

Vom sowjetischen Ultimatum an die estnische Regierung bis zur Auflösung der estnischen Armee hatte es somit genau zwei Monate gedauert.

SUMMARY

The Destruction of the Estonian Armed Forces in the Summer of 1940

Following the annexation of Estonia by the Red Army in June 1940, the Kremlin implemented Soviet reforms which by gradual expansion affected the political, economic, social, cultural, and other spheres. Among other things, the reorganisation of the Estonian army was initiated. The de facto incorporation of the armed forces of an independent state into the Red Army took place somewhat later, but significant changes in the armed forces took place already in June, July and August 1940.

The first critical situation for the Estonian army arrived on the first day of occupation. On June 17, the majority of units were forced to leave their bases. The emptied barracks, warehouses, training fields, shooting ranges, and civilian facilities were handed over to the authorities of the Red Army and Navy. As a result of the relocation, the army's fighting capacity was critically reduced, since units found themselves isolated from their bases and supplies.

The coup orchestrated by the Russian Embassy in Tallinn on June 21 initiated the replacement of the army leaders. The first to lose their positions were Nikolai Reek, Minister of Defence, and Johan Laidoner, Commander-in-chief of the Estonian Army. In the period up to September 1, at least 65 officers were discharged from the army, the Estonian Defence League, and the Border Guard; most of the officers were retired, many were arrested. A new Commander-in-chief was not appointed and the position was filled by Major General Gustav Jonson, Commander of the Armed Forces, who had more limited authority.

At the beginning of July, the institution of political leaders was implemented in the army. Paul Keerdo, a long-standing communist, was appointed chief political leader of the army and assigned to supervise the political leaders of military arms, teams and units. The main objective of the political leaders was to establish complete control by the Communist Party over the army and to monitor the actions of Estonian officers.

Eesti sõjaväe häving aastal 1941 [Die Vernichtung der estnischen Armee 1941], hrsg. von JAAK PIHLAU, Tartu 2003; Eesti sõjavägi (wie Anm. 3), S. 94-185.

Among the political leaders were Red Army commanders and regular and non-commissioned officers of the Estonian army, as well as commissioned officers from amongst reservists. Most of these men had not been known to have any pro-Communist bias prior to this.

At the same time, committees of soldiers were established within units. One of the tasks of the committees was to implement methods of Communist brainwashing in the army, as well as instigating conflicts between soldiers and army officers. Though fomenting dissent was not very effective in reality, the establishment of soldier committees enabled the occupying power to ascertain the soldiers' mentality: who was actively involved in the activity of the committees, who avoided these, and who counteracted the committees. Several members of the soldier committees became members of the Communist Party or the Komsomol.

The changes also had an impact on the regular mode of life in the army. This involved, for example, substituting the name of the army in Estonian and the term of address 'sir' with the Communist term 'comrade'. Soviet symbols – the red flag and the *Internationale* – gradually replaced the national flag and the anthem of the Republic of Estonia. All allusions to the War of Independence were reprehended, and participation at various political events – meetings, processions, political functions, etc. – became compulsory for soldiers.

On August 17, 1940, Marshal Semyon Timoshenko, the USSR People's Commissar for Defence issued a directive according to which the Estonian Army was liquidated and its military units and institutions reorganised as the 22nd Rifle Corps of the Red Army. The formation of the corps started on August 31, which also marks the end of the armed forces in independent Estonia.