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EESTI SÕJAAJALOO AASTARAAMAT

## **INDEPENDENCE WARS IN NORTH-EASTERN EUROPE AND BEYOND**

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Cover photo: Field Court Martial of the 2nd Division in January 1919. Chairman of the court Sub-Captain Karl Riigov is sitting in the middle. Photo by Johannes Niilus.  
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# Introduction

Toomas Hiio

At the end of May 2019, the Estonian War Museum – General Laidoner Museum and Estonian Military Academy organised the conference *Independence Wars in North-Eastern Europe and Beyond* in Tartu. The conference commemorated the 100th anniversary of the Estonian War of Independence. In addition to Estonia, several other nations were fighting their wars of independence at the same time, but the majority of them were unable to break away from the crumbling empires and establish national statehood. First and foremost, Soviet Russia, the successor of tsarist Russia, was able to consolidate itself after a bloody civil war, but in doing so releasing its grip on the Baltic countries, Finland and Poland.

Soviet propaganda claimed until the end of the communist empire that the workers, poor peasants and progressive intellectuals of the national minorities of the Russian empire achieved proper self-determination and independence only in the brotherly family of the Soviet nations. However, neither the Byelorussian SSR, the Ukrainian SSR, the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic, comprising Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia established in the early 1920s, nor the Central Asian Soviet republics, which were established a little later, became internationally recognized statehoods. In 1945, Ukraine and Belarus became founding members of the United Nations due to the international situation at the time, but they only gained actual statehood after the collapse of the USSR in 1991.

Hence, the conference agenda did not only include the issues related to the Estonian War of Independence. The speakers came from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden, Denmark, Poland, Germany, Russia, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan. The presentations covered events in all the Baltic states and Poland, as well as in Central Asia and Transcaucasia in those turbulent years. Several presentations focused on the fate of soldiers, including foreign volunteers fighting in the Baltic countries, prisoners of war in

Germany and also on relations between soldiers and civilians during wars of independence.

Although the presentations were to be published in the Estonian Yearbook of Military History in 2020, their publication was postponed for various reasons. Meanwhile in 2020, a new two-volume comprehensive study of the Estonian War of Independence was completed at the initiative of the Estonian War Museum – General Laidoner Museum, financed by the ministry of defence and compiled by Lauri Vahtre,<sup>1</sup> replacing the two-volume publication of the late 1930s.<sup>2</sup> An abbreviated version of this study will be published in English in the near future. Therefore, the lack of a contemporary comprehensive study of the history of the Estonian War of Independence has been addressed and it will be further refined by keeping in mind an international readership.

Some of the conference speakers did not want their presentations to be published, mostly because they were based on the studies which had been published before. This yearbook comprises the articles written on the bases of four presentations. Research Professor Vasilijus Safronovas of the University of Klaipėda, Lithuania, writes about the formation of the Lithuanian army and the experiences of the soldiers who had participated in the World War I in the Armed Forces of Tsarist Russia, as well as about the distinctions of volunteers and the conscripted. Emeritus Professor of Military History Lars Ericson Wolke of the Swedish Defence University, Stockholm, writes about a small unit of Swedish volunteers which fought in the Estonian War of Independence in 1919 and about the fate of its members. Research Assistant Thomas Rettig of the Chair of East Euro-

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<sup>1</sup> *Eesti Vabadussõja ajalugu (History of the Estonian War of Independence)*, I, *Vabadussõja eel-lugu. Punaväe sissetung ja Eesti vabastamine (The Prelude to the War of Independence, Invasion of the Red Army and Liberation of Estonia)*, written by Peeter Kaasik, Lauri Vahtre, Urmas Salo et al., compiled and edited by Lauri Vahtre; II, *Kaitsesõda piiride taga ja lõpuvõitlused (Defensive War Beyond the Borders and Final Fights)*, written by Peeter Kaasik, Lauri Vahtre, Urmas Salo, compiled and edited by Lauri Vahtre, Eesti sõjajamuseumi – kindral Laidoneri muuseumi toimetised (Proceedings of the Estonian War Museum – General Laidoner Museum) 10 (1–2) (Tallinn: Varrak, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> *Eesti Vabadussõda 1918–1920 (Estonian War of Independence 1918–1920)*, parts I and II, compiled by August Traksmaa, edited by Mihkel Kattai jt (Tallinn: Eesti Vabadussõja Ajaloo Komitee, 1937 and 1939).

pean History of the University of Greifswald, Germany, analyses the role of warlords in the continuation wars and wars of independence in the aftermath of World War I using the example of Pavel Bermondht-Avalov West Russian Voluntary Army, active in Latvia. Professor Khachatur Stepanyan of the Chair of World History and its Teaching Methods of the Armenian State Pedagogical University after Khachatur Abovyan, Yerevan, Armenia writes in his article about the failure of Armenia's independence aspirations between the Soviet Russia of Vladimir Lenin and the Turkey of Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) and about the Armenian uprising of February 1921.

