

# The Finnish Guard's campaign to Poland, 1831

Finnish soldiers in outsiders' perspectives

by

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### Preface

On November 29<sup>th</sup> 1830, four months after the July Revolution in Paris, a military revolt broke out in Warsaw, thrusting the Congress Kingdom of Poland, the *Kongresówka*, into a full-scale uprising against the Russian Empire. Among the military units assembled by the Tsar for the punitive expedition against the rebellious borderland was the Imperial Life-Guard's Finnish Sharp-Shooter Battalion, the so-called Finnish Guard, commanded by Colonel Anders Edvard Ramsay.

The Finnish Guard reached Poland in March of 1831, received its baptism of fire in the skirmishes of Krasnosielc and Wyszaków in mid-April, and experienced its first serious battles against general Dezydery Chłapowski's Polish lancers at Przetycz, Długosiodło and Wąsewo in southwestern Mazovia on May 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>. In the final advance against Warsaw, the Finnish soldiers participated in the storming of the redoubts of Rakowiec and Szczęśliwice on September 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>. The Battalion suffered disproportionate casualties, losing almost two-thirds of its original strength, mostly to cholera and other diseases. The Finnish soldiers returned to Helsinki in August of 1832, and the grateful Emperor rewarded the unit with the banner of St. George.<sup>1</sup>

The soldiers of the Finnish Guard who followed the banner of the double-headed eagle and the golden lion in the fight against the Polish insurrectionaries have remained mostly a footnote in the Finnish historiography.<sup>2</sup> Al-

<sup>1</sup> G. A. GRIPENBERG: *Lifgardets 3 finska skarpskyttbataljon 1812-1905; ett minnesblad* [Life-Guard's 3rd Finnish Sharp-Shooter Battalion 1812-1905; a memorial publication], Helsingfors 1905, pp. 81-91; JUSSI JALONEN: "Aż do gorzkiego końca; Finowie przeciw Polakom" [To the bitter end; Finns against Poles], *Tygodnik Powszechny* 20 (3071), 18 May 2008; IDEM: *Keisarin puolesta – Suomen kaartin sotaretki Puolaan 1831* [On behalf of the Emperor – Finnish Guard's Campaign to Poland, 1831], in: *Itämeren itä laidalla; näkökulmia identiteetin ja yhteistyön historiaan* [On the Eastern Side of the Baltic Sea; Viewpoints to the History of Identity and Cooperation], ed. by KARI ALENIOUS et al., Rovaniemi 2006 (*Studia Historica Septentrionalia*, 48), pp. 121-135.

<sup>2</sup> For typical examples, see MATTI KLINGE: *Keisarin Suomi* [Emperor's Finland], Espoo 1997, p. 83; JUHANI PAASIVIRTA: *Suomi ja Eurooppa; Autonomiakausi ja kansainväliset*

though the various political consequences of the November Uprising to Finnish autonomy have been discussed in research literature from time to time, no independent study has been made of the Finnish Guard's participation in the Polish campaign of 1831. Even the military histories of the Guard have tended to ignore the battles in Poland and have instead chosen to focus on the service of the Finnish Guard in the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878.<sup>3</sup> This predominance of the Turkish campaign in research literature is partly due to the greater availability of domestic sources from that era. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, newspapers and other forms of mass media had made their breakthrough in Finland, and the literate rank-and-file soldiers were able to write and sometimes even publish their war stories in their native language. In contrast, at the time of the Polish campaign, Finland was still an early-modern society, the "political night" that reigned supreme during the first decades of Russian rule still constrained public discourse, the Finnish national awakening was yet to take place, and the state of education and the written vernacular were not yet sufficient for the soldiers to record their experiences.

Even though the Finnish soldiers themselves may not have managed to preserve their recollections from the battlefields of Poland in written form, this does not mean that their participation in the campaign went unnoticed by others people at the front. Polish officers who fought in the insurgent forces as well as Swedish doctors who had arrived in Poland as volunteers subsequently wrote down their impressions of the Finnish sharpshooters, providing an external perspective on the soldiers of the northern nation who had fought as tools of the Imperial Russian war machine in the suppression of the Polish struggle for independence. Written by men who served on the opposing side, these memoirs make it possible to observe and analyze the role of the Finnish soldiers not only from the grass-roots perspective, but also in the greater, trans-national context of the war, revealing the historical significance of the campaign for the entire Baltic region.

This article shall focus on the exploration of the recorded Polish impressions and stereotypes of Finnish soldiers in the general context of the political and literary discourse that took place after the defeat of the November Uprising. Special attention is given to the memoirs of Stanisław Jabłonowski, which, in one short paragraph, aptly managed to capture the fun-

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kriisit 1808-1914 [Finland and Europe; the Era of Autonomy and International Crisis 1808-1914], Helsinki 1978, p. 109; HELGE POHJOLAN-PIRHONEN: *Kansakunnan historia III: Kansakunta löytää itsensä, 1808-1855* [History of the Nation III: The Nation discovers itself, 1808-1855], Porvoo 1973, p. 461.

<sup>3</sup> TEUVO LAITILA: *The Finnish Guard in the Balkans; Heroism, Imperial Loyalty and Finnishness in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 as recollected in the Memoirs of Finnish Guardsmen*, Helsinki 2003 (*Suomalaisen Tiedeakatemian toimituksia: Humaniora*, 324), p. 83. However, a beautifully illustrated narrative on the participation of the Finnish Guard in the Polish campaign was included in a recent popular history book by TORSTEN EKMAN: *Suomen kaarti 1812-1905* [Finnish Guard 1812-1905], Helsinki 2006, pp. 81-127.

damental historical contrast between the Polish and Finnish attitudes towards Imperial Russia, as well as the bewilderment which the Finnish sentiments of loyalty to the Tsarist régime caused in the author. Furthermore, this article shall analyze the memoirs of Swedish doctor Sven Jonas Stille and their portrayal of the captured Finnish sharp-shooters, their war experience and their identity as uprooted soldiers far away from their homeland. In closing, this article shall assess the significance of these presentations both in national and trans-national contexts, including specifically the memory of the November Uprising and its aftermath, the history of Polish-Finnish relations during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the development of Finnish national consciousness and military traditions.

### Polish recollections of Finnish soldiers on the battlefield

As a minority nation in the Russian Empire, the Poles paid special attention to the colourful ethnic character of the Russian army they were fighting against in 1830-1831. During the decades that followed the November Uprising, Polish national romantic poets and writers repeatedly invoked the memory of the non-Russian soldiers of the Tsarist army, who were usually portrayed as mindless foreign fighting slaves unleashed by the nefarious Emperor on the Polish freedom fighters. Adam Mickiewicz, the Polish national poet, approached the multi-national assortment of the Russian rank and file in his epic "*Dziady*", presenting the Tsarist military machine as an "alien, non-Slavonic force".<sup>4</sup> Ludwik Mierosławski, who fought in the November Uprising and spent the rest of his life as a professional revolutionary all across Europe, also recalled the exotic tribesmen summoned by the Russian Tsar from the distant corners of the Empire and the impact they had made on the Polish insurgents on the battlefield of Grochów:

"Tam chudy Krymczyk o maleńkim oku,  
Tunguz, Lapończyk, Samojed z Wajgacza."<sup>5</sup>

The memory of these wild, barbaric, Asiatic warriors, whose alien features had struck such a fear in the hearts of the Polish soldiers, allowed Mickiewicz, Mierosławski and other revolutionary nationalist poets to present the November Uprising as a latter-day Thermopylae – as a desperate battle of a small nation against a multi-national Oriental Empire, portraying Poland as the *antemurale* of European civilization against the brutal hordes of Muscovy. The foreign soldiers of the Tsar were regarded as a testimony of how Russia

<sup>4</sup> STANISŁAW EILE: The Image of Russia in Polish Romanticism, in: Finland and Poland in the Russian Empire: A Comparative Study, ed. by MICHAEL BRANCH et al., London 1995, pp. 179-189, here pp. 188-189.

