

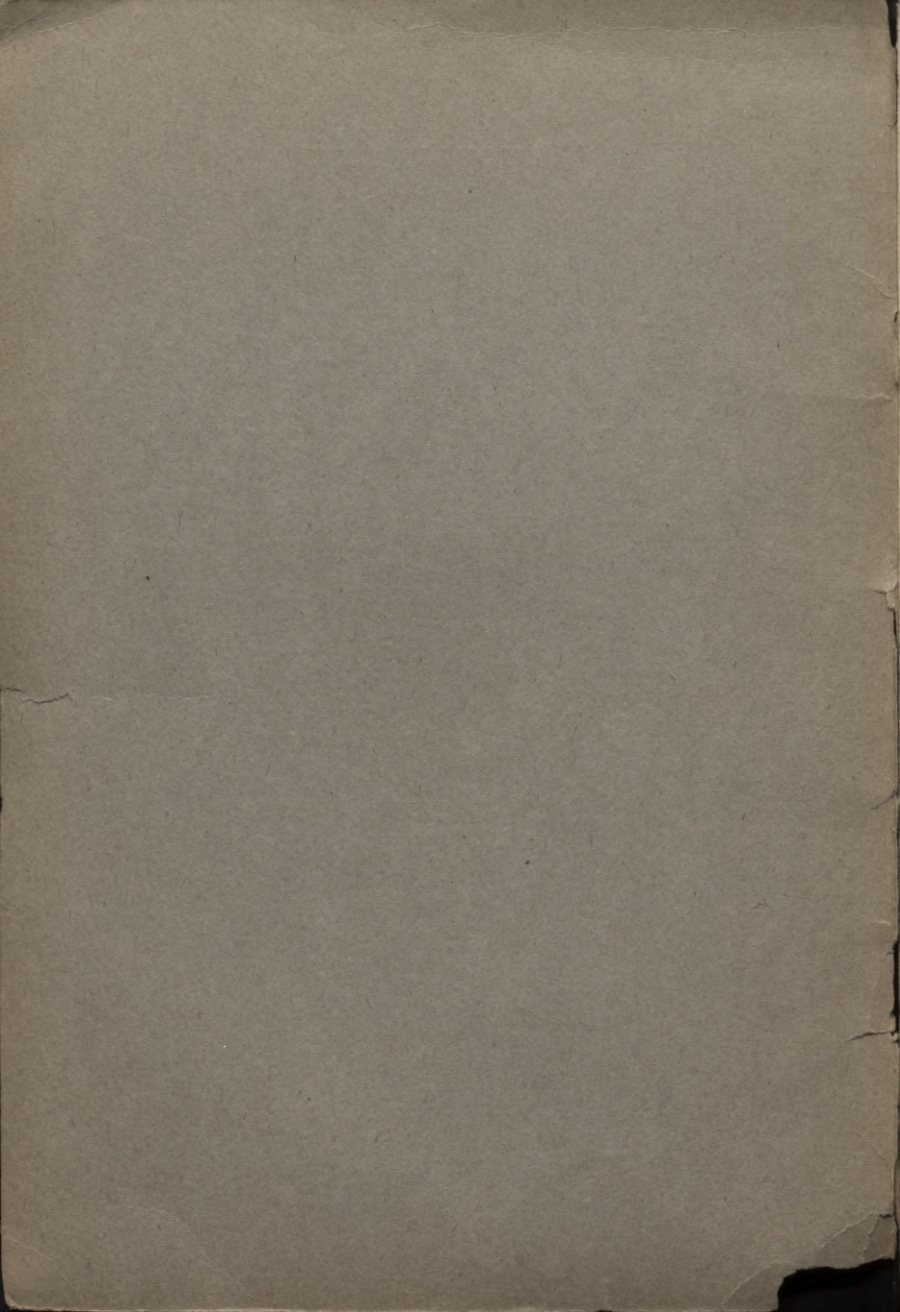
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LUDVIGS EKIS

LATVIA

Struggle for Independence





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Struggle for Independence

by
LUDVIGS EKIS



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P R E F A C E

In these times when every nation is mustering its forces for the final struggle against the forces of oppression and against the conquests of the European dictators, it seems that it would be of some interest to many of our friends to hear how the initial struggle for freedom and independence of Latvia was won from 1918 to 1920 against two great powers which also today endanger the independent existence of Latvia. Sometimes also publications regarding the Baltic questions are too *one sided*, and many real and would-be-helpers of the Latvians in their struggle for freedom exaggerate the amount, the extent and the significance of their help. Sometimes it sounds as if only *foreign* forces had help the Latvians to wrest their freedom from the jealously clasped hands of the former Russian Empire, holding the Latvians in the grip of subjugation. Even the open enemies of Latvian independence—the Russians, both red and white imperialists, and the Germans (sic!)—pretend—each certainly in their own manner—that only they and nobody else “helped” Latvia to become free and to obtain her high level of material and cultural well-being. The Poles, Estonians, Lithuanians, French and English,—all of them really were our friends, and helped in many ways, the Poles and Estonians with armed forces, the Lithuanians with a loan, the French helped with supplies for our troops in Siberia, and with artillery from their ships, when the Germans attacked Riga in November 1919. The British sent us supplies, and their warships also helped to drive the Germans back. Also America helped us with supplies from the stocks of the A. E. F. in France.

