸⁵ Gefechtbericht der Baltischen Landeswehr vom 3.03. bis 21.03. 1919, 6.04.1919. *BA MA*, R8025, 1, 0062.

⁸⁶ Oberstab der Baltischen Landeswehr Befehl Nr. 3, 11.03.1919. *BA MA*, R8025, 1, 0090.

⁸⁷ ECKERT, Otto. Vormarsch durch Kurland. Der Vorstoß der Baltischen Landeswehr von Goldingen bis Tuckum (13–15. März 1919). In *Jahrbuch des baltischen Deutschtums in Lettland und Estland*. Riga, 1928, S. 156.

Company. The entire column of the Assault Battalion was eight kilometres long, all those who were not on horseback requisitioned local farmers' carts. Each cart had one driver and three or four soldiers. On average, each company had about 40 such carts. The Soviets were unable to put up any serious resistance. On the night of 12 and 13 March, the 2nd Battalion of the Soviet Vitebsk VChK under Commander Dieckal planned to relieve units of the 10th Rifle Regiment north of Kuldīga at Graudupe manor, in order to take over the defence there together with units of the Talsi militia. The 10th Rifle Regiment planned to move to the vicinity of Vārme to relieve the 3rd Cavalry Squadron there. The attack by the *Landeswehr* started at the very moment of the movement. The units of the Vitebsk VChK Battalion, like the other two battalions in other places, quickly dispersed and began a panicked retreat eastwards. Thus, on paper, the largest unit of the 1st Brigade, with 2,600 soldiers, did not make a positive impression. One reason could be that the regiment was split into three battalions in different areas. It is clear that the Cheka punitive units were not the best formation for front-line fighting.

At 6pm on 13 March, the first units of the Northern Battle Group's Assault Battalion reached Sabile after a 40-kilometre march, where, after a short battle, they settled down to rest. The middle column travelled 25 kilometres and reached Kabile. The southern column, after a short battle at Vārme, and after a 30-kilometre march, reached Šķēde.⁸⁸ Although the resistance was no less than in the areas of the Iron Division or the 1st Guards Division, the speed of the advance was twice as much. In the towns seized, the *Landeswehr* units rested until 2pm on 14 March, when all three columns moved on. The objective of the northern column was to reach Tukums, the middle column was to settle at Sāti, southwest of Tukums. The southern column was to reach Jaundzīras. The southern column continued its attack after reaching its objective of 14 March, and after a 40-kilometre night march reached the Irlava area at 11am on 15 March. The Eulenburg Battalion of the middle column continued its night march on 14 March after the battle of Zemīte and reached Sāti at 10:30am on 15 March.

Initially, Fletcher's Battle Group was fighting around Kandava, 15 kilometres east of the line of departure, and then continued the night attack towards Tukums, reaching the outskirts of the town at 4am in the morning. The capture of Tukums was the only battle Major Fletcher, the leader of the operation himself, has published a memoir of.⁸⁹ The attack on Tukums was based on a tried-and-tested method, an unexpected attack from all directions, and the town's central square was liberated by 9:30am. This method was very successful against a demoralised opponent with poor communications. Within 48 hours, the northern column had covered 80 kilometres

⁸⁸ Gefechtbericht der Baltischen Landeswehr vom 3.03. bis 21.03. 1919, 6.04.1919. *BA MA*, R8025, 1, 0064.

⁸⁹ FLETCHER, Alfred. Die Eroberung Tuckums. In *Das Buch vom deutschen Freikorpskämpfer*. Hrsg. von Ernst von SALOMON. Berlin, 1938, S. 155.

while fighting. On 15 and 16 March, the main forces of the *Landeswehr* remained in place, and at the same time the Latvian Battalion continued its relatively slow attack against the Soviet 2nd Rifle Regiment, and by the evening of 16 March, together with the left wing of the Iron Division, reached the line Jaunpils–Annenieki.⁹⁰ At the same time, the 1st Guards Reserve Division encountered more serious resistance north of Žagare, where the Soviet 8th, 18th and 99th Rifle Regiments were engaged. By the evening of 16 March, the 6th Reserve Corps had surpassed the Operation Eisgang line of advance, and it was necessary to decide on the next course of action.⁹¹

Operation Fruhlingswind (17–21 March) (see Map 6)

