

SUMMARY



The Estonian Military Technical School (1920–1923, 1936–1940). Surveys, memoirs and documents

The present publication is compiled from the memoirs and articles of officers who studied or served in the Estonian Military Technical School during the period mentioned in the title. The writings have been accompanied with comments and relevant documents.

On December 3, 1919, General Johan Laidoner, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces approved the staff of the Military Technical Courses for half a year. After the end of the Estonian War of Independence (1920), the time of service was extended to a year and a half. The official opening of the school was on March 2, 1920 when the decree on opening the Military Courses was issued by the Minister of War Jaan Soots. On March 11, 1920 the Commander-in-Chief approved the new staff of the Military Technical Courses, specifying the departments (small arms, artillery, pyrotechnics, motor vehicle, radio, telegraph, electrical engineering). On July 10, 1920 the Military Technical Courses were renamed as the Military Technical School by the order of the day of the Minister of War No 644. In order to cut expenditures of the Ministry of War it was decided to reduce the number of students from the initial 315 to 75. At the request of the school staff council the duration of the courses was prolonged to 3 years, which was also ratified in the temporary statutes regulating the activities of the school.

Several military educational institutions were founded after the War of Independence (1918–1920). In 1920, the Non-Commissioned Officers School was established in Tallinn. Besides the Military School and the Military Technical School, the Navy School operated during 1920 and 1923. In 1921 General Staff Courses were started at a higher military level (named as the Military Academy in 1925).

As the above-mentioned schools were established at the end of the War of Independence or immediately after the war, their structure and general objective did not fully comply with the peacetime objectives. The main aim of the army conversion during the transitional period to peacetime was to save money. Later it was admitted that in some respect there was too much economy. Later assessments have justified the closure of the school by the excessive size of its administration and the number of classes (7 classes). For

example, there were only five students in some classes taught by an officer or an engineer serving as a battalion commander.

The decision to close the Military Technical School in its initial form or to reorganize it was made by the Ministry of War in 1921, but it was not executed until the first year of students graduated (1923). At the same time opportunities for joining the Military Technical School with the Military School were being discussed. Both the Military School and the Military Technical School were subjected to the Tallinn military district and formation problems were appointed to Nikolai Reek (1921–1923), the Colonel of General Staff serving as the inspector of the Military Schools.

This attempt at establishing a Joint Military School ended in founding the Estonian National Defence College, by the decree of the Government of the Republic in August 29, 1923. The former General Staff Courses (Military Academy), the Military School and the Non-Commissioned Officers School that had functioned independently were united. The provision of education was centralized under one commander with the aim of ensuring single training and reducing the staff of units (especially finance and administrative staff).

In autumn 1923 the technical company (under the Military School) was formed replacing the Military Technical School (comprising of one platoon). The technical company was liquidated in 1927, after two classes of junior officers had graduated (in 1926 and 1927). Since then no more regular officers of engineer forces were trained. Instead, reserve officer courses were started. In 1930 the detachment of reserve officer cadets for engineer forces was started in the Military School, where training was organised in communications, engineer or gas platoons.

By the order of the Ministry of War admission to artillery, engineer and navy courses was terminated in 1926. However, applicants meeting the requirements for infantry courses were all admitted. During 1922 to 1925 the number of officers admitted to the Defence Forces (222) was about three times less the number of others leaving the service (611). Separation from service was due to the reduction of staff. During the next 4 years (1926–1929), the number of officers employed in service (424) exceeded the number of officers who left (282). This can be explained by the need to overcome the existing shortage of staff. Infantry training was the cheapest and if necessary it was easy to organize in-service training.

In 1932, when the eighth year of machine-gunners graduated from the Military School, the training of peacetime (regular) officers was discontinued (until 1936). The reasons for suspending regular officer training, formulated in 1938, were the absence of norms regulating the renewal process of officer personnel and staffing the cadet courses of the Military School in 1924 to 1926, resulting in the overproduction of junior officers. Moreover,

the quantity of peacetime officers was not specified at the beginning of the 1930s when an economic crisis broke out.

Rules regulating the drain of officers and prescribing their age limit were adopted in 1934. Regular officer training came to a standstill, which caused problems in providing the Military Academy with officer staff. It was necessary to start training officers more flexibly. In 1935–1936 officer-training courses were restarted in the Military School resulting in reopening the Military Technical School. Intensive international situation in the late 1930s related to fast arms race in Europe emphasizing the importance of technical arms of service and units. International situation had its effect on Estonia.

