

## A MODEL T FORD, ROAD BARRIERS AND A PETITION FOR A MACHINE GUN

THE POLICE FORCE'S RESPONSE TO SPIRITS SMUGGLING BETWEEN 1923 AND 1932 IN THE POLICE DISTRICTS OF MERIKARVIA AND SIIKAINEN

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In these research notes, I will examine how spirits smuggling affected the development of a certain rural police force's equipment from 1923 to 1932. Spirits smuggling developed into a huge problem in Finland in 1919-1932 during the era of Finland's prohibition. I will take a closer look at one particular area, the coastal municipality of Merikarvia, which is located on the west coast of the country, in the Satakunta region. In 1923, the police district of Merikarvia consisted of the municipalities of Merikarvia and Siikainen.<sup>1</sup> I chose the year 1923 as the starting point of this research as that is the year when spirits smuggling also expanded to the Gulf of Bothnia. Prior to 1923, smuggling was concentrated in the Gulf of Finland. 1923 was also the year when the number of cars started growing rapidly in Finland, a trend for which smuggling contributed to. These research notes will shed some light on how the police reacted to this development on the local level.

These research notes are based on the articles I wrote for the local history of Merikarvia: *Kuunarin Kryssi. Merikarvialaisten historiaa 1860-luvulta 2000-luvulle*.<sup>2</sup> As source material for the articles, I used reports, official letters, statistics and district court documents that I found in the National Archive in Turku. Newspaper articles provided another important source group for this article.

## THE RURAL POLICE CONFRONT A NEW KIND OF CHALLENGE

The technical equipment and the means of transportation for the police force in the Finnish countryside were very modest in the 1910s and the beginning of the 1920s. When prohibition<sup>3</sup> came into force in 1919, the local police force faced a significant challenge: large-scale spirits smuggling<sup>4</sup>. Many people disregarded prohibition because it did not conform with their sense of justice. Further, there were many people who saw prohibition as a great chance to earn some extra money or even to make a living. There had already been some amount of spirits smuggling before the prohibition era, however, the phenomena grew a great deal larger during prohibition.<sup>5</sup> In the first years of prohibition, spirits were brought mainly from Estonia and the smuggling concentrated<sup>6</sup> in the Gulf of Finland.<sup>7</sup> The situation changed in the summer of 1923, however, when the smugglers started to use large smuggling ships that could carry up to 100,000 litres of spirits as well as smaller amounts of finer alcohol such as cognac, liquor and whisky.<sup>8</sup> Those smuggling vessels also travelled to the Gulf of Bothnia.

The spirits that were brought to Finland in 1923 were mostly exported from Germany and Estonia<sup>9</sup> and wealthy foreign companies were often behind the smuggling operations.<sup>10</sup> The biggest corporation that exported spirits from Estonia was Kuljus & Sinisoff, which had eight ships for smuggling spirits.<sup>11</sup> The spirits ships anchored just outside the territorial waters of Finland where the Finnish authorities could do nothing to stop them from selling their product.<sup>12</sup> The buyers in Merikarvia were local fishermen and other people who owned motor boats. They brought the liquor to the mainland through the archipelago of Oura.<sup>13</sup> When they arrived at the shore, they either handed the product

The police force of Merikarvia and Siikainen in 1926. In the front row sits the Police Chief Erik Fager and Deputy Chief Paul Lilja. The woman in the picture is the Police Chief's office assistant Sigrid Salo. The police officers are Väinö Häggroth, Aalto Vuorenmaa, Frans Alastupila, Juho Salonen, Taavetti Haapakka, Heikki Virta and the police reinforcement officers, Arvo Vuorinen and Frans Koskela. Photo: Merikarvia-seura.



straight to the retailer who packed it in their car or carriage or they hid it somewhere to be sold later.<sup>14</sup>

