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## A glimpse of the Finnish civil war 1918 – a weapons cache at Kourla Manor, Vihti

### Introduction

#### *Civil war and Vihti*

The Finnish Civil War in 1918 was fought for the control of the newly-formed state of Finland shortly after the declaration of independence in December 6<sup>th</sup> 1917. The war took place in the early spring of 1918 and lasted 3,5 months from January 27<sup>th</sup> to May 15<sup>th</sup>. Previously Finland had been a Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire and some Russian military troops were still present. The war was politically motivated, and the Red Guards and the White Guards represented the left and right political wings. The Red Guards were aided by the Russian military and the White Guards by the German military respectively. Geographically the Red Guards were concentrated in industrial southern Finland and the White Guards in the more agrarian Northern Finland.<sup>1</sup>

The municipality of Vihti is located in southern Finland and prior to the civil war the social structure of the region was heavily divided. Altogether 34 estates were recognised in Vihti and landownership was centralized amongst relatively few landowners. In 1918 Vihti had almost 9000 inhabitants, at that time Uusimaa region had just four municipalities with more 10 000 inhabitants<sup>2</sup>. The population of Vihti was intrinsically dominated by crofters, tenant farmers, and farmhands<sup>3</sup> and thus with a predominance of working class inhabitants Vihti was clearly leaning towards the left wing. Vihti was thus heavily controlled by the Red Guards already from the beginning of the civil war and there were several clashes especially between the Red paramilitary groups and local landowners.<sup>4</sup>

One of the first of these clashes took place in Kourla manor. The owner of the Kourla estate in 1918, Eljas af Hällström (1887–1918), was shot dead in his manor house by the Red Guards on January 31<sup>st</sup> 1918. The Red Guards had recently also

<sup>1</sup> E.g. Anthony Upton, *Vallankumous Suomessa 1917–1918. 1. osa*. Gummerus, Jyväskylä 1980.

<sup>2</sup> Tilastollisia tiedonantoja 29. Suomen tilastollinen päätoimisto 1920, 15.

<sup>3</sup> Seppo Myllyniemi, *Vihdin historia 1800–1918. Vihti Venäjän vallan aikana*. Vihdin kunta 1990.

<sup>4</sup> Jaakko Paavolainen, *Politiittiset väkivaltaisuuudet Suomessa 1918. 1. "Punainen terrori"*. Helsinki 1966.

shot Edvin Malmström (1882–1918), the estate manager of the Olkkala estate<sup>5</sup>. According to folklore, af Hällström had been warned and encouraged to escape, but he replied that he had no fear as he hadn't done wrong to anyone.<sup>6</sup> The notorious Red Guard patrol that executed af Hällström was not from Vihti but from a neighboring community. In the following days the Red Guards were active in Vihti practicing “red terror” and arranging several assaults that included murders and executions, the murder of the Thomé brothers being a notorious example.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Kourla estate and the manor house*

The history of the Kourla estate is known from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The present-day neoclassical, two-storey manor house dates back to the year 1825 (Picture 1). Originally, the ground floor was intended for the use of the owner's family and the upstairs rooms in turn were intended for workers.<sup>8</sup> The af Hällström family owned not only the



Picture 1. Kourla manor house. Photo: Pentti Törmä.

<sup>5</sup> Vesa Valtonen, “Vihti sata vuotta sitten”. *Luoteis-Uusimaa* 16.2.2018.

<sup>6</sup> Helmi-Briitta Lajunen, *Olkkala – kartanoajasta nykyaikaan*. Olkkalan kylätoimikunta 1992.

<sup>7</sup> Marko Paavilainen, *Murhatut veljet. Valter, William ja Ivar Thomén elämä ja kuolema*. Siltala, Helsinki 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Hilikka Högström, Kourlan kartanon päärakennus. Rakennushistoriallinen selvitys. Käsikirjoitus 12.9.1989, Vihtin museo.