On 17 March, in response to a question sent by the 6th Reserve Corps HQ about the possible capture of Jelgava, *Oberkommando Nord* announced that after the Sloka–Jelgava–Joniškis–Šeduva line had been reached, the corps' mission would be achieved. On the same day, the corps sent out orders to the units about the planned attack on Jelgava. According to the plan, the attack would be launched from the south in the sector of the 1st Guards Reserve Division. The main effort was planned as a flanking manoeuvre from the bridgeheads on the east bank of the River Lielupe near Staļģene and Bauska. With this manoeuvre, the 6th Reserve Corps planned to surround the Soviet units in Jelgava. The start of the attack was set tentatively for 20 March and was codenamed Fruhlingswind. At the same time, the *Landeswehr* and the Iron Division had to engage the enemy from the west and northwest. However, this operation was never carried out. To great surprise, General von der Goltz received an incomplete radiogram in the early hours of 19 March with the message that the *Landeswehr* was already in Jelgava!⁹²

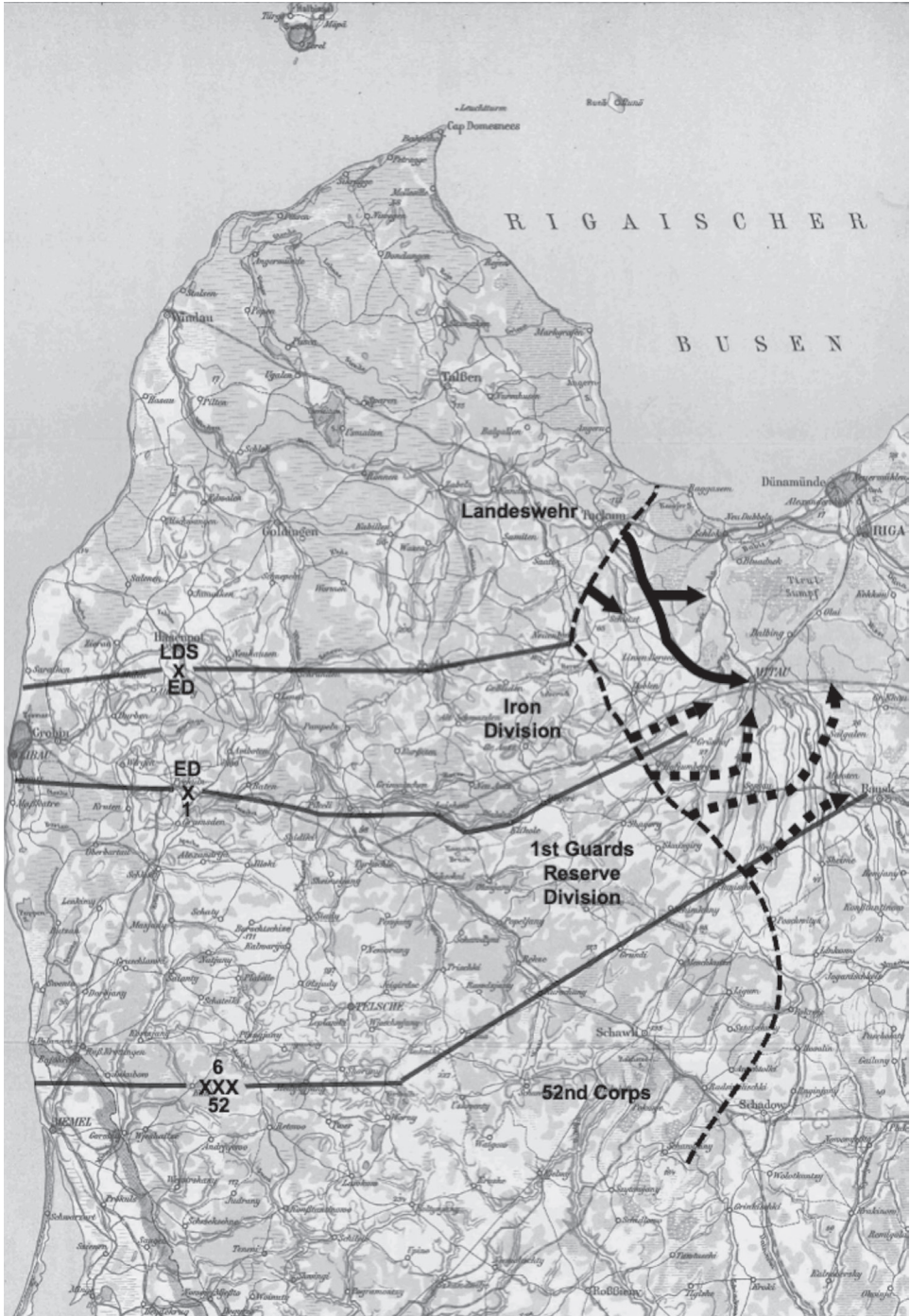
On 16 March, *Landeswehr* units, with the exception of the Latvian Battalion and the Engelhardt Cavalry Unit, concentrated in the vicinity of Tukums. The next day, Major Fletcher decided to launch an 80-kilometre attack to capture Jelgava. Unfortunately, he himself did not write what the main reason for this decision was, but it was a classic example of a military commander acting in what is known in German as *Auftragstaktik* or mission command. The *Landeswehr's* report mentions an event on 17 March when a German airplane pilot landed near Tukums, tasked with bombing Soviet forces at Penkule.⁹³ In the light of this information, and of the overall intelligence on the enemy's positions, an order was issued stating that at 8:15pm all