The police and other authorities had great difficulties controlling the smuggling both on the sea and on the mainland. In the rural municipalities in particular, the vast size of the police districts alone made it impossible for the local police to keep a watch over all maritime routes and roads.<sup>15</sup> The combined area of Merikarvia and Siikainen was around 900 km<sup>2</sup> (land), and Merikarvia also had around 795 km<sup>2</sup> of sea area, more than 1,700 islands and around 450 kilometres of coastline.<sup>16</sup> As prohibition continued and smuggling increased, the local governor assigned extra police officers to the areas where the situation was the most severe. Merikarvia was one of these areas and in 1926, Arvo Vuorinen and Frans Koskela, were assigned there as police reinforcements. In 1926, the police force of Merikarvia and Siikainen consisted of the rural police chief, the deputy chief and eight police officers, five of which operated in Merikarvia and three in Siikainen.<sup>17</sup>

## ANSWERING THE CHALLENGE WITH NEW MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION

The Merikarvia police already had a motor boat in 1923 but it proved to be too slow. In autumn of that year, the Police Chief of Merikarvia pleaded with the local governor to allocate a fast, motorized-boat equipped with a machine gun to his police district. The chief justified his plead by emphasizing that the rural police lacked the resources to tackle the growing amount of spirits being smuggled into the area. He stated that with their current technical equipment, the policemen of Merikarvia couldn't confront the smugglers at even a satisfactory level.<sup>18</sup> However, the governor declined the request. It is possible that he didn't realize the gravity of the problem on the local level or it was simply a question of money. In May 1926, when the police of Pori received a new motorboat, they gave their old motor boat to the Merikarvia police.<sup>19</sup>

By 1926, almost all the fishermen in Merikarvia had a motorized boat.<sup>20</sup> Their motorboats enabled them to participate in smuggling operations and provided a fairly easy way to earn some extra cash. Fishermen make their living fishing the sea, so it hardly seemed suspicious when they headed

The landscape in the Oura archipelago in May 2017. One can easily imagine that if you are unfamiliar with the archipelago you must stick solely to the marked routes to avoid crashing on the stones. Photo: Anni Ruohomäki.



to the open sea late at night. They also had a good chance of avoiding the authorities because they were well acquainted with the sea, the islands and the shores of their region and thus were able to use the unmarked routes where the authorities couldn't follow them.<sup>21</sup>

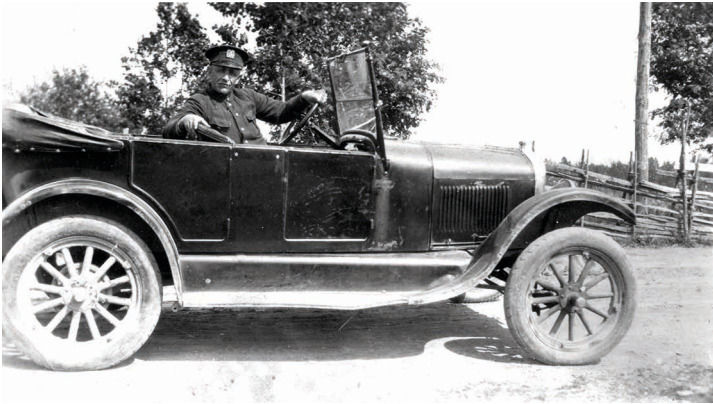
In the late 1920s, the deteriorating economic situation of the fishermen also pushed them towards smuggling. The fishing trade was growing less lucrative year after year and the main reason was overproduction: the largest export country, Rus-

sia, was closed and exports to Estonia had diminished. Because of overproduction, the price of salted Baltic herring had sunk so low that the fishermen were forced to get other jobs. Many fishermen started to work in the harbours as stevedores or sailors, but some of them turned to smuggling.<sup>22</sup>

Police Chief Erik Fager and Officer Väinö Häggroth pose for a picture on a boat with confiscated spirits containers in 1926. The man in the forefront is unknown but presumably he was a witness asked to come along on this quest. Photo: Merikarvia-seura.







Officer Väinö Häggroth posing with the new Ford Model T in 1926. Photo: Merikarvia-seura.

