

A Generational Shift: The military history crisis in the Estonian military education 1919–1940

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Abstract. The article analyses the teaching of military history in the Estonian army in the interwar period. It argues that the basic concepts – the purpose, thematic distribution, teaching methods – were developed by the former professor of the tsarist military academy, Lt. Gen. Aleksei Baiov. Baiov stressed that history, along with strategy, was at the core of military science. However, Baiov and other Russian émigrés came under heavy criticism from the Estonian command, particularly Gen. Nikolai Reek, who thought Estonia was too small to require a school of strategy. In the background, there was the theoretical clash, carried over from the pre-war tsarist Russia, between the old generation of bayonet tactics and the new generation of fire and movement. In 1926, Baiov was fired, but Reek’s reforms, which subordinated history to the needs of tactical training, remained incomplete even at the end of the 1930s. A number of questions about the utility and the substance of military history remained unresolved. Indeed, they are still not settled in Estonian officer education today.

How should military history be studied and taught, and what is its purpose? How can we transform the approach to military history so that it is as applicable as possible in military practice? And what part of military science is covered by the discipline of military history? These questions – which were discussed in many European countries more than 100 years ago – are salient in today’s Estonia.¹ Even though similar discussions

¹ Igor Kopõtin, “Sõjaajaloo õpetamisest ja uurimisest Saksa Bundeswehri kogemustele toetudes,” *Sõdur* 6 (2016): 45–49.

were held among Estonian military historians and service personnel just a few years ago, consensus has not yet been forged.² One solution, besides examining foreign experience, would be to take a look at the practices of teaching and researching military history in Estonia between the world wars, to understand how salient these issues were back then and what solutions were found in their regard. As questions of military history have been dealt with to some extent by other researchers,³ the task at hand now would be to determine how military history was seen back then and identify the principles used to teach military history in the armed services.

In 1923, Estonian military education was consolidated into a single institution that went by the name “Sõjaväe Ühendatud Õppeasutused” (United Military Educational Institutions, UMEI).⁴ All institutions in the UMEI system had their own curricula, which contained military history instruction. Historian Andres Seene has done noteworthy work in the study of Estonian military education. Unfortunately, while Seene’s research deals quite thoroughly with the activities of the Kõrgem Sõjakool (Officers’ School, KSK) and the Sõjaväe Tehnikakool (Military Technical School, STK), treatment of provision of education and various subjects at the Sõjakool (Military Academy, SK) is given shorter shrift.⁵

In the context of this article, one paper that should be considered important is the master’s degree thesis defended by Andero Nimmer in 2013, which dealt with the activities of the War of Independence History Committee from 1926 to 1940.⁶ Regardless of the fact that Nimmer’s research focuses solely on the activities of the History Committee, valuable information can be found on how the commanding officers of the Estonian military viewed military history. It is important to note that Nimmer, at the end of the thesis, concluded that even in the early 1930s,

² Kaarel Piirimäe, “Sõjaajalugu – kellele ja milleks? Sõjaajaloo perspektiivid (III),” *Tuna* 1 (2017): 146–148.

³ Andero Nimmer, *Vabadussõja Ajaloo Komitee (1926–1940)* (master’s thesis, Tartu Ülikool, 2013).

⁴ The reason for the consolidation of the schools was lack of resources, especially in specialists and teaching staff, Andres Seene, “Eesti ohvitseride ettevalmistamise süsteemi kujunemine ja areng 1919–1940” (PhD thesis: Tartu Ülikool, 2011), 41.

⁵ Seene, “Eesti ohvitseride.”

⁶ Nimmer, “Vabadussõja Ajaloo Komitee.”

broad swathes of the officer corps did not feel a need for research on military history, as they felt it lacked practical value for military training.⁷ In this connection, the observation by Kaarel Piirimäe – that the Estonian military command, and specifically Commander-in-Chief Johan Laidoner, did not draw the right conclusions from the War of Independence – seems eminently logical.⁸ It is not quite clear in this regard whether this stemmed from lack of strategic thinking on the part of the officer corps, in particular the high command, or whether it was shaped by the inability of military educational institutions to develop the capability of the officer corps to learn from military history. In any case, the present research should help determine the importance of the military history discipline within Estonian military education in general.

The Beginning of Teaching of Military History and the Crisis Concerning the Military History Paradigm

Several researchers have pointed out the significantly large role played by Russian émigrés in establishing the military education tradition in Estonia in the first half of the 1920s.⁹ The Higher General Staff Courses launched at Tondi in 1921 (and later held at the KSK) were taught by Russian émigré officers who laid the basis for the teaching of the military history discipline. An extraordinary role in this was played by a professor of the Imperial Nicholas General Staff Academy, the professor and military historian Lt. General Aleksei Baiov, who taught several different subjects

⁷ Ibid., 90.

⁸ Kaarel Piirimäe, “Preparing for war in the 1930s: The myth of the Independence War and Laidoner’s ‘active defence,’” *Estonian Yearbook of Military History* 7, no. 13 (2017): 132–134.

⁹ Ago Pajur, *Eesti riigikaitsepoliitika aastail 1918–1934* (Tartu: Eesti Ajalooarhiiv, 1999), 153. Seene, “Eesti ohvitseride,” 43. Roman Abisogomjan (Абисогомян, Роман), “Rol’ russkix voennykh dejatelej v obščestvennoj i kul’turnoj žizni Ėstonskoj Respubliki 1920–1930-x gg i ix literaturnoe nasledie (Rоль russkix voennykh dejatelej v obščestvennoj i kul’turnoj žizni Ėstonskoj Respubliki 1920–1930-x gg. i ix literaturnoe nasledie)” (Master’s thesis, Tartu Ülikool, 2007), 46–54. Igor Kopõtin, “Rahvuslus ja lojaalsus Eesti sõjaväes vähemusrahvuste näitel 1918–1940” (PhD thesis, Tallinna Ülikool, 2018), 239–247.

Aleksei Baiov, Lt. General of the Imperial Russian army and former lecturer at the Estonian General Staff courses. On the photo, taken in 1931, Baiov wears the fourth class of the highest military decoration of the Russian Empire, Order of St. George. Courtesy: Parikas, Estonian Film Archive



at both the Estonian SK and for the General Staff courses. Among other things, he prepared the first curriculum for the General Staff courses and laid down the system for the organization of studies.¹⁰

In spite of the prolific research and teaching activity of the Russian émigrés and their professionalism, UMEI considered the use of Russians' services a temporary measure in place only until they could be replaced by Estonian teaching staff.¹¹ The teaching by Russian émigrés was considered outdated due to their traditional teaching methodology, and they were faulted for ignoring the contemporary (the Estonian War of Independence) experience. This led to the cutting of ties with the Russian émigrés in 1923–1926.¹² Nor were the students satisfied with the Russian teaching staff, and the discontent was especially felt among the officers who were assigned to Standing Forces Courses and had fought in the War

¹⁰ Abisogomjan, "Rol' russkix voennyx," 48.

¹¹ Kopõtin, "Rahvuslus ja lojaalsus," 243, 246.

¹² Ibid., 243–244.

of Independence. One of them called the era “the Russian era” characteristic of the “general staff overtones wanting to force the development into a university with a grand strategy”.¹³

It can now be firmly asserted that the harassment of Russian émigrés was, among other things, justified by a policy of fighting back against a “Russian ethos”. The émigrés were faulted, with some justification, for being disloyal to the Estonian state and not proficient in Estonian.¹⁴ But can a generational conflict be seen here to some degree as well? The Estonian military cast aside the experience of non-Estonian specialists in the imperial army, unlike the Red Army, where former tsarist army officers (including the Soviet military theoretician Aleksander Svechin, who was also known in the West) were given the chance to shine. For understandable reasons, the principles of military education followed in the Entente powers, above all, France, were preferred in the early 1920s, and an attempt was made to apply these Western ideas in Estonia as well.¹⁵ Probably because of this, the Estonians hastened to rid themselves of the Russians.

The views of General Reek, who was highly influential for the development of the Estonian military and military education and who believed that it was necessary to teach military history, are therefore of interest. In 1921, Reek was the chairman of the Military Teaching Committee and UMEI Inspector. He was considered competent to decide such important assignments because he had military higher education¹⁶ and War of Independence experience as regiment commander and division and frontline chief of staff.¹⁷ Yet the choice of Reek can also be considered problematic, as Reek completed only short courses at the General Staff

¹³ Veste, “Tondil,” *Sõdur* 6–8 (1928): 328.

¹⁴ Kopõtin, “Rahvuslus ja lojaalsus,” 239–248.

¹⁵ See O.J., “Miiks suundume läände,” *Sõdur* 9/10 (1928): 410–411.

¹⁶ Andres Seene, “Kindralleitnant Nikolai Reek ja tema sõjakirjanduslik pärand,” – Nikolai Reek, *Sõjateaduslik testament*, ed. Andres Seene (Tartu: Ilmamaa, 2015), 9–10. It is worth noting that the peacetime graduates of the General Staff Academy did not accept wartime graduates as equal, calling them “недоучки” (half-educated) or even “недоноски” (premature babies), Andrej Ganin (Андрей Ганин), *Zakat Nikolaevskoj voennoj akademii 1914–1922* (Закат Николаевской военной академии 1914–1922) (Moskva: Knižica, 2014), 430.

¹⁷ Seene, “Eesti ohvitseride,” 41.



Chief of the General Staff Nikolai Reek was always interested in military education. In this photo General Reek is inspecting the Officers' School at Tondi, Tallinn, in 1935. Courtesy: the photo collection of Igor Kopõtin

Academy and other division and front staff commanders had served in the War of Independence as well. No doubt one reason for the appointment of Reek was the trust and authority he enjoyed among other officers in the 1920s. Reek's views were supported by generals August Traksmäe and Juhan Tõrvand, who called Reek a progressive-minded officer.¹⁸ The later Colonel Elias Kasak also supported Reek's candidacy. Still, Kasak admitted that Reek was a commander with a difficult personality who had extended the invitation for Russian émigrés to teach at the academy but did not create the necessary academic atmosphere at the General Staff Courses and levelled unfair criticism at the teaching staff.¹⁹

As one of the founders of higher military education in Estonia in 1921, Reek also wrote, even prior to his studies in France – citing Helmuth von

¹⁸ Juhan Tõrvand, "Rohkem objektiivsust ja õiglast analüüsi," *Sõdur* 9/10 (1928): 378–379. See also Elias Kasak, "Mälestusi, II osa," RA, ERA.4996.1.125, 165.