As a matter of fact, however, the real burden of the struggle on Latvian territory in the years 1914—1920, as well as in the years from 1939 to date,—were and will be born by the *Latvian nation*. It is true that the British Government and its War supply institutions, the British fleet, the French fleet, and expeditionary forces in Siberia helped the young Latvian Army, and that without their help it is very doubtful whether Latvia could have attained what she actually did. In the same way we Latvians appreciate very much the help the gallant Polish Army extended to us in 1919-1920 in our final struggle against the Bolsheviks. Our allies and brothers of fate—the Estonians—as early as in spring of 1919 helped us to organize *two* regiments on Latvian and Estonian territory, and on one occasion they helped us to liquidate the force of the local Germans which was endangering the whole independence movement of Latvia and also that of Estonia. But again nobody can say that the Estonians or Poles liberated Latvia. This task was performed in the past, and can be performed in the future only by the Latvians themselves. The structure of the liberty of a nation requires that living human beings be built into it. Human blood is required as cement to hold together this precious building of Freedom and Independence! Even if temporarily the leaders of a nation try to avoid a struggle of honor, things go wrong, as we have witnessed on many occasions in recent years.

LUDWIGS EKIS

Washington
1942.

Latvian Defense during the First World War

At the time when the first shots were fired in South-eastern Europe in July 1914, when later the Russian mobilization of all armed forces was ordered and the First World War started its first bloody steps, the *Latvian people*, who were under Russian rule at that time, had 182,000 of its members in the Imperial Russian army.* The *Baltic Provinces*—the name under which the territories of Latvia and Estonia were known before their liberation from Russian and German domination—were also the first to be attacked by the invading German forces. Liepaja (Libau), the most southern port and one of the biggest Latvian towns, was bombarded by the Germans as early as August 2nd, 1914, i.e., the second day of the war. At the beginning of 1915 Latvian territory was already directly menaced by the advancing German forces; Liepaja was taken on May 7, 1915, and the front ran along the Venta river during the first part of the summer of 1915. Later the Germans succeeded in making a break through the Russian lines, and on July 17, 1915, the battle line was already at Vec-Auce in Zemgale. On July 18 Dobeles was taken and the German forces rapidly approached Jelgava and Riga. Jelgava was taken on August 1st, 1915.

*For the first time, in the defense of Jelgava, a unit composed solely of Latvian territorials took part in the battle. This unit distinguished itself and achieved far greater success than the Russians did.***

The Latvian Rifle Regiments and the Russian Revolution

The Latvian deputies in the Russian Imperial Duma, J. Goldmanis and J. Zalists, asked the Russian Government permission to form Latvian military units and to concentrate all Latvian soldiers for the defense of their native land on the front along the river Daugava and around Riga. It was evident that the Latvians were opposed to the German invading forces, and that in the view of the historical past the Latvian people would never submit to German rule. There were many causes and reasons for this, but chiefly because the German nobility in the Baltic countries had pursued a policy of oppression and arrogance towards the Latvians for several centuries. Everybody understood that a conquest of the Baltic countries by Germany also meant the end of the Latvians as a people. This was the fate of another branch of the Baltic peoples and close relatives of the Latvians—the ancient Prussians (old inhabitants of East Prussia), who lost their nationality, language and culture after they were conquered by the Germans in the 15th—16th centuries.

After long consultations in Petrograd and under stress of circumstances*** it was at last announced that the Imperial Russian Government has granted permission to form Latvian forces.**** Soon afterwards the first Latvian battalions were formed, which later increased to several regiments. They were composed entirely of and commanded by Latvians from the Russian Army and

* Dr. M. Valters, *Le Peuple Letton*, Marcel Hayez, Bruxelles, 1926, Page 258.

** M. Skujenieks, *Latvija, Zeme un Iedzivotaji*, 1927, Page 736.

*** Dr. M. Valters, *Le Peuple Letton*, Bruxelles, 1926, Page 259: "... après une long résistance, le Gouvernement russe en juin 1915 après la seconde avance allemande en Courlande, donna l'autorisation de former cette armée."

**** The permission was granted after the consultation of the famous General Gourko who was commander of the 6th Baltic Army Corps. General Gourko's testimony was written by Colonel B. Gyllenboegel of the General-Quartermasters' Section of his staff. B. Gyllenboegel was of Finnish nationality: he was decorated with the Latvian highest Military Order of the "Lāčplēšis."