Kourla manor, but also the Olkkala manor that was located close by and was their main building. In this paper, in addition to other references and artifacts, we use diary notes as contemporary sources. Eva-Riise Gundersen has written a book based on the diary notes of Elina af Hällström (1893–1962), who during the 1917–18 events was a 25 year old woman living in the Olkkala manor. The book describes the everyday life in the Olkkala and Kourla manors through the eyes of Eljas af Hällström’s sister.<sup>9</sup>

The whole Kourla estate was sold by the af Hällström family following the end of the civil war in 1918. In subsequent years the manor house has changed hands several times.<sup>10</sup> In 2019 the Kourla estate was sold once again and the new owner started renovation work in the winter of 2019–2020. This work included removal of the old insulation material of dry sawdust. During this work an old package wrapped in white paper was found by the insulation removal contractor. The package was well hidden deep in the sawdust above the ceiling in the room that was previously a worker’s dormitory (Picture 2).



Picture 2. Location of the weapons cache. Photo: Pentti Törmä.

<sup>9</sup> *Murrosten ajat – Elina af Hällström ja 1918. Päiväkirjoja ja muistoja nuoruusvuosilta Vihdin Olkkalasta.* Edited by Eva-Riise Gundersen. Tammisaaren Kirjapaino, Helsinki 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Eino Jutikkala and Gabriel Nikander, *Suomen kartanot ja suurtilat I.* Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, Helsinki 1939, 206.

### Weapons cache

When the package was opened, the following observations were made: an outer layer of white packing paper surrounded an inner layer that consisted of four newspapers (Picture 3). These four newspapers were wrapped around three military rifles (Picture 4).



*Picture 3. Four newspapers. Two copies of Työmies were one inside another. Photo: Pentti Törmä.*



*Picture 4. Three rifles wrapped inside the white packing paper. Photo: Pentti Törmä.*

### *Newspapers*

All four copies of the newspapers were published by the left wing and were supporting the actions of the Red Guards. No information about the potential subscriber of these newspapers was found. Two major newspaper titles were present:

*Työmies* (translates as *The Worker* or *The Workman*) was printed in Helsinki and as many as 80 000 copies were printed in 1917. This magazine was established in 1895 and the last issue was printed on April 12<sup>th</sup> 1918. *Työmies* was the official media of the Social Democratic Party of Finland.

*Tiedonantaja* or officially *Suomen Kansanvaltuuskunnan Tiedonantaja* (translates as *The Spokesman for the Finnish People's Delegation*) was the official newspaper of the Finnish People's Delegation during the Finnish civil war in 1918. The newspaper was first published on February 1<sup>st</sup> 1918 and the last issue was published on April 24<sup>th</sup> 1918. As the name implies, the newspaper published notices, laws, and regulations of the Red government.<sup>11</sup>

The specific newspaper issues were:

- *Työmies* February 27<sup>th</sup>
- *Työmies* March 1<sup>st</sup>
- *Työmies* March 2<sup>nd</sup>
- *Tiedonantaja* March 2<sup>nd</sup>

### *Rifles*

Inside those two layers of packing material, three military rifles (Picture 5), an Arisaka model 35, a Mannlicher model 1888, and a Winchester model 1895, were found. Visual inspection indicated that all of the weapons were in a very good condition and storage over 100 years inside the packing paper and sawdust had not notably harmed them.

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<sup>11</sup> Päiviö Tommila, *Suomen lehdistön historia 5. Sanoma- ja paikallislehdistö 1771–1985*. Kustannuskiila, Kuopio 1988.

### *Arisaka*

The Japanese bolt action magazine rifle Arisaka model 35 in caliber 6.5x50 was developed and improved from the previous Arisaka model 30.<sup>12</sup> According to some sources it was specially designed for the Japanese Navy to replace the Murata model 22 rifle. Number 35 in the model name refers to the adoption year of 1902, which is the year 35 according to the Japanese calendar. The model 35 was manufactured from 1902 until 1905 when it was replaced by the model 38, and approximately 38 200 model 35 rifles were manufactured altogether. After the Japanese army replaced the model 35 with the model 38 the remaining model 35 rifles were sold to the Russian military and in consequence approximately 2500 rifles were in use in the Finnish Civil War.<sup>13</sup> According to the serial number, this particular rifle was manufactured in 1904 or 1905.