In recent years, the repressions and terror of both sides during the Estonian War of Independence have caught the attention of a number of Estonian history researchers. This is not a new topic, as it was touched upon already during the war of independence and later. Memorials were set up in memory of the victims of the Red Terror after the War of Independence, whereas the White Terror was one of the leading topics of the Soviet propaganda and the official approach to history in the studies of the Estonian War of Independence throughout the Soviet era. It goes without saying that for the Soviets, it was not Estonia's independence war but a class war as a part of the Russian civil war and struggle against foreign intervention.

In both cases, it was stigmatizing the enemy to a greater or lesser extent which is obvious during and after the war. Even a century later, an impartial view on the issue may cause misunderstanding and resentment. Unlike in the past, today it is possible to use the materials of both sides as far as they have survived, as well as memoirs and historical research of the topic is possible. In addition, the researchers have at their disposal the studies of historians on the Red and White Terror in Estonia's neighbouring countries.

Toivo Kikkas's studies are based on the proceedings of the penal institutions of both sides – the field courts martial of the Estonian army and the Extraordinary Commissions (so-called Cheka) of the Soviet Russia. Ants Jürman tries to identify the victims of terror of both sides in the eastern part of Viru County, in Narva and Ivangorod. He concludes that this was one of the regions with a large number of victims, suffering the

most between the bolshevist revolution of 1917 and the end of the Estonian War of Independence at the beginning of 1920.

Regardless of the publication of a comprehensive study of the Estonian War of Independence and a biographical reference book of the cavaliers of the Estonian Cross of Liberty<sup>3</sup> as well as a review of the monuments of the Estonian War of Independence<sup>4</sup> and a number of other smaller studies on the history of the War of Independence, the research of this field is far from being complete. The war ended more than a hundred years ago but yet more and more sources become apparent in the archives of Estonia and other countries, whose digitization in the last decades makes them more available. An opportunity to process large volumes of information fast brings out new interconnections, unnoticed so far and puts new fields of research on the agenda. Last but not least, the birth of each new generation of historians brings along a new look at the past influenced by the knowledge which has been saved earlier as well as the different view created by the present and the future. Hence, the current yearbook makes for an interim conclusion in the research of the Estonian War of Independence, but it is definitely not the last time when the Estonian Yearbook of Military History writes about the Estonian War of Independence.

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<sup>3</sup> Jaak Pihlak, Mati Strauss and Ain Krillo, *Eesti Vabaduse Risti kavalerid (Cavaliers of the Estonian Cross of Liberty)*, compiled by Jaak Pihlak (Viljandi: Vabadussõja Ajaloo Selts, Viljandi Muuseum, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Mati Strauss, Ain Krillo and René Viljat, *100 aastat Vabadussõja mälestusmärke (100 years of the War of Independence Monuments)*, compiled by Mati Strauss (Keila: Vabadussõja Ajaloo Selts, 2023).



**INDEPENDENCE WARS  
IN NORTH-EASTERN  
EUROPE AND BEYOND**



# **The War Is Not Over? On the Continuity and Discontinuity between the Great War and the War of Independence as Experienced by Lithuanian Soldiers**

Vasilijus Safronovas

*Peter Holquist, Roberth Gerwarth and other historians argue that, for Eastern Europe, the Armistice of Compiègne, signed in November 1918, did not mean an end of fighting and violence but a ‘continuation and transformation’ of the world war. However, a precise definition of the viewpoint is important when it comes to continuity. Is it from the perspective of soldiers, civilians or war refugees? For example, many of the Lithuanian veterans of World War I did not fight in the Lithuanian War of Independence from 1919 to 1920. The exceptions included officers, non-commissioned officers, and medical doctors. As a consequence, most of the Lithuanian army in 1920 was comprised of men who had not fought in World War I. In the war experience of the majority of Lithuanian soldiers, the Lithuanian War of Independence was not a continuation of World War I.*

## **Introduction**

In 2002, Peter Holquist published a book on the interaction between the First World War and the Russian Revolution. He claimed that “the war and revolution [...] were not two discrete events but rather points along a common continuum.”<sup>1</sup> According to Holquist, “the Russian Revolution served as a major precipitant for the wartime ‘remobilization’ after 1917

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution. Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914–1921* (Cambridge MA, London: Harvard University Press, 2002), 3.

that took place across Europe.”<sup>2</sup> He therefore suggested that the wars that broke out in Europe after 1918, especially the Russian civil wars, could be described as “a ‘continuation and transformation’ of the world war.”<sup>3</sup> The continuum of crisis—this is what Holquist called the entire period of 1914–1921 in Russia.

