

## SOVIET PARTISAN MOVEMENT IN ESTONIA 1941–1944

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Article is giving an overview of the activities of the Soviet partisans in Estonia in 1941–1944. The partisans, trained in the Soviet rear and sent to Estonia over the frontline or parachuted, were mostly recruited from among ethnic Estonians, evacuated to the Soviet rear or mobilised to the Red Army in 1941. Soviet partisans in Estonia were commanded by the Estonian Partisan Movement Headquarters that was subordinated to the Central Headquarters of the Partisan Movement of the Red Army. Most of the partisans sent to Estonia were captured soon or gave themselves up. The damage caused by the partisans in Estonia was not considerable. There was no national armed resistance in Estonia during the German occupation.

*Key words:* resistance to the German occupation, Soviet partisan movement during the Second World War, Estonia during the Second World War, Soviet partisans in Estonia

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### Introduction

During the Second World War, different forms of resistance to the occupation regime emerged in all countries occupied by Germany, both on the Eastern and Western fronts. Sometimes, there is some frustration that can be observed in memoirs, particularly in Western Europe, about foreigners first invading the country, then other foreigners bringing liberation, and the local people playing only a limited role. In most cases, the number of participants in resistance movements was lower than the number of those who collaborated with the occupation authorities. Resistance to an occupying force, or national resistance, can have great emotional significance for national self-perception, and it proved to be

a fruitful soil for exaggerations or fabrications in literature even during the war-time, and even more so after the war. The occupiers (or the compatriots collaborating with occupiers) are demonised and blamed for all kinds of crimes, whereas the actions of “our people” are often exempted from all criticism.<sup>1</sup>

A specific case is the countries and nations that, finding themselves between two great opposing powers, the Soviet Union and National Socialist Germany, did not have many alternatives as there were only two very bad choices available to them. In particular, this applies to the areas annexed by the Soviet Union in 1939 and 1940 but, less directly, also to much of Eastern Europe that experienced both the German occupants and Soviet “liberators”. In these countries, resistance to one occupying power paved the way to the other occupying power, as neither of the two had any interest in restoring the independence of the countries and nations that had been caught up in the war.

This article discusses the Soviet partisan movement, focusing on the particular example of Estonia. The Soviet Union was a totalitarian, bureaucratic police state, dominated by communist ideology, which manifested itself in ubiquitous propaganda. Any independent initiative without the Communist Party’s prior approval was, at best, suspicious, including in a situation of war. Even during the war, as well as afterwards, the resistance to German occupants was portrayed as “the fight of the whole people<sup>2</sup> under the guidance of the Communist Party”. This interpretation was finalised in the 1970s when propaganda flaunted the “Great Patriotic War” as one of the central events of world history.

Any uncomfortable facts were suppressed in the interest of shaping a narrative of heroism and suffering. Supposedly, the “fight of the whole people” had involved everyone and all nations of the USSR, and the Russian people in particular, had eagerly participated. The role of individuals was assigned less value than the abstract leadership role of the Party in this heroic fight of the whole Soviet people. This resulted in extreme glorification of the communist partisan movement.

The official reviews drafted already during the war clearly overstated the scope of the partisan movement and the extent of destruction caused by partisans. It was an easy thing to do because most of the claims could not be verified due to the lack of reliable data. The tinkering with the data to meet the needs of propaganda continued after the war. If the presented figures were to be believed, the Wehrmacht would have bled out even before reaching the front line. No train would have moved, communications would not have worked, and rivers would have been crossed only at fords because the absolute majority of the railroads,

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1 See Judt 2005, 32–43.

2 (Of the) whole people – Soviet ideological adjective – *obshhenarodnyj*.

communication lines, and bridges were blown up by the partisans according to the propaganda claims.<sup>3</sup> However, for a long period, there was no agreement concerning the number of partisans. Primarily, it was important for propaganda reasons – to demonstrate the “whole people” nature of the partisan movement. The final outcome was a vague consensus at “roughly a million”.<sup>4</sup> The number of partisans was also dependent on the definition of a “communist partisan”, the subsequent additions to that category, and those who included themselves in the group of Soviet patriots/partisans.

While in general the “fight of the whole people against German occupants under the guidance of the Communist Party” was a propagandist fiction, the reality behind the Party’s guiding role was that most of the partisan warfare was carried out, or at least commanded, by specially trained saboteurs dispatched from the Soviet rear. It was them who had actual close connections with the Party and security agencies.

A spontaneous resistance to German occupants was not the first preference of the Soviet regime. There were some regional differences but, as an example, the goals and organisation of the Soviet partisan warfare in Estonia were not different from those in the rest of areas of the Soviet Union that was under German occupation for a shorter or longer period of time. Only a resistance movement that could be controlled and managed was considered “correct” in the USSR. The partisan movement was under central command. The Soviet partisan movement was a method of non-conventional warfare that the Red Army used in the territories occupied by Germany; it was not spontaneous resistance of the people.<sup>5</sup>

The following article is basing mostly on the archive documents addressing the Soviet partisan movement in general and particularly in Estonia. There is a number of document collections, published in Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union, that include a number of documents on the organisation and activities of the Soviet partisan movement in general. The documents connected to the Soviet partisans in Estonia are preserved in Estonian National Archives. On the Soviet partisans there is no particular research paper written after Estonia has regained its independence and most of the publications from the Soviet period on this topic are useless. However, a book by Rudolf Lumi (1967) is among the secondary sources of the current article.

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3 For more, see Sokolov 2008, 41–45, 107–133; Armstrong 2007; Gogun, Kentij 2006; Hasch, Friedrich 1998, 230–231; Meien 2014.

4 See Minasjan et al. 1968, 550.

5 See Patrushev et al. 2000–2007.

## **Non-communist resistance movement in Estonia during the German occupation**

Apart from the Soviet partisan movement there were other forms of resistance (incl. armed resistance) to the German occupation regime as well, but in those cases the goal was not the restoration of the Soviet rule. Most national resistance movements considered the democratic Western states as their allies. The Soviet authorities saw such resistance movements as manifestations of nationalism (or separatism) and sometimes regarded them as even more dangerous enemies than German occupants.

Many Estonians greeted the invading Germans as “liberators” in 1941. However, year by year the German occupation was more and more disliked by most of the population. The expectation that Estonian independence would be re-established was not fulfilled. Still, the Germans were treated as “a lesser evil” compared to the Soviets. Therefore, there was no armed national resistance movement in Estonia during the German occupation.

The goal of the unarmed national resistance movement was to create pre-conditions for the restoration of Estonia’s independent statehood after the war, based on the principle of legal continuity. Having escaped the Soviet repressions, Jüri Uluots, the last Prime Minister of the Republic of Estonia, was named by an ad hoc constitutional election assembly as Prime Minister in the duties of the President according to the Estonian constitution (President Konstantin Päts had been deported to Russia in July 1940). An underground pseudo-parliament, the National Committee of the Republic of Estonia, was formed in February 1944, consisting of members who had belonged to democratic political parties in Estonia before the establishment of the authoritarian rule in 1934/1935. The German occupation authorities were not comfortable with the actions of nationalists, and many members of the National Committee and its support network were arrested in April 1944. Their number exceeded 300 people, according to some sources. Most of them were released from prison shortly before the Germans left Estonia in September of the same year. On placards posted on 1 August 1944, the National Committee declared itself the bearer of the supreme constitutional power in Estonia.