### *Mannlicher*

The Austrian-made straight-pull magazine rifle Mannlicher 1888 in caliber 8x52R was introduced in 1888 as a descendant of the Mannlicher M1886. It was later replaced by the more developed model 1895.<sup>14</sup> Approximately one million M1888 rifles were manufactured altogether. There is no exact record or even estimation how many of these rifles were present during the Finnish Civil War. According to the serial number, this particular rifle was manufactured in 1888 and sold for the civilian market.

### *Winchester*

Thousands of American-made Winchester 1895 rifles were in use in the Finnish Civil War of 1918. The high quality of manufacturing made this model very desirable during and after the war.<sup>15</sup> This lever action magazine rifle was made in the USA, but with Russian specifications such as the caliber of 7.62x54R and the possibility to use similar cartridge clips to those of the

<sup>12</sup> E.g. Fred L. Honeycutt Jr and Patt F. Anthony, *Military Rifles of Japan*. Fifth edition. Julin Books, U.S.A. 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Markku Palokangas, *Sotilaskäsiaseet Suomessa III*. Suomen asehistoriallinen seura 1991, 23.

<sup>14</sup> John Walter, *Rifles of the World*. Krause Publications 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Markku Palokangas, *Sotilaskäsiaseet Suomessa III*. Suomen asehistoriallinen seura 1991, 79–80.

Mosin-Nagant rifles.<sup>16</sup> Approximately 300 000 Winchester M/1895 rifles were imported to Russia during the first World War. It was thus natural that between 1915 and 1917 thousands of them ended up in Finland along the Russian military. According to the serial number, this particular rifle was manufactured in 1916 and thus it had probably arrived in Finland shortly before the outbreak of civil war.



Picture 5. Hidden rifles. From top to bottom: Winchester M1895, Arisaka M35 and Mannlicher M1888. Photo: Pentti Törmä.

### Condition

All three rifles were in surprisingly good condition considering that the package was hidden inside sawdust for more than 100 years. Only minor amounts of surface rust and other patina could be observed. No test firing was performed but visual inspection and cold firing proved that all three rifles were mechanically in order and also otherwise in working condition.

The rifles were also disassembled to further investigate their condition. The rear sight of the Winchester M1895 was assembled slightly in the wrong way. However that would not have affected shooting or its accuracy at shorter ranges. The Arisaka was assembled with parts from three different rifles. Most of the rifle parts were marked with “assembly number” 127, the bolt with number 343 and magazine floorplate with number 304. This would indicate that the rifle had gone through major overhaul or maintenance at some point. The Mannlicher and Winchester rifles had

<sup>16</sup> Luke Mercaldo, Adam Firestone and Anthony Vanderlinden, *Allied Rifle Contracts in America*. Wet Dog Publications 2011.

“matching numbers” in all of their parts. No further markings, stamps or labels were found besides the serial and assembly numbers.

## Results and discussion

The most intriguing question concerning the weapons cache of Kourla would be its origin and potential connections with local clashes between the Red paramilitary groups and local landowners supported by the White Guards. Who owned these rifles and why they were carefully hidden in sawdust? Why were these rifles abandoned for more than 100 years? The location of the weapons cache would have enabled rapid reuse of these rifles in case of sudden demand. In this light it is plausible that the weapons cache was planned as a short-term depository, as it was clearly not meant as a place for the final disposal of the rifles.

### *Background to the murder of Eljas af Hällström*

In 1917 after the Russian Revolution the atmosphere was restless and tense in the whole of Finland and led to several industrial strikes. For example in the middle of May 1917 in Vihti, as in many other Finnish rural municipalities, a general strike was planned among the peasant communities. The aim was to achieve a statute that restricted the length of the working day to a maximum of eight hours for the whole annual cycle. The manor owners did not approve the statute since the shortening the workday would have obliged them to hire extra farmworkers for the summer season.<sup>17</sup> The newspaper *Arbetet* wrote in May 22<sup>nd</sup> 1917 that the strikes had started among other manors and also in Kourla.<sup>18</sup> Later a group of red worker demonstrators walked via Kourla on their way to Vihti. The demonstrators and the manor owners negotiated about the eight-hour workday. Emil af Hällström, the owner of Olkkala manor, gave a speech that received a negative reception from the crowd. Af Hällström didn't agree with the stipulations of the contract. Eljas Af Hällström had to convince his father that it was wise not to sign. The Reds' attitude towards the wealthiest landowners was clear. Their possessions should be taken and given out to the local people. The attitudes and confrontations like these added tension between these parties.<sup>19</sup>

The Red Guards were supplied with large quantities of firearms directly from the Russian military troops. For the White Guards the supply of firearms was not that straightforward. According to the notes in the diary of Elina af Hällström, Eljas

<sup>17</sup> Gundersen 2009, 124.