Although Holquist’s book dealt with events in the so-called Don Territory, he was followed by a number of historians who examined the military conflicts of the early 20th century in another region, the post-imperial area that various authors referred to as “borderlands” (Oskar Halecki), “bloodlands” (Timothy D. Snyder), “shatterzone” (Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz), “lands between” (Alexander V. Prusin), the “European rimlands” (Mark Levene) or the European “Middle East” (Lewis Namier). For instance, when writing about “war after the war” in this region, Peter Gatrell emphasised “the close connection” between the Great War and subsequent revolutionary challenges, civil wars and “‘dirty wars’ fought by irregular troops and distinguished by the use of force against civilians.”<sup>4</sup> In Ireland, a team of historians led by Robert Gerwarth at the University College Dublin and the Trinity College raised the question of whether the Great War really ended in November 1918. They rightly concluded that for much of Eastern Europe the period known in the West as the “post-war” period, “was even more violent than the war years, with more than 4 million deaths as a result of revolutions, wars, and civil wars between 1917 and the early 1920s.”<sup>5</sup> In his last book, Robert Gerwarth referred to the inhabitants of the region as “the vanquished”,<sup>6</sup> while Jay Winter now claims that there was in fact a second Great War in Central and Eastern Europe that began in 1917 and ended in 1923, a new stage of the Great War that was qualitatively different from the previous

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 3–4.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Gatrell, “War after the War: Conflicts, 1919–23” – *A Companion to World War I*, ed. John Horne (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 567.

<sup>5</sup> The Limits of Demobilization, 1917–1923: Paramilitary Violence in Europe and the Wider World, Final Report Summary, last update 9 March 2016, URL: <<https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/240809/reporting>>.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished. Why the First World War Failed to End, 1917–1923* (London: Allen Lane, 2016).

one.<sup>7</sup> What all these arguments have in common is that they share the same goal—to try to establish an approach according to which the violence in much of Europe did not end in 1918, in fact, in some countries in the region, such as Estonia, it really only started in 1917; and that there was continuity between the Great War and the subsequent wars for the establishment of national states and their borders in the post-imperial area.

However, when it comes to the question of continuity, it is very important to be clear from whose perspective we see it—that of the soldiers, the civilians or the refugees, those who lost something in the war or those who were able to benefit from it? In this article, I want to show how important it is to assess the differences in perspective by selecting two categories of people who experienced the violence in a particular way, soldiers of Lithuanian origin who fought in the Great War and soldiers who fought for the Lithuanian national state in the years 1919 to 1920.

Indeed, two books recently published by Oxford University Press<sup>8</sup> have inspired the development of my argument. The authors of these books, Tomas Balkelis and Jochen Böhrer, examine war and paramilitary violence in Lithuania and Poland respectively. Both authors argue for a continuity between the Great War and subsequent national wars one argument they make for this continuity is that demobilisation did not take place there. They claim that in many cases the soldiers of the imperial armies simply switched their uniforms.

Of course, there are a number of arguments that support this statement. However, the lack of demobilisation was not equally typical of all the newly founded states of Central and Eastern Europe. The first Polish legions in the Habsburg Imperial Army were created in 1914. In response, the Romanov Empire also allowed the raising of Polish units (the Puławy Legion was the first to be formed in 1914). In the summer of 1915, the formation of Latvian rifle battalions in the Russian Army began. During

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<sup>7</sup> Jay Winter, “The Second Great War, 1917–1923,” *Revista Universitaria de Historia Militar* vol 7 no 14 (2018): 160–179.