<sup>5</sup> "There was a slim Crimean with his squinted eyes, a Tunguz, a Laplander and a Samoyed from Vaygach". LUDWIK MIEROSŁAWSKI: Bitwa Grochowska [The Battle of Grochów], Paryż 1835, p. 7 [<http://www.polona.pl/dlibra/doccontent2?id=4190&dirids=1>].

had forsaken its genuine Slavonic character, whereas the Poles had remained true to their origins. This accusation nicely provided the vanquished Poles with a sense of moral victory, explaining their defeat not on the basis of the Russian military superiority, but instead just attributing it to the despotic ability of the Muscovites to muster more cannon fodder from their subject races.<sup>6</sup> This interpretation was actually not too far off the mark, for the Russians had indeed often used their ethnic troops such as the Kalmyks or the Bashkirs in Central European military campaigns, specifically with the intention of “instilling terror among the enemy” with the display of “savage” soldiers.<sup>7</sup> As one can perhaps already conclude from Mierosławski’s reference to the “Laplanders”, the soldiers of the Imperial Life-Guard’s Finnish Sharp-Shooter Battalion – *strzelcy finlandcy*, as the Poles called them – were not left unnoticed in the post-war Polish depictions of the war, either.<sup>8</sup>

During the battles on the road from Przetycz to Długosiodło and Wąsewo in southwestern Mazovia on May 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>, in which the Finnish Battalion had been practically decimated, the performance of that unit had not escaped the attention of the Polish commanders. During the retreat, the sharp-shooters of the distant northern nation had briefly managed to hold back the vanguard of General Jan Skrzynecki’s army and the full weight of the Polish offensive, a fact which aroused amazement and even respect among the Polish officers. Prince Stanisław Jabłonowski, who served in the army of the *Kongresówka* and saw action as a young lieutenant in a Guards’ Horse Artillery Battery during Skrzynecki’s offensive, recorded his experiences in the battles on the road to Wąsewo with special attention to the role of the Finnish sharpshooters in the fighting:

“Our first encounter with the enemy was in the village of Przetycz, where the Finnish riflemen of the Guard’s Infantry, with their valiant resistance, held

<sup>6</sup> Comparable apologies were subsequently made after the American Civil War, when the Southern writers noted how the Union Army had contained a high proportion of recent immigrants, “trash of Europe”; likewise, during the First World War, the Germans regarded the French use of colonial troops on the Western front as a “violation of the rules” and an “affront to the White civilization”. WOLFGANG SCHIVELBUSCH: *The Culture of Defeat; on National Trauma, Mourning and Recovery*, London 2003, p. 61.

<sup>7</sup> Kalmyk warriors armed with their traditional bows and arrows had still seen action in the battles against the Prussian forces in the Seven Years’ War. CHRISTOPHER DUFFY: *Russia’s Military Way to the West; Origins and Nature of the Russian Military Power*, London 1981, p. 164.

<sup>8</sup> The Russian attributes *finski* and *finlandski* are often conflated in Polish sources. The former refers to ethnic Finnish units, such as the Finnish Guard, whose soldiers and officers were recruited solely from the inhabitants of the Grand-Duchy of Finland; the latter refers simply to those regular units of the Russian army that were garrisoned in Finland, but which often also had native Finnish officers in service. This article focuses on those descriptions which clearly concern the soldiers of the Finnish Guard. PERTTI LUNTINEN: *The Imperial Russian Army and Navy in Finland*, Helsinki 1997 (*Studia Historica*, 56), pp. 60-61.

back the advance of our army. Deployed in the forest, they retreated step by step; and in spite of the strong pressure of our vanguard, in spite of constant infantry assaults and constant cavalry charges, in spite of the fact that [artillery commander Alexander] Ekielski and his field-guns were shelling them without a pause, these battalions, shooting excellently and killing several of our men, were slow to retreat. During the whole day we advanced only a mile and we were forced to halt repeatedly.”<sup>9</sup>

Jabłonowski also mentions that in the subsequent clash at Długosiodło, the enemy riflemen succeeded in killing staff officer Wolski and wounding Tomasz Potocki, an officer from the 1<sup>st</sup> Light Horse Artillery Battery and an aide-de-camp to General Skrzyniecki.<sup>10</sup> A broadly similar account of the fighting was given by Ignacy Kruszewski, who served as the second ADC and was also wounded during the fighting. Kruszewski, who later went on to a career in the Royal Belgian army where he reached the rank of general, reminisced about how the Finnish sharp-shooters had used hit-and-run tactics and relied on the nearby forest and the buildings of the village as a cover during the battle of Przetycz. The Polish general also commented on the armaments of the Finnish and Russian soldiers fighting at Długosiodło; according to Kruszewski, the soldiers were armed with “short carbines and long bayonets”.<sup>11</sup> What is significant is that even though the two companies of Finnish sharp-shooters had actually formed less than half of the effective strength of the Russian rear-guard – the rest were actually Russian soldiers from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the Life-Guard’s Jäger Regiment – both Kruszewski and Jabłonowski remembered the encounter specifically for the participation of the Finnish soldiers.

Jabłonowski’s and Kruszewski’s recollections of how the Finnish sharp-shooters exploited the forest and the terrain to their advantage are probably correct. Considering the rigid quality of peacetime drill in the Imperial Life-Guard, one wonders how much these tactics were actually due to previous training, and how much simply due to brilliant improvisation under desperate circumstances. Faced with the onslaught of the largest enemy force so far, the Finnish soldiers may have simply resorted to their instincts, forgotten the niceties of linear tactics for a while and fought for their survival to the best of

<sup>9</sup> “Pierwsze nasze z nimi spotkanie było we wsi Przetycza, gdzie strzelcy finlandzcy piesi gwardyi mężnym oporem wstrzymywali pochód naszego wojska. W lesie rozlokowani ustępowali krok za krokiem, a mimo silnego parcia przedniej naszej straży, mimo ciągłych szturmów piechoty, ciągłych szarż kawalerii, mimo tego, że Ekielski ze swemi działami nieustannie ich kartaczami gromił, bataliony te, doskonale strzelając i wiele nam ludzi zabijając, zwolna ustępowwały. Przez cały dzień ledwie milę uszliśmy i ustawicznie musieliśmy się zatrzymywać.” STANISŁAW JABŁONOWSKI: *Wspomnienia o baterii pozycyjnej artylerii konnej gwardii królewsko-polskiej* [Memoirs from a Polish Royal Guard’s Horse Artillery Battery], Kraków 1916, p. 78.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>11</sup> IGNACY KRUSZEWSKI: *Pamiętniki z roku 1830-1831* [Journal from 1830-1831], Kraków 1890, pp. 108-109.

their abilities. Whatever the actual reality of the situation may have been, the descriptions of Finnish sharp-shooters lurking in the forests with their rifles and killing the attacking Polish chasseurs and lancers nonetheless bear a striking similarity to the legends of the imaginary Finnish snipers – the so-called *kukushki* – concocted by the Ukrainian soldiers of the Red Army during the Winter War of 1939–1940. The supposedly excellent marksmanship of the Finnish soldiers even became a feature in 19<sup>th</sup> century Polish historical novels, probably as a direct result of the 1831 campaign. Finnish sharp-shooters and their excellent marksmanship were subsequently mentioned in the novels of at least two popular authors, Adam Amilkar Kosiński and Kazimierz Władysław Wójcicki. Both of these stories actually take place during the Swedish Wars of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but given their similarity to Kruszewski's and Jabłonowski's anecdotes, one suspects that these descriptions of Finnish soldiers in Swedish service were influenced by the recent memory of the Finnish Guard's participation in the 1831 campaign.<sup>12</sup>

These anecdotes about the Finnish sharp-shooters would seem to be yet another example of the legends of untamed tribal warriors in Russian service. The Finns are described as a tough martial race who, as the inhabitants of the taiga belt, possess the natural prowess of fighting in the forest, and who are not scared of taking on an enemy twice their size. Armed with ad hoc weapons, these cold-blooded soldiers of the Far North kill indiscriminately, and not even the Polish officers are safe from their lethal rifle fire. Such examples of equating battlefield behaviour with ethnicity and national character are known throughout history, and have remained common in our times.<sup>13</sup> Needless to say, the Poles have, in popular imagination, also been attested to have a similar propensity for bellicosity and special talents in certain forms of combat – in their case, the cavalry. Both the Finns and the Poles have sometimes willingly embraced these respective stereotypes of their martial character and used them as cornerstones in the writing of national history.<sup>14</sup> At the time of the Polish campaign, Finnish authors were already converting the folklore of their own nation into an epic form, with poets such as Frans Mikael Franzén extolling the continuum of Finnish heroism that presumably extended from the Thirty Years' War all the way to the War of 1808–1809.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> ADAM AMILKAR KOSIŃSKI: *Powieści z dziejów polskich*, tom III [Tales from the Polish Past, vol. III], Warszawa 1851, p. 51; KAZIMIERZ WŁADYSŁAW WÓJCICKI: *Kurpie; powieść historyczna*, tom I [Kurpie; A Historical Novel, vol. 1], Lwów 1834, p. 33.