⁹⁰ SPANDEGS, V. Op. cit., 93. lpp.

⁹¹ Gefechtbericht der Baltischen Landeswehr vom 3.03. bis 21.03. 1919, 6.04.1919. BA MA, R8025, 1, 0064.

⁹² Bericht über die Operationen des VI. Reservekorps, die zur Einnahme der Aa-Linie von Bausk bis Schlok führten, 16.04.1919. DSHI, 120, 2, B/23.

⁹³ Gefechtbericht der Baltischen Landeswehr vom 3.03. bis 21.03.1919, 6.04.1919. BA MA, R8025, 1, 0064.



Map 6. Operation Fruhlingswind, 17-21 March 1919. The dotted line shows the initial plan of the 6th Reserve Corps; the solid line the actual attack of the *Landeswehr* on 18 March 1919

Landeswehr units would begin an 80-kilometre march on the night of 18 March to seize Jelgava early in the morning.⁹⁴ One company of the Malmedy battalion, based in Šlokenbek, would remain behind, and an improvised company would protect the supply units in Tukums. According to the plan, Fletcher would use the tactics already developed: attack in a single-column formation. The forward unit was initially the Lieven Battalion, which, after a 25-kilometre march at Ērzeļkrogs, was to reconnoitre towards the River Lielupe to take the flank. To the west of the main road, the Kleist Company of the Eulenburg Battalion moved towards Džūkste to secure the other flank. The leading element was a cavalry unit commanded by Karl Hahn of the Eulenburg Battalion. As the company commanded by Raden of the Eulenburg Battalion was formed in Jelgava 1918, it had to take the lead in the outskirts of the town.⁹⁵

Street fighting in Jelgava continued from 9am to 7pm in the evening, and the Soviet armoured train was the biggest challenge. By late evening, all *Landeswehr* units were concentrated in Jelgava, including the Lieven Battalion, which was unable to cross the River Lielupe. Instead, the Latvian Battalion was to guard the flank at Ērzeļkrogs. The *Landeswehr* wireless station was ready for work on the morning of 19 March, and was able to send a report about the capture of Jelgava. During the whole operation, the greatest losses were suffered by Kleist's company (six killed) at Džūkste, where during the night it came into contact with the Soviet 1st Cavalry Regiment, which was moving towards Tukums. During the fighting, the Soviet cavalry lost its fighting capability and joined the retreat on the morning of 18 March. The fall of Jelgava on the morning of 18 March came as a complete surprise to the Soviets. Although there were about 300 to 500 soldiers in the town, no effective resistance was observed. At 1pm a telephone call came from Jelgava to the headquarters of the Soviet 3rd Rifle Regiment, which was located at Penkule station. The armoured train was to go to the rescue of the headquarters of the 1st Brigade. At 3pm telephone communications were cut, and it became clear that the 1st Brigade had withdrawn from Jelgava.⁹⁶

From 7pm on 18 March to 6pm on 19 March, all Soviet rifle regiments south of Jelgava tried to clarify the overall situation. At 6pm on 19 March, the leadership of the 3rd, 8th and 99th Rifle Regiments and the 1st Cavalry Regiment held a meeting at Ūzīņi to decide what to do next. During the meeting, commanders were divided on the opinion of whether to launch a counter-attack from the south against Jelgava or to retreat without fighting. In the early morning of 20 March, most of the units from Mūrmuiža started to move eastwards to Eleja, and further towards Bauska, which the main

⁹⁴ Oberstab der Baltischen Landeswehr Befehl Nr. 8, 17.03.1919. *BA MA*, R8025, 1, 0084.

