

THE FLAG HERITAGE FOUNDATION MONOGRAPH
AND TRANSLATION SERIES

PUBLICATION No. 1

THE ESTONIAN FLAG
A HUNDRED YEARS OF THE BLUE-BLACK-WHITE

by Professor Dr. Karl Aun

Translated by Peeter Tammisto



FLAG HERITAGE FOUNDATION
Winchester, Massachusetts
2010

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Prof.Dr. Karl Aun

The original cover of the 1984 edition.

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Flag Heritage Foundation
12 Robin Hood Road
Winchester, MA 01890 USA
781-729-6658

Series Editor:
David F. Phillips
2331 - 47th Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94116 USA
415-753-6190
dfp18@columbia.edu

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THE ESTONIAN FLAG

A HUNDRED YEARS OF THE BLUE-BLACK-WHITE

by Professor Dr. Karl Aun

Blue-Black-White – The National Symbol

The blue-black-white tricolor has grown to be an integral part of the Estonian people and has become one of their most important and beloved national symbols. Every people has its national symbols, which are not necessarily only colors or flags. The Estonian people have other such symbols, like the national anthem, the national coat of arms, the national epic *Kalevipoeg*, folk costumes and others. The blue-black-white flag, however, is unquestionably foremost. It has been the visible connecting factor of the Estonian people's separate existence, self-assertion, partisan spirit, liberty and solidarity. Thus the blue-black-white and the Estonian people have become inseparable. The fact that the blue-black-white (called in Estonian *sini-must-valge*) is the first thing that the opponents and enemies of the Estonian people want to forbid or destroy proves this point. The history of the blue-black-white tells us how the colors and the Estonian people have become indivisibly united.

The History and Evolution of the Blue-Black-White

The blue-black-white was born among Estonian university students in Tartu, in the spirit of the National Awakening in Estonia (1860-1880). There were few university students of Estonian origin before or even at the start of the period of National Awakening. Most of the ones there were became German in character, and assimilated in the process of becoming educated, since there were no circles of Estonian intellectuals. Yet already in the spring of 1870, encouraged by the recent publication of *Kalevipoeg* and by the first country-wide song festival the previous summer in Tartu, a private assembly of Estonian university students gathered, also in Tartu. They wanted to learn about the intellectual cultural heritage of their people, primarily

Kalevipoeg and folklore and the history of the Estonian people, and aspired to preserve their nationality and remain Estonian.

For the next ten years that assembly, which called itself a society or *konvent* after the example of the German *korporatsioon* (society of university students), was small in number and could only function conspiratorially, in secret, due to the conditions prevailing in those times. In 1881 the society developed a plan for abandoning secrecy and obtaining the university administration's official acknowledgement of their organization. They intended to create a *korporatsioon* of Estonian university students (a college fraternity structured on the traditional German rather than the American model) with rights equal to those of the existing German student organizations. Speaking among themselves in Estonian, they referred to their organization as an *osakond* (chapter). They adopted the name *Vironia* and blue, black and white as their colors. Thus the Estonian tricolor was born.

The meeting at which the colors of the society was decided took place on September 17 (Old Style [OS] according to the Julian calendar then in use; September 29 New Style [NS]), at the apartment of university student Aleksander Morhfeldt (later known as Provost Mäevälja). The minutes of the meeting do not mention the reasons for the choice of colors, due to the still conspiratorial nature of their meetings and discussions. Thus it is not at all clear from the minutes why the decision was made in favor of blue, black and white, nor what discussions or arguments preceded the decision. Later recollections of participants indicate that thorough discussions took place before and during the meeting, and that other colors were considered, particularly green. It is interesting to note that six months earlier university student Jaan Bergmann, who participated in deciding on the colors of the chapter, had published a poem entitled *Eesti lipp* (The Estonian Flag) in which the colors were blue, black and green. When the same poem was republished later, white replaced green. It appears that there were also discussions concerning the order of the colors.

