

Castle Camps and Fires of Foe. Settlements of the Vyborg Province Amid the Turmoil of the Twenty-five Years' War (1570–1595)

1. Premises of the Study

Course of the War

Towards the end of the 16th century, Sweden and Russia were involved in a long and eventful war. The competition over the Baltic region led to a war in Estonia, and soon the warfare spread to Finland and Karelia, where the situation had already been tense for quite some time. The first Russian raids during the winters of 1571 and 1572 were followed by Swedish revenge campaigns which ended when the truce was signed in 1573. After four years of peace, the war between the countries restarted in 1577. Under the leadership of their capable Commander Pontus De la Gardie, the Swedish troops conquered the Käkisalmi Castle in the early 1580s. They also took the Ingermanland castles and a large part of Estonia. In 1583, a new truce was signed between Sweden and Russia, and with a few extensions, it held until 1590. In the winter of that same year, the Russians again raided the Vyborg province and other areas, and did so again repeatedly in 1592. The war fatigue felt by both parties as well as their internal problems contributed to their willingness to initiate peace talks which finally led to the Treaty of Täyssinä signed on 18 May 1595. According to the Treaty, Sweden could keep the conquered northern parts of Estonia whereas it had to return Ingermanland and the town of Käkisalmi with the surrounding province to Russia. From the Finnish point of view, however, the single most important factor of the treaty was probably the fact that Finland's eastern border was now clearly drawn up to the Arctic Ocean, instead of the Gulf of Ostrobothnia; thus Russia recognised the factual situation of the habitation since the new settlements initiated by King Gustavus I Vasa had already spread beyond the eastern border defined in the Treaty of Pähkinäsaari in 1323.

Object of the Study

The devastation caused by the Twenty-five Years' War has been addressed in the histories written for single districts and parishes, as well as during the Pan-Nordic project on deserted farms in the 1970s and '80s. However, there has been no comprehensive study covering the entire Vyborg province. The purpose of this study was to draw a comprehensive picture of the settlements of the Vyborg province during the Twenty-five Years' War, with a particular focus on the quantity, geographical distribution and causes of the devastation during the various stages of the war.

Research Area

During the period in focus, the Vyborg province comprised five districts (*härad*) plus the town of Vyborg (see Map 1; list of Maps etc. is at the end of Summary). In the south-east, the Äyräpää district included the Muolaa, Kivennapa and Uusikirkko parishes, while the Jääski district to the north of Äyräpää consisted of the Jääski and Ruokolahti parishes. To the west, there was the Lappee district with two parishes, Lappee and Taipale; the north-western corner of the district, and thus the entire province, extended as far as present-day Mäntyharju. The parishes of Virolahti, Vehkalahti and Pyhtää and a quarter of Elimäki belonged to Kymenkartano – an administrative district despite its Finnish name “Kymenkartanon lääni“ which refers to a province. The Ranta district surrounding Vyborg also encompassed the Vyborg, Säkkijärvi and Koivisto parishes, as well as the islands Lavansaari, Seiskari and Tytärsaari. When the war broke out, there were almost 6,400 farms recorded in the cadasters of the province.

The main source of living was agriculture. The prevalent form of agriculture was the farming of arable land, but forest areas cleared for cultivation through burning were also farmed, particularly in the northern and eastern parts of the province. Säkkijärvi and the southern part of Kymenkartano were the most favourable areas for animal husbandry. Hunting was fairly profitable, and the inhabitants of the coastal areas hunted seals, among other game. Fishing was the principal means of livelihood in Koivisto, and the catch was abundant both on the open sea and in the inland lakes. There were many salmon fisheries along the River Kymijoki. Both some inhabitants of Vyborg and some coastal peasants earned their living as seafarers.

