

# THE LATVIAN WOMEN'S RELIEF CORPS DURING THE LATVIAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE, 1919–1920

Aiga Bērziņa-Kite

## ABSTRACT

Significant changes in the social position of women in Europe, including Latvia, began in the 19th century, and peaked during the First World War. In Latvia, however, the momentum intensified during the War of Independence following the Great War, as women became increasingly involved in political, social and even military activities. They not only joined medical services and took on administrative roles, but also actively supported the Latvian army through their work with the Latvian Women's Relief Corps (LWRC). Established in September 1919, the LWRC quickly became the most prominent and the largest women's organisation in Latvia, earning recognition as the country's first mass women's association. This article discusses the founding and the activities of the LWRC during the Latvian War of Independence, including its contributions to supply, catering, sanitation, soldiers' entertainment, social work, and more.

**KEYWORDS:** women's roles in war, Latvian War of Independence, women's associations.

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## ANOTACIJA

Reikšmingi moterų socialinės padėties pokyčiai Europoje, taip pat ir Latvijoje, prasidėjo XIX šimtmetyje, o didžiausią mastą pasiekė per Pirmąjį pasaulinį karą. Tačiau Latvijoje šie pokyčiai sustiprėjo po Didžiojo karo vykusio Nepriklausomybės karo metu, kai moterys vis aktyviau įsiliejo į politinę, socialinę ir net karinę veiklą. Jos ne tik įsitraukė į medicinos tarnybų ir administracines funkcijas, bet ir aktyviai rėmė Latvijos kariuomenę, dirbdamos Latvijos moterų pagalbiname korpuse (LMPK). 1919 m. rugsėjį įkurtas LMPK greitai tapo žinomiausia ir didžiausia moterų organizacija Latvijoje ir pelnė pirmosios šalyje masinės moterų asociacijos reputaciją. Šiame straipsnyje aptariamas LMPK įkūrimas ir veikla per Latvijos nepriklausomybės karą, apėriantis jos indėlį į aprūpinimą, maitinimą, sanitariją, karių linksminimą, socialinį darbą ir kt. **PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI:** moterų vaidmenys kare, Latvijos nepriklausomybės karas, moterų asociacijos.

Aiga Bērziņa-Kite MA, research assistant at the Institute of Latvian History, University of Latvia, Kalpaka bulvāris 4, LV-1050 Rīga, Latvia. E-mail: aiga.berzina@lu.lv.

## Introduction

The First World War and the later Latvian War of Independence was a turning point in many ways: not only did it mark the end of the 'old world' and the rise of new democratic states, including the Republic of Latvia, but it also drew changes in society, including changes in women's social status. Although significant changes in women's social position in Europe (as well as in Latvia) began in the 19th century and reached their peak during the First World War,<sup>1</sup> in Latvia the War of Independence was the moment when women actively proved themselves in public life as an important and influential part of society.

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After tendencies in the First World War and also during the Latvian War of Independence, women became increasingly involved in social and political and military processes. Although individual bravery and acts by different women were necessary, and each example is particularly important, there were three wider ways women participated directly in support of the Latvian army. First, many women entered medical service. Second, women were hired to do office work, they were employed as telephone operators, clerks, cleaning ladies, and in other necessary positions.<sup>2</sup> And third, women applied to work in the Latvian Women's Relief Corps (LWRC). At the end of 1919, the press wrote: 'Latvian woman! What would the Latvian nation be without your immeasurably loving, infinitely responsive heart! Wherever there was a need for selfless work, a responsive heart or loving caresses, there was no need to wait for you. Without a reminder, without encouragement, you set to work, asking for neither profit nor payment!'<sup>3</sup>

The aim of the article is to highlight the main areas of activity of the LWRC during the Latvian War of Independence, providing insights into the extent and the significance of its efforts, and, more broadly, the role of women in the struggle for Latvian independence and the strengthening of the state. The article is based on archival studies and previous research about the LWRC.

The role of women in the War of Independence has only been studied fragmentarily in Latvian historiography. Similarly, the activities of the LWRC as a separate object of research has been touched on very little, and there are few comprehensive studies on the matter. The author of this article has previously explored this topic in several publications, which also contributed to the creation of this work.