¹⁹ Kasak, "Mälestusi," 159.

Moltke and John Frederick Charles Fuller – that thorough knowledge of military history was a key element of military education, which equal to tactical training had to give commanders the “instinct for mounting major operations”. He considered strategy and tactics the main subjects in military science.²⁰

After his studies in France, Reek developed a different view of the importance of military history. In an article on officers’ education published in the magazine *Sõdur* in 1926, Reek declared that military history was subordinate to tactical education. Reek called for significant cuts to be made to the History of the Art of War syllabus taught at the UMEI. In particular, earlier parts of the history before Napoleonic wars had to be cut, and there had to be near total focus on World War and War of Independence.²¹ In other words, he believed general history of the art of war was necessary only insofar as it yielded good tactical examples. He saw two needs for teaching the history of the War of Independence. One was that the war was supposed to get officers into the habit of thinking and acting in the conditions of an independent Estonia, taking into account, in particular, the battlefield experience of the War of Independence and the use of human resources in the Estonian context.²² Second, the history of the War of Independence was necessary, above all, for training officers.²³ These views probably determined Reek’s “reform” in military education and shaped the teaching of military history from that point on.

Teaching of the history of the War of Independence and the synthesis of its lessons for officers were important, Reek felt, as they shaped the understanding of Estonia’s military strategy. But precisely this, in the opinion of the historian Kaarel Piirimäe, was the problem, as it led to key miscalculations in the future vision of war. Piirimäe notes that the Russian émigré teaching staff deemed the experience in the War of

²⁰ Nikolai Reek, “Ühise sõjalise doktriini väljatöötamise tähtsus juhtide seas,” – *Sõjateaduslik testament*, 353, 357.

²¹ Nikolai Reek, “Meie kaitseväe juhtiva koosseisu kasvatuse ja väljaõppe alalt,” *ibid.*, 391.

²² Andres Seene, “Kõrgem Sõjakool 1921–1940,” *KVÜÖA toimetised* 9 (2008): 37.

²³ Reek, “Meie kaitseväe,” 391.

Independence specific, as an irregular amateur armed conflict.²⁴ Although this opinion in retrospect seems justified, the reason that Russian émigré teaching staff's stint at the UMEI was short-lived was because they did not give the War of Independence its due. Admittedly the problem was not unique, for just like the Estonian General Staff Courses, the Red Army General Staff Academy's old-school teaching staff likewise ignored the experience of the Russian Civil War, considering the conflict to also be an anomalous war.²⁵

The fact that the study of recent historical conflicts was preferred over older historical conflicts was not unusual in military education. Furthermore, there is reason to think that it stemmed from the experience of the Nicholas General Staff Academy. After the defeat in the Russo–Japanese War, the General Staff Academy was accused of the inability to provide students truly essential knowledge needed in war. Teaching of military history came under fire, as it was allegedly preferred to teach details of little use regarding the history of the art of war from earlier periods, as the approach to more significant recent conflicts remained superficial.²⁶ For this reason, in teaching subjects related to pre-1914 military history, the academy focused, above all, on four recent armed conflicts, in which students were expected to be familiar, right down to their intricacies.²⁷

In this connection it is important to note that the French model of military education, which was used as a model by Reek in the 1920s, was criticized by member of the War of Independence History Committee Major Oskar Jalajas. He defended a diploma thesis in the KSK,²⁸ but his ideas also reached a wider audience through articles in the magazine

²⁴ Piirimäe, "Preparing for war," 132–135, 129.

²⁵ Kirill Mereckov (Кирилл Мерецков), *Na službe narodu (На службе народу)* (Moskva: Ast, 2003), 12–13.

²⁶ For example, Lt. Gen. Gleb Vannovski, who later served as lecturer at the Estonian general staff courses, clearly underestimated Japanese military strengths before the war, for which he was heavily criticized later, Nadežda Brinjuk (comp.) (Надежда Бринюк (сост.), *Nikolaevskaja Akademija General'nogo Štaba 1832–1918 (Николаевская Академия Генерального Штаба 1832–1918)* (St. Petersburg: Dmitrij Bulanin, 2018), 198.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 74–75.

²⁸ Oskar Jalajas, "Sõjakunstiajaloo ja sõjaajaloo uurimise tähtsus ja meetodid" (Kõrgema Sõjakooli lõputöö, 1929), RA, ERA.2124.3.268.

Sõdur, drawing the attention of senior Estonian officers such as Major General August Traksmäe.²⁹ In addition, the War of Independence History Committee adopted Jalajas's thesis for use in the field of methodology.³⁰

In his thesis, Jalajas clearly cited the advantages of learning from German and Soviet military history compared to the French model. Specifically, he criticized the French attitude toward military history, which undervalued the importance of military history in military science. There was lack of a desire to learn from military history, papers on military history were not printed – the desire to save paper was cited – and the practical value of military history in the changing circumstances of warfare was not appreciated. In general, there was the view that winners did not need to learn anything from history.³¹ Whether Estonia had a similar winner's mentality due to its victory in the War of Independence, is hard to evaluate.

It is also difficult to say how much the crisis in French military history influenced Reek during his period of study in Paris, but some of his comments do contain ideas characteristic of the French School. This can be sensed in the abovementioned Reek's opinion that the practical value of military history lay solely in the service of tactical education. At the same time, it must be admitted that Reek had also given a high assessment to the Reichswehr's military training and education system, due to which various elements from the German system were adopted in the Estonian military in the 1930s.³² Yet it cannot be said that Reek turned his back on Russian military theory entirely. For example, in his article Reek quoted classic Russian military thinkers such as Generalissimo Alexander Suvorov, General Genrich Leer, General Mixail Dragomirov, Professor Colonel Alexander Neznamov and Professor Lieutenant Gen-

²⁹ Nimmer, "Vabadussõja Ajaloo Komitee," 19.

³⁰ War of Independence History Committee to the VI department of the armed forces staff, 3 September 1930, RA, ERA.495.12.531, 159.

³¹ Jalajas, "Sõjakunstiajaloo ja sõjaajaloo uurimise tähtsus," 7–8. Nimmer, "Vabadussõja Ajaloo Komitee," 19.

³² Seene, "Eesti ohvitseride," 46, 49, 51. Reek, *Sõjateaduslik testament*, 404–410. Igor Kopõtin, "Reichswehri identiteedikriis: selle mõjud ja kajastamine Eestis 1919–1934," *Ajalooline Ajakiri* 1 (2016): 118.

eral Nikolai Golovin.³³ Admittedly, the majority of his articles consists of interpretations of quotations from various leading world thinkers and of the evolution of military art.

Major General August Traksmaa, who also taught military history at the UMEI, also saw a deep crisis that arose in the mid-1920s in military history teaching in Estonia. In his view, the factor behind this crisis was that, like the antecedent of the French army, the Estonian military command lost confidence in the military history discipline as a source of truth. The main problem for Traksmaa was not the winner's mentality but rather the low-quality military historical literature published *en masse* after the War of Independence.³⁴

Reek associated the crisis in Estonian military education specifically with Russian émigrés, whom he wished to be rid of. Andres Seene uses the term "Reek reform" to denote the changes in Estonian military education in 1926–1927 that followed the dismissal of the Russian émigrés. In his article, Seene indicates that Reek promoted the use of active teaching methods modelled on the French military at UMEI. These were supported by the more progressive part of the Estonian officers, including Traksmaa and Major General Juhan Tõrvand. This was opposed by the older generation of teaching staff, including Major General Dmitri Lebedev, Colonel Artur Salf and several others, who had called for students to memorize, word for word, lecture outlines compiled by the teaching staff as the Russian émigré teaching staff had done previously.³⁵

The latter fact, and the conflict throughout its spectrum, can be seen as the influence of the processes occurring at the Nicholas General Staff Academy from 1905 to 1914. More precisely, following the Russo–Japanese War, an acute conflict broke out at that educational institution between teachers representing the so-called "bayonet" generation and the

³³ Nikolai Reek, "Sõjaväe sõjalise tegevuse juhatamise põhimõtted," – *Sõjateaduslik testament*, 189–190; Reek, "Korralduste andmisest sõjategevusel," *ibid.*, 127. Nikolai Reek, "Ühise sõjalise doktriini väljatöötamise tähtsus juhtide seas," *ibid.*, 343–352. Nikolai Reek, "Sõjaline olukord ja tema hindamine," *ibid.*, 197–198.

³⁴ Nimmer, "Vabadussõja ajaloo komitee," 19–20.

³⁵ Seene, *Kõrgem*, 42–43.

newer “fire” generation.³⁶ Two giants of Russian military theory, Leer and Dragomirov, can be categorized among the older generation; simply put, they backed obsolete bayonet battle theory derived from the art of war in the first half of the 19th century.³⁷ The thinkers from the older generation included, among others, the historian and professor General of the Infantry Nikolai Mikhnevich and Baiov, who was heavily influenced by the former. Baiov had to defend the entire older generation’s theoretical positions against strong criticism after the defeat in the war.³⁸ Since the younger generation included the capable French-trained professors Nikolai Golovin and Alexander Neznamov, whose convictions were partially vindicated in the First World War, the generational debate carried over to Russian émigrés (Golovin) and the Red Army’s General Staff Academy (Neznamov). Among other things, the younger generation called for the modernization of the teaching staff’s methods, preferring seminar format to lectures and independent study to rote memorization. As a

³⁶ Heavy criticism was levelled against the national school of thought represented among others by Leer and Dragomirov, who ostensibly failed to study contemporary military problems as they focused heavily on history. Mikhnevitch and Baiov clearly belonged to that school, see N. Kudrjavcev (Н. Кудрявцев), “Iskušeniija ruskogo polkovodčestva” (Искушения русского полководчества), *Voennyj Sbornik* (Военный Сборник) no. 4 (1913): 25–31. Mixnevitch argued that Russian military art was equal and even superior to the Western military art; even after the Russo–Turkish war of 1877–1878 he supported the bayonet over fire, Nikolaj Mixnevich (Николай Михневич), *Osnovy ruskogo voennogo iskusstva. Sravnitel’nyj očerk sostojanija voennogo iskusstva v Rossii i Zapadnoj Evrope v važnejšie istoričeskie ėpoxi* (Основы русского военного искусства. Сравнительный очерк состояния военного искусства в России и Западной Европе в важнейшие исторические эпохи) (Moskva: URSS, 2016), 136–137, 156, 168–169.