Motives of the National Colors

Generally speaking, three kinds of motives can be distinguished in

the choice of colors. First were colors that depict Estonian nature: the blue sky of the northern lands, the black, fertile soil and the white blanket of snow in the winter. Naturally, that was also the motive for green – the green natural landscape of the Estonian homeland. Second, the national colors of Finland (blue and white) were set as examples in order to emphasize kinship with the Finns and the common roots of both nationalities. Since the Finnish National Awakening began earlier than the Estonian, Finns were generally viewed as examples for Estonia on many points. Third, for several centuries most Estonians had been serfs toiling for Baltic German landowners, and the “long, black night of slavery” of the Estonian people (Mäevälja’s words) also figured as a reason for using the color black. The black coat of the Estonian farmer, especially the long black garment worn by independent Estonian farmers in Pärnu and Viljandi counties that “covers the breast of Estonian men,” was also a possible inspiration for the color black. According to one version, the Finnish colors were chosen and black was added between them to represent the past of the Estonian people, which was more difficult than that of the Finns. The consonance of the selected colors and their harmonious beauty could also have played a part. The relative rarity of black in national colors and national flags also appears to be central to the choice of Estonia’s colors. We can say in summary that the motives for the selection of all those colors were nationalist.

Blue and white have also been given other, more abstract meanings, but it is not certain which of them were current then and which were added later. Thus blue has been interpreted as a sign of belonging together and of friendship, and white as a color symbolizing hope, striving towards a brighter future, and honesty. At least some of these meanings were likely derived from later poems dedicated to the colors and the flag. Another question arises: were the participants already thinking about colors for the entire Estonian people and not only for their own chapter organization? Several circumstances confirm that their intent was to create Estonian colors, which did not yet exist at that time – for example, Bergmann’s poem *Eesti lipp* proposed a flag for Estonians with national colors. Estonian reliance on the Finnish example also supports this view. If the Estonian people had already

had national colors, the university students would presumably have adopted them as their own. National colors for Estonia were already being imagined, and the student society's need for a flag provided the impulse for the choice. But it was still too soon to foresee the blue-black-white as the national flag of an independent Estonia.

EÜS – Estonian Students Society

The attempt to found a *korporatsioon* of Estonian university students did not succeed. It would have required the consent of the already existing German *korporatsioon*s, but they were opposed to the idea, and so the university administration did not approve. In the meantime, however, the chapter had already adopted the blue-black-white colors and members wore them in the quarters of their chapter. When they found out about the university's refusal, Aleksander Mõtus, the student elected as chairman of *Vironia*, defiantly put on a *korporatsioon*-style cap with the blue-black-white colors on Good Friday in 1882 (March 27 OS, or April 7 NS) and hired a coachman to drive him to town. This was the first public appearance of the blue-black-white colors. But German university students attacked him on the street, snatched the cap from his head, took it away with them and trampled on it in the quarters of their *korporatsioon*. As if that were not enough, Mõtus was accused of violating university and student body regulations. Regardless of the fact that he was courageously defending himself, the university court expelled him and he was forbidden even to live in Tartu. He had to leave town, and went to St. Petersburg where he continued his studies.

The next year, though, in the spring of 1883, Estonian university students succeeded in registering as an academic society – the *Verein der Studierenden Esten* or *Eesti Üliõpilaste Selts* (EÜS, Estonian Students Society). The German *korporatsioon*s were powerless to forbid it. The Society retained the *Vironia* colors and used them in their quarters. A rowboat on the Emajõgi River, which A. Mõtus' brother had given the Society as a gift, was also painted blue, black and white.

The First Blue-Black-White Flag

The Society accepted Estonian alumni as well as students. In the spring of 1884 alumnus Dr. Karl August Hermann's wife Paula Hermann made a large blue-black-white flag for the EÜS out of silk. She was helped by Emilie Beermann (whose brother Christoph Beermann held the title *Fuchsmajor* in the EÜS) and Miina Hermann (later known as the Estonian composer Miina Härma). Since displaying this flag in public was forbidden in Tartu, Society members went to Otepää at the invitation of the Otepää church pastor, alumnus Burchard Sperrlingk, as his guests. The flag was consecrated in the Otepää rectory on May 23 (OS; June 4 NS) 1884. Sixteen university students and six alumni participated. They rode to Otepää together in a large carriage drawn by eight horses, and unfurled the flag about ten kilometers from Otepää.

