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Sõjamuuseum
KINDRAL LAIDONERI MUUSEUM

Estonian War Museum – General Laidoner Museum, call for papers and panel proposals for an international military history conference

NATIONAL FORMATIONS IN THE GREAT WAR: FROM AN IMPERIAL MOBILIZATION POLICY TO ARMIES OF INDEPENDENT NATION STATE

Tallinn-Tartu, April 25–26, 2017

Great nations and empires have formed military units based on ethnic groups or tribes since Antiquity. There are national formations in some armies even today. Before the Great War, most of continental Europe had established universal conscription as a basis of mass armies relying on a vast pool of trained reserves. The Russian Empire sought unity in its recruitment and formation systems. However, the German Kaiserreich and the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy were different from Russia in terms of their constitutional origins as unions of separate states. Therefore, as commanders-in-chief, the Hohenzollerns and the Hapsburgs presided over several nominally independent armies that were to a varying degree integrated into imperial armed forces. When the empires entered the Great War, Royal Prussian, Bavarian, Saxon and Württembergian troops as well as Imperial Austrian and Royal Hungarian units had often retained their own commanders, uniforms and tactical peculiarities. Sometimes they even took their oath to their King, not the Kaiser.

Empires with overseas possessions also formed units based on an ethnic or nationality. The reasons were somewhat different from continental states. In some cases, officers from the imperial homeland led local recruits in Asian, African and American colonies and protectorates. In other cases, local men fought under the command of local chiefs and warlords, maintaining their own traditions, tactics, and sometimes even pursuing their own goals. Because of the climate and tropical diseases, for which there was no cure until the 19th century, it was difficult to deploy

European soldiers in many colonies. But in the Great War, military migration took another direction, as large numbers of colonial and dominion soldiers from Australia and New Zealand to Algeria and Senegal were brought to the fronts of Europe.

The Estonian War Museum's annual conference for 2017, marking the 100th anniversary of the establishment of Estonian national units within the Russian imperial army, will aim at a comparative study of national formations in the Great War. It will analyse the political and military goals of the empires in recruiting and forming national units. To what extent were national formations tools for imperial war propaganda and mobilization, to what extent were they supposed to rouse national separatism against those empires? How important was the initiative by national leaders themselves? Obviously, internationalist agitation by the Bolsheviks, which competed with nationalist agitation, cannot be discounted as well. When empires collapsed, a number of those national units became the germ for armies of new states, which fought in independence or freedom wars; but there were national formations on the other side, in the Red Army, too. What was the effect of national units in the long term? Clearly, there were attempts to revive the policy in the Second World War.

In terms of tradition, many Eastern and Central European armed forces still draw their history and origins from the battlefields of the First World War and the continuation wars.

WE ARE INVITING PAPERS AND PANEL PROPOSALS ON THE FOLLOWING TOPICS:

- The utilization of martial traditions of minority ethnicities and hereditary groups in the armies of the European continental empires from the 19th century – from Cossacks to Polish Ulans and Hussars and from Bosniaks to Finnish rifle battalions and dragoon regiments.
- Imperial diversity and the territorial build-up of troops – the armies of the Kingdoms of Prussia, Saxony, Bayern, Württemberg, and imperial Austrian and royal Hungarian troops and royal Czech Landwehr within Imperial armies, and Caucasian and Central Asian troops within the Russian imperial army.
- The formation of new national units at the beginning of the First World War – Latvian riflemen, Finnish Jägers, the Polish Legion, etc. Political aims or military utility?
- The build-up of national formations on the basis of prisoners of war – the Czechoslovak Legion, Slavic Legion, the West Russian Volunteer Army, etc.
- The status of members of national formations, national versus imperial propaganda, language, uniforms, insignia, etc.
- National formations within the command structure – relations of national units with higher commands within the imperial armed forces.
- National formations and the processes of state-building. The role of national units in the development of nation states.
- National formations and party politics. Relations between the national units and soldiers' committees. Soldiers' congresses.
- National formations in war – weapons, equipment, operations, battles, casualties.
- Principles of recruitment. The build-up of officer corps of national formations and replacement of casualties.
- National formations in wars of independence – deployment without re-organization, or as the core of new units.
- War weariness and veteran policies – the treatment of the veterans of the Great War in new nation states.
- The use of the experience of national units in the Second World War – old wine in new bottles?
- The preservation of the traditions of national formations in modern armies.

Please send abstracts of your papers (length up to 4,000 characters) in English or Estonian by 31 January 2017 to conference@esm.ee. Panel proposals should include the abstracts of all prospective speakers. We also request that you send a short, one-page CV with an overview of your research so far. The length of presentations will be 20 minutes. The working languages of the conference will be English and Estonian. All the presentations in Estonian will be interpreted into English and vice versa. Articles based on the presentations will be published in the Estonian Yearbook of Military History in 2018. The Estonian War Museum will cover the costs of stay in Estonia. All speakers can also request compensation for travel costs.

The conference is held by the Estonian War Museum – General Laidoner Museum in co-operation with the Estonian National Military College. The events of 25 April will take place in the War Museum in Tallinn. For the second day on 26 April, all participants will be taken to the Military College in Tartu, and brought back to Tallinn at the end of the conference.

CONTACT

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