<sup>13</sup> JOANNA BOURKE: *An Intimate History of Killing; Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare*, London 2006, pp. 105–106.

<sup>14</sup> For Polish examples, see NORMAN DAVIES: *God's Playground; A History of Poland*, Revised Edition, vol. II; 1795 to the Present, Oxford 2005, pp. 195–196, 200–201; see also *Polskie Tradycje Wojskowe* [Polish Military Traditions], ed. by JANUSZ SIKORSKI, Warszawa 1990.

<sup>15</sup> LÄTTILÄ (cf. footnote 3), p. 61.



Praising the "valiant resistance" of the Finnish sharp-shooters was perhaps due at least in part to the desire of the Polish writers to glorify the initial success of Skrzynecki's eventually disastrous offensive. After all, the exultation of the brave enemy also made those brief Polish victories appear all the more magnificent. Consequently, as these recollections were imprinted in Polish historical memory, Finnish soldiers became yet another element of the "alien, non-Slavonic force" described by Mickiewicz, one more distant bellicose nation that had flocked under the Russian banner at the Tsar's orders, a fearsome opponent, but simultaneously, also a brave enemy worthy of respect and admiration, over whom the Poles had gained a hard-earned victory. The Polish officers were probably also able to recognize the historical similarities between the Finnish soldiers and themselves. Less than a quarter century earlier, the Polish *chevaux-légers* of Napoleon's Imperial Guard – another multi-national force – had participated in the French campaign in Spain, earning a legendary reputation in the battle of Somosierra at the gates of Madrid.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, more passing references to the Finnish sharp-shooters and their talents as marksmen can also be found in the memoirs of Leon Dembowski, who served as the Minister of the Treasury for the Polish National Government during the Uprising, and in the memoirs of Roman Krański, who fought at the Battle of Ostrołęka.<sup>17</sup> Leaving aside the special attention paid to the already-described distinctive battlefield role of the Finnish soldiers, these memoirs basically treat the Finns merely as one more foreign nation employed by the Russian army, as yet another faceless enemy. Their main significance lies in the fact that the presence of Finnish soldiers at Przemyśl and Długosiodło, which were otherwise very small encounters, actually managed to trigger at least moderate interest among contemporary Polish observers.

A somewhat more intimate Polish portrayal of the Finnish soldiers can be found from the memoirs of Teodor Teutold Stulichon Tripplin, one of the young Polish cadets who participated in the November Uprising and who later became a notable physician. This 18-year old scion of a Huguenot-Calvinist family served in the Polish cavalry as a 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant, and saw action in the battles of Grochów, Iganie and Ostrołęka. Twenty-five years after the 1831 campaign, Tripplin made an auscultation visit to the hospitals of Vilnius, and his observations on the confinement of local Finnish patients reactivated his memories of the wounded Finnish soldiers whose plight he had witnessed on the Polish battlefields a quarter century before:

"The Finns differed from all others due to their characteristic facial expression portraying the longing and nostalgia for their homeland – an illness that I'm

<sup>16</sup> DAVIES (cf. footnote 14), p. 221.

<sup>17</sup> LEON DEMBOWSKI: *Moje Wspomnienia*, Tom II [My Memoirs, vol. II], Petersburg 1898, p. 251; *Pamiętki i Wspomnienia, z sanockiej ziemi, Część I* [Journals and Memoirs, from the Land of Sanok, part I], collected by J. TRZECIESKI, Krosno 1907, p. 180.

regretfully familiar with from my own experience. Once upon a time, I saw these same Finns at Ostrołęka; back then, they did not arouse feelings of mercy, but other sentiments. But in our happy land, times are changing, and so are the people. If only everyone could get rid of the feelings of grief in their hearts!”<sup>18</sup>

The Finnish Sharp-Shooter Battalion spent the Crimean War of 1854-1856 stationed in the Baltic provinces and on the western borders of the Empire, and was severely crippled by typhus and cholera for most of this period.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, the Finnish patients whom Tripplin encountered in the hospitals of the old Lithuanian capital in 1856 may very well have been “the same people” he had seen at Ostrołęka in 1831, or at least people from the same military unit. After the outbreak of cholera in May 1831, one of the Russian military hospitals had been located at Ostrołęka, and the hospital had also treated the incapacitated soldiers of the Finnish Guard.<sup>20</sup> Since the Finnish Guard did not participate in the actual battle of Ostrołęka, Tripplin had probably seen evacuated Finnish soldiers at the local military hospital during Skrzynecki’s offensive, and twenty-five years later, the sight of the evacuated Finnish soldiers at the hospital of Vilnius reactivated this memory.

Tripplin does not specify the “other sentiments” that he had felt for the Finnish sharp-shooters when he had confronted them in the ranks of the enemy force for the first time back in 1831. His reference to the absence of mercy may be understood as an implication of hatred, fear, terror, contempt, aggression or other comparable negative emotions triggered by the desperate and violent circumstances of the war. Likewise, Tripplin’s appeal to the changing of hearts and people can be interpreted as an indication of his desire to forget and forgive. Such conciliatory figures of speech were obviously necessary also due to the censorship that still reigned under Alexander II, but Tripplin’s decision to express these emotions specifically when describing the fate of the Finnish soldiers is significant. The implicit message is the recognition that the Finnish soldiers had, in the end, also been victims and

<sup>18</sup> “Finlandczycy odróżniali się od wszystkich innych szczególnym wyrazem twarzy, na której malowała się tęsknota do kraju, nostalgia, – choroba znana mi niestety dobrze, z wiasnego doświadczenia. Widziałem tych samych Finlandczyków kiedyś pod Ostrołęką; wówczas nie wzbudzali oni litości, bez inne uczucia. Lecz na naszej ziemi szczęścia czasy się zmieniają, a z nimi i ludzie. Bodajby każdy mógł wyrugować ze swego serca martwiące uczucia!”. TEODOR TRIPPLIN: *Dziennik podróży po Litwie i Żmudzi odbyty w 1856 roku*, Tom I: Litwa [Diary of the Journey in Lithuania and Samogitia from 1856, vol. I: Lithuania], Wilno 1858, p. 112.

<sup>19</sup> EKMEN (cf. footnote 3), pp. 195-207.

<sup>20</sup> For documentary records on the Finnish soldiers who were evacuated to Ostrołęka due to the Cholera, see Bataillons-Ordres 125, Byn Nowowies, Maj 5 and Bataillons-Ordres 137, Byn Sokolowo, efter retraiten ifrån Byn Vonsevo, Maj 17 [Orders to the Battalion 137, at the village of Sokolowo, after the retreat from the village of Wąsewo], Finska Gardets Ordrejournaler 1831 [Finnish Guard’s Journal 1831], Finnish War Archives, Helsinki (Sota-Arkisto – henceforth SArk), M51/6.



casualties of the war. A quarter a century after the war, Tripplin was now able to look at the Finnish soldiers and regard them not merely as enemies, but as fellow humans.