Alumnus Rudolf Kallas, the pastor of the Valga congregation, conducted the consecration ceremony. The song *Mu isamaa, mu õnn ja rõõm* (My Fatherland, My Happiness and Joy) was sung as the concluding song. Reading between the lines of the speeches to the prevailing mood at the ceremony, the consecration was actually the dedication of the flag to the aims and ideals of the Estonian people. Several prayers and oaths uttered under the flag support this view, for instance those of the chairman, Peeter Hellat, from an 1873 song by Mihkel Veske ("Fatherland, bountiful and sacred, hear the longing of our prayer, dedicate us as your guardians") and alumnus Dr. Heinrich Rosenthal from Tallinn ("Even if Estonia were full of devils, they would not vanquish our flag"). The flag was brought back to Tartu, where it was kept in the Society's library room. This was the first blue-black-white flag. Rumors and opinions that the blue-black-white flag had been seen elsewhere before, for example at earlier song festivals, have all proved erroneous.

The National Colors in the Period of Estonian National Awakening

In order to understand how blue-black-white became Estonia's national colors, we should look at the period of National Awakening

and the part that Estonian intellectuals played in it. The National Awakening did not proceed simultaneously and uniformly throughout the country. It began in southern Estonia, first of all in Pärnu and Viljandi counties, and later spread from there to northern Estonia. At this time the role of main initiators and organizers of events shifted from the more active farmers to local schoolteachers and other rural intellectuals, and from there in turn to university intellectuals. We have seen that at first there were few Estonian university intellectuals, yet their number grew rapidly. This shift turned Tartu, where the university was, into the cultural centre of the period.

The EÜS in Tartu was the only countrywide organization of university students and alumni intellectuals. For this reason, it became the focal point of national cultural evolution during the last decade of the 19th century. We can even say that the EÜS included practically the entire intelligentsia of Estonia at that time. It attracted broader circles of Estonian nationalism around it and maintained contact among them. Estonian university students no longer lost their connection with their country and their homes, as had been the case earlier. Particularly during the so-called Tartu Renaissance around the turn of the century, many national cultural activities emerged from the EÜS. These included the gathering of folklore, folk music and antiquities, the Estonian National Museum, the Society of Estonian Writers and the work of nationalist publishers, the reorganization of the Vanemuine Society at a higher level according to new principles, agricultural exhibitions that were both economic and national cultural undertakings, the Estonian Loan and Savings Association (which helped to finance nationalist activity), and many others.

With this background, we can understand that awareness of the colors and the flag, although banned in Tartu as nationalist symbols, could not remain hidden from nationalist circles located farther afield. Some Estonian university students wore their colors in their home neighborhoods. A new attempt was made in the early 1890s to register the EÜS as a *korporatsioon*, this time under the name of *Fraternitas Viliensis* but with the same colors. Even though the German *korporatsioon*s no longer had as much influence as before, the university administration again refused recognition. It can be

presumed that this new refusal made the blue-black-white even more popular. Thus, although only in isolated cases, the blue-black-white actually began to be used at family festivities and local events in many localities, as decoration, on clothing or as insignia.

At the fifth countrywide song festival, held in Tartu in 1894, Estonian university students were responsible for keeping order. The song festival grounds were decorated with blue-black-white ribbons; two choirs (from Tartu Maarja and Suure Jaani) participated under the blue-black-white flag. It is noteworthy that the first of these previously had its own red, white and black flag, but made a new flag for the festival. The reason for this is quite clear. At the next countrywide song festival in Tallinn in 1896, the Russian state authorities prohibited the use of the blue-black-white. Yet at least three choirs nevertheless performed there with their blue-black-white flags: Haapsalu from Lääne County, Kivijärve from Tartu County, and Rõuge from Võru County. Thus it can be said that even before the end of the 19th century, blue-black-white were known throughout the country as the Estonian national colors.

The National Colors Spread Beyond the Homeland

This process of development continued much more rapidly and broadly in the early 20th century, even beyond the Estonian homeland. Thus choirs performed with blue-black-white flags at all three song festivals held in Estonian settlements in Russia: in Narva in 1912, and in Sukhum and the Crimea in 1914. A blue-black-white rosette served as the insignia for participants at the Narva song festival. There were isolated examples of the use of the national colors by Estonians in foreign countries, for instance by an Estonian athlete at the Stockholm Olympic Games in 1912 and by the world champion wrestler A. R. Aberg in New York in 1915 and 1916.

