

Arms Collection at the Vytautas Magnus War History Museum

Steponas Gecas*

Honorable Colleagues,

I. In this brief report I shall not be able to give a full and thorough survey in details of the arms kept at the museum. Because at such a high level conferences our museum are taken part for the first time (except the museums of the former Soviet Union) for many colleagues we were unknown or nearly unknown, so I present a general characteristics of the collection.

II. After World War I when the Lithuanian State was restored, Lithuanians had to defend their independence for two more years fighting against aggressive enemies: a) Russian bolsheviks, b) Polish legionary and c) German kaiser army and I tzarist Russian white guard unions. On November 23, 1918 Lithuanian army after the goverment issued the law was formed from volunteers. During a short time it was joined by several thousands of Lithuanian people: workers of different age, farmers. Many of them had recently served in the tzarist Russian army, participated in the Russian - Japanese war in 1904-1905 and in the first world war. Joining the Lithuanian army volunteers brought with themselves such arms among them war trophy, hunting guns, etc.

Even at the end of 1918 when the fightings for independence still were going on by the law of the countries minister, the organization of the war museum was begun. Its organizer was appointed general of medical service, archeologist Vladas Nagevicjus who later worked as the chief till the second Soviet occuation and died in 1956 the USA, Klivland.

(*) Vicedirector of Vytautas Manus war Museum.

On February 16, 1921 - the day of Lithuanian's independence the first exposition was opened which included pictures, war uniforms and hall of the exhibits were arms.

Already till 1940 the War museum collected a big collection

I of various arms. In the years of Soviet government the profile of the museum was changed but the accumulation of arms and their studios have always had priority significance. Especially plentifully the funds of the museum increased after World War II. The arms collection in the Kaunas War Museum was known as one of the biggest in the former Soviet Union after Oruzeinaja palata and Hermitage collections.

III. Now in the funds of the Museum there are more than 4,000 units of different types arms from various periods. They can be divided into such groups:

1. Ancient arms and their fragments, found during archeological mines. They, mostly, are stone fight axes, spears and their parts, arrows tips and so on. These are arms used by Lithuanians and their fights with crusaders till the beginning of the 15 century as well as those which were left by enemies in the Lithuanian territory.

The oldest group of exhibits include more than 60 artillery guns, arbalests. The oldest of them were made and used in the 15 century (1 slide).

2. Another big group of arms consists of wick, flint and capsule guns mostly produced in Western Europe, the date of the oldest is the middle of the 16 century (1 slide).

In this group there are about 300 pistols of various types. It is interesting to note that in the book of the Museums exhibits the first registered gun is of MOSINO type, sometimes called in Russian «triochlineika». This is the gun of the Russian guns constructor Sergej Mosino.

Guns of this type the Museum has enough because by these guns was mostly armed Lithuanian Army during the years of fighting for Independence and after the formation of Lithuanian military forces. Now and old modifications of the model of these guns were used by Lithuanian partisans in 1945-1953. Guns of Mosino type were used to salute also after the restoration of Independence, in autumn of 1990 during the reburial of the remains of the Unknown Soldier. Among the firing arms the Kaunas War Museum besides MOSINO has Japanese «ARTSAKA», German

«MAUSSER», Austro-Hungarian «MANLICHER» and guns of other types.

3. Almost 300 exhibits are in the collection of 18-20 centuries cold weapons. These are war axes, swords, sabres, spears, knives. (1 slide).

4. Very interesting, liked by visitors and valued by specialists is the collection of the 19 century hunting guns. This collection was gathered by the famous Lithuanian - Polish nobleman painter Hutten - Capskis.

5. Separate groups are formed by things of military clothing: shields, armours, helmets as well as horse accoutrements (saddles)

I spure and so on.

The oldest armour are made in Europe in the 16 century.

IV. After the war, quite a number of Red Army arms appeared the museum: guns pistols, automats, machine-guns, such as "MAKSIM" as well as artillery equipment «KATIUSA». (2 slides).

On of the rarest exhibit of that period is the heavy tank JOSIF STALIN-2 which during the years of Soviet system stood

I in a public place and tourists were told, that this is the first

I tank to enter Kaunas, when the Red Army chased the German army. (1 slide).

After revival in 1988 the citie's population organized transport and this 45 tons weighing tank was moved to a remote place. This dood then caused great response in the Soviet, especially military administration, Lithuanians were criticized by the war minister himself, one of the 1991 August revolt leaders Jazov. This tank, despite political aspirations, is now a rare technical object, because few such tanks were produced during the war, and after rockets have begun to be produced, tank vehicles are modified to carry them and only separate units of them have remained. However, the Museum hasn t got the possibility now to demonstate it.

Especially procious relics are memorial arms who wero dependence to Lithuania s famous people. They are the golded swords of the first leader of Lithuanian Army general S. Zukauskas, arms of Lithuania s military resistance against the Soviet occupation and post war years, etc.

V. All exhibits of arm collections are specifically interesting, however in the constant exposition we can demonstrate only 3-5% of the whole armas fund. The collection, comparatively, is well described and cared for, but due to the lack of money we can't propagate it, public advertising literature, catalogues as well as use computers. This congres and participation in it I expect will extend our relations.