of the hundreds of thousands of Latvian refugees. These were the troops which offered the greatest resistance to the Germans and held them up for more than 2 years on their section of the front. But lacking reinforcements in men, guns and munitions, and even being trapped on many occasions owing to the direct treachery of the Russian higher command, they could not succeed in their goal of driving out the Germans.* Nevertheless, these Latvian units proved to the whole world that they were better soldiers, more intelligent, much stronger and with better physical and moral qualities than the average Russian soldier. Even the enemy—the Germans, recognized that. Their Commander-in-Chief, Field-Marshal von Hindenburg, in his reminiscences wrote that on the Russian front near Riga they always encountered the 9 bright stars of the Imperial Russian Army, and these "stars" were the 9 Latvian Rifle Regiments, which stopped the Germans and saved Riga for two years. After the collapse of the Russian Army in 1917 the Latvian regiments never became so demoralized and so scattered as the Russian army. In the early stages of the Russian revolution these Latvian regiments were the most valuable military force in Russia. About four regiments of the *nine* threw in their lot with the Bolsheviks. There are observers who say that it is no exaggeration to say that the Russian Revolution succeeded and maintained its positions only thanks to the Latvian Regiments. Numerous Latvian officers, however, from the very first fought against the Reds** in anti-Bolshevik armies.

It is a tragedy that of these four revolutionized Latvian regiments which joined the Bolsheviks, a part was even used by their Bolshevik masters to fight against the *National Latvian Army* which was partly formed of their colleagues from other Latvian regiments and from the youths in Latvia.—The Bolsheviks even killed the legendary hero of the Latvian Rifle Regiments, Colonel Fr. Briedis, who opposed the follies and outrages committed by the Bolsheviks.

There are several different opinions even among well informed Latvian patriots about the importance and significance of the Latvian Rifles in their historical development, and many ask and doubt whether it was a wise thing to form such Latvian military units and in such way to sacrifice thousands and thousands of the best Latvian men. The loss of 35,000 for a nation of some two millions is a very large sacrifice, and it was done not directly for the benefit of a free and independent Latvia, but for Czarist Russia, the leaders of which, as is revealed by the Bolshevik Academy of Science (see remark*** on the preceding page) betrayed the Latvians. Thus these terrible sacrifices were in vain. The Latvian Nation gained only indirect benefit from the sufferings and heroic struggles of the Latvian Rifle Regiments in that later, during the struggle for the independence of Latvia, the military experience and the cadres of officers and organizers were of great value to the young *Latvian National Army*, the foundation of which was laid in November 1918, just a couple of days after the formal declaration of Independence (November 18, 1918) and after the establishment of the first democratic Latvian Government. There are on the other hand people who exaggerate the importance of the Latvian "Rifles."

Usually they are persons connected with the veteran's organizations of these Latvian Units, or even the organizers of these units themselves. They say that the "Strēlnieki," (the Latvian name of the Rifles), and only they, deserve

* The Soviet Russian Edition of the Academy of Science of the U.S.S.R. "*Istorič Marksist.*" No. 1, 1941. Article by P. Dauge. *Pribaltika v 1917-1940 godah.* There it is said that the Czarist Generals treacherously collaborated with the Germans in order to annihilate the Latvian Units. The Latvian casualties were at times 60% of their total number.

** R. O. G. Urch, *Latvia, Country and People*, London, 1939 (George Allen & Unwin), Pages 87, 88 & 89.

all the merit for an independent Latvia, and that only the "strēlnieki" raised the national consciousness of the Latvians as being a Nation and capable of independent State life.—In my humble opinion both these schools of thought are rather extreme and exaggerated. The truth, as is often the case, lies in between.

The Latvian Rifle Regiments really created a national consciousness, a feeling of pride for the deeds of bravery the Latvian Rifles performed in defending their native soil and towns. Later on the participation of the Latvian Rifle Regiments in the Russian revolution as sustaining pillars of the Bolshevik cause was definitely a negative role played by them, and caused the Latvian nation much embarrassment in explaining and proving that the Latvians are not to be identified as Bolsheviks, that as a matter of fact there are comparatively very few Latvian communists, and that even those have been exterminated "en masse" by the Stalinist purge of 1936-1937. Both the officers and non-commissioned officers of the old Latvian Rifle Regiments were the most valuable cadres of the Latvian Army in war and in peace. Even now, we hope, those Latvians who have escaped the Russian and German "liberations" of 1940-1941 will play an important role in the restoration of independent Latvia to her rights.

The losses of human life suffered by the Latvian Rifles, the most valuable asset, with which the Latvians cannot afford to be extravagant, were enormous and were felt throughout all the 22 years of the independent life of the Latvian nation. It would have been better for a small nation not to lose these 35,000 young lives, buried in the Brethren Cemetery of Riga and in many other places in the fields and meadows of Latvia.

The Foundation of the Latvian National Army

The political organization of independent Latvia was in full swing already from the beginning of the Russian revolution in the spring of 1917 and continued through all of 1917 and until November 18, 1918, when the independence of Latvia was formally declared and a Provisional Latvian Government was appointed by the Latvian National Council established on November 17-18, 1917 in Valka. The Latvian National Council was recognized by the British Government already on November 11, 1918 as a *de facto* Provisional Government of Latvia.*

After the declaration of independence intensive and even feverish work was begun in order to organize a real force behind the newly constituted Government. Latvian military experts came from the Latvian units of the former Russian Army and took part in the deliberations of the National Council as early as in November 1917.**

The former deputy to the Russian Duma, J. Zalits, was appointed Minister for Defense in the new Latvian Government. He appealed to the students, the officers and the Latvian youths of military age, to come to the assistance of the New State and to enroll themselves in the new army. But it was a very difficult task; almost unsurmountable difficulties were laid in the way of the birth of the new Latvian Army by the authorities of occupation. The real administrative power was still in the hands of the German authorities of occupation, and these authorities were not friendly towards the Latvian Government. Only on December 7, 1918, they gave formal permission to the

* Lord Balfour's note to Z. A. Meierovics, Latvian foreign minister on November 11, 1918. See also: *Latvia in 1939-1942*, Washington, 1942, p. 80.