⁹⁵ HAHN, Karl. Kämpfe um Mitau. In *Die Baltische Landeswehr im Befreiungskampf gegen den Bolschewismus. Ein Gedenkbuch*. [Hrsg. von Wilhelm von FIRCKS, Eberhard von PANDER, Percy VOCKRODT, Reinhard WITTRAM.] Riga, 1929, S. 90; Kriegstagebuch der Deutsch-Baltische Landeswehr Kompanie Mitau, 18.03.1919. *LVA*, 5627. f., 1. apr., 52. l., 10. lp.

⁹⁶ Zhurnal voennykh deistvii 3-Latvshskogo strelkovogo polka, 18.03.1919 g. *LVA*, 45. f., 2. apr., 191. l., 68. lp.

forces reached on 21 March. The last Soviet unit remaining west of Jelgava was the Soviet 2nd Rifle Regiment, which on 18 March took up positions near Dobele. When the remaining Soviet units began the retreat eastwards on 19 March, the German Iron Division launched a concentric attack on Dobele. Taking into account the available battle composition of the Iron Division on 16 March, it can be seen that the German units outnumbered the 2nd Rifle Regiment, but the Soviets managed to break through.⁹⁷

The Battle of Dobele is described in the memoirs of Captain Liebermann, who commanded a battalion of the Iron Division. It is clear from the description that the fighting was not easy. The Latvian riflemen, who as a unit had fought many battles still on Russian territory, showed great fighting abilities.⁹⁸ The Soviet 2nd Rifle Regiment had covered almost 90 kilometres from Dobele to Bauska in 40 hours of fighting, and had managed to maintain its combat cohesion. The battles showed that it would most likely be a great challenge for the *Landeswehr* to repel an attack on Jelgava from the south by the combined Soviet regiments. The issue was not tactical, but demonstrated the leadership of the opposing commanders involved, and the training, cohesion and morale of the units. The 1st Brigade's overall fighting capability collapsed after the loss of communication, and not because individual units suffered heavy casualties. It is also an open question whether the 6th Reserve Corps' plan for Operation Fruhlingswind would have worked, given that the attack would have been frontal. and Soviet units, with adequate leadership and continued reinforcements, could beat off attacks.

On 21 March, the 6th Reserve Corps, by order, established new combat districts, and thus the fighting phase began. Between 3 and 21 March, units of the 6th Reserve Corps lost a total of 93 soldiers killed, 242 wounded, and 25 missing. Of the total, the *Landeswehr* units had the lowest losses.⁹⁹ The actual number of Soviet casualties is not known, but it is clear that in terms of numbers it was not a disaster. Operation Fruhlingswind was a huge success because of Major Fletcher's audacity and aggressiveness.

Conclusions

The mission command approach, although often mentioned, is a difficult goal to achieve. To use it, it is not enough to have a commander willing to think outside the box. Several preconditions are needed.

⁹⁷ Kriegsgkiederung der Eiserne Division, 16.03.1919. *LCVA*, f. 929, ap. 3, b. 51, l. 260; STRAUSS, A. Op. cit., 235. lpp.

⁹⁸ LIEBERMANN, D. Kleinkrieg in Eis und Shnee. In *Das Buch vom deutschen Freikorpskämpfer*. Hrsg. von Ernst von SALOMON. Berlin, 1938, S. 157.

⁹⁹ Bericht über die Operationen des VI. Reservekorps, die zur Einnahme der Aa-Linie von Bausk bis Schlok führten, 16.04.1919. *DSHI*, 120, 2, B/23.

1. The strategic situation must be appropriate. Major Fletcher's daring raids into the enemy's rear were impossible in the trench warfare of the First World War. During the Baltic Wars of Independence, strategic mistakes by the Soviet army leadership in December 1918 and January 1919 created the necessary operational situation to achieve the best results.