³⁷ Bruce W. Menning, “The Offensive Revisited. Russian Preparation for Future War, 1906–1914,” – *Reforming the Tsar’s Army: Military innovation in Imperial Russia from Peter the Great to the Revolution*, ed. David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye and Bruce W. Menning (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press with Cambridge University Press, 2004), 229. Walter Pintner, “Vene sõjaline mõtlemine: Lääne eeskuju ja Suvorovi vari,” *Nüüdisaegse strateegia kujundajad Machiavellist tuumaajastuni*, ed. Peter Paret (Tallinn: Eesti Entsüklopeediakirjastus, 2009), 433–437.

³⁸ Nadežda Brinjuk Brinúk, Èduard Koršunov, Andrej Mixajlov (Надежда Бринюк, Эдуард Коршунов, Андрей Михайлов), “‘Celoe bogatstvo voennoj naučnoj mysli...’ Ob izdanii ‘Izvestij Imperatorskoj Nikolaevskoj Voennoj Akademii’” (Целое богатство военной научной мысли... Об издании “Известий Императорской Николаевской Военной Академии”), *Voенно-istoričeskij žurnal* (Военно-исторический журнал), 12 (2017): 25–26.

result, the conflict between Baiov and Reek can be placed in precisely this context. Furthermore, the students at the UMEI sensed characteristics of the bayonet warfare generation in the older teaching staff. According to descriptions, they demanded that their students execute a manoeuvre using *udaletskaia taktika*, *švunk* and *armeiskaja konnitsa*, in disregard of modern warfare tactics and the experiences of recent wars.³⁹

While still a professor of the Nicholas General Staff Academy, Baiov considered the history of the art of war an important subject in military education. The history of the art of war was intended to help students understand the current situation they and their adversary were in and serve as the foundation for military development. Baiov saw the use of active teaching methods proposed by Golovin and Neznamov (and slightly later in Estonia, Reek) as a risk, meaning that military education could lose scientific and formative value for military higher education and thereby become an NCO school or regiment training squad (as Reek put it, a “vocational school”).⁴⁰ In this light, the conflict between Baiov and Reek ten years after the clash between teaching staff or schools of thought at Nicholas General Staff Academy seems like a logical continuation.

Another output of Reek’s reform was preference for teaching of tactics over strategy. As a result, tactics became a more important subject at UMEI, as other subjects were placed in a merely supporting role.⁴¹ While prior to reform, the main emphasis in military education was placed on strategy, philosophy of war and the theoretical fundamentals of the history of art of war, after 1926, it focused on teaching practical skills needed by junior officers, which allowed them to command units up to the company level.⁴² From this point on, it was possible to detect a tendency to organize the entirety of the military training process on the basis of the “vocational school” principles mentioned above.⁴³ The influence

³⁹ Veste, “Tondil,” 328. *Udaletskaia taktika* meant in the Russian jargon decisive infantry charge using bayonets.

⁴⁰ Brinjuk et al., “Celoe bogatstvo,” 26.

⁴¹ Seene, “Eesti ohvitseride,” 44.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 45.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 51.

of the German military education model can be discerned in this shift, as according to it, officers had to acquire knowledge they could apply in practice.⁴⁴

By giving direction to the development of Estonian military education between Western and Eastern warfare cultures, Reek clearly indicated a preference for the West.⁴⁵ Baiov, on the other hand, continuing in the tradition of Mikhnevich, considered Russian warfare superior to that of the West.⁴⁶ As we will see below, this belief on the part of Baiov was reflected in his years-long teaching stint at UMEI. This fact was yet another cornerstone of a conflict between Baiov and Reek, i.e. the older and younger generation.

What is interesting is that Jalajas chose Baiov's side in this conflict. Jalajas called the changes in Estonian military education in 1926–1927 not an illustrious reform but rather a deep crisis, linking it with the departure of professor Aleksei Baiov. Jalajas noted that Baiov played a key role in teaching military history in the Estonian military, as his authority and influence were instrumental in the teaching of military history as a core subject in UMEI up to 1926. After Baiov was dismissed, the volume of teaching of military history subjects was reduced significantly at UMEI.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Hans von Seeckt, *Gedanken eines Soldaten* (Leipzig: K.F. Koehler, 1935), 127. See also James S. Corum, *Roots of Blitzkrieg: Hans von Seeckt and German Military Reform* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1992).

⁴⁵ General Tõrvand did not think the using of Russian lecturers was “normal” but he compared the situation to the practices of the University of Tartu, which – due to the lack of Estonian teachers – had also hired academics from abroad. Tõrvand did not think everything was bad about the Russian military school, as precisely the Russian military schools had laid the basis for the Estonian success in the War of Independence. Tõrvand thought attacks against Russian emigres were associated not with concerns over teaching methods but rather with “nationalist xenophobia and post-revolutionary radicalism”, Tõrvand, “Rohkem objektiivsust,” 378, 380.

⁴⁶ For example, Aleksei Baiov (Алексей Баиов), “Военное дело в эпоху императора Павла I. Очерк ordinарного профессора Императорской Николаевской Военной Академии Генерального штаба полковника А.К. Баиова” (Военное дело в эпоху императора Павла I. Очерк ordinарного профессора Императорской Николаевской Военной Академии Генерального штаба полковника А.К. Баиова), – Кар’ев, Е. (Кап’ев Е.). *Istorija Russkoj Armii* (История Русской Армии). (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Ё, 2016), 169. Cf. Mikhnevich, *Osnovy russkogo*, 6, 9, 133–134, 155–157.

⁴⁷ Jalajas, “Sõjakunstiajaloo ja sõjaajaloo uurimise tähtsus,” RA, ERA.2124.3.268, 79.

It can be presumed that Jalajas was impressed not by Baiov as a personality but rather by the older generation as a whole, as they considered military history the pillar of military science. What is also noteworthy is that Jalajas was one of the first Estonians to interpret – and adapt for Estonian conditions – the ideas of the already renowned Soviet military theorist Alexander Svechin. In Jalajas's interpretation of his most important ideas, military history had fundamental importance in force generation and in military thinking. "If we do not devote enough attention to historical study, we can train only unskilled labourers in the military who are unfit for conscious invention, nor can they understand or apply rapid advances in military science," said Jalajas in his interpretation of Svechin, speaking of the role of military history in training Estonian officers.⁴⁸

In providing evidence for the need for the scientific study of military history, Jalajas saw military history and the history of the art of war as sub-disciplines of the "military history science". The discipline of military history was in turn subordinate to the discipline of the history of the art of war, being the main source for the latter. Jalajas made no bones about the fact that he borrowed this hierarchy from the Russian tsarist army's practice.⁴⁹ But Jalajas defined the sub-disciplines of military history based on the German historian Ernst Bernheim's definitions. Paraphrasing Bernheim, Jalajas defined military history as a branch of science that researches and describes the spatial and temporal development of nations and states or parties with a "psycho-physical" causal connection from the perspective of the values of warfare. By "psycho-physical," he meant the object of research via both intangible and tangible factors; and by spatial-temporal development, he meant that the research had to be carried out in the context of societal phenomena. Based on the general definition of military history, the discipline had to focus on the study of a specific war from the viewpoint of values of warfare. The history of the art of war had to focus on the study of all wars from the standpoint of the evolution of warfare.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Oskar Jalajas, "Sõjakunstiajaloo ja sõjaajaloo uurimise tähtsus ja meetodid," (Kõrgema Sõjakooli lõputöö, 1929), RA, ERA.2124.3.268, 45.

⁴⁹ Jalajas, "Sõjakunstiajaloo ja sõjaajaloo uurimise tähtsus," 18–19.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 52–53. Nimmer, "Vabadussõja ajaloo komitee," 47.

It is very likely that this view of military history and its division into two sub-disciplines made the passage from the Russian General Staff Academy to Estonian military education through Baiov in particular. Even as late as in a study published at the Russian General Staff Academy in 1912, Baiov provided a detailed overview of the development of the study of military history in Russia, in which he introduced its principles. Baiov's description of the activity of the council headed by Count Miljutin in 1865 can be considered especially interesting. This council resulted in a definition of the nature of the study of military history, and the goals and methods of teaching it. It was the council that decided to divide the discipline into two branches – history of war as the analysis and description of military campaigns, and the history of the art of war, which was intended to study how methods of warfare changed in history from antiquity to modern times.⁵¹ As we can see below, these principles were also in force in Estonian military education until 1940.

Military history subjects at the KSK

During Professor Baiov's time – up to 1926 – two military history subjects were taught at the KS: the history of the art of war and the history of the World War. Their volume was fairly great, as only tactics and general staff service subjects were even more voluminous.⁵² After Baiov left UMEI, Reek shaped the teaching of military history at the KSK. His philosophy was that the teaching of strategic principles at the KSK had to be based on teaching the history of the art of war, which had in turn to consist of four subjects – general history of the art of war, the World War, the

⁵¹ Aleksej Baiov (Алексей Баиов), *Istorija voennogo iskusstva, kak nauka (История военного искусства, как наука)* (St. Petersburg: Suvorin, 1912), 7–8. This principle was later used and developed in the Red Army. For Soviet theorists, military history was supposed to consist of five elements: history of wars, history of the art of war, military organisation, history of military technology, and the history of military theory, Peter V. Vigor, "The Function of Military History in the Soviet Union," – *Transformation in Russian and Soviet Military History*, ed. Carl W. Reddel (Washington: USAF Academy, 1990), 117.

⁵² Georg Leets, "Kõrgem Sõjakool 1921–1931." Typed manuscript. RA, ERA.2124.3.588, 33.