** M. W. Graham, *The Diplomatic Recognition of the Border States*, part III: Latvia, 1941. University of California Press, pp. 405-499.

Provisional Latvian Government to organize certain defense units.** At that time the Bolshevik were advancing on Riga, and in Riga itself Bolshevik propaganda and agitation were felt everywhere. Even among the university students there was no unanimity on the question whether to support the Provisional Government of K. Ulmanis or whether to await the arrival of the Bolsheviks and then to see what would happen. It was easier to "wait and see" than to act, and therefore the formation of the new units for defense needs—and very urgent needs—was a difficult task and very few offered their services as volunteers. There was no power of compulsion, there was no money and arms other than those which could be obtained or taken from the German occupation authorities. The writer recollects quite clearly those troublesome days in Riga around the middle of December 1918. There were already in existence some units of a military character: the companies at Cesis, formed by Colonel Apinis of several officers, students and high school pupils in order to protect the property of citizens in and around Cesis when the robberies of the Bolsheviks started. The officers who were at Riga organized several hundreds of their Latvian colleagues into another company, known as the "Officers Company," under the leadership of Colonel O. Kalpaks and Colonel J. Balodis. —The Minister of Defense J. Zalits appealed several times personally to the University students. His appeals at last were successful. At a meeting at the University the organized students responded to the call of the country with enthusiasm and firm resolution. The principal fraternities (in Latvia called "Student Corporations") adopted a decision, that every member of the Latvian fraternities had to enroll as a volunteer in the New Latvian Army. The famous "Special Students' Company" (in Latvian—"Atsevišķā Studentu Rota") was formed of students of whom some already had military experience, but the greater part had none at all. December 20, 1918, is considered to be the founding day of the Students' Company. Later from this company, consisting of some 300 students as a nucleus, the 3rd Jelgava Regiment, and still later the "Courland Division" (Kurzemes Divīzija), were formed. These three Units: 1. *The First Officers' Company*, 2. *The Cesu Company* and 3. *The Special Students' Company*, formed during November and December 1918 in Riga and in Cesis, and later known as the "Kalpaka bataljons,"—were the first "National Latvian Military Unit," the first real force of the Latvian Provisional Government of President K. Ulmanis.

I remember the first military parade and review of the troops on December 26th, 1918, before the building of the Ministry of Interior in Riga. A group of British officers watched these young soldiers still clad in varied garments, some in Russian military overcoats, some in private overcoats with a national ribbon on their left arm, the students still in their colorful students caps . . . I remember we marched before our newly elected Prime Minister and Minister of War quite proudly. We wondered what the British officers thought of us, and whether they would supply us with the necessary arms and munitions promised to the Government.—Then the days of the hardest work and still harder struggles began. First we had to teach our comrades who had no military experience at all. There was a lack of armaments, rifles and munitions. The Germans had enormous stores of arms, amunitions and supplies in Riga, but they preferred to throw their goods into the River Daugava rather than to give the much needed arms to the young Latvian army. By ruse and force the Latvian units succeeded in procuring a rifle and several rounds of ammunition for every one. Such arms as machine guns were considered too "dangerous" for the Latvians. But machine guns were badly needed. We decided to get them. It was done with a couple of bottles of rum and a talk in German with two

* Juris Vīgrabs et Hugo Vītols, *La Naissance de la Lettonie*, Riga, 1938, Page 27. (Vingt Années, l'Indépendance de Lettonie).

German sentries on the Riga bridges. While some of us talked with the Germans, our other colleagues disarmed the German machine gunners and so we had the weapons during all the first stages of the war. To this very day I do not know what happened to those German sentries from whom we got our first machine guns. The only other machine guns were those which we took from the Russian Bolsheviks, until the first shipload of British armaments, munitions and supplies arrived in Liepaja on February 9th, 1919.

However, before that date the young Latvian army, which was growing daily even in times of retreat, was very poorly equipped. The first "fire baptism" was given to the new Latvian armed forces on January 2nd, 1919, during the retreat from Riga, when some Bolshevized "guerillas" attacked the forces of the Provisional Government. The Opera house in Riga was set on fire and wild shots were fired from dark corners in Riga.

In Jelgava a stop of several days was made, and the military and general situation was carefully studied. It was decided that one part of the armed forces would go by train together with the Government to Liepaja, but the bulk would slowly retreat while fighting the much larger and better equipped Bolshevik forces. According to the orders of the Allies, the German forces had to oppose the invading Bolsheviks, but seeing the new *National Latvian State* rising out of war and chaos, the German soldiers ran away, not caring very much who seized the country *after them*.—On January 16th, 1919, there was a fierce battle with the Bolsheviks at Liel-Auce, then at the river Venta, where the advance of the Bolsheviks was finally stopped altogether. The general advance started on March 3rd, 1919, from the Venta line, after reinforcements were sent to the front, and led to final victory.