The most successful action of the underground nationalist resistance movement was helping young, conscription-age men escape to Finland. Mostly, this concerned men who were born in 1919–1924 and in 1925 and subject to mobilisation announced, respectively, in February and October of 1943. In Finland, an Estonian infantry regiment was formed from them in February 1944. The regiment fought after training in Karelian Isthmus and was sent back to homeland

in August 1944 to participate in the battles in Estonia. In addition, the activists of the national resistance movement maintained secret contacts with Estonian representatives in Finland and Sweden, who then kept Estonian diplomats in Western countries informed about the events in Estonia and about the plans to restore Estonia's independence after the war.

Another goal of the nationalists was also to prevent the recognition of the Estonian Self-Administration, set up by the German occupation regime, as a legal representative of the Estonian people. However, after the war, the head of the Estonian Self-Administration, Hjalmar Mäe, claimed that he had no such intentions. The relations between the politicians that belonged to the National Committee and to the aforementioned election assembly were tense – the former saw the latter as supporters of President Päts who were co-responsible for the loss of democratic government. Nevertheless, an agreement was reached and on 18 September 1944, when the Germans were about to leave Estonia, Jüri Uluots named a new Government of the Republic, headed by Acting Prime Minister, Otto Tief. However, on 22 September, the Red Army captured Tallinn and most members of that government were soon arrested by the Soviet security agencies. Jüri Uluots had been evacuated to Sweden immediately after appointing the government, and he died there in January 1945.<sup>6</sup>

There were also many men who were hiding from the German mobilisations in Estonia. Johan Pitka (1872–1944), one of the heroes of the War of Independence in 1918–1920, returned from Finland<sup>7</sup> in 1944 having reached an agreement with the German occupation authorities, as the Germans permitted him to form an assault battalion involving the men who were in hiding. A unit with the size of a reinforced company was then formed in August, but it mostly served as a symbol of mentality. Pitka himself went missing in Estonia in the autumn of 1944.<sup>8</sup>

### **Centralised nature of the Soviet partisan movement**

The command structure of the Soviet partisan movement was based on a Directive of the Council of People's Commissars (CPC) and the Central Committee (CC) of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), of 29 June 1941, on "Mobilisation of the Soviet people to fight against the enemy", which

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6 See Orav, Nõu 2004.

7 In July 1940, after the Baltic States were occupied, Pitka managed to escape to Finland through Latvia and Sweden.

8 See Salo, Hiio 2008, 154–168.

included a call for the formation of partisan detachments and sabotage groups to fight the enemy in the occupied regions.<sup>9</sup> This was followed by respective directives from the Party committees of the western Soviet republics, autonomous republics, and frontline oblasts.<sup>10</sup> More specific guidance for partisan warfare was issued in the second half of July 1941 when it had become clear that the Red Army had lost hundreds of thousands of square kilometres of Soviet territory to the Germans for a longer period of time. On 18 July, the CC of the CPSU issued a regulation on the organisation of partisan movement, calling for the destruction of communication lines and means of transport, as well as the annihilation of enemies and their collaborators, and for collection of intelligence. For this, the Party and administrative bodies of the Soviet republics, oblasts, rayons and cities had to form partisan detachments and sabotage groups and to establish undercover Party centres for commanding them.<sup>11</sup>

The majority of those orders only remained on paper, at least in the regions close to the front line. On 30 June 1941, the Bureau of the CC of the Estonian Communist Party (ECP) adopted a decision on forming partisan detachments and establishing secret bases. Feodor Okk, Secretary of the CC of the ECP (and later commissar of the headquarters of the destruction battalions<sup>12</sup>) had to organise

9 Директива СНК СССР и ЦК ВКП(б) партийным и советским организациям прифронтовых областей [Directive issued by the Council of the People's Commissars of the USSR and Central Committee of the All-Union Communist (Bolshevik) Party to the party and Soviet organisations of the front-near oblasts], 29 June 1941. Published in: Naumov 1998, 446–448.

10 See Директива № 2 ЦК КП(б) Белоруссии партийным, советским и комсомольским организациям по развертыванию партизанской войны в тылу врага [Directive issued by the Central Committee of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party of Belorussian SSR to the Party, Soviet and Komsomol organisations on deployment of the partisan war in the enemy's rear], 1 July 1941. Published in: Patrushev et al. 2000, Vol. 2 Book 1, 138–140.

Oblasts were the biggest units of the Soviet administrative division usually. They were divided into rayons, the latter into the village councils. Smaller Soviet republics were divided only into rayons, bigger ones had oblasts as well. Krai were and are big administrative units in Siberia and North Caucasus (*author's comment*).

11 Постановление ЦК ВКП(б) “Об организации борьбы в тылу Германских войск” [Regulation of the CC of the All-Union Communist (Bolshevik) Party on the organisation of combat in the rear of German army], 19 July 1941. Published in Naumov 1998, 474–476.

12 Destruction battalions were semi-voluntary units of the NKVD for fighting enemy parachutists and local individuals who opposed the Soviet rule, in the front rear area. Destruction battalions were recruited from among Party and Komsomol members and from the “Soviet active” since the end of June 1941, but to a certain extent the mobilised men were sent to these battalions as well. Destruction battalions committed numerous atrocities against civilians in Estonian countryside (*author's comment*).

a 700-strong partisan regiment by 10 July 1941. In addition to this regiment, a partisan detachment had to be established in each county<sup>13</sup> and in Tallinn (two detachments in Viru county).<sup>14</sup> All this remained on paper. While the personnel was chosen and some raids to the German rear were made, it was of limited importance in terms of the partisan movement as a whole.

On 22 July 1941, when half of Estonia was held by Germans, an underground Party centre, a countrywide headquarters of the partisan detachments and illegal Party centres of the counties were established to manage the resistance movement.<sup>15</sup> No real actions were undertaken by the members of the centres/headquarters in Estonia when occupied by the Germans. Most of them were arrested in August/September 1941 and executed by shooting on the orders of the German Field Police (*Feldgendarmarie*) or the Special Commando (*Sonderkommando*) 1A of the Security Police Task Force A (*Einsatzgruppe A*).<sup>16</sup>

The Communist Party had the obligation of organising undercover cells and fulfilling the leadership role. After the start of the war, a directorate for the formation of partisan detachments and groups was set up at the USSR People's Commissariat of Defence for performing operative command functions. This directorate was closed down as early as December 1941, because it was believed to be inefficient, primarily due to its vague purpose. In the structure of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (*NKVD*), the organisation of the partisan movement was the responsibility of the 4<sup>th</sup> directorate and the respective 4<sup>th</sup> departments of the subordinated commissariats for internal affairs in the Soviet and autonomous republics.<sup>17</sup> The *NKVD* was also responsible for training the partisans