War of Independence and the Russian Civil War.⁵³ In practice, however, only three subjects were taught, as the Russian Civil War was skipped as a separate subject. Thus, starting in 1927, three military history subjects were established at the KSK: the history of the art of war (evolution of the art of war), the history of the World War, and the history of the War of Independence.⁵⁴ Since that time, the volume of military history and strategy subjects was reduced to one-third of its former size.⁵⁵ But in spite of this, military history was generally considered as one of the core subjects at the KSK after tactics, strategy and staff service.⁵⁶

In general, it was specifically during this time that Reek applied the principles of military education borrowed from France, bringing practical work methods into the study and shifting the main emphasis off strategy to tactics.⁵⁷ It seems that Reek's focus on recent conflicts was understood and accepted, especially among Military Academy students, who themselves wanted to know more about the history of the War of Independence and the World War. As mentioned above, the issue of studying conflicts from recent history at the Estonian KSK may have originated from the Nicholas General Staff Academy. In comparison, we can bring the fact that the same kind of question arose in the early years in the Red Army General Staff: what conflicts to teach and in what volume. Whereas the old-school teachers preferred to focus on the earlier history of the art of war, students were always keen on studying the history of the Russian Civil War and the history of the World War.⁵⁸ It was the later study and analysis of these two conflicts at the Red Army General Staff and Frunze Academy that became the basis of the renowned deep operation theory.⁵⁹ When the Red Army General Staff Academy was reopened in 1936, the

⁵³ Nikolai Reek, "Meie kaitseväe juhtiva koosseisu – ohvitseride kasvatuse ja väljaõppe alalt," *Sõdur* 26/27 (1926): 553. Seene, *Kõrgem Sõjakool*, 37.

⁵⁴ Leets, "Kõrgem Sõjakool," 64–65. Exam protocol, September 1936, RA, ERA.650.1.1734, 55.

⁵⁵ Leets, "Kõrgem Sõjakool," 64–68.

⁵⁶ Seene, *Kõrgem Sõjakool*, 38.

⁵⁷ Leets, "Kõrgem Sõjakool," 52, 65.

⁵⁸ Mereckov, *Na službe narodu*, 74–75. Leonid Sandalov (Леонид Сандалов), *Perežitoe (Пережитое)*. (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1961), 12–13.

⁵⁹ Pavel Žilin (Павел Жилин), *Istorija voennogo iskusstva (История военного искусства)* (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1986), 106–107. Frederick W. Kagan, "The Rise and Fall of Soviet

chair of military history was re-established also. This chair principally dealt with the study and teaching of 18th and 19th century history, dealing with the major operations of the 20th century from the Russo–Japanese War, the World War and the Russian Civil War and developed methodology for teaching military history. Although older history was also taught in the context of the history of the art of war, the main emphasis was still placed on study of the World War. These principles in teaching the history of the art of war and military history remained in place at the Red Army General Staff Academy until 1940. At that time, analysis and integration into curricula of the experience of the Winter War and the Lake Khasan and Khalkhin Gol conflicts (which had recently taken place) began.⁶⁰

The history of the art of war was one of the most important subjects at the KSK and was taught from 1927 to 1934 by Colonel Richard Tomberg, commander of the air force.⁶¹ In the mid-1930s, the history of the art of war was taught under the name “evolution of the art of war” (for second year cadets) and its volume was 20 hours of lectures and two hours of practical assignments. In the opening lecture, Tomberg intended to discuss the importance of the evolution of military history and the art of war, and the methodologies and sources for its study. Thereafter, his lessons were to deal with various topics from ancient history to the early 20th century. The range of topics was broad and included a brief overview of the development of warfare in ancient times, knights’ forces and mercenaries in medieval times, the reforms of Louis XIV, and the art of war of Peter the Great, Frederick the Great and Napoleon, and the French Revolution. The topics that dealt with the history of the art of war in the 19th and 20th centuries were larger in volume. According to Tomberg’s plans, the subject was to conclude with the development of 20th century warfare and discussion over future.⁶² In connection with the fact that there were

Operational Art,” – *The Military History of the Soviet Union*, ed. Robin Higham and Frederick W. Kagan (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2010), 86–87.

⁶⁰ Fedot Gajvoronskij et al., (Федот Гайворонский и др.), *Академия Генерального Штаба (Akademija General'nogo Štaba)* (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1987), 33, 42–43.

⁶¹ Leets, “Kōrgem Sōjakool,” 64–65, 77–79.

⁶² Colonel Tomberg to KSK, March 1934, course syllabus for the Evolution of the Art of War, RA, ERA.650.1.1707, 36–37.

constant attempts to decrease the volume of military history subjects at UMEI, the subject was entrusted in 1934 to Major Mart Haber (since 1940 Kaerma), a fresh graduate of the KSK; he was willing to teach the course in a volume of only 15 hours.⁶³

The problem of the volume of the subject at the KSK also pertained to the history of the World War, with Major Herbert Grabbi being named responsible for the subject starting in 1927.⁶⁴ At first, the volume of the subject depended on the existence of the corresponding entrance examination, as independent study by prospective students prior to admission was considered important in acquiring theoretical knowledge in order to gain more time for practical assignments. At the same time, Grabbi found that the 25 hours of lectures and one independent assignment for the winter period contained in the syllabus was too little for passing the subject as the volume did not allow students to complete the lecture material printed by the teaching staff in 1930. This fact forced the lecturer to look for a way out, making the subject more student-centred, preferring active study methods to the lecture format. In Grabbi's opinion, it would be difficult to decide what specific topics could have been discussed in the context of the subject.⁶⁵

Starting in 1927, the history of the War of Independence was taught by Lt. Col. Jaan Maide, who was replaced in 1930 by Colonel Traksmäa. The history of the War of Independence was different to other military history subjects in terms of its larger – 37-hour – volume. The subject was divided into two unequal parts. The first introductory part discussed the impact of the Russian Revolution on Estonia, while the second part focused directly on war events. The thematic structure of the subject was reminiscent of the table of contents of the history of the Estonian War of Independence published by the War of Independence History Committee's working group led by Traksmäa in the late 1930s and focused on describing military and, partially, military-political events.⁶⁶ Yet the volume of the War of Independence history subject decreased by an

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Leets, "Kõrgem Sõjakool," 64–65, 77–79.

⁶⁵ Lt-Col Grabbi to KS, March 1934, RA, ERA.650.1.1707, 83.

⁶⁶ Course syllabus, the Estonian War of Independence, academic year 1934–1935, Ibid., 77.

entire 2/3 in the late 1930s. From there on, the subject hinged on only ten lectures.⁶⁷

The strategy subject also had a strong connection with military history disciplines. The teacher of the subject, Maj. Gen. Herbert Brede, integrated strategy very closely with the history of the art of war. During the 1930s, the subject also encompassed the manoeuvres of Frederick the Great and Napoleon, the history of the general staff in the Franco-Prussian War and the World War, and gave an overview of the strategy of the three countries in the World War based on the example of Ferdinand Foch, Erich Ludendorff and Conrad Hötzendorf. The volume of the subject was equal to one history subject, including a total of 20 hours of lectures and an hour of practical work.⁶⁸

Even though there were attempts in the 1930s to reduce the load in the KSK curriculum by reducing history subjects, the military history disciplines were, despite their theoretical nature, represented significantly in the management and staff service course.⁶⁹ Furthermore, it can be said that probably due to a need for practical examples, two subjects in the military history field were devoted to recently ended conflicts – the World War and the War of Independence. While the French school's approach to military history can be discerned, it can probably be explained by the fact that the predominant majority of teaching staff who taught military history subjects and strategy – Reek himself and Brede, Traksmaa and Grabbi – had obtained their own military education in France, where they presumably adopted French army beliefs and views on issues concerning military science, strategy and military history.

⁶⁷ Course syllabus, the Estonian War of Independence, undated but probably 1935, RA, ERA.495.12.574, 990–991.

⁶⁸ Course syllabus, Strategy, probably 1935, *ibid.*, 985.

⁶⁹ Situation with courses on 1 February 1935, RA, ERA.650.1.1706, 66.

Military history subjects in the Military Academy

How was the teaching of military history structured in other subsidiary institutions of the UMEI where lower-level leadership personnel were educated? What principles was it based on and what share in the curriculum did military history subjects comprise in the Military Academy (henceforth SK) and the Military Technical School (henceforth STK)?

Statistics on the distribution of UMEI subjects in the years 1925–1926 show that 16 military subjects and 20 general subjects were taught in the SK's officers and cadets' class. By volume, the history of the art of war came second after practical tactics and made up 10 per cent of the total volume of the subjects in the officers' class in the infantry area of study and nine per cent of the artillery area of study. In the senior and junior cadets' class, the history of the art of war made up 10 to 14 per cent of the total curriculum volume.⁷⁰ It is noteworthy that besides the history of the art of war, students in the officers' class and the cadets' general class (who were acquiring secondary education) could also take two history subjects among the general subjects. These were homeland history and general history – and the volume was likewise considerable.⁷¹

The history of the art of war syllabus taught by Baiov in Russian for the officers' courses included 41 topics with a volume of 75 hours and dealt with the art of war from Ancient Greece to the 1914 battles in the First World War. A certain slant toward Russia can be noted in the topics of the art of war syllabus – for example, in shedding light on the Peter the Great and Napoleonic eras – although the syllabus did not cover any Russian art of war in the Middle Ages, and the World War topics focused only on battles along the Western Front.⁷² It is now hard to say how much the Baiov syllabus was cut by the administration of the UMEI, but it had several times fewer Russian topics than the Baiov's lecture notes used as study material.

During the Baiov era, the history of the art of war subject at the SK was divided into two unequal parts. In the cadets' junior class, Baiov

⁷⁰ UMEI curriculum, 1925–1926, RA, ERA.650.1.1668, 1.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Course syllabus, History of the Art of War, officers' courses at SK, 1924–1925, RA, ERA.50.1.1668, 14.

taught 10 lectures in 1924 and 1925, which encompassed topics ranging from Ancient Rome to the Napoleonic era.⁷³ The subject continued in the senior cadets' class with 25 lectures, of which one-third were devoted to the operations in the first year of the World War on the Baltic Sea. The course started with Napoleon's campaigns and included a few of the more famous wars of the 19th and 20th century, which Baiov apparently taught following Mikhnevich's textbook.⁷⁴ There were many examination questions and they required a very thorough knowledge of the subject in regard to different armed conflicts.⁷⁵ On the basis of these, we can presume that students had to memorize facts in order to pass the course, something that the UMEI administration criticized the Russian lecturers for. It is interesting that the examiner may not have been Baiov, who taught the subject, but someone else. For instance, in 1924, the examinations were accepted by Richard Tomberg,⁷⁶ who was still serving as a captain but later took over the teaching of history of the art of war partially from Baiov, and in 1927, Jaan Maide.⁷⁷ It is not quite clear what the aim of these substitutions was, whether to check the outcomes of Baiov's teaching activity or whether Tomberg and Maide were serving as Baiov's assistants.