The British arms and rifles, and especially the machine guns and automatic rifles, were of tremendous value. With the aid of these the Bolshevik forces were taken by surprise by a small but well armed and equipped elite force, composed solely of *Latvian* officers, University students and pupils from the last classes of high schools. Every group of 10 to 20 soldiers (the soldiers were often captains, lieutenants, etc., of the Old Latvian Rifle regiments, or of the Russian Imperial Army), had a machine gun and/or several automatic rifles. Later we heard from the prisoners that the Reds were demoralized by the intense and precise firing the Latvians practised. They said they were completely defenseless against an army in which every soldier seemed to possess a machine gun.

The War of Independence

At the beginning the young Latvian Army consisted of *three* units, small in numbers, pretty bad in equipment, but composed of *experts* (officers fighting as simple soldiers) and ardent patriots (the students of the patriotic fraternities). The leader of the first, the Officers' Company was Colonel *O. Kalpaks*, by Colonel who later was the first Latvian Commander-in-Chief. The second was the *Cēsu* Company led by Colonel Apinis (later General). As he was too old for active duty in the very strenuous actions and long and quick marches,—he was substituted by Captain Purinš (later Colonel); the third, the Students' Company, was led by Captain N. Grundmanis. The first two units remained all the time in constant action against the Bolsheviks; the third Unit went together with the Government to Liepaja and did all possible at that time to increase the number of fighting men by arranging partial mobilization in the still unoccupied regions around Liepaja. The necessary weapons and munitions were supplied later by the British, and so after a retreat in the first days of January 1919, it was decided in the second half of February to launch an offensive against the Reds, who were stopped at the river Venta. At the

beginning of the offensive, on March 3, 1919, all the Latvian forces were at the front. Only a couple of half-trained companies were left at Liepaja for further training and to guard the Government which did not enjoy easy days with the German occupation authorities and with the German Commander in Chief, General von der Goltz, who arrived in Liepaja from Germany on February 1st, 1919.

At the end of February the Latvian units had reached the number of 3600 men. There were plenty of arms for that force. It was arranged with the Landeswehr and with some smaller German units (Battalion Borch) from the Eiserne Division (Iron Division) to fight together against the Reds. The offensive started in the early hours of March 3, 1919 and stopped only when the entire territory of Latvia was delivered from Bolshevik occupation. Line after line, locality after locality, were taken. Owing to the high quality and intelligence of the troops, the offensive and all actions worked with clock like precision! However, once, in the heat of battle, a major mistake occurred, a very tragic and costly mistake! This happened on March 6, 1919, when the young Latvian Army lost its Commander in Chief, Colonel O. Kalpaks. With him several other higher officers lost their lives, including the Commander of the Students' Units—Capt. N. Grundmanis. It was Capt. Grundmanis who was first designated by Colonel Kalpaks to be next in command after Kalpaks himself was mortally wounded. But in the next minute also Capt. Grundmanis fell, and *died before Colonel Kalpaks*. Then Capt. J. Balodis (later General and Commander in Chief) was designated by the dying Col. Kalpaks to replace him.

All these and other losses were caused in fact by a tragic *oversight* and by the fact that certain Bolshevik prisoners gave false information. It was a fight between the Latvians and a German unit, but unintentionally. Both sides suffered severe losses, but the losses of the Latvians were almost irreparable! However, it took place on the battlefield, where no time is available for mourning. We had to go on or to die! We were very sad over the loss of our beloved commanders, but those who were still alive had to finish the job. Our numbers increased from day to day as we advanced. Now the people in the country had experienced the Bolsheviks, they saw also the young Latvian Army, with the *rising Latvian Sun emblem* on the badges of the fighters. In every town new volunteers enlisted in our lines. On March 24, 1919, we reached the river Lielupe line, and that meant that the greatest part of Kurland (and Zemgale) was liberated from the Reds. We had lost many of our comrades and friends in the battles, we had still many battles ahead, but when we reached Sloka, Kauguri, Kemeru and the marshes of Olaine, when we saw from the seashore at Kauguri the silhouettes of Riga—we *knew* we had won the war!

Until May 22nd, 1919, when the last stage of our offensive against the Reds was launched, we remained stationary along the Lielupe river and in the old World-War positions in the forests and marshes surrounding Riga from the South-West. In the meantime our Government had troubles with the Germans. We felt that at the front too. Supplies were cut off and we had to procure almost everything ourselves. Owing to the political troubles instigated by the Germans and their "political" General von der Goltz, we lost time and gave the Reds in Riga a chance to fortify themselves once more.