In 1905 the German *korporatsioon*s in Tartu lost their veto over the founding of new *korporatsioon*s. The number of Estonian university students and intellectuals had increased a great deal by that time, not only in Tartu but abroad. *Vironia* was founded in Riga (1909), *Fraternitas Estica* (1907), *Sakala* (1909) and *Ugala* (1913) in Tartu,

and *Rotalia* in St. Petersburg (1913). The basis for the colors of all the Estonian *korporatsioon*s founded at that time was the Estonian national colors, only replacing one of the colors or changing the order of the colors. The EÜS itself gave up applying for *korporatsioon* status on the ground that the essential part of their aims had already been achieved as a society. The use of the colors remained confined to the internal quarters of the Society and was optional for members. But all Estonian organizations of university students demonstrated their respect and esteem for the national colors.

Blue-Black-White as the National Battle Flag

The EÜS blue-black-white flag was brought out in public for the first time in Tartu during the tumult of the Revolution of 1905. On October 19 (November 1 NS) it was carried at the head of the procession at a demonstration of Estonian organizations that was both a nationalist demonstration and a protest against the arbitrary, wanton actions of extremely left-wing foreign university students and others. On the very same day Jaan Tõnisson declared to the rebellious university students in the university assembly hall that this “is not your, but our university of Estonians.” The rebels attempted to attack the flag during the procession, and J. Tõnisson and the writer K. E. Sõöt were injured in the skirmish. Sõöt, his handkerchief dripping with blood, led the singing in unison of the song *Mu isamaa, mu õnn ja rõõm*. This is considered to be the moment when the blue-black-white became a flag of political struggle. Up to that point, reactionary right-wing Baltic Germans and the Russian tsarist regime had been hostile towards the blue-black-white; afterwards, anti-nationalist left-wing extremist foreigners also turned hostile. The blue-black-white represented the rights of the Estonian people and their aspiration and struggle to secure them.

In the large demonstration and procession demanding autonomy for Estonia that took place in St. Petersburg in March of 1917, many Estonian organizations and groups of Estonian military personnel carried blue-black-white flags. Many of those flags had been hurriedly stitched together just in time for that demonstration. This event created such an impression in the Russian Provisional Government

that Estonia, alone among the many minority nationalities in Russia, was able to achieve autonomy. At that time, many Estonian officers and soldiers as well as civilians began wearing insignia in the national colors, notably in the form of small ribbons beside the officers' insignia.

National Colors and the Estonian War of Independence

Estonian officers and soldiers who served in the Russian Army during World War I, as well as many civilians, returned to their homeland in the turmoil of revolution. They ordinarily wore some sort of insignia in the national colors. When Estonian military units were formed in Estonia, the national colors were used for insignia indicating rank and in emblems of military units. Most units acquired blue-black-white flags for themselves. It became general practice during the Estonian War of Independence for the national colors to be used in different combinations as insignia on epaulets and uniform sleeves. General Johan Laidoner, Supreme Commander of the Estonian forces during the Estonian War of Independence, was fully justified in later declaring that Estonians fought in and won the War of Independence under the blue-black-white colors. Blue, black and white also became the main colors of the *Vabaduse Rist* (Cross of Liberty).

The Blue-Black-White as the National Flag

By 1917 several Estonian local governments had acquired a blue-black-white flag for themselves. In February 1918 the Declaration of Independence took place in many locations under the national flag, for example in Pärnu on February 23 (a day earlier than planned). Immediately after the end of the German occupation on November 21, 1918, the Provisional Government of Estonia adopted the blue-black-white flag as the national flag; it was hoisted at the tip of *Pikk Hermann* (Tall Hermann) Tower in Tallinn on December 12.

After the war, when independence had been established, it was generally accepted that the *Riigikogu* (Estonian Parliament), the highest organ of national power, should decide the question of the

national flag once and for all in the form of a National Flag Act. A parliamentary commission, under General Laidoner as chairman, was appointed to prepare the legislation. Other color combinations were suggested by the Government of the Republic, and by others as well. The primary arguments were that the national flag and the state flag should be different, and also that blue and black blend in with each other, especially at sea, and are often difficult to differentiate at a distance. A flag with a cross design was also proposed, to emphasize that Estonia belonged to the family of Nordic countries. The parliamentary commission nevertheless retained the blue-black-white; the argument that blue and black cannot be differentiated from one another was disproved.