In 1924, as directed by the UMEI administration – probably by Reek – Baiov's thematic plan was cut back in both the cadets and the officer candidates' class. As a result, ancient and medieval art of war were omitted and the course was to start with the Gustavus Adolphus era.⁷⁸ In the officer candidates' class, Baiov taught the history of the art of war in

⁷³ "Programma istorii voennogo iskusstva na 1924–25 učebnyj god" (Программа истории военного искусства на 1924–25 учебный год), Cadets' younger class, RA, ERA.650.1.1668, 192.

⁷⁴ "Programma istorii voennogo iskusstva na 1924–25 učebnyj god" (Программа истории военного искусства на 1924–25 учебный год), Cadets' senior class, *ibid.*, 133. N. P. Mikhnevich (Н. П. Михневич), *Vojna meždu Germaniej i Franciej 1870–1871. Čast' 1. Ot načala vojny do Sedana vključitel'no* (Война между Германией и Францией 1870–1871. Часть 1. От начала войны до Седана включительно) (St. Petersburg: Akademija General'nogo štaba, 1897).

⁷⁵ Exam plan, History of the Art of War, April 1925, RA, ERA.650.1.1668, 193–196.

⁷⁶ Exam plan, History of the Art of War, 1924, RA, ERA.650.1.1670, 24–27.

⁷⁷ Exam plan, History of the Art of War, 1926.–1927, RA, ERA.650.1.1039, 33.

⁷⁸ Course syllabus, History of the Art of War 1923–1924, RA, ERA.650.1.1670, 30.

1925 based on an abridged syllabus in the amount of 31 lectures. The topics covered were generally the same as in the cadets' class, but the main emphasis was placed on the so-called decisive battles starting from the Ancient Rome up to the WWI battles in Flanders in 1914.⁷⁹ In 1925, Baiov submitted the original syllabus prepared in 1922 once again to the officer candidates' class. It was cut back even more, however, and the course was to start from the Napoleonic era. One-third of the subject was devoted to the events of the World War, partly by decreasing the amount of coverage of the Franco–Prussian and the Russo–Japanese War.⁸⁰ Despite the cuts, the teaching of the history of the art of war also continued in subsequent years after the departure of Baiov, and largely according to the structure of the thematic plan he had proposed.⁸¹

From 1927, following Reek's decision the older cadets' class and officer candidates' class at the SK began to be taught a separate subject – the History of World Warfare – integrated with other subjects. In teaching world warfare, the main emphasis was placed on operations that took place during the periods of manoeuvre warfare in 1914 and 1918, with position warfare serving merely as the “connecting link”.⁸² Because of this the officer candidates and cadets in the oldest class were required to have especially good knowledge of the Marne battles and the Russian invasion of East Prussia.⁸³ In War of Independence history, taught in 1927 and 1928 by Lt. Col. Maide, the senior year cadets were required to know the most important battles and operations, such as the Battle of Narva, the Pskov and Petrograd operations, the war in northern Latvia and the Landeswehr War.⁸⁴ Also in the 1930s, the War of Independence history

⁷⁹ “Programma istorii voennogo iskusstva na 1924–25 učebyj god” (Программа истории военного искусства на 1924–25 учебный год), Officer candidates' class, RA, ERA.650.1.1668, 296.

⁸⁰ Exam plan, History of the Art of War, probably edited by UMEI commander, 1925, RA, ERA.650.1.1668, 331–332.

⁸¹ Entrance exam plan, History of the Art of War, 1927–1928, RA, ERA.650.1.1077, 21.

⁸² *SÜÕ Sõjakooli õppekavad. 2. osa. Kadettide õppekavad* [UMEI teaching programme, 2nd part, cadets' programmes] (SÜÕ: Tallinn, 1930), V–VI.

⁸³ Cadets' and officer candidates' class, entrance exam plan for History of Warfare, 1927–1928, RA, ERA.650.1.1077, 25.

⁸⁴ Entrance exam plan, War of Independence, cadets' class, 1927–1928, *Ibid.*, 63.

subject taught in the cadets' class was seen primarily as a continuation of what was taught in the officer candidates' class but in intensified form. Attention had to be devoted to individual battle periods and war events in connection with the political situation.⁸⁵

Military history lessons, particularly WWI and the Russo–Japanese War, were taken into account not only in the military history subjects but also general tactics – but only before 1926.⁸⁶ Military history was most integrated with military subjects in the SK classes before the UMEI administration began to intervene.⁸⁷ After Baiov and the other Russian émigrés were dismissed, military history became less integrated with other subjects in the SK classes.⁸⁸

The new UMEI cadets' class curriculum approved in 1930 by the Defence Minister recategorized the military history disciplines under general military subjects, the function of which was not only to develop the student's intellect and the general educational level, but rather, together with military subjects, create an integral set of knowledge and skills that was necessary for future officers as leaders and educators. The curriculum declared the military direction of the military history disciplines, such as the history of the art of war and the history of the World War. Together with other general military subjects, military history had to demonstrate to students that “military sciences were just a part of the general sciences”.⁸⁹ The thesis of the curriculum that stemmed from it was that the evolution of military science and the art of war were closely connected with general cultural development. This showed that the senior officers who were behind the approval of the curriculum and belonged to the military command had developed, by this time, a systematic and comprehensive understanding of military education as a whole, as well as the meaning of military history specifically.

Based on both official curricula and SK's correspondence on matters pertaining to the organization of study, we can say that the teaching of

⁸⁵ *SÜÕ Sõjakooli õppekavad. 2. osa. Kadettide õppekavad* (SÜÕ: Tallinn, 1930), VI.

⁸⁶ Course syllabus, general tactics, 1924, RA, ERA.650.1.1668, 270.

⁸⁷ *Programma taktiki pexoty na 1923–1924 učebnyj god*, RA, ERA.650.1.1670, 1.

⁸⁸ Entrance exam plan, infantry tactics, 1927–1928, RA, ERA.650.1.1077, 2–4.

⁸⁹ *SÜÕ Sõjakooli õppekavad. 2. osa. Kadettide õppekavad* (SÜÕ: Tallinn, 1930), II.

military history disciplines did not change much in the 1930s. Although the volume of military history subjects did decrease slightly, these subjects retained the same proportion to other subjects in the cadets' class curriculum. The distribution of topics was likewise unchanged. In the history of the art of war curriculum, much greater emphasis was placed on 19th century armed conflicts, highlighting the most important military events that had the greatest influence on the development of the art of war. While the history of the art of war was taken by the younger class, the history of the War of Independence and the history of the World War was taken in the senior cadets' class.⁹⁰

The distribution of military history subjects clearly shows the principle declared by Reek in 1926, according to which the SK should focus on study of recent military events, as the older era had to be given only cursory treatment. In the same curriculum, it was recognized, probably on the influence of professor Baiov, that the history of the art of war was one of the oldest and broadest subjects at the SK. In spite of that, the cuts in the subjects were justified by the argument that future officers had to know only a minimum amount of military history events. The curriculum designers deemed it important for students to be able to continue research into the history of art of war independently when serving as officers. For this purpose, the SK was tasked with inciting in the subject and "lead them to the sources for in-depth study of the topic."⁹¹

The teaching of history at the STK does not deserve much attention, as it operated only for a few years, with long hiatuses, and the education provided at this institution had a clear technical slant. From 1920 to 1923, the STK, similarly to the SK, taught both military history and history for obtaining a secondary school graduation certificate. Military history and other military subjects were taught in daytime format, as secondary school subjects were taught in the evening.⁹² After 1936, the SK's military history teacher Maj. Juhan Vermet taught the history of World War and the history of the art of war to third-year students at the STK. The choice

⁹⁰ Ibid., V. Distribution of SK courses, 1930, RA, ERA.650.1.298, 22.

⁹¹ *SÜÕ Sõjakooli õppekavad*. 2. osa. Kadettide õppekavad (SÜÕ: Tallinn, 1930), V.

⁹² Vassili Villemson, "Eesti Vabariigi Sõjaväe Tehnikakool 1920–1923," *KVÜÕA toimetised* 6 (2006): 59–60.

of topics was similar to that taught at the SK – starting with the art of war in ancient times and ending at the Franco–Prussian War. The history of the World War was a continuation of the history of the art of war and focused on analysis of a number of battles.⁹³ In addition, the assistant to the commander of the War of Independence History Committee, Captain Edmund Püss, taught the history of the War of Independence at the STK. The topics covered in lessons were similar to those taught at the SK and the KSK.⁹⁴ Elements of military history could also be noted in other lessons in the speciality, such as explosives, ordnance and weapons instruction.⁹⁵

Analysing the curricula of SK cadets and officer candidates, Andres Seene noted the tendency of history teaching in Estonia, according to which the selection of subjects taught at the SK and teaching methods had to shape a military mindset in prospective military leaders, allowing him to become oriented and quickly take a decision up to company commander level. Nation-state ideology was considered important in approaching theoretical subjects; in the context of every subject, teaching staff were to develop patriotism, the will to defend their country and a sense of duty in their classes.⁹⁶ This largely determined the volume of military history disciplines and the corresponding goal-setting in studies. For example, studies were extended at the KSK in 1938 by one year and the new subjects added included national defence and war leadership as a strategic subject and Estonian history during the early medieval times.⁹⁷ This trend showed clearly that the number and volume of military history subjects increased at higher levels of military education. This was quite reasonable, as an understanding of military history was needed more specifically at senior military leadership levels.

⁹³ Victor Orav, “Eesti Vabariigi Sõjaväe Tehnikakool 1920–1923,” *KVÜÕA toimetised* 6 (2006): 156, 162.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 174, 176.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 156–158, 174.

⁹⁶ Seene, “Eesti ohvitseride,” 54.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

Military history teaching staff

The first academic teaching staff member in Estonia can be considered to be the aforementioned Professor Baiov. From 1904 to 1914, he was a professor as well as manager of Nicholas General Staff Academy, being responsible for academy life and research. A number of his former students characterized Baiov as lacking talent, a boring teacher who considered himself an expert on the Empress Anne era (1730–1740) and not interested in modern warfare. On the other hand, he was also considered calm and supportive of students.⁹⁸ In spite of his strong academic background and extensive experience, his lectures at the academy were considered boring. A joke about Baiov made its rounds during this time: once Baiov's class awoke because of a sudden crash of something falling. It turned out a rat was running inside the auditorium's ceiling, stopped to listen to Baiov and fell asleep, then fell down.⁹⁹ It was probably his outdated, obsolete teaching style that encouraged Reek to look for ways of enriching the teaching process through active teaching methods. In spite of that fact, Baiov's contribution to the development of military education in Estonia should not be underestimated, especially when it comes to teaching military history.