On the mainland, the country police didn't have any better resources for catching the smugglers than at sea. In the beginning of the 1920s the police were still getting around with bicycles and horse carriages while many smugglers already had cars.<sup>23</sup> Cars were still quite rare throughout the whole of Finland, as it has been calculated that the total number of cars was only around few thousand.<sup>24</sup> However, from 1923 the number of cars imported to Finland started to rise rapidly. Most of the cars were affordable and mass-produced brands such as Model T Ford and Chevrolet.<sup>25</sup> And by the end of the decade the number of cars in Finland exceeded 30,000. Tapio Bergholm has argued that one of the incentives for importing more and more cars to the country was spirits smuggling as the smugglers needed to transport alcohol quickly inland and the automobile was the most convenient option. With the money earned from their illegal trade the smugglers were able to buy new, bigger and better cars.<sup>26</sup>

In some cases, people who already owned a car (mainly taxi drivers) also started smuggling. The smugglers often had cars that were rare and exotic in Finland, such as Buicks, Hudsons, Willys-Knights, Packards and Chryslers.<sup>27</sup> In Merikarvia a smuggler named Jonne Leppäluoto first bought a simple Ford, but in the summer of

1926, he then purchased a Hupmobile that was registered to seven people.<sup>28</sup> Sometimes the smugglers had to settle for a horse and carriage.<sup>29</sup>

In the autumn of 1926, the police of Merikarvia received their first automobile, a Model T Ford, which was relatively early compared to other country municipalities.<sup>30</sup> It has been estimated that before the First World War, there were only 40 police cars in all Finland, half of which were in the Helsinki metropolitan area.<sup>31</sup> Merikarvia received the car because it was a coastal municipality where large amounts of illegal spirits were brought from the sea to the mainland. The Police Chief of Merikarvia wrote to the municipal council in the summer of 1928 detailing how important a car would be to the police. He stated that law breakers didn't dare to show their faces at public events because they couldn't know when the police would dash to the scene with the car. He also emphasized that there were too few policemen in the district considering the challenging circumstances and the low number of the police had to be compensated by the ability to move around fast. The purpose of his letter was to convince the council to allocate money for the expenses incurred by the car. The current government allowance was insufficient to cover the expenses and the police chief had to pay the bills from his own pocket. Thus, the council later accepted his request.<sup>32</sup>

## FIGHTING THE SMUGGLERS ARMED WITH NEW EQUIPMENT, OLD WEAPONRY AND THE HELP OF THE TEMPERANCE BOARD

In the second half of the 1920s, spirits smuggling became more organized and smugglers more brazen. The police had been given signal lanterns for stopping suspicious vehicles, but the smugglers didn't care about the signals. They neither wanted to lose their valuable cargo or to be prosecuted in the court.<sup>33</sup> To stop the smugglers' cars, the police started to build road barriers. In July 1926, the police of Merikarvia received a tip-off about a car that was going to pick up spirits from the coast. They placed the barriers on the road and waited. The car sped through the first two barriers but was stopped at the third. The three men that were in the car escaped into the forest. The car was from Tampere and inside were 30 spirits containers (300 litres).<sup>34</sup> In August 1926, the authorities of Turku and Pori Province, including the police of Merikarvia, were given steel cables for stopping the smugglers' cars.<sup>35</sup> The cable was stretched between two trees or posts and if the driver drove through the cable he could only continue driving a few kilometres because the cable would have broken the radiator.<sup>36</sup>

The Police Chief of Merikarvia never received the machine gun he requested in 1923, but in November 1927, the governor's office sent binoculars to the police of Merikarvia specifically to help control smuggling at sea.<sup>37</sup> Sometimes the police managed to catch some smugglers on the water or they found the hidden spirits on the islands, but most of the smugglers slipped through the surveillance.

I did not find any evidence that the prohibition era affected the weaponry of the police force in Merikarvia. In all likelihood, the weaponry they already had before prohibition was considered to be adequate.