<sup>1</sup> For more about Latvian women during the First World War: ZELČE, Vita. Skice vēstures zīmējumam: Sieviete un Pirmais pasaules karš. *Latvijas Arhīvi*, 2002, Nr. 4, 28.–46. lpp.; JĒKABSONS, Ēriks. Latviešu sievietes militārajā dienestā Pirmajā pasaules karā. In *Sieviete Latvijas vēsturē*. Sast. Kaspars ZELLIS. Rīga, 2007, 36.–56. lpp.; JĒKABSONS, Ēriks. Latvijas sievietes un bērni militārajā dienestā Pirmajā pasaules karā. *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls*, 2014, Nr. 4 (93). 111.–148. lpp.

<sup>2</sup> JĒKABSONS, Ēriks. Sievietes un bruņotie spēki Latvijas Neatkarības kara laikā (1919–1920). *Latvijas Vēsture: jaunie un jaunākie laiki*, 2012, Nr. 3 (87), 20.–39. lpp.

<sup>3</sup> Latvju tautai – latvju sievietei! *Jaunākās Ziņas*, 03.12.1919, Nr. 158, 5. lpp.

## The founding of the LWRC, its structure and its personnel

The Latvian Women's Relief Corps was founded as an auxiliary army organisation at its first meeting on 22 September 1919,<sup>4</sup> just 12 days after the Latvian army, and just two weeks before Bermondts's attack on Riga. The idea to form such an organisation was proposed by Kārlis Ulmanis (1877–1942), prime minister of the first provisional government of Latvia, who took the Queen Mary Army Auxiliary Corps in the United Kingdom<sup>5</sup> as an example. The need for the organisation was determined by the difficult conditions of the war in Latvia and the need to mobilise as many human resources as possible. Nevertheless, this proposal coincided with women's readiness to participate and to play an even bigger role in the fight for the Republic of Latvia.

The LWRC's structure was based on basic military principles: discipline, loyalty, duty, personal courage, etc. The main organisation work was discussed in a total of five organisational meetings, the last of them taking place on 6 October 1919.<sup>6</sup> The main goal of the organisation was formulated at these meetings: a volunteer rear service support for the regular army. The presence of two representatives of the British mission, captains Dewhurst and Caselet, at the second meeting was important. Not only did they give an insight into the activities of the UK's Army Auxiliary Corps, but they also encouraged Latvian representatives to seek help in the form of donations from the British Red Cross. This proposal provoked the suggestion to also seek similar help in other countries (Switzerland, Sweden, Denmark, the USA and others).<sup>7</sup> The LWRC worked under the command of the commander-in-chief of the army, and even before the first meeting, Captain Arturs Galindoms (1894–1966) was appointed head of the LWRC.<sup>8</sup> He served in this position until July 1920.

Structurally, the LWRC was divided into thematic departments in Riga, each of which focused on a different area of work and was led by a woman leader. But outside Riga, it was expected to organise territorial-based departments, each consisting of at least ten members. On 2 December 1919, the decision was made to divide the activities of the LWRC into two branches: the Riga branch under Berta Ašmane (1885–1973), and the provincial branch under Olga Znotiņa (1891–?).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Protocol of LWRC 1st meeting, 22.09.1919. *Latvijas Nacionālā arhīva Latvijas Valsts vēstures arhīvs* (The State Historical Archive of Latvia of the National Archives of Latvia, hereafter *LNA LVVA*), 5192. f., 1. apr., 60. l., 103. lp.

<sup>5</sup> A voluntary First World War organisation in the United Kingdom that operated from 1917 until 1921, it was set up to increase the number of women in employment, which would release men to join the armed forces.

<sup>6</sup> Protocols of LWRC, 22.09.1919.–06.10.1919. *LNA LVVA*, 5192. f., 1. apr., 60. l., 103.–105. lp.

<sup>7</sup> Protocol of the LWRC's 2nd meeting, 25.09.1919. *LNA LVVA*, 5192. f., 1. apr., 60. l., 103. lp.

<sup>8</sup> Personal file of the Latvian army officer Arturs Galindoms, 1919–1940. *LNA LVVA*, 5601. f., 1. apr., 1952. l.

<sup>9</sup> BĒRZIŅA, Aiga. Latvijas sieviešu palīdzības korpuss Bermontiādes laikā, 1919. gada oktobris–decembris. *Latvijas Arhīvi*, 2013, Nr. 3/4, 165. lpp.

The organisation work was interrupted by Bermond's attack on Riga on 8 October 1919. In this situation, the LWRC needed to start its action as soon as possible, at the same time still also concentrating on some of the basic organisational needs, like the question of recruiting members. Since meetings of leaders were hard to organise during the war, the direct leadership of the LWRC was not elected. Instead, each unit acted rather independently, but heads of branches coordinated their work. The statutes of the organisation were adopted only after relative peace was gained on 26 May 1920.<sup>10</sup> Until its adoption, the LWRC is considered an institution under the army, and the LWRC's legal basis was the Provisional Instruction<sup>11</sup> adopted in November 1919.