Although Baiov often came under criticism for his outdated teaching methods and use of Russian, he was highly regarded by one student at the General Staff Courses, Elias Kasak. In his opinion, Baiov's lectures were lively and were based on proper lecture outlines he himself had prepared. It can be presumed that Baiov stood out positively from other Estonian teaching staff due to his professionalism, as the calibre of Estonian teaching staff was very low and did not meet the objectives of the General Staff Courses.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Ganin, *Zakat*, 374–375. Boris Šapošnikov (Борис Шапошников), *Vospominanija. Voennonaučnye trudy* (Воспоминания. Военно-научные труды.) (Moskva: Voennoe izdatel'stvo ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1982), 125.

⁹⁹ Ganin, *Zakat*, 375.

¹⁰⁰ Kasak, *Mälestusi*, 167–168.

After Baiov's departure, Jaan Maide taught the history of the art of war at the SK,¹⁰¹ Maide being a later colonel and long-serving chief of staff of the Defence League. At the KSK, the history of the World War was taught for a long while by Herbert Grabbi,¹⁰² head of the SK and president's senior aide de camp.

One of the most authoritative military history teachers was August Traksmaa, a long-serving head of department VI of the General Staff, leader of efforts to research the history of the War of Independence, promoted in 1939 to major general. The officer candidates considered Traksmaa to be a great authority as he published a book on the history of the War of Independence that the candidates read and discussed. The history of War of Independence subject was perhaps the one that students viewed most "fondly".¹⁰³ Traksmaa was said to have stood out for the objectivity of his lectures. He was said to have also covered mistakes made by Estonians and his "positions were at odds with the exalting bragadocio of festive speeches". He considered moral requirements of the military to be important, and the might of a more powerful adversary had to be compensated by the strong esprit de corps and good training of the smaller military. This, he felt, had led to victory in the War of Independence.¹⁰⁴

The novels written by the writer Lindsaar, a former student at SK, allow us to conclude that officer candidates trusted their history lecturers and their lectures were convincing and motivating for the candidates. In addition to the lecturer on the history of the War of Independence, Lindsaar also praised the lecturer who taught the history of the art of war – this most likely being the Major General Richard Tomberg – who was likewise said to have cited good examples of how a small army was able to prevail over a larger one thanks to good moral character.¹⁰⁵ At any rate, the idea, cultivated in military education, of a patriotic ideologi-

¹⁰¹ Course syllabus, History of the Art of War, 1930, RA, ERA.650.1.298, 27.

¹⁰² Ibid., 28.

¹⁰³ Peeter Lindsaar, ...*ja sõdurid laulavad*, vol. 2 (Eesti Kirjanike Kooperatiiv: Lund, 1962), 161.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 157–158.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 156–158.

cal narrative being preferred to military science calculations was indeed prominent in Estonia military thinking.¹⁰⁶

In general, we see that the officers who taught military history subjects were mainly experienced senior officers of whom most attained the rank of major general. Despite this fact, a number of them were not trained as historians. Here we could cite the thesis advanced by Nimmer – that the officers who served on the War of Independence History Committee and had dealt with military history lacked good career prospects in the service.¹⁰⁷ It was probably because of this that there were no military historians who were professional officers with an academic degree in history. It is likely that the situation was better when it came to teaching military history as opposed to military history research because unlike the War of Independence History Committee, the UMEI employed authoritative senior officers – indeed, the military’s intellectual elite of that era – as military history lecturers.

The military history teaching staff at the UMEI can be deemed relatively competent, at least from the military perspective. In Seene’s opinion, the fact that a number of UMEI teaching staff had earlier been educated as schoolteachers and thus were interested in pedagogical work education also played a significant role.¹⁰⁸ Yet as Seene rightly notes, the UMEI suffered from a shortage of teaching staff in connection with the dismissal of Russian lecturers that could not be compensated by the senior officers who returned from France. As a result, the SK staffed only two permanent lecturers in 1928, as only temporary staff were left to organize all provision of education at the KSK.¹⁰⁹

The temporary teaching staff undoubtedly included specialists acclaimed in their field. For example, in the years 1934–1936, General Laidoner, among the temporary teaching staff at the KSK, had to personally teach strategy (the political, “high strategy” part). General Reek taught the practical side of strategy for the Estonian conditions and staff service. He also taught the history subject – tactics of forces in the World

¹⁰⁶ Piirimäe, “Preparing for War,” 131.

¹⁰⁷ Nimmer, “Vabadussõja Ajaloo Komitee,” 19.

¹⁰⁸ Seene, “Eesti ohvitseride,” 45.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

War. The theoretical part of strategy was taught by Maj. General Brede. Colonel Traksmaa, who had dealt thoroughly with the subject, taught the War of Independence, and the evolution of the art of war was taught for a longer period by Gen. Tomberg. Major Mart Haber (Kaerma) taught at least one course, being himself a fresh graduate of the KSK.¹¹⁰

Despite the long-standing practice of using temporary teaching staff, in 1936 the UMEI administration reached the understanding that temporary lecturers were so overloaded with direct service duties that they could not prepare well for lessons. Their lessons were often deficient in terms of pedagogy. Nor could they stick to the KSK schedule, as a result of which cancelled classes and relocations were a chronic problem.¹¹¹ This leads us to a key conclusion that the noble attempts to enrich studies with active teaching methods and making all of military education better may have collided with serious difficulties due to the shortage of qualified teaching staff. As we have seen, this problem could not be solved in the mid-1930s.

In 1936, the situation probably improved slightly when more permanent teaching staff were included in the SK. At the same time, all military history subjects had to be taught at the SK – the history of the World War, the history of War of Independence and the history of the art of war – by just one teacher, this being Major Vermet.¹¹² The general trend of having the same teaching staff teach several subjects at several UMEI institutions was seen since the early 1920s. This mainly pertained to SK and STK classes.¹¹³

Sometimes inspections of the teaching work done by the lecturer were conducted, but only with the permission of the chief-of-staff of the Defence Forces. A committee was formed to evaluate the work of teachers. The committee notified the lecturer that the inspection would take place two days in advance. The lecturer then had to prepare a sample lesson 45 minutes long. In the course of the inspection, the committee evaluated the substantive and pedagogical side of the lesson. In the substantive part, the committee looked at whether the lecturer used language that was

¹¹⁰ List of temporary teaching staff, SK, 1934–1936, RA, ERA.650.1.1706, 29.

¹¹¹ SK activity report, 01.04.1935–31.03.1936, *ibid.*, 153.

¹¹² Seene, “Eesti ohvitseride,” 79.

¹¹³ Villemson, “Eesti Vabariigi Sõjaväe Tehnikakool,” 42, 60.

understandable to the listeners and the right terms and definitions. In the pedagogical part, the committee looked at whether the lecturer was able to provide examples, draw connections between practical and historical examples (if it was a subject different to history), had clear diction and grammatically correct language and syntax, and whether the lecturer achieved the aims of the lesson. Three members could serve on the committee. One was a UMEI representative (generally the head of the UMEI), a representative from the relevant speciality from the Defence Forces staff, and a representative of department VI (training) on the Defence Forces staff.¹¹⁴ Unfortunately, it has not proved possible to find any of those evaluation reports in the archives. In any case, it can be presumed that the lecturers' work was treated with full seriousness in the Estonian military.

Finally, we should discuss at greatest length the personality of Vermet, with regard to whom his students gave interesting but quite contradictory assessments. Onetime SK cadet Rudolf Bruus considered Vermet one of the best teachers at the UMEI. He was said to have expressed his talents so interestingly that even decades later, Bruus recalled how Vermet had presented the battles of Cannae and Marne.¹¹⁵ Unfortunately, Bruus' assessment of Vermet diverged completely from the rating given by Victor Orav, who studied at the STK in the late 1930s and remembered Vermet being called "Moltke", as he was not at all a good public speaker.¹¹⁶ Orav said his manner of presentation in the history of the art of war was dry and left his audience indifferent. Yet Orav noted that this course did not only discuss historical events but also analysed major battles. This was of greater interest to the students.¹¹⁷ This description and analysis above lead us to a key conclusion that the teaching of military history was often based on personality and depended greatly on the lecturer who taught the course and his ability to get his listeners interested.

Vermet's view of military history and the principles followed in teaching military history subjects can be determined based on a textbook he compiled, in the introduction to which he made a few declarative state-

¹¹⁴ Lecture inspection, secret report, 02.10.1935, RA, ERA.495.12.574, 214.

¹¹⁵ Lindsaar, ...*ja sõdurid laulavad*, vol. 2, 63.

¹¹⁶ Orav, „Eesti Vabariigi Sõjaväe Tehnikakool,“ 162.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

ments. For example, Vermet saw the art of war as the ability to make expedient and purposeful use of forces in war. He felt that the history of the art of war had to cover and study the manner in which the armed forces in the history of various peoples had been formed, organized, prepared for combat, supplied and used in combat. In addition, the history of the art of war had to consider the psychosocial, political, economic and historical factors that impacted on war. That is why Vermet, with reference to Svechin, called the history of the art of war a discipline of cultural history.¹¹⁸ Under the influence of Richard Tomberg and as interpreted by Vermet, the history of the art of war had to discipline the researcher's intelligence, develop a perception of reality in the researcher, accustom them to seeing the big picture, draw connections between events and their causes and teach them to critically view all military history questions.¹¹⁹

Teaching of military history at the UMEI

In the early 1920s, the teaching methods of the SK were considered outdated, the method of presentation too theoretical and institutional culture as old fashioned and Russian minded. The fact that lectures were held in Russian exhausted the students in the long term.¹²⁰ As mentioned earlier, the Russian émigrés were not taken seriously at the SK and a number of jokes spread among the cadets.¹²¹ But here the question comes up: did the methodology for teaching military history become more effective after the departure of professor Baiov? Andres Seene believes that practically oriented assignments began to be predominant as a result of Reek's reforms. In particular, he cites the staff rides to battle grounds that took place in addition to tactics lessons.¹²² Yet it remains unclear how quickly these changes were introduced into military history subjects.

¹¹⁸ Juhan Vermet, *Sõjakunsti ajalugu*. 1. osa, Sõjakunsti areng vanade klassikarahvaste ajajärgust Napoleoni ajajärgu lõpuni (Tallinn: Sõjavägede Staabi VI Osakond, 1939), XV.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., XVI.