In 1926, the police officers of Merikarvia and Siikainen had the following weaponry: Väinö Häggroth, Aalto Vuorenmaa, Frans Alastupila and Frans Koskela all had Browning pistols. Though the pistols of Vuorenmaa and Alastupila were not in working order at the moment the inventory was made. Häggroth had also a Mauser pistol and Alastupila had a Winchester rifle. The Police Chief had both a Browning and a Mauser pistol and two Winchester rifles. All the police officers were equipped with handcuffs.<sup>38</sup>

At times, the police were forced to use their guns when confronting smugglers. In September 1928, Officer Aalto Vuorenmaa was patrolling the highway with two other men. They had positioned the police force's Ford in the middle of the road with the headlights pointed in the direction where they were expecting a car with smuggled spirits cargo. The car approached and disregarded the light signals shown by the police. The driver smashed straight into the police car and bumped it off of the road.<sup>39</sup> The speed of the car slowed down in the collision so that the police were able to jump on the car's side board. They tried to stop the car by shooting at it but ultimately failed to stop it. They followed the tracks of the car and found it after some kilometres in a ditch. The car was empty, but it reeked of spirits. The police caught the driver, Kaarlo Aleksanteri Majjala of Luvia and later they also found 40 spirits containers in a nearby basement. The car was a Hudson and was owned by a man named Arvo Kivimäki from Tampere.<sup>40</sup>

In 1926 the smuggling situation was so severe in Merikarvia that the municipal council appointed a temperance board.<sup>41</sup> The members of the temperance board could be given the right to perform home searches and to confiscate illegal substances as well as tools and equipment needed for making home-brewed alcohol.<sup>42</sup> In 1927,

the temperance board arranged 82 patrols of its own, in addition to 10 patrols together with the police.<sup>43</sup> The patrols were carried out by car, bicycles or skis and lasted 10-24 hours.<sup>44</sup> The temperance board had around 25 volunteers who participated in the patrols. In 1927, they managed to confiscate two cars and three horse carriages, approximately 1,675 litres of spirits and five fire arms.<sup>45</sup> The temperance board always helped the police when asked and even shared a secret sign language with the police.<sup>46</sup>

In 1930, the police of Merikarvia received two spike strips for stopping smuggling cars. At the same time, they also acquired equipment for taking finger prints.<sup>47</sup> The police, however, did not receive any other new equipment during the prohibition era. After the prohibition era ended, they received a new car (in 1936).<sup>48</sup> The longer that the prohibition era lasted, the more that people became opposed to it. The prohibition law did not seem to serve its purpose.<sup>49</sup> At the end of 1920s, around 80,000 people were prosecuted for drunkenness every year and around one million litres of smuggled spirits were confiscated.<sup>50</sup> It was clear that the authorities could not prevent all smuggling.<sup>51</sup> In December 1931, the government arranged a referendum and as a result 70,6 per cent of voters voted to revoke prohibition. The new spirits act came into force on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April 1932 and according to this new law, the manufacture, import and sales of alcohol belonged exclusively to Oy Alkoholiliike Ab, which was owned by the Finnish government.<sup>52</sup> However, the liquor stores opened only in the cities.<sup>53</sup> In Merikarvia this meant that the illegal breweries started working again.<sup>54</sup> Moonshine also retained its popularity over the following decades because legal alcohol was more expensive and the nearest place to buy it was 55 kilometres away.

## CONCLUSION

During my research, I observed that on the local level the police saw the effects of the arrival of the large spirits ships in the summer of 1923 straight away. The local police of Merikarvia pleaded with the governor for better equipment but it took three years until the issue was addressed. In 1926, the police of Merikarvia received a new motorboat, their first car and extra police officers. I can argue that without prohibition, the police of Merikarvia would probably not have been issued a car as early as they were. The most important finding of my research is that the fight against the smugglers affected the means of transportation of the country police force and, as a result of prohibition, the police also received new technical equipment such as binoculars, steel cables and spike strips. A little bit surprisingly, I found that the fight against the smugglers did not seem to have an effect on the country police force's weaponry.

<sup>1</sup> Arkiston muodostaja: Merikarvian nimismiespiiri. <<http://www.narc.fi:8080/VakkaWWW/Selaus.action?kuvailuTaso=AM&avain=1025.KA>>.

<sup>2</sup> 'The Local History of Merikarvia from the 1860s to the 21st Century'

<sup>3</sup> The temporary government of Russia ratified prohibition in Finland in 1917, which came into force on the first of June 1919. Prohibition forbade the production, transportation, sale, and storage of alcohol. The Finnish government had the monopoly for producing and importing alcohol. See Asetus alkoholipitoisten aineiden valmistuksesta, maahan-tuonnista, myynnistä, kuljetuksesta ja varastossapidosta annettu Pietarissa, 16/29 päivänä toukokuuta 1917. Suomen Suuriruhtinaanmaan Asetuskokoelma 1917 N:o 29.