In 1920, as active warfare continued just in the eastern part of Latvia, the Latgale LWRC underwent significant organisational changes: a seven-member presidium was elected in January, but in July the management of the LWRC passed to the hands of the board, which consisted of 11 elected members. Alise Sūna (1870–1956) was elected head of the board, who served in the position until 1924.<sup>12</sup>

The LWRC increased its activities, and recruited using various methods, publishing news about the corps in newspapers, sending representatives out from Riga to spread information, and sending invitations to various existing organisations to join the corps. The first members were mainly publicly active women, many were also the wives of politicians, soldiers and other public figures. The numbers of participating woman increased rapidly after 8 October, due to overall patriotism and the readiness to act in all of society.<sup>13</sup> It is believed that several thousand Latvian women volunteered in the LWRC during the Latvian War of Independence. As the recruitment needs demanded the involvement of as many women as possible, the members formed a wide social portrait across all categories. For example, the youngest-known member in Riga was just 14 years old, while oldest was 60.<sup>14</sup> The LWRC organised schoolgirl units (both in Riga and in other cities), who participated mainly in the preparation of clothing and similar work. For example, in Riga, schoolchildren from at least seven elementary schools and 13 secondary schools were involved in preparing soldiers' laundry.<sup>15</sup>

Aid work required not only a willingness to act, but also material and financial resources. The budget of the LWRC consisted of several components: most were collected by donations, but some money was also received by collecting money from members, income from events organised by the LWRC, loans, and later also

<sup>10</sup> Statutes of the Latvian Woman's Relief Corps, adopted on 26 May 1920. *LNA LWA*, 2498. f., 1. apr., 1. l., 1. lp.

<sup>11</sup> Provisional Instruction of the Latvian Woman's Relief Corps adopted in November 1919. *LNA LWA*, 2498. f., 1. apr., 1. l., 53. lp.

<sup>12</sup> Protocol of the Latvian Woman's Relief Corps Board meeting, July 1920. *LNA LWA*, 2498. f., 1. apr., 4. l., 142. lp.

<sup>13</sup> BĒRZIŅA, A. Latvijas sieviešu palīdzības korpuss..., 158. lpp.

<sup>14</sup> The Latvian Woman's Relief Corps volunteer register in Riga, autumn 1919. *LNA LWA*, 2498. f., 1. apr., 37. l.

<sup>15</sup> BĒRZIŅA, A. Latvijas sieviešu palīdzības korpuss..., 170. lpp.

properties belonging to the LWRC. Aid work was voluntary, but from December 1919 a few people received a small salary for their work, which was seen as an opportunity to provide for themselves.<sup>16</sup>

### The work of the LWRC's Riga departments during Bermond's attack

Dictated by the necessity of urgent work, the LWRC's Riga department was first to turn to active duty. The activities of the LWRC increased rapidly, and in 1919 nine departments within the Riga department were formed:

1. the Fundraising Department, managed by the charity nurse Marta Celmiņa (1880–1937)
2. the Department of Army Supplies, managed by Justīne Čakste (1870–1954), the wife of the first president of Latvia Jānis Čakste (1859–1927)
3. the Laundry Department, managed by Johanna Reinharde (1873–1949), the wife of the doctor and politician Gustavs Reinhards (1868–1937)
4. the Funeral Department, managed by the teacher Milda Sleikša (1889–1942)
5. the Department of Libraries (also called the Department of Literature and Arts), managed by the public worker Helēna Kaire (1885–1975)
6. the Department at the Ministry of Transport and Labour, managed by the artist Paulīne Hermanovska (1884–1980) and the public worker Elza Klaustiņa (1885–1971)
7. the Department of Social Welfare, managed by the teacher Olga Jesena (1877–?)
8. the Gold Fund, founded and managed by the writer Ivande Kaija (also known as Antonija Lūkina, 1876–1942)
9. the Sports Department, managed by the public worker Milda Ķempele (1879–1954)

All the departments expanded their activities, and by the beginning of October 1919 the LWRC claimed that they 'can show brilliant success in its short period of operation'.<sup>17</sup>

The *Fundraising Department* was the first to start its operations, as it was necessary to achieve financial security. Donations were collected mostly in three ways: appeals in newspapers, street fundraising, and various events. Along with money, the LWRC collected other useful things, such as dishes, clothing, linen, food, etc. All donations were used to ensure the work of the LWRC, to supply soldiers, and also later to support socially unprotected groups of people (orphans, refugees, etc). The department not only collected donations themselves, but also managed collecting by other departments.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> BĒRZIŅA, A. Latvijas sieviešu palīdzības korpuss..., 163. lpp.