Sources

The principal source material was constituted by the Vyborg province cadasters from 1569 to 1597. The cadasters were included in the so-called bailiff accounts which the bailiff of each district was obliged to compile on an annual basis. Each farm's fiscal obligations were recorded in the cadasters; the document was therefore not a record of collected taxes but one of the bases of taxation. The cadasters of the Vyborg province have been preserved almost in full; only the Lappee account for 1570 and the Ranta account for 1578 have gone missing. In the cadasters, the farms have normally been classified according to their total tax burden. The village names are often quoted, but not always, which makes it difficult to define the exact location of the settlements.

A source complementing the information obtained from the cadasters, the lists of tithes are available only for Kymenkartano and Säkkijärvi; therefore the lists of tithes have not been used systematically. Other sources which reflect the information contained in the cadasters include the 1571 silver tax collection lists as well as the lists compiled during the inspections of the deserted farms in 1588. Moreover, the bailiff accounts contain copies of letters from the King and the authorities, lists of extraordinary taxes, etc.

Central Terminology

A central concept for the purposes of this study, a cadaster farm is a farm (household) recorded in the cadaster under the farmer's name. However, this is not a clearly definable term since in different years one farm house could include one or several family households. For example, the Lappee district cadaster of the 1580 shows that the number of farms had clearly diminished while the total taxable number of the village had remained unaltered, as has the "bow or archer rate" (*bog*; a taxation parameter based on the number of hunting men in the farm) which reflects the number of family households; it is evident that households which had previously been counted separately were recorded as one, but the tax rate imposed on that household corresponds to the sum of the several households.

Occasionally, it is also difficult to define a village in the Vyborg province. Villages are not always quoted in the cadaster, nor have single farms been systematically recorded under the one and same village; one year, a farm may belong to one village, the following year to another. Neither does the name of the farmer necessarily mean that that precise person had remained the master of the farm; the person of the farm proprietary was of secondary importance to the tax collector, as long as the taxes were paid. The person named as the farmer might have been dead for a long time.

Most of the farmers mentioned in the Vyborg cadasters were peasants with an inherited farm. There were also leaseholders, Crown tenants, persons with contract taxation and other special groups whose share, however, was relatively small.

An important term in the study of devastated settlements is desertion. In the cadaster, the term deserted (*öde*) does not necessarily refer to an uninhabited farm but to a farm that could not pay its taxes. Therefore, a farm recorded as deserted could be inhabited, and could also later regain its capacity to pay taxes. However, desertion mostly meant considerable poverty which, over time, led to the farm disappearing from the cadaster.

However, there were also partly deserted farms in the Vyborg province. They were farms which had obtained relief from some of the taxes but which continued to pay, for example, one half or one quarter of the taxes imposed on them. The partly deserted farms have often been recorded twice: either so that the part which was solvent enough to pay the taxes was recorded under the taxpayers while the part with tax facilitation was recorded in the tax relief list, or so that the farms were in the taxpayer list as concerned the partially tax paid while they were recorded in the list of the deserted farms for that part which was deemed to be deserted; in these cases the "bow rate" assigned to them was zero since that figure was already recorded in the taxpayer list. The fact that the houses were recorded twice has been proved by random testing; however, not all partly deserted houses have been recorded twice, but perhaps only half of them.

Burden Caused by the War on the Settlements

The war imposed several burdens on the settlements in the Vyborg province. Normally, the Russian raids were targeted on certain areas only, but the devastation could be extensive and involve entire villages. The enemies generally looted and burned all the houses that they came across, and the inhabitants who were captured were either slain or taken prisoner.

The maintenance of the country's own army also burdened the settlements in many ways. In order to finance the war and provide for the army, extraordinary taxes were levied. They tended to turn perennial and be quite high, and sometimes the extraordinary taxes exceeded the permanent taxes in quantity. Prior to military campaigns and after them, the army was camped and accommodated in so-called castle camps which meant that the inhabitants had to participate in the upkeep of the forces. There were special rules about the accounting of the goods confiscated for the army in castle camp, but the process of recording the goods was far from complete, and the soldiers also treated the inhabitants roughly in other respects. The peasants were also obliged to accommodate and feed the itinerant Crown officials; in times of war, there were many officials requiring this treatment. Soldiers were also recruited through forced drafting which diminished the number of men, i.e., workforce available at the farms. The years of bad crops, such as 1586 to 1588, also added to the difficulties.