¹²⁰ Seene, "Eesti ohvitseride," 42–44.

¹²¹ Peeter Lindsaar, *Värska*. Romaan (Lund: Eesti Kirjanike kooperatiiv, 1977), 18.

¹²² Seene, "Eesti ohvitseride," 48.

In a programmatic article on the restructuring of military education, Reek writes that teaching staff had to apply a greater share of active teaching methods in teaching military history. In the history of the art of war and in particular, in the history of the World War and the War of Independence, the lecturer had to focus on a detailed description of the entire chain of events, not analysis of individual battles. The analysis had to highlight the preparation for battles, leadership in battle, use of equipment and cooperation between branches of the military. To teach the context of events, facts previously presented as text had to be visualized by graphs and tables and posted on the walls of the auditorium. In this regard, the teaching of military history at the UMEI and in particular at the SK had to be completely reorganized.¹²³

When Reek's changes were introduced, it was decided in 1927 to make slight adjustments to the SK's cadets and officer candidates' curricula. The attempt to make the curricula in the SK's classes more practical became a goal unto itself. For that reason, the UMEI administration felt it necessary to increase the number of practical lessons and decrease the number of theoretical classroom hours. The necessity of formation training lessons in particular was stressed when it came to practical lessons. Yet the greatest achievement can be considered to be the shortening of the lessons from 90 minutes to 50 minutes.¹²⁴

The course outlines and homework preserved by Maksim Grauer, who was in the cadets' class of 1938–1939, allow a few conclusions to be drawn regarding studies in military history subjects. For example, the subject World War History followed Reek's principle to focus on the manoeuvring stages in 1914 and 1918 as illustrated by a number of operations on the Western and Eastern fronts. On the basis of course outlines, we can say that a majority of the lesson was spent by lecturer Vermet talking about the course of the operation with an accuracy of specific dates, and the second part of the lesson gave a comprehensive assessment of

¹²³ Reek, "Meie kaitseväe juhtiva koosseisu kasvatuse ja väljaõppe alalt" – *Sõjateaduslik testament*, 391.

¹²⁴ UMEI commander's report about SK teaching programme, 1927, RA, ERA.650.1.1077, 87. The tendency to increase practical subjects at the cost of theoretical subjects was also pronounced at the NCO school, Seene, "Eesti ohvitseride," 53, 55, 69.

the events. The treatment of operations was quite detailed and included data on the manoeuvres that were carried out by units ranging from brigades to the whole army.¹²⁵ In the subject history of the War of Independence, attention was devoted – for a majority of the time in the lecture hall – to analysis of battles. On one hand, there were many battles covered, yet analysis of the operations – which contained assessments of the belligerent sides’ actions and lessons learnt – allowed cadets more easily to connect what they learned to their own service at platoon and company level.¹²⁶

Recollections published at various times provide reflection on the provision of education at UMEI. Although Lindsaar wrote fiction, his work reflects the atmosphere and background of events at SK to an important degree.¹²⁷ He wrote that the relative importance of lectures was quite sizeable. Constant attendance of lectures at SK required unwavering attention and tired the students so that many ended up falling asleep on or under the bench. As the cadets knew the lecturers better than the officer candidates did, they knew exactly whose lectures were safe to sleep in. The self-respect of the lecturers prevented them from reprimanding the sleeping students, which led to awkward situations in the lecture hall. At the same time, it can also be concluded from Lindsaar’s description that in spite of it all, the lecturers were seen by the candidates as undisputed authorities because most of the lecturers had fought in the War of Independence.¹²⁸

The subject of history met with lively interest from the officer candidates. Many questions and counterarguments were aired after the lectures, all based on “rumours among the public”. For example, the Battle of Tannenberg – the Russian invasion of East Prussia – raised questions. The officer candidates asked follow-up questions regarding the actions of General Samsonov, the commander of the 2nd Army. The Battle of

¹²⁵ Ensign Maksim Grauer’s conspectus in the subject History of Warfare, 1938 or 1939, Museum of the Estonian Military Academy (hereafter MEMA), fond 654.1.1, unpaginated.

¹²⁶ Ensign Maksim Grauer’s conspectus in War of Independence, results of battles, grades and lessons learned, 1938 or 1939, MEMA 654.1.2, unpaginated.

¹²⁷ Seene, “Eesti ohvitseride,” 34.

¹²⁸ Peeter Lindsaar, ...*ja sõdurid laulavad*, vol. 2, 16–18, 159–160.

A caricature illustrating the generational chasm in the history lecture in the 1920s Estonia: a professor is imagining the battles of the Great War but the effort just appears as a comical performance to listeners. Source: Sõdur 6–8 (1928): 334



Tannenberg, one of the most thoroughly covered cases, was in fashion and was taught in both the officer candidates' and cadets' class.¹²⁹

The lessons on the history of the War of Independence met with the most interest from students because many of them had personal experience and emotions connected to the war, which occurred during the childhood of the officer candidates and cadets. The officer candidates always tried to supplement the lecturer with personal recollections and shared impressions after the lectures. A particularly substantive discussion started while cleaning rifles, when the officer candidates had time to recall moments from the War of Independence, experiences they lived through, communist atrocities witnessed, finding themselves amidst the fighting, or some remembered song.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Lindsaar, ...ja sõdurid laulavad, 160–162, 231.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 161.

A characteristic non-formal way of teaching military history was storytelling around the campfire at training camp (so-called Southern Camp near Petseri). Lindsaar describes how a colonel had recalled his service in the Russian army and participation in WWI and the officer candidates gathered around and listened attentively.¹³¹ Through this activity, teaching staff became closer to the students and probably gained even greater authority.

The writer Karl Ehrmann (Eerme) described in a work of fiction published in 1930, *Sõdurite elu* (The Life of Soldiers), the service performed by officer candidates at the SK in 1928. Just like Lindsaar's work, so, too, was the *Life of Soldiers* autobiographical and related to the author's own personal experience as a conscript in the Estonian military. As for his service in the SK, which he called a "monster hell", he noted that it was the most interesting time of his service. Similar to Lindsaar, he described the emotions of the officer candidates and noted that the studies were organized very well. Still, while Ehrmann said that all conscripts had high enthusiasm for studies when they entered the officer candidates' class, they learned how to slack off once they got used to the new conditions. He noted that the studies were predominantly theoretical and consisted mainly of lectures, which made some of the officer candidates more indifferent and laxer. After a time, the officer candidates had waved dismissively at the "lecturers' pathetic explanations as to how warfare was conducted in Rome" and what they heard in lecture went "in one ear and out the other".¹³²

Reek's suggestions for changes seemed sensible and appropriate compared to the Russian older generation's teaching practices. But even though Reek called for use of active teaching methods as early as 1926, the situation had not changed even by 1936 and lectures were still the predominant format of study. Changes in the didactic approach in the teaching of military history became more noticeable at UMEI starting from the 1936/1937 academic year, when the UMEI activity report noted that for the first time, the emphasis in the teaching of military history

¹³¹ Lindsaar, ...ja sõdurid laulavad, 245–246.

¹³² Karl Ehrmann, *Sõdurite elu* (Võru: Tähe, 1930), 245.



History of the War of Independence was popular among the cadets: here, would-be officers are preparing for Independence War exams at the Officers' School at Tondi, Tallinn, in 1936. Courtesy: Museum of the Estonian Military Academy

was shifted to independent research by students and presentation of their findings.¹³³ This probably meant that the studies were becoming student-centred.

Considering this, it can be presumed that things had indeed changed by the latter half of the 1930s. Thus, the recollections of Rudolf Bruus, who studied at the SK from 1934 to 1938 were particularly significant. Bruus recalled that the students called the two-storey outbuilding built for lectures at Tondi a “sleep castle”.¹³⁴ This probably referred to the fact that the theoretical teaching methodology was still one-dimensional, and the presentation style was dry and unappealing to the students. Yet Bruus acknowledged that the military history subjects – the history of the art

¹³³ UMEI activity report, 01.04.1936–31.03.1937, RA, ERA.650.1.524, 58.

¹³⁴ Rudolf Bruus, “Mälestusi Eesti Vabariigi sõjakoolist 1934–1938,” *Mälestusi Eesti Vabariigi sõjakoolist*, ed. Valdur Talts (Tallinn: Eesti Riigikaitse Akadeemia, 1996), 56.

of war, the World War and the War of Independence – were among the most fascinating subjects at the SK. As mentioned above, Bruus associated good teaching of military history subjects with the personality traits of the lecturer who taught them.¹³⁵

A rather interesting practice in the teaching of military history at UMEI can be considered to be the independent preparations on the part of students before tackling the course material. Students entering the KS were required to have thorough basic theoretical knowledge in military history, which was supposed to lay a factual groundwork for the subjects. This allowed the teaching staff to focus more on substantive discussions during the time in the lecture hall.¹³⁶ What is noteworthy is that in 1930, prospective students were recommended to read at least three books in the field of military history in preparing for entrance exams: Svechin's *Istorija vojennago iskusstva*, Delbrück's *Geschichte der Kriegskunst* and Professor Baiov's *Istoria vojennago iskusstva*.¹³⁷ At the entrance exams in military history, the candidate was required to know the most important historical events and to possess a broad understanding of the importance of individual events and their influence in the general historical context and the ability to draw conclusions from history.¹³⁸

Based on the practice described above, and taking into account the heavy subject volume at that time, Grabbi made a proposal in 1934 to make the history of World War more learner-centred at the KSK and let the students prepare oral presentations on the basis of the existing material. Grabbi felt such a teaching method would develop students' learning ability and speaking skills and that it would also "broaden knowledge of history". Grabbi believed that the 10 lessons called for in the second year of study could be furnished with two case studies – he proposed the Battle of the Ardennes in August 1914 and/or the 1915 winter Second Battle of the Masurian Lakes. To prepare the case studies, Grabbi asked that teaching staff be relieved completely of other duties.¹³⁹ It is evident that

¹³⁵ Ibid., 63.

¹³⁶ Lt. Col. Grabbi to KSK, March 1934, RA, ERA.650.1.1707, 83. See also the chapter on exams.

¹³⁷ Books that may be used at entrance examinations at KSK, 1934, RA, ERA.650.1.1706, 17.

¹³⁸ Entrance requirements at KSK, 1934, *ibid.*, 18.