The "longing" and "nostalgia" recognized by Tripplin on the faces of the Finnish soldiers are familiar themes in the Polish *émigré* literature and poetry. Practically the whole political elite of the old Congress Kingdom left Poland in the so-called "Great Emigration", *Wielka Emigracja*, that followed the suppression of the Polish Uprising; Tripplin himself evaded Russian capture by escaping to Prussia.<sup>21</sup> The yearning for his faraway homeland made it even easier for the Polish doctor to forget the past grievances and relate sympathetically to the plight of the Finnish soldiers who had been uprooted from their own country as well. Tripplin's compassionate attitude was characteristic for him, and unlike many other former insurgents who refused all reconciliation with the Tsarist régime and ended their lives in exile, he eventually opted for a *modus vivendi* with Russia. After his medical studies in Prussia, Britain, Spain, France and the Scandinavian countries, Tripplin returned to his homeland in 1849, spending most of the rest of his life quietly practicing medicine and writing popular science fiction novels resembling the later works of Jules Verne.

#### Stanisław Jabłonowski and captured Finnish officers

The brief encounters of the Poles and the Finns as enemies on the battlefield did not allow for any direct interaction. However, during the campaign, some Finnish officers and soldiers were taken as prisoners of war by the Poles. The detachment of Finnish sharp-shooters that fought at Długosiodło was commanded by Ensign (*npanopуuk*) Henrik Lyra and 2<sup>nd</sup> Ensign (*nod-npanopуuk*) Fabian Reinhold Niklas Spalding, both of whom ended up captured together with their men as the Polish lancers surrounded their positions. A brief anecdote about these Finnish officers and their experiences in Polish custody was later included in the memoirs of prince Stanisław Jabłonowski:

"As the Muscovite prisoners were brought to our camp, we were gathered together with the officers of our battery for a breakfast at the post of our commander, Lieutenant Colonel [Józef] Bem. We invited some of the officers among the prisoners to join us. During our conversation with them, we were astonished that they, Swedes, uprooted from their motherland by force, had fought with such a conviction for the cause of that same regime which had made war on them – and that they had fought against us, when they ought to have extended us a friendly hand, especially since we had found ourselves in a similar situation. The Swedes answered: 'True enough, we could join forces with you, but our homeland is distant and small, while Muscovy is large and

<sup>21</sup> DAVIES (cf. footnote 14), pp. 202-203, 214-215.

right there breathing down our necks. Whether it is pleasant or not, we shall carry out our orders with accuracy’.”<sup>22</sup>

Jabłonowski's story is an archetypical example of the 19<sup>th</sup> century military folklore, describing how the Polish officers, as true gentlemen, cordially invite some of their captured enemy colleagues to join for a good meal after a hard-fought battle, showing their respect towards a noble adversary. The captured officers gladly accept the hospitality and exchange friendly quips with their hosts, but in the end, politely but vehemently reject all suggestions of collaboration or switching sides, appealing to their patriotism and sense of duty, as well as to the exposed position of their homeland. Jabłonowski even stresses the exceptional loyalty of the Finnish officers still further, pointing out how many prisoners of war from the other units of the Russian army actually did show a willingness to defect and eventually opted for service in the ranks of the Polish insurgents.<sup>23</sup> Echoing chivalry, genuine homage to the courage of the captured enemy and mutual respect between two adversaries true to their cause, the story exemplifies perfectly the classic warrior myth that was still current in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and which has, in part, survived even to our times.<sup>24</sup>

Even though Jabłonowski had recognized the sharpshooters as “Finnish” in the previous paragraph of his memoirs, he describes the officers with the attribute “Swedish”, apparently simply because of their Swedish names and language. Although Lyra and Spalding are not mentioned by name – in fact, Jabłonowski does not even tell us the exact number of the men, as he speaks only vaguely of “some officers” – both of them would certainly fit the description well enough. Spalding hailed from a military family, and had enlisted for service in the Finnish Guard after the example of his elder brother, Berndt Magnus Fredrik Spalding, who was also serving in the Polish campaign as a staff captain in another Russian military unit, until his death in the field-hospital of Łomża. The father of the family, General Major Fredrik Johan Spalding, had earned his rank the hard way. As the son of a stock-broker, he had joined the Swedish army in Sveaborg as a young sergeant at the age of nine, served in King Gustav III's War of 1788-1790 and in the War of 1808-1809, and opted to stay in Finland after the Russian conquest of the country.

<sup>22</sup> “Kiedy do obozu naszego przyprowadzono jeńców moskiewskich, my oficerowie z baterii zebrani byliśmy u dowódcy naszego podpułkownika Bema na śniadanie, na które kilku jeńców oficerów zaprosiliśmy. W rozmowie zaczęliśmy się dziwić, że oni, Szwedzi, od swej matki ojczyzny siłą oderwani, tak zaciebie się biją za sprawę tego rządu, który ich zawojował – przeciwko nam, którymby rękę przyjaźni podać powinni, zwłaszcza, że się znajdujemy w tem samem co i oni położeniu. Odpowiedź Szwedów była: ‘Prawda, radzibyśmy się z wami połączyć, ale nasz kraj daleki i mały, a Moskwa wielka i tuż na karku – co nam każą, czy przyjemnie lub nie, wykonywamy z akuracją’.” JABŁONOWSKI (cf. footnote 9), p. 79.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>24</sup> BOURKE (cf. footnote 13), pp. 49-51.

General Major Spalding's application for a noble rank had been rejected by the Finnish *Riddarhus* in 1818, but given his record of distinguished service, he was accepted on the staff of the Governor General of Finland in the same year. Consequently, his sons were eligible for officer rank in spite of their non-noble background, as the sons of Finnish officers had, regardless of their estate, the same rights as the sons of officers of the Russian army in general.<sup>25</sup>

The 29-year old Lyra was also one of the few non-noble officers in the Imperial Guard, but perhaps a somewhat more exceptional case. As a son of chaplain Gabriel Lyra, he was a scion of a clerical family from southwestern Finland, and had gained an officer's commission through the rank of a *port d'épée* junker, a special arrangement that allowed distinguished non-nobles with no family connections the possibility of a promotion. According to the Imperial decree of 1818, the sons of Finnish clergymen were required to serve as non-commissioned officers for four years before becoming eligible for officer rank.<sup>26</sup> Both Spalding and Lyra were Swedish-speaking, and their upbringing had instilled into them a sense of commitment to their homeland. For Spalding, the officer's patriotic *ethos* stemmed directly from the military background of his family, whereas for Lyra, his father's clerical vocation and the traditional Lutheran obedience to higher authority provided a comparable example. In light of this, it would certainly not be too difficult to imagine either one of them answering the Polish officers in the stalwart manner that Jabłonowski recalled in his memoirs. Psychologically, the anecdote can also be seen as a typical example of a captured officer consoling himself by staying true to his duty. The triumph of individual virtue, redemption despite failure, and the salvaging of self respect in the face of defeat are ideas common to both Polish and Finnish military traditions.

Perhaps the most interesting part of the anecdote is the reference to the mixture of pragmatism and patriotism that characterized the loyalty of the Finnish officers. According to Jabłonowski, the Finnish officers were ap-

<sup>25</sup> Their mother, Anna Elisabet Spalding, née Hoppe, was also a daughter of a military family. See Suomalaiset kenraalit ja amiraalit Venäjän sotavoimissa 1809-1917 [Finnish Generals and Admirals in the Armed Forces of Russia 1809-1917], Biography Centre of the Finnish Literature Society 2006 [http://www.kansallisbiografia.fi/kenraalit/?gid=396]; J. E. O. SCREEN: The Entry of Finnish Officers into Russian Military Service 1809-1917, London 1976, pp. 157-158; KAARLO WIRILANDER: Suomen armeijan upseeristo, aliupseeristo ja sotilasvirkamiehistö 1812-1871 (1880); viranhaltijain luettelot [Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers and Military Officials of the Finnish Army, 1812-1871 (1880); Lists of Tenure-Holders], Helsinki 1995 (Suomen Historiallinen Seura, Käsikirjoja, 10), p. 90.