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- 13 The Soviet administrative division was introduced in Estonian SSR only in 1950. Until then, counties and civil parishes (rural municipalities) existed (however, beginning with 1945, civil parishes were divided into village councils (*author's comment*).
  - 14 Minutes of the Bureau of the CC of the ECP "Abinõudest seoses Punaarmee väeosade sunnitud taganemisega" [Measures in connection with the enforced retreat of the Red Army units], 30 July 1941. *Estonian National Archives* (Eesti Rahvusarhiiv, hereinafter: RA), ERAF.1.4.71, pp. 121–124.
  - 15 Excerpt from the Minutes of the Bureau of the CC of the ECP No. 16, 23 July 1941. RA, ERAF.247.7.43, pp. 32–33; Presentation by Artur Vaha, 28 August 1941. RA, ERAF.4.1.209, pp. 33–34.
  - 16 See German Security Police investigation files: Arbon, Herman Hermani p. RA, ERA.R-819.2.71; Cher, Oskar Juhani p. RA, ERA.R-819.2.72; Kadakas, Erich Jaani p. RA, ERA.R-819.2.73; Ruus, Neeme Alfredi p. RA, ERA.R-819.2.74.
  - 17 Записка наркома внутренних дел СССР в Государственный Комитет Обороны о создании партизанских отрядов и диверсионных групп для действий в тылу противника [Note to the State Defence Committee by the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs of the USSR on organisation of the partisan detachments and diversion groups for the activities in the enemy's rear], 8 August 1941. Published in: Patrushev 2000a, 464–466.

and saboteurs in special purpose training centres and military units before they were dispatched to the German rear.<sup>18</sup>

In 1942, after the front had stabilised, the Soviet leadership came to the conclusion that the local Party organisations and headquarters of the fronts and armies did not have sufficient ability to coordinate the partisan movement. With a regulation of the Soviet State Defence Committee, of 30 May 1942, the Central Headquarters of the Partisan Movement (CHPM) was established at the Headquarters of the Supreme Command, and Panteleimon Ponomarenko, First Secretary of the Communist Party of Belorussia, was appointed as the Chief of Staff. Vasiliĭ Sergienko, People's Commissar for Internal Affairs of the Ukrainian SSR, and Colonel Taras Korneev from the Intelligence Directorate of the People's Commissariat of Defence were appointed by the NKVD as members of the staff. Operative headquarters were established at Ukrainian, Bryansk, Western, Kalinin, Leningrad, and Karelian fronts.

The tasks of the Central Headquarters included expansion of the partisan movement, training of organisers and dispatching them to the enemy's rear, establishing reserve units of the partisan movement, building connections with partisan detachments to strengthen their political and military leadership, organisation of political propaganda among the residents of occupied areas, and expanding the network of underground Party and Komsomol organisations in cooperation with the central committees of the Communist Parties of the Soviet republics and the Party organisations of the oblasts and krais.<sup>19</sup>

The order of the USSR People's Commissar of Defence, of 5 September 1942, established specific objectives for the partisan movement together with a new structure. The main elements included the typical methods of partisan warfare – terror, diversion, and sabotage. However, there were also reconnaissance tasks and a duty to conduct political and organisational work amongst the population.<sup>20</sup>

On 6 September 1942, the People's Commissariat of Defence appointed Marshal Kliment Voroshilov as the Commander in Chief of the partisan movement, and approved the statutes of the CHPM. The latter was supposed to

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18 See Докладная записка УНКВД по г. Москве и Московской области № 1/1079 в МК и МГК ВКП(б) об отборе слушателей в специальную школу [Report by the Moscow City and Oblast NKVD Administration to Moscow City Committee of the All-Union Communist (Bolshevik) Party on the selection of students for the special training centre], 9 November 1941. Published in: Patrushev et al. 2000b, 296.

19 Постановление № ГОКО-1837сс [Regulation of the State Defence Committee], 30 May 1942. Published in: Patrushev et al. 2003, 507–510.

20 Order of the USSR People's Commissar of Defence No. 00189, 5 September 1942 "О задачах партизанского движения" [On the tasks of the partisan movement]. RA, ERAF.4.1.3, pp. 6–9.



conduct partisan movement in the enemy's rear, using the partisan headquarters of the Soviet republics and oblasts for practical assistance. The Estonian Headquarters of the Partisan Movement (EHPM, see below) was also established on this basis.<sup>21</sup> As a rule, the secretary of the Party Central Committee of the Soviet or autonomous republic (or the secretary of the oblast committee in case of oblasts) was appointed as the figurehead of the headquarters. The work itself was managed by a staff member from the *NKVD*, either as a deputy chief of staff or head of the operations department.

The Chief Command of the Partisan Movement was liquidated on 19 November 1942, and the CHPM was brought back under the Headquarters of the Supreme Command.<sup>22</sup> The CHPM itself lost its purpose and was liquidated in January 1944. The local headquarters of the partisan movement were retained and placed under the operative command of the war councils of the fronts and armies.<sup>23</sup>

## Dispatch of partisans to Estonia from the Soviet rear 1941–1942

No local undercover communist network emerged or was created in Estonia either in 1941, or in the subsequent years. The phenomenon that, later on, Soviet historiography labelled as local “resistance of the whole people” was actually a fiction. In reality, the partisan movement was directed from the rear of the Soviet Union.

At first, the formation and dispatch of partisan detachments for Estonia was overseen by Artur Vaha,<sup>24</sup> former head of department of the CC of the ECP, who had been assigned as senior instructor of the political directorate of the Leningrad front. After the siege of Leningrad began in September 1941, Estonian communists were transported deeper to the Soviet rear over Lake Ladoga. Initially, organisation of the partisan movement was an issue of secondary importance for the CC of the ECP and the CPC of the Estonian SSR. By that time, any connections to those who had remained in Estonia for undercover work had been

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21 Sokolov 2008, 41–45.

22 Постановление № ГКО-2527сс [Regulation of the State Defence Committee], 19 November 1942. Published in: <https://www.prlib.ru/item/1351062> [15.09.2023].

23 Постановление ГКО № 4945сс [Regulation of the State Defence Committee], 13 January 1944. Published in: Patrushev et al. 2007, 35–37.

24 Artur Vaha (1900–1976). He was born in Tartu county, was a worker in Moscow during the First World War, joined the Red Army in 1918. Later was a worker in Leningrad and a director of a machine tractor station in Western Siberia. Graduated from the All-Union Academy of Agriculture in 1939. In March 1941, he was sent to Estonia to work with the CC of the ECP. Served as State Audit Minister of the Estonian SSR from 1945–1949, Minister of Agriculture from 1949–1951.

lost, if they ever existed at all. Even some of the member lists of the ECP as late as from 1943 include several names of communists left in Estonia with the note “special assignments in Estonia”.

According to a presentation held in July 1943 by Nikolai Karotamm, Secretary of the CC of the ECP, about 50 people were dispatched from Leningrad to Estonia for undercover work from September to November 1941. There was no radio connection and Karotamm himself did not know what had become of them.<sup>25</sup> It is possible that these were the two sabotage groups formed in the Leningrad oblast: 21 fighters were sent to Estonia on 28 September 1941 from the 1<sup>st</sup> (191<sup>st</sup>) Estonian partisan detachment (commanded by Nikolai Katkov) and 27 fighters from the 2<sup>nd</sup> (205<sup>th</sup>) Estonian partisan detachment (commanded by Nikolai Shalomov).<sup>26</sup>

In the first half of the year 1942, the Bureau of the CC of the ECP and other leading communists were assembled in Moscow. The Bureau appointed Artur Vaha as the organiser of the Estonian partisan movement, now in the position of the head of the military department of the Central Committee. In early March 1942, the CC of the CPSU ordered 200 “best soldiers” to be released from the 7<sup>th</sup> Estonian Rifle Division, which was being formed at the time, to the CC of the ECP in order to prepare 15–20 sabotage and partisan groups for dispatch to Estonia.<sup>27</sup>

On 1 April 1942, the first group of future partisans/saboteurs began their training at the 7<sup>th</sup> Estonian Rifle Division in a special-assignment unit (*отряд особого назначения*).<sup>28</sup> By mid-June 1942, 208 partisans had completed their training and were assembled in Ivanovo.<sup>29</sup> A second group, with 350 members, selected from the 1<sup>st</sup> Estonian Reserve Regiment and 249<sup>th</sup> Estonian Rifle Division, began their training at the 7<sup>th</sup> Estonian Rifle Division in the special-assignment unit in June 1942. Colonel Abram Ratner was appointed as commander of the group.<sup>30</sup> After training, this group was sent to Ivanovo as well. A third

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25 Nikolai Karotamm to Lieutenant General Panteleimon Ponomarenko, Chief of Staff of the CHPM, 7 July 1943. RA, ERAF.4.1.7, p. 51.