The re-establishment of the Military Technical School under the Estonian National Defence College was decided by Lieutenant General Johan Laidoner, the commander-in-chief of the Estonian Defence Forces, and Major General Nikolai Reek, the chief of staff of the Estonian Defence Forces in summer 1936. The idea of this decision came from the establishment of Tallinn Technical School in 1936 (named as Tallinn Polytechnical School from 1919 to 1936 and Tallinn Technical University since 1938), where civil engineering, chemistry and mechanics specialties were started.

The Military Technical School was opened on the basis of the statute for preparing technical officers. With the decree issued by the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, the courses of small arms, artillery and pyrotechnics (the latter was sometimes also called the course of ammunition) were opened in the Military Technical School in autumn 1936. The young men who had completed reserve officers studies at the Military School were accepted to the school based on their results in physical tests. Different from those who entered officer courses in the Military School, the future technicians did not have to complete service practice after their reserve officer courses. The four-year course which lasted up to 5,810 hours (in the course of hand arms the theoretical course lasted for 3.5 years) consisted of a regular officer training course, the subjects of technical school (in the courses of small arms and artillery the emphasis was on mechanics whereas in the course of pyrotechnics the emphasis was on chemistry), and a military technician course. The theoretical course was followed by a half-year practical work at military units and the central office of the Minister of War. In 1938, on the order of the day by the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, the course of electrical and motor vehicle engineering was opened, the students were accepted and in September the studies began (as a third year course) in the Military Technical School. As a result of the Soviet occupation, the school was liquidated and the third year course was left unfinished. In August 1940, the students were promoted the Second Lieutenants with the authority of regular officers.

The 10-year plan of manning the armed forces with officers worked out by the General Staff of the Armed Forces intended training during four-year courses in the Military Technical School every other year with 45 students at a time. At the request of Johan Laidoner, the Commander-in-Chief, the courses should have been formed every year starting 1938, but with admission to different courses. By the year 1948, 220 officers were to have finished the school. It was planned that 552 officers would have finished the officer courses (artillery, infantry and navy courses) in the Military School. Thus, the ratio of new technicians and troop officers would have been 1:2.5. Unfortunately, the plan was never carried out.

It is known that at least five officers from the first year graduated from the Military Academy. Several first year graduates continued their studies in the universities of France, Warsaw Polytechnics, Tallinn Technical School and the University of Tartu.

In 1940, the majority of the graduates were transferred to the Red Army. According to the preserved records, at least 26 of the first year officers were repressed by the Soviet authorities (36–37% from the 71 graduates of the year 1923), eight of whom were executed. Most of those who survived died in prison camps. At the end of World War II at least 5 officers from the above-mentioned year belonged to the Red Army. At least 15 graduates served in Estonian units belonging to the German Army. 20 graduates of the first year (28%) managed to get away to the west.

In the second year, 40 Second Lieutenants and six regular officers graduated from the Estonian Military Technical School. Six of them (13% of the whole course) perished during military operations or in the following resistance movement. Five of the second year graduates were repressed (killed, arrested or deported by the Soviet authorities). One of them returned to Estonia after the war. One officer died immediately after finishing school, one officer died of a disease, and one officer was lost (probably perished while running away). 19 graduates lived in occupied Estonia after the war and 14 escaped to the west. In August 1940, 39 Second Lieutenants from the unfinished third year were promoted to regular officers. The Soviet authorities repressed four of them during 1940–1941. Six perished in war or in the resistance movement (15% of the course). 15 officers from the third year managed to escape to the west.

The Military Technical School provided their graduates with diverse military technical knowledge. Most of them took interest in technology using the opportunity of getting an education at the expense of state. The military aspect did not matter a lot to them. Several graduates continued their studies in Tallinn Polytechnic University (Tallinn Technical University); some of them later became lecturers or engineers in the same university. Several graduates who went abroad finished foreign technical universities (e.g.

Stockholm Royal Technical University in Sweden). In many cases foreign universities took into consideration the officers previous study results in the Estonian Military Technical School (especially in the subjects taught in Tallinn Technical University). Most of the officers who had gone to foreign countries (Sweden, England, the USA, Australia) found work in the profitable civilian vocation of technician, engineer or constructor.

Nothing can be directly taken over from the institutional or organizational experiences of the Estonian Military Technical School (from 1920 to 1923 and from 1936 to 1940). On one hand, the time and situation are completely different now; the size and structure of the Defence Forces is much different; international background is different. On the other hand, the importance of technical instruments has been increasing. The earlier experience shows how to carry out longstanding planning of commanders' staff and how to create a unique system suitable for a small country. It also points out the importance of cooperation between civilian and military educational institutions. Examining historical documents raises the question of how to determine the proportion between drill and technical skills in training military leaders and how to ensure this relation in the future.