<sup>4</sup> Smuggling is a crime in which the required licenses for importing and exporting goods are not followed.

<sup>5</sup> During the first year of prohibition the Finnish border patrol confiscated 8,000 liters of spirits, in 1920 the number had grown to 110,000 litres and in 1924, 520,000 litres were confiscated. According

to several estimates, the authorities managed to confiscate only around 10 per cent of all smuggled alcohol during prohibition.

<sup>6</sup> In 1921, 74 per cent of all seized alcohol was confiscated in the customs area of Helsinki. See Rasinaho 2006, 18.

<sup>7</sup> Pullat 1993, 34; Pulkkinen 2015, 115.

<sup>8</sup> Pullat 1993, 35; Sillanpää 2002, 54.

<sup>9</sup> Satakunnan Kansa 3.8.1923; T. & P. I. Maaherralle (Merikarvian nimismiehen kirjoittama kirje Turun ja Porin läänin Maaherralle) päiväämätön., Merikarvian nimismiespiirin arkisto, TMA, Muut konseptit 1925–1952, päiväämättömät Df:1

<sup>10</sup> Simpura 1982, 95.

<sup>11</sup> Pullat 1993, 40.

<sup>12</sup> Saarinen 2007, 49.

<sup>13</sup> T. & P. I. Maaherralle (Merikarvian nimismiehen kirjoittama kirje Turun ja Porin läänin Maaherralle) päiväämätön, Merikarvian nimismiespiirin arkisto, TMA, Muut konseptit 1925–1952, päiväämättömät Df:1.

<sup>14</sup> Saarinen 2007, 49.

<sup>15</sup> Pulkkinen 2015, 127.

<sup>16</sup> Merikarvia. Tilastokeskuksen [www-sivut](http://www.tilastokeskus.fi/tup/kunnat/kuntatiedot/484.html); Siikainen. Tilastokeskuksen [www-sivut](http://www.tilastokeskus.fi/tup/kunnat/kuntatiedot/484.html). <<http://www.tilastokeskus.fi/tup/kunnat/kuntatiedot/484.html>>; Lehto 2011, 14.

<sup>17</sup> Ruohomäki 2017c.

<sup>18</sup> T. & P. I. Maaherralle (Merikarvian nimismiehen kirjoittama kirje Turun ja Porin läänin Maaherralle) päiväämätön. Merikarvian nimismiespiirin arkisto, TMA, Muut konseptit 1925–1952, päiväämättömät Df:1.

<sup>19</sup> Merikarvian piirin nimismiehelle tiedoksi, Turun ja Porin läänin maaherra lääninkanslia, Turussa 18. toukokuuta 1926 No 1389, Merikarvian nimismiespiirin arkisto, TMA, Eaa:3 Saapuneet kirjeet 1923–1926.

<sup>20</sup> Veikko A. Venerannan haastattelu 17.7.2016.

<sup>21</sup> Ruohomäki 2017b.

<sup>22</sup> Kieltolakitiedustelu vuonna 1923, 17, 156–157, 161.

<sup>23</sup> Pulkkinen 2015, 127–128.

<sup>24</sup> Bergholm 2001, 68.

<sup>25</sup> Försti 2013, 30.

<sup>26</sup> Bergholm 2001, 68.

<sup>27</sup> Pulkkinen 2015, 127–128.

<sup>28</sup> Ruohomäki 2017a.

<sup>29</sup> Satakunnan Kansa 6.8.1925.

<sup>30</sup> Satakunnan Kansa 22.8.1926.

<sup>31</sup> Suomalaiset poliisijoukot. Autot ja moottoripyörät – merkkejä joka lähtöön. <[http://www.poliisimuseo.fi/instancedata/prime\\_product\\_julkaisu/intermin/embeds/poliisimuseowwwstructure/24437\\_5200\\_Ajoneuvot.pdf?857f9017a47bd288](http://www.poliisimuseo.fi/instancedata/prime_product_julkaisu/intermin/embeds/poliisimuseowwwstructure/24437_5200_Ajoneuvot.pdf?857f9017a47bd288)>.

