

‘Sarkans Junijs’: Military Relationship between Japan and the Baltic States in the 1930s

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Abstract

This article sheds light on the pre-war military relations between the Baltic States and Japan throughout 1930s. At first, Hobbesian sense of ‘fears’ against Communism realized the bilateral and trilateral cooperation in military intelligence sector. The mutual respects ever since the Russo-Japanese War connected the two distant entities. Although its main task, toppling the Soviet regimes in Georgia and Ukraine, was never succeeded, there were some notable achievements and it should be considered as one of the most successful Japanese intelligence activities in the pre-war period. However, this fruitful relationship suddenly came to an end by the Soviet invasion of the Baltic States in June 1940. The word ‘*Sarkans Junijs*’, which means ‘Red June’ in Latvian, brought not only the extinction of the three Baltic States, but also the historic intelligence activity in Northern Europe.

Keywords: Modern Japanese history, Modern history of the Baltic States, International Relations, Espionage, and Intelligence.

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Introduction

In August 2016, special TV drama titled ‘A Picture Book of Yuriko-San: The War of Onodera Family’ (*Yuriko-San no Ehon: Rikugun Bukan Onodera Fusai no Sensou*) which commemorates the 71st anniversary of the end of the Second World War was broadcasted on NHK, Japan’s most influential public broadcaster. It focused on the wartime intelligence activities of Makoto Onodera, Japanese Military Attaché to Sweden and his wife Yuriko. It is not only NHK but also other media begun to take up the pre-war and the wartime Japanese intelligence activities. For instance, *Joker Game*, the best-selling fiction novel of 2009 written by Kouji Yanagi, in which story was about secret intelligence agents of the Japanese Army in overseas, made into live-action film in 2015 and TV animation programme in 2016. Thus, I could say there is a movement in Japan to ‘revise’ its pre-war and wartime military intelligence activities.

‘Espionage’, which involves the aforementioned military intelligence activities, is “*the use of spies, surveillance equipment, etc., in order to collect information about the enemy.*” (Bowyer, 2007, pp.87-88). To be precise, military intelligence activities can be divided into four-five sections such as HUMINT (Human Intelligence) and SIGINT (Signals Intelligence). The former is literally ‘spying’ through informants in enemy’s territories and the latter is a compilation of analyses of intercepted enemy communication. The pre-war military relationship between the Baltic States and Japan is categorized to ‘COLLINT’ (Collective Intelligence), bilateral or multilateral cooperation among various intelligence organizations, based on HUMINT. The common ‘enemy’ for them was the emergent Soviet Union which once pursued the World revolution from 1910s to 1920s as the first-ever Communist state and as potential threats to the Baltic States and Japan even after the failure.

The Establishment of the Baltic-Japanese Diplomatic Relations

The Baltic States, where had historically been a buffer zone between the great powers such as Sweden and Russia, gained their first independence only after the First World War.

The establishment of Estonian-Japanese diplomatic relations dates back to 1919. Ants Piip, member of the Estonian Foreign Mission in London who became Foreign Minister in 1930s, made a courtesy call to the Ambassador Sutemi Chinda of Japan in the United Kingdom and delivered a formal message from the Estonian government to request Japanese recognition of the state. (Tokyo Asahi Shimbun, March 23rd 1919, p.2). Upon this request from the newly independent Baltic Republic, Tokyo made a ‘provisional recognition’ of Estonia following the decisions of the United Kingdom, France, and Italy. The decision of the Japanese government was notified to Piip by Chinda on March 15th. Later in the same year, Latvia was also given the recognition by Japan, but unlike Estonia, it was the formal recognition of the state. (Tokyo Asahi Shimbun, March 13th 1920, p.3). Lithuania had to wait until December 1922 for formal Japanese recognition due to the Polish-Lithuanian War (1919-1920) and the Klaipeda (Memel) territorial dispute with Poland in the aftermath of the War. (Tokyo Asahi Shimbun, December 24th 1922, p.1). By 1923, all the Baltic States were granted formal recognition by Japan.

In 1920s, Japanese Ministry of Army (MoA) began to send its officers to the Baltic States. In 1923, Infantry Captain Noritsune Shimizu was assigned to the first Army researcher in Riga residence. Main task of the Riga-based researcher was to master Russian language, but also collecting the Soviet military information as much as possible. In January 1926, Artillery Major Torashiro Kawabe was assigned to the second researcher in Riga residence. (JACAR, Ref. C01006107900). Along with Infantry Captain Genzo Yanagida, who was sent to Riga in early 1927 as an assistant officer of him (JACAR, Ref. C01006039400), Kawabe did research on ‘Special military facilities based on the conditions in the Soviet Union’ (JACAR, Ref.C01003722800) as well as the Soviet general military affairs. Their research went successful and Kawabe brought several useful information to Tokyo once he returned there.