<sup>17</sup> Latvju sievietes armijas apgādāšanas darbā. *Latvijas Sargs*, 05.10.1919, Nr. 157, 3. lpp.

<sup>18</sup> *Latvijas Sieviešu palīdzības korpusa piecpadsmit gadu darbības pārskats, 1919.–1934.* Rīga, 1934, 28. lpp.

The initial tasks of the *Department of Army Supplies* were the establishment of canteens and tea houses for soldiers near the front, providing the front with products, clothes and other essentials, and supplying war hospitals. The LWRC were able to organise and secure the work of two canteens for soldiers. The first of them, which opened on 8 October 1919 at Lāčplēša Street 25 and then moved to the house of the Riga Latvian Society at Merķeļa Street 13, prepared and served up to 7,000 meals a day.<sup>19</sup> Around 180 women worked in this canteen, and the diary of one of them, Māra Aula (1899–1984), describing the atmosphere and the tasks for the volunteers, has survived and has been published.<sup>20</sup> Another canteen opened on 9 November at Aleksandra (Brīvības) Street 2, where not only soldiers from the Latvian army, but also Boy Scouts<sup>21</sup> and war invalids were served. On 15 December, as the front moved further away, both canteens were joined, and the Corps fed 800 to 900 soldiers and 120 Scouts a day.<sup>22</sup> A nevertheless important task was also the delivery of prepared meals to soldiers on the front line, as well as medical centres and other places. This is closely linked to one of the most tragic pages in the LWRC's history, as on 10 October 1919, while delivering food for the soldiers on the frontline, two volunteers were hit by exploding shrapnel. One of them, the 18-year-old schoolgirl Emīlija Jātniece (1902–1971), survived, but was forced to live with the consequences of her injury, but the other one, 21-year-old Elza Žiglevica (1898–1919), died in hospital 19 days later.<sup>23</sup>

From 11 December 1919, the department also started to operate in the War Hospital. Around 250 LWRC women worked in the hospital during the war. A section under the supervision of the writer Anna Rūmane-Ķeniņa (1877–1950) also managed to organise tea houses for soldiers near the front line, the first of which opened on 8 October 1919. Soldiers were able to get refreshments (tea, coffee and sandwiches) in tea houses free of charge, and rest at the reading table. Sometimes tobacco, soap and other donated items were also available, and if possible, women from these places delivered products to the front and prepared food for soldiers who were changing location.<sup>24</sup>

For both the *Laundry Department* and the *Department at the Ministry of Transport and Labour* the main task was preparing clothing and linen for soldiers. The second of these also focused on fundraising and preparing other army supplies. For example, they used material from sacks for flour brought from the American Relief Administration, and made clothes from it. But the most important work was related to

<sup>19</sup> BĒRZIŅA, A. Latvijas sievietu palīdzības korpuss..., 166. lpp.

<sup>20</sup> BĒRZIŅA, Aiga. Bermontiāde sievietes acīm: aktrises Māras Antēnas (Aulas) dienasgrāmatas fragmenti. *Latvijas Arhīvi*, 2020, Nr. 1/2, 119.–137. lpp.

<sup>21</sup> These were young boys, below the age of adulthood, who served in the Latvian army.

<sup>22</sup> BĒRZIŅA, A. Latvijas sievietu palīdzības korpuss..., 167. lpp.

<sup>23</sup> Elza Žiglevica is one of only three women who were awarded the highest military order, Lāčplēša Kara ordenis (1928 as the last one). For more about her, see: *Par Latviju: Lāčplēša Kara ordenis, tā kavalieri un Lāčplēša diena*. Atb. red. Gunta APSE. Rīga, 2020, 391. lpp.