The offensive against Riga on May 22, 1919, was again a *sample* how things *must be done* in such circumstances. Almost without serious losses for us Riga was taken by much smaller forces than those of the defenders. With Riga taken from the Reds it was only a question of time until the whole country was liberated. But it was a difficult problem to free ourselves from the Germans, who until the liberation of Riga were also fighting against the Reds. After the capture of Riga (May 22, 1919) the Germans (the *local* German

"Landeswehr" and Reich-German "Eiserne Division" under Colonel Bishoff) showed tendencies hostile to Latvian independence, and a definitely hostile attitude towards the *Estonian* and *Latvian* forces formed in Estonia and in the northern parts of Latvia.—So the Germans, after passing Riga, did not turn against the fleeing Bolsheviks, as did the Latvian forces under General (then Colonel) Balodis, but turned their guns against the Estonians and Latvians. A fierce and bloody battle was fought at Cesis on the 21st and 22nd of June, 1919. The German Landeswehr (local Baltic Germans) and a part of the Eiserne Division which helped the Landeswehr were completely beaten by the *united Estonian and Latvian forces*. A great danger to Latvian as well as to Estonian independence was thus averted. A decisive victory had been achieved over an *arch-enemy* (the German Baltic barons!) of many centuries, and *by the Latvians and Estonians alone!* It was historically a very important victory, the *military* significance of which for political reasons has very often been exaggerated. It was a clash between local forces and nothing else. The fact that our friends the Estonians took part in this battle is also a reason why we attach too much importance to this episode of our war of freedom in order to underline the contact and unity existing between the Latvians and Estonians.

The Latvian forces had grown from 1,600 early in January 1919, to 1,200 officers and 20,000 soldiers by July 16, 1919. This fact alone proves that the Landeswehr, numbering 5000, even with some help from the Reich-German forces, could not have hoped to overwhelm the Latvian forces. True, the Latvian army still had to fight against the Reds and to get them out of the *third* Latvian province—Latgale, still occupied at that time by the Russian Bolsheviks. But the Germans and their military and political leader in the Baltic General v. der Goltz could not forget so easily the defeat at Cesis. It was evident that the Germans did not obey the Allies and certainly did not keep their promise and signatures by which they were to leave Latvia. Instead, they (the Germans under General v. der Goltz) started organizing a new force to oppose and to *annihilate young Latvia*.

By September 1919 the Germans were still in Kurland. They were ousted from Riga in the first days of July 1919. The Landeswehr after the defeat of Cesis was sent to the Eastern Bolshevik front. They were altogether 5000 strong, with good equipment. In the meantime the Germans quietly prepared themselves for big scale operations, having as their goal to set up in Russia a pro-German government and with the help of this Russian puppet government to regain the lost war. The Germans acted very carefully, appointing as Commander in Chief of their forces a Russian Colonel Bermond*, but behind the scene von der Goltz always remained as the real "string-puller."—The Latvian Government in Riga watched the developments with ever growing concern. Complaints of oppression and robberies committed in Kurland by the so-called "Deutsch-Russische West Armee in Baltikum," the official name given to this German force, were pouring in every day. This army was 50,000 strong, among whom only about 8000 Russian prisoners of war from Germany were enrolled to give the appearance of a "Russian army." The emblems and badges were *Russian*, but all the bulk of the army was German, *regular* German forces with the best equipment.

* His real name was "Berman." He was born in Odessa of Jewish parents, was converted to the Greek-Orthodox faith and started his career as a band leader of a cavalry regiment. He volunteered to take part in General Mishtchenko's punitive raid on Peking (after the Boxer insurrection), was admitted to a Cavalry school, graduated as Cornet; had to resign his commission, was mobilized in 1914, and at the end of the first World War was still a lieutenant. An adventurous German-Balt baron, von Osten-Sacken-Tettenborn, introduced him to Skoropadski in Kiev, and Skoropadski raised him to the rank of "Colonel." He was never Aide-de-camp of the Czar.

No wonder that things looked very dark at the beginning of October 1919, when this so-called German-Russian West Army started its attack on Riga. The young Latvian army was split in two. One half had to hold the eastern front against the Bolsheviks, and only about 11,500 were at hand to oppose the onslaught of the Russo-Germans at the beginning of their offensive on October 8, 1919.

But on November 11, 1919, the Germans were decisively beaten by the Latvians. It was the gun fire from the French and British war ships that frightened the Germans. Under cover of French and British guns the Latvian land forces managed to cross the river Daugava, and the would-be-invaders were driven from Riga and completely routed. In a short time Kurland was cleared of all enemy forces. Then a surprise radiogram was received from a German General v. Eberhardt, saying that the so-called Russo-German army had placed itself under the protection of Germany and that General von Eberhardt "had taken command of it."* In order to leave no doubt that Germany from that date took full responsibility for the so-called "Russian" army, the German Foreign Office confirmed General Eberhardt's radiogram on November 23, 1919. The Latvian Government replied in a note sent to the Wilhelmstrasse, and registered the well known facts, showing that against the will of Latvia a state of war had existed and continued to exist between Germany and Latvia.