Methods

The method followed in the study was to calculate the numbers of farms in the cadasters, farm by farm and year by year. All farms named in the cadasters have been included. The deserted and partly deserted farms have also been included; in order to define the number of the latter, random tests have been made to see how big a share of the partly deserted farms might have been recorded twice. The number of farms recorded in the cadaster has been the starting point here, in order to maintain the criteria for calculating the farms the same from year to year and from district to district. The outcome of these calculations is represented in Tables compiled for each separate parish. By summing up these parish-based numbers, the corresponding numbers were obtained for districts and finally for the entire Vyborg province (Appendix 1). This made it possible to obtain an overview of the various phases of the settlement. However, not only the war but also several other factors have contributed to the process, and the interpretation of the figures must therefore account for these factors.

Moreover, a couple of villages in each parish have been examined in more detail, focusing on their lives during the war years (the particular villages are indicated in Map 13). This resulted in an abundant and varied material on the destinies of individual farms in the turmoil of the war. On the basis of this data, it will be possible to determine, for example, whether the farms remained deserted after the enemy's attack or whether they were able to survive. The village sample also revealed any significant revisions of the cadasters.

2. Vyborg Province Overwhelmed by the War

Devastation in 1571 and 1572

When the war started in 1570, the Vyborg province cadaster included some 6,400 farms whilst the town of Vyborg had some 250 houses. For the distribution of the settlements, see Map 3.

The war broke out in 1570 in Estonia, and early the following year the Russians attacked the Vyborg province territory three times. The most severely hit district was that of Äyräpää, with 40 % of the farms burned down. In the south of the Ranta district, one third of the farmhouses were destroyed, and some of the Kymenkartano coastal areas also suffered devastation (see Map 4).

The enemy returned in early 1572. Most of the devastation took place in the eastern parts of the province: the Äyräpää district, the Uusikirkko parish excluded, the eastern parts of the Ranta district, parts of the Jääski district and the eastern part of the Lappee district (see Map 5). Every house in Koivisto was burned down, while the enemy did not enter the Kymenkartano area.

During the early years of the war, the devastation caused by the enemy was very unsystematically recorded in the cadasters, but the information seems reliable: there was no established pattern to record the destruction, and each bailiff and scribe recorded it according to their own discretion. Some information about the devastation is also contained in the 1571 silver tax collection lists, though not, however, for the Jääski and Äyräpää districts, and the information for the rest of the territory is sometimes in conflict with the cadaster recordings.

The list of deserted farms started to appear regularly in the cadasters of the districts as early as the early 1570s. As the 1573 truce pacified the general circumstances, so did the mode of compiling the cadasters become more standardised. At that time, the lists of deserted farms became a fixed part of the cadasters and the number of such farms became established at a certain level. In the Äyräpää district, 25 % of the farms were deserted, the corresponding percentage for Jääski being 12 %, Lappee 7 %, Kymenkartano 13 % and Ranta 8 %; however, there was considerable variation in the rate of desertion of farms between the parishes in a particular district.

Swedish Advance Phase

Once the warfare restarted in 1577, raids were initially conducted by both fighting parties. Under the command of Pontus De la Gardie, the Swedish forces advanced with success and took over the Käkisalme castle, also gaining dominance over the extensive province under the castle's rule. One by one, the castles in Ingermanland and Estonia also fell under Swedish rule. The front thus drew further from the Vyborg province, and between 1577 and 1583 the enemy struck only a few times, the attacks being separate and local, that on Jääski in 1579 being the most severe. The attacks on the coast in 1581 and 1582 were of more modest extent, although all of the Koivisto farmhouses were burnt in 1581.