<sup>24</sup> BĒRZIŅA, A. Latvijas sievietu palīdzības korpuss..., 168., 169. lpp.

organising workshops for women and schoolchildren where they were able to make clothing and linen for the soldiers.<sup>25</sup>

The *Funeral Department* performed the following tasks, which were later considered to be emotionally hard: collecting news from hospitals about fallen soldiers, preparations for holding a funeral (decorating chapels and coffins, etc), the delivery of coffins to hospitals, providing news to relatives and announcing in newspapers, taking photographs of the unknown fallen and identifying them, as well as organising burials in the Brothers' Cemetery. The first funeral organised by the LWRC took place on 26 October 1919, when 16 fallen soldiers were buried. This was the first department to end its actions at the beginning of 1920. In total during the operation, they held 924 funerals for fallen soldiers: 867 known, and 57 unknown.<sup>26</sup>

The main task of the *Department of Libraries* was to organise travelling libraries. Overall, the department managed to organise 43 libraries, of which 16 were sent to the front, others to war hospitals, tea houses and other places. The libraries consisted of donated books, and altogether 25 women at the department volunteered, mostly students.<sup>27</sup>

Although social work was not directly linked to the organisation's main goal of helping the army, as the war progressed it became an important part of the LWRC's duties. The first task for the *Department of Social Welfare* was to register poor families (especially those whose men were in the army). By 1919 the department had registered 14,121 children in Riga in need, and 23,624 more outside the city, as well as 102,880 people incapable of taking care of themselves, providing them with as much help as possible. Although during the war the focus was on supporting the families of soldiers, many Latvian residents received social support from the LWRC, also in cooperation with the American Red Cross.<sup>28</sup>

The *Gold Fund* was founded on 5 November 1919 at the initiative of the writer and public figure Ivande Kaija.<sup>29</sup> Its aim was to gather donations (preferably, but not only, various precious metals) for the State Treasury. The fund ended its operations on 12 June 1920 by giving the State Treasury around 400,000 Latvian roubles.<sup>30</sup>

The *Sports Department* only started its operations on 16 December 1919. Its aim was to promote a healthy and active lifestyle among soldiers, thus not only improving individuals' health, but also improving combat capabilities. However, the department

<sup>25</sup> CIGANOVŠ, Juris. Latviešu sieviešu palīdzības korpuss Atbrīvošanas cīņu laikā. In *Sieviete Latvijas vēsturē*. Sast. Kaspars ZELLIS. Rīga, 2007, 56.–61. lpp.

<sup>26</sup> *Latvijas Sieviešu palīdzības korpusa piecpadsmit gadu darbības pārskats...*, 26. lpp.; SPK Kareivju apbedīšanas nozare. *Jaunākās Ziņas*, 17.12.1919, Nr. 170, 5. lpp.

<sup>27</sup> *Latvijas Sieviešu palīdzības korpusa piecpadsmit gadu darbības pārskats...*, 26. lpp.

<sup>28</sup> BĒRZIŅA, A. Latvijas sieviešu palīdzības korpuss..., 172., 173. lpp.

<sup>29</sup> Kaija, I., Latvju sievietes! *Latvijas Sargs*, 05.11.1919, Nr. 181, 4. lpp.

<sup>30</sup> Latvju sieviešu zelta fonds. *Jaunākās Ziņas*, 01.03.1919, Nr. 49, 9. lpp.

grew more active later after the war, setting up football pitches, tennis courts and sports fields, as well as by purchasing sports equipment, thus significantly supplementing the leisure activities of Latvian army soldiers.<sup>31</sup>

## The LWRC's work outside Riga and after Bermond's attack

The LWRC's activities outside Riga were carried out by territorial units formed according to the territorial principle, and in the largest (or most active) cities by departments, which included several units formed according to the direction of activity or the territorial principle. Although the establishment of sections outside Riga were mostly activated after the Riga departments were already set up, some LWRC departments were founded in the provinces as early as October 1919, for example: the Cēsis department (the consolidated work of six units in Cēsis and 25 territorial units) on 13 October; the Bolderāja unit on 26 October; etc.<sup>32</sup> At the end of 1919, the work of the LWRC already covered all the liberated territory of Latvia: nine departments in Riga, four departments in other cities (Cēsis, Valmiera, Limbaži, Jelgava), and 96 territorial units, as well as two sections abroad (Tallinn and Helsinki).

The exact number of women participating in the work of the LWRC is still unknown due to a lack of research, but it can be measured in thousands. For example, the Valmiera department (led by the teacher Berta Stakle [1893–1994]) was founded on 17 October 1919. On 1 November 1919, 50 members volunteered, but by the end of 1919 there were already 90, mostly socially active and educated local women (teachers, doctors, wives of public servants, etc). In 1920, the number of volunteers decreased, and in April 1920 the Valmiera department had 60 members. Besides this, the Valmiera department organised the work of 22 territorial units, each consisting of eight to 50 members. They also organised schoolgirl units (on 25 November 1919, the schoolgirl unit consisted of 118 girls) who collected donations, as well as sewing and knitting clothes for soldiers.<sup>33</sup>

The main task of the departments and territorial units outside Riga, as well as the departments abroad, was related to collecting donations. The first donations from the provinces (a train carriage with various products from Smiltene) arrived in Riga on 27 October 1919.<sup>34</sup> However, some branches and departments acted independently to a certain extent, and, according to the centre, did not send the collected funds to the centre, but used them on the spot for the needs of troops located in their territory

<sup>31</sup> *Latvijas Sieviešu palīdzības korpusa piecpadsmit gadu darbības pārskats...*, 28. lpp.