<sup>26</sup> Biografiska anteckningar öfver officerare och civile tjänstemän vid Lifgardets Finska Skarpskytte-Bataljon [Biographic notes of the Officers and Civil Officials in the Life-Guard's Finnish Sharp-Shooter Battalion], compiled by V. SCHWINDT, Helsingfors 1912, p. 77; SCREEN (cf. footnote 23), pp. 158-159; Suomalaiset kenraalit ja amiraalit Venäjän sotavoimissa 1809-1917 (cf. footnote 25) [http://dbgw.finlit.fi/kenraalit/?gid=261].

parently not unsympathetic to the Poles, and justified their loyalty towards Russia simply as a choice that was dictated by circumstances. The Finnish officers of the story approach the position of their "small, distant homeland" with the best interests of their nation in mind but also with realism, recognizing that the survival of Finland was dependent on the goodwill of Russia. This prevalent willingness to accommodate Russian interests was, indeed, a cornerstone of 19<sup>th</sup> century Finnish political autonomy, and the subsequent historiography has readily recognized the significance of Finnish loyalty towards Imperial Russia as the dominating tendency in the political life of the Grand Duchy, at least up to the February Manifesto of 1899.<sup>27</sup> As testified by Jabłonowski's memoirs, for the Polish officers, such willingness to compromise with the imperial master in the name of national interests was difficult to fathom, if not a complete contradiction in terms. For the Polish insurgents, the liberation struggle in itself was a culmination of cherished national ideals, and in spite of the similar geopolitical position of their country, they had not feared to embark on an insurrection, against all odds.

The meeting between Jabłonowski, Spalding and Lyra can thus be seen as a practical example of how the fundamental contrasts between Finland and Poland were reflected on an individual level. Accustomed to the shrewd, cold and rational political opportunism inherited from Sweden's Age of Liberty and saturated with the Pauline doctrine of the Lutheran Church, the Finnish officers saw their willing service of Imperial Russia as the best safeguard for the existence of their nation. Thus, in order to protect their country, they were ready to prove their loyalty to the Tsar even by force of arms. For the Polish officers, however, national interests entailed the rejection of all foreign domination and the assertion of sovereignty against the depredations of the neighbouring imperial powers, with the restoration of the ancient independence of Poland as the ultimate goal. Jabłonowski and his comrades simply could not comprehend why the Finns, as another nation forcibly conquered by Russia, were not fighting on the Polish side, for the same exact reasons. The Finnish officers, on their part, were at least able to understand the reasoning of their Polish hosts and to admit that such an alternative indeed existed. For the benefit of their homeland, however, it was a choice that they simply could not afford to make. Whether Jabłonowski's anecdote is historical or not, it nicely captures the peculiar historical contrast between Finnish loyalty and Polish insurrectionary nationalism.

When assessing this particular anecdote in Jabłonowski's memoirs, special emphasis should be given to the fact that his story was published thirty-eight years after his death, in the series *Biblioteczki Legionisty*. Founded in 1916 at the initiative of professor Wacław Tokarz, a renowned military historian from the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, and the Polish Superior National

<sup>27</sup> For a brief overview of this "compliant tradition", see, for example, STEVEN DUNCAN HUXLEY: *Constitutionalist Insurgency in Finland*, Helsinki 1990 (*Studia Historica*, 38), p. 8-10.

Committee (NKN, *Naczelny Komitet Narodowy*), this series was aimed at the Polish Legionnaires who were fighting as volunteers in the Austro-Hungarian army against the Russian Empire. The series included an impressive number of original memoirs and historical studies, intended both to educate the Polish soldiers as well as to instill them with activist ideology and a sense of historical mission in the spirit of national romanticism.<sup>28</sup> The fact that a publication that was intended for the Polish Legionnaires associated with the Austro-Hungarian Empire contained a reference to the Finnish sharpshooters associated with the Russian Empire is an ironic case of historical parallels. Back in 1831, the collaboration with Tsarist Russia and service in the Russian army had arguably brought benefits for Finland, in spite of the fact that Russia had once been considered a traditional enemy of Finland. Likewise, by 1916, the activists of the Polish National Committee were ready to consider the possibility that collaboration with the Central Powers and service in the Austro-Hungarian army could now bring comparable benefits for Poland, in spite of the fact that the Habsburg monarchy was also one of the partitioning powers and hence responsible for destruction of Polish independence.

By the time Jabłonowski's memoirs were published for a wider audience, the current of Polish insurrectionary nationalism as well as the relations between the partitioning powers were very different than in 1831. While the Polish revolutionaries of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had often attempted to make a stand against all the partitioning powers at once, by the time of the First World War, a new generation had come to recognize that collaboration with some of the old imperial enemies – in the same manner that Finland had done during the previous century – was necessary. Using Finland as a model was by no means uncommon in the Polish political discourse of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, although it was more often done by writers who were advocating conciliatory, positivist policies.<sup>29</sup> The reference to the Finnish officers and their pragmatic patriotism in the published edition of Jabłonowski's memoirs was probably nonetheless just an ironic coincidence, and not a deliberately-cited precedent chosen to support the goals of the Polish Legionary movement. The irony of the situation was amplified still further by the fact that when the Polish political activists had finally accepted the idea of collaboration with at least some of the partitioning powers, Finnish separatism from Russia, until that time a completely marginal phenomenon, had sudden-

<sup>28</sup> URSZULA PERKOWSKA: Działalność profesora Wacława Tokarza w latach I wojny światowej [The Activity of Professor Wacław Tokarz during the Years of the First World War], in: Alma Mater. Miesięcznik Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego 33/2001, pp. 15-17 [<http://www3.uj.edu.pl/alma/alma/33/01/05.html>].

<sup>29</sup> JUSSI JALONEN: The Shared Experience of the Imperial Past; the Era of Tsarist Russian Rule in Polish and Finnish Historical Perspectives, in: *Slovo* 21, No. 1, Spring 2009, pp. 4-16, here p. 9; JANUSZ KUCZYŃSKI: The Changing Picture of Warsaw Positivism in Polish Historiography, 1918-1989, Turku 2001 (Department of Political History, Publications, 22) p. 6.



ly reached its high point. At the same time when the Polish Legions were enlisting for service in the ranks of the Central Powers, the initiative of Finnish independence activists resulted in the emergence of the 27<sup>th</sup> Royal Prussian Jäger Battalion, a Finnish volunteer unit in the German army, which symbolized a decisive divergence from those old loyalist attitudes towards Russia that had once so amazed Jabłonowski and his friends.

### Sven Jonas Stille and the captured Finnish soldiers

Jabłonowski's memoirs of his brief meeting with the Finnish officers, although interesting, were written several years after the war. A more fresh and more illuminating account of Finnish prisoners of war in Polish custody was given by Sven Jonas Stille, a Swedish physician who served at a Polish field hospital during the 1831 campaign. As the general enthusiasm for the Polish cause had engulfed the academic community at the University of Lund after November 1830, Stille and his two friends, Zacharias Agaton Fredrik Stenkula and Gustaf Fredrik Bergh, had decided to volunteer for service on the Polish side. The decision of Stille and his comrades was apparently based more on humanitarian rather than political motives. As young doctors, they wanted to put their medical studies in good use and do their part in alleviating the suffering on the war zone, much in the same manner as Florence Nightingale and Henri Dunant were to do later in the same century. In his memoirs, Stille directed harsh criticism against the Polish revolution, the feudal remnants of the Polish social order and the national hatred between the Poles and the Russians, thus making it clear that his own service at a Polish field-hospital had been motivated solely by his professional calling as a physician.<sup>30</sup>