Figure 1. Japanese Army officers at the 10th Latvian Independence Day Parade in Riga. (November 18th 1928). Major Torashiro Kawabe¹ (first from the right), Japanese Military Attaché in Riga residence, and Major Kiichiro Higuchi (next to Kawabe), then Military Attaché of the Warsaw Legation, were confirmed. Courtesy: Estonian Film Archives – EFA. 124.A-134-37

In 1928, Japan and Latvia mutually ratified the Treaty of Commerce and Navigation, the first-ever bilateral diplomatic agreement between Japan and any of the Baltic States. Under such circumstance, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) planned to establish the first diplomatic mission in the Baltic states. (Tokyo Asahi Shimbun, July 5th 1928, p.1) In November 1919, upon the provisional recognition of Estonia, the MoFA nominated Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, as a candidate site for the diplomatic mission in the region. (Tokyo Asahi Shimbun, November 5th 1919, p.2). However, the plan had to be abandoned because of the strong opposition from the Ministry of Finance (MoF). Again in 1929, the MoF requested the MoFA to

¹ He became a commander of ‘Manaki Organ’, the Army’s secret information agency of Japanese Military Attachés stationed in Europe, in late 1930s and visited Estonia in Summer 1939. At the end of the Second World War in August 1945, Kawabe was Vice Chief of Staff of the General Staff Office at the rank of Lieutenant General. According to several sources, he established ‘Kawabe Organ’ in 1948, in which the objective was Japan’s rearmament. Died in 1960.

cancel the establishment of a diplomatic mission in Latvia, however the MoFA defended the project as being 'based on International agreement' and therefore not subject to economic considerations.

They succeeded in persuading the MoF (Tokyo Asahi Shimbun, July 19th 1919, p.2) and eventually, in October 1929, the Legation of Japan in Latvia was established. (Tokyo Asahi Shimbun, September 4th 1929, p.3). Ambassador Nagaoka to Germany also hold the position of the first Envoy to Latvia and Infantry Major Shigeyasu Suzuki of the Warsaw Legation participated in the Ceremony of the Presentation of Credentials in Riga as the first Military Attaché to Latvia (non-residence) alongside Captain Saiichi Terada and Captain Sasaki, his subordinates in Warsaw. (Latvijas Kareivis, October 30th 1928, p.1) The real intentions of the MoFA and also, the Ministry of Army (MoA), regarding the Riga Legation was to use it as a base for intelligence activities against the Soviet Union.

Thoughts behind the Baltic-Japanese Military Cooperation

Back in 1930s, Latvia and the rest of the Baltic States were considered as parts of '*Cordon Sanitaire*', the wall to prevent the infiltration of Communism into (Western) Europe. Japan also defined the Soviet Bolshevism as a threat to the national polity which based on the reign of the Emperor and enforced the Maintenance of the Public Order Act (*Chian-Iji Hou*) in 1925 to regulate the domestic Communist movements. Thus, the Baltic States and Japan shared the isolation of Communism as a common political interest.

However, Japan had to wait until late 1930s to realize the actual military cooperation due to the political unrests of the Baltic States.



Figure 2. In Summer 1919, amidst the Estonian Independence War, Colonel Jotaro Watanabe, Military Attaché of Japanese Legation in the Netherlands, visited Narva, border town between Estonia and Russia, and inspected the Estonian 4th regiment. Courtesy: Estonian Film Archives - EFA.49.A-257-57

Amidst economic stagnation and political unrests during the Great Depression, extreme right-wing organizations, such as the Association of Estonian Freedom

Fighters (*Vabadussõjalaste Liit*) in Estonia and the Fire Cross (*Ugunkrusts*) in Latvia, emerged in the Baltic States. While the governments of the Baltic States concentrated on political conflicts rather than tackling on the Depression, they attempted to take power by coup d'état. (Von Rauch, 1974, pp.148-152). As these extreme right-wing organizations were serious threats to domestic securities which involved the nation's military forces, the Baltic governments took pre-emptive actions to clash their attempts including arrests of perpetrators and ban on their street marches. In order to avoid occurrence of similar organizations, the Baltic States installed 'authoritarian democracy' which was somehow similar to European fascist regimes in later years. Ironically, the creation of strong governments brought political stabilities to the Baltic States.

As of 1930, Infantry Major Hikosaburo Hata of Japanese Legation in Poland administered Latvia (Tokyo Asahi Shimbun, April 9th 1943, p.1), and, in July 1931, amidst the political upheavals surrounding the Baltic States, Infantry Major Taketo Kawamata was appointed as the first Military Attaché in Riga residence. (Latvijas Kareivis, July 21st 1931, p.1). During the work in Riga, Kawamata tried to build a mature relationship with Latvian military officials. On September 22nd 1932, he attended a social gathering organized by the Latvian General Staff with Captain Wataru Tanaka of the Japanese General Staff. (Latvijas Kareivis, September 23rd 1932, p.1). There, he met Colonel Ķikuls, chief of the Latvian Military Intelligence Service, and Colonel Rozenšteins, future commander of the Latvian Defence Forces.