<sup>32</sup> BĒRZIŅA, A. *Latvijas sieviešu palīdzības korpuss...*, 164. lpp.

<sup>33</sup> BĒRZIŅA, Aiga. *Latvijas Sieviešu palīdzības korpusa Valmieras nozares raksturojums (1919–1927)*. *Jauno vēsturnieku zinātniskie lasījumi*, 5/2019. Rīga, 2020, 14.–32. lpp.

<sup>34</sup> Report of the work of the Latvian Womans Relief Corps, October 1919. *LNA LWVA*, 2498. f., 1. apr., 4. l., 38.lp.



or for social work. The departments also organised thematic units. For example, the following units worked under the Valmiera department: Fundraising (every week the department sent most of its donations to Riga, some donations [food, tobacco and clothing] were sent directly to the soldiers at the front, but the rest were used locally in Valmiera), Sanitary (focused on caring for wounded soldiers and those incarcerated in the Latvian army prisoner camp near Valmiera, working in close connection with the Red Cross), Sewing and knitting (the preparation of laundry and clothing), Event organisation (different events, such as concerts, theatre and balls, in order to raise money and entertain the soldiers), the Resting place for soldiers (organised the soldiers' tea house next to Valmiera train station which operated from January to June 1920), the Library (later a unit for cultural development), the 18 November (the goal of the unit was to prepare presents for soldiers at Christmas, Independence Day, and other holidays), the Editorial office (in charge of informing about the work of the Corps), the Gold Fund (collecting donations for the LWRC's Gold Fund), and the Social welfare unit (which registered and gave material help to people living in poverty). In addition to the direct tasks, the Valmiera department participated in the burial of the fallen and other relevant events in the city, for example, at a reception for Prime Minister Kārlis Ulmanis in Valmiera on 9 January 1920.<sup>35</sup>

After the battles against Bermond's army, although active warfare continued in Latgale, the overall situation of the country became more secure. As a result, the LWRC departments and units reduced their activities, and the number of volunteers decreased. Nevertheless, the work of the LWRC continued all over Latvia, especially in the just-liberated territories of Latgale. For example, in Daugavpils, the biggest Latgalian city, a unit was founded on 10 January 1920.<sup>36</sup> During the long years of the war, the city and its neighbourhood were destroyed, and it needed urgent social work, as well as support for soldiers of the Latvian army who were still in the area. Many volunteers from Riga went to Latgale to do relief work. Until April 1920, seven tea houses (in Daugavpils, Ludza, Pitalova, Viļaka, Kārsava and two in Rēzekne) were organised near train stations, where soldiers could purchase cheaply tea, coffee and sandwiches. Every day one tea house received around 200 visitors. A number of clubs for soldiers were also organised in Latgale.<sup>37</sup>

The work also changed its nature in Riga, where no more food stations for soldiers or tea houses were needed. Instead, volunteers turned more to social work, and even founded new departments, like the Department of Prisons,<sup>38</sup> which volunteered to

<sup>35</sup> BĒRZIŅA, A. Latvijas Sieviešu palīdzības korpusa Valmieras nozares raksturojums...

<sup>36</sup> Dibiniet Sieviešu palīdzības korpusa nodaļas. *Jaunākās Ziņas*, 31.01.1920, Nr. 25, 3. lpp.

<sup>37</sup> Report of the work of the Latvian Woman's Relief Corps, 1920. *LNA LVVA*, 2498. f., 1. apr., 1. l., 180. lp.; *Latvijas Sieviešu palīdzības korpusa piecpadsmit gadu darbības pārskats...*, 24. lpp.