26 Списки личного состава I-го и II-го эстонских партизанских отрядов (командиры отряда Катков и Шаломов) [Personnel lists of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Estonian partisan detachments (detachment commanders Katkov and Shalomov)], 27 September 1941 and 11 January 1942. RA, ERAF.4.5.1, pp. 2–3, 6, 9.

27 Karotamm to Georgy Malenkov, Secretary of the CC of the CPSU, 19 March 1942. RA, ERAF.1.1.375.

28 Coded message from Y[efim]. Shchadenko, Deputy People's Commissar of Defence, № ГУФ/200 ш, 26 May 1942. RA, ERAF.1.1.857, p. 26.

29 Karotamm to Ponomarenko, 17 June 1942. RA, ERAF.1.1.375.

30 Abram Ratner (born 1900, date of death unknown). Served in the Joint State Political Directorate (OGPU) from 1927 and later in the NKVD; was head of division and department in the State Security Main Directorate of the NKVD. Sent to reserve in

group with 150 saboteurs, selected from the 1<sup>st</sup> Estonian Reserve Regiment, began their training at Podolsk Infantry School in mid-September 1942.<sup>31</sup> Later, training continued mostly in Ivanovo, but special courses took place elsewhere as well. 520 persons, including 328 in Ivanovo, were registered as Estonian partisans by 10 September 1942.<sup>32</sup> On 10 November, Karotamm informed the Chief of Staff of the CHPM that 655 partisans, including 23 radio operators, had been trained or were currently in training. Another 22 radio operators were taking courses.<sup>33</sup>

Multiple plans were drafted for the partisan network. On 17 June 1942, Karotamm sent a report to the Chief of Staff of the CHPM, stating that 208 partisans/saboteurs were awaiting in Ivanovo for their dispatchment to Estonia. The plan was to create four partisan detachments, each with 50 fighters, to cover the counties of Petseri, Võru, Tartu, and Viru. The dispatch of partisans to Estonia was to take place in cooperation with the North-Eastern Front and the Leningrad Front.<sup>34</sup> A couple of weeks later, on 1 July 1942, the Bureau of the CC of the ECP decided to divide Estonia into three regions. A trustee of the CC of the ECP was envisaged for each region. The appointed trustees included Oskar Sall (codename Otto Kivi) for North Estonia, Tarmo Talvi (Jaan Järv) for South Estonia, and Jaan Kalu (Andres Meri) for West Estonia. The trustees of the Central Committee oversaw the appointment of further seven Party organisers for cities or counties.<sup>35</sup>

On 10 July 1942, the Chief of Staff of the CHPM, Ponomarenko, approved the 1942 plan for the partisan movement in Estonia. Another plan for the network of partisan groups in Estonia was prepared. In total, the partisan network included a larger partisan detachment in South Estonia and ten smaller organisational groups, each with 13–20 members. A procedure was envisaged for communication between the detachment and the groups. According to the plan, the units had to be active by 25 July 1942 at the latest.<sup>36</sup>

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1939. 1942–1944 head of division and department of the NKVD special department for the Kalinin front and the 1<sup>st</sup> Baltic front (from 1943, Smersh administration). Retired in 1948. Available: [https://nkvd.memo.ru/index.php/Патнер\\_Абрам\\_Максимович/](https://nkvd.memo.ru/index.php/Патнер_Абрам_Максимович/) [18.09.2023].

31 Coded messages from Y[efim]. Shchadenko, Deputy People's Commissar of Defence, № ГУФ/199 ш, 25 May 1942; № ГУФ/265 ш, 14 August 1942; № ГУФ/291ш. RA, ERAF.1.1.857, pp. 25, 27–28.

32 Statement of the military department of the CC of ECP, 10 September 1942. RA, ERAF.1.1.376.

33 Karotamm to Ponomarenko, 10 November 1942. RA, ERAF.1.1.377.

34 Karotamm to Ponomarenko, 17 June 1942.

35 Lumi 1967, 67.

36 План Центрального Штаба Партизанского Движения по организации, засылке и действиях партизанских отрядов и групп Эстонской ССР [Plan of the Central

The first group headed out towards Estonia by foot in early August 1942. These 48 fighters (“Harju-Petseri Detachment”) established six organisational groups that were supposed to work in Harju, Võru, Viru, Tartu, Petseri (Pechory), and Valga counties.<sup>37</sup> The platoon crossed the front line on 13 August 1942 in Kalinin Oblast. On 19 August, they had their first skirmish with German troops near the village of Golubov, after which the platoon scattered. In September, two groups reached Petseri county: a 9-strong group No. 552 commanded by Tarmo Talvi and a 7-strong group No. 551 commanded by Ivan Yusev. In total, this made 16 men.<sup>38</sup> The partisan group of Tarmo Talvi had a couple of skirmishes with the Estonian Home Guard in October 1942 in which most of the group members, including Talvi, were killed, and the group disbanded after that. The group of Ivan Yusev split after arriving in Estonia. The Petseri group commanded by Yusev established a base in the forests of Bor-Belkovo (some 10 kilometres to north-east from Pskov) but they were soon discovered and the group was destroyed.<sup>39</sup> A total of 14 individuals died, were imprisoned or went missing. Seven people, including two radio operators, were evacuated back across the front line. 11 fighters never reached Estonia and continued as partisans in the platoon of Vladimir Margo<sup>40</sup> in Belorussia.<sup>41</sup>

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Headquarters of the Partisan Movement on organisation, dispatching and actions of partisan detachments and groups in the Estonian SSR], 26 July 1942. RA, ERAF.4.1.4, pp. 2–22.

- 37 Итоги боевой деятельности партизанских отрядов. Список партизанских групп, отрядов и бригады Эстонского Штаба Партизанского Движения направленных в тыл [Results of the military actions of the partisan detachments. List of partisan groups, detachments and brigades, dispatched to the [enemy’s] rear by the Estonian Headquarters of the Partisan Movement], 1945. RA, ERAF.4.1.160, pp. 7–8.
- 38 Pavel Stamm, instructor of the military department of the CC of the ECP, to Karotamm, 1942. RA, ERAF.4.1.7, pp. 10–13.
- 39 Circular of department B IV of the Estonian Security Police, 15 October 1942. RA, ERA.R-93.1.7, p. 51.
- 40 Vladimir Margo (1913–1977), Major, was from 1942–1944 commander of the 5<sup>th</sup> Kalinin Partisan Brigade. Before the war, he had been a teacher and education official in the Sebez rayon and in Velikiye Luki. After the war, he was chairman of the Executive Committee of the Sebez rayon and later head of the education department of Velikiye Luki Oblast. He was an ethnic Latvian. Available: <https://sebez-gid.ru/wiki?name=Владимир%20Марго> [18.09.2023].
- 41 Объяснительная записка к сводке переброшенных в Эстонию партизанско-диверсионных группах [Explanatory note to the summary report on partisan and diversion groups, dispatched to Estonia], 3 January 1943. RA, ERAF.4.1.7, p. 14.

