

Introduction

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Yearbook No. 13 (19) of the Estonian War Museum – General Laidoner Museum includes articles on the development and transformation of military thought between the two world wars, and on military thinkers of the European countries that became independent during or after World War I. This theme was the in the focus at the 14th Annual Baltic Military History Conference, *Military Thought and its Transformation in the Newly Independent States of Europe in 1918–1940*, held in the autumn of 2023 in Tartu. The conference was organised by the Estonian War Museum, the Baltic Defence College, and the Estonian Military Academy.

World War I resulted in a profound transformation of previous concepts of warfare. While military thinking still lingered in the 19th century, rapid technological advances had brought entirely new challenges to the battlefield, such as positional warfare and the industrial-scale destructiveness of total war. As the great powers faced the urgent need to reconsider existing principles of warfare, the newly independent countries, born amidst the cannon fire of the world war, did not have the luxury of revising their armies or military thinking – these had to be built from scratch. The challenges were similar for the Second Polish Republic, which had restored its independence, as well as for the newly independent Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Czechoslovakia. The creation of armed forces was expensive, placing these young and, for the most part, small nations before difficult choices, further complicated by the continual rapid development of military technology. The war machines and aircraft acquired by these small states at the end of World War I and in early 1920s had become hopelessly obsolete by the 1930s. At the same time, economic limitations hindered their ability to keep pace with latest technological innovations.

How did theoretical military thought develop in the newly independent countries between the two world wars? What were their role models, and what challenges to development were posed by the absence or prolonged interruption of their own national military science? How did military theory keep pace with technological advancements, and how was this reflected, for instance, in ideas of developing separate service branches and types of weaponry? How did societal processes, including political and economic changes, influence military theory and the development of military thought? How receptive were military personnel in these young states to new ideas, and what influenced them, or what were the factors shaping military theorists in the interwar period? These were only some of the topics that were discussed at the 2023 conference, now explored in this collected volume.

This yearbook publishes six studies on the evolution and transformation of military thought, based on presentations at the 14th Annual Baltic Military History Conference.

Michal Cáp, researcher in the Historical and Documentation Department of the Military History Institute, Prague, outlines in his article the broader institutional framework in which Czechoslovak officers published their military-theoretical texts. He demonstrates how officer-authored writings, despite undergoing censorship by military authorities, contributed both to advancing military readiness and significantly shaping national identity, indicating that military-theoretical debates were part of nation-building.

Markus Wahlstein, senior lecturer at the Finnish National Defence University, analyses in his article how threat assessments regarding the Red Army influenced the development of Finland's defence system and related military thought in the 1920s. He concludes that the outlines of the tactical-defensive foundation established in this period are still traceable in Finland's contemporary defence system.

Assistant Professor Tomasz Gajownik from the Institute of History at the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, provides an overview of the factors that shaped military theoretical positions

in interwar Poland, with Marshal Józef Piłsudski as the central figure. The article analyses the enduring impact Piłsudski and his authority had on the development of Poland's military potential, and explains the state of affairs at the end of the 1930s.

Following up on the same theme in the Estonian context, Colonel (ret.) Aarne Ermus, lecturer at the Estonian Military Academy, focuses on the Republic of Estonia's defence capabilities in the second half of the 1930s as exemplified by the character and activity of General Johan Laidoner. Colonel Ermus examines the extent to which Laidoner's views on national defence, sometimes articulated as an 'active defence' doctrine, were reflected in the State Defence Modernisation Plan approved by the National Defence Council in 1938. Being the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces in the authoritarian period following the 1934 coup, Laidoner possessed great authority and, presumably, his views would have been particularly influential, especially considering his experience. How did he utilise this power for the advancement of national defence?

The increasing threat to national security posed by two totalitarian major powers – Germany and the Soviet Union – was perceptible even to those who did not live in a *cordon sanitaire* country. Using the writings of one of the most prominent Dutch military theorists of his time, Michal Calmeyer, Professor Wim Klinkert of the Netherlands Defence Academy in Breda explores the experience of a small state regarding theoretical discussions on reinforcement of national security. His paper also reveals an intriguing discourse on how state neutrality framed and restricted public debates concerning alternatives to neutrality and the search for potential allies.

Visions of future warfare are discussed, to a greater or lesser extent, in almost all of the contributions. However, this is the central theme of the essay by Assistant Professor Peter Mitchell of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and Major Tanel Tatsi of the Estonian Defence Forces. Analysing Estonia's military preparedness in the interwar period, they also direct the reader's attention towards the future, attempting to formulate lessons the Estonian Defence Forces might learn from past shortcomings and highlight the important

aspects for the development of a defence strategy, given that Estonia's geographic conditions and the historical adversary have not changed over the past century.

Headed by Lead Research Fellow Dr Igor Kopõtin, the Estonian Military Academy launched the research project "Estonian Military Thought 1920–1940" in 2021, aiming to map the history, origins, and influencers of Estonian military thought. This project has now yielded initial results, with the publication of five collected volumes or brief monographs focusing on military theorists such as Lieutenant General Aleksei Baiov and General Johan Laidoner, or on specific fields such as naval and aerial warfare and moto-mechanisation. Toomas Hiio, Research Director of the Estonian War Museum, provides a thorough scientific review of two brief monographs published in this project – one addressing the development of naval military thought and related individuals, the other examining the role and influence of professor and former Imperial Russian Army Lieutenant General Aleksei Baiov on development of Estonian national military thought.