<sup>8</sup> Tomas Balkelis, *War, Revolution, and Nation-Making in Lithuania, 1914–1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Jochen Böhrer, *Civil War in Central Europe, 1918–1921. The Reconstruction of Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

the Great War, both Polish and Latvian national units fought in the area that later became the territory of the Polish and Latvian national states, respectively. Unlike the Latvian riflemen, many of whom were withdrawn into the depths of Russia by the Bolsheviks in 1918, some of the organised Polish troops remained in the area of the future Poland, fought for the national interests and eventually joined the Polish Army. That is why Böhler is accurate in claiming that the demobilisation did not take place and for many Polish troops active service neither began nor ended in 1918. Balkelis, however, is not precise in his attempts to show such continuity in Lithuania. In several chapters of the book, he points out that thousands of demobilised veterans of the Great War switched their uniforms and were re-mobilised into the nascent Lithuanian national army and paramilitary formations.<sup>9</sup> Balkelis provides some examples to illustrate his argument, but does not elaborate on the extent of the phenomenon. Thus, the reader may get the wrong impression that the same people fought in the Great War and in the three subsequent wars for Lithuanian independence. This article reconsiders his argument and tries to shed more light on the question of continuity between imperial and national armies by looking at the Lithuanian case.

## **How to form an army? The role of the Great War veterans in Lithuanian defence**

Unlike Latvians or Poles, Lithuanians were not allowed to form their national units in the Russian armed forces until after the February Revolution of 1917, at a similar time to Estonians and Ukrainians. The entire area of future Lithuania was still occupied by the German Army at that time. Consequently, Lithuanians serving as Russian soldiers could only establish their own military units in the rear areas. They emerged in Kyiv, Smolensk, Valka/Valga, Rovno/Rivne and elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> Of all these units,

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<sup>9</sup> Balkelis, *War, Revolution, and Nation-Making*, 9, 77, 111.

<sup>10</sup> For more on the Lithuanian national units see Vytautas Jokubauskas, "An Army never Created: Lithuanian National Units in Russia and their Veterans Organisation in Lithuania in the Interwar Period" – *The Great War in Lithuania and Lithuanians in the Great War: Experiences and Memories*, ed. Vasilijus Safronovas (Klaipėda: Klaipėda University Press, 2017), 101–122.



*Veterans of the First World War in the ranks of a Lithuanian national unit in Russia. The headquarters of a Lithuanian Detached Battalion in late 1917—early 1918. Lithuanian Central State Archives (LCVA), P-19269*

only the Lithuanian Detached Battalion<sup>11</sup> in Vitebsk (as part of the 3rd Finnish Rifle Division) was formed before the Bolshevik coup. All other units were formed afterwards, so they belonged to the Russian White Movement and were treated as enemies by the Bolsheviks. The Red Army tried to draw the soldiers of the Lithuanian national units to its side. In addition, some units (e.g. two Lithuanian squadrons of the 17th Cavalry Division) became German prisoners of war. As a result, most of these units were disbanded in the spring of 1918. All this prevented them from fighting on the territory of future Lithuania or for Lithuanian national interests. Despite the hopes of their organisers that the national units would form the basis of the future Lithuanian Army,<sup>12</sup> the veterans of

<sup>11</sup> In Russian: Особый литовский батальон III Финляндской стрелковой дивизии.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Ladislovas Natkevičius, *Lietuvos Kariuomenė* (New York: Lithuanian Development Corporation, 1919), 11.

the Great War did not reach their homeland in an organised form. Of all the national units, only the Lithuanian Detached Train Battalion<sup>13</sup> managed to return from Rovno to Vilnius in August 1918, more or less organised.<sup>14</sup> The situation in Lithuania was thus completely different from that in Poland, where some Polish units that had been created in Russia and France during the Great War were essentially absorbed into the Polish Army in 1918 and 1919.

The return of the ex-Russian Army soldiers to what later became Lithuania took several years. Although there is insufficient data on the course of this process, a small part of the Great War veterans, namely those who had served in the Lithuanian national units, filled in questionnaires containing some information about their experiences of military service in the late 1930s.<sup>15</sup> Quantitative analysis of these questionnaires shows that although 62.75 per cent returned as early as 1918, the process of their return from the frontlines, rear areas, garrisons and prisoner-of-war camps continued in the following years: another 17.68 per cent returned in 1919, 6.25 per cent in 1920, 9.62 per cent in 1921 and 2.47 per cent in 1922. Individual veterans continued to return in the following years until 1931.

In the meantime, when Germany began to withdraw its military units from the areas it had occupied in the east in late 1918, these areas were invaded by the Bolshevik armies. The Lithuanian state, which the Lietuvos Taryba (Lithuanian Council) had proclaimed in December 1917 and again in February 1918, had already come into being by this time. Its armed forces, however, were still being built. In fact, the first Prime Minister, Augustinas Voldemaras, did not consider the question of defence as something of the highest priority. In the course of November and December 1918, three regiments, two Lithuanian and one Belarusian, and the

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<sup>13</sup> In Russian: Отдельный литовский обозный батальон.