2. Adequate training and consistent implementation of basic military principles at all levels are necessary for the mission command approach to achieve results. The *Landeswehr* was the most successful of all anti-Soviet formations because it was able to find the time for training and the step-by-step development of the units' fighting power. Additionally the *Landeswehr* units recruited local Latvian, German, and to a lesser extent Russian, soldiers who knew what they were fighting for. The German Iron Division and the 1st Guards Reserve Division lacked this local connection, and their operations did not have the same social cohesion. On the other side, the army of Soviet Latvia failed to implement even the most basic military principles, and therefore its operations were not successful. On some occasions, Soviet units, especially locally recruited, showed good social cohesion and managed to evade complete destruction, but the lack of operational planning did not allow results to be achieved.

3. Commanders' aggressive decision-making, and once in a while ignoring orders from superiors, does not exclude careful planning and adherence to standard operational procedures. The general intention of the operation must be formulated according to the actual situation, and there is no room for wishful thinking. Again, the *Landeswehr* headquarter's actions and military planning documents (orders, communications plans, supply plans, etc) were of a superior quality, and created conditions for the commander's improvisation. Of all three 6th Reserve Corps units the *Landeswehr* had the most capable intelligence collection and analysis system, which allowed the mission command approach to be used.

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VOKIETIJOS VI REZERVO KORPUSO ANTISOVIETINĖ PUOLIMO OPERACIJA BALTIJOS ŠALYSE 1919 M. KOVĄ. TIKSLINIO VADOVAVIMO ATVEJIS

Valdis Kuzmins

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Santrauka

Šiandien Baltijos šalių nepriklausomybės karai yra gana plačiai ištirti ir aprašyti, tačiau galimybės panaudoti šiuos tyrimus konkreitiems karo istorijos klausimams analizuoti yra ribotos. Baltijos šalių istorikai daugiausia dėmesio skiria kiekvienos atskiros šalies kovoms už nepriklausomybę. Todėl dažnai nenagrinėjamos operacijos, vykusios kitapus „mūsų“ politinių sienų. Antrasis iššūkis karybos analizei yra įprastas tyrinėtojų susitelkimas tik į savo nacionalinius vienetus. Pavyzdžiui, Latvijos nepriklausomybės karo tyrimuose nagrinėjama tik Latvijos karinių dalinių veikla, praleidžiant operacinį karo veiksmų lygmenį.

Čia pristatomu tyrimu, remiantis pirminiais šaltiniais, siekta išsamiai aprašyti 1919 m. kovo mėn. karines operacijas ir išanalizuoti, kaip jų metu naudotas vienas žinomiausių karinių principų – tikslinis vadovavimas. Šis principas vis dar aktualus viso pasaulio ginkluotųjų pajėgų mokymuose ir kovinėse operacijose. Pavyzdžiui, JAV kariuomenės departamentas tikslinį vadovavimą neseniai apibūdino kaip „kariuomenės požiūrį į vadovavimą ir kontrolę, įgalinantį pavaldinius priimti sprendimus ir decentralizuotai vykdyti veiksmus, atitinkančius situaciją“. Straipsnyje nustatomi ir analizuojami veiksniai, darę įtaką tikimybei, kad tikslinio vadovavimo principas bus taikomas manevriniame kare, išsamiai aprašoma dviejų kariavusių pusių (vokiečių dalinių, kurie kovėsi Baltijos šalyse, ir Raudonosios armijos) mūšio organizavimas, planai ir eiga.

Pirmojoje straipsnio dalyje pasakojama, kaip 1918 m. lapkritį Sovietų Rusija pradėjo invaziją į Baltijos šalis, siekdama kuo greičiau prieiti buvusias Rusijos imperijos sienas. Iš pradžių Raudonosios armijos planai atitiko operatyvinę situaciją ir žadėjo greitą sėkmę, tačiau nuo 1918 m. gruodžio Raudonosios armijos vyriausiojo vado Jukumo Vāciečio politinės ambicijos privertė pakoreguoti puolimą. Dėl to 1919 m. sausio viduryje sovietų pajėgos Baltijos šalyse buvo priverstos kovoti dviem frontais (šiaurės Latvijoje ir Kurše bei šiaurės vakarų Lietuvoje) be ryškios pagrindinės krypties. Tokia padėtis antisovietinėms

pajėgoms leido persigrupuoti ir sukurti kovinę struktūrą, kuri 1919 m. kovo mėn. planavo Kurše ir šiaurės vakarų Lietuvoje pradėti kontrpuolimą.