<sup>38</sup> ŠČERBINSKIS, Valters. "Sieviešu armija" cīņā par Latvijas patstāvību. *Latviešu Strēlnieks*, 1993, Nr. 11, 9.–10. lpp.

provide food for inmates in connection with the American Relief Administration. The LWRC also organised ceremonial welcomes for troops returning to Riga from the front and from abroad, and provided registration and social help for refugees returning to Latvia. But at the end of the Latvian War of Independence, the LWRC turned towards help for children, stating that 'Children are our future.' With the support of the Red Cross, on 8 July 1920 the LWRC opened a sanatorium in Jūrmala for children with bone tuberculosis, where around 40 children received much-needed help during the summer of 1920. To attract donations, it increasingly developed co-operation with organisations abroad. Through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it sent invitations to join the work of the Corps to Sweden, Russia (Siberia), the USA, China, Norway, Denmark, Brazil, Australia, Argentina, Canada, etc.

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After the war, the importance of the LWRC decreased significantly; however, the Corps ended its activities only in 1940 after the occupation of Latvia, officially assuming the status of a society until then.<sup>39</sup> The LWRC developed social activities, including establishing and maintaining a sanatorium for children with bone tuberculosis, an orphanage, and other important institutions, as well as providing jobs for poor women.<sup>40</sup>

## Conclusions

The Latvian Women's Relief Corps was an auxiliary army organisation that provided important support to the Latvian army during the Latvian War of Independence. The army relief work of the LWRC covered a wide range of activities, including supplies, catering, sanitary, entertainment, and other functions. The activities of the LWRC not only improved the everyday life of Latvian soldiers and the Latvian army's quartermaster services, but it also increased the combat capabilities of the Latvian army.

The social work carried out by women volunteers was also important, helping many Latvian people not only to overcome the difficulties of wartime and after the war, but even to survive during the humanitarian crisis. The social assistance work included support for soldiers' families, orphans, war invalids, refugees and other socially vulnerable groups of society. The social work of the LWRC was largely determined by the extensive humanitarian aid work of the American Red Cross in Latvia and cooperation with it.

With the establishment of the LWRC, it became the most popular and largest women's organisation in Latvia, effecting significant changes in society. The large number of woman volunteers is also proof of society's support for the democratic state, and

<sup>39</sup> In 1939, the LWRC consisted of the Riga department and seven territorial units outside the capital.

<sup>40</sup> For more about the activities of the Latvian Woman's Relief Corps after the war: *Latvijas Sieviešu palīdzības korpusa piecpadsmit gadu darbības pārskats...*

characterises all of society's involvement in the struggle for freedom. Even more, the Gold Fund, formed and operated by the LWRC, formed the basis for the State Treasury, highlighting even more the importance of women's activities to ensure the future of the Republic of Latvia.

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## LATVIJOS MOTERŪ PAGALBINIS KORPUSAS PER LATVIJOS KARĀ DĒL NEPRIKLAUSOMYBĒS (1919–1920 METAI)

Aiga Bērziņa-Kite

Santrauka

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Per Latvijas karā dēl nepriklausomybės, kaip ir per prieš tai vykusį Pirmąjį pasaulinį karą, moterys ėmėsi naujų vaidmenų, aktyviai įsitraukdamos į socialinius, politinius ir karinius procesus. Prieš dvi savaites iki to, kai Pavelo Bermondto-Avalovo daliniai puolė Rygą, 1919 m. rugsėjo 22 d. buvo įkurtas Latvijos moterų pagalbos korpusas (LMPK, latv. *Latvijas Sieviešu palīdzības korpuss*). Šią idėją pasiūlė ministras pirmininkas Kārlis Ulmanis, kuris suprato, kad reikia sutelkti kuo daugiau žmogiškųjų išteklių, ir rėmėsi Jungtinės Karalystės Karalienės Marijos kariuomenės pagalbinio korpusu (angl. *Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps*) kaip pavyzdžiu.

Šiame straipsnyje siekta išryškinti pagrindines LMPK veiklos sritis per Latvijos nepriklausomybės karą, pateikti įžvalgų apie jo pastangų mastą ir reikšmę, o plačiau – apie moterų vaidmenį kovoje už Latvijos nepriklausomybę ir valstybės įtvirtinimą. Straipsnis parengtas remiantis archyvinių šaltinių tyrimais ir ankstesne istoriografija apie LMPK.

LMPK buvo organizacija, teikusi svarią paramą Latvijos kariuomenei (vėliau ir visai Latvijos visuomenei) Latvijos nepriklausomybės karo vidurinėje ir baigiamojoje stadijose – per Bermondto-Avalovo puolimą ir Latgalos išlaisvinimą. Ši moterų asociacija skleidė savo veiklą ir verbavo naujus narius įvairiais būdais: skelbdama žinias apie korpusą laikraščiuose, siųsdama atstoves už Rygos ribų informacijai skleisti, taip pat siųsdama kvietimus prisijungti prie korpuso įvairioms kitoms organizacijoms.