<sup>18</sup> *Arbetet* May 22<sup>nd</sup> 1917, no 37.

<sup>19</sup> Kaarlo Castrén, *Punaisten hirmutyöt vapaussodan aikana*. Kustannusosakeyhtiö kirja, Helsinki 1926, 12–13; Gundersen 2009, 133–134.



decided to obtain firearms for the foremen in Olkkala and Kourla manors so that they could protect the grain stores. They realised that if they purchased firearms they had to be carefully hidden when the armed movement of the Reds started. The notes do not reveal the exact type of the purchased firearms. They however mention that the most of the firearms were buried in the yard of Olkkala manor house and one was hidden under the floor planks of a wardrobe.<sup>20</sup>

Towards to the end of the year 1917 the Red Guards started making home inspections to reveal potential hidden firearms. In January 29<sup>th</sup> 1918 a group of White Guards arrived at Olkkala and stayed overnight. The Red Guards heard about this and it instantly led to a home inspection during the following night. A large group of the Red Guards invaded first Olkkala and travelled then to Kourla during the night time. In Kourla the invasion led to chain of events and in the end Eljas af Hällström was shot.<sup>21</sup> The events of that night were also described in newspapers.<sup>22</sup> *Hufvudstadsbladet* also published a obituary of Eljas af Hällström.<sup>23</sup>

What happened in Kourla after that night? The widow of Eljas af Hällström moved to Olkkala and the Kourla manor was evidently left for the workers. The Red Guards continued organizing home inspections in Olkkala and in Kourla during February 1918. A couple of days after the incident the Red Guards found the firearms that were purchased to protect the grain stores. The Red Guards then used this finding as evidence about af Hällström's intentions and also as a justification for the murder of Eljas. According to the diary notes this story was repeated so many times that the commoners faith in af Hällström's good intentions started to falter and only few remained as their friends.<sup>24</sup>

### *Potential sources of the rifles*

The weapons cache was undoubtedly constructed either by Red- or White Guard or their supporters. Newspapers and rifles can potentially provide some information to help reveal the identity of the constructor of the cache. The major source of military weapons for the White Guards was Germany. In late autumn 1917 the steam cargo

<sup>20</sup> Castrén 1926, 11; Gundersen 2009, 139–140, 142.

<sup>21</sup> Gundersen 2009, 146–149, 169. The newspapers across the country wrote that the manor owner Eljas af Hällström was murdered and the manor robbed. Although many of the news published in February contained false information claiming that person who was killed was actually the father of Eljas, Emil af Hällström. (E.g. *Savotar* February 15<sup>th</sup> 1918, no 17; *Keskisuomalainen* February 16<sup>th</sup> 1918, no 39; *Savo* February 16<sup>th</sup> 1918, no 18; *Vasabladet* February 19<sup>th</sup> 1918, no 21; *Vaasa* March 7<sup>th</sup> 1918, no 28; *Turun Lehti* April 16<sup>th</sup> 1918, no 12; *Uusi Päivä* April 18<sup>th</sup> 1918, no 26; *Uusimaa* April 22<sup>nd</sup> 1918, no 19; *Helsingin Sanomat* May 8<sup>th</sup> 1918, no 48).

<sup>22</sup> E.g. *Uusi Suometar* April 15<sup>th</sup> 1918, no 30; *Länsi-Uusimaa* April 23<sup>rd</sup> 1918, no 13.

<sup>23</sup> *Hufvudstadsbladet* April 29<sup>th</sup> 1918, no 35.