The journey of the three Swedish doctors to Poland had not been an easy one. At first, Stille, Stenkula and Bergh had traveled to Königsberg, from where they had crossed the border to the Polish side – illegally, since the Kingdom of Prussia had, as a member of the Holy Alliance, closed its borders with the Congress Kingdom in order to block the shipment of arms to the insurgents as well as to prevent the spread of the rising to the Grand-Duchy of Poznań and other ethnically Polish territories of Prussia. Upon his arrival at the Polish capital, Stille had enlisted for service at the Hospital of the Polish Guard's Corps in Warsaw, where he encountered captured Finnish soldiers. As Stille and his comrades were discussing in Swedish during a survey of wounded enemy soldiers at the barracks, one of the prisoners overheard their conversation and answered in the same language. In his memoirs, Stille described his delight at this surprising meeting with Finnish soldiers, men

<sup>30</sup> SVEN JONAS STILLE: *Anteckningar under en Resa till och ifrån Warschau vid slutet af Polska Frihets-Kriget 1831* [Notes from the Journey to and from Warsaw at the End of the Polish War of Liberation 1831], Lund 1834, pp. 3-5, 97-98; LARS ERICSON: *Svenska frivilliga; militära uppdrag i utlandet under 1800- och 1900-talen* [Swedish Volunteers: Foreign Military Involvement during the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries], Lund 1996, pp. 23-24.



who had arrived from a country which had been a part of the Kingdom of Sweden less than a quarter century before:

"Many of the wounded directed their attention toward us, and smiling in delight, waited for us to reach their bunks. Eventually one of them asked in our mother tongue: 'Are you, sirs, Swedish?' We were amazed and glad – these were the first Swedish words we had heard since our arrival, and we immediately asked the same question. – We are Swedish, they answered, for we are Finns. They told how they had served in the Finnish Sharp-Shooter Battalion, and ended up captured at Ostrołęka. They also told how they had suffered greatly in captivity, as no one had understood them; they spoke only Swedish and Finnish, languages that were known neither to Russians nor Poles."<sup>31</sup>

According to Stille's calculations, there were forty prisoners of war who had served in the Finnish Sharp-Shooter Battalion, "the bravest battalion in the Russian army", as he described the unit.<sup>32</sup> The Journal of the Battalion mentions twenty-nine men who were recorded captured or missing in action after the fighting at Wąsewo, the retreat to Tykocin and the subsequent march to Ostrołęka.<sup>33</sup> Assuming that the number of forty prisoners of war was correct, at least eleven additional Finnish soldiers were also held in Polish custody. It is possible that the figure includes some of the incapacitated men who had been evacuated to the military hospital of Ostrołęka and ended up captured by the advancing Poles, and it is also possible that some Finnish soldiers had surrendered to the Poles after deserting from the battalion before or after the battle of Ostrołęka.

A particularly interesting aspect of Stille's memoirs is his mention of the self identification of the Finnish soldiers simultaneously as both Finns and Swedes, which bears further emphasis. Although Stille briefly mentions in the above-quoted part of his memoirs that the soldiers spoke Finnish, he also points out that in their everyday interaction, the soldiers used Swedish and called themselves Swedes, which suggests that a majority of them either had Swedish as their first language, or otherwise regarded Swedish as their lan-

<sup>31</sup> "Flere sårade, som der voro förlagde, fästade sin uppmärksamhet på oss, och med ett gladt smålöje inväntade vår ankomst till deras bädd. Slutligen frågade en af dem på vårt modersmål: 'Äro Herrarne Svenskar?' Vi blefvo förundrade och glade – det var det första Svenska ord vi hört efter vår ankomst, och vi gjorde nästan ögonblickligt samma fråga tillbaka. Vi äro Svenskar, svarade de, ty vi äro Finnar. De berättade, att de varit anställda vid de Finska Skarpskytte-Bataillonon, och att de blifvit tillfångatagne vid Ostrolenka. De tillade vidare, att de lidit grufligt i sin fångenskap, emedan ingen förstått dem; ty de kunde ej annat än Svenska och Finska språken, dem hvarken Ryssar eller Polackar förstodo." STILLE (cf. footnote 30), pp. 94-95.

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem, p. 95.

<sup>33</sup> Förteckning öfver Befäl och Manskap, som försvunnit under Bataillon den 4/16 Maj, Retraiten ifrån Byn Wonsewo til Bjälostockska-Provincen och återmarschen derifrån till Ostrolenka [List of the Officers and Men who disappeared from the Battalion on May 4/16, during the retreat from Wąsewo and the march to Ostrołęka], Juni 20, Finska Gardets Ordrejournaler 1831, SArk, M51/6.

guage of preference. This would be understandable, considering that Swedish was still the language of command in the battalion, despite the official goal of gradually replacing it with Russian. The convoluted ethnicity of the soldiers had left the Poles with a somewhat slanted impression of their exact origins, and resulted in a peculiar rumour how "Swedish sharp-shooters" had suffered a horrible defeat against the Poles at the battle of Ostrołęka.<sup>34</sup> Such an interpretation was perfectly natural, given the relative obscurity of Finland in contrast to the traditional reputation of Sweden as the ancestral enemy of the Polish nation from the 17<sup>th</sup> century; as we have seen, Jabłonowski also referred to the Finnish officers as "Swedish", even though he was otherwise perfectly aware of their homeland.

Even as an indirect description of the Finnish prisoners in Polish custody, Stille's memoirs nonetheless reveal something of their experiences, especially when it comes to the remark how the hardships of the captured Finnish soldiers had been aggravated by the fact that "no one had understood them". Although the Finnish sharp-shooters were soldiers of the Russian Imperial Life-Guard, the linguistic barrier still deprived them of the possibility of interaction with their Russian comrades-in-arms. After the appointment of Arseni Zakrevski as the governor-general of Finland and the ascension of Nicholas I to the Russian throne, the authorities had begun to take measures for the closer integration of the Finnish military into the Russian army. As the first measure, native Russian teachers had been appointed to each company of the Finnish Guard. In practice, however, this had little effect. Instead of facilitating the adoption of the Russian language among the Finnish soldiers and officers, the Russian teachers usually became assimilated themselves, and started to speak Finnish or Swedish.<sup>35</sup>

Stille's testimony confirms the assumption that the Russian teachers of the Finnish Guard were unable to facilitate any closer interaction between the Finnish and Russian soldiers during the campaign. In spite of their service on the same side of the front, there had been no notable assimilation or mutual identification between the Finnish and Russian soldiers. At the moment of defeat, this lack of integration could, at first, have an adverse effect on the morale of the Finnish soldiers, as testified by the reference to their "great sufferings". As the captivity had uprooted the Finnish soldiers from the familiar surroundings of their unit, their foreign language now isolated them from the fellow soldiers of the same army and contributed to the traumatizing experience of the defeat.

Although the Finnish sharp-shooters were cut off from their Russian comrades, the captivity simultaneously increased their internal solidarity, as they had no one else to rely upon but themselves. The surprising arrival of the three Swedish physicians was no doubt a great relief to the sharp-shooters, as

<sup>34</sup> STILLE (cf. footnote 30), p. 95.

<sup>35</sup> EKMAN (cf. footnote 3), p. 25-26.

it suddenly provided them with a possibility to voice their grievances and reach out for help. The approach of the Finnish soldiers towards the Swedish doctors was probably very goal-oriented, and such opportunistic motives may also explain why the Finns were keen to stress their "Swedish" character, perhaps in a deliberate attempt to appeal to the compatriotic sentiments of Stille and his friends. A fraternization of this kind has been quite common in all wars through the history, whenever the opportunity has presented itself and especially when the men on the opposing sides have represented the same nationality or ethnicity, or when there has been a traditional cultural or sentimental affinity between their nations.<sup>36</sup> Still, for these same reasons, there is no doubt that the Finns were also genuinely delighted just to hear a familiar language from friendly people. Since neither the Swedes nor the Finns had any massive emotional investment in the campaign but were instead both equally serving on foreign ground, establishing cordial contacts was even easier.