However, the backup required by the country's own warfare and the status of a support area in general became a heavy burden on the settlements. The burden caused by the extraordinary levy of taxes increased, and the transit of the troops and their castle camps became a permanent state of affairs.

Arrangements during the Truce

When the 1583 truce gave the settlements a chance to breathe more freely – until the year 1590 – attention could once again be paid to the state of the settlements and some measures could be taken. In order to alleviate the adverse effects of the obligation to provide accommodation and relay travel, a system of inns was set up so that the burden would not lay on the shoulders of the peasants, but on specially assigned innkeepers. The castle camps were also to be replaced by a novel tax so that the soldiers could be accommodated elsewhere, no longer among the peasants. Neither of the reforms was implemented properly, and by the year 1580 the system was back to where it had started.

Efforts were made to involve the impoverished farms to assist the others in the payment of taxes. The neighbours farming the fields of the deserted farms were imposed a special tax which resulted in an increased tax income for the State. However, the Crown had to grant some tax relief to compensate for the war-related services, and therefore the number of taxpaying peasants decreased. Moreover, the Crown had to condone the peasants from most of the taxes in arrears since the peasants had no way of meeting their obligations.

During the truce, the number of deserted farms rose sharply, accounting for an increasing share of all farms. The total number of farms recorded in the cadaster decreased by 10 % in the entire province: however, their smaller number in the cadaster was also due to the fact that the farms exempted from taxation were not recorded anew in the cadaster if, for example, a new farmer took up a deserted farm and was granted one to three taxfree years. In the Äyräpää district, the deserted farms had accounted for over 40% of the total prior to the truce, and that level remained unaltered, whereas the share of the deserted farms in the Jääski district rose to one quarter of all farms. In the Lappee district there was a dramatic drop in the number of farms, and the share of the deserted farms rose from 10 to 40 %, and to one half by the early 1590. In the cadasters of Kymenkartano, the lists of the deserted farms are unreliable or are totally missing during the period of the truce but the share of the deserted farms can be estimated at 30 %. In Ranta, the corresponding share rose from a good 10 % to one third of all farms.

Inspection of the Deserted Farms in 1588

The year 1588 saw an inspection of deserted farms covering the entire province. Lists were drawn up after the inspection, and the information about most deserted farms was also complemented with data of the period in which it had become deserted (either year or the number of years of desertion) as well as the respective reason (slain, impoverished, escaped). In the Jääski district, the list of the deserted farms corresponds very well to the information contained in the cadaster, but other districts show some variation in this respect.

However, the information in the deserted farm list is suspect, especially that concerning the desertion that took place during the first years of the war; the war had started almost 20 years earlier and a list compiled on the basis of memory must be deemed unreliable.

Fiscal Rearrangements at the Turn of the 1590s

One of the measures taken to offset the tax burden was the fact that the fiscal unit “smoke“ (*rök*; a taxation parameter referring on the pillar of smoke coming out of a house), which earlier corresponded to one farm recorded in the cadaster, was detached from this connotation and turned into a fiscal-technical term. This had a bearing on the collection of auxiliary taxes, in particular; in the precedence, each smoke, i.e., farm had paid an auxiliary tax of equal quantity but now a poorer farm might have a smoke value of one half, or two or even three separate farms could collectively constitute one smoke which alleviated the tax burden on an individual farm.

The change was implemented varyingly in the different districts: Kymenkartano as early as in 1585, Lappee and Jääski in 1589, Äyräpää in 1590 and Ranta in 1591. On the same occasion, the taxes based on the cadaster underwent a radical rearrangement. A great number of new farmer names appeared in the cadasters of the early 1590s, and the total number of farms saw a clear increase when compared to the late 1580s.