## Partisans/saboteurs dispatched to Estonia by the Estonian Headquarters of the Partisan Movement from 1942–1943

The Bureau of the CC of the ECP discussed the development and command of the partisan movement in Estonia again on 29 August 1942. In line with the tasks assigned to the CHPM, they adopted a decision on the establishment of the headquarters of the partisan movement in the Estonian SSR, with the Secretary of the CC of the ECP, Nikolai Karotamm, appointed as its head. A numbering system (starting from number 11) was introduced for the partisan units. It was envisaged that the detachments in a county would form a company, resulting in the establishment of three battalions: the North, West, and South Estonia battalions. As the headquarters did not have appointed officials and its members were overloaded with other duties, the headquarters remained mostly an organisation on paper.<sup>42</sup>

The formation of regional headquarters of the partisan movement started in the autumn of 1942. The Estonian Headquarters of the Partisan Movement (EHPM) was formed on the basis of regulation of the State Defence Committee of the USSR of 3 November.<sup>43</sup> The headquarters was subordinated to the CHPM, which was responsible for providing equipment and weapons. Nikolai Karotamm was appointed as Chief of Staff, whereas actual work was managed by Lieutenant Colonel Pavel (Paul) Stamm.<sup>44</sup> The structure of the headquarters included operational, reconnaissance, personnel, communications, equipment, financial, encoding, administrative, and special departments. In addition, the headquarters

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42 Протокол заседания Эстонского Штаба партизанского движения № 1 [Minutes of the meeting of the Estonian Headquarters of Partisan movement], 3 September 1942. RA, ERAF.4.1.190, pp. 1–2; Karotamm to Ponomarenko, 7 September 1942. RA, ERAF.1.1.376.

43 Decision of the CPC of the USSR No. 2469, 3 November 1942. RA, ERAF.4.1.1, 13; Order of Marshal Kliment Voroshilov, Commander in Chief of the partisan movement, No. 0062 “Об образовании Эстонского Штаба партизанского движения” [On the formation of the Estonian Headquarters of Partisan movement], 10 November 1942.

44 Paul Stamm (1901–1967) was arrested in Tartu in 1921 for subversive actions and was exiled to Soviet Russia. He studied at the Moscow University and served in the Cheka, the OGPU and the NKVD. In 1937, he became deputy head of department at the NKVD Leningrad Oblast Directorate, and in 1940 deputy commander of the NKVD Nizhne-Amursk prison camp. Was sent to retirement in November 1940. After the war, he was a head of department at the CC of the ECP. Available: [https://nkvd.memo.ru/index.php/Штамм,\\_Павел\\_Юлиусович](https://nkvd.memo.ru/index.php/Штамм,_Павел_Юлиусович) [18.09.2023]. Постановление № ГОКО-2469сс “О партизанском движении в Эстонской ССР” [Regulation of the State Defence Committee on the partisan movement in the Estonian SSR], 3 November 1942. Published in: <https://www.soldat.ru/doc/gko/text/2469.html> [15.09.2023].

commanded a single unit for special assignments, a training centre, a reserve unit, and a mobile radio unit.<sup>45</sup>

Between 14 March and 5 May 1943, the EHPM dispatched five organisational groups to Estonia, charged with the task of establishing contacts with possible undercover communist organisations, doing propaganda work, forming new partisan units, and reporting back with information on German military units and the mood among local residents. These groups were short-lived. The group headed by Oskar Sall, trustee of the CC of the ECP for North Estonia, landed near Sonda on 14 March. The group had been assigned to operate in Viru county and to prepare a base for a second group (commanded by Jaak Karu) that landed on 5 May 1943. As early as 28 May, both groups were rounded-up and destroyed near the village of Sirtsu, some ten kilometres south of Kiviõli.

The group of Jaan Kalu, trustee for Western Estonia, landed on 17 March 1943 at the boundary between Pärnu and Viljandi counties. They established their base in the village of Riisa (currently in the Soomaa National Park), near Halliste River. They managed to post three flyers and report back to the EHPM with some reconnaissance<sup>46</sup> before the Home Guard eliminated the group in a raid on 18 June 1943.

The group of Albert Koppel landed on 15 March 1943 near Lake Endla, but the Home Guard destroyed it in a raid on 19 March. The group of Otto Saks that operated in Viljandi county was also soon liquidated. Otto Saks was the only one to survive and he hid in the forests of Viljandi county until the Red Army returned in late summer the next year.<sup>47</sup>

The arrival of subsequent groups was no longer a secret for the German security authorities. According to the statements of captured or surrendered partisans, the German *Abwehr* and Security Police knew the names and assignments of the trained personnel of the groups even before they were dispatched to Estonia.<sup>48</sup>

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45 Orders of the Commander in Chief of the partisan movement No. 2469, 3 November 1942; No. 0062, 31 December 1942; No. 034/342, 22 July 1943. RA, ERAF.4.1.1, 13; RA, ERAF.4.1.1, pp. 13, 19, 42; RA, ERAF.4.1.5, 58. Request for permissions by P. Stamm, Deputy Chief of the EHPM, to the commandant of the City of Leningrad, 10 February 1944. RA, ERAF.4.1.16, p. 26; Request for permissions by V. Kuusik, Commander of the Reconnaissance/Information Department of the EHPM, to the commandant of the City of Leningrad, 17 July 1944. RA, ERAF.4.1.16, pp. 105–106.

46 Coded messages No. 6–8. RA, ERAF.4.1.184, pp. 6–8.

47 Lumi 1967, 110–121; Circular of department B IV of the Estonian Security Police, 4 April 1943. RA, ERA.R-59.1.92, pp. 100–103; Karotamm to Ponomarenko, 17 September 1942. RA, ERAF.1.1.376.

48 See Report of the Estonian Security Police to the Police Director, A. Sinka, 15 June 1943. RA, ERA.R-77.1.5, p. 1.

As none of the groups was able to organise any preparations, the earlier plans of sending larger groups to Estonia never materialised. The EHPM had to coordinate its subsequent efforts with the Leningrad Headquarters of the Partisan Movement (LHPM). The EHPM was ordered to form a 60-strong partisan detachment by 15 July 1943 and to parachute it to the western regions of Leningrad Oblast by 1 August 1943 under the command of the LHPM.<sup>49</sup> The longer-term plan was to expand the activity in the eastern counties of Estonia.<sup>50</sup>

A total of 178 partisans had been dispatched to Estonia and Leningrad Oblast by 1 October 1943 (incl. 134 to Estonia). It was known that many of them had reached Estonia but, due to insufficient communication, it was not known how many were still active. A contact had been established with only two groups.<sup>51</sup> In the second half of 1943, the EHPM dispatched a further 12 partisan groups to Estonia, with 81 members in total. These groups were also very short-lived, with only 12 members surviving or escaping capture in hiding.