Visit of Captain Shimanuki to Estonia and Inauguration of the Official Baltic-Japanese Military Relations

In January 1934, Aviation Captain Tadamasa Shimanuki of the Japanese Army arrived in Estonia. (Sakala, March 10th 1934, p.2). The visit was part of his study trip to the Soviet Union from June 1932 (JACAR, Ref.B13091661400) to research the Air-Ground Separation Theory (*Kuuchi Bunri*), in which idea was to use flying squadrons and support units on the ground separately for the purpose of increasing wartime operational efficiency. As being a rare guest from Japan, Shimanuki was interviewed by 'Sõdur' (Soldier), the official magazine of the Estonian Defence Forces, in the same month he arrived Estonia. The topic of the interview was about 'Japanese mentality' (Sakala, January 14th 1935, p.2) and he explained its basic concept as such "*Neither physical strength or advantage in military technology would determine the fate of war, in case of Japanese, it is the strong will to fight against enemy. We Japanese all obtain such mental strength.*" (Sõdur, March 3rd 1934, p.250). Before leaving Estonia, Shimanuki was invited to the Estonian Airforce officer's clubhouse 'Rooma' (Rome) and enjoyed a pleasant talk with three generals belonged to Estonian General Staff such as Gustav Jonson, Johannes Roska (Orasmaa), and Juhan Tõrvand. (Lääne Teataja, March 10th 1934, p.3).

The Estonian hospitality shown to Shimanuki was highly appreciated by the MoFA and the MoA. It became one of the reasons why the MoFA sought to promote the Chargé d'affaires of the Riga Legation to Envoy Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary. The MoA was also interested in the information concerning the Soviet Union provided by the Estonian General Staff. In late 1934, the MoFA demanded a budget in order for the Chargé d'affaires in Riga to administrate Estonia and Lithuania, however, this was denied by the MoF. (JACAR, Ref. B14090839400). Although the

MoFA had to wait several years before this plan could be realized, the MoA, however, had a surplus of budgets and they immediately ordered the Military Attaché in Riga to administrate Estonia and also Lithuania.



*Lendur-kapten Tadamasu Shimanuki.*²



Figure 3. The picture of Aviation Captain Tadamasu Shimanuki² and Shimanuki (sitting in the centre) at the Estonian Air Force officer's clubhouse 'Rooma' in Tallinn with General Gustav Jonson (left of Shimanuki) and General Juhan Tõrvand (right of Shimanuki).³ (March 1934)

Courtesy: (The Picture of Tadamasu Shimanuki) Japanese Mentality (Jaapani Vaim). (1934, March 3)¹ *Sõdur*, 9. p.249. (Group Photo) Estonian Film Archives - EFA.77. A-11-16

In February 1935, an Estonian military delegation visited the Japanese Legation in Riga and had an opportunity to talk to Military Attaché Tsutomu Ouchi, Cavalry Lieutenant Colonel. They agreed on an exchange of weapons to commemorate the start of the official relationship. (JACAR, Ref. C01004065200). In May, a Type 97 Sniper Rifle (indicated as 'Type 38 Infantry Rifle with Sniping Scope' in the official document), a Nambu Experimental Sub-Machinegun Type 2, and a Nambu Type 14 Handgun were presented to the Estonian Army. (JACAR, Ref. C01006736600). Except for the famous Nambu Pistol, the guns were all experimental weapons, which at that time were still on trial. Ouchi probably did not expect the Estonians to request those kind of weapons for the exchange and it would have been an even greater surprise for the MoA in Tokyo. In fact, on February 21st, the Ministry suddenly ordered the immediate acquirement of a Nambu Sub-Machinegun for the Technological Institute. (JACAR, Ref.C01006653500).

² In 1939, Tadamasu Shimanuki participated in the battle of Khalkhin Gol (Nomonhan) as Colonel alongside his younger brother, Takeharu Shimanuki. Colonel Tadamasu Shimanuki was killed in action on August 2nd 1939, while being on reconnaissance flight over the battlefield. It is said the plane was shot down by the Soviet Anti-Aircraft guns.

³ Both Jonson and Tõrvand were arrested during the first Soviet occupation period (1940-1941) and perished in labour camps of the Soviet Russia.