Last Attacks by the Enemy

As hostilities broke out anew in the year 1590, the Russians attacked the southern part of the Vyborg province and devastated the Virolahti and Vehkalahti coastal area, and probably also Koivisto and Säkkijärvi (see Map 8). The new attack took place in 1592, and the villages along the River Vuoksi in the Jääski parish suffered, in particular, as houses were destroyed and people captured and taken as prisoners to Russia (see Map 9). However, the information on the destruction recorded in the cadasters is ambiguous. Initiated after these events, the peace talks lasted until May 1595 and ended with the signing of the Tälssinä Treaty.

At the end of the war, more than one half of the settlements in the Äyräpää district were deserted – i.e., unable to pay their taxes. The Kivennapa parish was most severely deserted while Muolaa had suffered the least. In the Jääski district, the corresponding percentage was 40%; in the Jääski parish, one third of the farms were deserted while the share in Ruokolahti was almost 50 %. Since the beginning of the war, the total number of farms in Lappee had dropped to a half, and 52 % of the remaining farms were deserted. In Koivisto, at district of Ranta, half of the farms were deserted, in Säkkijärvi one third and in the Vyborg parish one quarter. In Kymenkartano, however, the total number of farms had shown a slight increase from the beginning of the war, and the north-west corner of the district had seen a particularly strong development. One third of the farms were deserted; the percentage for Virolahti was over 50 %, Vehkalahti 37 %, Pyhtää 18 % and Elimäki 5 %.

The share of the deserted farms by “cow communities“ (*nöttslag*; an old tax parameter referring to a number of farms forming a community which was obliged to cede a cow to the Crown in taxes) is shown in Map 10. The map shows that desertion was most marked in the areas raided by the enemy: the Äyräpää district, the eastern parts of the Lappee district, the coastal areas of Kymenkartano, in Koivisto and in the outer islands. However, desertion was equally marked in other parts of the Lappee district and Ruokolahti; the tax burden caused by the maintenance of the country’s own army had weighed relatively heavily on these poorer areas.

Town of Vyborg during the War

The development in the settlement of the town of Vyborg is illustrated by the lists of the so-called Margeld payments. As early as the 1560s, the fortification work and the warfare-induced decrease in trading had led to impoverishment, and in the early 1570 a considerable part of the approximately 250 houses in the town were defined as impoverished; no records exist for the period after 1573. In the 1580s, the number of houses diminished by about 10 %. However, this was also a period in which the town extended over its old boundaries, and thus the settlement could be more dispersed and sparsely located.

The heaviest burden on the townspeople was caused by the repair and construction work in which they were obliged to participate. Their contribution was requested both in the form of building materials and workdays. The two short periods of siege by the enemy (1572 and 1592) did not cause any destruction in the town of Vyborg. The fire in 1594 caused much larger devastation.

3. Overview and Comparison

General Development of the Settlement

On the scale of the entire Vyborg province, the settlement trend declines until the late 1580s, taking a slight upward turn in the 1590s. At the end of the war, the total number of farms had risen to almost the level as it had been at the beginning of the war. However, one third of the settlements were deserted. This process started in the 1570s, and the share of deserted farms started to grow rapidly in the 1580s, remaining at a high level throughout the 1590s.

The development on the district level followed the same pattern, with great variation between the various districts and parishes. As regards desertion, the worst affected districts were Äyräpää and Lappee, areas which often had to accommodate the country’s own troops. Koivisto also suffered considerably from the enemy’s attacks, as did the outer islands Lavansaari, Seiskari and Tytärsaari which were almost totally deserted as a result of the 1571 attack.

Kymenkartano shows the opposite trend: the coastal area and Virolahti, in particular, suffered from the attacks, but the settlements in Elimäki and the northern parts of Vehkalahti continued to expand and the number of farms in these parishes grew. To a larger extent than in other areas, the farms of these

parishes remained in the hands of the same farmer-masters or families. This is illustrated in Map 11 which shows the situation at war's end in the special-focus or case study villages: the map shows the share of the farms in original ownership, as well as the breakdown of the total number in tax-solvent and deserted farms. In the whole province, the farms changed hands very frequently, with the trend in the western parts, however, corresponding to that seen in times of peace.