¹³⁹ Lt. Col. Grabbi to KSK, March 1934, RA, ERA.650.1.1707, 83.

such case studies incited lively interest among the students. In addition, it can be presumed on the basis of the above facts that the use of the active study methods launched by Reek encouraged faster progress, above all, at the KSK and then in the SK classes. In any case, it took no less than eight years to realize Reek's vision.

One output of the active teaching methods was the requirement that students at the KSK work through and prepare presentations on the history of the World War in one specific battle for the case study planned in the second year of study. The Battle of the Ardennes (21–25 August 1914) was picked as the case study in 1934 at the KSK.¹⁴⁰ It is not completely clear why this battle – part of the so-called *Grenzschlachten*, the Battle of the Frontiers – was chosen.¹⁴¹ It can be presumed that this battle was intended to highlight elements of manoeuvre warfare, which characterized the first battles of the First World War. At the same time, there were other examples from World War where manoeuvres were attempted on both the Western and Eastern Front. The display of preference for the French experience of warfare likely alludes to the fashion in the latter half of the 1920s and the influence of French military education.

The case study was divided into two practical sections. Part A devoted thorough analysis to the strategic and operational aspects of the Battle of the Ardennes, and part B examined the operational and tactical aspects. A general description of the battlefield was provided at the outset, introducing the belligerent parties and the preparation for the operation, and the high command's directives were enumerated, along with tasks for the armies and corps. Then, the situation was run through at the corps, division and regiment level. The battle orders for the action of 22 August 1914 was introduced in detail at the division and regiment level. The case study concluded with drawing of conclusions in regard to engagement and the "reasons for the Germans' tactical success".¹⁴² On the basis of some recollections, it can be concluded that the analysis of major battles

¹⁴⁰ Course syllabus, World War, 1934, *ibid.*, 84.

¹⁴¹ Ivan Rostunov (Иван Ростунов), *Istorija Prvoj mirovoj vojny 1914–1918*, vol. 1 (*История Первой Мировой войны 1914–1918*. Т. 1.) (Moskva: Institut voennoj istorii ministerstva oborony SSSR, i-vo Nauka, 1975), 282–283.

¹⁴² Course syllabus, World War, 1934, RA, ERA.650.1.1707, 85.

were of greater interest to students in the 1930s than ordinary theoretical lectures.¹⁴³

An additional outlet for teaching military history was the thematic final theses on military history written by students at the KSK. On the basis of the UMEI documentation of teaching activity, it can be concluded that great attention began to be devoted to the selection of topics for KSK theses and the principles for writing the theses. In 1933, guidelines for writing final theses were drafted for the KSK, being approved personally by the chief of staff Maj. Gen. Tõrvand. Among other things, these guidelines set out that final theses in military history did not have to include a practical part. The researchers writing on military history topics were required to draw “summaries of these conclusions and lessons learned which merit attention from the standpoint of modern warfare above all in our conditions”.¹⁴⁴

How much was written on military history topics at KSK? During the first to fifth class of the KSK, a total of eight theses of 64 were on military history topics (12 per cent). The battles of the Estonian War of Independence and World War were primarily covered. In addition, topics from the art of war were rather popular. In general, it appears that military history aspects were incorporated into nearly all KSK final theses.¹⁴⁵ During the sixth graduating class, four military history topics were added (there were a total of 29 final theses that year).¹⁴⁶ On one hand, this is indicative of low interest in history, but on the other hand, it shows some growth of interest.

Of the 31 final theses in 1936, 11 (35%) were written on military history. All of the topics were related to the lessons learnt from the World War and the War of Independence in the fields of tactical and operational art, supply of forces and use of different types of weaponry.¹⁴⁷ We can presume that the interest of KSK students in military history topics was much higher than it had been in years past.

¹⁴³ Orav, “Eesti Vabariigi Sõjaväe Tehnikakool,” 162.

¹⁴⁴ Guidelines for compiling KSK final theses, RA, ERA.650.1.1706, 8.

¹⁴⁵ KSK I, II, III, IV, list of final theses, the 5th Class, 1933, *ibid.*, 1–5.

¹⁴⁶ KSK list of final theses, the 6th Class, 30.03.1933, *ibid.*, 6–7.

¹⁴⁷ KSK list of the topics of final theses, the 7th Class, 08.02.1936, *ibid.*, 141–143.

The topics of final theses written at Latvian military academy were examined carefully at KSK. In the early 1930s, these included a noteworthy number of history topics (about 30%). The writing was intertwined with strategy, operational art, and the sociology and psychology of war. It is interesting that the history topics chosen in Estonia were constrained to 20th century conflicts, mainly WWI and the War of Independence, while in Latvia some dissertations were in the field of 19th and even 18th century military history. One thesis was even devoted to cooperation between Estonia and Latvia in the case of a potential conflict with Russia.¹⁴⁸

Knowledge of military history, above all the War of Independence experience, was used in the KSK for tactical excursions by officers to potential future battlefields – as the high command envisioned it, these were the border areas of the Republic of Estonia.¹⁴⁹ For example, in summer 1935, the KSK organized three tactical staff rides to strategic areas, which coincided with the areas where the 2nd Division had fought during the War of Independence – Irboska and vicinity, Laura and vicinity and the Vastseliina and Petseri areas.¹⁵⁰ Victor Orav, who studied at the STK from 1936, mentioned excursions to battlefields in Jõelähtme, Aegviidu, Tapa, Riigiküla and Narva. Unfortunately, the participant remembered only the entertainment aspect of the military history outings.¹⁵¹

The UMEI's experience in organizing excursions was also offered for use to military units. In 1935, the commander of the 2nd Division, Colonel Traksmäa (who had been engaged in the study of the War of Independence) proposed to Commander-in-Chief Laidoner that excursions to the War of Independence battlefields be organized for the 2nd Division units on the model of the KSK. The objective of the excursions was to get to know the history of military units. The excursions had to be conducted at the expense of officers' and NCOs' associations and during their free

¹⁴⁸ *Kara akademisko kursu diplomdarbu saraksta*, undated but probably 1933 or 1934, *ibid.*, 11–15.

¹⁴⁹ Piirimäe, "Preparing for War," 133. KSK correspondence, August 1935, RA, ERA.650.1.1715, 291.

¹⁵⁰ Commander of UMEI to the Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Forces, 28 June 1935, RA, ERA.495.12.574, 781.

¹⁵¹ Orav, "Eesti Vabariigi Sõjaväe Tehnikakool," 148–154.

time – at weekends. The professional cadre of each unit and a few reserve officers had to take part in these outings. During the excursions, presentations had to be delivered at the battlefields. Laidoner wrote “agreed” as his decision on the proposal, apparently concurring with Traksmaa that “military history excursions hold great importance in training our Defence Forces cadre”.¹⁵² The geography of the military history excursions proposed by Traksmaa was covered places in Petseri County, Võru County, Tartu County and Viru County.¹⁵³

Conclusions

In conclusion, we can say that the teaching of military history disciplines played a noteworthy role in Estonian military education. The foundation for this was laid by a Russian émigré teacher, the onetime professor of the Russian General Staff Academy, Aleksei Baiov. It is also important to consider changes proposed by Nikolai Reek pertaining to the teaching of military history. As a result of Reek’s activities, military history disciplines and their content were reshaped, military history assignments were set out and the relationship between military history and other branches of military science were clarified, subjecting military history to the needs of tactical training.

In founding Estonia’s military education system, Reek was forced to use Baiov, like other Russian émigré teaching staff, as ethnic Estonian specialists in this area were still scarce. Despite the fact that Baiov was invited by Reek, a conflict between Baiov and Reek quickly emerged. Although these figures in the military sphere had different academic aptitude and calibre, the conflict can be seen as the legacy of the onetime Nicholas General Staff Academy. On one hand, Baiov stood out in Estonia for his professionalism, but on the other hand, he represented the older generation of Russian military theorists. A positive aspect is the systematic

¹⁵² The commander of the 2nd Division Colonel Traksmaa to Commander-in-Chief Laidoner, 03.04.–06.04.1935, RA, ERA.495.12.574, 4.

¹⁵³ Plan of historical staff rides, 2nd Division, 16.04.1935, *ibid.*, 5.

research into and teaching of military history, which was valued by that generation; a negative aspect was that it was relatively unconnected with modern warfare. It can perhaps even be said that Reek played the role of the progressive of the younger generation of Russian military theorists, as he saw a fundamental need to modernize military history and the teaching of military history. In the opinion of Reek, this had to focus more on the study and teaching of modern armed conflicts as the history of the art of war in earlier times was supposed to merely establish the needed context for the knowledge.

One of the progressive decisions made by Reek was to modernize the teaching of military history through the use of active methods, engaging more with the audience. He thus preferred analysis of military history to mere factual knowledge. Still, military history continued to be taught in a lecture format up to the mid-1930s, as not enough resources were allocated to students' independent and group analytical work. In addition, the teaching of military history depended on the lecturer's individual ability to make the subject attractive to students.

The UMEI took a serious attitude toward military history subjects, as its teachers, especially in the KSK, were generally recognized senior Estonian officers who made up the intellectual elite in the Estonian military. Even though some of them had had earlier experience with school pedagogy, none was an historian by training. This fact could have also made it more complicated to plan and carry out teaching activity, to say nothing of developing a conception of the need for military history. Development of military history competency was, among other things, rendered difficult because unlike active duty, military history was not considered a promising area for an officer making a career. Thus, the teaching of military history remained more of a hobby for senior officers.

In general, we can draw a conclusion that regardless of the criticism, the volume of military history subjects in the UMEI did not change over the years. However, the distribution of military history subjects did change. Now it is clear that the principles for teaching military history disciplines were also shaped by Baiov. Although Reek took a stance against Baiov, he did not succeed in changing the principles for teaching the military history disciplines. It can be said that Baiov's – i.e. concepts and frameworks

developed at the Nicholas General Staff Academy – remained generally salient until the disbanding of the Estonian military in 1940. A positive outcome of Reek's work can be considered to be the teaching of the histories of two then recently ended conflicts – the World War and the War of Independence – as separate subjects. Thus, the division of the art of war into three subjects did not change the overall volume of military history in the curriculum but it did raise the share of contemporary conflicts in it.

In the future, it is worth considering the question of teaching of and research into military history in the context of Estonian military planning to better understand the influence it imparted on military planning. Compared to the development of other militaries in Europe, it could be determined how unique the problem of teaching military history was in Estonian military education during the interwar period. A brief digression into the teaching of military history in the Red Army shows that the intergenerational conflict was salient in the 1920s also in the neighbouring Soviet Union.

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