

Baltenregiment

By [Jarosław Centek](#)

During the Estonian War of Independence, the Baltic Germans - despite their relatively small numbers - established their own military forces, the *Baltenregiment*, in order to support the struggle. The regiment continued to exist until the general demobilization of Estonian forces in 1920.

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Historical Background and the Beginnings of the Baltenregiment

In the course of the Great War, [Germany](#) captured the Baltic Provinces of [Russia](#) with the intention to separate them from the Tsar's [empire](#). After Germany had lost the war at the [western front](#), the Bolsheviks decided to export [revolution](#) to neighboring countries. The Bolsheviks invaded Estonia, among other countries.

Since the Bolsheviks posed a serious threat to Estonia, its prime minister, [Konstantin Päts \(1874–1956\)](#), decided to negotiate with the Germans. The result was that Baltic-Germans were allowed to form their own companies commanded by Baltic-German officers; the Estonian government would help to equip them. In early November 1918, the Baltic-Germans tried to create an international "[Landeswehr](#)" (territorial army) in Tartu, which the Estonian authorities opposed. On 20 November 1918 the Germans from Viljandi County founded their own military forces with [Victor von zur Mühlen \(1879–1950\)](#) as their commander.

Baltenregiment in Estonian War of Independence

On 27 November 1918 the Germans in Tartu formed their own military forces, which eventually became the "Baltenregiment" (Baltic Regiment). Only a day later the "[Dorpat-Heimat-Schutz](#)" ("Dorpat Homeland Security") was formed. Both activities were initiated by corps students from the local university, mostly sons of Baltic-German nobility. The *Balten-Battalion*, formed by the Germans living in Estonia, participated in hostilities on the Narva front in 1918. In January 1919 the main Estonian forces consisted of 2,500 Estonians and 300 Baltic-Germans. Considering that the Germans only made up 1.8 percent of the Estonian population, they were clearly over-represented in these forces.

At the beginning of 1919 the *Balten-Battalion* merged with units under Victor von zur Mühlen's command and reorganized into the Baltenregiment. [Constantin von Weiß \(1877–1959\)](#), a former colonel of the Russian Army, was appointed commander of the newly established military formation.

The Baltic unit was sent to the Lake Peipus region, where it captured the city of Gdow. Later the unit was transferred into the Volosovo region to support the White Russian Northern Corps. In August the Baltenregiment fought on the Luga river as a part

of the 1st Estonian Division. In October it took part in the offensive on the Whites in St. Petersburg. Despite their initial successes, counter-revolutionary forces were eventually beaten back. In November the Baltenregiment again saw action on the Luga line. Soon, a ceasefire ended the hostilities; on 2 February 1920, a peace treaty was signed in Tartu.

Importance of the Baltenregiment

At the end of 1918 the regiment consisted of 1,000 soldiers, mostly Germans from Estonia. They were organized into four [infantry](#) companies, one [machine gun](#) company, one [artillery](#) battery, and one [cavalry](#) squadron. During the second half of March 1919, the Battalion of Baltic Germans consisted of twenty-nine officers and 445 noncommissioned officers and men.

After Estonian independence was achieved, the Baltic-German troops were no longer necessary. Moreover, due to their activities in Latvia, the Baltic-Germans had worsened the situation of Baltic-Germans in Estonia and were already considered a threat to the newly founded Estonia. They were, however, far too weak to take over the government. Therefore, the *Baltenregiment* would not exist past general [demobilization](#).

During the [war of independence](#) the regiment suffered sixty-eight fatalities (fifty-two were killed in combat, while sixteen died of natural causes) and about 120 wounded.

The *Baltenregiment* played quite an important role in the Estonian war of independence, but was too weak and could not play as significant a political role as the *Baltische Landeswehr* in neighboring Latvia. Therefore the Estonians did not need to disband it before general demobilization of their own forces.

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