Destruction in Other Areas of Warfare

The comparison of the destruction of settlements in various areas of warfare is complicated by the unsystematic nature of both the sources and the respective research. However, it is possible to draw an overall picture of the scale of the devastation in the various areas. Map 12 is a summary of such data.

Throughout the war, Estonia remained in the eye of military activities and was subjected to the conqueror. This had a devastating effect on the Estonian economy: agriculture and trade withered, and the towns eroded during the many sieges. The worst damage was done to the eastern and central parts of Estonia, with as many as 90 % of the farms becoming deserted. As late as in 1620, 75 % of Estonian farms remained deserted.

Ingermanland was also heavily affected. Sweden took over the area in 1581, and raids were conducted throughout the war. Only one sixth of the farms could pay their taxes in the 1580s. The devastation was thus as significant as in Estonia.

The enemy landed in the Uusimaa coastal area in 1571, 1577 and 1590, causing major devastation in certain places. In 1571, one third of the farms in the Porvoo province were deserted, most of them as a consequence of enemy action. At the end of the war, the corresponding figure was 13 %.

The frontier region Savo also had to suffer from many raiding and looting campaigns of the enemy. The source material is incomplete but the conserved cadasters from the late 1580s show that only 30 % of the farms existing at the beginning of the war had survived. However, a tax inspection conducted soon after this period showed figures well beyond the level seen at the beginning of the war. About one half of the farms were deserted.

The Käkisalmi province had already suffered in the 1560s due to the severity of the administration of the Czar's trusted men. Following the outbreak of war, the Swedes conducted raids in the 1570s; the conquest of Käkisalmi took place in 1580, after which the whole province fell under Swedish rule. The settlements in the province were heavily affected, and many inhabitants escaped to Russia; in 1590 as many as 88 % of the province's farms were deserted. The damage was greater in the southern parts of the province but the rate of desertion was 80 % even in the northern parts.

Further north, in the Lake Onega area, 40 % of the farms were deserted in 1583 but it is probable that the desertion was even more extensive. The area – especially the coasts of the White Sea and the Petsamo region – suffered from raids in the late 1580s and early 1590s, in particular, while the areas east of Lake Onega suffered less: in 1597, only 20 % of the farms in Novgorod Lapland were deserted.

In the northern parts of Ostrobothnia and in Kainuu, the settlements had grown rapidly from the mid-1550s but the favourable trend was interrupted by the war. The settlements round Lake Oulu suffered many times until their final annihilation in 1584 and 1585. In 1589, the devastation reached the north-west coast, i.e., the Ostrobothnian coast; 80–90 % of the farms of Liminka and Ii were deserted by the following year. The enemy returned in 1592 and burned over 200 farms in Liminka.

Devastation of the Vyborg Province in the Whole of the War

The devastation suffered by the province of Vyborg was of the same magnitude as in Savo and in Karelia in the area of Lake Onega – the devastation of the latter two areas affected about one half of the settlements. In the whole of the Finnish territory – defined as the area west of the border drawn in the Pähkinäsaari Treaty of 1323 – the province of Vyborg was one of the most devastated areas, with the destruction extending over the entire province, contrary to other areas in which the devastation was more local. In the province of Vyborg, the greatest rate of devastation was shown by the areas which were object of the enemy's raiding, but the poorer areas, with the predominant form of agriculture being that of cultivation on burn-beaten land, also suffered greatly under the burden of maintaining the country's own soldiers.

The devastation of the settlements in the Vyborg province was of a "medium" level in the context of the whole war. The province had a continuous presence of troops, but they were mostly the country's own soldiers, contrary to the experiences of Estonia, Ingermanland and the province of Käkisalmi which suffered greatly under the occupation of the enemy power.

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The size of the figures is in proportion to the number of deserted farms in the area.

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