LMPK struktūrą sudarė skyriai Rygoje, kurių kiekvienas, vadovaujamas vadovės moters, buvo atsakingas už skirtingą veiklos sritį. Rygos skyriai pirmieji pradėjo veiklą. Veiklą už Rygos ribų LMPK vykdė teritoriniu principu suformuotuose padaliniuose; tik didesniuose (ir aktyviausiuose) miestuose veikė skyriai, kuriuos sudarė keli pagal veiklos kryptį arba teritorinį principą atskirti poskyriai. Kadangi neatidėliotina situacija reikalavo skubių veiksmų, asociacijos įstatai buvo priimti tik pasiekus santykinę taiką – 1920 m. gegužės 26 d. Iki tol LMPK buvo laikomas kariuomenei pavaldžia institucija, o jo teisinius pagrindus nustatė 1919 m. lapkričio mėn. priimta Laikinoji instrukcija.

Susidūrimo su Bermondto-Avalovo pajėgomis metu LMPK veikla sparčiai plito. Per 1919 m. buvo įkurti devyni Rygos padalinio skyriai: 1) Lėšų rinkimo, 2) Kariuomenės aprūpinimo; 3) Skalbyklų; 4) Laidojimo; 5) Bibliotekų (dar vadintas Literatūros ir meno); 6) skyrius prie Susisiekimo ir darbo ministerijos; 7) Socialinės rūpybos skyrius; 8) Aukso fondas; 9) Sporto skyrius. LMPK veikla padedant kariuomenei aprėpė platų spektrą, kuriame matome aprūpinimo, maitinimo, sanitarijos, karių linksminimo ir kitas sritis. Ši veikla ne tik

pagerino Latvijos karių ir kariuomenės kvartyravimo tarnybų kasdienybę, bet ir didino Latvijos kariuomenės kovinius pajėgumus.

1919 m. pabaigoje LMPK veikla jau apėmė visą Latvijos laikinosios vyriausybės kontroliuotą teritoriją: devynis skyrius Rygoje, keturis skyrius didesniuose miestuose (Cėsyse, Valmieroje, Limbažuose, Jelgavoje) ir 96 teritorinius padalinius, taip pat du skyrius užsienyje (Taline ir Helsinkyje). Pagrindinė skyrių, teritorinių padalinių už Rygos ribų ir skyrių užsienyje užduotis buvo susijusi su aukų rinkimu.

Per Latvijos nepriklausomybės karą keli tūkstančiai Latvijos moterų savanoriškai dirbo LMPK, o narių socialinis portretas buvo įvairiapusis. Nors po mūšių su Bermondto-Avalovo pajėgomis Latgaloje ir toliau vyko aktyvūs karo veiksmai, bendra padėtis šalyje tapo saugesnė. Dėl to LMPK skyriai ir padaliniai susiaurino savo veiklą, o savanorių skaičius sumažėjo. Įtampos nestokojusi LMPK veikla tęsėsi visoje Latvijos teritorijoje, ypač ką tik išlaisvintose Latgalos teritorijose. Darbo pobūdis pasikeitė ir Rygoje, kur neberekėjo maisto punktų kariams ir arbatinių. Vietoje to savanorės daugiau dėmesio skyrė socialiniam darbui ir net įkūrė naujus skyrius, pavyzdžiui, Kalėjimų skyrių, kuris, bendradarbiaudamas su Amerikos pagalbos administracija, savanoriškai rūpinosi kalinių maitinimu.

Moterų savanorių socialinis darbas karo nuniokotoje valstybėje pasirodė esąs labai svarbus: daugeliui Latvijos žmonių jis padėjo įveikti karo ir pokario sunkumus ar net išgyventi humanitarinės krizės metu. Socialinė pagalba apėmė paramą karių šeimoms, našlaičiams, karo suluošintiesiems, pabėgėliams ir kitoms socialiai pažeidžiamiausioms visuomenės grupėms. LMPK socialinį darbą daugiausia lėmė plati humanitarinė Amerikos Raudonojo Kryžiaus pagalba Latvijoje ir bendradarbiavimas su šia organizacija.

Įkūrus LMPK, jis tapo didžiausia moterų asociacija Latvijoje, o tai – reikšmingų pokyčių visuomenėje įrodymas. Didelis moterų savanorių skaičius gali būti laikomas ir visuomenės paramos demokratinei valstybei įrodymu, argumentu, bylojančiu apie visos visuomenės įsitraukimą į kovą už laisvę.