A new issue emerged in the course of the discussion: the proper tone of the color blue. It was unanimously decided that the blue color of the Estonian flag was to be a light blue that does not blend in with black, as a dark blue might. The *Riigikogu* passed the National Flag Act on June 27, 1922, in the form proposed by the commission. It said:

1. The Estonian national flag is a sky blue (cornflower blue)-black-white flag. The color fields of the flag are of equal width. The proportion of width to length of the flag is 7:11. Note [*in original*]: the normal size of the national flag is 105 x 165 centimeters.
2. The flag of the State Elder [*Riigivanem*, the head of state during the first republic] is the national flag with the national coat of arms in the middle.
3. The national flag is the flag of national institutions. Institutions may place their separate symbols on this flag. Approval of separate symbols and their placement on the national flag must be obtained from the Government of the Republic.

[*See the flag chart on the inside back cover.*]

Note that this size and proportion of length to width apply to the national flag only, not to other blue-black-white flags. At the same

time, although the National Flag Act aspired to define the tone of blue by specifying *sky* and *cornflower* blue, this cannot be considered as being completely successful. Neither blue has a consistent tone. The color of cornflowers in particular can be very light and also rather dark. What can absolutely clearly be concluded from this definition is that the blue of the Estonian flag is light blue. Later on, more seriously after the Second World War and beyond the borders of the Estonian homeland, the precise definition of the “correct” Estonian blue as a chemical-technical constant has been attempted, relying on information concerning the oldest flags and on other historical facts. Without delving into these technical details, we can only reiterate that the Estonian blue is a light blue. For several reasons, particularly due to difficulties in obtaining the correct light blue color, a repeated trend has emerged where the blue tone becomes progressively darker. This should not be permitted. The Estonian blue is light blue, even though it may vary here and there.

Fiftieth Anniversary Jubilee Celebrations of the Blue-Black-White Flag

The 50th anniversary jubilee celebrations of this historic flag took place in 1934 in Tartu and Otepää. All of Estonia’s public figures participated, along with all members of the Government of the Republic of that time led by State Elder Konstantin Päts. The main celebrations took place in Tartu, but an official trip was made to Otepää as well. There a memorial plaque was affixed to the church building, engraved with words written by Gustav Suits from the flag song *Tõsta lipp!* (*Raise the Flag!*) he wrote in 1920.

Raise the flag!

May it speak, speak of the oath, which must last, last.

Striped with blue, plaited with the black earth,

Fly white and mighty, assailed and besieged.

Among other things, State Elder Päts said the following in his address at Otepää:

Today, on the 50th anniversary jubilee of the blue-black-

white, we pledge from the bottom of our hearts to hold this flag cleanly on high and to sacrifice what is required by a people that wants to live in freedom.

Thousands of people witnessed and participated in the celebrations. At Otepää there were more than 2000 people present. This was one of the grandest special events to take place during the period of Estonian independence. Thus free and independent Estonia honored its most important national symbol, which had helped to carry it to freedom and independence. The historical flag was given for safekeeping to the Estonian National Museum at Raadi Estate in Tartu.

The Flag Campaign in the Republic of Estonia

A year later, in 1935, the Government of the Republic started a flag campaign at the initiative of Minister of Interior and Deputy Prime Minister (later Prime Minister) Kaarel Eenpalu. The aim of the campaign was that in addition to governmental institutions and organizations, the Estonian flag would also be in homes, in cities and in the countryside, and that it would be hoisted on national holidays. During the final years of the independent Republic of Estonia, all houses in cities had flags and it was obligatory to hoist the flag on Estonian Independence Day. Nearly two thirds of Estonian farms in the countryside also had blue-black-white flags. There was to have been an annual observance of Flag Day, either on June 4 or on Victory Day June 23, but this was never realized.

The Government of the Republic also established regulations for the use of the flag, according to which every flag that was hoisted had to be in good condition and the flag was not to be hoisted arbitrarily or excessively. This meant respect for the national colors and the national flag. The national flag flew at the tip of Pikk Hermann Tower in Tallinn from sunrise to sunset. Flying high and subject to the effects of winds and weather, the Pikk Hermann flag was replaced by a new flag 45 times a year on average, that is almost every week.