Figure 4. Japanese Army Delegation visits Cavalry Regiment of Latvian Army in Daugavpils, Latvia. (April 1935) Lieutenant Colonel Tsutomu Ouchi⁴ (first from the left, second line) is confirmed. Courtesy: Latvian War Museum - 4-1424-FT/p

From May to June, fifty 6.5mm bullets for the Arisaka M1905 and one-hundred 8mm Nambu bullets were delivered to Estonia. (JACAR, Ref. C01004067100). In June, five-hundred Nambu bullets were additionally supplied by Lieutenant Colonel Taketo Kawamata, Military Attaché to the Japanese Embassy in Moscow, who used to be Ouchi's superior at the Riga Legation until July 1933. (JACAR, Ref. C01006855500)

From the Estonian side, at least one Arsenal M23, the first Estonian-made sub-machinegun developed by the *Arsenal* in 1926, was sent to Japan via the Riga Legation. The Arsenal M23 was basically an Estonian imitation of the Bergmann MP18, a German sub-machinegun used during the First World War. This Estonian-made sub-machinegun was probably a technological 'milestone' for the developers themselves, but was completely obsolete by the time it was presented to the Japanese. In 1938, all the M23s were replaced by the Finnish-made Suomi KP/31 and the remainder were completely sold off to the Latvian Army and the Republican forces during the Spanish Civil War.

Unfortunately, the guns given as a gift from Japanese did not contribute to the Estonian development of firearms either, for two reasons, 1) The Estonia's spontaneous firearms development projects were cancelled due to the purchase of the latest Finnish guns. This was related to the attempts of Estonian-Finnish defence cooperation in the late 1930s and 2) The guns were somewhat obsolete from the perspective of the European standard of firearms. For example, the Type 97 Sniper Rifle guaranteed high accuracy rate with an advanced scope and a handmade barrel; it was a masterpiece of Japanese craftsmanship, but its ammunition was still weaker 6.5mm. According to Mr. Toe Nõmm of Estonian Defence Ministry, the three Japanese guns were probably seized by the Soviet occupation forces in either August or September 1940 and sent to the Soviet Union. However, no information regarding

⁴ Ouchi was promoted to Colonel a year after the return to Japan and worked as an instructor of the Army Cavalry School. In 1939, upon the break-out of border conflict with the Soviet Union in Khalkhin Gol, he was mobilized as the Chief of Staff of the 23rd Division. On July 3rd, Ouchi was coincidentally hit and killed by fragments of the Soviet artillery shell.

the whereabouts of the Arsenal M23 were found in either Japan or the Soviet-seized Japanese guns.

Joint Estonian-Japanese Intelligence Operations in Late 1930s

By the late 1930s, the political situation in Europe descended into chaos due to the prolonged influence of the Great Depression, the Great Purge in the Soviet Union, and the expansionism of Nazi Germany.

In January 1938, Makoto Onodera, Japanese Military Attaché at the Riga Legation, who also administrated Estonia and Lithuania, requested the detachment of additional personal for 'negotiations' with the Estonian military. (JACAR, Ref. C01004434500). A month later, Chargé d'affaires Hirata of Japanese Legation in Poland, answered Onodera's request by dispatching Infantry Captain Takeharu (Takeji) Shimanuki.

Takeharu Shimanuki, who was actually the younger brother of the aforementioned Aviation Captain Tadamasa Shimanuki, had worked at the Japanese Embassy in Moscow for a year from 1937 as the Army's official researcher (JACAR, Ref. C01004299100) and at the time of being chosen as the liaison officer for Estonia, he was spending the last year of his researcher position in Europe at the Warsaw Legation.

By the way, the reason why Onodera was in urgent need of liaison was the ongoing Estonian-Japanese joint intelligence operation between 'Manaki Organ' (*Manaki Kikan*) of Japanese Army and Department 2 of the Estonian General Staff (*Sõjavägede Staabi II osakond*), Estonia's only Intelligence Service back then. (Okabe, 2014: Strategic Services Unit, 1946, p.24). The former was an intelligence organ of Japanese Army Attachés in Europe led by Infantry Colonel Takanobu Manaki, Army Attaché in the Berlin Embassy. (Kuromiya & Mamoulia, 2016, p.174). There were basically two objectives in the joint Estonian and Japanese intelligence operations: 1) Toppling the Soviet regimes of Georgia and Ukraine by supporting independence movements of émigré activists and 2) Collecting political and military information of the Soviet Union by Estonian agents inside the country. (Kuromiya & Mamoulia, 2016, p.173). In 1938, to help infiltrations of Estonian agents into the Soviet Union by a high-speed boat in Lake Peipsi, Onodera supplied 16,000 Marks to Richard Maasing, Chief of the Estonian Intelligence Service. From Estonian side, Lieutenant Colonel Villem (Wilhelm) Saarsen and Major Aksel Kristian were indicated as liaisons for the joint operations.