Ilmar Jürisson (1912–1985) was one of the more prominent former partisans in the Estonian SSR after the war. He was one of the best-known agricultural figures in Soviet Estonia, having graduated from the Higher Party School at the CC of the CPSU in 1948 and from the Estonian Agricultural Academy in 1953, specialising in livestock farming; he defended the candidate's degree in 1977. He was director of the Estonian Farming and Amelioration Institute from 1959 to 1979, and was awarded two Orders of Lenin, an Order of the October Revolution, and a USSR State Prize.<sup>52</sup>

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49 In early August, the first group of 18 partisans, commanded by Aleksander Kruise, were dropped in the region supervised by the LHPM. The group operated as part of Viktor Obyetkov's partisan brigade in the area between Pskov and Gdov. See Karotamm to Ponomarenko, "Внеочередное донесение о боевых действиях эстонской партизанской группы при бригаде тов. Рачкова на временно оккупированной немцами территории Ленобласти" [Extraordinary report on the military operations of Estonian partisan group subordinated to the brigade of comrade Rachkov in the territory of Leningrad oblast, temporarily occupied by the Germans], 29 August 1943. RA, ERAF.4.1.7, p. 58.

50 Order of the Chief of staff of the СНРМ No. 011 "О мерах по дальнейшему развертыванию и активизации партизанского движения на временно-оккупированной территории ЭССР" [On the measures of the future deployment and activation of the partisan movement in the territory of the Estonian SSR, temporarily occupied by the Germans], 5 July 1943. RA, ERAF.4.1.1, p. 37.

51 Справка о численном составе партизанских отрядов партизанского движения Эстонского фронта [Explanatory note on the number of personnel of the partisan detachments of the partisan movement of the Estonian front], 1 October 1943. RA, ERAF.4.1.7, p. 68.

52 His work – particularly in developing the field of agriculture – was not forgotten after restoration of Estonia's independence. See Sirendi 2012.

His partisan detachment (No. 579) consisted of an organisational group (6 members), and groups operating in Central Pärnu county (7 members), Western Pärnu county (8 members), North-Western Pärnu county (6 members), and South-Western Pärnu county (7 members). The platoon was dropped in Estonia in several dispatchments, on 10 September, 12 and 14 October, and 22 December 1943. L. Loorand was the commissar of the platoon, and Erich Meimre served as head of reconnaissance. According to the report, the platoon derailed three trains, damaging three locomotives and 21 carriages, blew up a rail bridge in Pärnu county, and destroyed 3 km of communication lines. Allegedly, they killed 30 members of a “punitive squad” while 100 men had been killed as a result of derailing the trains. The Home Guard put an end to the operations of the group in December 1943 by destroying the base of Jürisson’s detachment.<sup>53</sup> According to the reviews of the reconnaissance department of the EHPM, the platoon destroyed 3 trucks and 1 passenger car, derailed 4 trains, damaging 4 locomotives and 46 carriages, killed 453 enemy troops and police officers, captured 30 prisoners, destroyed 400 m of rail track and 1200 m of communication lines, blew up two rail and three road bridges.<sup>54</sup> Obviously, the information on sabotage and killed Home Guard and German military members was strongly exaggerated in the reports.

### **Dispatchment of sabotage groups to Estonia in cooperation with the Leningrad Headquarters of the Partisan Movement**

In early 1944, the front line reached the Estonian territory near Narva. This resulted in a reorganisation of the command structure of the partisan movement. As mentioned above, the CHPM was closed down in January 1944, and the command of the partisan movement was given, formally, to the Party’s central committee (or committee in oblasts) and the headquarters of the partisan movement responsible for that Soviet republic or oblast.<sup>55</sup> This is the reason why the EHPM was relocated from Moscow to Leningrad. On 6 February, 37 officers, 99 sergeants and 157 regular troops were sent from the former assembly centre

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53 Итоги боевой деятельности партизанских отрядов [Results of the military actions of the partisan detachments], RA, ERAF.4.1.160, pp. 22–25.

54 Итоги боевой деятельности эстонских партизан [Results of the military actions of Estonian partisans], RA, ERAF.4.1.161, p. 1.

55 Постановление ГКО № 4945сс [Regulation of the State Defence Committee], 13 January 1944. Published in: Patrushev 2007, 35–37.



of Ivanovo to Leningrad.<sup>56</sup> Preparations were launched, in cooperation with the Leningrad Front, the headquarters of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Baltic Front and the LHPM, for dispatchment of larger partisan units to Estonia. The reasons for such cooperation are unknown because, by that time, hundreds of partisans of Estonian origin had been trained and were waiting in the rear to be dispatched to Estonia. It is possible that the Estonians were not trusted, but the trained Estonian partisans also constituted a staff reserve for the continuation of the Sovietisation after the Red Army had recaptured Estonia. In addition, there were thousands of experienced partisans in Leningrad Oblast after the passing of the front, i.e. retreat of German troops from the areas of their former activity, and they needed something to do.

Thus, eight sabotage groups (each including 12–13 saboteurs) and Viktor Vennikov's partisan detachment (the latter also included 44 saboteurs of Estonian origin) were sent on airplanes over the front line, mostly to South Estonia, from 7 to 16 February 1944. Five of the groups did not include Estonians while the rest included only a few. They were able to create some confusion in the German rear, but did not gain special achievements and were destroyed in a couple of weeks. Only 12 of the 156 saboteurs survived.<sup>57</sup>

The next major joint action of the EHPM and the Leningrad Headquarters of the Partisan Movement occurred from 24 February to 17 March when three partisan brigades raided the rear of the Wehrmacht's Army Detachment Narva that held the front line on the river of Narva.<sup>58</sup> The brigades included volunteers selected by the LHPM and partisans from the reserve of the EHPM (who constituted about a quarter of those dispatched to Estonia).<sup>59</sup>

The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Partisan Brigades, commanded by Andrey Filipov and Fedor Yangirov, respectively, operated from 24 February to mid-March at the North-Western coast of Lake Peipus. They managed to create significant confusion in the German rear. After several skirmishes with the German rear defence units and the Estonian Home Guard, the platoons returned to Russia across the ice of Lake Peipus. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Partisan Brigade commanded by Dmitri Makarov did not fare as well. Having walked over the ice on Lake Peipus, they reached the shore between the villages of Omedu and Sääritsa, and immediately came under fire from the Lake Peipus Coastal Guard on 12 March. On the same day, they held

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56 Political information on relocation of the Single Special-Assignment Unit, 7–10 February 1944. RA, ERAF.4.1.16, p. 28v. See also Letter from Major Suslov, commander of the Red Army House in Ivanovo to the Secretary of the CC of the ECP, 9 February 1944. RA, ERAF.1.1.889.

57 *Итоги боевой деятельности партизанских отрядов*, RA, ERAF.4.1.160, pp. 26–32.

58 Niio 2006, 1051.

59 *Итоги боевой деятельности партизанских отрядов*, RA, ERAF.4.1.160, pp. 32–35.

a larger skirmish with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Estonian Border Defence Regiment and the Home Guard units in the forest of Muru, which was also the last serious action for them. The leadership of the brigade was not familiar with the area and headed towards Viru county, assuming that the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Partisan Brigades were operating there. The German rear defence quickly mobilised the Home Guard units of Tartu, Viru, and Järva counties and they started to pursue the partisans with the mobile units (*Jagdkommando*) of the 207<sup>th</sup> Security Division. The brigade moved north along the Mustvee river but was rounded up and scattered near the village of Ulvi. Only about ten of the 400 fighters in the brigade survived and were able to return across Lake Peipus or hide in the forest.