The Fate of the Blue-Black-White Flag During the War Years

In 1917 and 1918, all political parties in Estonia, both left- and right-wing, supported independence. Only the Bolsheviks (Communists) were opposed to independence. They remained subordinate to their party's central leadership in Russia, meaning that they never became an Estonian political party. Thus their attitude towards the blue-black-white was negative and soon turned into hatred. When they were temporarily in power, they destroyed blue-black-white flags wherever they got hold of them, with the help of Russian soldiers, workers and sailors. From that point onward, the blue-black-white became for them the most hated as well as the most dangerous symbol of both the bourgeoisie and nationalism.

In June 1940, during the first days after the Soviet Army entered Estonia, a gang of youths supported by a Russian tank removed the Estonian national flag from Pikk Hermann Tower. The blue-black-white was immediately hoisted again on the Tower, on the order of the Minister of Internal Affairs of the Vares-Barbarus government (the puppet government of Estonia sworn in according to the demands of the Soviet Union). It remained there (as a political maneuver) until August 6, when Estonia was forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union. Every demonstration that displayed the blue-black-white, many of which took place particularly in Tallinn and Tartu, was met with arrests. All flags that the authorities got hold of were removed and destroyed, and many of the people who kept or concealed those flags were murdered. Yet nevertheless, people succeeded in hiding most of the flags, including the historical EÜS flag.

[See the epilogue on page 16.]

The hidden flags emerged again throughout the country in the summer of 1941. The German occupation regime did not forbid the blue-black-white. Estonian military units formed by the German military and police authorities even wore insignia in the national colors. But public assemblies and nationalist demonstrations displaying the blue-black-white were obstructed, and it was forbidden as the national flag. A flag intended for Estonian soldiers fighting in the

Finnish Army against the Soviet Union was made in Estonia, and transported to Finland in the summer of 1944, but this could only be done with the greatest secrecy, and so it did not arrive in Finland in time as planned. When they returned home, the Estonian soldiers brought the flag with them, but once back in Estonia they had to hide the flag again. When Soviet forces re-occupied Estonia in 1944, many blue-black-white flags were again hidden. On September 21, 1944, the Estonian blue-black-white flag did fly at the tip of Pikk Hermann Tower, but only for a few hours.

Use of the National Colors is Made a Crime in Estonia

Since the second Soviet occupation in 1944, ownership or use of any sort of blue-black-white tricolor is a crime in Estonia, reacted to with harsh punishment. The objective of propaganda and the falsification of history is to root out altogether among the young people of Estonia awareness even of the existence of the blue-black-white. Yet regardless of this, the blue-black-white has emerged from time to time, and propaganda has not yielded the desired results. The Soviet regime has also cunningly attempted to make some seeming compromises, like adding blue and white wavy lines to the Soviet Estonian red flag, and the colored caps of university students have been brought back into use, but of course not in the national colors.

The Estonian National Flag Lives On Abroad

In 1944, refugees leaving Estonia brought with them the blue-black-white flags of many establishments and organizations, along with personal blue-black-white flags and other objects in those colors. Many more flags in the national colors were made abroad, and there is likely not a single Estonian organization abroad that does not have its own flag in the national colors. Desk flags on bases depicting Pikk Hermann Tower have become particularly popular. This is only abroad, where the blue-black-white can fly freely. The love of and dedication to the blue-black-white has grown even greater there than ever before. The 75th anniversary jubilee of the flag was celebrated with dignity in many foreign countries in 1959. ESTO '80 in Stockholm was an event of singular importance. The

entire downtown area of Stockholm was decorated with blue-black-white flags only a few hundred kilometers away from the Estonian homeland.

[See the illustration on the back cover.]

This did not go unnoticed in Estonia. Thus when ESTIVAL 1983 took place, the Soviet consul officially demanded that the Gothenburg [Göteborg] municipal government remove all blue-black-white flags. But the municipal government refused to comply. ESTO '84 is taking place in Toronto now that the 100th anniversary jubilee of the blue-black-white flag has arrived. The jubilee celebration is not only for the liberty of the Estonian community in the free world, but also its duty since this cannot be done in Estonia.

Fatherland, thou bountiful and sacred,
Hear the longing of our prayer,
Dedicate us as your guardians!

Epilogue

Estonia was invaded during World War II, first by the Russians, then by the Germans, and then again by the Russians in 1944. At the end of the war Russian forces remained in occupation of Estonia and the other Baltic republics, which they forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union.