Villem Saarsen, the right-hand man of Maasing at the Estonian Intelligence Service, was the closest friend of Onodera. Around late 1930s, Saarsen was in charge of communication affairs with Foreign Military Attachés residing in Estonia. Their relationship flourished after Saarsen was appointed to Military Attaché to Estonia's Riga Legation in 1938. (Rigasche Rundschau, September 17th 1938, p.7). Similarly, Onodera arranged cooperation with Colonel Gregolijs Kīkuls, Chief of Latvian military intelligence service called the 'Information Department' (*Informacija dala*). (Strategic Services Unit, 1946, p.24). But, Japanese cooperation with the Latvian Intelligence Service was very limited in comparison with that with the Estonians. Regarding the cooperation with Latvians,

However, the Department II of the Estonian General Staff was rather flexible compared to the Latvian Intelligence Department. According to Juurvee (2003), the Estonian Intelligence Service was positive on information exchange with foreign military attaches whereas such mission was merely an additional task for the Latvian Intelligence Service. (p.47). The Estonian Department II, modelled after the German *Abwehr* (Military intelligence organization), was highly organized for information gatherings and counter-intelligence.

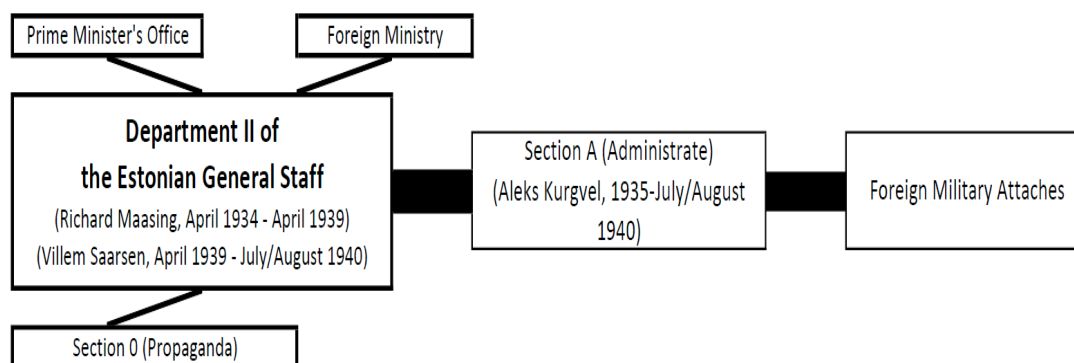


Figure 5. Organizational Structure of the Department II of the Estonian General Staff (*Sõjavägede Staabi II osakond*) in 1939. Based on 'Wartime Structure of the Estonian Army Intelligence' (*Eesti sõjaväeluure sõjaaegne struktuur*) - ERA f.495, n.12, s.113, I.139.

Unfortunately, Onodera could not confirm all the results since he returned to Japan on May 28th 1938 (Tokyo Asahi Shimbun, May 29th 1938, p.1), but the operations were taken over by Cavalry Lieutenant Colonel Tamotsu Takatsuki, new Military Attaché of the Riga Legation. (Strategic Services Unit, 1946, p.24).



Figure 6. Lieutenant Colonel Tamotsu Takatsuki⁵ (third from the left) among foreign military attaches at the manoeuvre of Estonian 3rd Division in Rapla, Estonia. (October 6th 1938) Courtesy: Estonian Film Archives - EFA.2.0-27943

⁵ He returned to Japan on July 8th 1939 by Japanese ocean liner *Kamakura-Maru* and soon after, promoted to a staff officer of the General Staff of Japanese Army, then transferred to Northern China Army in November 1940. But, on the 29th, Takatsuki was assassinated by terrorists on the street of Beijing in broad daylight. (Tokyo Asahi Shimbun, December 1st 1940, p.1).

In July 1938, Shimanuki set up an office of Japanese military representative at Pärnu Beach Hotel (*Pärnu Rannahotell*). (Postimees, July 16th 1938, p.4). The Pärnu office remained for few weeks during the month. (Uus Eesti Pärnu Uudised, July 15th 1938, p.1). This event was related to Takatsuki's plan to elaborate the Estonian-Japanese intelligence operations. Pärnu, a coastal town in the Western Estonia, was directly connected to Riga by train at that time which made it easy to communicate with Takatsuki and Saarsen. And, the hotel itself was just completed in the same year he established the representative's office thus did not have to be too much afraid of 'wiretaps' (listening devices inside the building) and was easy to recognize disguised foreign spies as the hotel's employees. On September 30th 1938, after 7 months of the works under Onodera and Takatsuki, 'Major' Shimanuki left Estonia for Japan. (JACAR, Ref.C01004593400). Until 2016, he has been the only Japanese military officer who ever resided in Estonia.