Eventually the German troops were driven out of Latvia. Long negotiations were conducted with Germany until peace was concluded on July 15, 1920. But in January 1920 hard fighting was still going on against the Reds. Our neighbors the Estonians had concluded on December 20, 1919, an armistice and on February 2nd, 1920 peace with Russia, so that the Bolsheviks could concentrate all their forces only against the Latvians. But we were lucky enough to be able to shift our forces from Kurland to Latgale and to have the most valuable help of our southern neighbors—the Poles. The Latvian forces by that time were much stronger (an army of over 100,000 men, well trained and experienced in many battles). With the help of the valiant Poles the Bolshevik war was ended in the spring of 1920. All Latvian lands were now free! A task had been accomplished which at the beginning seemed impossible. Peace negotiations were opened with the Russians on April 12, 1920, at Moscow and ended in a Peace treaty signed at Riga on August 11th, 1920.

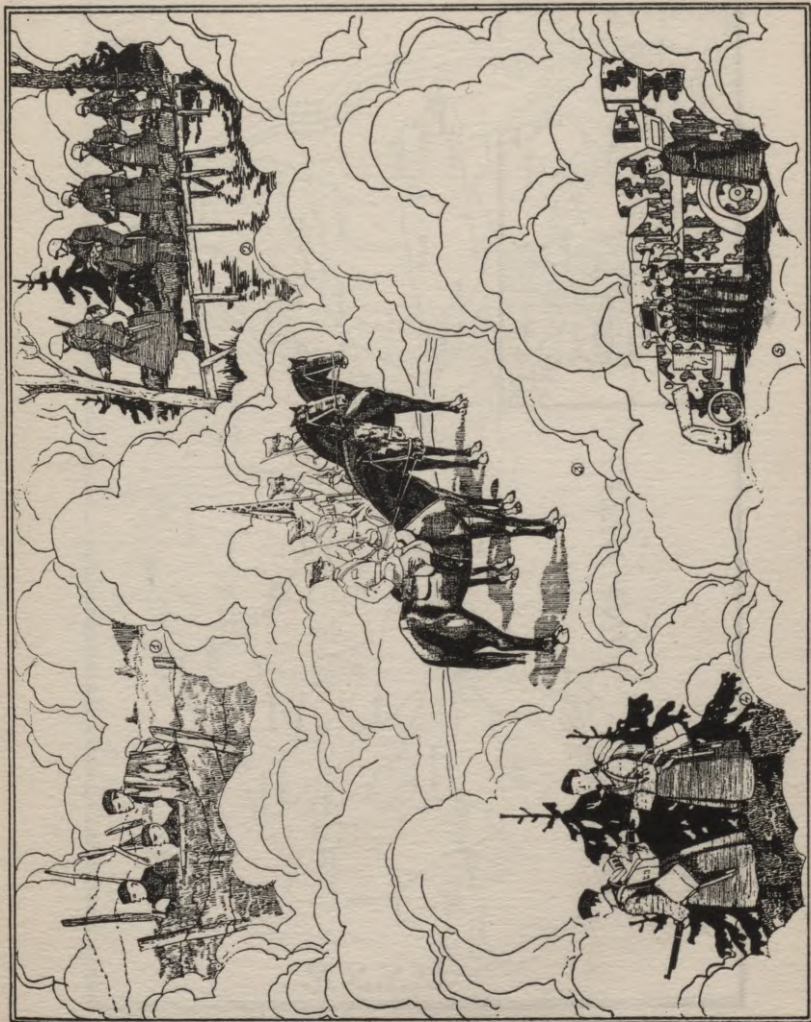
The army returned home. The country had to be rebuilt completely. But it was now our free and independent country, bought with heavy sacrifices of blood. About 5000 Latvians had lost their lives in the recent battles, and taking into account those of the Latvian Regiments, 40,000 young Latvian lives had been sacrificed for the freedom and happiness of the remainder.

* J. Vigrabs and H. Vitols, Lettonie, *Vingt Années d'Indépendance*, Page 36 quotes: "Russische Westarmee" hat sich unter deutschen Schutz gestellt, hohe Oberbefehl uebernommen, ersucht per Radio um Zustimmung zu voelliger Waffenruhe ab Mitternacht 19 zum 20 (November E.) zwecks Einleitung von Waffenstillstandsverhandlungen."