<sup>24</sup> Gundersen 2009, 180–181, 184, 193.

vessel Equity sailed from Danzig to the Finnish west coast where among other weapons 6 500 Russian military rifles and 1 850 000 rifle cartridges were unloaded in this pre-war shipment.<sup>25</sup> Military weapons were shipped to Finland already during the Russo-Japanese War, as in 1905 the SS John Grafton was used to mainly unsuccessfully smuggle arms for the Finnish resistance and were later part of the armory of the White Guards<sup>26</sup>.

During the civil war, rifles supplied from Germany included the following: the cargo vessels Mira and Poseidon (February 18<sup>th</sup> 1918) brought 44 380 rifles, Virgo (March 2<sup>nd</sup> 1918) 25 822 rifles and Arcturus (April 26<sup>th</sup> 1918) 16 900 rifles. In total the Finnish government purchased 87 102 rifles from Germany during the war.<sup>27</sup>

Due to the logistics of ammunition supply and other major practical reasons almost all of the rifles that came from Germany were actually not German but Russian military rifles, pillaged from the German eastern front during the First World War. Especially the earliest captured weapons were marked with a stamp “Deutches Reich” in the rifle stock. These stamps are not present in any of the three rifles found at Kourla. In addition, in the beginning of the civil war the White Guards confiscated rifles from the Russian military troops that still were stationed in Finland.<sup>28</sup>

The Red Guards were armed by the Russians and naturally the Red Guards' rifles were the ones that were also used by the Russian military: Mosin Nagants, Arisakas, and M1895 Winchesters. Russia and the Russian military already supported the Red Guards before the beginning of the civil war. For example Lenin promised some 10 000 rifles for the Red Guards.<sup>29</sup> During the war Russia donated or sold in total 52 931 rifles for the Red Guards.<sup>30</sup>

Palokangas (1991) concludes that the situation with weaponry during the 1918 war was disorganised on both sides of the conflict. The Red Guards relied on Russian-based rifles, but the same can be said about the White Guards as their rifles were 90% of Russian origin.<sup>31</sup> Some German Mauser rifles were also used (mainly Russian pillage supplied to the Red Guards), but the ammunition logistics was too complicated as the rifle was in a different caliber.

<sup>25</sup> E.g. Markku Palokangas, *Sotilaskäsiaseet Suomessa I*. Suomen asehistoriallinen seura 1991, 51.

<sup>26</sup> Karl-Gustav Olin, *Grafton-affären*. Olimex, Jakobstad 1993.

<sup>27</sup> SArk H1519 B/66.

<sup>28</sup> Palokangas 1991/I, 55.

<sup>29</sup> *Suomen Vapausota. I, Valmistelut ja esihistoria*. Edited by Th. Svedlin, Heikki Nurmio and Kai Donner. Gummerus, Jyväskylä 1921.

<sup>30</sup> Jussi Lappalainen, *Punakaartin sota I*. Valtion painatuskeskus, Helsinki 1981.

<sup>31</sup> Palokangas 1991/I, 46–61.

### *Three rifles in three calibers*

Interestingly all three rifles of the Kourla weapons cache were in different calibers: the Winchester used 7.62x54mmR cartridges, Arisaka 6.5x50mmSR and Mannlicher 8x52mmR cartridges. This would be a serious disadvantage for ammunition logistics. However, that was generally the case also for the Russian Military using 6.5mm Arisaka and 7.62x54R ammunition. Mannlicher ammunition was considerably rarer than the two others. However in desperate situations, 7.62x54mmR ammunition can be potentially fired from a Mannlicher. The accuracy would be poor, but otherwise the end results in target could be relatively effective at close distances.

As these rifles had no further markings or stamps besides the serial and assembly numbers from the factory, it is impossible to identify confidently how they ended up in Finland or who was using them. In addition the Red and White Guards were continuously confiscating weapons from each other during the civil war.

Of the rifles, the Mannlicher and Arisaka were manufactured well before the First World War and the Finnish Civil War. As the Arisaka included parts from three individual rifles, it was probably well used in military operations by the Russians and had gone through a major overhaul at some point in Russia or alternatively at a German pillage depot. According to the serial number the Winchester was newish as it was manufactured in 1916 and thus had arrived in Finland quite recently. Potentially it had been supplied directly for the Red Guards or for Russian troops still stationed in Finland.

