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## **Lithuanian Military-Civilian Relations in Kaunas 1919**

**Key words:** Lithuanian Armed Forces, Lithuanian soldiers, military-civilian relations, everyday life, Kaunas garrison in 1919

### **Summary**

In January 1919, Kaunas became a provisional and factual capital of the Lithuanian Republic, a concentration center of the volunteers of the Lithuanian Armed Forces. At that time in Kaunas, conditions for the formation of Lithuanian military units were particularly unfavourable, especially due to the fact that, until the July of 1919, Kaunas was actually controlled and governed by German military administration. The process of the establishment of state institutions of independent Lithuania and taking over the control of the city was hard and slow-going. In Kaunas, Lithuanian military personnel constantly felt like being surrounded by the enemy and continually persecuted by both communist-minded German soldiers and local citizens incited by Bolsheviks or those entertaining anti-State attitude. Sometimes such encounters ended in the loss of Lithuanian soldiers' lives but more often in injuries and maiming, for which the troops were treated in the military hospital. However, the Military School cadets stood out in this context and were sufficiently popular with the local population.

### **Lietuvos militāri civilās attiecības Kauņā 1919. gadā**

**Atslēgas vārdi:** Lietuvas bruņotie spēki, Lietuvas karavīri, militārās un civilās attiecības, ikdienas dzīve, Kauņas garnizons 1919. gadā

### **Kopsavilkums**

1919. gada janvārī Kauņa kļuva par Lietuvas Republikas pagaidu un faktisko galvaspilsētu, par Lietuvas brīvprātīgo bruņoto spēku koncentrācijas centru. Toreiz Kauņā bija nelabvēlīgi apstākļi Lietuvas militāro vienību veidošanai, īpaši tāpēc, ka līdz 1919. gada jūlijam Kauņu faktiski kontrolēja un pārvaldīja Vācijas militārā administrācija. Neatkarīgās Lietuvas valsts institūciju izveidošanas process un pilsētas kontroles pārņemšana noritēja smagi un lēni. Kauņā Lietuvas militārpersonas jutās kā ienaidnieka ielenktas un tika nepārtraukti vajātas gan no komunistiski noskaņoto vācu karavīru, gan no vietējo pilsoņu puses, kurus kūdīja bolševiki vai tie, kas izplatīja pretvalstiskas idejas. Reizēm šādas sadursmes beidzās ar lietuviešu karavīru dzīvības zaudēšanu, bet biežāk ar ievainojumiem un kroplošanu, kuru dēļ karavīri nokļuva militārajā hospitālī. Šajā situācijā Militārās skolas kadeti pozitīvi izcēlās un bija pietiekami populāri vietējo iedzīvotāju vidū.

## Introduction

Due to objective causes Lithuanian Armed Forces were formed at the very height of the fighting for independence. It is worth noting that the establishment of Lithuanian Armed Forces proceeded with the young state having neither material nor administrative resources. In January 1919, Kaunas became the provisional and factual capital of the Republic of Lithuania as well as a center for the concentration of volunteers, training of officers, and formation of various military units. At the beginning of 1919, conditions for the formation of Lithuanian military units were particularly unfavorable, especially since until the July of 1919, Kaunas was actually controlled and governed by German military administration. In addition to that, the demoralized and barely controlled military personnel of German Army, particularly the so-called “Spartacists”, formed not only their own Soldiers’ Boards but also conducted sallies against the soldiers of the Lithuanian Armed Forces then undergoing formation and state institutions. This caused quite a few conflicts in the aftermath of which Lithuanian soldiers would be killed. Certainly, Lithuanian state institutions gradually took over the control of Kaunas, but the process was hard and slow-going. A significant problem was the population of Kaunas, the majority of which were non-Lithuanians; therefore, it is no wonder that among them prevailed anti-Lithuanian sentiments against both the Lithuanian State and its Armed Forces and individual soldiers. The inhabitants of Kaunas treated Lithuanian soldiers with open contempt and insulted them by calling them derogatory words like clog-bearers, blockheads, army of bumpkins, and other epithets. According to the former Minister of Internal Affairs, Rapolas Skipitis, Polish-speaking citizens of Kaunas also demonstrated malevolence towards officials taking up their residence in Kaunas: “We are in majority in Kaunas and we are in command here but not the blockheads that have come from the countryside.” Jews, watching Lithuanian soldiers marching along the streets used to speak ironically: “Look, these clog-wearing country boors will defeat the great Russian Army! Kaunas was and will remain a Russian city.” (Skipitis 1961, 59–60)

