



Ambassador Hanna Lehtinen, Mannerheim and Robert Brantberg. Photo: Kari-Veli Lehtonen

## **Robert Brantberg**

### **Speech at the Embassy of Finland, Warsaw 5th June 2017**

#### ***Marshal Gustaf Mannerheim and Poland***

The Marshal of Finland, Baron Gustaf Mannerheim is the most notable person when it comes to the history of independent Finland. He led the White Army to victory in the War of Independence in 1918. He was the Commander-in-chief of the Finnish Army during WW2. He led Finland to peace in August 1944. He was also the 6th president of Finland from 1944 to 1946.

Mannerheim made his career in the Imperial Russian Army. He rose to the rank of Lieutenant General. He also had a prominent place in the ceremonies for Czar Nicholas coronation in Moscow 1896. Later he became to know the Czar family personally.



Mannerheim received his “Baptism of Fire” as a Lieutenant-Colonel in the Russo-Japanese war in 1904. In 1906 he went for a secret intelligence journey on horseback through Turkestan to Beijing. The successful trip lasted for two years. As a curious detail, it could be mentioned, that during the journey he officially met Dalai Lama, who lived in exile in China.

After the intelligence mission Mannerheim became the commander of the 13<sup>th</sup> Vladimir Ulan Regiment in Poland and was promoted to the rank of General in the Imperial Entourage. This meant immediate access to the Czar. He had the opportunity to follow at close range the life of Czar Nicholas and Czarina Alexandra especially here in Poland at the Imperial hunting palace at Białowieża Forest and at the hunting lodge in Spala.

He came to know the Grand Dukes, the Generals and the Cabinet Ministers of Russia as well as the high society of St. Petersburg and Warsaw. His hobbies included horses, hunting and gambling. He followed also closely the hectic political life of his times.

Russian generals were not very popular in Poland during the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, if ever. But Baron Mannerheim was an exception, mainly because he came from the Grand Duchy of Finland, then an autonomous part of the Russian Empire. And Mannerheim was a tall, handsome and intelligent cavalry officer, who spoke fluent French, as the Polish nobility Szlachta did.

He made good friends with the Szlachta. He became a member of the exclusive Polish Jockey Club. In fact, when the mobilisation for WW1 begun in 1914, Mannerheim was having dinner at the Jockey Club.

General Mannerheim went to the war as Commander of the Imperial Lifeguard Cavalry Brigade in Warsaw and fought on the Austro-Hungarian and Romanian fronts. In December 1914, after distinguishing himself in combat, Mannerheim was awarded the famous Order of St. George. A close friend of him, Grand Duke and Commander-in-chief Nikolay Nikolayevich decorated him in person.

“Now I can die in peace”, Mannerheim said after receiving the award. In March 1915 Mannerheim was appointed the command of the 12<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division. At the end of the Big War in 1917 he commanded the 6<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Corps. This meant 10 000 horses. He was at the top of the not anymore so Imperial Russian Army.



In December 1917 Mannerheim returned to independent Finland, a country that was at the brink of Civil War. In December 1918 Mannerheim was elected temporary Regent of Finland. Mannerheim, the U.K. Secretary for War Winston Churchill, the Polish General Józef Piłsudski and the Russian White Generals planned to overthrow the Bolševik Regime in St. Petersburg in a joint effort. Mannerheim discussed the matter with Piłsudski here just around the corner in the Belweder Palace.

This was a historical moment. But the plan collapsed, when the Russian White Generals refused to recognize the independence of Finland. The precious time slot passed.

The rest is better known history.