The joint operations continued even after Shimanuki left Estonia. Despite the failure of the first objective, overthrowing the Soviet regimes, the second objective did succeed with certain achievements. For example, Vassili Kalinin, the only Estonian agent infiltrated into the Soviet General Staff, kept providing general political and also some secret information of the Soviet Red Army until the arrest in the end of 1939. (Juurvee, 2013, p.38). Estonian intelligence network inside the Soviet Union dramatically grew throughout late 1930s, from Moscow to Eastern Siberia. In Volga region, the EIS used local ethnic Estonian colonies to collect information. According to Okabe (2014), the decision of using Estonian agents in East of Ural Mountain was actually based on the request of Japanese General Staff.

On May 10th 1939, Takatsuki and Aviation Lieutenant Colonel Hiroshi Onouchi, Takatsuki's successor in the Riga Legation, visited the Estonian Presidential Palace. (Uus Eesti, May 10th 1939, p.5). There, Takatsuki was awarded the Estonian Order of the Eagle Cross (*Kotkaristi teenetemärk*), a decoration bestowed to give recognition for significant contribution to Estonia's national defence. Onouchi, who succeeded Takatsuki's position and served as the last Japanese Army Attaché to Riga until the Soviet occupation of the Baltic States in Summer 1940, maintained good relationship with Estonian intelligence officer Aksel Kristian and Latvian intelligence chief Gregolijs Kikkuls. In exchange for the Soviet information provided by the Estonian Intelligence Service, he provided them some money equivalent to 500 Japanese Yen monthly, first in British Pounds and later in the U.S. Dollars. (Strategic Services Unit, 1946, p.27).

In July 1939, General Torashiro Kawabe, Japanese Military Attaché to Nazi Germany made a three-days trip to Estonia. He used to be the Army researcher in Riga, in 1920s, and due to his outstanding intelligence skills and knowledge in the Soviet military affairs, Tokyo assigned Kawabe as a new commander of the Manaki Organ. According to the memoir of Saarsen published in 1978, throughout the pre-war period, Kawabe used to travel around Europe to supervise Japanese Army Attachés stationed in each countries. (Saarsen, 1978, p.184). Onouchi served as an adjutant of his Estonia trip. On the first day of the trip when Kawabe arrived to Tallinn from Berlin, Saarsen took him to Viimsi Manor in Jõelähtme Parish where was the permanent residence of General Johan Laidoner, Commander-in-chief of the Estonian Army. (Saarsen, 1978, pp.184-185). The three officers, Kawabe, Laidoner and Saarsen, frankly exchanged opinions about political situations of Europe, especially German

intensions, on private beach near the Manor. While Kawabe was seeing the whole situation rather opportunistic, Laidoner gave a pessimistic answer to him that the second total war in Europe is inevitable.(Saarsen, 1978, p.186). Eventually, Laidoner's concern was materialized in only few months time from this highly political session with the Japanese general.

Next day, they travelled from Tallinn to Narva and Narva-Jõesuu, Estonia's Eastern border with the Soviet Union. In Narva-Jõesuu, Captain Aleks (Aleksei) Kurgvel, Chief of Section A of the Estonian Intelligence Service, joined lunch at restaurant '*Villa Capriccio*'. (Uus Eesti, July 4th 1939, p.5). Indeed, this small border town was popular among Estonian and Japanese intelligence officers. Later in the same month, Hiroshi Sugawara, Japanese Military Attaché in the Moscow Legation, visited Narva-Jõesuu with his wife and enjoyed taking pictures of 'surroundings'. (Uus Eesti, July 15th 1939, p.6). Also, it seems Japanese Military Attaché in the Helsinki Legation visited Narva-Jõesuu sometime before 1940. As the town locates only a few metre from the actual Estonian-Soviet border and known as the best Summer resort in Estonia, it was somewhat good place to presumably, observe the Soviet border defence and exchange secret information between the Estonian and Japanese military officials.

After Narva, the group stopped in Kiviõli, an industrial town in Ida-Viru Country, Eastern Estonia where was famous for shale oil mining. (Uus Eesti, June 4th 1939, p.3). Saarsen wrote, "*Mines (in Kiviõli) caught great attention from Japanese officers. They were all ears and eyes on everything they hear and see there*". (Saarsen, 1978, p.188). In the same month Kawabe payed a visit to Estonia, the United States handed a denunciation of the U.S.-Japanese Treaty of Commerce and Navigation to Japan due to the intensification of its aggressions over China. On July 28th, Ambassador Horiuchi to the U.S. reported Foreign Minister Arita that "*Since the U.S. is the only market to fulfil Japan's needs on oil, silk, and iron scrap, (in case of total embargo), it will definitely make Japan's military actions in China impossible.*" (MoFA, 2011, Volume 3, pp.2283-2284). Thus, finding new supplier, especially that of oil, was an imminent task for Japan.