The situation was further complicated by the fact that the Lithuanian police being formed in Kaunas was incapable of ensuring public order and peace in the interim capital. Therefore, military personnel of Kaunas garrison were forced to execute functions actually not assigned to them, i.e., to conduct night-time searches, pursue smugglers and fight against Kaunas citizens illegally making and selling moonshine. No doubt, this increased animosity against the Lithuanian Armed Forces. No less important was the fact that in Kaunas, at the beginning of 1919, Bolshevik propagandists actively operated by overtly conducting recruitment to the Red Army. Bolshevik propagandists promised a monthly salary of 300 Ostmarks by paying it for half a year in advance. Whereas the Lithuanian Government in its proclamations promised to pay just one hundred Ostmarks (*Savanorių žygiai* 1991, 248).

During the period under analysis, it is possible to relatively categorize Kaunas garrison into two parts: firstly, rear units, i.e., the Military School, the Military Aviation School, engineering, technical, aviation-related, logistical, and other military units as

well as Commandant's Headquarters for the city and district. Secondly, active combat units, i.e., the 2nd Infantry Regiment and combat units under formation at Kaunas Commandant's Headquarters, first of all the Hussar Squadron, later on renamed as the 1<sup>st</sup> Hussar Regiment as well as Kaunas battalions that later became the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiments.

The purpose of the article is to survey the relations of the soldiers of Kaunas garrison of the Lithuanian Armed Forces with the citizens of Kaunas in 1919 through the prism of the daily routine.

### **Relations of Military School cadets with Kaunas citizens**

From the beginning of 1919, volunteers having chosen to join the Lithuanian Armed Forces and arriving in Kaunas first found themselves at the Registration Point. In winter, it was cold in the Registration Point and bunks made of planks were bare, without any straw. The coming volunteers were not fed; they ate whatever they brought from home (*Savanorių žygiai* 1991, 109). At night, they slept wherever they found room, mostly on the floor. Though theoretically all the volunteers could choose in which unit to serve, officers proposed to join the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment or the Commandant's Headquarters of Kaunas city and district, other alternatives were simply non-existent. Cold and hunger helped fast to decide that it was necessary to choose whatever was proposed. It was true that later, having got accustomed to the changed environment, they used to ask to transfer them or simply willfully moved to another unit where service was better and more representative. The best service conditions were in institutions training officers, the most important of them was the Military School. Although the living conditions of the first Classes of the Military School were described as much more than spartan, they were considerably better in comparison to those in other units of Kaunas garrison.

The Military School had a barber's shop, but cadets could use the services of the barber and have their beards shaved not more than twice a week (LCSA, 1451. f., 2. apr., 1. l, 7. lp.). Cadets had no free time; therefore, they could go out rarely. On Sundays, all Roman Catholics were taken to the garrison church for mass. Upon the return from the church, those who had no penalties got permission to visit the city (*Šliogeris* 1920, 230). In public, cadets' behavior was exemplary (discipline was particularly strict) and modest since money-wise their pockets were empty – they usually would spend half of their 50 Ostmark pay on food (*Mašiotas* 1982, 59).