<sup>14</sup> Pranas Briedulis, "Mano atsiminimai. Iš Rovno lietuvių karių gyvenimo," *Karo archyvas* 4 (1928): 182–191.

<sup>15</sup> At present, the questionnaires are kept in the Lietuvos centrinis valstybės archyvas in Vilnius [Lithuanian Central State Archives, hereafter LCVA], f. 1446, ap. 1, b. 3 to 29 and 46. The results of the quantitative analysis of 1,320 forms are published for the first time in this article. 1,216 of 1,320 veterans indicated the exact year of their return.



General Staff and a commandant's office were officially created in Vilnius. But the army was disastrously short of weapons, ammunition, uniforms and, above all, men. By early January 1919, the National Defence had barely 100 officers (*karininkai*) and no more than 700 rank and file (*kareiviai*) in its ranks.<sup>16</sup> This force was unable to resist the advancing Bolshevik Western Army. Therefore, in late December 1918, all three units, proudly called regiments, were transferred to Alytus, Kaunas and Hrodna.

While the National Defence was still being organised, in some areas men joined together to form paramilitary formations. This was not entirely uncoordinated, but in many cases they emerged autonomously. The very first of these formations emerged at the end of 1918 near the former border between the provinces of Kurland and Kaunas (Kovno). The members of these formations acted as partisans both in the areas under the control of the German military contingent (control was, of course, conditional, but that was what the Germans believed) and in the areas invaded by the Red Army.

At this stage, the Great War veterans made an important contribution. They were actively involved in leading men who knew how to handle weapons. The brothers Aleksandras and Povilas Plechavičius, former officers in the Russian Army, organised partisan activities around Seda in north-western Lithuania. Jonas Bartasevičius, another Russian officer, was the organiser of a paramilitary formation in Pašvitinys, northern Lithuania, in early 1919. These are but some examples. Among those who joined the National Defence in 1918 were also many veterans. These included the later generals Jurgis Kubilius, Mykolas Velykis, Pranas Liatukas, Jonas Galvydis-Bikauskas, Vincas Grigaliūnas-Glovackis, Julius Čaplikas and

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<sup>16</sup> The Lithuanian Army numbered 144 officers and 2,676 rank and file on 1 January 1919. But these figures seem exaggerated, because the army only began to grow rapidly in the first days of January. Cf. Vytautas Jokubauskas, *"Mažųjų kariuomenių" galia ir paramilitarizmas. Tarpukario Lietuvos atvejis* (Klaipėda: Klaipėdos universiteto leidykla, 2014), 354; Vytautas Lesčius, *Lietuvos kariuomenė 1918–1920* (Vilnius: Lietuvos Respublikos švietimo ir mokslo ministerijos Leidybos centras, 1998), 248, 322; Gintautas Surgailis, *Pirmasis pėstininkų didžiojo Lietuvos kunigaikščio Gedimino pulkas* (Vilnius: Vytauto Didžiojo karo muziejus, 2011), 20–21; Gintautas Surgailis, *Antrasis Lietuvos didžiojo kunigaikščio Algirdo pėstininkų pulkas* (Vilnius: Generolo Jono Žemaičio Lietuvos karo akademija, 2014), 13–21.

Vladas Nagevičius, Colonel Kazys Škirpa and other prominent officers of the future Lithuanian Army, as well as some active organisers of Lithuanian national units in Russia such as Stasys Butkus or Petras Gužas.

In the first months of 1919, the contribution of the Great War veterans to Lithuanian defence increased even more. There were a number of reasons for this. After a change of government, the government faced challenges that made the issue of defence a critical one. Newly appointed Prime Minister Mykolas Sleževičius and Defence Minister Mykolas Velykis appealed to the people encouraging their voluntary enlistment into the National Defence on 29 December 1918.<sup>17</sup> A week later, on 5 January 1919, the government ordered the recruitment of all its officials who had experience of serving in the Russian Army as officers and military clerks. On 15 January 1919, the mobilisation of the remaining officers and staffers up to 45 years of age was announced.<sup>18</sup> In the wake of this mobilisation and due to intensive volunteering in January, the armed forces grew to about 270 officers and about 4,000 rank and file by early February.<sup>19</sup> It is almost certain that all of these officers and a small part of the privates were veterans of the Great War. In the spring of 1919, however, the enlistment of the Great War veterans for the National Defence seems to have reached its limits. Even though some paramilitary formations, including former Russian army officers, were co-opted into the army during 1919, the introduction of conscription transformed the army and led to a rapid change in the main body of soldiers. Through the compulsory recruitment of men born between 1894 and 1901 and the mobilisations of individual categories of the population in Lithuania, which continued throughout 1919–1920, the Lithuanian Army grew to about 46,000 men by December 1920.<sup>20</sup> As the Lithuanian Army continued to grow and the role of the paramilitary formations increasingly diminished, the share

<sup>17</sup> “Į Lietuvos piliečius,” *Lietuvos aidas*, 29 December 1918, 2.