In his commentary on further discussions with Finnish prisoners, Stille also records a peculiar rumour that was circulating within the Russian army at the time. According to Stille, the Finnish soldiers were under a belief that the military expedition was not actually directed against a Polish national uprising, but instead against a French invasion supported only by a few local Polish regiments.<sup>37</sup> With hindsight, it may be impossible to understand how the Finns could have been under such an illusion, and Stille's commentary may sound far too spectacular to even take it seriously. The confusion of the Finnish soldiers is, however, perfectly believable and quite easy to explain when one bears in mind that most of the units in the Russian army, the Finnish Guard's Battalion included, had initially been mobilized for the intervention of the Holy Alliance against French and Belgian revolutionaries. With the outbreak of the November Uprising, the mission had transformed into a punitive expedition against Poland, but many soldiers no doubt had still remembered the original orders and were now left with an impression that the French forces had reached Poland. Such rumours are by no means uncommon in wartime, especially among rank-and-file soldiers fighting on foreign soil

<sup>36</sup> Civil Wars are, for obvious reasons, exceptional situations. When it comes to examples of fraternization from conventional conflicts, the interaction between the Ingrian soldiers of the Red Army and the Finnish soldiers during the Continuation War of 1941-1944 is particularly well-known; also, the fraternization between the Hungarian soldiers of the Axis forces and the Polish partisans during the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 might be mentioned. NORMAN DAVIES: *Rising '44; The Battle for Warsaw*, London 2004, p. 289; MERI TUULIA TURUNEN: *Mikäs ryssä sinä olet kun suomea puhut? Suomensukuiset sotavangit Suomen sotilasviranomaisten suunnitelmissa ja kotirintaman arjessa vuosina 1941-1944* [What kind of a Russian are you when you are speaking Finnish? The Finnish-related POWs in the Plans of the Finnish Military Officials and in the Daily Life of the Homefront, 1941-1944], Poliittisen historian pro gradu-työ, Helsingin yliopisto 2005.

<sup>37</sup> STILLE (cf. footnote 30), p. 95.

with limited or no access to information.<sup>38</sup> According to the testimony of the Finnish prisoners of war, this rumour was widespread among the Russian army, and had reignited the Russian hatred towards France from the Napoleonic Wars. Stille, who also found this confusion difficult to believe, suspected that the rumour had been deliberately manufactured by the Russian High Command for the very purpose of exploiting the memory of the 1812 campaign.<sup>39</sup>

Spreading propaganda where the French were presented as an illusory enemy must have had a special reason, considering that there would have certainly been no shortage of traditional Polish-Russian antagonisms. Apparently these antagonisms were not suitable for propaganda for political reasons, and there were probably also solid practical reasons why the Russian High Command wanted to avoid them in the indoctrination of the rank and file. From the Russian viewpoint, the war was, after all, supposed to be merely an operation to restore order in the Congress Kingdom, not a full-scale national war against Poland. Russian poets such as Feodor Tyutchev and Aleksandr Pushkin, who wrote verses to justify the campaign, did not express direct hatred towards the Poles, but instead regarded the "strike against sorrowing Warsaw" as a tragic, but necessary "sacrifice" in order to preserve the unity between the two Slavonic nations as well as the integrity of the entire Russian Empire.<sup>40</sup> The Russian High Command in Białystok had also attempted to contain the conflict and issued strict orders to maintain discipline and prevent looting and violence against the Polish civilian population at the beginning of the campaign.<sup>41</sup> Given this, issuing propaganda appealing to the

<sup>38</sup> For a comparable example, during the battles of Taipale in the Winter War of 1939–1940, the Finnish officers of Infantry Regiment 30 believed that the Soviet forces were assisted by German advisors adhering to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact; likewise, the Finnish Waffen-SS volunteers who served in the armed forces of the Third Reich in Ukraine in 1941 recorded rumours of British troops arriving at Rostov to assist the Soviets. EINO POLÓN: *II vapaussota (Talvisota 1939/40)* [The Second War of Liberation (Winter War 1939/1940)], 17.4.1945, SArk, Pk 497; JUSSI JALONEN: *Kolmannen valtakunnan idänsotaretki suomalaisen jääkäriupseerin esikoisen silmin* [The Eastern Campaign of the Third Reich as told by the First-Born Son of a Finnish Jäger Officer], Jyväskylä 2008 (Sotahistoriallinen Aikakauskirja, 27), pp. 115–116.

<sup>39</sup> STILLE (cf. footnote 30), p. 95. Such manufactured rumours have not been unheard of even in our times; as late as in 1968, the soldiers of the Warsaw Pact forces preparing for the occupation of Czechoslovakia were deliberately led to believe that the invasion was actually a pre-emptive move against "West German threat", and after the invasion, the Soviet Army orchestrated public displays of captured "West German weapons" recovered from "secret stashes" in Czechoslovakia.

<sup>40</sup> DAVIES (cf. footnote 14), pp. 240–242.

<sup>41</sup> *Ordres till Activa Arméen, Hufvud-Qvarteret i Beljostock, Mars 18; Bataillons-Ordres 103, April 14* [Orders to the Active Army at the Headquarters in Białystok, March 18; Battalions-Orders 103, April 14], *Finska Gardets Ordrejournaler 1831*, SArk, M51/6. As one might expect, the practical enforcing of these orders turned out to be somewhat problematic in the course of the campaign.

old Russian-Polish national hatred might have been counterproductive; so, it is possible that the soldiers were, with the goal of nonetheless preserving the aggressive impulse which was regarded necessary for their combat efficiency, provided with another, imaginary target of hatred – the French.<sup>42</sup> Be that as it may, the reference to this rumour suggests that despite the linguistic barriers, the Finnish soldiers were not completely unable to communicate with their fellow Russian soldiers.

As a sign of the cordial relationship between the Swedish doctors and the Finnish prisoners of war, Stille and his friends decided to employ one of the Finnish soldiers as their assistant. The task was given to Johan Hjelm, whom Stille described as “a well-behaved fellow, who, with all the loyalty and honesty of his nation was an invaluable help for us”.<sup>43</sup> Johan Hjelm was 26 years old during the campaign, had served as sharp-shooter number 110 in the 2<sup>nd</sup> company of the Finnish Sharp-Shooter Battalion, and ended up captured with Ensign Henrik Lyra’s detachment during the heavy fighting at Długosiodło on May 16<sup>th</sup>.<sup>44</sup> Hjelm hailed from the southeastern Kymi province which, although predominantly Finnish-speaking, also included a number of primarily Swedish-speaking coastal parishes at the time of his birth in 1805.<sup>45</sup> Considering Stille’s description of the soldiers’ effortlessly bilingual identity, evaluations on whether Hjelm spoke Swedish as his first or second language would probably be rather anachronistic. Stille himself had no trouble regarding Hjelm and his comrades as members of the “Finnish nation”, but also noted that “by language, they were our brothers”.<sup>46</sup>

Stille’s memoirs paint a picture of mutual sympathy between the members of two Nordic nations, caught in the middle of a war in a foreign country. Leaving aside the deliberate nostalgia, Stille’s account is a credible testimony of how the Finnish sharp-shooters and the Swedish physicians dealt with the alien environment in which they had suddenly found themselves. The linguistic, social and cultural barriers still prevented the Finnish prisoners of war from establishing functioning contacts with their Russian comrades-in-arms in captivity; and meanwhile, the same factors were also hindering the interaction between the Swedes and their Polish hosts. However, the common language and the sense of kinship allowed a close and cordial exchange between the Swedes and the Finns, who were both relieved by the sight of familiar people on foreign ground. For the Finns, this connection alleviated

<sup>42</sup> For modern views of such “hate training”, see BOURKE (cf. footnote 13), pp. 140–143.

<sup>43</sup> “En beskedlig karl, hvilken, med hela sin Nations trofasthet och redlighet, för oss var ovärderlig”. STILLE (cf. footnote 30), p. 96.

<sup>44</sup> Förteckning öfver Befäl och Manskap, som försvunnit under Bataillon den 4/16 Maj, Retraiten ifrån Byn Wonsevo til Bjälstockska-Provincen och återmarschen derifrån till Ostrolenka, Juni 20, Finska Gardets Ordrejournaler 1831, SArk, M51/6.