In 1919, cadets of the Military School lived under constant combat readiness conditions because except for the Kaunas city and district Commandant's Headquarters company there was not a single military unit that could ensure order and peace in the interim capital. Therefore, the Military School was also forced to execute functions not assigned to it. This was particularly difficult for the 1<sup>st</sup> Class cadets who had to often go on patrol or safeguard the railway station, bridges, state institutions, the bank, the Government Palace or to lend assistance to combat units upon receiving the information that German "Spartacists" were ready to attack. Cadets of the Military School were also sent to conduct night-time searches in flats of communist

organizations, members of POW (pol. *Polska Organizacja Wojskowa*), smugglers and moonshine makers (Kiaunė 1954, 153). The search for the data on how the attitude of Kaunas community towards the Military School and its cadets kept changing was unsuccessful; however, it is reasonable to think that disciplined and fight-efficient cadets had to inspire respectful awe among the inhabitants entertaining anti-State disposition and joy, hope and pride among the patriots of Lithuania. In 1919, the Military School and its cadets were considered ambiguously. This consideration depended on the attitude of Kaunas citizens towards the Lithuanian State undergoing restoration. Those supporting the Lithuanian statehood assessed the activity of the Military School in ensuring order and stability in the city positively. A completely opposite assessment was typical of citizens embracing anti-Lithuanian and anti-statehood attitude while night-time searches conducted by cadets only strengthened that animosity. During the exploration, no data were found whether the cadets of the Military School had been assaulted or called bad names by citizens unlike the frequent occurrences concerning soldiers serving in Kaunas city and district Commandant's Office or in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment. Taking into consideration discrepancies in opinions and attitudes of local inhabitants, there emerged a necessity for the command of the Military School and cadets not only to retain their good name and favor of patriotically dispositioned population but also to win over the indifferent and instill in anti-statehood dispositioned inhabitants reverent fear and make them respect the restored Lithuanian State as well as its Armed Forces. Thus, from the very first days of the establishment of the Military School, its command and cadets made efforts to shape a positive image of the Lithuanian Armed Forces in the eyes of Kaunas community. The command of the military School aimed at making the appearance of cadets look beyond reproach (sometimes even using drastic means) and sought that their marching in city streets would provoke in Kaunas population not only positive associations but also admiration and liking. Physical development of Military School cadets was also meant to psychologically affect Kaunas citizens. Cadets, by running along Kaunas streets in harmonious formation despite the cold or nasty weather, demonstrated determination, endurance, combat spirit, and force. These "joggings" of would-be officers had to clearly demonstrate and prove to the local population as well as to German and French soldiers their physical fitness and trust in the growing might of the Lithuanian Armed Forces. This open demonstration of the fighting spirit and determination was unambiguously perceived and estimated not only by the population of anti-State disposition but also by the Command of the Lithuanian Armed Forces and the State. In a critical situation, the Military School used to be assigned to execute the most complicated and crucial missions that would-be officers executed with determination and beyond reproach. However, Kaunas citizens were most fascinated by marching songs of the cadets of the Military School. Since no special time was allotted for teaching and learning of marching songs, cadets voluntarily organized rehearsals during their free time before or after the roll-call. Although tired, cadets willingly attended singing lessons. It was the matter not only of honor but also of prestige. While marching back to the Military School, after the mass at the Garrison

church, it was pleasant for each of the cadets to receive praise (sometimes not in Lithuanian): *ladny chlopcy*, *ladnie spievaju* (handsome lads, beautiful singing) from quite a large company of young people (fellow- and non-fellow countrymen and young women) accompanying them (Šliogeris 1920, 230). At that time, cadets mostly performed songs by poet Maironis.