<sup>18</sup> *Lietuvos įstatymai. Sistematizuotas įstatymų, instrukcijų ir įsakymų rinkinys*, sur. Antanas Merkys (Kaunas: A. Merkys and V. Petruelis, 1922), 325–327.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. the contradictory estimates of Vytautas Lesčius, *Lietuvos kariuomenė nepriklausomybės kovose 1918–1920* (Vilnius: Generolo Jono Žemaičio Lietuvos karo akademija, 2004), 39; Jokubauskas, „Mažųjų kariuomenių“ galia, 354.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Lesčius, *Lietuvos kariuomenė 1918–1920*, 424–429 and Jokubauskas, „Mažųjų kariuomenių“ galia, 354.



*The first public oath of the Lithuanian Armed Forces. Kaunas, 11 May 1919. Vytautas the Great War Museum (Vytauto Didžiojo karo muziejus, VDKM), Fa-23058*

of the veterans of the Great War in the ranks of Lithuanian servicemen declined considerably.

## **The share of re-mobilised soldiers in the Lithuanian Army in 1919–1920**

No historian has yet attempted to estimate how many Great War veterans were in the Lithuanian armed forces during what was later called the War of Independence. Indeed, this is a complex question, the answer to which depends heavily on what exactly counts as the War of Independence.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Tomas Balkelis is critical of the concept of ‘independence wars’. Cf. his attempts to view the military conflicts in Lithuania after the Great War as “a single multidirectional war rather than a series of ‘liberation’, ‘civil’ or ‘revolutionary’ wars”: Balkelis, *War, Revolution, and Nation-*

The Lithuanian armed forces were involved in three different conflicts, including the war with the Red Army, military encounters with the West Russian Volunteer Army and the war with Poland. It was not until the mid-1920s that the entire period of the three conflicts was labelled by local authors as the “struggle for independence” (*nepriklaušomybės kova*), “fights for independence” (*nepriklaušomybės kovos*) or the “wars of independence” (*nepriklaušomybės karai*). But the end of these wars brought some confusion. After the intervention of the League of Nations Military Control Commission in November 1920, peace was not concluded. Although both sides had ceased military action, Lithuanians continued to encounter Poles in the so-called neutral zone, a creation of the Military Commission, until this zone ceased to exist in February–May 1923. Moreover, the personnel strength of the Lithuanian Army continued to increase, reaching its peak in December 1921 – January 1922. Demobilisation commenced in the spring of 1922 and lasted until the end of 1923. All this can be taken as an argument for the claim that the war, the violence, the military actions and the individual operations actually ended in 1923.<sup>22</sup> However, when it comes to the question of how many soldiers were actually involved in both conflicts (i.e. the Great War and the national wars), the extent of the involvement becomes an important criterion. The military encounters in the neutral zone were indeed a small-scale conflict with rather inconsiderable forces involved. An additional argument is the fact that men who had already served in the Russian Army were released from compulsory service in the Lithuanian Army from 1921 onwards (see below). Therefore, it seems more logical to follow the “traditional” approach toward the end of the “Lithuanian wars” in this article. In 1922, the Lithuanian Army recognised the period from 5 January 1919 to 1 December 1920 as the period for military action.<sup>23</sup> Although

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*Making*, 7, 96. For more on the role of these wars in the domestic memory landscape, see Vasilijus Safronovas, “Who fought for national freedom? On the significance of the Great War in interwar Lithuania,” *Acta Baltico-Slavica* 42 (2018): 189–215.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Jokubauskas, “*Mažųjų kariuomenių*” *galia*, 24; Balkelis, *War, Revolution, and Nation-Making*, 1–2, 156.

<sup>23</sup> According to the General Staff, the war with Bolshevik Russia lasted from 5 January 1919 to 5 January 1920, the encounters with the West Russian Volunteer Army from 26 July 1919 to