Karl Aun, the author of this pamphlet, was president of the Eesti Üliõpilaste Selts (Estonian University Association, or EÜS) when it was banned by the Russians on July 29, 1940. He was concerned that the Soviets would use the original flag (along with some silver cups belonging to EÜS) for propaganda purposes in Estonia. They were stored in the National Museum in Tallinn. With a small group of like-minded EÜS friends, he decided to steal the flag and cups and hide them for the short time that the Soviets were expected to remain in Estonia. One of the group was the Museum's director, Ferdinand Linnus (1895-1942), who died in Soviet captivity. Others involved included Tartu University Professor Gustav Ränk, a member of the Museum's board of directors, Eduard Leetmaa, Artur Kaigas and Verner Peterson. On August 16, 1940, they entered the museum, removed the original flag (replacing it with a 1934 replica made for the flag's 50th anniversary), packed it in a copper container inside a wooden box, and buried the box in the woods near Viljandi. Several other EÜS relics (including documents and the meeting bell) were also removed from the museum and buried in the same box.

They realized later that the Soviets were determined to stay, and that the flag was not adequately protected for a long stay. So on July 22, 1942, they regrouped, dug up the box, wrapped the flag in oiled cloth and asbestos, placed it in a steel box, and welded it shut. Then they wrapped the box itself in asbestos and put into an outer wooden box. Aun convinced his group that he could hide the box so that no one could find it. He left Tallinn with it and went home to his family farm near Vaimastvere in central Estonia. There he built the second chimney that his grandmother had been demanding for years. On April 28, 1944, Aun placed the flag container under the hearth of the new fireplace.

Two or three of the group knew the farm was its final destination, but only Karl Aun and his father Aleksander knew the flag's exact location. In the late 1970s Aleksander Aun, in ill health, told some close relatives of the hiding spot. In 1984 Karl, now in poor health himself, told his son and a few other Estonian expatriates. Apart from these confidantes, no one knew the location of the flag for nearly 50 years. In June 1989 Aun was able to visit the site and found it undisturbed. He arranged for the farm to revert to his ownership.

In August 1991, Estonia again achieved independence. Aun waited until 1992 to be sure that the Soviets were gone. As his health at that point was very poor, he contacted the son of his cousin in Otepää. He asked that the flag be dug up, that the entire procedure be recorded, and that the contents of the box be presented to the President of Estonia for the Estonian people.

The flag was retrieved from its hiding place on December 26, 1991. A 90-minute television documentary was made about this event. The producers filmed an interview with Aun in Canada that was incorporated in the production. When the film of the retrieval aired on Estonian television (on Estonian Independence Day, February 24, 1992), the entire country was entranced by the story and by Dr. Aun's part in the burial and return of this precious symbol of Estonian culture.

The original Estonian flag was sent for restoration on March 23, 1992. Even after all the years of burial damage was found to be minimal. On September 14, 1992 the restored flag once again went on display in the Estonian National Museum.

Professor Dr. Karl Aun



Professor Dr. Karl Aun was a very complex man. To some, he was the epitome of the absent-minded professor, except that his intelligent eyes sparkled with wisdom and glee. His students at Waterloo Lutheran University were slightly terrified, and at the same time in awe of his knowledge and skill. He demanded, and received, their best efforts; less than that earned his gentle

verbal scorn. He loved an argument, particularly a political one; no matter the stance of student or acquaintance, he would easily, cleverly play Devil's Advocate – in several languages.

Karl Aun (pronounced to rhyme with *town*) was born in the rural municipality of Vaimastvere, Tartu County (today Jõgeva County), Estonia, on May 15, 1914. His life on the family farm in Vaimastvere in central Estonia was not easy. He was expected to be a fully functioning, hard-working farm son, and he was. But he was also superbly intelligent and desirous of higher education. He received a scholarship to Tartu University in theology, excelled in his first year, and transferred, with scholarship, to his life-long love – law, particularly international law. On graduation, he was appointed assistant district judge. He participated fully in the life of the university and in 1940 became chairman of EÜS, the premier student association, a position he took most seriously; he maintained close ties to the EÜS throughout his life.