### **Service in units at the Commandant's Headquarters for Kaunas city and district**

Service in Kaunas city and district Commandant's Headquarters was slightly different. Its training company (about 100 soldiers, several officers and non-commissioned officers) was deployed in the center of Kaunas from its very foundation on 1 August 1919; therefore, soldiers' barracks, as they are described in remembrances, were spacious and clean (LMA VB RS 193. f., 46. l., 1. lp.). Food, though initially poor, gradually improved. Soldiers baked white bread from flour received from the USA, cooked porridge from groats and sometimes ate meat (LMA VB RS 193. f., 27. l., 2. lp.). From the very beginning of January 1919, when the Lithuanian Armed Forces started settling in Kaunas, the relations with the German army deployed here until its departure in July were tense and considerably hostile. German soldiers looked down at the forming Lithuanian Armed Forces with open contempt and taunted volunteers by calling them: *Litauishen Hund*, *Litauishen Schweine*, etc. (LMA VB RS 193. f., 46. l., 1. lp.). The situation was particularly complicated by the fact that, in spite of all factual circumstances, Germany and its Army were considered an ally, therefore, attempts were made to retain friendly relations. Lithuanian military personnel were commanded by the Order of the Minister of National Defense dated 24 February 1919 to politely treat German officers and soldiers in order to avoid unfavorable incidents (Order of the Ministry of Defence No. 36). Despite bilateral efforts, lethal outcomes were not avoided. On 11 January 1919, in the vicinity of the railway station, Germans shot Juozas Kalasiūnas and Antanas Zambacevičius, volunteers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment, while the latter were going to the Red Cross hospital; on 19 February, another volunteer of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment, Bronius Šimolaitis, was shot while being on patrol; on 18 March, the volunteer Pranas Eimutis was killed at the Metropolis hotel (Jakštys 2019, 98). In Kaunas, Lithuanian military personnel constantly felt like being surrounded by the enemy and continually persecuted by both communist-minded German soldiers and local citizens incited by Bolsheviks or those entertaining anti-State attitude who used to throw brickbats at Lithuanian volunteers in uniform as soon as they appeared in city streets (*Savanorių žygiai* 1991, 247). Attempting to somewhat control the situation, officers of the Commandant's Headquarters for Kaunas city and district tried not to allow volunteers to go out because it was not safe to walk in the Old Town or in more remote areas wearing a military uniform, since ill-disposed citizens tried to poke them with knives or attempted to assault them in other diverse ways. Quite a few soldiers of the Commandant's Office were attacked in the Old Town and particularly frequently on the Market place; they were often beaten and knife-wounded and found themselves in hospital (LMA VB RS 193. f., 52. l., 1. lp.). In 1919, with

Bolshevik forces approaching Kaunas, the relations between the local population and the military personnel of Kaunas city and district Commandant's Headquarters were still further complicated by the proclaimed martial law. After the declaration of the martial law, soldiers were sent to patrol the Aleksotas-Garliava highway. The order stated to prevent anybody from taking foodstuffs out of Kaunas without a special permission of Kaunas Commandant. On 16 February, upon arriving at the post in Aleksotas (a suburb of Kaunas), volunteers encountered hostile local population, quite a few of whom refused to let Lithuanian military personnel to have a place for rest because they were ill-disposed towards Lithuania. At night, military personnel were fired upon from the neighboring houses. Reacting to the afore-said, the military personnel identified the shooting-related houses and conducted searches in them. In all the instances, the troops, having identified the houses and broken into them, treated the residents roughly and cruelly (LMA VB RS 193., f., 60. l., 8–9. lp.). Such mutual everyday behavior could not serve as a basis for good relations. During this period, Kaunas was in a situation when each evening started with shooting and explosions of grenades. It was particularly difficult to determine who specifically and why used to open fire because the city abounded in people sympathizing with Bolsheviks; the more so, their activity was encouraged by the approaching Bolshevik army. The disorder in Kaunas was also caused by ever more and more demoralized German army and diverse criminal elements who perceived the complexity of the situation and tried to take the most advantage of it.

### **Conclusion**

In 1919, military personnel of the Lithuanian Armed Forces deployed in Kaunas were treated not without ambiguity. The standpoint towards Lithuanian troops depended on how the population of that time treated the Lithuanian State under restoration. Those supporting the Lithuanian statehood assessed the activity of the military personnel in ensuring order and stability in the city positively. A completely opposite assessment was typical of citizens embracing anti-Lithuanian and anti-statehood attitude while night-time searches conducted by troops only strengthened that animosity. In this context, Military School cadets who distinguished themselves by strict discipline and were popular among local young women clearly stood out. Their Sunday marching to the Garrison church was a genuine entertainment for the population of Kaunas.

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