<sup>32</sup> Merikarvian kunnanvaltuustolle. Merikarvian piirin kruununnimismies Merikarvia kesäkuun 28 p:nä

1928, MKA, Merikarvian Khall I Eg3:1 Nimismiehen kirjeet 1889–1950.

<sup>33</sup> Pulkkinen 2015, 128.

<sup>34</sup> Satakunnan Kansa 3.7.1926.

<sup>35</sup> Satakunnan Kansa 12.8.1926.

<sup>36</sup> Pulkkinen 2015, 128.

<sup>37</sup> Turun ja Porin läänin maaherra. Lääninkanslia Turussa 26 p. marraskuuta 1927 No 3559 [kirje], Merikarvian nimismiespiirin arkisto, TMA, Eaa:4 Saapuneet kirjeet (1927–1929).

<sup>38</sup> Luettelo Merikarvian piirin nimismiehen arkistosta ja valtiolle kuuluvasta kalustosta v. 1926, Merikarvian nimismiespiirin arkisto, TMA, Bba:1 Kalustoluettelot 1926–1952.

<sup>39</sup> Liite A 18 Ilmoitus. Vuonna 1929 tammikuun 15 päivänä aloitettiin Merikarvian ja Siikaisten pitäjien käräjäkunnan varsinaisten talvikäräjien ensimmäinen yleinen istunto Österbyn talossa ensimmäintu pitäjän Ylikarvian kylässä, Ulvilan tuomikunnan arkisto, TMA, Bf3:103 Merikarvian käräjäkunnan tuomioluettelot (1929–1929).

<sup>40</sup> Satakunnan Kansa 2.10.1928.

<sup>41</sup> Pöytäkirja, kirjoitettu Merikarvian kunnanvaltuuston kokouksessa kunnanhuoneella helmik. 27 p:nä 1926, MKA, Merikarvian kunnanvaltuuston pöytäkirjat vuod. 1926 Cb:6.

<sup>42</sup> Ahonen 2003, 226.

<sup>43</sup> Satakunnan Kansa 10.1.1928; Tietoja Merikarvian kunnan raittiuslautakunnan toiminnasta v. 1927, Tellervo Vuorelan kotiarkisto.

<sup>44</sup> Selonteko kieltolain valvonnan yleisestä kulusta Merikarvian kunnan alueella. Selostus koskee aikaa 31.12.1926–31.10.1927. Lähettäjä Merikarvian kunnan raittiuslautakunta, Tellervo Vuorelan kotiarkisto.

<sup>45</sup> Satakunnan Kansa 10.1.1928; Tietoja Merikarvian kunnan raittiuslautakunnan toiminnasta v. 1927, Tellervo Vuorelan kotiarkisto.

<sup>46</sup> Selonteko kieltolain valvonnan yleisestä kulusta Merikarvian kunnan alueella. Selostus koskee aikaa 31.12.1926–31.10.1927. Lähettäjä Merikarvian kunnan raittiuslautakunta, Tellervo Vuorelan kotiarkisto.

<sup>47</sup> Merikarvian piirin nimismiehen kalustoluettelo tammikuun 1 päivänä 1930, Merikarvian nimismiespiirin arkisto, TMA, Bba:1 Kalustoluettelot 1926–1952.

<sup>48</sup> Merikarvian nimismiespiirin kalustoluettelo [tammikuussa 1936]. Merikarvian nimismiespiirin arkisto, TMA, Bba:1 Kalustoluettelot 1926–1952.

<sup>49</sup> Sillanpää 2002, 62.

<sup>50</sup> Peltonen 1997, 97.

<sup>51</sup> Pullat & Pullat 2012, 50.

<sup>52</sup> Sillanpää 2002, 62–64.

<sup>53</sup> Pullat & Pullat 2012, 54.

<sup>54</sup> Satakunnan Kansa 17.4.1932; Satakunnan Kansa 23.4.1932; Satakunnan Kansa 18.6.1932; Satakunnan Kansa 21.8.1932.

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