<sup>45</sup> Munster-Rulla för Lif-Gardets Finska Skarpskytte-Bataillon [Muster Roll for the Life-Guard’s Finnish Sharp-Shooter Battalion], År 1830, SArk, M59/1.

<sup>46</sup> STILLE (cf. footnote 30), p. 95.



the humiliation of the defeat and eased the agony of the captivity. Eventually, the Finnish soldiers were released after the Russian conquest of Warsaw in October.<sup>47</sup>

### The legacy and the contemporary significance of the war

The 1831 campaign was one of the few mutual experiences that Poland and Finland have shared in the course of their history. Under the common rule of Imperial Russia, Poles and Finns could encounter each other not only on the realm of commerce, culture and political life, but also as enemies on the battlefield. As the successive Polish “rebellions” shaped the opinions of the Finnish *élités* on Poland, the continuous Finnish collaboration with the Tsarist régime also shaped Polish opinions on Finland. The descriptions of Kruszewski, Jabłonowski and their compatriots focused mostly on the role of the Finnish soldiers as yet another “alien” element in the Russian army. In this respect, these portrayals could easily be placed more or less in the same category with the verses of Mierosławski, Mickiewicz and other authors who continued to formulate the apologetic romantic-nationalist discourse even after the failure of the November Uprising, and for whom the non-Russian soldiers of the Tsarist army illustrated the fact that the Polish liberation struggle had been suffocated under the onslaught of non-Slavonic masses. In this respect, these descriptions would merely show that in Polish politics of remembrance, there was at least one special corner that was reserved for Finnish soldiers.

On the whole, however, the Polish attitude towards the Finnish soldiers remained somewhat more ambiguous. Even when these Polish writers portrayed the Finns as an enemy nation, their descriptions were, in the best spirit of the 19<sup>th</sup> century romanticism, tempered with feelings of respect towards a noble adversary. In the somewhat special case of Tripplin, the reference to the Finnish soldiers was also characterized by visibly pacifist and conciliatory tendencies. When compared to the other accounts, Jabłonowski’s memoirs stand out as a unique showcase of how the Polish portrayal of Finnish soldiers and their officers could also rise above the level of crude ethnic stereotypes and descriptions of the “other”, and actually provide a short, but meaningful illustration of the contrasting attitudes of Polish insurgents and Finnish Guard’s officers towards the Russian Empire. Thus, the 1831 campaign could, with hindsight, also be regarded as a formative event in Polish-Finnish relations. The memory of the brief encounters on the battlefield had, for the first time in modern history, granted Poland and Finland a special consciousness of each other. These brief descriptions of Finnish soldiers represent the first Polish attempts to formulate a perspective on this so far unknown, distant nation that had faithfully rallied under the colours of the Tsar at the time when the integrity of the Russian Empire was threatened. Aside from stereo-

<sup>47</sup> WIRILANDER (cf. footnote 25), p. 90.



typic presentations, the recollections of Tripplin and Jabłonowski display a deeper desire to relate and understand as well.

For the rank-and-file Finnish soldiers who represented the common populace of the Grand-Duchy, the war can be seen as one stage of their *ethnogenesis*, reflecting the problematic development of Finland as a modern nation on its own right. Judging by Sven Jonas Stille's memoirs, the identity of the Finnish soldiers was, at the time of the campaign, still somewhat convoluted. Although the soldiers of the Finnish Guard had lived practically all their life under Russian rule and were now serving in a Finnish national military unit in the Russian army, the old ties to Sweden had by no means been forgotten. Indeed, in captivity, the Finnish soldiers interacted more closely and strongly with the Swedish doctors, whereas their contacts with the Russian comrades in arms were either limited or completely nonexistent. Simultaneously, the soldiers could still identify themselves as Finns and Swedes, with no sense of contradiction. Although Imperial Russian policy had deliberately aimed to distance Finland from the former mother country, these attempts at nation-building from above had apparently not quite yet taken hold among the soldiers who were serving in the military establishment of the Grand-Duchy. This is hardly a surprise, considering that the Finnish military tradition, insofar as it existed in the folklore as well as in the emerging epic national tradition, was still based on memories from the Swedish era. In this respect, the Polish campaign was a war that took place in a transitional phase of Finnish history.

Stille's and Jabłonowski's memoirs may perhaps also reveal a difference in the attitudes of the Finnish soldiers and officers towards the war. The officers, who belonged in the educated classes, were aware of the purpose of the campaign, whereas the average soldiers had a somewhat blurred understanding of the war and the enemy, which made them more susceptible to propaganda and rumours. Likewise, while the captured officers steadfastly refused to collaborate with the enemy, the captured soldiers were ready to fraternize as soon as the opportunity presented itself. These descriptions suggest that the social cleavage between the officers and the soldiers still posed an obstacle to the successful indoctrination of the rank and file, and the expectation horizon of an average Finnish sharp-shooter was based on a very limited comprehension of the events. Consequently, both on the battlefield as well as in captivity, the soldiers were motivated not so much by loyalty, patriotism, *esprit de corps*, sense of duty or even by fear of superiors or promises of reward, but solely by the necessity to look after their own survival and welfare. This primeval sense of self-preservation allowed them to perform efficiently as killers, but also made it possible to behave opportunistically after being forced to surrender.

For the Grand-Duchy of Finland, the Polish campaign was the first practical demonstration of the fact that the autonomous status under the protection of the Russian Empire could also have a price in blood. With the Polish-Russian hostilities, Finland became embroiled in a crisis of international

proportions, and Finnish soldiers had to be dispatched to fight far away on the battlefields of Central Europe. As can be seen, the role of the Finnish soldiers among the mosaic of nations that participated in the Polish-Russian war of 1830-1831 was not ignored by contemporaries. As outsiders' perspectives, these testimonies augment the information that can be recovered from the Finnish archives, but they also have independent value in their own right. Consequently, they allow a perfect synthesis of national and trans-national viewpoints in the study of the Finnish Guard's participation in the suppression of the Polish November Uprising.

## Zusammenfassung

### *Der Feldzug der Finnischen Garde nach Polen 1831. Finnische Soldaten in der Betrachtung Außenstehender*

Zu den russischen Militäreinheiten, die im Jahr 1831 als Reaktion auf den Novemberaufstand für eine Strafexpedition gegen Polen zusammengezogen wurden, gehörte auch das Finnische Scharfschützen-Bataillon der kaiserlichen Garde. Dieses trug seine schwersten Kämpfe im Mai 1831 in Rückzugsgefechten gegen die von General Jan Zygmunt Skrzynecki befehligten polnischen Truppen in Masowien aus.

Zeugnisse der finnischen Soldaten und ihres Verhaltens sowohl im Gefecht als auch in Gefangenschaft sind außer in den zeitgenössischen Berichten des Bataillons auch in den nachträglich verfassten Memoiren polnischer Offiziere und anderer Beobachter überliefert. So fanden die Soldaten der Finnischen Garde Erwähnung in den Erinnerungen von General Ignacy Kruszewski, Fürst Stanisław Jabłonowski, des polnischen Arztes Teodor Tripplin sowie von Sven Jonas Stille, einem schwedischen Arzt, der während des Feldzugs in einem polnischen Militärkrankenhaus Dienst tat. Abgesehen von ihrem anekdotischen Wert bilden diese Blicke von außen eine Ergänzung zu den entsprechenden im Finnischen Kriegsarchiv lagernden Zeugnissen und stellen für sich eine wichtige historische Quelle dar. Die von Außenstehenden gezeichneten, z.T. stereotypen Bilder der finnischen Soldaten spiegeln die ambivalente Haltung polnischer Beobachter gegenüber einem edelmütigen und zähen Feind ebenso wider wie den besonderen Kontrast zwischen der finnischen Loyalität zum Zaren einerseits und der polnischen Widerstandstradition andererseits. Diese Quellenzeugnisse ermöglichen damit in hervorragender Weise eine Verknüpfung nationaler und transnationaler Blickwinkel, wenn es darum geht, die Beteiligung der Finnischen Garde an der Niederschlagung des polnischen Novemberaufstands zu untersuchen.