No ammunition was present in the weapons cache and cartridges were not found during the renovation project of the Kourla manor and further removal of the sawdust insulation in 2020. This could indicate that there were no immediate plans or need to use these rifles.

### *Other evidence*

As such, there is no direct evidence about the person or persons who constructed the weapon cache. Only the newspapers would demonstrate that the person who was doing the packing work, had a plentiful supply with current newspaper brands favored by the Red Guards. According to diaries, Eljas had ordered not only right-wing but also workers' newspapers so that he could best follow what was happening.<sup>32</sup>

The manor house of Kourla was inhabited by both the owner's family and their workers. The ground floor was the home of the af Hällström family and the upper

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<sup>32</sup> Gundersen 2009, 167.

floor was intended as a dormitory for labourers. A separate entrance and stairway providing access to the upper floor were present at the time of the civil war.<sup>33</sup>

The upper floor was thus the realm of workers that likely were more sympathetic to the Red than the White Guard movements. The stairway between upstairs and downstairs thus divided the house into two extreme political territories. However direct and undisputed information about the everyday circumstances in Kourla during the civil war is lacking. Even the narratives about the execution of the estate owner Eljas af Hällström have counterfactual details. After Eljas was shot, and the widow moved to Olkkala manor, the workers might have inhabited also the ground floor. On the other hand some of the workers moved away from Kourla towards the end of the war as they were afraid of revenge from the White Guards.<sup>34</sup> Thus the dominance and *de facto* power-structure of the Kourla manor during the civil war remains unclear.

According to the current evidence, approximately a month after the execution of Eljas af Hällström the weapons cache was constructed in the upper floor of the Kourla manor house. No major turn of events in the civil war was associated with this timepoint. One of the major decisive engagements, the battle of Tampere (16.3.–6.4.1918), had not yet started and it ended approximately a month after the weapons cache was constructed.<sup>35</sup>

However, at the time of late February – early March 1918 there were major international developments that could have lowered the spirits among the supporters of the Red Guards and encouraged them to hide their weapons for better times. Russia was attacked by a German army on February 18<sup>th</sup> 1918 and that led to a rapid meltdown of the armed forces of Soviet Union. As a result the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed on March 3<sup>rd</sup> in 1918.<sup>36</sup> This treaty ended war action on the Eastern front and transferred Finland to the German sphere of influence.<sup>37</sup> According to the diaries of an af Hällström family member during the February 1918 the Reds made several home inspections trying to discover caches of firearms. In March the situation was calmer but then again in April Vihti was said to be restless.<sup>38</sup>

During one of the home inspections the Red Guards had found an empty case of a Winchester rifle in the manor house of Olkkala and were eager to find also the actual rifle. According to the af Hällströms the rifle belonged to Eljas and would have been located in the Kourla manor. However the rifle was never found. This particular Winchester rifle was donated to Eljas several years prior to the start of the civil war

<sup>33</sup> Högström 1989.

<sup>34</sup> Gundersen 2009.

<sup>35</sup> Pertti Haapala, Tuomas Hoppu and Anu Planting, *Tampere 1918. A Town in the Civil War*. Tampere Museums, Museum Centre Vapriikki, Tampere 2010.

<sup>36</sup> John W. Wheeler-Bennett, *Brest-Litovsk: The forgotten peace, March 1918*. Macmillan, London 1938.

<sup>37</sup> Anthony F. Upton, *Vallankumous Suomessa 1917–1918. 2. osa*. Gummerus, Jyväskylä 1981.

<sup>38</sup> Gundersen 2009, 195.

and thus it can not be linked with the relatively new Winchester found in the weapons cache.<sup>39</sup>

As only three rifles were included in this particular weapons cache, it seems likely that only a few people were involved in the realisation. Based on several features of the cache and the fact that large scale hiding of firearms during the Finnish Civil War is not recorded, it can be assumed that the weapons cache of Kourla was not a part of any larger professionally organised program. It can be assumed that the construction was carried out by chance as the surrounding atmosphere had changed. Possibly the cache was made by the workers since the af Hällströms did not reside in the manor in March. The family had also greatly suffered from home inspections organized by Red Guards and thus it would seem improbable that they would have taken such a high risk by hiding these rifles inside their worker's dormitory.

