



# November 11 Lāčplēsis Day



Latvian Army soldiers in a armoured vehicle "Lāčplēsis" in September 1919

**Lāčplēsis Day** is celebrated in Latvia to honour the victory of the independent Latvian Army over the West Russian Volunteer Army, or Bermont's Army, 90 years ago – on November 11, 1919. Commemorating this event, Lāčplēsis Day is the day to remember Latvian Freedom Fighters.

The time from **November 18, 1918 - the Proclamation Day of the Republic of Latvia - until August 11, 1920, - liberation of Riga from the enemy forces** is one of the most complex periods in the history of Latvia. Although the Independence of Latvia was declared in 1918, German and Russian forces were still in the country; and only in 1919, during the Latvian War of Independence, the invaders were driven off from Riga, it became clear that the country had regained and enforced its sovereignty.

One of the most decisive moments in the Latvian War of Independence was the battle between the Latvian Army and the West Russian Volunteer Army. The enemy army was formally led by the Russian Tsar's army, Colonel Pavel Bermont; however, its de facto commander was the German General Rudiger von der Goltz. In the truce treaty, signed in Strazdi Manor on July 3, 1919, it was mentioned that the German Army had to stop the warfare and leave the territory of Latvia; however, von der Goltz had already made a secret agreement with Bermont to invade Latvia.

October 1919 is considered to be the beginning of the Bermontiade,



Latvian Army 6th soldiers in the wreckage, October 1919

when Bermont announced his intent to invade Riga. On October 8, Russian - German Army launched their attack on Riga. The attack was an unexpected turn of events for the Latvian government, but the presence of the enemy increased the patriotism of the Latvian nation and the Latvian Armed Forces, being just at their formation stage, they heroically fought in their defence positions.



Latvian Army soldiers in trenches at the Iron Bridge in October, 1919



Latvian Army soldiers in trenches on the bank of the River Daugava in October, 1919

The news about the attack of the Bermont's Army spread throughout the world, taking into account that invaders' actions were against political interests of western countries, Latvia soon started to receive help (weapons and essential goods) from abroad. During the attacks, significant support to



Latvian Army soldiers at the rubble of a building demolished by Bermontians in 1919

Latvians was provided by British and French warships.

The Latvian Army began its decisive attack on Bermontians on November 9, even though the battles were fierce, on November 11, Bermont's Army was driven away from Riga. To commemorate the victory of the Latvian Army over Bermont's Army, November 11 is celebrated as Lāčplēsis Day. This day symbolizes the victory of the Latvian national hero, Lāčplēsis, over the Black Knight, which was anticipated in Andrejs Pumpurs' epic poem "Lāčplēsis".

**Bermontiade** is remarkable for the fact that the initially small Latvian Army with limited resources was able to defeat the much larger and better-equipped West Russian Volunteer Army. The following are the main reasons for the Latvian Army's victory: Latvian soldiers' bravery and heroism, the support provided to Latvia by allied forces, and the lack of initiative in the enemy's army due to poor organization of battles.

Lāčplēsis Day is remarkable also for the fact that on November 11, 1919, a Latvian Army reward was introduced – **Lāčplēsis War Order** with the motto "For Latvia". Lāčplēsis War Order was awarded to Latvian Army soldiers, to the soldiers from Latvian Riflemen Regiments, as well as foreigners who participated in the Latvian War of Independence or contributed to the foundation of the State of Latvia. In total 2146 Lāčplēsis War Orders have been awarded.



Embankment of Riga after the retreat of Bermontians in 1919.

## Facts and Figures

**The Latvian War of Independence** – Battles fought for the independence of the state of Latvia from 1918 to 1920.

**The Duration of the Latvian War of Independence** – From November 18, 1918, when the Republic of Latvia was proclaimed in August 11, 1920, the Latvian - Soviet peace treaty was signed. Russia acknowledged Latvia's sovereignty and renounced the claim to Latvia's land.

**Bermontiade** – A period in the Latvian War of Independence, during which German and Russian forces attempted to occupy Riga and destroy Latvia's sovereignty.

**The Duration of Bermontiade** – From October 8, 1919, to November 28, 1919, Bermontians launched an attack on Riga and the West Russian Volunteer Army was driven off into Lithuania. The decisive moment in the Latvian War of Independence was November 11, when the Latvian Army liberated Pārdaugava region of Riga from the Bermontians.

**The Main Battlefields of Bermontiade** – Riga (Pārdaugava), Kekava, Jūrmala Saldus, Talsi, Sabīle, Kuldīga, Jelgava, Liepāja, Grobiņa, Aizpute.

**Latvia's Losses During Bermontiade:**

- Loss of human resources – 57 officers and 686 soldiers
- Financial loss – 293 million Latvian rubbles (according to the currency rate of the time)

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Photos from the holdings of the state agency "The Latvian War Museum"

More information available on home page of the Latvian War Museum

[www.karamuzejs.lv](http://www.karamuzejs.lv)

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