The three brigades included a total of 790 saboteurs and less than a half of them returned to the rear.<sup>60</sup>

On 4 February 1944, the CC of the ECP presented a new plan for the use of the trained partisan reserve. The reserve of the EHPM, 495 individuals in total, was to be assembled in Leningrad from 7 to 10 February. The plan was to dispatch 13 reconnaissance/sabotage groups to Estonia, each with 20 persons including a radio operator. The assignments were envisaged on a grand scale – organisation of partisan movement, reconnaissance, sabotage, propaganda, etc.<sup>61</sup> This plan was never put into practice. According to the instructions received from Moscow, on 20 April 1944, the Bureau of the CC of the ECP adopted a decision on the “Situation and tasks of the partisan movement in the Estonian SSR”. The decision provided for dispatchment of small reconnaissance groups to Estonia. Destruction of communication lines was to be avoided.<sup>62</sup> According to the EHPM,<sup>63</sup> 25 reconnaissance groups, consisting of a total of 68 individuals, were dispatched to Estonia from 23 March to 12 September 1944 and most of their members survived.<sup>64</sup>

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60 Итоги боевой деятельности партизанских отрядов, RA, ERAF.4.1.160, pp. 49–50; Итоги боевой деятельности эстонских партизан, 3 January 1945. RA, ERAF.4.1.161, pp. 1–3; Operative reviews of the Home Guard, 18 February – 20 March 1944. RA, ERA.R-358.2.23, pp. 64–90. See also: Lumi 1967, 187–198.

61 План первоочередных мероприятий ЦК КП(б) Эстонии в тылу врага [Plan by the CC of the ECP(B) on the first order measures in the enemy's rear], 4 February 1944. Published in: Patrushev et al. 2007, 151–154.

62 Lumi 1967, 215.

63 At the same time, training of saboteurs continued in the rear of the Soviet Union but, judging by the curricula, the goal of the training was now to prepare them as reserve units for future authorities of the Estonian SSR. See Political information on the work of the reserve assembly point of the EHPM from 28 May to 8 June 1944. RA, ERAF.4.1.16, pp. 99–102.

64 Итоги боевой деятельности партизанских отрядов, RA, ERAF.4.1.160, pp. 5–6.

On 10 August 1944, the Red Army broke through the German defence lines (the so-called Marienburg Line) near Alüksne, North-Eastern Latvia, and soon entered South-Eastern Estonia. They captured Tartu on 25 August, after which the front line stabilised for three weeks at Emajõgi river. In early September 1944, the EHPM was relocated to the southern part of Tartu county, in the rear of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Baltic Front.<sup>65</sup> As the headquarters was no longer needed, the USSR People's Commissariat of Defence and the General Headquarters of the Red Army ordered, on 2 October 1944, the EHPM to be disbanded by 20 October 1944. The officers were reassigned to the personnel department of the USSR People's Commissariat of Defence, while the regular staff and sergeants were transferred to the 123<sup>rd</sup> Reserve Infantry Regiment. The assets and means of transportation were given to the rear units of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Baltic Front.<sup>66</sup>

## Conclusion

Partisan warfare requires availability of personnel, either in the form of encircled troops or civilians motivated by national/ideological beliefs. For the partisan movement to be effective, members of the resistance had to be supported with equipment, weapons, additional personnel, evacuation of the wounded, and ideological literature from the other side of the front line. However, even more important was the environment in which the resistance fighters operated, incl. the assistance from local residents (hideouts, provision with food and clothing, intelligence collection, etc.). In fact, lack of local support was the greatest weakness of the Soviet partisan movement in Estonia. No spontaneous local partisan movement emerged. The efforts that were launched from the Soviet rear could only formally be called a "partisan movement". For the most part, it consisted of saboteurs who, depending on timing, had been given various reconnaissance and organisational assignments.<sup>67</sup>

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65 Order of Colonel Vasilyev, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Leningrad Front, № I /47721, 29 August 1944. RA, ERAF.4.1.16, pp. 148.

66 Order of Cherentsov, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Baltic Front, № VII/02738, 3 October 1944. RA, ERAF.4.1.16, 160, p. 3.

67 Saboteurs and intelligence agents were dispatched to Estonia by the army, the Baltic Fleet and the intelligence and counter-intelligence departments of the NKVD as well, but they were not called "partisans". One of those was Leen Kullmann (born in 1920), who was named Hero of the Soviet Union posthumously in 1965. According to the Soviet narrative, she was captured by the Germans and shot in March 1943 in Tartu, while other sources claim that she collaborated with the Germans and died in 1978 in West Germany.

According to the official data, the EHPM of the CC of the ECP, in cooperation with the CHPM, the LHPM and the Red Army, dispatched a total of 1354 partisans to Estonia from 1942 to 1944 (however, some of them never reached Estonia). At least 750 of them were killed or captured by the German rear security units (primarily by the Estonian Home Guard) and many of the partisans of Estonian origin surrendered voluntarily. According to later Soviet sources, further 387 persons joined the dispatched partisans in Estonia. This occurred primarily in the rural areas of Petseri county with mostly ethnic Russian population. However, more than a half of the accounted partisans belonged to an over 200-strong partisan platoon “Eagle” that never existed in reality. The actions of the “Eagle” were described in post-war Soviet propaganda among other alleged acts of diversion and sabotage that were included in the statistical reviews prepared in 1944/1945, but were not confirmed by any other sources.<sup>68</sup>

Discounting the people who allegedly joined the partisan groups, the figure of 1354 Estonian partisans is rather small in the context of the entire Soviet partisan movement. In addition, nearly 70% of the partisans/saboteurs were dispatched to Estonia by the LHPM that was not responsible for the organisation of the partisan movement in Estonia. The partisans of the EHPM were not able to achieve their main objective, which was to incite “widespread support by the population” for the partisan movement. They also did not succeed in establishing undercover centres.

The second main objective was the organisation of sabotage acts. The respective results were impressive, at least on paper. In 1944/1945, the EHPM prepared an overview of the work of individual partisan detachments, groups, and brigades, listing the achievements of each unit in destroying the enemy’s troops and infrastructure. Despite the fact that some of the groups only lasted for a few hours, the overview credits them with achieving extensive destruction.

Below are the figures presented by the Headquarters of the Partisan Movement, which deviate wildly from the information of the German police authorities and the Wehrmacht’s rear command operating in Estonia:

- German troops killed – 3468 (incl. two generals and 44 general staff officers);
- police officers and Estonian collaborators killed – 79;
- German troops captured as prisoners – 229;
- train echelons derailed – 11;
- locomotives destroyed – 11;
- carriages destroyed – 139;

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<sup>68</sup> See Kaasik 2014, 98–104.

- German garrisons destroyed – 8;
- total rail track destroyed (in 109 instances) – 5400 m;
- total communication lines destroyed (in 260 instances) – 36,000 m;
- rail bridges destroyed – 7;
- road bridges destroyed – 27;
- warehouses destroyed – 10.<sup>69</sup>

It is unknown how or when these facts were established and how they were attributed to the EHPM's partisan groups. Most likely, these are arbitrary figures that were presented with the belief that nobody will ever attempt to verify them or check them against the documents of German rear and security authorities.

It is true that the partisans dispatched by the EHPM committed acts of sabotage. Some of the explosions, communication impairments and bridge detonations were indeed caused by the same people who were mentioned in the documents of the partisan movement, and this is confirmed by the documents of the German rear and security authorities.<sup>70</sup> However, such actions constitute only a small part of the massive destruction attributed to partisans in Soviet sources and literature. Based on the Estonian example, it seems likely that exaggerating partisan achievements by an order of magnitude was a common practice even in those regions where partisan warfare was much more active and occurred on a larger scale than in Estonia.