The Beginning of the Second World War and Japanese Diplomatic Missions in the Baltic States

On September 1st 1939, Nazi Germany invaded Poland. Two days later, France and the United Kingdom declared war on Germany. It was the beginning of the Second World War.

The three Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania jointly declared neutrality soon after the outbreak of the war, since their economy and military capabilities were never strong enough to provide a resistance against any of the great powers. Nevertheless, the effect of their neutrality was very limited in front of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact which promised partition of Central and Eastern Europe between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. In the secret protocol of the pact, the Baltic States were to be annexed by the Soviet Union.

Shin Sakuma, the first Japanese Envoy Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania since February 1937, summarized the speech of General Johan

Laidoner, the Supreme Commander of the Estonian Defence Forces, in a diplomatic telegram sent to Foreign Minister Hirota on December 17th 1937 as '*Estonia has no foreign threats*' and '*Estonia does not rely on either Germany or the Soviet Union.*' It was not only Estonia but also the other two Baltic States proclaimed 'neutrality' in-between the two great powers.



Figure 7. Envoy Shin Sakuma⁶ (left) at Hotel Palace, Tallinn just before the Ceremony of the Presentation of Credentials to Estonian President Konstantin Päts (May 20th 1937). Person in military uniform standing behind him is Lieutenant Colonel Onodera⁷, Military Attaché of the Riga Legation. Courtesy: Estonian Film Archives - EFA.2.0-27473

The peace in the Baltic States lasted only few weeks. On September 14th 1939, the Polish submarine '*Orzeł*' entered the military port in Tallinn and was interned due to the Estonian neutrality, but it soon escaped. The Soviet Union claimed the submarine sunk their tanker '*Metalist*' in Estonian territorial water near Narva on the 17th (Yomiuri Shimbun, September 29th 1939, p.1) and soon after, on the 24th, they demanded Estonia to accept the immediate stationing of Red Army troops. (Kasekamp, 2010, p.125). In order to avoid a worst scenario, the Estonian government had no other choice but to accept the demand.

With the resignation of Sakuma (described as an 'honourable retirement' in Japanese newspapers) in December 1938, Shojiro Otaka was appointed as his successor. As being a Japanese Consul General in Qingdao, China, Otaka negotiated with the

⁶ Envoy Shin Sakuma returned to Japan on November 14th 1938 by Japanese ocean liner *Terukuni-Maru*. Later, he went back to Europe as a personal adviser of Oshima Hiroshi, the Ambassador to Nazi Germany, and was formerly appointed as the Envoy Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Nazi Germany on February 18th 1941. After the War, he volunteered as a defence counsel for Oshima, who was charged as a Class-A war criminal in the Tokyo Tribunal. He died from cardiac failure on December 8th, 1987. Aged 94.

⁷ Lieutenant Colonel Makoto Onodera, returned to Japan on May 28th 1938 by Japanese ocean liner *Fushimi-Maru*. Two years later, in November 1940, he was appointed to Military Attaché to Sweden. In the post-war period, he worked as a Swedish translator along with his wife Yuriko. Died from acute cardiac insufficiency on August 17th 1987. Aged 89.

Japanese Army to exclude the city from 'entrance restricted area'. At early stage of the Second Sino-Japanese War which broke out in July 1937, all Japanese residents of Qingdao, including Japanese Consulate General and its staffs, were evacuated and the city was completely devastated by Chinese militants soon after. (MoFA, 2011, Volume 2, p.1250). Otaka's intention was to accelerate the reconstruction of the city by calling back the former residents. His plan did succeed and Otaka literally became known as a 'new ace' of the MoFA.

Just before his departure to Riga, Yomiuri Shimbun on April 15th 1939 issued an article of considerable length on the second page, literally named 'Otaka to Europe!'. Here we can see how Japanese populace anticipated him back then. But, they soon found out the situations of the Baltic States were more severe than their imaginations.



Figure 8. Envoy Shojiro Otaka⁸ (sitting in left) at the Ceremony of the Presentation of Credentials to Estonian President Konstantin Päts (sitting in centre) on June 20th 1939. Lieutenant Colonel Hiroshi Onouchi⁹, Military Attaché of the Riga Legation, is standing behind Otaka. Courtesy: Estonian Film Archives - EFA.124.A-12-2.

On December 8th 1939, a new Japanese diplomatic mission was established in Tallinn, Estonia.(JACAR, Ref.B14090246400). The Diplomatic Office in Tallinn was merely one room in the hotel hosting only one diplomat, but for some reasons, it was declared externally as the 'Legation of Japan in Estonia'.