Antrajame skyriuje pasakojama, kad puolimas pradėtas planuoti 1919 m. vasario pradžioje, kai į Liepoją atvyko vokiečių gen. mjr. Rüdigeris von der Goltzas, paskirtas VI rezervinio korpuso vadu. Jis ne tik reprezentavo okupacinę vokiečių valdžią, bet ir faktiškai vadovavo karo veiksmams, kovinių operacijų metu kartu suteikdamas labai plačią diskreciją jam pavaldiems vadams. Per mėnesį korpuse buvo suformuoti trys kovoti pajėgūs daliniai – Landesveras, „Geležinė divizija“ ir 1-oji gvardijos rezervo divizija (dalis jų tiesiog sukurti anksčiau, bet tuo laiku buvo transformuoti į kovoti pajėgius dalinius). Puolimas buvo suplanuotas trimis etapais, kurie pavadinti „Atodrékiu“ (*Tauwetter*), „Ledonešiu“ (*Eisgang*) ir „Pavasario vėju“ (*Frühlingswind*).

Tuo metu priešingoje pusėje, kuri vertinama trečiajame straipsnio skyriuje, buvo Sovietų Latvijos kariuomenės 1-oji šaulių brigada ir 2-oji šaulių divizija. Jos, skirtingai nei priešas, neturėjo vientisos vadovybės struktūros. Abiejų dalinių vadovybė ignoravo pagrindinius karybos principus, be to, aplaidžiai rūpinosi karių mokymu ir aprūpinimu.

Kiti skyriai paeiliui nagrinėja tris kovo mėnesį vykusias puolamąsias operacijas. Vokiečių VI rezervo korpuso puolimas prasidėjo 1919 m. kovo 3 d. ir baigėsi kovo 18 d., kai Landesveras užėmė Jelgavą ir, tai darydamas, aiškiai nepakluso VI rezervo korpuso vadovybės įsakymams. Visos trys puolamosios operacijos suteikia galimybę analizuoti veiksnius, lemiančius tikslinio vadovavimo principo taikymą karinėse operacijose. Straipsnio išvadoje išskiriami trys pagrindiniai veiksniai.

Pirma, strateginė situacija turi būti tinkama. Per Baltijos šalių nepriklausomybės karus sovietų kariuomenės vadovybės strateginės klaidos 1918 m. gruodį ir 1919 m. sausį sukūrė operacinę situaciją, tinkamą geriausiems rezultatams pasiekti.

Antra, tinkamo mokymo ir nuoseklaus pagrindinių karybos principų įgyvendinimo turi būti paisoma visais lygmenimis. Landesveras buvo sėkmingiausia iš visų antisovietinių formuočių, nes sugebėjo rasti laiko mokymams ir laipsniškai dalinių kovinės galios plėtočiai. Tai buvo galima pasiekti sėkmingiau, nes Landesveras pasižymėjo stipria socialine konsolidacija ir suvokė galutinę karinio konflikto baigtį (dėl ko kaunamasi). Vokiečių „Geležinės divizijos“ ir 1-osios gvardijos rezervo divizijos gretose, skirtingai nei Landesvere, būta mažai vietos gyventojų. Tad jos stokojo ryšio su vieta, o jų operacijos nepasižymėjo tokia pat socialine konsolidacija. Kitoje pusėje Sovietų Latvijos armija nesugebėjo įgyvendinti net elementarių karybos principų. Todėl jos operacijos nebuvo sėkmingos. Kai kuriais atvejais sovietų daliniai, ypač sudaryti iš vietinių, pasižymėjo gera socialine konsolidacija, todėl sugebėjo išvengti visiško sunaikinimo. Bet pasiekti rezultatų jiems neleido kitos dedamosios – operatyvinio planavimo – trūkumas.

Pagaliau trečia, matydami agresyvų vadų sprendimų priėmimą bei išskirtiniais atvejais vyresnybės įsakymų ignoravimą, turime matyti ir kruopštų planavimą bei standartinių operatyvinių procedūrų laikymąsi. Vėlgi, Landesvero štabo veiksmai ir karinio planavimo dokumentai (įsakymai, ryšių planai, aprūpinimo planai ir t. t.) buvo geresnės kokybės ir sudarė sąlygas vadui improvizuoti. Iš visų trijų VI rezervo korpuso dalinių Landesveras turėjo pajėgiausią žvalgybos duomenų rinkimo ir analizavimo sistemą, kuri ir leido taikyti tikslinio vadovavimo priegą.