In August 1918 the af Hällströms sold both the Olkkala and Kourla manors. Newspapers announced that the decision to sell was made due to the persecution and misbehavior that the af Hällström family had undergone from the Red wing supporters.<sup>40</sup>

This study has several strengths. It is getting more and more unusual to encounter new historical evidence or artefacts linked directly to the Finnish Civil War. The context of a large estate and the recent execution of the estate owner generates an interesting background for this finding. The combination of weapons cache and the Finnish Civil War is also rather unusual as hiding the firearms is commonly linked to the *Weapons Cache Case* in the late 1940s where a large number of weapons were hidden as a countermeasure against potential Soviet occupation.<sup>41</sup> The motives for the weapons cache in Kourla were potentially corresponding in part as these rifles would have been retrieved during convenient political circumstances.

Our study has also several weaknesses as some of our results are highly speculative and can not be confirmed. We could not link these rifles directly to any persons or even political orientation. Similar rifles were used by both Red and White Guards and no markings about their previous ownership were found. However the recent manufacturing year of the Winchester would indicate that it was owned by a person having close connections with the Red Guards or the Soviet troops. "Red" newspapers would lead directly towards the assumption that the weapons cache was constructed by the supporters of the Red Guards. The fact that the cache was located in workers dormitory would affirm this assumption. However, we must take into account the possibility that our evidence is misleading and the location and newspapers were just for misrepresentation.

<sup>39</sup> Castrén 1926, 31.

<sup>40</sup> *Länsi-Uusimaa* August 16<sup>th</sup> 1918, no 46; *Mikkelin Sanomat* August 21<sup>st</sup> 1918, no 85; *Itä-Suomen Työmies* August 23<sup>rd</sup> 1918, no 112; *Uusi Aura* August 25<sup>th</sup> 1918, no 157; *Hufvudstadsbladet* August 31<sup>st</sup> 1918, no 155; Gundersen 2009, 206.

<sup>41</sup> Matti Lukkari, *Asekätkentä*. Otava, Helsinki 1984.

## Conclusions

The weapons cache of Kourla provides an interesting insight into a remarkably polarized society and an example how political dissonances may quickly develop into armed conflicts. According to all of the available evidence, the weapons cache of Kourla was constructed in early March 1918 and it is directly associated with the Finnish Civil War. The murdered owner of the Kourla manor Eljas af Hällström was the first resident of Vihti parish to become a casualty during the civil war.

The most likely constructor of the cache would be an individual or a small group of people supporting the Red Guards and working for the Kourla estate, potentially even living in the first-floor dormitory. It could be hypothesized that the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk could have been a major encouragement for hiding these rifles as the future seemed rather unfavourable for the Russian army and the Red Guards at that time. "Red" newspapers were used in packing as they were readily available and the weapons cache was hidden well enough not to be found by either of the parties. However the luck wasn't anymore in favor of the Red Guards and eventually the weapons cache of Kourla was abandoned for good only to be found again more than a hundred years later.

## Abstract

In 1918 a civil war broke out in Finland between two groups: the social democratic 'Red Guards' and the conservative 'White Guards'. The Finnish civil war started on January 27<sup>th</sup> and lasted until May 15<sup>th</sup>. The war of 3.5 months resulted in almost 40 000 casualties. One of the first victims of this civil war was an estate owner, Eljas af Hällström, who was executed by the Red Guards at the Manor house of Kourla in January 31<sup>st</sup>.

In February 2020 restoration work at Kourla uncovered a small weapons cache directly associated with the 1918 civil war. Three military rifles from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries had been wrapped in white packing paper and four "red" newspapers dating to late February and early March 1918. This package was carefully hidden inside the Kourla manor house near the workers' dormitory.

In this article we focus on these three rifles and the newspapers surrounding them. Published diary notes and memoirs of a family member from 1917 and 1918 also give insights into the environment and the customs of the residents of Kourla manor. We aim to provide a glance at the Finnish civil war within a very restricted geographical and temporal context. New finds directly associated with the Finnish civil war are sparse and we thus believe that this study can provide a small but important addition to our understanding about this woeful episode of history.