For the preparations, Shigeru Shimada, the First Secretary at the Riga Legation, frequently travelled to Tallinn after his arrival in Riga on November 28th (JACAR, Ref.B13091825000) and, after the opening of the Diplomatic Office, he was formerly appointed as the representative. Through the negotiations with the Estonian Foreign

⁸ Envoy Shojiro Otaka obeyed the order to return to Japan issued on August 12th 1940, but resigned from the MoFA in October. He died in 1966. Aged 74.

⁹ Lieutenant Colonel Hiroshi Onouchi lost the Estonian contacts inherited from Onodera and Takatsuki after he moved to Helsinki. However, another contact, Estonian Admiral Johan Pitka, who later became the military leader of the Estonian voluntary corps during the Soviet re-occupation in 1944, kept providing him with information regarding the political situations in Estonia under the Soviet occupation. He survived the War and died from cerebral thrombosis on August 21st 1984. Aged 84.

Ministry, he became close friends with Vice-Minister Karl Tofer and Director General Elmar Kirotar. (JACAR, Ref.B14090246400). Shimada had known both of them during his previous work at the Moscow Embassy. During this time, Tofer was the Estonian Envoy to the Soviet Union and Kirotar was a counsellor under Tofer. Due to Shimada's broad friendship, the Diplomat Office was given a place inside the Hotel Palace, one of the most luxurious hotels in the centre of Tallinn.



Jaapani esindaja S. Shimada.



Proua Shimada.

Figure 9. The First Secretary Shigeru Shimada¹⁰ of the Tallinn Diplomatic Office (left) and his wife (right). Courtesy: "Japanese Legation in Tallinn Residence". (1939, December 30th). *Uus Eesti*, Page 3.

On March 1st 1940, the Tallinn Diplomat Office moved from the Hotel Palace to a house in Lahe Street, Kadriorg (JACAR, Ref.B14090274900), an exclusive residential district in the outskirts of Tallinn where the Presidential Palace, the Foreign Diplomatic Missions, and mansions of successful merchants were located. From any sources, we cannot really see how much Shimada or the Envoy Otaka in Riga knew about the movements of the Soviet forces inside Estonia and Latvia, but they were about to face the greatest hardship. Only three months later, the Soviet Union finally started to collect the 'Promised' lands of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

The Soviet Invasion of the Baltic States in 1940 and the Fate of Japanese Diplomatic Missions

On June 16th 1940, when the eyes of the world were concentrated on Germany's entry into Paris, the Soviet Union finally began to invade Estonia and Latvia. The Soviet operation against Lithuania was launched a day before. By the 23rd, the Soviet army completed the occupation of all the three nations.

As the Kremlin anticipated, the news of the Soviet invasion of the Baltic States was obscured by the German victory over France. With less attention being shown by the world regarding the occupation, the Soviet implemented its next objective. This was the installation of pro-Soviet regimes in the Baltic States to legitimize the occupation. Street demonstrations were frequently held by the local communist activists and to

¹⁰ He resigned from MoFA in the aftermath of the War. This was probably due to the massive post-war layoffs caused by the restructuring of the Ministry under the Allied occupation, and instead, chose to work as a censor of publications for the GHQ (General Headquarters). He died from stomach cancer on December 18th 1954. Aged 69.

solidify the occupation, Andrei Zhdanov, a Soviet Politburo member was sent to Tallinn. (Kasekamp, 2010, p.128).

On August 27th, a suspicious person claiming to be an officer of the Estonian Army appeared at the Tallinn Diplomatic Office and asked the Estonian employee about the layout of the office.(JACAR, Ref.B14091188400). Two days later, in Moscow, the Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov handed a formal notice to Ambassador Togo declining the Japanese request for the diplomatic missions in the Baltic States to remain the diplomatic missions. The Consulate in Kaunas and the Diplomatic Office in Tallinn were already preparing to leave by September 5th, but the problem was the Riga Legation. As the deadline approached, the Soviet authority put more pressures onto the Legation e.g. a local employee was summoned by NKVD, the Soviet secret police, an Estonian typist worked for the Legation lost her guaranteed position at the academia, and eventually a Soviet officer and a Latvian policeman searched the Legation without warrant. On September 14th, Ambassador Togo in Moscow ordered Envoy Otaka to leave Riga with all the Japanese staff immediately. No official sources were found on how Envoy Otaka and the Riga Legation staffs escaped from Latvia, but they would probably had taken the ferry to Stockholm, Sweden, as Military Attaché Onouchi did so with some of his informants. (Okabe, 2014). He was later appointed to Military Attaché of the Japanese Legation in Helsinki. (JACAR, Ref.B14090846200).

On November 1st 1940, the Japanese Privy Council approved the MoFA report concerning the closure of the diplomatic missions in the ex-Baltic States, simply with one sentence: *'There was no more reason to remain'*. Here, the official relations between the Baltic States and Japan came to an end.

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