

The Battle of Näsilinna

Teacher, welcome to explore the Battle of Näsilinna on the www.tampere1918.fi website! The Battle of Näsilinna was one of the key events during the Battle of Tampere in the Finnish Civil War in the spring of 1918. The White Army captured the urban area of Tampere from the Reds on April 3-6, 1918. One of the most well-known battles during the capture of Tampere was fought for the control of Näsilinna. Näsilinna held strategic importance as it was located on Näsinkallio next to Finland's main railway. The Reds controlled Näsinkallio and had placed cannons there. In the animation, you can choose which point of view of the battle you want to experience.

The assignments are best suited for the module "HI 3 History of Independent Finland," but they are also suitable for other subjects, such as English studies. The objectives of the HI 3 module include understanding the shaping of Finland as part of European and international developments. The goal is for students to be able to evaluate interpretations of Finnish history and the motives behind them in their historical context. The Civil War is mentioned as a key content area in the module. (LOPS, 2019.)

In the *Battle of Näsilinna* assignments, there are sections related to animations as well as parts that practice skills for searching for information. The answers are indicative and marked in green.

Assignments

Before the animations

- 1) **Information search:** When was the Finnish Civil War and what were the reasons behind it?

The Civil War was fought in 27.1.-15.5.1918.

The outbreak of the Civil War had many reasons, such as societal inequality (e.g., suffrage) and class differences. The Civil War was part of the First World War, which reshaped the map of Europe. Finland was divided socially, economically, and politically. With the fall of the Russian Emperor, there was no effective law enforcement to maintain order, leading to different social classes forming their own guards that clashed militarily in late 1917. Finland gained independence in December 1917, causing a political, economic, and military crisis in the country. This ultimately led to the disintegration of the entire Finnish society when the Civil War began on January 27, 1918.

- 2) **Information search:** Who were the Reds and the Whites?

The Reds were primarily urban factory workers and the rural poor, the landless tenant farmers or crofters, who were reliable activists in the labor movement and trade unions. Many of them were members of the Workers' Guards, which began to be established in October 1917 when there was no general law enforcement on behalf of the state. The Workers' Guards had a role in maintaining public order, but their goal was also to secure the position of the political left in government. The more radical elements of the labor movement began to refer to the guards as the Red Guards.

Women in the Red Guards typically served in healthcare and support roles. In the spring of 1918, two armed women's companies were also established, consisting of a total of just under 300 women.

After the outbreak of the Civil War, the central leadership of the Red Guards operated rather poorly. Due to the lack of qualified instructors, the training of the Guards was weak. The headquarters of the Red Guard was in Helsinki, but other key centers for the Reds were Tampere, Kotka, and Viipuri. At least 6000 men and women, who were mostly industrial workers, skilled laborers, or artisans, joined the Tampere Red Guard. The Guard seized power in Tampere on January 28, 1918, immediately after the war started.

The Whites, on the other hand, composed of conservative activists and the bourgeoisie who began establishing Civil Guards, also called the White Guards, in numerous parts of the country during the summer of 1917 for various reasons. Establishing Civil Guards in the strongholds of the Reds, such as Tampere and its surroundings, was challenging. Towards the end of the year, civil guards started uniting behind common goals: removing the remaining Russian military presence from Finland, controlling the Red Guards, and restoring public order were among the objectives of the Whites. However, effective collaboration was achieved only after the outbreak of the Civil War. The fragmented self-sufficiency of the Civil Guards in January 1918 was one of the factors leading to the outbreak of the war.

In addition to the civil guards, troops were recruited into the White Army, and conscription was introduced to ensure an adequate number of men. A significant part of the leadership expertise of the White Army consisted of voluntary Jaegers trained in Germany, who participated in the Civil War in February 1918. The leader of the White Army was General Mannerheim, who had served in the Russian army in the past.

3) **Information search:** Why can the Finnish Civil War be called a war of amateurs?

Both the Reds and the Whites had to deploy poorly equipped and inadequately trained forces to the front. Many fought in civilian clothes, and only a few had received proper training for warfare. Child soldiers were also involved on both the Red and White sides. There was practically no established war strategy, and the operations were not organized. Logistics also functioned poorly, making it difficult for the troops to advance.

However, the weapons were modern. The Reds obtained their weapons from the Russians, while the Whites confiscated weapons from the Reds and later received additional supplies from the Germans. Machine guns and the artillery previously imported by the Russians played a decisive role in many battles. Red armored trains were also crucial since the battles took place near roads and, especially, railways. There was also aerial activity, as both sides had airplanes at their disposal, although they were used more for distributing leaflets and reconnaissance than for bombing raids.

- 4) **Information search:** What kind of building is the Näsilinna palace today? Who built it and when?

Näsilinna was originally named Milavida. It was built by the von Nottbeck family as their residence, and the palace was completed in 1899. In 1905, the city of Tampere purchased Milavida, renaming it Näsilinna, and also changing the names of nearby streets. The Milavida Museum began its operations in Milavida in 2015.

Animation

Choose your point of view: Reds

1. How long had the Civil War lasted when the Battle of Tampere began?
It had lasted for about two months.
2. What function did the Näsilinna palace serve during the Civil War?
The Häme Museum served as a Red Cross hospital during the war.
3. Who led the Whites in the capture of Näsilinna?
Senior lieutenant Gunnar Melin.
4. What were important weapons for the Reds when recapturing Näsilinna?
Machine guns, artillery and especially an armored train.
5. Why was the railway so important?
It allowed movement of the Reds' most intimidating weapon, the armored train, which the Whites did not have.
6. Why was communication challenging at Näsilinna between the Reds and the Whites?
White conscripts mainly spoke Swedish, while Reds spoke Finnish.
7. What happened to the Reds' defense of Tampere after the Battle of Näsilinna?
The Reds' defense collapsed rapidly throughout the city.

Choose your point of view: Whites

1. When did the attack on Tampere begin?
The attack towards the city center began on April 3rd.
2. Who led the Whites in the capture of Näsilinna?
Senior lieutenant Gunnar Melin.
3. What function did Näsilinna serve during the Civil War?
The Häme Museum served as a Red Cross hospital during the war.
4. What symbol did the Whites attacking Näsilinna use?
Spruce branches in their hats instead of a white armband.

5. Who was Oskar Nordling?

A White soldier who was injured in friendly fire. His leg had to be amputated, and it ended up in a horse cemetery. Nordling's bloodstains soaked into the parquet floor, where they are still visible today.

6. Which route did Melin's troops take when retreating?

They escaped across the frozen waters of Lake Näsijärvi, near Pajasaari (towards Naistenlahti).

7. How did the Battle of Tampere end?

The Whites took control of Näsiliina and occupied Tampere.