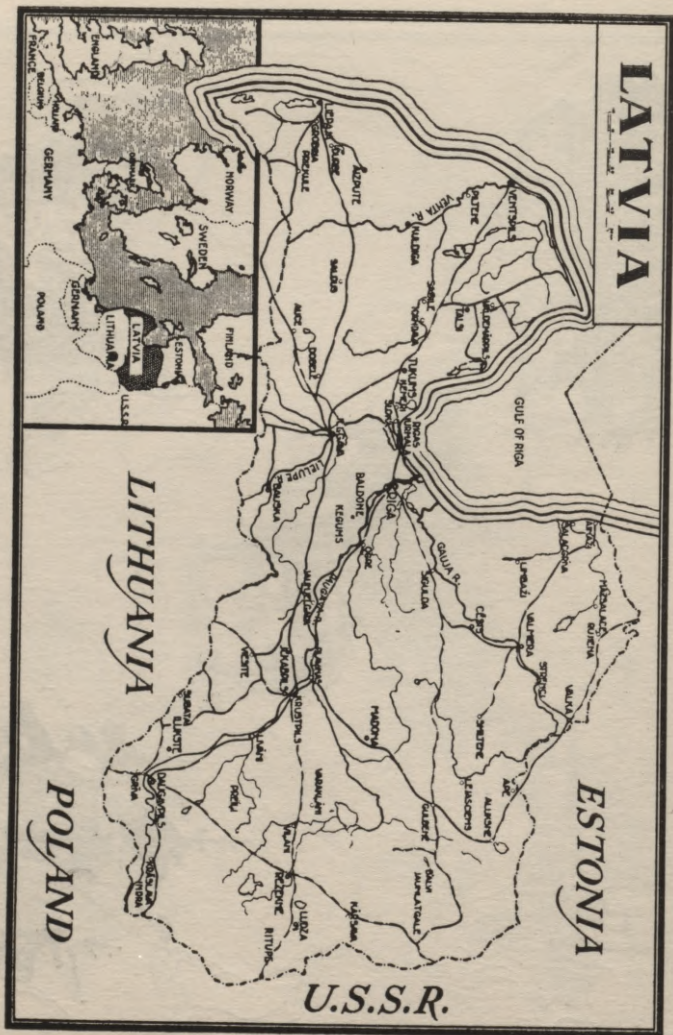
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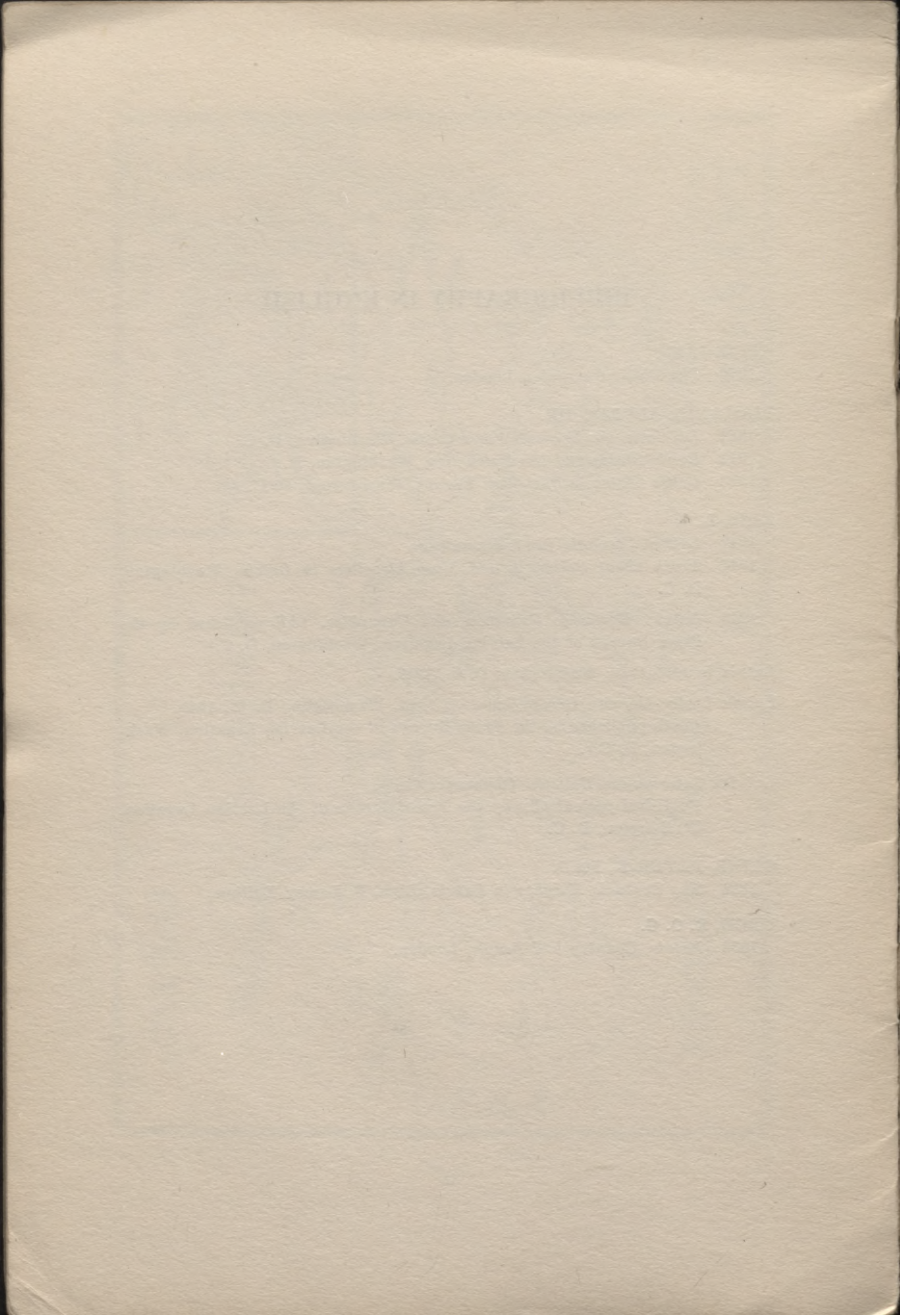
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