

TALLINN, 19-20 APRIL 2016



**Estonian
War Museum**
GENERAL LAIDONER MUSEUM

Estonian War Museum – General Laidoner Museum
calls for papers and panel proposals to a military history conference

VISIONS OF WAR: EXPERIENCE, IMAGINATION AND PREDICTIONS OF WAR IN THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

It is one of the most common military clichés that “generals are always preparing to fight the last war.” Constituting a quip at the expense of professional soldiers who have failed to predict the future accurately, the saying is not as old as one might think. It originates from the early 20th century. Before the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century, the pace of military reform had never been as rapid as to render the lessons of the previous war quite problematic.

Developments in society, the state and technology present difficult challenges for modern armies to cope with. The maintaining and refining of existing skills and practices claim a large part of the available resources; instituting reform to prepare for the future is, however, the most difficult task. Moreover, peace time innovations in operational art and tactics also entail risks, as only the next war can really show whether the reforms have been in the right direction or not. Needless to say, mistakes are difficult to correct once the battle has been joined.

Predicting the future is a thankless task, but innovation is impossible without the effort of envisioning. However, it would be wrong to assume that the quickening step of innovation has rendered the past irrelevant. Successful military organizations have been able to absorb the lessons of previous conflicts, as shown by Germany after the First World War or by the US after the Vietnam War. Learning from history has therefore been a key aspect of the effectiveness of the military forces as “learning organizations”. It has to be noted, however, that the most accurate or successful visions of future war have not always been produced among the military.

The Polish banker Jan Bloch and the American historian and lawyer William S. Lind, working before the First World War and before the 1991 Gulf War respectively, showed that civilian thinkers can sometimes be more imaginative than their military counterparts.

This year's history conference at the Estonian War Museum will discuss visions of war and predictions of the future in the armed forces, among the security and defence establishment and in society at large. Why have some armed forces been more successful than the others? How should one learn from the past and make accurate predictions? What does it take to innovate successfully? Why should soldiers and security experts learn from civilian visionaries, publicists, writers and even futurologists?

We are inviting papers and panel proposals on the following topics:

- armed forces and lessons learned from history in the past, the present and in the future
- prognoses of future war (including societal and technological changes) in military affairs
- visions of future war in the media, literature, the arts and sciences
- lessons of the past and predictions about the future in doctrinal development
- visions of the future in military education and training

Please send the abstracts of your papers (length up to 4,000 characters) in English or Estonian by 29th February 2016 to conference@esm.ee. Panel proposals should include the abstracts of all prospective speakers. We also kindly ask you to 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 translated into English and vice versa. Articles based on the presentations will be published in the Estonian Yearbook of Military History in 2017. The Estonian War Museum will cover the travel and accommodation costs of speakers. The conference is held by the Estonian War Museum—General Laidoner Museum.

The keynote speaker at this year's conference will be Prof. Martin van Creveld.

Photo: Baltic joint military exercises in Southern Estonia, 21 February 1994.
Author: Peeter Langovits. Estonian National Archives