In addition to organisational efforts and sabotage, the third main objective was reconnaissance to inform the Party, the security and intelligence agencies and the Red Army of the events in Estonia. Some of the preserved documents, such as radio messages from the partisan groups of the EHPM, seem to present a more adequate picture of reality.<sup>71</sup> The EHPM, in turn, prepared longer recon-

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69 Итоги боевой деятельности эстонских партизан за период с 14.08.1942–13.09.1944 [Results of the military actions of Estonian partisans during the period of 14.08.1942–13.09.1944], 17 December 1944. RA, ERAF.4.1.24, pp. 18–19. See Краткая справка о действиях эстонских партизан на территории Ленобласти и ЭССР с 1941–1945 [Short explanatory letter on the actions of Estonian partisans on the territory of Leningrad Oblast and Estonian SSR in], 3 December 1946. RA, ERAF.4.1.34, pp. 5–6.

70 See: Sicherungs-Division 207, Abteilung Ia, Kriegstagebuch Nr. 6, 1.1.1942–31.12.1942. *BArch*, RH 26-207/13; Sicherungs-Division 207, Abteilung Ia, Kriegstagebuch Nr. 7, 1.1.1943–30.6.1943. *BArch*, RH 26-207/20; Sich.Div. 207, Ia, Kriegstagebuch Nr. 8, 1.7. bis 31.12.1943. *BArch*, RH 26-207/23. See also: Omakaitse operatiivkokkuvõtet ja teatised erakorralistest sündmustest 1942–1944 [Operative reviews and reports of the Home Guard concerning the extraordinary events of 1942–1944]. RA, ERA.R-358.2.9 and RA, ERA.R-358.2.23.

71 Шифровальный отдел ЭШПД [Ciphering department of the EHPM], 11 November 1943 – 13 November 1944. RA, ERAF.4.1, files No. 184–189.

naissance reports using the information received from the partisans in Estonia. This information was submitted to the CHPM that used them for preparing general reconnaissance reviews. For instance, the overview of the CHPM of 12 July 1943 includes a longer section on Estonia. While the data were outdated, they were relatively accurate. However, it is unknown whether this information had been received from the partisans dispatched to Estonia. At the time of presenting the overview, there were no active groups in Estonia that could have communicated this intelligence.<sup>72</sup>

The EHPM's best successes came in training personnel for continued Sovietisation of Estonia after the war. Nearly 2000 individuals were trained at the special-assignment unit, the training centre and the EHPM reserve assembly point in Pushkino, with only a third of them dispatched to Estonia as partisans.<sup>73</sup> After Estonia was captured, most of the people who participated in these courses were employed at lower-level positions in the Party or Soviet administration (rural Party organisers, chairmen of rural executive committees, chairmen of collective farms (*kolkhozes*) and directors of state farms (*sovkhoses*), etc.).<sup>74</sup>

To conclude: Soviet partisan movement was a form of the non-conventional warfare, directed and controlled by the Red Army respective headquarters, the NKVD and, last but not least, the Communist Party. It was not a spontaneous resistance of the people under occupation. The environment for the partisan movement in Estonia was hostile and most of the partisans, sent to Estonia in 1942–1944 were captured soon by the Estonian Home Guard or German rear security units.

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74 Paavle 2009, 171.

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## PADOMJU PARTIZĀNU KUSTĪBA IGAUNIJĀ, 1941–1944

### Pēters Kāsiks

PhD, zinātniskais līdzstrādnieks, Igaunijas Kara muzejs – Ģenerāļa Laidonera muzejs

Zinātniskās intereses: Igaunijas Neatkarības karš, Otrais pasaules karš Igaunijā, mežabrāļi Igaunijā

Raksts sniedz pārskatu par padomju partizānu darbību Igaunijā 1941.–1944. gadā. Partizāni, kuri tika apmācīti padomju aizmugurē un iesūtīti Igaunijā pāri frontes līnijai vai nomesti ar izpletņiem, lielākoties tika savervēti uz padomju aizmuguri evakuēto vai Sarkanajā armijā 1941. gadā mobilizēto igauņu vidū. Šos partizānus komandēja Igaunijas Partizānu kustības štābs, kas bija pakļauts Partizānu kustības centrālajam štābam Maskavā. Vairums Igaunijā iesūtīto partizānu drīz tika sagūstīti vai arī padevās paši. Partizāni Igaunijā neradīja ievērojamu kaitējumu. Vācu okupācijas laikā Igaunijā nenotika nacionāla bruņota pretošanās.

*Atslēgas vārdi:* pretošanās vācu okupācijai, padomju partizānu kustība Otrā pasaules kara laikā, Igaunija Otrā pasaules kara laikā, padomju partizāni Igaunijā

### Kopsavilkums

Otrā pasaules kara laikā absolūtajā vairākumā okupēto zemju izvērās pretestība pret vācu okupāciju. Igaunija nebija izņēmums. Taču Igaunijā nebija vērojama nacionāla bruņota pretošanās. Igaunijā no padomju aizmugures tika iesūtītas daudzas īpaši apmācītu diversantu un desantnieku grupas.

Padomju partizānu kustība bija nekonvencionālās karadarbības forma, ko vadīja un kontrolēja attiecīgie Sarkanās armijas štābi, NKVD, kā arī ne mazākā mērā – Komunistiskā partija. Tā nebija spontāna okupācijai pakļauto iedzīvotāju pretestība.

Partizāni tika savervēti no padomju aizmugurē 1941. gadā evakuēto padomju aktivistu vidus, kā arī no Igaunijā mobilizēto vīru rindām. Liela daļa Igaunijā iesūtīto “partizānu” nebija igauņi. Partizānu darbībai Igaunijā tika izvēlēts ap 2000 personu, taču no viņu vidus uz Igauniju reāli tika nosūtīta tikai trešā daļa. Viņu apmācību un nosūtīšanu kontrolēja NKVD un Komunistiskā partija. 1941.–1942. gadā Maskavā tika dibināts Partizānu kustības ģenerālštābs, par kura priekšnieku tika iecelts Panteleimons Ponomarenko. Tika izveidots arī Igaunijas Partizānu kustības štābs Igaunijas Komunistiskās (boļševiku) partijas sekretāra Nikolaja Karotamma vadībā.

Igaunijā apstākļi partizānu kustībai bija naidīgi un vairums partizānu drīz pēc ierašanās krita igauņu zemessardzes vai vācu aizmugures drošības vienību gūstā. 1944. gada sākumā Igaunijā pa aizsalušo Peipusa ezeru tika iesūtītas trīs padomju partizānu brigādes diversijas aktu veikšanai Vācijas armiju grupas “Narva” aizmugurē. Arī viņi

drīz tika sakauti, un tikai dažiem partizāniem izdevās atgriezties frontes līnijas otrā pusē. Ziņojumos par partizānu darbību iekļauti saraksti ar iznīcinātiem ceļiem, tiltiem, komunikācijas infrastruktūru, noliktavām un nogalinātiem vācu karavīriem. Tomēr šie dati lielākoties negūst apstiprinājumu attiecīgajos igauņu zemessardzes vienību, kā arī par drošību frontes aizmugurē Igaunijā atbildīgās Vērmahta 207. drošības divīzijas ziņojumos.

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