Aun was a patriot, quietly, of one of the smallest countries and linguistic groups in Europe. With some help, mostly from EÜS friends, the supposedly absent-minded professor ran guns to the *Metsavennad* (Forest Brothers) guerrillas battling the Soviet, then German, then Soviet occupations of his homeland. He boarded trams and trains with his briefcase full of weapons and ammunition.

Professor Aun escaped to Germany after the Soviet re-occupation of his country in 1944, and after the war taught at the Baltic University

in Hamburg (later removed to Pinneberg and known as the Displaced Persons Study Centre). In 1948 he earned a *Juris Doctor* degree from the University of Hamburg. In 1949, after the closure of the former Baltic University, he emigrated to the United States, where he worked as an accountant at the University of Chicago while earning a Master of Arts degree there (1958). In 1959 he moved to Canada and taught political science at Waterloo Lutheran University (later Wilfred Laurier University) in Ontario until he retired as a full professor in 1979. He was the author of several books, including *Der völkerrechtliche Schutz nationaler Minderheiten in Estland von 1917 bis 1950* (Hamburg 1951) and *The Political Refugees: A History of the Estonians in Canada* (Toronto 1985). He died in Toronto on March 21, 1995, at the age of 80.

The epilogue, and this recollection of the author, were written by the author's son Tõnu Olavi Aun, daughter Ene Aun Hartel and daughter-in-law Carol Hendry Aun.

Colophon

This work was originally published, in Estonian, in Toronto in 1984, by Prof. Dr. Karl Aun (1914-1995). It is translated, and the translation published, with the kind permission of the copyright holders Tõnu Olavi Aun and Ene Aun Hartel. The translation by Peeter Tammisto was commissioned by the Flag Heritage Foundation. The epilogue and recollection of Dr. Aun, never before published, were written in English in 2010 by his son Tõnu Olavi Aun, daughter Ene Aun Hartel and daughter-in-law Carol Hendry Aun. The image on the title page is the emblem of the Estonian *Kaitseliit* (Defense League).

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State flag and national flag	Flag of the State Elder (Riigivanem)	Postal Service flag
Border Guard flag	Pennant of the State Elder	Customs flag
Flag of the Minister of Defense	Flag of the Supreme Commander of the Defense Forces	Flag of a Rear Admiral
Naval ensign	Naval jack	<i>Kaitseliit</i> (Defense League) flag (front)
Flag of Tallinn	Flag of Tartu	<i>Kaitseliit</i> (Defense League) flag (reverse)
	Warship and Auxiliary Ship pennant	



Riigi- ja rahvuslipp



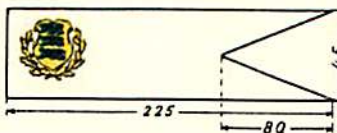
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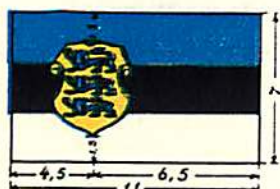
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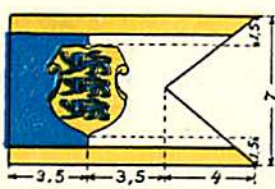
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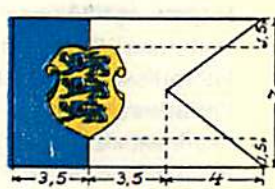
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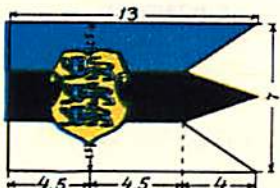
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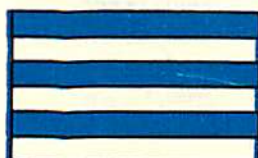
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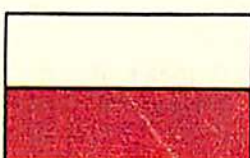
GÜs ja merekindluste lipp



Kaitseliidu lipp



Tallinna lipp



Tartu lipp



Sõja- ja abilaeva vimpel



The procession of Estonian flags in Stockholm during ESTO-80.

In 1944, as the Russians reoccupied Estonia, Karl Aun took the first Estonian flag from the National Museum and hid it until his country regained its freedom. In this pamphlet, first published in Estonian in Toronto in 1984 and now in English for the first time, Professor Aun relates the history of the blue-black-white Estonian flag from its origins in 1884 until the eclipse of independence. An epilogue tells the story of how he hid the original flag and its re-emergence in 1992.

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